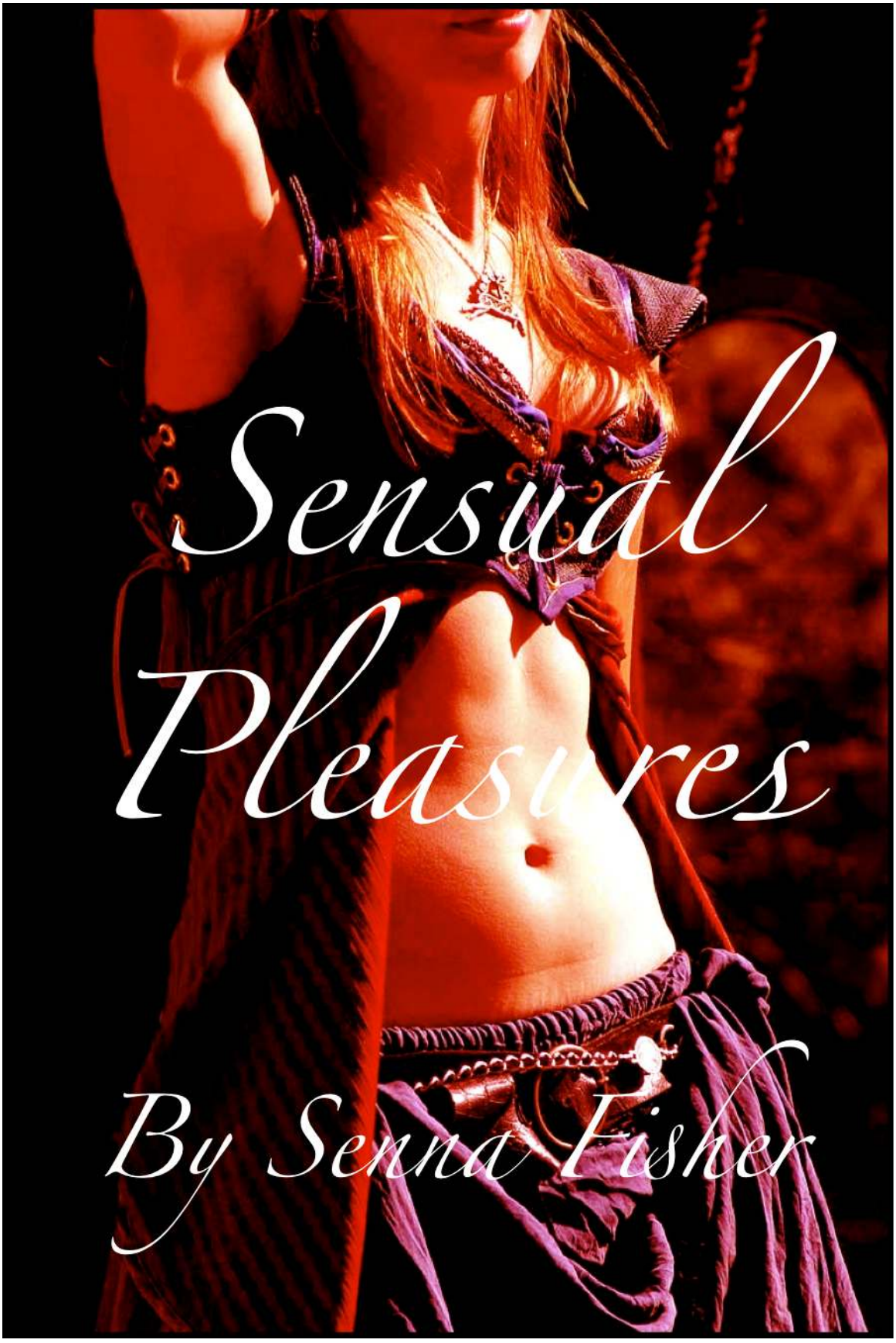
Sensual
Pleasures
By Senna Fisher

Sensual Pleasures

Senna Fisher

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Chapter 1

Gareth smiled indulgently. He was glad he had forced Trisha to come along with him to the gallery today. He watched her staring at the painting. Her head was slanted and she was trying to read the name of the artist scrawled along the side. He went to her.

'Like it?'

'Oh yes, it appeals to me. I like the way it looks almost abstract, but not quite. I like the bright, earth tones and the vibrant brush strokes. It makes me think of strong sensual strokes....of you know....'

Gareth laughed. 'You are a little horny today. You got all those thoughts from staring at a painting? Then you must meet Jocelyn, the *artiste*. She will be pleased to know that her work ignites your erotic fantasies.'

Gareth threw back his head and laughed. 'But first do you need a drink?'

'Oh yes, yes!'

Trisha rubbed her hands together in glee. Gareth laughed again. 'My, my. I must drag you to these things more often. It certainly gets your juices flowing.'

'Of course. Let's go over to the pub and get a little sloshed. That will calm me down and help me survive when I go back to my office for a long meeting this afternoon.'

Gareth smiled, 'okay, some white wine is in order?'

'Of course, of course. Need you ask?'

As they stood at the pub, Trisha turned and noticed a man standing a little behind them and realized that he had been listening carefully to their conversation. He stared at Trisha and then at Gareth, raising his eyebrows. He smiled slightly and Gareth smiled widely back at him. He stepped forward slowly, watching Trisha's eyes.

'Hey, Rod. How are you?'

'Gareth, hi. Fine, and you?'

'Yes, fine. Let me introduce you. Patricia Diason. Roderick Keyes.'

They shook hands and smiled politely at each other. Trisha liked the feel of his hand. It was warm and strong. She also liked his eyes dark, curious eyes. He was watching Trisha's face, as if trying to answer some question.

'See you around, Rod.'

'Yes, yes.'

Rod walked away and Trisha probed Gareth. 'Now who is that?'

'He is Jocelyn's benefactor. They are old friends. He is one of the partners at Keyes, Barker & Associates, you know, the accountants?'

'Ah, they are in that large, old building down Connor Street? Yes, I have heard of them. I think we use that firm for something. But he looks nothing like an accountant.'

'Oh really, why not?'

'He is too good-looking, refined and far too comfortable with himself.'

Gareth chuckled. 'Yes, he is also not very traditional. Jocelyn used to date his brother Wayne for years and when he left her and moved away, dear older brother basically took care of her. That was about three years ago and here he is, still making sure she is okay.'

'Maybe he has his own interest in the matter?'

Gareth laughed. 'Oh, Trisha of little faith! I doubt that very much. But I suspect Jocelyn would like to believe that. Just look at her now.'

Trisha turned and saw a short, pretty blonde woman standing next to him. Her eyes were wide and flirtatious and she touched his arm possessively. He simply smiled at Jocelyn and then looked up at Trisha, raising his eyebrows at her again. She smiled back at him and looked away.

'Oops, he caught me!'

'Yes, but I don't think he really minds too much. I think he is interested in you, too.'

'I doubt that. He seems a little sullen for me and he stares a lot. No, not my type, I am afraid.'

'Hush. They are coming over.'

'Shit!'

'Rod. Hi again. Jocelyn, how are you?'

'Oh Gareth!' Jocelyn hugged him tightly. 'I am so glad you came. That was so kind of you.' She gushed in an exaggerated, melodious voice.

'It is my pleasure, my dear. I brought a friend. This is Patricia.'

The two women appraised each other and instinctively Trisha felt an unease about her. She was beautiful in a glamorous kind of way, but her eyes were too shifty, too cold and they moved quickly over Trisha. She saw a nervous insecurity in Jocelyn which made her feel guarded. *Something is not quite in order with this woman,* Trisha thought.

'Hi, thank you for coming.' She gave Trisha a mild, cold smile.

'It is certainly my pleasure. It has been most pleasant.' Trisha replied, in the same mild tone.

'I am pleased to hear that. Let me introduce you. This is Rod, my best friend in the whole world.'

Rod smiled. 'We have met already, Joss. Now, do you want a drink? Need to get sloshed?' His eyes gleamed in mockery at Trisha.

Trisha blushed slightly and looked away. Jocelyn waved her hands. 'No, no thank you, Rod. I am hoping that you will get sloshed though.' Jocelyn laughed in a girly, giggly way and both Gareth and Rod smiled indulgently.

Trisha gulped the last of her wine and decided it was time to leave. She needed to get away from those dark eyes that seemed to follow her every move. He had a way of looking at her as if she was the only person there, as if he was asking her a personal question.

'It was nice to meet you. But I must really be getting along now. Gareth?'

'Oh sure, come. Let me walk you to your car. Jocelyn, I will be back shortly.'

He walked out of the building with her and as soon as they were out of earshot, he could not wait to ask. 'So, what's up, Trisha? Why are you running away?'

'I don't know. I just had a strong sense of ....I don't know, danger, fear, or something. There was something oppressive and dark. I needed to breathe.'

'Okay, relax. It must be the way he was staring at you. He seems a little intrigued by you. Relax. He is not a bad guy. Just not much of a talker. He is kind and quite funny when you get to know him. I suppose you are so beautiful he couldn't help himself.'

'Oh Gareth, you are so sweet. I suppose it is not a bad idea to get back to work. I have a long afternoon ahead,' she groaned.

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Trisha went back to her office, relieved to be away from the piercing eyes. There was something in the way he looked at her that unsettled her. She wanted to ask him, 'What do you want to know?'

Suddenly an image flashed through her mind. He was standing over her and glaring at her. He was asking her or rather accusing her of something. She tried to sharpen the image, but she could not hear the words. They were garbled and lost in the fear in her eyes. She closed her eyes. *Please, let me see the words.* But her mind cleared suddenly and all she saw was a blank, white screen in her mind. She tried to focus on the words on the page in front of her, but the dark eyes just danced around in front of her. The images started again, but this time they were faster, more intense and far more disconnected. The eyes laughed at her, glared at her and gently tried to persuade her. She got up and went to the bathroom. *There is definitely* s*omething about that man I should be concerned about. What could possibly cause such intense emotions in him towards me?*

She eventually settled down when all the staff in the office arrived for a meeting. She tried to focus on what was going on and it helped ease her tension when she slipped into a bored, professional mode. Her mind focused on the issues of rosters, new clients and parking and the accountant's intense eyes slowly faded from her mind. By the time she got home that night, she had almost forgotten about him.

When she opened the door at home, there was a note from Claire Clancy next door.
Trisha, honey. I have your gift with me. Please collect. Love, Claire.

Trisha was puzzled. *What present is Mrs. Clancy talking about?* She went inside, put down her bag and made herself a cup of coffee. She needed to relax before she went over to Claire. When she got to her neighbor's house, she could hear that Claire was talking to someone. She knocked on the door and Claire came to the door with the phone in her hand. She waved Trisha to a large, silver package against the wall. She pointed furiously when Trisha stared at it. 'Hold on, my dear.'

'Look there it is. There is a note. The delivery guy said to make sure that you get it today. I have to go. Lillian is on the phone. See you later.'

'Fine, thanks.'

Trisha lifted the large package and could hardly carry it out. She closed the door and lugged the large thing to her house. She was very curious now. *What on earth is this? What is this all about?* She ripped the paper opened as soon as she got it into her house and stared in amazement. It was the painting she had admired at the studio that afternoon. She looked at the picture, completely enchanted. It was even more beautiful lying on the floor of her lounge. The strokes looked stronger and the soft light made her believe she had seen the lines move in rhythm with the light. She felt the warm sensuality of it and felt a strong sense that something important was about to happen. It was not the usual feeling of fear and dread that she often experienced. It was a warm glow that filled her. She smiled suddenly. *Gareth is too much. I didn't expect him to buy the damn thing. It was a joke.*

She propped it against her couch so she could admire it further and phoned Gareth.

'Hi again. Thank you so much. You are such a honey. I really didn't expect you to buy it for me. I swear that if you weren't such a wonderful friend, I would dive into bed with you right this minute.'

'Trish? Are you drunk? Did you have more wine at work?'

'No silly. I like the painting so much. It is absolutely beautiful. Thank you so much.'

'Trish! Stop. Rewind. What painting?'

'Oh Gareth, stop messing with my mind. I just got home and the painting was here. So don't pretend you don't know what I am talking about.'

Gareth was silent for a while. 'Trish I am having a dilemma of conscience. If I tell you I sent it to you, I might finally find myself in your bed tonight. But if I say that I didn't send it, then some other man gets the pleasure. Shit, Trish, such a hard choice. Okay, okay. I have decided on the path of truth and honesty. I didn't send it you.'

'Gareth, are you sure?'

'Yes. Please don't make me say it again. I am already regretting it. Trish are you sure it's the same painting?'

‘Yes, of course. I am looking at it now. Wait, there’s a card, you horrible tease.’

‘Read it. I am dying to know. Wait, I need to go outside. I am at Jocelyn’s. Okay, now, tell all.’

‘Oh shit!’

‘What? What?’

‘I must be drunk.’

‘Trish! Tell me! Now! Or I will come over right now and....’

‘It’s from him.’

‘Who Trish?’

‘The dark eyes.’

Gareth waited, hoping he would not have to squeeze every last detail from her. He sensed her unease and excitement and knew, from years of experience with her, that her instincts were always right. He kept quiet, hoping it would jolt her back to him.

‘Okay Rod, you know. We met him this afternoon. He has the cheek to make fun of me. It says, *Dear Patricia, I hope you get the full pleasure of the strong, sensual strokes. Rod.’*

Gareth laughed so hard that he was starting to choke. Jocelyn came outside. ‘Gareth?’

‘I am fine Joss. I am having a very amusing conversation. Sorry, I will be inside in a few moments.’

‘Fine. Rod has just arrived. We will start dinner shortly.’

Jocelyn smiled politely and went back inside.

He nodded. ‘Trish, sorry about that. You must admit he has a good sense of humor. He is here now. He is pacing around inside. Gosh, I knew he was interested in you, but this is a bit over the top.’

Trisha sighed. ‘I don’t know. I suppose you are right. It is quite cute and funny. I will return it tomorrow with a suitable note. I’ll think of an equally cute response.’

‘No, you can’t send it back. He bought it this afternoon. Joss was very excited that he bought her art. But how did he know where you live?’

‘I have no idea.’

'Oh.... yes, I remember. He phoned me and asked me where you worked. He was very sneaky. He chatted about Jocelyn and asked me questions about a dentist she knows. Then he asked me about you. But it was very casual. He asked some general questions about you.'

'Like what?'

'Oh, Hi Rod. Yes, yes, I am coming inside. Have to go, Trish. I will call you later, okay?'

'Fine, fine.'

'Hey Rod. Good to see you again. Sorry to hold you guys up. Something urgent. Sorry Joss, my dear. I will switch my phone off.'

'Who is the woman who makes you smile so widely?' Jocelyn was smiling.

'Just a friend who needed some help. Just a friend, I am sad to say.' Rod was watching him closely.

'I doubt that. You seemed to almost die with laughter just now. What kind of woman makes you laugh like that?' Jocelyn was not going to let it go.

'Oh my friend Trisha. She has a wonderful sense of humor.'

'Ah, the one you brought to the studio? She seemed a bit unfriendly.'

'Oh no, she was just a little distracted. She only came along because I begged her to. She had some meeting in the afternoon and was doing me a favor. Tonight, she had a small problem.... you know.....' Gareth trailed off when he realized that Rod was watching him closely.

'Is she alright?' Rod's eyes were concerned.

'Oh yes, yes. A little confused, but absolutely fine.'

'Good.'

'Anyway, I have very good news. After Rod bought that painting, everything just seemed to go. I have absolutely nothing left to sell from that set. Thank you Rod.' She caressed his arm and grinned.

'Oh that is great stuff, Joss. I am very pleased.'

Gareth looked at Rod, smiling broadly. 'Yes, Rod, you took the most interesting one. Where will you hang it?'

Rod glared hard at Gareth. He looked away suddenly and spoke quietly. 'I don't know. It was a gift for someone. I hope she likes it.'

'Ah, I see. You bought my work for a woman.' Jocelyn gave him a pained expression.

'Yes, that panting made me think of a particular woman. So I bought it for her.'

'Rod never buys my stuff. But today, he told me that nobody was to touch it. It is probably the only one I never named. It seemed to belong nowhere in my scheme of things.'

'Yes. I found the right home for it. I call it sensual pleasures. Because of the strong, sensual strokes....' Rod spoke slowly and he had a distant, quietness in his eyes.

Gareth cleared his throat. 'Yes, that it definitely the right name for it.'

'I don't know what you are talking about. I really never thought about it in such an erotic way. It was intended to show the blending of the different roles of a woman in the world. But, men, they only see the erotic part. You men!'

Both Rod and Gareth looked at each other and laughed then, knowing that it Trisha who had interpreted it in such a sexual way.

'Oh I give up! Fine. Make my work the object of your sexual perversion.' Jocelyn was getting agitated and Rod quickly changed the subject to her other paintings. She seemed happy enough and delighted them with tales about moments that had inspired her art.

~ ~ ~ ~

But Jocelyn was not happy. She was spitting mad and deeply disappointed. She had assumed that Rod had finally bought one of her paintings as a symbol of his acceptance of her. She had spent the whole afternoon floating around, thinking how sexy it would be to find it hanging in his bedroom. She had planned to seduce him tonight, but she could tell that he was not in the mood and was thinking of that woman. She wondered who she was. *Who is the woman who has my painting and my man's attention?*

~ ~ ~ ~

Rod left quickly. His mind was flooded with images of her, the way her long brown hair sat so neatly around her shoulders and the way her green eyes had looked at him, knowing him. He had been sure she knew what he was thinking. There was something unusual about her, he was sure about that. He was also sure that he would do anything just to hold her, to touch her and to make love to her. He knew when she laughed and threw her head

back so deliciously, that he needed to be the one who made her laugh. He wanted her to whisper sensual words to him in public places. He wanted her and the irrational urge to be near her overwhelmed him, confusing his logical brain. He wished he had not heard her talk so sexually. *Yes. It is her fault. All that talk about sensual strokes.... I am simply aroused by her.* He nodded his head in approval at himself for having solved the problem. But he wondered why he was pleased when he realized that Gareth was not her lover. He shook his head, hoping he could dismiss the nagging disquiet that was slowly seeping into him. He sighed and he drove home slowly. He felt the urge again that had plagued him the whole evening. It was an unfamiliar urge to feel her heart beat wildly against his. *Patricia, Patricia.* The name spun around in his head.

When he eventually got home, he was disappointed. He had hoped she would have phoned him. He had hoped she would be pleased. But there were no messages from her. Should he try and phone her? Should he just go to her? But fear of her rejection kept his desire to see her again under control. When he had left Jocelyn's house, Gareth had warned him. 'Rod, this is none of my business. But you need to know that she is a very special woman. She is different. So tread carefully.'

'Tell me Gareth.'

'Just be careful how you deal with her. She is special to me and to everyone else.'

'Fine, okay. I just sent her a painting. I didn't attack her, you know.'

'I know. She is also very delicate.'

'Are you in love with her, Gareth?'

Gareth had laughed. 'Not in the way you think. No, I tease her sometimes, but not in a sexual way. But I do love her. She has a beautiful soul. She has helped me through a lot of difficult times. So she is special to me and I suppose I sound like a protective brother, don't I?'

'Yes, yes, was she pleased?'

'Yes, but also very confused. She doesn't know what to make of you.'

'Really, why?'

'I don't know.'

But before he could say anything else, Jocelyn had come to the door. Rod had left, thinking he would phone Gareth the next day.

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Jocelyn knew there was something going on and she wanted Gareth to stay longer so she could interrogate him. *These two have never really been good friends and suddenly they are sharing private jokes and secret conversations. It must be one of the women at Gareth's office.* He always said the women were gorgeous there. She watched him chatting up one of her friends and gently pulled him aside.

'So, what are you men up to?'

'Oh nothing. Just chatting about nothing. Rod is quite a nice guy.'

'Yes, but I suspect he is in love with some gorgeous woman. He was too pre-occupied today.'

'Oh? I didn't notice. Good for him if he is.'

'I thought it might be someone in your office.'

'Oh no. I doubt it. I would have seen him around there and somebody would have spoken about it. I doubt that very much.'

'Ah, I see.'

But Jocelyn knew he was lying. She wondered why he felt the need to lie to her. She went to bed that night vowing to find out about that woman and to stop her in her tracks before that slut sunk her greedy claws into her man. She lay in bed, fantasizing about how she would rip that woman's eyes out and how impressed Rod would be that she had fought for him.

Gareth also wondered why he had not simply told Jocelyn everything. *After all, she is Rod's best friend.* He wondered why he had decided that he needed to protect Trisha. Perhaps Trisha had been right to be a little cautious around them. She had said she needed to leave when they were near her. He wondered why Rod threatened her so.

'Trish, asleep?'

'No, no. Trying to do some work.'

‘Are you succeeding?’

‘No, not at all. Gareth, there is something major about to happen. I can’t tell if it is good or bad.’

‘What do you see?’

‘Rod. Rod, everywhere. I can’t see what it means. He is everywhere in my head and the images are quick and vivid. I think he is angry with me, but then his eyes are kind and laughing. What does it mean? And there is a dark cloud. I don’t know.’

‘Oh Trish, I don’t know what to say. He is definitely interested in you. He asked me if I was in love with you.’

‘What did you say?’

‘No, of course. But he is going to ask me more questions. He wanted to know if you are involved, who you live with and what you enjoy doing.’

‘Oh, and what did you say?’

‘I told him you like to be left alone. I told him that you like people to keep their distance. But I am not sure whether I simply raised his curiosity levels.’

‘Oh yes, fine. I also don’t know what to make of it.’

‘I really don’t know, Trish. He said something odd. He told me that your favorite color is blue and that you like the ocean.’

‘What? Who is this man?’

‘I asked him how he knew that, and he smiled and said, “I feel like I have always known her”.’

‘Oh Gareth what am I going to do?’

‘I don’t know. Also, there is something I don’t understand. He didn’t tell Jocelyn about you. Now that is odd. He tells her everything. When she tried to find out about you, I also said nothing. I just couldn’t.’

‘Okay, yes. I also felt a little heavy around her. There is definitely something dark around her. I think we need to be a little careful. I know that about her. What about him?’

‘That I don’t know. Anyway, what could he possibly want from you?’

'I looked at my cards, but I got absolutely nothing. I tried too hard and nothing happened. So I gave up. I don't know what to do about the painting. Since it arrived, I am feeling so restless and confused. It invokes something in me.'

'Yes, he seemed concerned that you might not like it. Whatever it all means, he seemed genuinely concerned about that. So you can't give it back. I think you should simply thank him and see what happens. If it bothers you too much, just turn it around to face the wall.'

'Yes, you are right. We shall have to wait and see. Thanks for the chat. I feel better already.'

'Good, now get some sleep.'

But she did not sleep well. She tossed and turned and when she fell asleep, it was in the early hours of the morning. She decided that she would call him at work to thank him. She knew if she sent a note, she might not see him again. And she wanted to see him, just to find out what was going on, she told herself repeatedly.

~ ~ ~ ~

When she got to her office in the morning, she found his number and called him. 'Yes?' his voice sounded edgy and impatient.

'Hi, Rod, it is Patricia Diason. Hi.'

'Oh hello, how are you, Patricia Diason?'

'I am fine, thank you. And you?'

'Hmm, fine.'

'You sound a little busy. So I had better get to the point.'

'Are you sitting down?'

'Ur, yes.'

'Good, now talk slowly and stop rushing as if I am going to do something awful to you. Relax, Patricia and talk to me.'

'Okay, I just wanted to thank you for the painting. That was really sweet, but I guess I shouldn't accept a gift from you.'

He was silent for a while. 'Yes, you are right. Do you like it?'

'Yes, of course. I ...'

'Yes?'

'I was a little embarrassed that you heard that conversation. I am sorry.'

'Why are you sorry?'

'It doesn't matter now. Thank you.'

'So you will keep it?'

'Ur,...I would like to.' She could have kicked herself for feeling so weak and useless.

'Good, I am pleased. It belongs with you. Now, talk to me about things.'

'Okay. How did you know where I lived?'

He laughed now and Trisha loved the feeling that warmed her.

'Patricia, I know lots of people. Your firm works with mine, so I told them I had something urgent to give to you. There you go.'

'Oh, I see. Okay.'

'Any other questions?'

'Yes. Why did you send the painting to me?'

'Hmm, let's see. Because when you spoke, I saw what you meant. I liked the way you looked at it and the way it looked at you. Together you make a beautiful image. I also hoped at least you would come over to thank me.'

'Ah, I see. So is this how you pick up women?'

He laughed again. 'No, I don't usually have to pick up women. I have never bought an erotic painting for a woman before. Did it work?'

Trisha laughed now. 'You are very charming, aren't you?'

'Yes, Patricia, yes. Have I got your attention now?'

'Yes. Of course.' She sighed. 'I don't know how to say this, but I am not really looking for a relationship at this time.'

'I see. Do you have different seasons for relationships?'

Patricia giggled. 'Don't make fun of me. You know what I mean.'

'I don't in fact. At this point, I was just hoping for a dinner with you.' Rod almost laughed aloud at that fat lie. *If only she knows what I really want from her right this minute.*

'Yes, I see. I am a complicated person. My life is busy and difficult sometimes, so I try to avoid being picked up.'

'Now I am curious. Have dinner with me and we will discuss this. Perhaps I will help you change this to a relationship season?'

She was silent for a while. 'Fine, but you have been warned.'

'Yes, good. Tonight. Shall I pick you up?'

She laughed. 'I thought you didn't have to pick up women.'

'Hmm, very clever. Tonight, 8.00. Wear something casual, so we can relax.'

'Shouldn't just meet somewhere?'

'No, I will pick you up, okay? I want to.'

'A little bossy, aren't we?'

He laughed loudly now. 'Yes. I will see you later.'

'Okay, goodbye.'

She smiled as she put down the phone. He was quite cute and she was so excited that she would see him tonight. She phoned Gareth.

'I have a crisis. I am having dinner with him tonight.'

'Him?'

'Yes, yes, Rod.'

'Oh Trisha, what have you gone and done? I thought we agreed that a little caution was in order here?'

'I know, but he was so cute on the phone, I couldn't resist. He does have a good sense of humor.'

'Ah. I see this so clearly. Between last night and 10.00 this morning he has moved from dangerous and confusing to cute and funny? Did he phone you?'

'No, I called to thank him.'

‘Ah, I see. I see. So you want him too?’

‘Yes, but what will I wear?’

‘Nothing, by the sound of things.’

‘Oh Gareth!’

‘I don’t what to say. Things are moving so fast. Yesterday you met him, said two words to him, he sends you a gift and tonight you are worried what you will wear?’

‘Yes, I guess. It’s just.... he is quite.... I don’t know....different.’

‘Oh shit Trish! Different? Why?’

‘Because he has an effect on me. He makes me feel like a woman.’

Gareth could not argue with that. He smiled to himself. He wished she could make up her mind whether she wanted to be with him or to fear him.

‘Okay, wear those black jeans and a clinging t-shirt.’

‘Really, not too obvious?’

‘My dear, you are have passed the point of discretion here, haven’t you? If you want his body, then go for it. No. Wear a loose, slightly transparent top. That will keep him guessing the whole night.’

‘Oh Gareth, make up your mind. What will be more effective?’

‘I suppose he is an accountant. Let’s not push him too far. Okay, black jeans and ....that thin blue top. Yes. It looks casual, but it will do the trick. Also, wear that nude bra you like so much. He will definitely battle to focus. Where are you going?’

‘I don’t know. He just said he would pick me up.’

‘Yes, I see. Trish, do you just want his body?’

‘Oh, I don’t know yet. I just want to be with him, even just to talk. I am curious about him.’

‘I see. Good luck. Phone me when you get back from the dinner. I can’t wait to hear the details.’

When Gareth got home that evening, he went and read his tarot cards and knew that Trisha was not going to phone him that night. He knew also that she would cry tonight. He held his breath and wondered whether he should phone her and stop her from going. But he knew that whatever was happening with Rod was a path she had to take to find the inner peace she so desperately craved.

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Chapter 2

Rod was smiling most of the day. He liked the way she teased him and made him laugh. He liked the sound of her voice, so accusing in her questions. She was right to be cautious about him. He wanted her so badly that he feared he would mess it up. He wondered how it had happened, that he had been standing there, looking at the painting, thinking that it lacked something. Then she had just walked to it, into it and it had looked complete. He wondered how a woman can complement a painting in such a perfect, sexual way. He wondered too, about how her words had reflected his thoughts. He had been thinking about how sensual she looked near that painting. The image of her merged with the painting had completely surprised and excited him. He was pleased that she had phoned him, because the way he had stood there, in silent awe of her, he assumed he had put her off. He had lost his ability to say anything sweet, polite or funny. He had been completely incapable of charm or anything close to a mild flirtation.

He tapped his pen on his desk and sighed. He hoped he would maintain control tonight. She had that way of looking at him that made him behave like a stranger and he wondered if he could trust himself not to just take her home and make love to her. He had to think clearly now. She was different. Gareth was right. She was trying to resist him and he knew that fact was fuelling his desire to have her, on his terms. *Where shall we go tonight? I would prefer to stay at home with her so we could talk, uninterrupted. But surely that is a mistake?* There was no way he would tread cautiously with her so close to his bedroom. *Somewhere casual and relaxed, where there are lots of people to keep me thinking clearly.*

He picked up his phone. ‘Jocelyn, hello, how are you?’

'Rod! Oh hello. I am fine. I am trying to do boring things, like get my documents ready for you, otherwise you are going to fight with me. All these invoices and slips are driving me crazy.'

Rod laughed. 'You are definitely fine. You say this to me every year and again I tell you. Just file them so you don't have to do this every year.'

'Okay, okay, next year I will try to be organized and file every single receipt.'

'Fine. I need your advice. I have this date tonight. I want it to be casual. Where should I go?'

'Who is she?'

'I will tell you if it works out tonight. I am not sure yet.'

Jocelyn was silent for a long while. 'Well, well. Now I am curious. You are being secretive. Is she that special?'

Rod laughed. 'I don't know yet. I will tell you once I know. There is just something about her, you know. I want to know who she is.'

'I see. That sounds very serious. Okay, why don't you have a quiet dinner at home? You are a fine cook and she will be seriously impressed.'

'No, no. That is too intimate. It will frighten her off. No, I need to be somewhere neutral.'

'Okay, one of those restaurants down Sherwood Drive. They are casual and noisy enough if you want to get out in a hurry. Try Harriet's. They serve a wide range of food and if you find things are not going well, you can adjourn to the pub there. There is always a lot of noise.'

'Okay, thanks. I didn't think of it. It will be perfect.'

Jocelyn felt agitated now. *There is something serious about this one. Damn. He wouldn't even tell me who she is. Damn. After all these years of hoping that he would eventually turn to me, that bastard had gone off to some other woman! He must have bought the painting for her. That's what hurts the most, knowing that some woman has my painting. And he must have been seeing her for a while to be comfortable enough with her to buy her such an expensive present.* Jocelyn thought about it over and over, trying to remember any woman he had mentioned lately but she could not remember any mention of a new woman.

~ ~ ~ ~

Trisha felt her heart pounding as he stood at the door of her house. She wanted to turn back inside and shut the door and shut off the rush of emotions that threatened to overwhelm her. *What is wrong with me? Shit, I am getting all emotional now.* She took a long deep breath. *No, I am just feeling horny,* she told herself. 'Hi Rod.'

'Hi, ready?'

'Yes. Want to come in?'

'Ur. Yes, okay.'

He stepped in and looked around. The painting was propped against the wall on the floor. 'Hmmm.'

'Oh, Gareth said he would come over this weekend to put it up for me.'

'Yes, I see. Where will you hang it?'

'Oh, over there, I think.'

'Not in your bedroom?'

She smiled. 'I think I had better not.'

He looked at her and smiled. 'Okay, we are going to Harriet's. Is that okay?'

'Yes, yes.'

He was looking through her blouse and she wished she had not taken Gareth's advice. She felt exposed standing there and he looked at her like she was standing naked before him.

'Need a jacket? It might get cold.'

'Ur, yes I suppose so.'

When they drove to the restaurant, he was a little quiet. He had a detached look about him as if he was pondering something serious.

'Have you been busy?'

'Yes, financial year end, so things are a little hectic. Everybody is panicking and running around.'

'Oh, so I shouldn't keep you out late then?'

He laughed. ‘Trying to escape already?’

‘No.’

‘Good, now tell me about your work. You are a vet?’

‘Yes, I deal mostly with domestic pets. Dogs, cats and occasionally horses.’

‘Horses?’

‘Yes, I have a few friends who farm in Belleview and I do some work out there. I go once a week. Most of them have horses.’

‘But you don’t have any animals at home?’

‘Yes, I suppose I don’t have much time to take care of them. Also, I go down to a friend’s farm over the weekends and I would need a babysitter for them every time. It would be inconvenient.’

‘Are you afraid of some of the animals?’

‘Not usually. Often they just need to know you won’t hurt them and they submit to you. I also tend to see the same animals, so they see me as the person who eases their pain. They just need to be handled gently.’

‘I can’t see how you can do that. I would never handle having to deal with growling dogs and scratching cats.’

She laughed. ‘You sound just like Gareth. He spends his whole day looking at people’s rotten teeth and he thinks my work is gross. You spend the whole day looking at numbers.’

‘Yes, but occasionally I go to a studio to see art.’

‘Yes, yes, and you buy it to pick up women.’ She smiled, and he grinned back at her.

‘Tell me more about your work. Why you do it?’

‘It is very simple. I like animals. I always imagined that I would buy a farm someday and just live there with all the animals. But right now, I like the city.’

‘Interesting. Somehow you don’t look like a farmer’s wife to me.’

She laughed. ‘It shows how little you know about me.’

‘Yes, but I am working on it. How do you know Gareth?’

'We were at university together. He dated a friend of mine and I dated one of his mates. So we spent a lot of time in the same social circle. When we broke up, Gareth and I kept our friendship. Also, everyone we knew seemed to have moved away, so we have been stuck together for a few years now.'

'And you never dated him?'

'No, we spent so much time together as couples that he became like a brother to me. I am an only child, so I sort of like having a brother.'

'Yes, I see. But you never had an affair with him.'

'No. I suppose I knew him too well by then. My friend Karen would spend hours talking about him and intimate things between them. Also, I suppose he was the one who held me while I bawled my eyes out when I broke up with Chris, his friend.'

'Why did you cry?'

'You know. I was young and impressionable. We had different ideas about the world. I was very upset.'

'Chris must be kicking himself now. Miss him?'

'Oh no. I think back and imagine what a stifled life I would have had with him. He never really fully appreciated everything about me. I would have been very unhappy.'

'What did he not like about you?'

But they were at the restaurant now and Trisha quickly got of the car. He was far too probing for her liking. When they sat down, Rod went back to his inquisition. 'Okay, now tell me about Chris.'

'No, Rod, it is very unhealthy to talk about ex-anything on a first....meeting.'

'Why?'

'It is just not done. I would hardly investigate every aspect of all the women you have known.'

'Go ahead. Ask whatever.'

'No, let us talk about something else.'

'Yes, perhaps you are right. What did you do today?'

‘I saw many cats. One died and a little girl, Vera, was devastated. It was a little sad. But I needed it to distract me. And you?’

‘Oh my usual day until about 10. Then you phoned, so it was an interesting day.’

Trisha blushed faintly. ‘Sorry, I didn’t mean to disturb you.’

He smiled at her. ‘No, it made the day a little better. Otherwise, I would have spent the whole day looking at numbers.’ He raised his eyebrows sardonically.

‘Hmm you are so ....’

‘What?’

‘Ur, attentive. You listen very carefully. You watch everything and miss nothing. It is a tad disconcerting.’

‘My apologies. It is an occupational hazard to pay attention to detail.’

He was looking at her breasts now and she knew he was trying to work out if she was wearing a bra. *Thank you Gareth, for that advice on the nude bra.*

‘Oh, I was not talking about that kind of detail.’

He laughed, his eyes sparkling. ‘I notice everything. But sometimes, things are not entirely clear. Like, why, just now, when that couple passed, you pulled your face in disapproval?’

‘What couple?’

‘Those two there.’

‘Oh. I just had this feeling that he was cheating on her, you know.’

‘Remarkable. You glance at them and you know this?’

‘No, I said I thought that. I don’t know that. I don’t know them.’

‘Hmm, so when the old man over there walked passed, why did you smile?’

‘What are you on about? Oh that guy. He smiled at me.’

Rod looked at her for a while. He could see that she was lying.

‘I suppose you make a little nervous. So I am trying to distract myself with stories about these people. Like I thought the old man must be meeting someone special, you know someone he really cares about. His body language.... you know.’

‘Hmm.’

Rod looked over her shoulder and watched the old man. He was with a very young girl who appeared to be his daughter. He had hugged her and they were excited to see each other.

'Hmm, you are very intuitive then, because the old man is with someone special. Now tell me why I make you nervous.'

'Oh Rod, please, you ask so many questions. That's what makes me anxious.'

'Good answer. Good answer. Fine, you ask me questions.'

'Okay, let's see. I don't know.' She rolled her eyes. 'Okay, do you have family?'

'Yes, one brother. He lives in the States. He is an architect, quite successful in his business, but a little irresponsible. Wayne is somewhat of a ladies' man. He likes all sorts of women and breaks their hearts over and over again. He will be visiting next week. Would you like to meet him?'

'Ur, yes. And Jocelyn?'

'She is sort of my family. She used to date Wayne for a long time and then he decided to go to the States. She refused to go and they parted on unpleasant terms. Now they are friends again. Joss never really got over it. I think she is still in love with him. But now she is seeing some dentist friend of Gareth's, Ian McGregor. Do you know him?'

'Yes, yes. He is very cute, a little shy though.'

'Cute? Hmmm.'

'Yes, he brings his cat to me, so I see him occasionally.'

'Dated him?'

Trisha laughed. 'Do I have to reveal every single person I have ever dated?'

'Yes, that would be nice.'

'Oh Rod, truly. This is not a good conversation. Your parents. Tell me about them.'

'Both are no longer with us. They have been dead for a while now. But they were good people. My father was an architect and my mother an accountant. So we are essentially products of our parents. They were wonderful people who battled to keep up with their exhausting sons. I think they secretly wished they had daughters.'

'I can empathize with them. Two of you. That would drive anyone crazy.'

He smiled at her and leaned back into his chair. 'Why are you not eating?'

'Oh I am not too hungry.'

'Hmm. Your parents, tell me.'

'My mother died a long time ago and my father lives down in South Crescent Park, with a "friend". She used to be my mother's friend. I try to see him now and again, but I don't get to see him much. We have some differences. He thinks I am a little crazy and I suspect he is a little afraid of me.'

'Afraid, why?'

'Because I'm not the traditional woman he had hoped I would be. He would have been happy if I was a nurse and had married some respectable doctor, had a brood of kids and lived happily ever after.'

'So he wants you to settle down?'

'Of course. All parents want that for their children. Every time we talk, he asks me if I have met "him" yet and then there is a lecture about the fact that I must get a real job so men won't be afraid of me. It is very tedious.'

'Perhaps I should speak to him.'

'Absolutely not! He would marry you off to me in a week.'

She was laughing and he just watched her, the way her neck seemed to call him. *Shit, I need to get better control of my hormones. Everything she does heightens my senses and her movements seem exaggerated and slow.* He felt drunk with her presence and he slowly sipped the smell of her perfume, which filled his head and made him want to close his eyes and lie down next to her.

'Hmmm,' he sighed.

~ ~ ~ ~

When they left Harriet's, Rod felt his anxiety rising. How was he going to simply drop her off, quietly, like a gentleman, when he could see her thigh so close to him, moving in

those jeans, begging him to caress it? How was he going to say polite things and be charming?

Trisha was also nervous and a little disappointed. He seemed to uptight and preoccupied all the time. Perhaps he was not interested in her. She just wanted to die. He was the most beautiful man she had seen. She wanted him to observe her breasts for the rest of her life. The way he looked at them, trying to fathom out whether there was bra, made her excited and flushed. *Shit.* But he seemed to drift off every now and again. Suddenly there were images in her mind. A small white car flashed across the screen in her brain, as it crashed into a large blue one. She tried to look deeper at the image and she saw that it seemed to be happening further down the road they were travelling on.

'Oh shit! Rod. Slow down. Stop the car!'

'What?'

'Please. Just slow down.' She was shaking now. She could see in her mind that there were other cars involved, but she could not tell if Rod's blue car was one of them.

He pulled over and switched off the car.

'Trisha, are you alright? What is the matter?'

She closed her eyes. *No, it is not his car. No, it is a bright blue.* 'Oh, nothing. I must be going crazy. You just make me go crazy.'

Rod was looking at her. He had seen the dread on her face and he wondered what had spooked her so. Her hands were shaking and she seemed like she was going to explode in fear.

'Okay...' she sighed. 'I can't discuss this now. Please, Rod, I am sorry.'

'Patricia, were you involved in an accident?'

She looked at him, perplexed. 'Ur... no, look please, I need to go home.'

He noticed one thing now that he had not seen before. When she lied, she clasped her hands together, as if she was praying. He wondered why she lied to him so much.

'Relax. Patricia, please. Let's go for a walk, okay? Some fresh air will do us both a lot of good.'

They walked in silence for a while.

`You can now confirm that I am a crazy woman.'

'Hmmm.' He sighed, because he wanted to hold her now.

They went back to the car and when they got close to her house, there were police vehicles everywhere. They had to take a detour. The policeman told them that there had been an accident further up and they were taking some time to clear it up. Rod felt a weird sensation creeping inside him, but he could not figure out what it was. He observed with interest as Trisha clasped her hands again, waiting for him to ask something. 'Hmm, it is such a lovely evening.' He smiled.

'Yes, very beautiful'.

And as she spoke he watched her unclasp her hands. *Okay, at least now I know. I also know that she doesn't like to lie. It makes her feel anxious. What is going on with this woman?*

'Rod, it was really very sweet of you to get me that painting.'

'Sure, fine.'

'I am trying to make conversation with you.'

'Why, Patricia? Enjoy the silence. Enjoy your secret, private thoughts.'

'Oh okay. I...'

She clasped her hands again and looked out the window. Trisha was wondering why he didn't ask her about the accident. She knew he had figured it out. But he seemed to pretend nothing unusual had occurred. Perhaps he had decided he was not interested in her and there was no need to discuss it.

'Rod, I am sorry that I turned out to be so flaky.'

'You spend a lot of your time apologizing. You are not flaky. You have not giggled once. In fact, you might be criticized for thinking too much.'

'Thanks, now you sound like my father.'

'Trisha, there is no need to be complicated. We both know that you are playing some woman game. I would like you to know that I don't want to play tonight. I don't want to

talk to you until you decide to be honest. I hate being lied to. So let's just leave it alone, okay?'

He could feel his antagonism towards her rising now. She should be telling him everything in her heart, not trying to shut him out. He wanted to place his hand on her breast to see if she was wearing a bra. He wanted to make love to her, but she was just trying to shut him out.

'Fine, if that's what you want.'

She looked out the window and wished she could get home soon. He was definitely not interested and she wanted to cry. She wanted him to want her, but he was too angry with her. When they got to her house, she jumped out the car quickly, thanked him and rushed inside. Rod sat in his car and watched her. She looked just as annoyed and edgy as he was. *What is going on here? Why is she angry?*

When he got home, he was in the shower when he realized what had got him so twitchy. He had been so consumed with wanting her that he had forgotten such an obvious thing. She had known about the accident before it happened. She had been certain that he needed to stop or slow down and had become panic-stricken. How had she known that? Why was she so angry with him?

He phoned Gareth.

'Hi, I need your help.'

'Hello Rod. Date over already?'

'Yes, you told me that there is something special about her. What is it?'

Gareth was still for long time. He had told Chris and he had run away. He had been frightened by her and she had been so hurt. She had not fully trusted another man again. Gareth was not going to do that to Trisha again. Rod was an accountant and there was no way he would deal with her special powers. He would freak out if he knew that she could tell all sorts of things about people.

'Oh Rod, she is not your conventional woman, you know. She is different. She wants different things and needs different things.'

'Yes, okay, what does she need?'

‘A man who will accept her for what she is. Who will just let her be, you know.’

‘No, Gareth, I don’t know. That is exactly what she said. But every time I asked her anything, she just lied. So I got angry and we did not part on good terms. She knows things and then she pretends she doesn’t know. That pissed me off. I don’t know why it pissed me off so much. So I lost it and we had a little fight.’

He sighed. ‘Oh that is awful. Rod, please, leave her alone. She has a lot of stuff to deal with. Fighting with her has hardly helped. You have just confirmed her worst fears. Where is she now?’

‘At her house. What worst fears?’

‘Rod, please, leave it alone. She is not your type.’

‘What worst fears? Gareth, I want to know.’

Gareth was silent for a while, hoping Rod would move on and hang up. But Rod waited.

‘She has spent a great deal of her life being rejected. She is afraid most of the time. She has been rejected because she does things differently, because her life is different. She would think you wanted out, so you started fighting to get out. You know, as a way out.’

Rod said nothing. ‘Okay I see. I am sorry to bug you, but she just won’t let me in. I got frustrated.’

‘Rod, she is very beautiful. All you will really get, if you are lucky, is great sex with a wonderful woman. She won’t let you in. Because she tried that and it got her a lot of pain. So, if you want sex, just tell her that. She would appreciate it. I am sure she would like the sex too. That sounds crude, but really, sleep with each other and we shall see. But wanting to know her, that won’t happen.’

‘So you are not going to tell me, are you?’

‘No, Rod, I can’t. She is the most precious person in my life. I owe her so much. I told you she was different. Can’t you just accept that?’

‘No, I want all of her. I want her body, of course, but there is a lot more there. I want it all.’

‘Rod, please, you will hurt her. Leave her alone. She doesn’t deserve that.’

‘Fine, fine, I suppose I should apologize.’

'Yes, that is a good start. Will you please leave her alone?'

'Okay, okay. But not telling me is just making me want to know more about her.'

Gareth tried to phone her, but her phone was engaged. *Who is she speaking to?* He sighed. *This Rod was going to be trouble. He is accustomed to a world that makes logical sense. Nothing about Trisha makes sense. Rod is going to drive himself crazy trying to figure her out.* But he wondered about that. He wondered if Rod might be different. He had seemed interested in her and he really wanted all of her. But, again, he was a powerful man who always had his way. He might be attracted to a woman because she was so closed off to him.

Trisha climbed into her bed and cried. *Damn him! What did she expect from some good-looking man? Typical!* She felt so disappointed. He had been so wonderful on the phone. But tonight, he had been tense and distracted. She had wanted him to be the one who would make love to her and hold her. She had wanted him to be the one who she told her secrets to. She had wanted him to be there for her. She cried for a while and fell off to sleep.

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She woke up to the sound of the telephone. *That is definitely Gareth, wanting to know about the date.* 'Hmm, a bit late to call, you skunk. I am alone in bed. Does that answer your question?'

'No. Hi again Patricia.'

She kept quiet for a while. 'Oh, Rod, sorry, I thought you were Gareth. Sorry again.'

'Don't apologize. I need to apologize for phoning so late and also for being such a total brute tonight. I am sorry Patricia. I was just too uptight. It was not your fault, okay?'

'Ur, fine, thank you for calling. That is very kind of you.'

'Am I forgiven?'

'Yes, of course. Really, it is fine.'

‘So does that mean you are willing to place yourself in the range of danger and see me again?’

‘Oh Rod! It is best if we.... don’t. I can’t really deal with you.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because you make me feel nervous and afraid.’

‘What are you afraid of?’

She was silent for so long that he thought she had gone off the phone.

‘Patricia?’

‘You ask too many questions that I cannot answer. Yes, I suppose I lied about some things. But I don’t want to talk about every single aspect of me with a man I hardly know. I am not that kind of person. But you want me to tell you everything and I just can’t. So I get nervous. I don’t want to feel nervous all the time, waiting for you to pounce on me with the next question.’

‘Sorry, I know, I was a bit much, wasn’t I?’

‘Yes, actually.’

‘Patricia, will you see me again if I promise not to ask too many questions?’

‘Why Rod, what is the point? You will sit there, getting angry and I will sit there waiting for you to pounce.’

‘Hmm, an appealing image. Was it that bad? Did you fear me pouncing on you? Was I that obvious?’

Trisha laughed now. ‘No, I would have been perfectly happy if you wanted to pounce on me. But you wanted something else.’

‘Hmm, I see. Was I wrong not to pounce on you?’

She was giggling now. ‘Yes, that was the plan. Was that so difficult for you?’

Rod laughed out. ‘Yes, it is the ultimate test for a man to sit so close to the sexiest woman he has ever seen and try to engage in social banter. Yes, Patricia, it was very difficult.’

‘So why didn’t you, Rod?’

'Wow! You are a cheeky one aren't you? Okay, because I thought you would think I was an animal. I was trying to be civilized.'

'Oh, I see. Rod, why are we talking to each other like old lovers?'

'I don't know. I have no clue what is going on. Now, how about lunch tomorrow?'

'I can't. I have made other plans. I have to meet a client.'

'I see. Patricia, do you want to see me again?'

'Yes, but I know I shouldn't. I am going to get hurt, aren't I?'

Her voice was soft and defeated now.

'Patricia, what do you want me to say? I don't know. I might get hurt too, you realize that?'

'Yes, of course. Rod, why can't we just.... '

And Rod laughed now. 'You are the craziest woman I have ever met. You just want my body?'

'That would certainly help.'

Rod laughed again. 'Now I have heard it all. You are quite an amazing woman to dare to say that to a man.'

'Sorry, I know it sounds awful. I just don't need to get myself hurt with promises that won't work.'

'I see.'

'Rod, thank you for calling me. I really appreciate it.'

'Yes. Patricia, how did you know about the accident?'

She felt her heart beating rapidly. *He had known all along. So why had he phoned?*

'Hmm, questions again. This is not going to work, is it? You keep asking me these peculiar questions. When I try to answer them, you won't be happy with the response and we will be back to square one. Rod, I have to go. It is getting late and I need to sleep. Goodnight.'

'Goodnight, Patricia. Goodnight.'

Rod put the phone down and battled to understand what he was feeling. He was frustrated and angry, but also pleased that she had opened up to him, just a little. He was also somewhat relieved because he knew what made her anxious. It happened when he asked her how she knew things. *Fine, if that is the only problem, then it is fine. I don't care how she knows things, as long as she talks openly to me. Yes, I don't care. I only need to know that she is being honest with me and is willing to open up to me.*

But he remembered Gareth's words that she had different needs. *What on earth is that about? What does she need that is so different from other women?*

He phoned her again.

'Hmmm?'

'Patricia. I retract that question. I don't care how you know these things. I only care that you will see me again. So, goodnight. I will speak to you tomorrow, okay?'

'Rod? Do you have insomnia?'

He laughed. 'Yes, tonight. Never before. Sorry, my sweet. Sorry. I will see you tomorrow, okay?'

'Fine, now please try to get some sleep. Goodnight, Rod.'

Trisha smiled as she put the phone down. She liked the way he was having a sleepless night over her. She liked the way he told her what he was thinking, some of the time.

Rod did not sleep. He tried hard to draw clear conclusions from the moment he met her. *What different needs did she have? What was it about her that Gareth was protecting?*

But in the end, his best efforts at logic and problem-solving were overshadowed by her green eyes that danced when she laughed and her breasts that smiled sweetly at him through that ridiculous shirt. Tomorrow, he would gently run his fingers through her hair. *Yes, tomorrow, I will touch her, just to make myself feel some a little touch of sanity.*

*****

Chapter 3

Rod felt dreadful in the morning. He needed to sleep badly and he knew it would be a long, exhausting day. But he was also a little excited, because he had the strong feeling that Patricia would play a significant role in his life. He felt her presence inside him and it reassured him. He was calmer today and more confident that he would behave better in her presence. He sat down and drank a strong cup of coffee. Something was changing inside him and he liked it. He liked the feeling of tender caring about her, the woman he had met only two days ago. He liked the feeling that he just needed to spend time with her and had released his need to know whatever bothered her. *Yes, she is beautiful and that is all that matters. Also, she knows how to make me laugh. Fine, the rest will take care of itself.*

Jocelyn phoned him and he was elusive as ever. 'Nothing happened I am afraid. We had a fight about nothing and that was it.'

'A fight, Rod?'

'Yes, you know, a disagreement. Anyway, how are you? Ready to deal with my dear brother?'

'Hmm, yes, I am fine. It's been a long time since I saw Wayne, but I am sure we will be fine.'

'Good, because I really don't need the performance right now. Things are chaotic at work and I am too tired to get between the two of you.'

'Oh, you are not in a good mood. That date was not too great, that's for sure.'

'Hmm, I must get back to work. Gail keeps beeping me.'

'Okay, I get the message. How about dinner tonight? I will cook something special for you.'

'Sorry I can't. I have to do some work tonight. Maybe later in the week, okay?'

'Fine.'

Jocelyn was so happy that she laughed out loud. *Good! So that woman with my painting is out of the picture. Lovely. Now he can focus his attention back on me.* She was very pleased to hear he was working hard, because that way he would not be distracted by

pretty women who liked art. Jocelyn stretched her body. *Yes, today I will celebrate. A nice glass of wine and I will be perfect.* She sipped her wine and phoned Ian.

'Hello, darling. What are you doing?'

'Hi my lovely. Just waiting for one of my clients. What are you doing?'

'Hmm, lying on my bed, sipping a glass of wine. Celebrating life.'

'Oh, what are you wearing?'

'Nothing, of course.'

'Oh Jocelyn, don't do this to me. Don't torture me so. I have a tiny little patient with tiny little teeth and I have to pay attention. Please, don't play with me so.'

Jocelyn gave him a throaty laugh. 'Perhaps, tonight, I will torture you more.'

'Oh yes, I will be there at 7.00. We will celebrate together?'

'Oh yes! Okay, good luck with the tiny patient. What do you want tonight?'

'Whatever you have on offer, my lovely. I have to go.'

'Okay, bye for now.'

Jocelyn smiled to herself. *One day soon, Rod would be begging me like that. Yes, I will torture him slowly. Yes, soon, he will belong to me.*

~ ~ ~ ~

Trisha was having a lovely quiet day. She had her usual patients today and she was grateful that there was no crisis. It allowed her mind to wonder to her night with Rod. She smiled the whole day, thinking how sweet he could be. She was closing up to leave when the phone rang. She rushed to answer it, hoping nobody needed her urgently. She was quite keen to have a quiet evening.

'Hello?'

'Is that how you answer the phone?'

'Oh Rod, hi. I was just closing up, hoping I would put the caller off.'

'Sorry my dear, that did not put me off at all.'

'Oh, you know what I mean. I thought some cat had a fever or something.'

'Hmm, I see. I think I must get a cat, a very sick cat.'

Trisha laughed. 'Then I would have to put him down.'

'Ooh that is mean. How about a drink before you go home?'

'Ur….Rod, okay.'

'Good, meet me at in 15 minutes at the Keg's Coach.'

'Fine, fine.'

She rushed back inside and carefully put on some make-up. She wished she had the will to say no to him, because it could be another bad date. But when she saw him sitting at the pub, chatting to the barman, she was glad that she had been too weak to refuse him. He stood up when she arrived and smiled pleasantly at her. 'Hello, good timing.'

'Hello. How was your day?'

'Fine. I saw Gareth this afternoon.'

'Oh, really?'

'Yes, he was seeing one of the guys at the firm and I met him in the passage. We had a little chat.'

'Ah, I see, male bonding?'

'No, about you.'

He watched with a perverse pleasure as she put down her glass and clasped her hands. *Okay, so if I ask something, she will simply lie. It doesn't matter. What matters is that she is as stunning as ever and she is sitting next to me. I can smell her perfume and inebriate myself with her essence.*

'Good things, I hope?'

He laughed. 'Yes, yes. He gave me the third degree. Told me I was to behave like an absolute gentleman with you.'

'Ah, I see. And what did you say?'

'I told him that I could make no promises.' And he laughed as she stared at him, her eyes wide.

'Relax, I am going to behave today. You will be pleasantly surprised. Now, tell me about your pets. What happened at work today?'

She unclasped her hands and started drinking her wine. 'A lovely, decent day. My regulars only. No crisis. It was quite a relief. I have this patient, Tommy. He is this huge tomcat. He has thick, golden fur and I tell you, he is grossly overweight and as ugly as can be. His owner, Jaclyn, feeds him all sorts of things. Today, he came in for a regular check-up. She asks me every time if he is overweight. And every time, I tell her that he is. Then she says "I don't know, I think he is just big boned". Then she coos over him. It makes me laugh every time.'

Rod was watching her, thinking how he loved the way her eyes lit up when she spoke and how she relaxed so quickly when he didn't ask questions.

'Tell her to put him on diet, so his bones can get smaller.'

Trisha laughed. 'Yes, I will try that. I will let you know what she says. In fact, I will tell her husband. He hates poor Tommy with a vengeance. He says he sleeps in the bed and snores.'

Rod laughed. 'That sounds like the worst nightmare of every man. A fat, ugly cat snoring in your bed.'

'Yes, the image is not pretty, especially since he looks a bit like the cat.'

Rod laughed. 'I must come and visit you. You certainly have more interesting clients than me.'

'Yes.'

'Now, Patricia. What would you like to eat tonight?'

'I was going home to have a quick sandwich. Rod, you can call me Trish or Trisha.'

'No, I like Patricia. Is that alright?'

'Yes, of course.'

'Okay, what would you like to eat?'

'Oh, something light. I had a huge lunch.'

'Do you want to get something here or somewhere else?'

'Oh, I don't mind.....' she stopped when she heard her phone ringing.

'Gareth, hello, my sweet.'

'Yes, yes, but I can't talk now.'

'Ur... I don't know yet,' and she laughed. 'I will call you later, okay? Bye.'

Rod was watching her neck, the way it always smiled at him when she laughed. He wanted to kiss her neck, to bite her right on that vein that popped out softly and laughed mockingly at him. He felt like a vampire, wanting to drink all of her. He really needed to touch her and feel her close to him.

He sighed.

'Oh, sorry, that was Gareth checking up on me.'

'Oh, nice. What was so funny?'

She looked at him for a while. 'He asked if I was with a man, so I told him I don't know yet,' and she laughed at the way he looked shocked.

'I see, you are very daring today.' He smiled at her and touched her hand. 'Let me see, should I take up that challenge now or later?' He was caressing her hand now and he watched her face, the way she seemed afraid and excited at the same time.

'Ur, I was teasing....'

'Oh no, you have cast some doubt on me as a man. Now, how am I going to prove myself?' He whispered to her.

'Rod, come on,' and she pulled her hand away. 'I was really ....'

'Hmmm, a little scared of me. Fascinating.'

He looked away from her, wishing he had not touched her, because, now he wanted to touch all of her. He liked the warmth of her hand, the way it melted against his skin.

'Okay, Rod, now, can we get something to eat?'

'Yes, come, let's go over there and sit down properly, little scary cat.'

He led her to the table and made sure that he touched her back as they walked. *Lovely, really lovely.*

While they ate, he worked very hard not to ask her any questions, so he talked about his clients and friends and she laughed at all his jokes. He kept touching her hand and she did not resist. He liked the way she gently allowed him to get away with it. She just smiled at him, her eyes sparkling at him.

'I like it here. It would be delightful to spend the whole night like this, but I think that guy really wants to go home now.' Rod looked at her seriously.

She looked around and realized that they were the only patrons left. 'Oh, I didn't realize. Look at the time. Oh Rod, the poor man. We better give him a huge tip.'

'Yes. Lucky guy.'

'Okay, let's get out of here.'

They got up to leave and Rod felt devastated that she had her car there. He wanted to take her home.

'What a wonderful night. Did I behave well?'

Trisha laughed. 'Yes, yes. I am very impressed.'

'So, do I get a huge tip now?'

Trisha just laughed. 'Let me see.' She put her hand on her chin and looked at him smiling.

'Okay,' and she leaned over and kissed him on his cheek. She tried to move away, but Rod just held her close to him. They stood for a moment at the door of the Keg's Coach. She started moving away.

'Not so fast. That is such a small, scrooge tip. Can you try to be generous?'

But Trisha just leaned against him and he held her head against his chest. She put her arms around him and sighed. Rod did not want to move, but the waiter was standing impatiently behind them, a look of trepidation on his face. He really wanted to go home. He sighed in resignation. *These two are going to have one of those defining moments right here.*

'Okay, come, we had better go before this guy throws us out. Patricia?'

'Okay,' she whispered. 'Sorry,' she smiled at the waiter, who looked relieved that the man still had some sense.

'It's fine, really.' He spoke quickly, tugging at the door. He smiled at her, but he hoped she didn't want to have a long conversation now. She turned away from him and Rod followed her.

'Patricia, come to my house for a nightcap.'

'Okay. I will follow you.'

Rod drove slowly. He was afraid she might change her mind. He wished she was in his car, so he could talk to her. But when he got home, he was pleased to see that she was still good-natured towards him and she followed him up the stairs to the door.

'I am very curious to know what an accountant's house looks like. Is everything in order, of date?'

Rod smiled. 'No, I am very untidy. I have no clue where anything is. I have no order whatsoever. The only thing I find every night is my bed.'

'Hmm, very convenient.'

And he laughed. 'You have very wicked thoughts.'

'Yes, sorry. That just popped out of my head.'

He just smiled. *Good, she is thinking about my bed.*

When they got inside and she saw that he had papers all over the floor, Trisha laughed. 'Okay, I am convinced. Now where will I sit?'

She stood with her hands on her hips. 'Let me see.' He took her hand and led her to a chair on the far end of the room.

'See? Anything is possible. Now sit down and I will entertain you,' and he smiled, his dimples flirting with her.

'And where will you sit?' She looked at him, her green eyes aglow.

'Yes, I see your point. Okay, come here, I have an idea.'

She stood up, looking at him in a questioning way.

He moved to her, kissed her and he felt her melting into him, like the hot wax of a candle against devouring flames.

When she sighed so deeply, so contentedly in the early hours of the morning, Rod laughed, happily.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

When Trisha phoned Gareth early in the morning, she was elated and bubbly.

'Okay, it was fantastic!'

'Really, that good?'

Gareth laughed. 'Yes, he is a wonderful lover. He knows when to be gentle and when not to be. Oh Gareth, it was quite an experience. I felt so fulfilled.'

Gareth raised his eyebrows. 'Okay, so he does wonders for your body. But your soul?'

'Oh Gareth, does it matter? We did not talk at all. I don't know. We just enjoyed the silence. What could we say? I mean, what do you say?'

'Usually I say, what is your name again?'

'You are a corrupt, debauched man! That is the most unromantic thing I have ever heard.'

'If the sex was great, I want to know for future reference. If it was bad, then I definitely want to remember who to avoid.'

'I can't wait for you to fall in love. I hope she gives you the complete run around.'

'Fine, whatever. Will you be seeing him again?'

'I don't know. We didn't discuss it. We got up late and I had to leave, so I dashed off. He was still in bed, complaining that I was running away. Oh Gareth, he was very sweet.'

'My poor Trish. You are in trouble with this one.'

'Yes, I like it. It is just the sex. I needed great sex with a hunk. I feel quite rejuvenated.'

'Yes, I can see. But what will happen now?'

'I am going to phone him and apologize for leaving in such a rush. He was not amused.'

'Ah, I see. But you should wait for him to call. I mean, a man might not want to.....call afterwards.'

'Oh, okay. I see what you mean. Wham, bam, thank you, ma'am? Is that it?'

'Yes, look I don't know. It's just, often a man, once satisfied, you know.'

Trisha sighed.

'Oh I hope not. I need to be satisfied again.' She sulked and Gareth laughed.

'Okay, but don't get your hopes up. I had better get back to work.'

'Fine, see you later.

She went to make herself a cup of coffee, humming to the music that flowed in her mind. But as she walked back towards her office, she felt a tension building up inside her. She could not bear the thought that he would not want to see her again. She stopped suddenly and the image of him came quickly to her mind. He was sitting over a desk, glaring in shock at a page. He looked devastated. She looked harder and couldn't read the page. But his face looked like he had seen his worst fear transformed on paper. He leaned back in his chair and he looked like he would cry.

She pulled out her phone and tried to call him. His phone just rang.

Shit, something is wrong. The feeling is getting stronger and stronger. She walked back to her office and hoped there was nobody there. She couldn't remember what appointments she had and her mind started getting confused.

She was so disappointed when she saw two patients waiting for her that she wanted to scream. She told Kathryn, her secretary that she had an urgent call to make and would see her patients shortly. She sat down and tried to calm herself. She breathed slowly and tried to relax, but she couldn't. She called his office. His secretary was a little hesitant, but she said it was urgent.

'Okay, but he said not to be disturbed.'

'Please, I need to speak to him.'

'Yes?'

'Is that how you answer your phone?'

'Oh Patricia. Hi.'

'Hi, Rod, is everything alright?'

He was silent now. He felt so angry and tired, but his radar went up. He wanted to ask her why she assumed something was wrong, but he stopped himself.

'No, not really. I can't talk now. I will call you later.'

'Okay, sorry to disturb you.'

He said nothing, so she hung up.

And, as Gareth predicted, he did not call her. The next day, Trisha was disappointed. She had hoped he would be special, but clearly he had been satisfied. When she phoned Gareth for consolation, he was no help. He seemed to believe that she was being silly, since sex was what they had both wanted. That night she tried to read her tarot cards, but could not work out the images. They were confused and she was so frustrated that she just went to bed and cried in defeat.

She woke up to the sound of her doorbell, persistent and penetrating in her sleep. She got out of bed and looked out the window. There was Rod, leaning against the doorbell.
'Okay, I am coming.'

When she opened the door, he just stared at her for a while. 'Hello, Patricia.'

'Hi Rod. Are you okay?'

'No, but you knew that already, didn't you?'

'Come inside.'

'Hmm, yes. Okay. What else did you know, Patricia?'

'Oh Rod, leave me alone. Damn! Did you come here with more questions? Accusations?'
She could feel herself getting angry now. *So he just came to find out what I know.*

'Damn you! At least you should have had the decency to say something polite, like it was good, or something.'

Rod stared at her, the way she clasped her hands tightly. Her eyes were wide and angry and it made him even angrier. He did not need another person lying to him today. What the hell does she know about his cheating, lying partner? Why did she call just when he was finally putting the pieces together? *Does she know Thomas?*

'Rod, do you need some coffee? You look a little upset.'

'Yes, I am very upset, my dear. I am also drunk. So perhaps I should just go home. At least my walls won't lie to me or avoid my questions.'

He turned and walked out. He got to his car and then decided that he was not going to leave her alone tonight. He rang the bell again and she flung the door open.

'Okay, if we are going to do this the whole night, I am leaving the door opened. When you are through with this game, just lock the door behind you.'

She went off to her bedroom. *This man is completely crazy. He is too drunk to reason with and what can I say? He is angry and looking for a victim. Well, fuck him. He must go to Jocelyn or some woman who had time for this.*

She sat on the bed, hoping he would leave soon, or it could be a long morning. She tried to breathe evenly and she closed her eyes, hoping to calm her wild heart that ached at his harsh eyes that glared at her and her hands. He looked at her hands as if they possessed all the evil of the world.

'Patricia?' he called softly.

'Rod, please leave me alone.'

'Open your eyes, Patricia.'

'No, go away. I can't deal with you like this.'

He sat next to her on the bed and touched her hand. 'I am sorry. I am going crazy.'

Trisha just kept her eyes closed. There is no way she could look into those hostile eyes. Rod kissed her eyes, but Trisha pushed him away.

'Rod, please, leave me alone. Not tonight.'

She opened her eyes and looked at him. 'I don't need this now. I need you to leave me. I had a long, rough day.'

'Oh Patricia, are you okay?' and she looked at him, confused by his concern.

She sighed. 'Just leave it alone. I am tired and you got what you wanted. So let's leave things now, okay?'

'Do you mean you got what you wanted? So I have served my purpose, Patricia? Good for you. I hope it was fun,' and he got up and walked out.

Trisha sat on the bed and waited until she heard his car pull off before she went to close the door. She cried so hard, because she had no idea what all this meant. She was plagued by weird dreams, of him laughing and joking, then angry and hurt.

~ ~ ~ ~

When Gareth phoned in the morning, because his cards told him that she was in pain, he went over to her house and hugged her.

'Oh Trish, my poor Trish!' and she cried more. When the phone rang, she ignored it.

'Answer it, Trish.'

'No, I don't want to face the world today. I want to run away and clear my heart and my head. I want to wallow in my pain and trauma. Let it ring. Some dog must have died or something. I don't want to know.'

'Okay, okay, I will answer it, okay? In case it is important.'

She heard him talk and she wondered why he whispered. She did not care. *Let him whisper. It is probably dad. Not today.*

She took a deep breath and tried to collect her thoughts. *Okay, get your act together and stop being such a baby. Get on with your life.*

When Gareth came back, he looked a little concerned. 'Trish, I think you should speak to him.'

'Who?'

'Rod, he sounds really betrayed.'

'Good, that makes the two of us. Tell him to piss off.'

'Rod, she can't talk now. Perhaps she can call you later?'

'Yes, yes, of course. I will give her the message.'

He closed her phone.

'Now, I have no idea what happened here last night, but he said to tell you that it has nothing to do with you. It was about work. He is sorry and he would like to talk.'

'Oh I see. There is nothing to talk about. He knows, Gareth and it pisses him off. He knows and it makes him so angry. I won't ever speak to him again.'

'Ur. He said you chased him away.'

'Yes, of course. He accused me of knowing all about something at work and was demanding an explanation.'

'Okay, okay. But he is angry because he says you keep lying to him.'

'Of course, what do you want me to say to him?'

'Trish, okay. I don't know what to say. Okay. Okay. Let's just try to relax and let the day take its course. I don't know what to say.'

'Yes, thank you, my sweet,' and she hugged him. 'I am being a baby. I had better go and see my patients.'

She was smiling now and he felt a little better.

Trisha went through the motions of working, waiting for the day to end so she could go home and try to relax. With time, she knew, she would feel better and this would all be a matter of the past. She knew that she would move on and Rod would be a distant memory some day.

He tried to call her during the day and she told Kathryn that she would be busy and would call him back later. Kathryn had smiled at her, because he had already asked if she was busy and he had said if she lies, he is coming over for her. He knew her well and she wondered why he had never called before. 'She really is busy. Someone just walked in with a dog that is choking.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes, of course. I have no doubt she will call you when it is over.'

'How long does de-choking a dog take?'

'It depends. Sometimes a few minutes, sometimes at least an hour. I really don't know. I will give her your message and will get her to phone you as soon as possible. Is your pet a patient?'

'No, but should I get a dog, or cat or something?'

And Kathryn had laughed. ‘That won’t be necessary, I am sure. She returns all her calls.’

‘Fine, thank you.’

Kathryn went to her.

‘That man, he is very charming. He wants to get a dog or cat to get your attention.’

And Trisha smiled. ‘Yes, he is quite capable of doing that. I had better call him. Fine, I will call him after lunch.’

When she called him, he was agitated. ‘Good, have you saved the dog?’

‘The dog?’

‘Yes, the one that was choking?’

‘Ur, yes, sorry, it has been a busy day. How do you know about my patients?’

‘Hmm, you sound a bit like me now, don’t you?’

‘Rod, I returned your call. I am not going to fight with you. What can I do for you?’

‘I need your advice. Should I get a cat or a dog?’

‘Neither! Please!’

‘Why not?’

‘Because they need to be treated with love and care. And quite frankly, you are not a suitable pet owner. Get a fish, it will suit you perfectly. When it dies, you can just get another one.’

‘Hmmm, I see. I thought you didn’t want to fight?’

She sighed. ‘Rod, you wanted my advice, that’s it. If you don’t like it, I can refer you to someone else.’

‘Patricia, please, not now.’

‘Fine, I will give your secretary the details later.’

He was silent for a while.

‘Give me the details tonight, okay?’

‘No, I will not see you tonight.’

'You are still angry with me.'

'No, I am not angry. I just don't need this Rod, really.'

'What do you need Patricia?'

'I need.....it does not matter. Now, is there anything else you want?'

He laughed now. 'Yes, my dear, you.'

'Oh I am afraid that is not possible. It is not a good season for me.'

Rod laughed hard now. I am sorry about last night. Things got a little messy here at work and I was a little stressed out. Also, you were so wonderful the other night, I think you dislodged a part of my brain. Now I don't know who I am.'

'Rod, is everything okay, at work?'

'No, no, of course not. But I am sure we can sort it out. What do you need, Patricia?'

'To be left alone.'

'Okay, if that is what you want, but I really want to see you again. Will you call me when you feel better disposed towards me?'

She smiled. *Damn you, always saying the right things.*

'Okay, fine. I will do that. How is Jocelyn?'

'She is in a very bad mood. Wayne, my brother is coming a few days earlier than expected. She is furious. He arrives on Saturday and for some reason, she doesn't want him to stay with me. Also, I think she broke up with Ian, so she is not a happy person.'

'Oh I am sorry to hear that. Perhaps she and Wayne will get back together again?'

'I doubt it. He is coming with some woman, whom he insists I need to meet.'

'Ah I see, hence Jocelyn's anger. You are going to have a fun time.'

'Hmmm. I am having a dinner on Sunday night. A few friends, so Wayne meets people. Will you come? It will be safe, I promise. Wayne and girlfriend will be staying here.'

'Ur, I don't know if I will be back. I am going to the farm this weekend. For some fresh air and sick horses.'

'Oh I see. Okay, if you are back, will you come? Gareth will be there.'

'He didn't tell me about that.'

'Yes, he will be there. Ian is coming along with him. It will be very interesting.'

'I am sure. I will call you if I get back in time.'

She put the phone down, resolved that she would not got to his house ever again.

~ ~ ~ ~

But when Gareth phoned her on Sunday morning and begged her to come back because he was having a crisis, she dashed back only to find that he wanted her to go to the dinner with him.

'I can't bear it alone, please. Ian and Wayne, together. I could hardly get out of it. Also, Rod said the two of you were okay now.'

'Yes, we are okay. But it was awful of you to deceive me this way.'

'There is also another problem. I need to tell you something and I hope you won't kill me.'

'Oh no. I know that look. What have you done?'

'Oh Trish, before you say anything, I want to say that I had no intention of doing it. It just happened.'

'Oh come on! What have you done?'

'I slept with Kathryn last night.'

'My Kathryn?'

'Ur, yes, we met at this club, we recognized each other and she came home with me.'

'Oh shit, Gareth. She is very vulnerable.'

'I know. I think I like her.'

'What?'

'Yes, we talked most of the night.'

'Oh come on, Gareth. Don't lie to me.'

'Truly, she is quite an intelligent woman. We read each other's cards. There is some new man for her, you know. The Prince of Pentacles. Quite a hunk, I think.'

'You read tarot cards with my secretary?'

'Yes, it was wonderful. She also read mine. Apparently, I am going to have an affair with a blonde woman.'

'Oh Gareth!'

'Relax, I said nothing about you. She said she wished she could bring her cards to work, but was afraid you would be horrified.'

'Okay, okay, are you now having a relationship?'

'No, but I think we could be friends. The sex was okay. The friendship was great.'

'Fine, but if she so much as mentions you, I will deny I know you.'

'Okay, deal. Now will you come with me tonight?'

'Fine, I had better phone Rod and tell him.'

When she phoned him, he laughed. 'Good, I am very pleased. We shall talk later, okay?'

'Okay. How are things with the brother and girlfriends?'

'Calm, so far. He only arrived yesterday. Jocelyn has not put in an appearance yet. She is trying to get back into Ian's pants.'

'Oh she is such a busy lady.'

'Yes, but tonight will be interesting. See you later.'

Rod smiled. He was very pleased. Wayne was watching him and wondered who the woman was who had changed his mood so quickly. He had been edgy and difficult until that call. *At last*, he thought, the *tough old rod is in love. At least, dear Joss will be forced to take her claws out of his back. Yes, this is very good news.* He was getting tired of that witch hanging onto his brother for so many years. He hoped this woman was strong enough to boot her out the door of his life.

'So, who is she?'

'What?'

'Oh, the woman who makes you smile so much.'

'Oh just a friend.'

'I see. I see. Does Joss know?'

'No, it is not her business. Also, things have been a little difficult and Joss has been in a hell mood lately. Anyway, at this point, there is nothing to tell.'

But Rod was very mistaken.

*****

Chapter 4

Wayne enjoyed all the guests, even Jocelyn, because she clung to some poor dentist who was clearly in lust with her. He was very pleased to see she had found someone to cling to. Lisa, his girlfriend, had already told him she would take a taxi to a club if Jocelyn even 'came near' him. He wished he had not told her about Jocelyn, because she was giving her daggers, even though for once Jocelyn was behaving. He wondered why Rod looked so agitated. He paced up and down and paid no attention to anything being said to him. He must be thinking about her, the one who made him smile. He was just wondering why she had not been invited when he saw his brother's face change to pure joy. *Okay*, he turned and saw a tall woman, with long brown hair and bold green eyes. She looked slightly unsure of herself, but the man with her just squeezed her hand. He was a good-looking man, with the distinct look of a man who played the field. *Well, well, well, so Rod is in love with a woman who is involved.* He wanted to laugh. *Pure, self-righteous Rod, having an affair and then inviting the couple to his house.*

He smiled to himself. *This is going to be a very interesting evening.* He watched how his brother avoided touching her and how he smiled generously at the man. *Rod, you dog! So the man is your friend.*

He looked at her face and she simply looked away from Rod. The man put his arm around her shoulder and Rod laughed at something he said. She glared at her man and Rod raised his eyebrows. Wayne looked around and noticed that Jocelyn was also watching this. *Hmm, she suspects, but doesn't know. Good. The last thing Rod needs is Jocelyn getting*

involved. But Rod simply walked off, leaving them standing there. *He is coming over, hmmm.*

'Wayne, come, let me introduce you to some friends you haven't met them before.'

'Gareth, Patricia, this is my infamous brother, Wayne.'

He shook the man's hand and laughed with a hint of nonchalance. 'I am not as bad as my brother pretends. You are a friend of Ian, aren't you? He mentioned that you were on your way. I think he wanted some moral support. Pleased to meet you.'

Then he turned to Trisha. 'Ah, I am very pleased to meet you. I must be bold and say up front that you are very beautiful. Lucky man.'

He held out his hand to her and she peeped at him. As she touched his hand, Wayne felt a mild vibration shoot through him. He looked at her and she looked at him, confused. She held onto to his hand and he felt her drawing his energy. She pulled her hand away suddenly, and said, 'thank you. You are very kind.'

She stepped back away from him and smiled politely. 'I have heard good things about you from Rod here. I am pleased to meet you.'

'Oh, are you?' Wayne had the same raised eyebrows as his brother.

'Excuse me?'

'Well? Are you pleased to meet me? Good news?'

Trisha looked at him for a while, 'of course, what a silly question. Rod, can I have drink?'

Rod had been watching the exchange. *What is Wayne doing? Trying to hit on her?* He looked at Trisha and she seemed a little apprehensive now. *Shit, that's what I need. My brother making things worse when all I need is his charm to smooth things over.*

'Okay, come, let's see what you want.'

He glared at her. She followed him to the bar counter and Rod said nothing.

'So, are things okay at work?'

He was leaning on the counter now and looking at her. 'Hmm yes, I suppose. Are you okay? Had a good weekend?'

'Oh yes. And you?

'Oh fine. Thanks for coming today. What do you think of Wayne?'

He watched her clasping her hands. 'I just met him, I don't know.'

'Hmm, interesting. Are you attracted to him?'

She stared at Rod. He watched with relief that she unclasped her hands. 'Don't be silly! The fact that I climbed into bed with you at the first chance doesn't mean that I do that all the time. So, back off. Your brother is not my type. You don't have to palm me off onto someone else.'

Her eyes were flashing and Rod laughed. 'Good, because I intend keeping you for myself for a long time.'

'Rod, you are completely crazy. Now can we please join the others? They are peeping at us in wild curiosity.'

He looked up. 'Since you have your back to them that is one more question you are not going to answer. How do you know? No, never mind, don't answer that. Jocelyn is coming over.'

'Good. That will keep your mind pure for a while,' and he laughed again.

'Joss, do you remember Patricia?'

'Yes, of course, you are Gareth's friend.'

'Yes, yes. I like your work. It is very inspiring.'

Rod smiled knowingly as she spoke. 'Oh thank you so much. That is so sweet. Now, Rod, why are you neglecting your guests?'

'Oh I am not. Patricia is my guest too.'

'Yes, of course. Rod, I don't see that painting "sensual pleasures" anywhere. Did you really give to a woman?'

Rod laughed out. 'Of course. I gave it to Patricia here. In fact, you should know she was the one who called it "sensual pleasures". She said she liked the strong sensual strokes.'

Rod enjoyed the look of shocked dismay on their faces. Jocelyn was too taken aback to speak and Trisha was too embarrassed to dare respond.

'So, would you like a drink Joss, to celebrate your wonderful painting going to such a beautiful woman?'

'Yes, of course. I am very flattered that you think so highly of my work. I am a little surprised. I never realized that you and Rod knew each other.'

'Well...' Before she could say anything, Wayne was behind her, patting Rod on his back.

'Why do you get to hog the beautiful women Rod? Come on, we are starving. Let's go and eat. And I want Patricia to sit next to me. I want to know all about you.'

Rod glared at him and Trisha just smiled.

Gareth also came over. 'Can we please eat some time this year?'

'Okay, okay!' Rod smiled and walked off to the kitchen. Jocelyn quickly followed him. 'I had better go and help him.'

But Trisha knew that they were arguing in the kitchen. She tried to hear in her mind what was being said, but it was too garbled and when she was getting better at it, she noticed that Wayne was watching her.

'So, you are Patricia. Gareth, how do you keep such a beautiful all to yourself?'

Gareth smiled. 'I have the gift of the gab and a whole lot of luck.'

'I see. You must share your secret with me.'

But he was looking at Trisha went he spoke. She just looked back at him and smiled. *Okay, is it something bad? God!* He was a little worried now. But she kept smiling at him. 'So, when do you plan on going back to the States?'

'Ur, about two weeks. I would like to stay longer but Lisa is keen to get back.'

'I suppose Lisa could just go back on her own.'

'Really, do you think so?'

'Yes, I suppose it is possible. And...' but Rod had walked back in, looking a little angry and carrying a tray full of plates. Wayne went over to him and helped him.

'Thanks, brother, Joss is having a moment.'

'Yes, fine. Let's do this ourselves,' and the brothers served their guests.

Trisha was completely turned on by the look of Rod, the perfect host, serving his guests. He looked at her while they ate and enjoyed the lust in her eyes. *Yes, I like it when you look at me like that,* he thought. He wished he could touch her and kiss her, just once. But Wayne was discussing world events with her, as if she was the authority on everything.

Gareth was trying to get Jocelyn out of her sullen mood. As soon as they had eaten, Jocelyn and Ian left, pleading another engagement. Wayne smiled and Rod was relieved. He was disturbed by her accusations that he had led her on, while sleeping with some other woman. She must be losing her marbles. He had always slept with other women. *But,* he thought, *since Wayne is back, it is understandable that she might go a little crazy. She is definitely not over him. Anyway, Lisa is quite exquisite in a sullen, gothic kind of way.* She said very little and seemed to be focused on 'her place in the universe' as she told Rod. *Good for her*, he thought and smiled. How Wayne imagined he could have a meaningful relationship with her was quite amazing. She was as different to him as any woman could possibly be. She did not have that quality of brilliance he liked so much in women. In fact, her eyes were dull and she was very self-absorbed. No wonder his brother was so interested in Patricia. He watched her speak and he noticed how comfortable she was with Wayne. He made her laugh and he seemed enthralled by the answers she gave to his questions. She never clasped her hands once and that really irritated him. *Why does she lie to me?*

Jocelyn had glared at him the whole time, as if he was the worst animal on the earth. *Really, she needs to get some control over herself. Why pick on me, when Wayne is sitting here?* He looked up and realized that Trisha was watching him. 'Would you like some help clearing all this up?'

'Yes, of course,' and they took some of the plates to the kitchen.

When they were alone, Trisha looked at him. 'Thank you, this is very nice.'

Rod just looked at her and he went to her and kissed her. 'Hmmm, I have wanted to do that the whole night.'

'I know,' she said and he raised his eyebrows. 'Oh I mean I also wanted you to.'

'Hmm, later, later.'

'Rod, will you come home with me tonight?'

Rod looked at her, surprised. He watched the lust in her green eyes and he turned away. 'Let's get the rest of the stuff, okay?'

'Fine. Suit yourself,' and she walked out.

Rod was getting confused. *What is she up to? Is she angry now?* What had he done now?

When they got back to the kitchen, he took the dishes from her and placed them on the counter. 'Now, are you fighting with me again? What have I done this time?'

'Nothing, I ...' but Rod stopped her as she tried to clasp her hands.

'Tell me,' and held her hands in his.

'If you don't want to, there is not much I can do, is there?'

'So you imagine, somewhere in your brain that I don't want to?'

'You didn't sound wild about it.'

'I was surprised, that's all. Now, please relax and we will leave when the guests are gone. Do you want to leave now?'

She laughed. 'No, you looked a little ambivalent.'

He looked at her, took her hands and placed them on his neck. He kissed her hard. 'Does that convince you?'

She hid her face in him, and whispered 'yes.'

Wayne walked in and found them like that. 'I like your cleaning mission here Rod. Now, can I just get some ashtrays? Some of us want to go smoke outside.'

Rod did not look away from Trisha.

'Fine, in there, below the sink. Smoke inside if you want to. Patricia has smoked in my bedroom, so I guess it's fine.'

He turned and looked at his brother. 'So, you asked me earlier. This is she.'

'I gathered. But can you just control yourselves while you have guests? You are being a little indiscreet. Gareth was about to come and get the ashtrays before I insisted I knew where you hide them.'

Rod laughed.

'Try and tell her that. She is fighting because I am behaving.'

Trisha looked at Wayne and smiled. 'Your brother is a little crazy,' and untangled herself from Rod and left them there.

'Interesting. I am amazed. I would never imagine you with someone like her.'

'Why not?'

'Her special talents. Not your style.'

'What are you talking about?'

Wayne looked at his brother. *He has no clue. How is that possible?* He had known immediately.

'You know, that combination of beauty and gentleness. You have preferred the more brazen type, I remember.'

'Ah. Maybe that is why we fight so much. She hardly fights back. She just keeps quiet, or worse, she lies to me to get me off a topic.'

'I am sure.'

Trisha walked back in, carrying other things.

'Talking about me?' She put them down and glared at him.

'You see what I mean? She will just pick a fight.'

'We were talking about her,' Wayne laughed and wondered why his brother could not see her clearly. *More importantly, why had she not simply told Rod?*

'Okay, I am going to have a cigarette. And you two must at least pretend you care that the rest of us are here.'

When he left, Rod looked at her. 'Now, can we just relax for a while?'

'Okay, sorry. Shall we get dessert?' She smiled and looked away from him.

'Are you teasing me, Patricia?'

'Yes. What can you do about it?' and walked out quickly.

She went to her bag and found her cigarettes. Wayne and Gareth were standing on the balcony, smoking. She went to them and they stopped talking. 'I am clearly an interesting subject tonight.'

'Trish, he was just saying how beautiful you are.' Gareth looked at her and she knew he was lying.

'Fine, thanks. I had better have a quick puff. Rod looks like he is going to kill us for leaving him with Lisa. They don't get on with each, do they?'

'Yes, there is no possibility of that. She is a bit far out for Rod. But he will survive. So relax and enjoy it.'

But Rod was not prepared to sit there with Lisa and walked over to the balcony and called her. 'Come, sit down and smoke inside. Would you like some coffee?'

'Okay, yes.' She followed him inside. She sat down and Lisa stared at her when Rod went out.

'You are one of them, aren't you?'

'Who, Lisa?'

'Those people with the gift.'

'Ur, I am not sure what you mean. I have no gift, really. I am a vet and I suppose I love animals.'

'I can see it in your eyes, when you look at Wayne.'

'Ah, I see. Now tell me about your plans while you are here.'

'Fine. I want to get to look around a bit. I would like to see someone who reads the tarot. Do you know anyone?'

'No. Ask Gareth there, he might know someone. He has a lot of human patients.'

Lisa smiled then.

'Yes, you are quite an interesting person.'

Trisha looked up in relief when Rod came back in, bearing two cups of coffee.

'It seems we are the only ones drinking coffee. So, tell me about the horses.'

'Oh, they were fine. One was a little depressed, but we moved her out of the stables and she seemed to perk up a bit. I hope that is all that was wrong with her.'

'So how do we know when a horse is depressed?' He was laughing now.

'Oh Rod, the same as humans, of course. Now stop making fun of my patients.'

'Fine, Lisa, do you think horses can be depressed?'

'Of course, everything in nature has a soul. If it can be happy, then it can be sad.'

‘Hmm, that was a bad question. Lisa, Wayne tells me you need to go back soon.’

‘Yes, I need to be in my own space to be grounded, you know.’

‘Yes, but I wish you could stay a little longer. I like having Wayne around. He grounds me,’ and he smiled to himself.

Trisha stared at him and he just raised his eyebrows at her. She looked outside and wondered what interesting conversation Wayne and Gareth were having. Wayne was desperate to find out more about this couple. He looked at Gareth, trying to see if he sensed the thing between Trisha and Rod. Gareth was relaxed and he doubted that he had any idea. But he really wanted to know about her.

‘So, how do you cope with Trisha?’

‘Oh fine. She is quite a gentle person, most of the time.’

‘I mean, with her ability. Doesn’t she always know when you do things, like look at another woman?’

Gareth was silent for a while. He looked away.

‘I am sorry. But I felt it when she touched me. And she knows something about me. Will she tell me?’

‘No, I doubt it.’

‘Oh, can’t you persuade her for me? You know, bedroom talk?’

Gareth laughed. ‘I wish! We are friends, not lovers.’

‘I would have sworn the two of you were a couple.’

‘Yes, we have been friends forever, so I guess we forget what others think.’

‘So you know all her secrets?’

Gareth laughed, ‘yes, but now you sound just like your brother. He also wants to know all her secrets.’

Wayne smiled, *okay, so this playboy is telling me to back off.* But he needed to speak to her alone. He needed to know what she had seen. He knew she had seen something important about him. He had been too many psychics in his life, when he was searching for the meaning of his life, and that look he knew it too well.

‘I am relieved to hear that, because she was kissing Rod in the kitchen just now.’

'Damn, those two. There will be a week of tears and fights. They both phone me, not each other. I wish they could just leave each other alone.' He groaned and Wayne laughed. 'So what is the problem?'

'Oh, they don't understand each other and never will. They need to focus on the sex and they will be fine. I told them, but they ignore my advice.'

'Yes, I'm sure. You told them just to have sex?'

'Yes, they wanted each other from the first time they met. So, have lots of sex and be cured. Simple, really.'

They laughed. 'I think we had better go inside and join them. Trish keeps looking here.'

Gareth walked in. 'Yes, thanks for the chat.'

Rod was glaring at them as they walked in. 'Oh very nice of the two of you to join us.'

Wayne shrugged and smiled at his brother. 'We were giving you an opportunity to have the women to yourself. Are you complaining?'

'No, no, of course not.'

'Was he decent to you ladies?'

'To me, yes, to Trisha, I am not sure....' Lisa looked away vaguely.

'Ah, I see.' Gareth looked at Trisha. *Are they fighting again?*

But she simply smiled back at him. She looked away, towards the balcony and then looked at Wayne. She had that confused look again.

'So, what is happening, Trisha?'

Wayne really wanted to know now. Trisha just looked at him. He realized that she understood his double meaning and she smiled.

'Ask Rod. He is making fun of my patients.'

Wayne stared at her. *Damn, she is quick.* He had hoped she would just say it before she had time to think. She looked at Rod, who was watching them. Then Wayne realized that she would never tell him when Rod was there. She did not want him to know.

'Okay, fine, Rod. Stop teasing her pets, okay. As Lisa will tell you, they have souls too.'

And he laughed with his brother.

'Gareth, Trisha tells me you might be able to help me. I am looking for a good tarot reader. Do you know anybody reliable?'

'Hmm, some of my patients profess such expertise. But, no, I don't know. I have this friend, Kathryn. She is pretty good. But she might not do it.'

He stopped talking when he saw how Trisha was staring at him. 'No, no, no, Gareth. We discussed this. Kathryn is not getting involved in this.'

'Oh come on, Trisha, what's the problem?'

Lisa sounded desperate now.

'She is Trisha's secretary. She does it secretly and would die if she thought Trisha even knew.'

'Why, Trisha, do you have a problem with people who have vision, who have the gift?' Wayne was challenging her now.

'No, I don't. But Kathryn works for me and I prefer not to get involved in her personal life.'

'Hmm, I see.' Wayne looked at her. 'I see.'

'If that is the problem then you don't have to be there. We can do it in the evening, at her place. Please, Trisha, I really need a reading. Something is about to happen that is huge in my life and I want to know.'

'Why, Lisa. What difference does it make? Things will happen anyway.'

Rod looked at her and then Trisha.

'Because it is better to be prepared. Also, there might be steps you can take to prevent harm. I would really like to see her or someone else.'

'Someone else.' Rod looked at all of them. 'Patricia is right. As much as I like Kathryn, you have to respect her work. Get someone else, if you have to do it.'

Trisha smiled at him. 'Thank you, Rod. Gareth, you, I am going to kill.'

'Oh come on, Trisha. What's the big deal anyway? Don't you want to know what is going to happen in the future?' Wayne looked at her.

'Not particularly. It is too stressful.'

'Oh, but I really want to know.'

He stared at her and she looked away and clasped her hands. Rod was completely confused. Why was Wayne acting so weird towards her? He acted like they had met before.

'Patricia, have you met Wayne before today?'

'No, of course not. What a silly question, Rod,' and he was relieved that she did not clasp her hands when she answered him. She had even looked straight at him.

'Don't start that discussion, okay?' appealing to him to let it go.

Rod knew she was telling the truth, but he also knew that she was not telling him something. He sighed. 'Fine. Now, will you excuse us? I need to speak to Patricia.'

He held out his hand and led her to his bedroom. 'Are you okay? You are getting tense.'

She sighed. 'I would like to go home now, please. It has been little stressful. Rod, are you coming home with me?'

'Yes, Patricia. Did you and Gareth use one car?'

'Yes, I was too nervous. I would never have made it here on my own.'

'Yes, you are too tense' and he held her close. 'Yes, I think we can leave this party now.'

They went back into the lounge, where Gareth and Wayne were sitting on the floor and Lisa had stretched herself out on the carpet.

'Patricia and I need to leave. Is that okay?'

'Sure, sure,' Wayne said.

The others were silent. They were watching how Rod had his arm on her so possessively as if he was afraid she would run away.

As soon as they left, Gareth spoke enthusiastically. 'Okay, now. I am going to phone Kathryn to come with her cards. Rod will not come back for a while, unless they have a fight.'

'Shit, I don't know. She seemed really tense about it. Is it okay?'

'Yes, she doesn't want to deal with Kathryn in that way. I am sure it will be fine. Even if Rod gets back, she won't be with him.'

‘Yes, it will probably be good for him. He could do with a reading.’

Wayne looked at Gareth.

‘Okay, don’t look at me like that. Yes, she has the gift, she always has. But it has been a difficult thing for her. Her parents tried to suppress it and even now, her father will pretend it doesn’t exist. Even her lovers have had a problem with it. So, yes, Rod does not know. That is what they fight about. He knows, but he doesn’t know.’

‘Why doesn’t she just tell him?’

‘Because she is in love with him. She can’t bear the thought that she could lose him.’

‘She is wrong about that. Rod has many faults, but he accepts everyone for whatever they might be. I can vouch for that. He has lived with all my strange and wonderful friends. He shrugs and accepts it. The only thing he cannot stand is being lied to. If she lies to him, he will never forgive her.’

‘Yes, hence my advice that they get over it. She will never tell him the truth and he will never accept her lie. So, sex is the only answer. You know what is so sad about it? Trish is the best I have ever met. She is 100% accurate.’

‘Really?’ Lisa was listening now.

‘Yes, her images are very sharp and she can give you colors and descriptions.’

‘Yes, I can see that in her eyes. She knows something about me. Shit, I wish she could tell me.’

‘If it is bad, I know she will warn you. Even if it means she loses Rod. She would have called you aside and told you.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘Yes, part of her gift is helping people make the right choices. If there is any danger, she is selfless in her help. So, relax, it is probably good news.’

‘Hmm, I hope so.’

Gareth’s phone was ringing. ‘Trish, calling already? Are you fighting with Rod?’

She laughed. ‘No silly. We are still on the road. I just phoned to tell you that if you have any idea of calling Kathryn now that I have left, I will be very angry.’

‘What, me? I would never do that. You gave us strict instructions, remember?’

‘Yes, but tonight is not the time.’

‘Trish, what do you mean?’

‘Lisa does not need Kathryn around today. Trust me, a girl knows these things. It is not good.’

‘Come on Trish, tell me.’

She laughed, ‘you had better behave. Yes, he is here. We are turning into my driveway now. Also, have the decency not to discuss Kathryn’s sex life. Please, respect that, okay?’

‘Shit, you can’t talk. Okay, some questions.’

‘Fine, fine.’

‘Is Kathryn in danger?’

‘Not in that way, but emotionally, yes.’

‘No, I promise we are not fighting, but I realized that you would try to phone her after I left.’

‘You saw something?’

‘Of course. I am not just a pretty face.’

‘Okay, now the other thing, why not?’

‘Ur.... she likes coins....what is another name for them? Yes, pentacles. Yes, no, not old ones, new ones.’

‘The prince of pentacles?’

‘Yes, of course, right before your eyes.’

‘Okay, Wayne?’

‘Yes, yes, you fool! Gosh.’

‘Okay, okay. Why not tonight?’

‘Lisa might not like having a beautiful woman around tonight. She is a little depressed and having spoken with her, she is not in a good way.’

‘Okay, like the hanged man?’

'Yes, yes. So will you please leave Kathryn alone? Why don't you guys just go to that pub, near your office?'

'The Crowded House?'

'Yes, yes, that one. I am sure all of you will be entertained. I am sure it will lift Lisa's spirits and yours as well.'

'Me?'

'Yes, of course. Now I have to go. Rod is staring at me in that way, like I am a crazy woman. Goodnight.'

'Goodnight.'

Wayne watched Gareth on the phone and when Gareth moved away from them, he knew that Trisha was talking about him. *What the hell is going on? Something about coins? Not tonight? A crowded house?* He wanted to move closer and listen to the conversation, but he resisted the urge. Gareth turned to them.

'Okay, as I was saying, Trish is 100% accurate. She said we are not to phone Kathryn tonight. She says, though, that we might be entertained if we go to this pub, the Crowded House. What do you make of that?'

'Hmmm, am I in danger, Gareth?'

'No, of course not. I told you, she would have told you herself. No, relax. She couldn't talk because Rod was there. I asked her about you and she says not to worry. Also, Lisa, she says you need to lift your spirits and the Crowded House is perfect for you.'

'Oh shit! How did she know I was feeling down?'

Gareth did not answer that question, because you would to have been blind not to see it.

'Okay, let's do it her way. Damn, I wish she could tell Rod. I really want to know what is bothering her about me. She gets that confused look and then she just stares at me, as if it is impossible. I want to say, what is impossible? Ughh.... this is so frustrating!'

'You guys go. I don't feel...'

'Yes, so you are coming. Let's go and see what happens.'

~ ~ ~ ~

Rod was looking at her, his eyes dark. 'Now, can I please have some of your attention? You take this business with Kathryn too seriously. What harm can come from them reading tarot cards?'

'Nothing. I am being silly. Now, you want some of my attention, do you? What do I get in exchange?'

She looked at him and then looked down demurely. Rod opened the door and smiled. 'Fine, I will show, you wicked wench.'

Rod woke up early and just stayed in bed with her. She was fast asleep and he liked the quietness around her. He loved the way her hands were spread over him and her legs curled around him. He sighed, feeling so happy. She was the best thing that could have ever happened to him. He thought about how she had a way of fighting with him, not trusting him. He knew that she was not ready to trust him, but watching her sleep, it did not matter. He smiled as she moaned at him for moving around. He started laughing, thinking how possessive she could be when she allowed herself relax. She woke up.

'Rod, who are you talking to?'

He kissed her head, 'nobody, just enjoying watching you.'

'Hmm, sleep. It is still dark.'

'Hmm I have a better idea.....'

~ ~ ~ ~

When Rod left later, he was very pleased. It was the first time that they had had a civilized night and morning, with no tension or argument. They sat in bed and drank coffee and teased each other. It was so wonderfully normal, he could not stop smiling. But when he got inside and found Wayne sitting on the balcony, looking so distraught, his heart sank a little.

'Shit Wayne, what happened to you?' He sat down

‘Oh Rod, I am truly a pig. I am the worst man under the sun. I really have no clue about women.’

‘Okay, what happened?’

‘We went to this club last night. It was great fun and Gareth met some woman he swears he is going to spend the rest of his life with. It was very funny, because I suspect he has said that before. So we were talking, while the women were in the ‘bathroom’. It suddenly dawned on me. I don’t even like her and I would never even suggest that she will spend the rest of her life with me. Shit, the thought made my blood go cold. It was such a mean thought. There was Lisa, smiling and having fun, and I realized that I did not love her, did not like her and that her sullen superior attitude towards the world was starting to irritate me. I decided she should go home. I want her to leave. Shit, that is so awful.’

‘Why? I could have told you it won’t work. She doesn’t have your passion, your carelessness. She is too self-absorbed, actually. She does not really know that you or anybody else is around. I am glad you found out now. Imagine if you tried to be a nice guy and then found out when you had three kids, grandma and 6 cats?’

Wayne laughed. ‘Yes, that is not a pretty picture. But, why now, Rod? In New York, we get on so well.’

Rod sighed. ‘I suppose I should be honest with you. Okay, you are home now, so I guess you are feeling more yourself. I suppose when you meet yourself at the home front, Lisa does not fit. She is not a bad person, she just needs something different.’

‘Yes, that is what Gareth said. But I keep doing this. I meet these women, lead them on and then wake up to find that I would rather die than be with them. What is wrong with me?’

‘Nothing Wayne. You just a romantic. Does she know?’

‘That’s the weird thing. As soon as I realized this, she seemed to be....liberated. She seemed to have more fun and was more relaxed. I never told her, but we understood each other. She looked liberated. Does that make sense?’

‘Hmm, so she is fine?’

‘Yes, I think so. We came back late last night and we just went to bed. We did not talk about it. I could hardly tell her that I don’t love her, after I brought her here.’

'Hmm, okay, just see what happens. If she does not like it here, she can go home. When you go back, you can see how you feel.'

'Yes, that is Trisha said.'

'Trisha? What has she got to do with this?'

'Relax, when we talked, she told me that I could just stay when Lisa goes back.'

'Hmmm, I see. Wayne, I am going to ask you something and I need you to be honest with me, okay?'

'Fine, what have I done?'

'Are you sexually attracted to her?'

Wayne laughed. 'Oh Rod, of course not. The moment she walked in, I knew she was yours. Really. I suppose I watched your face, the way it lit up when she arrived, so I am curious. She is very different and I suppose I want to know about her, the woman who makes my brother smile and growl. Oh Rod, that idea is really bizarre.'

'Fine, okay. It's just you seem to ...ur.... take a keen interest in her.'

'Yes, wouldn't you if you suddenly found me going crazy over a woman?'

'Yes, of course. Sorry, I had to ask. She seemed a little guarded around you, too. I just wondered.'

'Hmm, she seemed guarded towards everyone, if you must know. She is hardly the open, share-my-heart-with-all is she?'

Rod laughed, 'yes and as much as it drives me crazy, I like it that way.'

'Did you have a good time last night?'

'Oh yes. For once, we didn't fight. I thought we would, because she was a little tense. But once we were at her house, she was just relaxed. It was fun.'

'Fun?'

'I am not giving you details, save to say it was a wonderful night.'

'Good. Rod, thanks, once again. You always seem to deal with my problems. On that subject, what is going on with Joss?'

'I don't know. She was a bit strange. She said she is angry with me, for going off and sleeping with other women. I don't know. Since she knew you were coming, she was acting a little odd. But then she accuses me of leading her on, while I am sleeping with Patricia.'

'Shit! Damn! I never realized it before. That's it!'

'What?'

'She has always been in love with you. Even when we went out, she would want to come home and she often asked me about your girlfriends.'

'Oh, don't be silly! When you left she was completely devastated. She practically moved in here. Lamenting her broken heart. ....ah I see. No, it is not possible.'

'Yes, when she saw you with Trisha, her eyes flashed and that's why I came over. Watch her, Rod. She has been in love with you for years. Shit, that bitch used me to get to you! Damn! I spent many months feeling guilty about leaving.'

'Hmm, I don't know. She has never made a pass at me. She just talked a lot, about you and her life. I don't know. She was just acting crazy.'

'We shall see.'

Rod went to work and phoned Trisha. 'Good morning. How are the depressed creatures doing?'

'Hi Rod, you are awful. They are doing well. And you, how is work?'

'Hmm fine, I suppose. I just phoned to say hello.'

'Hello, that is very sweet of you.'

'Also, tonight, what shall we do?'

'I have some ideas....'

And he laughed. 'Okay, but can we make it a little late? I need to see Wayne. Things are not going well with Lisa.'

'Ah, the sultry Lisa. She is not much fun, is she?'

'Yes, I know. My dear brother has finally discovered this.'

‘Oh, but she doesn’t want to be here either. Why doesn’t she just go home?’

‘You are a cold woman.’

‘No, I am serious. She is not happy here.’

‘Hmm, I will tell her you said this.’

‘No, no, that will freak her out more. She will decide herself soon enough, I am sure. How is Wayne feeling about that?’

‘He would be relieved. But he feels a little guilty, because he brought her all the way here.’

‘Yes, but it will be fine. It could be worst I suppose.’

‘How so?’

‘They could find out later in their lives.’

‘Hmm that’s what I said to him. Anyway, he likes you.’

‘I doubt that. He is deeply suspicious of me.’

Rod laughed, ‘he can be a little protective, I suppose. Now, I will see you later, around 9.00?’

She sighed. ‘Oh, okay. I have to go. More depressive pets waiting.’

She smiled when she put down the phone. She liked it when he phoned her, just to chat. It was always more relaxed than when he stared at her, especially when she was having a vision. She wondered if she should just tell him. After all, what good would it do if he found out on his own? What good would it do if she got used to having him around when he would eventually run away from her?

Chapter 5

‘Trish, you are the most amazing woman, my best friend. Thank you so much. I could kiss you,’ Gareth was animated and excited.

‘Okay, that’s very nice. But what have I done to deserve such praise?’

‘You sent me to that dreadful place and there she was!’

'Who, what are you talking about?'

'Oh, stop pretending you don't know. Janine, of course!'

'Okay, so who is Janine?'

'Trish! You are so evil. Okay, I met her and she just ignored me at first. She peeked at me and when I looked at her, she looked away. Then, dear Wayne went over and asked her to dance with me. She just glared at him and I thought I would die.'

'Oh gosh!'

'Yes, she finally walked over to me, and then smiled. "So, you are Gareth?" I nodded. "So, why don't you want to dance with me?" I just stared at her. She took my hand and we went to dance. I felt her, you know, all over me.'

'Hmm, I am sure.'

'No, I mean, I felt the woman. We danced a few times and then we went to join Wayne and Lisa, who, by the way, was in a much better mood. Wayne, however, seemed to have gone into a slump. Anyway, we talked a bit. She is a psychologist, can you believe it? As sexy as they come. I want to lie on her couch right now.' Trisha laughed.

'Okay, so you are in lust. What happened?'

'I did what I know. I took her home. But nothing happened.'

'What? You?'

'Yes, we talked and talked and listened to music. It was the most erotic experience of my life.'

'Gareth, are you feeling okay?'

'Yeah, yes, it was intimate. I took her home this morning. We did not sleep at all.'

'So, you took a woman home and just spoke for a couple of hours?'

'Yes, we watched the sun rise.'

'Gareth, I find this hard to believe.'

'Me too. But you were right. You said it would be good for me to go there. So, stop playing dumb and tell me how she looks.'

'Okay, okay, but I could hardly tell you. I mean, you would have looked at every woman with long blond hair and blue eyes. She has a mark on her left arm, I don't know. A little patch. Okay, let's see. Also, she is a lot shorter than you, but then who isn't? And her eyes are large and she wears a pink lip gloss, little makeup, but she certainly doesn't need it. Great legs.'

'Excellent Trish. Shit, you are good. Only thing, I don't know about the mark on her arm. I didn't exactly inspect her. What is it?'

'Nothing, just a distinguishing feature, I suppose.'

'You know her better than I do. So we have a date tonight. I feel a little nervous now. What if we just talk again?'

Trisha laughed now. 'Ah, Gareth is back in top form. Why can't you meet a woman and just talk? Really, it might be a good thing.'

'Because she is so lovely. I would die if I never got to know her that way.'

'Hmm, I think you need to relax. Really, try and just enjoy her as a person for once. Women like that.'

'Okay, okay, so tonight, I just see what happens?'

'Yes, it might be fun to like her, Gareth.'

'Hmm, I don't need a friend. I have plenty of those. But okay, is this friendly or psychic advice?'

'I am afraid, just friendly. Nothing had come to me. I seem to have the strongest ones when Rod is around, isn't that ironic?'

'Yes, I notice that you seem much stronger. Why is that?'

'I don't know. The more I try to hide it, the stronger it gets.'

'Shit, Trish, he is going to find out, you know that?'

'Yes, but for now, I like having him in my bed.'

'Hmm, but the longer you take, the harder it gets.'

'And the angrier he will be.'

'Hmm, Wayne knows, so he might tell him.'

'I know, I know. It is driving me crazy.'

'Yes, I also want to warn you. Wayne asked for your number. He is determined to know what you saw about him.'

'I can't tell him, because I just get this image, of him and Kathryn. It is like a magical field around them, but then there is a cloud. That's the problem. There is a problem, but I can't see it. So there is nothing to say.'

'Hmm, a cloud, where?'

'Around him, as if he needs to do or not do something. I can't tell yet.'

'So you are sure it is Kathryn?'

'Yes, she is smiling happily and is in love with him. I think he is not going back. How can I tell him that?'

'Hmm I see. Yes, to tell him might influence him.'

'Yes, so I have to avoid him for a while. So keep him away from me. If I see the problem, then I will tell him. I suppose if I could read his cards, I could work it out. But how can I read his cards? Rod will definitely find out.'

'Okay. I will try to keep him away. How is Rod?'

'Oh, fine. We had a good night, relaxed and sexy.'

'Good. Just what I ordered. Seeing him again?'

'Yes, tonight.'

'Ah, good, remember, lots of sex and no conversation.'

Trisha laughed. 'I will try.'

~ ~ ~ ~

When Wayne tried to phone Trisha, she was on the phone to someone else. Later, her secretary said she had gone out for a while. *Okay, she is being evasive.* He found the address and decided he would go to her office. When he got there, he watched full red lips laughing on the phone. She had long, red hair that hung loose like she had been too lazy to comb it. Her blouse squeezed her breasts out, upwards and her big brown eyes turned to him, smiling. She stopped talking for a while and said, 'look I will call you back later.'

He liked her voice, the way it soothed the caller. She was quite exquisite.

'Hello, sorry about that, but I did not see you come in. Where is the patient?'

She got up and leaned over. He watched as her breast moved towards him, greeting him cheerfully.

'Ur…. I suppose I am the patient.'

'Oh, you are Rod, aren't you? I recognize the voice. I am pleased to meet you. I am afraid she is out.'

He looked at her, the way she spoke to him as if to comfort him.

'No, I am not Rod. I am his brother, Wayne. So Trisha is really out?'

'Yes, oh, you sound like him. He calls all the time. I have never met him, but he calls all the time. Your voice is very similar. Sorry.'

'Sure, fine. Ur... you are Kathryn?'

She stared at him. *How does he know my name?* 'Ur, yes.'

'Oh, Trisha has talked about you. Wonderful things. But she never mentioned that you were quite so lovely.'

Kathryn giggled. It was the highlight of her day that a glorious hunk would come to the office and flirt with her. She was in heaven. She liked the way he had dark, intense eyes that looked like they were trying to strip her naked. *Oh, he is quite scrumptious.*

'Oh thank you. I am surprised. Trisha never talks that much.'

'She told me about you. So, is it quiet now?'

'Yes, we are closed for lunch now. She is out, treating some cat that was bitten by the family dog. They don't seem to get on well, but the owner, Mrs. Kristy, is about 80 years old and she can't get here. So Trisha goes out there. I don't know when she will be back. She often spends some time there, to keep the old lady company.'

'Ah, but I am pleased I came down here. So, do you want to have a quick lunch with me?'

'Ur, I try not to go out when Trisha is out, but...'

'Oh come on. I will take responsibility.'

'No, no, it's just that she takes her patients seriously. Okay, let me phone her.'

‘Hi Trisha. Yes, very quiet. I want to close up for a bit. I need to go out. Do you have a key?’

‘Yes, yes, but I won’t be back for a while. I have some shopping to do. Do we have anything on this afternoon?’

‘No, nothing scheduled.’

‘Fine, I need a break. Can you call me if you need me?’

‘Yes, of course. Melissa has just walked in. I am sure she can hold the fort while we are out.’

‘Oh, perfect. Kathryn, have fun, okay? If it takes longer, then, well, that’s fine.’

‘Ur, what do you mean?’

‘It might take longer than you think, so relax.’

‘Okay, fine. I might see you later then, Bye.’

‘Melissa, perfect timing. Olga didn’t pitch for work, so I am all alone here. I need to go out for a while. Can you hold the fort?’

‘Yes, I was coming to try and get some studying done with you. But we can do that later. When will you back?’

‘Hi, I am Wayne. She is going to be a while. Do you mind?’

Melissa looked at him and smiled. ‘Oh, no. I have to complete an assignment. Where is Trisha?’

‘Mrs. Kristy.’

‘Ouch! Have you done your assignment?’

‘Sort of. I need one more day.’ They laughed

‘Okay, see you later. Thanks.’

Wayne liked this giggling woman very much. She seemed to like to laugh and he loved it.

‘So, you are Kathryn, hmm?’

‘Yes, why does that surprise you?’

‘I just never imagined that you would be so.... perfect.’

'Perfect?'

'Yes.'

'Oh I am not sure I like that.'

'Why?'

'Because that is so boring,' and he laughed.

'What assignment are you doing?'

'Oh, I am a student of the veterinary sciences. That is why I work for Trisha. She helps me get practical experience. So, she needed a secretary and that's what I do while I study. The receptionist, of course, takes advantage of this and doesn't come to work too often.'

'Ah, so Trisha does not mind you studying?'

'Oh no. She is great. Sometimes, I feel so tired or stupid. She is always telling me that I am too smart to let a few obstacles stop me.'

'Hmm, that is very sound advice. Yes, Trisha is a woman of many talents.'

'Yes, but she is a little strange. She told me to take as long as I needed, because it could take a while. But I never told her where I was going. I think she spend too much time with that old lady, I tell you,' and she laughed.

But Wayne was trying to think hard. *What did she mean? So, this is important. Hmm, yes, I bloody hope so. Kathryn is too lovely for a casual encounter.*

They chatted. They went to the park and sat on a bench. Kathryn was disappointed when he said he had come with his girlfriend.

Gosh! All the good ones were really gone. But never mind, it is wonderful to spend time with an intelligent, funny man who thinks I am beautiful and does not look like his dog or cat!

When she looked at the time, it was almost 4.00.

'Oh Gosh! Look at the time! I had better phone to check that everything is fine.'

'Melissa, sorry. Is everything alright?'

'Yes, one man came in, but I made an appointment for him tomorrow. Trisha is not coming back. Are you?'

'Yes, shortly. Are you okay?'

'Yes, fine. I managed to get some work done.'

'Okay, bye.'

She smiled at Wayne. 'Oops, I have been bad.'

'No, it was wonderful.'

'I know. I lost track of the time. Anyway, Trisha is not coming back today. She has gone shopping. I think she has another date with your brother.'

'Yes, I have no doubt.'

'Yes, he sounds quite nice. But she does drive him a little crazy.'

Wayne laughed. 'Trust me. He is not an easy man. Always wants to have his way. So they deserve each other.'

'Trisha is a lovely person, but a little stubborn. But you know, she really cares about her patients and everything. I like that about her. She lets us use her offices for our practical training. All my friends come in and she doesn't mind. She just laughs and tells us to have fun.'

~ ~ ~ ~

It was a few days before Wayne got to see Trisha again. Rod had taken her to his house for a drink and to collect his clothes.

'Hi Trisha. I seem to have displaced my brother.'

'Yes, I am very pleased that you have displaced him. He makes me coffee in bed and makes sure I get to work on time. Very useful man.'

She laughed as Rod raised his eyebrows at her. 'Hmm, in that mood, tonight? Fine.'

'I am going out just now. Lisa is staying in. Would you guys like a quick drink?'

'Yes, please. I need to get some stuff and I will join you.'

When Rod left, Wayne looked at her. 'So, are you going to tell me or do I have to beg?'

'Please, Wayne, this is not appropriate. Can you please let it go?'

'No, tell me.'

'Okay, you are not going to be with Lisa. She will go home this weekend and there is someone else. You will like her very much.'

'Hmm, I see. Kathryn?'

'That is not fair. If I say that, then you will sort of..... don't look at me like that! You are just as bad as your brother. Okay, it seems like. But there is something else and I can't see what it is. There is a cloud over you, I think. I don't know what it means. There is some confusion.'

'About what?'

'I don't know, okay?'

'What else?'

'Nothing, nothing. I don't want to talk about this. Rod....., we don't talk about that. He doesn't know.'

'Yes, but how long can you keep it from him?'

'I.... don't know. Can you please get the drinks?'

'Yes, yes.'

A few moments later, Lisa emerged from her bedroom. 'Hi, I didn't know you were here.'

'Yes, Wayne said you were resting. How are you?'

'Oh fine. So, what are you two talking about?'

'Oh, just work. Oh Rod, that was quick.'

'Hmm, hello Lisa. Feeling better?'

'Yes, yes, thank you. Sorry I have been a little gloomy. Just missing home, that's all.'

And Rod did not miss the look that passed Trisha's face. He wondered why she took such a keen interest in sending the poor girl home. But he smiled, because at least they were getting on very nicely now. Even Jocelyn had eased up a little and told him she was happy for him. Things were looking good and tonight, they would sit and talk. They had not done that in a while.

They sat and had a drink with Wayne and Lisa and Trisha was relieved that they were perfectly civil. Rod looked very relaxed now. He sat next to Trisha and touched her hand as he spoke.

'Are you tired, Rod?'

'Hmm, yes, a little. This problem with Thomas Sealy. It has been quite difficult. I have spent days going over all his books. There are errors and fraud. It is making me nervous about others.'

'I doubt it. When these things happen, everybody folds, so you would have heard by now. Don't you think, Trisha?'

Wayne desperately sought her reassurance.

'Yes, of course. It is like a chain reaction. But Rod, you need a break from it all.'

'Hmm I will see later,' and he closed his eyes.

'It doesn't help that you are so ....pre-occupied with Trisha at night.' Lisa said in a flat tone.

Rod laughed. 'Yes, I think this is all your fault, Patricia. Keeping awake at night.'

Trisha just smiled. *This Lisa really has to go home. She is starting to get that Jocelyn streak, and I don't like it.*

'Want another drink, Rod?'

'Hmm, yes, I suppose so.'

When Wayne left, Trisha whispered to him. 'Do you want to stay here tonight?'

'Hmm yes, that would be nice. Is that okay with you?'

'Of course. But you will have to take me home in the morning, early.'

'Fine.'

They sat on the balcony with Rod in a quiet, relaxed mood. Lisa went back to bed and Wayne went to an undisclosed destination with friends for a drink. It was 4.00 when Rod heard his brother return. *Hmm, this is not good. Poor Lisa.*

Rod was battling to fall off to sleep again. He had that feeling again, like he was missing something. He spent a great deal of his time paying attention to detail and he knew he was missing something. He tried hard to figure out what it was. Eventually he realized that he did not like the odd intimacy between Trisha and his brother. Something was wrong. She was tense around him and only relaxed when he was not there. And Wayne asked too

many questions about her. There was something wrong. It frustrated him that he was missing a detail. He needed to know what bothered him so much.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Some five days later, when Lisa went back home and he hardly saw Wayne, Jocelyn gave him the answer. 'Hi Rod. How are you?'

'Fine, a little busy, but fine. And you?'

'A little distressed. I don't know how to say this, but I think Trisha is seeing Wayne.'

'What? Jocelyn, what are you on about?'

'Oh Rod, I don't know whether to say this. About two days ago I was driving in the area of her office and his car was there. I didn't think much of it, but then later, after my appointment, he was still there. It was well after 5.00. He had been there the whole afternoon. So I phoned there and he answered the phone.'

'Jocelyn, are you crazy?'

'No, if you don't believe me, he has been there every afternoon, till late.'

Rod was silent. Trisha said she was out all afternoon, the past few days. Some old woman with fighting cats and dogs.

'This afternoon, he was not there, so I investigated the matter. Rod, they are at your house.'

'What, Joss. What do you mean?'

'Her car is there, at your house, now.'

He sighed. 'Fine, thanks. I will go over right now. I will kill both of them.'

Rod drove to his house. He had tried to phone her, but her phone was off. His heart was beating so fast, he felt it stop when he saw her car there, perched possessively on his driveway. He walked slowly now, trying to control his breathing. His chest was tight and his brain seemed to have died. He looked through the window and there she was. She was sitting on the floor, her shoes off and Wayne sat opposite her. Her eyes were closed and

she was holding his hands, touching them, feeling them. Wayne was staring at her, in complete fascination.

She jerked her head suddenly. 'Rod is not alright. God, what's wrong? Rod!'

She turned her head and there he was, watching them from the window. She got to her feet. 'Rod, Rod!' but he looked at her and just walked back to his car.

'Shit! Shit!'

'Oh fuck it! He thinks we are.... No, Rod would never believe that of me, of you. Shit, that is the craziest thing!'

Wayne stared at her. 'We were sitting here, in his house, in the middle of the afternoon.'

'Yes, but why would he just come here?'

'I don't know.'

She tried to phone him, but he simply switched off his phone. Wayne ran his fingers through his hair, pacing. 'Let me deal with this. He will listen to me. I ....he needs to talk to me. If you talk to him, you will just fight.'

Wayne looked a little puzzled. 'He never comes home in the day. He has never done that. Something is wrong here.'

'Please, we need to find him.'

But Rod did not return to his office or his home. Wayne waited until he fell off to sleep. He left messages for him and in the morning, he woke up to see Rod staring at him.

'Oh Shit, Rod! Fuck! Where have you been?'

'How could you? How could you even think of her that way?'

'Rod, calm down, please. Sit down. There is nothing going on. Please sit down and stop standing over me like that. Shit you should know me better than that! Rod, she came over to help me. Don't you understand? She came to help me. She loves you.'

'Really, is that why she is in my house, with my brother, getting cozy?'

'No, she was not getting cozy. I begged her to help me and eventually she said yes. I practically forced her. She said she needed to speak to you and I just went there this afternoon. I begged her.'

'What exactly was she helping you with? Are you a dog, cat, or maybe a horse?'

'Rod, sit down and let us talk, properly. Please, Roderick, sit down and listen very carefully.'

'What? What possible explanation can you give me for spending all your afternoons in her office?'

'What are you talking about? I saw her today for the first time since the night she stayed here.'

'So you decided you wanted more? Is that why you were both so eager for Lisa to leave?'

'No, Lisa had to go. But your Trisha, she would never do that. Gosh. Rod, don't you know her?'

'Clearly not as well as you.'

'Shut up, Rod, stop it. I have never had any such designs on her. You have thought that right from the beginning. You always wanted to believe that. Can you tell me why?'

'Because I saw the way you spoke to her, okay? From the first day.'

Rod sat down. 'I don't understand why you think I have been seeing her in her office. I have been there, because she was not there. I..... have been seeing Kathryn. We met there when Trisha was seeing some old lady.'

'But Jocelyn saw you with her, there and she even phoned.'

'Joss? Your source of information is Joss? Fuck it, Rod, I thought you had more intelligence than that. You trust Joss more than me? After I warned you. You trust that mad, compulsive bitch?'

Wayne got up and put his clothes on. He started packing his things. 'Fine, go to your precious Joss. After I tried to dump the insane cow, you just had to take her in and look after her. Why? Tell me why? So now, she tells you something, you don't ask me, you ask her, the woman I dumped because she was obsessive compulsive? Look at you, even now, you want to believe her. Go to hell, you fool!'

'Where do you think you are going? You expect me to believe that Patricia was helping you with what, to unwind? What do you take me for? All those secrets conversations, really, Wayne. I want you to tell me how you can live with yourself after that. Tell me, what was she helping you with?'

'Something way above your intelligence. Go to Joss. I am sure she will give you a nice explanation. You deserve each other. I am going. I will collect the rest of my things later. I can't bear to look at you right now.'

'Don't you dare run away. Don't you dare adopt that self-righteous attitude with me. You should never have touched her or phoned her or even thought about her. How could you? Behind my back?'

But Wayne looked at him and walked out. He sped out and phoned Trisha.

'The dark cloud? I can tell you. The dear, wonderful Jocelyn.'

When he had told her everything, Trisha was silent. 'Yes, I suppose it makes sense. This is so easy for him. This way he doesn't have to really deal with me. I am sick of all this. I keep having to think what I am going to say, or not say. Okay, I am going to tell him. Is he at home?'

'Yes, but he is not listening to me.'

'Fine, let me try. Wayne, thank you for trying. Where are you going?'

'I will find a hotel and then I will tell you where I am. Just in case that fool of a brother does something stupid.'

'Okay.'

She phoned him on his cell phone and then at home. But he did not answer the phone. His office said he would not be in for the day. *Shit. Where is he?*

When she eventually got through to his cell phone later, he greeted her. 'Hello, Patricia. I take it you are well?'

'No, Rod, I am not well. Can we talk?'

'No, I got a fairly good picture. And asking your lover to explain it to me angers me even more than your deceit, actually. At least you should have had the grace to tell me yourself. Have a wonderful life.'

And he hung up. She phoned him again. 'Rod, will you please listen to me? I have something important to tell you.'

'Hmm, a little late don't you think? Okay, now I know. You are fucking my brother! I know, okay? Now leave me alone!'

Rod was so angry that he felt he could beat the both of them up. How could dear, sweet Patricia do that? *How can Wayne, my own brother, who has been my friend for so long, hurt me this way?*

He couldn't think. He went to his bed and tried to sleep. He tried to think and there was a pounding feeling in his head. He played back all the things that had bothered him from the first time they had met. No matter what they told him now, he had known the first day. Wayne had been fixated with her and they had all those odd conversations that only they understood. He hated her now, for coming into his heart and tearing it apart. He wanted to take her and shake her and squeeze the last bit of life from her. He hated the way she sat on his floor, touching Wayne. *Damn,* he had been a fool. He had known from the beginning that she was not honest with him. He was so tired of all the lies and deceit, at work and at home. He fell asleep and woke up later in the day. She had phoned him again and now he was getting seriously angry with her. He imagined her sitting, clasping her hands as she tried to tell him she was just chatting to his brother. *Damn!*

He ate and slept again. He woke up the next morning. *Okay, I have been a total fool. Fine. Now back to my life. Let that bitch die in hell with my brother! They deserve each other.*

~ ~ ~ ~

Two days later, he phoned Jocelyn. He felt calmer now and he needed to thank her. 'Hi Joss, how are you?'

'Fine, fine, busy. Too much to do and too little time to do it.'

'Hmm, I know the feeling. Thanks for the other day. I appreciate it.'

'Oh Rod, are you okay?'

'Yes, now, yes, but I was pretty mad. So it's back to the drawing board.'

'Oh Rod, I am so sorry. Can I do anything to help?'

'No, I am fine, really.'

'Come for dinner tonight. I will cook something special and we can talk.'

'Yes, sure, I need it.'

When he arrived at her house, Jocelyn was gay and happy. She went to him and hugged him, 'oh poor Rod!'

'I am fine now. Still a little pissed off, but fine.'

He ate his dinner quietly and Jocelyn chatted. She did not mention Wayne or Trisha, but talked about her art.

'I see you are doing well.'

'Yes, but you gave my painting to that horrible woman! Ah, I wish you could get it back.'

'No. I gave it her. It was a gift.'

'Oh, can't you get it back?'

'No, of course not.'

'Fine. Now, tell me about work.'

'Oh there is nothing to tell, usual stuff. Why do you want the painting back?'

'I hate the thought that you gave it to her as a gesture of love. That really irks me, I suppose. After all that, she does not appreciate you.'

'It does not matter. That painting is for her. It does not matter.'

'Fuck it! Rod, you are still in love with her! After she did that! What is wrong with you?'

'Joss, leave it alone. That painting belongs with her. You will not understand that. Anyway, what does it matter now?'

'She has something that should be for you and me.'

'I had better get back home. I have lots of work to do. Thank you, for a wonderful night.'

'Will you come tomorrow?'

'Ah, no, I am afraid not. Are you okay?'

'Not really. I guess since Ian left, I feel a little lonely.'

He hugged her. 'You are so beautiful, I am sure some man is going to snap you up in no time.'

'But never the right one.'

He laughed. 'I am sure the right one will come along soon enough.'

'Oh really? Oh Rod!'

When he left, he felt that disquiet he always felt when he knew he was missing something again.

~ ~ ~ ~

When Gareth phoned him in the week, he was excited, despite himself. A dark part of him wanted to connect to something in her life, despite everything she had done to him. 'Hi Gareth, how are things with your lady?'

'Janine, oh, wonderful. We are having a wonderful time. She is great. I think I am in love.'

Rod laughed, 'you poor man. That is tough, isn't it?'

'Yes, I know. She has just taken over my body and my brain and I like it.'

'Good, good.'

'As Trisha keeps telling me, I have lost my marbles.'

'Hmm, she would never understand that.'

'Rod, I don't want to interfere, but you are making a huge mistake. Just so you know.'

'It doesn't matter now. I have learnt my lesson. Stay away from sexy women in studios, especially if they look vulnerable and mysterious.'

'Fine, as long as you know that you don't have all the facts. All this trouble over a stupid painting. I will see you around.'

Rod was confused now. *A painting? What does Gareth mean?* He played back the conversation with Jocelyn. She had gone on and on about the painting. *What?* She had said, 'I hate the thought that you gave it to her as a gesture of love'.

He remembered Wayne asking him over and over how she knew that he was at Trisha's office. *Yes,* he wondered. *How did she know that Trisha was with Wayne at the house that day? She also told me that Wayne was staying at the Regal Hotel. How did she know all this?* Gareth had told him that he did not have all the facts. *Hmm, yes, there is something missing and I am going to find out.*

He phoned Wayne, his heart beating rapidly and his brain feeling congested. 'Wayne, how are you?'

'Fine, what do you want?'

'I know you are going back in a few days, so I thought we should talk.'

'No thanks. There is nothing to say. You have done a wonderful job, as usual. You know everything, and anyway, what would be the point?'

'I need your help.'

Wayne was silent for a long time.

'I don't think I fully understand what has happened. Can you help me?'

'Why, Rod, why? You have done a marvelous job of alienating a woman who loves you, who is special, kind and so fucking vulnerable. What does it matter? You will hurt her more. Leave it alone. This way, she is fine and you can spend the rest of your life, fuming at the injustice of it all. That way, you are safe. Now, leave it alone.'

'I just need to understand. I don't know how I got to the point when I could accuse you that way. I know you and I know you would never hurt me that way. So, I need to understand how I ended up being your creepy, destructive older brother.'

'Shit Rod! Ughh! Leave it alone. I have to go. I have to see Kathryn. We are having some issues.'

'Oh, are you alright?'

'Yes, but you know, I will be leaving and I am not sure I want to.'

'Jesus! Is it that serious?'

'Yes, as Trisha says, we are going to die together!'

'Shit, what are you going to do?'

'That's the problem. I don't really want to be here, with all this crap. I really have no reason to stay here, but I think she might be special to me. So, I don't know and she senses that. There are problems. She will never leave her precious Trisha, who has helped her through her studies, and now, when she qualifies, she wants to join Trisha. It is like a cult I tell you. She wouldn't even consider it.'

'Why not?'

'After all Trisha has done for her, she wants to stay with her. Trisha tells her to go, but loyalty, I suppose. Also, she loves it here and will never leave. She doesn't say that, but I know that she would just hate New York. You never told me that Trisha even paid her fees.'

'I didn't know that. I didn't even know that she was helping Kathryn with her studies.'

'Hmm, she was right about you. You didn't really want to know who she was.'

'That's not fair. She never let me know. She would just shut me out.'

'Yes, but she was right, wasn't she?'

'That is totally unfair. And you know it.'

'Let's be honest. You had two versions, you chose Joss, my ex-girlfriend over her. She was right not to trust you with her secrets.'

'Okay, I deserved that. Fine. Now what are you going to do about Kathryn?'

'I don't know. This might anger you, but I am meeting Trisha tonight. She is great at helping me work through these things. So there, go ahead, blow your top, whatever. I actually don't care. Trisha is going to be my friend. So, go for it.'

Rod laughed now. 'Shit you are still so cheeky with me! We need to talk, okay?'

'Fine, but will you learn to listen, too?'

'Fine, fine, good luck with Kathryn.'

Rod sat back in his chair and thought about Wayne. He must have been completely crazy to even think that Wayne would do that to him. Wayne, although younger, was protective over him and would easily die for him. What had gone wrong in this brain?

He wished he could take it all back, because he knew it would take a long time for Wayne to trust him again. He missed his brother so much now and felt a great loss. Wayne should have been talking to him about his problems. It had not been an easy decision for him to move to the States, but once he was there, he had enjoyed living there. Could he come back now, living a quieter life? Could he dare to take the risk that things would work out with Kathryn? Tomorrow, he would see him and talk to him properly. He had been as self-absorbed as Lisa, only obsessed with himself and Trisha. He never really thought about what Wayne was going through. After all, he had broken up with Lisa just recently and now had met Kathryn. He thought about it and that he did not even know how his brother had met Kathryn.

*****

Chapter 6

Wayne felt the slow creep of nervous frustration as he drove to Trisha's house. She knew the answer to his problem and he knew that she was deliberately not telling him. He wondered why. He got to the door and she opened it, still talking on the phone.

'Fine, fine, but I really have to go. I have a guest who is standing at the door. Dad, please, tomorrow, okay?'

She switched off her phone.

'Sorry about that. That was my father. We are having one of our many fights. He almost sounds like your brother. It is just so tiresome, sometimes.'

'Is something wrong?'

'No, not really. He just gets so upset. He has never accepted my... talent, as you call it. So, he gets mad at me and tells me to get help. Today, I saw that he was in danger. There was a gunman at a bank that he was going into. Of course I phoned him and told him not to go to the bank in the morning. He was angry with me, but he didn't go. So, this evening, he phones to shout at me, because there was a robbery in his bank this morning and one

person was injured. He is more furious because I was right. So he says these terrible things.' she sighed.

'What terrible things?'

'Oh, it is not important. How are you?'

'Look, my dear, I am not Rod. What terrible things does your father say?'

She looked at him for a while. 'You behave just like Rod. You assume you have the right to know.'

He just stared at her.

'Okay, you know, things like that I need to get the devil out of me, that's why I will never find a decent husband, that I must place myself in a mental institution, that I only know evil things that are going to happen, etc, etc.'

'Oh Trisha, that is the worst thing I have ever heard. He is a maniac. The next time he calls, I will speak to him. That damn bully.'

She laughed now. 'You sound exactly like your brother. And that does nothing to help me. Is he alright?'

'Yes, yes.'

'Okay, now, come and have a drink, sit down and relax. Hopefully, this time, there will no major catastrophe to distract me.'

'Thanks.'

They sat on the floor and Trisha looked at him for a while. 'If you are not happy in New York, why do you stay there?'

'Why do you assume I am not happy there?'

'You are not yourself there. You get torn between who you are and what you are. You don't need a psychic to tell you that. Your relationship with Lisa told me that. It worked there, but not here. So, I am not Rod, answer the question.'

He laughed. 'I am sometimes happy in New York. It is a different life. There is no room in your life to think and feel, so you can get through life very easily. I like that. There are no issues or emotions to cloud your judgment. You act for money and status and if you are lucky, as I was, and are good at it, you are revered by everyone. It is not a bad life.'

'Hmm, I see. Why did you come back now?'

'Partly to see my dear brother. I miss him when I am there. He has that way of making me feel like I belong somewhere. We talk on the phone, but living in the same house, discussing our problems, it is the greatest joy for me. He listens to my problems and then, bang, he has a clear solution. He knows how to care, believe it or not. But with all this stuff with you, I don't know if I could stay here.'

'No, this is not about Rod. It is about you.'

'Fine, fine. Okay, New York is getting tedious. I thought coming home would give me a new perspective. Also, I really do miss Rod, when I am away.'

'Okay, so what new perspective were you looking for?'

'Oh I don't know. Just a fresh view of the world. The life there is a giant routine. Work hard, play hard. I suppose I was getting bored with it. I was not getting the satisfaction, the thrill. I was going through the process of being this wonderful guy with wonderful options. But each option looked the same. My buildings are starting to look the same.'

'Hmm, fine. Did you get the new perspective?'

'In a way. People here are so alive! They feel things and there is a space to be different or the same. Look at Gareth. He is a fun guy who is a dentist. He makes a lot of money, but lives a moderate life. I mean, the man can even read the tarot. When we talk, we talk about real things, about life, about love, you know. I miss that. I like the vibrant emotions that run through everybody here. I had forgotten that. Even you and Rod, through your fights, are fighting about real issues, about real things. It is not about what car you should drive.'

'But there are also people there in New York who think like that.'

'Yes, it is different. I can't explain. Their sense of identity is very largely tied to what they are, not who they are, you know?'

'Yes, yes. What do you want from me, Wayne?'

'I was hoping you could tell me, upfront, what you see. That first time we met, you saw it all. I know that. I felt it surge through your body. What did you see?'

'If I tell you, then I am deciding the issue for you. You need to work that out on your own.'

'No, I can't. I have tried. Just tell me, please.'

She sighed. ‘Okay, I saw you chasing Kathryn in a park, you were joking and laughing and teasing. She was very happy and so were you. There was also a large building and you seemed to be working there, upstairs. Kathryn came over to you and you were pleased. I saw you staying here and despite the objective facts right now, you and Rod had a very good relationship. I know that sounds odd now, because of all that has happened. But in the end, he is your best friend.’

‘I know. We spoke earlier and things are improving.’

‘So, that is what I saw. I was very confused to see Kathryn there.’

‘I can imagine. You kept looking at me as if you were surprised.’

‘Oh, I was. But you need to understand. I have no time frames. So, you could go back and then return later. I don’t want you to close off the option of New York because of this. It could be that all this happens later.’

‘Yes, I see what you mean. But you first asked me, no, told me I was not happy in New York.’

‘Yes, I picked that up on that Sunday at Rod’s house. When you are next to him, I see you very clearly. I don’t know why.’

‘Because we have always been close, even as children.’

‘Oh. What are you going to do?’

‘I am going to stay here for a few more weeks. I will just do my work from here. I want to see if my work gets any better in this environment. I think I had already decided that I would do that. My partner, Greg, will send all the technical material and with email now, I can do it. He once worked from Japan, can you believe it?’

‘Yes. I suppose that is sensible. What about Kathryn?’

‘She is driving me crazy right now. She is withdrawn and I can tell that she is as confused as I am. But, when we just chat about other things, we get on perfectly well. Also, the sex keeps us from shooting each other. I think I am in love with her. But I don’t know whether I love her. I am still obsessed with her breasts. So most of the relationship is lust right now.’

‘Hmm, I have never heard a man admit that before. It is quite remarkable. You know who you are.’

'Yes, but I never seem to work out what I need.'

'Where will you live?'

'With Rod of course. That man needs someone to look after him all the time. I could live somewhere else. He would be really hurt and despite it all, I don't want to hurt him. So, I think I will live with him until I decide what to do. If I stay, then I will find a place. But for now, that brother of mine needs all the help he can get.'

'Yes, teach him to be more civilized. He was absolutely rude to me on the phone.'

'What will happen with you and Rod?'

'Nothing. It was foolishness, really. He reminds me a bit of my father. He gets angry whatever I do.'

'Can you see in your own life?'

'Not usually. But sometimes I get a small hint. About Rod, I must say, I have only seen when he was angry or hurt. Nothing else.'

'Such a pity. That way you could figure him out.'

'No, I suppose it would just confuse things. But I am glad I ....knew him. He is a special man and I am glad for having had that experience with him.'

'Hmm, I see, so you still want him?'

She laughed, 'yes, and I know that I always will. He is different. But, that does not mean we could have been together. He would have fought me all the way. He would never have accepted this.'

'You are wrong about that. Rod is not as bad as you think. I know that he has been appalling lately, but underneath all that, he's fair. With you, he feels a little out of his depth, so he tries to fight back. But it's because he knows something and he is not sure what. It frightens him.'

'Yes, but he is not alright today. I can feel it. Something is bothering him. You must phone him tonight and check on him. He is not alright.'

'Okay, damn that man is so lucky. You always look out for him.'

'I know. It is my weakness, the cross I have to bear.'

When Wayne was leaving, he hugged her and thanked her furiously. 'I wish you and Rod can work things out. You would be the best sister-in-law. My own personal psychic,' and he laughed.

As he was walking down the stairs, Trisha called to him. 'Wayne, I hope you really like kids,' as she closed the door. She laughed at the shock on his face.

Wayne drove off and laughed out loud. Trisha really liked to play with him. So, he was going to have kids? He was very pleased. He phoned Kathryn and he went over for a nice quiet evening with the woman he was hoping to spend the rest of his life with.

When he got there, Kathryn was cooking for him. He smiled and enjoyed the image of her large breasts teasing him from her apron. He went to phone Rod.

'Rod, so, what's the matter?'

'Ur, hi. What makes you think something is wrong?'

'Are you okay?'

'No, no. I just come from Joss and she is as crazy as they come.'

Rod felt a shiver down his spine as he recalled the scene. He had agreed to have dinner with her, because she pleaded with him, saying she was so miserable tonight. He went over and knew that this night would be different. She had greeted him and she seemed a little hostile.

He had hugged her. 'How are you, Joss?'

'Oh, I suppose I am alive, that's all I can say at this stage.'

'What happened?'

'Nothing, that's the problem, nothing happened.'

'Oh Joss, you are too impatient. Really, you need to relax a bit. Before you know it, he will be right in your arms.'

'Damn, Rod, don't play with me. Let's go and have something to eat.'

'Fine, where would you like to go?'

'Whatever is close by. It's Friday night and I am a little tired.'

'Okay, let's go.'

They had dinner at a quiet restaurant near her house. It was dark and gloomy and had few patrons. But Rod enjoyed the warm country food and drank lots of wine. He had not been so relaxed in the last two weeks, since he had seen Patricia sitting on his floor with his brother. He was feeling better, because he had established a link with Wayne again.

'So, why are you so upset today Joss?'

'Because you won't get the picture back from her.'

'Hmm, I thought we discussed that. I bought it for her, only for her. It is hers and will always belong with her. What exactly is the problem?'

'It was so insensitive of you.'

'Why, Joss?'

'Because you should have kept it. You should have treasured it.'

'Maybe I gave it to her because I treasure it.'

'Why? Because you treasure her?'

'Yes. Joss. Whatever happens in my life, she will always have a place in my heart. That is the hardest part. She will stay there, forever.'

'Why? Rod, why?'

'You are getting upset. Let's go and we can discuss this later.'

They left the restaurant and Jocelyn did not want to talk. When they got to her house, Rod sat down. 'We need to talk. Now sit down, stop pacing and stop looking like somebody has hit you.'

She sat down next to him and folded her hands demurely on her lap.

'Now, first thing. Why does Patricia bother you so much?'

'Because she is a slut. She played with you and then tried to destroy you with your brother. I hate her, because she just used you.'

'You are mistaken. She never did all that. It was a mistake.'

'Really, even now, with all the evidence, you still want to believe in her? You see, that is why I hate her. She has got your brain confused.'

Rod sighed. 'Jocelyn, it is very sweet of you to try and protect me this way. But Patricia is not like that at all. In fact, I have been a terrible person to her and to Wayne. Now, tell me, how did you know where Wayne was all those days?'

'I told you, I was driving pass...'

'Joss, I think I had better go. You are lying. So this is a complete waste of time.'

'Rod, no, please, don't go. I was just looking out for your interests. I wanted to be sure that nobody hurts you. Okay, I saw the way they behaved when they met. It was there, the lust. So I thought, let's see what happens.'

'How did you know that he would go there?'

'I did it for us. I really did. I did not trust her, or him. So I had Wayne followed. When he was at your house with her, this guy phoned me and then I phoned you.'

'I see. So you employed someone to follow Wayne around? What about his privacy, Joss?'

'I figured it was a question of time before they did it. There was a strong bond between them. I was sure he would do it. He kept watching her, that night at your house. I knew he would contact her. So, I thought, if he hurts you, then you need to know. If he doesn't, then he will never know. Anyway, that creep broke my heart. Why should I concern myself with his privacy? So that's what happened.'

'I see. That is how you knew where he was staying?'

'Yes, I thought he would go and stay in her house. But I guess he is good at this, so he went to a hotel. No matter what you say, he spent every afternoon there, and then at night she would come to you. Damn, Rod, she is evil.'

'Did you ever consider the possibility that he was seeing someone else?'

'Don't be silly. They went to your house, remember? That's where you found them! Rod, darling, don't let them fool you this way!'

'Joss, you are so mistaken. Nothing is going on between them. I know my brother. He would never do that to me.'

'That's where you are so wrong. Let me tell you something. The only reason he dated me was to get at you. He knew that we had something special, so he charmed me, fooled me, just so you could not have me.'

‘But Joss, you are confused. I only met you after the two of you had been on a number of dates, remember?’

‘Come on, Rod, you had seen me before. It was at the cafeteria. You smiled at me and asked me if I had a pen. That was the magical moment. Don’t lie to me. You know it was the moment.’

‘I have no idea what you are talking about. I always lost my pen. I asked so many people for a pen. Joss, you are mistaken. I never met you until Wayne brought you to our house. I remember it because you kept giggling at everything he said.’

‘Okay, suit yourself. If it makes you feel better. That makes it easier for you to deny your brother wanted to cheat you. Fine! But he used me to get to you.’

‘Fine whatever. But why didn’t you just tell me, then, or now? Why did you have to go to such lengths to prove that he was evil?’

‘Because you would not have believed me. You had to see it yourself. Rod. All this doesn’t matter anymore. Now, we have each other, like always.’

‘We have never been together! What is going on, Joss?’

She was silent for a long time. ‘Is Wayne still being followed?’

‘Yes, tonight he was at her house again. So you see, it is still going on. Also, he has changed his flight. He is going to stay. So you had better get used to it. I wish that bastard would just go back where he came from. I wish he could just take her with him.’

‘Joss, please, you are talking crazy. We have never been together. You were always my brother’s girlfriend. I never thought of you in that way.’

‘Really, is that why you always tell me that the right man is arriving soon?’

‘Oh Joss, I mean, an unknown man.’

‘But Rod, don’t you feel it, the magic between us? I love you, from that day you asked me for a pen. I have always loved you.’

Rod got off the couch. ‘Shit, Joss! Don’t say that. I ....no. No. Don’t say that.’

‘Why not? I love you! You are mine, that’s it. I have said it and I will say it again and again. Why do you fight it Rod? Because of that Patricia?’

'No, no, look try to think clearly now. I know that you are feeling a little lonely. But Patricia has nothing to do with this. I only met her recently, remember? Why did nothing happen between us before I met her? Think about that. She has nothing to do with it.'

'But if she was not around, at least you would not deny what is between us.'

'I don't know how else to say this. There is nothing between us. There never will be. You and I. There is nothing! Nothing! Also, leave my brother alone. Stop following him. He is not going to change the fact that nothing is ever going to happen between us. Do you understand? Joss, please, you need to understand this. I.... it will never happen. You are my brother's ex-lover, for God's sake. It will never happen. Leave him alone.'

'What are you saying? That I have been waiting for you, all those years for nothing?'

'Oh Joss, yes. I wish you had told me. We could have sorted this out a long time ago. I ....don't want to see you hurt, really, but, I don't know what to say to make it better.'

'Fine, you don't love me. That is fine. But will you give it a chance? With time, you will realize....'

'No, Joss. Okay, maybe I have been stupid to believe that we could be friends. I suppose I felt guilty that Wayne just ran off like that. That is why I started hanging around. I was feeling guilty. But that was all. And I suppose, I got used to having you around. But I never imagined anything else. Honestly.'

She started crying now and Rod went to her and held her. 'I am sorry, Joss, I really am.'

And she stayed there, holding onto him, as if it was the end of the world. He finally released himself from her.

'I have to go. Joss, are you going to be alright?'

'No, first your brother, now you. Both of you have ripped my heart to pieces. I will never be okay.'

'Oh Joss, come, go to bed and get some sleep. Tomorrow, all this will look a little better, okay?'

She looked defeated and lost and Rod could not decide whether to stay with her, or to leave. But at the back of his mind, he reminded himself that she was tough and had the tenacity to have his brother followed. So he put her down on her bed, covered her and let himself out. It was only when he got to his house that he realized how absolutely stupid he

had been. He could not bear it, as he remembered the way Jocelyn had manipulated him over the years, how she had been so needy every time he dated someone, or tried to move away from her. *Shit, I am the biggest fool.* But the real pain that shot through his heart was how he had treated his sweet Patricia. *God, she must be so hurt.* And Wayne. How could he even think about Wayne in that way? What on earth had gotten into him? He had sitting there thinking about it when Wayne had phoned.

'Anyway, I left her there and I hope she finally got the message.'

'Yes, I am sure she has got it. She is a survivor. She will move on to the next victim. Are you alright, Rod?'

'I will never be okay. I will never forgive myself for treating you and Trisha that way. I would give anything to take it back. Did I tell you that I was truly, truly, sorry?'

'Not in those words, but it is wonderful, sweet music to my ears. The perfect Rod has apologized.'

'Shit, Wayne, don't tease me now. I feel so ashamed. What can I possibly say to Patricia? I have no excuse or explanation.'

'I don't know.'

'Is she alright?'

'Yes, I suppose. But she has other problems. Your little stunt did nothing to help her, I can tell you that.'

`What is the problem?'

'Her father is a total pig. He is so horrible to her. Shit, she was on the phone to him when I arrived and she was upset. She tried to be casual, but I could see that she was shaken. She has nobody to protect her, only accuse her.'

'God, Wayne, don't say that. I feel even worse now.'

'And you should. But perhaps you should at least apologize to her. At least she won't keep feeling that she has done something wrong.'

'Yes, I will do that if she is willing to speak to me. Now tell me, what is happening with you?'

'Let's say I am going to need a place to stay and I am hoping you will take me in.'

Rod laughed. 'Are you serious? You are going to stay?'

'Hmm, now is not a good time. I will come over tomorrow morning and we will discuss it.'

'Okay. Kathryn is close by and you haven't told her?'

'Yep. Tomorrow. Now try to get some sleep.'

Rod went to lie down on his bed and tried to reconcile the emotions that ravished his body. The feelings of regret and shame were so strong, that he wished he could die tonight and never have to face another day. He could not bear the cold, hard fact that he had hurt Patricia.

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Wayne was smiling at Kathryn.

'Sorry, my sweet. Just needed to talk to my dear brother. He feels like shit, so ...'

'It's fine. I like the way you care about him. Are you ready to eat?'

'Yes, yes. I am starving. I have had a long day.'

'What have you so busy with?'

'Oh, this and that. How were the pets?'

'The usual. We had a small drama though. There is this Great Dane. He is absolutely huge. His name is Daniel. He came in with a skin condition. He has a path of fur that seems to fall off every few months. Trisha treats it, but we can never figure out what causes it. When he arrived today, he was edgy and irritable. He would not sit quietly and then suddenly, he heard a whistle outside. He went berserk. He jumped and barked and just caused mayhem. I was tempted to open the door and let him out into the street. The cats were screaming and the other dogs started barking. It was the most awful noise.'

'Shit, that must have been scary, too.'

'Yes, a little. I was on the phone. I could do nothing. I tried to calm him down, but he just barked and scratched. He wanted to go out, no matter what. His owner, Mr. Peterson, just

stood there. The bloody cheek! He brings this huge animal and then waits for someone to sort it out.'

'What did you do?'

'Trisha came through. She just stood there and then she softly called his name. He stopped moving around and turned to her. She leaned down and looked into his eyes. I swear she was talking to him. Suddenly, he just stopped and sat quietly. I tried to get her to see him first, but she just look at him, and said "he will be fine, he just got a fright". And he was fine. He just sat calmly the rest of the time.'

'And she wasn't scared?'

'No, she seemed to almost understand him. It was very strange. I think Mr. Peterson was hoping she would offer to take him home. He was very grateful. I tell you, Wayne, she has a special relationship with the animals. She understands them.'

'She does.'

'What do you mean?'

'She understands a lot of things, Kathryn. Animals and humans. She has special powers. She will kill me if she knows I told you.'

'Like psychic powers?'

'Yes, she knows things and can predict the future, or rather, she predicts the choices. She is very good.'

'My Trisha?'

'Yes. But she would die if she thought you knew.'

'Why?'

'Rod doesn't know.'

'What, you are kidding!'

'Yes and he probably will never know. But it is a long story. Don't ever tell her you know.'

'But why? That is wonderful.'

'I suppose people treat her differently, and ask her all sorts of questions. It is an easy way to avoid making hard decisions. I went to her today.'

'Oh Wayne! This is too much. I need to think. Okay, so the day you came over and she said I would be gone a while... yes, it was odd. Why would she see that?'

'She thinks we will be together.'

'Really, she told you that?'

'Yes and other things. But the point is, I went there, because it was easier than making my own choices. But Trisha is very clever. She didn't tell me. We talked and she asked me all sorts of questions. She would not tell me and forced me to deal with the issue. She knew how to make me decide on my own. Kathryn, I want to stay for a few weeks. I will work from here.'

Kathryn stared at him. 'Really, really?'

She hugged him. 'I am very pleased.'

'Hmm, later you can demonstrate your pleasure. But, now, let us talk a bit, okay?'

'Okay, so what else did she say?'

Wayne laughed. 'You sound like me. I nagged her so much. It seems that…..you and I will have a good relationship.'

'Oh, I could have told you that,' and he laughed.

'What are you not telling me?'

'Nothing, I promise. She told me that. Now, I don't want you to feel pressurized. Trisha is right. I came back home because New York was starting to bore me to tears. So I want to try being home. I want to spend more time with Rod, or he will just fuck up everything.'

'Oh he is not too bad.'

'Oh he is very bad. Do you know why they broke up? Because he accused me of having an affair with Trisha.'

Kathryn stared at Wayne as if he was crazy. 'It seems a friend saw me parked at your offices for a number of afternoons and assumed that I was seeing her.'

'Oh that is terrible. But didn't he just ask you?'

'Because he is a fool and he is so in love with Trisha, he can't tell the difference between left and right. He really has lost his footing in the path. I tried to reason with him, but he

wouldn't hear it. I was so pissed off with him, for thinking that of me. That's why I moved out.'

'Oh, you must help him. Poor thing. Imagine the pain of thinking you have been betrayed by your brother and the woman you love. That is so awful.'

'Oh no, that is not good enough. I hope he has suffered enough, because he should have known better.'

'Oh Wayne, don't be so hard on him. Imagine that. Imagine what he must have felt.'

'But he did not need to feel that way. He brought it onto himself. Don't look at me like that. I have long forgiven him. I won't tell him that, though.'

'Wayne! You should be supporting him, not making it more difficult.'

'Oh, but I have to. He is going to go bananas when he discovers that we all have cheated on him. He must be the only person in the universe who doesn't know that Trisha is psychic.'

'But why?'

'Because Trisha feels he will not approve. But can you see his face, when he realizes that I knew? That she didn't tell him? He is going to explode. So, you see, if he feels bad enough, he will be grateful that we are telling him.'

Kathryn laughed. 'That is down-right wicked. Don't ever try that on me. I will kill you.'

'I would never dare.'

'Really, like what do you think I am going to do to you when you eventually tell me what Trisha saw for us?'

'Hmm, let's go to bed. Come, woman,' and she giggled as he grabbed her. *So there is more,* she thought.

~ ~ ~ ~

Trisha sat down and drank a glass of wine. She looked at the painting. She wondered why she did not just throw it out. All her problems started when she saw that painting. She wanted to just press rewind, start again and never go to the studio that day, never meet him and life would have been normal. She was enjoying this fantasy when Gareth phoned.

'Hello, Trish, what are you doing?'

'Oh nothing, just pondering my life. You?'

'I am with Janine. We want to come and visit you. Is that okay?'

'Ur, fine. Is everything alright?'

'Yes, of course. I just wanted to see you and for her to meet my dearest friends.'

'Fine, come over. I am drinking some wine.'

When Gareth arrived, Trisha was not surprised to see Janine. She was exactly as she had seen her. She greeted the beautiful woman and smiled. But as she touched Janine's hand, she felt her insecurity. *Ah, she is afraid that Gareth will run off with someone else. Hmm, interesting.*

'I am pleased to meet you. Gareth has said wonderful things about you.'

'Yes, you too. He talks about you all the time, when he is not on the phone to you. But I must confess, I would not have been so generous if I knew you were quite so beautiful.'

Gareth laughed and Trisha smiled. 'Thank you, you are very kind. But you can relax. Gareth and I have managed to behave in all these years.'

They drank wine and talked and she felt Janine's tension slowly falling away.

'So, how are things with the Rodster?'

'Ugh.... none the better. I could kill him, that silly man.'

'Who's Rodster?'

'Oh, her man. They fight so much, it is unbelievable. They have not talked now, for about what, three weeks?'

'No, not that long, about two weeks. He was mean to me and I doubt things are going to improve.'

'I don't know. When we spoke, he seemed to realize that he is wrong.'

Trisha laughed, 'Rod is never wrong. That is completely outside his brain. I am always wrong.'

'Sounds just like Gareth.' Janine touched his hand.

'At least I admit my mistakes. I admit immediately.'

'Yes, because you just want to get into my bed.'

'That is a most honorable motive, don't you think?' and they all laughed.

'Anyway, dear Wayne and Kathryn are doing very nicely.'

'Yes, we saw them last night. He was a little tense and she simply lets it go over her head. Was he better today?'

'Yes, very much so. Anyway, he is staying for a few weeks. Six weeks. He wants to see if he likes being back.'

'He is back for good?'

'Yes, but he thinks he is trying this out. I am glad for him. Kathryn will be a wonderful wife for him.'

'Oh, that is really interesting.'

'Yes, especially since she will take good care of Rod. She has a strong link to him, as if they knew each other before.'

'Really, and you, what will happen to you?'

'I have no idea.'

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Chapter 7

Trisha sighed in exasperation. She felt at a loss at what else to say or do. Rod was being simply impossible. He was so stubborn and unreasonable. She had tried to phone him to explain and she had sent him email and had even sent him a few text messages.

She had told him she was sorry that he was angry and that he misunderstood. But he had not responded. It was two weeks now, and she was starting to get angry, thinking that he thought so little of her, that he would accept Jocelyn's version of what happened. He had never even bothered to hear what she had to say. He had just assumed the worst about her.

Now that her desperate need to be with him was subsiding, she started to think about him and wondered why it had been so easy for him to accept such awful lies about her. Why had he not even bothered to hear what she had to say?

She put her head in her hands and felt the pounding headache work its way into her brain. There was something she was not understanding or accepting. She tried to relax, but her brain just went round and round, images of Rod glaring at her, angry and hurt.

Oh Rod, why were you so eager to believe the worst of me? Why? Why did your eyes flash so readily at me, so desperate to believe that about me? That I would betray you in such a terrible, vicious way? Why did you need to believe that of me? Why? She started to cry in anger and helplessness and eventually she fell asleep. She was curled up in her bed in the morning, dreading having to get out of bed on a Saturday morning. The booming silence filled her bedroom. Rod was not there to tease her and make her laugh.

But the silence was overpowered by the sound of the telephone ringing. It was only 6.00.

'Hello?'

'Hello. Patricia, it is Rod.'

'Oh hello, what can I do for you?'

She felt the anger of last night starting to build upon her. This was the man who had worked hard not to trust her.

'You said you wanted to talk, so talk.'

She was silent for a while. *After two weeks of accusations and pain, he suddenly wants to talk. How dare he?*

'No, that was two weeks ago. Now I understand, so, thanks for that wonderful offer for me to explain. But it doesn't matter anymore. Goodbye Rod.'

She hung up the phone and felt her heart beating hard against her chest. He had been so cold and clinical. The phone was ringing again.

'Yes?'

'Patricia, please. Let's just talk okay?'

'Why, Rod? What's there to talk about? You have all the answers. Don't you? What could I possibly say now?'

'Oh Patricia, look, I have been a total fool, haven't I?' His voice was soft now.

'Yes, now, I want to go back to bed. I have nothing to say about anything. All has been decided. If you need more information, just ask Jocelyn. I am sure she will be more than willing to oblige.'

'Yes. Patricia, I want to come over, so we can sit down and talk. There are things.... I need to tell you some things.'

'No, Rod, what is the point? I don't want to know. Just tell Jocelyn. I am sure she wants to listen to everything you have to say. I don't see the point of this discussion. I really don't want to know. I know too much already.'

'Fine, I will be there in 15 minutes.'

'Rod, no. I mean it. You will not bully me anymore. You will not treat me like some useless fool who can't think anymore. I am sorry if I gave you the impression that I was some fool to be played with. I suppose I was in lust with you. Now, that is over and I am back. So leave me alone. You made your feelings about me clear. If you come here, against my will, you will definitely not get my attention.'

'Oh, Patricia, please, sweetheart. You have every reason to be angry with me. But we need to talk. I need to talk to you.'

'I see, no matter what I say, it doesn't matter. You have never listened to me, not even now. So basically you are telling me that you have decided that I must listen to what you have to say. You don't really care that I don't want to talk, or listen to what to have to say. No, I will not listen to what you have to say. Now goodbye. Also, don't phone me again, especially so early in the morning. It is rude and inconsiderate. So go away and find some other victim to bully. Goodbye!'

Trisha banged the phone down. Then she disconnected it. Now she was getting really angry. It was true. He had never listened to her. He always did whatever he wanted, right from the beginning. He had decided he wanted her and had done exactly that. He had decided everything and had his way with her. She wondered at her complacency, the way she had simply accepted his authority over her. It was the lust that had driven her to him, allowing him to invade her, take her heart and soul and had allowed him to do whatever he wanted. It had also been a more sinister motive. She had been worried that she was too

powerful, too strong and she had been afraid to frighten him off with her power and strength. So she had simply given herself to him.

But the pain in her heart grew as she reflected on their relationship. His voice, so pleading, had hit her straight in the heart. She missed his dancing eyes that seemed to smile only at her. She missed him in her bed right now, his leg stretched over her so possessively and his dark, mischievous laughter that always made her want to laugh too. She missed him and wished so much that things had remained the same.

She covered her head and cried. *Damn!* She had hoped that it would get easier, but his voice had made her want to go to him, to hold him. She cried and wished she could die. She did not know whether she hated him or loved him. The banging on the door shocked her. Was her bell broken? *Go away, whoever you are. Leave me alone! But the banging persisted.* She went to the bathroom and washed her face. *Shit! I can't deal with this now.*

She went to the door and Rod stood there, looking at her. His eyes were so gentle that she wanted to collapse in his arms. But her anger soon took over. 'Oh, you have come to talk.'

'Yes, Patricia, and I suggest you let me in, because your neighbor is standing outside. Do you want her to hear what I have to say?'

'Fine, come inside.'

He followed her in and had to resist the urge to grab her, turn her around and kiss her. He could see she had been crying and he really needed to kiss her. 'I am very sorry that I have been so pushy. I am sorry about everything, Patricia, for being me, for even having met you. I am so sorry that I ... hurt you that way. I know you are angry and I accept that. But, I just have to tell you that I am an idiot, and.....'

'Do you want some coffee?'

He looked at her and she looked away.

'Yes, come. Let me help you.'

'No, sit down, I need to think.'

'Fine, fine.'

He sat down and looked at her painting. It calmed the strong forces that had ruptured inside him when he had seen her. It calmed his urge to go to her and just kiss her. He

wished he could take it all back, every single thing he had said to her, even the good things, just so he could start all over again. He put his head in his hands and wished hard, that he could just start all over again.

'Rod?'

'Yes, yes. Thank you.'

He drank the coffee slowly. He closed his eyes and wished he didn't hate himself so much at that moment.

'Rod, I understand what you are saying, that you are sorry. That's fine. Thank you for saying that.'

'Patricia. I can't even give you a reasonable excuse for what happened. I can't even begin to tell you that I can ... I don't know. Let me explain. Jocelyn told me everything.'

When he had finished talking, he just looked at her. Patricia did not look at him. She looked on the floor.

'So, that is what happened. But I cannot tell you why I was so completely stupid. I just hope that someday you will forgive me.'

'I have forgiven you, Rod. Really, it is fine. Can we leave this alone now? I really can't talk about it now. It has been a long week and I just don't know what you want me to say.'

'Patricia, will you look at me?'

'No, I don't want to,' and he watched her clasping her hands. For once, he was happy that she did that. He went to her and lifted her face.

'Please Patricia, just look at me. That is all I ask.'

Patricia felt her resolve failing. His voice was so gentle now, she felt herself floating into it. She opened her eyes and Rod could have died a hundred deaths as the tears rolled down her face. He tried to kiss each tear away and she just cried. He held her.

'Rod, this is all your fault. I told you we should have just had sex,' and Rod wanted to laugh with joy that Patricia was being herself again.

'Yes, I should have listened to you. Perhaps you can tell me that again and I promise this time, I will listen.'

Patricia laughed and moved away from him.

'Don't make fun of me.'

'Okay, sorry.'

He smiled at her now and her heart jumped, bouncing up and down.

'So, now what?'

'I don't know Patricia. What do you want?'

'I don't know. I feel so..... Rod it is so complicated. I wish.....I don't know.'

'Patricia, is everything alright?'

'Yes, yes, it has been a long week. I have no energy to deal with you today. Everybody has been pushing me and I just can't deal with you too.'

'Okay, but if you need anything, will you let me know?'

She clasped her hands and smiled sweetly, 'okay.'

Rod looked at her and wondered if there would ever be a day when she had not lied to him. He wondered if there would ever be a day when she would turn to him, for his love and support. He felt the heaviness in his heart, because he knew that he had closed off that possibility.

The phone was ringing and she ignored it. 'Do you want me to answer for you?'

'Yes, if it is a patient, please, I am away the whole weekend.'

'Okay.'

'Hello'

'Gareth! Hi. Yes, ur, she is not really.....hold on.'

'Patricia, it is Gareth. Do you want to talk?'

'Yes, fine.'

She took the phone from him, assuming he would leave. But he stood there, watching her.
'Gareth, how are you?'

'Very well, but you? Things improving?'

'No, not really. I will call you later. Is Janine alright?'

'Yes, why do you ask?'

'No, no, just polite chat.' She laughed, 'I promise. I will call you later. This is not a good time for that conversation. Go away.'

She smiled as she put the phone down.

'Sorry, he was just checking in. He is having a lovely relationship with a beautiful woman and I think it is making him crazy. He phones me all the time to see if I am okay?'

'Hmm, he is right. Patricia you need someone to take care of you.'

'I am fine. I am doing fine. I have learned a long time ago that I must deal with my own problems.'

'Why, Patricia, why?'

'Because the few men I relied on always let me down when I needed them the most.'

'Oh Patricia. I have been a total creep, haven't I?'

'Not a word I would have used. But Rod, that has always been the way it is for me. That is what I said, when we started seeing each other, that I was not up to a relationship. That is just the way it has to be.'

'No, it does not.'

'I have yet to see a difference. So far, the pattern has been fairly consistent. Oh, Rod, don't look at me like that! I am not trying to make you feel bad. I really mean it, in the broader scheme of my life. My whole life. You just confirmed it, I suppose.'

Rod sighed in resignation. 'This is one of those moments when I wish I could say a clever, warm thing, but I am a simple accountant, what do I know?'

Trisha smiled. 'Simple accountant? Oh Rod, you are many things, but not that. I am not trying to make you feel awful. I guess I am trying to explain.'

He looked at her defeated body and soul and he wanted to cry. He had made whatever plagued her so much, much worse.

'Patricia, one day, I will prove you wrong. But that day will come when you share that awful thing, that secret that lurks so much over you. When you stop being afraid, I will prove you wrong. I am going now. I am sorry that I bothered you. Call me if you need a friend.'

And he was gone.

Rod could feel his old friend, his angry impatience creeping into him again. She was hiding something from him. She would always do that. No matter what he had done or said. Even before the business of Jocelyn, she had decided she would not share herself with him. He left and went home to try to calm himself again. There was too much to handle. He should not have touched her. That had been stupid and completely suicidal. Now he wanted her more and now he wanted even her secrets. He wanted every, single inch of her and the urge was going to destroy him. He found Wayne sitting in his car, waiting for him. 'Wayne, are you okay?'

'Yes, yes, I thought we should talk, so I assumed you would be languishing in pain at home. But clearly, you spent the night somewhere else.'

'No, no.'

He looked at his brother walking towards him. He moved to him and hugged him. Wayne was completely shocked. Since they were teenagers, Rod had made it clear that he was not going to hug him.

'Okay, I believe you. No need for such drama,' and he laughed, because he knew Rod had been to her. Gareth had phoned to tell him that he had answered her phone. Inside, they went to the balcony and sat for a while. 'Now, tell me about Kathryn and this business of not going back.'

'I am going to see if things are good here. I am tired of New York and from what I have seen since I have been back, you need some serious guidance, Rod,' he laughed. 'I am teasing you. Relax. Kathryn is one of the reasons, not the only one. I suppose I was starting to burn out there. I need a new way of life. Something quiet and gentle. Kathryn is lovely, but I am doing this for myself. She is just a bonus.'

'How are things with her?'

'Fine, it has been fine, but last night, I suppose it got a lot better. I told her things that I had not bothered to inform her about before. So, yes, we have moved to a higher level, so to speak. But I need to take it a little slower with her. I have been in love so many times that I can't bear to do it again. So I am going to tread cautiously and hope for the best.'

'Yes, that sounds good. You have either grown up a lot or you have just found her. You are dealing with this very differently. I am pleased. So you want a quiet, gentle life? Since when?'

'Since I saw how you run around, going crazy.'

They both laughed. 'Yes, I have not exactly been the shining example of the older brother, have I?'

'No, not at all. Now, how is Patricia?'

'Fine, I suppose. At least we talked a bit. She even laughed. So it is fine in the circumstances. Wayne, I am going to spend the rest of my life feeling sorry about this.'

'Hmm, I doubt it. Give you an opportunity and you will be accusing me of something else.' Wayne smiled at him.

'How did you know I was with her?'

'Gareth phoned. He was hysterical. He said she had been crying and that I should go over there and stop you, whatever you were doing. You see, you now have a reputation for being the crazy brother. Now, people are going to phone me to stop you from being crazy.'

'Yes. Despite all this, I got really angry with her again. She keeps hiding things from me. I left because I was about to shake her.'

'Damn, Rod, what is the matter with you? What do you want from her? Jesus! Gareth was right. You are completely banned from going near her. You really are crazy.'

'Relax. I said I thought about it, okay. But I left when I felt it coming to me.'

'Coming to you? You just have the urge to hurt her, every now and again?'

Wayne stared at him.

'Don't make it sound like that. I mean, she just shuts down, like a computer that hangs when you are in the middle of something important, and when it does that, what do you do?'

'I reboot. I don't try to shake it.'

Rod laughed.

'I would reboot, but I don't know where the button is.'

'Rod, you are completely losing it. Have you considered holding her, so she can feel less afraid? Do you think a woman is going to tell you her most intimate thoughts while you glare at her, wanting to shake her? Especially with her, since she would already know you want to shake her?'

They were both silent for a while. Wayne could have kicked himself. *Damn! That was very stupid.* Rod looked at him.

'So how does she know that?'

'Come on. Let her tell you that. I am not taking responsibility for that too.'

'Wayne, don't fuck with me. What is going on?'

Wayne got up and paced. What should he say? He had never actively lied to Rod before. In fact, he liked the fact that he could always be honest with him. It was the thing that he liked the most in their relationship.

'Shit, brother, I don't know what to say. Fuck, I ... why can't you ask her?'

'I am asking you, Wayne, Tell me!'

His phone was ringing. Wayne was so pleased that he pulled it out to answer it. 'Not now, Wayne, that is too easy. Put it down and stop fucking with my life. I want to know. Fuck it, tell me.'

Wayne looked at his brother. There was no way he could get out now. He switched off his phone.

'Fine, if you insist. But before I tell you this. You have to promise me, swear on both our parents, that you will not fight with her about it. Rod, I know you don't ever listen to me, but this time, it is too important.'

'No, I promise nothing. Tell me.'

'Okay, here goes, here is the big secret. Trisha is psychic.'

Rod looked at him.

'Wayne, stop fucking with me. It has been a long, hard road. So fucking tell me the truth.'

'I told you. That is it. She has the wonderful talent, ability or skill that allows her to know things before they happen. It frightens her and....'

'She knows things? Like what?'

'When something important is going to happen. Like she knew that I would meet Kathryn and that Gareth would meet Janine and that her father was going to be in a bank while a robbery is taking place.....'

'Or when an accident is going to happen.'

'Rod, what are you talking about?'

He sighed, 'on our first date, she went hysterical and told me to stop the car. Then later, we saw an accident where we were going to be. She was freaked out. Also, she knew things about people in the restaurant. She just told me some story, I can't recall, about those incidents. I didn't pay attention again. Tell me more.'

'Why don't you just ask her?'

'Because she will just lie to me. Tell me.'

'Okay, fuck. She is going to kill me.'

'I will kill you if you don't tell me everything. So it's your choice.'

Rod was glaring at him now. 'Will you please try and relax? I can see why she won't tell you. Shit, even I am scared looking at you now. Damn, Rod, calm down, it is not the worst thing in the world. Okay, she gets these images, I suppose visions, of events. It happens at random. I suppose she could train her mind to focus it, but her parents didn't approve, so she tried to stifle it. It doesn't seem to go away, even if she tries really hard. The problem is, the more she wants to stifle it, the stronger the visions get. Like, when she is with you, the images are sharper and clearer.'

Wayne sighed. He was hoping Rod had heard enough, but Rod simply looked at him, waiting.

'She tries not to talk about it, because she says people, like me, harass her for answers to their problems. That is what she was doing that day you came home. I had begged her, pleaded with her. She eventually agreed on the condition that I do not tell you. I promised that even if you torture me I would never reveal. I was so desperate to know that I would have promised her the earth.'

'Why did she not want me to know?'

'Because I gather that previous men have taken it rather badly. They find it disturbing, frightening. She wanted to be with you without the problems. Her own father is a total bastard about it.'

'Why? Tell me, Wayne, I need to know what frightens her so much.'

He told his brother about her father and what had happened when he was there.

'I gather it happens often. She saves him from something, he acts on it, but then he basically abuses her, calls her the devil and other things. She was really shaken, but she tried to underplay it. Rod that is why she is afraid to tell you. She loves you. It seems the men she loves use it against her. So, she didn't tell you.'

'I am going to kill that bastard. How dare he treat her like that? I am going to rip his tongue out so he never speaks to her again.'

Rod was pacing now.

'Listen to yourself. Do you now understand why she wouldn't tell you?'

Rod sighed, 'okay, sorry. Go on.'

'She has not told me this, but I think she speak to the animals too.'

'What? Are you crazy?'

'Perhaps. But Kathryn told me something the other day. She basically chatted to a dog that was going crazy. It calmed down and she was sure it would behave after that and it did. I think that is why she works with animals. Kathryn told me that the animals never do anything silly or aggressive with her. They never try to bite her.'

'Yes, and she told me that she knew a horse was suffering from depression. I just laughed, but she solved the problem. Damn! She has been telling me in so many ways, trying to see how I react. And all I have done is laughed.'

'Hmm, yes, as usual, very smooth. Now what else do you want to know?'

'How did you know this about her?'

'The first time we met, when she touched my hand, I felt it and I knew. That is why I tried so hard to engage with her.'

'Yes, I remember. I was so jealous.'

'Yes, smooth, smooth Rod.'

'Gareth, what does he have to do with this?'

'She saved him from being implicated in some fraud scam at university. He was a brilliant student and apparently some of the guys tried to set him up. She just went to him and told him. She was dating his friend. It seems that when the boyfriend found out and he went crazy. Gareth was there and he developed a protective possessiveness over her.'

'Okay, anything else you want to tell me?'

'I should have told you. I am sorry, Rod. But she said she had to tell you, her way. That day, when you so deliciously accused us, she had decided to tell you. But I gather you said unkind things to her.'

'Shit, don't remind me.'

'Okay, I might as well get it all out. The problem seems to be you induce it in her. When you are around, she does it better.'

'What does that mean?'

'You somehow make it easier for her to have visions.'

'What are you telling me?'

'That if you love her, you will have to live with images and visions all your life. If you can't deal with it, Rod, please, don't let her know that is the reason. She has had enough rejection already.'

'Hmmm, yes, I see what you mean. Does she have these images of me? Or her life?'

'No, not really. She only has for you when you are distressed. For her, she sees nothing.'

'I am always distressed. She must think about me all the time.'

'No, really, she told me to call you that night you were with Joss. She insisted that you needed to talk.'

'I see. There was thinking my brother cared.'

'I would have phoned you, but she had the timing right.'

Rod laughed.

'I see this has been very useful to you.'

‘Oh yes, I told her I want her as a sister-in-law. It would be perfect. But you went and completely fucked up my perfect plan.’

‘Good, because you are not allowed to use her that way. That is my job. Is that clear?’

They laughed, and for most part, the brothers had restored their relationship.

‘What can I do now?’

‘I don’t know. But if you tell her I told you, I will never forgive you.’

Rod laughed. ‘Of course you will forgive me. Because you still have not told me why you decided to keep something so important from me. I must be the only person who doesn’t know. I take it that Kathryn knows?’

‘Ur, yes, but....I would have told you....’

‘Liar..... But I need to do something so she feels okay with it.’

‘I don’t know. You have to be a little sensitive, Rod.’

‘Not my style. Anyway, why did she think I was that kind of man? When we were together, she should have known better.’

‘Yes, like you knew better than accusing her of having an affair with your brother.’

‘Damn! You will never let me forget that, will you?’

‘No, never. Of all the awful things I have been called, that was the worst. I am traumatized. I am scarred for life.’

‘Oh get over it. But I see your point. I get the point. Okay, where is Gareth now?’

‘Ur, at home, I suppose, what do you want?’

‘Her father’s address, of course.’

‘Rod, listen to me, just once. What do you want with the father?’

‘For him to leave my woman alone. What else?’

‘Rod, when will you learn?’

‘What?’

‘That you need to deal with things quietly, smoothly?’

‘Never, I want him to leave her alone. I want to meet him.’

‘Shit, she is going to kill you.’

‘That fine. Even if she never speaks to me again, I want to know that he won’t hurt her again. Simple.’

Wayne stared at him. ‘What are you going to do to him?’

‘Whatever it takes. I love her and nobody is going to make her miserable.’

‘Except you?’

‘Not even me.’

He phoned Gareth, hoping he had not decided to stop taking his calls. He felt a rush of relief when Gareth answered quickly.

‘Gareth, hi again, sorry to bother you. How are you?’

‘Fine. And you?’

‘A little better. I need a favor. A huge favor.’

‘Let’s hear it.’

‘I want to know where her father lives. I need to speak to him.’

‘Whose father?’

‘Come on, Patricia.’

‘Why?’

‘I need to speak to him about his daughter’s psychic powers, that’s all.’

Gareth was silent for a while.

‘I know, okay?’

‘Clearly. Did Trish tell you?’

‘No, but I have my own sources.’

‘Hmm... I see. Can’t you just leave it alone?’

Rod laughed. ‘That is the only advice you have ever given me. But I remember you also told me that she has special needs. She needs someone to protect her from the fruitcakes. Her father is clearly one. What is his address?’

'No Rod, leave it alone. She has enough trouble dealing with you. The last thing she needs is her father freaking out. Gosh, the poor girl is still in tears.'

'I plan to stop all that. Okay, I suppose I will just go to her and squeeze it out of her.'

'No, no. That won't do. Rod, will you please try to be reasonable? He is a very difficult man. He will just make her pay, later.'

'He won't. I am a very difficult man, too, if you haven't already noticed. Now Gareth, please, let me deal with it. I need to do something to help her. I need to make it okay for her.'

Gareth was silent for a while.

'Okay, but can you at least take Wayne with you?'

He sighed, 'okay, I will take Wayne with me. He is right here. He can assure you I will behave. Also, I don't want you to tell her. I will tell her when I get back.'

'Ur. Okay, put Wayne on the phone.'

'Wayne, what is going on?'

'He is still crazy, but I suppose we can't have him going there alone. I will go with him. If he does anything weird, I promise I will get him out of there. I am sure it will be fine. If he doesn't go with our help, he might do it alone. God forbid that we unleash him on society in this mood. I will go with him. But don't tell her or she will just fret. I will call you when we leave the house. Okay?'

'Fine, I hope I am not going to regret this for the rest of my life.'

'Me, too, me, too.'

*****

Chapter 8

Rod looked at the old man as he opened the door. His resemblance to Patricia was staggering. 'Mr. Diason. I am Roderick Keyes. This is my brother, Wayne. I am sorry that we did not make an appointment, but I need to speak to you urgently. It is about Patricia.'

'Trisha, my baby? Why?'

He stood at the door. 'This is a sensitive matter. I would prefer to discuss it indoors, if you don't mind.'

The old man looked at the men. They were good-looking and were clearly from a wealthy family. *What has Trisha done now? Shit, I hope they were not suing her.* He had better let them in and talk them out of it. *That Trisha probably had another one of those visions. I knew that one day it would get her into trouble. And there it was on my doorstep.*

'Okay, fine, please come inside.'

He led them in and offered them a seat. 'Amanda, we have guests,' he shouted.

A small woman came out of the kitchen. 'Who is it, dear?'

'They have come about Trisha.'

The woman looked at them. 'Oh.'

They got up. 'I am Roderick Keyes. This is my brother Wayne. We are very sorry to intrude in your home in this way. But we have an urgent matter to discuss. If you don't mind, I would like to speak to Mr. Diason alone please. Wayne can you wait in the car?'

'No, please, come Wayne, we have a garden. I will make you a nice cup of tea.'

The lady had gentle eyes and she smiled at them.

'Thank you very much.'

Wayne followed her. He was relieved he was not going to the car. At least now he was close enough to stop Rod from strangling the man. He would have to wait for any sounds of struggle or pain. *Shit, what am I doing here, intimidating such a nice old couple? I am going crazy like Rod.*

Amanda was very sweet. 'So, what is this all about?'

'To be perfectly honest, my brother loves Trisha, so he wanted to clear some things with her father. He is very protective over her.'

'That is very nice. They have been fighting a lot lately. I wish he would just leave her alone. What can she do about it? I got so angry with him in the week. She protects him and then he gets really angry. Each time it happens, he gets angrier, as if it will stop it from happening. It is about her powers, isn't it?'

'Yes.'

'Ah, she can't do a thing about it, you know. You brother can say whatever he wants, but Trisha does not help it. It just happens.'

'Yes, I know, I like that about her, actually. She has been very helpful to me.'

'Really, so he is alright with it?'

'Yes, yes, I think. But we shall have to wait and see. This house was built in 1928, wasn't it?'

'Yes, how did you know?'

'I am an architect. I love most buildings.'

'Oh, how nice.'

'I like it. But you need to replace that panel on the porch, though. It will fall off.'

'Oh I would love to. We just can't find the right panel that fits there. Nobody has it in stock.'

'Perhaps I can help. If after this meeting, we are still welcome here.'

She laughed. 'You are a very sweet man. You don't look at vicious as your brother. But you will always be welcome here. Don't mind Ken. He just gets all huffed up for nothing.'

That is what I am afraid of, Wayne thought.

'I will get that panel for you. So if some guy comes here, accept it as a gift from me, for being such a gracious hostess.'

Amanda laughed. 'Oh you are really charming.'

But inside, nobody laughed.

'Let me start off by being very upfront with you. I do apologize for intruding in this way, but I saw no other way. I love Patricia, with or without her powers.'

The older man stared at him. *Was he some crazy? Have I let a crazy into my house?*

'Yes, I love her, so that is why I am here. I want to tell you that I want to stop hurting her.'

'Hurting her, are you mad? What are you talking about?'

Rod glared at him. *The arrogant swine is going to try and deny it.*

'Yes. She has those powers, Mr. Diason, whether you like it or not. What is the point of abusing her, making her feel so awful about it? What does it help her, when it is so difficult anyway?'

'That is none of your business. How I raise my daughter is my business.'

'Oh you are quite wrong. Patricia is not just my business, she is my life. She is everything to me. So, I am afraid, she is my business and yours, of course. I want you to stop hurting her. Is that too much to ask of her father?'

Ken looked down. He was very confused. *What is this man talking about? I do not hurt her.* He had spent many years trying to get her to see that it would get her into trouble. He had tried everything possible to make it stop.

'I have never hurt my daughter. We don't agree, I admit, but really, you are going too far.'

'Okay, let me help you out here. She phones you because she is frantic you will be injured in a bank robbery. She is your daughter, so she naturally doesn't want her father to be hurt. She has the information to protect you. What does she do? What is her choice? She phones her father and warns him. Good girl, would you agree? So a good father would phone her and thank her, grateful that his daughter was protecting him. That is what is expected. But what does she get? A diatribe of abuse, that she is the devil? Do you think that made her happy or hurt her?'

Ken was looking down now.

'What do you think, Mr. Diason? Does it help or hurt her?'

'I said those things so it could stop. How do think I feel when my daughter is plagued with nightmares of peoples' pain? I want it to stop. I have tried everything. I just want her to have a normal life. I did not mean to hurt her. I wanted her mind to think it was a bad thing, so it would go away.'

'I am afraid it is not so easy. You have been doing it for years. Bashing at her for years. When did you try to gently dissuade her, to say wonderful things, so your daughter would try to stop for love, not fear or hatred?'

Ken sighed. 'You have no idea how hard it was, all those years. I just wanted her to have a normal life.'

'But she has a normal life. What good does it do to tell your daughter that no man will love her? How does that help her self-esteem?'

Ken man looked away. There was a look of horror on his face. 'I have been hurting her, my baby. All this time, I thought I was protecting her. God, I have hurt her. She never said anything. She simply would say, "Dad, you don't understand." She never told me that it hurt. Oh God, my baby.'

Ken had tears in his eyes. Rod just glared at him.

'You know, despite it all, she always phoned me. No matter what I said. She would phone me and warn me. She never let me down, no matter what I said. She just took the pain. God, I have been a total bastard to my only child and she just put up with it.'

'Okay, now we understand each other. I want it to stop right now. I don't mean to make this difficult, but I need you to understand that neither you nor I can decide who or what she will be. That is Patricia. You can't really wish away the things about her you don't like. That is who she is. She is not going to stop. She is not going to change. Why put her through all that? So it is simple. You will not talk to her that way again. You had better accept your daughter. If you don't, I will make sure she leaves you to suffer through whatever. Also, she won't see or speak to you again. I hope we understand each other.'

Ken was looking at him. 'God, it took some pretty boy to show me how much I have hurt her. Thank you. Where is Trisha?'

'At home. She is fine by the way.' Rod glared at him. *The bastard is going to phone her.*

'I ...I have been so self-centered that I didn't even know you were in her life. She never said a thing. She never told me.'

'I know that I sound like an awful bully, but Patricia is off-limits. If you want to let off steam, find another way. You need to understand that I am very serious. I will do whatever is necessary to protect her. I won't have her hurt by anyone.'

'Young man, please, I heard you. Do you know, until now, I always assumed that I should just shake it out of her? I never considered the possibility that she had no control over it. I never thought it was okay.'

'It is more than okay. It makes her a very special person. She has special needs. You need to help her. When she is afraid, you must comfort her. She needs to be loved for everything that she is.'

'Yes, yes, I .... what can I say?'

Ken wiped his eyes and suddenly really saw Rod. 'You really love her, don't you?'

'Yes, very much. Most of the time, she drives me crazy, but I love her.'

'I am very pleased that she has you on her side. How did you meet?'

'At a gallery. She was looking at a painting. I knew then that she was special.'

'Yes, she is that. Why didn't she just tell me that I was hurting her?'

'Because that is who she is. That's what we fight about, all the time. She just shuts down and then we fight.'

Ken smiled, 'yes, I must have a lot to do with that. When she was having one of her visions, I would just glare at her and she would look away and clasp her hands, as if to control herself from saying something.'

'That is exactly what drives me crazy. But she is a wonderful woman, with a great deal of compassion and love. She treats all her animals as if they are her personal friends. I suppose you know all about her powers.'

'No, I don't really know. What do you mean?'

'The way she talks to the animals and helping people with difficult choices. It is a wonderful gift. She needs it to complete her.'

The old man was fixated with this young man who seemed to know his daughter so well. *Where have I been all these years? I certainly did not know she speaks to animals.*

'I am sorry for Trisha, all those years, without you. All those years when we tried to shut her down. I am a terrible father. What am I going to do?'

'Leave her be, that's all I ask. If she wants to share something with you, just accept it. All you have to do is not call her names. Can you do that for her?'

'Yes, young man. Yes.'

'Good. I am glad we understand each other. Because I was dreading having to threaten you with her other powers.'

'Other powers?'

'Her power to make things,….the body very uncomfortable.'

'She can do that too?'

'Hmm. But since we understand each other, you never heard that from me.'

'Understood. I am sorry that we had to meet under these circumstances. I am pleased though, that you love my daughter. Thank you. Thank you for making me realize what a fool I've been.'

'Okay. Now I have to go. Patricia is going to kill me, so I had better get my energy up.'

'Why?'

'Because she is going to freak out when she finds out I came here.'

'She doesn't know?'

'Not a chance,' and Ken laughed. 'You are quite an amazing young man.'

'Be sure to tell her that,' and they were laughing when Wayne walked in.

It had been too quiet in there and he was convinced Ken was lying in a pool of blood on the floor, desperately trying to breathe. He was sure Rod had knocked him over the head and then tried to strangle him. He was very surprised to see them laughing. *Good, I have come in time, before the bloodbath starts.*

'Everything alright?'

He looked at Rod. 'Yes, yes, thank you for seeing us. We really have to go now.'

'Bye, Amanda. Hope to see you again.'

Ken Diason watched the two men leave. He felt the pain of the young man's words and it really hurt him. He had never imagined that he could have so blatantly tortured his precious daughter. She has been more sensitive lately and he should have picked it up. He

should have noticed that she was in love with that stern man. But he was also pleased, because he knew now that she would be taken care of. No sane person would ever try to harm her now.

Amanda watched him, the tears in his eyes. 'Oh Ken, is it alright?'

'Yes, at long last, it will be fine. Oh Amanda, I have been a terrible, evil father. Will she ever forgive me?'

She held him and they went to lie down. Ken cried, because he remembered all the horrible things he had said to her over the years. He cried for the years he had lost, refusing to see how special she was.

~ ~ ~ ~

In the car, Wayne could not contain himself. 'Okay, tell me.'

'He seems like a genuine man. He started off by being defensive, so I wore him down, threatened him and we understand each other now.'

'Threatened him, how?'

'He didn't seem to understand he was hurting her, so I explained into him. Then he seemed to understand and seemed quite upset, so he was crying and I didn't know if it was genuine or not.'

'Rod, what was the threat?'

'I told him that Patricia has special powers.'

'What powers?'

'That she could control his body and if he said anything to her, I would make her hurt his body.'

'What? Are you crazy? She has no such powers.'

'He doesn't know that.'

They laughed.

'He won't really take the chance to find out?'

'Exactly.'

'What did he say?'

'He was horrified. If nothing worked, I am sure that did the trick.'

Wayne laughed again. 'Gareth is right. You are crazy. Shit! I had better phone Gareth. He must be frantic.'

'Hello Gareth, all is well. Can you talk?'

'Hi, Wayne, how are you? Yes, yes, I am with Trisha.'

'Okay, everything is fine. They had a civilized conversation like two grown men, can you believe it? It went well. So relax, I will tell you the details later. How is she?'

'Not good. It appears that just when they were getting cozy, he ran off. She is seriously pissed off and a little rejected. How is he?'

'The same. So she wanted him?'

'Oh yes. But that crazy brother of yours ran away. This is too complicated. But she is fine, because she is glaring at me, telling me to stop being such a blabber-mouth.'

'Put her on.'

'Hi, Wayne. How are you?'

'Not too good. You torture my brother, so I suffer. You have no idea what he had made me do,' he laughed when Rod almost went off the road.

'You have got to take him back, just for my sake.'

'I don't know about that. He left in a huff and a puff, the usual stuff, just when I was about to seduce him.'

'So you were trying to seduce him? Gosh, he really needs all the help he can get, that brother of mine. Never mind, I will work on him.'

'You are in such a good mood. What are you up to?'

'Rod is driving and he is glaring at me, because he doesn't think this is funny.'

'He is with you? I am going to kill you.'

'That's what he says to me all the time. He is getting really angry now, so I had better go before he drives right off the road. Do you want to talk to him?'

'No, no, absolutely not.'

Wayne laughed, ‘okay, suit yourself. Goodbye,’ and he had a good laugh all the way back to the house.

Rod just glared at him and stormed inside the house.

Wayne waited for Kathryn to join him at Rod’s house that afternoon. It had already been such a long day and he needed some rational company. Rod did not leave his bedroom. *He is probably plotting some other crazy scheme. God help us!*

When he finally surfaced, he looked a little relaxed and focused. He had lost that rough look in his eyes. ‘Wayne, thank for coming with me today. I appreciate it.’

‘Fine. Am I off the hook now? For not telling you about Trisha?’

‘No, never,’ and he smiled as he went to pour them a drink.

‘What are you doing tonight?’

‘Kathryn is coming over. You?’

‘I am going to seduce Patricia, of course.’

‘Oh no. I knew you were busy with some crazy scheme again. What now?’

‘Nothing. I am not going to do anything, but sit quietly and listen to her and then I will make her drunk’.

Wayne laughed. ‘I hope you stick to that plan. I really hope so, because if you do, she will be so surprised that she will tumble into bed with you. Will you talk about ....’

‘No. When she is ready, she will tell me. Maybe she never will.’

‘Okay, I like this plan. Will you promise to stick to it, please?’

Rod laughed, ‘yes, yes, I will.’

When he phoned Trisha, she was sounding a lot better than she had been earlier. ‘Hi, Rod. How are you?’

‘Not so good. And you?’

‘Alright. Sorry about this morning. You got me at a bad moment and certainly too early.’

'Fine, stop apologizing so much. It was my fault. As usual, I didn't really think. I am sorry, Patricia.'

'Okay, now why are you not fine? What's the matter?'

'The matter is that I am missing you.'

'Oh.'

'Can you help me with that problem?'

'I don't know. This morning you seemed quite keen to run away.'

'Yes, I guess I feel really shit about the way I behaved. I want to make it up to you.'

'Oh Rod, leave it alone. What are you doing?'

'Sitting on edge hoping you accept my proposal.'

'What proposal is that?'

'That I come over with a bottle of wine and we try to be friends again. I miss you so much Patricia.'

'Oh Rod, what can I say? We will just end up in mortal combat.'

'I promise that we will not fight. I will behave so well, you won't recognize me.'

She laughed, 'I doubt that very much.'

'Is that a challenge?'

'Yes, Rod. You could never spend an hour without picking a fight.'

'Okay, you are on. If I win, what do I get?'

'Let's see. I will think of something ....let's see. I will cook for you for a day.'

'No, a week.'

'Okay, but if I win, will you cook for me for a week?'

'No, two weeks!'

'Really, you are very sure of yourself today.'

He laughed, 'no, just finally learning to grow up. So, what time?'

'You have tricked me into this, haven't you?'

'Yes, of course. What time?'

'Around 7.00 will be fine. Bring some wine, okay?'

'Fine, lots of wine. What else?'

'Tons of good-behavior magic.'

He laughed, 'fine, I will see you later.'

When he arrived at her house, he smile cheerfully at her and greeted her politely. She laughed at him, hoping to goad him.

'Four bottles of wine. Are you trying to make me drunk?'

'Of course,' and he smiled his special smile, his dimples flirting with her. He kissed her lightly on her cheek.

'Thank you for being so special, Patricia. Now, is there food in this house? I am so hungry.'

'Yes, yes. Come let's eat.'

While they ate, Rod smiled at her and listened to her stories about her patients. 'Are you okay with my brother being with Kathryn?'

'Yes, they are good together. I just hope he knows what he is doing.'

'Why?'

'She is a very strong woman. He only sees the demure little thing that smiles sweetly. But I have seen her being strong and aggressive.'

'Good, he needs some of that. He really likes her, so I think it will be fine. The only problem is he might want to go back to New York and I gather she refuses to go there.'

'Yes, she will never leave. She loves her life here.'

'I hope it never comes to that. I want him to be happy. When he is not being rude and obnoxious to me, he is quite a great guy.'

'Yes, he is very sensitive and understands a lot about people.'

'Yeah, I only recently discovered that about him. All my life, he has been the younger, irresponsible brother. It has been quite a shock to find out that he is more rational and responsible than I am. In an odd kind of way, it is also quite comforting. '

'He worries a lot about you.'

'Yes, he firmly believes that I have become crazy and that I am likely to do something bizarre.'

'I think he might be right,' she smiled sweetly at him. *Shit, he really is behaving. He did not even raise his eyebrows. No fits of anger.* 'More wine, my dear?'

'You are determined to make me drunk.'

'Yes, yes.'

'Why?'

'So that I can seduce you, of course.'

She laughed, 'do I have to be drunk for that?'

'Yes, why else would you even consider a crazy man?'

'Rod, you are behaving a little too well. What's up?'

'Nothing, I told you that I am going to behave. I have a total of 3 minutes left.'

'You are watching the time?'

'Yes and after that, the old Rod is back.' He smiled knowingly at her.

She touched his hand. 'Let me see if I can convince you to misbehave in three minutes.'

She caressed his hand and he just smiled. He turned over his hand and held hers. 'We should have put in a clause that also required you to behave.'

She laughed, throwing her head back. He watched as her throat grinned at him. She face changed suddenly. *My father is upset about something.* She saw him, sitting on the porch, sipping a glass of whisky. She had better phone him and find out what was wrong. 'Are you okay, Patricia?' He held her hand tighter.

'Ur, yes, yes. I just remembered I should have phoned my father.'

She looked away from him. 'Fine. I will go and sit in the garden. Okay?'

'Are you sure? It is not necessary. I will only be a few minutes.'

'Relax. I will be fine. Do you want me to leave?'

'No Rod. I promise it will be a few minutes.'

'Okay.'

He got up and went outside, carrying the bottle of wine with him. She returned a few moments later, looking a little confused. 'Everything fine?'

'Yes. I had the strangest conversation with my father. He thanked me for caring so much, for phoning him. I hope he is alright.'

'I am sure he is fine. Now, come, more wine for you.'

'No thanks, I have had enough.'

'Are you drunk yet?'

She laughed, 'drunk enough.'

'Drunk enough for what?'

'For you to seduce me, of course,' and she walked off inside.

Rod followed her, hoping she was not just teasing him. 'What is the time?'

'8.15.'

And he walked to her and touched her cheek. 'Patricia, you are quite beautiful. What am I going to do with you?'

'Let me see.....' but he kissed her before she could say anything else. She flung her arms around him and held him tight.

He laughed, 'next time, we will see if you can behave.'

'Rod, please will you stop behaving already?'

He laughed out loud as he led her to her bedroom. That was the most wonderful thing she had ever said to him.

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It was 11.30 that evening when Rod heard the doorbell. He wished the caller would go away. Patricia was fast asleep, looking relaxed and pleased. He hoped they would go away and leave her to sleep. It was probably one of her patients, needing urgent help. He got out

of bed and dressed quickly. *I will just tell them to go away, that she is ill or something.* He moaned at the fool who would bother her so late.

He opened the door and was completely taken aback to see Ken Diason standing there.

'I know I should have phoned first, but she would have just told me not to drive at night. Amanda is in the car. Can we come in? I need to speak with Patricia.'

'Ur, of course. Please come in. I will get her.' *This is awful timing. Just when I am getting her to relax.* He went to wake her and she just slept.

'Patricia, please, wake up.'

'Rod, no, I am tired. Later, okay?'

He smiled. 'Patricia, your father is here.'

'Yes, yes, I will call him tomorrow.'

He kissed her. 'Patricia, sweetheart, he is here in your house.'

She opened her eyes. 'Here? Are you sure?'

'Yes, he is waiting in the lounge. Can you wake up please?'

'Okay, okay.'

She jumped out of the bed and started walking out.

'Patricia!'

'What now?'

'Can you put some clothes on?'

'Shit! I am still sleeping!! Rod is my father really here? This is not some joke, is it?'

'No, no. Amanda is also here.'

'Something awful must have happened.'

He went to her and helped her put her t-shirt on. 'Now, here, some jeans.'

'Thank you, Rod. I think I am completely blind drunk. That is all your fault.'

'Fine, you can deal with me later. Shall I go and make some coffee?'

She looked at him. 'Will you? Thanks.'

'Fine, now try to relax, okay?'

Trisha just stared at her father and then at Amanda. She could see nothing. *Okay, it can't be that awful. Their faces are quiet and still.*

'Dad, Amanda, what on earth is the matter?'

'Nothing, my dear. Come give me a hug.'

She went to him and he hugged her tightly. 'Oh, my baby!'

She still could see nothing. *This is very strange. There is no death, accident or anything. Why is he acting so strange?*

She went to Amanda and hugged her. *Nothing here too.*

Rod cleared his throat. 'Would you like some coffee, tea, or a drink?'

'Yes, please, a whisky for me. Do you have any?' Ken asked.

'Ur. Yes. Rod, in the kitchen in that tall cupboard.'

'Amanda?'

'Ur, a glass of wine would be nice.' She looked at the two empty bottles on the floor.

'Yes, that I definitely have. Can I have coffee, Rod?' Patricia was trying not to panic.

'Sure.'

He moved towards the kitchen. 'Rod, please, let me introduce you to my parents.'

Rod looked at Ken. 'We met already. Rod let us in remember?'

'Oh yes, of course. Sorry, I am a bit confused today.'

'Are you okay, Trisha?'

'Yes, yes, Dad. I am fine. I am just a little surprised to see you here, so late at night. Is everything alright?'

'Yes, Trisha, I need to talk to you.'

'Okay. That is my cue. I will help Rod in the kitchen,' Amanda smiled as she walked out.

When she got to the kitchen, she smiled at Rod. 'Thank you for helping him. It was the hardest thing he ever did, coming here tonight. I hope it will be alright.'

'Yes, me too.'

They chatted about general things, pretending that the conversation next door did not have a strong impact on their lives. Rod wished he could go in there and sit with her, just in case. But he resisted the urge and smiled politely at Amanda.

Amanda was worried that Ken would make a mess of things and the relationship with his daughter would be worse. She wished she could sit next to him and guide him through it.

Rod went in and gave them their drinks.

Trisha was curled up in one couch and her father sat opposite her. He looked like a father, instructing his daughter about something and she looked like a bored teenager who had heard it all before.

'Sorry to interrupt, but here are your drinks. Patricia, give me a shout if you need anything.'

'Thanks.'

He went out reluctantly. She had her hands clasped tightly now and he wondered what the father was saying.

'Okay, they seem to be fine.'

'Good.' Amanda sighed.

'Trisha, I suppose I am just talking nonsense. This polite stuff is silly. I came here to tell you that I am very sorry for being such a terrible, useless father to you. All those years, I tried so hard to pretend your gift would go away, but today, I realized that it never would. I am sorry that I never stood by you. I am so sorry that I never knew what you needed.'

'Dad, look what is going on here? What are you talking about? Are you ill?'

'No, but I have been ill for a long time. I am telling you that every time you needed my assurance that you were okay, I just shouted at you and said awful things. I know now that I did not give you what you needed. I would give anything to start again, to give you the love and support you need.'

He had tears in his eyes and Trisha went to him.

'Oh Dad! What has got into you? I know that you were hoping it would stop. I know,' and she started crying too.

‘Oh my baby, I hope someday you will forgive me. I hope you will show me what you need.’

‘Dad, just hearing you say that is all I want,’ and they cried together for the years they had lost as friends, as family.

Trisha moved away from him. ‘Dad, what happened to make you change your mind?’

‘Roderick. He told me that I was an awful father.’

‘Rod, that Rod?’

‘Yes, he loves you so much. He told me that your powers made you special and I should accept that.’

‘Dad, I am very confused. When did Rod say this to you?’

‘He hasn’t told you, has he?’

‘No Dad. What?’

‘Okay. He came over this morning to tell me that,… basically about your powers and that it was a wonderful thing. He told me over and over, as if I was a child, that it was not going to stop, no matter what evil things I said to you. He was very harsh with me, but it was a good thing. He forced me to realize what a total fool I was. He threatened me if I did not stop hurting you.’

‘He threatened you?’

‘Yes, he told me about ur.., your special powers that could.... You know.’

‘No, I don’t Dad, what special powers?’

‘That you can make my body do things.’

‘Ah I see. Dad I have no such power. Rod is just demented. What else did he say?’

‘He told me that you talk.... communicate with animals and that you see events, so you can help people. All that stuff. I must say he was very civilized. He spoke to me as if he wanted me to know my own daughter. It was quite shocking.’

‘He was calm and rational?’

‘Yes, most of the time. Yes, except when I told him it was none of his business. I thought he was going to explode. He told me that you were his business because you are his life. Why did you not tell me that you met a man who loves you so much?’

'Oh Dad, he never says anything to me. We fight all the time. I am surprised that he said all those things to you. I worked hard to make sure he never knew about those things. We never discussed it. Until now, I thought he did not know.'

'That is very interesting, because he knew so much. He was very clear that nobody is to hurt you. I suppose hearing him speak so passionately about you, hit home. He went on and on about how I have been hurting you. It was so sharp and clear that I finally realized.'

Trisha had tears in her eyes now.

'Oh Dad, I am sorry that all this happened. I am sorry that I had these things that made you so uncomfortable.'

He held her. 'Trisha, Rod said something to me that you need to remember. You must never apologize for who you are. That is what makes you so special, okay? He was right. You are special and a wonderful person, so I don't ever want you to say you are sorry about that.'

The two of them cried. 'Oh Dad, thank you so much.'

'You must thank Rod. He is the one who made me realize how wrong I have been.'

She laughed. 'No, he is in trouble. He should not have threatened you.'

'Oh, but he was right. But Wayne was there, so it was fine.'

'Wayne was there?'

'Yes. I think he was to be the voice of reason.'

Trisha laughed. 'I am glad you told me, because now they are both in trouble.'

Ken laughed. 'Rod told me that you are going to kill him when you find out and I promised to help him. So, will you be gentle with him? He loves you and my dear, he was absolutely right.'

'We shall see about that. We had better let them join us, before he does something crazy again.'

'Yes.'

She went into the kitchen and watched Rod smiling at Amanda. He was telling her a joke and she was laughing hysterically.

'Okay, you two, break it up. Sorry about that, but we just needed to talk.'

She did not look at Rod. 'Would you like to join us?'

'At last. Is everything alright?' Rod went to her and hugged her.

'Yes.'

They chatted for a while and the older couple got up to leave.

Despite Trisha's insistence that they stay the night, Ken wanted to go home and try to settle his emotions. 'I promised Amanda I would take her to a casino, so I am afraid we will stop off and probably spend the whole night on our feet.'

'Yes, it was the only way he could convince me to go driving in the middle of the night.'

Trisha waved them goodnight and shut the door. She looked at Rod for a long time.

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Chapter 9

Rod was watching her, standing there at the door. Her body and mind were tired and she was battling to deal with everything that had happened. *Okay, her father has told her that I went there this morning.* He could see it on her face. But he wondered why she was not angry, or even a little annoyed with him. Her eyes looked so hollow now, he went to her. 'Patricia, it has been a long day. Come, back to bed. Let's get some sleep.'

'We need to talk, Rod.'

'I know, but not now. Anyway, I don't want to talk to you when you are blind drunk. It makes you impossible. Now come. Tomorrow we will have a long chat.'

'You always want your way. Okay, I am tired and I suppose, today has been too much.'

She took his hand and they went to bed. She dozed off to sleep, but Rod could not sleep. He was worried. *How are we going to deal with the issue that has plagued our relationship right from the beginning?* Would he stop himself from getting angry? She had

not told him, and in fact, had gone to a lot of trouble to conceal the most wonderful thing about herself from him. She had not trusted him and had assumed that he would treat her badly. It hurt him to think that Patricia had such thoughts about him. It hurt and angered him. He did not want to talk about it, because there was always the possibility that he would get angry and do something crazy. He could not trust himself to speak about it, but he knew that if he didn't, they would always have it hanging over them. He wanted her to be with him for a long time. He thought about it and realized that he would have to deal with whatever happened. He got out of bed and went to watch television. The images flew off the screen and he sat there, hoping that maybe this time, he would do the right thing. He hoped he could just keep calm and deal with her in a rational way.

His brain reminded him that he had accused her of having an affair with his brother and he was in no position to fight with her about trust. But he needed to know that she ....what? That she thought he was a wonderful man, who would always take care of her. He wanted her to adore him and trust him. His phone was ringing. He looked at the time. It was 2.00. He grabbed it quickly, hoping its shrill did not wake Patricia.

'Hello?'

'Rod, where are you?'

'Patricia?'

'Hmm, where are you?'

'Next door. Watching television.'

'Come back to bed.'

'What?'

'Come back to bed. I need some of those strong, sensual strokes.'

She hung up the phone. Rod stared at his phone. Was he dreaming? Patricia was very strong with him today. But he smiled. He loved it when she commanded him to come to bed.

'Rod, really, do I have to look for you all over? Why aren't you in bed next to me?'

He laughed. 'You are a very bossy woman.'

'Shh. Make love to me.'

He climbed into her bed and hoped that this was not just a beautiful dream.

He woke up early, still concerned about their pending discussion today. She seemed to deal with him very nicely when they were making love, but outside the bedroom, she was completely different. What would he do if she clasped her hands and lied to him? He needed to get some control before she woke up.

She was standing at the door, looking at him.

'Rod, what were you thinking the first time we met?'

'What?'

'That day, I turned around and you looked like you had a question that you couldn't answer.'

'Oh, you stood next to the painting and I had been thinking that it was so sensual, but it needed something. You stood there and it looked complete. I wondered whether you were a dream, my imagination, because the image was too perfect.'

'Oh, fine.'

'Why?'

'You have that look again. What are you thinking now?'

He looked at her for a long time.

'That I hope I don't get angry when we talk. I was telling myself that I had better behave.'

'Ah.'

'What?'

'I was thinking that I should properly introduce myself to you.'

He looked confused.

'I am Patricia Diason, a horny psychic.'

She held out her hand to him. He took it and shook it. 'I see, pleased to meet you. I am Roderick Keyes, a crazy man who does not understand you.'

'Ah, nice, nice. But are you not also the man who threatens my father with untold misery?'

'Yes, yes, that is the crazy part. It also accuses you of having an affair with my brother. It also wants to shake you right now.'

'Oh why does crazy Rod want to shake me?'

'Because you should have told me, right at the beginning. You should have trusted me. It is a wonderful gift and you should have told me.'

'Yes, I know, but I... I suppose it is not something you tell a man on a first date, if you are planning to have him in your bed.'

'You didn't tell me because you wanted sex?'

'Yes. I told you I was horny. I figured I could just have great sex and then run away.'

'So you didn't trust me?'

Yes, I did not trust you, Rod. Please, are you going to get all angry now?'

'Yes, of course and now I really have to shake you.'

'What now?'

'Because you have just taken the most difficult thing for us to discuss and made it the most natural thing in the world.'

'Is that bad?'

'No, but I wanted a chance to shout and get angry and get crazy.'

'Okay, okay, Fine. Get angry and then I will get angry with you, for making me live for two whole weeks without great sex because of Jocelyn. Go ahead. Hit me with your best shot.'

He stared at her and then he laughed. 'You are crazier than I am.'

'Good, now we understand each other.'

She was getting agitated now. He pulled her closer.

'I will never understand you, horny Patricia, the psychic Diason.'

'Good. That will keep you interested for a long time. Rod, now seriously. I need to talk about it with you. Are you still angry with me?'

'Hmmm, a little. Okay, tell me.'

When she had talked, Rod sat quietly and listened for once in his life.

‘Okay, thank you for telling me that, Patricia.’

‘I suppose, while I am confessing all, I need to tell you something else.’

He raised his eyebrows.

‘I ...ur... when I get a vision, I get very horny.’

‘Patricia, stop teasing me.’

‘Yes, it sort out creates too much energy in me and I get horny. Is that okay?’

He just laughed.

‘Also, you seem to induce the images, sometimes you are staring at me and it just happens.’

‘Let me see. Is it possible that they get stronger because you are feeling horny?’

‘I don’t know. But the thing that scared me about you is that they got so much clearer when you were around. Yes, maybe you make me horny and then the images are sharper. I don’t know. Whatever the case, it is entirely your fault.’

‘Fine, I am happy to be responsible for your horny visions. I can deal with that. But Patricia, you have not told me the most important thing. What do you need from me?’

‘Oh Rod! You have done it already. You listened. I need you to listen to me and accept me. Sometimes I get very.... strong. And you have to be able to cope with that.’

‘Fine. But Patricia, what happens when you are driving and it happens?’

‘It doesn’t happen that often. It flashes quickly through my brain.’

‘I don’t like it. That is dangerous.’

‘I have managed to survive this long, haven’t I? Anyway, you must just make sure that I don’t get horny while I am driving.’

‘My fault again. But which man will ever be able to control you? You are horny all the time.’

She laughed. ‘Only when you look at me like that.’

‘Oh no, not my fault again.’

‘Oh Rod, I love you.’

He looked at her and held her. ‘Hmmm, we shall see about that.’

'What?'

'Do you love me enough though?'

'What?'

'To accept that sometimes I am crazy? That I will do things, like visit your father or anybody else who dares to hurt you?'

'Yes, yes. But Rod, no more visits, okay?'

He just looked at her. 'Really Rod, otherwise I will use my special powers on you.'

'Don't try that on me. I just said that to your father.'

'Really, are you so sure that I can't do it?' She smiled at him, titling her head.

Rod laughed. 'Oh Patricia, I love you. You are going to drive me insane, but I love you.'

They heard the phone ringing, but they ignored it. *Not today.* Today, they were going to spend the day exploring the joy of being loved.

~ ~ ~ ~

Later that evening, they went to Rod's house. Wayne and Gareth were sitting in the lounge laughing about something. They must have been talking about them, because they both looked so guilty.

'Hello, you two. We were getting worried. Why don't you answer your phones?'

Wayne looked harshly at his brother.

'Sorry, we were busy. Sorry Wayne. Are you okay?'

'Yes, of course, but are you? You look a little tired.'

'Fine, fine, yes. I am tired.'

Gareth went over to Patricia and hugged her. 'Are you okay?' he whispered.

'Yes, thanks. Relax, he knows.'

'No fireworks?'

'No. We had a very decent conversation.'

‘Will you two stop whispering? That is very rude. I also want to hear what she has to say.’ Wayne was laughing.

‘Do you want a drink, Patricia?’ Rod looked at her.

‘Oh no. No more alcohol for the rest of my life. Never again. Rod made be drunk last night and I still have not recovered.’

He laughed. ‘Everything is my fault.’

He went off to his bedroom.

‘So which one of you told him?’

‘Ur, me. He was getting so angry that I swear he was going to beat me up. Trisha, he already sort of figured it out. I am sorry. But then I figured, it was not helping you that he didn’t know. Also, I knew it would not be a problem for him.’

‘I’m going to kill you Wayne,’ and when Gareth laughed, she glared at him.

‘Don’t think you are off the hook. How could tell him to go my father? Are you crazy?’

‘Ur.., he insisted. He was going all demented. I had no choice. Trish, he was really going crazy. That’s why we told him he can’t go unless Wayne was there.’

She glared at them.

‘Truly. He would have done it himself. At least with Wayne there he had to act with some level of decency.’

‘Yes, Trisha, but he was very calm. He was polite and spoke properly to your father. I was so scared he would attack him, but he was perfectly civilized.’

‘I don’t care what you say. Both of you should not encourage him to do these crazy things. He has a terrible temper. You allowed him to go and intimidate an old couple.’

‘Sorry, Trisha, but I promise I went along to make sure he didn’t do them any harm.’

They all kept quiet as Rod walked back in.

‘What now?’

‘Oh nothing. Just chatting,’ he watched Trisha clasping her hands.

‘I see. Fine, lie to me. When I find out, you can live with the consequences.’ He walked out.

'You two always get me into trouble. He was perfectly fine the whole day.'

They laughed at her, looking so distressed when it was clear to them that Rod was teasing her.

'Relax, he is just teasing you. He wants you to panic, so he can have his way with you. That is how he controls everybody.'

Wayne laughed. 'Even me.'

'Oh, okay. But, just in case, I had better go to him.' She walked off.

Gareth was laughing now. 'You would think a psychic wouldn't fall for that trick.'

'Yes, but fortunately for him, she can't see for him.'

She went out to him. He was standing on the balcony. She put her arms around his waist and he could not turn around, because she would have seen him grinning in triumph.

'Rod, will you please just relax?'

'Not when you lie to me.'

'Fine. I was just shouting at them, for encouraging you to do crazy things.'

'So why didn't you tell me that?'

'Because you look at me in that accusing way and I want to just drop the subject.'

He turned around now. 'How is a man supposed to feel when he finds his woman huddled with two men, whispering?'

She laughed. 'You are too possessive. That is your brother and my friend, remember? They are not some random men in a pub somewhere.'

'Still you should be whispering to me.'

'Okay.'

She leaned over to his ear and whispered. 'Rod you are absolutely gorgeous.'

He laughed. 'Is that all you think about?'

'Sometimes I think about other things. Like, how do you always know when I am lying?'

He looked at her for a while, his eyes sparkling, smiling at her. ‘That’s obvious, I am psychic,’ and laughed out loud.

She glared at him and tried to run away. He pulled her back. ‘I know lots of things about you. I pay attention to detail. Now, kiss me so we can go back and have a normal discussion, for a change.’

She kissed him and he was very pleased as they went back inside.

‘Rod, have you heard from Joss lately?’ Wayne was in that mood tonight. He liked to see the sparks fly between them.

‘Yes. She has gone away to that awful place her parents own out there in the bush. She needed new inspiration.’

‘That is very nice. I couldn’t stand her hanging around here now.’

‘Where is Kathryn?’

‘She has gone off with Janine. They said they would meet us here. They wanted Trisha to go with them. That is why we phoned. Anyway, it is a big secret.’

‘I am glad you couldn’t get hold us. I am not interested in any more secrets.’

Rod smiled. ‘Also, can you men please stop whispering things to my woman?’

‘The crazy is back.’ Wayne laughed. ‘Trisha, you are going to need the endurance of Hercules to deal with this man.’

‘Yes, I know. I know.....’ and she laughed when Rod glared at her.

She stopped suddenly and frowned, then she looked at Wayne.

‘Okay, just tell me. I know that look. I am not going to spend weeks trying to figure out if it is good or bad. Tell me Trisha.’

‘Oh leave me alone. It is nothing,’ and when she clasped her hands, this time Rod wanted to laugh.

‘Trisha that is depraved. Was it something good or bad?’

She laughed now. ‘Nothing. That was to punish you for telling Rod my secret and for taking him to my father.’ But her hands were clasped and Rod smiled. She looked at him and he laughed out loud.

'Good, for once I am not in trouble. But that is wicked, Patricia. How can you torture my brother so?'

'It could be worse. I might have used my special powers on him' and this time, Gareth and Wayne laughed.

'I swear I had nothing to do with that. Rod made that up all on his own.'

~ ~ ~ ~

Rod and Trisha went into the kitchen to cook. Even though she had lost the bet and had to cook for him for a week, he liked moving around the kitchen with her, kissing her when he felt like it. 'So what did you see for Wayne?'

She was about to lie when he went her and held her hands. He kissed her lightly on her lips. 'Before you decide to lie, I am going to take some precautions.'

He kissed her again and she sighed.

'Rod that is not fair. You know how horny I am. Don't use it against me,' as he placed his hand on her breast.

'Okay, okay!' She moved away from him.

'Kathryn is pregnant. She doesn't it know yet, but he can feel it. He wants it very badly.'

'But they just met a few weeks ago. He used no protection?'

'Ask him that. Don't tell him. She won't tell him because she wants him to decide to stay on his own.'

'Damn, Patricia. Why do you women think you can hide things? If she doesn't tell him, I will. All these secrets have to stop. Anyway, he has already decided the stay. He loves her, even when she is impossible. This is great news. I am very pleased. Is it is girl or a boy?'

'Rod please, it was just a flash.... okay, a little boy. He actually looks more like you than Wayne. Rod, Kathryn is going to be important in your life.'

'Why?'

'You will understand each other and help each other.'

'I would prefer to understand you, not my brother's woman.'

'I know, but I suppose, I understand Wayne a little better. Like now, he has figured out already that I really did see something and he is going to hound me.'

Rod laughed, ‘no, let him suffer. I can’t have people nagging you this way. That is my job.’

Rod heard the doorbell and peeked out the kitchen. ‘They have arrived.’

They went to greet the women. Kathryn smiled shyly at Trisha. She was still a little awkward to find her boss in the same house as her lover. Trisha smiled at them.

‘I can’t wait to get you two alone. I hope you have found the secret weapon to control these men.’

Janine giggled. ‘Yes, I think so. We will brief you later.’

Kathryn smiled at her and Trisha knew she had found out she was pregnant. She was afraid of what Wayne would say. Trisha went back to the kitchen. Wayne followed her.

‘Okay, tell me.’

‘You sound like your brother. There is nothing to tell, honest.’

‘Honest? Trisha, don’t play with me. Okay I admit I told Rod everything. I am sorry, but he needed to know. Don’t I need to know?’

‘No, not really. Leave Patricia alone. There is nothing to tell.’ Rod was standing at the door.

‘Not yet.’

Rod laughed at the desperate look on his brother’s face. He went to his brother and hugged him. ‘Relax, brother, you are going crazy.’

‘Then it is really bad. You never hug me, unless it is a matter of life and death.’

Rod looked at her and they both laughed. It was definitely a matter of life.

‘You know me too well. We are teasing you. You should have told me about Patricia and now you will pay.’

‘Damn you two. Trisha punishes me because I told you and you because I didn’t! What should I have done? Either way, I am in trouble.’

They laughed at him, happy for him and enjoying his desperate plea to them.

'It is nothing. We are teasing you, I promise brother. Patricia just wanted some fun at your expense. Gareth will get his turn soon.'

He relaxed a bit. 'Fine. Can you move on to him now?'

'Okay. Now go and entertain our guests.'

When he left, Rod and Patricia laughed. 'Rod you are completely crazy!'

When Kathryn came into the kitchen for a glass of water, she cleared her throat because Rod was about to kiss Trisha.

'Sorry, I just.....'

Rod moved away and Trisha smiled. 'I am sorry but this man just can't keep his hands to himself. Let me take this through otherwise everyone will starve.'

Rod looked at her leaving. *What is she up to now?* He knew she was up to something again. When would she stop these games? When would she learn to tell him everything?

'Ur, Kathryn, what do you need?'

'Oh a glass of water, please.'

'Sure. Are you alright? You seemed a little distracted.'

'Fine, fine. Really. I suppose the stress of the exams was getting to me and now that it's over. I feel a bit out of sorts.'

'Yes, especially with Wayne coming into your life at that point.'

'Yes, it just adds to the stress.'

'I know he doesn't tell you everything. But in the end, he talks. So relax. He is just like Patricia. They keep you wondering what is going on all the time.'

She laughed. 'Yes, it drives me crazy. Sometimes I just want to throw something at him. I am always the last to know everything.'

Rod laughed. 'I know, I know.'

'He will probably never tell you this, so I will try to help you. He loves you.'

'What, he said that?'

'Yes, of course, right from the first day. He was shell-shocked that he had met you.'

'Oh. He never told me.'

'He does. And he will be very happy when you tell him.'

'What?'

But Trisha had walked back into the kitchen. She knew that Rod was misbehaving and telling her things he shouldn't. *This man is impossible.* But she smiled at how well he accepted her psychic powers. He even seemed to enjoy it now.

When Kathryn went back into the lounge, she went to Wayne and hugged him as he stood there, smoking on the balcony.

'Hello, are you okay?'

'Hmm? Yes, Wayne. Yes.'

'Do you want a smoke?'

'No today, thanks.'

'So what's up?'

'Nothing. I just needed to hug you.'

'Ah I see.'

She went back inside and Wayne panicked for a moment. Kathryn never hugged him in public and Rod never hugged him at all. He wondered if he was going to die and they knew. Would Trisha tell him something like that? He looked at her, smiling at Rod. *No, I am not going to die. Rod would never have that naughty look in his eyes.* He wished he had not told Rod, because now, he was going to use it against him. *Damn*, he should have made him suffer, the way he was suffering now. They all knew something and he was the only one who didn't know. *Next time, I will not tell Rod a bloody thing.*

He watched his brother hugging Kathryn. *Damn! I am going to kill him. Why is he getting so cozy with Kathryn? He hardly spoke to her and now he was hugging her? Damn, this was getting out of hand.* He walked back inside and they all looked at him.

'Wayne, I don't know why you insist on smoking outside. Really, Patricia just smokes everywhere.'

'Habit, I suppose. For years you made me smoke outside. Suddenly all the rules have changed. I just don't know what to expect.'

'Whatever works for you. Now, come and help me. Explain to these women that a horse cannot suffer from depression.'

Wayne laughed. *I am going to be fine. Rod would never joke like this if there was a problem.*

Gareth smiled. He liked the way these brothers understood each other. He liked the way Rod was taking so kindly to Patricia and her life. *Yes, my cards were right.* Rod was her King of Cups and he would keep the whole family together. He wondered if she should tell Trisha that she and Rod were going to get married and that her father would give them an amazing present. He would buy them a ranch for all her animals. Rod was going to fight every time she went to spend the night there without him. He smiled, of course, that was fairly predictable.

He wanted to laugh out loud as Rod joked about the horses. *He does not know how much he will love those very horses*. He wondered if he should tell her that Kathryn was going to stay with her, until they retired. It was all too country for him. *Really, the sisters-in-law in business together!* He smiled, because, in his cards, they would have a happy life together and he was pleased.

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About the author

Senna Fisher is a romantic fiction writer from Durban, South Africa. She has an affinity to things magical and spiritual matters. She is also interested in the power dynamics between women and men in a modern society. She loves to observe the world in nature and its connection to human experiences.

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Thank you for reading.

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