

Shadow's Forge 2:
Trials on Tour



Jena' Galifany

SHADOWSFORGE 2: TRIALS ON TOUR

by

Jena' Galifany

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WHAT THEY ARE SAYING ABOUT
SHADOWS FORGE 2:
TRIALS ON TOUR

“Geoff Richards, the ever-cocky rock star, ignores the [death threat] warning and lives his life. If it’s your time to go, it’s your time to go, and he’s going to have a damn good time on his way out.

Valerie Leonard, journalist, wants proof that he can handle commitment, that she won't be just another notch in his belt.

Laced with romance, suspense and a good dose of rock n’ roll, *Trials on Tour* will keep you reading until the last page is done. And leaves you wanting more.”

~~Reviewed by Marissa for Novelspot.net

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ShadowsForge 1: Three Times a Hero

Dedication

To Steve Conrad, my love, my friend, my muse, and Technical Advisor for the ShadowsForge series.

To the Deluxe Readers: Joyce, Brandi, Jennifer, and Maria. Thank you for your loyalty to ShadowsForge and your patience with me. We'd be nothing without you.

To that special Bass Player who inspired ShadowsForge.

Chapter 1

Ipswich

Geoff Richards huffed as he flopped on the sofa. It was obvious Nigel Patton, road manager, was in a tizzy again. That usually meant more restraint on the band and Geoff hated restraint. He watched the small man sneak up on the door at the sound of a knock.

Geoff thought Lyla really should burn that horrid outfit Nigel seemed to be sewn into. Nigel always looked like he'd slept in his suit. Even after dry cleaning, the suit remained rumpled, much like Nigel's personality. The short, bearded road manager allowed Gary Felding, head of the ShadowsForge security team, to enter. Nigel glanced down the hall both ways before he took great care in relocking the door of the suite where ShadowsForge held their morning meeting.

Geoff sat beside Ty Synclair, who pushed back his chest-length blond mane as he stretched his arms. Ty nudged Geoff. "You think Nigel's more paranoid than usual?"

"Y'think?" Geoff took his attention from the manager long enough to light a cigarette. He blew a cloud of blue smoke toward Nigel and Gary, who stood before the group like the headmaster after a smoke bomb was detonated in the boys' washroom.

Gary folded his muscular arms across his chest and leaned his thick torso against the door, his full attention on Nigel.

“Okay, lads.” Nigel looked from one member to the next, across two sofas littered with musicians. “First up, we need a new wardrobe lady so if you know anyone, let me know. That doesn’t mean last night’s leftovers that will do anything just to be near you *forever*. We need someone who knows what they’re doing with the costumes. Meanwhile, Richards, take it easy on those trousers. There’s nobody to sew them up for you right now. Lyla has gone home.”

Jordan Cantrell shrugged, and exchanged a glance with Brian Cummings. “That didn’t sound too important.” Brian nodded his agreement as they turned their attention back to the wiry manager.

“Second, I don’t know who brought this on. It doesn’t matter but we need to do something about it now.” The look on his face showed the band whatever he was talking about had him deeply concerned.

“Okay,” Geoff began, sarcasm in his voice. He raked his fingers through his brown waves. “It’s stopped. For the record, what did we stop doing this time?” The others snickered.

“This isn’t funny. It was probably you. You seem to attract this kind of trouble,” Nigel thundered at the lead singer and left the entire band silent at his outburst.

Geoff blew smoke rings casually toward the manager. “What are you talking about, Boss?”

Nigel shot back at Geoff, “I’m talking about the guy that wants your ass.”

“Well, that’s different.” Geoff smiled. There was a sparkle of mischief in his topaz eyes. “It’s usually the babes that want my ass. And other parts, too.”

Ty realized the seriousness of the situation and the unusual level of panic in Nigel’s dark eyes. He backhanded Geoff in the chest to get his attention. “I think he’s serious, G.R.”

Then to Nigel, “Who wants whose ass? All of us or only one?”

“You figure it out.” Nigel pulled a crumpled envelope from his coat pocket. He unfolded the letter and read:

ShadowsForge—

This is a warning. I want to let you know that you’ve been a thorn in my side for far too long. I have had to put up with my lady gushing over you for the last four years now and I’ve had enough of it. It was bad enough before you came through my city but since you did, I’ve given a lot of thought to ending your career permanently. I wanted to give you a sporting chance by letting you know that your days are numbered.

Geoff rolled his eyes as he listened. He held up his hand, and shook his head. “Nigel, you’re getting all worked up over that? Guys have been jealous before and they will be again. No big deal. It’s not the first time we got something like that. What are you worried about?” Nigel glared at Geoff before he continued.

When my lady came home from your hotel, drugged up and well used, I decided that’s it. She won’t tell me which one of you she was with but it doesn’t matter. I’ll probably be doing the world a favor by terminating you all. Consider it my contribution to the morality of my country.

Be advised. I will get to you. If you are reading this letter, it will be no problem to get to you. Could be a bomb or a bullet, but you’ve been warned.

Only the sound of Nigel refolding the letter and shoving it into his pocket invaded the silence. He looked from one face

to the next, and waited for the full impact to sink in.

Geoff cleared his throat. "Okay. So it's never been so clearly defined before," he conceded. "I do believe this guy is a bit upset." He over-emphasized the last word.

"You got that impression?" Nigel smirked. "So, what do we do about it?" He turned to Gary.

Gary searched the floor with his eyes as if he read the answers there. "Well, first thing, no one goes out alone. No one leaves the floor without an escort. No one comes up." A round of groans made him look up. "What? You want to invite trouble up here?"

"Not trouble," Jon Wiles spoke up as he curled a strand of blond hair behind one ear, a habit he exhibited when he was concerned about something. "A bit of company, that's all."

"All right, say you bring up some company and she cuts your throat while you're sleeping?" Gary put the question to him in a matter-of-fact tone. "The guy could have friends. Or knows some glory-hungry bitch who wants to do a Lennon on you to make a name for herself."

Jon grinned. "If she cuts me, I'd have to say I gave her a bad performance before I went to sleep." Jon and his band mates laughed, but their laughter ceased under the cold glare from Gary and Nigel.

Ty pushed himself up from the couch, and headed anxiously toward the door. "Alexis is down in the pub alone—waiting for me."

Gary stopped him at the door. "We have some local constabulary down stairs. Plain clothes, watching out for things. They're keeping an eye on Alexis, Ty. You can relax," he added to reassure the blue-eyed bass player of his wife's safety. Gary continued as Ty reluctantly returned to his seat. "But they can't travel along with us. I might have to pick up some new muscle for the trip," Gary concluded, and turned

back to Nigel for approval.

“Get what you need, but screen them damn good. I don’t like bringing in new people with this going on. Get one for each of them.” Nigel paced to the window and pulled the drapes closed. “I’m canceling our flight plans, too. The Ethereal jet is grounded for a while. Order us up a few buses, Gary. I’d like to stay on the ground until this is over.”

“Right,” Gary agreed with a nod.

“Now wait a minute,” Geoff said. He crushed out his cigarette before he boosted himself over the back of the sofa. He opened the drapes before turning to face Nigel. “I refuse to live in the dark. We’re on the eighth floor. What do you think is going to happen up here?”

Nigel shrugged. “You never know.” He moved away from the plate glass window.

“Boss?” Ty asked. “What happened to Lyla? She get fed up having to stitch up G.R.’s pants every night?”

Nigel pulled the letter from his pocket again, and held it up. “She got fed up being blind folded and duct taped to a chair with this note stuffed down her blouse.”

Chapter 2

London

Diane Starling flipped through the pages of the magazine to the article:

ShadowsForge - Britain's Resident Bad Boys.

Geoff Richards - Lead Vocals.

Geoff, at the age of twenty-five, is the front man for ShadowsForge—the epitome of the rock star. He has classic good looks and an easy-going personality uncommon to performers of his caliber. A hard working performer and a true ladies man, Geoff takes his fun where he finds it. He goes through women like candy and loves life on the road with ShadowsForge. Geoff is as out of control off stage as he is on. He confided that he “may have come to a time in my life when I want to settle down a bit. Maybe on this tour some babe will get lucky.” This could be good news for some lucky lady if she thinks she can tame this Bad Boy. Geoff has medium brown, shoulder length hair that is thick and wavy. His eyes are an unusual golden topaz. He is six foot two inches of lean muscle.

Taylor “Ty” Synclair - Bass/Vocals.

Not only the bassist, Ty is the main support to Geoff Richards' lead. He is “the voice behind the voice” of Shadows-

Forge. This lady-killer wild man was recently captured and caged by Alexis Synclair. They met on a snowy road overlooking Mirada Valley in California during an earlier U.S. leg of the *Ethereal Edge Tour*. They literally ran into each other, and the collision brought an end to his prowling days for a second time. Only time will tell if Alexis can hold on to this Bad Boy. He and Alexis make their home in Brighton when they are not on tour with ShadowsForge. Ty is twenty-five years old. His trademark blond to light brown chest-length curly mane, and his crystal blue eyes, made him most popular with the ladies until Alexis took him out of circulation. He is six foot, muscular, and finds it difficult to stay in one place on stage. He usually burns off two to three pounds during each performance. Off stage, he spends his time with Alexis or writing lyrics for ShadowsForge.

Jordan Cantrell - Lead Guitar / Vocals.

The conservative member of the group, Jordan has collar length dark brown hair and dark brown eyes. He is single but ever on the lookout for that special lady. He claims his Gibson guitar is his closest friend and spends most of his free time in practice. He enjoys writing and arranging most of the music for the band. J.C., as he is referred to, is the oldest of eight children. He is dedicated to being a success in order to help his mother and siblings. In the habit of being a big brother, Jordan mentors Jon Wiles in guitar style and technique. The two are like brothers on the road, and share just about everything. Not exactly the classic ShadowsForge Bad Boy, he handles his share of the ladies, although he is a bit more selective than the others. He is an exceptional guitarist and the peacemaker in the group. Jordan is twenty-four years old, six foot tall, and can be described as sinewy.

Jon Wiles - Co-Lead / Rhythm Guitar / Keyboards.

Jon is the youngest of the group at twenty-two. He has thick blond hair that is chest length and straight. His steel blue eyes give the impression that he is calm under any circumstances. The only indication that something is on his mind is when he winds a strand of hair through his fingers or behind one ear. He is lean, muscular and stands five foot eleven inches. He says it is “the perfect height for attracting the hottest women. Not too tall to be intimidating. Great for almost any position.” He has left a trail of broken hearts behind as the band tours, second only to the master heart breaker, Richards. As the craziest onstage member of the band, Jon is unusually quiet off stage, and spends his time in practice, picking up guitar technique from Jordan.

Brian Cummings – Percussion.

Brian Joseph Cummings, sometimes referred to as B.J., is twenty-six, the oldest member of ShadowsForge. He is single, fun loving and pounds out a hammering back beat, complimented by the rolling thunder of Ty’s bass. Brian enjoys the occasional practical joke but is serious when it comes to his drum kit. He has shoulder length silvery blond hair and honey brown eyes. He is five foot eleven inches, broad at the shoulders, narrow at the hips. He tends to fling ten to twenty sticks into the audience without missing a beat during his spotlight performance at each concert, which thrills the fans and irritates the accountant who has to justify the multitude of lost equipment. Brian likes to spend time after a show in the nearest pub, checking out the local talent in drummers and ladies. His quiet manner finds him with plenty of company. “Keeping the girls off Ty for Alexis is a full time job for me and the lads,” Brian remarks with a friendly smile. “But I like running interference in any game.”

Ty and Jordan may be the most stable members of this group of party loving Bad Boys but what they lack in action,

Geoff, Jon and Brian more than make up for, keeping ShadowsForge at the top of the list of must see groups on three continents.

This is ShadowsForge, one of the hardest working, hardest playing, and hardest loving bands in the business today and a show not to be missed when they come to a venue near you.

* * * *

Diane laid the magazine in her lap, and turned her eyes to look out of the window of the train. The green countryside passed by, unnoticed by her chocolate brown eyes. She drew in a deep breath, and tried to quench the anxiety building up within her. Butterflies invaded her midsection as she thought about her situation.

Seamstress for ShadowsForge. That was her new job. She smiled to herself. Most girls her age would be totally overwhelmed to have the opportunity to travel with a band half as popular as ShadowsForge and here she was, heading across England to take her place in their entourage.

So much had happened in the last year. She felt old for only nineteen. Rory was the love of her life. He swept into her life and devastated her, completely overpowering her heart. He left her no choice but to say 'yes' when he arrived in a suit of armor on a white horse to propose to her on her mother's front porch, much to the shock of the neighbors. She had never met any one like him and was sure she never would again. His dark hair and darker eyes made him mysterious and captivating.

After a Renaissance-style wedding, they made their home in Southampton. Diane worked as a seamstress while Rory worked his way up on the docks. They both worked hard but when they were home, they loved to be together, content to sit out on the porch or walk about the town, holding hands and talking of the future Rory was sure would be wonderful.

His eyes would sparkle as he told her his plans, and begged her to stand by him until he was successful with his own shipping company. He promised her many dark-eyed babies, once he built the fortune he promised would be quickly accumulated if she'd be there for him. Diane would have followed him to the ends of the earth in poverty only to be near him.

As suddenly as he swept into her life, he was swept away. One gloomy overcast day, Rory's friend, Rich, entered the boutique where she worked. She wondered what would bring someone like Rich into a ladies dress shop, until she saw the stricken look on his face when his searching eyes rested on her. Diane felt the blood drain from her face as he came toward her. She read his mind, and knew why he was there.

"Richard, don't," she commanded as she stood. "Go away." Rich came to face with her, and wrapped his brawny arms around her.

He spoke quietly. "Diane, there's been an accident."

"NO," Diane heard herself shout.

Rich didn't say anything else. He stood silent, and held her to his massive chest while she cried. He was such a comfort to her in the following days. He helped her to make funeral arrangements, and packed away Rory's things, the thought of which made Diane faint. Rich took care of so many of the details. Diane felt she would be forever grateful to him for his friendship to her and to Rory.

Less than a month later, Diane was on her way to a new life, wardrobe lady for the band. Her brother, Peter, was Road Boss of the stage crew. Pete was a blessing, and got her the position before he had asked if she even wanted it. When he called, she sat in that house that had grown so big and lonely without Rory in it. She accepted the position without hesitation. Now she found herself on the way to London to meet Pete and ShadowsForge.

* * * *

Geoff sat with leather-clad feet on the edge of the coffee table; his red silk shirt hung open over black leather pants. He raked his fingers absently through the thick covering of coarse hair on his chest as his eyes wandered around the large room.

Waiting. What a pain in the arse. Jordan and Jon huddled in the corner with their practice guitars, and ran through a few of the more creative and difficult riffs. Jon missed his cue and Jordan stopped long enough to slap the back of Jon's head.

"You want to pay attention here? How can I share my expertise if you're not paying attention? Do you want to work or play?"

"Both," Jon shot back at him, and smoothed his hair. "And don't touch my hair again, mate."

"Why? In an hour, you're going to look like a train wreck anyway."

Geoff laughed. Those two bickered like brothers most of the time. That was cool. Families were like that. And to Geoff, ShadowsForge was family.

Brian pounded the stuffing out of the arm of the sofa. He never got tired of drumming on whatever happened to be around. His pounding didn't intrude on the private world of Ty and Alexis Synclair.

Geoff watched his best friend across the brightly lit room. Ty sat on the sofa; his wife, Alexis, stood behind him, and worked the muscles of his upper arms. She separated Ty's trademark mane carefully over his shoulders, and kneaded his neck and down his back. She leaned down now and then to whisper in his ear, which brought a dimpled grin to his face.

It was hard to believe how happy Ty had become after he married Alexis. The two of them went missing for a couple of days in a freak California blizzard, during an earlier U.S. leg in

the *Ethereal Edge* tour. Alexis' ex-boyfriend, and a couple of his weapons, interrupted their happy little retreat. It ended with Ty suffering a flesh wound when he threw himself between Alexis and the lunatic ex. Alexis fared much worse, when the bullet that pierced Ty's shoulder clipped her neck and a second shot struck her in the chest.

Watching them now, Geoff thought back to that night. When Geoff had realized how serious his friend was about this skirt, he tried to talk some sense into Ty as they'd waited for news on Alexis.

"Have you gone completely mental? Over the edge?" Geoff shouted, and received an unfriendly glare from a sturdy looking nurse.

"Call it what you want, Geoff. She's the one I've been looking for," Ty answered. He looked pale, drained. The fluorescent lights reflected from the lime green walls of the waiting area made Ty look even more washed out.

"What do you want with only one skirt when there are so many out there?" Geoff tried to reason with him. "What happened to no promises for them, no pain for us?"

And how about your ex-wife? Geoff thought about reminding his friend but held back. Elsbeth. Now there was a real piece of work. She ripped Ty's heart out four years ago and fed it back to him, one bite at a time. Now he wanted to chance it again?

"The pain's there when I wake up in the morning, not knowing the name of the woman beside me." Ty grimaced. "Not knowing where she came from, hoping to God she's legal age. Not knowing what I said to her the night before because I was so wasted I can't remember. Worse than that... Why is she there in the first place? It sure isn't for the love. I'm tired of being a trophy, damn it, and if I can't be myself

and be with Alexis, you can tell Nigel that ShadowsForge can audition for a new bass player.”

Geoff was shocked by the determined look on Ty’s face. Shooting himself point-blank in the stomach would be less painful than telling Nigel he was losing a member of the band after six successful years.

“You’re freakin’ serious, aren’t you?” Geoff choked out the question.

“Damn serious.” Ty pressed the bandage on his shoulder, and leaned his elbows on his knees. “You have no idea how great it’s been to be with her and be myself. Remember who I used to be? I haven’t had to live up to anyone’s expectations but my own.”

“She’s that good, huh?” Geoff said thoughtfully, a wide grin on his face. There was hope for Ty yet. “Uuh.”

Ty shot a fist backhanded into Geoff’s chest.

“I’ll have to let you know.” Ty’s comment dripped with sarcasm. He flinched in pain. “That hurt me more than it hurt you.” He pressed his palm to the bandage again.

“You mean you didn’t even do her?”

“No.”

“You hit your head or something when you went off the road the other night?” Geoff shook his head as he slumped back in his chair, and rubbed his chest. He turned away from the glare he was getting from Ty. The nurse glanced in their direction again. Geoff gave her his award winning, heart-melting smile. She frowned as she turned back to the chart she was scribbling on.

Hard case.

* * * *

It wasn’t much longer until the doctor, in light blue scrubs, pushed his way through the double doors at the end of the hall. Ty was on his feet before the doctor cleared the

doorway. The doctor gave Ty a glance up and down as he came forward, finally extending his hand as he reached the idol.

“Mr. Synclair?” He shook Ty’s hand.

“Sir,” Ty said, respectfully.

Geoff, remaining in his chair with his head against the wall, rolled his eyes. He crossed his arms over his chest.

“The young lady—Miss Rivers. Are you a relative?”

A feeling of foreboding came over Ty. *Why did the doctor ask that? Was it a ‘next of kin’ kind of question?* Ty pushed the idea out of his head.

“We’re engaged.” Fear made his chest tight.

“Are there any relatives that should be contacted?”

Geoff sat up, and listened to the conversation. This didn’t sound too good. With the second question, Geoff stood up, and placed an encouraging hand on Ty’s shoulder.

“No, I’m all she’s got,” Ty explained. “Her mother died three years ago. She never knew her father. I don’t know of anyone else.” Panic rose in his voice as he answered.

“Well, then, she’ll be ready to see you in a few hours. She’s under sedation, but if you come back in the morning, you can see her. She’s a lucky woman. The bullet was from a small caliber handgun. Not much more powerful than a pellet gun, really, at that range. Nothing was broken and nothing vital was hit. A larger caliber might have killed her. Her neck will be scarred, but the shot only nicked the artery. She lost a lot of blood but we’ve given her transfusions. I’m told that you held pressure on the wound until help arrived.”

“Yes, sir.”

“She would have lost much more blood, probably too much, if you hadn’t. She should be stronger when she wakes up. I want her to stay for a few days.” The doctor glanced at

Ty's bandage. "You should get some rest as well. Do you need a sleeping aid for tonight?"

"No, sir. I'll be fine knowing she's all right. You be sure that everything is done for her proper. I'll cover whatever she needs." Ty fought a flood of emotional tears.

* * * *

Geoff recalled that Ty grasped the doctor's hand and nearly shook it off the man's body. Eight months later, Geoff could see that Ty was right about Alexis. She had the look of total devotion in her eyes when she looked at her husband. It was a look Geoff would like to find in someone's eyes someday. The way Alexis was running her fingers up the back of Ty's neck and into his hair to help him relax was actually giving Geoff a chill.

Damn. Where can I get one of those?

Nigel burst through the door in his usual flurry of urgency. "Showtime!"

* * * *

Diane pushed her medium brown hair back from her face, and licked her dry lips as she followed Pete into the large dressing room. The room was strewn with clothes, boots, sneakers and damp stage towels. It reeked of cigarette smoke, alcohol, and sweat, and made Diane wrinkle her nose at the mixture of pungent odors. Lounging around the room were five sweat-slick band members in various stages of undress. Not one of them had on a shirt. One that Diane decided was Brian Cummings pulled his robe on as they entered.

A dark-haired lady peeled the black waistcoat from a wild-haired member, and helped him pull a robe on over his black jeans. He had to be Taylor Synclair. Diane assumed that the woman was Alexis Synclair, as she continued to scan the room. Off to one side was a long shower area. Five large portable wardrobes were lined up across from the tiled al-

cove. Diane took a mental inventory of the clothing she would be responsible for, before she let her eyes take in the other occupants of the room.

Pete drew her attention when he pulled her forward by the hand, and led her to the man who sat on the sofa with his socked feet on a low table. The thick mat of hair on his chest sparkled with perspiration under the fluorescent lighting. It drew her eyes unexpectedly along a trail to the unbuttoned waistband of his leather trousers. He stroked her with his eyes as she approached him, a lecherous grin forming on his lips.

“Pete.” His topaz eyes sparked with anticipation. “Damn fine job. You’ll get a bonus for this one.”

Diane thought about the article once more. “You must be Geoff Richards.” She extended a trembling hand.

“You must be my bunkmate for the night.” He stood, and took two steps toward Diane before Pete intercepted him.

“Geoff. This is Diane, my sister. Remember?” His voice held a note of warning. “She’ll be taking over for Lyla.”

“Oh, yeah...Right. Sorry, mate. But you have to admit, she’s a tasty looking dish.” Geoff backed down as Diane lowered her hand. “Did you enjoy the show?” His eyes continued to travel along the curves of her body, which made Diane uncomfortable.

“Very much, thank you. I’m ready to start work, though. As soon as you have all changed, I’ll collect the costumes and...”

“Pete, she’s trying to undress me.” Geoff grabbed Pete, turned him to face Diane, and used the shorter man as a shield while he made seductive eyes at Diane over Pete’s shoulder. “You told me to behave. Didn’t you tell her to?”

Diane felt the heat rise in her face as she heard suppressed laughter from around the room. How she hated to blush. Be-

fore she knew what to do, a hand on her shoulder drew her attention.

“Come with me, Diane. We’ll let these rancid Englishmen shower before we have to put up with them any more tonight.”

Pete smiled. “Good. Thank you, Mrs. Synclair.” He headed toward the door. “I need to get back on tear down. See you later, Diane. Stay out of trouble.”

“Okay.” Diane could hear the nervousness in her own voice. She faced the black-haired woman who was a bit shorter than she. Mrs. Synclair had dark brown eyes, darker even than Diane’s. Diane was happy to escape from Geoff Richards’ intrusive leer.

“I’m Alexis Synclair.” The woman took Diane by the hand, and pulled her to follow. She stopped at the door, and pointed out each band member. “That nasty creature is Geoff Richards, but you knew that. Over there with the stringy blond hair is Jon Wiles. Jordan Cantrell is in the corner chair, and Brian Cummings is there with his mouth hanging open.” She paused to let out a dreamy sigh. “And that magnificent specimen of manhood is my husband, Ty Synclair.”

Her last remark brought a caterwaul of complaints from four men, and a killer smile from Ty as he nodded cordially to Diane, his crystal blue eyes sparkling. Before Diane could turn away, he unfastened the button of his skin-tight jeans. The harmless act made Diane’s face instantly warm. Her heart raced when their eyes met. She could see what the article meant by lady-killer.

“We’ll be back when we can stand the smell of you boys.” Alexis pushed Diane out the door into the hall. “They’re really harmless when you learn how to handle them.” She led Diane down the hall into a coffee room. “I brewed some tea. Would you like a cup?”

“Please.”

Diane heard a rush of activity and screams. She turned in time to see three girls race past the door, and thunder down the hall toward the dressing room. The sound of a door slammed open followed, more screams, male voices shouting added to the commotion, and two large men in black t-shirts with “Security” in large white letters across their chests dashed past. Diane stepped into the hall to watch.

“Don’t worry about that,” Alexis commented. Diane turned to her, and received a steaming cup of tea. “Some of the fans broke through the lines of defense. It happens now and then.” Alexis sounded as if it were an every day occurrence.

“Aren’t you worried about your husband undressing in there?” Diane was amazed at how calm Alexis was.

“No, not really.” She returned to the sideboard to pour a second cup. “If they want to see Ty’s body, they can buy pictures from corporate. Besides, Geoff usually throws himself in the way, no matter who the girls are after. Geoff, then Jon and Brian. Jordan jumps in if he sees something he likes. The girls usually get caught long before they get to Ty. Geoff and the boys like to block for him, if you know what I mean.”

She stepped into the hall, cup in hand, and turned toward the sounds of begging and whining. She and Diane moved back as the security men struggled past, pulling the girls toward the exit.

“He did. Geoff Richards touched me,” cooed one starry-eyed girl, in a near-faint.

Alexis shook her head and took a seat on the sofa beside the door. “See? Nothing to worry about.”

Diane thought about the girl’s words. Geoff Richards almost touched her, as well. He was a stunning personality.

Diane wondered why he stirred the reaction in her that he had. “Well, this won’t be a dull job, I can see that.”

Alexis shrugged and smiled. “Welcome to ShadowsForge.”

Chapter 3

Manchester

*A candle lit room, a sultry surprise.
The flames of our passion reflect in your eyes.
You come to me (Softly) you touch me (Oh.) there.
No greater sensations, nothing else can compare.*

*Enter into euphoric free flight.
(Fly with me).
Breaking through into the darkness of night.
(Come take me.)
Knowing that it exists to excite.
(To make me).
Fly to the ethereal edge.*

*Holding on to all that we know.
(Come teach me).
Knowing now we can never let go.
(You reach me.)
Finding how we don't ever want to.
(Forever.)
Dance on the ethereal edge.*

ShadowsForge 2: Trials on Tour

*Fold me into your heavenly arms,
Seduce me with your insatiable charms,
Pull me down to your white satin sheets,
Where no other divine lover competes.*

*When the morning light comes streaming through,
I'll know that you have taken my all.
We've flown the edge of perfection as one,
Tasted the sweet life, taken the fall.*

*Exploding through into the darkness of night.
(Pull me through.)
We've left behind what we once thought was right.
(It's all new.)
Emotions soaring, we give in to free flight.
(How we flew.)
High on the ethereal edge.*

*Shadows long, they forge the new night.
(Once again.)
Hold on, lady, hold on to me tight.
(Wrapped in sin.)
No other future can burn quite as bright.
(We begin to)
Dance on the ethereal edge.*

*Dance with me on the ethereal edge.
Dancing free on the ethereal edge.*

Geoff Richards swept his topaz eyes across the front row.
As the three axe men of ShadowsForge bent and skewed the
final notes of "Ethereal Edge." A furious exercise in stamina,
he was left sweat soaked and sweltering. His wavy brown hair

was melded across his forehead and to the back of his neck in curls. As the lights went down, he caught sight of a dark haired lovely staring up at him. They made eye contact only seconds before the darkness cloaked her. He made a mental note to check her out during the next song.

*For all the times I let you down,
You stayed right by my side.
The times you knew I failed, I lost,
I cheated, sinned and lied.*

ShadowsForge moved smoothly into “Make Mine You.” Geoff stalked across the stage like a lion, perusing the women, surveying the prospects. Each one made gestures to him as he sang, offering a multitude of services across the safety zone of security men. *Those guys get a sweet show with this job.* Some of the women did everything but completely disrobe to catch the band’s attention.

*My dreams are only wishes that come true
so late at night.
The time when I correct my sins,
the choices not made right.
I made you walk away from me,
I feel like such a fool.
I’d give it all for one more call,
I’d choose to make mine you.*

He made his way back to the right side of the stage. His eyes fell once more on the dark haired lady. She was the perfect entrée from tonight’s feminine buffet.

She stood. Just stood. Not dancing. Not even swaying to the music. She didn’t wave, smile, or reach for him as those

around her did. Intriguing. She watched him. Studied him, tilted her head as if she were trying to come to a decision about him. He smiled as they made eye contact again for a quick moment. As the song came to a close, he looked out into the sea of faces and sang out to the crowd.

I'll live for us, rebuild the trust.

For the final phrase, he turned back to the lady, and dropped dramatically to leather clad knees. He reached out to her, with all of the sincerity he could pour into the words as he finished.

I choose to make mine you.

Amid the thunderous applause, Geoff held her gaze until they were once more immersed in darkness. Before the lights came up again and ShadowsForge stepped into the next song, Geoff dashed to the wing.

“Nigel.”

Nigel hurried to him with an alarmed look. “What’s wrong?” Nigel screeched to be heard over the applause.

“Nothing.” Geoff pulled him out onto the stage by a handful of the front of his shirt. “You see that one there? Dark hair and big... uh, eyes? Red blouse, tight buttons, black slacks?” Geoff pointed out the lady.

“What’d she do?” Nigel snapped his fingers, and tried to get the attention of the nearest security guard.

“Nothing yet, but I hope a whole lot later.” Geoff wiped his perspired forehead on Nigel’s shoulder. Nigel glared at him in disbelief.

“Ah, crap, Richards. Don’t you ever quit?”

“Not until I’m dead, mate. Send someone to pat her down for weapons and bring her along after the show. Don’t worry, I’ll strip search her later—there’s a good manager.” Geoff pushed Nigel toward the wing, and smacked him on the rump like a child being sent on an errand. The fiery notes of “Teasin” hissed alive, and swept the crowd into a renewed level of thunder. Geoff strutted his way to center stage.

* * * *

Geoff broke away from the record company representative he talked with when he saw Nigel escort the girl in. She was shapely, more so than he realized from his vantage point on stage. She had shoulder-length chestnut hair that curled under, and bright blue eyes. Geoff couldn’t wait to get his hands on this dish. He swaggered up, cool as could be, and glared at Nigel to introduce him.

Nigel smirked. “Geoff, this is Valerie. Valerie, this is ShadowsForge’s biggest pain in the ass, Geoff Richards.” With the introduction made, Nigel faded into the crowd.

“Pay no attention to him.” Geoff spoke in his most seductive tone. His voice was deep and raw from having done three concerts in as many nights. “He’s jealous.” He took her hand, and folded it in his as he led her to a sofa at the side of the room.

“What is there to be jealous of?” Her remark caught Geoff by surprise.

“I am the voice of ShadowsForge. Without me, they wouldn’t have gone very far.” He thought it amazing that she hadn’t figured that out on her own. She should know that he was the most sought after catch of the group...well, now that Ty was married and out of circulation.

Not too bright, this one. Just the way he liked them.

“You don’t know that,” she challenged, as she looked him straight in the eyes. “They could have found someone else

with a voice as good as yours. Or maybe even Taylor Synclair. He has a great voice.” Valerie spoke so point blank that Geoff wasn’t sure how to respond. What she said was true, but he wasn’t thrilled about hearing it. This wasn’t quite going the way he was used to.

“Let me guess. You’re here to meet Ty. Is that right?” Geoff sat back, and let her hand drop. He made no attempt to hide his annoyance. He could never get used to being second choice after Ty. “You’re a bit late, love. He got married eight months ago.”

“That’s not it.” She slid back on the sofa beside him. She looked around the room, and located the other band members before turning back to him. “I wanted to meet all of you. I’m doing research on what attracts young girls to bands like yours. I’m trying to determine what they see in you. I’m a journalist.”

Great. From all the skirts I could have taken, I get Barbara Walters. Geoff gave her a kind smile. This was not working out the way he expected. It was time for a change of plans.

“Well, Valerie. Let me, out of the kindness of my heart, help you out.” Geoff scanned the room, his eyes coming to rest on a young sandy-haired woman on the far side of the crowded room. “That one there.” He nodded toward the girl in a short black skirt, heels and a tight, cream-colored blouse that didn’t leave much to the imagination. The girl searched the room, biting her lip in anticipation. “She came here to meet me. I’ll let her tell you why. Watch this.”

Geoff stood up. He pointed at arm’s length, and lowered his chin slightly. He narrowed his eyes at the girl, wavy hair falling low on his forehead, shadowing his eyes. His stance gave him a dark, sinister look. Somehow the girl felt his gaze and straightened her back, putting on a mask of confidence. He crooked his finger once before he lowered his hand. The

girl glided seductively through the people milling about, and reached Geoff in an instant.

“What is your name, lady?” Geoff lightly pawed the girl’s arm. Her eyes sparkled as she returned Geoff’s electrified gaze.

“Linda.” The name came in a breathy tone. The girl trembled as Geoff stroked her arm.

“Well, Linda, why are you here?” Geoff turned to see the look on Valerie’s face as the answer came.

“To meet Geoff Richards, of course.” Linda made the statement as if it should be common knowledge.

“Why would you want to meet me?” Geoff’s eyes were locked with Valerie’s.

“Because you’re Geoff Richards. Is there any other reason?”

Geoff gave Valerie his media smile as he slipped his hand around the back of Linda’s neck. He snaked his arm under her hair and around her shoulders. “You, my girl, have won the grand prize. Me. What do you think about that?” He watched Linda, and saw the anticipation grow in her eyes as she licked her lips. She pressed her chest against him as she wrapped her arms securely around his waist, fitting her body to his.

“How long do I get to keep you?” She gave Valerie a look of conquest, as if she had beaten her out of the trophy.

“Does it matter?” Geoff asked.

“No. I’ll take all I can get.” Linda pulled Geoff closer, and rubbed her body against his like a cat.

“Good. We’ll see how much you can take. Let’s get out of here. Valerie, it was nice to meet you, but if you’ll excuse us, we have some business to take care of.” He gave her a wink. As they walked away, Geoff asked. “So, Linda, you’re over eighteen, right?”

As Linda giggled, Geoff escorted her across the room and out the door. Valerie shook her head.

* * * *

The following morning at the group meeting, Nigel made an announcement:

“ShadowsForge has the unique opportunity of having a journalist join the entourage for the rest of the tour. You will be immortalized in a biography of the band, and you damn well better co-operate with the writer or I promise to have corporate book you into the worst dives I can find in the U.K. and America on our next tour. We’re talking tearooms and dude ranches. You better behave.”

His announcement was interrupted by a knock on the door. “Ah, here she is.” Nigel hurried to the door. When he opened it, Geoff groaned.

Nigel grinned at Geoff’s reaction, and took great delight in the introductions this time. He pointed out each member of the band.

“Brian Cummings, Jon Wiles, Jordan Cantrell, Ty Sinclair. And I’m sure you remember Geoff Richards. Gentlemen, this is Valerie Leonard, and she will be traveling with us for a while. Be yourselves and she will record the tour for posterity.”

“My posterior,” Geoff mumbled.

“What’s that, Richards? I didn’t hear you.” Nigel was pleased at the discomfort he caused the singer.

“I said, my—I’m glad she’s here.” Geoff slouched down on the couch. “Hey, Valerie.”

It was Valerie’s turn to wink.

* * * *

Dark eyes stared at the news. He took in the details as he toyed with his hunting knife. ShadowsForge didn’t take his warning serious. They continued to tour. They refused to go

into hiding as he expected them to. More importantly, they refused to leave the women alone. That was all right. It would only make his mission easier.

He glared at the television screen. There they all were, laughing, having a good time. Each one accompanied by a woman as they were discovered moving through their hotel lobby. He wondered whose women they defiled this time.

“Go ahead. Have your fun. It won’t be for long.” He scowled at the television.

His eyes scanned each man as the camera captured them in turn. The woman with Synclair was the most beautiful. She was far too beautiful for one of them. She could do better than to waste her time with that kind of man. Anger burned within him as he listened. The reporter stuffed his microphone rudely in the woman’s face.

“What do you do for ShadowsForge?” The reporter’s voice dripped with innuendo.

The black haired woman glared at the reporter before she looked up at Synclair, who had his arm draped casually around her shoulders. Synclair gave her a nod.

The woman turned back to the reporter with a straight face. “I usually do the bass player, but I’d do them all if they wanted it.” She shoved the microphone out of her way as she and Synclair stepped into the waiting elevator beside Wiles, Cummings and company. They all laughed as the doors closed.

Which one would Janet go for? Probably tall, but they were all tall. Probably dark-haired. That ruled out Synclair, Wiles and Cummings. Cantrell was not as tall as Richards. Janet had to have the best, the top of the line. Number One. Spoiled brat.

Richards. It had to be Richards.

Anger flared as the camera zoomed in on Geoff Richards' smiling face. He escorted a trim lady into a second elevator where another woman was all over Cantrell. Geoff buried his face in his date's neck as the doors closed.

"Damn you." The man threw his hunting knife with the intent to stick it dead center in the screen. The television screen which was thicker than he anticipated, bounced the heavy knife back at him, and stuck it in his boot.

* * * *

Valerie pulled on her blue blouse, and buttoned it as she heard the knock at the door of the suite she shared with Diane. He was early. Imagine that. She would have thought Geoff Richards, with his wild, irresponsible attitude, would be late. She slipped on her low-heeled pumps, and took a quick look in the mirror as she hurried from her room. She tucked her blouse into her navy blue slacks as she moved to the door. She took a deep breath before she opened it.

She found herself looking directly into the thick mat of hair that covered Geoff's tanned chest, as he filled the doorway. A silver rope chain hung around his neck, and supported a silver medallion depicting the ShadowsForge logo. He wore a silvery silk shirt, closed only by the last two buttons. It was held open by the way he leaned one forearm casually on the door facing. His black denim pants had to have been painted onto his body, and left very little of his anatomy to the imagination. How could he possibly breathe in something that tight? Her eyes continued down his full length, and stopped at his black brushed-suede boots.

"Come in, Mr. Richards," Valerie said, once she had recovered her voice. She walked across the room, and left Geoff to close the door. When she heard the deadbolt click, she knew she'd made her first mistake. "Have a seat." She sat on

the sofa. She found it difficult to maintain a calm voice; he had already set her on edge.

“Whatever you say, babe.” Geoff sprawled casually less than a foot from her. She faced him.

“What I want to do is ask you a list of questions. I’ll record your answers, go through it later and put it in a printable format. I’m planning to do this with each of you. I’ll merge all of your answers together, show you and Nigel what I’ve done, and get your approval before I go any further with it. Is that all right with you?” She tried to maintain an air of professionalism although she trembled inside.

“Sure. Ask me anything you want.” He stretched his arm across the back of the sofa. His fingertips lightly brushed her back.

Valerie sat forward, picked up her notepad from the table, and took the opportunity to click the recorder on. She shifted away from him as she sat back.

“All right, Geoff Richards, interview one,” she prompted the recorder.

“Have you anything to drink?”

“Sorry.” Valerie clicked off the recorder. “I should have asked before we started. Help yourself to the bar.” She waved her hand toward the bar beside the door as she pretended to look over the list of questions on her notepad.

Geoff moved briskly to the bar, searched out a bottle of vodka, and poured a glass. “Get you something?” he offered.

“No. Thanks. I’m fine.” Valerie waited anxiously.

“Where’s Diane?” He sat close at her side, and sipped the vodka before he placed the glass on the table.

Valerie had hoped that Diane could be in her room when this meeting took place, but Diane had to tend to the wardrobe. Valerie thought about telling him that Diane was napping, so he wouldn’t know they were alone.

“Not here, huh,” he added, before she could answer.

“No, she isn’t,” she confessed, and regretted it as he smiled. “I thought it would be better to have no interruptions.” His smile broadened. Valerie suddenly felt very warm. “I have a lot to do and want to get this down in one take.”

“One take,” Geoff echoed, moved closer, and looked down at the notepad on her lap. “Can I know what you’re going to ask before we start? Y’know, so that I can be ready with the answers?”

Valerie held the pad against her chest. “No, I want your first thoughts, not something you rehearsed in your head. Candid answers. That’s what people want. Not some P.R. release from the corporate headquarters of ShadowsForge. They want to know the real you.”

“Oh, come on,” he tried to coax her. He ran one finger from her chin down her throat to the top of the notepad, and caught the edge of her blouse, as he pulled outward.

Valerie became annoyed as she moved away, pulling the notepad tight against her. “Now, come on, Mr. Richards. Let’s try it my way,” she suggested.

“Any way you want it, Val,” he said as he sat back, much to Valerie’s relief. “How do you really want it?”

“I told you.” Val ignored his insinuating question as she leaned forward to start the recorder once more. “Okay.” She glanced at the pad. “Geoff, how did ShadowsForge get its start?”

“Taylor Synclair and I attended school together. We wanted to get out of the usual boring classes. An alternative was chorus. So we got this wild idea to try out for it. We liked to sing with the radio when we were hanging out on the weekends. We could do harmonies and we weren’t too awful, so we decided to give it a go.”

He leaned forward, and took a sip of his drink. When he returned the glass to the table, he moved toward her a few inches. “We made the chorus, and it didn’t take long for them to figure out that we were very good. Our voices seem to fit together, almost sounds like one instead of two. Ty and I both have projection and full range.”

“So, you’re saying that Ty Synclair could have been the lead voice for ShadowsForge, or he could have a successful solo career? With his drop-dead good looks, he could have taken off without you?” It wasn’t in her list of questions but Valerie couldn’t resist ruffling the egotistic idol’s feathers. She was well aware from their first meeting that Geoff had a certain amount of envy of Ty, though it didn’t openly interfere with their friendship or success.

Geoff gave her an annoyed look before he conceded. “Uh, yeah, I suppose he could have. But he’s a bass player, too. They don’t usually sing lead.”

“What about Sting—formerly of the Police? He’s a bass player, I believe.”

“Yeah, but that’s unusual.” He gave her a hard look that he didn’t allow to translate into his recorded response. “Besides, I have the stronger voice.” He shifted forward a bit. “We figured if we were good enough for the cheesy duets they had us do for school assemblies and activities, maybe we could make something more of it. So we advertised for a lead guitarist and a drummer. We wanted to sing something with more muscle to it. Something harder.” He made a fist to emphasize the remark.

“I see.” Valerie peeked at her notepad. “Your ad brought responses from the current lineup of ShadowsForge?”

“No. As a matter of fact, there were no responses at all. Some people don’t have faith in teenagers. We were both only seventeen at the time.” He took another drink. “So we

went to a few pubs in Liverpool, Birmingham, and traveled down to London at the weekends. We spent a lot of money trying to romance some of the house bands into giving us a chance.”

“Where did you find Jordan Cantrell?”

“J.C. was carrying a really pitiful group, playing a small dive in London. We knew he was phenomenal the first time we went to see them. We did some checking about on the band before we went back the next night. It’s lucky we went that night, too, or we would have missed the opportunity of grabbing him.”

“How did it happen?”

“Ty and I got there about ten, as they finished their first set. They were taking a break at the bar. Jordan was the only real talent in the group. He could sing and play the hell out of that Gibson of his. We decided we needed him. So, Ty came up with an idea. We got Jordan to come down to the end of the bar away from his band mates. While I talked to him about doing something better with his life, Ty went to have a talk with their bass player and their singer, Jesse Winington. I don’t remember the bass player’s name. Anyway, long story short, a fight broke out between Winington and the other guy. Jordan, of course, threw himself in the middle of the fight, trying to stop them. He’s such a peacemaker.” Geoff paused, and rolled his eyes as he scooted closer to Valerie.

“It got out of hand and the bouncers were all over the three of them. Ty and I pulled Jordan out of the tumble and I shuffled him out the door, while Ty went back to get his Gibson and equipment. He wanted to know what the hell we were doing. I told him his group had disbanded and if he needed a job, we needed a guitarist. Once Ty came out with his equipment, J.C. made up his mind to give it a go.”

“What was the fight about; do you know?” Valerie was genuinely intrigued.

“Well.” Geoff leaned closer, grinning. “Ty mentioned something he heard about the bass player. As I said, we did some research earlier that day and found out Winington’s baby sister was expecting, but wouldn’t tell big brother who the daddy was. Big brother was bent about the situation. Ty made a supposition. You know how information travels in the entertainment circles. All of the local round-heels are community property.”

“Round-heels?” Valerie raised her eyebrows. “I’m not familiar with that term.”

“You know. Round-heels. Girls that fall on their back as soon as a musician walks in front of them.”

“Oh.” Valerie raised her brows.

“Ty said he heard that the guy had a round-heel named Winington. Wanted to know if she was as good as rumor had it and where he could get a hold of her. I guess Jesse went a little crazy. Had the lad by the shirt, asking hard questions fast. I suppose the guy didn’t have the right answers. Or the ones that Jesse wanted to hear. Ty bowed out before it got too physical.”

“Wow. Are all musicians so highly explosive?”

“No. A lot of us are more the lover type.” Geoff placed his hand on her thigh, and stroked it lightly.

“So you purposely plotted to break up their band to get Jordan Cantrell?” Valerie laid the notepad on her lap, and pushed his hand gently away. She was quickly running out of room on the sofa.

“No, we wouldn’t do that.” His words were colored with innocence, his eyes filled with mischief. “They wouldn’t have made it much longer anyway, especially after that fight. Someone elbowed Jesse in the throat. The poor guy couldn’t

sing a note after that night. Not that he hit many good notes before the fight, but still..." He shrugged innocently. "Jordan Cantrell's been with us ever since."

"Violent beginnings." Valerie shuddered.

"Birth is never easy. Or painless, I hear." He picked up his glass, drained it, and set it back on the table. "Now, what say we take a break? Turn that thing off and let me tell you what I really want to say."

"I don't know what you could say off the record that you can't say on. If this is to be a candid biography, you can say anything you want to." Valerie was excited that he might really open up about behind the scenes issues with ShadowsForge. She placed the notepad on the table to free her hands for the conflict she knew, by his actions and attitude, would be coming soon.

"Some things shouldn't be recorded, y'know. Private things. Conversations." He leaned close, and pressed his face into her hair. "You smell delicious."

Valerie felt the heat rise in her face as she held him back by the shoulders. "I think you need to back up, Mr. Richards." She trembled.

"Why?" he asked, innocence in his voice. He stroked her arm.

"Well, you're making me nervous," she confessed as she caught his hand. She could feel the panic grow.

"I'm over eighteen. You have nothing to be nervous about. I'm legal." He continued to nuzzle her hair, a motion that sent chills through her. "I don't give myself to just anyone, y'know. I'm looking for a serious relationship."

"I don't think I trust you." She choked out the words.

"Come on, babe. You can trust me. I'm yours for the taking." Geoff crowded Valerie to the end of the sofa. "All you have to do is say yes. You're in control." He took her hand,

and kissed her fingers. She pulled her hand from his grasp, and shut off the recorder. He was right. She did NOT want this on tape.

She turned to face him with a stern look. "Mr. Richards," she commanded. "I am not your babe, nor am I a round-heel or any other of the terms that you use to describe your girlfriends. And I will thank you to keep your hands and lips to yourself."

"Why can't you trust me?" He sat back for a moment, and achieved a look of innocence that almost made Valerie laugh. It was a practiced look if ever she had seen one.

"You're kidding." Valerie was stunned. "Trust you enough to have a serious relationship? Maybe I should have left the recorder on. No one will believe this." She ran out of room to retreat from his advancing presence. She was against the arm of the sofa with nowhere to go.

"Tell me what you want me to do and I'll do it." His eyes sparked with sincerity. "I'd do anything for you, Val."

Before he closed the trap, Valerie leapt to her feet. She moved around the table, intended to take a chair, and hoped to get back to the interview. No such luck. He followed her, towering over her. This interview was a total loss. She opted to head for the door, and prayed she could convince him to leave.

"There's nothing you can do for me, Mr. Richards," she said, as she continued evasive maneuvers.

"Oh, don't call me that." Geoff's eyes sparked with mischief. "Call me Geoff or G.R. Or even "lover" would work. I can make your dreams come true." His heart-stopping smile returned. "I'd really like to."

As she reached the door, he closed in on her. She turned her back to the door, and found herself trapped. He leaned one forearm above her shoulder, the other hand on the door

at her side, and looked down on her. She felt like the “kill” of an overbearing hawk. Valerie reached behind her, and groped for the dead bolt as she looked up at him. If this hadn’t been her suite, she’d slip out the door and run.

“Are you always like this?” She finally unlocked the bolt as she found his exposed chest so close to her face, she thought briefly about biting him. She decided that perhaps that was what he wanted her to do, and she didn’t relish the thought of all that hair in her mouth. Instead, she pressed both hands to his hot chest.

“I don’t know what it is,” he cooed. “I can’t stay away from you. I’ve got to have the essence of you.” A deep growl emanated from his throat as he pressed against her, his hands stroking her arms.

Valerie couldn’t help it. Despite her fear, she burst into laughter. “Oh, you have got to be kidding. They actually fall for this stuff?”

“Hey, babe, they’d pay for it if I’d let them.” Geoff leaned close to her ear, a note of defensiveness in his voice. “You don’t know what you’re missing here. You’re passing up the elite.”

“All right, maybe I am. But you’re missing out on something pretty special, too.” She braced herself against the door, and shoved him back a step or two. As scared as she was, his arrogance made her determined to fight back. She pulled herself from the door, and stood up to him although he was seven or eight inches taller. She was encouraged by the surprised look on his face. It gave her the confidence to continue. “If you want to find out how special I am, then you better rethink your strategy. I’m not some flaky brained teenage round-heel groupie dying for you to sweat all over me while you breathe hard and satisfy your animalistic lust.”

“I like the way that sounds,” Geoff interrupted.

“It won’t happen.” She snapped out the words, and took control of the conversation. “Now this is the way we’re going to play this, *BOY*.”

She pushed against his firm chest again and again as he allowed her to maneuver him backward. When he backed into the sofa, he sat down, and hoped she would get close enough to reel her in. He could take her right here on the sofa or on the floor. He waited. Once he got a hold of her, she’d come around. They always did.

“You are going to be a good boy and prove yourself before we have a go at a relationship, understand?”

“Whatever you say.” Geoff agreed. He looked up at her, and waited for her to take one more step.

“I don’t think you can do it but—six weeks, no groupies, bed warmers or play things. We’ll see what we can work out after—if you can do it. Until then...”

Valerie took that one more step, and stamped her foot firmly on the sofa cushion between his thighs. She moved so quickly, Geoff jumped as he grabbed her ankle with both hands. She leaned forward for emphasis. “Keep that dragon in its cage, Geoff Richards, because I don’t share.”

“Yes, ma’am.” Shock registered on his face. “I’ll do that. Promise me one thing?” He looked down at her foot so close to his manhood, slid back, and carefully released her ankle.

“What?” She was proud of the bluff she pulled off, although she continued to tremble inside.

“Keep that attitude,” he said, adding another deep growl. “Baby, I like that.”

“Get out.” She screamed, and pointed to the door as she stepped away. “Out.”

“Whatever you say, Val. I’ll see you ‘round. Six weeks? The dragon’s going to be bloody well famished by then. But what a dish.” Geoff blew her a kiss as he slipped out the door.

Valerie thought about throwing both of her shoes, followed by his glass and everything else from the table, at the door. Instead, she sank to the sofa, and closed her eyes to calm the rage she felt.

“Damn you, Geoff Richards,” she snapped, and covered her face with her hands. She couldn’t stop the nervous smile that crept across her lips. What had she gotten herself into?

* * * *

The band headed through the hotel doors surrounded by the collection of new bodyguards, fans and reporters. The reporters tried to get to each member, asking questions as they made their way out of the hotel lobby and toward the waiting bus.

“Ty, how’s married life? Are you planning any children?”

“Only practicing for now. We’ll let you know.” Ty tightened his arm around Alexis’ shoulders as Vaughn, Ty’s personal guard, escorted them to the equally new tour bus idling at the curb. Ty wore a warm smile as the cameras flashed around them. He found himself nearly blind by the time they reached the bus. He handed his bag and Alexis’ overnight case to Vaughn who opened the cargo compartment, and placed the personal things in the storage area.

“Jon. Jon. Remember me!” came a call from the crowd. Jon looked around, and tried to locate the owner of the voice.

“I’ll remember you forever, doll. Show me where you are so I can remember you now.”

Jon shook back his hair, and hooked one strand behind his ear with his free hand as he looked through the crowd for a familiar face. A fairly attractive redhead broke from the crowd, and flung herself into Jon’s arms. As Ian tried to block the girl, Jon nearly missed her. Jon dropped his sports bag and jacket, not wanting to drop the girl. Luckily she was petite, easy to get a hold of, and a good six inches shorter. Jon se-

cured her to his chest. Ian moved in to remove the girl but Jon gave him a shake of his head. Ian stepped back as the girl wrapped her arms around Jon's neck and smothered him with kisses.

"Oh, baby, there you are." He spoke as if he had been searching for her. He returned her kisses with equal fervor while he held her suspended above the ground. A multitude of cameras flashed. "I'll remember you forever, doll."

"Do you promise?" Her eyes widened. Disbelief registered momentarily on her face but she hid her surprise as Jon gave her a wink.

"I promise." Jon assured her with perfect sincerity. He gave her a tender kiss on the lips and smiled down at her. "But I have to get going now, y'know?" He spoke tenderly, his tone apologetic. He hugged her tight, with eyes closed, before he set her on the ground, retrieved his jacket and bag, and handed them to Ian. "You're the best, babe." He squeezed her hand as he moved away from her, unwilling to let go until the last. He turned away as if it gave him great pain to leave her behind.

As Jon walked to the bus, a disbelieving Ian close behind, Jordan caught up with him. Jordan had signed several photos, a bomber jacket and an arm cast before he escaped the circle of fans that had captured him along with his shadow, Greg, during the episode.

"Leaving her behind? You promised to remember her forever? Pretty slick, mate." Jordan clapped Jon on the shoulder as they stepped up into the bus. Ian and Greg stood guard on either side of the bus door along with Vaughn.

"Yeah, well. I'll remember her forever as the doll whose name I never knew." Jon looked back to see the girl still stood where he had left her. Other girls asked questions as she gazed at Jon, who looked out the window at her with longing in his

steel-blue eyes. She grinned at their shared secret, and ignored those around her as several reporters, who had witnessed their conversation, flashed her picture.

Jordan took a seat across the isle, and settled in for the long ride to come. "Geez, you could have at least asked her name last night. Another hit and run, eh, Wiles?"

"No. Had a brunette last night that snuck out with my favorite blue shirt sometime early this morning. Never saw this one before." He blew her a kiss, amused at the approach she had taken. He nodded toward her. "I like her style."

Jordan laughed. "Then what was that all about?"

"Well, I probably won't remember her for long, but I gave her a memory to last a lifetime." He grinned at Jordan before he turned back to the window. "She's now the doll that Jon Wiles left behind in—ah—where the hell are we, anyway?"

* * * *

Brian tossed his bags into the luggage compartment before he climbed aboard, and took a seat mid way down the bus. He dropped the window to slap a few high fives as hands came up to touch him.

"Could we get rolling now, Gary?" Brian called out. He settled in as he signed a picture that someone had thrust through the window.

"Did you want to leave without Geoff?" Gary questioned. The driver/security boss sat sideways in the driver's seat, and watched as Geoff sauntered casually toward the bus, happily chatting with the reporters that surrounded him like a pack of wolves.

"Yeah." Brian whined, "Aw, come on. Let's leave him this one time. Please?" The others laughed as Geoff finally reached the curb. "Why waste all this free publicity? 'Shad-

owsForge leaves lead singer behind.' He'll catch up eventually."

* * * *

"Geoff, with your reputation, has anyone accused you of being a father?" a reporter asked.

"Nope. No, they haven't." He gasped. "Unless you know something I don't." He flashed a worried look before he put on his "media" smile. Valerie rolled her eyes as the reporters laughed. "But I don't call it a reputation. I call it—forging a legend," he added, with a touch of drama. He laughed as Valerie stepped up into the bus ahead of him. "Time's up, mates. See you later." He followed Valerie. His eyes took note of the snug fit of her slacks as he stepped into the bus, and left Wes alongside of the rest of the new bodyguards.

Gary closed the door as Vaughn locked down the baggage compartment and slapped the side of the bus to signal all was secure. Gary put the bus into gear as Geoff dropped into the seat beside Valerie, and looked at her with adoration. The Shadow Team, as the media dubbed them, saw the band safely away before they dashed to a second bus. Fans and reporters waved until they could no longer see the entourage that headed out to the next venue.

"Forging a legend, G.R.?" Ty asked with a laugh as he slipped his arm around Alexis. "More like blazing a bloody trail. You've left DNA samples across three continents. You're a lucky bastard, that's all."

Chapter 4

Portsmouth

Geoff looked in the mirror. His face was pale and there were circles under his eyes.

“You look like hell,” he said to his reflection. “I thought this would be easy. Six weeks? How long has it been?” He closed his eyes tight, and thought back. “Seven days? Only one week? Five more to go? Don’t people die from withdrawal? I’m going to die. That’s all there is to it. I’m freakin’ going to die.”

His one sided conversation was interrupted by a knock. Geoff opened the door of the suite to see Jon smirk at him.

“What are you doing?” Geoff walked away, and left Jon to close the door.

Jon followed him across the room. “Not much. How come you’re up here? The party’s down in the pub.” Jon flopped on the sofa across from Geoff. “Too tired? You look like hell.”

“Yeah, thanks. Trying to be a good boy.” There was a noticeable level of annoyance in his voice.

“Since when?” Jon raised his eyebrows. “Why would you want to be a good boy? That’s not part of the program.”

“It is now. There’s this skirt...”

Jon laughed. "Then it's true."

"What?" Geoff went to the bar and poured a drink.

"I heard a rumor," Jon taunted.

"Yeah? So? There're a lot of rumors about us. Especially me. I'm really popular, y'know?" Geoff lounged on the opposite sofa, and absently stroked his chest.

"This one was hard to believe, though. Usually, they're not so bizarre that they can't be believed."

"What the hell are you going on about, Wiles?" Geoff asked, in no mood to play twenty questions.

"You being faithful to one skirt, that's what. So it's true?"

Geoff gave him a glare. Jon laughed again.

"It's true. I'll have to go back and tell the others. They'll never believe it."

"Yeah, whatever." Geoff took a drink. "This could ruin my reputation. She'd better be worth it."

"If you're not sure then why are you doing it?" Jon smirked. "I'm disappointed in you, Headmaster. How can I follow in your footsteps if you stumble?"

"Call it a challenge. I think you better go back to your party. I'm not in the best of moods." Geoff set his glass on the table and scrubbed his face. "Give my best to the babes."

Jon stood. "If that's what you want. Too bad you can't give your best to them yourself," he commented with sympathy in his voice. "I'm sure they're going to miss you."

"Go, Boy," Geoff replied with a threatening tone.

"I'm going, but, hey, since you can't come down, how about a little something to make you feel better." Jon reached into his shirt pocket, and produced a small blue pill. "A pick-me up." He placed the pill in Geoff's palm before he headed for the door.

“Thanks.” Geoff tossed the pill into his mouth, and washed it down. “Anything’s better than sitting here bored. What is it?”

“Viagra. Now you can be bored stiff.” Jon laughed as he jerked the door open. Geoff tossed back the remaining vodka then threw his glass at the retreating guitar player.

* * * *

Jon pulled the door closed in time to hear the crash on the other side. He laughed as he turned, and found himself face to face with Valerie.

“Val. I didn’t see you.” He smiled, and stepped back.

“Hi, Jon. Is Geoff in there? Sounds like something broke.” She eyed the door with curiosity.

“Sure. He probably needs some help. He seems a bit lonely.” Jon hurried to the elevator as Valerie knocked on the door. “Have a good time,” he called out, as the elevator door closed and the suite door opened.

Chapter 5

Plymouth

“Brian Cummings was the last member to find his way to ShadowsForge. He was born in Leicester but relocated to London in his teen years. Brian is the oldest of the members at twenty-six.” Valerie recorded the lead-in to the interview. “So, Brian, what made you take up drums?”

Brian grimaced as he settled himself on the sofa. “Don’t know if this is what your readers will want to hear, but when I was a lad I liked to hit. Furniture, walls, cats—people. Anything that made an interesting sound when I hit it was fair game. Didn’t matter. I was a hitter. So Mum and Dad decided to channel some of that energy in a more positive direction. Percussion.”

“Interesting,” Valerie said.

“Yeah, my parents were very wise. Look where it’s gotten me. I’m nursemaid to a bunch of skirt-chasing loonies, running around the country—the world. Not to mention making a grand amount of money.”

“The other four were together for a month or two before you joined. What did they do for practice before they found you?”

“Click track. It’s an electronic device that a lot of drummers use to keep time. Also, it allows the band to practice on their own when we can’t or don’t want to be together. No matter how close the band is we need time away now and again. I never use it live but we used it when we recorded *Shades Of Fire* and on *Ethereal Edge* last year.”

“I haven’t seen ShadowsForge away from each other very often. When was the last time you all had a separate holiday?”

“Oh—let me think.” Brian looked puzzled for a moment, and rubbed the stubble on his chin. “All of us? Would you believe—never?”

“You mean that you have all been together for six years?” Valerie found that astonishing.

“Yeah, pretty much. One of us may take a day or two leave here and there, but we’ve been together since I joined. Like when Ty decided to take that unplanned holiday in California last year. Look at the souvenir he brought back. A wife.”

“Ty and Alexis seem to be extremely happy together,” Valerie observed.

“That’s right.” Brian nodded. “Ty is a lucky man but he had to work hard for his happiness.”

“How’s that?”

“His first wife was horrible to him. That was some years ago. He was young—nineteen, I think, and she made him miserable.” Brian shook his head, sympathetically. “It’s great he met Alexis. She’s good for him and good to him. Spoils him. He’s a blessed man.”

“You sound as if you’re a touch envious.”

“You bet. I think even Richards is jealous of their relationship. If you can believe Geoff being that serious about any one lady.” He gave a sly smile.

“I can almost imagine,” Valerie commented with a smirk. “How did you find your way into ShadowsForge?”

“It was really by accident. I was supposed to do some backing work for another up and coming group. I wandered into the studio, made myself comfy at the wrong drum kit and found myself a member of ShadowsForge before the session was over. I thought I was with the other band. Geoff and Ty thought I was on loan from the studio. We really hit it off, so to speak, and I never left. Don’t know what happened to the other group I was supposed to help.”

“Do you have any regrets?”

“None at all. Only that I didn’t hear about them needing me sooner. I was wasting my time hanging about the studio, hoping to fill in for anyone who needed my services. The pay was non-existent and the better-known groups always gave an empty promise to keep me in mind. I was going nowhere until I got into the wrong sound room. Best mistake I ever made.”

* * * *

“Now you be right careful with that weapon, mate.” The sleazy-looking dealer glanced up and down the alleyway. “That forty-five automatic will put messy holes through just about anything.”

“If it puts holes in musicians, that’s all I need.” The tall customer slapped a roll of cash down on the hood of the car. He checked to be sure the clip was full. He slammed it into place, chambered a round, and aimed at the dealer’s head. “You never saw me.”

The dealer nervously raised his hands. “Easy, mate. I’ve got so much business today, I’ll see too many faces to remember only one.”

“Hmm.”

The tall man shoved the handgun into his coat pocket and walked away.

* * * *

Geoff paced like a caged cat. He stopped at the window, looked out at the bright day, and grimaced as he heard Alexis laugh again at whatever Ty kept doing. The things that Geoff was forbidden to do by the sounds of it. The sound grated on Geoff's nerves. It had been too damn long. Between trying to stay faithful to Valerie and not getting to walk around without the Shadow team dogging his every step, it was suffocating. He needed freedom.

Nigel and his grand idea to keep a low profile for safety's sake landed them in this old hotel with small rooms and not much else. *Wonderful*. No pool. No weight room. Not even a decent pub downstairs. Geoff had to subject himself to sharing a room—instead of a suite—with Ty and Alexis. One room with two beds and the lovebirds were nesting on one of them. Not that he had anything against them personally. He hated to be the third wheel. Especially when they carried on as if they were alone.

"I've got to get out of here." Geoff made the announcement to no one in particular. Before Ty or Alexis could respond to his aggravated words, he grabbed his cigarettes from the table, shoved them into his shirt pocket and flew out the door with a slam.

Geoff waited impatiently for the elevator as he watched the descending numbers. Wes jogged down the hall to catch up with him. When he noticed his shadow, he turned on the unsuspecting bodyguard.

"Go away." Geoff's demand halted Wes in his tracks. He grabbed a handful of the front of his jacket and held Wes at arm's length as the elevator arrived, and deposited Brian.

Brian smirked, and pushed past Geoff. “Having trouble with your shadow?”

Geoff narrowed his eyes. “Where were you?”

“Sightseeing,” he offered, as he kept walking.

“Where’s your shadow?” Geoff called after him.

Brian shrugged as he disappeared into his room with a slam of the door.

“I was hired to...” Wes began as he held his hands up in surrender.

“To make sure no one kills me,” Geoff recited the order. “At this point, I don’t really care if someone does.”

He shoved Wes as he stepped into the waiting elevator before the doors closed. Geoff fell against the back wall, and grasped the railing so tight that his knuckles turned white. “This must be what cabin fever feels like. Or insanity.” He reached out and punched the button for the top floor of the aged hotel. Maybe taking some fresh air, if he could get to the roof, would help him feel better.

The ride upward was quicker than Geoff would have thought. The doors shushed open into a hall that led to a solid door. The sign above the door read simply “Roof.” There were only two rooms on this abbreviated floor, one on either side of the short hall. Geoff moved past them, and pushed his way out into the open. It was a graveyard for dilapidated outdoor furniture sent to that great patio in the sky. The top floor looked like it had been added as an afterthought, the smaller top layer on a cake.

The smell of the sea air was brisk, refreshing after spending so much time in stuffy hotel rooms over the last week. It whispered freedom and he wondered again if he should really try to keep up his end of Valerie’s challenge. Was one skirt really worth this much change to his lifestyle? What if she wasn’t? He would have wasted many weeks, and countless

opportunities to perhaps find that one woman that Ty kept telling him was out there for each man.

Not wanting Wes to catch up to him, Geoff pushed one of the rusted chairs against the door, and wedged it under the handle so that it could not be pushed open from the inside. He'd let someone else out when he was good and ready to be bothered.

That done, Geoff looked around. It didn't look like this portion of the hotel was used much anymore. Perfect. No one should wander up here to disturb him. The patio area circled the top floor that housed the two rooms and elevator shaft. After he relaxed a bit, he'd take a walk around and see what was on the other side.

A light stir in the air, not quite qualifying as a breeze, teased at his open shirt. He pulled a cigarette from his pocket, lit it, and watched the blue cloud float away into the clear Plymouth sky. He pulled out a second chair, turned it toward the distant sea and dropped into it. He slouched as he watched gulls glide in the distance, and wondered what it would be like to glide on the wind and experience that kind of freedom. He ignored the sound as someone rattled the door and tried to open it. He was pleased that the chair held. Who ever it was, probably Wes, Geoff heard them curse and walk away toward the elevator. He pulled his shirt open to the cool air, and closed his eyes while he took in some sun.

After ten minutes of quiet contemplation, Geoff stood, and stretched. The air had graduated to a full-fledged breeze by the time he crushed out his cigarette with his boot, and turned to walk to the right corner of the building. There was only one window along the wall. He walked to the left side. It was the mirror image of the first side, a blank wall with one window about half way to the far corner. Geoff strolled the length of the rooftop that was perhaps twenty feet wide from

the wall to the edge. A three-foot ledge ran around the perimeter of the building. It was silent, restful, up here.

As he rounded the corner at the far end, he walked into Diane. He grasped her shoulders to keep from knocking her over as they collided. She put her hands up, her cool fingers raked through the hair on his chest, and her touch shot unexpected shards of desire through his body.

“Diane.”

“Oh.” Diane pressed her palms to his chest to keep from getting run over. She looked up into his face, obviously as surprised as he was to find someone else in the silent sanctuary. “I didn’t hear you.” She caressed the warmth of his flesh. It took her a few seconds to realize that she was kneading his chest. He enjoyed the feel of the coarse curls threading through her fingers. His hands remained in a firm hold on her shoulders. Her hands froze, and she took a step back.

“Have you been up here long?” Her cool hands on his sun-warmed chest drew a response in the pit of his stomach and several other parts of his anatomy. He appreciated the softness of her shoulders in his hands, unhindered by her sleeveless gauze summer dress. He was fully aware of the nearness of her, and allowed his hands to caress her arms as she stepped away. The breeze that played with his shirt coaxed her dress to define her slender figure, and tease Geoff with the view and the scent of lavender and vanilla.

“I was just going in. I won’t bother you.” She sidestepped the tall singer, and looked down to hide her face as she continued around the corner.

“Diane?” Geoff called out to halt her. “Don’t go yet. You don’t have to run off so soon, do you?” He realized how much he missed feminine company, and rationalized that Diane didn’t really count. She was an employee of ShadowsForge.

Valerie couldn't expect Geoff to stay away from the girl who was so intimately acquainted with his wardrobe, could she?

"You want me to stay?" Diane asked, but did not raise her face to him.

"Yeah. Sure. Why not?" he casually asked. "Show me the sites of the town from here."

"There's not much to see, really." She swallowed. Geoff tried to define what he saw in her actions. What was it that she felt? Desire? Something stirred deep within her, he could tell. Before he could put a label on it, she looked him in the eyes. "I don't think I should stay."

"Why?" Geoff was disappointed and it showed in his voice. "Are you afraid of me?" Normally, that would be fine with him. Intimidation made a submissive lover, and Geoff was no stranger to that brand of subtle control. He felt that it would be wrong to use his influence over this woman though, who had not long ago lost her husband. At such a young age, that had to be difficult.

"I'm not afraid of you, Mr. Richards," she answered, and looked out toward the gulls. "I'm afraid of me." Without further explanation, Diane headed across the rooftop toward the door at the far end. He really should just let her go, let her get as far from him as she could. The touch of her hands on his flesh had been almost overwhelming.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Geoff couldn't let a remark like that go. He jogged to catch up with her brisk strides.

He wanted her to tell him what she felt. Diane shrugged but did not stop. "I can't tell you when I don't even understand myself. I'm lonely. Probably. I miss Rory so much it hurts sometimes. Physically hurts. I want so bad to have Rory's arms around me, for him to make me feel secure again. I didn't even get the opportunity to say goodbye to

him. He left for work, as always, that day and never touched me again this side of dreams.” She huffed. “I’m afraid of being too vulnerable right now, Mr. Richards.” Through the monolog, she refused to slow her pace.

Geoff stopped, and barked her name in a commanding tone that made her stop several yards ahead of him. “DIANE. If you call me ‘Mr. Richards’ again, I’ll paddle your ass.”

Diane spun to glare at him, eyes wide. “You’ll do what?”

Geoff’s lips curled into his media smile. “I said I’d paddle your ass.”

“You’ll do no such thing,” she challenged. She didn’t even attempt to hide her amusement at his threat. She smiled at him before she added, “Mr. Richards.”

As his smile faded, his eyes narrowed with a mischievous glint. Diane turned to run, and hoped to get around the corner and through the door before he caught her. She heard him closing on her as she reached the corner. She didn’t look back; instead, her eyes locked on the chair jammed under the door handle.

“Oh, no,” Diane yelled with a laugh. She skidded to a stop, grabbed the chair, and tugged to dislodge it. She glanced up in time to see Geoff round the corner twenty feet away, the greatest pleasure showed on his face as he bore down on her. She was struck with the giggles as she tugged at the stubborn chair. Before she could successfully break it free, Geoff caught her around the waist, lifted her effortlessly off the ground, and took her along with him as he slid to a stop.

He swung her up into his arms with the intent to carry her to a chair to administer her punishment. Three gunshots sounded from the far side of the door. Three holes appeared in the door; one slug pinged off of the chair in a cloud of rust. Geoff jerked Diane to his side, and threw their backs against the wall.

“What the hell?” Geoff barked, and pulled Diane close to him. He stayed between her and the door, and inched toward it with the intent to make sure that the chair was secure.

“What are we going to do?” Diane whispered, a trembling note in her voice. She tried to force her fear down as she clung to Geoff’s arm.

“I’m going to make sure who ever is in there can’t get out here. Is there anywhere we can go? Another way in or down?” Geoff moved with caution toward the door, and Diane matched his every step.

“A fire escape on the far end, but it’s well rusted.”

“That’ll have to do.” Geoff lowered his voice as they stood beside the door. He whispered into her ear. “I’ll jam the chair under the door, you run for the fire escape.”

Diane nodded as she bit her lower lip.

The door burst open, Geoff and Diane behind it. As the door swung at him, Geoff pulled his knee up to chest level and kicked as hard as he could. He repelled the door, and slammed it closed again as he scrambled for the chair.

“Go, now.” Geoff grabbed the chair, and shoved it as hard as he could into place. Diane ran. Once he was sure it would hold, he followed her. As he turned the corner, he remembered the window. “Diane,” he shouted. “The window.”

Diane skidded to a halt. The pane of glass shattered outward with several more shots, not three feet in front of her. She screamed, dropped to her knees, and covered her head. Geoff caught up with her, and jerked her to her feet. He took her hand, and led her to halfway between the window and the end of the building. He looked around, frantic for a place to go.

“You’d think someone would hear all of this.” He pulled Diane against the wall so he could think. He looked at Diane,

and then up at the small overhang above them. Not too high. “Come here.”

Geoff pulled her away from the wall. He turned her back to his chest, took her by the waist, and with little effort, he lifted her up to sit on his shoulder. He wove his fingers together as she reached out for the roof. He placed his hands under her foot. She pulled herself up as he raised her easily to the top of the building. She leaned over, and looked down at him.

“What about you?” Fear caused her face to pale, making her dark eyes appear darker.

“Be right with you. Move.” He jumped up to grasp the edge. He climbed the wall with his feet, struggled, and finally pushed himself up over the top. They moved as quietly as possible toward the far end. “If we can get to the end, the elevator shaft will cover any sounds we make getting back down—I hope.” He wrapped his hand around Diane’s upper arm to guide her along the cracked tiles.

They moved over half way to the end when a bullet fired through behind Geoff. It was quickly followed by several other shots.

“RUN.” Geoff pushed Diane ahead of him as they sprinted toward the edge of the building. Each time Geoff moved his foot, a hole would appear where he had been. The adrenaline rush was dizzying.

Diane skidded to a stop at the edge, panic in her face as she turned to Geoff. Only he didn’t stop. He leapt to the roof below, rolled and got to his feet in one smooth choreographed move. He turned back to her, and reached up.

“JUMP.”

Without hesitation, Diane leapt toward him, and prayed he would catch her. He set her quickly on her feet, took her hand, and pulled her at a furious pace toward the fire escape.

Geoff leaned over the edge to evaluate the safety of the rusted ladder that stretched up to him from the alley ten floors below. Given the choice of standing unarmed against a madman with a gun or chancing the ladder, he climbed over the edge. Once he was sure it would hold them, he motioned for Diane to follow.

“He’ll have to go through the door or a window before he can get out here to us. If we’re quick, we can be down before then.”

They moved with care down the ladder, and simultaneously watched for any sign of the gunman above them. If the guy chose to pick them off, they had no place to go. That thought spurred them to move as quickly as possible. A shot might miss, but the fall from here would mean certain death.

“Geoff, who’s shooting at us?” Diane finally took the opportunity to ask.

“We have this fan,” Geoff began, careful to test each rung before he trusted his full weight on it. “He’s unhappy with the band.”

“I can see that.” Diane tried to keep her mind off of the nine-story drop below.

“One of us had a piece of his woman so he wants us all dead.”

“What a nice guy. Which one of you did she sleep with?”

“Don’t know.”

“Oh, come on. Was it you?”

“Could have been. Do you really want to talk about this right now?” Geoff felt the tension build.

“Yes. I want to talk about anything that will take my mind off of where we are.”

“Okay. Nice panties you’re wearing. Silk, satin or spandex?”

“Oh, that’s really cute, *Mr. Richards*.” The color rose in her face.

“I owe you for that one and the last one, babe. Be sure I’ll collect.”

“It’s a date. If you get me down from here, anything you want, it’s yours.”

“You’ve got it. I’m stopping here. Don’t step on my fingers.”

“Why are you stopping?” Diane felt fear rise again to replace the embarrassment.

“Stay there,” Geoff commanded.

Diane moved to one side of the ladder so she could brave taking a look down. As she did, Geoff moved to the opposite side. He reached out to a window, and tried to slide it open. It wouldn’t budge.

“Hold on tight. This might shake the ladder,” he told her.

He moved to the side, swung out, and forced one booted foot through the glass. The shattering sound made Diane jump and she nearly lost her hold on the rusted metal.

Geoff pulled his foot out of the glass. He unlocked the window frame, slid it open, and pulled out the curtain to brush as much glass off the sill as possible.

“Come here.” He held his hand up toward her. Diane descended until her body was encased in his arms. “Can you get through the window?”

“If you help me, I’ll try.” Her voice trembled.

“Get one foot over,” Geoff instructed. He helped her step over to stand on the sill. He held onto the ladder with one hand, the other hand a tight hold on her arm. He supported her until she crouched down and climbed safely through. It took him only a moment to swing over and follow her into the eighth floor room.

* * * *

It was a vacant room, smaller than the one Geoff shared with the Synclairs. One queen-sized bed, a dresser bolted to the wall, and the bath. Geoff moved to the door, and listened for sounds in the hallway.

“I don’t know if we should go out there or stay here,” he said.

Diane pressed against his back. When he felt her warmth, he turned to look into frightened eyes. He leaned his back against the wall, and moved her to stand between his feet. He wrapped her in his arms, held her securely against his body, and thought about how she had sent streams of desire through him by her touch, only a few minutes ago.

Diane slipped her arms around his waist beneath his shirt, and laid her face against the coarse layer of curls that covered his firm chest. Geoff knew she could hear the quickening of his heartbeat, and hoped that she thought it from the situation. He stroked her back with his fingertips to comfort her.

Geoff rested his cheek on the top of her head, and breathed deep to dispel the adrenaline that surged through him. Her hair was soft against his skin, and caused him to pull her body tight against his. She was a collection of soft curves, scented with lavender and vanilla. Geoff could picture her in black lace and a smile. The vision raised his core temperature several degrees in a split second.

“What do you think we should do?” He didn’t trust himself to remain alone with her for long. He fought the temptation to scoop her up and make use of that bed ten feet away. Two weeks ago, he wouldn’t have thought twice about it, gunman or not.

“Do you think he’ll follow us?” Her lips brushed his skin as she spoke.

“I don’t think he can get out the door up there. He could climb out the window. If he were smart, though, he’d leave

the building before he gets caught.” Geoff reveled in the feel of her body as she shifted against him. She brushed her lips softly against his throat as he continued. “If we take the elevator, I’d hate to have the doors open and find him standing there. We could take the stairs down—but he might be taking them, too.”

“That’s only four flights down.” Diane applied a light kiss to the hollow of his throat. He closed his eyes; a low groan rumbled within him. She stroked his chest with her cheek, her breath warm on his skin.

“I think we should stay here.” Geoff stroked her back with more force, and worked the bundles of tension beneath her skin. He could feel her body respond to his touch, and knew as she pressed against him that he had better... *Damn, it’s warm in here.* He needed to walk away. He should...

Geoff drew a slow breath. She moved her hands up his back as he stroked her hair. Before he knew it, he clenched his fingers in her hair, pulled her head back and covered her mouth with his. She tasted sweet; his tongue teased hers as she eagerly accepted him. The fervency of the moment consumed them both, their hands explored, caressed, tongues mingled in a dangerous dance of seduction. Self-control was lost in the frenzy of unfulfilled mutual need.

“GEOFF. ARE YOU THERE?”

The shout from the hallway quenched their rising passion as sudden as a shower of cold water, and cooled the fury without dousing the flames.

“Damn him.” Geoff cursed, and looked into Diane’s passion-filled, disappointed gaze. “I told him I wanted to be alone.”

Diane sighed, grinding against him.

Geoff groaned as he felt his spine melt, right along with resistance and fidelity. If she did that again, he would be

forced to take her standing right here. Not very romantic but need was need. His need was as urgent as hers seemed to be.

Diane smiled at his reaction, and moved against him to music that only her body could hear. “But you’re not alone, Mr. Richards.”

“Oh, you’re a tease, you are.” He gave her one firm swat on her backside.

“Now, who’s teasing?” She cooed, and nipped his chest, bringing a devilish smile to his face. He bent down, intent on another taste.

“GEOFF RICHARDS.”

“Damn.” Geoff frowned as he released Diane, and turned to the door. He jerked it open, and stepped out into the hallway. “WHAT?”

Wes stood at the end of the hall to Geoff’s left, beside the door to the stairwell. He held a handgun at arm’s length, and sighted down the barrel aimed straight at Geoff’s head. Geoff put his hands up as a knot developed in the pit of his stomach. The elevator doors opened behind him. He turned as Ian stepped out, also armed.

Wes disarmed his weapon. “Don’t jump out like that. I could have dropped you.” He jogged toward the idol. “Didn’t you hear the gunshots?”

Geoff clutched his hands to his chest, and willed his heart to slow. “Sure did.” He closed his shirt. “We saw them, too. If you care to go up to the roof, you might find the guy.”

“No, sir.” Wes placed his weapon in a concealed shoulder holster. “I’m not letting you out of my sight again.”

“Wonderful.”

Ian stored his weapon. “Let’s get him back to the band floor before Patton has another anxiety attack.” He stepped aside, and invited Geoff to head to the elevator.

“Just a minute.” Geoff turned into the room. He pulled Diane out by her hand, and pushed her toward Ian. “Make sure she gets safely to her room, too.”

Wes smirked as Diane dropped her eyes to the carpeted floor. Ian grinned at Diane, then Geoff.

“You can wipe that stupid look off of your face, too.” Geoff assumed an indignant look. “She was on the roof before I got there. That’s where the shooting started. I couldn’t leave her there.”

“Right, Mr. Richards.” Ian nodded, doubt obvious in his voice.

“Come here.” Geoff pulled Ian into the room by his shirt. “See? The bed’s not been touched. You think I’d do her standing up?” Geoff suppressed his disappointment at the missed opportunity. He’d sure been ready to. He shoved Ian toward the window. “Broken window. How do you think we got in here?”

“The fire escape?” Ian asked, toeing the broken glass on the carpet.

“Fire escape,” Geoff concluded, and turned to leave. “Let’s get out of here.” As he followed Ian and Diane to the elevator, he groaned at the many clear impressions of his hands in rust on the back of her dress.

Wes frowned as Geoff glared at him, and dared him to say a word.

Chapter 6

Belfast

Geoff took a deep breath as he looked around the crowded room. He took a step closer to Valerie as he attempted to pull his eyes from the specimen of womanhood that moved cat-like across the room. That girl took his breath away. If she wore anything at all beneath that leopard print bodysuit, it had to be made of cellophane. Nothing else could possibly fit under there.

Spandex. God's gift to man.

"Are you all right?" Valerie's voice intruded on Geoff's silent fantasy.

"Um...Yeah." He pulled his eyes from the shapely sight and turned to face Valerie. "I'm great. Glad to be out in the real world."

Geoff had secluded himself in his room for so long, and missed so many parties, that he couldn't stand it any more. He knew if he were not in the direct company of Valerie, he would have wasted the last nine days of faithfulness the first chance he got. Diane had shown him that much. Oh, was the dragon famished.

"I don't know why you've been hiding in your room. This is where you should be," she commented, and looked

around for the other members of the band. "It's part of your marketing strategy to be at these parties. These people are here to meet you."

Geoff glanced at the girl in spandex again. "I was noticing them." He turned away with a shudder.

"If I won a contest to meet ShadowsForge, I'd certainly expect to meet them all. Especially the lead voice."

"Yeah, well, the lead voice hasn't been feeling too well." He sipped his drink long and slow. He peered over the rim of the glass, and searched for that leopard print. What fantasy material she made. He felt cheated when he found her in the company of Jon Wiles. *Yeah, Jon is definitely not going to be alone tonight. That is, if he can get her past Gary's security.* Geoff gave a pain-filled sigh.

"Excuse me a minute, Val." Geoff handed his glass to her before he made his way across the room toward Jon. "Hey, Jon?" He stepped up beside the guitar player. "How's that infection doing? Are the open sores under control yet?" He slipped on his media smile for the leopard print as he wrapped a brotherly arm around Jon's shoulders.

Jon stared at Geoff in disbelief before he broke into a grin. "Fine. Really. Thanks for asking." He turned back to the girl as he elbowed Geoff hard in the ribs. "Becky, this is Geoff Richards. I have to tell you something about him." Jon looked around to be sure no one else could hear. He motioned Becky to lean in closer. "He's an ass."

A confused look crossed Becky's face. "Wow. Really?"

Geoff took her hand and pulled her closer to Jon. He took Jon's hand and placed Becky's in it. "You deserve this one. In your own words, she's a real doll."

"Thank you," Becky bubbled. "That's really nice of you to say." She leaned forward, which forced her cleavage into Geoff's direct line of sight as she kissed him on the cheek.

Geoff rolled his eyes. “Becky, do you know what a doll is?”

“A special girl?” That confused look surfaced again.

“Actually, according to Jon here, a doll is an empty headed play thing. Y’know? Like a toy?” Geoff knew this one was in the land of the lost. Just the way he liked them. She had the body of a goddess and the brains of a brick.

“A toy?” Becky snuggled against Jon. “I’d like to be a toy,” she stated with a bright smile.

“Terrific.” Jon gave Geoff a triumphant look. “What do we get to play?” Jon wrapped an arm around Becky’s waist, and led her toward the door.

“Don’t forget your blue pills, Wiles.” Geoff gnashed his teeth. He released another deep sigh as he returned to Valerie’s side.

“What was that all about?” Valerie noticed Jon leave.

“Nothing. Just wanted to check on something with Jon. He was busy, though.”

“I noticed.” Valerie rolled her eyes. “Brian and Jordan seem to be hiding over in the corner. What do you suppose those two are up to?”

Geoff noticed that his two band mates were huddled in the corner. Now and then, they glanced his way. He took another sip.

“I don’t know what they’re doing, but I have a bad feeling about it.”

Nigel received a message delivered at the door. He thanked the delivery person and closed the door. He read the message on the folded paper, frowned, and headed straight across the room to Geoff.

“Richards, do you want to explain this?”

“Explain what? I’ve been in my room for nearly two weeks. What did I do now?”

“You know there are to be no deliveries to the band floor.” Nigel gave Valerie an odd look.

“I didn’t order anything.”

“Are you Geoff Richards?”

“Stupid question, Nigel. Don’t you know my name by now?” Annoyance colored his words.

“Are you the same Geoff Richards that ordered three blond, one red-head and two brunette—uh—escorts,” he sputtered, as he eyed Valerie. “It’s a confirmation from an—escort service. You know that no one is allowed up on the band floor.” Nigel gave him a stern look.

Valerie crossed her arms, and turned from Nigel to face Geoff. Her anger burned into him. Geoff felt like a cornered animal.

“Oh, Hell. Val, I swear I didn’t order any...” Geoff’s words of defense faded at the burst of laughter from the corner of the room.

The three turned toward Brian and Jordan, who lifted their glasses toward Geoff and yelled, “Surprise.”

“Yeah,” Geoff yelled back. “Thanks.” He turned back to Nigel. “You can cancel that order.” Then to Valerie, “You know I didn’t do that, right?”

Valerie left him to suffer for a long moment. “It looks like your friends are trying to help you get back into action. I’ll accept that—this time.”

“Thank you,” Geoff said, and kissed her hand. “I’ll be out of my room tonight when I go to kick some ass, in case you come to check up on me—or to tuck me in.” He gave Valerie his heart-melting smile.

“You won’t have the opportunity, Geoff.” Nigel interrupted. “We have to be in Sheffield tomorrow. We’re traveling tonight.”

* * * *

“Everyone here?” Nigel asked as he looked past Geoff down the crowded hallway. He called off each name as if he had a checklist. “Cummings. Synclairs. Two, one each. Cantrell. Wiles.”

“What? Are we back in school, or are you taking inventory for taxes?” Geoff tried to push his way past the short road manager.

“No. I don’t want to lose anyone. But if I did leave someone behind, Richards, it would have to be you.”

“I love you too, Pygmy Boy.” Geoff hooked his arm around Nigel’s neck, and leaned to plant a kiss on his forehead. Nigel struggled away, and wiped his forehead with his sleeve.

“Knock it off. Where’s Valerie? Had enough of you?” Nigel sneered.

“No. She wanted to play with the stage crew tonight. She needed to hang out with a slower crowd for a while. She can’t handle me.”

“Now she’ll get to hear the truth about you.”

“Hey, I’ve only told her the truth.” Geoff looked hurt at the insinuation.

“Like the one about the bladder infection causing you to keep that pillow in your lap for warmth half the night when Jon slipped you the Viagra?” Suppressed laughter emanated from down the hall. “Valerie thought you were in severe pain.”

“It wasn’t a lie. I was in severe pain.” Geoff glared at Jon.

Jon laughed. “Trying to help, mate.”

“Sure.” Geoff rolled his eyes and turned back to the window. Security scurried around the bus. It looked good enough to him as he pressed forward, and attempted to open the door.

“Wait for security, boy.” Nigel stopped him. They watched through the windowpane on the door as the Shadow team and hotel security made a human barrier from each end of the bus to the walls of the fan-shaped loading area. It was late, well after midnight, as ShadowsForge waited to head out from the rear entrance of the hotel. They would walk up the cement loading-ramp to the bus some thirty yards away.

They had less than twenty-four hours to travel from Belfast to Sheffield, dictating that the night would be spent on the road. The three equipment trucks and crew bus had left already. Once the area was secured, Nigel pushed through, and held the door to allow Geoff to pass.

“As a thief in the night, the Fornicating Five...” Geoff stopped, and turned to Alexis. “Pardon me, Madam Synclair.” He bowed apologetically before he continued in a deep narrative voice, slinking along like an escaped convict avoiding searchlights. “Correction, the Sensual Six stealthily make their way from the high security compound, avoiding detection as they moved under the cloak of darkness. Their escape vehicle awaits them, cleverly disguised as an ordinary tour bus, concealing the true identity of those traveling within behind a cloak of silvery metal skin...”

Brian nudged past the slinking singer, knocked him into the wall, and interrupted his narrative. “Stuff a sock in it, Richards, and get to the bus.”

“Damn, B.J. You’re grumpy tonight, aren’t you?” Geoff stumbled as the muscular drummer repelled him.

“Not grumpy. I work for a living. I don’t stand around, trying to look good.” He grinned. “I’m tired and want to get going. Keep your spy thriller fantasy to yourself.” Brian walked away to drop his bag beside several suitcases piled by the open luggage compartment, before he climbed aboard.

“Well.” Geoff replied with a huff. He acted insulted as he leaned against the wall, a prissy look on his face. “At least I have someone to take care of my bags for me. Wes is a good little valet. Huh.” He huffed again.

Ty and Alexis, who followed behind the two, laughed. Ty wrapped his arm around his wife’s shoulders. “Isn’t our little boy cute when he’s playing?”

Alexis smiled. “Too cute, my dear. But not as cute as you are.” She wrinkled her nose at her husband, and reached out to ruffle Geoff’s hair as they passed by him.

“Thanks, Mom,” Geoff said. “Hey, Dad, can I borrow the car? Huh? Can I?”

“Not until you show a bit of responsibility, young man,” Ty called over his shoulder.

“Damn.” Geoff sulked against the wall.

Ty and Alexis placed their bags in the stack. They moved toward the door of the bus but instead of boarding, chose to lean against the doorframe to watch the two guitar players that burst from the building. Jon and Jordan almost knocked Nigel over.

“Go long.” Jordan shouted as he cleared the building right behind Jon, who ran toward the bus while he looked back over his shoulder.

“I’m open,” Jon called, his hands up in the air.

Jordan waited until Jon covered half of the distance to the bus before he threw his rolled and belted jacket, North American football style. As it flew through the air, Geoff decided to play. He thrust himself from the wall, and ran at full speed to nab the “ball” before it got to Jon.

“Intercepted. I got it,” he shouted as he flew through the air, and grabbed the bundle. He landed, and circled around before he hit the ring of security men who turned at the shouting to see what happened.

Jon turned to run after Geoff. Before Geoff knew what happened, he was sandwiched between J.C. and Jon as they sacked him. The three stumbled and tripped over each other, trying to maintain balance until they crashed into Wes. The four men fell in a tangled pile. Before they could begin to sort themselves out, the pile of suitcases at the side of the bus exploded.

Propelled by the concussion, Ty pushed Alexis down at the front of the idling bus. He bent his body over her as he tucked his face below windshield level, his arms over his head. The blast shattered the curbside windows of the bus but the windshield stayed thankfully intact. Flames leapt skyward, followed by a rain of burning luggage parts and clothing.

Once the rain of glass inside the bus subsided, Ty shouted, "Brian."

"Yeah." Ty heard the drummer respond.

"You all right?" Ty stood up, and looked around as he pulled his wife protectively to his chest. "Are you all right, babe?"

"What's happening?" Alexis' voice betrayed her fear.

"I don't know." Ty stepped up on the curb with his wife tucked close to his body.

"Damn. What was that?" Brian leaped from the bus, and landed beside Alexis who clung to her husband. The three were intercepted by shadows and hustled frantically toward the hotel.

Security men were frenzied as they gathered band members, grabbing and shoving them as fast as possible back toward the building. Wes had some difficulty getting untangled from Jon, Geoff and Jordan, who were extracted from the pile by Ian and Greg. Once on his feet, Wes pulled Geoff up by the shoulders of his shirt, and propelled him at full speed toward the door of the building.

“What the hell happened?” Geoff tried to look back.

“We’ll find out later. Get your ass inside.” Wes snapped in anger.

“What’re you mad about?” Geoff tried to slow his pace before they reached the door. Wes pulled the door open and shoved Geoff roughly through it. He held it open long enough for Ian and Greg to deposit Jon and Jordan inside.

“Screw-ups.” Wes spat, and pushed the door closed until Ty, Alexis and Brian reached the building. Wes stood guard outside, and opened the door only long enough for each member of the group to be deposited. Several hotel security personnel joined the band inside the building in case the bomb was planted to send them into a trap.

Nigel stared through the window with his mouth hanging open in disbelief. When he finally found his voice, Geoff thought he had lost his mind.

“What’d you do to the bus?” Nigel watched as the security men put out what was left of the luggage with fire extinguishers. The luggage compartment door was buckled and burnt, and hung by one hinge. The side of the bus was blackened and the side windows were gone.

“You think we did it?” Jon asked, incredulous. “You’re off your nut, Nigel.”

Geoff leaned a forearm on the short manager's shoulder. “My mouthwash must have gotten too close to my spare lighter,” Geoff explained through clenched teeth. “Y’think?”

“Well—it didn’t—uh...” Nigel shook his head. “I suppose not, then. I think we need a new bus.”

“Geez, Boss.” Geoff allowed sarcasm to creep into his tone as he clapped Nigel on the shoulder. “You think so? Well, I think I need a drink.” Geoff pushed his way through the group.

“Take a security man with you, Richards,” Nigel yelled after the retreating singer.

“Why? Think it’ll help?” Geoff called, not looking back. He headed into the hotel. “I’ll be in the pub. Call me when the new bus gets here.”

Brian shook his head, and poked at his ears. “Things are buzzing,” he commented to no one in particular.

“Did you get cut?” Ty asked, surprised at the apparent lack of injuries on the drummer.

“I went into the back. Good thing, too. That damned thing jumped.” He spoke louder than normal. “Talk about rock and roll leaving you deaf.”

* * * *

The police report stated that the bomb had been placed in one of the suitcases and left among the other luggage. It was a remote detonation device that apparently malfunctioned. It was assumed that the bomb would have been detonated once the bus was on the road with the band aboard.

Chapter 7

Sheffield

“Jon, how do you feel about the attacks that have been made on the band?” Valerie sat on the sofa. She faced Jon Wiles in one chair and Jordan Cantrell in the other.

She felt more at ease as she interviewed the members of the group, putting the meeting with Geoff Richards out of her thoughts. This was the pleasant job that it should have been all along. She was thankful that she hadn’t been involved in the assaults, although she did find herself more than worried when someone tried to shoot Geoff. She could understand concern for another human being, but what she felt was something more.

Jon threaded strands of hair through his fingers. He smiled a crooked smile that Valerie thought gave him that “little boy” look. In contrast, the lean body, revealed by the open shirt over the low-rise leather trousers, was undeniably that of a mature man.

“We have a bunch of guys that are well paid to make sure nothing happens to us. I feel safe with them around. Ian—my shadow—now he’s a big guy. He’s cool. He gives me space but stays close enough in case of trouble. It’s good to know that he’s there. I don’t know when the guy ever sleeps.”

Jordan nodded agreement; his dark hair fell over his forehead. “Greg is great, too. He used to be some kind of wrestler or something. He’s got some terrific stories to tell, funny stuff. My mum gets worried when things like this happen but our security is so tight right now, I doubt that even she could get to me. Things like this will always happen when a band like ours becomes popular with ladies. It’s not all our fault and people don’t understand that. If these skirts would think about their everyday life, the commitments they’ve made to their men, before they come looking for one of us, it would save a lot of trouble.”

“You blame the lady that was involved?”

“Well, sure.” Jordan reached for his drink on the low table that separated them.

As Jordan leaned forward, Valerie’s eyes caught the pattern of dark curls on his chest that led downward. She noticed that when any of them did bother to wear a shirt, none of them knew how to fasten more than two buttons. Jordan’s white shirt was no exception, closed only at the bottom, which afforded Valerie a heart stopping view of his sculptured body. His sleeves were rolled up to his elbows, very casual. The tailored black slacks accented his narrow hips, and completed a picture of Jordan Cantrell that was decidedly alluring.

Jordan raked his fingers through his hair, and pushed it out of his face. “If she was faithful to her man, he wouldn’t be hurt and wouldn’t be out to hurt us. We don’t know who she was or which one of us she was with. We don’t even know what city it was in. The guy didn’t give any details. I mean it could have been me, unlikely as that sounds.”

Val raised an eyebrow. “Why is that unlikely? You’re lead guitar with a phenomenal voice and every bit as attractive as the rest of ShadowsForge. Why would you doubt yourself where women are concerned?” Valerie was curious about Jor-

dan's self-doubts. She may not include this information in the biography but she personally wanted to know. From her point of view, he was a strong candidate to give even Geoff Richards competition.

"Look at all of us." He set his drink down.

"I have," Valerie interrupted, her face warmed a bit. "For the past few weeks, before I contacted Nigel about writing the bio."

"So you noticed that I'm number four in the lineup of desirability." He smiled, and his dark eyes gave him an innocent appearance. "I'm one up on Brian."

"Why is that?" Valerie wanted to understand his feelings.

"I think it's due to the large family I come from. No skirt wants to chance getting involved with a man who wants a dozen children. The girls that hang around us are only willing to have the here and now, late night parties, some terrific sex—heavy on the sex." Jordan paused to smirk. "A bit of travel sometimes, then move on to the next big name musician or singer or group who books into their city. I'm selective about the women I spend my nights with."

"There's nothing wrong with that." Valerie encouraged him. "I think that it's commendable for you to be selective."

Jon coughed. "It's easy to be selective when they're not breaking down your door."

"You have that problem, then?" Valerie turned back to the co-lead guitarist.

Jordan backhanded Jon in the shoulder. "He calls it a problem," he commented with sarcasm.

"I've had women sneak into my room, break into my house in London, try to get in my car when I'm stopped in traffic. It's really amazing what some will do to get my attention."

"And he's humble, too," Jordan concluded, with a laugh.

“And talented,” Jon added. He slouched, leaned his head back, and balanced his glass on his forehead. “I like to do this but the ice freezes the brain after a short while.”

Valerie laughed. Her eyes were drawn from his face, down his slender throat, firm chest, and rippled abdomen, only to be halted by the leather that hugged low on his hips. She felt an involuntary shiver as her eyes made the return trip. He really knew how to grab attention.

Why couldn't one of these two be interested in having a relationship?

“I still think it's good to be selective. Let's move on.” Valerie had to tear her eyes from Jon's body, back to her notes. “How do you deal with being on the road, away from your families?”

A dark look clouded Jordan's features. “I really miss my Mum sometimes. She has been the driving force in my life. It's hard to be away for so long at a time. Sometimes, we're on the road for months before I get a chance to jet home for a day or two.”

“May I ask what happened to your father?”

“My father passed unexpected, sudden like. Working too hard to support all of us. Mum has been taking care of things since. It's for her that I need to be successful. I've set up a fund for her, bought her a house in Sheffield early on. She always encouraged me to follow my dream and I'm here now because of her. She's a tough lady. I really admire her.”

“Would you ever consider branching out into anything else, say, acting?” Valerie turned to Jon.

He captured his glass, and took a sip before sitting up. “Of course. We already have. We act like a bunch of rock stars every night on stage. You don't think we're really that good, do you?”

“Speak for yourself,” Jordan interrupted. “I am a rock star. I really am that good.” The two men laughed.

“More humble remarks.” Valerie shook her head. “You two seem to have a great relationship.”

“We share everything.” Jon nodded to Jordan. “J.C. is like a big brother to me and I like that. I can blame things on him when we get into trouble.”

“And he does, too. But without Jon, I’d miss my family more. He’s a substitute kid brother.”

“How many siblings do you have?”

“Seven younger Cantrells. Leslie, Mark, Mallory, David, Steven, Christian and Terra.”

Jon held up two fingers. “Two younger brothers, Eric and Brandon. They used to blame things on me.”

* * * *

Dark eyes watched as Geoff Richards lounged in the front row of the arena with the rest of the band. The bustling roadies kept the band waiting to rehearse. With any witnesses below stage level, it was easy to slip behind the wall of amplifiers with a screwdriver and wire cutters. The workers were on the far side of the stage, the left wing unattended.

Great care was taken to remove the cover from one of the amplifiers. Deft fingers located the ground wire, and pulled it loose. A snip, twist on a small length of additional wire so that it would reach the four hundred forty volt power source. Just a bit of creative rewiring before he tucked his handy work in, and replaced the cover. Drop the screwdriver and cutters between the seams of the stage floor. Done.

He checked once more on the location of the band before he slipped backstage.

* * * *

Jon flipped on his amp while he watched the roadies in their final set up frenzy. Everything was nearly ready. The

band stood around and waited for the roadies to clear the stage so they could have practice time. Jon wanted to try something that he was working on.

“Geoff.” Jon called out from center stage. “Would you like to relax for a few more minutes?”

“Why?” Geoff was in no hurry to get up.

“I’d like to run through something to see how it sounds. Mind if I use your microphone?” Jon moved to the center microphone stand.

“Don’t drool in it.” Geoff made himself comfortable.

“That’s why I use a headset.” Ty stood at the edge of the stage, and threw the strap to his black Hamer bass over his head. “I don’t have to share.”

“You use the headset so you can hear me and harmonize,” Geoff corrected.

“Well, someone has to carry your voice when it gets a flat.” Ty gave his friend an impish grin. “Y’know, until you can pump it up again?”

“Shh.” Geoff huffed.

Jon rolled his eyes, and looked at the wireless that Geoff used. “I’d rather use a hardwire anyway.” He moved to his own stand, and called out across the stage. “Could one of you guys hook me up?” He stepped out of the way while plugs were checked to make sure they were connected. Jon kicked at the cord from his amp, and moved to the microphone stand.

“What are you doing?” Jordan walked across the stage with his Gibson.

“I want to hear what I sound like in Geoff’s place.” Jon expected some reaction from Geoff. “In case I have to take over his job some day.”

“No chance,” Geoff called out. He flung open his shirt to the sun as he slouched in the seat.

Jon laughed. “J.C., give me some back up.” Jon played the opening notes of “Teasin’” as Jordan fired through the complicated riff.

Geoff called out, “You’ll never get that one close to right.” He was well acquainted with the difficulty of the fast paced song.

As Jon stepped close to the microphone, Ty joined in to provide a strong foundation of bass.

*A thrill, a chill, against my will.
You make me want your body.
You dance and shake, yeah, grind, gyrate.
Oh, girl, you play so naughty.*

*Teasing, squeezing, ever pleasing.
Pull me to the floor.
You’ve got me wanting, craving something.
Show me what that body’s for.*

Jon leaned forward as he got into the fiery pace of one of ShadowsForge’s early hits. He glanced down to watch the complicated fingering, and touched his nose to the microphone.

Stars.

Jon saw stars as he felt the electric shock surge through him. He felt like he’d been hit in the face with a hammer, his nose and eyes stung from the jolt.

He jerked at the bite, and slammed his guitar strings against the microphone stand. In a blaze of sparks, the strings glowed fiery red before they simultaneously burned through. The sound system in the arena shrieked with a *BBURRRRRPPPPPP*, and deafened everyone before the

PPPPLLLLIIIIINNNGGGG of the six strings exploding from the smoking guitar body ended the performance.

“AAAUUUUUGGGHHHH.”

Jon screamed once the light show was over. He staggered back from the vicious microphone, not sure if he could stand, and thought it would be better to fall down. He jerked his hands from the guitar, and allowed the smoking carcass to hang free. The fingertips of his left hand bore burn marks from the hot strings and his face hurt like hell.

Yeah, falling down sounds real good. Jon sank to the stage.

The stage crew rushed from all around. They unplugged wires and checked over the equipment in a panic. Jordan swung his guitar onto his back as he knelt beside Jon.

“What the hell did you do?” Jordan grasped Jon by the shoulder to steady him.

“I got the crap shocked out of me. What did it look like I did?” Jon was dazed but angry. “That freakin’ hurt,” he added as he pressed his hands to the sides of his face.

“You should see your nose,” Jordan pointed out. “You’ve got a grid on it. Smells awful, too.”

Jon looked at his friend, confused.

“What?”

“It looks like you got hit in the face with a rolled up window screen.” Jordan held back a smile.

“Beautiful.” Jon reeled, and looked around. “I wonder if everyone will want one. Like when Ty streaks his hair. I can start a fashion fad, y’think?”

“Not with that smell.” Ty knelt beside Jon. “Burned flesh is out this season.”

“Damn,” Jon commented, void of emotion. Nigel made his way to the group on stage. Jon stared up at the road manager. “Suppose I can go lay down for a while?”

“Do you need medical help?” Nigel knelt beside the downed guitarist.

“No, but a nap would be good, I think.” Jon felt a little better. “My face hurts.”

“Get him up.” Nigel stood, and allowed Jordan and Ty to lift Jon to his feet. A guitar tech removed the smoldering guitar from around Jon’s body.

Geoff climbed to the stage once the sparks subsided. He stood silent, and watched until Jon was on his feet before he walked over to him.

“I’ve been singing that one for a couple of years but I never put that kind of spark into it.” Geoff smiled.

“Hey, it takes someone with talent to do what I did. You should really give it a try.” Jon gave him an uncertain smirk. “Lights you right up. I guarantee it.”

Ian helped to support the shaky blond as they walked off stage toward the dressing rooms.

“Are you going to be all right?” Ian settled Jon on a sofa. Jon lay down, and pulled a cushion under his throbbing head.

“Yeah. I just need a bit of a rest.” Jon closed his eyes. “In the U.S., that would have hurt half as much,” he mumbled.

Ian watched Jon until he slept before he took up his post outside of the dressing room door.

* * * *

“Here, Mr. Patton.” Pete pulled the cover from Jon’s amplifier.

Nigel and Gary squeezed through several shadows and stage crew that stood in the way. Pete pulled out a panel from inside of Jon’s amp, and pointed out the odd looking wiring.

“I don’t know wiring.” Nigel stroked his beard. “But that looks like shoddy work. Did you do that?”

Pete wanted to punch the road manager. What an insult.

“No, sir. We didn’t do that. That right there could have cooked our guitar player. Without the amp grounded, four hundred and forty volts just went through him. I don’t know when it was rigged but it had to be between Belfast and here. Otherwise, Jon would have gotten bit during the last show. Someone had access to the lorry or did it right here on the stage.”

Nigel looked around. “Anyone here that shouldn’t be?”

Gary sent Wes and Greg to look around. They disappeared back stage, only to reappear in front of the stage a few minutes later.

Wes held up a pair of wire cutters and a screwdriver. He called out, “These belong to someone up there?”

“Where were they?” Gary wanted to know.

“Under the stage. Right about where Jon’s amp is sitting.”

“They won’t tell us anything now, Wes. You got your bloody hands all over them.” Gary shouted, and shook his head. “Didn’t anyone ever tell you about fingerprints?”

“Sorry, Boss.” Wes wiped the tools with his jacket.

“Never mind.” Gary jumped from the stage, snatching the tools.

* * * *

Brian stared out at the gray morning sky. ShadowsForge would be on the move in a few hours. He had to wake her; get her out of his room before anyone found out. All of their sneaking about had brought them to this. His bed was the last place she belonged. He’d had no right to make love to her all night. All he could do now was watch her sleep, wonder why he let her stay, but not regret that he had. He felt a burning passion every time he looked at her. She transformed him into that long ago person that he used to be—the person he never wanted to be again. He knew he could never resist her. She

was exactly what he wanted—and the last thing that he needed. With a sigh born of foreboding, resignation, and satisfaction, he slipped under the sheet beside her, and wrapped her in his arms.

Chapter 8

Newcastle

“We’ll be doing the second show here tomorrow night.” Geoff looked around the room as he talked to the entertainment editor for the local paper. He wondered what happened to Valerie. She hadn’t made her usual appearance after the concert. “We will be heading out for Birmingham after tomorrow’s show. After that, I believe we are making another pass through the U.S.”

Nigel entered the suite, and handed Geoff an envelope.

“Excuse me,” Geoff told the editor. The tall thin man wandered off toward Jon Wiles on the far side of the room as Geoff stepped to the side. In the envelope, he found a folded slip of paper and a key. He read the note.

He grinned before he looked around to see if anyone was watching. No one seemed to pay attention. He casually moved toward the door. He was lucky enough to slip out unnoticed, and walked briskly toward the elevator. The anticipation of getting to the auditorium consumed him. The note was an invitation to meet Valerie on the stage—alone. The key was to the auditorium.

He was intrigued, impatient to get to the ground floor to make his way to the auditorium, and hoped no one else would

be around at this late hour. Luckily, he'd slipped out without Wes, and Geoff wondered briefly where his shadow was. Geoff looked at his watch as he crossed the deserted lobby. Valerie had kept him at arm's length since the interview and laying down the challenge. Maybe she finally realized what a great opportunity she let slip by. He had made his gratuitous show at the meet and greet so he felt free to slip out, and rush to the stage.

Geoff unlocked the door, and slipped the key into his pocket as he found the auditorium quiet and dark. He entered by the side stage entrance, and slowed the door to keep it from slamming, drawing any attention. He saw, in a single pool of light, a packing quilt spread in the middle of the stage. It was placed between Jon and Jordan's microphone stands and between the drum kit and his microphone stand. There was a basket sitting beside a bottle of wine and two glasses. From his vantage point, it looked like a picnic. Valerie laid on her side with her back to him. Geoff grinned at her creativeness, and hoped that at last he would be receiving what he'd been trying to earn for the past few weeks. In the middle of the stage, too. That'll be a first.

"Hey, baby," Geoff said as he strode onto the stage from the wing. When Valerie didn't respond, Geoff decided to slip up behind her. He crouched a bit, and took light steps as he came closer. At the edge of the blanket, he knelt and leaned forward to stroke his fingers down her back. She flinched but said nothing. "Val, it's about time you changed your mind." He pulled on her shoulder.

Valerie rolled on her back, and looked up at Geoff with fearful eyes and a piece of cloth tape over her mouth. Her hands were taped together at the wrists as well.

“What the hell...” Geoff peeled the tape carefully from her mouth before he felt cold metal press through his hair, point blank to the back of his neck.

“Which one are you?” came the question in a coarse British accent.

“Geoff Richards. Who wants to know?” Geoff straightened on his knees.

“Not one of your biggest fans. How many women have you defiled?” The words dripped with bitterness.

“More than you’d know what to do with. You couldn’t even take care of one, I’d say—if you’re who I think you are.” Geoff kept his eyes on Valerie. She watched the person who stood behind Geoff with calm anger in her eyes. *Tough lady.*

“Is that what you think?”

“That’s what I know. If you’d taken care of her, one of us wouldn’t have had to. Kind of speaks for itself, doesn’t it?”

Geoff noticed that Valerie shut her eyes tightly before he felt a stunning blow applied to the back of his neck. He fell forward into a dazed darkness.

* * * *

Geoff felt the cold wetness of wine as it poured over his face. He shook his head, and wiped his face with his hands. Before he could open his burning eyes, he was pulled to his feet and shoved toward the wing. He was prodded up the narrow stairs with Valerie ahead of him, up to a rickety catwalk thirty-five feet above the stage floor. He stumbled and fell to his knees on the wooden planks. He rubbed the knot at the back of his neck as he pulled himself up by the railing, and tried to clear his foggy mind. He turned to face his attacker.

“Kind of the unfriendly type, aren’t you.” Geoff tried, in the dim light, to focus his eyes on the person before him. “Boy, are you ugly, mate.”

“It’s a mask, you idiot,” the man commented.

“Hmm.” Geoff blinked his eyes again to bring the man into focus. “Well, it’s an ugly mask.”

“Geoff.” Valerie touched his back. “You’re not making this any better.”

“He started it.” Geoff leaned against the railing as he turned to look at her, still a bit unsteady. A creaking sound warned Geoff that he shouldn’t trust his full weight on the rail. Valerie pulled him forward. The tape had been removed from her wrists, and left wide raw marks.

“Convenient, isn’t it?” the mask said. “You two shouldn’t have been drinking and fooling around up here. It seems that you both fell when you were leaning against the rail and it gave way.”

“Ah, crap. Is that the best you could come up with, Slick?” Geoff made no attempt to hide his annoyance. He looked at the floor far below. “I’m losing respect for you now. What happened to ‘a bomb or a bullet’? At least that showed some backbone. Oh, yeah. You tried both of those—and missed.”

“You know, you’re really pushing me, lad.” The man took a threatening step toward Geoff, and raised a piece of pipe.

“Yeah, and...” Geoff stood up to him, though his head was pounding. He realized that the man held a pipe. “You don’t even have a gun? Oh, geez. You really don’t know how to do this, do you?”

“If I had a gun, I might be tempted to shoot you.”

“Well, that didn’t work too well the last time you tried it, did it? Think you could have hit me from this range?”

Slick swung at Geoff with the pipe, and tried to knock him off balance. Geoff caught him by the wrist before the blow connected. The two men locked in a competition of strength and balance. Geoff found an opening to throw one

punch, landing it on Slick's chin. As Slick regained his balance, the pipe dropped, and echoed as it clattered to the stage floor.

"Hey, Slick, did you think I'd just jump for you?" Geoff taunted his foe as the masked assailant came at him again. He struggled to keep his balance. "I don't think you thought this through."

"I've thought about this a long time. You're the one that was with my Janet. You're going over; don't worry about that, Richards." Slick's voice was strained, the heavy accent suddenly missing.

"I don't think so. Might mess up my stage down there and I like the way it's set up for the show tomorrow. Besides, I've got a date with this lady. I can't disappoint her, y'know?"

"You'll be making a hit on the stage in a minute, but you won't be around for tomorrow's performance," Slick snapped.

Geoff backed up, and bumped into Valerie. "Get back, girl," he called over his shoulder. He gained some ground against Slick once more.

The two men shoved each other back and forth as each tried to push the other off the catwalk. Geoff tried to sweep Slick's feet from under him. Slick lunged toward Geoff. When he did, Geoff jerked the man toward him. He side-stepped as he spun Slick around. By Slick's cry, the move caught him completely by surprise. Geoff caught a glimpse of Valerie, now behind Slick.

"VAL. Look out," Geoff shouted, as Slick stumbled backward toward her.

In her attempt to get out of the way, Valerie lost her footing. She fell on her back with one leg slipping over the side. She put her hands out to repel the falling attacker, and pushed him to the side. She screamed as the man fell across her body and slid over the edge. She screamed again when he

grabbed hold of her leg. She rolled on her stomach as his weight pulled her over the edge. She grabbed the plank, and held on for her life.

Geoff dived to grab her. He caught her arms as she lost her hold. The weight of both people was almost too much for him as he held on with determined desperation. His hands slid down Valerie's arms to her wrists.

"Kick him," Geoff shouted. His hands, though tacky from the wine, began to slip. Valerie looked up at him as she obeyed his instruction. Kicking Slick's hands with her free foot several times, her shoe came off, and broke his hold. She heard the curses as the man fell away. She closed her eyes.

Geoff watched Slick fall, and expected to hear a sickening thud. The sound came more muffled than he expected.

"Geoff." Valerie was desperate. "Help me."

"I've got you. Don't panic, Val." Geoff tightened his grip on her, and wondered how he was going to get her up to safety while he laid in such an awkward position on his stomach. "I'll get you down."

"You can do this, Geoff. You're strong. I know you can pull me up." She inhaled deeply. Her fear made her pale as it consumed her. "I'm scared." Her voice became deep and throaty, her eyes large as she looked up at him.

"I know." Geoff answered in a soothing tone. His palms began to sweat, further weakening his grip. "Shh. Don't struggle. Hang on. I'll get you down."

"Hurry." Her request came in a halted voice that threatened to escalate to a scream.

"Shh. Listen to me. Look at me. Look at me." He locked his eyes with hers. "Don't look anywhere else. Look at me and listen to my voice. Trust me, all right?"

"All right."

"Swing."

“What? What are you going to do?”

“I said swing. Swing your legs to make yourself swing. Trust me, Valerie. Do you trust me?” Geoff became desperate. His grip wouldn’t hold for much longer.

“I trust you.” Her voice was low and breathless. Her body began to sway. “Pull me up.”

Geoff could feel her tremble as she moved her legs, slowly at first but getting her body to swing. As soon as she swung forward with some momentum, Geoff let go. He watched her fall flat on her back with her eyes riveted to his as the ear-shattering scream escaped her lips, and echoed through the auditorium. Geoff drew a sharp breath and narrowed his eyes.

Geoff let go of the breath he was holding when Valerie landed in the packing quilt, held by Jordan, Jon, Greg and Ian. They lowered her safely to the floor. Jon helped her to her feet. Geoff was afraid to tell her what he planned, not wanting her to panic and land wrong. He hated to let her go like that. He had seen the four below stretch out the quilt beneath her. They came up the steps from the dark auditorium in time to see Slick hit the floor. Slick missed the microphone stands, and impaled himself instead on the bottle through his back. Geoff hoped that the splatter around the body was wine.

Geoff ran across the catwalk, and leapt down the steps three and four at a time. By the time he reached the stage, Jon held Valerie steady. She stared at the floor, her fingers white-knuckled as she clenched Jon’s arms. Ian and Greg used the blanket to cover the shattered body that lay behind her.

Geoff ran to her, and tried to determine if she were injured. He took Jon’s place, held her by the shoulders, and waited for her to acknowledge him. Jon stepped away as he rubbed the circulation back into his biceps.

“Val. Are you all right, girl?” Geoff was breathless, more from the situation than from running down the stairs. “Val?”

She raised her eyes, and looked at him, confused. She straightened, threw back her shoulders and pushed his hands away.

Geoff smiled as a glint of recognition crossed her face. She gave him a crooked smile. Quietly, she raised her hand and slapped Geoff across the face. Hard. Twice. Geoff shook his head as she threw her arms around his neck, and hugged him. She melted into tears as she collapsed against him. He scooped her up in his arms.

“Well, okay, then. I deserved that.” Geoff held her trembling body tight to his.

The side door opened, and Ty along with Brian ran in with more shadows and hotel security in their wake.

“Jon. Did you find him?” Ty shouted before they reached the stage.

“Got ’em both. Wouldn’t you know he’d be fooling around with Valerie while we’re worried about him.” Jon crossed his arms over his chest in mock annoyance.

Ty stopped short when he saw them. Geoff rocked Valerie in his arms. He had his head down, and murmured to her.

“Whoa. Did we interrupt something here?” Ty made his way across the stage.

“Yeah,” Jordan said. “A first class diving act.” He jerked his thumb at the covered body on the stage floor. “That one missed the net. He hit the wine bottle, though. Messy.”

“Who’s that?” Brian walked over to the body.

Jon grimaced. “You don’t want to look under there. Gross.”

Brian shrugged. “I’ve seen it before.” He lifted the blanket and reached down to pull the mask off. “Damn.” He dropped the mask on the body, then the blanket.

“What?” Ty asked.

“Wes won’t be picking up his last paycheck,” Brian concluded.

“Wes?” Geoff acknowledged for the first time that he and Valerie weren’t alone.

“Did you know it was him?” Brian kicked a lifeless foot.

“No, but you can bet your ass I’m going to have a talk with Gary about his screening process. That was the jerk that’s been trying to kill us.”

“We know,” Ty said. “Gary found a detonator on the Shadow’s bus. Looks like the one used to set off the suitcase. You set off the bomb when you, Jon, and Jordan crashed into Wes playing football. It probably fell out of his pocket on the way here. That’s why we were looking for you. Gary told Nigel. Then we noticed the three of you missing.”

Geoff walked past the others, and headed for the side doors with Valerie securely in his arms. “Send a doctor to my room for Val,” he spoke over his shoulder as he pushed his way through the exit.

* * * *

Geoff held Valerie as the elevator carried them to the band floor. He could feel her body shudder now and then with a sob that prompted him to hug her tighter each time.

I almost missed her. She could have died.

He looked down at her as the doors opened. He walked down the silent hallway to his suite, and hoped that someone would be there. He kicked the door, not willing to put Valerie down.

Nigel jerked open the door, a stern look on his face. “Geoff, where the bloody hell did you go?”

“We thought we’d have a trapeze lesson. Get my door, would you?” Geoff spoke with an unnatural calm in his voice.

“A what?” Nigel rushed ahead of the singer to open the door.

“Trapeze lessons. Ask the Shadows,” he suggested, and stepped into his room. He turned. “When the doctor gets here, let him in.” He left the bewildered manager with a puzzled expression as he pushed the door closed.

“Hey. What’d you do to Valerie?”

Geoff left the question unanswered as he placed Valerie on the bed. He pulled off her remaining shoe, and dropped it to the floor. He knelt beside the bed, gently brushing her hair from her face.

“Val, are you with me?” He spoke in a soft voice.

“You dropped me,” she whispered, teary eyes questioning his actions.

“I wouldn’t have done it if I thought you’d be hurt. The lads were there to catch you.” He wiped the tears from her cheeks, pulled the comforter over her, and tucked her in as her body trembled. He didn’t know if it was cold, fear or maybe shock. Either way, the warmth couldn’t hurt. “Did he hurt you?”

“Only with the tape.” She held her hands out for him to see. Geoff took her hands in his, and kissed each wrist with care. The tape had been ripped off, and left wide areas of raw skin. “Does my face look the same way?”

“No, I took that one off, remember? Your face is beautiful,” he added with sincerity.

“Do you really think so, or are you being your charming self?” She gave him a hint of a smile.

“I really know that. I’m a connoisseur of beauty and I know what I’m talking about. Trust me.” He placed a light kiss on her lips.

“I may be emotional right now, but I know better than to trust you, Geoff Richards. That’s what you said before you

dropped me.” She wrapped her arms around his neck, and pulled him down.

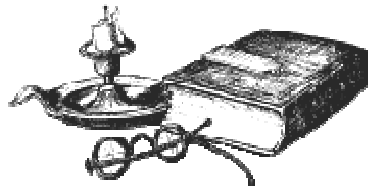
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Jena' Galifany, mother of three, grandmother of one, has been writing for over thirty years, but has only recently begun to seek publication of her works. Jena' has written several novel length books, short stories, online articles, children's stories, fan-fiction and poetry.

Jena' is currently working on completing the Shadows-Forge series based on fictional British rock band, Shadows-Forge. These five British Bad Boys travel in the Romance/Adventure genre. Jena' hopes you enjoy traveling with the boys as much as she does. She also appreciates your comments:

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