

CHAPTER ONE

Catherine West stared out of her kitchen window,
over her kitchen garden and the summer-gold pad-
docks beyond towards Mount Macedon, with a
tinge of longing in her deep blue eyes. She was pre-
paring a luncheon for four—two guests—but the
clear skies and heat of this Victorian summer day,
the intoxicating scent of grass and bush, a tantalis-
ing drift of woodsmoke through the air, were calling
to her very soul, and she wondered what Tom would
say if she went in to him—breaking all the rules—
and told him to cancel the luncheon and take her
for a picnic to Hanging Rock.

She closed her eyes and remembered the time,
two years ago, when he had done just that. She had
been a very new bride, still hardly able to believe
that Tom West, acclaimed film director and screen
writer with a well-deserved reputation for arro-
gance, a terrible temper or a kind of crushing in-
difference, which was worse, and a reputation with
women that could be summed up in one word—
dangerous, had married her. Not only that,
although that had been staggering enough and still
staggered her secretly, and nowadays sadly, but he
had brought her to this beautiful old stone home
with its steep roof and tall chimneys, with its acres
of garden, and Mount Macedon, which was re-
putedly the Hanging Rock of the legend and the

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book and film, *Picnic at Hanging Rock,* in the
background.

She'd been fascinated, she remembered, and sure
there would be sinister auras at the Rock. But on
a day just such as this, it had been peaceful and
placid with insects humming, birds singing—and
Tom had made love to her in the grass in a secluded
little dell, and the Rock had overlooked and given
no indication of disapproval.

She opened her eyes, turned away from the
window and grimaced at her curious fancies. There
was no way Mount Macedon could have expressed
its disapproval of their lovemaking by placing a—
a what?—on their marriage. A curse? No, that *was*being ridiculous. Besides, it had been so lovely the
way Tom had suggested it with a little glint in his
eyes, and laughed, but gently, as her eyes had
widened and she had blushed just to think of it,
then not laughed when, in a bid to show him she
wasn't quite the shy, inhibited girl he thought she
was, had started to unbutton her blouse. And she
remembered, as if it were happening to her again,
the feel of his fingers on hers, stilling them, and
the way he had taken her into his arms and kissed
her first, slowly and thoroughly, her lips, then her
neck and throat and lower, until she was dazed with
desire and not even sure where she was...

'Cat?'

Cathy blinked and refocused from her mind's eye
to the kitchen doorway and the tall figure of her
husband, who was staring at her with a faint frown
in his eyes.

He said her name again with a lift of an eyebrow
and moved towards her, adding, 'You looked as if

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you were in a trance—want to tell me where you
were?'

She blushed, a habit she'd not lost, and turned
hastily to the kitchen table and the salad she'd been
making. 'Nowhere. Just... thinking. '

Tom leant his broad shoulders against the wall
next to the table and watched her measure oil and
vinegar and a pinch of mustard into a cut-glass
container, cork it, then tilt it backwards and for-
wards to blend the contents. 'Your thoughts must
have been particularly wistful, then, ' he said at last.

'No, not particularly, ' she lied, and tried to smile
brightly.

'Come here, Cat, ' he said softly.

'Tom ' another faint flush of colour stained

her cheeks '—I'm running late. They'll be here soon
and I haven't changed or '

'Because you've been daydreaming about some-
thing you don't want to share with me?' he queried
lazily.

'I'm running late, that's all '

'Then I'll come to you, ' he murmured, and before
she could side-step he straightened and slid his arms
about her waist.

'Tom '

'I'm not proposing to make love to you, ' he said
gravely but with a glint of amusement in his eyes,
those hazel eyes that could see through to her soul—
sometimes, she thought rebelliously, not always! 'I
just thought I might—embrace you. You look—
looked—as if you needed it, ' he added with a twist
of his lips.

Cathy winced, and he felt it and narrowed his
eyes as he stared down at her. Then he said in a

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**different, suddenly harder voice, 'What's wrong,
Cat? Tell me. '**

**'Nothing, ' she said briefly, then shut her lips
obstinately.**

**'You're being childish, Cathy, ' he warned im-
patiently, and drew her a little closer.**

**A phrase she'd heard often ran through Cathy's
mind—he always gets his own way, by fair means
or foul. And the context she'd heard it in most fre-
quently applied to Tom West, her husband, her tall,
loose-limbed husband with his unhandsome face,
his ruffled dark-fair hair, his devil-may-care aura—
a combination that attracted women in their
droves—his thirty-eight years of age and ex-
perience as opposed to her twenty-two, his ability
to arouse her physically so that there was always,
but more particularly when they were as close as
this, the desire to simply revel in the fact that he
still wanted her, even though that was the only way
he wanted her...**

**The phone rang. There was no extension in the
kitchen, but it could be heard clearly down the tiled
passageway from his study. Tom lifted his head,
then looked down at her and said with soft
mockery, 'Saved by the bell—but you're going to
have to tell me some time. ' He released her and
touched her mouth lightly with his fingers. 'Don't
run too late, will you? I'm starving!'**

**Cathy stared at the kitchen door he'd closed behind
him, a supremely symbolic gesture, she thought
angrily, and gritted her teeth. Then she said, 'All
right, I will tell you, Tom West—at least, I'll tell
myself. I don't know why you married me. You**

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**shut me out of every part of your life except your
bed and your home. You're quite happy for me to
spend my whole life here, not that I don't love it,
but I might as well be the housekeeper you come
home to sleep with. You share none of your dreams
or aspirations with me, nothing, except the daily
little things that happen here. You make me feel
illiterate and immature and good for one thing
only—and I'm not even sure if I'm good enough
at that to ensure I'm the only one you sleep with.
I mean, when you're away so often, do you... do
you... ?'**

**She was still staring at the door with this awful
question mark in her mind when she heard a car
drive up the sweeping gravelled driveway, and she
muttered, *'Damn.* They're here!'**

**Lunch, despite her rush, was a success, and their
guests were content to linger at the table for their
coffee in the elegant, panelled dining-room with its
bow window overlooking the rose garden.**

**Cathy had set the table with a cream damask
cloth and napkins, silver and cut glass and a low
bowl of full, scented roses. Now she cleared most
of it away and produced the fine, paper-thin
Wedgwood coffee service, while Tom poured port
for the men, and the conversation turned in earnest
to the reason for this lunch.**

**Their two guests were both heavily involved in
the latest film Tom was to direct. Duncan Haines,
head of the production company, was a gentle giant
of a man with sleepy eyes and in his middle forties.
Yet he both was wise and had an acute financial
sense as well as an artistic judgement that Tom re-**

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spected—they'd been friends for years and always
worked closely. In stark contrast, Peter Partridge
was younger, dark, thin and intense. He had written
the best-seller the film was to be based on, and he
and Tom were collaborating on the screenplay—
not an easy liaison at times, Cathy had guessed,
and looking at the zeal in Peter Partridge's dark
eyes she could understand why.

She listened to the conversation with interest as
she moved about the room.

'Chloe, ' Peter was saying. 'We still have to find
a Chloe. I'm happy with all the other casting—I'm
ecstatic about Bronwen Bishop playing the lead
female role, I think she has the vitality, the star
quality, and she's a very accomplished ac-
tress '

'She can also be one tough lady, Pete, ' Duncan
said. 'Don't be fooled by those large dark eyes and
willowy figure. '

Pete paused to give this some thought, then
shrugged as if it didn't really enter into his pri-
orities and continued intently, 'But I'm beginning
to think it will have to be an unknown who does
Chloe—no one else I've seen has the... the right
blend of mystery and beauty, vulnerability, that
fragile, essentially *mysterious* appeal, if you know
what I mean. A woman or a girl who holds the eye
on just a glimpse and you can't forget her. '

Cathy saw Tom and Duncan exchange glances as
Peter spooned sugar into his coffee and stirred it
vigorously.

'We'll find you your Chloe, Pete, ' Duncan said
soothingly and with the long practice of someone
used to dealing with the artistic temperament.

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' She's really an important part of the plot,
Duncan, ' Peter said urgently. 'I know—I know it
might not seem so. ' He gestured. 'It's not a big part,
but it sort of embodies the spirit of it—this girl
who keeps cropping up in Robert's life but he can't
get his hands on her. This girl who's at different
times joyful, vulnerable, sensual, wistful—the effect
she has on him is a pivotal part of the plot. '

'We understand that, Pete, ' Tom said easily, and
added with his eyes on the window, 'You still there,
Cathy? Because your best friend is at the window. '

Cathy was standing at the sideboard putting away
silverware, and she glanced over her shoulder, then
had to smile ruefully. 'I don't know about my best
friend, but a most persistent one. '

'Let him in—he's probably hungry. '

'You make him sound like a dog!' Cathy said
indignantly as she crossed to the window.

'He follows you around like one sometimes-
well, William, ' he said to the child Cathy helped
climb over the low windowsill. 'Come and be in-
troduced. Gentlemen, this is William Casey, who
lives with his grandparents next door—and spends
a lot of time eluding them. Do sit down, William.
I'm sure there's some lunch left for you. I can't
imagine why we didn't invite you in the first place. '

'Thanks, Mr West, ' William, who was seven, thin
but unabashable, replied, and sat down with
alacrity. 'I've had my lunch and I've got clean
hands—see?' He held them up palm out.

'Excellent, ' observed Tom. 'We're making pro-
gress, but if you've had your lunch... ?'

'No dessert, ' William said succinctly. 'Gran
doesn't believe in 'em, so all she gives me is an apple

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or something. But Cathy makes the most 'ston-
ishing desserts!'

'Cathy does indeed, ' Duncan agreed gravely. 'In
fact Cathy cooks like an angel—thanks for that ex-
cellent lunch, my dear, ' he said, laying a hand on
Cathy's arm as she placed a bowl of trifle and ice-
cream in front of William, 'but come and sit down
and talk to us. After all that effort you deserve to
relax. Let Tom do the dishes, ' he added with a mis-
chievous twinkle in his eye.

'I '

'Sit down, Cathy, ' said Tom with a wry look.
'Otherwise I'll acquire the reputation of wife-driver
as well as everything else. Would you like a glass
of port—I didn't think to offer you one?'

'No, thanks. ' She pulled out a chair and sat down
next to William and said seriously to him, 'This is
a special occasion, William. Your grandmother is
right—too many desserts aren't good for you. '

'So we're not corrupting you, William, just—in-
dulging you. '

Duncan and Peter grinned, but Cathy looked at
her husband reproachfully. 'I don't suppose he
understands half of what you say to him, Tom—
which is just as well. '

'Is it?' For some reason Tom West's hazel eyes
lingered on her, on her long, fair, curly hair that
was gathered into the nape of her neck today, her
darker eyebrows and blue, blue eyes—so blue, the
whites of them were startling, her wide, generous
mouth, the cool, sleeveless blue and white print
dress with its revered neckline and belted waist that
she'd changed into so hurriedly, the smooth golden
sweep of her arms and throat. Then he grimaced

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as if at some private thought and said, 'Want to
bet? William, at four o'clock this afternoon, in the
interests of fitness, I should be prepared to have a
short bout of that ancient and barbaric ritual that
originated at a no doubt equally barbaric public
school, with you. How does that affect you?'

'Oh, boy!' William said joyously. 'I was going
to ask you if you'd kick my rugby ball around with
me till I realised you had visitors. '

Everyone laughed, including Cathy, although she
did say to Tom's I-told-you-so expression, 'That
was a safe bet. You do it nearly every afternoon
with him. '

'You two need kids of your own, by the sound
of it, ' said Duncan, still grinning. 'What's stopping
you?'

Cathy stilled and her smile faded as she stared
into her husband's eyes, then looked away and
heard him say after a little pause that was just be-
coming awkward, 'Oh, there's plenty of time for
that, Duncan. '

It was Peter Partridge who created the diversion.
He had been staring at Cathy for a couple of
minutes, but now he made a convulsive movement,
knocked his coffee-cup over but didn't even notice,
stood up with his mouth open, then said in a
strangled voice, 'That's it. How blind! Chloe!'

It didn't immediately occur to Cathy that he was
talking to her as she hurriedly rose and reached for
a napkin to blot up the coffee. It still didn't
altogether sink in what was going on as Tom said
in a hard, decisive voice, 'No. '

'But... but, ' Peter had trouble getting the words
out, so great was his emotion, 'she's perfect! She's

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everything I was trying to describe to you. Didn't
you see that... vulnerable, wistful '

'Pete, ' Duncan said warningly, and Cathy
stopped mopping coffee at last, and straightened
and looked in turn at the three men, then back at
Tom.

'Does... he mean me?'

'None other. ' His tone was clipped and curt.

'But '

'And you do have some acting experience, don't
you, Cathy?' Pete continued obliviously, his dark
eyes starting to shine. 'Isn't that how you two met?
Tom!' He switched his luminous gaze to his host.

'Sit down, Pete, ' drawled Tom, changing moods
adroitly—outwardly at least. 'Yes, we did. In the
classic director-actress manner for which I have
yet to—forgive myself, ' he said barely audibly
but causing Cathy to colour. 'That was in a stage
play, though. Cathy's never worked before a
camera '

'I have. ' All eyes switched to her, including
William's.

'Well, to be precise, you've done a television
commercial. '

'That's working in front of a camera, ' she said
with a little shrug.

'Selling shampoo is a little different from selling
Peter Partridge's mystery woman, ' Tom said drily,
then, with a suddenly dangerous glitter in his hazel
eyes, 'And before this goes any further—husband
and wife on the same set rarely work. '

'It wouldn't worry me, ' Cathy said quietly. 'Be-
sides, I think I need a bit of a challenge. But I'll
leave you to discuss it. Come, William. *You* can

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help me with the dishes—that's the penalty for il-
licit desserts!'

A couple of hours later, Cathy watched Duncan
and Pete leave from her bedroom window. She
guessed they didn't realise she was back from the
walk she'd taken William on after they'd done the
dishes—either that, or there was some embar-
rassment about facing her again.

She sighed and fingered the long blue velvet cur-
tains. It was a blue room, the main bedroom,
almost a Victorian bedroom with its heavy cur-
tains, beautiful mahogany furniture, blue and ivory
wallpaper, velvet-covered, buttoned mahogany
chairs in front of the fireplace and its great four-
poster bed. It might have been made for *you,* Tom
had said on their first night in it. It matches your
eyes...

Her eyes, she thought, had been what had in-
trigued him about her from the beginning—that
classic, director-actress encounter which he still
found it hard to forgive himself for... What had
he meant? The cliched way it had happened or that
he'd allowed it to happen at all? She remembered
it so well...

A nineteen-year-old Cathy Kerris in her first year
at NIDA, having won a place in the acting school
for, oddly, a flair for comedy. Tom West, ac-
claimed director doing a teaching seminar in a most
practical way—directing a play put on by the
students, who were, almost without exception, quite
bowled over by the experience—and the possibility
of being 'noticed' by the great man. A love scene,
during which Cathy was to be passionately kissed

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by the leading man and was expected to kiss him
back with equal passion. One problem—Cathy
Kerris, despite her looks, despite her fledgling
talent, had apparently been miscast.

'Look ' Tom West had stridden down the

stage towards them, '—that was about as effective
as two frozen cod kissing each other! Haven't you
ever kissed or been kissed?' he demanded, his hazel
eyes running over her flushed, embarrassed face,
her figure, and returning to her face with an acute
degree of scepticism in them.

'Not... actually, ' she mumbled, and cringed in-
wardly as everyone laughed.

'I find that hard to believe, ' he drawled. 'Your
eyes alone are—where have they kept you since you
left school?'

She was unable to answer, only able to stare at
him like a mesmerised rabbit until he made an im-
patient gesture and said drily, 'Well, in the interests
of your career, perhaps you'd better acquire some
experience to call upon. This, ' he added with a sat-
irical twist of his lips, 'is how it's done. '

It was a kiss that would go down in NIDA's
history, Cathy suspected. It certainly held the whole
cast and everyone else who was there spellbound.
What it did to her was also history, she'd thought
often, and just as often wondered how in her awful
embarrassment and confusion, it could have af-
fected her so. But there was no doubt that it did.
Some attraction to this tall, worldly man had ob-
viously sprung up in her as soon as she'd laid eyes
on him, she'd reasoned later, but because of so
many things, so many poles between them, she had
not even admitted it to herself. Yet, when it had

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ended, when his mouth had left hers and he had
held her away from him, not only had there been
stunned shock in her eyes but something else, an
awakening and an unlocking, an unspoken ad-
mission that the feel of his arms around her, the
feel of his hard body against hers, his sampling of
her lips, his teasing them apart, his fingers moving
up the back of her neck and into her hair—all of
it had been a revelation.

Which he had seen in her eyes, with a faint frown
growing in his own. To make matters worse, they
had all seen it, and people had begun moving awk-
wardly, looking away... That was when he'd ended
it—not only by releasing her but abruptly calling
an end to the rehearsal. Cathy came to life and
stumbled away, conscious of the fact that she
doubted she'd have the courage to face him again,
or NIDA.

Mercifully everyone left her alone as she gathered
her things and escaped with relief out into a dark,
wet winter's afternoon.

But as she almost ran along the pavement, a sleek
green foreign car pulled into the kerb and the driver
leant over and opened the door. It was Tom West.

'Cathy?' he said. 'Hop in. '

She had to bend down to see him properly, and
her tongue tied itself into knots as she sought to
speak.

He waited for a moment, then said wryly, 'All I
had in mind was buying you a drink—assuming you
drink—or a cup of coffee, and apologising. '

The bar he took her to was warm and dim and after
disposing of her coat and long scarf Cathy ac-

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cepted a brandy and dry, then with some help-
lessness looked across at him. His hair was damp
and ruffled and there were droplets of rain on his
tweed jacket; he'd stretched his long legs out
sideways to the small round table and he was
twisting his glass around absently, staring down at
it. And her heart started to beat oddly again—but
what was the use? she thought with some despair.
They were still poles apart, this was only an act of
kindness—there was no way this tall, experienced,
clever, sometimes satanic man could be interested
in her.

He lifted his eyes and disturbed the fixed way she
was looking at him, and raised an eyebrow rue-
fully. 'I wish I knew what was going on behind
those beautiful blue eyes now, young Cathy, and
for what it's worth I do apologise for putting you
on the spot like that. I hope you don't think I've

blighted your career or ' he paused '—made it

too difficult for you to go back. It'll all be for-
gotten by the next rehearsal, you know. '

To her surprise, Cathy heard herself say, 'But I
don't think I'm right for the part, so... '

He studied her rather intently for a moment.
'Perhaps not, ' he said slowly. 'Not yet, anyway.

How come ?' His hazel eyes narrowed. 'I mean,

for a budding actress you do seem... not quite the
type. '

'I'm much better at deadpan comedy than
kissing, ' she told him with a grimace, 'although I
did think I could broaden my scope, *should* broaden
it. Now, I don't know. I certainly couldn't... well... '
She stopped in confusion.

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'Kiss just anyone passionately?' he queried with
a glint of amusement. 'That could be due to a con-
flict of interest—a conflict with your upbringing,
perhaps. Tell me how you did grow up. '

Half an hour later, Cathy stopped self-
consciously and realised she'd told Tom West her
whole life story. How her parents had died when
she was four and her grandmother had brought her
up with the help of an exclusive convent boarding
school. Told him about her grandmother, who was
dead now too and had been an old-fashioned auto-
cratic lady in her sixties when she'd taken on her
orphaned granddaughter.

'I'm amazed you ever got as far as NIDA, ' he
had commented once. To which she had replied that
the Kerrises, her father and grandmother, had both
had a stubborn streak and she guessed she'd in-
herited a little of it.

'But why acting?'

She shrugged. 'Why does anyone ?'

'I know that, ' he said, 'but in some cases it's a
form of rebellion. In your case, against your ex-
tremely sheltered, even repressed childhood. '

Cathy considered, then she said seriously, 'You
don't think I've got any talent?'

Tom sat back with a grimace. 'I didn't say that.
It's only your first year, and you must have shown
someone something to have got in. As a matter of
fact, I have to admire your tenacity, and one cer-
tainly needs to be tenacious for this profession. So, '
he put his head on one side and those clever hazel
eyes watched her curiously again, 'apart from
NIDA, what else do you do with your life?'

'Lots of things, ' Cathy said vaguely.

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'Do you live alone?'

'Yes. I inherited quite a bit of money, so I
can... afford to, ' she said with a trace of
awkwardness.

'Are you ever lonely?'

She looked at him, then away. 'Sometimes. But
you get used to it. And I *do* do lots of things. I go
to a cordon bleu cooking school, I belong to my
church's fund-raising committee and I have friends.
You don't have to feel sorry for me, ' she said with
sudden dignity.

'No, ' he said, but thoughtfully. And not long
afterwards, he drove her home. But on the way, he
said to her, 'I hope I'm forgiven, and would you
object to changing roles in the play?'

She tensed.

'Cathy, ' he said quietly, 'believe me, I can do it
without any loss of face for you—further loss of
face, ' he added with an oddly grim twist to his lips.
'That way—well, it will be better for everyone, but
especially you. '

'AH right. '

He was as good as his word. He achieved the re-
casting with the minimum of fuss, and although it
was a smaller role, Cathy was undoubtedly happier
playing an old woman rather than a passionate one.
And such was Tom's mastery not only of the play
but of everyone in it that the subject of *the* kiss
was not alluded to, to her, although she doubted it
would ever be completely forgotten. But the fact
that Tom West didn't single her out for any special
attention, and treated her exactly as he had before,
helped.

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Treated her exactly as before at NIDA, that was;
but when they bumped into each other in a rush-
hour crowd a couple of weeks later and he all but
knocked her down so that she had difficulty getting
her breath back and the contents of her handbag
rolled all over the pavement, he insisted, with a
rueful glint in his eyes, that he should be allowed
to compensate. He took her to the same bar and
she had the same drink, and he exercised the same
knack so that she was able to talk freely to him and
even invite some confidences in return. Such as that
film directing was his great love and, he felt, his
forte, but he liked to keep his hand in with live
theatre from time to time.

Then Cathy got a cold and had to miss a re-
hearsal and at the next one was still a bit pale and
pulled-down-looking, and once again Tom caught
up with her just after she'd left the building and
told her she looked as if she needed a good meal
and that was what he proposed to do with her—
feed her.

He took her to a subduedly elegant restaurant
where the food was superb and the atmosphere calm
and restful. And remarked at the end of the meal,
with his hazel eyes resting on the faint colour in
her cheeks, that he'd been right and had she *no*living relative to look after her?

'Not even two ugly sisters like Cinderella, ' she
replied with a grin. 'But you don't have to worry
about me. '

'For some reason, I do, ' he said, rather drily, she
thought. But then he changed the subject, and
presently he drove her home.

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To her immense surprise, she actually got up the
courage to ask him to come up for coffee and, even
more to her surprise, he came. And it was obvious
her flat was something of a surprise to him—the
really good pieces of furniture she'd saved from her
grandmother's home, the paintings, rugs and por-
celain—and she sometimes wondered afterwards if
those things had led him to believe she was more
sophisticated than she actually was—led him to be-
lieve he was safe from an adolescent crush.

Whatever, after that night, their meetings were
no longer chance ones. Every now and then Tom
would ring her up and ask her out to dinner or to
a movie and dinner or to a concert, and he kept up
the practice after the play had come and gone and
his seminar at NIDA was finished. But it was four
months after their first kiss that he kissed her again,
and then somewhat reluctantly.

It happened one night when she had asked him
to dinner, when she knew she had fallen deeply in
love with him but was determined not to show it
because she was quite sure it would ruin their
friendship. But after what he told her was an ex-
cellent meal with his usual faintly wry smile, she
went to get the coffee and tripped, and he stood
up quickly to save her from falling and she ended
up in his arms.

For a moment, the world seemed to stand still
for her and her breathing altered as she stared up
into his eyes, and her lips parted—and all her de-
termination to hide things from him went for
nothing.

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And Tom stared back, then he closed his eyes
briefly and said softly, 'Oh, *hell. '* And gathered her
closer and kissed her.

But when it was over he put her away from him
and said abruptly, 'Cathy, we shouldn't do that
again. '

'No, ' she whispered. 'I know. '

'What do you know?' he queried with a sardonic
little twist to his lips.

Cathy said with an effort as she smoothed her
dress agitatedly, 'That... it's not the same for you. '

He raised an ironic eyebrow. 'Kissing you seems
to come fairly naturally to me, as a matter of fact. '

'Well, perhaps it's more that you enjoy teaching
me rather than doing it *because* it's me. Does that
make any sense?' she asked anxiously.

He grimaced. 'Yes—and no. I suppose most men
would enjoy teaching you, but I'm not so sure we
can separate the inner you from the outer you—
does that make any sense?'

Her lips parted and, unbeknown to her, a
glimmer of hope lit the deep blue of her eyes.

But he saw it and he said roughly, 'Cathy, I think
it's best if you just forget about me. I'm not the
type of man for a girl like you; the kind of ar-
rangement I usually have with women... is not for
you. '

She turned away. 'No... I always knew that.
That's why I didn't want this to happen, you see,
and it wouldn't have if I'd watched where I was
going. ' She made a small gesture with her hands.
'You can go now—I mean, I understand, I really
do. '

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He put his hands on her shoulders and turned
her back and said something under his breath, then,
'I'm *sorry. '*

Cathy lifted suddenly calm eyes to his. 'What for?
It wasn't your fault. '

'Oh, yes, it was, ' he said grimly. 'I should never
have... ' He broke off and swore, then he said, 'Can
you really understand that it's best if I do go?'

She nodded, and he stared down at the pale oval
of her face, the deep blue eyes, her long loose cloud
of fair hair, and he said with a sigh, 'Goodbye,
Cathy Kerris. Look after yourself—promise me
you'll do that?'

'Yes. '

But two weeks later he was back. He simply turned
up unannounced, causing her to gasp and then go
pale as she opened the door and saw who it was,
and be struck speechless.

'Cathy?' he said, and added with an oddly self-
directed note of mockery, 'Will you marry me,
Cathy?'

'I don't understand, ' she said later, but by then Tom
was sitting on her settee with her in his arms.

'It's quite simple. ' He smoothed the Peter Pan
collar of the blouse she wore with jeans. 'I couldn't

get you out of mind. I couldn't ' his lips twisted,

'—concentrate. Nothing seemed to have much
purpose for me—quite simple, ' he repeated, and
above her head grimaced.

'But do you really want to marry me? That's what
I don't understand. ' Cathy looked up gravely into
his eyes.

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'I do really want to marry you—for one thing, I
don't want anyone else to be able to teach you any-
thing. I want you, Cathy. ' And for once his hazel
gaze showed no amusement or mockery, no com-
passion or irony. 'And I can't envisage not wanting
you. '

'But I *might* be a terrible disappointment to
you—I have no experience, you see. ' She bit her
lip.

'Cathy, how have you felt these last couple of
weeks?' he asked abruptly.

She stared up at him, then shivered suddenly and
buried her face in his shoulder, recalling the lone-
liness and the sense of sorrow that not even the
fillip of getting a shampoo commercial had been
able to pierce.

'So you see, ' he said, cupping her cheek, 'we're

in the same boat. As for experience ' his fingers

roamed behind her ear and there was a slightly wry
glint in his eyes as he continued '—you seem to be
very much at home here, in my arms, so... '

Cathy raised her head with a hectic little flush
burning in her cheeks and a stricken look in her
blue eyes which caused him to smile faintly down
at her. And to say, 'Believe me, that's a good sign.
I don't think your inexperience is going to be a
problem at all. '

It hadn't.

Not the way Tom had handled it. And handled
her body—but only after he'd married her, which
he'd done quite quickly—gently and with care, so
that it had flowered for him and her love for him
had grown, and she'd thought she was even learning

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to match him, to develop a sensual style of her own
that not only accepted his lovemaking but added
to it.

So where did it all go wrong? Cathy West asked
herself that beautiful summer's day at Mount
Macedon, standing at her bedroom window. Should
I have insisted on staying on at NIDA? Or accepted
the couple of commercials I was offered after the
shampoo one? But I knew he wasn't keen on that,
and it wasn't really practical for him to have a wife
studying to be an actress—or studying anything
away from home, for that matter. Nor did I really
think twice about giving it up—it was as if I'd come
home at last. Should I have given a lot more thought
to *why* he wanted to marry me, though? Was it,
talking of being practical—was it a practical de-
cision for him—to take a wife?

The door clicked open and Tom stood in the
doorway for a moment. Then he closed it, but
didn't cross the room to her. Instead he leant his
shoulders back against it and let his hazel gaze rest
on her thoughtfully.

And finally, as her nerves began to tighten, he
said abruptly, 'Tell me why you want to do this,
Cat. '

CHAPTER TWO

To prove to you that I'm a woman, not just a body,
not just an orphan you took under your wing and
are fond of... The urge to say it was almost un-
controllable, but something held Cathy back—a
lack of confidence to open that subject with him,
a lack of articulacy to match his, the lack of courage
to risk his sometimes cruel remarks... Yet it's all
there inside me, she thought with despair.

'Cat?'

Tom's own private name for her that he never
used in public—did it mean he wanted to
understand?

'I thought you were happy with this life until you
started looking all... wistful and mysterious, ' he
said with an ironic twist to his lips.

No, he didn't. 'I am happy here—I love it, but
I did always want to be an actress. You love it here
too, but you combine a career with it. '

'Is this, ' he said after a moment, 'a calculated
backlash against the fact that I'm not in any great
hurry to start a family?'

Cathy turned away and laid her fingers on the
curtain again. 'No. I don't think it's a good idea
either—yet. '

'That's a sudden change of heart, ' he said softly.
Then, 'If you feel so strongly about it, let's go
ahead. '

*'No!'* The word was torn from her.

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*'Cathy* '

But she swung round with her eyes blazing.
'What's the use if you don't really want to?'

He'd started across the room, but he stopped
mid-stride, his eyes narrowed and his mouth set
grimly. 'So, ' he said curtly after a moment, 'I gather
the state of our marriage is not pleasing you at
present and you're aching to change it, but if you
think playing Chloe is going to improve it, I have
to disagree and we'll have to settle for the other
option so dear to your heart. Unfortunately, be-
cause we're due to start shooting in about three
weeks, that's all the time we'll have for a while to
have a really concentrated go at it. Should we start
now?' he queried with a glance to the bed, then a
mocking, deliberate glance at her that stripped her
naked and brought dull colour to her cheeks.

The silence lengthened as disbelief, fright and
anger all warred within her, then anger got the
upper hand. 'Well, I'll tell you why the state of our
marriage isn't all joy to me at the moment, Tom
West, ' Cathy said through her teeth, and was dimly
amazed at herself. 'You cut me out of most of your
life! Because I love it here, you're content to *leave*me here, and you fob me off with silly excuses about
it all being business, but you won't even discuss it
with me. I don't even know if it is all business! You
certainly have a lot of friends that I only get to
meet when they come here, but *they.*.. I mean, when
they do, they talk about this party or this "hap-
pening" or that, and *you* certainly don't look blank,
although I '

'In this business, Cathy, ' he broke in roughly,
'people give parties and "happenings" on the flim-

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siest of pretexts, and that's how most of the business
is conducted. It's all a part of the industry and it's
incredibly fake often—and something I thought
you'd be happier to live without, to be honest. '

'row don't '

'It's also part of my livelihood—and, ' his eyes
glinted with sudden menace, 'are you accusing me
of being unfaithful to you when you say you don't
even know if it is all business?'

The only sound to pierce this silence was the ir-
regular thud of a football approaching. All the
colour had drained from Cathy's face now as she
stared at Tom and her lips parted several times.

'I don't know, ' she said painfully at last. 'You're
away so much. It's as if you have two lives. I don't
know... '

'So—all women are the same. I thought you were
different, Cathy. I thought '

'I know what you thought, ' she whispered as
something inside her felt raw and bleeding. 'You
thought that if you married me you could have the
best of both words—a Cinderella who was grateful
enough and young enough and in love enough to

take care of this part of your life ' she gestured

'—without disturbing the rest of it. So you could
go on being your own man who basically despises
women on an intellectual level. '

'Is that what you really think?' Tom was paler
now too, but his eyes were glittering dangerously
and a nerve flickered in his jaw.

'I don't know what else to think, ' she said de-
spairingly. 'Why ' she licked her lips '—why

don't you want us to have a baby? Do you think
it will tie you to me more than you want to be tied?'

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'I'm irrevocably tied to you, Cathy, ' he said
harshly. 'Is it so inconceivable for you to stop and
think that, since once you have children you have
them for the rest of your life, therefore *this* part of
our life will be gone for ever?'

A tremor went through Cathy and her shoulders
slumped. 'Is it inconceivable for you to admit,
Tom, ' she said huskily, 'that you can't keep me a
perpetual Cinderella?'

They stared at each other until she said tone-
lessly, 'Our surrogate son is here. '

He swore and raked her from head to toe with
a hard hazel glance, and she trembled visibly, but
he said no more—the way he slammed the door as
he left said it for him.

He didn't come in again until about eight o'clock,
and Cathy guessed he'd walked to the village pub
after his exertions with William, which they some-
times did together—never alone. Cathy tried to eat
her own dinner, but it was oddly hard to swallow,
and she left a light meal of cold meat and salad out
for him and wandered out into the garden. It was
that lovely last-of-the-daylight time, and the garden
Tom's grandmother had planted and his mother
had tended was alive with perfume and the slight
dampness of approaching night.

When she went in at last, he was eating his meal
at the kitchen table.

'Oh, I didn't know you were back, ' she said ner-
vously, and stood just inside the kitchen doorway
rubbing her hands down the side of her dress.

He raised an eyebrow. 'Where were you?'

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'Just... in the garden. It's been a beautiful day.
I wonder how many more we'll get?'

'The longer you live in Victoria, the more you
realise it's useless to speculate. Have you eaten?'

'Yes. Would you like a cup of tea?'

'Thanks, ' he said briefly, and went on eating.

Cathy made the tea in a nerve-racking silence.
But when she put a cup and saucer down in front
of him, he said, 'Sit down, Cathy. I'm off tomorrow
morning about my "dubious" business, so we have
to have this out now. Has a burning desire to do
Chloe really awakened in you?'

She stirred her tea, then lifted her blue eyes to
his, and they were shadowed but suddenly ob-
stinate. 'Yes. But you don't think I'm capable of
it, do you?'

'That's a new twist, ' he said drily. 'I think '

he sat back and surveyed her expressionlessly
'—you could certainly look the part, you're eye-
catching enough for that, but good-looking girls
are a dime a dozen. Whether you can reproduce
what Pete has in mind in front of a camera remains
to be seen. But the other problem *will* be working
with me—not an easy task under the best of cir-
cumstances, harder when everyone will be attuned
to our slightest vibrations towards each other, and

ever harder ' he paused '—if you cherish the

doubts about me that you've obviously been nur-
turing for some time. '

Cathy stared at him. 'You're not going to forgive
me for that, are you, Tom?' she said at last.

He lifted his shoulders in what could have been
a denial or simply a gesture of indifference.

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Cathy swallowed and battled with some angry,
frustrated tears.

He watched her, then he said, 'Cathy, what we
had was rather unique. It was for me, anyway, and
to be honest again, the other side of my life, my
art, if that's not too grandiose a term for it, is
something I can't share with anyone—it's the way
I'm made. But what we did share, the lovely, quiet
times '

'What do you mean?' A spark of panic lit her
eyes. 'You're talking as if it's all over!'

Tom grimaced, 'It's about to enter a new era. '

'It doesn't have to be different, ' she said hoarsely.
'We can still have the quiet times—what have I
done?' she asked more of herself than him. And
she jumped up and knocked her chair over in her
agitation.

'Cathy '

But she ignored him and the fallen chair and ran
to their bedroom.

She was standing in the middle of it, looking
around wildly, when he came in and closed the
door. 'Go away!' she whispered fiercely. 'You won't
even *try* to understand. You're treating me as if we
lived in the Middle Ages, as if I were a possession
and had to be content just to be a wife—or more
particularly, someone to sleep with... '

'I sometimes wonder if that wasn't the way it was
meant to be, ' Tom said ironically. 'But at least you
could console yourself with the fact that you enjoy
sleeping with me, however badly I treat you in other
respects. ' His eyes mocked her. 'It also seems to me
it might be what you need right now. '

'I *don't* '

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'Oh, come on, Cathy, this is getting out of hand, '
he said impatiently, and reached for her. 'Is it
something to do with the time of the month?'

'No. Tom—-'

But he picked her up and carried her over to the
bed, where she only exhausted herself trying to fight
him and ended up lying with her hair spread out,
her dress rucked up to her thighs, her eyes bitter
and her mouth clamped shut, her wrists caught in
his hand.

'This is not only getting out of hand, it's ridicu-
lous, ' he said grimly, and released her wrists
abruptly. 'You're carrying on as if I'm about to
rape you!'

Cathy caught her breath and said huskily, 'But
you seem to think making love to me is the sole
solution, the cure for all my problems, yet you
won't even let it be productive—you know, I don't
think you understand women very well at all, Tom. '

He sat back and stared down at her in a way that
was angry, then became curiously cold and calcu-
lating, and at last he said coldly. 'All right. Teach
me, then, Cathy. Make your statement and let's put
it to the test—you've got the part. ' He shrugged
and with a cynical little glint in his eyes, let his gaze
rove the twisted grace of the way she was lying.

Cathy sat up and pulled her dress down defen-
sively. She said slowly as she rubbed her wrists, 'I
don't want the part without a screen test. I don't
want any patronage or the possibility of people
saying I only got it because of you. I want Duncan's
approval as well. '

Tom was silent and their gazes caught and
clashed.

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'What happens if the screen test is no good?' he
queried at last.

'I'll... find something else to do. '

'You're sure you wouldn't care to leave me
altogether?'

'That depends on you, ' she said barely audibly,
but her eyes were bravely stubborn again, although
her mouth trembled.

'I see, ' he said. 'That is laying down the gauntlet,
Cat, ' he added softly, but his eyes were entirely
enigmatic. 'Well, let's begin our new life. ' He stood
up and walked towards the door.

'Tom... '

He turned and lifted an eyebrow at her.

'Don't leave me like this. '

He studied her for a long time. The long fair
ruffled fall of curls, her pale but composed face,
the blue and white dress and the blue canvas shoes
she wore with rope wedge heels and narrow criss-
cross ties about her slender ankles. Then he said,
quite gently, 'Cathy, you object to me making love
to you *unproductively*—as you put it—you've re-
jected my offer to change that and you've chosen
the other option. Let's just leave it at that for the
time being. ' He walked out and closed the door
quietly.

Cathy stared at the door for a full minute. Then
she buried her face in the pillow and wept.

The next morning Tom was gone when she got
up and there was a brief note for her on the hall
table saying that he'd be back the following after-
noon. It was a strategically placed note—it was
propped on a copy of the screenplay of Peter

Partridge's best-seller.

**‘ ‘ ‘**

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'Well?' Tom looked at Duncan and Peter in turn
in the small darkened auditorium, but not at Cathy.

'I *told* you... ' Pete started to say, but it was
Duncan Tom was really concentrating on.

And it was Duncan who turned to Cathy and
said, 'My dear, he *was* right. You have a haunting
quality on screen I've rarely seen equalled. And the
contrast between your Chloe and Bronwen's much
more robust and earthy Portia will be quite stun-
ning. ' He paused and turned to Tom. 'But what do
you think, Tom?' he asked with his eyes slightly
narrowed.

'I agree. ' It was said abruptly. 'So, the show is
on the road—are we all agreed we're ready to start
shooting on schedule? You have no further alter-
ations for the screenplay, Pete? Or last-minute
changes of casting in mind, or any other changes
you can think of?'

Pete looked hurt. 'I only want to get it right!'

'Of course!' Tom said blandly. 'Would I suggest
anything else? Then it's Queensland, here we come!'

'Queensland?' Cathy stared at him.

'Oh, did I forget to tell you?' her husband said
casually. 'We've hired the Warner Village Road
Show studios at Cades County, which, for your
further information, is between Brisbane and the
Gold Coast, closer to the Coast. The new *Mission
Impossible* series was filmed there... We'll be using
the Upper Coomera Valley which is just behind
Cades County for the outdoor sequences and
Brisbane and Surfers for the city shots, and the
Broadwater and Stradbroke Island for the idyllic
uninhabited tropical island sequences so dear to
Pete's heart. If it worked for Paramount to turn

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south-east Queensland into any part of the world
they wanted, I don't see why it can't work for us—
you look a little stunned, Cathy. '

'Where will we live?' she asked.

'At a place nearby called Sanctuary Cove. We
leave next week. Any more questions?' he asked all
round.

There weren't. Cathy, for the simple reason that
it was impossible for her to communicate with Tom
on any but the most superficial level and had been
since that disastrous night when she'd made her
objections to the state of their marriage plain, and
in her hurt and confusion had withdrawn into
herself. She had also asked herself a number of
times how it was that she could love a man and
have lived with him for two years yet still under-
stand so little about him. But Duncan also looked
as if he had something on his mind, although he
chose not to reveal it, and if it hadn't been for Pete's
bubbling enthusiasm which once again made him
immune to any undercurrents, the lunch Duncan
gave them might have been an awkward affair.

The drive back to Mount Macedon from
Melbourne was accomplished almost in silence,
although one part of Cathy was crying out to break
it, to wring some words of reassurance from Tom
even if he wasn't prepared to comment on the screen
test—even just some general discussion about the
film, anything, but every time she stole a glance at
his shuttered expression her courage failed her.

And by the time they reached home, a sense of
resentment had replaced the need for reassurance
and had stilled the growing feeling that there must
be some way to understand him, perhaps some key

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from his past to unlock this barred path to his heart.
It had occurred to her that she knew very little about
his past other than the facts of it.

It was a long drive, and she was stiff and cramped
when they pulled up in front of the house.

'Have a bath, ' said Tom as he unlocked the front
door. 'I'll fix up some dinner. '

'I'm not terribly hungry. '

'You have to eat, Cathy, ' he said much as he
might have spoken to William, and for an instant
a flare of anger lit her blue eyes, but she turned
away and stilled the impulse to say something
cutting in return.

But while a warm scented bath washed away the
stiffness of her body, it didn't ease her resentment
or that curious, cold little feeling of panic around
her heart.

True to its reputation, the Victorian weather had
done a complete about-face, and it was a cold,
windy night, so she put on a pair of red and white
dotted silk pyjamas and her rich red velvet robe.

And Tom had built a fire in the lounge grate and
set his dinner out in front of it—a light meal of
tinned asparagus soup and toasted chicken
sandwiches.

He also made some effort at conversation as they
ate in front of the fire. 'Have you ever been to
Queensland?'

'No. It should be... interesting. '

He looked wry. 'You've obviously heard it de-
scribed as the Deep North. '

'Why do you say that?'

'Your expression of guarded reserve, ' he
murmured.

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'Well, ' Cathy shrugged 'people do talk about
Bananaland and Banana Benders, so... '

'It's a different lifestyle. The tropics and sub-
tropics have that effect on people. '

'So they're more relaxed up there?' she asked
with a lifted eyebrow.

'Definitely. '

'Don't you approve?'

Tom grimaced. 'Yes, I do. In small doses. '

'I see. '

'You're doing it again, Cathy, ' he said softly.

She raised her blue gaze to his. 'I don't
understand. '

'Looking all guarded and reserved. '

She stared at him. Then she said coolly, 'I was
wondering if it's a good idea for you to be making
a film up there, that's all. '

'In case the relaxed atmosphere drives me round
the bend? I wondered the same thing, so at least
I'm aware of the problem. ' He put his plate down
and sat back in the linen-covered armchair. 'Don't
you agree that's half the battle?'

Cathy got rid of her own plate and stood up to
pour the coffee. The fire glowed brightly on her
hair as she bent down—the rest of the comfortable,
chintzy room, with its lovely porcelain lamps and
vases and oak tables and bookcases, was in the
shadows.

'Cathy?'

She straightened with his cup and saucer in her
hands. 'I don't know. I guess time will tell. '

'And what, ' he held her blue gaze with his own,
'do you think time will tell about us?'

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'I've told you—but ever since I told you, you've
treated me like a stranger, you sleep in the spare
room, ' her eyes flashed suddenly, 'which I happen
to think is adolescent, ' she finished bitterly.

'So you're missing it, Cat?' he said softly.

She put the cup down, but on the tray. 'I'm
missing being treated like an equal, like an intel-
ligent human being. I'm wondering why you're *like*this, and why it took me so long to realise I don't
understand you at all. '

'You might not like it if I told you why I'm like
this, Cathy, ' he said after a long tense pause. 'You
might like it even less, but since you've insisted on
being treated like an equal and an intelligent human
being, and since you've insisted on doing Chloe,
you're probably going to find out anyway. Sit
down. '

Her eyes widened and her lips parted at some-
thing in his voice, something that lay under the even
syllables and chilled her oddly.

'You asked me once why I married you. There
were several reasons—the one that I made plain to
you and *hasn't* changed; guilt also, which hasn't
changed either, ' he said drily. 'And—the fact that
you're the exact opposite, or so I thought, to the
only other woman I ever asked to marry me. '

Cathy could only stare for an age, then she said,
and thought her voice didn't sound like her own at
all, 'She didn't want to?'

'She knocked me back—let's not beat about the
bush. ' He smiled faintly but derisively.

'Why? Didn't she love you?'

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**THE DIRECTOR'S WIFE**

He shrugged. 'What is love? Perhaps we had dif-
fering opinions of it. She was content to live with
me as if she loved me but make no commitment. '

Cathy frowned confusedly. 'There must have
been a reason. '

'A reason, ' Tom said musingly, and stared into
the fire. 'Oh, yes, there was a reason. Her career—
her all-consuming passion, you might say, that just
couldn't be fitted around a marriage. '

'What career?'

He lifted his eyes to hers and she was struck by
the cynicism in his hazel glance. 'Acting, my dear
Cathy, as you feel yours should be. It's quite a co-
incidence, isn't it?'

'Who... ' But she stopped as a dread premon-
ition struck her. 'Not... ?'

He stared at her. 'Yes. Bronwen Bishop. '

Cathy closed her eyes, but it didn't shut the
images she could see in her mind's eye. She'd never
seen Bronwen Bishop in the flesh, but she was an
established enough actress to be instantly recog-
nisable to most Australians, and she did have large
dark eyes, a willowy figure and, if not conven-
tional beauty, a compelling quality that was both
essentially feminine and vitally arresting. She was
in her early thirties, Cathy guessed. A tough lady,
Duncan had said—and of course, Duncan probably
knew about her and Tom, which explained his res-
ervations and slight unease.

'Do you still love her?' she asked.

Tom took a long time to answer. 'If I knew the
truth about that, I might be able to tell it to myself,
Cathy, ' he said eventually. 'It doesn't seem possible
that love could exist along with the other emotions

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she generated in me—hate sometimes, despair,
scorn, a desire, to be honest, to strangle her some-
times... The important thing is, I made the de-
cision to sever the relationship and put it all behind
me. ' He lifted his eyes at last to hers. 'And since I
made that decision, and since I married you, that's
what I have done. Contrary to what you think, I
haven't been unfaithful to you, Cathy, with her or
anyone else. '

A thought ran through Cathy's mind—I'm too
young to cope with this, too immature to even con-
template those dark emotions without a shiver and
a desire to wish I'd never known... Then a tremor
ran through her, and she knew they were cowardly
thoughts and exactly what he'd believed of her.

'But, ' she said with an effort, 'you're making this
film with her?'

Tom smiled rather bleakly. 'Not from choice, but
I knew it could happen one day if we both con-
tinued to live and work in Australia. ' He lifted his
shoulders.

Their gazes caught in the firelight. 'Cathy, ' he
said slowly, still staring into her eyes, I wish I could
make you understand and believe that there's part
of me solely reserved for you and that will never
change. Nor will I be betraying you, whatever
happens. '

Sudden tears shone in her eyes but didn't fall.
She said with difficulty, 'I suppose I should thank
you for that and for being honest, but can you
understand how I feel now?'

'Yes, ' he said abruptly, 'but tell me anyway. '

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But that proved astonishingly hard to do, and
she could only stare across at him with succeeding
expressions of frustration, sorrow and helplessness.

Tom muttered, 'Oh, hell!' almost beneath his
breath, then rose swiftly and pulled her out of her
chair and into his arms.

Cathy was too stunned and confused to protest
and, in spite of everything, the familiar feeling of
his arms around her, his mouth on hers, the feeling
of being safe—although how that could be now,
she didn't know—claimed her.

He picked her up and carried her through to the
bedroom, took her robe off and her white and red
dotted pyjamas and put her beneath the covers like
a child, then after a brief interval he slid in beside
her and gathered her close again. Then he began
to make love to her in a way that was impossible
for her to resist and that made her think dimly that
her taunt about him not really understanding
women would probably haunt her for ever. Unless
she was an unusually arousable one, it occurred to
her, as he stroked the soft skin from her armpit to
her waist and other satiny, vulnerable areas like the
nape of her neck, the small of her back—as he often
did before he laid claim to any of the more intimate
parts of her body. And so that she was relaxed,
soothed yet revelling in his arousal of her smooth,
naked skin and feeling a rhythm of movement, a
rhythm of desire welling up in her.

But as the rhythm claimed her and she moved
against him, needing the feel of his lean, hard body
on hers, an agitation also rose in her. A sudden
expression that broke the bounds of what he was
doing to her, of resentment that he could still do

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it while he loved another woman; an angry, con-
fused urge to assert *her* imprint on him.

'Cat... ' He said her name on a breath once, but
she moved her head back and her blue eyes blazed
briefly in a warning of some kind that silenced him
into a narrow, probing look. He said no more, but
responded to her sudden fierce urgency by easing
his weight on to her, and all her soft, scented flesh
became consumed with a need to drive him to the
kind of distraction he was driving her to.

All conscious thought fled from her mind as he
took possession of her body, and she moved be-
neath him and raked his back with her fingers,
straining her breasts against him, and he buried his
face in the curve of her neck and held her unflinch-
ingly as if he understood... And all the time his
possession of her deepened and quickened, more
than she'd thought possible, and she felt the long
muscles of his back ripple as he moved on her and
heard his breath come shorter and felt his heart
beating heavily as he drove her inexorably towards
the only fulfilment that would slake the terrible
agitation of her mind and heart and body.

It was a climax when it came that was shattering
in its intensity, that left her gasping and shuddering
and feeling as if she was falling down an endless
cliff. It was a curious mixture of pleasure and pain
and like none that had ever happened to her before,
and when she was capable of thought again and
capable of quietening at last, her first thought was
how it had been for Tom. Her lashes fluttered up,
and it was only when she saw him through a haze
of tears that she realised she'd been crying silently.
She blinked and licked her lips. 'Tom... ?'

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THE DIRECTOR'S WIFE

He stared down at her sombrely and smoothed
her hair. 'Don't talk. '

'But '

'No, Cathy. Relax—I'll help. '

'Will it hurt me to talk?' she whispered.

'You're going to hurt a bit tomorrow. That
was... ' He stopped and cautiously rolled away from
her, then immediately reclaimed her in his arms.
'Go to sleep, ' he murmured.

'My head is sore—why my head?'

'It'll go, ' he said quietly.

'But I have to say something '

'You don't have to say anything. I understand
how you felt and it's not your fault. I should never
have '

'I know about all the things you shouldn't have
done!' she said in a stronger voice, and struggled
to sit up. He let her go finally. 'What I don't know
is—how we'll be able to go on, and what I really
don't know, ' her voice sank and tears beaded her
lashes again, 'is whether you liked that or—hated
it. '

'I obviously didn't... hate it. '

But she caught the faint hesitation, and she saw
how his eyes were narrowed and intent as he
watched the twisted, awkward way she was sitting
with the sheet clutched to her breasts which rather
accurately reflected the state of her mind.

'All the same, ' she said more to herself, 'why do
I get the feeling I've done myself some harm in your
eyes?' She stared at him, but he had crossed his
arms behind his head as she spoke and he looked
perfectly normal now, breathing easily, his dark-
fair hair wayward, but then it always was, his eyes

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unreadable—he looked, even in the aftermath of
love, all the things that had troubled her before their
marriage—attractive, slightly dangerous, so far out
of her real reach... And not as if he were suffering
a pounding headache.

'It's not a question of that, Cathy, ' he said gently
but nevertheless with an underlying emphasis, like
a steel fist in a velvet glove, she thought, and re-
alised why as he continued. 'As to how we go on,
we have no option but to go on as before, although
with some adjustments, but essentially as what we
are—man and wife, and what we'll remain, ' he
added.

Cathy's lips parted, then she put her hands up
to her face and closed her eyes. Tom pulled one
hand from behind his head and closed it round her
wrist, fingering the narrowness of it and the soft
skin inside it. Then with a little tug, he pulled her
back into his arms.

She found she didn't have the strength to do any-
thing but lie quietly in his embrace, and she fell
asleep not long afterwards.

CHAPTER THREE

Cathy woke alone to a grey, wet morning and lifted
her head cautiously off the pillow, but her headache
had gone. The rest of her as she moved her limbs
cautiously beneath the covers felt lethargic but
warm, and she decided to stay where she was and
try to review everything that had happened.

She got no further, though, because the door
opened and Tom came in with a tray in his hands.
Their eyes caught, and Cathy felt herself colour and
looked away awkwardly.

'I don't think, ' he said rather wryly, 'it can be a
bad thing for a two-year-old marriage to be capable
of surprising itself occasionally—if that's why
you're feeling embarrassed, Cathy. ' He put the tray
down on her bedside table, but stood looking down
at her with a question mark in his eyes.

With an abruptness that took her by surprise,
her awkwardness deserted her to be replaced by an-
noyance. 'I'm sorry if you feel we'd got into a same
old "routine" situation, Tom, ' she said tartly, 'but
perhaps your heart and soul were never really in
it?'

'That wasn't what I was trying to say at all, Cat, '
he replied evenly.

'What, then?' she shot at him.

'Look, sit up and have some breakfast instead
of spitting at me like an angry kitten, ' he recom-
mended, and reached for her robe.

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She closed her eyes in extreme frustration. 'You
don't think I have cause to be upset?'

'I do, ' he agreed briefly, and pulled the blankets
back.

Cathy sat up with an angry gasp, because
although two years of marriage had seen her lose
a lot of the inhibitions that had caused Tom to call
her his convent-bred little puritan from time to time,
to be naked and on display for him now seemed to
her to be an outrage and an insult. *'Don't... '* she
whispered fiercely, trying to gather back the covers.

But he did. With an easy strength, he not only
kept her wrists in one hand but he also thoroughly
inspected her upper body, her satiny breasts and
nipples of the palest, furled pink, her slender neck,
for signs of their torrid lovemaking. As he touched
his fingers lightly to the few marks blemishing her
skin she flinched, suddenly realising her breasts were
sensitive and sore.

He took his hand away, but she trembled and
couldn't tear her gaze away, and to her horror, re-
alised why. Her hapless body, almost with a mind
of its own, wanted him to go on gentling it, soothing
it as if the defeat she had suffered in the night had
been right and proper. And it had been a defeat,
she realised. Her confused 'statement' had merely
left her broken and crying in his arms and dashed
against his strength and unassailability—perhaps
further from him mentally than she had ever been.
Well, she thought rebelliously, managing to look
away at last but with a tinge of pink growing in her
cheeks, I'd be stupid to make that mistake again.

But Tom took her chin and tilted her head back.
'What are you thinking?'

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She said nothing for a moment, but she couldn't
and didn't even try to hide the hostility in her eyes
and about her mouth. 'Can I have my robe?' she
asked.

Something flickered in his eyes, and he hesitated,
then sat back and handed it to her. Cathy pulled it
on and bunched the pillows up, and he put one of
his on her lap and put the tray on it. There was
orange juice, a boiled egg and toast.

Cathy stared at them and discovered she'd never
felt less like eating, but Tom picked up her hand,
put the glass into it. 'Go on. You have to eat. How's
your head?'

'Fine, ' she said coolly, although she was battling
desperately for composure because she hated him
for reminding her and felt like doing something es-
sentially childish, such as pouring the juice over
him... 'As a matter of interest, is there a clinical
explanation for it? That you might have encoun-
tered in your much greater experience?' She raised
the glass to her lips and sipped the juice, but she
felt like biting the glass, she discovered.

He smiled drily and she knew she had been
childish. 'No. But you're liable to give yourself a
headache when you do anything with the intensity
you—we employed last night, that's all. '

'It didn't give you one. ' She drained the glass
and set it down sharply on the tray.

'I'm obviously a much tougher nut, ' he replied
with some irony, and handed her an egg-spoon.

She cracked the egg with a ringing blow, then
flung the spoon down and put her hand to her eyes.
'Go away, Tom, ' she whispered shakily, 'and take
your breakfast with you, please. Because I'm not

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sure if I want to cry or I want to die, but I want
to do it on my own '

'No, Cathy, ' he said harshly, 'you're not going
to do either, you're going to eat your breakfast and
we're going to talk this out. '

'You can't make me '

'I could, but I won't—I will point out that you
told me yourself last night you were an adult and
resented being treated otherwise—well, here's a
chance to prove it. I'm going to get the coffee. ' He
stood up, stared down at her with a plain warning
in his eyes, then turned away.

Cathy watched him go, then turned her attention
to her maltreated egg and deliberately ate it all, and
the toast, and pushed the tray away, waiting.

He made no comment when he came back with
the coffee, but removed the tray and pulled a chair
up beside the bed. In deference to the cold wet
morning, he wore his beloved old plaid dressing-
gown over only his pyjamas bottoms. The vagaries
of the weather seldom affected him, Cathy had dis-
covered; in fact he seemed to gather inspiration
from the worst elements of it.

And it was with a curious sinking feeling that she
eyed him over the rim of her cup. She'd eaten her
breakfast in a spirit of defiance and resentment over
and above a whole host of emotions, but the reality
of getting through to him and making him admit
the terrible error of his ways, which was what she
burningly wanted, suddenly seemed monumental.

She sighed and slipped dispiritedly down the
pillows.

He took her cup. 'Cathy?'

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'Go ahead, ' she murmured. 'I'm listening. How
*are* we going to sort this out?'

'Have *you* come to any profound conclusions
about it?' he countered.

Cathy laughed huskily, a small, desolate sound,
and turned her cheek to the pillow. 'No. '

'You're not, for example, ' he said evenly, 'sud-
denly filled with a burning desire to leave me?'

'You make it sound such a ridiculously childish
thing to even contemplate, ' she said bitterly after
a moment. 'Why shouldn't it be an option?'

'Where would you go?'

She shrugged. 'Back where I came from. Back
to spinsterhood but older and wiser, ' she said very
quietly.

*'Had* you thought of it, Cathy?' Tom asked
curtly.

*'No. '* She moved restlessly as her mind was filled
with images of her pre-Tom West life. 'Not
yet... Tom?' She sat up abruptly and captured his
gaze. 'Why are you treating me as if I'm in the
wrong?'

His eyes didn't waver and she could see the little
green flecks in them. Then he rubbed a hand along
his blue-shadowed jaw and said, 'As a defence
against corrupting the innocent, probably. Cat, life
is rarely perfect, unfortunately, and I'm one of the
imperfect specimens peopling it. But one thing I
need to make clear is that it's over between me and
Bronwen and I have neither the desire to nor the
intention of rekindling it. Wait, ' he said as she
opened her mouth. 'I understand that saying it is
one thing and living with it another from your point
of view, but what you're living with is not the ghost

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of another woman—what I felt for Bronwen and
what I feel for you are two different things. '

'Do you mean you don't think of her... when
you're sleeping with me, Tom?' she asked on a
breath.

'No!' He said it harshly and definitely, but there
was a sudden glint of compassion in his eyes. 'Do
you honestly think I'm capable of that?' he added.

'I don't know, ' she whispered, pleating the sheet.
'Are there different kinds of love for different
women?'

A nerve flickered in his jaw as he stared down at
her. 'I don't know, ' he said at last. 'I do know,
however, that the way I am is probably a mixture
of my natural nature and the cynicism and disil-
lusionment Bronwen left me with—but don't im-
agine the blame lies solely with her. In some respects
I'm a loner, and I always will be, I suspect. She
certainly accused me of it and told me I expected
a total commitment from her when I couldn't give
it myself. If that's true then I was far more in error
than she was. Unfortunately, again, acknowledg-
ing these things doesn't always make them go away.
But if you *could* live with the kind of man I am,
now that it's all out in the open, what we do share
is... something to build on. '

Cathy went on playing with the sheet, then she
raised her eyes at last and wiped them with the back
of her hand. 'You're being very honest again, ' she
said huskily, 'so I'll have to be honest in return.
What's to build?'

'We could start with you. One thing I can ac-
knowledge and change is that it would be su-
premely selfish to expect you to go on as before.

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And this—doing Chloe, I mean—will at least be a
positive step forward for you. ' He got up and went
to the dressing-table to get her a tissue.

'It couldn't be a more ironic way for me to take
that step, though, could it?' She blew her nose. 'I
only wish I weren't now—is it too late?'

He sat down again. 'To pull out? No. And, ' he
shrugged, 'it will be loaded with ironies, I guess,
but you said you needed a challenge; perhaps it's
what we both need. '

'It'll certainly give you the opportunity to hold
us up against each other, Tom, ' she said with an
oblique look.

'That wasn't what I had in mind, Cat, ' he said
abruptly.

Cathy laid her head back. 'I don't know what to
do. I don't even know what to say. '

'Neither do I any more. '

She lifted her head and stared at him intently until
he said roughly, 'All the way, right from when I
asked you to marry me in a moment of aberration
and guilt, I had one harmless motive, Cat—I didn't
want to see you hurt. At least, I thought it was
harmless, but that's where I was in the wrong, my
dear, because it might have hurt you less... but, '
he paused, 'be that as it may. I'm also trying to say
that if you can handle it, I'd much rather you stayed
with me than left me, because that part of me
capable of loving cares more about you than any-
thing else. And is prepared to cut the Cinderella
cord, to prove it. But, ' again he paused, 'it's *not*going to be easy to work together, it wouldn't be
under the best of circumstances. '

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To her surprise, Cathy came to a sudden de-
cision. 'I can do that, ' she said quietly. 'It's the rest
of our life I don't know about, but I suppose, ' she
frowned, then went on with an effort and barely
audibly, 'it's not your fault I love you more than
you love me. It never was '

'One day you might find that's no longer true, '
he said gently. 'You were so young, Cathy. You still
are. '

She smiled sadly. 'Do you think I'm still in the
grip of an adolescent crush or something like that?
After two years?'

Tom's eyes narrowed. 'It happens, ' he said
sombrely.

'So you're prepared to keep me until I grow out
of it?'

'If you think that, you haven't understood what
I've been trying to say. '

'No. I have—that you love me in a limited sort
of way, you feel guilty about me and you want us
to try to build something better out of it. I just—
perhaps I need some time to think it all out, ' Cathy
said helplessly.

'We don't have a lot of time, ' he said quietly.
'Not if we're going to do this movie together. And
there's no way we can separate and do it. By the
way, about last night... '

Cathy put her hands to her face. 'I don't want
to talk about it. I don't know what got into me, '
she whispered.

Tom lifted an eyebrow. 'You don't think you
hated me for the things I'd told you and that was
the only way you could express it?'

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'No... ' She stopped. 'Well, a little, but I also
wanted to try to erase the memories of her, and
that's why I knew you didn't like it. '

'It wasn't that. What I didn't like was dragging
you down into the mire of my tortured relations
with myself, the way I am, and it was myself I was
hating. Cat, will you let me try to make amends?'
He put his hand over hers.

She trembled and lifted her tear-streaked face to
his. 'Are you saying I should make a decision now?'

'I'm saying... oh, hell, ' he muttered beneath his
breath, and went as if to take her in his arms, but
she stiffened.

'No! No, Tom—that's what you did last night,
but I think I have to come to grips with this and
really stop being a Cinderella. If you do want us
to go on, then for the time being I'll try, mainly
because I can't think of what else to do, but there'll
probably be times when I'm going to be offended
and resentful and there might be times when I'll
wish I hadn't. All the same, I do understand I have
to be professional about the film, but I can't... I
just can't let you make love to me at the moment. '

'I see. ' He studied her earnest, painful expression
for an age, then touched his fingers to her lips in
a brief caress. 'And very proper too!'

'If you're laughing at me—I didn't *mean* it to
sound juvenile and prissy, ' she said in an agony of
frustration.

'It didn't sound like that at all, nor did I have
in mind making love to you, but I did want to
comfort you—I thought it might help just to be
ordinary together for a while. '

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'Is that what you love about me, Tom?' she said
on a suddenly indrawn breath. 'Being ordinary with
me, no heights, no depths... '

This time he brooked no refusal and gathered
her on to his lap, and it seemed to her supremely
ironic again that, as she wept out her sadness and
disillusionment, it was his arms that did comfort
her, his hand on her hair, the beating of his heart
beneath her cheek, the wiry golden roughness of
his chest as she slid her fingers beneath the old plaid
that she touched with love.

'I'm all right now, ' she said shakily at last. Which
wasn't true, of course, and she could tell from
Tom's eyes and the lines beside his mouth that he
knew it wasn't true, but there was no more he could
do. And for some reason that gave her some
strength. 'Should we be practical as well as or-
dinary?' she said, and tried to smile. 'I don't know
any of the details of this trip to Queensland and
you probably have a million things to do—I might,
as well. ' She sat up with a frown.

But he pulled her back and kissed her lips gently
before lifting her back on to the bed. 'You might, '
he agreed. 'We'll be away for eight weeks approxi-
mately. We're flying up, but I'm sending the car up
by rail and you can send whatever you like that way
too—any special things that will make you feel more
at home. And the costume designer is coming up
to do a rush job on you this morning—but not for
a couple of hours, so relax for a while. '

Cathy lay back and watched him shrug off his
dressing-gown and head for the shower. But as she
heard the water thrumming in the bathroom, her

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mind was curiously blank when she was sure it
should be otherwise.

It was still blank when Tom walked back into the
bedroom, rubbing his hair with a towel which he
dropped on the carpet, and strode over to his
dresser. She stared at his naked back, at his tall,
lean body which she knew so well, his compact hips
and wide shoulders, at the little crescent scar at the
top of his left thigh which was the relic of a
schoolboy rugby game and which she'd often
touched gently. Then her gaze sharpened and her
eyes widened and she made a husky little sound.

He swung round and saw her dilated stare. 'What
is it?'

'Your back, ' she whispered.

'Oh, that, ' he said with a faint grin. 'Don't worry
about it. '

'But '

'All little cats liken to sharpen their claws oc-
casionally, ' he said gravely but with a wicked glint
in his eyes. 'Why should mine be any different?'

'Tom '

'Cathy, ' he overruled her, still gravely but still
secretly laughing at her, 'it's nothing. And I've run
you a bath—which will help your battle scars!' And
he turned away and got dressed with the minimum
of fuss.

It crossed her mind then that she really was in
an impossible situation, she had to be when he
could make her feel weak with love just by teasing
her. How unfair was that?

It was something she found herself dwelling on
during the busy days before their departure for

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Queensland. Busy days that helped promote the
image that they were going on in unity and harmony
when in fact she was consumed by an unresolvable
mental turmoil; she wondered how she was man-
aging to fool Tom, *why* she was trying to, why she'd
been so foolish as to give him the undertaking she
had. And the core of her turmoil seemed to be that,
while he had tried to brush Bronwen Bishop aside
as a symptom, and blame himself mostly for the
way he was, she found she couldn't believe you
could do that to a living, breathing woman you'd
lived with, slept with, wanted to marry... In other
words, I'm already plain jealous of this woman,
she acknowledged to herself, and I haven't even met
her. Was I mad to think I could work with her, with
them?

To make matters worse, although they slept
together, Tom hadn't tried to make love to her since
she'd told him she couldn't, and every night she
trembled inwardly in terror in case he did, because
she didn't know if it would be a sign of weakness
and *spineless* acceptance of the situation to let him,
and trembled with a desolate little sense of loss
when he didn't.

Then, when it all boiled up one day, she dis-
covered that she hadn't fooled him at all, about
anything.

She was studying the script at the kitchen table at
the same time as she was keeping an eye on their
evening meal when Tom walked into the kitchen
and raised his eyebrows at her rapt expression.

Cathy coloured faintly but said with dignity, AT
know it's not a big part, but I don't see why I

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shouldn't prepare myself properly—anyway, I
always thought the best directors spent as much time
as possible with their actors before they began
shooting. '

'It's a flexible thing. I do and I don't, and you're
one of the ones I'm just going to let run, Cathy. '
He opened the fridge and took out a can of beer.
'Would you care to share this with me?'

'No, thanks—you might have told me. '

'Well, now you know. Dinner smells good, by
the way. '

Cathy compressed her lips. 'What about Bronwen
Bishop?'

He was standing with his back to her and he took
a long draught from the can before he turned and
put it down on the table. 'I haven't been having
long coaching sessions with her, if that's what
you're suggesting, Cathy. She too will do her own
thing, more or less, ' he said drily. 'Besides which,
there hasn't been time. '

Cathy looked at him sceptically.

'That expression doesn't quite become you, ' he
said softly. 'In fact I haven't laid eyes on Bronwen.
She's only due back from overseas tomorrow. '

'But... ?' Surprise overcame Cathy's irritation
at being told what did not become her.

'If you recall, Bronwen was not our first choice
for Portia. Julia Whitefield was under contract, but
she broke her leg, and to Pete's joy—he wanted her
right from the beginning—Bronwen was available,
and I was outmanoeuvred. But she's been working
overseas. ' Tom met her gaze levelly. 'And it's over
two years since I've seen her except fleetingly, and
never to talk. '

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'Oh. ' Cathy flushed, but her eyes were mutinous.

'Anything else you'd like to know?' he asked with
a trace of mockery.

'Yes—how you can imagine I can't help won-
dering about her and... oh!' she exclaimed again,
and gritted her teeth.

'I don't imagine it's easy, ' he said abruptly, 'but
we're not going to get anywhere unless you can tell
yourself it's over, which it is, and put it away from
you. '

'Perhaps if I recite it to myself a hundred times
or write a hundred lines—do you think that would
do the trick?' she taunted.

'Cathy, you told me you wanted to do this movie,
and you assured me you could be professional about
it '

She got up and slammed the script shut. 'We're
not on your precious film set yet, ' she said tightly,
and she strode over to the window and stared
angrily at Mount Macedon.

Tom watched the taut, slim lines of her back be-
neath a simple green sun-dress, then silently crossed
the room to her.

'Cat. ' He said it barely audibly, and she flinched.

He waited a moment, then put his hands on her
shoulders. Cathy held herself rigidly, then they
slumped beneath his hands and he drew her back
against him and slid his arms about her waist, and
for a long time they stood like that without moving.
Until he turned her to face him and smudged the
tears on her lashes, but that precipitated more, and
he pulled her into his arms and she buried her face
in his shoulder. 'I don't know what to do, ' she
whispered at last.

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'I think I might. ' He picked her up and started
to carry her to the bedroom.

'Dinner... ' she said faintly.

'It can wait—this can't. ' He shouldered open the
bedroom door and laid her carefully down on the
bed, then sat down beside her, stared down at her
for a long time and said, 'Cathy, I have memories
of you, of us, that I'll have for the rest of my life.
Lovely memories. That must mean something to
you. '

Her lips parted.

'Memories of this. ' He lifted his hand and cupped
her cheek and his long fingers wandered down her
throat and twined in her hair lying on her shoulder.
'I'd also give anything not to have hurt you the way
I have, but I was hurting you anyway without re-
alising it, so... ' He lifted his shoulders wearily. 'But
there's the possibility that I can also heal you. Will
you let me start to try?'

'Like... this?' Her eyes were wide and very blue.

'Yes. '

She said after a long time, 'All right. '

She lay passively beneath his hands as he unbut-
toned the sun-dress down her body, with her eyes
closed and her cheek on her hand against the pillow.

All she wore underneath was a pair of bikini
briefs, and Tom laid the dress aside, untying the
halter neck without disturbing her position, then
lay down beside her.

Cathy didn't move for a long time as his hand
wandered over her body, then she sighed softly and
opened her eyes and began to unbutton his shirt.

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She had long ago learned that the feel of him
gave her as much pleasure as the way he touched
her gave her. And that to touch, stroke and slide
her lips and her arms and her breasts against his
body both excited and softened her body and
pleased him, and that sometimes she too could de-
liberately prolong this sensuous pleasure until he
gave way with a groan and a glint in his eyes, and
claimed her because he could no longer help
himself. But this time she did what she loved doing,
not with the raw intensity of their last lovemaking,
not with a naughty but nice desire to tease, as he'd
once called it, but a profound feeling of destiny in
her heart because she couldn't change the fact that
she loved him and because he was the centre of her
life.

Perhaps he guessed what was going through her
mind and what was in her heart, because he re-
turned her lost, gentle rapture for a long time until
she was arching her body and her hands fell idle
and her head fell back, and only then did he part
her legs, and this time his first contact with her inner
flesh was all that was needed to tip her over the
edge of rippling pleasure, and to take him with her.
And this time it was pure pleasure, and it held them
united for an age, breathing as one, locked together
until the last echoes faded slowly.

There were two consequences to this lovemaking.
Cathy's dinner was burnt beyond redemption, so
Tom took her out to the pub. And over the last
days left to them at Mount Macedon, there seemed
to be a closer, unspoken closeness between them.

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The day before they left they took William and
his grandparents to Hanging Rock for a picnic,
which somewhat compensated William for the
prospect of the lack of their company over the next
weeks. After they had eaten, Cathy lay back on a
rug and plucked a feathery stalk of grass to swish
away the flies, and stared thoughtfully at the Rock.
William and his grandparents were inspecting a
stream and Tom was packing up the remains of their
lunch.

Her thoughts drifted idly for a time, then centred
on what had been eluding her for days—had she
made a subconscious decision about her marriage?
Had she decided to accept this state of affairs, and
was she even going on in the hope that one day she
might supplant Bronwen Bishop in Tom's heart?
If so, she thought, was there a code of behaviour
she should adopt? Her mind told there was, and
she stopped to think of all the women through time
who had found themselves in this position, all the
women who had made this decision or had had no
choice but to clamp down on their anger and their
jealousy. Although, of course, it wasn't a question
of having no choices, for her. Yet the alter-
native... She sighed and turned over, burying her
face in her arms.

'Cathy?' It was Tom's voice above her, and she
turned back reluctantly. 'All right?'

He was kneeling next to her, and he took the
crushed stalk of grass from her and smiled down
at her so the fine lines beside his eyes and mouth
crinkled and the sun shone on the long tanned lines
of his throat and his hair.

Cathy took a breath and smiled back. 'Fine. '

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'The last time we were here, ' he said quietly,
'we '

'I remember, ' she broke in.

'It's a pity we're not alone. ' His tone was wry,
but his eyes held something else.

Cathy stared into them for a moment, then
glanced at Hanging Rock. 'Perhaps it's for the best. '

He raised an eyebrow, but she sat up and kissed
him briefly and said gravely, 'There'll be other times
and places. '

'I'm relieved, ' he remarked. 'You had me worried
there!'

'Well ' she thought for a moment '—there's

tonight, for example. A farewell to our bed and
bedroom might be called for—what do you think?'

'I think, ' he said slowly as he searched her eyes
right through to her soul, she felt, 'it might be dif-
ficult to wait that long, but also worthwhile. ' He
took her chin in his hand and kissed her back, and
she knew as he lifted his head that not only had
she now consciously made her decision, but in some
curious way, had transmitted it to him. She had
also managed to keep her equally curious fears and
fancies about Hanging Rock to herself.

Twenty-four hours later they were winging their way
north to Queensland.

Cathy gazed out of the window at the carpet of
woolly white cloud below the wing. They had had
their lunch and would be landing at Coolangatta
in half an hour—the thought of which was making
her nervous.

But right on cue, Tom put his hand over hers and
said, 'These might be the last few relaxed moments

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we'll have for a while—we're the last to arrive.
Everyone else is assembled and, let's hope, rarin'
to go. '

Cathy's hand moved under his. 'Tell me about
them. ' She turned her head on the backrest to him.

He stretched his long legs out more comfortably.
'On the technical side, I've worked with a lot of
them before—the camera crew and the sound en-
gineer were part of the team on *Last Friday?* He'd
received an Oscar nomination for *Last Friday.* 'I've
gone out on a bit of a limb with the film editor,
Jason White. He's a crazy kid, but he has sparks
of genius and he has the same kind of imagination
as Pete—they make a good pair, ' he said wryly.
'And I suspect Charles Westfield could make it
three of a kind. '

'I used to think he was rather a dish when I was
about—twelve, ' Cathy said with a grin. Charles
Westfield was an American actor who as a boy had
starred in a television series and not quite made the
major break-through into the big league of movies
yet. His signing on for the lead role of Robert in
the movie of Peter Partridge's best-seller *Half an
Hour Earlier in Adelaide* had reactivated some of
the long-running controversy about the habit of
importing foreign actors to star in Australian pro-
ductions, but, as she'd heard not only Duncan but
Tom point out, the role might have been written
for him—a good-looking, rather zany American in
Australia grappling not only with his personal
problems in the form of Portia and Chloe but also
a case of mistaken identity which had several of the
world's leading secret services chasing him.

'Did you?' His hazel eyes laughed at her.

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'Mmm. But I haven't seen him for ages. I don't
even know how old he is. '

'He's twenty-six and has quite a way with girls,

so I'm told. I have this ' he paused '—intuition

that he and Portia will clash. '

Cathy said without a tremor, 'On principle? Be-
cause he's American? Or... ' She stopped.

He said after a moment, 'I think Bronwen has
always had a good understanding of what side her
bread's buttered on, but I think this might be a
difficult role for her to play. She's supposed to be
younger, she's supposed to be madly in love with

someone ' he paused again '—whom I'm sure

she considers no more than a pretty face acting-
wise and probably every other wise. '

'He might surprise her, ' said Cathy. *'You* must
have some faith in his acting ability. '

'I do. But I also don't have any inbuilt prejudices
about men. ' He grimaced.

Cathy had been studying his hand on hers but
she raised her blue eyes to his. 'I wonder why she
has these prejudices?'

Tom said rather drily, 'Who knows? But that's
not your problem, ' he added with the faintest of
smiles and tightening his grip on her hand briefly.
'Nor is it mine in any other but an artistic sense
now. ' He stopped and continued a moment later,
'When you look like that, I know you do have the
capacity to do Chloe, Cat. '

'Tom ' she looked away, then back '—thank

you. Just one last thing—do a lot of people know
about you and Bronwen?'

'Unfortunately, yes, Cathy. ' His hazel eyes were
suddenly bleak. 'That's why, the way things worked

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out, you had to know from me and not some
stranger. '

When they landed, as they were walking through
the arrival hall, Cathy tripped and Tom put his arm
about her shoulders and kept it there. And a flash-
light exploded at the same time as Duncan emerged
from the crowd to greet them and introduce the
Press.

Cathy didn't see the picture in the paper the next
morning, or the one alongside it of Charles
Westfield who had arrived on an earlier flight, but
among the many who did, two of them reacted with
more than normal interest.

Charles Westfield, known to his mates as Charlie
and his mother as Chuck, stared at his handsome
likeness with satisfaction, then glanced casually at
the other picture. Whereupon his brown gaze sud-
denly became riveted on Cathy, and he pursed his
lips and emitted a soft whistle of very genuine ap-
preciation. Then he read the caption and his eyes
widened and he said incredulously, 'The director's
*wife*—why didn't anyone tell me? Damn... ' And
he frowned ruefully, then shrugged fatalistically,
but at the same time discovered that his slight
unease about doing this movie in a foreign, albeit
English-speaking land, which was a hell of a long
way from home, had disappeared.

Bronwen Bishop also stared at his handsome
likeness, but briefly, then transferred her dark gaze
to the picture of Tom and Cathy, to Tom's arm
around his wife's shoulders and the way he was
looking down at her, to Cathy herself, and she
closed her eyes in pain.

CHAPTER FOUR

'Now I've got you all together at last and we're
about to start shooting, ' Tom said easily but with
his usual laid-back magnetism, so that every eye
rested on him and no one fidgeted, 'I'd like to say
a few general words. The true style of a motion
picture is in its overall handling and shape, quote
unquote, and that's my job—to take Pete's plot and
translate his original creativity to the screen via the
medium not only of the actors and the inspiration
I can give them but the technical aspects of film-
making—the impact and the tension, good camera-
work and sound, framing, editing et cetera, can
achieve. This is not a "big" movie or one with a
particular message, but that doesn't mean we can't
imprint it with the same kind of style and pace,
timing and suspense that grabbed Pete's readers in
the first place and held them spellbound. I'm always
open to suggestions, but perhaps I should warn you
that I'm extremely intolerant of tardiness and an
uncooperative attitude, not only from my own point
of view but because of the inconvenience to others
and the waste of time and therefore money. Any
questions?'

Despite herself and despite the fact that Bronwen
Bishop was sitting a few feet from her, Cathy felt
a little thrill run down her spine. She was un-
doubtedly a part of this professional team, and it
was impossible not to feel stimulated and excited.

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There were several questions and some general
discussion, then Tom said, 'The fact that it's
pouring in paradise means we can't do the outdoor
sequences we planned for today, so we're going to
make a start with Chloe—as you know from the
script, Chloe keeps making these mysterious ap-
pearances in Robert's life, both fascinating him and
frustrating him, and the first of these is at a party—
a sort of "some enchanted evening" and "across
a crowded room" affair. Now, seemingly by chance
but not by chance at all, all the other major charac-
ters are at the party and all have a vested interest
in immobilising Robert—not to stop him from
getting to Chloe but for much more devious reasons
which he's quite unaware of—so it's a comical scene
with sinister overtones. The set is ready, and what
I'd like to do is run through it in rehearsal as you
are, with an aim to shooting it this afternoon—let's
go!'

It was nine o'clock that evening when Tom finally
called, 'Cut—it's a take!' and everyone cheered.

He grinned rather wryly. 'Sorry, folks, but I think
we've all started to get the feel of each other, so
things will be easier from now on. ' And he outlined
briefly what he planned to do the next day, and the
session broke up.

Cathy was sitting on a settee with her beautiful
yellow brocade off-the-shoulder long evening dress
hitched up to her knees because of the heat, and
she thought for a moment that she might not have
the energy to move, but no one else seemed to be
quite as exhausted, so she made the effort and
trailed through the throng to her own small

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dressing-room, stilling the instinct to go to Tom,
who was surrounded by people anyway. She closed
the door with relief and sank down in front of the
make-up table with her elbows on it and her chin
in her hands, and she searched her reflection wearily
but discovered that what she was really examining
was the odd feeling of being two people, one to be
treated as a wife, but only in private—well, hope-
fully then, she thought with a grimace—and one to
be treated like everyone else, even to be looked at
purely academically and discussed in the same
way... She closed her eyes and took herself to
task—you knew it had to be like this, *he* told you
and it is the only viable way to work, so what's the
problem?

She opened her eyes and watched her lips move.
'He's so good at it—how *can* he divorce himself so
completely from me and with no evidence of strain
at all, whereas I feel like a nervous, not to mention
physical, wreck. How can he be *so* seemingly ob-
livious of the way everyone is watching him with
Bronwen, and watching me, oblivious of the un-
spoken speculation that's humming through the air?
For that matter, how can she? Is it super-
professionalism, whereas I'm just a rank amateur?
Or... '

Someone knocked on the door. It was Bronwen.

'Cathy, are you decent?'

'Yes... Come in, ' Cathy said uncertainly.

Bronwen had changed into jeans and a blouse
and taken her make-up off, and she carried two
mugs of coffee awkwardly in one hand as she came
in. 'I thought you looked as if you needed a re-
viver—you were great today, ' she said straightly,

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her large dark eyes resting on Cathy's parted lips
and slightly dazed eyes, 'but it's an exhausting
business, and especially for a beginner. ' She kicked
the door closed with her heel and handed Cathy a
mug, then leant against the wall with her own.

Cathy. took a sip of coffee. 'Thank you. I do feel
exhausted. I thought you were great too—and much
less tense. '

'Comes from experience—how are you liking
Sanctuary Cove?'

Cathy thought, for a moment, of the luxurious
harbour-front villa that had been rented for the ex-
clusive use of the director and his wife for the next
eight weeks, of the rather charming shopping
village, the marinas, the boats, the golf courses and
sports facilities, the Coomera River and more that
made up Sanctuary Cove, and said with a little
grimace, 'I'm still a bit overwhelmed, but it's only
been a few days—and it's been raining. '

'You're not wrong!' Bronwen said with a laugh.
'What amazes me about Queensland—one of the
things—is how people just ignore the rain. You see
droves of kids riding to school in torrential down-
pours without even a raincoat. '

'I suppose it's hot enough to dry off quickly, '
Cathy responded with a grin, and they laughed
together, then sobered together and stared at each
other until Cathy looked away awkwardly.

'Cathy, ' Bronwen said slowly, 'I'd like to think

we could work together with no ' She broke off

a little helplessly.

Cathy took a breath. 'I think we can, ' she said
quietly. 'Tom has told me about you, and it's
probably best... I mean, it's silly for us to try to

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ignore it. You must have been wondering whether
I knew—I can see everyone else is wondering the
same thing. *I've* been wondering how you feel about

Tom now ' It was her turn to break off and stare

into Bronwen's eyes.

The other girl didn't flinch, but it was with an
oddly bleak look that she said after a moment, 'It's

finished between Tom and me, Cathy. You ' she

paused '—you're very lovely, Cathy, and younger
than '

'She is, isn't she?'

They both swung round to see that Tom had
opened the door silently. He added abruptly by way
of a sardonic greeting, 'Bronwen. '

Bronwen straightened. 'I was just going, Tom. I
was telling Cathy I thought she'd been great today.
Well, I'll see you two tomorrow. ' She stared at Tom
until he stood aside and let her pass. He closed the
door and turned to Cathy. 'Is that all she's been
telling you?'

'No, Tom, ' Cathy said steadily but with evidence
of strain in her eyes. 'I think we both decided that
it wasn't going to work, the way we started off.
Pretending, in other words, that we were complete
strangers, so I told her that I knew about you and
her, and she told me, ' she hesitated for the first
time with her eyes on his shuttered expression, 'that
it was all over between you and her, ' she finished
barely audibly.

His lips twisted. 'I hope you believe that, Cathy. '

Do I? Cathy asked herself. I don't know, but
there's no point in saying it. 'I believe I can work
with Bronwen and that tomorrow I'll be much less

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tense. ' She turned away, and this time their eyes
met in the mirror.

'In fact you were great today, ' he said after a
long pause.

Cathy shrugged slightly, then picked up a jar of
cold cream and started to clean the stage make-up
off. 'You don't have to pay me compliments you
normally wouldn't. '

'I'm not. Nor do I have to treat you profession-
ally behind closed doors. ' He took a step towards
her and put his hands on her shoulders close to her
neck, massaging the back of it with his thumbs.
She wiped the last trace of make-up off, stared at
herself for a moment, then closed her eyes and re-
laxed a little. 'I'm so tired, ' she said huskily.

'I know. But you'll get used to it gradually. In
the meantime, let's go home to bed. ' He took his
hands away and looked around for her clothes, and
when she stood up, he released the zip of the yellow
dress and helped her to step out of it. Then he said,
with a little glint in his eye as he surveyed her figure
clad only in a flesh-coloured, strapless bra and
panties, 'Did you enjoy being the belle of the ball
today, so to speak?'

'Was I?'

He handed her her cream blouse. 'If I'm any
judge, quite a few people thought so. '

'Oh. ' Cathy buttoned the blouse and took her
fawn linen skirt from him. 'Well, I was supposed
to be, I imagine. I mean, Portia gatecrashed the
party in her air hostess uniform. ' She fumbled with
the side waistband button and felt his long fingers
do it for her. Then he turned her to face him and
settled the collar of her blouse and lifted some

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strands of hair that had got caught in it away and
ran his fingers through the luxuriant silkiness of it.
'I'm glad we decided to leave this just as it always
is. Well, as you often say to me, ' his hazel gaze
roamed up and down her, 'all prim and proper
again and hardly able to keep your eyes open. Let's
go. '

But once home, in a home that couldn't be more
different from Mount Macedon, with its cool tiled
floors, modern furniture and angles and pastel
colours, Tom insisted they have something to eat,
and poured Cathy a glass of white wine to go with
it.

And when she protested feebly, he said wryly, 'I
know you, Cathy. Some people eat when they're
wound up—you don't. But that's not good for you,
and it's not good to go to bed without unwinding,
so keep your eyes open just a little longer. '

In fact the meal, and the wine, did just that,
helped unwind and even woke her up a bit, and
afterwards Tom came to sit beside her on the settee
she was curled up on, stretched his long legs out
on a low table and put his arm around her
shoulders. He also, for the first time ever, talked a
bit about his day's work. He even brought it up
himself.

'I was right about Charlie and Jason and Pete.
They'll have to be kept under some surveillance,
otherwise we could have the makings of a "brat
pack" on our hands. '

Cathy laughed softly. 'I think you were right
about Bronwen and Charlie too. They look, when

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the cameras are off, just ever so slightly suspicious
of each other—did you notice?'

'I did. I also noticed ' he hesitated, glanced

down at her unconscious face and changed tack
without her being aware of it '—one good thing
about Pete and young Charlie Westfield becoming
kindred spirits is the fact that Pete believes in the
story so utterly that he might be able to infect

Charlie with ' he paused again '—*all* the right

enthusiasms. '

But this time Cathy noticed something different
in his voice and she lifted her face to his enquiringly.

He grimaced. 'In other words, point out to him
that Robert does love Portia despite his infatuation
with Chloe. '

'Pete *can* be very persuasive, ' Cathy said with a
chuckle, and rested her head on his shoulder. 'Do
you realise something, Tom? I'm the only one of
the actors who's worked with you before. I think
I've come a long way, ' she added gravely, 'since
you told me I looked like a frozen cod. '

He grinned. 'I didn't tell you you looked like
one. '

'Was as effective as one, then, ' she amended.
Then she suddenly looked rueful. 'I'm glad I don't
have to prove that. '

'Kiss anyone passionately, you mean?' he
queried, looking down at her with a sudden glint
in his eye. 'So, incidentally, am I. '

Cathy sat up. 'Would you really mind, Tom?'

He considered her serious expression and
answered her question with one of his own. 'Why
shouldn't I?'

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She opened her mouth, hesitated, then said,
'Husbands and wives of people who have to do
those things must be able to understand it's only
acting. '

'That doesn't mean they like the thought of it. '

'Even... ' She stopped, then blurted out, 'How
will you feel about Bronwen and Charlie—sorry,
that slipped out. ' She grimaced ruefully.

Tom's expression didn't change. 'My big
problem, I suspect, is going to be getting some
realism from them. '

'But you can switch off, Tom, ' Cathy said slowly,
and when he raised an eyebrow, she went on, 'You
can switch off completely to everything but the
movie—I saw you today. I might just as well have
been, ' she gestured, 'Minnie Mouse. I'm not com-
plaining, I '

'Are you not?' He reached out and drew his
finger down her cheek, and there was something
quizzical in his eyes.

'Well, I realise it's got to be that way, ' she said
more truthfully, 'so if you can, I should be able
to. ' She frowned. 'But I don't know... '

'Perhaps our reservations have something to do
with my being the first and only man who's ever
kissed you. Properly, ' he suggested. 'Are you
burning to have a go?'

'No! I just told you '

'It seems to me you're also telling me it's some-
thing we should consider, ' Tom drawled, and added
with some irony, 'I guess once again there's no one
more qualified to show you all the right techniques,
for the camera, the best angles, et cetera. A good
way to start is with a really deep glance between

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the two of you, like this... ' And he put his hands
on her shoulders and stared down into her eyes with
all the amusement gone from his and in a way that
suddenly caused her to catch her breath and feel
hot. But she managed to say, 'You're making fun
of me, Tom!'

'Not at all, ' he denied. 'Now you should tilt your
face up and I should, again in the classic tradition, '
he paused as she did tilt her head back, 'appear to
hesitate—and here endeth the first lesson, ' he said
with a strange smile as he let her go and picked up
her hand. 'I was teasing you, ' he added, leaning
his head back. 'You could either forgive me or—
slap my face. ' And he kissed her knuckles instead,
then returned her hand to her lap but didn't take
his eyes off her face.

'Tom, ' she said thoughtfully, after a moment,
'you don't want to be having this conversation with
me, do you? Is it against the rules of play—while
we're working together? Or am I trespassing?' She
shrugged.

He said quietly, 'It's not a case of trespassing on
any hallowed ground to do with Bronwen, in fact
it could be quite ' He stopped rather abruptly.

Cathy waited.

'It could be quite simple, ' he said at length. 'I'm
too tired to be making much sense, while you
appear to have perked up remarkably!' He sat up
with a wry look. 'Why don't you take pity on me
and take me to bed?'

Cathy stared at him, then she said with a faint
smile, 'That's the worst excuse I've ever heard you
conjure up, Tom West! All the same, come. ' And
she held out her hand.

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He took it, but pulled her into his arms. 'There's
so much I love about you, Cathy Kerris, can you
keep believing that?'

Once again she opened her mouth, but this time
she decided to hold her peace and sighed an odd
little sigh that somehow extended to a large yawn.
'OK, ' she said through her fingers, and, 'Contrary
to what you believe, I don't even know if I've got
the energy to get up the stairs, Mr West. '

Tom laughed. 'I'll help you. And contrary to
what I told you, I still have some work to do. '

'I knew that, ' she murmured. 'Just take *me* to
bed. '

He did, and she fell asleep almost as soon as her
head touched the pillow. But it was some time
before Tom stopped staring down at her uncon-
scious face. And when he went back downstairs,
instead of working, he poured himself a glass of
wine and took it out to the terrace, where he stared
out over the water, and the lights of Sanctuary Cove
reflected in it, for a long time.

The next morning Cathy woke feeling surprisingly
refreshed and she let Tom sleep in while she set out
to potter around her new, temporary domain,
making breakfast, doing the washing. But as she
worked, she tried to take stock and see behind their
conversation of the night before, only to come to
the conclusion several times that the only thing she
could be sure of was that there must be *some*hallowed ground between Tom and Bronwen, even
if he might be trying to deny it to himself. Then
she deliberately reminded herself of her code of be-

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haviour and warned herself to apply it to her
thought processes.

Tom was still fast asleep when she took his
breakfast in, and she paused a moment before
waking him. He was lying on his side and he had
taken over all the bed since she had left it; he'd got
the sheet impossibly twisted round the lower half
of his body and he was cradling her pillow in his
arms.

A faint smile touched her mouth, because it was
only in sleep that he ever looked—not vulnerable,
she mused, but younger somehow, and it was only
when he was asleep or just waking that she found
herself feeling affectionately indulgent and as if she
had a slight edge instead of being very definitely
the younger, the student half of the relationship.
But when he was asleep she could, and often did,
remind herself that he had some faults. He was
hopelessly untidy and incredibly forgetful about a
lot of things, such as paying basic bills like the elec-
tricity and phone; he could never remember where
he'd put his car keys; he was utterly careless of his
clothes, often found himself without a cent on him
or a credit card, forgot appointments and, when he
didn't forget them altogether, often turned up a day
late or expected people a day early—in fact, how
he'd survived before he'd married her was some-
thing of a mystery to her. He could also be abom-
inably rude to perfectly innocent people and then
be surprised to find he'd hurt them to the core.

'Tom?' she said softly.

He opened one eye and squinted at her, then
rolled on to his back with a groan. 'What's the
time?'

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'Nine o'clock. I brought your breakfast '

'Nine!' He sat up and raked his fingers through
his hair.

'We start at ten, don't we? That's plenty of time, '
Cathy said placidly, and put the tray down beside
the bed.

'You start at ten—I had planned to be there a lot
earlier so I could go over yesterday's rushes. '

'Oh, ' she said, and smiled down at him. 'You
should have told me. '

By way of reply, Tom fingered the blue shadows
on his jaw, eyed her state of pristine freshness, her
gleaming hair, her white shorts and blue T-shirt,
then with a sudden movement pulled her into his
arms and lay back with her.

'Tom!' she protested.

'Cathy?' he returned politely, but added, 'I have
this... caveman urge to undo you and muss you
up, quite an irresistible urge, I must tell you. What
do you say to that?'

She trailed the shadows on his jaw with her
fingers and said demurely to the wicked, hungry
glint in his eyes, 'That will make you even later. '

'Not the way I feel right this instant—but I've
changed my mind—I don't care if I'm late or the
rushes have to wait. I don't give a damn. Dear
Cathy, ' he finished gravely.

'You... you're serious!' She managed to evade
his arms long enough to sit up, although his hands
captured her about the waist almost immediately.

'Never more so. '

'Well '

'There you go again!' he teased.

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'But *I'll* be... I mean, I was feeling much calmer
this morning, sort of, and unrushed and '

'I don't plan to change any of that—in fact I
could add to it. Sometimes, ' he said seriously, 'the
way I make love to you gives you an air of rather
lovely serenity. '

Cathy stared at him. 'Tom West, ' she said
severely, 'you are incredibly vain about some things,
you really are!'

'But wrong?' he queried softly.

'Well... '

But that was the last word she was able to say
for a time, and by the time his mouth left hers, she
was drowning in the warmth of his embrace and
unable to resist the deft removal of her clothes or
her 'undoing' as he had put it, which turned out
to be a mutually joyful experience despite the fact
that he was as good as his word and it didn't take
long at all.

In fact they made the giant, rather barnlike
studios with two minutes to spare, and Tom put his
hand briefly over hers before they got out of the
car. 'Am I forgiven?' he asked.

Cathy raised an innocent eyebrow. 'What for?'

'Rushing you. '

She looked up into his eyes and answered him
with a little glint in her own. 'The true test of that
will be in today's rushes, probably. '

'Ah ' his lips twisted into a wry smile '—so

be it. '

It was not until they began shooting that it oc-
curred to Cathy that whereas yesterday she had been
expected to project a Chloe unconscious of what

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was going on around her, today's script called for
more, a serene Chloe who could not be unaware
that a very odd sequence of events seemed to be
unfolding about her but at the same time refused
to be fazed by any of it.

She had no trouble with the part at all, although
she did eye her husband once a little narrowly and
wondered about two things—how well he must
know her and whether he would actually use that
knowledge to get a better performance out of her.
Then she resolutely closed her mind and gathered
her serenity back.

It was amazing how time flew. Hours, then days
and weeks. And it was equally amazing how well
it all went—which was not to say those first weeks
of shooting didn't have a share of drama; they did.
Tom had been right about Bronwen having some
difficulty with Portia—but nothing that was to ap-
proach the last few weeks' high drama, did they all
but know it. It was also, Cathy realised more and
more, a tribute to Tom's genius, those relatively
trouble-free first few weeks—his patience with
Bronwen, his knack of inspiring the others and
leading them to the correct interpretation of a role,
his judgement on when honest criticism would work
and when encouragement was needed—and when
throwing the script to the floor and swearing coldly,
comprehensively and precisely at everyone would
galvanise them out of a bout of boredom.

And Duncan, although he commuted to and from
Melbourne fairly regularly, contributed too, as a
referee occasionally, or as a quiet friendly presence.

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It was also a time of pleasant socialising for
Cathy, more particularly the sessions they had at
home at Sanctuary Cove where she was happy to
provide food and drink and listen with deep interest
to the debates that flourished on every aspect of
film-making. But there were other outings—boat
trips and sightseeing trips, receptions, media
sessions—no wonder, she thought once, time had
flown.

Was it also how busy they all were, she also won-
dered once, that accounted for the fact that her
problems appeared to have virtually disappeared?
It was certainly no longer a problem for her to be
just one of the cast on the set. Just as it appeared
to be no problem for Tom and Bronwen to work
with each other, despite her difficulties with the part
and the undoubted animosity between her and
Charlie. And, Cathy was to realise later, it was easy
to put Bronwen's air of abstraction down to the
problem of Portia and leave it there... For that
matter, to ignore the fact that Bronwen spent very
little time at the Sanctuary Cove villa compared to
most of the other members of the cast and crew
but seemed to prefer to be alone with Duncan, who
was obviously an old friend despite his once made
comment. And it would have been asking a lot
anyway, she *had* reasoned once, to expect Tom and
Bronwen to be like lifelong buddies, and it might
have made *her* feel awkward when Tom put an af-
fectionate arm about her or the times when they
stood in the doorway and waved their guests off,
then closed the door on their private life...

That was another aspect of it all that she was to
discover had escaped her—it was true she and Tom

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had never been demonstrative in front of others, it
was also true that even socialising, she often felt as
if she was trailing in Tom's wake, a quiet shadow
with the snacks. But every now and then he would
say something or do something that demonstrated
to all concerned that she was his, and manage to
do it in a way that warmed her and satisfied her.
She never stopped *to* think how little it took to
achieve that for her... Just as, she was to come to
realise with bitter self-mockery, she was either too
stupid or busy and stimulated enough to be lulled
into accepting the surface of things, and didn't see
the rocks below the surface until she crashed into
them.

It didn't even, for example, occur to her that
Charlie Westfield was to be one of those rocks.

She did discover during those first weeks that she
liked him, that he made her laugh, that she thought
he was doing a good job with Robert, and also that
his aura of being into fast cars, fast women and
moderately loose living was somewhat exag-
gerated. Although there was certainly an abundant
supply of girls who were happy to surround him,
girls with dark-painted lips and nails and few
inhibitions.

But that Charlie Westfield should consider
himself falling deeper and deeper in love with her
every day actually only surprised two people—
herself and him. In fact, it would have wounded
his pride severely had he realised that on top of this
strange new feeling that was gripping him so in-
tensely he was not quite hiding it with his usual
cool. That his emotions would get the better of him
one day surprised no one else either; indeed, it was

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a matter of open speculation among some that it
was only a matter of time.

The first intimation of it came when they were
filming a balloon sequence—another of Pete's
cherished cameos of Chloe escaping Robert- this
time per medium of her being hijacked in a balloon
with Robert chasing in another.

They used three balloons on a clear sunny Sunday
morning, setting out from a vast paddock at
Carrara—Cathy in one with the villain who was
abducting her. The villains in the plot had by now
realised that by dangling Chloe in front of Robert
they could get him to do almost anything. Her
villain was in fact a balloonist in disguise, while
Robert was ostensibly operating his own balloon,
and Tom and a cameraman were squashed into a
third.

Of all Pete's bizarre scenarios, this was the only
one that had worried Cathy, but she had said
nothing and trusted in her new-found profession-
alism. But no sooner were they off the ground and
rising higher than she discovered she was frozen
with fear, that the roar and the smell of the burner
were horrible, the swaying was nauseating, but what
was worse was looking down, and she crumpled to
the bottom of the basket.

The confusion that followed mostly escaped her
as she tried desperately to concentrate on the advice
her alarmed balloonist was offering her and the
image, if she could ever get on her feet again, she
was supposed to project this time for the camera,
of haunting farewell as she was sailed off into the
blue yonder. In fact, she did get to her feet once
and look back, but she didn't stay up for long,

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although she was dimly aware of Tom's voice
booming through a megaphone and Charlie adding
his voice and manhandling his balloonist, who was
supposed to be unseen, upright and commanding
him to do something!

By some miracle, they managed to curtail the
flight and all land in another large paddock,
although some distance from each other. But it was
Charlie who reached Cathy first and helped her
down while the balloon was made fast, and it was
Charlie who had his arms around her when she dis-
covered her legs had left her, and Tom arrived on
the scene.

There followed another couple of confused
minutes as Charlie Westfield clutched her and de-
manded angrily of Tom how he could have put her
through such an ordeal.

Tom replied with some cutting advice of an ex-
tremely personal nature, and uttered so menacingly
that he quite took Charlie by surprise, and took the
opportunity to take Cathy from him, swing her into
his arms and snap at her, his hazel eyes cold and
furious still, 'You bloody idiot! Why didn't you tell
me?'

'Why didn't you tell me, Cat?'

The same question, but asked in a different voice,
several frustrating hours later after a forced, es-
tranged wait in a strange paddock while the ground
support team changed direction and desperately
tried to find them.

Cathy had refused to say a word, although due
to Tom's machinations and the fact that he'd sat
himself down to wait and kept her in his arms,

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together with her genuinely feeling sick, she had
hidden her extreme chagrin with him from the
others.

Now, though, she was home and alone with him,
ensconced on a settee with a cup of tea beside her,
and had been ordered not to move.

She fiddled with a small ornament on the table
beside her, then lifted her blue eyes to his at last.
'I didn't *know, '* she said hotly.

He lifted an eyebrow. 'Didn't even suspect?'

'I... well, I was a bit nervous, ' she admitted re-
luctantly at last.

'You should have told me that, Cathy, ' he said
quietly.

'I didn't think... I really didn't know it would
be so... ' She broke off and shuddered. 'I mean, I
don't mind flying in planes or helicopters, but...
I also, ' she said with a dignified glance this time,
'wanted to be professional about it, and I thought
if you knew I was nervous, well... ' She shrugged.

'You're damned right—I would have done some-
thing about it, ' Tom said with a rueful smile. 'The
point you seem to have missed is that I wouldn't
have expected *anyone* to go through that kind of
hell, but least of all you. '

'Is that so?' A little glint of anger lit her eyes.
'I suppose that's why you called me a... an idiot?'

His lips quivered. 'I apologise for that, ' he said
gravely, however. 'It was, in fact, an expression of
concern—that got a bit twisted. '

She considered, then said candidly, 'You were
also terribly rude to Charlie. '

Something flickered briefly in his eyes, a curious
mixture of irritation, she thought, and speculation,

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but about what she didn't know. He murmured fi-
nally, 'I'm sure Charlie will survive. How are you
feeling now?'

Cathy laid her head back with a grimace. 'Fine.
And foolish. Do... will I have to do it again?' She
sat up suddenly. 'Perhaps you could hide in my
balloon? I'm sure I'd feel better with you there. '

Tom's eyes resting on her determined expression
were oddly gentle. 'No, you won't have to do it
again. We'll find some other way. '

But, later that day, he got an excited call from
Jason, and he turned to her when he put the phone
down.

'You can relax, Cathy. The rushes are mar-
vellous, apparently. You look thoroughly haunted
and Charlie suitably demented, and the whole se-
quence has a tangibly tense air about it—I wonder
why?' he added with a grin. 'But anyway, will you
let me give you dinner? We could wander round
some of those fascinating shops in the village and
then have an early meal. '

But not all the consequences to the ballooning se-
quence were so successful.

Unknown to anyone this time, Charlie Westfield
brooded darkly but very secretively this time and,
several days later, found himself alone with Cathy
in a deserted corner of the set, surrounded by some
really weird props such as a stuffed tiger which
Cathy got trapped behind, and found he could no
longer conceal his feelings.

'Cathy, ' he said slowly, his dark eyes roaming
her simple yet exquisitely cut dusky pink dress that

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was so different from the complicated mixture of
straps and studs, berets and socks, trousers of all
description and tiny tube bodices, jangling brace-
lets and necklaces and bizarre earrings that most
of the girls he knew wore.

'Oh, Charlie, there's a real menagerie here. What
do you suppose '

'Cathy, ' he broke in intensely, still studying her
smooth, bare, golden arms, her bare throat and her
hair, 'I *love you.* I can't think about anything but
you, I... ' He stopped as she made a shocked little
sound and her blue eyes widened.

They stared at each other across the tiger.

Cathy cleared her throat. 'Charlie, you can't be
serious, ' she said with difficulty. 'I '

'Goddamn it, I am '

'But I'm married '

'Leave him!' Charlie Westfield said urgently. 'He
only treats you like his lapdog anyway. They all do!
And do you know why? They're jealous. '

*'Jealous?'* Cathy echoed incredulously.

'That stuck-up bitch Bronwen Bishop is, anyway. '
He gestured contemptuously. 'For two reasons, be-
cause you're going to steal the show—you've got
movie magic in you, honey! Everyone here knows
it and *she* knows it—next to you she looks like a
dried-up old bat, and don't think she's not re-
gretting that on two counts—your precious husband
being one of 'em. It's killing her to think you're
not only going to steal the show but you stole him. '

'I *didn't!'* She '

'Whatever, ' Charlie said with another grand
gesture. 'And don't think he's not jealous either!
He's no fool, whatever else he might be, our high

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and mighty Mr Director. He knows how good you
are, he knows a love affair between a person and
the cameras when he sees it, but has he ever told
you?' He waited a moment as Cathy's lips parted,
then closed. 'Of course he hasn't. He's not one to
share the limelight either, our Tom West. Specially
not with his wife, whom he's trained like a
little '

'Stop it!' Cathy gasped. 'How *dare* you?'

'I dare because I'm crazy about you, Cathy. ' A
dull flush of colour spread over Charlie Westfield's
good-looking features. 'And I don't want you as
my faithful shadow. I want to free you. ' His voice
deepened and quietened. 'Have you ever been free,
Cathy? Have you ever spread your wings and let
your hair down and done things just for the hell of
it? I could teach you how to do that, but I'd also
look after you because, ' this time his voice
quickened with exasperation, 'I love you. '

There was no doubting that Charlie earnestly be-
lieved what he was saying. Cathy licked her lips
and tried to sort through the tangle of thoughts that
filled her mind. It was a fatal hesitation, however,
because Charlie then vaulted the moth-eaten tiger
and took her into his arms and attempted to kiss
her passionately.

'I believe this isn't particularly original, ' a dry
voice said behind them, 'but would you kindly un-
hand my wife, sir?'

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Charlie released her and spun round, going as pale
as he'd been flushed.

There was a moment's silence as Tom's gaze
bored into his dark one, then transferred to Cathy.
He was leaning against an iron girder in a way that
indicated that he might not have just arrived, and
there was something about his negligent, medi-
tative stance, despite that quick, cutting look into
Charlie's soul, that contrived to make Cathy feel
curiously hot-handed and adolescent. She won-
dered briefly how Charlie's psyche was standing up.
He immediately indicated that it was somewhat
bruised.

'She may be your wife, but I love her and you
don't deserve her! You treat her as if '

'That's enough, Westfield!' said Tom, and there
was no mistaking the contempt in his hazel eyes
now or the menace, again, in his voice. 'You may
be prepared to shoot this production down in
flames—I'm not. We're waiting for you on the set.
You might recall, ' his gaze was now mockingly
ironic, 'that you and Bronwen are about to embark
on a passionate love scene. '

Charlie opened and closed his mouth a couple
of times, and despairing futility was stamped into
every line of his body. 'She '

'Dislikes you as much as you dislike her, ' Tom
said evenly. 'That's not the point. You're both

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actors, or claim to be. ' He paused to let this sink
in. 'What's more, you're both under contract. '

Charlie stared at him and Cathy could see the
stiffening of resolve overcome the futility. He said
coldly, 'I am an actor, pal, and I will see this pro-
duction out. That doesn't mean I can't make my
own judgements, nor does it alter the fact that
you're side-stepping the real issue here. But then
where Cathy's concerned, I guess that's second
nature to you. ' And with this parting shot, he
stepped over the tiger and walked away.

Tom let him go. He didn't even turn his head.
He watched, instead, Cathy's parted lips and the
way her eyes followed Charlie, then jerked back to
his. And the way she licked her lips before she
spoke.

'I had no idea!'

He grimaced. 'None?'

'Of course not—you don't think... ?'

'I'm sure you haven't led him on in any way,
other than getting yourself trapped behind a tiger.

What ' he straightened abruptly '—did you

make of the rest of his sentiments?'

Cathy said slowly, 'I don't feel like your lapdog,
although I can see why some people might... but
that's probably *me.* The way I am, I mean. I
don't... ' She stopped.

'Go on, ' he said quietly.

'Tom, I think we should leave this until later. It
isn't the right time or place for '

'I think it will be hard to be spontaneous later, '
he said drily. 'You were saying—you don't... ?'

Cathy made an effort to concentrate. 'I don't
believe Bronwen is jealous or that you are—that's

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crazy, ' she said firmly. 'I don't believe I'm going
to steal the show either. ' She shrugged. 'So '

'But you do believe he's in love with you?' he
said softly but capturing her gaze.

A tinge of colour entered her cheeks. 'He... seems
to believe he is, but I don't know why. '

Tom raised an ironic eyebrow. 'You don't?'

'Well, I'm just so different from all the other girls
he... ' She stopped, then went on a little helplessly,
'I am, aren't I?'

But he chose not to comment on that. He said,
instead, 'What about the "freedom" he offered
you?'

Cathy took a breath. 'I... ' But she couldn't go
on, nor was she sure why she couldn't just say it
was as ridiculous as everything else Charlie had im-
plied, or that it didn't appeal to her at all. Then it
occurred to her that Tom was treating her like a
witness on a stand, like a defendant, in fact, when
she had nothing to be defensive about, and she
found that annoyed her. 'Tom, ' she said quietly but
with resolve, 'you're blowing this out of all pro-
portion '

'Am I? You don't think the fact that Charlie
Westfield is madly in love with you, that he loathes
Bronwen and detests me, is a matter of quite some
proportion, Cathy?' His expression was sardonic.

'Of course! I mean, it's going to make things
rather difficult. '

'Only rather?' he mocked.

'Very difficult, then, ' she said through her teeth.
'But it's not *my* fault. '

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'On the other hand, if you hadn't insisted on
doing Chloe, none of this would have happened, '
he said harshly.

Cathy gasped. 'That's—you *agreed—how* unfair
can you be?'

'It's not a matter of being fair or otherwise—it's
a fact of life. '

'But Charlie would have loathed Bronwen
anyway, probably, and could just as easily have
fallen in love with whoever did Chloe, so '

'Oh, he could, ' drawled Tom. 'I suspect our
Charlie falls in and out of love regularly, but if
someone else had done Chloe, she wouldn't have
been my wife—do you see, Cathy?'

Cathy stared at him, then she stumbled round
the tiger and ran past him towards the refuge of
her dressing-room.

There was, fortunately, not the opportunity for any
further words on the subject until later that night,
by which time some of Cathy's rage had abated to
a slightly duller emotion. She also left the set mid-
afternoon and occupied herself at home until Tom
came in after ten, which helped calm her down a
bit.

But it was a set, cold face she turned to him when
he closed the front door behind him and came
towards where she was sitting in the lounge with a
book.

'I gather you're still not talking to me, ' he said
briefly when she turned back to her book.

'Now that would also be ridiculous, ' she said
coolly. 'But while I may talk to you, it doesn't mean
I'll enjoy it. '

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A faint, dry smile lit his eyes. 'I'm suitably
damned, ' he murmured, and cast himself down on
the settee opposite her. 'However, I'm sure it would
be better for you to get it all off your chest. '

Cathy took a breath. Then she said acidly,
'You're wrong, you know. Talking about it won't
change anything, it won't change *you,* particularly,
and the only thing, to my mind, that we can do
now is get this movie over and done with. '

'In a state of armed neutrality?' he queried.

'Yes, ' she replied baldly.

'Unfortunately, ' he said thoughtfully and with a
smothered yawn, 'I'm uncharacteristically ex-
hausted, and without the energy to prise it out of
you or do much more than go to bed, but don't
hold that against me too, will you, Cathy? By
tomorrow morning I'm sure I'll have come up with
a better plan. '

'You !' Cathy said hotly, and stopped

abruptly as she realised his face *was* uncharacter-
istically lined with tiredness and his eyes heavy-
lidded. '... Are you sickening for something?' she
asked uncertainly.

He grimaced. 'I hope not. '

'You have been working awful hours, but then
you always do and it never seems to affect you... '
She stopped with a frown in her eyes. 'All right, '
she said with sudden decision, 'you'd better go to
bed. '

'Are you coming with me, or is that too much
to ask?'

Cathy compressed her lips, then was struck by
the memory of once accusing him of being ado-

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lescent for sleeping in the spare room. 'Why not?'
she said, but added coldly, 'When I'm ready. '

His lips twisted, but he said no more, and it was
with an obvious effort that he pulled himself
together and took himself off to bed.

'I hope it's conscience, ' Cathy said, but to herself.

It was conscience that had tired Tom out so un-
characteristically, but not about her, she was to dis-
cover the next morning after a restless night during
which he tossed and turned in his sleep to an extent
that really worried her.

Then she fell deeply asleep in the early hours,
and when she woke with the sun streaming over the
foot of the bed she was alone.

She lay for a while in the rumpled bed, sleepily
gathering her thoughts which, surprisingly, had lost
a lot of their hard certainty, she discovered. Not
that she believed for one minute that she was
stealing the show—or that Tom was jealous of her.
Nor, on reflection, was she less annoyed with Tom's
attitude, but Bronwen... ? Bronwen isn't happy—
the thought surfaced in her mind and refused to be
banished. Why? Because of the antagonism between
her and Charlie? No... it's more a bone-deep un-
happiness that she hides rather well, but it's when
you see her in the odd times she forgets, when you
see the vitality and the energy, the intelligence and
the humour—that's when you realise it's mostly
smothered.

'Is it because she's discovered she made a terrible
mistake about how much Tom means to her?'

It was a whispered question Cathy asked herself,
and one that she didn't have to search for an answer

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to. Instead she thought with some bitterness that
she herself had spent the last weeks with her head
buried in the sand, and it had taken Charlie of all
people to make her see that Bronwen was deeply
hurt and desperately battling to put a brave front
on it. And on top of it all, she thought, she has to
put up with seeing herself usurped by a lapdog.
If... just say I could ever fall in love with someone
nearer my own age, someone like Charlie Westfield,
her thoughts ranged on, how would I be, I wonder?
Free and able to spread my wings? Able to do things
just for the hell of them? Tom does sometimes...

She sighed, pushed away the sheet and got up,
then she caught sight of the clock, and because it
was so quiet, guessed Tom had already left for the
set.

But when she walked noiselessly down the stairs
in her bare feet and white nightgown, he was sitting
at the breakfast bar surrounded by a sea of papers
and with his head in his hands. He wore only a pair
of jeans, and the Queensland sun had tanned his
body a deep smooth gold and lightened his hair.

'Oh, ' Cathy said at the bottom of the stairs.

He looked up slowly and their gazes clashed.

Cathy was the first to look away. 'I thought you'd
gone, ' she said coolly, and walked into the kitchen,
where she opened the fridge and took out the orange
juice and poured herself a glass. 'Don't you feel
well after all?'

His hazel eyes followed all her movements, the
way her breast tautened under the fine cotton as
she reached up for a glass, the disorder of her hair
and the faint flush of sleep still on her cheeks, her

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slim hands adorned only with his gold wedding ring,
the lack of interest in her blue eyes.

'As a matter of fact I feel bloody awful, ' he re-
marked after an age, 'but not because I'm sick. '

Cathy raised her eyebrows and sipped her orange
juice. 'I suppose it would be too much to expect
that it might be conscience after all, ' she murmured.

'Conscience, ' he said slowly, and surprised her
by grinning unexpectedly. 'I guess you could call it
that. The fact is, this blasted movie has "gotten"
away from me—as your besotted young swain
would no doubt express it. '

'He *isn't..*. I hate you sometimes, Tom!' Cathy
hissed, then took a deep breath. *'I'm* '

'As pure as the driven snow, I know, ' he broke
in. 'Although I wonder for how long—but be that
as it may. ' His lips twisted ironically. 'We did agree
to be professional about all this, didn't we? Well—
your favourite word this time—now's the time that
I need some pure professionalism, my dear, ' he said
laconically.

Cathy stared at him through narrowed eyes and
felt a cold rage such as she'd never known flood
her. 'All right, ' she said abruptly, 'if it's advice
you're talking about, I'll give you some. This
movie's *gotten* away from you for one simple
reason. It's not only the fact that Charlie and
Bronwen hate each other that's making it imposs-
ible to get the right sparks from them, it's because
Bronwen is desperately unhappy and would find it
hard to act in a Christmas pantomime at the
moment. I've seen her on screen, and she just
doesn't have her usual lustre and verve. Now
normally, ' she paused, 'I'm sure your directing

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skills would be able to overcome this "'block" she's
experiencing, but since you're the object of this
deep unhappiness of hers, you can't. And for your
information, Tom West, the biggest mistake you
made was not agreeing to me doing Chloe but
agreeing to work with Bronwen—and it wouldn't
have mattered if I'd been doing Chloe or not. You
say it's over, she says it's over, but it's pretty ob-
vious it's *not*—for her, at least. '

She stopped, gulped down the last of the orange
juice and continued quite evenly, which was not a
true reflection of her emotions, 'Actually there's
something else wrong, while we're on the subject.
You're trying to get Bronwen to come over as a
beautiful bimbo, but Portia wasn't like that in the
book. She wasn't just gaily and illogically, madly
in love with Robert, she was also deeply torn by
her love for him and the fact that she knows he'll
never love her as much as she loves him, although
he goes back to her in the end. It was a real love-
hate relationship, and it made sense that way. It
doesn't this way. '

Tom had studied her through narrowed eyes as
she spoke, and he now said with irony, 'Are you
trying to tell me how to do my job, Cathy?'

She shrugged. 'You said you needed
professionalism. '

'I do, but the whole tone of this movie is '

'I know, ' she interrupted, 'light fantasy. Per-
sonally, 1 think it could do with a touch of realism. '

'So, ' a muscle flickered in his jaw and there was
something frighteningly intent about him now, and
angry, 'you're not just a pretty little lapdog after
all, dear Cathy. And if Bronwen can't act her way

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out of a paper bag at the moment/ he added mock-
ingly, 'how am I going to get her to come up with
some reality?'

Cathy stared at him, then she said huskily, Tell
her to imagine Robert is you, Tom. That should do
the trick' But she didn't leave it there. She picked
up the empty glass and hurled it across the breakfast
bar at him, then whirled around to run upstairs
again.

He caught the glass in a lightning reflex action,
and he caught her halfway up the stairs.

'Don't touch me, ' she said through her teeth.
This lapdog has had *enough!'*

That's the trouble about being a lapdog, ' Tom
countered grimly, standing on the step below her
but still towering over her, 'they're not very
ferocious. '

'Don't you believe it, Tom, ' she warned. 'I'd have
no qualms about biting and scratching and
screaming my head off—in fact, I'd enjoy it right
now/

'Your convent would be shocked to the core, ' he
drawled.

'Do you think so? In fact it was a certain Sister
Margaret Mary who once told us exactly where to
aim for, '

'I wouldn't recommend it, ' he said gravely with
a suddenly different light in his eyes.

'Just... go away, then!' she blazed, and with a
twist of her body ran up the remaining stairs and
into the bedroom. She was not quite quick enough
about slamming and locking the door, however, and
as he shouldered his way in, she retreated to the

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bed, but her eyes were still a deep, furious blue,
her cheeks pink and her hands shaking with rage.

'Don't you dare '

'Cathy. ' Tom closed the door and leant his
shoulders back against it. 'Calm down. I'm not
going to touch you. ' He paused, then said rather
wryly, 'As a matter of interest, what are you im-
agining I'm about to do to you?'

'Do?' Her lips quivered. 'Probably try to make
love to me. That's your panacea for everything, isn't
it? Well, I have to tell you the days of it converting
me back into a "pretty little lapdog", ' she said with
tremendous scorn, 'are over!'

There was a moment's taut silence. Then he said
softly, 'So he did get through to you. '

'Yes, he got through to me, ' she flashed. 'Why
shouldn't he? It's obviously the way you saw me
yourself. You just *said* '

'That didn't come out quite the way I meant it,
Cathy, ' he said abruptly. '1 was somewhat piqued. '

Cathy sat down and ran her hands through her
hair. 'And that's another thing, you're treating *me*with the utmost suspicion as... if, ' she stammered
wrathfully, 'I've got something to be ashamed of,
and then you've got the nerve to tell me you're
piqued when it's all a figment of your imagination!'

'You agreed a moment ago that Charlie '

'I *meant—he* opened my eyes about a lot of
things. '

'Cathy, ' he said roughly, then with an effort
perhaps to still his hands, folded his arms. 'Cathy,
we're at cross-purposes here. When I said what I
did downstairs it was in a moment of resentment
because you're right. '

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She laughed hollowly. 'What about?'

Trying to portray Portia as a mindless bimbo.
It's been—for some time now I couldn't put my
finger on what 1 was doing wrong. More amaz-
ingly, Pete didn't see it either. You have to admit
that even in the book Portia does sort of stray into
bimboish country. '

'When she's on the defensive, ' Cathy said wearily.
'Well, perhaps it is a fine line—how come Pete... ?'
She lifted her head and looked into his eyes curi-
ously, her rage temporarily forgotten.

'Pete's a novice at the more subtle nuances on a
screen. He's also been very busy trying to learn so
many tricks of the trade, ' Tom added with a ghost
of a smile in his eyes.

Cathy thought of Pete and how he'd been over
the past weeks—intense, eager and under every-
one's feet. She had to smile shakily herself.

'Am I forgiven?' asked Tom after a long pause,
during which he hadn't taken his eyes off her,
although she'd been studying her hands distractedly.

She raised a hand and pushed her hair back
again, fighting some sudden weak tears. 'No, ' she
said desolately. 'Except in public'

'Could 1 come and sit next to you on the bed?'

'Tom, ' she said on a breath, her eyes flying to
his, then skidding away.

'Not to touch or to offer any panacea you find
intolerable, ' he murmured.

She lifted her shoulders in a helpless little gesture
which he took as assent, and strolled over to sit
down beside her.

And he said, not looking at her, 'I've never in
our life together, thought of you as a lapdog. If

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I've given *you* that impression, I'm sorry, and if
I've given other people that impression I'll do what
I can to rectify it. But, ' he paused, 'you '

'I know what you're going to say—it's what I
tried to explain yesterday—what Charlie doesn't
understand is that I'm not a very outgoing person.

I ' she hesitated '—perhaps I've just never had

the opportunity to be different. '

He was silent so long that she looked across at
him at last. 'You mean, ' he said slowly to his hands,
'you might be capable of letting your hair down
and spreading your wings given the right con-
ditions?' And at last his eyes met hers, soberly, even
a shade bleakly.

A tremor ran through Cathy. 'I don't know, ' she
said painfully. 'To be honest, I've never even given
it much thought. '

'But now you have to. ' It was a quiet statement,
but she felt as if he was looking right into her soul.

She licked her lips and for a brief, mad moment
felt like throwing herself into his arms and begging
him to love her, to end this awful confusion, to
take her back to the days when the one simple fact
of her life had been her love for him, and it had
overridden all else. 'Do you think that's silly?'

Tom picked up her hand and threaded his fingers
through hers. 'No, ' he said evenly. 'Although I
don't know if Charlie Westfield is the one to do it. '

Cathy tensed. 'I didn't mean that!'

'What did you mean, then?'

She looked down at his long, strong fingers
around her own. 'I'm not sure, ' she said at last,
and freed her hand. 'How are we going to go on
now?'

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'Cathy ' he took her hand back, then sighed

harshly '—do you mean us or the movie?'

'Both, I guess, ' she said tonelessly, and won-
dered if he would bring up the subject which was
really the heart of it all—Bronwen. And she
shivered suddenly, thinking of her callous sug-
gestion downstairs that had been torn out of her in
the heat of the moment—and came to a sudden de-
cision. 'What I said earlier about Bronwen, ' she
clenched his hand suddenly and went on awk-
wardly, 'was also said out of pique, and I'm sorry
for it. And 1 can go on—we have to go on, don't
we?'

'Like real troopers, ' he agreed drily. 'How will
you handle Charlie?'

'Very firmly, ' she said in a firm voice, 'but you'll
have to help me. It won't do any good to be cutting
and unkind to him. We'll just have to pretend it
never happened and present a united front. '

'Your wisdom amazes me, ' he said, and stopped
rather abruptly.

'I know, ' Cathy conceded with a very faint, wry
smile. 'It amazes me a bit too, so it's not surprising
you—well, people have this lapdog view of
me '

'Cathy, ' Tom gripped her hand so tightly she
winced. 'I'm sure I deserve to suffer for my sins,
but could you do one thing for me? Don't ever call
yourself that again. I hate the very thought of it,
and it's not true—Charlie wasn't accusing you of
it, he was accusing me of treating you that
way '

'I know that, ' Cathy interrupted, 'but I
suppose... anyway, it doesn't matter. We do have

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to forget about all this for the time being. That's
what really matters. '

There's still us, ' he said.

She stirred and said with a little sigh, 'I guess we
have to go on as before, otherwise... ' She broke
off uncertainly.

He tilted her chin and stared into her eyes. 'Just
now you didn't want me to touch you. '

Her mouth trembled and her eyes were troubled.

'Can you not her voice was husky with emotion

and it faltered '—understand why, Tom?'

'I understand, ' he said slowly, 'that... ' He
stopped, raised his head and stared out of the
window at the wide, cloudless blue sky and the sun
streaming in. Then he said, 'Why the hell not?' and
reached for the phone beside the bed.

It was Duncan he rang and Duncan he said
casually to, 'I'm taking a day off, mate. Can you
give everyone a holiday? And if you'd also schedule
a conference for nine o'clock tomorrow morning,
please. You, Pete, Charlie and Bronwen, and re-
schedule everything we had planned for today to
tomorrow afternoon. '

He listened for a moment, then grinned wickedly.
'That's what producers are for, Duncan! The ul-
timate authority. As to what I'm doing today—I'm
going fishing. ' He put the phone down gently.

'Fishing?' Cathy stared at him, mystified. 'I
didn't know you liked fishing. '

'I don't. '

'Then... ?'

'It's a well-known synonym for playing hookey, '
Tom said gravely. 'Have you never played hookey,
Cat?'

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'Not really, but •

Then your education *is* sadly lacking, and we'd
better start to rectify it. What you'll need is a
swimming costume, sand shoes, a hat and towel,
shorts and a shirt and a jumper. I'll organise the
rest. Be on the jetty in an hour. '

Tom '

'Cat, ' he said softly, 'this is freedom, letting your
hair down, doing things just for the hell of them
when you should be doing something else. I know
I'm not Charlie Westfield, but that doesn't mean
I don't know what it's all about. '

Each villa had its own jetty, and an hour later a
sleek cruiser nosed into theirs and Tom appeared
on the back deck and threw Cathy a rope. 'Welcome
aboard, Mrs West. '

'Tom, ' Cathy scrambled on, 'whose boat is it,
and ?'

'It belongs to a very good friend of mine who
lives on the coast and keeps it moored here. I've
been out on it a few times on previous trips and he
told me I could use it any time I liked. '

'But I didn't know you knew anything about
boats!'

He said, 'I probably know about lots of things
you don't know I know about—I know, for ex-
ample, that I could teach you to handle this boat. '

'Me?' Cathy stared around. They were in the
spacious main cabin by this time with a seat running
along one side towards the spoked wooden wheel
and cupboards and a compact galley on the other.
Down two steps forward, she could see two berths
forming a V. And on the galley counter she noticed

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several bags of food and one with some long-necked
bottles protruding. '1 think I'd better be head cook
and bottle-washer, I think I'd be better at that-
Torn, you've got an awful lot to eat. How long... ?'
She stopped, frowning.

'Overnight. '

Tom!'

'Cathy, ' he said firmly but with a little glint in
his eyes, 'trust me. And no, you're not going to be
head cook and bottle-washer, you're going to have
your first lesson at being a mariner right now. ' He
put his hands round her waist and lifted her into
the chair in front of the wheel. The engine was
ticking over slowly and she looked at the dials with
panic in her eyes. 'But don't you have to have a
licence to drive boats?'

'Only those that go over ten knots. This doesn't.
Now listen carefully and I'll be right beside you. '

A couple of hours later, Cathy said wonderingly,
'I had no idea it was so simple. '

'Once you understand the buoys and channel
markers and know which side of the channels to
keep on, it's easier than driving a car, ' Tom told
her. 'Of course, there is a bit more to it, but for
the Broadwater, which is very well signposted and
on a weekday when there's hardly anyone else out,
you'll do. '

'Of course, ' she agreed gravely, then laughed up
at him. 'I'm starving! Show me how to anchor this

boat now so we can have some lunch. '

‘ ‘ ‘

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They anchored off South Stradbroke Island, op-
posite a tree-lined beach where the cottonwoods and
casuarinas were suddenly familiar to Cathy.

'Isn't this where ?'

'Yes. Where Robert supposedly got himself
stranded on an uninhabited island. '

Cathy giggled, remembering some of the hazards
of that day's shooting, such as the surprised couple
and their particularly persistent dog who had wan-
dered into the shooting area, ruining a sequence
that had been going particularly well. Today would
have been a better day, ' she murmured, gazing
around. There were no other boats at anchor, no
sign of life on the beach and the glittering, sun-
metalled water stretched about them undisturbed.
'It is lovely, isn't it?'

'Yes, After lunch we could go ashore in the
dinghy and walk over the island to the surf, if you
like. '

'Yes, please, ' she said simply, and began to help
him peel the succulent pink prawns he had bought
for their lunch.

But they didn't go for their hike straight after
lunch, because Tom opened a bottle of wine of
which Cathy had two glasses, and after the ex-
citement of the morning it seemed quite natural to
curl up on one of the bunks and go to sleep.

He woke her about four o'clock by tickling her
cheek with a lock of her hair.

She yawned and sat up, looking rueful. 'You
shouldn't have let me sleep so long, ' she told him.

'Why not?' he said idly, but watching her pull
down her blouse and tuck it into her shorts. 'I had

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a kip too. If you're going to have a surf, you'll need
your togs on. '

'Oh'

'Here. ' He handed her her sapphire blue one-
piece costume, then, as she hesitated, turned away,
saying, 'I'll put the towels and sand shoes in the
dinghy. '

It was only about a twenty-minute tramp through
the hot, still bush and across the burning sand to
the unprotected side of the island with its high,
rolling dunes, wide, long beach and pounding surf,
and again, there was not a living soul in sight. And
it was hot enough for Cathy to be grateful to throw
her shorts and blouse off and plunge into the water.
Tom did the same, his lean golden body slicing a
wave. They both surfaced with their hair plastered
to their heads and water streaming from them.

'Nice?' he asked.

'Wonderful!' she called, and flipped on to her
back with her arms outstretched, her face tilted to
the sky.

They frolicked in the water, then came out, but
Cathy discovered as she dried herself down that she
felt full of pent-up energy. 'Let's walk up to the
horizon, ' she suggested with a grin, shaking out her
hair so that sparkling droplets of water flew in all
directions.

'Why not?' Tom returned wryly.

And as they strolled up the beach he told her that
North and South Stradbroke had once been one
island joined by a narrow neck, but weather and a
cargo of sunken dynamite had breached the neck
and formed Jumpinpin Bar, which separated the

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islands now. Cathy shaded her eyes as they walked
north, trying to see the bar, but the sand just went
on and on. And eventually Tom said they had better
turn back, otherwise they'd be caught trying to find
the path over the island in the dark. In fact, the
sun was just slipping behind the mainland as they
reached the Broadwater side and stepped on to the
beach.

She caught her breath and put out a hand to stop
Tom, pointing delightedly at a family of wallabies
at the water's edge.

They watched them for a few minutes.

'What are they doing?' she whispered.

He shrugged. There must be something nu-
tritious in the seaweed the tide brings in. '

Back on the boat, Tom switched on some lights but
left the afterdeck in darkness—for a reason, Cathy
discovered.

There's a cold water shower out there, ' he said,
not quite smiling. 'It's cold but fresh water, so it'll
get all the salt off, and the sand. '

'I see, ' Cathy said gravely. That deck is also very
public'

There's not a soul for miles. It's also quite dark, '
he replied innocently but with a little glint she knew
well in the greeny depths of his eyes. 'Look, ' he
added, stripping off his trunks, 'I'll go first'

Cathy sighed, for several reasons. Because only
this morning she had been so angry with him,
angrier than she'd ever been with anyone, and de-
termined not to succumb to any physical blackmail,
yet now, taking a naked shower on the open deck
of a boat seemed only a right and fitting thing to

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do. Strange, but then only today I learnt to drive
this boat, she mused, which is something I never
visualised myself doing, and there's no one about
and it is dark, so it's not so very daring, but Tom...

Her thoughts centred on Tom, standing straight
and tall on the deck with his back to her, dousing
himself with cold, fresh water from the hand-held
shower, and she found herself wondering if he might
appreciate her more if she did let her hair down and
spread her wings, did do things just for the hell of
it...

'Is it very cold?'

He turned and blinked as she stood in the spill
over of soft light from the cabin, and switched the
water off.

'Pretty cold, ' he said after a moment, his gaze
roaming her body. 'Shall.., I?'

'Yes, please. ' Cathy braced herself and closed her
eyes.

But he didn't begin immediately. Instead he said
with an oddly restrained beat in his voice, 'I wonder
if you have any idea how beautiful you are, Cathy?'

Her lashes fluttered up and she stared at him for
an age until he said, 'Tell me what you're thinking. '

She cleared her throat. 'If you must know, I'm
asking myself why I can't stay angry with you, Tom.
Why I'm doing this '

'It's not such a desperate thing to do—for a
husband and wife, ' he broke in, but rather gently.

She lifted her slim shoulders and spread her
fingers. 'Tonight I'd rather be someone else, a
fascinating stranger—I suppose that sounds rid-
iculous ' she paused and wondered what had

made her say it, what had made her wish it '—but

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I don't want to be made love to because I'm *here*and because I'm your wife, because you think it
might placate me. I'd rather... no, ' she said be-
neath her breath, and half turned away.

'Tell me. Cat. ' He caught her wrist and swung
her back.

'It's very difficult, ' she said with a frown. 'You
want me because you think I have a beautiful body,
and it's not that I don't want to be wanted, but... '
She stopped and bit her lip.

'You want to be courted again?'

She winced. 'That sounds awfully coy—no, I'd
rather you wanted to talk to me and be mentally
attuned, ' she whispered as his fingers tightened
round her wrist, but her blue eyes were dark and
curiously brave.

'This, ' he said after a long time and fingering her
inner wrist as he sometimes did, 'is an odd con-
versation for a naked couple, however married, to
be having, but, ' his lips twisted into a faint smile,
'I concede your point. Unfortunately I'm going to
have to take another cold shower—just to be on the
safe side. ' And he switched on the water and held
the nozzle in a strategic position.

Cathy started to blush, then she began to laugh
and received a spray of water which made her gasp
and then laugh again at the sheer, tingling invig-
oration of it, the freedom of being alone like this
beneath the stars and surrounded by dark water
with the sheen of a rising moon silvering it, of being
able to be so uninhibited—and something else: the
sudden primitive sensual awareness of the wet lines
and angles and strength of Tom's body and the
paler, softer curves of her own. The white glint of

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his teeth as he drenched them both from head to
toe and the way the water ran down her breasts and
dripped off her nipples which the chill had made
full and sensitive.

In fact she was looking down, observing this
phenomenon, when a faint hum in the darkness
made her look up, and immediately forget it as she
realised Tom was staring at her dripping breasts and
unfurled nipples, and that a moment before he'd
turned the shower off and laid it down.

Tom... ?' It was more a husky little sound.

He lifted his eyes to hers, but said nothing.

'I... ' But she could formulate no words, be-
cause not only her breasts but her whole body was
suddenly aching with a desire to be touched, aching
with the remembered, familiar feel of his hands and
lips, aching for him. 'I feel so humiliated' she said
in a sudden rush of words.

'Why?' His lips barely moved.

'Do you ' she stared at him with a painful

enquiry in her eyes '—did you feel like this just
now?'

'Yes. '

'I mean—as if you'd die of desire if I didn't... if
I didn't... ' But the words stuck in her throat.

His smile was only a brief chiselled movement of
his lips. 'It doesn't last—it's only a small death. '

She closed her eyes briefly. 'What can I say?'

'Nothing—welcome to the ranks, Cat, ' he said
softly.

'Ranks?' Her blue eyes were bewildered.

'Of us mere, often muddled adults. '

'I don't understand... '

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'You thought you didn't want to be wanted, with
reason, but reason doesn't altogether govern these
things. You '

He stopped abruptly, and with a start, Cathy re-
alised the hum she'd heard had become the loud
throbbing noise of an outboard motor, and as they
both turned their heads, a powerful spotlight was
turned on from the approaching boat, and it bathed
them unerringly in stark relief.

Tom swore, stepped between her and the light,
picked her up by the waist and lifted her into the
cabin, slamming the door behind them with his
heel.

'Oh, God!' Cathy gasped as he released her and
swiftly pulled all the blinds down.

He turned to her and grinned at her expression
of utter horror, but it was an oddly taut grin. 'Ex-
citing times we're having, aren't we? I'd say they're
fishermen who caught an unexpected thrill, but it's
probably just as well they came along. *We* could
have caught a chill if we'd stayed out there much
longer like this. ' He knotted a towel around his waist
and handed her one.

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Cathy took it, but with a dazed look on her face.

'Use it, ' Tom said briefly. 'You're getting goose-
bumps—here, I '11 do it. '

'I can, ' she mumbled as with sudden impatience
he put his hands on her wet, satiny buttocks and
pulled her towards him.

'You look too stunned to do anything, Mrs West, '
he drawled, and proceeded to rub her dry vigor-
ously until she was pink and glowing all over and
starting to protest,

'Tom!'

But all he said was, 'That's better. Get your
clothes on now and I'll fix us a drink—I think we've
earned one, don't you?'

Cathy grimaced as she pulled on her blue French
silk and lace panties. 'Something, anyway. '

A glint of amusement lit his eyes, but he made
no comment as she stood and stared stubbornly at
him, clad only in that frivolous silken triangle. But
when he merely raised an eyebrow at her, she sud-
denly felt as if she was blushing all over and in a
reflex gesture brought her hands up to cover her
breasts, then reached for her blouse and shorts and
scrambled into them. Tom still didn't comment as
he turned away and produced a bottle of Scotch,
although when he handed her her glass he did
murmur, 'I thought the fright you got might have
doused the flames. '

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Their fingers touched as she took the glass from
him, but a measure of decorum had returned to
her, together with a measure of something rather
challenging. 'It did, actually. But it's left me

feeling ' she paused and studied her glass, then

lifted her lashes '—oddly truculent. Is it a part of
that "small death"?'

'Definitely, ' he said with a twisted smile.

'Do you feel hostile too?'

Tom laughed briefly. He hadn't changed and his
hair was still dripping on to his bare shoulders, but
*he* didn't look cold, he looked instead rather tough
and impervious and curiously detached as he leant
back against the galley with his arms folded and
his drink unregarded in his hand. 'I think I've had
more experience of it, ' he answered obliquely.

Cathy sat down and sipped her Scotch, tilting
her chin reflectively as it slid down her throat. 'Well,
I suppose it's taught me something, if nothing else, '
she said ruefully.

He lifted a quizzical eyebrow at her. 'Tell me. '

She thought for a bit, then said slowly, 'Not to
be superior about these things. ' She hesitated, stared
at her drink, then lifted her eyes to his. 'What's for
dinner?'

'Cathy '

But she got up swiftly and touched her fingers
to his lips. 'Don't, ' she said quietly. 'I've got the
feeling that nothing we can say now is going to re-
solve anything for either of us, so let's not spoil
the rest of our gone-fishing trip. '

Tom got rid of his glass and hers and put his
hands on her waist. 'I've offended you again, but
in fact my motives are rather pure this time. I don't

*•*

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want to be party to you compromising your prin-
ciples. But—it wouldn't be difficult to rekindle the
flames—perhaps that's all we need to say to each
other. '

Cathy searched his eyes with her lips parted as
his words sank in, and a growing feeling of being
at a loss, suddenly, as if things had taken a new,
bewildering tack, then, as he waited and watched
but she couldn't read his expression, she sighed in-
wardly and resorted to flippancy. 'Perhaps, but
seeing that you've walked me and swum me, not
to mention frightening the life out of me—I think
you have to feed me first, '

'I didn't do all those things to you at all, ' he pro-
tested with a grin.

'You brought me here. '

He stared down into her eyes. 'So I did. ' And he
pulled her into his arms, which she didn't resist.
'Do you hate me even more now?' he said into her
hair.

'No, ' she answered, thinking, no, how can I? But
why do I feel I'm battling something 1 don't under-
stand as well as the things I do?

They ate grilled chops and sausages, chips and a
salad and opened another bottle of wine, but they
didn't rekindle the flames. Instead they talked
desultorily and listened to some music, then, when
the fishing boat departed noisily, sat on the after-
deck finishing the wine and watching the stars until
they were both yawning and Tom suggested they
get some sleep.

But they woke at dawn to a lilac-pink sky that
laid the same living shimmer on the water, and it

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was so beautiful, it made Cathy's throat ache and
made her feel inexplicably sad. She turned to Tom
as if for reassurance which he must have read in
her eyes, because he took her into his arms and
held her for a long time.

'Why so sad?' he asked eventually, setting her a
little away at last.

'I don't know. ' She leant back against him, not
wanting to be parted, and laid her cheek on his bare
shoulder while she considered, realising that, while
she might not be possessed of any great blinding
truth, it was as if the forerunner of it was there,
and the premonition that it was going to be a lonely,
unhappy truth.

Tom, ' she said on a sudden breath, and went on
in a rush, 'if you gave me a baby, whatever hap-
pened to us, it would be the most precious thing I
had. '

He stared down at her, then said steadily, 'What
is going to happen to us, Cathy?'

'I don't *know, ''* she answered anguishedly,

'Then that's the last thing you need. ' He took
her face in his hands and his eyes searched hers.
'Have you come to some momentous decision?'

'You keep asking me that. ' She drew a deep
breath. 'No. But I am changing, Tom. '

'Do you think I don't know that?' His voice was
clipped. 'Although don't *you* think wanting a baby
might be your way of trying to halt the process?'

'I would have thought, if you married me to have
the kind of wife who was completely committed to
you, that could be the best way of showing it, Tom, '
she said huskily.

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He lifted his head and stared over her shoulder
and she was struck by his suddenly graven
expression apart from a nerve beating in his jaw.
She felt incredibly cut off from him suddenly and
resentful, and she drew a sharp little breath that
caused him to look back at her and narrow his eyes.

'What words of wisdom are you about to offer
me now, Cat?' he said softly, curiously.

'It doesn't need to be put into words, ' she coun-
tered, equally softly. And indeed, what she did,
didn't.

'Cat, ' he began on a suddenly indrawn breath
himself, 'you don't... '

'Hush, ' she said without looking up. There are
some things you can dictate to me about, some you
can't. This is one of them. '

'I'm afraid, ' he said with an effort, staring down
at her disordered hair, 'you're right about that. '
And with a sudden groan he swept her up into his
arms and took her back to his bunk.

'I've called this conference, ' Tom said on the dot
of nine, 'because I've finally worked out what I'm
doing wrong. As a matter of fact, although she
asked me not to tell you, it was Cathy who was able
to pinpoint it. '

Cathy bit her lip as everyone looked at her with
varying degrees of surprise, except Charlie
Westfield, who was looking rather sphinx-like.

'Bronwen, ' Tom continued with a direct glance,
'my apologies. According to Cathy, I've been trying
to turn your role of Portia into that of a mindless
bimbo, which, ' he switched his gaze to Pete who
was suddenly intensely alert, 'was never meant and

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doesn't work. And is, no doubt, the reason for your
difficulties with it, Bronwen. Apart from your dif-
ficulties with Charlie, which have to be resolved
now, ' he added quietly but with an unmistakable
air of authority, and sat back.

'Of course!' It was, not unnaturally or unex-
pectedly, Pete who led the debate that ensued, and
quite a heated debate it became, as Charlie forgot
the perils and traumas of having the untouchable
love of his life sitting a few feet away from him,
and Bronwen unfroze—what had she been
expecting? Cathy wondered. The other truth?

But finally they all agreed, and it was with a little
smile twisting her lips that Bronwen said to her,
'Thank God for you, Cathy. I suppose I *should* be
able to play the part of a mindless bimbo, but... '
She gestured ruefully and turned to Charlie
Westfield. 'Peace, Charles—and my apologies. '

Charlie looked several things. Taken aback, un-
convinced, but then under the weight of Tom's
regard and Duncan's and Pete's he said, less grudg-
ingly than he felt, 'Accepted and returned, Bron!'

Bronwen winced but barely perceptibly, then
grinned and said to Tom, 'I suppose we'll have to
reshoot a bit of it—I might need a day or so to
rethink it. '

'We'll do it together. In the meantime, Chloe and
Robert have one last scene to be shot, so that's what
we'll do today. We'll run through it now and hope-
fully shoot it this afternoon. Ready, Cathy?'

She lifted her eyes to his but couldn't read them,
could see no reflection of that urgent lovemaking
of a few hours ago, when it had been she who had
succoured and comforted with a new kind of

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strength. No reflection of the surprising way she'd
left him when he'd been sated at last, and without
thinking about it had absently checked that no one
was about and showered her slim, spent body on
the afterdeck in the early morning sunlight—then
turned to find him watching her from the doorway.
They'd said nothing at first, just stared at each
other, then she had handed him the shower.

Thank you—but not only for this. '

Cathy had only smiled. And they hadn't said
much on the way home either, as if they'd each
been thinking their own thoughts...

'Cathy?'

She came back to the present. 'Yes, I'm ready. '

'Cut—that's fine, ' Tom said in the early evening.
'In fact you were inspired, Charlie, old pal, ' he
added in a faintly dry tone. If he noticed the hostile
glance Charlie cast him before he could stop
himself, he gave no sign of it but went on, 'It's also
worked *in* well—now we've cleared the decks of
Chloe, so to speak, and no disrespect intended
towards you, my dear, ' he nodded at Cathy, 'we
can really come to grips with Robert and Portia's
tortured relationship. Bronwen, if you'd care to
come back to the villa we can begin hammering it
all out tonight. You better come too, Pete. Cathy,
why don't you take a night off? I'm sure Charlie
wouldn't mind shouting you dinner. '

If Cathy's lips parted in astonishment, Charlie
Westfield did worse. He was carrying a bag which
he dropped on his foot, causing him to swear but
still look incredulous, and to say to his everlasting
shame, 'But shouldn't I be in on this conference?'

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'It's not you we're having the trouble with, ' Tom
replied briefly, and turned away.

'Why the hell did I say that?' Charlie muttered,
then bounded towards Cathy. 'Where will we go?
Surfers? There are some great nightclubs and
discos—but it's up to you!'

Cathy removed her gaze from Tom's back and
in doing so, discovered Duncan was watching him
curiously too, and turned her attention to Charlie.
'No discos, thanks, Charlie, ' she said firmly. 'I'm
tired, but, ' as his face fell, 'I'm also hungry. What
about Beers at Sanctuary Cove?'

'Done! Er... what do you think's got into your
old man?'

Cathy had to smile and say quite truthfully, 'I
don't know. '

Tom came to find her in her dressing-room before
they left, and although she didn't phrase it quite as
Charlie had, she did look at him with a question
in her eyes.

He closed the door and leant back against it.

'Do you mind?'

'I don't know. ' She pulled off the robe she wore
as she took off her make-up and reached for her
dress. 'I do find it hard to understand. '

He didn't help her to dress this time. 'It's all grist
to the mill, ' he said thoughtfully. 'If you have to
fight him off, mention my name. '

Cathy's fingers stilled on the buckle of her belt.
'You don't believe... ?' Her eyes were wide.

'No. No, I don't. ' He moved his shoulders rather
restlessly. 'But there's no reason why you two
shouldn't be friends. '

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Cathy heard herself laugh. 'So it's a PR job?
While you're sorting out Bronwen, 'I ' ll be sorting
out Charlie. Tom '

But he didn't let her finish. He said, 'If anyone
can let him down nicely, you can. Cat. Under
normal circumstances, wouldn't you want to try?'
But there seemed to be a question mark in *his* eyes.

She opened her mouth, closed it, then said,

'Well—yes, perhaps. You ' she paused and

stared into his eyes '—you're obviously not afraid
I'll no longer be as pure as the driven snow after
a date with him?'

'No' He said it very quietly.

'Because of this morning?'

'No;

Tom—I don't understand. Something's going
on, ' she said slowly. 'Tell me. '

He touched her at last, just the point of her chin
with one finger. 'Only the inevitable, ' he said barely
audibly.

'What does that mean?'

He smiled, but it didn't reach his eyes. 'You said
this morning you're changing—I think that means,
among other things, that you can handle Charlie
Westfield on your own and without me having to
keep you under double wraps any more, that's all. '
He dropped his hand. And as if on cue, Charlie
knocked on the door.

Tom opened it with a flourish. 'Well, pal—she's
all yours!'

'You could have knocked me down with a feather, '
Charlie said as they cut into juicy steaks. It wasn't
the first time he'd said it.

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'Charlie, ' Cathy said firmly, 'don't get this
wrong. We can be friends, but that's all. '

'Is that what he told you?'

'No—it's what I believe. ' And that's not a lie
either, she told herself firmly.

'I'm surprised he allows you to make those kind
of decisions. '

Cathy put her knife and fork down and picked
her napkin up off her lap. 'If '

'Sorry. Sorry!' Charlie said hastily, and replaced
her napkin and topped up her wine glass. 'The guy
gets to me, that's all. '

Cathy subsided. 'You have to admit he's a good
director. '

Charlie waved a hand. 'Sure. He can also be as
cold as the proverbial maggot. '

She smiled. 'That's called professionalism—you
know, Charlie, I think it would be better if we left
Tom out of our conversation. '

'Would that we could leave him out of our lives, '
he murmured with a grimace, 'but I guess you're
right. Tell me your life story—just leave out the
bits that include Tom West. '

'I've got a better idea—tell me yours. I used to
think you were gorgeous when I was about twelve. '

Charlie brightened perceptibly and needed no
further invitation—indeed, a couple of hours later
he looked ruefully at his watch and swore mildly.
'You should have stopped me!'

'Why?' Cathy asked with a grin. 'I enjoyed it. '

'You know, ' he said seriously, 'you're the most
gorgeous thing and you're... different. How come
you're into older men?' he asked with genuine

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puzzlement. 'I mean, I can understand the old sugar
daddy bit, but that doesn't *fit you. '*

Tom's not old, ' Cathy protested.

'Did he sweep you off your feet, then, dazzle you
and all the rest of it? How come I don't?'

It should have been laughable, but it wasn't. In
fact Cathy found herself staring at him with some-
thing close to resigned affection, because it had
become increasingly obvious during the evening that
he was dazzling just about every other woman and
girl in the restaurant. Their waitress was falling over
herself to serve them, two girls had come up and
asked for his autograph and several more mature,
definitely sophisticated ladies had taken a very
roundabout detour to the powder-room, via their
table. So, how to answer him? she wondered.

'I happen to love Tom, ' she said simply at last.

'So does Bronwen... Does he love both of you?'

'That's none of your business, ' she said evenly.
'And this time I am going. '

'So there's a serpent in Paradise—I'm coming,
don't make a scene, Cathy, ' he said softly. 'Sure as
hell it'll find its way into some gossip column. '

She'd started to rise, but she sank back and
waited while he called for the bill and paid it by
credit card. They walked out together, and it was
impossible to be unaware of every head turned their
way.

He tried to take her hand as soon as they were
out of sight, but she withdrew it and they walked
along the waterfront in silence until she said with
genuine weariness, 'Take me home, Charlie, other-
wise I'll walk. '

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He had parked the car they had given him close
by and he said nothing as he opened the door for
her, and nothing as he drove through the village
and through the security gates and around the curve
of harbourside villas. But as he pulled up outside
'home', he said quietly, Tm sorry if I've offended
you. My big problem is that 1 happen to be in love
with you myself. And no amount *of friendliness* is
going to change that. But I'm not just a big mouth
and a big ego—if ever you want someone to talk
to about it, you could trust me. '

Cathy laid her head back on the seat. 'How could
I trust you?' she said a little desolately. 'You'd never
understand. '

'I might—I'm *not just* a pretty face either, you
know, ' he said gravely.

An involuntary smile curved her lips and she sat
up. 'Actually, I like you a lot, Charlie, but I sus-
pect I'm a lost cause—there is one thing you could
do for me, though. You could stop letting Tom get
to you. ' Charlie swore, but she patted his hand.
Try it, I promise you *Half an Hour Earlier in
Adelaide* will benefit. '

'Want to bet?' he said bitterly. 'You know I've
got the feeling that damn silly catch-phrase is going
to haunt me for life! For one thing, we never even
get to blasted Adelaide '

'Adelaide is a very nice city, but that's the crux
of the plot, isn't it? The time difference '

But he broke in broodingly, 'Adelaide and
Chloe—both goddamn mirages!'

'Ah, but there's always Portia to come back to,
and one thing you are, Charlie, is a good actor. '

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He looked at her incredulously. 'You're not trying
to flatter me on your husband's behalf, by any
chance, are you, Cathy West?'

'Not at all, ' Cathy said seriously.

'Or flatter me into dazzling Bronwen Bishop?'

'I don't know if that's possible, but I'm sure you
could dazzle Bronwen's Portia. '

'Hell, I've been trying to do that for weeks, '
Charlie said feelingly, and their glances caught and
suddenly they were both laughing. 'OK, ' he said
finally. 'All messages received and digested, but I
must warn you I don't believe in lost causes—no, '
he held up a hand as her expression changed, 'I'm
not going to be causing any furores, and if it's the
last thing I do I'll wring some kind of a spark out
of Ms Bishop, but that's not going to change the
way I feel about you—and don't pat me on the head
and fob me off with some platitude, dear Cathy, '
he warned. 'It won't work. '

Cathy stared at him and felt a frisson of some-
thing touch her nerve-ends—the knowledge perhaps
that Charlie Westfield was indeed not just a pretty
face. 'I'm sorry, ' she said quietly. 'I'd better go in. '

He let her go.

Bronwen and Pete were still there and the lounge
was littered with papers, plates and coffee-cups.
They all looked up, but it was Tom who said with
a glance at his watch, 'You're home early,
Cinderella. '

'Yes—how's it going?'

'Well, 1 think, cautiously, that it's no longer
going to be like getting blood out of a stone, ' said
Bronwen with a yawn. She wore a one-piece sleeve-

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less cotton boiler suit in a vivid emerald-green that
suited her colouring and suited her tall, lithe figure,
and despite the yawn, the vivacity that had been so
tempered was back. Was it to do with having Tom
more or less to herself? Cathy wondered.

She said, 'I ' m glad. ' And looked around with a
rueful little smile.

Bronwen jumped up. 'You sit down, ' she or-
dered. 'It was supposed to be your night off—I'll
clear up the mess. Pete will give me a hand, ' she
added.

Pete looked surprised, but got up and began
gathering plates. Cathy hesitated, then sat down
opposite Tom, who had spread his arms along the
back of the couch.

'Well?' he queried a little quizzically.

'Well what?' she returned.

'Did you have to mention my name?'

Cathy shrugged. 'Not in that context, no. '

Then my confidence in you wasn't misplaced. '

She didn't answer, but couldn't prevent the swift,
immediately veiled glance of resentment she sent
him.

'Cathy?'

But Bronwen intervened unwittingly. 'I've poured
us all a nightcap—I think we deserve it, and you
deserve one too, Cathy. ' She handed Cathy a glass
of wine. 'How did you get on with our Chuck? Did
he make a pass at you? I think we've all got the
message fairly loud and clear that he's rather
smitten. '

Cathy's reaction to this surprised her. For a
moment she felt like flinging her wine over
Bronwen, but she tightened her fingers on the stem

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of the glass. 'No. He was very good company, but
I suppose we're more of an age, ' she said lightly.

Bronwen laughed. 'That's true. He sometimes
makes me feel a million years old, and so do you... '
She stopped and bit her lip, then turned away and
drank some wine.

Cathy stared at her back, then looked at Tom,
but he was watching Bronwen with a curious in-
tensity that made her shiver inwardly—and sud-
denly decide she'd had about as much as she could
stand for one day. She put her untasted glass down
and stood up. 'I really can't keep my eyes open.
Do you realise we've been up since the crack of
dawn, Tom?'

He turned his head to her. 'So we have. You go
up, I'll supervise the clearing up. '

She called goodnight to Pete and Bronwen, to
which Pete, as usual, replied unconcernedly but
Bronwen with the definite sound of strain in her
voice.

And Cathy closed the bedroom door and leant
back against it, feeling inexpressibly drained and
claimed by the sense of sadness with which she had
started the day. But there was more—for the first
time she had a clear picture in her mind of Bronwen
and Tom, a clear sense of the conflict between them.
It was as if the mists had parted and the real
Bronwen had stepped forward—not the shadowy
version who had done the unthinkable and refused
to marry Tom, and been so hard to equate with the
living, breathing one, the one she had even come
to like—until tonight when she'd wanted to throw
her wine over her...

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She straightened and walked over to the window,
saying to herself, 'And *not* only because of what
she said but because, however much they deny it,
there's still a current between them, an electric
current... '

The door opened, and at the same time car doors
closed downstairs and a motor revved up.

Cathy turned from the window as Tom switched
on the light and came to a decision. Tom, I'd like
to go home for a while. '

He stopped, his hand still on the light switch,
and his eyes narrowed. 'Why?'

She lifted her hands. 'You don't need me. Chloe's
part is finished, and if there's anything you need
to reshoot I can come back. '

He dropped his hand, walked a few paces towards
her, then stopped in the middle of the room. 'That
doesn't answer my question. '

Cathy steeled herself despite her weariness, but
she noticed that he was tired too, that there were
lines of strain beside his mouth and that his big,
loose-limbed frame was oddly tense and that he
flexed his shoulders as if they were cramped. Once
again a longing to get through to him flooded her,
and she wanted to go to him and run her fingers
through his dark-fair hair and massage those broad
shoulders... well, why not? she thought. If that's
a way we do communicate, why shouldn't I use it?

'Why don't you get ready for bed?' she asked.

'What kind of an answer is *that?'* he said curtly.

'I have plans for you. In bed. '

'Cathy, ' he said with sudden soft menace, 'have
you turned to a life of seduction? Wasn't this
morning enough for you?'

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A flush burnt her cheeks, but she said coldly and
bitterly, 'I did what I did this morning for reasons
that had nothing to do with seduction for the sake
of it—that's your speciality, ' she added slowly,
conscious of a desire to retaliate to the awful hurt
of his words. And she turned away to hide the tears
on her lashes, and the stark knowledge of rejection
in her heart.

But he walked over to her and deliberately turned
her back and kept his hands on her shoulders.
'Cat '

'No, Tom, I'm going home and that's it, ' she
whispered. 'I've tried, I've tried to be pro-
fessional '

'You have, ' he said harshly, and she thought he
looked pale beneath his tan, but she couldn't care.
'You've been the most professional of all of us. '

'Well, I just can't go on!' Her voice rose. 'And
I can't help feeling jealous of Bronwen when I see
the way you look at her, and desperate. '

'Cathy, that's '

'No, Tom, you're treating me like a fool, ' she
insisted, and the tears spilled over. 'Do you know
what happened to me tonight? When she made her
patronising remarks about Charlie? I wanted to
throw my wine over her because not only did she
patronise Charlie, she patronised me in the same
breath—and so have you tonight. Why? I know she
regrets losing you. Are you feeling the same way?
Is that why you've done such an about-face and
now seem to be almost pushing me at Charlie
Westfield—who incidentally is a much nicer person
than either of you, stuck up in your lofty towers,
give him credit for... *Tom!'* Her voice changed as

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his mouth tightened to a white line and his fingers
dug mercilessly into her shoulders, came out with
a little gasp, yet the stubborn angry defiance in her
eyes, despite the tears, didn't change.

But he only stared down at her with a grim, bitter
look in his eyes, his fingers still digging into her
shoulders. Then he said in a voice she barely recog-
nised, 'If you feel we're patronising Charlie and
that he's a viable alternative, why don't you take
it?'

And he released her abruptly so that she stag-
gered and strode out of the room without a back-
ward glance.

Cathy stood like a stricken statue, and a few
minutes later doors opened and closed again and
another motor sprang to life, but one she recog-
nised only too well. And he drove his car away at
speed.

He didn't return that night; she didn't wait
around for long the next morning. And by the next
evening she was stoking a fire in the lounge grate
of their Mount Macedon home but wishing, really
wishing she'd fled somewhere else.

She couldn't eat any dinner, which was just as well
because there was nothing much to eat, but when
she got the fire going—it was a wet, miserable
night—she poured herself a fair portion of Tom's
expensive liqueur brandy into a balloon glass and
sat sipping it, letting the fire warm her body but
discovering that neither the fire nor the brandy were
warming her soul.

As she lay curled up and with her head back in
the comfortable wing-backed chair, watching the

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firelight on the ceiling, she wondered what had
possessed her. Not that anything she'd said hadn't
exactly echoed the turbulent confusion of her
thoughts, but to let it all spill out like that,.. And
on top of, only that morning, begging him for a
child.

The typical outpourings of a jealous wife, she
mused, but then I am, and it's no use trying to
pretend otherwise. I want him to love me as I love
him, it's that simple, and is it so much to ask? But
now he doesn't even want to make love to me.

'Why?' Her lips framed the question—and the
phone rang.

CHAPTER SEVEN

It was Tom.

'Cathy?' he said down the line before she got the
chance to say anything.

'Yes—hello, Tom. '

There was a short silence, then, 'You had me
worried. '

'Did I?' she said quietly when she very much
wanted to say—Good! 'I told you I wanted to come
home. '

'I don't think it's much good for you to be there
on your own. '

'I'm quite used to it, Tom. ' There was an edge
to her voice, she realised, but she couldn't help it.
Nor could she help adding, 'Where were you?'

'At the studio, Cat, ' he said levelly. 'On my
own—look, what I said '

She cut in, Tom, you asked me why 1 wanted
to come home. Well, I want some time on *my* own
to sort out how 1 really feel. I'm not going to do
anything rash, and if you really are worried I'll
come back—next week, but right now I'm tired and
cold and I think it's best if we just say g-good-
night. ' Her voice shook a little, but she put the
phone down resolutely.

She got three days on her own, then Duncan ar-
rived on the doorstep.

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'Hello, Cathy, ' he said, and once again she
noticed his warm smile and wise eyes.

'Come in, ' she said ruefully—it was raining
again. 'I suppose you're here to check up on me. '

He didn't bother to dissemble.

'It's quite funny really, ' she said with an odd little
laugh. 'In the old days Tom never worried. I mean,
I'm quite safe so he didn't have to *worry,* but... '
She shrugged.

'He also used to get home as often as he could,
Cathy. '

She stared at him, then turned away. 'Come into
the kitchen, I've just made some tea. '

She poured two cups and cut him a slice of fruit
cake, wondering how to get over the awkwardness
of the moment, but Duncan began to chat easily
and to fill her in on how things were going, even
to make her laugh a little with anecdotes of Charlie
and Bronwen's efforts to come to grips with Portia
and Robert. But she sobered suddenly and had to
turn away to hide the tears that welled up.

'Cathy, ' he said gently.

'I suppose you know I was the last to know?'
she heard herself saying fiercely as she dashed at
her eyes.

'About Tom and Bronwen?'

'Who else?' Her voice was bitter.

'And you don't believe it's over?'

She turned back at last and said even more bit-
terly, 'Do you? Do you know why he married me,
Duncan? Not because he'd fallen in love with me
but because he knew he was never going to get over
her, but he couldn't ever *forgive* her, so it didn't
much matter who he married, '

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'Cathy '

But she went on as if he hadn't spoken, 'And
there was I, in love with him and not able to hide
it, and he felt guilty, and then he thought I was
young enough and... whatever you have to be to
put up with a one-sided marriage. '

Duncan watched her sombrely as she pulled out
her handkerchief and blew her nose. 'You know
him well, ' she went on huskily. 'So you know I'm
right. '

'Tom's not an easy man to know well, Cathy. '

'You're right about that—and of course he's a
friend of yours, so I shouldn't... I don't know why
I'm telling you this, it must be very embarrassing
for you. Sorry, ' she said with a weary sigh. 'Another
cup of tea?'

'Cathy, it's neither embarrassing nor is there any
reason why you shouldn't have someone to confide
in. I don't think you have anyone else, ' he said with
a keen glance.

She laughed hollowly. 'No. Except Charlie
Westfield. He's dying for me to confide in him, but
how could I? That would be worse than confiding
in you. '

She reached for the teapot, but he put a hand
over hers. 'In fact I'm a better person to confide
in than you could imagine, Cathy. You see, I've
been in love with Bronwen myself for, ' he gestured
wryly, 'a long time. Before she and Tom even met. '

Cathy's mouth fell open and her eyes widened,
and a million little things tumbled into place—the
way Duncan could put Bronwen at her ease, the
way he had so unobtrusively but nevertheless been

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like a buffer between Tom and Bronwen, the time
they'd spent together...

'Doesn't she know?' she whispered.

'Oh, she knows. Not that I've mentioned it for
years, but, ' he smiled faintly, 'I'm a patient man. '

Cathy blinked several times, and it was he who
poured her some more tea. 'Thanks, ' she said
vaguely. 'This... ' And she stared at him, still dazed,
until she said eventually, 'So you know what it's
like. '

'Yes. But there are some differences. Tom '

'Has a place in his heart for me, ' Cathy inter-
rupted. 'So he told me. Bronwen probably feels the
same way about you, and you're right, there is a
difference—you're not *married* to her, so it *can't*be as difficult. '

'In some ways, no, ' he agreed, 'but I happen to
believe it is over between them; they just haven't
realised it yet. '

'Duncan, ' Cathy said slowly, 'I can't help be-
lieving otherwise, and I'll tell you why. So long as
I was—the way I used to be—things were fine
between us. Tom could come and go and live his
life exactly as he wanted, and I was happy enough
with the scraps of it. But since I've grown and ma-
tured and come to understand that it's not enough

for me any more he ' her voice broke '—is no

longer happy, and, leaving Bronwen right out of it,
that means to me that he doesn't love me for myself,
the real person I am... But of course, we can't
leave Bronwen out of it, can we?'

'Cathy... ' Now his eyes were narrowed and sud-
denly very acute.

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'Yes, ' she said huskily, 'perhaps you do
understand. '

'No—I mean, there could be a different in-
terpretation for the way he is. There are enough
similarities between you and Bronwen to make him
rather wary.'

Cathy blinked. 'I can't think of one.'

'Can't you? I can. You're about to have a career
on the screen lying at your feet.'

'Oh, that,' she said wearily. 'I'll believe it when
I see it.'

Duncan pushed his cup away and stared at it
thoughtfully for a time, then he sighed and said
with a grimace, 'When are you coming back—you
are planning to, aren't you?'

'I told Tom next week. Why?'

'Why don't you come back with me? There's a
bit of reshooting to be done and—well, to be
honest, everyone's a bit on edge.'

Cathy grimaced. 'If you think I can change any-
thing '

'But you can,' Duncan said quietly, and smiled
at her. 'I don't know how you do it, but you do.'

'Duncan,' she said painfully, 'can't you under-
stand it's a bit like walking back into the lions' den
for me? Apart from Bronwen,' not to mention
Tom, she thought, 'there's Charlie. If it weren't for
me we wouldn't be having any problems.'

'We would,' he said.

'Well '

'But I think they all feel guilty now, you see.' He
stared at her steadily.

For a moment Cathy felt like telling him they
could all go to hell, and it must have shown in her

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face, for suddenly his eyes began to twinkle rue-
fully and he said, 'I know how you feel.'

It was her turn to look rueful yet doubtful.

'But I do' he insisted. 'In fact, you and I are a
lot alike,' he added. 'The quiet, steady types—
which we often cop a lot of flak for. But it's amaz-
ing how much they need us, loath as they would
be to admit it.'

'And true professionals to the bitter end?' Cathy
said drily.

That too.'

Cathy put her bag down and looked around.

Duncan had delivered her to the villa, but
although the car was in the garage Tom was no-
where about.

Nothing had changed except that the place had
an untidy, rather desolate air even with the last of
the late afternoon sunlight glinting on the waters
of Sanctuary Cove and reflecting in the windows.
It wasn't only an air either, she discovered as she
wandered around. There were dirty dishes in the
sink despite the latest-in-technology dishwasher,
there was a huge four-day pile of every possible
newspaper available slipping and sagging off a
chair, the bed was unmade upstairs and the bath-
room floor was a sea of towels and clothes.

She began to pick them up almost mechanically,
but stopped with a shirt in her hands—a shirt she
had washed and ironed many a time, but it con-
jured up a vision of Tom in her mind—and not
only there, to all her senses, so that she closed her
eyes and could almost believe he was there with her.
Could feel the texture of his dark-fair hair and the

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rough, smooth texture of his skin, see the little lines
beside his mouth and the greeny glint in his eyes,
remember exactly where she came up to, his
shoulder, and how he always had to bend his head
to kiss her, how his hands felt around her waist and
how he could lift her with them, how he used to
tease her and make love to her in the same mood
yet make her feel like dying for him...

Her lashes fluttered up and she brought the shirt
up to bury her face in it as a shudder went through
her body, but two things happened. There was a
sound in the doorway behind her—and she dropped
the shirt as if it was burning her fingers before
swinging round.

They stared at each other and for a moment it
was as if they were drowning in each other's gazes.
Cathy, certainly, was reliving in the flesh all she
had been visualising in her mind: his tall, loose-
limbed body and wayward hair, those clever eyes
which were often so hard to read—and as the
thought slipped across her mind, they did just
that—became unreadable and no longer intent on
her hair that was tied back today but still curly and
vitally fair, her eyes, her jeans and white silk
blouse—even her white Reeboks.

And it was Tom who broke the silence—in an
uncharacteristically banal way, for him. 'You're
back/

'Yes... You're in a bit of a mess.'

His mouth twisted. 'I was going to have a big
clean-up next week. I didn't expect Duncan *to*succeed.'

'Oh.' Cathy looked around awkwardly. 'I'll do
it. I thought you might be at the studio.'

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'No. I walked down to get the paper.' He had it
under his arm, but from the rather surprised look
he gave it as he pulled it out it was almost as if he'd
forgotten it was there.

'Another one,' Cathy said with a faint smile. 'I
don't know how we're going to get rid of them all.
Well...' She turned away and began to pick up
towels and clothes.

But he said, 'How's home?'

'Fine, although William was away ' she hesi-
tated '—gone fishing with his grandfather.'

'Lucky William! Cat, leave that. You're making
me feel guilty.'

'But it has to be done!'

'Later, then,' he said with an amused glint in his
hazel eyes. Til give you a hand. Why don't you
come for a walk with me?'

She turned to face him. 'You've just been for a
walk.'

'There's a band playing in the bandstand, it's a
beautiful afternoon and we could have a
sundowner'

How does one do it? Cathy asked herself much
later, in the darkened bedroom, as Tom rolled off
her body but immediately reclaimed her in his arms.
How can you partake in lovemaking when you're
so much at odds with your partner—yourself, even,
and you've made certain resolutions—without
hating it or being stiff and tense? How *was* I? Not
stiff, not tense, although not terribly involved but
acquiescent...yes, that's the word, acquiescent. So
how do you explain that? Do you tell yourself he
is still your husband, you do have a duty and he

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did seem to want you rather urgently? What's more,
now you're lying comfortably in his arms, listening
to him starting to fall asleep, certainly not aching
to tell him any home truths or tell him anything,
for that matter. It's as if—all afternoon and evening
together it's been the same, no real communication
but still *together.* Out of habit? she reflected. Is
that how marriages jog along? Out of habit with
neither one really knowing what the other is
thinking. He hasn't asked me anything

'Cat?'

Surprise caused her to move. 'Yes?'

'All right?'

'Mmm... I thought you were asleep.'

'No. Do you want to talk?' He stroked her bare
arm.

She was silent.

Tell me why you came back and how long you
plan to stay, for example,' he said very quietly, and
moved his hand down the curve of her hip beneath
the sheet.

She slipped her hand beneath her cheek and
stared into the darkness, then said with a tremor
of desolation, 'I don't think I know anything any
more—I thought I did, I thought I had it all worked
out. One of the things I'd worked out was that if
you still wanted me it would have to be on *my* terms
or not at all, but then—well—oh, I don't know,'
she sighed.

'What,' he paused, 'are your terms?'

'But that's the thing—they don't seem to make
sense now. I mean, we can't change each other, can
we? I can't *help* changing and you can't help it if
you hate it.'

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'I don't *hate* it!'

'Well, don't want me to. And there are the times
you don't want me at all,' she said barely audibly.

'I thought I'd explained—about that.'

'You also accused me of turning to a life of se-
duction when in fact all I wanted to do was rub
your back and...' She stopped as she felt his jolt
of laughter and bit her lip. 'I know it sounds '

'If I laughed it was only because that makes me
feel rather geriatric,' said Tom before she could go
on.

'Well' Cathy struggled to be honest, 'I didn't
only want to rub your back, I wanted us to be able
to talk to each other, and I thought it might be
easier if we were physically close—you yourself said
it might be all we needed to say to each other.'

'And you didn't see it quite like that—on one
memorable occasion, Cathy.'

She sighed. 'No—and I was more right than I
knew,' she added.

'What do you mean?'

'Well, when I seduced you the next morn-
ing '

'Very successfully!'

'Perhaps,' she said drily, 'but I don't think you
see that as my role at all, although the few times
it's happened it's been because you've moved me
to it, so how can it be wrong?'

'The few times it's happened I've moved you to
anger or desperation—oh, hell,' he said wearily.

'Whatever,' she said. 'But does it matter when
two people love...?' She broke off and flinched.

The silence stretched.

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'In fact, you often seduce me without even
trying,' Tom said at last.

'I think Cathy Kerris did,' Cathy said forlornly.
'1 don't know about Cathy West.'

He started to say something, but didn't finish be-
cause the phone beside the bed rang stridently,
causing them both to jump.

Tom reached for it and Cathy sat up, pushing
back her hair and pulling the sheet up round her
breasts, and listened to the one-sided conversation
which consisted of Tom saying tersely that no, he
couldn't discuss it now, it would have to be the
morning, and replacing the receiver ungently.

'Who?' whispered Cathy, feeling her nerves still
jangling.

'Bronwen.' His voice was clipped and curt.

'What's wrong? Is she...?' Is she all right? she'd
been going to say, but something made her twist
round to stare at the bedside clock which showed
eleven-thirty—not that late for Tom, but... And
change it to, 'Is she in the habit of ringing you up
through the night?'

'No, Cathy, she's not,' he said grimly but getting
up and reaching for a pair of jeans.

Then why?'

'She's nervous about tomorrow. We're shooting
the big finale when Robert comes back and first of
all she kicks him out and then she relents. I thought
I had her all teed up for it—heaven alone knows
why I allowed myself to be so optimistic!'

Cathy lay back. 'Where are you going?'

'To make myself a nightcap. Would you like one?
I might do some work on the script too; I doubt if
I can sleep now.'

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'No, thanks,' Cathy said slowly, but she felt a
tide of anger rise up in her as he strode out of the
bedroom. Yet who to blame? she wondered, as she
clenched her teeth. Bronwen, or the fact that once
Tom had his mind on work, *everything* else ran a
poor second?

She didn't wake when he came back to bed, and
she also slept in as late as he did, so they had to
rush to get to the studio by nine—she hadn't
expected to be needed, but he told her he wanted
her there. Which became the subject of an ongoing
conversation in the car.

'Are you reshooting today as well?' Cathy asked.

'No.'

Then why...?'

'You might just calm 'em all down,' Tom said
briefly.

Cathy shook her head. '1 don't know why
everyone thinks I have this ability '

'Everyone?' He shot the question at her without
turning his head and negotiated a roundabout with
a flick of the gear lever.

'Not everyone, but Duncan virtually black-
mailed me into coming back, because he said the
same. But '

'It's nothing very mysterious. You're supposed
to be the novice, that's all, yet you've often shown
them both up, so they might be on their mettle.'

Cathy made a distracted little sound. 'But it was
such a small part!'

'Quality can be as hard to achieve in small doses
as in large. And Cathy,' he turned his head at last
so their eyes met, 'I need to get this movie over and

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done with. The longer we drag it out, the less chance
we have of getting it how I want it—it'll just sink
into a mire of bloody temperament and emotion.
And 1 might sink with it.'

Cathy opened her mouth, but closed it, and her
eyes widened as she read the almost unbearable
tension in his.

It was plain no one knew she was back, and she
wondered why Duncan had chosen not to enlighten
anyone.

Bronwen virtually did a double-take as she
walked in with Tom, then she looked guilty, but
Charlie was quite exuberantly delighted.

'Doggone! as they say back home,' he drawled
with a grin almost splitting his face. 'You've just
made my day, Ii'l lady!' He threw his arms around
her and picked her up and twirled her through the
air, while Tom looked on expressionlessly. 'Ah do
apologise, pardner,' he added to Tom as he set
Cathy back on her feet with a flourish and said to
her less audibly, 'Your old man has his "unhand
my wife" expression on, therefore I shall desist.'

But Tom heard, although he said pleasantly
enough, 'I would if I were you, Charlie, because
we're about to have a brief conference and then
we're going to shoot the finale, come hell or high
water, and we're going to get it right.'

Bronwen groaned, they all did, but she also said
normally, 'It's good to have you back, Cathy. It
didn't feel quite right without you,'

'That's what I told her,' murmured Duncan.
'Well, kids,' he added with a twinkle, 'I 'm here in

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my usual position of referee if the going gets
tough—let's get to it!'

But as everyone turned away, Cathy noticed how
his eyes lingered on Bronwen and how she half
turned back towards him, then squared her
shoulders and followed Tom.

But despite the conference and despite a deter-
mined start by all concerned, things didn't go well,
and it was late afternoon when Tom said abruptly,
'Bronwen, I know you're trying as hard as you
know how, but you're still lacking conviction—in
fact, you're trying too hard. You're not living the
part.'

Bronwen swore. 'Then I can't do it, Tom,' she
said tightly, and an unnatural hush fell on the set.

Tom got up from his director's chair and walked
slowly towards her. He stopped about two feet from
her, staring at her. 'Why can't you do it?' he said
softly but with a sort of insolence that caused
Cathy's eyes to widen. 'Don't you know what it's
like to love and hate a man? To hate and fight the
awful dependence of love, the ties you resent so
much? But don't *you,* of all people, know now that
you can't have one without the other—haven't
you... lived through losing out, and not just to a
will-o'-the-wisp like Chloe?'

Bronwen returned his gaze, her dark eyes glit-
tering unnaturally and her face pale beneath the
paint. 'You bastard!' she whispered.

'Perhaps,' he conceded with an ironic little shrug,
'but why lose out altogether? Acting was supposed
to be your *life,* so why not use the experience, why
not give us a glimpse of the awful turmoil Portia

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is going through even if her reasons are somewhat
different from ... your experience; why not *show*us the pain and loneliness she's so afraid of—if you
know it? And then the turning point, when she de-
cides that if you can't have everything, you make
the best of what you've got, will have some
meaning.'

As his words died away you could have heard a
pin drop. Cathy didn't realise it, but she too had
gone pale at the sheer cruelty of what he was doing,
the ultimate revenge he was taking, let alone *her*implicit involvement in it all, and she couldn't see
how Bronwen could bear it.

But Bronwen came to life after what seemed like
an eternity. She visibly unclenched her jaw and said,
although her eyes were incredibly bitter, 'Why not?
Are you ready?'

CHAPTER EIGHT

It was midnight when they got home and Cathy
was white with tiredness and tension, not sure why
she hadn't insisted on leaving earlier—but then no
one had been able to tear themselves away—and
not sure what name to put to her latest mental
turmoil.

Because, among other things, the fact that
Bronwen had finally produced a stunning perform-
ance appeared to have elated only Pete and Jason.
Bronwen herself had retired immediately to her
dressing-room with a set, haggard expression when
Tom had finally called 'Cut!' and they'd not ex-
changed a word. Duncan had followed her, Tom
had gone straight into a conference with Jason, and
even Charlie had looked tired, moody and subdued
and had taken himself off with little to say.

The drive home had been silent, and the first
words Tom said as he closed the front door behind
them were, 'Bed, I think. I don't know about you,
but I'm exhausted—thank heavens it's all over bar
the shouting.'

'Bar the shouting?' Cathy stared at him, her eyes
wide and wary.

He glanced at her. 'The final editing, then the
post-shooting publicity and parties. What did you
think I meant?'

'I don't know,' she said wearily.

'What's wrong?'

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Cathy didn't answer his rather curt question. In-
stead she shrugged and half turned away.

But with a sudden tiger-like movement he caught
her wrist and swung her back. 'It had to be done,
Cathy.'

'Why?' she whispered, not pretending to mis-
understand, and even though she was suddenly
afraid of the hard glitter in his hazel eyes. 'In the
cause of your art? Her art? Forgive me if I can't
help thinking it was only a very public bid to avenge
yourself, Tom.'

His mouth hardened, then he drawled, 'You have
a short memory, my dear. You suggested it yourself.'
Cathy gasped, but he went on imperturbably, 'And
aren't you exhibiting a curious ambivalence towards
Bronwen? Only last night you were extremely sus-
picious of her, yet now you're siding with her—I
find that strange.'

Cathy tugged at her wrist, but he tightened his
fingers on it. 'Oh no, you don't! I think you need
to explain, Cat. You can't have it both ways,' he
added mockingly.

She stared at him, her face pale and still, and her
lips worked once, but it was a good minute before
she could express herself, and then it came in a
torrent of words. 'Yes, I can, Tom. I can be sus-
picious of—both of you, although not because I
imagine you've been leaping into bed with each
other behind my back but because of the power of
whatever it is between you... Because even if you
don't know whether you love her or hate her and
vice versa, I can't believe you're unmoved by each
other. On the other hand, I can't help feeling sorry
for her and even understanding how she feels. Be-

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cause I'm in the same boat as she is, you see, Tom.
You wanted to change her, didn't you? You wanted
to make a lapdog out of her just as you want to
keep me that way. The only thing I haven't worked
out yet is *why* you're like this. Did you have an
overbearing mother who henpecked your father?
Did '

But she got no further, because with a lightning
movement of his arm he pulled her wrist sharply
so that she winced with pain and cannoned into
him, into his arms.

His teeth gleamed white but in a frighteningly
savage little smile as he said softly, 'My sweet Cathy,
what a veritable fount of wisdom you've become
lately—but I think it's gone to your head. My
mother in fact went to her grave being a doormat
for my father. What, as a matter of interest, do you
make of that? Other than the obvious?' he queried.

Cathy licked her lips. 'Obvious?' she echoed
huskily, her eyes scared but stubborn and very blue.

'That we Wests are male chauvinists of the
highest order,' he said sardonically.

'Are you saying it's just the way you're m-made?'
she stammered.

'Well, I've bared my soul to you—more or less,
and you've guessed the rest. 1 can't think of any
other explanation. Can you?'

Cathy tried to speak but couldn't.

'On the other hand,' Tom continued, watching
her mouth and her eyes and every hurt, bewildered
expression that chased across them, 'Charlie
Westfield believes that's all old hat, doesn't he?
He's all in favour of "freeing" you. Perhaps you
should try it.'

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With a superhuman effort, Cathy tore herself out

of his arms. *'Why* ' her own eyes glittered now

and were no longer hurt or bewildered but furious
*'—are* you pushing me at Charlie Westfield, Tom?
I'd really like to know, because there could also be
an *obvious* explanation for that too, you see. With
me gone there'd be space for Bronwen to come
crawling back to you, wouldn't there, for example?'

He stared at her, and suddenly his shoulders
sagged and he raked a hand through his hair. He
also said barely audibly, 'It occurred to me that
you might be better off with him—there's no
question of Bronwen being allowed to come crawl-
ing back.'

Cathy blinked several times. Then she whispered,
'How can you *say* that? Unless...' She stopped.

'Cathy ' he paused and looked deadly tired

'—let's go to bed, we're not getting anywhere.'

'We never get anywhere,' she said bitterly. 'It's
like a circus roundabout, and I'm on it with my
hands tied to it like a puppet.'

That's because, despite all your new-found
wisdom, there are still some things you don't
understand—perhaps you never will,' he said
harshly. 'Are you coming?'

Cathy put a hand to her brow, suddenly aware
that she had what felt like a hammer pounding
inside her head. 'What don't I understand?'

'It doesn't matter—you'll be quite safe from me
in bed,' he murmured, and frowned. 'Is something
else wrong?'

'... I have a headache,' she said uncertainly.

His eyes suddenly flashed mockingly. 'How
original!' he drawled.

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She shrugged and winced.

Tom stared at her with his mouth set in a hard
line, but then his eyes narrowed and he swore under
his breath, then before she could do anything, he
picked her up in his arms and carried her upstairs.

She didn't have the will to resist him in the end,
she found. And she fell asleep first in the wide
double bed despite the pain in her head and the
mental gulf between them, and the foot or so of
mattress between them.

But very early in the morning she woke with her
heart pounding and her mouth dry from a
nightmare she could remember nothing about. Tom
stirred beside her as she twisted restlessly, then he
put his hand out to her and sat up abruptly.

'Cat?'

'W-what?' Curiously, her teeth seemed to be
chattering, although she felt hot.

He switched on the bedside lamp and stared down
at her, her pink cheeks and the dew of sweat at her
hairline, her damp nightgown. 'Cat—you're not
well, why didn't you *tell* me?' he ground out.

'I didn't know...'

'I knew I shouldn't have let you go home—you
never could take care of yourself,' he said savagely,
getting out of bed and pulling on clothes at random.
'You probably ate next to nothing!'

'I made a fruit cake,' she said vaguely and with
a shiver. 'What are you doing?'

'Ringing for a doctor.'

'It's too late, you won't find one,' she protested,
sitting up herself.

'Oh, yes, I will,' he said coldly.

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'I always used to take care of myself while you
were away—I could just as easily have picked this
up, whatever it is, up here. 1 wonder what it is—I
don't know if I'm hot or cold.' Cathy looked up
at him with a bewildered little smile. 'What an awful
time to pick to be sick—the last thing you need! I
could have waited until after the movie was fin-
ished, couldn't I?'

Tom slammed the phone down and sat down
beside her, taking her in his arms. 'You can't help
it,' he said into her hair. 'Forget about the bloody
movie,' he added roughly, then moved her away
from with a sigh. 'I'm going to get you into a dry
nightgown, and you mustn't get cold even if you're
feeling hot. And I'm still going to get a doctor!'

He did, but Cathy was not privy to their conver-
sation after the doctor had examined her—Tom
took him downstairs for that.

'Your wife has picked up some kind of virus, Mr
West—there are a lot of them about, and if it's the
one I suspect she'll have a fever for a couple of
days and then be on the mend. I'll prescribe some-
thing to make her as comfortable as possible in the
meantime, and the length of time it takes her to get
over it will depend on her. If you're debilitated or,'
he gestured, 'have been under a lot of strain, for
example, you don't fight these things off quite as
easily or get them quite as badly as she seems to
have it. Has she been under a lot of strain?' he
asked, and discovered himself pinned beneath a
curiously savage hazel gaze.

Then his patient's husband raked a hand through
his disordered hair and rubbed his face wearily. He

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also said barely audibly, 'God help me—yes. Are
you *sure* it's nothing more serious?'

'On the evidence at the moment, yes, but 1'11 keep
an eye on her, rest assured.'

It wasn't anything more serious, but it was three
days before the fever left her and nearly two weeks
before Cathy felt one hundred per cent herself
again.

It was also Tom who put everything else on hold
and nursed her himself for those three days with
surprising skill and compassion, although he got
someone in to clean and cook. And even when she
was on the mend, he spent a lot of time with her,
much more than he could afford, she was sure...

'Tom,' she was still in bed and they were, of all
things, doing a jigsaw puzzle he had bought her—
he'd bought her books to read, books of crossword
puzzles, games which he seemed quite content to
do and play with her, 'shouldn't you be at the
studios?'

'I might go in tomorrow for a couple of hours.
Tired?' he asked.

She grimaced. 'I shouldn't be—all 1 do is sleep
and eat. When are you going to let me get up? It's
been five days now.'

'When the doctor agrees.' He began to collect
the jigsaw pieces. 'We're about halfway there,' he
added as he carefully removed the tray on which a
picture of a sailing vessel was taking shape.

Cathy ran her fingers through her hair and
stretched her arms up. 'I didn't know you liked
jigsaws. I'd love to wash my hair.'

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A little glint lit his eyes as he watched her, today
in a fresh pink dotted nightgown. 'Well, that must
be a good sign. I don't see why you shouldn't—I'll
give you a hand if you like.'

'I can do it in the shower, 1 can manage!'

'Then I'll dry it for you—up you get.'

So she took a shower and washed her hair, but
she found it unexpectedly tiring and was muttering
to herself, 'I don't know what's wrong with me,'
as she came out of the bathroom into the bedroom
swathed in a towel.

'Nothing rest and time won't put right,' Tom said
quietly, unwinding her from the towel and deftly
slipping her nightgown on as she raised her arms
obediently.

Cathy found herself smiling as he picked her up
and deposited her on the bed which he had made
while she'd been showering. 'What?' he'd enquired,

'There are just *so* many things I didn't know
about—jigsaws, what a good, even tyrannical nurse
you could be, although I should have suspected the
tyrannical bit, how quiet you can be. You must have
been very bored.' She looked up at him as he piled
pillows behind her and switched on her hair-dryer.

'No,' he said lightly. 'How do you use this thing?'
He lifted some damp strands of hair up.

'Just blow it on my hair. Mmm... that's nice,'
she murmured as he ran his fingers through her hair,
lifting strands and blowing warm air through them.
'But I am worried,' she said after a while. 'I know
this is such an important time, the final editing to
be done and '

'Cathy ' he switched off the dryer and sat

down on the side of the bed '—the best thing you

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can do for both of us is quit worrying. There are
times when...one needs to be quiet, and this is
one of them.' And he tipped her chin up with his
fingers. 'In all conscience this is definitely one of
them,' he added barely audibly, but smiled faintly
immediately and said wryly, 'You'd do the same
for me, I expect.'

'Of course...'

'Well, then '

But she broke in with sudden urgency, 'We're
very married in one sense, aren't we, Tom?'

His fingers stilled on her jaw. 'What do you
mean?'

'We don't mind doing these things for each other
despite...' Cathy stopped with a suddenly indrawn
breath as for the first time full memory flooded
back of the disastrous sequence of events that had
occurred the night she had fallen sick.

But Tom moved his fingers and put one across
her lips. 'Forget about all that—I insist. Otherwise
1 won't let you up tomorrow.' And he switched on
the dryer again.

She didn't forget, it would have been impossible
to, but she discovered there was a curious air of
unreality about it—about everything beyond the
walls of the villa over those next peaceful days,
those days, as she regained her strength, of quiet
companionship with Tom that reminded her of
home. Days when he spent a few hours at the studio
but most of the time with her, and unbeknown to
her crammed an unbelievable amount of work into
the hours he spent away. They were also peaceful
because he allowed no one to visit, not even
Duncan, although everyone sent flowers. Days

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when they sunned themselves on the terrace and
swam in the pool, times when they sauntered up to
the market together, and the village vintner, and
times when he let her cook and concoct marvellous
dishes from the stunning array of seafood and fresh
produce available, but insisted she leave the dishes
for the daily lady who still came. Days when his
hands lingered on her body and nights when he slept
with her in his arms but didn't attempt to make
love to her, times when she looked up from the
jigsaw or a crossword or a game of cards and found
his hazel eyes resting on her, only to look away...
Lovely days for her, and, she couldn't help believe,
for him too, because the tension sometimes so
visible in his eyes and his tall body was gone. Eve-
nings when they listened to music and talked about
nothing very important and watched the stars.
Nights when she fell asleep like a child because she
still tired easily, soothed and comforted by the solid
presence of Tom so close, his hand on her hip or
about her waist, and so that she couldn't help but
feel that, although he hadn't tried to make love to
her, it was not because her slender body was not
still his domain but because of concern for her.

And perhaps that was why it came as such a
shock that this period could end, did end, and she
wondered if she had been sicker than she realised,
and really cocooned from reality because of it,
allowing herself to be lulled into such a false sense
of security, while another part of her wanted to
scream at him and ask him how he could have done
it—let her build up her hopes only to crash them
to the ground.

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Because that was what he did, unspectacularly
but all the same like someone removing the crutches
from a cripple who had to learn to walk alone.

The first intimation came after he had taken her
to the doctor for a final check-up, much against her
will because she had known she was fine now, that
she'd even probably been malingering, but mainly
because he had insisted on it; on the way home he
told her that *Half an Hour Earlier in Adelaide* was
almost ready for its first preview.

Cathy opened her blue eyes wide at him. 'But
how?'

'We've all worked our guts out.'

'But you couldn't have—you've spent nearly all
your time with me.'

Tom shrugged. 'I put what I didn't spend with
you to good use.' He smiled slightly and added,
'I'm not very popular at present.'

Tom '

'It also had to be done,' he interrupted. 'There's
nothing worse than dragging these things out in-
terminably. That gets on everyone's nerves even
more, did they but realise it.'

Cathy grimaced and bit her lip. '1 feel guilty.'

'It wasn't your fault—but for the next few days
until the preview I'll be flat out.'

'Oh—of course,' she said quickly. ' I' ll be fine,
I'm fine now.'

He turned his head. 'You certainly look... fine,'
he said on an odd note.

'That's because you were such a good nurse.
Thank you,' she replied with a grin.

An expression crossed his eyes of something like
self-mockery, but then she thought she must have

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imagined it as he said casually, 'You might as well
stay out of the way, incidentally, until the preview.
I imagine there'll be a party afterwards/

'I 'll have to get out my glad rags—will it be that
kind of party?'

'It usually is—why not?'

Tom, is something wrong?' she asked slowly.

'No. Why?' He drove on with his usual effortless
ease.

'I.. .just thought you sounded ... preoccupied,
but then I guess you are—don't worry, I do under-
stand,' Cathy added with that flicker of guilt again,
and they arrived at the villa.

But it was that night, when he didn't get home until
midnight and was moody and uncommunicative,
that she asked herself if she did understand, and
over the next few days kept asking herself the same
question and several more, such as—what did I
expect? That that lovely rapport we had would go
on—why can't it? Why do I have to be shut out
now even if he is tired and under enormous pressure
again—he must have been under pressure without
me knowing while 1 was sick. And once—what did
I imagine—that Bronwen and Charlie and all those
problems had vanished into thin air because I got
a virus? When will I ever learn? Why doesn't he
even want to make love to me now? I'm fine now,
and I thought when I came back, after that night-
was that just to keep me happy until he'd finished
shooting? Why don't I...? Because I'm afraid to,
that's why, afraid of being rejected again.

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And inexorably the day of the first preview drew
nearer, and finally was there and she was dressing
for it, although Tom hadn't come home.

She chose, by way of 'glad rags', a dress she had
never worn before, a blue shantung dress that
matched her eyes and hugged her figure and was
quite short although not a mini, and she couldn't
help feeling it was a sophisticated dress and might
lend her some sophistication or something that she
felt she needed desperately. Then she put her hair
up, which she did rarely, and was quite surprised
at her reflection—not someone she altogether knew,
she decided, and thought it was rather apt with a
sad little smile—then she turned at a sound.

Tom was standing in the doorway, his hands on
the buttons of his shirt but not undoing them, his
hazel eyes riveted on her.

'Oh!' she exclaimed. 'I didn't hear you come
home. Is something wrong?' she added, taking in
the fixity of his expression, and when he didn't reply
finding herself nervously smoothing her skirt.
'Don't you like it?'

'It's fine,' he said curtly, and his long fingers
started on his buttons again. 'Very fitting, and I'm
running bloody late. Are *you* ready?'

'Y-yes,' she stammered.

'Well, give 'em a ring, would you, and explain
that we'll be about fifteen minutes late.'

'Tom ' she began.

'Not now, Cathy,' he said impatiently, and
shouldered open the bathroom door as he un-
zipped his jeans.

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She tried again in the car. 'Did you mean the
dress is too tight?' Which wasn't what she wanted
to say at all but came out somehow.

'Not at all,' he replied.

Then...?'

Tom turned his head briefly. 'I meant it was very
fitting for a... rising star, a.. .director's wife—
whatever you see yourself as, in fact.' He shrugged.

Cathy closed her eyes and prayed she wouldn't
cry at the hard indifference in his voice, praying at
the same time for some guidance and some under-
standing of why he would bind her to him as he
had when she'd been ill, only to sever it like this,
because she had the chill knowledge in her heart
that that was exactly what he was doing, and for
some reason she'd chosen to wear an outfit that
was helping him to do it... and not only that, she
had to get through an extremely public experience
for the next hours and cope with this knowledge at
the same time.

The lights came up and there was a moment's
silence, then a spontaneous burst of applause, and
to her surprise Cathy realised she had lost herself
in the preview, as had all the rest of the cast and
crew despite their familiarity with it. She could only
marvel how all the scenes they had shot out of se-
quence, all that had been pruned and moved and
woven through, had, thanks to Tom and Jason's
and everyone's skill, come together and created a
movie that still had the power to hold them spell-
bound as well as those who were seeing it for the
first time.

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Of her own performance she couldn't help but
be aware that she seemed to establish a rapport with
the audience new and old alike, yet at the same time
she was conscious of how little real acting she'd
had to do. And as she stirred at last, Tom did too,
with something like a deep sigh, then Duncan was
up on the stage saying a few words of congratu-
lation and recommending with a grin that they all
let their hair down.

So the party began, although for a fair while Tom
was surrounded by people shaking his hand, and
even Bronwen and Charlie were happily under the
same kind of siege together. What surprised Cathy
almost as much was her own siege, and for a time
the interest and desire to talk to her that so many
people exhibited was exciting and made her forget.

What brought it all back was seeing Tom
watching her over the crowd, his eyes expression-
less and curiously still. And the way he turned away
as her eyes met his.

She couldn't remember afterwards how she got
through the rest of it, including everyone's concern
over her recent illness, Charlie's particularly, and
as Tom made no move to come to her she under-
stood how you could feel lonely and incredibly
bereft even while you were talking and laughing,
having your photo taken, even in a multitude, and
she found herself wishing she'd never heard of *Half
an Hour Earlier in Adelaide* and that she could be
home at Mount Macedon in her old role. Can I go
back? she wondered. If I thought I was unhappy

then it's nothing compared to now.

‘ ‘ ‘

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To make matters worse, the party relocated to
Sanctuary *Cove* and turned into an all-night affair,
and as the sun rose Cathy came downstairs at home
after trying to snatch some sleep to find some sleepy
revellers toasting the dawn with champagne on the
terrace. Tom was not one of them. He was stretched
sideways across a chair, asleep. And he had, even
when they'd got home, hardly said a word to her.
Cathy stared down at him with tears in her heart
and knew that, for whatever reason, he had delib-
erately closed off the last link between them. She
stilled an urge to reach out and touch his hair,
smooth it off his forehead, and remembered how
she had always liked to watch him asleep. But now,
even in sleep, he was as remote from her as he had
ever been and she knew, with a shaft of pain but
sudden resolution, that she couldn't go on.

'Going my way?'

'Ch-CharIie!' Cathy stammered. 'What are you
doing?'

Charlie Westfield leant over and opened the
passenger door of his car. 'What am I doing? In
fact I've been asleep in this *ol'* roadster for hours,
having discovered myself not fit to be driving it—
somewhat to my surprise,' he confided candidly.
'But the sun shining in my eyes woke me up, and
no sooner had I hit the road than who should I see
walking down this cobbled Sanctuary Cove Way
carrying a bag but Cathy West, bright new star of
the silver screen but not looking so bright,' he fin-
ished with a grimace. 'Have you left him?'

'I...' Cathy blushed and gritted her teeth. 'I just
wanted some time on my own '

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'By my reckoning you had that a few weeks ago,
Cathy.' He looked at her steadily.

To her horror she found sudden tears rolling
down her cheeks, then to her further despair Charlie
leapt out and contrived to get her into the car and
reposition himself behind the driving wheel.

'How have you left him?' he asked, patting her
hand and offering her his handkerchief.

'I left a note on the pillow,' she wept. 'And I
closed the bedroom door so everyone would think
I was asleep '

He lifted an eyebrow, 'Everyone?'

'Yes,' she said bitterly. 'They're out on the terrace
toasting the dawn.'

'I see. But Tom was not in the bedroom, I take
it?'

'No. He was asleep downstairs—they didn't see
me go. Oh, Charlie, he didn't even speak to me
after...after...' She couldn't go on.

'Listen,' he said after a while, 'if you really want
to leave him, even temporarily, you need to go
somewhere, don't you?'

'1 suppose so,' Cathy said indistinctly. ' I haven't
thought about it yet.'

'Ever seen the Barrier Reef?'

She took his hanky away from her eyes. 'No.'

'Everyone tells me you shouldn't leave Australia
without seeing it. Come up there with me. Now.'

'I couldn't!' she protested.

'Why not?'

'It might.. .it might create a terrible scandal to
go *anywhere* with you, besides getting your hopes
up and—no. Thank you, Charlie, but '

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'Well, where are you going to go? Or is this just
a bit of bravado? Are you planning to frighten him
for a couple of hours and then go back?'

Ten minutes later, Cathy heard herself say, 'So long
as you understand, Charlie. I'm only travelling with
you. I'll pay my own way, I'll sleep in my own bed,
in my own room, and I'll expect you not even to
touch me, because the first time you do I'll '

'I get it,' he drawled. ‘Yes, ma'am! All your con-
ditions will be met. Scout's honour.' And he placed
his hand on his heart.

'All the same,’ Cathy said worriedly, 'if people
recognise you, even travelling together '

'We won't hit the high spots.'

'But '

'In any case, 1 have a disguise!' He reached
forward to the glove box and with a flourish
withdrew a red wig and a pair of horn-rimmed
spectacles.

For the life of her Cathy couldn't help smiling
feebly, then more so as he put them on with the
wig back to front. 'Well...'

They spent two weeks drifting through the sun-
soaked Barrier Reef, and Charlie observed all his
promises to the letter—so much so that Cathy was
moved to comment on it once with gratitude, and
in doing so, provoked a curious conversation.

'There's something about you, Cathy,' he said
lazily, as they were lying side by side on a golden
beach, 'that makes it impossible to be any other
way. For me,' he added ruefully.

'What do you mean?' she asked after a moment.

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'Well,' he thought for a bit, 'you're so innocent,
I guess, and sort of.. .untouched, if you know what
I mean. Which is a bit of a mystery—1 mean, how
you survived two years of Tom West and stayed
this way has to be some sort of miracle.'

'I'm not,' she protested, but with a frown in her
eyes, and sat up abruptly.

Charlie grinned. '1 don't mean you're dumb, if
that's what you thought. It's something else—much
as I don't go for the guy, I can sort of understand
why he kept you under double wraps until he had
this change of heart. There'd be plenty of blokes
around who'd want to change that—I just don't
happen to be one of them,' he added with his usual
candour, and sat up as if struck by a sudden
thought. 'Be odd if we had anything in common,
wouldn't it?'

'What... who?'

'Me and your old man,' Charlie said with a
grimace that deepened into a fleeting frown.

'I...what could you have in common?' asked
Cathy.

Charlie shrugged. 'The way we take care of Cathy
West,' he said with an ironic little grin, and refused
to elaborate.

'Well, I still don't see why I need such care taken
of me,' Cathy said finally and irately, but added in
a different voice, 'I can't really be so innocent and
untouched.' She stared at him.

'Can't you?' Charlie cocked an eyebrow at her.
'You don't think you'd have given Ms Bishop a run
for her money or even a sock in the eye, otherwise?
You don't think you might have made it plain to
all and sundry that he might be Mr Director but he

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was first of all your husband—if the guy really got
to you, I reckon you would have.'

'Oh...' she said, and it sounded uncertain even
to herself.

And that night, on her own in her own room,
she lay awake for a long time examining her new
feelings of uncertainty, and found herself suddenly
wondering fearfully whether she'd been more of a
Cinderella than she'd realised, and not through
anyone's fault but her own. And as the long, dark,
lonely night ticked away a lot of little things oc-
curred to her, stretching back like a guided path
through her mind... How, for example, she had
been completely unconscious of Charlie's feelings
for her, how she'd had to be jolted into seeing all
was not well with Bronwen, how Tom had told her
there were some things she might never understand
and also used Charlie's very words to her once—I
don't have to keep you under double wraps any
more...

Was that what he'd done through their mar-
riage? Gone out of his way not to disillusion her
or let anyone else do so, rather than the things she'd
accused him of? Had he in fact been trying to
protect her? Was that why after two years of mar-
riage she still came across as an ' innocent'? Be-
cause she *was,* and she'd never really changed, and
Tom had understood—as Charlie thought he
understood.

She sat up suddenly with her heart pounding, re-
membering what Charlie had said about having
something in common with Tom and then
clamming up on her. Could he have meant that they

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were both in love with her but because of the way
she was...

But I did change, she thought despairingly. Even
if it wasn't as much as I thought, I did try to get
out of my chrysallis—why couldn't Tom accept it?

It was two weeks to the day after she had left him
that Cathy picked up a newspaper and leafed
through it with not much interest. Then she
stiffened, and Charlie pushed his straw hat back.
'What?' he queried.

'Bronwen's. ..got married,' Cathy said with
difficulty.

Charlie sat up and brushed sand off his hands.
'Er...seeing as it couldn't be to your old man
without making him a bigamist, let me guess—
Duncan?'

'Yes,' whispered Cathy.

'Cathy,' he said in a different voice altogether,
'I suppose you want to rush back and hold his
hand.'

'I have to go back some time—I can't just
disappear.'

'What about us? I've done everything you asked
me to or *not* to, but '

Cathy gathered all her mental resources and took
his hand in hers. 'I know, and I thank you, Charlie,
but I have to explain some things.'

CHAPTER NINE

'When's Cathy coming back, Mr West?'

Cathy stood at the open kitchen window and
watched Tom and William unseen. It was a beauti-
ful afternoon and Mount Macedon was as clear
as a bell in the sunlight. Tom and William had come
into view, William carrying his inevitable football,
and from the fact that his socks were dangling about
his ankles and they both looked hot and had
stopped at a tap, she made the inevitable deduction
which explained why they wouldn't have heard the
taxi that had deposited her. Why they would be un-
aware that she could hear their conversation, un-
aware that Mount Macedon and, after that cursory
glance, William, had faded from her field of vision.
And supremely unaware that as she stared at Tom,
her heart was beating heavily in her breast and she
felt like a thirsty traveller confronted with a mirage.

'I don't know, William.' Tom cupped his hands
beneath the tap and took a drink. 'Want some
water?'

'Thanks. Is she still on holiday? Hasn't she
written and told you when she's coming back?'

'William, it could be a long holiday, old son, and
we'll just have to get along as best we can without
her.'

'Shouldn't you have someone to look after you,
though?' William asked thoughtfully after a pause.
'Gran reckons without Cathy the place must be in

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an awful mess and you prob'ly aren't getting
enough to eat. She said to tell you to come for
dinner any time you want.' He looked up suddenly.
‘I could come and stay with you till she comes back.'

Tom ruffled his hair and smiled down at him.
That's a very kind offer,' he said gravely, 'but then
we both might go hungry. I'll be fine.'

But William persisted. ‘ Aren't you lonely, Mr
West? It just doesn't seem the same without Cathy.
Why don't you go on holiday with her?' he added
with sudden inspiration. 'Gran reckons it's strange
you haven't anyway.'

Tom took a moment to answer. Then he said,
'William, the fact is Cathy might not be coming
back. We... well, it's probably hard for you to un-
derstand, but when you're older, you will, but we
might not be the right people for each other, you
see, and then the best thing is to stay apart.'

'But...' William's eyes were suddenly huge and
anxious. 'But she'll be so lonely. Won't she?'

'I don't think so. I think she's found someone
who's right for her—William, these things happen,
but I'm still here and 1 think I can hear your gran
calling you. Come back tomorrow afternoon and
we'll work on your tackling. Off you go!'

William went with a sudden spurt as his grand-
mother's voice made itself clearly heard. Tom stared
after him, then squared his shoulders and started
to walk towards the kitchen door.

Cathy unfroze and spun away from the window,
suddenly panic-stricken, and taking several deep
breaths to calm herself.

Tom didn't see her immediately as she stood like
a statue in the same jeans and white blouse she had

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come back to him once before in. In fact he went
straight to the sink and washed his hands, and only
then, as he turned round, did he go still as his eyes
came to rest on her and they narrowed as though
he was looking through sunlight. He made no move
to reach for the towel for about ten seconds—as if
she really was the last person he expected to see.
Then he said quietly, 'Hello, Cathy.'

'Tom ' Cathy had difficulty with her voice

'—how did you know I'd gone away with Charlie?
That is what you meant when you told William I'd
found the right person, isn't it?'

His eyes rested on her sombrely. 'I saw you drive
off with him.'

'But...' Her lips worked.

He shrugged. ‘I woke up not long after you left
and decided to go for a walk to clear my head and
to get away from the rabble.' He grimaced. 'Of
course I didn't realise until 1 got back to the villa
that you'd actually left for good... with him.'

'I hadn't planned to go with Charlie at all,' she
said hoarsely. 'It...just happened, and I was going
to tell you about it, anyway.'

'Were you?' His lips twisted. 'What went wrong?'

'Wrong?' She stared at him.

'With you and Charlie.'

'Nothing. I was never in love with Charlie or
anything like that,' she whispered.

'He was certainly in love with you.'

Cathy took a breath and cautioned herself to take
hold. You've done nothing wrong, she told herself.
Don't go on the defensive... She pulled out a chair
and sat down, looking around as she did and noting
for the first time that the kitchen was in a fairly

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pristine condition. 'You aren't in a mess,' she mur-
mured, and smiled faintly. Then she looked at him
levelly and her eyes were very blue. 'He thought he
was,' she said steadily, 'but we decided he was really
in love with a will-o'-the-wisp—like Chloe, some-
thing he'd never really understand, not as well as
you did...' She stopped and waited for some re-
action, but all she saw was a faint movement of his
eyelid.

Then he said, 'You actually convinced him of
that?' His gaze was suddenly supremely sceptical.

Cathy gripped her hands together. 'Well, he had

no choice really, and ' she raised her eyes and

they were oddly defiant '—because Charlie is also
more a *gentleman* than you ever gave him credit
for, he agreed to...' She loosened her fingers and
gestured instead of adding that Charlie had in fact
promised to be there for her to his dying day.
'Which,' she went on with determination, 'leaves
us with Bronwen.'

Tom pulled out a chair himself. 'Bronwen is out
of the game,' he said casually. 'She married
Duncan.'

'I know,' said Cathy. 'That's why I'm back.'

'To hold my hand?' he queried.

She winced but said coolly, 'Does it need
holding?'

Although he'd only just sat down, he stood up
abruptly and said something like, 'Not by you...'
beneath his breath, then, more audibly, and nor-
mally, 'Is that the only reason you came back? You
said in your note...'

'I said in my note that it was obvious you didn't
want me any more, Tom. I came back,' her voice

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faltered but she made herself go on, 'in case I
was.. .mistaken.'

'Because you think that without Bronwen or
anyone I'll go to the dogs?' he said with a dry little
smile.

Cathy stared at him and remembered her resol-
ution on the long flight home: to try to explain her
new understanding of herself to him, to be honest
in the face of all odds—as well as to nurture the
seeds of hope in her heart that Duncan might have
been right, and Charlie in his oblique comment
which could have meant that both he and Tom were
in love with her...

She said quietly, 'No. Because I've been wanting
to come back almost ever since I left, Tom. I'd
rather be with you than anyone '

'Cat—Cathy,' he corrected himself, causing her
to tremble with apprehension, 'there are reasons for
that, but they're not necessarily the right ones. Let's
examine them. All this,' he gestured around, 'rep-
resents a home and security to you, and those things
are important to you because you know rather well
what it's like to be on your own. That's also why
when someone like Charlie offers you freedom,
you're wary of it even though you're dying to spread
your wings, because you also want *roots'*

She said slowly, 'That's true, but I'm not so im-
mature as to want them with anyone just for the
sake of them, and '

'Let me finish—and because there were the good
times as well as the bad, you can't help feeling some
concern for me now. But there's no need.'

He said it quietly but quite definitely, and if she
thought she saw a shadow of strain in his eyes, as

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so often happened, it was gone before she could be
sure.

She thought for a moment, then chose another
tack. 'Because she's married Duncan? That needn't
mean anything other than that you're both too
proud to back down.'

'Cathy, it's not that.' Tom's voice was clipped
and curt now.

Then what was it, and why did you affect each
other so?'

The only way we affected each other...' He
stopped, then started again after a moment. 'Con-
trary to what you believed the night we shot the
final scene, I did what I did because in the end it
was the only way to wring what it needed out of
her. When you have more experience, you'll un-
derstand how it's impossible for directors and actors
not to be moved by each other, especially over
interpretations, because... well, often I have to try
to get inside someone's head and thoughts. It was
just unfortunate,' he said wearily, 'that that was
the only key left in the repertoire and it had the
significance it did.'

Cathy took an unsteady breath. Tom, are you
trying to tell me you don't love Bronwen any more?'

He moved his shoulders restlessly and said
shortly, 'All I'm trying to make you understand is
that you don't have to feel sorry for me and I don't
need my hand held.' His hazel gaze was suddenly
piercingly acute as it captured hers. 'Would you
have come back otherwise? When did you find
out?'

She bit her lip. Tom saw it and his mouth twisted;
he pushed himself away from the wall and went

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over to the window to stand staring out at Mount
Macedon with his back to her.

She watched his tall frame in jeans and a check
shirt, and thought that, even for him, his hair
needed a trim—which she was quite good at doing
herself, which reminded her of a time when he'd
slipped her damp hair through his fingers and dried
it for her.

‘I don't think that point has as much signifi-
cance as you're attributing to it,' she said in a low
but stubborn voice.

He turned and smiled wryly. 'Let's not get too
academic, Cathy I really am fine, and '

'On the other hand,' she tilted her chin at him,
'I can't deny it gave me hope. The hope that if you
and Bronwen had found out it was all over, there
might be another chance for me.'

Tom laughed, but with no amusement. 'A chance
for what? Don't you think you might have suffered
enough at my hands, Cathy?'

'No, I don't,' she said quietly. 'And if you'll let
me, I'll tell you why in a moment, but in the
meantime, Tom, 1 am still your wife, and if there's
no longer another woman in your heart, at least I
deserve to know, don't you think?'

He eyed her with his mouth set in a hard line.

'And to know why,' she added.

He continued to stare at her in the same way.
Her heart started to beat rather oddly and she found
her palms were damp, so she hid them in her lap
and sat with a straight spine returning his look
bravely.

Until suddenly a smile twisted his lips and he
shrugged. 'The Spanish Inquisition in blue jeans

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and a silk blouse—all right, I'11 tell you. It was a
battle royal of the sexes between me and Bronwen;
it was a sexual confrontation of the worst kind with
each of us fighting for supremacy, and both of us
more concerned for ourselves than each other. And
the spark of what attracted us to each other in the
first place soon got lost in the carnage, but we
fought on. Do you know why? Because we're both
the same kind of egotists and we neither of us knew
what love was. Strange, isn't it?' he said drily. 'I
mean that we can admit now that if we'd ever
stopped fighting there would have been nothing left.
1 have no regrets about her marrying Duncan,
Cathy,' he said straightly. 'I hope she's very happy,
and in fact she rang me and told me the news
herself. She also told me that after she'd got over
the public aspect of shooting the finale, it seemed
to have acted as a catalyst for her and washed all
the bitterness and self-deception down a drain. The
same,' he paused, 'had already happened for me.
Does that satisfy you?'

Cathy gripped her hands in her lap.
'When ?'

But he ignored her. 'It also means we all, you
included, can get on with our lives now.'

'Oh, can I?' Cathy said with a little glint of anger
in her eyes. 'I'm sorry to keep repeating myself,
Tom, but you and I are *married.'*

He turned back to the window. 'That was a
mistake, my mistake, and a bad one, my dear,' he
said evenly. 'I hope you'll let me retrieve it as best
I can.'

'Because you *did* marry me to get back at
Bronwen or something like that?' she whispered.

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He didn't turn. 'Something like that.'

Cathy took a deep breath and knew she had to
take the plunge. 'And you don't think discovering
you never loved Bronwen might have had some-
thing to do with... me?’

He turned slowly at last and his eyes were bleak.
'Cathy, I care very much about you, but '

She smiled sketchily. 'I'd understand, of course.
I've worked a few things out about myself lately.
I'm really very naive—1 might always be a bit. That
has to be why 1 didn't know Charlie was falling in
love with me, for example. And why I sailed
through those first weeks in Queensland trying to
like Bronwen when everyone must have been won-
dering—why is she doing this? Or at least—how
can she be so unaffected? How can you work with
a man who's your husband so unaffectedly, es-
pecially with an old mistress around getting thinner
and paler by the day?' She grimaced. 'And they
didn't know half of it! But how can you? Only if
you're like me, more of a Cinderella than I ever
dreamt, and even though I first used the com-
parison, until ' her voice faltered '—something

happens to shake you out of it.'

'What?' he asked in a different voice.

Cathy lifted her shoulders. 'The thought of losing
you. The frustration of waking up out of my frozen
time warp and not being able to get through to you,
of not having the right interpretation put on it—of
you thinking I was longing to spread my wings and
be free—but afraid to do it.'

Tom walked back to the table and leant on his
chair. 'Was it the wrong interpretation? Cathy,' he
said gently, 'don't feel guilty. It was quite a normal

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thing to happen even without the abyss of my affair
with Bronwen that I'd opened at your feet and
dragged you down into.'

'Do you know something, Tom? I'm glad you
did, now, because it's made me understand how
you'd protected me for so long, because you *knew*

what an emotional virgin I still was ' Cathy

stopped as he made a restless movement, then stilled
it. 'And I can't blame you for misunderstanding
later. But I'm no longer that way.'

Their gazes held for a long, breathless moment,
then she said barely audibly, 'Tell me honestly—
why didn't you want me to have a baby? Surely you
can do that for a wife of two years even if she's on
her way out? At least tell me the truth before I go.
Was it so you wouldn't be tied to me irrevocably?'

Tom closed his eyes suddenly. 'No. It was the
opposite. It was,' he hesitated, then said bleakly,
'like closing the trap on you.'

'What trap?' she whispered.

'The trap I opened by marrying you when you
were too young to know what you were doing,' he
said harshly.

'That's what I wondered, and that's what I want
to tell you, Tom. I'm not too young now to know
that I love you, to know that things have gone far
beyond my "orphan" days when I didn't know any
better than to fall in love with you. So any guilt
you feel is unnecessary—do you still feel guilty?'
she asked directly.

He stared at her with a nerve flickering in his
jaw. 'Yes...'

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'Then let's deal with it for once and for all—I'd
hate you to have me on your conscience when I'm
gone.'

*'Cathy!'* he said brutally.

She slipped out of her chair but didn't attempt
to approach him. 'I love you, Tom, in every way
it's possible for a woman to love. When you're
making love to me, when your body is on mine,
inside me, I feel,' she said softly, 'so wonderful it's
hard to describe. And it hurts me to think it might
not be the same for you. That's why I got desperate
and angry sometimes. That was my way of telling
you how much I loved you, that was me waking
up at last.'

'Cathy,' he straightened, 'all right, I
concede '

'Tom,' she overrode him, 'if you made love to
me one more time, now, would you be able to send
me away?'

She saw the tightening of all his muscles, the
tension about his mouth and in his eyes, but he said
quite steadily, 'It's not going to happen, Cat. It
would be insane.'

'Because you don't love me the way I love you?'
she queried, barely audibly but with a little pulse
of hope beating in her heart. 'Or because you don't
*believe* in me? You don't believe I've matured suf-
ficiently towards having your children and making
it work. You think that, if fame and fortune comes
my way, I'm going to be lured away by it—is that
what you think?'

He sighed and rubbed his face wearily. 'It's
myself I don't believe in,' he said at last, his eyes
capturing hers. 'I'm still the same kind of egotist

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I always was, I'm possessive and jealous, and if I
protected you from anything, it wasn't without an
ulterior motive.' He looked past her. 'I did want to
keep you the way you were—you accused me of it,
and you were right.'

'Why?' she whispered.

Tom said nothing.

She tried again. 'But then you tried to give me
away. Was it easy to give me to Charlie, Tom?'

'It was the hardest...' He stopped and said
grimly, 'I wasn't giving you to Charlie, Cat, so
much as letting you have the opportunity to make
up your own mind. It was also obvious he wor-
shipped you and wouldn't willingly hurt you.'

Cathy took a careful breath. 'You mentioned just
now that you and Bronwen had cared more for
yourselves than each other—if it was that hard to
give me to Charlie but you still did it, mightn't that
mean you loved me enough to want what you
thought was best for me, Tom?'

'Hell,' he muttered through his teeth, 'you should
have been a lawyer. *Yes,* and it's still best that you
should get away from me, Cathy. One day you'll
understand.'

She moved at last, one step closer. 'No, I won't.
I'll never understand why you're sending me away
if you love me, Tom. Do you?'

'Love you!' he burst out on a suddenly tortured
breath. 'I think I fell in love with you when I first
kissed you and you looked up at me out of those
blue, stunned eyes. Why do you think I went on
seeing you when I knew I shouldn't, when I knew
you deserved a few years to find your feet, to test
your powers of dazzling young men, to spread your

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wings—instead of being shackled to a world-weary
cynic like myself? Why do you think I tried to go
away and didn't succeed—why do you think I
wouldn't admit it to myself? Admit that your
mixture of wisdom and innocence, your home-
making skills, your *wifely* skills—just the way you
move and look and are... meant more to me than
anything in the world,' he said softly but with a
suddenly blazing glance. 'I wouldn't admit it,' he
went on, and she could see the greeny depths of his
eyes and that he was breathing heavily, 'so that
when the time came to let you go, I'd be able to
do it. But at the same time, another part of me
went out of the way to keep you as you were to
guard against ever having.. .to lose you,' he said
deliberately. 'Now do you understand why I'm no
good for you, Cat?'

She took another step and there was a shimmer
of tears in her eyes, tears of relief, but she knew
the battle was still not won and she had to choose
her words with care. 'If you send me away, I'll be
like lost property for the rest of my life.'

His teeth shut hard. 'That's not all of it. It wasn't
only my conscience that stepped in and wouldn't
let me foist a family on you—it was a disinclination
to share you with anyone—even a baby.'

Cathy put out a hand and laid it on his sleeve.
'Perhaps you also knew I wasn't ready for a baby.
Looking back, I don't think 1 was. It was more a
guard against being lonely, against sensing there
could be so much more between us but not being
able to find the right key to make it happen. But
now I can. Do you think I could understand all
this—and still be the way I was, Tom?'

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'I think,' he said with an effort, 'you can go
ahead now and all you've learnt and become could
be put to better use, Cat.'

There's no better use for me, Tom.' She slid her
fingers down his sleeve and took his hand. 'It will
all be wasted.'

His fingers closed harshly around hers, then re-
laxed, but he didn't look at her or say anything.

'And you're wrong about something else, Tom.
I always did love you, even when I should have
known better, even when I didn't know how to ex-
press it properly, and through all these awful weeks
I never stopped.' She withdrew her hand. 'But now
it's up to you. If you still want me to go, I will.'
She smiled tremulously up at him. 'But I'll always
believe I could have made it work if only you'd
trusted me.'

'Cat,' he said roughly, 'how do you know I can
change?'

'What's to change?' she whispered. 'Sometimes
you're quite a perfect husband.' The tears were
sparkling on her lashes now.

He said beneath his breath, 'Oh, hell...'

'And you *did* change. Tell me one last thing,
Tom. When did you admit to yourself that you
loved me and not Bronwen?'

He was gripping the back of the chair so hard
his knuckles were white, she saw, and he said
eventually, 'I don't know. It kept... it was a series
of times, and none of them to do with Bronwen
really. It was times such as the day you lay in the
grass at Mount Macedon and decided to go on with
me; it was the relief I felt. It was the time you
yourself said you'd never had the opportunity to

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spread your wings and I knew you were wondering
about yourself, and us, and Charlie. That boat trip,'
he told her unevenly, 'was supposed to switch your
focus back to me, but do you know what
happened?'

'Your conscience?'

'Yes—plus the fact,' he said grimly, 'that I was
suddenly afraid to make love to you because more
and more I wanted to do it in a way that would
leave you incapable of even thinking about the likes
of Charlie Westfield. Or anyone but me. That's
when I even thought of giving you the baby you
thought you wanted just to keep you.'

Cathy's eyes widened. 'You were afraid to make
love to me? Oh,' she said softly, 'that's the best
news I've ever had, Tom.'

'You couldn't have had much good news to
compare with it, then,' he said ironically.

'You could make love to me any way you liked
now,' she said huskily.

'Cat...' He stopped abruptly and she saw the
turmoil in his eyes.

'You could do anything you wanted, bind me in
chains, give me babies galore, although it's not
really necessary, because I've changed my mind and
I'm just not going to go away, you see. I did warn
you once how stubborn a Kerris could be, didn't
I?' Her lips curved into a smile. 'Sorry.'

He stared down at her, into her radiant eyes, and
closed his briefly, then he took her hand and seemed
about to say something, but at last his control broke
and he was holding her so hard she could barely

breathe, saying her name over and over.

‘ ‘ ‘

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The bedroom was quiet and peaceful in the last of
the afternoon sunlight despite the clothes strewn
everywhere and despite the fact that their loving
had at last achieved an equality and there had been
no holds barred in the way Tom had lost himself
in her and his desire neither had had to be reined
nor could have been reined. And for once, it was
he who slept in her arms, and she who watched
over him lovingly.

But he didn't sleep long. He stirred and his lashes
lifted. Cathy brought her fingers up to stroke his
face and to still the faint wariness in his eyes before
they focused on her properly. He stared into her
eyes for a long moment before he buried his head
in her shoulder and murmured, 'Welcome home,
my love. It was the most barren place on earth
without you.'

'So was where I was,' she whispered with a
shudder she couldn't control.

'Oh, Cat, it's over, I'll never let you go again.'
And he spent the next minutes holding her and
speaking the words of love she'd longed to hear
until she was soft and reassured in his arms. Then
he said, 'You've no idea how many times I nearly
came and got you.'

A minute went by, then she tilted her face up
again and her eyes were wide and uncompre-
hending. 'You knew where I was?'

He nodded.

'But how?'

'Charlie rang me from Brisbane Airport.'

This time only a moment elapsed before she freed
herself and sat up. 'Charlie... he didn't!'

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'He did, an hour or so after you drove off with
him and while you were in the shop buying some-
thing to read. That's how I know young Charlie
Westfield is more of a gentleman than 1 gave him
credit for and why I... decided to let you be.'

'What did he say?' Cathy was still incredulous.

Tom fingered the sheet that was caught about
her waist, then took his hand away. 'He explained
how it had come about—that he'd discovered you
walking down the road with your bag and how he'd
thought that if you were running away from me
you'd be safe with him. He said,' he went on
quietly, 'that I could rest assured that, as much as
he loved you, he wouldn't take advantage of you
and the state you were in—although he added,' Tom
smiled slightly, 'quite belligerently, that I deserved
to be shot for treating you the way I had and that
no one in their right minds could blame him for
trying to court you himself if you really decided to
leave me.'

'Well!' Cathy exclaimed, filled with some in-
dignant confusion.

'Well what, my love?' Tom said gently, his gaze
resting on her breasts, her shoulders, her mouth
and finally her eyes.

'I...don't know!'

'Perhaps you were enjoying thinking of me suf-
fering the torments of the damned and this has
taken the edge off it? I was, Cat,' he said differ-
ently. 'But because I knew then, or thought I knew,
that Charlie could be... the right one for you after
all as opposed to just someone who wouldn't hurt
you.'

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Cathy stared down at him, then the corners of
her mouth trembled into a smile and she lay back.
'Perhaps I was,' she conceded ruefully. 'I do hope
he finds someone,' she added anxiously.

'He will,' murmured Tom, drawing her back into
his arms. ' I 'm afraid this is going to be something
that will happen with monotonous regularity—we
should have a name for it. How about "the Charlie
Westfield syndrome"?'

Cathy blushed, which he studied through half-
closed lids, and she felt her skin, where his fingers
lay on it, shiver expectantly. But he went on, 'As
for your career, are you really not interested in it?'

She considered. 'I still find it hard to believe in,
Tom. I...'

He waited, then said as she looked confused, 'It
has worked, you know—rarely, I grant you, but
husbands and wives can achieve it. In fact we had
no trouble at all *working* with each other.'

She opened her eyes wide in surprise, then
lowered her lashes to hide from him the fact that
she knew her career, if ever it existed, would always
be difficult for him to cope with, and that it would
take tact, time and patience to overcome his fears.
So she said softly, 'We'll see,' and kissed his
shoulder.

But Tom saw more than she realised. He said
with a wry little smile, 'Am 1 being humoured?'

She opened her mouth, closed it, then said
gravely, 'That's for me to know and you to wonder
about, Tom.'

'Oh, Cathy ' he buried his head against her

breasts '—just don't ever forget how much I love
you.'

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 She stroked his hair and the back of his neck.

'Or I you,' she whispered.

 His hands started to move on her urgently, but

suddenly a strange shuffling sound made itself

heard on the gravel of the driveway outside the

bedroom window and they both stilled.

 'What the hell was that?, Tom raised his head.

 'I don't know, but...' Cathy started to say when

the doorbell rang.

 Tom swore and raked his hair out of his eyes.

'We won't answer it.' But it rang again and was

accompanied by a thin knocking this time.

 'All right,' he said savagely, and got out of bed

to stride over to the window. But with his hand on

the curtain, the taut long lines of his back relaxed

and he turned to her ruefully. 'Come and have a

look.'

 Cathy wrapped the sheet around her and

stumbled over to the window which looked across

the drive towards the front door. And there, with

his hand raised to knock again and his back to

them, stood William.

 But there was more. A large suitcase lay beside

him, half open and disgorging a jumble of clothes,

his pillow, his football and a battered teddy bear.

He also, as they watched, looked anxiously over his

shoulder as if expecting his grandmother to arrive

in hot pursuit.

 'Oh, Tom,' Cathy breathed. 'He's come to stay

with you so you won't be lonely!,

 'Oh, William,' Tom said, his eyes suspiciously

bright for a moment, 'you're a mate among mates.

And have I got a surprise for you!,

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'Let's ring up his grandmother and ask her if he
can stay the night,' Cathy begged. 'I'll make him
his favourite dessert.'

Tom turned to her and took her into his arms.
'Done,' he said seriously, 'provided we can come
back here once he's in bed and I can have *my*favourite... dessert.'

'Of course,' she smiled, 'anything you like. Oh,

I really feel as if I'm home now ' She stopped

and blushed. 'I mean...' She stopped again and
for a long time he simply watched the colour in her
cheeks enigmatically.

Then finally he took her face in his hands and
kissed her lingeringly. 'Don't look like that—home
will never, ever be the same without you. I love
you, I always will.'