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# A Sterling Affair

by

## Susan Palmquist

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

A Sterling Affair

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#### Dedication

For Dad, the man who got me hooked on reading.

#### CHAPTER ONE

There was light. It cast a brightness he hadn't seen or experienced in 178 years.

His hand twitched, shook, and then a strong jolt shot up his arm. The impulse was intense and so powerful that it sent his arm springing up into the air. His hand struck the top of the coffin he was encased in, but he did not feel any pain.

He felt spreading warmth working its way from his left foot to his thigh. He thought how strange it suddenly felt in comparison to his right leg and foot. That side of his body was still cold, numb...lifeless.

The warmth spread into his stomach. It felt like a steady stream of something hot and wet invading his body. It extended upwards into his chest, filling both of his lungs. He took his first breath, but then held it. He had to because he'd just felt his first heartbeat.

He expelled the air from his mouth. He then felt a pounding in his head. He sensed that his heart was circulating blood around his body again. There was no mistaking these sensations. He was coming alive again.

His eyes sprung open. He saw a muted light above him. He flexed his fingers, then his toes. His body suddenly felt heavier. Once again he had internal organs, skin, blood, flesh...everything that made a person mortal.

The ground underneath him quivered, but then stopped. It rattled, but then stopped again. Then there was a violent rumbling sound. The dirt above the coffin started to make its way inside. It fell in mounds on his chest and face. He could see light, or what he remembered as light, streaming down upon him. He reached up to feel it on his palm and felt a brisk wind stinging his skin. He was breaking out of his prison.

The shaking subsided and only silence fell on his ears. He listened closely for a hint, or even a clue, as to what might be happening to him. There was a sudden clap of thunder, but no rain. He listened again. And then he heard it, voices...children's voices, calling in the distance.

"Sir Ian Ashby, Sir Ian Ashby, come to us."

\*\*\*\*

Deana turned her head to listen. She was sure it was Todd and Amy calling to her, but then a few claps of thunder outside the bathroom window had muted any sounds within the house. She thought maybe a storm was brewing, but didn't hear any more thunder. Maybe it was all her imagination. And after all, the house was over a hundred years old and often made peculiar noises.

But then she'd heard the children calling out again. At first Deana had thought they were calling for help. However, as she listened closely, she could hear it was a man's name they were shouting out loud. It was at that point she'd concluded it was some type of new game they'd invented.

She sat back down in the bath. It had turned tepid, but all she needed was a few more minutes to relax and she'd be as good as new again.

Deana wondered what type of game the kids had come up with this time. She heard their voices drifting up the stairs again. However, this time she closed her eyes and ignored the intrusion. She was going to enjoy some peace and quiet, and some time for herself. Just five minutes more and then she'd have to get ready to leave for the evening.

She pushed her head back onto the inflatable

pillow and smiled. At least the children had found something to occupy themselves with. She knew they were becoming bored with the whole routine. In previous years she'd taken them shopping. They had also enjoyed visits to all the museums in the area. They'd visited London every summer vacation since Alex had decided to open an office there. Now she had to attend board meetings and deal with the stockholders. Deana had little time for recreation these days and hoped that her children accepted that everything was now her responsibility.

Deana lifted up the sponge, squeezed it out, and let the water run over her chest. She pushed her shoulders under the water. How she loved English baths, they were so much larger than the ones back home.

"Mom, you'd better get down here...and quickly," she heard Todd calling to her.

Deana opened one eye. She knew it had been too good for too long. This was what parenthood was really all about. Deana sat up in the bath, determined not to get out of the water unless the house was on fire.

"Can't it wait? I'm getting ready to go out," Deana called back.

"I don't think so, this is pretty serious."

Deana sighed. Yes, it had been too good to be true. She stood up and stepped over the side of the bath. She walked over to the laundry hamper, picked up her robe and threw it around her shoulders. She walked out of the bathroom, along the hallway, and then down the stairs.

Deana expected to see a broken vase or a lamp lying in the hallway, but saw nothing. She walked into the living room and saw Todd and Amy standing side by side. She looked at their faces and realized she'd never seen them look so serious before. In fact, their look resembled newly-recruited soldiers at boot camp who were waiting for the first inspection of their beds and boots.

"Okay, what have you done?"

They both looked to the wall on the opposite side of the room and then back to Deana.

"I just want to say it's all Todd's fault. I warned him this wasn't a good idea," said Amy.

"Really. Maybe you should just tell me what you've done and I can decide if it was a good idea or not."

"Prepare yourself, Mom, it's bad," said Todd.

"Extremely and incredibly awful, I might add."

Had Deana heard correctly? Had an Englishman just said that? She turned to face the window, screamed out and jumped back, hitting her shoulders on the wall behind her.

Standing at the end of the living room was a man, a naked man. Well, that was if you discounted the cushion he was holding in front of his lower body. And he was covered in what looked very much like mud. He was about six feet tall, broad shoulders, thick brown wavy hair. He had more than an ample sprinkling of hair on his chest, stomach and lower belly, all of which were caked down with mud.

"We told you it was really bad," said Amy.

"Okay, no one panic. I'll call the police. They'll know how to deal with him."

Deana walked over to the phone.

"Did he break in through a window?" she asked. She knew there was a large psychiatric hospital a few blocks away. She'd heard of patients breaking out and then breaking into a house. Some were violent, others more on the timid side.

She picked up the receiver and prepared to dial. She glanced at him out of the corner of her eye. She just hoped he didn't fit into the violent category. Maybe she should tell the police to bring a straitjacket in case he put up a fight.

"Mom, he didn't break in," said Todd.

"Don't tell me you let a mental patient in here."

"Mental, Madam, how dare you. I can swear to you that no one in my family was ever mad. And what is that strange-looking item you have placed at the side of your head?"

"You want me to believe you're standing in my living room in nothing more than your birthday suit, and that you don't know this is a phone," she said, swinging it up in the air. "And you honestly want me to believe you're not from the psychiatric hospital."

"It's our fault. Let us explain," said Todd.

"I'm sure it is your fault. Whatever were you thinking?" asked Deana. "Don't you know how dangerous some of these mental patients can be?"

"Madam, I forbid you to use that word again."

"Will you just shut up," shouted Deana.

She couldn't believe how difficult dialing three numbers could be. At least it was difficult when you had a naked lunatic standing in your living room.

"We brought him here," said Todd quickly.

"What?" asked Deana, slamming the phone down on the table.

"This has all to do with Mrs. Williams, blame her," said Amy.

"What has Mrs. Williams got to do with this?" asked Deana. She knew their London neighbor was a bit on the eccentric side, but the woman was away in Brighton for the week. There was just no way she could be held responsible for this.

"She gave us an idea about calling Dad back from the grave."

Deana closed her eyes. *What a stupid woman*, thought Deana. Filling their heads with garbage like that. Deana was afraid to ask her next question.

"But don't tell me you..."

"Madam, may I just say..."

"Oh, be quiet, will you," said Deana.

"How dare you speak to me like that? I have never been spoken to in such a rude manner before."

"Just tell me what the two of you did here tonight," said Deana.

"We wanted to practice calling Dad back, so we got a name off a headstone in the cemetery down the road. We called him back and it obviously worked."

Deana looked at this man. She wasn't really hearing or experiencing this. The man was alive. *Very much alive*, she thought as she caught sight of his naked buttocks reflected in the mirror he was standing in front of.

"I don't believe it," she said.

"Believe it, Madam. I am Sir Ian Ashby. It seems your imps have brought me back from the dead. Now I demand that they send me back."

Deana fell backwards, hoping the couch was behind her. If only their father was here, he'd know what to do. No, she didn't really mean that, take that back. One person returned from the dead was enough to deal with. She looked at him again, and this time he stared back at her and wouldn't take his eyes off her.

"Todd, go upstairs and get some of your clothes so this gentleman can at least cover himself up while I deal with this mess. And bring him a damp washcloth or something so he can clean all the mud off his body."

Sir Ian watched as the male imp ran out of the room. He then looked back down to the mother of the imps. She was fair of face and equally fair of hair...blue eyes too. He imagined that she had not stayed on the marriage mart very long. And she was wearing the skimpiest gown he had ever seen. When she'd fallen back on the couch, the folds of the gown had suddenly parted. What a sight for him to behold! He could see everything from her thighs downward. *Delicious*, he thought. He had always had a weakness for women with beautiful legs. He could imagine those delightful beauties wrapped around his own body.

He took another peek, hoping that her husband would not come in and catch him staring at her. He took another look at her legs. Yes, very nice indeed. Sir Ian Ashby had always had a weakness for blondes.

Maybe this was not such the unfortunate situation he had initially suspected it to be. He'd been called back from the dead to a house with a beautiful woman residing in it. And as she was obviously a mother, he believed that she was a married one. Even luckier for him.

While many a man would have thought that a negative aspect, Sir Ian always knew that married women were the best to pursue. They were already off the marriage mart and therefore had no expectations that he would need to make an offer before he took them to his bed.

He heard footsteps outside the door. Sir Ian quickly turned his head in the opposite direction so it looked like he was looking at the painting on the wall. He turned his head back to the door when he heard it opening. The male imp had returned. He was carrying some clothing that he handed to his mother. She was now getting up. Sir Ian took a deep breath; she was coming his way.

Deana gingerly walked over to Sir Ian. What kind of phenomenon was he? A phantom? A ghost? She studied him more carefully as she got closer to him. He looked like the average man; no, not average. He was above average. If she had to rate him on a scale of one to ten, she'd have to give him an eleven.

"I'm sorry for what's happened. Maybe you should get dressed while we sort this mess out. I just don't know what to think of the whole thing."

She didn't want to step too close to him. She stretched her arm out, hoping he could reach the clothing. He didn't take the clothes. Instead, she felt him grab her wrist and pull her toward him. She felt foolish when she screamed out. Just what he was going to do to her?

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"Madam, are you afraid of me?"

Deana couldn't speak, so she just shook her head. But then she got up the courage to answer him.

"Why would you think I'm afraid of you?"

"The fact that I can feel you shake in my hand. That I can see your body trembling."

"It's just that I've never seen a ghost before," she said quickly. The shaking wasn't because she thought he was a ghost, or even spooky for that matter. She was in awe of this magnificent man.

"A ghost. I do not believe that I am a ghost. Ghosts are dead. I believe that I am alive."

He took her hand and pressed her palm to his chest. She could feel a network of well-defined muscles, and the little mats of curly hair tickled her palm. If he hadn't come back from the dead, she would have taken a guess he'd been working out a couple of times a day. He moved her hand across to the left side of his body and she suddenly felt his heart pounding against her palm.

"Are you now convinced that I am alive?" "Yes."

Deana felt her knees go wobbly again, and it definitely wasn't because she was standing next to a supposedly dead man. There was only one simple explanation for the way she was feeling. She was attracted to him, and found him, well, the only word she could think of was sexy.

He let go of Deana's wrist, so she stepped backwards away from him. "The clothes," she said, holding them out to him again.

He took them with one hand while managing to keep the cushion in place with the other.

"Perhaps you should tell me your name, Madam."

"I'm Deana Adams, and those are my children, Todd and Amy."

He looked across the room at them. "Yes, imps who enjoy a lark. And I would very much like to speak with their father as soon as possible. I would like to recommend to him what their punishment should be for this game they have played."

"That won't be possible," said Deana.

He looked back at her.

"And why not?"

"Because I'm a widow, their father is dead."

She saw him look at her again. If she wasn't mistaken, the look was just a little bit different this time.

The situation was not what it had first seemed, thought Sir Ian. Here was a beautiful woman, he had been instantly attracted to her, and now he had learned that she was not a married woman after all.

Now this was certainly a dilemma. He looked back at her one more time. Once he got the idea about taking a woman to his bed, he never gave up. Would this one be willing to do just that without an offer of marriage? After all, Sir Ian Ashby had vowed since he was ten years old that he would remain a

### bachelor all of his life.

#### CHAPTER TWO

"Why don't we leave the room while you get dressed?" Deana signaled for the children to follow her into the hallway.

She shut the door and turned to face her children. Both of them were now grinning at her. A visual image sprung to her mind. Her hands were wrapped tightly around their necks, and she was about to start squeezing. *Stop it*, she ordered herself. *They're your own flesh and blood. You gave life to them.* 

"I want both of you to go upstairs and stay out of trouble for the rest of the evening."

"But we're going out to dinner with you."

Deana looked at her watch. She'd almost forgotten that two of the board of directors would be at the door at any minute. She glanced in the mirror in the hallway and noticed, as she suspected, that she looked a complete mess. Her hair was haphazardly piled on top of her head. She wasn't wearing any makeup. And let's not forget that she was only wearing her bathrobe and nothing else. If that wasn't enough to deal with, she also had a dead man in her living room. Well, not exactly dead.

"You're not going anywhere tonight. Let that be the punishment for what you've done."

She heard the doorbell ring. "Both of you, upstairs," she said quickly. She never liked the children being within listening distance when she had to lie. And boy, was she going to have to tell some whoppers to get out of this one.

She made sure her robe was tightly secured,

walked over to the door and opened it. She saw Philip and Colin dressed in evening suits and both their wives were wearing black evening dresses. Their smiles turned to frowns as they eyed her from head to toe.

"We can come back later if we're too early," said Colin.

"No, no, really. I'm sorry I didn't phone you sooner, but it's only just come on. I can't remember if I told you this before, but I get some really awful migraines."

"Oh, dear," said Colin's wife.

"Yes, they come as quickly as that," said Deana, snapping her fingers.

"I take it you won't be joining us at the club," said Colin.

"No, I'm really sorry."

"Don't you worry, my dear. You don't have to tell me how frightful a migraine headache can be," said Philip's wife. "They run in my family."

"I'll make this up to you. In fact, let me pay for the meal tonight," said Deana.

"No, we wouldn't think of it," said Philip.

"I can assure you we will go out to dinner one of these days," said Deana.

"I'd go and have a nice rest," said Colin's wife. "My mother used to pull the curtains. She said a darkened room is always the best remedy for a nasty migraine."

"Yes, I'm going straight to bed as soon as you're gone," said Deana, relieved to think they were on the verge of leaving.

She heard the door behind her opening up, and then heard a manly cough. She saw four pairs of eyes immediately look over her shoulder. She sensed the dead man had stepped out into the hallway.

Deana turned to look and saw him standing there. She closed her eyes. If it was true you could die from embarrassment, then these were her last few seconds on earth.

At least he was now fully clothed. The problem was the clothes were a good two sizes too small. The pants were halfway up his calves, and the T-shirt so short, his hairy midriff and belly button were on full display. He looked like a cross between the Incredible Hulk and a hippie.

She suddenly noticed what T-shirt Todd had donated to him. It was the old Guns N' Roses one that he'd found at a garage sale. No wonder it didn't fit Sir Ian; it barely fit Todd these days.

The silence that had fallen in the hallway was getting more unbearable. Deana had to think of something to say. She had to somehow explain this stranger's presence in their home.

"There you are. Let me introduce Sir Ian Ashby. He's one of Alex's dearest old friends. He arrived very unexpectedly and he's going to stay with us for a few days. Sir Ian, this is Colin Mitchell and his wife June. The other gentleman is Philip Smith and this is his wife Annabell. Both Colin and Philip are on the board of directors at my company."

Sir Ian took three confident strides across the hallway. He shook hands with the men, and then lifted June's hand and kissed the top of it. He then did the same with Annabell's hand.

"Charmed, I am sure," he said.

There was another bout of silence while everyone looked at one another and smiled. Deana was about to speak, but Sir Ian jumped in first.

"This is not very hospitable, making you stand out here. Please do come into the study and we can take refreshments."

"We'd love to," said Colin. "We didn't even know Alex had friends in England."

Sir Ian glanced at Deana and then turned to lead the guests into the living room. Okay, so what her children had done to him was awful, but embarrassing her in front of her business associates was a spiteful way to get revenge.

"Please be seated," said Sir Ian.

The women sat down, followed by the men.

"I will just call for some sherry," said Sir Ian, walking over to the window.

What was he up to now? The drink cabinet was on the other side of the room, thought Deana.

She felt perspiration breaking out on her forehead as she watched him grab the cord at the end of the drapes. If she wasn't mistaken, he was going to pull it. *He probably thinks it summons the servants*, she thought. She saw him give it a tug and the drapes swished across the windows, casting the room in almost total darkness.

"What is..." muttered Sir Ian.

Deana took control of the situation. She got up and walked over to the window. She couldn't see where she was going, and she hit her leg on the coffee table. She tripped and almost fell into Colin's lap.

"Are you all right, my dear?" he asked, catching her before she went to the ground.

"Yes, it must be the tablets I took for my headache," she said.

She took a few more steps over to the window, took hold of the cord, and pulled back the drapes.

She laughed. "Sir Ian is such a joker, that's what Alex loved about him. Always one for a practical joke."

"Let me go and call the servants from the door."

"Now, that's enough, Sir Ian. You've had your little joke."

The clock in the hall struck seven.

Colin stood up. "We really should be getting to the club."

"Club," said Sir Ian. "Almacks, Boodles?"

Deana had heard of those clubs. In fact, she was positive she'd read about them in a history book.

"Sir Ian, do stop it with these jokes," she said, tapping him on the arm. He looked at her with complete bewilderment on his face.

She had a horrible feeling this situation was much more serious than she'd thought. Yes, it was all starting to add up now. Servants, Almacks...the way he spoke. He was from the Regency period. Her children hadn't called back just any corpse. They'd chosen one who'd probably been dead for over two hundred years.

"We really must be leaving," said Philip, standing.

"I'll walk you to the door," said Deana.

She hoped they didn't sense she was more than relieved at their departure.

"I hope your headache is better soon, my dear," said Annabell.

"I hope so too," said Deana, feeling a real headache gripping both sides of her temples now.

"We'll see you at the office tomorrow," said Colin.

She closed the door and ran back into the living room. She saw Sir Ian was now sitting in one of the armchairs.

"I'll deal with you in a minute," she said, rushing over to the window. She gently eased it up and stuck her head outside.

"Madam, may I ask what you are doing? This household seems very strange. In fact, I do not think a mad man would want to break into it. If I am any judge, I think he would prefer to break out."

"Can't you be quiet for even a minute? I'm trying to listen to the people who just left. I need to hear what they're saying about me."

She felt him brush by her shoulder. He was now standing right beside her. For a man who had just

returned from the dead, his body certainly radiated lots of welcoming warmth. Deana heard footsteps on the path. Her guests were just about to turn the corner.

"Did you believe that bit about him being Alex's friend?" asked Colin.

"Not for a minute," said Annabell. "He'd obviously put those clothes on in a hurry. I'm sure both you men noticed that Deana had nothing on under that robe. And did you see his clothing? Nothing even fit him. He'd thrown them on in a hurry. We'd obviously interrupted them. No wonder she didn't want to come out with us. I bet they couldn't wait for us to leave so they could get back to whatever it was they were up to. And it's the children I always feel sorry for. Those poor little dears, what must they be thinking with that sort of thing going on under the same roof."

"I must say I'm surprised at her," said Philip. "I thought she'd at least wait another year or so before she got involved with another man. And was it just me imaging things, or did you get the impression that he's not quite all there?"

Oh, great, thought Deana. They think I'm now upstairs having torrid sex with a mentally deficient man.

"Not that it's any of our business, but is she really the woman we want to head a company we have money invested in?" asked Colin.

She heard their voices gradually trail off as they went farther down the path.

"Do you see what you've done?" asked Deana, forgetting she'd stuck her head out of the window. She stood up and hit it on the edge of the frame. "They think you're my lover."

"Preposterous, Madam. I hardly know you."

"And if that's not bad enough, they think that you're a bit funny in the head."

"Oh, Madam, please do not start with that madness nonsense all over again," he said, sitting down in the chair.

"And one more thing. Just don't touch anything until I tell you to. Like the drapes, for example."

"What sort of house is this? I mean, the servants do not come when the master summons them."

"I don't have servants."

"No servants. Then you are a poor widow?"

"In fact, just the opposite."

She wanted to tell him very few households used servants like that anymore. However, that would bring up another problem for him. Like him finding out he hadn't been brought back to Regency England.

"In fact, Madam, everything about this house seems slightly peculiar. And the people that you invite to your home dress rather strangely. Not to mention that you and your imps have funny voices."

"Funny voices?"

"Yes, you do not speak as I do."

"We're American."

"Ah, from the Colonies. I hope you are not over here to spy on anyone."

"No, I can assure you that we're not."

"And you say your husband is dead?"

"Yes, Alex, my husband, passed away six months ago."

"My condolences," he said, bowing his head. "Then this is a house in mourning."

"People don't mourn. I mean, they don't mourn officially anymore."

She'd said the wrong thing. She realized that when it was too late. Now if they could just get him back to wherever he came from before he found out what year it really was, everything would be fine.

"This is obviously a house that breaks with tradition. And these rags I have been given to wear." He pulled at the material on the T-shirt. "This shirt with the military insignia."

Deana managed to suppress a laugh. "I'm sorry, but we had to get you something in a hurry."

"And may I ask if you have come up with any solution to my predicament?"

"I've given it some thought, but I can't think straight right now. The best I can say is, let's wait until Mrs. Williams comes home."

"And where may I ask is she?"

"Brighton."

"Oh, Brighton, such a gay spot."

Deana didn't want to tell him that adjective had an entirely different meaning these days. She saw him looking at her again.

"Yes, I am sure the Prince Regent is there. Does Mrs. Williams know the Prince personally?"

"I'm sure she knows of him, but they're not personal friends."

"You know, I met him on a few occasions. He can be rather odd, but a good sort, nevertheless."

"I'm sure Mrs. Williams will know what to do with you as soon as she gets back. In fact, she should be home in about four days."

"Four days, Madam. I have to stay with you and the imps for four whole days?"

"I can assure you, the im...my children will behave themselves. Plus, I'll make sure they stay out of your way."

"I hope so. I have never been fond of children."

He broke into a yawn.

"You must be tired," said Deana, seeing him stretch his arms into the air. The T-shirt went further up his stomach and Deana couldn't help but notice what firm muscles he had. *He must have been in great shape before he died*, she thought. And he'd obviously been returned to his former splendor when the children brought him back. Oh, this was all too crazy to even be thinking about. Dead man, attractive man, an attractive man that had been brought back into her home. She took a deep breath. Maybe he would go to sleep and return to his eternal slumber, problem solved.

"I'll show you the spare room where you can get some sleep."

She turned and left the room. She sensed he was now close behind her and watching her every move. She just hoped he wouldn't see the lights, or hear the telephone ring, for that matter. She could imagine how he was going to react when he knew the whole story.

She started to go up the stairs and glanced behind her. She saw him casually straightening all the paintings on the wall. She took him along to one of the rooms at the front of the house. She almost turned on the light switch, but then took her hand away from the plate. Luckily it was still light outside.

She saw him looking at the furnishings.

"I'll try and find you something to sleep in."

"Do not worry about that, Madam. I prefer to sleep as nature intended us to."

Fortunately, the bed was already made up. She walked over to the window and opened it slightly to let in some air. Deana then pulled the curtains across but kept a small gap between them. She knew if enough natural light filtered into the room, she wouldn't have to turn on any lights.

"I'll say good night to you now, Sir Ian."

"Good night, Madam."

She almost jumped back again when he grabbed her arm.

"I can imagine how frightening I must appear to you. Let me assure you, Madam, that I will not harm you."

He lifted the back of her hand up to his mouth.

He kissed it gently and let it linger under his lips while he looked her in the eyes.

Deana pulled it away. Most women probably would, because the thought of a previously dead man kissing any part of their body would be creepy. But that wasn't why she wanted to pull away from him. She was getting the wobbly legs again, just like when she'd first set eyes on him.

This was ridiculous. She was a grown woman with two teenagers. And here she was, acting like she was back in high school, swooning over the class heartthrob.

"Good night, Sir Ian."

She hurried out of the room and down the hallway.

"Where is he, Mom?" asked Todd, putting his head out of his bedroom door.

"In the spare room."

"Then he's going to stay here with us?"

"I'm afraid so," she said.

She saw Todd disappear into his room and then heard him turn on his music. She rushed into his room.

"Sir Ian's just gone to bed. I don't want to have to deal with him again tonight. So, I suggest you either turn that music down or put your headphones on."

"But Mom..."

"Just do it. And another thing, I want you and your sister to stay out of his way as much as possible until we can deal with this situation."

"Fine with me. Kinda gives me the creeps anyway. It makes my flesh crawl to think he's really a dead man."

Deana had to admit Sir Ian sent more than a few shivers up her spine too, but for a completely different reason.

"As long as you know and understand what I

expect of you while he's here?"

She shut the door and could no longer hear the music. She walked along the hallway and knocked on her daughter's bedroom door.

"Come in."

"I heard everyone leaving," said Amy, who was lying on her stomach reading a book.

"Unfortunately, Sir Ian introduced himself," said Deana, sitting on the bed.

Amy turned onto her side. She put her hand under her chin to support her head. "What did they think of him?"

"I'm sure they found him a little different."

"Are you really angry with us for what we did?"

"A mother can't be angry with her children for long. And as soon as Mrs. Williams comes home we'll be able to send Sir Ian back. After that, this will be our little secret. We'll always keep it to ourselves. In fact, once he's gone, we'll act like nothing ever happened, okay?"

Amy nodded.

"We only did it because we want Dad back."

"I know you loved your father every much, but you and Todd have to accept that he's gone forever. We can't ever bring him back."

Deana lifted her hand and wiped the hair away from Amy's eyes.

"But if we could bring back Sir Ian, doesn't it make sense that we could..."

Deana quickly put her hand over her daughter's mouth. "You're not to try it again. Do you hear me? I don't know what happened here this evening with Sir Ian...I can't explain it. But I don't want you or your brother trying anything like that again. You promise me?"

"I promise."

"Good. So what are you reading?"

"The book I got from W.H. Smiths yesterday."

"Is it good?"

"It's okay. I'm sure I could start reading your adult books soon. What do you think about Sir Ian? Isn't he a hunk?" she asked, rolling onto her stomach again.

Deana didn't think he'd like to be called that, even if he did understand what it meant.

"I suppose he's quite a handsome looking man."

"He's the stuff dreams are made of."

"Amy, I think you're too young to be thinking about men in that way."

"Why? Todd's got a dirty magazine hidden in his room."

"First of all, you've got plenty of time to think about boys, and secondly, it's not nice to tell tales on your brother."

Amy turned over onto her back.

"I'm always too young for everything," said Amy, looking up at the ceiling.

"Good night, honey. And just think, one day you'll be the right age," Deana said before she leaned over to kiss Amy's forehead.

"I guess so. 'Night, Mom."

Deana closed the door and then walked along to Sir Ian's room. She thought it only decent that she check on him. She knocked on the door, but didn't hear anything. She carefully opened it and looked in on him.

Sir Ian was in bed, fast asleep, or was he...maybe he was dead again. She crept into his room and studied him closely. No, he was still alive; she could see his chest falling and rising. The light from the window cast a shadow across his face and chest. Her daughter was going to have great taste in men. Amy was right. This was the type of man that dreams were made of.

Deana stood there watching him breathe. She felt like she was all of a sudden intruding. After all, he was fast asleep, and here she was almost spying on him.

Before she could stop herself, she crept over to the bed. She reached out her hand and touched his chest. He was so beautiful, and...wait, what was she doing? She'd read stories about women who were divorced or widowed, getting so anxious to be with a man that they'd jump into bed at the first opportunity. Maybe that's what the wobbly legs were about and nothing more.

Deana excited the room as quietly as she could. She carefully shut the door and went into her own room. Wasn't it men who had to take cold showers when they got all worked up about the opposite sex? Looked like she'd be doing the same thing tonight.

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At first Sir Ian thought he had been dreaming. Dreaming that he was once again alive. But he knew that could not be possible. He had not had a dream since he had died. And it did not seem logical that there were dreams after death. Therefore, he could only conclude one thing, that he was indeed mortal once again.

He slowly opened his eyes and looked up at the ceiling. He was no longer in his coffin. He lifted his head and then turned it from side to side. He studied the furnishings. He was in a room, in a house. Ah, now he remembered everything that had happened to him.

He suddenly heard what he could only describe as a swishing noise. Swish, swish, swish. And it was coming from outside the window. He got out of bed and walked to the window. He pulled back the curtains to take a look. The sun was just rising. It was going to be a beautiful day with just a touch of dew on the hedgerows. Maybe, if he acted in a polite manner to the lady of the house, she would allow him to take the gig, or even the carriage, out for a short journey.

Another swish caught his attention. Sir Ian saw just a flash of color through the trees, and then another flash. What could it possibly be? He could not see a thing from his window. He would have to go downstairs and take a look.

He wrapped a blanket around himself, went out of the room, and seeing no one in sight, crept down the stairs. He opened the front door and stepped outside. He put his face up to the sky and took a deep breath. He walked down the path and headed toward the road. The swishing noise was becoming more distinct now. He crossed the grassy verge and went over to the edge of the road.

He heard a blast of something that sounded like a hunting horn. He turned toward the source of the sound and was horrified to see a monster with large eyes coming straight at him. And darn it, he had left the house without his sword or even a pistol.

He watched in horror as it stopped just a few feet from him. He jumped back, not believing what he was witnessing. A peculiar-looking man was emerging from the monster's belly. A monster giving birth to a man? This had to be an awful dream. Perhaps he had consumed too much bad sherry at Almacks the night before.

"What are you, bleeding mad? Standing out there in the bloody road like that, I could have killed you."

Why was everyone so obsessed with madness all of a sudden? They must be frightened that the King's malady was catching or something. Sir Ian jumped back again. Another monster passed by in the other direction, and then another. A green one, a blue one, a red one, another green one.

Sir Ian held his head. Perhaps Madam had been right. He was going mad. Completely half-baked, perhaps. It would be the insane asylum for him very soon.

Sir Ian ran back to the house. He looked back at the road. There were monsters all over the place now. Something was not quite right.

He went into the living room and looked at the object on the table. What had she called it? A telephone? He sat down and looked around the room. He had thought it was just this household that was not quite all there, but now he wasn't so sure. The outside world was a little peculiar too. He studied everything in the room, one item at a time. A drink cabinet. Yes, that was more than normal. He saw a box with a piece of glass at the front. Now that looked strange. What was that?

He walked over to it but he remembered she'd told him not to touch anything. Yes, he hadn't liked the tone of voice she'd taken with him. After all, a woman telling a man what to do! He saw a button by the glass panel and pressed it. A man suddenly appeared behind the glass. Sir Ian almost fell backwards. How could a man get into such a small box?

He looked behind the box, but there was no opening for a man to climb through. He shook the TV, but the man did not fall out. He did not even complain about being shaken, for that matter. He looked at the glass panel again. No, he could not believe what he was seeing. There were now ten people in the tiny box, and he had not seen any of them enter it.

Something was not right here. There was something that the lady of the house had not told him. She was keeping something from him. He had the awful feeling it was no longer 1815.

#### CHAPTER THREE

Deana woke suddenly when she heard her alarm clock radio switch on. She sat up and rubbed her eyes. Was it morning already? Had yesterday really happened? It probably had, because it was just too strange to have been a dream.

She got out of bed and put her robe on. The first thing she needed to do was check on Sir Ian. She walked to his room and knocked on the door. She didn't get a response, but decided to go in anyway. Her heart started to beat faster when she saw that he was gone.

Maybe it had been just a dream. Maybe she'd just been fantasizing about handsome men appearing in her house. She walked over to the bed and looked down at it. The sheets were definitely rumpled and there was a distinct indentation on the pillow. And by the look of things, a blanket was missing. Someone had slept there. She wasn't having strange dreams about men.

She sat down on the bed. Maybe he'd only been able to come back to life for a short time. Maybe it was due to a sudden burst of energy, the storm perhaps, and now he was back in a cold, dark grave. She shuddered as if someone had walked over her own grave. It was too macabre to think about.

She stood up and walked over to look out the window.

"Madam, I demand to know what year this is?"

Deana turned around to see him standing in the doorway with just a blanket tied around his waist.

No, it wasn't due to a burst of energy. Trouble

was still here. His voice sounded angrier, more indignant now. She had the sneaky suspicion he'd discovered the truth. Just like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, he'd just discovered he wasn't in Kansas anymore.

Deana turned to look at him. It had just been wishful thinking on her part. Did she really think they could send him back before he discovered the whole truth?

"It's 2008," said Deana, sitting down on the bed.

"Then this is more wicked than I originally thought," he said, sitting down beside her. "Do you know that a monster almost killed me out there in the street?"

"Monster?" asked Deana.

"A blue one. A man climbed out from the pit of its belly."

"That wasn't a monster; they're called cars."

"Cars?"

"Yes, it's a form of transportation."

"And what happened to the good old horsedrawn vehicle?"

"They went out of style many years ago."

Sir Ian shook his head. "I have this dreadful feeling in the pit of my stomach. I fear there are many things out in that world I will not like."

"I wouldn't say that. We've made great advances."

"I cannot see how a car is one of them. They are the most unbecoming looking...things I have ever seen."

Deana had to admit some were not pretty to look at. "We own a car; maybe you'd like to ride in it."

"No, Madam, definitely no. And downstairs there are people in a box with a glass front."

Deana knew he was referring to the TV. She'd like to explain how a TV projected its image, but didn't think she could. And it was just too early in the morning for such a discussion anyway.

Deana stood up. "Let me know if there's anything you need. I'm going to start on breakfast because my children will be up and about soon. Come downstairs to the kitchen when you feel like it."

Deana was about to leave.

"Madam, I hate to discuss this rather private matter with you, but I cannot wait for your son to rise. This is most urgent. I have looked everywhere possible in this room, but I cannot find one single chamber pot."

"We've made a great advancement on that too. Just follow me."

Deana took Sir Ian along to the bathroom and showed him the toilet. He checked it over and then just stood there looking down into the bowl.

"But this pot is full. Someone has already used it. And look, it has not been emptied."

"Just watch. After you use it, you pull this," she said, flushing the toilet.

"What the..." said Sir Ian, stepping closer to it. "It is the strangest thing I have ever witnessed."

"But a lot more sanitary than a chamber pot. Plus, we have hot and cold running water." Deana turned on both taps and let them run for a few minutes. Feel free to use whatever you want or need around the house."

Deana left Sir Ian in the bathroom. She went along the hallway and then down the stairs. She shook her head. It was going to be like introducing a child to the world.

She went into the kitchen. Deana turned on the coffee pot and then got out the bacon and eggs. She burst out laughing when she heard the toilet being flushed for the third time.

A few minutes later Todd walked into the kitchen.

"That Sir Ian sure is a strange one. I just walked by the bathroom and he was sitting on the floor right in front of the toilet. And do you know what he was doing? Just sitting there watching the water run away."

"You'll have to be very patient with him, because he's only just found out this is 2008."

"I've known that all year."

"I know you have, but it seems you called back a man from Regency England."

Todd whistled. "We didn't look at the dates on the headstone. Wow, that was when, the early 1800s? That makes him ancient, a relic."

"And not a wrinkle in sight," said Deana.

Amy walked into the kitchen.

"Would someone please tell Sir Ian I need to use the bathroom? He's turned on every tap and he's going to use up all the hot water. How am I going to wash my hair?"

"He's from the early 1800s," said Todd.

"So didn't they have water back then?"

"They didn't have indoor plumbing back then," said Deana. "I'll tell him breakfast's ready, maybe that will get his mind off the taps and toilet. And remember, you've got to be polite to him. He's here because of your stupidity."

Deana left the kitchen and walked to the bottom of the stairs. She called up to him.

"Sir Ian, breakfast is about to be served."

Deana walked back to the kitchen. It reminded her of mornings when Alex was alive. He'd been a late riser and she'd always have to call up the stairs to him. She was placing the food on the plates when she noticed Sir Ian was now standing in the doorway watching her.

"Come and sit down. I hope you like bacon."

Sir Ian came in and immediately sat at the head of the table. "It is a relief to know bacon has not gone

the same way as the horse-drawn vehicle."

"That used to be my dad's place at the table," said Amy.

"Then I am most honored to be sitting here," said Sir Ian, placing a napkin across his lap.

"Would you like some eggs to go with that?" asked Deana.

"I would indeed, Madam."

Deana broke two eggs into a bowl, beat them, and then placed them in the microwave.

"What sort of contraption is that?" asked Sir Ian.

"It's called a microwave oven. It cooks the food in next to no time," explained Deana.

Sir Ian stood up and walked over to look into the microwave.

"But the food is being spun."

Deana saw him kneel down in front of the glass door so he could watch the food cooking. It brought back memories of when Todd and Amy were toddlers, both eager to explore the world around them.

"You shouldn't get too close to that oven," said Todd. "Mom's warned us about staying away from it."

"And why would that be?" he asked, looking up at her.

"It's a form of radiation," said Deana.

"Radiation. I do not understand."

"You know, atoms and nuclear energy?" said Todd.

"All after Sir Ian's time," said Deana.

"I forgot," said Todd. "Anyway, Sir Ian, just stay away from it or the thing could nuke you."

"Nuke me?" asked Sir Ian as the bell sounded on the oven.

Deana walked over to the oven and pulled out the bowl. She saw Sir Ian peering into it. "Amazing, but could someone please explain to me what a nuke would do to me?"

Deana tipped the eggs onto his plate. "We'll have a long chat later."

*It would have to be a long chat*, thought Deana. How could you possibly condense two hundred years of history into a normal conversation?

Sir Ian sat down and took his first bite of bacon. "At least bacon tastes vaguely familiar."

Deana noticed the children were not eating, but sitting with their mouths partly open as they watched Sir Ian eating his breakfast. She kicked both of them under the table. They turned to look at her and she shook her head.

"Madam, I could tell that your children were being impolite and staring at me. And I also saw the signal you just gave them. If we are all to be under one roof for four days, let me warn you that I do not miss anything that goes on around me."

Deana was about to give him a sharp reply, but then she remembered she'd insisted the children be polite to him. It was now up to her to set a good example.

"They weren't staring to be rude, it's just that you fascinate them."

Sir Ian nodded. "I fascinate myself. In fact, I studied myself in the looking glass and I look exactly the same as I did before I died."

"I guess we're like Dr. Frankenstein," said Todd.

"Todd, stop it," said Deana.

"Dr. Who?" asked Sir Ian.

With that Amy and Todd burst out laughing.

"Madam, would you please explain to me what I have said to cause them to roar with such laughter?"

Deana wasn't in the mood to do any explaining.

"Both of you, upstairs. I'll be leaving for the office in thirty minutes. I want to see both of you washed, dressed, and ready to leave in twenty-five minutes."

"You are going out? Am I to be left to my own devices?"

"Of course not. Would you like to come along with us?"

"I would indeed, but I am afraid my present attire is not the kind that I wish to be wearing in public."

"I've been thinking about that, and I might have a temporary solution, if you'd like to come upstairs with me."

Deana went up the stairs with Sir Ian following closely behind. She took him along to the other spare room. She could see him looking—no, correct that studying everything in the room.

"I remembered I still have some clothing that belonged to my husband," she said, opening up the closet. "I know you're a larger size than he was, but I'm sure we can find something."

"I only hope that we can."

Deana pushed the hangers along. As he was going into town and also the office, a suit would probably be the most appropriate thing for him to wear. She pulled out one of Alex's three-piece suits and handed it to him. She could see him tugging on the buttons and pulling a face. She wondered if he'd been what they'd called a dandy. "Now we have to find you a shirt, a tie, some socks, and of course some shoes."

She walked over to the chest of drawers and gradually sorted out various items.

"These are the only pair of Alex's shoes I haven't gotten rid of. He only took a size ten, so I'm sure they're going to pinch you. I can buy you a new pair before we go to the office. So this will only be a temporary solution to the problem."

"I do have one concern. We will need transportation."

"Yes."

"The monster...the car, I refuse to travel in one of those things."

"Then we'll walk to the Underground."

"Underground?"

"You'll see when we get there."

This was certainly a strange world, thought Sir Ian as he got dressed in his room. Nukes, monsters, undergrounds. and not-so-attractive-looking footwear that did not even fit his feet. He pushed his foot down. His toes were cramped, but he'd have to put up with it. He walked along to the bedroom of the lady of the house to tell her he was ready and noticed that her door was just slightly ajar. He was about to knock when he caught sight of her through a slight crack in the door. He knew what he was doing was wrong. A lady deserved absolute privacy while she dressed. However, he could not take his eyes away from her.

Only her breasts and buttocks were covered with undergarments. She was standing there brushing her hair. Oh, how it shone so beautifully. He was sure she must brush it a hundred times a night before she retired. He checked the hallway to make sure no imp was lurking there. Imps often did that.

No, no sight or sound of them. He pressed his eve to the crack in the door. She was spraying perfume on her neck. She had her head slightly tilted to the right to do so. He pressed his lips together to prevent himself from moaning. She had the most beautiful neck he had ever seen. How he wished he could burst into her room, lift her up, place her on the bed and kiss every delightful inch of it.

She turned around and he studied her some more. He suddenly felt the same guilt he had experienced as a young boy when his father had found the hole he'd made in the wall of the governess's bedroom. He remembered the many hours of enjoyment he had experienced. How he had loved to watch the governess dressing, but mostly undressing. He could still feel the sting on his backside when his father had finally caught him in the act.

Of course, as a young boy he had no idea what he would have done with the governess, even if she had invited him into her bed chamber. He felt a familiar stirring in his groin. He might have been dead for over two hundred years, but he definitely remembered what that stirring feeling was all about. He knew he should walk away, and quickly, but instead he pressed his eye closer to the crack.

She was rolling material up her legs now. She was more beautiful than the governess had been. Maybe he should just burst in there and take his chances. After all, she was a widow—widows had needs he could satisfy. But she was a widow with children to provide for. She was perhaps looking for another husband. If he took her to his bed, she might assume he was interested in making an offer.

Such complications...but perhaps not. He was only going to be in the household for four days. He would woo and bed her in that short time. After all, how could a man that was going to return to his grave be expected to make an offer? Yes, while he was mortal again, he might as well have some fun.

He suddenly heard voices and knew it was the children. One thing had certainly not changed in all these years. Children always ruined a man's pleasure. His cousins had been just the same. In fact, he was sure it was his cousin Frederick who had told his father about the peephole. And now these children's voices were getting louder. He knew they were about somewhere. Blast them; they were approaching. He quickly turned away from the door and hurried down the stairs. He waited in the hallway. He heard them talking at the top of their voices and watched as the imps raced one another down the stairs. And then he saw the lady of the house appearing at the top of the stairs. She was wearing a royal blue dress now. She started to walk down the stairs. Oh, my, yes, a definite beauty.

Deana had to almost stop in her tracks as she walked down the stairs and saw Sir Ian, now dressed in Alex's clothing. Her husband had looked smart and businesslike in that suit, but Sir Ian...how could she describe it other than to say it looked like it had been tailor-made for him. She tried not to stare but she couldn't resist. A man in a suit had always been her weakness. She saw him looking up at her and wondered what he was thinking about her. Did he find her attractive? She imagined him kissing her, making love to her, cradling her in his arms when they were done.

"Mom, did you hear me?"

That was Amy's voice that had suddenly jolted her out of her dream scenario with Sir Ian.

"Mom, why is he wearing Dad's suit?" asked Amy.

"I am merely borrowing it, that is all," said Sir Ian.

"Are we all set to leave?" asked Deana. She glanced in the mirror in the hallway. Was she looking as flushed in the face as she felt?

Deana's girlfriends back home had been right. After a relationship came to an end, most women didn't want to admit it, but they missed the sex as much as anything else. But her girlfriends hadn't warned her about all the fantasies your mind made up.

"We're taking the Underground," said Deana,

stopping her train of thought.

"Not the car, not a cab?" asked Todd.

"Not today. It's about a five-minute walk. Sir Ian, do you think you can manage to walk in those shoes?"

"Madam, I can only try."

"There's a department store right next to the office building. We'll stop by there before I go to work," said Deana, opening up the front door. "And would you please call me Deana?"

"If you wish, Ma...Deana. However, you must understand that during my day a man did not call a lady by her first name until they were formally engaged. You must bear with me if my old habits seem outdated to you."

"You mean like saying a hundred words when you only need to say five?" asked Todd.

"Todd, remember what I've told you," said Deana.

"Morning, Mrs. Adams," said the mailman, placing his bike against the wall.

"Morning."

Deana saw Sir Ian watching him, but then he quickly turned his attention to the cars passing by.

"You own one of those monsters?"

"Yes, it's in the garage."

"I cannot believe those things actually replaced horses."

"I can; horses make a mess on the street," said Todd.

"Nonsense. And look, your streets are still riddled with mess," said Sir Ian, pointing to a large mound of dog poop on the sidewalk.

"Yes, but horses make even bigger piles of that stuff."

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It was a very slow walk to the Underground. Not only because the shoes were hurting Sir Ian's toes, but because he wanted to keep stopping to look at every single building.

"This is it," said Deana when they arrived at the Underground station.

"Hampstead," said Sir Ian. "The name is the same."

"Yes, and where we're going is only a few stations away."

She saw him frown. "You'll see when you get there."

They went inside the station and Sir Ian stood watching everyone as Deana bought four tickets.

"It's down this way," said Deana.

They walked to the escalator, but Sir Ian stopped abruptly as he watched the steps disappearing before him.

"Just think of them as a form of transportation," said Deana. "They'll take us down to the lower level to the platform where we wait for the train to arrive. They're just like stairs, but they move."

"Come on," said Todd, getting hold of Sir Ian's arm and pushing him onto the first step.

Deana had a horrible feeling that Sir Ian was going to lose his balance and fall, so she reached out and grabbed him. He wobbled a bit and then grabbed hold of Deana's waist. He held on to her as the escalator moved.

"You okay?" she asked.

"Perfectly."

Deana eased out of his grip and looked down away from Sir Ian, who she could tell was still looking directly at her.

"This is the strangest thing, I believe we are now under the ground," he finally said when they got to the bottom.

"Of course we are. That's how it got its name," said Todd.

Deana wondered how Sir Ian was going to react

when he saw the platform and train.

"And they take us back up?" he asked, pointing to people traveling in the opposite direction.

"That's right," said Deana.

A strong gust of wind blew up as they got close to the platform. Deana saw Sir Ian's hair and tie lift up into the air.

"I do not understand. How can it be windy when we are inside and underground?"

"It's the train approaching. They set up a draft when they come through the tunnels."

They arrived at the platform. Deana watched as Sir Ian looked at everyone who was waiting for the train. He then caught sight of a map on the opposite side of the train tracks.

"Ah, more names I recognize," he said, pointing. "Despite the fact that two hundred years have gone by, they had the decency not to change the names of the towns."

Deana saw a man look up from the newspaper he was reading and stare at them.

"Sir Ian, when you mention where you're from and how you got here, would you mind keeping your voice down?"

"Ah, yes, of course. I forgot."

Deana heard the rumbling noise that signaled the train was making its way through the tunnel, and then saw Sir Ian's hair gently being lifted up in the air again.

"What is...?" Sir Ian's mouth literally fell open when he saw the train pull up and the doors slide open. "It is just a longer, larger monster. And how can doors open by themselves?" he asked as he got on board.

"They work on electricity, something you wouldn't know about," said Deana. "Let's grab those seats while we can."

They managed to find four vacant seats

together. Deana sat next to Amy, while Sir Ian and Todd sat opposite them. The doors swished shut and the train started to move out of the station.

"I cannot believe what has happened to the world. All these people pushed into this strangelooking monster. Most of them look half-baked, if ask you me."

"Mom, what does half-baked mean?" asked Amy.

"I'm not sure," said Deana. "But I think it means a little crazy."

She saw Sir Ian studying everything intently. She wondered what was going through his mind. She thought about how she'd react if she found herself two hundred years in the future. She closed off that train of thought. She knew it was true, Sir Ian had somehow been brought back from the grave, but thinking about it made her seem half-baked.

The train pulled into the next station and more people got on. A young man and woman couldn't find seats and decided to stand close to the spot where Sir Ian was sitting.

Deana had to stop herself from laughing as she saw Sir Ian looking at the holes in the backside of the jeans the young man was wearing. She saw him shaking his head. She then saw him turn away, blush, and then cough as the young woman put her hand on the man's left buttock and squeezed it. He glanced back at the couple, but then quickly looked away when they started to kiss. Deana wondered if Sir Ian had blushed because he was shy by nature or if he found, as most people of his time did, public displays of affection taboo.

"We get off at the next stop," she told him.

Deana felt the train slowing down. She stood up and Sir Ian took her cue. The train pulled up and the doors opened, and most of the passengers got off with them.

"Ah, Bond Street," said Sir Ian. "I used to come

here all the time with my mother and sisters. They would purchase their ribbons near here."

As they stepped out onto the platform and started to mingle with the crowd, Deana's maternal instinct took over and she quickly grabbed Sir Ian's arm.

"It is all right. I know where I am now. I have been to this area more times than I can remember. I probably know my way around here better than you do," he said as they went up the escalator.

When they reached the top, Deana was glad to see Sir Ian now had a smile on his face. However, as they stepped outside, the smile turned to a frown. He looked at all the cars traveling along and then shook his head.

"There are monsters all over the place. Oh, and the noise. This was once a normal place."

"Wasn't your time noisy?" asked Amy.

"At times, yes, but not at this level. I can hardly hear myself think."

"The store is over there," said Deana. "Let's cross the street here."

Deana took the opportunity to explain to Sir Ian about the traffic lights and that he had to wait until the little green man appeared before he could walk.

Deana took him into the store. The shoe department was on the first floor. An assistant walked over to them.

"We need just a plain pair of men's shoes. Black, if possible."

"Do you know what size you are, sir?"

"The last time I was alive..."

Deana coughed. "He means the last time he had his feet measured, he took a size 12," said Deana, taking a guess.

The girl returned and got the shoes out of the box.

Sir Ian studied the tops, turned them over, and

then put them on. He stood up and walked around for a while.

"Excellent," he finally announced.

"We'll take them," said Deana. She reached into her purse for a credit card and handed it to the girl.

"Let me see this," said Sir Ian, taking it from the girl. "This is what money looks like now?"

Deana looked at the girl and smiled. How was she going to get out of this one?

"It's a credit card," said Deana under her breath, "you use it just like money. They send you a bill later and then you pay for the item."

"Ah, I get the idea. What a splendid invention. I would think this would be ideal for the gambling tables."

He handed the card back to the girl.

"I will be over here looking at the shoes," he said.

The girl handed Deana the slip to sign.

"He's started early, hasn't he? I didn't think the pubs were open yet."

Deana looked back at Sir Ian, who was now picking up a pair of ladies' shoes from the display. She watched as he turned them over to inspect the soles.

"We're doing our best to help him out," said Deana.

"Here's his old pair of shoes."

"These would suit you, Deana," he shouted across to her.

Deana turned to see him lifting up a pair of black patent pumps.

"I think these would make your legs and feet look most delightful. You have well-defined calf muscles, you see."

So he'd obviously been looking at her legs long enough to notice the calf muscles, had he? Well, at least her exercise classes were paying off, and at least a member of the opposite sex was noticing them.

"I have plenty of shoes," she called back to him.

"A woman can never have enough of anything in life," he said, walking back over to her.

"This woman does, and are you ready to leave?"

"Lead the way."

When they got outside, Amy and Todd were pacing up and down outside.

"Sorry that took longer than I'd planned," said Deana.

"Can we go to one of the museums instead of going to the office?" asked Todd.

Deana knew sitting in the office for most of the day always bored Todd and Amy. However, after yesterday's incident, she had to seriously consider whether she could trust them to be on their own ever again.

"Please, Mom," begged Todd.

"Okay, but you're to go straight to the museum. And I want you back at the office in two hours. And you're not to leave the museum for any reason."

"Not even if there's a fire in there?" asked Todd.

"Don't be sarcastic. I'll get you a cab."

Deana went to the edge of the sidewalk and lifted her hand to the first vacant cab she saw. The driver pulled up and wound down the window.

"Where to, darling?"

Deana opened the cab door. "The Science Museum, and don't let them get out before you get there."

"Couple of terrors, are they? Right, don't you worry. I'll keep my eyes on 'em for you."

Deana put the children in the cab, closed the door, and watched as it pulled away.

"I would imagine they are quite a handful without a man's firm hand to control them," said Sir Ian as they walked along. "I manage. This is the office building."

"And what type of business does your husband have, or should I say, had?"

"Electronics and computers."

"No doubt another new invention."

"A really useful one. I don't know what we'd do without them now. And my company has exclusive rights to a new brand. I'm really excited about it."

"I am afraid I do not understand."

"I'll show you later."

Deana pressed the elevator button and the doors slid back. She stepped inside and Sir Ian got in beside her. Deana pressed the button for the tenth floor, the doors shut, and the elevator started to move.

"What on earth?"

"It's an elevator," said Deana. "It takes you up or down to other floors."

"Have stairs become a thing of the past too?"

"They have for people who are lazy."

The bell tinged and the doors opened.

"Have we finished our journey, or will we be propelled further up into the air?"

"No, this is our floor."

Sir Ian got out and walked beside her.

"Good morning, Mrs. Adams."

"Morning. Oh, this is Sir Ian Ashby. He was a friend of Alex and he's visiting us for a few days."

Deana thought it best she keep to the same story.

"Madam," he said, nodding.

"The stockholders and board of directors are already in the conference room."

"Great, I'll go straight in there. And could you hold all my calls?"

Deana knew Sir Ian wouldn't want to sit in on the meeting.

"Julie, do you think you could get Sir Ian

something to drink? And maybe keep him entertained while I'm in the meeting?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Adams."

Sir Ian watched Deana go into a room to the left.

"What can I get you, Sir Ian, coffee, tea, a soft drink?"

Sir Ian wondered what a soft drink was. Would it be the opposite of a hard drink? And what on earth would a hard drink be?

"Tea, please."

"If you'll have a seat, I'll be right back."

Sir Ian sat on a couch next to the desk. What a strange place, bright colors, bright lights. He jumped when he heard a bell ringing and then realized it was what he'd been told was a phone. However, this one had paper coming from it.

Julie returned, handed him the tea, and sat back at her desk. He watched with interest as she removed the paper from the machine. She read it, then picked up the phone and placed another sheet of paper in the machine. Sir Ian saw the paper disappear.

He knew Deana would probably be annoyed at him for asking questions and looking suspicious, but he was too curious to do as he was told. And, after all, Deana was a woman. He'd never ever taken orders from a woman before.

Sir Ian put his teacup down. "What exactly is that machine?"

"What?"

"The machine."

"It's a fax."

"Fax," repeated Sir Ian. "May I try and use it?"

"You mean you've never used one of these? Where have you been living?"

He was sure she would not want to know the answer to that.

"What business are you in?"

"Um shipping," he said quickly. Well, that's what his family had been engaged in, so it was not a lie.

"Who did you want to send a fax to?"

"You choose."

"You could send one to Mrs. Adams' house."

"Splendid," he said.

"What did you want to say?" asked Julie, pulling out a sheet of paper.

"Just hello, this is Sir Ian Ashby."

He saw Julie writing that down and then she placed the paper into the machine. She pressed some numbers and the paper went in and then came back out.

"But it did not disappear."

"It doesn't, but a copy will now be at Mrs. Adams' office in her house."

He was even more confused now. "Let me try this. Show me exactly what I have to do," said Sir Ian, grabbing a pile of paper.

"No, please, Sir Ian, I don't think Mrs. Adams will be very happy if you break this machine."

"Rubbish, I'm not going to break it."

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Deana came out of her office thirty minutes later to see Sir Ian sitting on the couch looking like an innocent child. The sound of Julie shouting at someone had alerted her that maybe Sir Ian was causing problems. She saw paper being thrown across the room and the fax machine making loud pinging noises.

"Oh, thank goodness you're here, Mrs. Adams," said Julie. "I told him he was going to break it, but he kept feeding it more paper. There's a terrible jam in there now. And I can't even switch it off. I've had to send for the repairman."

Deana looked across at Sir Ian, who was now drinking his tea and sitting there as if nothing had happened. He obviously couldn't keep himself out of trouble. And if she didn't keep a close eye on him, he would give away their little secret. Until Mrs. Williams returned and could help them out, Deana was not going to let him out of her sight.

## CHAPTER FOUR

After they arrived home, Deana prepared dinner while the children watched TV. Sir Ian had excused himself and gone up to his room.

Deana looked at her watch. He'd been up there all by himself for about an hour now. She hoped he was all right, or at least hoped that he wasn't getting into any more trouble. She placed all the dishes on the table and then took the chicken from the oven.

"Todd, Amy, dinner. Sir Ian, the meal's ready."

Todd and Amy came into the kitchen and sat down. Deana passed the salad bowl over to them and then sat down herself. She heard footsteps on the tiled floor and turned around to see Sir Ian, still dressed in Alex's suit. He walked over to the table and then turned to look at Deana.

"We eat in here, and not in the dining room?" he asked.

"We only eat in there if we have guests," said Deana.

"I see," he said, sitting down. "And I take it you only dress formally when you have guests too?"

He'd asked that question after he'd looked down at Todd's bare feet.

"Yes."

Deana just about stopped herself from saying something sarcastic after she heard him mumble something under his breath. She quickly put some salad onto his plate.

"We do not start with soup or consommé, then?"

"No, we do not," said Deana, trying to keep her patience.

He picked up his knife and fork and began to eat.

"Why are you dressed up like that?" asked Amy.

"I do not know of any other way to dress. Men dress like me, and ladies, such as my mother and sisters, would dress in their best attire. And I must add I feel more at home in this suit than I did in the clothing with the military insignia on it."

Todd burst out laughing.

"And, pray tell, now what have I said?"

"I think Todd's trying to tell you the design on the T-shirt you were wearing hasn't anything to do with the military. Guns N' Roses is a rock group," said Deana.

"Rock group, you mean minerals?"

"No, music. You know, you listen to it," said Todd.

"Music?"

"Didn't you have musical groups in your time?" asked Amy.

"We had music, if that is what you mean."

Deana took the plates away and placed the baked chicken in the center of the table. She cut off a few slices and then placed them on Sir Ian's plate. He then helped himself to vegetables.

"Quite good," he said, wiping the corner of his mouth.

"I'm glad you like something," said Deana.

"Ah, and I have a request. I will need some toiletries. A brush, comb, and also some soap. And of course, I must have something to shave myself with. I am growing whiskers and I was always most particular about being clean-shaven."

Deana saw the dark shadow starting to appear on his face. *He shouldn't be complaining*, she thought. He had just the right kind of face for some sexy designer stubble.

"I've got a battery-operated shaver if you want

to use it," said Todd. "So far I only have to shave once a week."

"Thank you for your kind offer. And do not worry about not having to shave regularly. You are fair, like your mother. In fact, I had a young cousin who was so fair that he could not grow one single whisker until he was one and twenty."

"Twenty-one, I can't wait that long. What will the girls think about me?" asked Todd.

"I don't think you've got much alternative," said Deana.

"And how old are these children?" asked Sir Ian.

"Todd just turned seventeen, and Amy will be fourteen in December."

"I see," he said.

"You mentioned your family, Sir Ian. Maybe you'd like to tell us more about them."

"What would you like to know?"

"Were you married?" asked Deana.

That question came out before she'd realized she'd asked it.

Sir Ian laughed. "No, no young lady had legshackled me. Of course, a few had cast their caps at me, but I had seen too many bad unions for that. And you, Deana, how long had you been married?"

"Seventeen years."

"I cannot believe that. You must have been little more than a child when you wed."

"Mom's ancient, she's thirty-seven," said Amy.

"And how old are you, Sir Ian?" asked Todd.

"If I am the same age I was when I died, then I suppose I must be thirty years old."

"That makes Mom seven years older, so she's in charge," said Amy.

"Young lady, I have no intention of living in a petticoat government."

Deana frowned.

"One in which the women rule," explained Sir

Ian.

"Oh, really," said Deana. "You sound just like all the members of the board did this morning."

"No man likes to be ruled by a woman."

"Not even if the woman's more intelligent than the man?" asked Deana.

"Balderdash," said Sir Ian. "A woman more intelligent than a man, what utter nonsense," he said. He turned his body away from the table, shook his head, and then crossed his legs.

"I'll get dessert," said Deana. She knew nothing had changed. Men's attitudes had stayed the same for over two hundred years. And most people claimed progress had been made!

Deana loaded the dishwasher and then suggested they all go into the living room.

"And now what do we do?" asked Sir Ian.

"We watch TV," said Todd, throwing himself down on the couch in front of the TV. He picked up the remote control, turned the TV on and started to flick through the channels.

Sir Ian went over to it and laid his palm against the screen. "Yes, the moving pictures I saw before. It is quite amazing."

He sat in one of the chairs. He looked at the TV and then looked all around the room.

"And this is how you entertain yourselves every evening?"

"We sometimes go out," said Deana.

"Ah, the opera...perhaps?"

"No, not the opera." Todd flicked through the channels again.

"May I try?" asked Sir Ian.

He took the remote control and flashed through the channels several times. "I cannot say I find any of this particularly amusing or entertaining."

"I don't think it's meant to be amusing," said Deana.

"But leisure time was always designed to be amusing."

"Okay, tell us what you did that was more fun than this," said Deana.

"I am glad you have asked. If I did not go to one of my clubs, then one of my sisters would play the pianoforte. I do not suppose you or Amy..."

Deana shook her head.

"A pity. Or we could play cards?"

"How about listening to some of our music?" asked Todd.

Todd got up and walked over to the bookshelf and got his Walkman. He walked back over to the couch and placed the headphones over Sir Ian's ears.

"Not too loud," warned Deana.

Todd slipped in a CD and pressed the button.

Deana saw Sir Ian's eyes growing wider. He withstood about a minute of it and then he ripped the headphones from his head and threw them onto the floor.

"Music, you call this rubbish music?"

"Everyone has their own personal taste," said Deana.

"And this is not mine."

"We'll try and find some music from your time," said Deana.

"Perhaps you have some books I could read?" asked Sir Ian.

"Over on that shelf."

Deana saw Sir Ian take out a few books and study them, but then he hastily put them back on the shelf.

"I see the standard of literature has also deteriorated."

"May I just say, Sir Ian, that I'm growing just a little sick and tired of you criticizing everything we have in this house. And I don't know about you, but I'll be glad when you go back to wherever it is you came from."

Deana rushed to the door. She opened it and rushed out into the hallway. She then slammed the door closed.

Sir Ian sat down in the armchair Deana had just vacated. He could smell her fragrance still hanging about in the air. Ah, a floral bouquet, if he was not mistaken. Now that he did approve of. Yes, that fragrance suited her well.

"I'm sure Mom didn't mean it," said Todd.

"All women mean what they say. I have yet to meet a woman who does not say exactly what she is feeling or thinking."

"She's outspoken, but she'd never say anything nasty," said Amy.

"She's uptight," added Todd. "She's in charge of Dad's business now and it's not easy for her running the whole company. Plus, some other company is trying to buy into her company. She doesn't think we know about it, but we know more than she thinks."

"And she misses Dad," said Amy.

"Indeed."

"Can I ask you something, Sir Ian?" asked Todd. "Of course."

"You've been dead, right?"

"Yes, I believe this is true."

"When you died, did it hurt? I mean, I want to know if it hurt my father."

"I suppose it all depends on how one dies."

"Dad died of a heart attack," said Amy.

"Then I am sure he did not suffer one tiny bit. Whereas in my case...well, I died rather violently."

"And what happens after you're dead?"

"It has been such a long time since I died that I am unable to remember the incident that well. However, I think it was very much like falling asleep."

He started to feel truly sorry for these two

children. Goodness, what was happening to him? Sir Ian Ashby, pitying two imps; it could not be true.

"So it's like Dad's asleep now?"

"Exactly."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Todd. "I think I'm going to turn in for the night."

"Me too," said Amy.

"You can have the remote control all to yourself if you like," said Todd, handing it to Sir Ian.

"Good night, and sweet dreams to you both."

Sir Ian's mind was too full of questions, thoughts, to think about sleeping right now. He pressed the button and the TV came back on.

Deana had been perfectly right. He was being too critical about their new world. His world had been far from perfect. He looked at the TV screen. Perhaps, if he tried to understand more about the new world, he would be more tolerant of it.

He studied the TV again. A woman was holding up a bottle of something and smiling. He pressed the button and now saw a man was sitting at a desk with a map behind him. A man's voice was saying it was the News at Ten.

Sir Ian sat and listened. Countries were mentioned that he had never heard of before. And war, countries were still at war. People were still unable to get along with one another. He flicked off the TV and cast the room into darkness.

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Deana had tossed and turned in bed for the last hour or so. She looked at the clock and saw it was almost 12:30 a.m. She looked at the ceiling for a few minutes. She'd started to suffer from insomnia right after Alex died, but she'd been back to her normal sleep cycle for the last four months. She hated to think the insomnia was back again.

It was Sir Ian who was causing it. She knew it. Who wouldn't be restless with a dead man living under the same roof? She turned over to her left side and closed her eyes. Put all thoughts of him out of your mind, she told herself.

However, all she could see was Sir Ian standing at the bottom of the stairs looking gorgeous in her husband's suit. She felt ashamed that she hadn't experienced similar feelings of what could only be described as lust when Alex had been wearing it.

Deana closed her eyes and tried to drift off to sleep again, but knew it was pointless. She'd never get any sleep with her mind turning over so many thoughts. The doctor had told her if she woke up and couldn't get back to sleep within thirty minutes it was best for her to get up and do something else. Maybe read a book, watch a little late-night TV.

She got out of bed and then made her way downstairs. When she was a child her mother had always made her a mug of hot milk when she couldn't sleep. Deana figured it was worth trying again.

As she passed the living room she thought she saw a shadow in there. She knew everyone would be in bed by now. What was it, nearly 1 a.m.? Her heart started to pound because she remembered that five houses had been burglarized in the neighborhood in the last two months.

She picked up a vase and crept slowly into the living room. She felt for the light switch on the wall and flicked it on. She saw Sir Ian put his hand up to his eyes as the sudden burst of light caught him in the face.

"I hope that you are not going to hit me on the head with that vase," he said.

"I didn't know it was you. There have been some robberies in this area."

"I very much doubt that tiny vase would have been very effective."

"Oh, you never know."

"It is a good thing you have a man around the house, even if it is only for a short time; at least I can protect the household."

Just this one time, she was going to let him believe he was correct in thinking a household wasn't safe without a man. It was too late to be arguing with him.

"I didn't expect you to still be awake and sitting down here," she said.

"Neither did I, but I had a lot on my mind. I was not as sleepy as I obviously thought."

"Me neither. I was just going to make some hot milk, would you like a mug?"

"It would indeed be very welcome."

As he stood to follow her, she noticed he just had a sheet secured around his waist.

"You must be cold. I can find you a jacket or something to wear," she said.

She knew she wasn't worried about him being cold, but the sheet was almost transparent and she could clearly see the outline of his lower body through it. She'd never been distracted by a man's anatomy before, but there was just something about Sir Ian that drew her to him.

"Do not worry about me. I rarely feel the cold."

Deana walked into the kitchen with Sir Ian close on her heels. She suddenly realized that she hadn't put her dressing gown on. After all, she hadn't expected to find Sir Ian sitting in the living room. All she was wearing was her short nightie, and that was just as transparent as the sheet tied around his waist. Both of them might as well be wandering around the house in their birthday suits.

She took the milk from the refrigerator and poured it into a saucepan. She carried it over to the range and ignited the gas under it. Deana then had to stand on tiptoes to try and reach the two mugs that were on the top shelf. She suddenly felt Sir Ian standing right behind her. She felt the front of his body pushing into her back; well, not all of his body, just from the waist down, pressing into her buttocks.

"Here, let me help you," he whispered in her ear.

He didn't reach for the mugs himself, but instead placed his hand over hers as he stretched with her and they brought the two mugs down to the countertop together.

"Thank you," she said.

He did not let go and she could feel his breath on her cheek.

Deana closed her eyes, almost hoping he was going to kiss her. However, if she didn't get to the stove, and soon, the milk was going to boil over and burn.

"Sir Ian, the milk's almost ready," she finally said.

"Oh, yes, of course," he said, finally stepping aside.

Sir Ian held the mugs as she poured the milk into them.

"Shall we take these into the living room? It's more comfortable in there," said Deana.

Sir Ian followed behind, carrying the mugs of milk. She sat in an armchair and he handed her the mug. Sir Ian decided to sit on the couch directly opposite her.

"I should apologize for my behavior earlier this evening," said Sir Ian.

"It's me who should be apologizing. I'm sorry for what I said. I had no right to say what I did."

"Please, we will not speak of this matter again. And perhaps we can try and make the most of this situation...fate...destiny...I do not know what to call it. Whatever it is, it has been forced upon us, so we must make the most of it. And I would very much like for us to try and be friends." "I'm willing to try."

"Your children mentioned you have some problems with your company; perhaps I can offer some advice."

"They know about that?" asked Deana.

"Children never miss anything."

While Deana didn't want to talk business, she thought maybe it was the perfect topic for the situation.

Yes, thought Deana. It will take my mind off the fact that I'm sitting opposite the most handsome man I've ever seen. He's wearing just a sheet. And just a few minutes ago I was hoping he was going to kiss me. Yes, let's talk business.

"Maybe I'll start by telling you something about the business. We have offices here and in New York."

"New York?"

"Not the York here, it's in America."

"Ah, the Colonies where you come from."

"Yes. The stockholders really want this other company to merge with the London division. However, we would just keep control of the New York office."

"And you do not wish for this to happen?"

"No, this office is just as important to us as the one in New York. It took years for my husband to build it up. Plus, we've got a new patent on a computer. We're going to make an announcement about it in the next few months."

"Please forgive me. I am now out of this conversation."

"It's an exclusive right to manufacture the computer."

Sir Ian nodded. "The question is, can this other company take over your office without your permission?"

"No, but if someone should sell their shares to

someone who already has a lot of shares, I would be in the minority."

"And is this a possibility?"

"I don't know."

"Then I would not worry about the situation until the problem actually arises. That was always my father's philosophy."

"What worries me the most is if I lose the company, it would be like dishonoring my husband. And not to mention letting the children down. It's going to be their company one day."

"Ah, yes, the children. I can tell that they loved their father dearly."

"They still miss him. You probably know that, or you wouldn't be here."

"They were asking me questions about dying."

"They keep worrying about how he died. I wish they wouldn't keep dwelling on it."

"I suppose they think I am an authority on the matter."

"What did they ask you?"

"If dying was painful. What it was like to die."

"What did you tell them?"

"That I doubted their father felt any pain and that he is now merely asleep for eternity."

"Thank you for saying that," said Deana, putting her mug down. "I hope that puts a stop to all their questions. Sometimes they get quite morbid. I wonder if I should send them to a doctor or something."

"I do not know that much about the way a child's mind works, but I am sure it is perfectly normal. Tell me about your husband."

"I don't think you'd be interested in hearing about Alex."

"Please, I would like to know more. For example, how long was it after you met him that he made an offer for you?" "You mean proposed? Only about six months."

"And it was a love match?"

"Of course."

"And there are not too many of those."

"I don't know about that. At least these days we can choose who we marry, not like the arranged marriages of your time."

"And you chose Alex."

Deana nodded.

"And you loved him?"

"Yes, I loved him. How's the milk?" asked Deana, suddenly wanting to change the subject.

"Excellent. It was a wonderful idea. It has made me feel very relaxed."

"Me too."

"Then I think we should both retire for the night."

They both stood up at the same time and almost bumped heads.

"Here, let me take your mug for you. I'll let them soak in the sink overnight," said Deana.

Sir Ian knew he should have just headed up the stairs to his bedroom as soon as possible, but he stood at the bottom of the stairs and watched her walk into the kitchen. The lights were off in the hallway, but the reflection from the moon was beaming through the glass in the front entry door. Her nightgown was very transparent and he could see the outline of her body. In fact, when she'd first stepped into the living room and turned on the light, it was as if she was standing there naked.

It had taken all his self-control not to scoop her up in his arms, carry her to his bed and make love to her. Self-control had not been one of his virtues. When he was alive he had two weaknesses, gambling and beautiful women. Both had often landed him in trouble. One had cost him his life.

He saw Deana come back out from the kitchen.

The moonlight was now shining on her face and chest. He had not made love in two hundred years, but he doubted he had forgotten how to do it. And he very much doubted that any of his skills for driving a lady wild with desire had completely disappeared.

Perhaps he should take his chance with her. After all, he would be gone in a few days. Out of her life and out of this world.

"Deana," he said as she approached him.

She looked at him, but didn't say a thing.

He pulled her to him and placed his lips on her mouth.

Deana wasn't quite prepared for what was happening. She thought when he said her name, he was simply going to say good night, but she'd been wrong.

She felt his mouth move to her neck. She ran her fingers through his hair. Then she grew impatient with him and forced him to kiss her on the lips again.

He made his way down her neck, over the center of her throat. The stubble on his face scratched her, but it felt so good. He then kissed her left breast through the material of her nightie. She felt her nipple instantly tighten. It had been so long since her body had reacted in that way. She felt his hand going up underneath her nightie now. He stroked her leg. Deana thought how wonderful it was to feel a man's touch on her body again. He kissed her again and she wrapped her arms around him.

She suddenly heard the toilet in the upstairs bathroom being flushed and guessed Todd or Amy must be up and about. She couldn't let her children see her and Sir Ian standing embracing one another like this. Whatever would they think of their mother doing this sort of thing with a virtual stranger?

She pulled away.

"I don't think this would be a good idea," she

said before she headed up the stairs.

Sir Ian stood at the bottom of the stairs and watched until she was out of sight. He had heard footsteps upstairs and knew that one of the children might be spying on them.

"Perhaps not tonight, but there will be another time," he said under his breath.

He thought about what he and Deana had spoken about. When he had asked about her husband, she had swiftly changed the subject. And when he had asked if she loved her husband, she had simply said yes, and then moved onto the subject of the milk.

Sir Ian had seen one too many bad unions in his time. Perhaps that was the reason he was so against marriage for himself.

He had always known when a woman did not love her husband. He was sure Deana had not loved hers.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Sir Ian woke early and decided he would take a bath before the rest of the household rose. He went along to the bathroom and turned on the taps. He looked in the mirror and studied himself carefully. He really would have to borrow that razor from Todd to shave his face. He turned off the taps, undressed, and then stepped into the bath. He closed his eyes and laid back. The hot water was most welcoming.

He heard the door creaking and opened one of his eyes. He saw a woman he had never seen in the house before and she was now standing by the window. She was obviously unaware of his presence because she just walked over to the wicker hamper in the corner of the room and took out some dirty bath towels. She then turned, looked at him, and screamed at the top of her voice.

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A scream woke Deana from her sleep. She knew it wasn't Amy's voice. In fact, it sounded like an older woman.

"Oh, Mrs. Adams, there's a strange man in your bath. Quickly, call the Bill," she heard a woman suddenly shouting through her bedroom door.

Deana got out of bed and rushed out of her room and into the hallway. Mrs. Cooke almost ran into her arms. Deana looked up the hallway to see Sir Ian standing outside the bathroom holding a towel around his waist.

"Gave me a nasty turn, he did," said Mrs. Cooke.

"You told me you had no Abigail in this household," said Sir Ian.

"My name's Ruth, not Abigail," said Mrs. Cooke. "I think he means servant."

"Servant? I'm a cleaning lady, and who is he?"

"Mrs. Cooke, let me introduce Sir Ian Ashby. Sir Ian, this is Mrs. Cooke. She cleans the house for me twice a week. Today is one of those days."

"Pleased to meet you, Madam." He went to extend his hand out to Mrs. Cooke, but suddenly realized the towel was not quite big enough to be held in place without both hands. "Please excuse me if I do not shake your hand, Madam, but I fear if I did, you would be in for a greater shock."

"I wish you would have told me he was staying here; my heart's still pounding. There he was, lying back in the bath."

"Sorry, I didn't expect Sir Ian to be in the bathroom at this time."

"Yes, I am sorry too, Mrs. Cooke," said Sir Ian.

"I didn't think you knew a lot of people here in London," said Mrs. Cooke.

"He's an old friend."

"How come I've never seen him before, then?"

Deana had trapped herself. Mrs. Cooke had cleaned the house since they'd owned it.

"He's been on business in, eh...France."

"Yes, this is perfectly true. I have been looking for Napoleon."

Deana shook her head. "Napoleon brandy," she said. "He works for a wine and liquor company there."

Deana could see Mrs. Cooke looking back and forth between her and Sir Ian.

"If you ask me, the two of you sound like you've been dipping into some of that brandy. Well, I'll go downstairs and start on the living room...that is, if there's not another man waiting for me there," said Mrs. Cooke.

"No, only this one," said Deana.

Deana watched as Mrs. Cooke went down the stairs.

"Napoleon's dead," said Deana.

"Hooray," said Sir Ian.

As she stepped closer to him, she noticed a mark on his chest she hadn't seen before. He had a distinct round mark under his left nipple. He must have noticed her staring, because he quickly put his hand there.

"I think I should get dressed," he said.

Deana went downstairs to see Mrs. Cooke dusting the TV unit.

"I'm sorry about the fright," said Deana.

"It's all forgotten now. Is he going to stay here long?"

"We're not sure yet. It's quite possible he'll leave this weekend."

"Can I ask you something? Let me know if I'm being nosy, but is he your fancy man?"

"No, no, please don't think that we're..."

"Not that I'd blame you. Blimey, now that's what I call a real looker."

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Sir Ian quickly finished washing and then went out into the hallway.

"Morning, Sir Ian."

Sir Ian turned to see Todd standing in the doorway of his bedroom.

"I've got that razor if you want it. Feel free to come along to my room."

Sir Ian walked along the hallway and stepped into Todd's room. He watched as the boy opened up some drawers and rummaged through his clothing.

"Dad gave it to me."

"Then it will indeed be an honor for me to use it."

He handed it to Sir Ian.

"I appreciated what you told us last night. You

see, it's only Amy who's worried about Dad."

"I hope I have put her mind at ease."

"Absolutely."

Sir Ian turned to leave.

"Have you got a few minutes?"

Sir Ian turned back to look at the boy. He generally did not like young people. However, there was something in this young boy's eyes that cried out for help. Or, perhaps the young man was looking for a friend, a man, to confide in.

"Yes, what would you like to talk about?" asked Sir Ian, sitting on the bed.

"It's just since Dad died I'm the only man left in this family."

"Ah, I know how that feels. I had three sisters, and when my father went away, well, it was quite unbearable at times. Natter, natter, about ribbons, dresses, the latest fashions, yes, quite unbearable. Now what is your problem?"

"Should I be taking care of my mother?"

"I think that you should. After all, she is a woman. However, perhaps she will remarry and become her husband's responsibility. If I may say so, she is a fine-looking woman, and still in her prime. Yes, I would not be too surprised if she remarries, perhaps has more children."

"I don't think I'd like Mom to remarry."

"But it is inevitable that she will, my dear boy. Your mother, as all women, has her own special needs too. Some things are exclusive to men, but needs are not one of those things."

"Needs? You mean Mom will be looking for a man to take care of her sexual needs?"

"Well, yes. That, and let us not forget love and companionship. All the things that will see her serenely into her old age."

"But no one will replace Dad."

"I am sure no one will, but do not stand in the

way of your mother's happiness."

"How come you never married?"

"It was never one of my goals. And of the three needs we have just discussed, I had plenty of the first, but alas, never the other two."

"How many women did you sleep with? I've always heard people of your times had loose moral standards."

Sir Ian laughed. "Is that what they say? And to answer your question, I am afraid I have been with more women than I now like to admit to."

"And you never loved any of them?"

"I was rather fond of one, but no, it was not true love."

"And what is it like...you know?"

"Oh, my dear boy, it is best I do not tell you, but that you experience it for yourself, and gain your opinion of the act."

"Is it as great as they say?"

"I fear I am not the one to say, as I have told you, I was never in love. Yes, there is great physical pleasure in the act, but without loving that person there is not the emotional side of it. And I realize now that is what counts. That is what was lacking from my life. Remember what I have told you when you fall in love for the first time."

"I only wish I could find you a lady to love so you could experience love before you have to return to..."

Sir Ian patted him on the head and stood up. "Perhaps it is best that I do not fall in love. If I did then I may not want to ever go back."

"But you could stay here...if you wanted."

"But what if that is out of my control, then what a predicament I would be in." A Sterling Affair

## CHAPTER SIX

Deana was reading the newspaper at the breakfast table when Sir Ian came downstairs. She looked up at him and noticed his designer stubble was now gone. She was glad that the incident with Mrs. Cooke had almost broken the ice between them that morning. After their heated embrace the night before, Deana was worried she'd never be able to face Sir Ian again.

"Todd must have given you his razor," she said.

He rubbed his chin. "Yes, it took me quite some time to determine how it worked. Is that what a newspaper looks like now?"

"That's right."

"May I?" asked Sir Ian, pulling up a chair. "I also watched the news last night, quite fascinating."

"Here, it's all yours," she said, sliding it across to him. "Can I get you some coffee?"

"Yes, please. The Prince Regent became king, I presume?"

Deana brought the coffee back to the table.

"History, especially British history, wasn't one of my best subjects at school. However, I think I do remember something about him becoming king after his father died."

"And this is the new prince?" he asked, pointing to a photo of Prince Charles.

"Yes."

"And he'll become king when his father dies?"

"No, after his mother dies. England has a queen, not a king now."

"I cannot believe it. You mean another woman

will be head of this country?"

"That's right. There was also a Queen Victoria. Oh, and England also had a female prime minister."

"I have never heard of such things. What has happened to the men of this country?"

"And what's wrong with a woman running a country?"

Sir Ian gave a sarcastic laugh. "Women are fit for many things, but running a country is not one of them."

"Oh, really."

"Of course."

"That's just about it for the day," said Mrs. Cooke, putting her head out the door. "I'll be off now."

"Okay, see you Wednesday," said Deana.

"Nice to have met you, Sir Ian."

"Yes, likewise."

Deana walked her to the front door.

"I'll try and do all the laundry on Friday."

"You're a sweetheart. I'll probably be at the office all day."

She opened the door for Mrs. Cooke just as she heard the phone ringing. She quickly said her goodbyes and ran into the living room.

"Hello?"

"Deana?"

"Yes."

"It's Neil, Mrs. Williams' nephew."

"Oh, yes, hi, Neil."

"I've just had a call from my aunt and she said she'll be back on Saturday afternoon. However, she forgot to water the plants before she left. I'd do it, but I'm on my way to Germany for a week. Could I ask you pop in there and do it for her?"

"Sure, I'll go over there right now."

Deana walked into the kitchen to see Sir Ian reading the rest of the newspaper. "I'm just going next door to water Mrs. Williams' plants."

"Mrs. Williams, is that the lady who will help me?"

"Yes, she's coming home on Saturday."

"I see. May I come to her house with you?"

"If you want."

Deana walked to the drawer and pulled out the house key Mrs. Williams always left with her in case of an emergency. She and Sir Ian went out the back door and cut across the lawn to Mrs. Williams' house.

Deana was suddenly self-conscious about being on her own with Sir Ian. She somehow had to get things straightened out about what happened between them.

"Sir Ian, about last night..."

"I am sorry if you felt I took advantage of the situation."

"I think maybe it was me who took advantage. I shouldn't have encouraged you, and then..."

He raised his hand. "We will forget the matter happened. Do you know Mrs. Williams well?" asked Sir Ian.

Deana was glad he'd been the one to quickly change the subject.

"She's lived here since we've owned our house, but she travels a lot so we've never seen that much of her. Of course, when we're here and she's at home, the children are always going to her house for tea and cookies."

As they stepped inside, Deana could see Sir Ian looking all around the hallway.

"I see she has a few items from my time period," he said, running his hand across a table.

"I'll just get the watering can."

By the time Deana headed into the living room, she found Sir Ian in there studying some books and photos. "Is she a bit of a case?"

"Case?"

"You know, highly eccentric?"

"Well, she's...she's, let's just say a little different."

"And does she also call people back from the dead?"

"I think she reads about it, but I don't know if she's ever achieved it."

"And you are going to enlist her services to help send me back?"

"She's the only person I know that can help us."

"Are you finished with your plants?"

"Yes, all done. I was wondering if there's anything you'd like to do today?"

"I have given that some thought. I decided I would like to go for a stroll in the park, St. James Park. Perhaps you would like to come with me? It is going to be a beautiful day."

Deana didn't really feel like a stroll in the park, but at the same time she felt like she owed him some company. And if she let him go out on his own, well, it was possible that anything could happen to him. Or he could get himself in a whole bunch of trouble, which would eventually come back to them.

"If you don't mind a woman joining you?"

"I always like a companion, male or female."

"Wait here while I get my bag. And I must warn the children to stay out of trouble."

"Yes, I am sure one dead person in the house is quite enough."

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Deana tried to persuade Sir Ian to ride in the car, but he had been stubborn. It had been the Underground once again. They'd taken it to Charing Cross and then walked to St. James Park. When they arrived at the edge of the park, Sir Ian held his ribs and took a deep breath. "Are you feeling all right?"

"Yes, never better. I was just taking in the splendor of the fresh air. Two hundred years underground, and now this."

"Has it changed very much?" asked Deana.

"It used to be quite full, but it seems to be packed to its limit now."

"That's because there are a lot more people on earth."

"And most of them seem to be here. Well, shall we take our stroll? If you would please take my arm."

"Sir Ian, people don't do that anymore."

"What do they do, then?"

"They hold hands, or put their arms around one another...but only if they are involved in a relationship."

"Then we will just settle for you holding my arm."

He got hold of her hand and forearm and placed it over the crook of his arm. Deana started to feel uncomfortable, but wasn't sure what would cause more people to stare. Would it be her protesting about holding his arm, or them looking young but acting like a pair of seniors taking a stroll arm in arm in the park?

"Did you do this sort of thing with your husband?"

Deana knew the answer to that. Alex had never had time for this sort of thing. He wasn't a man to relax. In fact, in the last two years of his life, now that Deana thought about it, they'd hardly spent time together. No wonder he had a heart attack, thought Deana. She knew the reason he'd had a heart attack, and she didn't want to think about it again.

"No, my husband had a business to run," she said quickly.

"But surely he had leisure time."

"Not very much."

"I find that hard to believe."

"Things are more hectic these days."

"What did you do while he worked?"

"First of all, I had the children to look after. When they didn't need me so much, I did some volunteer work at the local hospital. And of course, I have all my girlfriends back home. We go out to lunch or go shopping together."

Deana noticed they'd arrived at the edge of the lake in the center of the park.

"Would it be all right if we sat here for awhile?" asked Sir Ian.

"Sure, why not."

They sat on a bench. She tried to take her arm away from his forearm, but he quickly stopped her and put his other hand over hers to hold it there.

"Tell me, do you often go on picnics?"

"We have a few times."

"I used to love going out into the countryside for a picnic."

"Maybe we could do that, if..." Deana stopped suddenly.

"But after Saturday evening I will no longer be here. I think I would like to continue walking now," he said, standing quickly.

"Sir Ian, I'm so very sorry about what's happened."

"Madam, would you please stop apologizing. I find it rather irritating. And if you think I do not want to return from whence I came, well then, you are mistaken. Who would want to live in a world with mad metal monsters running about? Too many people crowding the parks, and not to mention children and women who do not know their proper place in society."

He stormed off quickly and was out of sight

within minutes. This wasn't what Deana needed right now. She'd have to go looking for him. If he wandered the streets of London on his own, she could guess what sort of problems he'd get into. And if the police picked him up, what would happen then? What if he told them the whole story of how he got here...for her children's sake, she had to find him.

She walked back along the path, scanning the faces of everyone in the area. She then crossed the pathway to the grassy verge on the other side of the walkway.

"What do you mean I have to pay for this seat? I have never heard of anything quite so ridiculous."

"You pay, or you get out of that deck chair, Sunshine."

"I will certainly not pay. You will have to physically remove me to get me from this seat. And my name is not Sunshine."

"Maybe I should get a policeman over here, then."

Deana recognized Sir Ian's voice immediately.

"I'll pay," said Deana, running over to the chair.

Sir Ian turned around to look at her.

"You most certainly will not. I am getting up now anyway."

"Don't go off like that again," she told him after the man walked away. "You had me worried."

"I am quite capable of looking after myself, even in this strange world of yours."

Deana looked at her watch. "We have to be getting back now. And I'll have to stop by the grocery store on the way home. Maybe you'd like to choose something for your dinner."

The train journey back had been a fiasco. It was full of young people holding machines with earphones. The music was so loud that he could still

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hear it. And just like Todd's music, it was awful. The train was full to its brim. People squeezed up against one another. He had never witnessed such chaos.

And if the park had not been bad enough, the supermarket, or whatever they called it, was a crazy place. Sir Ian watched as Deana placed the items in a wire object on wheels. He recognized fruits and vegetables, but not the small square packages. He picked one up to study it. On closer examination it looked like rice with some type of mushy meal.

"Is there anything you want?" Deana asked him.

"I used to be quite partial to pigeon pie."

"I don't think this supermarket carries that, but I know they have chicken and mushroom pie."

"Then that will have to do."

"We have to go to the checkout to pay for these things now."

Sir Ian saw Deana putting the items in a bag, so he did the same. He saw her pull some paper money and some coins from her purse. He watched as the clerk took it and then gave her some coins in return.

"You do not use the little plastic card for this?"

"Not for the grocery shopping."

"Here, please let me," he said, taking the bags from her. "You should think about getting a servant."

"If you'd let me bring the car, we wouldn't have to carry all this."

"You mean it is you who drives the metal monster you own?"

"Of course, who did you think drove our car? Didn't women drive carriages during your days?"

"The more impertinent ones did, yes."

"Look, Sir Ian, see how many women are passing by in cars? Look, they're all driving. And look, there's even a man sitting beside that female driver." "Um, like I said, this new world is not to my liking."

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Deana got dinner ready as soon as she got home. The fresh air must have made her hungry; either that, or she'd used up most of her energy trying to get Sir Ian to see her view of the world, and how it was just as much a woman's world as it was a man's one. Still, she supposed he couldn't be to blame for his chauvinistic views.

Now to finish off the day, Sir Ian was lifting up the pastry on his pie.

"Something wrong?"

"No, no."

"I hope the two of you tidied up your rooms like I requested?" Deana asked Todd and Amy. "I'm going to send Sir Ian up to inspect them after dinner."

"Oh, please, do not involve me."

Deana winked at the children.

"I'm going to watch TV up in my room," said Todd.

"And I'm going to fill in my diary. I haven't done that since you arrived, and I'm going to write about you, Sir Ian," said Amy.

"I hope you will say only good things about me," said Sir Ian.

"Looks like it's just you and me," said Deana. "Let's take our coffee into the living room."

"I think this is very nice, that you and I can spend my last evening here alone."

Deana didn't want to think about it. It was sad when someone who'd been staying with you had to return home. But Sir Ian would be going back to a place where she wouldn't be able to pick up the phone to check if he got home safely.

"Is something wrong?"

"No, I was just thinking about the meeting I have Monday morning."

"I wish you luck, but I will not be here to know of its outcome."

"Stop it. What are you trying to do?" asked Deana.

"I do not understand."

"Will you stop reminding me of where you're going?"

"Why?"

If he only knew she was getting used to having him around. As pompous as he was, she quite liked having another adult to talk to. Or maybe it was the thought of having a man around the place.

"It reminds me that my husband's in the same place."

"I am sorry. I was not thinking."

"Perhaps we could now change the subject, and you could tell me what has been happening in the world in the last two hundred years. I doubt the information will serve any purpose now, but it might be entertaining."

"It will have to be very condensed. Let's see, there have been two world wars. A man invented a bomb."

"Bomb?"

"Yes, an atomic bomb. They already used it on Japan during the Second World War. Let's see, there was a Russian Revolution, and a Communist government took over. What else...we still have diseases, now we have one called AIDS."

"Aids?"

"Yes, they're trying to find a cure."

"And can anyone catch it?"

"Yes."

"So I am at risk?"

Deana shook her head. "No, you can only get it through tainted blood or..." She wished she hadn't started on this one.

"Or what?"

"Or if you sleep with someone who has it."

"Sleep with, you mean share a bed?"

"No, sex."

"Ah, then one must still be careful. However, we had our own deadly perils during my time, so nothing has changed."

"I have some files to read through," said Deana.

She stood and walked over to the bookcase and took out some manila folders. She sat back down again.

"I think I will read too," said Sir Ian. He stood up and pulled down some books from the shelf and settled himself onto the couch beside Deana. She smelled something familiar in the air. If she wasn't mistaken, Sir Ian was wearing the same cologne that Alex used to wear.

"That cologne."

"It was in the bathroom cupboard and I took some and splashed it on my face after I shaved. I am sorry if I have stepped out of line."

"No, don't worry."

"Why have you chosen to keep so much of your husband around this place?" he asked.

She looked up suddenly.

"I mean his suit, shoes, tie, shirt. The bathroom is filled with his things. And it obviously tortures you so."

"I hadn't really thought about it," said Deana, quickly getting back to her files. "The chocolates, remember the ones I bought at the store this afternoon? Why don't we try them? They're in the kitchen, could you get them for me?"

Sir Ian got up and came back a few minutes later holding the box.

"What's your favorite?" she asked him, opening the lid.

"Surprise me."

"Let's see."

She picked one and handed it to him. She put a berry crème in her mouth.

"Raspberry," said Sir Ian. "Your chocolate is filled with raspberries."

"How can you tell?"

"Because, dear lady, I can smell it on your sweet breath."

Before Deana could say anything, Sir Ian's lips were on hers. He ran his tongue along her lower lip.

"Your chocolate was obviously much more delicious than mine. Did you save the best one for yourself?"

"Sir Ian, I thought we'd decided that this sort of thing wasn't right."

"Did we?" he whispered.

"Yes, and..."

She was just about to answer him when she heard someone calling out.

"Yahoo!"

It was coming from the letterbox in the front door.

"Is that an owl?" asked Sir Ian.

"No, I think it's Mrs. Williams."

Deana stood and walked to the front door. She opened it back and saw her neighbor standing there.

"Hello, Mrs. Williams."

"Deana, it's nice to see you. Thanks for looking after the place for me."

"Come in."

"I have some treats for the children. And how are they?"

"They're doing great. Mrs. Williams, could you come through to the kitchen with me? We seem to have a little problem."

"I hope it's nothing to do with my house," she said as she followed Deana.

Mrs. Williams listened with interest as Deana told her about what the children had done.

"They must have the gift; it's their youth, you see. How clever of them. I've never been able to do it. And you say he's still here?"

"Yes, but he wants to go back. We were wondering if you could help him."

"I'll try my very best. In fact, could I meet him?"

Deana took Mrs. Williams into the living room.

"Sir Ian, this is Mrs. Williams."

"I can't believe this."

She rushed over to him and squeezed his arms and then the top of his leg.

"Madam, please, what do you think you are doing?"

"Just seeing that you're real. This is the first time I've actually witnessed such a phenomenon, it's absolutely amazing. I must congratulate the children on such a feat."

"I'd rather you didn't," said Deana. "I don't want them to try this again."

"Can you help me?" Sir Ian asked her.

"I'm sure I can."

"But you've never done anything like this before?" asked Deana.

"Never."

"You are a widow. Have you not thought about bringing your own husband back?" asked Sir Ian.

"My dear Sir Ian, you wouldn't even be asking me that question had you known Mr. Williams."

"Do you think you could perhaps do it right now?" asked Sir Ian.

Deana was caught off guard with his request. She at least wanted to say goodbye to him.

"I don't think so. I'll have to go home and consult my books. And I'd like the children to be present."

"Do they really have to be? I don't want them getting involved in this sort of thing again."

"I do think they're an essential element. They obviously have the right sort of psychic energy." "Tomorrow night, then?" asked Sir Ian.

"Yes, I'll come here about 7:30 p.m. And you died when?"

"1815."

"And your grave is near here?"

"I have not seen it, but from what the children say I gather it is just a mile from here. That seems correct, as I lived in the Hampstead area."

"Okay, and I'll be back tomorrow night," said Mrs. Williams.

Deana showed her to the door.

"What a handsome man, and those muscles. I bet it's been a temptation to you. I mean, you're young, unattached."

Deana guessed that if Mrs. Williams had stopped by just five minutes later than she did, she might have witnessed how tempting Sir Ian was on the young widow.

Deana shut the door and then walked back into the living room. She saw Sir Ian now standing at the window and watching Mrs. Williams walk down the path.

"Are you sure she knows what she's doing?" asked Sir Ian.

"She seems to be an expert on it."

"Let us hope so. She may be milking the pigeon."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Deana was dreading Saturday evening for several reasons. First of all, she hated to think some sort of séance was going to be held in her house, especially with children involved. Secondly, even though Sir Ian had only been in their lives less than a week, it was almost like being a real family again. And Deana could not forget the feelings he'd gradually stirred within her. Feelings that she thought had long since died.

At 7:15 p.m. on Saturday evening, Deana, Todd, Amy and Sir Ian sat in the living room waiting for Mrs. Williams to arrive.

"I think this is going to be a really exciting evening," said Todd. "But I have to say, I'm going to miss you, Sir Ian."

Deana had to suddenly leave the room. She knew if stayed in there any longer she was going to become too emotional. And she was sure Sir Ian hated emotional women. Just as she stepped out into the hallway, she heard the doorbell ringing and guessed it was Mrs. Williams. Deana walked to the door, opened it, and noticed it was raining hard.

"What an awful night. They didn't forecast this. Good time to be inside," said Mrs. Williams, handing Deana a large box.

"Come in and dry yourself off."

"Are we all set?" she asked, stepping inside. She shook her umbrella. "It's a pity it's raining; the airwaves won't be quite so clear, but we'll do our best."

"Tell me, Mrs. Williams, he will be all right,

won't he? I mean, he won't feel any pain?"

"No, no, none at all. It will be just like he's falling asleep again. He won't even remember where he's been," she said, handing Deana her raincoat.

He wouldn't remember her, he wouldn't remember their kisses, their encounters, but she would.

"I've been worried about him. They're all in the living room, by the way; hope that's okay," said Deana.

She put Mrs. Williams' raincoat on the hook and put the umbrella in the stand by the door.

"Lead the way. And I'll take that box from you now."

Deana opened the living room door and saw Sir Ian look up as Mrs. Williams entered the room.

"Hi, sweeties," she said to Todd and Amy. "I heard what clever children you've been."

She placed the box on the table.

"Mrs. Williams," said Deana, shaking her head.

She nodded her head to Deana. "Shall we get down to business?" asked Mrs. Williams. She opened the box and pulled out various candles and books.

Sir Ian stood up. "I shall say my goodbyes to you all now." He put out his hand to Todd. "Young man, remember that conversation we had."

"I will."

"Amy," he said. He took her hand and then gently kissed the top of it. "When the time comes, remember to make a good match, a love match if at all possible."

"I hope so," said Amy. "Good luck."

Deana tried to hold back the tears as she saw Amy put her arms around Sir Ian's neck and kiss his cheek. Sir Ian put his hand to his cheek and looked totally surprised by the act.

He then turned to Deana. "And Deana, you too must remember the conversations we have had." He lifted her hand and kissed it. He then raised his head and looked straight into Deana's eyes. She hoped the moisture forming in her eyes wasn't visible to him.

"I will bid you all farewell."

Deana couldn't think of anything to say, so she just nodded.

"Mrs. Williams, please tell me what I must do," he said.

"It's very simple," began Mrs. Williams. "We all have to sit around the table; luckily, it's a round one. I've brought everything we'll need to do this. Let me explain what's going to happen. First of all, I will light my candles and we have to turn off all the lights. Then we have to form our circle. Todd will sit next to Sir Ian and they will hold hands. Then Amy will sit next to Todd and join hands. Then I will sit next to Amy and we will join hands. Next Deana will sit between myself and Sir Ian and we will hold hands to complete our circle."

Mrs. Williams paused and flicked through the pages in her book.

"Yes, that's right. Now if we could all sit down."

They sat around the table. Mrs. Williams lit the candles, placed them in the middle of the table, and then turned off all the lights. She then came back to the table and sat down.

"Ready, everyone," she said. "Now, we will first join hands and then close our eyes."

Deana felt Sir Ian squeezing her hand. Her heart started to pound. How she hated doing this. Sir Ian felt so warm and alive, but yet in a few minutes he was going to be cold and dead again. She then heard Mrs. Williams starting to mumble something, so Deana squeezed Sir Ian's hand, hoping he wasn't as afraid as she was.

"Sir Ian would like to return to his former existence. He wants to return. He does not wish to be among us mortals. I call upon whoever is out there to grant Sir Ian's wish."

Deana waited for the windows to fly open and the wind to howl or something, but nothing happened.

She heard Mrs. Williams coughing.

"I call upon whoever is out there, please help Sir Ian. He wishes to return to his former home. He does not choose to live with mortals."

Deana felt something now, almost like electricity shooting through her arms. It was traveling from Mrs. Williams' hand through Deana's arm. It ran across her body, down her arm, and into the hand that was incased in Sir Ian's palm. It was getting stronger, and the tingling sensation was becoming almost painful.

"Return Sir Ian from where he came."

Deana felt a zap of static electricity shoot through her chest. She almost let go of Sir Ian's hand, but he held it firmly. She knew this was it. This was goodbye. He was going to leave them very soon. She cheated and opened her eyes so she could take one last look at Sir Ian. It was the strangest thing she'd ever seen. He now had a distinctive blue aura around his head.

"Return," shouted Mrs. Williams.

Deana said a silent goodbye and then squeezed her eyes tightly shut. She heard what sounded like a charge of static electricity in the air, and her body started to shake. In fact, it felt like the table was shaking too. Then there was a loud bang. She felt her hand become free again and knew that he was gone. She kept her eyes shut, but then heard Amy screaming.

"She's gone," shouted Todd.

Deana quickly opened her eyes to see thick smoke surrounding the table. She looked down at her hands and knew exactly what Amy was screaming about. It was her left hand, and not her right one, that was now empty. It was Mrs. Williams who had disappeared and not Sir Ian.

"Todd, turn on the light above the table. We have to look for Mrs. Williams," said Deana, trying not to choke on the smoke.

"I had this feeling she did not know what she was doing," added Sir Ian.

Todd turned on the overhead lights.

The room was completely filled with smoke now. They all started to cough and choke. Deana blew out the candles, and waved her hands around to try and get rid of at least some of the smoke.

"Can anyone see Mrs. Williams?"

Deana coughed to clear her throat. As some of the smoke disappeared from around the table all she could see were Mrs. Williams' shoes under the table. They had a steady stream of smoke bellowing from each toe.

"Oh no," said Deana. "She's really gone, look down there."

Todd, Amy, and then Sir Ian stood up to look at the shoes.

"Oh, wow," said Todd. "Wait until the kids at school hear about this one."

"You have to promise me that you won't tell anyone about this," said Deana. "We've probably broken the law here tonight."

"What are we going to do, Mom?" asked Amy. "Mrs. Williams has probably returned to Sir Ian's grave instead of him."

"I had this feeling," said Sir Ian. "Once I saw her consulting those books, I had this strange feeling the woman did not know the slightest thing about any of this."

"Okay, we won't panic," said Deana. "Todd, put those books and candles in the box. We'll all brainstorm ideas about how we're going to handle this."

The doorbell rang just as Deana finished speaking.

"Maybe that's her," said Amy.

Deana got up. "I'll go. Keep your fingers crossed."

Deana went out of the room, across the hallway and opened the door.

"Hi, Deana."

"Matt, what are you doing here?"

"I've just arrived in London. I'm passing through on my way to France and Switzerland, and I thought I'd come and stay a couple of nights with you and the kids."

Deana heard the living room door opening up. "Was that Mrs. Williams?" asked Sir Ian.

Deana turned to see Sir Ian looking at Matt. She turned back to look at Matt, who seemed just as interested in Sir Ian as Sir Ian was in him.

"Hey, Deana, I'm sorry if you've got company, I'll..."

"No, he's a business advisor," she said, pulling Matt inside. "Sir Ian Ashby, meet Matt Adams, my stepson."

"Pleased to meet you, Sir," said Matt.

"Here, let me take your raincoat," said Deana.

As she hung up Matt's coat, she noticed Mrs. Williams' raincoat and umbrella were still clearly visible. She took her own raincoat and quickly covered both items.

"Was that Mrs. Williams?" asked Todd, rushing out into the hallway. "Matt!"

"Hi kiddo," said Matt.

Todd rushed over to Matt and they hugged.

"We didn't know you were coming here," said Todd.

"It was a last-minute decision. I'm meeting some friends in France in a few days. I have some gifts for everyone. Why don't we go into the living room?"

Deana couldn't think of any sane excuse to stop Matt from going in there.

They walked back into the living room with Matt in tow.

Matt immediately put his hand in front of his face and started to wave his arms about to clear the air.

"Phew! What have you guys been up to in here?"

"Matt?" shouted Amy.

"Amy, honey. What's happened in here? No electricity or something?"

"Of course we have electricity," said Deana, switching on all the lights.

She heard Sir Ian coughing. At first she thought he was clearing his throat again, but when she looked at him, she noticed he was nodding toward the table. Deana saw Mrs. Williams' shoes were still in plain view. She casually walked over to them and swiftly kicked them out of sight.

"Why don't I go and make us some coffee."

"And a few sandwiches, if it's not too much trouble," said Matt.

Deana went into the kitchen. She looked out of the window. She just hoped that Mrs. Williams wouldn't just return out of the blue and straight back into the living room. If she did come back, Deana hoped she would at least ring the doorbell first.

She quickly made coffee and sandwiches. She put everything on a tray and took it back into the living room.

"You're a business advisor?" she heard Matt asking Sir Ian.

"Yes," he said.

"Deana hired you?"

"Yes, that is correct."

"What are you working on?"

"Um...fax machines."

Deana shut her eyes.

"Fax machines?" asked Matt.

"Yes," said Deana, putting the tray on the table. "We're working on a fax machine that hooks up with the computer and television. The messages appear on the screen."

"I've never heard of that. Sir Ian, you'll have to tell me more."

"Your sandwiches," said Deana.

"Thank you. Hey, could someone please open a window? There's a strange odor in here, must be all this smoke. What were you burning in here?"

"Incense," said Deana quickly. "I brought some the other day, but I didn't like it," she added, walking over to the window.

She pulled back the blinds and had to give the window a good shove to get it to open. The wind almost took it off its hinges, and the rain hit her in the face. *Of all the times for Matt to show up at the house*, she thought.

"Where do you live, Sir Ian?" asked Matt before he took a bite of the sandwich.

"He's staying here," said Deana quickly.

"I see," said Matt. "Just while you're working with Deana?"

"Yes. You mentioned going to France; when?" asked Deana.

"If I didn't know better, I'd say you were trying to get rid of me."

There was a tapping noise in the room just as he finished his sentence.

"What was that?" asked Matt.

"The pipes," said Deana.

"Pipes?" asked Matt.

"Yes, they've been acting up. This is an old house. I think I'll have to call a plumber if it happens again." "Yahoo."

"Todd, why don't you let Matt listen to your new CD?" said Deana.

"But you told me I wasn't to play it without wearing my headphones."

"I've changed my mind."

"Yahoo, psssst, it's me."

"Right, Mom."

"Did you hear that?" asked Matt. "Now that sounded like a woman's voice or something."

"The wind," said Sir Ian.

"Wind?"

"Hey, Matt, what do you think of this?" asked Todd, turning the volume up.

"What the..." said Matt, dropping his sandwich and putting his hands over his ears.

"Great, isn't it," shouted Todd as he started to dance.

"Yahoo, I'm over here."

Sir Ian took the cue, got up and started to move around the room with him.

"I can't stand this," said Matt. He stood up and turned the machine off. "Deana, I've always admired you for being a liberal mother with Todd and Amy, but I really think if you've started to smoke pot that you shouldn't do it with your children around. That's what that smell is, isn't it?"

"Matt, no, really. I can't believe what you've just accused me of," said Deana, raising her voice. Not because she was annoyed with him, but because Mrs. Williams' voice was getting louder.

"I know when you're guilty, Deana; you start raising your voice," said Matt.

"I have not been smoking pot. And if I had, I wouldn't think of doing it in front of my children."

"I'm coming back," Mrs. Williams shouted from somewhere up near the ceiling.

"Who said that?" asked Matt.

"I did. I'm learning to be a ventriloquist," said Todd.

"And changing your sex by the sound of your voice?" asked Matt.

Deana closed her eyes, hoping she'd be the next person to disappear.

"Nearly home," called Mrs. Williams.

There was a flash of light and Mrs. Williams appeared by the couch. Her hair had changed from gray to black. And instead of being flat against her head, it was now stuck straight up into the air, like she'd stuck her finger into a light socket. Her clothes had large holes and rips in them and some parts of her body had smoke streaming from them. Deana knew if it had only been October 31<sup>st</sup>, she could have come up with a great story, one she might just get away with.

"Would someone please tell me what is going on here?" asked Matt.

"Oh jolly well done, Mrs. Williams," said Sir Ian, clapping his hands. "She's been trying that for months, is she not splendid?"

"Wait a minute, I feel I'm fading again," said Mrs. Williams. "Look out, everyone."

There was another flash of light and she was gone.

Deana saw that Matt was just sitting there with his mouth wide open, looking at the spot where Mrs. Williams had just been sitting. He was still holding a sandwich in his hand, and the mustard Deana had added to it was now dripping down his chin and onto this tie.

"Goodness me, she has a long career ahead of her," said Sir Ian.

"I either have really bad jet lag, or you've put some of that pot in these sandwiches," said Matt. "I could swear I just saw a lady who looked like Don King appear and then disappear." "It must be jet lag, so why don't I show you to your room," said Deana.

"Sure, maybe I need to lie down for a bit," said Matt, shaking his head and then rubbing his eyes.

Deana took Matt upstairs. He didn't say a word to her as he stood outside Sir Ian's room while she moved the few pieces of clothing and toiletries Sir Ian had collected. She pulled the curtains across the window.

"Just sleep it off," she said as she left the room.

She went back downstairs.

"Mom, what are we going to do about Mrs. Williams?" asked Todd.

"I don't know," said Deana, slumping down in the chair.

"Where do you think she's gone to?" asked Amy.

"Another dimension," said Todd.

"The whole thing has been a disaster," said Sir Ian.

"By the way, we have to find somewhere for you to sleep while Matt's here," said Deana.

"You mean he has my room?"

"I'm afraid so, and the other spare room is full of junk that needs to go up into the attic."

"We have an air bed," said Todd.

"Air bed?"

"Yes, it inflates, you can use it on the floor down here."

"I'm going to bed," said Amy.

"Me, too, tonight's been too much," said Todd.

"It looks like I am here indefinitely now...well, at least until Mrs. Williams reappears."

Deana hadn't thought about that, not with all the troubles of the evening. They still had to get Sir Ian back to wherever he'd come from. She looked at him, remembering their farewell, and how sad she'd been when she'd thought he'd gone. She hated the idea of having to go through the whole thing again. Deana watched him as he finished eating the last of Matt's sandwiches.

"I had no idea you had a stepson," he said.

"Yes, and a stepdaughter."

"Am I to understand that your husband was older than yourself?"

"Yes, twenty years older."

"I see, and he was a widower?"

"No, he was divorced. And yes, I was nineteen and he was thirty-nine when we married."

"Such a union was not uncommon in my day."

"It wasn't too common when we got married; in fact, my parents didn't look too kindly upon it."

"Do you like older men?"

"I've never thought about it. And if you must know, we had to get married."

"You mean..."

"I was pregnant."

"And your husband was not young when he died. I thought perhaps that he was."

"He was just a few months away from his 57<sup>th</sup> birthday."

"During my days that would have been considered a long life. And I am sure it was a very happy one. I do hope Mrs. Williams is safe where she is now. I would hate to think she is now lying in my cold grave."

"Knowing Mrs. Williams, I'm sure she's somewhere exotic."

"I was wondering, what if I am still here when you return to America, what would happen to me?"

"You'll come with us."

Deana knew the consequences of what she'd just said.

"I do not think I could leave England. It is my home. I was born here. I died here and my resting place is here."

"Let's face one problem at a time. First of all,

I've got to find that air bed, or you won't have anywhere to sleep."

\*\*\*\*

Sir Ian was glad Mrs. Williams had been unsuccessful. He did not want to admit it, but he wanted to get to know Deana much better. She had already opened up to him tonight and told him about her indiscretion as a young lady, that she had been forced to marry a man. Despite what she continued to tell him, Sir Ian knew that it had not been a love match.

He would eventually get her to admit that, not only to him, but also to herself. There was something other than the children that was stopping her from being intimate with him. He would do his best to find out what it was. He would break down those barriers to show her the pleasures of the mind and body.

Sir Ian watched as Deana placed a sheet, a blanket, and a pillow on the temporary bed she'd placed in the living room. She was the most beautiful creature he'd ever seen. Up until now, he'd only wanted to bed her as he had other women. But Deana was starting to mean more than that to him. She turned around to look at him.

"This should only be for a few nights."

"Thank you."

"If there's nothing else, I'll say good night."

"Just one thing. I did enjoy dancing earlier tonight, even if I did not approve of the music. I was wondering if I could obtain some music from my own time period? And if you would do me the honor of dancing with me?"

"I wouldn't know how to."

"I could teach you."

"If you don't mind a partner with two left feet..."

He immediately looked down at her feet. What a strange thing for her to say. They did not look different than any other lady's feet.

"They look quite normal to me."

Deana laughed. "It's a modern expression. It means I'm not a very good dancer."

"Well, we will see about that."

\*\*\*\*

Sir Ian woke up the following morning to find Matt peering down at him. He tried to sit up, but sensed that the back problem that had occasionally bothered him was acting up once again.

"Morning," said Matt.

"Good morning."

"You didn't have to sleep down here. I wouldn't have minded you sleeping with Deana. She is, after all, an attractive widow," said Matt.

"Sleep with...oh, no, please do not think that she and I...I am merely a business advisor."

"Sure you are."

He saw Matt leave the room, and then heard Deana's voice out in the hallway. He saw her coming into the room a few minutes later.

"Your stepson seems to believe that you and I are..."

"Yes, I gathered that too."

Sir Ian tried to sit up again, but felt his back and neck were just too stiff. Yes, the old problem was still getting the better of him. His father and grandfather had suffered the same malady.

"I'm sorry about that air bed. You look like you have a stiff neck. Does it hurt much?" asked Deana.

"Only when I try to move around."

"I have some ointment for stiff muscles. It works really well. I have some upstairs. You want to try it?"

"I do not suppose it could hurt."

Sir Ian saw Deana leave the room. She returned a few minutes later with a jar containing what looked like light blue lotion. "Here, use as much as you like. I can always buy some more," she said, handing it to him.

She turned around to leave.

"You are not going to put it on for me? How is one expected to place one's hands behind one's back?"

She walked back over to him. She took the jar from him and opened it.

"Lie on your stomach."

Sir Ian managed to turn himself over and placed the side of his face on the floor.

"That is cold," he said when he felt Deana putting the first dab on his back.

"It's supposed to be."

She started to massage the lotion into his upper back and shoulders. Her hands felt exactly like he imagined they would, soft and light on his skin. She ran her hands down his spine and rubbed his lower back. She was using tiny circular moves over his back now. He was glad he was lying on his stomach so she could not see how his body was reacting to her touch.

"How does that feel?"

"Very good, very good indeed."

It took very bit of willpower to prevent him from turning over, grabbing her and bringing her lips down to meet his own. Control yourself, Ashby, he told himself. Start a boring conversation.

"I was wondering what your plans are for the day."

"Being lazy, that's what most of our Sundays are all about these days."

"I was wondering..." His voice trailed off as she got close to his buttocks.

"Yes. Were you going to say something? I mean, I'm not hurting you or anything? I thought I heard you moaning."

"Just a sore spot on the back. And don't worry,

you were not causing me any pain," he said.

*However, you are causing me great pleasure,* he wanted to add.

"I would like to go and look at my grave."

That's it, Ashby. There could not be anything more boring than discussing one's own grave with a beautiful woman whose hands were about to drive you into a frenzy.

"Whatever for?" asked Deana.

"I want to see what is on my headstone, to see what others thought of me. Would you not want to see your own?"

"I hope I'm never given the opportunity."

"But nevertheless, I want to see mine."

"Okay, it shouldn't be too hard to find. Todd and Amy obviously know where it is. I'll have to ask them for directions."

"And will you come with me?"

"I don't suppose I've got much choice in the matter, do I?"

"Not really. Oh, by the way, has there been any word or sign of Mrs. Williams again?"

"Nothing since she disappeared the second time. How does that feel now?"

"Wonderful, thank you."

"Okay, I'll let you get dressed."

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Deana managed to get Todd on his own later that morning. She pulled him to one side and whispered so Matt couldn't possibly hear what they were talking about.

"Sir Ian wants to know where his grave is."

"It's in the cemetery about three blocks from here. But why does he want to know?"

Deana coughed when she saw Matt coming back in room carrying one of the Sunday newspapers.

"He's going to visit his mother's grave. I said I'd go with him," said Deana.

"You and Sir Ian going out? That's perfect," said Matt. "I promised to take Todd and Amy to the Tower of London this afternoon. I didn't want to steal them away from any plans you had with them."

Deana knew Sir Ian wouldn't allow her to drive him to the cemetery, so she let Matt take the car for the afternoon. As soon as he'd driven off with the children, Deana managed to find Sir Ian a sweater and a pair of pants. At least it was going to be a beautiful afternoon for a walk.

"You look very lovely this afternoon," said Sir Ian as they started to walk along.

"It's just an old dress. And I'm sorry I had to make you wait for Matt to leave before you could get dressed."

"You did not want Matt to see me in yet more of your husband's old clothing."

"Exactly."

"He must be getting suspicious that I have similar clothing to his father."

"He hasn't said anything yet."

"It seems Matt gets on extremely well with his half brother and sister."

"Yes, they really love one another. I'm very grateful for that. Matt found a having a baby brother and sister very fascinating."

"And you say you also have a stepdaughter?"

"Jennifer. We don't see her that often because she got married last year and now lives in Arizona."

"Arizona?"

"It's a western state in America. We'll probably visit her at Christmas because she's expecting a baby any day now."

"Your husband would have been a grandfather."

"Yes. I think Alex would have liked that."

"And if my thinking is correct, this event will make you a grandmother."

"Correction, a stepgrandmother. I'm not quite

ready for the real thing just yet. I still have two of my own to see safely into adulthood."

"I am sure it will not be long before a young man makes an offer for Amy; she's a very pretty young lady."

"Men don't make offers for ladies anymore."

"Does that mean that every union is a love match?"

"Most of them are, yes. Anyway, Amy's going to be a career girl like her mom."

"Oh, pray, do not tell me there is another rebellious lady about to emerge."

"I wouldn't want her to be anything else. I don't want her to make the same mistakes I did."

Deana realized that had sounded like her marriage had been a mistake. She was just about to correct herself when Sir Ian jumped in.

"But you loved your husband, surely that is not the mistake you are referring to."

"No, I mean, I would have gone to university. I would have had a career as well as being a wife and mother."

"I cannot see how that can possibly be true. Why, it is a contradiction in itself. Is it not a fact that a woman must be at her husband's beck and call to serve his needs? She cannot possibly do that if she is not in his home twenty-four hours a day."

"That's the most chauvinistic thing I've ever heard, Sir Ian. She can have her own career, her own life, if her husband takes care of his own needs. Men are quite capable of doing that if they put their minds to it."

Sir Ian gave a short laugh.

"But there are certain things...certain needs every man, every husband has that he cannot fulfill and satisfy without his wife."

She knew what he was referring to.

"He'd just have to wait until she got home from

work."

Sir Ian laughed more heartily this time. "I have to say, I have known some very outspoken women in my time, but you seem to be the most rebellious. I cannot seem to get the last word in, or get the upper hand."

"Ah, so a woman can get the upper hand...and outsmart a man."

"I am not making generalizations, dear lady. I am assuming that you have an exceptional mind...considering you are a woman."

"I don't know if I should be thanking you or getting into an argument with you."

"Then I have now outwitted you."

Deana looked at him, he glanced at her, and she smiled. "I'll think of some reply to this later," she said.

"I shall look forward to hearing it. And of course, giving you my rebuttal."

Deana saw a cemetery on the other side of the road. She looked at the name of the street. Yes, this was where Todd had told her Sir Ian was buried. It looked like it was one of the older cemeteries, and by the look of things, no longer was in use. The grass had grown so tall that it blocked the view of most of the headstones and graves.

"That's the cemetery over there," said Deana.

They crossed the road, and Sir Ian pulled the gate back. He then stepped to one side and let Deana go ahead of him.

"I do remember this cemetery, but it was kept in impeccable condition back then."

"Your grave shouldn't be hard to find. Todd said it's next to a black iron fence, and that's over there."

Deana felt strange saying those words. It was still too incredible to think about how he'd gotten here.

Deana and Sir Ian walked along by the graves.

Sir Ian went up close to a few and gently pushed back the tall grass.

"Ah, I have found my headstone."

Deana walked over to take a look and then read the words out loud.

"Sir Ian Ashby. Born June 16, 1785. Died November 17, 1815. Beloved son and brother, and dearly missed.' You had a birthday about six weeks ago," said Deana, running her hands over the lettering. "You look great for such an old man."

"I must say I do approve of my headstone. It is what I would have chosen for myself."

Deana saw him walk along to the next grave.

He pulled back the grass. "Alfred Ashby, it is my father's grave; he died just three months after I did."

"I'm sorry."

"Oh do not be sad for Papa. He was in ill health for many years. He always told us he was on borrowed time."

She saw him look up at the grave that was next to his father.

"Mama," he said under his breath.

Deana walked further down the path. She saw him using his fingers to pull back some of the overgrown grass from his mother's grave.

"Lucinda Ashby died 1831."

"Dear Mama," he said, running his hand over the stone. Deana thought it was a shame the headstone was now tilting on its side.

Sir Ian stood up, and then walked farther along to the next set of graves.

"These graves look like they belong to the rest of the family. My three sisters and their husbands."

Deana stood beside him to look at the names.

"Portia, how silly of you, you married that awful man. How I begged you not marry him as I felt in my heart it was not a good match. And look, it's Lizzie. The poor girl died six months after me. She was with child when I died. And I can only assume that she died in childbirth. Poor Rodney, he must have been heartbroken when she passed away. Now that union was truly a love match. And poor Mama, she must have been very sad about losing two children and Papa within a year."

Deana heard his voice suddenly getting choked up.

"But yet, look, my youngest sister, Libby, lived a long life. Libby was a lot like you. She always had an answer. Lippy Libby we nicknamed her. She even insisted on driving a carriage one day. Yes, I have no doubt the two of you would have been the very best of friends."

He walked farther along, checking on the graves on either side of the path. "I see many people with the name Ashby are buried here. Do you suppose they are all my relatives?"

"I wouldn't be too surprised if they were."

"Then it is quite possible that my ancestors are still living here in London. Perhaps I should try and locate them and pay them a social call."

"Somehow I don't think that would be a good idea. I think you'd give most of them a nasty shock."

"Yes, you are probably right. Oh, the most horrible thing about coming back to life is I am able to see what happened to everyone I loved."

"I'm sorry. I suppose I have to take some of the blame for what's happened."

"Deana, would you stop saying you are sorry. I was just about to tell you that I feel I have come back for a specific reason. I believe I have been given a second chance to live my life again. I am here to live life to its fullest this time around."

Somehow Deana didn't like the sound of the enthusiasm in his voice. In fact, she'd never heard him be so upbeat. What happened to the man that was constantly complaining about the new world? "It is obvious Mrs. Williams cannot return me, and who knows if anyone can. No, I must make the most of this second life. I am going to live my life as I used to live it. Yet, even better than before, and with greater appreciation of what I have got."

Deana hoped that meant a quiet life spent at home, reading, and maybe listening to some music now and then.

"And you are going to help me do that."

"Me?"

"Yes, there will be visits to the countryside, outings to the park, operas to attend. Parties to attend...and perhaps even hold ourselves."

Deana felt tired just listening to him.

"Sir Ian, if you've seen all you want to here, would you mind if we went for something to eat and drink?"

"That was exactly what I was about to suggest we do."

Deana didn't know the area very well, but she managed to find a wine bar a few blocks away. It had outside dining with tables and umbrellas. It was the perfect setting for a meal on such a sunny day.

"I am glad you chose to sit out here," said Sir Ian. He took several deep breaths. "I find this weather very invigorating."

The waiter arrived at their table and Deana ordered coffee and sandwiches for both of them. She watched as the waiter went back inside and then saw two young girls wearing miniskirts walking by. She saw Sir Ian watching them closely. She was about to slap his arm when she remembered she was with Sir Ian, not her husband. She had to accept that who he looked at was his own business.

"The fashions have certainly changed. You do not wear skirts such as those?"

"I don't think I have the legs for it."

"You are mistaken. Your legs are the most

shapely I have seen."

"There's something I've been meaning to ask you," she said.

"And what would that be?"

"I know this is very personal, but I'm very curious to know how you died. I mean, did you have a disease or something?"

"A bullet killed me."

"You were shot in a battle?"

Sir Ian laughed. "Oh, if it had only been that exciting. No, it was pistols for two, breakfast for one. And unfortunately, the breakfast that was served afterward was not for me."

"I don't understand."

"A duel."

"A duel? I thought they were against the law, even in your days."

"Yes, there were rules, but people chose to ignore them. In fact, that was the rule, to ignore the rules. And yes, duels were against the law, but still a very popular way to settle a dispute."

"And let me guess, this duel was over a woman?"

"No, this matter was much more serious. The dispute was over a game of cards."

"I heard gambling was popular during your time."

Sir Ian paused as the waiter came out and placed the coffee and sandwiches on the table.

"We would take a gamble on anything and everything," Sir Ian continued.

"What happened with the card game? I mean, what happened that caused you to get into a duel?"

"It is a long story. It happened one evening at one of the clubs I frequented. Earl Bingham came into the club that night and asked me if I would like to play a game of Piquet with him. I had always had a weakness for the game, and as I was a dab hand at it, I accepted his offer. We agreed to play the best of three games. I, of course, won all three. And can you believe this, he accused me of being a Captain Sharp. The sheer audacity of him." Sir Ian shook his head.

"Who was Captain Sharp?"

"If someone calls you a Captain Sharp, it means they think you are a roguish gambler, one wellschooled in cheating."

"He accused you of being a cheat?"

"Yes, he most certainly did. I could not allow him to make such accusations about me in front of all my friends and business associates. Not to mention that he had done so in earshot of people I had fought alongside with in battle. I had no alternative but to call him out."

"And you lost?"

He raised his hand.

"There is more to the story. He accepted the duel and we agreed to go out of town to a heath in Kent. I stayed in a house down there for the night with my second. Earl Bingham arrived at dawn the following morning. He asked if I would like pistols or swords. I am well trained in both, so he suggested we toss for it. I lost the toss, and he opted for the pistols." Deana started to eat her sandwich. This was one entertaining story.

"Go on, then what happened?"

"We went out to the heath and we took the usual paces. I turned and got my shot in first, but he did not go down. I fired again, but nothing. And then the next thing I knew was that he had fired and I felt myself go to the ground. I fell into my second's arms and saw the blood pumping from my chest. I became dizzy and lightheaded, and I knew I was dying. I ordered my second to take a look at my pistol. It was just as I suspected. My pistol was not even loaded. Earl Bingham had taken the bullets out before he'd handed me the gun." "The little Captain Sharp," said Deana.

"Exactly. The next thing I knew there was just blackness."

"That's awful. I hope Earl Bingham was brought to justice."

"I hope that my second dealt with the situation, but I do not suppose I will ever know of the outcome."

"And this Earl Bingham got away with murder. What a pity we can't look all this up in a history book to see what did happen after you died."

"Perhaps this really is my chance to live my life again. I really do believe I went before my time. And of course, if I am to be a man about town again, I will need suitable clothing."

Deana knew after all he'd been through, she at least owed him a decent wardrobe.

"We'll go shopping tomorrow after I finish at the office. We'll get you a whole bunch of stuff."

"And we must buy some music for dancing. Yes, I will make the most of all this. Perhaps Earl Bingham is watching me right now and I will have the last laugh in this matter."

"Deana, is that you?"

Deana didn't have to look up to recognize the woman who asked that question. She glanced up to see she was standing on the sidewalk directly in front of the table Deana and Sir Ian were sitting at.

"Stephanie," said Deana.

"How are you doing?"

"I'm just fine, thank you."

"Look, I've been meaning to call you. Maybe we can have lunch one day. I really want us to be friends. You know, I'm sorry for what happened with me and Alex."

Deana didn't say anything back to her.

"And who is this?" she asked.

Deana saw her eyeing Sir Ian up and down.

"This is a friend of the family. Sir Ian Ashby. Sir Ian, Stephanie Westham."

Sir Ian stood and then held out his hand to her.

"And I take it that you are also from America. I mean, your accent," said Sir Ian.

Deana noticed the way Stephanie held onto Sir Ian's hand. The woman hadn't changed one bit.

"Yes, that's right, but I live in London now. Maybe you and Deana could come to dinner with me one night. I have this new personal chef and he's wonderful."

"Sounds splendid," said Sir Ian.

"Look, Stephanie, we really have to be getting back home. And as for the offer, I don't think we have the time. Sir Ian, let's go."

Deana stood up, threw some money down on the table and walked away.

She felt Sir Ian catch up with her. They walked a few minutes in silence and then it started to rain.

"Am I to assume that that lady is not one of your dearest friends? I have never known you to be so rude," said Sir Ian.

She stopped and turned to face him, hoping he'd think it was splashes of rain that were dripping down her face and not tears.

"That's the woman who not only destroyed my marriage but killed my husband. And I never want to talk about her or it ever again."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Whatever had the woman done...killed her husband? thought Sir Ian. But the children had told him that their father had died of a heart attack; how strange. And Deana had literally run back home, leaving him to walk by himself. He'd arrived at the front door just as Matt, Todd and Amy were returning. When they'd gone inside, Deana was busying herself making their evening meal.

Sir Ian decided to follow Matt and Todd into the living room. He sat on the couch, while Todd and Matt sat in the two armchairs.

"Do you still have relatives living here?" asked Matt.

"Yes, a few aunts and uncles," he said quickly.

"How did Deana hire you as a consultant?"

Sir Ian could see Todd looking at him.

"She got him through an agency," said Todd.

"Really. I'm looking forward to working with you at the office tomorrow. I thought I'd go in and check things out with Deana."

"Yes, I will look forward to that too."

"I was thinking of going to a club tonight," announced Matt, taking off his shoes.

"A club?" asked Sir Ian. Now that sounded like just what he needed. "Would I know of this club?"

"It's over in the West End. I went there the last time I was in town. How about coming along with me? You know, two bachelors out on the town."

"I would love to."

Deana walked in with cutlery to set the table.

"Sir Ian and I are going out to a club after we

eat."

"What?" said Deana. "You can't."

"Really, Deana, Sir Ian's a big boy now. He doesn't need your permission to go out on the town," said Matt.

"We have some business details to go through," said Deana.

"He can do all that tomorrow," said Matt. "This is the boys' night out."

Sir Ian sensed what might be going through Deana's mind right now. However, he would not let her down. He would not say or do anything out of place. He would not give their secret away.

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Deana still couldn't believe Sir Ian was going with Matt, and to a nightclub of all places. If there were one particular place he'd be the ultimate fish out of water, a nightclub would be it. She managed to get Sir Ian on his own before he left.

"You have to promise me you'll act as normal as possible."

"I am normal. It is the modern world that is not."

"You know what I mean."

"If I am not mistaken, I detect envy that I am going out on the town. Perhaps not envy, jealousy perhaps."

"Me, jealous? I hate clubs."

"Sir Ian, you coming with me or what, our cab's waiting."

"I will be right with you," Sir Ian called back to him.

"Remember what I've said. And here, take some money; this is a twenty pound note, a ten, and two fives, can you remember that?"

"I will not let you down."

He kissed the back of her hand and then left the house.

"Have a nice time," she called after him.

Deana shut the door and closed her eyes. This was turning into one rotten day for her. First of all, she'd run into Stephanie. And now, Sir Ian was going out to a nightclub with Matt...Matt, of all people. Matt Adams, who never seemed to date a woman for more than a month before he moved on to the next one.

And Deana had to start being honest with herself. She was unhappy about him going out, not because he might give their little secret away, but because a club probably meant he'd come into contact with other women. And he was attractive, charming, and debonair, everything that women loved about a man.

Sir Ian had to admit that the clubs did not look anything like the ones of his day. And there were women everywhere; in fact, more women than men. Were all the men of this modern age madcap? Clubs were not places for the weaker sex. And what a strange custom they now had. A man at the door had stamped the back of his hand with something that had left a print that looked like a tiny monkey. Sir Ian had almost hit him in the jaw when he'd grabbed his wrist, but then he remembered Deana's warning. Matt had insisted they go to the bar and order their drinks before it became too crowded.

"What will you have to drink?"

Sir Ian looked around. He saw glasses with flowers hanging from them, some with tiny umbrellas. Every single one of them was very peculiar and nothing looked familiar to him. But he would have to think of something quickly because Deana had warned him about looking out of place.

"I will have the same drink as you are ordering." Matt turned to the bartender.

"Two Barcardi and Cokes."

Sir Ian saw two liquids being poured into one glass, neither of which looked very attractive. Matt paid for them and then handed one of the glasses to Sir Ian.

"Thank you," he said, taking a sip. He choked on the first sip, but then saw Matt looking at him, so he drank the rest down in two big gulps. He was sure his stomach would reject it later.

"You must find women like your title. I mean, they must all think about becoming Lady Ashby."

"There are lots of men out there with much higher titles than my own."

"Hey, what do you think of the two ladies over there?"

Sir Ian saw two young women, both about twenty-two, wearing short black dresses, sitting at a table in the corner. Sir Ian jumped when some loud music blared through a box close to his ear.

"Shall we ask them to dance?" asked Matt.

"I do not think..."

"Come on, I'll take the blonde one."

Sir Ian followed Matt over to the table where the two women sat talking.

"Would you ladies like to dance?" asked Matt.

"Sure," they both said at the same time.

Sir Ian did not like this situation at all. He was sure the young lady that was now holding his arm would not like his style of dancing. And he was sure she would not know how to Cotillion.

Oh, if only he had taken Deana's advice and stayed at home. But he had been led to believe that the clubs were still places of gambling and political conversation. The girl started to dance and he tried to copy her. Matt, who now held his partner tightly, was moving around the floor with great ease. He saw him run his hands down her back, but Sir Ian did not want to copy him.

"Oh, ouch, watch it," said Sir Ian's partner as

she hopped around on one foot.

"I am so sorry," said Sir Ian, realizing the hard thing he had just stepped on had been the girl's right foot.

"Ouch, that's my head."

"I am so sorry," he said as he hit Matt's partner in the ear with his elbow.

"You've got two left feet," said Matt.

Sir Ian looked down, but then remembered what Deana had told him about that saying.

"If you will excuse me, I think I would like to sit down and watch for awhile."

He sat down at the nearest table. He noticed the girl he had been dancing with was quickly able to find herself another partner. He looked around the place. He felt like everyone was looking and laughing at him. If he knew how to use one of those things called phones, he would call Deana and beg her to come and collect him. He would even ride with her in the monster; anything to get him out of this awful place.

\*\*\*\*

Deana knew she was starting to get obsessive about Sir Ian being out there with women like Stephanie on the prowl. She couldn't blame him if he did go home with one of them. After all, she'd made it clear every time he'd touched and kissed her that she really wasn't interested in getting physical with him. A man had needs, and he could only try so many times with one woman until he moved on to his next conquest.

"Mom, why do you keep pulling the drapes back and looking out the window?" asked Amy.

"I thought I heard a car."

"Are you worried about Sir Ian?" asked Todd, flicking over the page in his book.

"No, of course not. He promised me he'd behave himself."

"And he'll keep his word," said Todd. "I'm sure by now he's got some pretty girl under his charm."

"I'm going upstairs to take a bath," said Deana. "And then I'm going to have an early night."

Deana laid her head back on the bath pillow. "By now he's got some pretty girl under his charm," she kept recalling Todd telling her.

Even her seventeen-year-old son sensed Sir Ian would be the most attractive man to all the women in a club. And after all, didn't most women, just like men, go there, not to dance or drink, but to find a potential bed partner? Sir Ian was thirty years old. He had needs. And he had not had sex in what, two hundred-plus years?

Deana got out of the bath and grabbed a towel. Maybe she should have slept with him, taken away his itch. And maybe it would have taken away her itch too. It had been so long since her body had been touched the way Sir Ian had touched it. So long since she'd felt her tummy tighten, her heart beat faster, and her legs get weak from being close to a man. In the short time Sir Ian had been around, she felt all those feelings and sensations again.

Deana walked over to look at herself in the mirror. She leaned over the sink to get a closer look at her face. If she wasn't mistaken, she had some gray hairs appearing around the front of her head. And was that, yet another wrinkle at the side of her eye? She was sure that hadn't been there the other day.

She stepped back to view her naked body. Her breasts...she was sure they were starting to sag. She'd have to get a bra with stronger straps now. Maybe she'd even get some breast implants like the ones Stephanie had. Maybe that's what Alex had liked most about Stephanie, that she was always willing to improve her body.

She looked down at her stomach. How come her

stretch marks were clearly visible again? She pulled up the skin around her stomach with both hands and stood sideways to look at her herself. Now that looked more like it. She let go of the skin and was depressed at what she suddenly saw. What would a man like Sir Ian want with an older woman like her, when there were younger women out there for him? Now that he'd looked at what was available, he probably wouldn't even attempt to kiss her again.

She could remember each part of her body that Sir Ian had touched, her breasts and her thighs. She closed her eyes; she was sure she could still feel his fingers moving across her skin. She quickly put her robe around her. Just put it and him out of your mind, she told herself.

She walked along the hallway to her bedroom and shut the door. She threw herself on the bed and started to cry. She thought back to the day she found Stephanie and Alex in bed together. When she'd asked him why he cheated on her, he'd told Deana that he didn't find her that responsive to him anymore. Cold fish, he'd called her.

He'd promised her he wouldn't see Stephanie anymore. But a week later, he'd moved into another room, and they hadn't had sex for the two years before his death. And then she'd received the phone call that had revealed the ultimate slap in her face. A call from the London police telling her that her husband had died from a massive heart attack. She'd taken the next flight from New York. She, the grieving widow, who was to learn that her husband's heart failure had probably been brought on by the fact that he'd been making love to Stephanie at the time. He had lied to her, hurt her, but she had not told her children, not even her stepchildren. He was their father and she would make sure they thought he was perfect. Only Deana would ever know the truth about his betrayal.

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Sir Ian sat on his own for almost two hours when he finally saw Matt approaching him.

"Sir Ian," said Matt. "I'm going to take Lucy home, so why don't you find your own way back home? You can get a taxi outside this place."

Sir Ian saw the clock on the wall said it was already 12:35 a.m. He could not believe he had been in the club that long. He had only spoken to one person all night, a fat, unattractive woman. He had summed up quickly this lady was a future ape leader. She had declared him boring. Sir Ian, called boring! And by a woman at her last prayers, no less.

"Tell Deana I'll see her sometime tomorrow."

Sir Ian was glad Deana had given him some money; at least he could pay for his ride home. The monster seemed quite comforting to him when he settled into the back of it. He was more than relieved to be heading home to Deana.

Deana heard the front door opening up, and then she heard footsteps on the stairs. She looked at the clock; it was almost 1 a.m. She listened closely and heard a gentle knock on her door.

"Deana, are you awake?"

She quickly turned off the light.

"What, oh, is that you, Sir Ian?" she said, trying to sound as if she'd just woken up.

"Yes, may I come in for a few minutes?"

"Yes," she said, snapping the light back on.

He stood in the doorway for a few seconds, then walked over to the bed and sat down beside her.

"Why did the light go off just now when I knocked on the door? I saw it under the door. Do not tell me you have waited up for my return?"

"Of course not, sometimes it flickers off and on. I was reading...I had a headache."

"I never did think reading was a good thing to do when one had a headache." "I couldn't sleep, and I didn't want to just lie here. I didn't hear Matt come in with you."

"No, he met some young lady. I do not think he will be back at all tonight."

"And did you meet anyone?"

"One young lady, but she was not my type."

"What is your type?"

He moved closer to her.

"The nearest I have ever come to finding my type was Lady Wellington, but unfortunately she was Lord Wellington's wife. Of course, that did not stop me from spending many a night with her."

Deana didn't want to hear any more of this. Of course, back in his days, it was probably acceptable to commit adultery, what with their arranged marriages. But it was different when you actually loved someone.

Deana suddenly realized she didn't want to hear about Sir Ian's adventures with Lady Wellington, not because she thought of her own husband's infidelity, but she was, well, jealous, She knew it was ridiculous for her to feel that way. The relationship he was referring to had happened over two hundred years ago.

"Did you love her?" she asked, before she realized she'd said anything.

"I do not believe I did, no. Did you ever have a lover while you were married?"

"Of course not."

"I assume it is another thing you do not do today?"

"No, people are doing it all the time."

"Ah, at last I have found something our two time periods have in common. I was sure we would find something."

"And I'm sure we can find more."

"Yes, I do want to know as much about these times as possible."

"And without finding fault."

"In fact, I did find something we have in common. At the club, I went into the gentleman's room, and I see snuff is still being used."

"That's not stuff, it's cocaine, it's a drug and it's illegal," said Deana.

"Oh, dear. And I think I know of what you refer to. Is it something like the pot Matt accused you of taking?"

"You're learning fast."

"And what is this?"

"It's a woman's magazine I was reading."

Without invitation he picked it up, and then placed the spare pillow up against the headboard. He leaned up against it, and then opened up the magazine.

"I would like to read this through and then ask you questions," he said, yawning. "I must be more tired than I thought."

Deana saw him closing his eyes, and the next thing she knew, he was asleep.

"Sir Ian," she said, nudging his arm. She saw him slump down in the bed as his chest fell and rose.

She now had the option of going into Matt's room or staying in here. She decided to stay in her own bed. He was on top of the covers and she was under them, so what could happen? She turned off the light and snuggled under the quilt.

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Deana woke up a few hours later to find pressure on the area just below her breasts. She looked down and saw that Sir Ian's arm now rested there. She tried to get free, but then heard him murmur as his hand moved further up her body. She turned her head to look at the clock; another thirty minutes and then the alarm would be going off, but until then she'd have to make the most of it.

She felt his hand and arm move again, so she

tried to slide her body upwards. She then felt him nestle his head on her shoulder. He seemed to have a smile on his face. She wondered what he was dreaming about, probably Lady Wellington. He muttered something, but she couldn't make out what he was saying.

The alarm radio went off. She sat up, and Sir Ian stirred.

"What, where am I?" asked Sir Ian. He looked at Deana. "Have I been here all night?"

"Yes, you fell asleep reading a magazine."

"I hope I was a gentleman."

"You were fast asleep. And now I have to get up and dressed for the office, if you don't mind leaving."

"I will go downstairs and finish reading this magazine," he said.

Sir Ian decided to take the magazine into the kitchen, where he found Matt sitting at the table drinking coffee.

"You got home okay?" said Matt.

"Yes, I take it you had an enjoyable night."

"One of the best."

"I am glad to hear it."

"Sorry you didn't find anyone to your liking, but maybe you already have with my stepmom. I've seen the way you look at her."

"No, no, you are mistaken. However, I am sure many men look at your stepmother. You cannot expect her to stay a widow for the rest of her days."

"No, I'm sure someone will come along very soon. What do you have there?" he asked, looking at the magazine.

"Ah, there is an article I want to read."

Todd walked into the kitchen.

"Hi there, buddy," said Matt.

Deana followed on his heels. "I'll be ready to leave for the office in about fifteen minutes, if anyone's coming with me." Sir Ian had to tighten his fists as Deana drove the metal monster. He did not like sitting in the thing. And with a woman at the wheel, well, it was ridiculous. He remembered his youngest sister, Libby, had once commandeered the family carriage and had insisted she drive them all to church. The silly girl had overturned it halfway there, and the whole family had rolled out of the carriage and slid into a muddy ditch. He hoped this journey would not end in the same way.

"I'd like you to sit in on our meeting to get your input," Matt told Sir Ian when they arrived at the office.

"I thought he could look at the accounts," said Deana quickly.

"No, if we're paying him as a consultant, I think we should get his business input."

Deana didn't know how Sir Ian was going to get on in the meeting. And she just hoped he would follow any cues she gave him.

"Do you have the patent on this yet?" asked Matt, looking at the diagram.

"It's been applied for. I have our attorney in New York working on that."

"This is going to be great. It's what Dad would have dreamed about. What's your opinion, Sir Ian?"

"It looks wonderful. I am sure it is going to make lots of money."

"It's going to do more than that, it's going to put us above our competitors. We're going to not only be the first company to have this, but the only one."

"Ah, and speaking of money, perhaps I should now look at your accounts," said Sir Ian.

Deana could feel the perspiration moving slowly down her arms. She just wanted this to be over with as quickly as possible.

"If you'll excuse me, I have some letters to dictate and I also need to get some information ready to fax to New York. That is, if the fax machine is fixed yet," said Deana.

"I'll keep Sir Ian entertained," said Matt.

"And Sir Ian, remember we're going shopping," said Deana.

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Deana had rescued him an hour later. They left the office and then walked down to the main shopping area.

"I thought we could start at the music shop," said Deana. "I don't know if they have any music from two hundred years ago, but they might have something you like."

They walked into the shop. This was the strangest place he had been in. Loud music shook the walls and ceilings from which hung peculiarlooking art, but he did not comment, did not complain.

"Why don't we check with an assistant," said Deana.

Sir Ian saw a man of about twenty standing behind the counter. He was wearing a black T-shirt and black trousers, and had black hair stuck up in the air. He also had some kind of jewelry stuck in his nose and ear.

"Can I help you?"

"Yes, I was wondering if you have any music from the Regency Period?" asked Deana.

"The what?"

"Regency," repeated Sir Ian.

"I dunno about that, let me ask someone. John, some geezer here is after some Regency music."

"Never heard of that group," he shouted back.

"Who are these idiots?" asked Sir Ian.

"Shh," said Deana. "Where is your classical section?"

"Over there to the left."

Sir Ian followed Deana over to another section of

the store.

"I'll select a few, and you can listen to them to see if you like them."

She put the headphones on him and pressed two buttons. He then heard music flowing through them.

"Quite beautiful, yes, this one will do."

"How about this one too?" she asked, pressing another button.

"Oh, yes, perfect for dancing."

"We'll get these two CDs then."

On the way to the checkout, Sir Ian noticed a CD by a group named Queen. "May I have this one too?"

"They're a rock group," said Deana.

"The name sounds very royal. I would like to have it."

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"It's surprising how much that little card can buy one," said Sir Ian when they got home and started to unload the car. Deana opened the door to find Mrs. Williams' nephew talking to Todd and Amy.

"He's been asking about his aunt," whispered Todd.

"I just wondered if she'd gone away again. I've been trying to reach her all weekend," said Neil.

"I think she did go on some type of trip," said Deana.

"Do you know when she'll be back?"

"You know your aunt, who can tell," said Deana. "I'll let you know if we hear from her," she said, showing him out.

"Do you think we should tell him what she was doing?" asked Amy.

"Maybe she doesn't want him to know about her little paranormal activities," said Deana.

"What have you got there, Sir Ian?" asked Todd.

"Eh, the packages...my new outfits. You will be

glad to hear I have some clothes of my own now."

"Are you going to model them for us?" asked Amy.

"Of course, I will be proud to show you my new wardrobe."

Deana sat in the living room with Todd and Amy. Sir Ian had taken all his new clothes upstairs and Deana had told him he could try them on in her bedroom. She couldn't wait to see what he would look like in the items she'd picked out for him. She heard him humming a tune as he came down the stairs.

Todd gave a loud wolf whistle as Sir Ian stepped into the room. He'd chosen to model the blue suit first. He walked back and forth a few times as Todd whistled at him again.

"Would you tell me what that whistle means?" asked Sir Ian, checking his appearance in the mirror on the wall.

"If you get a whistle like that it means you look really..." Deana couldn't think of the right word.

"Dandy?" asked Sir Ian.

"Yes, something like dandy," said Deana. "Now how about showing Todd and Amy the outfit I picked out for you?"

"Do I really have to? After all, they were not my choice; they were very 21st century."

"You're going to look great in them," said Deana.

"If you insist. Your mother thought it would make me look like a man of the modern world."

Deana heard him whistling as he came down the stairs about ten minutes later. She saw him walk into the living room wearing the jeans and the Tshirt with the emblem on the pocket. Alex had been all about shirts, ties and business suits. And as she studied Sir Ian, she thought how the clothes looked like they'd been custom made for him.

"What do you call these?" asked Sir Ian, pulling

on the material on his thighs.

"Jeans."

He pulled up the T-shirt material. "And this?" "A T-shirt."

"Oh, I fear I will never grow accustomed to any of this. And yes, I have some questions to ask you about your lady's magazine. I found some items in it most fascinating."

Deana heard the front door opening up, and then saw Matt putting his head around the door. "What's this, a fashion show?"

"Sir Ian is just showing us some of his new clothes. Why don't you come and join us?" asked Deana.

"I'd love to, but I have a plane to catch in two hours. Can I use the phone to call a cab?"

"No need, I can take you in the car," she said.

"Great, I'll just grab my stuff."

Matt had said his goodbyes to the children and Sir Ian at the house, and then Deana had driven him out to Heathrow Airport.

"I'll probably see you back home," said Matt before he went through security.

"Have a great time in France, and it was wonderful to have you visit us."

"Take care, Deana," he said before he kissed her on the cheek. "And that Sir Ian, he seems like a nice guy. I think he's crazy about you, so don't stay a widow too long, okay. You're still young."

He turned and headed through security, then turned and blew her a kiss when he got through the other side.

Deana had been lucky. She had two great stepchildren and they'd been easy to get along with since the first time she'd met them. And that had been even more surprising since she'd almost been thrown upon them. The first time Alex had

introduced her to them had been at their wedding. They'd barely had time to get used to having another woman in their father's life when six months later they had a half brother joining the family.

She waited until Matt was out of sight and then turned to leave. Sir Ian crazy about her, Deana laughed as she walked back to the parking ramp. She shook her head. "Oh, Matt, if you only knew the whole story," she said under her breath.

She got caught up in the rush hour traffic on the journey home, so she decided to read some notes from work while she waited in line. She looked at her watch and knew the children would probably be wondering where she was. She tapped her hand on the steering wheel. She just hoped everyone was behaving themselves, and that included Sir Ian. He'd assured her the children would be in good hands with him supervising them, but she had her doubts.

Deana finally got home an hour later. She put the car back in the garage, and then walked up the path to the house. The windows were all shut, but she could hear the music blaring in the living room. How many times had she told Todd to keep the volume down or to wear headphones? She knew ringing the doorbell was going to be pointless, so she took out her front door key. She was sure Sir Ian would be hiding in a cupboard by now, probably with a finger stuffed in each ear.

She stepped into the hallway. It sounded like a disco was being held in the house. She just hoped no one had complained to the police. Deana was on her way to the living room when she saw Todd and Amy coming out of the kitchen, each carrying a glass of soda.

"How many times have I told you not to play that music so loud."

"Hey, don't look at me," said Todd. "It's Sir Ian."

"I don't think that's the sort of music Sir Ian listens to," said Deana, trying to raise her voice above the level of the music.

"He said you bought him a CD, *Classic Queen*. I put it on for him and he fell in love with it. He said the louder the music, the better for him. He said he could actually feel the music. I've been telling you that for years, Mom."

Deana went into the living room to see Sir Ian still dressed in his jeans and T-shirt. He was stretched out on the couch with his eyes closed, his feet tapping to the beat of the music. One of his hands went up in the air and he was now pretending he was conducting.

Deana went over to the CD player and turned the machine off.

"I say," said Sir Ian, quickly sitting up.

"I could hear the music out in the street."

"I am sorry. I did not realize it would carry that far. And this was such a wonderful choice," he said, picking up the CD case. "Have you heard the song about the boy whose mama kills a man? What is it called?" His fingers ran down the titles of songs. "Ah, yes, 'Bohemian Rhapsody,' a true delight."

"I'm glad you finally found something you like."

"Yes, although it is not the same type of music I am accustomed to, I can see merit in it."

"I thought you'd be listening to your classical CDs."

"I was waiting for you to return to do that."

"Waiting for me?" asked Deana, taking off her jacket.

"Yes, I wanted you to listen to them with me."

"I'll put them on for you, but at a lower volume. We don't want complaints from the neighbors."

Deana went over to the machine, took the CD out, and then replaced it with one of the classical CDs. She had to admit it wasn't her type of music. It was painfully slow. There were no lyrics and it sounded like just harpsichords and violins were being played.

She saw Sir Ian tapping his foot to it.

"Beautiful, most beautiful," he said.

He started to hum along to the music. Deana wondered how she was going to make a polite exit from the room.

"Would you like me to show you how we used to dance?" he asked.

"No...really."

He stood up and offered her his hand. "I will teach you how to dance."

She was trapped now. She walked toward him and put her hand into his. He held onto it firmly. He stepped toward her, and then took one step back.

"You will come toward me and then back out away from me."

Deana copied him. As she stepped toward him, she could see a grin coming on his face.

"You would have made a fine Regency lady. You see how quickly you have learned these dance steps. Now we will try something else. We will turn to the left and back, and then turn to the right and back."

Deana turned, and then took hold of Sir Ian's other hand.

"Are you sure you did not live during the Regency period?"

"I'm sure I'd remember more than just a dance."

She wasn't ready for the next move. Sir Ian grabbed both of her hands and pulled her in close to his body. She could now feel the contours of his body against her own. She could feel his breath brush her nose and cheeks. He ran his hand up her spine, and then pulled her in even closer.

Deana didn't know much about the Regency period, but she was sure that gentlemen were never allowed to get this close to their dance partners. She glanced up to see him looking down at her.

"You see, you have to feel the music," he said slowly, spinning her around.

The only thing Deana could feel right now was Sir Ian's manhood pressing into her stomach. The children were in the kitchen, and if she didn't stop this right now, she'd be beyond the point of no return.

"Sir Ian, didn't you want to ask me some questions about the magazine?"

He was grinning again. Or was it a smile? No, it was a grin. A grin had different meaning than a smile. Grins were more devilish, and Sir Ian was a master of them. He obviously knew she was starting to feel uneasy about their closeness and probably sensed she could feel his obvious excitement as he pressed into her.

"Why don't we sit down here and I can see what answers I can give you. We can still listen to the rest of the CD on the couch."

"Oh, Deana, one of these days."

"One of these days, what?"

"Never mind, we will sit on the couch," he said, releasing her from his grip.

Deana sat down while Sir Ian went over to the table and picked up the magazine. He returned to the couch and sat next to her. He turned to the editorial page.

"This is the number to call people on the phone?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And this is a fax number?"

"That's right."

"I would lift the phone and press these numbers?"

"Yes."

She could see he'd dog-eared certain pages. He flipped open one page and laid it flat on her lap.

"Contact lenses," said Sir Ian.

"They're like glasses, but they fit right into your actual eye."

"That sounds almost sinister. And I assume one does not need glasses if these are worn in the eyes?"

"That's right; they take the place of glasses."

"Amazing."

He turned to the next page and pointed to the advertisement.

"Am I to understand correctly that one purchases this hair color to cover up the gray in one's hair?"

"Yes, didn't people do that in your day?"

"It is possible, but I do not think anyone would have ever admitted to doing such a thing."

He turned to another page.

"It's a casserole," said Deana. "You put everything together in a pot and cook it. And this is what we call an advertisement."

"Advertisement."

"Companies try to sell us their products via advertisements and commercials on the television."

"And what are they trying to sell me here?"

"A casserole mix. You buy the meat or chicken plus a few vegetables, and then you add this mix and water. Then put it all in the oven and a few hours later you have dinner."

"I must say the advertisement makes it look quite edible."

"I'll buy some and you can try it."

He turned over several pages. "This I found most fascinating."

Deana saw it was an ad for a home pregnancy test.

"Am I to understand that ladies use this to see if they are with child?"

"That's right."

"Quite amazing. It is a fascinating world in

which you live. I have so much to learn, so much to do."

The phone rang just as he'd finished speaking.

Sir Ian put his hand on Deana's forearm. "Please allow me to get that for you. I know what that noise is now and I must practice answering it."

Deana watched as he picked up the receiver.

"Hello, hello," he shouted. He looked at Deana. "I do not understand, there does not seem to be anyone there. Could this be possible? Can the phone ring on its own?"

"You're holding it the wrong way."

Sir Ian coughed, and then turned the receiver around the other way. "Hello? Yes, you may. Deana, it is for you."

Deana got up, walked to the phone and took it from him.

"Hello?"

"Good evening, Deana. It's Colin, I was wondering if you and Sir Ian would like to come to the theater with June and myself. We were given two extra tickets. They're for tomorrow night's performance."

"I don't know."

"Please say yes. We'd love to spend more time with you, and we'd also like to get to know Sir Ian."

She glanced across at Sir Ian. She supposed he did deserve another night out on the town.

"Yes, all right."

"Wonderful. We'll come by and pick you up around 7 p.m."

"I'll see you then."

She put the receiver down. "You'll be pleased to hear we're going to the theater."

"Splendid."

"I don't know what type of play it is, but the tickets are free. Do you remember Colin and June?"

"Colin and June. Ah, the names are familiar.

Yes, they came here the night I..."

"Yes, the night you arrived. They'll be joining us."

"We are not going on our own?"

"No."

"Perhaps some other time. Nevertheless, I will look forward to this evening out."

\*\*\*\*

The following evening Deana wished she'd been swifter in getting into the bathroom, but Sir Ian somehow managed to beat her to it as she heard water being run. She remembered reading how the Regency gent would take hours getting himself ready for a night out on the town. And boy, those history books hadn't been wrong.

She looked at her watch. She'd now have to skip taking a bath and just settle on a quick shower. Maybe she could put a face mask on while she waited to get into the bathroom. She went back to her bedroom and sat on the stool by the vanity.

She heard the water stop running in the bathroom, and then heard Sir Ian turning on his music. He must have taken Todd's portable CD player in there with him. She laughed when she heard him playing the Queen CD yet again. She listened to him splashing the water as he hummed along to the music.

"Bohemian Rhapsody" came on and Deana heard him starting to sing along this time. She stood up and went out into the hallway to listen. She saw Todd and Amy had done the same thing.

"He's got a really good voice," said Todd. "Do you think we could send him to audition on *American Idol*?" he asked jokingly.

Deana had to admit he had a great voice as he hit both the high and low notes with equal ease. She heard what was obviously Sir Ian getting out of the bath, and then the water draining away. He sang louder as the music picked up tempo. She heard the song finishing, and then the toilet being flushed.

The three of them quickly stepped back inside their rooms when they heard the sound of the bathroom door opening up. Deana watched as Sir Ian went by her bedroom, whistling and carrying his bag of toiletries.

Sir Ian waited in the hallway for Deana to come downstairs. He caught sight of her at the top of the stairs. She looked beautiful in her black evening dress. Black was very becoming on her. And he had not known many women who could take its harshness quite as well as she.

He watched as she walked down each step of the stairs. The dress had a slight slit at the front and from where he was standing he could see almost to the tops of her thighs.

He remembered how they'd felt that night standing in the moonlight by the very same stairs she was now descending. And he could still feel them pressing against his body when they had danced together the evening before. He knew she was just as excited about their closeness as he was. He had purposely pushed his body into hers so she could feel that excitement and his anticipation for her.

She could not resist him much longer. Soon those beautiful thighs would be wrapped around his body as they made love together. Perhaps on the living room floor of the house, or perhaps in Deana's bed. He had a feeling it could possibly be tonight after they returned from the theater.

"You look beautiful," said Sir Ian, reaching out for her hand as she stood on the bottom step.

"Thank you, you look very nice too."

"You look great, Mom," said Todd, walking into the hallway.

"I've put a casserole in the oven for you and Amy, and it should be ready in about half an hour." "Don't worry about us."

"And remember what I've told you about behaving. And no trying any more...well, you know what I'm referring to."

"Yes, Mom. We've learned our lesson from the first time."

"Women are quite bossy, are they not?" asked Sir Ian.

"Oh Mom's a bit bossier than most."

"I will see what I can do about that."

"Someone has to keep you men in line," said Deana.

The doorbell rang.

"That will be June and Colin, now remember what I said about behaving yourselves."

Sir Ian opened the door.

"Good evening. Are you good people ready?" asked Colin.

"Yes," said Deana.

Sir Ian offered her his arm and they stepped outside and walked down the path.

"Beautiful evening, isn't it?" said Colin, opening the car door for them.

"Good evening," said June as they got into the car.

"What play are we going to see?" asked Deana.

"It's a new mystery. All the critics have been raving about it."

\*\*\*\*

Half an hour into the play, Deana knew the critics had been wrong. The play was slow paced and she could tell that Sir Ian was getting bored. She didn't have to turn to look to know that because she could feel him fidgeting next to her. And then she heard him not even trying to suppress a couple of yawns.

"I cannot believe people actually pay money to watch such utter rubbish," he whispered.

"Shh," said a woman sitting behind them.

"Do these actors actually get paid for this nonsense?"

A man sitting directly in front of Sir Ian turned around and glared at him.

"Would you keep your voice down, some of us are trying to watch this...even if you're not."

"I cannot..."

"Sir Ian," whispered Deana, quickly gripping his forearm. "You have to be quiet because people are trying to listen and follow along with this play."

"Then they are just as mad as the players. And not to mention the writer of this is rubbish."

"Just keep quiet," said Deana.

"Be quiet," said three people all at the same time.

Deana thought there was only one solution to this. And she had to do it now before Sir Ian was actually asked to leave. She grabbed his hand.

"Let's get some air outside."

She led him out of the auditorium and then into the foyer.

"You're doing it again," said Deana.

"Doing what?"

"Being critical."

"Oh, surely, you cannot think that...that rubbish this establishment calls acting is entertaining."

"That's beside the point. You were being rude."

"Me, rude? I would like to know one thing. Do you find that play enjoyable?"

"No."

"Then I have proved my point."

"Yes, it's awful, but you can't go around being critical and ruining the play for other people. We just don't do that these days."

"These actors are lucky, that's all I can say. In my days boos and hisses, and sometimes rotten vegetables, were hurled up onto the stage." Deana burst out laughing. "I would have loved to have seen that."

"If only I had brought some tomatoes along with me."

"You wouldn't dare."

He grinned.

"All right. We have now ascertained that the play is awful, but that one should remain silent during the performance. I will remember that the next time."

The doors to the auditorium opened and people started to filter out.

"Is it over?"

"I think it's just the intermission."

Deana saw Colin and June walking toward them.

"I'll make some excuse so we don't have to sit through the second half."

"I'm sorry we had to leave," said Deana. "But Sir Ian felt an upset stomach coming on. In fact, he's just returned from the restroom complaining of stomach pains, so I think I should take him home."

"Oh, dear," said June. "How will you get home?"

"Please don't worry, we can get a cab. And thank you for inviting us to join you. We've had a wonderful time."

"I'll see you at the office, Deana," said Colin.

Deana and Sir Ian stood outside on the pavement a few minutes later. The temperature had dropped and it was just starting to rain.

"I must say you are very good at that sort of thing."

"What sort of thing?"

"Telling lies."

"I never lie, I just come up with creative alternatives."

"It is a shame that you and I are dressed up so wonderfully and we have nowhere to be seen in such fineries. I do not suppose Vauxhall Gardens is still open?"

"Not that I know of, but I do have an idea. Why don't we eat out? Somewhere fancy. I haven't eaten at somewhere fancy for over a year," said Deana.

She hailed the first available cab, and asked for a restaurant in Knightsbridge. The maitre'd recognized her as soon as she stepped through the door.

"Mrs. Adams, so nice to see you again. We were all so sorry to hear about your husband."

"Thank you."

"We're glad you're still going to come and eat with us. Let me find you a table."

He showed them to a table by the window and they sat down.

"Enjoy your meal. I'll send a waiter over to you straight away."

"You and your husband used to eat here?" asked Sir Ian.

"Yes, the food's excellent. You're going to love it."

The waiter came to the table and handed them each a menu.

"Can I get you something to drink?"

"Yes, we'll have a bottle of wine," said Deana.

"I am not accustomed to a woman taking such control and ordering for me," said Sir Ian after the waiter left.

"If you're going to live in this world you'll have to get used to it."

The waiter brought the wine, opened it, and then poured it into their glasses.

"Are you ready to order?"

"I am, but I think Sir Ian would like to study the menu for just a few more minutes. I'm going to start with the prawn cocktail, and then I'd like the sirloin steak with green beans and sautéed potatoes." "Very good, Madam."

"I am ready to order too. I will begin with the beef consommé. To follow that, I would like the duck with roasted potatoes and baby carrots," said Sir Ian.

The waiter wrote that down and went into the kitchen.

"What did your husband eat when he came here?"

"The same as me."

"Can I ask what he looked like? I noticed you have no portraits of him around the house."

"I took them all down. It was just too painful for me to keep looking at them. But I do have a photo of the children with him," said Deana, getting out her billfold. She opened it up, pulled out a photo, and then slid it across the table to Sir Ian.

"A fine looking man. I can see Amy's resemblance to him."

"Yes, she is her father's double, but Todd looks more like my side of the family."

He slid the photo back. "Were you with him when he passed away?"

"No, he was here in London; I was in New York." Sir Ian nodded.

The waiter arrived with the appetizers and bread rolls.

Sir Ian tried the soup.

"Very good, almost like the soup we had during my day."

"I'm glad we're gradually finding things to your liking."

"Tm sure I will find many things to my liking...given enough time to try everything. Oh, and that reminds me of something, I do have a request. I wish to visit my old home. And of course, I would like you and the children to come along with me."

"Your old house. I think there's a strong

possibility that it will be gone by now."

"I can at least see if it is there. In fact, I had two homes. Next week I will go out to the countryside and see if that house is still there too."

The main meal arrived and Sir Ian started eating immediately. By the look of things, he was enjoying every bite.

"Do you think you can manage dessert?" asked Deana when she saw him finish the last slice of duck.

"I know I should not push my limits, but I am tempted to try one of the pastries the gentleman over there is eating."

Deana ordered two cream pastries.

"No, no," said Deana.

"Whatever is it? Is this pastry not divine?"

"It's Colin and June. They just walked by the window."

Deana watched them closely as they looked at the menu outside by the entrance of the restaurant. They studied it for a few minutes but then decided to head across the street.

"It's all right. They're going across the road to the Italian bistro."

"If they had come in here, you would have been forced to tell more lies."

"You mean more creative alternatives."

"Not even that, for now it is quite true, I am actually feeling ill. I do not know if I have overeaten, but I feel quite hot and achy all of a sudden."

Deana looked at him. He did look red and flushed.

"I'll pay the bill, and then I'll get you back home as soon as I can."

She only hoped it wasn't anything too serious.

## CHAPTER NINE

By the time they got back to the house, it was obvious that Sir Ian had a high fever. On the ride home he was shivering, but kept complaining about being hot. Deana could even see beads of sweat appearing on his forehead.

"I think you should go straight up to bed. I'll bring you up something that might help," she said as she helped him get out of the taxi and into the house.

Deana could hear Todd's music blaring from upstairs again. She went into the kitchen and turned on the light. She put the kettle on, and then reached for a mug. She opened the refrigerator door and pulled open the vegetable tray.

Her mother had always told her hot water with lemon and honey cured just about anything. And of course, a shot of brandy wouldn't hurt either. She cut the lemon into thin slices and then poured the hot water and brandy over them. Deana hoped Sir Ian didn't have any diseases from his own time period...or at least didn't have one that couldn't be cured by today's medicines.

She carried the drink upstairs. When she got to Sir Ian's room, she saw him sitting on top of the bed. Deana walked into the room and placed the mug down on the nightstand.

"How are you doing now?"

"I feel very hot, like I am going to burn at any moment. And my whole body aches."

Deana heard the music in Todd's room getting louder.

"Excuse me. I have to go and speak with Todd."

Deana knocked on Todd's door and then went inside. He was dancing to the music. He turned and caught sight of Deana watching him and started to blush.

"Mom, I didn't know you were home."

"I want you to turn that down, or use the headphones. Sir Ian isn't feeling well."

"What's wrong with him?"

"I don't know."

She walked back to Sir Ian's room and sensed Todd was close on her heels.

"Hi, Sir Ian."

"Hello, Todd," he said before he sneezed.

"Sounds like you've got a cold," said Deana. She sat down on the side of the bed and offered him the drink.

"Do you think we should call a doctor?" asked Todd. "Maybe he's..."

"Todd," said Deana.

"I do not think I am dying, dear Todd. Remember I have done that once before, and this is nothing like the process."

"I'm sure you've just caught a cold. Our germs and bugs are probably foreign to you."

"Everything about this new world is foreign to me," said Sir Ian.

Deana saw him put his hand to his throat as he spoke.

"My throat does feel rather raw."

"Mom will take care of you. She always makes us feel better when we're sick."

Todd left the room.

"Is that true?"

"I can't take all the credit. I think they recover all by themselves."

Sir Ian started to cough.

"I'm sure it's a cold. You could even have the flu.

Why don't I go and get some medicine while you get undressed. Then you can get into bed and rest, even go straight to sleep. You'll probably feel better in the morning."

Deana walked along to the bathroom. She opened the medicine cabinet and looked through its contents. She just hoped they had something for colds.

"Mom."

Deana turned to see Amy standing the doorway.

"Todd said Sir Ian's sick. Is he going to die again?"

"No, honey, he's just got a cold. And if he's no better tomorrow, I'll call the doctor. I'm going to take some medicine in for him."

"Okay, good night, Mom."

"Good night, sweetie."

Deana took out a box of aspirin. She then remembered that she'd always used a wet cold washcloth on the children's heads to cool them down. She quickly pulled one down from the cupboard and ran it under the cold tap. She carried everything back to Sir Ian's room and knocked on the door.

"Can I come in?"

"Yes, I am safely in bed."

Deana went inside and saw him sitting up in bed. He had the sheets wrapped tightly around his lower body, his chest bare. She could see sweat was glistening on it.

"I've brought some tablets for you, take two of them. They should bring your temperature down. Here, swallow them with this lemon drink."

He put the tablets into his mouth and swallowed.

"I've also got a wet washcloth; you can use it to cool yourself down."

"Perhaps you could do that while I lie down," he said.

"Sure."

Sir Ian slid down a few inches until his head was flat on the pillow.

She started to pat the cloth on his forehead.

"And we were having such a delightful evening. I had planned something special to conclude our night out on the town," he said.

"Oh, and what was that?"

"We will do it some other time, when I am fully recovered from whatever this awful ailment is."

"Now you've got me intrigued," said Deana.

"My chest is burning up, could you perhaps use the cloth on it?"

She patted the cloth on his chest and saw the round scar close to Sir Ian's left nipple, and guessed it had probably been caused by the bullet that had ended his life. She gently dabbed the cloth on it. She saw him close his eyes and hoped she hadn't hurt him.

"You must be an expert at this," he said.

"I've done it more times than I can remember. When the children were young they were always coming down with something."

"And you have also done this for you husband, yes?"

"For Alex, no, never. How does that feel?"

"Um, I..."

She could tell Sir Ian had fallen asleep. She was going to get up and leave, but decided to continue to pat his chest. She dipped her hand lower, sensing she should get out of the room right that minute. But she couldn't. It was almost as if she was spellbound. She put the washcloth on the nightstand and instead used her hand to gently rub his chest and then his stomach.

She traced the maze of muscles around his upper stomach and then the hair around his belly button. She ran her finger down the single trail of hair that led from his belly button and then down under the sheets. She'd never been this brazen before, but she inched her hand and gently touched his manhood.

Sir Ian turned quickly to his left side and she swiftly removed her hand as if she was a child getting caught with her hand in the cookie jar. She wasn't sure if that had been an unconscious move on Sir Ian's part, or if turning on his side had been his diplomatic way of forcing her to stop what she was about to do. Either way, she was suddenly embarrassed about touching him without his consent. She had to get out of the room and take a few deep breaths.

Deana was gone. He had heard her closing the door. It was now safe. He turned over onto his back again. The woman had no idea what the mere touch of her hand did to him, and how she only had to stand near him for him to feel excitement pumping through his veins. He had planned to make love to her tonight, and now he was feeling sick and the whole evening was a disaster.

Oh, why could she not be an average-looking widow? Why could she not be a shrew? Why had he been brought back to a house with a woman he was greatly attracted to? None of this was going according to plan. And tonight as they sat in the restaurant, he realized one thing. He was in love for the first time in his life.

Sir Ian Ashby in love. Who would have believed such a thing?

## CHAPTER TEN

Deana got undressed and then got quickly into bed. She fell asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow, but she woke a few hours later to find someone tugging on her arm.

"Mom."

"What?"

"Mom."

Deana could see Todd's outline standing beside the bed.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

She sat up and turned on the lamp. She looked at the clock and saw that it was 2:33 a.m. She hadn't been woken up in the middle of the night by Todd or Amy since they were little kids.

"Is something the matter?"

"Yes, it's Sir Ian. I went to the bathroom, and on the way back I thought I'd just look in on him. Mom, he's really sick, he's covered in sweat, and I heard him talking in his sleep."

"I'll go and check on him."

Deana got out of her bed. She went across the hallway to Sir Ian's room and went inside. She crept over to the bed and looked down at Sir Ian. Todd had been right about Sir Ian being covered in sweat.

"What do you think, Mom?"

"I'm going to call the doctor."

Deana went back into her bedroom and dialed the doctor's number. Deana told them she thought it was an emergency, so they assured her someone would be there as soon as possible.

Thirty minutes later a doctor was standing at

the front door.

"I'm sorry to have to bring you out at this time of the morning, I hope it's not a problem."

"Not at all. Where's our patient?"

"Upstairs."

Deana waited outside with Todd and Amy while the doctor went into the room to examine Sir Ian. He was in there for about ten minutes and then came back out to talk to Deana.

"He's got the flu. There are still a few cases going around. Has he been out of the country lately?"

"Yes, he has," said Deana quickly, looking at the children and hoping they'd follow her cue.

"That's usually what happens. People have to adjust to our nasty little germs again once they reenter the country. I'm going to write out a prescription for him and you can get it filled as soon as the pharmacy opens. He's to rest for a few days, preferably in bed, lots of liquids, fruit juice and soup. And you could wipe him down with a damp sponge just to make him feel more comfortable."

He handed her the prescription.

"I think he'll be fine, but call me if you feel you need to. And one more thing, don't worry if he doesn't make any sense. He was telling me about this party he attended, and with the Prince Regent of all people."

"We thought he was hallucinating," said Deana quickly.

"Yes, a high temperature can do that to your brain."

"Thank you once again, Doctor. I'll show you out."

Deana went back upstairs to see Todd peeking in at Sir Ian.

"How is he?" she asked.

"I think he'll be okay. He's a really tough guy."

"Tll get a sponge and a bowl of cold water. How

about wiping him down for me?" she asked, knowing what had happened the last time.

"That's your department, Mom. You know all about looking after sick people. I mean, you're a mom. I'll see you in the morning."

Now what was she going to do? She remembered just a few hours earlier when she'd tried to cool him down with a wet washcloth. Sir Ian might have ended up a few degrees cooler, but touching his body had sent her temperature through the roof.

This time around she'd have to keep herself under control, and no giving in to temptation, no matter how appealing his body was to her. She walked into the bathroom and got hold of the sponge she used in the bath. She took a bowl from the cupboard and filled it with ice-cold water. If it didn't work on him, at least she could cool herself down with it. She walked back along the hallway to Sir Ian's room. As she entered the room she noticed he was awake and sitting up.

"How are you feeling?"

"Still very hot and achy, but the doctor has assured me I will survive."

"He left a prescription for you. I'll get it as soon as the store opens."

"That isn't soup in that bowl, is it?"

"No, more cold water."

"Thank goodness for that, because it looked very unappetizing."

Deana walked over to the bed. She placed the bowl of water on the nightstand and sat down. She wrung out the sponge and decided that now that he was awake, he could handle things for himself.

"What am I supposed to do with that?" he asked, looking at the sponge.

"Like I said, it will cool you down."

"Deana, I am the patient, am I not? You are looking after me."

She saw him grinning again.

Deana placed the sponge on his chest and started to dab here and there.

"How does that feel?" she asked.

"Cold, I will say that."

She saw the hairs on his chest darken and sit flat against his skin. She put the sponge in the bowl and wrung it out again. This time she wiped it across his stomach. She saw him put his arms out to the sides of the bed.

"Is that too cold?"

"It was just the shock, that is all," he said as he started to take deep breaths.

"Are you sure you're all right?"

"I can assure you that every part of me is in fine working order."

Deana sensed he was starting to play games with her.

"You look like you too are flushed around the face, Deana."

"I've been running around a lot in the last hour or so."

"Maybe I should be cooling you down with this sponge," he said.

"No, I'm perfectly all right. And I really think you should try and get some sleep. There's nothing like rest and relaxation when you don't feel well."

"Yes, perhaps you are right."

Deana put the sponge back in the bowl, while Sir Ian settled back down in the bed. Deana pulled the blanket over his shoulders.

She waited near the doorway just to make sure he was all right. She saw his head flop down and could see he was now fast asleep. She didn't know why, but she didn't feel the least bit tired. She decided she might as well sit in the chair next to his bed. That way she could keep her eye on him. She got one of the blankets out of the cupboard and wrapped it around herself, then settled down for the rest of the night. She closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep.

## \*\*\*\*

Sir Ian opened his eyes. It was morning. The room was filled with dappled sunlight and the birds were singing outside the window. He turned his head and saw Deana asleep in the chair. Her hair had fallen over just one half of her face. What a sight for him to wake up to. The lady was beautiful, even in slumber. Now if she would only wake up in his bed instead of a chair, he would be a very happy man.

He was feeling much better and decided it was time for him to stretch his legs. He crept over to where she sat and knelt down beside her. He reached up to touch her face and gently pulled the hair back from it.

"Good morning," he said softly.

She stirred. Then he saw her lift her head to look at him.

"What time is it?" she asked.

"I would imagine it is early morning."

"I must have dozed off."

"Did you sleep here for the rest of the night?"

"Um, yes."

He saw her place her hand at the base of her neck and grimace.

"I was quite all right. You did not have to be so worried about me that you felt you had to spend the night with me."

"I know, but I just wanted to check on you. I used to do that all the time with the children."

"I am sure you have had lots of practice at playing nursemaid."

"Lots," said Deana, standing. "In fact, I miss doing this sort of thing."

"Maybe you will have more children to take care

of one day."

"Me? No, I don't think so."

"You would not want more?"

"When I was a little girl I always dreamed about having four."

"But you and Alex had only two."

"That's all he wanted. Remember, he already had two children."

"Perhaps one day you will marry again and produce two more with your new husband."

Deana was starting to feel uncomfortable with the conversation so she stood up.

"I'm going to shower and then I'll get some breakfast. Are you hungry?"

"A little."

"The doctor said you should eat just light meals today. And you're to stay in bed for at least two days."

"I do not think that I could. I have never been one to stay in bed later than 8 a.m."

"Maybe not, but you will this time. And I thought oatmeal would be a good breakfast," she said.

"It is, if one is a horse."

"You'll love the way I make it."

"I very much doubt it."

Deana prepared Sir Ian's breakfast and then carried everything upstairs on a tray. When she got to his room, he was sitting up in bed reading one of her paperback novels.

"I am not going to like being in bed for two days. I must get out by the weekend."

"We'll see."

"I think I mentioned that I wish to visit my old home. And I would like you to accompany me so you can see it for yourself."

"Is it far away?"

"No, and I feel I will be able to find it quite

easily."

Deana put the tray down on his lap.

"I told you before, don't be too surprised if it's not there now."

"Nonsense, of course it will still be there."

"I've sent Todd to get your medicine, plus some magazines for you to read."

He reluctantly took the first spoonful of oatmeal. "Do I taste honey?"

"I always add some at the same time I add the milk."

"It is rather good. I should think I will be up and about in no time with this type of treatment."

Deana heard the front door opening up and then heard Todd pounding up the stairs.

"Here's the medicine and magazines you wanted."

Deana took the package from him. She removed the container and then shook out two tablets.

"Here, take these with the orange juice."

"The house down the road was broken into last night," said Todd. "They took all the antiques, the DVD player and the TV."

He sat on the bed and took a slice of toast from Sir Ian's plate.

"The man at the pharmacy told me. I told him we don't have to worry; we only have one antique, and that's Sir Ian. And that he's so pompous that if they took him, they'd soon bring him back."

"That wasn't a very nice thing to say," said Deana.

"Oh, do not let it be said that Sir Ian Ashby does not have a sense of humor."

"We'll just make sure we lock all the doors and windows," said Deana.

"Have no fear, I am here," said Sir Ian. "And I have already made up my mind that I cannot stay in this bed all day." "You can go downstairs," said Deana. "But no going out, okay."

"She used to be the same with me," said Todd. "Why don't we watch some DVDs?"

"DVDs?"

"You'll see."

"Now that sounds like a good idea. You can both keep yourselves entertained while I see to my paperwork," said Deana.

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An hour later Sir Ian went downstairs to the living room. He sat in the armchair. He felt foolish wrapping a blanket around his shoulders, but Deana had insisted. He saw Todd switching the TV on.

"I thought you called it a TV, not a DVD."

"This is a DVD player," said Todd, pointing to the box underneath. "This is the DVD," he said, holding up something that looked like a shiny plate. "This goes in here, then you press this button and it starts to play."

Sir Ian saw the TV flash and then another image appeared.

"Why would you want to play a DVD when you already have an image on the TV?"

"Because there may not be anything on TV you want to watch. Plus, with DVDs you can pick what you want and watch it whenever you like."

"Let me see this."

Sir Ian studied the DVD container carefully. "*E.T., the Extra-Terrestrial*. What is an extraterrestrial?"

"Someone from another planet."

"Another planet, you mean the moon, the sun?"

"Yes; did you know that people travel into space now?"

"I do not believe such things."

"It's true. A man walked on the moon a long time before I was even born. I've seen programs about it on TV."

"I cannot think of such a thing...and this DVD is about the man walking on the moon?"

"No, but it's a great story; just watch it and you'll see."

Deana was in the study and could hear Sir Ian laughing at the top of his voice. It was a funny, almost contagious laugh. After hearing it for a few minutes, she had to give in and laugh herself. She wondered what DVD Todd had chosen to watch. She heard another roar of laughter.

She'd love to join them in the living room, but she had work to do. She had to phone the New York office as soon as it opened, and then she had to be fully prepared for the meeting the next day. She heard another burst of laughter, but then there was silence.

Half an hour later she knew it was time to remind Sir Ian about taking his next round of pills.

She looked into the living room. Todd and Amy were sitting on the floor in front of the TV, while Sir Ian was sitting in the armchair opposite the TV. It reminded her of when Alex was alive and the three of them would watch cartoons together.

She looked at the screen and noticed they were watching E.T. Alex had hated that movie. He'd always said he could never understand how such a far-fetched movie could attract so many viewers, and not to mention make so much money.

She looked at the screen again; E.T. was dying. She walked further into the room. Sir Ian must have sensed she was there. He looked up at her. She felt deeply moved when she noticed he was actually crying.

She wanted to assure him that E.T. was going to be all right, that he survived, but she didn't want to spoil it for him. She sat on the couch but didn't watch the TV; instead she sat watching Sir Ian. He was like a child with his eyes fixed to the screen. She saw him dab his left eye with the edge of the blanket.

"Oh, what a relief," he said when he knew E.T. was alive. "Oh, what a relief. I was so terribly concerned for the little imp."

Deana smiled. She got up and left the room. She'd let him watch the rest of the movie in peace. She went to the kitchen. She was making a pot of coffee when she saw Sir Ian coming in.

"It ended happily," he said.

"Yes, I like happy endings," said Deana.

"I thought about the similarities between E.T. and myself. He also had to adjust to a new world. Plus, he had to learn all the strange little things about it."

"So you enjoyed watching it?" asked Deana as she cut a quiche into four quarters.

"Oh yes, it was a rather jolly little story."

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Deana sat in bed reading that night. "It was a rather jolly little story," she remembered Sir Ian saying. She laughed; she loved that expression and it sounded so cute when Sir Ian said it. She yawned. The late night was finally catching up with her. Maybe tonight she'd get a full eight hours of sleep. She turned off the light and then put her head down on the pillow.

She fell asleep, only to be woken up a few hours later by a thud of some kind. She walked out into the hallway and looked around. At first she thought it was Sir Ian walking to the bathroom. She wondered if he'd taken ill again and maybe fallen over. But then she saw him standing at the top of the stairs looking down into the hallway below.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Deana, please be quiet. It would appear that we have a visitor downstairs," he whispered.

"I'll call the police."

"There is no need. I will handle this. I was trained in the art of fencing."

"Fencing...I don't think you..."

He turned around and put his finger to his lips. She then saw him tiptoeing down the stairs.

"Sir Ian," she whispered, following closely behind him. "This intruder could be dangerous."

"Not half as dangerous as I can be. I am about to teach him a valuable lesson. Now, where do you keep your swords?"

"We don't have any."

"No swords, a house without swords. I have never heard of such a thing."

"We don't have any need for them these days."

"Rubbish! Is this situation not proof that you need them? Never mind, I will use this."

Deana saw him pulling out an umbrella from the stand by the door. He turned and walked toward the living room. She followed closely behind him.

"Ah-ha, caught you redhanded," shouted Sir Ian.

The man was in the process of unplugging the DVD player. He turned around quickly. In fact, so quickly that he dropped an assortment of items from the inside of his raincoat.

"What the..." he said.

Sir Ian lunged toward him with the umbrella pointed in the air.

"Drop the rest of the items you have there."

"I don't have anything else."

"I believe you do."

Sir Ian used the tip of the umbrella to slowly peel back the man's raincoat from his body. Deana saw he had specially made pockets within it, and by the look of things he'd had a very busy night.

"They're mine," he said.

"Put them on the table."

"And what if I don't?"

Deana jumped back when Sir Ian swiftly brought the tip of the umbrella up from the man's chest and then placed it just below the intruder's Adam's apple.

"Drop them or I will run you through."

"With a bleeding umbrella? What do you think, I'm nuts or something? You'll have to do better than a brolly to scare me."

"Do not argue with me."

Deana saw Sir Ian push the tip deeper into the man's throat, causing a red indentation.

"It is not the weapon that counts. It is how one uses it."

"Okay, gov, I get the picture, just back off and I'll do whatever you want."

Sir Ian pulled the umbrella away from the man's throat. The man then took everything from his pockets and dropped them on the floor. Deana saw a silver dish that belonged to her, plus a cut glass figurine Alex had given her on her 35<sup>th</sup> birthday.

"Now you will promise me that you will never ever return to this home."

"No, I won't come back here, scout's honor, gov."

"And you will not rob any more homes."

"Well, I don't know about that."

"I did not quite hear that last sentence. What was your answer?"

"That I won't rob anyone again."

"Much better. Now get moving."

The man put both his palms up in the air and backed out of the room, all the time looking at Sir Ian. Sir Ian followed him and Deana followed Sir Ian. The man kept looking over his shoulder. He opened the door and was halfway through it when Sir Ian took the umbrella and plunged it into the man's left buttock. With that the man screamed. He dropped a DVD on the floor and ran out of the door. He then traveled down the path at about twenty miles an hour.

Deana bent down to pick up the DVD from the floor.

"It's *E.T.*," she said.

"The sheer audacity. Oh, if I had only had my sword," he said. He pushed the umbrella though the air so it made a loud swishing noise. "I will have to see if I can buy some for your home. It will be my gift to you."

"He could sue you for assault. And I should have called the police."

"Poppycock, I think I handled that situation quite adequately."

"What's going on down there?" Todd called down the stairs.

"It's Sir Ian. He's just dealt with a burglar."

"Burglar?"

Now Amy was standing at the top of the stairs.

"Nothing to be alarmed about. I have dealt with it," said Sir Ian. "And I suggest we all return to our beds now."

"You have to tell us all about it tomorrow," said Todd.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Deana woke up the following morning to hear Sir Ian out in the hallway telling Todd and Amy all about the incident that had taken place the night before.

"Wow, just think if you would have had a real sword," said Todd.

Deana went into the hallway.

"If he had, we would have been in a lot of trouble," said Deana. "He's a menace with an umbrella. I hate to think what he's like with a sword."

"I would have loved to have seen it," said Todd.

"I'm going to get ready to go to the office. And I'd prefer you two come along with me," said Deana.

"Can we go to the Science Museum instead?" asked Todd.

"I don't know if can I trust you."

"Of course you can," said Sir Ian. "I think they have learned their lesson about getting into mischief."

"And how about you?"

"Have I learned my lesson about mischief?" he asked.

"You probably haven't, but I was wondering what you were going to do today."

"I will stay here and rest for another day."

"So you won't get into any trouble?"

"You have my word as a gentleman."

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The house was quiet, and for the first time since he'd returned from the grave, he was alone. Sir Ian had been somewhat of a loner, but now he felt, well, lonely. At first Deana and the children had irritated him, but now they'd only been gone, what, a mere fifteen minutes, and he already missed them, especially Deana.

He walked over to the TV and turned it on. He flicked through the channels, but nothing really interested him. He looked through the DVDs again and pulled out *E.T.* He was going to watch it again.

He blew his nose at the conclusion of the movie. It had seemed even sadder on its second showing. The phone rang. He went over to it, determined to speak into the right end this time.

"Hello?"

"Can I speak with Deana?"

"She is not here. Can I give her a message?"

"Yes, could you tell her that Jennifer gave birth to a boy last night and that we'll call her again tonight."

Sir Ian wrote that down.

"I will tell her, goodbye."

He heard the knob being turned on the front door. He rushed out into the hallway and grabbed the umbrella from the stand. He thrust it forward as soon as the door opened back.

He heard a woman screaming. He then saw Mrs. Cooke standing there with one hand on her chest.

"I am so terribly sorry, Madam."

"It's you again. Gawd blimey, you gave me another scare. No one's usually here at this time. You'll be the death of me, you will."

"Please come in and go about your business. Think of the house as completely empty."

He saw her hang her coat up. She then went to the cupboard under the stairs and pulled something out.

"What is that..." those three words had come out before he realized their implications. "Are you being funny? You know it's a vacuum cleaner."

"Of course I do. I was just checking to see if you knew what it was."

He saw her unwind an electrical cord and plug it into the wall. He pretended he wasn't paying any attention to her. He picked up a magazine from the table in the hall. He started to whistle as he casually paged through it.

He heard a familiar noise; he'd heard it a few times before in the house, but he'd never bothered to trace its source before. Now was his chance. He slyly watched out of the corner of his eye. He saw the machine with the deafening noise traveling across the floor. He saw a piece of paper lying on the floor, and then watched as the machine passed over it. As if by magic, the paper completely disappeared. He watched again. This was the most amazing thing he had ever witnessed. It looked like this machine ate things.

"You're in my way," shouted Mrs. Cooke.

"Sorry, I will go into the living room."

Shortly afterwards, she came into the living room and ran the machine across the floor. She then turned the machine off. He watched as she sprayed something onto the table and then wiped it off with a cloth. She repeated the process with the drink cabinet.

"They left you all alone today, then?" she asked.

"Yes, I have had the flu."

"Lots of it about. I usually take a break about now for a cup of tea, would you like one?"

"I would love one."

"Come on out to the kitchen when you like."

Sir Ian followed her to the kitchen. He sat at the table while Mrs. Cooke filled the kettle. She then reached for a tin in the cupboard and pulled out some cakes from it. The kettle whistled; she turned it off and poured the water into the teapot.

"Have you been working for Deana long?" asked Sir Ian as she poured him a cup of tea.

"Oh, yes, we go back a long way. I've worked for Mr. and Mrs. Adams since their children were little. In fact, I used to clean for the family that lived in this house before them."

"Then you must have known Deana's husband."

Mrs. Cooke reached across the table and placed a cake by Sir Ian's teacup.

"Yes, I knew him. You never met him, I mean, you being Deana's friend?

"Deana and I hadn't seen one another for many years, so no, I never had the pleasure of his acquaintance."

He knew it was none of his business, but he was going to ask some questions.

"And what was your opinion of him?"

He saw her look at him.

"I suppose I shouldn't speak ill of the dead, but I never thought much of him."

"Really, why?"

She took a bite of the cake.

"He wasn't much of a family man. It was all business with him. When Mrs. Adams was over here he never seemed to have time for her. She used to spend all her time here on her own." She shook her head. "No, that's not my idea of a good husband."

Now the conversation had suddenly taken a very interesting turn, thought Sir Ian.

"I think his death really shook her up," said Mrs. Cooke.

"It must have been awful for her," said Sir Ian.

"Not so much that, but the circumstances. You know he died with that woman."

"A woman?"

"Yes," she whispered as if Deana was about to appear in the kitchen at any minute. "He was upstairs in bed with a woman, they were doing youknow-what."

"I see," said Sir Ian. *Poor Deana*, he thought, and in her own house, in her own bed.

"Was the lady in question a tall brunette?" asked Sir Ian.

"That's her, Stephanie something or other."

Now Sir Ian knew why Deana had acted the way she had the day they had dined outside. *Poor Deana*, *seeing that awful woman again*, thought Sir Ian.

"I don't know why he needed another woman. But she was always here when Mrs. Adams was back home in America. I mean, Mrs. Adams is gorgeous."

"Yes, she is, indeed she is."

"I can't say I'm sorry about him because I never did like him. I'm glad to see Mrs. Adams is getting on with her life now. And I hope she finds a man who will treat her with respect." She looked at her watch. "I should be getting on with my work," she said. She stood up. "And don't you go telling Mrs. Adams that I told you about any of this."

"Of course not. It will be our little secret."

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Sir Ian watched as Mrs. Cooke walked down the path an hour later. He knew Deana and the children would be back soon, but he wanted to try that vacuum out for himself. How was he expected to cope with the world if he didn't get hands-on experience with all these items?

He pulled it out from the cupboard and plugged it in. He turned on the switch and started to push it along. He then threw a few pieces of paper onto the floor and pushed the machine over them. He then saw some petals lying by a bowl. He reached for them and scattered them all over the floor. He whistled as he vacuumed them up.

He pressed another switch and saw a light come

on at the front of the machine. He pushed the vacuum farther up the hallway. He pushed the machine over the rug, and that is when the problem occurred. The vacuum decided to eat the rug.

"No, you are not meant to eat this," he said.

He tugged on the rug, but the machine would not give it up. He turned off the machine and then lifted it up. The rug hung limply from it. Mrs. Cooke had made it look so easy. He heard the front door opening up. He looked up to see Deana standing there.

"It looks like you broke your promise."

"Not at all. I was merely trying to learn more about the  $21^{st}$  century."

"But isn't vacuuming women's work?"

He had been cornered. "I have to know everything, to try everything, or I will not know how anything works."

"Let me give you a tip. Always put one foot on the rug when you vacuum over it."

"It's totaled," said Todd, joining his mother in the hallway.

"Totaled?" asked Sir Ian.

"Ruined," said Deana.

"No, no, not at all." Sir Ian gave it a quick tug and heard a loud ripping noise. He was now holding only one half of the rug, while the other half remained in the jaws of the vacuum. "You are correct, it is totaled."

"Never mind. Put it down to experience. Oh, and by the way, dinner is ready," said Deana, passing by him with a large flat box.

"Dinner, in there?"

"You'll love it."

Sir Ian sat at the table as Amy got four plates down from the cupboard. Deana put the box on the table and opened it up. Inside was the strangest looking thing he'd ever seen. How could a circular blob like that be edible?

"What is it?"

"It's called a pizza."

"Pizza," repeated Sir Ian.

"Yes, it's bread, meat, vegetables, and they top it all with cheese," said Deana, placing a slice on his plate. "You eat it with your hands."

"Surely not."

Deana nodded. Sir Ian reluctantly picked it up and took his first bite.

"What do you think?" asked Todd.

Sir Ian chewed on it. "I am sure this keeps one's mouth occupied for a long time." A piece of cheese stretched from his plate up to his mouth, which he found most embarrassing.

"Look, cheese bubble gum," said Amy.

"How does one get it off?" asked Sir Ian.

"Just pull it," said Deana.

He gave a tug and it finally broke in half. "Oh, my goodness, I almost forgot to tell you. There was a phone call from America. There has been a birth, a son has been born to Jennifer."

"Who really cares about that sort of thing? Babies, yuck," said Todd.

"You're an uncle," said Deana.

"Half uncle," Todd corrected her.

"I died before I had a chance to become an uncle; enjoy it, Todd. You will have the privilege of holding your relative, but none of the responsibilities parenthood always thrusts upon one."

"I can't wait to see him," said Amy.

"I'm just going to call them and check that everything's okay," said Deana.

Sir Ian was glad to hear everything was well with the new arrival. The children had retreated to their rooms, while Sir Ian had decided he would sit in the living room with Deana. He sat reading while she studied her account books. He glanced up to look at her and noticed she had her legs tucked under her body. He saw her head gradually going down onto her chest. It looked like she was going to fall fast asleep at any minute.

One of the books slipped from her hand and fell to the floor. Sir Ian got down on his hands and knees and reached for the book. He sat back in the chair and flicked on the lamp. He opened the ledger. It contained accounts for the London office. He studied the figures, and then turned to the back of the book.

He heard Deana fidgeting, and then heard her murmur. He put the book down, got up and crept over to her. She needed to be more comfortable. He took off her shoes and placed them on the ground. He took one of her feet in his hands and then proceeded to rub its sole. He then ran his hand up her calf to her knee. She stirred, and then murmured something under her breath. There was a blanket at the end of the couch so he reached for it. He opened it up and spread it over her body. He then walked back to the chair, sat down and started to read again.

Deana woke up wondering where she was. She looked across the room to see Sir Ian sitting and reading. She sat up and yawned.

"Welcome back," said Sir Ian.

"I can't remember falling asleep. I was looking at the accounts."

"I have them here," he said, raising a book from his lap.

"I can't even remember taking off my shoes."

"I am responsible for that as well."

"And this blanket?"

Sir Ian nodded.

"I didn't feel a thing. Maybe I should watch out for you."

"Perhaps you should. The company is doing splendidly. At least it looks like it is."

Deana stood up and took the book from him. "I hope so." She yawned again. "Excuse me, but I think I'll go up to bed now."

"Remember tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" asked Deana, picking up her shoes.

"Yes, you said you would come with me to visit my old home."

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Deana almost regretted that she'd volunteered to accompany Sir Ian to find his old home. They had been around the same block five times, but at least she'd gotten him into the car again.

"Are you sure this is the right area?" asked Deana.

"I am positive. Once I saw the graveyard I knew it was just a few miles away."

Deana took her foot off the accelerator so Sir Ian could get a better look at the houses in the area.

"The place has changed, but I am sure I will recognize my old home."

"What happens if they've torn it down?"

"Torn it down, torn it down. Who would do such a thing? It was a great old house."

"But property prices have been pretty high around here. Maybe they tore it down and built more houses on the land."

"I have never heard of anything quite so ridiculous...oh, there it is."

"Where?"

"Over there."

Deana saw a large brown house on the opposite side of the road.

"I am sure you can drive straight up to the front entrance. You see, it is still there."

"I'm sure I can drive up there," said Deana. "Look, it's a hotel now."

"The sheer audacity," said Sir Ian, banging his fist down on the dashboard.

"Do you still want to go and take a look?"

"More than ever; drive ahead."

Deana drove through the entrance into the driveway.

"This was our driveway, the carriages used to pull in here."

Deana saw the sign for the parking lot and turned left.

"We used to have stables over there," said Sir Ian, pointing to the area behind where Deana parked the car.

"Do you want to go in and take a look?"

"Of course."

Deana and Sir Ian walked through the front entrance and then up to the reception area.

"This is disgraceful. How dare they?"

"It's been over two hundred years. You can't expect everything to be the same," said Deana.

"But nevertheless...our chairs."

"Where?"

She saw Sir Ian marching over to an area where several guests were sitting reading newspapers. She saw him studying each chair. She then saw one of the guests flick some cigarette ash onto the arm of the chairs.

"I say, be careful. How dare you, those have been in our family since 1715," said Sir Ian.

"And what's your problem?" asked the man before he got up and walked away.

"I cannot believe any of this," said Sir Ian. He turned around to look at the rest of the furnishings. "I want to see the remainder of the house."

"I don't think that's going to be possible. They have paying guests staying here now."

"I demand to see upstairs, especially my old room."

"What floor was it on?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Just tell me and I'll see if that room's vacant. Maybe they'll let us take a look. Just leave it to me."

"Wonderful idea. Let me think. Yes, it would have been on the second floor and overlooking the driveway."

"Follow me."

Deana went up to the reception desk.

"Can I help you, Madam?"

"Yes, we're thinking of spending a few nights here, but we'd like to see one of the rooms first, especially the one on the second floor overlooking the main entrance."

"Of course, let me see if it's vacant. Yes, in fact, it is."

He pressed a button and a young man came to the desk.

"Yes, Mr. Marcus."

"Could you show these people room 212?" he asked, handing him a key.

"This way," said Deana.

She got hold of Sir Ian's arm and they walked up the first flight of stairs.

"I do not believe it," said Sir Ian, suddenly stopping by a painting.

Deana immediately knew what he was referring to. It was a portrait of Sir Ian.

"I sat for that one month before I died."

The boy turned around and looked at him.

"Is there a problem, Sir?"

"No, no, carry on," said Sir Ian.

It was a great portrait and a pretty amazing one too. He didn't look any different, any older, than he had two hundred years ago.

"The hallway is the same," whispered Sir Ian.

The boy unlocked the door to room 212.

"After you, Sir, Madam."

"This feels just like home. I cannot believe I am back after two hundred years." Deana coughed as the boy walked in behind them. She saw him look at Sir Ian.

"This is one of our best rooms," he said.

"I should jolly well hope so," said Sir Ian, walking to the window. "Splendid. Yes, this brings back all the memories of riding up the driveway in the family coach."

"And how much is the room?" asked Deana quickly. She didn't want the boy to have a chance to think about what Sir Ian had just said.

"Two hundred sixty-five pounds a night, plus VAT."

"You mean people are paying two hundred sixtyfive pounds to stay in my old room? I cannot believe it."

"Your old room, Sir?"

'Yes, I used to live here before it was a hotel."

"But it's been a hotel since 1900; that would make you over a hundred years old."

"Is there a bathroom?" asked Deana quickly.

"Yes," said the boy, walking over to a side door. Although he had his back to them, he turned every few seconds to look at Deana and Sir Ian. He flicked on the light.

"It's much more elaborate than I remember," said Sir Ian. He stood in front of the mirror. "Many a time I have stood here and readied myself for a night out. At some of the parties I attended I was even in the presence of the Prince Regent himself."

"Thank you very much for showing us the room, it's very impressive. We'll let you know if we want to make reservations," said Deana.

She pulled Sir Ian's arm to get him out of the bathroom and kept hold of him as they left the room and went back down the stairs.

"Our dining room. Look, it is now a restaurant," said Sir Ian. "Could we have some tea?"

"As long as you don't say anything out of place."

Deana watched as Sir Ian looked all around the dining room. She could imagine what was going through his mind. She put her hand on top of his before she realized what she was doing.

"I know how you feel," she said.

"It is such a shock to see it like this. I only wish, Deana, that you could have seen it as it was. How we would sit at the table and talk about current affairs. They were such jolly times, you would have loved it."

She thought she saw a tear in his eye as he spoke, but despite the somber mood of the afternoon, she had to admit she had enjoyed the visit.

"We'll have to do this again," said Deana as she paid the bill.

"It is a terrible thing that I now have to pay to spend time in my old home."

They went through the reception area and Deana saw the boy who'd taken them up to Sir Ian's room. He was now talking to the man behind the desk. Deana looked at him and smiled. She saw him pointing toward her and Sir Ian. She then heard what he was saying.

"Weird couple, Mr. Marcus, he reckons he lived here before this place was a hotel."

Mr. Marcus laughed. "What is he, a vampire?"

Deana saw both men look at one another and then hold their necks. She smiled at them and then pulled Sir Ian out the front door.

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Sir Ian had not said another word on the ride home. As soon as they got back to the house he'd gone straight up to his room without saying anything to Deana or the children. In fact, he hadn't bothered to come downstairs again.

"Where's Sir Ian?" asked Amy.

"He was a little upset about his old home."

"What can we do to cheer him up?" asked Todd.

"I don't know if there's anything we can do for

him right now," said Deana.

"Sure you can, Mom. You've got to try."

Deana knew her son was right. They were responsible for all of this. She went upstairs and walked along to his room.

Deana tapped on Sir Ian's bedroom door.

"Can I come in?"

"Yes, please do."

She opened the door and saw he was sitting on the bed reading.

"We were worried about you."

"There is no need to worry about me. Come and sit beside me."

Deana sat on the edge of the bed.

"I'm sorry about this afternoon, maybe you shouldn't have gone there."

"Nonsense, I had to know the truth. My father always said the truth may hurt at first, but it is best in the long term."

"Did you get on well with your father?"

"Very, and my mother also. How about you, Deana? I have never asked about your parents."

"They're both still alive and they live in Florida."

"Florida, is that a country?"

"No, it's another state in America."

"Now that I have found out about our London home, I must see our country residence."

"I really don't think that's a good idea."

"Perhaps not, but I must see and know everything."

He got hold of her hand and sandwiched it between his two palms.

"The house was out in Kent."

"We could drive there."

"And I would like to have a picnic."

"I think I can arrange that, but I don't want you to be upset if the house isn't what it used to be."

"I am fully prepared this time. And you will be

there as support. I could not do all this by myself."

He put his hand under her chin, and then leaned over. She knew he was going to kiss her. She secretly hoped it would be on her lips, but then she felt his lips brush her cheek.

"I am so grateful that I arrived in your household."

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Deana was preparing dinner the following evening when Sir Ian came in and sat at the table.

"Are you feeling better?"

"Much, both physically and emotionally. I am greatly looking forward to the family outing."

"You'll have to tell me what sort of foods I have to prepare for this authentic picnic."

"I do not know if the foods are still available, but we can try and duplicate what we had. And what is that you are preparing?"

"Remember the casserole mix you saw in the magazine?"

Sir Ian nodded.

"This is it."

"It smells quite delicious."

Todd came into the kitchen.

"I was just looking out the window and I saw Mrs. Williams' nephew coming here with a policeman."

The doorbell rang just as Todd finished his sentence.

"We'll just have to stick to our previous story," said Deana, wiping her hands.

Deana showed both men into the living room.

"It's Aunt Lilly, I think she's gone missing. I've phoned everywhere and no one's seen or heard from her."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Deana.

"Mr. Williams tells me she came to see you on the evening she returned from Brighton," said the policeman.

"Yes, yes she did."

"Did she mention where she was going, who she was staying with?"

"I think she was talking about taking another trip."

"This is correct," said Sir Ian. "I seem to remember that as well."

"I think we have to assume your aunt is a missing person. I'll file a report at the station. Now if we could get a full description and a photo."

"I'll go to her house and get one for you. And Deana, if you do hear from her, could you let me know straight away?"

"Of course."

"Do you think they know she disappeared from here?" asked Sir Ian after the two men had left.

"I don't think so."

"Do you think there is a possibility that she might be...well, you know, dead?"

"We heard her calling to us, and we saw her before she disappeared again," said Deana.

"I would hate to think she has lost her life over me. Perhaps we should tell the policeman the whole story."

"Do you really think anyone's going to believe how you got here? Or even how Mrs. Williams disappeared?"

"Sometimes I do not believe it myself."

Deana had worried about the visit from the policeman more than she'd let Sir Ian know. She knew they should have owned up to more than they had, but as Sir Ian had said, who would believe their story anyway. If they did start telling the authorities that Sir Ian had returned from the dead...well, it was possible that they could all end up in that psychiatric hospital down the road.

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Deana felt more at ease when the weekend arrived. Deana and Sir Ian loaded the picnic items into the car. She got out a road map and placed it across the hood of the car.

"Do you remember where this house was?" she asked.

"Let me see if I can remember."

Sir Ian studied the map. "Tonbridge. Yes, it was just outside Tonbridge, close to Tunbridge Wells. I remember my mother and aunt used to take the waters at the spa there."

"Would you recognize the house?"

"Of course. Well, that is if it has not been changed into a hotel."

Deana got into the car and Sir Ian sat beside her, while Amy and Todd sat in the back.

"I have to say I hate picnics," said Todd about an hour into their journey. "They're so boring."

"You have obviously not been on a proper picnic," said Sir Ian. "The fresh air, the scenery..."

"The warm food, the flies, the bees," added Todd.

"You have raised a cynic as a son."

"But a realistic one," said Deana. "By the way, we're just approaching the town called Tonbridge."

Sir Ian looked out of the window. Nothing looked familiar at the moment. "Keep driving toward Tunbridge Wells," he said, putting the map on his lap.

About half an hour later he glanced out of the car window and saw something familiar.

"That's it," he said.

"Where?"

"The walled property over there. It is the house with the beige brick wall surrounding it. And can you believe it, it is still the same color as it was when we lived there."

Deana stopped the car and then backed up. Sir Ian looked up the driveway. It was exactly how he remembered it.

"Drive up to the front of the house," he said.

"I can't do that. Look, there's a number on the gate. It's someone's house."

"It was once my home and I insist we take a look."

Deana turned into the driveway. Sir Ian looked from side to side. A few things had changed, but surprisingly most things looked the same, even the pebble-lined driveway.

"Oh, would you take a look at the splendor of this place," he said when the house came into full view.

"It's lovely," said Deana.

"Let us go and take a good look around."

"Sir Ian, we can't just do that. This is someone's home, we're trespassing."

He was not having any of that. It had once been his home. In his mind that made him entitled to at least look around the place. He got out of the car, walked over to a rose bush and bent down to take in its scent.

"Can I help you?"

Sir Ian saw an elderly man walking toward him. He was wearing a strange-looking straw hat and carrying some type of pruning shears.

"I am just taking a look around. I used to live here."

"You don't say, when was that?"

"Oh...quite a good many years ago now."

"It must have been because we've lived here for thirty-five years."

"Yes, it was many years ago."

"What's your name?"

"Ashby, Sir Ian Ashby."

"I'm very pleased to meet you, Sir Ian. I'm Nigel Porter. Ashby, you say, the name does sound familiar. I'm sure I've seen it somewhere around here."

"It is quite possible that there are still Ashbys in this area. We were quite a large group."

"And is this Lady Ashby?"

Sir Ian turned around to see that Deana was now standing by the car.

"No, this is Deana Adams, and her two children. They are good friends of mine."

"I'll tell you what, Sir Ian, I'm all on my own for the afternoon, why don't you all come into the house and I'll whip up some tea and cakes?"

"That would be splendid. Come along, Deana, Todd, Amy, we have been invited inside."

The man put down the shears and then wiped his feet as they went through the front door. Sir Ian looked around the hallway. The basic structure of the place looked exactly the same. Yes, apart from the change in furnishings, the place looked identical to when he'd lived there.

"Do come through this way," said Nigel.

He showed them through to the living room.

"Ah, the ceiling, I always remember that ceiling," said Sir Ian.

"Yes, a beauty, isn't it, we wouldn't dream of ever altering it. Please sit down and make yourself at home. "I'll go and make us some tea, and lemonade for the youngsters."

"Has the room changed very much?" asked Deana after Nigel had left the room.

"Surprisingly, no, and at least it is not a hotel."

Todd went over to a bookshelf.

"Don't touch anything," said Deana.

"I wasn't going to," said Todd.

"Here we are," said Nigel. "I hope you like Dundee cake."

"I hope we are not keeping you from anything important," said Sir Ian.

"No," Nigel said, pouring the tea. "I was just

puttering around in the garden."

"My mother loved the garden. She would say it was the highlight of her time here."

"When did your family move here?"

Sir Ian looked at Deana.

"I am sure it was long before even the former tenants lived here."

"Funny, you don't look that old."

"I was just a mere child at the time."

"With a good memory. Are you just passing through?"

"Yes, we are going to have a picnic."

"You have a beautiful day for it."

"Is that land over to the left of the property still vacant?"

"No, darn shame too, but someone bought it up and made it a retirement home; happening all the time now."

"Indeed."

"But I can suggest another area for a picnic. Turn right as you go out of the driveway and keep driving down this road to the roundabout. Drive to the other side and there's a beautiful woodlands about a mile down on the left."

"We will take your advice on that. And I feel we are taking up your valuable time. We will take our leave, but thank you for the splendid cake and tea."

"Yes, thank you very much," said Deana.

Nigel walked them to the car. "Stop by again if you're ever in this area."

"Indeed we will," said Sir Ian.

Deana was just pulling away when Sir Ian saw Mr. Porter tapping on the car window. Sir Ian wound it down.

"I just remembered where I'd seen your name, Sir Ian. Out in the back, the area by the patio. The name Portia Ashby is carved into the stone."

"Ah, indeed, yes. I remember my sister carving

that one sunny afternoon. In fact, it was a day very much like today."

"I'll think of our visit each time I look at it," said Nigel.

Sir Ian nodded and then wound up the window.

"You handled all that very well," said Deana, pulling out of the driveway.

"I had believed so, but I may just have made a grand faux pas."

"Oh, how?"

"I should not have told him it was my sister who carved that name. Or even worse, that I remember the actual event."

"Didn't she carve her name there?"

"Oh, indeed she did. Portia made a hobby of doing that sort of thing. But next time he looks at it he will see the year, 1807, carved by it. I can guarantee that he will never forget my visit this afternoon. Yes, he will probably think about me each time he sits there."

"He might not give it a second thought."

"No, perhaps not. Oh, and I did not ask him if the ghost is still there."

"Wow, a ghost," said Todd, learning forward. "You mean we've just been in an authentic haunted house?"

"Oh, yes, we used to see him quite often on the stairs. He used to take things from us, and then they would show up in the strangest of places."

"Todd, when did you start believing in ghosts?" asked Deana.

"I believe in Sir Ian, so I have to believe in ghosts now. Isn't that right?"

"Ah, but you can touch me. This gentleman, this ghost, well, you could put your hand right through his body."

"What did it feel like?" asked Amy.

"Cold, almost as if one was plunging one's hand

into ice cold water."

"And you think he's still there?" asked Amy.

"I would imagine he would be. Mr. Porter may not be aware of him. I was quite young when I saw him. They say children have a talent for that sort of thing."

"Maybe that's how we could call you back from the dead. It's like Mrs. Williams told us, she thinks we have a gift."

"Can we change the subject?" asked Deana.

"I am so sorry; I forgot that the spirit world disturbs you," said Sir Ian.

"It's not that, it's..."

"I know exactly what it is," said Sir Ian, placing his hand on top of hers.

Deana saw what looked like the area Nigel had described. "This looks like the woodland area," she said.

"I think I remember this place too," said Sir Ian.

"Looks like we're the only ones here at the moment," said Deana.

"Pull the car up over there. We can walk through that pathway. I am sure there is a stream over on the other side."

Deana parked the car. They all got out and stretched their legs. Sir Ian carried the picnic basket while Deana took out the plaid blanket. They went along the pathway, and then climbed the hill that looked over a valley.

"I was right; you see a stream."

"You have a great memory," said Deana.

"Let us take our picnic down to the water's edge."

Deana had to admit it was beautiful, and not to mention the ideal spot for a picnic. She laid the blanket down on the ground and Sir Ian put the basket on top of it.

"There isn't anything to do here," said Todd as

they all sat down.

"The pleasure comes in the actual experience of eating out here in nature. And I am sure I can find you something to do."

Deana opened up the basket and took out four plates. She then got out some dishes containing cold chicken, salad, and bread rolls. She'd packed lemonade for the children and wine for her and Sir Ian.

"Let me get that for you," said Sir Ian, taking the bottle from her.

"So what do we do once we've eaten?" asked Todd.

"If you are asking what we used to do, then I can tell you that we usually went for a long walk. My sister would look for flowers to take home and then she would press them into her diary."

Todd gave an exaggerated yawn.

"Todd, don't be so downright rude," said Deana.

Sir Ian put the down the chicken leg he'd been eating. "And what would you be doing if you were not here with your mother and me? Probably listening to that awful noise you call music."

Deana could sense an argument brewing. "Okay, you two, we've been keeping things very civilized lately, let's not spoil it. Why don't you and Amy take the Frisbee and..."

"Frisbee?" said Sir Ian.

"This," said Deana.

Sir Ian took it from her. "What does one do with this?"

"We'll show you," said Todd. "Come on, Amy."

Sir Ian watched as Amy and Todd threw the Frisbee back and forth to one another.

"And they believe looking for flowers is a boring task."

"To each his own," said Deana.

"I do not suppose I will ever fully understand

this new world."

"Oh, the Frisbee isn't the most bizarre thing we've produced. In the '70s we had pet rocks."

"I do not believe what you are telling me. A rock as one's pet, as one has a dog? And did you have one?"

"No."

"I am relieved to hear that."

The Frisbee came across and landed on the blanket.

"Throw it back," shouted Todd.

Deana handed it to Sir Ian. "Give it a try."

Sir Ian threw it and the Frisbee hit a tree trunk.

"Oh, dear. I do not think I will be very good at this."

"It takes practice."

"Mom, is it okay if Todd and I walk down over the hill to take a look?"

"Sure, but make sure you stay together."

"Would you like to take a walk along by the stream?" asked Sir Ian.

"I'd love to."

As usual, Sir Ian put his arm out for Deana, but then withdrew it. "I forgot it is holding hands that is now in fashion."

Deana tried to pull her hand away, but Sir Ian had a firm grip on it.

"Did you bring your lady friends here?"

"Only the one."

"Did you love her?"

"I thought I did at the time."

"But you later found out that you didn't?"

"No, actually I did not find that out until I came back to life."

"You've learned something worthwhile, then."

"Indeed, I have. Is this not a wonderful view over the valley?"

"It is, and the air smells a lot fresher here. Has

it always been like this?"

"Surprisingly, yes. In fact, I can remember standing here with Lady Wellington. She was holding my arm, just as I am standing here holding your hand."

"Lady Wellington?"

"Yes, I have mentioned her before."

"I think I remember; she was married. In fact, didn't you mention that many of your conquests were married women? Were you always trying to break up happy unions?"

Sir Ian coughed.

"It was not what I usually did, no, but this was not a very happy union; it had not been a love match."

"And so that made it okay for you to have an affair with her? I've read that during your days people made love with just about anyone and had more partners than they had meals."

"And now who is being critical? You are saying that people do not have affairs today?"

Deana pulled her hand away and walked off.

Sir Ian looked at Deana. Darn it, he had a loose tongue. He had forgotten what Mrs. Cooke had told him about Deana's husband.

"Deana, please, I am sorry if I offended you," he said, taking two large strides toward her. He grabbed her arm and turned her around to look at him. He could see her eyes had tears in them.

"I am most humbly sorry if I said anything offensive."

"There's no need to apologize. It's just I was feeling sad."

"It is all my fault; I have brought on such sadness."

"Why would you think it was your fault?"

Sir Ian could not think of anything to say, so he kissed Deana. He felt her arms going around his

neck, her lips parting for him. He pulled her in as tight to his body as humanly possible, hoping she could now feel his excitement for her, and only her. He had once shared a similar encounter with Lady Wellington at this very same spot, but with Deana it was different. It was not just physical, but emotional too. He moved his hand up and down her back. This was a wonderful day. He tried to hold on to his thought, but he felt something hard strike him in the back.

He pulled away, and then felt something sitting on his foot. He looked down and saw the Frisbee lying there. He looked up to see Todd standing up on the hill above them. He could actually see the boy had a grin on his face.

"Your mother had something in her eye," he shouted up to him.

Darn it, in his days, it was a woman's father or brothers one had to be careful of; now it was a woman's offspring. Still he had overheard Deana talking on the phone just the other day. If he was not mistaken, she was making arrangements for the children's return to America. That meant that he would soon have Deana all to himself. Yes, with the children gone, he would finally be able to make love to Deana.

Deana could sense Sir Ian was occasionally glancing at her as they drove back to London. Todd had been silent since he'd seen her and Sir Ian kissing. She pushed her hair behind her ear as they got in a line of traffic. The silence was making her uncomfortable, so she turned on the radio. She saw Sir Ian looking at her again, but she was going to do her best not to turn her head to look at him.

She'd been carried away with emotion this afternoon. Of course, she'd been aware she was physically attracted to Sir Ian for more than a few weeks now. But this afternoon, she'd learned one more thing; she was getting emotionally involved with him too. And that was ridiculous, she could not give her heart to him; he looked alive, he looked like every other man, but in the back of her mind she would always know the truth about him. It was tragic enough when a man up and left you, it would be even sadder if he just disappeared into a puff of smoke.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

When they got back to the house, Sir Ian carried the blanket and picnic basket inside the house. Deana got out her key and opened up the door. She looked at the floor next to the fax machine and noticed someone had sent her a letter. She picked it up and read it.

"I can't believe this," she said.

"What is it?" asked Sir Ian.

"We've had an offer for a company to merge with Maatron."

"You can't let that happen, Mom. Dad left the company for me and Amy to run one day," said Todd.

"Don't worry, I have no intention of letting someone else buy into the company. My only fear is if the members of the board outvote me."

"Surely not," said Sir Ian.

"I'm afraid it's possible," said Deana. "I'm going to make some phone calls to see what the general feeling is about all this."

Sir Ian sat looking at the sheet of paper that the fax had delivered to Deana. The name of the company was the Orden Corporation. It sold computers, and was seeking another computer company to merge with. He saw Deana coming back into the room. He had never seen her wearing glasses before, and thought they made her look even more becoming and sophisticated.

"How did things fare?"

"I have two who aren't sure which way they'd vote," she said, sitting down.

"Could you persuade them to vote to your

liking?"

"I'd have my work cut out for me. This Orden Corporation is offering them jobs at their head office. And the terms seem very attractive. Top positions and better salaries."

"Oh, dear me," said Sir Ian. He stood up, walked over to her, and then knelt down beside her. "I have never seen you wear those things before," he said, pointing to her face.

"Oh, you mean these glasses," said Deana, pushing them to the top of her head. "I should wear them more often, but I don't."

"They are very becoming on you and there is nothing shameful in having to wear such things."

"It's got nothing to do with vanity...yes, it has. Every time I put them on and look in the mirror...well, I'm reminded I'm not getting any younger."

"Nonsense, you do not look a day over twentyfive," he said, running his hand over her left cheekbone.

"Sir Ian?"

'Yes?"

"About this afternoon."

"The picnic?"

"The kiss."

"Ah, the kiss, I enjoyed it."

"I did too. And then there's the matter of all the other little incidents."

"Ah, the stairs that night, the kiss on the couch, the inquisitive lady's hand."

Deana found herself coloring instantly.

"None of these things can ever happen again."

"They cannot?"

"No."

"I think I will prove you wrong."

He pressed his lips to hers and then placed his hand on her shoulder.

"Sir Ian, no," she said, pulling away.

"You have nothing to fear, your son is nowhere to be seen. There is no Frisbee to throw at my head." Deana laughed.

"He's protective of his mother."

"And no doubt his father too."

"Yes, and his father."

"But surely he has to realize one thing. He must know that you will want to be involved with another man one day."

"He will, but that day hasn't arrived yet."

"It has not?"

"No, it hasn't."

Deana saw Sir Ian looking at her. He was too wise for his own good. She could swear he knew what she was thinking, what she was feeling. She thought she'd loved Alex Adams; she wanted to believe she still loved him, despite all the pain and hurt he'd caused her. But then this strange man, a dead man, had appeared in her life, literally appeared, and she was gradually falling in love with him. And if that wasn't bad enough, the type of love she felt for Sir Ian wasn't the same type of love she'd felt for Alex. Yes, she'd loved Alex, but she was in love with Sir Ian. She knew there was a big difference, and that's what scared her the most.

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Deana knew she had her work cut out for her.

"I'm probably going to spend the whole day at the office," said Deana the following morning. She took her raincoat down from the coat stand. Sir Ian took it from her, and then held it so she could easily slip her arms into it.

"May I accompany you?" asked Sir Ian.

"If you like, but it might be a bit boring for you."

"I'm sure I can find something to do."

Sir Ian had been bored. He had gone into each department of the business and tried his best to

learn about everything. He felt like a scholar of some kind. He had finally settled down on a couch in the reception area to wait for Deana. He saw her emerge from the boardroom looking most fatigued.

"How did you fare today?"

"It's going to be a tough one. I've decided to meet the enemy face on. I'm going to meet with the Orden Corporation's CEO tomorrow."

"Is that a good idea?"

"I think so. I want to let them know that I'm not interested in any merger with them. And if they do try to join with us, well, then I'll treat it like a hostile takeover. I'm really hungry all of sudden, why don't we get something to eat."

It was pouring rain when they got outside. In fact, the rain and heavy clouds were making it seem later in the day than it actually was. Sir Ian put Deana's umbrella up over their heads and they started to walk along the street.

"There's a café down the road; it's small but the food's great."

The café was crowded, so Deana and Sir Ian had to wait for a table. She was glad she wasn't alone because the whole day had been draining on her. Running a large company like Maatron wasn't easy. Maybe that's why Alex had been so bad-tempered most of the time.

"What were you up to all day?" Deana asked Sir Ian while they waited for their meals to arrive.

"I had a tour of all the departments. I must say I find it all quite fascinating."

"Maybe you should think about taking a job with us. What type of work did you do?"

"People of my class did not really work as such. We had businesses. My family was in shipping. Of course, we were eventually affected by the war and the blockade."

Deana nodded.

"Perhaps I could work in your reception area."

"Could I trust you with the fax machine?"

"I have learned my lesson with that. I just thought perhaps when Julie leaves your employ."

"Julie? I didn't know she'd given us her notice."

"I feel it will not be long. I did not mean to pry, but I saw one of those pregnancy test kits from the advertisements sitting in her bag, and she also had a queasy look most of the morning."

Deana smiled. "I've got a feeling you don't miss a thing."

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Deana was looking forward to getting back to the house, and to a nice long soak in the bath. When she opened the front door she expected to hear loud music, but instead she heard a familiar chanting.

"Bring our father, Alex Adams, to us, come to us..."

"What the...they can't be."

Deana ran down the hallway and pushed the living room door open with such force that it hit the wall and rebounded back. The room was dark, but she was able to see Todd and Amy sitting on either side of the table with a candle burning in the middle. Their arms were outstretched and they were holding hands. She snapped on the light, and they both looked up at her.

"How dare you, how dare you? What have I told you about doing this sort of thing...and to your own father?"

"Mom, we need Dad back now. The business is in trouble."

"I can handle it. How dare you think about doing this again? Haven't you caused enough trouble for Sir Ian?"

"If we can bring back Sir Ian, we can bring back Dad. And Sir Ian doesn't seem to be having such a bad time now." "You just listen to me. What you did was wicked, but I've forgiven you. Sir Ian has graciously forgiven you, but you're not to think about bringing your father back. Do you hear me?"

"I hear you, Mom. I didn't want to say this before, but I don't think you really want us to bring back Dad. I think you want him to remain dead. You've got Sir Ian now. Yes, Mom, I saw the two of you down by that stream. Dad coming back just might ruin everything for you now."

Deana took three strides toward Todd and slapped him across the face. He held his cheek, looked at her for a few seconds, and then ran out of the room.

"How could you, Mom, how could you hit him like that?" said Amy, bursting into tears. She got up and ran out of the room after her brother.

Deana put both hands to her mouth and burst into tears herself. She turned around to see Sir Ian standing in the doorway.

"Sir Ian, what have I done?"

"You did exactly what you should have done, dear Deana. Do not worry about your actions."

"But I've never laid a hand on either of them. I don't even believe in spanking children, no matter how naughty they are. I've never hurt my children before."

"Todd's words were out of place. He was lippy; no boy should speak to his mother in such a dreadful manner."

"I don't know what came over me. I have to go up and apologize to him."

"I think he should be the one who apologizes."

"No. I'll have to put this matter right."

Deana walked up the stairs. She went along to Todd's room and knocked gently on the door. He didn't answer; she guessed he was listening to music. He usually did that when he got upset. She opened the door. Todd was lying on the bed with his headphones on.

"Todd."

He turned his head to look at her, but then turned back to his original position. Deana walked over to this bed and sat down. She pulled off his headphones and sat them on the bed.

"Just leave me alone."

"We have to talk. I'm sorry I hit you. You know I love you and Amy more than anything else in this world."

"We know that."

"And you also know why I was so angry with you."

"We just wanted to bring Dad back."

"But you can't. You have to accept that he's dead."

"But we did it with Sir Ian."

"It was just a lucky thing. And you know it was wrong."

"You don't seem to think it was a mistake anymore."

"What you saw yesterday was nothing."

"I'm worried, Mom. At first you and Sir Ian seemed to hate one another, but now...I've seen the looks you're giving one another. I may be young, but I know about those looks. And after yesterday, I just got worried."

"Okay, yes, it's true. I am beginning to like Sir Ian. He's not so bad after all. But a man and a woman can just be friends."

"You're sure that's all you want to be with him? I mean, are you thinking about sleeping with him or something?"

Deana shook her head. She hated lying to her son. Recently, she had thought quite a bit about making love with Sir Ian, having him beside her when she woke up in the morning. "We're just friends," she said. "And you have to promise me you won't ever try this again."

"I promise."

Deana bent down and kissed him on the head.

"But you have to understand that one day someone special might come into my life."

"I know, Mom, but he won't replace Dad in your heart, will he?"

"No, of course not."

Amy was waiting outside Todd's room when Deana left.

"I heard you talking to Todd. Thanks, Mom, and I'm sorry too. I won't do that again."

Deana hugged her. "It's all forgotten now, and we won't talk about it again."

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Deana went into the bedroom and almost collapsed on the bed. She was tired and both her body and brain ached. She heard a knock on the door.

"Deana, it is Sir Ian."

"Come in."

She saw the door swing open and Sir Ian stood in the doorway.

"I just wanted to ask if everything is all right."

"It's fine, we've sorted it all out."

"I'm delighted to hear that. May I sit down and speak with you?"

"Sure."

Deana took off her shoes, got up, and walked to the dressing table. She took off her earrings and set them down on the dressing table. She looked in the mirror and saw Sir Ian had seated himself on her bed.

"I was wondering if I should leave the house."

Deana turned around to face him. "Whatever for?"

"Perhaps it is I who is causing this problem."

"If there's any problem, it's with my children. Anyway, where would you go?"

"Probably to my old home. I know it is a hotel now, but at least I could have my own room, even if I would have to pay for the privilege."

"I couldn't possibly let you do that. I mean, my children brought you here, so you're my responsibility. This is your home."

"Do you think I will ever go back to...you know?" "Do you want to?"

Sir Ian shook his head. "It is true what Todd said. I am beginning to enjoy my life. Even if I do have to travel in metal monsters and be with a woman who has far too much to say for herself."

He winked at her.

"We'll see if that's true tomorrow when I face the Orden Corporation."

"My thoughts will be with you. Perhaps at the end of the week, we could go on another picnic. You look fatigued, still pretty of course, but tired. I think the country air is just what you need."

"We can go, but on one condition."

"I know what you are about to say. That I do not try and embrace you like that again."

"Exactly."

## \*\*\*\*

Deana sat in the conference room the following day and looked over the notes the Orden Corporation had faxed her. She looked up and across the table to the man who sat at the other end.

"I'm sure your company is very successful, but I'm not really interested in merging my company with anyone else, successful or not."

"Mrs. Adams, please think carefully about this." "I have."

"But surely you must realize that together we could be a very successful company. I mean not only in Europe, but the rest of the world." "If that means merging and losing some of our autonomy, then I'd rather be the second-best company in the world."

"I won't give up, Mrs. Adams."

"Then one of us is going to be very disappointed."

"If I can win over any of your stockholders, then I'm afraid it's going to be you, Mrs. Adams."

"Is that a polite way of threatening me with a hostile takeover?"

He raised his hands. "See it however you want."

"I think we've finished with our discussion," said Deana, standing up. "My assistant will show you out."

He stood up. "You'll be hearing from me again."

"Yes, unfortunately I'm sure I will."

Deana thought she had handled that quite well. At least he would know she wasn't some weakling who had foolishly been left in charge of a thriving business.

She left the office and drove home. She liked the fact that she wasn't going home to an empty house. She went through the front door and hung her jacket up in the hallway. Something smelled wonderful. She went along to the kitchen and saw Todd and Amy mashing potatoes, while Sir Ian was stirring something in a dish on the stovetop.

Sir Ian looked up at her. "Ah, Deana, you are back."

"What's going on in here? It all smells so wonderful."

"We knew you've had a hard day. Plus, we wanted to say we're sorry," said Todd.

"We're cooking dinner," said Amy. "We even got Sir Ian involved. He's prepared one of his favorite recipes."

"Actually it was my mother's recipe. I think you will love it; it is a good potted pigeon."

"Wait a minute," said Deana. "Where did you get a pigeon from?"

"He went up on the roof. You always said they were ruining it with all their dirty droppings, so Sir Ian took care of one or two of them," said Todd.

"You didn't! How could you, Sir Ian?"

"Your son is being, what do people say now? Pulling your leg. I have substituted chicken for a pigeon."

Deana let out a sigh of relief.

"Not that I can see any difference. I mean, how can one eat chicken and then get squeamish about a little pigeon? They are both birds."

"But I've fed pigeons in the park," said Deana.

"I will never understand the female mind," said Sir Ian, bringing the dish to the table.

"I never knew you cooked, Sir Ian. First vacuuming, and now this; you're quickly becoming a 21<sup>st</sup> century man."

"It is just this one time," said Sir Ian quickly. "Just to let you try some of the cooking of my time. If you'd all take a seat?"

Deana pulled up a chair as Sir Ian placed two spoonfuls of the dish onto her plate. She had to admit it looked great. She then helped herself to the potatoes and carrots.

"It's very good," she said after she'd taken her first bite. "In fact, it's excellent."

"I am glad you think so."

"Maybe you'd like to tell us more about the customs of your time."

"Yes, we'd love to hear about it," said Amy.

"Perhaps we should try and locate some books about my time. In fact, I would love to read about what historians have to say about the Regency period."

"We can take you to the library tomorrow," said Todd.

"And that reminds me," said Deana, putting down her fork. "If you want to buy anything to take back home with you, you should do it soon," she told Todd and Amy.

"Yes, I thought I heard that the children will be leaving soon," said Sir Ian.

"They have to go back to school on September  $5^{\text{th}}$ ."

"We don't have to," said Amy.

"Oh, yes, you do."

"Oh, dear me, how I will miss both of you," said Sir Ian.

"And just think, he used to call us imps," said Todd.

"You are still quite impish at times. But one can still miss imps."

"You can come and see us," said Amy.

"I do not think so. I have seen those things that travel through the sky. And your mother has even told me that women are at the controls of some of those things. I like to keep my feet on the earth. I take it, Deana, that you will be staying on here at the house?"

"That's right. It will be the first year that I haven't gone back with the children, but this time I've got to stay a few more months to catch up with the work."

"And Todd and Amy, who will look after them?"

"My parents. They're going to stay at the house in New York."

"You'd love them, they're cool. More liberal than Mom," said Todd.

"Liberal?"

"It means they let them get away with just about anything and everything."

"You've also got to look after Mom," said Amy. "To make sure she behaves herself."

"I will, of course I will. I can be a strict

disciplinarian when I need to be."

Deana loved taking Sir Ian to places he'd never seen before. There was so much to read in his view as he studied the new area. She watched as he looked around the bookshelves in the local library.

"Did you have libraries during the Regency period?"

"Yes, but now there are so many more books."

"Let's look at the reference file to see what they have."

Deana pushed a few buttons, and a few titles came up on the screen.

"What is this one?" he asked, pointing to the screen.

"It's a romance."

"Romance?"

"Yes, lots of romances are set in Regency England. Women seem to love it. In fact, lots of people are great fans of the whole Regency period."

"Fans, is that not what one cools one's self down with?"

"It is, but now we also use the word to mean an admirer."

"Ah, now I understand. And I am not surprised people love my time period, especially after seeing some of the things that go on now. I would like to read one of these romances as well as a few of these historical books."

They returned to the house an hour later and Sir Ian had a pile of books.

"Mom, Julie called to say some men from the Orden Corporation want to call a stockholder's meeting tomorrow," said Amy.

Deana sighed. "I keep hoping they'll go away."

"I think I should come along with you," said Sir Ian.

"I can handle it."

"Nevertheless, I think you should take me along as a business advisor. They may think you have taken outside counsel."

"But you don't know anything about the company and the products."

"Do you have any books about your company?"

"We have brochures and a confidential file about our new product."

"I will read them tonight."

"As well as the library books?"

"I have always been a fast reader."

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"I found those brochures very interesting, especially learning how your husband founded the company," said Sir Ian as they walked into the boardroom.

Deana saw everyone already seated at the table.

"Good morning; this is Sir Ian Ashby. I've hired him as my business advisor."

Sir Ian nodded and sat down next to Deana.

"I'll start by saying two things," said Deana. "First of all, I'm totally opposed to a merger. And secondly, I strongly believe that none of this would even be happening if Alex was still president."

She saw the men look at one another, and then one man spoke up.

"The fact that you're a woman heading this company has nothing to do with this matter. We just think a joint venture will be the best for everyone."

"Okay, let's discuss what the advantages would be."

"Better distribution for our new line of computers."

"I hope none of you have spoken about this new line of computers to anyone at the Orden Corporation," said Sir Ian.

"Of course not."

"I'm assuming you're going to take a vote on

this?" said Deana.

"I think we owe it to the company to do what's best."

"Can you give me some idea of which way each of you will vote?"

"Let's just wait and see, shall we, Deana."

"Okay, shall we say Friday morning at 9 a.m.," said Deana, opening up her appointment book.

The men filtered out of the room while Deana and Sir Ian remained seated.

"They're going to vote for the merger," said Deana.

"I assume that too. Are you sure it would not be for the best?"

"No way; Alex would have gone crazy. They would never have even attempted this with Alex heading the company. They're typical men, just a bunch of chauvinists."

"It is not an easy world."

"I've got to find a way to prevent this." Deana put her hands on the table. "Let's go and get something to eat."

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"Alex and I always ate here," said Deana when they sat down in the café.

"Did you meet him before he started the company?"

"No, many years after that. Alex was already a successful businessman by that time."

"How did you meet?"

"I'd just graduated from high school, and I was looking for a job for the summer. I was going to try and save money for college. I wanted to study art. Anyway, I saw this advertisement for an intern's job at Maatron."

"And you got the position?"

"Yes. I didn't meet Alex until two weeks later. He was away on a business trip when I started work there. He'd only been divorced about a year."

Sir Ian nodded as he listened.

"And he courted you?" he asked.

"No, not really."

"And he was your first..."

Deana knew he meant lover, so she nodded. "My one and only, if you must know."

"When did he open the London office?"

"Only about five years ago, and that's why I can't lose this company. I'd not only be letting Todd and Amy down, I'd be letting myself down too."

"There must be an answer."

"I've been thinking. I still have a few days before they vote, if I could try and find something about the company."

"You mean something to discredit them?"

"At least something that will put doubt in everyone's minds. Oh, can you believe this, I've forgotten my notebook," said Deana, opening up her bag to pay for the meal.

"Please, let me return and get it for you."

Sir Ian used the key Deana had given him. He saw a light coming from under one of the doors. That was strange because Deana had told him everyone would have left for the evening and that was the reason why he would need the key. He walked over to the door and heard a man's voice. He knew he was being nosy again, but he pressed his ear to the door and listened.

"Yes, I've got the main stockholder right where I want him. I found out he's given the blueprints to another company. I told him he either votes with us, or I tell Deana about it."

Sir Ian went into the boardroom, got hold of Deana's notebook and then left the room. He wasn't going to tell Deana about what he had heard; he was going to find the man and confront him. This needed a man's touch, and he would handle it for Deana.

## \*\*\*\*

Deana sat looking at Sir Ian as he sat reading by the lamp in the living room.

"Deana, I can tell you have something to say. A woman always has your sort of look and hesitation when she has something to ask a man."

"Tell me, were all men of your time that perceptive?"

"I am not sure; perhaps I am more so than the rest."

Deana laughed. "I forgot to tell you I thought you were great at the meeting today."

Sir Ian looked up. "Thank you."

"I was wondering ... "

"Yes?"

"Well, it looks like you're going to be staying around."

"Yes."

"I was thinking, you're going to need something to do, some money to live on. I was wondering if you'd like to stay at the house, rent-free...you know, and look after it while we're gone."

"It would be my pleasure."

"And also, I'd like you to come and work at the London office for me."

"In what capacity?"

"I'm sure we could find something for you."

"That is most generous of you. And indeed, I would like it very much."

"Good. I'll be flying back here every few months, so if you have any problems you can discuss them with me."

"Then we will be seeing one another on a regular basis. I will like that very much. And at least I will be close to my old home."

"I hope you feel this situation has worked out well for you."

"It has most perfectly."

She was waiting for him to say something else, but he returned to his book. She'd never known him to be so agreeable before and wondered if he was up to something.

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Sir Ian waited until Deana was safely in bed. He then went along to Todd's room and knocked on the door.

"Come in."

Sir Ian stepped inside the room. "I was wondering if you would have the names of everyone who works for your mother's company?"

"Why don't you ask her?"

"I want this to be a secret. I think I may have a way of preventing this other company from buying into your family business."

"How?"

"I cannot explain it all now."

"I think you should talk to Mom."

"I know what I am doing."

"But you know what Mom's like if she thinks anyone, especially us guys, are going behind her back and keeping things from her."

"Balderdash, she will be most grateful."

"Okay, be it on your own head. Go to the personnel department tomorrow, and they have a list of everyone. But don't say I didn't warn you if Mom hits the roof."

"Hits the roof?"

"A 21<sup>st</sup> century expression."

"Do not worry, if she hits the roof, I can go up there and get her down."

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The following day, Sir Ian waited for the right moment to go into Deana's office.

"I was wondering, as I am going to work here, I will need to go to the personnel department."

"You know about that?" asked Deana.

"I think I read about it in one of those magazines you gave me."

"I'll show you where it is, but I'm going to have to leave you there because I have a phone call to make to New York."

"I can deal with everything."

Sir Ian waited until Deana was out of sight.

"I wonder if you could tell me about one of your members of staff, he is the major stockholder."

"That's Colin Mitchell."

If Sir Ian wasn't mistaken, that was the name of the man who came to Deana's house that night. The one who took them to that awful play. Sir Ian was going to have to be a sly boots. He would tell Deana he wanted to look over some files, and then he could stay in the building and go through the gentleman's desk.

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Deana checked her watch. Maybe she should have insisted Sir Ian return home with her. It was almost like having a third child. She checked the casserole one more time and knew it was going to be ruined. She looked at the clock again, and then corrected herself. It wasn't like having a third child. She was worried because she was head over heels in love with the man. She looked at the clock again. He was probably out there meeting someone. Oh, just not anyone, probably an attractive woman, one who had the privilege of not knowing anything about his background.

"Good evening."

She turned around.

"You look very pleased with yourself."

"I managed to find my way home on the Underground."

"Why don't I teach you to drive? You could take a road test and then you'd be able to use the car when I'm not here." "No, no, I draw the line at public transportation. Of course, if they ever bring the horse and carriage back, I could..."

"Stick with the Underground."

"Have you ever ridden a horse?"

"Never."

"I cannot believe it."

"There's not much call for horses in New York."

"We will change that. We will find out where one can ride and you and I will go riding one day."

"I don't think so."

"I will not take no for an answer. And you will have plenty of time on your hands after Todd and Amy return home."

"I have work to do."

"But you must also have some leisure time."

"How about if I ride a horse, and you drive a car?"

"The monster, you know my views about that."

Deana laughed. "You can't be a 21<sup>st</sup> century man without driving a car."

"Then I will stay a 19<sup>th</sup> century one."

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For the next few days Deana tried to spend as much time as she could with the children. They went out shopping and she bought them new clothes for school. Since they'd arrived in England, she knew she was going to dread saying goodbye to them. Of course, when they arrived in England, she hadn't counted on having Sir Ian for company after their departure.

Deana put her head around Amy's door a few hours before they were set to leave for the airport.

"Have you got everything?" asked Deana.

"Yes, I'm just putting my last T-shirt in my suitcase."

"Great, I'm just going to check on Todd."

Deana went along to Todd's room to find Sir Ian

sitting on the bed talking to him.

"Ah, Deana, Todd and I were just having a manto-man talk."

"I'm going to let Sir Ian have my CD player. I've told him I can't play it at home because the electricity is different."

"I cannot believe electricity is not the same all over the globe. I mean, did more than one man discover it?"

"I've never thought of asking that in class," said Todd, stuffing more T-shirts in his bag. "And Sir Ian, you're not to play that music too loud."

"I am sure your mother will let me know if I do."

"That looks like everything," said Todd, closing the bag.

Deana looked at her watch. "Bring the bags downstairs and I'll put them in the car."

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Now came the part Deana hated, the actual farewell at the airport, but at least Sir Ian had offered to ride along.

"You did not warn me I would be so close to the planes," said Sir Ian when they parked the car. "On the ground the metal birds look huge. Are you sure they are safe for the children to travel in?"

"Statistics prove that you're safer in the air than you are on the ground," said Todd.

"Seeing how some people drive, I think I can believe that," said Sir Ian.

A plane took off and made a rumbling noise; Sir Ian couched down on the ground.

"Don't worry, Sir Ian, we'll get you over the fear of these things so you can come and see us in America," said Amy.

Deana took their bags and tickets to the counter while the children waited with Sir Ian. She walked back to them a few minutes later with their boarding passes and name tags. She pinned the first one on Todd's chest.

"Mom, you didn't put us in care of the flight attendant, did you?"

"It's the safest thing to do. After all, you've never traveled on your own before."

"It's going to make us look like babies. Will you tell her, Sir Ian, that we're no longer her babies?"

"Don't ask him for help. He's going the same way if he ever travels alone," said Deana.

Deana saw Sir Ian look at her and then she smiled.

"Come on, let's get you two through passport control and security before you miss the plane."

They waited in line to get into the area for ticketed passengers only.

"Remember you have to go through customs when you land, but don't worry about that, just show them your passports. Then Granddad will be waiting for you outside. Most of all, behave yourselves."

"I don't see what we can get up to on a plane," said Todd.

"You know what I mean. And will you call me as soon as you get home?"

Todd nodded.

"And you know I'll be with you again in a few months."

"We know, Mom. Sir Ian, make sure you take care of her."

"I most definitely will."

"Goodbye, my darlings," said Deana.

She kissed Amy first, and then Todd.

They went through the gate and then stopped to wave to her. Deana lifted her hand, blew them a kiss, and then she burst into tears.

"There, there, Deana," said Sir Ian, putting his arm around her.

"I know I'm going to see them again in a few months' time, and I know the time will go quickly. But I'm going to miss them. We've never been apart since I gave birth to them."

"They will be fine; after all, they are sensible children. I am sure being a parent is not an easy chore, but I think I have something that will lift your spirits."

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The following day Deana had a sneaky suspicion that Sir Ian was up to something. He had insisted they take another drive out into the countryside.

"Sir Ian, tell me if I'm being paranoid or not, but are we going horseback riding?" she asked him as they drove along.

"And you say I am the perceptive one. Yes, you are quite right, but I can assure you that you will love it. And I will hear no protests. I will not take no for an answer. I have put much effort into arranging this just for you. I found the number for the stables in the large yellow book. I even dialed the number all by myself."

"I appreciate that, but I think when we get there that I'll just watch you ride."

"We will see about that."

Deana could feel her legs starting to shake as she stood in the courtyard of the stables. She'd only been on a horse once in her lifetime and that had been when she was three years old. Her parents had taken her and her older sister out to a petting zoo. Her mother had insisted she sit on the horse so they could get a photo of her. As they'd placed her on top of its back the horse had been spooked by a car backfiring. It had reared up into the air, sending Deana sliding to the ground. She was fine, just a couple of bruises, but the embarrassing thing was, in her fright, she'd relieved herself on the saddle. Her parents and her sister had never let her forget about the incident.

She took a deep breath as she heard what

sounded like horse's hooves approaching her. She turned her head to look toward the stables. Two of the biggest black horses she'd ever seen were being led out into the courtyard.

"Mrs. Adams will watch me ride until she feels more comfortable," said Sir Ian.

"Very good, Sir."

Sir Ian took the reins of one of the horses and gracefully mounted it in one fluid movement.

"Steady there," said Sir Ian as the horse started to move backwards. "Ah, it feels marvelous to be on a horse once again. Come along, Deana, climb on the back of this one and ride with me."

Deana shook her head.

"Come along now, I have sat in your monster."

*He had a valid point there*, thought Deana.

"Okay, but if I don't like it or feel uncomfortable, I can get straight back down. Do we have a deal?"

"You have my word. And I will not let any harm come to you, but I think you know that already."

The stable boy held Deana's arm as she tried to mount the horse. She slipped a few times, but then Sir Ian simply put his arm behind his back and scooped her up. Deana looked down at the ground. Her stomach flipped. What if she got thrown off the thing again?

"Put your arms around my stomach and hold on tight."

She wrapped her arms tightly around his chest and turned her head to one side so her left cheek was resting on his back. Sir Ian pulled on the reins and the horse started to trot. Deana closed her eyes and started to pray.

"How do you like it?"

"It's okay...so far," said Deana, opening up one eye to take a peek. She just hoped she wouldn't be sick.

"After this, I feel you will give up riding in the

monster. It will be horses from now on."

"I can just picture everyone's face if I arrived at the office on horseback."

She could tell Sir Ian was encouraging the horse to go faster. She said another prayer as the horse started to gallop.

"Do I see a picnic set out over there?" asked Sir Ian.

Deana saw a basket and plaid blanket laid out under an oak tree.

"Shall we go and take a look?" he asked.

"It might belong to someone else," she said, knowing full well he'd set the whole thing up.

"No, it belongs to us."

"And how did you manage that?"

"The stable hand was most helpful."

He pulled the horse up, and with one single movement jumped down to the ground. He held Deana's hand as she slid down from the horse. He then took the reins and tied the horse to the oak tree.

"When did you arrange all this?"

"A few days ago. I knew you were going to be sad about the children leaving, so I thought this might lift your spirits."

"That was very thoughtful of you."

"I am glad you think so. Please have a seat."

Deana sat on the blanket as Sir Ian opened up the basket.

"Today, we have all sorts of sandwiches, pastries, wine, and a few surprise treats."

"It looks delicious."

Sir Ian handed her a glass and poured her some wine.

"Did you make all these yourself?"

"No, I ordered everything from a store in town. I asked specifically for food that would have been served during the Regency period." "And this is one of them?" asked Deana before she took a small tart from the basket.

"As close as one can get. Ah, and I forgot to tell you, while I was in the store I managed to acquire a pair of dueling swords. The house will be perfectly safe now."

"I told you we didn't need swords. Someone could end up getting hurt with those things."

"Balderdash; I will not use them unless it is an emergency, they will be merely for decoration. Does that make you feel any happier?"

"Well, in that case, why don't you put them over the fireplace. But only as a decoration; they're not to ever be taken down from there."

"Ah, this is just like the good old days," said Sir Ian, taking a few deep breaths.

"It seems as if you went on a lot of picnics in the countryside."

"Yes, they were one of my favorite ways to pass the time. And if the company was good, it made them all the more enjoyable."

"And I assume you went on lots of picnics with, let's see, what was her name, Lady Wellington."

"You have a good memory for names. Yes, we did go on a few picnics together, while her husband was away of course. However, she always rode her own horse. Quite the horsewoman was Lady Wellington."

"Ah, but would she have driven a metal monster?"

He laughed. "Knowing Lady Wellington as I did, she probably would have fainted at the mere thought of it."

"If she hadn't been married, would you have married her?"

"I vowed I would never marry. Of course, sometimes I used to think Lady Wellington would be made a suitable wife. However, since I have been back I have concluded she would not have been the right lady for me."

"What made you change your mind?"

"At first I was not sure, but now I know it is you, Deana."

"Me?"

"Yes, you," he said, running his index finger around Deana's jaw. "You have made me realize that I did not love Lady Wellington and that love is a higher...deeper emotion. Surely, Deana, you know I have very special feelings for you."

"Yes, as a good friend."

"No, not as a friend. You are just being silly if you do not know that we are beyond the point of friendship. We are on the point of becoming lovers. I suspect if the children had not been around, we would have already made love. I know you are more than ready, Deana."

"I don't think we should be having this conversation."

She tried to stand, but he held her arm and prevented her from doing so.

"And why should we not have this conversation? Why should we not make love? I am single, you are widowed."

"I haven't been a widow that long."

"A poor excuse. Look me in the eye and tell me you do not feel anything for me."

Deana tried to get up and move away again, but now found both of Sir Ian's hands holding her arms. He looked at her, but she tried to turn away.

"Look at me."

She turned to look him in the eye.

"I've grown fond of you. Yes, it's true," said Deana. "But I can't take it further than us being very good friends."

"Pray tell, why?"

"Because of the situation we're in. I've already

lost my husband; say I get involved with you and you return back to your former state."

"Oh, Deana, I am here to stay with you forever."

"But we'll never know that for sure."

"And this is the only reason you will not become more intimate with me?"

"Please, Sir Ian, let's not get into this any more."

"Your husband, he betrayed you, did he not?"

"How did you know that?"

"It does not matter. He was with the lady we met that day when we dined outside."

Deana nodded.

"He had a heart attack and she was with him, in our bed. It was the most humiliating thing I've ever had to deal with. I couldn't ever go through that again."

"Oh, dear lady, if you think I would ever do anything quite so vile, you are mistaken."

Deana suddenly felt his lips on her. Her lips parted as she felt herself falling backwards with Sir Ian's body going on top of hers.

He stopped kissing her and looked down at her.

"I know that you are still hesitant to become my lover, so let our time here this afternoon be a preview of what is to come. After that it is up to you to take the next step, if that is what you wish. Do you agree? And one other rule, you are not to say a word during this preview. Agreed?"

"Yes," said Deana.

"And you are to close your eyes and not peek. Do you agree?"

"Yes."

She closed her eyes and then felt him kiss her lips and then her chin. His lips moved slowly down the front of her throat. He pushed her gently to the ground and kissed her lips again. He then ran his tongue along her bottom lip.

She opened one eye, and he must have seen her

doing it.

"No peeking," he whispered in her ear.

She couldn't go on any longer about denying her feelings for Sir Ian. She wanted him, wanted him to make love to her right here on the blanket under the sky. She never felt this way about a man before. No, not even the man she'd been married to for all those years. Deana Adams had found true love at last.

She felt his hand moving down her belly. He tugged on her T-shirt and pulled it out from her jeans. He pushed his hand up inside and made his way up to her bra. He put his hand inside the left cup and found her nipple.

"Sir Ian."

"You promised not to speak," he whispered in her ear.

As he circled her nipple with his finger, she was having trouble staying under control. Would he consider moaning, speaking?

She felt his mouth touch her nipple. He kissed it gently and then circled it with his tongue. She did moan, but he said nothing.

She ran her fingers through his hair.

He pulled her T-shirt up over her head. He then lifted her shoulders off the ground and pulled off her bra. She felt a cool breeze on her chest now as he carefully laid her back down.

He kissed her lips and then let his mouth trail down her neck. He kissed each of her breasts, took the right nipple in his mouth and gently sucked on it.

She moaned before she could stop herself. She wanted to reach up and put her arms around him, but she felt him lift off of her and start to unzip her jeans. He peeled back both sides of the material and planted a kiss on her navel. He tugged the jeans down her legs and pulled them from her ankles.

He lifted her left leg and kissed her foot, then

gently kissed her leg all the way from ankle to thigh. He placed her leg back down. He didn't do anything for what seemed like minutes. It was probably only seconds. She wanted to tell him to hurry, to touch her more. A cool breeze brushed across her legs and feet just as she felt his hand sliding from her stomach and into her panties. He pulled them down her legs and pulled them from her ankles.

His fingers brushed across her stomach and then down to the folds of her womanhood. His fingers felt like they were feathers at first, but then she felt him stroke her harder.

She moaned again.

"I think you said something again," he said. "We will have to see about how to keep you quiet."

He kissed her as his fingers stroked her more quickly now.

She started crying out, and not even Sir Ian's mouth could muffle the sound of her whimpers.

But then he stopped kissing her, stopped stroking her.

"That has been your preview. If you want more of this, if you want me to make love to you, you will come to my bed tonight."

Deana sensed that he was gone. She sat up, opened her eyes and saw that he was already packing up the picnic basket.

She looked at him. He'd been right. She wanted nothing more than for him to make love to her. She had for the last few weeks. And now the next move was hers.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Deana had not known quite what to say on the ride home, or even at dinner that evening. She was wondering what he was thinking. Was he wondering if she could make the next move? What if she didn't? Would he give up, or did he love her so much that he would keep trying?

They had watched TV together, and then Deana's heart beat faster when he announced he was going to bed.

Deana waited for him to leave, waited until she heard his bedroom door closing shut. She turned off the lights and walked up the stairs. She walked over to his room.

If she turned the handle and went inside, everything would change. Everything between her and Sir Ian would suddenly be different. There would be no turning back.

She knew what she had to do.

She walked over to her own bedroom and started to undress.

Sir Ian was in bed, but he had managed to stop himself from falling asleep. He had heard Deana's footsteps outside his door. He had then heard them traveling across the hallway, obviously to her own room.

His heart had sunk when he heard the door closing. He was sure she would come to his bed tonight. He knew he had driven her crazy earlier that day. He had purposely stopped pleasuring her just so she would hunger for more of his touch, but perhaps he had been wrong to do that. He remembered feeling her body shaking when he had stroked her. He had heard her murmur. It had taken all his control not to make love to her there and then. But he wanted the move to be hers. He wanted her to realize that she wanted him just as much as he wanted her. No regrets, no thinking she had made a mistake becoming his lover.

And just when he thought all was lost, he heard footsteps outside his door again. He'd heard the doorknob being turned. His back was towards the door, but he could sense she was standing there close to his bed, looking down upon him.

He felt the bedclothes being lifted, then felt her warm body moving into his. He felt her breasts with their already hardened nipples pressing into his back. She made tiny little kisses across his shoulders and then down his spine. And then she wrapped her arms around him and kissed the back of his neck.

She moved her hands to his chest and stroked it, and then moved down to his stomach. Ever so slowly her hand found his manhood. She kissed the back of his neck again as she stroked him.

It was his turn to moan. If he didn't get the situation under control, he would not last more than a few minutes, and this was not what he had planned for them.

He made a quick turn and was now on top of Deana.

"I take it you enjoyed the preview this afternoon and that you are here for the rest of what I can give you."

Deana wasn't going to stop moaning, she wasn't going to stop saying his name this time. She wasn't going to be quiet.

She moaned when he took each nipple into his mouth. She called his name when he stroked her and gently put his fingers inside her. She wrapped her legs around his hips and arched her back as he slid into her. He started to move but then lifted her legs higher and slid even deeper.

She looked up at him, thinking she must be dreaming. Here she was, in love with a man who her children had brought back from the dead. Maybe he had been brought back to give her a second chance at loving and being loved again.

His pace picked up intensity and she grabbed the bedsheets on either side of her body and cried out. Her body was still trembling when she heard Sir Ian call out her name and then felt him slide his body down by her side.

Deana turned over to her side and Sir Ian quickly put his arm around her and cradled her. He kissed the top of her head. She looked up at him and then he kissed her forehead, her nose, and then her mouth.

"I wish this moment could last forever," said Deana.

Sir Ian pulled her in closer to him.

"Perhaps it will," he said.

Deana put her hand on his chest and made a circle around the scar on it.

"I'm so happy that my children selected you to call back from the dead. I mean, out of everyone in the cemetery, they picked you. Do you think it was fate?"

"I think it might have been. And just think if they would have chosen an ugly man."

Deana laughed and Sir Ian joined in. She hadn't felt this happy in a long time. And how many men liked to cuddle and talk after they'd made love? She was certainly a lucky woman.

"Are you tired, my darling?" asked Sir Ian.

"I couldn't sleep now even if I tried," said Deana.

"I am glad to hear that because I think I'm going to have to make love to you again."

"I was thinking the same thing." She barely had

time to say anything else before Sir Ian's mouth covered hers.

After they'd made love again Deana remembered him kissing her head and then gradually falling off to sleep wrapped in his arms.

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Sir Ian woke up and was relieved to know that it had not been a dream. Deana had come to his room the night before. They had finally made love and here she was asleep in his arms.

He would do anything to keep her safe from others harming her, and he would start by dealing with her company. He wanted her to be happy, for them to be happy together, but that would not happen until the business with her company was resolved. He would deal with that for her.

Sir Ian went straight into Colin's office and waited for him to arrive at work. He watched as he strolled in and immediately put his coat on the rack by the desk. Sir Ian had seated himself on the couch behind the door and as Sir Ian had suspected, Colin was totally unaware of his presence there.

"Sir Ian, I didn't see you sitting there," he said just after he sat at his desk.

"Obviously not."

"What can I do for you?"

"First of all, I think you should shut the door. And then I suggest you sit down."

"Goodness, this sounds serious."

"It is. I am sorry to have to discuss this with you, but it has come to my attention that you are about to vote in favor of the Orden Corporation buying into this company."

"Where did you hear that?"

"It does not matter where I heard it. I would just like to know if it is true."

"Of course it's true. It's the best thing that can happen to this company. Deana has to realize that before it's too late."

"Good for the company, or good for you?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"I think you do."

"I can assure you that I don't."

"Then you are telling me that you do not know anything about the patent on the new computer model?"

Sir Ian saw him lose every bit of the color from his face.

"What do you know about this?"

"Someone told me you were going to vote for the merger. And not because you think it is best for this company, but because someone knows you are selling plans for the new computer to a rival company. You are being blackmailed."

"I don't know how you could have found this out."

"So you do admit that it is true?"

"What's the use of denying it? And Deana, does she know about this, know about me?"

"No, I am the only one...at the moment."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am staying out of this now, but you will go to Deana and tell her you want to sell your shares. Then you are going to resign from this position. Should you ever sell or give that idea to anyone, I will personally take matters into my own hands."

"You can't do this to me. Who do you think you are, coming in here and taking over this place? Everyone here knows you're Deana's lover. I suppose you think you'll eventually head this firm."

"I want you to do as I have told you or I will inform Deana of your treachery against her. And she may just choose to take this matter further."

Sir Ian stood up.

"Okay, I'm going to resign, but don't think you, or Deana for that matter, has heard the last from me."

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Deana was sitting in her office talking to Julie when Colin came to the door.

"Can I speak with you, Deana? Privately."

"I was just leaving anyway," said Julie, standing.

Deana had never known Colin to come into her office and quickly shut the door before. In fact, the whole company had a relaxed policy of open doors and everyone knowing what everyone else was doing. She could only guess he had something on his mind.

"What can I do for you?"

"I'd like to sell my shares. Due to this current situation I'm sure you'd like an opportunity to buy them."

"I would, but what's brought this on?"

"I've been thinking about retiring and this seems to be a good time to just do it."

"If you're sure this is what you want, then I'll have my attorney and bankers see to everything. You know what this is going to do for the company?"

Colin nodded.

"Thank you. I wish you luck and a happy retirement," she said, placing her hand on top of his.

He stood up and left. Deana sighed. That was certainly a weight lifted off her shoulders. The Orden Corporation didn't stand a chance of a merger now.

Deana couldn't wait to get home to tell Sir Ian the news. When she got to the house, he was sitting in the living room reading the newspaper. He looked up when she entered the room.

"Is it still raining?" he asked casually.

"Yes, no signs of stopping tonight."

"How was your day?"

"I have to tell you something that you're never

going to believe. I don't have to worry about the takeover. Colin sold me his shares. He's decided he wants to retire."

"There you are, you see, I told you everything would work out. You should always listen to an Ashby."

"I'm so relieved, I thought the Orden Corporation was going to merge with us and then slowly take us over. I even got brazen and phoned them to tell them the news."

"I am very happy for you. How about some champagne?"

"Champagne, I didn't know we had any in the drink cabinet."

"I bought some...just in case. I believe it is always wise to have champagne in the house. One never knows when there will be something to celebrate."

Deana sat down as Sir Ian opened up the champagne and poured her a glass.

"All your problems are solved," he said, handing the glass to her.

She leaned over and kissed him.

"What can I get you for dinner?" she asked.

"I know what I would like to try."

"Name it."

"On my way home, I went by this store where people were coming out carrying packages and they were eating food from them. The sign above the store said fish and chips."

"There's a fish and chip shop just down the street, I can go and get us some."

"I think I would like to walk with you, I could use some fresh air."

Sir Ian insisted they share an umbrella as they walked along the road.

"I heard you speaking with the children earlier. How are they?" "They're fine and they love school. In fact, Amy has to do a history project, so she's chosen Regency England. She wants you to help her with it."

"I will be most honored to."

"And my parents were asking about you. My mother said you are all Todd and Amy ever talk about these days. They said you sound wonderful."

"I am glad to hear that, but I hope the children have not informed your parents how I came into your lives."

"No, I'm sure they've made up some clever story of how we happened to meet you."

They arrived at the store. Deana ordered two portions of cod and chips and then they walked back home.

"Let's eat this on our laps in front of the TV," said Deana as she opened the front door.

"Let us watch the little E.T. one more time."

"Oh, Ian, if I see that one more time, I'll scream."

"You do not like the little creature?"

"It's not that, but I've seen it more times than I care to remember."

Deana got out some plates and flatware.

"I thought that perhaps we could watch the movie and then retire upstairs," said Sir Ian, kissing her on the neck.

"How about we eat and just skip the movie," said Deana, putting her arms around him.

The doorbell rang.

"I wonder who that could be?" asked Deana.

"Ignore them, they will probably ruin our evening."

"No, I should go and answer it, it could be important."

"More important than Sir Ian making love to the woman of his dreams?"

The doorbell rang again.

"I'll be right back, I promise."

Deana walked to the front door and opened it. "Hello, June."

"Deana, I'd like to talk to you."

"Of course, come in."

Deana took June through to the living room.

"You remember Colin's wife, don't you?" she asked Sir Ian.

"Of course, good evening, Madam."

"What can I help you with?"

"It's Colin; he's very sorry for what he did."

"You mean selling me his shares? You mean he's changed his mind?" asked Deana.

"No, about revealing the ideas about the new computer and then being foolish enough to be blackmailed into voting for Orden Corporation to buy into the company."

"I don't understand."

"I think I may be able to enlighten you on this situation," said Sir Ian. "I found out what Colin was doing and gave him an ultimatum."

"You should have told me," said Deana.

"Please, won't you consider taking him back? This company has been his whole life. I just don't know what he'll do now without his work."

"I hadn't fired him, but hearing this, I don't think I want Colin to be part of my company. I'm sorry, June, but that's where I stand on this matter."

"I see it's been a waste of time coming here. Good night, Deana."

Deana walked June to the door. The woman didn't say a word as she left. Deana went back to the living room.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I did not think there was any need for you to be concerned about this matter."

"So how long have you known?"

"About a week."

"I can't believe Colin, or you for that matter. Why did you take it on yourself to make him resign?"

Sir Ian laughed. "But it is the same decision you have just made."

"I know, but it's my company. And once again someone I love has sneaked behind my back and not told me the truth."

"Deana, you are comparing your husband taking a mistress, another woman to his bed, with me merely taking charge of a business situation. I thought you were more intelligent than that?"

"The bottom line is that you kept something from me, you lied. I didn't expect that from you."

"You are making this issue far greater than it needs to be."

"I have to get some air," said Deana, grabbing her raincoat.

She went outside, thinking about what he'd done. *How dare he lie*, she thought. Sir Ian was supposed to be part of her happy ending.

Deana knew this was all wrong. She should not have become involved with Sir Ian. Her first instincts had been correct. She should have resisted him, resisted falling in love with him.

She put her hand into her pocket and found that Mrs. Williams' house key was still in there. She must have forgotten to hang it up again after she'd watered the plants.

Maybe she was supposed to find it in there and on this particular night. Maybe everything had happened for a reason. She went out the door, down the path and across the lawn to Mrs. Williams' house. She opened up the door and went inside. She glanced into the dining room and studied the books on the shelves. She pulled out one she thought might help her. Deana sat down, opened it up and paged through it. She finally found the page about calling people from the other side. She hated doing this to Sir Ian, she loved him, but it was the only way. There were no happy endings. This wasn't meant to be. Yes, they'd had one marvelous night together, but things had to go back as they were.

She found something of interest and started to read the paragraph. 'It is best to find something from the time period. One should hold on tightly to this object as the words are said, this brings the two worlds together as one.'

Something from his time period, thought Deana, looking around the room. She remembered the coat stand. Sir Ian had mentioned it when she'd brought him in here to water the plants.

She rushed out into the hallway and gently dragged it back to the dining room. She placed it by the table and sat back down.

Deana read the next set of instructions. "Focus on the time and place of death."

A heath near Tonbridge, and on, what did his headstone say? Yes, November 17, 1815.

"Now focus on how he died."

Deana closed her eyes, trying to visualize the duel with Earl Bingham.

"Now as you say the word 'return,' hold the token and focus on what you know about the circumstances surrounding the death."

Deana held the coat stand and closed her eyes.

"I'm sorry, Sir Ian, but I have to do this. Return Sir Ian," said Deana. "Return Sir Ian," she shouted.

Deana burst out crying when she heard a clap of thunder. He'd returned; she knew something was happening. She felt her hair standing on end and her skin starting to prickle. She felt a jolt of something hit her in the back. It was so strong it propelled her forward and she fell face-down onto the table.

Deana raised her head and wiped her eyes. It

was over. She had to go back to the house now. He would be gone and everything would be back to normal. She replaced the book on the shelf.

Deana went to the front door and opened it. The rain was really starting to fall with more intensity. She stepped outside. She should have run home. She was going to get drenched, but she decided to walk anyway. She didn't feel any need to hurry back to the house.

By the time she got to the front door, she was soaked through to her skin. She opened up the latch on the door and stepped into the hallway. Was she imagining it, or did the house feel somehow different now?

She walked across the hallway and into the living room. She pushed the door back and the hinge creaked. She'd never heard it do that before. The room was in total darkness, but she remembered the light was on before she'd left to go to Mrs. Williams' house. She'd done her job. She'd sent him back. She'd never see him again. She turned to leave.

"Deana, is that you?"

She turned back to see him sitting in one of the chairs.

"Look at the state of you. You will catch your death in those wet clothes. You know the children insisted I look after you. Deana, why are you looking at me in such a strange way?"

Sir Ian turned on the lights.

"Because you're still here and I..."

"Deana, did you go next door to Mrs. Williams' house? I thought I saw you heading that way. Did you try and return me to my grave? I fear that you did."

She nodded and burst into tears

"I didn't do it because I hated you. It's just...I've never loved someone the way I love you and I can't stand the thought of ever being hurt by someone I love ever again."

He stood up and rushed over to her.

"You are shivering and you will be ill. Go upstairs and take off those wet clothes. I will light a fire for you. You are to come down here and warm yourself. And then we will talk."

It was true. Deana did feel chilled to the bone. She crept upstairs, stripped off her wet clothing and wrapped her robe around her. By the time she came back downstairs, Sir Ian had a fire roaring in the grate. She had to admit it was a welcoming sight.

He turned around and smiled when he saw her.

"I have not lit one of these for...it seems silly to say years, doesn't it? I always loved a roaring fire, especially in the winter in the house in Kent."

"You certainly have a knack for it. We've never used it since we bought this place."

"Come and sit here and take the chill from your body. The children will not forgive me if you catch pneumonia," he said, pulling up an armchair.

Deana sat down.

"Can I get you a brandy to warm your body?"

Deana nodded.

She saw him pour a glass of brandy. He then walked over to her and handed her the glass. He sat down on a cushion on the floor between her and the fire.

Deana sipped the brandy. She didn't know quite what to say to him now. Not when he knew the truth about what she'd just tried to do to him. But he decided to speak first.

"Are you now convinced that I am here to stay forever? That perhaps the situation that we found ourselves in could be a way for both of us to have a second chance in life? Me for having my life cut short, me who never found true love, and you, a lady who was betrayed by a man, but now has another man who will love her more than life itself." "I don't know, this is all so...I'm sorry for..."

"Do not start apologizing all over again."

"I'm…"

Deana laughed.

"Did you really mean it when you said you loved me more than life itself?"

"I did. And you know that I worship the earth that you walk on?"

He separated the folds of her gown and kissed each knee. He kept his mouth on her knee for a few seconds and kissed it again. Deana ran her hand over his hair and then he looked up at her.

"Do you have any candles?"

"Yes, why?"

"Where are they?"

"In the drawers over there, top one."

He stood up and walked over to the drawer. He pulled out two candles and lit them. Sir Ian then turned off the lights and placed the candles on top of the mantel.

"You would have suited the Regency period," he said, kneeling down in front of her. "The candlelight is so becoming on your beautiful skin, hair, and not to mention your face."

He knelt down and pulled her hair around to the front of her chest. She put her hand up to the side of his face. He brought it around to the front of his lips and kissed it. He then pulled apart the top of her gown.

She hadn't put anything on underneath and she felt a sudden chill on her breasts.

"You are the most beautiful woman I have ever set my eyes upon."

She felt him gently dust his fingertips over her breasts. He pulled on the belt of her gown and it fell open on both sides of her body. He let his hand slide down her belly and between her thighs. She put her arms around his shoulders and kissed him. "I've always wanted to make love in front of roaring fire," she whispered in his ear.

"Then your wish is about to be granted," he whispered back to her.

He threw some cushions on the floor and then took off her gown. He kissed her again. Deana unbuttoned his shirt and ran her hands inside and over his chest. She then unzipped his pants.

She sat down on the cushions on the floor while he let his clothing fall to the floor.

Deana put out her hand to invite him to join her in front of the fire.

They kissed as Sir Ian ran his hands up and down her thigh.

"That tickles," she said.

"Ah, so I have a ticklish one here," he said, rolling her onto her back.

He stroked her tummy and then let his hand drift down to her womanhood. He explored its silky folds and then stroked her gently.

Deana could feel excitement building her in body. His strokes got heavier and quicker, and every once in a while she would have to gasp for breath.

He was going to drive her crazy this time. She moaned and arched her hips, hoping he would know what she wanted.

"Patience, my lady, patience."

He was driving her over the edge and she'd have to take matters into her own hands this time. She pushed him off her and down onto the cushions. She lifted herself up and straddled him and then lowered herself onto his manhood.

This time she heard him moan. He reached up and used light touches on her nipples until they hardened more with each passing touch. How much more pleasure could he give? And how much pleasure could a woman stand?

She moved her hips and felt him slide deeper

within her. He kept still while she moved faster. He grabbed her thighs as she cried out and her whole body shook. She barely had time to breathe when he got hold of her and spun her over onto the floor, filling her even more.

Feeling Deana's body pulsate with pleasure had driven him insane. He'd never been with a woman who had taken control over him like that. And he'd loved it. A woman who knew what pleasured her...now, that is what drove a man crazy with desire.

He had told her to be patient, but he could no longer stand it. He pulled her hips up and placed her legs around his upper thighs. He heard her moaning as he thrust harder. It was his body's turn to shake with pleasure. He could stand no more and finally gave in, and then flopped onto her so he could kiss her lips and then her nose.

He kissed her again and again. And then he stood, offering her his hand. She stood up and he lifted her up in his arms. He carried her out of the living room and made his way up the stairs. He was going to take her to her bed tonight. There he would make love to her again until they were both so tired that they would fall asleep in one another's arms.

# CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Earl Bingham was not quite sure what had happened or what was happening to him, but he was positive he was once again among the living. He looked down at himself. Apart from the mud on his body, he was as naked as the day he had been pulled from his mother's womb. He looked around and noticed that he was in a cemetery. He could not remember how he actually got there, just that he had woken up and seen a light, a very bright light above his head. He had reached out for it and then found himself standing next to his grave.

And yes, now he remembered one more thing. He'd heard a woman's voice saying something. He had not heard or understood what she was mumbling at first, but now he recalled her words more clearly. She had been saying the name Sir Ian Ashby. Could that possibly mean that the little Captain Sharp was also alive again?

And their duel...yes, he'd seen an image of it played out as he'd felt himself being pulled through the dirt above his coffin. They were on the heath and he'd just shot Ashby in the chest. He'd walked over to gloat as Ashby lay there dying. However, Ashby's second had obviously known what had happened and had turned and fired the pistol, putting a hole right in the middle of Earl Bingham's forehead.

"Yes, Sir Ian Ashby, you and your second, should you both be still alive, will pay for ending my life," he muttered.

Earl Bingham walked down the path that led from the cemetery. He walked out of the gate and ran straight into a woman who happened to be walking by at the exact same time. She looked at him and screamed at the top of her lungs.

He looked down at himself and suddenly remembered that he was naked. He placed his hands in front of his private parts and started to run. Clothes, he had to find clothes.

He saw a man walking on the other side of the road. He hurried across the street and crept up behind him. He waited for the right moment and then grabbed him. He hit him over the head with the back of his hand and the man fell to the pavement. He quickly stripped the man of his jacket and pants. The clothing was not to his liking, but at least he was decent again.

Now he was ready to find and kill Sir Ian Ashby.

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Deana woke to the smell of bacon cooking. She sat upright, and noticed Sir Ian was missing. She felt herself go hot and cold, but then heard him walk up the stairs humming a tune, and if she wasn't mistaken it was "Bohemian Rhapsody." She saw him opening the door with his foot, and then he entered the room carrying a tray of food.

"Breakfast is served," he said, putting the tray down onto the bed.

"I've never had breakfast served by a nude man before."

"I did not see the point of getting dressed just to cook a breakfast. And I am going to allow you to try many other firsts in your life."

"You already have," said Deana before she kissed him.

"Come now, you are to eat this breakfast before it gets cold."

"Will you be serving me breakfast every morning?" asked Deana.

"Of course not. I think we should get a servant

for the house and possibly an Abigail for you."

"I already have Mrs. Cooke."

"Oh. I do hope this is not one of her days to clean."

"No, she won't be here until tomorrow."

"Thank goodness for that," said Sir Ian, taking a piece of bacon from the plate.

Deana saw Sir Ian looking at her.

"What are you thinking?"

"I can think about only one thing now, my sweet, and that is you, and what a lucky man I am."

"And I'm the luckiest woman, having a man make love to me and then have that same man cook me breakfast the following morning. And I could stay in this room with you forever, but I have to get up in a minute."

"Oh, but why? I thought we would stay in bed all day."

"I have to get to the office, but I'll make sure I'm home by lunchtime."

"Then I will look forward to the noon hour when I will show you how much I have missed you."

Deana got out of bed and glanced out the window. It was going to be a beautiful day now that the storm had completely cleared out. She looked down at Mrs. Williams' house, but didn't like what she saw.

"Ian, come here quickly."

"Whatever is it?"

"Look over at Mrs. Williams' house. There's someone moving about in her living room."

"Do you think someone has broken into her house?" asked Sir Ian.

"Maybe it's Mrs. Williams, maybe she's back. I think I should go and check it out."

"I will come with you, as this could be another intruder in the area."

Deana decided to take Mrs. Williams' door key

with her because that way she and Sir Ian could get into the house, and if it was an intruder they could take them by surprise and call the police. Sir Ian had wanted to take one of the dueling swords that now hung above the fireplace, but Deana had insisted he leave it at home.

They took a shortcut across the pathway to Mrs. Williams' house and then crept up to the front door. Deana slipped the key carefully into the latch, trying to make as little noise as possible. She opened the door, and Sir Ian stepped ahead of her.

"Whoever it is, they're in the kitchen," said Deana, seeing a shadow pass by the door at the end of the hallway.

Sir Ian picked up an umbrella and started to walk toward the kitchen. Deana heard a cupboard being opened up in there.

"I wonder if it's our intruder back in this neighborhood?" Deana whispered to him.

"If it is, he will be most sorry."

Sir Ian stepped into the kitchen. As the figure passed by them, he hit the person on the head with the umbrella.

Deana heard someone moaning and then heard a thud on the kitchen floor.

"Oh, no, it's Mrs. Williams," said Deana, seeing her neighbor sprawled out on the floor.

Sir Ian quickly knelt beside Mrs. Williams.

"How can this be possible? Oh, the poor woman, what have I done?" He grabbed Mrs. Williams' hand. "Do you think she is dead?"

Deana knelt down on the other side of Mrs. Williams' body.

"I don't think so." She lifted the woman's hand and felt her wrist. Deana was more than relieved when she felt a slow but steady pulse. "She's just unconscious."

Sir Ian held his chest. "Thank goodness for that.

Let me carry her into the living room."

Sir Ian put his hands under her body and rolled Mrs. Williams into his arms. He carried her through to the living room and placed her on the couch. Deana then placed a pillow under the woman's head and covered her with a blanket.

"I wonder how she managed to get back?" asked Deana.

"At least she is safe, well, except for possibly a lump on the head."

Mrs. Williams started to murmur.

"She's coming around," said Deana. "Mrs. Williams, can you hear me?"

"Where am I?"

"At home," said Deana.

"What happened?" she asked. She sat up, swayed a bit, but then put her hand to the back of her head.

"I am so sorry, Madam, but I hit you over the head."

"Why?"

"Sir Ian and I saw someone moving around in here; we assumed it must be an intruder because we knew you weren't here."

"That's right. Oh, and I must tell you about my journey. In fact, you're the only two people I can tell."

She swung her legs over the side of the couch and shook her head.

"I was making some tea and biscuits; come out to the kitchen, we can talk there."

Deana and Sir Ian followed Mrs. Williams out to the kitchen. They sat at the table while she put the teapot and a plate of cookies onto the table.

"When did you get back?" asked Deana.

"It was early this morning. I just found myself back in the living room."

Deana wondered if her own little séance the

night before had anything to do with that.

"Where have you been?" asked Sir Ian.

"After I left the house...I mean, the second time, I found myself in Scotland."

"Why didn't you just come home?" asked Deana.

"That's where it gets difficult to explain. I was in Scotland, but I must have time traveled and it was 1913."

"How amazing," said Sir Ian.

"I tried to get back but I couldn't. However, I met a charming man. Oh, the most handsome man you've ever set your eyes upon. In fact, I'm going to hold a little séance later to see if I can get myself back there. However, before I do, I must deal with your problem, Sir Ian. Would you like me to have another go at sending you back, you know, to the other side?"

"Certainly not," said Sir Ian. "Quickly put that thought completely out of your mind."

"Sir Ian has become attached to this time period," said Deana.

"And we should tell you," he said, getting hold of Deana's hand, "that while you have been away, Deana and I have fallen in love."

"Oh, how wonderful. And wouldn't this make a wonderful story for one of the women's magazines. Widow meets and falls in love with man her children called back from the dead."

"Let's just always keep this as our secret. And no more playing around with any of the..." started Deana.

"No, I think I'm just going to leave it to the professionals."

Deana looked at the clock on the wall.

"I have to be getting to the office," said Deana.

"Why don't you come over for dinner one night?" asked Mrs. Williams, walking them to the door.

"We'd love to. Now, are you sure you're okay?"

asked Deana.

"Fine, never better."

For most of the day Earl Bingham wandered around in an aimless state. Nothing looked familiar. But he was not going to give up. He would find that Captain Sharp Ashby and take his revenge.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Deana knew it was silly of her to feel this way. After all, she was a grown woman. However, when she called Todd and Amy that night, she felt almost guilty that she hadn't told them that her relationship with Sir Ian had moved on to a new level.

"How are you, Mom?" asked Todd.

"I'm very good," said Deana, feeling Sir Ian's arms snaking their way around her waist. He pulled her to him and kissed her on the neck.

"We're looking forward to seeing you soon."

"I am too," she said, thinking about what was going to happen now. Would Sir Ian come home with her? Would she even be able to leave without him now? The way she felt about him, she very much doubted it.

"How's Sir Ian doing?"

"He's fine too," she said, turning to look at him. She wondered how she was going to break the news to the children about her and Sir Ian being...being, well, lovers. Deana wouldn't worry about that just yet. They would have plenty of time to sit down and talk once she got home.

"I guess we should say good night to you now, Mom. I know it is close to your bedtime in London."

"Okay, goodbye sweetie, send my love to Grandma and Granddad."

Deana put the phone down and turned around to face Sir Ian. She put her hands around his neck and they rubbed their lips lightly against one another. "Are you ready for bed?"

"Very much so, but we are not going upstairs tonight. I have a wonderful surprise for you. But I have to order a taxi."

"A taxi? Where are we going?"

"If I tell you then it will not be a surprise."

Deana sat in the back of the taxi with Sir Ian. If she wasn't mistaken, they were heading somewhere south.

"Are you going to give me any more clues as to where we're going?"

"You will see when we get there. I was going to order a horse and carriage to take us there, but of course we had to settle for a monster."

When the taxi rounded the corner of Redington Road, Deana guessed where they were going. The Smith Hotel, a.k.a. Sir Ian's old home.

They got out of the taxi and held hands as they went up the steps to the hotel. As they got to the reception desk, Deana was glad to see neither Mr. Marcus nor the bellboy were on duty.

"Sir Ian Ashby. I reserved room 212."

"Yes, Sir. If you'd sign here."

Sir Ian scribbled "Ashby" and then took the key.

They went up the stairs and walked along to the room. Sir Ian opened up the door; Deana stepped inside and saw that the fire was already lit. The blankets and quilts on the bed had been turned back.

"Does it feel like home?" asked Deana.

"More than ever. And I have one more surprise."

He walked over to the cupboard. Deana saw him slide the door back and pull out a dress. Not just any dress, a Regency dress, or at least it looked like it could be.

"Where did you get this?"

"At a store that sells used clothing. It will look beautiful on you."

Deana started to take her blouse off.

"Put it on in the bathroom. I want to be surprised when I see you in it for the first time."

Deana went into the bathroom and took off her clothes. She lifted the dress over her head. She had a difficult time buttoning up the back of the dress, but after a few attempts managed to get it buttoned all the way to the top.

The Regency woman must have been like a twig, she thought. Either that, or the dress wasn't made for a woman who had given birth to two children. Deana took a deep breath and laughed as the bodice of the dress pushed her breasts over the top of the material. She stepped out from the bathroom and saw Sir Ian sitting in a chair waiting for her.

"Beautiful, beautiful," said Sir Ian.

"I can never understand your time period. Women had their breasts, almost their whole breasts on show," said Deana, looking down at herself. "But if they showed their ankles, it was considered risqué."

"Every period has its own quirks. Oh, you would have been a beautiful Regency lady. Men would have made an offer for you every day."

"I think I'm about to burst every seam of this dress," said Deana, feeling herself short of breath.

Sir Ian laughed and walked over to her. "Then perhaps we should get you out of it as soon as possible."

He kissed her lips and then the tops of her breasts. He ran his hands over them and quickly pulled each of her breasts out of the bodice so they were on full display.

"Now you will see how much easier it was for the Regency man," he said, sliding his hand up under the dress.

He knelt down and looked up at her.

"Do you know that I love you with all my heart?"

he asked.

"I'm not quite sure if I do," said Deana, teasing him.

"If you do not, then let me begin to convince you yet once again."

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Deana placed her head on his chest after they had made love. He could feel his heart beating slowly.

"There is another reason I have brought you here tonight. I want you to become Lady Ashby."

Deana sat up and looked at him.

"You mean you're proposing to me?"

"I believe that is what it means. Unless making an offer to a woman has changed that drastically too."

"Well, I wasn't quite ready. I mean, what's brought the subject of marriage on so suddenly?"

"Love, and nothing more. And have no fear, I have already made an offer for you."

"You haven't told Todd about us, have you? I wanted to break the news to him myself."

"No, I made an offer to your father."

"My father? How?"

"I simply asked Todd to put his grandfather on the phone and I made an offer for you."

"What did you say?"

"That we had fallen in love and that I wanted you to be my wife. I said it was most urgent."

"I don't believe it. My dad wasn't too happy about me marrying an older man like Alex. I hope you mentioned you're two hundred-plus years older than me."

"I did not take this matter lightly. And just to make sure that he did not refuse my offer, I told him that I had ruined your reputation. And that it is possible that you are even with child."

"Ian, what must he have thought? And what if

he mentions this to Todd or Amy?"

"Your father gave me his word. He will not mention this until our engagement is formally announced. And more importantly, he gave us his blessing."

"Did he really?" asked Deana. "But Ian, I just can't say yes to you before I've told Todd and Amy. I have to speak with them before we can get married. They don't even know we're a couple yet."

"What do you mean? We are in love. And do not lovers want to marry as soon as it is possible?"

"And you're forgetting several things. One, I live in America."

"You can move here."

"Two, my children live there."

"They can move here too."

"Oh just like that, what about their schooling?"

"There are schools in England."

"But they have to make a decision in this matter too."

"Deana, I love your children, but what is between you and me is not their business."

"I have to talk this through with them before we make plans for our future."

"I do not believe I am hearing this."

"Please, Sir Ian, just let me do this my way."

Sir Ian got up and started to pace up and down. "I do not know how to deal with this situation. I do not understand you, Deana."

"It's still early in America. I'd like to go home, call the children and tell them about us first. Please, let me do this my way," said Deana.

"Then we will spend this night apart, so you can tell your children."

"We'll talk again in the morning."

"I will see you get a taxi."

\*\*\*\*

He had finally found it. He knew Sir Ian's house

had to be in this vicinity. He hid in the bushes and waited. Ashby must have been throwing a party because so many people were milling out of the front door of his house.

He saw a familiar-looking man walking down the steps. It was Ashby. So he had finally found him. And as usual he had his arm around a lady. Why had the women always found Ashby so charming?

A strange-looking large metal object on wheels was rolling up to the bottom of the steps now. He looked across the road and saw that Ashby was kissing the woman, and rather intimately by the look of things. She must be his lover, or as difficult as it was to believe, Ashby could even be a married man now.

He looked at the happy couple again. Was this Lady Ashby? If so, things were getting even better. Yes, he would use her as his ultimate revenge. He would kidnap her and let Ashby know he had her. Ashby would be forced to duel with him again. He listened closely so he could ascertain where Lady Ashby was headed.

"Where to, love?" asked the driver.

"11 Willow Road."

Ashby was waving her goodbye. Now all he had to do was get in one of those funny-looking vehicles and give the driver that exact same address.

#### \*\*\*\*

Deana got back to the house and arrived at the front door just in time to hear the phone ringing. She rushed inside to answer it, thinking it might be the children again.

"Hello?"

"Deana, I've been thinking, you can't do this to me."

She recognized Colin's voice, and by the sound of it he was drunk.

"I'm coming over to deal with you."

Deana heard a purring noise. She went to the door and slid the bolt across, and then turned off all the lights. She was halfway up the stars when she heard the front door being kicked in. Colin must have been calling from his cell phone to get to the house that quickly.

She dashed to the phone to call the police, but felt a sweaty hand going over her mouth. She felt something sharp being pushed into her ribs. She then felt herself being dragged toward the door. Deana thought her abductor was Colin, but then she saw a note being dropped on the step.

She wasn't able to read what it said, but she doubted it was Colin who had grabbed her. She could see a large B was signed at the bottom of the note. But she couldn't think of anyone with a first or last name beginning with the letter B. And she definitely couldn't think of anyone who would want to harm her like this.

Whoever it was meant business. He literally dragged her down the path until she lost both her shoes. She could feel and hear the soles of her pantyhose being ripped apart as she was pulled over the rough concrete on the sidewalk. She wondered if this person would ask for a ransom.

"We are getting into the carriage now, and not a word or I will have to cut you."

It was a man's voice, but not Colin's voice. Maybe he'd hired someone to scare her. She was pulled into a taxi and turned to see a man with dark hair and an equally dark goatee sitting next to her.

"Who are you?"

"I am Earl Bingham."

"Earl..." Deana suddenly remembered where she'd heard that name. No, it couldn't be the same Earl Bingham who'd killed Sir Ian. No, that wasn't possible. Deana felt herself go hot and cold at the same time. This was her fault. She was responsible for this.

The other night while she'd been trying to send Sir Ian back, she'd pictured him and Earl Bingham dueling. However, instead of sending Sir Ian back, she'd obviously brought Earl Bingham back from his grave.

I obviously have a gift just like my children. Maybe that's where they get it from, she thought.

"Where to, gov?" asked the taxi driver.

Earl Bingham looked at Deana and then to the taxi driver.

"Sommerville House, near Tonbridge," he said.

"No," said Deana.

He pushed the knife into Deana's side, causing her blouse to rip and she felt its point nip her skin.

"I am sure your husband will follow us there and we will finish our business once and for all."

#### CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Sir Ian went back to the house the following morning. He saw Deana's shoes lying on the path near the door. He picked them up and then felt sick when he saw the front door hanging from its hinges. He rushed inside and looked down to see the note lying there.

"Sommerville House, I have your lady, we have unfinished business."

Sir Ian saw the B signed at the bottom. He crumpled up the paper in one palm. If he'd touched or hurt Deana in any way, it would not be pistols they would use this time around. Sir Ian would kill Bingham with his own hands. He would take great pleasure in placing his hands around the man's evil neck and squeezing it until there was no more life left in him.

He had to get to Tonbridge. He rushed into the living room and took the dueling swords down from the wall. Now he had to find transportation to Tonbridge. He could call a cab, but the driver, he feared, would not get there quickly enough.

There was only one solution. He had to drive the monster there. He went to the key stand in the kitchen and took down Deana's car keys.

He rushed out to the garage and lifted up the door. He went inside and got into the car. He put the key into the ignition as he had watched Deana do it. He tried to remember what she had done next. Foot on the pedal, Ashby, and then push it into first gear, he told himself. He backed out, and then bumped the car down onto the road. He was on his way. He reached a roundabout and couldn't remember how Deana had driven around it in order to reach the other side. Darn it, as he traveled around it for the sixth time, he realized he was losing valuable time. He would have to break the rules of the road; after all, this was an emergency. He drove across the concrete center in the middle of the roundabout and headed in the direction he wanted to go.

"I am on my way, my darling," he shouted as if Deana could actually hear him.

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Deana recognized the area they were approaching. It was close to where Sir Ian had brought her horseback riding.

"Stop here," said Earl Bingham, slamming his fist on the seat by the driver's head.

The driver pulled the cab over by what looked like an overgrown lane.

"That will be 134 pounds, gov," said the driver, turning around to speak.

Earl Bingham said nothing, simply hit the man in the back of the head. Deana saw a gash in the driver's head as he slumped onto the steering wheel.

"Out you get, and start walking."

Deana could feel the stones cutting into her feet as Earl Bingham pulled her along the lane. She could see what looked like the remnants of a rundown house ahead of them. She could also see a heath to the left.

"This is the place where you killed Sir Ian."

"And I assume he has told you all about it."

"Of course."

"Probably only his side of the story."

He pushed Deana up what was left of the steps to the house. She fell into what was obviously the entryway.

"I did not kill him; it was a duel."

"An unfair one by what I hear, an unloaded gun and..."

He laughed, and Deana noticed a large scar in the middle of his forehead.

"He knew about that, did he not?"

"Of course he knew."

"Yes, you could not pull much over Ashby."

"And do you know you're here because of me? I brought you back, and I can send you back."

He laughed again. "Not before I kill Sir Ian and you watch him die."

"I don't think so, he'll kill you first."

"I do not think so, dear lady. And we will wait until he arrives to see the true outcome. In the meantime, perhaps you and I can get to know one another better. In fact, I can see why Ashby has chosen you as his wife."

He put his hand under her chin and forced her face-up so she could look at him.

"Ashby always did have a good eye for women, I will give him that."

He leaned down to kiss her, but Deana screamed.

"Don't you dare come near me."

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Sir Ian knew he was approaching the area at which he needed to be. He knew Deana would be there. He saw that there was a taxi by the lane. Bingham had probably commandeered it to get here. He turned the car into the lane. As he drove along he saw the remains of the house and the heath where he had died.

He stopped the car, reached for the swords, and made his way to the house. The sound of the gravel under his feet brought back a flood of memories. He stepped into what was left of the house and a strong sense of deja vu came over him. He'd spent his last night alive at this place. He walked into the hallway. What was left of the place was littered with fallen leaves, glass bottles, newspaper and dirt.

"Good morning, Sir Ian. How strange that we meet again."

Sir Ian turned to see Earl Bingham standing there in the doorway.

"Deana," called Sir Ian.

"Ian," she shouted, and then he saw her running toward him. She ran into his arms and he kissed her head.

"Tell me if he has hurt you or taken liberties with you in any way."

Deana shook her head.

"How did he return from his grave?" Sir Ian asked her.

"I think I brought him back that night I went to Mrs. Williams' house. I've been trying to send him back, but I just can't do it."

"You look the same as before," said Earl Bingham.

"You do too. Well, except for that little hole in your forehead."

Earl Bingham put his hand to his head. "I have your second to thank for that."

Sir Ian laughed. "I am relieved to hear I did not die needlessly, that my second did his job. He obviously saw to it that justice was served upon you."

"And now we must duel yet again."

"With pleasure," said Sir Ian, taking off his jacket.

"No," said Deana. "No dueling."

"You do not understand about this matter," said Sir Ian.

"Pistols, Sir Ian?"

"If you do not mind I think we should use swords this time."

"You still do not trust me, Ashby?"

"No, said Deana. "This is insane."

"As you can see I have brought a pair with me," said Sir Ian.

"You always did come prepared," said Earl Bingham.

"May the best man win," said Sir Ian, tossing him one of the swords. The Earl caught it with one hand and then swished it around in the air to try it out.

"I would think this would take your head off nicely, Ashby. One quick cut and it should be over quickly. In fact, you should not feel a thing."

"One has to be close for one to do that. I will take a gamble that you will not get within a foot of me," said Sir Ian.

"Shall we commence?"

Deana could only watch as the two men started to duel. She saw them each take turns jumping toward one another with the swords pointed at their chests. She assumed she must be dreaming. She couldn't possibly be watching two previously dead men duel in a run-down house out in the middle of the English countryside.

She must have dozed off while she'd been watching an Errol Flynn movie. But like everything else that had happened in the last month or so, she knew it was all too real.

She screamed out as Earl Bingham charged at Sir Ian, but he was too quick and jumped out of the way before the sword touched him.

"You must be quicker than that," said Sir Ian.

"Is this quick enough?"

Earl Bingham took a succession of short, quick steps, and then brought the tip of the sword across Ian's upper arm. Deana cried out as blood started to seep through Sir Ian's white shirt.

"Fear not, my darling," said Sir Ian. "I have the upper hand." Sir Ian took two quick steps toward Earl Bingham. The noise of metal scraping against metal filled the air and Deana noticed that Sir Ian had now managed to knock the sword from Earl Bingham's hand.

"Goodbye once and for all," said Sir Ian as he plunged the sword into the center of Earl Bingham's chest. Deana watched as he collapsed to the floor. He then disappeared as if he'd never been there at all.

She rushed over to Sir Ian.

"Don't ever worry me like that again."

"I am afraid I will have to, my darling. My arm has just a flesh wound, but I feel it has done something peculiar to me. I am, as you know, not like a normal man, and I must warn you that I am dying once again."

"You can't be, it's just a scratch," said Deana, ripping the shirt away from his arm so she could examine his injury.

"I know these things, dear Deana. I feel the same as I did two hundred years ago. I am so sorry, but I am about to leave you, my sweet."

"No, you can't. I'm going to get you to the hospital. They'll know what to do. You won't die this time."

He could hardly stand now, but Deana managed to put his arm around her shoulders and was able to walk him out to the car. She opened the passengerside door and gently eased him onto the seat. She turned on the ignition and put her foot down as far as it would go.

She glanced across to Ian. He now looked very pale and sweaty. She had to keep talking to him.

"Did I tell you that I'm going to marry you," said Deana.

"Did you just say you are going to marry me because I am dying and that you know it will not be our destiny to be man and wife?" "No, I know I was supposed to meet you and that we were destined to be a couple. And I don't want to hear any more silly talk about you dying."

Deana saw the sign for the hospital. She turned left and put her foot down again. She went through the gates of the hospital and saw the arrow for emergency was to the left of the building. She pulled the car up outside the door.

"It's going to be all right."

She looked across at him. His head was slumped forward on his chest now. She had the horrible feeling he'd been right. He was dead again.

She quickly felt his pulse; it was weak, but at least he was still alive. She rushed into the emergency room.

"My friend's been injured, I think he's unconscious."

Two nurses got hold of a gurney and rushed out to the car with her.

Deana watched as Sir Ian was lifted out of the car, placed on the gurney and wheeled inside. A doctor came to the room a few seconds later.

"What happened?"

"Some madman accidentally stabbed him in the arm."

The doctor cut away what was left of Sir Ian's shirt and then lifted up each of Sir Ian's eyelids.

"I don't quite understand what's happening here. This wound wouldn't need more than a few stitches to close it up. But he seems to be going into a coma. Does he have an allergy to anything, a heart condition?"

"Not that I know of."

"Okay, get me an IV," he said to one of the nurses. "I'm going to sew up that arm and then we'll transfer him upstairs and try to at least stabilize him."

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Deana sat beside the bed holding Sir Ian's hand. He was wired up to machines and had tubes going into him. She heard the machines beeping steadily. She usually hated the sound of those things, but now it was a welcome noise. Every time she heard that beep, it meant Sir Ian was still alive.

"Sir Ian, can you hear me? I know you can't answer me, but I have to tell you this. I love you and I want to marry you. I want to have children with you. I want to grow old with you. You know you can't leave me now. Who's going to vacuum for me? And hey, you even know how to drive the monster now."

Deana burst into tears and dropped to her knees. She kissed the back of Sir Ian's hand.

"You can't die. I won't want to live without you."

"Mrs. Adams?"

"Yes," said Deana, standing up to see a nurse coming into the room. Deana quickly wiped her eyes with the back of her hand.

"There's nothing you can do right now, so why don't you go home. We'll call you should there be any change in his condition."

"I couldn't, I have to stay here."

"Would you like us to find a room?"

Deana nodded; she would accept that. "You will wake me if he needs me?"

"Of course."

Deana kissed him good night, and then left his room. The nurse had shown her to a room just down the hall from Sir Ian's. She looked at herself in the mirror in the bathroom and noticed her eyes were swollen from crying.

She thought about phoning Todd and Amy. She knew they'd want to know about Sir Ian...if anything should happen to him. She burst into another round of tears. Surely if he was going to die it would have happened by now.

She walked out to the bed, sat down on it and

laid her head down on the pillow. She closed her eyes but she wasn't going to sleep. Or so she thought. She had obviously dozed off for a while because she was woken up by activity in the hallway. It was an emergency call, Code Blue in room 356.

She got off the bed and ran out of the room. She saw two nurses running by her room. One was pushing a machine on wheels and they were turning into Sir Ian's room. And she knew why. The noise was now echoing through the whole building. The steady burring nose that told her Sir Ian was dead.

Deana ran as fast as she could down the corridor.

"No!" she shouted as she rushed into the room.

"Mrs. Adams, you'll have to wait outside," said the nurse.

She saw them putting the sinister-looking pads onto his chest. She then cried out as his body jumped into the air. But he was still dead. There was still a steady burring noise.

She watched as they tried again. She saw them increase the voltage and then saw his body being lifted high up off the bed. Each time his body would fall back with a thud that shook the whole room, but still nothing revived him. He was gone.

"Okay, increase it and give it one more try before we call it," said the doctor.

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Sir Ian felt himself going into a tunnel. A thick black haze was surrounding him. He knew what this meant. Last time he hadn't fought it, but he had to this time around. This time Deana was waiting for him.

"No, I refuse to go this time, I refuse to. I will fight you," he called out.

He saw the light. The same sort of light he witnessed the day the children had called him.

"Come to us, Sir Ian, come to us."

He raised his hand to the light.

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Deana heard a steady beat replacing the burring noise.

"We've got him back," shouted the doctor. "Stand back, he's waking up."

"Deana," said Sir Ian. "Where is Deana?"

"I'm here," said Deana, rushing into the room.

She leaned over and kissed him on the forehead.

"This is the strangest case I've ever dealt with," said the doctor. "How are you feeling, Sir?"

"Splendid. In fact, never better," said Sir Ian, sitting up like nothing had happened.

"I can only think it was an allergic reaction to something."

"I do not know where I am, but I think I would like to go home now."

"I think I'd rather you stay in overnight, just in case," said the doctor.

"Could I have a few minutes alone with him?" said Deana.

The doctor nodded and left with the two nurses.

"My darling, come and sit beside me," said Sir Ian.

"You had me scared there," said Deana, putting her head on his shoulder.

"I had myself worried, but I knew I had to return for you. And you may have thought I could not hear you, but I did hear everything you said to me, especially the bit about marrying me."

## EPILOGUE

Sir Ian knew he should have insisted they stick with tradition. He should have waited outside until a nursemaid came and told him that his child had arrived safely into this world. But from the moment Deana found out they were going to have a child, she'd insisted that one, he attend childbirth classes with her, and two, that he be by her side to witness the birth of the child.

Deana was not due to give birth for another week, but they had been out to dinner at one of London's finest restaurants to celebrate their first wedding anniversary when she had told him it was time to get her to the hospital. And here they were, many hours later, with Sir Ian wiping perspiration from Deana's forehead as she dealt with the pains of labor.

"It's a boy," said the doctor, holding him up for Sir Ian and Deana to see.

The boy was handed to Deana, and Sir Ian patted his head. "I would like to name him Alfred Ashby in honor of my father," said Sir Ian. "My darling, you are so wonderful to produce such a fine boy to carry on the family name."

"I think you're the wonderful one. I mean, you're over two hundred years old and you can still get a woman pregnant. I'd say most people would be impressed with that," whispered Deana.

## A word about the Author...

Born in London, England, Susan Palmquist now resides with her family in the Twin Cities. She's a freelance writer whose articles have appeared in such publications as *Health*, *Arthritis Today* and *Psychology Today*. She also writes two columns and runs the website *The Budget Smart Girl's Guide to the Universe*. Prior to freelance writing, she worked as a publicist. She is the winner of the Loft's Children's Literature award, and her short stories have appeared in publications both in the US and UK, including *Woman's World*. A Sterling Affair is her first novel. Visit Susan at:

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