

The Journey

Terry Elton

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Author's Notes

The story that follows is a work of fiction built on a platform of fact. Some of the characters are based on real people who have given permission for their names to be used. Others were conjured in the author's mind; therefore, any similarities between those characters and actual people are purely coincidental. The author found one curiosity in his research: the mayor of Bristol in 1761 was one Isaac Elton, prompting speculation that the author had come upon a lost relative.

Soaring Eagle and his people are fictional members of the Mahican Indian tribe, part of the Iroquois League or Hodenosaunee, meaning "people of the longhouse." ("Settlers tended to anglicize Indian names when the real names were too difficult for them to pronounce.") It is widely believed that today's Constitution is based on the Great Law of Peace of the League of the Hodenosaunee.

The author has endeavored to include actual place-names from eighteenth century New York and England. Fraunces Tavern, Bowling Green, Trinity Church, St. Paul's Chapel, Federal Hall, and the Woolworth Building still exist in lower Manhattan. The Bush Tavern on Corn Street did exist in eighteenth-century Bristol but was demolished in 1854.

The Shelburne Murray Hill Hotel and the Eastgate Towers exist in present-day New York and are owned and operated by Manhattan East Suite Hotels. The author finds the Shelburne to be the perfect place to stay when visiting New York.

The author admits to taking some liberties. The Bradford mansion is actually on the site of the William Walton mansion at 326 Pearl Street, formerly Queen Street. It was built in 1752 and torn down in 1881. The restaurant Bianchi and Margherita's actually existed on Fourth Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues but was closed in the mid-1990s. Out of nostalgia, the author chose to keep it open.

Prologue

New York, 1760

A fire dances in the hearth as an errant tongue of wind finds its way into the eerie quiet of the room. A wispy strand of smoke escapes from the fireplace and meanders silently like a cat exploring a new home. Candles flicker. A young man is sprawled in a wing-backed chair. His head droops on his chest. An eye patch remains resolutely in place; the exposed eye is wide open. A tiny trail of spittle runs down his chin. On the table next to him a cup lies on its side, rejected by its saucer, its contents puddled on the tabletop. Outside, iridescent bolts of lightning race across an ink-black sky, thunder pounding with the fury of distant war drums. Inside, the room is still. Thomas Bradford is dead.



Chapter One



Near London, 1758

Thomas Bradford was bewitched from the moment he saw her. He had been a guest in the home of his old friend Walter Bottomly for two weeks before a chance meeting with her. And on that day, a day that was promising to be like all the others, he happened to return to his room to fetch his hat, and there she was—so engrossed in making his bed that she didn't notice him.

Her cap was askew. A wisp of raven hair fell over her forehead into her eyes. She was tall for a servant girl, and the full dress she wore could not conceal her voluptuous figure. As she fluffed the pillows on his bed, she blew at the errant strand of hair in a vain attempt to keep it out of her eyes. He smiled at her persistence. Although he could only see her face in profile, he took full notice of her high cheekbones and the luscious pout of her lower lip.

The moment she saw him she ran for the door. "Oy'm not supposed to be in 'ere when you are, sir. Oy'll wait in the 'all 'til yer done, sir, so Oy will," she blushed as she turned to face him, her hands clasped in front of her and her head slightly bowed.

"Don't be silly," he said. "You'll do no such thing. I just came back for my hat. I'll be gone in a minute."

“Very well, sir,” she said, “but Oy’ll still stay by the door, if you don’t moind, sir.”

“As you wish,” he said, retrieving his hat and moving toward the door. As he passed her, he was close enough to pick up the fragrance of soap, not sweet but coarse, the aroma of Freshly Scrubbed. Yet no perfume had ever been more potent, no aphrodisiac more compelling than the particular aroma that came from her.

The spell was cast.

Thomas delayed returning home to America under the pretext that he had more work to do—a decision not made lightly since it called for him to delay the departure of one of his own ships. It would be costly keeping the men in port with little work to do, and they wouldn’t be a happy lot. They didn’t like sitting around. Still, it was his ship and he could do what he damn well pleased—within reason. The truth was, he wanted to see more of Catherine. It wasn’t easy. Every time he tried to engage her in conversation, she’d tell him that she could lose her job if she were caught dawdling. It was hard enough just getting her to tell him her name. She was toying with him and he knew it, but her elusiveness only added to her charm.

Whenever he closed his eyes he could see her, humming as she went about her work, her cap always at a rakish angle and that single strand of hair falling onto her face. Her smile lit up his mind as if the sun itself were shining, and the low timbre of her voice chilled his soul. He had seen her happy and giggling with the other maids, and he had also seen her tender side. One day he spotted her sitting under a shade tree behind the house, stroking a kitten in her lap. A more contented look he had never seen on any creature’s face and he longed to feel that same touch. When she walked by, he marveled at the way she carried herself. Her poise suggested breeding, yet where would an upstairs maid get that kind of polish? Her hair, when freed from the cap she wore most of the time, was thick and luxuriant and cascaded down her back toward a stunningly narrow waist. And

her eyes...her eyes were the most startling blue he had ever seen. He couldn't sleep, he couldn't concentrate. Now that she had come into his life, he spent his days devising excuses just to see her and to talk to her.

Several days after their first meeting, Thomas found Catherine alone in an upstairs hallway. "I wonder if you would consent to have supper with me one evening," Thomas asked hesitantly.

"Oy'm not that kind of girl, sir," she said, averting her eyes and fidgeting with some nonexistent spot on her uniform.

"No, you misunderstand," he pleaded, blushing in spite of himself. "I simply want to get to know you."

"Why would you be wanting to do that, sir? Oy'm nothing but a poor working girl—way below your station. Men in your position only want one thing from the loikes of me, and loike Oy said, Oy'm not that kind of girl. Now Oy needs to get back to moy work, sir, before the butler finds me talking. Will that be all, sir?" she asked, turning to leave.

Thomas tried another approach. "Wait," he said, reaching for her arm. "If Walter asked you to dine with me, would you agree then?" Without waiting for a reply, he added, "Though I would much rather have you agree because I asked and because you want to," he said, looking into her eyes.

"Well, sir, if Master Walter was to ask me to have supper with you, Oy'd have to do it now, wouldn't Oy?"

"Are you saying that's the only way you'll dine with me... if Walter asks you to?"

"Oy'm saying that if Master Walter asked me, Oy'd have no choice and Oy couldn't be sacked, could Oy, sir?" Her eyes teased him, as did the furtive smile which tugged at the corner of her lip, then vanished in an instant.

"Very well," Thomas said. He suddenly realized what she was doing, and he smiled at her cleverness. "If that's the way it has to be...so be it," he said, scarcely able to control his excitement.

Progress at last, he thought as Catherine withdrew into one of the rooms. Unable to maintain his composure any longer, he rushed downstairs in search of Walter, nearly running over the butler in the hallway.

“Master Walter left about an hour ago, sir,” the butler told Thomas. “He said he had some business in the village. Is there anything I can do, sir?”

“No, thank you. Did he say when he would be back?”

“I’m sorry, sir, he didn’t. But I don’t think he’ll be too much longer.”

Thomas’s immediate impulse was to ride to the village and find his friend. But he knew that would be foolish. Instead, buoyed by his excitement, he began pacing, crossing the entrance hall past the gently rising staircase, and arriving in the formal dining room with its elegant mirrors and massive hand-carved table and chairs. He pulled out a chair and sat facing the French doors leading to the gardens. Unable to sit still, he rose and paced some more, this time heading for the kitchen, where he absentmindedly took an apple from a dish on the side table before moving on. Thomas came to the living room with its huge stone fireplace, above which hung portraits of Walter’s mother and father. Biting into the apple, he sat down again, this time in Walter’s favorite “thinking” chair. As he settled against its high back, the overstated wings obscured his view of the room and his eyes focused inward on images of Catherine. So engrossed in thought was he that he didn’t notice when his friend returned.

Walter was well aware of Thomas’s obsession with the upstairs maid. It was almost comical to watch as he struggled to describe an infatuation he himself could not understand. Thomas had asked for permission to pursue Catherine with the hope of persuading her to come with him to America. Walter was skeptical, but being a good friend, would never stand in Thomas’s way.

“I don’t know what’s happening to me,” Thomas confessed

to Walter. "I'm completely taken with this girl. I hardly know her, yet she has cast a spell over me that I can't break. I know, or I think I know, that she's somehow testing me. I think she wants to see if I'm really serious, but she says she will not have supper with me unless you ask her to."

"Well, Thomas," Walter replied, "I'm not sure I should do that."

"But why?" Thomas asked, barely able to suppress his exasperation.

"It could be misconstrued by the rest of the staff and that would cause unrest. It's not like the old days when the master of the house could do whatever he pleased. We need to make sure we don't give the help any reason to spend their time gossiping instead of getting their work done. I suppose I could tell Catherine, in your presence, that if she would like to dine with you, I would have no objections. But I will also tell her she will not be sacked if she declines your offer. The decision is entirely hers to make."

"Thank you," Thomas said gratefully, slapping his friend on the shoulder. "Thank you very much. I won't forget this, Walter."

A few days later the arrangements were made, though Catherine insisted that they meet away from Walter's home. "It wouldn't be roight for one of the other servants to have to serve us, me a servant moysself, would it, sir? And Oy'd be oh so nervous knowing the others was watching everything we was doin', do you see moy point, sir?"

"I understand," Thomas said. "Suppose we go to the inn in the village. Would that be all right?"

"That would be just lovely, sir," she replied.



They were shown to a small table by a window in the rear of the dining room. As they sat down across from each other, a

gentle breeze slid silently through the window, carrying with it the subtle fragrances nature had prepared for them.

“I love the smell of evening,” Catherine said. “It makes me relax and remember suppers in the garden with my parents. Those were happy times.” There was no trace of her brogue!

Her hands flew up to cover her mouth as she realized she had slipped out of character.

“Not that Oy’m unhappy now, sir, sitting here with you,” she recovered, the brogue back in place.

A puzzled look crossed Thomas’s face. “A moment ago you spoke with no trace of a brogue. In fact you spoke in a voice that shows breeding and a higher station. Would you mind telling me what you’re up to?”

“You caught me, sir, you did. Oy was putting on airs, Oy was. Oy’m just an upstairs maid, that’s all Oy am.”

“Rubbish,” Thomas countered. “You’re hiding something.”

“It’s a very long story, sir, and Oy don’t want to bore you.”

“I’m not bored, and we have plenty of time. I want to know all about you.”

“Whoy this fascination with me, sir? Oy’m just a servant.”

“I’m not sure I believe that any more.”

“Believe what, sir?”

“I’m not sure you’re just a servant. I’ve had my doubts for a little while, and when you lost the brogue a few minutes ago ...well, that just convinced me that there is more to you than you would have people know. Am I wrong?”

“Oy think you must be, sir. An upstairs maid, that’s all Oy am.”

“I still don’t believe you and I need to know about you because I may have a—” Thomas stopped himself.

“You may have a what?” Catherine asked.

“I’m getting ahead of myself,” Thomas said. “I suppose it’s too late now. I’ll tell you what I was about to say, but you must promise to tell me your story first.”

“And what if Oy won’t?” Catherine asked.

“Then we shall have a nice supper together, I will return you

to Walter's, and I shall leave for Bristol on the morrow."

"I'm not sure I would like that, sir," Catherine said. "At least not until you tell me what you were going to say." The brogue had vanished again!

"All in good time," Thomas countered. "But first, tell me who you are and why you maintain this charade that you are an upstairs maid."

Catherine turned and gazed out of the window for a moment, her eyes focusing on a distant place and time. Then she turned to face Thomas, a single tear sliding down her cheek. Quickly, almost angrily, she brushed it away.

"Sorry, sir, this is not easy for me and no one in Master Walter's house knows about what I'm going to tell you...not even Master Walter," she said. "Can I ask you to promise that everything I'm about to tell you will be kept in confidence? The memories are very painful for me and until tonight, I thought I had put them all behind me." She looked into his eyes.

"I promise that anything that is said between us tonight will be kept just between the two of us," Thomas replied, holding her gaze.

Catherine paused, then took a deep breath. "It all started when my father was befriended by a man named Higgins who claimed to be involved in shipping. In fact, he claimed he was a captain, and he told lavish tales of sailing to and from Africa." She looked down at her hands. "Anyway, he approached my father with a scheme to smuggle diamonds from Africa, though he didn't call it smuggling. He told my father he had found a source for inexpensive diamonds. The stones would be totally raw and uncut and that was why they were so inexpensive. He wanted my father to provide funding for a ship and crew and to find a jeweler who would cut and polish the stones that were brought back."

"Why did Higgins need a ship if he was already the captain of one?" Thomas interrupted.

"Because Higgins was not really a captain at all. He was a

mere deckhand, but my father didn't learn that until much later," she explained. "Higgins told my father he needed a ship of his own so he could concentrate on the diamond business and not have to work for someone else. It all seemed quite plausible. At the time, Father was involved in buying several storehouses. As a result, most of his assets were tied up. The diamond business, though a little shady, seemed like a wonderful opportunity to make a great deal of money. He thought the rewards would be well worth the risk. Foolishly, he overextended himself by giving Higgins the money to buy the ship and pay for the crew. He didn't tell anyone in the family what he was doing...not even my mother."

She shifted in her seat and looked out to the garden as if it might somehow inspire her to continue. Thomas thought he saw tears welling in her eyes. But then he saw her set her jaw and straighten her back before turning to face him.

"It was all a hoax," she said with venom in her voice. "Higgins took the money and disappeared. Several months later, he came back and asked my father for more. He said pirates had set upon him on his way home and had taken everything. He produced a small bag with a few uncut stones and told my father that was all he had managed to hide from the pirates. My father suspected he was lying and threw him out. Eventually he found out that Higgins had never bought the ship or hired the crew. Nothing. Instead, he had taken all of the money and squandered it on whores, whiskey, and fancy living.

"I'm giving you a much abridged version, sir. It was much more complicated and much more involved. My father was no beginner when it came to business. But this time he let greed blind him. He was my father, but he'd been a fool." She banged her fist on the table, then caught herself. "Sorry, it still makes me so angry," she added sheepishly.

"I understand. I would have been angry too," Thomas said.

"Notes became due," she went on, emotion painting her cheeks with color. "My father's business began to crumble

around him. Without revenue from the diamonds or from a ship he could have sold, he was unable to pay. His creditors demanded their money and he had to sell his holdings to satisfy them. Finally, there was nothing left. He was so distraught over being duped and losing everything that he..." She paused, trying to compose herself. "He...he committed suicide."

The tears that had been slipping down her cheeks gave way to heaving sobs. Thomas offered her a handkerchief.

"Thank you," she whispered, avoiding his gaze. Carefully she wiped away the tears. A bird chirped and she turned her head towards the garden. Emotions raced across her face like cloud shadows on a windy day. Thomas waited as moments turned to minutes. She was struggling for composure, a battle she was fighting alone. Slowly, resolve settled on her face and she was ready to go on.

"Mother was left with nothing to live on, so she had to look for work," she continued, finally looking up at Thomas. "But she had no training; she never expected she would have to work. In desperation she became a cook. Her first job turned into a nightmare. Her employer wouldn't leave her alone—he wanted more than her food. He'd visit her at night in her room, though it was our room, the room that we shared at the time. He would send me to the kitchen to clean dishes, even though there were none to clean. And when I returned to our room, my mother would be crying."

"Why didn't she just refuse him and leave?" Thomas asked.

"It wasn't that easy, sir. She couldn't leave. Work wasn't easy to find and she had me to consider. She spent her days-off searching for other work. After four months of looking and looking, she found a position in a London mansion. It wasn't a head position—she was hired as an assistant to the cook. That meant she was expected to scrub dishes and cook all the things the head cook didn't want to be bothered doing. She put up with all of these indignities just so that I would have a roof over my head. I was expected to work too if I wanted to eat, so I was

trained to be an upstairs maid. Then one night the master of the house came for me and I chased him out of our room, screaming at the top of my lungs.

“Mother and I left that very night. We lived on the streets for several weeks until, quite by accident, Mother ran into an old friend, a Mrs. Willacy or ‘Frit’ to her friends. Mother was so ashamed. We were dirty and our clothes were a mess. After all, we’d been living on the streets, which can be very dangerous in London. Mrs. Willacy was shocked when Mother explained what had happened. She immediately suggested we move in with her until we could get back on our feet. She lived in a beautiful part of town, a place called Bloomsbury Square. Are you familiar with it?”

Thomas shook his head.

“It is truly a beautiful setting. However, it was awkward for Mother, and I think Mrs. Willacy sensed it. She seemed to go out of her way to make Mother feel at home. Mother cooked most of the meals and I worked at whatever task I was given, but I never felt like I belonged. As I got older, it was time for me to find true employment of my own. Since my original training was as an upstairs maid, that is what I decided to do... and what I still do.”

“What about your mother?” Thomas asked. “Is she still with Mrs. Willacy?”

“As a matter of fact, she is. When I told her I was going to move out, she wanted to move too, but Mrs. Willacy talked her out of it. So she’s still there, still cooking. I think she’s over the embarrassment, because Mrs. Willacy treats her more like a sister than a servant. I think she’s finally happy there.”

“That’s wonderful. Maybe someday I’ll meet her.”

“Maybe you will.”

“Good. I hope it will be soon,” Thomas replied with a mischievous grin.

Catherine looked puzzled. “Is this another of your mysteries?”

“What do you mean—mysteries?”

“Everything with you seems to be a mystery. First you say you have to get to know me, but you won’t tell me why. Then you start to tell me something, but you catch yourself. You won’t tell me anything until I tell you about myself. Everything’s a mystery with you, that is...if you don’t mind saying, sir.” She smiled as she slipped back into the brogue. “I’ve told my story, now it’s your turn.”

Thomas stammered, “I’m not sure where to begin. I have given so much thought to what I am about to say that I expected it to be easy when the time came. But now that you’re sitting here, it’s suddenly very hard. Please bear with me as I muddle my way through it. My dilemma, as silly as this might sound, is that I find myself thinking about you all the time. I shouldn’t be telling you that and I can’t explain it, but I have no choice, because time is slipping away and I must get back to America. I can’t bear to leave you here for fear I may never see you again. I want you to come to the Colonies. Would you consider moving to America—as a housekeeper with the authority to run my house as you see fit?”

“Oh, sir, I don’t know what to say, truly I don’t. I’m flattered, sir, but that’s quite a jump from the position I hold now, and America is so far away. How do you know I can manage a job with that kind of responsibility?”

“The truth is, I don’t know. But I’m betting you can and I have people who can help you learn. As I watched you, during those days you made me wait, I sensed that there was another side of you that you were trying to keep hidden. You don’t hold yourself like a maid. Your use of language, on the few times I was able to get you to talk to me, even hidden under the brogue, bespoke of someone with schooling. I had a sense that the real you was hiding behind a...a charade. What you told me here tonight confirms my suspicions. What I don’t understand is why you have chosen to remain an upstairs maid.”

“Once you present yourself as a maid, it is very difficult to present yourself as anything else. Once society sees you as a

servant, it's almost impossible to climb up from that station."

"But you see," he said quietly, "I'm offering you an opportunity to do just that." He reached for her hand and for once she didn't pull away. He leaned closer to her. "I must get back to America very soon. Time is my enemy and can't be wasted. I am compelled to say things tonight that normally I would not say until I got to know you better. Please hear me out before you make up your mind one way or the other.

"I would hope that as we got to know each other, a very different type of relationship might evolve. I want you to know this before you even consider my offer. If you find me unattractive or not to your tastes, tell me now and I won't trouble you any further. If, on the other hand, there is the slightest interest on your part, and I sense that there is," he said, looking down at their joined hands, "please tell me yes."

"Oh, sir, I don't know if I could," she replied. "My first impulse is to say yes. The truth is I'm a little afraid. I would have to leave my mother and I'm all she has. We work so far apart and we don't see each other as much as we'd like. But I know that if I needed to see her now, I could. To pick up and go to America would be a very big move for me."

"Well, I'll grant it would be more difficult to see your mother, but it wouldn't be impossible. And you could always write," he said hopefully, but she looked unconvinced.

Unwilling to give in at this point, Thomas asked calmly, "Would you accept my offer if I extended it to include your mother?"

"Oh, I would, sir. Do you mean it?"

"Yes, but there is a condition."

"I knew it. There's always a catch," she said, disappointment dripping from her voice.

"What's the condition?"

"The condition is that you come first."

"But what about Mother?"

"If you like it over there, we will send for your mother

within six months. If you don't like it or don't like me, you can return home and the bargain will be off. At the most, you'd be away from her for less than a year. Look at it this way: the voyage to the Colonies is physically challenging for even the most able souls. You are a healthy young woman, so the trip should pose no hardships for you. And if you were to decide during the first six months in America that you did not wish to stay, you would be able to manage the return trip alone. But your mother...how do I say this delicately, without offending? For your mother, because of her age, we would need to plan the very best time for her to cross so that we minimize the weather hardships she'd face. Do you see now why it would be better for you to make a final decision about staying in America before your Mother undertakes such an arduous journey?"

"How do I know you won't change your mind once I'm over there?"

"I'll write up my offer as a legal document and have copies prepared for you and your mother."

"In that case I accept," she said. "With one condition."

"Very well." He smiled, knowing that she was paying him back. "What condition?"

"That I talk with my mother before giving you my final word."

"Done," Thomas said, squeezing her hand and looking around the room. "Innkeeper! Bring us a bottle of your best wine."

"And some food?" Catherine asked sheepishly.

"And some food," Thomas said. "We're famished!"

"I've never seen this side of you, sir," Catherine said, "I think I like it."

The innkeeper hurried over with a bottle of wine and a basket of coarse bread. "We 'ave some noice roast beef tonight, sir, if that would be all roight," he announced in a gravelly bass voice.

"Indeed, and what to go with it, pray tell, for we're celebrating tonight."

“We ’ave potatoes and some turnips, which is roight good, sir. Then, if you don’t moind moy suggestin’, sir, we ’ave some fresh strawberries an’ cream for dessert.”

Thomas looked to Catherine for confirmation. She nodded, and the innkeeper scurried off to the kitchen.

“What is it like over there?” Catherine asked excitedly. “Tell me everything.”

They talked over their meal and late into the evening. Actually, he talked late into the evening, telling her all about life in the Colonies. She had heard so much about New York—the Dutch people who had settled there, the British who now governed, and the Indians—and he delighted in answering her questions.

As the evening wore on, they grew more comfortable with each other and began to talk like friends, rather than employer and potential employee. Thomas was smitten, but he had no idea how she truly felt. He sensed that she liked him—she must. She wouldn’t have accepted his offer otherwise, he told himself. He wanted to hear her say that she liked him—but he was afraid to ask.



Chapter Two



Bristol, England, 1758

“CAAAAST OFFFF,” shouted the boson above the din. “CAAAAST OFFFF,” echoed the sailors as they relayed the command to the men on the dock. Heavy ropes were lifted free of their moorings and thrown toward the departing ship. The sailors, already in position on deck, hauled the lines aboard and stowed them for the voyage.

Slowly the ship slipped away from the protection of the dock, moving resolutely toward the sea which seemed to beckon her—not surprisingly, for she bore the name, *Lady Morgan*, meaning “Lady of the Sea.” The selection of an English name for a ship traveling between England and the colonies was no accident. The Acts of Trade and Navigation dictated that all goods passing between England and the Colonies must be carried on ships that had been built either in England or in America. The owners were required to be English or American, as were the captain and most of the crew. While the name itself was not proof of the ship’s origin, it tended to deflect further investigation, since the laws were not enforced very strictly.

Seagulls hovered overhead, supervising the departure with plaintive cries. The ship took on more movement as she ventured into deeper water, and the whip-crack of the sails signaled that the wind was ready to take them out on their journey.

Catherine stood at the rail waving to her mother, who had come down from London to see her off. Panic ran through her at the thought of not seeing her mother for six months or more. She was afraid and excited at the same time—afraid of the voyage but excited about seeing Thomas again. The mere thought of him transported her back to that night when he had asked her to come to America. She smiled as she thought of all she had put him through prior to that evening. She too had been smitten at first glance. So intense was her attraction to him that it was as if she had recognized the face of a lover from another life and knew that she would be reunited with him in this life.

Now she was on her way to him, drawing courage for the voyage ahead from the joy in her heart. And yet, from the moment they set sail, it had not been easy for her. It was obvious that several of the sailors resented her presence on the ship. They didn't speak to her directly, of course, but they voiced their complaints loudly enough so that she would overhear. Many of these men still considered it bad luck to have a woman on board even though there were women who made their living as sailors. A sudden roll of the ship brought Catherine back to the present. Looking back to the dock she was shocked to see that they had sailed so far she could no longer see her mother.

Her cabin, compared to other parts of the ship she'd seen, was lavishly furnished with a table and two chairs, a chest of drawers, and a wardrobe. Pictures lined the walls and a window allowed a partial view of the sea. *This is wonderful*, she thought, *nicer than some of the rooms I've had to live in for years*. A generous bunk dominated the far corner of the room and there was even a carpet in the center of the floor. *If it weren't for the slight odor of fish and kerosene*, she decided, *this could be a very nice room indeed*. On further inspection she noticed that everything was fastened down tightly. *That makes sense*, she mused. *If the ship is tossed around at sea—the thought sent an icy shiver through her—it is better that I not have to dodge flying furniture*. This revelation seemed to give her comfort.

She had trepidations, of course. Here she was, the only woman among a hundred men. Would there be anyone she could talk to? Was she safe? How was she going to pass the time? In a very brief conversation with the captain, he had let her know that if the ship were not Thomas Bradford's, she would not be on board. He had also told her he would deny having said that to her should she feel compelled to tell Thomas. Captain Yates's instructions were simple: "Stay out from underfoot."

The seagulls had abandoned them miles ago. There was a seething blue-black carpet of water everywhere. The constant motion of the ship, coupled with the faint though persistent odor of her quarters, caused her stomach to recoil. Every time she tried to eat, she wound up rushing over to the rail to vomit. The wind played an important part in helping her figure out which side of the ship was better for this purpose. She was miserable.

One day a sailor approached her as she clung to the rail. His weathered face bore a look of concern. "Miss Catherine, if Oy moight be so bold..."

"What is it?" she demanded, not really wanting company.

"With all due respect, miss, Oy moight be able to 'elp you with that nasty seasickness you've been battlin'."

"How's that?"

"Well, miss, Oy see you spend a great deal of toime in your quarters. Not that Oy blames you, moind, with the sea as rough as it's been. But Oy think if you'll get out into the fresh air more, you'll foind your stomach doesn't get quite as queasy... if you don't moind moy saying. Fresh air and solid food on your stomach and you'll feel better in no toime. Watch out for anything that moight slosh on the stomach, moind you. Try liquid only after you've had something solid to eat. That way it will absorb the liquid when it hits bottom."

She was miserable enough to try anything. "How do you put up with this kind of life, day in and day out?"

"What do you mean, miss?"

“The dampness, the cold, and the threat of drowning...and whatever other perils you might face that I have yet to learn.”

“It’s not loike this every voyage. And this won’t last but another week or so and then it’ll be beautiful out here...you’ll see.”

Catherine liked him. Behind his humble demeanor she sensed a quiet strength born of self-confidence. He was short in stature, probably no more than five feet four, but powerfully built. His hair was bleached almost white, while his face reflected the deep tan of someone exposed to the elements for a long period of time. His eyes radiated pleasure when he smiled and Catherine found it very easy to talk to him.

The fresh air worked, and soon she was able to keep small amounts of food down. When the sea and weather permitted, she spent hours looking out at the vast expanse of undulating water, thinking of Thomas and wondering what life was going to be like in America. *The ocean is so immense, she thought, and there is nothing in any direction but water. No wonder the early sailors thought the world was flat.* She hoped the ship would hold together long enough to arrive safely at its destination.

One thing the sailors certainly weren’t concerned about was bathing, yet it bothered her that she was often not able to wash herself because of the limited water supply. Fortunately she was able to get her one friend, the sailor who had helped her overcome her seasickness, to bring up a bucket of seawater so that she could at least sponge herself off. Her diet on board ship was causing her to lose weight, and her clothes had begun to hang loosely on her. She ate salt horse—god, how she’d come to loathe the monotony of it. The cold, salted meat or fish was enough to turn the stomach. You had to chew on it seemingly for hours before it was ready to swallow. And even then the stomach tried to reject it. The other staple was a kind of biscuit called hardtack. How she longed for more of the fruit she had brought with her! She had rationed it carefully, but it had only lasted a little while. The cook tried his best to add variety to the

basic diet. When the weather permitted, he'd whip up a hot stew or bake some bread, but he hadn't done that nearly enough for Catherine's liking.

Time passed slowly. She occupied herself by writing in her diary, a tedious process the first two weeks because of the erratic movement of the ship as it forged its way through the tormented water. But as her sailor friend had predicted, early into the third week of the voyage the water leveled out and the sun climbed high into the sky. The sea suddenly became a fiery garden as the sun reflected off the white caps and danced on the ripples rushing away from the *Lady Morgan* as she cut her course to America. The sun brought warmth and a renewed energy. The sailors didn't seem to quarrel as much and Catherine began to understand how someone could be drawn to the sea. On days like this, all was well with the world. Fortunately there was enough wind to keep the ship moving. She had heard of "dead calms" where ships had to sit and wait, bobbing up and down like broken twigs on the surface of a pond. She shuddered at the thought.

On occasion her friend Cayle—she'd finally learned his name—would stop by to see how she was doing. At first they talked of trivial things: the weather, her life on board ship, how it had taken her a little while to get used to the gentle curve of the ship's deck as she acquired what Cayle called her "sea legs." As the days passed and she became more comfortable with him, she dared to ask if he knew anything about her new employer.

"Oy don't know him personal, moind, though Oy've met him on several occasions, but from wha' Oy've seen an' 'eard, he is one foine gentleman. He's very fair with those who work for him, so Oy'm told. Oy've 'eard Captain Yates speak very hoighly of 'im on more than one occasion and 'e didn't know Oy could 'ear 'im at the toime. Oy'm told 'e's the most chased-after gent in all of New York. Moind, this is just hearsay, but Oy believes moy sources, so Oy do."

“Chased after,” Catherine mused. “We’ll just have to see about that.” An impish grin raced across her lips.

“So you’re sweet on ’im too, are you, Miss Catherine? You won’t have to worry your head about the competition, if you don’t moind moy sayin’.”

“That is nice of you to say, Cayle,” she laughed. “But I am in a most fortunate position.”

“’ow’s that, miss?”

“Well, you see, I will be living in his house and he will see me every day. I believe that gives me a slight advantage, don’t you think? Now, not a word of my interest in him to anyone, you promise?”

“Yes, miss, not a word. May Gawd stroike me dead if Oy do,” Cayle said, smiling.

Several days later Cayle asked if he could bring one or two of his mates along on his “little visits,” as he called them. At first she was hesitant, not wanting to do anything that might upset the captain. But Cayle assured her that it would not cause problems, since the men would only visit when they were off duty. The life these men had chosen and what drove them fascinated her. Most of them were outcasts without social skills. Some were embarrassed and shy because of the way they spoke and by the limited vocabulary they possessed. Others were completely aware of their shortcomings, verbal or otherwise, and just didn’t care. They were content the way they were—and damn anyone who tried to change them. Over the next week Catherine was surprised to see how popular she was becoming. Cayle and his friends were visiting more frequently, and more of the other sailors started to appear near her cabin. Some just wanted to be near a beautiful woman, while others thought it might help their careers to know someone who would have the ear of their employer. At first she was flattered, then disturbed when Captain Yates looked at her one day with disgust. He didn’t like her, he made no bones about it, but the look he had just given her was pure evil and made her shudder. She retreated to her cabin, not

letting anyone except Cayle coax her into conversation.

This is ridiculous, she thought. No pompous, overbearing, swaggering imbecile of a captain is going to keep me from the deck and my one diversion, my conversations with the men. It has taken time to get to know Cayle and his friends and I'm not about to give up the pleasure of their company. I will, however, limit the conversations to Cayle and the original group of men.

She would feel excited about her adventure one minute and then fear would creep into her mind. *What was life in America really going to be like?* She liked Thomas and she felt as though she had known him forever, yet the truth was that they hardly knew each other at all. He was handsome, to be sure, blessed as he was with a strong jaw line and dark, silky hair. But her attraction to him went far deeper. He had charm and a quick wit, but he also displayed a quiet confidence and a gentleness that made her feel safe with him. And there was something else about him, something that gave him an air of mystery—the patch he wore over one eye. He had never once mentioned it, and she felt it was not her place to question him about it. Maybe he lost the eye in an accident...or in a duel, she thought, then quickly caught herself. Stop! Now you're being a romantic fool! She closed her eyes and his face appeared as if floating before her. How many more days before she could get off this damnable ship, she wondered.

“LAAAAND HO,” came the cry from high up in the ship's rigging. Catherine raced from her cabin to the rail where she joined others in searching for detail in the hazy shoreline. Slowly, oh so slowly, New York began to take shape, as buildings emerged from the haze, some as tall as four stories. Several ships appeared to be tied up directly alongside the houses, while others rocked at anchor away from the busy docks. Seagulls swooped over their ship, screaming for their morning meal. Tantalizing hints of baking bread and morning fires drifted across the water. Subtle changes in the air announced that land was near. She hurried back to her cabin and began throwing her things into her

trunk. She shook with excitement. Today she would see Thomas.

Catherine ran back to the rail. Time seemed to be moving slower than it ever had before. Sailors were pulling down the sails and securing the canvas in a burst of activity. But she stood transfixed by the tableau before her. As the *Lady Morgan* drew closer to the dock, she spotted Thomas among the waiting crowd. She waved although she wasn't sure he could see her. Then she knew he had seen her, for his arm shot into the air and he was waving. The ship made its way as slowly as if the water was trying to push her away from the dock. In her heart she knew that couldn't be true, it was just her impatience to be on land. Thomas was shouting something to her, but she could not make out the words. She was still trying to understand what he was saying when she felt an almost imperceptible thump as the ship eased up against the dock. She had arrived in America.

Thomas paced nervously as the gangplank was moved into place. He willed himself to be still as Catherine started down to the dock. Sheer willpower prevented him from racing to her as she stepped onto the dock. He approached very formally until he could hold back no more. He picked her off her feet and hugged her to him.

"Sir?" she laughed. "Are you always this friendly with your hired help?"

Flustered, he set her down and stepped back to look at her. "Well, Miss Catherine, I was so happy to see you, I just plain forgot where I was. It won't happen again. Pardon me, I keep forgetting you're 'hired help', as you call it. Are you ready to see your new home?" he asked, returning to a formal tone.

She nodded, feeling a little sorry for making him uncomfortable.

Together they walked along the dock. "I've made arrangements to have your things brought to the house," he said. "It seems like years since I last saw you and I want to know everything that has happened between then and now," he said, smiling. As they walked, they fell into the easy conversation of old

friends who were catching up after a long separation. Thomas was immediately interested in hearing how she had fared aboard ship.

Catherine confessed she had been sick the first few days until Cayle had helped her. “Once I learned how to deal with the sea sickness, it wasn’t too bad. And when the sea finally settled down and the sun came out, it was glorious. I must admit, though, there were days when I thought we would never see land again.”

Although it was early morning, New York was wide awake. The dock was bustling with friends and relatives of the passengers from other ships, while workers scrambled to unload cargo. The streets were filled with people from all walks of life—vendors pushing their carts, merchants stealing a little space in front of their stores to show their wares, businessmen moving importantly through the assembling crowd. An errant pig roamed the streets looking for its next meal. There was a growing sense of excitement and urgency in the air, and Catherine began to feel it as Thomas led her toward her new home.

As they approached Thomas’s house, Catherine struggled to conceal her awe. Never had she imagined anything so grand, so proud. Almost centered on a large expanse of land, the house towered a full three stories with nine bays facing the street. Porch columns soaring upward through two stories created an impressive front porch that provided cover for the balcony above the front door. The effect was massive splendor. The surrounding lawns and gardens, meticulously landscaped with an understated sense of harmony, contributed to the aura of beauty and supreme comfort. Walter’s house seemed small in comparison.

“I’m not going to be able to do this, sir,” Catherine murmured, fighting the feeling of inadequacy that had moved in on her.

“What do you mean?”

“Your home is way beyond my capabilities,” she blurted. “You need someone older, more schooled in these matters. I am not trained to handle a home so grand.”

“Nonsense,” Thomas said. “Jeremiah Coker, my assistant, can help you with most of it. I’ve had him managing the house along with all his other duties. He handles the books for my businesses—that’s what I hired him for. I think he will be pleased to hand the reins of the house over to you whenever you are ready. You’ll have the hang of it in no time.”

Catherine brightened. Grateful for the reassurance, she threw her arms around his neck and hugged him.

“Are you always this friendly with your new employers?” he teased gently.

She stepped back and curtsied. “Oyl control moysself better in future, milord,” and they both broke out in laughter.

“Now let me show you the house,” he said as he took her arm.

Four steps took them from the walk up to a beautifully designed doorway. As they approached the front door with its inlaid panels and stained glass borders, the door opened inward, as if on cue, to reveal a large hall. Standing at attention was a very tall man dressed in a cutaway coat revealing a linen shirt, brocade vest, and breeches tucked into knee-length boots. Well over six feet, he towered over everybody near him. His dark unblemished skin resembled polished ebony and his smile lit up his whole face.

“Catherine, I’d like you to meet John, my man of many things.”

A puzzled look crossed Catherine’s face.

“John is a master with the horses, he can fix anything around the house, and all those flowers you saw outside are the product of John’s handiwork.”

“Now I understand what you mean by ‘many things,’” Catherine smiled. “John, it’s a pleasure to meet you. As I learn my new duties, I suspect you’ll be just the man I’ll need to know.”

“It will be my pleasure, miss,” replied John with a slight bow.

I wonder if the rest of the house is as elegant as the place where we are now, Catherine thought.

Servants moved quietly though the hall, their footsteps muffled by a richly hued Oriental carpet. Enormous potted palm trees stood at the periphery of the carpet. There was little furniture in the hallway, but each piece was purposeful as well as extraordinary in its craftsmanship. Two Georgian loveseats were placed against the far wall to receive visiting trades people for brief conversations. A gate-leg table with a single chair occupied the right-hand corner beneath a staircase that rose majestically to the right. On the wall above the stairs was a mural, painted in exquisite detail, of a grassy park by the sea, populated with palm trees and beautiful flowering plants. Among the trees near the water were groups of people in gentle conversation, relaxing in the beauty of the moment. The blues, greens, browns, and yellows of the mural complemented the sea-green of the walls and the dark luster of the wooden stairs and banister. To her left were two doorways. Through the first Catherine could see plastered walls, a beamed ceiling, and a natural plank floor. Two wing-backed chairs blocked her view of the rest of the room. Through the second door was a smaller room, which she thought could be a parlor, judging by the furnishings, which were sumptuous indeed. How odd, she thought, that the first room she saw should be so sparsely decorated in comparison. *It's almost primitive*, she decided.

Thomas apparently read her thoughts. "The front room is my office," he explained. "It is just the way my father designed it. He believed that all a man needed in his office was a desk and a chair or two—anything beyond that was excessive. I tend to agree with him, although I have added a few pieces of furniture that I believe have function." Directing Catherine's attention to a solarium, Thomas said, "This room is actually my favorite room from spring into early fall." The lower windows were the finest stained glass that Catherine had ever seen. Beautiful flowers, including some varieties unfamiliar to her, filled every available space. Chairs surrounded a table in the center of the room, although they didn't look very comfortable.

“It is truly a glorious room, Thomas,” she said, while thinking, *But it must be cold in the winter.*

“In the winter,” Thomas continued as if reading her mind again, “we are forced to board up the entry to this room because it would get cold otherwise. The boards are covered with tapestries to make the room look presentable and to keep out the drafts. From May through September, however, this room is truly magnificent.”

“I love it,” Catherine agreed.

“Come this way,” he said as he led her down a long hall lined with oil paintings of very serious but relatively young subjects. “These are my relatives,” he explained casually. “This last one is of my sister whom I have not seen in ten years. She married a missionary and is somewhere in Africa doing God knows what. I’ve tried to find her on two occasions, with no luck, I’m afraid. But come along, I want to show you the rest of the main floor.”

Leading her through a doorway, he said, “This is the sitting room. As you can see, it was designed to be very formal. My father and I went to great lengths to find the finest and most uncomfortable furniture,” he smiled, “and now I only use this room for meeting with people that I don’t want to talk to for very long.”

How thoughtful of him to go to such gracious lengths not to insult any guest! she thought.

Thomas then led her into his office. This was the first room she had seen from the entrance hall—the room with plastered walls and simple plank flooring. A huge desk, plain in design but with drawers on each side and an exceptionally large working surface, dominated the room. Strangely enough, the desktop was perfectly clear; not one single sheet of paper could be seen anywhere. Behind the desk was a long table of equal length, with a single row of drawers measuring perhaps ten inches deep and running parallel to the top of the table. Between the desk and the table was a large leather chair with overstated wings. Two simple chairs stood in front of the desk.

“Do you not work in here, sir?” she asked. A puzzled look crossed his face. “The desktop is so clean, no papers, not even an inkwell and quill,” she explained.

“Well, knowing that you were coming, I thought I would tidy up a bit,” he smiled. “I didn’t want you to think I would be difficult to look after. Usually there are piles of papers and broadsheets all over the place.”

The plank floor was covered with another luxurious oriental carpet. On the walls were gun racks and two very large paintings. Each was a landscape, one showing rugged snow-capped mountains with trees in the foreground. The other was of rolling hills with a river winding its way from one side to the other.

He noticed her admiring the pictures. “Those are paintings of properties I own. The mountain scene is up above Albany, while the other is just outside of Philadelphia,” he explained. “I acquired the mountain property on a whim because I liked the rugged beauty of the scenery around it. I fantasize sometimes about building a simple cabin up there and hiding away from the world. It won’t happen, but I love the dream. The Philadelphia property is simply an investment. With Philadelphia larger than New York and growing by the day, I really think I will be able to sell the land soon.”

“I agree with you, the mountain scenery is breathtaking. Does it really look like that?”

“Understand that I’m a little prejudiced on the matter,” Thomas said, “but I think it is actually better in real life than the picture indicates. Maybe I’ll take you there some day, but for now let’s keep moving along.”

As they moved toward the door, Catherine noticed a suit of armor that looked as though it had actually seen battle. A large leather sofa with a low table in front of it faced a fireplace in the back of the room. This was truly a man’s room. Designed by a man. Just off this room was the kitchen, a large and very bright kitchen by Catherine’s standards, with windows on two walls. The sink had a pump to bring water into the house. The third

wall supported an extremely large fireplace bedecked with complicated cooking gadgets, wrought iron arms that swung out to allow larger pots to be swung in or out over the fire. These were safety devices designed to keep the cooks' skirts out of the fire. There was an oven built into the fireplace, and chains to hold assorted cooking pots and a spit for roasting wild game. There were flat surfaces for long-handled pans and a collection of poles to aid in hanging the pots and setting the pans.

A stocky middle-aged woman was using bellows to breathe life into a dying fire. Her skirt was lifted and tucked into a belt to keep it out of the fire, but her modesty was protected by a shift, the standard undergarment worn by every woman. "This is Anna," Thomas said. "She is our cook, and a splendid one at that."

Anna set the bellows aside and started untucking her dress. "Good day, Mistress Catherine," Anna said. "I've heard so much about you I feel that I know you already." She smiled.

"And who, pray tell, has been talking about me, as if I didn't know," Catherine said, returning the smile.

"I'm not sure I'm at liberty to say, that individual being in the room and all," Anna chuckled coyly. "But it is good to meet you finally and I hope you'll be happy here."

"Thank you, Anna," said Catherine. "I like what I've seen so far and after eating nothing but ship's food for the past few weeks, I can tell you I am very much looking forward to some good home cooking."

"Would you like something now? I have some nice scones coming out of the oven in a minute."

"I would give anything for a nice cup of tea and a scone." Suddenly she turned to Thomas. "Is that all right, sir? I didn't mean to be rude."

"No, by all means," Thomas said, a little flustered. "I should have thought of it myself. I was just so excited about seeing you and showing you the house that I completely forgot that you might be hungry and tired after your voyage. Please have some

tea and a scone or two—they are always delicious. Perhaps by the time you are finished, your trunk will have arrived and Anna can get you settled in your room. We can continue the tour later. In fact, I'm expecting someone anyway," he added, appearing suddenly uncomfortable.

"There you are, Miss Catherine. That should make you feel better," Anna said as she served her. "Do you take cream and sugar? And how about some nice butter for the scones?" Without waiting for an answer she went off to fetch them, and just as Catherine nibbled on a scone, there was a knock on the front door.

"I'll see who it is," Thomas said. "It may be Captain Skinner and I need to talk to him. Why don't the two of you get better acquainted, and I'll be back as soon as I can. Oh, and Anna, if Jeremiah Coker comes in, introduce him to Catherine and ask him to wait for me, would you, please?"



Chapter Three



The Present

Sitting in his favorite seat on the aisle of the exit row, Brian watched the latecomers board the plane. He tried to guess which one would take the window seat next to him. This was a game he'd played on countless flights. It amazed him how the ticketing agents were always able to place the largest, homeliest, loudest, smelliest, most obnoxious people in the seat next to him.

"Excuse me." The words came out of nowhere. The tone was irritated; the owner of the voice was beautiful. But where had she come from? He hadn't seen her get on the plane. "Excuse me," she repeated.

He shot out of his seat to make room for her, banging his head on the overhead compartment. She smiled and thanked him. Once seated, she looked up at him as he stood in the aisle.

"You can sit if you like—I don't bite," she said.

Brian hadn't moved since she slid past him. He was blocking the aisle. Hurriedly he took his seat and glanced at her.

"That must be some daydream you're having," she said. "You seem to slide back into it without any effort." He stammered something incoherent about a fat obnoxious person that made no sense to either one of them. Before he could explain, the cabin attendant came on the intercom with the

usual message of how pleased they were...

When the instructions were over, Brian turned to the woman, intent on sounding intelligent. But her eyes were now closed, her breathing deep and regular. They weren't even off the ground and already she was asleep! He took advantage of this opportunity to study her high cheekbones, the slight cupid's bow of her upper lip, and the pout of her full lower lip. He admired her elegant nose and wonderfully thick black hair.

Her eyes opened and one eyebrow rose in question. A suggestion of a smile played across her lips. She didn't appear to be angry about the attention he was giving her. Still, he was unnerved. Looking away he felt himself blush. He didn't know what to say or do. It had been a long time since anyone had intimidated him this way. He felt like a schoolboy about to ask for his first date. But why? He didn't know who she was. They had only just met. He felt foolish. He glanced at her.... Her eyes were closed again.

Was this a game she was playing? Was she making fun of him?

It didn't matter—he knew he was hooked.

Somehow he had to find out all about her. Something in the back of his mind said he already knew a lot about her, but that made no sense. He settled back in his seat, closed his eyes, and began to wonder what he could do to draw her into conversation. Then he thought, *Conversation? What conversation! She's asleep, for God's sake! What am I going to do, wake her up and say, "Hi, my name is Brian Pearson. We seem to be getting off to a bad start. Could we start again?"*

"Yes, we can," she said.

His eyes flew open. His head whipped around toward her voice. He knew he had only imagined the question. Was he dreaming?

Her eyes were closed, but again she said, "Yes, we can." Her eyes opened and she smiled. "My name is Nancy Donovan. I'm on my way to New York to attend a convention. You are a mer-

chandising manager with a midwestern department store and you are on your way to New York for a trade show. It's Market Week for most of your ready-to-wear buyers, none of whom are on this plane. You are going in early because you want to go to the opera tomorrow night and you're hoping to find someone to go with you."

Brian was stunned. "How do you know that? How do you know what I'm thinking? We've never met!"

"You're right," she agreed, "we've never met. Yet somehow you seem familiar to me. Isn't that odd? The information I gave you a moment ago just popped into my head. I have no idea where it came from."

"Right," he said. "And I'm supposed to believe that."

"You can believe whatever you want to believe. I'm just telling you I don't know how or where I got the information."

"Excuse me," interjected Brian. "Do I have 'Slow on the Uptake' or 'Easily fooled' tattooed on my forehead?"

"Look, if you want to be a jerk about it, that's up to you. I'm just trying to tell you what happened, as I understand it. Do you think I like it any more than you do?"

"You're serious, aren't you?" he asked, looking at her.

"You're damn right I'm serious. The first time I even knew you existed was when I boarded the plane. Somehow, as I walked down the aisle to my seat, I knew I would be sitting next to you. We've never met, yet I feel as though I know you, I mean, *really* know you. That's very scary to me."

Intuitively Brian knew that she was telling the truth, but it still didn't make any sense. You don't just meet somebody, then start knowing things about them. Things like that just don't happen. He too was sure they'd never met, yet she did seem strangely familiar. They couldn't have met; he was positive he would have remembered her.

There hadn't been many women in his life since the death of his wife four years ago. When Sheila died in a car accident, he thought his world was over. He had loved her deeply. They

had been best friends since grade school, and then she was gone. He had thrown himself into his work to mask the pain and had risen quickly through the ranks, but without Sheila life had little meaning. He'd tried dating a few times. He found that sex, quick and noncommittal, was all he needed from time to time. The rest of his life was work.

The woman's voice interrupted his thoughts. "This is scary. You were just thinking about your wife, right?"

"How do you know that?" he demanded.

"I honestly don't know. These bits of information come flying into my mind, I don't know where from. I know you were devastated by Sheila's loss. You think there is nothing left for you except work. But strange as it might sound, from this moment forward you are going to live again."

"There you go again," he exploded, trying to keep his voice down. "How could you know all this unless you've been checking up on me? Who are you really and where did you come from? This is a three-hour flight, lady, and I've got lots of time to listen."

"If you're going to take that kind of attitude, we'll have nothing to talk about. The Brian I'm seeing in these...these..." She couldn't find the right word. "See, I don't even know what I'm saying anymore." She brushed an angry tear from her eye.

"You don't give up, do you?" Brian cut in. "What do you mean 'the Brian I'm seeing'?"

Wearily she shook her head. "I don't know. As I said earlier, all the way down the aisle I was looking at you and you seemed to be very far away. After I said 'excuse me' for the fourth time, you snapped out of your daydream and seemed so surprised. Sorry you bumped your head, by the way. Does it hurt?"

"Not really," he conceded.

"Good. Well, as I was saying, I was moving past you to get to my seat when I accidentally touched you. And at that moment it was as if I could see into your mind. It was like a floodgate opening and snippets of information rushed into my

head. It was frightening. Since then I've touched you accidentally a couple of times and each time more pieces of information flow into my head. But that's it, that's all I know."

"And I'm supposed to believe this?"

"Believe what you want, I'm telling you the truth as I know it. If I were sitting in your seat, I probably wouldn't believe it either. But like it or not, everything I've told you is true. Girl Scouts' honor." She raised her fingers in salute and smiled tentatively.

Brian heard the sincerity in her words but still struggled to believe her. "I don't like this. Any of it. This whole thing about you grabbing snippets of information out of my mind doesn't make any sense to me."

"Nor to me," she interrupted. She started to touch his arm but stopped. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said anything. But it was so strange, I just had to."

"Would you like something to drink?" came a voice from the aisle.

Brian looked at Nancy, his body language repeating the question.

"I'll take a Scotch on the rocks," she replied.

Brian turned toward the aisle to give the attendant their order. "Make that two." He froze. Standing in the aisle was Nancy's identical twin! He looked back at the seat next to him to make sure Nancy was still there. She was. She too was staring at the attendant. Then she screamed, drowning out the soft murmur of conversation in the cabin and drawing the attention of all the other passengers.

"Are you all right, miss?" the attendant asked, startled by the scream, yet showing no signs of recognition.

Brian gave Nancy no time to answer. He looked at the attendant with astonishment. "Don't tell me you don't see it!"

"See what?" The attendant's face was blank.

"The resemblance between you and this woman next to me."

"Sorry, sir, I don't know what you're talking about," she

said, handing Brian their drinks.

“But you look exactly like her!” he said, pointing to Nancy.

“I’m sorry, sir,” the woman said dismissively, “you’ll have to excuse me.” Releasing the brake on her cart, she moved down the aisle behind them. Brian looked around at the staring faces and as he did, they spun back to their own conversations, convinced that the excitement was over.

Nancy downed the drink, the ice chattering in her empty glass.

“I’m an only child,” she said, fear tugging at her face. “How could that person look so much like me...and not make the connection when she saw me?” She turned her head to get another look at the attendant. “She has to know that we look—” Nancy gasped and Brian spun around to see where she was looking. Standing by the cart serving drinks was a male attendant. Nancy’s twin was gone.

Brian motioned to this new attendant. “Excuse me,” he said. “Where did the other attendant go?”

A puzzled look came over the man’s face. “I’m sorry, sir, I don’t understand. What other attendant?”

“What happened to the woman who served us our drinks?”

“I was the one who served your drinks, sir. Two scotch-on-the-rocks. Right?”

Nancy screamed again, this time a loud, anguished cry. Heads spun around again.

Brian looked at her. She was shaking, and gripping the arms of her seat so tightly he felt sure that she would leave indentations in the metal.

“Is there anything I can do to help?” he asked.

“Yes,” Nancy said. “Go tell the pilot to land this bloody thing. NOW.”

“It’ll be all right,” Brian said, trying to calm her.

She shook her head. “It won’t be all right. We’re forty thousand feet up in the air. I’ve suddenly started doing a mind-reading act. My ghostly double is walking around the cabin and I’m

not even dead yet.... And you're telling me it will be all right."

"I know you're upset, Nancy," Brian said, trying desperately to keep his voice calm. "Maybe if we talked for a while it would get your mind off these crazy things that are happening. There has to be an explanation, although I must admit I have no idea right now what it could possibly be. So let's talk about something else and maybe we can forget about it for a while. How about another drink? Two or three more scotches would surely get our minds off this craziness." He winked like a burlesque clown letting her in on a prank.

Without hesitation, she said, "Okay, I'll have a double scotch. And Thomas..." She stopped cold. "Where did that come from?" she said to no one in particular.

"What did you say?" Brian asked, turning back to Nancy.

"I just called you Thomas. I have no idea why. I don't think I even know a Thomas. Better tell them to keep the scotches coming—it's going to be a very long flight."

"Now, what should we talk about?" Brian said to Nancy as he pressed the call button.

"I don't know," Nancy said, "you tell me!"

"Well, since you seem to know all about me, why don't you tell me about you?"

"There's not much to tell," she said.

"I'm not sure I believe that," he smiled. "Let's start with who you are and what you do. Then we'll go from there."

"As I told you," she began, "my name is Nancy Donovan. I am a research analyst specializing in consumer attitudes. I was born in England and emigrated to the States with my parents when I was fourteen."

"I thought I noticed a slight trace of accent, though it's very faint," Brian interrupted.

"It comes back when I'm around people from Lancashire. You know how the Beatles speak? That's the way I used to speak. It's an interesting accent, but it's certainly a far cry from the Queens' English that Americans expect from a Brit.

Anyway, I'm not aware of any relatives still living over there, and as a result, I don't go back very often. I've never been married, though I was engaged once, but that's a very long story that I don't care to visit right now. I grew up in Towson, a suburb of Baltimore. I went through high school there and then on to Goucher College. After college I tried several different jobs including one where I served as a research analyst in South America. There was some trouble down there, and when I was finally able to get home, I decided to find something a little quieter."

"What kind of trouble?" Brian asked.

"The village where I was working was taken over by rebels," Nancy explained, adding, "I'd rather not go into all the details right now, if you don't mind."

"Fair enough," Brian said.

"Anyway," she continued, "I was offered a job at the research institute in Kansas City. The job didn't last too long. That was mostly my fault—I couldn't stand the confinement of an office. So I left and started my own company."

Now that she had started talking, the information flowed. By the time they reached New York they knew a good deal about each other. There was a marked familiarity between them, as if they had known each other for years. Both of them sensed it. Finally Brian said something about it and Nancy agreed. Neither one of them could put their finger on why that would be, but there was certainly no denying it.

The plane touched down, the reverse thrust making it shudder as it slowed to taxiing speed.

"See," Brian said. "I told you conversation would get your mind off the weird stuff. Now we're here."

"We're not off the plane yet, though," she said. "I won't be happy until I'm on good old terra firma."

"I'll buy that," he said, smiling.

To them, it seemed as if the pilot had set the plane down in Pittsburgh and was taxiing the rest of the way. Mercifully it

finally stopped and the fasten-seatbelts sign went out.

With excruciating slowness the other passengers began to move down the aisle and onto the gangway. At last it was their turn. They almost ran off the plane. People stared at them, but they didn't care.

Our luck must be changing, Brian thought, as a shiny, apparently new cab slid to a stop in front of them. "Where to?" the driver asked.

"I forgot to ask," Brian said, looking over at Nancy. "Where are you staying?"

"The Shelburne," she said.

"But that's where I'm staying," Brian said.

"I know," she smiled and climbed into the cab.

"What do you mean, you know?" Brian demanded as he climbed in behind her.

She laughed. "I'll never tell." Leaning forward, she said to the driver, "The Shelburne, Thirty-seventh and Lex."

"You got it," the driver said. The cab picked up speed and began its dutiful game of chicken with the other cabs jockeying for position on the highway.

"We were so involved with luggage as we were getting off the plane I didn't see your look-alike," Brian said.

"That's true," Nancy said. "I don't remember seeing her either. We didn't just imagine her, did we?"

"I don't think so," Brian answered, "but this has been such a strange afternoon. I'd like to think the weird part is over, but there is one more thing that puzzles me."

"And what's that?"

"I want to know how you knew I was staying at the Shelburne."

"Oh, that," Nancy smiled. "Remember? Every time you touch me, I learn something more. I have no control over the amount or type of information I pick up—it just comes to me. You have no secrets from me, Thomas Bradford." She stopped dead. "What's going on? Who is this Thomas and where did his

last name come from? It has to be coming from you.”

“I don’t think so,” he shrugged. “Maybe he’s a long-lost lover?”

“Not one of mine,” she said.

“Aha! How can you be so sure?”

“I’m sure. At least not in this life,” she laughed.

“That’s better.”

“What?”

“I think that’s the first time I’ve really heard you laugh. I must admit, I love the sound.”

She cuffed him shyly. “Thou makest me blush, sir,” she smiled.

They walked down the steps into the hotel’s marbled lobby with its beautiful antique furniture. They passed the concierge, who was busy helping a young couple, and rounded the corner past gilt-framed mirrors before reaching the check-in desk.

“I was right, our luck is changing,” Brian said.

“What do you mean?”

“You see the young ladies behind the counter? That’s Lauren Gambino and Kasia Zak.”

“And...?”

“And they are terrific. I’ve never had a bad room when Lauren or Kasia has taken care of me.”

“Good evening, Mr. Pearson. It’s good to have you back with us. How are you today?” Lauren asked.

“For the most part well, thank you, Lauren. To be honest though, we’ve had something of a difficult day.”

“Then maybe we can fix you up with a nice quiet room in the back. No great view as you know, but no noisy garbage trucks to wake you up at 5 A.M. either.”

“Would you make that two rooms?” Nancy interjected, “And preferably on different floors.”

“I’m sorry,” Lauren said. “That was presumptuous of me, but the way Mr. Pearson was talking...there I go, assuming again. Please forgive me.”

“No harm done,” Nancy said. “How could you have known we weren’t together?”

“Would you mind if Kasia takes care of you while I finish with Mr. Pearson?”

The registration process went quickly and soon they were on the elevator. Nancy got off first. “Maybe we’ll bump into each other again,” she said, “but if we don’t, have a nice stay in New York.”

“Wait,” he said. “How about having dinner with me?”

“Thank you, but I can’t. I have a date. Sorry.”

“That’s okay, I understand. How about the opera tomorrow?”

“I’m not sure,” she said. “Why don’t you call me in the morning?”

“All right,” he said. “What’s your room number?”

“Just call the operator—she’ll connect you,” she said, and turned to go up the hall.

A bell went off, indicating the elevator door had been open too long. He let go and the door slammed shut.



Chapter Four



New York, The Present

It was late when Brian walked into Bianchi and Margherita's. He stood for a moment breathing in the atmosphere as if he were savoring the bouquet of a fine wine. The ambiance kept drawing him back, and yet there was nothing fancy about the place. The original red, flocked wallpaper still adorned the walls, as did the photos of famous and not-so-famous people, some of whom had become legends at Margherita's. On a raised platform in the center of the room was a baby grand piano. The man they simply called Maestro was at the keyboard, as usual.

Facing the piano was a long bar that looked as if it belonged in a Victorian mansion somewhere uptown. Behind the bar an anvil and two ball-peen hammers were prominently displayed, these three items being the centerpiece for the house specialty—the Anvil Chorus from the opera *Il Trovatore*.

“Am I too late for food?” Brian asked, as Joe D'Amico came rushing to greet him. Joe was one of the owners of the restaurant as well as a jack-of-all-trades—singer, maitre d', bartender.

“You, my friend, are never too late—even if I have to cook for you myself,” he laughed. “But I must warn you, I'm a lousy

cook.”

“That’s what your partners tell me,” Brian said, smiling. “They told me if it weren’t for your singing, they’d throw you out on your butt.”

“They did, did they?” Joe laughed again.

Their standard greeting ritual was interrupted by angry voices coming from one of the back tables. Brian turned to look and did a double take. There was Nancy, the woman from the plane! She was in a heated exchange with a man Brian didn’t recognize. All conversation had ceased around them.

Abruptly the man stood up, threw his napkin down, fished a few bills from his pocket, and threw them on the table. “THAT’S IT, BITCH, I NEVER WANT TO SEE YOU AGAIN,” he screamed.

Brian had to step back into the cloakroom to avoid being knocked down as the man stormed past him toward the exit. “Who was that?” he asked Joe as he ventured back into the room.

“His name is Jeremiah Coker,” Joe said. “He’s a crook, always playing an angle. He’s not to be trusted.”

That was an uncharacteristically strong statement for Joe. Brian couldn’t remember ever hearing him say a bad word about anyone.

“I have a good reason for saying that,” Joe said, noticing Brian’s surprised expression. “About a year ago he came to me and said he was interested in buying the restaurant. You know I’ve been looking for a buyer so I can retire. I want to go home to Rome. I think I told you that.”

Brian nodded.

“Well,” Joe went on, “to make a long story short, he tried to cheat me out of the place.”

“And you still let him come in here?” Brian asked.

“I have no reason to stop him now. He pays with cash and as long as he behaves himself, he can come as often as he likes. I’ve never seen the lady before. She looks as if she’s

had a very bad day.”

“Well, I can’t speak to what happened in here, but she had a scary afternoon.”

“You know her?” Joe asked, surprised.

“We met on the plane coming to New York. Some strange things happened enroute and neither of us can come up with an explanation for them.”

Briefly Brian told Joe about the unusual happenings on the plane.

“That’s it. That’s all I know. She’s staying at the same hotel I am and we parted friends.”

“Why don’t you see what you can do for her,” Joe suggested, “while I fix your drink?” He headed for the bar as Brian went to over to the table where Nancy sat facing away from the room, head down. As he approached, he could see she was sobbing.

“May I sit down for a moment?”

She looked up, startled. “Where did you come from?” she asked.

“I’ve been coming here for years,” Brian said. “A trip to New York wouldn’t be complete without a visit to this place.”

“Are you sure you weren’t following me?”

“Of course not. Why would I follow you? And why would you even think something like that?”

“I don’t know, it just seems that suddenly you are making a lot of appearances in my life and I don’t know if it’s by accident or what.”

“Sorry I bothered you. I just thought you might like some company. I can see now that you don’t.” Without another word, he turned and went to his usual table where his drink was waiting for him.

A commotion by the front door grabbed his attention. A huge, shabbily dressed woman wearing a large floppy hat with a feather was trying to come through the door and Joe was trying his best to stop her. Brian couldn’t help laughing at the

sight. Poor Joe was struggling in what looked like the fight of his life against a woman twice his size. He was pushing his hands firmly against the enormous cushions that were her breasts, so enormous that his forearms appeared to sink in to his elbows. The woman began screaming at Joe, letting him know in graphic detail what she was going to do with the little runt if he didn't get his hands off her tits. Mercifully, two of the waiters came to Joe's rescue, and the men quickly escorted the woman out to the street. Joe came back inside, out of breath, rubbing his hands and holding his head to one side. He raced toward the bathroom and vanished.

Suddenly Nancy was beside Brian's table. "You didn't have to stomp off," she said.

He glanced up at her, startled, his mind still with Joe and the bag lady. Recovering, he sprang to his feet. "I'm sorry," he said. "Now who's following who or is it who's following whom, I can never get it straight."

"It doesn't matter," she answered. "I was having a bad night and I took it out on you. I came over to apologize."

"Accepted. Now please join me," he said, pulling out a chair for her.

"I'm not sure I'd be very good company tonight," she said, not moving. "Besides, I've already eaten."

"That's okay. You could have a drink, or you could try some of their famous rum cake. It borders on sinful. Please, I would really like you to keep me company. Have you ever been here before?"

She shook her head.

"Then you must stay," he said.

"Why?"

"So you can experience the magic of this place. Come on, it might cheer you up and I promise you don't have to tell me what was going on when I came in...unless, of course, you want to," he smiled.

She looked deep into his eyes for a moment. Apparently

satisfied, she said, “Well, all right, as long as you remember that what was going on when you came in is none of your damn business, pardon my French.”

“Deal,” he said, smiling as he pushed in her chair.

He ordered her a drink and a piece of rum cake.

They sat quietly for a long time, sipping their drinks, the music transporting them to their private worlds. Once their food arrived, Brian ate ravenously while she picked at the cake. Nancy didn’t say a word—she had withdrawn inside herself. She stared straight ahead, her eyes unfocused. She seemed to be wrestling with something, but what was it? The expression on her face bordered on pain, or perhaps grief. Her jaw was set, her mouth a tight line. A tear escaped from the corner of her eye, but she made no move to wipe it away.

When their dishes were cleared away, Brian continued staring at Nancy. She was still in her other world. He removed a dollar from his pocket and folded it in half lengthwise. Then he took Nancy’s hand and laid the bill on her upturned palm. Startled by this intrusion into her thoughts, she looked questioningly at her hand and then at Brian.

“Thoughts that deep have to be worth more than a penny,” he said.

“I’m afraid the dollar doesn’t cover it either,” she said, smiling and suddenly focused.

“Do you want to talk about it?” he asked.

She shook her head. “It’s too muddled right now. Maybe later, but for now why don’t you tell me about this place, like you promised?”

“All right. In the beginning...”

She reached over and punched his arm lightly. “Not quite that far back, if you don’t mind.”

“Did you notice the photograph of Robert Duvall near the entrance when you came in?” Brian went on. “For a long time I thought Joe was faking it with that picture. I have been coming here for almost twenty years and I had never seen the man

in here. Then one night I came in and there he was with three other people. Joe asked if I would like to meet him and of course I said yes.”

“What’s he like?” Nancy asked.

“He is probably one of the nicest people you could wish to meet. He was very gracious when Joe introduced me. I apologized for interrupting his evening and told him that I was a great fan and that I had enjoyed his movie *Angelo My Love*, part of which was actually filmed here in the restaurant. He asked me to join him and his guests for a drink, but I declined, saying that I had interrupted his evening enough.”

Brian continued. “It’s not the famous people who come here from time to time who draw me back to this place. It’s the warmth and friendliness. Joe will introduce customers to other customers if he senses it is appropriate. Friendships and business associations have started in this room. Joe really has a gift for making everyone feel comfortable. The outstanding French/Italian food, light opera, and Joe’s singing all work to weave a spell over those who come here.”

“I can feel it,” Nancy said. “I’m starting to unwind for the first time today. Thanks for making me stay.”

“The pleasure is all mine,” he replied.

Brian grew quiet as Joe began singing his repertoire of love songs that always cast a romantic spell over the room.

“I can see why you like to come here,” Nancy said.

“I’m glad,” Brian smiled. On impulse he took hold of her hand. She didn’t pull away.

Brian looked into Nancy’s eyes. “I feel as though we’re lost in our own little world. I wonder what it is that is pulling us together.”

“I don’t know,” replied Nancy. “I don’t mind admitting that I was more than a little concerned on the plane.”

“Me too,” Brian agreed, “although I am not convinced that we are completely free of whatever it is.”

Nancy frowned at the thought.

The hours evaporated until they were the only customers left in the place. After apologizing profusely to everyone for staying so late and then promising to return soon, Brian and Nancy left for the hotel. They turned down Fourth Street and walked toward Sixth Avenue to catch a cab.

“It’s such a beautiful evening, let’s walk for a while,” Brian suggested.

“Good idea.”

They looked in store windows and bargained with street vendors whose eclectic display of wares enthralled them. Stopping in a little food market, they each bought some fruit and drinking water to take back to their rooms. Almost immediately they found a cab and were soon back at the hotel.

The romantic mood of the evening had not abated, but each of them was reluctant to say anything. As the elevator reached Nancy’s floor, she turned and placed a sisterly kiss on Brian’s cheek. “Thank you for helping me through the plane ride and for salvaging my evening,” she said as she turned to leave.

“Wait,” Brian pleaded, struggling with his groceries and reaching for her with a free arm. The elevator door slammed shut as he pulled her toward him. They came together in a deep, searching kiss, their shopping bags falling to the floor.

Suddenly, Nancy pushed back. “No,” she said, breathing heavily. “I can’t do this. I’m sorry.”

“But you seem to feel as strongly as I do,” Brian said.

“I do feel strangely drawn to you, Thomas Bradford.” She stopped. Her hand flew to her mouth. “I’ve done it again.”

“Done what?” Brian asked.

“Called you Thomas Bradford!”

“Who is he?”

She shook her head. “I honestly don’t know. I don’t know anyone by that name. But this is the second or third time I’ve called you that.”

“That’s weird,” Brian said.

“Yes,” she replied, “and scary.”

The elevator doors opened.

“This is your floor,” she said, holding the door open as he collected the fallen groceries.

“You’re sure you won’t change your mind?” he asked.

“I’m sorry. I’m truly attracted to you, but I just can’t run off to some strange man’s room. It’s not the way I am.”

“I’m not strange,” Brian offered, trying to lighten the moment.

“You are to me...in a nice way, of course,” she said, adding, “but I still won’t come to your room. Sorry.”

Reluctantly Brian stepped out of the elevator. He turned and looked at her. She smiled and the doors closed.



Chapter Five



New York, The Present

Consciousness came slowly. Brian stretched and rolled over. For a moment he was disoriented. Shafts of sunlight streamed through a timeworn window, creating a modern abstract of light and shadow on the wall. Rolling onto his back, he thought of Nancy and smiled. He rolled over again and lifted the phone.

“Operator,” the voice said.

“What room is Nancy Donovan in, please?” he asked.

“Sorry, sir. We’re not allowed to give out that information. I can connect you if you like.”

“Yes, thank you.”

After seven rings, the operator cut in. “I’m sorry, sir. There doesn’t seem to be anyone in at the moment. Would you care to leave a message?”

“Yes, please. Would you ask her to call me when she gets in...and would you tell her it’s urgent?”

As he stepped out of the shower, the phone was ringing. Soaking wet, he raced across the room to answer it. “Hello?”

“Hey, Brian, it’s Mike. How ya doin’, buddy?”

“Oh, hi, Mike.”

Mike was one of Brian’s best friends, a relationship that had

started when they'd worked together in their early department store days. Theirs was a friendship that had grown over the years. In fact, when Brian married Sheila, Mike was his best man. And after Sheila died, Mike was the one Brian turned to when he needed a shoulder to lean on. Now he was a vice president with a well-known clothing line headquartered in New York. Their jobs and travel schedules kept them from seeing each other as often as they would have liked. But when it was market week in New York and Mike knew his old friend would be in town, he always tried to line up a date for him.

But this time Mike heard something different in Brian's voice. "Don't sound so happy, ol' pal," Mike went on. "Cheer up, I've got the perfect date for you tonight! She looks like an angel, loves opera, and she's dying to meet you."

"Thanks, Mike, but I think I'll pass."

"What, are you nuts? Have you any idea what I went through to get you this date? And at your request, I might add!"

"I know and I appreciate it, Mike, I really do. But I may already have a date."

"What do you mean you may already have a date? You're not sure?"

"Not really. In fact, when the phone rang, I was expecting it to be her. I had left a message for her to call me."

"So you're going to turn down an angel in the hope this other woman calls."

"That's about it. I'm sorry if it screws you up. I do appreciate the effort you went to, but the lady I'm waiting to hear from is very special."

"This one I've got to see."

"One day I hope you will," Brian replied.

As soon as he put the phone down, it rang again. "Hello?" he said, snatching up the receiver.

"What's so urgent?" It was Nancy.

"You," he replied.

"How so?"

“I wanted to see you. Do you have plans for today?”

“Actually I do. I’m going to do some shopping and then...”

She let the sentence hang.

“Could you be talked into a little sightseeing? There are some places I would love to show you. We could do some shopping in the Village and then go down near Wall Street. Have you ever walked around the original part of New York?”

“Actually I haven’t. What is there to see down there?”

“Places like the Stock Exchange, Fraunces Tavern, Bowling Green, Battery Park, the Woolworth Building.... Have you been to any of them?”

“No, so it might be fun. Okay!”

“How about meeting me in the lobby in half an hour?”

She was dressed in slacks and a sweater, with another sweater tied casually around her shoulders. She looked as if she’d just stepped out of a fashion magazine.

Brian beamed at her. “You look magnificent—much too good to take out and share with the masses. Maybe we should stay here.”

“Let’s go,” she laughed. “I just went to a great deal of trouble so that I could look good for you. I want to go out among the masses as you call them. So that they can oooh and ahhh just like you did.”

“I’m flattered,” he smiled.

“You should be,” she said, linking her arm through his. “Let’s go.”

They walked a couple of blocks before grabbing a cab. Their kamikaze driver shot through impossibly tight spaces and honked his horn at the slightest delay or provocation. Stoplights did nothing to impede this cab’s forward motion. Red apparently meant to lean on the horn and reduce speed to forty. How they made it to their destination without injury was a miracle. As they pulled up at Fourth Street and West Seventh Avenue with a sudden squeal of brakes, Brian and Nancy made a hasty exit from the cab. The prospect of walking had suddenly

become very appealing.

As they strolled along the streets, they were amazed at the number of stores they saw that were unquestionably bizarre. Overcome with curiosity, they ventured into a few of them, including one that sold only rubber clothing, and another that sold grotesque furniture like a chair in the shape of a hand and a footstool with hairy legs. What a different sort of neighborhood this was!

They ate at a little place on Seventh Avenue with window seating that allowed them to watch the parade of humanity going by on the sidewalk. Only in the Village could you find such an assortment of people—from businessmen in expensive suits, to artistic types in strange get-ups, to bag ladies pushing shopping carts down the street or rummaging through trash bins.

“Look at that,” Nancy said, pointing to an aging hippie gliding by on roller blades. His long gray hair was pulled back into a tight ponytail. As he skated, the ponytail bobbed from one side to the other in tempo with the thrust of each blade. He was smiling.

“I wonder what he’s so happy about,” Nancy murmured.

“I don’t know,” Brian replied. “Maybe he’s reliving a special night like the one we were starting to have last night. That would put a smile on his face,” he grinned.

Nancy smacked at his arm playfully. “Our evening was quite innocent and you know it.”

Outside, horns honked and drivers shouted clever suggestions at each other or opted for hand gestures instead of words. It was the definitive New York experience, a kaleidoscope of street scenes and colorful language all performed to a cacophony of horns, screeching tires, and raucous voices.

After leaving the restaurant, Brian and Nancy instinctively joined hands and almost immediately found themselves locked in a passionate kiss. Whatever was happening between them could not and would not be stopped. When they were finally able to release each other, they continued walking down the street, somewhat oblivious to everything around them. They

browsed through several boutiques and were chased out of one because the owner, a wild-eyed woman in a purple caftan, didn't think their "auras" were appropriate for her store. She told them that she was able to see auras emanating in brilliant colors from people and that what she saw around Brian and Nancy was different from anything she had ever seen. Something about the two of them frightened her. She claimed their presence made the hair on the back of her neck stand on end!

"What do you think of that?" Brian asked Nancy as they made their hasty exit. "Do you think she knows something we don't?"

"You don't think it's something related to what happened on the plane, do you?" suggested Nancy.

"I don't know," Brian replied. "Hold on, I'll go back and ask her what she saw around us."

Brian headed back into the store, and within moments came charging out with the woman at his heels. "When I tell someone to get out of my store," she shrieked, "it bloody well means I don't want them coming back. I don't know exactly what it is that's strange about you two, but whatever it is, I don't want it in my store." With that she turned and stormed back inside.

Brian and Nancy were baffled. They weren't sure if they should laugh or be frightened, but they did know they had to move on. At a sidewalk stand he bought Nancy a pair of earrings that glinted like diamonds in the sunlight. Not for a moment did Nancy mind that they were not diamonds—all she knew was that she liked them.

They hailed a cab and headed south to their first stop, the Woolworth Building.

"For my money this is one of the most beautiful and interesting lobbies in the entire City of New York," Brian said as they entered the building. He pointed to the vaulted ceiling. "Look at that mosaic work. Beautiful, isn't it?" Taking Nancy's hand, he continued, "The bronze work is so incredibly delicate, and the cornices are wrought iron and covered with gold-leaf.

They look like lace, don't they?"

He led Nancy over to three gargoyles. "If you look closely at these, you'll see that they are Mr. Woolworth himself, and over here, Cass Gilbert, the architect, and finally Louis Horowitz, the builder. I wish I could have met Mr. Woolworth. Not only did he have a great mind for business, but these gargoyles are proof that he had a great sense of humor. Even more amazing is the fact that this entire building was built for cash—\$13.5 million. It's hard to believe that someone could have built a building so magnificent on nickels and dimes. For seventeen years this was the tallest building in the world."

"It is incredible," Nancy agreed. "As many times as I've been to New York, I never would have seen this on my own. I love it—thank you for bringing me."

Brian was pleased. "We have to keep moving, there's so much more I want to show you."

Turning right as they left the Woolworth Building, they passed St. Paul's Chapel on their way down Broadway to Trinity Church. "This is actually the third building to occupy this space," Brian explained as they reached the church. "I've always been fascinated by the names on some of the headstones, though I can't explain why. They date back to the 1700s and yet I feel as though I know some of these people."

Nancy smiled. "Did you have something to drink this morning before I met you?"

"I know it sounds crazy, but I've had this feeling for years. The first time I ever visited this place, it felt familiar to me. Sure, it sounds impossible, but it's true. And I haven't been drinking or smoking anything, I swear."

"I believe you. But are you saying that you recognize the names on the headstones?"

"Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying. It doesn't make sense, but look at this one: Dr. Richard Ayscough. I have the distinct impression that I was standing where you are now when they put him in the ground."

“But that’s impossible! The headstone says he died in May of 1760.”

“I know. But I can see Richard in my mind. He was about ten years older than I. I remember him as being fair complected and standing about five foot two or three...and he walked with a slight limp.”

“I’ve changed my mind,” Nancy laughed, “I think you must have been drinking this morning after all.” But she stopped short when she saw the expression on his face.

“I’m serious. Look at this one—Mary Dalzell. I knew her and her husband, James, or I feel as though I knew them. As I stand here now, I have the strongest notion that you and she were friends. She was only twenty-eight when she died so you would have been about the same age.”

Nancy was starting to get uneasy. “What are you talking about, Brian? You’re not making any sense.”

“For some reason I keep locking into 1760. I don’t know why, but that year resonates in my mind.” Brian pointed to three other headstones and studied them. “Gilbert Forbus, John Bates, Thomas Perry. I feel as if I knew them all, but they were all buried in the late 1700s. So that’s absurd, right? But then why do I feel as though I know so much about them?”

“You’re really serious about this, aren’t you?”

“I’ve never been more serious in my life. I probably wouldn’t even have mentioned all of this except that we’ve been having such strange experiences this just seemed like one more. Now you’ve come into my life, and I’m wondering if you’re tied in somehow. Does any of this mean anything to you?”

“Okay, I have to admit the name Mary Dalzell does ring a bell. But I’m not getting any flashbacks or any sense that I lived in the eighteenth century. I wish I could help you, I really do, but I’m afraid this is just an interesting old place to me, nothing more.”

Brian looked disappointed. He had hoped Nancy would warm to the subject.

Feeling responsible for the sudden change in his mood, Nancy searched her mind for a way to cheer him up. “Okay, mystery man,” she smiled. “You promised me a fabulous tour. Are you going to make good on your promise or not?” As she linked her arm through his, he began to lead her instinctively toward Wall Street, and by the time they arrived, he had stopped thinking about the headstones and had regained his interest in showing her around old New York.

Brian was happy to be her tour guide once more. “By the way, the street we just crossed is Broadway. What most people don’t know is that it is the longest continuous street in the country, stretching from the Battery, which is not far from here,” he said, pointing, “all the way to Albany.” He smiled at her. “Just a little trivia for you to tuck away and forget.”

“Actually, that’s one little piece of information I just might un-tuck to impress my friends.”

“The street we’re on now,” Brian continued, “is the famous Wall Street, aptly named because it actually was a walled street. The governor of New Amsterdam at the time, Peter Stuyvesant, ordered it built, not to keep the Indians out, which is what most people believe, but to keep the English out. He was afraid of an invasion by the English who were living in the New England colonies. Over time, the wall deteriorated, helped along by the townspeople who were not above taking a board or two to repair their houses or to use as firewood. When the wall was torn down in 1695, the name stayed.

“Now look across the street. That is the world-famous New York Stock Exchange. Normally you would see groups of people leaning against the wall having a cigarette and taking a break from the hectic pace of the Exchange. It’s deserted right now only because it’s Saturday and the market is closed.”

Continuing down Wall Street, Brian pointed to their left. “That’s Federal Hall, but once it was the site of New York’s second City Hall. And it was here that freedom of the press won its first battle.”

“What do you mean?” Nancy asked.

“Well, it was here that Peter Zenger of the *New York Weekly Journal* was tried for seditious libel for printing the truth about the royal government and the governor at the time, William Cosby. Zenger won the case, which is widely considered to be the first test of freedom of the press. Am I giving you too much information?”

“No, it’s really interesting,” replied Nancy without hesitation. “You’re bringing these places to life for me.”

As they reached the corner of Broad and Pearl Streets, they came upon Fraunces Tavern. “This is one of the oldest establishments in New York,” Brian explained. “Actually this isn’t the original building, it’s a re-creation, though you can find a few of the original Dutch bricks in the west wall. It started out as a private home, built in 1719 by a wealthy merchant named Stephen DeLancey. But by the time it was sold to Samuel Fraunces in 1762, it had become a warehouse. Fraunces turned it into a tavern called the Queen’s Head. Then, when the American Revolution broke out, the place was renamed Fraunces Tavern and it has stayed that way ever since. In 1783 George Washington said goodbye to his officers in this very place.”

“Where do you find all this information? And how on earth do you remember all those dates?” she asked.

“Well, for one thing, I have a photographic memory. I’m able to remember things quite easily. Sometimes it’s a blessing, sometimes it’s not. I’m sort of a history buff and I like architecture, so all this information just kinda congregates in my head and stays there,” he replied, smiling.

“Sounds like a painful condition. Is there a cure?” Nancy teased.

“Yes...you!” Brian smiled, pulling her into a playful hug.

The old tavern was open, so they went inside and climbed the stairs. They stood at the doorway to a long room where dishes and clay pipes were set out as if Washington and his generals were about to arrive.

“Close your eyes for a moment, Nancy. Do you feel it?”

“Feel what?”

“Feel as if you belong...as if we have returned to our old neighborhood?”

“Okay, I hate to say it, but it does a little. It’s funny, but I do feel very comfortable in this part of town. I didn’t have that feeling up at Trinity Church, though. But here...”

Hand in hand they walked to Bowling Green. “This was originally a cattle market and parade ground before it became a place where the early New Yorkers actually did bowl. But it was a different kind of bowling than what we do today. In England they call it bowling on the green and it was more like the Italian game of bocce. The people living in the houses facing the Green once rented the area for one peppercorn per year for their private use and recreation. The original fence was erected in 1771 and was put there to protect the little park...and it also kept the pigs out.”

“Pigs?”

“Yes, in the early days, pigs used to roam the streets. They were a little like street sweepers because they cleaned up the refuse that people would toss out on the street.”

Nancy made a face. “That’s disgusting. It must have been awfully unsanitary.”

“It sure was. There were no garbage pickups, no toilets, and in many cases no running water in the houses. Some of the refuse wound up in landfills.”

“Landfills? Back then?”

“Yes, as strange as that might seem. The Dutch were famous for creating land where there wasn’t any. If there was anything they didn’t know what to do with—like old ships or equipment—they just sank it out in the water off shore. In fact, if you look at the streets, the ones down by the water that are flat, they were all built on top of landfill. The ones that go uphill, they’re actually on the original land.”

They walked quietly for a while, lost in their own thoughts.

Heading north, they had passed Wall Street and Maiden Lane and were not really sure where they were. Turning a corner, they found themselves on a street that time had forgotten. Huge trees cast eerie shadows over the cobblestones, and a light breeze whispered through the branches. The all-embracing sense of quiet defied them to make a sound. Brian reached for Nancy's hand. They continued slowly down the street, overwhelmed by a feeling of moving back through time and space, and in fact they were. Reason told them to turn and run, but something else told them to move on. At last the quiet was ruptured by the sound of children laughing. The laughter made them smile, until they realized there were no children anywhere around—they were the only ones there. Nancy tightened her grip on Brian's hand and moved closer to him. Something was happening to her. She wanted to turn and run, but like Brian, something compelled her to continue down the street.

Nancy stopped short, and stared in awe. Halfway up the street, beyond an ornate wrought-iron fence and surrounded by trees, loomed a very grand, old mansion. Almost centered on the large expanse of land, the house towered a full three stories with nine bays facing the street. Porch columns soaring upward through two stories created an impressive front porch that provided cover for the balcony above the front door. The effect was massive splendor. The surrounding lawns and gardens, meticulously landscaped with an understated sense of harmony, contributed to the aura of beauty and supreme comfort.

"What is a place like this doing here?" Brian wondered aloud.

Nancy shrugged. "I have no idea."

There was no one on the street. Nothing but the rustling of the trees disturbed the deathly quiet. The normal sounds of the city could not be heard even though the city was only a block or so away. Nancy and Brian were transfixed, like subjects under a hypnotist's spell. And then the huge wrought-iron gates opened.

"Come on, let's go in," Brian said enthusiastically.

“I’m not sure we should right now. It’s getting late and we should be heading back.”

“But what if the gates don’t open again? This might be our only chance! We don’t have to stay long. Okay?”

Nancy could tell that Brian was not about to give up, so she followed him, somewhat reluctantly, through the gates. Almost guiltily, they looked around to see if anyone was coming, but saw no one. As they started up the walk to the house, the gates closed behind them. As they approached, it almost looked as though the mansion was beckoning to them. Surely it was just a trick of the imagination. Or was it?

The light was fading as they walked around the side of the house. In the back was a very large barn. It appeared to be divided into three sections. A hayloft was to the left, and stables to the right. The center door was open, revealing a beautiful covered carriage. Hanging on the walls were assorted tack for horses, but there were no horses in sight, and not a soul around.

Brian nodded in the direction of the barn. “Do you want to take a closer look?”

“I think it would be better if we just get out of here.” Nancy replied, turning around toward the house and pulling Brian with her.

“What do you think, Nancy? Would you like to live here, in this house?” Brian smiled, ignoring her anxious expression.

“Maybe in another life. Right now I just want to leave.”

Brian tried the gates. “They’re locked.”

“They can’t be—we just came through them a few minutes ago. Maybe they’re only stuck.”

“Well, we can always climb over them,” Brian suggested.

“You might be able to climb over, but I sure can’t,” Nancy replied. “Let’s see if anyone is at home. Maybe they could open the gates for us.”

Four steps took them from the walk up to a beautifully designed doorway. As they approached the front door with its inlaid panels and stained glass borders, the door opened inward,

as if on cue, to reveal a large hall.

“Hello?” Brian called

There was no answer.

“Hello? Anyone home?” he called again, this time stepping over the threshold.

Still, no one came.

“Maybe it’s a museum,” he said. “Come on, let’s look around.”

Enormous potted palm trees stood at the periphery of the carpet. There was little furniture in the hallway, but each piece was purposeful as well as extraordinary in its craftsmanship. Two Georgian loveseats were placed against the far wall. A gate-leg table with a single chair occupied the right-hand corner beneath a staircase that rose majestically to the right. On the wall above the stairs was a mural, painted in exquisite detail, of a grassy park by the sea, populated with palm trees and beautiful flowering plants. Among the trees near the water were groups of people in gentle conversation, relaxing in the beauty of the moment. The blues, greens, browns, and yellows of the mural complemented the sea-green of the walls and the dark luster of the wooden stairs and banister. To the left were two doorways. Through the first Nancy could see plastered walls, a beamed ceiling, and a natural plank floor. Two wing-backed chairs blocked her view of the rest of the room. Through the second door was a smaller room, which she thought could be a parlor, judging by the furnishings, which were sumptuous indeed.

As they entered the first room, Brian and Nancy again had the distinct impression that they were stepping back in time. The plastered walls, beamed ceilings, and natural plank floors conjured up images of a Charles Dickens novel. Even the window glass was handcrafted, its uneven surface distorting the last rays of daylight in the room. A fire was going strong in the fireplace, and flames from the crackling logs sent shadows dancing across the walls. A gentle hint of smoke floated in the room, mingling with the scent of melting wax. There were six small

tables in the room, each illuminated by a flickering candle.

“Two for dinner?” The words seemed to fill the room.

Startled, Brian and Nancy spun around in the direction of the voice. And then Nancy gasped, for the man she saw in front of her looked exactly like Brian, except for his clothing and an eye patch. The man had a boyishly handsome face, yet a stately appearance, and was dressed in clothing from another time. He wore a velvet jacket, loosely resembling tuxedo tails, over a starched linen shirt and a silk vest. At his throat was a neck cloth of fine silk. His trousers tapered down to a tight fit just below the knee and his riding boots were highly polished. The patch he wore over one eye did not make him look sinister, but rather all the more debonair.

“Two for dinner?” the man asked again.

Nancy held tightly onto Brian’s arm. Her face was ashen, and she appeared to be struggling for breath. The resemblance between Brian and this man had shocked her deeply. Brian apparently was having the same reaction, judging from the strange expression on his face.

Brian finally spoke up. “No, thank you. We just need someone to open the gates so we can leave. In fact we’re sorry to have disturbed you at all, but we were attracted to the house and when the gates opened, we couldn’t resist trying to get a closer look. We really are very sorry for the intrusion.”

“You are not intruding, sir. I’m afraid I don’t understand what you’re talking about when you say the gates are locked. There are no gates anywhere on the grounds.”

“But there are,” Brian insisted. “We came through them just moments ago and they locked behind us.”

“I must protest, sir,” the man said. “I’ve lived here since the house was built and there are no gates. I must also tell you that your presence was anticipated.”

“I don’t understand,” Brian said. “Anticipated?”

“Yes, sir. I’m sure it’s confusing right now, but it will work itself out. Mark me well. Now, as I was saying, ‘Two for dinner?’”

Brian was getting uneasy. “I don’t think so, thank you anyway. If you could just have the gates opened, we’ll be on our way.”

“As I said, sir, there are no gates, and even if there were, I couldn’t possibly let the two of you go out in this kind of weather.”

“What are you talking about? Other than getting a little dark, it’s a beautiful day.”

“It was when you came in, sir, but now there is a terrible storm.”

“I don’t want to question you, but I find that hard to believe,” Brian replied.

“Then I suggest you go to the door and look outside,” the man replied evenly.

Brian left the room and opened the door through which they had entered. The sky loomed heavy and dark except when angry streaks of lightning tore through the blackness. Rain was falling so hard that the drops bounced off the ground. Thunder rumbled in the distance. The man was right about something else: there were no gates.

Slowly Brian walked back to where Nancy stood. His face had lost all its color. “I owe you an apology, sir. You won’t believe the storm that’s going on out there, Nancy. And as this gentleman pointed out, there are no gates—or fence, for that matter. If it’s all right with you, I suggest we eat here and wait out the storm.”

Nancy was shocked by the expression on Brian’s face. “That’s fine by me,” she nodded, trying to regain her composure, “although I’m not really that hungry.”

“Please follow me,” the man said, leading them to a bare, wooden table by a window in the back of the room. A bookcase perpendicular to the wall created a small alcove that provided them with complete privacy, their own little world. They could no longer see the entrance to the room, and no one coming in could possibly see them. The only light came from the candles

on the table and from the sconces on the walls. Behind each sconce was a dark smudge, left by the dying smoke of a succession of candles.

Brian and Nancy sat down across from each other. The window glowed with each flash of lightning. On one of the walls was a very large painting of rugged, snow-capped mountains with trees in the foreground. Across the room they could see another painting, this one of rolling hills with a river winding its way from one side to the other. An old clay pipe lay on a ledge, as if its owner had just set it down for a moment.

Now that they were alone, Brian could no longer contain his excitement. “That guy looks just like me, doesn’t he? You thought so too, didn’t you?”

“If you had an eye patch, the two of you could be identical twins. How very strange.”

“I know. But what is even more strange is that I’m getting that same feeling of being at home here. I can’t explain it.”

“Yes, and it’s a little too comfortable for my liking,” Nancy replied. “I feel as if I’m in the middle of the strongest *déjà-vu* episode of my life and I don’t mind telling you I’m a little scared.”

A crack of lightning drew their attention again to the window. When they looked back, they were shocked to see glasses of ale, a basket of coarse breads with cheese, and a plate of fruit laid out in front of them. “Where did all this come from?” Brian asked. “Did you see anyone bring it?”

“No,” Nancy replied, looking around. “We only looked away for a minute...and there it was.”

Brian got to his feet and looked around the room quickly, but they were alone—there was no one else in sight.

“That’s odd. How could anyone move so quickly or quietly that we wouldn’t see them or at least hear them coming?” Brian wondered aloud.

“This whole place is spooky, if you ask me. I still think we should have tried to leave,” Nancy responded.

“You’re right,” Brian conceded. “But the weather is really bad outside, and I think we should at least wait for a while. This storm can’t last all night.”

Brian lifted his glass to sniff the ale. He tried a small sip and, satisfied, took a long, appreciative drink. Studying the glass in his hand, he commented, “This ale is very good, though it’s not something I would have ordered on my own.”

Their host seemed to materialize at their table. “How’s the ale?” he asked.

Brian was taken aback by the man’s sudden appearance. “It’s very good, but where did it come from?”

The man spoke calmly. “I brought it while you two were looking out the window.”

“But how could you? I looked around the room as soon as we saw the things on the table and you were nowhere in sight.”

“Perhaps you didn’t notice the door on the other side of the bookcase. That’s where I went.”

“Well, no, I guess I didn’t see that door,” Brian responded, still not convinced.

“You see, there’s an answer for everything,” the man smiled. “It’s a pity it’s so dark out there,” he went on, pointing to the window. “During the day there is a wonderful view of the garden. It’s particularly lovely at this time of year. We spent quite a bit of time designing it and finding the right plants to bring it to life. John, our ‘man of many things’ as we call him, created a masterpiece, I think. There is nothing else like it in the whole of New York.” The man suddenly stopped. “I’m sorry, you didn’t come here to listen to me ramble on. What can I get you to eat?”

“What do you have?” Brian asked.

“Well, let’s see...,” the man said stroking his chin. “Tonight our main course is roast beef, shepherd’s pie, or tripe with onions, served with Yorkshire pudding and roasted potatoes. We also have black pudding, and for dessert we have trifle, blanc-mange, or sponge cake with fruit.”

“What an unusual selection!” Brian exclaimed and, leaning

over toward Nancy, asked, “Do you know what all these things are?”

“Yes, but other than roast beef, I haven’t seen any of these dishes since I left England,” she said. “I always hated black pudding—it’s made from pigs’ blood. I think I’ll try the shepherd’s pie. I always liked that when I was a little girl and suddenly I feel hungry. Then if I still have room, I’ll have the trifle,” she said with an impish grin. “I love trifle.”

“What’s shepherd’s pie and what’s trifle?” Brian asked.

“Depending on where you get it,” Nancy replied, “shepherd’s pie is basically ground beef and mashed potatoes, which are cooked by themselves first. Then the potatoes are placed in a deep dish and the center is scooped out. The ground beef goes in the center and the remaining potatoes go on top of the meat. The whole thing is then baked. Occasionally people put diced carrots and turnips around the meat for additional flavor. It’s really good. As for trifle, it’s a dessert made in layers of fresh fruit, sponge cake, and whipped cream. But what makes it heavenly is the rum or some other liquor that is poured over the top. The concoction is allowed to sit until all the flavors mingle. Maybe I should start with the trifle, I made it sound so good,” she added, laughing.

“I think I’ll stick with things I know. I’ll have the roast beef,” Brian said. “A nice big baked potato with butter would make it perfect.”

“We only have roasted potatoes. Did I not mention them?”

“Yes, I think you did,” Brian said. “Okay, I’ll have the roasted potatoes.”

When their host left to prepare the meal, Brian reached across the table for Nancy’s hand. “You know, aside from these weird goings-on, this is one of the best days I’ve had in a long, long time,” he began. “I’m so glad I met you. I’m even glad those crazy things happened on the plane. Otherwise, you would be God-knows-where now and I would be at the opera. I would never have found out what a special person you really are, and we never would have found this wonderful old mansion.” He

kissed her hand gently. “Is it just me or are you feeling some of the same things?”

“It’s not just you,” Nancy replied. “I feel as if we were destined to meet, though normally I don’t believe in that kind of thing. Every time I see you or touch you, I feel as if I have done it before. It makes no sense, but I can’t get past the feeling. We never met before yesterday, I’m sure of that. If it hadn’t been for that craziness on the plane, as you said, I wouldn’t be here. The fact that I am here is something I cannot explain. I don’t regret any of it. I couldn’t be happier. And yet it’s very strange to me. In some ways I feel as though I’m still asleep on the plane and everything that has happened since is just a dream. But that can’t be.... I know I’m awake and I know all this is happening. Am I making any sense?”

“Perfect sense. I understand exactly what you’re saying and I don’t have any answers either.”

“There’s something else that’s very odd. Each time I touch you there is less and less information about you coming into my mind.”

“Maybe you’ve learned all you need to know about me,” he said, smiling.

Nancy smiled back. “I doubt that...although—and this will sound really strange—I suddenly feel that I know all about you. But the images I’m getting now seem to apply more to our host than to you. Or maybe it is you dressed in his style of clothing. I’m not sure what to think any more, it’s really getting very confusing. The other thing is that when I get these images, your name is Thomas, not Brian. Why do you suppose that is? And where did this name Thomas come from? I keep using it as if it were your real name, but I don’t know where it’s coming from.”

“I don’t know where it’s coming from either, but sitting here with you in this place at this time, I have to say it doesn’t feel uncomfortable. In fact, I feel as if you and I once sat in this very same place by this very same window. It’s like the feeling I had

when I saw the headstones in the churchyard, except this time you're experiencing the same thing. The images seem so real, but they can't be because we only met yesterday, right? I still can't get over that."

"Get over what?" Nancy asked.

"Over the fact that we only met yesterday. By the way, on the plane you mentioned being engaged to someone. If you don't mind my asking, whatever happened to him?"

Her face clouded and her eyes began to water. "They said he killed himself," she said. "I think I mentioned something to you yesterday about a job where there were some problems with a South American country. I didn't want to go into it then, but this might be a good time."

Nancy paused and took a deep breath. "I was working for a company that had dealings with several Latin American countries. A problem came up in one of the countries and I was a member of a group sent to see what we could do to straighten it out. Without going into all the gory details, we had to travel to a remote village. Fighting broke out in the region and we were detained. All of our equipment was confiscated and I had no way to get word out that I was all right. I was held for two years and then released. In the meantime, someone told my fiancé that I had been killed. They say he was never the same after he received the news. Anyway, by the time I returned, he was dead. He killed himself, so they say. I was never really sure. For some reason, an autopsy was never performed and there were constant rumors that a friend who wanted his money and his property had poisoned him. I never did find out."

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't have asked."

"It's all right, it took a while. I thought I was over it. I am over it. I don't know where those tears came from. Anyway, if I'd married Alan, I wouldn't be here with you."

"Good point," Brian said.

Their food arrived, giving off an assortment of delicious aromas. Suddenly they were ravenous. Without another word

they began to eat. The only sounds were those of knives and forks clinking against fine bone china.

After the meal, Brian sat back in his chair and wiped his mouth with a napkin. “That was excellent. I can’t remember having better food anywhere. I’m stuffed.”

“Me too,” Nancy said. “That just might be the best shepherd’s pie I ever had.”

“For someone who claimed not to be hungry, you sure cleaned that plate,” Brian observed.

Nancy chuckled. “You’re right. I made a real pig of myself.... But guess what! I still have room for some trifle.”

“Good,” Brian said. “Maybe I’ll join you.”

A half hour went by, but no one came to remove their dishes or to take their dessert orders.

“Let me see if I can find the waiter—or whatever he is,” Brian suggested, getting up from the table.

He was back almost immediately. Nancy jumped up from the table. “What happened? You look as if you just saw a ghost—” She caught herself. “You didn’t, did you?” She was becoming alarmed.

“I never found the man who showed us to our table. I was told that the bartender was the owner of this place. When I asked to meet him, I was in for a shock. Not only is his name Jeremiah Coker but he looks just like that guy Coker you were with last night! When he saw me, he turned very pale and I saw real fear in his eyes. Why do you suppose he would be afraid of me?”

“I don’t know, but there has to be a mistake,” Nancy said. “The Jeremiah Coker I know never owned anything, at least as long as I’ve known him. Certainly he couldn’t own a place as magnificent as this.”

“Well, he certainly looks like the man you were with last night and he was calling me Thomas. I told him my name was Brian and he said no it’s not, it’s Thomas Bradford. Then—and this is really strange—he asked me what happened to my eye

patch. The man who showed us to the table wore an eye patch and he did look just like me, we both recognized that. You don't think he might be Thomas Bradford, do you?"

Nancy's hand flew to her mouth. "Coker's right! We even said that ourselves, remember?"

"I do now."

"Anyway, Coker wanted to know how I got in. I told him we'd been here about an hour and a half. I described the man who let us in, but he didn't seem to believe me. Another odd thing about this place is that everyone is dressed in clothing from the late eighteenth century. At first I thought it was a 'period' place and I asked him if the employees dressed up like that every night. But Coker's response was, 'Dress up like what?' And then he said, 'Are you pulling my leg, Master Thomas?' Finally he saw something in my face that convinced him I was serious. He asked where I'd come from, and then he asked me a very strange question. He wanted to know who was buried in the grave he thought was mine. I told him I had no idea what he was talking about, but I don't think he believed me. I told him I had come to New York from Kansas City. At that point, he looked at me as though I were an escapee from an insane asylum."

Brian was clearly agitated. "And then, do you know what he said? He asked me, 'Where is Kansas City?'"

"'In the middle of the country,' I told him. 'Everybody knows where Kansas City is.'"

"And he said, 'Never heard of it—are you drunk?'"

"I told him I didn't believe so. But when I looked outside for just a moment—you won't believe this—I couldn't see any cars or tall buildings anywhere around."

"You must be hallucinating," Nancy said. "You don't suppose there was something in the ale, do you?" But she could see that he was truly frightened, and so she spoke softly. "Why don't you pay the check and we'll just leave?"

Taking the lead, she rose from the table, picking up her purse as she did so, and together they walked to the front of the

room. Several people were sitting at tables. Everyone in the room turned in unison and gawked at Nancy. It was as if she and Brian had entered some kind of time warp.

Impossible, she thought. But why were they staring? Hadn't these people ever seen a woman dressed like this before? Or was it that her sweater was too tight, or her slacks were too snug? If they really were in a time warp, then the clothes she was wearing—and the way they were designed to show off her figure—would be scandalous. She suddenly became very self-conscious. What had seemed like a comfortably stylish outfit for the day might brand her as a...as a what? A harlot, or even worse, a witch! She moved closer to Brian, positioning herself so that the people in the room couldn't see her. But it wasn't working. They were still gawking. Two of them even had the gall to get up and move closer so they could see her better. When Coker saw Nancy, he almost fainted.

"Miss Catherine," he gasped. "Where did you come from?"

"Coker? What are you doing here?"

"Oy own this place. Remember, when Master Thomas doied, 'e left the place to me? But 'e couldn't 'ave doied, could 'e, sir? Because you're standing roight here, aren't you, sir?"

"Who is this Thomas you speak of?" Nancy asked. "I don't think I know any Thomas."

"You're pulling moy leg now, aren't you? Who is this man with you then if it isn't Master Thomas? Last time Oy saw you, Miss Catherine, you was engaged," Coker said, nervously avoiding her eyes. Nancy began to wonder if he was lying but let him continue. "You was going to be married roight after you got back from your trip to England, don't you remember, Miss Catherine? 'ow did Master Thomas come back to life? 'e must be dead, Oy know because Oy..."

"Because you what?" Nancy asked.

"Nothing. Oy...nothing. Oy was just going to say, 'Because Oy buried 'im.' Anyway, apparently 'e's not dead, 'cause 'e's here with you, just loike old times. Isn't that roight, lads?" he

said, appealing to the other patrons.

Several of the men nodded.

“You’re not the Jeremiah Coker I know,” Nancy said

“Miss Catherine never dressed loike that before,” one of the men shouted, drowning out her words. Several others snickered.

“Is this some strange game?” Coker went on. “We all thought you was dead, but if you’re not, who did we bury in that grave?”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Nancy said.

“Are you trying to tell me that you were never engaged to Thomas Bradford?” Coker asked.

Nancy went white. “I’ve never been engaged to anyone named Thomas Bradford.” She turned to Brian with a pleading look.

“I think what we have here, Mr. Coker, is a case of mistaken identity,” Brian said. My companion, whose name is Nancy by the way, simply happens to look very much like the lady you knew. I can assure you, however, that she is not the same woman.”

“If you say so, sir,” Coker said. “But if she has a strawberry birthmark on her left buttock, she’s the same Miss Catherine.”

Nancy screamed before she fainted and fell heavily to the floor. Brian knelt beside her and took her into his arms.

“Do you have any smelling salts?” Brian asked Coker.

“Oy keep some behind the bar. Oy use them to wake up the occasional drunk.” He winked and smiled broadly as if he had just told a huge joke. “Oy’ll get them.”

Coker returned with the smelling salts. “Why don’t you and the lady stay ’ere tonoiht and maybe it will all sort itself out by morning?”

“No, we couldn’t do that. We must get back to our hotel. We have appointments tomorrow. People will be looking for us.”

“Oy don’t know what a hotel is, Master Thomas, but if you mean an inn, then the only other place close to ’ere, as you know, is the Queen’s Head owned by that Fraunces fella. In this weather that would be a nasty walk and there are no carriages

out tonoight. Stay with us, Oy won't even charge you for the night and we can talk in the morning after a good noight's sleep. Oy'll even put you in your old room. 'ow would that be?"

Brian was about to remind him that he wasn't Thomas, then changed his mind. "What is today's date?"

"August 17th in the year of our lord 1762," Coker replied.

"But that can't be," Brian said, shaking his head vehemently. "How could it be?"

"Oy don't understand," Coker replied.

"When Nancy and I walked in here tonight, the date was August 17th, but the year was 2001."

"You shouldn't be talking loike that, sir. They could execute you for being a devil and the lady for being a witch. We don't want that, do we, sir?"

"But how could that be?"

"Oy truly don't know, sir. Maybe the ale was a little strong tonoight and it's affecting your mind. Why don't you and the lady just stay here tonoight?"

Nancy winced as the smelling salts were waved under her nose. She opened her eyes and tried to burrow in Brian's arms.

"Gentlemen," Brian said, "could you give us a little privacy for a moment? I need to talk to Nancy."

Reluctantly the men moved away. When Brian was sure they were far enough away, he quickly whispered their situation. "Look, Coker wants us to stay the night. The weather is really bad outside and I have no idea how we'd get back to the hotel. I know you are going to have trouble believing this, but we seem to have slipped back in time and we are in the year 1762, or so I was told."

"That's bullshit. Someone must be playing a joke on us," Nancy replied.

"Maybe so, because I find it hard to believe myself. But there really is a terrible storm out there, and when the lightning lights up the sky, I can't see the city skyline or anything I can recognize. I know it will be a little awkward, but I think we

should accept Mr. Coker's offer and stay. After a good night's sleep, I'm sure we will be able to figure this out in the light of day. Coker wants to put us up in what he calls my old room. He insists I'm Thomas Bradford, and remember, even you have been calling me Thomas Bradford, whoever he may be. Now the question is, would you like a room of your own or do you want to stay with me?"

Nancy stood up, still holding on to Brian. "We're in this thing together, aren't we, and I'm afraid to let you out of my sight. But no funny stuff."

Brian feigned a hurt look. "How could you possibly think that I would do anything ungentlemanly at a time like this? Seriously though, I'm like you, I just want to get through this night in one piece so we can get back to our hotel in the morning."

"Then we'll stay," she said, still feeling reluctant.

Brian waved Mr. Coker over. "We'll be delighted to accept your offer and stay the night. Thank you."



Chapter Six



New York, 1762?

Fetching a candelabrum, Coker led Brian and Nancy through the entry hall and to the stairway.

“Oy can’t for the loife of me figure out how the two of you got ’ere,” Coker said as they climbed the stairs. “And why you would choose that particular table, now that’s a real mystery.”

“Well, first of all, Mr. Coker, we didn’t choose that table, we were shown to it. But aside from that, what’s so special about that table anyway?” Brian asked.

“When you lived ’ere, or when Master Thomas lived ’ere, that was ’is office. That table where you sat, the one in the little alcove, was ’is favorite spot to sit. Moind, the bookshelf wasn’t there then and the room was woide open. But you—sorry, Oy mean Master Thomas—and Miss Catherine used to sit there of an evening and talk for hours. In the summer they’d open the windows—they loved to smell the flowers and they seemed happy just looking out into the garden and talking to each other in private. Toward the end, though, Oy did overhear them planning their wedding. They was so ’appy. ’Tis a shame what ’appened to ’em.”

“What did happen?” Brian asked.

“Well, sir, like Oy was sayin’, towards the end Master Thomas and Miss Catherine was planning to be married. Miss Catherine went back to England to fetch ’er mother and was lost at sea, or so we thought. Master Thomas took that news very ’ard, ’e did, and wound up killing ’imself —roight in that very room, as a matter of fact. Then to everybody’s surprise, Miss Catherine came back. She was so distraught when she found out what happened to Master Thomas that she took her own loife too. And that was the end of it ’til you two appeared ’ere tonight. ’ere we are then,” Coker announced as they reached a door at the top of the stairs.

Coker handed the candelabrum to Brian and put his shoulder to the door. “The door sticks a little when it hasn’t been opened for a while,” he muttered, bumping it with his shoulder. When the door finally gave, he turned and removed a single candle from the candelabrum, then entered the room, lighting each of the sconces on the walls. The flames sputtered as the wax softened. And then the flames began their dance in earnest, and the light they cast illuminated the entire room, revealing more details. The room was cold, and a chill cut through the light clothes they were wearing. Brian felt Nancy shiver, and instinctively he put his arm around her waist, pulling her to him.

“You should ’ave a look at the portrait over the fireplace,” Coker suggested, with a devilish look in his eye. He stood aside as they approached the portrait and smiled as a look of recognition crossed their faces.

They were staring at a portrait of Nancy! Her clothing was from another era, but other than that, there could be no doubt—the face in the painting was the very image of Nancy.

For the second time in two days they had seen something that defied explanation, something that didn’t seem humanly possible: first, the woman on the plane and now, a portrait of another Nancy who must have lived two hundred years ago! It couldn’t be—but it was. The frightening thing was that they had both been awake when these phenomena occurred. Awake and

sober. Some force was working on their minds, trying to destroy their sanity, and they were determined not to let it happen.

Forcing themselves away from the picture, they began to look around the room. A large canopied bed with tapestry drapes dominated the room. "Those tapestries are magnificent, Coker," Brian commented, doing his best to regain his composure.

"Thank you, sir, they was imported from Spain by Master Thomas. 'e was right proud of 'em, 'e was. 'e said they not only looked good but they blocked the draughts that whirl around this room in the winter. A very practical gen'leman, our Master Thomas. Would you loike me to build you a foire?" Without waiting for an answer, he went to the fireplace and set fire to the kindling. "This room can get very cold at noight even when it's warm outside. We don't really know why. But for some reason the room never really warms up without a foire."

Thick oriental rugs covered the floor, and wing-backed chairs, each with a footstool, mirrored each other as they faced the fireplace. A bearskin rug lay between the chairs and hearth. On either side of the door through which they had entered were matching armoires beautifully decorated with inlaid wood and polished to a high gloss. By the window was a large brass telescope, behind which was a plain, straight-backed chair.

Coker noticed Brian admiring the telescope. "Do you remember that, sir? Does it bring back any memories at all?"

"Of course not," Brian replied. "Why should it?"

"It was one of Master Thomas's most cherished possessions," continued Coker, undaunted. "With that telescope, 'e used to watch the ships come in. Of course, 'e was always particularly interested when one of 'is own would arrive. 'e kept logs on their schedules, do you remember, sir?"

"Why do you keep asking me if I remember these things? How could I possibly remember them if I'm not Master Thomas?" Brian asked.

"Well, sir, it's just that you look so much loike 'im, Oy just can't 'elp it. Oy'll never forget 'is excitement when 'is ships

was due in. If they was late, 'e would pace up and down, look through the telescope, and then pace some more. Once they was docked, 'e would be off roight away talking with the captain about the voyage."

Coker grew very animated. "Oy'll never forget the look on your face when you learned Miss Catherine's ship had been lost at sea. Oy've never seen such pain on a 'uman face."

Brian was exasperated—Coker was back to talking to him as if he were Thomas Bradford. He started to correct the man once again, but then figured it probably wouldn't help. Besides, he was somewhat curious about where all of this would lead.

Nancy glared at Coker. "So you're talking about what happened after I supposedly went back to England to get my mother—is that correct, Mr. Coker?"

"That's roight, miss. You was going to England to fetch your mother. You was to marry Master Thomas as soon as you got back. Don't you remember? The preparations was all made. Then when we learned the ship was lost, well, Master Thomas went mad with grief. 'e wouldn't talk to anyone or eat. 'e got thinner and thinner and finally wound up poisoning 'imself. Please, Miss Catherine, don't you remember? When you came back from England and found out Master Thomas was dead, you was so distraught, we feared for your loife, we did. And roightly so, if you ask me. It wasn't long after you went to work for that ol' biddy Mrs. Hicks that we 'eard you'd done yourself in." Coker took a deep breath. "Which brings me back to who moight be in those graves if it's not the two of you?"

"I really don't know what you're talking about, Coker," Brian retorted. "I don't mean to be rude, but this whole conversation, quite honestly, is pure rubbish. I think we'll be better off if we call it a night and try to straighten this out in the morning."

"Oy'm sure we will, sir."

Brian was just about to say goodnight when something occurred to him. "Tell me, Coker, when exactly did Thomas Bradford die?"

“Well, it was in the fall of 1760, about two years ago now.”

“Then that proves two things: that I’m not Thomas Bradford and that Thomas Bradford did indeed die when you said he did.”

“Oy don’t follow, sir.”

“Well, first of all, 1760 was not two years ago, because this is 2001.”

“That can’t be, sir, and if you are going to say things loike that, Oy swear someone will accuse you of witchcraft.”

“It’s not witchcraft, it’s the truth.”

“As you wish, sir, but please, Oy beg you, don’t talk about this outside this room. Bein’ as Oy’m an ’onorable man, Oy will not repeat what you’ve said, but others moight.”

Finally satisfied with the fire, Coker set the poker down and turned toward the door. He hesitated for a moment, then moved off to his right and pressed what looked like a rose carved into the paneling of the wall. A door slid open to reveal a dark space behind. Taking a candle he stepped through the door and lit two sconces. He turned and beckoned Brian and Nancy to follow him.

“Do you remember this room, Master Thomas, you was always so proud of it?”

Brian sighed. “No, Coker, I don’t.”

“You must’ve ’it your head while you’ve been gone, Master Thomas. Oy’d ’ave bet money that you would never forget this room, particularly after all the trouble we went to. And ’ow about you, Miss Catherine—do you remember?”

“Of course not, Coker,” Nancy said, barely containing her irritation. “Why should I remember this room?”

Coker ignored her. “This room is for the ablution process,” he explained importantly. “It’s unloike any room you ’ave ever seen and Oy must explain ’ow it works. You will foind two pitchers filled with water, and two bowls. There is soap to the side of each bowl.” Opening a pair of cabinet doors, he pointed to two beautifully decorated china pots. “This is where we keep the chamber pots. But we only uses ’em in the winter when things freeze. If you will step over ’ere, you will see what looks loike a

chair. You're sure you don't remember this, Master Thomas?"

"I really don't, Coker, but please go on."

"Instead of using the chamber pots, you will use this chair. You see the hole in the center of the seat? Well, when you are finished, you will pull this," indicating a chain dangling from what looked like a big wooden box. "This will send water into the basin and force the contents down and out of the 'ouse to a pit at the back of the property."

So what we have here is a flushing toilet, Brian thought. "That's pretty remarkable, considering the year," he exclaimed. "I thought flushing toilets didn't find their way into America until the early 1800s. If Coker's right about the year, Nancy, this is an incredible find."

Coker interrupted. "You said it was the invention of your friend Alexander Cumming. Remember, Master Thomas? You said 'e got the idea from that parchment 'e found written by Sir John Harrington sometime during the 1600s."

"Thomas Bradford might have told you that, but I happen to know this idea goes back to about 1700 B.C."

"You're pulling moy leg now, aren't you, sir?"

"Not really," Brian went on. "There is evidence that this sort of thing was used at the Minoan palace of Knossos on the island of Crete, which puts it in 1700 B.C."

Coker looked confused. "Well now, Master Thomas would've been real interested in that bit of 'istorical information. But 'ow come you know about something that old? Are you sure you're not just pulling my leg? If you're not Master Thomas, then you sure do talk loike 'im, particularly when you go on about all these koinds of things."

"I'm not pulling your leg, Coker. The information I just gave you has been documented," replied Brian, adding sarcastically, "Of course, if this is 1762 as you claim it is, then it's highly unlikely anybody would have that information yet."

Brian had grown tired of trying to reason with Coker and turned his attention to Nancy. "What you're looking at is a piece

of lost history,” he explained patiently. “There is no mention of any device like this in the colonies prior to the early 1800s in any book I have ever seen. I could understand why you might not find it fascinating, but believe me, I can’t wait to tell my friends about this.”

“Hey, this is all part of the adventure, and I’m along for the ride,” she laughed. “Seriously, I think it’s pretty exciting that you’re finding out all these things, and I have to admit I’m learning a lot.”

Coker interrupted, anxious to continue his lecture. “Well, then, if Oy’m not boring you with all this, Oy’d be ’appy to tell you more.”

Nancy nodded encouragement as Brian said, “If this is 1762, then this water delivery method—and the water closet—were in existence much earlier than we had thought.”

“Yes, sir,” Coker agreed. “In fact, if you remember, there is a wooden poipe system that delivers water to street pumps in several parts of town and you even managed to get a pump installed in the kitchen.”

“How do you get the water up here? Do you have to carry it?”

“No, sir. On the roof is a windmill connected to a ’ydraulic pump and on a good day we draws water up to a ’olding device ’idden by a false roof.”

“I don’t suppose you have a shower,” Brian smiled.

Coker looked puzzled. “A shower, Master Thomas?”

“Yes, a place to bathe and wash one’s body.”

“That’s what the pitchers and bowls is for. Or Oy could fill the big tub in morning, if you loike. Are you sure you don’t remember any of this?”

“I’m sorry, Coker, I really don’t,” Brian said truthfully. He remembered reading somewhere that the forefathers thought bathing was a health hazard and that in 1835 Philadelphia came two votes shy of banning wintertime bathing. Ten years later Boston forbade bathing except on specific medical advice. So for tonight anyway, he and Nancy would not be having a shower—

nor, thank god, would they have to use the chamber pots.

“In these cabinets,” Coker went on, interrupting Brian’s thoughts, “you’ll foind towels and over ’ere is a cabinet for your clothes. There’s more foirewood in the other room, and that, Oy believe, should be all you need for the rest of the noight. With your permission, Oy’ll leave you now. If you should need something during the noight, my quarters are off the ’all at the bottom of the stairs.”

“Thank you for your hospitality, Coker,” Brian muttered as he closed the door and turned to face a smiling Nancy.

“Wow,” she chuckled, “for a lover of obscure history, you sure hit pay dirt tonight. Coker shows you an ablution room, and you act like a little boy who was just given a key to the toy store! I guess we can be grateful that something positive is coming out of the weirdness.” Then her expression turned serious. “What do you suppose is happening to us?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “These have been the strangest two days of my life.”

“I feel the same way.”

Brian reached out for Nancy and pulled her into his arms and kissed her. It was a kiss to comfort her... warm, gentle, and lingering. They continued holding each other, lost in their own thoughts and grateful for the warmth of the fire.

Very soon the heat from the flames became too intense, and they were forced to separate and move away from the fireplace. Yet Brian still felt connected to her, and even energized by their embrace. “You don’t suppose there are any more secret rooms or doors around here?” he wondered aloud. “That bathroom is incredible. According to everything that I have ever read on the subject, there were no bathrooms anywhere in this country before 1829. That’s when the Tremont Hotel in Boston opened for business. It was four stories high, but it had only eight water closets—all on the ground floor. What a mess that must have been! I wonder if you had to book an appointment,” he smiled.

“My goodness, your store of knowledge knows no

bounds,” teased Nancy.

“Well, I may know a lot of things, but I sure don’t know where we are at the moment. I don’t believe in time travel, but I have no answer for what is happening to us. The fact is, we’re here now, wherever *here* is and we should make the most of it. Let’s explore this room and see what else we can find.”

Together they moved around the room, looking, touching, and examining. The ceiling was paneled and polished to a high gloss, much like the walls. The panels were actually twelve-inch-wide boards of wood fitted together in seamless perfection. The craftsmanship, especially in the hand-carved motifs, was exquisite and unlike anything they had ever seen.

Remembering how Coker had opened a panel for the bathroom by pushing on a carved rose, they started pushing all the carved roses they could find. They were astounded when another panel slid back to reveal stairs leading upward. A sudden blast of frigid air roared through the room, blowing out all the candles. The only light that remained came from the glow in the fireplace. Frantically they sought to find the rose that had opened the door so that they could shut it again. The temperature in the room had dropped so low that they began to shiver. Quickly they moved closer to the fireplace to warm themselves.

“Well, this can’t be a nightmare because we’re both in it...and anyway, I can’t imagine any nightmare that would have you in it,” Brian reflected as he rubbed Nancy’s hands in his own.

“That’s a very nice thing for you to say.”

“It’s true. In spite of all the strange things that are happening, you are the most wonderful thing that has happened to me since I lost my wife.”

“Thank you, kind sir,” Nancy answered, “but that’s a pretty strong statement about someone you only met yesterday.”

“Apparently you haven’t been listening,” he laughed.

“What do you mean?”

“According to Coker and all the evidence we’ve become aware of tonight, you and I have been lovers for centuries,” he

said, grinning. “Betrothed to be married, no less. I wonder why you didn’t return when you were supposed to. Would you like to tell me why you weren’t on that ship?”

“I’m not sure I remember. It’s been a couple of hundred years, you know, and I don’t have a memory like yours,” she smiled, playing along.

“Fair enough. But when the memory returns, you must promise to share it with me. After all, it cost me my life!”



“I found a nightshirt to wear,” Nancy announced as she came out of the ablution room. “There’s another one in there in the closet for you. I feel so comfy right now and relaxed. It feels good to unwind a little after what we’ve been through. Do you suppose we could take the nightshirts as souvenirs?”

“Well, this is supposed to be my room so we should be able to take all the furniture too, if you’d like,” he laughed. “But I agree with you, the nightshirts are a great idea and I can’t tell you how good you look silhouetted against that fire.”

“Men! You’re all alike!” Nancy pirouetted for him and smiled coyly.

Brian grinned at her and headed for the ablution room. Moments later he returned in his nightshirt and set about putting more wood on the fire. Soon the candles died out, and the only light in the room came from the fireplace. Brian stood in front of the fire, soaking in the warmth from the bright-red coals. Funny, he thought, we are so comfortable with each other...maybe we *were* lovers two hundred years ago.

Nancy found some more candles in the ablution room and placed them around the bedroom. Then she turned to Brian with a puzzled look. “By the way, did you take my clothes out of the closet?”

“No. I hung my clothes in the closet, right next to yours.”
“Well, then mine have disappeared, and so have yours. And the

washbowls have been emptied, too.”

Brian scratched his head. “Maybe there is a secret passage in here for the servants, and they took the clothes to press them.”

They began searching the bathroom for a hidden door but found nothing. Finally they gave up and went out to the main room.

“You don’t suppose this place is haunted, do you?” Brian asked.

“I don’t know, I hope not. I’m not sure how I would deal with ghosts on top of everything else we’ve been through so far. But tomorrow we will get out of here early and put this all behind us.”

Suddenly Nancy frowned.

“What’s the matter?”

“Well, in spite of everything, I don’t want to leave you.”

“Who said anything about leaving? I’ll be in New York most of the week.”

“But you see, that’s the problem—I’m supposed to leave the day after tomorrow.”

“Can’t you change your plans? You could stay with me and go back with me later in the week.”

“It’s not quite that simple. But I’ll try.”

He reached over and drew her to him. The heat from the fire was now intense. Their lips touched, gently at first, before their bodies gave in to the overwhelming desire that had been building between them, a passion born of two hundred years of forced separation. He reached for the bottom of her nightshirt and began to lift it over her head. She made no move to stop him. Instead, she stepped back to make the task easier, and the nightshirt was gone in a whisper. His shirt came up over his head and slipped to the floor. He felt her flesh tingle as his hands slid lightly over her rear. Their lips came together again. Her arms went around his back, and she ran her fingers gently down his spine. Though they were barely touching, every inch of their bodies was aroused, as if the sensation within every

nerve ending had been heightened. For a long time they were content just to hold each other. Slowly he turned her away from him and kissed the nape of her neck. The palms of his hands slid gently from her belly upward to her waiting breasts. Rock-hard nipples pressed against his fingers. His hands moved like butterfly wings on her skin, gently exploring the soft contours of her body. She turned back to face him. Her fingers traced the length of his hardness as she looked into his eyes. Slowly she moved to the floor pulling him on top of her. The two-hundred-year wait was over. There was an urgency about this union, a powerful, demanding, consuming need not just to join souls but also to re-unite as lovers.

It was over too soon. Spent, they fell asleep still tangled in each other's arms.

A peephole closed in the wall.



Chapter Seven



England, 1760

The ship that brought Catherine back to England dropped anchor at the mouth of the Avon River near the village of Pill, just five miles short of Bristol. Catherine was anxious to catch the Flying Post chaise service to London. She had been assured that a carriage would take her to the Bush Tavern on Corn Street in Bristol, where she was to meet the chaise. The excitement was building; she could feel it in the pit of her stomach. Her emotions had swung violently during the voyage—happiness at the thought of finally being able to collect her mother, and sadness over the prospect of being separated from Thomas for nearly four months. She and Thomas had become close; in fact, very close indeed, she thought to herself. No longer employer and servant, they had become lovers and were now engaged. Absently she touched the brooch he had given her as he saw her off in New York. It was exquisite—a large diamond surrounded by rubies in the shape of a heart and mounted on gold filigree.

“Think of this as my heart,” Thomas had whispered as he pinned it on her dress. “Wear it as a reminder that I will be with you in spirit every moment until you return, which frankly cannot be soon enough for me. In fact, I wish I’d never suggested

that you go. But it's too late now and I know you must make the trip." He paused and smiled in an effort to lighten the mood. "But this time you now know what to expect, so you'll be able to help your mother deal with most anything that happens on the voyage. It will be easier for her to adjust to life on board ship, and you will have ample time to catch up on all the things that have happened since you were together last."

"Miss Catherine?" Neither the voice nor the man now standing before her was familiar.

"Moy name is Rufus 'igginbottom," he said, with a slight bow. "Master Thomas sent me to meet you, ma'am. 'e wanted to make sure you arroived in London safe and sound, 'e did."

"How thoughtful," she replied. "But I've already made arrangements with Mr. Bush to take the chaise."

"Oy know that was the original plan, miss. But the chaise gets roight crowded, it does, and as you know, it's a 'undred moiles and more to London. That's a long time to be stuck in a coach with strangers. Master Thomas thought you moight be more comfortable in a coach of your own. 'e thought you moight be able to get some sleep along the way so you'll be proper rested when you see your mum."

Something about the man didn't quite ring true—the way he avoided her eyes and the way he kept pressing her to get into the coach. *I'm just imagining things*, she thought. Dismissing her suspicions as foolish, she nodded in the direction of the coach. "I suppose you're right, Mr. Higginbottom. It does sound more comfortable."

"And so it will be, Miss Catherine. Oy 'ave a noice picnic basket packed for when you gets 'ungry. Master Thomas wanted this to be a roight surprise, 'e did. 'Don't spare any expense to make her comfortable, Mr. 'igginbottom' were 'is instructions in the letter."

"Letter?" Catherine asked.

"Yes, miss. It came about three weeks ago. 'e said for me to get a noice coach and 'ave food and drink for the journey. Then

'e said to foind some noice rooms in London near where your mother works. Oy would have put you up in an inn, 'cept there's no inn around those parts. But the rooms wha' I 'ave is very noice. Oy think you'll loike 'em."

"Thank you, I'm sure they'll be wonderful. Well, Mr. Higginbottom, it appears I'm in your hands until we reach London."

The trip from Bristol was slow and relatively uneventful. She nibbled at the food and drank a little wine but was too excited to sleep. For a long time she just watched the countryside go by. She loved the English countryside with its neat little fields and quaint stone walls; it was so different from the wide-open spaces of America. Her pulse quickened as she began to recognize the outskirts of London. They passed the magnificent home of the Duke of Buckingham and then headed toward Covent Garden. At Kingsway they turned right.

"Do you remember any of this, Miss Catherine?"

"Yes. I know where I am now. Had we turned left instead of right, we would have gone to the Willacy house. I assume we are now on our way to the rooms you have for me."

"Indeed we are, missy. Indeed we are."

Something in his tone alarmed her for a moment, but she was tired and decided she was just being foolish. Besides, they had arrived.

"'ere we are then, Miss Catherine. A place fit for a queen, if you don't moind moy sayin' so. There's a noice view of the Thames in dayloight. Oy think you'll be roight comfortable 'ere. Oy'll just let the coachman go and then we can go in."

I'm too tired to unpack tonight, Catherine thought. I'll get up early and do it in the morning before I go to see Mother.

"Ow about a noice cuppa tea before you gows to bed, Miss Catherine?" asked Higginbottom.

"That would be lovely, thank you."

"Awroight, you just get yourself settled, and Oy'l 'ave Mrs. 'igginbottom bring it to you as soon as it's ready."

“Mrs. Higginbottom?”

“Yes, miss, moy woife. She came over earlier to get the rooms ready for your arroival. She’s going to stay with you and look after the place—toidy up a bit when it’s needed and fix you something to eat if you need it...if that’s all roight with you, Miss Catherine.”

“That will be very nice, thank you, Mr. Higginbottom.”



As the gray light of dawn forced its way through the skylight, she struggled to shake off the effects of a deep sleep. Something wasn’t right. She couldn’t put her finger on exactly what it was, but she knew she was in danger. She could sense it. And suddenly it hit her—this was a different room from the one in which she had fallen asleep. She leapt out of the bed. Her clothes and the trunk with all her belongings were gone. She tried the door...it was locked. The only clothing she had was the nightgown she was wearing. Frantically she looked for the brooch. She’d been holding it when she fell asleep. It was gone. She tore the covers from the bed and looked underneath. She searched everywhere. It was gone. She went to the door and pounded until her knuckles bled. No one came. She looked around the room for another way out. She noticed the curtains on the far wall. *A window*, she thought, relieved. She raced over to pull the curtains back only to find a brick wall. Trying to control her fear, she began a systematic search of the room.

Very high in the ceiling was a skylight, too high for her to reach. The generations of grit and grime allowed just enough gray light into the room for her to make out her surroundings. Even if she stacked the few pieces of furniture in the room on top of each other, then climbed, she wouldn’t be able to reach. *I’m in a warehouse of some kind*, she thought. The floor was rough planking and the walls were brick. A pitcher of fetid water, with insects floating on the surface, sat on a small table.

A chamber pot, black with dust, was near the bed, a rusty iron-framed monstrosity with coarse cotton sheets. She pounded on the door again and shouted for help.



Nothing.

Day drifted into night and one by one her landmarks were swallowed by the darkness. Then all went black. She heard scratching and the sound of tiny feet moving around the floor. She shuddered at the sound. Her skin crawled. There was no place to hide. She hoped, if she lay still enough, the rats wouldn't find her. Fear squeezed her like a corset. She was hungry, thirsty, and afraid... and very much alone. She drifted off into a fitful sleep until something walked over her leg, rocketing her into screaming wakefulness. Her hands struck out and felt something go flying off the bed. She shuddered and for the rest of the night sat wrapped in her sheet with her back to the wall, her knees drawn tightly to her chest.

Above her came a faint glow as light struggled to penetrate the skylight overhead. She became aware of a tapping on the glass above. At first it sounded like fingernails. Tap...tap...tap...tap...tap...tap...taptaptap. As the tempo increased, she realized she was hearing rain. She watched as sheets of water slid over the filthy glass high above her head. Hypnotized by the sound, she jumped off the bed and began to search for leaks. If she could find just one, she might be able to collect enough water to drink. But there were no leaks. As if reading her mind, the rain slowed, then stopped. *Why am I being punished?* she wondered.

The light above began to change. Slowly the clouds moved away and sunlight began to push fragments of its warming rays into the room. The room grew brighter, and the early-morning chill slowly dissipated. She was desperately thirsty. *If I don't get something to drink soon, I'll go mad,* she thought. She

picked up the pitcher and peered inside, finally forcing herself to reach in and remove the insects from their watery grave. She examined the water again, but noticed that black specks of something unidentifiable still floated on it. The thought of drinking it was repugnant to her.

By late afternoon the room was so hot she'd stripped off her nightgown. Her throat was raw. She would have to drink some of the water in the pitcher if she were to survive. She had an idea. But in order to carry it out, she needed a receptacle of some kind.

Other than the chamber pot, there was nothing that would do. She picked up the dusty relic and using a corner of a bed sheet, tried to wipe the inside clean. She was surprised to find that most of the blackness came away easily, revealing a shiny porcelain bowl. Pleased with herself, she retrieved her nightgown and laid it over the chamber pot. Raising the pitcher, she gently poured the water over the fabric. Slowly the liquid seeped through the tightly woven fabric into the bowl. It was a tedious process and the light was beginning to fade. She wanted to be finished before it grew dark so that she could see the results of her work.

Finally she was satisfied. The nightgown had filtered the water enough to make it potable. Slowly she raised the bowl to her lips and allowed a little of the liquid to slide down her parched throat. It soothed her throat a little, but the taste and the smell made her want to vomit. Still, she had won a small victory and she was pleased with herself. *Wait 'till I tell my grandchildren about the time that I drank water from a chamber pot*, she thought.

It was dark now and she wrapped herself in a sheet to stave off the coming chill of night. She settled herself into the same position as the night before, knees up, with her back to the wall. There were no sounds of tiny feet scurrying across the floorboards this night. She was totally alone.

Dawn broke overhead and she lay on her back, looking up

at the clouds as they slid silently by. She envied them their freedom. She remembered the days with Thomas—the long walks, the carriage rides, the conversations in the garden in the evening. She relived the quiet dinners they had shared and the intimacy that usually followed. She wanted her freedom back. And she wanted Thomas.

Slowly she sat up and worked her way off the bed. She needed to use the chamber pot. Taking a corner of her sheet, she wiped the inside of the pitcher before pouring the water from the chamber pot into it. Now that the chamber pot was empty again, she relieved herself.

Am I ever going to get out of this room? she wondered. The day passed slowly, and she began to think she would die here. *But why? Who hates me so much that they would do this to me?* Her memories of Thomas helped her pass the time. She loved him deeply. *Will I ever see him again? Next to my father, he is the kindest man I have ever met. He is thoughtful and caring and everyone who knows him likes him.* At least she had thought that until now. Maybe there was at least one person who didn't like him. *Is that why I'm here? Is someone trying to get to him through me?*

Her thirst returned. Fighting her revulsion at the idea, she took small sips from the pitcher of water. The sun was back and quickly began to warm the room. By afternoon she was baking in the stifling heat. Time crawled. The heat intensified, and now the odor from the chamber pot permeated the room.

On the fourth day the door opened. There stood Higginbottom, a huge grin plastered on his face. "Oy've come to rescue you, moy sweet," he sneered.

"From what?" she spat at him. "Aren't you the one who put me here?"

"True enough," he said, "but Oy wanted you to learn 'umility. You've become an uppity little tart over the past year and you needed to come back down to where you belong."

"How do you know what has happened to me in the last

year?" she demanded furiously. The surge of anger burned more energy than she could spare in her weakened state, but she wasn't about to let this cretin see that he was getting the best of her. She would fight until she collapsed, she told herself.

The angrier she became, the more Higginbottom seemed to be enjoying himself. "Oy've been watchin' you in your big fancy 'ouse with your rich merchant friend. Oy've even watched you make love to him."

"There is no way that could happen. You're making it up," she declared vehemently.

"Wha' a wanton creature you are when you're all 'eated up. You think Oy'm making it up? What about the toime on the bearskin rug in front of the foire in New York? You was a wanton little tart that noight. Oy came in me drawers just watchin', Oy did. Oy particularly loiked the way you rode him loike a galloping steed. 'e popped off good and propa that noight." Higginbottom licked his lips. "How can you forget that, miss? I surely can't."

"You're making it all up. There is no way you could have seen us."

"How about the strawberry mark on the left cheek of your ars then, or the mole you 'ave 'igh up on the inside of your roight though? Still think Oy'm making it up?"

"You could have seen those things while I was unconscious."

"With the number of drops we put in your tea, you was out loike a loight, all roight. And Oy must admit, Oy did take just a little look-see. So you're roight, I coulda seen them marks then, but Oy didn't. Oy saw them in New York in that big fancy mansion of Master Thomas's. There's peepholes in the walls of that 'ouse, didn't you know that? Moy friend Coker and me put 'em there when we did some carpentry work for Master Thomas. Oy saw you on that bear rug with your bare ars movin' to beat the band. It was a lovely soight indeed. And Oy intend to sample some of that moyself before we're finished, moy sweet."

"You are nothing but a filthy swine, and a liar. Had you been

around Thomas 's house, I would have seen you. But I never did—therefore you weren't there," she said angrily.

"Oh, but Oy was. Coker invited me over one noight so we could watch the two of you. Oy came in the back door after Anna went to bed, and we went roight to the 'idden passageway me and Coker put in when we was doin' work on the 'ouse."

"If there were secret passageways in that house, Thomas would have known about them. But he never said anything to me about them. You're lying."

"Think wha' you loike. Master Thomas doesn't know about 'em 'cause 'e was in England at the toime we put 'em in. There's one that goes from your old room to 'is. There's another that goes into that ablutionary 'e's so proud of and there's a false wall roight by the foireplace. That's where we saw you, Coker an' me. It's a wonder you didn't 'ear us, we was so excoited."

"You really are a poor excuse for a human being," Catherine fumed. Angry to the point of tears, she looked for something to throw. Just as her fingers closed around the pitcher, Higginbottom grabbed her from behind, so that her arms were trapped at her sides as he lifted her off her feet. She struggled and tried to kick. It was no use. He was too strong and she had become too weak.

"Cor Blimey, Oy gotta get out of 'ere," Coker said under his breath.

He carried her out of her prison into a hallway and dropped her. His fingers slid into her hair and closed tightly around a hunk of it as he dragged her, head down, along a narrow hallway to another room.

Catherine was able to tell that this room was similar to the one in which she had been held prisoner, only slightly larger. A small table caught her eye. There was a pitcher of water on it along with a basket of bread. She lunged for the pitcher, almost dropping it in her haste to get it to her lips. She drank deeply until her stomach began to cramp. For a moment she thought she was going to vomit. The cramping and nausea passed, and

she drank more. Greedily she grabbed at the bread, but Higginbottom wrenched it out of her hand.

“You don’t eat until your duties is finished,” he said. “Then, when Oy say you can eat, you can ’ave some of the bread.”

“What duties?” Catherine demanded.

“You’ll see! Now take off that nightgown and wash yourself—you stink,” he commanded as he walked out of the room. Alone for a moment she took a slice of bread and ate hungrily. With Higginbottom still not back, she devoured another slice of bread and washed it down with more water.

“Wha’ the bloody ’ell do you think you’re doin’?” Higginbottom shouted from the doorway. “Get your ars into that tub and wash yourself. Or does you want me to do it?” he asked with a nasty smile.

“I’ll do it myself,” Catherine barked. “Now get out, you filthy pig, and leave me alone.” Slowly she slid into the cold water of the tub.

A chortling noise made her look up. Higginbottom was leaning in the doorway watching her.

“Get out of here,” she fumed, trying to cover herself.

“Oy’m going to watch,” he said, “to make sure you don’t troy and eat any more of moy bread.” He laughed as if he’d just told a funny story. “Besoides, it’s not loike Oy ’aven’t seen it all before.” He laughed again.

“Just who are you?” she demanded. “I know Thomas didn’t send you. He wouldn’t deal with filth like you.”

“Oh, but ’e did deal with me. Years ago Oy worked for ’im with moy friend Coker. ’e’s the one, not Master Thomas, what really sent the letter tellin’ me you was comin’. We thought it would be a roight lark to kidnap you and ’old you for ransom. But then Oy got another oidea and Oy’ll tell you about that in a little whoile.”

Higginbottom moved toward her. “Now, Oy want you to be good and woild when Oy rides you, so Oy’ll also tell you that Oy’m the bloke what spent all your Daddy’s money. Moy name

is really 'iggins, not 'igginbottom. Oy cheated that stupid bastard out of everything 'e 'ad," he laughed. "I slept with your mother too, did she tell you? Probably not, it was some time ago. She wasn't as woild as Oy know you can be," he leered. "But she was definitely all roight."

"You're a liar," Catherine seethed.

"Liar, is it? That mother of yours would've done anything to get your father's money back. Oy told 'er if she slept with me, Oy'd see what Oy could do." He laughed again and added, "The dumb bitch actually believed me."

"I'll see you dead, you filthy swine," Catherine screamed. She jumped from the tub and ran toward him with her fists raised, but he was too strong and threw her back across the room.

"Oh, yes. Oy forgot to tell you, your mother doied...yesterday, Oy think it was. Or it could 'ave been the day before. Moy memory's not so good sometimes. Sorry you made that long trip for nothing." He laughed.

Catherine froze and stared at him in disbelief. "You're lying," she stammered, realizing she was not so sure.

"Not this toime, missy. She got run over by a carriage, she did. Took a nosedoive into the ground and broke 'er neck, they said. Anyway, she's dead."

"You bastard! You had something to do with it, didn't you? If you did, I swear on everything I hold holy I will see you punished."

"You can't prove anything. Most people said it looked loike an accident. They never found the carriage or the droiver, so Oy think it will stay a mystery." He laughed again.

"Why?" Catherine asked. "What possible reason could you have for killing my mother?"

"She 'ad some blokes out lookin' for me. They was supposed to kill me."

"You're a liar! My mother would never do a thing like that."

"See, missy, that's where you're wrong. She wanted to settle up with me before she left for America. She wanted me to

pay for wha' Oy done to your father and she was troying to 'ave me killed. The way Oy found out was that the stupid bitch hoired a couple of moy friends to do the job. She paid 'alf up front and was to pay 'alf when the deed was done. Stupid bitch," he muttered.

Catherine sank to the floor and sobbed. Somehow she knew the bastard was telling the truth

"There's plenty of toime for croyin' later. Roight now Oy wants you to finish cleaning up so Oy can 'ave me some fun."

Catherine didn't move. She was lost in grief over her mother's death.

"Well, Miss Hoigh and Moighty," Higgins shouted in her ear as he picked her up and placed her back in the tub. "You bathe. Oy watch."

"You will not," she sobbed. "You piece of human filth. I'll see you in hell."

"Maybe," Higgins laughed, "but once you're cleaned up, Oy'm going to 'ave you and then Oy can say Oy did the whole bloomin' family." He laughed at his own joke.

Reaching for her nightgown, Catherine noticed a second man in the room watching her. Was this to be a show and she the entertainment? *I must be in hell*, she thought. *Surely it can't get any worse than this*. Hugging the nightgown to her body, she tried desperately to cover herself.

"Don't cover yourself, missy. Oy want Mr. Plimpton 'ere to see what he's buying."

"What do you mean, 'what he's buying'?" she exclaimed, horrified.

"Exactly what Oy said. When Oy've 'ad you, Mr. Plimpton 'ere is going to take you with 'im," Higgins smirked, adding with a wink, "that is, if 'e approves of the merchandise. Then you're going to entertain 'is friends."

"I will not," she screamed. "I'd rather die first!"

"You 'ave no choice, moy dear. Mr. Plimpton has two friends waitin' to meet you, and there's only one of you. Now

be a good girl, and show Edward 'ere what a woild woman you can be. Come over 'ere and loie down."

"Never," she screamed. "First you kidnap me and hold me for days without food or drink, then murder my mother...and now you want me to give in to you? Have you lost your mind? Wait 'till Thomas hears of this—you are a dead man. Now where are my clothes and all my belongings?"

"Oy sold 'em all," Higgins answered gleefully. "They was-n't worth much though, except for the brooch. Oy got quite a bit for that little bauble, enough to pay for the coach from Bristol and the picnic basket full of food and wine. And there was even a little left over to pay for the rooms we took you to first and that whore what played the part of moy woife. So now all you own now is what you're wearin'. NOTHING!" Again he laughed at his own joke. "Now come 'ere."

"I will not."

He sprang like a cat and caught her wrist. He lifted her and threw her to the floor and was on top of her before she could resist. She pummeled his back with her fists until she felt someone grab her wrists. Plimpton was holding her so Higgins could carry out his threat. She struggled, but the men were too strong and she had no strength left. She could feel splinters from the rough floor digging into her back. Finally she stopped struggling. She had no idea how long it took Higgins to finish, probably only seconds. But it seemed like an eternity to her as she lay there.

Finally Higgins rolled off her, angry about his inability to perform like a man, and stormed out of the room. Plimpton pulled Catherine to her feet. "Come on," he said, "ol' 'iggins is done now, a little premature if you ask me, 'e came before 'e even touched you. But me and moy friends, now that's another story. Put this coat around you. The noight air is cold, and Oy don't want you getting sick before we has our fun."

Covered only by a large woolen coat thrown over her shoulders, she was marched out of the room. As she and Plimpton left the warehouse and started down the deserted street, Catherine

could feel the cold edging up from her bare toes. There was no point in resisting, for no one else was on the street, nobody who would hear a call for help. At last they came to a shabby waterfront building where Plimpton dragged her inside and pushed her against the wall. By now, she was numb. Two men appeared out of the darkness.

“What’s this, then?” one of the men asked, holding a candle high in one hand while reaching out with the other to fondle her breast.

“You must be the dessert Plimpton promised us,” the other man leered. “Maybe Oy’ll just eat you now.”

Catherine shivered, more from terror than from the frigid air. They marched her down a long hallway and into a dingy little room. The only piece of furniture appeared to be a bed. They led her to a wall where one of the men produced a piece of rope and tied her wrists to a ring attached high above her head. Another removed her coat. Hands groped every part of her body.

With her eyes closed, enduring the horror in silence, she vowed to herself that one day these men would pay for their cruelties. She didn’t know how or when, but they would suffer all the pain they were inflicting on her and more. The two new men wanted to take her immediately, but Plimpton told them there were things that had to be done first.

Reluctantly, they left her. She was cold and naked and tied to the ring in the wall. In the silence of the dark and empty room, Catherine sobbed uncontrollably, trying to make as little noise as possible. She was terrified. Suppose there were others. She could only imagine what her captors had planned for her when they returned. *I will get through this*, she told herself. *All of them will pay dearly for this pain and humiliation. I’m not sure how, but I will find a way.*

It was late when Plimpton and his men staggered back into the room.

“Light some candles,” Plimpton ordered, “so you can see what your little treat looks like.” The men complied and then

began untying her from the ring, using the opportunity to explore every curve and orifice of her body.

“Give us a little kiss then,” laughed one of them as he licked her ear. She jerked her head to one side. His breath smelled as if the sewers of London had backed up into his mouth. She wanted to vomit. With her hands released from the ring but still tied, she twisted on her heel and lashed out with all her might. Someone yelped in pain. She had hit the man who had been exploring her with his fingers. There was so much force behind the blow that he fell first to his knees and then dropped forward, smashing his face on the floor. She had knocked him unconscious.

Plimpton pinned her against the wall. “You’re a feisty little bitch,” he whispered, leering at her, “but it won’t do you no good ’ere.” He slapped her hard across her face with his open palm and sent her sprawling onto the floor. Lightning bolts of pain shot through her mind as she collided with the end of the bed. Plimpton grabbed her hands and dragged her to the bed.

“Give us an ’and, Rob. Oy think old Will is out cold, she ’it ’im pretty good, she did. Toie ’er wrists to the top of the bed.” At the same time she could feel something being tied around her ankle. She couldn’t fight anymore. She would endure whatever they had planned. They secured both ankles so that her legs were wide apart. Her hands, secured to the top of the bed, were pulled tight above her head. Plimpton was first. He was so drunk he was incapable of penetrating her. “See what you bleedin’ made me do?” He screamed and smacked her as if it were her fault that he couldn’t perform. “Oy’ll get you when Oy’ve ’ad some sleep,” he mumbled and left the room, slamming the door shut behind him.

Next, the cretin with the foul-smelling breath straddled her and tried to force himself into her mouth.

“Wait! Can I say something first?” she asked. A plan was forming in her mind.

“There’s nothin’ to talk about. Oy’m gonna ’ave you and then Oy’ll get a little sleep and we’ll do it again,” he sneered.

“Plimpton says you’re supposed to be good.”

“But it could be so much better if you tell me what you like,” Catherine said.

“You know what Oy loike,” the man said. “Now open your mouth.”

She opened her lips and felt him slide between them. As soon as the tip had passed over her teeth, she bit down with all her strength. The man screamed and lashed at her with both hands. He hit a solid blow on her right cheek, sending spikes of pain through her head, which caused her to bite down even harder. He quickly realized his error and stopped hitting her. Reaching down, he tried to pry her mouth open. But she was in control now. Enduring the pain of his prying fingers, she bit down harder.

“Untie me,” she hissed through clenched teeth. “Untie me or I swear I’ll bite it off.” She became aware of the salty taste of blood in her mouth.

He had no choice, and still moaning, he leaned forward and untied her hands from the top of the bed.

“Give me the rope,” she commanded.

He did as she asked.

Taking the rope, she tied his wrists together as tightly as she could. She was in constant fear that the man’s screams would wake his friend Will, who was out cold on the floor...or worse, alert Plimpton, if he was still within earshot.

No one came.

The man on the floor didn’t move. Her luck was holding, but she still hadn’t figured out how she was going to get her ankles untied. Then it came to her. She took the extra rope dangling from the man’s wrists and wrapped it tightly around the base of his shaft in such a way that the slightest jerk on the rope would send excruciating pain through his testicles. The man looked on in horror as he realized what she was doing. He tried to fight, but she just bit down harder.

“I’m going to kill you, bitch,” he threatened.

Catherine opened her mouth, releasing the source of the man's pain. He started to hit her again, but she jerked the rope and a blinding pain shot from his groin to his head. He screamed and almost passed out.

"Untie my ankles," Catherine said.

"And what if I don't?" the man asked, although he knew he was trapped.

She jerked on the rope.

As the white light of pain subsided from behind his eyes, the man untied her ankles. It wasn't easy to do this with his wrists still tied, but the thought of her yanking on the rope again spurred him on. With the ropes untied, she crawled shakily off the bed.

"Lie down," she commanded.

He hesitated, and she jerked the rope again.

He all but fainted from the sudden pain.

Quickly she tied the remainder of the rope to the top of the bed. Next, she tore a piece of bed sheet and shoved it into the man's mouth and tied it in place with yet another piece of bed sheet. Satisfied, she pulled on the rope one more time and watched as the man's eyes bulged out of his head.

Hearing a noise, she turned just in time to see Will come up off the floor. Clumsily, he lunged for her. His mind, still heavy with drunken sleep, could not get the proper messages to his limbs. Adrenaline pumping through her body, Catherine jumped back, and the man fell past her trying in vain to regain his balance. As he went by, she reached out instinctively and pushed, sending him crashing into the wall. His head connected with the brickwork in a sickening thud, and the man collapsed to the floor. She waited several precious minutes. She prayed that Plimpton was still unaware of what was happening. The man on the floor groaned. Catherine approached him hesitantly. He was lying on his back, blood streaming from a viscous cut on his forehead. He was unconscious. Pleased with herself, Catherine checked the man on the bed, then looked

around for something to wear. Under the bed she found one of the men's coats. It was too big for her, and it smelled of smoke and cheap ale, but it would do. Quietly she slipped it around her shoulders and went to the door. She pressed her ear to the space between the door and the frame. Hearing nothing, she opened the door very slowly, half expecting Plimpton to come charging through.

She peered through to the darkened hallway. All was quiet. Satisfied, she tiptoed down the hall although the ancient boards under her feet would not allow her steps to be silent. At any moment she expected someone to come racing after her. When she reached the door, she found it was locked and there was no key. Panic-stricken, she realized she would have to go back into the room she had just left. Again she crept down the hallway, trying to make as little noise as possible. The floor was her enemy, creaking in protest wherever she placed her feet. But for once the darkness was her friend. At last she reached the door and opened it. She peered inside. All seemed to be the way she had left it, except that the bed was empty. She wished the light were better.

Straining her eyes, she looked again. The bed was empty, but Rob was still tied to it. He must have fallen off in an attempt to free himself. Slowly she approached the bed. The man was half on the floor on the opposite side of the bed. He was out cold. *I hope it's from pain*, Catherine thought as she saw how the rope had tightened around his groin. Carefully she went through his pockets looking for a key to the outside door. He stirred and opened his eyes. He tried to kick her, only to find that the motion put pressure on the rope. He screamed into his gag and then he passed out again. Nervously Catherine watched the door. Seconds were small eternities in her race against time. She searched his pockets without success. Now she would have to deal with Will on the floor. She was unsure whether he was still unconscious. He seemed to be. But she was afraid to move any closer. He could be trying to trick her into coming close

enough for him to grab her. On the other hand, she knew she had to do something. Spotting one of the ropes that had been used to tie her ankles, she went over and picked it up. Carefully she tied a loop at one end of the rope using a slipknot. Then gingerly lifting Will's head, she ran the rope around his neck several times. Next she brought the remaining length of rope across the man's chest and wrapped it around each of his hands, finally lashing both hands together. *If he should wake up*, she thought, *he might choke himself if he tries to attack me*. Feeling a little more confident, she began her search of his pockets, though her four days of captivity had taken their toll on her. The man was heavy and her arms felt like lead as she tried to shift his weight to gain access to his pockets. She grunted and strained as she rolled the man over. There was no key.

Panic again overtook her. *There has to be a key*, she thought. *But where?* She went back through the man's pockets. No key. She went back to Rob and re-examined his pockets with the same results. She was on the verge of screaming, her nerves ready to explode. She pulled the coat tighter around her to fight off the cold and then jammed her hands in the pockets. She felt something. There it was... a key.

Slowly, her fingers clumsy with fatigue, she put the key in the lock and turned. A crisp click and the door unlocked.

She withdrew the key and eased the door open, cautiously peering outside. The night was dark, but mercifully, it was clear. She inched her way outside. Hoping there would be no one on the street, she turned to lock the door. Just as she had the key in place, she heard a frantic voice from behind the door, shouting "STOP."

It was Plimpton—there was no doubt about it. She willed her hands to turn the key. The lock clicked just as the handle turned.

"Oy'll get you, you little bitch," he raged at her through the door.

"I think not," said Catherine, coldly.

She heard him trying desperately to unlock the door. Catherine responded by twisting her key in the lock so that it would prevent his from working. "Mark me well, Plimpton, one day I will make you pay for what you did to me tonight," Catherine cried bitterly.

"Oy'll foind you and kill you first, you whore," Plimpton bellowed. But his angry words carried onto an empty street. Catherine had fled.

She had no idea where she was. All she knew was that the building she had just left faced the river. Knowing that the Thames was south of where she wanted to go, she struck out in the opposite direction. Moving as quickly as she dared, she worked to put more and more distance between herself and the river. She was cold and very, very tired. *If only there was a moon tonight*, she thought, *I could use its light to confirm my bearings*. As if listening to her thoughts, a full moon slid from behind a cloud and smiled down at her. Frantically, she searched for landmarks, anything that might tell her where she was. She heard voices, male voices. Out of her mind with fear she looked around for a place to hide. She noticed an old church. Its doors were closed, but the great columns in front of the entrance offered a place to hide. She made a run for it.

"Wha' was tha'?" asked a voice with a deep cockney accent.

"Wha' was wha'?" came the reply.

"Oy saw somefin' moving, Oy did. It went across the street and up to that church," the first voice said.

"Gow on," the second voice answered. "You've been drinking, mate, and now you're seein' fings."

"Now Oy'm not. Oy knows wha' Oy saw."

"Awl roight," his companion said. "Suppose you did see somefin'."

"Was it male or female?"

"Ow the bleedin' 'ell would Oy know? We've been drinking, 'member?"

"ow the 'ell could Oy forget? Let's say Oy believes you.

Wha' do you want to do about it then?"

"Wha' do you mean, 'wha' do Oy want to do about it'? Oy don't wanna do nuffin' about it. All Oy said was Oy seen somebody run across the road. And you bleedin' turn that into an argument."

Catherine breathed a sigh of relief as the voices grew faint. The pair had taken their argument down the street.

She waited until there were no sounds at all. Only then did she come out of her hiding place. From her new vantage point at the top of the church steps, she could make out a few more shapes. And then she saw a familiar landmark that told her she was not far from the house where her mother worked. She emerged cautiously from the shadows and began to move up the street. *I'm almost there*, she thought.

Seeking cover in one doorway after another, she made her way toward the Willacy house. Finally she was there. The house was dark. She looked around to be sure that no one was watching. She could wait no longer. Fatigue and cold were overtaking her body. Her strength failing, she knocked on the door. No response.

She knocked again. *Please come*, she thought, *I don't have much strength left*. That was her last conscious moment. She fainted and slumped down in the doorway just as the moon slid behind another cloud.