

Victoria
WOLDS APART

P. ARTHUR STUART

Victoria Worlds Apart

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To Patricia Lynne, the love of a lifetime.
I'm sorry I'm not the Arthur you deserved.
I did and do love you more than you knew or know.

Prologue

December 31, 2013, the man is standing in the middle of the New Year's Eve Times Square celebration crowd, estimated at close to a million or more. Yet it has no meaning to him. He's alone, like all the previous years he's attended. He asks himself, *Why do I do this to myself?* He doesn't have an answer.

For the first time, there are a few moments as the new year comes, that he is buoyed up by the crowd's enthusiasm, robust shouting, and general spirit of the event; or is it something else. A fleeting thought or perhaps a premonition that this year, will bring a life changing event. It fades quickly.

No matter how many more times he will attend, he expects to be alone. Tomorrow he will stay home, turn on the tv and let it play in the background, take a walk, surf the web, go out for dinner, stop at his club for a drink, and return home. It's the same year after year.

Waking January 2, before six, he struggles out of bed. Washes, dresses, and goes out to meet his chauffeur service. On the ride to his office, he reviews the *Wall Street Journal*, listens to the daily news, and plans his day, which includes a multitude of meetings, reviewing reports, and making plans. Entering the building he encounters an aggregation of people entering and leaving. Their faces are familiar, except for an occasional one, he knows none of them. He thinks, *We're all robots, programmed to work and survive.*

Passing the guard station, he shows his ID, even though he's a primary occupant and recognized by the guards. Joining the crowd, he takes the elevator to his floor. Many of the riders greet him. Some are his employees and others are people that share the floor with his company. Exiting the elevator, he passes his reception area, where the receptionist greets him. On the way to his office, the staff and he exchange salutations. His secretary smiles and offers a good morning. She follows him into his spacious office, with her note pad. They discuss the expected days activities. She leaves and returns moments later with his coffee. The morning ritual is always the same.

Throughout the day, he attends meetings, reviews documents, checks and signs invoices, and performs a multitude of other routine tasks; the days are all the same and one blends into another.

Although, from time-to-time he meets with colleagues, on rare occasions is joined by a female companion, today, as on most days, he eats in his office. He calls the local sandwich shop and orders a meal to be delivered.

At the end of the day, before he leaves he meets with his secretary to discuss and formulate preliminary plans for the next day and upcoming events. He needs to schedule his quarterly visits to his other offices and manufacturing plants. Maybe this year he'll spend an extra week or two in Miami—for some reason this thought is uplifting. It would also allow him to spend more time with his mother and father. Thinking, *I really need to visit them more often.*

When he departs, his chauffeur service is waiting for him. On his way home, to change his clothing and shower, he has a friendly conversation with the driver. He has several drivers assigned to him, all of which vie for his trips, because he includes a sizable tip when he signs the trip ticket; sometimes it's more than their actual salary for the trip. He is a generous man.

His next stop is at his members only business club. The club was once one of the relics, that is, a men's only club. He likes that it is now integrated in all respects. If you have the money and social standing, you're welcome. After eating dinner, he relaxes in the club lounge. There he meets a couple of his friends and they discuss business, the stock market, and some sports. Around eight he departs.

From his club, he has the driver take him to one of the several, exclusive night clubs. As a regular, he joins a group of his friends. Occasionally, he will meet a woman, date her, and form a relationship. Most were short lived. Other seem to just dissolve. Tonight, he had a few drinks, danced with a couple of women friends, and conversed about current events and, of course, sports.

Settling in a chair, with his nightcap, Dewar's Scotch over ice, he reflects on his past. This is unusual, normally, he thinks what's done is done; you can't change history. Holding the glass so it is suspended from his fingers, he swirls the ice and liquid around, while he idly thinks. Leaving the army as a captain, he settled into his father's company.

As an only child, it would be his someday. Smiling as he remembered how key executives resented him, but there was nothing they could do. At staff meeting, after doing substantial research, he presented and suggested plans for expansion. As the company grew, he became accepted. The executives' resentment shifted to respect, as their roles grew, along with their income. By the time he was thirty or there about, his father let him take over running the company. A few years later his dad retired, and funny, moved to Florida, with his mother.

Laughing, he reminisces how his mother was always telling him to find a girl and get married. He wanted to. In his early years, he had several hot romances, unfortunately the fires went out quickly. Over the years, he had his share of relationships. Except for one or two, they all ended peacefully. The reasons for their incompatibility varied: he's dull, they're dull, his work came first, they were more interested in his money—than him, demanding, and lacked commitment—both ways, are a few of the reasons. He acknowledges to himself, maybe it was me.

Around the time he turned forty, he realized, that meeting a woman and establishing a relationship had become more difficult. Women in his age category aren't out there like the younger girls. Young girls are more interested in romance and excitement. Older women want security and stability. He thinks, *What do I want? Was that meteoric moment I had a precursor of a major change? Or was it just wishful dreaming.* The man is Charles Poppachi.

Chapter 1

I cannot understand why, at age twenty-four, I feel like an old man. I feel like life is passing me by. I know people would say, “You’re young. You’ve got plenty of time. Don’t worry.” That advice doesn’t help. I still feel depressed. I wonder where my life is heading and worry it is becoming stagnant. I think, *Becoming stagnant? It’s already stagnant.* I just want to stay in bed, wallowing in self-pity. I’m afraid I’ll grow old alone. That my work will be all I have. It’s not enough.

These thoughts cause me to lie here in a semicomatose state, conflicted and debating internally. My logical, concerned self says, *Get up, do your run, and go to work. People are depending on you.* My despondent, self-deprecating side says, *Stay in bed. They can do without you for a while. They probably won’t miss you. Besides, you’re the boss.* The argument continues for several more minutes, and my morose side wins. I decide to stay in bed.

To make matters worse, as I try to turn over to catch a little more sleep, I realize I have a hard-on, a damned hard-on. Just what I need when I’m alone and feeling melancholy. What a waste. I’ve been alone for a couple of months. Shit!

I feel myself. I squeeze it. That feels good. I contemplate masturbating, but I’m not mentally aroused or in the mood. It’s a struggle, but I finally open my eyes.

Before I started arguing with myself, I had been lying in a stupor, fantasizing about being a super attractive man that all women, even the most beautiful, would swoon over and drop their panties for in a heartbeat. Yeah right. Only in my wildest imagination. In the light of day, I accept that my six-foot frame and plain face would likely put me at a seven, plus or minus one or two, depending on how much a woman had had to drink or how desperate she was when considering me as a possible partner.

I lie for a few more minutes before I realize my erection is seriously hard. It even hurts a bit. And I have an overwhelming need to pee. I’m alone and no longer fantasizing about some beautiful woman, so I suspect the erection has to do with my need to urinate. I’ve heard these erections are sometimes called “pee-ons,” but I have no idea if there is any truth to this.

I manage to get up and put on my pants, a habit I developed in the navy. You never know when an emergency will occur on a ship—fire, man overboard, blackout, collision—so you never go anywhere without your pants. It is difficult to get them on, even though they’re loose-fitting running pants and my briefs are pressing me inward.

I make my way to the bathroom. I lift the toilet seat and need to lean over the bowl in a ridiculous position because my erection hasn’t gone down, and it hurts when I try to push it down to aim. There were occasions I wished I had this difficulty when I was with a girl, particularly in my older teen years; I wasn’t having sex in my younger teen years, except by myself. Shortly after peeing,

I begin to soften. Maybe it's because I peed or I'm not thinking of anything arousing. I just don't know.

While I do my morning pre-run routine—splash-in-the-face wake-up wash, brush my teeth, and stretching—I wonder why I feel so different today. I have this overwhelming foreboding that something is about to happen. What could possibly happen in my life? It's pretty mundane. Maybe I'll feel better after my run. I run to work every day, even when it rains.

It's just past six when I set out. The temperature is around sixty degrees, perfect for running. My apartment, located on Midland Road in Poway, California, and my maintenance and repair company, located on Stowe Drive, are only a couple of miles apart. The distance is too short for a direct run but not too long for a walk home, which takes me about thirty minutes.

Running usually helps me clear my mind, but not today. I still have a gloomy feeling. When I arrive at work, just before seven, I take a shower in the bathroom attached to my personal room. This area is a one-room apartment. It has a daybed, a table with chairs, a recliner, a radio, a wall-mounted flat-screen TV, and other odds and ends. I rarely use the TV. On occasion, I spend the night here. Sometimes I get caught up in my work and am too tired to walk home. Other times, I've stayed because I didn't want to be with my current female roommate.

I've had my share of relationships. Nearly all of them ended peacefully and mutually. The women got tired of me for various reasons: I wasn't committed strongly to the relationship, I didn't pay enough attention, I worked too much, I wasn't there when they needed me, and I didn't understand them—show me a man who understands a woman, and I'll show you a man who is probably going to have a sex change. I'm not sure if women understand women. In truth, I think that I just didn't see spending the rest of my life with any of them. They surely felt the same way about me. Something intangible was missing, and I couldn't love them the way they deserved to be loved.

After showering and dressing, I settle into my recliner. I adjust my body to a comfortable position and think, *Today, I'll just meditate and reflect on the journey that is my life and business. Maybe then I can figure out what's bothering me.*

I spend half an hour meditating and resolve nothing.

I look at the digital clock: it's 7:46 a.m., Tuesday, March 25, 2014. I'm ready to go to work. I leave my private room and head for the staff lounge to get a cup of coffee. I see Helen is with several of the techs, discussing today's projects. Gregg is also with them. As I transit my office, I turn on my computer. In the lounge, I make my coffee—an easy, quick task with the single-cup brewer.

Helen walks in. She is an attractive thirty-six-year-old single mom with two children, a girl and a boy. She has brown hair that hangs down just past her shoulders. Her eyes are brown too, with a bit of a twinkle to them. Her nose is Roman, which is rather attractive on her. Her mouth is average size, not wide or narrow, with lips that accentuate her wonderful smile. She stands about five feet nine. I'm sure her figure would look good in a swimsuit, bikini or otherwise.

We exchange our morning greetings. Cup in hand, I start to leave the lounge for my office. Helen stops me with “Art, is everything okay?”

“Sure! Why do you ask?”

“I don’t know. You just have a strange look.”

“I always look strange.”

“Yeah, yeah, but today it seems stranger, and there’s an unusual tone in your voice.”

“Nothing’s wrong. I’ve just been thinking about this and that, and some personal stuff. Nothing to get worked up about. Life’s dilemmas.”

“Well, if you want to talk about it, you know where to find me.” Her tone indicates she is worried, but she doesn’t push it.

“Thanks, sis. I will if I need to.” Having Helen around is always comforting.

In my office, while I’m sipping my coffee, I decide to google “peeing with an erection.” There are copious pages. I click on “Images.” Hundreds appear. I spend a couple of moments looking at them and laughing inwardly.

Then I click on my live news app to find out what today’s weather will be like. The program that’s on is one of the local morning shows. There’s news about the president, accidents, sports, and a myriad of local events. Before the weather comes on, there’s a piece on a charity gala that took place last night in Los Angeles. A lot of big-name people attended, and the program shows clips of them on the red carpet.

One particular attendee attracts my attention. She’s beyond-belief beautiful, the kind of woman men fantasize about. Maybe I’ll dream about her tonight before I fall asleep. The reporter stops her and asks her several questions, which I don’t pay any attention to. I’ve become mesmerized by her beauty. Or is it something else—something I can’t define?

As the camera focuses on her face, I feel a strong attraction to her, different from how it’s been with other women. It’s strange to me that she seems so serious and doesn’t smile. Or rather, her smile seems to be forced, somewhat ingenuous. After the reporter finishes the questions, which she’s answered very cordially, the woman moves on.

The reporter gives a summary of the woman’s participation, during which there is a slideshow of her. The reporter tells the audience that the woman donates significant sums to this charity and many others, as well as having an active role in several of them. The woman is a board member of the group sponsoring the gala.

While I am looking intensely at her pictures, Helen walks into the office. I look up at her. She reaches out, puts her hand under my chin, and closes my mouth. I smile.

Helen says, “That was one gorgeous woman. Who is she?”

“Yes, she is. Every man’s fantasy. I think the reporter said her name is Veronica, or maybe Victoria—Victoria Starburst? Starcluster? Something like that. The CEO of a very large corporation.”

At this point the weather comes on, and we shift our attention to it. As always, the weather in San Diego is sunny and warm, and expected to remain that way for the rest of the week.

I close the news app, and Helen sees my Google page. She bursts out laughing. Puzzled, I ask her, “What are you laughing at?”

Reining in her laughter, she tells me, “Several times when Josh was a toddler, he got an erection and needed to pee. I had to hold him over the bowl like in those pictures. It was the funniest thing. I can only imagine what it would be like for a grown man.” She pauses and then gets down to business. “I need to talk to you about the lighting system upgrade we’re installing at Kyons Industrial’s learning center facility.”

“I thought we were all set to do it. Isn’t Tank scheduled to install it today?”

“Yes. I thought that maybe I should go along with him because I think it’s a two-man, or should I say two-person, job.”

Before I can reply, Gregg interrupts us. “Sorry! I heard what you guys were talking about, and I’d be glad to go along with Tank.”

“That will really be helpful. Hang on a minute.” I pick up my phone and call Tank.

Tank answers, “Hi boss. What can I do for you?”

“Gregg has offered to go along with you. Are you okay with it?”

“Great. I can sure use the help. With his knowledge and experience, he’ll be able to contribute. More so if I get stuck.”

“Where are you?”

“In the shop.”

“Good. I’ll send him out.” I tell Gregg, “Tank is waiting in the shop. And if you need to talk, remember that I’m here for you.” Gregg has been mentoring me for a couple of years. He retired from the navy and a school district job. He knows his stuff. He’s my go-to guy when I’m in technical trouble. He’s in his early seventies and quite fit.

“Thanks Art. I’ll keep that in mind. Don’t worry; I’m fine.”

I'm not sure. He doesn't have the smile and quick wit he had before Pat passed.

Gregg leaves, and when he's out of earshot, Helen asks, "Do you think that's a good idea with the way he feels? He's been depressed and listless since his wife passed in January."

"Actually, I think it will be good for him. He's like me. Working on equipment is fun and relaxing. It will take his mind off his loss. I think it will be therapeutic. It's better to be around people who care about you than to be alone when you're dealing with a personal tragedy."

Helen nods. "Do you know how Tank got his nickname?"

"Yes. It was his grandfather's nickname. They called Richard 'Little Tank' because he was so like his grandfather. Behaviorwise, not in the physical sense."

"Well, how did his grandfather get the name? Who nicknames someone after a fish tank or a gas tank?" she asks.

I laugh. "Helen, they're not named after any kind of holding tank. They're named after the most prolific World War II tank, the M4 Sherman. Richard's grandfather was in the war, and his army buddies gave him the name. I met his grandfather once. He's taller and about twice the size and weight of Richard. I could see why his comrades named him Tank."

Helen departs with a smile on her face.

As she leaves, I think back to how smart—no, *lucky*—I was to have hired her. About eighteen months ago, I determined that I needed an office manager. I didn't need a secretary; I needed someone who could order parts, send the staff out, schedule projects, and take over for me if need be. As I went through the applications, most of the candidates were qualified to be secretaries but didn't appear to have the skills to manage an office. Except one: unbelievably, Helen Olivia Troy. On her résumé, it was Helen O. Troy.

During her job interview, I was trying to be funny, so I asked her, "Does the *O* in your name stand for 'of'?"

She didn't laugh. I guess she'd heard it before. Probably more times than any sane person should tolerate. She asked, "Is your name S. A. Zwyx?"

"That's correct," I replied.

She smiled and asked, "Does the *A* stand for 'Asshole'?"

I burst out laughing. "I guess I asked for that," I muttered. I thought of a book I'd read, *Up the Organization*, in which the author said (and I am paraphrasing here), "Every leader should have at least one person who can tell him he's full of crap." I wondered if Helen might just be that person. "Do you think you're capable of being respectful and following orders?"

“Yes, sir, and I’m sorry about the *A* comment,” she informed me.

“Truthfully, are you?”

“Well, I will be if I don’t get the job. I’ve really got to learn to keep my mouth shut.”

“Well, I really set myself up for your comment and accept that. But you do know that if you do something like this with a client, I will fire you—right?” I pause and then add, “However, here I expect you to speak your mind. I need you to understand that when I say, ‘Enough, that’s it, this is what we are going to do,’ then you’ll do it. Do you understand?”

She answered solemnly, “Yes. I understand.”

I liked her. She appeared to have the personality that an office manager needed to deal with maintenance personnel. She would not be intimidated and would hopefully keep me from getting a big head. I didn’t think further and hired her on the spot.

Helen’s performance exceeded my expectations. She’s been a most valuable employee and has become a special friend. And by special friend, I mean just that—a friend I can depend on, who is there for me, and who cares about my well-being. Helen is a true find. She is smart and quickly got a grasp of the business, even the technical aspects. I can depend on her to run it anytime I need to leave. She makes me feel unnecessary at times. The entire staff adores her, and they do what she wants them to.

I named my company Pro4ms, which stands for “Professional Material, Money, and Maintenance Management.” My company’s credo is *Everything Needs Care and Maintenance*, whether it is equipment, facilities, relationships, or bodies. Sadly, most people don’t care about or don’t know the importance of maintenance.

At my facility, I have another small room that has a weight machine, treadmill, stationary bike, and other fitness equipment. To maintain my body’s physical fitness and a relatively stress-free state of mind, I do meditation/self-hypnosis/biofeedback (MSB), weight training, and running. I spend two days a week training in hand-to-hand combat with a couple of retired Navy Seals. They kick my ass every time, but it’s getting more difficult for them to do it. I’m not sure if I’m getting better or they’re getting older. Perhaps it’s a bit of both.

Through the use of MSB and physical exercises, such as Kegels, I’ve been able to control my erection length, that is, the duration before, during, and after orgasm. I can actually control the onset of ejaculation. While my orgasm alone is enjoyable, it is much, much more enjoyable if it comes when the woman is having hers. I believe I can feel a woman’s vaginal contractions during orgasm, and I’ve mentally programmed those contractions to be one of my triggers for release.

Helen departs and I return to the task at hand. I start working on a maintenance program for a prospective client. Since I’m having difficulty gathering the necessary data, and making lots of

mistakes, I decide it's time to take a break, before I get really upset and frustrated. I take a few deep breaths and calm myself down.

I go out into the shop and find Helen. Smiling as warmly as I can, I explain my difficulty. I don't want her to worry. Over the time she's been here, we've formed a strong personal bond. I tell her I need to take a break and would appreciate it if she only interrupts me for an emergency. She says, "Okay, I think I can handle it. Is there anything else I can do? You know I don't like seeing you like this."

"Stop fretting. I just need a little time to clear my head. No funny remarks, please."

She refrains.

I make my way to my personal room and call my mom, who now lives in Florida. We speak for a few minutes. I let her know that everything is okay here and that I will try to make time to get out and see her shortly.

I settle back in my chair and turn on the radio, which is on the station I listen to regularly. It's KYJ, 1776 FM, affectionately dubbed the jelly station by listeners, but officially it is known as "the Revolution." The morning disc jockey, Jack Daniels, hosts a show called *The Morning Shot*. Jack babbles about this and that, plays music, and periodically has an associate give traffic updates. Jack announces that in ten minutes he will ask the question of the day. He states today's prize is super large, one of the biggest prizes he's ever had the opportunity to award.

Right on schedule, Jack says, "Listen up, people. Here we go. Today's prize is a real doozy. I'll let you know all about it after we have a winner. Are you ready? The big question is"—he pauses for effect—"what is the only English word that has *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, and *y* in it, only once and in alphabetical order?"

I know the answer and call. I really don't expect to get through, but Jack answers the phone. He says, "Who do I have on the line?"

"A-Arthur," I stammer, not believing that I'm going to have an opportunity to answer the question.

Jack asks, "Is it okay if I call you Art?"

"Sure, I prefer it," I sort of mumble in reply. I'm nervous. Actually, I'm very nervous knowing I'm on the air. Sometime back, I googled, "What are the top things people fear?" All the pages I checked had "fear of public speaking" at number one or two. Most had it at number one. Dying was fifth, sixth, or seventh. So, you might surmise, I'd rather be dead than speaking on air.

"Okay then, Art, give me the answer," Jack demands.

Struggling with my fear, I barely manage to squeak it out. "The word is 'facetiously,' f-a-c-e-t-i-o-u-s-l-y."

Stealing a line from the show *My Fair Lady*, Jack says, “By George he’s got it, he’s got it! Hey, Art, do you want to know what you won?”

I manage, “Are you kidding? Of course. You can bet your”—I leave the word *ass* to the audience’s imagination—“I do.”

Jack laughs. “Folks, we have a gentleman on the line. The prize is four first-class airline tickets to Honolulu, Hawaii, with four rooms for a one-week stay at the Enchanted Palace Hotel, a very swanky, upscale hotel on the beach. The most significant part of the prize is \$10,000 to spend.”

Chapter 2

I think I've stopped breathing. I'm in shock.

Jack puts a song on for the other listeners that is also perfect and appropriate for me, "Happy Days Are Here Again." Speaking to me off the air, he confirms the number I'm calling from, just in case he loses me. He then tells me he is going to transfer me to one of the office staff, who will take down my name and address, so they can send the prize.

The phone goes dead. I think, *Oh no! Shit, why does this always happen to me?*

My fears are short-lived. A woman, she sounds young, comes on the phone and tells me her name and callback info. She takes down all my details and says that I should receive the prize in a few days. If I don't get it by Friday, I'm to call her. The tickets and hotel vouchers are good for six months. After giggling a little, she says, "The money will lose its value over time."

I thank her profusely, and she laughs and says, "Good luck!" Boy, how quickly a day can change from crappy to great. She transfers me back to Jack.

When Jack picks up again, he tells me we're on the air. "I'd like to ask you several questions about yourself, so the audience can get an idea of who won the prize."

I say, "Go ahead; ask away." I'm slightly more relaxed. My breathing is almost back to normal. It gets easier the longer I talk. If the questions are about me, I feel confident I can answer them. I seem to forget we're on the air.

He asks, "Are you single? What do you do? What do you like?" And lots of other typical things people ask when they first meet. Jack has a smart remark for each of my responses. For example, "Are you currently involved or married?"

"Not married, not involved."

"Ladies, we have a live one. I'm sorry but I can't give out his phone number."

As he gets ready to terminate the conversation, he adds, "One more thing, Art. While it's not a requirement of the prize, I think our listeners would appreciate it if you would call us after your trip to Hawaii. I'm sure they would like you to share your adventure. Have a great trip."

Although I'm high, my expectations are typical of what I'm used to. I inform Jack, "I could probably tell you now. I'll go to Hawaii alone and return the same way. While I'm there, I'll take a few tours, swim, get a terrible sunburn, and wish I'd stayed home. I'm sure I'll enjoy the nightlife and spending the money, though."

“You definitely are not an optimist,” Jack quips.

“That’s true. I never figured I’d win a prize of any sort, let alone this one. I don’t think I’m a pessimist either, just somewhere in between. A realist, perhaps.”

“Art, it was fun talking to you. Regardless of what you are, I hope you really enjoy your prize. Bye for now.”

I’m disconnected, so I hang up.

I figure I’ll take a one-week vacation; that’s about all I can handle. It will be good for me to get away for a while, both for my sake and the staff’s. I have been working steadily since I started the company.

What am I going to do with the extra tickets and vouchers? I’m not in a relationship. I don’t have any close friends, mostly guys I play sports with. They’re older, married homebodies. Occasionally, one of their wives tries to fix me up.

I ponder my dilemma for a few minutes. Then the light bulb above my head comes on. I know exactly what to do and why.

I search out Helen and ask her to come into the office immediately. I’m sure I’m smiling like I’ve lost my mind. Her look of “What’s up with you?” confirms it. She asks, “What’s going on that you need me right now? You’re on a break.”

“What are you doing that you can’t be interrupted right now?”

She shrugs. “Actually, nothing.”

Once we’re in my office and seated, I say, “I’m sorry. I—no, we—that is, you and I have just won four first-class plane tickets to Honolulu, four rooms for one week each, and ten thousand in cash. I said I was sorry because, while I was trying to figure out what I would do with all the tickets, I realized that you haven’t had a full week of vacation since I hired you. You’re more than an employee; you’re a good friend. You’ve supported me ever since you joined us. This is one way I can thank you. I’m giving you three of the tickets and vouchers, and half of what’s left after taxes are taken out of the cash, so you can take your kids on a vacation to Hawaii. I’m only going to take a week. It’s all I can handle. I’ll be stressed being away from here, even though I know it will be in good hands and with dependable people.”

After a pause, during which she said nothing, I continue, “You and the others do the real work anyway. You’re going to be in charge while I’m gone. I don’t want you calling me unless it’s life or death, and I do mean life or death. You can plan your vacation for sometime after I complete mine. Keep in mind that the tickets and vouchers expire in six months. Please arrange for a temp when you take your vacation.”

The look of disbelief on her face could have been a prize-winning photo. She says, “You’re bullshitting me, aren’t you? Is this another one of your stupid jokes?”

“No, I’m not bullshitting you, and it’s not a joke,” I state emphatically. I tell her about the question of the day and how I knew the answer and all that transpired.

She wraps her arms around me, hugs me tightly, and says, “If this is really true, it has to be one of the nicest things anybody has ever done for me. But if you’re BSing me, you’d better leave town for good.”

I give her the number of the young woman who is going to send me the materials. I tell her to call and ask if what I have told her is true. I don’t know if she does, but for the rest of the day she and I walk around in a daze. We probably should’ve gone home right then and there.

Chapter 3

Thursday morning, a FedEx delivery arrives for me from station KYJ. The package contains the airline tickets, hotel vouchers, and check for \$10,000. A letter is included telling me the IRS valuation of the prize and advising me to contact an accountant to determine the amount I need to pay in taxes.

The taxes come to just over thirty-eight hundred dollars, which I tell my accountant to take out of my pay. When I cash the check, I'll put the amount back into my personal account to cover.

I take my phone out and text Helen.

---- Thur, Mar 27, 2014 ----

Art
<Subject: My office>
Be in my office after we close tonight.
11:47 a.m.

Helen
What for?
11:50 a.m.

Art
<Subject: TRY TO REMEMBER WHO'S THE BOSS>
IF I WANTED TO TELL YOU, I WOULD HAVE. JUST BE HERE.
12:00 p.m.

Helen
<Subject: If I must?>
Yesss sire. No need to shout. Does his majesty want me to bring anything?
12:03 p.m.

Art
<Subject: You must!>
That's better. No. Just yourself, perhaps with a slight bit of humility. You know someday your smart mouth will get you in trouble.
12:05 p.m.

Shortly after five, when most of the staff is gone, Helen comes bouncing into my office. I point to one of the chairs at the table I'm sitting at. "Okay, what do you want?" she asks, like she is bored and wants to get it over with, as quickly as possible. She takes her seat.

“Look, show a little bit of respect. I know I can’t run this business without you, but piss me off enough and I might try.”

“Sorry, what is it you need?” She seems to be trying to appear remorseful but is failing miserably.

I think, *This woman knows me too well and what she can get away with.*

I show her the plane tickets, the room vouchers, and the check. Her mouth falls open, and she appears to stop breathing. “Breathe Helen, breathe,” I say. She does, finally.

“I won’t sleep with you,” she announces. Pauses. “Okay, I will sleep with you.” I think she’s half-serious. Looking at me, she asks in a very unsure manner, “Are you really going to give me those things?”

“Yes, I am. I will *not* sleep with you, even though you are a very beautiful, sexy woman. I can give you a myriad of reasons why, but I am not going to go into that now.”

She frowns. I laugh. She asks, “Okay, what do I have to do?”

“I’m going to start my vacation April 14. I’ll need you to pick me up when I return on Sunday, April 20, sometime in the evening. I’ll take a shuttle to get to the airport the day I leave. I want you to find a temp to do filing, order parts, and take trouble calls for the period that you’ll be gone. You and I can interview any candidates you come up with. I would like them here for a week or two, your choice, before you go. You can leave anytime after I’ve been back for three weeks. And I think you should thank me.” I hand her the tickets, room vouchers, and \$3,100, her half of the prize check after taxes.

She looks at me then at the tickets, then back at me, and repeats the process several more times. Her mouth keeps opening and closing, but nothing is coming out. “Helen, take a deep breath,” I say. She does. “Let it out. Do that again.” She does.

Finally, she regains some composure. She stands up and runs to me, throws her arms around me, hugs me, and says, “Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. Someday you’ll make a good boss.” She is overjoyed. I feel very good about making her happy. She’s like the sister I want, not the one I’ve got.

After she settles down, we go over my plan again. This time she writes it down and says it will be a snap. She orders me not to worry while I’m gone, that she will find a good candidate for the office. She has a friend with an excellent background who is currently unemployed. I ask her to bring her friend in, so we can interview her together. Then I tell her to go home.

As she gets up to leave, she says, “I really didn’t believe you. I thought that if you won something, it was probably two tickets to Legoland. I want you to know this is the best place I’ve worked, even though the boss is really crazy—in a good way. But if you ever repeat that, I’ll kill you.” She plants a kiss on my cheek. “Thank you, Art. I really do appreciate this.”

Over the next couple of weeks, I make arrangements. I book the room, schedule the flight, put the prize money in my ATM debit card account, and arrange for a shuttle service to pick me up at five-fifteen in the morning for my eight-thirty flight. I also have my luggage shipped ahead.

The days drag by slowly. I am really getting impatient and on my staff's nerves. When they know I am within earshot, they say, "I wish he was gone already."

It is in those last few days before I am due to leave that I become the biggest pain in the ass. I worry about everything. Helen pulls me aside and says, "Boss, get a grip, or you're going to expire before your vacation even starts."

It doesn't help. The entire staff avoids me like I have a communicable disease and, just by being in my vicinity, they would catch it from me. If they actually have to deal with me, they tolerate me as best they can. I literally have to corner them. When I go home that Friday evening before my flight, I think I hear the entire staff give a collective sigh of relief.

I know I have good staff. They know what they're doing. My mentor, Gregg, says that if needed, he will be there to keep things running smoothly.

Chapter 4

The morning of April 13, I get out of bed at four thirty. I have lain awake since midnight, tossing and turning. I'm so nervous, I can't even get excited enough to play with myself, though I try several times. I'm dressed and ready to go at 4:46 a.m.

My carry-on luggage contains underwear, running shorts, T-shirts, and miscellaneous personal items. I have this bag in case the ones I shipped get lost. The shuttle driver arrives on time, and I pay him up front. He makes a couple of stops but gets us to the airport by six thirty. I give him a twenty-dollar tip. He says, "Thank you, it's not necessary."

I say, "You did good. Take it with my best wishes."

After taking my seat in first class, I imagine some grossly large, cigar-smelling CEO sitting next to me, who will talk endlessly about his company and his superior leadership. Or an unkempt woman, reeking of a gallon's worth of overpowering body wash. Or a person eating sunflower seeds, dropping the shells all over the place, and occasionally propelling one at me as they talk. Of course, I will get hit once or twice. What an imagination!

Boy, am I wrong. Standing next to my seat is the most beautiful creature I have ever seen. For an instant, I think I recognize her. It's a fleeting impression; there is no way I would ever forget meeting this woman. She's about five feet nine, with an absolutely perfect figure. Her glossy auburn hair is in a bun. She is dressed immaculately in a navy-blue pantsuit that accentuates her perfect figure. The navy-blue color makes her hazel eyes stand out brilliantly. I can see flecks of blue, green, and red in her irises. Her face is roundish and symmetrical, with unblemished skin. I want to reach up and stroke it. Her nose is straight and has the slightest upturn. It fits her face perfectly. I've read that the shape of her face is called the celestial type. She's certainly heavenly.

Her lips are full—*succulent* is the word that comes to my mind. For a brief instant, I imagine those lips on mine, and also around me. I just sit there, looking at this heavenly goddess, my mouth open. I'm totally mesmerized.

When she has had enough of my gawking, she says sternly, "Do you mind?" I see her teeth are snow white and, of course, perfect in all respects.

Partially regaining my senses, I pull my legs back, so she can pass. I mutter softly, "Sorry."

She moves by me with impressive grace and ease that reflects breeding and immense self-confidence. My thought processes are going crazy. I wish I were her seat, so she could sit on me. I thank divine providence or whoever arranged this. I think this is going to be a five-hour flight of utter bliss.

After we get airborne, I try to strike up a conversation. "Have you been to Hawaii before?"

She knocks me off my cloud and crashes my dreams. Politely, but with an air of finality, leaving no room for doubt, she says, "If you please, I do not want to talk to you. I have work to do and prefer to be left alone. I hope you can honor my wishes." I fully expected her to add, "You're an absolutely hideous man. Who would want to talk to you?"

"I understand; six-ten," I reply, feeling like she had just kicked me like a mongrel dog in the street. I take out my book: *Fifty Shades of Grey*. I swear she gives me a look of utter disgust after seeing the title. She probably considers me some kind of pervert for reading it. I think, *Another one of those people who can't see the forest for the trees.*

Because of my restless night, the drone of the airplane, and a very comfortable seat, I fall asleep while reading.

About midway through the flight, one of the attendants nudges me. "Sir! Could you move your legs, so the lady can get by?" she asks politely.

Begrudgingly, I say, "Sure," and pull my legs closer to the seat so the bitch can get out. She called the flight attendant instead of nudging me herself? I guess she was afraid of becoming tainted by me. I smile at her as she goes by. She walks to the first-class restroom. I think, *The goddess has the same body functions as the rest of us, only hers doesn't stink.* I snicker.

When she returns, I pull my feet in quickly and extend my hand in a gesture that says the path is clear. As she crosses in front of me, I look deep into her beautiful hazel eyes. I think I could look at those eyes forever. Her look of abhorrence could melt subzero ice in seconds.

Once I'm sure she is comfortably seated, I extend my legs again and fall back to sleep for the rest of the flight.

As the plane prepares to land, we are given the typical landing instructions: return seats to the upright position and so on and so forth. After the plane comes to a stop at the terminal, we all stand up and stretch a bit as we prepare to disembark. When Ms. Ice Maiden Bitch stands up, I step back to allow her to exit before me. While this is just good manners, my ulterior motive is that it gives me the opportunity to look at her ass. It is a fine, fine ass. I can feel a slight stirring in my groin. If I masturbate tonight, I know whom I will be fantasizing about.

Because I don't have any baggage to claim, I can leave the airport quickly. I hail a cab and tell the driver to take me to the Enchanted Palace Hotel. I've been told it is one of the high-end hotels on the beach. It is a fifty-six-story edifice reflecting man's imagination and capabilities.

Walking into the hotel lobby, I'm awestruck. The space is big enough for a basketball court and bleachers. The marble floor is laid in intricate geometric patterns in various colors—reds, blues, blacks, greens, yellows. The hotel's logo is placed so that you walk across it. It is a gold crown with five spikes. Topping each spike is a jewel—peridot, sapphire, diamond, topaz, and zircon. Below the crown are two crossed jeweled scepters. The crown and scepters are on a shield of cobalt

blue. Above the crown is the word “Enchanted,” and below the scepters is “Palace,” written in an old-fashioned script. The outer inch or so of the shield is trimmed in gold. It’s quite impressive.

There are couches, chairs, and coffee tables throughout the lobby for guests and visitors to relax in. The check-in desk nearly covers the wall to the right. Hallways facing the entry. To the left are several gift shops. Between the gift shops and hallways are the elevators. The wall and ceiling patterns match the floor. It is all very decadent.

I make my way to the check-in desk and present my voucher. The staff is friendly and treats me like royalty. Just as I turn from the desk heading to the elevator, in walks Ms. I’m Beautiful and My Shit Doesn’t Stink. She sees me, frowns, and gives me a look of utter contempt. I can just imagine what she’s thinking: *What is this Neanderthal doing in my hotel? He should be moved to another planet.*

I get on the elevator and glance back at her. I must admit, she is one beautiful sight. I think about a song from the show *A Chorus Line*. It’s about being rated on a scale of 1 to 10. I would rate her: Looks 10; Personality 0. And I suspect I’m overrating her in the personality category.

Chapter 5

Once I settle into my room, I take a shower and dress. Since I haven't eaten anything all day, even on the plane, I decide to go to the hotel dining room for lunch.

While I am sitting there, eating a cheeseburger and fries, in walks Ms. I Own This World. I gape at her; she has that effect on me. I wonder, *Is it just her looks or something more?* I don't know.

As she sits down, she looks around and notices me. Her normally stoic look changes to one of displeasure. I think, *I really annoy this woman. I don't understand it, but I don't want her to be unhappy.*

When the waiter arrives at her table, she smiles at him—disingenuously, but nevertheless a smile—and places her order. I don't care whether she is smiling, frowning, or stoic; she is one beautiful woman.

I laugh suddenly, thinking about the cliché that opposites attract. We are certainly opposites. She is beautiful and apparently smart. I'm not very handsome and not at all intelligent, but I'm smart enough to make my way through life. As you might guess, I have personal issues and don't think much of myself with regard to the opposite sex. This way, I don't get disappointed when I get rejected. It's a lot less painful.

I swear that when I get up to leave, I can see her smile with relief. At least I can make her happy by not being around. Strangely, that thought makes me feel good—that she'll be happy.

A few hours later, I decide to do some exploring, since I have nothing else to do. I begin wandering around the business section of downtown Honolulu. I am walking past one of the major buildings when out comes Ms. I Am Lord and Master of the Universe. As soon as she sees me, her face registers disgust, and I think I see anger. I just stand there, gazing at her, noticing that my heartbeat has accelerated. Undoubtedly in an effort to avoid me, she quickly turns and walks away. Each time I see her, it kind of makes my day, but I suspect that seeing me ruins hers.

After returning to my room, I change into my swimming apparel and make my way down to the hotel pool. I swim around for a while and then sit in one of the lounge chairs under an umbrella and relax. About five thirty, I go to my room to shower and dress. I head straight for the formal restaurant. Since I have what I think is an abundance of money (the three thousand and change I have left from what I won), I order prime rib and a baked potato. Prime rib is probably my favorite meal. I'm relatively easy to please in the food department.

I'm eating peacefully when Ms. I'm God's Gift to Men's Eyes strolls in. Yes, she is a gift for some lucky or perhaps unlucky man. Before she sits down, she looks around and sees me. Instantly her face forms a look of disdain, like she's been forced to sit near something that smells awful. I think for a moment she is contemplating turning around and walking out.

She selects a table as far away from me as possible and seats herself so that all I can see is her back. I guess this way she doesn't have to look at me. She can pretend I'm not here, and that way she'll be able to enjoy her meal. I'm not sure she enjoys anything.

After completing my meal, I leave the hotel via the rear entrance that opens onto the beach. I remove my shoes and socks, placing my socks inside my shoes. I carry them as I walk along the beach. I roll my pants above my knees, so my feet feel the surf as it comes into the shoreline. Fantasizing and thinking, I walk along the water's edge for half an hour in a contented daze.

As I near the hotel again, the beautiful witch (spelled with a *B*) is walking toward the hotel from the opposite direction. Instantly when she sees me, anger registers on her face.

I'm about ten feet from her when I notice the setting sun in those hazel eyes. The sparks of blue, green, and red seem to flash in the early evening light. Her eyes are mesmerizing, like the sway of a cobra ready to strike. I feel like I am the prey.

I bow, gesturing with my hand for her to go ahead to the hotel: another opportunity to view that beautiful ass. Huffing, she precedes me. Much to her dissatisfaction, we both make for the elevator. I think I see a bit of relief in her when I push the second-floor button. She of course is on one of the upper floors, where all the most expensive suites are. When I get off the elevator, I swear I hear her say, "Thank God."

It is right around nine o'clock. I settle into my room and watch a bit of television. Since there is nothing even marginally enjoyable to watch, I turn off the TV. I decide to read a bit. I pick up *Fifty Shades of Grey* and start reading. It's a shame that the bitch goddess gave me a dirty look when she saw the title. The heroine Anastasia is the kind of woman I would like to meet and fall in love with. She is smart, sassy, unsure of herself, sexy, funny, and has many other charms and weaknesses that make her adorable. She's a woman who knows what she wants and goes after it. I think, *Not at all like the beautiful bitch goddess.*

It is just after eleven when I lie down to sleep. I am dog-tired, because it is two in the morning, Poway time. I close my eyes and fall asleep quickly.

I am awakened a little past midnight by a knock on the door. Who the hell could that be? I struggle out of bed, wearing only my shorts and T-shirt. Groggily, I make my way to the door. I ask, "Who's there?"

A feminine voice says, "Just open the door."

I look through the peephole and there she is—the bitch goddess. It takes me about a nanosecond to open the door. In her left hand, she has a bottle of wine and two glasses. She is dressed in a beautiful black evening gown.

My mouth is wide open—my jaw possibly resting on my chest. She places her right hand flat on my chest and pushes me back into the room. As she enters, she closes the door behind her with a

foot. I am mesmerized and can't move on my own. She puts the two glasses on a small table and the bottle of wine in the minifridge. I just watch her.

Coming back to me, she puts her hands on my hips and guides me to the bed. Hands now on my shoulders, she pushes me down. I sit like a statue. I can feel my heart beating quickly, and I'm having a great deal of difficulty breathing. My head feels like it's about to explode.

She grasps the bottom of my T-shirt and pulls it up. Because my arms are hanging down, she is unable to take it off. She smiles at me and says, "Lift your arms, moron."

I think, *You can call me whatever you like; just don't stop.*

After she takes my shirt off, she pushes me down so that I'm lying with my feet hanging. She signals me to shift further onto the bed, which I do immediately. Moving up close between my legs, she signals me to lift my butt, which I again do immediately. Grasping my shorts by the waistband, she pulls them off and then smiles.

I'm hard, so hard it hurts. She places her hand around me. Slowly she strokes me up and down for a few moments. The feeling is exquisite, and I'm surprised I don't explode right then and there. I don't seem to have the self-control I mastered. It's all gone.

Stepping back, she indicates that I should sit up, which I do. I'm still mesmerized and essentially unable to move, except at her command.

Standing about five feet from me, she reaches behind herself and unzips her dress. Crossing first one hand in front of her and then the other, she grasps the top of the dress and slides the straps off her shoulders. Smiling, she slowly lets the dress fall and pool around her feet. She steps out of it.

I look at the most beautiful sight I have ever seen. She is wearing a provocative red bra and matching panties, along with a red garter belt and black stockings. All of which are my favorites. My wildest fantasy is coming true. How could she have known?

With a look akin to that of a predator whose prey is cornered, she unclips her bra and lets those straps fall off too. Very slowly she lowers the bra and exposes her magnificent breasts: not too large and not too small. For me, they're perfect. She hooks her fingers in the waistband of her sheer, elegant panties and begins to lower them slowly, wiggling her hips. Because she has worn them over her garter belt and stockings, those items remain in place. This is exactly how I would have scripted it.

I am still paralyzed. She smiles and asks, "You like?" All I can do is nod. Before me stands a true goddess. Everything about her exudes perfection. I wonder what the gods were thinking when they sent me this gift.

After a short pause, she once again places a hand on my shoulder and pushes me down on my back. Without any foreplay, she positions herself over my erection. She spreads her sex a bit and

takes my erection in hand and slowly sinks down on it. I close my eyes and relish the intense feeling. I struggle to control myself, to hold back my impending orgasm.

For some reason, I lose all control. Only a couple of up-and-down motions drive me to one of the most intense orgasms I can ever remember having. All I can think is, *Oh, no! My one chance and I blew it.*

My eyes shoot open and I'm alone. I scream inwardly. What has just happened?

I reached down and feel my briefs, which are soaking wet. Hell, I had a wet dream. A bona fide wet dream. I haven't had a wet dream for years. Most of the time when I'm alone and get a bit horny, I just take things in hand and have my "wet dream" before I fall asleep.

I get up, go to the bathroom, remove my briefs, and take a shower. Holy crap, that woman has really gotten under my skin. It saddens me to know that any impression I've made on her probably makes her sick. I get the feeling that I am her worst nightmare. And that each time we cross paths, it gets worse for her. She won't be having a wet dream about me.

Chapter 6

The next morning, I wake up refreshed. Even though this is a vacation for me, I have not reached the period when I normally take a week off from exercising, to allow my body to rest and rejuvenate. After putting my running gear on, I make my way down to the water's edge. I begin running where the surf comes in and recedes, leaving softened but still somewhat firm sand.

I've been running for fifteen minutes when, you guessed it, Ms. Get Out of My Way slowly runs past me. She turns to see whom she is passing. When she recognizes me, her face instantly changes to the expression she always gets when she sees me. She increases her pace slightly. So as not to drive her to murder, I pick up my pace, but not as much—just enough so I can keep about twenty-five feet behind her.

I think I could run forever watching that beautiful butt of hers. It is even better in the tight shorts she's wearing. The way her cheeks move sends shivers down my spine and other places as well. I think I would've had an instantaneous erection if I hadn't had tight pants on.

I continue to run behind her for another fifteen minutes and then decide to return to the hotel. On the way back, I slow my pace to what's normal for me. Again, she shoots by me. Again, I consider picking up my pace, just to watch that ass of hers.

Instead, I walk the rest of the way. When I get back to the hotel, she's nowhere to be seen. I head up to my room, take a shower, and dress.

I go down to the dining room for breakfast, thinking about doing some more island exploring. Perhaps I'll take one of the many tours offered. As I finish up my scrambled eggs and bacon, in walks, Ms. Stay Out of My Fuckin' Way. When she sees me, I get her usual reaction.

Just before I finish, the server places the bill folder on the table. I give it a quick look, add a tip, write my room number, and sign it. As I leave, I look back at her and smile. I could swear she starts to raise her hand to give me the finger but refrains because others are present. Sometimes I think the powers that be just sit around to see what kind of mischief they can cause us. They're probably laughing their asses off right now.

Yet I don't understand why making that woman unhappy bothers me. She thinks I'm awful. Looks aside, I don't think very highly of her. I don't understand where my emotions are coming from.

I make my way downtown and take one of the tours. It lasts several hours and follows the coastline. It hits a few of Oahu's major seaside attractions and out-of-the-way beaches. The tour stops at the USS *Arizona* Memorial at Pearl Harbor, and we visit the Arizona's final resting place. We're all silent and humbled by it, reading the posted material and looking at the pictures.

Most of the group is made up of either older couples or honeymooners. I'm seated next to an older woman. I think she is in her late fifties. We talk amiably. I wonder for a moment if she's a cougar. Yeah, right.

Walking away from the bus, I start to wander around the business section again. Don't ask me why. I don't know. Perhaps unconsciously I am hoping to see her again. Am I drawn to her by some mysterious force, or am I just a glutton for punishment?

Around noon, as I walk past the same office building she came out of yesterday, the Wicked Witch of Beauty Land comes walking out. I'm delighted. I stop and hope she doesn't look in my direction. I can't explain it, but I don't want her to get upset. I think I have that effect on her.

Unfortunately, she turns in my direction and spots me. The look on her face is one of astonishment. It changes quickly to fury. I think if she had a gun, she would take it out and shoot me. She appears to be pissed beyond belief. I cringe but keep on walking and make my way to an outdoor restaurant.

Unbelievably, she walks in a few minutes later and sits down at a table before she realizes I am here. Her look says it all. I fully expect her to get up and leave. Instead she walks around to the other side of her table so that her back is to me. I guess this way she can pretend I'm not here and enjoy her meal, as she has done before.

I take a few more minutes and finish up, pay my bill, and leave. I go back to my room, put on my swimsuit, and head to the beach for a swim. I apply sunscreen before and after my swim, just as recommended by the medical community. It all relates to good health and proper body maintenance.

While swimming, I think, *If the bitch goddess were here, she would be spreading chum, hoping the sharks would get rid of me.* That thought sends shivers down my spine, causing me to make the decision to return to shore. I wander up to the beach pavilion and lounge around for a couple of hours until four thirty, when I decide to go back to the hotel.

In my room, I undress and take a shower. *Boy, I think, I'm taking a lot of showers.* After dressing, I once again go to the hotel restaurant for dinner. It is just after six. I order my typical basic meal of a steak and potatoes, with iced tea for a drink.

Sure enough, I haven't been sitting there more than fifteen minutes when the beautiful goddess decides to make her appearance. It's like one of those comedies where people are trying to get together, and one walks through one doorway, as the other walks out another doorway. Only in this case, I know she's trying to avoid me.

Once again, the sight of me appalls her. I just smile politely and continue to eat. She takes her seat and makes sure she's not facing me. I'm probably making her stay here miserable. For some reason that makes me laugh, and it also makes me sad. I don't want to make this woman unhappy, even though she kind of deserves it. My feelings are very confused when it comes to her. What the hell is happening to me?

I think, *Oh well, you'll be back in Poway in a couple of days and never see the bitch princess again.* Why is that thought depressing?

After dinner, I make my way to the hotel's beach-facing patio. I find an upright lounge chair and settle in. I look out at the ocean. The surf is rather calm. The waves are three to five feet. There are several surfers enjoying themselves. There are a few people on the beach, relaxing and swimming. One couple is making out like they're alone. The water is a rich blue, with rainbows forming in the mist caused by the waves. The sun is setting to my right, makes the clouds a mixture of fiery reds, oranges, yellows, and grays against a darkening blue canvas. It's a picture that only nature can paint. The scene is breathtaking, yet serene and comforting. It doesn't take me long to become really lost in super sensuous daydreaming. I'm engulfed in my reverie when suddenly the bitch goddess confronts me.

She's standing there in the most defiant stance one can imagine, hands on her hips and legs spread slightly. Angrily she says, "Why the fuck are you following me?"

Chapter 7

She's beautiful. She takes my breath away. I stand up to face her, perhaps fearing that I'll need to run or protect myself. With the heels she has on, she is almost my height. I look her in the eyes. God, those eyes are beautiful. I intelligently respond, "Huh?"

Loudly and angrily she says, "You've been following me. Everywhere I go, you show up. What the fuck do you think you're doing? I have half a mind to call the police."

I am stunned. Spontaneously, I say, "That is exactly what you have, half a mind." Then I just stand there, drinking in her beauty. Even in a nasty, unbelievable situation like this, I can only focus on her beauty. I'm losing my mind. I begin to laugh.

"What are you laughing at, you retard? Don't you understand me? I asked you why the fuck are you following me!" It appears my laughing has made her madder, if that is even possible.

"Hold on a minute. You think I'm following you?"

Sarcastically she says, "Well! It appears that you might have a brain, albeit a picayune one. Yes, that's exactly what I think. Why the fuck are you following me?"

I finally start putting a response together. "First of all, I couldn't give a shit about you." Mentally I note, *That isn't quite true*. I find that I have a strong attraction to her. What I feel, I can't explain. Lust perhaps? I ignore my better instincts and behave like a recalcitrant child. "I haven't the slightest idea who the hell you are, and frankly, I couldn't care less." *Again, that's not entirely true*. I feel a connection, like there is a strong, undefinable force that is drawing me to her. I am behaving stupidly and childishly. "You have a personality that would cause hell to freeze over and make a pride of lions turn and run away. You're conceited and arrogant. You make me want to take you across my knee and spank you. Somebody should. You behave like you were born with a silver spoon, not in your mouth, but up your tight ass. You're nothing but a stupid, nasty, petulant bitch. So why don't you climb on your broom and fly back to where you came from?"

I see her nose flare. Her breathing becomes short and rapid. She glares at me. It appears that she is struggling with some inner conflict. *Whack!* She slaps my face—hard. Ow! That smarts, but it's nothing I can't handle. I can see the anger and contempt in her eyes. It takes all my willpower, but I just stand there and smile while my cheek smarts.

I think, *She is even more beautiful with her teeth clenched and her hazel eyes on fire*. So, to piss her off a bit more, I laugh and turn my face, exposing my right cheek. "Here's my other cheek, bi—"

Whack! Before I can finish, she slaps me again, this time with her left hand, while she glares at me with utter disdain. Ow! Again, it really stings.

My irritation escalates. I very much would like to let her have it. It's something I could never do without being truly threatened. I know I'm in no real danger of being harmed. However, I feel I need to do something.

On impulse, I grab her by her upper arms. For a moment, I see something, then fear in her eyes. Almost instantaneously, she recovers and glares defiantly at me, fury emanating from every pore. So I bend down and kiss her.

Possibly in astonishment, she opens her mouth slightly. This gives me an opportunity to explore her mouth with my tongue. At the same time, I wrap my arms around her and pull her close, pressing my groin into hers.

Unexpectedly, and much to my amazement, she begins to respond. Her tongue explores mine. She sucks in a deep breath and pushes her body closer.

Whoa, whoa. I stop kissing her and push her away. I think, *What the hell are you doing, Art? Why did you kiss her? Why did you stop kissing her?* I'm emotionally conflicted, mentally tied up in knots.

I look at her. Her eyes are glassy, like she has no idea where she is or what is happening, not at all like the arrogant, confident, master-of-the-universe woman I've seen. She just stands there bewildered, all the fury gone. It's surreal.

Still holding her at arm's length, I look her in the eyes and softly say, "Look, I am not following you or anyone else. If I were following you, you would never have seen me, because I know how to keep from being seen. I have no idea who you are. And while I'd like to take you to my room and screw you every which way but loose, I know that's not going to happen." I pause to give her the opportunity for what I've said to sink in. I don't know if it does. "If you want to avoid me, I will be here for at least another hour. Then I will probably stop at the hotel bar for a glass of wine, after which I will head up to my room. I'll use the stairs from now on. You can use the elevator."

I have an afterthought and add, "If you would like to avoid me for the rest of the week, I'll prepare an itinerary. I'll leave it at the reception desk. Pick it up if you want."

"Take a moment to think. Most of the time when our paths have crossed, I was already established. The dining room, running on the beach, at the small outdoor restaurant—just about everywhere I went, you turned up afterward. I could say you were stalking *me*. But I know I'm not that lucky."

My hands are still on her shoulders, so I turn her to face the hotel. I release her and put my hand in the small of the back, gently nudging her in the direction of the hotel. She walks away slowly, not with the confidence she normally exudes.

I wonder where my anger came from. It's not like me to respond to a woman, or anyone, like I did to her. I'm usually about understanding problems and keeping them from escalating. Was I trying to prove something? I'm really going to have to think about it. I don't like the way I responded

before the kiss. It was childish and ignorant behavior. I should know better. Damn it, I'm confused! That woman is an enigma.

I take the deepest breath I can, hold it, and let it out slowly. I repeat the process several times. Then I sit back down, close my eyes, and fight to push her out of my mind, not without difficulty. I don't want to have another wet dream about her.

Before I have a chance to settle in, an older woman, out walking her dog, stops and says to me, "Young man, I couldn't help observing your conversation with your girlfriend. You must have made her very mad to cause her to slap you. Maybe you should apologize."

She seems like a nice person. I inform her warmly, "I don't think you understand. I don't even know that woman. She thought I was stalking her. I don't know what came over me. I behaved badly and insulted her. Although I did enjoy kissing her."

Appearing astonished, she says, "You two seemed so intimate. I would have sworn you were lovers. Please forgive me for intruding."

"No forgiveness is necessary," I say. "With you being far away, unable to hear what was said and only seeing the physical interaction, I can easily see how you arrived at your conclusion."

"I'm puzzled. If you didn't know her, why did you kiss her?"

"I knew I couldn't hit her, but I needed to retaliate somehow. I impulsively acted. It did have a spectacular effect."

Shaking her head and rolling her eyes, she says, "Young people, who can understand them. Well, I'd best be on my way—little Tko needs to find a place to go. It was nice talking to you. I hope things work out for you. Goodnight."

When the woman leaves, I settle back and reflect, metaphorically, on where I've been, where I am, and where I want to be in the future.

When I get like this, I can never figure out whether my thoughts are profound or stupid. They're complicated and cover an extensive range of misgivings, accomplishments, failures, dreams, and desires. I don't come to any concrete conclusion except *que sera, sera*—whatever will be, will be.

About forty minutes after I sent the bitch goddess back to the hotel, I hear footsteps and look up. She is coming back, carrying a bottle of wine and a couple of glasses. Unlike in my dream, she is wearing a navy pantsuit, with a white blouse that is unbuttoned at the neck. She is beautiful and immaculate. Not likely to be wearing a garter belt and stockings, though. Why am I even thinking like this? She's a living, breathing dream.

She tells me to move my butt, and I do. She sits alongside me on the lounge.

I look into her hazel eyes, those very beautiful eyes. I tense up and ask, “Have you come back to poison me?”

She laughs pleasantly. I relax some. She smiles at me. My heart rate spikes. She muses softly, “Hmm, I really hadn’t thought of it. That might not be a bad idea.” She hands me one of the glasses. I take it. Our hands touch for a brief instant. I feel a surge of excitement, like an electric current running through me. It’s that unknown connection I’ve been feeling.

Puzzled, I question her. “If you haven’t come back to poison me, then why are you here?”

“I want to apologize. Sometimes I let my paranoia and ego overwhelm me. It probably doesn’t help that the business deal I’m working on is stressing me. Look me in the eyes and tell me that all of our encounters were just a matter of chance.” Matter-of-factly, she pours some wine into each of our glasses.

I look into her eyes and tell her, “It really was purely accidental that I was in those places at the same time you were. Except, perhaps, when my tour finished. I walked by the business building in the hope you would come out. But that is the only time one might consider our encounter not accidental. But, I can’t say that when I saw you, I was disappointed. You are one magnificent woman. As far as I’m concerned, you are God’s gift to man, at least appearance-wise.” I give her a quick summary of how I got here. A little bit about my mentor Gregg and my staff. Inform her she can have it all verified by calling my office, it’s in the phone book under Pro4ms (I spell it out), or by calling the radio station. You could also Google my business or visit my company website. My site has a picture of and a short piece on me, a very short one.”

She grins and comments, “I don’t think anybody could make up a story like that.” She adds, “Would you like to have sex with me?”