

Scotland – 1466

Searing pain shoots through Isobel's leg as the rock slams into the back of her calf. Her ripped skin leaks blood onto the warm ground. She looks up into the eyes of a madman as he drops the slingshot and charges at her. She ducks and slips under his huge outstretched arms, his fingers skimming across her neck leaving a trail of scratches. The world blurs as she turns and blindly pushes at him with the full weight of her body. He teeters, already off balance from missing his target. His arms flail helplessly trying to stop his forward momentum. Loose rocks dislodge as his feet slip out from under him and he tumbles over the edge of the cliff. She stares in disbelief as his massive body disappears from sight. Isobel thinks the blood-curdling scream she hears is coming from her own throat until she turns toward the sound and sees Heather—eyes bulging—mouth wide open.

Chapter One

The sun was just starting its downward trek on the other side of the lake, the air fresh from the recent rain. Still plenty of time to get the perfect shot. Delany Payton set up her tripod, attached the camera and made a few adjustments. Streaks of pink and yellow faded into brilliant gold and reflected off of the water in slivers of shimmering color. The Universe painted the canvas sky for Delany. Her job now was to capture it.

She enjoyed the solitude photography afforded her. After a long day of teaching, it was nice to have some peace and quiet. Of course, being single for the past several years afforded her plenty of quiet at home too. But this was a different kind of quiet. The quiet contained within the walls of her house was sometimes lonely. No. Lonely wasn't the right word. She sometimes felt alone but she wasn't lonely. It felt more like someone was missing who should have been there but wasn't. She had no idea who she was longing for, or why. She was perfectly content, happy in fact, being alone. Not that she would have resisted a relationship with the right person. She just wasn't going out of her way to find it.

This evening, nature provided her with plenty of company. An occasional fish leapt out of the water aiming for a bug, coming down with a splash. Birds still flew overhead, not yet ready to settle down for the night. Crickets and frogs sang all around her.

Delany was hoping to get some decent shots that she could take to the Marcus Gallery on Monroe Ave. She wanted to see about the possibility of having her own show there. She needed more photos in her portfolio in order to approach them. If things worked out tonight she would be one step closer.

She spent the next hour and a half taking pictures, making camera adjustments and framing her shots. She opened the aperture on the camera lens and lowered the shutter speed as the evening progressed into night and the moon took the place the sun had held. It was quite dark by the time she packed up her gear and headed back to her car. The flashlight she'd decided to stick in her back pocket at the last minute definitely made the walk easier than it would have been without it.

Once home, she debated whether to make herself something to eat or to forgo food in favor of uploading her shots to the computer to see what she had captured. She compromised by making herself a chicken salad sandwich and eating it at her computer desk in her makeshift office, otherwise known as the spare bedroom. She took a big bite while she waited for the pictures to transfer from her smart card.

Several of the shots held real promise. She marked them as favorites and moved them to another folder on her computer. She would play around with cropping and color adjustments over the weekend.

She finished her sandwich, turned her computer off for the night and headed back downstairs with her dirty plate. She needed to get some sleep if she was going to be any use teaching her first class in the morning.

She took one more hike up the stairs to brush her teeth, wash her face and crawl into bed. She was just pulling up the covers when her phone rang. A quick glance at the screen told her it was Abby.

She'd met Abby three years before when Abby had taken one of Delany's writing classes. Abby didn't seem to mind that she was the oldest one in the class, a good thirteen years older than most of the students, many of whom were fresh out of high school. Abby was writing—or rather *trying*—to write a book on holistic healing practices. She'd ultimately given up the idea, but she and Delany had become close friends in the meantime. Abby was the kind of person you could

trust with your deepest, darkest secrets. Not that Delany had any of those, but it was good to know she could tell Abby if she did.

Delany hit the answer button on her phone.

“Hey,” Abby said before Delany even had a chance to say “hello.” “Did you get any good shots tonight? It looked like a beautiful sunset from my apartment window. I’ll bet it was spectacular from the lake. How did it look?” Delany wasn’t sure when Abby found time to breathe. She seemed to talk in a rush at times.

“Yeah. It was great. I got some usable pictures. Surprisingly there wasn’t any ice left on the lake.” Rochester winters could be brutal, and ice by the shoreline could sometimes last well into May. The warmer weather had started with the actual arrival of spring on the calendar this year, a very unusual occurrence, so by the second week in April the ice was gone and the air was warm.

“Did you want ice?”

“Either way was fine. Ice would have made for some pretty interesting pictures.”

“Speaking of pretty interesting pictures, are we still on for ice cream after work tomorrow? Scoops and Cones in Panarama Plaza opened for the season early this year.”

“What does ice cream have to do with interesting photos?” Delany asked.

“Nothing. Although pictures of ice cream would be interesting.”

Delany laughed and shook her head. “Sure. What time?”

“I have a client at three. What time is your last class? How about we meet there around four?”

“That works.”

“Great. See ya then. And, hey, get some sleep. You have to be up bright and early for work tomorrow.”

“That’s what I love about you Abby. Always looking out for me.”

“Of course. I love you too. Good night.”

“Night.”

Delany woke before her alarm went off. She went downstairs, made herself a pot of coffee and brought a cup up to her office to sip while she printed out a few of the pictures she took the night before. Abby would appreciate seeing them. A quick shower and one wardrobe change later, she poured the rest of the pot of coffee into a Thermos, added half-and-half and grabbed her backpack.

The traffic was light on the short drive to Monroe Community College, and she made it there well ahead of her first class. That gave her plenty of time to go over her lesson plans for the day. She liked to be prepared and was most comfortable when things went as planned.

Jade Taylor stepped out of the shower and toweled herself dry. She’d worked up quite a sweat playing tennis at the health club, but she enjoyed it. It was a good way to expel her pent-up frustrations. Of course so was sex, but she hadn’t had that since she broke up with her partner last year. Hell, she hadn’t had sex in the last two and a half years. The last year and a half of her relationship with Sheila had been stressful and sexless. It wasn’t for lack of trying on her part. Jade had done everything she could think of to try to make things work: flowers, dinners, long talks, time together, time apart. Nothing seemed to work. She realized after Sheila had moved out that she didn’t even miss her and all her efforts had been a waste of time.

Nine years of her life wasted. Nine fucking years. She never wanted to repeat that mistake

again. No, she was fine alone and happy to stay that way. Well, except for the lack of sex part. She missed sex. Sure, she could take care of her own needs. She was quite handy with a vibrator and giving herself an orgasm was no problem. But she couldn't kiss herself. Couldn't hold herself at night. Couldn't whisper sweet things in her own ear. She missed that.

Maybe a friends-with-benefits situation was just the thing she needed. No messy, heartbreaking relationship. Occasional sex with someone she liked. What was the harm in that? Granted, she'd never had sex outside of a relationship before, but dammit she was thirty-four years old. It was time to start doing what she wanted to do. And lately what she wanted to do was have sex. *Enough*, she told her brain. *All this sex talk without sex action is getting to me. I need to cool my jets here.* She wrapped the towel around her and made her way to her locker.

Nicole, her tennis partner, was slipping her shoes back on, already showered and dressed. The girl didn't seem to sweat, even after the strenuous set they'd just played. Nicole would be a good choice for that friends-with-benefits thing—except for that pesky husband and the fact that she was straight.

Jade smiled to herself and shook her head. This was such a stupid idea and so far removed from anything she'd ever done. Her vibrator would have to do.

“What are you smiling at?” Nicole asked, pulling Jade out of her thoughts.

“Oh, nothing important. Good game today.”

“Sure was.” Nicole grabbed her purse from the locker. “I'll see you next week.” She said and walked away.

Jade watched her exit the locker room, doing her best to keep her eyes off of the tight jeans hugging her rear end. *Oh my God. Stop it. What the hell is wrong with you? You're acting like a teenage boy.* Maybe she needed to rethink the friends-with-benefits thing.

“Shit. What the hell was I thinking?” Jade said out loud. “You weren't thinking. You let your hormones get in the way of good sense. Hope you're satisfied. You did it now. You actually did it.” She stared at the words on the computer screen. *E-mail sent.* There was no way to retrieve it. It had already traveled through cyberspace to her friend Abby's computer.

Maybe she'll think it's a joke. I'll tell her it was a joke. This was so out of character for her, even with all the crazy thoughts earlier today. She had never done anything like this before. She wasn't sure why she had done it now. Oh who was she fooling? She knew exactly why she'd done it—and that word started with a capital *H* and ended with *orny*.

Even if Abby did take it seriously, Jade doubted she would be able to come up with anyone on such short notice. Her trip to Rochester was only four days away and she would only be in town for three nights. Not much time for anything—especially what Jade had asked for.

She opened up her *Sent Mail* folder and reread the note.

Hi Abby,

I'm driving in from Buffalo next week. Hoping we can get together for dinner or drinks. Would love to catch up. Hey, I was thinking, I haven't had sex in over two years. Wondering if you have any single friends I can maybe get together with. Just a thought. Talk to you soon.

Jade

A quick glance at the clock told her it was well past one in the morning. Maybe fatigue was to blame for her lapse in good judgement. She closed the lid on her laptop and rubbed her eyes.

Chapter Two

“Are you trying to pimp me out?” Delany asked.

“No,” Abby said with a laugh. She handed Delany an ice cream cone. “I would have to get paid to be your pimp. No one's offered me any money for this. Although I do accept tips.”

Delany licked a drip of chocolate ice cream from the side of the cone before it reached her hand. “Explain this to me again.”

Abby paid the young girl behind the counter and the two women walked over to a nearby picnic table and sat down. “My friend Jade is visiting from Buffalo for a few days. She hasn't had sex in a while and she asked me if I had any single friends. Are you interested?”

“Is she looking for a date...like a blind date?”

Abby shook her head. “No. I'm pretty sure she was just asking about sex.”

Delany tilted her head toward the warm sun, enjoying the early spring weather. How could she agree to have sex with a total stranger? True it had been a long time since she had enjoyed the company of a woman and the thought of it sent a tingle through her, but a sex with someone she didn't even know...she wasn't sure it was a good idea. “I'd be happy to have coffee with her.”

“Delany, she's not looking to have coffee,” Abby said. “Look, she's really nice. Beautiful. You'll like her. I've known her forever. We've been friends since grade school. She moved to Buffalo a few years ago. Jade Taylor. Look her up on Facebook before you decide. She ended a relationship last year with someone I thought was a total bitch. She's not looking to get into another relationship. I think she's a little lonely and would like to spend an evening or two in the company of a nice woman.”

“And what if I say no?” Delany trusted Abby with her life. She wasn't so sure she wanted to trust her with her *love* life, although in this case it would be more like her *sex* life.

Abby tucked a strand of short red hair behind her ear. It immediately slipped out and hung across her face again. She shrugged. “Say no if you want to. I'm not forcing you into this. I have a couple of other friends in mind I can introduce her to if you don't want to meet her.”

A strange panic hit Delany in the gut like a punch. “No. I didn't say I don't want to meet her.” What the hell? She wasn't sure she wanted to do this and at the same time she was sure she didn't want Abby to give this chance to someone else. “I'll check her out on Facebook tonight and let you know.”

“Don't wait too long. No pressure but she'll be here on Friday.”

“Oh no pressure at all.” Delany shook her head. “That's in three days.”

“I know. You have three whole days to get ready.”

“Ready?”

“You know—shave your legs, buy breath mints, tidy up your bedroom...trim.”

“Ha ha, aren't you just so funny.” But Delany hadn't shaved her legs in weeks. No need to when you aren't wearing shorts or a skirt in public, and Delany rarely did that even in the hottest months of the summer let alone the winter they had just left behind. It was amazing what you let slide when no one was around to see you naked.

“I'm not sure why this is such a big deal,” Abby said.

“Because, I don't do one-night stands.”

“Oh come on. You've done one-night stands before. And besides this would be more like a two-night stand.”

“Yeah and they were never worth the effort. That's why I don't do them anymore.”

“Delany I'm not trying to talk you into this. You can do whatever you're comfortable with.”

She's my friend and you're my friend. She asked me and I immediately thought of you. You're close in age. You're kind, funny and cute. I thought the two of you would hit it off.”

“Well I am cute. And she likes cute?”

“Loves it.” Abby smiled. “Look her up online, think about it and let me know. It could be fun for you.”

“Sure, is all fun and games until someone loses an eye.”

“It's just sex. How is someone gonna lose an eye?”

“Oh, I don't know. You get squeezed too hard. Someone loses control of a vibrator. You never know.”

“Jade Taylor from Buffalo. Look her up,” Abby repeated. “Now let's see the pictures you took at the lake last night.

Whoa, Delany thought as she looked at the profile picture of Jade Taylor on Facebook. *She's pretty. Wow. Jade was beautiful. Her profile picture showed her with a tennis racquet in hand. Oh, and look, she plays tennis. She's probably super fit. She'll doubtlessly think I'm a slouch.* Delany had played volleyball her first year in college, but hadn't played any sport since. As her interest in photography grew, her interest in sports faded. Not enough time in the day for it all.

Delany studied the picture. Perfect features jumped out at her. Brown eyes—light, more like amber—long straight brown hair with a hint of red, a smile that seemed to take over her face, revealing perfect teeth. Perfect. That word seemed to sum up her looks. No one's perfect. She must have something major wrong with her personality. No, Abby would have told her if she was some kind of weirdo freak.

Delany stared into eyes that seemed to stare back through the computer screen. *Wonder how come she has to ask for help to get laid? I'll bet she has women lined up waiting to do her.* Delany smiled at herself and her slightly vulgar thoughts. She never talked like that but sometimes her own thoughts caught her by surprise. *I could so do her.*

She clicked the *About* tab on the site and read out loud. “Lives in Buffalo. Grew up in Rochester. Oh yep. She plays tennis.”

She pulled her cell phone from her pocket and hit Abby's number from her contact list. “Okay. I'll meet her,” she said before Abby had a chance to say hello.

“You slut,” Abby said with a laugh. “You'll sleep with the first pretty face that comes along.”

“Stop it.”

“I'm kidding. I told her you would probably be calling her. I'll text you her number.”

“You were that sure I'd say yes?”

“No. I wasn't sure. But I think you'll like her.”

Jade settled down with a glass of wine and the latest copy of Tennis Magazine. She kicked off her shoes and pulled her feet up underneath her on the couch. She'd had a rough day at work and it was good to be able to relax for a little while.

She jumped at the sound of her ringing phone. It was a Rochester number she didn't recognize. Probably the woman Abby was setting her up with. Abby obviously didn't take the e-mail as a joke. She'd tried to explain to her that she hadn't been in her right mind when she'd sent the request, but Abby had already told her friend about Jade, and the friend, Delany, had agreed to meet her. Abby said she was sure they would hit it off. Jade had explained to Abby once again that

she wasn't up for starting a relationship with someone new, and Abby had reassured her that she'd explained the situation to Delany.

What would it hurt to talk to her? Jade thought.

"Hello."

"Um. Hi. Jade?"

"Yes, this is Jade."

"Yeah. Hi. Sorry. This is Delany. Abby gave me your number? I guess I'm a little nervous calling you like this."

Cute, the way she's stumbling over her words, Jade thought. "Nothing to be nervous about. I'm the bizarre person that put out that strange SOS."

"Yeah, I guess that makes me the bizarre one that answered it."

"Well, I'm glad you did." *Am I really glad?* She seemed like a nice enough person, of course they hadn't said much more than "hello" so far. But Abby said Delany was great and Jade trusted Abby judgement. But it was her own judgement she was questioning now.

"I hope I'm not calling too late. Abby said you would still be up. So if I woke you, it's all her fault." Delany laughed.

Jade warmed to the sound of it. "No, I wasn't sleeping. I'm a night owl. Not usually in bed until at least midnight, even though I have to be up early for work."

"Me too. Abby told me you're in customer service."

"Yeah. I lead a very exciting life. I manage the department at the Buffalo gas company."

"Do you like it?"

"It's okay. It's a lot of paperwork and occasionally I have to field a phone call or two from an irate customer that one of the operators can't handle. I had a customer call me a 'bitch' today because I wouldn't let him pay his bill over the phone."

"Is that unusual? Don't you take payments that way?"

"We do. But this guy wanted to pay with cash. Not sure how he planned on stuffing the money through the phone. We get all kinds."

Delany laughed. "I read on Facebook that you play tennis."

Jade wasn't surprised Delany had checked out her online profile. She had done the same.

"I do. I love the game. I'm not the best at it, but I try. Do you play?"

"No. Too much running for me. I usually only run when something dangerous is chasing me or when I shoplift."

Jade smiled. "Do you shoplift often?"

"Not a lot. I teach writing at the community college here and it doesn't pay that well. I only steal to make ends meet. You know—a bottle of wine here, a container of cream cheese there."

"I dream of a world where our teachers make enough money to afford cream cheese," Jade said, playing along.

"I dream of a world where chickens can cross the road without having their motives questioned. I read that somewhere. I think it was on a T-shirt."

"You're very funny," Jade said. She couldn't help but smile again. "What else do you like to do besides shoplift?"

"Oh, just for the record, I don't enjoy shoplifting. It's actually a lot of work. I write a little. Nothing serious. I think it's mandatory for a writing teacher to write. Oh wait. What's that saying? Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach?"

"Yep that's it."

"So I'm not sure if that means I can or I can't. But anyway, I try. I'm also into photography,

landscapes mostly. I love to take pictures at sunset, when the sky is on fire. In fact I recently bought myself a new camera.”

“You can afford a new camera when you can’t even afford cream cheese?”

“Hey. Don’t judge me. Photography is my passion. Cream cheese is not.”

Jade laughed. “I would love to see your photographs some time.”

“Why don’t you plan on coming over when you’re in town this weekend? I could show them to you.”

Jade hesitated. Talking on the phone was one thing, but agreeing to meet in person was another. Going to Delany’s house meant she would be agreeing to have sex with her. Wouldn’t it? Did her e-mail to Abby mean that it was a done deal? No. That was ridiculous. She could meet Delany in person and still have the option of not sleeping with her. Maybe that’s what she would do—meet her...and then decide. There were no rules set in stone here.

“Or not,” Delany said, immediately dragging Jade out of her thoughts. Delany must have sensed her hesitation.

“Sure. That would be nice.” *There, I said yes. God help me.*

“Great. That’s great.”

Jade thought for a second that Delany might be a little undecided about this too. And why wouldn’t she be? Any normal person would.

Chapter Three

"These are beautiful pictures," Jade said. She had driven in from Buffalo earlier in the day, spent some time with her parents and had a drink with Abby before driving to Delany's. She was fine when she left Abby but was hit by a case of nerves as she got closer to Delany's house. After the first phone conversation with Delany she thought maybe this wasn't a bad idea after all. Or maybe it was. *Who knows? I'm here now. I can always leave if it this gets too weird.*

The photos on the wall *were* good. Mostly landscapes. "When you told me you were into photography I had no idea you were this talented. Wow."

Delany lips spread into a grin. "I'm glad you like them. If my humor and cuteness don't win the chicks over I can usually get them with my pictures."

"Well you have me won over. I'm impressed."

"Hmm. That was easy. I didn't even have to show you my magic lasso or invisible plane." Delany handed Jade a glass of red wine.

"You have an invisible plane?"

"Oh yeah. But I can't take you for a ride in it right now. It's got engine trouble and my mechanic can't seem to see the problem."

"...and that would be 'cause it's got an invisible engine too?"

Delany sipped her own wine. "You catch on quick. Come on, let's sit." She led them to an overstuffed couch across from a matching chair. The room was full with furniture, a coffee table and various knickknacks and personal items, but it wasn't cluttered and everything seemed to fit together effortlessly.

Jade sat and glanced at Delany. If she was as nervous as Jade felt, she didn't show it. Jade studied her features. Her online picture didn't do her justice. Light brown hair framed an oval face. Deep-set green eyes sat under dark brows with lashes equally as dark. Abby said she was cute, and she was right. The T-shirt she wore hugged her in all the right places and was neatly tucked into the waistband of her jeans.

"So, Jade tell me what you do in your free time besides tennis."

"Well." She led a fairly solitary life in Buffalo. It wasn't that she didn't have friends, it was more like she didn't *do* much with them lately. Part of the problem was that most of them were paired off and she was single, and part of the problem was that she was choosy about who she spent her time with. "I like movies, eating out, all the normal stuff. I run...and not because I shoplift."

"Oh sure, I confess one little crime and you throw it up in my face." Delany smiled. "So when you say run, do you mean like marathons?"

"Oh no. Nothing like that. I run to clear my head. Only a mile or two. I try to do it at least a couple times a week."

"And nothing's chasing you?"

Jade laughed. "Nothing's chasing me." She sipped her wine. "Sometimes after work or on weekends, I go hang with my uncle."

"Oh that's nice. So he lives in Buffalo?"

"Yeah, in a nursing home. He's got dementia. I'm the only family in the area so I make sure he's doing okay and has what he needs."

"Wow. That must be a blessing for him. How is it for you? Is it hard?"

"It's hard watching him deteriorate. It is both interesting and horrific watching someone literally losing their mind inch by inch. Sometimes he thinks I'm his sister, maybe because I look

like my mom, and sometimes he knows exactly who I am. I don't bother correcting him because it only confuses him more. But I love him and love spending time with him. When my parents come to visit they always go to see him. His wife died about five years ago and he didn't have any kids of his own, so I'm the closest he's got. What about you? Are you from this area? Is your family here?"

"I have one sister. Our parents abandoned us." Delany chuckled. "They moved to Florida last year when Dad retired."

"You must miss them," Jade said. "I know I miss my parents since I moved to Buffalo, but it's only an hour and a half drive to visit. Florida isn't just car ride away."

"I do miss them, but we talk often. Having my sister here helps. She's married. They have a little girl, Lizzy. She's four. I love that kid. And of course having Abby in my life keeps me hopping."

"I love Abby. She's one of my oldest friends. Speaking of oldest—can I ask you how old you are?" Jade said, changing the subject. "Or is that too personal?" Abby hadn't mentioned it and Jade couldn't find it on Facebook.

"Thirty-six—and age isn't personal. Asking me about—oh, I know know—my underwear. That would be personal. By the way I'll be thirty-seven in eighteen days."

"What day is that?" Jade asked trying to do the math in her head. "Don't make me count."

"You can either count or we can talk about underwear, which do you prefer?"

Jade didn't answer.

"Underwear? Okay, mine are purple with little pink dots...bikini briefs...and yours?"

"What day?"

"What day do I change my underwear? I try to do it at least twice a week."

Jade laughed. "No. What day is your birthday?"

"Oh, my birthday." Slight dimples formed in her cheeks as she smiled. "April 18th. I'm an Aries. What sign are you?"

Jade sipped her wine and felt it warm as it reached her stomach. She was starting to feel a warmth lower as well. It was a familiar feeling, one she hadn't felt in quite some time but she welcomed it as she would the return of an old friend. She was also surprised at the feeling. It usually took some time to warm up to people but she felt very comfortable with Delany. She was definitely attracted to her.

"Hmm?" Delany raised her eyebrows. "Sign?"

"Oh. Umm, Scorpio. But I'm afraid I don't know much about the zodiac."

"Scorpio huh? That's a water sign. I'm a fire sign. Know what you get when you mix them?"

Jade shook her head.

"Steam." Delany wiggled her eyebrows.

Jade couldn't help but laugh. "Oh is that right?" The steam was definitely starting to rise inside her.

"So you don't know about zodiac signs. Are you into any metaphysical stuff? Tarot cards? Psychics? Spirits? Anything like that?"

"Not really. No. I have nothing against it or people that believe it. But, I believe this is it." She waved her arm in a sweeping motion. "This is all there is. We live. We die. We're done. So all of that sort of thing seems like nonsense to me. But I guess whatever gets you through the day. How about you?" Jade asked.

"Oh, I believe in it all. I believe life is like a school that we choose to come to for our souls to learn and progress. We choose the lessons we want this time around and come to earth to learn

them.”

“I’m not sure why some people would have chosen the experiences they go through. That would seem kind of crazy. Sometimes things are so hard.”

“It’s the hard things we learn from. It’s when we face our fears and get through the rough times that we grow.”

“I never thought about it like that before. I’ll have to ponder that. I hope my opinions aren’t offending you.”

“Oh, not at all. Everyone is on their own journey and part of your journey is to believe what you believe. But, I’ll tell you what. If I die before you, when your time comes I’ll be the first one to greet you on the other side and say I told you so.” Delany’s wide smile was infectious and Jade found herself smiling in return.

“Deal. Did you always have such strong beliefs?”

“I was raised Catholic. Religion class taught all about God and heaven, but it goes so much beyond that. I don’t go to church anymore. I consider myself spiritual but not religious.”

Jade scrunched her face up in thought. “What’s the difference?”

“I think of religion as a box. You’re taught or *told* what to believe. You’re given *their* truths. There are different rules for each religion, although some are very similar. Most are man-made rules.”

“What about the Bible? Isn’t that filled with rules directly from God? Isn’t that what most believers think?”

Delany smiled. “We could be here for weeks while I explain my thoughts on the Bible. To me spirituality is everything that is outside of the box. It is so much more than any one religion can hold.” She paused. “I’m not explaining this very well.”

“I’m sorry,” Jade said. “I didn’t mean to put you on the spot.”

“Oh no. Not at all. Growing up I pictured the God they talked about in church, as this old man sitting on a throne judging us. This is good, that’s bad. That sort of thing. I believed in heaven and hell and what we did directly affected where we would end up after we died.”

“And you don’t believe that anymore?”

“I still believe in heaven, but I don’t believe that God would create us, give us one shot on earth and then condemn us to hell for all eternity because we screwed up. I believe He loves us too much for that. My niece being born kind of opened my eyes to that.”

“In what way?”

“I love that little shit. Ya know? I can’t imagine anything she could do that would make me condemn her to hell forever. *Because* I love her. I’m sure God loves us even more than that. In general I don’t use the name God anymore. I prefer to say the Universe. I find it much more encompassing than the image of that old man on the throne.”

“Interesting.”

“Sorry. I don’t mean to be preachy. I’m probably boring you.”

“No. Not at all. Just because we have different beliefs doesn’t mean I don’t find yours interesting. So why did you stop going to church?”

Delany shrugged. “I’m not against church. Some people find a great sense of peace and community there. I just don’t like it when some of them use God to promote hate. I didn’t like the feeling of being locked into their rules.”

Jade smiled and raised one eyebrow. “So you’re a rule breaker?”

Delany returned the smile. “Oh yeah. I’m a rebel all right.” She shook her head. “Not.”

Delany poured them both another glass of wine, their third. There was something about Jade. Something that felt familiar. Something she was drawn to. But, she was beginning to wonder if sleeping together was still an option. They hadn't really talked about it on the phone or in the texts they'd exchanged. As undecided as she had been when Abby first asked her about this, she realized now that she was very interested in seeing the evening end with the two of them in her bed. But, Jade hadn't made any moves in that direction. She watched Jade's lips move as she talked and wondered what it would feel like to kiss her. Were her lips as soft as they looked? She didn't know what to do. She liked Jade and thought Jade liked her. But didn't want to offend her or put her off if Jade had changed her mind about this.

“So tell me more about your photography. Have you been taking—” Jade said.

“Can I kiss you?” Delany interrupted, surprising even herself. “Because I've wanted to for the past two hours.” She waited for Jade's response never breaking eye contact. She could see the blush rise in Jade's cheeks.

Jade hesitated a moment before answering. “You aren't supposed to ask.”

Okay. Did that mean yes or no? All this time waiting and Delany still wasn't sure what to do. Silence grew between them as Delany contemplated her choices.

At the moment it got uncomfortable, Jade piped up. “I like that one picture you took of—” Jade's words were cut off as Delany planted a gentle kiss on her lips.

The plan—if it could have been called that—was to kiss Jade softly and pull back to gauge her reaction. Delany didn't have a chance to pull back as Jade's arms circled her and returned the kiss full force. A small moan escaped from the back of Jade's throat. By the time Delany did pull away she was finding it hard to catch her breath. She had never been kissed quite so thoroughly before. She actually felt the need to uncurl her toes.

Jade stroked Delany's hair and pulled her in for another kiss. A surge of moisture soaked Delany's underwear as Jade's tongue circled her lips and plunged deep into her mouth.

Delany willed her hands to continue caressing Jade's arms, forbidding them to move to her breasts. Her palms ached with the thought of what it would feel like to have this woman's taut nipples against them. She allowed her fingers to feel their way up to Jade's neck and tangle in her hair, bringing their mouths even tighter together, deepening the kiss.

Oh my God, Delany thought through the haze of passion. *What it is about her?* The realization that she was kissing a stranger struck her. But she didn't feel like a stranger. She felt familiar and warm and...a flash of light behind Delany's eye lids stopped the thought...and the kiss. “What was that?”

“What was what?” Jade's asked, her voice ragged.

“That light. Did you see it?”

“I didn't see anything. Maybe you were seeing stars.” Jade's brown eyes lit up with her smile. “Come here.” She pulled Delany's mouth back against hers.

Delany let herself once again be drawn back into the kiss. She saw the light again, but it was warm this time...golden. It seeped it from the edges of her closed eyes, into the frame of her vision. A scene played out in her mind.

The light is coming from a fire. A fire in a stone fireplace. She is lying down on a thin, stiff mattress with someone. It's Jade. But it isn't Jade. And at the same time it is. It's them. Young. Different. But them, nonetheless. The image is fuzzy but the feeling is clear. It's love. It flows to

her and through her. She can see the person beneath her. Her face. She loves her. Loves her.

“Stop. I’m so sorry. I need to stop.” Jade saw the look of disappointment and confusion in Delany’s eyes as she came out of some kind of reverie. Green eyes. Beautiful eyes. Jade closed her own eyes to avoid looking at them. She willed her breathing to slow down. Fear mingled with the excitement she felt and slowly replaced it all together. Fear? Fear of what? She blew a lung full of air out in a useless attempt to gain control.

“You okay?”

Jade opened her eyes and nodded. “I’m sorry. I thought this was a good idea, but now I’m thinking maybe it’s not. I don’t think I’m cut out for the friends-with-benefits kind of thing. I get attached. And I definitely am not in the market for a relationship.” She wasn’t sure she was making sense.

“It’s okay. We don’t have to do this.”

“It’s not that... I mean... it’s not that. I don’t... oh, I’m sorry. I don’t know what my problem is. It’s definitely me though. It’s not you at all. You’re great. You’re smart. You’re funny. You’re beautiful. It’s me. It’s been a while and... well... I guess maybe I’m not ready. I don’t know. I seem to be rambling here. Stop me before I say something stupid.”

“Really. It’s okay.” Delany tilted her head and looked up at Jade. “But I am going to have to tell Abby that you don’t put out.” She grinned.

Jade shook her head and couldn’t help but smile back. “You do, huh?” She couldn’t explain to Delany why she had to stop. She didn’t even understand it herself. One minute she was up to her lips in kisses and the next she was in a full-blown panic. Her heart rate was just beginning to pump out a normal rhythm again.

Delany smiled. It was genuine and it was beautiful.

I must be crazy to be turning her down. “I know I’m the one that—”

Delany put her finger over Jade’s lips. It was all Jade could do not to kiss it. “Shhh. Honest. It’s okay. Can we at least be friends?” That smile again. “I’d like to be your friend.”

“Of course.” Jade smiled back. She wasn’t sure who started it but before she knew what was happening, her lips and tongue were joined once again with Delany’s. Fire burned inside her and rose to the surface.

Delany pulled back long enough to say, “I thought you wanted to stop...”

“Shh... Can we just kiss? That’s all. Just kiss?” Jade pulled her back in. The fear seemed to have dissipated. It still danced around the corners of her mind, but her body was in control now. She wasn’t going to listen to her mind.

“Kissing is good. Are you sure?” Delany asked, her lips a fraction of an inch from Jade’s.

Jade nodded. She couldn’t believe how well Delany kissed. How well they kissed each other. There always seemed to be a little bit of an adjustment period when she kissed someone new. She had to figure out the right angle to tilt her head or open her mouth to get everything just right. But not with Delany. They meshed together seamlessly. She didn’t want to be a cock tease... or a pussy tease, but she wasn’t sure how far she could go before she herself would be unable to stop.

Why do I have to stop? She thought. We’re both adults. Both single both... ummm. Her brain had trouble firing thoughts. She was swept up in the kiss and the arms that were around her, pulling her in, feeling full breasts that pressed against her own.

Her hand found its way in between them and she cupped Delany’s breast through her shirt.

Delany let out a low moan. “Hey. That’s more than kissing,” she whispered.

“Uh huh,” Jade whispered back. “Is that okay?”

“Mmm.”

“I’ll take that as a yes.” Jade increased the pressure and felt Delany’s nipple harden under her fingers. Fear took a step forward in her gut and she squeezed her eyes tighter against it. She didn’t understand where it was coming from. She’d never had this happen before. Of course she’d never kissed a stranger before. But that wasn’t it. It was something about Delany herself. Jade was afraid of being too close to her. Of wanting her too much. *What? Why? Too much thinking*, she told herself and pushed the fear to the back of her mind. None of it made any sense anyway.

Delany’s lips left her mouth and started a journey of small kisses across her face, to her ear and down to the nape of her neck. Delany undid the top three buttons on Jade’s shirt and the kissing continued down to her cleavage. A tongue dipped in between her breasts.

Jade hooked a finger under Delany’s chin and brought Delany’s mouth back up to hers. She kissed her. Hard and wet.

Chapter Four

“It's up to you. You can tell me if you want. You don't have to. But I know you want to. So go ahead and tell me what went on last night,” Abby said to Delany over the phone.

Delany laughed. Yeah she was going to tell Abby and Abby knew it. “Well not a lot happened.”

“What does that mean?”

“We talked. We drank wine. We kissed...”

“And?”

“And I don't know. She stopped me at one point and then before I knew it she was kissing me again.” Delany flopped back on her bed. She only had a couple of classes to teach today and that wasn't for a few hours.

“Um, okay. I mean, was that okay?”

“Yeah. I like her and was definitely interested in more but she seemed hesitant. Did she tell you any of this? Did you talk to her today?”

“I had breakfast with her this morning. She said she thought you were great but that's about it. She doesn't share the details of her life with me the way you do. So it never went beyond kissing?”

“There was some touching too. I didn't want to push it and was letting her take the lead, but she led it nowhere. Which is okay. Honestly. I was just sort of confused.”

“So how did the evening end?”

“You know she's staying at her parents' house while she's in town. Around midnight she said she should be getting back there so they didn't worry and wait up for her.”

“Wow. I'm sorry. I know you were planning to get together again tonight. Is that still on?”

“Yeah. We're going out to dinner and then coming back here. I like her, so just being friends would be fine. I...I mean I would like more, but friends is okay too. It wasn't like it was a real date or anything, right? I would like to get to know her better. Although I sort of feel like I *already* know her. Like I've known her before.”

“Well, yeah. It wasn't supposed to be a *date* date.”

“Something weird happened while I was kissing her.”

“Weird like how? Like she licked-your-eyebrow weird?”

“No. I'm being serious. Weird like I had a vision or something. I'm not sure how to explain it. We were kissing and I suddenly felt like I was somewhere else. I was still with her but it wasn't really her. It felt like it was in another time.”

“Like a fantasy?”

“No, more like a memory that I was reliving.”

“What does that mean?”

“Like I was seeing a bit of my life that I had already lived. But it wasn't. Nothing like that has ever happened. It almost felt like I was watching a movie but I could feel the actual emotions.”

“What were you doing in the vision?”

“Kissing Jade, but it didn't look like her. And I didn't look like me, for that matter. I knew it was still us. I know it sounds strange.” Delany yawned. A cup of coffee before her class might be a good idea.

“Are you serious or are you messing with me?”

“Totally serious.”

“That is weird. What do you make of it?”

“Not sure what to think. It was probably my overactive imagination taking over.” And with that, she dismissed it from her mind.

Delany wrote POV on the white board at the front of the classroom. “Can anyone explain what point of view means?” Glad she decided on the cup of coffee earlier, she felt much more energized.

Several hands went up.

“Krista.” She pointed to the girl in the back row.

“It's how the story is written, like if it's being told from one person to the reader or like the reader is watching the characters.”

“That's part of it,” Delany said. “What else can you tell me?” The words echoed back in her head. *What else can you tell me?* But the words were not her own. They were coming from the same girl she saw in the vision she had while kissing Jade the night before. She caught a glimpse of her in her mind, the sun bright on her skin.

Her dress is light brown with white lace trim, her hair golden blond. She's sitting on a large rock, the soft sound of running water close by.

“What else can you tell me?” The vision girl asks again. “What do you like to do when you aren't working?”

“My brother says I daydream a lot.”

“You look like your brother. Same dark hair and dark eyes. Is that what your parents looked like too?”

“Miss Payton? Is that right?” Krista's voice brought her back to the present. The image gone from her mind but not forgot.

Delany realized she hadn't heard any of the girl's answer. *Maybe I should talk to someone about this, she thought. Or check in to the psych ward.*

Chapter Five

Jade buttoned her blouse, glad she had packed a nice outfit to go out to dinner in. She was looking forward to seeing Delany again...to the possibility of kissing her again. Maybe more. Probably more. She had spent a restless night thinking about the possibilities.

The smell of pot roast cooking wafted up the stairs and into the guest room. Jade's stomach rumbled as she trotted down the steps. She found her mother in the kitchen peeling potatoes at the kitchen sink.

"That smells good, Mom."

"Are you sure you can't stay for supper, honey?" She rinsed the last potato, placed it in the bowl and wiped her hands on a green plaid dish towel. Jade recognized it as part of a set that she had given her mother for her birthday a couple of years ago. It was a simple pattern, but Jade had been drawn to it.

"Thanks but I have plans." Plans she was looking forward to.

"Are you going to be out late again tonight?"

"I'm not sure how late I'll be. Please, don't wait up for me like you did last night." It had been more than ten years since Jade moved out of her parents' home and four since she'd moved to Buffalo, an hour and a half away. But her mother still acted like she was a teenager that needed supervising when she returned for visits. In a way it was sweet and in a way it was annoying.

"You have a key so let yourself in when you get back...whatever time it is."

"Thanks. I'll try not to be too late."

"You might want to take a sweater. It's still getting pretty cool in the evenings."

"I have one in the car," Jade said. "Love you Mom." She gave her mother a kiss on the cheek and headed out the door.

Her thoughts went to Delany. She had asked Jade if they could be friends and Jade wanted that. Looked forward to it, in fact. She liked Delany. There was something very appealing about her. She couldn't quite explain it, but she felt very comfortable with her. Kissing her last night had been great. She'd wanted more and at the same time something about that scared her...which was pretty damn stupid. She'd been with several women. Having sex with them never frightened her. She wasn't afraid of sex. Afraid wasn't exactly the right word for it. Anxious? Nervous? No, those words didn't seem to fit either. Was it because she didn't really know Delany? She wasn't sure. How could she be so comfortable around someone and at the same time freak out with fear when she kissed her for the first time?

She hoped Delany wasn't too disappointed they hadn't progressed much past kissing last night. Jade was actually disappointed in herself and very frustrated by the time she left. Time seemed to fly by last night and before she knew it, it was midnight. She was torn between staying longer and getting back to her parent's house knowing they were waiting up for her. Tonight if she was going to take the leap, she had to act on it earlier. She didn't think Delany was going to steer things in that direction after Jade told her that she didn't think sleeping together was a good idea.

How could she be so torn about sleeping with someone? She was driving herself nuts. It wasn't that she didn't find Delany desirable. She certainly was that. "You need to put it out of your mind," she said out loud. "Oh great. Now I'm talking to myself. Maybe I am going nuts. Well at least I'm not answering myself."

She signaled to turn into the restaurant parking lot. "Yes you are. And you're right. You need stop thinking about it and enjoy the evening. Whatever happens, happens."

A quick look at her watch as she walked in told her she was a couple of minutes early.

“What time is it?” Delany whispered in her ear from behind. Jade had a sense of déjà vu, but dismissed it without much thought.

She couldn't help but smile as she turned and looked at Delany. Her shoulder-length hair had a bit of a curl in it today and she had a hint of makeup on. The warm tones of the peach blouse she wore brought out the brightness of her skin. “It's time for a drink.”

“My favorite time of day,” Delany replied.

They sat at the bar and Delany ordered them both a glass of wine while they waited for their table.

“How did your class go today?” Jade asked with true interest.

“It went well. I like teaching. When I first started it scared the hell out of me. I was so nervous. But then I realized no one in the class was trying to kill me and it was fine.” Her eyes lit up with her smile.

“That's good. If they were trying to kill you I would recommend you find another profession.” Jade sipped her wine.

“You're heading back to Buffalo tomorrow?”

“Day after that. My parents are having a family dinner tomorrow, invited some relatives I haven't seen in a while.”

“That sounds like fun. I'm donating blood tomorrow.”

“Oh that sounds like fun too.”

“I have plenty. Thought it would be nice to share.”

“It is nice to share. I learned that in kindergarten.”

“In kindergarten, I learned that boys are stupid and have cooties.”

“You must be a fast learner 'cause I didn't learn that until I was in middle school.”

“So you didn't date boys in high school?”

“Actually, I did. I had this whole ‘trying to fit in’ thing going.” Jade made air quotes with her fingers. “What about you?”

“Nope. Didn't date anyone until my senior year. She was in my English class and I fell instantly in love. Of course no one knew we were dating. Being out at school wasn't an option.”

“So what happened with her?”

“We went to different colleges and just drifted apart. I think we both found that we wanted the freedom to explore other relationships.”

“And did you?”

Delany sipped her wine. “Explore? Yeah. Nothing too serious. Longest relationship was a little over two years.”

“My longest relationship lasted nine years.”

“That's a long time to be with someone and have it end. I'm sorry it didn't work out.”

“I'm not sorry it didn't work out. I am sorry it took me so long to recognize it never should have happened in the first place. It was a long, hard lesson to learn.”

Delany nodded.

“I was super bitter for a while. I felt like I had been tricked into the relationship.”

“How so?”

“She was so great at the beginning. Very loving, very giving, very attentive. But, it was all an act. She was actually very narcissistic. By the time she started letting her real self slip out into the open, I was so in love that I dismissed it. I spent the last half of our relationship trying to get back what I thought we had lost. It took me a long time to understand that we never actually had it in the first place.” Jade realized she was revealing more of herself to Delany than she normally did

with other people. She was surprised to find how easy it was to open up to her.

“Did you have other relationships before that one?”

“I was twenty-four when we met. I had a couple other girlfriends, short term. But she was the first really serious relationship.”

The hostess stepped up to inform the women that their table was ready. Drinks in hand, they followed her and sat down. The conversation continued as they ordered and ate their meals.

Jade had a slight buzz from the wine by the time they finished eating. She wasn't sure she should drive.

Delany seemed to read her mind. “How about I drive us back to my place, if you're still up for coming over? We can come back and get your car later.”

“Sounds like a plan.” She did want to go back to Delany's place. And she did want to sleep with her. But she still wasn't sure if she should.

Jade was quiet on the ride back as she tried to sort through her feelings.

“Doing okay?” Delany covered Jade's hand with her own.

The jolt of electricity it sent through her was surprising. “Yep.” Jade smiled to reassure her. She felt like she needed to reassure herself as well.

Back at the house, Jade excused herself to go to the bathroom. She splashed cold water on her face, looked at herself in the mirror and shook her head. “Make up your damn mind,” she whispered.

“Hi,” Delany said, when she came out.

“Hi yourself.”

“I thought I would get us something to drink. What would you like? Coffee, water, more wine maybe?”

“Water would be great.” Coffee would keep her from sleeping tonight and more wine was simply a bad idea. She made her way to the living room and once again studied the photographs on the wall.

Delany went into the kitchen, returned a few minutes later and set two glasses of water down on the coffee table.

Jade, without hesitation or any real thinking, put her arms around Delany, pulled her in close and kissed her full on the mouth.

Jade's body reacted as soon as her lips touched Delany's. She wanted nothing more than to take her by the hand, pull her upstairs to bed and make love to her. The electricity that passed between them was almost too much for her to bear. This was the moment of truth. She laced her fingers through Delany's and brought Delany's hand up to her mouth. She looked into Delany's eyes as she kissed each of her fingers, one by one. Yes, she wanted this woman. Wanted her now. She pulled her in for another kiss. A deep kiss. A wondrous kiss. A kiss filled with promise of what could be. If Jade could let it be. If Jade could only...but she couldn't. Something stopped her. She wasn't sure if the extreme heat running through her was from excitement or pure panic. Both feelings surged through her in rapid succession. She stepped back and took a deep breath.

“Everything okay?”

“Umm. Yeah. Let's, umm...Can we sit down?”

“Sure.” Delany led them over to the couch. “Drink some water. You look very pale all of a sudden.”

“Water would be good. Thanks.” Jade took a few sips and tried to gather her thoughts. But she couldn't make sense of them. She liked Delany. Found her attractive and was very drawn to her. But...*but what?* She didn't have an answer for her mixed feelings. She knew she must be

making Delany crazy with this, coming on to her one second, pulling back the next. It might be best to call it a night and leave. But that was stupid. She wanted to spend time with Delany, not go running off with her tail between her legs like a scared puppy. "I think I need to leave," Jade blurted out. She saw the confusion in Delany's eyes, but couldn't offer her a reasonable explanation. How could she, when she didn't even understand it herself?

Delany didn't want to see her go. "Do you have to?"

"I do. I'm sorry."

"Any chance of seeing you tomorrow?" She raised her eyebrows, waiting for the answer.

"I wish I could. But I can't. I have that family thing."

"Oh yeah. I forgot about that." She didn't want to push, but she truly wanted to see Jade again.

"I've enjoyed spending time with you and...well... kissing you." A blush rose in her cheeks.

"Me too," she said. "I would like to stay in touch when you go back home."

"Of course." Jade's answer sounded so positive, but Delany had her doubts. "I better be on my way." She wrapped her arms around Delany and hugged her.

"You might want to wait so I can give you a ride back to your car. Did you forget you left it at the restaurant?"

"Oh my God I did. How stupid. You don't mind giving me a ride do you?"

"Not at all." It would give them a little more time together. But the time seemed to go by too quickly and Delany found herself parked next to Jade's car before she knew it. "Well I guess this is it," she said.

"I guess so." Jade leaned over and kissed her quickly on the lips. Then kissed her again and let it linger. The third kiss was much more involved and quickly deepened. The small moan that escaped from Jade's throat sent a surge through Delany.

"I feel like a teenager making out in the car," Jade said with a smile. She kissed Delany one more time and opened the car door. "I really did have a nice time with you."

"Me too."

"Goodnight," she whispered and got out, closing the door behind her.

Delany watched as she got into her own car and drove away with a wave.

Damn, Delany thought. Damn. Damn. Damn.

Her cell phone rang as she pulled into her driveway. It was Abby. Of course.

She answered without saying hello. "How do you know I'm alone and not in the middle of some hot girl-on-girl action?"

"Cause I just got a text from Jade saying she was heading back to her parents' house and that she had a nice time with you. So I'm calling to ask you what kind of a nice time she had."

"Oh my God. Can't a girl have a little privacy here?"

"Sure. If you want to keep it private you can. No problem."

"All right, stop begging. I'll tell you." Delany proceeded to give Abby a recap of their evening.

"I'm sorry it didn't work out the way you wanted it too. I'm not sure why Jade changed her mind about what she wanted."

"It's okay. I'm glad I got a chance to spend time with her. I like her."

"Any more weird visions while you were with her?"

"Actually I had one this afternoon while teaching. Freaked me out a little. It seemed so real. When I was with Jade tonight...I don't know...there was such a feeling of familiarity."

“You know I was thinking about what you told me. I talked to my friend Valerie about it. She’s the medium that has the office next to mine. She also does past-life regressions. She thinks it could be a memory from a past life.” The Downtown Healing Center, where Abby’s office was, contained various types of natural healing and metaphysical services.

“I don’t think so. It was so clear. I mean I you know I believe in past lives, but I’ve never heard of anyone actually remembering them.”

“She and I have talked about it before. She said all kinds of crazy things can happen. I think you should make an appointment to see her and have either a psychic reading or a past-life regression. What do you think?”

“I don’t know. It probably doesn’t mean anything. Although I have to tell you that I really, really like Jade. I...don’t know. These are pretty strong feelings I seem to be developing all of a sudden.”

“You said you felt like you’ve known her before. Maybe you have...in a different life. It would be interesting to see if maybe you did. Have you told Jade any of this?”

“No. She doesn’t believe in an afterlife. I don’t think she’s going to believe in a past life. I don’t want her to think I’m crazy.”

“She spent the past two last evenings with you. I’m sure by now she knows you’re crazy.”

“True, but I don’t want her to think I’m insane.”

“I’ll text you Valerie’s number as soon as we hang up. You decide what you want to do, but I think you should call her.”

Delany said she’d consider it.

Back at home, Delany didn’t bother with the lights when she went inside. She took off her jacket, kicked off her shoes and plopped down in the armchair. Tired but restless, she flipped on the TV. She drifted off to sleep somewhere in the middle of a Cagney and Lacey rerun.

She’s standing on the edge of cliff. At her feet pebbles fall over the brink and tumble far below. She takes a step back and looks around. Patches of small violet flowers blanket lush, rolling green hills. In her hand is a bouquet of the same purple flowers. She pulls out a stem and gazes at the clusters of small bell-shaped blossoms. Suddenly the wind picks up and sweeps the flowers away. As if in slow motion she reaches for them. Her fingers graze the edges as they tumble away, down the cliff and out of sight. A green plaid blanket lying on the ground nearby, also caught by the wind, flutters away and follows the flowers down into the abyss. A bird circling overhead shrieks at her and flies away. She watches until it becomes nothing more than a dot in the sky.

Delany woke with a start, the dream still vivid and alive in her mind. She made her way to the bedroom, undressed and crawled into bed. She couldn’t shut her brain off as the dream mingled with the two previous visions she’d had. Trying to sort them out and make sense of them was no use. Any way she attempted to reason them away was also useless. There had to be an explanation for them. She just wasn’t sure what it was. Maybe it she needed to find out.

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