

The wind howled with a ferocious groan and the fireplace snapped back at it. The warmth created by the logs banked on there for the night was a soothing antidote to the storm. Christianna glanced at the deck, thankful Stephen had pulled the stuff off there the week before he went on his tour. She was trying to write a little and failing with writer's block hitting hard again. Christianna grabbed the phone quickly when it rang sitting up at Roxanne's voice.

"I'll keep the pup up here for the night, I can't walk in the wind, unless you want to drive over and get him." Roxanne informed her breathlessly. She had tried and had nearly blown over in the effort. Sailor had even had a difficult time.

"That's ok." Chris didn't feel like getting dressed and driving and Sailor spent nearly as much time there as he did with Christianna anyway.

Pulling her legs up on the couch, Christianna settled in to sleep, the wind, her favourite lullaby crashing in wanton gusts against the house, reaching a deafening crescendo then waning for a moment before building up again.

The crash that woke her wasn't the wind but she told herself it was. She looked around disoriented at first, unused to sleeping in the living room. The stars twinkled outside and the wind had faded somewhat, to a rippling wave over an ocean still black with the nor'easter's carnage.

Christianna pulled herself off the couch to go investigate grabbing the cell phone and sticking it in her jean's pocket as she walked towards the back. The back door was wide open and she heaved a sigh of relief. She must not have locked it though she could have sworn she did. She was walking down the stairs to close it when he filled the frame and the scream that left her lungs was stifled by his hand smashing against her cheek, knocking her back against the steps.

She clambered up frantically, and he slammed the door behind him. It didn't catch and swung back open, making a crash-bam-crash rhythm as the wind battered it again and again. His eyes were as cold as the last time she'd seen him and his smile came the second he saw that she remembered.

"Greg?" She whispered the question, her heart pounding as fear drifted through the room, palpable and thick.

"Hello *Christianna*." His voice was deeper with a layer of anger just underneath its calm tones and his eyes were wild, a deep contrast to his steady words.

Christianna backed up the steps slowly, her face stinging, her body taut with adrenaline and trepidation. Greg followed her, looking at her as though searching for something indefinable. As it had been years before, he did not see what he always hoped to see in her face. He decided to be content with what was there, fear.

"What are you doing here? Christianna's brain searched its depths for answers. She needed a way out of this situation. Her mind hoped that whatever he had planned it would be over quickly and it wouldn't harm her baby and pure self-preservation prevented her from hugging her arms around the front of her.

“I came for you.” He said, his eyes flashing with the madness that had finally and completely destroyed his rational mind. Here she was, the woman who had left him, the one who had treated him so terribly all those years ago and his life had been on a downward spiral since. He’d been ridiculed in Ontario, moved back home to Punt Cove only to feel himself shunned by everyone there because of what Christianna had told people about him and he’d never been able to make a go of his life again. She’d said very little but he believed otherwise. He’d lost his career, had been incarcerated for domestic violence several times and she’d heard he’d battled addiction.

“Why?” Christianna had a notion that if she could keep him talking she might think of a way out of this.

“Because I hate you.” He said, his voice calm. He reached out and touched her face and she flinched. He smiled at her fear, rejoiced in it. He had dreamt of this moment for a long while and now it was here at hand and the thought excited him. He grabbed her by the back of the head his mouth coming towards hers and she wrenched violently to one side to avoid his assault and at the same time threw herself backwards towards the landing, hoping to toss him off balance.

He growled a guttural, unnatural sound at her protest and pushed her hard so that she landed against the far wall with a dull thud, her head hitting the corner of the banister post. The blackness came then, closing in around her, and she was grateful for it when she saw Greg Kennedy walking towards her loosening his belt buckle. Before she passed out she heard a scream echoing in her ears and Greg’s laugh as he disappeared in the bliss of the darkness.

The light burst against her eyes, blinding her and for a moment Chris was confused by the weight against her. She screamed at the face that loomed above her and remembered what was happening. She tried to fight back but was pinned both by her own weakness and his strength. Consciousness seemed to be fighting a losing battle and she drifted, feeling his weight against her and then seconds later in the haze of pain and fear the face was gone, replaced for a joyous moment by the concerned face of Joe Indigo. Her eyes shot opened in surprise at the oasis that was his dark flashing eyes and then she drifted back into a black ocean of peace.

Joe’s voice called her from a great distance, begging her, pleading her to come back. She wanted to, she had missed Joe and her body ached for him as did her heart. It seemed a great struggle but finally she forced herself to open her eyes, her thought that this might be the last time she saw his face, inspiring a great effort. Perhaps she was already dead. Surely he would be in her heaven.

‘Christianna!’ Joe’s desperate voice was inches from her face and when she finally found focus his dark eyes were terrified and grateful all at once. He sighed a great sobbing noise of relief and leaned forward and kissed her cheek, his tears unabashed and cleansing against her battered face.

“How did you know?” Christianna’s memory was seeping in slowly and she knew Joe had saved her from Greg Kennedy somehow. In her slumbering mind was the image of Greg Kennedy about to hurt her and she glanced down to find she was still fully clothed. He hadn’t gotten far.

“Where is he?” Her voice was frantic as she suddenly realised that was the most important information. Were they still in danger?

“He’s gone?” Joe’s voice was gentle.

“Escaped? We have to call the cops, they have to catch him.” Her fear made her lean forward and she winced at the pain in her neck and head and felt herself drifting again. She struggled to remain conscious and Joe’s hands held hers gently.

“Easy does it.” He suggested, then carried on. “I killed him.” He said the words lightly but the weight of them was tangible.

“He’s *dead*?” Relief and horror were both in her voice. She looked at Joe, a question in her eyes that her lips couldn’t ask.

“I went too far.” He admitted. He looked at her, taking her other hand into his and holding them both.

“When I got the text message from you I tried to answer it but it wouldn’t go through. Then I tried to reach you to let you know it wasn’t me but there wasn’t any answer.”

“I was away.” She explained avoiding the detail that she had been on her honeymoon.

“I panicked, I thought you were in danger and if it wasn’t me then someone else was after you. I tried to ignore it but something told me to check on you. I came here yesterday because it was driving me nuts. I parked the car behind the trees and waited there and watched. I was going to come see you in the morning so that we could talk and then I heard his car and saw him coming into the house. I wasn’t sure if it was your husband or not so I listened first. Then I heard you scream. Who was he?”

“You know I’m married then?” She looked at him sadly. How was it possible to still care so much for him and still love Stephen? Was it the lifetimes of love they had had before they reached this earth. Was it because he was her destiny?

“Yeah, I was talking to David.” He’d wanted to die that day.

“It was Greg Kennedy, Joe.” She realised then that Joe had never met Greg. “You still came to check on me? I thought you hated me.” His love was as deep as hers and the connection as strong and as usual she was amazed by it.

“I thought I did too. But truth is, I still love you Christianna and I had to make sure you were fine, especially since you thought it was me threatening you. Not that I didn’t deserved that after the way I behaved the last time.” He was ashamed of himself for ever hurting her though it helped him understand a little of the madness Greg Kennedy had felt.

“You saved my life,” her eyes were bright with gratitude and she smiled and reached up and touched his face. “You are still a protector.”

“Will you come to see me *this* time?” He asked though he knew it would make her life difficult to do so. He just thought he could bear it better if he knew he’d see her on occasion.

“See you?” She was confused.

“I killed a man Chris, they’re not going to let me get away with that.”

He sat on the floor in front of her, defeated by the knowledge that his life was forever altered. He saw himself strangling the man he'd pulled off Christianna, saw the fear in Kennedy's eyes as Joe dragged him to the deck, knocking furniture and ornaments over in his attempts to escape. He remembered the pleading look on Kennedy's face when he'd realised what was about to happen and saw the light go out of his eyes when he bashed his head against the wooden rail of the patio and then tossed him over that same rail. He felt again the anger and disgust at the violence in his soul and knew without a doubt that he'd do it exactly the same if the moments were offered back to him. He also knew he deserved whatever punishment he received.

"It was self-defence, he came here to hurt me and you stopped him." Surely they would understand. This would ruin Joe and destroy his family. Their secrets would be out. She knew her life could survive, Stephen would understand, it was *her* past, but Joe would go to prison, his family would be alone without him. He was *their* protector too and they needed him.

"I went too far, they'll know I went too far, they'll investigate, they'll know we've been together in the past, phone records and then there's *my* record. I've got a history. I might get off but I doubt it." Joe's face was resigned. Even if he didn't end up in prison he'd lose his family, his business and he'd already lost Christianna. It *would* ruin him.

"Go then, go," Chris ordered understanding how right he was. "You have to get the hell out of here, I'll say I did it, if they ask for details I'll say I passed out, I have a head injury, they don't need to know there was another person here, nobody knows about you and me, Joe, I'll never tell and I don't think they'll suspect once they look into Greg's life." She knew from people back home that he'd spent time in and out of prison. *She* was the victim here and everybody would know it. The only other witness was dead.

"How did you do it?" Chris asked, glancing around for signs of a struggle. There was plenty of evidence, furniture tipped over, things broken but no blood. Her body protested. And her head throbbed.

"I hit his head." Joe didn't go into details, "He's on the ground below the deck."

"Help me out there." Chris reached for her phone, her arm screaming from the movement. Her shoulder felt broken or dislocated. Joe looked at her with wonder and concern.

"It might work, but you're hurt."

"It'll work and I'll be fine." Christianna smiled.

At Christianna's direction Joe wiped down any surface he might have touched just in case they did investigate the circumstances. There were few, he'd mostly just hammered at Greg Kennedy's body. Joe then carried her battered body carefully to the deck against his every instinct. He covered her with a blanket to keep her warm but she protested and made him put it back on the couch. It had to look real. Chris would say Greg already appeared beaten when he came to her door to explain away any other injuries that Chris wouldn't have physically been capable of inflicting. He'd chased her, they'd struggled on the deck, he'd hit his head then fell. No one would ever expect there would have been a third person there.

After she was on the freezing deck, the stars still twinkling, appearing oblivious to the humans below, Chris tried to send him away.

“You’re freezing.” Joe Indigo held Christianna close to warm her. “Will I see you again?” He was reluctant to leave her there, cold and alone, it went against his every instinct.

“The Moorlands in Whitbourne.” She suggested, nodding. “I’ll text you a date and time after we’re in the clear.”

“I’ll be there.” He promised and with a gentle kiss against her cheek he whispered, “I love you.” and he listened with bittersweet agony as she whispered the words back. Then he stepped away, into the house and out the back door, leaving the door open as he’d found it.

As Joe drove off and out of sight, Chris dialled the number that would bring her help. She readied herself for her acting debut under a million twinkling stars that shouted their encouragement to her in the raw pre-morning light. When the sirens screamed around the corner and up the long laneway to her house and the officers stepped carefully out of their cars looking at the still form that lay on the ground, the trembling in her body was no longer completely from the coldness of the night air but from the chill in her soul that the words she spoke now would be sufficient to leave them both free.