

SHATTERED

**SMASHED
TO
SMITHEREENS**

SAM SMITH

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To Bizzy...

My handsome, furry friend.

*Now that Shattered is ready for our readers to enjoy,
and before we backtrack into 'piggy mode' to write Part Two,
I would like to take you for a long drive in my car.
You fetch your blanket, and I will warm your seat.*

*I love you, Bismark, always,
Mummy xx*

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Chapter One

Susan did not have to see his face to know it was him. His hair, though cut in a short style, the width of his shoulders, and the casual curls let her know who he was and that he was waiting.

Yes, he was waiting to greet only her, she thought, smiling.

His body, tall and robust, stood straight as if to touch the ceiling, and she longed to jump him from behind if only to kiss the nape of his neck, wrap her arms around his torso, and fall in love again.

She hurried further to him, pushing through crowds of people who, like herself, were ready to take flight or greet an arriving passenger.

Airports could be like that, friendly and loving and filled with people hugging and kissing each other in either a goodbye or a greeting.

And though she looked fondly around the terminal, she did not spend too much time on other people; she could only think of him, and her body ached with the knowledge that soon they would be side by side, arm in arm, laying on soft sheets as they covered each other in sweet kisses of what was about to come.

A sudden desire to touch his face, caress his bearded chin, and nestle against his muscular chest almost sent her to heaven. Such was her need to be wrapped in his arms and feel his body pressed against her own.

A body they both worked hard to keep, a body they both enjoyed and a body they had explored entirely with all senses afire.

She enjoyed nothing more than to be cradled within the safety of his arms, arms that protected her from all the evils she had ever encountered and the ones yet to come.

He understood her like no one else.

He allowed her to feel free and sink into a depth of emotions she had never experienced.

No, he had not. Susan wanted to object but knew her argument would be a lie because he had proved himself trustworthy.

This man had captured her heart with love and laughter. She smiled when he smiled, and when he laughed, she laughed.

Remembering how his green eyes shone with delight, she knew he felt the same way.

Apart from each other, they were two, but together, they became one, and as one, they were complete.

Oh, how they became one; it was magical, and Susan smiled naughtily, anxiously awaiting their lovemaking and sacred kisses, kisses that would release her passion and eventually steal her heart.

A heart she had deemed dead, never thinking a love like his could come into her life. Yet he had come as if from nowhere, and suddenly he was here, and here he would stay.

Yes, he was here, nestled in her life until forever.

He had promised never to leave.

She believed his words.

He was a man of few, yet his meaning was true.

How wonderful he is, thought Susan.

Forget wonderful, she decided. He was and will always be more than wonderful because he is the ultimate in everything she ever wanted or needed in a man.

She could trust him with her deepest thoughts. He was a man she could not wait to see or share the craziness that ran through her mind when he was gone. And a man who merely smiled as he ruffled her long hair between his fingers and kissed her forehead with glee in his eyes.

His searing eyes, eyes that seemed to reach deep within as if to bless her soul, and they did, ever so effortlessly. The depth of his gaze sent her emotions into overdrive, wanting to kiss his lashes like a cat hungry for a bowl of milk.

That was what she liked the most. She thought, adjusting her short-sleeved printed top. A top she had chosen to wear to deliberately tease the deep-seated hunger that hid within the masculinity Jerry possessed without effort.

Susan flushed with color, knowing she would be a liar if she denied wanting to bring a sly smile to his full lips while

watching his eyes dance with glee while she lay naked next to his hardness.

A hardness that left her begging for more.

Yes, he always managed to make her want more; he was passion personified, and she loved everything about him and every inch of his mind, body, touch, scent, and love.

Jerry Owens had her utmost attention from the first time they had met and continued to do so throughout all the years that had passed by, ever so slowly, which had only tormented her more since she wanted and needed him from day one.

"Hi," he had smiled, and she? She had fallen foolishly in love to the point of obsession.

He was in her head. A place she chose to visit alone, but that was before she had allowed him to consume her every waking thought, and she had spent hours wondering if she was inside his head like he was inside hers. Did he think about her like she thought about him?

So many questions had engulfed her life to the point of living in a dysfunctional trance; his aura and smile were powerful. So much so that she had become trapped by his smile if only to taste the fullness of his lips, hoping to shock him, wipe the smile from his face, and plant herself inside his head.

She need not have worried. Jerry had told her she was in his head every waking moment. In fact, he had admitted to becoming scared of the devilish images that flashed through his mind, and he had spoken nervously when he confessed all the things he wanted to do once they were alone.

Initially, Susan had been shocked by his declaration of love. She had never imagined herself to be able to compete against the stiff competition of his glamorous co-stars or the fashion models that clung to him like he was the only man God had created. In recent years, the younger generation of fans seemed more available and more gorgeous than ever, and Susan worried because she felt awkward and plain compared to them. But Jerry had pleaded with her to engulf her beauty and to understand that it was she he lusted after.

"You are the woman I love," Jerry told her, and she believed him because she knew he was honest.

Today, she realized how extremely maddening her life had become, mainly as she would sit and spend hours fantasizing about him only to become saddened by the reality that nothing would ever come from dreams.

Yet it never stopped her from wondering about him, whether it was what he was doing, whom he was doing it with, and if he would ever come back, back for just a few lousy seconds, even if it were only to smile at her once again.

She never thought he would feel the same, and it tore at her heart to know his revelation had only come forth a short time ago.

They would still be apart, sad, and lost if she had not seen him by sheer utter nosiness. She was grateful she had been courageous enough to confront him, and even at the time, though wrong, she planted herself at his feet, enamored by his magnificent smile.

Earlier today, while driving to the airport, she had spent hours wondering how he looked without all the thrills of movie industry magic.

Would he look the same, or had he, like she aged a little too fast?

She need not have worried. Jerry looked as she remembered, except now, his smile was more expansive than she had thought possible.

Because of her? She dared not ask, wish, or dream.

She could only hope.

Even now, after trusting each other for years, and only after he had confided how he had crushed after her since first sight, could they relax and realize they were two peas in a pod brought together by fate, and though their current lifestyle forbids their togetherness, they could not stay away from each other long enough to realize the damage their relationship could cause to others.

Still, Susan marveled when she heard that Jerry had secretly pined for her since birth.

Since he was thirty-five, that meant years.

Years!

He had needed her for years, and she needed him. If only to enrich her miserable life, to lift her esteem upward toward the heavens, and to hold her dearly, never to criticize or harm her fragile ego.

And his revelation was music to her ears, cementing the knowledge that she had not loved or fantasized in vain.

There was something behind his smile, a wanting that only she could see but was often afraid to face, but with his encouragement, she grew brave and dealt with obstacles

headstrong, no longer a wilting flower; she was in full bloom whenever he was around.

Susan smiled. She felt silly while fixing her hair in the escalator's reflective metal. How foolish was she to have missed the signals his dynamic smile had sent the first day they met?

She smoothed out unruly curls and sighed. Not anymore, she thought. Now, she was savvy to all the subtle clues Jerry revealed. Oh, how sexy was he? She gasped, realizing his modest manner, a mannerism that drove her into a sexual frenzy, was the guiding light behind her pathway through life.

He was the key.

She was the lock.

Both proved to be fruitful as they explored each other's bodies, both tormented by lust and both delighted by the flame of passion that engulfed them as they shared an intangible rhythm that shocked them into the lustful temptation of wanting and needing increasingly, forever more.

While apart, they had pined for each other, sending messages by text or email, and quite often, they posted long love letters to their respective agents, concealed in large manila envelopes to look like business documents with the words 'private' written in bold.

Had they fooled anyone? She wondered as she neared his stance.

She saw the color of his hair, different shades of brown, like salt and pepper. He was a dream, a man most men envied, and she could understand why as she caught a waft

of his cologne, a fresh scent that smelled like oak yet screamed seduce me.

How many men hoped to live his life? She shuddered to think but surmised thousands if not millions. His lifestyle was that of the rich and famous. As an actor, his career took him across the globe to exotic locations where he had shared company with some of the world's most beautiful women.

And yet, he only had eyes for me, thought Susan, a sheepish smile upon her lips. Softly, she gnawed her lower lip, and nervously, she wondered why he had yet to notice her, yet to see her so close, yet to know she was within arm's reach, so focused was he on the airport entrance, but she knew deep down his nervousness was the culprit.

Jerry was loving and dear but also insecure, like most other men.

Susan knew him to be nervous, too, and on top of being excited and anxious, he would be worried if she would show up.

Today, she had almost not come to the airport, mainly because she was afraid to meet him again, and as wrong as their relationship was, she could not back away from him now, not after they had shared their darkest secrets and a love blessed by the gods above.

A half smile etched her lips. Susan glanced at his troubled face; he looked fragile, which shocked her as he was always in control, and every situation was well planned.

So why did he look so lost?

She straightened her top and wondered again if she had made the right decision to come to the airport. She glimpsed the twinkle in Jerry's eyes and realized she was suitable to

meet him. If not? He would have found and dragged her to his side, insisting it was meant to be.

That was his way. His personality trait weakened her heart and made her love him more. And he would give her some credit for discreetly entering from another parking level as she had purposely chosen to sneak through the departure door and not the arrival. She was not sure if her decision was based on nerves or if she had not wanted to see him chatting with other women, but she need not have doubted him, for he was alone and appeared to ignore the looks of passers-by.

Slowly, anticipation overcame Susan, and she could wait no longer as she was desperate to see the depth in his eyes and feel the touch of his hands if only to reinforce that the journey, they were embarking on was real.

She took two short steps before nervously stopping directly behind his athletic body, and then, as fear began to overcome her slender figure, she wondered if he would see her doubts when he turned.

Did she have any? She did not know.

How could she? She had only learned to love because of him.

Should she trust him? Or should she spend every minute worrying that all might change, and both would be alone with nothing but wanting for company?

Then, once together, would he continue to allow her to flow freely and sink into the depth of emotions she had never experienced?

Would he? She asked.

Yes, he would.

Please do not be stupid, Susan whispered as she cursed her foolishness.

Why, he had relished the tender moments they had spent together. Besides, Jerry was the one who constantly suggested they run away and live far from people who would try to destroy their love.

All endeavors were his idea and plan, and she liked it; letting him take control made her life easier because he enabled her to think only of their meeting and not how they might sneak away together.

Looking back in time, she realized their second meeting had been awkward, but as time passed by, and though she felt strange, she was amazed by his remarkable ability to make things flow easily.

She longed to have his strength, forthright attitude, and determination so that their relationship could end in perfect harmony, but sadly, she was neither stronger nor wiser than him.

Jerry was a masterful man who, thus far in their romance, had been right. Their relationship was flourishing, and they were coming together from nowhere and heading for everywhere that was good and kind. She wondered how he managed to find time in his busy schedule, but he did. He effortlessly entered her life and whisked her away from all the troubles that harmed her fragile soul.

He was a sheer genius.

He was a thinker.

He was a romantic.

No, strike that... He was the ultimate romantic, and no other man could touch the easiness he poured into her battered heart.

He was the one.

The only one.

The love that held a truth, through and through.

Stop it! Susan scolded, knowing that if she did not, she would be flushed with color, and he would know exactly what she had been thinking when he saw her.

Besides, she wanted him to know she was happy with their meetings, delighted with their kisses, and in heaven with their love.

She felt enthusiastic at the thought and so wanted to tap his right shoulder, but did not, she knew he did not like surprises, and she cursed herself for entering the airport from a different level as she had not arrived as planned, she had defiantly chosen her own way to come.

Would he be annoyed? She gnawed her bottom lip again and figured out what to do next.

Susan, just get a grip, for goodness' sake, and stop worrying so much, she cursed. You have a mind, too.

He knows that to be true.

Do not spoil the surprise.

Please reveal yourself to him so he can lose the lost look in his eyes.

Darn, she fussed before adjusting her top once more and reaching into her pocketbook for her cell phone, to which she speed-dialed his phone number.

She saw him glance toward his phone's screen, his eyes reading a missed call and his body tense. Quickly, she typed

a text, as she did not want him to become impatient with her antics.

I love you, she typed. And I am right behind you.

She prepared herself for his turnaround, knowing he would have that cocky look of, oh, so you thought you fooled me? Well, you did not, I knew you were behind me the entire time.

Sure enough, his face explained all she had expected, and as she stared into his glistening eyes, she wanted nothing more than to hide in his arms and behold the man she would die for if asked.

She stepped awkwardly, aware of passing glances from people walking by who recognized him, and suddenly, not knowing how to react, she froze.

She need not have worried.

Seeing his arms stretch outward and then pulling her close, closer to his body than she had ever imagined, especially in such a public place, she grinned mischievously and relaxed.

Airports were notorious for fame seekers and paparazzi who patrolled the arrival and departure terminals in search of a famous face to photograph or autograph hunt, if only to sell later down the road. Yet, Jerry did not seem phased by anything or anyone but her, and while wrapping his strong arms around her waist, he buried his face into her hair and moaned in delight.

Delighted, she softened against the strength of his body and cared for only him, not the fans who followed him everywhere, not the paparazzi who yearned to expose his

private lifestyle, and not the strangers who stared while they embraced for what felt like hours.

Susan warmed against the hardness of his stomach. She had spent her entire life looking for his love, yet never knowing how to find it had caused her to shiver; tears welled in her eyes, and she buried her face into his chest, knowing their togetherness would cause people to take photos and sell them to the press, but she did not care.

All her needs surged into fruition, her fears dispelled, and from how he tugged her closer, almost as if they could merge as one, she knew he felt the same; relief made her knees weak, yet Jerry held her firmly; he would not let her fall.

He would laugh later and tell her 'To heck with them.' And she would ponder if it were true, could they honestly escape the public and build their love wide open to the eyes of the world without losing each other in the struggle?

Yes, he would assure.

Yes, that is all she wanted to hear.

Susan felt his kisses creep from the tip of her head down to the side of her face, and her cheeks felt the heat from his tongue when he kissed away tears that ran down her face.

She felt alive, secure, and safe with him and only him. Jerry was her protector; he would never allow anyone to hurt them, and he was cunning, his instincts sharp on keeping prying eyes out of their relationship.

"I'm settling into an awkward situation here," he announced, pulling her even closer to his body.

Susan raised her head and smiled. "Me too," she answered, feeling the wetness flowing between her long, slender legs and soaking her panties, cotton gusset, and white jeans.

"I think I need help."

"You're on your own, darling. I need help, too," she whispered into his ear so only he could hear her alarm.

"But, Sue, it's embarrassing for me," he protested, pushing his pelvis into her lower torso.

"Baby, you have to calm down. I am also in a mess," she took his hand and brushed it between her thighs.

"Bathroom?" His eyes brimmed with excitement.

"Um, have we ever?"

"No, but today we will."

"You're joking, right?" She pulled away slightly. "I mean, do you see the security, not to mention all the eyes upon you?"

He flashed a superstar smile that spoke a thousand words, none of which needed to be said. Susan sighed and pinched his forearm until he grimaced and replaced his lustful look with concern for their privacy.

Jerry was a darling.

Susan knew he would never expect her to, nor drag her to the nearest toilet for a quick romp with so many people suspecting what they would be doing. That was not his style, no matter how tempting a situation they were in, which was another reason to love him.

In a swift movement, he moved her sideways, kissed her ear, and whispered that they would miss their plane if

they did not get to the security checkpoint and head to their gate.

Nodding, she followed his lead.

Strange, she thought, handing him her computer carry case so he could hold it in front of his legs while they walked through the terminal.

She felt proud with his arm around her tiny waist, and as she looked up toward his gaze, she admired his devotion as he ignored the voluptuous young women who would throw themselves at his feet without needing to be asked twice. It was easy for her to get inside Jerry's mind and read him well. Know his desires, yearnings, and wants, yet he was a complex man to read. Well, maybe to those who knew him less than she did, but all the same, she loved the challenge.

"I love you." He whispered when they reached the security desk.

"Me too," Susan answered deliberately, almost teasingly leaning backward into his body if only to feel if his manhood was still throbbing. It was not, and sadness overwhelmed her; she wanted him hard forever, and knowing he was now in soft mode made her question her sexuality.

Was she enough for him?

She hoped so because she was still soaking wet.

Stop it! She told herself. It is not your fault. Understand him and know he cannot walk around an airport with a significant lump in his pants, can he?

No.

Susan cleared security and watched him remove his jacket, belt, shoes, and light green sweater; she noticed the color emphasized the green in his already sizzling eye color.

Susan cleared security and watched him remove his jacket, belt, shoes, and light green sweater; she noticed how the color added a vibrant hue to his already sizzling eye color.

He was aware of his surroundings, she noted and smiled.

He appeared so confident; most people would not know how insecure he was beneath the iron curtain where his deepest emotions hid. Deep inside the tough facade was a sensitive, emotional man who, like a baby or a little boy, was afraid of the ongoing thoughts his head held, and it melted her heart when his vulnerabilities openly showed their ways.

The public saw what he projected.

A movie star.

She saw a significant difference in what was hidden—a child within a man.

Once they cleared the security checkpoint, they naturally settled in each other's stride as they marched toward their gate.

Susan looked at him again and smiled. His hand reached out to her arm. She entwined her fingers into his and felt a clammy palm. "You, okay?" she asked, slightly concerned.

"With you?" His brow raised as mockery etched his face. "Of course, I am."

"But" she hesitated before questioning him but spoke her mind. "Your palms are clammy. What is wrong? Are you feeling all right?"

He squeezed her hand tightly and smiled. "I'm fine," he said and winked.

"But you're burning up," Susan said, alarmed. She noticed his brow perspiring and a drained look register across his face, and though she detested giving him stress, she was concerned as it was unlike him to look disheveled.

"I said I'm fine," he snapped and wiped his ashen face. "I'm flustered, that's all. If you haven't noticed, Florida is boiling hot this time of year."

Startled by his outburst, Susan wanted to run back through the airport and leave; she had never heard this tone in his voice, and she hoped it was not a sign of things to come, for a temper was something she wished he had not been concealing. "Well, if you say so," she spoke softly, almost afraid of the man she walked beside.

But do you? she secretly asked herself.

What?

Do you honestly know him? The real him, not the deluded version that fills your mind with fantasies.

Of course, I do, Susan argued.

No, you do not, her conscience argued back.

You only know what he tells you or what he wants you to learn.

Face the truth.

This conversation went back and forth for what seemed like hours, and though it only lasted until they reached their

gate, Susan still could not shake the feeling something terrible would happen.

Noticing Jerry had slowed in his stride, she cautiously followed suit, and with so many questions swirling in her thoughts, she feared the worst was to come.

Jerry had shocked her with his outburst as it was so unlike him, and she had never seen him looking so ashen. Still, she ignored the caution rising in her stomach, preferring to excuse his behavior as they had never been to an airport together. Perhaps he is afraid to fly, she concluded and tried to brush her queries aside, but she could not.

Damn! She cursed.

Double Damn!

What was wrong with him, and why now?

Why couldn't he have shown his dark side months ago before she thought him Mr. Wonderful?

Get a grip, Susan, she cursed inwardly, noticing he had stopped walking. She watched him lean against a wall as he struggled to catch his breath.

"Jerry," she whispered. "Are you sure you're, okay?"

He glanced upward, then down to the floor, and suggested they sit momentarily. "Come here," he motioned as he patted his lap.

Susan beamed. He is wonderful. Stop making something out of nothing. A lot of people are scared to fly.

Yes, but that is not something that Jerry would ordinarily hide.

She sat on his lap and ruffled his hair with her fingers and kissed his cheek. "We can go slow," she told him. "I understand completely."

"Understand what?" he asked, bewildered.

"Being afraid to fly, silly." She answered.

She felt him suddenly stiffen and regretted her assumption. She knew full well that if he were afraid to fly, he would have admitted it and certainly would not be in an industry that required him to fly every other week.

Please do not let me down, Susan secretly pled to him as he rose to walk toward the departure gate. She watched him slowly sit in a restricted area, awaiting notification that the plane was ready to board.

Quickly, she followed, and sitting beside him, she turned to him, took a tissue from her purse, and wiped his brow. "I love you," she said, and she meant it.

He moved awkwardly against the seat and rubbed his palms together. "I love you too," he murmured, sounding strained to Susan.

Could he be a cad? she asked herself, perplexed by the sudden change in his personality.

Good gracious, do not let him be.

Stressed, Susan turned to face him and willed him not to turn out to be an awful beast that totally and completely fooled me.

Jerry leaned backward in the seat, his arms falling by his side and his eyes closing slightly, and then, almost urgently, Susan felt a hand grasp onto her own like a crab claw.

Startled, she jumped to her feet. It was Jerry, and he needed her, and where had she been?

Deep in thought and forgetting where she was, such was her mind, always playing tricks. "My goodness, are you

alright?" She gasped, noticing his face was pale, and his green eyes not only looked dull but also, his gaze had a distinct hue, he seemed out of sorts. Not his usual self.

"Hey," She prodded roughly, which she had never done before, but now was not the time to debate right from wrong.

She reached for his hair to turn his head closer to her own and felt moisture. She listened intently as his breathing deepened and waited to see if he caught his breath.

She did not want him to panic, but he was not behaving or looking like himself. She checked his heartbeat and heard a choking sound deep in his throat. At that moment, she pushed him forward and began to pat his back. "Please be fine," she begged and looked around for airline personnel to help, but she could see none nearby as she searched through masses of people.

Oh no! Now what? Susan grimaced. She rose from her seat and stared down the terminal, searching for a flight attendant, but none was around. Glancing at a monitor before settling beside him, Susan reached for his hand and squeezed it hard.

She noticed his radiant complexion had paled, and his skin resembled something ghostly white as his normally healthy glow drained from his face. She watched motionlessly as his hands turned blue, and then she panicked.

"Somebody, anybody, please help!" She exclaimed and jumped to her feet. "Help me. Please help me. Please!"

She struggled to control the rapid tremors that shook through her body and tried to calm herself before she placed

a hand on each side of his face as she willed him to look into her eyes. "Help is on the way," she lied. "Stay focused. Look into my eyes." Susan wondered if that were such a good idea as she knew her eyes revealed fright, but it was too late; she had already blurted out that he should stay focused on her gaze.

"Hey, I'm here!" She implored when his vision drifted. "Look at me, stay with me. Don't you dare fade off and leave me? Not now. Not ever! Oh dear, what was happening? What was wrong with him?" She questioned people who walked by without even stopping to help and cried when she kissed his lifeless hand.

Forcefully, Susan's eyes skirted the airport as she debated whether to leave him and run for help. As if sensing her thought, his hand touched hers, and he spoke in a deep whispering tone. "I'm dying, Sue, I'm dying." He coughed hard, and Susan saw the blood on his lips and inside his mouth. "No!" She yelled. "Don't you dare die on me, do you hear me?" She began to cry to him, willing him to pull through, but it appeared her words were in vain.

As seconds ticked by, the glorious man she loved could no longer understand who she was or what she said.

He showed no response, as if he had heard nothing. He sat motionless; his breathing became shallow; no more was he gasping for air, and even his hand was not responding to her touch.

Afraid and alone, she called out for help again. Then, suddenly, she saw people rush to aid him, and that made her more fearful.

She wanted to let go of his hand, but she just could not; if he were dying, he could not die alone. One must always look into the eyes of someone you love when it is time to cross over, right?

Susan could not think straight with all the commotion going on around him. She only knew that there was no way he was dying. She would not allow it to happen now or after they would both found love.

He might have taken a pill or eaten something that did not agree with his metabolism, but he was not dying.

He may feel like he was, but she was sure he would be fine.

Susan grasped his hand tighter and spoke softly into his ear, assuring him he was suffering from nothing but a panic attack. And though she was not a doctor, it was the only thing she could surmise considering how quickly he had fallen sick.

So, nervous energy was the cause of his demise, and though he felt like he was dead, there was no way he was dying.

Yes, that was it. It had to be. It was the only acceptable answer she wanted to hear; even if Susan said the words herself, she did not care. She would not allow such foolishness to grow into anything beyond speculation. If he thought he was dying, he was not. He was merely in a panic due to his notorious fear of flying, and nothing anyone told her would change her mind.

Dear Lord, please help, she begged, turning away from his passive expression to watch emergency services rushing to his side before pushing her out of the way.

Afraid to look, she remained quietly at his side and watched as paramedics checked his vitals. Then, noticing the worrisome look expressed by a male paramedic, she began to cry.

Swiftly, she bent sideways and whispered into his ear, using all her strength to coax him back to life, to a time when not so long ago, he was gregarious and carefree, laughing and joking and basking in love.

She raised his clammy hand to her mouth and kissed his fingers, hoping that the force within her soul would reach from her fingers into his and breed new life. 'Come on, pull through,' she coaxed as more medical personnel raced towards them with a gurney.

The crackling of radio frequencies shattered her mind like a sledgehammer, crushing all the positive energy she had been transmitting to him into smithereens.

"Move," an older male yelled. "Get out of the way." But she could not and would not because she refused to let go.

Suddenly, heavy hands forced her aside. However, she still held Jerry's hand, prayed for help, still longed to bring life back to him, and still willed him to fight.

Still, her efforts were futile as she watched one emergency technician pull him upward and lay him on his back before yelling out 'Code Blue.'

What did it mean? She did not know medical terms. She could only sit, listen, and continue to hold his hand while pain stabbed a broken heart.

"Get the AED ready!" Another medic screamed, cutting through his clothing to attach two white square patches to his chest, one below the heart and one on his left shoulder.

"I'm a doctor. May I help?" A stranger asked the medics.

"Yes." They answered hurriedly. "We've got an automated external defibrillator on this man, and it's detecting ventricular fibrillation, so we're about ready to provide an electrical shock to restore a normal heart rhythm to start the heart beating again."

"Is an ambulance on the way?" The mature doctor murmured so as not to alarm the gathered crowd.

"Yes, but he's still in cardiac arrest, and he's not breathing." The medic wiped his brow while another prepped to perform CPR.

Susan could only watch in horror as the rescuer lay him face up, rolling the head, body, and limbs at the same time, except his hand; she would not let go despite their pleas; she was scared they would take her away by force, but they did not.

Jerry's head was tilted backward, his bearded chin elevated, and his nose appeared pinched. Then, a female rescuer's mouth met his and began artificial respiration by breathing air into his lungs.

Mortified, Susan cried when they performed chest compressions, especially when the medic became too weak to be effective. Another medic swapped places and thrust into his chest, but he was not recovering, so they rolled him onto a gurney.

Susan rose from the floor, and as the medics secured him on the gurney, she noticed he was no longer gripping her hand; it was she who clung to him. She touched his face

and sobbed upon seeing his beautiful eyes, which were now cloudy and grey, expressing nothingness.

She wiped her brow and rubbed her eyes. She felt broken inside, and seeing Jerry's eyes reflecting nothingness, no color, or emotion, caused her body to shake uncontrollably.

"Dear Lord! She exclaimed. Those are not his eyes, not the eyes that would wink and tease, not the eyes full of life and love, and indeed not the eyes that gazed adoringly into her own.

No! They were not his eyes.

Those lifeless eyes were the eyes of the dead.

She felt her skin chill to the bone and fell to the ground.

"Are you alright?" A medic asked before aiding her to a nearby chair.

"E, Ey, Eye." She tried to say the word but could not.

Encumbered by terror, she could only point.

"What are you trying to say?"

Suddenly, Susan jumped. "Eyes," she shrilled, and then she fainted.

Chapter Two

On Friday evening, Susan Reynolds awoke from a nightmare and glanced around the four walls that encased her bedroom. Still feeling the prying eyes caress her body, she shook her head, scrambled her thoughts, and then shrugged.

It was just a dream.

And yet, it still seemed so real.

Sitting in bed, she could not help but relive the fantasy with Jerry. The handsome man she had conjured up to protect her when she slept, and how he had held her tightly as he had smothered her body with unrequited love. And how wonderful it felt to be touched so lovingly as he had pulled her close.

Plenty of dreams flooded her mind each time she slept. And having a good dream was welcomed as she had often had vivid nightmares that seemed eerily lifelike.

Tonight, she had had a romantic dream, she gushed, remembering Jerry and his addictive smile. It was one of the better dreams that plowed through her agile mind when fatigue forced her to sleep, as she mainly experienced terrifying dreams filled with fear from a stranger who followed her every move and whose eyes scared her stiff.

Drifting back to Jerry, Susan noted that, for the most part, the dream was good as it was about a recurring hero who protected her throughout the solitary nights when she was alone and afraid.

Susan inhaled deeply and rubbed her eyes.

Glancing around her bedroom, she sniffled before lifting her hands with a shrug and reaching for a tissue to wipe her face and eyes.

Even as she blew a runny nose, thinking about his smile and the softness of his lips, she groaned.

Then, feeling a sudden heat rush throughout her body, she yearned. And to control her passion, she turned on the light and murmured loudly.

Tonight, every ounce of her body ached. And she decided to venture into her home studio and work on next season's designs.

As she nestled against the pillow, leg swinging down the side of the bed, Susan recalled the evil eyes whose torment still lingered and fidgeted to wrap a nightgown over her cold shoulders.

Up and down, no sound, no figure in sight, only the knowledge of eyes, eyes lurking outside in the dark and searing into her home.

She could feel them watching, forever waiting, and could not manage the fright much longer.

She was clearly going mad from the evil that caressed the depth of her soul and chilled her to the bone.

How the eyes lurked in her subconscious, she did not know.

Yet, their constant reminder made her blood boil, and she grew angry and struggled to control her temper.

She rose from her bed, rushed downstairs, and ran through a room that boasted two window walls until she stumbled, smashing her head against a prominent corner of a wall painting.

"Ouch!" she exclaimed, feeling a gash from the heavy frame against her right cheek. Her hand touched her face, and she suddenly felt the warm blood seep onto her fingers.

It did not deter her; she kept moving forward, rushing faster, her heart beating at an elevated level, yet she continued toward sanctuary in the kitchen.

On the floor, she took a few moments to breathe. Then, to her surprise, when she heard knives scraping against panes of glass rather than cowering behind a chair.

She stood tall.

She was going to face the devilish man who tormented her every waking hour and every sleepless night and force him to reveal himself.

But when she walked toward the entryway, she froze and crumbled. As her mind burst with anger and her hands trembled with fear, she saw the eyes of torment and realized this was no longer a dream.

It was not only real, but it was harmful, too, and she was unsure why she chose to stare into the eyes of hell.

She still could not comprehend the reality of that night.

Earlier, she had dreamt of Jerry, and aside from the evil eyes almost killing him, which she hoped they could not, as he was her only sanity in this tortuous web of deceit.

She was not sure if she could face the calling of death that beckoned her outside, and she hoped she had time to correct her wrong from the torment of ghouls determined to push her sanity over the edge of the cliffs built around her waterfront home.

The howling voice was male and threatening. She turned to face the window again, and this time, the shadow of a man, illuminated by garden lights, summoned her to him and then faded into the night.

In stark contrast to the dream in which Jerry had eased her wearied soul, Susan reached out to touch the entity that threatened to hold her hostage until she could no longer face the challenging curse of the dead.

Instead, she flung open a kitchen compartment and searched among its items that were hidden out of sight.

She snatched a bag with medications to ease her distress and sat down on the ground to think, to breathe, and to think again about which pill she would take.

She rubbed her swelling knees and punched herself hard.

Think, she urged.

Think. Think fast.

Time is of the essence.

But tonight, Susan could not think.

On a good day, she knew each pill by heart and what reaction they would take her scared thoughts to, and once in the depth of prescription hell, only then could she relax and escape the eyes.

Could she pretend to sleep and hope the eyes would leave?

She had tried before, had never succeeded, and doubted tonight would be different. She thought for an instant that she might be setting herself up for death. She could take a sedative and sleep or risk a heart attack with an upper.

Whichever path she chose, she had to decide.

Would she fight to live or succumb to death?

It was all becoming so confusing.

She could die in her sleep, or she could remain awake if only to face the stalker behind the eyes.

He was close, too close.

She could smell him. She could hear his footsteps.

Deep, heavy thumps shuffled over the soil outside, and only a rainstorm could stop his wandering path. But, according to the local news station Channel Five, rain was not on the horizon. The broadcaster's sunny face seemed to project clear skies ahead as she sat enthusing that it was an excellent day to partake in one of South Florida's endless sporting events, snorkeling, golfing, and tennis, and even the weather forecaster enthused about a day spent tanning on the beach.

The news crew announced a fabulous sun-filled day and encouraged viewers to go outside to enjoy endless activities on land or at sea. The excitement in their voices as they suggested paddle boarding on the beach, gorging at world-

class restaurants, or shopping at trendy boutiques made her want to vomit.

She was sick to her stomach and sick of life in Miami, and the high occupancy of a Latin community only added to her frustration as she did not speak Spanish.

She had more critical issues to sift through.

One was how to rid her thoughts from the prying eyes that continued to stalk and torture her regularly. She listened intently as a thud outside the window sounded eerily close, causing her to panic.

Sad, she huddled in a corner, nervous and alone, and while clutching the bag of pills, willed herself to act, to be strong. But as she began to weaken and cry, her hopes failed miserably, and she wiped away her tear-soaked cheeks.

She knew this was a game to some sick pervert who enjoyed the power he held. If it were not a game, he would have broken the glass and slit her throat months ago.

She rubbed her neck and cringed.

Stop thinking such thoughts, she demanded; just focus and listen and find out where he is and what he wants.

Sitting in silence, Susan listened to his breath against a pane of glass in the center window of the living room. Grateful her assistant Sandy has closed most of the room's drapes, sadly there were many left open, but at least the closed ones obstructed his view, which she knew would anger him more.

And feeling his anger, the glare his eyes held, she could only wonder why he wanted to leer so dangerously into her home.

He had to be mentally ill, thought Susan, knowing it was only a matter of time before he would force himself inside. And whether she wanted to face him or not, she would have no choice, as the man with the burning, fiery eyes of the devil would eventually stand before her.

Nervously, she wrapped a blanket around her slim figure and willed herself to decide if she would live or die. Just get it together and plan, and whatever you choose, make it fast because eventually, he will tire of this game.

A game that will be your destruction.

So, Susan, what would it be?

She forced herself to choose.

An upper, a downer, or death?

Suddenly, a rattling against the glass pane caused terror to reign within, and in haste, she dropped the bag of pills and froze.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

The monster was taunting.

Despite questioning whether these incidents were actual or dreams, she realized tonight that they were real, and she was not imagining. Although this eased her nerves, she was herself, suddenly annoyed, as in the past, she had thought she was a mental case experiencing hallucinations.

Such vivid dreams and visions had forsaken reality.

As she strained to listen tonight, Susan could hear the sound of glass being scratched and knew this was not imagination.

It was real.

Outside, the eyes of hell commanded her attention and would continue until they pounced and destroyed all that she had.

Racing into the kitchen, Susan rubbed her tired eyes and peered around the house's elaborate kitchen. It held humongous cupboards, cupboards she could easily squeeze into and hide. But she knew the eyes that followed would discover any place she chose to withdraw, for the nervous chatter of her teeth would give it all away.

She stared and glared out the window, and though she saw no shadow or figure of a man, she knew deep in the darkness the monster was there, watching and waiting, for what, she hastened to think, but could think only one thought.

Destruction.

The blasted kitchen is lit up like a fish tank, and she is the fish, in full view and trapped.

She was a fool who should have stayed hidden in the dark. The ceiling light was burning bright, and he would see her crouched on the marble floor and then laugh, knowing he had won.

As her hands carelessly opened several bottles of pills, she quickly swallowed two and gagged, which ones she did not know, and right now, she did not care.

Determined to fight and battle his evil, she planned a concoction of drinks, a special brew of potions to help her survive, and if she never slept again, then so be it.

There was no way she would let him win and no way she would allow him to take her in her sleep.

Not tonight.

Not ever.

The cold marble floor did not chill the heat that burned in the pit of her stomach. Reaching deep into a drawer, she clutched the steel metal of a revolver and filled the chamber before hiding the gun in her pocket.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

Oh, sweet, Jesus!

He was after her again, mocking her weakness and playing tricks to prove himself better.

He was pure evil, and she hated his tortuous pranks, but mostly, she hated his eyes.

Now that you know he is real, you should report him. But I have, she wailed, and nobody believed me, not even my husband Jay.

The man she had married had quickly become disinterested and moved on to engage in adulterous affairs with film groupies worldwide, which was no wonder she found solace in dreams of Jerry Owens.

Jerry was always there, supplying emotional support and undeterred strength.

On the contrary, Jay was never home, and now, she lived in a land where reality had faded into a misty morning love song, and nights were spent dreaming of nothing but the sweetest of love.

The air conditioning vent caused the blonde hairs on the nape of her neck to rise, and she took the gun from her pocket and shivered.

The house is cold.

Earlier this evening, feeling safe and secure, she had slept, and, in her sleep, she had fantasized about Jerry.

The dreamy man who guided her through the loneliness of the night, and though Jerry made her feel lucid and accessible, she became cold and calculated outside his imaginary arms.

Now, the central air conditioning blew colder than winds off the North Atlantic Ocean, which made her feel afloat, swaying on a small boat in the chilly breeze that encumbered her soul, and not even dreamy Jerry could help her.

The best thing about drugs, aside from the apparent high, was the way they make you feel, and right now, Susan felt wide awake as the upper began to take effect.

The worst thing about drugs was the paranoia that right now was heightening Susan's anxiety and her doom.

She pressed a hand against her chest, tried to slow her heartbeat, and listened for outside noises.

At first, she could hear nothing but drops of water plopping onto a metal patio set and then the sound of footsteps moving.

Damn! The maniac was still outside.

She had to shut the lights if only to show him she was not afraid; she crawled across the floor, grabbed the remote, and turned off all the kitchen lights.

She saw better in the dark.

Eye surgery had left her partially blind, and because of that, she had learned to rely on her other senses.

Tonight, would be no different.

Adjusting her eyes to the dark, she maneuvered around familiar furnishings until she stepped into the living room,

the same room she had occupied when she had first seen the eyes.

Unlike the kitchen, the room was brightly lit, making it impossible to see anything outside other than strategically placed green bulbs at the base of swaying palms. Though, in the sky, Susan saw dark clouds swirling by so fast, she thought a storm might wash ashore, but remembering the weatherman's forecast, she muttered, no such luck.

Susan chuckled softly. "You're not getting me tonight. My heart is on fire, and I'm worn out, but with my gun in my pocket, I will fight you to the death."

She rose from the floor and began straightening the room, organizing ornaments, fluffing cushions, and placing various books on a shelf.

She struggled to project confidence when she felt scared like a baby lamb whose mother was taken to the slaughterhouse.

She needed backup, but no one was available, and Sandy had left hours ago.

Dear Sandy, was her faithful friend and a woman who understood her anguish in this house of horrors. And though she had hundreds of acquaintances, she confided in none of them, not even her husband.

The minute details she had shared with Jay had fallen on deaf ears, as he was useless in his interest in her afterlife experiences. And he would not allow her to talk about eyes that haunted every waking moment. Besides, she had to be careful, for she feared her husband may scoff at her allegations and whisk her off to a sanctuary.

Most definitely, thought Susan. Jay would drop you in a heartbeat, and sadly, she knew it was the truth.

In the eyes of public opinion, Jay could do no wrong.

In the eyes of her soul, he could do no right.

Like the eyes, Jay also possessed evil; she was sure of that, and she was certain her life had become rotten since marrying the unruly man who thought only of himself.

Suddenly saddened, she fought the urge to cry.

If the eyes were not watching, she would have screamed in pain, but she chose to suffer in silence, as she was not giving the madman outside grounds to believe he was winning.

Deciding to give him what he wanted, Susan rose, strode to the window, and stopped, allowing him to see her, while knowing she could not see him.

In the daylight, she had spent hours admiring the landscape of her lush garden. Still, her visibility was limited at night, and not even garden bulbs to enhance numerous King Palms allowed a clear view of the many shrubs in her garden.

She made a mental note to fix this issue and would have the windows tinted so she could see the garden clearly under the night sky, yet no one outside could see in.

Feeling entertained with this new plan, she continued adjusting cushions and rearranging furnishings if only to irk the intruder and disrupt his power, and then she recalled her suggestion to Jay that they treat the windows and how he had refused.

His explanation was that he liked the bright sunlight sweeping into the house. Besides, he had argued that her

orchids would die if the windows were tinted as they cannot live without sunshine.

Jay's theory was a total lie but bless him for trying.

She was not stupid and would not fall for his ridiculous explanation. She was smart enough to know that Orchids needed shade, not direct sunlight.

Susan drew a deep breath and continued tending to the plants. Knowing she was still being watched, she contemplated confronting the manic who stood brazenly outside. If only she could tell him how disgusting, he was to spy on her and make her life a living hell.

How fulfilling would that be?

She wished she had the guts, but she did not, and deep down, she knew facing him would not happen.

Not in this lifetime, anyway.

Are you still watching me? She wondered as she dusted a silver ornament. Can you see me smiling? Of course, you can. Out there, you can see everything I do.

Thank you, Jay. She scoffed aloud.

Susan forced a weak grin.

Where are you, you creep? Did you finally give up and leave?

She wanted to spray the windows with a cleaning solution to see if the eyes flinched, but chose not to, as this was the first time, she had allowed the evil to know she suspected his presence.

She grinned again, which was not what she wanted to do, particularly after hearing his footsteps stomp heavily atop the muddy soil. Still, realizing that the garden sprinkler

system timer had activated a watering session made her happy.

Ha! She gushed, almost laughing.

She was tempted to look toward the sprinkler jets, feeling giddy that the monster outside would be soaked. She did not.

She stayed quiet and continued in her quest to present a perfectly decorated room.

Again, she heard footsteps in rhythmic bumping that sounded eerily like the thumps of her heartbeat and challenged herself to cross the room.

If only to tell eyes exactly how she felt, although she remained beside herself, and blamed her confusion on one of the many pills she had taken.

It was the only way she could cope.

She had seen, heard, and would say nothing.

She was simply paranoid.

Drugs can do that to a person, if not right away, eventually, as they destroy the mind and the body, too.

Despite knowing the dangers, she continued mixing uppers with downers as this was the only way to survive her storm-battered life.

She would not be broken.

Not by the glistening eyes.

Not by anyone.

The telephone rang, interrupting her thoughts and causing her to jump.

"Hello, may I help you?" she asked angrily. She had forgotten to check the call box and cursed inwardly for

making such a stupid mistake, reminding herself to never to repeat it, and always check the caller identification box.

"Hey, Baby," It was Jay.

"What's up?" She asked, desperate to keep an even tone in her voice.

"I'll be home in a few minutes, that's all," he answered.

"Is everything all right?"

"Why wouldn't it be?" she questioned, noticing hysteria rising in her voice. She needed to end the call before he noticed the terror in her voice and questioned her to the brink of insanity.

"I don't know, you sound weird," he said.

Susan dug into her pocket for the gun and hid it behind a cushion. She wanted to yell, to tell her husband exactly how she felt.

I have a stalker out in the garden, you are having an affair with your current leading lady and doing goodness knows what else, and you are accusing me of sounding weird.

The words burned her lips.

Though she had practiced the sermon hundreds of times, she said nothing.

Instead, she took a deep breath and rubbed her temples. "It's been a long day," she replied flatly.

She wanted to cry to Jay but did not.

Jay was looking for a separation; he had not asked yet, but she could feel it in the pit of her stomach.

Her husband may think he was fooling her with words of love and displays of affection, but hell, even Jay Kemp was not that good an actor.

Or perhaps it was she who was no longer stupid enough to believe such rubbish from a man whose foreplay was walking to the bed.

In the beginning, we had shared a wonderful life, she reflected, but not anymore.

My husband is an international movie star.

The halo above his head will eventually slip and it would hopefully choke him to death, and it could not happen to a more deserving man.

"I'll be there soon."

"How come you're getting off work so early?" She asked. "Did everything go all right on the shoot?"

"Fine, baby, just fine," he said, tired.

"Good, well, I'll see you soon," she spoke softly this time, sensing the pain in his voice. She wanted to soothe his anguish, but she simply could not.

A gossip news site had published sordid details of yet another of her husband's illicit affairs, and much to Jay's denial, she just did not believe him.

Now, his touch left her cold.

Trust is of the utmost importance; she had none, and all of it was lost.

"Susan?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure you're, okay?"

"I'm fine."

"Perhaps we'll talk when I get home?" He suggested.

"Whatever you want, Jay," she told him, forgetting the eyes and all the drama in her life. "I'll be here, where I always am."

She pressed the end call button and gnawed her lower lip; she was sure he would ask for a divorce.

She felt like a failure. You are a failure, she reminded herself. Just look at yourself. You are pathetic. Of course, your husband is going to screw around.

You express no love. You mock his fans. You ridicule his artistic creativity. You flounder in the bedroom. You, you, you are the cause of his affairs. You are to blame for this mockery of a marriage.

Not Jay.

YOU!

Susan Reynolds placed the phone back on the charger and resolved that life would continue with drugs, and if Jay were cheating and the eyes were watching, nothing would stop her from taking them.

The medication deluded her mind to unreality, and she quite liked it, even if it was like drinking twenty cups of coffee.

Sleep will not come tonight. She knew that to be true. Who are you kidding? She scoffed. You would not quit those pills even if life were perfect. So, stop making excuses. This is not the path your life was supposed to take, and unless you change, there will be no escape from the devil, whether it was husband Jay or the freak outside.

Susan quickly found herself sitting on the sofa, surrounded by all the beautiful furnishings Jay had provided.

She sat with an arm resting on both legs, aware that the haunting eyes were silently pressed against the window outside, and feeling her throat constrict, she cried as she

pleaded with anyone listening, living or in heaven, to help her save herself.

She was not a Saint, but she was not so bad either.

She deserved peace from the demon in the garden and the wandering husband who romanced every costar he met.

Susan sighed. Again, she wondered what the eyes wanted.

She hoped it was something substantial because the amount of time he had spent watching went from days to weeks to months.

Who does that?

Who spends time terrorizing another person?

It was insane.

She walked out of the room, knowing she could pray all she wanted, repent sin after sin, and beg forgiveness until the end of eternity, and yet she would not be saved. Mainly because she did not deserve peace of mind. She was a horrible person, and not even an angel in heaven could save her from the karma she owed.

Life's a bitch, and then you die. That is what most people seem to think and speak.

Yes, but not tonight, thought Susan. Another upper would ensure she would see the light of day.

Chapter Three

Settled in the heart of Miami, Florida, is Coconut Grove, a small town offering CocoWalk's open-air enclave and the shops of Mayfair. Small stores, restaurants, and waterfront parks lead to scenic Biscayne Bay, making the small city charming, beautiful, and rich.

The bohemian village, known for its artists and the culturally mixed neighborhood is filled with tourists throughout the year who flock to the stores and stroll the streets known as 'The Grove.'

The small downtown entertainment features the famous art show and other annual events, the pet show being an all-time favorite, as is the boat show at the marina on Bayside Drive.

Kennedy Park is another fan favorite for dog walking, rollerblading, bike riding, and joggers alike who all bask in the year-round sunshine while enjoying the glorious outdoors.

Coconut Grove is a picturesque place to cherish, and its vibrant and down-to-earth charm will grasp your attention and imagination, as will the late-night bars and clubs that are sure to satisfy even the thirstiest of thirsts.

"It's certainly caught mine." Robert Greenberg spat.

He pushed through an assortment of bushes planted alongside the house walls and sluggardly strolled toward the next pane of glass to watch the woman who had destroyed his life.

He mumbled profanity as sharp thorns from preened roses tore into his skin and was maddened when Indian figs clung to his clothes. Angrily, he marched onward, his worker boots covered in mud and soggy grass. "Blasted sprinkler system," he hissed, undeterred, but slowed his pace to move more carefully.

Like most other nights, tonight turned out to be reminiscent of past visits where he had stood watching Susan Reynolds lose control of herself and her emotions. And while he had been through the exact routine many times, tonight's ending would be the only thing different.

Usually, he spied, jerked off, and left, but tonight, he was going to enjoy watching the beautiful Susan spend her last night inside the safety of her home, for she was about to go down, and sooner rather than later could not happen fast enough.

A sadistic laugh rose from his stomach to his throat, and then, just as he was about to cough up bile, he gulped, swallowing hard, forcing the bile back down to his stomach.

Greenberg stood beside a French door and peered inwards as the hardening in his groin tightened.

Quickly, he forced himself to rid his mind of all sexual images of Susan, and though he wanted to release all pent-up frustrations, this evening was not the time nor the place.

He stood in the shadows and watched the woman who carelessly wandered half-nakedly through the home she shared with her husband without care or concern of being watched. Her nonchalance irritated him, causing a throbbing in his temples, which was better than on his manhood, at least on this visit.

She was busy planting, adding water to an impressive display of household plants, particularly an orchid collection, which was incredibly beautiful with full blooms in soft shades of lilacs and pinks.

Greenberg smiled as Susan appeared to talk to the plants as if the sound of her voice could or would possibly create brighter or bigger flowers, or perhaps she catered to their needs to ensure their buds would solely make her home more beautiful, as her obsessive attention to detail masked an urgent need for perfection. A perfection that would never come to Susan Reynolds, mainly because she was never satisfied and never would be.

He almost laughed while watching as she tore off a small, discolored leaf, which was not even flawed and hardly worth the effort as far as he was concerned. Still, he gloated in silence, noticing everything from her slinky bustier to her manicured fingernails, polished to perfection in a soft pink hue as she tore at dead leaves.

Why bother with such trivial detailing? Greenberg thought, questioning the mental ability of the woman with whom he had become fixated. He watched as she fumbled

with different stems before carefully wrapping the dead, broken pieces in a peach paper napkin.

Who has time for this? He scoffed as he peered through the glass, leaning against a windowpane.

As entertaining as she was, Susan Reynolds was equally annoying, and he could not understand her attitude that if one drop of soil fell onto the home's expensive marble floor, it would propel her life into a wretched world of filth.

Filth like me, Robert decided and spat to the ground. Annoyed, he looked at his hands, which were ragged and bloodied from months of hard labor.

His once neatly groomed, his gentle hands were replaced with bitten cuticles and hardened calluses.

Robert remembered that there was a time when his hands were groomed by a manicurist as part of his weekly visits to a Coral Gables spa, but that was in an earlier occupation as a top physician in Miami, Florida.

Sadly, it was precisely one year ago, when she had betrayed his trust on that fateful day and had gotten busted for having over fifteen bottles of controlled substances in her precious Hermes handbag.

Robert tensed with the memories of how Susan Reynolds cried to the judge while insisting that it was not her fault, but the fault of the doctor who prescribed the medication.

In the courtroom, everyone, including the judge, sympathized with her dramatic innocence and her cleverly anointed sobbing, and within minutes of hearing her explain how she was victimized, his license was revoked.

Despite his lawyer David Graves's pleas for leniency, he was professionally and personally finished. Looking back, Robert agreed with his attorney that his case outcome could have been worse, as he wasn't given jail time, and he was not being ordered to pay his blasted victim any punitive damages. So, at the end of the day, Graves was pleased that all he had lost was his life as he knew it.

The rustle of palm trees blissfully swaying in the distance did nothing to ease his pain. Though he had managed to survive on a busboy salary, Greenberg simply could not allow the witch of a woman the freedom to escape the destruction she had brought to his life.

Glancing at the night sky, he swore silently at his foolishness in thinking he could treat such a wretched woman who, aside from being a con artist, lied so often and so quickly.

The gorgeous Susan Reynolds and her obsessive need for uppers and downers was the force behind all his current woes. The woman was a ticking time bomb who took uppers to systematically keep a heart rate beating so fast that no extra pound of weight could be added to her svelte figure. Then, come bedtime, she would shove an abundance of sleep aids down her throat to rest. However, Robert believed the downers were more to erase the franticness of her conscience as it must be challenging to face the torment and evils of one's ways, especially the nastiness of someone with her evil characteristics.

How she had not died still amazed him and would continue to do so until his dying day.

You blasted fool, he criticized. You should never have trusted that patient. She was the wrong number from day one and the downfall of your career.

The knowledge still made him crazy like a fox. Yet, at the time, he could not help himself, as he had been swept away by her voluptuous lips and dazzling smile.

You were such an easy target, thought Greenberg. He regretted prescribing Susan medication but knew he still would be if he had not gotten busted.

His week-long court trial ended as quickly as it began. Afterward, aside from being swamped with questions from local news media, his practice was closed, his marriage ruined, and his bank accounts bled dry by government officials and disgruntled families.

It had been a crisp October morning on that life-changing day. The sizzling summer months were long gone, as were the sexually charged nights spent with a lustful lady whose resemblance to Susan was so uncanny that he could not help but fantasize and obsess.

The morning of his arrest was a brilliant day that had started with a romp at a cheap hotel on Eighth Street, where he had shared a quick, lustful session with a sexy lass who settled all his wants and needs. The bodacious blonde was stacked like a young Monroe, and like the screen legend, she had sexy eyes, long lashes, and a stare that screamed, I am horny.

On the morning, he had met Susan Reynolds, Greenberg arrived at his offices after a quick release at his favorite trashy motel, and feeling jubilant, he dashed into his

reception area with a spring in his step while greeting each person he had met a good day.

Too focused on the upcoming Columbus Day Regatta and a mind full of sin, he gifted his assistant Jasmine Field a 'welcome to another crazy week' present as he did every Monday before settling into his office, his privacy, and his sanctuary.

Several minutes later, and after greeting waiting patients, Jasmine introduced a new patient, Susan Reynolds Kemp, and seemingly from nowhere, his erection almost doubled because new patient Susan was quite possibly the most beautiful woman he had ever met.

The tall, slender blonde, with baby blue eyes and tantalizing tits, stood in high black heels, a blue Chanel suit, and a Hermes Kelly handbag. Of course, he did not know the outfit details at the time of her visit. Greenberg admitted his defect in women's fashions and admitted to anyone that after hours and days of listening to his office staff chat about expensive accessories, he had become remotely aware of the cost of her attire.

Though Greenberg was not so impressed with the choice of her designer closet wear, he did make an extra effort with his own choice of clothing when Susan was coming into his office for an appointment, and he did enjoy watching her legs cross each time she recited a troublesome moment in her life.

Tonight, feeling himself getting hard, Greenberg touched his pants and sighed. He was a lot harder than usual, which was the excitement in the night, he surmised before drifting back to the thoughts of Susan.

The first moment he had met her, Susan was dressed in a light blue pantsuit, the top zippered tantalizingly low to expose a plentiful cleavage, and without being asked, she had seated herself on his suede couch, crossed her legs, and leaned forward to face him.

She tousled with her long hair and smiled her voluptuous, pink-stained lips. As lust flared in her sea blue eyes, she had allowed her tongue to wet her upper lip, just enough to get the reaction she craved, which caught Greenberg off guard because it was usually, he who played dirty. Yet, it pleased him when Susan played coy because he admired a woman who knew what she wanted and would not stop until her desires were satisfied.

The new patient in his office wanted prescription pills regardless of cost or how many visits it took to secure a regular supply, and she handed him a list of the drugs she wanted.

Like a fool who is easily tamed, he wrote prescriptions and cautioned about the dangers of mixed chemical reactions.

She was unconcerned and merely answered that she was fine on all the medications as, while in California and under the care of Leonard Marks, she had taken everything on her list without compromising anyone else.

On that visit, she was sharp, bright, and confident in her knowledge of chemical interactions, which made it hard for him to resist her wit, and like an immature high school boy, he could not resist an urge to satisfy her needs.

Tonight, it repulsed him at how easily he had allowed her beauty and pretentious charm to use, con, and destroy him.

After getting into trouble by the feds, his lawyer David Graves had reluctantly informed him that contrary to Susan's claim, there was no Dr. Leonard Marks in California or any other State. The man did not exist, not in the medical field, but there was a janitor in one of Los Angeles' top hospitals, the only medical worker with the same name, and that deemed her a liar.

There was only one word for a woman like her: bitch.

She was a spiteful, manipulative bitch who had flippantly teased and tormented his masculinity.

Then, she had taunted his ability to medically assess her falsified documents as if he were not qualified to treat her complexities, and for what?

To collect an endless stream of prescription drugs. The show was a joke and angered him because he had treated her well. I did more than that, he thought. I generously bestowed a grandness over her head when in fact, she deserved nothing more than being called what she was, a tacky junky.

Greenberg straightened his stance, and noticing his leg was sinking into a murky pool of slush, he struggled to steady his footing before falling into a pool of dark water gathering in a weakened flower bed.

Shaking off mud, he remembered that he was highly gracious, considering the selfishness she had bestowed on his staff and, often, him.

That was who she was and is, he reflected. Susan was all about herself. The sight of her tonight angered him more than ever. He contemplated smashing the glass and grabbing her by her slender throat or whatever he could hold because she deserved some pain for all the chaos she had created in his life after she had exposed the seedy side of his medical practice and his staff's devotion to helping the sick, which Susan claimed was a front, which was totally not true. His staff cared, and that snippet from Susan's testimony hurt more than all the other bogus claims she had made.

The carelessness leading to her arrest was long overdue, and Greenberg should have seen it coming.

Maybe he did, but he was too deep to stop the snowflake from rolling into a giant snowball.

On the day of her arrest, Susan was booked for driving recklessly along Bird Avenue in Coconut Grove, which resulted in her crashing into a City of Miami Police Department's parked car.

Instead of stopping, she led the police on a chase before smashing into a storefront window, almost killing three pedestrians and countless others.

Completely smashed, Susan Reynolds showed no remorse. She chose, instead, to curse at bystanders for standing in her way, and when local police tried to cuff her, she lashed out at a police officer for grabbing her arms and then punched a male officer.

A crowd of people live streamed video onto social media when it was uncovered that Susan was the wife of movie star Jay Kemp. Then, in minutes, local news teams in helicopters circled like vultures, making individual

comments about Hollywood when they should be doing their jobs, reporting the news as nobody cared about their individual opinions as that is not what they are getting paid for.

Remembering one video on channel Five News, which showed Susan crying for her beloved SUV more than the innocent victims she had mowed down, Greenberg smiled for the first time tonight.

Susan had expressed fear that her husband would kill her once he saw the smashed vehicle, as it was her second that year, which caused tension in the city streets.

Most hardworking people do not have the funds to blatantly flaunt wealth, let alone act like a smashed Porsche was no big deal as I will have a new one by tomorrow, said Susan, which was not taken lightly by the police or the public. But worse than her vile words, her arrest brought Detective Bryan Murray and his partner of eight years, Gary Greene, into his upscale medical office chipper as a lark early the following day. Local television stations interrupted regular programming to announce movie star Jay Kemp's wife had been almost killed in an auto accident the previous day while under his private care.

The crazy bitch had forcibly thrust him into a media frenzy that sparked a thirst around Miami from local news stations, who sent broadcasters abuzz with questions about his client's condition.

Sensationalized journalistic gossip entered the home of almost every resident via television, radio, or newspaper in South Florida, mocking his quality of care, describing him as a doctor who sought an elite clientele, a patient with

money, as only the wealthy could afford his service, which depicted him a disgrace to his doctorate and the community itself.

Once the scandal made national news, his wife Elizabeth was so shaken and upset she fled to upstate New York to escape the hype.

Once sheltered by family in New York, she refused to accept his phone calls, which made him feel the lowest of the low, not as hated as a murderer but hated more than a pedophile.

The cool ocean breeze helped soothe Greenberg's heated brow but offered no relief to the torment that grew inside his broken heart.

Yes, he had cheated on his loyal wife, Elizabeth, but none of those other women meant anything to him. It had always been Liz whom he loved, cared for, and respected.

When she left, she broke him, both physically and mentally, and now?

He regretted all the heartache he had caused Elizabeth as he still loved his ex-wife and always would. Accepting his forever love for his wife, Greenberg was saddened, for it pained him to know that through fanciful lust, he had ruined the one truth in his life. A throbbing deep within his chest caused him to be tense, and though remorseful, he cast his thoughts aside and leaned against the side of the house, fearing dizziness. As faintness loomed, Greenberg pushed his hand hard against the pain.

The ache caused his heart to beat rapidly, forcing his lungs to gasp for air. Though fearful of falling, Greenberg noted that the beating of his heart reminded him he still had

feelings. These feelings, though revengeful, confirmed his suspicions that he had made the right decision to avenge Susan.

Before his demise, he had lived an affluent life and studied hard to get his doctorate degree, which enabled him to enjoy his expensive suits, fancy cars, and homes around the globe. On the contrary, Susan had married her fortune, and though a model since her teenage years, she had never been inclined to further her education.

Now look at her, Greenberg spat. She was living large. Yet, in contrast, he saw poverty as he struggled to make ends meet. But not for long, hissed Greenberg, who was determined to reclaim his former lifestyle and expose the former model's drug-infused state of mind.

Revenge is sweet, he snarled, facing the oceanic breeze to soothe his heated body. As are you, Susan Reynold, as are you.

Greenberg sighed profoundly and steadied a fluttering deep within his chest, and though the breathing exercises were not helping, he fought hard to calm his anxiousness.

The wind blew hard against the growing heat of his flesh. A new vision of Susan illuminated by a soft table light ignites his senses and eases the anguish of his mission.

A smile etched his lips, he noted the word bitch was used repeatedly when near Susan, but he did not care. It was the only word his educated mind could think of when viewing the wretched woman who had recklessly destroyed his life.

Peering through a smaller pane of glass on the side of the house that her husband Jay Kemp owned, Greenberg

guffawed at her restlessness, watching as she rushed around the living room alarmingly.

He leaned closer against the house as freshly cut grass filled his nostrils, awakening his senses to fields of evergreens and life on a country estate.

What a joke. All dreams of retiring and disappearing into oblivion on a farm in the middle of nowhere were shattered.

He shook his head. Maybe he was doomed to be poverty-stricken and alone.

Whatever.

At least he could come and go as he pleased, which pleased him plenty, particularly the spy missions he had been enjoying for months.

Tonight, he laughed inwardly and smiled in the darkness.

She was busy fluffing pillows on the couch, and it looked like she was living and breathing pure tension or drug withdrawal.

Still, more than anything, strung out.

He scorned her restlessness to occupy a fleeting mind until Mr. Kemp returned to their lavish estate.

What a fabulous pair of breasts she had, he admired, carefully wiping away water from the sprinkler system with an old rag he had found next to an automobile parked in their lavish driveway.

Finally, he could see, and though the figure was blurry, he knew her physique well enough to know that every bit of flesh was tanned and toned.

Suddenly squinting against the outside humidity and the blasted frigid air blowing inside, thanks to their ultramodern air conditioning unit, he did not have a clear shot of Susan no matter which window he looked through, but it did not matter; he could see enough to know she was high.

In the past, he had spent numerous sessions watching her dark pupils dart around his office, and right now, he knew she was on uppers as nobody had this much energy, especially at ten o'clock at night. Well, nobody who woke at dawn to engage in a rigorous exercise routine.

He wiped water droplets from his cap, a Miami Dolphins football team hat that was part of a disguise to hide his face, and then he inhaled and exhaled before noticing water dripping down.

He sighed deeply again.

This is not good.

Greenberg wiped his face with the dirty cloth and moaned inwardly before glancing at a billion stars shining brightly through a cloudless sky.

Then, he noticed another valve on the sprinkler system was running, scattering water across the lawn, and pushed against the wall to avoid being completely soaked.

The State of Florida was in a drought season, yet she was watering the property grounds without care or reason.

Technically, Susan should be arrested.

City officials in charge did not take kindly to residents who ignored temporary laws that ordered them not to replenish their gardens, wash their cars, or fill up pools.

All plant-loving residents and horticulturists alike, such as fanatics like Susan Reynolds, who believed in Climate

Change yet wasted the earth's water supply, paid no attention to rules. These obsessive lunatics did not recycle, so news that Lake Okeechobee was low from lack of rain meant nothing to them. But rules were rules, and nobody was allowed to use excessive water, let alone a sprinkler system, as she was doing, which simply showed she held no regard for the law.

He had his cell phone in his pocket and thought to take a photo of her reckless use of the city's water but decided against it as doing so would cause officials to question how he obtained such pictures.

Greenberg moved through the bushes and stood outside a tall glass door that offered optimum views and nodded as he watched his former patient charge around the luxuriously furnished living room in a quest to keep everything tidy and clean.

She appeared to be on autopilot, and her ongoing erratic behavior was that of a junkie desperate to pass the time if only to ease a craving for drugs.

As a doctor whose niche was psychiatry, he spent years treating patients with addictions, and he knew when they lied and cheated and indulged in their drug of choice without care or concern for others.

Outside the house, he noted that Susan's husband, Jay, probably had no idea she was still a user spinning lie upon lie to soothe a troubled mind.

Former medical expert Robert Greenberg did not doubt she could pass every urine test possible to humanity, for she was no ordinary woman.

Susan was a robotic contraption hidden inside a feminine beauty.

Most people would crash under pressure, but not her.

No, not the captivating Susan, for she seemingly sailed through every task with minimum effort.

It was as if she possessed an inward strength that, though admirable, drained those weaker, if not physically, mentally. She could outwit and fool others, especially sincere souls who believed her lies, mainly people like him, who trusted too much, becoming easy prey for her to target.

Greenberg stepped away from the window. As he strode through mud, a thought entered his mind. And though violent, he promised that after tonight, his last night to snoop, he would bring the object of his attention down to the gutter, even if it killed him in the process.

He chuckled softly. I am not going to die, he murmured to himself. Not by anything Susan did, that is for sure.

Although the hot and humid weather had a chance to knock me six feet under, it would not happen tonight; even if I wore extra clothing, such as this camouflage outfit that weighs heavily over my regular clothes, I am still going to live.

His thoughts fell silent as he focused on ocean waves pounding into the coastline.

Despite a welcoming morning view, Greenberg envisioned that life on the coast could damage property and people, too, and he pondered how many people had 'accidentally' fallen from the cliffs into the sea below before.

It was seventy-four degrees outside, and a cold front was forecast to engulf South Florida within the next week,

dropping temperatures to the low fifties. Robert wondered if the weather was correct because, right now, sweat clung to the back of his neck, and his forehead was on fire from his tightly fitted combat clothing.

The brutal, sticky air constrained his body and concealed all yearnings. Only he knew how he would like to grab Susan, touch her wetness, and taste her juices. After doing so, he would shove his tool inside the pathway of her well-oiled machine, which was protected like an armored truck's guard, and then he would rip her insides out.

Because of her.

He had lost everything.

Greenberg nodded.

He was a good doctor who was understanding, trusting, and caring.

If Susan Reynolds had not been a referral from another client, he would not have allowed her to mesmerize his penmanship on his prescription pad.

Remembering, Greenberg realized what a stupid mistake he had made and kicked himself for ever trusting the bitch.

He despised Susan so much for her selfishness.

He loathed her.

Still, he wanted her.

A few minutes later, Robert Greenberg became restless and moved further away from the house. He turned and walked the rest of the way back to his bicycle.

Aside from the suffocating heat, his back was in agonizing pain, a pain he had not experienced until last year

when the police department grabbed him and flung him into a holding cell on the day of his arrest.

Over the past year, he hoped the pain and anger would disappear once his accomplice Susan was punished, but his hope fell short when she received no sentencing.

Then, besieged by anger, he devised a plan to destroy his former patient, and if that meant driving her mad with his nightly games, then so be it.

He, like Susan, did not care. His concern now was ensuring she suffered until he was satisfied that justice had prevailed.

Nothing more, and nothing less.

Greenberg shook his head and shrugged. Do not worry, she will flounder, he assured himself while crouched beside a bush to hide from a neighbor who appeared to be roaming her garden.

Silently, he sat. In his resume, he was a prominent doctor of Psychiatry in Miami, Florida, respected in the community, and a lecturer at the University of Miami, one of the better schools in Florida. However, his affluent life crumbled the day a patient caused a road accident while inebriated on prescription pills and medication bottles all prescribed by him.

The reckless patient was Susan, whom he had instructed and who had promised to obey and never to carry the enormous collection of drugs on a person. Yet, she had, and worse, most were strewn carelessly in a plastic bag without the prescription bottle. She had argued later on the phone that she had safeguarded her pills outside the bottles to protect his name. Still, her actions alerted the police to

investigate what the medication was and for what, which led to their arrival at his doctor's practice.

He wanted to scream when he found out that her car's interior was covered in pills as they had fallen from an open designer handbag onto the floor of her vehicle.

Best friend and lawyer, David Graves, had informed him that the interior of Susan Reynold's SUV was like a drug store in that hundreds of pills were everywhere, even stuffed inside the console, the drink cup holders, and the passenger door.

As police officers stared in disbelief, one savvy officer, Detective Murray, packaged each bottle, noted the doctor's name, and took notes.

Greenberg remembered that morning as if it were yesterday.

The sharply dressed detective entered his office with two uniformed police officers and then interrupted his cozy confession room, much to the dismay of the patient involved in a forty-five-minute private session.

Robust and fit, Detective Murray held a document and offered Greenberg one of two choices.

He would either leave willingly and go with them to their downtown precinct, or he would be cited at once, forcibly detained, and dragged downtown to police headquarters.

Initially, he flatly denied even knowing Susan Reynolds. He argued against her accusations, pointing out all his patients suffered from mental trauma and that a stolen prescription pad could be the only conclusion he could think of as to why the woman was carrying such an extensive collection of

medicine. But his explanation apparently ignored as neither the officers, notably Detective Murray, believed or bought his fabricated story.

Shortly after the accusing detective's arrival, and during his accosting remarks, his assistant, Jasmine Fields, rushed into his treatment room to await a signal as to whether to contact an attorney and destroy all evidence.

'Yes,' he had eyed, giving her authority to shred all the files about fake patients who merely paid large amounts of money for his prescription pill services.

The detective issued a subpoena to search all his medical practice. Suffice it to say, both his efforts and Jasmine's proved futile, and other than Jasmine scrambling through his address book in search of his defense lawyer's phone number, all other credentials were seized.

After his arrest, his lawyer pleaded with the judge to allow him minimal sentencing, explaining that the loss of his license to practice medicine was punishment enough, and though the judge heard all about his charitable connections within Miami Dade County, he tossed the news aside, as the judge treated him worse than an animal abuser who had witnessed a dog pissing on a rug. And then he was finished.

Twelve years of schooling and a twenty-year-old practice were gone just like that.

Snap!

Former doctor Robert Greenberg clicked his thumb to his middle finger to imitate his thoughts before recounting the hellish ordeal to which he had been subjected. His career, friends, wife, and lover left him, and they all quit,

even the bitch who is created all the drama, but unlike the others, she would not escape.

Soon, Susan Reynolds would feel all the pain she had caused him back tenfold.

Knowing tomorrow he would call the Drug Enforcement Agency; he shook his head firmly as he detested the flock of martyrs who reveled in arresting and charging those who tried to survive in a world that was overpriced and underpaid.

Greenberg felt his phone vibrating in his jacket pocket and reached for it. He glanced at the text and quickly responded that he was ready.

Since most people owned their own phones, favoring family share plans, and technology had virtually wiped-out public phones, he would have to drive to the airport and search inside for a pay phone if he could find one to report Susan for breaking her probation.

Greenberg managed to extract himself from the entanglement of a large bush and its prickly leaves that he had hidden behind and pulled off numerous twigs that stung his hands.

Cautiously, he rose, peering toward the neighbor's house where an elderly woman lived, the one who had chosen to stroll in her garden right before he wanted to leave. He rose from the ground and slithered away from the garage door, brushing past the foliage his heavy boots had trampled before he snaked his way back to where he had hidden his beaten old pushbike, determined to make a phone complaint that would sink Susan Reynolds.

Afterward, a toast would be good, and ten toasts would be better, and then he would lose count because all he wanted was the satisfaction that Susan Reynolds was as miserable as him.

Revenge is bittersweet, he thought triumphantly.

Like a hand of poker, his ace was almost on the table.

He looked ahead again. He was determined to get his bike and leave. And whether the feds burdened Susan or not, he would relish with delight that their presence would alert her husband and his hounds of fans that yet, it is true. Movie Star Jay Jennings was an addict.

Greenberg cleared his throat.

He hated sneaking around.

If he had any savings, he would have gladly paid someone else to do this dirty deed, but he was financially broke, and unless a former friend offered him consulting work, poor was where he would remain.

He turned and faced the house and nodded at the massive wealth it signified, and all the prosperity it was built around.

He did not want to leave.

He had come to feel safe there, tucked deep beneath the large shrubbery and squeezed between the oversized garage structure that allowed easy access to all the elaborate windows that faced the Atlantic Ocean.

Greenberg lowered his head, sighing at the vast wealth that surrounded Susan. This was not a time to reminisce, he cautioned. Right now, you must leave.

Suddenly, shots blasted through the quiet evening and sounded like a rocket blasting off into orbit.

He stopped walking and froze, listening as the earth-shattering sound rifled across the quiet tree-lined row of homes until a harrowing scream echoed through the peacefulness of Bayshore Cove, a private community of oceanfront property situated along Bayside Drive in Coconut Grove.

Greenberg smiled at the noise echoing from Jay Kemp's mega-mansion and chuckled heartily as a woman's ear-piercing screams filled the air, sending shockwaves throughout the pristine neighborhood.

'Good gracious,' he moaned, hastening his space. He slid through the gated entry, noticing Jay's Porsche parked in front of the main entryway's door.

Once outside the gates and off the property owned by Kemp, he rushed back to his bicycle, galloping at racehorse speed.

The Kentucky Derby could not compete with me tonight, he bragged, aware of how fast his legs moved. Then he wrestled with bushes and uncovered his bike, tucked away behind an endless row of bushes before he jumped on and rode away.

The nearby park was open to the public though not after sundown. Still, if spotted or questioned by police, it was a safer place to be apprehended than trespassing on private property.

Greenberg pulled off his mask, quickly threw his combat outer garments into a sports bag, and checked himself for visible snares and cuts. Thankfully, there were none.

He peddled to the road before stopping.

He turned his head toward the Kemp household and watched as security trucks raced to the scene.

A silent snicker erupted into fits of laughter.
"I'll be damned," he yelled as a broad smile etched his face.
"I believe the husband shot the bitch, and it's about time too."