

Chapter Seven

Friday morning was lovely, the sun out again, the bright blue sky softened by some wispy clouds. There was a feeling in the air; the air felt like satin, a quietness and calmness seemed to be around.

I was at the work surface having opened the French windows in the kitchen to look out at the beautiful day. I had just made tea when Charlie came into the kitchen, wagging his tail so much it was hard not to laugh at him and pat him. I got his water dish from under the sink and washed it out then gave him a drink. Where there was Charlie there should be Tristan; I went to the windows and saw Tristan coming down the path with another young guy; they were talking.

This other guy was very attractive from my viewpoint, wearing jeans and a blue t-shirt with a dark blue tartan shirt over it, his hair shone in the sun and was pushed behind his ears. As he and Tristan got closer, I realized it was Corbett. Wow, modern clothes, and his hair behind his ears showing off that bone structure, he was as I had first thought very good looking.

When they were on the patio I greeted them, and was rewarded with a big smile from both, it was great to see Tristan a bit happier than last night.

I offered them coffee and Tristan said he would make it, Charlie had heard the raison toast pop up in the toaster and I gave him a piece. He took it to the area where his water bowl was to eat it.

“How are things going Tristan, with Corbett, he’s looking good”, and I noticed that Corbett had some sneakers from somewhere.

Tristan spoke happily, “I can’t believe how delighted with everything Corbett is, he’s still having a great time”.

I pointed at Corbett’s sneakers and gave him a smile. Tristan elaborated on my approval for the sneakers in their language and Corbett grinned and to my surprise did a lovely spin around like a dancer.

“Wow”, I said smiling again.

Tristan grinned too, he put coffee down on the table in front of Corbett who then sat down; to me he said, “The most remarkable thing has happened, Laura has taken Corbett under her wing, she got him the sneakers; actually I think she likes him, as in, really likes him”.

“That’s cool; well he is very good looking, intelligent and nice too, what about the language?” I was beaming because this was a great development. I was happy to hear it.

“They are trading words, and I heard her this morning change some of her French to his and he a little time later did the same, he’s changing his French for hers. So I am telling him the alternative words”.

Corbett was watching us, and suddenly said something to Tristan, and smiled at me.

“He says my lady is very pretty”, Tristan grinned.

I smiled at him.

“What’s going on this morning Tristan, do you have plans?” I asked.

“Chloe, Corbett is becoming my right hand man so to speak, he’s so into the whole trip he has taken, I’m amazed at his resilience; it has kind of perked me up this morning. I think he will help me “find” the jewellery in the font if I ask him, and I just might. It would be such a good cover story here I am showing the visitor around and he loves the font, is feeling around the Griffin and there it is, it swings in and a pouch of treasure is revealed. The font must have dried out a bit now it is out of the ground and enabled the secret compartment to be found. I would tell James the story first naturally and then when the treasure was

handed back to Jack maybe it would cover the shortfall and he would stop with this selling stuff off”.

I looked at Tristan, “Impressive plotting Tristan, I couldn’t have done better myself. Just what will the pouch contain, a few stones as well as the jewellery, as we don’t know what they might be worth?”

“I thought yes, I want to go into the city today and try to get some kind of estimate on what the stones are and might be worth. I think they may be worth lots but you know I never had to think about things like that, I just saw the jewelled daggers and swords, I had my rings, my family wore jewels; it was liked decoration to me, fur to keep warmer, coloured stones to make things attractive. The fighting swords were plainer. I was very privileged as a child”, he became pensive for a moment and then reached in his pocket and got the three stones he had kept back from the Eleanor treasure. He put them on the table.

Corbett looked hard at them and then speaking to Tristan, he picked them up and looked closely at them.

He was talking to Tristan and seemed to know something about the stones.

Tristan shook his head and asked Corbett something and then he said to me, “Corbett says these are big precious stones, diamond, the best ruby, a sapphire, he says in his time they are worth a great deal. Maybe they are now”.

“Excellent Tristan that means you can put a few of them in the pouch with the jewellery and there you are Jack has his treasure.

Let’s face it he’s been looking for it as long as I have known you”.

Tristan drank some of his coffee, “I think he may have been looking for it far longer than that Chloe”.

Charlie wagged his tail and sat down next to Corbett, who fondled his ears. It looked like Corbett was a good addition to our group; I was pleased I had tested the portal with fruit that morning. I suddenly realized that we had not given the nine o’clock slot a thought, oh well.

“Chloe, Corbett is an archer as well as a glazer, I have seen him shoot in fairs, in the past, of course but he’s quite good, I mean you know he doesn’t fight, but it’s a sport for him. I was thinking to get Ben and Oliver to take him down to their archery club; I know he would enjoy that. What do you think?”

I told Tristan that I thought it was a great idea and wasn’t that interesting that one of Ben’s ancestors shared his interest in archery. Then I gently added what might happen when Corbett wanted to go home, would Tristan and now Laura miss him, would we just push him onto the reed pad at an allotted portal opening time. I was looking at him kindly and only wanted to find out if Tristan had thought of any of this.

His expression changed; he looked so sad and thoughtful. Without thinking about Corbett watching I went to him and put my arms around him as he sat in the chair near Corbett, I leaned over him and kissed him on the cheek.

“Tristan you don’t want Corbett to go do you?”

“No and yes if he wants to; I trust him implicitly to say nothing about the portal. Gui is a different story; I think he would realize something and maybe bring others back to the portal. Not maliciously, but simply because it’s strange. I couldn’t just push Gui back through an opening, and I wouldn’t do that to Corbett, he could choose”.

He had turned to me as I leaned over him and now kissed me just quickly and gently.

“How is Gui adjusting is he ok, I hope you have replenished his food stocks”. I said and letting go of Tristan I sat down near him.

“He’s very well taken care of Chloe, and he seems ok but he has mentioned his family to Corbett, he may start to get homesick soon. I don’t know what will happen then”.

I thought about Tristan finding information out about the precious stones he had.

“So Tristan maybe you should think up a story for the jeweller I mean it may look suspicious just wandering in with the precious stones”.

“I have, I thought I would say my father left them when he died; they’ve been in the family years and I have just had them kicking around, it’s not so far from the truth”. He pushed them around a little on the table then picked up the big red one, “This is a bit like the stone in my ring”, he commented.

“Your ring is lovelier Tristan I smiled at him”.

Corbett asked Tristan something then glancing at me as he did, and Tristan laughed as he answered.

He stood up and picking up the stones stuffed them back into his jeans pocket. I think we will go now Chloe; I’ll call you later.

I put my hand on his arm, “What did Corbett say to you just then Tristan, it seemed like it was about me?”

“Oh nothing Chloe, I’ll call you later I desperately want to get on with the plan to stop Jack selling stuff”.

Just then, the doorbell rang and it was Leslie the archaeologist with a couple of guys. I let her into the house; they were going to start on the glass screen and door affair in the big drawing room.

There was a small truck outside with timber on it and a white dog in the passenger seat, which was looking out of the open window. Eyeing us with hope, I thought. He looked cute as one eye had a black circle of fur around it, on his otherwise totally white face it looked like an eye patch.

Leslie’s big four-wheel drive with the county archaeology department logo was out there too.

I took her straight down to the big drawing room and told her I was about to make coffee if they would like me to bring some down. That seemed to do down well and they started talking about the job they had to do.

I went down to the kitchen and found Tristan and Corbett had gone out onto the patio with Charlie who was watching a wasp in the plants there.

Tristan came forward to me and put a hand on my upper arm he gently kissed my cheek. “I’ll call you”, he said and I gave Corbett a little wave as they both started up the path to the woods.

I made the new work team coffee and put a packet of chocolate biscuits on the tray; when I took it down to the big drawing room I asked Leslie how long the job might take and she said a few days.

In my room, I picked up Tristan’s ring that was on my desk next to the whole roundel, which featured both Oliver and Tristan as knights. I put it on and ran my fingertip across the big red stone, it felt like satin, just as the other big red stones in the Eleanor treasure had done. I put it down thinking Tristan was so kind and I felt miserable for him thinking Jack might sell the stables and this house and the woods that Tristan seemed to love. It was obvious Tristan was not possession oriented when in all this time he had not amassed his own fortune nor insisted on some of the Dearing property deeds being in his name. I guessed that he had always been thinking of what he owed the Dearings for keeping him a secret and for protecting the stained glass in the abbey. I was shocked by Jack’s attitude, it occurred to me that maybe Jack did not fully understand what Tristan was. Some small seed of fear for Tristan dropped into my mind. If Jack found out about Tristan’s blood, maybe he would find a way to make money from that. As it was, he seemed only to know that the stained glass kept Tristan alive. I looked at my cell phone I wanted to ask Tristan right then the extent of Jack’s understanding of his condition, but I didn’t, Tristan had enough to think about.

I was by my big cupboard and suddenly had the idea to look at the treasure; I carefully opened just the one pouch. What if one of these stones was worth so much it could make Tristan rich? I mean you hear about the Hope diamond and similar jewels, maybe if Tristan was independently wealthy, he could just buy his own house, and the woods and stables from the Dearings and get the deeds in his own name. How sick was that though, and I was trying to remember what he had said about my dad not knowing the house was his, because the Dearing trust appeared as owning it. That's what was wrong really; Tristan was swallowed up in the Dearing trust. He worked hard and it would have been inconceivable to him that Jack would keep on wanting to sell the places that were the closest to his heart.

I had one of the biggest red stones in my hand and I looked at it, I would love to know what this stuff was worth, just for Tristan's sake.

I went to my computer and Googled dealers in precious stones.

There were quite a few in a nearby city, and naturally heaps in London, I was interested in one that was on the outskirts of a nearby city, they seemed very big and were attached to an auction house; it had some endorsements from the very big names in the art and antique auction world.

I desperately wanted to help Tristan, I wondered if Oliver was available that afternoon, I didn't want to disturb him if he was working and we had arranged to go to Kool Kafé that night but I decided to call and check.

Oliver said he could be with me about three if that was any good and I agreed that it would be quicker if I met him at his place. We could take the fork in the lane below his road that led to a bigger road, which crossed above the motorway and into the outskirts of the city where the auction house was situated. It might take a half hour.

I weighed the red stone in my hand I had no idea what it weighed and from the website, I realized it had to be carats anyway. There was no way I knew what they felt like.

I got the beautiful green stone out of the pouch, the one that looked like green water from some tropical island pool. I would take both of these.

I know what you are thinking, maybe I should just take the red stone, and it is a risk as well as a bit of a nerve, but you understand, I wanted to help Tristan.

I printed out the address and Google directions to get there and put the stones in the button down pocket of my jean jacket. Its one thing showing the things to a dealer, and quite another to have lost them, as I pulled my cell phone out of my jeans pocket. Let's face it, you probably remember some other incriminating evidence that flew out of my jeans pocket.

I went off to Oliver's place about fifteen minutes before three and arrived just as he was pulling into his drive in the old Landrover.

He got out smiling at me, "What are you up to then?" he asked as I got out of my Wrangler and walked towards him.

I was grinning and having already outlined my plan to Oliver on the phone just filled him in on where exactly I wanted to go and why. He said he would drive and knew the route into the next city; I just needed to tell him which exit to take to the business suburb that was on the outskirts.

On the way, I told Oliver about the whole sorry situation and he was just as appalled as I was that no deed was in Tristan's name.

"The Dearings might have been protecting Tristan but it's turned out that Jack at least may have also been protecting himself. Haven't you always had a sneaking feeling there was more to him hiding Tristan's sword and the other archaeological finds in the base of that globe?" Oliver asked as I finished the story.

"I wanted to think it was to protect Tristan but who knows now? Oliver I wonder what it would take for Tristan to set up his own trust or whatever, and use the income from the Eleanor treasure or some of it to purchase his house and woods and his stables and for that

matter anything else he wanted of the estates. If it was a generic name, like The Waterfall Trust or something Jack would not know it was Tristan. Not to be malicious, just for Tristan to be independent. If it solved Jack's problems then what harm could it do?"

I ventured this question and idea to Oliver who had set up his own company and might know something that would help.

Oliver had stopped at a junction; he glanced at me with a smile on his face, and then turned left.

"You are the master planner Chloe, but in a way it's a good idea, there will be ways as long as Tristan has proof of identity as in modern day stuff, does he have a passport or anything. Maybe not, how would he do that unless someone had helped forge a birth certificate. Then again maybe if he has a bank account, tell you what I'll ask my dad, he helped me, sometimes it's handy to have a lawyer for a father".

I leaned across the seat and kissed him quickly on the cheek,

"Thanks Oliver I think Tristan really needs help this time what with the portal and all".

"Hell, I had for just a minute there forgotten the portal, any news on that?" Oliver said laughingly.

"Not today Oliver, but guess what, Corbett and Laura seem to be becoming an item".

Oliver laughed out loud, "Poor Corbett, no, that's unkind; she has changed quite a bit, if they care for each other then the best of luck to them both. Though I have heard long distance relationships never work and a thousand years is a fair distance". He laughed again and I smiled, "Maybe Corbett will not go back, who knows".

Oliver stopped laughing, "Maybe", he said.

We had reached the Auction house, it was big, they had a very large car park to the left of the front entrances, and we could drive straight in it as we approached on the road from the left.

There was a big door open at the side of their building that faced into the car park. It was like one of those big barn doors that opened and you could drive a tractor into it. Outside a van was parked and men in maroon coloured cotton canvas coats were unloading things from the van. Some of the things were visible but others were in crates. The men wore white gloves and were handling the items expertly and swiftly.

A glass door to the right of this barn type door was closed up; it had a big logo embossed onto the glass. Oliver and I walked around to the front; there were two doors side by side, one was embossed Stannidge Art and Antiques Dealers and Auctioneers the other door was Dealers in fine jewellery and precious stones. This was the one we wanted. It was locked and there was a doorbell, which we didn't know if we should ring.

We decided to go into the open door of the auction side and ask if the precious stone people were open. A tall woman in a lovely fuchsia pink dress and jacket told us they were and to ring the doorbell. She was very elegant, her nails were French polished, and her hair pulled back in a glossy dark brown chignon. She was also very nice and gave us a smile saying again, just go and ring the doorbell.

Oliver and I almost backed away from her, and then turned and went back out of the door. Outside, I rang the doorbell of the precious stone dealers; a woman opened the door. She was older than the other one and not quite as tall, but still her navy blue business suit looked very expensive, and she wore almost an identical navy blue top under the jacket. Her nails were pink and her blonde hair cut into a bobbed style.

When I told her I had a couple of stones I just hoped someone might tell me what they were, even if they couldn't tell me the value, she smiled a kind smile and said Mr Edward Stannidge was in and he would take a look. She went through a glass partition that had seemed like a wall of glass to me, but somehow a door had appeared for her. The place was

very swish, opulent even, cool and decorated in muted colours, there was a single photograph on the wall adjacent to the glass door wall, it was very large and showed an excellent necklace, like a lace golden collar with a huge blue stone glittering and hanging like a teardrop from it. The thing looked like some ancient Egyptian artefact.

Mr Edward Stannidge was younger than I expected, perhaps thirty. Plain grey suit, white shirt, he introduced himself, we went to sit at a dark wooden table with him that was just inside the glass door area, and I went into Chloe the liar mode as if I was born to it.

"I have these pebbles from when I was little; my grandfather and I dug them up in a desert area we used to go to, near Albuquerque. We got an arrowhead one year too, that's in a museum as it turned out to be ancient Native American. Anasazi Indian. Anyway, here are the pebbles. I was going to get the red one cut into a teardrop shape for a necklace you know, but one of my friends said it was probably worth a couple of hundred pounds and I should at least find out it would cut up as it may just shatter. The other one grandpa and I always thought was a bit of glass as it shimmers".

I had put the stones on this mat thing he had put down as I talked.

Hey, look the arrowhead thing is true, so what if I used that story for the stones. He looked at them and at me a couple of times as I spoke. He got out this eyeglass thing and checked the two stones. Then he asked if I would like to come with him to look more closely at them. I followed him to another area of the place, and he had little scales and like computerized machines in there, a sort of telescope affair attached to a computer. He seemed also to be checking a document on a laptop for a while. I was busy checking out the whole place, which seemed completely made of glass with invisible doors. The area we were in you could see Oliver still at the table through the glass but I knew he couldn't see us.

Mr Stannidge took me back to the table and put the stones on the mat thing.

I had introduced myself as Chloe Stewart, which was my grandmother's name, and he addressed me now,

"Miss Stewart, these pebbles as you call them are precious stones. The red one is very fine and at eleven carats and as a pigeon blood ruby, a buyer may pay more than a hundred thousand pounds per carat for it. The piece of glass is one of the finest emeralds I have ever seen, first water, and just over sixteen carats, a buyer might pay more than a million pounds for it".

I just looked at him stunned, "Sorry, Mr Stannidge, could there be a mistake, I have another bigger red one and a blue lump of glass too at home on my desk. You know they are keepsakes as my grandpa is dead now".

"I assure you Miss Stewart I can of course understand if you would like a second opinion." He smiled at me, "Seriously here is my card, I can find buyers for these stones and I will look at the other pebble and lump of glass for you, should you want to drop by with them, it will be my pleasure". I took his card and just to show I was nonchalant about the stones I spun the red one around on the mat as I thanked him. I picked the two stones up and he winced slightly when I stuffed them into my jean jacket pocket again. The blonde woman appeared and we were shown out of the place and the locked door clicked again behind us.

I grabbed Oliver's hand as we hit the pavement and held it very tightly; he had been silent all this time. "Chloe did you and your grandfather really find an Anasazi arrowhead?"

I breathed out, I felt almost dizzy after that shocking display in the dealers, and I tightened my hand over Oliver's as we went down the car park.

"Yes that part is true", I told Oliver.

He stopped walking and so I had to, "Chloe, that's quite a grip you've got on my hand, I think its stopping my circulation, there will definitely be a mark, either way, I think it's safe for you to let go, no-one seems to be following us".

I looked at him, then let go of his hand, "Oliver that was so scary, I kept thinking he would phone the police or ask for some kind of ID, and when he said how much the things were worth I very nearly stopped breathing".

He shook his hand as I let go, "Chloe, it's ok, you did well, you did it for Tristan, no one is hurt, nothing is lost. On the contrary if Tristan sells these then he could get his house in his own name and maybe the stables too".

I sighed, "Thanks Oliver, sorry about your hand, do you want to go and get coffee or something before we go home, or maybe just get the stones back in the cupboard. Sorry yes, let's do that I suddenly feel afraid I may lose them. That would be dreadful. Thank heavens we are going to Kool Kafé tonight I don't think I could be in the same room as the Eleanor treasure all night".

Oliver laughed, "It's the same stuff that's been in the tunnel for weeks Chloe, and you were ok with it last night, it's just the shock of how valuable those two stones are. Who knows those two may be the pick of the bunch I bet the blue ones and the clear ones are worth a quid each or something".

We got into the car and Oliver drove us to his place where I picked up my Wrangler and Oliver kissed me through my open driver's side window, he was still coming over to get me about eight.

It was five thirty when I pulled in the drive at home, to see that Leslie and her carpenters had left. Once inside I went down to see how far they had gone with the glassing in of the secret fireplace room. Basically not far, it seemed to me that they had only put up some wooden frames on the outside of the fireplace and a wooden beam, if it could be called that as it wasn't very thick suspended from the frame and a bolt in the back wall. The place however was festooned with standing lights and rope lights and switching them on I looked at Eleanor.

The sight of her face had me thinking about Tristan and turning the lights off I went out of the big drawing room and up to my own room. I went straight to my desk and sat down at my netbook. I made a list of things to do. Oliver updates the Dearing website, I design a flier to cross market the arts and crafts holidays, I talk with Liz tomorrow not only about the birthday party but about an open day and free art classes to kick off the venture at least in the neighbourhood.

If you're thinking what would I know about these things; well in the last year at school for Business studies, we had to form little business enterprise task teams and do exactly that. This would be easier since there was already a product, we had to design that first in school.

I took the two stones out of my jean jacket pocket and looked at them, unbelievable; I never expected them to be so valuable.

I went to my armoire and looked at the pouch I had got them from, picking it up I took it to my desk and poured the contents onto my desk gently. I took out the largest blue stone, it was like blue water contained in a shape by some indefinable boundary. I put it with the two stones I had taken to the Dealers. Then I got the biggest red stone, it was like a glowing ember, placing that alongside the three stones, I put everything else back in the pouch and returned the pouch to Tristan's box inside the cupboard. I put those four stones inside a sock and put them next to the pouches in the box. Somehow, I thought these would be the stones that might clear Tristan from having to let Jack sell this house, his horse, and stables. I wanted to ring Tristan and check if he had been to a jeweller, and for about ten minutes, I stared out of my big window across at the woods, thinking about if I should ring. I was wondering if he would mind about me having been to a dealer with the other stones, in a way I had sort of brought those stones out in the open and I thought now if others were suddenly found maybe questions would be asked. Who knew what path to take that would be

the safest. I had no doubt in my mind that Tristan should try to claim some of his heritage, you can't live for almost a thousand years and your home still exists but you can't have it, that's ridiculous. Especially if you have worked to keep it in existence for hundreds of years, I thought and I got out my cell and phoned Tristan.

His voicemail was on, I just left a message saying, hi, and that I would call him some other time.

I decided to shower and put on a dress to go to the Kool Kafé, it would be nice to dress up and go out. Having decided on the violet dress, I took out the blue shoes that had a bit more heel than I usually wore, I had not worn them since I had seen the other Oliver. I thought about that, should I wear them, they were just shoes; I put them on.

Downstairs mom was in the kitchen with Steven and John; they were talking about school, which started next week. I joined them at the big table. I asked Steven if he had started looking for a car yet, he had. John and he had been looking at a couple of car yards that afternoon with John's big brother, he had seen a car he wanted mom to look at and they were going to see it the next day. Mom asked me where I was off to that night looking so pretty and I told her Kool Kafé with Oliver.

That seemed to be the cue for him to arrive as I heard a car on the drive and the doorbell rang shortly after. Oliver was standing at the door, he looked so gorgeous, he was wearing a pale blue shirt with a double white stripe through it and jeans, he smiled his lovely smile and came in to say hello to mom. They talked for a few minutes about computer stuff and I watched Oliver, he was so good to look at. Steven caught my eye and made a face at me then grinned. I grinned back at him.

We parked in the library car park and walked through the churchyard to the street where Kool Kafé was situated.

Oliver had already told me he thought I looked great in the dress and now with his arm around me walking down the street to the café he said, "Hey, I haven't seen you wear those shoes before, they are different for you Chloe, but very cool".

I smiled slightly and slipped my arm around his waist, at which he smiled more.

We could see The Kool Kafé as we walked down the street, the fairy lights and twig lights already glowing; the place was already quite full, despite it was nearly dark there were still people at all the outside tables and we went into the building and down to the table area in there.

Samantha was already serving someone at a table near the one we chose and as she emptied her tray of their order, she swung by to us with a big smile. I thought she had grown, she looked taller and more grown up somehow. It could have been her hair, she had it swept up instead of in a ponytail, and she wore a new style of white top. It was a three quarter sleeve white t-shirt with random silver white bursts of sequins, and bits of lace. It was very cool and I wouldn't have minded one myself. I told her this as we ordered and she said mum likes the wait staff to go sparkly as autumn arrived. She enjoyed the compliment though and went off still smiling.

I turned to Oliver, "Is it autumn Oliver, I can't believe how quickly time has gone". Oliver nodded, "Strictly speaking, but the weather and darkness will only creep upon us in October. So far September is lovely don't you think?" I did and told him this. I wanted to cling onto summer.

Oliver had his head close to mine to talk and we looked up to see Liz and Will approaching. It was good to see them and they sat down with us to talk about the band, and how pleased Will was that he had finished school. He was going to take a gap year and see how his music went before going to university and had deferred a place he had won to do a degree in his beloved subject. The band was doing so well and Steven and John his friend had

voiced their disdain for the new school year. They would continue to play with the band of course but still school took up a fair chunk of time.

Will was asking Oliver how his Computer business was doing and he was answering when I saw Clare and James coming along towards us. It was lovely to see them and they rounded up some chairs and sat with us. I was talking with James about the fireplace in the big drawing room, and how Leslie had been there today to oversee the start of the protection work for the archaeology. Clare caught my attention by adding yet another chair to the table and Ben sat down there to the left of us. Everyone seemed to be happily talking and as I looked about me, James having started to talk with Ben I was suddenly aware that Laura was heading our way and she was leading Corbett, holding his hand and turning occasionally to smile at him and check his progress through the crowd. At the table, she introduced Corbett and told them he was French and spoke no English. I smiled at her and at Corbett who did the tiniest bow to me. We got more chairs around the quite small table and Samantha was summoned for orders of coffee and juices. Oliver put his arm around my shoulders and pulled me to him gently, I turned to him, and he kissed me. It was only by chance I saw Corbett watching us; I had tried to move my chair along for Samantha to get by to another table, and realized he was looking intently at Oliver and me. I saw him say something to Laura then and she looked at us; I smiled at her and she did smile back, but when she spoke again to Corbett, he did not smile again, and looked at me strangely. I knew it was because he must have thought I was Tristan's girl, after seeing us together in the kitchen; it had to be confusing for anyone, after all, it was confusing for me. I had stopped hearing the music and the chatter. I had stopped seeing the fairy lights and the glitter of Samantha's t-shirt, it was suddenly and glaringly apparent that the only person not out here tonight with everyone, even though we had not arranged to meet and had happened upon each other by chance, was Tristan. I didn't like it, it just didn't feel right, and I leaned forward and yelled to Laura, you had to, now the band was in full swing for their first set, "Laura do you know what Tristan is doing tonight?"

She frowned at me, which I took to mean she had not heard me properly. I stood up, walked the two paces to be very close to her, and leaned in to her ear space asking her the question again. This time she turned to me and I inclined my ear to her,

"I don't really know, he may have been in the greenhouses earlier this evening, he was not in the house when Corbett and I left". I turned my face back to talk in her ear, "Did Corbett ask about Oliver and me just now, it's important to me to know what he said". She sighed and then said in my ear, "He said that he thought you and Tristan were together and he was sad to see that you are with Oliver as he knows Tristan loves you".

I looked at her before I said anything back, I looked at her to make sure she could see how sincere I was, "I was just thinking how I wished Tristan was here with us all, the night has lost its lustre for me, seeing everyone here but him, what did you say to Corbett?"

She sighed again but to her credit turned and said in my ear, "I told him that Tristan knows about Oliver and that he must speak to Tristan to find out the situation from him".

I nodded at her, and when I looked across at Corbett he looked at me with his pretty eyes silvery in the fairy lights with some confusion. I smiled straight at him and nodded my head, for some reason it was important to me he not think I did not love Tristan.

I sat back down next to Oliver, he was talking with Ben, and I took the chance, picking up my cell I went outside and called Tristan. The air was much cooler out here, and the music muted, there were still a few people at the outdoor tables and I went to one end of the wall leaning against it as I waited for Tristan to pick up. I thought he was not going to when suddenly he did.

"Tristan where are you, I'm at Kool Kafé and everyone seems to be here except for you, what are you doing?" it seemed sad that he was not there too. I knew I had gone there with Oliver and I think if it had just remained us two I would not have rung Tristan.

Tristan seemed to hesitate slightly, "I'm in the greenhouses; I just felt like being here in the calm amongst the plants. I finished an order and it's in the cool room now ready for delivery and I just sat down with some coffee to think".

I could picture him in the little office end,

"Tristan did you find anything out about the stones; go to a jeweller?"

"I did although I didn't bother with the city I just went to the one in the end of the high street there, they said I should get a further opinion but that in their opinion the stones are each worth many thousands of pounds. I've decided to go through with the plan to pretend Corbett and I find a pouch in the font. I was just thinking it over now and it seems a reasonable thing to do. Could I drop by tomorrow morning to get one and just get on with this deception before I lose my nerve?"

I raised my eyebrows to myself, "Tristan its not malicious deception, it's just to make sure you have your house, and also never forget this Eleanor treasure is actually rightfully yours since it belonged to your father". I was going over in my mind if this was totally true as I said it, and I couldn't see how it was not totally true. Was he doing anything wrong? The answer was definitely no.

I heard Tristan sigh, "I know, although it was left for Richard and Eleanor, but still it was not my fault they didn't receive it and we know what happened when I tried to change that. It comes to me next as my father's heir. I miss you Chloe, are you with Oliver?"

I told him yes and that Corbett was looking a bit puzzled about that. He laughed a little then but I could tell he was sad.

I asked him if he could get down there to Kool Kafé that it was still early enough as it took hardly any time to get down here. I could almost hear him shake his head, "No I think I will go and see Cedric, maybe take a few apples over, I will drop by tomorrow Chloe". I told him to take care and that I was thinking of him and we rang off. I was thinking of him too, the old worry over loving both him and Oliver was uppermost in my heart.

I went back inside, Clare came up to me in the small corridor asking where I had got to, and I told her I had to make a phone call. We walked back into the heart of the café together and Oliver came up to the back of the room and met me. Putting his arms around me, he swung me over to one side and we stayed there at the back where it was a little quieter for a while.

"I can't believe everyone has just shown up like this, just co-incidentally. I knew everyone except the older staff and a couple of agency workers had the night off because we are all working tomorrow on the wedding reception but who knew everyone would show up here?" he laughed. He was still holding me and bent his head to kiss me; I smiled at him, kissing him back "its fun though isn't it Oliver?"

He nodded, and we just leaned in to each other watching the others talk and listening to the last song in the band's set.

When the band was off CD music was played, it was a lovely album with lots of softer and slower tracks. To the lovely strange lyrics of 'Flightless Bird', we watched Laura and Corbett dance close together, totally in harmony. No gap between them as they had their arms around each other, they seemed lost in an effortless flow of steps.

Obviously, Kool Kafé had burned a compilation themselves because I knew, 'Love and Some Verses' didn't follow in the album but it came on next. Laura and Corbett just flowed straight on into this song.

"Looks to me as if they are a couple", Oliver commented with a gentle smile, and nodded at them. I looked around at him and nodded too. Some part of me suddenly wanted that too. It couldn't ever totally be though could it, not when I loved both Tristan and Oliver, unable to let either go.

Oliver sensed my strange emotion and tightened his hold on me just a little; he didn't kiss me but put his cheek against mine and rocked me slightly. How was I ever going to give up Oliver I thought and as I put my arms up around his neck and held his head to mine gently I could actually hear Tristan as he had said I miss you Chloe are you with Oliver. I sighed, how was I ever going to give up Tristan?

Later, Oliver and I were walking back through the churchyard to the car park, it was a soft night, the satin air was back; Oliver had his arm around me. We stopped at the end of the path and he went down the step and turned to me, I slowly hugged him to me, I was kissing him and he kissed me too. I felt as if we were wrapped in silk, just softly merging into each other. It was a moment of complete sensation, all I could feel was Oliver's kiss, and I put my hands up into his shirt where it was out of his jeans. I wanted to feel his skin and I traced my fingers around his waist and up his back to his shoulders, I was pressed against him and kissing him, I heard him catch his breath and he suddenly let go of me. He moved slightly from me, his arms by his side, I stopped kissing him as he whispered, "Chloe, I don't know if you know", then he took a breath, "if you know what you are doing". I took my hands out of his shirt and put them behind my back. I moved a little away from him I wasn't sure and so I didn't speak, I just stood there looking down at the ground. He took my hand and we went on to the car park, silently. When we got to the Landrover Oliver gave me a quick hug, "We're ok?" it was a question about what had happened back there at the entrance to the church pathway. "Yes I think so", I told him and he smiled opening the door.

On the drive home I was thinking about that moment when all I wanted to do was feel his skin and the way we seemed to be wrapped in silk, it was the first time I had realized there was something different now about the way I felt with Oliver and the way I felt with Tristan.

Oliver broke my reverie, 'You're deep in thought Chloe?'

I made myself smile, "Sorry Oliver".

He didn't say anything else.

At my house, he came to the door with me, and just held my hand as he kissed me quickly, "I think I will go Chloe, its quite late now". I was crushed; Oliver always hung out a little even when it was late. He knew it of course and suddenly relented, he put his arms around me and kissed me again this time not quickly, "I love you so much" he said, "remember that". Then he sighed, "I am going though, I have to", and he smiled. I watched him drive away from my doorway. I was thinking had I somehow driven him away, concluding no I couldn't have; after all, he had just told me he loved me.

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