



an *SN* free read



*Timeless
Encounter*

Adelle Laudan

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Timeless Encounter

by

Adelle Laudan

Chapter One

Lisa traced the frosted semblance of an outstretched hand on her windowpane. The creative genius behind each intricate crystal pattern intrigued her. Snowflakes clung to the slumbering branches of an old oak tree bowed across her driveway. The morning sun shining off of the frozen gems resembled glittering diamonds. Beyond this display of winter in all its glory, her new neighbor shoveled away the blanket of fallen snow from his sidewalks.

His thick sweater pulled tight across a broad chest with each shovel he hefted over his shoulder. Her artistic mind imagined a well-sculpted chest. Two years ago, her husband rode off into the sunset on his Harley. Since then, she really hadn't been interested in the opposite sex. Something about the sexy distraction who moved in across the street had her peeking out the window several times a day.

At least her work kept her mind off of things. What started out to be a hobby, turned into a thriving business. Lisa took her own bike apart the first winter after Jack left. She'd painted an intricate mural of herself wandering the wilderness. Talk of her talent spread like wildfire and before she knew it, her garage turned into a shop. Fenders and frames hung from the rafters in various stages of paint, and matching gas tanks littered her workbench.

Despite the steady flow of customers who stopped by, she'd never felt so alone. Steven came by on a regular basis to check on her, but it just didn't fill the void in her heart. After a quarter of a century together, Steven's father had the audacity to tell her not to take it personal. He didn't like the man he'd become and his soul craved the

freedom of the open road. Over a three-day span, he'd dropped the bombshell, packed up his bike, and left. He'd only called once to ask about his son. He didn't even know he'd become a grandfather to a gorgeous little girl named Heaven.

Lisa sighed heavily, her gaze wandered back across the snow-covered road. Mr. Sexy moved in just before the first snowfall covered the last remains of autumn. Since then he'd left on numerous occasions in a big Kenworth transport. She appreciated the long lean lines of his body. Even though he had far too many clothes on to define every detail, her imagination kicked into overdrive to fill in the blanks.

He brushed a stray curl back from his eyes. His hand went to the small of his back as he looked up and down the deserted street. His gaze met hers, and the corners of his full lips turned up in a smile.

Oh God! She pulled her hand from the windowpane, and held its coolness to the warmth of her cheek. *Blushing? At my age?* Lisa pressed her back to the garage wall, and struggled to catch her breath. She summoned up the nerve to take another look, only to find his discarded shovel sticking out of a snow bank.

Admittedly disappointed, she turned her attention back to the painting she'd been working on. The intricate details of the fairy wings took a steady hand to create. Fairies weren't necessarily her taste, but Janet paid for her to fabricate her daughter's likenesses in the three faces. Lisa stood back and chewed on the wooden end of her brush. Sometimes the preciseness of her work surprised even her.

She dipped the tip of her brush in an iridescent shade of pink and began to fill in the outline of the final fairy's lips. A rap on the glass of the garage door startled her. The brush slipped, marring the perfection of the lips.

"Shit!" Quickly, she dabbed away the imperfection with a rag. Lisa stormed toward the incessant rap and threw open the door. "This better be good!" Her gaze traveled up the long frame of her unwanted guest, and came to rest on the handsome chiseled face of her neighbor. Her stomach fluttered.

He stepped back as if bitten, the smile all but disappeared from his face.

"I, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to disturb you. Maybe I should come back another time." He turned to leave.

Lisa stifled a nervous giggle. "I'm sorry. You just caught me off guard. Come in out of the cold." She stepped aside, and folded her arms across her chest in a futile attempt to hide her paint-splattered shirt. He ducked inside the doorway, the musky scent of his aftershave filled her senses.

His vivid blue eyes scanned her shop before he turned his attention to her. "So this is what you are doing out here all the time." He took off a glove and offered his hand. "The name's Dylan."

"Oh," she stammered, and wiped the paint from her fingers before shaking his hand. "Lisa, Lisa Abner." His gaze followed the myriad of tattoos up her arm.

"I hope you don't mind me coming over like this, but I couldn't help but be curious why a pretty lady such as yourself spent so much time in her garage." He turned and studied the painting she'd been working on. "I'm impressed."

"Thank you." Here emotions threatened to spiral out of control. "Can I get you a coffee?"

"I'd like that." He smiled warmly.

Lisa made a quick turn to the door, his smile did things to her she hadn't thought she'd ever feel again. She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Why don't we sit in the kitchen away from all these paint fumes?"

"Sounds good to me." His sexy baritone prickled up her spine as he followed her inside.

"You're in luck. I just put a fresh pot on before I went to work."

Dylan bent over to remove his snow-covered boots before he stepped into the kitchen. Lisa stifled yet another giggle upon noticing his odd socks. Her hand trembled as she took two mugs down from the cupboard and filled them with coffee. "Cream and sugar?"

"Black is good, thanks."

Lisa set a coffee on the table in front of him, and sat down across the table.

"So how long have you been painting? You do good work."

"I, uh, for a long time." *Damn, good answer, brainiac.* She refolded her arms across her chest. *Could I look any less attractive?* She'd twisted her hair up under a baseball cap, and went straight to the shop this morning. "So I couldn't help but notice you drive truck."

"Only when I have to." He smiled, and her stomach fluttered yet again. "I own a small trucking company and lately all I've been doing is filling in for guys who don't want to work."

"I'm sorry."

"It's not so bad. I love being on the road. I'd just rather it wasn't winter."

"You and me both."

"So I see you paint motorcycles, do you actually ride one?"

"Of course, do you?"

"Nope. Maybe one day when I have the time to myself. I used to fool around on a dirt bike as a kid, if that counts."

As a kid, geesh, when, last year? Dylan looked even younger up close.

"Well, I guess I better get back to the snow. Thanks for the coffee, next time my treat."

Next time? Her pulse raced.

"When you're finished, you're more than welcome to tackle mine."

"If I can still walk when I'm done mine, I'll think about it." He winked, and put a hand to the small of his back before he covered his mismatched socks with boots.

"My son will be by later with a scoop to do my drive. Do you want him to do yours as well?"

His brow rose. "Your son? Um, well, sure if he wants." He shrugged and pulled his gloves back on.

Shit! Why don't you just shout it out, I'm old enough to be your mother! Lisa studied the lines of his back to the door. Warmth flooded her cheeks and she coughed to mask her reaction.

"You're not getting a cold are you?"

"Nah, just a tickle."

"Get your husband to rub you down with Vicks, it works like a charm for me."

"I'm afraid my husband went for a ride a couple years ago and never came back." She may not have been on the dating scene for a very long time, but she recognized his not so subtle attempt to find out if she was married.

"Well, I'd be lying if I said I'm sorry." He smiled broadly, his blue eyes danced with mischief. "Well, thanks again for the coffee."

Snow swirled in around her ankles the instant the door opened. "Brrr. You keep warm little lady. If you ever need me, you know where I am." He stopped in his tracks, and squeezed her hand. "I mean it. It's been a pleasure, Lisa. I'm glad I came over."

Words escaped her, and she bowed her head. For the third time in less than an hour, heat rose to her cheeks. She pressed her forehead against the cool glass to try and regain some semblance of composure. A loud thump silenced the crunch of his footsteps down her drive.

Lisa didn't see anything out of the ordinary except for the fact Dylan was nowhere to be seen. *Boy does he move fast.* She'd almost turned completely away when she caught sight of a boot. Sprawled out on his back, lay Dylan.

"Shit!" She flung open the door, and slipped on the ice. Luckily she caught her balance and kneeled down next to her unconscious neighbor. A nasty goose egg already formed on his brow. "Dylan? Dylan?"

Dylan mumbled without opening his eyes.

How he hell am I going to move him? "Don't move. I'll be right back."

Lisa ran inside and picked up her cell from the workbench, and punched in Steven's number.

"Hello?"

"Steven, I need you to get over here right away!"

"Mom? Are you okay?"

"I'm fine. My neighbor fell in my driveway and he's out cold. I need your help."

"I'm on my way."

The line went silent and she tucked her phone in her back pocket. From on top of the dryer she grabbed a blanket and ran back outside. The wind sliced through her thin shirt as she tucked the blanket around a semi-conscious Dylan. It seemed a lifetime passed before she saw her son's truck barrel up the road. He came to an abrupt halt at the end of her drive and bolted from the truck.

"What happened?"

"He slipped on the ice." Her teeth chattered.

"You're going to catch your death, Mom. Go in and grab a coat and help me get this guy in my truck."

Lisa disappeared inside the house and back out again in record time. She wore an oversized parka left behind by Jack. They struggled together to get Dylan in the back of the truck and sped off to the hospital.

Chapter Two

"What was he doing in your driveway to begin with?" Steven handed her a vending machine coffee, and sat next to her in the hospital waiting room.

"He came over for a coffee and slipped on his way out."

"Do you make a habit of inviting strangers in your house?"

"Last time I checked, I was over the age of consent."

"Sorry, but you don't know anything about the guy."

Lisa nursed her coffee. The chill started to recede, and the circulation painfully returned to her hands. Steven meant well, but since his dad abandoned ship their roles seemed to have shifted. At times he acted more like her father than a son. She loved him for caring, but sometimes his concern smothered her.

Jan appeared in the doorway of the examining room. Lisa had been relieved to see her friend on duty. She smiled and crossed the distance between them.

"How is he, Jan?" Lisa stood.

"Well he has a nasty bump on the head, but all the tests say he'll be fine. I don't remember meeting this guy before? Have you known him long?"

"Hardly. I met him today, he's my new neighbor."

"That's too bad."

"Why?"

“Well, there isn’t any contact information in his wallet and to be quite honest, he isn’t making a whole lot of sense right now. He needs someone to keep an eye on him for the next little while.”

Terrific. “Well, I guess I could watch over him.”

“You can’t be serious, Mom. You don’t even know the guy.”

“He’s barely conscious, I don’t think I have anything to worry about.” Lisa laughed, partly in response to her sons over concern, and partly because of nerves. She must be mad, but what other option did she have?

“You don’t have to do this, Lisa. We can keep him here until we’re sure he’s okay.”

“I’m very sure. It’s the least I can do. Maybe he’ll take pity on me and not sue the pants off of me.”

Jan put a hand to the side of her mouth and moved in next to her. “Maybe him wanting your pants off wouldn’t be such a bad thing. He’s not too hard on the eyes, is he?”

Lisa pushed her friend away, and shook her head. “I never noticed.”

Jan chuckled. “Yah right.”

Lisa signed the release form, and left her phone number. She almost choked reading his particulars. ‘Dylan Wade Sanford. Age, 31’. *Fourteen years younger than me. Give your head a shake, woman. I’ll just make sure he’s okay and send him on his way.*

The door to the examining room opened and an orderly pushed a very ‘out of it’ Dylan toward them.

Steven tugged on her sleeve. “You don’t have to do this, you know.”

“Oh hush, and help get him out to the truck.”

Steven shook his head and reluctantly showed the orderly the way. Lisa followed them out of the hospital, and held the door while they maneuvered him into the back seat. The bump on his head had grown to the size of a golf ball, a yellow and purple golf ball. Lisa winced sympathetically.

Steven continued to try and talk her out of playing nurse the entire drive home.

“For God’s sake, Steven. I’ll be lucky if he doesn’t sue me. The least I can do is make sure he’s okay for the next twenty four hours.”

Lisa helped him carry the dead weight of Dylan into the house and lay him out on the couch.

“Do you want me to stay here with you?”

“You go home to your family. If I need you, I have your number.” Lisa struggled to remove Dylan’s boots. She sensed his look of disapproval from the doorway. “Go on with you.”

Steven sighed heavily, and opened the door.

“Steven?”

He stopped and turned.

“Thank you.”

He shook his head. “You call me.”

“I will.”

Lisa breathed a sigh of relief upon hearing the door close behind him. Dylan mumbled. His voice laced with pain.

In the kitchen she filled a towel with ice and brought it back to the couch. She kneeled next to him and carefully put the ice to the nasty bump. He grabbed her wrist, and her breath hitched.

“Easy now, big guy. I’m just trying to help.”

His grip on her wrist relaxed and fell down the side of the couch. As she applied the ice once again to his bump, his eyes opened to slits and he tried to focus on her.

“You’ve had a nasty fall, Dylan. You just rest easy and I’ll take care of you.”

He licked his lips as if he might speak, but his eyes closed again. She heard the slightest whimper as she held the ice to his head. Her heart went out to this man she’d just met, and she wished she could do more.

The heavy parka she still wore did little to stop the shiver that traveled the length of her body. The damp fabric of her jeans clung to her legs like a second skin. The fire she’d built that morning, now a pile of glowing embers.

The ice all but melted under the heat of his forehead. She laid the cool cloth across the nasty bump, and brushed back a few stray curls from his face. Up close he was even more handsome than she'd first thought. Every artist dreamed of painting a face like his—perfect chiseled lines, a bronzed skin tone and long dark lashes. She sighed, and struggled to her feet.

Lisa hurried to her bedroom and changed into yoga pants and a long sleeved t-shirt. She gave a quick assessment in her mirror. Even after having a kid she had what some considered a good shape. Her boobs were still where they should be, and her daily workout routine paid off with a flat stomach. She winced at the disheveled mess of her hair.

First thing's first, a fire.

In no time at all the fire crackled in the fireplace, warming up her small house. The shadows danced on his sleeping face and she swallowed hard. *Damn!*

Dylan still wore his damp clothes. *How in the hell am I going to get that sweatshirt off of him? No way can I get it over his head without his help.* She took a pair of scissors from her desk and kneeled next to the couch. *Here goes nothing.*

"I hope this isn't your favorite shirt, Mr. Sanford."

Dylan's mouth lifted in a faint smile. Lisa smiled back even though she knew he didn't have a clue what was going on. Carefully, she cut a straight line up the center of his sweatshirt. After a great deal of manipulating, she pulled it out from under him. She proceeded to do the same to a soaked black t-shirt he'd worn underneath, revealing a smooth, rock hard chest. Her body betrayed her by responding to the firmness of his chest and the rippling of a most exquisite six-pack.

"Oh my." Her fingers trailed the deep groove down the center leading to the drawstring of sweatpants. She opened and closed the scissors. Lisa shook her head and decided against completely disrobing the man. Carefully, she tucked a blanket over him.

A mew not unlike a cat came from Dylan.

"I'll be right back."

Lisa walked to the bathroom and ran a brush through her tousled excuse for hair. It took a good fifteen minutes to rid her long mass of tangles. She'd already applied mascara to her blonde eyelashes before she stopped herself. *Just what the hell do you think you're doing? The man's almost comatose for God's sake.*

She laughed at herself, and checked on Dylan. She took the warm cloth from his head. In the kitchen she refilled the cloth with ice, and set the kettle on the stove to boil.

I better get some caffeine in me; this could be a long night.

After an hour of replacing the cloth, the swelling seemed to subside. The time between the ice melting grew longer. The sun began its' descent, and she threw more wood on the fire. She tucked the blankets back around him before turning the light on above her artist easel. She needed a stencil for one of her next jobs. A woman rider wanted a handsome Greek god-like man on her tank to watch over her ride.

Her gaze drifted to Dylan and she smiled. Talk about luck, the perfect model lay right here on her couch. Feeling totally inspired, she set to work, starting with the beautiful face of her sleeping houseguest. It felt strangely comforting having him here, even in his condition. *I guess I'm lonelier than I care to admit.*

The shrill ring of the phone in the kitchen startled her. Dylan's hands flung out from under the blanket, and he swung at the air above him.

"Shit!" Lisa ran to the phone and picked it up. "Hello?"

"Mom?"

Lisa let out a long breath. "Steven, you scared the bejeesus out of me. I'm fine."

"Is he still there?"

"Yes, he *was* sleeping comfortably on the couch until the phone rang thank you very much."

"Well, I'm sorry, but you can't blame me for checking in with you."

Lisa smiled. "I'm sorry. Everything's fine and I love you for checking up on me."

She hung up the phone and noticed Dylan had flung off his blanket, and now snored softly. She carefully tucked it back in around him. "Well I'd say the crisis is over."

She smoothed back his hair. His hand came up and covered hers. Dylan opened his eyes, his brow creased.

"Where? Who?"

"Hush, you had a bad fall." She placed his hand back under the blanket.

"Lisa?"

"Yes, you're on my couch. Close your eyes and go back to sleep."

He held her gaze. His eyes expression changed from confusion to recognition.

"I should go." He tried to sit up and winced, falling back to the pillows she'd put under his head. "Maybe not." He forced a smile.

"There's no hurry. I'll make some tea. The nurse said once you can keep something down, the fear of a concussion has passed."

"Nurse?" Confusion clouded his expressive blue eyes once again.

"I'll explain everything later. You need to rest." She took the fallen cloth and laid it back across his forehead.

He nodded, and his eyes closed again. "Thank you." He whispered as he drifted back to sleep.

Her hand cupped the side of his face and she resisted the urge to kiss his forehead. "You are very welcome."

Chapter Three

Sun streamed in the window and nudged her awake. Confused, she took in her surroundings. The drawing she'd been working on sat in front of her. Strong lines formed the ridged chest of Dylan. Her gaze flew to the couch to see a mound of blankets, her houseguest gone. She looked in all directions with no sign of him.

"Dylan?" With great effort she stood. Her body ached like she'd run a marathon. She must have fallen asleep while drawing. *Where could he have gone?* She wandered from room to room. Her gaze fell to where she'd placed his boots to find them gone. She hurried to the window to see fresh snow almost covered the tracks leading from her front door across the street to his house.

Lisa sighed heavily. Inwardly cursing for being disappointed he left. *What did you think he was going to do, move in?* She chuckled and padded to the kitchen where she readied the coffeepot and turned it on. Outside, the snow fell softly to the ground. She saw no sign of life from across the road. Panic rose up in her as she pictured him stagger back to his house and fall inside the doorway where he now lay unconscious. She scurried to the front door and slipped on her still wet boots, and ran across the road. She knocked and waited, jiggled the door to find it locked, and noticed the fresh tracks leading from his garage.

"Damn fool!" She stormed off back to her house and slammed the door behind her. She stomped over to the bathroom and ran the shower, discarding her clothes in a

pile on the floor. She closed her eyes and let the pounding water wash away her anger and frustration.

It's high time for me to go out and get laid. Maybe if she hadn't been so sex deprived, she wouldn't have drawn all kinds of happily ever after conclusions. No wonder Steven was so concerned. He was probably afraid to leave the poor man with me for fear of what I'd do, not the other way around.

She'd no sooner dressed and rubbed her hair almost dry with a towel when the phone rang. *Dylan?* Her heart soared and she ran to the phone, juggling it in her hand before putting it to her ear. "Hello?"

"Mom?"

Disappointed engulfed her. "Oh, it's you."

"Who'd you think it would be? Happy to hear from you too!"

Lisa laughed at herself and proceeded to fill him in on her absent houseguest. "So I guess he must be fine if he could drive off somewhere."

"I'm glad he's okay. I guess you'll be working in the garage today?"

"Am I that predictable?" She groaned into the phone.

Steven laughed. "You're in quite the mood, aren't you?"

"Lack of sleep. Maybe I'll go lay down for a bit before I get too carried away painting."

"Good idea. Do you want me to come by and clean out the driveway?"

"Don't bother. I'll throw some salt on the ice. I don't have any plans to go anywhere. Wait until the snows stopped falling. Give that little angel a kiss from Grandma."

"Will do."

Lisa hung up the phone, and stifled a yawn. She listened to the coffee pot let out a final gurgle, and grabbed a mug from the cupboard. "Lots and lots of caffeine is what I need."

She poured herself a cup and headed for the shop.

The morning passed without incident. Lisa applied the first layer of clear coat on top of her fairies. She gave a nod of approval and placed the mesh cover she'd designed to prevent anything from marring the glossy finish.

Her heart skipped a beat upon hearing a knock at the door. She smoothed down her hair and opened the door to find Tater standing on the other side. Her heart sank.

"Good morning, Tater."

Tater had been a good friend of Jack's. It wasn't until recently he'd begun paying her visits. She'd been around long enough to know the signs. He was interested. Too bad he did nothing for her in that way. You couldn't ask for a nicer guy, but he stood at least six inches shorter than her, giving her a birds eye view of his receding hairline.

"Hey good lookin' how's business?" He shook the snow from his boots before he stepped inside.

"Busy as always. What brings you by on a day like this?"

"I was just passing by with the plow and saw yours needed done."

Lisa looked past her friend to see her freshly plowed driveway. *How in the hell did I miss that?*

"Thanks a bundle, Tater. Do you have time for a coffee?"

"Not this morning pretty lady. I wondered if you started on my fenders?"

"I'm just finishing up Jan's tank and you're next on the list."

Tater's gaze fell on the just finished tank and he whistled. "Man oh man, you got killer talent!"

Lisa beamed under the praise. "Why thank you."

"Well, you got my number when you're done. I can't wait to see what you come up with. Any ideas yet?"

"If I told you, it wouldn't be a surprise. Thanks again for the plow, it'll save Steven from having to do it."

"No problem. Maybe we can get together for a drink sometime soon?"

"Just as soon as I get caught up in here." She knew she kept using the same line over and over again, but she really didn't want to hurt his feelings.

He tipped his hat and opened the door. "The weather is supposed to turn nasty tonight. You need anything, be sure to call."

"Thanks. I will."

Lisa closed the door behind him. From the window she watched him walk away. Already a thin layer covered her freshly plowed drive. She shivered and turned back to her work. Her stomach growled reminding her she hadn't eaten for quite some time. She tossed the rag on her workbench and went back in the house.

Before she set to finding something to eat she rekindled the fire. The blankets still lay in a disheveled ball on the couch and she frowned. As she folded them up, the lingering scent of his aftershave wafted up. She brought the blanket to her face and inhaled deeply. With closed eyes she tried to conjure up the image of his bare chest.

"Sorry 'bout your luck!" Lisa tossed down the blanket and stomped to the kitchen. *No sense daydreaming about something that ain't gonna happen.*

Lisa made a bowl of soup and sat at the table. The wind howled, the house across the street only a faded blur beyond the veil of snow. *I wonder where he got to? He must have a killer headache.*

Resigned to another day alone, she put her empty bowl in the sink and walked back to the shop. Tater left her free reign to paint the flat black fenders on his old Shovelhead. She knew him well enough to know he'd want something old school, so she opted for a unique design of a twisted chain. She hoped to make it look like the chain held the fenders in place. She was pretty sure he'd love it.

By the time she'd finished the first outline, the shop grew dark and she turned on the lights to finish. She stood back to access her work and the lights flickered precariously. She looked out her window to see a blanket of white. The lights flickered again.

Great. Now the power is going to go out. She'd better stoke up the fire and find some candles just in case. Lisa set to work. She brought some more wood in from the shop where she kept a dry load, and rounded up a half dozen candles from throughout the house. Having lost the power on a couple occasions, she made herself up a plate of

cheese and crackers, a bottle of wine and her sketchpad before she made herself a nest on the couch. She'd no sooner filled her glass and the light in the kitchen flickered and went out.

On her sketch pad, the drawing of Dylan stared back at her and she hurried to fold it over to a new page. *No sense driving myself crazy sitting here all alone in the dark.* She laughed out loud and set in to drawing a new God for her friend's tank.

Warm breath on her neck coaxed her awake. She opened her eyes to find herself staring straight into a set of baby blues. Her heart hammered and she bolted upright, knocking her visitor back.

"Hey!" Dylan laughed landing on his backside in front of the fire. "Do you take pleasure in seeing me flat on my back?"

Lisa couldn't help but notice the suggestive glimmer to his eyes at his remark.

"How did you get in here?"

"Through the door. I hope you don't mind, but I was worried about you when I came home to no power."

Lisa caught herself chuckling at his smart-ass comment. She was usually pretty careful about locking up the house at night. She smoothed back her hair and noticed the drawing on her sketchpad. Her 'new' warrior looked very similar to the man sitting in front of her.

"I'm flattered."

Heat flooded her cheeks and she closed her sketchpad. She set it on the end table, and took a healthy swallow of wine before attempting to speak. Rather than try to justify her actions, she opted for changing the subject.

"So where did you get off to this morning?" She noticed the swelling had all but gone leaving behind a nasty bruise. "You look a whole lot better than you did last night."

He ran a hand through his silky mass of curls.

"Well, I have to admit I was thrown off a little waking up on your couch with one hell of a headache. I saw you sleeping at your desk, but since I was only half

dressed and didn't have a clue what happened, I went home. I thought I'd get dressed and come back to let you fill in the blanks."

He rose to his knees and motioned to the half bottle of wine. "Do you mind?"

"Oh, I'm sorry." Lisa went to throw back the blanket that covered her and he lay a hand on hers sending electric impulses up her arm. Her brow creased, and she searched his face for answers.

"Stay put. Are the glasses in the kitchen?"

Lisa nodded seeming to have lost her ability to speak. Her gaze followed him as he left the room. He'd changed into form fitting faded jeans and a stark white button down shirt. His very being oozed sexuality and had every nerve ending in her body on high alert.

"Anyhow, when I got home there was a message from the hospital that my wallet and cell phone were left behind."

"I'm sorry, I didn't..."

He waved a finger. "You have nothing to be sorry for. The nurse told me how you offered to take care of me." Dylan poured a glass of wine and swirled the red liquid in his glass before tipping it to his lips. "Mmm, this is good. I would have come back right after that, but when I checked my cell messages there was a problem at the office. One thing led to another, this weather, and here I am."

He raised his glass to her and smiled.

"Well I'm glad you're okay after your fall."

"What happened exactly?"

"Ice, on my driveway." She scrunched up her face and waited for him to yell lawsuit.

He laughed. "Don't look so worried. My mother used to say I was born with two left feet. I'm forever tripping over stuff."

A comfortable silence settled between them as they both stared into the fire. She took in his handsome silhouette. Her drawings hadn't really done him justice. *He isn't just handsome... he's beautiful.*

"Tell me something?" He stood up and sat next to her on the couch. He lifted the blanket and laid it over his lap. The feel of his leg against hers was almost her undoing.

"Hm?"

"What's a woman like you doing living here all alone?"

"A woman like me?"

"Well, it isn't a secret your drop dead gorgeous."

Lisa laughed. She hadn't been complimented like that in a very long time. She bowed her head. With him this close to her, saying these kinds of things. "I hardly think..."

Dylan halted her words with a finger pressed to her lips. He pushed her hair from her face and cupped her cheek. "I don't know what it is about you exactly. I can't seem to get you out of my mind."

Her breath hitched. *Surely this is a dream.* Things like this simply didn't happen to her.

"I, I..."

He leaned in and brushed her lips with his. "If you want me to stop, I will." He said, a mere whisper from her face.

"I don't want you to stop, but I have to ask. Do you know how old I am?"

"I don't care. All I know is how you make me feel. Do you have any idea what you're doing to me?" Dylan took her hand and pressed it over his heart.

Lisa took her free hand and thread it through the curls she'd wanted to touch since first laying eyes on him. "The same thing you're doing to me." She pulled his face to hers and boldly claimed his mouth. She broke free and looked deep into his smoldering eyes.

"If you want me to stop..." She held his gaze, slowly unbuttoning his shirt. "I don't think I can."

The fire crackled, echoing the spark between them. Their hands traveled the lengths of each other's bodies in an erotic frenzy. Shadows danced, bringing to life the aged tattoos across her heaving chest. In that moment, she cared about nothing but the

way he made her feel. The empty place in her heart filled, every nerve in her body, rejuvenated and alive.

Maybe love really is timeless, and the only boundaries in age are the ones we bestow upon oneself. Life really is for the living, and the sweetest of dreams happen with our eyes wide open.

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