

ONE

I open my eyes briefly and then close them again. I can vaguely hear voices somewhere in the background. I blink a few times and try to focus. My eye lids feel heavy. I hear someone fussing next to me and then a wet cloth on my forehead. I can't keep my eyes open.

"There, there dear. You're going to be just fine." Her soft voice is soothing somehow, and I take a deep breath.

I blink a few times and slowly the room comes into focus. I see an elderly lady next to me. She has short grey curly hair and she picks up the phone.

"She is coming to." Her smile is friendly and her soft grey eyes are filled with concern as she drops the phone.

"Hi there dear, you're finally awake. Are you thirsty?"

I give her a bewildered look as I nod. My mouth is dry. I try and get up, but she places her hand on my shoulder.

"No, try not to move, dear. You'll only hurt yourself." Her voice is gentle and calm. "Here, take this and drink slowly. Take a small sip."

She hands me the glass and helps me to bring it to my lips. The sun is shining brightly into the vast room. *Where am I? Oh, this tastes good.* I gulp down the water not caring about it spilling all over me. The woman tries her best to help me, but I'm so thirsty.

Reluctantly I let the glass go. She looks down at me again. "There... how are you feeling?"

My eyelids are heavy as I close them briefly and my head hurts like hell. I wince as I touch my head. My arms are feeling heavy.

"Your head hurts?" She asks knowingly. "I'll get you some pills." She gives a sigh of relief - I think and she quickly leaves the room.

I try to sit up again but my entire body hurts, my head especially. I lick my dry lips and look longingly at the glass of water on the bed stand next to me. I feel so weak.

The woman returns with two pills and she hands me the water again.

"Where... am... I...?" I look around the vast bedroom. White walls, full length window with a spectacular view of the garden in front of me. Everything is white and neutral. It's stunning.

The woman opens her mouth to speak, when someone enters through the door.

"Is she awake?"

The man's voice is cool and collected as he saunters closer to the bed. His mouth is slightly open and his dark brown eyes are fixed on me. He is breathing hard through his grey t-shirt and black leather jacket. He looks down at me not saying a word.

We stare at each other for a moment. I try and focus, but my head is pounding. He looks at the woman next to the bed, clenching his jaw.

"How long has she been awake?" His voice is stern.

"Not long. I've just given her some water to drink. And some medication for the pain..." She points to the glass on the bed stand. He looks back down at me, his face serious, clenching his jaw muscles.

"How is she, Mary?"

I can feel my eye lids getting heavy again. I close my eyes.

"Call Doctor Bennet."

I try to open them. I feel so weak... I drift back to sleep.

I hear muffled voices and I start to blink. I stare at the white ceiling and white walls. I lift my head slightly and the pain is there.

"She's coming to, Mr Reeves..." the same woman walks over to the bedside and with her is another man wearing glasses. And behind them is the young man from earlier.

"Hi. I'm Doctor Bennet. How are you feeling...?"

My mouth is dry. I find it difficult to speak. "Water..."

"How is your head?" He looks down at me and then he signals to the woman to give me some water.

She lifts the glass up to my lips and I gulp it down. I'm so thirsty. Doctor Bennet starts talking next to my bed, but all I can concentrate on is how good the water tastes.

"You were and are still severely dehydrated, so you'll need to take in a lot of fluids. You also took a nasty hit to the head. Can you tell me your name?"

My eyes shoot up to him. I'm coughing up some of the water making a real mess all over myself. My eyes are big, and I can feel all the blood draining from my face. I can hardly breathe. I slowly shake my head, feeling confused. And it dawns on me... *I don't know who I am...* I've no recollection what so ever. My heart starts racing and I can feel a sudden panic starting to overwhelm me.

"No... I... I don't know..." my voice trails off.

Doctor Bennet immediately comes closer to the bed, obviously observing me closely.

"Now, now there's no need to worry! You hurt your head quite badly but I'm really not too worried about it! My guess is that you'll get your memory back in the next couple of days, so there is no need to worry. Mary over here, will take real good care of you!"

His smile is reassuring. He takes his stethoscope and checks my vital signs.

"Where am I...? What... happened?"

The man behind him moves closer. "You're in my house. I'm Tyler Reeves."

His tone is formal and I can't seem to read his facial expression. "I'm the one that found you." He is gazing at me and he is clenching his jaw.

Found me? Where?

Doctor Bennet explains that I was unconscious when Tyler found me.

Unconscious? I frown at him. I don't understand. "When... How long has it been?" My heart is beating frantically in my chest.

"Two days ago." Tyler answers me and his mouth is forming a hard line.

Two days! *I've been asleep for two days?* My mind is reeling.

Doctor Bennet clears his throat and answers my unspoken question. "You were sedated due to your head injury. We wanted to make sure that the swelling went down before allowing you to wake fully. You're doing very well." He reassures me.

Head injury... Well that explains the blazing fire on top of my face. Why would he bring me to his house? And who is this Tyler? My mind is flooding with questions, but I feel so tired and weak.

Suddenly I feel overwhelmed by all this information. I can feel the tears building in my eyes.

I don't want to cry in front of these people. I try to turn and wince as the pain stings everywhere.

Tyler comes to my side. His hand is touching my shoulder to prevent me from moving.

"Steady now! You have to take it easy."

He is studying my face to maybe try and see how much pain I'm in. His voice is calm and even. I'm aware of his hand on my shoulder. I can smell his after shave and his dark eyes are gazing into mine.

Suddenly he collects himself and he gracefully takes a step back from me, not taking his eyes off me. He clears his throat and moves away from the bed. I find it hard to focus.

"This must all feel a bit overwhelming for you, but I'm confident you'll make a full recovery. In the meantime, we'll give you a moment." Doctor Bennett sounds positive, but I feel so confused.

He looks at Tyler whose gaze is unwavering and fixed on me. My throat is tight and hurts.

"Tyler let's give her a moment."

Reluctantly he nods. And then thankfully they all leave the room.

The tears are flowing down my face and I let out a sob. My head and thoughts feel cloudy and I'm desperately trying to think what could have happened to me... Car accident? But surely they would have found my car? Maybe they did... Maybe they know more than what they are letting me to believe?

My thoughts are running wild. My head feels fuzzy and my eyelids are feeling heavy again.... I drift...

I slowly wake up and find that it is dark outside. I wonder what time it is? I mentally prepare myself for the pain, but dammit, I want to sit up.

"Ah!"

I pull myself up against the bed post and suddenly my eye catches the dim light shining in the far- right corner of the vast room. *This bedroom is huge.* Tyler is sitting on a couch drinking what looks like a glass of whiskey. He is reading a document or some paper. He looks up at me in surprise.

"Hi." His voice is soft.

"Hi!"

Our eyes lock for a moment. The medication must be wearing off, because it's like I'm seeing him for the first time. His dark eyes are penetrating me and suddenly I feel shy. He is young and attractive. His thick hair is dark, short-trimmed and shining in the light. He's got a strong jaw and a perfect straight nose. *He must be in his early thirties?* He really is quite attractive.

"Did I wake you?" He looks concerned again.

"No." I smile at him feeling shy. "I think I've slept enough for a life time..."

His face is all serious again. "You need your sleep to recover." His brows furrow and he is searching my face.

I adjust my position. *I really need to pee. Badly!* But as I attempt to get out of bed a sharp sting shoots through my ribs. *Wow, that hurts.*

"What are you doing?" Tyler jumps to his feet, sounding annoyed suddenly.

"I need to go to the bathroom." I frown and attempt to swing my leg off the bed. I desperately need to pee. "Ouch..."

In a split second he is by my side and to my surprise and without a word he picks me up into his arms and starts to carry me to the bathroom. *Oh, this is so embarrassing!*

His arm muscles are flexing as he carries me. I hold my breath and grab onto his shoulders. He is muscular and strong. I can feel the warmth of his body so close to mine. He smells divine. A heady mix of expensive aftershave and whiskey.

When we reach the bathroom he gently puts me down and slides his arm around my waist to steady me.

"You okay?" his voice is clipped. He is gazing down at me. Bright brown eyes, penetrating mine. He has the longest lashes. I swallow and I'm blushing like a school girl.

My legs feel like jelly and I'm grateful that I didn't have to walk to the bathroom. My breathing has changed, and I battle to locate both my brain and voice.

"Will you be able to stand by yourself?" He asks me, holding me close.

I nod and grab a hold of the basin. *You can do this!* He slowly loosens his grip around my waist. "You okay?" I feel a bit dizzy... I close my eyes briefly.

"Just give me a minute..."

I hold on for dear life and hope that the basin won't break. There. I steady myself and find my balance. My legs are still feeling shaky, but I take a step forward. *Ah, my ribs hurt!* Everything hurts... I take two steps and let go of the basin. *Why is this bathroom almost as big as the room? Who the hell needs so much space?*

"Thanks. I'm fine." I can't look at him and I stare at the floor. This is mortifying.

He is not moving and when I look up at him he is clenching his perfect jaw and he is ready to grab me in a second, should I lose my balance.

"Tyler. Can I call you Tyler?"

He nods.

"Tyler, I'm fine. Really." I assure him.

He doesn't move.

"Please tell me you're not going to stand there and watch me pee!" I say mortified, my face turning red just thinking about it and he gives me a small skew smile.

Wow! He really is gorgeous.

"Okay. But I'll be right here at the door if you need me!" He says and walks out.

I walk shakily over to the toilet and take off my panties as I find the seat. *Ahhh, this feels heavenly.* Such sweet relief. I think my bladder was going to explode!

The bathroom is modern and spacious. It's all done in stone and huge beige floor tiles. It's beautiful. It has a double basin, a Victorian bath in the middle with a huge double volume shower.

When I'm done, I close my eyes briefly and pray that I'll be able to get up by myself. I pull up my panties, clenching my teeth and when I look back up, I see myself in the huge mirror in front of me.

HOLY SHIT! My mouth drops open and suddenly both my hands grip my face in shock and horror at the sight of me. I am blue and purple - bruised all over my body. My eyes are swollen; my dark hair is dirty and hanging dreadfully down my shoulders. My lip is cut at the corner. *Gosh, I look awful!*

And then I notice that I'm wearing a pale blue satin night dress and at the sight of that I hysterically start to laugh. I laugh so hard that I lose my balance completely and just before I hit the floor, Tyler catches me and I'm in his arms again. My hysterical laugh turns into an uncontrollable sob! Tyler is holding me close and we both fall gently onto the bathroom floor. He is holding me in his arms and I can't stop crying. I'm sobbing, and I can feel every tiny muscle in my body hurts. *What the hell is this? What happened to me?*

I have no idea how long we've been sitting like this. My body is shaking and suddenly I'm feeling cold.

"Come. Let's get you back into bed." His voice is so gentle. It almost sends me over the edge again. I can hardly focus; my eyes are stinging from all the crying.

He effortlessly lifts me up from the bathroom floor and carries me back into the room. I hold on to him, gripping his shoulders. He gently and carefully lowers me back onto the bed and draws the covers.

"Sleep now, girl. You need your rest." He stands next to the bed and turns towards the couch and switches off the lamp.

I feel exhausted.

When I wake up the next morning I find a chilled glass of orange juice on the bedside table with four pills. I notice that the curtains are drawn and I quickly glance over to the couch in the corner.

The chair is empty and I'm surprised to feel a small twitch of disappointment.

And then the image of me in the mirror last night pops into my head and I can feel the tears burning in my eyes. I hastily throw the duvet cover off my legs to examine them. There are blue and purple marks all over them and suddenly all the blood starts draining from my face. This horrid idea pops into my head... Was I raped? My heart starts racing again and then there is a knock on the door.

"Good morning, Sunshine! How are you feeling?" Mary comes walking in as friendly as ever, until she sees my face.

"Oh, dear... What's wrong...?" She looks at my exposed legs and she knows. She takes pity on me and sits down next to me on the bed.

"Those are just bruises, dear! They'll heal soon. Try not to worry too much about them." Her tender voice makes me fall into a million little pieces and I start to sob.

"What happened to me, Mary? Please... You have to tell me!" I can't hide the desperation in my voice. She is hugging me and stroking my back.

"Oh, honey, I wish I could tell you!"

It's the way she said it...

I wipe away my tears and I look into her kind light grey eyes. I hold her gaze for a moment.

"You know." I almost whisper. She blinks briefly a few times trying to look innocent but I'm no fool. She knows something...

I feel so desperate. "Please, Mary! Please... You have to tell me what you know." I'm pleading.

She opens her mouth to say something and then there is a knock on the door. We both look up and Tyler gracefully enters. He walks into the room adjusting his black leather jacket and I can't help noticing how good he is looking in those faded jeans he is wearing. He is holding a file in his hands. Mary jumps to her feet and straightens her dress. She is obviously intimidated by him. Did Tyler tell her not to say anything to me?

"Good morning! How are you feeling today?" His voice is polite, regarding me.

I can't help feeling a little weary. I opt for the truth.

"I'm actually quite shitty, thank you. My head hurts, I'm covered in bruises, my eyes are swollen, and my hair looks and smells like crap and I don't even know my own name!" I'm waving my arms around as I speak and I irritably wipe away the uncontrollable tears dripping down my face.

Tyler looks like he is suppressing a sigh and he vaguely looks irritated.

"Your name is Elizabeth Stuart. Or Lizzy as your friends would call you."

Tyler's face is expressionless as he looks at me with a steady gaze.

"Would you please excuse us for a moment, Mary?" He doesn't look at her. His eyes are fixed on me.

What? I don't know what to say... *Elizabeth... Lizzy...* I'm testing the words in my head. Over and over again. It doesn't mean anything to me.

Mary hands me the glass on the bedside table and my pills before leaving the room without a word. I pop them in my mouth and swallow. Tyler takes the glass from me and puts it on the bedside stand. He holds out the file that's in his hand. The front reads ***Elizabeth Ann Stuart.***

"This might help filling in some of the blanks. You're welcome."

His lips form a line and his strong jaw muscles are moving. I look down at the file on my lap and choose to ignore his snide comment. I'm too stunned for words. I look at him and then back to the file in my hand and then when I look up again, Tyler turns around, without a word and strolls out of the room, closing the door behind him.

What the hell is his problem?!... I hesitate as I stare back at the file... What is this?

I take in a deep breath. *My ribs!* And then I open it.

TWO

Elizabeth Ann Stuart

DOB: 22 September 1991, Port Elizabeth

ADDRESS: 10 St Tropez, Durbanville, Cape Town, 7550

MOBILE NUMBER: 083 354 2277

ID number: 9209220030085

OCCUPATION: Photographer

PRIOR EDUCATION: Campbell Printing College, Paarl, Cape Town

EMPLOYMENT: Self

FATHER: Arthur Frank Stuart 1948-2013 (Deceased)

MOTHER: Caroline Williams Stuart 1951-2013 (Deceased)

BROTHER: Collin Stuart, born, 19 March 1992

Address: 321 Franklin Drive,

Christchurch, New Zealand

Occupation: General Practitioner

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION: Christian

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: Not known

RELATIONSHIPS: None indicated at present.

I stare blankly at the pages... Nothing seems familiar. It's like I'm reading a story about someone else... I read through it again and again, hoping it would trigger some kind of memory. *Photographer... I have a younger brother. Are we close? Is he my only family?*

I touch my head. How to process all of this... No parents! *And where the hell did Tyler get this information from?* Does he know more than what he's leading me to believe?

I decide to go and look for him. If he does, I want to know. Surely he knows more than what he is letting on... My thoughts are overwhelming all of a sudden, clouding my head.

I slowly get out of bed. I see there is a matching satin gown hanging from the chair on the opposite side of the room. I wrap it around myself trying not to think about how horrible I look. Maybe I should shower first.

No. The shower can wait!

As I'm standing there in the middle of the open space I can feel my legs starting to shake. Please don't fall! Please don't fall! Slowly I walk over to the bed and sit down again. I let out a big sigh. The room is spinning.

I should take a shower - Let it all sink in. Maybe I'll remember something. I take the file from the bed and read it again. When my head settles I try to get up and slowly start walking to the bathroom. When I get there I lean onto the basin again and look at the shower.

Come on... You can do it. Lizzy! Elizabeth Stuart. I test it over and over in my head.

Eventually I can feel the hot water pouring all over my skin. It feels heavenly! I lean against the cold tiles on the wall. *This is a massive shower. Tyler is obviously filthy rich. And he is very young... Too young to have so much money...* My long dark hair is clinging to my shoulders and the water is soothing against my skin.

I squirt out some body wash and rub it on my sensitive skin. It smells divine. I study my arms and legs while leaning back against the tiles. They are covered in bruises. Where exactly did he find me? What could possibly have happened to me?

I find it difficult to wash my hair, but I'm determined to find some answers and I know I'll feel better after a shower. *What on earth am I going to wear?*

I close the tap and there is a knock on the door. I'm exhausted after the shower and I have to lean against the cold tiles for a moment.

"Elizabeth, it's me, Mary. Can I come in? You really shouldn't be doing this alone!"

She opens the door and enters the bathroom before I can answer. She shuts the door behind her and she hands me a soft white towel. I'm so relieved to see her. I feel so weak.

"Here, let me help you. You must be feeling better after taking a shower? Come, I have some clean clothes ready for you."

I like Mary. She is so caring and sincere. She helps me into a white dress. It is probably the easiest and most practical to wear. Some clean, new underwear, it fits perfectly. I frown. I'm sitting down while Mary is combing my hair and drying it. I can't bare to look at myself in the mirror... I look dreadful, like someone stepping out of a horror movie!

Mary has finished drying my hair and I must admit I feel a lot better.

I look her square in the eyes and ask her straight out "Mary, what do you know... about me?"

"Oh, dear... I know this must be hard for you..."

"Please, Mary, just tell me the truth. Tell me what you know." I'm pleading.

She stills for a moment to think.

"Lizzy... You arrived here three days ago. Mr Tyler went out for his daily run and he found you unconscious in the forest. He brought you here... That is all I know, dear."

She doesn't look straight at me and instantly busies herself, hanging the towel back onto the railing. I have a feeling that she is not telling me everything. I study her face. *She definitely knows something.*

I don't want to make her feel uncomfortable though, so I change the subject...

"Did Mr Reeves hire you...? To look after me?" My voice is soft.

"No." She laughs softly. "I'm the Reeves' house keeper, but I happen to be a nurse too." Her smile is friendly. "Are you hungry? I can make you some breakfast. What would you like?"

I don't even know what time it is... And I would really like to speak to Tyler first.

"Maybe later. I need to speak to Tyler first... Mr Reeves... Is he always so...serious?" The question is out before I can stop myself.

"Yes, mostly." She says and I can sense that she doesn't feel comfortable talking about her employer so openly.

"Come dear, I was planning on bringing you breakfast in bed, but I think some fresh air might do you some good. It is such a lovely day outside. Are you up for it, Elizabeth?"

I'm still not used to hearing my name. I frown.

"You can call me... Lizzy. Thanks, Mary. Outside is just fine." I pause for a moment. "What day is it?"

"It is Saturday, dear."

Saturday. "And the date?"

"16 April..." I shake my head and look puzzled at her.

"2018." She says. Answering my unspoken question.

She gently takes my arm and leads me towards the door.

"Will you be able to walk?"

I nod. I want to see Tyler. I need to know.

She gently leads me down the long corridor. I'm walking considerably slower to my liking. We take a left turn and we enter another enormous room that must be the living room. It is lavish and spacious and beautiful.

It is double volume with three massive white leather couches facing a fireplace. The floor-to-ceiling windows let in a lot of natural light and the open floor plan connects it to the dining area with a gorgeous crystal chandelier hanging over the twelve seater table.

This really is a massive house. I feel a little overwhelmed.

"Come and sit here on the couch, darling. I'll go call Mr Tyler for you."

She helps me to sit down on the couch and then she disappears around the corner into another room. I stare at the huge painting on the wall.

It's two little boys playing joyfully on the beach and a little baby girl sitting under an umbrella. It is stunningly done and it almost looks like a photo. I frown and I find it odd. Not something I would have expected to see in a serious, thirty-something man's house... And then it strikes me. Maybe he's got a family. Kids, a wife! It never occurred to me before.

"Elizabeth!" Tyler is standing before me and he is watching me like a hawk. I shake my head to try and make sense of my thoughts...

"Is everything alright? Do you need anything?" His polite response throws me a bit, as well as the intense gaze he is giving me.

I nod. "Yes... Sorry... I... I have questions, Mr Reeves." I quickly add (unsure about where to begin exactly)... *I have no idea what to call him.*

"We'll have some breakfast on the patio, if you are up for it? Fresh air might be good for you."

He walks over to me.

"Feeling strong enough to *walk*?"

I look up at him. He is possibly suppressing a smile, but I'm not sure. *Is he making fun of me?* I find him very hard to read. It's frustrating, to say the least. His eyes pierce into me.

He holds out his hand. As I place my hand in his, he takes a firm hold. He slips his arm around my waist again, helping me find my balance and slowly we make our way to the patio, careful not to let go of me.

There is a slight breeze coming from the open sliding door and the scent of his aftershave hits me. I notice that he took his jacket off. He is wearing a fitted white t-shirt and flip-flops. *Why does he have to be so damn beautiful?*

As we walk onto the patio there are three big couches overlooking the pool. The garden is spectacular with large mature trees and a manicured lawn. The leaves are blowing peacefully in the wind.

We slowly make our way to the sitting area and he gently helps me sit on the oversized couch. There is a little breeze and it brushes over my face. It's wonderful to be outside.

He takes a seat opposite me and he is watching me intently. "You look lovely in that dress." And I can almost feel his eyes gawking over me.

I look up at him and our eyes lock. Brown to dark grey. He holds my gaze for a moment. I can't take my eyes off him.

"Thank you." My voice is soft and I frown. "I really don't know what to say..." and I look down to my lap. "Thank you for the clothes... for finding me... for taking me in... I'm..."

"Don't mention it." He gives me a small smile but still I have no idea what he is thinking. It's frustrating. Annoying, really.

I take a deep breath. I'm desperately trying to fight my tears. I find his stare intimidating.

"I hope you don't mind, Mr Reeves. I have some questions... about what happened to me..." I trail off. This is so much harder to actually talk about than I thought it would be. And by the looks of things, he is not going to make it any easier on me. I take a deep breath, my ribs reminding me not to do that.

"What happened to me? Please. I need to know." My voice trails off.

I don't know what he is thinking but his eyes soften slightly and I think he is taking pity on me.

"I gave you the file. I take it you've read it?" He is ignoring my question. He lifts up his eyebrows at me. He is arrogant...

I narrow my eyes at him, ignoring *his* question. *Obviously I read it!*

"Where did you find me? Was I alone, did I have anything on me? A bag or keys... Anything?" I shrug.

His eyes are cool and his voice is calm as he responds. "You were alone and unconscious in the Newlands forest when I found you. I went for a jog." His words are clipped. "Heaven knows what would have happened to you if I didn't." His eyes are serious and penetrating.

"Why?" I ask immediately.

He frowns at me. I swallow.

"Why bring me here?" *Why not take me home?* And how do you know who I am? *It doesn't make sense...* I want to fire all these questions at him, but I find him so intimidating. And suddenly I feel unsure about him.

He sifts slightly in his chair, his eyes not leaving mine.

"I mean, you did call the police, didn't you?" I search his face for... anything... My voice is small. He doesn't reveal a thing. *I could bash a pillow right now.*

He is silent for a moment and then I know. *He didn't! Holy Shit!* I start to panic. *Should I panic?*

"You didn't call the police?" I know that I'm raising my voice but *what the hell...?* He just sits there! Suddenly the thought of my brother pops into my head. "And what about my brother?" I am feeling desperate, confused.

"Calm down, Elizabeth! It's not as simple as picking up the phone and calling the police. I did phone your brother but we couldn't reach him." His mouth is forming a hard line. "I suspect that there are people..." He pauses, almost like he is choosing his words carefully. "They are after you and this is the safest place for you to be right now."

"People?! After me?! Whom...?" I frown up at him. "What people?" I'm completely shocked.

He doesn't answer me for the longest time. I want to get up from my seat, but I know I'm too weak. *Dammit!*

I open my mouth to speak but suddenly his cell phone starts ringing. He reaches for it inside his pocket and looks at the screen.

"Please excuse me for a moment..." He gracefully stands up and walks away to take the call. "Reeves..."

Seriously! Seriously? My head starts pounding as I feel the anger building inside me. My eyes are pooling. *Ouch...!* My head hurts. Please can this not be happening right now?! *Can I please just focus on one thing at a time!* I'm touching my head... I can't believe he is actually taking the damn call... *Asshole!*

Mary comes walking onto the patio pushing a trolley. I clear my throat, trying to rein in my wayward emotions. She has been busy in the kitchen and it looks like a buffet breakfast at a hotel. *Who is going to eat all that?*

I nervously look over my shoulder at the patio table. I hope there aren't more people coming... I think about the painting in the living room. *Shit... his family...*

"Can I pour you a cup of coffee? I know Mr Tyler would like some. Do you take sugar?" I look up at her friendly face. She realizes what she just said and her face falls. "Sorry, dear! I do apologise." She adds quickly.

I shake my head and drop my face. "It's fine Mary. Make it black, without sugar." Like my mood... "We'll take it from there..." and I give her half a smile.

She rubs my shoulder briefly as she hands me my coffee. I look at the black liquid in the all-white cup. White cups, white rooms, white shirts, dresses, towels... *What's up with all the white?*

"I think I'll take some milk." I scrunch my face as I taste it and hand her back the cup and she pours me some milk.

Tyler comes back and he slides his phone into his jeans. I square my shoulders in an attempt to look braver than I feel. I wait for his reply to my burning question.

"Ready for some breakfast? I'm starving. Thanks, Mary! This looks delicious!"

What?

He walks over to me and holds out his hand again. It's as if he never threw this bombshell at me merely minutes ago...

"Care to join me for breakfast?"

His mood has suddenly changed. Must have been the phone call. How could he just leave me hanging like that? And now he is all chirpy and full of smiles. *And full of himself.*

I look at him in disbelief. I open my mouth to speak but words fail me...

This tiny voice in my head quickly reminds me that *I am in this man's house...* and I feel so bewildered. *Should I worry? Should I be grateful?* I really don't know what to make of this... or anything... The ache in my head is back.

I really want to cry.

He takes the cup from me and with his other hand he takes my hand. And there is that feeling again. He takes a firm hold. We walk over to the table and he pulls the seat out and helps me to sit down. I try to calm myself.

"Mary will you please dish for Elizabeth?"

"Sure Mr Tyler. What would you like, Lizzy?" She looks at me while handing Tyler his cup of coffee.

I can smell the bacon and mushrooms and I realize I'm famished.

"Anything, thanks Mary." Food is the last thing on my mind, but my stomach is totally not agreeing with my mind on this one.

I've got a hundred and three questions in my head but we sit in silence for a moment. Awkward on my part. Calm and collected on his. This is so infuriating!

Mary places my plate before me and hands one to Tyler.

I look down at my plate and my stomach makes a turn. This looks and smells amazing. Bacon, eggs, mushrooms, toast with jam, cream cheese on the side, fried tomato. I hate the fact that I'm distracted by this food in front of me right now, and I fight the urge to stuff my face.

"Thanks, Mary." He nods at her without a smile. Dismissing her. At least he said thanks! I look at him and frown. He really is unpleasant!

We eat in silence for a while. *Boy, this tastes good!* I try not to look at Tyler while we eat. I focus on the trees in the garden. It's good to be outside.

I'm desperately trying to gather my thoughts and the million and two questions I have. When I look up Tyler has been watching me. My eyes are drawn to his mouth, his full sculpted lips. His strong cheek bones while he is chewing.

It's getting awkward... I move my plate to the side and I take a deep breath. I can't take it anymore.

"Well?" I ask impatiently.

He lifts one eyebrow up at me, a cool gleam in his eyes. He is making me feel foolish. Like I'm ten or twelve... He takes his time. He lifts his coffee to his mouth. *Those lips...*

"I want to know, Tyler!" I say agitated. With him. With myself! His steady gaze makes me look down for a moment and I add, barely audible, "I need to know!" I peek back up into his dark beautiful eyes and I hate that he intimidates me so much.

"I know." He says eventually, stopping in mid-air and pauses for a second, holding my gaze.

He puts the cup down in front of him and puts his elbows on the table. He folds his fingers together, brushing his index fingers over his lips. His toned muscles are flexing. *Talk already, dammit!*

"You are not safe on your own. That's why you are here with me and not back at your place. All you need to know is that you are safe as long as you are with me."

"How do you know?" I look at him. Tears pooling in my eyes. *Who? Why?* "How do you know all this?"

"Let's just say I'm trained in this kind of a thing... I won't let anything happen to you!"

I fall back into my chair in disbelief and wince at the pain in my ribs. *Trained for this kind of a thing... Seriously?!* "Trained for *what?*" I feel like I can burst out laughing it's so ridiculous. I mean this is my life we are talking about here...

"Who is after me?" I shrug at him. "What do they want?"

His eyes narrow and he looks speculatively at me.

"I know that you must feel very confused, Elizabeth, anyone in your position would, but please trust me. All you need to know for now is that you will be safe here. I promise you that."

We sit and stare at each other in silence. *Safe from whom?* I open my mouth to speak again but Tyler is already standing up from his chair, cleaning his mouth with the serviette.

He is making it clear that this discussion is over. And this is getting us nowhere. My head is pounding, now.

I stare at him in disbelief. I feel tired and weak all of the sudden. Dead tired. I need to think...

"Get some rest, Lizzy. You'll need your strength."

What does that mean? But before I can ask him, I'm staring at his back as he is entering the house.

My mind is reeling. *Should I trust him? Do I have any choice?*

Mary helps me back into bed. She brings me some more medication and I fall into a restless sleep.

When I wake up, it's late afternoon. How long did I sleep?

I sit upright and on the opposite side of the room I see a table and on it is a black sleek lap top. It is open. I look around the vast room again but I'm alone. On the bedside table I see a note. *For you. Google is your friend.*

I'm taken aback by this... A laptop? *Wow, this is thoughtful.*

I struggle out of bed and make my way to the computer. I sit on the chair and notice that it's on. I move the mouse and the Google page comes up. I feel a little excited about this new tool to my disposal. And then I see it. My name is already typed in the menu bar. **Elizabeth Stuart.** I press enter. I feel anxious...

Elizabeth Stuart Photography comes up and a whole list of other sites. **Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram.** I click on the first one. It must be my website.

The screen opens on the home page, revealing a wide screen shot of a black and white photo of a beautiful bride laughing wide-mouthed in a field. Her valet dancing behind her in the wind. It is an amazing picture.

I scan the top of the menu bar on the site. My eyes rest on the words, **ABOUT ME** and I click on it.

THREE

ABOUT ME

My interest in photography was first paged looking at photographs my dad took. We moved quite around a bit because of his sales career and he always used to take piles of new photos of places he has seen and worked in. It fascinated me!

I was born in Port Elizabeth and moved to Cape Town in 2013 after falling in love with the Mother City!

I was modelling for an agency called On Square since the age of twelve, but I felt more alive and at ease when I jumped in behind the camera one day, working in Paris for a top modelling agency. This was the beginning of a new chapter for me.

In 2013 I was assistant to celebrity photographer, JCK. It was during this period that I gained a lot of technical skills in photography. I've learned to direct and communicate with my clients.

At the end of 2015 I decided to fly solo and I am now doing profile work for models, weddings and private shoots. I am completely in love with my work!

And then my eyes are fixed on a beautiful woman with long, thick curly hair and shiny dark grey eyes. She is smiling broadly at the camera with perfect white teeth holding a camera in her hand. She looks playful and happy. I read Lizzy written underneath the photo in a handwritten type of font.

I can hardly believe I'm staring back at myself not remembering a thing! My eyes become watery again.

I click on **GALLERY** with the hope to distract myself and hundreds of photos pop up on the screen. Model Profile Shoots, Weddings, Family Photos, Boudoir, Engagements, New Born. I click through a few photos. . . *These are really good. Did I really take them?*

And then my eye catches a family shoot and I click on it.

I'm so privileged to have had the opportunity to finally meet my little nephew, Luke Stuart! I took these adorable pictures of him and my brother's family when I visited them in New Zealand in April this year.

And a note to my brother Collin and Jolene (his gorgeous wife) - you two know how to make the perfect babies! I've missed little Matthee's hugs and kisses so much! I just love spending time with my family!

It was posted May 23rd, 2017. *That was last year!*

I slowly work my way through the photos. Scanning them noticing every one looks so happy on the beach!

Collin is tall with dark short hair. He has dark blue eyes and is handsome. He looks nothing like me. His wife, Jolene is a beautiful petite blond with short hair. Matthee is a gorgeous little

boy with light curly hair. He must be around four or five and then there are a few adorable photos of the baby.

I go back to Google and type **Dr Collin Stuart NZ**. *My brother...*

A whole lot of information comes up. The first one is **Harley Street Practitioners**. My eye catches **Collin Stuart** and I click on it.

All his information comes up, address and contact details... I stare at it, wondering what to do... *Should I call him?*

A knock on the door startles me. "Come in."

Tyler walks in gracefully and there is a vague smile on his face as he is eying me behind the computer.

"I see you have been putting it to some good use?" His eyes are pinning mine.

"Thank you... It seems I can actually take some decent photos!" I smile weakly at him.

"You are very talented, Elizabeth!" He is standing across the room from me and his eyes are sincere. "Care to join me for a drink?"

No, thanks, I'd rather stay here and do some research... but then again, it might be the perfect opportunity for me to get some more information out of him.

I nod, wondering what time it is. I look on the screen and see that it is 17:00.

"Can't believe what time it is... I slept through most of the day!"

He walks towards me around the table and he holds out his hand. I look up at him and he has a cool gleam in his eye. His lips curl up, forming a perfect skew smile as I place my hand in his. He firmly holds it and slips his arm around my waist for support.

He looks down at me.

"You okay?" he is searching my face.

My breathing has stopped as I can feel his warmth next to me. His eyes are dark. *Why is he so damn attractive?* I manage to nod. I feel nervous around him.

When we get to the patio I can hardly believe my eyes. It's like we've stepped into a gorgeous painting. The sun is busy setting, sitting low in the distance reflecting on the crystal blue water of the pool, painting the sky with glorious pink clouds. It's picture perfect. It is amazing!

Tyler moves to the corner that looks like a mini bar area. He doesn't say anything while he is pouring us a drink. I slowly make my way to the pool area.

I can get lost in this view as I look up in the sky. The trees are moving peacefully in the slight breeze. It is lovely to be out.

"Your drink." Tyler is standing next to me bringing me back to the here and now. He hands me a glass. "Caipirinha" The drink is light in colour, filled with ice and slices of lime.

I look into his shining brown eyes as I take the glass from him. Our fingers brush briefly and I breathe in a quick breath.

"Thank you." *Mmm alcohol... should I be worried about my meds?*

I take a sip and start to cough. *Boy it's strong...*

"Steady, now." He takes my glass and lightly pats me on the back.

I hold up my hand and wince from the pain in my ribs. "I'm fine..." I manage. "Jeeze! You could have warned me, you know... It's nice, but strong. What is it?"

"Cachaça." He looks at me with his skew smile.

I lift my brow at him. "I don't know what you just said to me." *I'm so out of my depth here.*

He smiles. Showing off perfect white teeth. *Oh my!*

"Also known as Rum."

He hands me back my glass. Our eyes lock for a brief moment, and I take another sip. Cautious this time and it's delicious.

"I like it." I smile back at him, holding my chest.

My head is spinning and my legs are feeling weak. Without realising it, I grab a hold of his arm.

"Sorry... I... I need to take a seat."

He quickly takes the drink from me and puts it on the tiles. Not letting go of my hand.

"Can we sit here? By the pool?" I want to relish in the water. It's so beautiful.

I bend down slowly and lift my dress. Strong arms are around my waist. I swallow.

Suddenly he lifts me effortlessly and lowers me down carefully. I put my feet into the cool refreshing water.

The sun is setting and the picture is changing, the entire sky is filled with pink and orange clouds hovering over us. I look up to the sky.

"It is beautiful!" I look up at Tyler towering next to me. He is not taking his eyes off me.

"Breathtakingly..." and I can't help thinking he is not referring to the picture above us. *Don't be ridiculous! You are blue and purple! He is definitely referring to the sky!* And I can feel my blush.

He looks down at me and then he bends down and rolls up his pants and he gracefully sits down next to me, handing me my drink again.

"Is it always like this, so peaceful out here?" *I wish I could stay in this moment forever. This house, the garden, the pool, the sunset...* I quickly take another sip.

"Mostly." He says swirling his feet playfully in the water. He lifts his glass to his mouth. *That mouth...*

"How long have you had this place?" I point my toes in the water.

He looks away and he frowns. "A couple of years."

"You are not one for many words, are you? Or you don't like talking about yourself?" I search his face for some kind of emotion, a clue to what he is thinking. He gives me nothing. Again.

"Ehmmm." He looks at me with a skew smile and his eyes are playful. *Finally something is shifting... slightly...*

"You are very serious." It's out before I can stop myself. "Most of the time..." *Nope, all the time actually, except for now, maybe.*

He shrugs at me. "I was born like this."

"I'm sorry, it kind of slipped out. It seems my filter is missing too, having a party somewhere with my memory..." I look down onto the water and feel my feet beneath it. It's soothing.

He looks at me, eyes amused. "It will come back to you." He holds my gaze for a second and reaches for his drink.

We sit in silence enjoying the spectacular view. Suddenly we hear something in the bushes and out of nowhere a beautiful Golden Retriever comes running towards us. Tail wagging and ears flat. He is carrying a flat soccer ball in his mouth and looks adorable. He runs around the pool and then suddenly makes a jump for it, splashing water all over us.

"Lucy!" Tyler shouts holding out his hands.

He's a girl. We both start laughing. I look down at my dress and we are both wet.

Lucy is swimming towards us, still holding the deflated ball in her mouth.

"And who is this?" I smile at Tyler.

He takes the flat ball from her and throws it over the water to the other side. She paddles after it.

“This here is Lucy.” He smiles as he is looking at her. She grabs the ball in her mouth and climbs out. She comes running towards us and then shakes her body, splashing water all over us again.

“Eeeeck,” I squeal and hold my hands up.

“Lucy!” Tyler shouts.

We both laugh. He gracefully gets up and walks over to the patio. He opens up a little box and takes out two towels. He casually makes his way back to us.

I’m rubbing Lucy’s semi-dry face. He dries her with the towel and he hands me the other towel.

“She’s adorable.” *Why didn’t I see her before?*

“She likes to visit Mary often. She lets her into her section of the house.” He rolls his eyes.

“Oh, and you obviously don’t.” I smile up at him. His eyes are shining bright.

“Nope.” He slowly shakes his head. “She’s a dog.” He shrugs playfully. “With lots of hair.”

“Ahhh poor baby.”

I look at Lucy again, holding her ball in her mouth sitting looking at us. I look at Tyler and notice that he seems more relaxed this evening. He throws the wet towel to the side and he lowers his feet in the water next to me.

He casually leans back, his arms are stretched out behind him, and his feet are caressing the water. I find it difficult to look away.

We are quiet for a while and then I take a deep breath.

"I'd like to ask you something." My voice is very soft.

I look at his hands, as he is taking the towel from me with long elegant fingers and when I reach his eyes, they are expectant and shining. *Oh, I could get lost in them. Focus, Lizzy!*

I hesitate.

“What is it?” he looks concerned. I take a deep breath.

“You said you found me in the forest.” I study his face.

“That is not a question.” His face is passive.

I build up all the courage I have...

"I'd like to go... to the forest." I study his face. “Please, Tyler.” It’s almost a whisper. *I really need to know.* And I have to start somewhere.

He looks at me and frowns. I have no idea what he is thinking. He doesn't respond. He takes his hand and rubs his face impatiently. I'm definitely changing the mood between us. *Arrgh, this man is frustrating.*

Eventually he says, "I'll take you tomorrow... if you insist."

I look at him again. My voice is soft and sincere. "Thank you."

I take my glass and take another sip. I can feel the warmth of the alcohol sliding down my throat. *Maybe I'll remember something when I'm there. I have to!*

The sun has disappeared behind the mountain the slight breeze is chilly in the air. The water is shining bright as the lights automatically switches on inside the pool.

"Come. Let's get you inside." He offers me his hand and gently pulls me up.

As I try and stand, I'm aware of my wet feet on the tiles and true as Bob, I lose my balance.

I fall forward, and instantly strong arms catch me. My face briefly touches his chest. He is rock hard, and I have to close my eyes for a second. I inhale his scent. He feels so strong, holding me.

I desperately try to find my balance.

"Careful!" His voice is soft.

His arms still holding me. He is standing so close. I look up to meet his gaze. Our eyes lock.

I nod, not able to say anything. I'm holding my breath.

It feels like time is standing still.

My heart is racing, and I hope to God he doesn't feel it... standing so close to me.

"Your dinner is on the table, Mr Tyler, Lizzy!" Mary is shouting from the patio door, breaking the spell.

He immediately drops his arms slightly, first making sure that I'm well on my feet.

I let out a soft breath.

"Hungry?" He asks me, eyes glowing and this time he gives me a smile.

"Starving." I say and I take his out stretched hand. His hand is soft and strong and it fits perfectly.

We walk towards the house. Slowly we make our way to the living room. He guides me towards the dining room table which has been neatly set for two. There is a wine bottle on the table with a glass holder of ice and some wine glasses. He helps me into the chair. *No family then.*

Jeeze, more alcohol... I don't even know what medication I am on...

"I hope you like salmon." He says as he takes the bottle of wine to open.

"I hope so too!" I say and give him a sweet smile.

I feel better now that he has at least agreed on taking me to the forest. And the alcohol is having an effect on me too, I'm sure.

"Some Chardonnay?" His eyes are pinning mine again and I'm relieved to see that his playful mood is back.

"Please." I can't take my eyes off him. *This is ridiculous!*

He takes his time opening the wine and the crystal-clear liquid looks cool and inviting. He passes me a glass. It's half filled.

"Don't want the good doctor upset with me giving his patient too much alcohol..." He gives me a skew smile again and I start to giggle.

"That rum alone, was probably already over my limit for the week..." and we both start laughing.

The food is divine. The salmon is perfectly cooked drizzled with some garlic butter. It melts in my mouth. The rice is fluffy and tasty and the mixed veggies are out of this world.

"Mary is quite talented?" I lift my brow at him.

I've got a million questions floating around in my head, but I decide to take it slow. Keep things light. Tyler is such a closed book. I need to know what I'm dealing with.

He's got that penetrating look again. His jaw is so strong and distracting, chewing his food. I've got no idea what he is thinking...

"That she is." He agrees and lifts his wine to take a sip.

"How long has she worked for you?"

"Five years." He is holding my gaze. I swallow and take another bite. I frown. I find it hard to concentrate.

"Are you enjoying the food?" He asks me with a skew smile.

"It's my new favourite." I smile back at him.

"You have the most beautiful eyes." His eyes are blazing.

It feels like he can see straight into my soul. I'm surprised by his honesty. I'm about to respond when Mary enters the room asking if she can clear the table. Tyler holds my gaze for a second longer and then frowns at Mary, I think, but I can't be sure.

He shifts his seat backwards giving Mary some space to clear the table. His brown eyes, appraising me. I can feel my blush.

And then suddenly he stands to his feet. "Please excuse me. I have some work to do. Please, make yourself at home. Mary, you'll attend to Miss Stuart?" He is very polite but doesn't wait for Mary's answer. He disappears down the hall.

What? That's it? I sink back into my chair in disbelief. I have a hundred questions in my head...

I find myself sitting alone at this huge twelve-seater-table. Work... On a Saturday evening? What does he do? He really is so curt. It drives me mad. I feel the frustration setting in.

I desperately try and figure him out. This is such a huge house for just one man. Was he ever married? Divorced? Is he in a relationship? Maybe he has a girlfriend... Maybe I should ask Mary.

She is busy clearing the table, loading all the cutlery on her trolley.

"Has he always stayed alone? In this big house? By himself?" I'm not quite sure how to ask this... And suddenly I feel foolish for asking such a personal question.

"Yes, dear." She answers far too quickly and I get the message that she's not comfortable talking about it.

I slowly stand up from the table. Mary stops immediately and turns towards me to help.

I want to tell her that I'll be okay, but my legs are feeling weak.

"Come dear, hold on to my arm."

We slowly make our way back to the room.

"I loved the salmon, by the way... It's my new favourite." I smile at her.

"I'm glad to hear that, Lizzy. It's nice to cook for two for a change." She says and winks at me.

When we reach the door, I tell her that I'll be okay.

"You sure? I don't want you falling."

"I won't. Thanks, Mary."

When she closes the door behind her, I momentarily wonder what I should do with myself...

My thoughts drift back to Tyler. He was in a better mood tonight. How am I ever going to repay him? But most importantly, why is he doing this? I don't understand. And all of the sudden my mood is plummeting to the ground. Oh, this is so frustrating!

I walk over to the side table where the laptop is, and I look at the file again with my name on. I close my eyes and briefly ask for some recollection of memory, anything...

I open up the laptop and read through my website again. I look through the gallery of photos, studying everyone's faces, trying to concentrate, but they are all a bunch of strangers to me. I read up on the college I went to.

I go onto On Square Modelling Agency's website. I see all the new faces on the front page of models that recently joined them. That's not really going to help...

I Google my name again. **Lizzy Stuart Model** and I click on Images. And suddenly a whole lot of photos come up on the screen. There are photos of me posing on the beach, fashion shoots, a few lingerie shoots. There are a few casual shots, me sipping on a straw enjoying a soda. *It's so strange; it's like looking at a stranger...*

I go through all the photos making sure I don't miss a single thing... but the entire exercise just frustrates me more. I look at the time. It's just after nine.

I hear a knock on the door. I look up from the computer. "Come in."

Mary comes walking in with a glass of orange juice and some pills. I'm surprised that I'm a little disappointed it's not the curtly Mr Reeves entering my room.

"Hi, there dear. How are you feeling? I see you are putting the laptop to some good use. Find anything yet?" She smiles at me.

"Just some modelling photos of myself." I show her the open screen.

"Oh, Lizzy, you are beautiful. You really are very special dear! These are simply gorgeous."

"It doesn't mean anything to me." I say in a small voice and stare blankly at the photos. Mary is stroking my arm.

"Not to worry, dear. All in good time." She hands me my medication. I take it from her like a good girl. "Are you ready to take a shower?"

"I'd love to." *I'd love it more if I could do it myself...* I give her a sad smile.

Mary helps me out of my clothes and I climb into the hot water. It feels heavenly! It takes me longer than it should, but I try and concentrate on cleansing my body as well as my head.

After the shower, Mary is drying my hair. This time I'm wearing a soft pink satin night gown. I don't entirely feel comfortable in it, but there is no way I'm asking Mary to dress me again...

"Are you all right dear? Anything else you need for the evening?" Her smile is warm.

"I'm fine. Thanks for your help, Mary... I..." words fail me.

"It's my pleasure, Lizzy. You worry far too much, dear. Everything will be all right. You'll see!"

I sigh and sit on the bed. I feel tired again. It must be the medication.

"Get some sleep. I'll see you in the morning." She turns around and leaves the room.

Just as I get ready to climb into bed, there is a soft knock on the door again.

"Come in."

Tyler enters the room and once he sees me, he stops in his tracks. His eyes are glancing down my body and when our eyes meet; his eyes seem darker, alive. He doesn't show any other facial expression.

"Sorry, I didn't realise the time." He says, and I get the feeling he is trying to distract himself by looking at his watch. He walks closer to the bed.

"You still want to go to the forest tomorrow?" His eyes are searching mine again. He is clenching his jaw and he seems tense.

Our eyes are locked. I can't seem to move. "Please." I whisper. It's a plea.

He nods. "We'll leave at 07:30. He turns and makes his way to the door. He turns around again.

"Get some sleep, Lizzy...You look lovely in that pink." He adds before closing the door.

I climb into bed.

Tyler Reeves... Mr Oh-So-Serious... I find him strange, handsome as hell, but intense, even his eyes... and he is impossible-to-read. He seems very distant and withdrawn. Strange. Very strange, too strange.

I wonder suddenly if he is a model. He would be earning mega bucks. That will explain the house, his money. The camera must love him... I can picture him on the beach, on the rocks... posing, wet body...

I lie in bed, and my thoughts don't waver at all from this enigmatic man, called Tyler Reeves. Thinking about his jaw, his mouth, and those lips. I swallow.

Seriously, Lizzy, get a hold of yourself.

I turn with difficulty and my thoughts go back to the forest. *I really hope tomorrow will deliver... something... anything...*