

CHAPTER 17

PARIS

There they were, dressed in semiformal attire, enjoying a fresh lobster dinner on the balcony of a plush restaurant overlooking the city lights. It was probably the most romantic setting any couple could possibly hope for. With a full moon, candlelight and the Eiffel Tower as their setting, the ambience seemed perfect. Maggie was sure that nothing on earth could dispel this beautiful moment. Unfortunately, the King of Nothing on Earth was sitting directly across from her.

"There's something I've been wanting to tell you." Eddie's expression appeared to be a prelude to what Maggie was hoping would lead to a romantic interlude.

"Yes, Eddie," she replied passionately.

Realizing that she was obviously expecting him to journey in a much different direction, he grinned and chuckled. "Believe me, there's all kinds of things I'd like

to say, but I really wanted to talk a little bit about the project."

She dropped her head. "How apropos. Here we are in the most romantic city in the world and you want to talk business. Okay, Eddie," she invited. "What is it?"

"I'm sorry, Mag. I don't mean to spoil your evening and I wouldn't have brought it up if it weren't important."

"I'm sure it is, but I don't mind telling you that your timing stinks."

"I can't argue that, but you don't understand."

"Oh yes I do."

"Huh uh."

"Problem?" she asked with a look of surprise.

"Well, no, but there are some things that you need to know."

She was hoping for poetic flattery. Instead, she found herself preparing to discuss scientific probability. "All right, Eddie. What don't I know that's so important?"

"This may not seem like the right time or place, but I don't really know if there ever will be a right time."

"You're dancing," she educed.

"It's our patient."

"There is a problem, then?"

"Well, not scientifically speaking, but for you and I though, there may be reason for concern." She now had a blank stare. "What I mean is, I know you have wondered who our patient is?"

"Oh, of course I have," she declared receptively.

"This project was started more than forty years ago and that's another very long story in itself. Anyway, it has all escalated to the point we're at today." He looked her in the eye and with carefully chosen words, continued,

"At first, it didn't seem to matter much who the guy was, that is until I found out who he was. Then of course, you shared that little theory of yours. Now, I have an entirely different perspective."

"Well, who is it?"

"Get ready," he prepared her with a deep breath.

"More wine, sir?" The waiter seemed to have worse timing than Eddie.

"Leave the bottle and see that we aren't disturbed," Eddie requested, holding up a twenty as incentive. Maggie was amused by the assertive gesture. The waiter accepted the bribe and left.

Eddie delved right back in. "Do you remember that seminar we attended in Orlando, back in May of 2000?"

"Vaguely."

"Randall Miller was the speaker. He talked about rumors of a man being frozen down in the late sixties. Do you remember that?"

"Kind of, but that was a such long time ago."

"It didn't mean much to me at the time, but as fate would have it, the rumors were true."

"Our patient?" she asked to confirm.

"Yep! And his name is..." He paused to insure that no one could over hear. With raised eyebrows and a cocky grin, he said, "...Vic Dazzle!"

Maggie gasped and lost the grip on her wine glass, which shattered on her plate. She placed her hand over mouth to hide the huge opening and held it there. "Oh my God," she murmured through her fingers. "Oh my God."

"Yeah," he enlightened as he reached across to pick up the pieces of broken glass. "That's pretty much the standard reaction. Now, you'll be able to understand a lot of things now, like why I was so distant for a while."

"Oh my God, Eddie," she repeated as she lowered her hand and retrieved her napkin. She dabbed it at the corners of her mouth, then her forehead and finally at the wine from her glass which was now running over the edge of their table.

"Incredible, huh?"

She pondered for a moment in an attempt to formulate an appropriate reply. Like Eddie, she was beginning to consider the potential ramifications. Eddie poured some more wine in another glass. She took a long slow sip. "Do you realize what this means?"

"Yeah, if we revive Vic Dazzle and prove your theory wrong in the process, it could be the best thing that ever happened," he proclaimed. "But if we revive him and your theory turns out to be correct, whew! I don't even want to think about it."

"That sums it up pretty well. Now, a lot of things are beginning to make sense."

"Like what?"

"The poison, 'Death by the sword'. You didn't stumble on that piece of information, you were looking for it."

"Well," he admitted, "you got me thinking, but I didn't really expect to find anything."

"But you did."

"Yeah, and the more research I did, the deeper it got. I found some other rather ironic facts that you might find interesting."

"Like what?"

"Like 6-6-6, I even found the number in his name."

"How did you manage that?" she asked with discerning doubt.

"It seems kind of silly to me. I mean, what do I know about establishing the number of a man? So I used Kate's formula," he steadfastly claimed. "It seemed almost too

elementary, but it did lead to some intriguing conclusions."

As Eddie went on to explain, he uncorked their second bottle of wine and before they had concluded a very lengthy conversation, had started on a third. It was well after midnight when they retired to their luxurious suites. Eddie had the bottle in hand.

Neither was accustomed to excessive drinking and both were feeling the effects, giggling like small children and stumbling most of the way to their adjoining rooms.

"Are you ready for bed?" Eddie asked with slurred words as they reached the door.

"Not really."

"Do you want to come over for a while?"

"Sure." Her replies remained simple.

"I feel good, I mean really good. Matter of fact, I've never felt better." Maggie watched and listened with

comical intrigue. "Here I am, in the most beautiful city in the world, in one of the finest hotels in the world, with some of the best champagne in the world, and with the most beautiful woman in the world. I'd say I was doing pretty good."

"Yep."

He loosened his tie and wrestled it off over his head, then fell back into a large chair. "God you're beautiful."

"You're pretty cute too."

"Why don't you slip into something a little more comfortable?" he cleverly invited. "But not that nappy ass bathrobe, okay?"

Though it may have been the wine prompting her response, she was aroused by the prospect of exploring this romantic endeavor. "Don't go away. I'll be right back."

"I'm not going anywhere."

Eddie just sat there gleaming and watched her pass through the door, then helped himself to another huge swig. He placed the bottle carefully between his sprawled legs and then began sinking lower and lower into the chair. Soon, the wine had taken its toll and he fell fast asleep. The bottle toppled forward and began dribbling out onto the floor.

Maggie's grand entrance was all for nothing. She had paused at the door to give him a stunning vision of the long sheer negligee, which barely concealed the black lace teddy beneath. A lot of women would have been disappointed, she wasn't. If anything, she may have been somewhat relieved.

A heartfelt snicker quickly transformed into a laugh as she tried to rouse him. She just couldn't bring herself to leave him sleeping in that uncomfortable position, but the bed was too far away and she wasn't strong enough to carry him. Then, she noticed that the lightweight chair was situated on an oval rug that was spread out on a polished marble floor. Her unusual plan was set into motion.

She neatly rolled the excess rug up behind the back legs of the chair, then carefully leaned the chair back and began sliding it toward the bed. Though she managed to accomplish that portion of the task without too much difficulty, she still had to get him into it.

After some more innovative thought, she carefully repositioned Eddie into a horizontal position with his legs over one arm of the chair and his head drooping back over the other. She tilted the chair back until it rested on the edge of the bed, then circled around and positioned herself between the legs of the chair. She bent down, gripped the lower set and in one swift motion, lifted with all of her might. Eddie's body rolled smoothly onto the bed.

After a brief reprieve, she pulled the bedspread across to cover him, then wiped her hands together as if shaking off some dust and collapsed in the chair. "Now we're even," she said, referring to the comforter incident in his apartment.

Then, much to her discontented surprise, Eddie sprang up with a huge grin on his face and informed, "That was the

most incredible example of scientific ingenuity I have ever witnessed."

"Eddie Grisham," she scolded with an angry grimace. She grabbed a pillow and without warning sent it plopping into his face.

He fell back, laughing uncontrollably. "That was great, Mag, the way you slid me across the floor and rolled me onto the bed. I was impressed."

"You are such a jerk," she exclaimed as she dived at him with wailing fists. "You're going to pay for that one."

"I hope so." He restrained her with a tight hug. "Are ya mad at me?"

"Um hmm," she whimpered.

"Will you forgive me?"

"I don't know." He kissed her lightly on the cheek. "That's certainly not going to do the trick," she assured. He kissed her on the other cheek. "Nope." That was followed

by another planted warmly on the tip of her nose. "You're getting warmer." Then, it was a soft tender kiss on the lips. "Well," He kissed her again. "All right," she surrendered with a hug.

"I just thought you ought to know the kind of man you're getting involved with."

"How will I ever I be able to trust you now?"

He kissed her again. "I'm an honest guy and I could never lie to the woman I love...for very long," he admitted proudly.

"I can't believe it."

"Believe what?"

"You actually said it."

"Said what?"

"You love me."

"I did?" he questioned himself. "Well, of course I did. I mean, I do," he confessed. Maggie was beaming. Then, he said the words again with genuine conviction. "I do, I love you, Maggie Bennett."

"That's nice, Eddie," she said to casually repudiate. The exuberant smile on her face expressed her true feelings. "Now, go to sleep," she instructed, then closed her eyes and snuggled up close to him.

"You don't want to fool around?" he nudged.

"No way, Hosea. You blew any chance of that," she said with a slap on his chest.

"Not even a little?"

"In your dreams."

"Now, that I'm accustomed to." They snuggled up together and were soon fast asleep.

