

# ~ A Sacrifice For Friendship ~

by DS Bauden

**Disclaimers:** This Uber tale is the latest creation to be extracted from my brain. All of the characters are mine, and not to be confused with anyone else's. They may resemble two women we dig a whole lot.

**Love/Sex Warning:** Yep and yep. It may not be everyone's cup of tea and if you aren't old enough to drink that kind of tea or even read it. please press the "save" key until a later date.

## Part 1

### Preface

As I sit here trying to put to words all that has happened to me, I am trying to imagine your faces as you read it. I guess the first thing I should tell you is that what you are about to read will be as unbelievable to you, as it was to me. Everything that I am going to relay to you will sound completely off the wall. All I can tell you is bare with me as I recapture the most incredible experience of my life.

I guess for starters, I should introduce myself. My name is Frances Theresa Elizabeth Christina Camarelli, but you can call me Frankie. When you are Italian, I guess one name isn't enough for you; so I went through my childhood hoping the new kids didn't ask me my name. I made it easier for them and just told them what they could call me. Everyone has called me Frankie since I was little, except for Stacey, my ex, who still just calls me bitch when I see her, but that's an entirely different story all together.

I am the only child of my parents, Frank and Myrna. My mother left us when I was about two so I really don't remember much about her. I keep a picture of the two of us on the mirror of my vanity as a reminder. Pop says she couldn't handle being a mother and a wife, so she opted for neither. Pop forgave her, but I think she was just a chicken shit.

Ma was a real head turner; people tell me I have her eyes. I like the smile I got from Pop though; it's gotten me out of more shit than I ever intend to talk about. You could probably get it out of Crystal though; she's never known how to keep her mouth shut, except when it counted. Crystal and I have been best friends since I was about four. She moved here from Ohio, a good choice too I think, I mean, what's in Ohio anyway? This is Chicago; there isn't a town like this one anywhere. Some people like New York, it's just because they haven't lived here yet. Anyway, Crystal and I have been through hell and back together. We have run from trouble starting with our parents to cops, to the boys on the corner, she's such a flirt, God, I can't even begin to tell that story. Anyway, we have done it all. There isn't much we wouldn't do for each other, and that theory was recently put to the test.

### Chapter One

Bounding my long frame down the steps of my apartment, I looked forward to a new day. It was ten a.m. and time to open. I ran to open the door of Technicolor Classics to the general public. Unlocking the front door I looked out to discover an incredibly blue sky with absolutely no clouds in sight. It felt so fresh and crisp. I knew instantly that something amazing was going to happen today. As I stepped under my purple and black awning, I saw several of the other neighborhood shops begin to open up as well.

My favorite neighbor is Mr. Hooper; no really that *is* his name. He owns the butcher shop on my block; he has since I have been alive. My Pop and Hoop, my nickname for him, were friends since World War II. He still likes to remind me from time to time how he changed my diaper when I was a baby and how I'm not too old to be put over his knee. Of course the old guy would probably like that a little too much in my opinion. Anyway, he lives upstairs above his shop, as most of us from the old neighborhood still do.

I have run my shop for the last seven years. My Pop left it to me after he passed away. It's an old movie novelty shop with more paraphernalia than anyone deserves to have. I have always loved this place; it gives me comfort in some way. Pop and I would always watch the old movies together. His favorites were the ones with Bogey; you know Humphrey Bogart? I always liked Jimmy Stewart. He had a presence about him on screen that no one else could ever top. Pop wanted to bring a little of that feeling home to us, so he opened up Technicolor Classics. It has wall to wall pieces of memorabilia of the old movies. Some of the stuff I have bought at auctions that I go to, just to keep up with the demand. It still amazes me that people love this stuff as much as I do. I get people coming here from all over saying that they heard about it from a friend of a friend. That is what I love about the people that come in here. They genuinely like the merchandise and get all sentimental about it.

I have a replica of a suit that Clark Gable wore in *Gone with the Wind*. You know the black one that he wore when he danced with Scarlet during her "mourning" period; yeah she was really sad, whatever. Everyday I get to live out all the movies and I don't even have to leave home.

My first customer walked in and instantly her mood changed from, "God, I need coffee", to "Oh my God, I totally remember that picture!" It makes me happy to be able to do that with my shop. After my customer and I chat a bit, I notice my friend Crystal walk in too.

"Good morning Frankie, how are you on this glorious day?" She asked.

"I'm wonderful Crystal. I feel like something incredible is going to happen today. There is almost an electricity in the air."

"I feel it too. There must be some serious movement with the planets. Look at my arms, I have had goosebumps all day. Whatever it is, it's gonna be big." She honestly replies and sticks her arm in my face.

"Oh you think so? Have your karmic buddies called you to confirm all of this yet?" I tease and put her arm back at her side.

"Frankie, I'm serious." She said. As I looked into her eyes, I really believed it too.

"OK, I'm sorry. You know how I feel about all of that mumbo jumbo."

"Yeah I do. You need to open your mind a little more. You really need to let me relax you." "Oh no, I am not going under. I have seen all those films. Nothing good comes from that!" I half jokingly reply to her.

"Yeah well, I have a lot of customers that would disagree with you."

"Speaking of customers, I need to get back to mine. Don't you have a business to run?" I ask as I move her towards the door.

"Well of course, I just plan my schedule so I don't have to wake up as early as you do. My first appointment isn't until noon." She giggled and stuck out her tongue at me. "I'll get out of your karmic space, don't worry. I won't hex your business, but Frankie?" She suddenly took on a serious tone.

"What is it?"

"I really have strong feelings about today. Be careful and come see me after work ok?" She said as she touched my forearm.

"OK babe, have a good one. See you later."

"Bye now." She said as she walked next door to her apartment.

I turned around to find my customer smiling at me.

"Hi there, is there anything else I can help you with today?" I ask her.

"I just wanted to tell you what wonderful things you have in here. You have so many pictures from the films of my day. It's nice to know that you are here. You have brought some wonderful memories back to me." She said as she smiled at me. Her hazel eyes were almost glistening with tears.

"Thank you. I am so glad that you feel that way. Come back and see them whenever you want. We are open every day except Sunday from 10 to 5." I smile back at her.

"I will come back for sure. Take care now."

"You too. Have a wonderful day!" I exclaimed, feeling even better about having this shop.

This day was starting off much better than most. Maybe something was happening in the universe somewhere. *Oh God, please tell me Crystal didn't hear that from me.* Looking around I saw that I was still alone and breathed in a deep cleansing breath.

Crystal Jacobs was my best friend since we were knee high. Her grandma raised her because her mother died giving her life. She is a small-framed woman, well anyone is small compared to me, I am almost six feet tall. She has long curly brown hair and deep brown eyes. She is a very beautiful woman, but most people don't see that part of her. You see, Crystal has a gift, well she and her grandma both have the same gift. She has psychic abilities, or so she says. I really have never believed in any of that stuff. Frankly, it gives me the heebie jeebies. Life has already been planned out for us; we just live it out and stop trying to change it, I say. She, and her grandma believe things can be changed, and that we still have the ability to change our lives as we go. I just don't understand how that is possible. Anyway, because she has always believed this, a lot of people tend to avoid her, some have even called her a freak. Let's just say those people didn't say it more than once after I had a talk with them about their manners. They just don't know the person that she is, Crystal is an amazing woman. Her customers will agree with that as well. She has brought happiness to so many people just telling them what they want to hear. Maybe there is something to all of this, I just don't know if I want to pursue it.

Five o'clock came and I locked my doors for the day. It was a good day today. I was able to sell quite a few framed pictures today. A new movie house is opening a few miles away and wanted some photos for their foyer. God it's nice to be needed.

My paperwork is finally finished and I put my deposit away for the morning bank run. As I stood, my foot got caught between my desk and my chair. I felt myself falling and could do nothing about it. The next thing I knew I was upstairs on my couch with Crystal looking down over me with an ice pack on my head.

"Hey sleepyhead, I'm glad you are back." Crystal smiled at me.

"What the hell happened?" I replied not knowing what time it was or what day for that matter.

"Apparently the myth is true, the bigger they are, the harder they fall. I was ready to call an ambulance. Nice job on your forehead though, it'll bruise beautifully." She teased.

"Come on Crystal, enough, what happened? I really don't remember."

"Well it looks like you fell and hit your head on the corner of your desk. I seem to remember telling you to be careful. You don't listen well do you?" She smiled.

"Ha, ha... Oh yeah... I remember tripping over my feet or something." I said as I tried to sit up. "Whoa... I don't feel so hot." I said as I felt instantly nauseous and dizzy.

"Hold up tiger, you probably got a concussion. I think we should have Nonnie check you out." She said sternly.

"Oh man, no she will try and give me some concoction you two worked on all day in your coven." I kidded her about the habits of her and her grandmother all the time.

"I am not a witch! I'm a psychic! I would think that you would know the difference by now. If you would only let me put you under hypnosis once, you would feel my gift. It may even bring some happiness to your life. Do you have any idea how many people leave my parlor daily with a whole new outlook on their lives?"

"Yeah well, I don't want to know what you do to them when they are "under" your spell. C'Mon Crystal, you know how I feel about all of that."

"Oh the nonbeliever awakens." Crystal's grandma said as she climbed the remainder of the stairs into my apartment

"Hi Nonnie. Will you take a look at her head? I think she has a concussion." Crystal asked.

"Sure." She agreed and set her coffee mug on my wooden coffee table.

Crystal and her grandma looked into my eyes and they just nodded back to each other like they were communicating or something. It was making me crazy so I had to break their connection, or whatever it was.

"Hey! What the hell is going on?" I said outraged.

"With manners like that no wonder no woman will have you." Her grandma teased back at me.

"I just haven't found the right one yet, there have been plenty of offers I'll have you know." I defended.

"Mmhmm , I'll just bet. I see the line out the door from here."

"Doc? Am I gonna live or not? I can't take much more of this." I was starting to feel a little irritated that they were talking about my love life as I lay here feeling like I was going to puke at any given moment.

"You'll be fine. Your pupils are good, but your buddy here is gonna make sure you don't sleep for any period of time, ok? You think you can handle that?"

"Yes ma'am." I said back to her with a smile.

"Good, then my work here is done." She said as she tucked a long strand of her graying brown hair behind her ear and stood to leave. "I'll be right next door honey, if you need anything." She kissed the top of my head and caressed her granddaughter's cheek as she left.

God they are so cute. They have the best relationship I have ever seen. It used to make me jealous with my ma leaving and all, but she adopted me basically when I was a kid, so I didn't have to crave long for a maternal figure in my life. I looked up to find Crystal's eyes looking at me in concern which made me think that I had missed something that she said.

"Did you say something? I'm sorry, I think I drifted away for a second there."

"Yes, I asked you if all of that was true. The offers and all. Has there been someone lately?" She asked with a mischievous smile on her face.

"No not lately Miss Nosey Body. It's been a few months actually if you must know the boring details of my sex life." I chided back.

She smiled down at me and continued to tend to my head wound. She had the gentlest touch, no wonder people came to her for help. I started to wonder what she really did for her customers. Maybe that blow to my head sparked some curiosity in me. It'll pass.

"What are you thinking about Frankie? You looked a million miles away from here." She said with her brown eyes sparkling at me.

"I was just thinking how lucky you are going to make some man one day. You are a wonderful spirit Crystal, thanks for taking care of me."

"Ok, who are you and what have you done with my Frankie?" She joked as she leaned down to kiss my wound. "Thanks for saying so. I just hope that I am not too old before I can understand what love is all about. I think once I get that, then I would be able to die happy."

"Is that what you are looking for in a relationship, love?" I really was interested in hearing her response. This was something we never really talked about.

"Hmm, well I guess that is a large part of it. I want love yes, but I want passion, I want desire, I want to be able to look into their eyes and know that I couldn't live without them, ever. God even just to feel it just for a moment would be amazing to me. I mean look at me. Who the hell is gonna love me like that?" She said as she fanned her hands up and down her body.

"I would Crystal, but you bat for the wrong team." I smiled at her.

"Smooth talker. I think that bump on your head is making you loopy. Get some rest and I will wake you in an hour or so. OK?" She gently stroked my hair and I felt myself fall into a deep sleep.

## Chapter Two

"*Frankie? Frankie?*" I heard this voice calling to me but didn't know where it was coming from. The voice was so sweet, it was almost a song to me. I looked and looked but couldn't find the owner to the voice.

"I'm here!" I shouted to no one. "Where are you? I can't see you. Please, show yourself." I pleaded with the voice.

*"I'm waiting for you Frankie. Please find me."* The voice called to my soul like nothing I had ever experienced in my life. I called out to it one last time. "I'm right here! Where are you?"

*"Frankie? Frankie?"*

Suddenly I woke up to find a concerned Crystal shaking me out of my sleep. "Frankie? Are you with me now?" She gently asked.

"Yeah, I... Um... Yeah. Wow I had such a strange dream." I said groggily.

"Ooh, you did? Please tell me about it. You know I live for this stuff."

"Well, I dunno really, it was just strange. I heard a woman's voice. She was calling my name." "Frankie if this is some perverted sex story I don't want to hear about it." She joked.

"No she wasn't 'calling' my name, it was like she was trying to find me. It was weird. I couldn't see anything really, and all I could hear was her voice. It spooked me. I shouted for her to show herself, but she didn't appear. The next thing I knew you were trying to wake me." I was confused, but I felt worlds better than I had before I went to sleep.

"Maybe you mixed up my voice in there somewhere when I was trying to wake you. I did say your name a few times."

"Hmm, maybe that was it. I dunno, it was still really odd. It was almost pulling at me." "Well then it definitely was me. I was totally yanking on you after you didn't respond to my voice. Don't worry about it. If it comes back, let me know. I'll ask Nonnie about it."

"No, no, you are probably right. I'm sure it was just something going on because of my injury."

"Always the practical thinker. I always loved that about you. You are as practical as I am illusory." She said. "Are you thirsty? It's about 7:30, I bet you haven't had anything to eat or drink since lunch." She accused.

"You presume correctly. I would actually love some water. My throat is really dry."

"Sure babe, coming right up." She winked and trotted off into the kitchen.

The bells on her anklet jingled softly as she padded her bare feet through my house. I have always loved the way she dressed. She's always worn long flowing dresses or long skirts with a non-matching top, and almost never wears shoes. Her grandma dresses in a similar fashion, but she, at least chooses to wear shoes. I bet her soles feel like leather. But what an odd question that would be for me to ask her, 'Hey Crystal, can I feel your feet?' She would then finalize that I was completely bats.

She wears more jewelry around her wrists and ankles than people should be allowed. I can always hear her approaching. It's either the bells or the bracelets clinking together that give her

away. She really needs to lose the five-inch hoop earrings though. Those went out when Jody Watley did.

She came out of the kitchen with a glass of water and gently held my head up as I drank. "Thanks Crystal, my throat feels much better now. You ever consider being a nurse. You have a wonderful bedside manner."

She slapped my arm and scooted under my long legs to sit on the couch. She grabbed the remote to the home theater and turned all the decks on. With another click of the remote she turned on the big screen TV and pressed play on the DVD player. There was my man talking to an invisible rabbit. Man Crystal really did know me well. She always knew how to cheer me up. Tonight was no different. God she is the best.

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As the credits rolled I felt extra weight on my hips. Crystal had fallen asleep and her body leaned on top of my lower half. Her head gently rested on my right hip and her right arm draped over my left leg protectively. I really hated to wake her, but nature was calling and I had to answer. I gently tousled her hair until she shifted in her sleep. Her eyes slowly opened to reveal the brown eyes I knew so well.

"Is it over?" She said as she wiped the spittle from the corner of her mouth.

"Yes dribble girl. I need to pee, so I need you to move please." I told her.

"Oh I'm sorry. I didn't mean to fall asleep on you. How is your head?"

"It's feeling better since you gave me such wonderful TLC. I am not feeling sick to my stomach anymore either. I think that is the part I like the best right now." I smiled at her sleepy face. "I'll be right back."

"I'll be here." She yawned out.

I walked into my bathroom and turned on the bright fluorescent lighting. I squinted at the lights and looked into the mirror to inspect the damage.

"Oh, that is just beautiful. Nice job Frankie. You really go all out." I said as I fingered the lump on my head.

I used the facilities and looked at my reflection once again. As I was staring back at myself, I suddenly felt like someone was staring at me. I quickly looked behind me and saw nothing, of course, but I would have bet a million bucks that someone was there.

I exited the bathroom rather quickly and felt rather than heard Crystal approach me as I walked right into her.



"Where's the fire stretch? Man you almost ran me over." She joked.

"Sorry Crystal, I didn't see you. Are you OK?" I asked making sure I didn't hurt her in the collision.

"Yeah I am fine. You look like you've seen a ghost. You're as pale as one too. Go back to the couch and I'll get you some more water."

"I'd rather lay in my bed if that is alright with you." I said to her.

"Sure Hon, go on. I'll meet you in there."

"OK thanks." I smiled and made my way down the hallway.

I have many old pictures on the walls in the hallway. Lots of Pop and me; my favorite is of him wiping ice cream off my chin with his handkerchief. Crystal took it when we were at the Lincoln Park Zoo. She thought it was the cutest thing she had ever seen. I guess since I was about 19 when he did that, it was kinda cute to see. That was just the kind of man he was. He loved me more than anything. I miss him so much.

He drank and smoked just a little too much. His body just couldn't take it anymore. One day it just gave out on him. His heart attack hit when he was home and by himself. I hated not being there for him. My biggest question was, would he still be alive if I had been home that day to call 911? I will never know. Crystal says that it was just his time to pass on. That may be true and all, but I still miss him a lot.

I walked into my bedroom and clicked on the lights. I have one of those halogen lamps that lights up the three surrounding counties when it is on. I quickly walked over to it to dim the light. My head didn't like that at all. I like the colors of my walls too. They are a deep periwinkle. I love that color. My bedding is that coloring as well. My walls of course are covered in huge color prints. Mostly abstract art, but very cool just the same.

I undressed and slipped under my crisp sheets. Crystal soon followed with a glass of water and some Ibuprofen. I take the glass of water and wash down the two pills I put into my mouth. I open up the other half of my bed to Crystal. She takes off her dress and rummages through my dresser to find some boxers and a T-shirt to wear. This is almost like routine for us. We have spent so many nights at each other's homes that acting any differently would feel foreign to me. She can always wear my clothes to sleep in; I on the other hand am not so lucky with hers. This brings a smile to my face and she looks over at me questioningly.

"What's so damn funny? You have the goofiest grin on your face right now." She said with a grin.

"I was just imagining myself trying to wear some of your shorts to bed. I don't think that they would make it past my thigh." I said as I began to laugh.

She came over to me and brushed my long dark hair behind my shoulders. "That's because your legs are as long as a giraffe's neck! I can't help it if I am normal!" She pretended to act hurt.

"Oh my God Crystal, you couldn't be normal if you tried." I laughed harder now. "Come on, get in bed and let's get some sleep."

"That's your problem Frankie."

"What is?" I asked.

"You get a beautiful woman into your bed and all you offer her is sleep. No wonder you can't keep a woman happy." She deadpanned.

"Oh you are in trouble when you stop spinning. I'll show you an offer."

"Yeah, yeah... Promises promises." She said as she killed the lights and rolled over to face me. I brought my hand up and stroked her curly head as I smiled at her.

"I love you Crystal. Thanks for looking out for me. Pop would be happy about that."

"I love you too Blue Eyes. You are the greatest friend in the world. There is nothing that I wouldn't do for you. Good night." She said and gave me a dazzling toothy smile.

"Right back atcha baby. Good night." I took her hand and kissed her knuckles and slowly fell asleep feeling loved and protected.

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I felt myself wandering in darkness again. I tried to use my hands to help guide myself out of there. I was starting to feel very afraid. All of my senses were on edge and very aware. I took a few more steps and stopped.

"*Frankie?*"

There she was again. I still can't see her! What the hell is going on?

"*Frankie, can you hear me? Please find me Frankie, I need you so much.*"

Good God, who is she? Why can't I see her?

"Where are you? I can't find you. Please just tell me who you are." I pleaded into nothingness.

"*Frankie? Come back to me Frankie, please.*"

This is killing me. I can't stand this torture! "Who are you? If you won't show yourself to me, stop tormenting me! I want to help you, but I can't find you." This is just really getting out of control. I want out of here, NOW.

"Frankie honey, wake up. Come on sweetie, snap out of it."

Crystal was shaking me to pull me from the dream. I slowly felt myself return to reality and saw Crystal's silhouette over me.

"Crystal, what's wrong? Why are you waking me? Has it been a couple hours already?" I asked.

"Well, that would have come in about forty-five minutes, but you were crying out. Did you have that same dream again Frankie?" She was really concerned.

"Yeah, I think I did. This time I felt scared though. This woman was calling to me in the darkness and no matter where I was, she still sounded so far away. I have no idea who she is, I just know that she needs to find me for some reason. God, this is making me nuts Crystal. I really hope this is my head talking because I don't think I can handle this on a daily basis." I said sadly.

"Turn over on to your side Frankie." She suggested.

I did as she requested and I immediately felt her hands rubbing my back in small soothing circles. God she has a touch on her. She is gonna have to do that until morning because I really don't think I am going to be able to fall asleep tonight. This woman has me so freaked, I just don't know what to make of it. Maybe I will feel better after I do get some sleep. I finally gave in and closed my eyes. After a while I slowly felt myself start to relax and surrendered to Morpheus' pull.

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Feedback is the Ruler of all Bards.

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**Disclaimers:** This Uber tale is the latest creation to be extracted from my brain. All of the characters are mine, and not to be confused with anyone else's. They may resemble two women we dig a whole lot.

**Love/Sex Warning:** Yep and yep. It may not be everyone's cup of tea and if you aren't old enough to drink that kind of tea or even read it, please press the "save" key until a later date.

## Part 2

### Chapter 3

*Help me I think I'm falling in love again. When I get that crazy feeling, I know I'm in trouble again. I'm in trouble 'cause you're a rambler and a gambler and a sweet-talking-ladies man. And you love your lovin', but not like you love your freedom...*

The morning came fast as I heard my clock radio turn on with Joni Mitchell singing. This was one of my favorite songs of old. The tune played on as I felt the person in the other half of my bed stir. I looked over to see mobs of brown curly hair coming right at me. The sight was very amusing and would have been even more so had it not been eight o'clock in the morning. Crystal came at me with the purpose of breaking my alarm clock.

"If you don't turn that thing off, I will, and then you'll need to buy a new clock." Crystal grumpily said.

"What, you don't like Joni Mitchell?" I playfully teased.

"At this hour, I don't like anything." She said matter of factly.

"Aww, not even me?" I continued.

"Especially not you. Will you please turn that off? God, I don't understand why you get up so damn early. Your shop doesn't even open for another two hours for Chrissakes!" She said as she pulled her pillow over her head.

"Come on Crystal, why are you such a grump in the morning?" I asked as I walked over to the window and peered through the mini blinds. "Just look at the sky! It's gonna be a beautiful day."

"Mhmm, I believe you." She said as her eyes squinted from under the pillow. "Just don't make me get up to see it." She said as she continued to pull the covers over her head as well.

"Has anyone told you how adorable you are in the morning?"

She pulled the covers down and stared at me with daggers coming out of her eyes. "Has anyone told you that you are way too talkative in the morning? Especially when you have a woman in your bed that likes to sleep in?" She just stared at me and I couldn't help the grin that formed on my mouth.

She was truly adorable. Her hair was strewn all over her head and falling into her eyes. She rubbed her eyes like a four-year-old would. She used balled up fists to grind into her eye sockets while making a cute squeaking sound. As this exercise came to an end I watched as she focused in on me and finally gave me a good morning smile.

"Ah, there she is. Hi Crystal welcome back." I smiled.

"Keep it up girlfriend. I'll knock the other side of your head silly too." She winked. "How is that head of yours darlin?" She inquired finding her kind soul again.

"I'm feeling much better today, thanks to you. I really appreciate you taking care of me the way that you did."

"Yeah well, what was I gonna do; leave you on the floor of your shop? Next thing we know is we got another 'Murder at the Wax Museum' story on our hands."

"Ha ha very funny. How long was I out?" I truly didn't know.

"Well, I would imagine only a few minutes. I came after my last appointment, which was around six o'clock, thinking that you would want to get some dinner with me. Lucky for you, I have a key. I saw your head peeking out from around your desk. I got Mr. Hooper to help me get you upstairs. You really spooked me Frankie, I'm just glad that you are OK." She sincerely said.

"Me too, thanks again. You're a good friend Crystal." I replied.

"Right back atcha Frank." She smiled her special smile at me. That always would get the same response from me; I get this goofy ass grin on my face that won't go away even if I wanted it to, which I don't. Shit, why is she straight again? Someone please remind me.

"OK, I have to get in the shower. Are you going to be here when I get out, or are you gonna go back home and go back to bed?" I asked half teasing.

"Actually I'm awake now. I might as well start to get some stuff done. Do you want some breakfast?"

"Oh, you're gonna make me breakfast? Did something happen last night and I am just suffering from amnesia?" I set her up for the old joke.

"Baby, if I *let* you have me, you would have remembered. Trust me." She said the last part so close to my face that I had to control the sound of my swallowing. Damn she's good, and I need a shower... NOW.

"Well?" Shit, I think I missed something.

"What?"

"Breeeaakfast?" She drawled out.

"Oh... um... sure. I'll be at your place in about twenty minutes." I recovered.

"Bullshit, I'm not messing up my kitchen. I'll be in there." She said motioning towards my kitchen.

I started laughing at this comment. "OK, I'll be out in a bit." I said as she was already walking down the hallway waving at me from over her shoulder.

I walked into the bathroom connected to my bedroom and started the water in the shower. As I stretched in the mirror, I noticed the swelling on my head had gone down considerably. I touched it gently and immediately flinched at its tenderness. "Ow, dammit. I guess I won't be doing that again any time soon. You really did a job on yourself Frankie, you big klutz."

As I brushed my teeth I felt the hairs on the back of my neck start to stand on end. I glanced into the mirror and saw a flash of something behind me. I whipped around and started to choke on the toothpaste.

Nothing.

What the hell is going on?

I finally got the remainder of paste out of my throat and began to breathe again.

A knock on my bathroom door startled me; I walked over to open it. Crystal was there with a concerned look on her face.

"Frankie, are you ok?" Crystal asked.

"Yeah, I um... I stuck my toothbrush too far in the back of my throat. I started to gag. Didn't know that I was being loud enough to cause alarm."

"Well, I had come back to steal your slippers and I heard you coughing hard."

"My hero... again." I smiled at her.

"Hurry up, breakfast is gonna be done soon. Remember... If you're too late... you know I won't wait... and you'll get nothing but an empty plate." We both finished the last line together and started laughing.

"OK, OK, I'll be out in a bit. Go on you." I said as we exchanged a kiss on each other's cheeks.

"I'm out! I'm out!" She said as she walked down the hall.

"I wish..." I said to myself.

I stepped into the shower and began to wash my body. I just don't understand what is going on. What is with the voice of the girl? Now I'm seeing shit too. What the hell is gonna happen next? Wait; scratch that, I really don't want to know. I refuse to tell Crystal about this morning. She will insist on doing an exorcism on me, or whatever it is that she does. God! Why me?

I washed the remainder of shampoo down the drain with the usual handful of hair that accompanies it, and turned off the water. I got the excess water out of my hair and reached out to get my towel from the rack. To my surprise it was handed to me. I screamed and whipped open the shower curtain to reveal an amused Crystal staring at me.

"Chill out Frankie, I just needed to brush my teeth. I just thought I'd give you a hand. What the hell is the matter with you?"

My heart was racing. "Nothing you just startled me." I said as I took the offered towel from her hands. "Thanks Crystal." I said as I stepped out of the shower naked as the day I was born.

"Never were a modest one were you Frankie?" She smiled as she gave my body a mock once over.

"Never saw a need for it. You don't like it, don't look at it." I said back to her smiling face. For some reason I wished she liked it more than she did.

"I didn't say it wasn't nice to look at. Unfortunately for you, I am only window shopping." She said with a wink and a smirk and walked back towards the kitchen.

I swear she does that on purpose.

~~~~~

I finally finished getting dressed and dried my hair. I walked into a kitchen that had the most incredible smells coming from it. God what a way to start the day. I could get used to a life like this. Waking up with a beautiful woman in my bed, and then meeting that same woman for breakfast in our own kitchen.

"Hungry?" Crystal asked as she spooned scrambled eggs onto my plate.

"Oh yeah. Thanks so much for making me breakfast." I smiled.

"Oh it wasn't for you, I was hungry and I haven't gone shopping yet. I just used you for supplies." She teased.

"Women, they use and abuse me, then they eat me out of a house and home. Figuratively speaking of course." I smiled back at her.

"Of course." She played along. She handed me my plate, which was now filled with bacon and English muffins with grape jelly on them.

"Ooh, you spoil me. This looks great Crystal, thank you." I said as I sat down and started to eat my food.

"It's about time someone gave you decent food to eat. You can't live on burgers and fries your whole life."

"Says who? Meat is an important part of the food groups, as is bread, potatoes, and the cheese on my burgers, and especially the milk that I wash it down with. I think it is very healthy." I mocked.

"Oh you are incorrigible." She said as she threw her hands in the air and then back on her hips.

"Yeah but you love me." I winked at her.

"Yeah, I guess I do." She winked back. "OK Frankie, I'm gonna go home and shower and stuff. I have an appointment at noon. Have a great day." She said as she kissed the top of my head. "And please be careful today, huh? I don't want any more head wounds from you this week ok?"

"I promise I'll be careful. I'll watch my footing at all times today. Cross my heart and hope to die." I said as I drew an imaginary X on my chest.

"Well you're lucky I have no needles or I would stick them in your eye."

"Meanie."

"OK Frankie, I'm outta here. I'll tell Nonnie that you're feeling better. She was worried about you, you know?"

"I do, you guys have been my family since I can remember. Tell her I'll come by to see her after work tonight." I said sincerely.

"OK, will do. I'll see you later, babe."

"Thanks again for breakfast Crystal, and for everything yesterday."

"No problem, I'm just glad that you are better. Take care." She said as she walked downstairs heading for home.

"Bye."

As she left my house, I sat and stared at the emptiness around me. Wow, this place really gets quiet when no one is here. I really have to get out more.

Chapter 4



Ten o'clock came as it always does, right on schedule. I unlocked my door and welcomed another day of business doing what I loved. I had a few mannequins that needed to be dressed so I put that on my list of things to do for the day. I stepped in the workroom to grab some clothes for the dummies when I heard the doorbell chime to let me know someone had arrived.

I poked my head out to find no one. I scanned the store and decided that I must have been hearing things. I grabbed the clothes that I needed and set off to do my work. I hated trying to get the shirts on the mannequins, because these days they are so anatomically correct it's almost embarrassing when people walk in and I have plastic boobs in my face.

I had almost finished the first mannequin when I noticed that I had knocked her hand off. I looked down and I couldn't find it anywhere. 'What the hell happened to it? It's not like it got up and walked out of here.' I got down on my hands and knees and began to crawl around like an animal looking for the hand. 'God this is ridiculous.'

"It's over there, under the table." She said.

I was under a display and was so surprised by hearing someone's voice that I smashed the back of my head on the shelf above me.

"Ouch! Dammit." I silently cursed as I rubbed the back of my head. "Thank you, I have been looking all over for this." I said as I grabbed the hand and stood to thank my customer.

"I can't believe I couldn't find..." I started to talk in the direction of the voice when I noticed that my shop was empty. I frantically turned around looking for the owner of that voice. Thinking about it a little more, I realized that I had heard that voice before... in my dreams. "Oh my God. It was her! It was that same voice." I steadied myself against one of my shelving units before I fell on my face again.

God, what the hell is going on? If this is some kind of joke, I really wish the

Pranksters would show themselves. I'm not finding this at all funny.

I have had enough of this; I was really starting to get pissed. "If you are still here, show yourself! This is really getting old!" I screamed into the empty store.

I stood there and waiting for what seemed like an eternity, when I returned to my work. "This is getting outta hand... anymore of this and I'll be forced to tell Crystal. Oh, she'll love this. God I'm never gonna live this down." I breathed out. "I really must have hit my head hard yesterday. That's gotta be it. It has to be..."

I shook my head and began to work harder than I have in a long time. I really needed to stay focused. If I have anymore confrontations with this voice again, I will ask Crystal what she thinks it could be. I could ask her a hypothetical question, that way she won't know it's me. Yeah right, like I would just pull a question about ghosts out of my ass. She would see right through that. She knows me far too well. "Ah shit. This sucks."

All day I had in the back of my head that nagging question of "who is the owner of that voice?" I just wish I knew.

I looked at the clock and again I missed lunch. If no one reminds me, I seem to always forget or have too much have to do to go and get something for myself. Crystal usually reminds me of my poor eating habits, but today she had a lunchtime appointment and didn't show up. I look forward to our lunches together.

"Oh well, maybe we'll grab dinner or something together." I said to one of the mannequins. "God I really need to get out more." I said as I walked back up to my front desk.

I looked around and felt a loneliness I never felt before. I had a pulling in my gut that I just couldn't explain. It didn't hurt or anything physical like that, it was just something very foreign to me. "I think I need a vacation." I sighed and put my head in my hands.

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Crystal came bounding into the shop at 5:45 with a huge grin on her face. I had given her a key to the shop years ago. It was much easier for her to let herself in. God knows she would just keep banging on the door until I let her in. That got real old, real fast.

"Hey girlfriend! You done yet? I'm starving!" She exclaimed.

I turned from my paperwork and smiled back at her. It was so hard not to when she was in a mood like this.

"Yeah, I just have a few more things to finish up. I'm quite hungry myself. I forgot to eat lunch again today." I knew this would get a rise out of her.

"God dammit Frankie! That isn't good for you! How many times do we have to talk about your eating habits? It's a damn good thing that I fed your ass this morning." She seriously said with her hands on her narrow hips.

"Crystal I'm sorry." I love that she cares so much. "I didn't have my usual alarm come in and remind me."

"What would you do without me?" She asked mockingly.

"I really don't wanna know that answer darlin." I said truthfully.

She smiled at me and took my hand in hers. "Come on, let's go eat. Nonnie is expecting us."

"Alright, give me two seconds here and I'll be done." I said as I finished the rest of my paperwork for the day's business.

~~~~~

We walked into Crystal's place to find Nonnie waiting for us on their couch. Their home was unlike what most people would expect from them. They lived very normally, if you want to use that word. They had a couch, a couple of lights, some nice artwork on their walls, the usual décor for a family room.

Nonnie looked up from her crossword puzzle and smiled at us. "Hey girls, are you hungry?" She asked.

"This one forgot to eat again, so let's make sure we stuff her to the gills." Crystal said while motioning towards me.

"Oh, I see. Well, let's see if we can make her eat some of my spaghetti."

"Oh, Nonnie, you know I could never turn that down." I said as my mouth began to water at the mere thought of eating her pasta. If Nonnie was in it for the money, she would make Chef Boy Ardee go out of business. Yes, it's just that good.

Dinner was eaten in silence since it was rude to talk with your mouth full. Nonnie's spaghetti always did that to me. I usually ate the stuff until it didn't taste good anymore. This night was no exception.

Crystal got up and walked into the kitchen to start the dishes. I patted my belly and leaned against the back of the chair. "God Nonnie, you did it again. That had to be the best meal I have had in weeks."

"Aww, thanks child. You only say that since you don't eat on a regular basis." She smiled at me.

"No it's not like that at all. I really just love your cooking. You can taste every ounce of the time you spent making it. Thank you again for inviting me over to eat with you." I said as I stifled the air trying to escape through my throat.

"You are welcome. I'm going to go to my room and make some phone calls. Have a good night." She said as she got up.

"Good night Nonnie." I got up to go help Crystal in the kitchen.

"Do you want some help cleaning up?" I asked as I peeked my head into the kitchen.

"Grab a towel. I'll wash 'em if you dry 'em." She smiled.

"Man, you guys have a dishwasher, why don't you just throw all of the dishes in there?" I asked as I motioned to the appliance.

"Nonnie hates the smell of the dishwater soap. She much prefers her glasses to smell like Palmolive." She smirked.

"Oh come on, you are gonna tell me if you snuck in a few glasses in the dishwasher, she would know the difference?"

"You bet your sweet ass she would. Then I would have to deal with her, so don't even try it." She accused.

"OK, OK" I laughed.

I was trying to figure out how to ask Crystal about this voice in my head without her freaking out on me. God knows I have never shown an interest in this stuff before. She will probably have a heart attack. I figured I should just get over it and just come right out and ask her. The moment I reached this decision her eyes pinned me with a questionable stare.

"What?" I asked nervously.

"Are you going to ask me your question or not. You have had the strangest look on your face for like the last fifteen minutes. It must be a doozy since you can't come right out and say it." God she knew me so well.

"Well... actually I do have kind of a strange question for you."

"Well spit it out. You look like you are going to waste all of that food that Nonnie made for you."

"I'm not going to be sick, Crystal." I hoped. God I was so nervous. What if she thinks I am going insane? Just say it dammit. I took a deep breath and met her eyes again. "Crystal, have you ever had the feeling that you were being watched, I mean not by a physical presence either... I mean... oh God, what do I mean?" Crystal touched my arm and took me to the kitchen table.

"Come here and sit down and really try to tell me what is going on, OK?"

"OK." I took another breath. "Last night, ok, I had this dream, remember? Well I had a couple of them."

"I remember. What about them?" She softened her voice.

"Well, this morning when I was in the bathroom getting ready for my shower, I could have sworn someone was watching me brush my teeth. When I turned around, no one was there, but I swear I saw something in the mirror. That's what made me start coughing, it wasn't my toothbrush I was just freaked out. Then when you handed me my towel, I thought I was gonna find a person that didn't belong in my bathroom."

"What did you hear? Anything?" She was genuinely concerned.

"No, not at that time. All I know is that I felt the strangest sensation in my belly, and then the hair on the back of my neck was totally standing on end. Then it was gone." I took a deep breath and looked into her eyes. She wasn't going to razz me, I couldn't believe it.

"What else Frankie. I have this feeling that you have more to say." Shit, how does she do that?

"Today in the shop. I heard the bell ring when I was in the stockroom. I looked out to find that no one was there. So I continued doing my work. I was dressing up one of the mannequins. I knocked off one of her hands and couldn't find it anywhere. I got down on the floor and started to look for it. Then someone said 'It's over there, under the table', I banged the back of my head on the shelf above me I was so startled by the voice. I grabbed the hand and stood to thank my customer for finding the elusive appendage, but there was no one there."

"You are sure you heard someone say that, and didn't imagine it?" She asked.

"No Crystal I *heard* it with my own ears. It wasn't just any voice either, it was the same voice from my dreams. I don't know what is going on here, but it is starting to get to me." I confessed.

"It must be since you are actually talking to me about this. I know how you feel about all of this stuff." And she really did know.

"So what do you think this means Crystal? Am I just hallucinating from the blast to my head yesterday?" I really needed to know.

"No I don't think that is it at all." She stopped.

"Well, what DO you think it is. I can't take much more of this. Things like this may happen to you everyday, but it is really not my cup of tea." God this is just so weird.

"Frankie, do me a favor OK?" Crystal looked at me dead on with a totally serious expression on her face.

"OK, what?"

"When you go to sleep tonight, if you have another dream like you had, write down anything you may remember from it when you wake up."

"What will that do?"

"When you awaken from a dream all of it will be really fresh in your mind. I wanna get a better idea of what is going on. It may be that someone is trying to reach you from the other side."

"You have GOT to be kidding me. Why me? What did I do to deserve that?" I said more loudly than I had wanted.

"I don't know Frankie, but it sounds like she is looking for you. Just do as I ask , please? If it doesn't happen, then we can just write it off as a strange happening. If it does happen again, maybe Nonnie and I can help whoever it is find out why they are here."

"Oh God, you aren't gonna tell Nonnie are you? She will never let me live this down. She has always called me the non believer."

"This isn't something that Nonnie will joke about. Trust me on that. She takes this very seriously and won't kid around." She said with a serious look on her face. "Where is Nonnie?"

"She went to her room to make some phone calls." I answered.

"Oh alright. So tonight try and write down anything you remember." She said again.

"OK Crystal... if anything happens tonight, I will write down as much as I can remember." I agreed.

"Good girl. Let's go to your place and watch a movie." She suggested.

"OK, you are on." I smiled.

"What do you want to watch?" She asked.

"It's your night to pick."

"Aw Frankie, I picked last night." She whined.

"OK, OK, how about The Matrix?" I asked knowing that she would cringe.

"Sure."

"What no argument?" I couldn't believe it, she always argued about that movie. So what if I've seen it 25 times already.

"Nope, I said it was your turn to pick, so you get to pick."

"OK, now I am scared."

"Don't be scared, but don't be surprised either when the next film we watch is something not to your liking."

"Oh no, not another romantic comedy." I dreaded those. She would get all teary and mushy on me.

"You'll just have to wait and see."

"I can't wait." I said as we walked out her kitchen door, which led to the stairs to my place.

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The movie ended with Crystal sound asleep leaning against my shoulder. How could she sleep through a movie like that? There was more gunfire in the last half-hour to keep the dead awake. But here she is, sleeping like an angel on my shoulder. It's late though and I need to go to sleep myself.

"Crystal? Crystal honey, wake up." I gently nudged her.

"Mmm, is it over?" She said as she stretched on the couch.

"Yep... and you missed it."

"I'm sorry Frankie, I guess I was sleepy."

"You're always sleepy, but it's a cute quality."

"Gee thanks." She smiled and rubbed her eyes again with her fists, God I love that.

"Ok sleepyhead, I think I need to get to bed myself. Do you want me to walk you down?" I said as I stood. I took her hand and helped her to stand.

"Nah, I'll be ok. Night Frankie, and remember what we talked about." She said as she hugged me.

"Yes, I remember. I will bring a pad and pencil to bed with me tonight." I hugged her back.

"Good, I look forward to hearing from you tomorrow. Bye." She said as she gave me a wink and headed home.

"Bye hon." I waved and headed down the hall to get ready for bed.

I turned down all the lights and walked into my room. I went to the bathroom and washed my face and brushed my teeth. I clicked off the light to the bathroom and headed to bed.

I stripped off my clothes and jumped into cool sheets. 'Damn I forgot the paper' I got up and walked my naked self into my kitchen. I grabbed a pad of paper and a pencil and walked back to my room.

I put the two items on my night table and got comfy again.

"Alright whoever you are, I am ready for you now. Come and get me." I wasn't sure if those were the right words to use, considering I didn't know what was going on or who the voice was for that matter. Oh well what's said is said.

I closed my eyes and waited for my body to surrender once again to sleep. I didn't have too wait long.

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[Continued in Part 3...](#)

Feedback is the Ruler of all Bards.

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## ~ A Sacrifice For Friendship ~

by DS Bauden

**Disclaimers:** This Uber tale is the latest creation to be extracted from my brain. All of the characters are mine, and not to be confused with anyone else's. They may resemble two women we dig a whole lot.

**Love/Sex Warning:** Yep and yep. It may not be everyone's cup of tea and if you aren't old enough to drink that kind of tea or even read it. please press the "save" key until a later date.

### Part 3

#### Chapter Five

*Help me I think I'm falling in love too fast. It's got me hoping for the future and worrying about the past. 'Cause I've seen some hot hot blazes come down to smoke and ash. We love our lovin', but not like we love our freedom...*

My eyes drifted open as I heard my alarm turn on. "Damn, again with Joni Mitchell. They need to change the deejay on this channel." I leaned over to hit my alarm, but it wasn't there.

*Holy shit, where the hell is it? Now I was starting to panic. There must have been someone in my house last night. Why the hell would they take my alarm clock? Why is it that this song won't stop playing? Where was the music coming from?*

I rubbed my eyes again and sauntered over to the window. I looked down and I felt my mouth fall open and pressed my head to the glass.

"What the...?" My eyes didn't believe what they were seeing. I was looking down at my neighborhood, but it looked like it did in the seventies.



*Jesus what is going on? The Twilight Zone ended years ago, but I'll be damned if I don't feel like I'm there now.* I thought to myself.

I went to bed naked, but here I was with clothes on, and ones I don't remember buying that's for sure. I had on long ass bell bottoms and a gray top with a big flower in the middle of it.

*I think I need some fresh air. I'm going to take a walk outside I think and try to clear my head. Where the hell is that music coming from?* I couldn't stop the thoughts racing through my head.

As I got closer to my bedroom door the music seemed to be getting louder.

*Shit, whoever stole my alarm clock is messing with my stereo and is STILL in my house.*

"OK, Frankie, you can handle this." I blew out a long breath and grasped the doorknob.

I slowly walked through the doorway and minded all the creaky spots on the wood floor. I felt like a cat burglar sneaking through my own house. "Jesus!" I whispered, there was a shadow of a person hanging on the wall. My heart was totally racing, but I needed to call someone, anyone at this point for help. Then he spoke.

"Honey, can you help me for a minute?" I heard the voice, but I couldn't believe my ears. This man sounded just like my father.

"Just a minute Frank, I'll be done in here soon." I heard the woman say.

I pressed the back of my head against the wall for support. *What the hell kind of joke is this anyway?* I needed to see this with my own eyes. I tried to control my breathing and gather up enough courage to peek into the living room.

"Come on Frankie, you can do this." I whispered my own support to myself.

I slid down my hallway that was now empty of all my pictures. I was so close to the front room I could barely breathe. I heard the song end and start back up again. *I think this alone is going to be the death of me.*

*Help me I think I'm falling in love again...* Joni kept singing without a care in the world.

*Well she has the "help me" part right... I need it really badly right now.* One more step and I would be able to stretch my neck into the family room to see my unwanted guests.

As I looked, my eyes instantly welled with tears. There was my father sitting at the kitchen table trying to fix something. I lay back against the wall to try and hold myself up. I took another quick look around to see that my furniture was all gone; only to be replaced by the furniture I remembered from my childhood. I saw the record player; you know the kind that if you left the arm all the way to the side, the record would keep playing? *Man I haven't seen a 45 record in ages.*

"Sweetie? I'll only be a second ok?" The woman popped her head up from behind one of the counters. *Jesus Mary and Joseph... it was my mother! God she was more beautiful than the photos I had. I can see why my dad fell for her.* This was too much. I felt my knees start to give, so I grabbed onto the wall for dear life.

*What the hell is going on? This just isn't funny anymore. I have seen enough to know that I need to get the hell out of here... NOW.*

I slowly walked back into my room, which was now clear of any evidence that I was even here. My room was empty save for a few boxes of things left in one of the corners.

"I have to get out of here." I said to myself. I went over to the window and opened it slowly. I climbed over the fire escape to the ladder, just as I did when I was a teenager to sneak out with Crystal.

I moved my numbing body down each rung of the ladder. When I reached the sidewalk I took another look around. My dad's shop was still there, and looking across the street I could see Mr. Hooper's butchery, but everything was different. Crystal's grandmother's palm reading shop wasn't even here. *God, this is really whacked.*

I heard movement above me and saw my dad's head peek out of the window. I stared at him but he didn't see me. He shook his head and closed the window. *Guess I won't be going back up there anytime soon.*

"What the hell am I going to do now?" I asked aloud only to get stares from strangers wondering who I was talking to.

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As I made my way down Sheridan Road, I saw the campus come into view. I knew there would be people there that didn't care that I was loony and was seeing shit from nearly thirty years ago. *Man, Rogers Park used to be a nice place. It has gotten pretty bad with crime now... or then... or... fuck, this is ridiculous.*

"I am in Oz, in clothes that I don't recognize, no money to my name...well..." I reached into my pocket to find a twenty dollar bill. "OK, twenty bucks to my name, don't know where I got it from, but I'm not questioning anything anymore." I knew anyone within an earshot was gonna grab me and commit me to the nearest mental hospital.

I walked a little further to find a tiny diner. *I think a blast of caffeine will be just what the doctor ordered.* I pulled on the handle and as soon as the door opened, I smelled the greatest aromas coming from this place. My stomach growled in agitation, so I thought I'd get something while I was here. I went up to the counter and sat down. The waitress had her back to me, but I could tell that she was young. Perhaps she was a student at the university.

"I'll get your order in just a minute." I heard her say.

I blinked twice after my head started racing with disbelief. *That voice... it was her! Jesus!*

She slowly turned around and I found myself lost in the deepest green eyes I had ever seen. My eyes slowly took in the sight before me. Long blonde hair tied back away from her face. Full lips with the tiniest dash of color to them. Beautiful bone structure in her cheeks and jaw. God this was the most angelic face I have ever seen. Her skin was like porcelain, not a flaw to be found.

"Did you want to order something darlin'?" She asked again with that beautiful voice.

"Uh..." I so profoundly answered. God I couldn't feel my tongue. "Yes I would." I finally managed to put a sentence together. It wasn't much of one, but hell I was proud at that moment.

"What can I getcha?" She said as she smiled the most amazing smile at me. God she needs to stop that so I can breathe again. *Damn, what couldn't she get me?*

"Can I see a menu please?" *Whoa, good girl Frankie.*

"Sure Hon, here you go." She said as she handed me their menu.

"Thanks." I nervously smiled at her.

"Just holler when you are ready, ok?" She asked.

"Sure, thanks." I answered. Thank God she walked away. I needed to calm down. I didn't think I could eat right then if I wanted to. I probably would have lost everything as soon as I ate it. *I really wish I knew what was going on.*

I looked around and noticed a newspaper on the seat next to mine. I saw that it was the Tribune and picked it up. I took a drink of water from my glass and spit out the contents as soon as the date flashed in front of my eyes.

April 22, 1974

I was coughing and gasping for air as more water jetted into my lungs. The waitress came over to my side instantly.

"Are you ok? Breathe in through your nose and out your mouth slowly." She said as she softly rubbed my back. Funny how you are extremely aware of things like that when you are choking.

My breathing slowly returned to normal and I looked into her eyes again. God I could have gotten lost in them.

"Thank you. I guess my water just went down the wrong pipe." I smiled weakly.

"Well, that's a relief. I would hate for one of my customers to choke to death." She smiled back.

"I think I am ready to order."

"OK." She said as she went behind the counter again. "What'll you have?" God I was thrown back into that bad Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer ad with that Elvis impersonator. Hello... time warp.

"I will have scrambled eggs, a side of bacon, and toast."

"Anything to drink with that?"

"Yeah I'll have a Diet Coke."

"You mean Diet Pepsi?" She corrected.

"No, Diet Coke." I corrected right back at her. There is a HUGE difference.

"Umm... I don't think there's such a thing. We do have Tab and the new sugar-free Sprite though." She offered.

"No, I need caffeine... better make it Diet Pepsi." *God, do they still make Tab? Man I wonder if Diet Coke has even been invented yet. I need to watch myself from now on.*

She placed the beverage in front of me and I realized that she was wearing a nametag. "Annie" What a perfect name for her. I watched her interact with the rest of the customers in the diner. Everyone seemed to love her. She was talking with an elderly man that kept smiling at her. She just patted his head and touched his cheek as she took the check from him. I wonder what that was all about.

I heard the bell come from the kitchen and Annie walked over to the window to get what looked to be my order. She walked over to me and placed the plate down in front of me.

"You aren't from around here are you?" She smiled.

"What gives you that idea?" My eyebrow went up on its own accord.

"You just seem a little out of sorts is all. I can read people pretty well." She gestured to the diner. "It comes with the job I guess."

"God, I bet." I smiled at her. "I guess you could say that. I used to live here, but it has changed a whole lot since I was here last." *That wasn't really lying, was it?*

"The neighborhood is going through quite a bit of change. It seems to be for the better though." She smiled.

I took a mouthful of food and started to hum my appreciation. It had seemed like forever since I had had something to eat. I lifted the glass to my beverage and proceeded to drink almost all of it in one gulp.

"Easy darlin, you'll get a stomach ache." She soothed. "So what are you doing here? Visiting family?"

"Yeah you could say that. I just saw my parents this morning." I smirked.

"Oh, from the look on your face, it doesn't seem like it was a good visit." She softly replied.

"Well let's just say that they weren't expecting me." I winked.

"I gotcha, kind of a surprise visit?"

"Yeah, exactly." I answered. *Although it was me that was surprised and not them.*

I smiled back at her adorable face and continued to eat every ounce of food on my plate.

"So umm..." I started nervously. "Have you worked here long?"

"About two years. I am a student at the university so this helps with the bills."

"What are you studying?"

"Creative writing."

"A regular William Shakespeare eh?" I kidded.

"Well, not yet, but maybe someday." She winked back at me. *God I think I'm gonna faint. Get a hold of yourself Frankie Jesus!*

She was called over to another customer thankfully, now I could try to digest my food. The wall clock showed it was about twelve noon. I wondered how long I could stay there without it looking conspicuous. I didn't want her to leave my sight, ever. I needed to find out more about her. Why was I hearing her voice in my dreams? She didn't seem to recognize me at all.

*I just don't understand how we fit together. I know how I would like us to fit together. Whoa, easy there tiger, you don't even know anything about this girl.*

"I am getting off in a half hour, do you have any plans for the rest of your stay here..." She trailed off.

*I guess this is where I tell her my name. Duh...*

"Frankie." I outstretched my hand to take hers in mine.

"Frankie." She smiled sweetly giving my stomach another run for it's money.

"I... uh... actually, no, I have no plans today. What did you have in mind?" I inquired.

"Well, I was gong to take a walk down by the beach. You don't see many April days in Chicago that are over seventy degrees."

"Very true. Do you want me to wait for you?"

"If you want. My boyfriend will be here to pick me up. I'm sure he won't mind giving you a ride."

*Boyfriend? Damn, well it was nice while it lasted.*

"If it doesn't get you in trouble with your boss, sure I'll wait." I smiled trying to hide my disappointment.

"Great. Well if you see a big burly guy with longish brown hair, that's Billy. Just let him know who you are and you guys can wait for me. Sound good?" She said hopefully.

"Yeah, sure. Why not?" I smiled. *Man I haven't smiled this much in months.*

"Great. I'll see you in a bit. I have a few more people to serve and then I'll be done." She grinned.

"See you soon. I'll keep watch for Billy."

"Excellent. Bye." She said as she disappeared into the kitchen. I don't know why I agreed to going out with her and her boyfriend. I'm just a sucker for a beautiful face, and she definitely fell into that category. *Here goes nothing.* A tall longhaired guy walked into the diner. *That has to be Billy.* He looked over at me and I smiled at him and approached.

"Are you Billy?" I asked.

"I'll be whoever you want me to be baby." He said as I swallowed back the bile that had found its way into my throat.

"Well, Annie said someone with your description would be coming in here soon. I just assumed it was you. I apologize if I was mistaken." I said through clenched teeth.

*God I don't like him already.*

"Where is Annie? She better not be late getting off work again. I got shit to do." He grumbled.

"Well she didn't say that she was going to be late. If she is no big deal, I got no where to be." I challenged.

"Well I'll give her five minutes... after that I'm outta here." He stated.

*What a dick.*

I rolled my eyes and watched the clock over the kitchen doors.

*God please let her be on time. I don't want to commit murder in the first with an asshole on second. What the hell does that mean? God, Annie just be on time.*

Just as I was going to have to control myself Annie walked through the doors with thirty seconds to spare.

"Girl you are damn lucky you are on time." He walked up to her and grabbed her upper arm rather roughly. "You said twelve thirty. You know how I hate to be kept waiting." I saw fear shining through the pale green eyes that were so bright a half-hour ago.

"Sorry Billy. I won't be late next time." She weakly smiled.

"Well see that you aren't, or I won't be here when you come out." He released her arm and started walking towards the door. "Well, are you coming or not?" He grouched again.

"Yeah, come on Frankie. Let's not waste this wonderful day. You don't mind that I invited her do you Billy?" She asked tentatively.

"Whatever, let's just go." He said as he stormed out the front door.

*God, I really don't like him... at all.*

I gave her a tiny smile and out of pure reflex rubbed her back. "Well, he was pleasant."

"You just have to get to know him. He is really very sweet." She defended.

"Oh, I'm sure. I hope to have someone like that father my children." I deadpanned hoping she wouldn't take offense.

Luckily for me she burst out laughing. "Thank you for that. Sometimes he just gets... well, nevermind. Let's go enjoy that sunshine." She beamed while hiding what looked to be pain.

"Good idea. After you..." I said as I held the door for her.

"Thanks M'Lady." She winked as she left the diner.

*Ahhh... if only...*

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[Continued in Part 4...](#)

Feedback is the Ruler of all Bards.

The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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## ~ A Sacrifice For Friendship ~

by DS Bauden

**Disclaimers:** This Uber tale is the latest creation to be extracted from my brain. All of the characters are mine, and not to be confused with anyone else's. They may resemble two women we dig a whole lot.

**Love/Sex Warning:** Yep and yep. It may not be everyone's cup of tea and if you aren't old enough to drink that kind of tea or even read it. please press the "save" key until a later date.

### Part 4

#### Chapter Six

The ride to the beach was a quiet one. I could feel the tension between these two, it was very thick. She sat between us in the cabin of his truck. The closeness of her body was making me twitchy. She needed to leave this bastard. And soon. Billy's pick-up truck stopped at the Northeast Beach of Campus, right off Pratt Lane. It was truly an awesome day, and many other patrons felt the same way.

"Wow, how many days do you see like this in April eh Billy?" Annie said excitedly.

"Yeah babe, just point me in the direction of the keg. Corey said he was gonna have one down here today." Billy said looking around. His eyes landing on his target, "There he is, lets go. I don't want to wait for a cup." He said as he bolted from the truck to find his nectar of the gods.

"It's nice to see a man with priorities." I joked. The look on Annie's face was forlorn. "What is it Annie? Did I say something wrong?" She turned slowly to look at me.

"No, I just don't like him to drink so much. He just won't listen to me. Every time I bring it up we fight and he gets really upset and then he... well let's just say I don't bring it up anymore." She finished quietly.

I was really pissed off now.

*If he has done ANYTHING to you, I will kill him where he stands.*

My protective feathers were ruffled tremendously. There was something inside of me that needed to protect Annie with everything that I had. I wasn't about to let her down.



*There is such a sorrowful look on her face. She was so excited just a few minutes ago. I need to stop her sadness. It is too nice of a day to feel like this. I'll try to talk to her about this another time. She doesn't look like she wants to talk about this anymore.*

"What d'ya say we find a volleyball game or something to watch?" I suggested.

Her face instantly lit up. "What do you mean watch? Let's go kick some ass!" She said with an amazing fire in her eyes. She dashed out to the game already in progress.

Annie ran up to some friends of hers that were there and asked if they needed any more players. I stood at the sidelines of the pseudo playing court and waited for a signal from Annie.

Annie's face was beaming from the sunshine and the adrenaline rush of wanting to play.

*She is absolutely adorable... and straight. I need to remember that.*

I was taken out of my thoughts by a snapping set of fingers in my face. "Frankie? Darlin, you okay?" She asked.

"Yeah, do we get to play?" I asked hoping to be able to take out some aggression on an unknowing ball.

"Yes ma'am, this is Betsy, she lives on my floor." She introduced, "Betsy this is Frankie, we just met earlier today. She is very nice." She leaned over conspiratorially to Betsy, "And she is very attractive, don't you think?" My face instantly blushed and I tried to turn away. Annie caught my face with her fingertips, and spoke directly into my eyes. "You are darlin, don't take for granted what you have been given freely." God... those were words to live by. "Hell, you could have anyone here if you wanted!" They both started laughing, and Betsy chimed in, "And we do mean anyone!"

*Was that a hint for her or Annie? I am rooting for the latter.*

"Thanks. I guess I'm just not very good at accepting compliments." I said almost shyly, surprising even me.

"Come on Frankie, let's go kick some ass!" Betsy said as she put her arm around my shoulders and led me towards the team.

The three of us took the front row of our little squad and awaited the serve from the other team. I took the middle, Betsy was front right, and Annie the front left.

"Incoming!" Screamed one of girls in the back row. I looked up to see the serve coming right for Annie. She watched the ball come right for her. She connected solidly with the ball and bumped it to Betsy who in turn set it up for my spike. I eyed the ball and leapt as high as I could.

WHACK!

"YES!" The girls on my team shouted as my shot landed in between two girls on the other team in the back row.

"Way to go Frankie!" Annie beamed at me. I couldn't help but smile back.

This was easy. Although, I think I had quite an advantage over them.

"Annie! Get your ass over here!" Billy shouted from the sidelines.

"Billy, I'm in the middle of the game here, give me a couple seconds ok?" She asked.

"No, I want you now! Move it girlie!" He gruffed.

Annie's face fell as she walked over to him. "Hey, sorry guys, I'll be back in a sec." She said.

I couldn't help but watch the interaction between them. Billy was an asshole, plain and simple, I just didn't understand what Annie saw in him. She could do so much better than him. She deserved much better than him. He was just too stupid to realize what he had.

Annie walked over to Billy and again he grabbed her upper arm roughly. "When I ask you to come over to me, you do it! Not in a few seconds or minutes. Now means now!" He sputtered.

"I'm sorry Billy, what is it that you wanted?" She quietly asked.

"We need more beer. Go to the store and get another half barrel." He pulled out a wad of cash from his pocket and handed it to her. Annie took the wadded bills in her hands as she took his keys. She weakly smiled at him and he leaned down for a kiss. He grabbed the back of her hair roughly pulling her head back to face him. She whimpered slightly as she let him kiss her sloppily.

She pulled back and started to walk towards the truck. Billy slapped her ass as she walked away and downed the rest of his beer. He laughed with his buddies about his role in their relationship.

"Damn bitch, never listens to me. I'll straighten her out later on. You think you can embarrass me in front of my friends? I'll teach you some manners..." He trailed off when I approached him.

"What do you want?" He asked as he staggered and tried to focus on me.

"Something tells me that even a dog wouldn't obey you. If she has any sense to her at all, she'll leave your sorry ass. Since I believe she has more sense than you'll ever have, it's just a matter of time." I really wanted to lay him out, but something told me that this wasn't a good time for that.

"Bitch. You sure don't know shit about women. Annie likes the way we are. Don't you baby?" He yelled out to her and she nodded slightly. I couldn't believe my eyes. "See? She ain't going nowhere. Not without me anyway." He smugly said as his friends joined him in his snickering. *God I want to make him eat the sand under my shoes right now. Calm down Frankie, if Annie*

*doesn't want your help, you can't make her accept it. My thoughts took control and I didn't feel the slight tug on my sleeve.*

"You want to come with me to the store Frankie?" Annie asked. "I gotta pick up some beer for the guys." She asked with a look that almost pleaded with me to come with her.

"Sure." I said as I eyeballed Billy. "Asshole. Don't say I didn't warn you. She'll be gone before you know it." I smiled at him in a feral kind of way.

*Pop taught me that sometimes if you smile just so, people will understand your passion without having to feel it smash against their skull. This was one of those times that I wished I was smashing something against Billy's skull.*

*It's not like he didn't deserve it. Bastard.*

"Let's go Annie." I smiled a sweet smile her way and turned towards the truck.

"Hey Bets! We'll be back in a few, OK?" Annie shouted at our teammate.

"Sure guys! See you soon! Don't do anything I wouldn't!" She shouted back to us.

*That was an odd statement. This day is getting odder by the second. Who am I kidding? This is the oddest fucking day I have EVER had.*

~~~~~

We walked to the truck in moderate silence. Annie looked distraught, and it wasn't hard to figure out why. Her so-called boyfriend had just humiliated her, and you can be guaranteed that it wasn't the first time. We got in the truck and sat in silence for a few moments.

"Hey, you okay?" I asked softly.

She looked up with tear filled eyes that almost broke my heart. "I don't know why he has to drink so much. He is never like this when we are alone. I'm sorry that you had to see that, being that we just met and all. Thanks for sticking up for me though." She added as she gently touched my forearm.

"Who wouldn't stick up for you? He was being a real jerk and he needed to be told off." I explained.

"Well, still, thank you. I really appreciated that."

"I'll do it again if I have to Annie. He shouldn't treat you like that. Drunk or not, he was an asshole. Forgive me for saying so."

"No need to apologize, Billy was being an asshole. I just need to stick up for myself more. It's just..." She trailed off. "Well let's just say he doesn't like those discussions." She said to the air above her as she rested her head against the seat and blew out an exasperated breath.

"Annie, I know you and I really don't know each other well, but can I ask you a personal question?"

Her eyes returned to mine. "Sure. I can't promise I'll answer, but you can ask." She smiled weakly.

"OK, there is no easy way of asking this, so I'm just gonna ask."

"Ok." She fully focused in on me.

"Does Billy hit you?"

She turned in the driver's seat and gripped the steering wheel until her knuckles turned white. I could see tears rolling down her face. I reached up to wipe away her tear when she flinched at my touch. Her face went from showing sadness to fear in a matter of milliseconds.

"Hey... Annie? You don't ever need to be afraid of me. I would never lay a hand on you. Please know that." I said in my most gentle but most reassuring tone.

"I'm sorry Frankie..." She started. She looked out towards the beach and took a deep breath before continuing. "No one... Knows anything... No one has ever even bothered to ask. It took a total stranger to see all of this. You don't feel like a stranger to me though. I'm so comfortable with you; it's almost scary." She turned to face me and shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know how to leave him. It's always been this way. My dad was the same way with my mom... well before she left us."

"She left you with your dad?" I asked.

"Yeah... He had never hit me, so I guess she thought I would be safe. She just knew that she had to leave. She left me a note though... wasn't that thoughtful? That was over ten years ago. I've never heard from her since."

Somewhere in this conversation I found a very sad and lonely girl. She was becoming a statistic. Raised by a father who beat her mother, who in turn started beating her, and now she was dating a man who beat her too.

*If I have anything to say about this Annie, you will not turn into a statistic. I'll do everything in my power to make sure that you stay safe and loved. I'll make you see how much you deserve those things, and more.*

"Frankie?" She broke me from my reverie.

"Sorry, kinda spaced out there for a minute. You know, my mom left my Pop and me when I was two. So I kinda know where you are coming from. The only difference is that my Pop didn't beat me." I said honestly.

"You were one of the lucky ones that's for sure. It just makes you wonder why, you know?" She rhetorically said, I knew she wasn't looking for an answer.

"Well, if you need help with Billy, I'll be here for you, I promise." I said as I noticed her rolling her eyes. I took her forearm gently but firm enough for her to face me. "A Camarelli never breaks a promise." I said very seriously.

"Thank you Frankie, I think I might even believe you." She replied.

"Good, because I'm very serious about this." I finished as she took my hand in hers and gave it a squeeze.

"Let's get this damn thing over with. I can't believe that they drank all of that already. This party only started a couple hours ago." She said disbelieving.

Annie started the engine and we headed off to liquor store. We drove down Sheridan Road and I was still in shock from all of the changes that I was witnessing.

We drove past the 400 Theater and I looked at the Marquis. *The Godfather Part II*. My head was spinning so badly I felt like I was in *Back to the Future*.

"I think I liked the third Godfather the best." I said without thinking,

"The third Godfather? Frankie, there are only two."

*Dumb. Dumb. Dumb Frankie!* "I meant I liked this one the third time that I saw it." *Smooth catch idiot. Hi Annie! I'm from the future, where you invaded my dreams with your voice. Remember me? God!*

"Oh." Annie said as she was eyeing me suspiciously.

"I need some music, do you mind if I turn on the radio?" I quickly asked.

"Sure, I could use some myself." She said as she leaned over to turn on the radio.

She was turning the tuning knob like mad. God I forgot how radio's used to look without a CD player or a cassette deck in them. I wouldn't have been surprised to have seen an eight track in there somewhere. She finally settled on Elton John's Bennie and the Jets.

*Hey kids, shake it loose together,*

*The spotlight's hitting something*

*That's been known to change the weather.*

*We'll kill the fatted calf tonight*

*So stick around,*

*You're gonna hear electric music,*

*Solid walls of sound.*

I had always had a soft spot for Elton John. It made me happy to see that she felt the same way. I watched her as she sang along with the melody as the chorus kicked in. She had a beautiful singing voice.

*Say, Candy and Ronnie, have you seen them yet*

*But they're so spaced out, Bennie and the Jets,*

*But they're weird and they're wonderful,*

*Oh Bennie she's really keen.*

*She's got electric boots a mohair suit,*

*You know I read it in a magazine,*

*Oh! Bennie and the Jets.*

I smiled as I watched her slam out sound of the B's in the word Bennie over and over again. I looked over at her and she started to look a little fuzzy to me. I rubbed my eyes and tried to sharpen my vision. I felt myself get extremely tired and was helpless to fight it off. I closed my eyes thinking that if I rested for a second or two I would feel better. My eyes were shuttering close and I could see Annie talking to me but I couldn't hear her voice anymore.

*What the hell? Annie? Can you hear me? Annie? Annie? Why aren't you answering me? Annie? Annie?*

"Annie? Annie?" I heard myself mumble.

"Frankie? Come on sweetheart, wake up." I heard a familiar voice say. "Frankie? You are dreaming Hon, come on wake up." I finally recognized the voice, but it wasn't Annie, it was Crystal. Oh shit... no...

My eyes slowly opened to find concerned brown ones staring back at me. The curly brown hair and deep brown eyes were unmistakably Crystal. She looked down with a small smile on her lips.

"Welcome back darlin. Are you ok?" She asked, but I couldn't speak. After a couple of attempts I finally took a deep breath and concentrated on forming words that were so hard to annunciate.

"No... it couldn't have been... God damn it." I closed my eyes as they were filling with tears.

"Frankie? What's wrong? Shh... why are you crying?" She gently asked as she stroked my sweat soaked bangs.

"I can't believe it was just a dream. I just cant... She was right here... I touched her Crystal... Oh God..." I rolled onto my stomach and began to cry mournfully. I felt a loneliness I hadn't felt since my Pop passed away.

*I really hope that the bastard playing with my emotions is getting a good laugh now, because if I ever find them I won't be responsible for my actions.*

*This I guarantee.*

[Continued in Part 5...](#)

Feedback is the Ruler of all Bards.

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### [The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive](#)

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## ~ A Sacrifice For Friendship ~

by DS Bauden

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### Part 5

#### Chapter Seven

"Frankie? Hon, are you ok? Please talk to me." Crystal was pleading with me.

"I... I don't know what to say. Crystal, I met her." I croaked out.

She looked at me questioning my response and then finally she understood what I meant.

"Her? You met her? The one from your dreams?" She asked as her eyebrows shot up towards her hairline.

I just nodded my head. It was all I could muster at this point. My heart was aching to see her again and I had only been away from her a few moments. Her scent was still trapped in my sinuses. God... why was this happening? That was the only thing that I needed to know.

"What happened Frankie? Can you try to tell me what happened? Where did you see her? Did she recognize you? What did she say to you? Did she say anything? Was her voice the same as in your dreams?"

My head was swimming from all of the questions she was throwing at me, but I knew she was just trying to help. I needed something to drink. My throat had become incredibly dry from my crying.

"Could you get me some water, please?" I managed to choke out.

"Sure babe, I'll be right back." She smiled and kissed the top of my head.

She'd done that for as long as I could remember. Whenever I would get sad or depressed, she would always kiss the top of my head. I never really knew the significance of it, I just knew that it always helped. Kinda like your favorite cookie whenever you needed a pick-me-up. Crystal had always been my favorite cookie... so to speak.

She came back into my room with a glass of water and some Kleenex. Both of which would help with my body fluids. My heart felt so heavy that I could hardly breathe. She handed me the glass, and I emptied its contents in a couple of gulps. She took the glass and then handed me the box of Kleenex. I took one of the tissues and looked up into her concerned brown eyes.

"Crystal, did this really happen? Or am I so incredibly lonely that I can't decipher between reality and fantasy anymore?" My bottom lip started to quiver and she immediately put her arms around me in comfort. I rested my head on her breast and listened to her heartbeat as I wiped my tears. I heard her take a deep breath and felt her voice vibrate through her chest.

"Do you believe that you were really there Frankie?" She asked quietly.

"Crys... I can't even fathom the idea that it wasn't real. It was so INCREDIBLY real. I can still smell her..." I said as my tears soaked into her shirt.

"I believe you sweetheart. I really do." She said as she continued to rock me like a small child.

"Why is this happening Crystal? Do you have any idea at all?" I asked.



"Well, Frankie, it's hard to say. I believe that our souls are very timeless and always active. I also believe that once the time that they live in the physical realm is over, they are still very much alive, and come back again in a different physical form."

I sighed heavily because I never really believed in the absurdity of reincarnation. I always looked at death as a finality to life, not a new beginning. She knew how hard it was for me to hear this stuff. Maybe I should have listened to her prattle before now.

"So what exactly is happening Crystal?" I didn't want to know the answer. I just wanted the hurting to stop.

"Well, why don't you tell me about your experience and I can try to give you a little insight."

"Ok, I'll try to recall as much as possible. God I hope you can figure some of this out. I don't know how much more of this I can take."

"I'll do what I can Frankie. Now let's get you comfy." She said as she leaned me against my headboard and piled my pillows behind my head and shoulders. She kicked off her shoes and climbed into my bed and waited for me to speak.

"OK, well, it started off with Joni Mitchell."

"Wait... the singer? She was in your dream?" She looked at me like I was gonna tell her I was joking.

"Well, in a way she was. Remember the other day when my alarm went off and she was singing?" She nodded. "Well the same song came on so I just thought the same deejay was working and really liked to play this song at the same time every day. Well, it wasn't my alarm; it was the record player in my family room. Except I wasn't playing records, my Pop was." Her eyes got big again but she urged me to continue.

"OK, I heard that "Help Me" song and I went to hit my alarm clock, and it wasn't there so I went out of my room to investigate where the music was coming from. I walked down the hallway until I heard voices. Crystal, I heard my Pop's voice. I couldn't fucking believe my ears. I hadn't heard his voice in years; it took me awhile to actually place where I'd heard the voice before.

"I braced myself against the wall initially because I swear my body was going into shock. I heard a woman's voice next. Crystal it was my Ma. Can you believe that? I don't remember much about her at all, but as soon as I saw her I knew who she was. I watched my Pop try to fix a radio or something at the kitchen table. She was messing around in the kitchen and that song kept playing over and over again. It was making my head spin. I was spying on these people, who hadn't even had me yet, from their own hallway!"

Crystal stayed silent waiting for my next segment. I gulped down the last of my water. My throat really was parched. I got up and took my empty water glass into the bathroom to fill it. I needed more water since I knew that this storytelling thing was gonna take a lot out of me.

I crawled back onto my bed and joined Crystal who was patiently waiting for my return.

"OK, ready for more?" I smiled.

"Sure, just take your time Hon, I got all day. It's Sunday, so you do too."

"God, I almost forgot. Thank God Mario doesn't mind working on Sunday. Have you met him yet?"

"I think I met him briefly last week. He seems like a nice person. Is he working out for you?"

"He is today, let's just say that." I smiled.

My newly hired employee Mario Antonelli was working his first solo Sunday shift. We're only open for a few hours on Sundays, so I didn't think he'd had any issues. I just knew that I needed another person with me, I started to get sick of working seven days a week. I may be committed to my lil store, but I'm not yet crazy enough to be committed. There is a fine line there somewhere that I'm just not ready to cross.

"OK Miss Avoidance, let's talk more about this." Crystal teased.

"Alright then. Let me get situated again." I said as I shifted myself back on top of my pillows.

"Where was I again?"

"You were staring at your parents."

"Oh yeah... So, right, I was watching my parents who were back in the seventies all young again. It was wild. I never remembered my Pop having so much hair. I couldn't believe that I was looking at my Ma. I don't remember much about her, but the pictures that I have really didn't do her justice at all, she's really beautiful."

*I wonder where she is now? It's been so long since she left, I wonder if she even thinks about me anymore. Bet not, damn bitch didn't even show up for Pop's funeral. My thoughts were flooding my brain.*

"Frankie? Hello? You were really out there babe. Wanna share?"

"Oh, sorry Crystal, I was just thinking about my Ma. I can't believe she didn't even show up for Pop's funeral. I would have bet that if anywhere, she would have shown up there."

"Yeah well, people's priorities are pretty friggin' whacked these days."

"You can say that again." I agreed. "So anyway, I watched them for a bit and went back into my room. Well it wasn't my room really anymore, because when I went back in, there was no evidence of my being there at all. I got really kinda freaked so I climbed out the window and down the fire escape."

"Ah just like old times. Remember when we used to sneak out like that? Your Pop never knew!" She said while laughing.

"Oh believe me, he knew. He was always waiting up for me. I knew his fake snoring versus his real snoring. I just never knew why I never got punished."

"He just wanted to make sure that you were all right Frankie. You were a good kid for the most part and he knew that. I'm sure he was just concerned about your safety."

"Yeah, that's probably true. I never had a curfew. We had a good relationship and communication was never a problem." I could feel my eyes tearing up. "God, I miss him Crystal."

"I know sweetheart." She said as she lay her head on my shoulder and rubbed my arm.

We stayed like that until I could compose myself. I really felt like I was having a nervous breakdown. So much had happened, or had it? I didn't know whether or not to truly believe that my experience was an actual journey or whether it was just a dream. I'd never had a dream feel like that before.

God! What is going on?

I felt myself begin to relax and I decided to continue with my story.

"OK, I think I'm ready."

"All right Frankie, I'm listening." She said as she snuggled closer to me.

"Well after I shot down the fire escape, I just looked in awe at the neighborhood. I mean Crystal; your shop wasn't even a thought yet! It was so incredible. I was looking down the street and it was as if I was looking through someone else's eyes. I saw everything in the neighborhood as it was in 1974."

"1974?"

"Yeah. I walked down Sheridan Road and found a little coffee shop that I *know* isn't there anymore. It was the cutest little café. Then I sat down and waited to be helped. I took a seat at the bar-like counter and there she was Crystal. I noticed a newspaper and the date on it was April 23, 1974! I thought I was gonna throw up my anxiety was so high. Then I saw her up close and personal. I couldn't form a sentence I was so tongue-tied. She was so incredibly beautiful, more than I could have ever imagined. Then she spoke to me in that angelic voice that I had heard so often. It was almost too much for me to bear."

"What did she say?" Crystal asked.

"Did you want to order something darlin'?" It was so adorable Crystal. I was slack-jawed just looking at her. My mind was tracing every line of her face and every curve of her body. I thought she was gonna have me arrested for the thoughts in my head. I would have... damn."

"So, ok you ate then I am assuming?" She was getting anxious I could tell.

"Yeah, I did eat and then we made plans for the rest of the day. It was so weird. I mean, I don't know that I could have made plans with someone that I had just met at my job. Anyway, I waited for her to finish up her shift and she told me her boyfriend would be coming to pick her up."

"Boyfriend?" Crystal gasped.

"Yeah... I know... boy he's a real charmer this one. I don't know Crystal; I am worried about her with him too. We talked about how abusive he gets, especially when he drinks. I am afraid that I might have to kill him if I see him hurt her."

"Is she strong enough to leave him do you think?" She asked.

"I think with enough encouragement, she would. She is afraid of what he will do to her if she even suggests that. This guy is a total loser Crystal. I wanted to skin him when I met him. He was foaming at the mouth in my direction until he knew that I was a friend of Annie's. I swear he cheats on her. He is just scum."

"Annie eh?" She nudged me with a smirk.

"Yeah, it's so perfect for her too. She is such an Annie. She is studying to be a writer at Loyola University. God, Crystal, how can something like this not be real? I don't understand it. I was there dammit. There is nothing anyone can say to me that will make me believe otherwise."

"I'm not saying it didn't happen Frankie. Things like this do happen. I think we should talk with Nonnie about this. I think she can help. She has been around longer and has seen more than I have."

"What do you think it was Crystal?" I was curious.

"I would say that you had a conscious out of the body experience."

"What is that?" I didn't like the sound of this one bit.

"There is an experience called an 'out-of-the-body' experience that happens usually during the sleep state where you might experience a sensation of flying or falling, but definitely traveling. The person is in an altered state of consciousness. There are those that have experienced 'conscious out of the body' which is more difficult, but it's like lucid dreaming. This is what I believe happened to you."

*I knew I didn't like the sound of this.*

"So what now? I mean can this happen again do you think?"

"Well that is up to you and your friend Annie. It is quite obvious to me that she needs you for something. Maybe it's the situation between her boyfriend and herself. I don't know. We won't know unless it happens again. I think we should go see Nonnie, Frankie. She may be able to shed some light that I wasn't able to."

"Alright Crystal, but I'm warning you. I'm not drinking any funky ass tea or anything to help this process. I want answers more than anyone, but I won't participate in any sacrifices to help this cause." I seriously explained.

Crystal laughed at me like I knew she would.

*God even I'm laughing at the ludicrousness of all of this. I need to laugh about this, I have already cried too much today. God my heart aches.*

## Chapter Eight

We walked down to Nonnie's and found her taking a nap on the couch in their living room. I didn't want to wake her so we waited in the kitchen for a bit. Crystal was hungry so we decided to make some brunch. It was way past the breakfast hour, but not late enough to be called lunch. I think people decided on calling it brunch as an excuse to eat more.

*But what do I know? I'm having out of body thingys happen to me. Right? Right.*

We sat and ate until our bellies couldn't take much more. After drawing straws to see who was gonna wash and dry we began to clean. When we finished cleaning up the mess we had created in the kitchen, Nonnie had awoken from her nap. She came into the kitchen and wiped her sleepy eyes as she looked at us.

"Hey there girls. Whatcha doing in here on such a beautiful day?"

"Hi Nonnie, we just finished eating. How was your nap?" Crystal greeted.

"It was restful. You know a girl my age needs her beauty rest anytime she can get it." She smiled at us.

"Nonnie, we have to talk with you about something that happened to Frankie." Crystal said with seriousness.

"OK, let me get a cup of tea and we'll talk in the living room." Nonnie replied.

"Alright. We'll meet you out there," She said back to Nonnie.

Crystal took my hand and led me out into the living room. I was still very nervous about talking about this. I mean what if it was nothing more than a vivid dream? This was just ridiculous. It

was a dream, and that's all, it had to have been. I had to think that, otherwise I was gonna go nuts trying to figure out a way to see Annie again.

*God... Annie... Are you real? Or are you just a dream? God!*

"Ok, Frankie?" Crystal said. Oh shit, I missed something somewhere.

"Sorry?"

"You okay kiddo? Take a deep breath. This is gonna be fine I swear. Nonnie isn't gonna make fun of you." Crystal said as she took my hand and gently caressed the inside of my wrist. God she was always so calming.

"Yeah, I'm fine. I just don't know what to believe anymore, you know?" I said honestly.

"I know honey. Let's just see what Nonnie says about your experience." She reassured.

Nonnie entered the living room with a piping hot mug of tea for herself. She looked at me and then at Crystal and decided that this was going to be a conversation that was gonna take awhile.

"OK, so who wants to start?" Nonnie said getting right down to business.

"Let me sum up what has happened to Frankie, and Frankie, if you want to chime in when I am forgetting something, go right ahead. OK?" Crystal finished.

"Sure, that sounds fine." I agreed.

"OK then I'll start." Crystal took a deep breath and began my tale. "I believe that Frankie had a conscious out of the body experience Nonnie." She explained.

"Well now, that is something. Go on." She urged.

Crystal told Nonnie everything that I had relayed to her a couple hours ago. Nonnie sat in her favorite chair and stayed extremely quiet throughout the whole explanation of my journey. The silence was making me mental.

"What do you think Nonnie?" I couldn't stand it any longer.

"Child, give me a minute to sort this out. Patience is something you need to acquire and soon." She jabbed at me. She knew I didn't have any patience.

"Sorry, I am just a little unnerved by all of this. I just want to know if this was real or not." I said as I hung my head.

"Oh, it was real alright. I just need to think for a minute." She got up and went back into the kitchen. She made some noise sounding like she was refilling her tea mug. I just stared at Crystal in disbelief.

"It's real huh? Great..." I put my head in my hands. "So I'm not crazy?"

"Hon, you were never crazy. I promise you, Nonnie and I will help you as much as we can with all of this. My guess is Nonnie trying to figure out why this Annie person has contacted you in the first place. She likes to know everything before she goes head first into something like this."

"She's not an "Annie person"... just Annie." I trailed off.

"Ooh, touchy subject eh?" I just stared at Crystal. "Frankie? You are falling in love with her aren't you?" She grinned at me with her know it all smile.

"I'm not in love with her... At least not yet." I admitted. "But if I was, there wouldn't be anyone else that I would rather be in love with."

"Wow Annie must be really something." She said as she rested her elbows on her knees and stared at me.

"She really is Crystal, and I would appreciate you not making fun of me at the moment." I pretended to pout and Crystal just put her hand on top of my head in a soothing gesture.

"You know I wouldn't do that. I'm just teasing, I can see that she means something to you. We'll do what we can, I promise." She reaffirmed to me.

Nonnie reentered at this moment. She looked deep in thought. She had indeed refilled her mug with hot tea and took her place back on her favorite plaid covered easy chair. She rocked back and forth for a bit and then looked at me for a long time without saying a word. I knew this time not to say anything. As much as it was bugging me, I just let her stare.

"OK Frankie. I believe that what you experienced was indeed a conscious out of body experience." I groaned internally. "I believe that there is a strong reason that she has come to find you. It could be that you knew each other at one time and your time together was cut short by something, maybe even death. At this time I don't know. I will try to make contact with some people tonight and find out more. What I need for you to do is not to try too hard to return to this place. Let yourself be taken. You must be very relaxed almost in a meditative state of mind. Do you know how to meditate?"

"No...I..."

"Crystal will show you." I closed my gaping mouth and looked at Crystal who smiled and shook her head at me. "In the meantime, if she tries to make contact with you again be it through your dreams or whatnot, just let it take you. Do not try to control the situation, I know how you are." She said as she pointed at me. "Let it just happen. Open your mind, and I do mean open it. I have

known you too long to know that you don't believe in a lot of the things that Crystal and I do, but you must trust us in what we do know of the other side."

"The other side?" I asked incredulously.

"Yes, the other side." She said again.

"What's on the other side Nonnie?" I asked softly.

"The answers that you need." She said as I watched her get up and go into her room.

*Could she be anymore cryptic? Knowing her, I think I know that answer.*

[Continued in Part 6...](#)

Feedback is the Ruler of all Bards.

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## ~ A Sacrifice For Friendship ~

by DS Bauden

**Disclaimers:** This Uber tale is the latest creation to be extracted from my brain. All of the characters are mine, and not to be confused with anyone else's. They may resemble two women we dig a whole lot.

**Love/Sex Warning:** Yep and yep. It may not be everyone's cup of tea and if you aren't old enough to drink that kind of tea or even read it. please press the "save" key until a later date.

### Part 6

#### Chapter Nine

*So where do I go from here? Do I just sit around and pretend that none of this has happened? I know I can't do that. Nonnie and Crystal have been great, but now all I want to do is to get back to Annie. I miss her sweet face and her beautiful smile. God I'm never gonna want to wake up anymore. If sleeping means I get to see Annie again, and then sleep sounds really good to me. Then again, if it was just a dream, I need to get over it and live my life.*

"Frankie? Where are you babe?" Crystal asked breaking me away from my thoughts.



"I'm just thinking about my options at this point Crystal. Is Nonnie going to come out and tell me if she finds anything out?" I asked. Nonnie went to her room and hadn't come out in a long time.

"I promise you if she finds out anything, she'll either tell you directly, which is her style as you know, or she'll tell me and I'll relay the information." She explained.

"Alright. I guess I need to learn how to be patient, just like she said. I really hate being patient though." I said as I started to pace back and forth like a caged animal.

"Let's do something Frankie. It's the middle of the afternoon, what would you like to do?" She asked hopefully.

"Sleep." I answered truthfully.

"Now cut that out. My best friend is not going to become a part of her furniture. I won't let that happen. What would I tell people?" She smiled.

"You'll tell them to mind their own business just like you always have. That's what I love about you Crystal, I know that all of my secrets are completely safe with you."

"Right back atcha babe." She smiled. "You know they always will be safe with me."

"I don't doubt that Crys." I took her arm with my hand. "Let's go to the movies." I smiled knowing that she would love that idea.

"What? Really? Like in the theater? Frankie since you bought that home theater you never want to leave your house! You really want to go?" She got so excited it was like I was talking to a child.

"You pick the flick and that's what we'll see."

"The 400 is showing an oldie but a goodie."

"You don't want to see a new movie?"

"I love the classics. You know that. C'Mon, you know how much I love them."

I felt my resolve weakening with every plea coming from her mouth. I loved the classics even more than she did. "Fine, whatever you like my friend. I owe you big for your help with this... but especially for not making fun of me."

"Frankie, I would never make fun of you with something like this. I know how hard it was for you to even tell me about this. I have known you my whole life just about, and I know that you have never seen any of the things that I do to be real or truthful. I think it has been just nonsense for you."

"Crystal, I..." I started.

"No, it's ok." She held up her hands in defense. "I know that you are not the only one to think that supernatural stuff is hoaxy, I deal with that every time someone walks into my door with a non-believer. It's OK, you have many redeeming qualities in you that surpass your stubbornness."

"Gee, thanks. I think." She smiled at me.

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We walked into the theater and Crystal started to order food from the concessions area. She ordered everything necessary for a good film: a large popcorn, a large soda, Raisinets, and of course cherry licorice ropes. After she made me pay, we found a good seat in the direct center of the theater. I never could understand how people could watch a movie from the front row. If your neck wasn't broken by the time the movie ended, it sure as hell felt like it was.

We sat down and noticed only a few other people in the theater. There were some couples but there were mostly women. I'd say it was a favorite for the female race.

As the movie started I watched the screen and felt myself begin to finally relax. I looked over to Crystal who was munching away on popcorn and sipping her soda without a care in the world. The look on her face brought a smile to mine. She was truly a wonderful friend. She still looked to the little things in life to make her happy. That was rare these days. She made me feel a lot younger than I truly was, and for that I will be forever grateful. I never want to feel as old as I am. I don't think I ever will.

Half way through the film Crystal and I were singing our hearts out. I had forgotten how much I enjoyed this film. The fellow theatergoers stared at us with smiles on their faces when they weren't singing along with us. Barbra herself, would have been proud of all of us funny girls. The poor guys that came with their girlfriends just sat back and endured. That in itself was a noble quality, I thought.

The movie ended two and a half hours later. Crystal and I walked out into the fresh air and breathed deeply. I loved the smell of popcorn, but after that long in a theater, enough is enough.

"So now what?" She asked.

"Umm... I really hadn't thought past the film. Is there something that you would like to do before nightfall?" I asked.

"Well, we could go window shopping. There is a great boutique just down the road a bit here. It's safe for us since it's not open. I can't remember the last time you and I were able to go shopping without spending a mint." She said and started to giggle.

"Isn't that the truth? The shopkeepers see us coming and they grease up their cash registers." I laughed.

"Especially that shop that carries those great China shoes. God I love that place!" She said as we started to walk home.

We walked and sang down Sheridan Road. It was turning into a beautiful spring night. The temperature was around sixty-five and there wasn't a cloud to be found. All I could think about was Annie. The diner that she worked in wasn't even a diner anymore, it looked to be a convenient store of some kind now.

"Hey Crys, can we walk down to the beach for a minute?" I just needed a little more of a reminder of Annie.

"The beach? You got a sudden urge to go swimming?" She joked.

"No, it's just so nice out and days like these are rarities. C'Mon, just for a minute?" I put on my best puppy eyes for her. There was no way she would deny me.

"Oh God! Not the eyes... fine. We'll go for a bit Frankie, but it's getting dark out and I don't want to end up walking home in darkness."

"Yay! Thanks Crys, we'll only stay a minute. I just want to see the water."

"Let's go." She said as she headed for Lake Michigan.

We jogged a bit to save on time and headed towards the lake. We finally arrived and my thoughts were flooded with Annie. God I missed her.

*What the hell is wrong with you Frankie? You barely even know this girl. Get a fucking grip on yourself. You don't even know if she is a real person.*

"She's got to be." I whispered out loud after fighting within myself.

"What?" Crystal asked as we stared into the changing sky.

"Hmm? Oh nothing. Sorry, just thinking out loud."

"God this is really beautiful. No one thinks that Chicago has more than just big buildings to offer someone. Take a look around us. This is just gorgeous." She marveled,

The sun began to make it's decent and I promised Crystal a cab ride home if she would stay and watch the sunset with me. She agreed only because she knew how much I wanted to stay. I felt a real connection to Annie here. There was something special about her and there was a reason that we were brought together the way we were. I just didn't know what that reason was yet.

"Honestly Frankie, I don't know. We can try hypnosis if you'd like. Sometimes I have had luck with my customers with this kind of thing. We might be able to help you get back there if you are completely calm and relaxed."

"I don't want to get hypnotized Crystal. I will take my chances when I go to sleep tonight." I said. There was NO way I was gonna do that.

"Suit yourself, but if it doesn't work, we can try that if you change your mind."

"Thanks." I said as I finished getting ready for bed.

I grabbed a large, thick blanket and opened my window. I stepped over my sill and landed on the fire escape. Crystal looked at me with concerned eyes.

"Frankie, what the hell are you doing?"

"What does it look like? I'm gonna sleep out here tonight."

"Why the hell are you going to do that?"

"Because if I get back there, I don't want to be inside the house again in case my Pop sees me. Duh!"

She gave me a great look after that. "Oh, silly stupid me. Why didn't I think of that? Frankie are you crazy? You could get attacked outside." She was trying to talk sense into me.

"There is no way that anyone can get up here. I brought up the ladder, so no one, unless they come from inside my home, can get to me." I stated. "Don't worry."

"I worry Frankie. I worry a lot. As much as I want you to be able to get back there, I don't want you to get hurt." She paused to look at me with her beautiful brown eyes.

"Crystal, I know you mean well. Just let me do this. If it doesn't work, then I'll stop because then I'll know that it was just a dream. Until the morning comes, I have to believe that what I experienced was real. It was so real for me that it couldn't have been just a dream."

"I believe you Frankie. I really do. I truly believe that Annie is real, and that she will call for you again. Just be careful. Promise me?"

"I promise. Thanks for your support Crystal."

"What kind of friend would I be if I didn't support you? Especially since you are experiencing things that are right up my alley." She said with a smile.

I leaned inside the apartment and grabbed hold of Crystal. I held onto her with everything I had. She was the greatest friend I would ever know.

"I love you Crystal. Thank you so much." I said as I kissed her cheek.

"You're welcome Frankie. You know there isn't anything I wouldn't do for you. It's the least I can do. I'll make sure that I pay extra attention to the sounds outside tonight. I don't want anything to happen to you."

"Thanks for your concern, but I'll be fine. You forget I can take care of myself." I said as I wiggled my eyebrows.

"I should have taken those classes with you."

"Then I would have no one to protect." I smiled. "Now go on, get some sleep. Hopefully I'll have a new story for you in the morning." I tousled her hair and she hugged me again.

"Good night Frankie. You want to leave this window open?" Crystal asked.

"Yeah, if I have to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, I need to have easy access inside. My luck the lock would break and lock me out completely. That would be ugly."

"True. Are you sure you'll be warm enough out here? You want another blanket or a jacket or something?"

*God she is adorable.*

"No darlin, I'll be just fine. Now shoo. Off with you. I'll be fine. I even have a pen and paper here to write down anything specific." I said as I held up the items to her.

"Good. Alright. I'm going. See you in the morning. If I don't see you by nine, I'm coming up for you."

"Ok babe, I'll be here. Mario still has the keys to the shop, so if I don't open up, he'll be here. I'm covered so don't worry."

"It's my job as the best friend, I'm supposed to worry."

"Good night Crystal." I pretended to sound exasperated.

"Good night Frankie." She said as she slipped out of the window and back into the apartment. I watched until her shadow disappeared.

"OK, this is it. I just wish I was tired." I said to the clouding sky. "Don't get any ideas, it's not supposed to rain for another couple of days. Back me up Pop."

The night was quiet and my neighborhood never seemed more still. It had been awhile since I had slept out here. I used to do it all the time after Pop died. It would remind me of all the hot summer nights we would hang out here. I always loved those times with him. We would just sit out here and suck on Popsicle's and just watch the city lights go out one by one.

*God I miss you Pop.*

## Chapter Ten

I couldn't help but shift as I felt the hardness of the fire escape dig into my back. When I opened my eyes I was looking into eyes I hadn't seen in years. It took every ounce of my control not to scream.

"You need a place to stay?" I heard him say.

"Wha..." I couldn't speak. I rubbed my eyes and cleared my throat and tried again. "Excuse me?"

"I asked you if you needed a place to stay." He repeated.

"No... I um..." *Think fast Frankie.* "I thought this was my balcony. I guess it was late when I got home last night, and I went up the wrong ladder." I looked at my father and he still had the most warmth I had ever seen in anyone's eyes. "I'm sorry, just let me get off of here and I'll get out of your way."

"It's no problem. I just wanted to make sure that you were ok."

"Thanks P..." I stopped myself. "Mister. I appreciate the concern."

"You want some breakfast?" He was always so nice to people.

"Breakfast? Um..." *Would this be a good thing or a bad thing?*

"Are you hungry? My wife and I were just sitting down to eat and I heard you out here. We have plenty if you want." He said just smiling his beautiful smile at me. How could I resist an opportunity to eat one more meal with my father and actually get to meet my mother.

"I would love to, thank you." The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them.

He held out his hand and helped me into my bedroom. I had the same clothes on that I was wearing the night before. I checked my pockets and felt the bulge of the money I had put in my pockets too.

*So much for not being able to control the situation Nonnie.* I smiled to myself.

Pop led me into the apartment and through the hallway I knew so well. My Ma was in the kitchen and looked a little astonished to see me walking into her home with my Pop. I looked at her and smiled.

"I'm Frankie. Your husband was nice enough to invite me in for breakfast."

She outstretched her hand to me. I shook it and felt a great softness in her hands. Maybe that was where I got my baby soft skin.

"I'm Myrna, I see you've met Frank." She said as she looked over at my Pop. He gave her the look that said, "we'll talk about this later". God I knew that look all too well.

"Yes I have." I looked at him and smiled back.

"Well, please, make yourself at home."

*Lady this is more my home then it will ever be to you.*

"Do you like scrambled eggs?" She asked.

"Yes ma'am. Can I help out with anything." I didn't want to be completely useless.

"No dear, that's ok. I have everything ready. I'll just bring it in. Go on and take a seat at the table."

"So Frankie..." My Pop started. "You look really familiar to me. Do I know your father?"

*Do you ever...*

"I don't think so. I actually live on the other side of the street. I must have been really tired when I crawled up the ladder last night." *Nice cover.*

"Mm... I see." He replied. That was his way of saying he didn't believe anything that I was saying.

"Thank you again for inviting me in. I am grateful you didn't have me arrested."

He laughed out loud, God I missed that sound. "Nonsense. If you had meant us any harm you wouldn't have stopped at the fire escape, you would have come right in. In fact I think we had someone in the house a couple weeks ago. By the time I got to the fire escape they had already disappeared though." My heartbeat sped up instantly.

*At least he didn't see me. A couple of weeks ago? God I wonder what day it is.*

"I'm harmless actually. Just a little misplaced." I said with a smirk, which made him smile.

"Are you sure we haven't met before?"

"Yes sir, I am sure of that." Liar.

"Oh Frank, give the girl a break, if she had met you before she would say so." Ma came in with breakfast and came to my rescue.



*There's a first. Where were you my whole life lady?*

I couldn't help but look at her with wondering eyes. I was an exact replica of the two of them. I had her eyes and his smile. I had his dark coloring, but her soft skin. I found myself feeling extremely lucky.

*How many people actually have breakfast with their parents before they know you are their kid? My guess is none. I knew this couldn't be a dream.*

"So Frankie, what do you do?" My Ma inquired.

*You do NOT work downstairs. You do NOT work downstairs.*

"I don't have a job right now. I love the movies and am looking to get a job at the theater down on Sheridan."

"The 400?" My Pop asked.

"Yep, that's the one." I replied.

"I love the movies too. My shop downstairs has a bunch of keepsakes from the movies. I have costumes, pictures, and memorabilia of all kinds. You should come down after breakfast and take a look around." He said with pride in his voice. He always loved his shop.

"I have been in there before. Maybe that's where you have seen me." I suggested.

"Could be." He said while taking a mouthful of food.

"Thank you again for breakfast Ma'am."

"Please call me Myrna." She said.

"Thank you Myrna." I have to say she did cook a mean breakfast. I just didn't know what else to say to her.

"Do you have any children?" I couldn't help but ask.

"No we don't." She answered immediately.

"But we want them, don't we dear?" My Pop chimed in.

"I don't think we should discuss this now." She said with a hint of anger in her voice. I think we struck a nerve.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry. Please forgive me."

"Don't worry about it Frankie." My Ma said as she stared at my Pop. "Frankie, that's an odd name for a girl."

"Well my real name is Frances. My friends have called me Frankie for as long as I can remember." I explained.

"I see." She said as she stuffed the rest of her breakfast into her mouth. She didn't seem very happy at the moment.

My Ma picked up her plate and walked into the kitchen and put the dish into the sink. Without saying a word to either of us, she began cleaning up the kitchen.

"I'm sorry Mr. Camarelli, I didn't mean to upset your wife." God that sounded weird coming out of my mouth.

He put his hand on mine and rubbed it. "Don't worry about it. It's just a subject we disagree on." He leaned in conspiratorially. "I want a daughter one day who I can spoil, but she doesn't want children at all. Hopefully someday we can agree to have a baby." I couldn't help the smile that formed on my mouth.

"I think you'd make someone a great father. Don't give up on that." I could feel my eyes welling up which meant it was time for me to go. How was I going to explain that?

"I should let you get on with your day. I'm sorry again for sleeping on your fire escape, I'll pay closer attention next time I'm out late."

"Don't worry about it Frankie. It was nice to meet you. The next time you are in the shop, make sure you say hello."

"Thanks I will." I turned back to my silent mother. "Thank you again for breakfast Myrna, it was really delicious."

She turned from her task and smiled. "You are welcome. Take care of yourself Frankie."

"You too." I said and looked at her one last time. I really didn't know this woman at all. I didn't know if that was a bad thing or not.

"I'll walk you out. Let me get your jacket."

"Oh I didn't have one." I corrected.

He went into his hall closet and pulled out a jacket. "Here you can wear this home. It's kinda chilly today. The sun is out, but you know how the Windy City is. It looks beautiful outside until you take that first step out the door." He said as he slipped the jacket over my shoulders. I had forgotten what a warm man he really was.

*Thank you whoever you are that gave me this chance to see him again.*

"Thanks Mr. Camarelli. I'll get this back to you." I said as I pushed my arms through the sleeves of the jacket.

"Take your time. I have a few others to wear. Just drop it off the next time you are in the neighborhood." We stood smiling at each other. It was as if he knew.

"Well, thank you again for breakfast. It was very kind of you." I didn't want to leave.

"You're welcome. Tell your folks that they are welcome over too."

"I will." Before I could stop myself, I leaned in and gave him a hug and kissed his cheek. He didn't even flinch at the contact. He just looked at me with his loving eyes and waved as I walked out the door.

"Bye Frankie." He said as he closed the door.

"Bye Pop." I said quietly to no one.

## Chapter Eleven

As soon as I knew it was safe I completely broke down and cried. I wasn't sure if I would ever be strong enough to see him again. It was so hard not to tell him who I was. I sat on the bench at the bus stop and composed myself. It took me a few minutes to pull myself together. As much as I loved seeing him, it made me miss him all over again.

I had a better picture of my Ma though. It was quite obvious she didn't want any kids. I guess my Pop talked her into it. She didn't seem like the nicest person in the world. Maybe I should be glad that I didn't have her in my life. I had Pop and he was the most loving person I could've ever asked for to be my father.

I walked past Technicolor Classics and peered in the window. The lights were off and the Closed sign was on the door. I guessed it was Sunday since the shop wasn't open. It wasn't until I bugged Pop about the business that he opened his doors on Sundays.

I walked down to Sheridan Road just smelling my Pop on his jacket. God I missed that Old Spice smell. Rain or shine he would wear that stuff. I never remembered liking it more than I did right at that moment. I don't know what I did to deserve a chance to see him again, but I was extremely grateful.

I walked down towards the diner that Annie worked in hoping to find her there.

*How am I going to explain my leaving her the last time and then coming back now? It has got to be a couple weeks since I have been here according to Pop's discussion of his unwanted guest in his house. Me.*

I walked up to the diner and glanced inside to see if I could see her. I watched the activity at the bar to see if she was working, but there was no sign of her.

I entered the diner to ask if she was going to be at work at all today. I came upon a waitress with "Doris" on her nametag.

"Excuse me Doris, I am looking for Annie. I was supposed to meet her here, but I don't see her. Is she working today?" I asked while lying a little bit.

"No honey, Annie's been off the last couple of days. She's been sick. You may want to try her at the dorms." Doris suggested.

"Thanks. Is she at Mertz?"

"Yeah I do believe so. I think she is on the eighteenth floor."

"Umm... Doris this is gonna sound funny, but I can't remember her last name. We are in a writing class together and we were gonna go over some notes, but I can't remember it. Can you help me out?"

"Sure honey, it's Parker. You aren't some psycho are ya?"

*Like I would answer yes to that question.*

"Well that would depend on who you asked that question to." Her eyes got huge and her skin blanched. "I'm kidding Doris, like I said, we are in class together. Don't worry, Annie is in no danger, I promise you." I gave her my best calming smile and she seemed to be more at ease.

"Well you are definitely a lot safer than that boyfriend of hers. I want to wring his neck for what he's done to her." I could feel my anger boil.

"What did he do to her Doris?" I said through clenched teeth.

*If he has done ANYTHING to her I will kill him myself.*

"Well he didn't pick her up the other night and it was raining out, she nearly caught pneumonia from that storm. That's why she ain't been here in a few days." I felt my temper calm down.

"Nothing a little chicken soup and some TLC won't fix." I smiled knowing I could take care of both of those things.

"It's good to know she's got friends like you then."

"Yep, it sure is." I agreed. "Well, I'm gonna get going. Thanks for your help Doris."

"You're welcome honey. Tell Annie we miss her down here." She smiled.

"I will. See ya." I said as I left the diner.

I walked towards campus and right up to Mertz Hall. I went up the stairs and walked up to the little security desk. A guard with a bunch of sign in sheets sat there eating his lunch.

"I'd like to see Annie Parker please." I said to him. He didn't even look up at me.

"Sign in please." He said as she slid the clipboard over to me.

I filled out as much information as I could sans Annie's room number since I had NO clue what that was. I was just hoping to get in the elevator before this guy got a clue and tried to stop me.

I got in the elevator and pressed the eighteenth floor button. The doors closed and the elevator began its ascent to the eighteenth floor. The door opened and closed letting on and off many students along the way. I finally reached my floor and stepped out hoping to catch a glimpse of her.

I walked slowly past rooms listening for that sweet voice I knew so well. I turned a corner to hear laughter from the corner room. I got a little closer and heard a familiar voice; it was Betsy from the volleyball game. I walked up to her door and knocked. I heard her hang up the phone. The door opened and Betsy stood there in nothing but a towel and a smile.

"Well, look what the cat dragged in. How the hell are ya Frankie? We thought you disappeared into thin air." She jokingly said.

*God how right you are. If you only knew how right.*

"Hey Betsy, how have you been? I've been alright I guess no complaints anyway."

"Come in girl have a seat. I am in the middle of getting dressed I hope you don't mind." She said as she dropped her towel and stepped into some clothes.

I immediately looked away and felt my cheeks flush with a bit of embarrassment. It's not everyday you have a woman you barely know show you her naked body. It's not a bad thing mind you, it just doesn't happen all that much.

"Hey have you seen Annie? I don't know what room she is in and I need to talk to her about the other day." I said hoping I wasn't too off with my timing.

"I think you pissed her off with your disappearing act. That was over two weeks ago Frankie. I don't know how great of a reception you are going to get. You can go over and see her though, it may help. She is just next door actually. I haven't seen her in a couple days though, I have had lots going on with class and all. You want me to come with you?" She asked.

"No I'm a big girl, I can take it."

"I bet that is true." She replied very flirtatiously. I needed to leave her room and fast. I liked Betsy and all, but I could tell she was looking for love in all the wrong places.

"Thanks for your direction Betsy, I appreciate it. Wish me luck." I said with a laugh.

"Just apologize Frankie, I'm sure whatever made you stay away so long was a good reason. She'll understand, really. Just don't lie to her, she hates that."

"OK, thanks again Betsy. Bye." I said as I walked out of her room and went to Annie's door.

I could hear faint sounds coming from her room. I felt like a child waiting to walk into the principal's office.

*What the hell am I going to say to her?*

*"Hi Annie, I'm sorry I vanished on you a couple weeks ago, but I had to return to my own time..." Or I could say... "Hey Annie, I'm sorry I bailed on you, but my time here is limited, you see I'm from the future..." Or I could use the old... "Hey babe, sorry about the other day, but something suddenly came up." AAHHHH!!! OK Frankie, calm the fuck down and breathe.*

I calmed my thoughts and my breathing. I wiped my sweaty hands down the length of my pant leg and brought my hand up to knock on her door. I knocked on the door and heard footsteps approaching the door. This was not the time to vomit. My stomach was thinking otherwise.

Then the door opened and I saw her face for only a moment.

"Hi Annie..." I said as the door slammed in my face. "Shit..."

I turned around and leaned my body into her door and rested my head on the wood.

*Fuck. This is going to be a lot harder than I thought.*

[Continued in Part 7...](#)

Feedback is the Ruler of all Bards.

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~ A Sacrifice For Friendship ~  
by DS Bauden

**Disclaimers:** This Uber tale is the latest creation to be extracted from my brain. All of the characters are mine, and not to be confused with anyone else's. They may resemble two women we dig a whole lot.

**Love/Sex Warning:** Yep and yep. It may not be everyone's cup of tea and if you aren't old enough to drink that kind of tea or even read it. please press the "save" key until a later date.

This next section deals with descriptions of domestic and physical abuse. If this upsets or disturbs you, please feel free to read something else. I just wanted to forewarn you. Thanks for reading.

## **Part 7**

### **Chapter Twelve**

*Do I sit here all day and wait for her to come out? Or do I knock the door down to convince her how sorry I am. Oh right, good one Frankie, show lack of physical control to a woman who fears her boyfriend's beatings. I should just knock again and see what happens.*

I knocked again but nothing happened. So I knocked again this time louder.

"Annie, I know you are in there. Please just hear me out." *Yeah right, what are you going to say that she's gonna believe?*

"Go away Frankie. I don't want to see you again." Annie said sternly to the door. I could tell her face was only inches away from it. I leaned my forehead against the door and spoke to her again.

"Please open the door Annie, I really need to talk to you." *And I need to see your beautiful green eyes again. Come on darlin'; open the door for me, please.*

"What could you possibly say to me that I have any interest in hearing?" She asked.

*Good question.*

"I need for you to know what happened. I know you and I don't know each other that well, and there is nothing that I can say that can possibly make any sense to you about my leaving. But you have to know that I HAD to leave Annie. I didn't want to go. I didn't have a choice Annie, please believe me." I took a long breath to see if anything would change.

Nothing.

"Annie, please, you know me just enough to know that if you didn't mean anything to me, I wouldn't be here right now. You have to know that. Please Annie. Please open the door." I could feel my voice fade out as I asked her one last time to open the door. I really didn't know what else I could say. If she didn't want to see me, she wouldn't open the door and when I decided that it was time to wake up, I would return to my future life once again.

*God this is so fucked up.*

I heard small sighs on the other side of the door. I was hoping that maybe she had changed her mind and wanted to open the door. I felt my face being hit as she slammed something into the other side of the door, hitting me in the process. That would teach me to lean my face against a door.

"Ow! Damn, that was my nose!" I said while holding my nose.

I heard a gasp from her room as she swung the door open.

"Frankie! I'm so sorry! Did I hurt you?" She said as she fumbled to get a closer look at my face.

Looking at the smaller woman in front of me I noticed her bruised face. The wounds had started to yellow from healing, but it was still noticeable. I took her face gently in my hands and looked into her eyes for the first time. She immediately knew what I was doing and pulled back into her room. This time she left the door open. I took that as an invitation and walked in and closed the door behind me.

"Annie, what happened to you? Are you all right?" I asked her back facing me.

I didn't hear any response, just small sobs that started to leave her body. I walked behind her and lightly placed my hand on her shoulder. I could feel her body flinch at my touch so I pulled away.

"Please tell me what happened, Annie." I was almost pleading. I needed to know what had happened. It wasn't a mystery to me who had done this though; that bastard was going to pay for this.

"I'll be here for you, I promise. A Camarelli never breaks a promise." I heard my words coming back at me like daggers going in for the kill. She turned around and faced me with her bruised face and tears streaming down her black and blue cheeks.

"Annie... I..."

"Don't even say it Frankie. You lied to me. I trusted you and you lied to me." She said as she started to pace through her room. I watched her like I was watching a caged tiger at a circus. She needed to get this out, and dammit it WAS my fault. This was MY fault.

"This was my fault Annie. I'm so sorry."

"DON'T! You come into my life acting like you can help me, change my life, be my closest friend, and most of all give me strength enough to leave my abusive piece of shit that I call my boyfriend. Then you disappear like the Holy Ghost." She said sarcastically with a smirk.

"Annie, I was forced to leave."



"I'm not finished yet." She walked up to me and got so close that I could smell the toothpaste she used. "You fell asleep in the truck on the way to the liquor store. I left you in there because I thought you needed the rest. I came back out with a fucking keg of beer so my drunken boyfriend could enjoy himself with his drunken ass friends, and you were no where to be found..." She paused to try and compose herself. I could tell she was no where near done.

*God I hate this! I wish I could just tell you the truth.*

"I thought maybe you had gone to the restroom or something and just didn't see me or know where I was in the store. I waited for you for an hour Frankie. A fucking hour! I took the damn beer back to the beach and Billy was fucking foaming at the mouth because I took so damn long to get back there!" She continued to cry as she told me her ordeal. I could feel my heart breaking at her pain and sorrow. "I tried to talk to him, but he was so angry, Frankie. God he was angry. He slapped me in the back of my head in front of everyone at the beach. I couldn't believe it. I never thought he would actually let anyone see him do that to me. I guess I was wrong again." She stopped and let the tears flow down her face. She took a deep cleansing breath and looked up into my eyes with her tear-filled ones.

"So... Frankie? Tell me what happened to you. I hope it was worth it. You know, I thought you were different. You seemed so different then all of these people that call me their friend. I truly believed that I finally could acquire the strength that I needed to leave Billy with you at my side. All it got me was this face." She pointed at her wounds to clearly demonstrate her failure.

"Annie, please stop. I am so sorry. You HAVE to believe me."

"Why, because you have been so honest with me since we met? Try again lady." She said very bitterly.

*Ouch that one hurt.*

"Annie, I cannot possibly tell you the truth about what happened to me. You would never in a million years believe what I had to do. All I can tell you is this. What pulled me from you is something that holds me stronger than anything you can imagine. I had no choice but to leave. I swear on my father's soul that if I could have stayed with you, I would have. Please believe me Annie. I truly am so very sorry that he hurt you again." I said as I felt my throat start to constrict from the emotion that I was feeling.

She sat and listened to me and just stared. It made me feel a little uneasy at first, but I knew she was just looking to see if I was telling the truth. I could tell a part of her wanted to believe me, and all of me wanted that part to win.

"So you can't tell me why you left?" She was trying to understand. I could feel it.

"No I can't. Please know that if it were something that I could have controlled, I would have. I know your situation. I would NEVER have given you a promise and then bailed out on you." I looked into her eyes hoping that she believed me. "I'm not like that."

"Well, I have nothing good to compare that to at this point, I'm sorry to disappoint you. I don't know you very well, Frankie."

"I know you don't, Annie, but I want to change that. If you give me a chance to make this up to you, I swear to everything Sacred that I will. I promise you, Annie." I took her hand and looked into her wet, bloodshot eyes as I said my last plea.

"I swear to you Frankie, if you ever lie to me, don't EVEN look my way again. I hate when people lie to me. I won't allow it or tolerate that in my life. I have too much shit to deal with as it is." She squeezed my hand and let go as she walked towards the window of her room.

She placed her hands against the glass and just looked down. I walked so I was right beside her and shared her view. She had an incredible view of Sheridan Road from up there. Eighteen floors up will do wonders to a normally gray colored city. You could see a light trail from the street lamps all the way up the street.

"I bet this looks amazing at night." I said nonchalantly.

"It is quite a view. The lights go all the way North until you can't see the road anymore. On a clear day it seems like you can see for miles. It's really quite lovely." She said in a quiet, almost childlike voice.

We stayed like that for several moments and she turned to look at me.

"I really hope you are the person I think you are. I have always known that my life would be able to change with the right person in my corner. I hope you are that person, Frankie."

"I can be whatever you need, Annie. I will do everything I possibly can to help you with Billy. I'll help you, I promise." I whispered as I pulled her into an uneasy embrace. She pulled away and turned away from my questioning stare.

"I'm sorry Frankie. I just don't feel comfortable when people hug me. I'm sorry. It's just something I need to get over. Please don't be offended by it." She turned to face me as she finished her apology.

"First of all Annie, you don't have to apologize. I'm a touchy Italian, I can't help myself. I should be apologizing to you. From now on I will not touch you at all without your permission. But um, if you ever want a hug, all you have to do is ask, and I'll give you one without question. Deal?" I asked her with a hope-filled look.

"Deal. Thank you, Frankie." She smiled that beautiful smile at me and I could feel my heart begin to melt once again.

*I hope the day continues to go in this direction. I could really get used to seeing that smile.*

## **Chapter Thirteen**

"So you wanna go for a walk?" I asked her.

"No. I really don't want anyone to see me like this." She explained sadly.

"Annie? What happened to your face?" I asked tentatively.

She paused and walked from the window to sit on the edge of her bed. She sat there with her hands folded in her lap trying to gather her emotions. I could tell that she wanted to tell someone, and I was hoping that she would feel better once she got it out in the open.

*Billy's ass is gonna pay for this.*

"After the slapping incident, I told Billy I didn't want to see him anymore." She said quietly. I walked over to where she was and sat next to her on the bed. "He got really pissed. He called me so many nasty names I stopped counting after awhile. I left the beach party and told Betsy I was going to my room because I wasn't feeling well. I was so emotionally confused about Billy, and I was worried sick about you." She said as she looked sadly into my eyes. If a look could make your heart break, then mine definitely needed to go in for repair.

"I walked upstairs and could hear him calling after me. Luckily I had a good lead on him and I told the security guard not to let him in. As the elevator door closed I could hear him screaming obscenities at the guard. The last thing I heard before his voice faded was his warning to me that he would get me for this. I found out later that campus security had to remove him from the building." She stopped as her voice quivered a bit. She took a deep breath and continued. "I went into my room and was afraid to leave it for a few days. After several days I started to go to class and Billy was nowhere to be found. I hoped that he was over the whole thing, but unfortunately he wasn't." I leaned closer and began to rub her back. She didn't ask me to stop so I didn't. I wasn't sure if I should say anything at this time so I just let her finish.

"A few days ago I was on my way back from my writing class. I was completely oblivious to everything around me because it was such a beautiful day outside. Before I knew it I was in the elevator on my way up to my room. I got out of the elevator and felt someone grab my arm roughly. I didn't need an introduction, I knew who it was. Billy's alcohol filled breath was all I needed to know who it was. I felt my body start to shut down like it did when my dad used to beat me." She got up and went over to her little refrigerator and pulled out a bottle of juice and proceeded to drink its contents. She emptied the bottle and came back to sit on the bed.

"I felt Billy dragging me towards my room by my hair. I don't really remember a whole lot of it. It was almost like I was watching it from someone else's eyes. He grabbed my hand that had my keys and he squeezed it tearing the skin off of my palm. I remember crying out from the pain in my hand and dropping my keys. He picked them up and quickly opened my dorm room door. He threw me inside and I landed on my bed. He slammed the door shut and slowly approached me like I was some kind of prey for the taking. His eyes were so glossed over; he was definitely high on something. Probably pot, he liked to breathe that in more than fresh air.

"He said he was gonna make me see that no other man would be good enough for me. If I didn't see it his way, he'd make sure that I wouldn't be good enough for anyone ever again. I got scared, really scared. I had seen Billy angry before, but this time he was out of control. I guess me telling him that I wasn't going to see him anymore got him just a little pissed."

I just sat there with my eyes bearing into her as she relived her tale. She looked like she had nothing left in her as she retold her story. Her energy was just sucked out of her throughout this ordeal. She just sat there and told the story with no emotion, no feeling, no... life.

"He pulled me up by my shirt and punched me square in the face. All I remember was seeing stars and landing back on the bed. The blood that started to pool from my mouth started to drip down my throat and I began to choke. I spit out a lot of blood and it got all over my sheets, Billy, and me. I started to cry and plead with him to just let it go and to move on with his life. He wouldn't have any of that at all. He slapped my face again and mounted himself on top of me. There was no question in my mind of what he wanted to accomplish with this visit. I started to get really queasy and I threw up all over him. This only made him angrier and he punched my face again. I passed out after that and when I woke up he was gone. My clothes were still on so I guess he didn't have sex with me, thank God. As bad as the beatings were I never was raped and I am truly thankful for that. I mean I'd had sex with him, I just never wanted him or anyone to take me that way. That is one thing my dad never did either. I don't think I could have come back to a regular life had he done that. I don't know how people can survive when things like that happen. It just makes me feel better about my own circumstances. My life was never filled with roses, but it wasn't as bad as some people have it, you know?"

I guess when she needed to talk about something, she really meant it. It didn't matter to me, as long as she wanted to share some of her life with me, I would be here to listen.

I could feel my own body start to shake at the pictures of abuse that she was painting of her childhood. She started to tell me stories of her father's abuse. My eyes were wide with shock of the abuse that she endured a good majority of her life. I could tell she wanted me to know the whole picture, and I was trying to be as supportive as possible. I found myself very angry at the idea of someone harming her on such a regular basis. I bet she never knew what a real childhood was supposed to be like: loving parents, friends to play kickball with, a place to call home without fearing it. It certainly wasn't the life that she led. I don't know how long I could have handled a life like that without leaving or at least killing my father. I knew one thing for certain, I was gonna do everything I could to make sure no one harmed her again. If that meant becoming a bodyguard for this beautiful woman, well, then I couldn't have asked for a better job.

"So now that you have the whole sordid tale, you still want to be my friend?" She asked bitterly.

"Oh, Annie, there is nothing that I want more in this world, except for your happiness and safety." I replied. "Please let me help you find both."

She turned to look at me and I know that my hidden tears were well beyond staying inside. I took one look at her trusting face and knew that this was someone that shared a deep part of my soul. I let the tears fall. She reached up and wiped them away with her fingertips.

"I will let you. Just promise me one thing." She smiled.

"Anything, anything at all." I said quickly.

"Don't break your promises, it would kill me." It scared me to think how true those words could be. Especially with a psycho like Billy in her life.

"I give you my word as your friend and protector, I will never break these promises to you. I'll figure out a way to keep Billy from ever touching you again."

"Thank you, Frankie." She smiled and leaned into my shoulder with her head.

"You are very welcome, Annie." I continued to stroke her back with my fingers and leaned in to kiss the top of her head.

We sat like that for a good long time. It felt so natural for me to touch her, to comfort her. There wasn't anything in this world that would keep me from loving her too. Except of course if she didn't want it, but that would be a discussion for another time.

## **Chapter Fourteen**

Darkness fell and I feared my time with Annie was going to end soon. I just didn't know when I would be brought back to my own time. I wasn't looking forward to leaving Annie again. I needed to let her know what was going on. I needed to at least try to explain what was going on.

I approached her as she was writing in her journal. She looked up at me with those big green eyes and I saw nothing but hope in them. God I felt like the biggest shit in the world. Here I was promising her that I wouldn't leave her and I didn't even belong in this time! She was so trusting and I wanted to be there for her. I just didn't know if it was going to happen. She just needed the strength to stick up for herself.

*Hopefully I can give her that strength. Would she believe me if I told her the truth? I just don't want to leave again without her knowing why I had to leave. And would I be coming back? Here goes nothing.*

"Annie, I need to tell you something. It's going to sound completely whacked and you are probably gonna throw me out of your room. But I really think you need to hear this." She closed her journal with the pen holding her place. She arched her back and cracked her vertebrae one disc at a time. I was completely transfixed watching this sensual movement. I know she had no idea what she was doing to me. I almost forgot how to speak when she answered me.

"What is it, Frankie? I won't throw you out. I'll just ask you to leave politely." She smiled.

"I need to talk with you about where I went when I left last time."

"Frankie, if you can't tell me, I don't want to get you into trouble."

"Oh, Annie, you won't get me into trouble. I'm just afraid that you won't believe me and you'll think that I am completely crazy." I said honestly.

"What is it then, Frankie. Just tell me."

"God I wish it was that easy." I started to pace back and forth.

Annie stood from the bed and grabbed my forearms and looked me right in the eyes. "Just tell me, Frankie."

I swallowed hard. "OK, maybe it would be better if I waited."

*Chicken shit.*

"Whatever is easier for you Frankie. I'll be here when you want to talk about it."

"Just know this Annie. If I do leave again, you HAVE to know that I will come back."

"What do you mean leave again. Frankie you promised me you wouldn't do that."

"Annie, I have a home that I have to go back to. I have no choice but to go when I am told to do so. I have no options here. If I need to return home, then I have to go. Just know that I'll be coming back to you. Nothing could keep me away for long." I said as I stroked her cheek with the back of my knuckles.

I felt the war within her. Part of her wanted to flinch at my touch, where the other part was craving it. I of course was rooting for the latter team.

"Does that still hurt?" I asked referring to her bruised face.

"No, it just looks like shit. It doesn't really hurt that much at all. I just can't believe he did this."

"Billy's gonna pay for doing this to you, Annie."

"NO, Frankie. That will just make him angry again. I just want to forget about all of this."

"Annie, if you don't do anything about him, he's gonna keep doing this or he'll do it to someone else. Hell, he may even kill whomever it is that he decides to beat next. Billy doesn't realize what he's doing is wrong. He needs help. If no one calls him on it, it's never going to change."

I could see the motor working inside her head. She was waging war again. This was one that may be the scariest decision she would have to make. It would mean telling the Police what Billy had done to her. It would mean she would have to tell someone what had happened to her. It would mean her humiliation would be public knowledge around campus.

"Alright, Frankie. I know that I have to tell someone about this. No one saw him though. Won't it be my word against his?"

"Well, is there anything that you can give the police that could be considered evidence?"

"Nothing comes to mind. I bet Billy has my puke or blood on his shirt though. It really wasn't a pretty sight. I don't think he would be smart enough to clean his clothes, he isn't the cleanest of people."

"My Romeo." I mumbled under my breath. "Can I ask a question, Annie?"

"If it starts out, 'Annie, what the hell did you see in him?' kind of question, I can't answer that. He was always nice to me. We saw each other at parties and he was in one of my classes. He dropped out though. He just hangs out around campus because he has lots of friends around here." She explained. "If I had known that he was gonna beat the shit outta me, trust me, I never would have gotten involved with him. It's just not something people advertise on their sleeves." She said a little harshly. I know I hit a nerve.

"Annie, I'm sorry. I know you didn't know he was like that. How could you know he would act like that? I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make a joke about it."

"It's ok. I guess I was destined to live this kind of life."

"No! No one should have to live like that. You just need help trying to get rid of him. That's where I come in."

"My hero."

"If you want me to be your hero, that's what I'll be." I smirked my sassy grin at her. She smiled in return.

*God she is beautiful.*

"It's dark out Annie. Do you think you would be up for that walk now? If anyone saw you, I doubt that they would be able to see your bruises."

"Sure. I wanna get something to eat too. I'm really hungry. You know, I wanted to ask you something too Frankie."

"What's that?"

"How did you know how to find me? I don't remember telling you where I lived."

"I asked around when I got back into town. I went to the diner and your friend Doris told me where you were. Don't be angry, I can be persuasive when I want to be."

"I'm not angry. I should thank her. I feel better knowing that you are OK."

"Me? You are the one that has bruises on her face, and you were worried about me?" I couldn't believe she was saying this.

"Yeah, well, what can I say? I tend to care more about others than I do about myself."

"That, my dear, is the understatement of the year."

"Come on, Frankie, let's get outta here." She smiled and took my arm and led me out of the dorm room.

As the door closed behind us I watched her walk towards the elevator. She had an unmistakable bounce to her step.

*I'd like to think that I had something to do with that. I really hope we don't see Billy out and about. I may have to kill him with my bare hands.*

[Continued in Part 8...](#)

Feedback is the Ruler of all Bards.

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## ~ A Sacrifice For Friendship ~

by DS Bauden

**Disclaimers:** This Uber tale is the latest creation to be extracted from my brain. All of the characters are mine, and not to be confused with anyone else's. They may resemble two women we dig a whole lot.

**Love/Sex Warning:** Yep and yep. It may not be everyone's cup of tea and if you aren't old enough to drink that kind of tea or even read it. please press the "save" key until a later date.

## Part 8

### Chapter Fifteen

We took the elevator downstairs and Annie was extremely quiet along the way. I think she was just feeling a little exposed and vulnerable with her face all bruised. I looked over at her and met her eyes.



"Are you alright, Annie?" I asked.

"Yeah, I guess I'm just a little uneasy right now. I look like I walked in front of a truck."

"Nah, a bike maybe." I kidded hoping to make her smile. Luckily for me, it worked.

"Funny, Frankie. Just a laugh riot." She said sarcastically.

"Sorry, I just wanted to make you smile." I said and pretended to pout.

"Quit that. It won't work. I know you are full of shit."

"Great, way to blow my cover." I played along with her.

"No problem." She gave me a full smile and I immediately returned the gesture. How could I not?

The doors opened and we walked out into the corridor leading to the foyer. As soon as we walked into view, Betsy came bounding over to us.

"Annie! Babe, where have you been?" She said running towards us.

"Hey, Bets. How are you?" She said trying to hide her face.

I placed my hand at the small of her back to try and relieve some of her stress. I knew she didn't want to see anyone yet.

"Annie? Jesus! What happened to you? Or do I need to ask?" She said as she took one of Annie's hands in hers. "Come on Annie, it's not a secret." Betsy whispered.

I could see Annie's eyes begin to well with tears. She turned to me and fell into my arms. I guess this was her way of telling me she needed a hug. She held onto me as if I was going to let her go.

*Not this time. I'm staying right here; where you need me.*

"Shhh... it's ok, Annie. You are with friends." Betsy cooed leaning into Annie's ear. "You are with friends." She reassured.

I could feel Annie's body shake with each gasp of air she took trying to calm her sobs. I continued to rub her back and held her securely. I rested my cheek on the top of her head and gently kissed it. Annie burrowed deeper into me and Betsy watched with interest. Annie's head was tucked under my cheek and her face was snuggled into my chest. I could hear her sobs ease and her breathing became deeper as she tried to compose herself. I felt her take one deep breath and she let go of me and stood on her own legs.

"I'm sorry about that. I don't think I have let myself feel like that in a long time. It came without warning. Sorry, Frankie." She apologized.

"Hey, anytime you feel a need for a hug, you let me know. I will never deny a hug. Annie, you have been through a lot. I'm surprised you are doing as well as you are." I stated flatly.

"She's right, Annie. I feel like a total shit, too. I had a feeling that was going on with Billy. I'm so sorry I didn't do anything to help." Betsy confessed.

"Betsy, what were you gonna do? You couldn't do anything until I was ready to do something. This tall Italian here convinced me to finally tell someone. Billy's not going to do this to me or anyone, anymore."

"Good for you, Annie. I know that couldn't have been an easy decision for you to make." Betsy said as she took one of Annie's hands.

"No, but it's a smart one." Annie said. She wiped her swollen eyes with the back of her sleeve. "So, Bets, what are you doing down here?"

"A group of us are going down to the beach to have a bonfire. Lacey is gonna bring her guitar and we'll have some beer and whatnot. Just gonna hang out. You guys want to come?"

I looked down to find green eyes looking back at me looking for an answer. I gave her a smile to let her know if she wanted to go, then that's what we were gonna do.

"Sure, Bets. You guys have any food down there?" She asked hope filled.

"We got some dogs and some burgers, nothing special, but you guys are welcome to whatever we have down there."

"Thank you, Betsy. It'll be nice to get out and see people again. I just didn't want anyone to see me this way."

"Actually, Annie, it's not that bad. Once we get down there, it won't be that easy to see your face. Don't worry alright? Just have some fun tonight."

"That's a good idea." I agreed.

"Well let's get to it!" Betsy said excitedly.

"Lead the way, babe." Annie said while taking Betsy and my arms. We headed on out of Mertz Hall to have some fun. Lord knew she needed some fun in her life.

*I hope those burgers are ready, God I'm starving.*

We walked down to the same beach area where we played volleyball. The only thing missing was Billy's big mouth. It was something I wasn't missing at all.

As we walked our way down to the circle, a group of girls were sitting around the fire that was already blazing. Lacey I was guessing the one singing and playing the guitar. It sounded like she was attempting Suite: Judy Blue Eyes by Crosby Stills Nash and Young.

*Not bad at all. She actually can sing too.*

I walked over to the grill with Betsy and Annie and helped myself to a hamburger and bun. I took one bite and felt an ecstasy that only food can provide when you are extremely hungry. You know that hungry you get when the first bite of whatever it is you are eating is the greatest thing you have ever tasted? It probably tasted pretty normal, but since I was starving, everything moved up a couple of notches.

I felt like I inhaled my burger, but I felt a whole lot better. I just had this nagging feeling inside because I didn't know when I was gonna have to go back home.

*God, I hope I can spend more time with her than I did last time. So far, so good. I am really enjoying her company. She is just an amazing person. She has an amazing spirit, not to mention a great body under that beautiful head of hers. Oh man, I got it bad.*

I continued to watch her interact with Betsy and the rest of the women at the fire.

*Funny, there are no males here at all. I wonder...*

"Hey, Annie? Your boyfriend coming tonight?" One of the girls shouted from the fire.

I watched Annie's expression change dramatically with the question. "I would hope for his sake, that he doesn't show his face any where near me or this one." She said as she motioned to me. "Fucking bastard. I hope he gets hit by the next town bus." She mumbled loud enough for me to hear.

*Oh I wish I was a bus right now. There isn't anything I would like more than to hit that piece of shit.*

"Amen, girl. I like this one much better anyway." The same girl smiled back at Annie and looked back and forth between us, then winked at Annie.

*Ahh, I thought so. So Miss Annie... do you bat for my team? Would you be willing to pinch-hit? I would love to pitch to you. God, I'll even pitch slowly to make sure you can hit anything that I throw.*

I could hardly contain my happiness with the knowledge of the possibility of her wanting more than friendship from me.

"Settle down, Mary, I need another relationship like I need a whole in the head." She said back to the woman at the fire. "No pun." She smiled.

*Well there goes the wind from that sail. Damn. Time to get out the paddles.*

"I dunno, Annie, that one may be worth the pain." She laughed and continued to smile at Annie. "If you don't want her, God knows I'm no stranger to a little bit of anguish. Hurt me baby. Hurt me."

"Mary! Behave yourself." Annie chided.

*Oh my, I have walked into a den of undersexed women. God, help me.*

I suddenly felt like I was on display in front of all these women I didn't know. Annie came up to me and took my arm.

"Come on Frankie, they really are harmless. Lesbians don't bother you, do they?"

"Ahh... well... actually..." I stammered horribly.

"Don't tell me that you are one of those close minded people, Frankie. I won't be able to forgive you. There is so much crap in our world right now with blacks and whites, now we have issues with people loving each other."

"Annie... I..."

"No, Frankie, I can't believe you would feel that way. You seemed so much more open-minded. I had the hardest time dealing with the fact that I was bisexual because of people that can't deal with anyone that is a little different than they are."

"Annie, I never..." I tried to stop her ranting.

"No, Frankie, I won't accept any kind of reasoning here. We are just people. I am no different than you are. I put on my pants the same as anyone else every single morning..." She continued as she poked my chest with each of her points of her rave.

*I am getting a verbal ass kicking because why? I have to stop her before she blows a gasket.*

"No one is gonna tell me how to live anymore! I can't believe I let myself worry about you when you are someone that just isn't able to..."

I took Annie's face in my hands and firmly pressed my lips against hers. I had never felt such softness before. Her body stopped flailing and leaned deeper into the kiss. I felt her hands against my chest and I pulled away. I looked deeply into her eyes and saw both disbelief and relief all in one look. The catcalls and howling that were coming from the bonfire were deafening. I'm not sure if either of us really heard any of them at all. It was all about us, nothing else mattered.

"Does that answer your question?" I said as I smirked.

"You... um... wow... so you're gay?" She couldn't seem to form a sentence. I was glad that she felt it too.

"Good guess. That was the only way I could get you to shut up. I didn't mean to invade your space, but I had no choice. I wasn't going to get my ass reamed for no reason at all." I laughed.

"Ahh... God, I'm sorry. I just hate all kinds of prejudice and I was just running off at the mouth. I do that sometimes."

"Really?" I said sarcastically which earned me a jab to my belly for my troubles.

Annie was looking at me like she had seen me for the first time. I guess the kiss we shared was messing with her train of thought. God knows it was messing with mine. I had never wanted to do something again so badly, like I wanted to kiss her again.

"Did you um... get enough to eat?" She softly asked.

"Yeah, I don't even remember tasting my burger though. It was gone all too fast." I answered.

"Well there is plenty, eat more if you want." Betsy chimed in and skipped over to the fire.

"Thanks, Betsy." I said. I was feeling so flustered; even more than the first time I ever kissed a woman.

I grabbed a beer for Annie and myself and we made our way over to the fire. The night was absolutely perfect. It was only about sixty degrees, but there was hardly any wind and the sky was as clear as crystal.

*God, Crystal, I wish you could see me right now. I feel so complete with Annie at my side.*

We took our place at the end of a broken log and relaxed with the rest of the girls. I took a deep pull from my beer as Lacey looked over to me with questioning eyes.

"Do you play?" She asked.

"Oh... well... I play a little. Nothing you guys would know though."

*God wasn't that the truth.*

"Oh, Frankie you play? Oh you can play whatever you want." Annie said excitedly. "We'll be a captive audience I promise."

"Oh, I don't know. It's been awhile since I've played at all." I really hated playing in front of people. That had always been a very personal thing for me. The only one I had ever played for

was Crystal. And that was only because she was too sweet to tell me I sucked. She was the perfect fan. I was my own worse critic though.

"Please, Frankie? For me?" She looked at me with those big green eyes and I was toast.

"Oh, alright." I acquiesced. The women started cheering again.

I took the proffered instrument and started to tune it to my key. I did a couple of warm ups and decided that I was ready.

"This is a song... well let's just say it's an original." *Not my original, but hell they probably don't even know who Patty Griffin is. Hell I don't even know if she is even alive yet. Play Frankie, you have an audience waiting for you.*

I emptied the contents of my beer for confidence and began to play.

"This is a song that reminds me of my father. The most loving person I have ever had in my life. This one's for you, Pop."

As the strumming of the guitar got louder the attention was drawn completely to me and Lacey's guitar.

*Occurred to me the other day*

*You've been gone now a couple years.*

*Well I guess it takes a while*

*For someone to really disappear.*

*I remember where I was*

*When the word came about you.*

*It was a day much like today*

*The sky was bright, and wide, and blue.*

*And I wonder where you are*

*And if the pain ends, when you die.*

*And I wonder if there was*

*Some better way to say good-bye.*

*Today my heart is big and sore  
It's trying to push right through my skin.  
I won't see you anymore.  
I guess that's finally sinkin' in.  
Cuz you can't make somebody see  
With the simple words you say.  
All their beauty from within  
Sometimes they just look away.  
And I wonder where you are  
And if the pain ends, when you die.  
And I wonder if there was  
Some better way to say good-bye.  
Some better way to say good-bye  
Good-bye  
Good-bye  
Whoa..... Whoa..... Whoa.....*

I finished the song's chords and slowly ended it softly with a final strum.

The fire was quiet and I heard a couple of sniffles. I felt a little embarrassed because I knew that I put a lot of feeling into singing the lyrics that were so true to me.

"Oh, Frankie, that was beautiful." Annie said with glistening eyes. "I felt every word you just sang to your father. I'm so sorry, but Frankie? I thought you said you had just visited your father a couple of weeks ago."

*Shit, here we go.*

"That's a long story, Annie. I will tell you though, I promise."

"Ooh, more secrets eh? You are just a bundle of surprises aren't you?" She smiled.

"Oh, yeah."

*More than you could ever imagine.*

"Frankie, will you play another song? You have a beautiful singing voice." Mary gushed.

"Oh, I think I have maxxed out my talents today." I tried to explain.

"Aw C'Mon, Frankie. I bet you know a hundred songs. Pleeaaaaasssseeee?" Annie pleaded.

*Man she is gonna be the death of me. Saying no to this one is NOT an option.*

"Alright then, did you guys have any requests? I may know something you want to hear." I played along.

Annie got up and got us both new beers. It was nice to see her so relaxed with her friends. This was a side to her I could definitely get used to. It's no mystery why Billy wouldn't want to let this one go.

*Too late pal, she's not gonna be on the market for long.*

"No, Frankie, just play whatever you want. Do you have any more originals?" Mary asked.

"Sure. Let me think for a bit." I said.

*I could play anything after 1975 and it would be an original. Dr. Evil, eat your heart out. I know one that may be a little premature, but hell, why not?*

"OK, this one doesn't have much guitar in it, but after I set a beat to it, I would love it if you'd clap along. Sound good?"

A cacophony of "sure's" and "cool's" were all around me. I sat back and tried to remember the rhythm of my favorite song of all time.

"Ready?" I asked.

"Go for it, Frankie." Annie said anxiously.

"This one is for that someone special in everyone's lives. Call me a sap, I don't care." I joked.

*This one's for you Annie.*

I began to clap in a one three one beat and everyone seemed to follow easily. I plucked out the few chords there were to this song and I began to sing.

*La da da da da da da...*



*La da da da da da da...*

*There comes a time in everyone's life*

*When they get tired of fooling around*

*Juggling hearts in a three-ring circus*

*Some day will drive a body down to the ground.*

*I never imagined that love would rain on me*

*And make me wanna settle down*

*Baby it's true, I think I do*

*And I just wanna tell you that I want to with you*

*And baby if you do too.*

*Forever, forever, baby I want you forever*

*I wanna keep you for the rest of my life.*

*All that is wrong in my world you can make right*

*You are my savior, you are my light*

*Forever I want you in my life.*

*La da da da da da da...*

*La da da da da da da...*

*There comes a road, in everyone's journey*

*A road that leaves you afraid to walk on your own*

*I'm here to tell you that I'm at that road*

*And I'd rather walk with you than walk it alone.*

*You are my hero, you are my future*

*When I am with you, I have no past*

*Oh baby my one and only desire  
Is find some way in this doggoned world to make this feelin' last  
Oh, baby it's true, I know I do  
And I just wanna tell you that I want to with you  
And baby if you do too  
Forever, forever, I want you baby, baby forever  
I wanna keep you for the rest of my life  
All that's wrong in my world baby you can make right  
You are my savior, you are my light  
Forever I want you in my life  
La da da da da da da da...*

The chords faded out as I strummed lighter and lighter until it was finished. The girls were totally into the song as I sang each lyric. Annie just sat there looking like she was trying to figure out if I was singing that song to her. All she had to do was ask. I knew my life wouldn't be complete without her in my life.

*Oh yeah, Frankie, you have fallen hard.*

[Continued in Part 9...](#)

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## Part 9

### Chapter Sixteen

Annie finished her beer and lightly smiled at me. She had a soft blush to her bruised cheeks that shined very sensuously. It made my heart happy just to look at her. I felt like all of my searching for the other half of my soul was complete. I knew just by looking into her eyes, that I would never again have to worry about finding love.

The women around the bonfire had finally given up on me singing another song. I figured ten songs was enough for one evening. My fingers started to throb after playing so much. I was having such a wonderful time with Annie and her friends. I think Mary finally got the idea that drooling while staring at someone was rude. I think the repetitious behavior of Betsy throwing stones at her gave her the clue she needed. Whatever it was, I was grateful for it.

We sat in companionable silence as the night went on. We sang many songs together and I think I had reached my alcohol limit. I knew I needed to keep sharp, otherwise lil Frankie was gonna get me into trouble.

Big trouble.

"Frankie?" Annie's flushed faced looked at me.

"Yeah?"

"I'm really glad you came back." She said while grabbing my hand.

"Me too. I'm having a really nice time tonight." I smiled.

*God Frankie, you think you could get any cheesier?*

"Me too." She was so beautiful.

The night was absolutely perfect.

Until he showed up.

"ANNIE!? WHERE THE FUCK ARE YOU?" Billy screamed.

His voice was closer than he was. We could see him staggering towards the beach.

"Oh shit. God, I thought this was over." Annie said with a quiver to her voice.

"You guys get out of here, we'll take care of Mr. Wonderful." Betsy said as she stood with her posse.

"Yeah, go on, hurry, before he sees you." Mary urged.

"Come on, Annie, let's go!" I said quickly.

I tugged on Annie's hand and pulled her with me as we ran in the opposite direction down the beach. I grabbed a blanket off one of the logs and wrapped Annie in it hoping that Billy didn't see her. We ran as fast as we could; holding hands the whole duration. We occasionally looked back and saw Billy flailing his drunken body all over the campsite. It was obvious that he wasn't happy that Annie wasn't there.

*Too bad, fuck nut. She's not going to be your punching bag anymore.*

"I think we can slow down now." I said while trying to catch my breath.

"God damn him! Why the hell can't he just leave me alone?" Annie was really pissed. She took off the blanket and began to pace. "I was having such a great time, too. Fuck him!" She screamed and started walking with her hands above her head while she continued to scream the word "Why".

"He knows what he lost." I almost whispered.

Her head turned around to face me.

"What did you say?" She said as she slowly walked towards me.

"I said he knows what he lost." *Here goes nothing.* "Annie, you are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen in my life. You have an amazing spirit, and such a love for life and for the people in it. Given the cards you have been dealt in life, there aren't many that would share your passion. You have the warmest heart that I have ever seen. Figuratively speaking of course." Her eyes never left mine. She looked like she was going to cry.

*No, not tears, God, please not tears. Aww... man...*

She wrinkled her face as her hand covered her mouth. Her eyes instantly welled with tears as she lunged herself at me. Her warm embrace was all I would ever need.

I knew this now.

"Shh... it's ok Annie, I'm right here." I softly whispered into her ear.

I rested my cheek on the top of her head while I slowly rocked her from side to side.

"Why, Frankie?" She sobbed.

"Why what sweetheart?" I asked delicately, knowing what she was going to say.

"Why did I let myself get treated like such shit for so long? Why did it take me so long to stand up for myself? Why did I have to meet you before my life meant anything? I just don't get it."

"Annie, no one knows why things happen. There is a reason for everything that happens in life. No one is going to hurt you again, Annie. I will promise you that. I'll do whatever I can to make sure I make good on that promise for as long as I live." I held her close.

"Thank you, Frankie. That means so much to me. I have never been able to show my emotions so easily before. What is it about you that is cracking every brick of my walls of defense?" She snuggled closer. I could feel my heart begin to pound and I knew she could hear it.

"Annie, I need to tell you something." I had to warn her before this got out of control.

She let go of me and started to wipe away her tears. "What, Frankie."

"I'm not who you think I am."

"What?" She looked at me with big green saucers.

"I mean... God... I am who I am, I'm just not from around here."

*Oh yeah, that made sense. Keep going, Champ.*

"Frankie, what are you trying to say? I'm getting confused here."

*You're not the only one.*

"Annie, let's go sit over there. I need to tell you a secret that I've been keeping from you." I said motioning to some rocks close to the shore. "You are definitely going to want to sit for this." I reassured her.

"THE secret, Frankie?"

"Yes, THE secret." I said very seriously.

We walked over to the rocks and sat down. To say I was nervous was the biggest understatement of the year. I felt my heartbeat quicken each time I tried to open my mouth to spill the beans of my existence.

"This is really hard for me to say, Annie, so please give me a sec to gather my thoughts."

"Sure, Frankie. You just let me know when you are ready." She encouraged as I nodded my approval.

*Truth, Frankie. Just tell her the truth. Deep breaths... now tell her.*

"I guess the best way to describe me and what I am is," I paused.

"WHAT you are, Frankie?" She was really looking at me like I had grown another head.

"Just let me say this, Annie." I stopped to gather my courage again. "What I'm trying to tell you is that I am from another time."

*There, I said it. See? It wasn't that bad. She's still sitting here with you and she's laughing. Oh My God! She's laughing at me.*

Annie's face had broken into a large open-mouthed smile. She was trying to hold back the laughter that seemed to have taken over her body.

"I..I'm sorry Frankie. I thought you just said that you were from another time. God! Hahaha! Oh, Frankie, thank you, I needed that!" She continued to laugh and my face remained serious. She watched me and gradually the laughter slowed as she realized that I hadn't changed my expression.

"You can't be serious, Frankie." I didn't flinch. "How can you expect me to believe that?"

"Because it's the truth. I can't ask you to believe it, I just needed to tell you." I finished as Annie stood from the rock and started to pace across the sand.

"You are REALLY waiting for me to say that I believe you, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am." I could feel the coldness of her stare now. She walked up to me and grabbed both my arms.

"Why are you doing this?" She said loudly. "I don't understand!" She said as she started to shake me. I put my hands over hers and tried to calm her.

"Annie, how else can you explain my mysterious departure the last time we saw each other. I didn't fall asleep in the truck, Annie. In my time, I WAS asleep. This was a dream, IS a dream for me." I blew out an exasperated breath. I didn't know how much more she was going to take.

"Dream?! What the hell are you talking about, a dream? Frankie, this is reality babe! Look around you. I am right here! You are right here! This is real life! This is real water, real sand, and real AIR!!!" I could tell she wasn't going to buy this at all.

*Christ, now what do I do?*

"Can I just tell you how it started? This is maddening for me, Annie. You really have NO idea." I looked pleadingly into her eyes.

"Ok, Frankie. I'm gonna sit down on this REAL rock and you can tell me why and how it's not really here." She sat and looked at me. "Whenever you are ready. I'm all ears." She sarcastically said.

"Alright. All I'm going to ask of you, is that you don't butt in, and that you let me explain everything. Can you do that for me?" I asked.

"OK, Frankie. I promise to keep my mouth shut." She mimed turning a key by her mouth and tossing it away.

*I guess that meant I should start my sordid tale.*

"Alright. A few days ago I fell at work. I own a movie memorabilia shop called Technicolor Classics."

"Hey, I know that place..." I held up my finger. "Sorry, I'll be quiet."

"Well what you don't know about that is that my father gave the business to me, after he died." She looked puzzled as I knew she would.

"He's dead then?" She cautiously asked.

"Yes he is. He died in 1994." I said while watching her expression for change.

"Frankie, that's impossible. That's twenty years from now."

"I know. This is what I'm telling you. I guess for lack of a better phrase, I am from the future, Annie." She started to open her mouth again and then shut it. "If I may continue?"

"Please, go on." She said.

"OK, I was in my shop one day, and I tripped over something at my desk and knocked myself unconscious. While I was out, I had a very strange dream. I heard a woman's voice. I couldn't see her, but I could hear her. She was calling my name."

"Frankie, if this is some perverted sex story, I really don't want to hear it."

*God, why does it feel like I have had this conversation before?*

"She wasn't 'calling' my name per se, she was looking for me. Anyway, the voice was one I didn't recognize at all. Then my friend Crystal woke me up."

"Crystal?" Annie asked.

"Yes, Crystal. She is my best friend in the whole world. She and I have been friends since we were like four or something like that. You'd love her, she is just the most amazing person. I wish you two could meet, I know you would really like each other."

"She sounds great."

"She is. So anyway, she woke me up and took care of the lump on my head that was caused by my fall. Later that night, I went into the bathroom, and I felt like someone was watching me. I have never felt like that in my own home before, it really freaked me out. When I went to bed that night, I had that same dream again. I heard this woman's voice and she was asking me to find her because she needed me or something. Crystal had heard me screaming in my sleep and woke me again. After talking a bit more about the dream I finally fell asleep.

"The next day I had to go to work. I had some mannequins that needed to be dressed into costumes, so I started on that. I was in my backroom looking for the ensembles and I heard my bell ring, telling me I had a customer. When I got out there, no one was there. So I continued to work and I dropped one of the hands of my mannequin. I couldn't find it anywhere, then all of a sudden I heard a woman's voice say 'It's over there, under the table'. I almost jumped out of my skin, because I really thought that I was alone. Anyway, I stood to thank the woman and she wasn't there. It was the same voice that I had been hearing."

"Who do you think it was, Frankie?" I could tell she was trying to understand my story.

"I had no idea until about three weeks ago when I met you."

"What?"

"It was you, Annie."

## **Chapter Seventeen**

"Frankie, that is not possible. It's just not. I haven't traveled into the future lately that I know of, so I think you are mistaken."

"I'm sorry, Annie, I have to disagree with you. The day I saw you in the diner, I heard your voice as your back was turned. I could hardly breathe when I figured out who's voice that was. Annie, it was your voice. The question is, why did you summon me from my time into yours?"

"OK, Frankie, as much as I want to believe you, this story is just too far fetched."

"I know it is Annie, I have been LIVING it! I cried my eyes out when I left you last time. I woke up in my own bed with Crystal looking down on me trying to comfort me. I was a wreck, Annie. I couldn't believe that it was all just a dream. You were so real to me." I said as I stroked her cheek with my knuckles. "You are real to me. If someone has a right to be confused, it would have to be me. I really don't understand why this is happening. What's worse is, I don't know when I am going to have to leave. All I know is that I don't want to leave you ever again." I said



my last statement in almost a whisper. I knew I didn't want to leave her, but I wasn't the one in control. I just wished I knew who it was. I needed to strike a deal with them, somehow.

Annie leaned into my touch and closed her eyes. She was truly the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. Her hair was blowing with the soft breeze coming off the lake. She opened her eyes and looked at me with such warmth. She reached up and caressed my face with her hand.

"You are a gorgeous woman, Frankie. I would have to be blind not to notice that. I don't know what to believe about any of this. All I do know is that I have never wanted to be with someone so badly in my life before I met you. You have this magnetic pull that keeps tugging at me no matter how much I want to run from it. Maybe it was my heart calling to you so that you would come and take me away from all of the hurt I have felt my whole life. Maybe that's what you heard."

"Can you hear what's in *my* heart?" I questioned hoping she would know the answer.

"Yes, I think I can."

She moved her hand from my cheek to the back of my neck and gently pulled my head down to hers. Her lips met mine and I could feel myself getting lost inside of her. It was the most incredible feeling I had ever experienced. She slowly sucked my bottom lip and then the top. I felt her tongue ask for entrance and I graciously let her in. She tasted sweeter than any candy known to man. I heard her moan into my mouth when our tongues met for the first time. I couldn't suppress the sounds I was making either. This felt too wonderful to hold anything back.

Her embrace tightened and the kiss became much more passionate. If any two people could kiss so hard that they became one, then that's what we had done. I didn't know where our boundaries were anymore. What I thought was my own was actually hers. I didn't really care, all I knew was I was finally feeling what everyone had always talked about.

"Frankie?" Annie gasped as she broke apart our kiss.

"What, baby?" I whispered.

"Make love to me. Please?"

*OH MY GOD! Did she just say what I think she said?*

"Www... what? Right here?" I stammered shamelessly.

"Yes, right here and right now. I couldn't stand it if you did leave again, and I never knew what loving you felt like. Please, Frankie... will you love me?"

"I do love you, Annie. God help me, I do love you."

I crushed her lips in another burning kiss that sent my hormones off the charts. My heart was doing flip-flops and my libido was definitely running on overload. Annie's body was pulling mine down to the sand. I rolled off the rocks and gently stopped Annie before she hit the ground.

"Here, wait." I stopped to grab the blanket that Annie had thrown and shook out the remainder of the sand. I spread it out on the ground and led her back down with me. "There are certain rules that apply when it comes to body parts and sand." I smiled.

She giggled at that, then slowly moved to straddle my body. I could feel myself wanting to grind my body into hers. She leaned down to capture my lips and I wrapped my arms around her. I held her close wanting to memorize the feel of her body against mine. It was exquisite. I felt her start to move against me. She began a slow and long thrust against my pelvic area. Her mouth started to nibble on my ears and neck. I could feel the goosebumps parading throughout my body. She was making me absolutely crazy.

"Oh, God, Annie... you feel so good..." I sighed.

I felt her smile against my face, "So do you." She replied.

She continued to rub herself against me and I could tell that she was extremely excited. The small pants of air coming out of her mouth were a dead giveaway.

I held her close to me and I flipped her over to her back with ease. I smiled down at her surprised face.

"Is this okay?" I wanted to make sure she was all right considering her past encounters with Billy.

"Yeah, I like the view from here." She smiled back.

"God, you are adorable." I smiled and leaned down to kiss her again.

I kissed and tasted every part of her mouth and moved down her throat and around her neck to her ears. I softly sent a breeze of my own into her ear and felt her body respond in kind. I nibbled on her earlobe and felt her tugging at my shirt.

"Off... I want to feel your skin." She demanded.

With one swift motion, I grabbed the back of my shirt with one hand while supporting my body with the other, and took off my shirt. She looked up at me and I could sense a carnal desire that you only hear about in trashy romance novels. This was truer than any of those stories. She pulled me back down and continued to undo my bra with her skilled fingers. She helped me out of the remaining material and started to run her fingers all over my upper body and back.

"My God, Frankie, you are magnificent."

"I'm glad you think so." I paused to smile at her. "What do you want, Annie?"

"Hmm?"

"What do you want me to do? I'll do whatever it is that you need from me. I want to please you in whatever way that I can."

"I've...um... never had anyone ask me that before." She blushed.

"Then you'll just have to get used to hearing that from me. I want to know how to please you, Annie. Tell me what you like, what you don't like. I won't do anything you don't want me to. I promise you." I ran my fingers through her hair.

"Good Lord, you must be from the future." She kidded.

"Let's not talk about anything except for right now, okay? Right now it's all about you." I leaned down and smothered her lips with my own.

I moved my hands down to her sides and pulled her shirt out of her pants. She wriggled a little and helped me take off her shirt. I pulled her into a seated position to help her remove her bra. As soon as the unwanted clothing was gone, she pulled my body against hers again.

"Oooohh, Frankie... God you feel good against me." She hissed.

"Good, I want you to feel good, baby." I cooed in her ear.

I sprawled my body over hers. I placed my thigh between her legs and felt her straddle and capture it. She started to rock against my leg and kissed me fervently. I slowed my kisses and worked my way down her body. I placed tiny kisses on her shoulders and down her sternum. My hand gently cupped one of her breasts and she softly sighed in pleasure. I took her nipple gently between my thumb and forefinger and started to shift my fingers back and forth. She moaned and leaned her body further into mine. She started to quicken the pace she had set against my thigh. I helped her along as I slowly thrust my thigh into her excited center.

"Oh, Frankie... " She sighed.

I replaced my fingers with my mouth and took her nipple inside. I swirled my tongue over her heated flesh and Annie began to moan louder. This was beautiful music to my ears. I sucked harder drawing in as much of her into my mouth as I could. I reached down and rubbed my hand down her thigh and back up again. I grabbed her butt and pulled her harder against me. She and I were moving in a beautiful dance of love. I could feel the sweat on my back as the breeze from the lake picked up.

"More, Frankie. I need more of you, please... " She panted.

"What do you want, baby?"

"Naked... now... need you... inside... please."

She didn't have to ask me twice. We moved and grunted trying to get the rest of our clothing off without wasting any precious time. She was done before me and laid back down and stared at me with complete and unchecked desire. She raised her knees and spread her legs waiting for me to use my body as a puzzle piece. We were a perfect fit. My calm, cool exterior shattered as soon as I felt her wetness rubbing up my body.

"Oh, God, Annie." I passionately moaned.

I moved harder against her. I felt myself getting extremely close to reaching the ultimate pleasure. Annie's voice reminded me that it wasn't about me, this was about her.

"Inside... please... Frankie." She looked up at me with dark green eyes and I knew she meant it.

I scrunched back a little to make room for my arm. I moved my hands to her apex and felt the heat radiating from her. I brought my fingers higher and reached the moist center that was waiting for me. I gently probed the area and entered her with two fingers. Annie's sounds were so incredible. She moved with my hand as if we'd done this a thousand times before. I kept a slow pace to relish every moment of this dance. I watched as her facial expressions changed with every movement of my fingers. I brought my thumb up to play with her clitoris. She nearly jumped as contact was made.

"Oh, Jesus!" She screamed.

The combination of my rhythmic motions were sending her to heights I hoped she'd never reached with anyone other than myself. I needed to taste her. I moved my body down so that I faced her curly damp hair. She looked at me as if I was going to stop my ministrations. That was the farthest thing from the truth.

I lowered my head and kissed her swollen flesh. I began to move my tongue everywhere it could reach. She tasted so wonderful. I could feel her body moving faster and faster. I reached behind her hip and held on as I felt her body reach it's limits. I plunged deeper and faster as I moved my tongue in the same manner. I knew she was going to come hard.

"Oh, God! Frankie... I'm... Oohhh!!" She screamed as her orgasm flooded every part of her body.

"For you baby." I cooed as I felt the last of her tremors leave her body. I begrudgingly left my position and rolled myself onto my back and brought Annie's limp form with me. She snuggled against my shoulder and tried to control her breathing.

"Shh... I got you, sweetheart." I said as I felt her body begin to shake. I looked down to find her crying. "Annie? It's okay, honey. I'm right here."

"Yes... but for how long?"

*Crap I don't want to think about this now.*

"Truthfully, I don't know, Annie. Everything that I told you is all I know about this force that takes me from you. I just hope whatever it is sees how much you mean to me and allows me stay with you forever."

"Me too." She sobbed. "I've never felt like this before. I think I have fallen in love with you, Frankie."

"That is the greatest thing anyone's ever said to me. I love you, Annie." I said as I held her tight and kissed her gently on her tear soaked face.

We lay together in silence just relishing the feelings we had just shared. She was the most precious being I had ever known other than Crystal.

*Please let me keep her in my life. Whoever you are, please see my love for her. Please let me stay. Please?*

## **Chapter Eighteen**

We stayed where we were for what seemed like hours. We watched the movement of the clouds as they shifted over the water. She liked to snuggle more than I did. She never left my side. I never let go of her.

Which was why I was so surprised when the next sentence left her mouth.

"Wanna go swimming?" She playfully looked up at me.

"You're serious aren't you?" I couldn't believe what I was going to do, especially in May! Lake Michigan hadn't even defrosted yet.

"Come on it'll be fun!! It'll invigorate our bodies." She smiled.

"I really must like you, because I would never do this otherwise." I laughed.

She stood up in all her naked glory.

*Glory indeed, God she has a beautiful body.*

She reached down to take my hand to help me up. I took it and stood and stretched out the kinks in my back. I caught her staring and I smiled at her.

"What'cha lookin' at?" I smiled knowing damn well what she was looking at.

"You're gorgeous, Frankie. In every sense of the word. Do you have any idea how amazing you look?"

"Never really paid any attention." I humbled.

"Well, let me be the first, which I'm sure I'm not, to say you are absolutely breathtaking." She gushed.

"Thank you for saying so. You're not so bad yourself." I smirked. "So you going in first? I know I'm not. And if you don't go in, I'm not going in, either." I stated clearly.

"Last one in..." She started as she took off towards the water.

I watched her dive into the cold lake and shrieked with glee.

"Frankie!! Get your naked ass in here!! It's great!! God this feels good!" She shouted.

"Ready or not here I come!" I shouted back as I ran into the water. "Jesus!! This shit is cold!! I can't believe I let you talk me into this!" I shivered.

"Aw, Frankie, where's your sense of adventure?"

"It's back on the shore." I said sarcastically.

She grabbed me and kissed me solidly on the mouth.

*This I could get used to.*

I kissed her back and felt her hands start to wander over my newly heated skin.

"Don't you wanna go back to blanket?" I questioned between kisses.

"Nope. Like I asked before, where's your sense of adventure?"

"I think I'm starting to like your way of thinking."

"I thought you would." She said as she kissed me hard and lunged her tongue into my mouth.

"I want to make you feel what I felt, Frankie." She said as she nipped at my chin.

"You do, Annie. I felt everything that you did." I reassured her.

"Shut up and kiss me, Frankie."

"You drive a hard bargain ma'am." I smiled and kissed her again.

She moved her body closer to me and started to move her hands everywhere they could reach. Her movements became more fervent with every second that passed. I knew I was in big trouble.

I leaned my head back to give her better access to my neck. She didn't hesitate as her mouth sought out my throat. She kissed my neck hard.

"Ow! You bit me!" I said rather astonished.

"Yeah, but it's only a sucker bite." She giggled.

"A what? Oh, you mean a hickey?" I asked.

"Yep. A big ole fat one." She said proudly.

"Great, now what am I gonna tell all my girlfriends?" I said as I raised my eyebrow.

"Well you'll just have to tell them that you are off the market... for good. Right?" She said as she put her hands on her hips.

"Absofrigginlutely!" I laughed and pulled her into an embrace.

She started to nibble on me again and I didn't stop her this time. Her mouth reached my nipples and my body began to sing with pleasure.

*She is really good at this.*

She sucked harder sending all rational thought out of my head. She teased my other nipple with her fingers and then switched her positions. My body was on fire and I needed her to touch me in my most needed place.

She picked up on my needs and moved us deeper into the water.

"Just hold on to me, Frankie. Trust me." She said seriously.

She patted my leg and motioned for me to wrap it around her waist. I complied and then she motioned for me to do the same with my other leg. Since we were buoyant, this was a possibility. I straddled her waist and held on to her neck as she moved her hands southward.

"Just hang on to me, Frankie and all your desires will be satisfied, I promise." She sensually smiled. I knew that she wasn't kidding.

*I lived near this water all my life and didn't do this before why?*

My thoughts were stopped abruptly as I felt her fingers stroke my labia. I could feel her tentativeness.

"It's okay, Annie. I trust you." I answered as if I had heard her silent question.

"Thank you." Was all she said.

Her fingers moved skillfully over my heated center. She began to rub my clitoris with a delicate hand and slowly began to quicken her pace. She entered me with one finger and moved her other fingers around my wetness. This was the best sexual encounter I had ever shared with anyone. My heart was racing with excitement. It wasn't going to be long before she brought me over the edge. God she felt so incredible. Her fingers were working inside of me as her other fingers were rubbing my swollen clitoris. I could feel my body begin to stiffen as the warm sensations were multiplying.

"Oh, baby... I'm almost there. You feel so... good... unngghh." I moaned in her ear.

"Let it go, Frankie, for me. Just feel me loving you. That's it." She said as I felt my body betray any sort of command for control.

Her fingers were moving with a beautiful synchronization that made my body crave nothing else.

"Oh... God... Yes!" I screamed as I felt my climax shoot through my core.

Annie just held on as I squeezed her tightly and she relentlessly manipulated my body. I blew out several breaths trying to control the spasms racing through me to no avail. I had never felt such ardor in my life. My body never knew such pleasure.

*I have never known such peace.*

Annie held tight to me as my body found it's sea legs. I unwrapped my legs from Annie's waist and landed them on the sandbar.

"Thank God for no seaweed." I breathed out. "I have always hated that feeling between my toes.

Annie laughed out loud. "So have I." She agreed.

She stroked my bare skin with her strong fingers and kissed me tenderly.

I looked into her eyes as we broke away and knew this was where I belonged. Naked, wet, and standing in Lake Michigan with the girl I loved wrapped around me.

*This is what love is all about.*

[Continued in Part 10...](#)

Feedback is the Ruler of all Bards.

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# ~ A Sacrifice For Friendship ~

by DS Bauden

**Disclaimers:** This Uber tale is the latest creation to be extracted from my brain. All of the characters are mine, and not to be confused with anyone else's. They may resemble two women we dig a whole lot.

**Love/Sex Warning:** Yep and yep. It may not be everyone's cup of tea and if you aren't old enough to drink that kind of tea or even read it, please press the "save" key until a later date.

## Part 10

### Chapter Nineteen

We splashed around the water until our skin was more pruned than the fruit. I hadn't felt this alive in ages. Strange that I would feel this way, when I wasn't even sure if this was real or not. It had to be real; it just had to be.

Annie rushed up to the shore and started to jump around trying to get dry without using the entire blanket for herself.

"Come on, Frankie, get over here before I get the whole thing wet." She shivered.

"I'm right behind you." I smiled.

We wrapped our naked bodies in the blanket and held each other close. We kissed softly and held each other reverently. She was the softest woman I had ever come in contact with. I never wanted to be without her again. I knew this was an impossible wish, however, I knew we were meant to be together. This had to come together soon or I was going to go mad.

We managed to get back into our clothing and began to warm up. The sun would be up in a couple hours so we waited on the beach to watch our first sunrise together. The clouds had thickened in the sky and I wondered if we were going to get rained on before the sun actually showed its light.

"It looks like it's going to storm, Annie. Are you sure you want to stay out here?" I asked.

"Yeah, I think we'll be okay. If we see any lightening, we'll go inside. I just thought it would be fitting to watch the sun come up with you."

"I agree with you. I also now know that you are a hopeless romantic." I grinned.

"Do you have a problem with that, Ms. Frankie?" She smirked.

"Absolutely not. In fact I think it suits you incredibly. You deserve romance in your life." I said as I brought her body close to mine again.

We settled on the damp blanket and lay in each other's arms. She rested her head on my shoulder as I drew imaginary circles on her back. She let out a deep sigh of contentment and I couldn't help but smile. I could feel her body weight increase which told me she was falling asleep.

*I don't have the heart to wake her. I'll just lay here until morning or until we get poured on.*

I snuggled closer to Annie and breathed in her scent. Even though we had just spent way too much time in Lake Michigan, she still smelled incredibly fresh. I closed my eyes to relish our new beginning. As I lay there I felt my own body give in and start to fall asleep. I could hear my last thoughts before I fell into deep asleep.

*You own my heart, body and soul. I love you, Annie.*

I felt the inevitable rain begin to splash at my face. I started awake into a seated position to find my back up against the metal that was my fire escape. The rain was coming down and playing a musical tune on the gutters of my building as I looked around in horror. My dream had come to an end once again and I felt my stomach turn in anguish.

*This can't be happening... NO... please... tell me this isn't happening. Oh Jesus Christ in heaven! Oh Annie... Annie... I'm so sorry I had to leave you again. I'm so sorry. Not again... Oh God, not again.*

"NOOOOOOOO!" I screamed hoarsely into the new day. "WHY!?!!" I sobbed and choked on the emotion and pain screeching through my body.

I could feel myself falling against the rails of the balcony. I couldn't hold myself up any longer. The weight of all of this had hit me harder than anything I could've ever imagined. It felt like I'd had the wind knocked out of me and I kept grasping at my chest hoping to relieve the pain that was so incredibly agonizing.

*I can't breathe... I don't want to breathe without her. God, why are you doing this to me?*

I sat in the pouring rain with my knees to my chin. I rocked back and forth choking down the tears with each breath I took. I had never needed someone so badly before, like I needed Annie.

*She's gonna wake up and not find me there. After everything we just shared, I'm going to be gone. She's not going to understand any of this. Hell, I don't understand any of this. How can I expect her to understand this? Dear God in Heaven, if you can hear me, please keep her safe. Please.*

The sobs wracked through my body continually and I sat in the same position for what seemed like days. I held my knees to my body to fill the empty space that used to be Annie.

I missed her.

I needed her.

I loved her.

## **Chapter Twenty**

The darkness had come and I hadn't even noticed. I hadn't even noticed that I wasn't outside any longer. I was in my bed and was dressed in clothes that I hadn't put on myself. I felt like a brick had hit my head. My mouth was incredibly dry and I felt a little disoriented. All in all, it was a pretty shitty feeling.

When I finally got my bearings, I saw Crystal at the foot of my bed, asleep. She had a small cloth in her hands that I could only assume she was using on my head. I knew I had a fever since I was feeling so odd. Maybe I had been in the rain too long. She would always take care of me when I was sick. I felt sick to my stomach. I felt like I was dying.

I wanted to die. I didn't want to live without Annie. She was everything to me. The thoughts of us making love on the beach made my swollen eyes well up once again. I felt my lip quiver and my sobs began once again. I rolled onto my side in a fetal position and started to rock back and forth to comfort myself.

*Maybe if I went back to sleep, I could be with Annie once again.*

I couldn't think of anything else I would ever want to do more.

"Frankie?" Crystal's garbled voice whispered to me.

I couldn't form any words to answer.

"Frankie? Come on talk to me, babe. I know you can hear me." She climbed up towards my face and began to stroke the cool cloth on my forehead.

"Why?" Was the only word I could muster, before I started to cry like a baby.

Crystal instantly wrapped her body around mine and cuddled me from behind.

"Shh... I know honey. Let it out." She soothed as she let me cry. She combed my sweat-soaked hair with her fingers as she rocked me back and forth. "You found her again." It was a statement of fact.

I only nodded as I continued to cry.

"What happened? Can you tell me?" She asked softly.

"Everything Crys... everything." I sobbed. "Oh, Annie." I couldn't stop the tears that were streaming down my face. Crystal knew that I wouldn't be able to talk about this, so she just held me and spoke comforting words into my ears.

Several hours had passed and my condition hadn't changed at all. Crystal had called Nonnie up to my room to try and talk to me. To no avail, I must add. I didn't speak to either of them. Not because I wouldn't, but because I couldn't. The only words that came to my lips were Annie's name and how sorry I was that I had left her again.

I heard Nonnie and Crystal talking between them. I heard them speak of my journey and the strong possibilities of it being true. My head was screaming 'It Is True!', but I couldn't form the words.

"We'll be in the other room, Frankie. I'll be right back, sweetheart." I heard Crystal say. She leaned over me and kissed my temple. "I'll help you through this, Frankie, I promise."

I heard her and Nonnie leave my room and my sobs were the only sound I heard after that. My heart was indeed broken and there wasn't anything that I could do to change that. I didn't have control of the situation and I hated my knowledge of that. I needed Annie. That was all I knew to be true.

Crystal came back into my room and just watched over me. I stayed like this until the next day arrived. My sobbing had finally stopped. I think I just ran out of tears to shed. Crystal stayed with me the whole time. She looked exhausted.

"I'm sorry Crystal." I whispered.

"Oh, Honey. Don't you even apologize. I can see how much you are hurting. You know there isn't anything that I wouldn't do for you. So what if I was up for almost two days. You needed me. Whether you knew it or not." She smiled.

"Two days?" I asked.

"Yea, Frankie. You were out for about two days. We couldn't wake you. We brought Doc Sanders into look at you. He said you were asleep and your body must have needed the rest. He said not to worry unless you didn't wake after today. You just made the cut off."

"Good God. I have never slept like that before. Hell, there are lots of things I have done that I haven't done before actually." I couldn't keep the sarcasm from my voice.

"I know Honey. You've been through so much. I wish I could take away your pain." She said sadly.

"I love you, Crystal. Thank you." I stood from my bed and my body rebelled from being in the same position for so many hours. My chest still felt extremely heavy and my fever was still evident.

I reached over my head and felt my vertebrae slide back into their rightful places. The sudden movement caused me to wobble a bit and I sat back down.

"Whoa... my head is spinning." I said as I put my head in my hands.

"It's the fever. Frankie, you were outside in the rain for hours. When you didn't open your shop, I knew something was wrong. I'm glad you had Mario's number on your fridge. He was happy to work for you. He sends his regards." She informed me.

"Mmm. God, my head hurts. My eyes hurt. My heart hurts the most though." I said while looking into concerned eyes.

"I know sweetie, I know. I can tell just by looking at you."

"Crystal, she's the one. I have fallen so deeply in love with her. I think I have always been in love with her. To not love her would feel all wrong for me I think. She has completed me Crystal. I have always had this strange emptiness in my heart that she filled as soon as I met her."

"What am I? Chopped liver?" Crystal joked.

"Crystal, you know you and I could never be more. We will always be the best of friends. I will hold you dear to my heart always." I smiled weakly at her.

"I know, Frankie, I was just trying to make you smile. It worked. I can see in your eyes, the changes that she has made in your heart."

"How can this be, Crystal? I don't understand this at all. This is a sick twisted joke. I'm not laughing, either!!" I screamed to no one in particular. "I've got to pee." I almost growled as I stood and walked to my bathroom.

I used the walls as support as I found the lightswitch. I went into the bathroom and looked at myself in the mirror. I thought I was looking at someone other than myself. I didn't even recognize myself.

*I think this is how boxer's must feel after a fifteen round match. I feel like I have been hit with everything, including the kitchen sink.*

I used the toilet and leaned my head against the wall as I sat. I imagined Annie's face as she woke on the beach and found me missing... again. I could feel the sadness bubbling up and I tried to choke it back down. I swallowed a few times and felt incredibly sick to my stomach.

I stood and spun as the contents of my stomach chose that moment to leave my body. I crouched down onto the floor and felt my body contract again and again while it purged my insides. As the spasms slowed I flushed the toilet and began to breathe normally again. I pulled my body off the floor and hung my head in the sink. I ran the cold water and splashed it against my face and pushed my hair back.

I stood to look at my face as I doused water against my throat and neck. I looked up to find the most glorious thing in the world branded to my neck. I immediately ripped off my shirt to make sure I wasn't seeing things.

"Oh, baby, you did it! You did it! This is the hope I was looking for!" I smiled feeling better instantly. "Crystal!!" I screamed. "Crystal, come here quick!" I screamed again.

I could hear her bolting from the bedroom.

"What? What is it, Frankie? Are you all right?" She looked at me strangely.

"Where's your shirt?"

"Crystal what do you see here?" I said indicating my beautiful marking. I had forgotten that I was naked from the waist up.

"Why are you smiling?"

"Because I have hope! Crystal, look!" I pointed again.

"Is that what I think it is?" She asked skeptically.

"It depends. What do you think it is?"

"It looks like a hickey."

"That's because, it IS A HICKEY!!! Annie gave it to me! Holy fucking shit! She IS real! I told you!" I grabbed Crystal's hands and pulled her into a huge hug.

"Frankie, are you sure?" She mumbled against my nakedness.

"I've never been more sure of anything in my life, Crystal. Annie and I made love the other night on the beach. She gave me this hickey. She called it a sucker bite." I laughed. "I've never been so happy to have been given a hickey in my whole life!"

"I can't believe it, Frankie. We have to tell Nonnie." She said stunned.

"What does this mean, Crystal? What can I do?"

"I honestly don't know, Frankie. We need to talk to Nonnie about this. She'll know what to do." She reassured me. "Are you feeling well enough to walk downstairs?"

"If you wanted me to, I could run down there."

"Do me a favor though, will you?" She asked.

"Anything."

"Put a damn shirt on." She said as she slapped my arm.

"Yes, ma'am." I agreed simply because I didn't want to have Nonnie in my face yelling about me catching pneumonia.

## **Chapter Twenty-One**

We got down to Crystal's apartment to find Nonnie in the parlor with a client. Much to my dismay I was going to have to wait until she was free.

"How long do these things usually last?" I asked impatiently.

"It really depends on what they are looking to achieve from their visit." She stated simply.

"God! I've got to know how to get back there, Crystal. There has got to be a way." I started to pace in the living room.

"Frankie, you have got to calm down. Whether you realize it or not, you are still sick. You still have a fever and you are very weak. Please sit down and relax your body until she is finished, ok? For me?" She pleaded.

"Fine." I reluctantly acquiesced to her request. She was always right anyway.

I sat down on the couch and leaned over to Crystal. She reached around my shoulders and pulled my head to her shoulder.

"It'll be okay, Frankie. We are going to figure out how to get you back to Annie. Just relax ok?" She said as she rubbed my head.

"Mmm... you always know how to make me feel better."

"What the hell kind of friend would I be, if I didn't know how to make you feel better?"

"You are the best friend in the world, Crystal. Thank you." I snuggled closer.

"You're welcome, Frankie." She kissed the top of my head and continued to rub my head and neck.

We waited for what seemed like hours, but Nonnie finally came out of her parlor and found us sitting on the couch.

"Frankie, darling. Are you feeling better? You still look a little pale though." Nonnie said as she caressed my cheek.

"Hi, Nonnie. Yes, I am feeling much better. But I..."

"Nonnie, there is something going on here. I need to talk to you." Crystal uncharacteristically butted in. "Frankie, will you excuse us for a minute?"

"Sure." I said confusedly.

It was very odd that Crystal would do that. She seemed like she didn't want me to hear what she had to say to Nonnie.

*What could she possibly say to her that I couldn't hear? We are like sisters for Christ's sake!*

I sat on the couch forever. I rested my head on the armrest of the couch and felt myself drift off. It was about an hour later when they woke me.

"Morning sleepy head." Crystal smiled.

"What? Oh I must have fallen asleep. Sorry." I rubbed my eyes.

"Don't worry about it. I'm sorry, but I really wanted to talk to Nonnie about all of this. Sometimes you get a little emotional about this thing, so I wanted to talk to her rationally about this, before we spoke to you about what we think we can do."

"What we can do?"

"Yeah, about Annie." She confirmed.

"What do you want to know?" I asked.

"Well, we want to find out a little bit more about her. Do you know her last name for example?"

"Of course, it's Parker." I smiled proudly.

"Ok, has she lived in Chicago a long time?" Crystal continued.

"Well, as far as I know, she has lived in the Chicago area all her life. Why all the questions?"

"Well before we can try anything, we usually like to do some research."

"What kind of research? She isn't someone I made up Crystal. We are NOT having this discussion again." I was starting to feel angry.

"No, no, no, that's not what I meant. There's not an easy way to say this Frankie, so I'm just gonna tell you."

"Tell me what?" I suddenly felt worried about her answer.



"We need to find out if she is alive or dead." She stated flatly.

"What?"

"Well the fact that she has called you back to 1974 tells me that she is probably not alive anymore." Crystal softly said.

"Jesus." I breathed out.

"Frankie, it's not like that." I held up my hands.

"I know, I know. I was just going to say that I never even considered that possibility. The thought of that really scares me." I honestly said.

We sat in silence for a long time. Crystal was just waiting for me to say something about what I wanted to do. I was waiting for her to tell me what could be done. This was really starting to confuse me. I just sat there and absorbed the possibility that Annie might not be alive in this time.

"How can we be sure whether or not she is alive or not?" The word "dead" was just not appealing to me at the moment.

"Well first we need to check the city's records to see if there is a record of her death. If she has died, there will be records of how and when it happened. You also said she went to Loyola University, we can check to see if she graduated and if there is any Alumni information. I think the first way is our best bet, but the other is just another option since you don't know too much about her." She looked carefully my way to judge my expression.

"Ok, when can we start this? I really want this mystery to be over." I needed closure to all of this. I couldn't take much more.

"Well as soon as your fever goes down, we'll start. I think you need one more night's sleep, and then we can start the investigation." Crystal stated practically.

"Crystal, I feel fine. Can we please just go to City Hall today?"

"Not unless you want to break in. They have been closed for at least three hours."

I checked my watch and it was about eight in the evening. I had absolutely no sense of time since I got back home.

"Shit, I guess I have no choice here." I said defeatedly.

"I'm sorry to say that we have to wait." Nonnie finally chimed in.

"Great, I hate waiting." I grumbled.

"Let me give you something for your fever, Frankie. You'll sleep better and it won't seem too long for you to wait if you are asleep." Nonnie said.

"That does sound like a good idea. Maybe I will take you up on that. I'll get lots more done if I'm really rested." I agreed.

"Good girl. This Annie must be really something. You never give in that easily." She smiled at me.

"She is Nonnie. She really is." I whispered.

## **Chapter Twenty-Two**

Morning came and I felt very stiff and sluggish from my sickness. Knowing that I was going to do research that would help me find Annie, made that feeling slightly less apparent. The question was though, if I were to find out that Annie weren't alive anymore, what would that mean of our encounter? Why did she summon me only for me to find out that she wasn't alive? Did she die prematurely? Who was responsible for her death? I didn't know nor would I know those answers until later on that day.

As soon as Crystal woke for the day, she came to see me.

"Good morning, sunshine." She chirped.

"Good morning, yourself." I smiled.

"Are you feeling better today?" She asked concerned.

"As a matter of fact, yes I am. I can't wait to get to City Hall to do some digging." I said excitedly.

"Oh no, first things first. Open." She said as she stuck the thermometer in my mouth.

"Hrrmmpph." I mock growled at her.

"Ooh, I'm so scared. Now hush, you have about two and a half more minutes." She said as she looked at her watch.

Without hearing the actual ding of the timer in my head, I reached up to grab the glass temperature gauge. Crystal, unfortunately, was two seconds ahead of me and pulled it from my mouth.

"Ha! Too slow, you must be ill." She grinned.

"Just tell me what the damn thing says."

"It says 'My name is Frankie, and I'm allowed to go outside today'." She playfully said.

"Great, what time does City Hall open?" I asked hoping she would know that answer.

"I would assume 9 A.M., but I'll call just to be sure." She said grabbing the phonebook from my junk drawer in my kitchen. "Are you sure Mario won't mind working for you today?"

"He loves big paychecks. He'll probably cry when I come back to work." I laughed.

"You're probably right." Crystal agreed.

She picked up the phone and called the city. She asked them their hours and she wrote it down on the scratch pad next to the phone. Crystal hung up the phone and reported the information back to me.

"They are open at nine which was an hour ago and are open until five o'clock tonight. Let's get dressed and mosey on over there." She said happily.

"I'll be right out. I really need to shower this ill body of mine. I haven't seen water since Lake Michigan."

"Lake Michigan?" She asked confused.

"A story, perhaps, for the ride to City Hall." I smirked as I walked towards my bathroom.

"I'm not sure I want to know." She said with a touch of apprehension.

I walked into the bathroom and smiled at my reflection, which still contained that beautiful marking on my neck.

"Good morning you beautiful sucker bite." I smiled. "We are going to find out a little more information on your creator today." I rolled my eyes at my words and stripped down. I leaned over the tub and turned on the water. I stepped in when the water's temperature became bearable.

I took the fastest shower in history that morning. I dried off and ran from the bathroom into my bedroom and changed into the first items of clothing that I saw. I grabbed a pair of jeans and one of my T-shirts. I didn't even look to see if they were clean, or right side out; they were just thrown on. I ran back into the bathroom, dragged a comb through my hair and put it in a Cubs baseball cap. It was my favorite since my Pop gave it to me after our first baseball game together. It usually brought me luck. I was hoping today was no different.

I ran into the kitchen to find Crystal eating a bowl of fruity loopy cereal. I just looked at her with impatience.

"Well? Aren't you ready to go?" I asked while sticking my hands on my hips.

"Easy, killer, I didn't know you were going for the record of fastest shower today. Give me two seconds and I'll be ready. Deal?"

"Fine." I said indignantly and sat next to her to watch her every bite.

"Oh Jesus Christ, let's go already!" She finally said and ran out the door with me in her shadow.

We jumped in my old Nissan and were off to City Hall. In one breath, I was very excited to find out the information to find Annie. In the other breath I was scared shitless. I didn't want to find out that everything I shared with Annie was in the annals of history, never to be relived again. The thought of that made me kind of sick to my stomach again.

"So what happened on your last visit, Frankie?" Crystal asked softly.

"Other than sharing the most beautiful moment in my life with Annie, something wonderful also happened." I said cryptically.

"Ooh, share please." She said as her leg tucked underneath the other to face me.

"I had breakfast with my parents." I nonchalantly stated.

"You what?!" Crystal said unbelieving.

"I got busted sleeping on the fire escape. I woke up to my Pop's eyes staring down at me. He thought I was homeless and sleeping on his escape." I smiled.

"Oh, God. I bet you almost shit your pants." She grinned.

"Well, that was only the beginning. He asked me inside after I explained some bullshit story about me being too tired to realize I wasn't at home."

"And he believed you?"

"Of course. Wouldn't you believe this face?" I said while giving her my best sad puppy look.

"Oh, Jesus. So what happened next?"

"Well, he walked me into the eat in part of the kitchen where I actually met my mother."

"You actually talked to her?" Her eyes got really wide.

"Yep."

"So what did you think?" She asked apprehensively.

"To tell you the truth, Crystal, she wasn't really nice." I answered honestly.

"Really?"

"Nope. Well I think I struck a nerve in her when I asked her if they had any children." I smugly smiled.

"Oh God, you didn't."

"I did."

"I wasn't born yet, so I guess I wanted to find out a little bit more of what she thought about being a mom. Needless to say, she wasn't very happy and immediately wanted the subject changed. It's no mystery to me now, that my Pop was the one who wanted kids. It definitely wasn't her." I explained.

"Wow. How was your dad through all of this? Did he seem like he wanted to talk about it?"

"Yes, in fact it was when he said he wanted kids, that she really glared at him and demanded a subject change. Bitch."

"Damn. I bet that was really something to see." She pondered.

"It was." I agreed. "Anyway, the rest of the meal was kinda quiet except for a little small talk about movies and such. I really had forgotten what a kind and generous man my Pop was. He asked a total stranger into his house, after they slept on his fire escape without his knowledge, and then asked them to stay for breakfast. Not many people in this day and age would do that. They'd probably call the Police now. Not Pop, he wanted to meet my family the next time I was around the neighborhood." I giggled.

"He was a very special man, Frankie." She said as she touched my forearm.

"I know... I'm just grateful I got to see him again. I gave him a hug and kiss when I left and it was almost as if he knew who I was. It was really freaky." I concluded as we pulled into the parking lot of City Hall.

I took a deep breath and stood from the car. Crystal looked over at me and gave me that reassuring smile I had grown to adore. We approached the Hall steps and I heard Crystal laughing behind me.

"What is so funny?" I asked puzzled.

"You obviously were in quite a hurry this morning. Have you seen what shirt you're wearing?" She couldn't help but laugh.

I looked down to see a white T-shirt and looked back at Crystal with a questioning stare.

"A white T-shirt is bad?" I queried.

"Only when you are wearing it backwards and the front of it says, 'I only sleep with the best'. Nice touch, Frankie." She smiled again.

"Oh shit, I got this for free when I bought my new mattress. I gotta turn this inside out." I said and ran back to the car. Within seconds I had the shirt inside out and backwards.

"Very nice, Frankie, very nice." Crystal smirked as she shook her head and we walked into the building.

"Hey, I could've done that on the stairs." I challenged.

"I don't even want to go there." She knew I would have too.

### **Chapter Twenty-Three**

We strolled up to the nearest occupied window and waited to be helped.

"May I help you?" A small elderly lady asked.

"Yes, I am looking for someone and I was wondering if I could find out if there is a coroner's record of their death." Crystal inquired.

"Just a minute, please." She walked away from the window and returned with a key. "The first hour will cost you ten dollars. Five dollars for every hour after that."

"Ten bucks?" Crystal griped until I threw the money at her. "Is fine, thank you." She finished and took the key from the old woman.

"Go down this hall and take your first right. You'll find what you need in there. There is someone on duty to help you if you can't find what you are looking for." She smiled and disappeared behind the thick glass.

"I can't believe they charge by the hour!" Crystal said unbelieving.

"Well, how else can they guarantee that people won't use these rooms to live in?" I said pragmatically.

"I guess that's true. That's really sad, but true."

"Some people really dislike homeless people. Doesn't matter that most of them are harmless. As I have experienced, what people don't know about, tends to scare them. Hell, look at people when it comes to my sexuality. I've had people grab their kids away from me when they find out that I'm gay. It's a bit ridiculous being that it is the twenty-first century and all, but yet it still happens."

Crystal wrapped her arm around my shoulder and gave me a quick squeeze. "I'm sorry, Frankie. That has to feel horrible."

"No worse than having people spit on you or kick you because you're asleep on the sidewalk." I stopped and took a deep breath. "Boy this has been an uplifting conversation hasn't it? Let's hope we find better news in there." I said as I motioned to the Hall of History.

I inserted the key and walked in with Crystal close behind. I spotted a computer instead of a microfiche machine. I walked over to the available resource and sat down. A woman of large stature walked over to see if we needed assistance.

"Good morning, ladies. Is there anything I can help you find today?" She asked pleasantly.

"Yes, I am trying to find records of an individual. Would you be able to help me find that?" I asked.

"Of course. I need some information. Do you know the full name of the person you wish to research?"

"Yes, her name is Annie Parker. I'm gonna guess that she..." I paused not wanting to say the next few words. "I think she died in 1974." Crystal put her hands on my shoulders and began to rub them.

*She always knew what I needed.*

"OK, let me bring up the program and insert this information and see what we come up with." She said nonchalantly. I almost didn't want to know the answer. I could feel myself tremble with trepidation.

"It'll just be a moment or two. Do you have any other information that might be useful if nothing comes up?" She asked and I searched my head for any more insightful details that Annie may have shared with me. I couldn't think of anything more.

"I'm sorry I don't think so. Let's just see if we can narrow it down to May or June of 1974. Does that help?"

"We'll see. Ah, here we are. Yes, there was a record of a fatal car accident on May 28, 1974 involving William D. Johnson, 24 and Anne M. Parker, 21." My heart was in my throat as she continued to read the screen. "The accident happened at 10:44 P.M. in Rogers Park around Loyola University. It seems that Mr. Johnson was intoxicated while he was driving and hit an oncoming car killing both him and his passenger, Anne Parker."

I could feel Crystal's hands stiffen as the woman read the account of the incident. I couldn't breathe.

*Annie was... dead.*

"Does it say if she... " I paused to take a deep breath. "Did she suffer at all?" I managed to choke out.

"According to the records, Mr. Johnson died instantly while the woman was taken by ambulance to Loyola University Hospital. She died on arrival." Seeing my distress of the new information she gazed sympathetically my way. "I'm very sorry. She must've been someone special."

"She was." Crystal chimed in knowing I wouldn't be able to answer.

The woman nodded. "Was there anything else?" I could tell that she really didn't know what to say.

"No, thanks you have been really helpful. We found out all that we needed to." Crystal explained gently.

"OK. If you need anything else, my name is Nancy and I'll be over at the information desk." She said as she motioned to the large marble desk at the front of the room.

"Thank you, Nancy." Crystal said again. I looked over at her and could only nod numbly at her.

Nancy walked away and I felt my resolve crack shamelessly. Crystal took one look at me and I began to sob. She reached down and hugged me from behind.

"I'm so sorry, honey." She held tightly to me.

"She's gone, Crystal," I wept. "I can't believe she's really gone."

We stayed this way for several minutes. My breathing was still erratic but the tears had finally slowed. Crystal's hold on me lessened and she turned to face me to wipe my tears. I looked up at her with my swollen eyes and asked the only question that came to my head.

"What do I do now?" I said sniffing like a toddler.

"Now you leave this up to me. This is what I know best." I had never seen her more determined and confident in my whole life. The woman in front of me had shown me every hat she had ever worn except this one. As much as this Crystal impressed me, she scared me as well. I knew better than anyone that a woman on a mission was one not to be messed with. This was no longer my show, it was hers. And I couldn't think of more capable hands to keep my heart safe.

"Let's go home." I suggested. She looked at me and held my face in her hands.

"No, let's go get your other half."

I had never heard sweeter words than that. Crystal stood and walked towards the exit.



"I'm right behind you." I said as I wiped my eyes. I adjusted my cap and took off after Crystal with hopes of finding Annie once again.

*Hang on Annie, I'm coming for you.*

[Continued in Part 11...](#)

Feedback is the Ruler of all Bards.

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## ~ A Sacrifice For Friendship ~

by DS Bauden

**Disclaimers:** See Part 1.

### **Part 11**

#### **Chapter Twenty-Four**

The car came into view as Crystal and I left City Hall. We walked in silence as we approached the vehicle. I looked at Crystal with red rimmed eyes and she immediately motioned for me to hand over the keys to my car. I slid into the passenger seat feeling worse than I could ever remember. She closed the door to the driver's side and leaned over to me and embraced my saddened form. I leaned into her body and began to sob once again. I had no control right now of my emotional state. Who could honestly blame me though? In a matter of minutes my heart had been filled with incredible sorrow. The woman that I had grown to love had been killed in a car accident due to her alcoholic ex-boyfriend. I do stress the word ex.

I didn't think that I had a chance of ever seeing my Annie again. Crystal, however, seemed to be pretty positive about it though. She held me as my sobs lessened and my composure was regained.

"How are you doing, Frankie?" She looked into my eyes.

"I don't know how to feel, Crystal. She's really gone. That bastard drove her literally, to her death. If he wasn't already dead, I'd kill him with my bare hands." I growled. "How am I supposed to feel? I feel numb."

"Well, I'm not going to settle for this being the end. You've already proven that time isn't an issue in this matter. Otherwise, you never would've been able to meet Annie in the first place. True?"

"True. So what are we going to do?" I asked curiously.

"Well, first of all, we need to get something to eat, I am starving. I will do you absolutely no good, if I have an empty stomach. If memory serves, you haven't eaten yet today, so you need to eat as well. Believe me you are going to need your energy." She said cryptically.

"Do I want to know what you have planned?"

"I'll let you know when the time is right, Frankie. I promise." She smiled.

"Somehow I don't think I'm going to like whatever you have planned, Crystal."

"Maybe, maybe not, but we'll know more later. C'Mon, I'm buying, let's go get some food."

"I'm not really hungry, Crystal, really." I said as brown eyes turned slowly to look at me. "But I'll try to eat." I finished sweetly. God knows that woman had a temper on her when it came to me eating.

"Good girl. Let's go to the diner on the corner. They always have hash and eggs just the way you like 'em." She suggested.

"Sounds good. Let's go." I weakly smiled at her.

The rest of the car ride was very quiet. It was very apparent to me that Crystal was trying to think of something to do so that Annie and I could be together again. I just don't know what could possibly be done now that we knew she wasn't alive anymore. I really didn't like to use the word dead when it came to Annie. It made everything so final.

We pulled into the Park Diner parking lot and Crystal shut the engine off.

"Okay, Frankie, are you ready to face the public?"

"Am I ever?" I smiled and looked at my reflection from the rearview mirror. I wiped away the dried salt marks on my cheeks and decided that this was as good as it was going to get for now. "I think I'm ready." I said as she smiled and opened the car door.

We walked into the restaurant and waited to be seated. We took a seat on the bench while the hostess took her sweet time finding some menus for us.

"Alright ladies, how many? She asked.

Crystal and I just looked at each other and then around us seeing no one else. We looked back at the hostess whose name was Brenda, and smiled. Crystal looked at her and answered, "Two?"

"Fine. Follow me." She said.

"Jesus..." I whispered to Crystal who started to giggle at my response.

"Here we are, your server, Brandy, will be with you in a moment." She said with her fake smile.

"What's up her ass?" I really wanted to know.

"God only knows. It's not like they're busy, shit." She said as she rolled her eyes.

We sat in companionable silence when Brandy arrived.

"How're y'all doin'? Can I take your orders today?" She drawled in some southern tongue.

*Could this get any worse?*

I looked at Crystal and it seemed she could read my thoughts. She started to laugh under her breath as I gave my order to our server.

"How did you want your eggs?" She blinked wildly at me. I almost couldn't keep up with her eyes. It was making me dizzy just looking at her.

"I would like them over easy, please. Make sure they put the eggs right on top of the hash too, please."

"Sure, honey, no problem." She said as she snapped her gum. I was waiting for Mel and Vera to come out to help us next. "What about your darlin'? You made up your mind yet?" She blinked at Crystal next. It was my turn to stifle a laugh.

"Yes, I would like the large stack of pancakes with scrambled eggs and bacon on the side. Please make sure the bacon isn't crawling on the plate. You could even burn it a bit if you'd like." She finished.

"My goodness girly, where you plan on putting all of that?" She joked as her gum snapped again loudly.

"Why don't you let me worry about that, alright? You bring it out, and I guarantee you won't be throwing anything out. K, darlin'?" Crystal smiled that venom smile that usually meant 'I've had it with your shit, now go away.'

"You got it." She blinked at both of us and walked towards the kitchen.

"Good fucking God! What the hell is wrong with people these days? Could her eyes flutter any faster? You'd think they were wings for Chrissakes!" I said as Crystal snorted out the water she had just drunk.

"OH JESUS, FRANKIE! Don't do that." She laughed out as she blew her nose into her napkin.

"And how about that gum? You think she's put some serious mileage into that piece with all that chewing? Man..." I couldn't help but pick on her. It was making me feel better and she didn't hear me.

At this time Crystal had leaned into the booth we were seated in to hide her bright red face. She was laughing so hard that it had become silent. Her mouth had a permanent "O" shaped to her lips as she tried to compose herself.

"Ppplease... Frankie... I'm gonna wet myself." She sputtered out. She was taking deep calming breaths and then I looked at her and blinked my eyes like Brandy and sent her into fits of laughter again. I couldn't help it; she was just too easy of a target. Crystal was so easy to amuse once she got going, so I didn't stop, until she came back.

"Here you go ladies. Enjoy." She placed our food down and watched in amazement as Crystal attacked her plate. "You gals just let me know if you need anything else. OK?" She asked.

"Mmhmmm." We both mumbled with full mouths.

We ate until there was no food left. I surprised myself that I actually was hungry and ate all my food. Crystal never ceased to amaze me with the amounts of food she could ingest into that tiny body of hers. We sat for a couple minutes as our food digested and motioned to Brandy for her to bring the check.

"Here you go little darlins, I hope everything was good for ya's." She paused as she looked at the empty plates. "Well, sew my mouth closed for a million years, you really did eat it all, didn't you?" She said surprised.

"I told you nothing would go to waste." Crystal answered.

"Well, that you did. I hope you aren't one of those girls that goes into the little girl's room to throw up everything she just ate." She said accusingly.

"Absolutely not. I think that's more of waste than not eating what's on your plate at all. I'm pretty confident about my appearance, and fuck anyone that thinks differently." Crystal said with a brash tongue.

"Good for you, honey!" She said as her gum snapped again.

I just looked at Crystal and smiled at her. I had never met anyone who spoke his or her mind as much as she did. Until Annie that is. She really let me have it when she thought I was against homosexuals. God that was absurd.

*Little did she know where our night would lead after that.*

"Earth to Frankie. You ready, babe?" Crystal asked jarring me from my memories.

"Yeah, let's get outta here before Alice gets here." I kidded.

"God, I was thinking about that too! How funny! I was waiting for Mel and Vera too!" She said as we laughed. It was really great how our minds were so in sync sometimes.

We left "Flo" a decent tip and went back to the car. I felt much better so I took my keys back from Crystal and we set off towards home.

## **Chapter Twenty-Five**

I slowed the car as we approached the back parking lot of our building. I was very curious on how Crystal planned on getting me back to Annie. I could feel my sadness creeping back slowly. I don't think it really left me, it just took a nap while I ate.

I knew I would never be able to forget Annie and all that we shared together. So many people don't ever feel what we did in their whole lives. I just hoped I would be able to share all of that with Annie again, very soon.

"OK, Frankie, before we get started, I really need to talk with Nonnie about all of this. Do me a favor and stay at home or go to your shop until I am ready for you, OK?" She said sternly.

"Crystal, why won't you talk about this in front of me? I feel that it's..." She cut me off.

"Frankie, please, just trust me on this, alright? Nonnie and I need to get everything together so that we can continue with this. I promise I won't be long, but I know you and I know how you like to ask questions and all of that. There will be plenty of time for your questions, I just have to make sure that Nonnie knows what's going on and that she's clear for the rest of the afternoon, OK?" She smiled and gave me her best puppy dog look. She knew those brown eyes would get her anything she wanted from me.

"Fine, I should go see how Mario is doing anyway. Just do me a favor and come and get me as soon as you guys are ready, alright?" I pleaded.

"I promise, Frankie. I'll be back soon." She assured.

"OK. See you later." I acquiesced.

I walked upstairs to change out of my inside out T-shirt. I took one look at my hair as I took it out of my hat and decided a shower was in order. My hair had started to grow into my Cubs hat, so I gave it a good washing. I dried off and changed into my favorite purple polo shirt and tucked that into my button down fly blue jeans.

After I finished blow drying my hair, I put a touch of makeup on my face and wandered down to Technicolor Classics. I opened my back door and wandered into the shop. It was a slow day, but Mario was putting some new clothing on the front window's mannequin.

"Hey Mario, how have things been going?" I asked.

Mario looked over to me and smiled. He was a decent guy about nineteen years old and loved the classic movies. I think he liked them even more than my Pop did. He was short as men went only about five feet eight or so, which was still shorter than myself. I felt bad for him since he was so young and his hairline had already started to recede. What he lacked in outward appearance, he more than made up for with his personality. Hell, if I were straight and younger, I'd have dated him! I took his hand in a friendly shake and smiled warmly at him.

"Thanks for watching the place, Mario. I haven't been feeling so well as of late." I gave him the abridged version.

"You are very welcome, Miss Frankie. I'm sorry you have been sick. Don't you worry though; this place has been running fine with me here. I won't let anything go wrong to make you worry. It's been kinda slow anyway, so you rest up and feel better. You still look a little pale, Miss Frankie."

"Mario, you know you can call me Frankie. I am as informal of a boss as you'll ever have." I smirked.

*Isn't that the truth.*

"I know Miss Frankie, but my Poppa would be very disappointed in me if I didn't treat you with respect." He said honestly.

"Please call me Frankie, ok, don't make me feel like an old lady. Alright?" I smiled at him.

"Oh, Miss Frankie, I meant no disrespect. I mean... Frankie..." He blushed.

"Mario?"

"Yes?"

"Take a deep breath and let it out slowly." I had heard through the grapevine, otherwise known as my neighborhood, that Mario had a crush on me. I could tell that I was flustering him.

He did as I suggested and blew out his breath.

"There, feel any better?" I asked sincerely.

"Yeah, sorry. I just wanna do a good job for you."

"Mario, you've been doing a great job, so don't worry so much, alright?" I said warmly to him.

"Thanks for saying so, Mi... um... Frankie. Um, can I finish up the window now? It might scare some people to have a naked mannequin up there as they pass by."

I laughed, "Of course, Mario, you go right ahead."

It was very obvious to me that he had this place under control. He had even cleaned up a few messes that I hadn't had time to do myself. I turned to go back upstairs.

"Looks great, Mario, thanks for holding down the fort for me. Did you want to get something to eat or use the bathroom or anything while I'm here?" That was the only thing I hated about working alone. You had to close the store just to pee or eat. Unless of course, Crystal dropped food off for me.

"No, Frankie, I'll be fine. You go rest now." He smiled his crooked smile at me and waved.

"OK, Thanks again, Mario." I said to his back.

"Bye." He waved again and I went back upstairs to wait for Crystal.



## Chapter Twenty-Six

I walked back upstairs and sat on my couch. I turned on the TV and tried to take my mind off of finding Annie. It was no use. Every commercial especially the Hallmark ones, was reminding me of her. I missed her smile, her scent, but most of all, I missed her sweet voice. I hadn't heard it in awhile. I was hoping to hear it in my dreams last night, or even get taken back, but unfortunately I stayed put.

I heard the footsteps on my back porch and hoped it was Crystal. I turned off the TV and walked towards the kitchen.

"Crystal? Is that you?" I hoped.

"Yeah, babe, miss me?" She joked.

"You know I've been waiting here on pins and needles waiting to hear from you." I pouted.

"Well, if you are ready, Frankie, then lets get started. Nonnie knows the situation and we are ready to go for it." She reassured me.

"Great, you know I am. Let's go!" I excitedly said as I blew past her to get downstairs.

Crystal breathed out a long breath and ran after me. "Wait up, Frankie. You can't do anything until we are all ready." She shouted after me.

I couldn't wait to get started. I knew that I was rushing around and there was probably a good chance that this wouldn't work either, but I couldn't stand being away from Annie any longer. I needed her like I needed air to breathe.

I opened the door into Crystal and Nonnie's home and walked into their kitchen. I found Nonnie sitting quietly at the table sipping some tea.

"Hi, Nonnie. How are you?" I smiled.

"Child, come sit down and let me talk to you about this for a second, alright?" She calmly requested.

"Sure, Nonnie. I'm sure you are going to say that this might not work and that I shouldn't get my hopes up. Right?" I said raising my eyebrows in question.

"You are partly right, as usual." She smiled. "But I want to ask you about this Annie woman and what she means to you."

"I am in love with her, Nonnie. I haven't felt like this with any other woman I have ever been with. She is the other half of my being, I just know it." I honestly responded.

"So there is nothing that you wouldn't do, to be with her again, correct?" She asked seriously.

"I would give and do anything to be with her again, Nonnie. I love her that much."

"OK, we've established that much, and that is wonderful. Now, I need you to understand that this may not work exactly the way you want it to. We may get you there and she may already be gone. Do you understand that? Is it going to be enough for you to see her that way? What happens if you show up just as she crashes? There won't be anything that you can do. Am I making sense to you?"

I had to think about that for a second. I had never thought about that aspect of it. I don't know if I could see her in that state. It would kill me I was sure. Not doing one more thing to see her again though, would hurt even more. I think that answered my questions.

"Yes, Nonnie. I would do anything to see her again. I can't not try one more time." I implored to her.

"OK, then let's get on with it." She stated simply and walked into her parlor mumbling something about stubbornness.

Crystal looked over at me and smiled. "Ready?"

"Readier than I'll ever be."

"Then let's go get your girl." She happily said to me as she draped her arm around my shoulders and led me into the back towards their parlor.

"Is Nonnie okay with all of this?" I wasn't sure how she was really feeling about this whole thing.

"What do you mean?" Crystal asked concerned.

"I mean, she almost sounds like she doesn't want to do this."

"I think she is really just concerned about you not finding what you're looking for. She loves you as if you were her own, Frankie. She doesn't like to see you hurting. She just wanted to make sure that you understood all the aspects and you realize as she said, that it might not go the way you would like it to."

"I know, and I love her for it. I just know that I have to do something if there is still a chance for me to do anything. You know?" I asked and felt my eyes begin to well.

"Yes, honey, I'm gonna do everything in my power to get her back for you. I can see how much you love her. It hurts me to see you hurting as well, Frankie. You are my best friend in the whole world. I'll be damned if I'm just gonna sit here and do nothing. So..." She kissed my cheek. "Let's go get your Annie."

"Sounds good to me."

We walked into the back parlor, which really didn't look like anything other than another room. It had a wooden table with four chairs, there was a couch on the wall with a lounge chair next to it. It was a little darker than most rooms, but it was really comfortable. It felt very homey, actually. It would have felt that way even if I hadn't known these two most of my life.

Nonnie was sitting at the table waiting for us to arrive. She didn't have a turban on or anything like that, just so you don't go thinking that she is really out there or something. The only thing that seemed different to me is that there was a bit of incense burning on the back table. Other than that, it was a regular room.

"OK, so where should I sit?" I asked wanting to get this show on the road.

"Where will you be most comfortable? The couch? The table?" Nonnie asked.

"Am I going to go to sleep? Cuz if that's the case, I should park it on the couch." I said pragmatically.

"Alright then, please get comfy on the couch." Nonnie pointed to the couch and motioned for Crystal to come closer to me.

"Alright." I said as I lay on the couch.

Crystal came and sat on the edge of the couch and just smiled down on me. "You ready, babe?"

"Sure, let's do this."

Nonnie and Crystal both smiled at me. Nonnie took a seat at the table and Crystal remained at the edge of the couch with me. I took a deep breath and tried to relax my body.

"Now, Frankie, the most important thing to remember is not to try to control the situation. Just keep yourself calm and relaxed." Crystal softly said to me. "Now close your eyes. Relax, Frankie. Just trust in me and we'll be fine."

Nonnie put on some music, it was an old classical piece that my Pop loved. I think it was Bach; one of the Brandenburg Concertos. I was brought back to when I was a kid. He used to play those records all the time and whenever I would complain about them, he told me that they would culture me. He was right, I still remember them. I felt really close to him at this time, it was a connection we would always have.

I was very comfortable where I was. I could feel myself getting very relaxed. I could hear Crystal talking softly next to me.

"Imagine yourself flying towards the clouds. The lighter you are the higher you'll fly. Let yourself go, Frankie. Lighten yourself. Feel yourself float. You can see the rainbow above the clouds try to catch it, lighten yourself a bit more, Frankie, you can do it. Do you see it?"

I could, I could see the rainbow she was showing me. I was so close to reaching it. I felt myself nodding at Crystal and she must have seen me since she responded to my actions.

"That's a good girl. You're so close. Let yourself go a little bit more, Frankie. Annie is on the other side of that rainbow. You'll be able to get to her soon. Relax yourself, feel the weight of your body leave you. You are completely free to go anywhere, this is where you need to be. Go to her, Frankie. She's waiting for you. You'll find her. When you come down you'll be exactly where you left her last. Go towards the top of the rainbow, you'll get to the other side, you'll get there. Feel yourself fly higher... higher...

## Chapter Twenty-Seven

I felt freer than I had ever felt in my life. I knew I would get to her, I just had to stay focused and relaxed. Focused and relaxed...

"Frankie?"

*Am I not doing this right? Do I need to go back down to Crystal? Why would she be calling me?*

"Frankie? Can you hear me?"

I opened my eyes only to guard them against the strong sunlight shining into them. I saw a silhouette above me. I moved so the light hit the person differently. It was Betsy. It was Betsy!

*YES! It worked, thank you, Crystal.*

"Betsy? Is that you?"

"Yeah, why are you out here?" She asked a great question. What was the right answer?

"I fell asleep out here last night with Annie, is she with you? Where is she?" I started to panic. She left me on the blanket we made love on. I needed to find her.

"I haven't seen her today, Frankie. That's what worries me. She was supposed to work this morning. She didn't show up. That isn't like her. I'm very worried."

"What day is it?" I said all confused.

"It's Monday."

"The twenty-sixth?" I guessed.

"No, twenty-eighth. She was scheduled at 10 A.M. this morning and it's about noon and she is no where to be found. Do you have any idea on where she is? The café called and they are concerned as well."

"I don't have a clue, Betsy. Now I'm worried. We fell asleep out here together after the bonfire. That was last night wasn't it?" I asked hoping I wasn't too far off.

"Yes it was last night. You must have some hangover. You guys had lots to drink. I have to say it made me smile to see her so happy being with you. You two were inseparable."

"So inseparable, she pulled a Frankie by disappearing on me this morning. I hope she's alright. Billy didn't see us did he?" I hoped she wasn't with him. Not after what I read about their wreck on the twenty-eighth.

*The twenty-eighth! Oh God!*

"No, luckily he gave up and left. He was such an asshole last night." Betsy was talking to me and I didn't hear a word of it. He had her. He must have her.

"Betsy, where does Billy live? I have a really bad feeling about this. He could've come here last night and saw us together. I'm sure it was a sight he didn't want to see. I'm betting that Annie is with him right now. Believe me, Betsy, she is in grave danger. He's capable of killing her. We have to find her before it's too late."

"I'll do what I can. I think I have a student directory upstairs." She tried to recollect.

"I didn't think he was a student anymore." I remembered Annie's words.

"He's not, but he used to be and he hasn't moved in ages. The address should be the same. I think I have an older listing. Let's go and find it." She lowered her hand for me to reach up to stand.

I reached up and took hold of her hand and pulled up to lift my body into a standing position. I shook out the remainder of the sand off my body and off the blanket. I grabbed the blanket and gestured for her to lead the way.

We flew up the concrete steps of Mertz Hall. We took the elevator up to the eighteenth floor and walked over to Annie's room. I knocked hard on the door so if she was in there, she could hear it no matter what.

"Annie are you in there?" I screamed. I continued to knock loudly. "Annie can you hear me?" I jiggled the handle and luckily for me the door was unlocked.

I looked inside her room and found it empty. She was nowhere to be found. Everything was as we had left it before going to the bonfire.

"Shit! Where are you, sweetheart? I gotta find you! Give me something. A clue, anything!" I could feel the panic start to take me over. I don't do calm well, least of all when someone I love is in danger. Grave danger.

"Anything?" Betsy ran in with the student directory from 1972 in her hands.

"No, nothing. It looks exactly the same as we left it last night." I slumped.

"Well, we did get somewhat lucky, I did manage to find that old student directory. Billy's in here. He lives on Pratt, which is just down the street. We can walk it's that close."

"Well then, what are we waiting for? Let's go pay a visit to that nice bastard, shall we?" I sarcastically asked.

"Yes, lets. I can't wait to watch you kick his ass." She smiled.

"I can't wait to kick it!" I growled. "Come on, let's go."

We took off out of Annie's room and straight to the elevator. When the floor lights indicated the elevator wasn't coming up any time soon, we hit the stairs, two at a time. We got downstairs faster than the elevator could ever move. We both

were determined to get Annie away from Billy. How we were going to do that was another story, but for now, getting to her was our first goal. What we did once we got there was something we would have to think about later. For now, all I wanted to do was find Annie to make sure she was alright. She can't die, she just can't. I wouldn't be able to live with myself knowing I didn't do anything to save her.

That may have been messing with time and the future, but dammit, I didn't care. I was going to find Annie and we were going to be together. That's all there was to it.

We walked out of Mertz Hall and Betsy pointed North towards Pratt Lane. It wasn't far at all. I could feel the anxiety building inside of me.

"It might take us all of five minutes to get there, Frankie." She stated flatly.

"Alright. He drive anything other than that pick-up?" I asked.

"Nope, he and that piece of shit deserve each other." She smiled. "I hate that rat bastard. He'd better not have hurt her again. I don't know what I'll do." She calmly said as we started walking towards Pratt.

"I know damn well what I'm gonna do if he has harmed her in any way." I stated matter of factly. "I'm gonna rip him apart with my bare hands. He's gonna wish that he'd never laid eyes on Frankie Camarelli, I'll tell you that much." I hissed through my teeth.

"Remind me never to piss you off, Frankie. Okay?" She smiled.

"Noted. Let's go get that son of a bitch." I said as I started to pick up the pace a bit.

Betsy kept up with me as we ran down Sheridan Road to find Billy Johnson. If he's lucky, he'll have left her sleeping somewhere in his house while he went out of town. If not, he's gonna rue the day he ever touched Annie Parker.

*That my friend, is a promise.*

[Continued in Part 12...](#)

Feedback is the Ruler of all Bards.



## ~ A Sacrifice For Friendship ~

by DS Bauden

**Disclaimers:** See Part 1.

### Part 12

#### Chapter Twenty-Eight

"Where the hell are they?" I screamed in frustration.

We arrived to Billy's home, if you wanted to call it that, and found it vacant for the most part. I didn't see any sign of Annie or Billy. There wasn't even a trace that they had even been there at all.

"Now what?" Betsy asked.

"I'm not sure. Where did they usually hang out?" I inquired.

"Well, Billy usually liked to hang at Forest's. It's a bar on Sheridan not too far from here. We can go over there and see if anyone's seen them. Sound good?" She suggested.

"Yeah, let's go. Anything sounds good right about now. I'm really worried about her. What time is it?" I asked as she checked her watch.

"It's a little after one o'clock. Don't tell me you gotta be somewhere." She said with her hands on her hips daring me to say yes.

"No, I just don't want her with him too long, is all." I lied. I knew that if I didn't get to her by 10:44 P.M. Annie was going to die by Billy's hand, or by his driving, I

should say. "Where's this Forest's anyway, are we close? Can we walk?"

"Yeah, we can walk there. Let's go." She started off.

"I'm with you." I trailed after her.

We jogged up Sheridan Road looking for Forest's Bar. All I could think of was, 'Forrest Gump has a bar?'. I knew she wouldn't get the joke so I didn't let it out.

"There it is, Frankie. I don't see loser's truck, either." She slumped.

"Doesn't matter, maybe someone has seen them. Let's go inside." I offered.

"K." She followed.

We walked into the dive smelling nothing but stale beer and smoke.

"Gee, I think I'd like my wedding reception here." I said sarcastically.

"Don't say that too loud, someone might take that as a marriage proposal." She laughed.

"Ew. I don't even want to think about what kinds of creatures come here." I grimaced.

"No kidding. There's Barney, I think he actually owns this place. I can't believe someone would be proud to say that out loud." She smiled and motioned over to a heavy-set man wearing jeans that were too tight with a red flannel shirt and a slipshod beard. He was sitting at the bar with a crony of his. He was absolutely the ideal man to run this establishment.

*If you want to call this an establishment. Yuck.*

"Hey, Barney, right?" Betsy attempted to get this man's attention. He mustn't have heard her since he made no movement at all.

"Hey buddy! I gotta thirsty lady with me!" I tried my version of the script.

"Yes, ladies, how may I help you?" He drooled, as he looked us up and down. I thought I was going to lose it.

*Count to ten, Frankie. He's just your average scumbag.*

"I was wondering if you'd seen Billy and his lady, Annie today?" Betsy tried.

"Billy? Who's that?" He suddenly became stricken with amnesia. He looked at his buddy and started laughing. I lost the few patience I had left.

"Look you fat fuck! I need to find Annie and you are going to help me! Got it?" I hissed in his face.

"Or else what?" Oh he asked for it now. I grabbed him by the top of his shirt and looked into his eyes with the iciest glare and the most feral smile I could form with my lips.

"Or I'll stuff what little balls you have left in that blender over there and make you serve them on ice! How's that for an or else what?" I could hear him audibly gulp and felt him nervously adjust under my grasp.

"I... I saw them about a half-hour ago. He threw back a few while his girlfriend bitched at him about some punk named Frank." I smiled at this news. "I guess the bitch cheated on him. I'd a slapped her ass around too!" He shot off. That earned him an elbow in his gut and I grabbed his throat by his shirt collar.

"What do you mean, *too*? Did he hit her in here?" I spit through my teeth as I held on tightly to his throat.

"It's not like she didn't deserve it. She cheated on him!" He argued.

"And how many times has he cheated on her?" I spat back as if it really mattered. "You know what? Don't answer that, just tell me where they went." I snarled.

"I don't know. He didn't say. He just grabbed her and they took off." He said quickly.

"If you are lying to me I swear to everything holy that I'll make good on my threat." I said through gritted teeth.

"I swear!" I could see the perspiration on his brow telling me that he was telling the truth.

"Well do me a favor, if they come back, you tell Billy that Frankie was here." He looked at me with a new awareness. "That's right, Annie's Frankie. You tell him that I'm looking for him and if he's done anything to her, I'll kill him with my own hands. You got all that?" I shook him as I finished.

"Yyyyeah... I got it." He sputtered.

"Good." I turned to look at Betsy who hadn't closed her mouth since this all began. "Close your mouth, Bets, you'll catch more than flies in this place." I said as I dropped the fleabag back on his stool and slung my arm around her shoulder escorting her out of the bar. I could hear Barney saying something under his breath about me being lucky he was in a good mood to his barmate.

"Jesus, Frankie!" She squeaked. "I almost peed MY pants in there. Where did you learn to be so intimidating?" She questioned.

"It comes with the 'Being Tall' instruction booklet. It's a prerequisite." I smiled at her awestruck face.

"God, it worked on me and it wasn't even directed at me." She breathed out.

"Well, that was a waste of time, but I do feel a little less tense. I should send Barney a thank you card." I smiled.

"Oh please, like he can read!" She laughed and I immediately joined in.

"Alright, Betsy. Where else can we look? Should we go to the café and see if she checked in at all?" I queried.

"Yeah, why not. Let's hope she at least called."

"Let's go." I said as we headed towards the diner.

We walked down Sheridan Road trapped in our own thoughts. We finally reached the diner after what seemed like an hour's walk. We opened up the door to the diner finding Doris taking orders at the bar.

I smiled at her and waved. "Hey, Doris. Have you heard from Annie yet?" I asked filled with hope.

"Yeah, she called about, what, fifteen minutes ago and said that she wasn't gonna make it since she was sick." She relayed.

"She was sick?" I asked again.

"Yeah. It ain't like her though. I think she's playing hooky with that boy of hers. She didn't sound too convincing. We like her though, so we let it slide." She weakly smiled.

"Any idea on where she would've gone today? Did she mention anything?"

"Well as a matter of fact she did leave me a message to give to you. I thought it was odd, but let me find it." My heart raced with the anticipation of what she could have said. "Here we go." Doris said as she found the piece of paper in her apron. "It says, 'Tell Frankie thanks for coming to the beach party I was filled from the keg to the core'."

"That was it?" I asked puzzled.

"Yep, that's all she said. She sounded like she was trying to whisper that part, so I may have written it down wrong, but I'm pretty sure that's what she said." She reaffirmed.

Betsy and I looked at each other and neither of us knew what the hell she was talking about. We had no clue.

"Well, thanks anyway, Doris. If you hear from her again, please call Betsy's room at Mertz Hall, ok?" I said while Betsy gave her the phone number.

"Maybe, she went back there. Let's go back to the dorm and see if anyone's seen her." Betsy suggested.

"Alright, we haven't done anything else worthwhile." I grimly stated.

"Come on, Frankie, we'll find her, don't worry." Betsy reassured me.

"Yeah, but will it be too late?" I said too loudly.

"What does that mean? Frankie, you don't think that Billy's really capable of killing her do you?"

"All I know, Betsy, is that ANYTHING is possible. Trust me on this one." I strongly said.

"Okay. Let's hit it. Bye, Doris." Betsy waved.

"See you later, girls." Doris said as she continued to help her customers.

## **Chapter Twenty-Nine**

I was trying to figure out what Annie was talking about in her message to me. It didn't make any sense to me at all. It was all I could think about on our way back to the dormitory.

"What the hell was she talking about, Betsy?" I asked again.

"I don't know, Frankie. You guys don't speak in some special code do you?" She smirked.

"Don't be a smart-ass. No, we don't. We hadn't reached that point in our relationship yet. That came today, apparently."

"We'll find her, Frankie. Have faith in your connection. You guys have a stronger bond than anything I've ever seen before." She touched my forearm as she spoke to me during our hike. "I've been Annie's friend for quite some time, and I have never seen her take to anyone the way she has taken to you. It's love, Frankie. I don't know if she's told you that yet, but if she hasn't, then it's coming soon. I can feel it. I guarantee it." She smiled.

"Yeah, she has." I shyly smiled. "I love her too, Betsy. Which is why it's making me crazy that I can't get to her. I really fear that Billy's gonna do something that's gonna be detrimental to the both of them." I explained.

We walked the rest of the way in silence. We went up the steps into the building and into the foyer towards the elevators. We walked up to the security desk and went to sign me in again. I noticed that Annie had signed Billy in.

"Bets, what time is it now?" I panted.

"It's after two."

"Fuck," I cursed under my breath.

*I only have eight hours to find her before it's too late.*

It appeared that Billy had been signed in about twenty minutes ago and that we had JUST missed them leaving.

"Dammit, Betsy, we just missed them!" I spazzed and looked at the security guard. "Hey, do you remember which way this guy and his girlfriend went?" I asked pointing to Billy's name.

*Wait... isn't Billy spelled A-S-S-H-O-L-E?*

"What is this, a daycare center?" He looked at me with indignation. "I have no idea. If they left here then they aren't my responsibility anymore." He stated complacently.

"I bet your supervisor would disagree since your badge says campus security, you pompous ass!" Betsy chimed in.

"Watch it, lil lady or I'll..." He was cut off.

"Or you'll what? Write me a ticket? Go on, and I'll slap a countersuit on you faster than you can eat that pastry. This IS your job to know if the people you are letting in here are safe enough to be in here. My friend happens to be in grave danger. Her boyfriend is crazy! Most of all he is probably high on something and drunker 'n hell and could quite possibly be trying to KILL her! Write THAT on your damn ticket!" Betsy shouted. I was very proud of her for sticking up for Annie like that. She was a good friend.

"Our elevator is here." I said trying to diffuse this situation between them without actually starting to laugh at this man's change in demeanor.

"Good. I was starting to get agitated down here." She glared at the security guard.

The doors closed and Betsy breathed out a long sigh. She looked up at me and smiled hugely.

"I did it! I was intimidating!" She beamed, obviously very proud of her accomplishments.

"Yes, yes you were. Good job. That stupid cop wanna-be was a real piece of work." I said.

"Yeah, but still he was intimidated by me!" She excitedly screamed.

I smiled and shook my head as we waited for the eighteenth floor to arrive. The car finally reached our floor and we walked out. We walked over to Annie's room and jiggled the doorknob again. It was still unlocked. This time the room had changed some. It looked like she had thrown some of her clothing around as if she was packing.

*PACKING?!? Where would she be going? Where did you take her you bastard?*

"What the hell? Is he kidnapping her?" Betsy asked. "It looks as if she was moving or packing or something."

"I know. I have no idea. He obviously was taking her somewhere. God damn it! What was she trying to tell me? I know there had to be something in that message from Doris! THINK, FRANKIE, THINK DAMMIT!!" I screamed at myself.

"Frankie, try to calm down. You are only going to add more stress to your head. Take a deep breath and let's try to piece together all of what she said to you." She soothed.

I took a deep breath and agreed. "You're right Betsy. I do need to calm down. I can't think when I'm like this." I took another couple of breaths and tried to again figure out her message.

*Tell Frankie thanks for coming to the beach party I was filled from the keg to the core.*



Betsy went to her room and grabbed two glasses of water for us. I graciously drank the offered liquid and let it quench my thirst. It felt great going down my extremely dry throat.

"Ok, let's break this apart." I began.

"Alright," she agreed and grabbed a pen and paper off of Annie's desk. "Let's write it down so it gives us something to stare at." She smiled and wrote down Annie's message. "Sometimes you have to have the puzzle in front of you for it to make sense."

"You're a very smart girl, Betsy. I totally agree. Now the first part is for Doris to tell me which she did. So let's forget about that part. Let's just focus on the meat of it." I suggested.

"Deal." She said as she pondered Annie's words again.

We sat this way for over an hour. The keg, the beer, filling her to the core. It didn't make any sense.

*FUCK!! I'm starting to get really annoyed!!*

Betsy could sense my agitation and got some more water for us. She also brought in some vanilla wafer cookies. She knew the way to a woman's heart. Sugar.

"Thanks, Betsy." I said as I checked the time on Annie's clock. "Shit, is that right?" I said pointing to the clock.

"Four fifteen, yeah." She confirmed after looking at her watch.

"Jesus, time is just not on our side, right now." I groused.

"Do you mind if I turn the radio on? This silence is making me a little uneasy." Betsy explained her request.

"Sure, go on." I said as she got up and turned on the small radio on Annie's desk.

Betsy started whistling as she sat close to me and I just looked at her hoping she got the message.

"Oops, sorry. I can't help it, I love Elton John." She said softly stopping all sounds.

"Yeah, me too. Annie told me she liked him as well. Where were we when that would have come up?" I thought for a second and remembered our trip together to the liquor store. "Annie was singing *Bennie and the Jetts* on our way to the liquor store. She had the most beautiful voice. I should have made HER sing at the bonfire."

"Yeah, she does. God, Billy was such a prick that day. I remember when she came back without you, he actually hit her in front of all of us. What a fucking dick. He was just trying to impress his friends at her expense, God I have such contempt for him right now."

As Betsy was retelling her story I almost came out of my skin.

"That's it! The beach party! The keg!" I started to stutter I was so excited. Betsy looked at me as if I was crazy.

"Frankie, what the hell are you talking about?" She asked confused.

"Annie and I went to get another keg for Billy and his friend, COREY! *Tell Frankie thanks for coming to the beach party I was filled from the keg to the CORE!* That's where Billy was taking her. To Corey's house!" I exclaimed.

"Jesus!! That's it!!" She excitedly said.

"Where does he live?" I asked hoping it wouldn't be far.

"Corey lives a little ways from here. He's not a student anymore, but he's fuckhead's best friend!" She added.

"Do you have a car, Betsy?" I kept my fingers crossed hoping she had one.

"Yeah, it's parked in the south lot. If we hurry we should get out there in about an hour or so." She stated.

"An hour? Where the hell does he live?"

"Western suburbs. I'll have to fish out his address from the directory. It's been awhile since I've been there. Billy used to take us all out there to party when Corey's parents would go out of town." She clarified.

"How juvenile." I sarcastically said.

"How Billy." She corrected.

"Touché." I answered as I watched her leaf through the same directory that found us Billy's address. "Is it in there?"

"Gotcha! He lives in Elgin. We just gotta jump on 90 and take it west till we get to Rte 31. I'll get us there, don't worry, Frankie. We'll get her in time." She reassured me.

"Let's hit it!" I said as I jumped to my feet.

"Let me grab my keys and my purse and we'll be outta here." She said as she went and grabbed the items from her room. "Let's go." She said as I met her in the hallway waiting at the elevators.

## **Chapter Thirty**

We jumped onto the expressway only to have the cars stopped bumper to bumper in Cubs traffic. God I hated the city sometimes.

"Fuck! We're not gonna get there for like three hours if it stays like this." Betsy whined.

"Isn't there another route we can take?" I asked desperately.

"No, unfortunately, this is the fastest way." She resigned.

"Dammit. Hopefully this will break up at the junction." I said filled with hope.

*Hang on, baby, we're coming. Please hang on.*

After two and a half hours on the tollway we finally reached Rte. 31 leading us to Elgin. Betsy maneuvered the car through the steady city traffic on the two lane road. She took a right turn on a dirt road and I immediately felt my stomach go into knots. We had to be close.

She turned left next to a small shed painted like an old red barn and pulled into the driveway.

"I do believe this is it. Let me recheck the address, but I'm almost positive, this is Corey's place." She said as she checked the directory.

"Time check, please." I said to her tapping her wrist.

"Almost seven thirty, God that took long." She breathed out.

"Shit, we don't have much time left." I said unknowingly.

"Frankie, is there something you aren't telling me? Time for what?" She asked.

"I just have a bad feeling is all." I lied.

I got out of the car and ran to the front door and rang the bell. I waited for a few minutes and rang it again. After no one answered I started to knock loudly on the big wooden door.

"Hello? Is anyone home?" I yelled.

Betsy had caught up to me at this time and started to look inside the windows to see if anyone was home. "I don't see anyone. Let me check around back. He's got a porch back there where we used to hang out."

"Ok, I'll keep trying up here." I said as she walked towards a large fenced in area. She opened the gate and walked towards the back of the house. I continued to ring the bell and knocked hard until I felt the skin on my knuckles start to rebel.

"COREY?! Can you hear me?" I pleaded to the door. I shook the handle but it was locked.

*Please let someone be home... please!*

A car pulled up behind Betsy's Ford and a familiar faced male came out of the car. It was Corey, if I wasn't mistaken.

"Hey, you're Corey, Billy's friend right?" I interrogated.

"Yeah, who wants to know?" He quipped.

"My name is Frankie, and I'm..."

"Oh, YOU'RE Frankie. I suppose you are looking for Annie." He said as he put his arms across his chest.

"Yes, Corey, I know you don't know me very well, but Annie's in danger, grave danger." I tried to sound convincing.

"Danger from what? Billy? You're crazy." She said as he pushed his way past me.

"Please, Corey, you have to believe me. I know for a fact that Billy's been drinking a lot today and he's probably been smoking some too. That's no way to be driving around. He could get them killed. I'm sure he told you about Annie and me, but still, think about the potential here. Your friend could die today." I passionately said the last part hoping to jar some kind of feeling from this doped up idiot.

"Gee, I guess I shouldn't have given him those J's for the road then huh?" He said as he was scratching his head.

"The road? Where were they going, Corey? Please tell me. If you have any feelings for your buddy, you have to tell me." I pleaded.

"Well the only reason he came up here was to get some dope from me. He scored what he wanted and he bailed back to the city. Something about taking that bitch of a girlfriend back to the scene of the crime. I don't know what the fuck that meant, but I knew he was pissed." He recalled.

*I can only imagine the beach was the place in question.*

"BETSY! Let's go!!!" I screamed. "Thanks Corey, there's hope for you yet." I looked towards the fence and screamed again, "Betsy we're outta here, let's go!" I saw a glimpse of her running towards the gate. I opened it for her and we ran back to the car. "Bye and thanks again." I stupidly waved at the idiot waving back. "Fuck, Betsy, we have to make some serious tracks."

"I'm on it." She said as she pulled around Corey's car towards the street. She put it in high gear and screeched her way to the main road.

"Frankie, it's already after eight o'clock, if we hit any traffic going into the city we might not get there until around ten or so."

"Shit! Well we just gotta make sure WE get there safely. Go fast and I'll watch for cops."

"You got it." She said. What a team we were. I liked Betsy a lot. I wondered if she was still around in my time.

*Note to self: look up Betsy Carter in phonebook.*

Betsy drove east on 90 and traffic was pretty smooth until we started getting closer to the city.

"What is it with the traffic today? It's a fucking Monday for Chrissakes!" I pouted loudly.

"Oh shit, that's the problem, it's Memorial Day." A lightbulb went off in Betsy's head.

"OH FUCK! No wonder! God, I hope it's better than it was getting out of the city." I kept my fingers crossed.

"Let's hope. Don't bank on it though. This is the time when everyone comes back from the weekend out." She stated truthfully.

"I know. Let's just do what we can." I breathed out. I would rather run back if I knew it would be faster than this."

It was after ten by the time we got back into the city. I knew approximately where the accident was going to take place and when, I just needed to make sure it didn't happen. I needed to make sure that no one got hurt, and now that included Betsy.

"Betsy, I want you to do something for me. I want you to pull over and let me out here." I started to say pointing to the side of the road.

"Why? What's going on?" She asked a little alarmed.

"Nothing. I want to hang out by the diner and see if she came back or called. I want you to go to the dorm and see if they are in there. Can you do that?" I hoped her answer was going to be yes.

"Yeah, if I see anything I'll call you at the diner and you do the same if you hear anything. Here." She scribbled down her number on a matchbook and handed it to me. "Don't lose it, I don't want people to think that number is for a good time." I looked at her funny. "It's on a fucking matchbook, Frankie. It might as well be a bathroom wall!" She said outraged.

"Ok, Ok! I get it!" It took me a second, but I did get it. I laughed in spite of my anxiety and got out of her car. "Hey, one more thing, can I borrow your watch, please?" She nodded and gave me her wristwatch. "Thanks for driving all over the place, Betsy. I really appreciate it. You're a good friend. I'll talk with you soon." I smiled.

"No problem, Frankie. I'll call if I hear anything." She said as she drove away.

I walked into the diner and found Doris still there. "Thank God, you're still here. Anything more from Annie?"

"I was just on my way out. Ten thirty and I'm done! No, I haven't heard from her since this afternoon. You mean you haven't heard anything from her since then, either?" She asked with wide eyes.

"No, we've been on a wild goose chase looking for her and Billy. I think Billy could do some serious damage to her, Doris. I mean in the most extreme possible way." I stressed the word 'extreme'.

"You think that lil bastard would kill our Annie? Why would you think something like that?"

"Because he doesn't know when to stop drinking and driving and one day it's gonna be the death of him and anyone accompanying him. Literally." I spat.

"I see your point. Well I wish you luck in finding her. She's gonna show up, darlin. Don't you worry." She said as she patted my shoulder and walked towards the exit of the diner with me.

I walked back outside and started to walk down Sheridan Road. I knew I would see his truck drive by the campus, I just needed to make sure I could stop it in time.

*God please let me be there in time.*

## Chapter Thirty-One

*Ten forty. God, baby, where are you?*

My answer was coming all too quick when I noticed Billy's truck swerving down Sheridan approaching the campus exits. I ran into the street hoping that he'd see me and stop.

No such luck. He made eye contact with me from many yards away but I could see in his eyes that he wanted to hit me. I heard the engine of the truck accelerate and knew he wasn't going to stop. I waved my arms over my head urging him to stop when I saw Annie in the passenger seat grab the wheel just as his truck would have collided with me sending him and the love of my life into the oncoming lane.

It was like slow motion when the impact with the other car happened.

"Noooo!" I shrieked in horror as I watched the front end of the truck crumple from the violent contact it had made with the oncoming vehicle. The smell of burning rubber and oil fouled the air when everything became deathly quiet.

I ran to the truck to see Billy's smashed form against the steering wheel. There was blood all over his head. If I didn't know who he was, I never would've been able to I.D. him. I immediately ran to Annie's side and noticed that she had been thrown out of the cabin of the truck and onto the pavement. She was still somewhat conscious when I timidly approached her.

*This was my fault. Jesus! This was my fault, she was swerving to avoid hitting me.*

I saw her laying on the ground and I couldn't help the tears that started to bleed down my face. Her body looked so lifeless until she coughed.

"Annie!" I started out of my reverie. "Oh, baby!" I cried as I slumped down and held her bloody body to mine.



I felt her face burrow into my neck and then felt the tiniest of kisses being given to me. My breathing hitched as I felt the tender offering.

"I... love.. you... Frankie..." I felt more than heard Annie say. Those were the last words I heard her speak to me.

I lowered her head to look into her eyes just one last time. The beautiful green eyes that I had grown to love so much were now the loving brown eyes I had known my whole life. I rubbed the tears from my own eyes to make sure I wasn't seeing things.

I tried to speak, but I could not. I held the body that was my angel at one time, and it now belonged to my one and only true friend.

Crystal.

The hair and body were still Annie's, but the eyes were hers. I would never forget them as long as I lived.

I took several breaths after I realized she was smiling at me. The voice I thought I had lost returned in a meek childlike tone.

"Crystal? Is... is that you?" I couldn't believe the amount of tears pouring from my eyes.

"Yeah, babe, it's me." She coughed.

"Oh... my God... why? How... why... are you doing this?" I just couldn't understand.

"I told you once that if I could feel love, feel passion and desire just for a moment, that I could die happily. Well I have, Frankie. I knew as soon as I felt your love for Annie. I can feel it now within this body. It is the most incredible feeling I have ever known. This body is so tired." She almost whispered. I was crying at her words, because I now knew what she had done.

"You're leaving me, aren't you?" I sobbed.

"Yes, babe. I am. I told you I would tell you my plan when the time was right. Well, there's no better time than the present."

"Oh, Crystal." I clung tightly to her, knowing the double analogue of that phrase.

"Which reminds me. The present. You have someone waiting for you there. You need to go back." She smirked at me.

"What about..." I stuttered.

"Nonnie knows all about this. She helped me. When I told her that I wanted to take Annie's place she knew why I was doing it. I think that's why she asked you if you were willing to risk anything for Annie. She needed to know how important she was to you. She's okay with it, now. She wasn't at first, but she knows me and knew your worth to me. You have always been there for me, Frankie. Through everything, and for that I'll always love you.

"Nonnie knows this is going to be a strange transition since my physical form will still be there. Well most of it. Annie got to keep these." She motioned to her eyes and I smiled a weak smile at Crystal. "No one knows the spiritual realm like Nonnie and she knows that I'll never really be gone. I'll always be with you, Frankie. Always."

"Oh, Crystal. You are the most incredible person I have ever met in my life. I'll be forever grateful for this. I love you. I'll always love you."

"I know. Now go, they'll be here soon. I can hear the sirens. Go now. Please. Go to sleep, Frankie." She smiled one last smile before she lost consciousness.

"Crystal?" I cried and stared at the now closed lids of my best friend's eyes.

"Thank you, Crystal." I sobbed and held her as long as my body could hold out. I could feel my body going into shock from what I had encountered. Dismissing all of the glares from the onlookers, I placed a final kiss on Crystal's mouth. I laid Crystal's lifeless form on the ground and rested my head on her shoulder one last time. I closed my eyes and said a prayer of thanks to the one person that knew me and loved me like no other.

*Good-bye my friend.*

[To Be Continued...](#)

Ok let me have it!

Feedback is the Ruler of all Bards.

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### The Athenaeum's Scroll Archive

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## ~ A Sacrifice For Friendship ~

by DS Bauden

**Disclaimers:** See Part 1.

### Chapter Thirty-Two

I felt my body start to awaken. I was afraid to open my eyes in fear of not knowing where I was going to wake up. I could hear music in the background of wherever it was and a beautiful voice calling my name.

"Frankie? Can you hear me sweetheart? Please wake up." She said sweetly.

*Oh my God, Crystal!*

I struggled to open my eyes. I felt drugged and sluggish and wanted to stay asleep. It was much nicer asleep. Then she called to me again.

"Please, baby. Come back to me. I'm really afraid here by myself." She softly whispered in my ear.

*That's Crystal's voice all right. Why would she be afraid? Oh my God, it's Annie! She's afraid. Hell I'd be afraid if I were her as well. I AM afraid.*

I made an effort to try to open my eyes. It worked. I woke up in the parlor of Nonnie and Crystal's apartment. My eyes darted around looking for Nonnie. I couldn't find her. I could feel pressure by my arm so I looked down. A curly brown head was lying on my arm and hand. My hand felt moist from warm tears. She must have been crying.

The next words I spoke would be forever branded in my brain.

"Annie, is that you?" I asked tentatively.

I wasn't sure if I really wanted to know that my best friend really had sacrificed herself for me. A dark head slowly raised itself from its earlier position and beautiful green eyes looked up at me.

"Oh, Frankie, yes it's me. Thank God!" She said as she laid her head down on my chest. I brought up my hand and started to stroke her hair with gentle movements. I felt tears welling in my eyes. It wasn't a dream. She's here with me, this time it's for good. I let out a shaky breath and let out the tears that started to come of their own volition.

Annie looked up at me with her eyes shedding tears of her own. We locked our stare and it lasted for many moments. Neither one of us really knew what to say. So much had happened in a matter of minutes, really.

"Are you okay?" I said with emotion filling my voice.

"I think so." She slowly nodded. "Physically, I'm mostly here; mentally, well, I think it's gonna take a bit for me to digest all of this." She stated matter of factly.

"You and me both." I looked around. "Where's Nonnie? Have you seen her yet?" I hoped their first meeting wasn't hard for either one of them.

"Yes, we did meet. It was very awkward for both of us. I know the sacrifice that Crystal made for our happiness. I've never known a friend like that, Frankie. She really was an amazing woman, just like you said. I think Nonnie went out to absorb all of this as well. She didn't seem upset actually. She greeted me with a large smile and gave me a huge hug. It was really comforting being in her arms. I guess that comes from the bond between them. I hope that never goes away. I've never had that kind of nurturing from family before, and I'd hate it if she felt like she couldn't do that since this isn't Crystal's body anymore. I mean it's still Crystal's body, it's just mine now. Oh God... this is so strange!" She put her head in her hands and started to rock.

"Shhh... baby, it's gonna be okay. We'll make it through all of this. Come on, I wanna take you home." I said as I stood on shaky legs. I quickly found a pen and paper and scribbled a note to Nonnie letting her know where we were. I knew she

was gonna need some alone time. As much as she'd say she was alright, I knew she was hurting over Crystal and would for a very long time. I know my life would never be the same without her in it.

*I hope you can hear me, Crystal, because I'll be talking to you very often. I miss you already. I still can't believe what you have done for me. I'll love you forever, babe. I promise to look after Nonnie.*

My thoughts overwhelmed me as I looked at Annie in Crystal's form. I took Annie's hand and led her up the back stairs to my apartment. She couldn't help but stare outside at all the newness of the neighborhood. It was going to be fun showing her all that had changed in the last twenty-six years or so. Kingsley Avenue was definitely a different place than it used to be. Rogers Park had changed almost completely since the time she knew of. It was undoubtedly going to be a time of rediscovery for Annie. I just hope it wasn't going to be too hard for her to adjust to her new life.

We walked into my kitchen from the back door and moved inside. The air seemed a bit thick so I turned on the air conditioner.

"Have a look around. Whatever I have is yours, Annie. Are you hungry? Can I get you anything?"

"Yes, I would love a glass of iced tea." She paused to look at me with a confusing stare. "I'm just gonna chalk it up to one of her likes because I have never liked tea." She smiled.

"I'm gonna have to agree with you. Crystal was an avid tea drinker. She didn't drink much else actually. I have some of her favorite blend in my cabinet. I'll be right back." I smiled and wondered how many other things we were going to find that were Crystal's likes and new to Annie altogether.

"Thanks, Frankie. I really apprec..." I heard her stop and gasp from the other room.

I immediately went to her and wondered what had happened. I saw her in the hallway looking at her reflection in the mirror.

*Oh God! I bet she is really freaking out right now.*

I walked up very slowly trying to register her reaction to her new physical attributes. I couldn't describe the look she gave her new body. She was definitely intrigued by it. She went from having medium length straight blonde hair to having mobs of long curly brown hair. She just kept touching her face and neck with total disbelief etched in her expression.

I rested my hands on her hips and looked into the mirror over her shoulder and never said truer words in my life.

"She was always incredibly beautiful to me, Annie. Now with your spirit in there, I've never seen that body more beautiful. I couldn't have asked for a better mixture of people to love, Annie."

She turned in my arms and looked deeply into my eyes. I saw so much love reflecting back at me I felt a warmth spread throughout my entire body.

"I love you, Frankie. I love you more than I can say right now. Would you kiss me, please? Let me know that this is real." I could see the tears begin to pool in her eyes and knew she needed to feel the connection that only we shared.

I slowly leaned down and gently pressed my lips against hers. The kiss was different than what I'd felt before. These were Crystal's lips. I could feel Annie's emotion getting the best of her. I felt the sob that escaped her lips as I pulled back.

"Annie? Are you alright?" I asked with concern on my face.

"You aren't going to love me the same way now are you? It's her body not mine. These are her lips you are kissing, not mine. I could feel it, Frankie." She stopped and put her head in her hands and continued crying.

This was breaking my heart. I wonder if Crystal had the ability to read minds and just never told me. I never thought about the fact that I would be loving Crystal's body. I would see it everyday. Was it guilt that I was feeling? I wasn't sure. I knew that Annie couldn't know the doubt I had otherwise it would break her. That wasn't what this was about. I just needed to get used to this. It was so new for all of us.

"Annie, please believe me when I tell you I love you. It is just gonna take a little while to get used to this. I've known this body almost all my life, and loving it with

the passion that you and I share, never really crossed my mind. Let's just allow this to absorb a little, Ok? I'm still a little whacked from the journey home." I said honestly. I really wasn't allowing Crystal's death to sink in yet.

"Oh, Frankie. I'm so sorry. I'm being so selfish. You have just lost your best friend. God I'm such an asshole. Forgive me, please?" I really thought that Crystal had those abilities after all. I think when the emotions are high, she can feel what I am thinking. Maybe Annie was just really in sync with what I was going through. "Frankie?" She stared at me. I guess I checked out for a second.

"Yes, baby?" I whispered.

"I love you." She said as she wrapped her arms around me.

"I love you, too." I replied in soft tones. "Can we take a rest? I really think I need to lay down." It dawned on me how exhausted I was.

"Let's, I'd love to lay in your arms." She smiled through unshed tears.

"Good because there is no better place I'd like to have them right now, then wrapped around you." I winked and led her into my bedroom.

"This is lovely, Frankie." She said looking around.

"Thank you." I smiled. "Come in here." I said as I pulled down the sheets and slid to one side of the bed. She took her bracelets off and placed them on the night table. Annie slid into the bed and snuggled close to me. She pulled up the sheets and rested her head on my shoulder. My arms wrapped around the familiar frame. I kissed the top of her head out of habit and held her close as we drifted off.

### **Chapter Thirty-Three**

I woke up in darkness. I checked my clock and it flashed nine twenty-one. We must have been tired. I haven't taken a nap like that in forever. I felt the weight of Annie's head on my shoulder. We hadn't moved since we layed down. The light from the street lamp shone into my room. It illuminated Annie's features beautifully.

She looked so at peace now. I just marveled at what had taken place in the last day. I was so heartbroken just yesterday and now I had the love of my life laying in my arms, but in the form of my best friend.

"Jesus." I whispered.

I felt her stir on me and her leg flipped over onto my own. She snuggled closer and breathed a deep sigh of contentment. I held her tightly and kissed her head once more.

"How long have you been awake?" She mumbled with sleepy edges in her voice.

"Not long. How did you rest? Okay?" I asked as I brushed her cheek with the back of my knuckles.

"Yeah, I did. It really felt great laying in your arms, Frankie." She said as she leaned over and gently kissed my chest, which was the closest thing to her mouth.

"It was great to hold you and not worry about not being here when I woke up. I think I'm gonna get used to that." I said as my mind raced back to Crystal. "I still can't believe what she did for me, Annie. For us."

"I know, sweetheart. She was really special. In fact she came to me in my dreams."

I adjusted myself to look into her green eyes. "Really? What did she say?" I knew it wouldn't be at all crazy if she had. It's just like Crystal to try and get the last word in.

*God I'll miss that feistiness.*

"She wanted me to tell you not to be sad for her since she would be with you every single day. She did what she did out of her love for you and your friendship. You meant more to her than anyone, Frankie, well except for Nonnie. She said to be happy. Your happiness is all that mattered to her."

"She really said all of that? I wonder why she didn't tell me that herself. Well, I guess she did that night." My sadness was gripping at my heart and Annie picked up on that right away. She squeezed me tightly and I felt all of my defenses go down. The unchecked tears streamed down my face and onto my ears and pillow.



"It's okay to cry, Frankie. I'm right here for you. Let it all out. Please don't hold it back." I heard those sweet words from the mouth of the woman I was mourning. God it was confusing to me. I knew one day it would all work out, but right now I didn't know whether to accept this or not. I had no choice, it had already been decided. I just wished I had a say in the matter. If asked, would I have really known which answer to give? I think I should thank Crystal for not asking that of me. I wouldn't be able to answer. She took that option away from me and did what she thought she had to do. She felt my love for Annie and knew how important that love was to me. God she was an amazing woman, indeed.

My sobbing got louder as the realization that my friend was gone soaked deeper and deeper into me. I felt my body shake with each breath I took. Annie just held me as I cried. She said soothing words to help me grieve. She knew what kind of loss this was to me. This was a close second to me losing my father. At least I was with Crystal as she died. For that I will be eternally grateful.

I felt my sobs lessen and my body relaxed into Annie. She kissed my face and wiped my tears as they tried to escape my eyes. She was a very loving woman and I knew our lives together would be very special. I looked down at her with swollen eyes and smiled weakly at her.

"Thank you, Annie. I didn't see that coming and I'm glad I had you with me. I knew eventually it would happen, but..." I stopped as Annie placed her finger on my lips.

"Shh... it's ok, Frankie. You don't ever have to apologize for mourning someone you loved. I'm so sorry that I was the reason for her death."

"Now wait... she did this for us, Annie. Please don't take this on alone. She knew how much I loved you. She saw me when I would return from seeing you and I was an absolute wreck. I couldn't breathe without you, Annie. She saw all of this and made her own decision about this. Apparently she and Nonnie had talked about this before it even happened. I went into the parlor that day to stop the accident. I couldn't bear the thought of you dying the way that you did."

"You knew about the accident?" She looked at me with wonder.

"Yes, I did. I needed to know if you were really real, Annie. Crystal and I went to City Hall to look up the record of your death. I was really just looking for any clue that would tell me that you were a real person and not someone from my dreams.

We went into the Hall of Records and a woman there typed in all of your information into the computer and then the year, 1974. She pulled up a car accident involving you and Billy. A fatal car accident."

She just stared at me.

"You got this information from a computer?" She asked.

"Oh my God... there is so much that you don't know." I smiled. "But yes, I found out this information and went back trying to stop Billy from killing you. Unfortunately, you tried to avoid hitting me on the street and you crashed anyway. I saw the truck going into the oncoming traffic and all I could think of was that I was the reason you crashed!"

"Frankie, Billy was the reason we crashed. He was drunk as shit and had no business driving at all. Please don't blame yourself for his actions. I'm just glad he can't hurt anyone ever again. The bastard. I hope Crystal kicks his ass." She smiled.

"Believe me, Annie, where Billy went, he'll never even see Crystal. She's in a much better place. I'm sure of that."

"You're probably right." She smiled back at me as her stomach made it's presence aware.

"You hungry?" I asked with a smirk.

"Oh God yes! I was just waiting for the right time to let you know." She said looking down almost embarrassed.

"Well, I need to warn you, Crystal had one hell of an appetite. Look out. You're gonna eat more than you ever imagined. Count on that!" I laughed. God that felt good to laugh with her again. I knew it was only the beginning.

"Really?" She raised an eyebrow.

"Really. Let's test this. How about some Chinese?"

"Oooh, yes, please."

"God, that was easy. That was her favorite food in the whole world. She would set

the table and I would be doing something and then the food would arrive. She had this little jingle she'd always sing if I wasn't getting to the table fast enough. Let me see how it went..."

"If you're too late... you know I won't wait... and you'll get nothing but an empty plate." She smiled and finished the jingle without me. I just stared back at her and immediately embraced her as hard as I could.

*Crystal didn't really leave. Just her soul. I guess every part of her is the same minus her eyes and spirit. Her heart is the same her brain, maybe she can remember some of the things that Crystal knew. This is amazing. I have been given a gift that I can never repay. Crystal and Annie are one person.*

"You know the song?" I asked with a teary smile as I pulled back from the embrace.

"I guess so. I don't know where it came from, but I knew it." She smiled with a bit of confusion on her face.

"I don't think I'm gonna question anything anymore. I'm just gonna let things happen and see where they take me." I said in awe.

"Frankie?" She called my name.

"Yes?"

"Can we eat now? I got a craving for some egg rolls." She laughed.

"Yes m'lady, let's feed that beast of yours." I said as I kissed her cheek and got up from the bed.

She got up as well and asked if she could take a shower first.

"You want me to run downstairs and get you some clothes?" I asked.

"That would be great. I wouldn't even know where to look for them."

"I bet you would." I smirked. "Now there are towels in the linen cabinet in the bathroom and there's shampoo and whatnot in the shower itself. I have an extra toothbrush in the medicine chest as well."

"Thanks, Frankie. Thank you so much for loving me." She beamed.

"No thanks necessary. I'd be a fool not to." I said as I gently kissed her lips with my own. "Like I said, that toothbrush is in the medicine chest." I winked.

"You know... just for that, I might not brush till after we eat!"

"I'm only teasing. I would kiss you even if you hadn't brushed your teeth at all."

"Liar."

"Ok, so I exaggerate a bit. You'll get used to it."

"Get out of here!" She jabbed at my stomach playfully.

"I'll be right back, Annie. Just be careful, I put a new razor in there, don't go and play Psycho in the shower."

"I won't. See you soon."

"Bye now." I almost had the door closed when I poked my head in again as she started to undress. "Any preferences for underwear?" I smirked.

"Frankie! Just grab anything, I don't even know what she has!" She was clearly blushing and it was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen.

"All right, all right, I'm going! Jeez!" I laughed as I shut the door to my bathroom.

I knew Nonnie would be downstairs when I got there. I just didn't know what I was going to say to her. It was because of me that her grandchild gave her life to someone else.

*I have no idea what I'm going to say. Sorry about that Nonnie. Sheeyaaa... that'd go over like a sword through the chest. It'll come, Frankie, just go down and talk to her.*

I walked down the back steps and walked towards their back door. I saw Nonnie in their kitchen. I softly tapped on the window and she smiled and motioned for me to come in.

"Hi Nonnie." I said unable to meet her eyes.

"Come here, child." She took me to her and I fell into her arms. I started to cry and she rubbed my back as she always did when I was upset about something. "You know neither of us had the will to stop her from doing what she did. That girl had a stubborn streak a mile long." She calmly stated.

"I know, but still." I sobbed.

"Shh... you and I know that what she did, she did from her heart and she only wanted you to be happy. She knew when she was a little girl that her gift would help you somehow." I sniffed and looked into her eyes with my own.

"Really?" I sniffled again and she embraced me again. I could tell it was easier for her to talk to me about this while she had something or someone to hold onto. She wasn't fooling anyone, least of all me. I knew she was hurting.

"Yes. When she was about eleven or so she came to me and said, 'Nonnie, one day my spirit is gonna give life to someone. It's gonna make Frankie real happy.' I didn't really know what she meant by that. We had always known her gift was strong, sometimes it was stronger than mine.

"She came to me after your last encounter with Annie and she told me what she needed to do. Not wanted, but needed. She knew that I could help her with the power of my own gift. We talked about it for hours. I didn't want to let her go, but more than that, I knew she needed to do this for herself as well as for you. She loved you so much, Frankie. When she saw the pain you were in, she knew there was no other way. This was the ultimate sacrifice that anyone can give to someone. She did it without hesitation. That's how much she loved you. She came to me today after she had spoken with Annie. She knows how upset you are, but she knows how happy you'll be."

"Annie told me that Crystal came to her in her dreams. I knew it was true." I whispered.

"Yeah, she'll be with us always, Frankie. You have to know this. I know you never really believed in any of the things that we did, but you never made fun of her or me. In fact I remember a few occasions of you coming to her rescue when people would make fun of her for her gifts. You were her knight in shining armor. She'll

always be here, trust me. As much as I'll miss her, she'll actually be within sight all the time. It's just going to be hard to keep reminding myself that it's not really her. It'll be a great reminder of who she was though. I'm thankful for that. Did Annie tell you we spoke a little before you woke?" She asked.

"Yes, she did. She said she was so happy when you didn't shun her for what had happened. She really felt the bond between you and Crystal and it brought tears to her because she'd never had that from any family member before. She's hoping that it doesn't end." I explained hoping that I didn't break my confidence with Annie.

"It won't, child, and you tell her that. I knew she was someone special. The minute she entered Crystal I could feel how special. I knew that instant of your love for each other. Crystal was right for doing what she did. I gave her my blessing and I want you to know that too. I'm not angry nor bitter. I will always have my grandchild in here." She said as she pointed to her heart as we separated. "She'll always be with us, Frankie."

"I love you, Nonnie." I said as I hugged her one last time.

"I love you too, Frankie. You've always been a blessing to me. You've been like my own child. That will never change." She had such love in her expression that I knew then things were really going to be okay.

"I have to get some things for Annie. Do you mind if I get them from her room?"

"Not at all. I'm gonna assume that she's gonna spend a lot of time upstairs with you then?" She smirked.

"If that's ok."

"I wouldn't have it any other way. I think it'll be nice to have this place to myself. She was getting too old to be here anyway." She winked.

"Uh huh." I winked back and set off to Crystal's room.

## **Chapter Thirty-Four**

I walked into Crystal's bedroom and her scent was everywhere. I sat down on her bed and just looked around for a moment. She was such a special person. She had nothing but love to give to anyone that would give her the time of day. She didn't really have any friends other than me. I'm still not sure why that was. She was incredible. I'm very honored to have been her best friend.

I stood and walked over to her dresser. I never really went through her underwear drawer before. Never really had a reason to. I picked up a pair of black lacy panties and smiled.

"What were you going for with this look, eh babe?" I said to myself. "Very nice."

I picked out a bra to match and I knew I was going to get swatted from Annie for my choices but I know she was gonna look awesome in them. I grabbed a shirt and a skirt that I saw Crystal in a lot. They were comfy for her to wear. Hopefully Annie would like what I chose for her.

I closed the drawers and the closet and made my way back into the living room. Nonnie was reading while the news played in the background.

"You have everything you need, child?" She asked looking at my arms.

"Yeah, I think I got what she'll need for the rest of the night. We'll be back tomorrow. Would you like to have breakfast?"

"I would love that. See you in the morning." She said with a smile.

"Good night, Nonnie." I said as I leaned down and kissed her cheek.

I walked out of the kitchen and back upstairs to my place. I found Annie on the couch staring at my entertainment center with eyes as wide as the Grand Canyon. She was wrapped in a towel with her hair slicked off her face. God she looked beautiful.

"What on earth do you call this?" She asked as she saw me come in.

"Paradise." I smiled.

"No, really. This is amazing. I'm only going to assume that is a TV but Jesus, it's huge!" I smiled with pride. I had always loved my home theater.

"Well, get dressed and I'll treat you to all the toys that I have."

"Cool!" She stood and her towel gave way. Her face darkened a bit from embarrassment and she held the towel to her body. "Sorry, I'm usually not so modest. It's just a new um... "

"Body?" I finished.

"Yes, I guess for lack of a better word, body would be about right." She smiled.

"Well I got some things for you to cover that beautiful body up with." I said as I handed the clothes to her. "If there is something you don't like, we can always go to the store to get you something else."

"Thanks, Frankie, but I'm sure these will be great."

"You're welcome. I'm gonna order some dinner for us. It should be about thirty minutes or so. I'm just gonna order our regular. I'm sure you'll like it."

"OK, Frankie. I'll be back." She said as she walked towards the bedroom.

I took the phone and hit speed dial number five, which was the Haw Moy Restaurant. I heard Ellen's lovely voice and gave her my order.

"Thanks, Frankie. It'll be about a half-hour or so, ok? Say hi to Crystal for me." She finished as my throat constricted.

"I will. Bye, Ellen and thanks." I choked out and clicked off the phone.

A little while later Annie emerged from the other end of the house. She looked radiant. Her hair was still wet but she was dressed and looked so refreshed.

"You look beautiful, Annie. Do you feel better?" I asked as I went to her and gave her a tiny kiss.



"Mm... I do. I have to give her credit. She had a great body. It'll take some getting used to, but it feels so much more alive than mine did. I think mine was just so tired. It wasn't the best of lives that I led, Frankie." She sadly said.

"I know, baby. Crystal said something to the effect of your body being tired when she entered it. I'm so sorry your life was so hard."

"It's ok, Frankie. We can't changed the past. Just the future."

"Well, we did kind of change the past if you think about it. The actual events might be the same, but the people involved are just a little bit different." I smiled.

"Very true." She agreed.

"Dinner will get here in about thirty minutes, just as I thought. Ellen is really quick with deliveries."

"Good, cuz I'm starving!" She said motioning over to the TV. "Are you going to show me how this contraption works?" She said with her hands on her hips.

"Of course. Let me show you the remotes."

"The whats?" She said as she raised her eyebrows.

"The remote controls. They work the system so you don't have to get up. Things got very accommodating in last twenty-six years. We've become very lazy. Just wait till I show you the microwave."

"Should I be afraid?"

"Nah, there's just been a lot of changes in technology to make our lives easier. I know you're just gonna be amazed at some of the things now." This was better than anything. Being the gadget queen that I was, it was gonna be so great to show off all these things to her. I couldn't wait.

*God she's gonna freak when she discovers the Internet. Slowly, Frankie, you don't want to freak her out even more!*

I pressed the power button on the TV and it came to life. I turned the other decks on as well so she could feel the power of the home theater.

"So many things came and went that you didn't even get a chance to see. As far as music goes we have compact discs now and not albums, we have digital videodiscs to replace videotape, which you never even saw so don't worry about that. We still use videotapes, but I prefer the quality of the DVD. Umm... here I'll show you. Let me grab this Batman movie to show you."

She waited patiently as I popped in the disc and waited for the credits to blow her away.

"Wow! This is just like the movie house! This is incredible!" Her eyes were as big as saucers as she looked at the screen and tried to follow the sound with her eyes. Surround sound is an amazing thing.

The movie started and I pressed stop to end the demonstration.

"Hey! What did you do that for?" She pouted.

"We have plenty of time to watch movies. I have so many you'll be bug-eyed before you get a chance to watch them all." I promised.

"You're right. I was just so into it, I couldn't help but pout when it was over so soon." She explained. "Hey Frankie? Do you have one of those computers?"

"Yeah, I do. Do you want to see it?" I smiled.

"Yes, I wanna see what kind of thing can give you information like what you found at City Hall."

"Sure, but I think I hear the delivery people. Can I show it to you after we eat?"

"Of course. I'm just so curious about all the things I missed out on."

"You haven't missed out, Annie, they're just better now than when they first came out." I tried to make her feel better.

"I bet that's true."

Sure enough the delivery was at the back door with hot food for us to ingest. It smelled wonderful. Annie was at the door in a flash grabbing the bags from my hands. Ernie the delivery guy smiled at her hunger.

"You'll never change will ya, Miss Crystal?" He smiled and waited for an answer that never came. She didn't realize she was being spoken to.

"She actually goes by Annie now, Ernie." I nudged.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Miss Annie, you have a great night, you hear?" He smiled.

"You too, Ernie." She smiled not looking up from the contents in the bag. She was absolutely priceless.

I closed the door and just watched her instincts play out at the table. She knew exactly where my dishes were and placed them the way we always did when we ate together. It was truly amazing. I just sat down at my usual place and waited for her to settle.

"You know so much about her, yet you never even met." I said in awe.

"What?" She asked stopping abruptly in her tracks.

"I've been watching you for the last few minutes. You have set the table exactly the way Crystal used to. I'm sure you had no idea, either." I sat in bewilderment.

"No, I had no idea. Wow, this is really wild."

"You know, I'm gonna try not to compare what you do with the way she did things. I think that's gonna be easier for you if I don't. I don't want you to think that I'm gonna be comparing the two of you all the time."

"It's ok, Frankie. That's completely natural. I really don't mind. She was an incredibly person and I'm honored to be compared to her. I've never been so lucky in my whole life." She beamed.

"God, I love you so much, Annie." I said as I stood to embrace her. I leaned into her caress like it was bath water. I pulled my head back and looked deeply into her eyes. I could feel myself leaning closer until I felt her lips upon mine. The kiss was tender and gentle but most of all filled with love. That was Annie through and through. Her mouth opened slightly and our kiss deepened as well as our passion. Our tongues danced with each other's taking in all of the love that we shared for each other. I heard Annie moan into my mouth and it was the sweetest music I'd

ever heard. I got a tingly feeling in the pit of my stomach and it was intensifying with each moment that had passed.

She pulled away breathlessly and looked into my eyes with passion written all over her expression.

"Dinner." She said.

"Hmm?" I asked clearly dazed.

"Food, dinner, then this, later." She breathed out.

"Ok. Dinner first, necking later." I smiled and managed to find my chair as I stumbled from lack of oxygen.

"I like that." She said.

"You like what?" I asked.

"I like the fact that you get all fuzzy headed after we kiss. I'm just glad I'm not the only one."

"You'll never be alone in that category. My knees would have given out next if you hadn't stopped that kiss." I smiled.

"Mine too, I think that's why I stopped." She said with a saucy smile on her lips.

"Let's eat, this looks delicious." She said as she looked over the entrées.

"Dig in. And I know you will." I grinned knowing I would be right. And I was. She ate with abandon. It would have looked like she hadn't eaten in weeks to any stranger watching. I just looked on with adoration. I loved her more and more with each passing minute. This wasn't Crystal eating before me, it was Annie, my Annie.

## **Chapter Thirty-Five**

As the credits rolled, I watched her face as the tears cascaded freely down her cheeks. Her eyes were red-rimmed and swollen from the story that had unfolded. I knew she was gonna love that movie. It told our story only ours was a happier tale.

"I can't believe that." She sniffed. "It was like me and you up there. I think we have it better though. He had to die to be with her again. God, my heart aches right now. I'm so glad I'm here with you, Frankie." She leaned into my body and wept. She wept for the sadness in the film we'd just watched, but I also knew she wept in thanks for Crystal and what she gave us.

It was nearly two in the morning and I hadn't even shown her my pride and joy. There was no better time like the present.

"Wanna see my shop?" I asked as I rubbed the head resting on my chest.

"Your shop?"

"Yes, the one my Pop left me. It is the one thing that I have that will always bring me close to him."

"Lead the way!" She said excitedly. She wiped her tears on the sleeve of her shirt and reached down and offered her hand to me. I took hers and pulled myself up. I walked her down the steps and opened the door leading into Technicolor Classics. I flipped the light switch and the fluorescence came to life.

I watched with pride as she walked through my shop touching almost everything as she passed by. She looked at me with such love it made my heart swell.

"This place is incredible, Frankie. I bet you make some people really happy with these things. There is so much paraphernalia from every movie of old and new. This is so cool! I love these costumes! Are they originals?"

"I used to have a few originals, but mostly these are replicas. I go to auctions and places like that to make sure I get whatever I can. People really get a sentimental feeling being here. I'm just glad I get to be a part of that. My Pop taught me how wonderful that can be. I've made so many people's days with the things I sell here. It's what makes me love what I do."

"You are a remarkable woman, Frankie Camarelli. I'm so glad you came back to me."

"Me too, Annie. Me too." I said as I wrapped my arms around her. It was a feeling I couldn't get enough of.

"Are you ready for bed?" She asked softly into my shoulder.

"Are you tired?" I asked not really feeling any fatigue at all since our nap.

"No, actually I just wanted to feel your body next to mine again. I really loved laying with you today."

I felt my body get very warm at her suggestion. "I loved it, too. Sure, come on." I said as she looked around one last time and smiled back at me.

"This place is wonderful, Frankie."

"Thank you. It means so much to me." I said as I turned off the lights and went back upstairs.

"You can tell." She beamed as we walked wrapped around each other.

We made it back upstairs and went into my bedroom. She went to the bathroom and I sat and stared out the window. So much had happened in my life in the last month or so. It was hard to believe it all, really. I was waiting for my alarm to wake me again. It never rang.

Annie came out of the bathroom and I turned to meet a radiant sight.

*I knew she would look gorgeous in those underclothes.*

She saw the look on my face and smiled very seductively. I slowly walked towards her while running my eyes up and down her body with a new desire.

"Annie, you look absolutely breathtaking. You are truly the most beautiful woman I have ever seen." I breathed out.

She placed her hands on the sides of my cheeks and pulled my head down for a kiss. I felt myself moan into her mouth at the contact. She felt so damn good. I pulled her slowly down onto the bed with me. I lightly stroked her petal soft skin with my fingertips. She smelled so good. I breathed in her scent as her hair fell

onto my face. She straddled my body as she had in front of the lake. She moved against me with a desire that matched my own.

Her hands found the buttons on my shirt and slowly worked them open until they were no more. She pulled the shirt off of my body as well as the bra that had no use to me anymore. She slid down to unbutton my shorts and slowly unzipped them while looking directly into my eyes. I knew she saw the wanton hunger in them. I'd never wanted someone so badly in my life as I wanted her then. She returned that stare and licked her lips sending new pulsations down between my legs.

She put the heel of her hand at the apex of my legs and I moaned deeply. She pressed into me and my body started to rock on its own. She shook her head and started to play with the waistband of my underwear.

"These have to come off." She said in a tone I'd not heard before. It thrilled me to no end.

I nodded because I found that I had no voice. She had charged me so high, I couldn't even function.

I raised my body to assist her in taking off the unwanted apparel. I looked at her to let her know that her clothes needed to be removed as well. She understood my stare and preceded to undress slowly in front of me. She unhooked her bra with a sway in her hips and gracefully let it fall down her arms and onto the floor. Her breasts were perfect. Her nipples were taut with a need to be touched. She moved around sensually and playfully and removed her panties by working them down her thighs and calves with a painful slowness.

"Come here." I husked. "Please." I needed to feel her body on me again. I needed the connection we shared only a few days ago. It seemed like a lifetime to me.

She climbed back onto the bed and straddled my body once again. I felt the wetness between her legs and it excited me more than she had already. The contact of our skin brought sighs from both of us. It just felt so right. I kissed her slowly and deeply like never before. I wanted to make this last. I could feel her body responding to my kiss. She began to rock her hips and press her sex hard against my stomach. I could feel each movement as if she were inside of me. I was so aroused I couldn't think. Her movements intensified as I brought one of her

breasts to my mouth. I began to lick and suck the nipple on her right breast as my hand fondled her left.

"Oh, Frankie..." She whispered into my ear sending my passions even higher.

Her hips moved harder and faster into my belly. Her wetness was covering me completely. My hips had matched her movements pressing our sexes together and occasionally I would feel the wetness of hers touching mine.

"God, you feel incredible." She said breathlessly as I heard her sighs begin to get louder. She was getting close and so was I.

She took my earlobe in her mouth and quietly said things to make my skin shiver with gooseflesh. She brought her tongue into my ear and I almost came on the spot. She knew my weakness with one tiny action. I squeaked out a moan and said her name softly. She responded in kind with more attention to my ears. She would be my undoing shortly. I felt my body move into hers with a grace and synchronicity that felt so natural. It was like we had been making love for years.

She ground her hips faster and faster as I heard her whispering my name over and over again.

"Oh God, Frankie, I'm so close." She sighed.

"Let it go, baby. Let me feel you." I whispered back. I knew once she started to go I would follow right after.

I felt the perspiration on her back as I dug my nails into her. She began to shake as her orgasm took full control.

"Ahhh..." She ground out.

"Yessss...." I could feel my own orgasm reaching it's peak and I let my body shake with each breath I took. Our bodies ground into each other as our sweat soaked skins heated up with the friction.

As the last of our spasms ceased, Annie collapsed on top of me panting hard into my ear. I had to move her head or I would start all over again. She moved her body so half of it was on me and half on the bed. She rested her head in the crook of my arm and shoulder.



"That felt wonderful, Frankie. You are an incredible lover." She sighed.

"As are you, my love." I kissed her head as I let my own breathing return to normal.

We stayed like that for many moments just loving the feel of each other together once again. This time I wasn't going anywhere.

She lazily started drawing designs on my chest with her fingertips. I'd hold her closer and I would feel her smile into me. She moved her fingers lower and started to play with my nipple on my right breast.

She watched in fascination as it grew with attention and shrunk from the warmth of her palm. She played this game until I couldn't handle it anymore. I held her hand as she began to play again.

"I can't take much more of this teasing."

"Who's teasing?" She said as she rolled over to take my nipple into her mouth. Her thigh moved to rest between my legs and press against my sex.

"Ohhh..." I breathed out.

"You are so beautiful, Frankie. Do you have any idea?" She said in between kisses to my breast.

I just smiled and let the feeling wash over me. Before I knew it she had put her body between my legs and was licking my torso down to my navel. I looked down to see her dark expression as she continued to go further.

"Oh my God..." I whispered.

She kissed my inner thighs slowly and let her tongue linger as she got closer to the heart of my passion. She teased me incessantly until she read total frustration on my face. I was breathing erratically and as I felt her tongue on my clit my legs opened voluntarily. She reached to up to hold my hips and brought her tongue down again on my swollen flesh. She licked and tasted all that I offered. The sounds of gratification were coming from her loudly with each stroke of her tongue. She entered me slowly with one of her fingers and my body tilted upwards to meet her hand. The pressure building inside of me was one I was learning to love. I had a few lovers in my past, but nothing that compared to what I was feeling at that moment.

Her tongue began to move quicker with each thrust of her finger. My body was responding like it never had before. My hands had found my nipples and were playing with them intensifying the stimulation I was receiving.

"Ahhh.... " I breathed out. I needed to touch her. "Please, Annie."

"Please what?" She asked as she looked at me with deep emerald eyes.

"I need to touch you... please."

I felt her nod against me and without breaking any contact she had moved her body one hundred and eighty degrees. I had everything that I needed right in front of me. I grabbed the back of her hips and lowered her incredibly wet sex down to my mouth. God I had missed tasting her. Even though it wasn't the same physical body, it was still Annie, my Annie. I found her clit and sucked it completely into my mouth. I felt her body tense and her hips press against my face. Her tongue had started to move faster and I knew I wasn't going to last long at all. I sucked hard at her tip and brushed my tongue against it with quick determined strokes. Her body shook with fervor as I felt the start of her climax. I reached over to put my thumb inside of her. Her moans intensified with each thrust of my hand. I felt my body begin it's climb to it's precipice. Her tongue felt so incredible as did the rest of her body. I heard and felt her climax begin. Her breathing came in spurts and her body shook wildly. I held on as my own body betrayed all signs of normalcy. I felt my body quake and my moans were frequent and loud. I cried Annie's name more times than I can remember. She sighed mine again and again until no more words could be spoken.

When we were able to expel any amount of energy, Annie turned to curl up in my arms once again. She was all that mattered right now. I loved her more than I can remember loving anything. I will always love Pop and Crystal, but Annie was the other half of my soul. There were many forms of love and I think I had discovered quite a few of them.

## **Chapter Thirty-Six**

The morning came abruptly as the sun that shone through the window landed directly in my eyes. I flinched at the light and turned to look at my clock.

Nine forty-five.

We had breakfast plans with Nonnie. I had almost forgotten.

"Hey, sleepyhead." I whispered into her ear.

"Hmm...." She murmured and sunk deeper into my body.

"Wake up lil one. We have a date with Nonnie for breakfast. I'm sorry I forgot to tell you that last night."

"Mmm..." She said as she stretched and rubbed her eyes with balled fists, just like Crystal used to do. That made my heart smile warmly and I held her even closer.

"Are you hungry?" I teased knowing she would be just at the sound of the suggestion.

"I am now." She said with a sleep filled voice. Her stomach soon made it's voice heard as well.

I smiled down at her and caressed the face that would look at me for many years to come.

"Do you want to take a shower with me?" I asked knowing we smelled like sex and Nonnie would know it in a heartbeat.

"Ooh, do you always start your days this way?"

"Showering?" I giggled.

"No, showering with a partner." She smiled.

"Not as of late, but it's a tradition I'd like to start as soon as possible." She smiled.

"Let's get going. We don't want to be late." She said as she darted out of the bed and into the bathroom. Crystal definitely didn't have her morning spirit. I laughed to myself with that realization.

We made it down to Nonnie's around ten thirty. She had made a full breakfast including pancakes and scrambled eggs. Annie's eyes got really big and a smile washed over her face as soon as she saw Nonnie.

"Good morning, girls." Nonnie said.

"Good morning, Nonnie." I said as I walked over to her and placed a kiss on her cheek.

"Good morning." Annie said almost shyly. Nonnie picked up on her trepidation and approached her directly. Annie's face was looking down and Nonnie took her chin with her finger and lifted it to face her.

"You have beautiful green eyes my dear. You shouldn't give your shoes all of their attention." She smiled. Annie couldn't help but smile back at her.

Nonnie took Annie into her arms and gave her a long embrace. I could tell she was whispering something into Annie's ear and Annie just nodded as her eyes welled up with tears. My heart was bursting with the sight in front of me. There was so much love between them and they were practically strangers.

*Some bonds just can't be broken.*

"So, how was your first night in the future, my dear?" Nonnie cheerfully asked.

"It was really nice, Nonnie, thanks for asking. We had a delicious dinner and we watched a great movie and Frankie showed me her shop and then we fell into an exhausted slumber. It was bliss." She beamed. I applauded her for keeping out the other parts of our night together.

"So you had a good night then?" She smiled.

"It was wonderful, Nonnie." I chimed in.

"Good, now let's eat." She happily said.

Breakfast was so comfortable. Nonnie and Annie spoke of Annie's life before now. They spoke of her returning to school in the future. She was almost finished with college when all of this happened. I would love for her to get her degree in journalism. I knew she really loved writing. It would be hard to explain to the

school of who she was when she didn't even look like Annie anymore, but I'd move the earth for her if she asked me to. We'll make it happen if she wants it to, somehow.

We said our good-byes and thanked Nonnie for a wonderful meal. I could tell they were going to be great friends. That alone made this all worthwhile. We walked back upstairs and headed for home.

Home.

That word held so much more meaning to me now.

Annie had so many questions about what had happened in the last twenty-six years. I hoped I answered them all correctly. She seemed pleased with the answers I gave so that worked for me for now.

"What about that computer thing you were talking about. Something like that must be really incredible." She said with a little amazement to her face.

"It is." I agreed. "About fifteen years ago computers would fill a whole room because of their size. Well now, computers are so compact you can put them in a briefcase."

"You've got to be kidding me." She said with disbelief.

"No I'm serious. Here let me show you." I took her into the family room and showed her my PowerBook Laptop.

"This is a computer? It looks like a small typewriter with no ink." She giggled.

"This little baby has lots of power and it's all in this tiny casing. It's pretty incredible. Here let's get on the Internet."

I dialed in to my server and my main page came up.

"What do you wanna know? Give me a topic. Anything."

"Anything? Can I be naughty?" She laughed.

"Yes, you can. There are plenty of areas with porn. Believe me." I laughed at her.

"You've got to be kidding. Ok. Ok... Umm.. look up say I dunno... what did you call this? PowerBook. Look up PowerBook."

"Ok," I said as I typed PowerBook into the search engine. "Boom, here are all the places that tell you about the PowerBook. I'd recommend going here though since they were the ones that created it."

"Apple Computer. What a funny name."

"That's what Bill Gates thought too." I said.

"Who's Bill Gates?" She wondered.

"Only the richest man in the industry. He used to work for Apple, now he has his own billion dollar industry called Microsoft."

"Wow. Billion dollar? That's crazy."

"I know, you'll see how much inflation has changed the cost of things. Coffee at your shop was what about a quarter or something?"

"Yeah, about that."

"Well we got coffee houses like Caribou Coffee that only sell coffee and they get a buck fifty for a cup." I said outraged.

"You're kidding! For a lousy cup of coffee??" She couldn't believe it. I still can't.

"Nope sorry to say. It's pretty crazy what people will pay for these days." I shook my head. "Oh and by the way, there is Diet Coke now." I smiled.

She laughed remembering our discussion at the café about Diet Pepsi and Sprite.

"This is a program I think you will like. It's called Microsoft Word. It's a word processing program that works just like a typewriter only you don't have to white out every mistake you have. You can just hit the delete key. You can use this whenever you want."

"Wow, it's like an electronic journal." She said in awe. "You wouldn't mind if I used this? Of course, you'll have to show me how to use this damn thing." She laughed.

"Of course! I know you kept a journal at school, and if you want you can do that here if you'd like. I know how much writing means to you."

"Thank you, Frankie. That means a lot to me."

"You're welcome." I said by kissing her face as she looked down at me. "It's really easy to start too, here give it a whirl."

I watched as she maneuvered the cursor like she had been doing it all her life. She got the hang of it and I couldn't get her off the Internet for almost three hours. She was amazed at the amount of information available just by typing in a topic. I do have to admit, I was the same way when I started to use it.

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The next week or so was filled with Annie making discoveries about the things she had missed out on in her journey. She was like a little child absorbing every ounce of information I could offer her.

I found her many times typing frantically at the keyboard. One day she said I could read it all. She was really coming into her own groove in Crystal's body.

*Oh, Crystal.*

I missed my friend terribly and Nonnie and I had decided that we would have a service for her passing. It wouldn't have been right not to have one. We held a small ceremony in their apartment with candles and incense burning throughout their home. I had placed a picture of Crystal and myself in the middle of two candles. It was a picture my Pop took when the three of us had gone to the zoo. He said he'd never seen two better friends than Crystal and I. He was right. She was the greatest friend I would ever have. I would miss her greatly in my life. She gave me the greatest gift a friend could ever give. She sacrificed herself to give me the gift of love. I, to this day had never known a greater cause. I doubt I ever would.

The End

## Epilogue

As Frankie closed the book in her hands her eyes welled with such tears. She slowly fingered the wording on the cover. "A Sacrifice for Friendship" by A.C. Parker. She glanced up at Annie who was waiting with such anticipation.

"Well?!" Annie exclaimed waiting for a response.

"Umm.." Frankie couldn't find the words.

"Say something, Frankie. Please, I gotta hear what you think!" She said excitedly.

"Well, it's not Shakespeare..." She stopped and noticed the look of hurt in her lover's eyes. "But I never liked him anyway." She smiled. "Annie this is wonderful. I can't believe you hid this from me until now. Well until several hours ago."

"It was a surprise. I wrote it as soon as I'd figured out how to use that damn laptop." She paused to read the expression on her face. "So you liked it?" She said shyly.

"I loved it. I'm so proud of you!" Frankie exclaimed as she picked up Annie and spun her around. "You are so incredible! You have a book! Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I can't even believe it!" She put her down and examined the book one more time. "A.C. Parker?"

"Annie Crystal Parker. She helped me write this as much as anyone. She deserved to be on the cover somewhere. I hope you don't mind."

"Annie, you are the most wonderful person in this world. No, I don't mind at all. I know Nonnie would love to see this as well."



"I can't wait to show it to her."

They both just looked at the book as their arms encircled each other.

"I can't believe you wrote this." Frankie said in awe.

"You told me so much about *your* journey as well. I just wanted you to see what a beautiful story this was. It may fade in time in your mind, but this will keep it fresh in our heads forever. People need to read this. I couldn't wait to start writing it. I'm really proud of it." She beamed at her accomplishment.

"You should be, it's beautifully written, Annie. You did a great job." Frankie said as she kissed her temple. "You'll be the Judy Blume of the Gay Community. People are gonna want more of this romantic stuff." She said sarcastically.

"What, you don't like romance?" Annie jabbed her partners stomach.

"Let's just say I'm more of an action kinda girl." She stated flatly.

"Well, I'm sorry to burst your bubble, but you give me the inspiration for all of this 'romantic stuff' as you so delicately put it. You are my romance, Frankie. You're just gonna have to live with that." She huffed playfully with her hands on her hips.

Frankie looked out the window for a brief moment and remembered why Annie was here in the first place. She took a deep breath and smiled down at her.

"I can live with that." She said with a kiss to Annie's lips.

**THE END**

### **AUTHOR'S NOTES:**

I would like to thank Agatha Tutko for her generous help during the writing of this piece. I will always be in awe of your knowledge. My thanks to you and your gracious

willingness to answer all of my questions. I can't tell you how thankful am for that. I'm especially thankful for the fact that because of this story we became friends. That means more to me than I can say. Thank you.

The lyrics used in Chapter Fifteen were used without permission. But listen to these artists, they are really wonderful.

Patty Griffin's "Good-bye" from her CD, Flaming Red and

Prince's "Forever in My Life" from his double CD, Sign O' the Times.

Thank you all for your incredible feedback from this story. You really made me smile and urged me to continue my journey. For those of you that thought I touched you with my words, you did the same for me with yours. Thank you so much for your support.

As always, this is dedicated to the love of my life. Without you, life would be a very scary place for me. You are my inspiration, I love you.

Feedback is the Ruler of All Bards

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