

Twice in a Blue Moon

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Prologue

"I want something sorted out; you know something you are good at." He smiled briefly.

"Oh yes?" She sipped her coffee.

"Someone who crossed me, some years ago, before my..." He paused. "...enforced holiday. It's just that we think we have found a way to get her."

"You think you have found her? I'm intrigued."

"No, we don't know where she is yet, but, we have found her brother and our sources say she is working with him, albeit under an assumed name. She thought that she could vanish. Stupid girl!" He smiled. "Anyway, I need you to ensure we have the right person, and then I want to have a word with her."

"A word?" She looked up.

"In a manner of speaking. I want her to be my guest for a short time. However she may not be so willing."

"A little gentle persuasion then?" She smiled.

"I am glad we are on the same wavelength". He reached for a brown envelope. "Here are the details. You can ride can't you?"

"Ride?"

"Horses?" He smiled slyly. "I thought you were a Pony Club girl?"

"I was thrown out of the Pony Club." She frowned.

"I know. That's why you are so perfect for this job..."

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## Chapter 1

Rain clattered against the window dripping slowly through the leaking roof, plopping gently into the bucket that sat on the dusty carpet. Monday morning had come, as it did so often, too soon. The sky was dark marking the prelude of a day that would remain rainy and dull. The only sound was the expectant kicking of hungry horses.

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The sign at the end of the drive had once proudly announced the presence of 'The Redbridge Riding School', now it stood at an angle, its letters faded. The pride had gone, and as the water ran across the muddy yard, it was easy to see why.

Here was a place that prided itself on not being special; it was just 'another' riding school. With all the common factors, the riding school horses and ponies. A team of staff, living in uncomfortable and damp accommodation, working long hours for little money and a head girl, Amanda King, who at twenty-four years old was a perfect host to her customers. The staff however felt that she was bossy, but generally fair. Amanda had bought the yard from the previous owners some years before.

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The alarm clock beeped loudly announcing the unwelcome start to another week. Adam reached up and clutched the small clock, staring at the faint green numbers through bleary eyes.

Six o'clock, it was time to drag himself out of the relative warmth of his bed and into the real world.

Adam Bishop was nineteen years old and had worked at the yard for two years. He was an instructor and by his length of service and instructor's status, he was supposedly second in command. The rank meant that more often or not he was the one who had to take most of the customers' lessons, whilst Amanda sat behind the large desk in the office. She was always there to supervise, but as she was the boss, she believed that she was fully in control. However, today she was not.

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He shuddered as the shower drenched him in freezing water. This was not one of the better mornings. Towelling himself dry Adam quickly put on a clean pair of jodhpurs and sweatshirt. He couldn't think what he had done the night before, but he imagined that it had involved rather too much alcohol. Snippets of the evening came back to him briefly. . .

Adam walked into the kitchen and filled the kettle, the door opened, Kate Grimshaw walked past him.

Kate was eighteen. She groaned, rubbed her bloodshot eyes and sat on one of the long bench seats beside the wide pine table, the kettle clicked, steam rose clouding the inside of the window.

"Coffee?"

"Thanks. . . No milk please, I'll have it black." Kate took the mug and gingerly sipped the hot liquid.

"You look as bad as I feel!" Adam slurped his coffee.

"Thanks! I'll take that as a compliment!" Kate grinned weakly.

"What did I drink last night?"

"Too much. . ." Kate frowned. "I can't remember a thing about last night. I don't even know why we went to the pub!" She glanced at her watch. "The others are late getting up this morning."

"Never mind them, I suppose we had better start feeding, I'm sure they will come down when they're ready." Adam took his mug and walked down the hall, grabbing an old wax jacket on the way. He plunged his feet into a pair of well-worn green Wellingtons before going out into the blustery rain.

Adam unlocked the office, normally at this time of the morning Amanda would be sitting in the office, today the door was locked and there was no sign of the head-girl.

"Isn't Amanda there?" Kate stepped into the office, sweeping her hair back from her eyes.

"I don't think that she was with us last night. I'm sure I would remember if she had been." Adam smiled. "But. She's the boss, and if she wants a lie-in, that's up to her!" He picked up the feed room key.

"What's her car doing here?" Kate walked towards the rusty red car that was sitting in the middle of a muddy puddle. She peered through the frosty glass. "Well she's not in there!"

"I didn't expect that she would be! That car is terrible; it's probably broken down again. She'll walk in soon, no doubt mad as hell!"

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The feed room was little more than a badly built shed, which offered little shelter against the elements. The musty smell of bran and pony nuts filled the room as Adam opened the steel bins and started to scoop bran into the first feed bucket.

"Hello. . ." Caroline stepped through the open door. Caroline was seventeen years old, with scruffy brown hair and a fair complexion.

"You're late. . . Where are the others?"

"They're on their way down. . . Is Amanda cross?"

"Cross? No, she's not here yet. . ." Adam noticed that Caroline was frowning. "What's up?"

"Is she not here? Now that is odd. . ." She paused. "Are these feeds ready to take?" Caroline grabbed a pile of buckets and dashed out of the feed room.

"She's acting strangely. . ." Kate laid out another line of feed buckets on the floor.

"I would ignore her if I were you. . ."

Slowly the rest of the staff appeared and started taking feed buckets round the yard. The horses became quieter as they ate. The rain started coming down with more vigour.

There was no sign of Amanda.

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Before the first lesson of the morning, Adam stepped out of the office. Amanda had not made an appearance. In the centre of the yard, there was a gaggle of staff standing, staring into the distance. Adam closed the office door and slowly walked towards them.

". . .No. . . I didn't want to get involved in the first place. Now look what's happened." Caroline shook her head.

". . .Didn't want to get involved? That's rich. You were there! You can't say that you weren't involved." Karen, one of the younger grooms, span on her heels. Seeing Adam standing there, she stopped dead and smiled nervously.

". . .I wasn't the one who came up with this idea. . ." Caroline ranted.

"Caroline." The other staff edged away from her.

". . .It was you lot that did this. . ."

"Caroline. . ." One of them tugged her sleeve.

". . .But what should we do about it. . .?"

"Do about what Caroline?" Adam stepped forward. Caroline stopped "Come on Caroline. Do about what?"

"Shall we go inside and talk about this?" Caroline put her hand on Adam's shoulder.

Kate walked towards them and stopped.

"Hi Kate. Caroline is just about to tell me what is going on." Kate froze and pointed.

"What's up?" Adam stopped and turned round. Suddenly it all became clear...

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Chapter 2

Sunday afternoon, Adam had spent most of the day standing in the outdoor school whilst he taught his pupils. The school was a fenced square of sand, which in the summer was hot and dusty, and was now saturated. Adam had been standing in a deep puddle since it had started

raining about two hours before. He was sure that one of his boots was leaking, but since his jacket and jods' were completely soaked, it didn't really matter. One of the riders pushed their horse into a canter and over the small jump. There was a splash as the horse made contact with the puddle on the other side.

"Very good!" Adam tried very hard to sound at least interested in what was going on. He saw Kate ride towards the gate that led from the moor back onto the yard. She leant down unlatched the gate, and pushed it open, waiting until the other riders had come through before she swung it shut. They made their way down to the main yard. "Hi Kate! How's it going?"

"Don't ask."

"You're covered in mud. . ." Adam laughed. "I know mud packs are good for the complexion, but I can assure you that you don't need it!" Kate scraped a handful of mud from her jacket and threw it at Adam. It splattered across his face. "Come on what's up? Can't you take a joke?" He wiped the mud from his face.

"I'm not in the mood. . ." Kate frowned and dismounted.

"Oh Kate. . ."

"Don't 'Oh Kate' me!" Kate handed the reins of her horse to Caroline who had come up to the school. She limped across to Adam.

"What have you done to yourself?" Adam opened the gate to the school.

"I came off." Kate frowned.

"What..?" Adam tried to stop himself smirking.

"Don't laugh! My horse slipped."

"Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. . . I've just bruised my leg." Kate sniffed.

"Come here." Adam held out his arms and gave her a hug. "Do you want me to take your next hack? This is the last lesson I'm teaching today."

"I can't ask you to do that." Kate wiped her eyes.

"Of course you can." Adam smiled. "I would have a hot bath if I were you."

"Thanks Adam. . ."

"Are you sure you don't need to see the doctor?"

"No. . . I'm fine. I'll see you later." Kate limped off across the yard.

The rain had stopped by the time Adam returned. Caroline took his horse.

"Thanks Caroline." Adam looked around the silent yard. "Where's everyone else?"

"Everyone else?" Caroline smiled nervously.

"Yes Caroline. There's no one around, and where's Amanda? She said she would come out and tell me if I was teaching tomorrow."

"Amanda? She's gone home." Caroline paused. "Yes, she went earlier."

"Oh! Okay." Adam took his hat off. "Can you make sure that these horses are dried off?"

"You go. I'll get the yard sorted out." Caroline watched as Adam walked away.

"Has he gone?" Karen looked round the corner.

"Yes." Caroline frowned. "I'm not happy about this."

"Well, did he see anything?" Caroline shook her head. "So he doesn't know what's going on."

"I don't think so. But. . ."

"But what?"

"We just can't leave her there. . ."

"We're not going to." Karen pointed over her shoulder. "She deserves everything she gets. We'll leave her for a while, just worry her a bit."

"So long as you know what you are doing?" Caroline started to walk away. "I want the horses dried off. Can you get your cronies to do that?"

"It'll be done." Karen smiled. "Relax Caroline. . . It's only a bit of a laugh."

"I don't think that everyone will be laughing."

Adam sat next to Kate on the sofa.

"Was there enough hot water for you?" Kate smiled.

"I think I just about got the last of it." He paused. "The others are acting a bit strangely this afternoon."

"How do you mean?"

"Well when I came back to the yard, none of them were around. And Caroline was being a bit defensive."

"I think they must just be tired. It's been a long week. They were probably all in the tack room." Kate smiled. "It's not worth worrying about."

"I'm sure you're right!" Adam put his arm around Kate. There was a clatter as the front door opened and the staff stomped noisily upstairs.

"Oh sorry are we disturbing anything!" Karen smirked.

"No! We were just waiting for you lot to arrive. . .Who's cooking tonight?"

"I'll check the rota." Karen disappeared into the kitchen. "It's Caroline!" She yelled loudly.

"What is?" Caroline appeared through the doorway. "I've not done anything. . . It was the others."

"Done what Caroline?"

"She's joking. . ." Karen leapt out of the kitchen. "She just doesn't want to cook tonight!" She whispered to Caroline. "Shut up! Don't give the game away!"

"Yes. . . I didn't want to cook tonight." Caroline laughed nervously.

"So what are we having Caroline?"

"Well it is Sunday night. What do we have every Sunday night?"

"Not leftovers again." Kate sighed loudly.

"I think it would be nice to go out for the evening." Karen took the last of the dirty plates off the table and handed them to Adam who was washing up.

"Go out?" Caroline frowned.

"I think that's a great idea!" Adam looked over to Kate. "Do you think you would be up to it?"

"I'm sure I could manage to limp down to the pub."

"What about the rest of you?" Karen looked across the expectant faces. "Well that's settled then."

"Do you think we should? Don't we have things to do tonight?" Caroline stood up.

"Things to do?" Adam shook his head. "Like what? You'll enjoy a night out. It'll do you good. After all, it has been a busy week for us all."

"Let me have a word with her." Karen led Caroline into the living room.

"What are you doing suggesting that we go out. . . What about..? You know!" Caroline hissed.

"Caroline, we can't just disappear onto the yard. Adam and Kate would get suspicious. If we all go out. We can leave them at the pub and nip back here and sort everything out."

"But.."

"Please. Caroline it is just a joke. But Adam and Kate would get annoyed. They just don't have a sense of humour!"

"Shall we go then!" Kate stepped into the living room. "Is there anything wrong?"

"Wrong? No, nothing is wrong. I was just saying that someone should stay back at the yard, make sure everything is okay."

"And I had said that everything will be fine." Karen stepped forward. "Caroline is a real worrier!"

"Yes. Come on Caroline. I'm sure we can all go out for an hour or so with no problems."

"Okay. I'll get my coat."

Karen watched as she left the room, quickly she pulled out a mobile phone and dialled a number. It rang once before she spoke softly.

"It's me. Everything is ready..." She paused sniggering. "Pre-packaged as well!" Karen shut down the phone and thrust it into her jacket pocket.

The village of Redbridge was little more than a church, post-office stores, phone box, pub and a couple of houses. If you wanted any more excitement than a quiet drink you had to go the fifteen miles to the nearest town, and without a car there was no way to get there except on-foot.

The collective staff of the Redbridge Riding School filled the small saloon bar of 'The Horse & Groom' public house. Karen took out a ten-pound note and handed it to the landlord.

"Keith. . . I need a favour." Karen whispered to Keith Bevan the landlord of the small pub.

"Yes. What do you want?" Keith was a portly individual who enjoyed a good drink as much as his patrons did.

"We are having a bit of a celebration." Karen paused. "Erm. . . Its Caroline's birthday."

"How nice for her."

"I wondered if you could pep up her drinks a bit. She says she only wants an orange juice. . ."

"I understand." Keith added a large shot of vodka to the glass. "It will help her enjoy herself."

"Thanks Keith." Karen laughed. "It will. . . I think she needs to enjoy herself more!"

Karen walked over to the table and placed the last drinks down.

"Your orange juice, and a pint for you Adam."

"Thanks Karen." Caroline took a sip of her drink. "Oh. . ."

"What's up Caroline?" Karen bit her lip.

"That tastes very nice!" Caroline took a large gulp.

"Good! I'm sure you will enjoy it." Karen chuckled into her drink.

"It's getting late. . . I think we should go back now." Adam glanced at his watch.

"Okay." Karen smiled, possibly a little too much. Her speech was slightly slurred.

"What about her?" Caroline was fast asleep on the floor.

"What do you want me to do with her?" Karen beamed.

"I think you had better take her with you. If you can wake her up that is!" Kate shook Caroline's shoulder. "Come on Caroline, it's time to go home."

"I don't want to go to school. . ." Caroline rolled over.

"Don't wake her up. . ." Adam stood up. "I'm sure a couple of you can drag her back." The staff groaned. "I'm sure she would do the same for you. We'll see you in the morning!"

"Aren't we going home now?"

"I think there's time for just one more drink, don't you?" He walked to the bar.

"I see Caroline is enjoying her birthday." Keith nodded towards the door.

"Her birthday?"

"Yes Karen told me it was Caroline's birthday, that's why she spiked her drinks."

"Really. . . I must talk to her in the morning."

Soon afterwards, Adam and Kate walked home, along the quiet road back to the yard. The moon shone lightly allowing them to see their way and the stars glistened like diamonds. All too soon, they were back at the yard. Adam fumbled with the front door key before letting them into the flat. As the door closed, he caught sight of the two cars sitting out in the darkness, and ignored them. Not that he knew it then, Adam would live to regret his eagerness to hurry into the warmth of the flat.

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### Chapter 3

Unusual traditions are rife in many establishments, none more so than the yard of the Redbridge Riding School. For some unwritten rule states that when a person either has a birthday or leaves a yard they should be part of a form of celebration. The exact form of the celebration had been handed down through the ranks of grooms and instructors for years. The 'lucky' person is grabbed by the assembled staff and thrown onto the stables muck heap. There are many variations of this dire treatment. However, most of them involve the victim getting out, having a nice hot bath and change of clothes and pledging revenge on the person who organised their 'downfall'.

However somewhere along the line, tradition had gone horribly wrong. Therefore, as Adam and Kate stood staring at the muck heap they could quite clearly make out a worrying form. Adam turned to Caroline, who was standing quaking.

"It shouldn't have happened like this. . . I wasn't me who did this to her. . . Please don't get too angry. . ."

Adam ignored her and strode towards the steaming heap. He climbed to the top and knelt next to Amanda who was buried up to her neck and not looking very happy.



"Hello Amanda!" Adam looked down towards her tear stained face. Straw was matted into her long brown hair and a strip of brown parcel tape prevented her speaking what was undoubtedly on her mind. "I just want to apologise on behalf of all the staff and say that what has happened here is no doubt an unfortunate mistake." Amanda raised her eyebrows and looked up towards Adam. "I would also like to say, that given time I will no doubt be able to discover who is responsible for this and will bring them to justice, and that you shouldn't worry at all." Amanda made a muted squeaking noise followed by a low mumble. "Now if I remove this tape will you be reasonably restrained?" Amanda stared at him. "I know you're angry but I just want to know that you won't get in a state about it too quickly." Amanda shook her head. "So you're a little calmer?" Amanda nodded. Adam pulled the tape off. "Oops! Sorry. . . I hope that didn't hurt too much."

"Please just get me out of here. . ." Amanda spoke in slow, well-controlled tones.

"What's it worth?" Adam laughed.

"Come here. . ." Adam knelt closer as Amanda whispered to him. He shuddered.

"Okay. . . I suppose it is worth getting you out of here." Adam paused. "You wouldn't do that. . . Would you?"

"Do you want to find out?"

"No. . . . No, we'll get you out of there right now. Caroline fetch a pitchfork. Kate can you give me a hand?"

So the digging began. Amanda was normally a very careful dresser, she always ensured that she wore a white blouse and tie with a v-necked jumper. Her long brown hair brushed or in a hair net and white jodhpurs topped off with brilliantly shining leather riding boots. When she was finally removed, her soaked hair riddled with straw, her blouse torn, her white jodhpurs anything but white and her boots were missing entirely.

Adam took his penknife and cut through the bandages used to tie her wrists and ankles, and carefully helped Amanda step down onto the yard. She rubbed her wrists and looked around the assembled staff. Suddenly there were none of them who thought this had been funny. Caroline was on the brink of tears. Karen who had finally realised that this was a mistake, took a step forward ready to apologise but stopped when Amanda threw her a particularly bitter stare.

"Adam I want to see you in the office!" Amanda yelled.

"Actually I have things to do right now. . ."

"Now! Get into the office!" Amanda noticed that Caroline had burst into tears. "What are you snivelling about? Do you want to take Adam's place?" Caroline was silent, she looked pensively at Adam. "Well shut up then!" Amanda stormed into the office with Adam closely behind.

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Amanda waited until Adam had stepped into the office before slamming the door and closing the blinds. The kettle that someone had switched on some minutes before was boiling. Adam walked towards it and poured a mug of coffee.

"Do you want some coffee?" Adam held out the mug.

"No I don't!" She knocked the mug out of Adam's hand, spilling hot liquid across him. He yelped in pain dropping the mug, which smashed, on the floor.

"There was no need for that!" Adam clutched his scalded hand.

"Do you know how long I was left there?"

"Look I didn't know you were there until this morning. You may not believe me but I really didn't know what was going on. If I had, I would never have let it happen. I'm very sorry." Adam sat down opposite Amanda at the desk. She held her head down, tears dripped slowly onto the green blotter. "Oh Amanda. . ."

"They all hate me!" Amanda looked up. Her eyes red with tears. "Last night I had time to think about it all. I know I've been hard on them. But don't they understand, we just aren't making enough money. You must have noticed, there aren't as many lessons, more people are either keeping their own horses or just not riding at all. And as for the holidaymakers, they're all going over to that new holiday centre. You know I would love to have a hotel or a posh equestrian centre, but we just don't have the money. I'm just treading water to keep us ticking over."

"It's not that bad!" Adam took Amanda's hand. "We still have quite a few lessons. We are the only stables and livery yard for miles, and as for the holidaymakers. Well who needs them? This isn't like you. Not after all we've been through. There's something else isn't there. What's really worrying you?"

"It's nothing. . ." Amanda looked up into Adam's eyes. "Look at me. . ." Adam glanced away. "No look at me. I'm a figure of fun. I have no respect on this yard; the staff enjoyed doing that to me last night. . . They deliberately left me there. As they were tying me up, they were laughing, saying how this would be 'really funny'. Is that all I am?"

"Look. Don't be so stupid." Adam stood up. "It was a mistake that you got left. But you must admit that it was a bit of a laugh. At least it would have been. . ."

"I knew it! You are always on their side. . .-" Amanda started crying again.

"No listen! If they had left you there for only a few minutes would you have thought that they hated you?"

"Well, maybe not."

"Of course not." The clock ticked loudly in the background. "It was just a show of youthful exuberance. They are all young. They saw that they could get you back for all the shouting and arguing that they have had to put up with over the last few months. Just it got out of hand. I think they would have dug you out earlier, but they all went drinking and. . . . You know what I mean. I know there was no malice intended. But I would take it as a warning."

"A warning?"

"Yes. Try not to take it all out on the staff. You've been a real cow for quite a while now. They work really long hours and its all hard work. They just get frustrated when they're told off at the end of a hard day's work. Please try and be a little more restrained. They don't hate you, in fact, they really respect you, but you are upsetting them when you shout at them." Adam took a box of tissues from the shelf. "Here dry your eyes; you can't go out looking as if you have been crying."

"Thank you Adam. Do you think I could change, for the better?" Amanda tried to smile.

"Of course you can. Now I think you had better go home and have a nice long bath and change. Don't bother coming back to the yard today, I'll look after everything."

"Do you think I should have a word with the staff?"

"No. I'll make sure they know that they don't do that to you again."

"Or anyone. . ."

"Well I don't think that I can dissuade them, if they have their minds set on it. Remember it's my birthday next week."

"I'll have to make sure we have enough parcel tape!"

"I really wonder why people don't like you!" They both laughed. "Right are you ready to face the masses?"

"I think so. . . Ah! Only one thing." Amanda looked down at her bare feet.

"Oh! I'll get them to find your boots, and I think that there is at least one person who could do with boot polishing practice." Adam slid off his Wellingtons. "But here, you can have my wellies for now."

"Are you sure?"

"Go on! I can borrow some others later on."

"Oh you're great!" Amanda smiled. "Is your hand okay?"

"I'll live! Anyway when you get back home you'll find a little surprise waiting for you. . ."

"What is it?" Amanda rubbed her hands together.

"That would ruin the surprise. . . I'll come round later before I do the late check."

Amanda pulled the door open. The staff were standing around outside the office. They scattered as she stepped outside.

"I'm going home, Adam is in charge." She strode off through the mud and puddles to her car. Adam watched as she drove off, Kate walked towards him.

"She looked like she was in a fierce mood." Kate caught sight of Adam's hand. "What has she done to your hand Adam?"

"That's nothing. . . Just an accident, I dropped my mug of coffee." Adam paused. "Can I ask you a favour?"

"Yes of course!" Kate smiled.

"Can I borrow your spare wellies?"

"Why? Oh Adam! Did she take your boots as well?"

"She borrowed them for a short time." Adam smiled. "Could you get all the staff together in the tack room. I would like a word with them all."

"Sure!" Kate kissed Adam on her cheek. "You're so brave you know."

"If only you knew everything. . ." Adam whispered under his breath as he walked away.

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Amanda drew up at the cottage. She had bought it with the yard those years ago. It was a stone cottage with two small bedrooms. The garden at the back of the house was filled with herbs and vegetables; Amanda was not one for flowers or fancy plants. She didn't have the time to look after them anyway. So she would plant up hardy things that would have a use. She had good lettuce, potatoes, tomatoes and many others; often yielding so much that she would gladly donate any surplus to the staff at the stables.

Walking inside it was in the same state as she had left the week before. Across every surface were scattered papers and documents. She had not realised that running a stable would involve so much paperwork; she was always filling in this form or providing that document. Amanda paused to pick up some papers from one of the tables and knocked a calculator tally roll that fell and unrolled itself across the carpet. She sighed and threw the bundle of papers back down.

Catching a glimpse of herself in the dressing table mirror, she thought of her sleepless night. But perhaps Adam was right; in fact, she knew he was, Adam was so often right. Perhaps she had been a bit rough on people. Amanda always seemed to be screaming at the staff. She had

lost count of the number of times she would leave some of them in tears just to drive home and reduce herself to the same state out of pure frustration.

Amanda stripped off her filthy clothes and considered washing them. Looking again at her ripped blouse and mud splattered socks she put them into a pile to throw away. She had expected some sort of problems, it being her birthday and all, so she had worn her oldest clothes. Her only regret was that she had worn her leather boots and not borrowed a pair of Wellingtons. No doubt, Adam would get them back.

She ran the hot water and added a copious amount of bath foam. This was the way to get over these problems. Slowly she immersed herself in the fragrant water.

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Adam strode across the yard, approaching the tack room he heard a number of expectant voices, each trying to blame each other for what had happened, they became silent as he walked into the room.

The rain had stopped, but the air was still cold and damp, and so the tack room with its warmth and shelter was a favourite place. Saddles lined the walls, each with a bridle hanging beneath it. The heady smell of leather and horses was intoxicating; Adam strode to the front of the room and looked across the silent crowd.

"I do hope you are satisfied with yourselves." The staff all looked down at the floor. "Caroline, I expected more from you than this. You deceived us yesterday and now look what has happened."

"I'm sorry. . ." Caroline whimpered.

"However I think that there is one person who is more to blame than the rest of you. Isn't that so Karen?" Karen looked up sternly. "I hope you got Caroline a card for her birthday."

"I'm sorry. It got a little out of hand." Karen frowned.

"I have a job for you. . ." Adam smiled. "You may have noticed that Amanda was not wearing her boots a little earlier. I don't suppose you know where they might be. . ."

"Someone buried them on the muck heap."

"Oh how pleasant of someone. Well I want you to find them, and when you have found them, get some boot polish, because before I bring them back to her I want them absolutely sparkling." Adam smiled. "Okay?" Karen muttered under her breath. "Oh as you have some much to say you can clean out the yard drains. . ." Karen was silent. "Thank you." She stormed out of the room. "Oh dear perhaps we have upset her." Adam nodded and Kate left the room. "Right here's the deal, I have spoken to Amanda, or rather I have been spoken to by Amanda, but I managed to ask her to be a little nicer to you lot. So hopefully she will be a bit better. So please let's not have this happen again. Okay?" The staff nodded and agreed. "But, here's the nasty bit!" Adam laughed. "I'm sorry but I think you had better have some jobs to do. . . So I want the paddocks skipped out, the muck heap thrown back, and some of you can help with the drain cleaning. After that, I want all the tack cleaned. Off you go."

Kate was waiting outside the door.

"I'm worried about Karen."

"Worried? What about?"

"No Adam I'm serious. I'm worried about her. I am worried about what she is saying she would do to you."

"What she would do to me? Like what?"

"She is really mad about what you have made her do."

"A little hard work never hurt anyone. She had it coming to her. I wouldn't worry about her, of course, she's mad; I think I would be in her position. But it will wear off" Adam hugged Kate.

"I just hope you are right."

"Of course I am."

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Amanda had just stepped out of the bath when the doorbell rang. She swore to herself and unlocked the bathroom door. The bell rang again. She grabbed her bathrobe and put it on.

"I'm coming. Have some patience. . ." Amanda ran down and across the living room. When she opened the front door there was a man standing on the doorstep his finger poised to ring the bell again. "I heard you the first time."

"Miss Amanda King?" The man spoke with a local accent.

"Yes."

"Sign here please." The man handed her a clipboard with a delivery note attached.

"What for?" Amanda looked at the paper and then back at the man. She noticed that he was slightly balding and that he had tried to cover the patch by brushing the hair over it. She smiled quietly to herself.

"I have a delivery for a Miss Amanda King."

"Yes that's me, so what is it?"

"If you would just sign please madam, I have other deliveries to make this morning." Amanda signed the form. "Thank you madam. I will just get your package." The man walked back down the path, leaving the front gate open, he appeared a moment later carrying a brown cardboard box. "There we are madam, one litter tray, one sack of cat litter, five cans of cat food assorted and various sundries."

"But I don't have a cat?" Amanda frowned as she put the box down on the doorstep.

"Oh! I am sorry." The man walked back up the path, again leaving the gate open and appeared again, this time carrying a pet box. He handed it to Amanda. "Good day madam." Amanda peered into the box and saw a tiny black and white kitten. She took it out of the box and put it on her lap.

"Oh! Aren't you beautiful?" The kitten purred softly and settled itself down in her lap. She noticed that there was an envelope attached to the box. She pulled it off and opened it. Inside there was a birthday card inscribed. 'With lots of love, Adam.' "Well what do I call you little kitten?"

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Karen growled as she waited for the phone to be answered.

"Come on, come on..." She glanced out of the office window. "Yes, what happened?... Look shut up! I went to a lot of trouble..." She paused. "No you look here!..." She paused frowning at the phone. "Alright. Don't screw up..." Slamming the receiver down she walked out of the office."

\*\*\*

The day had passed. The staff got to work doing their tasks and had finished them with few complaints, apart from Karen who had not appeared at dinner and was sulking in her room.

Adam put his jacket on.

"Where are you going?" Kate looked across to Adam.

"I promised Amanda I would get her boots back to her before I did the late check. I'll be back soon I promise." He picked up the now gleaming boots and went downstairs.

It was only a short distance to Amanda's house. As he reached there, he saw through the windows that she was sitting on the living room floor playing with her new friend. Adam tapped on the window. Amanda looked up, and blushed. She ran to the front door.

"Oh Adam! Thank you!" Amanda rushed forward and hugged him. "Come in, please." The kitten walked majestically out into the hall to see who had arrived. Adam picked him up and stroked him.

"He's a lovely little thing isn't he?" Adam smiled. "What have you called him?"

"Pinkerton." Amanda announced proudly.

"Pinkerton?" Adam paused. "Oh I remember now you had that fluffy elephant called Pinkerton. I think it's a very nice name. It suits him." Adam handed the kitten back to Amanda. He clawed his way onto her shoulder and sat watching. "I only came round to drop your boots off. I have to get back to the yard."

"Oh can't you stay for a drink?"

"I'd love to but I think I had enough last night, anyway I don't want to leave the staff alone tonight."

"Are they okay?"

"They're fine. I think Karen has held a bit of a grudge against me though!" He laughed.

"Oh do be careful Adam."

"What do you think she's going to get a gang out to ambush me?" Adam laughed. "Anyway I'll leave you and Pinkerton alone. See you tomorrow."

"Of course." Amanda smiled and closed the front door.

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As Adam returned to the yard, Kate was waiting on the drive for him.

"Hi Kate. Anything wrong?"

"No I just thought I would get out of the flat, you can cut the atmosphere up there with a knife!" Kate put her arm round Adam's waist. "Anyway I wanted to be alone with you for a while!"

"Promises, promises." Adam laughed. "Let's check the yard first!"

The late check involved walking round the yard ensuring that all the horses each had adequate water and that their rugs were fastened. Adam and Kate went round the main yard together.

"Let's do the one of the back yards each. It will be quicker that way." Kate smiled.

"Okay." Adam watched as Kate went off into the darkness. He went off to the other yard. As he was checking one of the horses, he heard a slight noise, something he couldn't describe. He left the stable he was in and went round to the other yard. As he turned the corner he saw that the lights were off, Kate would have switched those on, he thought to himself. He flicked the switch but there was nothing. "Damm lights! Kate are you okay?" Adam paused there was no response. "Kate!" He saw a vague movement in the shadows. . .

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Chapter 4

"No Pinkerton, you can't come with me." The kitten meowed loudly. "I'll be back soon." Amanda wanted to get to the yard early this morning; she had fed Pinkerton, but would be back later to play with him. She edged her way out of the front door and closed it quietly behind her.

The morning was dry and bright, there was a crispness on the grass as she walked towards her car. The mist rolled across the valley forming great grey shrouds of the fields and hedgerows. She thought that it would be a nice day to walk to the yard. She wouldn't need the car after all. So she set off down the country road.

The yard was very peaceful. Amanda stood on the driveway trying to ignore the mud and puddles and imagine this place being an impressive holiday equestrian centre with five star hotel and restaurant. That was a stupid thought; she couldn't even run this small yard without any other complications. She walked towards the main yard; one or two horses had their heads lazily hanging over their stable doors. She went up to a big grey and rubbed his ears, it wickered and rubbed its nose on Amanda's chest. Walking towards the back yard, she noticed a bundle of rags lying in the mud. Amanda walked towards it and was suddenly hit by a sense of foreboding. As she got close, she suddenly realised what it was.

"Adam? Adam! Oh no! What's happened?" Amanda knelt in the mud next to Adam's silent body. His breathing was shallow and laboured. "Oh no! Wait here. . ." She ran across the yard to the office, fumbling with the lock she eventually pushed the door open. Picking up the phone, she dialled 999. "Hello. . . Hello?" There was nothing but silence, she tried again, there was no dial tone. Amanda ran out of the office again and back to Adam. He was still lying still on the yard. "Adam. . . I'm going to get some help for you! Adam!" Amanda rushed across the yard; she saw her car wasn't in the car park. "No!"

Amanda ran down the drive and out onto the yard. There was a payphone in the village, she didn't have a phone at home, she told herself that there was nobody who would want to call her. At the payphone, again there was no dial tone. She slammed the handset down. The only option was to get her car and drive Adam to the nearest hospital. She ran back to her house and picked up the car keys.

Opening the car, she sat inside and fumbled with the ignition key, turning it the engine turned over but would not start.

"Come on! Come on!" Amanda yelled, turning the key again, the engine came to life. She drove as quickly as she could to the yard and stopped her car next to Adam. "Come on Adam I'm going to get you to hospital." Adam was silent. Amanda grabbed him under his shoulders and dragged him across the yard, she wrenched open the back door of her car and pushed him onto the back seat. "Oh Adam why do you have to be so heavy?" Amanda slammed the door and leapt behind the wheel.

Amanda pulled up in an area marked for ambulances, and ran into the casualty unit.

"Please help me I have an injured person in my car."

"Yes, one of the porters will help you." The receptionist pointed to a person in a white coat.

"But he's unconscious! I need help. . . Don't just sit there! "Amanda grabbed the telephone handset from the receptionist."Please. . ." A nurse appeared from a side office and ran towards

the desk. They both went out to Amanda's car. Adam was placed on a trolley and wheeled into the casualty unit.

"Miss King" The nurse came through to reception

"Yes, that's me. . . Is Adam okay?" Amanda stood up knocking over the cup of vending machine coffee.

"He's fine, he has slight concussion but he'll be okay." The nurse smiled. "Don't worry. . . Would you like to see him?"

"Oh yes please. . ." Amanda followed the nurse through into a cubical. Adam was lying flat out on the bed; he was wearing a light blue smock with 'Hospital Property' stencilled across it.

Amanda walked towards the bed, "Adam. . . Are you okay?"

"Amanda? Is that you?" Adam stared directly upwards.

"Yes it's me!" Amanda turned to the nurse.

"As he has sustained a blow to the head and has concussion. We would like to keep him in for observation for a couple of days. Do you know how he sustained the injury?"

"I'm sorry I don't know. I found him on the yard this morning, he was just lying there. I don't know how long he had been there. I tried to ring for an ambulance but the phone wasn't working. . ."

"That's okay. . . I think we should let him rest for a while."

"Okay." Amanda took Adam's hand. "I'll come and see you soon. Now you rest."

Back at the yard, everything seemed normal. Caroline was sitting in the office as Amanda walked in.

"Hello Amanda. . . What's wrong?"

"I've just had to take Adam to hospital, I found him lying unconscious on the yard this morning." Amanda shook her head.

"That's why he didn't come down this morning, we thought him and Kate had run off together."

"Kate?"

"Yes Kate isn't around. She's not in the flat, or on the yard."

"Have you checked her room?"

"Yes Karen checked Adam's and her rooms when they didn't come down to work. Their beds hadn't been slept in. What's happened to them?"

"I really don't know? I really wish I did."

"Perhaps Adam had an argument with Kate; she could have hit him and run off." Caroline shrugged her shoulders.

"I really don't think that is very likely?" Amanda stepped into the office and sat down. Perhaps Kate had argued with Adam. She might have hit him with something in her temper; she may have easily got frightened and run off. Amanda looked down. Suddenly she saw something that made her blood freeze. She reached down and picked it up and placed it gingerly in her pocket, things started to click into place, Amanda shuddered. This couldn't be what had happened. . .

"Amanda?" Karen crashed through the office door. "You're here!"

"Karen. Were you not expecting me to be here?"

"No..." She paused. "I found this." Karen put a copy of the local paper in front of Amanda.
"Look at this!"

"Look at what? What's up?" Amanda looked down at the paper.

"It has just arrived, look at this." Karen pointed to the obituary column.

"Who's died? Anyone I know?" Amanda read down the column. Her blood ran cold.

Amanda Jane Bishop

Age 24

'Taken so suddenly from us all.'

"Is this some kind of joke?" Amanda's voice quaked.

"No Amanda. . ." Karen shook her head.

"Can you leave me alone for a minute . . .?"

Karen and Caroline left the office silently. Amanda looked at the page in front of her. This might be just a joke, she shuddered, or it could mean a lot of trouble. There were things to do; she had to contact the police for one thing. Amanda stood up and left the office. The sun was shining, but the wind was cold, so she zipped up her jacket, she ignored her car and walked down the driveway and on towards the village. As she passed the pub, she saw a grey Telecom van parked up on the pavement. Amanda walked towards the engineer who was sitting on the edge of an open manhole.

"Hello." The engineer looked up, still clasping bundles of cables. "I had a problem this morning; I had to call an ambulance. The phone at my stables up the road was out of order; the payphone wasn't working either. . ."

"I'm sorry about that." He picked up a bright yellow test meter. "You see this lot." Nodding down to the huge bundles of brightly coloured wires. "Someone has cut through them."

"Cut them?" Amanda looked down at the damaged cables.

"Yeah, it's wiped out phones in Redbridge and for miles around. It must be vandals, they are so stupid." He frowned.

"I agree." Amanda crouched down in front of the manhole. "How soon will it be fixed? I need to ring the police about something." The engineer looked up.

"Well the cables will take a few hours to fix. But if you want you can use my mobile, it's in the van. The door is unlocked."

"May I? Thanks." Amanda opened the door and sat in the driver's seat. She picked up the mobile phone and dialled 999. The operator answered. "Police please. . ." The line clicked and a person answered. "Hello I would like to report an attack. . . In Redbridge. Yes, at the riding school. Adam Bishop. My name? Amanda Bi. . . Sorry Amanda King. Thank you." She put the phone down, and stared at the receiver.

"All okay?" The engineer stood in the open doorway.

"Yes. . . I suppose so. Thank you for the use of the phone."

"That's fine. . ."

Amanda stepped out of the van and started walking back towards the yard.

Detective Inspector Bailey had just arrived at the station. Currently he was trying to open the door with a cup of coffee in one hand and a pile of buttered toast in the other, when his phone

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