

SAM

SECOND VOLUME

HOME, SWEET HOME

CHAPTER 1

When Sam woke up, the first thing she noticed was the old oak tree. She felt relieved. Then she looked around and the park was gone, which was a good thing, but the house where she had spent the few last years before going into the future, was also gone, which was a bad thing. A pang of pain and terror crossed her chest as her mind was racing, wondering where (or when) she was. Nothing around seemed familiar except the old oak with its strong roots deep in the hard ground. A storm was coming, everything around her predicted it. The wind, the sky, the heavy clouds, the distant rumble. She needed shelter again. At least she had some food with her and some water. But the weather was quickly turning stormy and she knew she had to find some shelter from it. She started running as fast as she could, stopping from time to time to catch her breath, panting with the effort, but not giving up. She was grateful for the sturdy leather shoes she was wearing, the first clothing item she had bought when she got her salary. They kept the water from the puddles outside, where it belonged, and her feet were warm and dry. So she kept running and looking around for anything that she could use for shelter. Lighting streaked across the sky closer and closer until she was really

afraid. Then she thought she heard a horse neighing nearby. But she didn't stop, she kept running. Then she tripped against a rock and fell hard to the ground, hitting her head. Then all went dark again while the rain was pouring down soaking her.

Some time later, she didn't know exactly how long had passed, she opened her eyes a bit but she felt dizzy as she was clearly on the move in an uncomfortable position. She was on horseback. A man whose face she couldn't see was riding it in a hurry with her strapped tight behind him. She was still dizzy from the blow to her head from when she fell earlier and even though she tried to speak, she found the effort was too much at the time being and she lost consciousness again. When she woke up again, she wasn't on horseback anymore. She was on a comfy bed in a small hut and there were no lights anywhere. It was total darkness, so it was still night. No lights from the small window, either, so she was pretty sure she wasn't in the 21st century anymore. She didn't know where she was or what period it was. But she was going to find out in the morning. If the man who had brought her there wanted to hurt her, he would have done so. So she reckoned it was safe to rest till morning and then with a clear head she could see what her situation was.

Soon, she fell asleep. She dreamed again of the house of her dreams, her dream house, her house.....

Morning came with a slight headache and confusion. But soon somebody knocked on her door. She just waited for the person to enter. A middle aged bearded man entered her room. By the way he looked he was probably a preacher she thought. And she hoped. His face was harsh but his eyes were kind. He wasn't dressed like a priest but everything about him told her that he was a priest. Maybe he could tell her what year it was because the place was certainly the same. That was the one thing that didn't change.

"Are you OK, miss? You were pretty confused when I found you...." He said in a whisper as if he didn't want to scare her. But she wasn't afraid, he didn't scare her. And now that she was rested, she was ready for whatever dawn brought.

"Yeah, I'm fine, thank you mister...." And made a pause so he would tell her his name.

“Father Josh” he said with burning eyes. He was intrigued by her, there was something about her that made her different from the other women he had met before and certainly from the women of this village. And it wasn’t just the way she was dressed that was different. There was something else even if he couldn’t put his finger on it. But he was intent on finding out.

“Nice to meet you Father, I am Sam.” Was all she said waiting for him to ask her more first and then she would ask about the year. She didn’t have to wait long.

“Where are you from, Sam? I've never seen you here before and I know everybody in the village. Are you from the neighboring town? And how come I found you all alone? Are you lost?”

“My mother died and I don’t know my father.” Then thinking that it was safe to tell him a white lie she added: “I am from Clover Town.” She said sure that the big town must be there no matter the year as it was the biggest town in the area. She wasn’t sure about the small villages but she couldn’t go wrong with Clover Town. This way she didn’t have to tell him she traveled through time as she didn’t know how he would react. So this was the safest way.

“Oh, Clover Town...” said the priest like an echo with an unconvinced voice.

Meanwhile she hoped he wouldn’t ask her of the people there or the mayor's name as he would catch her lying. Luckily, he seemed content for the moment. So she went on carefully.

“I must have bumped my head last night before you found me, Father Josh. Would you be so kind as to tell me what year this is!?” It was risky, she knew it, but there was no other way. She had to know if she had landed at least close to her own time, the 18th century.

“Why it is the year of the Lord 1402 of course, dear. Are you sure you are OK?”

She nearly fainted when she heard him. 1402....300 years before her time this time. Last time was more than 300 years after her time. The pallor on her cheeks gave her away and the priest was sure now that there was something odd about her no matter how hard she tried to convince him that everything was OK.

“So what were you doing so far from home, miss Sam?” the priest went on still examining her. By now he was pretty sure she was a witch. The way she spoke, the way she had her hair tied, the shades on her eyelids, the color on her lips and finally the fact that she had no idea what year it was. How was he supposed to know that poor Sam's only sin was of having some make up on and some lipstick....She should have wiped everything from her face before touching the oak but she hoped she'd find Kevin and she wanted to look beautiful. Natalie had done her hair and make up to look like that and she loved it. She had even given her some lipstick, mascara and makeup for when she returned and Sam had been grateful as she couldn't buy those nice things back home....

“Ugh, I was looking for work” she lied. She was in fact looking for her home. Well, she didn't have a home anymore but at least there was Kevin and everything that was familiar in her own time. She just wished to get back to the boring simple but safe life she had led there.

When she got up from the chair she was sitting on, her photo fell on the floor. It was the one thing from Nat that she treasured most, the thing that reminded her of the time spent together and of their friendship. She hurried to pick it up but Father Josh was faster. He took the piece of paper from the floor and examined it closely. He had no idea what it was. Had never seen anything like it before. It was an image on a piece of paper, a colored image of the girl standing in front of him and of someone else. But how? What was that? He didn't know or care. What he cared was that now he had the proof that Sam was indeed a witch. He would send her to jail until her sentence would be given.

“Witch!” He yelled at her while keeping a small wooden cross in front of her hoping that would protect him from her evil doings. But Sam was harmless. She burst into laughter when she saw his stupid reaction but then she realized that this could be serious and that she might actually be in trouble as she couldn't explain the photo to the people of the 15th century.

“I'm not a witch!” she said with pleading eyes. “Not more than you are!”

“Shut up, witch! And stand still!” the priest said while they fought. He managed to tie her to the chair with a strong rope he had nearby and then with the photo in his hand he hurried down the street to call for help and to imprison her. He banged the door behind him and he was off.

Sam took a good look around. She had to escape before the priest returned with the guards. She tried to untie her knot but it was to no avail. Her wrists hurt and her hands were still tied. She turned around with the chair until she was in a good position to grab the small pocket knife from the table. It was pretty difficult with her hands tied and with her back at the table. She felt the contents on the table until she grabbed the knife with her right hand. Then slowly she began to cut the rope. Sweat was running down her cheeks as she was trying to liberate herself from the grip. After a few minutes of extenuating effort, the rope gave way and she was as free as a bird. She had to run away as fast as she could before the priest and the guards came back. And by the commotion in the street, they were near. She ran in the street. It was so sunny that the light literally hurt her eyes. She was once again grateful for her robust shoes. She ran like that until she got pretty far from the village and until she was sure she was safe. Or at least she hoped she was for the time being. But she knew the priest wouldn't give up, she saw it in his eyes when he had called her a witch, the fear, the loathe, the horror for the unknown.

She needed shelter and she needed to clean her face. She got to the forest, same one where she would pick sticks for the fire 300 years later.... She just hoped it was the same now as it would be in the seventeen hundreds. She knew the paths and she got to the river. She wiped her face in it and drank from the fresh water. It was invigorating. So fresh and clean, so tasty. Then she picked some berries to dampen her hunger and looked for a good hiding place. There was a huge tree trunk near the river with a large hollow in it. It was perfect for shelter. At least for now. She covered herself in leaves for camouflage and went to sleep. She needed a nap before she could go any further. She was exhausted from the running. She fell asleep there in almost no time. Her sleep was short but refreshing. When she woke up, the sun was still up so she reckoned she probably hadn't slept long. But she felt a lot better.

All she had to do was to find the tricky oak tree and try to get back to her own time, to the people and places she knew. If she thought about it, even the 21st century with all its dangers was better than this. And at least there was Nat and her nice family there...but no, she had to go back where she belonged and try to make a life of her own, one that would make sense to her.

Barks in the distance brought her back to this reality. The priest must have brought the guards with search dogs to look for her. She had to lose them and there was no better way for the dogs to lose her scent than if she crossed the river. That was her best option. The river was rather cold for a swim but she had no choice. As the water reached her ankles it entered her shoes and touched her skin. She shuddered but continued. The water got to her waist now and she was shivering like crazy. She hoped it wouldn't go upper before she would reach the other side. She went down the river for a few more meters to make sure the dogs couldn't find her scent anymore and finally got out of the water. By now even the shirt she had on was wet. She was all wet and trembling but at least she was safe. Better wet than burning on the pyre for witchcraft. How could she ever explain to these simple people that photo in the priest's possession? Or the year she came from. Or the fact that she had seen the future too and that now she was in the past and she needed to go back to her present. She wasn't a witch, she was just a lost soul. She needed help, not problems. She had enough of her own. But people tend to judge what they don't understand.

She went deeper into the forest and searched for some branches to make camp. She had to dry her clothes if she didn't want to catch a cold. And she didn't. It was the last thing she needed right now. When she thought she had enough wood for a small fire she tried to rub two sticks to get the fire going while blowing in them. No smoke came and no fire to her utter despair. The clothes were wet and kept her cold. She took them off and then she felt something in the pocket of her jeans. Could it....? Yes!! It was a lighter she had taken from Nat's kitchen last time she had used the oven and forgot to put it back. She had learned how to use it and found it wonderfully useful. She had no idea then how useful it would indeed turn out to be. She just hoped it was still working. She took it out of the pocket andyes! It worked. She thanked God and started the fire. Things were looking better already, she told herself. She was totally naked by the fire with all her clothes hanging on sticks next to the burning flames. If Nat could see her now she would probably laugh out loud. She must be looking weird but at least there was nobody there to see her, right?

Well, wrong....

While turning her clothes upside down to dry them faster she heard a faint rustle in the bushes nearby.

“Crap! Is anyone there!?” she said scared out of her mind. She quickly took a sturdy branch that was already burning on one end and pointed it menacingly towards the bush where the noise had come from.

“Show yourself or I'll poke you with....my burning weapon! I'm not afraid” she lied as convincingly as she could. She went closer to the bush lighting it with the branch as darkness had already fallen upon the world.

To her surprise, it wasn't the priest or the guards. A man holding a short pointed sword appeared before her. He seemed just as surprised to see her as she was at seeing him there when she thought she was all alone.

It was kind of dark to make out the features of his face at the trembling light of the branch. She threatened him once more as he had a sword in his hand but then he put his sword back in his scabbard. Geez, was he afraid of her? I mean he was the one holding a sword while she only had a stupid branch. But, that wasn't the reason at all as she soon found out.

“Ugh, miss, you might want to put that away and...well...put some clothes on. You know you are naked, right?” and he even turned his back on her so she could get dressed. And to think that for a moment she thought that she had scared him with her...broom? She was so embarrassed with everything, she quickly took her panties and bra and socks and put them on. But her jeans and shirt were still damp. She couldn't stay in her panties so she put on her jeans and shirt the way they were and started shivering again. Curse him! Who the hell was he and what was he doing in her universe? I mean in her little part of the forest....

“May I turn now? Are you decent?” he asked in a low voice as if he was afraid someone else might also hear him.

“Well if by decent you mean dressed, yeah, I'm dressed. But as for decent, I've always been decent. How was I supposed to know there was somebody here? I swam and was trying to get my clothes dry and besides, I didn't see you there earlier.”

“I suppose you are right. I just got here when I saw your little camp fire and I thought to check it out. You can imagine my surprise when I saw a naked woman in front of the fire alone in the woods at night. Who are you miss and what are you doing here if I may ask?”

“You may ask but I don’t know what to tell you....” Sam said stalling, trying to get a better glimpse of the man standing before her, trying to guess if she could trust him or not. She saw what happened with the priest earlier who in the end thought she was a witch and wanted to burn her on the stake.

He was quite handsome in the dim light so he was probably really good looking in the day light. But that was not what she was trying to find out, right? The question was: could she trust him? A stranger? She had to take her chances, maybe not tell him quite everything from the beginning, just need to know basis.

“My name's Sam. I'm trying to get back home and I am in trouble with Father Josh who got the impression that I am a witch....could use some help” she added in a really low voice.

“Wonder what might have given him that idea!” And the man started laughing with all his heart.

“What's so funny? Haven't you heard what I just said!?” Sam asked annoyed.

“Yeah, I heard and that's why I am laughing. Imagine Father Josh seeing you here naked dancing around the fire under what seems to be a full moon. And then tell him that you are not a witch! Good thing I don't believe in witches!”

Sam's first reaction was to check if there was indeed a full moon above them. Yep, there it was. Full moon indeed.

“Now that I think about it, it must look strange if you put it that way. But I told you the truth, I wasn't performing any ritual, I was just trying to get my clothes dry. I had to swim across the river to escape the man hunt. They were looking everywhere for me, they even had dogs. That is why I was naked. And I wasn't dancing, I was trying to keep warm while my clothes were drying. So who are you anyway?”

“I'm Jeff. I'm ...the town smith.” He said after what seemed to be quite a long pause as if he wasn't sure what to say. Maybe he had things that he didn't wanted to share, just like her.

“Ok, Jeff, and what are you doing here if I may ask you this same question?” Sam asked looking straight into his dark blue eyes. Yep, she searched his face long enough to see the color of his eyes.

“I ...was taking a night stroll in the woods. Needed some air after a day's work. Would you care to accompany me to town? I know an inn where you could stay.”

“Clover Town? I don't know if it's safe. Father Josh might be looking for me there in the morning. And he's the last person I want to see.”

“That makes two of us” whispered Jeff to himself and out loud he said: “Trust me, where I'm taking you there are no priests or guards as a matter of fact.”

“Ok. Can't be worse than sleeping in the woods I guess. Too bad you can't call a cab...”

“A what? You talk funny” said Jeff wondering if she was in her right minds.

“Nothing, sorry, I mean it would be great if we had any means of transportation. I am so tired, I just need some rest.”

“Oh, you mean like this!?” asked Jeff while he whistled loudly. As soon as he whistled, a beautiful black horse came out of nowhere and was standing in front of them. Well, not out of nowhere but rather out of the bushes to be more exact.

“I guess this will do just fine” exclaimed Sam delighted at the sight of the majestic animal.

CHAPTER 2

Dawn was breaking when they finally arrived in town. It was nothing like Clover Town of the 18th century and not even close to Clover Town of the 21st century. It was sodirty and dusty and crowded. Some kids were playing in a puddle of mud hitting some sticks in it while a few girls were running around trying to avoid the splashes. But they seemed to have fun and Sam thought that was what really mattered.

They went through a market and people were putting up their market stalls with vegetables and cheese and milk and whatever else they were selling. That was when she realized how hungry she was. She was ashamed that she had to ask him for money to buy her food but she promised she would pay him back as soon as she found a job. Because she knew there was no way she could return to her own time too soon. He got off the horse and left her on and then he pushed his horse a bit. That was enough for the horse to start galloping down the street until it finally stopped. Sam was all alone on Jeff's horse in a remote alley. Good thing that at least it was day already. Then she heard the familiar whistle and the horse started neighing happily. The next minute Jeff was standing next to her with a bag of goodies in his left hand and a beautiful blue scarf in his right hand.

“This is for you, Sam...” he said and handed her the scarf.

“Thank you...”she said rather embarrassed. Then added jokingly: “hope there is food in there too....”

“Come” he said and helped her off the horse. He took her a few more steps in front of a shady old building. Now Sam was afraid ...of him, of the building, of what could be inside, she wasn't sure what exactly she was afraid of, but she was afraid. For a moment she thought that maybe the priest wasn't all that bad, maybe she could try to reason with him....

He was holding her hand tightly when they got in front of the door. It was made of iron and looked creepy. She looked at him and tried to pull her hand from his grip. He let go of her hand and looked at her. Well, she looked closer at

him too. At least she had been right last night, he was indeed very handsome. Tall, well built, dark hair and blue eyes. He couldn't be a bad man with those looks, could he? Then she remembered what had happened with her former employer at the bar during the 21st century and cold chills went down her spine. No, she was sure this wasn't the case now. She blushed at her own thoughts and took his hand.

He seemed content. He knocked on the door in a certain manner and there was movement behind it. She heard a click and the door opened.

A huge man was standing behind the door as they entered. He had knives in both hands and he looked dangerous as any armed man could look. Sam was sorry she had followed Jeff here. How could she be so dumb to trust a complete stranger? A handsome one nonetheless. Had he kidnapped her?

All sorts of scary thoughts crossed her mind as fast as lightning. Everything pointed to her being in peril, I mean everything, from the huge man at the entrance with knives in his hands, to the desolate looking alley where the house was situated and finally to the stranger she had entrusted her life to... Then she looked at Jeff again to see the grin on his face at having trapped her. Weird enough, there was no grin.

"Hey Bob, how are you!? Did you guys have a busy night?" Jeff addressed the huge man who looked like a bear.

"Not as busy as yours it seems" The man whom Jeff called Bob answered winking at him and then at Sam.

"Ah, her, no, it's not what you think, silly! I found her in the forest. She needs our help to avoid the priest and the guards, that's all"

"Oh why didn't you say so? Anything for you, chief!uh then she is ...??"

But he didn't get to finish the sentence when Jeff answered: "Out of your league, boy! She is not to be touched, you hear me? No one touches her, she is my guest here. We will help her and let her go. She is not from around here, she needs help."

“Ok boss” answered Bob disappointed. Sam on the other hand couldn’t believe anything she saw or heard. Was she dreaming? She pinched herself to make sure she wasn’t.

“Thank you...” she managed to utter in his ear.

He showed her the way through a long corridor that led to a huge noisy room. It was filled with man and women drinking and singing and dancing and ...kissing and touching....it was more like a secret den rather than an inn as he had told her.

The moment they entered the room, the music stopped and the man bowed their heads at Jeff while the women stared at her, curious, intrigued, jealous?

They advanced towards the round table when another huge man greeted them, even scarier than the first as his body was covered with scars and he had a tattoo of a rattle snake on his right arm. Sam grabbed Jeff's arm tighter as the man before them gave her the creeps.

“Hey chief, hope you had a fruitful night besides that!” and he pointed at Sam with a grin.

“Nope, unfortunately, last night was a wreck. Didn’t get anything. But I found her, Steph, and decided to help her. She is not like our girls here, at least I don’t think she is. She is not to be touched, are we clear!?”

“Yeah, yeah, sure, whatever you say boss...” he said looking at Sam and then at Jeff, trying to guess if she had him under his spell or something. After that Jeff told him that Father Josh believed her to be a witch and he wanted to help her. Nah, Steph didn’t believe in that nonsense, he wasn’t like Father Josh. There were no such things as witches.

Sam on the other hand didn’t know what to make of all that was going on. At least it appeared that she was safe from everyone in that scary room. But was she safe from Jeff? He was clearly their leader. Now she understood what he meant when he told her that where he would take her, there would be no guards and she would be safe from them. But was she safe from him? Would he hurt her? The more she thought about it, the more sure she was that he wouldn’t hurt her. She knew it in her heart.

A cute skinny red headed girl approached them. She was wearing a red short sleeveless dress and a pair of beautiful sandals on her feet. A nice pearl necklace adorned her white neck.

She stopped before them, took a long look at Sam and then tried to kiss Jeff.

“Ariana, what's gotten into you!?” He said while he gently pushed her away.

She seemed hurt and disappointed while she said in his ear: “I’ve been trying for so long to get you Jeff... I even started thinking that maybe you liked men and that was why you kept refusing me. But now I know. Hope she's worth it...” And Ariana left with her cup of wine in her hand and a sour heart. But it didn’t last long as she landed in a man's arms, singing and having fun.

“That was weird...” Sam managed to say when both Ariana and Steph had gone far enough not to hear their conversation.

“So who are you Jeff, really!?” she asked although she assumed she knew by now.

“I’m a smith...I forge our weapons, that part is true. But I didn’t tell you who we use them against or what we do with them... We are honest...thieves ...one might say... we take from the ones who stole from us first with their huge taxes and who forced us to become this. And we give to...well, to ourselves. We are just trying to keep the balance. You see, the mayor is the biggest thief. And so are his men, putting huge taxes which people can't pay. We are just restoring the order. We are not murderers, not cutthroats, just....”

“Common thieves” Sam finished his sentence for him.

“Would you have followed me if you knew? I bet you would have stayed in the forest alone in the dark, which trust me, could have been more dangerous than we are. And you are in no danger here, no one will touch you. You are safe with me.”

“Am I?” she said more to herself than to him.

CHAPTER 3

Sam needed their help if she wanted to get back to the village and to the old oak tree. She wasn't sure if she was supposed to wait for another storm for the oak to take her to another time, hopefully her time this time. But she supposed she had better wait for the right conditions to increase her success chances. Till then she was stuck with Jeff and his gang.

She couldn't say she liked the atmosphere in Jeff's hideout. The men were constantly looking with lust at her. Even though that was all they did, it was still annoying. And the women, that was another story. They seemed to hate her for the attention she got from Jeff and for the passion she seemed to wake in the men of the gang, their men. But Ariana seemed to loathe her presence the most. It was almost unbearable. So Sam tried to stay as far away from her as possible and from the men. It looked like she was stuck with Jeff for the time being...

Later after they were all tired with the eating and drinking, Sam asked Jeff where she could sleep for the night. So he led her to a tiny room upstairs and even gave her a tiny key to lock herself in. He hoped his men wouldn't go over his word but he wasn't very sure about Steph. He suspected that the snake was trying to take over leadership from him, to take over his gang. He didn't have proof, but he knew it in his guts that he was right. It was the way he looked at him sometimes when he gave them orders for a job or another, the envy in his eyes that he was trying to hide.... Anyway, he would sleep in the room next to Sam's and if Steph tried anything funny, then it would mean he disobeyed a direct order and he could punish him as he saw fit. It also meant that he was right about him, too. Either way, it was better to get rid of the threat while he could still do something about it, before Steph would lure more from the gang to follow him.

Sam had no idea of the silent rivalry between the two men. As soon as she saw herself alone in the room she took the key and locked herself in. She left the key in the door so if anyone tried to enter she would hear it. Then she looked around. It was a nice simple room with a bed on the left next to the wall and a tiny wardrobe opposite it. She opened it to inspect it. It was empty which was

rather curious. Not even a piece of clothing inside, not even a rag. Such a waste, she thought, such a large wardrobe and it was empty. There were no chairs or tables in the room. Only the bed and the wardrobe. But it was enough for her. At least she could sleep in a bed and not out in the forest, trying to hide from the priest.

She was so tired that she soon fell asleep. Then although she was sleeping she was startled by a faint noise. It was enough to wake her up. She got up next to the bed and listened carefully. Just when she was about to go back to sleep thinking that maybe it had been a dream, there it was again. There was someone behind her door. She was really scared by now thinking that Jeff was behind the door. She cursed him in her head and not knowing what else to do, she opened the window and then hid in the wardrobe. She was hoping to make him think that she had escaped through the window. Then after he would leave the room she intended to really escape by the window. But there was not enough time for that now as the person trying to get in would soon manage to enter. So she just hoped this would work. She got inside the empty closet holding her breath in fear and expectation. She was grateful that it hadn't creaked while she got in. She would have been exposed then. She started praying that he wouldn't look inside. She rested her back against the back of the wardrobe. She heard a noise inside and clearly there was somebody at the window as she heard the windows shut. Then the steps got closer to her hiding place. They stopped a moment probably just in front of her. The next moment she felt a hand around her mouth, but from behind her!!! She couldn't scream as her mouth was covered. Then someone pulled her through the wall as clearly the wardrobe was a decoy for a secret passage. It was Jeff! He signaled to her to be quiet and stand still. So he hadn't been the one trying to enter her room, he....had just saved her!! He showed her to sit a bit further away while he took her place in the closet and locked the secret entrance. And not a minute too soon as the next moment Steph opened the closet and foundJeff instead of Sam.

“What the devil!?” Steph exclaimed with a funny grimace on his face.

“I could ask you the same thing!” Jeff said and he punched him right in his smug face. Steph fell with a loud thud, hitting his head against the end of the bed. A trail of blood started oozing from an open wound that would surely leave a

scar. Although Steph must have been pretty dizzy with the fall and bump on his head, he somehow managed to get up and even tried to hit Jeff back. He looked a lot stronger and better built than Jeff but somehow Jeff seemed to have the upper hand. With another swift move Jeff sent him back to the floor. He landed on his ass this time and he was trying to get up again when Jeff said in a powerful commanding voice: "Stay down if you know what's good for you!"

For a split second Steph seemed to lead an inner battle, not sure if to stay down or get up and fight. But he decided to stay down, bowing his head and his eyes, acknowledging defeat.

Meanwhile Sam had entered the room through the secret passage and was looking from behind at what was going on. If she had any doubts by then concerning her safety there and Jeff's intentions, she was pretty convinced now that he meant her no harm.

Jeff helped Steph get up and pushed him through the door of the room. As they were exiting, Jeff turned to Sam.

"You can sleep now, miss, but lock your door again just in case. Although I don't think anyone will be bothering you anymore now that this scoundrel has been dealt with." And he winked at her while leaving the room.

Confused, she went back to sleep. Nothing out of the ordinary happened that night anymore. But the next day Steph wasn't among the gang members anymore. She was afraid to ask Jeff what he had done with him so she preferred not to think about it anymore. But she remembered Jeff saying that they weren't murderers so he probably just expelled him from his gang. Which could also turn out dangerous as Steph might seek revenge sooner or later. But that had nothing to do with her.

Anyways, now more than ever she missed her old quiet life when the worst thing that could happen was a brawl in the inn where she used to live with her mother. Oh, how she missed her and everything that she had meant to her. Her sweet and young mother who had died such a violent death killed by the fire at the inn. If only she hadn't fallen asleep in the woods while gathering sticks, if only she had been back earlier, maybe things would have been different, maybe she

could have prevented everything and saved her. But it was too late for sorrow now and all she could do was go forward.

A thing was certain: this place and time was just as dangerous as the 21st century and she had to try going back to her own time and maybe to the peaceful life she had in Kevin's house. Maybe she could be more than just his servant.... Now if she thought about him, life with him was better than among thieves or among the cars and guns in Nat's time. She had to find a way back sooner rather than later, that was for sure.

CHAPTER 4

A few more days passed with nothing out of the ordinary happening. Till one evening when she saw that everyone in Jeff's gang was rather nervous. They were clearly planning something, a hit. She didn't know what it was, but she was sure it was going to happen soon. She tried to find out from Jeff but as he wouldn't tell her, she tried a different approach. She tried to use her charms on Bob to find out but that also failed grossly. She had no idea how to seduce someone as she had never tried it before. All she managed to do was to be ashamed of herself. And mad at the same time as she hadn't even been good at that! This sucked but Sam didn't give up. She needed to get close to the oak and if Jeff and his gang were going anywhere close, she needed to follow them. It was her chance to get home. So if nobody was going to tell her what was going on, she would have to follow Jeff and the gang, that was all. Simple, right?

So Sam decided to pretend that she didn't care anymore so they wouldn't suspect anything and she could follow them from a safe distance. She was going

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