

Adam and Kathleen

By Kate Simon

Adam Green stared out his office window to the street below. His last patient was draining. It was his job to emotionally separate from his patients but some were tougher than others. Elaine was a rape victim struggling to get her life on track. It was hard to stay impartial when the attacker was her own father and Adam would like to find the bastard and beat him down. She'd come a long way but he knew she'd never be the same. What was worse was she knew it too. It was his job to help her get through days like today but today he didn't feel up to the task. Elaine's father was about to be released on good behavior and she was understandably terrified. He thought he might call in some backup. Maybe someone from a shelter could tell him how to proceed.

Adam poured himself a coffee and made some notes in Elaine's file. He glanced up and saw the picture of his graduation from medical school. His parents stood on either side of him, smiling from ear to ear. His grandfather was standing next to his father with what passed for a smile. Even though his parents were non-practicing his grandfather had been very active in the synagogue. His grandson the doctor gave him bragging rights with his cronies. He'd gone to synagogue with his family when he was younger, mostly to keep his grandmother happy. Shortly after his bar mitzvah they'd moved to suburban town in Pennsylvania that had excellent schools but the nearest synagogue was an hour away. Once he'd moved just outside Philadelphia to start his practice he stopped going all together. It wasn't because he couldn't find somewhere to go. The truth was after enough time spent treating patients he didn't know what to believe. He saw the wreckage that was left with what people did to each other. He tried to clear his head and finish his notes. Maybe he just needed a vacation. A week on a beach with a good book and a drink sounded very good.

Elaine had been his last patient so he had time to get some input. He put a call into a local shelter he'd contacted previously for other clients. "Virginia Reynolds, please."

"Oh, I'm sorry, you don't know. Ms. Reynolds passed away last month," said the receptionist,

"Oh no, I wasn't aware. What happened?"

"A car accident."

“I’m very sorry.”

“Thank you,” said the woman, her voice catching. “We were all very upset.” Adam could hear the woman shift gears. “But I’m sure you had a reason to call. How can I help you?”

“This is Dr. Adam Green. Virginia advised me when I was treating rape victims.”

“We have someone who can help you, Kathleen Malone. If you can hold on I’ll transfer you.”

Adam waited a minute before a woman came on the line. “Kathleen Malone.”

“Ms. Malone, I’m Dr. Green. I’m a psychiatrist and I’m treating a rape victim. Ms. Reynolds would advise me when I had operational questions, safe houses and such.”

“Of course, Dr. Green. I’d be happy to help you.”

“I have a patient whose rapist is about to be released. I know how to advise her emotionally but I need to know how to make her feel physically safe.”

“I understand. I could give you several options. Look, Dr. Green it’s nearly seven and I missed lunch. I need to eat soon or I’m going to start scaring villagers. There’s a place at Fifth and Main, Doyle’s. Do you know it?”

“Yes. I could meet you in twenty minutes.”

Kathleen Malone packed up her things and headed for Doyle's. Her stomach was growling and all she could think about was how hungry she was. She walked passed the reception desk and waved at the receptionist. "Good night, Carol."

"Good night, Kathleen. Thanks so much for helping us out."

"You're welcome. I'm not here tomorrow but you have my number if you need me."

She jumped in her car and made the quick trip to Doyle's. She ate there often and everyone knew her. The truth was the Irish pub felt a lot like her old neighborhood. She could look around and see faces that looked like the faces she grew up with.

The owner, Breeda, greeted her. "Hey Kathleen. Seat at the bar?"

"No actually, I'd like a booth in the back. I have some meeting me."

"Oh really?" she said with a broad smile.

"No, nothing like that. It's business." Breeda took her to a booth on the back wall and handed her a menu. They heard the front door open and they both looked up. A man stood alone at the door. He was six feet tall with longer, curly salt and pepper hair. His beard was a deeper silver and just short of scruffy. He had thick black framed glasses that only served to highlight crystal blue eyes. He was wearing black jeans and a black crew neck sweater. He looked nothing liking a psychiatrist but Kathleen thought he might Dr. Green.

"Is that him?" asked Breeda.

"I think so. Could you ask if he's Dr. Green?"

Kathleen sat nervously as she watched Breeda approach the man. When he nodded yes Breeda turned and gave her a cat that ate the canary smile. She could forgive her because as the man came closer she could she see he was very fit under the not too tight sweater. She extended her hand as he sat down. "Dr. Green, it's nice to meet you."

"Thank you for meeting me, Ms. Malone."

"Kathleen, please."

“Adam.”

“I am surprised you agreed to meet me. You don’t know me.”

“I know of you. They filled me in at the center about you.” She was taken aback by his smile.

“What did they tell you about me?”

“They said you’re a very caring doctor who tries to do the best for his patients.”

He looked down at his menu. “That was nice of them to say,” he said quietly.

“They don’t do nice.” He looked up. “The one thing we don’t do at a shelter is sugar coat things. We do reality. It’s the most effective way to operate.”

“I agree.”

“My reality at the moment is I’m starving and I need to eat.” She waved at Breeda. She came to the table with a pad.

“What can I get you?”

“I want a strip steak with some red potatoes and in the interest of being a grownup, I’ll take a small salad.”

“Wine?”

“You need to ask?”

“My bad,” she laughed. “You, sir?”

“Sounds good. I’ll have the same.” Breeda returned quickly with the wine and a basket of warm, fresh bread.

Kathleen smiled and grabbed a piece of brown bread. “Oh thank God,” she said as she took a bite. “I suggest you grab a piece before I scarf it all down.” Adam smiled and reached for a piece.

“Umm. It is good.”

Kathleen took a sip of wine. She realized Adam Green's smile was having an unsettling effect on her. "So, you gave me a bit of information about your patient. Do you believe she is at risk by this man's release?"

"I do. The rapist was her own father. The family never believed her despite the evidence. They cut her off but will welcome this man back with open arms."

Kathleen set down her wine. "We see this more often than you'd think. Is she willing to speak at his parole hearing?"

"No. I brought it up and told her I'd go with her but she's still terrified. I haven't been treating her that long. She had one friend who brought her to me and actually sat with her through her first few sessions. She's made progress but I'm afraid she'll backslide once he's released."

Breeda brought them their salads and Kathleen took a bite. "I have a thought. I have a guy. He's ex-Army and a security expert. He could check her residence and recommend security options. He could show her some defense moves."

"That's a great idea but she's not a person of means."

"He volunteers to help victims. How does she afford you?" Kathleen asked with a smile because she already knew.

"I take some cases like hers."

Kathleen smiled. "I know. The center let me know that you take on patients who've been struggling. Why rape cases?"

"Because it makes me angry. This is how I deal with that anger." He took a sip of his wine. "I'd like ask you something. Most people use the euphemism, sexual assault. You don't."

"No. Like I said. I do reality."

They finished their salads and Breeda brought their steaks. Kathleen took a bite of her steak and smiled. "God, this is good."

“You really were hungry.”

“Yeah. I rarely miss a meal. Hell, I’ll be dead three days and still be hungry.”

Adam snickered as he sipped his wine. He sat back and looked at her. “I told you why I do it, why do you? Were you...”

“A victim? No. My roommate in college. She came home from a date one night. Her eye was blackened and her clothes were torn. I tried to get her to tell me what happened but she wouldn’t. I tried to call the campus police but she stopped me. She wouldn’t tell me who did it. All she said was she wanted to forget about it and get on with her life. She seemed okay for awhile. One night I came home and found her hanging from a water pipe.”

“That wasn’t your fault.”

“It took me a long to figure that out. It was the eighties and no one talked about rape. If they did, more times than not they’d blame the victim. That made me very angry. Volunteering is how I deal with the anger.”

“You’re a volunteer? I thought you were the new director.”

“No, I volunteer. I’m just filling in until they find a new director. I help fundraise, manage finances, establish contacts. I’m a behind the scenes person.”

“That surprises me. You seem very capable to be in charge.”

“Thank you, but I don’t have the qualifications.”

“What do you do?”

“I’m an independent stock trader.”

“Really?” he smiled.

“Why do you sound so surprised?”

“I don’t know. I guess you don’t look like one of those wall street types.”

Kathleen smiled. This was not the first time she'd had this conversation. "That's because I'm not one of those Wall Street types. I went to college for finance and business. I was the only child of an older couple. When they died they left me a nest egg. I didn't like the advice I was getting from the regular financial types. I started making my own investments and found out I had a knack for it. I've taken on a couple of clients but I work out of my home. It gives me time to do other things." She watched as he stared at her. "What?"

Adam smiled. "You're not what I expected."

Kathleen took a sip of her wine. "I never am."

Adam was surprised by this woman, which in itself was surprising. Thirty years of practice had made him very good at sizing people up quickly. Over the phone she'd sounded brisk and efficient. He'd pictured some bureaucrat wearing a plain suit and flats. What he didn't expect was a t-shirt and blue jeans wearing free spirit. He could understand why she felt so comfortable at Doyle's. Her long red hair, blue eyes and fair skin telegraphed her Irish heritage.

"Should I expect a diagnosis?" she asked.

"Excuse me?"

"You're staring. I thought you might be diagnosing me."

He smiled. "I'm sorry. Occupational hazard."

"What's your assessment?"

"I'm sorry?"

"I'm curious. You've been talking to me long enough to at least form an opinion." She leaned back against the booth. "Don't worry, I can take it."

He knew she was challenging him to be honest and he found that he liked it. "Okay. My first impression is that you are an intelligent, confident woman. You like going your own way. You're not a fan of rules. The only person you're interested in pleasing is yourself. In other words, you are not someone who would ever require my services." She stared at him for a moment, then she smiled.

"Why, thank you, Doctor. I believe that was a compliment."

"Just calling them like I see them." He found he enjoyed her smile.

"It wasn't always that way. After Carolyn, that was my roommate, I became very depressed. Fortunately I have an excellent sense of self preservation and I sought help. It took about a year of therapy before I finally came to terms with how I was feeling. But I was lucky. I had a good foundation to work from. My parents had given me a loving upbringing with a strong sense of self worth."

"You were very fortunate."

Her smile turned wistful. "Yes, I was."

"How long have they been gone?"

"My father died shortly after I graduated from a heart attack. My mother died a couple of years later, I think from a broken heart."

"You miss them."

"Every day," she whispered.

Before he realized what he was doing he reached for hand. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay. I've come to think of the pain I feel now from missing them the price I paid for being so loved."

"You're remarkable."

"Thank you," she smiled.

Adam suddenly realized what he was doing and pulled his hand back. "I'm sorry, Kathleen. "I'm being forward."

"It's fine, Adam. Why don't you tell me about your family?"

"I'm an only child, like you. My father has passed but my mother is still very much alive and kicking."

"She must be proud."

"A Jewish mother with her son the doctor? Yeah, she likes the bragging rights but I'm still an embarrassment."

"How?" she said with a surprise that pleased him.

"I never married or had children."

"Why not?"

"I never met anyone I wanted to spend my life with. What about you? Are you married?"

“No, I’m a never been too.”

“Why?” he asked he said with a smile.

“No one ever asked. But we were talking about you. Your mom gives you a hard time about being single.”

“She says I dress like a beatnik. She thinks I should cut my hair and shave my beard.”

“God no,” she said with a surprising enthusiasm. Then she blushed bright red. “I’m sorry. That was rude.”

“Not at all. Just tell me what you mean, ‘God no’.”

“I meant that the look works for you. You shouldn’t change, at least in my opinion.”

Adam couldn’t help but smile. “Thank you.”

Breeda came back to their table. “Could I get anyone dessert?”

“No thanks,” said Kathleen. “I would like some coffee.”

“That sounds good,” said Adam.

“We should probably finish talking about your patient. Do you want me to contact my security guy?”

“I think that would be helpful. We could meet at my office.”

“I should probably be there too. Mac is a big biker guy, bald with a beard and tattoos. He could seem intimidating and I could act as a buffer.”

“You’ve done this before,” he smiled.

“Yes, unfortunately.”

“I will defer to your judgement on this. I will talk to my patient and see if she’ll agree.”

“I’ll give Mac the heads up and you can call me when you want to meet.”

“Thank you, Kathy.”

Her head snapped up and she smiled. “Nobody’s called me that since I was a kid. I think I like that since I’m clearly no longer a kid.”

“You’re not that old.”

“I went to college in the eighties, early eighties. I’m fifty five.”

He sat back against his seat. “Huh. I wouldn’t have guessed.”

“Thank you. Okay, you’re turn.”

“What?”

“How old are you?”

“I’m fifty five too.”

“Well, how about that?” she smiled. Breeda came with the check and they both reached for it. Adam was quicker. “Adam, I asked you to join me.”

“But you are helping me with my patient. It’s the least I can do.”

“Thank you, Adam.” He put his credit card into the folder and handed it back to Breeda. He signed for the meal and escorted Kathleen to her car.

“Despite the reason we met, I enjoyed this,” he said.

“So did I.” She extended her hand. “I’ll wait to hear from you.”

He held on to her hand a little longer than he should. “You’ll hear from me soon.” Adam watched Kathleen drive away and wondered what just happened.

Kathleen met up with Mac at Adam's office. They sat in the conference room and waited for Adam to join them. "Do you want to take off your jacket?" she asked.

"No. Sometimes the tattoos can put people off," said Mac.

Adam joined them in the conference room. Kathleen stood and extended her hand. "It's good to see you again, Adam. This is Mac McClain."

"Thank you for coming. I've spoken with Elaine and she's agreed to the meeting. She's nervous about repeating her story to strangers."

"We've dealt with this before. Let's not keep her waiting. It will make her more nervous," said Mac.

Kathleen followed Adam and Mac tagged behind. "Elaine this is Kathleen and Mac. They're the people from the Advocacy Center."

"Hello, Elaine," Kathleen extended her hand. Mac extended his hand and Elaine was far more hesitant.

"Hello," she said quietly.

Kathleen and Mac took their seats opposite Elaine. "The first thing I want to tell you is anything you tell us will be held in the strictest confidence, just as if you had told Dr. Green."

"But he told you about me."

"Not you specifically. He told us the needs of one of his patients."

"Are you here to convince me to go to the parole hearing?"

"No. Dr. Green has already told us that you don't want to do that. What we are here for is to offer advice and some piece of mind. Mac is a security expert. He can check your home for safety, locks, alarms."

"I don't know," said Elaine.

Kathleen understood her reticence. "Any devices like locks and alarms that Mac adds will be covered by the center. I will also be with him when he tours your home."

“Elaine,” Mac said quietly. “I have extensive training in hand to hand combat. I can show you some simple techniques to defend yourself.”

“I’ve worked with the center for a number of years,” said Adam. “I trust them. I wouldn’t have brought them to meet you if I didn’t.”

Elaine gnawed on her lower lip. “Well, I guess it would be okay. I do have one question.” She looked at Mac. “It’s near eighty. Isn’t it a little warm for that jacket?”

“I have a lot of tattoos. Some people find it intimidating.”

“I have a tattoo.” It was the first smile they’d seen. She twisted her arm around and showed a small teddy bear on the inside of her wrist.

“Nice,” said Mac with a smile. “Your artist did a good job.”

“Can I see yours?” she asked.

“Sure.” He took off his jacket and showed his arms. He had an army tattoo on his right upper arm and a tiger on his left arm.

“Wow. Your tiger is amazing.”

“Thanks.”

She looked at her watch and back at Adam. “I have to get going. When do you want to come to my house?”

“Will Thursday work?”

“I’m home by four.” She extended her hand to Elaine and Mac. “Thank you. I’ll see you Thursday.”

Kathleen watched as Adam chewed on his pen. “What is it?”

“It was unusual, bonding over tattoos. I would have never expected it.”

“I’m just glad it didn’t put her off,” said Mac as he stood. “I have to get going. I’m teaching a class soon.” He extended his hand to Adam. “It was nice to meet you, Dr. Green.”

“Adam, please. Thank you for coming.”

“Sure thing,” he smiled. “I’ll talk to you later, Kathleen.”

Kathleen waited for Mac to leave. “That went better than you expected.”

“Yes, it did. I was concerned she might balk at having strangers in her home but you made her feel comfortable. You both did.” He continued making notes in Elaine’s file.

“You think that you’ve failed her somehow.”

Adam’s head snapped up. “What?”

“You think you missed something, but Adam, you didn’t. I’ve been dealing with these specific situations for twenty five years. In your practice you handle a variety of diagnoses and situations.”

Adam sat back and looked at her. “You’re good.”

“Yes, I am.”

Adam laughed. “You are something.”

She smiled and shrugged. “Like I said, I deal in reality.”

He looked at his watch and smiled. “Speaking of reality, it’s nearly six. You must be ready for dinner.”

She smiled. “You would be correct.”

“How about I pick the restaurant this time?”

“Sounds good but you’ll need to drive. Mac gave me a lift here. I was going to catch a cab home.”

Adam smiled and closed Elaine’s folder. “Let’s go.”

Adam held the door for Kathleen as she got into his car. She wasn't like anyone he'd ever known. He got into the car and he was about to start the car when she put her hand over his.

"Adam is this a business dinner or is this a date?"

He smiled. She really was something. He'd never met anyone more direct. "I'd like it to be a date. What would you like?"

"I'd like it to be a date."

"Well, it's good we cleared that up," he laughed.

"Since this is a date, there is something I've been thinking about." She reached up toward his beard. "May I?"

"Feel free," he smiled.

She brushed her hand over his beard. "Mmm, it's softer than I imagined."

"You've imagined what my beard felt like?"

"I've imagined a lot of things."

"Oh really?" he grinned. "Like what?"

"Like this," she leaned in and gave him a soft kiss. "Yes, very nice."

"Yes it was."

"I've never kissed a man with a beard before."

"You're verdict?"

"I hope I get to do it again."

"I think that's a sure bet." He leaned close and cupped her cheek in his hand. He pulled her to him and kissed her. It started soft and tender but it quickly turned passionate. He forced himself to pull away.

"Wow," she whispered.

“I agree,” he smiled. Kathleen’s stomach took that moment to growl. He laughed out loud.

“Good Lord. How embarrassing.”

He started the car. “Not at all. That’s just the signal I need to feed you.”

He took her to Delfino’s, his favorite Italian place. They were seated at a small table in the back. A tall woman in her forties approached their table. She had dark brown hair tied in a tight ponytail.

“Dr. Green, it’s good to see you.”

“Hello Maria. This is Ms. Malone.”

“Hello,” she said with a smile. She turned back to Adam. “E quasi ora”

“Posse per favore ordinaire,” he smiled. “O dovrei chiamare, mamma?”

“Fine,” she said with a smile. “The carbonara is amazing tonight.”

“Sounds great.” He looked at Kathleen. She just stared at him. “Kathleen? Do you know what you want?”

“I’m sorry. I’m still getting over the fact that you speak Italian.” She looked over at Maria. “The carbonara sound great.”

Maria nodded. “The Merlot?”

“Yes, thank you.”

Kathleen kept staring at him. “What did she say to you?”

“She said ‘It’s about time’”

“I take it you don’t bring a lot of dates here.” Adam shook his head. “Why not?”

“What do you mean why not?”

“Where do you take your dates?”

“I don’t date that often.” He was strangely pleased at her genuine surprise.

“How is that possible? Do you own a mirror?”

Adam smiled. “What do you mean?”

“Please, Adam, you know by now I work with reality. You are an incredibly handsome man with a very powerful male energy. You should be dripping in women.”

He couldn’t help laughing. “Well, thank you very much for the compliment. You know what it’s like at our age. Everyone is trying to set you up with a single friend who has a ton of baggage.”

“And I bet they want a little free analysis to go with dinner.”

“That’s right. Either for themselves or their troubled teens.”

“Okay, I see your point. With me it’s divorced Dad’s with money problems. So, what did you say to Maria?” she smiled

“I asked if she could take our order of did I have to call her Mama out to the kitchen?”

Kathleen laughed. “Where did you learn Italian?”

“I took a year off before medical school and spent it touring around Italy. I like to come here for the food and to brush up on my Italian.”

“Very impressive,” she said with a sly smile.

Maria came back with two glasses of wine and a plate of focaccia with a plate of dipping oil. Adam tore off a piece, dipped it and handed it to Kathleen. Instead of taking it she simply let him feed it to her. She took a bite and rolled her eyes.

“Oh God, that’s heaven.”

“I thought you’d like that.”

She looked at him and smiled. “I do, very much.”

Adam stared at her for a moment. He didn't quite know if she was talking about the bread. "Yes, the food is very good."

She smiled. "That too."

Okay, now he knew. This woman was incredibly direct. He had to get his mind back on track. "Have you always lived in Southampton?"

"In the vicinity. We used to live in Warminster but after my parents passed the house was too much for one person. That's when I bought my condo on over on Fourth. It's closer to the center and the area suits me." She smiled. "Great take out."

Adam knew the area and knew she must do well for herself. That area of town was very pricy. "Do you date a lot?"

Kathleen chuckled. "No. Between work, the center and a couple of other things I'm involved in, I don't have a lot of time."

"What other things are you involved in?"

"I do fundraising for a few charities, the animal shelter, the Boys and Girls Club. I help maintain their books, manage some investments for them." She stopped and looked at him. "You're staring again."

"I'm sorry. It's just that I find you fascinating."

"Are you making me a case study?"

He smiled. "No, nothing like that. I've never met anyone like you. You do so much for others."

"I want to leave the world a little better because I was here. I use my talent with numbers to help good causes." She smiled. "You do the same thing."

"I don't know about that."

"Of course you do. You help people in ways I never could. You help them heal and go on with their lives."

“I often wonder about that. After they stop seeing me, I wonder if I really made a difference.”

Kathleen reached for his hand. “You know you do. You may not be stitching up wounds, but the wounds are just as real.”

“Thanks, Kathy,” he smiled.

“That’s the second time you’ve called me Kathy,” she smiled. “I like it.”

They enjoyed their dinner and the conversation turned to homeowner problems, the Phillies and what kind of food they liked. “How do you feel about Chinese?” asked Adam.

“Love it.”

“We should go to China Rose next time.”

She gave him the sly smile he enjoyed. “You’re assuming there’ll be a next time.”

He leaned in and smiled. “A guy can hope.”

She reached for his hand. “I think it’s less a hope and more a certainty.”

Adam drove Kathleen to her large, three story condo. Modeled after the homes in Old City Philadelphia, they had the charm of historic homes but the convenience of new construction.

“Would you like to come in for coffee?” she asked.

“Sure.” He followed into her home and was surprised at what he saw. It wasn’t full of high end furniture and pricy artwork like he would have expected. Instead, it had a comfortable furniture, a big screen TV and a large, filled bookcase. He followed her into the kitchen where she pulled two mugs for the cabinet.

“Decaf?”

“Yes, thanks.”

“I can’t drink regular past three or I’m up all night.” She set a mug under the spout and put a decaf pod in the machine.

“Same for me. One of the many glories of getting older.”

She turned and smiled. “I don’t feel that old. In my head I’m still twenty five. Occasionally my body reminds me otherwise.” She looked him up and down. “You certainly don’t look old.”

He laughed and stroked his beard. “That’s not what I think when I look I the mirror.”

She stroked his beard and whispered, “Then you’re looking in the wrong mirror.” She pulled the coffee mug out of the machine and handed it to him. “Milk?”

“No, black is fine.” She made her mug and put in some milk and sugar. “Let’s go get comfortable.”

Adam followed her into the living room and they sat down on the couch. “You’re home is not what I expected. Nothing about you is what I expected.”

Kathleen laughed. “What did you expect from my home?”

“Looking at the neighborhood I would have expected some antiques, something more fussy. I guess I shouldn’t be surprised. You aren’t like anyone I’ve known in this line of work.”

“What do you mean?”

“Most of the people I’ve worked with are more...subdued. You’re are a much brighter personality.”

“Thank you.”

“How do you stay so positive with the work your doing?”

Kathleen got quiet. “There are times when it does get to me, especially when the cases involve children. But when it does I try to focus on the victories, women starting over, successful prosecutions. I guess you would call it a coping mechanism.”

Adam smiled. “I would call it the sign of a healthy psyche.”

She nodded. “Why thank you, doctor. What about you? How do you cope with everything you hear? Some of it must be truly horrifying.”

He sat his coffee cup down on the table. “Some of it is. Sometimes I wonder how we haven’t died off as a species with what we do to each other.”

“How do you cope?”

“I’m not sure I do. I just move on to the next case.” He stopped himself. “I’m sorry. I don’t know why I said that.”

“Because it was the truth.” She set down her coffee. “It explains why you’re so buttoned up.”

“You think I’m buttoned up?”

She ran her hand over his silver temple. “Tighter than hurricane shutters.” She toyed with a curl. “But I understand why.” She brushed his hair with her fingers.

“You seem to be fascinated with my hair.”

She leaned closer. "You have great hair."

"Thank you," he said with a smile. "I'm very fond of yours too."

"Oh yeah?"

"Definitely." He reached around pulled her hair over her shoulders. "You look like one of those Irish fairies."

"Maybe I am," she whispered. "Maybe I'm going to cast a spell on you."

"I think you already did," he said as he leaned close and gave her a soft kiss. What he meant to be a gentle touch quickly morphed into a passionate war. She pulled him tight against her until he found himself pinning her to the couch. He raised his head and smiled. "I haven't made out on a couch since high school."

"Well, you seem to have an excellent memory." She tilted her head and smiled. "But there is one big advantage to not being in high school."

"And what would that be?"

She pushed him up and took him by the hand. "No parents to catch us." He followed up the stairs and she guided him into her bedroom. He was vaguely aware of his surroundings as Kathleen backed up to the bed as she pulled off her top. He couldn't stop himself from making a low growl. Something about her spoke to him on a primal level. He pulled off his glasses and tossed them on a night stand. He grabbed the edge of pullover and yanked it over his head. He shed his shoes and slacks.

"Oh my," she whispered.

He smiled as he removed her jeans. He climbed on bed putting his knees on either side of hers. "My God, woman." He ran his hands up her fair skin. "So beautiful." He slipped up her panties and undid her bra and ran his hands over her breasts.

"Adam," she whispered as she extended her arms to him.

He covered her and dove into a deep kiss. "Kathy," he whispered as he nipped at her ear. He worked his way down her body tasting and nipping. "You taste so good." He moved back up to kiss her and was surprised when she rolled him on his back.

“My turn,” she said with a wicked grin. She tasted and teased her way down his body until she got to legs. She sat back and looked, running her fingers up and down his legs. “My God, you’ve got thighs like tree trunks.”

“Is that a good thing?” he said through clenched teeth.

She chuckled. “What do you think?” She leaned down and began a slow torture with her tongue until she finally took him in her mouth.

“Oh God,” he whispered. He focused as long as he could until he grabbed her and flipped her on her back. When they finally came together it was explosive. When he finally rested his head on her shoulder it took a few minutes before he had enough breath to speak. He looked into Kathy’s eyes and realized for once in his life, he had no words.

Kathleen woke up and realized she was curled up against a solid chest. Mmmm, that wasn't the only thing about Adam that was solid. She loved his strong physique. She couldn't believe how the buttoned up doctor turned into such a passionate man. He stirred and pulled her close.

"Ummm, good morning," he whispered.

"Good morning."

She leaned over and gave him a kiss. "Do you have to be anywhere today?"

"No, unless I get a page from my service I have my weekends to myself."

"I work from home and I have a few things to check but I don't have to be anywhere."

He rolled her over on her back. "That sounds good." He gave her a kiss and stroked her hair.

"How about if I make us some breakfast?"

Adam smiled. "Let me guess. You're hungry."

She gave him a quick kiss. "Starving, and it's your fault." She slid out of bed and tossed on a t-shirt and a pair of shorts. Let me get cleaned up and I'll get us breakfast." She ran into the bathroom and freshened up. When she looked at her reflection she saw a bit of redness from Adam's beard. She walked out of her bath and Adam was pulling on his boxers. He noticed her red skin. He ran his fingers over her skin.

"Oh sweetheart, I'm sorry. I didn't realize your skin was so sensitive."

Kathleen smiled at the memory of his beard tickling every nerve ending in her body. She stroked his beard and smiled. "It's totally worth it." She gave him a kiss. "Never, ever shave it."

She left him to get dressed as she went downstairs. It had been a long time since she'd had a guest for breakfast. She started the coffee and grabbed the makings for some omelets. She stood for a moment and tried to think of exactly when her last relationship

had ended. She shook her head when she realized how long it had been. "Pathetic," she growled.

"Excuse me?"

She turned around and saw Adam standing the doorway with light behind him.. He actually took her breath away. "Definitely not you," she whispered. She walked towards him and ran her hands up his chest. "Damn, dude. You are one fine looking fella." He leaned down and gave her a kiss.

"Thank you," he smiled. He stroked her cheek. "And you, Ma'am are a very beautiful woman."

"Well then we make a good pair," she laughed.

He pulled her close and gave her a kiss. "I smell coffee."

"Sit, It's ready." She brought him a mug and put hers underneath the spout. "I'm making omelets."

"Sounds great. Want some help?"

"You could get the toast."

They sat at the kitchen table and had their breakfast like any other couple. Kathleen wondered how she could feel so comfortable with Adam so quickly. Normally, she didn't invite people into her life.

"You never told me, what was pathetic?"

"Me."

"Why do you say that?"

"I was trying to remember the last time I...well it's been a pathetically long time."

"Oh," he said quietly. He reached for her hand. "Then why me?"

"Truth?"

“Always.”

“When I first saw you at Doyle’s you made my heart race.”

“Really?” he asked with a grin. “So you just want me for my body?”

Kathleen laughed and squeezed his hand. “I’ve very quickly realized that you’re a very good man.”

“Thank you, Kathy.” He took her hand and placed a kiss in her palm. “I think you’re an amazing woman.”

They cleaned up the dishes and made themselves a second mug of coffee. “Come on, it’s a nice morning. We can sit on the deck.” She led him out to a small wooden deck in a surprisingly large garden. They sat down on the lounge chairs.

“Wow. This is beautiful.”

“Thanks. I like to putter around. It’s relaxing. What do you do to relax?”

“Hobbies? I play some racquet ball.”

Kathleen grinned. “That explains your legs.”

“You do seem to be enamored of my legs,” he laughed.

She set her mug down on the small table and climbed into his lap. “I am fond of all your many wonderful parts but your legs, ummm. Very nice.”

He put his arms around her waist and gave her a kiss. “Why, thank you, sweetheart.” He ran his hands down her back and up under her shirt. “I’m very fond of all your many wonderful parts too.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you have a favorite?” she grinned.

“I’m a scientist. I believe further research is called for.” He gave her a deep kiss.

“Ummm, I approve of your thoroughness, doctor, but I do have to go check in on my computer. Why don’t you come with me and I’ll show you the rest of the house.” She got up and took him by the hand. “The quicker I check in the quicker you can get back to your research.” She led him through the living room and back upstairs. “This floor is my room and two guest rooms.” She led him to the third floor. It was a large open floor space with large dormer windows that made it bright. There was a nice table and chairs and a comfortable couch.

“Wow, this is nice,” said Adam.

“Thanks. It’s really comfortable and I occasionally bring clients up here.” She gave him a kiss. “Now I need to boot up and see if anything needs my attention.”

“I’ll get out of your hair.”

“You can stay if you want. It won’t bother me.”

She booted up her computer and checked her emails. There were a few from clients but nothing that was pressing. Being Saturday, the markets were closed and she knew what trades she would be making on Monday. She screened her few clients so she knew she wouldn’t have any nervous Nellies to hand hold. They trusted her to make the right choices. She closed her computer down and turned around. “Well doctor, I’m done with my work. Are you prepared to continue your research?” She loved his wicked grin.

Adam watched as Kathleen worked. He'd never met anyone like her. Gifted, kind, not to mention sexy as hell. So was also honest, painfully so, maybe. He would never have to wonder what she's thinking. She'd have no problem telling him. And God, was she beautiful, an Irish Catholic dream girl. Mom may have a problem with that. Wait. He was already thinking about her meeting his mother? He was really getting ahead of himself. But something about her reached him. He didn't understand it but he always over analyzed his relationships. Maybe this time, he shouldn't try. She closed her computer down and turned around.

"Well doctor, I'm done with my work. Are you prepared to continue your research?"

He stood and took her by the hand. "Come here," he growled. He pulled her into a passionate kiss as he ran his hands down her back and rested on her round ass. She pulled back and smiled.

"A little hands on research, doctor?"

"I believe in a thorough scientific method." He took her by the hand and led her downstairs to her bedroom. He yanked her t-shirt over her head as she kicked off her shorts. She pulled off his glasses and stuck them on the end of her nose.

"Do they look as sexy on me as they do on you?" She pushed them up onto the bridge of her nose and rolled her eyes. "Wow, you really need these." She pulled them off and set them on the nightstand.

He pulled her close and ran his hands over her bare skin. "I see well enough to know how beautiful you are."

"Oh, Adam," she whispered.

He set her down on the bed while he quickly shed his clothes. Then he began a torturously slow exploration of her body. She moaned as he brushed his beard against her skin. He tasted and nipped at her skin as she writhed under him. When he brushed against her most sensitive skin she arched up and called out his name. She pulled him towards her and wrapped her legs in a vise grip around him. He lost himself in her body and her passion.

Adam held Kathleen close and kissed the top of her head. "My God, woman. That was...I don't know if there is a word for it."

She propped herself on her elbow, her long hair falling across his chest. "Since my heart is still racing and my legs are now jelly I think 'Wow' is close to accurate."

"Oh yeah?" he grinned.

"Yeah," she smiled as she pushed at his chest. "Look at you all proud as a peacock. You may be surprised at the results but I'm not."

"You're not?"

"Oh Lord, this is going to go to your head. Adam, the moment I saw you at Doyle's I wanted you. I could feel your energy and damn, if everything in me that's been asleep for so long woke up. I knew right away if we did get together it would be...powerful." She smiled and curled up on his chest. "I've never been more happy to be right."

"I'm pretty happy you were right, too."

She looked him in the eyes. "What did you think when you first met me?"

He smiled. "Well..."

"Come on. I'm a big girl. I can't take it."

"I thought how was I suppose to focus when...you'll think I'm ridiculous."

"No I won't. Promise."

"I wanted to run my fingers through your hair."

"Oh yeah?"

He ran his fingers through her hair. "Yeah. It's so striking. Beautiful hair on a very beautiful woman."

She gave him a little kiss. "Thank you. See. I don't think you're ridiculous at all."

"No?"

She looked into his eyes. "No. I think you're smart," she kissed his chest. "Handsome," she kissed his neck. "Kind," she kissed his cheek. "Sexy as hell," she whispered as she nipped at his ear. "But definitely not ridiculous." She gave him a deep kiss.

Adam rolled her on her back and smiled. "Kathy," he whispered as he kissed her neck.

"Yes?"

"How would you feel about spending the rest of the weekend right here?"

She gave him a bright smile. "So long as you throw the occasional burger my way, I'm good with it."

"Like sliding raw meat under the bars for the bears at the zoo."

She laughed. "Exactly. If I'm not fed regularly I start growling."

Adam smiled. "Noted," he said before he kissed her again.

Adam sat in his office and reviewed his notes for his first patient. At least he tried to. He smiled at the thought of the past weekend. He couldn't remember the last time he'd had a weekend like that. Had he ever? Their weekend had been passionate but it had also been relaxed and comfortable. He realized he didn't feel on guard with Kathy and he didn't know if that was a good thing or not. His intercom buzzed, interrupting his thoughts.

"Dr. Green you're ten o'clock is here."

"Thank you, Ellen." Adam closed his notes and picked up his pad. He took a breath and cleared his mind to treat his next patient. He'd been doing this for thirty years but today, it would be a challenge.

Kathleen closed down her computer and made a few notes. The trades were complete as well as the few calls to clients she needed to return. She went downstairs to get changed for her meeting at the Animal Shelter. She was pulling together the resources for a free spay and neuter clinic. She'd report to the board that everything was in place and two local veterinary surgeons had agreed to volunteer their services and that of their staffs. She brushed her hair and put it into a quick ponytail. She was glad she didn't have to dress up for this particular board. The meetings were held at the shelter and everyone would be in jeans. She looked in the mirror and smiled. Her neck was still red from Adam's beard. He'd left early this morning so he could change for work. It had been an incredible weekend. She couldn't wait to see him again but they both had work. Maybe it was a good idea to give themselves a break. Her legs were still jelly and she could use a long nap. She also wanted to give her emotions a break. She was feeling so much so fast she was getting nervous. Adam was an amazing man. Everything about their weekend was perfect. But Kathleen was leery of putting too much into a relationship. She'd seen too much relationship wreckage.

Kathleen came out of her meeting and checked her messages. She saw a text from Mac confirming Thursday at four thirty. They'd meet at Elaine's and walk her through the process. She would also talk about getting a restraining order. Any criminal activity

like violation of a restraining order and he'd be back in prison. She'd have to run this past Adam. She didn't want to put too much pressure on his patient. Her phone rang and she smiled.

"Hello."

"Hi Kathy. How's your day going?"

She loved that he started calling her Kathy. "It was just thinking about you."

"Oh really?"

"Cool your jets, Doctor," she laughed. "I just got a confirmation text from Mac about Thursday. I'll need you to text me her address."

"Fine."

"I also wanted to ask you about something for Elaine. I would like to recommend filing for a protection order for her. She wouldn't have to go to court or confront him. It would give her an extra layer of protection but I don't want to push her."

"No, I think that would be fine."

"Excellent. So, that would conclude the business portion of the phone call. My day is going well. I just finished a board meeting at the Animal Shelter. How is your day?"

"Fine." Adam paused and chuckled. "Do you feel as much like high school kid as I do?"

She laughed. "Absolutely. I only saw you six hours ago and..."

"And what?"

"I miss you."

"I miss you too, Kathy."

"This is crazy."

"Well, I am an authority on crazy."

"Do we qualify?"

“Borderline,” he chuckled.

“What is happening with us, Adam?”

“I’m not sure, but sweetheart, I know I want to find out.”

“So do I.”

“Dinner tomorrow night? Out at a restaurant, like grownups.”

“That sounds great.”

“I’ll make reservations. I’ll call you later and tell you where.”

“You just want an excuse to call me again.”

Adam paused. “I’m never going to get anything past you, am I?”

“Not a chance.”

Kathleen put the finishing touches on her light makeup. She'd missed Adam even though she'd seen him yesterday morning. She didn't understand it. Maybe she shouldn't try. She'd always done a good job of looking out for herself. She could handle Adam Green in her life. She looked into the mirror and laughed. Who was she kidding? Adam wasn't like any man she'd ever known. This was unfamiliar territory. She already felt in over her head. Her thoughts were interrupted by the door bell. She opened the door and took a deep breath. Adam was wearing a dark blue suit, a light blue shirt and a dark blue tie. The color emphasized his amazing blue eyes. "Wow," she gasped.

"What?" he asked.

"This," she whispered as she pulled him into a deep kiss. "My God, you look handsome."

"Thank you, sweetheart," he smiled. Adam rubbed his hand down her back. She was wearing a simple green shift that was tucked at her hip. She favored it because she thought it was classic but showed her curves to the best advantage. Apparently Adam thought so too. "You look beautiful."

"Thank you." She pushed her hair aside to show her Celtic drop earrings. "I call this my full on Irish look"

Adam smiled. "It's working for me."

"Oh yeah?" she grinned.

"Hell yeah." He pulled her close into a passionate kiss.

"Mmmmm, delicious but someone promised me food."

"We better get going before we lose our reservations."

Adam had chosen Ti Amo, one of his favorite restaurants. He'd never had a bad meal here and he was hoping Kathy liked it as much as he did. The hostess led them to the corner booth he'd requested. Kathy slid into the booth and he slid next to her. He knew it was a high school move to get close to her during dinner but he didn't care. He

recognized he wasn't behaving like he normally did with a woman but Kathy wasn't just any woman.

"This is lovely."

"It's my one of my favorite places."

Kathleen looked over the menu. "It all looks so good. What do you recommend?"

"The spaghetti Bolognese is amazing. They're famous for their mushroom ravioli."

"Oh, I love mushroom ravioli."

Adam ordered them each a glass of chianti as the nibbled on warm, oil dipped bread. "Mmm. This is my downfall. I love their breads."

"It's delicious," she smiled. "How was your day?"

"It was okay. How about yours?"

"Not bad. The spay and neuter clinic is on track. The shelter's volunteer vet also works at the Mavis Zoo. He's recommended me to their board as a financial advisor and fundraiser."

"That's great."

"It's pretty exciting. I have a meeting with them next week. They're going to give me a behind the scenes tour to see what they want to accomplish. They hope I can match them up with the financial sources to get it done."

"Can you?"

Kathy gave him a sly grin. "It's what I do best."

Adam laughed and took her hand in his. "You're a very remarkable woman."

"You're pretty remarkable yourself, doctor," she smiled as the server brought their meal.

He took a bite of his meal and smiled. The chef was definitely on point tonight. He saw Kathy's eyes were closed and she was sighing. "How's your ravioli?"

“Hush,” she said without opening her eyes. “I’m having a religious experience.”

They finished their meal but passed on dessert. “How about coffee at my place?” he asked.

“Sounds perfect.”

Adam’s apartment was smaller than Kathy’s place but it served him well. The furniture was overstuffed and comfortable and the living room featured a large screen TV. There was no mistaking this was a man’s apartment. It was in a nice location and being on the top floor he had a great view of the park and the city beyond. He set up some decaf to brew and joined her in the living room.

“This is lovely,” she smiled as she looked out the patio door.

Adam slipped his arms around her waist and kissed her neck. “Thank you.”

She turned to face him and slid her arms around his neck. “Although I think we’re past any awkward conversations, I don’t have any meetings until tomorrow afternoon.”

“Would that be your way of saying you’d like to spend the night?”

“It would.”

Adam chuckled. “I’ve never met anyone like you.”

“Is that a good thing?”

“A very good thing,” he whispered before pulling her into a passionate kiss.

Elaine Connors walked around her small townhouse to make sure it was tidy. She decided it was suitable enough for company. The people Dr. Green introduced to her seemed like they knew what they were doing. They also seemed to care. She was always careful with new people but she didn't think Dr. Green would steer her wrong.

She looked in the mirror and ran a brush through her blond hair and pulled it into a tight ponytail. She'd changed from her office clothes into a t-shirt and jeans. She didn't need to impress these people. Although. That Mr. McClain was kind of handsome. She hadn't dated much, not because she hadn't been asked. She was just cautious. Maybe too cautious. That's why she was seeing Dr. Green. She'd felt more in control since she'd started seeing him. Knowing that her father was about to be released was making her feel like she was pulling back. The security check would help ease her mind. So would that Mr. McClain. He seemed very strong. He could defend her. She shook her head. What was she thinking? He wouldn't be with her around the clock. He would install some security on the doors and windows. He said he'd teach her some moves to protect herself. She'd like that. He seemed so nice.

Mac McClain got ready for his meeting with Kathleen and Dr. Green's patient. She was a pretty little thing, petite and blonde. She seemed really shy but that was to be expected. He was surprised when they bonded over tattoos. Hers was really cute. He stopped and looked in the mirror. "What are you doing?" he asked his reflection. "This woman has been through hell. You're there to help her not hit on her." He started volunteering when a female friend, Karen came to work with a black eye. She claimed it was nothing but he persisted. She finally broke down and told him she'd been raped the night before. She didn't want to report it because she'd been in a bar and had a few drinks. She thought the man she was dancing with was nice. That was until he got her in the parking lot. She tried to fight him off but he beat her. Mac convinced her to go to the hospital only when he'd promised to go with her. Turned out she had three broken ribs and a fractured wrist. She reported the crime despite the fear that people would say she'd been asking for it. Thankfully the bar had a security camera in the parking lot that caught the whole thing, including how hard Karen had tried to fight him. The man had a record

and was easily identified. He was immediately arrested. The guy was big, as big as Mac. He'd easily overpowered Karen.

Mac had walked Karen through the process, learning as he went. Depositions, pre-trial hearings. The man's record made a plea deal his best option and he took it. Karen agreed to it because it meant she wouldn't have to testify. She was never the same after the rape. Before she'd been easy going and funny. After, she was quiet and withdrawn.

The plea made Mac angry. He wanted to see the guy suffer and he wouldn't have minded inflicting that suffering himself. He would never understand how a man could do something like that but he'd spent years trying to stop them. His self-defense classes for survivors were always free, as were these inspections, like today at Elaine's. Different organizations funded the equipment but his time he gave freely. If he could save one woman from Karen's fate, it was well worth it.

Kathleen pulled up in front of the address Adam had given her. It said a lot about trust that Adam was comfortable with her and Mac meeting with Elaine without him. On time as usual, Mac pulled his SUV next to her sedan.

"Hey Kathleen. You ready to do this?"

"First I want to talk to her about getting a restraining order. I have Adam's okay to discuss it."

"Adam?" he said with a grin.

Kathleen blushed and slapped his arm. "Hey, I'm a big girl."

Mac smiled and put his arm around her shoulder. "I'm just busting your chops. He seems like a nice guy."

"He is," she smiled.

They walked up to Elaine's door and knocked. She opened the door to them and smiled. "Hi. Thank you for coming." They followed her into the small, comfortable living room. "Can I get you some ice tea?"

“Yes, thank you. That would be great.” Kathleen learned early that any courtesy offered by a survivor should be accepted. They took spots on the couch as Elaine brought them their tea. “Thank you,” she said as she took a sip. “Before we start I want to talk to you about something. I want to discuss a restraining order.” She could see Elaine start to freeze. “Don’t worry. It doesn’t mean you’d have to appear in court or face him at all. Our attorney will file it on your behalf and his parole officer will be notified before his release. That way it will all be part of the process.”

Elaine looked back and forth between her and Mac. “I really wouldn’t have to face him?”

“No, I promise,” said Kathleen.

“We wouldn’t recommend anything that would put you at risk,” said Mac.

Elaine twisted her fingers together. “I’m afraid it will make him angry.”

Mac looked at Kathleen and she nodded. She knew what he was going to tell her. He looked at Elaine. “Honestly, it probably will. But if it’s part of his parole he will have no choice but to obey. Once the order is in place if he tries to contact you in any way he violates parole and he’s back in jail.”

Elaine took a sip of her tea and then took a deep breath. She squared her shoulders and looked at Mac. “Mr. McClain, you said you’d make sure I was safe. Did you mean it?”

Kathleen was surprised when Mac reached his hand across the table and took her hand.

“Elaine, you have my word.”

She could see Elaine physically relax as she gave him a small smile. “I believe you.” She released his hand and sat back. “I’ll sign what ever you want.”

“If you sign it needs to be because you want it. We are only offering advice, not telling you what have to do,” said Kathleen.

Elaine seemed to take that into consideration. She took a sip of her tea. "Do you find that getting a restraining order is helpful?"

"It gives you an extra layer of protection, legal protection," said Mac.

She took a breath and sighed. "I wish I didn't have to do any of this. I wish it wasn't necessary to fortify my home and learn self defense. But it is. That's my reality. If I'm going to stay in my home, in my job I love and stay with my friends, I have to. I'll be damn if I'll let that bastard steal any more from me." She looked at Kathleen and nodded. "I'll sign."

"I think you'll be glad you did," said Kathleen. She caught a glance between Elaine and Mac but she knew Mac. She knew he would never cross the line with a client. "I get the papers for Elaine. Mac, why don't you start your inspection?"

Mac stood and looked at Elaine. "Do you mind if I look around?" He knew to never do anything for a survivor with expressed permission.

"Please go ahead." She managed a smile. "I managed to tidy up before you arrived." He smiled and started looking at windows in the room before he moved to the hallway. Kathleen pulled out a file from her messenger bag and explained what she was signing. By the time they finished going over all documents Mac returned from looking around the townhouse.

"Will the landlord have any problems with me installing an alarm system."

Elaine smiled. "I own this place. It's small but it's enough for just me."

"You have a lovely home," said Kathleen.

"It is very nice, Elaine. The fact that you own it will make it easier for me to set up wiring and lights."

"Lights?"

"You have sufficient light out front between the porch light and the street lights but out back is dark. I'd like to install a motion activated light in the back. That way if anyone comes into your backyard, you'll know it. Do you have a smart phone?"

“Yes.”

“Great. I can tie everything into your smart phone. You can control everything from anywhere. You’ll even be able to see who’s at your front door from work.”

“Will it take you long to install?”

“A few hours. I should have everything together by Saturday.”

“That would work for me,” said Elaine.

“I have a meeting on Saturday morning. Can we do it in the afternoon?” asked Kathleen.

“I have a class Saturday afternoon,” said Mac.

“I don’t mind if Mac comes over himself.”

“Are you sure?” he asked.

“I’m sure,” she smiled. “I trust you. I trust you both. Dr. Green would have never introduced us if he didn’t trust you.”

Kathleen extended her hand. “Thank you, Elaine. That means a great deal to us.”

Mac extended his hand. “Is eight a.m. okay with you?”

Elaine took his hand and smiled. “That will be fine. I’ll put the coffee on.”

He gave her a broad smile. “That will be great. I work better with plenty of fuel.” He finally let go of her hand and said their goodbyes. Kathleen stopped him before he got into his truck.

“Mac, I can see you’re attracted to her. And it’s obvious she’s attracted to you. Please...”

He cut her off. “Don’t worry. I won’t let ‘white knight’ syndrome get in the way. I admit I think she’s very pretty and under normal circumstances I’d ask her out. But you know me, Kathleen. I would never do anything to break your trust or that of someone I’m trying to help.”

Kathleen smiled. "Of course not. I just had to...well you know."

"I understand. Believe me I do." He pulled out his keys. "Are we good now? Can I go?"

"Yeah, we're good. Let me know how the installation turns out."

"Will do."

Kathleen got in her car as she watched Mac pull into traffic. She knew there were sparks between him and Elaine but she knew if nothing else, Mac was a man of honor.

Adam drove toward Kathy's house for dinner. She'd insisted she would cook tonight. Frankly he could use a low key evening. Some patients took more out of him than others. Today was one of those days. The young man he was treating might never be the same after the abuse he'd suffered at the hands of his drug addicted parents. Fortunately his grandparents took custody of him and were doing everything they could for him. Unfortunately, he didn't know if it would be enough.

He knocked on her door and was greeted by Kathy's smile. "Well, hey there handsome." She grabbed his hand and pulled him inside. "Kiss me quick before my boyfriend get here." He laughed before he pulled her into a deep kiss. "How was your day?" She asked as she headed toward the kitchen.

"The same as usual," he said.

She turned and looked at him. "What's going on, Adam?"

"What do you mean?"

"When you come from work you seem so, I don't know, sullen?"

"I'm not sullen."

"You're sullen. What's going on? Trouble at work?" She took his hand and led him to the couch. "Okay, talk to me."

"You know I can't."

"Not specifics, generalize."

"I'm not sure if I'm doing any good."

"How do you mean?"

"There is so much suffering. I don't feel like I'm making a dent."

"If you mean are you going to wipe out mental illness? No, you're not."

He cracked a smile. "Well, that's supportive."

“You know what I mean. It is an illness as prevalent as cancer with just as many variations. There is no magic bullet to cure it. But you do help one patient at a time. I would bet the farm that there is someone out there right now, someone who used to be your patient, who is doing great things. Or they’re living an ordinary life. Going to work, coming home to the spouse and the kids. But none of that would have been possible without your intervention and treatment.”

This time he grinned. “You have a farm?”

Kathy laughed and slapped his shoulder. “Smart ass.”

He leaned in and gave her a kiss. “Thank you,” he whispered. “What’s for dinner?”

“Come on, you can set the table.”

They ate their meal and enjoyed some conversation about nothing in particular, and that was great. Guilty pleasure TV shows, favorite snacks, how much trouble they got into as kids. He noticed Kathy’s right eye was a bit puffy. “Are you okay?” he asked pointing to her eye.

“It’s just a little headache. It’s the humidity and pollen.”

“Did you take anything?”

“Some aspirin.”

“How long has it been going on?”

“A couple of days.”

“Days?” He grabbed a penlight from his pocket and walked to her side of the table. “Turn around, please.”

“An exam, doctor? Really?”

“Please, baby.”

Her smile slipped from her face. “Okay.” He flashed the light in her left eye, then the right. “Ow. God that’s bright.”

“Sorry,” he whispered. “What you have is a hell of a migraine. I don’t know how you manage with it.”

“You get used to it.”

“Does it happen a lot?”

“I’m allergic to a lot of things.”

“I’m going to get my bag.”

“You carry a bag? Since when do psychiatrists carry medical bags?”

“Since my mother occasionally asks me to prove I’m a ‘real’ doctor.” He walked to his car with his heart pounding. He thought he knew what was going on but he prayed he was wrong. Please let him be wrong. He grabbed his bag from the trunk and went back inside. He pulled a chair up next to her and opened the bag. He grabbed a blood pressure cuff and a stethoscope. He listened and watched the dial. Damn. He held out his two forefingers. “Sweetheart I want you to squeeze my fingers as hard as you can.”

“What? Why?”

“Please.” She did and he knew he was right. Damn. “Where’s your purse?”

“What? Upstairs on the dresser.”

“I’ll be right back.”

“Adam, please what’s going on?” she yelled to his back. He ran up the stairs and back down again. He handed her the purse and pushed his things back in his bag.

“Come with me.”

“Where?”

“The ER.”

“What? Why? For a little headache.”

“Please baby, trust me.”

“Okay,” she nodded.

Adam made sure Kathy was strapped in and tried not to speed to Mercy General. He hoped he was getting her to the ER in time.

“Will you please tell me what’s going on?” she asked.

He tried to stay calm. “Your blood pressure is too high. That’s what’s causing the migraines. We need to get your pressure down right away.” He pulled into the ER entrance and helped Kathy to the front desk.

“Dr. Green?”

“Hello Carol. Is Doctor Richards still on?”

“Yes.”

“Please let him know we’re here and find me an open exam room.”

“Yes sir.” Carol led them to the exam area and open the curtain. “Do you need anything else?”

He looked at Carol and nodded. “Just find Pat. This is medical issue.” Carol left and Kathy sighed.

“Great. She thinks I’m a psych patient.”

“Please lay down and try and get comfortable.” He pulled off her shoes and fluffed her pillow.

“Hey Adam, what’s up?”

He turned to see a tall, prematurely gray man with black horned rimmed glasses. “Hey Pat. This is my girlfriend, Kathy. She’s got a bad migraine and her pressure is way too high.”

“Okay, let’s see what we’ve got.” He looked at Adam and pointed to the foot of the bed. “Dude, I’m the one in the white jacket now.” He looked at Kathy and smiled. “Hi, I’m Pat Richards. Let’s see what’s going on here.”

“You mean beside Adam freaking out because I have a headache.”

Pat grabbed the blood pressure cuff and attached it to her arm. “I’ve know Adam Green for twenty years. He’s a great shrink, a lousy racquetball player...”

“Hey...”

“Face it, you suck, dude.” He looked at Kathy and smiled. “But what Adam Green does not do is freak out under any situation.” Pat took her pressure and looked in her eyes with a light. She cringed again. “I’m going to run a CT scan and then I’ll get you something for the pain. Adam, can you give the admins the information they’ll need?”

“This is ridiculous but everything is in my wallet,” said Kathy.

Pat put a hand on her shoulder. “It’s not ridiculous. I also am not given to over reaction.”

“What’s going on?” she whispered.

“Let’s talk after we get the scan. I don’t like second guessing myself.” He flagged down an orderly. “Get Ms...”

“Malone,” they both answered.

“Get Ms. Malone to CT. Head of the line.”

“Adam?” she said as a tear ran down her cheek.

“I’m here, sweetheart. I’m not going anywhere. And you’re in great hands.”

“The best,” smiled Pat.

The orderly moved Kathy out of the exam area and Adam sagged against the wall. “Pat, was I right?”

“Yeah, you were. She may be having a stroke. As soon as I get the CT results I’ll give her something for the pain. How long has this been going on?”

“She said a few days. She thought it was allergies.”

“Christ. From her pressure and her response to light she’s had a wicked migraine.”

“How could she function?”

“Believe it or not, people get used to pain. It becomes normal.” He put his hand on Adam’s shoulder. “You trusted your instincts and your training. You’ve probably saved her from a full blown stroke.”

“What?” he gasped.

“Just now she was 210 over 170.”

“She wasn’t that high at the house.”

“Well you were smart to bring her when you did.”

“Does she have family?”

“No. Parents dead, only child.”

Pat smiled at his friend. “Well she should be very glad she has you.”

Adam waited as patiently as possible for Kathy to be brought back to the exam room. He'd given the clerks her insurance information and used himself as her emergency contact. A stroke. How could it have happened? She's in good shape, she didn't smoke. All he could think about now was she had to be okay. He'd already called his service to cancel all his appointments for tomorrow and pass any urgent calls to his associate. David wouldn't mind. He'd covered for David a number of times. In their fifteen year partnership Adam had never called off. He jumped to his feet when Pat walked back into the exam room. "How is she?"

"I double checked with the neurologist and it's what I thought. She's had a TIA. The only reason it did go massive is you got her here in time."

Adam sat back down and tried not to let his voice shake. "Is she going to be okay?"

"There may be some side effects but I think they will be minor."

"Thanks, Pat." The exam curtain moved aside and the orderly returned Kathy to her spot. He stood and gave her a kiss. "Hey sweetheart."

"Hey."

Pat stood next to Adam and pulled a hypodermic out of his pocket. "Before I give you the magic juice, let me tell you what we found." He set the needle aside and looked at Adam. "He was right to bring you in. You've had a transient ischemic attack. With your history of migraines the neurologist is of the opinion it's probably not your first TIA."

"A what?"

"It's commonly called a mini-stroke."

"What!"

Adam took her hand in his. "It's going to be okay, sweetheart."

"He's right, it is," said Pat. "You may need to make some dietary changes but my guess is your high blood pressure is genetic. You're going to need to take blood pressure med."

"For how long?"

“Forever.”

“Oh Christ,” she whispered.

“Ms. Malone you’re very lucky.”

“How do you figure?”

He nodded toward Adam. “You know this guy. You were headed for a massive stroke. If not tonight, one day soon. Now you know what you’re dealing with.” He picked up the needle and injected it to her IV. “That’s enough for now. You’re about to feel a lot better very quickly. We’re going to run a few more tests in the morning but I might be able to get you out of her in a couple of days.”

“Days?”

“I’m getting you a room now.” He turned to Adam. “I assume you’ll stay with her.”

“Of course.”

“Okay, you can keep an eye on her vitals but remember you’re not her doctor. You’re her boyfriend.” Pat got a big smile and looked at Kathy. Her eyes were beginning to flutter. “Well done, dude.”

“I know. She’s pretty amazing.”

“She’d have to be for you to turn into a giant mush ball.”

“I am not.”

“You are too,” Kathy slurred through a smile.

“Somebody’s feeling better,” Adam smiled and took her hand.

“You’ll stay with me for a while?”

“Of course, sweetheart.” He watched as her eyes fluttered closed.

Kathleen woke up to the sound of beeping and snoring. She turned her head and realized that was a mistake. Her headache was still pounding. She pried open her eyes and saw Adam propped up in a chair snoring. She tried to move and let out an involuntary groan.

“Hey, how are you feeling?”

“This headache has some staying power but other than that I’m fine.”

He glanced up at the machines. “Your pressure is a lot better than it was,” he said sounding relieved. “I’m sure Pat has prescribed something for you. I’ll go check with the nurse. He left the room and she glanced at the walk clock. Three a.m. He’d been sitting with her all this time. If her head didn’t hurt so much she’d smile.

He walked back in and stood by her side. “The nurse will be right in with your shot.”

She reached for his hand. “You’ve been here so long. You must be exhausted and you have patients tomorrow.”

“I cleared my schedule for tomorrow.”

“You what?”

“I had to make sure you’re okay.”

Kathleen crooked her finger at him. “Get down here, hot stuff.” He leaned over and she gave him a kiss. “Thank you.”

“For kissing you? I enjoy kissing you.”

“For taking care of me, making sure I was okay.” A tear ran down the side of her face. “Thank you for saving me.”

Kathleen sat on the edge of her bed looking out the window of her hospital room. Four days was more than enough to get her. She wandered up and down the hospital corridors dragging her IV pole along side and grumbling at the staff. She needed to get out of here before she started scaring the villagers. She pulled her purse out of the nightstand and reached inside for a small case. She opened the case and pulled out a string of rosary beads. They were a deep green, made of Connemara marble. Far from the good practicing Catholic girl she'd been, she still said her rosary. It was a way for her to feel connected to her mother and their Irish heritage. She blessed herself with the cross and started the prayers. She never prayed for herself. As she recited the prayers she would imagine the people she was praying for. She would see them as healthy and smiling and knew God would figure out the rest. She never prayed for herself. It seemed so selfish. She'd been given so much. She was happy in her life, comfortably set, but now...now it was all at risk. A mini stroke. It sounded like something you ordered from the kids menu. I'll have a happy meal and a mini stroke to go. But there was nothing mini about it. A stroke is what had taken her mother and both her maternal grandparents. She shouldn't be surprised that it was trying to take her, but she was.

"Please don't let it get me," she whispered. "Not now. Not when I've just found him. Please let me stay a little longer." She finished her prayers and put the rosary back in its case. She turned to get back in bed and saw Adam standing in the doorway. His eyes were wet with tears. He sat down next to her and took her hand.

"You're not going anywhere. You're going to take your meds and your life will go on as usual."

"Nothing is the same. I've never been sick."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, I've had colds and flus, normal sick. I've never been old people sick. Sick with something that could kill me." She closed her eyes and squeezed his hand. "I'm scared," she whispered. Adam pulled her close.

“I know, sweetheart. I can’t fix your blood pressure. That’s going to be on you following the doctor’s orders and taking your meds. There is one thing I can tell you one thing for sure, I’m not going anywhere.”

She looked at him as he brushed the tears from her cheek. “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me. I’m not doing you a favor. I’m here, with you, because that’s what I want. I want to be with you.”

“I want to be with you too.”

They were interrupted by Pat Richards and a doctor Kathleen hadn’t seen before but apparently Adam knew. He stood to shake both their hands. “Kathy, honey, this is Ed King. He’s the best neurologist in the state. The man extended his hand to her. “It’s good to meet you. Adam’s told me a lot about you.”

“It’s nice to meet you.”

“I asked Ed to take a look at your results,” said Adam.

She looked at him with surprise. She shouldn’t have been because Adam was a doctor with an excellent reputation. He had a lot of pull in this town. She was surprised that he was using his influence for her. “What do you think?”

He opened his iPad and pulled up a picture of what looked like a cross section of a brain, her brain. “This is the scan that was taken of your brain the night you came in.” He pulled up a second picture and she didn’t see any difference. From the look on Adam’s face, he did.

“What am I looking at?” He took his pen and pointed to small dots on the first picture. On the second picture there were a few more, no bigger than the head of a pin. “I’m the only one in the room without a medical degree. You’ll have to explain it to me.”

He pointed to the dots in the first picture and then to the additional dots on the second. “You’ve had a history of migraines.”

“You can tell that from dots?”

“You didn’t have them treated.”

“They were just bad headaches. They weren’t that often I’d get a bad one a maybe every other month. I’d take some over the counter stuff, take a nap. I’d be fine in a day or two.”

“Days?” said Adam.

“What? They were just headaches.”

“No, they weren’t. They were the result of your high blood pressure. This first picture shows me you’ve had several TIA’s before this past one. He pointed to the dots on the second picture. “This is the result of the last one.”

“Are you talking about...brain damage?” she whispered.

Adam rubbed his hand down her back as Dr. King squared his shoulders. It’s minor. Now that we know what’s caused it we can prevent it from happening again. Stay on your blood pressure meds and go for regular check ups. Once your pressure is under control you’ll find the headaches will for the most part disappear.”

“For the most part?”

“Ms. Malone, there are no guarantees, especially in medicine but if you follow doctor’s orders your outlook is very positive. And I don’t say such a thing lightly.”

“Will I have side effects?”

“You may have some memory loss but considering how close you came to a massive stroke, things could have been much worse.”

“Dr. King, one day I may believe that but right now I’m pretty freak out.”

“Well I have some news that might make you happy. Your pressure has been stable long enough to release you. The nurse will bring in your discharge papers. Adam, once she’s signed out, you can take her home.”

He rose and shook Dr. King’s hand. “Thanks for the consult, Ed. We really appreciate it.”

“No problem, Adam.”

Pat looked at Kathleen. "I'll get the paperwork started for you."

"Thank you, doctor."

Kathleen watched as the doctors left her room. She felt like she'd been hit by a truck. She would go home now and resume her life. At least she would try.

Adam smiled and pulled her clothes out of the small closet. "Why don't you get ready, that way when we get the paperwork, we can get you home."

"Okay. It will be good to get out of here."

"Kathy, can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"When I came in, the beads..."

"My rosary? What about it?"

"I didn't realize that you..."

"Worked the beads?" she smiled. "For a man who is so eloquent you are stumbling a lot there, Green. Okay, let me clear things up for you. I'm not what you would call a practicing Catholic. I don't go to church on Sundays. I only go for weddings and funerals." She reached in her bag and pulled out the rosary. "But these. They connect to who I am, my heritage and what I've lost, like my mother."

"I guess I'm surprised."

"Why? You have a mezuzah on the doorway to your apartment." Adam blushed. She thought he was cute as hell when he blushed.

"That's for my mother's benefit."

She stood and kissed his cheek as she walked into the bathroom. "You're so freaking adorable."

Adam sat in his office waiting for his first patient of the day. It wasn't like Elaine to be late and he was concerned. He knew Kathy's man had installed the security measures while Kathy had been hospitalized. Elaine had even made it clear that she was comfortable with Mac McClain in her house without Kathy. That was a real step forward. He looked up her number and called. He was surprised when a man answered.

"Hello,"

"I'd like to speak to Elaine."

"Dr. Green? Yes, sure. I'll get her."

"Hello?" Elaine answered quietly.

"What's going on."

"It's started."

"What started?" He heard her hand the phone back to Mac. "What's going on?"

"Her family has been calling, harassing her. They're telling her it's time she repent for her sins against her father."

"I'll be right over."

Adam knocked on the door and was surprised when Kathy opened the door. "What are you doing here?"

"Mac called."

"You should be home, resting."

"I've been out of the hospital for a week. I'm fine and this not the time or place for this discussion. Now, come in. Elaine is very upset."

He walked toward the couch and took a seat next to Elaine. Kathy had taken a seat in an arm chair. Mac stood behind Kathy, looking more anxious than Adam would have expected. "Do you want to tell me what's happened?"

“My mother called. She said she didn’t know how I gotten a restraining order against my father. It’s made him very angry and my lies have to stop.” She started weeping and Mac handed her some tissues. He also put a comforting hand on her back. Adam shot Kathy a glance and went back to Elaine.

“Elaine, you know the truth. The police and the courts know the truth. The evidence proved what happened. You have always told the truth.”

“Then why doesn’t she believe me?”

“I can’t answer for her,” said Adam.

“Elaine,” said Kathy, “I may have some answers. I don’t know your mother but I’ve seen this situation many times before. If the wife admits to herself what the husband has done, then everything she’s believed in for her whole marriage has been a lie. Many women can’t accept that, even at the cost of their own child.”

“What about Marie?” she cried.

“Marie?” asked Kathy.

“Elaine’s younger sister. She was only a baby when her father went to jail,” said Adam.

Elaine could see the looks exchanged between them. “She’s at risk, isn’t she?”

“Let’s focus on your safety,” said Mac.

“No, what about Marie? Do you think she’s in danger?”

Adam look at Kathy, who nodded at him. He could hear what she was thinking. ‘Reality. Deal with the reality.’ He looked at Elaine and took at breath and nodded. “I would have to say she probably is at risk. How old is she now?”

“Fourteen. He started molesting me when I was twelve. It took me ten years before I got the courage to get help. Who’s going to help her?”

“Our primary concern right now is protecting you. I think the first thing is to change your phone and getting you off social media. We need to restrict their access to you,” said Kathy.

“No, we can’t!” Elaine cried. “Marie knows how to get in touch with me. We’ve been emailing for awhile now. I think I’ve gotten her to trust me. If I disappear she’ll have no one to protect her.”

“I have an idea,” said Mac. “I sometimes give safety lectures to schools. You could write Marie a letter with a new email address. I’ll set it up on my secure server. No one would be able to trace it. I could slip it to her during the lecture. She could contact you there.”

“You could do that?” she asked

“Of course.”

Elaine jumped up from her seat and threw her arms around Mac. “Oh thank you, Mac.”

“You’re welcome,” he whispered.

Adam stood and nodded to Kathy she should follow him to the hallway. “What is going on?” he whispered through clenched teeth.

“Nothing is going on.”

He pointed toward the living room where he could see Mac and Elaine sitting close together on the couch. “Do you call that nothing? She doesn’t need someone taking advantage of her. How could you let this happen?”

“I didn’t let anything happen. I trust Mac implicitly.”

“Really? He pointed to a duffel bag in the corner of the living room. “That looks to me like he’s spent the night. How could you let someone like him take advantage of my patient?”

“Someone like him? Who the hell do you think you are?”

Adam suddenly realized what he was doing and how red faced Kathy was getting. "Calm down, sweetheart. Don't get upset. I'm sorry I raised my voice."

"Your...sorry...you...Ahh!" Kathy threw her hands in the air and walked around him, back into the living room. "Elaine, are you comfortable with the security measures Mac has set in place?"

"Yes. He's also showed me a few moves to protect myself. We've been practicing."

"I'm glad. I'm sure Dr. Green has a few things to discuss with you. I do need to go now."

Elaine jumped to her feet and came toward Kathy. "Oh, Ms. Malone, I'm so sorry. I totally forgot you just got out of the hospital."

Kathy smiled and took Elaine's hand. "Don't you worry about me. I'm fine. I'm glad Mac called. I think Mac has all the security aspects covered and I'm sure Dr. Green will be able to address any of your other concerns. Mac, you can call me later."

"Sure thing, Kathleen," he said.

She grabbed her purse and walked out the front door. Adam knew this was a big mess and he didn't know how to fix it. But his first priority had to be his patient. He looked at Elaine who looked him square in the eye.

"What the hell was that?" she demanded.

"She is really pissed at you Doc and Kathleen doesn't get like that unless it's big," said Mac.

"Well, she is just out of the hospital."

"Bull," said Elaine.

"Excuse me?"

"Is this because I hugged Mac?"

"I did notice his duffel. I take it he spent the night."

“I did,” Mac replied. “In the guest room.”

“Dr. Green, I’m not afraid of Mac. In fact, I’d like very much to have a personal relationship with him but he said no.” Elaine smiled. “At least not until all of this business with my father and my family is sorted out.”

“Elaine, I’m concerned you’re transferring...”

“White knight syndrome?” she said.

Adam was duly startled. “Yes. It can happen with a relationship established under dangerous circumstances.”

“That’s what Mac said. He said we had to wait and take it very slow.”

“Dr. Green, I do like Elaine, very much. I think she’s smart and funny, besides being incredibly brave. But I would never begin a relationship under these circumstances.”

“What about pretty?” she laughed.

Mac smiled through a blush. “Well, that’s obvious.”

“Good,” she nodded. She looked at Adam. “Dr. Green, I’m not afraid of all men. Just the one who hurt me. I learned to trust my instincts. You taught me that. My instincts tell me Mac is a good man, a man I can trust.”

“What about handsome?” he smiled.

“Well, that’s obvious,” she smiled.

“Good to know,” he replied.

“Doctor Green, you don’t need to worry about me. I’m upset about the current situation, of course. I was mostly scared for Marie. But now Mac has an idea of how I can get to Marie. I feel better. I know it’s not going to be easy and I’m still going to need my sessions with you.” She looked at Mac. “But I know now I have the right support in place. Mac has been very clear about what I need to do to stay healthy and safe. Continuing to see you is part of it. He’s also said I’m pretty good at self defense.”

“She’s a natural.”

“We’ve been practicing, so you see, I’ll be okay, eventually, but I’m on the right path. I know it.”

Adam took a breath and looked at his patient. She looked much less upset than when he’d arrived. “I’m very proud of you, Elaine.”

“Thank you,” she smiled.

“I suggest you chase after Kathleen,” said Mac. “My guess is you’ve got a lot of groveling to do.”

Adam shook his head. “I think you’re right.” He turned to leave.

“Flowers,” Elaine called after him. “Don’t forget flowers.”

Kathleen paced around her kitchen. She couldn't believe Adam thought she'd let someone take advantage of his patient. A survivor. How could he think that? She'd spent the last twenty five years working for survivors. "Ahhh! Men!" she growled as she put on the kettle. She was just pouring herself a strong cup of tea when her doorbell rang. She looked out the peephole and she saw Adam carrying an armful of flowers. She sighed and opened the door.

"What?"

"Can I come in?"

"Fine." Adam walked in and handed her the flowers. She took a breath of the large bouquet of mixed flowers. "They're lovely. Thank you."

"Elaine said I should bring flowers." He glanced down at his shoes. "Mac said I should grovel."

"Also a good idea," she said as she pulled out a vase.

"I'm sorry."

"Why?"

"What do you mean why?"

"Are you sorry I was upset or are you sorry for what you said."

Adam glanced down at his shoes, his tell when he was looking for the right words. "Both. I should have known better. I saw Mac and Elaine's connection and I assumed the worst."

"Yes, you did."

"I see the results of the worst of humanity every day. I guess I've gotten used to going to worst case scenario."

She put her hands on her hips. "Yeah you did, and you pissed me off. Not just because of that. Because of the way you've been treating me."

"Treating you?"

“Like I’m made of glass. I’ve got a clean bill from Pat. I take my meds and my pressure is perfect.” She saw the look on his face. For a minute she thought he’d cry.

“I heard you.”

“I’d hope so seeing as I’m yelling.”

“No. In the hospital, when you were praying. You said ‘Don’t let it get me, not when I just found him.’”

All the anger left her. “Yeah, well, that’s when I was still so scared. Pat and Ed have both told me I’ll be fine. I just have to keep taking my meds.”

He reached for her hand. “You said ‘Not when I just found him.’ What did you mean?”

Kathleen smiled. “You know damn well what I meant. I was asking God not to let a stroke get me now when we’re just getting started.”

Adam stepped closer. “And why would that be?”

“Because I’m in love with you, you big hairy goon.”

He gave her a lopsided smile. “Hairy goon?”

She pushed at his chest. “Yeah.”

“Well, I’m love with you too. That’s why I’ve been so careful with you. I don’t want to lose you either.”

“Now I’m mad I’m not mad at you anymore.”

“Well, that makes sense.”

“So are you going to stop treating me like a porcelain doll?”

“I just want to make sure you were....”

She pushed away from his chest. “Don’t move.” She grabbed her purse off the table and pulled out what looked like a prescription. “I figured you might pull something like this so when I got my last check up from Pat I asked him.”

“You asked Pat? About us having...sex?”

Kathleen couldn't hold back her laugh. “Oh my God, Adam. You're a psychiatrist and you're embarrassed about sex?”

“No, I'm embarrassed my racquetball partner knows about my sex life.”

“I asked him what should I tell you about my medical condition. Read the prescription.”

Adam blushed. “Son of a bitch.”

“Out loud”

“Go for it, dude!”

She took the prescription from his hand. “Well, are you going to ignore doctor's orders.”

He laughed and took her by the hand. “I guess not.” He started to lead her upstairs when she stopped and tucked the paper back in her purse. “What are you doing?”

“I'm getting that framed!”

Adam pulled up to his mother's house and stopped the car. He couldn't believe after all this time he was bringing someone home to meet his mother. For that matter, neither could she. All he told her was her name was Kathleen. He thought one shock per phone call was enough. The fact that he was dating an Irish Catholic would be obvious when they walked in the door.

"Would you calm down?" said Kathy.

"I'm fine."

"You're nervous as a cat. We been dating for weeks. You love me. I love you. Your mother needs to meet me. I've brought her that nice bottle of Cabernet you recommended. Everything will be fine."

He leaned in and gave her a kiss. "Of course it will." He got out of the car as he thought, "I hope so." He knocked on the door before he let himself in. "Mom, we're here."

Esther Green walked out of the kitchen and smiled at her son. She was a petite, trim woman who short hair was dyed the same shade as her son's no one would take her for eighty two. She gave Adam a kiss. "Your timing is excellent. Dinner is almost ready."

"Mom, I told you I'd take us out to dinner. You didn't have to cook."

"Nonsense. I know how much you like my apple brisket." She turned to Kathleen and smiled. He could tell she was surprised. "You must be Kathleen. Adam hasn't told me nearly enough about you."

"Mom!"

Kathy laughed. "Of course he hasn't. He may qualify for a senior discount but he's still nervous around his mother."

Esther's eyes narrowed. "And why should he be nervous around me?"

"Because there is no hiding that I'm obviously Irish and yes, I'm Catholic. He's concerned you won't approve." Esther gasped. "So let me fill in the blanks your son has obviously left. "Yes, I'm Irish Catholic. I'm an only child and both my parents have past. I'm a private financial trader and I do well for myself. I own my own home and I'm the

same age as Adam, fifty five. So that grandchildren boat has sailed.” She smiled when Adam gasped. Kathleen looked at him and laughed. “What? At this point I’m sure your mother is just glad she can prove to her friends you’re not gay.”

Adam looked up to the heavens. “Oh God,” he whispered. He looked back at his mother who was staring at Kathy. Then she did completely unexpected. She started laughing. She laughed so hard she had to wipe her eyes.

“Oh, Adam. I like her.”

Kathy handed her the bottle of wine. “I brought a little something.”

Esther examined the bottle. “Oh, I like her more. Come. Dinner’s ready.” She handed the bottle to Adam. “Here, you open.” She led Kathy into the kitchen where the two began talking like old friends. Adam opened the bottle and watched, wondering what the hell had just happened.

“Mrs. Green this brisket is delicious.”

“Thank you, dear. And please, call me Esther.”

“It’s wonderful, Esther.” She looked at his mother with a conspiratorial glance. “Do you think I could get the recipe? He obviously loves it. I’d like to cook more at home. Going out is great and your son takes me to wonderful places, but really, there’s nothing better than an evening at home.”

“Of course, dear.”

Adam stopped mid bite. His mother was going to give up her apple brisket recipe? What was happening?

“Adam tells me you were in the hospital. How are you feeling?”

“I’m fine now, thank you.”

“What happened?”

“I had a small stroke.”

Esther put down her fork and covered Kathy's hand with hers. "Oh my dear. I'm so sorry."

"I'm okay now," she looked at Adam and smiled. "Thanks to your son. He realized what was happening and got me to the ER before it got worse. He saved me. Your son is a wonderful doctor."

Esther looked at her son and smiled. "Yes, he is. He found his calling." Adam couldn't speak. His mother had never said anything like that to him.

"He spends his life helping people recovering from the unimaginable. He is an amazing man." Kathy smiled at him and all his nervousness left him. He'd never realized it before but this was what he'd been waiting for all these years. A woman who looked at him the way Kathy did.

“Are you sure this is going to work?” asked Elaine

“Elaine, you need to relax. All the teachers know is I’m bringing my assistant to demonstrate defense techniques. It will be fine.”

“I haven’t seen her in so long,” she whispered. She’d been so nervous for Marie that she’d convinced Mac to let her come too. She needed to see how she was with her own eyes.

“You’ve spoken with her on the internet. She knows you’re coming and not to tell anyone.”

“Yes, but...I haven’t felt like this since...”

Mac knew he shouldn’t but he couldn’t help himself. He pulled Elaine into a tight hug. “It’s going to be okay,” he whispered. “I’ll protect you both. I promise.”

She pulled back and smiled. “You haven’t broken a promise to me yet.”

“And I never will.”

Elaine’s heart pounded when she saw her sister sitting in her seat in the small auditorium. She was a picture of herself at that age, long blonde hair, hands folded in her lap. Quiet. Too Quiet.

Mac was half way through his impressive demonstration when he called Elaine on to the stage. She began to go through the moves he’d shown her, much to the amazement of the children. As Elaine leaned her hip into Mac to toss him to the ground she whispered, “We need to get her up here.” He nodded and then she flung him to the ground.

“Ouch” he said to the amusement of the children. “Ms. Elaine is one of my best students.” He rubbed his hip. “She’s really good.” He moved to the center of the stage. “I want you all to remember that if you are being bullied, hurt, if someone is putting you in danger, you will be believed. Those who would hurt you will tell you no one would believe you but they will. We will. Come to your principal, Mr. Thornton, a teacher, a policeman, you are a valuable, precious person.” Mac looked at Elaine, who’s eyes were tearing.

“You will be believed.” He paused for a moment and smiled. “How about I let one of you demonstrate what I’ve shown you on me?” All the children shouted and raised their hands but Mac walked down the stage stairs and toward Marie. He extended his hand. “Will you give it a try?” Marie nodded and took his hand. He led her back up the stairs to the stage. “What’s your name?”

“Marie,” she said quietly.

He looked out to the students. “The reason I chose Marie for this demonstration is she is small and you wouldn’t think she could defend herself. But she can. Marie, remember what I showed about stomping on a foot?” The girl nodded. “Don’t be afraid to hurt me. I’m wearing strong boots and padding. Are you ready?” Marie nodded. Mac put his hands on her shoulders and she immediately shouted.

“No!” She stomped hard enough on his foot that he could feel it through the steel toes. She turned and ran towards Elaine.

“That was very good, Marie. Would you like to try something else?”

“Okay.”

Mac stood tall and he put his hands on his waist. “It’s okay, Marie. Go ahead.” She punched him in the gut and he emitted a genuine grunt. “That’s very good, Marie,” he said still bent over. Marie turned toward the back wall and glanced at Elaine. She reached up and covered Mac’s microphone.

“He’s hurting me,” she whispered.

“It’s okay now. We’re here. We’ve got you,” Mac whispered. He stood upright and faced the students. “Thank you all for your attention and let’s have a big hand for Marie.” Everyone applauded as he walked Elaine and Marie backstage. The principal closed the door behind them.

“That was an excellent demonstration. Thank you, Mr. McClain.” It was then he noticed Elaine had pulled Marie into her lap and was rocking her back and forth. “What’s going on here?”

“Elaine is Marie’s sister. You need to call the police.”

“No!” said Marie.

“Sweetheart, it’s the only way but I promise you I won’t leave you.”

“Neither will I,” said Mac.

They sat with Marie at the hospital as the detective took her statement. Her father had started with touching as soon as he got out jail. “This morning he...he was on me and I was yelling for him to get off me. Mom opened the door and I screamed for her to help but she just shut the door.” She looked at her sister and wept. “Why wouldn’t she stop him? Why wouldn’t she help me?” Elaine held her close.

“It’s over now, baby. I won’t let anyone hurt you again.”

“We’re going to have to do an exam.” said the detective.

Elaine cringed, knowing how difficult it was going to be. “I’ll be with you. It will be hard, but you’re strong.”

“Don’t let him hurt me anymore?”

“I swear.”

Mac waited outside the exam room with the detective for the SANE nurse to come out of the exam room. She was a nurse specially trained to exam rape victims. When the door opened they both stood.

“Well, Janie?” asked the detective.

“George you know the tests won’t be back for a while but I’ve done this enough to know. That girl’s been raped. I got some good samples. You should be able to make your case.” The nurse looked at them and shook her head. “Apparently when he was done with her this morning all her mother said was hurry up, you’ll be late for school.”

“Christ,” muttered George.

“Well, the mother may have done more to convict her husband than either of her daughters. By not letting her shower before school, I was able to get those samples.”

Elaine came out of the room and closed the door. “The nurse said it was okay for her to shower. Detective...I’m sorry I forget your name.”

The detective gave her a small smile and nodded. He was a very imposing man, well over six feet, dark skinned and bald. But his smile was warm. “That’s alright. It’s been a difficult day. Hodges, George Hodges.”

“Are you going to arrest him?”

“I’m going to get warrants to arrest them both.”

“Both?”

“Accessory after the fact for the mother. Whatever I can think of. How a woman could allow that...” He looked at Elaine and stood back. “Oh Ma’am. I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to...”

“It’s quite alright detective. You didn’t work my case ten years ago. The important thing is you’re here, now, to protect my sister. Can I take her home with me? She can’t go back there.”

“Pretty soon there won’t be anyone there. I think it will be okay. The DA may have a fit because you’re a previous victim but you are her closest relative so I’m going to say yes. Try not to discuss the case. We don’t want to taint any testimony.”

“Is it okay if I call my therapist? He’s been helping me. Marie is going to need help.”

“Sure. Doctor patient privilege. He won’t affect the case.”

Elaine tucked Marie in and kissed her forehead. “I promise you, you’re safe here. There are locks and alarms. My room is right across the hall.”

“And there’s Mr. McClain. Is he your boyfriend?”

“No. He came with a lady from the Advocacy Center to help secure my home. Mac taught me how to defend myself.”

“Mac?” she smiled.

Elaine looked at her sister and wondered how the little baby she hadn't seen in ten years had grown into such a sweet young woman. “He's very nice but he's not my boyfriend,” she smiled.

“But you want him to be.”

She tucked the covers over her sister's shoulders. “You hush now and get some sleep.” She reached for the lamp.

“No, leave it on.”

“Sure thing.” She walked toward the door. “Good night, angel.”

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Elaine walked downstairs and Mac handed her a glass of wine. “Bless you.” She took a sip and sighed. “Aren't you having any?”

“No, thanks. I thought after today you could use it.”

She took another sip. “You are so right.”

“How is she?”

“Surprisingly okay.”

“I think that may be because she feels safe with you.”

“The big bruiser of an army man in my living room helps.”

He laughed and rubbed his stomach. “Speaking of bruises, you didn't hold anything back.”

“Oh no. Let me see.” He pulled up his shirt and she could see the bruise forming over his washboard abs. “Oh my God, Mac, I’m so sorry.”

He pulled his shirt back down and stroked her shoulder. “Don’t be. That bruise just means you’ve learn what I taught. You can defend yourself. That makes me happy.”

She set her wine glass down and looked at him. “It really does, doesn’t it?”

“Of course.”

“Mac McClain when all of this is settled we are going to have to talk,” she smiled.

“About?” he grinned.

“This.” She gave him a gentle kiss.

“Marie is in the guest room,” he smiled.

“I’ll make up the couch,” she grinned.

Adam knocked on Kathy's door. He was really looking forward to this weekend. Three days away was just the thing he needed. A mountain cabin, some long walks and several bottles of an excellent wine he had in the car. David was covering his patients for the weekend. He didn't expect there would be any problems. Although he didn't normally treat children, he'd been treating Marie since both her parents went to jail. She appeared to be on a good track. She was living with her sister and seemed to be happy with the idea of Mac McClain as a brother in law. Kathy opened the door and smiled.

"Hey cutie. You ready for a hot weekend in the mountains?"

"You seem to be assuming a lot." He grinned.

"Let's see. If I know you, and I do, you have some excellent wine in the car."

"True."

"You're dating a hot Irish girl."

"True," he grinned.

She held up a small overnight bag. "And this is all I'm bringing to wear for three days. Ergo, hot weekend."

"Ergo?" he smiled. "Impressive. I bow to your logic."

"Smart man. Now let's get this party started."

They enjoyed the ride up the interstate. The leaves were starting to turn and he already felt more relaxed. He opened the door to the cabin and set down the wine. He watch Kathy as she looked out the sliding glass door.

"Oh, Adam. This is beautiful." She walked out on the deck and clapped her hands. "Hot damn! A hot tub." She walked back in and saw him watching her. "What?"

"I didn't bring a suit."

She smiled and slipped her arms around his waist. "Neither did I."

Adam laughed. "You are something else, woman."

She patted his chest and smiled. "You're pretty nifty yourself, fella." She walked away and grabbed her overnight bag. She opened the door to the bedroom and smiled. "King size. Perfect." He took the bag from her hand and set it aside. He led her into the bedroom and had her sit next to him on the bed. "Oh, I like where this is going," she grinned.

"Kathy, I want to talk for a minute."

She looked startled at his shifting the conversation. "Okay, what's up? Is something wrong?"

"No, nothing. And that's my point. When I met you I was doubting everything about myself. You made me see what good I was doing in my profession when I couldn't. When I'm with you I feel completely at peace. And you make a hell of an apple brisket."

"Don't tell you're mother," she smiled.

"Never," he smiled. Kathy, when I with you I am, for the first time in my life, completely happy. I love you, Kathleen Malone."

Kathy wiped a tear from her eye. "Oh Adam, I'm very happy too. You understand me and you like me anyway. You don't want me to be anyone but myself. I've never had that. Not ever. And you're a lousy cook, but you make up for it by being a world class kisser."

"Well, thank you...I think."

"I love you too, Adam Green. So much."

"I was thinking about something."

"Does it have anything to do with this giant bed we're sitting on because if it is, yes!"

"No," he grinned. "At least not yet. I was thinking of making my mother happy."

"Okay, on the list of mood killers that's right up there."

He laughed and took her hands. “No. One thing my mother has always wanted but I’ve never given her was to be able to dance at my wedding.” Kathy gasped. “Kathy, sweetheart?”

“Did you just ask me to marry you?”

“I believe I did.”

“This situation requires certainty.”

“Yes, I’m certain. Kathleen Malone, will you marry me?”

She broke into a broad grin. “Yes, Adam Green I would love to marry you.”

He pulled her into a deep kiss. “When we get back to town I’ll buy you a proper ring.”

“You bet your ass you will.” She grinned. “Should we call your mother?”

He looked at the bed and pulled down the covers. “Later.”