

Billionaire's Accidental Wife by C.ELLICA

Chapter 66 Warning Rated SPG 18+ Catherine knew she was playing a very dangerous game that would inevitably end with her screaming for him to go harder and faster, and she was all the more excited about it. Shawn managed a faint smile, all the while never leaving his eyes. She pinched her nipples to bring them to prominence as she stared down at herself. Shawn groaned. She looked up at him after that, then twisted and pinched her nipples once again, wondering excitedly. "So, what's up, husband? Do you want to play more games?" He was about to say anything when he heard a clicking sound, and the overhead light in the kitchen came on, along with the gentle sound of the central heater blowing air.

"Yes, electricity is back! Catherine happily muttered as she flung herself towards him with a delighted expression on her face, exclaiming excitedly that the power was on. She held and kissed his face and cheeks, ending with a deep kiss on the lips, after he fell backwards onto the carpeted floor. The embrace lasted many minutes before abruptly ending with a wet kiss while she straddled his waist, rubbed his hair, and lowered herself to meet his lips a second time, "Hmmm," Shawn sighed and whispered huskily, "That's a really good kiss, milady." "Are we going to call the strip poker game a draw?" he asked, pushing himself up onto his elbows and peering at her once the embrace broke. Shawn gave a wink. "Well," Catherine remarked, provocatively smiling, "I'm game for a new game. How about you let me win?" "No way! You have to earn something to see me naked and naked dancing in front of you." "Oh really? Fancy another game then?" She said as she ground herself into his hardened shaft. "What game is that?" he replied, his throat becoming dry. "Why don't you go around and turn off all the lights," she offered, running a delicate touch across his chest and then caressing his muscular abdomen, before finishing with, "Then we can play f**k your wife, in front of the fire," Catherine slid off him and began removing her thong as he pushed up into a sitting position and so he did close all the lights with urgency. She called his name as he stood and turned to fulfil her wish. When he turned around, the lacy panty smacked him in the face, and she burst out laughing "You be careful little wife, or I'll have to slap that cute little a*s of yours!" he warned, pulling the undergarment from his face and feigning anger by shaking a finger at her, trying not to chuckle.

At her back, she was giggling wickedly "Oh, wow! That sounds a little scary, doesn't it?" Then they burst out laughing. Clearly, the wine was starting to take its toll on their inhibitions.

Turning all the lights out, he came back to the living room, where Catherine was already under one of the quilts and was sitting in front of the sofa. He removed his undershorts and she commented on the size of his e*****n. "I'm not surprised." Grabbing one of the sofa's cushions, he asked her to scoot forward, so he could place it against the couch.

Once this was done, he sat against it, issuing a pleasant sight. Spreading his legs, he asked, "Do you think we can snuggle together?" With another giggle, Catherine slid

back against him and then made sure they were both well covered. While she was doing this, he slipped his arms under hers to hug her waist. Pressing back against him, she took Shawn's hands in hers, placed one on a breast and slid the other between her legs. With a purr of pure satisfaction, she cooed, "There, that feels nice. Go on, move that finger."

Shawn smiled and kneaded her b****s with one hand while using the index finger of the other to find her c**t and massage it. For several minutes, she leaned her head back and laid it against his shoulder, and for several minutes, they enjoyed the dark quietness and watched the flames dance in the fireplace. Releasing his hands, she placed hers on his thighs and began brushing them with her fingertips. "So. I won the game?" Catherine asked and then lightly kissed his cheek

Turning his head to look into those amazing blue eyes, he smiled and replied, "For you, I can be a loser anytime." Pouting, she said, "That's too bad, because this is really nice," smiling in the flickering light. Her breath was warm against his face as she passionately whispered, "Kiss me," opening her lips to receive him.

Smiling in compliance, his lips met hers and she pushed her tongue into his mouth. The embrace lingered for several minutes, as he shifted his hands from the work of massaging her to hugging her lean torso. She then moved her body so that she could get closer to him as they hugged again. For the next five minutes, they kissed, caressed, and fondled each other. He enjoyed the way she touched him and the supple feel of her warm skin next to his. After a long, passionate kiss, Catherine laid against his chest and ran a finger playfully through the hair that covered it, observing, "I now see the value of making love to someone I care about." "Oh really? You care about me?" Shawn asked and halted for a bit while. "Oh, yes! Bigboy!" Chuckling and lightly resting his chin on the top of her head as he hugged her, he responded, "Why is that?"

Smiling and scrubbing his broad chest, she giggled and said, "Did you know? Most young guys just want a little foreplay and then get right to the f****g." Reaching down to take his shaft in her hand, she cooed, "Older men know how to treat their lover. You're making me feel very special."

"So you think I'm old?"

"Not really... Maybe... just matured a little!"

"Oh really now? You said I was childish!"

"Yes, you are Shawn; no arguments there!" She said and kissed him again.

He hugged her close in return and kissed her crown of blonde hair.

After a few quiet minutes of holding each other, Catherine admitted, "You know, I've been looking for a way to get you to f**k me again since the first day I worked for you."

“Oh, really now? Because as far as I can remember, you never took advantage of me.” Shawn smirked.

“Because you have women in every corner of the office, everywhere!” Past!

That was my past, sweetheart. I’m a new man now, I’m only yours now!” he smirked.

“You better be!”

“Really?” He blurted out, completely surprised.

“Yes, because you are mine! Only mine.”

“I didn’t peg you as possessive.”

“I am now,” she said, kissing him in the neck that earned him a moan of delight.

Pushing away from him to look into his eyes, she said quietly with a s**y smile, “I was very impressed by your possessiveness, strong demeanor,” and placing a soft hand on his chest and massaging a pectoral, she added, “On top of that, the way you’ve treated me today, shows what a gentleman you are and that needs to be rewarded. Don’t you think?”

Smiling and hugging her close in return, he remarked, “That is very sweet of you to say,” and leaned down to kiss her again. She willingly accepted, and their embrace lingered for several long, tantalizing minutes. Then he carried her to the sofa bed adjacent to where they sat. She moved her arms to a more comfortable position and squirmed in her cocoon of the bed, pushing her nude a*s out. She went completely still. Her exposed b**t had brushed something, so rigid now. Very hard!

Catherine inhaled deeply; his fragrance was distinct. Sandalwood, seaside, and fresh mint scents... Her actions were met with a faint gasp as she dared to push back a bit more. “Oh, I’ve wanted to f*ck you since our accidental marriage in Vegas,” she said with a smirk. She moaned when she felt his warm hand glide over her ribs and down around her waist as she struggled to control her pounding heart. Part of her wanted to open her mouth, and it was a strong reminder of how they had agreed to leave things to come out. But her heart’s burning need was fighting it, twisting what she intended to say into something profound and sexual.

She opened her mouth and said, “Yes, that’s it!” to the sensations she was having. Shawn started rubbing her front and stomach without saying anything. Each touch on her skin was electric, as it had been previously, and he caressed her in a way no one else had ever done before or since. “Oh, God, you are torturing me, Shawn.”

She pushed back against him once more, the wonderful sensation of his very warm e*****n pressing against her lower back heightening her senses even more. He skillfully

roamed all over her back, and slid over her stomach, hips, thighs, and up over her nipples, which were now so hard and tuned in to what she was feeling. She barely had her eyes open, deep breathing, heart racing, becoming lost in the feelings as his hands competently wandered all over her back, and slid over her stomach, hips, thighs, and up over her nipples.

She leaned forward as the sensation crossed her right nipple. His eyes were still locked on her sweet, delicate neck, but his mouth fell open as her most perfect breast moved ever closer. Soon it was pressing against his lips, and he wrapped them around her nipple, and he began to s**k like his life depended on it.

Nothing else mattered. His only desire was to have more of his moans.

Soon he smelled a rich woman's scent and was overwhelmed by what was left of his senses. Soon he felt the smooth wet folds of her haven moving up his neck, over his chin, finally coming to rest over his mouth. "Enjoy."

No further prompting was necessary. His reply was, "Gladly, my wife," was smothered as his tongue found its way between her folds and uncontrollably began to probe deeply inside of her.

His desire to eat her surpassed even his desire to s**k on her magnificent b*****s. He didn't want to stop. He couldn't stop.

"Shawn," She paused, "Ah-don't stop. Hmmm."

He lost all sense of time as he pleased her deep into the night.

His tongue was too busy to answer, but he managed to nod his head as he continued to eat. "Good gracious."

At that moment, she erupted in a tremendous o****m, gushing her love into his waiting mouth.

She moved again, and she began to slide away from his mouth and down his chest. As she continued her journey down toward his waist, he realized that his shaft was swollen and throbbing with desire. Catherine pushed his hips upward as she slid further down, and the lips of her folds were pressed against the tips of his rod. Catherine pulled them together and pushed his shaft deep into his wife's haven. They rocked back and forth, in and out, until he felt he would explode if he did not c*m. "Shawn? Um-do you want to c*m inside of me?" "Are you sure?"

"Yes."

Shawn smiled as he thrust himself into a frenzy, then exploded inside of her, all desire gone except to make her happy for the rest of her life.

And if only he had had the nerve to tell her how much he loved her.

Five minutes after a cuddle rest, Shawn groaned at her ears and started kissing her again.

A sense of absence hit her as Shawn withdrew from her. She perked up, longingly into his face. He beamed at her, skimming his hand under her right hip, he rolled her in one powerful action onto her front. As his trunk brushed the backs of her legs, he planted kiss after soft kiss on her shoulder and spine, lower, melting her, giving her goosebumps. She felt his powerful warm hands on her hips, pulling her up onto her knees, Catherine rested her spinning head on the pillows before her as she felt him breathing heavily against her lower back. She closed her eyes as she felt the throbbing head of his rod opening her once more. Different this time, in one smooth hard thrust he entered her deep. She let out a muffled, approving moan almost as instinct. "Shawn."

Shawn was persistent, his hands remaining on her ample hips, he began f*****g her harder, deeper... she could not believe how good this felt. She pushed back, part instinct and part desperation to feel more, to draw him further into her... every hard thrust grazed past her aching c**t. She could feel him swelling within her, tightening herself around his shaft as their bodies slapped off one another's, his hands gripping and her folds twitching and throbbing in time to his c**k

She felt Shawn's breathing begin to change. As his pushes became more typical, harder, his breathing became deeper, more continual, with a tone of groaning fleeing with each breath She wanted this, she shoved back harder, meeting his thrusts before they'd barely begun, adding to the intensity of the moment. Her whole body felt like it was flickering, the air on her skin making her hairs stand on end.

Shawn fastened his grip on her hips, and in a matter of two ultimate deep hard thrusts, he moaned as he climaxed deep within her again. The emotion touched her like nothing else like tiny electric pin p****s all touching her at the same time, erupting from her folds and down to her toes, along her abdomen and to the ends of her nipples as they clasped against the material of the sofa bed covers.

Shawn lounged inside her, throbbing as she clamped his shaft inside her, moving barely, milking, with innate wanton longing, she kept going, working herself on his trunk as her head began to spin. She nudged back on him and reached under herself, as her numb fingers grazed her swollen c**t, pushed back again onto his emptying rod. She held her breath as she exploded within herself, her thighs shaking and her lips curling inside her mouth as she wailed to herself, into the pillow. Gasping, Shawn stroked her a*s and hips as she wiggled... milking the last drops from him with her own tightly wound and promptly waving orgasm. She felt Shawn's lips on her back, gently kissing and massaging her sensitive skin as he traced his way up to her neck. As she knelt, quivering, he slipped out of her gently and stroked his way up her sides as she fell onto her front, eyes still closed but tilting her head to the left. Shawn kissed her neck, drew her long brown hair from her cheek and kissed her softly. Slumping onto his side next to

her, and resting a hand on her naked back, he enabled himself to drink in the view before him. She opened her eyes to see Shawn smiling, comprehending Warmth came over her, happiness. This wasn't going to be a straightforward future...

Billionaire's Accidental Wife by C.ELLICA

Chapter 67 The next morning, the couple travelled to the nearby town, Shawn stared across the table at Catherine as she sipped her coffee. Her short dark blonde hair shimmered in the sunlight, a pearlescent wave amid a smooth clear sea. They'd requested a table on the street to sip their coffee and have breakfast waiting for Eddie's men, and they planned to go to Gretna Green village. The cool morning air gave necessity to light jackets, but the bright morning sun bathed them in a solace heat as they ate their breakfast of eggs, pancakes, fresh apples, and peanut butter jelly sandwiches.

The small Scottish cafe overlooked over the city in the distance, high above the rooftops of the multicoloured cottages and marts that streaked the streets. Pedestrians strolled by, some with shopping bags, others with travel gears, and still others with their hands in their pockets as they talked about the day's events.

Shawn had never really spent much time in the town of Scotland, and surely not in this particular city. The need had never come up. Now, he regrets that fact. The gorgeous countryside, the architecture, the food, the culture, had all grown on him in the short span of a week since he'd arrived. Unfortunately, it was time to travel again and talk to Dr. Roundwater. They would eventually determine what the woman knew about the message left by his grandfather and if she had something to do with deciphering the vague messages of the old man.

His grandfather was indeed a man of adventure, puzzles, and treasure hunting. Somehow, if he recovered the key and the riches of the old man, more than likely, it would wind up in a museum somewhere, which was what Shawn hoped would be the case. A spectacular work of treasure and art like the Buddha should be available for all the world to take in and appreciate. Catherine caught him daydreaming about the Buddha as he gazed up at the castle to his right." Do you want to go visit the old castle, which was the tourist attraction of this town before we leave, or are you thinking about something?" He flashed a playful grin as he spoke, noticing that she was having a deep thought.

His eyes blinked wearily, not from the fatigue, but simply from being happier than he'd been in a long time. For the first time in forever, Shawn was completely relaxed. He'd dreamed of feeling content like this. Now he had it. The woman he loved was sitting across from him. He was eating amazing food. Things had been quiet for the last several days – Javier's men had been quiet lately.

The feelings of comfort and appreciation waned as he thought about the one who ambushed them at the airport, or perhaps Eddie's men had apprehended them and

rescued Dave. Shawn figured they weren't no-names, but locals who had just happened to learn about the priceless treasure he was trying to unearth. It was rarely that simple. "Shawn I have one question, something is amiss with the key to the Buddha treasure of Sir Anthony,"

"What is it?"

"My point is, why not give you the key directly? What's with the cryptic messages?"

"Well, it's because the Russians, France, mobs, and Uncle Alfonso's men were after it, and even the Thai government wanted the real Buddha back to their country."

"So they knew that what they had on display was a fake one," Catherine asked.

"Yes," Shawn sighed, but actually it was more complicated than that. Long before, a new home for Buddha was constructed in Bangkok's Chinatown in 1954. As an army of workers moved it slowly toward its new digs, pieces of terracotta broke off, revealing that this sculpture, ten feet high, and weighing nearly 5.5 tons, was made of 18-karat gold. The discovery that it was gold came on May 25th, 1955 – just short of the year 2500 in the Buddhist calendar, which begins with Buddha's passing. According to one version of the story, a piece of heavy equipment dropped on the Buddha, and that is when its solid gold substance became known." :

"I never thought of you as a religious person, Shawn," "You know, I'm not," Shawn replied and sipped his coffee, and Catherine did the same. "But whatever the case, these events coincided approximately with the 2500th year of the Buddhist era, and many people believed the discovery was, therefore, a miracle. This lovely gold sculpture is still in its small shelter in Chinatown, with minimal security. I suppose that if you weigh so much, not much security is necessary." "Really?"

"Yes, then what happened next?"

"My grandfather was one of the curious. He dug deeper, set aside the many myths and went behind its origin." "How big exactly is it anyway?" "Well... to get an idea of this Buddha's size, consider the elephant tusks in the foreground of the photo. According to a poorly-translated history available at the temple, the Buddha's dimensions are "6 cubits and 5 inches at the lap span, and 7 cubits and 1 inch high." "Wow! You surely know all of it!"

"I did, um-I did my research. In fact, last year, I went to Thailand and saw the fake one."

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"Wow!"

"When this whole mess is done, we should visit it again, you and I."

“That’s a good plan.” Catherine nodded and smiled, “So what else? Did you find out?”
“The accidental unveiling of this Buddha as being gold lent support to the highly controversial Ramkhamhaeng stele, a stone tablet from the 14th century that is the foundation -stone of traditional Thai history. Many scholars believe this tablet is a 19th-century forgery. However, the fact that the stele mentions large golden Buddhas in Sukhothai (none were known at that time) gives at least some support to its authenticity.”

“And those zealots believe it is sacred?”

“Yes.”

Shawn thought about how his employed historians had studied the fake statue in Thailand for days. The experts, however, always had plans on top of plans. The two who tried to take a chunk of the Buddha had been clever enough not to get detected by the guards. Without the historian’s help, Shawn wasn’t sure if he could have gotten a second clue about where to look. To his grandfather’s diary. He’d been lucky that they’d turned up when they did, although he learned it wasn’t luck at all.

Eddie tracked them down to Europe after they returned from Thailand through a series of connections, one of which was his butler’s old friend, Sebastian, who also happened to be Shawn’s former classmate at college. It was maybe a coincidence that they both shared connections, so Eddie was able to track the two historians who were scared and hiding from Javier’s men.

Eddie, affectionately known Sebastian from his Mexico’s spying days and was able to tell him where he could find the two historians concerning what city and country they lived in, but he’d been kept in the dark as to where Shawn was hiding out since he received many death threats, and because it was sheer luck that his men here in Scotland were able to find Dave’s apartment and conduct a surveillance routine check, he wondered if perhaps Fate was on Shawn’s side because he found Catherine well and alive.

Back in his college days, he made too many mistakes and ended up being a police asset when he was involved in the drug trafficking s**t hosted by his friends, back when he worked as a field agent for the ultra-covert group that reported directly to the chief of police. He knew it was foolish to risk his life knowing he had billions of dollars to spend on wealth, but being the man who loves adventures and shits, he did many things that were far beyond the ordinary, and being a field agent was one of them. Though his grandfather ended up paying off his senior to kick him from the assignment, the old man gave him the CEO’s job at a f*****g young age, so instead of killing himself from the covert job, he ended up being a suit and tie CEO who attended meeting after meeting until he had his hand on it. Not that he blames the old man. He loved the company and his people who depended on it, but sometimes he missed the action, and perhaps right now he had his wish, running for their lives, hiding and being madly in cover op? How hard could it be?

Billionaire's Accidental Wife by C.ELLICA

Chapter 68 “You know what? I really don’t understand those religious fanatics or those who believe they can change the world.” Catherine grumbled under her breath and took the egg, followed by another sip of tea.

“I know, it is so complicated. My uncle Alfonso would be glad to explain it to you. The old man must be insane, but he had his fair share of beliefs and ideals, though they will bore you to death.”

“Thank God, I didn’t meet him.”

“You bet!” Shawn smiled and thought his mind was occupied with something more than just keeping his wife alive at all cost.

He’d intentionally not told Eddie where he was staying in case someone was eavesdropping on their conversations. That sort of thing didn’t happen often, but it did happen from time to time and in much more secure institutions than theirs. While Eddie’s resources were pretty tight, they did experience issues with hackers now and then. Those who ambushed them in the airport couldn’t have learned where he was from skimming emails or text messages. They found out some other way, which was almost more troubling. For the moment, however, they were safely six feet underground and the rest were under Scottish police radar and wouldn’t present a problem in the immediate future. The police had been more than cooperative in bringing in the criminals. It didn’t help that they’d committed the crime in the airport with the billionaire, who donated massive amounts to their many charities. Shawn knew they would take care of those who ambushed them and the man behind it. Maybe that’s why Javier was on his tail anymore, perhaps he was hiding now.

“You Ok?” Catherine asked.

“No,” Shawn said, finally answering her question. He’d been in a daze since they’d sat down.” I’m good. Besides, we have to... I have to get back to Grenta later. Let’s just be vigilant.” “How are we going to know if the men were Eddie’s?” “We will know.”

“Alright, I trust you with that. And yes, you can say we. I’m definitely coming with you.” She raised her cup of coffee and held it in front of her lips to hide the grin her eyes betrayed. He shook his head. “No. I have a better plan. Let me go to Grenta alone. You stay in the cottage with the-”

“F**k no!” Catherine growled. “I’m not going to f**k no! You are not going alone, Shawn, you promised, we are doing this together.”

“But what if-”

"I'm with you, Shawn, nothing could go wrong." Shawn wondered if he blushed or if his ears turned red because they were the most beautiful words he had ever heard from her. He loved her to the moon and back, but he had doubts

about her feelings for him. Catherine was never an emotional individual. For two years as his secretary, she was the epitome of workaholic and seriousness and never mixed her personal life with duty. So now, he was torn between telling her he loved her or keeping it to himself.

"What if-"

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"I'm coming whether you like it or not, understand?" Her tone was dismissive, and she took a long sip of coffee. "Fine! You're the boss." He said, clearly defeated. She smiled, "Good... uh-weird. It was long before you were the one being so bossy." "I'm not bossy." "Yes, you are Mr. Richmond. So bossy and a jerk, and a playboy." "Jealous, wife?"

"F**k no!"

"Oh?"

"A little...maybe." She said and rolled her eyes, which earned Shawn a grin. They'd caught up over the last forty-eight hours, but Catherine had remained coy as to what she'd been up to.

It had been so long. Was it two days or three? And still, she didn't have any news about her brother? More than that?

Neither one of them wanted to think about it.

Catherine had dropped off the Gretna map she had from the cafe as Shawn had been busy on his phone calls.

It wasn't that he hadn't tried to get in touch with Eddie's men but it was killing her. The wait was killing her. Dave must be alive or else... Oh God, she doesn't want to think about it, she couldn't. As the hours drained away like water swirling in a sink, he'd waited to hear from his men, and to see his brother, to hold him once more.

To Shawn, he had more than his fair share of secrets. He knew about Javier's plan for Catherine. He knew about what they had planned but he was far off than that, thinking about her betraying her was by far the most painful thing but could she have betrayed him? Now she was back, seemingly all of a sudden. She wanted to pick up where they'd left off, but she was keeping something from him. He knew that. Something was amiss with her. She had her own secret. Whatever it was, he had to find out so she could help herself and thought he couldn't blame her. He just hoped it wasn't anything threatening

that much he knew-but Shawn felt like it had carved a divide between them, a trench that he couldn't bridge, not unless he figured out what had happened.

He wasn't going to ask again. She'd fill him in on her own time.

"So, you're coming back to London with me then? For sure? Nothing has come up?"

"Yes, after we find Dave."

"Sure?" "Yes, Shawn. Where could I possibly go? You are my husband and you are stuck with me as I am stuck with you!" She grinned.

He snickered and set down his coffee. He rolled his shoulders and leaned his head to the side. "I don't know. I feel like there is something you are not telling me. Whatever happened when you were abducted."

"Shawn, I don't want to think about those nightmares. I was over it. I just want a new life with you. You and I... I don't want to be on those sides again when I don't know whom to trust. However, I know I can trust you." Her grin faded, her eyes glazing over with fog. "I'm sorry, sweetheart," he said as he kissed her hands and added, "... that won't come up again." "I promise."

"Thank you, Shawn, and like I said the other night, I'll tell you about it when I'm ready. And when I feel it's appropriate." He didn't know what that meant. He strived not to care. Shawn was not an easygoing kind of man. He was serious and used to whatever he said needing to be followed, yet he was a total loser to Catherine. She held him in her palm.

He didn't like to be tied to too many commitments when it came to his professional life, which is why working for his grandfather's company turned out to be a great thing. It combined his love of business with his passion for travel. The greatest thing it fiddled with, nevertheless, was his fascination for leisure. He'd had a stressful life for a while, and the last thing Shawn needed was to add more to it. Being able to sort of work at his own pace, his own schedule, and having plenty of time between projects was a good thing for his mind and body.

Catherine had mentioned that he seemed stronger than before, more energetic. He'd explain it away by saying he had more free time to work out and focus on nutrition. Deep down, she figured there was more to it than that, but she didn't push the issue. "Does Eddie have another plan for us already? After Dave and Gretna, where are we going next?" She made the transition to another subject swiftly and painlessly. He smirked. This woman gets him, unlike anyone he has ever met. "Well, after Gretna, Maybe Dr. Roundwater could give us the next clue then we will go there forward. Eddie said he needed to tell me about something, so I guess maybe he does I know something else that he couldn't tell on the phone. That's not the norm. Usually, he does

keep tabs on me, and he certainly doesn't request a meeting unless something is going on."

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Chapter 69

Gretna Green Village

Dr. Lanna Roundwater sat at a cafe along the street in front of her office. She was busy at sixty five years of age, as she travelled a lot. While looking at the scenery outside her favourite cafe while enjoying her morning tea, tourists passed by while bicyclists pedaled by in a casual rhythm, clearly in no hurry to get wherever they were going. Pedestrians strolled by at a similar pace, leisurely and carefree. The high late morning sun beamed down brightly, and despite a chill in the fall air, she didn't feel the cold in her white office shirt and black slacks

She traced her right index finger along the lines of an article on her computer. It was a newspaper piece, written more than sixty seven years prior, about a controversial stone tablet from the 14th century that went missing from a golden Buddha's new supposed home in Bangkok Chinatown in 1955. Though there were many different accounts of it, she knew she was in the right place.

Her former lover Sir Anthony Richmond didn't give her the exact information about the stone tablet that was supposed to be the key to the rumored wealth of the Richmond family. She knew from her many sources that even the Russian and Thai governments were after Shawn Richmond, especially Anthony's insane cousin Alfonso Richmond III, long before Anthony, though he claimed it was a priceless masterpiece.

It was a strange story, to say the least. Why not tell the insurance companies, the banks, and the authorities the name of the buyer, whoever that man may be? And what of the Russian mobs after it? Even if they got a hand on the tablet, it was totally useless without the key. Anthony made sure of that because she and the old man planned it together and even made the puzzle in his diary too vague and foolish. It seemed like a foolish thing to not give enough details to aid in the recovery of the 14th century treasure.

It would be foolish unless Sir Anthony, before he died, was doing his best to hide the fact that he'd somehow procured a piece of stone tablet. Three months before he died, he sent half of the tablet to her, and since then, it has been in her care while the other chunk was in someone else's care. According to the article, the man's name was unknown. He'd built up a vast fortune immediately following World War II, taking advantage of huge gaps

following World War II, taking advantage of huge gaps in the market. His main source of revenue had been textiles, but after a little digging, Dr. Roundwater learned that the guy

had a darker side. He dealt in the stolen arts and the black market trade, shipping them to those art enthusiasts willing to collect them in good measure. According to her research, the man didn't seem to mind that many of the arts came from the underground market and that the things he sold had a high rate of forgery. She figured it was karma that he was killed in his private pool on his own private island.

However, Dr. Roundwater took hours, maybe days, searching through the scores of electronically stored newspaper clippings and old records before she found the image she was looking for. When she did find it, she knew that the dead guy was the man she'd been searching for. Then a piece of the tablet was in his collection, and maybe the key that was still missing could be used if all the chunks of the tablet could be discovered soon. And for that, she needs Anthony's grandson, Shawn Richmond, the one and only person Anthony trusted.

That still didn't explain where the key was now, nearly sixty-seven years after it had been taken from the Buddha's resting place, and some believe that it was a fake and that the real Buddha was here in Europe. Dr. Lanna had a source here in Scotland that could help, someone who'd worked as an assistant curator at the Louvre in Paris. The woman was also well connected in Paris's criminal underworld. If anyone had information concerning the missing key painting, it would be her. Dr. Lanna picked up the phone from her purse and started looking through the contacts. She passed Joy's name and paused for a second. It seemed forever ago, like a distant faux memory from a dream. How did Joy manage to keep her exploits secret from Anthony? Lanna didn't know, but sooner or later a secret that big would come out. She continued to scan through the names until she came across the one she was looking for. When she heard a muffled explosion, she began tapping it. It was about a half mile away in the distance. The earth began to shake. Her coffee cup jiggled on its saucer as the table vibrated. Dr. Lanna and the other patrons were perplexed as they gazed up. Everyone started glancing around at each other a split second later, scrutinizing faces to see if anyone had an explanation. A plume of black smoke emerged above the buildings across the street, providing the first clue as to what had transpired. Then came another low boom, this time a little closer than the last one.

Dr. Lanna sprang from her seat and turned to face the cafe's barista, who'd come out onto the patio and was staring at the strange site along with everyone else. "Sir, do you have a basement?" she asked in hurried, thick English. "Yes," he answered in kind. "Why, madam?" "Get all these people down there. Now!" "Why?"

"It's an attack!"

The manager and some of the patrons ran into the premises. Others dashed for their automobiles, believing that escaping quickly was the best choice. Some sat motionless in their chairs, their cheeks flushed with surprise. That was one of at least a dozen. There was no way she could assist all of them. She swung around and dashed across the newly congested street, heading for the sounds of chaos. She leapt and slid over a car's hood, landing on her feet on the other side in mid-stride, and continued on her

way. Something was yelled by the driver. She couldn't hear him clearly since she was too far away, but she guessed he'd screamed something profane. Dark smoke billowed towards the sky in thick clouds. Screams filled the air and reverberated through the concrete, steel, and glass canyons. Gretna's main street had gone from being a quiet part of town to becoming the site of Armageddon. The majority of the people she came across were heading in the opposite direction. Adriana couldn't say she blamed them. On the other hand, she wasn't wired that way. She had no choice but to assist in whatever way she could.

It took her another three blocks to notice the first traces of what had transpired. She noticed the wreckage of a compact automobile amid the blazing inferno as she rounded the last curve at the intersection of 23rd and 24th Avenues. Sirens sounded, but only one cop had arrived on the scene thus far, and he appeared powerless in the midst of the chaos.

Bodies were strewn all over the place. Dr. Lanna did a fast survey of the area and found at least twenty casualties, and that was only on this side of the car. It was impossible to tell what had transpired on the other side. She made a quick assessment of the situation. Who could have done this terrorism?