

CHAPTER TWENTY – STEAMY VERSION

Warning – contains adult content

Extract from Hawaiian Escape, by Debbie Flint @ 2013

Hawaiian Escape EXTRA - Steamy Chapter

**Helen & Alessandro
in Tuscany**



Debbie Flint

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Hawaiian Escape Extra – STEAMY CHAPTER 20: Helen and Alessandro in Tuscany

By Debbie Flint

The story picks up from chapters 1-19 in [Hawaiian Escape](#), book 1 in the trilogy following sisters Sadie and Helen...

If Sadie had known that a last minute economy trip to Tuscany would lead to so many heart-stopping moments, would she have put herself through it? Even now, back in Francesco's hotel room, Sadie was still not sure. He'd been witty, attentive, gracious and kind. He'd listened to her moan about her weekend, he'd regaled her with stories of his maverick 'ancient star chasing' – making himself sound like the Indiana Jones of Paleo-Astronomy. And he'd invited her back to his place for the night – without needing to be asked.

She'd steered clear of conversations about the kids, and macrobiotics. And it had worked. She must remember that for the future. But now as things were starting to get heated, Sadie wondered if she'd be better off leaving whilst the going was good. What had Helen said – don't put out first night? The problem was, the fire inside Sadie which was slowly building to an inferno, very much needed putting out. And from the look of Francesco's hose, he might be the one to do it...

If Helen had known that a last minute Tuscany treat for her sister would lead to so many heart-stopping moments, would she have put Sadie through it?

Or herself?

Or would she have run away like she always did, when things started getting serious? The sight before her eyes made Helen blink. For this, she'd have stayed.

Alessandro stood naked before her, apart from the tiniest of towels, dominating the doorway like some Roman god, the light from the marbled bathroom silhouetting his outline as he waited for her reply. Helen sipped her champagne and swallowed hard. This was it, then.

The evening had turned unseasonably warm – stifling, close, like a storm was brewing – and his request had seemed innocent enough – to take a quick shower in her room after bringing her back from the conference centre. Before their picnic at the vineyard ruin. Helen had popped to her hotel to change, before he drove her back into the warm night, back up the winding Italian hillside, back to a life she would glimpse but as usual, would never be a permanent part of. Always moving on, don't stay too long, don't get too close. *Better that way.*

Just a shower, he'd said.

Perhaps she should have known better.

To be honest, a marketing conference with her sister in tow hadn't exactly had 'find a naked hot guy' at the top of the agenda. But here he was in her hotel room, dominating the doorway of the bathroom in nothing more than a towel. A little towel.

'You can't guess, then?' he was saying. 'Ok, I will tell you – I think I should take you up on your challenge.'

What challenge?

Oh-oh.

All the way back to her hotel, the signals were there – he'd been paying more attention to her face than to the road ahead. His voice had been low, seductive. The way he'd helped her adjust the seat, leaning a little too close. The way he'd brushed his fingers against her leg several times as he changed gear. Even the way he'd opened the door for her and taken her hand as she stepped out of the low, luxurious car – it wasn't her usual experience of a ride home. But then he wasn't her usual experience of men.

But there was a problem. He was exactly her type. Well, the type she *would* have chosen if life hadn't got in the way – you know, the film-star type.

Tall – tick.

Brooding – tick.

Broad – oh *yeah*, big tick.

Tantalisingly sexy, with his thick, dark hair falling over his deep brown eyes, and that Mediterranean charm... the accent which had made her quiver when he'd introduced himself yesterday. A quiver that reached from her neatly manicured, scarlet fingernails right down to the tips of her toes inside the towering 'I'm making a statement' Manolo Blahnik's she'd just changed into.

She was resting on the edge of the plush hotel bed with all its crisp, white linen and dozens of designer cushions, with her shoes still on, even though her jacket was off, and her shirt was slightly open... Well, it was hot.

'Challenge?' she replied, hoping desperately she wasn't getting the signals wrong. It wouldn't be the first time.

'Yes,' he went on, walking towards her. His towel was so small, he had to hold it together with his fingers, and she could see the top of his thigh, slightly whiter than the rest of his tanned skin. His chest was pin-up perfect and still moist from the shower – it rippled slightly as he moved. She snapped her eyes back up to his face as he replied.

'You said to me last night, did you not, that no man was capable of breaking down the barrier in your... defences – and that right now you are too closed-down, too hurt...'

I did?

'...And I told *you* – have faith, because one day a *very* special man would open your mind again...*Tesoro mia*, what if that time has come?'

Helen was silent.

'I want you to think about it,' he added, then disappeared back into the bathroom.

So she did. Helen realised that Sadie's answer would be, *yes, send me a special man to love*. But they didn't exist, did they? And if they did, Helen would gladly let her sister have him. Maybe she was with him right now.

Come to think of it, where was said Sister? After she'd got the hump earlier on, she'd sent little more than a holding-text – '*I'm ok. Have fun. With F.*' Did she mean with Francesco? Or did she mean 'fun with an F' - their old code meaning third base, *don't wait up*.

Well, even if Sadie had begged Francesco to let her stay with him tonight, it'd still be nice to be sure. And she hadn't answered Helen's calls when Alessandro was in the shower just now.

Helen knew now that Sadie meant it, when she'd declared that she wanted to do things her way – well, so be it.

Knowing Sadie, that also meant she wouldn't stop until she got to the bottom of the accusations about identical entries. *Whose?* She hadn't understood the organiser's explanation for the interrogation followed by the sudden dropping of the matter last night. And now it looked like Sadie might be ditching out early before the big results were announced tomorrow afternoon. Helen could hope for a miracle, couldn't she? *For one moment, she made herself visualize a big announcement...* Now it all depended upon the checks being done by midday tomorrow... If not, Sadie might not talk to Helen for a very long time. Well, whatever – she wasn't going to hear from her tonight. So Helen turned her mobile off. There were other more pressing matters at hand.

Back home in the UK, Grace was listening to a very curious message from her oldest daughter. This was unusual. Grace had shut up shop and hadn't realised there was a message until she'd got home, where her trusty old-fashioned answerphone still responded reliably with one press of one button. She listened, then made a quick phone call.

'Darling it's me. Can you do me a favour? You know mum's old laptop? Well I need you to talk me through how to turn it on and send an email... Yes an email... And attach a file or folder or something. Is it hard... ? Well, I can work the washing machine darling so it can't be that difficult can it... ? Mouse? Er... Well you'll just have to tell your father that dinner will have to get cold – your Auntie Helen needs my help, and this is far more important than bloody Yvette's sodding nut-loaf and veggie chipolatas. Ok, then here we go...'

Alessandro came back out of Helen's hotel bathroom no longer dripping wet, a slightly bigger towel draped round his shoulders. Helen's thoughts were brought dramatically back to the present as she gazed wonderingly at his toned body, his big shoulders and his 'tiny towel...area'.

'So, do you recall,' he said, 'I gave you a prediction.'

'You did? I mean...you did.' Helen muttered, sipping her champagne again.

'Yes, it is often true of women who have been hurt in the way you have. When you least expect it, a special man suddenly appears and turns your life upside down. Turns YOU upside down, *amore mio*. Do you not remember what I said?'

Last night was still a bit of a blur, if she was honest. After all, it wasn't every day you see your sister get to do a speech in front of five hundred people. One neither of you were prepared for. Then immediately afterwards, get hauled into a small back room to explain yourself. Her heart missed a beat, remembering for a split second that the biggest confrontation could still happen tomorrow. She shook off the sick feeling in her gut.

Focus on the Now.

'Can you? Can you remember what you told me, when I dropped you off last night, my sweet?' he asked.

'Er...'

'Think about it – for I have been thinking of nothing else all day. All day in a stuffy hall filled with stuffy people, waiting for our journey back, together.' He raised an eyebrow and waited.

Nothing – a big fat blank. Think, think!

'What I said to you, when I turned down your invitation to come in to your room?'

He turned ME down? Ouch.

'I see your face,' he went on, 'but do not be concerned – there was a very good reason I resisted the urge to join you in your bed.' No reply. He continued. 'I promised you that *l'uomo giusto* would appear in your life just at the moment destiny needed him to...' he had stopped walking now, and stood just in front of her, 'maybe he is right beneath your nose.'

He lifted her chin with his finger and she looked up, their eyes met and she felt a spark between them. Then he dropped her chin again and reached for her champagne, gingerly took a sip then offered it to her. She took it. When she looked back at him he was rubbing his dripping hair luxuriantly. He looked every inch a model, like he was auditioning for a shower gel commercial. Even his damn toenails looked perfect.

'Tell me, what do you want from life?' he asked, seeing her watching him and stopping suddenly to fix her with a gaze that felt as though he was searching her soul with those intense brown eyes.

'I – don't know. I thought I knew, but now I'm not so sure. Yesterday didn't help. Right now, maybe all I want is to get to midday tomorrow unscathed – that'd be a start.'

Alessandro didn't move, waiting for more. She watched a drop of water from his neck run down the centre of his chest towards his navel.

'The prize you and Sadie have come here for – you want it so much?' he asked, 'Is it so *very* meaningful? The anguish it causes – I see it in your eyes. Is it not more important – for the soul – to have peace? Peace... and love?'

'You sound like one of the Beatles – Maharishi era,' she joked nervously, but it went completely over his head. 'But, well – yes *of course* the prize is *so very important*. It's life-changing, Alessandro. It's why Sadie came.'

'And why did *you* come, Helen, my dear?'

'Eurgh, only grandmas and maiden aunts use "*my dear*,"' she said, smiling. The corner of his mouth curled up. 'Don't try to be English,' she said, 'I much prefer the Italian, *mia Carogna*.'

'Carina, my darling, carina, not Carogna. That's not nice. Or I can say – *tesoro mia* – is that any better? *Tesoro mia*,' he asked, his voice seductive and soft. He sat down on the bed next to her.

She raised her glass to him. 'Tesoro mia,' she said, imitating him in an exaggerated Italian accent. She felt a little nervous around him – that was unusual. *What had happened to the Magic Confidence of the Shoes?*

'Much better,' he replied, and tapped the tip of her nose affectionately. 'Tesoro mia,' he repeated, imitating her accent.

‘Yes much better,’ she said, aware now of being so very close to him, his towel gaping slightly as it draped over powerful thighs. ‘As long as that doesn’t mean “my little donkey” or something. It wouldn’t be the first time.’

‘Haha, no, it means *my treasure*.’ Then he took her hand, and moved a little closer on the bed. ‘So listen to me – *tesoro mia* – you have side-stepped the question. I think that whatever the reason you claim to have made this trip, there is a much deeper one – one that even you do not know. But it is there. And maybe we can discover it – but you have to open up to me – completely...’

Helen looked doubtful. He touched her face and gazed deeply into her eyes, down to her mouth, then back up to her eyes. He went on, ‘Yes, I am sure that, if you give me the chance, I can help you find out what is deep down inside. *Very deep in fact.*’

And in that moment, she did something very uncharacteristic. But if she didn’t do it here – now – with him – she feared it would be a long time before anything like this happened again.

‘Ok,’ she said. ‘You may be right. And you’ve got me intrigued now. Go on then, show me.’

And with that, Alessandro pushed her gently back on the bed, and let his towel fall to the floor.

‘Oh I think I’m beginning to see already,’ Helen said, her eyes becoming dark, her heart exploding into a thunder of beating, as he stood for a second, resplendent in his naked glory – six pack and pecs and – mmmm... Then he moved closer and lifted her feet, removing her heels carefully.

‘You do not need these shoes,’ he said to her, ‘it is your naked self that is so priceless, so beautiful, so...’ and his mouth was upon hers, hot and demanding and searching and passionate.

Helen felt his kiss ignite an explosion of desire inside her. It had been building up for hours and now she was just about ready to implode. All the frustration after seeing Victor in New York, all the celibacy since the split, all the stirring she felt when she’d first laid eyes on this gorgeous Italian with a voice like silk and a body like steel. It all whirled up into a tornado, just waiting to be unleashed.

And unleashed it was.

She kissed him back equally as hard, and they rolled over on the bed until she was on top of him. His arousal was plain to see, and she reached down and held him in her hand, moving and caressing and making him groan with pleasure. The fury continued to mount, until it was a tempest. Her shirt became untucked, her skirt rode up around her hips and she straddled him whilst continuing to kiss him hard, and deep and strong.

‘Momento,’ he said, and gestured to move so he could slowly undo her buttons on her shirt. She sat astride him, and reached around behind her to his thighs, so she could touch his muscles and feel between his legs. The hard ridge below her moved tantalisingly against her silky pants, and she thrust her hips one way then the other, making him catch his breath as the pressure made him even harder. His hands were skilfully releasing her buttons until her shirt fell open and Helen breathed in to push her breasts towards his face. He reached to stop her hands touching him, giving her a devious look. Her eyes flickered with enjoyment and surprise.

‘You have a beautiful body,’ he said, ‘and the softest skin...’ and he sat up so they were facing each other, so he could pull her shirt off her shoulder and kiss the skin he had bared. His lips were hot, his kiss was achingly sensuous, and Helen threw back her head in pleasure. ‘You like this, no? Well I like it too – I like the taste of you,’ he whispered, his mouth moving further down her shoulder, licking her then sucking her skin a tiny bit then kissing further down. Thank goodness she’d nipped in and had her shower before him.

Her shirt came to rest half way down her arms and he pulled both sides behind her, holding her still, trapping her arms and breathing hotly over her bulging breasts, which strained in captivity within her lilac balconette bra. He looked at her chest, then up at her face, then back to her chest. Then he let go of the shirt, freeing her arms. ‘I want to see you. Release it for me,’ he said, and Helen couldn’t get the clasp undone fast enough. But he grasped urgently at her hands, indicating to slow down, and took her face in one hand firmly, bringing her close to him, moving his lips tantalisingly slowly along her mouth and staring deeply into her eyes.

'Slowly, my angel, this is what I mean. Your passion is unbounded, and I will take you to the stars before the night is out, but slowly, and this time, you will do it my way. Is that agreeable to you, Helen? *Ho un debole per te* – I am weak for you, as I see you are for me. But what you have told me makes me think it is time to... how do you say, *turn the tables round*? Yes?'

Helen realised what he was asking and tried to recall the last time she hadn't been the dominant one during sex. Then she realised who it was with, how very long ago it had been, and how it had felt at the time. A feeling of hurt flitted through her body and she blinked several times. She hid it quickly.

'You can turn round whatever the hell you like, Alessandro – I am weak for you too,' and she jerked forward and kissed his mouth hard. Then did it again. 'Very,' and again, 'very,' one more time, 'weak indeed.'

Alessandro gave a throaty 'hah' and suddenly jerked her shirt into a tight knot behind her back, pinning her elbows to her sides, and held her there with one hand. With the other, he gripped the back of her hair, and exposed her neck, then passionately kissed from her jawline right down to her bra, then stopped once again. He scrutinised her as she sat, still straddling him, watching his every move, panting slightly at the unbridled passion that had whipped up so quickly between them. His pupils were very large, completely in the moment, and it was clear that there was very little chance they would be leaving for that trip to the ruins any time soon. He moved his face nearer to her skin, and inhaled. 'Your fragrance is enticing, Helen, it is driving me insane. Ever since I saw you I have been wanting this moment to happen. Your beauty is intoxicating me... you are so, so sexy.'

Helen just gulped and panted a little. She wanted him badly.

'I am thinking that you may be very ready right now for me to get what I want from you... are you ready, Helen?' he asked, letting go of her hair and tracing his finger slowly down her neck and chest, skimming over her loosened bra and meandering down towards her skirt, rucked up high around her hips. She watched his finger go further down, and tried to wriggle her arms loose. 'Aha, no you don't, *mi amore*, tonight you are to give yourself over to destiny, to my command, to do what I wish and not question it.' He smiled. A flicker of amusement crossed his face, enjoying every moment. *And so am I*, thought Helen. 'Do we have a deal?' he asked.

Helen took a deep breath and smiled back, giving a thrust of her hips just to tease him. 'Yes,' she answered, 'we have a deal.'

Alessandro's response was to thrust his tongue inside her mouth and kiss her deeply, and she inhaled suddenly before kissing him back with equal force. He stopped instantly. 'No,' he said, 'I want you to try something. This time, you must not react. Tonight I want you to act as though you are an innocent. Sure, you are a woman of the world, you will have made love, but act as though you have never – never – done the things I am to do with you this evening. Can you play along with my wishes, my darling?'

OMG, thought Helen, *you bet your bloody life I can*.

'Yes,' she said. And he kissed her passionately once again, but this time she did not try to match him, she just took it, and groaned a little for good measure. *This was new. This was interesting. This was an incredible turn on*. He kissed her some more, and, still holding her shirt tightly, with his other hand he played with her hair, her chin, her shoulders, her arms and then finally as he gradually stopped kissing her, and pulled back to just a few inches in front of her face, his hands went down towards her legs.

'Well, my innocent one,' he breathed, huskily, 'let us see if you are ready for me, shall we? And you must not protest, for our neighbours may hear us, so do not utter a sound...' and with that he leant backwards and motioned for her to swing her leg round over his chest, so she sat across his lap, on top of his thighs, and then he resumed his grip on her arms.

Now his hands went to her ankles, and slowly caressed across the long length of her legs, until her reached the skirt. 'Not quite high enough,' he said, 'I want to see you...' and he pushed the hem higher towards her hips so that a hint of light purple could be seen. Her legs were together, so he pushed one knee further away

from the other. Helen immediately clamped them tight shut again. 'Ahh, but my love,' he said, 'how can I initiate you in the ways of love if you do not let me touch. Open your legs.'

Helen didn't move, just curled one corner of her mouth up slightly.

'I said OPEN them,' he said, and roughly pulled her bra down, and clamped his mouth around her nipple and sucked hard.

'Ohh!' said Helen, as he bit very, very gently.

'Your time will come later, I promise, cheri,' he whispered, then resumed his commanding voice and said, 'Now, obey me. Move your thighs. Open your legs for me, just a little.' *Wow this was hot.* He began flicking the other nipple with his tongue, all the while looking up into her eyes whilst trailing his fingertips back and forth around her knee. She swallowed and moved her legs a fraction apart. 'More,' he said, and Helen obeyed. Alessandro brushed his fingers tantalisingly over her thighs towards her pants, which she knew were already getting wetter. He licked his lips and looked straight into her eyes as his fingers finally reached her, and then she breathed harder as he expertly began to move her pants to one side, without touching her at all. He reached up and sensuously kissed her mouth, slowly, top lip to bottom lip, tongue flickering, indicating his intent. Then he pulled back slightly from her face, looked down to where his fingers hovered and then up at her face once more. He flicked his gaze enquiringly, from her left eye to her right, and back again, fast, as if searching for permission. She nodded, and he smiled and nodded back. Then he pulled her pants further back and moved his finger to touch her, so, so gently. She nearly shot through the roof, and arched her back slightly and groaned. He narrowed his eyes sadistically, seeing her torment, and slowly, slowly moved his fingertip against her wetness, hardly touching at all. His finger slipped easily. 'Oh yes,' he said, 'oh yes.'

Then he slowed to an excruciating crawl as his finger reached the top of her until it barely touched her swollen peak. She jumped. His chin jutted forward, pleased with having hit the button so perfectly, and he barely touched it again. Helen jumped again and wriggled a little. Then his finger slid back down and plunged into the depths of her, emerging slick and he sucked it hungrily. 'Mmmm,' was all he said.

'Oh wow,' said Helen, heart pounding, panting, pleading.

'My darling, you taste so good. You are certainly ready for me. But first I want you to obey me some more,' he said, moving her aside to stand up. He stood proudly before her, and touched his own erection, sliding his hand up and down slowly. 'I want you to wet your fingers,' he said. Helen raised her hand towards her mouth and he caught it. 'No,' he said, moving her hand downwards. 'There.'

She did as she was told, touching herself delicately, as if she was indeed the ingénue he had instructed her to be. He stroked himself a little harder, then gestured, and she lifted her hand towards his. Her fingers were indeed moist now, and he closed them around his hardness and moved her hand up and down his length. Helen couldn't help herself, sitting as she was on the edge of the bed with her head so close to his cock. She dipped her head forwards and took the head in her mouth in one swift motion and sucked on him, fast and hard. He gasped. For one long moment he didn't move, just threw his head backwards and gripped the back of her head. Then just as fast, he stepped away, panting.

'Sorry,' she said, licking her lips. He was big, and hard and long and Helen had barely even begun. But his face told her all she needed to know, as he moved towards her once again. She sat still and gazed in wonder. He was amazing. Beautifully tanned, wonderfully toned and exceptionally tempting. 'God you're gorgeous,' she said.

'Not nearly as gorgeous as you are, Helen,' he said tenderly, his mask slipping for one moment, as he reached the edge of the bed again and stood before her, still holding himself. With his other hand he raised her chin, and bent to kiss her delicately with such tenderness that she felt emotions welling up inside of her. He was truly a masterpiece.

'So,' he said, the look of mischief back on his face, 'you wanted a taster did you?' Helen nodded, looking hungrily at his length, only a foot away from her face. She went to reach up. 'No,' he said. 'Do not touch. Just

sit.' He closed the gap between them and moved his tip towards her mouth. 'Close your eyes.' She closed her eyes. 'Now close your mouth,' he said. She did so. 'And do not open it,' he instructed, as he began tracing a line around her lips with his stiff head. She kept her eyes closed, and at first, her mouth too. But it was too much temptation and as he reached the middle of her lips, she just flickered out her tongue. There was a sharp intake of breath from Alessandro and he put his finger once again on her mouth, and made the shape of 'shhh' with his own. He was panting and Helen could see the pulse in his neck. *Sorry*, she mouthed back. He rolled his eyes and shook his head, slightly smiling, as if it was so hard to control himself. Then he bit his bottom lip and did it all over again, and this time Helen didn't move. When he spoke again, his voice was deeper, huskier, sultry. 'Now open your mouth,' he breathed. As she parted her lips, he placed his tip on her bottom lip and rocked gently in and out, 'Do... not... move...' he said, as his cock went further and further in, millimetre by millimetre until she could feel the edge of him on her tongue. The pangs of desire were shooting all over Helen's body and she began to ache for him.

'Now,' he whispered, throatily, 'suck me. Three times.'

Helen brought her hands up and held the base of him, then drew him into her mouth, sucking once - deep, twice - deeper, three times - deepest - long and hard, making the final time last an age, feeling him throb on her tongue. Then as he drew back out of her mouth, she closed her lips around him tightly, and he made an 'oh god' face.

'Stand up, Helen,' he said, and she stood, whilst inch by inch, he removed everything but her matching underwear, the bra hanging loosely, feeling exotic as it brushed against her nipples as she moved. Standing before this Adonis, naked, Helen felt exposed exhilarated. But not awkward - they were too intimate already for that. She knew he liked what he saw and she puffed up with pride, and felt a surge of the old Helen come flooding back into her being - the one who loved sex, had lots of it, and was insatiable. It was as though Alessandro detected the change in her. 'Uh-uh,' he said, wagging his finger at her, and shaking his head, still with the mischievous smile on his face. She took a breath, looked at the floor, and tried to quash the urge to throw him on his back and have HER evil way with HIM.

'What next, boss?' she asked. 'I mean, what next would you like me to do?' The last bit was in her most innocent, wide eyed manner. He pursed his lips in pleasure.

'Let's see... You have been a bad girl, but I know it is because you are new to the ways of Italian lovemaking,' he said, circling behind her, holding himself in his hand once more, and coming to a halt behind her back. He put his hand on her shoulder and nudged her to walk with him over towards the open window. It looked out over the fields beyond, to a silhouette of the ruined castle on a hillside far, far away. A gentle breeze was blowing the curtain softly, and the air smelled of the balmy night, with traces of cooking from the restaurant below. He rested his chin on her shoulder, his cheek touching hers, and put a hand on her hip, caressing ever so softly, hardly moving. The tip of his hardness was resting against the small of her back and she jiggled ever so slightly against it. He pushed her with it very gently and she put her hands on the windowsill. Then his other hand came around to cradle her breast. There was a pathway below and the faint sound of footsteps made her look behind her, questioningly. 'Do not move,' he whispered. His fingers played with her nipple, but apart from that they were motionless, his hardness touching her buttocks now, tracing up and down the middle of her cheeks.

The diners from the hotel restaurant passed by below them, completely unaware of the sight in the window several floors above, hidden in the shadows of the trees and the clouds across the moon. When they had passed by, he turned her head back to him, and kissed her long and soft, his tongue tracing out a tribute that felt like love. She tingled from top to toe.

Helen went to turn around to him, but he stilled her and motioned to the sky.

'Tesoro mia,' he said, looking up, as the moon emerged and the cloud drifted away. 'Do you see the constellation up there?' He leaned in tightly to her and his cock rested vertically against her lower back. His arm extended past her ear and his cheek pressed tightly against hers. 'Ursa Major - some 83 million light years

away – the brightest galaxy of its group. The light we see now, it left 83 million years ago. Imagine - how big must the universe be, and how small does that make us feel.'

You're not feeling too small to me right now, thought Helen, but she didn't say it. Instead she replied, 'It's incredible isn't it. Wasn't there a Super Nova up there recently too?' *Sadie wasn't the only one who could google.*

'Why yes,' he said, enthusiastically, 'our department photographed a Type 1a Super Nova – an exploding star. You may be aware that their brightness is so constant they can be used to determine the distances of remote galaxies. It shows that the Universe is expanding at an increasing rate, Helen. And we are one tiny, tiny spot of dust in its vastness.' Helen just nodded, listening to the melodious sound of his dulcet tones, and feeling the heat of his naked torso against hers. 'But when we are at one with the universe - when we meditate, when we feel the joy of the sun on our face... when we make love,' he said, his voice becoming more throaty, 'then, we are all part of the same eternal dance. It is so important to feel that connection,' he continued. 'Too many people are separate, when really, the human race was intended to be part of the same whole. So many lonely people – I see it in their eyes. Since I have studied such things, I feel it in their hearts.' As he spoke the final word, he moved his hand to press up against her heart, and he leant forward and nibbled on her ear. 'I told you it is time to open up, Helen. To let in a man who can take care of those feelings inside you,' he added, and she felt herself melting into him.

Helen's knees became a little wobbly and she could feel a powerful emotion making its way up from her stomach to her chest. She gripped the windowsill even harder and swallowed to fight back the sob that threatened to expose her. He was so beautiful. So strong, so masculine. Saying all the right things and whether it was because she was being subservient – for once – or whether he was truly *l'uomo giusto* she didn't care. Because right here, right now, she wanted him inside her more than anything in the world. *Helen's back*, she thought to herself. The original Helen, not the recent hard-nosed one. But the girl she once was, full of optimism about mankind... about men.

'Yes, inside me...' she breathed and closed her eyes, as he began rocking against her.

He was getting hotter, his body starting to perspire with the effort of self-control. 'It's time,' he whispered, almost silently, and he kissed her shoulders, from one side to the other, across the back of her neck, where he dwelled a little, to feather tiny butterfly kisses over her skin, around her sensitive neck, making her whole body tingle as he hit every erogenous zone she owned. His hands came round and cupped her breasts again, and she arched back hard against his chest, feeling his cock slip down between her thighs as he moved his hips against her. Helen bent over ever so slightly, but Alessandro pulled on her shoulders to bring her up again, then turned her to face him. He looked wonderingly at her, using his fingers to delicately brush her long blond tresses back from her eyes, then he took her face in his hands, and kissed her with what felt like the exact same powerful emotion she was feeling.

Helen felt a tear leave her eye and move slowly down the side of her face. Still Alessandro continued to explore her mouth deeply and slowly with his tongue, his lips and his skilful fingers, touching her lips and kissing them alternately, passion building, bringing her to a crescendo of desire. Then he pulled her into him, into his chest, and rocked her just a little side to side, before kissing her delicately on the forehead and cheeks and lips and then pulling back to smile at her. A beautiful smile. She felt safe in his hands.

Helen knew that this was going to be unlike the last time. Or the time before that. In fact, she had no clue what was in store other than she was up for any and all of it – whatever the hell he said, she was willing to do it. She nodded her head and he took her hand and led her back over to the bed. He turned her round to him, and slowly teased her pants down and she stepped out of them. He threw them over his shoulder, then did the same with her bra. Totally naked now, she felt the pulse between her legs as the urge to have him became almost uncontrollable.

'Now my darling, I want you to kneel on the bed,' he said, indicating that she face the headboard. She did so and he disappeared behind her. The light was low now, the darkness outside creating a romantic hue inside the room, shadows from branches making a flickering moonlight dance across the room. Then she felt the bed

move behind her and his hair was suddenly against her legs, as he wriggled up the bed and appeared below her. Then his hands were on her thighs and he was pushing them apart, lowering her down a fraction until she could feel his hot breath between her legs. He held her buttocks and began rocking her hips up and down, backwards and forwards, lowering her inch by inch, until finally his hot tongue entered her and she felt herself begin to explode. Just as quickly, he stopped, completely still, his tongue inside her, whilst she pulsed against him and felt herself come back from the brink. Then when it was time, he moved her hips again, moved his tongue again and instantly she was almost racing to the precipice once more, so he stopped once more. Several more times he repeated this, until she almost screamed, and raked her hands through his hair. With one deft move, he pulled her forwards onto all fours, raised one of her legs so he could move upwards and positioned himself on the pillows. He prompted her to kneel above, directly over his cock.

'Oh, god, Alessandro,' hissed Helen, aching like she'd never ached before.

'So Tesoro mia, you like the Italian ways of love? You want me now?'

'Yes, oh yes,' she said, and lowered herself towards him. But once more he stopped her, until he had positioned himself vertically beneath her, then he lowered her hips a fraction at a time towards it, until the very tip of him was touching her. Then he stopped. He took a juddering breath and managed to calm his panting, his heart beating so hard you could hear it in his breath.

'I want you Helen. I want you like I have not wanted anyone, since...' he paused, '...For a long time,' he said, a warmth in his voice and a gleam in his eye. 'I think we must have been lovers in a former life,' he said, raising one hand to brush her hair from her face and rubbing his thumb gently on her lower lip. '*Sono abbagliato da te.*'

'I have no idea what that means,' Helen said when he didn't offer an explanation, 'but whatever it is, I think the answer's yes,' and they gazed in the dappled moonlight at each other's face, and Helen felt that moment of connection, as big as the universe and about to get bigger. 'I need you – I need this – now,' she whispered, looking into his big brown eyes, with their enormous pupils, black with desire. He just nodded, swallowed, took a breath and began to lower her down onto him.

At first Helen closed her eyes as she felt the solid mass slip into her wetness, oh... so... slowly. She bit her lip. Then as he was nearly fully inside, he thrust her hard down on top of him, and her eyes snapped open. Helen took a sharp intake of breath and groaned long and loud. He grunted and thrust again, he was so deep inside her. She folded herself against him, feeling his glistening chest against hers, and the dance began.

In the next few minutes, no words were needed as Helen lost herself in the heat of him, filling the depths of her and moving her up and down against him. She could feel the powerful urge mounting as the rhythmic motion triggered a chain reaction inside her, and when she was almost on the point of coming, he suddenly tipped her sideways onto her back on the bed and lay heavy on top of her. Helen was startled. She looked at him, enquiringly.

'Now I...' he said, resuming the rhythm, '...Am once again...' he thrust back and forth, '...Truly in control...' and he wrapped one arm around her back, leaning on his other arm. She felt totally engulfed, as though they were one, his body so firmly interlocked with hers, she was following his motion without even thinking. There were no thoughts, no words were needed, as the pace began to build. Every part of her was being touched by every part of him, his length penetrating her innermost being, and his groin rubbing exquisitely against her, pushing her higher and higher and higher. Then he stopped, pulled out, sheathed himself and thrust hard into her again, and this time he didn't stop. She gripped him tightly with her muscles, hard between her thighs, and felt the bed begin to move. He groaned aloud for the first time, and she could tell it was close. And with that, she allowed herself to totally abandon any attempt to orchestrate her own reactions, and gave herself over to the moment, to the pounding, to him. He felt the change, and increased his pace, and Helen could see that he was just waiting for her to totally give in before he too joined her in the surrender, and their heartbeat, their rhythm and their breathing became synchronised and they rose together to the peak of their union, and suddenly Helen was tumbling, tumbling, over and over, lights flashing in a blinding celebration, and the sound of her own voice groaning and groaning as she came and kept coming, and so did he.

'Spent, I think the word is,' she said, a minute or so later, when she could finally talk again. 'What's that in Italian?'

'What is... what did you say? I'm sorry... I'm just so...'

'Spent.' She confirmed, and giggled out loud to herself. 'As the kids say, "*O.M.Gee*," Alessandro, "*O.M.Gee*," she said, stretching luxuriantly on the crisp white bedding, all crumpled beneath them.

'Next time, we try tantric,' he said as much to himself as to her.

Already talking about next time? Helen thought, with a little frisson of glee. 'So dare I ask – how was it for you?' she teased.

'More importantly,' he said, leaning up onto his elbow and facing her, 'how was it for you, not to be the domination... dominatrix,' he corrected himself and made a gesture like cracking a whip.

'Fan-bloody-tastic,' she said, replaying the memory in her mind. 'And *you* – YOU, are incredibly bossy.' She tapped his nose and he bit his teeth together, chomping playfully towards her finger. She went on, 'I envy the women who have benefitted from your prowess... I'm amazed you're single.'

The look on his face made her pause. 'Have you ever been married?' she asked.

'Briefly,' he replied, after the slightest hesitation.

'Oh, so did you have any children?' she said, finding that she was more interested in the answer than she should have been.

'Briefly,' he said again, then rolled onto his back and put his arms behind his head, and stared at the ceiling.

Oh shit.

'But if it was not meant to be, in this life, then maybe there is a different calling. That's why I am taking a sabbatical after this term.'

'A sabbatical,' mused Helen, glad of the change of subject, 'I've always fancied taking one of those. But wouldn't the college miss you?'

'Francesco is more than capable of handling the students himself,' he said, a grin spreading across his face, 'in more ways than one.' Helen's face must have been a picture, as he quickly added, 'But don't worry, I am confident your sister will be in good hands. She is in need of some passion, is she not?'

'That obvious, huh?' Helen replied.

'Sadly yes, and according to our lunch companions today, there has been some trouble at your marketing conference? Some mix up with competition entries?' He looked at Helen and she made a face.

At least we've changed the subject, even if it's not one I'd have chosen for pillow talk, she thought. 'Nothing that I can't sort out,' she replied, 'As ever. I'm just waiting on some urgent news from home, and hopefully, I mean maybe... I mean *I'm confident* everything will *definitely* be OK. Definitely. For certain. *You hear me, universe?*' she joked.

'Ahh, a woman after my own heart, so much positivity,' he said, 'if only such a soul mate were there for me at the start in *this* life, instead of in the last life, when we were on this earth together.' He was smiling, but in shadow, and she couldn't work out if he was serious or joking.

'OK then, *Buddha*,' Helen teased, prodding him in the ribs, 'what *were* we then, in our former life?'

‘Well is that not clear? I would have thought tonight made that obvious. I was the master and you were the slave,’ he laughed, and Helen rolled on top of him to play fight. He caught her hands and pulled them both over his head, bringing her down flat on his chest, and he kissed her so tenderly she thought her heart would burst. She felt like a slave, in his hands – she felt like a woman, feminine, protected, secure. Just like... A sudden thought struck her and she sat bolt upright, staring into the darkness of the room. He sat up beside her.

‘What is it, my darling? What is on your mind? You look like you have remembered something very disturbing.’

‘I have,’ she said, not moving. ‘But it’s not about you. It’s about... someone I used to know.’ He didn’t speak, just waited for her to continue, stroking her hair. ‘He was... a bit like you. I realised that’s why you felt so familiar at first.’

Alessandro’s brow furrowed, as he kissed her shoulder. ‘But he is *not* here and the past is the past, correct? And the past does not have to influence the future, if we are determined that it should not.’ There was more to that answer than just replying to her, she thought. ‘And if our union reminds you of a past love, one that clearly holds troubled memories, then better that we create some new ones to take their place,’ he added, and leaned over to kiss her nipple. She shivered. He pulled the cover up over her and leaned up on his elbow to look at her face. ‘I felt that familiar feeling when first we met, too, tesoro mia,’ he said, ‘but as I believe you and I knew each other long before your other love came long, well, then I have priority,’ he said cockily, in a teasing voice, ‘and that is all there is to say.’ With that he pulled himself up onto her and held her arms above her head, pushing her back onto the bed. Then, still holding her arms, he rolled over so that she was on top of him, as if she was the one holding *him* down and he pretended he could not get away. ‘No, no, mistress,’ he said, playfully, ‘I cannot make love with you for the fifth time in one night, you are too demanding of me, no, no,’ he cried, winking at her as he rolled them about, as if he was trying to break free but couldn’t.

Helen laughed, but then stopped laughing and she saw him look at her face, then get serious. ‘Helen, *mi amore*, you need to make some serious decisions about your life. There is a whole wonderful world out there – a wonderful *universe* and we are part of it. Isn’t it time to make some different choices? So this beautiful face does not have to suffer such pain?’

Helen lay there in Alessandro’s arms, contemplating the words she’d just heard. Would she be brave enough? He waited a long time before speaking.

‘Pennies for your thoughts?’ he said.

‘Hehe,’ giggled Helen, ‘you mean “penny” – “penny for your thoughts,” Alessandro.’ He smiled down at her and kissed her nose.

‘At least my English is still better than your *Italiano*,’ he snorted comically, to make her laugh. It worked. ‘Well? What is on your mind?’

‘Erm,’ she replied, wondering whether she should share exactly what was on her mind – there was a chance he’d be straight out the door if she did. ‘I was actually thinking... that... That I could murder a Panini.’ She reached for the room service tariff.

‘Hah! But I have other plans for those delicious lips of yours,’ he said, his mouth curving up in one corner as he removed the menu from her hands and rolled her back onto the bed once again. ‘And it all begins with something I just have to get from my trousers over there...’

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The next day, Helen awoke in the hotel room to find Alessandro gone, and the light streaming in through the window. The memory of last night came back to her and she grinned and stretched luxuriantly, touching her body and closing her eyes. She sat up and looked around. The bedding was still all over the floor, his belt still tied to the bedpost and her sexiest underwear still strewn across the room. The remains of last night's carpet picnic were by the bin – they'd brought it in to the room once they ran out of time to go see the ruins at the vineyard. Instead, Alessandro had been the ruin of *her*. Or the making of her. She hadn't decided which, yet. Helen smiled and stretched her arms above her head, recalling one of the most passionate nights of her life, at the hands of this skilled Italian, and was filled with an unusual wave of being sated, complete. *Was this how a proper morning after is supposed to feel?* she thought.

But then reality hit. Like it had last night. Other memories came flooding back, and she got up and tidied the room. No sign of Sadie yet. Helen went to the bathroom to shower. She examined her face in the mirror.

'What shall we do, HellsBells?' she asked her own reflection, 'Considering what's happened.' And she watched as a darkness crossed her face, then the tiniest sign of a tear prickled in her eye. She pulled on her dressing gown and walked back out into the bedroom, just as the door handle turned quietly and the door opened slowly.

It was Sadie, tip-toeing back into the room, holding her shoes in her hand.

Sadie was no longer angry with Helen. In fact, last night had been the icing on the cake of this journey of self-discovery which meant that nothing would ever be the same again.

Nothing.

But not in the way Helen might think. But her sister looked strange. They looked at each other for a moment, then Sadie held out her arms, and Helen came over and folded herself into them and did something she'd never done before. She started crying into her sister's shoulder. Helen, her great big, grown up, protective older sister needed protecting herself, and for the first time in years, she was openly showing it.

'Shhhhh,' comforted Sadie. 'You ok?' she asked, expecting a new tale of woe – 'he loved me then left me' instead of Helen's usual, 'I loved him then left him.'

'Tell me what happened,' asked Sadie, 'did he hurt you? Woke up and he was gone? What?'

'No,' said Helen, sobbing a little still. 'Well yes, I woke up and he was gone and...'

'The bastard,' snapped Sadie, 'never trust a bloody man with a bloody Ferrari, that's what I say, I...'

'Wait, Sadie, listen,' interrupted Helen, and there was something in her voice that stopped Sadie short.

'You couldn't be more wrong. It was nothing like that. He... he...'

Sadie's heart began to beat a little faster, suddenly fearing this new look in her sister's eyes. 'What? Tell me!'

'He was... amazing...'

Sadie's eyebrows rose.

'...Astounding...'

Sadie's eyes were wider.

'Pure magic,' Helen said finally and did a little spin, then threw herself backwards on the bed.

'And magic makes you cry because...' asked Sadie, making a *what the hell* face.

'Because it's never been like this before.'

'Not even with Victor?'

'Not even with Victor.'

'Blimey,' Sadie said, sitting herself down on the bed next to Helen, amazed. She went to speak, hesitated, then said it anyway. 'Not even with Jason...?'

'He's asked me to go travelling with him,' Helen replied, as usual ignoring the topic.

'Travelling?' Sadie repeated.

'Yes, travelling. All summer. We had the most amazing chat last night whilst we ate supper and...' Tears were forming in her eyes once again. '...And he wants to show me the world. His world.'

'And that's bad, why?' Sadie asked.

'It's *not* bad, it's not bad at all. In fact, it's great. It's incredible. He said he wanted to show me another side of life – and that it could be the making of me. He's going on a sabbatical and if I went he said he would... what was it again... show me how to love myself. And how to achieve bliss and self-awareness and do meditation and...'

'Meditation? You? No wonder you're crying,' joked Sadie, relieved, reaching over to wipe a tiny tear from the corner of her sister's eye.

'Exactly. It's just not me, is it? Maybe years ago,' said Helen, staring into space. 'Before...' her voice was softer. 'But now – I just can't. It's not what I am – it's not what I do. I work, I'm on the treadmill, I'm in the rat race, I'm...'

'Are you though?' Sadie said, looking carefully at her sister and seeing signs of confusion in her eyes. 'It's who you *have* been, but it doesn't mean it's who you always *will* be. Can't you take the leap of a lifetime and try something you've never done before? Go for it? I'm the boring one, remember? You're the one who likes trying new things.'

'Yeah,' Helen said, sitting up on the edge of the bed and grabbing a bottle of water. 'Trying them. Like, *once*.' She unscrewed the bottle and took a drink. 'Not twice. And after Victor, I made up my mind I'd never do "twice" again.'

'But Alessandro's not Victor,' Sadie said, sincerely, putting her hand on Helen's arm.

'You can say that again. For a start he's not...' Helen stopped herself and looked away.

'What? What is Alessandro? And what happened with Victor – when will you tell me?'

Helen looked at her sister, drinking the rest of the bottle of water, then changed the subject. 'Now you tell me about your night – what happened with *your* Italiano stallion-o.'

'That's not even a word,' Sadie sighed, then looked away and smiled.

'Go on, spill!' Helen said, sitting herself up to face Sadie, expectantly. 'Did you have sex?!'

Sadie grinned, then looked at the floor, flushing slightly.

'Hah! You did!' said Helen. 'So up yours Mister Damian frickin' Hugh, eh? Sadie Turner doesn't hang around waiting for a reunion with a loser – she goes straight out and finds herself an Adonis to shag.'

'Helen!' Sadie said, laughing.

'Did he have an amazing body, like Alessandro's got?'

'Yes, Francesco's body was amazing, he even had a six pack, and he was very strong – he had to be, to lift me.'

'Lift you?' asked Helen, with a look of mischief creeping over her face. 'Was he all *Tarzan and Jane*, then?' she asked, digging her sister in the ribs.

Sadie flushed some more and smiled, but shook her head. One particular memory from last night flashed back into her mind and she made a face, bit her lip, then wrinkled her nose.

'Oh, oh,' Helen said, the mischievous look suddenly gone. 'What does that face mean?'

'This face means that it was a One Night Only,' Sadie replied.

'Oh dear,' said Helen. 'Dare I ask why?'

'Well let's just put it this way, whilst my sister was off encountering the passion of a lifetime, I was in a hotel room with a guy who liked to sniff his own armpits, like...'

'...Kevin Kline in *A Fish Called Wanda*,' Helen joined in and both girls spoke at once. 'Noooooo!' said Helen. 'He didn't?! I didn't know that was a real thing!'

'Yes,' said Sadie. 'Maybe it's an Italian thing...?'

'It's *not* an Italian thing,' said Helen firmly, smiling. 'Go on.'

'Well, we had a lovely dinner, he made me laugh. And he was quite a turn on, even though what he did with the ice-cream was a bit messy...'

'Yes...?' Helen said, smothering a giggle.

'Then we got back to the hotel and he decided to do a strip-tease. Without music. Which was quite nice.'

'Quite...nice?' said Helen, over-enunciating each syllable.

'And then he disappeared into the bathroom with all his clothes. And came back out with his just his pants on.'

'Back on? Why?'

'That's what I thought. So I asked him. "Why have you put your pants back on," I asked. And you know what he said?'

Helen shook her head, so Sadie told her.

'Well, he just stood there in a kind of a porn star pose and said "Because, my dear, I want you to *find* me",'

'*I want you to FIND me?*' Helen said, an incredulous look on her face, 'As in...' she added, indicating lower down her body.

Sadie nodded. 'Oh,' said Helen, then burst out laughing.

'Oh, indeed,' said Sadie. 'Let's just say it took some concentrating to overcome the "eurgh" factor.'

'*I want you to FIND me,*' mimicked Helen, posing and doing a little imitation of Francesco.

When they'd stopped giggling, Sadie spoke again. 'The rest of the night was... satisfactory, shall we say, complete with a fireman's lift onto the bed. But it was nothing to write home about.'

Helen was still laughing. 'Unless you're writing to Weirdo-sex Monthly. Tragic. You've really had some perverts lately haven't you?!

'Don't judge. One person's *perv* is another one's normal. But, yep, I suppose I have. I'm not saying it wasn't fun, 'cos it was, but he's not Mr Right, that's all I can say.'

'He was Mr Shite by the sound of it.'

'Haha, not quite that bad – he still had some good moves in bed. And on it. And at the side of it. And at the bottom of it.' They laughed again, then Sadie added, 'but there won't be a return journey, that's for sure.'

'You sure?' Helen asked, playfully.

'I'm abso-friggin-lutely certain,' Sadie said, adding in an embarrassed whisper, 'He took ages to come, and when he did, the only way he could do it was on his knees with my legs in the air, so he could look at himself in the mirror. And his face was so weird,' Sadie made the face, quivering her bottom lip and rolling her eyes to the ceiling and Helen burst out laughing.

'Ooo, no! No return journeys there then. Shame – I had high hopes.'

'I didn't, not really.'

'And what about Mister Hugh? Is it over?'

'How can it not be? He knew how important honesty was to me, and he turns up here with Delta.' Sadie thought about her last 'flame' whilst Helen *tutted*, and made a face Sadie recognised. She spoke before Helen did. 'No, before you say it, I'm not going to go running back to him, even if he has got a big house and prospects, as mother keeps saying. It's been nice just being with the girls more again lately. No, I think it's time I forgot about men for the time being.'

'Glad to hear it.'

'Well, there's too much else to worry about. I've been ignoring Abi and Georgia too much lately.'

'No you haven't, you're a good mum, Sade. They love you.'

And they need me, thought Sadie, feeling excited about seeing her daughters again. 'So, talking of return journeys,' she said, 'I'm going to check in again to see if that earlier flight has become available.'

Helen made a disappointed face. Her sister continued,

'Well after yesterday is there really any point hanging around till the end? Do you want to come back earlier too?'

'No, I've promised I'll see Alessandro this evening at least, before he flies back to Milan to college tomorrow. He finishes this term, then that's it – he's off to Tibet.'

'Go with him, sis. Take the plunge. Step off the rat race and get to know *YOU*. Really learn to love yourself, like he said. Go on – try it for the first time. You might like the person you uncover.'

Helen was thoughtful for a moment, but shook her head. 'Listen, there's no doubt he rocked my world, but I have to get back to my contract – I've got another column to submit this week – I'm interviewing Ki-Ka herself this time. She's insisting on it, since the column's started to do well, she wasn't to stamp her mark on it just like on everything else. It's just an excuse though – to talk about her next fashion range, "*perfect for fall*".'

Helen mimicked Ki-Ka, in a nasal Californian drawl, making Sadie laugh.

Then she continued. 'And I've got to do a lot of prep for this one, even if it is out in New York. But at least it'll take my mind off... other things.' Helen looked at Sadie.

Sadie knew exactly what her sister meant. ‘Honestly, sis,’ Helen continued, ‘you’ve no idea how much it’s meant to me to have this job, after what happened at the agency – it’s meant I can hold my head high again – even though I still have to hide from the occasional ex-colleague when I’m in New York. And even though it’s beyond ridiculous the stressful way they all work there, it’s kind of rescued me a bit, you know?’

‘You mean it’s meant you can buy things again?’ Sadie teased.

‘Yes – lots of lovely stuff.’

‘You and your stuff,’ said Sadie. ‘Life isn’t all about stuff. Are you sure you won’t change your mind? A trip with someone like Alessandro could be a whole new chapter for you, too?’

Sadie saw her sister’s eyes flicker and a look of resolution appear on her face. Admittedly she’d been a lot happier since this whole column thing, but there was still an emptiness in Helen that had been there since her first marriage fell apart all those years ago. ‘Listen, Hells, let’s bunk off today – let’s go see those ruins – wouldn’t it be fun?’

‘I was supposed to see them yesterday, but they’ll keep. Hey look at the time,’ she said, glancing at the clock. ‘Let’s get cracking – better that we attend those last few sessions this morning – there’s a surprise keynote speaker – you might miss something important!’

‘Well, ok, but if I can get on the earlier flight I will. I don’t want to hang around near Damian any longer than I have to.’

Helen picked up her mobile and turned it back on.

‘You checking to see if your sex god has messaged you already this morning?’ asked Sadie, going into the bathroom.

‘No, er... yeah, haha,’ Helen said. ‘Tell you what, I’ll phone the airline for you,’ she said, just as her sister closed the door.

Helen walked over to the bathroom and spoke into her mobile loudly so Sadie could hear it in the bathroom. ‘Yes, I’m enquiring about a flight change...’

She told Sadie through the door, that the airline still didn’t have any cancellations and they doubted they would now. Then Helen sat back down on the bed and waited as the rest of the messages all came through. Work... work... a lovely one from Alessandro... Dame and Kate in New York... and another work one.

Nothing from home – yet. Dammit. But with what was at stake, considering how it could turn Sadie’s life upside down and she didn’t even know it, there damn well better be some news, and she only had till midday to get it.

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