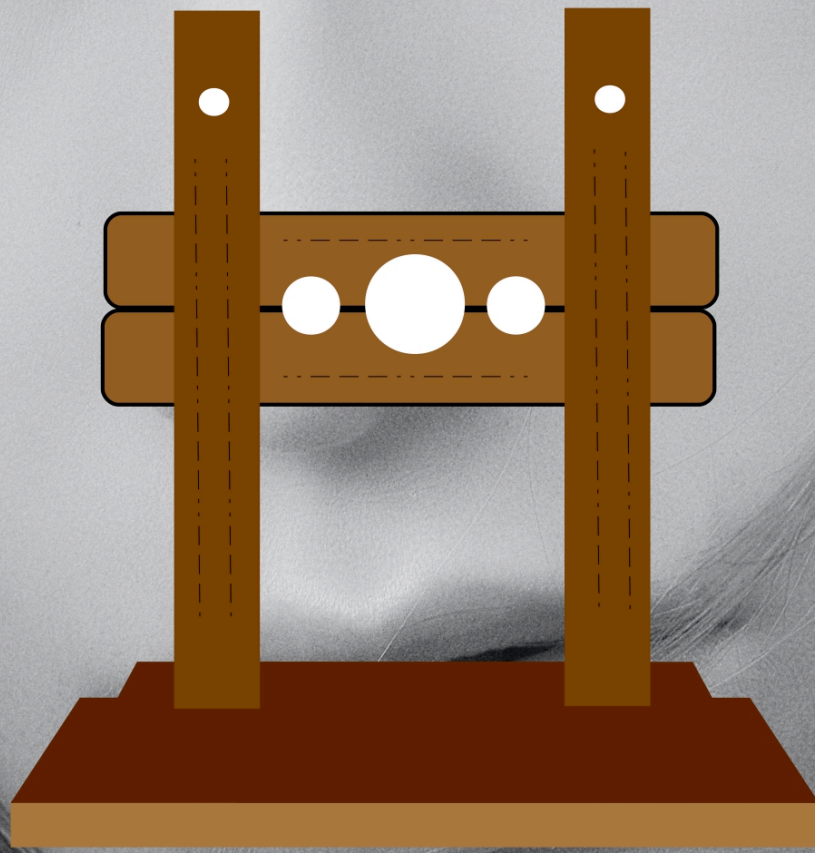


**Open your eyes,
Dude**



**Romantic Comedy
Steve Weissman**

OPEN YOUR EYES, DUDE

by

Steve Weissman

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About the Author

Steve's 12 stories

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Chapter 1 - Tom

* * * * *

Washington D.C.

The Washington Monument thrusts up from morning mist.

Dr. Tom Adams, 36, movie star looks and knows it, in a sweat soaked muscle shirt and head bandana, jogs around the Lincoln Memorial onto the Arlington Bridge.

He glances up at the "Earth" woman of the "Sacrifice" sculpture, gives a wink and grins.

Eyes still on the statue, he nearly collides with another runner.

Runner, "Hey, open your eyes, Dude."

Tom yells over his shoulder as he dashes away, "Sorry!"

* * * * *

Potomac River bike path.

Three young women, ponytails swinging, power walk.

As Tom runs past, they eye him and plow into each other like dominoes.

Tom sprints to a Corvette and zooms off.

Tom's playboy life:

-- Night Club, Tom dances with a striking Blonde.

-- Riverside Café, Tom eats lunch with a gorgeous Redhead.

-- Bedroom, in bed, Tom nuzzles against a lovely Brunette.

* * * * *

Doctors' clinic, reception.

Awards grace the wall for Thomas Adams: George Washington University Medical Center, Honor Student; Fight for Sight Award; International Congress of Ophthalmology; American Academy of Ophthalmology; International Glaucoma Congress.

Tom enters.

His secretary, Sue, 55, hands him mail.

Sue, "Good morning, Dr. Adams."

Tom, "Any word from Dr. Hall yet?"

Sue shakes her head compassionately, "I'm sure you'll get the job, Sir."

Tom sighs, walks in his office.

* * * * *

Chapter 2 - Bachelorhood

* * * * *

Tom's examination room.

Examining eyeglass on his head, Tom studies a small girl's eye.

He finishes, lets the girl bounce up and race to a big model eye.

He scribbles a prescription and hands it to her attractive mother, 30, who sits on the other side of his desk.

He rises, "The eye's healing nicely. Put a drop in it twice a day."

Eyes glistening, the mother gets up, clasps his hand, "It's true. You're the world's best... eye surgeon. Thank you."

Tom smiles amiably.

Her hands hold tight, she slides around the desk, becoming provocative.

Tom backs away, she stays close, eyes excited.

Tom wiggles his hand free, "Saw your husband at the hardware store. He sure looked good."

She turns away.

Using gentleman's charm, Tom taps the girl's head playfully, nods.

She runs to the door, opens it.

The mother strains a smile, leaves.

Tom leans against the door, "Whew..."

* * * * *

Bar.

Wiry, wisecracker Dr. Joe Shaw, 35, Anesthesiologist, drinks as Tom stacks half peanuts on top of each other.

Tom, "Day in and day out. I'm going nuts."

Joe, "Ever try raisins?"

Tom, "Boredom city, stuck in a dead end clinic!"

Joe, "Politics can fix that."

Tom, "Don't tempt me."

Joe, "Marriage?"

Tom frowns.

The peanuts fall over.

Tom, "Joe, I'm the best ophthalmologist around, link my skills with the top scientists in the country and there's just no limit to what could be achieved! I need that job."

Joe puffs himself up, "Think he'd want an anesthesiologist?"

Tom, "Right, it's got to be me. And get me away from those lonely mothers."

Joe, "Lucky you."

Tom, "No way. Here's to single women, the most ravishing creatures in the world, a species worth dying for."

Joe nods, holds up his glass.

Tom, "Bachelorhood forever."

They clang glasses, swagger over to two gorgeous women.

* * * * *

Chapter 3 - Dr. Hall

* * * * *

Conference hall.

On stage, Tom speaks under a banner, "Ophthalmologists' Convention".

Tom, "With these new advances, eyeglasses will soon join the horse and buggy".

He grabs a huge model of an eye, "'Eye" thank you all for coming."

He smiles, the model winks.

The audience laughs and gives him a standing ovation.

Magnetism oozing, Tom hops offstage as the crowd surges forward, competing for his attention.

Tom weaves his way through them, homes in on Dr. Hall, 52, distinguished bearing and self-assurance of one with power.

Tom, "Dr. Hall, it's great to see you."

Dr. Hall, "Tom, why be a doctor, when you have a Senator's charisma?"

Tom, jokingly, "My dad would disown me if I became a politician."

Dr. Hall, "Fine well-rounded neurosurgeon, your father. Too bad he's not an ophthalmologist."

Clearly not appreciated, but Tom lets it go.

Tom, "So do I get the job? With me as your head surgeon, we'll make medical history."

Dr. Hall, "Your resume is impressive. However you may be of more use to us as a senator. Doctors in Congress can help us greatly."

Tom, "Huh, senator?"

Tom's dazed.

An upbeat Organizer rushes up, gives them "Goodie bags," full of brochures and eye paraphernalia.

Organizer, "The best seminars in the world! They could change your life."

She sweeps away, offers her prizes to others.

Dr. Hall, "However my political connections feel that you must make more fame as a doctor before a Senate run."

Tom, "Politics... Senate... huh?"

Dr. Hall, "McKenzie's Sydney Lab is the best in the world. It's such a pity you have no experience in their work."

Tom regains his awareness, "How? They haven't given seminars for two years nor buried under a ton of regulations and--"

Dr. Hall, "A senator could help slash those regulations. But until such time, I may have to recruit an Australian doctor like McKenzie. I need the head surgeon by the end of August. However--"

A cute caterer offers Dr. Hall a bag of popcorn.

He refuses.

She turns to Tom, smiles sexily, puts a bag in his empty hand, and slides her hand along his.

Tom smiles back.

Dr. Hall clears his throat.

Tom returns his attention, "Uh, yes, Sir?"

Dr. Hall, "It would help if you settled down."

Tom's eyes bug out, they dart to the caterer sashaying away, back to Dr. Hall.

Tom, "Set... settle... down?"

Mrs. Hall, "Honey, I have to give the opening address at my fund raising dinner."

A slim, attractive Mrs. Hall, 48, approaches, hugs Dr. Hall.

Dr. Hall, "Being a family man would be an advantage. Especially for senate."

Tom, "Family?"

Switching to his charm, Tom smiles, puts the popcorn into his hand with the Goodie bag and shakes Mrs. Hall's hand.

Tom, "If I could be as lucky as you, I'd even give up my job."

Dr. Hall, "Tom, charity gains the sympathy of Capitol Hill which is also essential for all important grants. Your father excels in this area."

Mrs. Hall, "Dr. Adams, your father must be so proud."

Tom gives a forced smile, "Yeah... too bad he had an important charity function to attend."

Dr. Hall, "Let me know if you plan to get married soon. With your reputation, I'm sure you have many willing partners."

Tom, baffled, "Wife?"

Dr. Hall raises one eyebrow, "And of course, if you pick up on McKenzie's work."

Tom, "Yes Sir, um, yes um... Sir."

The Halls smile politely and float away.

Watching them, Tom reaches in the Goodie bag, pulls out an eye patch.

Tom, "Wife?"

Not realizing what it is, he starts to eat the patch.

He spits it out, bumping into a person passing by.

He loses his balance and trips, tossing the popcorn bag in the air.

It flies, lands on Mrs. Hall's head, scatters over others' hair, shoulders, pockets and the floor.

The Halls maintain perfect composure, look back to see Tom sprawled on the ground.

Many rush over to help him.

Mrs. Hall, "Are you sure a wife and medical training are all he needs?"

* * * * *

Chapter 4 - McKenzie's Lab

* * * * *

Tom storms into his reception, drops the Goodie bag near Sue.

Sue, "Oooo, convention swag!"

Tom, "Nothing in here for McKenzie's Lab. Search the web for them. To hell with an Aussie stealing my job!"

Tom strides into his office.

Sue delves in the bag, grabs the eye patch, slips it on and giggles.

She pulls out popcorn, gives a quizzical expression, pops it in her mouth.

* * * * *

Tom collapses in his office chair, pulls out his cell phone, clicks to contacts, lighting up a list of his many girlfriends.

One by one he checks his list, smiles occasionally but shakes his head.

Frowns at some.

Searches them all with a look of desperation.

He stops on Rose, takes on a "maybe" look.

Then shakes his head.

Reaching the end of his list, he tosses his phone aside, turns to his computer, types MATCHMAKING SERVICE in Google.

Twenty million hits.

He scrunches his face.

He madly taps the keyboard, registering his data and photo on five sites, "I want that job. That job is mine. I want--"

He stops, screams, "What the hell am I doing!"

He puts his head down on his arms.

Sue enters, peers inquisitively.

Tom quickly shuts down his computer, "You wouldn't believe me."

Sue, "Well, you do need glasses."

Tom, "Ophthalmologists with perfect vision don't need glasses."

Sue, "So how come you missed this important flyer?"

She reads, "ESCO, Every Sight Charity Organization"--"

Tom, "Saw it. Forget it, I'm not going to practice for peanuts."

Sue, "Oh well, ESCO's only lured Dr. P. McKenzie--"

The flyer whizzes to the trash.

Tom dives for it, reads, ""to share the latest advancements in eye surgery at a Houston seminar, August 20." Book me in, and a vacation beforehand."

* * * * *

Chapter 5 - Tricia

* * * * *

Small Texas town street.

Bright smile to match sparkles on his black shirt, a little boy reaches out to sensitive Tricia, 35, a slender Australian woman, blue jeans, T-shirt and white jacket.

Three barefoot girls in swirling skirts trot behind her.

Other children join them as they pass low income housing.

Tricia clasps the little boy's outstretched hands, "How's your leg, little one?"

Proud, he sticks out his bandaged leg and foot.

Tricia, "So, Dr. Mat already dressed it."

* * * * *

Clinic.

Weather beaten men huddle around Dr. Mat Garcia, 38, good looks and pride of an upper class Hispanic, as he examines one man's leg cast.

Tricia enters.

Mat brightens, "Nice shiny day."

Tricia looks aside.

A boy, 5, sneaks in, thrusts a bloody finger between them.

Tricia, "Oh dear, another emergency."

Mat, "He probably cut it so he could be near you."

Tricia sits, puts on glasses, cleans the boy's finger.

Mat, "We make a good team."

Tricia smiles as she grabs gauze and scissors.

Mat, "Not just professionally."

Stunned, Tricia drops the scissors.

Tricia, "Mat, I do value our friendship."

Mat, "Friendship is a firm basis for--"

Tricia welcomes the sound of chattering women.

* * * * *

Chapter 6 - Lynn

* * * * *

An excited town woman leads in Lynn Baker, 40, sporty, casual but powerful, baseball cap in hand.

Lynn, "Tricia, why didn't you bring your phone? Paul's been giving me hell."

Tricia, "Why does he have to share it?"

Tricia finishes the boy's dressing, gives him a silly face, "I only agreed to help those who need it, not to further his ambition... in any area. I hate being pressured."

She shoots a pointed look at Mat who lowers his eyes.

Tricia, "Please don't play Paul's game."

Lynn, "What game? Paul sounds charming."

Tricia, "In the chase. Once he gets what he wants, all he cares about are his mates, the Lab and cricket. I'm not interested in a rerun."

Tricia exits.

The boy stays, eyes glued to Lynn's cap.

Lynn, "Wonder if I'd like cricket."

Lynn's phone rings.

She reads the name, smiles and answers, "Paul, we were just discussing you."

* * * * *

Chapter 7 - Paul

* * * * *

Australian Research Center hallway.

Ruggedly handsome and suntanned, Dr. Paul McKenzie, 37, Australian, presses his code next to doors under a sign, "McKENZIE'S LAB RESTRICTED AREA," while he talks on his phone.

Paul, "Positively, I hope. What's the story with Tricia? Has she decided--"

Lynn, "She sure has."

The doors slide open.

Paul enters.

Dozens of staff work.

Paul, "Thanks for talking sense into her. She always made the seminars first class. Maybe this one will help her realize her mistake in leaving--"

Lynn, "You?"

Paul, "We were a great team. I can't understand why she's become so reclusive when she--"

A researcher waves from her microscope.

Researcher, "Dr. McKenzie, it's finished."

Paul, "I'll have to catch you later. Thanks Lynn, you're a darling."

Lynn turns off her phone, sighs.

Lynn, "How did I get to be the meat in this sandwich?"

Mat, "That's your role as director of ESCO, soothing the egos of famous doctors you need for your work."

Lynn spots the boy eyeing her cap.

She slaps it on him, peak backwards.

He hugs her, bounds out.

Lynn, "That's four caps this month. Now if I give Paul a cap, will he hug--"

Mat, "How's the seminar going?"

Lynn snaps to attention, "The interest is overwhelming. And, of course, it can only happen with your gracious support. Even the award winning Dr. Adams, from Washington, has registered."

Mat appears impressed.

Lynn, "Surgical skills aside, he's famous for his playboy reputation."

Lynn's expression teases, but Mat haughtily shakes his head.

Mat, "An arrogant American playboy is the last thing Tricia wants."

* * * * *

Chapter 8 - The Moon

* * * * *

Tom's apartment.

Trendy bachelor's pad.

In one corner, a Venus statue faces a statue of Bacchus.

Tom sits at his computer, opens his email program, clicks RECEIVE.

Four thousand emails download.

Tom, "Holy shit."

He opens one of the web Matchmaking sites, types in his password.

Three thousand replies.

Tom stares blankly.

* * * * *

Gym.

Muscles rippling, Tom lifts weights.

Joe skips rope, "Nine thousand, three hundred and--"

Joe bursts laughing, trips on his rope.

Tom, "This isn't funny."

Joe, "Most men would love to be in--"

Tom, "They can have my shoes, I'll keep my freedom."

Joe mimes speaking into a microphone, using his jump rope, "But what about: "Senator Tom Adams announces his presidential bid"?"

Tom, "Can't senators be single?"

Joe, ""Polls indicate that most voters think Senator Adams is gay." What's wrong with Mia, Terry, Zoe and all the girls at Delta Phi Epsilon?"

Tom, "Joe! Screw this marriage stuff. I'll just go to the seminar, learn the techniques and if Hall isn't satisfied, well, screw him, too."

Joe, "I think you're screwed. Who's this McKenzie anyhow?"

Tom, "Only the world's best eye surgeon. And to learn from Dr. McKenzie, I'm willing to go to the moon."

* * * * *

Chapter 9 - No way!

* * * * *

Sidewalk restaurant, Austin, Texas.

Moonlight.

Tricia and Lynn eat dinner though Tricia only picks at her food as Lynn devours hers.

Lynn, "You know Mat adores you. You could do a lot worse--"

Tricia cuts her off with a look.

Lynn shrugs, "I'd be as horny as hell if I didn't have sex for two years. Even Paul is concerned about--"

Tricia screws up her nose in distaste, "His fame. Lynn, please. I enjoy working with Mat, but..."

Tricia glances away, spots an elderly couple holding hands.

The husband leans over, whispers in her ear.

The wife giggles.

Tricia looks longingly at them as Lynn takes it in.

Lynn, "Only trying to help. How's this?"

Lynn whips out a Medical journal with Tom's smiling face on the front.

Tricia slightly smiles, "Yes, very cute. America's most notorious playboy doctor, who even dates movie stars."

Lynn, "He's coming to the seminar."

Tricia, "So what would he want with me other than add another score? Shallow men like him turn my stomach."

Lynn, "Mine, too, but um-umm! You never know, you two might hit it off."

Tricia, "No way!"

* * * * *

Chapter 10 - Tom & Tricia meet

* * * * *

Five Star beach resort, Texas.

Sunlight glistens on water dripping down the bronzed back of a curvy, buxom woman gazing out to sea.

Sunglasses and swimsuits, Tom and Joe collapse in beach chairs.

Tom reclines fully.

Joe pulls out a vial, rubs balm on his temples, "Ow, headache city. Travel makes me sag."

Tom, "Ah, sleep now, awaken when the nightlife's in full swing."

The buxom woman sways to her sarong.

She rubs sunscreen over her chest and stomach as Joe lowers.

He notices her, quickly raises up, "Not so droopy now."

Tom, "Amazing what a short nap will do."

Tom springs up, his tiredness evaporated, his torso erect, a man sure of himself as he saunters to the water.

The woman glances at Tom who smiles.

She sashays toward him.

Tom struts toward her.

Arms wide, she increases her pace.

Tom pauses, expectant.

She passes him by, into arms of a taller, muscle-bound man.

Tom gulps, returns as Joe guffaws.

Tom flops down and scans more sexy torsos of several women.

Joe, "So are you changing your mind to satisfy your ambition?"

Tom, "I want the job, but not a wife. Besides it's impossible to find one in a week. Hall's nuts, like my dad. Pressure, pressure, pressure."

Joe, "You could become an ESCO volunteer."

Tom, "Very funny."

* * * * *

Small bungalow.

Old, with a sea view.

Family owned setup.

Half a dozen bungalows and a small restaurant.

Five hundred yards along the beach from the Five Star resort.

A dog, Joni, holds a bandaged leg up high, its tail wags madly.

A saronged Tricia pets Joni, "You'll run again in no time, Joni."

Tricia bounds down the steps with Joni laboring after her.

Two happy pre-teen Hispanic girls, Sofia and Isabella, T-shirts and shorts, dash out of the restaurant.

Sofia, "Tricia, Tricia! Come!"

They race up the beach laughing.

Tricia runs after them as Joni curls up.

* * * * *

Tom gulps the last dregs of a fruit juice cocktail, spots Tricia and the girls jogging.

Sofia stops close to Tom.

Sofia, "Tricia, vamos a nadar."

The girls splash into the water.

Tricia flings off her sarong, exposing a tiny bikini, plunges in, twirls Sofia around.

Tom moseys to the water's edge.

Tricia glances at him for a long time.

Her eyes squint.

Tom notices her looking at him.

He smiles.

She turns away.

Tricia, "Speak English, not Spanish."

Isabella, "What is your name?"

Sofia, "Name Sofia."

Tricia, "My name is Sofia."

Isabella, "Your name is Tricia, not Sofia."

Tricia, "Very good."

Isabella, "We better go home now."

They prance out, race off.

Tricia swims out to large waves, body surfs in.

Joe strolls up to Tom, "Not so curvy."

Tom, "She knows how to ride waves."

Joe, "Yeah, good rhythm."

Tom, "All right, I'm for rhythm."

Tom leaps out, swims close to Tricia as a wave swells up.

Thrashing madly, he gets dumped.

Tricia gracefully glides to shore, watches him as he goes under again.

She swims out.

Tom, "Got any hints?"

Tricia, "Keep your eyes on the wave and not on me. That's if you really want to ride the waves."

She laughs, rides another whopper.

Oblivious to a towering wave behind him, Tom disappears in white foam.

Concerned, Tricia swims out to help.

Tom surfaces, sputters, gasps big breaths.

Seeing her anxious face, he smiles, "Good advice. Should I go under again so you can save me?"

Tricia, "Go ahead, if you need such attention."

She points at a looming wave.

Tom spins around, dives under it.

Tricia rides it in, grabs her sarong, jogs away.

Tom swims in, exhausted.

Joe grins, "She's a bit unusual, eh?"

Tom stares down the beach at Tricia jogging away.

* * * * *

Chapter 11 - Why not?

* * * * *

Tricia strolls along the beach, speaking on her cell phone.

Joni trails.

Tricia, "Yes, the one and only Tom Adams."

* * * * *

Lynn sits in her office, "Great! So why run away from him?"

Tricia, "He's too conceited. He even seemed surprised I didn't throw myself at him."

Lynn, "As bad as Paul?"

Tricia, "Wouldn't know and don't want to know."

Lynn, "Well, bring him here for me. Is he really as handsome as his photos?"

Momentarily stunned, Tricia stops, stares out to sea.

Lynn, "You turned him on and you're not even his usual type. Why not ride the wave of change!"

Tricia, "Always the hopeless optimist. I want a man who shares my world not just my bed."

Lynn, "Oh-oh, where's Tricia, the hopeful idealist, who always preaches about the human potential to grow and change?"

Tricia, "I'm also a realist."

Lynn scoffs, "Why be so afraid? Have some fun for a change."

Tricia flops down on the sand, fidgets with her toes.

Joni licks Tricia on the face.

She hugs Joni.

Lynn, "Tricia? Tricia, you there?"

* * * * *

Chapter 12 - Footsteps

* * * * *

The rising sun reflects in lapping waves.

An unshaven, swimsuit clad Tom jogs barefoot.

Ahead, Tricia, see-through blouse matching her bikini top, long skirt, does some Yoga with Sofia, Isabella and their mother, Camila, 35.

They all salute the sun and walk away.

Mesmerized, Tom stops, watches them disappear into the restaurant.

He heads into the water.

* * * * *

Tricia ambles to the water, unaware of Tom swimming into the beach.

As he rises from the water, Tricia sees him and freezes.

Tom hops up, beams his most charming smile, "Glorious sunrise today. Tricia, right? I overheard the little girl."

Tricia glances away.

Tom, "I'm Tom Adams, from--"

Tricia shakes her head, walks along the beach.

Tom catches up.

Tricia looks at the sand, her face peaceful and her steps graceful.

Tom, "Have you had breakfast yet?"

Tricia, "No. Please don't talk now. I'm meditating."

Tom, "Oh, what are you meditating on?"

Tricia, "My footsteps. Feeling the sand beneath my feet."

Tom, "Doesn't sound very exciting when we have this magnificent view and each other to enjoy."

Tricia keeps walking.

Tom, "Watching your footsteps?"

Tricia, "Yes, it's very calming. You should try it."

Tom drops behind, places each foot next to her footprints.

His eyes wander to her narrow waist and hips.

Tom, "Much prefer to watch you."

Her hips sway as she takes a wider step.

Tom smiles, but trips on unseen protruding coral.

He yelps, hops, holding a bloody toe.

Tricia, "More exciting than a cut foot I imagine. Can I help dress--"

Tom, "At your place or my resort?"

Tricia half smiles, "You're wasting your time."

Tom crouches, inspects his toe, becomes solemn, "Thanks, it does need dressing. Got anything at your place?"

* * * * *

Chapter 13 - Tricia's Bungalow

* * * * *

Verandah.

Wearing glasses, Tricia bandages Tom's toe.

The rickety cane chair's woven seat strains under Tom's weight.

Tricia, "Nothing serious."

Tom, "I'm not sure yet."

Joni sniffs Tom's hand.

He brushes her away.

Tricia drops his foot, takes off her glasses, packs up her first aid kit.

Tom, "Thanks. You did that very well. Got a professional first aid kit, too. You must be a nurse."

Tricia, "Traveling teaches you to be prepared. You're obviously not."

Tom, "Good thing. Then I wouldn't be here with you. Nurse Tricia, who rescues humans and dogs, will you please join me for breakfast?"

Tricia appears surprised.

Tom, "It's the least I can do for your expert dressing skills."

He scans her blouse.

She nervously fingers a button.

Tom, "My resort has an excellent buffet."

Tricia, "International resorts put family bungalows out of business."

Tom, "Then how about here?"

She looks him up and down.

Her eyes linger on his torso, which does not escape Tom's attention.

Tricia, "Okay, I'll ask Diego to lend you a shirt. Though your shoulders and... chest... are much broader than his."

Tom, "Shirt or no shirt's the same to me. We're at the beach."

Tricia, "Yes... but--"

A cell phone melody.

Tricia happily retreats inside and shuts the door.

Tricia, "Mat, I asked you not--"

* * * * *

Orphanage, Austin, Texas.

Mat stands surrounded by four young girls playing, "The girls and I miss you. You needn't have raced away. I wasn't pressuring you. I'm patient."

Tricia, "Then let's drop it, okay? I need a holiday and to see friends here."

Mat, "Paul called about the seminar."

Tricia frowns, "I'm sure you and Lynn can take care of Paul."

Mat, "When are you coming back?"

Tricia, "A few days."

A crash.

Tom's voice, "Holy shit!"

Phone in hand, Tricia races out.

Tom's on the floor, scrunched up in the tipped over chair.

His bum's stuck deep in the broken seat.

Tricia, "Tom! Are you okay?"

Mat, "Who the hell is Tom?"

Tricia lays her phone down on the table.

He gives her a sheepish grin as she hurriedly looks over the chair to figure out an escape.

Tom acts helpless, "Ah... maybe you could give my backside a shove."

Tricia turns crimson as Tom winks.

Tom, "It's okay, I'm not shy, dear nurse."

Mat's eyes go wide, "Tricia?"

Tricia flexes her hands, places them gently on his backside.

Tom, "I'm solid. I won't break."

Tricia, "Indeed you are."

Tom, "Push harder."

Mat grimaces.

Tricia, "I'm pushing as hard as I can."

Mat, "Tricia!"

Tricia pushes.

Tom slides out, sprawls.

They both laugh.

As Tom hops up, Tricia returns to her phone.

Tricia, "Hi Mat, sorry. I had to help--"

Mat, "Who's Tom!"

Tricia bounds down the steps but remains audible to Tom.

Tricia, "Just someone who hurt his toe on the beach. He wasn't looking where he was going. And he didn't have any bandages."

She glances back at Tom.

Tricia, "Not even a shirt and I... well... what else could I do but try to dress him... I mean, the toe."

Mat, "I'm coming down."

Tricia, "No, don't do that. I'll call back later, okay?"

Mat, "Are you sure you're all right?"

Tricia, "I'm fine Mat, really. Thanks for calling."

Tricia turns.

Tom smiles his charmer.

* * * * *

Chapter 14 - Breakfast

* * * * *

Rustic restaurant.

In a too tight shirt, open, except for two buttons near his ribs, Tom wipes the cutlery clean with a paper napkin.

Tom, "Are you sure the food's okay? I don't want to spend my vacation on the toilet."

Tricia, "Do I look ill?"

Tom slides his chair near her, "Can I examine you more closely?"

Tricia shifts her chair further away.

Tom, "No, that's far. But, even from here, your eyes look bright, clear, and beautiful. Food must be good."

Tom reaches for cut chilies in sauce.

Tricia grabs his arm, "I wouldn't. Dishes here are already fiery."

Tom, "I like it hot."

Tricia, "It will set you on fire."

Tom, "I'm willing to experiment."

Tom scoops chilies onto his food, eats a huge spoonful.

He reddens, his eyes water, sweat pours out.

He gulps water.

Amused, Tricia offers him a plate of cut cucumbers, "This will help cool you down."

Tom wolfs them as the fire in his mouth explodes.

Camila, 45, Isabella and Sofia's mother hurries over with a standing fan as Diego, 50, father, pulls up a chair.

Diego, in Spanish, "Your boyfriend?"

Tricia, in Spanish, "You have to be joking."

Diego laughs, inspects Tom, as Tom gazes at Tricia.

Diego, in Spanish, "Not yet."

Tricia's taken aback.

Tom, "What did he say?"

Tricia, "You'll have to learn Spanish if you really want to enjoy Texas."

Tom, "Not practical for a short vacation. How long have you been in the States?"

Tricia, "Almost two years."

Tom, "Do you live here?"

Tricia, "In a restaurant?"

Camila brings cut fruit as Sofia and Isabella hover around.

Tricia, "Diego, Camila, Sofia and Isabella... Tom. They're my friends. Too much food, please join us."

They smile and grab plates, cutlery, pull up chairs and eat.

Diego, in Spanish, "What does he do?"

Tom, "What did he say?"

Tricia, "Diego wants to know your work."

Proud, Tom straightens.

One of his buttons pops off, flies down Tricia's cleavage.

Tom, "Oops, sorry."

The family guffaws as Tricia jumps up, yanks at her shirt.

She turns away, bends over mindful of hiding her breasts, but not the direction of her behind.

Much to Tom's pleasure.

Tom, "Anything I can do to help?"

Tricia displays the naughty button just as Diego mimes taking off the shirt and Tom undoes his remaining button.

Tricia, "No."

Tricia drops the button on the floor.

She and Tom scramble around, both reach for it.

Their eyes meet.

Self-conscious, Tricia laughs.

Tom gives her a mischievous grin.

She gingerly places the button in his shirt pocket and flops into her chair, acting nonchalant, unconvincingly.

She turns the standing fan on full.

Tom, "I'm a doctor."

Diego, "Very good!"

Tom, "So you speak English?"

Diego, "Of course."

Tricia looks away, acting uninterested and unimpressed.

Tom turns to her, "You're not interested?"

Tricia, "I'm not ill."

Diego, in Spanish, "He'll make a good husband. When are you going to get married, have children?"

Diego, "Doctor, are you married?"

Tom, "No."

Diego in Spanish, "Available, too."

Tricia, in Spanish, "Not interested. I have freedom."

Camila, in Spanish, "Don't you ever get lonely?"

Tricia colors, looks down.

Tom notices it.

Tricia, in Spanish, "You can be lonely in a relationship, too."

Tom, "I really have to learn some Spanish."

Camila, in Spanish, "He looks intelligent. Perhaps he could be tamed, like Diego."

Isabella giggles.

Diego frowns at Camila's teasing smile.

Tricia evaluates Tom as she offers him a dessert.

Tricia, "I know a charity organization that needs doctors. Why don't you--"

Tom, "No thanks. I like my luxuries."

Tricia, "Like resort buffets for breakfast."

* * * * *

Chapter 15 - Uh-oh!

* * * * *

Tricia and a relaxed, bare-chested Tom stroll back to her bungalow.

Tom, "Breakfast was erotic... I mean exotic. Thank you."

Tricia appears embarrassed.

Sofia and Isabella dance up behind.

Isabella, "Go for run and swim?"

Tom grabs their hands, hobbles away, "I'll start walking with them. It'll give you time to undress, uh, change your clothes and catch me."

Tricia, "Why would I want to run after you?"

Tom, "My resort has the best waves."

* * * * *

Back at his resort beach, Tom adds sea shells to Sofia and Isabella's sand castle.

The girls race to collect more.

Tricia's sarong lies near the castle.

Close by, Joe lifts his sunglasses to peer at Tom.

Joe, "Careful, buddy, she sounds like a New Age chick."

Tom absorbs Tricia's rhythm as she rides waves.

He grabs his cell phone, takes photos of her.

Joe, "Meditates, avoids resorts, suggests you work for free. Next you'll have to give up steak and eat that rubbery stuff."

Tom, "There was tofu and seafood. Don't remember what she ate, I was too preoccupied with buttons."

Joe, "Mushrooms! Could've been hallucinogenic, man."

Tom grins.

Joe groans, flings his arms up in frustration, "Yup, totally drugged out, brainwashed already."

Transfixed, Tom photos Tricia gracefully emerging from the water, this time in a demure one-piece swimsuit.

Tom, "Joe, I'm going to marry her."

Joe, "What! Are you nuts?"

Tom ignores Joe, taps on his phone.

Joe, "What the hell are you doing?"

Tom's phone displays a beautiful photo of Tricia.

He clicks the send button.

Tom, "I just sent Hall a photo."

Joe, "My god, you're mad!"

Alex, "My goddess, where have you been!"

Alex, 30, longhair swinging, silver jewelry jangling, jogs up, sweeps Tricia into his arms.

Tricia laughs.

They whisper.

Sofia and Isabella skip over.

Alex hugs them.

Joe, "Woeee, buddy, you're more than nuts, she's already taken."

Tom, "There's no ring on her finger."

Tom gets up, cruises over to them.

Tricia, "Alex, Tom. Tom hurt his toe--"

Alex, "Smooth move, Dude. The celestial goddess shows mercy to stray dogs."

Tom tenses up.

The girls drag Alex to their sand castle.

Tricia, "Tom, I'm sorry. I told Alex, I'd meet him an hour ago. I forgot--"

Tom, "Time disappeared for me, too."

He gives her a sexy smile.

Flustered, she looks away, "I hope your toe heals."

Tom, "It feels better already. I'd love to experience a Mexican dinner."

Tricia, "I don't eat dinner."

Tom, "Huh? Right, big breakfast healthy way to eat. How about a drink and dancing?"

Tricia, "No, thanks. I don't--"

Tom, "Drink, of course. I'm really striking out here. Can we meet for breakfast tomorrow?"

Tricia, "Maybe. I'm not sure what tomorrow will bring. Bye."

Tom, "See you."

Tricia jogs off with Alex and the girls.

Joe walks up, "Do you realize what you did?"

Tom's phone rings.

A text, his eyes widen, "TOM, WOW! SHE'S PERFECT! ANOTHER MELANIA IN THE MAKING. CAN'T WAIT TO MEET HER. HALL"

Tom, "Uh-oh."

* * * * *

Chapter 16 - Maybe

* * * * *

Beach party.

Carol, 30, blonde, and Mary, 30, redhead, shake their ample endowments in beat with deafening rock music.

Observing from the edge of wild dancers, Joe points them out.

Joe, "There they are. Carol's the blond, met her in the lounge. The redhead must be Mary, let's go for it."

Indifferent, Tom resists as Joe drags him in.

The crowd engulfs them, along with Alex gyrating with another woman.

Seeing them, Tom's mouth agape.

Alex, "Hey, stray dog."

Tom, "You're not Tricia's boyfriend?"

Alex, "Platonic is all any man'll get."

Tom, "She gay?"

Alex, "Goddesses don't need mere mortals."

Alex laughs, shakes his head, no.

Tom turns to Joe, "Got to go. Enjoy Carol."

Carol and Mary spot Tom and Joe.

They smile seductively towards an eager Joe and an uninterested Tom.

Joe, "Man, are you blind? You're already undressed. Skip the hors d'oeuvres, Mary's hungry for the main course."

Joe winks at Carol.

Joe, "Tricia's just playing hard to get. Hot bod, Dr. Tom Adams, get any woman you want, when you want. Ego's shattered. Ain't love."

Tom, "Joe, Hall said Tricia's 'perfect'. If I marry her, the job's mine!"

Joe gives him an exasperated look, "Tom!"

Tom, "Carol's eyeing the other guys."

Joe snaps his attention to Carol as Tom darts off.

* * * * *

Tricia and Camilla stroll together on the beach.

Twenty yards ahead a young couple sit, meditating.

Camila, "Tom seemed very nice."

Tricia, "Most men aren't interested in a deeper meaning of life."

Camila, "Some are."

Tricia looks at the meditating couple as they pass.

She nearly walks into a piece of coral.

Camila grabs her, points at the coral.

Tricia, "Thank you."

* * * * *

The full moon reflects in the lapping waves.

Tom approaches Tricia and Camilla, Sofia and Isabella as they all sit in meditation.

Tom sits close to Tricia.

Camilla nods, touches Sofia and Isabella lightly.

They rise and tiptoe away.

Tricia opens her eyes.

A flash of uncertainty, vulnerability crosses her face.

She hides behind a controlled expression.

Tom, "It's very peaceful here. What do you meditate on?"

Tricia, "Do you really want to know?"

Tom, "Interesting question. If I'd listened this morning I might not have a sore toe. But I might not be sitting here tonight either."

Tricia, "Karma. Some people have to suffer before they ask deeper questions."

Tom, "Speaking from experience?"

Tricia, "Are you a psychiatrist.?"

Tom, "Ophthalmologist... eye surgeon."

Tricia smiles, begins to rise.

Tom jumps up, offers her his hand.

She ignores it.

They walk.

Tom, "I should've guessed you'd enjoy a moonlit walk on the beach."

Tricia, "Uh-hum... and why did you become a doctor?"

Tom, "Money's good."

Tricia, "That's all?"

Tom, "My grandfather and father were doctors and it was... expected. My father's a very determined man."

Tricia, "So you take after your father?"

Tom, "In determination, yes. I've never seen him enough to discover his other good qualities."

Tricia gives him a compassionate expression.

Tom, "He's always been too busy being the excellent doctor... helping others."

Tricia, "Do you like being a doctor?"

Tom, "It's a good living... but that's not what you meant, is it?"

Tricia, "I know doctors who feel a lot of satisfaction helping people who normally can't afford such help."

Tom, "Helping people is helping people, rich or poor, isn't it?"

Tricia, "But there's also the joy of giving without wanting in return."

Interest ignited, Tom draws closer, takes her hand, "I'm willing to give without wanting in return."

A stunned Tricia looks up at his tender expression.

Offended, she yanks her hand away, "You really like yourself a lot!"

She spins around, sprints towards her bungalow.

Tricia, "I doubt any woman could penetrate through your conceit!"

Tom, "I'm sorry, Tricia, really."

Tom hurries after her.

Tricia slows down.

Tom, "I couldn't help myself. You're so beautiful."

Tricia, "You really are wasting your time."

Tom, "Matter of opinion. Most fascinating time I've had in years."

They reach her bungalow.

She stops.

Tricia, "You're a smooth talker."

Tom, "And you?"

Tom smiles his charmer.

Tricia, "Good night, Tom."

Tom, "Good night, Tricia. Can I join you again for breakfast?"

Tricia walks up to her verandah, pets Joni.

Tricia, "Maybe."

She disappears inside.

Tom strolls to the water.

The moon reflects on the waves.

* * * * *

Chapter 17 - Gone

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The rising sun's reflection on the water.

Tom jogs towards Tricia's bungalow.

He hurdles the steps, knocks.

Silence.

He knocks louder.

He swings around as Diego approaches, shaking his head.

Isabella runs over with Joni at her heels.

Tom grabs her hands, "Where's Tricia?"

Diego, "Gone to Austin."

Isabella, in Spanish, "He's a doctor and so handsome. Why doesn't Tricia like him?"

Tom, "Shit, I was so stupid."

Diego, in Spanish, "She escaped or is training him."

Isabella, in Spanish, "Like Mommy did to you?"

Diego cracks a smile.

Frustrated, Tom watches.

Isabella consults her Spanish/English dictionary, "Tricia lonely. She more like us. You change?"

Tom, "Do you have her address?"

Isabella pulls Tom to the restaurant and hands him an envelope marked "Tricia" with an address.

Tom, "Thank you, Isabella."

Joni whines.

Tom pets her and runs off.

Tom sprints toward Carol rubbing sunscreen sensuously on Joe's back.

Mary reads a fashion magazine, which covers her face.

Joe, "Breakfast done already?"

Tom, "No!"

Mary drops magazine, smiles seductively, "Oh, yes?"

Tom, "No!"

Tom races to the bungalows.

Joe, "Hey!"

* * * * *

Beach airport.

Many people move to and fro, suitcases everywhere.

A taxi speeds up.

Tom dashes out towards the Check-in Hall, still in his swimsuit, tank top and bare feet.

A short guard, 40, blocks him, "Sorry Sir, your clothes."

Tom, "Emergency! I have to find Tricia."

Tom breaks past the Guard.

The Guard blows a whistle, "Stop!"

* * * * *

Check-in Hall.

Many travelers stand in queues.

Tom hightails it to a receptionist, interrupting her, "Emergency! The plane for Austin. Has it left yet?"

An older woman receptionist giggles, eyes Tom's body.

A young cute receptionist stands in the adjacent booth, "Maybe I could take him home and dress him."

Tom, "Please! Has it left yet?"

Four guards hurtle over.

Older receptionist, "Next building, Sir. In five minutes."

Short guard, "Sir, I must--"

Tom, "Yes, I'm going. Thank you."

Tom zips out.

* * * * *

Tom heads to the Departure Hall, up a short lane, dotted with shops.

He spots a Tricia-look-alike from behind entering the Departure Hall.

Tom, "Tricia!"

She doesn't turn.

He catches up to her, grabs her arm, "Tricia!"

She's not Tricia, but she smiles seductively.

Tricia-look-alike, "No, but I could change my name if you'd like."

Tom, "Sorry, no, uh, sorry."

* * * * *

Tom zooms in the Departure Hall.

Up to the Boarding counter.

A male receptionist, 30, appears repulsed.

He picks up a phone.

Tom, "The flight for Austin. The people boarding, where are they? It's an emergency."

Male receptionist, "Security."

He motions to the airfield.

Male receptionist, "Taking off."

Tom, "Shit."

Tom races out, spots the plane ready.

He heads toward the field, collides with a worker painting a pole.

They both sprawl on the ground.

* * * * *

In the plane, Tricia sits in a window seat.

Janey, 30, plops next to her, "Hey, I'm Janey."

Tricia, "Tricia."

Janey, "Here for a holiday?"

Tricia, "Holiday but it got interrupted."

Janey, "Yeah? Sounds bad. Like some A-1 jerk tried to get you into bed."

Tricia, "You're very perceptive."

Janey points out the window, "Him?"

Tricia turns, her jaw drops, eyes go wide.

Tom stands on the side of the airstrip.

High over his head, he holds a painted sign, TRICIA!!!!

Guards surround him.

Janey, "If you don't want him, can I take him?"

Tricia, "Please do."

* * * * *

Chapter 18 - That means--

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A second plane.

Tom and Joe walk up the plane's entrance staircase.

Joe, "So big chase, she's on plane one and we take plane two. Do they collide in space?"

They enter, a Hispanic flight attendant greets them.

Tom, "Hola como estas?"

Flight attendant, "Oh, you speak Spanish."

Tom waves a Spanish phrase book, "Poco."

Tom fills a paper cup with water as they head for their seats.

They sit, he studies the phrase book.

Joe, "You need new glasses."

Tom, "I don't wear any."

Joe, "Uh-huh."

Tom, "Joe, look, I don't know. She's... she's--"

Tom's phone rings.

He balances the water and book in one hand as he pulls out his phone, checks the name, frowns, "What do I tell him?"

Joe, "Plead temporary insanity."

Tom answers, "Hel... hello?"

Dr. Hall's voice, "How's it going, Tom?"

Tom, "Great, Sir."

Dr. Hall's voice, "I just came from your Dad's charity dinner. He was a bit put out to hear from me you're engaged. You really should've told your folks."

Tom, "Oh, uh, I... I guess he didn't get my email, Sir."

Dr. Hall's voice, "Well, he and your mom are thrilled and looking forward to being grandparents."

Tom, "Grandparents!"

Tom jumps up, spills water in his lap, bangs his head on the overhead locker, "Ow... that means--"

Dr. Hall's voice, "Kids. Yes, the public loves a family man, Tom. Talk more later."

Tom turns off his phone, looks down at his wet pants, "Kids?"

* * * * *

Chapter 19 - Arrogant

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Restaurant, Austin.

Kids and adult customers eat breakfast dishes.

Lost in thought, Tricia plays with a jam filled donut.

Her mood is not lost on Mat who sits across from her, eating a plain cinnamon donut.

Mat, "You seem very quiet and distracted. Is it the man you met... Tom?"

Tricia, "He's nothing... just an arrogant playboy."

Her glass bangs down with a thud, "His ego's even bigger than Paul's."

She smiles sweetly at Mat.

Tricia, "I'm glad you're not like them."

Mat, "There's a committee luncheon at the hospital today. Would you like to come?"

Tricia, "That would be nice."

She looks up to a painting of a lotus pond, relaxes.

* * * * *

Chapter 20 - Tom arrives

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Sheraton hotel lobby, Austin.

Tom and Joe pass a pot where two lotus buds emerge.

The marble floor shines.

Fresh flowers reflect in mirrors.

Joe checks in.

Tom shows a porter Tricia's envelope.

The porter grabs an Austin map.

* * * * *

Tom rides in a taxi as it weaves through narrow lanes.

Teenage boys, kicking a soccer ball, race out of the way, wave.

Tom beams, waves back.

They stop in front of an elegant but modest Guest House.

Tom points further up the road to the driver, 50.

Tom, "About fifty yards, okay?"

Driver, "Meter stays on."

Tom, "She's worth it."

He hops out, holding a box of a dozen jam filled donuts.

An Antique shop next door grabs his attention.

The front window displays a medieval torture "Pillory stock" which locks the head and arms.

Tom, "I wonder if wives used them on their husbands."

Receptionist, "Only if they're naughty. Ha!"

Surprised Tom turns to see a laughing, elderly woman, the guest house receptionist holding a large bag of groceries.

He laughs, "I can tell you speak from experience. Please let me."

Tom takes her bag.

They approach the Guest House door and enter a simple furnished, clean reception area.

The receptionist walks behind a counter.

Tom hands over the groceries, "I'm looking for Tricia."

Receptionist, "Gone for a bit, she'll be back soon. Have a seat?"

Tom, "Thanks. I'll sit outside."

* * * * *

Tom waits on the front steps.

He puts the donuts down and calls Joe.

Tom, "Hey..."

(pause)

"yes, yes, okay, I'm mad."

* * * * *

Hotel room.

Joe walks back and forth, rubbing balm on his forehead, "Mad is mild!"

Joe, "You do realize Dr. Hall wants you with a wife who fits the bill, not a new-age spacey."

Tom, "Right, well, maybe she's not what you think."

Joe, "Fine, but she wouldn't share her bungalow with you. What makes you think she'll share her guest house with you?"

* * * * *

Chapter 21 - Tom's other side

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Tricia exits convenience store with a small bag.

She walks to the corner, turns.

Shock.

She spots Tom on the steps, turning off his phone.

She backs up, out of his sight.

Her face hard and angry.

She peeks around the building.

Tom puts away his phone as a young couple walk by, ten feet in front of their five-year-old daughter, Rosie playing with a balloon.

Rosie races to keep up, drops her balloon which bounces into the road.

She runs after it, in line of oncoming traffic.

Rosie, "MOMMY! MY BALLOON!"

Her parents turn around, spot their daughter in the street.

Mother, "No!"

Tom leaps off the steps, grabs the girl just as a car speeds by.

Rosie, "MOMMY! DADDY!"

Tom hands a crying Rosie to her parents.

Mother, "Rosie, honey!"

Mother and Father, (to Tom) "Thank you. Thank you so much."

Mother holds Rosie as Father shakes hands with Tom.

Father, "How can we thank you?"

Tom, "It's fine."

Father, "No, please."

Father pulls out his wallet.

Tom puts his hand on Father's hand.

Tom, "Let me."

Tom picks up the donuts, offers one to Rosie.

Rosie stops crying, takes a donut, "Thank you, Mister."

Tom, "You be more careful now, okay?"

She nods as she bites the donut.

Father pulls out a business card, "This is nothing compared to what you did, but if you ever need toilet brushes, give me a call."

Tom, "Will do."

They walk away.

Tom sits, checks the card, "Toilet brushes?"

He smiles.

* * * * *

Chapter 22 - Donuts

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Behind the building Tricia melts.

Her face beaming with appreciation of how Tom acted.

She sobers herself, walks slowly toward the building.

Thrilled, Tom springs up, without grabbing the donuts, "Tricia, good morning!"

Tricia stays reserved, "Been here long?"

Tom, "No."

Tricia, "Anything exciting happen?"

Tom, "Not until now and seeing you."

Tricia gives him a "side" look, "What do I do if I meet someone who's very conceited at the wrong times and very humble at the right times?"

Tom gives his charmer smile, "Try to help him open his eyes?"

Tricia, "Tom, I admire your efforts..."

(pause)

"but you're wasting your time."

Tom, "You said that before."

Tricia turns her head away.

Tom, "Can you show me your city sights?"

Tricia doesn't respond.

Tom, "The wonderful views... besides yourself."

Tricia frowns.

Tom softens, "I'm sorry, Tricia... again. Should I put my foot in my mouth?"

Tricia, "You appear to enjoy the taste."

Tom grabs the donuts, "Maybe a donut instead?"

He opens the box, offers.

Tricia half smiles, "I'm sure there are many tours you can join."

Tom, "Yes, my hotel offered a dozen."

He picks up a donut.

Tom, "But who wants a dozen plain cinnamon donuts when you can have jam filled ones... right?"

He offers her the donut.

She declines.

He breaks one up and offers her just a piece.

Tom, "Favorite, am I wrong?"

Tricia smiles, takes the piece.

Tom eats, smiles back.

Mat, "Tricia!"

Tricia nearly chokes on the donut.

Mat steps out of his Jaguar across the street.

Tricia looks over as Mat approaches.

Tom glances quickly, then eyes back at Tricia.

Mat, "Ready to go?"

Mat looks Tom over.

Tom's eyes stay glued to Tricia as he eats the donut.

Tricia, "No, uh..."

Mat points at Tom, "Friend?"

Tricia, "Oh, uh, Mat, please meet Tom. Tom's--"

Tom reaches out to shake hands with Mat, "Tom Adams, from Washington."

Mat gives Tom a wet fish handshake.

Tom looks at their hands, shrugs.

Mat, "Mat Garcia, Austin."

Tom, "Want a donut, they're delicious."

Mat, (to Tricia) "Is this the man you told me about?"

Tom, (to Tricia) "Really, you were talking about me?"

Tricia, (to Mat) "Perhaps I exaggerated some."

Tom, "I was talking about you to my friend and boss."

Mat, "No exaggeration."

Tom, "Donut, Mat?"

Mat, "Good grief."

Mat curtly shakes his head.

At the same time, Tom and Mat speak, "So, Tricia--"

They look at each other.

Mat frowns.

Tom laughs.

Tricia's phone rings.

She answers, "Yes?"

Tricia walks up her stairs as she listens.

She turns to the men.

Tricia, "Excuse me. I... I'll go get ready."

Tricia disappears into the guest house.

Tom, "Sure you don't want a donut?"

Mat, "Jam filled donuts are not--"

Tom, "Your favorite, eh?"

Mat raises his nose.

Tom, "I'll take a guess, you like plain cinnamon, right?"

Mat smiles curtly.

* * * * *

Chapter 23 - The Choice

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Tricia's room.

Tricia holds the phone in one hand.

Chooses a dress with the other hand.

Tricia, "Lynn, I can't believe how modest he was."

Lynn's voice, "Maybe he's not all what you saw at the beach?"

Tricia half-smiles, glances out the window.

* * * * *

Tom sits on the steps, eats a donut.

Mat stands aloof.

Tom, "You Tricia's boyfriend?"

Mat, "You met Tricia at the beach?"

Tom, "Not her boyfriend, good."

Mat, "You're not her type."

Tom takes a bite, "She likes jam filled."

Mat's face hardens.

Tom offers the donuts again.

Tricia appears, looking beautiful.

Tom bounces up, smiles wide, "Tricia, you're--"

Mat, "We will have to hurry for lunch."

Tom's eyes stay on Tricia, "Beautiful."

Tricia blushes, looks straight at Tom, quickly drops her eyes.

Mat puts out his hand to Tricia, "Ready?"

Tricia, "Tom, would you excuse us, please?"

Tom, "Sure. I... uh, I'll just eat another donut..."

He glances away, "Over there."

Tom leaves them.

Mat, "Arrogant."

Tricia, "He did apologize."

Mat, "So?"

Tricia, "Mat, please. Nothing happened between us at the beach. He also only knows me as Tricia--"

Mat, "Fine with me if he never knows your name or anything about you."

Tricia, "He'd like me to show him around Austin today."

Mat, "So you told him we have other plans."

Tricia, "I didn't say one way or another."

Mat, "Well, I'll tell him. I'll make clear what you should've made clear."

Tricia's face hardens.

Mat changes tactics.

Mat, "You're too kind to people."

Tricia, "Too kind? I'm not sure I've been--"

Mat, "You have to get tougher."

Mat gives a smug expression.

Tricia smiles astutely, "Yes, indeed. It's hard to know when it's appropriate to show kindness or strength, and to whom."

Cockily sure of himself, Mat smiles.

Tricia, "But I have to make those decisions for myself. After all I am the owner of my own Karma, right?"

Mat's smile disappears.

Tricia, "Thanks, Mat. I know you'll understand... if my decision means not going with you to the luncheon."

Mat raises his nose, "And what if I decide to tell Tom, you're the famous Dr. McKenzie?"

Tricia smiles, "Please yourself. You do realize how much more he'd want me if he knows? Which is exactly the reason why I didn't tell him."

Mat, "So are you coming to lunch with me, or going to get taken advantage of by him."

Tricia, "Sorry, Mat."

Mat stomps off to his car.

Munching on a donut, Tom wanders back to Tricia, "Poor guy, wouldn't even try a jam filled one."

Tom waves to the Driver.

Tricia looks up the road, sees the taxi approaching, "That confident?"

Tom, "Not this time, just very hopeful."

He gives Tricia a melting smile, "So, what's first on our tour?"

Tricia, "Ninety-nine."

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Chapter 24 - An even match

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Mt. Bonnell Stairway.

Ninety-nine steps.

One of Austin's favorite sites.

Worn out tourists descend.

Tricia strides up, passes others.

Tom takes on the challenge, follows.

Increasing her pace, Tricia zips past upward moving tourists just before downward tourists block Tom's path.

Enjoying the game, Tom waits, zooms up, until he's one step behind her, "Like being one step ahead of me?"

Tricia, "With your form, you probably leave everyone behind."

Tom cruises level with Tricia, "With yours, it could be an even match."

Tricia, "For the short term."

Tom, "Concerned about the long term?"

Tricia shows signs of tiring, slows down, "Probably take more energy than I have. You're a bit fast for me."

Tom, "Have to be, to keep up with you."

A few steps above, four oblivious tourists descend, engaged in conversation.

Tom's eyes remain on Tricia.

Tricia, "Keep your eyes on each step or you'll fall."

Tom lurches, recovers.

The tourists scramble out of his way.

Tom, "Thanks for the warning. Such a big fall could hurt."

They resume climbing.

Tom, "You're so careful. Fallen before?"

Uncomfortable, Tricia looks away.

Tom sees the impact.

Tricia, "Preventing a fall is easier than recovering from one."

Tom, "Safe, but lonely. You may miss the magical mystery of the journey."

Tricia stops.

Tom smiles.

He takes a couple of steps, glances back, beckons.

She catches up to him.

Tricia guides Tom around the city:

-- Mt. Bonnell overlook, Tricia and Tom soak in the view.

He slides his arm around her waist.

She draws away.

-- Handicraft Market, Tricia and Tom meander past bustling stalls.

Tricia admires a gorgeous, woven belt studded with semi-precious stones.

Tom takes out his wallet.

Tricia shakes her head.

He looks back, whispers.

She declines firmly.

-- Gardens, Tom picks up two Frangipani flowers, smells them, places one in Tricia's hair.

They stroll to a Fig tree, where a serene Buddha statue sits.

Tom reaches for her hand.

She pulls it away.

* * * * *

River park.

Tricia points to a map.

Tom feigns interest, moves very close.

Tricia edges away with Tom moving in unison.

Tricia packs up the map, "Tom--"

Tom, "You're just so magnetic--"

She cuts him off with a look.

He makes a funny face.

She laughs.

Tom gives her space, they walk.

Tom, "Nurse Tricia, where do you put your skills into action?"

Tricia, "Why do you jump to conclusions and think I'm a nurse?"

Tom, "So let's get to know each other better. What do you do?"

Tricia, "Charity work."

Tom, "Like the organization, ESCO?"

Tricia, "I know people who work for them."

A motorcycle with fruit passes by.

Tricia, "You must experience the fruit market. Come, it's real close."

She rushes into the crowd with Tom in pursuit.

* * * * *

Fruit market.

Tricia hands a cut Sapote to Tom.

He bites into it.

A seed dislodges and falls toward the ground.

As they scramble to catch it, Tricia's hand slaps him in the jaw.

Tom feigns being hurt.

Tricia, "I'm sorry, are you okay?"

Tom, "Can you kiss it to make it feel better?"

Tricia, "Tom, really."

Tom, "Yes, really, always worked with my mom."

Tricia gives him a quick peck.

Tom, "I see you've never had kids."

Tricia, "You're not a kid."

Tom, "And I'm glad you're not my mom."

The amused vendor hands Tom a bag of fruit.

Tom protests as Tricia pays.

Tricia, "Please, my gift."

Tom puts the fruit in his backpack.

They stroll down a narrow lane, lined with stalls full of tourist trappings.

Tom slips his hand in hers.

She glances down, allows it.

* * * * *

Chapter 25 - Triciarella

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Tom and Tricia stroll into a park.

Tom, "Okay, Tricia's short for Patricia, and your last name is...?"

Tricia, "When I visited Thailand, everyone drops last names, so you're Dr. Tom, not Dr. Adams. And I'm just Tricia."

Tom's expression shows she's not off the hook, "I didn't know I'm Thai."

Tricia, "The Thais believe we're all part of one big family. How old are you?"

Tom, "Thirty-six, and you?"

Tricia, "Younger, so I'm 'nawng' or younger sister. And you're my older brother or 'pee'."

Tom, "I'd be pee-pissed. Tricia, your secrets are safe with me, I'm not a CIA agent."

Tricia, "My blood group is AB. My star sign is Virgo."

Tom, "Rare virgin... what do you do in your charity?"

Tricia, "Help people."

Tom, "Any other clues?"

Tricia, "I don't like people judging me from the outside."

Tom, "How do we find out if we have anything in common?"

Tricia, "Aren't we all human? In being so, we're all very similar."

Tom stops, grasps both her hands, "Triciarella, who are you? I'd love to know your story, because I--"

Tricia, "Who I was yesterday is different to who I am today and who I will be tomorrow. Let's just be here, now."

Tom draws closer, "I've forgotten who I used to be and where I was headed."

Tricia grins, shakes her head, "You really are determined... I'll show you one place where I work."

* * * * *

Chapter 26 - Ann

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Tricia and Tom enter an Orphanage schoolyard.

Mia, 10, and three other girls toss a ball to each other.

Delighted, they embrace Tricia.

Mia, "Teach English today?"

Tricia, "Not today, Mia."

Tom, "Of course, you're a teacher and I bet you have a super approach."

Mia grabs Tricia's hand as they walk to the building.

* * * * *

Dance room.

Six young girls mimic dance movements of an Hispanic woman, Lucia, 30, a graceful beauty.

Seen through a window, Mia leads Tricia and Tom.

Mia bursts in.

Lucia tries to speak, "Doctor T--"

Tricia indicates Tom, smiles a secretive smile.

Tricia, "Tom. From Washington."

Lucia, "Hello. (to Tricia, in Spanish) Your boyfriend?"

Tom, in Spanish, "Not yet. I'd like to be."

Mia giggles, embarrassing Tricia and surprising Lucia.

Tom, in Spanish, "I understand a little."

Tom and Tricia sit as Lucia turns on Mexican music.

She and the girls glide.

Mia races to Tom, urges him to join in.

Tom grins, pulls Tricia up.

Tom, his face alive with delight, and Tricia sway.

Tricia enjoys his ungraceful but uninhibited efforts.

Bending his knees, he trips.

Tricia grabs him but falls down with him into his arms.

He laughs.

They catch eyes.

A long moment.

Tricia shivers, giving away her arousal.

She jumps up, struggles to refocus.

Eyes twinkling, Tom rises, "That was an interesting move. Can we practice that again?"

Embarrassed, Tricia looks away.

The door opens.

A woman brings in an eleven-year-old girl, Ann, sits her down and she sways to the music.

Tom notices her, walks over, checks her for a reaction.

None.

He peers into her opaque glazed eyes.

Tom, "What happened to her?"

Tricia speaks to the woman in Spanish, as the music ends.

Tricia, "Her name is Ann. She's new today. She was blinded during a tornado. Apart from her grandmother, her family perished."

Mia crouches down with Tom.

Tricia, "Her grandmother just died, so relief organizations sent her here."

Clearly impacted, Tom looks at Ann compassionately.

Tricia, "What do you think?"

Tom, "I'd have to examine her properly but I believe she could be helped."

Tricia, "An operation?"

Tom, "Yes, cornea transplants. But I'm not sure I could operate here."

Tricia, "Wait, let me call my friend."

Tricia dashes out.

Tom examines Ann's eyes.

* * * * *

Hallway.

Tricia listens on her cell phone.

* * * * *

Lynn cradles the phone on her shoulder as she sorts papers in her office, "What's he going to think when he finds out who you are?"

Tricia plays with her hair, fidgets, "I'll let him know after the operation. Lynn, please let me tell him, okay?"

Lynn, "So you're finally allowing someone to get close--"

Tricia, "I wouldn't go that far. He's fun, but... not my type."

Lynn, skeptical, "I really believe you."

Tricia turns.

Through the window she sees Tom, holding Ann's hands, surrounded by everyone.

He looks her way, smiles.

Tricia, "I mean... look, I better get back."

Lynn, "Paul wants your new phone number."

Tricia, "To hell with Paul. Got to run, bye."

Tricia hangs up, hurries to the door.

Lynn gazes at Paul's photo on the Medical journal, presses her phone.

Lynn, "G'day Mate. No luck, Paul. You're stuck with me."

* * * * *

Tricia enters the dance room, kneels next to Tom and Ann.

Tricia, "Ann, this man is Dr. Tom, from Washington, DC. He wants to fix your eyes."

Ann lunges at Tom, gives him a giant hug, "I love you."

Tom's eyes widen.

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Chapter 27 - Hospital

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Tricia and Tom slide in a taxi.

It drives off.

Tricia, "I'll check with ESCO before saying it's impossible."

Tom, "But, Tricia, I'm out-of-state."

Tricia, "And what if you were out-of-country?"

Tom, "Huh?"

Tricia, "Why is Dr. McKenzie, an Australian giving a seminar here?"

Tom, "You got me. I don't know yet."

Tom edges closer, his charmer personality ignited, "But I'm sure glad it is here... and I met you."

Tricia smiles sweetly.

Tom, "As for the seminar, it's probably a waste of time. I'm already an award-winning surgeon."

Trying to impress, Tom puts it on, "But Dr. Hall, the director of the most forward thinking medical team in America, requires I spy on the Australians, before confirming my position as his head surgeon."

Intended impact received, and Tricia shows it, "That must mean a lot to you."

Tom, "We'll make medical history and my career will soar. He even has plans to help me run for the Senate. He and his wife would love you. How'd you like to join our team?"

Tricia treats it as a joke it was not meant to be, "Hmmm."

They arrive at the hospital.

They get out, stroll to the entrance.

Tricia, "Are you open to learning from this Australian doctor?"

Tom, "Sure, but I doubt I'll learn anything new."

Tricia, "So you think you could match this doctor's skills?"

Tom, "Definitely."

Tricia, "I'd love to see you in action..."

Tom's taken aback.

Tricia smiles coyly, "...so I'll assist if you donate your time. ESCO will sponsor the operation."

* * * * *

Hospital Operating Theater.

Tricia, Tom and a subdued Mat stand in a gleaming high tech Operating Theater.

A wide-eyed Tom touches instruments, "Wow, nice."

Mat, coolly, "Most up-to-date surgery equipment in Texas. ESCO's backing has enabled us to realize it."

Tom, "But will the hospital allow out-of-state doctors?"

Tricia, "It's fine with ESCO sponsorship."

Tom, "Then I'll donate my time. And the rest of the surgical team?"

Mat, "Nurses rotate for charity surgery but the anesthesiologist won't be available until next month."

Tom, "Back in Washington by then."

Tom sees disappointment flash across Tricia's face, "Is the surgery open tomorrow?"

Mat, "You need an anesthesiologist."

Tom, "I can solve that."

Mat, "Bit short notice. It'd be impossible to get corneas in time."

Tricia, "Mat, you have friends at the Donor Bank. Please check them for me... and ESCO. We've helped this hospital greatly."

Mat raises one eyebrow and his nose, "I'll do everything within my power to ensure Tom's return home will not be delayed."

Tom, "Tomorrow afternoon, just in case Tricia's positive thinking fruits?"

Mat withdraws behind politeness, does a curt nod, "Muy bien."

Tricia, (to Tom), "He feels joy with your good action."

Mat's strained smile hardly portrays joy.

They exit into a hallway.

A knockout nurse, Sunee, 25, approaches.

Sunee, "Good morning, Doctor T--"

Tricia, "Tom, from Washington."

Tricia points to Tom.

Startled, Sunee smiles to Tom, who returns the greeting.

Sunee stares at them as they walk on.

Mat frowns.

Tom, "Can we bring Ann here for tests?"

Tricia, "ESCO's arranged for me to take Ann to an ophthalmologist's clinic."

Tom, "I suppose I could free up some time to come with you if you want, although the doctor may not like me just barging in."

Mat, "Since when do you care about barging in unwelcome? Tricia doesn't need you--"

Tricia, "Mat, please--"

Mat, "On second thought, why don't you take Tom. He's sure to be impressed with the surgeon's skills."

A confused Tom watches Mat nod stiffly and strut away.

Tricia, "Tom, why don't I send the tests to your hotel?"

Tom, "Sounds good... I do have other things I need to do."

* * * * *

Pedicab.

Tom relaxes, happy to have Tricia's full attention.

Tricia, "Where are we going to find an anesthesiologist so quickly?"

Tom, "Perhaps... at the Sheraton? Will you join me for dinner?"

Tricia, "Joe?"

Tom, "Yes, but he's afraid you're turning me into a spacey New Ager. If you'd grace us with your presence--"

Tricia, "He likes his luxuries."

Tom, "We all have potential to change and... you have such sweet powers of persuasion."

Tricia, "I'll see what my powers can do."

Tom, "Great, I'll pick you up at seven."

Tricia, "No, I'll meet you in the lobby. I have much to do."

The Pedicab stops at the Orphanage.

Tricia gets out and hurries inside.

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Chapter 28 - Mom & Dad

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Living room.

Tom's Dad, 60, snores in his lounge chair.

Tom's Mom, 58, bustles into the room, shakes Tom's Dad awake.

Mom, "Wake up, Dear, it's time to call."

Dad, "Thomas should've called us days ago!"

* * * * *

Tom exits the Pedicab at his hotel.

His phone rings.

He checks the name, MOM & DAD.

He takes a deep breath, answers, "Hello."

Mom busies herself next to the speaker phone while Dad frowns.

Mom, "Hi Honey--"

Dad, "What's going on there!"

Tom cringes.

Mom, "Dear, now don't--"

Dad, "Well, he should've--"

Mom, "Dear."

Dad, "He had enough time to send Hall a message and a photo! Thomas--"

Mom, "Dear, please. Tom, honey--"

Dad, "Thomas, what's going on!"

Tom, "Mom, Dad, I'm sorry I didn't let you in on Tricia."

Mom, "What a beautiful name. What's she do? Where's she from?"

A pause.

Tom's eyes bug out, his free hand slides all over his face and hair.

Dad, "Speak up. I stopped a nap for you."

Mom, "Tom, I'm so happy. Send us a photo, honey."

Dad rolls his eyes in exasperation, "Let him speak."

Tom, "I've been flat out working on an important project. I'll send a photo, but I have an appointment tonight so must run. I'll tell you more later."

Mom, "Yes, Honey."

Dad, "Later? What about right now!"

Tom, "Right, Dad, sorry. Tricia's a teacher from Australia. Bye."

Mom, "I'm so happy. Just can't wait to have a granddaughter."

Dad, "Grandson."

Tom turns off his phone, "Whew."

He heads to the hotel.

Tom, "The job. Enchanting Triciarella. I can do this. I can do this..."

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Chapter 29 - Dr. McKenzie

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Hotel room.

A whistling, bare-chested, smiling Tom exits the bathroom.

Joe surfs on his laptop.

He Googles "Dr. McKenzie".

Thousands of sites appear.

Joe clicks on one.

It takes a long time to open.

Tom, "Well, closer to fulfilling one requirement for Hall."

Impatient, Joe grabs a mandarin, bounces it in one hand.

Joe, "After one day-time date? You haven't even kissed."

Tom, "She kissed me."

Joe, "You're getting used, buddy."

Tom, "I booked the O.R. for tomorrow."

Joe sinks his fingernail into the mandarin, juice spurts onto his face.

Tom laughs, chucks a tissue box to Joe.

Joe, "You crazy? I didn't come here to work. Especially for nothing."

Joe mops his face, bends over and carefully peels the mandarin, pops a segment into his mouth.

Tom, "The poor girl lost her family in a tornado."

Joe, "Probably a thousand more like her. Can't help them all."

Tom takes out a shirt from the closet, slides it on, "Sure, but helping one little girl is better than helping none."

Tom flings an apple to Joe who bounces it up and down.

Joe, "Okay, now this isn't about a little girl, is it? How far will you go to please Tricia? Helping one girl doesn't guarantee she's gonna fall for you."

Joe tosses the apple back to Tom, "Great holiday fun."

Tom, "Right, couldn't have planned it."

Tom zips the apple smack into Joe's chest.

Joe, "Wake up, man! Are you blind? This girl's just the beginning. You're a doctor, period."

Joe picks up the apple, "How many little girls do you think you're going to have to help?"

Joe throws Tom into doubt.

Tom, "Believe it or not, I genuinely want to help Ann."

Joe, "Since when are you the great altruistic doctor?"

Tom, "Joe, it was weird. Have you ever had an eleven-year-old, blind orphan hug you and say, "I love you"?"

More subdued, Joe shakes his head.

Tom touches his heart, "Well, it hit, right here."

Joe, "Yeah, right."

Uncomfortable, Joe turns his attention back to his computer screen.

He squints.

It shows a very unflattering, badly-lit photo of a younger Tricia wearing big thick-rimmed glasses, hair tied back severely, in an unbecoming hospital gown.

The caption reads, "DR. P. McKENZIE".

Joe, "Well I'll be damned. McKenzie's a woman!"

Tom glances quickly at the screen, "She reminds me of my third grade teacher, Mrs. Harpington. Boy was she a dull, uptight lady."

He turns back to the mirror, combs his hair, grooms himself, "Thank god Tricia's not like her. The seminar's going to be dull, dull, dull."

Joe closes his laptop, "Why the spit and polish?"

Tom, "Tricia's coming here for dinner."

Joe, "Amazing how people change when they want something."

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Chapter 30 - The Deal

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Hotel lobby.

Tom taps his fingers nervously as he sits with eyes glued to the entrance.

He checks his watch, clutches a small bag.

An elegant Tricia, in a flowing dress, hair cascading over her exposed shoulders, gracefully glides in.

Men and women's heads turn as she passes by.

Tom rises slowly, his eyes riveted on her.

He reaches in his bag, "You look stunning."

Tricia, "Thank you."

Tom, "Your dress needs a belt."

Tom secures the handcrafted, woven belt, from the market, around her waist before she has a chance to object.

Tom's loving look defies protest, "Perfect fit. Must have been made for you."

Tricia looks down.

Tom, "Joe's waiting in the restaurant."

Tom slips his arm around her waist as they walk.

He bumps into a chair.

Tricia, "Last time you watched me more than where you were going--"

Tom, "Gave me the chance to be with you tonight."

* * * * *

Restaurant.

Embroidered wall hangings glitter, and flowers grace every table.

Mexican music.

Tricia, Tom and Joe eat at a table.

Hispanic dancers in colorful costumes enter and sway gracefully.

The lead dancer smiles at them.

Tom, "Lucia!"

Tricia, "Yes, she's the best in Texas."

Tom, "Lucia gave us lessons at the orphanage, where Tricia volunteers. We met the little girl, Ann, there."

Tricia, "Joe, you have the wonderful opportunity to bring light into a small girl's life."

Joe, "Anesthesiologists need holidays. One mistake can be fatal."

Tom could hit smug Joe.

Unfazed, Tricia takes out an intricately painted, lacquered box and hands it to Joe.

Tricia, "Ann made this, before the Tornado. Her family were artisans."

Intrigued, Joe examines the box, "It's beautiful."

Tricia, "If you help Ann, she won't have to beg on the streets. You and Tom will help an orphan live a more fruitful life."

Joe, "What else will Tom have to do?"

Tom kicks Joe's shin.

Joe, "Ow!"

Joe whips out his balm, rubs his head, "Okay, okay, I'll help Tom aid the blind to see and enjoy..."

Tricia, "Thank you, Joe."

Joe, "...pleasure."

Joe watches a relieved Tom slide his hand over Tricia's.

Tricia responds by grasping it.

Joe, "Are you guys ready... for dessert?"

The Maître D', with Lucia at his side, taps on the microphone.

Maître d', "Ladies and Gentlemen. We have a special show tonight. The girls from the Karuna orphanage are making their very first appearance!"

The music floats.

Ten miniature angels, costumes and ornaments glittering, golden skin glowing, glide in.

They sway, with a fluid, flawless grace.

Except for Mia who stumbles in wonder at the opulent decor.

Lucia eyes her anxiously.

Mia spots Tricia and Tom.

She squeals, dashes to them, "Dr. Tom, Tricia!"

She clasps Tom's hand.

Tom springs up, grabs a reluctant Tricia.

Mia leads them to the dance floor.

The other girls continue to dance as though nothing has happened.

Lucia looks anxiously towards the Maître D' who nods a restrained, polite consent.

A much-improved Tom dances.

Tricia laughs, joins in.

A hip man bounces up, pulls his date to the dance floor.

Hip man, "All right! Let's flow!"

He mimics the girls.

Laughter peals.

More stream to the dance floor.

Bodies sway, faces beam as they imitate the dancers.

The Maître D' smiles.

Tom catches eyes with a radiant Tricia.

He moves closer, "Shall we try the down to the floor move?"

Tricia laughs.

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Chapter 31 - The Spell

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Hotel lobby.

Tricia and Tom approach the lotus flowers, petals barely open.

Tricia glances at them, reaches for Tom's hand, "Come."

They exit.

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Lotus pond.

Lotus flowers, in all stages, emerge from leaf-draped water.

Moonlight shimmers.

The spell of the secluded garden leads Tom and Tricia to a bench.

Tricia, "My favorite place here."

She sits and focuses on a lotus in full bloom.

Tom hesitates.

Tricia invites him with her eyes.

He sits close.

Tricia, "Many believe lotuses symbolize the human potential."

She points toward a bud that peeks above the water.

Tricia, "Searching for meaning, many rise above the water, but never bloom before they die."

She indicates a toppled bud with a rotten stem.

Then scans the pond and selects a solitary open lotus.

Tricia, "While others, rising from mud, reach the heights and bloom."

Tom finds two equally tall lotuses in full bloom leaning against each other, petals touching.

Tom, "Those two grew together."

Tricia, "Very rare. Is it possible? Some feel threatened when you want to--"

Tom puts his arm around her, "Challenged is more what I'm feeling and it may be worth the risk."

Tricia, "Only challenged?"

He leans forward.

Their lips get close.

Closer.

A dog barks.

The sound of footsteps.

Tricia dashes away, gives Tom a "catch me if you can" look.

He laughs, pursues.

* * * * *

Guest house hallway.

Buoyant, Tom and Tricia float toward her apartment.

She fumbles for her key and unlocks the door.

Tricia, "Thanks, Tom, today was--"

Tom kisses her.

Caught up in the spell, she returns the kiss.

In unison, they move inside.

Kissing passionately, they swiftly make their way to a double bed illuminated by the light streaming through the window.

Tom's hands slide down her body.

* * * * *

Chapter 32 - What!

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A thoughtful Tricia, in a silk negligee, looks in her bathroom mirror.

Seen through the door frame, wearing underpants only, Tom sits in bed admiring her.

He looks at his bare ring finger, fondles it with his right hand, smiles.

He rises, enters the bathroom, embraces her, kisses the back of her neck.

She closes her eyes.

Tom, "You're wild."

Tricia stiffens and walks out.

Tom follows.

She gazes at a vase with two lotuses, partly opened.

Tom wraps his arms around her, hugs her close, "There are poor orphans in Washington."

Tricia, "Do you plan to help them?"

Tom, "You could... and also live in style. Let's grow together, fulfill our potential."

Tricia moves away to a shelf, lights one of two candles, moves the match towards the other candle.

Tom, "We'd make a great team. A partner who helps the poor is good for my professional image. Capitol Hill would fall in love with you so grants would be a breeze, make my run for Senate easy, and you--"

She forcefully blows out the match, spins around, flares, "Is that all you see in me!"

Tom appears genuinely surprised.

Tricia, "Do you really think I'd help people simply to further your professional image! How conceited!"

Tricia throws the match box at Tom.

She grabs a bathrobe, puts it on, "Being an egotistical doctor's little woman is the last thing I'll do!"

Tom, "Tricia, I'm sorry, I didn't--"

Tricia, "Sorry? Sorry? I'm sorry. I've been so stupid! I've become another score for the great Dr. Tom Adams."

Tom, "No, that's not what I meant, I've put my foot in my mouth, please--"

Tricia, "Foot! Two feet and your hands, too. You have a very big mouth."

She picks up Tom's shirt and pants, slams them into his chest, "To go with your big head. You've made your intentions quite clear. We're oceans apart!"

She darts to the door, opens it.

Tom, "Tricia, please calm down, I--"

Tricia, "Out!"

Tom, "Out?"

Tricia, "Out."

Tom inches out, holding his clothes, "I'm sorry."

Tricia slams the door shut.

A knock.

Tricia, "What!"

Tom, "Can I have my shoes, please?"

* * * * *

Chapter 33 - Threat

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Mat's hospital office.

Lynn taps one foot, "I won't do it."

Mat, "As head of ESCO, you do realize that state bureaucracy can really slow down--"

Stunned, Lynn stares at him, "You wouldn't..."

He holds her gaze.

Lynn, "She only just met Tom."

Mat, "You do understand what I've said, don't you?"

Lynn, "And you do understand you could lose her either way."

He sighs as an upset Lynn leaves, slams the door.

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Chapter 34 - The Operation

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Hospital hallway.

A door opens.

A downcast Tom steps out in operating gear, almost collides with Tricia.

She weaves to miss him, walks stiffly on.

Tricia, "I didn't expect you to come."

Tom catches up to her, "I'm truly sorry about last night. I was way out of line."

Thrown off guard, Tricia's tight expression relaxes.

She slows down.

Tricia, "Well, maybe I--"

Tom, "No, it was totally my fault. I got carried away. I'm not that, uh, practiced in asking anyone... to share my life."

Dismayed and surprised, Tricia stops.

Seeing the impact and her discomfort, Tom seeks his opening, "Relax... I'll try focusing on the present. Maybe then you'll believe the guy I was last night is different to who I am now and who I can be tomorrow."

Tricia can't suppress a slight smile.

More relaxed, they walk on.

Tom, "And... the guy I am today, really does want to help Ann."

They approach two hospital attendants wheeling Ann into the operating room.

Happy to have the focus elsewhere, Tricia smiles, "Thank you. She'll be so grateful."

Tom, "Believe it or not, so did the guy last night. And maybe I'm not, nor always will be your preconceived idea of me."

Tom's loving expression unnerves her.

She looks away.

Tom, "Shall we go in?"

* * * * *

Operating Theater.

Tom prepares for the surgery.

Tricia, closest to Tom, watches.

Joe checks the liquid that drains into Ann's arm.

Sunee stands near by.

Joe, "Sunee, I need your help here."

Sunee, "What would you like me to do?"

Joe, "Help the liquid flow freely."

Sunee draws very close, bats her eyelashes at Joe.

Together they reposition the tubes and tape them.

Tricia, "Be careful, Sunee. Joe's got many girlfriends."

Sunee, "I bet not as many as Dr. Tom."

Tom, "No girlfriends, Sunee. I'm not good enough for the one I'm closest to."

Tricia drops an instrument.

Disapproving, Sunee throws it in a bucket, gives a sterilized one to Tricia.

Tom, "Are you two playing with the trephine or can I have it?"

Tricia hands Tom a trephine knife.

Tricia, "Try this trephine from the left."

Tom, "Huh?"

Tom peers at the knife, "This isn't the standard trephine. What on earth would you know?"

Tricia, "I saw Dr. McKenzie do this same operation."

Tom, "You're kidding!"

Tricia, "No, try it."

Tom, "What the hell. Tricia, I've done this operation a hundred times. Every doctor cuts from the right and they use the standard trephine."

Tricia, "Dr. McKenzie cuts from the left with this trephine."

Tom, "Oh boy! So this is why you've been so secretive, you're not just any nurse but Dr. McKenzie's nurse!"

Tom sees a guilty Tricia's eyes twinkle above her mouth guard.

He fondles the new knife, examining it carefully, "Cut from the left, use this trephine, cut from the left, use this..."

Tom looks long at Tricia.

He nods, places the trephine on Ann's eye.

* * * * *

Hospital hallway.

A worker paints one wall yellow.

They all exit the Operating Theater.

Sunee looks admirably at Joe who winks.

An impressed Tricia glances at Tom, "Thanks so much, Tom, Joe."

Tom, "Happy to please you... in any area."

An embarrassed Tricia looks away.

An aide comes along with cups of water and juice.

They each take one.

Joe and Sunee move off to the side, whisper to each other.

Tricia, "You did the operation very well."

Tom, "As good as your Dr. McKenzie?"

Tricia smiles.

Tom, "It's a brilliant technique. Thank you very much. It'll be interesting to meet Dr. McKenzie at the seminar. Is she as dull as her photos look?"

Tricia chokes on her juice.

Tricia, "Actually you'll probably like her."

Tom, "Business only, she reminds me of my boring third grade teacher."

Tricia, "How big are your feet?"

Tom, "Feet?"

Tom drops his head, takes one of Tricia's hands in his, "Yes, well, Tricia, maybe this isn't the best place, but--"

Tricia, "If it isn't the best place, then--"

Tom moves closer, his eyes questioning.

Tricia smiles.

His head leans towards hers.

Lynn, "Tricia!"

Tricia and Tom jolt apart.

* * * * *

Chapter 35 - Blind?

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Lynn marches down the hall.

Lynn, "I want to meet your special doctor. Dr. Adams, pleased to know you. I'm Lynn Baker, director of ESCO."

She shakes Tom's hand in a firm grip, then to Joe.

Joe, "Joe Shaw. Anesthesiologist."

Lynn, "It's so rare to meet two generous doctors like you. ESCO thanks you greatly for helping in our work."

Tricia, "Lynn, please."

Lynn, "Tricia, regrettably some things are beyond our power to control. Relax."

Tricia, "Lynn--"

Lynn, "Tricia's told me so much about you, Dr. Adams. You may have restored the sight of one poor girl--"

Joe, "But for every little girl like Ann, there are a hundred others who need assistance."

Lynn, "Spot on, Joe. I have a list here of those who are in most need."

Lynn displays her folder.

Joe turns to Tom who stares at Tricia.

She shrugs helplessly, fidgets.

Lynn, "If we have the skill of such an eminent surgeon like Dr. Adams--"

Tom, "Sorry Lynn, Tricia, you'll have to seduce another surgeon. Or maybe Tricia can go back to Medical school and become a doctor."

Tom spins on his heel, dashes away, Joe right behind.

Lynn, "Maybe Tricia can go back to--"

Lynn bursts laughing.

Tricia glares at her, races after Tom.

Tricia, "Tom!"

Mat appears around the corner.

Tom zooms past Mat, flings open a door, storms into a broom closet, straight into brooms, mops and buckets.

They fall all over him, scatter.

He scrambles to retrieve them, fumbles, sends them flying.

Mat smirks.

Protective, Tricia glares at an amused Joe and Mat who become poker faced.

Tricia, "Tom, I'll get them."

Thankful but not wanting to show it, Tom nods curtly, opens the adjacent door and disappears inside.

Joe follows into the doctors' preparation room.

Tom hurls his gear into the laundry bag, "You always knew. How could I have been so blind?"

Joe nods, satisfied.

* * * * *

Hallway.

Tricia deposits the last broom in the closet just as Tom bursts out.

He avoids eye contact and hastens to the exit.

Tricia pursues, "Tom!"

Tricia catches up to Tom, runs to keep abreast with him, "Tom, I didn't know Lynn was going to ask you. Please, believe me."

Tom, "So who's turn is it now? Is that all you see in me?"

Stunned, Tricia hesitates.

Tom's eyes are penetrating.

Tricia, "Is that all you see period!"

Tricia walks briskly away.

Confused, Tom flops into a taxi.

Joe joins him.

The taxi speeds off.

* * * * *

Tricia storms down the hall, straight to Lynn and Mat.

Tricia, "Lynn!"

Lynn cocks her head toward Mat, whose smugness oozes.

Mat, "Good to be rid of the arrogant--"

Tricia grabs the painter's brush, slaps yellow paint across Mat's face.

* * * * *

Chapter 36 - Wake up

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Sheraton hotel bar.

Joe commiserates with a semi-inebriated Tom who swigs a beer.

Joe, "Maybe you do need glasses."

Tom, "I've made an absolute ass of myself."

Joe, "Couldn't have done any better. Look, she's in another world and it ain't yours."

Tom, "Oceans apart. And I'm drowning."

Joe, "Hell no, you were drowning. Better to know she just used you than stay deluded. She's lost in her ideals, not in touch with the real world."

Tom, "Real world?"

Joe, "How can a man live on ideals?"

Tom, "Right. Need money for pleasures."

Tom drains his can.

Joe, "Sounds good."

Tom, "But what the hell am I doing? Shit, Joe, I love her."

Joe, "When I'm drunk I love everyone, too. Tricia needs to wake up to reality."

Tom scans many of the designer-clad drinkers' sad faces.

He looks out the window, sees a blind man walk by.

Tom crumples his empty can, "Maybe I need to wake up."

* * * * *

Chapter 37 - How can I?

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Hotel room.

Tom paces as he talks on the phone.

Joe types on his laptop.

Tom, "That's right, Sir."

* * * * *

Washington airport.

Dr. Hall talks on his cell phone, as he and Mrs. Hall sit near the Boarding Gate for Houston.

She reads a business paper.

Dr. Hall, "Well, well, I'm impressed. Learned the procedure from McKenzie's nurse as well as romancing her. All in a few days."

Tom, "As I've said, Sir, if you hire me as the head--"

Dr. Hall, "Tom, are you going to marry her?"

Tom trips, falls over.

Dr. Hall, "Tom?"

Tom, "Yes, uh, well, Sir, I'd like to. But, it's not up to--"

Dr. Hall, "Good, I look forward to seeing you two at the convention."

He hangs up.

Mrs. Hall hands him the paper, "The market says there's a new trend in stocks, Dear."

Interested, Dr. Hall reads the paper.

* * * * *

Tom collapses in a chair, "Joe... How can I ask Tricia to marry me now?"

Exasperated, Joe bangs his head with his hands.

Tom, "She kicked me out of her bedroom and I told her she--"

Joe, "Used you, which of course she did! Buddy, wake up! You're mad to love her."

* * * * *

Chapter 38 - Mad

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Tom and a small shop assistant struggle to lug the Pillory stocks out of the Antique shop, next door to Tricia's guest house.

Joe stands back shaking his head in disbelief, "You're absolutely mad."

Tom, "Yeah, but soon my back'll give way and I'll be mad, crippled and angry at my best friend."

The small assistant gives up, "Too heavy. My helper comes in an hour."

Tom struggles alone.

Reluctant Joe grabs the other end.

* * * * *

Chapter 39 - PLEASE FORGIVE ME!

* * * * *

Houston airport.

People and suitcases everywhere.

Next to a stall selling snacks with a popcorn dispenser, a TV screen displays Tom locked in the stocks in front of Tricia's Guest House.

A sign reads, TRICIA, PLEASE FORGIVE ME!

Dr. and Mrs. Hall exit customs.

Mrs. Hall spots the TV.

She walks over, peers.

It shows Tom's face.

A moment of surprise breaks through her reserve.

Announcer, "And who says stocks aren't exciting? We'll be back in just a moment with some weird news."

The announcer does a commercial with filming Tom staying on a portion of the screen.

Mrs. Hall, "Dear, looks like your star doctor is investing in new stocks."

Dr. Hall stares, shakes his head, "You just might be right about Tom."

Mrs. Hall, "At least we're safe from his popcorn."

A tourist buys a bag of popcorn.

Tricia and Lynn hustle with suitcases from another direction.

Tricia, "He seemed to genuinely want to help Ann. I guess I was wrong."

Lynn, "You've fallen big, haven't you?"

Tricia, "Don't be ridiculous."

Tricia gives her a pained expression.

Perceptive Lynn doesn't buy it, "For the world's best eye surgeons, you guys sure can't see what's in front of your noses. Maybe you could operate on each other's eyes."

They get close to the TV.

Dr. Hall turns around, bumps into the tourist.

Popcorn flies, lands on Mrs. Hall's head.

The tourist and Dr. Hall apologize profusely, scramble to help a pokerfaced Mrs. Hall.

Tricia sees them, quickly takes out a handkerchief, offers it to Mrs. Hall.

Lynn, (to Tricia), "You could try training him."

Thinking Lynn was speaking to Mrs. Hall, an offended Dr. Hall gives Lynn a steely look as Mrs. Hall smiles, takes the handkerchief, mops butter from her face and blouse.

Tricia, (to Lynn), "Impossible."

Mrs. Hall shakes the last popcorn off her head.

Tricia, "Please keep--"

Mrs. Hall, "Thank you, I will because my husband is quite well trained."

She points at the TV, "Pity the woman who tries to train him."

She and Dr. Hall float away.

Dr. Hall, "Did she look familiar?"

Tricia and Lynn see a back shot of Tom, which does not show his face or the sign.

Lynn, "Great, get one of those!"

Tricia, "I wonder if his neck is the same size?"

They laugh.

Lynn motions to the Ladies' room, "That makes me want to pee, do you?"

Tricia shakes her head.

She looks back at the TV as Lynn disappears.

Her eyes bug out as the TV camera pans to show Tom's face and the sign.

Tricia, "Oh, no!"

Announcer, "So, our weirdo story of the day. He says his name is Tom and he's in love with Tricia. Boy, this one wins an award!"

Tricia dashes over near a window, pulls out her phone, watches the TV as she dials.

* * * * *

The guest house receptionist rushes out with a phone, brings it to Tom.

Receptionist, "Tricia's on the phone in Houston."

She holds it next to Tom's head.

Announcer, "Looks like he's going to talk with Tricia. We'll get the mic in close."

The camera crew filming Tom moves in.

Tom, "Tricia?"

Tom is heard in the Airport.

Many people watch.

Tricia, "Tom, what on earth--"

Tom, "Tricia, will you forgive me? I've been an ass."

The airport audience laughs.

More people gather.

Tricia, "Tom..."

Tom, "Please, Tricia, I'm so sorry."

Audience, "Forgive him, Tricia, forgive him."

Tricia, "Yes, of course I forgive you."

Tom, "You will? Great!"

Forgetting he's in the block, Tom tries to rise up with joy, only to wrench his neck.

Tom, "Ow!"

Tricia, "Tom! Are you okay?"

Tom, "Uh, no, can you kiss it and make it feel better?"

Everyone laughs.

Audience, "Do it, Tricia!"

Tricia, "Tom, do you realize you're on TV?"

A burly man viewing the TV, stands near Tricia.

He overhears Tricia, realizes who she is.

Tom, "Okay, let them all be witness: Tricia, will you marry me?"

Tricia's mouth agape.

She plays with her hair.

Tom, "Tricia?"

The burly man races to the crowd, points at Tricia.

Tom, "Tricia?"

The crowd surrounds her.

Audience, "Tricia, marry him!"

Tricia freaks out.

Tom, "You have an audience?"

Tricia, "Tom, I have to go, we'll talk tomorrow."

Tricia hides her head and zips away.

Tom, "I love-- hey, she hung up."

Joe hustles over from an Internet Café, across the street.

He unlocks Tom.

Joe, "Now you're an international idiot. You were on CNN, FOX, ABC, everywhere. Hall probably saw you, too."

Tom, "Uh-oh."

* * * * *

Houston airport.

Lynn exits the Ladies room, looks around, "Tricia? Tricia!"

The burly man passes by.

Burly man, "She's getting married."

Lynn, "Huh?"

* * * * *

Chapter 40 - Maybe he does

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Lynn and Tricia leave the airport building.

Lynn, "Can I be Maid of Honor?"

Tricia, "He'll have to agree on our direction."

Lynn, "If you buy those stocks, that won't be a problem."

They laugh, stride up towards the Taxi area.

Lynn, "He's certainly turning out different to his public reputation."

Tricia, "People can change."

They stop behind Dr. and Mrs. Hall waiting for a taxi.

They overhear the Hall's conversation.

Dr. Hall, "Tom wants the job, doesn't he?"

Mrs. Hall, "It's a bit hard to believe he found a suitable wife in just one week."

Dr. Hall, "Dear, he's smart, handsome and an excellent ophthalmologist. Scoring McKenzie's nurse is brilliant. With that ambition, he'll make senator and, well, maybe more."

Mrs. Hall, "What if this Tricia woman finds out he's marrying her just to get the job?"

Tricia's eyes go wide, her face becomes pale.

Lynn's face turns hard.

A taxi pulls up.

Dr. Hall shrugs as he and Mrs. Hall get in.

Dr. Hall, "Maybe he does love her."

They drive away.

Tricia blankly stares.

Lynn puts her arm around Tricia.

* * * * *

Chapter 41 - Rain falls

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Bustling Houston street.

A "TO HOUSTON AIRPORT" street bus passes by Tom as he ambles aimlessly through the busy night life.

A guitar, playing the same tune when Tom and Tricia danced, breaks his thoughts.

He turns.

A small boy, in scruffy clothes, sits with a blind man playing the guitar.

The boy holds out a cup.

People rush by.

Oblivious to the others on the street, Tom steps toward the blind man and nearly collides with another man.

Man, "Hey, open your eyes, Dude."

Tom, "Sorry!"

Tom smiles, "Yes, Tom, open your eyes."

He puts fifty dollars in the Blind Man's hand.

Joyful, the boy speaks to the man in Spanish.

Surprised, he bows.

Blind man, "Thank you, thank you."

Tom, "I wish I could give you a greater gift of being able to see."

Tom touches the awed boy's head gently, sighs, moves on.

Rain falls.

People head for cover.

Tom walks in the pouring rain.

Totally soaked, he stops, looks across the street, spots the blind man and boy huddled under an awning.

The little boy waves at him.

Tom waves back.

The raindrops cease.

He glances up.

An umbrella.

With another umbrella over his own head, Joe motions to the open door of a taxi.

Tom nods, slides in the taxi.

They drive off.

From the other direction, Tricia meanders, umbrella only, indifferent to being half soaked.

Lynn, head to foot rain gear, races up next to her, "Hey."

Tricia, "It was Dr. Hall, right?"

Lynn, "I checked online."

Tricia, "And?"

Lynn, "Can I lie?"

Tricia, "Just serves me right. Inside I knew he'd never change."

Lynn, "But it's super low to do such a stunt. Don't blame yourself."

Tricia, "Guess I could be flattered Tom chose me."

A ex-hippy, baby boomer couple, grey long hair, hop puddles, laugh, delight in each other and the rain.

Tricia pauses, watches them.

They beam and wave.

Tricia manages a smile.

Lynn, "But what if Dr. Hall's right, maybe Tom really does love you."

Tricia, "Oh Lynn, give it up."

They walk again, reach the Hyatt Hotel entrance.

Tricia, "He loves himself. Just another Paul McKenzie... only worse!"

Tricia walks briskly up the stairs.

Lynn stays on the sidewalk, looks down the street.

She spots the blind man and boy huddled under the awning.

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Chapter 42 - The Seminar

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Hyatt hotel lobby.

Startlingly feminine, Lynn adjusts a sign that reads: McKENZIE ESCO SEMINAR.

Two large, standing billboards display a flattering photo of Tricia and another one of Paul, with their names underneath.

Smartly dressed Tricia enters, does a double take.

Tricia, "Wow, you look great.-- If Paul comes early, I don't want to talk to him."

Lynn, "I'll try to be Paul's total focus."

Tricia, "Thanks. I'm so sorry to burden you with him."

Lynn flips back her hair nonchalantly, "No worries, Luv."

Tricia, "And--"

Lynn, "Tom?"

Tricia, "I don't want to talk to him either."

Lynn sighs sympathetically as downtrodden Tricia walks to the Coffee Lounge.

* * * * *

Taxi.

Traffic jam.

Tom fidgets in a taxi.

Joe lays back, relaxed.

Tom, "I'm sure she'll be there. I'll just take her aside and we'll talk--"

Joe, "What about the seminar? What about Dr. McKenzie?"

Tom, "Screw McKenzie, I couldn't care less about her. I have to talk with Tricia."

Joe, "Just don't blame me when you find out how much more she wants from you."

Tom checks his watch, "We'll be late."

He pays the driver, they hop out and race through cars and people.

Joe, "She's no good for you! Forget her!"

* * * * *

Hyatt hotel.

Dr. Hall exits a taxi, strolls to the entrance.

Tom speeds from behind and bowls Dr. Hall over.

Tom, "Dr. Hall, I'm so sorry."

He and Joe help Dr. Hall up.

Dr. Hall, "I was more hopeful you'd bowl me over with a beautiful Tricia."

Tom, "Yes, uh, yes, Sir."

Dr. Hall, "Did she forgive you?"

Tom, "Huh? Oh, I think so. She said she did."

Dr. Hall, "Tom, if she's McKenzie's assistant and you marry her, you have the job."

Tom, "Yes, uh..."

Dr. Hall, "Something wrong?"

Tom fumbles for words.

Joe slaps him on the back, "Tom's just love-struck, Sir, she's a knock out. He's been knocked out the whole week."

* * * * *

Hotel Lobby.

In a slinky outfit, stunning Sunee holds name tags, standing near Tricia and Paul's signs.

She glances anxiously at the clock as the three enter.

Tom races to Sunee, "Sunee, is Tricia here?"

Sunee, "She's in the Coffee Lounge."

Tom dashes away, not seeing Tricia's sign.

Dr. Hall turns to Joe, "Joe, is Tom really okay?"

Joe spots Tricia's sign.

His mouth's agape.

Dr. Hall, "For that matter, are you okay?"

Dr. Hall follows Joe's startled look and sees Tricia's sign, "She is attractive, isn't she?"

Joe, "Attractive isn't half of her, Sir. I'm sure Tom's very keen to finally meet the famous Dr. McKenzie."

* * * * *

Chapter 43 - Hall's job

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Coffee lounge.

Tricia sits alone, sips water, stares out a window.

Tom enters, looks around, "Tricia!"

She shuts her eyes.

He hurries over, sits, "Tricia, I'm so--"

She cuts him off with a deadly look.

Tom, "Uh-oh."

She smiles, "It's so lovely to see you."

Tom, "Whew, you had me worried there."

Tricia, sarcastic, "Did I? Oh, I'm so sorry."

Tom, "Maybe I should stay worried."

Tricia, "And why would you do that?"

Tom, "Tricia, I don't know what's up, but I love you, I want to marry you."

Tricia, "Sure."

Tom, "Okay, uh, maybe I'm not doing this right."

He gets down on one knee.

Tricia, "Try lower."

He gets on both knees.

Tricia shakes her head.

Tom, "On my face?"

Tricia, "Why not? Anything to further your professional image, right? Even marry to get Dr. Hall's prize job!

Tom's eyes go wide, "Tricia, I--"

Tricia jumps up, pours water over his head and strides away.

Tom races after her, "Tricia, please."

He bumps into a table, sprawls on the floor.

Tricia turns, shakes her head and suppresses a smile, "Why not ask the waitress to dress your wounds?"

He scrambles to his feet, "Tricia, no, I'm sorry, really. I--"

Tricia spins around, heads out the door.

Tom screams, "Tricia! I'm not taking Hall's job."

She halts in the door way, bites her bottom lip as Tom catches up.

Lynn approaches, "Tricia, hurry, it's time. We have to start."

Tricia looks at Tom questioningly.

Tom, "Can we talk more later?"

Softer face, she nods, zips away with Lynn.

Tom spots Joe in the Lobby.

Joe cocks his head.

* * * * *

Chapter 44 - Dr. Patricia McKenzie

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Hotel lobby.

Tom follows Joe to Tricia's sign.

Many people stand in front of Paul's, so Tom doesn't see it.

Tom, "Holy shit."

Joe, "No time for a church bathroom."

Sunee, "Dr. Adams, we're late, please hurry."

She hands bewildered Tom his nametag, checks her list.

Sunee, "Dr. Shaw, you're not--"

Joe, "With it. If only I'd known you'd be here. I better go buy some glasses."

Sunee smiles as Joe reluctantly walks off.

Tom, "Joe."

Joe turns, takes out his balm, throws it to Tom, "Here, you need this more than me."

Joe gives Tom a thumbs up, "Go for gold, buddy."

Dazed, Tom smiles.

Sunee, "Come quickly."

Sunee gives Tom a Goodie bag and rushes him to big doors.

* * * * *

Seminar hall.

Sunee guides him to a front row seat of honor next to Dr. Hall, who takes in Tom's wet hair and shoulders, along with his spaced out face.

Dr. Hall, "No popcorn?"

Tom, "Would you like some balm, Sir?"

Dr. Hall, "You okay, Tom?"

Tom, "I think so.

Dr. Hall, "Is your girlfriend here?"

Tom, "Yes, you'll meet her soon, Sir."

* * * * *

Chapter 45 - Bang

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Off stage.

Tricia and Lynn approach the stage entrance.

Lynn, "He said that!"

Tricia, "Yes."

Lynn hugs Tricia.

Tricia, "But how can I believe him?"

Lynn, "Either he really means it, or he's the biggest jerk in the world.

Tricia, "Oh, Lynn--"

Lynn, "What I can't believe is you never told him who you are."

Tricia, "In between which cyclones?"

Lynn, "Never mind, when he sees you walk out, it's bound to make an impact."

Tricia smiles.

Lynn peeks out the stage door, "We have to start."

Tricia's smile disappears, "But Paul's not here yet. What if Tom misunderstands?"

Lynn, "Don't worry. Talk to him later."

Tricia, "I have to tell Tom now."

Lynn, "Where, on stage? We can't wait any longer, we're already twenty minutes late."

Lynn goes onstage, "Ladies and Gentlemen. Welcome to the McKenzie ESCO seminar."

Tricia sighs deeply, "And Paul loves making grand entrances."

Lynn, "The famous team has given their skills freely to hundreds of operations sponsored by ESCO."

Applause.

Nervous, Tricia peeks out.

Lynn, "Today you will learn about their groundbreaking new procedures and research. I'm sorry to say half of our award-winning team has been delayed in traffic, but we'll start with our famous Ophthalmologist, Dr. Patricia McKenzie."

Professional Tricia approaches the podium.

Applause.

As Tricia's sight reaches Tom, she pauses.

Their eyes meet.

Tom flashes a broad grin, claps louder than everyone.

Tricia's trepidation gives way to a loving smile.

Perfect for a brief moment.

The back doors swing open with a bang.

* * * * *

Chapter 46 - Go, Tricia!

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Paul rushes through with a huge flower bouquet.

Lynn, "And her most charming scientist partner, Dr. Paul McKenzie."

Paul hops on the stage, gives Tricia a big hug and kiss, hands her the bouquet and waves at the clapping audience.

Shattering Tom's world.

A small eternity as Tom stares blankly at Paul waving while he wraps his other arm around Tricia.

Paul again kisses Tricia on the cheek.

Tricia glances awkwardly at Tom.

A myriad of emotions flash across Tom's face.

He springs up, drops his Goodie bag into Dr. Hall's lap.

Dr. Hall, "Tom? What the..."

Tom strides out.

Tricia, "Tom!"

The doors bang shut behind him.

Tricia shoves the flowers into Paul's chest.

Confusion reigns.

Except for Lynn who slides close to Paul.

Tricia jumps off the stage, hurries after Tom.

Lynn, "Go, Tricia!"

Paul looks at Lynn suspiciously.

She gives him a sexy smile.

* * * * *

Chapter 47 - Never!

* * * * *

Tom charges past the reception, out the entrance.

Tricia speeds into the lobby, looks around.

She spots Tom through the windows, hailing a taxi.

Tricia races out, "Tom! Can't you at least say goodbye?"

Tom pauses halfway inside the open taxi door, his bum faces Tricia.

An attendant holds the door ready to shut it.

Tom, "Goodbye."

He flops in.

Tricia, "Don't shut the door!"

The attendant complies.

She slides in next to an angry Tom.

Tricia, "Tom--"

Tom bolts out the other door, dashes off.

Tricia, "Drive next to him."

The taxi runs alongside Tom.

Tricia, "Is that all?"

Tom stops.

Tom, "More? You want to hear more? Okay, here's more. I'm no longer the playboy you met at the beach. Nor the playboy who wooed you in Austin. There!"

He marches off.

Tricia, "And?"

Tom stops.

Tom, "And I didn't want to marry you for Hall's stupid job. I fell in love with you, with who I thought you were before... before ..."

Tricia, "Before?"

Tom, "I didn't care if you were a nurse, a teacher or whatever. I didn't even know you were the famous McKenzie until ten minutes ago! There!"

He zips off.

Tricia, "And?"

Tom stops, "And I wanted to see your enchanting face every day of my life. There!"

His face flushes.

Tricia, "So why are you racing away?"

Tom, "Paul, Paul, Paul! Couldn't you have at least told me?"

Tricia, "I didn't think you'd care."

Tom, "Care? Why shouldn't I care! Never! Never am I going to have an affair with a married woman."

Tricia, "And if you're married, and the woman is single?"

Tom, "No difference, never."

Tricia, "I'm happy to hear you say that."

Tricia gives a truly loving smile, totally bewildering Tom.

Tom, "Great, I made you happy. You drive me nuts."

He speeds away.

Tricia, "Tom."

He keeps stomping along.

Tricia, "Tom."

Exasperated, he halts.

Tom, "Oh, what!"

Tricia, "It's my turn to say, I'm sorry... but there's more to me than you see."

Tom, "Very funny, great, you're sorry you didn't tell me you're married."

Tricia, "No... I am sorry... I didn't... tell you..."

She smiles guiltily.

Tricia, "Paul and I are divorced."

Tom's eyes go wide.

Radiant, Tricia opens the door.

In shock, Tom slowly enters the taxi.

They kiss.

* * * * *

Chapter 48 - Tom & Tricia

* * * * *

Operating theatre.

Tricia and Tom, in surgical gear, look down at a small boy's face.

Tom glances at Tricia, nods.

Tricia refuses, indicates for him to begin.

Tom's eyes smile as he gives the special knife to Tricia.

* * * * *

Hospital hallway.

Tom and Tricia stroll down the hall, holding hands.

Tricia's left hand sparkles with a diamond ring.

They pass by Joe whispering in Sunee's ear.

* * * * *

Hospital entrance.

Tricia and Tom exit.

Ann, in a Mexican dancing outfit, screams with delight as she races from Lucia to Tom who hugs her.

Ann reaches in her bag, hands him a small lacquered box.

* * * * *

The end

About the Author

Thank you for reading "Open your eyes, Dude", one of Steve Weissman's 13 stories now available worldwide. We hope you enjoyed the "journey" with Tricia, Tom, Joe, Lynn, Mat and the other characters.

Steve has been an international Buddhist meditation teacher since 1987. He was a resident teacher at a meditation center in Thailand for 25 years, teaching over 8,000 students from more than 85 countries. He currently lives in Australia, and continues teaching at various centers worldwide.

It was in his early years of teaching that Steve started weaving in entertaining short stories. One of his students commented on how they thought Steve could successfully write a screenplay. At the time Steve had far too much work to consider such a project, and dropped the thought.

Several years later, Steve was contemplating the Buddhist philosophy concerning death in different realms of existence, particularly the higher realms. In those realms, beings are thought to live an extremely long time and may come to believe their existence is permanent. He wondered what it would be like to explain what death is to someone, who had absolutely no knowledge about the aging process or death. These thoughts sparked more thoughts, and three days later, Steve finished his first screenplay draft.

After polishing that script and experimenting with a few more, Steve realized that no one has yet produced a dramatic movie of the Buddha's life for Western audiences. Yes, there are many biographies of the Buddha, but a biography is a biography, and very difficult to create the excitement that movie audiences want.

So, why not write a semi-fictional biography, with the dimension and character of a true "Hero's journey"?

Steve's movie script, "The Great Quest" is that story, which has the potential to become the first Hollywood-level, dramatic movie of the Buddha's life produced for both Western and worldwide audiences. <<http://thegreatquest.net>>

But although "The Great Quest" has made 22 script contest finals, Steve's many attempts to attract producers, directors, actors, agents and managers, has not yet produced fruit.

Understanding more about the film industry, Steve realized that a film of this magnitude - with good directing & acting - could be Oscar-worthy, but it would be very expensive. So he decided to write more scripts that were lower budget, thinking that if one of these would sell, he

might get a better response for "The Great Quest". These scripts have made another 36 finals, and he has now won 7 contests, with dozens more semi & quarterfinals.

But, again, Steve's attempts to attract Hollywood interest, has not yet produced fruit.

So now his thought is - turn the scripts into inexpensive short stories, and see what happens.

Do you have any possible connections with film personnel? If so, would you please pass "Open your eyes, Dude" on to them. Steve will also gladly send all 13 of his stories to anyone who has a genuine interest in turning one or more of these into a film.

And, if you did enjoy this story and would like to help in even a small way, would you please take a few moments to leave a good review at your favorite retailer? More positive reviews will encourage others to read and enjoy it, too.

Thank you very much. You might be that special person who can help "Open your eyes, Dude" and "The Great Quest" become wonderful movies.

More information about Steve's teaching can be found at <<https://rosemary-steve.org>>. And specific film/stories information can be found at <<http://thegreatquest.net/stories.htm>>.

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Steve's 13 stories

The Great Quest

Drama Biopic

Based on the true story of the Buddha: The battles of a Prince who rejects riches and power, risks insanity and death, in a quest to find ultimate freedom.

Imprisoned in the Palace by his father, the time fruits when a naïve Siddhartha awakens to the realities of the world, and escapes in search of a deeper meaning to life. His devious, look-alike, unrelenting alter ego, Mara, presents the greatest obstacle, thwarting Siddhartha at every possible opportunity. Siddhartha also confronts barbaric Brahmin Priests, a war-raging King and evil spirits before he attempts harsh austerities and starvation. Barely escaping madness and death, Siddhartha strengthens himself for his illustrious battle with Mara, when only one will survive.

ISBN 978-0-6487941-0-3

Open Your Eyes, Dude

Romantic Comedy

Relaxing at the beach before a seminar with the world's most renown, yet reclusive eye surgeon, playboy doctor Tom has been given an ultimative - stay a bachelor stuck in his boring job or join an elite group of doctors keen to be in the Senate. However, he has just one week to find a wife who will enhance his public image. When he meets secretive, gentle new-ager Tricia in the surf, she intrigues him and then escapes his advances before he can discover more. He follows her but confronts the scheming tricks of a jealous neurosurgeon, and his own selfish ways. Finally he seduces her for one night, and actually finds that he is falling in love with her. But what happens when she discovers his original motivation?

ISBN 978-0-6488482-5-7

Barred Engagement

Crime Thriller, Romance

Travis and Janie are lovers from high school, engaged to be married, with her father welcoming Travis more than his own son. But when they find out Travis has a different real last name, all hell breaks loose. With her father threatening to kill Travis if they tried to marry, Janie cancels the marriage to save Travis, but he won't give up that easily. Despite the danger, a resolute Travis must fight not only for his love, but for his life. And little did he expect to find out how Janie's father was connected to his parent's deaths.

ISBN 978-0-6487941-8-9

Love, Mysterious

Fantasy Romantic Comedy

Cupid's top marriage agent from who-knows-where, Kolby has a massive problem. His job – and Cupid's life - are on the line unless Kolby can fulfill the hardest of all assignments! Rumor has it the couple were Romeo & Juliet, Anthony & Cleopatra, plus believe it or not - Adam & Eve. But when there's a time limit on the love arrow's potion, things don't always work out the way you'd like. He shot the greatest two soul mates as little kids, but the girl was born to the wrong parents and moved halfway around the world. Kolby must get them back together and make sure they stay that way. He's in a race against time to save Cupid and Love on Earth. And if that wasn't enough, he also struggles with another love agenda of his own.

ISBN 978-0-6487941-6-5

Mick, a kid who fought

Coming-of-age Drama

Brought up by an immigrant Polish father who never "stirs a tiger", quiet Mick shies away from any confrontation, even when he's denied his well earned High School award with a desperately needed scholarship by a jealous teacher. Yet after the girl he loves calls him a loser, Mick chooses to identify with his freedom fighting grandfather who died rocking too many boats. Will Mick learn to fight against bullies and win back his love, or will his father prevent him?

ISBN 978-0-6488482-3-3

Vicki in Viewland

Fantasy Adventure Animation Comedy Spoof

ALICE IN WONDERLAND meets THE WIZARD OF OZ in the land of foolish views.

A 13-year-old's crush on the paper boy has her falling head over heels, landing in the fantasy world of Viewland where the vicious President labels her a terrorist and tries to annihilate her. Aided by a five foot tall Bluejay and Count Alf the Fourteenth, she confronts foolish view after view until she must defeat the President in order to return home. Yet is the President the only one she must battle? Or is there someone more ominous who awaits her?

ISBN 978-0-6488482-7-1

For Life

Drama

For years Taylor, the president of a leading euthanasia group, has pumped all his energy and drive into his "mission". But now he must confront the reality of his own mother's illness and face-off with his estranged anti-euthanasia daughter, who holds power of attorney and medical decisions for her grandmother. Fearing the worst of her hated father, she does what she can to stop Taylor, yet his buddies also come knocking on her grandmother's door. Meanwhile Taylor's incestuous sister-in-law plays her sexual games and plans what to do with her share of the inheritance.

ISBN 978-0-6487941-7-2

Security Act 2070

Thriller Drama Sci-fi

Sixty years in the future, materialism reigns supreme in America, "One nation under Money". Those who protest the accepted creed are declared fanatical enemies of the State. After losing his parents and his love, the death of his brother tips Buddy over the edge into the "disease" which pits him against the culture. Swiftly suppressing his protest, the authorities commit him to a mental hospital where a doctor seeks a live specimen for research.

ISBN 978-0-6488482-1-9

Get Updated, System's Archaic

Coming-of-age Dramedy

Ken and Aaron's childhood sibling rivalry continues as adults. Though Aaron tries to make it good, even saving Ken's life, Ken's hatred stays. When Aaron shows up for a family reunion with Rahula, a half-Asian adopted son, Ken's prejudice grows, and multiplies a hundred-fold

when Rahula and Ken's daughter fall for each other. Can the past be healed or will the reunion tear the family further apart?

ISBN 978-0-6488482-0-2

The Kalama Awakening

Cult Drama

On a spiritual quest, young naive Julie's longing for freedom and devotion makes her an easy target for a cult Guru's lust and her boyfriend's willingness to trade her for power and fame. Isolated and drugged, she ends up in a nightmare of betrayal and manipulation, yet resists being brainwashed into submission and becoming the Guru's sex slave. Sage, an ex-devotee, knows the evils that await and risks his life to rescue her. Yet he also becomes caught in the Guru's web and it's up to Julie whether she can save both of them.

ISBN 978-0-6488482-6-4

Leaves fall

Fantasy Dramey

In a world where soulmates meet, an inept fellow has failed constantly for over 300 years. Even when his true love appears, rather than being ecstatic to see him, she yearns for her past life as a celibate nun. Clever, quick and breaking the rules, she outfoxes mating attempts, not realizing that they are an eternal pair. So what happens when a ninety year old nun, celibate all her life, dies and is spontaneously reborn as a young beautiful woman in a world where everyone meets their true mate?

ISBN 978-0-6488482-2-6

Another Chance

Drama Thriller

Brad, a star High School quarterback/Valedictorian, turns bad, becoming a local drug lord. Despite his wrong ways, he longs for the approval of his virtuous father. When Brad finally entices his father into his nightmare world, a surprised and shocked Brad watches his Dad out perform his own evil ways. When he awakens from his hell, he tries to reform and plans to marry a homely, innocent Librarian whom he truly loves - but will his fate allow this?

ISBN 978-0-6488482-4-0

The Burden of Angels

Fantasy Comedy Short

God warns goofy Humphrey, he's on the verge of failing Angel School when an elite class of angels head to earth to help major catastrophes, yet poor Humphrey plans to aid just one man who lost a piece of paper.

ISBN 978-0-6488482-9-5