

Tuesday April 2 1974: Chicago

Candace knew only too well what men like Bill Holden had in mind when they said they *needed to talk*, especially when the talking was scheduled for the Departures lounge at O'Hare with a bottle of cheap Italian fizz for company. All she cared about was getting in first. She found the bar, picked him out and crossed the room before he spotted her. She stopped him getting up with a hand raised like a traffic cop, no physical contact thank you. She could see he was all set to break it to her gently, his hand poised and his eyes all dewy as if the situation was hard for him too. *Laughable.*

"It's perfectly all right Bill," she said in the tone reserved for malingerers at the clinic, "I want out of this mess much more than you do."

She'd thought of standing him up but in the end decided to come conspicuously over dressed with heels and make-up to remind him of what he was missing. The

jarring contrast between how she looked and how she sounded took the wind out of his sails and he gaped, his plan in ruins.

"Really - - "

"Yes really," she said swiftly, "so no rationalizations thank you. I've got too many of my own."

She couldn't even summon the cliché about it being fun while it lasted because it hadn't been, but most of all she dreaded him saying it'd been *complicated*. It wasn't, it was dead simple, and the word had taken on a whole new charge since she'd found Annie's card. Like Harry Kaplan told her, complicated meant somebody else's husband - - infidelity, lies, and betrayal. She couldn't imagine Annie being any more comfortable playing the other woman than she'd been, although neither of them was immune to the frisson of forbidden fruit. Nobody was, unless they'd been locked away in a convent. She'd even succumbed with the sorry instance of masculinity across the table, although it was easy imagining *him* scuttling home to his wife.

"Well, Candy - - " he said fiddling with his glass.

"Don't call me that," she hissed stifling an urge to send it flying. "I told you before."

"Sure, sure, sorry - - "

"Just don't do it." It made her want to pin him to a specimen board like a moth.

"I won't."

He wasn't going to get another chance.

She studied him anew, taking in the middle-aged spread she'd once seen as *robust* and the come-hither macho look that was no better than a barroom leer, and marvelled at her poor judgement. It had all been so damned corny, meeting in a bar and already the worse for wear. Mom had died a few weeks before and she'd been suffering from grief and guilt. She'd had to deal with Dad and Marie Claire too - - whoever said funerals *rounded things off*? And that particular night she'd postponed sorting out the house. The attic and Annie's trunk had been preying on her mind and one drink seemed harmless enough. She'd told herself she was entitled to a break from reality but hadn't planned on ending up in bed with a stranger. She couldn't even remember it and the rest had followed like a bad script. It didn't deserve to be called an affair.

My God. Enough already.

"Right, I'm out of here." She pushed her glass across the table, slopping the wine. "Celebrate on your own."

He struggled to his feet and she eyed his waistline.

"And by the way Bill, a word of professional advice: get your wife to put you on a diet or she's going to lose you."

He gaped some more and she pointedly put a hand on her chest and said "and I'm not talking about another woman." With that she turned on her heel and headed for the El. Swarms of people were going the same way and it felt as if she was floating on a tide of humanity - - and in the same direction for a change. She was light-headed, relieved, liberated, but also pricked by a bad conscience: he'd been such easy meat but she'd enjoyed making him squirm. Had he deserved it? Probably, but it still felt a tad gratuitous.

But the more she thought about it the more she figured Annie would've trashed him and not given it a second thought. She had been the ruthless one, Mom had always said so - - which was the other reason Candace was feeling better than she had for years - - she'd finally

made up her mind to confront the past. She'd talked to H el ene long distance and they'd decided she should hire a private detective. Now they knew there'd been "SOMEONE" in Annie's life, and no matter how long ago they had to find out who.

It was amazing what a decision could do to your morale and *weird* how coincidences happened. Standing on the platform ahead of her was none other than that same private detective, Harry Kaplan, wearing a very handsome flying jacket with the fur collar turned up. She nearly called out his name and virtually skipped over to him.

"Dr Fayol," he said, clearly taken aback, "what are you doing here?"

Her mind went blank. "Seeing off my aunt. She lives in Montreal." *Idiot:* the man was a private detective and used to seeing through lies. "Sort of an aunt anyway, she shuttles between Montreal and Paris." She babbled on: "Rags to riches, literally, she's in the lingerie business. Anyhow please call me Candace. Dr Fayol sounds like you're my patient when actually it's the other way round. That's a great jacket by the way."

"Memento from Long Island."

"Sal told me you'd been. I called the office this morning."

"Anything she couldn't handle?"

"No. I was just touching base."

"She's booked me on a flight to Cameroon tomorrow via Manchester. I'm going to pick up the tickets from her now." He glanced at his watch.

"You don't hang about."

"It's your money - - "

"You don't have to rush for that."

"I'm not. It's just the way the case is going."

Why did she feel let down? She'd only just hired him and somehow she'd imagined them covering the ground together. She still had some of Annie's stuff to go through. "Who's in Manchester?"

"Ronald Uttley: the guy fooling around under the net of bananas."

She nodded. "So the Ice Maiden was useful, was she, Eleanor What's-her-name?"

"Eileen O'Connell. Yeah, she gave me some contacts and a couple of possible candidates: the suave black guy at the café, and the thickset man on the riverbank." He took two photos out of his pocket. "These guys."

"I remember them - - " They'd caught her eye, very different but both oozing macho self-confidence. "What's O'Connell like?"

"No ice on show, charm itself."

"Really?" She frowned: women normally gave Dad their best smile. "I'm surprised."

"She's a woman of many parts."

"A fake you mean?"

A train was coming up the track and he took her by the elbow. "There's a bar down here," he said. "We can't talk on the El."

His grip was firm but gentle and she didn't shake him off. "Is something wrong?"

"I don't know yet."

He eased her through the crowd into a bar, an ersatz western saloon with double doors, polished wood, stuffed bison heads and wagon wheels. The girls behind the bar were

wearing suede leather skirts and vests with fringes. Sounded like Patsy Kline on the jukebox, all broken hearts and deserted women, the sort of place she'd normally avoid like the plague.

"Sorry to drag you in here," he said as if he'd picked up her vibe, "but we need to talk."

"Fine." An unfortunate phrase but how was he to know? She headed for an empty booth and smoothed her skirt before sitting down.

"Drink?" He seemed on edge.

"I get the feeling it's time for something strong." She smiled. "On expenses of course. Bourbon, on the rocks."

He nodded and she watched him cross the room. *Damn:* *Bourbon*, the family poison - - what was she thinking? She was jumpy now: was it just him or what he'd found out? Either way she was glad she'd dressed up; Bill had his uses after all. She stole a quick look in her make-up mirror and then studied the Frederick Remington print pasted onto the booth wall. The Fifth cavalry was arriving in the nick of time to save a plucky family of homesteaders from a circling pack of heathen Sioux and she half expected there to be some blond damsel tied to a stake.

It was exasperating: what chance had the future got when the past was doled out like this? Guys like Remington, Hollywood and TV, were all wielding the power of image to the wrong effect, no better than propaganda. She knew that line about art and propaganda, but there had to be a difference.

She looked up as Harry came back from the bar.

"Here we go," he said putting down a tray with two glasses and a bowl of peanuts.

"Thanks." A double: the glass was cold and heavy, the bourbon matching the colour of the pine table.

"Good health," he said and clinked her glass.

"Well?"

"I'm sorry, but I didn't expect to run into you like this."

"Nor did I."

"Maybe it's all for the good. I was going to call but it's better to talk face to face."

"What is?" She tried to quell a flutter in her stomach and watched him gather his thoughts. What Mom used to call a pregnant pause. She knew it wasn't fair but it always sounded like a jibe about her not having grandchildren.

"Well for a start," he was saying, "like I said, there's a lot more to Eileen O'Connell than meets the eye." He swilled his drink round. "She didn't hide the fact that she and your sister didn't hit it off."

"Annie didn't hit it off with most women. She was too busy making it in a man's world and they didn't like it. They either felt guilty for not being the same or resentful and things haven't changed that much I can tell you."

He nodded as if he understood. "Eileen O'Connell would agree with you. Somewhere else they might've got on but Douala was too small a pond for them both."

"Annie didn't give in to anybody. She was tough and always got her own way."

"O'Connell thought she was reckless."

"She was doing a risky job - - "

"Right, but you said she used her looks to get stories and she was with the guy the night she died - - "

"I told you she wouldn't have gone skinny dipping on her own."

"Right, that's my point. Skinny dipping with a guy she'd only just met is reckless."

She felt cornered and the flutter got close to panic. "What are you saying?"

"Nothing yet." He drained his glass. "It's what happens in a new case. The assumptions get thrown in the air."

"What assumptions?"

He shrugged. "Who was there and what happened. Eileen O'Connell reckoned Annie was on her own despite the gossip about her and those two guys. She figured your sister had a rendezvous but the guy never showed."

"Well, I think he did."

He nodded. "That's why I'm keeping an open mind about how she died."

Now panic gripped her. "You mean it wasn't an accident."

A dam burst and the words leapt out at her as if they'd been waiting for the chance. *Somebody killed her.* She'd always suspected something but had only managed to utter the words out loud over her mother's open coffin in the chapel of rest, muted like the whisper of dry leaves, but now they were deafening as if she was trapped in a bell tower.

"I've got to consider it," he said.

She took a swig and the bourbon hit her stomach and radiated in every direction. A thought raced through her mind: she'd been waiting for this situation for years without having the slightest idea where it would come from. Now she knew.

"How?" she asked.

He didn't have to say anything. The slightest movement of his head was enough to fill her mind with a kaleidoscope of horror.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I have to check out all the possibilities."

He was trying to pacify her. "It's not your fault - - "

Fault: the word caught in her throat. It was *somebody's* fault for God's sake - - blood pounded in her ears, waves were crashing on a shore and somebody was tearing at a skirt - - - a scream ripped through the night. *Annie:* a hand reached up before disappearing below the surface of the water.

Suddenly she was trembling uncontrollably. She threw off the rest of her drink.

"It's only one scenario," he said, getting up, "I just need to get out there and poke around a bit."

"It's better knowing," she said, her head swimming. "A whole lot better."

But she didn't know what she was saying: it *wasn't* a whole lot better. The pictures of Annie at the beach wouldn't let her alone. She looked up: he was shaking her hand and saying something about staying in touch.

"You've got to find him," she said grabbing at his arm. "It's the only way."