

Look After Each Other



Marilyn L Rice

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About the Author

Marilyn L. Rice

She was born in 1951 at Chilwell in Nottinghamshire. Her father and paternal grandfather were farmers. Her earliest childhood memories are of Syerston, the Nottinghamshire village where she and her parents lived until just after her ninth birthday. In 1960, her father took up the position of farm manager on a Derbyshire country estate. She drew upon these early life experiences when writing *Time & Tide*, her first published book.

She was educated at Lady Manners Grammar School, Bakewell. In 1969, she went to the Crewe College of Education, where she studied Divinity and Literature and qualified as a teacher in 1972. She spent a further year at the University of Keele and graduated in 1973. Her teaching career began at the Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Atherstone. In 1974, she became head of Religious Studies at the Oldbury High School in Sandwell and spent the rest of her teaching years in Sandwell, taking early retirement in 1993.

She has always believed in living life to the full and making the most of every moment and opportunity. Her numerous part-time employments include bar work, market researcher, census officer, shop assistant, and travel rep. Her personal life has been a roller-coaster ride of tragedies and magical moments—all of which have given her much experience and information for her novels.

She has settled in the West Midlands and now lives in West Bromwich, spending her time enjoying her main hobby of writing. *Look After Each Other* is her fourth work.

Her other novels are:

Time & Tide

No Regrets

Stay In Touch

Acknowledgements

The acknowledgements are in some ways harder to do than writing the book. Novels evolve from ideas and experiences, from comments and people. There is always the danger of leaving out someone who has made a significant contribution.

The one person who has always guided and supported me throughout my life is my father. I thank him for giving me the inspiration for this book. Daddy, you are the best, and I will always love you

I would also like to thank all of you who have read my previous books, encouraged me with glowing comments, and ordered this one before I had even started writing it. As a self-published writer and not a mainstream author, your kind words are very much appreciated and spur me on.

There are individuals who have “the gift” and spend their time as mediums or clairvoyants, communicating with those who have already passed over. They are a great source of comfort to people who want to contact the departed and help them, particularly when grieving, to move on with their own lives. Some scoff at the idea of an afterlife; that is their privilege. However, on behalf of all of us who have visited mediums and gained information that has helped guide us through life, I would like to thank these special people, and in particular, John Barber and Robert Cooper.

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Part of the fun in writing is creating characters and playing with their lives. Where else can you kill someone you are tired of and get away with it? In this book, all of the characters are

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my creations except one. I am indebted to Savvas Pavlikkas for the inspiration and creation of the surgeon, Charles Urquart-Latterley (known to his friends as C.U. Later), and for allowing me to use him in this book. Thank you, Savvas.

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Chapter One

June 24th, 2004

There's a reason for everything. Nothing happens by chance, Sofia thought. She looked around the room. Still the plain whitewashed walls, a light brown patterned carpet, the dark brown two-seater settee where she sat waiting, and a matching chair opposite her next to the coffee table. A tape recorder, a selection of blank tapes, and several candles were on the table. Nothing had changed since her last visit two years ago. The sunlight filtered in through venetian blinds at the small window; there were no curtains. Two candles were burning, and the sweet aroma of relaxing sandalwood and citrus reached her nostrils—just right for that summer afternoon. It was a small back bedroom in a West Bridgford semi, but it served its purpose. This was a suburb of Nottingham; the city famous for its lace, castle, Sherwood Forest, and the legendary Robin Hood.

Sofia wondered what she would hear today. What did the future hold for her? Was there any escape from her mundane lifestyle? Would things improve? But then, what does the future hold for any of us? It was a hot, still, June afternoon when every sound seemed to be accentuated. Through the open window, she could hear traffic noise from the nearby town center; it was interspersed with a neighbor's dog barking and the unmistakable sound of a lawnmower. All of this faded slightly as jet engines roared above. A plane had taken off from the East Midlands airport; it was heading for the clear blue skies and on to foreign shores.

Life went on outside as she was about to hear her destiny, what fate had in store for her for the next two or three years, from John Taylor, the highly respected clairvoyant and medium, or JT, as she fondly called him. He claimed a 95 percent accuracy in his readings and that they were usually two to three year into the future, although timing for any event was always the

most difficult to predict. She had been having regular sittings for almost ten years and was always amazed at his predictions. She felt that he or the spirits were guiding her through this life and for that, she was eternally grateful.

JT sat opposite her, looking relaxed and cool, wearing denim jeans, sandals, and a Notts County T-shirt. That infuriated her. He should be a forest supporter like her father. John was middle-aged, medium build, with a mass of blond hair that any female would die for. His dark blue eyes were a prominent feature of his small round face. A long beard and moustache hid most of his visage, but more important, for him it hid the scars that were a reminder of an awful car accident and his near-death experience, which had resulted in him having “the gift.” Some scoffed at his claim to communicate with the other side, but she knew from personal experience that JT genuinely had the ability to communicate with the spirit world.

He was preparing for the sitting, eyes closed and mentally tuning into the other world. She inhaled the citrus and sandalwood, still aware of the lawnmower and hoping the neighbor had a small lawn. When ready he looked across at her, initially captivated by her natural beauty. She was one of Nottingham’s finest: tall, slim, late-twenties or early-thirties, dark shoulder-length straight hair with middle parting and a fringe in proportion to her long face. She had brown eyes, natural rosy cheeks, and deep, full lips. She wore no makeup or perfume. Her only accessories were a silver cross and chain, wedding ring, and watch. She was wearing a long, plain tan/orangey dress with short sleeves, buttons down the front, and a belt. Her cream sling-back low-heeled sandals were the perfect match. She reminded him of a pretty porcelain doll, looking so demure, seated with her hands resting on her lap, showing neatly manicured nails at the end of long fingers perfect for playing the piano. Her feet were firmly together on the floor. Only her ankles were visible beneath her dress. She wore no stockings. Her torso was neatly in the *S* position on the left-hand side of his sofa with her cream leather bag next to her.

“Nice to see you again. You know how this works.” His voice sounded angelic, soft, and soothing, unusual for a man.

“Yes, just say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ but do not give any information.”

“How long has it been since your last reading?”

“2002, January. Just over two years.”

“Things working out well?”

“Okay I guess.” She made a poor attempt at a smile. “It was as you said. Obviously, I can’t tell you until after the reading.” She, too, had a soft voice but spoke as if she had come top of the class in elocution lessons. Everything about this woman said “class.”

“You’ve got the hang of this. Well, I see a lot of people and I can’t remember what I’ve said before. I remember you as an individual, and I know you spiritually. Ready?”

“Yes.”

He switched on the tape recorder just as another jet could be heard heading for the skies.

“I hope that doesn’t spoil it.”

“It won’t. Trust me.” He closed his eyes. As we come to this moment in time in spirit, I’m getting a lovely blue aura around you, and that means someone close to you who’s died is coming through. It’s a lady. I’m getting the letter ‘B’ Brenda. It’s your mother. Is your mother in spirit?”

“Yes.”

“She’s telling you that you should not have given up your career as a nurse. Housewife, mother, and Women’s Institute meetings are not enough for you. Were you a nurse?” He asked almost in disbelief. She did not look the type to him, and he had no recollection of that fact from previous sittings.

“Yes.”

“She was taken into spirit early in life, wasn’t she? It was illness. I’m getting cancer, bowel, no breast cancer.”

“Yes.”

“How old was she? Forty-two?”

“Yes.”

“She definitely wants you to go back to work or take up a new interest, something that will give you a new lease of life. You’ll be happier then. You’re not happy now, are you?”

Sofia sighed and put her hand to her head. She knew she ought to be happy with her lot in life—a husband who earned a

large salary and two lovely children. There were many women who would swap places without a second thought, but her mother was right, she was not happy; she was dissatisfied. Something was definitely missing and had been for some time. She hoped that today she would receive the answer and guidance she so desperately needed to move forward.

“Are you going to Greece for your holiday this year?” JT had moved on, possibly sensing her answer.

“No. Cyprus. Why?”

“Well, they’re showing me the Acropolis. I’ll leave it with you as something for the future. Do you understand that?”

“Yes.”

“I’m getting the name Donald.”

“Donald. My husband’s twin brother.”

“Your brother-in-law?”

“Yes. Is he dead?” Sofia’s eyes widened. She had not seen him since the weekend.

“No, he’s downstairs, but there’s a strong attraction between you. The spirits are giving you a warning. Be careful with him or it will end in disaster. Have I told you before that you have an Indian spirit guide?”

“Yes. Is he my parking angel as well?”

This comment caused JT to open his eyes and smile, just as the neighbor stopped mowing his lawn and another plane flew overhead. “Parking angel? Are you one of these people who ask for a parking space?”

“Yes and it usually works.”

“I’m sure it does. Do you do the Lottery?” He closed his eyes again.

“No. Why?”

“There’s some money coming to you in the near future. They’re showing me a large wad of cash. Does the number 5 mean anything now? Can you take it now or in the future?”

“My house number is 5.”

“That’s not it. They’re saying it’s a date, something will happen on the fifth in the future. Anyone getting married?”

“Neighbor’s daughter.”

“Maybe. Is it on the fifth?”

“I don’t know.”

“Have you ever worked in a shop?”

“No. Never. Why?”

“You’d be good with your own business. Perhaps you should start up one. They’re suggesting hairdressing and beauty salon. You need something else in your life. Have I told you that before?”

He had, but the comment made her think about her husband. She knew that he would never allow it or would make her life so miserable that she would inevitably give up whatever she started. Then she would see that silly smirk on his face. Once again he had won, scored another victory over her, and she would be back to square one and even more depressed than before. He had persuaded her to give up nursing after the birth of the twins. His flourishing and lucrative career meant that there was no need for her to work, and for the last eight years he had been controlling her. His favorite comment was that her purpose in life was to look after him, the home, and their children. He was not a “new” man but a traditionalist who considered a wife to be a possession owned by her husband, whom she must always obey.

Her self-esteem had reached an all-time low. At the back of her mind, she recalled JT telling her about her husband’s domineering nature about four years ago and that she should do something about her life, but she had not heeded the warning. She should have gone back to nursing or started a new career as soon as the twins started school, but now it was too late. She had allowed herself to become a victim, a downtrodden, dominated housewife with no real identity of her own, just an extension of her husband—someone he could manipulate and use as he desired. She was the perfect hostess when he wanted to entertain his colleagues and the perfect accessory for social functions. Somehow, she had become isolated from her friends. Before her marriage, she had been a real party animal, full of life and fun, with a large circle of friends from her school days, church, time at university, and work.

“It’s not too late. They’re telling me. You just need to take control. The spirit world will help you. Do you understand that?”

“I haven’t worked since the last century. Who’d employ me now?”

“There are schemes and help available, but you have to take the first step. Do you understand me? You make the first move and everything will fall into place. You’re a people person. You miss communicating, they’re telling me. You care, like helping people and being with people. You need more than the monthly Women’s Institute, shopping, and the school run. Do you take part in school activities? PTA? Do you live in Coventry?”

“No to all three questions. Wollaton. Why?”

“They’re showing me Lady Godiva and Coventry Cathedral as something in the future.”

“Maybe, we’ll take the children over this summer.”

“Do you go to church regularly?”

“No. Why?”

“They’re telling me that you used to. You were an active member of the congregation.”

“That’s right. Like most things, it was before the children were born.”

“You still say your prayers, though.”

“Yes.”

“They’ve heard you. Never underestimate the power of prayer. You’re asking for a change in your life and that’s why you’re here today. They’re showing me the Book of Exodus in the Bible. I don’t know why. I’m getting something else. It’s the letter D, the name, Derek. Your husband. Is that right?”

“Yes.”

“He’s had a promotion at work.”

“Yes. You told me he would the last time I was here. And as usual, you were right.”

“About a year ago and he’s been unbearable since then, they’re telling me; the new power has gone to his head. Is he really happy?”

“What makes you ask that?”

“At the hospital when people complain or moan, they call them “Derekisms” after him, because he’s always finding fault. He’s not your typical doctor, is he? No real bedside manner and his misery has rubbed off on you. You used to be a much happier person before you married him. You need to find your old self again.”

“Since he became a consultant, Mr. D. Haslington, FRCS, as opposed to a senior registrar, he’s been like a dictator, a complete tyrant and you’re right, he’s always complaining. I hadn’t realized before. I guess I’ve become so accustomed to it that it just seems natural.”

“They’re showing me what he’s like at work. I can see his face. When did he last smile? He wears gold-framed half-moon glasses and walks around with his collar permanently up on his white lab coat. He always wears a dark suit and a bowtie for work. Is he really in cardiology?” John’s angelic voice rose as if surprised.

“Yes.”

JT laughed. “A heart specialist without a heart. He’s devoid of all emotion; a hard man. They’re giving me the number 5 again, as to something in the future. Who’s Barbara?”

“Mum’s sister.”

“She’s in spirit, isn’t she, and she’s around you. You’re lucky you have quite a lot of women upstairs looking after you. I’m not saying they’re all around you all of the time, but they’re helping you to cope and they’re telling me there’s light at the end of the tunnel.”

“That’s reassuring.”

“Did Barbara play the piano?”

“Yes.”

“She was talented and so are you. They’re telling me that you should learn to play the piano. You’re a natural.”

“You’ve told me that before. I started lessons, but Derek moaned it was a waste of money for me, and so I stopped. We have a piano in the drawing room. He plays occasionally and the children have lessons. . . .”

“But not you. He’s controlling you. He doesn’t know you’re here, does he?”

“No. He’d have a fit if he knew. He thinks I go shopping on a Thursday afternoon.”

“They’re telling me that you need to sort your life out. They want you, and so do I, to have some fun. Get the sparkle back into your life. Make some new friends. Have you thought about voluntary work? Get out of the house more. Is there a park near you? I’m getting open space and a lake.”

“Yes. Wollaton.”

“Of course. Just go for walks by yourself. You need to relax more. Take up meditation. Join some clubs. Make new friends. Get a social life. Is your father in spirit? I get mum in spirit as I’ve said before, and she’s concerned about you. I get your father in . . . oh, no . . . they’re showing him to me now and telling me that he’s downstairs and lives with you in a flat in your attic rooms. They’re laughing about it. Is that right?”

“It certainly is.” That brought a smile to her face, and she laughed just as another plane flew overhead, a car alarm was activated, and the citrus candle died a natural death.

“He’s a real comedian. Always up to tricks and makes sure you’re all aware of his presence. But he certainly cares about you, which is why he decided to live with you; he wants to look after you. He doesn’t like the way Derek treats you. He’s a laid-back type of man. I can see him smiling, and he wants you to smile more like you used to. He’s told you that, hasn’t he?”

“He certainly has, and Derek knows he’s met his match with his father-in-law. My father is the one person he has no control over.”

JT carried on. “He’s been a big influence in your life. You could not have wanted for a better dad; he certainly loves you and his grandchildren. He likes a drink, gets on with everybody, and he’s a sportsman: likes cricket and football. Was he a pub landlord before he retired? Does he call you Sweet Pea?”

“Yes he ran a pub and yes, my initials were SP. Sofia Pemberton. SP somehow became Sweet Pea.”

“Who’s Miranda?”

“My sister-in-law.”

“She doesn’t like you, does she?”

“I don’t think so, but we used to be such friends. I don’t know why things have changed.”

“They’re telling me she’s a jealous woman who always wants what other people have. She wants Derek.”

“Why?”

“She thinks he’s more handsome, intelligent, and earns more money. You have an easier life than she does. You’re more attractive than she is. You could have been a model, you know. She’s not very tall and slightly stocky build . . .”

“What?” Sofia raised her eyebrows in total disbelief. “Derek and Donald are identical twins.”

“But Donald isn’t a consultant, is he?”

“No.”

“They’re telling me he’s a brickie. Is that right?” JT was amazed at that information.

“That’s correct. He’s a builder and works for a large company.”

“Miranda likes money and spending it. He doesn’t provide enough for her. She has to go out to work and would prefer your life style. She hates her job as a physiotherapist.”

“Really? Perhaps she should retrain or spend a long period of time with Derek.” The new word *Derekism* kept going through her mind, and all she could think about was his perpetual moaning. She had not been aware of it before, but as soon as someone points something out it suddenly seems obvious, and she wondered why she had not realized earlier. Why had she tolerated his moaning and domineering attitude for so long? In fact, why had she married him? Oh yes, it was the old story, but without the fairy-tale ending. He was a doctor and she was a nurse. She had fallen in love with him or rather in love with who he was ten years ago, when he had shown the loving, caring, and compassionate side of his nature that his children still witnessed; but for about the last six years, she had seen the other side of his character. He was a true Gemini; a real Jekyll-and-Hyde man.

Her first reading with JT had been just before her marriage; he had warned her of storm clouds ahead as opposed to a rosy

future and predicted the birth of twins and that it would be a boy and girl before the scan. She had ignored his warning and gone ahead with the marriage, mainly because she was pregnant. As a popular and attractive nurse in her twenties, she could have had her choice of doctors, but the dashing Dr. Derek was the one who had captured her heart. She had let her heart rule her head when they made love without taking precautions, and she had not thought to take the morning-after pill, much to her later embarrassment. How could she, a nurse, have made such a mistake? JT brought her back to reality.

“They’re telling me that you’re not to let her get to you. Has she got children of her own?”

“Who?”

“Your sister-in-law.”

“Oh, no.”

“They’re telling me she’s infertile and can’t have any. That’s another reason she’s jealous. She thinks your life’s a breeze. You like reading, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“You like to escape from reality by burying your head in a book; that’s not the answer. The twins, how old are they? Eight.”

“Yes.”

“I’m getting a girl and a boy, Susan, no Sophie?”

“Yes. After me.”

“She looks like you as well, long dark hair, rosy cheeks, and brown eyes. She loves animals and wants a puppy.”

“Yes, she does. The answer is firmly, no. Animals need looking after and I know my daughter well enough to know that I’ll be the one looking after it.”

“That might not be a bad thing. Another interest would get you out of the house. Sophie’s brilliant at math and English. Always top of the class. Her brother doesn’t like that.”

“No, close as they are, there’s a healthy competition between them at school.”

“Donald. Donny?”

“Yes. We named him after my brother-in-law and call him Donny to avoid confusion.”

“He’s good at science and takes after his father. He wants to be a doctor. You must have been young when you had the twins. You’re not very old now. What, late twenties?”

“I’m thirty-six, a Leo, born August sixteenth, 1967. I’m a child of the sixties, born during the population boom.”

There was silence. For the first time ever, JT did not know what to say. He could not believe the information, and there was no way he could tell her what he was seeing.

“Well, they know when you were born, and now they’re asking me if you want to know when you’re going to die.”

“We’ve mentioned this before. You know death holds no fear for me, but I’d like to know when and how.”

“Are you sure? It’s your responsibility if you want to know, and there’s no guarantee that it’ll be right. I can only go on what they’re telling me today.”

“Yes.” She was positive. “Am I going to live to a ripe old age and see my great-grandchildren?”

It was hard to tell in the sunlight, but she was sure John had suddenly gone pale.

“The short answer, they’re telling me is ‘No.’”

“Oh?”

“Are you sure you want to know?”

“Yes. Yes.”

“Really?”

This presented him with a real dilemma. “They’re telling me that you should enjoy your next birthday in August and make the most of every moment you have left. Make next Christmas special for the children. Start a new career and be happy.”

“Fine, but when am I going to meet my maker?”

“They’re showing me rabbits, lambs, and trees in bud, suggesting springtime. Now, pancakes, that’s Shrove Tuesday; Easter eggs, chickens and cards, a cross, a piece of paper with a list of names on it, a box, possibly a gift box? Now flowers, snowdrops, crocuses, daffodils, and bluebells. The number 5 again. That’s three times the number 5 has come in this sitting.”

“Yes, but when, next year, next decade?” She paused as a thought flicked through her mind. “It is next year, isn’t it?”

“I can’t say, but they’re saying months as opposed to years. It could mean anything; time is different in the spirit world. We’re all going to die one day and we both know that death is glorious and nothing to be feared. All they’re suggesting is that it will be at the beginning of the year as opposed to autumn or winter. They’re trying to make sure that you enjoy the rest of your life, short or long, and make the most of every moment, every opportunity instead of just existing and drifting from day to day as you are now. Are you all right?”

There was silence again. She could feel the tears welling up and then denial. JT was never wrong, and deep down she knew it would be next year, despite how he tried to gloss over the revelation.

“How am I going to die? Is it cancer like my mother?”

“I can’t say.” He definitely could not tell her the awful sight that he was being shown.

“Illness? Accident? Am I going to be murdered? Will the children be okay?” There was panic in her voice.

“Come on Sofia. You know I can’t see that sort of information.” He knew he would not be seeing her again, but he could not tell her that and fortunately it was getting near the end of the sitting. He hoped he had given her some reassurance, even though he knew her days were numbered and she definitely would not see next June. Somehow, he had to end this sitting on a positive note. He continued. “Now I want to give you a package for the future; something positive. Have you lost a child? They’re giving me something else. A baby that went straight to Spirit world.”

“Boy or girl?”

“Boy.”

She had had an abortion when she was eighteen, but surely that could not be what he was seeing. “No.”

“I’m getting the name Billy. Oh, well, we’ll leave that for now. Something for you to think about later. Do you live in an old property?”

“Edwardian.”

“How old’s the central heating?”

“Don’t know. Seventies, I think.”

“There’s going to be a problem with it. They’re telling you to get it sorted before the winter or you’ll be cold.”

“This winter? So, I’m definitely going to see it?” she laughed.

“Of course you are. Did you know your grandparents?”

“Not my mother’s side. They died young. Both cancer victims.” She shivered slightly.

“There’s someone in spirit close to you, around you, someone you do not know. I think it’s your maternal grandmother with your mother and aunt. They’re telling you not to worry but be happy. They’re all at rest and sending their love to the family. I think you can sense your mother around you.”

“Sometimes. When I’m really low.”

“They know you’ve been down. It’s only your children that keep you going and give you hope. You’re living for your children, but you must live for yourself. Now, as to the future . . .”

“You mean I’ve got one?”

“Of course you have. We all have, whether it’s days, months, or years. When it’s your time, someone will come and collect you, but that’s not yet.”

“But you said . . .”

“Yes, I know what’s come through, but it certainly won’t be tomorrow and you’ve got a lot of living to do yet.” He hoped he had managed to rectify the situation and moved her away from the inevitable; he could not tell her the awful truth. “I’m giving you what I’m told in spirit. It’s up to you to put it all together.”

“You mean I have to follow the clues.”

“Something like that. In the next twelve months, all the answers do come and you will turn your life around. You will set yourself goals and achieve them. You need to begin with self-affirmation. You have to tell yourself that you are happy, intelligent, successful, beautiful, a good wife and mother, etcetera, and then whatever goals you set yourself after you have listened to this tape you will achieve. Your children will be proud of you. You will return to your former self, and you will be happy again.

Derek will continue to moan but he will lose his control over you, because your first resolve will be to cease being a victim, a dominated wife. When you leave here, you will take the first step to a changed identity. You've still got a lot to give to other people, but it will be one step at a time. The spirits are waiting to help you, and you will achieve all you set out to do." He opened his eyes and leaned over to switch the tape off. Normally he would ask if the client had enjoyed the sitting, but that did not seem appropriate in this case.

"Do you feel better equipped to face the future now?"

"There's certainly a lot to think about."

"You have to be positive."

"You make it sound easy."

"Well, it's really down to you. Only you can change your life."

"I know, but it's so much easier to do what Derek wants than to fight. Somehow, I seem to have lost my fighting spirit." She opened her bag and looked for her purse, "Still £30?"

"Yes. You will do it. You will achieve all you have to do before your time is up on this earth."

She took three ten-pound notes from her purse and stood up. He, likewise, rose from his chair, took her money, and gave her the tape recording of the sitting. He escorted her downstairs to the front door. As he opened the door, another plane could be heard above, the dog was still barking somewhere along the street, the traffic noise seemed to intensify with the addition of sirens from emergency vehicles, which reminded John of the scene the spirit world had shown him that afternoon. It was on occasions like this that he did not feel privileged to have his gift.

She turned to thank him and say farewell until the next time. He mentally undressed her in the way that men do when they see an attractive woman and imagined making love to her. He was sure that beneath her dress she had the most beautiful body, tall and slim but curvaceous and with breasts that he could cup and fondle, a 34B, he reckoned, and he was usually right about these things. She certainly deserved better than the dastardly, devious, devil called Derek. It was so ironic that he should be a heart sur-

geon. A lump swelled in his throat as he said goodbye, knowing that he would not see her again.

She walked toward her car parked about two hundred yards down the road, without looking back. He watched her from his lounge window in dismay. He felt sorrow and sadness for the children, Sophie and Donny, who were soon to lose their mother. He thought that she was too young and too beautiful to die but then, Princess Diana had been only thirty-six.

Focus. Focus, she kept saying to herself. Her throat was dry, the palms of her hands sweaty, and she could feel perspiration falling down her face from beneath her fringe. The full heat of the afternoon was affecting her, and the distant sirens were adding to the torturous throbbing pain that had started above her left temple. In addition, the still, sick, stagnant smell of the scorching summer afternoon was making her feel nauseous. The sweet aroma of citrus and sandalwood had quickly become a distant memory. She could not believe, neither did she want to believe the information that the spirit world had chosen to impart that afternoon.

She fumbled in her bag for the key and with a shaking hand, pointed it at her car, the black Honda Accord. The car unlocked; she leapt into the driving seat and picked up the bottle of water from on the passenger seat. Instead of being nice and cool, it was tepid and the car felt like an inferno. It was too hot; she opened the windows and tasted some of the water. It was better than nothing, but it did not quench her thirst. Tears trickled down her cheeks. After several minutes of staring blankly into space, she searched in her bag for Paracetamol tablets for the headache and tissues for her tears. She needed to regain her composure. *Focus. Focus. Control*, she repeated to herself. In less than an hour, she would be picking up the twins from school.

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