

NOTE FROM DIANE:

I refer to this as my bitter divorcees, but only because it's two friends who, after being divorced and left with little more than a junk yard, are not particularly fond of their exes. Besides, I seem to find divorce funny. Weird, right? There ARE a lot of emotions that come out of it! I only have a couple chapters of this so far, but would love to find the time to write it.

Enjoy! Xoxo,

Diane



“He’s winning,” Tess said.

“Who?” said Camille.

“X. I looked at his Facebook profile. He’s fit. He lost the forty pounds he had the whole time we were married. How is that fair? He used to stretch his photos so he didn’t look fat. I carried that jerk for ten years and now he’s the butterfly and I’m the cliché.”

“What does that have to do with special K?”

“Two weeks, two inches. It’s a start,” Tess said.

“This isn’t like that grapefruit diet, is it?”

“No. That was to fit into the size eight dress I bought on eBay.”

“So this is different how?”

“This is about equality. Get Gloria Steinem on the phone. She’d understand.”

Camille smiled. She knew her friend Tess well enough to know when she got wound up like this, there was no stopping her. The last time Tess was angry with her husband she’d come over and reorganized Camille’s entire kitchen. That was before the divorce. This time Tess was more than just fired up. She was practically bursting animosity.

“Here’s an idea. Forget the breakfast cereal and go for a run. You’ll feel better,” Camille suggested.

Tess put her hands on her hips. “It’s forty degrees outside and you want me to run? I don’t run anymore. I hate exercise. You know that.”

“You used to hate exercise. Before. Things are different now. You should try it. Besides, we’re out of milk.”

Tess looked at the box of cereal in her hand. “I didn’t pack running clothes,” she said.

“You can borrow mine. You still wear a size eight sneaker, right? I have a pair in the closet that I’ve never worn.”

“Fine,” Tess said. She set the cereal box on the table and it tipped over, spilling small corn flakes across the polished mahogany surface.

Ten minutes later, she was layered enough to resemble the Michelin man. She pulled the hood from one of her sweatshirts over her head, limbered up with a few stretches, and headed out.

Running on the island used to be one of Tess’s favorite activities. Luna Bay was small enough that most of the roads intersected, allowing the carefully controlled population of cars to easily get around town. The same qualities that made the town so charming were the ones that made Tess want to stay indoors these days. With a population below a thousand residents, everybody knew everybody else. That meant that her divorce could not fly under the radar. Until something better came along, the news of her failed marriage would be the talk of the town. It was even worse that her husband had left her for a twenty-year-old tootsie. That girl was no more qualified to be his legal secretary than Tess was to become a private investigator. But as she’d quickly learned, it didn’t take a PI license to follow the evidence Mickey left behind and figure out that he was having an affair. Stupid man. Willing to throw away twenty years of marriage over a twenty-something. And worse, Tess didn’t fit into her own life anymore. It wasn’t like she was going to stay on at Mickey’s legal offices now. And with only two lawyers on the island, there weren’t a lot of opportunities for her to find work.

Tess jogged along the road that faced the bay. In about half a mile, she turned off into a series of trails that cut through a large mass of mostly untamed foliage. These trails led to the Gnome Gardens, a stretch of public property that was covered with plants and trees that stood no more than four feet high. Wooden paths had been installed to allow sightseers the chance to wander above the gardens, exaggerating the illusion that the gardens were tended to gnomes.

There was less of a chance of her running into someone in the Gnome Gardens. Twenty pounds and two sweat suits might be enough to keep her warm on a cold island morning, but the last thing she needed was for someone to see her and report back to Mickey that she’d let herself go. Maybe that picture of him in the paper had been Photoshopped. Maybe he was in worse shape than her. Maybe now that she had moved

out and he was left with the tootsie, he'd realized that he couldn't get by without her. Not that she'd ever go back after what he'd done, but it was nice to think about.

The trails in the park were empty. As her body temperature headed up, she pushed up her sleeves and took a swig from the water bottle she'd strapped to her waist. She came to the end of a trail and stepped onto the wooden path. The only sounds around her were that of birds chirping, their various cries sounding like a dialogue that she couldn't understand. She'd forgotten how peaceful it was to run through the trails. No engines running, no cell phones ringing, no radios blasting. Only the sound of her feet against the wooden slats of the path. She was completely alone.

She was completely alone.

She slowed from her jog to a walk. Her lungs expanded and contracted almost spasmodically with their need for oxygen. She put her hands on her hips and kept going, gulping air. The path ended and she stepped down onto a trail that wound around the perimeter of the garden. Below her were the wetlands. The drop was about a hundred feet. Only residents of Luna Bay knew that the end of one trail wasn't far from the beginning of the next. Tess kept her eyes on the ground and slowly followed the path until the opening of the next trail appeared. She took another swig of water and headed into the dense brush, only to come to a complete stop.

Lying across the path in front of her was a body.