

Cry Destiny

Chapter one

Donna Drake, a slim, petite, thirtyish bottle brunette, felt happy as she waited patiently in Arrivals, scanning the weary passengers, all eager to off-load their baggage and be reunited with their loved ones. The shoulder bags were evidently weighing heavy on the tired travellers as they proceeded through the barrier with an assortment of waves, smiles and seasonal cheer.

She scanned the Arrivals board for the flight from Gatwick; it had landed. *Where is he?*

Her eyes lit up with anticipation, then dulled in disappointment when what looked like her friend turned out to be a laughing middle-aged man in a T-shirt and shorts carrying a stuffed koala bear and a lit-up Christmas tree.

This being a very cold December day, the frosty air outside left her breathless and the sunshine seemed to have left with the man from down under. She closed her eyes and shook her head in bewilderment.

“Do I look that bad?” The voice drifted into her inner senses and she opened her eyes.

On the other side of the barrier was a man about her age, tanned with naturally curly ash-blond hair, azure blue eyes and a smile that almost made her cry.

“Scott, you look beautiful! And you’ve gone from a bean frame to a healthy gym-pumped Adonis”.

“Careful girl - otherwise I’ll think you’ve gone all normal” he shouted back.

Donna rushed to the opening and regardless of the fact that he was struggling with a fully loaded trolley, hugged him almost to breaking point.

“Hold on honey - remember I’m really a just a delicate flower that needs to be cherished”.

“Well you will while you’re with us” she replied, relaxing and brushing back a tear.

“Where’s Poppi by the way?” he asked, breathing in deeply and straightening his suit.

“Still at the hospital - but she does have 2 days off over Christmas. So she won’t be back at work until the 27th – which isn’t fair really cos she worked the same shift last year. Someone conveniently went sick”.

They walked, chatting and laughing, steering towards the fresh air when a voice cut through the hubbub.

“Mr Farrell. *Mr Farrell*”.

“Its for you Scott” Donna said, stopping and turning round.

A tall, good-looking uniformed young man was rushing towards them.

“My telephone number. Sorry - I forgot to give it to you before you got off the plane” he said

almost exhausted, but still smiling.

Scott took the small piece of paper from him, nodded and shoved it into the zipped pocket of his dark green suede jacket.

“Well, well” Donna replied after they’d left behind the noisy airport’s hustle and bustle - and the smiling, sighing man.

“Donna Drake - don’t you dare think there’s anything at all in that. Its just some man who asked me if I was the guy in the photograph in his copy of ‘Vogue’” Scott replied frowning.

“Was it?”.

“Yes”.

“You mean to tell me” she exclaimed bringing the trolley to a halt

“That you were in ‘Vogue’?”.

“I told you about it in an e-mail” Scott replied, pushing the trolley forward.

“You never did, dear heart” she said.

“Anyway what’s the big deal? It was only a model shoot,” he said, leaving her behind as he carried on walking regardless.

“Only a model shoot’ he says, as though everyone appears in ‘Vogue’ magazine” came her exasperated reply as she caught him up.

“Anyway darling heart, I’ll tell you all about it later, probably over dinner. And anyway its not as good as the one of me in ‘Harpers Bazaar’.

“You’re not serious” she exclaimed, stopping again with her mouth wide open and eyes bulging.

“Don’t get on your high horse Donna Drake. I know that look from you of old. You did enough of it when we were at College”.

Before she could ask any more questions, they’d were out in the open air.

“Ah England!’ he shouted. ‘Salty air and Mother Earth!’”

By the time they reached the Plymouth Airport car park’s exit, and before she could ask more about the mysterious stranger on the plane or why he was really here, Scott was curled up and sound asleep – so she headed straight for home.

At the traffic lights, Donna looked over at the sleeping beauty and couldn’t believe that it was about 10 years since they’d last met. They’d kept in touch by ‘phone and e-mails and in that time a lot had happened to both of them. She’d been with a partner now for 6 years: Poppi Seade, a doctor at the local hospital. Scott had been settled down for 11 years with Myles Crawford until their break-up just after Christmas last year.

Donna blinked, her mind wandering slightly from the road ahead along quick glances at Scott. Darling Scott, the brains and the beauty of the college where they’d all met over a decade ago. Yes, they did have a lot to talk about!

After dinner, the three of them settled down in Donna and Poppi’s lounge. It was only when she served coffee, though, that Scott got a good look at Poppi- the seating arrangements at dinner had made it impossible to do so without appearing rude. She was slightly taller than her partner, but otherwise her figure was almost exactly the same, with her hair swept back from her barely made-up and attractive face in a small neat bun. He wondered whether her ambitions were limited to getting ahead at the hospital as resident houseman or whether she hoped to move onwards and upwards, away from the naval city.

Scott had a feeling an inquisition was about to start as he sat in an armchair directly opposite the two women. Sipping his coffee, he sighed. And it was noted.

“Is the coffee to your liking Scott?” Poppi asked, leaving hers on the small table that separated them.

“Delicious,” he remarked “Unlike the instant muck on the plane”.

“Which one?”.

“How do you mean?” he replied placing the half empty china cup on the table.

“Sorry” Poppi said smiling. “Which plane? The one from New York or from Heathrow?”.

“Heathrow”, Scott replied, also smiling and tilting his head backward.

“I was telling Poppi the other day, before I sent you the e-mail inviting you for Christmas, how daring and bold it was of you to make that decision at college. You know, planning your future...”

Dona said grinning.

Scott undid a button of his golf cardigan.

“Well, heart of hearts, it *was* a long time ago and perhaps at the age of 18 I was a lot more bolder and daring. In fact in those headstrong days I thought I was a reincarnation of Eleanor of Aquitaine and you were Jack the Ripper!” he replied with a smirk.

“May I ask what made you choose to work in the USA?” Poppi said, now unsmiling as she matter-of-factly picked up her coffee from the table.

“I saw an advert – well actually it was a couple of photographs in Harpers Bazaar. The clothes were so sleek and sophisticated that I immediately put pen to paper. I saw they were designed by Nova Nukes, so I sent a letter saying that I was coming to the end of my 3-year course at The Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design, that my tutor had assured me I was on course for a good degree, and that I wondered whether there were any vacancies”.

“Wow, that’s gumption for you!” an excited Donna smiled.

“I got a letter back asking me to go over for an interview with no strings attached. No definite contract in the offing but then I got my degree and ...”.

“With honours” shouted Donna.

Scott nodded: “I made sure I had a return ticket with me though! I’d been working part-time evenings and weekends for 3 years to make absolutely sure I wouldn’t end up stranded in a strange country”.

“So,” Poppi said, taking a sip from her coffee “In fact, you’d made up your mind to go to the States well before you saw those photographs in the magazine?”.

He nodded.

“You seem to have the British reserve in abundance Scott, but if I remember correctly you told me that you were nervous after the interview” Donna stated.

“Why was that?” Poppi enquired.

“I got the job and was asked if I could start the next day!” he replied and quickly finished off the remains of his coffee.

“Wow. I think I would have just died” Donna said, beginning to flush.

“Even as a doctor that would’ve made me nervous too. What on earth did you do?” asked Poppi.

“I spluttered out YES, nervously, and then wished the floor would open up and swallow me”.

“Whatever did you do next?” Donna said, furiously fanning her heated face with her right hand.

“Well, I staggered to some sort of attention and Nova Nukes held out her hand. I shook it and muttered something about not having a green card and she shrugged her shoulders mumbling that it would be dealt with and to report here tomorrow at 8:30 am sharp. Going down in the lift, or as I was later to learn *elevator*, I didn’t know whether to go back to the hotel and back up my bags and leave. But then I saw this billboard on the way to the hotel that read ‘America, the land of Opportunity’. So I thought *what the heck!* I’d booked the hotel for a week and had enough money anyway, so I thought I’ll give it a try and if things don’t work out I can just go home”.

Poppi and Dona stared at one another.

Both were about to deluge him with more questions when Scott gave a large yawn.

“Here we are” Poppi said, getting up from the sofa “Wearing poor Scott out after his two lengthy journeys from New York via Gatwick. He must be exhausted!”.

Scott smiled and nodded.

“Tomorrow’s another day” Donna exclaimed and led the trio out of the room.

After Scott had retired Donna stared at Poppi and smiled.

“Why the smile?”.

“I don’t know why” exclaimed Dona “But I keep thinking of when we were at college and Scott sometimes use to get send-ups from other students and he’d just grin and turn away... I asked once what he thought was so amusing when they behaved liked that. “Well Lady of Lewisham, they’ve got something to hide! I haven’t” was his cryptic answer.

Scott awoke with the sun streaming through the bedroom window. Still nude, he trotted over to look outside at the rather nice trimmed and informative garden. The bungalow’s plot must be pretty large if this was anything to go by.

Later, he found that his friend and companion lived in a row of 6 detached bungalows in an area known as Bere Alston. It was close to the railway station on the Tamar Valley branch line and there was also a pub and some shops nearby. It in was one of these shops that Donna was running a business. She’d leased one and initially began selling the dresses she designed. When she found that it wasn’tt doing too well she’d added many other lines, such as wool, silks, cotton, needles, millinery and a host of other things in an effort to make it pay. Donna had hoped that this would only be a temporary thing but in the end found that diversification was the only way to make ends meet. She put a notice in the window advertising ‘private tailoring’ was available and kept a book of sketches of dresses, suits and costumes but it only brought in one order for a pair of slacks. It obviously wasn’t the sort of area that wanted or encouraged a graduate with a degree from a London College of Fashion.

Donna wasn’t an ambitious person and enjoyed her idyllic life with her partner and the beautiful Devon countryside, the river Tamar and

the Tamar Valley discovery trail, a walk that she and Poppi loved whenever they had time together.

Scott put on a track suit and popped his head around the kitchen door.

“I need to get into shape. Where’s a good walk or run?”.

A couple of wolf whistles echoed around the room.

“Love the colour”.

“Love the style”.

“Thank you ladies. I designed it myself. Dark mauve with a hint of lavender - my favourite colour. You don’t think it’s too ostentatious?”.

“No” came a reply from both.

“Thank you sweeties. I’ll throw caution to the wind and hope I can eat something now other than shreddiees and orange juice for breakfast”.

Poppi stood up and put her mug and bowl on the kitchen drainer.

“Hot water with a squeeze of lemon juice and porridge”.

Donna screwed up her face behind her back.

“I’ll point you in the right direction for a quick walk or run outside” she said, giving Donna a peck on the cheek.

Once outside she pointed: “When you get to Bere Alston station forecourt, turn right under the railway bridge and follow the sign for the pedestrian ferry. A short way down the lane is a stile on the left-hand side. Cross it and bear right across the field and then downhill. Follow the apple symbol – that’s the discovery trail”.

“Many thanks and don’t work too hard” he said, and before she could answer he was gone.

About an hour later, when he had returned, showered and had breakfast, he accompanied Donna to her shop, ‘Pandora’s Box’. Even on first impressions, he could quite understand why she’d called it that.

For a brief moment he remembered when they’d first met. Dizzy in mind and spirit as always, Donna was rushing down the corridor looking at each door in search of her class, dropping books, pen and pencil as she went. He calmly stepped over to her and helped pick them up. They stared at one another for a split second, instantly

recognising one another's true gender, smiled and walked together into a room where they would remain, on and off, for the next 3 years and become great friends. Later, they were joined by two others, Rhonda and Kevin, and they all lunched together, swapped ideas, helped one another with homework, studied carefully and conscientiously, talked of politics, love, scandal, religion and how famous they'd all be in 3 or 4 years time. They were known by the other students as The Four Misfits.

Scott cringed at the fact that the whole floor space seemed to be a cluttered mess. It was dark in the sense that the walls were colourless and had probably never painted and the stacks and shelves seemed almost deliberately designed to stop, rather than encourage, browsing. There were no displays or focal points and the room screamed out, not so much formake-over as a complete face lift.

He noticed that one corner contained rolled bales of materials stacked against the walls, In another a 'display' of colourful saris was hidden by shadows and inadequate lighting. Should he mention this now, wait, or just leave it all alone? It was one way of losing a beautiful friendship. He noticed a door at the back.

"Where does the other door lead to?"

"A kitchen of some sort".

"What's out the back?"

"Just a vacant area fronted by garages. Each shop has one".

With the fluorescent lighting switched on, the place looked even worse to Scott. Major surgery was what it needed. He shrugged his shoulders and dismissed any thought of suggesting that he could design the whole shop and bring the whole thing out of the dismal eighties and into the 21st century!

"Did you mention that it had a flat above?"

"Yes" Donna answered, almost falling over some unpacked packaging.

"Give us the key then and as soon as I come down I'll make some tea or coffee. OK?"

She nodded and then rummaged through her handbag for several minutes before handing him the elusive object.

“Outside, turn right and at the end of the shops is a stairway which leads to a balcony for the entrance to all the flats. You can’t miss our number”.

Scott raised his eyebrows and shook his head slightly before leaving the shop.

Later that evening, after dinner, they had their usual coffee gathering, which always seemed to be a continuation of the previous events – way of catching up with what had happened to each of them while they were oceans apart.

Scott took a larger than usual gulp of coffee, his eyes doing somersaults over his lesbian friends opposite.

“May I ask if the flat above the shop is part of the rental?” he boldly asked.

Dona blinked her eyes. “As a matter of fact it is, why?”.

“Well” he continued “What would you say if I took over the flat and paid half of the rental or whatever you wanted to charge for it?”.

Poppi put her cup down and stared at Dona.

“But I thought you were returning to the States around the start of January?” Poppi asked.

“But, of course, you’re welcome to stay as long as you want” Donna said, looking rather harshly at her and then back at Scott.

“Of course, you can stay as long as you want Scott” Poppi reiterated

“I just assumed that you’d want to get back, or had to, for work”.

“Actually I won’t be going back,” Scott said, finishing his coffee in a single gulp.

“More coffee anyone?” Poppi asked, then promptly got up and left the room.

“Poppi didn’t have to leave. It’s not as though I wanted to tell you anything secret” Scott said, his face starting to flush.

“Actually you don’t have to tell anyone your business Scott, if you don’t want to. Naturally you can have the flat. Did you have any plans for it?”.

Scott rushed over and hugged her: “Why couldn’t you have been a man”.

The both fell back on the sofa laughing.

They all talked until well after midnight and Scott said that he'd love to do the whole flat up and do a make-over on the furniture and so on. He went on to mention that he once did an interior decorator course on the advice of Nova Nukes, who believed in nurturing the talent of the designers she really believed in.

He explained how he'd started in the basement of this large building that belonged to Nova Nukes, lock, stock and barrel and how the lady herself had worked her way from a sweatshop in the Bronx to the glamorous world of fashion in the heart of Manhattan.

Scott said how for the first 3 months he studied with a French cutter to learn how to shape and define materials and understand how they hung, looped, draped and combined with accessories in all shapes and sizes. Then he learned everything there was to know about neck shapes, shoulders, waists, lengths, hems, linings, stitching, eyelet's, buttons, zips and every last detail of every form of garment. That was followed by a stint in fabrics, colours, perfumes and interior decoration, all the time immersing himself in a multitude of books and magazines about famous designers from the 19th century to the present.

But Nova Nukes was not always sweetness and light. If she found a member of the staff was not worth the money she had spent on him or her, she'd humiliate them in the monthly boardroom meetings and summarily fire them on the spot, saying that anything owing would be sent on to them. She could be ruthless and cruel, but hers was the top fashion house in the USA and she had very high standards for her designers to uphold. She also took care of anything that came in the post that concerned, visas, immigration, work permits and so on. If anything like that came my way, I just gave it to Personnel and never heard any more".

It was agreed then that after Christmas, Scott would renovate and decorate the flat over Donna's shop. Tomorrow was Christmas Eve and he'd be going to London to see his mother in a nursing home and to check up on his flat that had been let for several years by an estate agent in Islington.

After the fast pace of everything and everyone in the United States, the train journey to London seemed to be taking ages. Not having

been used to that mode of travel in literally years, the packed carriage full of shrieking mobile 'phones drove him to distraction – or at least to the comparative peace of the catering carriage, where he asked for a cold canned drink.

The sparse seating arrangements in the catering carriage made him wonder if it was a revamped guard's van like those he remembered from his childhood. Anyway, away from the passengers and their phones it was a quieter and draft free.

Although the train was warm, it was a cold, crisp and sunny day outside, so he'd worn a suit and cashmere overcoat. It was only once ensconced in the relative comfort of the catering carriage that that he remembered he'd left his coat on his seat. Was it safe there? he wondered. Perhaps he was being paranoid after so long an absence. He finished his drink, left the empty can on the counter and returned to his seat – and to his relief, his coat was still there. Finally, after more than 3 hours he arrived at Paddington Station wondering whether it would have been quicker to have flown!

Luckily he managed to get a taxi almost as soon as he had got off the train and headed immediately to Upper Street in Islington and to the estate agents, whom he'd told in advance of his visit..

It appeared that the tenants of his flat, or to be precise which would his be after the death of his mother, would be leaving at the end of the month. He mentioned that he did not want it to be re-let because he had other plans in the offing for the new year - although none were yet finalised. When they were, he'd get in touch.

On leaving the premises he was almost on top of Islington Green as the sun filtered through the trees and played across the grass that surrounded the short walk to the sitting area. Scott hesitated, wondering whether to enter and sit down for a while but it was cold and anyway the wooden seats didn't look very clean. He stopped and looked around. It seemed so long since he was last here and the memories kept flooding back of school days at the bottom of Packham Street, the dreaded Regent's Canal and his home in the Corporation of London block of flats, South Islington. A cold wind with an eerie sound brushed a lapel of his coat and he shivered. Scott

suddenly felt alone and vulnerable and tired in mind and body. Had it been it wise to return?

At that point he saw a taxi and almost ran out into the street to hail it down. Once inside, he told the driver the nursing home's address and asked him to go via Essex Road station, outside which he hoped there'd still be a florist's stall. He then sat back in the seat in hope and hesitation.

On the way back to the station he took a detour to London Wall having remembered that he needed some money. While in the USA he banked with The Chase Manhattan Bank merely because it was almost opposite where he worked. He knew there was a branch in London and although he had his Chase Manhattan Platinum Credit Card he wasn't sure he could use it in the UK. Visiting in person he could check and also find out what his balance was and how to get the money transferred to the UK and add it to the rent revenue from the estate agents.

The train back was even more crowded and took even longer – or at least it seemed it thanks to the usual chatter, noise of phones, clicking of laptops and the endless parade to and from the toilets, the barging of trippers to the restaurant car and the constantly blocked aisles, Scott was saddened that his mother hadn't even recognised him, and his gut feeling was that he'd never see her again. he was doubly saddened because tomorrow was Christmas Day. Poppi had to work over Christmas, thanks to that colleague who was supposed to working claiming to be ill – just like last year. On the up side, that meant Donna and Scott got to spend most of the festive season alone together.

Donna wanted to invite an Indian lady, Merle Oberon, who owned 'Serendipity', one of the six shops in the parade known as The Gables where Dona traded, but she was visiting her daughter in Clapham.

After a turkey lunch and all the trimmings, which Scott cooked American style, they watched the Queen on TV with her annual message and decided to leave swapping gifts until Poppi arrived, hopefully, in time for dinner.

In a red polo neck, black silk trousers and a touch of cologne, Scott settled in his usual part of the sofa, this time just looking at the steaming coffee cup rather than sipping it piping hot.

Donna, in white T-shirt and black denim jeans, took a sip of hers straight away for once, fixing her eyes on Scott through the coil of steam that looked like a cobra transfixed by a strange sound.

“I suppose to be fair I ought to spill the beans and tell you why I’m really here” Scott said, looking first at his steaming cup and then over to Donna.

“Only if you really want to luvvey but are you telling me you’re not just here out of a desperate need to see the butch lesbian friend you’ve neglected for over a decade for Christmas?” she teased, deciding the coffee was too hot after all and quickly replacing it on the table.

“As you know, precious, I had the most marvellous relationship going with the gorgeously built - in more ways than one - jock, Myles Crawford. It was a marriage made in heaven to say the least and for 10 years it was solid as a rock and the loving never stopped – it just got better and better. We even had a fabulous party thrown for us us by friends in Greenwich Village, as we were the longest-standing couple in a very long time, at least in the States anyhow,” he smiled, took a breath and reached for his cup of coffee.

Donna smiled and caught a whiff of his cologne, which was just as dreamy as her friend.

“Then suddenly we just drifted apart. Neither of us had another lover, and I can assure you somebody would have said something if we had - gay scandal’s like a daily bulletin in Greenwich Village.

My own version’s probably to do with work. Myles was always working away and I worked between 8 and 10 hours a day, sometimes weekends - so we were either there alone, or in other states most of the time”.

“I know I asked you once years ago what Myles did for a living and I believe you said it was to do with making movies. Can you clarify that?”.

“Well, er, he works as part of a camera crew out on location. Some for the movies and some for TV, DVD, video, that sort of thing.”

Scott replied, sighing with an air of relief as though something of great import had finally been revealed.

Donna smiled, nodded and slightly squinted her eyes as though she knew - but she didn't really.

"Then this time last year after we spent Christmas together, he was off to Canada and I more or less said that perhaps he should become a Canadian Mountie and catch another man!"

Dona laughter: 'Always the wisecracks Scott'.

"Then at the beginning of this year, I suddenly looked at myself and realised that really I had achieved what I had set my heart on. I was a success. I'd won the Designer of the Year Award, named a cologne and was rich and even slightly famous".

"Actually I was invited to the Designer Awards if I remember correctly. You sent me an e-mail and said you'd send me an air ticket and meet me at the airport".

"Yes, dear one, and you ended up getting pneumonia, which was more on my mind at the ceremony than picking up the award itself".

"That's why I love you so" Donna screamed, rushing over and giving him a real smacker on the lips.

"As a sister, I hope?" Scott replied, feeling breathless.

"Touché".

Donna went back to her seat and this time really took a mouthful of the coffee.

"I always wanted to ask you Scott, what's Nova Nukes really like?"

He smiled, tossed his head back and rested it on the back of the sofa. Staring at the ceiling first then straight at Donna, he said,

'A cross between Bette Davis and Joan Crawford of the old school at times and cool and as sophisticated as Princess Di in the way she played the press. Quite a combination. If you worked hard, she left you alone and if you did well she would congratulate you and shower you with gifts. She was an ugly old broad who pretended to be middle-aged and attractive".

After the award, the entire collection I next designed, was a sell out on the same day. The show was held at the same hotel as the awards: The Waldorf Astoria, her favourite hotel'.

"Where did she live? And did you ever see her house?"

“Not only did I see her house but I was invited for the day” he replied.

Scott took another sip of coffee and breathed in slowly.

“Her emporium was in Manhattan, as I believe you know, and each day someone, I think a car hire firm, brought her directly into work. She didn’t want to travel on buses or trains, or anything like that so all the staff assumed that it was somewhere nearby. Actually it was in Amityville Village, 20 miles from the New York City Line. She chose that area because ‘Amity’ apparently means ‘friendship’, at least I remember her saying so once when a few of us went there for Sunday lunch. You note I said Sunday, well this was so it would not interrupt with our working week. Crafty cow”.

“Amityville. The name seems familiar” Dona said raising her eyebrows and finishing off the coffee.

“Remember a horror film decades ago, called ‘The Amityville Horror’? Well the place actually exists and believe it or not her house is just round the corner from it”.

“You’re joking?”.

Scott shook his head.

“It was a detached house. Lovely, but not a gracious mansion with nice big gardens in the front and back. like you might expect Don’t get me wrong - the place or village as it was called is a lovely place and she hated all the tourists who came just to see the famous house where the murders took place”.

“Is she married?” Dona asked.

“No-one knows. Probably has a muscle-bound masseur that calls and gives her a ‘massage’ once a week”.

“Plus extras,” laughed Dona.

“Or a drop-dead-gorgous sex slave that she keeps in the attic” smiled Scott.

“So who did you go with for this day at the boss’s home?” Dona asked, still smiling.

“Just some of the staff I knew and worked with at times. We’d all done well for the rich cow and she was just showing us how the other half lives”.

“Modest then!”

“Hardly. But somebody will be very rich when she kicks the bucket”.
“So there you are Donna dear that’s it – all that remains to say is that Nova Nukes and I are not on speaking terms. I recently asked for a year’s sabbatical. I wanted to come home, see my mother and my friends. I’ve never had any holiday to speak of apart from a week here and there in all the time I’ve worked there. I’ve given her the best part of 11 years’ hard graft and she’s made a lot of money from my efforts”.

Dona eyes nearly popped out of their sockets.

“She didn’t believe me - she just asked who I was going to work for. I said it was no-one and then she offered to double my salary, with more fringe benefits. I shouted ‘No’ and she shouted back that I was probably had the Gay Mafia as my backer.

I then went to the Salaries Section left this name and address. I hope you don’t mind. I should had left my London one but I was so enraged at the time that I went to my desk collected some personal belongings, gave a V-sign to the place and waved everyone goodbye. Also, to be honest. some of the staff didn’t like the way a Limey came over and took what they thought were their just desserts. I believe I told you about the competition prize I won – apart from the design award, I mean... Since her designer perfume, the body lotion and talc had been such a success, someone suggested at the monthly staff meeting - not me this time - that we should exploit it further by grabbing the male market.

She thought about it and the next meeting she decided that it could be a profitable enterprise. She’d start with a man’s cologne, she said, and she had this ingenious idea that every member of the staff would have a chance of winning the prize, which was either a \$5,000 cheque or 5,000 shares in the particular product. So she sent a memo round the next day and we all got our thinking caps on. In the meantime she flew to Grasse in France, as she always did to find the perfect perfume, and there she tested untold aromas till she’d got the one she thought epitomised the 21st century man.

Personally, I thought that since her own personal perfume had been such a success bearing the name of Nova Nukes, why not abbreviate it to N.N. So that was my entry. We weren’t to put our

names on the entry forms - just our staff number – to eliminate any possibility of favouritism on her part. Anyway I won and took the prize in shares. Of course my winning again caused more bad feeling around the place and it was then that I thought perhaps I should do something about it. Even worse was to follow - Nova had this other brainwave that since I'd I won the competition I should be the model for the ad campaign. That's how I got in Vogue and Harpers & Queen – and then got a modelling contract with 21st Century Models. I did a lot of work at the weekends – and traveled a lot. I was even flown to Niagara Falls for a shoot. So I just kept on banking the cheques and now I really have no idea what I'm worth. Anyway, the day after my dramatic exit, when I was feeling more relaxed, I turned on the answer-phone and wouldn't speak or reply to Nova Nukes, Myles Crawford, Uncle Tom Cobbly and all. I gave a month's notice to my landlord and, hey presto, here I am. That, dear heart, is my life up to date".

"Wow! What a life".

"More of an over-the-top drama Queen's performance luvvy".

Just then they heard a key in the front door and shortly Poppi came in looking cold and tired.

"I'm off to bed darlings. Merry Christmas! Your pressies are under the tree over. Sleep tight and don't let the bed bugs bite".

Scott moved quickly out of the lounge, just overhearing Donna whisper to Poppi that she had such a lot to tell her, after a bite to eat, or a night of love!

There was a slight drizzle and a northerly wind as Scott set off for his usual early morning run, waving goodbye to Donna and Poppi on the doorstep.

"You know, I may not be a psychiatrist but I think your friend's holding something back" Poppi said, fingering a button on her blouse with one hand and flicking at her costume with the other.

"*Our* friend" Dona said sternly.

Poppi shrugged her shoulders. "I can't quite put my finger on it but I'm sure you will find out eventually".

“Only if there *is* something and *if* he wants to tell me” Dona replied and kissed her on the cheek.

Once inside the bungalow, Donna was tempted to look through his large amount of luggage, but dismissed the thought as quickly as it had arrived.

After breakfast, it was while she was switching on the computer that she wondered if perhaps now might be a good time to satisfy her lover’s curiosity.

“Scott. Don’t forget you can use the computer whenever you like! You must have some e-mail’s waiting for you by now?”.

“Thanks a lot. Actually I was going to ask you about that. I seem to have been so busy since I arrived, quite honestly, I almost forgot”.

Donna left the room and Scott, still in his track suit, sat down and immediately fingered the keys.

Later, when she returned he was laughing out loud.

“You wouldn’t believe it. 12 e-mails from Myles and 2 Christmas e-cards, plus an assortment from the friends we, or I know, in Greenwich Village”.

“Perhaps he wants to get back together again” Donna asked.

“More like advice about something or other. Listen to this one. ‘Why don’t you answer my mail? Is there something wrong? What is happening? What has happened? Are you sick? Please, please send me a reply. I have something very important to tell you!’”.

“He seems genuinely concerned” Donna said, staring at Scott and then the screen.

“Its Boxing Day and he’s just being melodramatic. Anyway we’re not an item any more - he should get his act together and get a life. After over a decade of my being at his beck and call he should be standing on his own two feet ow. For God’s sake he’s 30 years of age”.

He suddenly stopped looking at the screen and dropped his head down onto his chest, covering his face with the palms of his hands.

Dona suddenly realised that he was concerned and too proud to admit it. She put her arms around his shoulders. Her looked up at her and she saw that he was beginning to cry.

“Are you sure that there is nothing wrong?” Dona asked brushing his tears away with her fingers.

“I’m sorry Donna please forgive me. I must go to my room and freshen up. This isn’t like me at all”.

He got up quickly and left.

No, it isn’t like you at all Scott, she thought, staring back at the screen and at the e-mail messages it contained.