

And excerpt from. . .

Waterlillies Over My Grave

by

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Chapter 1

“It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee...”

Dr. Annabelle O’Brien stared at her cell phone. “I think you have the wrong...”
“And this maiden she lived with no other thought than to love and be loved by me.”
My God. What th...?

The tone set the back of her hair on end. She recognized the voice, yet she didn’t. A sing-songy, almost child-like tone had replaced the beautiful baritone that had been Duncan’s. A horrid taste of bile rose in her throat, her palms moistened, and the phone slipped from one hand into the other then fell onto her oak veneer desk with a thump. She had a hard time picking it up again.

Annie’s throat turned to sandpaper, but she managed to squeak out, “Duncan. What do you want?”

The man on the other end cleared his throat as though he were exercising the greatest of patience to an elementary school student. “Do you remember, my dearest Annabelle, ‘Til death do us part’?”

Air lodged in her throat. She forced herself to breathe. In-out, in-out, until her intake came in steady shallow streams, gradually lengthening to deeper breaths. Slow. Relaxing. She was finally able to speak. “How did you get this number?”

The caller laughed. The laugh turned to a whisper. “Doesn’t matter how I got your number, love. No matter where you run, where you go, where you hide, you can not get away from me.”

No! He couldn’t be threatening her now.

Her usually cool nerves betrayed her as her stomach pitched like it had plunged straight down hill doing sixty-miles an hour on a roller coaster.

Annie concentrated on an oil painting, the focal point of burgundy and gray walls. Water lilies her mother had painted for her when she was a child. It went everywhere with her. Made her feel at home and at peace no matter how hard life got. She wished she could walk into that scene right now. Her eyes shifted to the stack of client folders on her desk and back to reality.

She forced tensing muscles to relax. “Duncan, knock it off.” Drumming her fingers against the desktop, fear rapidly turned to resentment. “Look, I’m no longer in New York. I’ve moved away.” Apparently, not far enough.

“I know exactly where you are.” His tone held a stony edge.

Annie's jaw stiffened. He's fishing. "How?"

"My dear girl. I know that you are sitting in your new office in a hospital in upper Wisconsin."

Annie gasped. He knew where she was. Could see into her office? Her gaze swept out through the large picture window and across the parking lot. Besides a drizzly day, she didn't see anything out of the ordinary. No movement of cars or people. Surreal. As quiet as a black, white and gray painting.

Until the voice broke the silence. "Then, how could I know that you're wearing that gray suit with the mini-skirt that shows off your lovely legs? How do I know that your hair is tied up in a knot that reveals a neck as delicate as a swan?"

A moment's frozen silence settled upon the room, until what he'd said registered. Then her elbow knocked into a plastic vase of tiger lilies. The water spilled over the edge of the desk, flooding the carpet.

Chuckle. "Don't you think you ought to wipe that up before it gets all over your client's charts?"

Her muscles tightened and, in spite of herself, her voice shook. "How did you know that?"

"Lucky guess."

"You heard the noise through the phone." Time for some bravado. "Look, I'm not afraid of you."

Again, that chuckle. She couldn't put a finger on the sound he was making. Some hybrid of humor?

"Oh, but you should be afraid my dear. Very afraid. You'll never be rid of me. And, you'll never know where I am, or when I'll turn up. I could be behind the next corner, in the shadows, in a dark alley."

"Duncan..."

"Or on the banks of Lake Nager." Another clearing of the throat. "Oh, and one more thing. If you try another restraining order, there's no law enforcement that will honor one against me. Just try."

Now, Annie was getting just plain mad. "What do you mean the law won't arrest you for violating a court order? Who do you think you are, God?"

Click. Silence.

She stared down, her brain slow to comprehend the significance of that conversation. A long exhaled breath came in one long quick whoosh.

Maybe he did think he was God. But, that didn't escape the fact she was shaking from the top of her head to the bottom of her soles. And it wasn't like Duncan to try and scare her like that. He'd given her the divorce graciously. He'd offered her anything she'd wanted. Everyone had thought she was nuts to give him up. But maybe he was finally starting to exhibit certain signs she'd seen coming for years--and yet had never quite believed.

Duncan was slowly going insane.

She couldn't put a diagnosis on it yet, but he needed help, and she didn't think he'd go get it.

She looked at the mess on the floor. Oh bother. Look what the idiot made me do. Giving herself something else to think about, she picked up the vase, grabbed a handful of tissues and dried the water that still dripped from her desk onto the gray carpet.

Then, in a sort of fog, she closed the vertical blinds and shut out the outside world.

Insanity--such a broad term. And she was supposed to understand it, help treat it. Yet here she was, a psychologist, and didn't feel she knew the first thing about it. She wondered if anyone did.

Annie was alone in a strange town where she knew nobody, and some psycho...no, not some psycho--her psycho ex-husband had just threatened her. But threatened her with what? Word games? What did he want? Could he really be here in Lake Nager? Not possible. He was in New York City attending a psychiatry convention.

She dwelt, only briefly, that he'd described what she wore. Accurately.

She forced her muscles to loosen, to relax. First day on the job. Trying to make a good impression. The phone call from hell. What else could go wrong?