

Little Bits
OF
KARMA

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The following is an excerpt of the first chapter.

CHAPTER 1

The Two of Cups

Holly O'Rourke wished she could be lying on a beach soaking up the sun and forgetting her troubles. She took a break from the mind numbing task she was working on to look out of her office window at the cheery, bright and sunny day. Her office was on the tenth floor of a commercial building in downtown Washington, D.C., and she could see for miles. She had a great office. It was filled with light from two tall windows, and although it wasn't a large office, it had an inviting feel with everything she needed to get her work done. She worked as an Executive Assistant for a Department of Defense contractor, Military Technology Analysis Corporation (MTAC), directly supporting one of the company senior vice presidents. It was mid-September and summer would soon be fading. She loved the summer and hated to see it end. Sunny days and warm temperatures lifted her spirits when she was feeling down, and she was not in the best mood this morning due to an argument late last night with her significant other, James Macklin . . .

. . . "What's happened to us? These last two years, you spend less and less time with me. I understand your needing to spend time with the guys now and then, except that I only get to be with you twice a month, and that's if I'm lucky! We've become two ships passing in the night, or rather the morning," Holly said angrily to her longtime lover.

"You just don't understand the kind of pressure I'm under. I need a break from working at that place. I need an outlet. We keep having this same fight over and over. What more do you want from me?" James snapped back at her.

"I want your time and attention without having to beg for it. You used to give it freely. When you come home after hanging out with the guys, it takes you about 2 days to come back to your normal, loving self. I feel like you take me for granted. Are you

tired of being in this relationship?” she asked him, her eyes glaring and her hands on her hips.

“Holly, I love you . . . however, when you keep harping on me like this, I want to pull away. I’ll work on spending less time with the guys if that’s what you want,” he replied with a sigh.

“You’ll WORK on it? I didn’t know being with me was work. All you care about is having a place to sleep at night and a warm body for sex once in a while. I don’t want to talk to you anymore; I’m sleeping on the couch tonight!” she yelled at James and stormed off into the living room carrying her pillow.

James came after her and said, “If you don’t want to sleep next to me, I’ll take the couch tonight . . . you can have the bed.”

“Just go away,” she replied and turned her body away from him as she lay down on the sofa . . .

They had been living together for 11 years and the last 2 years were challenging for them. James would frequently disappear on his days off. He would justify his absences saying he went to the shooting range to let off steam due to stress at work, and then he would visit one of the guys and hang out. He used the excuse of not wanting to drive home while intoxicated, as he usually drank a lot when he was with his buddies so he would crash for the night with a friend. During this time he never called to check in with Holly. When these disappearing episodes would happen, James became distant, moody and emotionally unavailable after he returned home. A wall was building between them, and she wanted to tear it down and get back to the way things used to be.

When James and Holly first met, she felt like she knew him from somewhere. They met at a speed dating event. She was immediately attracted to and comfortable with him, and they could talk and laugh about anything. James was a handsome man. He stood 6 foot 3 with blond hair, blue eyes, and had a nice body. He lifted weights and liked to go running. James was now a man of 53, and he was still in good shape and not losing his hair, although it was more white than blond these days.

The first 9 years of their relationship were great; she thought she had found the love of her life. However, things were changing now. She hated his disappearances and resented him not

spending more time with her on his days off. He worked long hours as a chef at the American Steak Bistro and Pub, a five-star restaurant in Arlington, and his shifts would change every few weeks. The restaurant overworked their kitchen staff, yet they paid better than most of the other area restaurants and James put up with it. The restaurant served breakfast on Saturdays and Sundays, and lunch and dinner only Monday through Friday. The weekends were the busiest time, and the kitchen didn't close until 10:00 p.m. There was a large bar area attached to the main dining room for the late-night revelers.

She reflected on her life and the lousy choices she made in selecting mates as she watched the people walking on the street below. She had been married twice. Her first husband, Roger Chasen, was a wife beater. Her second husband, Alex Manning, had a drug problem and was bisexual. Alex was one who often disappeared too. At least James told her where he was going; Alex would take off for days to do drugs with his friends. She didn't have any children by those men, and was thankful for that. The only way she would ever consider motherhood was if she could be a stay-at-home Mom for a few years. Just the thought of trying to work full-time and take care of a baby made her feel exhausted, although she thought that if she accidentally became pregnant by one of her former flames, she would have loved the baby dearly and been a good mother. Holly's thoughts were interrupted by a knock on her door. She turned around to see that it was her good friend, Patricia Swain, stopping by for some chitchat.

"Wishing you were somewhere else?" Patricia asked, looking at her over reading glasses that slid down her nose, her big blue eyes indicating mischief.

"Every day!" Holly replied emphatically. "What are you doing up this way?"

"I just finished talking with Neil Peters, and he told me an interesting tidbit about Charlie Thomas," she said.

"Spill . . . I need something to spice up my day," Holly replied.

"Did you know that Charlie was divorced?" Patricia asked.

"No, I don't work with his group much anymore," she replied.

"Apparently, he's been divorced for 3 years. His wife was a pistol; she embarrassed him by punching a contractor in the nose who was doing some work on their house, and then began pummeling the poor guy. She was convicted of assault and spent 90 days in jail . . . along with a hefty fine. Prior to that, she totaled two of Charlie's vehicles at different times, trying to chase down people who cut her off in traffic. Those were a few things that Neil mentioned; there must

have been others too. I guess he had enough of her tantrums and kicked her out,” Patricia said with a laugh.

“I remember when he first started working here. He got married a few weeks later, and Matt Weedon asked me to get a card and gift for Charlie and his new wife on behalf of the group. I collected money and bought them a gift card for Macys. I think it’s sad that they are no longer together, marriage is hard work. Actually, any long-term romantic relationship is hard work,” Holly said, thinking about her current situation with James.

“I think I married the last good man on the planet,” Patricia said with a sigh of relief.

“I would have to agree . . . Andy is a gem,” Holly replied thinking . . . *I never wanted to marry James. I was afraid marriage would ruin our relationship, and yet it’s sliding downhill anyway.*

“Speaking of Matt Weedon, have you heard anything from him lately?” Patricia asked sarcastically.

“You know I haven’t, and I don’t want to,” Holly replied with a laugh. Matt Weedon was her former boss; she worked for him for 5 long years and wanted to dance on a cloud the day he announced his resignation.

“I’ve got to run . . . too much work and not enough time to do it. I’ll catch you later,” Patricia said as she turned to leave.

“Have a nice day,” Holly said cheerfully.

Patricia Swain was Holly’s best friend at work. She was 57 years old, tall and slim and looked the part of the quintessential businesswoman. She was wearing her perfectly tailored navy blue suit, designer pumps, expensive white silk blouse, with salt-and-pepper hair cut into a stylish pixie. Patricia could carry off the short haircut without looking matronly, and her exuberant personality made her seem years younger. Holly and Patricia bonded when working on a project several years ago. They had been located on the same floor and would seek each other out for gossip and lunch; they worked in different areas now. They still saw each other several times a week. Holly often talked to Patricia when she had problems with James. Patricia had issues with her boss. She didn’t like him, and he was difficult to work for. Patricia was happily married though, to the same man for 32 years. Holly wished she could say the same.

Holly put her unhappy thoughts aside and went back to crunching numbers for another hour. Lunchtime was approaching, and she started to get hungry. She decided to walk to the

nearby deli, two blocks away. As she left the building and walked down the sidewalk, she reveled in the feel of the warm sun on her face. September was warm and the weather today was perfect and inviting. She thought about continuing her backyard tan this upcoming weekend. She was a redhead who loved the sun and carefully nurtured a light tan. Lying in the sun was therapeutic for her. It made her feel relaxed.

Holly stood 5 foot 7 with long and thick auburn hair that fell well below her shoulders. Her large, hazel green eyes were framed with naturally curling eyelashes. She didn't need to wear much makeup. She had a slim and slightly athletic build from regular workouts, and she looked good today. She was dressed in a dark purple suit with a knee-length skirt and black, low-heeled pumps that showcased her toned calves. She noticed more than one man checking her out as she walked down the street. Holly was a strikingly pretty woman who didn't realize how beautiful she appeared to others. She was 45 and did her best to stay in shape; she was afraid of growing old and fat.

As she entered the deli, she recognized the tall man standing at the end of the line. He turned around to see who was behind him and greeted her warmly.

"Holly! How are you today?" Charlie Thomas said with a flicker of excitement in his eyes . . . *My fantasy girl just walked into the room . . . I wonder if she still has that live-in boyfriend.*

Holly was surprised to see him. It was a funny coincidence after talking about him with Patricia earlier. "Hi, Charlie. I haven't seen you in months. Where have you been hiding?" she asked pleasantly.

"I've had to travel lately, although I don't like to travel for business much anymore," he replied. "It's such a nice day; I won't be surprised if my staff doesn't return from lunch."

Holly noticed how handsome Charlie looked today. She never looked at him in this way before. He was tall, standing 6 foot 4. She looked into his brown eyes as he talked, noticing his long eyelashes. She saw that his dark brown hair had streaks of gray which gave him a distinguished look. She thought to herself . . . *What a good looking man; I wouldn't kick him out of bed. Why didn't I notice him before? It's like I'm seeing him for the first time.*

"I hear you. I certainly don't want to return to work either. Hey, do you want to run away? We could hop a plane to the Bahamas or something," she said to him teasingly while

placing her hand on his arm . . . *Why did I reach out and touch his arm like that? I'm flirting with him . . . having visions of the two of us holding hands, walking along the beach.*

"I'd follow you anywhere," he replied with a charming smile, thinking . . . *Leave your boyfriend and run away with me.*

She was startled by the way he was looking at her and how it made her feel . . . happy inside, and her heart was beating a little faster. Holly started to reply, "Well, it sounds like a plan. You can buy the plane tickets and—"

"Charlie! I have some news to tell you!" Their moment was interrupted when Charlie's boss, Mitch Devlin, suddenly bolted through the door and struck up a conversation with him.

Holly didn't like Mitch. She thought he was obnoxious and pretentious. He gave a cursory hello to her and proceeded to talk to Charlie about one of their client's issues. Holly let Mitch cut in front of her so he could talk to Charlie more easily. Mitch was a nice-looking man, with a buzz haircut and brown eyes. He had prominent facial features and a Native American look to him. He liked expensive cars and had the money to afford them. He was demanding of his workers and not particularly compassionate.

Charlie and Mitch became involved in conversation, and she stood behind them in line thinking romantic thoughts about Charlie. He was 8 years older than she, the same as James; she knew that from handling personnel records when he was working in her group several years ago. He had a master's degree in operations research, a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering, and served as a pilot in the air force. She loved that he was tall and he didn't slouch. He had broad shoulders, a flat stomach, and obviously worked out. There was a small bald spot on the back of his head; however, it didn't detract from his looks. She was enjoying her thoughts of running away with him.

In her previous relationships with Roger and Alex, when things started to go wrong, she would get crushes on other men. Granted, neither one of them treated her well. In the 11 years she lived with James, she never had thoughts like this until now. It was happening again. She hoped it would be a passing thing. Charlie was looking too good to her today. An uneasy heaviness was forming around her heart. She decided that she would make things right with James, and that her thoughts about Charlie were a warning signal. She still loved James, and missed him when he wasn't around.

Charlie and Mitch ordered their sandwiches to go and turned to leave the deli when they were ready. Charlie looked at Holly and said to her, "Have a nice day."

"You too, Charlie," Holly replied and turned to watch him and Mitch walk out of the deli, still in awe of Charlie and the strange new feelings she was having for him.

Holly got her lunch order to go and walked back to the office. She started thinking about her situation with James again. He was her third and longest significant relationship. She wasn't getting any younger and didn't want to start over with someone new. It took so long to build a relationship, and she had time and effort invested in him.

She arrived back at her office, ate her lunch, and devoted the rest of the day to various administrative tasks that were piling up. The day went by quickly and soon it was quitting time. Holly changed into her flat shoes to walk to the subway station, or the "Metro" as everyone called it. As she left the office and walked out of the building, she had a thought to stop by the bookstore three blocks away. The bookstore was a small, privately owned business called, "The Book Store," an unassuming name and easy to remember. Despite the simple name, it was a great place for books and the selection and variety were good. Holly was drawn to the New Age and Philosophy sections. She loved to read books about reincarnation, spiritual healing methods, how-to books on developing psychic ability, communicating with angels, books written by psychics describing the afterlife, and anything with spiritual or metaphysical content.

She glanced over the available selections in the New Age section and was drawn to a book written by a hypnotherapist who performed past-life regressions for his clients. It was titled, *Welcome to Yesterday*, by William Livingston. A light bulb turned on in her head and she thought she would look into seeing if there were any people in the Washington area who did this kind of work. She bought the book and left the store. She was excited at the prospect of being hypnotized into a past life. She believed in reincarnation and read much about it over the years.

On her ride home that afternoon, she overheard bits and pieces of a conversation that two ladies sitting behind her were having about calling a psychic hotline. Their voices went from soft to loud, depending on the sensitivity of the subject.

"... and the psychic I talked to was amazing," Lady #1 said.

"What did she tell you?" Lady #2 asked.

“She told me that I shared 15 lives with my husband, and 10 lives with my mother,” Lady #1 said. “She said in 7 of the lives I shared with my husband that I was a man and he was a woman!”

Lady #2 let out a laugh which sounded more like a cackle. Both women were laughing now. The train came to a stop and both ladies got up and exited. Holly was sorry to see them go. She enjoyed eavesdropping on their conversation and wanted to hear more. She consulted phone psychics at various times throughout her life, but since she had been with James, she never felt the need to consult a psychic. Her life was filled with love and happiness, and there was no anxiety about the future . . . until recently. She was beginning to think there was a message here. First she was drawn to the bookstore and bought a book about reincarnation, and then she heard these ladies talking about psychics and past lives. She decided to investigate seeing or calling a psychic, and look into consulting with a past-life regression therapist.

Holly arrived home to a quiet and empty house, as usual. She and James lived in Alexandria, VA, near the Huntington Metro station which made commuting to downtown Washington tolerable. Their house was a small, single-family home on a large, flat lot. There was a wooden privacy fence around the property, and she nurtured a sunflower garden in the backyard, along the back part of the fence. She loved sunflowers and grew Kong Hybrids, which can grow up to 14 feet tall. She enjoyed looking out her kitchen window over the summer and watching these giant beauties rise. She measured them yesterday and most were close to that now. There was a concrete patio just outside the dining room, and it was perfect for having guests over for cookouts and lying in the sun.

The ranch-style house was made of brick with a finished basement. It was a two-bedroom, one-bathroom house. She liked to joke that she lived in a box, as the house was plain-looking on the outside. From the street it looked like a simple, one-story house with two large windows on each side of the entry door. She planted boxwood shrubs underneath each window when she first bought the place, and they were now thick and full. The inside was pretty, with honey-colored hardwood floors throughout and off-white painted walls. The furniture was plush and comfortable in shades of dark olive green, orange-red and beige. A brightly colored area rug in coordinating earth tones was the centerpiece of the living room and helped bring it to life. The sheer curtains on the two main windows were an orange-red color which helped the living room

pop, and blended nicely with the area rug. She was a good housekeeper and took pride in her home.

As she walked through the door, the cat woke up from its slumber, stretched, and jumped off the sofa and came over to her. She and James recently adopted this cat from the local animal shelter and called her Fate. They didn't choose to name her "Fate," that was her name at the shelter, and it seemed appropriate to keep it. She was a 5-year-old Tortie with beautiful, light green eyes. She had thick, silky, luxurious fur. She meowed at Holly because she was hungry and she knew that Holly fed her when she got home from work.

"I'll feed you in a moment, sweetheart. Let Mommy get settled first," she said to the cat.

Fate followed Holly as she went into the bedroom to change into more comfortable clothes; she sat waiting patiently for her to finish up what she was doing. Holly turned on her computer in the spare bedroom which they set up as an office, and then went to the basement to prepare Fate's meal as the cat followed her, bounding down the stairs.

After she fed the cat, she made her own dinner. She opened a can of tomato soup and cooked a grilled cheese sandwich. She gulped her soup and ate her sandwich quickly. She was anxious to get on the computer and search the Internet for local psychics and hypnotherapists.

When she finished eating, Holly went into the home office and began to search the Internet. She searched for past-life regression therapists and found several in the area. She noticed that none of them had their fees listed. This was a concern for her as she didn't want to spend a small fortune on this venture and not seeing any prices led her to believe that it was expensive. She was able to find one hypnotherapist who listed her fees. For a 2-hour session, this therapist was charging \$350. The maximum Holly would spend for something like this would be \$150. After all, there was no guarantee that she would be able to be hypnotized, definitely something to consider when spending that kind of money.

She thought that her next option was to visit a psychic medium. She hoped this would be more affordable. She continued her Internet search and found one located in the Dupont Circle area of downtown D.C. Dupont Circle was easily accessible by the Metro and was an interesting part of the city with restaurants, shops, small museums, and galleries. The psychic's name was Martina Preston and her business was called "Martina's Psychic Services." She was a medium who claimed she could talk to the deceased, angels, spirit guides, see past lives and tell the future. She charged \$150.00 for a 45 minute session. Holly thought this was expensive, yet she

wanted to find out about her past lives and decided to go for it. She noticed that Martina had evening hours until 9:00 p.m.; she looked at the clock on the wall and saw that it was now 8:15 p.m. She called and was able to connect right away.

“Hello, this is Martina,” the psychic answered.

“Hi, my name is Holly, and I would like to make an appointment for this Saturday. I would like to have a past-life reading,” Holly said.

“Certainly . . . I have an opening this Saturday at 11:30 a.m. Will that work for you?” Martina asked.

“Yes, I will be there. My name is Holly O’Rourke,” Holly replied happily.

“Great, I look forward to seeing you then. If for some reason you are unable to make it, please call to let me know,” Martina said.

“I will. Thank you. See you Saturday,” Holly replied and hung up the phone.

Holly was so excited that she had a hard time falling asleep that night. Tomorrow was Friday, and she wouldn’t have to wait long for her reading. She finally dozed off and was slightly awakened by James getting home from work and crawling into bed next to her. She acknowledged him in her state of half-sleep, and he kissed her on the cheek. She caught a whiff of fragrance that smelled like sweet vanilla. She thought for a half-second that he must have taken a shower before coming to bed, and then she rolled over and went back to sleep.

James was sleeping soundly when she woke up for work the next morning. She went through her usual morning routine, thinking about her upcoming psychic reading. As she was taking her shower, she vaguely recalled James smelling like vanilla and realized that neither of the soap bars in the shower smelled like vanilla. *Maybe he was making or sampling desserts last night*, she thought to herself.

She was ready to walk out the door when James appeared in the living room looking handsomely disheveled in his gray lounge pants, muscular shirtless chest, and tousled hair. She admired how sexy he looked. Their sex life wasn’t what it used to be, the arguments and fights these past 2 years, combined with him not being around, had taken their toll. She had a momentary impulse to call in sick to work and stay home in bed with him, and then realized she had to finish a report which was due Monday.

“Good morning beautiful,” James said to her.

“Good morning,” Holly replied casually, remembering the fight they had yesterday.

“I have Sunday and Monday off and I thought we should do something fun. Anything you want,” he said.

“We haven’t done anything fun together in a long time. I don’t want you to do something with me if it’s going to feel like WORK,” she replied tersely.

“I know I haven’t been the best partner. I’m sorry, and I want to make it up to you,” he said and walked over to her and pulled her close to him, nuzzling his head into her hair. She noticed again the faint smell of vanilla.

“You smell like vanilla,” she said.

“Oh, that’s from the new room spray we started using in the kitchen. Not only does it smell fantastic, it gets rid of stale food odors too,” he replied . . . *I sound like a friggin’ commercial . . . I wish I had taken a shower before coming to bed last night.*

“I like it, bring some home. I’ve got to get going. I’ll see you late tonight,” she said and kissed him lightly on the lips.

“Have a good day,” he replied and watched her get into her car and pull out of the driveway.

As Holly drove to the Metro station, she felt somewhat relieved by James apologizing and wanting to spend more time with her and hoped he really meant it this time. She was curious as to what the upcoming psychic visit would uncover concerning their relationship.

When she stepped off the train that morning, she noticed Charlie in the distance. He was too far ahead for her to catch up with him, so she admired him from afar. He was so tall and yet he carried himself well, and didn’t have a lumbering or goofy walk. She watched him get on the escalator, smiling to herself and having mental pictures of the two of them engaged in a steamy kiss. *Why am I thinking stuff like this? It must be because I’m sex deprived . . .* she thought to herself. Watching Charlie made her feel like a teenage girl hoping to catch a glimpse of her dreamy crush on her way to class.

Holly settled into her work routine and drank three cups of coffee, hoping the caffeine would help her focus on her work. There must have been 100 e-mails in her inbox this morning. She had many tasks to get done today, including travel reservations for several program managers, each of them going different places. One of the manager’s she supported, Jack Briggs, left her 20 documents that needed to be scanned. She didn’t want to do any of it. She took five documents from the stack of 20 and walked to the copy room. It was a large room with three

copiers, two black-and-white, and one color. There was a fax machine and wall cabinets containing various office supplies. While she was standing at the copier, Neil Peters entered to fax a document and he struck up a conversation with her.

“Hi Holly. Got any plans for the weekend?”

“Not really. James has to work most of the weekend. I’m going to see a psychic tomorrow, just for fun,” she replied thinking . . . *It isn’t just for fun . . . I don’t want to ruin my credibility by admitting the truth.*

“That sounds cool. I’ve been to a few psychics in my time. Some of them were good, some not so much,” he replied. Neil Peters was an interesting guy to talk to. He was a retired naval officer who had been around the world in his career. He was a short man, standing 5 foot 6 and probably 40 pounds overweight. He was in his early 60’s with hair that was still brown, showing no hints of gray, and he wore plastic-framed glasses. He told colorful stories of the places he visited, and was well-liked by everyone. He continued, “What kind of reading are you going for?”

“I’m going for a past-life reading,” she replied feeling self-conscious.

“Whoa, I bet that will be a hoot! I’ve never had one of those. Let me know if the psychic is any good. I might want to get a reading myself. I’ve had a strange recurring dream for a long time where I’m participating in some weird, native ceremony that involves fire and naked, writhing bodies,” he replied with a laugh.

Holly started laughing. “Sure. I’ll let you know,” she said with a smile, relieved that he didn’t think she was crazy.

“Have a good weekend,” Neil said as he left the room.

“You too,” Holly replied and continued to scan documents.

Patricia stopped by Holly’s office later that afternoon to see if she wanted to join her for drinks after work, she knocked on her door to get her attention.

“You’re working too hard,” Patricia said to her.

“No, it just looks that way,” Holly replied. “What’s up?”

“I stopped by to see if you want to join us for happy hour at Jake’s Joint.”

Jake’s was a fun, beer-themed restaurant four doors down from The Book Store. It had an outdoor, rooftop bar area that was open late spring through early fall, weather permitting. It wasn’t fancy, just a concrete rooftop bar set up with outdoor furniture and a fantastic view of

historic landmarks like the Capitol Building, the Washington Monument, and others. Patricia wasn't one to frequent happy hour and neither was Holly.

"That's surprising, you don't normally do happy hours," Holly replied.

"Normally I don't. Andy's in the area on business and it was his idea," Patricia said.

"Sure, I'd love to. It beats sitting alone at the house tonight," Holly said, overjoyed that she had an opportunity for some fun this evening.

"I'll come by and get you, and we'll walk over together," Patricia said.

"Great, see you then!" Holly replied.

Quitting time came 3 hours later, and Patricia and Holly walked down the street to Jake's. The sun was still high in the sky, and it was quite warm. Andy Swain was waiting outside the restaurant for his wife. Holly liked Andy; she thought he was the perfect husband. He adored Patricia, and she never said one bad thing about him. Andy and Patricia were the same age. They were college sweethearts. Andy stood 6 feet tall, with blue eyes and gray hair that was receding in the front. He had a warm and friendly personality.

"There are my two favorite ladies," Andy said, and then he kissed Patricia and shook hands with Holly. "Let's go get some drinks. I'll buy the first round." The three of them took the elevator to the rooftop. Holly loved the city view from there. As they stepped off the elevator, Holly heard someone call her name.

"Holly . . ." Charlie Thomas called out to her.

She looked in his direction, waved, and said, "Hi, Charlie." She was suddenly delighted to see him. He was sitting at a table with two of his colleagues, Henry and Nathan, who Holly didn't know well. They were sharing a pitcher of beer.

"Come on over, bring your friends," Charlie said and motioned to a vacant table next to his.

"He seems friendly; the more the merrier," Andy replied and the three of them went to join Charlie and his companions.

As Holly approached the table she felt her heart pounding . . . *Why am I having this reaction?* Charlie got up and moved the adjoining table close to his and rearranged the chairs so they would be comfortable. Patricia immediately noticed the sparkle in Charlie's eyes as he held out a chair for Holly. Charlie wanted Holly to sit across from him so he could look at her.

“Good to see you Charlie,” Patricia greeted him with a smile. “This is my husband, Andy.” The two men shook hands, and Charlie introduced them to Henry and Nathan, who seemed kind of quiet and were just happy to sit and drink their beers. A waitress asked to take their order, and Andy got the first round as promised. Patricia and Andy ordered scotch on the rocks and Holly ordered hard apple cider.

“If I’m going to drink, I should order something to eat when the waitress comes back. I want to make it home in one piece,” Holly said.

“Would you like to share a basket of potato skins?” Charlie asked.

“Yeah! That sounds great,” Holly replied.

When the waitress came back with their drinks, Charlie ordered food and Nathan and Henry finished their beers and said they had to leave and get home to their wives and kids. It was now just the four of them sitting around and talking about work. The alcohol helped Holly to feel more relaxed around Charlie and the conversation flowed easily among the four of them. Two hours later, Andy and Patricia had to leave as they had company coming to visit.

“Drive safely,” Holly said to them as they left.

“You too,” Patricia replied. “See you on Monday.”

Patricia and Andy left the bar and Holly and Charlie were alone together, sitting across from each other. Charlie consumed five beers over the course of happy hour and he was feeling good and buzzed. Holly felt on top of the world. She was more relaxed and happy than she had been in a long time. Charlie was looking at Holly like he could devour her as they continued to talk, and she loved every minute of it. *Charlie, I could drown in your eyes . . .* she thought, unaware that she was glowing.

At that moment, music began to play in the background. The bartender turned on the radio and speaker system. It was tuned to an oldies station playing hits from the 1970’s. The dreamy, ethereal song, “I Only Have Eyes for You,” sung by Art Garfunkel filled the air.

“So . . . are you still living with James?” Charlie asked her.

“Yes,” Holly replied.

“Too bad,” he said with a sigh, looking into her eyes.

Holly held Charlie’s gaze for a few seconds, and asked him with a teasing look on her face, “Why is it too bad that I’m still living with James?” *Here I go, flirting with him again.*

His dark eyes appeared serious and he replied, "It's too bad because if he wasn't in your life, then I would have a chance with you."

"Charlie, that is so sweet," Holly replied a little breathlessly and continued, "If I were single, you would". . . *I would do way more than just go out with you . . . and you would like it . . .* she thought.

"Good to know," he replied with a big smile and looked at her lovingly. "I hope I'm not making you feel uncomfortable. I like being here with you, and you are fun to talk to. I think you are beautiful . . . I'm saying this because I've had a few too many beers."

"It's okay, Charlie. I've had a few too many myself" . . . *I'm quite drunk, and crazy, happy, silly, and trying not to say or do anything stupid . . . I'm doing my best to refrain from throwing myself at you.* "I don't want to pass out on the Metro. My head is spinning a little," she said and started giggling. She drank at least four hard ciders since eating the potato skins, which were gone in the first hour.

"I take the Metro too. What station do you get off at?" he asked thinking . . . *I'm going to help her get home tonight.*

"Huntington," she replied.

"I take it to Springfield," he said. "I can ride the Metro with you to Huntington and make sure you get to your car okay."

"That's out of your way. You'll have to backtrack to Springfield," she replied.

"I don't mind. I'd feel better knowing that you made it home safely. That is, if it's okay with you," he said . . . *I could stay here talking with you all night.*

"Yes, it's okay. I guess we should go before you have to carry me out of here," she said jokingly.

"I would happily do that," he replied smiling.

Holly and Charlie got up to leave. The radio was now playing the joyful, romantic song "Laughter in the Rain," by Neil Sedaka. The bar was getting crowded and their vacated table was taken before they stepped on the elevator.

They walked down the city sidewalk toward the Metro station. The sun was setting, and it was beginning to get dark. Holly looked up at the sky and saw a glimpse of the moon. There would be a full moon later tonight. The early twilight air was pleasant and warm. Charlie was walking close beside her, and she felt like she was on a first date. She enjoyed being with him

and didn't want their evening to end. The city was busy tonight, lit up with cars and buildings, and a street band was playing their instruments hoping for money from the passersby. One of the band members began to sing another old song from the 1970's. He began to belt out the words to "Me and Mrs. Jones," by Billy Paul. The song was about an extramarital affair, and it was one of Holly's favorites. She loved the smooth, jazzy tune and prominent saxophone.

"That's one of my favorite songs," Holly said . . . *I would jump Charlie's bones if I was unattached, and that song fits in perfectly with the way I feel right now.*

"I like it too. That guy sounds exactly like the original singer," Charlie replied and continued, "I like a lot of 70's soul music. I even like old disco tunes."

"So do I!" she replied enthusiastically.

"You weren't old enough to be into the disco scene," Charlie playfully said to her.

"I have an older sister who listened to the Bee Gees, Donna Summer, Gloria Gaynor, The Village People, and a bunch of others. I grew up listening to that kind of music," Holly replied.

"Would you like to stop and get a pastry and coffee? I'm concerned about you driving home. I think you need more food to absorb the alcohol," he asked.

"I'd love to. There's a Starbucks across the street," she replied.

"Let's cross here . . . There's no crosswalk further down," he said and reached out to take her hand as they hurried across the street. Holly felt like she was walking on air. He held onto her hand for a few moments after they reached the other side of the street, and then gradually let go.

They walked into Starbucks, and there wasn't a line. As they were standing at the counter, Charlie placed his hand on the small of her back and said, "This is on me. What would you like?"

I love how I feel when you touch me . . . "I'll have a skinny vanilla latte and that big piece of chocolate layer cake, that's looking at me," she replied happily and asked, "Are you going to get anything?"

"Yes, I'll have an espresso and that pastry over there that looks like tiramisu," he replied, his hand still on the small of her back. Holly resisted the urge to lean into him.

Charlie paid for their items, and they took a seat to wait for their order. "A skinny vanilla latte and a big piece of chocolate cake . . . are you the type who orders desserts with Diet Coke?" he said lightheartedly to Holly.

“Yes, and proud of it,” she replied with a wide smile . . . *It’s so easy to be with him.*

A few minutes later, their order was ready. Charlie walked up to the counter and got their coffees and brought them back to the table.

“Thank you Charlie . . . Now I can dive into this chocolate cake,” she said.

“If you want to try my tiramisu, you better do so now, because it won’t be around for long,” he replied.

Holly stuck her fork into his dessert and tasted it, “This is fantastic. I think I should concentrate on my cake or I’ll end up eating most of yours.” . . . *This feels intimate, like we’ve been a couple for years.*

“I’ll buy you another one,” Charlie offered.

“No, I’ll have to work out extra tomorrow to make up for splurging tonight,” she said . . . *I feel like I’m with my lover . . . This feels wonderful.*

“Me too. I plan to go running and hit the gym tomorrow,” Charlie said.

James does those things too . . . “You’re in great shape. I think it’s important to exercise regularly,” she said to him.

She thinks I look hot . . . She’s gorgeous and I know she takes care of herself . . . “Isn’t this a great dinner? Beer, potato skins, cake and coffee,” he said, highly amused.

“The BEST!” she replied. They finished their cake and coffee and resumed their walk to the Metro.

“I feel more alert, that was a good idea to stop for food, even though technically it wasn’t food,” Holly said smiling up at him.

“Dessert and coffee makes life worth living,” Charlie said with exuberance.

They walked two more blocks and the Metro station was on the other side of the street. When they saw the crosswalk signal, they instinctively reached for each other’s hand and hurried across. This time they didn’t let go until they reached the escalator for the ride down to the turnstiles. As luck would have it, the train they needed was right there waiting for them. The seats were small and cramped, and this was one time she didn’t mind.

As they sat down in the small seats, Charlie said, “Normally I detest these cramped seats. However, tonight, I’m thankful for them.”

Holly laughed and said, “I think you are flirting with me.”

“Yes, I am, and I know you aren’t currently available. If that changes, I hope you’ll let me know,” he replied and touched her hand.

“Oh, I will,” she replied sincerely . . . *You bet I will.*

“So, what other types of music do you like?” Charlie asked, wanting to keep the conversation interesting and light.

“I like country and classical along with instrumental and orchestral music. What I don’t like are sad songs. I think music should be uplifting. I work hard to stay happy and upbeat. What about you?”

“I’m not a big fan of country music, although I find myself listening to it on occasion. I’m with you on the classical, instrumental, and orchestral music. I could go to a National Symphony concert and enjoy it immensely,” he replied with enthusiasm.

“Me too. I don’t know many people who have the same musical taste as I do. It’s nice to know I have a kindred spirit working at MTAC,” she said.

“What about movies and TV? What do you like to watch?” he asked, wanting to know if they had similar tastes in that area too.

“I like comedy, suspense, adventure, mystery, and horror stories if the focus is on the supernatural and not a crazed slasher. I’m not a fan of heavy emotional drama and tearjerkers. Romantic movies are okay if they are not clichéd. I like happy endings. I’m a big fan of the History Channel, HGTV, and the Discovery Channel,” she replied.

“We have a lot in common. I like everything that you just said, with the addition of war stories and anything military, typical guy stuff. I know you like chocolate cake and potato skins, what other comfort foods do you like?” he asked.

“I love macaroni and cheese, scalloped potatoes, and any type of bread with gobs of real butter. I don’t eat that stuff often, and when I do, I savor it, like tonight,” she said fondly . . . *I wish I had met you before I met James.*

I could fall hard and fast for this one . . . “Same here. If you ever want someone to eat dessert with, don’t hesitate to give me a call,” he smiled.

“So, if I should get a raging sweet tooth at 2:00 in the afternoon while I’m sitting at my desk, I can call you and we can sneak out for a piece of cake?” she said laughingly.

“Sure, if I’m not in a meeting,” he replied smiling.

The train reached Huntington, and they stepped off and began the short walk to the parking garage and her car, a white 2010 Lincoln MKX. It was parked on the top level of the parking garage. It was dark and the full moon was hovering over them. The night sky was clear and filled with stars.

“Do you live far from here?” he asked.

“No, probably 2 miles at most,” she replied and looked up at him.

“Good. I think you can make it 2 miles,” he said looking in her eyes, not wanting to leave. They stood looking at each other for a few seconds, and she broke the silence by saying, “Thank you so much for making sure I got to my car okay, and for the good eats. You’re a great guy Charlie. You went out of your way tonight.”

Charlie leaned down and kissed her on the lips. She smiled up at him and said, “Thanks again. Please drive home safely. I don’t want anything to happen to you.” Her heart was pounding in her chest, and she wanted to kiss him again . . . and again.

“Don’t worry, I’m fine to drive home. I’ll see you at work next week,” he replied and squeezed her hand, continuing to hold her gaze and wanting to kiss her again. He then opened her car door and she stepped inside.

“Thanks, Charlie. Have a good weekend,” she said to him.

“You too, drive safely,” he replied.

She waved to Charlie before she drove away. He watched until she left the parking garage, and then he walked back to the Metro to get the next train to Springfield. As he made his way back to the station, he hoped he didn’t scare her off. The alcohol really got to him. He liked Holly and he knew he couldn’t have her . . . yet. He secretly hoped she would break up with James soon. *I think that things aren’t too happy at home . . . Women in happy relationships don’t usually carry on like she did with me, holding hands and flirting . . . I’ll have to contain myself at work . . . I’ll be a gentleman and hope things aren’t awkward between us next week.*

I can’t believe Charlie kissed me! Oh . . . my . . . God! I won’t be able to stop thinking about him . . . she thought over and over as she drove home. She watched her speed closely. She hadn’t driven under the influence in years and didn’t want to get pulled over tonight. *I feel young again . . . I had so much fun this evening . . . and Charlie kissed me!* She pulled into the driveway, got out of her car, and unlocked the door to the house. As soon as she walked through the door Fate began voicing her displeasure. She was hungry. She fed the cat, and then went into

the bedroom to change her clothes. She lay down on the bed for a few moments while still fully dressed, thinking about Charlie. Her head started to spin and she passed out.

James returned home in the early hours of the morning. He put his key into the front door and discovered it was unlocked. Holly never left a door unlocked. He was panicked now. He entered the house and went into the bedroom and saw Holly asleep on the bed fully dressed. She still had her shoes on. He thought it was strange and woke her up to find out if something was wrong.

“Holly, wake-up. You’re sleeping in your clothes,” James said as he gently shook her awake.

Holly woke up. Her head was throbbing, and her mouth was dry. She sat up on the bed and said, “Hi James. I went to happy hour with some coworkers and drank too much. My head feels like it’s going to explode.”

“You left the front door unlocked. Anybody could have just walk in here. How did you get home? Did you drive?” he asked her angrily. His voice was loud, and he was thinking of several guys who would like to mess him up.

“I’m sorry I left the door unlocked. Fate was hungry so I fed her first and must have forgotten to lock the door behind me. I was going to take off my clothes, and when I lay down on the bed I must have passed out. I got home just fine, as you can see. The Lincoln and I are in one piece,” she replied abruptly.

“Don’t let it happen again,” he scolded her.

“What do you mean by that?” she said, and felt her anger rising.

“Leaving the door unlocked,” he replied with exasperation. “I don’t mind if you want to go out with your coworkers, just please, be more careful.”

“Okay. I’m sorry,” she said, feeling guilty that just a few hours ago she kissed a handsome man under the moonlight, or rather she let him kiss her, and she liked it.

“I’ve had a rough day and I want to get to bed,” James said, somewhat irritated.

“Me too,” Holly replied. They both changed into sleepwear, got into bed and were asleep within minutes.

Later that morning Holly woke up first and went into the kitchen to make the coffee. She looked at the clock on the wall and it was 8:15. She had her psychic reading later this morning and James had to be at work at 3:00. She felt better, although her head was still aching. She took two aspirin with her first cup of coffee and sat down at the dining-room table. She got back up and opened the curtains so she could look out onto the patio.

She thought about last night and Charlie. The song “Me and Mrs. Jones” was running through her head like a freight train. She was having mental pictures of the two of them in the coffee shop and thinking of how they held hands walking to the Metro. *I guess I sort of cheated on James last night, holding hands with another man, even though it wasn't for very long. One part of her brain was thinking . . . Don't be so hard on yourself. James has taken you for granted for a long time. He repeatedly hurt your feelings by choosing to spend time with his guy friends over you, and you never do fun things together anymore . . . no wonder you are attracted to someone else . . . Charlie is HOT!* The other part of her brain countered with . . . *Stop making excuses . . . you have years invested in James and you know you still love him . . . Work it out, don't ruin it by having an affair.* Her troubling thoughts were interrupted by James coming into the kitchen.

“Good morning,” he said as he poured his coffee into a bright yellow mug.

“Good morning,” she replied, feeling the unspoken coldness between them.

“So, what are your plans today?” he asked.

“I have an appointment at 11:30 downtown to see a psychic,” she replied.

James laughed out loud, and it broke the tension. She started to laugh too.

“Why the hell do you want to see a psychic?” he asked, still laughing.

“I overheard some ladies on the Metro talking about past lives and I thought it would be a fun thing to explore,” she replied.

“Past lives? I know you believe in that stuff . . . I don't. I believe you get one chance at life, and then you turn into worm food,” he said with smug satisfaction. “Let me know what she says.”

“I will. It should be interesting,” Holly replied. She was used to James not taking any of this seriously. He sincerely believed you turn into worm food and that is the end of the road.

“I'm sorry I jumped on your case last night,” he said.

“That’s okay. I understand. It wasn’t smart, forgetting to lock the door,” she replied.

“How did you get home? You must have driven drunk,” he said, looking serious now.

“I told you last night that I got home fine. By the time I got to my car I wasn’t drunk anymore, just buzzed. I drove fine,” she replied, slightly agitated.

“How about I make a sausage, ham, and cheese omelet for us?” he asked, hoping an offer of food would calm the residual irritation between them.

“Sure. I’m extremely hungry right now,” she replied.

James cooked a delicious omelet for them. She loved that he could cook. There were advantages to living with a chef. James liked to invent new meals for the restaurant, and he often asked Holly to try them first, although it seemed like it had been months since he created a new entree. Holly scarfed down the omelet like a starving prisoner. James watched in amazement. He wasn’t used to seeing her eat like that.

“You just inhaled an omelet stuffed with meat, and it wasn’t a small one either. I’m still working on mine,” he said with a look of surprise on his face.

“The last thing I ate was a piece of chocolate cake last night and some potato skins several hours before that. No real dinner,” she replied.

“I’m surprised you aren’t sick this morning. Please be more careful in the future and never forget to lock the door behind you, especially late at night,” James said to her, trying his best to not sound scolding.

“Yes, Daddy,” she replied with a laugh and glanced up at the kitchen clock. “I need to get ready for my appointment.”

She took a shower and later as she was putting on her make-up, James took one. By the time he was finished showering, she was ready to go. He was blow drying his hair in the bathroom when she went to kiss him good-bye.

“I’ll see you when I get back,” Holly said and kissed him.

“What do you want to do tomorrow?” James asked her.

“Oh, I don’t know. Let me think about it,” she replied.

“Whatever you want is fine with me.”

“See you later,” she said.

This Saturday morning was sunny and warm and Holly was feeling anxious. She hoped this woman would be able to tell her about her past lives. She arrived ten minutes early to the appointment. Martina was located within walking distance from the Metro. She lived in a small row house with a sign in the front yard indicating her services by appointment only. Holly rang the doorbell, and Martina opened the door.

“Hello. Are you Holly O’Rourke?” Martina Preston asked her.

“Yes. Are you Martina?” she asked excitedly.

“Yes, I am. It’s great to meet you. Come on in,” Martina said with a smile and extended her hand. Martina’s demeanor was friendly and inviting and Holly instantly felt at ease.

Martina was a little lady, standing no more than 5 foot1. She was in her mid-30’s with a round, pretty face with crystal blue eyes, medium brown, curly hair that fell past her shoulders, and a voluptuous figure. She was wearing a red checkered sundress and matching solid red espadrille shoes. She led Holly into a small room with gleaming hardwood floors and two white leather chairs and a round wooden table. There were two windows in this room. Martina pulled down the shades to block the sun. There was a large wooden cabinet next to one of the windows. The room was practically empty.

“Have a seat Holly, and we will talk for a few minutes,” Martina said. The two women sat in the white chairs across from each other.

“So, you are here today for a past-life reading, correct?” Martina asked.

“Yes,” Holly replied.

“First, I want to tell you what will likely happen during this session. I go into a trancelike state, and my voice might change. I sometimes take on the behavior of whatever spirit guide is there to speak through me. Usually it is my spirit guide working together with your spirit guide to access your past lives. Each of us has spirit guides to help us in our earthly incarnations. Your primary spirit guide is assigned to you before reincarnating into your current body. As you go through life, the circle of your guides expands, depending on the work you need to accomplish. When you reincarnate, you go through a veil of amnesia, and as you learn and grow in this life, you wonder, what the heck am I here for?

“We come from heaven, a place of total love and happiness. Your enemies in this life are dear friends on the other side. By incarnating into physical bodies, you learn a deeper appreciation for good things and even the bad. The potential growth from experiencing the bad is

tremendous. There is no 'bad' in heaven, and if you never reincarnate you won't know the difference between good and bad. There are many wonderful worlds to advance to in heaven after your schooling on Earth and your incarnations are completed.

"We plan our lives before we are born, and our spirit guides are here to help us achieve what we came here to learn and do. They do this by giving us intuitive nudges in the right direction, although we don't listen to them most of the time. They do their best to keep us on track and guide us for our own good.

"Today, we will be accessing an area of the spiritual realm called the Akashic Records. This realm contains detailed records of your past lives and the past lives for every soul who has reincarnated. Your thoughts, dreams, and actions are recorded for eternity. Do you have any questions before we start?" Martina asked.

"No, I understand. We can begin whenever you are ready," Holly replied thinking . . . *Even our thoughts are recorded for eternity? That's embarrassing . . . Thank goodness not just anyone can access them.*

"Okay. I will ask the guides to show the past lives that might resonate with you at this point in time," Martina replied and became quiet.

It took several seconds for Martina to enter a trancelike state. She began to speak and the voice was not her own. A deep male voice was speaking with a distinct Middle-Eastern accent:

"Hello, Holly. My name is Kavi . . . I am your guide."

"You lived a life in Atlantis and fell deeply in love with your college teacher. He was married and would not leave his wife. You became pregnant with his child . . ." The voice paused for a few seconds.

"You lived a life in India in 1500 BC. You were a man in that life, and we were brothers. Your name was Sanjay. We were devout Hindus and ran a spiritual center together where we helped people better their lives . . ." Again, he paused for a few seconds before continuing.

"I see a life as a Roman Gladiator during the year of 47 BC. You were a prisoner of war and forced into fighting for the Roman's entertainment . . ." More silence.

“You were a baby left on the doorstep of a monastery in Ireland in the year of 816 and raised by monks. You died young, as the monastery was raided and burned to the ground by Vikings. The Vikings gang raped you before cutting off your head . . .”
Still more silence.

“I see a life in Germany in the 1340s. You were a young boy and your mother was mean and cruel to you. You left home on the day you turned 16 . . .” The voice again paused.

“I see you and the man who was your abusive German mother. You are both on a Spanish sailing ship in the late 1480s. You are engaged in a fist fight and you kill him . . .” More silence ensued.

“You lived another life in Germany in the 1560s. During this time they killed women suspected of witchcraft, similar to the Salem Witch Trials in America. The townspeople believe that you are a witch and burn down your home. You escape your burning house and lose everything you own. A man traveling through the countryside comes to your rescue and helps you get back on your feet. This is the same man who was your married lover in Atlantis . . .” The voice paused for a moment.

“You lived in Japan in the early 1600s, where you were a prostitute and killed your pimp. This is the same man who was your abusive German mother and enemy on the Spanish sailing ship. You killed him in self-defense . . .” The voice hesitated for a brief moment before continuing.

“You lived in Sweden in the 1740s during a time of war. You tended to wounded soldiers, like a nurse. You fell in love with a married soldier from an allied country and carried on an affair with him for over a year. This affair cost him his position, and he was stripped of rank and sent back home. This broke both of your hearts . . .” Again, the voice was silent.

“In another life in England in the 1850s, during the Victorian Era, I see that you and this same man were again secret lovers and married to other people. You were best friends with his wife, and your husband was often away from home due to work. You had a falling out with his wife that ended your friendship, and the two of you began having a secret affair. One day your husband came home from work and caught the two

of you in bed together. He shot and killed your lover. You turned to alcohol to ease your depression and died 1 year later . . .” Moments later, the voice continued.

“You lived a frontier life in the American West during the late 1890s with the man who was your Atlantis lover. He treated you and the children poorly. He preferred getting drunk with his friends. You were extremely unhappy as you did most of the work on the farm to ensure the family’s survival.

“Holly, we reincarnate to experience life from different perspectives so that we can grow both as a human and a spirit. You have lived many more lives than what I have just shared with you. Earth is a classroom, and you choose what you wish to learn before reincarnating. It can take many lifetimes to learn your desired lessons. There is no time in the spiritual realm and you choose when and how to clear the negative karma that you have created. I want to add that you are not required to clear bad karma, nor are you required to reincarnate. As an eternal being of light and love, your soul desires to clear it and make things right for the greater good, and you make the choice to do so, in agreement with the other souls involved . . . That is all for now my dear . . .”

Martina came out of her trance. Holly sat there flabbergasted at what she had just heard. She didn’t know what to think or say. If Martina was a hoax, she was a damn good one.

“Kavi has left. Do you have any questions, Holly?” Martina asked.

“I don’t know. I’m in a state of astonishment at what just happened,” she replied.

“Did any of those past lives resonate with you?” Martina asked.

“Interestingly, in this lifetime I’ve never been unfaithful to any man that I was seeing. The Hindu life that he mentioned does resonate with me because I have several CDs of Hindu mantras that I chant on occasion to help me with occasional bouts of depression. I’m stunned, amazed, and fascinated by everything that was revealed. It’s one thing to read books about reincarnation and other people’s experiences. Having a reading like this just increases my curiosity. I want details, are these men in my current life?” she asked thinking . . . *Hearing my spirit guide’s voice was pretty freaky.*

Martina paused for a few moments and said, “Yes, you are currently in a relationship with one of them and you have crossed paths with the other two. One of them is a work

acquaintance, and the other was your first husband. I see that this first husband was physically and mentally abusive. You have shared many lifetimes with him.”

“I looked into having a past life regression session with a hypnotherapist and it was too expensive. Do you have any recommendations on how I can further explore this?” Holly asked.

“You could read a book on how to do your own past-life regressions and practice the techniques, or you could purchase a CD that includes a guided meditation similar to what a hypnotherapist does, and keep practicing until something happens. I think repeatedly listening to a past-life regression CD would help you eventually regress to other lifetimes and help to find the details. I see a lot of them listed on Amazon,” Martina replied.

“That’s a great idea . . . I think I’ll pursue that,” Holly said excitedly.

“If you happen to experience some past lives, interesting things will happen during these regressions. You will know the people you interact with, you will know who they are in your present life even though they look completely different, unless you haven’t met them yet in the here and now. Your soul knows who they are. We have 20 minutes left, is there anything else you would like to know?” Martina asked.

“Yes. I’ve had some problems with my significant other, James, these past 2 years and want to know where our relationship is headed,” Holly replied.

Martina was silent for a moment, and then she said, “I feel there is something he is hiding from you. He is deeply troubled. He is trying to work through his issues. Would you like a quick, three-card tarot reading on this?”

“Yes, definitely,” Holly replied.

Martina got her deck of tarot cards from the large wooden cabinet and asked Holly to think about her question and shuffle the deck. Holly shuffled the cards thinking about her situation with James. When she was done, Martina told her to place the cards in a pile on the table. Martina drew three cards from the top of the deck. The first card was the past, the second card was her present, and the third card was the future.

The first card she drew was the Two of Cups. It showed a picture of a man and a woman standing face-to-face sharing their cups (which look more like large chalices) with each other. The overall feeling of this card was joy and happiness.

The second card she drew was the Three of Swords. It showed a heart with three knives pierced through it. A large cloud was above the heart, and it looked like rain was pouring down onto it. Holly tensed up when she looked at this card. She was familiar with tarot cards as she had several decks of her own, and this wasn't a good omen.

The third card she drew was The Tower. It showed a building on fire at night. The top of the building has been blown off and there are figures jumping out the windows. Lightning is striking the building. Holly remembers when she used to do her own readings, and she often took this card out of the deck. This card alarmed her because of its catastrophic appearance.

Martina began to interpret the meaning of these cards, "I'm sure I don't have to tell you this, however, I tell each of my clients that there is nothing mystical or magical about tarot cards. They are simply a tool to help access your intuition and the subconscious mind. If your thoughts are scattered and you are unfocused, the reading will not be clear. I feel that in your case, this three-card reading gets to the heart of the matter. The card meanings are not set in stone. If you look at a card and something about it echoes a particular feeling or thought within you, pay attention to it," she said and continued . . .

"The Two of Cups in the first position signifies the past. Cups relate to emotions. This card typically indicates attraction and the beginning of a love relationship. In addition, it can indicate a business partnership or a truce, or a meeting of the minds. I feel that this card signifies the beginning of your relationship with James, although I also feel it could indicate someone you recently befriended." *Holly thought of Charlie when she said this.*

"The Three of Swords in the second position relates to the present. Swords relate to action, force, and power. This card indicates heartbreak and betrayal. You just have to glance at this card and the meaning is blatantly portrayed. I think you know this already. It doesn't mean that you will break up with James. However, I feel that you should take this as a warning that some type of upset is possible for you soon."

"The Tower in the third position relates to the future. I am getting a feeling of fear and apprehension from you. Please don't let this card scare you. It portends sudden change, upheaval, the possible dissolution of a relationship, and letting things go. However, it is not necessarily a negative card. In my experience, it often indicates a sudden revelation which sets you on a new and better path, or circumstances beyond your control that force a much-needed change."

Holly manages to suppress the tears and emotions building inside her. She is an emotional mess from her new and unexpected feelings for Charlie, and her conflicts with James, and now this reading. Martina watches her and explains that she doesn't sugarcoat readings, yet she thinks it is important to point out the positive aspects too.

"Holly, my advice for you is to find out what is troubling James and work with him to get through it. Don't dwell on the negative aspects of these cards. The future is constantly changing. It changes with every thought and action we undertake in our daily lives. Live your life day to day and focus on the things in life that make you happy and that you are thankful for. If you continue to dwell on the negative parts of this reading, you will attract the negativity it portends," Martina advised her, and then she asked, "Why don't I draw a fourth card to shed additional light on the situation?"

"Please do," Holly replied.

Martina drew a fourth card from the top of the deck. It was the Ace of Cups. This card showed a hand coming out from the sky holding a chalice which was overflowing with water. A white dove was hovering over the chalice. It was one of the most positive cards in the deck. Holly let out a sigh of relief when she saw it.

"The Ace of Cups in this upright position portends good things. Whatever problems arise from the previous cards' messages, you will overcome them and your life will be filled with love and happiness. I feel that a strong, happy, joyous love will come into your life. The relationship will be lovingly balanced. See, things aren't completely bad," Martina told her with a smile.

"Maybe things will turnaround with James," Holly said hopefully, yet she felt a strong feeling of discontent and a heaviness in her chest area as she spoke those words.

"It is too early to know, and like I said before, the future is constantly changing," Martina replied. "There is one more thing I want to tell you. You have strong psychic ability which I believe could be further developed, should you wish to explore it. You have the potential to be a psychic medium. Just something to consider."

"Wow! I don't know what to say to that. I've been intuitive my entire life, yet I haven't followed my inner guidance, and I've made plenty of mistakes. But the older I get, the more I try to listen to it. Thank you, Martina. I appreciate the readings, and I will try to focus on the positive. All this information is overwhelming," Holly replied.

“Thank you. I hope that both readings were helpful. Feel free to make another appointment anytime you need to. It has been a pleasure getting to know you,” she said.

“You too,” Holly said happily.

Holly paid Martina for her services and left the building. The sun was hot, and there was no breeze for relief. It was lunchtime and there were many people out for a stroll, walking their dogs, jogging, eating and drinking at the outdoor cafes, and taking in the beautiful day and everything that the city had to offer. Holly walked to the nearest Metro station thinking about the tarot card reading she just experienced. She barely noticed the other people around her, or the beauty of the day. She was in her own little world, feeling a jumble of mixed emotions. She was excited about the future, but worrying what might happen with James and feeling like she needed a drink of water or anything cold and wet. She was still dehydrated from her bender last night. She didn't drink alcohol often. She reflected on last night and Charlie, replaying the entire evening over in her head. She forced herself to stop thinking about him and instead began to recall what Martina told her about her past lives.

On the train ride back to Alexandria, she decided she would get on the computer and order a past-life regression CD when she arrived home. Her past lives weren't anything like she imagined they would be. She killed the same guy twice, had secret love affairs, was a man more than once, and lived in Atlantis. The Atlantis aspect was fascinating to her. She believed that Atlantis existed, even though it could never be proven. She wanted to know who was the man she had secret affairs with . . . *Could it be Charlie?* . . . and she was sure that Roger was the abusive mother and the one that she killed twice. James liked to drink and hang out with his guy friends. Was he the lousy frontier husband?