

Uneasiness swirled in the pit of Nat's stomach as they drifted closer while others streamed past. Her voice was a squawk with a strange upwards intonation at its thankful demise. 'Is that offer to meet at the pub, um...tonight, um, Sail and Anchor, for a drink, still open?'

Real smooth. Jeez, she hadn't nailed the cool or sophisticated greeting. How could she ever catch the eye of a man like Mancini?

Seb was in full doctor's mode, 'No. Not now,' His frank no-nonsense composure dissolved as her scent, all fresh and jasmine, flooded his professional manner. Lured away from work, he softened his rebuff. 'Arh, sorry.' Unable to stop the need he had to let her know he wasn't blowing her off, 'Tonight I have a JCP board dinner at Nunzio's.'

Somehow this woman loosened his lips, 'Is that how your luck's been playing out lately?' Drawn to her beautiful face, he leant in, transfixed on her full red lips. A pause. 'Same here.' A shuddery breath left him. No longer young and stupid, how could she reduce him to being this ridiculous? He didn't seem to affect her, he thought, except to make her angry or clam up or both. He had better control this, whatever *this* was. He'd made one big past mistake. Once was enough. Lesson learnt, he'd made himself impervious to women, other than to relieve the occasional carnal itch. Then along came this woman and he was weak with an overwhelming, all-over tingling itch that only she seemed to soothe.

Natasha couldn't help stupidly smiling back at him. 'Yeah, just my luck.'

People continued to flow busily around them. They were still.

Seb leant closer, mouthing, 'Luck can change.' While no one noticed, he gently squeezed her forearm, lingering a little. His tantalising touch drifting down her arm called to Natasha.

With her mind somersaulting down a soft grassy hill, she chose a song quickly to halt any nonsense from any Alters. Natasha's cheeks heated momentarily, luckily the only hint of disquiet showing outwardly. Inwardly she was the beginning of *Thunderstruck*, the AC/DC song, her mind spinning and cascading like the opening guitar solo. Her heart, having skipped a beat and slowed, was rapidly picking up speed like the drumming and chanting accompanying the guitar riff. Natasha's mind, heart and soul seemed to collide to produce only one thought. She'd been...thunderstruck.

Seb didn't want to feel her temper again. 'So, ah, will Rick...be with you?'

Her eyes fixed on his mouth and then flitted to his bottomless brown eyes. His heart leapt. She shook her head, and he felt strange. Excited and sad, he cocked his head.

Natasha shook her head again, trying to derail her adolescent desires. Thankfully it helped, as she scrambled to find words. Finally, 'No,' dreamily left her lips.

They were like two rocks lodged together in a stream of people who surged around them. They remained motionless, resistant. He wanted it to last. 'What about Monday night drinks and dinner?' His full megawatt Mancini shone. 'Maybe, together, our luck can change.' He fixed her with a caring gaze. 'Especially if we can finally be alone, just you and me.'

Her mind, although thunderstruck, finally caught up with his words. She was stunned. Sebastian Mancini was already granting her wishes she'd waited months hopelessly for another to deliver. Faking calm, she answered, 'You're on.' Gawkins returned as Natasha tried flirting with a playful swat at his shoulder, missing.

Seb took heart, he'd flustered her, albeit briefly. His voice molasses, he followed up, 'So how about we say seven pm Monday? I'll meet you at The Norfolk. Then what will be, will be.'

Internally Nat was putty in his hands. Right there, that thing he did with his voice, the smooth, deep, treacle thing, made her want to bend and bow in ways she never thought she could. He could talk to her all day in that tone, and she'd be his. Nonetheless, Goldilocks had trained her well and externally she only smiled. 'Sounds fine.' He was indeed the finest of temptations.