



**TWISTING
FATE'S ARM**

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*When we two parted,
In silence and tears
Half broken hearted
To sever for years.*

Lord Byron

‘When we two parted...’

*Did you ever have a dream so wonderful
That achieving it was totally impossible,
And if you did, it was inconceivable,
That you knew it would make you miserable?
Do you delude yourself that happiness would be total
Or if you try your hardest, you might achieve the unachievable
And help make the fantasy world believable?
It's simple if you try -- too simple.*

Colin Jones

‘Realism’

The afternoon had melted prematurely into evening. Gathering winds were punctuated by distant, angry thunderous growls. Colin Jones, hunched over his desk, stared at an article, but did not see it. The pressure of the threatening storm had been building over the weekend, and now, Monday afternoon, it brought an uncomfortable heat and tensions which tightened like a vice around his temples. A blinding streak, so intense that Colin thought someone had taken a flash photograph outside his window, was followed by snarls of thunder. They carried memories with them: the fire; the collapse of the roof; him, bursting from the thick clawing smoke; eyes stinging; him, lying face down in the grass; panting in the needling rain; the cold air clawing at his lungs.

He closed his eyes, unconsciously wiping his forehead. Then he looked back at the first line of the article, an article he'd been trying to read all day.

The phone buzzed. He jumped. He cursed himself for being spooked at a memory from so long ago. Daft, really. He wasn't getting anywhere with the article. He'd spent the day getting frustrated with admin – his shares in companies whose revenue gave him opportunity to write fiction – and his mind was still there and not on the task at hand.

On the phone, his secretary, Sally, spoke almost conspiratorially: "There's a young man here. Says he knew you a while ago. Wanted to

say hello.’

Colin closed his eyes. On the one hand, a visitor would be a welcome distraction: his work was going nowhere. On the other hand, it *was* a distraction. The deadline for his novel might be several months away, but time would soon pass. He weighed up the odds and the chance of a distraction won. ‘Show him through,’ he said, then lowered his voice. ‘I’ll want an urgent call in twenty minutes.’

A sound of paper being ripped. Colin jumped, looking at the rain lashing against the window. Lightning flared again. He realised he was holding his breath and counting seconds until the thunder. He shivered, feeling a breeze, even though the doors and windows were shut. ‘Did you get his name?’

‘James Holmes.’

Colin pulled a face. The name meant nothing to him. Most people who claimed to know him had met him at a signing and still greeted him like a long lost friend.

Yet, something was familiar. Something that flittered out of reach like a butterfly in a half-remembered dream. Holmes. Yes, that was a name he wasn’t going to forget. But not James.

‘Better show him in,’ Colin said, pushing the article away; he stretched in his chair. He wondered if ‘James Holmes’ had a preconceived idea of how his office should be. Did he expect it to be stacked from floor to ceiling with books, papers, filing cabinets of ideas? Perhaps a shelf of curios he’d picked up on his travels? He had only a small bookcase of reference and research books. Most of the information he needed could be found on the Internet and his research books changed with each project. His laptop was tucked away neatly in the corner of the office, looking lost on the enormous desk. The desk was for when notepads of ideas, plots and character maps were unfurled. On the other side of the office there was an old leather sofa and a coffee table next to a small drinks cabinet. Only a few items adorned the walls. Hardly anything to inspire ... or distract.

He conjured a professional smile as the door opened.

His smile faded. He took a double take. His visitor was a boy, a

young man, perhaps sixteen, dressed in a white sports jacket, soaked by the rain. His wet, sandy-coloured hair was swept untidily back over his head. His mouth was thin. He looked at Colin with uncertain blue eyes, eyes Colin already knew.

A whip-snap of lightning. Thunder cracked. Colin jumped. He wiped the back of his neck with his sleeve. When he stood, his muscles felt like bursting bubbles. He extended a trembling hand. He tried to speak, anything to break the tense silence. There was no lubrication in his throat.

Thankfully, the boy looked away, looked around the room. Colin tried to read his expression. Was there a pensive shimmer in the shadow of the boy's eyes? Or disappointment at the writer's minimalist approach? 'James Holmes' stopped in front of the book jackets Sally had framed: monuments of Colin's success. Next to them was the photograph of Colin standing with the local amateur dramatics group who had adapted one of his novels for their summer performance. That photograph was a window across time. Colin's brown hair had thinned, just a little, and he now had it cut short. And his face was slimmer, younger without the cropped beard, although the few worry lines that had etched into his forehead and the flecks of grey in his hair were a testimony to the years. His taste in clothes had barely changed: both in the photograph and now, he was wearing grey chinos and a short-sleeved shirt. The photograph had been taken about seven years ago. James Holmes would have been nine or ten.

I don't remember growing older, Colin mused. *When did he find time to do it?*

Then James Homes was looking at the only item of decoration that Colin had added himself: a framed piece of parchment, bearing the legend: ***Deuteronomy 18:11; Leviticus 19:31.***

'Is that all?' Sally asked from the door.

Colin looked up sharply, trying to twist his uncertainty into a reassuring smile. His stomach muscles knotted: she would know it was false. She'd been working with him for too long. She'd leave him with James Holmes, and only when the boy had left, the questions

would come.

‘Yes ... no ...’ he looked down at his visitor. ‘Do you want a drink, Jamie? Tea? Coffee? Coke? Something stronger?’

‘Nothing, thanks.’

‘I’d like a “special” coke,’ Colin added, not looking at Sally, although he felt her glaring at him. ‘Can you find a towel for Jamie? You’re soaking, boy.’

‘D’you remember me?’ Jamie asked after the door had closed. ‘I wasn’t sure you would. I wasn’t sure you’re the right person.’

‘You’ve come to the right place,’ Colin admitted. He fumbled for the right words. ‘I knew your mother.’ He stared past Jamie at the cover of his first book, a book he had written for her ten years before. ‘She and I ... lost contact a long time ago. I’m surprised you remember me.’

Jamie looked sheepish. ‘To be honest, I didn’t. Not to start with. No more than bits of memories. The books: you kept sending them and Mum kept reading them.’ He looked away. ‘I saw a feature in *The Times* and when I saw your photograph I made a link between Colin Jones and Uncle Nick and Auntie Kim.’

Colin’s glance was like the flick of a scorpion’s tail. ‘Another name I’ve not thought of in a long while.’

‘What? Uncle Nick?’

‘Actually no, “Auntie Kim”. Well, both, to be honest. No, I changed my name to Nick when I left college. At the time it was important to help me move on. Then I changed it back to Colin when I started writing. Colin’s like an inverted pseudonym.’ He mentally kicked himself. Already he was giving away too much information. He couldn’t smile when Sally knocked and brought him his coke, laced with brandy. He downed half of it before she had left.

‘You wrote *Seekers* for her, didn’t you?’ Jamie said and Colin wondered if he heard a trace of accusation in the boy’s voice. ‘You didn’t write her name, but from the characters it was clear you’re talking about Mum.’

Oh yes, the characters. As a younger writer, he had found it

difficult not to steal words and phrases, mannerisms, even whole characters from people he knew. And she had been such a beacon in his life it was impossible not to plunder her influence and trap her in the pages, the way a butterfly catcher pins his collection.

Jesus. Memories. Breaking like tidal waves. Dinner, eleven years before. Hadn't it been thundering that night too?

He sipped his drink through clenched teeth and nodded like a convict with no alibi.

'And the words at the beginning, "We are all seekers. We have to be careful in the path we choose." Who said that?'

Colin sighed patiently. 'It's an epigraph. And your mother said it. A long time ago.'

'What about all the other books? You didn't dedicate them to anyone. Why not?'

Colin made a dismissive gesture. Why would he? They would have all been dedicated to her.

But Jamie didn't wait for an answer. 'But you never wrote to her yourself.'

'I thought she would sooner forget.' He spoke more harshly than he'd intended. 'Your mother and I were friends for a while. To be honest, I didn't know my publishers had ... your mother on our mailing list.' He winced, realising he still couldn't bear to speak the name, even after so long. 'The friendship became stale and had to end.'

'But,' Jamie looked uncomfortable, 'weren't you Dad's friend?'

'Sometimes people grow apart. That's what happened with your father and me. All we had in common was our place of work. Sometimes, it's not that people don't want to be in contact. They just don't *need* to be in contact anymore.' He winced. How many lies was he going to have to tell? Jamie didn't seem to notice.

'The blurb on your books doesn't say you're married. Is it true, or something to keep your family out of the picture?'

The next lie, resting on his tongue, could have slipped out so easily. Perhaps it *should* have. Perhaps Jamie would have gone away. But through this boy, Colin experienced the impossibility of wanting

both to fulfil and suppress a desire. ‘Why would I do that?’ He was hitting defensive strokes, but his bat was crooked and Jamie easily caught him.

‘I read somewhere writing’s like an addiction and writers like you have an office to keep work away from home.’

Colin smiled caustically. ‘Writing *is* an addiction. And, yes, sometimes it’s a good idea not to live and work in the same place. I work in Archway, I live ... somewhere else. I have good working habits: getting up, shaving and going to work. It’s especially useful if you have neighbours who think that because you’re at home, you have free time.’ He bit his lip. ‘The curse of anyone who works from home.’ He made to drink, but he’d emptied his glass without realising it. He tried to stop the next words from emerging. They tumbled out anyway. ‘I don’t expect you to understand how I felt. I couldn’t care for someone else the way I cared about your mother. After Anita ... a relationship seemed pointless.’ There, he had spoken her name out loud and given power to her memory. Poisoned nectar. It was strange how five letters brought so much pain to him. He fumbled in a drawer, found a box of cigarettes. He couldn’t remember how long they had been there. Didn’t matter. He offered one to Jamie, who declined, before taking one himself and lighting it. His fingers trembled as if he were detoxing after a binge of alcohol.

The rasping taste of tar and smoke was unfamiliar. The nicotine fogged his mind. He’d not smoked since the night of the fire, never even been tempted. Now he was inhaling like he’d never broken the addiction.

Jamie looked up at him sadly. ‘And that’s why you went away? Because you loved her and couldn’t bear seeing her with my dad?’

Colin’s face clouded. ‘More than that.’ *On the defensive from a teenager*, he thought and an unwelcome blush spread to his cheeks. Jamie’s mother and Colin ... they had been a volatile mixture, tearing each other apart. No way could he have stayed within easy reach of her, not after she had told him to go. The temptation to call would have been too much. Better this way: an unspoken agreement of no contact. A mutual respect of each other’s privacy.

‘I bet she doesn’t know you’re here. She sure as hell wouldn’t approve.’

‘She knows I’m in London. I asked her if I could come now I’m seventeen.’

Seventeen? Jesus! Has it really been so long?

‘How did you find out?’ Colin asked, genuinely interested.

‘The compliments slip with one of the books,’ Jamie said almost apologetically.

Sally had maintained contact for him. Sally, meaning to be efficient, had passed Anita’s details to the publisher before he had deleted her name from his database. Sally had held open the doors between their lives. Jamie’s mother ... she’d had his address all along. She didn’t need him to contact her, probably didn’t want him to contact her ... probably ... but, she’d had his details all along.

‘So you came all this way to London, to see someone who *once* knew your mother, to see where he worked?’

‘Well, it’s more than that. I saw a photograph of you and it reminded me of someone I knew. That’s why I became interested in you, because I knew Mum had all your books. There’s a few articles about you online.’

‘And that’s it? Have you even read one of my books?’

Jamie’s eyes were dark and insolent. There was an inherent strength in his face. ‘All of them, actually. But I actually came because of someone else.’ He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a wallet. He handed Colin a photograph of a boy, younger than Jamie, much younger.

‘This is David, right?’ Colin said after a moment’s reflection on the name of Jamie’s brother.

No, it wasn’t David. The boy in the photograph had Anita’s eyes, but that wasn’t what seemed familiar. His hair was dark. Jamie, David and Carly all had their father’s fair hair. The boy in the photograph’s half-smile reminded Colin of his mischievous youth.

As the thought crossed his mind, Colin felt slapped as the pieces connected. Blood drained from his face. He was absently aware that the photograph had fallen to the desk. Jamie’s words could have been

spoken by someone a hundred miles away. ‘Nicholas Colin Holmes.’

Colin couldn’t drag his eyes away from the grinning face. He distantly wondered if Anita had taken the photograph. What had she been wearing? What scent? What jewellery?

Forlorn, he stared down at the ring on the wedding finger of his left hand. An item of jewellery so familiar, so much a part of him, that he had forgotten it was there. Anita’s ring. How could he have forgotten?

‘I’m sorry,’ Jamie stood up. ‘I shouldn’t have come. Keep the photograph. You won’t tell Mum I came, will you?’

‘Wait.’ A million questions flew through Colin’s mind. ‘How long’ll you be in London? Where can I contact you?’

As Jamie scribbled a telephone number on a scrap of paper and pushed it to him, Colin heard Anita’s last words to him. *You’re not to contact Steven or me.* Had eleven years really passed? How had he managed without her for so long?

‘My mobile,’ Jamie was saying. ‘I’ll be in town until the day after tomorrow. One other thing,’ he looked back, pulling a copy of *Past Light*, Colin’s second book, from inside his jacket. The book was battered, well read. Not just by Jamie, but by Anita as well, perhaps a hundred times. Jamie smiled shyly, his face a crazy mixture of hope and fear. ‘D’you mind signing this for me?’

Colin would have laughed if Jamie hadn’t been serious. His mind was numb. Like an automaton, his fingers closed round the barrel of his pen. The name was signed. It could have been his death warrant.

‘Thanks.’ Jamie smiled and walked to the door. ‘See you around, Colin?’

Colin nodded. ‘Never can tell,’ he said. He stood up and followed Jamie across the room but stopped at the drinks cabinet. Once Jamie had left, he withdrew a bottle of brandy and poured a generous measure. It was gone in two fiery gulps. The glass had been refilled before Sally returned. She looked at him disapprovingly, but her expression melted when she saw his acidic stare.

‘Problems?’ she asked, eyes narrowing. ‘You look like you’ve seen a ghost.’

Colin eyed her disdainfully, then looked around the room. *Ghosts*, he thought, *not necessarily spirits of the dead. Spectres in the form of names and dates, memories and regrets. Those are real ghosts, not someone in a white sheet, rattling chains.* He glanced at the Biblical references on the wall. 'Perhaps I have,' he said distantly.

'Who was he?'

'A fan.' Suddenly he regained his composure. 'I want to breed him with another to make some more.' Unable to look her in the eye, he drank his brandy like water.

Sally wasn't convinced. 'It's unusual for them to come to the office. You'd have thought he'd have waited for a book signing.' She peered down at his glass. 'You called him Jamie very quickly. If he was just a fan, you'd have called him James.' She'd seen his eyes misting as he slumped down at his desk. At twenty-five, she'd not learned to soften the bite of her truth. 'Do you want to talk about it?'

He wanted to speak, to tell her all that had happened so long ago. The words caught in his throat. Perhaps it was just as well. He would have lied, hidden the parts of the truth that hurt. Hidden all of it.

'Not now,' he said, and his voice was almost filled with relief that he'd found something to say. He found himself fumbling in the drawer for the cigarettes.

'Since when did you smoke?'

Since I remembered Anita. His thoughts remained unspoken. How had he managed to forget her? What else had he banished from his mind?

He looked over at Sally. Concern etched across her face. 'Go home, Sally. It's past five.'

'So, I'm no longer your secretary. You look like you need a friend.'

'I can't explain my feelings to you. I can't even explain them to myself.'

'You can try.'

'No, Sally. Not tonight. Go home. I'll be all right.'

She looked down at him, her eyes filled with frustration and despair. Their eyes locked for painful seconds. Then she cocked her

head. ‘All right,’ she conceded. ‘Promise me one thing. Promise me you won’t drive home tonight. You want me to call you a taxi?’

‘No. There’s things I need to do here. I won’t drive, I promise. Go home.’

He had hoped he could collect his thoughts in the silence of the room. But even in his solitude, silence was a foreign country. Rain swept across the window in a staccato clatter. The rumble of traffic down Archway Road seemed to take on a voice, grumbling at him to remember. Even when he heard the sound of the reception door closing, he felt far from alone. There were a hundred people with him, spectres of memories he’d tried to push aside a decade before. Faces passed from behind a veil of amnesia. Her face ...

He tried to push her away, but the ghosts of his past were flowing forward, relentless and hungry. He had shaken them away before, but this time they weren’t going to let go.

You’re not real, he called in a pathetic, half-whine. His eyes squeezed closed, trying to convince himself they were no more than memories given form by alcohol.

When his eyes opened, he recoiled from how bright the room seemed. The memories, whatever they were, had gone. The only spirits remaining were in his drinks cabinet. He was alone, shivering. He looked again to see if Sally had left the door open.

Thunder growled behind him like a wild animal. He jerked and as he turned, he saw the photograph: Nicholas Colin Holmes. Jamie hadn’t clarified the relationship between Nicholas Holmes and Colin Jones, but he didn’t need to. He knew. They both knew.

He didn’t remember the night. He didn’t remember that he and Anita had ...

Had Sally seen the picture? Would there be more questions in the morning?

If the photograph was destroyed, at least then he’d be able to confine these memories and return to being Colin Jones.

Perhaps hours later, he looked at the photograph, still lying on his desk, not torn. He’d not found the courage to totally separate

himself from the past.

What was it Jamie wanted? It wasn't a casual visit. He didn't come all the way to London to get an autograph. Was it idle curiosity? A young person's dreams of getting embroiled in the glamorous illusion of the writing world? Or was there a darker, more sinister reason why Jamie had come? Was it Steven who had sent him as a warning?

His eyes drifted back to the photograph. Nicholas Colin Holmes. His son.

He was caught off-guard by the vibrancy of the thought. *His son*. He had admitted it. He didn't believe it, but he *had* acknowledged it. His flesh prickled. A shiver ran down his spine. He breathed slowly, trying to calm his erratic pulse. In an instant he was bombarded by hopes and assailed by terrible regrets. He clenched his jaw to stifle the sob in his throat. Could things have been different?

Jamie had brought him the photograph. Did he want to blackmail Colin? How much would it cost him to keep Nicholas Colin Holmes out of the papers and to keep Anita blissfully unaware of how close their lives had come to touching once more? What did the boy hope to achieve by hurting so many people?

His mind ached with possibilities. He laid his head on his desk, hoping that closing his eyes for a few minutes might dispel some of the alcohol and the more irrational thoughts.

Part of him wanted to go back.

The rest of him knew he couldn't.

*

It was dark when he opened his eyes again. He didn't remember turning off the light. His cheek was cold from where it had been lying against his desk. Outside, the thunder had died to a distant rumble, lightning periodically highlighting the night sky.

Not moving his head from the desk, he fumbled with the packet of cigarettes with one hand, pulling one out. With his other hand he found his lighter and lit the cigarette. The flame partially blinded him. He recoiled momentarily, blinking away the flash burns on his retinas. Then the cigarette was lit and the only illumination was the

pale glow two inches from his face; he heard the tobacco burning in the stillness of the office.

He pushed himself upright, drawing an invisible pattern on the desk as the nicotine fogged his mind. After a few drags, he gagged with the unfamiliar sensation. He would stop tomorrow, he vowed.

What did Jamie want to achieve by this? he wondered again.

Only silence answered.

And that same silence, how much would it cost him when the boy went to the papers with the story? His agent had warned him that not all publicity was good publicity. A story *might* increase the sales of his books, but the stress of the continuing accusation, whether true or not, might silence his pen.

Ash dropped on to the desk. Colin barely noticed. He leaned back in the chair. 'Anita!' he called softly, knowing only the night would hear him.

He saw her in his mind now. Her image was clearer, like a watery reflection on a brilliant day.

He was suddenly back more than a decade ago and two hundred miles away, when he and Anita had travelled with Steven and Kim to the farm house in North Devon. He remembered seeing Anita laugh for the first time. The way she had thrown back her head. Her eyes had shone with delight. She always had such sad eyes, and that moment of happiness had been like taking a walk in the cold night air after being trapped in a hot, stale room for hours.

He smiled sadly, fighting his anxiety. He lost. He wondered if he had ever been happier than when he had spent time alone with her.

Of course, he remembered how anxious he was; someone might have seen them as they met. That thought had always held back his full feelings and, of course, the knowledge that at the end of every day they were together, they had to part. She had to return to being Steven's wife. He had to return to being alone.

The door opened.

He looked up. He'd not heard the sound of the reception door.

He was instantly awake. In his thoughts he had been drifting towards sleep, his head sinking closer to his chest, the tip of his

cigarette burning closer to his fingers. He blinked twice. This room could never be totally dark: sodium bled from the streetlights, bathing the room in a jaundiced glow. In the semi-darkness he saw the face of the woman who had entered: clear smooth pale skin; her slender white neck; her high, exotic cheekbones; her fresh face glowing with pale gold undertones, radiating a youthful beauty; her dark hair glistening like polished wood. He was beguiled by her eyes, ancient blue eyes. A soft slender hand raised a slim forefinger to her lips.

The white ball-gown she wore shimmered with ethereal light. It was a gown he had seen before, one belonging in a Cinderella Ball of the early part of the century, and in fleeting dreams. And in the farmhouse. And the twisted nightmares.

‘They’re in the house, they told me to find you,’ Colin was told. The figure had not spoken, but he still heard the words. ‘They told me to call you Ernest. That’s who you are.’

The words rolled over in his mind. They didn’t belong to this figure. Anita had spoken them, years before.

‘You came,’ he breathed. His heart leapt. Anita had returned to him, despite Jamie’s assurance that he’d travelled alone.

Images were colliding. Someone else was speaking Anita’s words. The ball-gown, the memories. They belonged to a past that was not his own. A ghost he had believed was laid to rest.

Yet, here was the memory, vivid, almost tangible. He stopped holding his breath, forcing air through his throat. Words formed, and they were as natural as a heartbeat: ‘Will you waltz with me, Ernest?’

Another floodgate of memories, surging so fast he couldn’t focus on them. They swamped his mind, forcing his head down against the desk, stopping his breath. When he finally had the courage to breathe once again, his office had been replaced by a huge white ballroom with high arches, punctuated by Doric pillars; with the vast Georgian windows scaling to the ceiling and plasterwork reliefs of classical gods some fifty feet above them; with curtains of brocatelle and damask woven with gold and silver thread; with the marble floor glittering like diamonds and snowflakes; with a whole garden of palm trees between

the pillars; with tables sparkling with crystal and silver; with the orchestra playing and the music reverberating around the dome decorated with classical images; with the rainbows trapped in chandeliers. Music: *the Beautiful Blue Danube*. Guests: the gentlemen, some in military dress uniform, some in dinner jackets and bow-ties, some dancing, some lounging and smoking; the ladies in elegant, flowing dresses of white satin and cut velvet, sparkling with jewellery. Their conversations echoed. Single phrases: ‘eligible bachelor’; ‘magnificent wife’.

A voice at his shoulder. ‘Grab her fast, old man, before she slips through your fingers.’

He turned to look at the speaker. Someone in a dinner jacket with waxed hair and a ruddy complexion. Someone he knew and didn’t know. But they were talking about him. Not about Anita at all. This was not a place he associated with her. This was a memory of a memory. And the young woman in the ball-gown: she was the one of whom they had spoken. His mind raced as he tried to connect the memories.

Not Anita.

Angela.

Miss Montague.

And she was standing in front of him. She was smiling, holding out her hands for him to join her. His heart took a perilous leap. Warmth bubbled inside him, mixing with excitement. *She* wanted *him* to dance. *She* wanted *him*. And this dance should be the first of many.

He stepped forward. His strong hands closed over her cool, slender fingers. Was it him? Was he Ernest? Did it matter? His heart pounded, his cheeks flushed.

He had danced before, but never with the same passion. It was the adoration in her eyes, the serenity of her movements, the way their bodies fitted perfectly together. People were watching them. He had never thought he had been able to turn heads before.

‘Because you never looked to see whose head you were turning.’

That was Anita’s voice, intruding on this memory. He pushed her

aside, engulfed by the moment. He could barely contain himself. Barely stand. Was this love? Was he imagining that this was love? There were moments when he felt he was more alive in that instant than he had been in the rest of his life combined.

He and Angela moved with such perfection that he barely noticed his feet touching the floor. The dance room blended into a kaleidoscope of colour and sound. For a moment, the rest of the world faded away.

All too quickly, the dance ended. He was breathing heavily, not wanting to let her go. She reached up and whispered in his ear. ‘So wonderful!’ Joy sparkled in her voice and shone in her eyes, echoing his own thoughts. At that moment, he was red-faced with such an exultation of happiness that he wanted to sing out loud. He wanted to shout her name from the highest balcony.

Like all fairy tales, it ended. He couldn’t see beyond that night at the ball when he had realised he had loved her, and he *had* loved her. But he could love her no more, not now she had fled from his mind. He was overwhelmed with loneliness as the image faded, felt he was losing her forever. She was slipping through his fingers.

If I should meet thee after long years, how should I greet thee? Byron had asked in the book that Anita had given him.

He shook his head, not wanting to give the answer.

Everything passed away. Neither Anita nor Angela stood in front of him. His office was bathed in the ethereal sodium twilight. He mourned them both. He had never loved as he had in that moment. He had never risked it. He had told Jamie that after Anita, pursuing another relationship seemed fruitless. The truth was he had failed ... always failed.

He fought to cease calling her name, begging her memory to return. In the final struggle, he promised that when tomorrow came he would not call Jamie. He would let the boy and his mother carry on with their lives. He would consign the picture of Nicholas Colin Holmes to the bin, and he would forget this meeting ever happened.

It was a promise he knew he would break.