



PHOENIX RISING

Stan Daneman

AUTHOR OF THE SOLAR MURDER

Phoenix Rising

By
Stan Daneman

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Dedicated to my wife and daughters,
Anita, Taryn and Lauren
With all my love

Acknowledgement

No one can write a book in isolation. Whether the support is direct or indirect, the encouragement and advice of family and friends is paramount.

My family supports me in my desire to write and has always encouraged that interest in writing – be it poetry or novels. Without them I would not have the motivation, drive or desire to write. My books are dedicated to my wife Anita, and our daughters, Taryn and Lauren. My appreciation is expressed to Lauren for the final editing and critique.

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About the Author



Stan Daneman was born in South Africa. He is a graduate of the University of South Africa obtaining a B.Com (Accounting) and a postgraduate Hon. B.Com (Business Economics). He also holds a diploma in Organization and Methods and is a certified management consultant.

He is a past president of the Institute of Management Consultants of South Africa and was awarded fellowship of the institute.

During his business career, he held senior positions as a management consultant with professional firms and Director of Education positions in the IT industry.

Mr. Daneman has published six previous books. His three books of poetry were published in 1987, 2002 and 2013. In 2009, he published a book on positioning and measuring learning in an organization. His three previous

books through The Endless bookcase were: 'From my hilltop – a living history of South Africa' (a unique look at the changes in the country as narrated by a tree), 'Reflections of heaven' published in 2013, and Stan's first novel, 'The Solar Murder', which was published in 2014.

Mr. Daneman immigrated to Canada in 1995 and resides in Richmond Hill, Ontario. He is married with two adult daughters, and has been involved in sport management and volunteer activities for over forty years. This book is dedicated to his wife and daughters.

This book is Stan's second novel, and is a spin-off from 'The Solar Murder'.

Part 1

Chapter 1

Elizabeth McKenzie was not one for the limelight. She did not enjoy speaking in front of people. She had a quiet demeanor. She was short and to the point. That is the way the lawyers whom she had worked for preferred her to be – to get the message across without being flowery.

She had thrived in the legal firm environment. Over the years very few people knew much about her – she kept her private life to herself. However, on a scale of one to ten in regard to being efficient and professional in her job, she was a twelve.

After joining the law firm of Greg Winters, she felt that she had developed even further. She ran the office administration, kept everyone to his or her deadlines and made sure that the law firm functioned as smoothly as possible. She succeeded!

She knew that Greg and his associates teased her – in particular Greg, but right to the very end she knew that Greg respected her and loved her. After all, when he died just after his retirement, he left her two million dollars and his cabin in Alpine Meadows.

Elizabeth had never cured Greg of his habit of eating greasy burgers and drinking too much coffee. She could only reprimand her boss to a certain extent! As a top-class defense lawyer he seldom found time to eat properly. Coffee provided the adrenalin when his tank was truly empty. Deep down he knew that he had to pay more attention to his work-based life style. Even before his beloved Mary passed away he had poor eating habits. But at least Mary would cook him meals and keep his mind off work on weekends.

When Elizabeth resigned from the law firm and moved into Greg's cabin she thought that she would be happy in retirement. She expected the setting of the cabin in the woods would bring her comfort and a quiet life style. The small lake just off to the left of the cabin and the tall trees surrounding most of the area nearby presented a very tranquil setting.

After all of Greg's electronic equipment had been removed and the cabin refurnished, Elizabeth settled down into her new environment. The drive to town was only seven miles, and she spent most days there. Maybe she was looking for something to do. From being a high energy Office Manager and Assistant to the most famous lawyer in the state, to being retired to a cabin in the woods was a gigantic change. Maybe too big a change!

Elizabeth never did feel very safe in the cabin, especially alone at night. Even during the day, it was so secluded that she wondered if anyone would hear her scream if something should happen. The setting of the cabin was a touch of heaven on earth but somehow, she felt uneasy about her new abode. She had installed a high-tech

security system and had replaced all the windows with shatterproof glass but still she felt vulnerable at night.

It was a hot Tuesday afternoon when Sheriff Norman Wilson walked past the diner where he saw Elizabeth sitting at a table by herself. It was the best place in town to have tea or coffee and something to eat. He stopped for a second and then decided to walk into the diner. He had only met Elizabeth briefly at Greg's funeral and he thought it right that he make himself known to the town's new resident.

"Hello" said Norman, "It is Ms. McKenzie, right?"

Elizabeth had not seen the sheriff enter the diner nor walk up to her table. She was a little taken aback as she heard her name.

"Oh, hello Sheriff, I didn't see you come in. I must've been deep in thought. How are you?"

"Sorry if I startled you!" he said.

"No need to apologize, I was a thousand miles away!"

"How is our newest resident doing? Are you finding your way around our bustling metropolis?"

"I'm fine thank you, and yes, I'm finding my way around town. It is a lovely town, and so different from living in the city."

“Well, if you need any help you know where to find your friendly police department.”

Norman Wilson was a big man but he had such a gentle smile, it made his whole face light up.

Elizabeth thought for a moment then said, “Sheriff if you have a moment would you like to join me for tea?”

“Yes, that would be great but could I trade it for a coffee?”

“Sure, whatever you like.”

As the sheriff sat down the waiter was already pouring a coffee for him. This was only another of the thousands that Norm Wilson had consumed in the diner over the years. Regulars have a way of not requiring communication when they enter their local coffee shop or bar.

“So how are you settling down?” he asked.

“Well, it’s so different from the city. It is much more relaxed and stress free. Working for Greg was totally consuming. We had hardly any time to think about anything else but the case that we were working on. I can see why he wanted to get away from San Francisco and visit Alpine Meadows whenever he could.”

The two chatted about Greg for the next minute or two before the waiter came back with a burger and fries and fresh coffee for the sheriff.

Norm Wilson did not know if he should be embarrassed or not. His standard fare was a burger and coffee whenever he came into the diner.

Elizabeth came to his rescue, "He must have known that you looked hungry!" She smiled at the sheriff and they laughed.

"Please, go ahead and enjoy your burger". She could not comprehend how one could eat so much meat and fries. A while back she would have scolded Greg for eating a meal like this but she could not say anything like that to the sheriff of Alpine Meadows.

When Norm Wilson had finished his meal, he insisted on paying for the herbal tea that Elizabeth had ordered.

Chapter 2

Madelyn Wilson developed an early interest in the arts – in particular in painting. After graduating high school she obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. Her further academic ambitions were curtailed, however, by a lack of finances and a developing relationship with Fred Nelson. They moved in together once they had graduated with their Bachelor degrees. Living together was frowned upon in those days.

Madelyn chose to become an arts teacher while Fred furthered his academic career. It seemed almost natural for her to fund Fred's future studies. They planned to marry as soon as Fred obtained his Doctorate in early childhood education.

After loyally being the breadwinner for over three years, Maddy was shattered when Fred called off their relationship straight after he graduated. She had poured all of her income, her body and soul into funding Fred. Each month had been a financial struggle but somehow they had made ends meet. When Fred walked out on her, she lost all faith in the male form of the human species. Maddy could not bring herself to go home to see her family for almost a year after Fred left her.

Over the next thirty years she taught painting in Reno. Her studio was well known and her income was good. She lived a simple life style and over the years she had accumulated a respectable bank balance.

Just like her much younger brother Norman, Maddy had never married.

Norman was the result of an unexpected pregnancy for his parents. Maddy was in high school when Norman arrived as an addition to the family. Just as *Sis* was dedicated to painting so Norman was dedicated to police work.

After many years of loyal service he was appointed as chief of police for Alpine Meadows. He stood just over six feet one inch tall but he had put on a great deal of weight since first joining the police department. Meeting the physical examinations was becoming more difficult for Norman. To the surprise of the review board he was still agile and fit for his size. The question was for how much longer could he pass the grueling police testing.

Norman Wilson had lived with his mother in their long-time family home in Alpine Meadows. When she passed away, Norm felt very lonely. He struggled to care for himself.

It was about this time that Maddy started to develop arthritis in her hands and painting became more and more difficult. When her mother died, Maddy asked Norman if she should move back to Alpine Meadows and live with him. He was delighted to have her home. Maddy was a strong and determined woman and, with the substantial age difference between them, she often came across as the mother figure. In truth, Norm did not mind it too much – but sometimes she was difficult to deal with once she got an idea in her mind.

Norm was now in his early fifties and Maddy Wilson in her late sixties.

Chapter 3

Maddy Wilson was never one for mincing her words. She was direct, even more so with men. Deep down, she had never really recovered from the hurt that Fred had inflicted on her all of those years ago.

One evening after work, Norman was to again experience the unrelenting personality of his older sister.

Maddy was in the kitchen when Norman arrived home.

The greeting was always the same.

“Hi Maddy, how are you?”

“Hello Norm, I’m good thanks, and you?”

“Good thanks. I’ll wash up and be ready for dinner soon.”

“Don’t be too long, dinner will be ready in a few minutes.”

Norman would change out of his police uniform, wash up and throw on some casual clothes all in about ten minutes.

When he came down stairs he kissed his sister on the cheek and she gave him a hug. She could never put her arms fully around him, as he was too big.

“I could eat a horse I’m so hungry.”

“Knowing you, you’ve already eaten one today.” she replied.

Norman refused to be baited. He just walked over to the fridge and took out a beer for himself and a strawberry cooler for Maddy. This was the same routine every evening.

Norman would devour his first plate of food and then have to sit patiently until Maddy finished her meal. Only then would she offer him seconds. It was as she completed her meal – and with Norman almost ready for his seconds – when she dropped the bombshell.

“So why don’t you invite her over for dinner? I’d like to meet her”.

Norman almost gagged. Maddy’s timing was perfect!

After he composed himself he said, “Whom are you talking about?” He put on a puzzled look on his face. It did not work. He looked more like a kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

“Norman Wilson, do you take me for a fool? Really, who do you think that I am talking about – Snow White?” She gave Norman a very disgusted look. She continued before Norman could answer her.

“The city lady, the one that used to work for Greg Winters, the one he left his cabin to, the one that you’ve had coffee with several times this month. Does that jog your memory?”

Norman had no way out.

“Oh, you mean Ms. McKenzie? Sure we’ve met for coffee several times. But what business is it of yours anyway?” Maddy looked at him without replying and he had no choice but to elaborate.

“I introduced myself as sheriff one day in the diner and we started to chat. She was very polite and offered to buy me tea. She is very formal – and rather icy I might say.”

Norman paused.

Very calmly she prodded, “And the other times that you’ve met?”

“Gee, are you spying on me? Sure we’ve met when she comes into town. I think that she’s pretty nervous being out at the cabin by herself. And what business is it of yours anyway?”

“What did you talk about?”

“It is not a big deal. If you must know, we spoke about Greg Winters. I knew Greg for many years but only really the person who came to Alpine Meadows. I knew very little about Greg, the famous and successful lawyer. Ms. McKenzie knew him as that lawyer and how he operated in the legal world. We spent time chatting about him and exchanging stories. Does that satisfy your interest in who I talk with in town?”

Maddy continued as if she had not heard a word that Norman had said.

“So, you call her Ms. McKenzie? Does she have a first name?”

“My God woman, what’s the matter with you? She introduced herself as “Elizabeth McKenzie”. I address her as Ms. McKenzie and she has never said that I should call her by her first name. She addresses me as Sheriff Wilson. Are you satisfied?”

The answer to that question was obvious. Maddy Wilson was not satisfied.

“Are you telling me that all that you have ever discussed is Greg Winters? Have you ever asked her about her background, where she was raised? Nothing about her?”

“Let me put it simply and clearly for you - 90% of what we have ever discussed has been about Greg, the rest has been about how she has settled into town. Can we move on now – I’m hungry!”

So many times in his life Norm had under-estimated his older sister – this was again one of them. Maddy Wilson was not satisfied.

“So, when are you going to invite her for dinner – how about this Saturday? We could have drinks outside before dinner. You should offer to fetch her and take her home afterwards – it’s too dark to drive home alone.”

To say that Norm Wilson was frustrated with the conversation would be an understatement. He was angry. This for him was very unusual. He normally had a very level personality. But here he was dealing with his older and determined sister.

“Tell me why you want to have her over for dinner? We don’t owe her anything. I don’t understand why you are so hell bent on meeting her.”

She thought for a moment and then lied with a straight face, “Because I need company. My friends are so boring. There’s never anything new to talk about in this small town. I thought that Ms. McKenzie could be an interesting person for me to meet. Besides, you are the most respected person in town and showing a newcomer some hospitality might encourage others to accept her. So, what is wrong with inviting her for dinner?”

Norm thought for a long time before he answered. In reality it might only have been thirty seconds but the silence at the dinner table seemed like an eternity. When he spoke it was both with a sense of acceptance of Maddy’s logic and, to a degree, knowing he could not win.

“Alright, I will phone and invite her for dinner on Saturday.”

“Will you call her in the morning?”

“Don’t push it – I said that I’ll phone her.”

She smiled and said, “Norm, would you like seconds?”

Chapter 4

Elizabeth was washing up her breakfast dishes when the telephone rang. The sound startled her. Sometimes a week or more would go by without a telephone call. This was so different from working in a law firm where everything was push-push to get done.

Elizabeth would not accumulate her dishes and do them only once a day. After every meal her home in the woods was tidy and clean.

“Hello, can I help you?”

“Ms. McKenzie this is Sheriff Wilson, how are you? Is this a good time to talk?”

Elizabeth was taken aback by receiving a telephone call from the sheriff.

“Oh, hello sheriff, is anything the matter?”

“No, nothing the matter. I just have a question for you. My sister and I would like to invite you over for dinner at our home this coming Saturday evening, so, I’m calling to check if you can make it”.

Elizabeth was stunned by what she had just heard. Her first reaction was *“why would the sheriff and his sister want to invite me over?”*

“Hello, are you still there?” asked Norman.

"Yes, I am still here. I - I was just thinking about what you said, sorry; it took a minute to register. Is there a special occasion or something?"

"No, nothing special, it will be the three of us. Madelyn loves to cook and she thought that it would be nice to show some local hospitality. We hope that you can make it. If you're available then I'll drive out to fetch you."

"Actually, that would be very nice – can I bring anything?"

"Great! And there's no need to bring anything. We'll have drinks before dinner and then we'll eat a little later. Should I collect you around six?"

"Yes, that will be fine, thank you. I look forward to seeing you on Saturday."

When Elizabeth put the telephone down she sat in the kitchen and thought about what had just happened. She was certainly not the social type. She was very tempted to telephone the sheriff and cancel the arrangement but she thought that it would not be professional.

Once she had got her mind around the invitation then she thought *"Oh, what would I wear? I haven't been to many home dinners before. Most of my clothes are business formal."*

Over the next few days Elizabeth was riddled with doubt about the upcoming dinner invitation and what to wear.

When Norman put the telephone down after his conversation with Elizabeth he too felt as if this was a mistake. He was still thinking about the call when his cell phone rang; it was his beloved sister making sure that he had telephoned Elizabeth.

Finally on the Friday Elizabeth drove into town and found a dress shop. She bought a skirt and blouse that looked respectable on her. She decided to wear her hair in her favorite style for the dinner.

On the Saturday, Norman pulled up at the cabin just on 6 p.m. The buzzer in the cabin had gone off as Norman had crossed onto the property. Some of Greg's security gadgets were very practical.

Elizabeth was locking her front door when Norman reached the cabin. He took a deep breath when he saw Elizabeth. She looked so different and ten years younger. He noticed her hair and what she was wearing. A smile came to his face.

"Good evening Ms. McKenzie how are you?"

"Good evening sheriff, I'm well, thank you. How are you? Please, call me Elizabeth."

"I'm fine thank you Elizabeth, please call me Norman – I'm off duty now!" He smiled.

They had a pleasant but somewhat tense ride into town.

Maddy either wore her hair up in a bun or loose over her shoulders. When preparing for the evening with Ms. McKenzie she decided that it had been a long time since she had a reason to do something special with her hair. She used to wear her hair in a special way many years before. It took her several hours to get the house in order and prepare dinner but she seemed to be able to do her long hair in lightening quick time.

Norman had left to fetch their guest after 5:40 p.m. She expected them back just before 6:20 p.m. This time gave Maddy the chance to recheck the house, finalize the dinner and peek at herself in the mirror.

As per her calculations, Norman and Elizabeth arrived at the home just after 6:20 p.m.

Norman could not wait for the two ladies to meet face to face!

Maddy walked down from the porch as Norman and Elizabeth climbed out of the vehicle and walked towards her.

“Hello Ms. McKenzie, I’m Madelyn – everyone calls me Maddy. It’s so nice to meet you.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you Maddy – and please call me Elizabeth.”

It was then that the two women looked more closely at each other.

Not only were they wearing the same skirts and blouses but also both women had decided to do their hair in French plaits. Norman could not believe his eyes when he had seen Elizabeth at her home.

The initial stare of embarrassment gave way to a roar of laughter from Maddy. Elizabeth felt her knees knocking and her legs shaking as she realized that they were dressed identically. She could have fallen through the floor if there was one. It was within the next ten seconds that she began to like Madelyn Wilson.

"Elizabeth, we have such good taste in clothing!" She smiled at Elizabeth and that spark of friendship ignited.

"Norman, why didn't you say anything when you picked me up? I feel so foolish! I could have changed."

"What could I say?" He thought for a moment then said, "Besides you both look great! Just like twin sisters." Both women smiled at him.

"That was very diplomatic Norman, thank you!" Elizabeth smiled at him.

"Elizabeth, let me see your hair"

Maddy entered into a conversation as she took Elizabeth by the arm and walked with her towards the steps leading up to the porch. Norman followed them up the steps and finally found an opportunity to indicate that they should sit down.

Norman sat in silence listening to the conversation. It must have been at least five minutes before Maddy said, "Norman, you are a very bad host, you haven't offered Elizabeth something to drink!"

In reality he had not had an opportunity to say a word!

"Of course, of course, Elizabeth what can I get you?"

"Well, I'm not much of a drinker actually – what would you suggest?"

Before Norman could answer Maddy interjected, "Norman makes a wonderful sherry brandy, would you like to try one?"

"I haven't had that before. Yes, I'll try it but only a small one if you don't mind."

Norman smiled and said, "Sure, two sherry brandies coming right up." He unfolded his large frame from his chair and walked into the house.

Maddy did not waste a second to continue their discussion. She asked Elizabeth about how she was fitting into town, if she found any shops that she liked – including the dress shop where they had both purchased their skirts and blouses – only that Maddy had acquired hers many years before. She kept up the polite questioning.

Elizabeth felt as if she was being questioned on so many things but at least she did not have to make the conversation. Maddy was doing an excellent job at that.

Norman returned with a tray of drinks.

“There you are Elizabeth, one small sherry brandy.” He placed the drink on a side table next to her.

“Thank you Norman.”

He handed his sister her drink and then sat down with his beer in hand.

After some idle chatter – mostly that excluded Norman – Maddy went inside to put the dinner out. When she was out of earshot Norman said, “Maddy does like to chat, sorry if she just climbed in!”

“Oh, I didn’t mind at all, I’m not a great conversationalist and I prefer it when someone else is keeping things going. Your sister seems very nice.”

They chatted for another minute or two before Maddy returned.

“We can eat in just a few minutes. Norman your bar duties are required again.”

“Yes! I am reporting for duty.” He smiled as he stood up.

“Elizabeth what would you like to drink with dinner? Red or white wine, or a cooler, or another sherry brandy?”

“Well, to be honest I don’t drink very much – I’m not sure, maybe a half glass of red wine.”

“Coming right up!” Norman walked into the house without asking Maddy what she would like to drink with dinner. She always had red wine.

“Come Elizabeth let’s get settled at the table while Norman pours the wine”. As they rose she took Elizabeth by the arm and walked her into the home. Elizabeth was not a touchy feely person and she was a little uncomfortable by being held.

Over time she would get used to her new friend and not mind the occasional pat on the hand or the arm. It was just her way of communicating. All things take time and some adjustment.

The Wilson home was old and furnished out of a bygone era. It looked very 19th century inside. Display cases were large and made of dark and heavy wood. The living room that Elizabeth walked through on the way to the dining room was dim even at this early evening time. Elizabeth was no connoisseur of old furniture so she could not date anything in the fleeting moment as she walked through the house but what did strike her immediately was how sophisticated and smart the house looked. Maddy was obviously very proud of their home. As Elizabeth would find out later, the home had been in the family for over ninety years.

The dining room was beautifully decorated. The large display case and dining room table dominated the room. The table settings were a work of art. As Elizabeth

took her seat she felt as if she was on a movie set. The layout of the cutlery was as prescribed by etiquette professionals.

Maddy and Norman excelled as hosts and the evening flitted by in an instant. Elizabeth told her hosts how she used to shop in her local village market on a Saturday. She was always on the lookout for homemade products. While describing her Saturday morning adventures to buy fresh produce Elizabeth stopped in mid-sentence.

"Elizabeth, are you unwell? Is something the matter?" asked Norman.

Elizabeth felt her cheeks go red and then she felt as if she was going to faint. She took a deep breath as her hosts looked on with concern. She raised her hand to indicate that she was fine. She took a sip of water and then cleared her throat.

"I'm fine thank you. As I was describing my shopping to you I remembered that I was out shopping the day that I heard on the TV newscast that Greg had been shot and killed. I...I fainted in the street and had to be taken to a nearby hospital to be checked out. I was fine but the news of Greg's murder was too much for me to grasp. I...I'm sorry if I startled you. I am fine now."

"My dear, I am so sorry. That must have been a great shock to you. I had met Greg Winters several times and he was an outstanding man."

Maddy then thought about Norman sitting at the table.

“Norman, you found Greg’s body. I cannot even begin to think how you felt that morning. I’m so sorry for you both.”

The three of them sat silent for a moment then Norman raised his glass. All he said was “To Greg!”

The two ladies clicked their glasses with Norman.

Then Maddy said, “I’m sure that Greg would have wanted us to have our meal while it was still warm!”

Elizabeth and Norman smiled and the tension was broken.

Although Elizabeth never really did relax completely that evening, she did feel that Maddy and Norman had come into her life for a purpose. Norman was more reserved while his sister was charming, warm and irresistible. She kept the evening moving along without even really trying. But of course she was trying very hard – it was just that she was good at it!

Elizabeth had not eaten so well since she had moved to Alpine Meadows.

It was well after 9 p.m. when Norman suggested that they retire to the living room for coffee. At first, Elizabeth was reluctant and suggested that she should be heading home. Her hosts would hear nothing of it. To her surprise,

and without having being asked, Norman brought out a liqueur while the coffee was brewing.

As Norman handed the liqueur to Elizabeth he said, "Oh, I apologize, I should've asked you if you would have liked a liqueur before your coffee. I'm in the habit of just pouring for Maddy and myself."

Elizabeth accepted her drink – even though she was feeling rather woozy after the wine with dinner.

As the conversation progressed there was more talk of the late Greg Winters. Maddy allowed Elizabeth to speak about Greg. In a way Elizabeth felt more at ease when talking about someone else than herself. Maybe Elizabeth's conversations with Norman had also been a form of healing.

Then almost completely off topic, Elizabeth asked a question – she surprised Maddy and herself!

"You mentioned at the dinner table that you used to operate an art studio, is that correct?"

"Yes - it was my life until the onset of arthritis. Painting and teaching was my passion. Why do you ask?"

"A long time ago, I thought of taking painting lessons but because of the hectic life that I led at the law offices I worked for, I never took up my interest. I was wondering if you might be available to give me some lessons if you had the time – I would pay you of course."

There was silence in the living room – well, for all of five seconds before Maddy answered.

“Of course, I would! That would be my pleasure! Oh, yes, that would be my pleasure!”

Norman just sat in shock. His sister had not picked up a brush in years and here she was readily accepting to teach Elizabeth how to paint.

“Oh, thank you! ...but I must insist that I pay you for the lessons.”

“We can work that out later but for now let’s talk about what you would like to do.”

After coffee Elizabeth finally succeeded in persuading Maddy to let her go home. The two women had agreed that Elizabeth would telephone in the next few days to discuss a suitable art program schedule. Norman had witnessed a one night bonding experience.

Driving back to the cabin Elizabeth kept thanking Norman and Maddy for having her over for dinner. She repeated herself several times on the quality of the dinner, the great company and the prospect of starting painting lessons. This was very unlike Elizabeth. Maybe it was the wine and liqueur speaking.

At the front door Elizabeth extended her hand to Norman and thanked him again for a wonderful evening. Once she had locked the door and indicated that the alarm system was armed she waved to him and he drove away.

He was hoping that his sister would be in bed when he got home. He was mistaken. She was doing the dishes as he walked in. She had taken her time cleaning up! “Are you pleased that we invited Elizabeth over for dinner?”

Chapter 5

The next day Elizabeth gave great thought to the happenings of the previous evening. After breakfast she sat outside and became engrossed in her thoughts and the splendor of her surroundings.

She often sat outside but she had really not taken in the true beauty of the location. The small dirt track that led off of the tarred road wound first to the right and then to the left. As the gentle left turn was made the small lake came into view. In reality it was no more than two hundred yards long and three hundred yards wide. It seemed to always reflect the sunshine. It looked to be such a happy lake! The sunsets were particularly spectacular. Sharing the sunsets had mostly been a lonely experience for Greg as they were now for Elizabeth.

She looked at the gravestones for Mary and Greg Winters. It was almost ominous seeing them there. She felt as if she were intruding in their private space. It seemed such a lonely place to be after the city life.

The day passed slowly.

All of that week passed without Elizabeth telephoning Maddy. She also did not drive to town but instead did her shopping at another nearby village. She could not bear running into either her or Norman and them asking why she had not as yet telephoned.

Maddy also decided not to telephone Elizabeth that week. She needed to give her time.

On the following Monday, Elizabeth decided that it was time she telephoned Maddy. As much as she believed that she wanted to try painting lessons she believed even more that she should return to San Francisco. She did not know how the conversation would go – except that Maddy would be disappointed.

When the telephone rang Elizabeth thought that it was Maddy calling to finalize the pending arrangements. She could not have been more wrong.

“Hello, how can I help you?”

“Hello, Elizabeth, it’s Ken Parker calling. How are you?”

This was not a telephone call that Elizabeth would have expected.

“Oh, hello Ken, I’m fine thank you. And you?”

And she automatically asked, “Is anything the matter?”

“I’m good thank you. Are you enjoying life in the wilderness?”

Elizabeth replied, “Well, it does take some getting used to. Ken, how can I help you?”

“Well, as you know we hired someone after you left us. She seemed okay to start with but it really did not work out for her or the firm. She resigned about two weeks ago.”

Ken continued, "We have shortlisted a number of potential candidates and we were wondering if you had the time to come to San Francisco and assist us in the selection process."

Elizabeth hesitated before she answered.

"Well, I have the time. When were you thinking of me coming in?"

"We were hoping to do the selection on Thursday and Friday. We'd put you up at the hotel near the office. We would cover your costs - if you wanted to stay for the weekend that would be fine too."

Elizabeth agreed to drive in for Wednesday evening. On Thursday and Friday she would form part of the panel that would interview the candidates. She readily accepted to stay in the city until the Sunday.

Elizabeth telephoned Maddy.

"Hello Maddy, this is Elizabeth McKenzie, how are you?"

"I am fine thank you, and you. I was hoping that you would telephone soon."

They exchanged pleasantries for a minute before Elizabeth broke the news.

"My old law firm have asked me to come into San Francisco and assist them in selecting someone to fill the

position that I held. Things did not work out with the first replacement. So, I will be going into the city this Wednesday and will only be returning on Sunday. We will have to delay our classes.”

“Are you still interested in painting lessons?” she asked.

“Yes, but they would have to be delayed.”

“Tell you what, why not pop around for a quick cup of tea before you leave and I will provide you with a list of the tools of the trade that you will need for when we start our lessons. There is a great art supply store in The Bay area.”

Elizabeth felt a little trapped but she agreed to visit with her that afternoon and pick up the list. She was not sure if she would visit the store or not. They had an enjoyable hour together that afternoon.

Elizabeth drove into San Francisco and checked into the hotel near the law firm.

Elizabeth felt uncomfortable as she parked her car at the law firm the next morning. The anxiety only increased as she walked towards the entrance of the building and then took the elevator to the upper floor of the building.

When the elevator door opened, she saw that Wendy was sitting at the reception desk – just as she had done for the last twenty-five years.

Wendy escorted Elizabeth to the “war room” where the interviews were to take place, but they were stopped several times as the staff saw Elizabeth and came out to greet her. It was a strange feeling as Elizabeth felt both wrong to be back and so right in being home.

The war room held so many memories for Elizabeth. Once Wendy left her to settle in, Elizabeth sat for a few moments and looked around. She needed to go to the ladies restroom to dry a few tears.

Ken was waiting for her on her return.

Two interviews were conducted in the morning and two in the afternoon. The following morning, there were two further interviews to be conducted. On the Friday afternoon Ken and Elizabeth were in the war room – it was decision time.

“So, what do you think? Any front runner?”

Elizabeth thought carefully before she spoke.

“All of the candidates had good legal executive assistant backgrounds. I tried to balance their experience, administrative skills and personalities together, as a match against what I think the law firm expects. Some had great skills but I don’t think that they would be a good fit for the firm.”

“I agree. I had the same feeling. Some candidates were good but I did not get that feeling of comfort. I think they might lack the passion that we are looking for.”

Ken thought for a moment then said,

“The partners and I would like to add another name to the list.”

Elizabeth looked at him but did not expect to hear what he said.

“We would like to add the name Elizabeth McKenzie to the list. We would really like you to consider coming back to the firm.”

Elizabeth sat in silence. Maybe, when Ken had telephoned her earlier in the week, she had thought that he was calling to offer her job back. After he mentioned the interview process she had completely dispelled the thought from her mind. Now this.

Ken just looked at her and smiled.

She did not know if she should smile back.

Ken sat and waited for her answer.

Finally she answered.

“Ken, I don’t know what to say. I really don’t know what to say. I hadn’t expected this.” She was silent again and just sat there. Another endless pause took place. Neither of them spoke.

“Look, I know that this might be a surprise to you. The fact is the firm is not the same without you.”

Still Elizabeth just sat. She could not even get an initial thought to pass through her mind.

“Tell you what, I will be in the office tomorrow morning, why not think about it overnight and then pop by and we’ll see where you stand.”

“Yes, thank you, that will give me some time. What time would suit you for me to come by?”

“Why not call me from the hotel and tell me when you are ready to come over, say about ten in the morning?”

Elizabeth had a terrible night.

She went through a very personal assessment about her life and what her future expectations were. Finally she came to a decision.

The next morning she telephoned Ken right on 10 a.m. When she parked her car, Ken was waiting at the entrance of the building to let her in.

They walked through the deserted offices to the war room.

After they sat down Ken decided to let Elizabeth speak first.

“Ken, I’ve considered your offer. It stunned me. I was honored. I could not find the words to answer you yesterday and my apology for that.”

Ken nodded and said, "Yeah! I suppose that we did blindside you but it is something that we wanted to ask. You are our first choice. The offer that I made yesterday still stands."

Elizabeth hesitated and then answered, "I am absolutely flattered by your offer. My time with the firm was the most rewarding of my life - even with all of the teasing that I had to endure from you and Greg."

Ken had a broad smile on his face. "Yes, it was fun, and maybe we over did the teasing!"

Elizabeth continued without comment.

"I still cannot comprehend why Greg left me so much money in his Will and his cabin. I have never been able to rationalize why he did that."

Ken interrupted, "He did that because he admired you, he often said that without you he would not have been successful as a lawyer - he said that to me many times. He said that you were his confidant, a stabilizing force in his life. He often spoke about his wife and how he missed her - but he had you next to him - I suppose that more than anything else you were his true friend."

"Ken, my life in Alpine Meadows is so different from here in the city. It is not easy to fit into a small town where not much ever happens and there is no burning rush to get things done on time. In many respects next week is better than tomorrow to get things done. It is a strange sensation living where there is little time pressure.