

## The Case of the Known Strangers

A Shirley Holmes Fan Fiction

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### The Case of the Known Strangers : Chapter 1

The doors of Sussex Academy burst open and kids poured out. Shirley Holmes was among them. She's tired from school and isn't not happy to have to walk all the way home, and by her self. Alicia had to go shopping . . . of course. And Bart had to go and check out some house, supposedly there was a poltergeist sighting. And Bo, well, Bo was tutoring. He had an excuse. He always did. She would always find one for him. But she didn't like him like that. He was just her best friend. He was her person to go to for help. He was just a friend. She sighed. Alicia told her that she would eventually go out with him. But she had said that when they had been twelve, five years ago. Now they were seventeen, going off to university in two years. It was kind of scary if she thought about it, which she wasn't. Instead she is thinking about Matt. Big surprise. They had met a while ago. Gone on a few dates. But that was all gone. He had left two years ago, probably for France. He was always talking about it. He had disappeared. Never wrote. Nothing. It was like he had dropped off the face of the earth. At first she had thought he was coming back. But then she realized how naive she had been. That was about a year ago. He wasn't coming back. She wasn't going to find a letter in her mailbox from him, telling her of his undying love for her. He didn't really care. *Probably married to a French model or something dumb like that*, she thought bitterly.

"Good. That was really good, Tess." Bo Sawchuk leaned over the page. She was supposed to need a tutor for German, the third language they needed for credits. "That's good. You know what? You don't even need me anymore. Why do you keep coming?" He studied the slight girl. She was a few inches shorter than him, with clear, very clear blue eyes and short reddish-blond hair.

She looked up. "It's nothing, really."

The detective inside Bo perked up. *Must have rubbed of Shirley.* "What? You sure you don't want to tell me?"

"Well...it's my parents," she started. Looking out the window, searching for some kind of strength, she went on. "They don't really like each other. They yell and scream at each other all the time. And I don't want to be in the middle of it. So I come here. I have nowhere else to go. I don't have many friends and they are all out of town right now. Sorry to waste your time, Bo. I have to get going now." She started packing up her things.

He got up. "No, it's not wasting my time. I like hanging out with you. Uh, what are you doing Friday?" he asked, looking at his shoes.

She looked up from cramming her jacket into her backpack. "Nothing. Why?"

"Uh, do you want to do something with me and Shirley, Bart, Alicia and Stink? I mean, Alisha might bring a new friend, but you can come if you want, that is."

Tess stopped. "I, uh- I have to ask my parents first." She brightened. "I hope I can. Because you're, you're pretty cool." She blushed. "I have to be going. My mom wants me home soon." She shoved the rest of her jacket in her backpack and stood up. "I'll see you later then." She grabbed her book and walked quickly out of the room.

He caught up with her at her locker. "Tess-. It's okay. Everyone's parents are like that sometimes. Don't worry about it." He put a hand on her arm. "I'll walk you home."

"Who is this, Tessa-Marie?" Tess's mother was standing in the doorway. "And where have you been? I have been waiting for at least a half hour." She glared at Bo. Beside him, Tess's shoulders slumped.

He stepped forward. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Jackson. But it was my fault. I kept her after school longer than I thought. She was working on German with me. I'm sorry-"

Tess stepped in front of Bo before he said any more, especially about Friday. "Um, this is Bo, mother. He's from the Sussex Academy. He's my tutor for German."

"You need a tutor for German? Have you not been studying enough? I do not think you should see this, this boy until I see that you have a satisfactory grade in it. It is, after all, the mother tongue, Tess," she said sharply. "Now go inside and get washed up. Supper is in ten minutes."

Tess gave Bo a sad look as her mother whisked her into the house.

"And where were you?" Shirley asked as Bo came up through the hidden stairs.

“What? Oh. Tutoring. Didn’t I tell you . . .?”

“Yeah, but I didn’t know that it was going to be that long. Who is it that you’re tutoring?” She already knew from Alisha but wanted to hear him say it. Alisha said that the girl was super cool and had a cool but funky fashion.

“Tess, Tess Jackson. She’s from Australia but her parents are really strict and are from Germany originally. Her mom tells her stuff about how she shouldn’t do certain stuff because it goes against what they did in the mother land, Germany, I’m guessing.” He flopped onto the couch. “Her mom’s a real hard case . . . . But I invited her to come hang out with us on Friday, if it’s okay with you?” he added quickly.

“Well, it doesn’t matter to me because I have to go to New York with my dad for Friday and Saturday, so whatever. You would have to talk to Alicia, Bart and Stink.”

“Oh, uh, okay.”

She sat down beside him. “I want to try and find Matt again.”

Bo blinked and snapped back to reality. “What?”

“Matt. I want to find him again.”

“Um, sure, why?”

“I don’t know. I just want to see him again, that’s all.” She looked wistfully out the window. “He just, knew me, he knew me better than anyone. Well, except for you.”

He studied her. “You really liked him when you guys went out back then, eh?”

She looked back at him. “Yeah, yeah I did. But then he left and I was all confused. Sorry I tried to replace him with you for that bit.”

After Matt had left, Shirley had tried to fill the boyfriend gap with Bo but she had treated him as if he were Matt. They ended up in a bitter argument that had resulted in Bo not talking to Shirley for two months.

“Ah, that’s okay, Shirley. We all make mistakes sometimes, even the great granddaughter of Sherlock Holmes.” He smiled and she knew that he had forgiven her long ago. “So, how are you going to find him?”

“I don’t know. I think I might try to find him when I go down to New York. He might be there.” She sighed. “It’s a wild guess but he might be there.”

Bo watched her silently as she absentmindedly picked up a book and thumbed through its pages.

“Okay, well, I got to go, Shirley. Fish market duties today.”

She smiled. “Yeah, ok. See you later then.”

After Bo leaves, Shirley sits down at her computer. "Time to do some searching," she whispered as she clicked on the Internet icon.

## The Case of the Known Strangers : Chapter 2

The next day at school, Bo ran into Tess.

"Hey Tess! What's up?" he said. She was dressed in the school uniform but she had made some adjustments to it. And Alicia was right, she did have a good fashion sense, well, she looked good.

And that was all that really matters to him, going by the whole 'fashion sense' thing.

She brightened.

*She's genuinely happy to see me. Shirley doesn't really do that. She's more the kind of girl that just accepts me just being there. Like it's natural, sort of.*

"Hey Bo!" She closed her locker and waved at him. Then all her books fell out of her arms, on the ground. She looked very stricken and quickly stooped down to pick it all up.

Smiling to himself because she was so afraid that she was a klutz or something, he asks, "Can I help you carry something?" He bent down and starts scooping up things. "You know, you don't need all this stuff," he said, handing her a book on the culture of Africa.

"I know, but my mother . . . She's obsessed with me graduating with honours." She stuffed a few books into her locker, slammed it then turned to Bo. "And about Saturday, I can go, well, sort of. It depends what you guys are doing." She smiled sadly. "My mom is treating me like I'm five! I hate it!" she said, frustrated.

"Fergetaboutit," he said in his best gangster voice, slinging his arm around her shoulders. "You and me baby, we're going to the most boring thing in the world on Saturday! We're gonna to watch a movie!"

She laughed. Then grew serious again. "Which one."

"Uh, Notting Hill." He nodded with a grin on his face. "Yes, that's the one." Then he dropped his arm from around her shoulder, seeing Shirley turn the corner.

"Bo! Hey. What's up? Who's this?" She studied Tess.

"I'm Tess. Tess Jackson. Bo is tutoring me." She held out her hand.

"That's Miss Tessa-Marie Jackson," Bo said with a straight face. "She's very partial to her name." His face broke out in a grin as Tess smacked him in the arm.

"No, it's not! Its just Tess."

"Oh, I get it. Hello." Throughout that whole thing, Shirley didn't ever crack a smile. "I'm Shirley.

Shirley Holmes.”

They shook hands just as the bell rang.

“See you guys later!” Tess yelled over her shoulder as she raced to her first class.

Shirley glanced at Bo who was waving madly at Tess disappearing around the corner. A flash of jealousy flickered on her face for an instant then was gone. “Ah, well, it’s not like we haven’t been late before, right?”

They walked to first class together.

“Bo. I have to meet Alicia and help her with an assignment for next class. I can’t have lunch with you,” Shirley whispered across the aisle.

“Okay, don’t worry about it. I’ll sit with Stink and Bart,” he whispered back.

“Okay, good.”

The bell rang and everyone left the class.

“Hey, Bo. Who’s the chick that you were with this morning?” Stink Patterson asked as they pushed through the cafeteria line.

“What? Oh. Tess. Yeah. She’s cool.” Bo smiled to himself, think of the morning. “Hey. How did you know about that?”

“Oh, uh, Molly.”

“Still going out with her?” Bo still couldn’t believe that Stink was actually going out with Molly for a couple of months.

“On and off, you know, she’s had some other guys, but came back with me every once in a while.”

“That’s got to be rough,” Bart remarked. “Don’t you feel bad when she goes out those other guys?”

“At least I have a girlfriend, mon ami. You, on the other hand, are batting since last year with that science girl.”

“Correction, you do not have a girlfriend. Isn’t that her sitting with Aaron McTavish over there?” Bart said maliciously, pointing towards a table to their right.

“Shut up.”

“Hey guys. Cool it. None of us have girlfriends. All three of us want girlfriends but none of us even has an almost girlfriend. Okay? Calm down,” Bo intervened.

They paid for their lunches at the cashiers.

“What about that Tess girl?” Stink asked as they walked outside to find a table in the sun.

"I don't know. Her parents are so strict it's not funny. But, sure, I guess. That'd be worth it."

"Speaking of which." Bart interrupted, nudging Bo. "There she is." He pointed towards an empty table at the edge of the quad where Tess sat. She was immersed in a book and her hair fell down, forming a curtain around her face, blocking out the world.

"Let's go!" Stink whooped and walked quickly towards her. "Who knows," he threw back over his shoulder, "maybe she'll like me better than you, ugly-mug Sawchuk."

"Yeah, right! The day I see some girl choose you over me is the day we find a blind, psychotic maniac of a girl," Bo shot back, matching Stink's pace.

"Oh, it hurts Bo, it hurts, right here." He patted his heart, nearly dropping his tray in the process.

"Hey, guys, wait up!" Bart jogged after them.

"Hello there, beautiful. Mind if we sit here?"

Tess looked up. A tall boy with green eyes and cropped yellow-orange hair stood on the other side of the table. Beside him was a shorter boy with brown hair and glasses. And then beside him was Bo, with a sheepish grin on his face.

"Uh, hey."

"Sure."

"You guys are lucky to have me. She wouldn't have let you two sit down if it weren't for me being so handsome and all," Stink boasted. He plunked his tray down beside Tess, who closed her book and put it back in her book bag. "I'm Stink Patterson, the most handsome, great, funniest, one of a kind person at Sussex Academy. Nice to meet you," He said, waving his hamburger at her.

She smiled and Bart sat down in front of her. "I'm Bart James. Welcome to Sussex. Bo says that you just moved here."

"Um, yeah. I just moved here from Australia a couple of weeks ago. But I wasn't there long either. My parents moved around a lot because they didn't really have a job that was in one place then they got one here at the university, I ended up here."

"And aren't we glad that you did," Stink said, looking very sincere.

Bo sat down on the other side of Tess. "So, what are you guys doing Friday night?"

"I have a date with Molly."

"Oh, she's coming back, is she?"

"Yes Bart. Shut up. What about you? What are your big plans? Eh?"

"Well," he said slowly, "actually, Wendy, in my science class is coming with me to the museum." He

smirked at Stink.

“Oh. Um, okay.” Bo blinked. “Yeah.” *Now what? I’m going to watch a movie with Tess alone? This can’t be all bad . . .* “What about Alicia?” he asked.

“Uh, I don’t know. You’d have to ask her.”

“Look at that, Shirley! Look! Our boys . . . Fawning over some girl! Ugh! It’s disgusting!” She noticed a guy walking by. “Oh, he’s cute, don’t you think, Shirley? Shirley? Oh, right! The boys!” She started walking over.

“Alicia, it’s okay. That’s Tess. Bo tutors her.” But she frowned as Tess laughed at something Bo said.

“You still like him, don’t you?” Alicia accused.

“No,” Shirley said evasively.

“Admit it. Not even just a little?” Alicia prodded.

“Well, maybe a little. But very little,” she added quickly.

“Sure. Whatever. Come on. Let’s go.”

“Hi! I’m Alicia Ginelli! How do you like the school?” Alicia and Shirley came up.

“It’s nice. Nicer than my last one.”

“How come you don’t have an Australian accent?” Shirley asked.

“And you must be Shirley. My parents moved a lot. We were only there for about a month. Why?”

“Just wondering.”

“Why were you following me this morning?”

Shirley stared at Tess. “What? When?” *How does she know that?* A little voice added in her head.

“I picked you in the crowd. You were observant and tried to be cautious. That was your mistake. You tried to look like you didn’t know anything but I knew that you were really smart so you didn’t have a very good cover. You can’t use it on someone who knows you,” Tess replied quietly.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Shirley snapped.

Bo stared at her. *What has gotten into her?* He wondered. “Hey, Alicia what are you doing tomorrow night?”

“Friday? Well, I don’t really know yet. Because Eric has to call me back and we don’t know what we’re doing yet.”

“Do you want to watch a movie with us?”

“Who is ‘us’?”

“Me and Tess?” It came out sounding like a question. He glanced at Shirley. She was frowning slightly.

“Why? Where’s everyone else?”

“Stink’s going out with Molly-“

“Again?” interrupted Alicia.

Stink gave her a dirty look. “Yes, again. Bart’s going out with Wendy and Shirley’s out of town with her dad.”

“Hunting down Matt,” added Bo.

Shirley blushed.

Alicia smiled. “Ah, I see . . . it is all clear now!” she said triumphantly.

“Hey, Tess. Can I talk to you? It’ll just take a sec.”

Tess turned around. It was Alicia. “Sure.”

“Do you like Bo?”

“He’s cool . . .”

“No. I mean, like, like,” Alicia blurted out.

“Well, I don’t want to get between him and Shirley-”

“Oh, don’t worry about that! They went out for a bit but she treated him like he was her other boyfriend from before. Not that she’s a bad person or anything.”

“Yes, I know.”

“So you do? That’s so cool! Another friend likes him! Awww, you two would be cute. You just wait. Friday, you’re coming over to my place and we are going to catch you a Bo.”

“But my mother-”

“Don’t worry, just say you’re sleeping over at my house and we’re going to study. We’re watching the movies at my house anyways.”

“Okay, I’ll try.” Tess smiled. “Got to go! See you Alicia!”

“Bye Tess!”

Tess ran all the way home. Her parents weren’t home. There was a note on the fridge. “Potatoes on counter. Roast on counter. Put on oven at five. Clean potatoes before putting in oven. Mother. Right. Like I’m a moron or something.” She pulled out a piece of paper.

“Hello, is Bo there?”



"Yes, Who is calling?"

"Tess Jackson."

"Hmm, one moment."

She waited. The longer she waited, the more nervous. Finally as she was getting ready to hang up someone picked up on the other end.

"I got it, mom!" she heard him yell, then, "Hello?"

"Hi, Bo."

"Oh, hey Tess! What's up?"

"Not much. Have to make supper. My mom thinks I'm a moron! She practically left me detailed instructions!" Tess slid the roast into the oven and cleaned the potatoes.

"That's no good. My mom does all the cooking. If you touch her kitchen, she'll kill you."

She laughed. "So. What are the movies?"

"I don't know. Maybe Lethal Weapon 4 and The Thirteenth Warrior?"

"I don't really know my movies." She laughed again. Then she grew serious. "I'm glad you invited me." She put the potatoes in beside the roast and slid down and sat leaning against the oven.

"Yeah, me too. Hey . . . I thought you weren't allowed on the phone, especially with guys."

"They're not home. It's very peaceful. I'd invite you over, but I don't know when they're coming home. Sorry."

"That's okay. So, you're sleeping over at Alicia's on Friday and Saturday?"

"Yep."

"We can hang out both nights?"

"I don't know! Oh, have to go. They're back," she said, hearing the front door open and her mother walk up the stairs.

"Who was that on the phone, Tessa-Marie?"

"Just a salesperson, asking dumb questions about cable."

"Oh. Did you put the potatoes and roast in?" Mrs. Jackson asked, peering into the oven.

"Yes, mother."

"Did you finish your homework?"

"Yes mother." She hadn't done anything but she had next to no homework. "I'll go finish it up."

Mrs. Jackson smiled to herself. Her baby was growing. Mothers could spot the happiness under their daughter's normal personas. Perhaps it was this Bo character. He looked decent enough. Went to a good school. Not in a gang or anything. *Maybe I should let her sleep over at that girl's house on*

*Friday and Saturday*, she thought to herself.

### **The Case of the Known Strangers : Chapter 3**

“Which one do you think Eric will like? The red one or the green one?” Alicia studied both dresses held up to her body. “Personally, I like the green one.”

“Then wear it! Geez, how long does it take you to get dressed?” Tess shook her head and looked down at her blue tank top and summer skirt. “Clothes aren’t *that* important, are they?”

“To me they are!” Alicia pulled the green dress over her head. “There. Done.” She was wearing a short summer sundress. Tess had to admit it looked better than the red one, she’d only tried them both on about seven times each.

“I still can’t believe that my mom let me stay with you! I mean, I feel dumb because I’m seventeen and my mother won’t let me stay at a friend’s house usually, but she was in a good mood when I asked her the first time and she said she’d think about it. And here I am!”

“I know-“

“Alicia!” Mr. Ginelli yelled up the stairs, interrupting their conversation. “They’re here!”

“Oh, they’re here! C’mon!”

“Okay, okay.”

“Come on!” She dragged Tess along to the top of the staircase. Then she descended, leaving Tess at the top.

*Well, okay, here goes nothing.* She slowly went down the stairs. Eric whistled. Tess didn’t notice whether it was for her or not. She was concentrating on where to put her feet.

“Hey Tess.”

She looked up. Bo. Looking really good. “Hi.”

Alicia looked up from Eric’s shoulder. “Movies?”

Eric held them up. “Dragon Assassins aaaand Notting Hill. Here’s one movie that we picked out and one that you wanted. Ugh! Sappy, sappy movies! I think I’m going to die,” he joked as he kissed Alicia softly on the cheek.

Tess watched and a twitch of envy went through her. She turned back to Bo and saw the same thing on his face. *Well, if I like him, and he likes me . . . . . Why isn’t anything happening?*

“That was so dumb, when the car blew up!” Eric announced. “They lost their money and didn’t even get the girl at the end.” He sighed.

“Oh, well,” Alicia said brightly, picking up Notting Hill, “The guy gets the girl at the end of this one!” She popped the tape in the VCR and settle back cuddling with Eric.

“Awww, ruin the movie for me!” Eric said, laughing as Alicia elbowed him in the stomach.

As the movie started, Tess glanced over at Bo. He was looking back. There was an awkward pause when neither spoke but both knew that they should say something but never did. So she turned back to the movie.

About halfway into the movie, Tess felt someone take her hand. Turning she saw Bo, his eyes questioning. She smiled and leaned comfortably against his shoulder. His hand squeezed hers tightly.

Alicia glanced over. They were both smiling that gushy, dreamy smile a person uses only use when they're with someone they really like. And they looked so cute. She laid her head back on Eric's shoulder. *Awww, that's so cute. Tess and Bo. Bo and Tess. Don't even know each other for more than a couple of weeks...oh well.* They look very happy together. *But what about Shirley, a little voice at the back of her mind said. She wanted Matt, had a chance with Bo, but blew it,* another voice shot back. It wasn't that she didn't like Shirley anymore; she was still same old Shirley, but Shirley was acting like a real witch to Tess lately and she was very tense. Maybe the trip to New York will be good for her.

“That was the dumbest movie ever!” Eric exclaimed. “What was with that Oopsie-daisy stuff? I don't get it.”

Alicia looked over at Tess, who stifled a grin. She sighed. Guys. They just don't get romance movies. “She said that it was something only little girls said but he said it. Right? Right. So he's a really soft, nice person. Like he's the sensitive guy like, uh, Bo! Yeah, Bo's the sensitive guy mixed with the kind of tough guy. Because he used to be in a gang and then he turned good. Well, he's not that he wasn't good to start of with. You, on the other hand, are the class clown. Bart, I'm sorry to say is the guy that gets picked on a lot. He's like a geek or something. And Stink is another class clown. And that's because he's always playing tricks on people,” She finished and smiled at Eric.

“See. Everything has an easy explanation. So now what are we going to do?”

Eric took her hand. “Well, it's still light out. We could go outside for a bit.”

“Umm, yeah,” Bo agreed. “We could go down to the river.”

“Umm, okay. Hang on. Gotta get shoes.” She pulled Tess up the stairs.

“Oh boy,” Eric remarked. “Make yourself comfortable, Bo. They’re going to be awhile.” He sat down on the bench in the front hall. Bo leaned against the wall opposite the door.

“Tess!” Alicia squealed as soon as they were safe in her room. “You guys are so cute! Awesome!” She beamed at the other girl. “Are you psyched? Did he ask you yet?”

“Yes, yes I am! No, he hasn’t asked me yet.” She rummaged through her bag for her sandals.

“Oh, don’t worry. You still have lots of time! Oh! What shoes am I going to wear?” She opened her closet and proceeded to throw sandals, slippers and boots all over the room.

“Just grab some sandals!” yelled Tess, ducking to avoid being hit by a flying running shoe that flew at her head.

“I have ten pair!” replied Alicia sophisticatedly.

“Hey, Tess?”

Alicia and Eric were sitting in the swinging chair. Bo and Tess were sitting at the edge of the water.

“Yes?”

“Um, can I ask you something?”

“Sure.”

He turned to look at her. “Um, do you, uh, want to, um, be my, uh-”

“Geez you’re slow! Yes, Bo. Yes, I will be your girlfriend.”

He grinned. “Great! I mean, wow, that was easy.” Then he leaned over and kissed her, softly, on the lips.

## **The Case of the Known Strangers : Chapter 4**

Shirley watched from behind a bush. The trip to New York had been cancelled at the last minute. So she had called Alicia’s. But her mother had said that they were down by the river. So she had gone down to the river.

She had made it there just in time to see Bo lean over and kiss Tess.

Her eyes narrowed and she felt tears prick the corners. *It just isn’t fair. Why me? I lost Matt and now I’m losing Bo too.*

*You were the one who pushed him away,* a voice deep down inside her said. And it was true. She couldn’t deny it. *And you thought you were over him,* the voice added snidely.

Turning, she walked home.

Robert Holmes looked up from his paper as his only child entered the room. She looked so sad. Perhaps about the trip being cancelled? *Maybe this'll cheer her up.* "Honey, you got a phone call about fifteen minutes ago."

"Who was it?" Shirley asked, her voice unemotional. She flopped into a chair. Who would call her? All the people who might were gone for the night.

"He said that he was Matt Harris or something of the sort. Strange sort of chap."

Shirley jumped up from the chair, as though stung by a bug. "Did he leave a number?"

"No, he said, meet him tonight at the Braden Bridge at eight, if you had come back by then.

Otherwise he was going to call back later."

"Thanks dad! Bye dad!" She kissed him quickly on the cheek then sprinted out the door.

*What am I going to say? She asked herself. Did you have a fun time in France without me? Did you meet a really pretty French girl?*

Oh, shut up, she told the voices. And then she was there. The bridge was just ahead. A guy was leaning against the rail, watching the swirling waters below.

"Matt?" She caught her breath when the guy looked up. His dark hair had been cut short. Now it was spiky. His whole face had almost changed. He looked older than the 18 years he was.

"Shirley." His voice too, had changed. He straightened up. "Hey."

"Hey? That's all you have to say?" She grew angry. "Two years, Matt. Two years. Where have you been? I waited for a year until I realized that you weren't coming back."

"Shirley. I'm sorry. But there's stuff. Stuff you don't know about. Stuff you didn't know about. I'm sorry," he repeated.

She stopped when she came near. "Tell me."

"Shirley?" Mr. Holmes asked, as Shirley came in. "Who is there with you?"

"Don't worry, dad, its just Matt. You do remember Matt, right?" She pulled Matt up the stairs. Once they were in the attic, she turned around. "So, that's it? You came back because there's a threat on this girl and you came back to protect her."

"Um, yeah. She has been running from these people that are trying to get her. It's strange, I know. And this is why I took the case. I knew it was in Redington and I wanted to see how you were." He sat down on the couch. "I know you don't believe that I still like you. And I do. I really do. But if you

don't believe me, that's okay. I'll just find this girl and then go undercover and you won't see me because I can't." He looked out the window. The sun was going down. "I have to go, Shirley. I've wasted enough time already. I still have to find her."

"Well, I'll help you find her." She sounded a little desperate, she knew, but she did want to spend more time with Matt.

He turned back to her. "Would you, Shirley? That would help a lot. But, really, I have to get back to the hotel."

"You could stay here, if you want to."

"Seriously?"

"Yeah, sure, y'know, whatever." She tried to sound nonchalant. "I'll ask my dad." Getting up, she glanced back towards him as she left the room. *He's back!!!* Something screamed inside her. But outside she tried to remain calm. *He's going to leave again*, another voice reminded her.

"He says you can. You can have the guest room," she said happily. They were back in the attic, looking for the girl in the school directories. "How old is she?" Shirley asked.

"Seventeen. Just like you. And she's medium height, with light blue eyes and reddy-blond hair. Here, I have a picture." He reached into his pocket and fished out a wallet. Flipping through, he found what he was looking for. "Here." He passed Shirley the picture. "She always runs away from me. I've been looking for her for almost two years. Never wants my help. Tries to make friends but her parents are so strict that they move all the time to keep her to themselves. They're kind of suspicious themselves. We've been trying to check on them but they have nothing, or it's hidden." Shirley looked down at the picture. Her eyes widened and she dropped it.

It fluttered to the ground and she saw the smiling face of Tess Jackson. Except in the picture she had longer hair.

## **The Case of the Known Strangers : Chapter 5**

"Can you believe that we are graduating in a couple of weeks?" asked Alicia. They were back at her house, sprawled on the back deck. She sighed. "I am going to the best fashion school in North America. It is going to be the best. But you guys won't be there with me. That'll be so sad." She squeezed Eric's hand. He squeezed back reassuringly. "But we'll write, right?"

"Can't say that I'm much of a letter writer," Bo said wryly. "But, yeah, sure."

"Mhmm," added Tess.

Bo hugged her closer.

“Tessa-Marie! Your father has brought you home a surprise!”

Tess looked up from her homework. “What?”

“Come downstairs!” her mother yelled up the stairs.

She put her pen down and walked down the stairs. Her mother was waiting at the front door. “It is outside. Waiting for you.” She pulled Tess outside.

It was brighter out than her room. Her eyes adjusted and she saw her present.

“This is so great!” Tess circled the car. It was a light blue convertible. She slid into the driver’s seat and turned on the car.

“Be back before supper, Tessa-Marie!” her mother yelled from the house as Tess pulled out of the driveway.

She drove towards Bo’s house to show him the new car. *I’m free*, she thought. *Now I can do whatever. I don’t need anyone.* She was so caught up in her thoughts; she didn’t notice the van behind her, almost touching her bumper. It bumped her lightly and she turned around to look at it. It bumped her again, harder this time. She grabbed the wheel and straightened the car as the van hit her again.

It came up beside her. She tried to see the face of the driver, but the windows were tinted. She braced herself as the van rammed her from the side. *It’s forcing me off the road*, she realized. She stepped on the gas, trying to get ahead of the van and away, but the van sped up too. It moved so that its back wheel was lined up with her front. Then it moved over.

She saw it in slow motion. Coming over and hitting her front. The car started to spin out of control. And she couldn’t stop it. Wrenching the wheel to and fro wasn’t helping. The brake didn’t help. She let go of the wheel and cradled her head in her arms as soon as she saw the parked car loom up.

“She is in stable condition, Mrs. Jackson. Don’t worry. We are doing everything we can. Go home and get some rest. She will probably be awake tomorrow.”

Mrs. Jackson nodded. She bit her lip and a tear slid down her cheek. “Who would do such an awful thing to my daughter?” she asked quietly.

“I don’t know. You will have to ask the police. That’s their field.” The doctor turned and walked away.

Mrs. Jackson turned towards the elevator. She was about to leave when someone called her name.

"Mrs. Jackson? Is she alright?"

She saw Bo and another boy and a girl. Bo's face was tight with emotion. The girl looked like she had been crying. "Yes, yes, my daughter is fine. She is in room 404, if you would like to see her."

Then she turned and walked into the elevator.

"This is awful. I haven't even known her for even a week and I am so sad. She better be okay.

Because if she's not I'm going to be so sad." Alicia was babbling.

Bo was quiet as they entered room 404.

Tess was lying on the bed. She was so pale that at first Bo thought she was dead. Then he saw her chest rise and fall. He walked quickly to her bedside. "Tess? Can you hear me?" He took her hand. It was cold...but not deathly cold. "Why?" he asked. "Why did this happen to you?"

Alicia put her hand on his shoulder. "Bo. You can't explain these things. It was probably some stupid drunk driver."

"I know."

"What happened?" Tess was back at school a few days later. Everyone was asking questions. She still had a few cuts and bruises. She wished that everyone would just leave her alone. Shirley seemed to hate her. *Probably because you're with Bo*, she mused. *Oh, well, I tried to be nice and everything*. Even Molly seemed to be sympathetic.

"I hope you feel better." Molly. Again. She was around a lot now. Because you're not really friends with Shirley, Bo had said.

His arm tightened around her waist. Molly was trying to convince her, again, to join the school council. "Molly. I don't really want to do that. I am incredibly shy and I don't think I could get up in front of the whole school and do things like you."

"Oh, sure you could. You can't be that shy. Everyone loves you. Did you see all those guys this morning?"

"Yes, I remember." There had been a bunch of guys that had offered to help her with her studies. But Bo had told them to go away. He helped her already with school. He didn't like Molly. She is really evil underneath all this, he had whispered to her a few minutes ago.

"Don't worry about it, then. You would be a good addition to the council."

"Um, no, I don't think so, Molly. My mom is very strict. She doesn't want me to do a lot of things.



And I already have dancing and tutoring. She's really strict."

Molly looked at Bo, who nodded. "It's true. Her mom tried to kick me out of the house, the last time I went to see Tess. She said that Tess had a lot of homework to do. She's very overprotective."

She dropped the nice act. "Fine. Watch out then. Because I always have my way." She turned and stamped away.

"Would Tess Jackson please come down to the office? Thank you."

It was the last period of the day. Tess frowned. Why did they want her down at the office? She walked down to the office and saw the secretary. "Tess Jackson?"

"Yes. That's me."

"There's a parcel for you." She passed a big parcel to Tess.

"Thanks. Um, do you have any scissors? Thank you." She sat down with the parcel in her lap.

Cutting the tape she pulled back the flaps.

"Oh my goodness. Oh. My. God." She dropped the parcel. Inside was her new kitten, Alistair, dead.

## **The Case of the Known Strangers : Chapter 6**

"Tessa-Marie Jackson?"

Tess looked up, her face blank. "Yes?"

The detective tipped his hat. "I'm detective Maris. I'm here to help you."

"Well, maybe you can." She sat down on the seat in the office. They had cleared out the box with Alistair. At the bottom of the box they had found a note:

Life's precious and fragile as can be,  
And if you don't come with me,  
Friends disappear every day,  
But this time, it'll be my way.  
Come to the place with flowers in bloom,  
Or someone dear,  
Will disappear.

"Do you have any idea who would do this to you, Miss Jackson?" Maris asked softly.

"No." She was tired. First the accident happened and then this. Why? "I- I don't understand. Why

would someone want me? I'm a normal girl. I go to Sussex. My parents work at the university. I don't understand." Pictures of Alistair kept flashing through her head. When she first got him. When he was lost and found again. Playing in the sunshine. Finally, lying dead in the box. She blinked back the tears. "What?"

"I said, has there ever been anyone in your history that has threatened you before?" He tried to talk softly. Obviously this girl had been through a lot. He had heard about the crash and could see the cuts still on her face.

"Tess? Are you okay?" Bo came into the room. Maris looked up. "Who are you?"

"Bo. Bo Sawchuk. I'm a ...friend." He looked back to Tess. "Are you okay?" he asked again.

"Yes, he's a friend. No, I'm not okay, Bo. I just had to see my cat, dead, in a box with a threat of killing people around me. What do you think?" She got up. "Excuse me, detective, I have to go home. I cannot handle this." She ran from the room.

Bo started to follow, but Maris stopped him. "I would like to talk to you too, son."

"I'm not your son, and there's nothing that I could tell you. I have to go see Tess. She needs someone to comfort her."

"And you think that you would be the right person to do that?" Maris asked softly.

"Are you trying to say something, detective? Do you think I did this? I would never-"

"I am not trying to say anything. I just want to know why this girl is so spooked. She seems more afraid than a normal girl whose cat has just died. And we found this note." He passed the note to Bo, who read it quickly.

He stepped back. "I have to go, detective. She needs me."

"Well, thanks. And if you find anything unusual, give me a call." He handed Bo his card and left the room. Bo looked down at the card in his hand.

*Gerry Maris*

*Interpol*

*Cell phone: (657)-952-3652*

*home: (952)-768-3214*

"What the? Why would Interpol be in on this?" Bo whispered to himself. Shaking his head, he walked out of the school to his car.

"Mother?" Tess pushed open the front door. "Hello? Is anyone home?" She dumped her bag on the dining room table and walked through the silent house. She went up the stairs to her room. Pushed open the door. "No-

It was a wreck. Her clothes were all over. Drawers were ripped open. Papers were scattered all over the place. "No. No. No. It's happening again." On the wall something was written. *Love is bittersweet. But don't worry, love, we shall be together again soon.* Screaming she turned and ran downstairs. Outside everything was dark and quiet. The sun was setting.

"What do you want?" she screamed. "Leave me alone!" She collapsed on the grass, sobbing.

"Hello, luv. How nice to see you again," someone said.

She looked up. "No. No way. You're dead."

The person stepped out of the shadow of a nearby tree. "Ah, Tess. So naïve. Did you see me die?"

"Raquel told me..." She swallowed. "She was with you the whole time, wasn't she?" He nodded.

"Every letter that I sent her... you got those letters, didn't you?"

"But of course. Just before you left, she was killed by one of my agents. They took over her identity. You didn't even notice the difference, you were so caught up in Jeff's death." He smiled. "And now it's your turn."

"I never did anything to you." She scrambled back on the grass.

He followed. "You came to the warehouse with Jeff. He was supposed to come alone." He aimed a kick at Tess.

She rolled out of the way. "Then why did you kill Raquel? She wasn't there."

"She was your friend, was she not? She was my insurance. You did everything I wanted you to do, pet." He drew back his leg for another kick.

As Bo drew nearer, he noticed two shadows on the front lawn. One was on the ground and the other was standing, trying to beat up the one on the ground. He stopped the car and jumped out.

Tess was the one on the ground.

He sprinted towards them. "Stop!" he yelled. "Leave her alone!" He grabbed the person around the waist. They started flailing at him but he held on. "Run, Tess, run! Get away!"

She stood up. "Bo! No! Leave him alone!"

Thinking that she was yelling at him, Bo let go. The person swung wildly at him and struck him on the side of the head. He fell, seeing stars. Then the person whistled loudly. Two men stepped out from the trees.

Tess saw the two men step out from the trees. Bo was on the ground, struggling to get up. She dropped to her knees. "Bo. Get up. Please, get up." She pulled his arm and he shakily got to his feet. "Bo, you have to go. Run away. He'll kill you. Please." She was so desperate. Tears were running down her cheeks. She didn't want him to die. Like Jeff. Like Raquel. She tried to push him towards his car but he wouldn't budge.

"Tess. I can't leave you here." He pulled out his keys to his car. "Here. Go. Don't try to argue."

"No. Bo, you can't. He *will* kill you."

"At least I'll know you're safe." He pushed her gently towards his car. "Please. Tess. Go."

The men ran towards them. They knew that she was going to run. Bo tripped the first and tackled the second. "Go, Tess!" He shouted as both men grabbed him. "Go!"

She turned and ran to his car. Yanked the door open and jumped inside. Slamming the door behind her, she locked it. Looking out, she saw the two men dragging Bo off. The original person attacking her, Craven was his name, looked towards her. "You cannot win, luv!" he shouted towards her. "We have the boy. He fought bravely. He will die bravely. Another one trying to protect you. Again. They all die, Tess. All of them. If you just come now we will let him go."

"Like hell! I refuse to let you kill him! I'll find where he is and get him back!" she screamed, starting the car and speeding away as he ran towards her.

She went to the only person she thought could help her. Shirley Holmes. Parking the car she got out. She looked up to see Shirley's face in the window. It was suspicious. Probably thought that it was Bo. *But when I got out of the car, she got mad. Oh, well, here goes nothing.* She knocked on the door.

Matt opened the door. It was her. Tess Jackson. The girl he was looking for. She was here. He had found her.

"You. Get away. Leave me alone." She backed away from Matt.

He moved towards her. "Tess. Tess, I'm here to help you. Those people. They're coming. And they're going to get you if you don't come with me."

"How do I know that you're not one of them?" she told him, narrowing her eyes. She was now at the

fence. She inched along to the gate. "How do I know that you aren't going to bring me to them?"

"Tess. I am here to help. Why don't you believe me?"

"Because everyone I've tried to trust have turned around and stabbed me in the back. My parents. It was they, wasn't it? They're not really my parents. They were set up so that I would do everything just the way he wanted me to. You don't know how that feels. Everyone is against me. Always. They kidnapped Bo, my only real friend. They tried to kill me. They trashed my room, my new car, killed my cat." Tears slipped down her cheeks. "I just want it to stop."

He moved towards her. "No. Tess. I want to help. Really. Just let me help. I'll help you find Bo. We'll help get him back. I promise."

Shirley came up behind him. "I want to help you, Tess. Even if I don't like the fact that you are with Bo... I want to help you. I know you don't really like me, but I don't hate you. Because of Bo and all." She was babbling.

"Yeah, I know."

"Do you want to come in?" Matt asked.

"We know where Bo is," added Shirley.

"Sure." She followed them up the stairs and through the hidden bookcase to Shirley's attic. There was a map spread out on the desk. Red circles marked certain places. "Well? Which one is it?"

Matt pointed to two. "We don't know exactly which one but it's one of these places. I'm sorry that we don't know which one it is." He shrugged. "But we'll find it. Don't worry."

"Can we go now?" Tess asked. They didn't have much time. Bo could already be dead, but she doubted it. Craven would keep him alive until Tess got there herself. Then he would use him as a pawn. *Like the rest*, she thought miserably. *But he's not going to die. I refuse to let him.* She looked up at Shirley and Matt. "Let's go."

"Wait," Shirley said. "We should think this through." She started towards her computer.

"There's no time, Shirley. We have to go now. Right now." Tess walked past them towards the bookcase. "Well? What are you waiting for? Come on."

"She's right, Shirley. We have to go." Matt took Shirley's hand.

"Ok, hang on for two seconds." Shirley grabbed the map and her backpack. "Ok, let's go."

They used Bo's car again. This time Matt drove. Shirley sat beside him, directing him where to go.

Tess sat in between them, clutching the dashboard as Matt swerved around corners.

"Didn't you ever drive in France?" she yelled over the screech of tires.

"Yeah, but there's someone following us, I have to shake them!" he yelled back. They turned sharply as a van came into view. It was the same van that had followed and had made Tess crash.

When they got to the first place, Tess knew that they weren't at the right place. It was deserted.

They looked around for a bit but finally gave up. "He's not here."

"I know," said Tess sadly. "Let's go. Next place." She hopped in the car. They followed at a slower pace.

"Do you think she's okay?" asked Matt before getting in the car.

"I don't know, Matt. I think she'll be better if she sees Bo. Sooner the better." Shirley opened the door and saw Tess's sad face. *We better find him real soon. She's in trouble. And it's all her fault that he's gone. She must feel so bad.*

When they got to the second place, Tess tensed up. "They're here," she whispered. Right behind them the van pulled in, blocking their escape.

"Well, now we're sure," quipped Matt.

Two men got out of the car. *The same two men that had kidnapped Bo*, thought Tess.

"Well, well, well, Tess Jackson. How do ye do?" the first asked sarcastically with a heavily Scottish accented voice. "Do ye remember me, lass?" When she shook her head, he pulled off his mask.

"Now?"

She gasped and stumbled back. "Jamie?" she whispered. He had been her last boyfriend before she had had to go on the run. He had been the nicest boy she had known then. But he hadn't believed her that she was being attacked or whatever they were doing.

"So, ye got yourself another, then? Well, no matter, 'e'll be dead no time. Don't worry, luv, ya always find another." He grinned wolfishly. "And there's always me and Danny.... After the master's done with ye, a course."

Tess leaned against the car for support. No, she would not go quietly this time. She would be kicking and screaming the whole way. No more will a guy save her and die instead. She was going to take this down, right now. "You want me?" she replied, her voice shaking a bit. "Come on. Let's go." She grew stronger. "Was Enrique too much for you two last time?"

They flinched. That must have hurt their egos. "Do ye need those two to 'elp ye fight yur war, then?"

"No, they are friends...concerned for another friend's life."

"Oh, you mean the boy? The little boy who kept pounding on the door and yelling things at us?"

Danny had an American accent. Craven had picked them up from all over. "There were some nasty things in that, hun. He needed to be taught a lesson." He smirked at them. "Shall we?"

A door opened and they disappeared, leaving the three teenagers alone in the dark parking lot.

## **The Case of the Known Strangers : Chapter 7**

"So what now guys?" Tess turned around.

Matt and Shirley were nowhere to be found.

"Okay, not funny, guys. Guys?" She glanced around frantically. They were gone. Just disappeared.

"Oh, no. No, no, no, no. This is not happening."

"Oh, but it is, Miss Jackson. It is. Your two little friends are safely inside. As for yourself... well, you better get inside in less than five minutes or they will die one by one. Starting with the girl," a voice said, seemingly coming from the sky.

"Craven!" she yelled in the empty parking lot, "Why are you doing this to me?"

"Because I can. And because.... well, you'll figure it out soon enough." There was a click and Tess was left in silence again.

"Okay. Okay, I can do this. I can do this," she said, shaking her hands to keep them warm. "First, to get inside." She started towards the door.

"Matt?" Shirley woke up in a dim room.

"Yeah, over here, Shirl. Come here." She crawled over and he wrapped his arms around her. "You okay?"

"Yeah. I'm fine, Matt? But where are we?" She gazed around, trying to figure out the shapes.

"We're in a room. In the basement of the place that we were standing outside with Tess." He also looked around. Nothing was familiar.

"Tess. Where is she? Is she here?"

"I don't know, Shirley, I don't know where she is."

"Well, we have to find her!" She stood up and started to search the room frantically.

"Why do you care so much about her now? I thought you hated her because she took Bo from you."

Matt clambered to his feet. "She's not here and there's no way out of here. I checked about ten minutes ago."

Shirley stopped running around and turned and faced him. "I figured, why bother be mad. If I were mad that would make Bo mad at me. And I don't want that. It's not worth losing his friendship again."

And besides, she's probably going to leave anyways, right?"

Matt flinched. "Yeah, we both are. So you can have your Bo," he said bitterly. "And you'll never see us again because we'll be DEAD!" He sat down again, turning so his back was towards Shirley.

She turned pale. "Matt. Matt, I'm sorry. I just, I don't know. I think that I still want to be with Bo but I can't now can I?" She touched him lightly on the shoulder. "What about you? Did, or do you like Tess? You've been following her all this time."

"No." He turned around. "I like you. All this time all I thought was to get back to you. And then when I do, you are still chasing after Bo. And I hear from people that you guys went out but it didn't work. You treated him like dirt."

"That was because of you. I was still thinking of you!"

"Well, thanks. Now I know that I ruined your relationships with Bo. He doesn't like you like that anymore, Shirley. Or if he does, he's put it out of his mind. Because he doesn't want to be treated like that! And then he meets Tess. She's cute, funny, and a good friend. And she liked him. So he went for it and didn't even think about you. I know it sounds selfish but you kind of deserved it. Because he liked the way she treated him and acted around him." Matt searched her face. "It used to be like that for us. Is it still? I don't know. You've been acting like the jealousy queen ever since I came here."

"No! You don't understand! When I went to see Alicia and Bo and Eric, Alicia's boyfriend and Tess, I found Bo kissing Tess. And that hurt, Matt. It hurt. Because I knew that I had lost him."

"Well, then help me understand because I don't get your logic!"

Tess stood in a dark hallway. All along the walls, were doors. She tried the first. It opened to a empty room. This is going to take a while, she thought to herself. "Bo! Bo, can you hear me?!" She yelled. Running down the hall, opening and closing the doors along the way. "Hello? Shirley? Matt?"

At the end of the hallway was a door. She tried the handle. It was locked. Stepping back, she kicked it in. Without a second glance, she ran through. "Bo-

"No, you chose wrong. Craven's my name. You know me, pet." He stayed in the shadows.

"Who are you really?"

"Look inside you. Don't you know me? Don't you remember? Tell me who I am."

"I don't know. I don't know! Who are you? I'm so tired of this. Tell me why you are chasing me!" A tear slid down her cheek. She wiped it away angrily. This was not the time to be weak.



“Oh, luv, don’t cry. You do know who I am. You just don’t want to see. Think about it.” He touched her gently on the cheek. “You’re so sweet, pet.”  
She stumbled backwards, feeling burnt at his touch.

\*\*\*\*\*

She was living in England. Her parents were teachers at Oxford. It was the first day of ninth grade. She was so scared. Coming to the school She thought it was enormous.  
“Hey, watch it, girl,” A girl snarled, brushing by her. The boy with her smiled sadly to her. He felt bad, she could tell.  
“Sorry.” She moved out of the way and the bell rang.

First class was math. She was late. Taking a seat in the front because that’s where the only free seat was. Glancing beside her, she was startled to see the boy she had run into that morning.  
About halfway through class, a note landed on her desk. Watching the teacher, she unfolded it.  
*What is you name???? Want to do something after school???? I’m Jeff.*  
Still watching the teacher, she scribbled back then threw the note back.  
He smiled.

After school they went to get ice cream. Jeff was nice and funny and cute. Tess laughed and sang drunken songs with him. She didn’t know why. But it was fun. At the end of the day, when it was getting dark, he walked her home. At her door he had stopped her from going inside.  
“You’re so sweet, pet.”  
She had smiled and he had kissed her.

“No. No way. I saw Jeff die. He was shot in the head. I saw him die.” She started breathing quickly and the room spun.  
“Don’t go away now, Buttercup.”  
She blanched. That was what Jeff called her. He was the only one who did it. She leaned up against the wall. “Jeff?”  
He smiled and stepped out of the shadows. “Hello, Buttercup. You were always so cute when you

were scared. Remember when we watched that movie? What was it? Oh, yeah, Halloween H20. You jumped into my lap every time something scary happened. But, hey, I'm not complaining." He grabbed her by the arm and started dragging her towards a door with a glowing exit sign above it. "Come, my little Buttercup."

"No!" she screamed.

"That's Tess," Shirley exclaimed. She jumped off the box that she was standing on to look out the window.

Matt stood up. "Let's go!" They both ran to the door and started banging on it.

"Move!" Matt yelled and ran at the door and ramming it with his shoulder. It broke open and they glanced around.

"Where? Where is she?"

Shirley looked up at him. "Where's Bo?"

Bo looked up. Tess. Screaming. Where was she? He got up from the bed. Outside his room was a guard. *Need an idea, need an idea*, he thought furiously. Looking around the room for about the hundredth time that day, he searched for an exit. *Have to get out!* His eyes fell a crack on the floor. He hadn't noticed it before because the carpet had been there. When he had been searching for an exit, he had probably kicked it out of the way.

Kneeling down, he examined it closer. It was a trapdoor.

He followed the cracks around and blew in them lightly to get the dust out. There was an almost invisible handle one of the sides. Pulled.

"No! Leave me alone! Jeff! Let go!" She wrenched her arm out of his grasp, almost pulling her arm out of its socket.

"Bad girl!" Jeff growled and struck her across the face with the back of his hand. She fell, clutching her face.

"Ow," she whimpered, as he picked her up in his arms and started carrying her towards a car parked at the edge of the deserted parking lot.

"I don't think so." Bo stepped out in front of them. "You're not taking her anywhere."

Jeff laughed. "You think you're going to stop me, boy? You want to be another dead hero of hers?"

She has lots. And I killed all the ones that wouldn't join me."

"What the hell are you doing? You can't handle that she gets a new boyfriend or something? So you kill them or keep them for cronies? Chase her halfway around the globe just because you're a stalker?" Bo yelled.

Jeff's eyes blazed. "Don't say that to me. You are nothing to her. She does this every time she goes someplace new. She gets another guy to fight for her. She's a mind-bending freak."

"So why do you still go after her?" Bo asked calmly.

Jeff spun around and put Tess down on the ground. She was unconscious. Bo's blood boiled.

Jeff slammed into Bo, knocking them both to the ground. They rolled around, beating each other with their fists, feet and anything they could grab off the ground around them.

Tess opened her eyes slowly. *Ouch, head*, she thought, her temples throbbing. Two figures were rolling around nearby. She shook her head, which only made her vision swim even more. One of the figures got up. The other stayed down.

"My little Buttercup...." *Damn*. Jeff leaned down and picked her up. "It's time to go away. Far away... to France, maybe." He started walking to the car again. She tried to fight him as he pushed her into the passenger seat. But her head throbbed and her vision swam. Blinking, she tried to keep conscious but slowly she drifted off. The last thing she saw was Bo, bleeding and hurt, lying on the ground. "No..."

## **The Case of the Known Strangers : Chapter 8**

"Bo! Bo, wake up! You have to wake up! Don't be dead! Please." Shirley dropped down beside Bo and grabbed his hand. "Bo?" She checked for a pulse and found one, it was faint but she knew that he was going to be okay.

He blinked and tried to get up. Matt shoved him back down. "Whoa, whoa. Lie down, Bo. You're hurt."

Bo could feel the blood dripping down his face but ignored it. He had to get up. *Go, go, go, go, go*, a little voice in his head screamed. *Got to find Tess*. He ignored Matt trying to push him down and stood up. *Whoa*. The world seemed to tilt and spin. Ignoring it, he stumbled off towards where he could see where his car was parked.

"Bo," Shirley shrieked after him, "You can't go! You aren't well enough!" She ran after him and caught up. Catching his sleeve, she pulled him to a stop almost at his car. "You can't save her. And

you're hurt. Bad." She tried to wipe blood off his cheek but ended up smearing it.

"I have to try. I am going after her. Even if it means that I have to get on a flight to Germany or Australia. Or wherever. I have to go, Shirley. You have to understand. Tell my parents. Explain it for me. I gotta go." He hugged her and kissed her quickly on the cheek then pulled out of her grasp and jumped in the car.

"Goodbye Bo," she whispered. "I wish it weren't like this." A tear slid down her cheek and Matt hugged her as they watched Bo zoom off towards the home and then the airport.

He snuck into his room as quietly as possible. He knew exactly where his passport and his extra money were. Pulling them out of a drawer, he stuffed them in his wallet. Grabbing his jacket from the bed, he grabbed some paper and a pen. Quickly scribbling a note, he left it on the bed and crawled out the window.

"Where is he? Where is that stupid man?" Jeff whispered to himself furiously. He was half carrying, half dragging Tess along with him. He breathed a sigh of relief as a man slipped through the crowd to meet him. "Well, Tom. Nice of you to show up."

"At least I didn't kill a girl."

"She's not dead."

"Almost, though."

"Let's go."

"The plane leaves for England in fifteen minutes. You staying here?"

"Yes. I'm taking the flight tomorrow."

"Alright. Just make sure that those spoiling brats don't see you. Then they'll know."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah."

Bo watched them talk and overheard their conversation. Then he snuck off to buy a ticket for London, England.

"One, please, for England." He paid and made it through customs just in time. He went to a washroom and washed his face as best as he could. He had gotten stares that he didn't want. Attention was a bad thing. That Craven guy and Tess got on in first class. They boarded first. He was flying coach and would get off first. That way, he wouldn't miss them. *How did they get through without a passport? Bribery. I should have known. Who is that guy, though? That Jeff guy. He had*

*so much money but was so young.* He settled back to get some sleep. He would probably need it.

“Ah, all the comforts of home, don’t you think, luv?” Jeff caressed Tess’s cheek. She flinched.

“Get away from me.”

“Champagne?”

“Go away.” She turned over and stared out the window. How did all this happen?

“Going to the club tonight, Jeff?” Don asked.

They were sitting around in the cafeteria. Tess looked over at Jeff. He was staring off into space.

“Jeff?” She nudged him gently.

“Huh? What was that, luv?” He blinked owlishly.

She smiled. “Are you coming to the club tonight?”

“Uh, no. I-I have something t’do.”

“What is it?” Tess asked curiously.

“Nothing. It’s nothing, pet. Don’t worry about it.” He got up from the table. “I have to go. Something I have t’do.”

“You always have something to do now, don’t you, Jeff?” Tess said angrily, standing up from the table. “Well, you’re this close.” She held her fingers a centimetre apart. “This close.” She stalked off.

“Tess! Wait!” He ran after her but she dodged through the crowd and hid in the girl’s bathroom, then, when she was sure that he was gone, she went home, begging sick to her parents.

She didn’t talk to him for the next week.

She followed him to the warehouse, she didn’t know why but she did. She saw him hand over a lot of files to some guy and the guy handed him a big envelope back. She left, thinking no one had seen her.

“I saw you.”

She jerked back to the present. “What?”

Jeff smiled wanly. “I saw you creep out of that building, way back when, two years ago. You were thinking about it weren’t you? About that night two years ago? When you followed me, pet. That

was why they want me to take you down or bring you in to them. And I couldn't take you down, Tess; I couldn't do it to you. So we're going to visit some friends, luv." He touched her lightly on the cheek for a moment then his hand dropped back into his lap. "I'm sorry, but it really is all your fault." Her heart had softened at the first thing he had said but her eyes narrowed at the last thing. "What? You were the one who had told me that you had better things to do!"

"That was because I did not want you involved, at all. But you couldn't help yourself, could you? You had to know what was going on, didn't you?"

She turned back to the window. "I thought you were a human being, Jeff Craven. What did they do to you?"

"The same thing they are going to do to you, pet."

*Ok, what now?* Bo glanced around. They were getting into a red car. *Damn.* He looked around. No taxis, nothing. *What was with these people? Didn't they have any cabs at all?* The car pulled away, Tess inside, and there was nothing he could do. No. *No, no, no, no, NO!* He watched the car drive away, noting the direction, knowing that it was pointless, they were going to downtown England. A million places to go from there. *At least you have the licence plate number,* a voice inside his head reminded him. "Like that's going to help me," he said bitterly.

A car pulled up, just then and Matt leaned out the window. "Need a lift?"

"Yeah," a very surprised Bo replied. "We have to-"

"Follow that car," finished Matt, pointing to the car almost disappeared in traffic.

"Yeah," repeated Bo. He felt like a broken record. "How did-"

"Have a private plane. Courtesy of the company I work for, of course. Much faster than your average jumbo jet." He smiled as he pulled into traffic near the red car. "It wasn't that hard to track both you and them." Sliding through the cars easily as Bo gripped the dashboard tightly.

"You're going to get us killed Travers," he said, tensing every time they came close to a car.

"Been doing this for the last two years. Saved a lot of people."

"Oh, yeah? You're going to give me a heart attack. Nice car, by the way."

"Thanks." Sitting relaxed, he looked like your average rich kid out for a drive. It was a blue sports car, with the top up. "It's mine, actually. Left it when I went to Redington. Nice little thing, and helpful too." He narrowly missed a car's bumper by centimetres.

Bo drew his breath in. "Yeah, I'll bet. So what's the plan?"

"We find out where they are holding her and we wait 'til I get the go-ahead. And then, well, then we go in."

## **The Case of the Known Strangers : Chapter 9**

"Nuh-uh. I'm not waiting. I'm not leaving her in there any more than I have to. I'm going in as soon as we get back to your apartment and get some stuff."

"No. Bo, we've been arguing about this for the last ten minutes, they'll take you out as soon as they see you. You'd be dead in two seconds. We have to get stuff from my group."

"I can't help it. I have to get her out."

"Bo. You're no good to her dead."

Bo shoulders sagged. "I know, but I have to try. She's in there all alone and I can't stop thinking about what they're doing to her. I feel so helpless."

"I know the feeling."

"What about Shirley? I thought that she would refuse to stay behind in all of this..."

"She doesn't know I'm gone, yet. I took her home and she went to bed. I said that I was going to tell your parents. Then I left. I'm sorry. I didn't tell your parents."

"That's okay. Shirley will tell them. So you left her, again, to do your job, again."

Matt flinched. "Yeah, I guess so. I screwed up, again, huh?"

Bo shrugged. "Are you going to go back to her? After, I mean." He looked out the window and then back at Matt. "Are you going to go back to Redington?"

"Yeah, I think so. I mean, I want to. Because of her and all. What about you? Are you going to go back after all this?"

"I don't know... I want to finish high school and go to university but I don't know-"

The phone interrupted him. Matt picked it up. "Hello? ... Yeah ... ok ... yeah ... thanks..." He hung it up and turned to Bo. "Tomorrow night."

"What?"

"Tomorrow night. We go in tomorrow night."

"Well, well, well, so this is the infamous Tessa-Marie Jackson, eh?" The man leaned forward. "Quite young to be running around toppling empires, aren't you?" He laughed.

"Whoever the hell you are, I didn't do anything!"

"Oh, I *am* sorry. I am Geller. I am Jeff's 'father'. I teach all my boys what to do. And I think that I

taught Jeff rather well, don't you? It *is* too bad that your friend didn't come along for the ride. He would have made a good addition to us." He smiled as her eyes blazed. "And yourself? Will you join, little Buttercup?"

She straightened up. "Get bent and go to hell."

"Tut, tut, such language for a little girl..." He beckoned her forward. "You will join us, my dear, or you will die. It is as life goes."

"Forget it."

A boy came into the room. He handed Geller a cell phone. "Sir, there's a Mr. Sikes on the phone."

"Alright." He turned to the little group in the middle of the room. "One moment." Then he swivelled his chair around so they couldn't hear. He said a few words into the phone then passed it back to the boy then turned back to the group.

"We leave tomorrow night. Eight o'clock sharp. You will be on the plane, whether you want to be or not."

"I thought you wanted me dead?"

"Change of plans, my darling. You are my liability."

"What?"

"That is a shame. Seems that your friends are here."

"What? Here? Who?"

"You are beginning to sound like a parrot. Your friends, those boys, Boris Sawchuk and Matthew Harris. They are here in England. They are trying to find you. They are employing the help of one of the boy's friends here. So you will understand when I say that we need each other."

"I don't need you."

"Yes, you need me to live, my dear. And I need you to keep them off my backs. George, find her a room. Thank you, child, you have solved a lot of things for me. Maybe, if you're lucky, you can stay longer."

Tess dug in her heels as they dragged her out of the room. "You aren't going to beat them. They have a lot of help!" she yelled out to him.

"Who do you think has stopped that Matt character from finding you all this time?"

"What. Is. That?" Bo pointed to Matt's desk.

Matt shot Bo a confused look. "This?" He picked up pictures of Tess. "This is pictures. Of Tess. It was so I could find her."



“Oh. I see. Yeah, sure.”

“You should get some sleep. You look really tired.”

“Umm, yeah.” He rubbed his eyes. *Sleep deprivation is making me suspicious of everything...*

“Bed’s just through that door.” He pointed. “Get some sleep. You’re no good to her half-dead.”

“Yeah.” Bo stumbled to the bedroom. It was plain, very plain. But it didn’t matter much. He flopped on the bed and stared at the ceiling. *What am I going to do? Go back to Redington? Graduate? Go to university? Act like this never happened? Never. Maybe go to school here? Redo my last year? Go to university here? Might be worth it. Ah, well, burn that bridge when I get there. First. Get Tess out of there. Yes... that’s... the plan...* He slowly drifted off to sleep.

Matt sat in the living room. *What am I going to do? Go back to Shirley? A normal life? In Redington? Pretend this never happened? Oh, man.* He got up and looked out the window. The city was going to sleep. Lights were going out, more people going into their homes, less and less people in the streets. Until there was one man left standing out on the sidewalk. He was looking up towards Matt’s apartment. He waved and smiled. Not a very nice smile. He lifted a parcel and pointed to it. Then he walked over and placed it on the doorstep of the apartment building. Matt froze. *What is in the parcel? Who is that guy? Friend or foe?* He grabbed his jacket and sprinted down the stairs. No one was outside. It was like the guy just disappeared. *Where the-*

*/* He was interrupted as a fist crashed into his stomach. “Uhhg.” Regaining his breath, he looked up. The man was sitting on a bench, not too far away.

“Why are you doing this? Who are you?” The man stared at him blankly. “Fine.” Matt stepped towards him and grabbed him by the arm. Flipping him over his shoulder, Matt peered into the man’s face. “Who are you?” He shouted.

The man replied with a smash in the face. Matt lurched backwards, his lip starting to bleed. He started forward. Swinging wildly. Each time he attacked, the man brushed him aside or hit him hard in the stomach or face.

At last, the man just brushed him aside and made him fall. Then, he didn’t let Matt up and crouched down beside him. “Hello Matthew. I am here to help, though it may not seem so.”

“Who are you? How did you do all that stuff?”

“I am a friend. And I have trained long and hard to learn these moves. You are also a good fighter, though I wish your friend had come out instead.”

“Why?”

“Because then I would know the extent of his ‘love’ for Tess Jackson.” He stood up. “Come. We shall talk. It isn’t safe here.” He held out a hand.

Matt looked up at him for a moment. Then he grabbed it. “Thanks.”

The man also grabbed the parcel as they walked up to Matt’s apartment.

“And so you see, I have followed this gang for quite some time. You could say they are my life.” He sipped his drink. “And you? How did you get caught up in all of this? This is not standard operation for that branch of Interpol.”

“It was personal. They killed my father, who was part of the Interpol. So they started up a group, you could say. This group was made up, mostly, of people out to avenge. That was our first mistake. We tried to take them down. It didn’t work. It was the most horrible night of my life. We were massacred. A few of us slipped away. They’ve tracked the others down and killed them. But not me. I’ve kept moving. But I had one close call, once. Once was enough. Now I’ve turned around and I’m now chasing them.”

“I see. The hunted becomes the hunter... And your friend?”

“Sorry?”

“Boris Sawchuk. Likes to be called Bo. Lived with his mother and father who owned a fish market. He worked there. Best friend was Shirley Holmes until she tried to use him as a boyfriend but ended up hurting him. He didn’t talk to her for two months. Now he’s a friend of Sterling ‘Stink’ Patterson and Bartholomew James. Just two weeks ago he saw the most beautiful girl walking around Sussex. He loved her immediately. Because of the way she interacted with other people, a very self-less girl. When he signed up to do tutoring for extra marks, he was surprised and very happy that the girl he had been following was the person he was going to tutor. And it was even better that she really didn’t need a tutor; it was just because she had a very pushy mother who wanted her to be the best. They talked a lot. About everything and anything. Finally he asked her to do something. She said yes. They watched two movies at a friend, Alicia Ginelli’s house. After they went down to the river, the Redington River. He asked her out there. They had their first kiss. That was what Shirley Holmes witnessed. She was devastated. Then Tess starts getting attacked. Shirley puts her personal life behind her and wants to help Tess. But you stopped her. Why?”

“I thought that Tess could handle it herself. But she couldn’t, could she?” He shook his head. “I messed it up, again. You know what?” he said, getting up. “Maybe I’ll just disappear myself. Because I am not helping anyone around here or anywhere else!” He started towards the door.

The man got up, surprisingly quick, and stood in front of Matt. "There is a person, in that room, that would not have gotten this far, had it not been for you. Do you really want to abandon him right now? Would you do that? Leave him here for them to come and kill him at their leisure? He wouldn't know the first thing about getting away from them," he exploded in a whisper. "He needs you, much as he hates to admit it. He needs you to get him in, and to get her out. He. Can't. Do. It. Alone." With every word, he jabbed Matt in the shoulder.

Matt backed off. "But I am no good. Everything I have tried to save and to protect ha-has died. Bo and Shirley's relationship. Mine and Shirley's relationship. And now Tess will too. And I can't handle it."

"So you are going to walk away and let her be killed and Bo too? Or, if, by chance, he lives, let him take all the guilt? Is that how you want him to remember you? The coward that won't stand up for what he believed in? The coward that just rolls over and dies quietly? Did you see the pain in his eyes when they took her from him? He only knew her for a couple of weeks and he loves her so much. You are going to destroy that if you walk away now. They will both be very different in the future. Believe me, I know how it ends. It is not pretty."

"How come you know so much about this? Did you do this too? Did you not 'handle the situation right'? Did you walk out too? Tell me."

"Matt? What's going on?" They both turned.

Bo stood in the doorway. Matt and a man were standing inches apart. The conversation seemed pretty heated. "Or maybe I'll just go back to bed..." He turned.

"Boris, right? Boris Sawchuk?"

He turned back. "What?"

"Boris Sawchuk? I thought so. So, you're the new love. Hmmm."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Bo said tightly, his fists balled by his sides.

"Bo, forget it. He's trying to provoke you." Matt said, as the man pushed him away and headed for Bo.

"Well, it's working." Bo started towards the man.

The man stopped just in front of Bo. "You're hot-headed, boy. That's not a good thing in a fight. You will get beaten. Every other time you were beaten because you were impulsive."

Bo clenched his jaw. "Yeah, well, works for me." With that he swung his fist at the man's face.

Catching his wrist, the man flung Bo over the couch. He landed on the coffee table, breaking it.

“What the-” He got up. Then man was already moving towards him. *Okay, Mr I-want-to-fight you want me mad? You got it.* He ducked as the man swung at him and drove his fist into the man’s stomach.

The man doubled over and Bo flipped him then shoved him down, onto the couch. “How about that?” he asked smugly. “Now who are you and what do you want?”

The man seemed surprised that he had been beaten. He caught his breath. “I am Hans Clergy. I am here to help you get Tessa-Marie Jackson out.”

“What help do you have that Interpol doesn’t?” Matt asked coldly. “What can you give us that they haven’t already?”

Instead of answering, the man tossed the parcel onto the table. “Everything you need is in there. Now if you will excuse me-”

“You’re not going to help?” Matt asked, astonished. “What about all that stuff that you were ranting on about before?”

“You can handle it. I am sure of that now.” He nodded at the parcel. “I’m sure that that will also help you.” With that he left the apartment.

Glancing questioning up at Matt, Bo slowly opened the parcel. Inside there were maps and booklets of things. Sifting through it all, Bo realized that it was floor plans and maps of the location of every safe house of the kidnapers. His eyebrows shot up and he looked over to Matt. “He did his homework.”

“Yeah.”

## **The Case of the Known Strangers : Chapter 10**

Packing the last of the gear in the back of the jeep, Tomas turned to the two teenager boys. “Okay, we’re done.” He turned and got in the car. Bo opened the passenger door. “What are you doing, son?”

Bo frowned. “I’m getting in the car to go rescue Tess?”

Tomas laughed. “You mean you thought-?” He started chuckling then burst out laughing. “You aren’t going anywhere, boys. This is real work. Leave it to the professionals.” Still chuckling he pulled the passenger door shut and sped off, leaving Bo and Matt, steaming, on the side of the road.

“This is not what they said,” started Matt.

Bo brushed him off and went back up to the apartment.

When Matt got to the apartment, he found Bo pulling on a dark sweatshirt, adding to the rest of the black clothes he was wearing. "What are you doing?"

"What does it look like?" He grabbed the car keys from the dresser. "I'm going to save Tess." Stuffing the keys in his pocket, he walked to the door.

"No, you're not." Matt stood in the doorway. "Leave it to the police and Interpol to do."

"Matt. They aren't going to get to her in time. We have to go. They won't find her in time." He shoved Matt aside and strode down the stairs.

He was about to pull away when he saw Matt running out of the apartment building to the car, dressed in black. Opening the door, he slid into the passenger seat. "Okay, fine. But we do this my way."

"Whatever." Bo put the car into gear and they zoomed after the police.

When they got to the warehouse, the police were already in positions around the perimeter. They stayed out of sight until they got to the edge of the perimeter.

"Okay, we wait until they start busting in. Then we go in, not before. We go, find Tess, and get out. Easy as that. We don't interfere with the police business. We just get Tess out. They won't know we're here. Okay?"

"Sure."

They sat, waited through the police negotiating, watched as the terrorists yelled insults out at them, and watched the police get angry, and then frustrated, as the terrorists would not give in. And then it was time. The police gave the signal and the S.W.A.T. team started to silently begin to infiltrate the building. Shots were fired from inside the building and all the men outside broke into a run. Bo and Matt followed the last man in, careful to be as silent as possible. Then the world turned to turmoil. Men, from both sides, went down all over the place.

"Let's go Matt!" Bo yelled over the burst of gunfire and they both inched their way along the walls until they were safely in a deserted hallway. "Okay, now what, genius?" He asked and Matt pulled out a map.

"Okay, we take this hall down and at the fifth door, we go in. Take a left and run to the door at the end. It'll be in the open so you have to be silent and quick. Very quick," he added seriously.

They sprinted through the door and down the hall. Fifth door; left and quickly down that hall. They were in another silent hallway, the same as before.

"What is with these dumb hallways?" Bo whispered.

"Why are you whispering?" asked Matt.

"I don't know. Would you rather I yell down the hallway, 'we're coming to get you!' Well, would you?" he asked.

Matt shook his head. "Point taken."

"They will get you. You're not going to get anywhere." She stood defiantly. "They're coming. The police are already in the front room."

"Well, then we take the back way." Jeff grabbed Tess and followed Geller down the hall. Tess twisted and turned but stopped when she saw two figures standing at the end of the hallway. Something twisted inside her chest and she grinned in relief. Bo. And Matt. They lounged against the wall.

"Long time, no see, Jeff," remarked Matt, not moving as the group drew nearer. "Okay, you're done." He held out his hand. "Hand over the girl." He said it so easily.

Tess's heart was pounding. Would Geller tell Jeff to give her up? Or would they fight? Or use her as a shield? Surely they could not take on Bo and Matt, both over six feet and very athletic. When they paused Bo pushed off of the wall and stood beside Matt.

"The way I see it, you have to get through us to get away. You can't go back because there are policemen coming up those stairs as we speak, and there's no other door in this hallway, no connecting hallways. Where are you going to go?" he said deliberately taking his time.

The police started banging on the door. It was locked but they would be through it in a matter of minutes. Geller turned to the door then back to Bo and Matt. He closed his eyes and thought, *If I let them have her, then they will keep coming back for others. But if I don't they will get her by force anyway. But, he added, If I use her to bargain my way out... yes, that will do fine.*

When Geller opened his eyes, Tess knew that he wasn't going to let her go anywhere without a fight. She sagged in defeat.

"Hey, Jeff, did you ever ask Tess how many boyfriends she had after you?" asked Bo. "Oh, yeah, she had a bunch," he added when he knew he had Jeff's attention. "She talked about them. About how much they were better than one boyfriend. His name seems to slip my mind. She said that he left her in England to die when these people started coming after her. Yeah, what a jerk, eh? Oh, oh, that's you? Oh, I forgot for a minute there." He knew that Jeff would get very mad.

Jeff almost threw Tess to Geller and sprung at Bo. Only Bo's reflexes kept him from getting his head rammed into the wall. He ducked and Jeff flew over his head. Turning around, Bo tried to fend off Jeff but he wasn't fast enough this time. They fell to the ground, Jeff hammering punches into Bo. Bo kicked up, catching Jeff in the shin. Jeff shuddered and rolled away. Bo got up. Jeff got up. They were standing face to face.

"Let's go!" yelled Geller, shoved a surprised Matt out of the way, and sprinted down the hall to the exit at the end.

Jeff smiled faintly at Bo and then threw him into the wall. Bo hit the wall, and fell, but didn't get up. Then Jeff ran down the hall and out the exit.

Matt bent down to Bo. "Are you okay? Bo? Bo? C'mon." He shook Bo gently. He watched the two men sprint down the hall. *Do I go after them and leave Bo here? Do I leave him all alone and take off? Leave him to the police in a strange country? No way.*

When the police found them, Bo was just getting up. He looked around, as if something was missing.

*He in shock, Matt realized. He thought he could save her. But he didn't. He couldn't. He did everything he could and still it wasn't enough.* He frowned. Bo didn't look too good. Which was understandable.

"Didn't I tell you guys to keep out of this?" Tomas pushed his way to the front of the group. "You guys don't give up, do you?"

"Nope. We almost had them too...they were right here and then...then they just got away..."

"Whatever. Go back to your apartments. Next time I'm taking you in for disrupting police investigations."

Bo, who had been quietly looking around throughout the whole conversation looked up. "Are you from the U.S. originally?" he asked.

"Yeah, why?"

"How old are you?"

"What? I don't have time for this. Get them out of here."

Bo shrugged off the policemen that took his arms. "How old are you?" he asked persistently.

"Get them out of here," repeated Tomas and they were led from the building.

"What was that, Bo?" Matt asked as they were driving back to the apartment.

“What?” Bo asked wearily.

“That whole deal. You were asking him his age.”

“Uh, nothing. Don’t worry about it.” He looked out the window, distracted.

Matt scrutinized Bo. He shook his head. “We’ve both had a long day. Let’s get some sleep then we can-”

“Turn the car around.”

“What?!”

“Turn the car around. They’re going to the airport. They’re getting out before the cops can mobilize enough to cover the airports.” He turned to Matt. “Let’s go.”

“No.”

“What?! What are you waiting for? This is our chance to get them. Matt, don’t you want this?”

“No. End of discussion. We are not going to go back after them. The police can-”

“No. They can’t. Haven’t you noticed that yet? They are always just a little too late. They never make it. That Tomas guy... he’s not what you think he is. He’s not on our side.”

“What do you mean, Bo? He’s just doing his job.”

“Oh, yeah? And why did he tell us to wait here. Why did he come too late? Why didn’t he meet you at the airport? If he’s your ‘special agent’ then why is he so bad at what he does?”

They got to the apartment and both got out but the argument didn’t stop.

“You are so naïve!” yelled Bo. “You can’t accept that he’s bad, can you? Or is it the fact that you can’t accept that you couldn’t save Tess?” Matt flinched and Bo went on. “You like her, don’t you?!”

“No. What are you talking about?” Matt denied. “I like Shirley!”

“Well then what are you doing here? Shouldn’t you be back in Redington?” Bo snapped.

“Because she wanted me to take care of you! She wanted me to stay but she wanted to help you too. So she sent me here! So just shut up!” He tackled Bo to the ground. They rolled around, throwing punches.

“Are you about done?”

Both boys stopped and looked up. Shirley Holmes leaned against the Bo’s car, her arms crossed over her chest, her eyebrows raised.

## **The Case of the Known Strangers : Chapter 11**

“Because I can wait until you draw blood or whatever. Geez, I didn’t know that you guys hated each other that much. But oh, well, keep going. Don’t let me stop you,” she said bitterly. *What are they*



*doing?* , she thought to herself.

Matt shoved Bo off himself and got up. "Shirley. What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be finishing high school in Redington?" He hugged her hard. "You shouldn't be here," he murmured into her ear. "It's not a good place."

"Couldn't let you guys have all the fun." She looked at Bo, lying on the ground. He was in partial shock. "Let's get inside," she declared. She and Matt walked into the apartment building. Bo lay there for a minute, taking it all in. Then he followed.

"So, why are you here, Shirley? Shirley? Hello?" Matt waved a hand in front of her face.

"What? Oh, yeah. So you guys haven't found Tess yet?"

Bo's eyes closed and Matt looked anywhere but at Shirley.

"What?" She grabbed Matt's chin. "Where is she?"

"Well, uh, she was taken to this warehouse, and well, she kinda fell into her old boyfriend's arms and well, he kinda wants her now, and he and Bo kinda duked it out and Bo kinda lost and not they're kinda gone. We were going to go to the airport and find them right now but you kinda came and messed it up."

"Oh." Shirley swallowed and looked at Bo. *He must feel so...so bad...like it's his entire fault.* He looked so sad, sitting on the rug, his arms wrapped around his legs, his knees up to his chest, and his eyes closed. "I'll try to hack into the airport computers," she said softly.

Matt nodded. "Yeah, okay. C'mon Bo, you need some sleep." He nudged Bo.

"Sure. Whatever." He got up, walked into the bedroom and shut the door behind him.

"He's been through a lot."

Shirley nodded. "Yeah. We all have. Tess kinda put us through a lot."

"Yeah, but it wasn't really her fault. She needed help. Bo gave it. I gave it. You just came along for the ride. She thought you hated her so much, Shirley. For taking Bo from you..."

"Bo wasn't mine to give, though," Shirley said sadly.

"Yeah, well, don't worry about it. Unless you still like Bo that much. Because it's fine, you know, whatever. I'll just go find Tess and you guys can stay here in my apartment and do whatever." He gulped. "You want something to drink?" Getting up quickly, he almost ran to the kitchen, and opening the fridge. He felt its blessed coolness. *Okay, calm down, Harris, it's okay. If she likes Bo you don't want to be with her, because that would just suck. And then Tess, whoa. Maybe her coming her will mess up a lot.* But, he added, *she did stop our fighting.* Grabbing the juice and two

mugs, he walked back to Shirley sitting in the living room. "Shirley-"

She walked towards him. "No, let me go first. We are growing up so fast it's scaring me. I feel like I'm losing Bo to Tess and I was afraid that I would lose you too. So I came, and I looked up your address. I come and I find you and Bo fighting on the front lawn. What's with that? So I can't understand and the only explanation I can come up with is that you said you liked Tess and he just went crazy or something and I don't want that to be the cause. But I do still like you." She stopped in front of him. "In fact I love you Matt Harris. And I was so scared that I would lose you."

"I know. I know what you're trying to say and I understand. And I love you too but I, no, we, need to help Bo because he loves Tess and she's going to have something bad happen to her and he would just fall apart. He needs us. And her. So we have to help him before we can have happily ever after." He pulled her into a hug. "I missed you, Shirley. Those two years were killer." He tilted her head so he could look into her face.

"I know. I thought you were going to be married to a French model by now." She laughed. "Stupid, eh?"

"Nah. Nothing's too dumb for me, world's biggest mess-up." He kissed her gently on the lips. "Been a while, eh, City?" he remarked when they stopped.

"Yeah. But still feels the same." She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him closer.

"Same as before."

## **The Case of the Known Strangers : Chapter 12**

When he woke up, Matt knew that there was something wrong. The apartment was silent but there was something definitely wrong. He slowly and silently got up from the couch. Bo was sleeping. Good, thought Matt, he needs rest. He glanced towards the door to the bedroom where Shirley slept. It was slightly ajar. Strange, I thought she closed it when she went to bed, he wondered. Creeping towards it, he readied himself to fight.

Someone jumped up from behind the couch. He yelled and it shrieked. They both fell behind the couch.

"Shirley?"

"Matt?"

"Uh, yeah." He got up, looking sheepish.

"What? What! What?!" Bo struggled up, tangled in the sheets. He glanced sleepily at Matt and Shirley. "Oh." He fell down onto the couch and resumed sleeping.

Matt and Shirley looked at each other for a minute then they both burst out laughing.

“Shh.” Shirley put her fingers to Matt’s mouth and pulled him into the kitchen. “Let him sleep.” She grinned. “Why were you slinking around in the middle of the night near my door?”

“Why were you doing the same out of your room.”

“I thought someone was coming...”

“So did I...”

“Oh.” She giggled. “We are very mixed up.” She leaned against him. “You’re so warm and soft.”

He backed away. “Shirley what’s wrong with you? Why are you acting so weird?”

She twirled around the room. “Nothings the matter! I feel so happy!”

“Shirley!” He grabbed her. She swayed back and forth. He narrowed his eyes in suspicion. Letting go of her, he walked into her room and started coughing. “Something’s in the air in here.” Still coughing, he left the room. It left him a little light-headed. “Shirley! Stop it! Snap out of it!” She had climbed onto the couch and was sleeping on top of Bo. Matt lifted her up and placed her on Bo’s old bed. Then he shook Bo.

“Wake up, Bo! There’s something in the air where Shirley was sleeping!” He coughed violently. “It’s in here,” he realised. His head swum and the world tilted as he tried to run to the window. Then everything went black and he fell to the floor.

Bo opened his eyes. Matt was shaking him and saying something and then stumbling away. “Matt? What’s wrong?” he said thickly. It felt like a million pounds weighed him down as he struggled to get up. Looking around groggily, he saw Shirley and Matt on the ground. “Guys? What’s wrong? What’s happening to me?” His head started swimming. “What the-” He blinked and blinked again. *What is this*, he asked himself. *What is happening? I don’t understand*. So tired. Must sleep.

He knew that if he slept he might not awake again. *But the pull is so strong*. He collapsed onto the couch and into darkness.

Later, he woke up. *Someone standing over me. Can’t move arms or legs. Something holding me down. What is happening? So muddled*.

The person reached down. He felt a prick, like a mosquito bite and everything went dark again.

“Bo. Bo.” Someone is shaking him. “Come on Bo. Wake up. I don’t have much time. They’re going to notice I’m gone! Bo! Oh, please wake up!”

He opened his eyes. A girl, average height with clear blue eyes and reddish blond hair was shaking him. *I know her from somewhere...but where?*

"Bo! Oh, you're awake! Thank god! Bo? It's me. Tess?"

He closed his eyes. Tess. Tessa-Marie. Tessa-Marie Jackson. *Tess. Oh, my god.* "Tess." His eyes snapped open and he looked up at her.

"Bo." Tears pricked the edges of her eyes and she hugged him.

He sat up slowly. "Tess." He smiled and hugged her back. "You're real. I'm not hallucinating. Unless, of course, you're a box or something," he added thoughtfully and felt her shake with laughter.

"Oh, Bo. I thought...I thought that I would never see you again." Footsteps went by the door and she sat up. "Uh, we don't have much time. We're on a plane. Jeff's plane. He brought you here. And Matt and Shirley but I don't know where they are. I'll find them, though. And you have to be careful. Because they are going to do something to me to make me a good little girl or something. So don't tell me anything when you see me again. Okay? I have to go. I'm so sorry to drag you into this..."

She hugged him then turned to the door.

"Tess. You don't have to say you're sorry. It's okay." He pulled her back. "I'll see you later. I will," he added strongly and kissed her on the forehead. She smiled sadly.

"Sure, Bo. See you then." Kissing him softly on the lips, she slipped from the room, leaving him alone.

She crept down the corridor, hiding when officers came by. She could still feel Bo's hand on her back, his kiss on her forehead. *Oh, Bo. I am so sorry for dragging you into this.* She stopped.

Listened. *There.* Pushing open the door, she stepped inside. "Matt." He turned and his eyes lit up.

"Tess!" He ran forward and hugged her. She stiffened but he didn't notice.

"Where's Shirley?" she asked.

His face darkened. "I don't know. But how did you get out? Have you seen Bo?"

"I slipped out. They don't know. Yet. Yes, I've seen him. But, Matt, they're going to do something to me. I don't know what it is but they're going to make me into a puppet. You can't trust me the next time you see me. I don't want to hurt you or Shirley or Bo. Please, just trust me. Okay? I'll go find Shirley. I have to keep moving; they're probably after me already. Bye Matt." He wouldn't let go.

"Tess. I can help."

"No, you can't it's my fight. I've just dragged you three into it. I'm so sorry." She removed his arms from around her and kissed him quickly on the cheek. "I'm so sorry," she repeated and left the room

quietly.

He sat back down on the crate he had been sitting on before she had come in. *What's with you, Harris?* he asked himself. *When she came into the room...I don't know how to say it. I can't have fallen in love with her? No way. I love Shirley. Right. But I was so relieved...stop it. Just stop it.* He mentally slapped himself. *Bo has Tess and you have Shirley. This is not good.*

The door opened again and Shirley slipped in, Tess right behind her.

"Okay, plan A scratched. We're getting out of here," said Tess. "I'm going to get Bo. Be right back." She exited, leaving Matt and Shirley alone.

"Shirley," he said in relief. She went over and hugged him. He held her tightly. "I thought I had lost you again."

"Never."

"Bo?" He sat on the ground in the shadows.

"Ah, Tess. I knew you would come back to him, eventually. Even after what happened between you and Matt..." Jeff came out of the shadows behind Bo. "Too bad he doesn't feel the same way anymore..." he chuckled and her mouth opened in horror.

"Bo?"

He looked up; his blue eyes empty of emotion. "Why did you do it, Tess? Was I not good enough for you? You wanted him more than me? Was it his plane? Did he impress you with all the things from Interpol? Was I too small-town for you?"

Tess backed up against the door. "What? Matt? No. Whatever Jeff told you, it's a lie. It's all a lie. I never did anything with Matt. He's with Shirley. And don't you think I did enough to her?"

"What?" Bo looked confused then angry. "What did you do to her, you murdering back-stabber?"

"I killed her. I killed them both. And now I'm going to kill myself. I won't give you the pleasure! Not you or Jeff." She opened the door and started to run but Bo tackled her into the hall. They crashed into the opposite wall.

"Tess. It's okay. It's me," Bo whispered into her hair. When she looked up at his face, he smiled and his eyes crinkled at the corners. Her expression turned to fake horror as Jeff came up behind Bo. She knew if they couldn't pull this off, they were dead.

"Get away from me!" she screamed at him.

He grinned once more before turning his face into a mask of nothingness. He reached down and grabbed her by the hair. Holding her underneath where Jeff couldn't see he pulled her up,

seemingly by her hair.

Jeff laughed. "Well we know that it works." Bo turned and Jeff shivered. "You'll make a great addition to the team. But the mission will change because, well, we have Tess now!" He laughed, as if it were a really big joke.

"I'll finish with her. You can go," said Bo, monotonously.

"Uh, yes, I suppose I could do that." Well, I'll go take care of the Holmes brat and her boyfriend." He smiled wickedly at Tess. "Have fun."

As soon as he turned the corner, Bo let go of Tess's hair and hugged her. "We're out."

She looked up at him. "Yes, we are."

"She killed him." Jeff stood in the doorway leaning against the doorjamb. "She's a psychopath. Couldn't handle the face that Shirley here was cutting between her and Bo."

Matt turned to Shirley. "What?"

"No, Matt there was nothing. I swear."

"She's lying, Matt. She and Bo went behind your back."

"The only one who's lying is you Jeff." All three turned around. Bo and Tess stood in the hallway, arms folded across their chests.

"I didn't kill Bo. I never did anything with Matt," started Tess.

"And I didn't do anything to Tess and I never did anything with Shirley," finished Bo.

"Good," Shirley said finally.

"Good," echoed Matt.

## **The Case of the Known Strangers : Chapter 13**

"I have to go, Bo. There's no way that you can stop me. I can save us."

"Yeah, you can also get killed. It's suicide, Tess. It's dangerous I won't let you take a risk like that."

"You can't stop me. This is my decision not yours. I have to go. You're wasting time and your breath arguing with me. I'm going." She glanced over at Matt and Shirley standing uncomfortably in the corner. "I'll be back in"-she glanced at her watch-"fifteen minutes."

He looked at her face and saw her determined look. They glared at each other for, what seemed, a long time. "Be careful," he said at last.

She let out her breath. "You too." She opened the door, looked around for people walking and slipped out; glancing backwards one last time at Bo's worried face. She grinned mischievously and

the door shut behind her.

"It's too dangerous," he said again.

"Don't worry, Bo. She's very strong, and resourceful. Besides, do you have a better, safer plan?" Matt said.

Bo turned to him. "Yeah, go up there, take Geller hostage and make them land the plane."

"I said safer, not crazier. Don't worry; she's been doing this sort of thing for two years. Two years, Bo. You'd think she'd pick something up..."

"It's good reasoning," added Shirley. "If they got Jeff off the plane to get us, and then got us onto this plane then there has to be a way off this plane."

"Yeah, but it still doesn't make me feel any better."

"Plane? ... Plane? ... Plane? ... Bingo...plane." She crept up slowly towards the plane. It was larger than she had first thought. How did they pay for all this? she wondered. Were they all so rich and she just hadn't noticed in the time that she had gone out with them? Am I that bad a girlfriend? she mused.

Pushing those thoughts to the back of her mind, she pondered their present situation. If, by a miracle, they could fly the smaller plane off the big one (who would fly it?), then what? Fly around dumbly waiting for Geller and Jeff to give the order to pick them off? Or, try to find an airstrip even though they had no clue as to where they were?

Oh, well, she thought, I know where the plane is. That's a start... Now get back to the others, Jackson, she told herself sternly. You're no good to them standing around ogling you only way off the plane, thinking about the future and the past. Think later; act now, her father had once told her. "Ah, Miss Jackson. Do you enjoy the view? It is nice, if I do say so myself." Geller stood right behind her. His hand clamped down on her bicep. "You did not enjoy being alone and just decided to find your little friend? Well, did you find them in good spirits? And your little boyfriend? Does he still keep good faith? There have been so many rumors flying around..." he remarked off-handedly. She stiffened and could tell he noticed because he continued mockingly, "Something about that girl...oh, her name seems to evade me but give me a moment and I'll have it..." He furrowed his brow in fake concentration.

His grip was starting to hurt her arm. But she couldn't move to lessen the pain of it, he was still behind with her with his bony fingers digging deep into her upper arm.

"Kindly let go of my girlfriend."

Geller spun around, bringing Tess with him, using her like a shield.

Bo, Matt and Shirley stood in the doorway of the 'hanger', blocking the exit to the rest of the plane.

"Well." Geller licked his lips nervously. "Seems you have me at a disadvantage. But I seem to hold the trump card," he added slyly. "Your girlfriend..."

## **The Case of the Known Strangers : Chapter 14**

Bo's jaw tightened. "Let her go," he repeated through clenched teeth.

Geller smiled knowing that he had found the one weakness. "And if I don't?" he taunted.

Bo's drew in a breath, his eyes blazing. "I hope for your sake that that doesn't happen."

Geller's other arm came up around Tess's throat. He smiled maliciously and squeezed a bit.

Bo's hands balled into fists as he prepared to jump Geller.

Just then, Matt pushed him out of the way and raced to Geller. Not giving him the time to recover from the shock of someone trying to jump him, Matt grabbed the arm from around Tess's neck and twisted it behind Geller's back, forcing him to let go of Tess. She stumbled towards Bo, who caught her.

They watched, helpless, Matt and Geller battle it out. It went on and on and they noticed that Matt was getting tired. Geller hit him in the stomach, making him double over then threw him at the plane. Matt hit it and fell. He didn't get back up. With an evil grin on his face, Geller pulled something out of his coat pocket and pointed it at the still form of Matt lying on the ground.

"No!" yelled Bo and ran towards Geller.

Tess watched and it seemed everything was moving in slow motion as Geller turned towards Bo. There was a crack as he fired the gun. Bo jerked then fell to the ground heavily. She surveyed the scene before her. Matt was groaning and starting to move, Bo was lying on the ground in front of her, not moving, and Geller was swinging the gun towards Matt. Think later act now. Think later act now. Think later act now. Over and over in her head. Thinklateractnow. She jumped at Geller and started hitting him. They rolled over and over. The gun went off again and something liquid started to soak into Tess's clothing. Gasoline, she realized. He hit the plane's gas tanks. They rolled over again and Geller's head hit the wall and he slumped down.

Shirley ran over to Tess and pulled her up. "Here!" She yelled and thrust a parachute into her hands. "Put this on!"



“A parachute? I don’t know how to parachute!”

“I didn’t object to any of your crazy plans!”

“Crazy?!” Tess yelled indignantly. “Let me tell you about-”

She stopped as one of the plane’s engines cut. “Fine! We’ll talk about crazy plans later!” If there is one, she added silently.

She followed Shirley over to where Matt was supporting Bo. Both had parachutes on. “Are you okay?” she yelled hugging him.

“Just hit me in the arm! Don’t worry!” he yelled back, putting his good arm around her and kissing her softly.

“Let’s go!” shouted Matt. “This thing’s going down, fast!”

They left the hanger and sprinted down the hall, passing a lot of panicked people running around.

The other engine cut and they lurched to one side.

“We have to find an exit!”

They ended up at the cockpit.

“There’s a door! There!” Bo pointed and Shirley lifted the lever and pushed out. The blast of air almost sucked them all out.

Behind them, they could hear someone yelling. Peering through the cockpit door they saw Jeff racing towards them.

“He’s coming!” screamed Shirley.

Tess over to Matt and a look of understanding flashed between them. Her eyes grew sad. You have to, mouthed Matt. She nodded.

## **The Case of the Known Strangers : Chapter 15 : Endings**

Dear Journal,

I don’t know where they are, but I wish I could. She had already made her decision long before the plane was going down. She clipped me to Bo and before we could protest, she pushed us out. Jeff was coming. I didn’t know whether they were going to fight him or jump after us. They were never found. Lots of searches were sent out. Just before she pushed me out, Matt kissed me. He knew that she was going to do it. I don’t know how though. I didn’t know then why he didn’t stop her. Maybe he knew that we were going to die if we all stood there gawking at Jeff running towards us. Yesterday, I got a letter from Matt. It was postmarked in Japan and I tried to track them using it but no luck. They had covered their tracks. Here it is:

Dear Shirley,

Don't try to follow this. I know that you will but I wanted to try and stop you anyway. It will send you on a wild goose chase and end up at a dead end. Interpol has set us up well... I'm sorry it happened that way. I didn't want it to but dreamers wish, right... Tess and I both knew that we couldn't go back to Redington right now and that you two were better off with out us. So I wasn't surprised when she clipped you two together. He's a great guy, Bo. Don't lose him. I guess he's pretty sad, mad, shaken... whatever. I mean, I would be after losing my girlfriend and getting shot. Even though it may not look like it and you might not have felt it, seen it or ever believed it but I love you. You're why I came back to Redington. All that stuff about trying to find Tess... well, it's not true. The truth is, I'm her bodyguard. I protect her, I'm always there for her. I thought that Redington would be the best place for her to go, so I sent her ahead, kept a low profile and then came to see you. But everything happened so quickly. I didn't think she and Bo would fall for each other. I didn't think that they would find her again. But I was wrong. Wrong about everything. About her. About Bo. About you and me. So, now you know. Maybe, I'll come back sometime, maybe you'll forgive me. I can hope, right? Bye, City.

Love,

Matt

I don't know why but after Bo read Tess's letter, he gave it to me to put in here. 'To be on the record. Can't leave out anything, Shirl,' he had said sadly. So here it is:

Dear Bo,

I can't say how sorry I am to have brought you into this. And then just leaving you to pick up the pieces after as I run away, again. Matt said I should just go. I think if I had stayed to say a real goodbye that I wouldn't be able to leave you. I should never have gone to Redington. I should never have gone to Sussex. I should never have accepted that invitation to hang out with you guys. But, when I think back, it was so fun to be just normal. Not think about where to run to next. Matt is taking me away. Away for a rest, he says. No, I do not like him like that.

When I pushed you out of that plane, it didn't mean that I didn't want you around anymore. As

dumb as it sounds, I just wanted you to be safe. I wish things could be different. Maybe they will be, some time. But for right now I have to stay away. Matt thinks there is something wrong about my parents. I don't know what it is or even if it's true but I have to stay here and just watch and wait how it turns out. I hate it! I don't want to be here. Cooped up... waiting! I hate it! I'm sure Shirley will want to check it out... so watch her back for her, okay? And watch your own. I'm not going to say be careful because I know you would jump into anything to save a friend... even in front of a bullet... So, that's it. Everything I want to tell you would take so long and I don't have much time. So, bye Bo, and I hope our paths will cross some time in the future...maybe I'll come back to Redington to check my parents... Matt would flip but, hey, who really cares...

With love,

Tess

Shirley closed her journal and looked up at Bo standing with Stink and Bart. Bart was telling them another theory of his about aliens and Stink was trying to pull another trick on Alicia. They were all laughing. But as Shirley looked closer, she saw Bo touch his hurt arm and stare off into the distance. He had changed. She had given him the picture of Tess and he kept it in his wallet. Sometimes he pulled it out and looked at it. Tess Jackson had made quite an impact on him.... She reopened her journal.

I wonder if they are trying to put us back together? Is it that they feel guilty of coming between us? But I guess that one mystery I can't solve and never will. Unless, maybe, if they come back...

THE END