

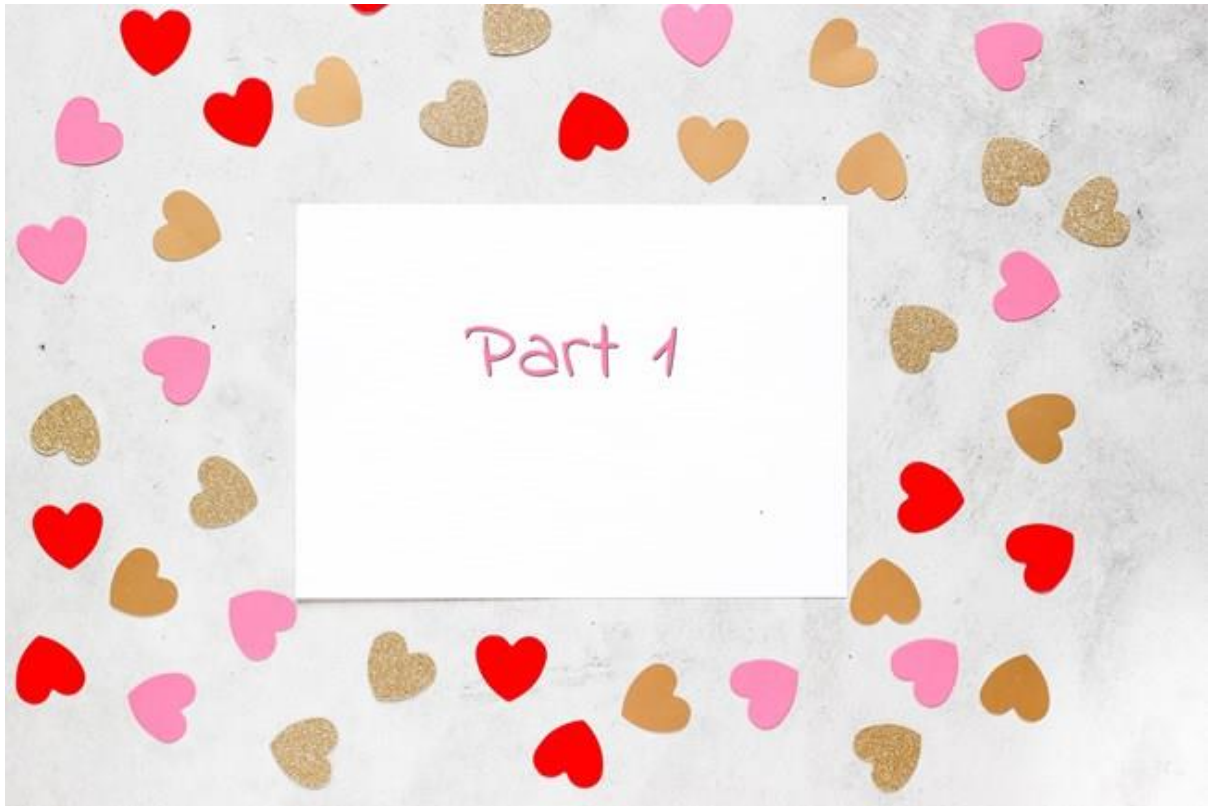
# MILLENNIUM COMPLIANT



G A Price

# Millennium Compliant

G A Price ©



Working in a busy office you really notice the times when it's quiet. So quiet you can hear the proverbial pin drop. It has been like that for the past three days. No-one laughs or talks; they just sit there, working away. The unhappy glances are mirrored by my own, the sad sighs escaping my work colleagues lips frequently. I am the most affected, and I'll tell you why. Someone has died. Not just anyone, but someone I truly cared for. Someone I loved with my whole heart, my secret crush, my adoring glance from across the crowded room falling upon his empty chair and my smile and dreams fading into despair.

He wasn't just anyone. He was magnificently handsome, with gorgeous straight blonde hair that fell to his shoulders and curled slightly at the edges. His hair was so beautiful and natural, which today is very hard to find with all the fakers sporting bleached-blond locks. The sunlight would fall upon his mane of golden hair like rays of light playing with an irresistible beauty. He had intelligent, sparkling blue eyes which danced excitedly when he talked, animating his features so wonderfully. His smile was genuine and his lips not hugely big, but seductively big enough to attract attention. His teeth were perfectly white and straight. His face was tanned and his movements easy and natural. He wore the most attractive male perfume, and was always dressed immaculately. His name was Mike.



I can't deny I was attracted to him, probably most of the other women in our office felt the same way. He was popular, clever yet humble, qualities that made him shine above the other men who would be considered competition, not that they even came close to someone that stunning.

Such a tragedy that somebody so talented and beautiful could die in such a terrible way.

Our company is an agency called Millennium Compliant. We hire people for businesses, specialists who solve problems that are computer oriented, particularly those pertaining to the Millennium Bug. The specialists we hire are contracted to companies to sort out pending problems. This is quite a lucrative market to be in at the moment, and with the increase in computer sales the demand for our particular service is particularly high.

As a consultative representative, I am required to sort out suitable interviewees for businesses and canvass potential agents or candidates to find the elite to consult our clients. So was Mike, but he was at a far more senior level. He was the type of person who simply clicked into the recruitment industry. He had charisma and personality. Clients became friends not just business associates when Mike was involved. Interviewees became enamoured of him, male and female. He was worshipped by everyone who met him. A cold gust of wind from the nearby open window drew me back to harsh reality and I shivered with horror.

It was so cold in the office, and I sat there leafing through a copy of Year 2000 Problem Solver: A Five Step Prevention Plan by Bryce Ragland. I couldn't concentrate on what I was reading, too much had happened to fully understand, my head was swimming.

I reached into my drawer for a tiny photo frame with a picture of Mike. It was pocket sized and I took it everywhere with me. It was my most precious belonging. Now, because of the tragedy, it was all I had left to remember him by.

I began to drift back to before the unthinkable occurred. I was so heartbroken. I had never made him aware of the deep feelings I had for him. Now, it was too late.



Three days ago, Mike had almost caught me gazing wistfully into the confident smiling man... himself in the photo; but I had managed to quickly hide it in my lower drawer before he could make out his own features on the picture. I knew I was blushing like a schoolgirl on her prom night and turned away from him. I felt humiliated by the depths of my feelings for him.

Mike had just smiled before asking me to do some small tasks for him. He had sat close to me, and his aura of warmth and gentle confidence had surrounded me. I remembered closing my eyes and fantasising about a non-existent relationship before Mike became concerned with my behaviour and asked me what was wrong.

"Nothing, Mike. Sorry, you wanted me to chase this guy?" I quickly resumed my professional approach, shaking my head to dissolve any lingering romantic thoughts and focused my eyes on the document he had placed in front of me, instead of looking directly at him.

"You weren't listening, were you?" Mike said softly, his voice patient and calm. "I would like you to send out some details of our company to him. Are you OK?"

"Yes, sure!" I smiled reassuringly at Mike, his eyes connecting to mine for the first time that day. I purposely never connected eyes with him, as I became completely lost within them. I was absorbed by the vibrant colours in them, the soft pools of black in the centre, like the island in the middle of an ocean. I began to lose myself in them, such deep blue eyes, such expression and intelligence betraying an otherwise youthfully naïve appearance.

"There's nothing wrong at home is there?" Mike leaned forward and his arm touched my shoulder. I moved back, immediately annoyed with myself for doing so.

"Nothing's wrong. I'll send this out straight away," I said, leafing around through the clients addresses in my over-full and overflowing card system. Mike rose and left to go to his own desk and I followed him with my eyes.

Such a graceful movement. Of course, when he walked he moved in a way that captured one's attention. All men born with beauty had such a grace that came so naturally to them alone. Mike's walk was just as alluring as the man himself. His thighs moved suggestively when he walked as if to an exquisite dance.

I looked at him as he seated himself with an easy and relaxed manner, and suddenly his eyes locked into mine and he smiled as I blushed and turned away for the second time that day.

At lunchtime that same day, Mike took all his more junior staff to lunch, and invited me even though I was not a part of his particular team. I agreed as Mike smiled and we walked and talked to the double-doored entrance of the building. He had a very natural way of inducing conversation from people and making them feel they had known him for years and we talked as if we were best friends. Or more than that.

The moment was ruined, not by the fact that his girlfriend was waiting for him at the doors and his embracing and covering her with a shower of kisses that turned my stomach in a silent turmoil of envy, but that he had called off the lunch till the next day to spend time with his girlfriend.

She flaunted around him mercilessly as the girls around me looked enviously at her show of affection and I felt my stomach churn at the sight.

I was hurt and green with envy, but I little realised this was due to another reason I would find out later.



That afternoon, after lunch, Mike came over to me to apologize.

"Sorry about that, I'll make it up tomorrow." Mike promised, his flashy smile penetrating my defences instantly, and his aura of warmth making me feel so much better.

"Sure," I whispered, painfully trying to disguise the anguish I felt upon seeing another woman holding him, kissing him.

"No I mean it." Mike continued, his eyes dropping, and for the first time I sensed something was wrong with him. His smile had vanished for an instant, but then it returned with full force eliminating my doubts and suspicions.

"Are you OK?" I asked, watching the worry come back to him, the small frown, the eyebrows knotting together - golden eyebrows like two rays from his sun-like golden hair.

"Not really." Mike confessed.

My heart knotted as he said this, a secret fear came over me.

"What's wrong?" I asked, my fear sounding like despair in my voice. Mike detected the worry and he looked at me, his worried expression melted immediately and he smiled again.

"Oh, nothing for you to fret about, darling." He said, his smile broadening, his eyes brightening like a gem turning in the light.

"If it's upsetting you then tell me. Sometimes it's good to talk to at least one person about your troubles," I said hopefully, desperately wanting him to confide in me.

"Well.... its my girlfriend. We were on the verge of breaking up." He said softly, and turned away as if to protect me from the more serious and emotional side of his nature.

"Really..." My face formed the most astonished expression as I asked in a whisper of disbelief. "What happened?" I was shocked that any woman could resist this handsome, luxurious and masculine vision of perfection. He seemed the side of myself I wished to express, his confidence always sheltered those around him.

"We really aren't compatible." He whispered more to himself than to me, his voice trailing off so much that I could hardly make out the last word he spoke.

"You seemed compatible at lunchtime today," I winked at him with a smile, desperately trying to bring back the side of him I loved so much. He laughed and put his hand on my shoulder. I didn't flinch and let the hand remain, so warm on my arm.

"What was it in your desk, that photo you hid from me?" He asked suddenly looking at me directly with that puzzled look I had seen so many times before. It was the look he gave when he was trying to figure out something.

"A photo of...." I stopped, unsure of which way to progress "... my brother!" I finally said, angry with myself for making it so obvious that I had thought quickly to make up an answer.

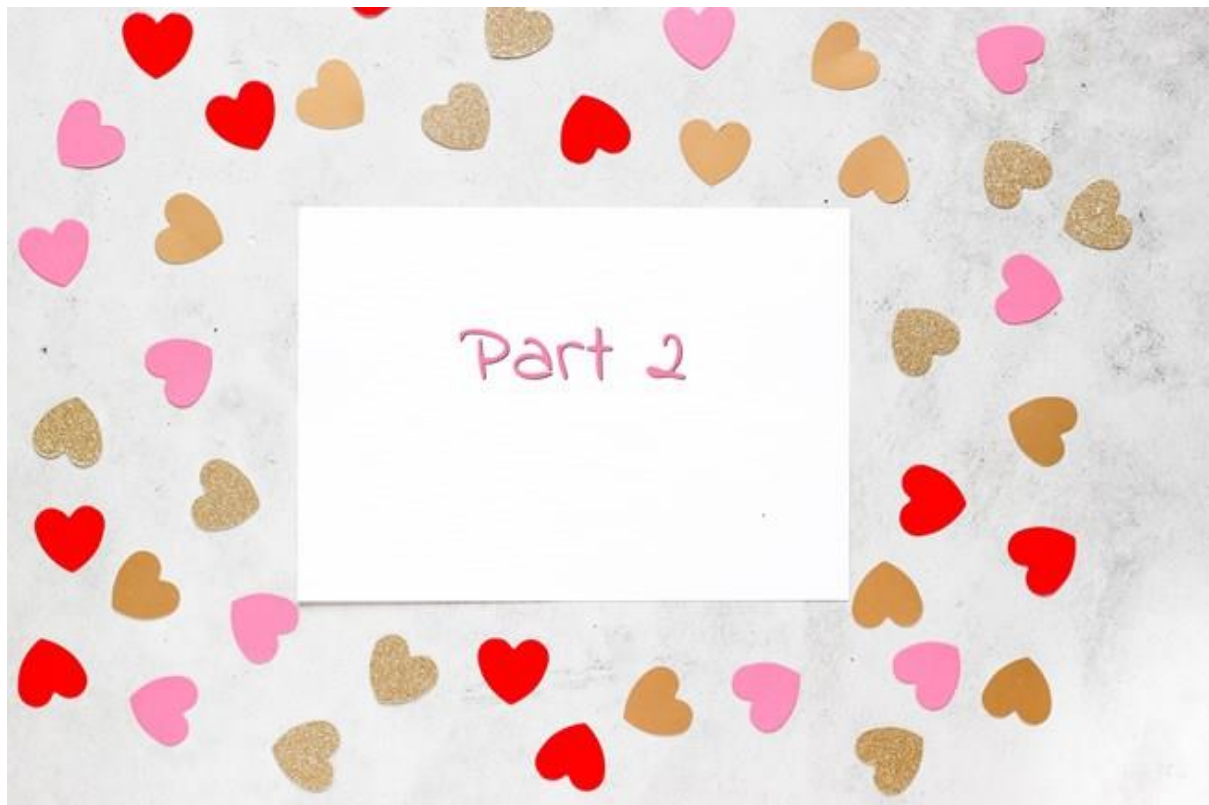
Mike smiled, a knowing smile. Then he got up and I turned to my work, ashamed I was blushing so deeply. He moved close to me without me realising and whispered into my ear:

"I thought you were an only child..."

I stopped working, stunned and tried to think of a suitable response. Then I turned around and I saw him back at his desk working and occasionally looking up at me. I tried not to look at him, but he had stirred my passion for him, and at 6:30 pm when I left the office I quickly glanced at him on the other side of the room. He didn't see me, as he was absorbed in his work, but that moment was so significant.

It was the last time I saw him alive.





The next day I travelled to work listening as usual to the local Radio station. There was something on the main headlines about a horrific local accident, happened less than ten miles from my house and I listened in dumb shock as the news of the accident became more graphic.

Before I reached the car park, driving in my sleek black Ford Puma, I knew who had been involved in the accident. Before parking my car I followed the route around the car park and looked for Mike's car, a dark blue BMW with personalized nameplate, but I saw no such car. I drove around the car park once again, panic stricken, concentrating desperately on the various cars on either side of me until they became a blur. I stopped the car suddenly, and broke into tears over the steering wheel.

I was barely able to park the car, and make my way into the office. Everyone was sitting at their desks in horror, not one person was untouched. It was as if all the joy and competitive spirit had abandoned the office along with Mike's presence.

I sat heavily at my desk, pulling from my drawer Mike's photograph and crying when I saw again how beautiful he looked. How could someone like him die?

I barely heard lunch announced in a tone that was as dismal as the horror of the days events. As I left my desk Sall my best friend, a tall Asian man with very dark

complexion, sleek black hair and shining brown eyes quickly approached me and we walked together without talking to the front entrance.

We poured over the menus at the glitzy French restaurant Le Gourmet but neither of us felt hungry. Usually frogs legs or snails were my favourite dishes but today I couldn't eat hardly anything. All I ended up ordering was a French salad with vinaigrette dressing instead. Sall ordered snails as usual. I could not understand why he ate so many, especially not being overly enthusiastic about them.

I managed a slight smile. "Sall, why do you keep ordering those snails?"

"Oh I know what you're thinking, I hate snails, I become sick after I've eaten them, they overly expensive and they give me a funny sensation in the back of my throat which is more discomforting than perhaps you realise. But, all that's a welcome diversion from what's happened today."

"Yeah, I know," I sighed. The snails arrived and a waiter set the plate down in front of Sall, whilst explaining to me that my dish would arrive soon with an obviously fake French accent.

"I hate that waiter," Sall whispered to me.

"Yeah me too, he's so false." I agreed, once the waiter had left our table and had disappeared into the kitchen.

"You liked him a lot, didn't you?" Sall asked me suddenly.

I bit back my tears, thinking of a suitable response without appearing soppy or over-sentimental. "Yeah, everyone did didn't they?"

Sall nodded, he and Mike had been quite close. They had shared a lot of interests: Football, Pubs and Clubs, Film tastes, computer interests, commission earning and keen competition. They were so alike personality-wise perhaps that was the reason I had latched on to Sall as a close friend.

My salad arrived and I watched the fake waiter in disgust as he put down the plate.

"Any vin for mademoiselle, monsieur?" The waiter asked Sall.

"Would you like a glass of wine, you probably need it?" Sall asked.

I nodded my head in ascent, and the waiter poured from a bottle on a trolley two glasses of wine then left us to eat.

I sat there, head in my hand, the knife in the other hand twirling a long strand of lettuce doused in some vinegar sauce around the tines. I must have done this for some time, because Sall asked me if I was alright.

I barely touched my plate, and the waiter came to collect the plates, looking quite alarmed that the food was quite untouched.



"Was the food alright, mademoiselle?" The waiter asked.

"It was fine, I was just not that hungry." I explained, riled that I should have to explain my eating habits in such a glamorous restaurant.

"The bill please?" Sall asked, and the waiter walked away, quite disgruntled.

"I'm sorry about this, did he offend you?" Sall asked me gently. The tears were beginning to build once again, and I tried to hold them back. But the day's events had shattered me and had worn me completely. The one thing I really wanted to do was hug Sall. But I still held back my emotions.

The waiter put the bill in front of us and Sall whisked it away, placing a number of notes underneath it, and helping me put my coat on.

"How much do I owe you?" I asked.

"Just call it a slight compensation for a trying day," Sall smiled and took my hand. We walked back to the office for the afternoon in silence once more.

I was particularly glad when the day was over and I left feeling very alone.





The evening came in an instant and I lay on my bed, confused and alone trying to understand the situation and figure out an answer to all the questions that repeatedly went through my mind.

Why he? Why now? Why didn't I tell him I loved him? Why didn't I confess all and see what he'd say?

Strange thoughts came to me of the things we could have done together - slept together, the thought of making love to Mike had always overpowered my thoughts. It was probably due to the fact his ex-lovers had spread rumours about him being the most sensual lover. I hated these thoughts, untried fantasies I had wanted so much to be reality.

I tried not to fall asleep, lest I see his face in my dreams but after a while the day's bitter and tragic events had me worn completely and I fell asleep in a deep, lush sleep with just darkness and no dreams.

I awoke early in the morning before dawn and I listened to a gentle patter of rain on the windows. I blinked on the verge of tears as I listened to the wet and consistent sound.

I lay very still, listening to the persistent patter of rain on my window, curtains open, staring at the midnight sky. My vision blurred with tears, the burden of regret. If only ..... If only .....

My eyes became heavy with the tears and so tired I had to close them. I felt the dreamy weightlessness of a coming sleep and surrendered to it.

My first dream was a vision of him. Mike was dressed in a white suit and he was bathed in a deep and rich sunlight which invaded his beautiful blonde hair. The enhanced colour made his hair shimmer like a halo, like an angel. He stood there, confused expression, watching me. Then he held out his hands to me and I saw blood on them as he silently mouthed my name.

I screamed and awoke.

Covered with sweat and feverish I got up and went to the window. The night was as black as before and calmed me even as I looked out upon dotted lights from various houses. The lights were few as it was very late but were very distinct.

I sighed deeply, reiterating to myself that this was only a dream. Mike was dead and I had to accept this. Feeling more confident now about sleep I clambered back into bed and closed my eyes. I started to dream.



I saw a valley, so luscious in colour and warmth that I wandered it for seemingly hours, looking above me at the pale sun which cast shadows on the ground. But unlike real shadows with definitive edges these dream ones melted into the different shades. I wandered still, absorbed with the whole beauty of this little valley, unable to find the end of the valley and totally uncaring.

Then I saw the little house with its thatched roof and moss crawling up the bricks. The windows were open and the front door was ajar. I walked inside and was immediately hit with a familiar scent - Mike's aftershave. Hugo greeted me as I walked into the living room and stopped sharply, my eyes focusing on a figure in front of me.

Mike himself, larger than life in his white suit which made his figure even more shapely if that were possible. He was sitting on the window ledge, he had obviously seen me approach and enter the house, but he hadn't turned around to face me. He continued to look out, and then I heard his voice say:

"If I turn around will you leave again?"

No voice had ever sounded so deep and smooth. By this time, I had already figured out that Mike was in my dream, but this was so real and then so unreal. Everything seemed hazy to me, he was here and he was not here.

"No," I answered with a small choking sound, fighting back my tears as I struggled to focus on him.

He turned his head, and then his body, but he continued to sit on the ledge, and he gazed at me for a long while.

"I'm dead." He said finally. His eyes widened as if this possibility had never occurred to him before.

"You were in a car crash," I said, trying to ease the pain I was suffering by becoming quieter.

"Yeah, I remember." Mike sighed, looking back out of the window before continuing. "I saw the last few moments before the crash in slow motion. It was weird. Then when the car hit mine my whole life came in flashes to me. I knew then I wouldn't be alright, but I never thought I would die."

I turned away from him. I was afraid he'd see my tears. Then I felt his arms around me. He was standing directly behind me and had rested his head on my shoulder.

"Why are you here darling? Are you dead too?" Mike said turning me to face him. He saw the tears and looked into my eyes suddenly.

His gaze was probing and too magnetic for me to avert my eyes. I felt him scanning me as if he could read my mind. I saw myself giving him all my secrets, all the secret erotic passions I had ever felt for him. He breathed naturally and he closed his eyes arousing himself with my dreams, and I drew back astonished.

"Not this time" Mike said with a slight smile. "Why did you never tell me? I wouldn't have minded."

"Not with your girlfriend around," I laughed suddenly, remembering the woman whose jealousy had caused bitter feuds with those who had confessed to Mike a crush on him.

Mike laughed too and suddenly kissed me on the forehead. He drew my head to his with his hands and kissed me. A thrill passed through me from where he'd kissed me to my toes, burning through the lower sexual region like fire.

He was still smelling me like I were a rose caught in his hand, but this was unnerving me.

"Why do you do that?" I asked, concerned.

"You smell like nothing I've ever smelt before," Mike said.

I drew back offended.

"What do you mean?" I asked, terrified. I had already had a shower!



"Not that kind of smell," Mike laughed again. "I don't know how to explain it. It's some kind of aura around you that I can see and breathe and smell. Its like cocoa and silk, sweet and tender and it covers your whole body. It smells of exotic fruit and rich perfume."

I sighed with relief that the smell was pleasant.

"I can read your mind," Mike said suddenly.

I blushed deep red, as his arms came around me and rocked me gently in his arms laughing at my embarrassment.

"That's not fair. I can't read your mind Mike!" I laughed suddenly, feeling myself loosen and relax in his arms. It felt natural to embrace him this way, but I knew with sadness this was just a vision or dream.

"It's not just a dream," Mike said suddenly, his arms enfolded me with warmth I had never felt before. This was the man I so much loved in life and I wanted so much to believe all this was real, that we were together and nothing would ever separate us.

"But I fell asleep, and I knew I would dream of you!" I countered, my eyes tearful, my arms becoming tighter around his waist, afraid to let him go because he felt so real.

Yet, I felt myself beginning to waken, and the embrace was loosening and I was losing him. I cried out to him as I saw his face one final time before I awoke with nothing more from the previous day except bitter regrets.





The next few days were terrible as Mike's funeral was to be held on the Saturday. Each night I dreamt of him - one night he had silently called to me, merely whispered my name and I had ran to him and held him. We hadn't talked in that brief embrace but had held each other tightly, afraid we'd see each other for the last time and not have had the chance to be in love. He had ran his hands over my body and my face and had undressed me slowly with his caressing glances and soft fingers. We were naked together in a hazy dream but I was enthralled by his toned body and wild blonde hair that was sexual in itself.



During the day, work was slow, and business seemed to be at the lowest point since I had started there. No body was in the team spirit any more. I became more embittered and alone during the day, but on the nights with Mike I felt I was free to be with him and to love him.



The night before the funeral, Mike asked me how work was now he was gone.

"Awful," I replied "I have never seen them all so lost and quiet. Even Sall doesn't say much anymore."

Mike nodded wistfully. "Its funny how it happened really. I was at the top of my field, you could say. I was really career focused and very well off. Then I realised that I didn't love my girlfriend. She's beautiful, you know. But we didn't get on. I was a cheater and I slept with lots of women she didn't even know about. I know you can't understand that but I never had someone like you to talk to about this sort of thing. I thought of love as a joke and sex with more than five people was normal."

I nodded trying to understand, but finding it hard to.

"You don't understand" Mike continued, seeing doubt and misunderstanding in my expression. "When you have all the money you could ever need you think you're entitled to more than the average man. I wanted everything. And I got killed in a car crash. It just shows you - you can't stay young and party forever. I wasn't immortal, but I thought I was, it seemed impossible that I should die."

"And the world collapses for those few who meant more than I would ever know. I could have had so much more with you. Why wasn't I allowed that?"

I shook my head, unsure of what I could say. What could you say to someone who had everything and then lost it all so tragically?

"I didn't have everything," Mike corrected my thoughts. "I was such a lonely person, you'd never know how much it hurt me. Perhaps whatever higher force that took my life felt sorry for me that I had never really loved anything important and gave me a last shot at it before I moved on."

"Don't say that," I murmured, stunned at what he'd just said. "After all, next time it's not going to be you who's left alone - it'll be me."



The funeral held was an expensive and lavish affair with caviar on the tables and champagne in all the glasses.

Debbie, Mike's girlfriend, was dressed in a beautiful black dress with as much cleavage showing as possible. Her legs were as tall as some of the smaller girls in the office and she walked about with a smile for everybody.

"She loves the attention," Sall commented to me as we watched her strut by, her lovely dark hair falling from her shoulders with the natural beauty all models possess.

The coffin was brought into the church and then out into a black, tinted windowed limousine. Debbie pulled out a tissue with a fluid motion, something I could have imagined her practicing the night before to get it just right. She felt the wood of the coffin and ran her hand along the frame. Then she leant to kiss it.

It would have been a most touching moment, seeing someone who had been so intimate with Mike saying goodbye in her own way, but she ruined it intentionally. Stooping to kiss the coffin, she bared her silk underwear at the vast crowd of onlookers. The men's mouths gaped in awe. I grimaced in disgust.

"Not exactly a subtle woman is she," Sall whispered to me with a slight smile.

"Not exactly much of a tribute to him either," I said sadly as I saw five men walking to her side and taking her hand.



The night of the meal was a sombre, morbid affair with Debbie, Mike's girlfriend telling everyone how much she missed him and what a tribute this was. However, most of those listening were the men who had seen her panties earlier in the day, and were hoping for sex with her. Then she turned from them, and her face was pale. She broke down into tears and then she turned and looked directly at me.

I turned to Sall as I saw her eyes moisten again. "She really loved him didn't she?" For a moment I felt a shock of guilt ricocheting through me like a stray bullet.

Sall smiled knowingly and shook his head. "When you work in our team you have to know who's telling you the truth and who isn't. I can tell you now that her concern isn't because of Mike's death but that she may have to foot the bill tonight."

"You're kidding!" I gasped amazed.

Sall shook his head. "Nope!"

I turned to him and whispered into his ear "Then why the hell did he go out with her?"

Sall turned to me and with a slight smile said: "Image. She's a top model, he's a top businessman, they're perfect together. She'll probably find another like him for a substitute, tonight."

"So love decided to take a jump out the nearest window," I said disgusted.

"It's not about love, Mike saw it like this, as long as she has a matching salary, good car, fine house and is so beautiful she could be on the catwalk, then that's his girl." Sall laughed, a sad reflective sound.



I turned my head as I remembered Mike's gentle words the night before. "He's not that shallow," I murmured.

"What?" Sall asked, having not caught my words.

I smiled a secret smile, "Nothing." I said.

I ate the meal and listened to Sall talk about Mike, even though he had no idea of the person he was talking about. I felt revolted by the whole thing, I knew him, and so many people had judged him by his looks, not by his personality.





Mike looked at me tenderly as I explained about the funeral. I had seen him now for a week and each night I was spirited to this realm between the living and the dead.

We were in a field of colour and sound, and the grass was soft as air as we talked together. I casually had my arms around Mike's waist as was his around mine, and when he stopped, I carried on walking and talking about the funeral. I stopped when he didn't follow me and turned to him puzzled.

His eyes were gazing at me thoughtfully, and I stopped the narrative of the sombre affair suddenly.

"Why didn't we get together when I was alive?" Mike asked suddenly, his voice very, very sad.

I smiled. "I never told you I liked you. That's why."

Mike shook his head "No, I could have asked you out too."

"We lived in two separate worlds. It's so different now we are in the same world." I said.

"What do you mean?" He asked me.

"You were beautiful, rich and everything that I was not," I looked at the ground, admiring the colours and the texture of everything - from the slight breeze to Mike's

arms around me. "Like Prince Charming, only there are now too many princesses in the world for you to choose from."

Mike shook his head and smiled "You know, that would never have been a problem with me."

"I know now," I said.

"Its OK - we're together now," I laughed and ran into his arms. He caught me and fell onto the grass with me. I looked down at him as I had fell onto him and he kissed me on the mouth suddenly, urgent and hard as the warm wind whipped past us. I returned this with as much heat and urgency and he rolled me over suddenly and looked down upon me.

"I want to make love with you," Mike said, the passion evident in his voice. I stroked his beautiful hair and smiled.

"I want that too," I said, returning to my previous erotic thoughts with utter abandon.

His hands moved over my neck and my face and I allowed this, too full of passion and desire to draw back. I had lost control of my resistance. He kissed my neck, and then my mouth again, his tongue penetrating my mouth, finding mine and playfully circling it twice. I moaned with pleasure but suddenly he drew back.

"Can you make love?" I asked him, lost in my erotic visions, gaining confidence every second as he broke into a beautiful smile.

"Lets find out," Mike said as sure of himself here in this strange in-between world as ever he had been when he was alive.

I felt him unbutton my blouse as in my delirium I had closed my eyes. I felt each button loose itself and then as he lifted me slightly the blouse fell off my shoulders. He held me in his strong arms, and I realised he had gained much strength in this strange world in between life and death. I felt his fingers touch the clasp of my bra and a sudden excitement overtook me. I moaned again as the bra fell away and his fingers touched my breasts. Then his lips covered one nipple and he sucked gently and pulled at it with his teeth. I was wet and in agony, and as he unbuttoned his own shirt and I waited, each breath excruciatingly perfect and gorgeous as I saw his chest for the second time. Never had I seen a man with such a well-toned body, and I kissed this chest which tasted of the sunlight that fell about us and enveloped us in its warmth. In my new heat I was totally subservient to his every gesture and loving touch.

Still on top of me and in control, Mike unzipped my jeans with slow and sure fingers that almost made me cry out in my passion. He tugged at the jeans playfully as he pulled them gently off me, and then lifted me to take off my panties. I lay naked as he unzipped his own jeans and pants and he fell on top of me again his penis sliding up my leg as his mouth again reached for mine.

I kissed him, grasping his buttocks with both hands, edging him towards me, but he pulled away each time, teasing me. It became too much to bear, and I cried out to him to enter me, but he just laughed and kissed my naked breasts and then my stomach, and then he enveloped my sex in the warmth of his mouth.

Such warmth and bitter sweet agony as I longed for him to enter me, then his tongue flicked at my clitoris, and I pulled at the grass around me, feeling the passion coming to its inevitable crescendo.

Just as I was about to orgasm, he moved up alongside me, and then I felt his penis enter me and I gasped with pleasure. I had never surrendered myself so totally, so fully. I felt him move inside me, and he began his rhythm, and I moaned and moaned with pleasure, feeling each thrust, and I pulled him even closer, controlling the rhythm more as I reached my summit. I cried out in satisfaction as the overwhelming feeling flooded my loins and then my entire body. I felt him shudder against me and I lay there with him, his head away from me.

He looked at me, and I saw tears in his eyes.

"I guess we can't do this now." He said, choking back his tears and turning away from me. I understood perfectly what had happened. He couldn't orgasm.

I rolled away from him, feeling a complete failure, wishing and praying this had been different. It had been so perfect. I lay naked and for the first time I cried out in a deep and mournful way.

I felt his arms around me again, and I clung to him, lost and afraid. He sheltered me with the warmth of his presence but this wasn't enough and he knew it too. I was shattered and depressed and he knew why. It wasn't just that I had failed to satisfy him through a simple human act, but that for the first time it had become clear to me that we would never truly be together in any intimate way.

I turned to face him and felt the warmth of his body pressed against mine. This was a false warmth, he wasn't here bodily at all and when I looked up at him now I saw an expression I had never witnessed in him before. He was crying, his face wet and miserable staring down at me beside him.

"I've failed you," Mike managed to choke.

Suddenly he was gone from me, in a haze of light and he vanished. I cried out, terrified of being left alone, but he did not return. I wandered around in tears calling his name, but he did not return. I woke shortly after.





The next working day seemed to plod as I thought about Mike's last words to me. I knew he wasn't right, we had been fools to try to make love but it was so unfair. I needed to be with him and he knew this.

Sall came up to me and sat beside me, his expression was of nervousness.

"Are you OK?" He asked me, and I looked away from him out of the window. I barely heard his rushed conversation. I caught half words but this was unimportant. He had just made a deal and gained over £3,000 for himself, so what. Mike was still dead. My life was still in pieces, and I realised that if I had never met Mike in the afterlife, I would have probably got over his death. Now I never would.

After work, I drove home and walked up the stairs to the bathroom as always to take a shower. I started the water running and again broke down in tears. I opened the cabinet and saw a bottle of Paracetamol staring at me from inside. I took the bottle out and realised, horrified at myself for doing so, that I was contemplating taking an overdose. I dropped the bottle and it broke sending little pills all over the bathroom floor. I started to pick these up and thought about this horrible way out a little bit more.

If I took them, I would be with Mike. We would be together, even though we would both be dead. This meant more to me than the world and I knew I was going to do this. I would simply take the whole bottle and lie in the shower with the steaming hot water until I passed out from the heat and then died. It would be so very simple.

I took the first Paracetamol, then 2 more gingerly. I looked in the mirror at myself but I could only see Mike there looking back at me, his hands folded, his expression stern and unforgiving.

"For you," I whispered and then took three more Paracetamols, looking at Mike as I did so. More and more I took, and I got in the shower and lay down. The bottle was empty. I saw no more of them to take and I closed my eyes and waited.



I was half expecting Mike to collect me, but as I drifted I became aware of deep voices around me. I blearily looked around myself and was horrified to discover a huge plastic pipe down my throat. I felt as though I was about to be sick, and I saw doctors pumping the little Paracetamols out of my body. My stomach was racked with pain, and I cried out in terror Mike's name.

A little while later I was in a hospital bed, still drowsy, staring at the rain beating on the glass of my window. I started to drift into sleep, and all other noises in the hospital evaporated in a shimmering white light.

Mike appeared by the side of me and we walked as we often had, arm in arm.

"You had a hand in calling the ambulance, didn't you?" I asked him.

Mike nodded, still walking through a whiteness that was almost blinding. There seemed to be no definite path we were walking on, but we continued anyway. "Yes, I don't think we're allowed to materialise in your world, but I did it anyway. I had to. I couldn't let you do that horrible thing. I simply put all my energy into sending a message telepathically to Sall. He knew at once something terrible had happened to you and called the ambulance."

"He didn't know it was you who told him?" I asked.

Mike shook his head "No. But it doesn't matter now anyway. You can't break the rules here. I'll have to leave you for good now."

I stopped walking, dumfounded "But you promised you wouldn't leave me."

"I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do about it now. I have to go." Mike kissed me on the forehead.

"Don't go" I cried, holding on to his arm. "I need you."

Mike ran his hand along my cheek and rested it on my shoulder. "No you don't. You'll be fine without me. Its my fault its gone this far."

Mike walked away from me, and I tried to follow but my legs had become powerless and I could not move. He became fainter as he was further away but suddenly he stopped. He turned and stared at me, and the expression on his face was one of regret and finality.

"If only I had lived." He said suddenly, his voice so sad and torn that I cried out to him in fear.

I had lost him. I would never see him again. I didn't know what to say or to do. I couldn't move - and I would have given up everything to be with him once more, even my life.



Trying desperately not to wake I began to hear distinct voices around me, attempting to rouse me.

"Danni ....."

There was a voice around me, echoing my name in the shimmering whiteness. I knew it wasn't Mike.

I had lost him and it was all my fault. I cried out his name as I felt myself waking.

"Danni, its Sall. Wake up!"

I cried out Mike's name again as I felt the heaviness of sleep lifting more. I wouldn't wake, I wouldn't come back until Mike returned.

"Danni, please!!"

A mixture of voices, combining around me, I struggled to remain asleep but I knew I would wake soon. Such a collection of voices and one sounding so much like Mike's that my eyes were full of tears.

I remembered the first time I had heard the news of Mike's death in my Puma, the horror of recollection returning as I reminisced how I had met him and fallen in love with nothing more than a ghost. All my experiences with Mike came to me suddenly as if it were the end, and moments in my life were coming to me in flashes.

"Danni, its Mike. Come back, you can do this." His voice, the rich and deep voice I knew and I awoke with a start and saw his face above my own.

Mike signalled for a nurse to come to my bedside, and I was raised slightly. He kissed me on the forehead as I had experienced in that strange afterlife many times. But I wasn't dead, so why wasn't Mike?

"You've been in a car crash." Mike said in a hushed and gentle voice. "You were in a coma for three weeks. You said my name a number of times when they brought you to the hospital, just before you went into the coma."

"How long have you been here?" I asked horrified by my voice, which seemed croaky and hoarse.

"On and off about three weeks. After work, just before I went to work, weekends. I was the only person they allowed here at times."

I smiled at him, and the perfection of him. I realised that all the times we had together had been unreal and nothing more than the dream of a person in a coma. But I was sure that it had a purpose this dream. Something much more mysterious had happened between us that I was positive Mike knew himself.

Mike looked away suddenly, his eyes clouding. "I found the picture of me in your drawer."

I smiled and reached out with my hand and touched his shoulder. He clasped this and quickly kissed it.

"Why didn't you tell me?" He asked suddenly. I thought of when I had been asked this question before by another Mike in a strange coma-state. I had found it difficult to find an appropriate answer, but I now knew exactly what to say.

It was so clear to me now that, wherever I had been in my coma, it had been real in one sense. I had known Mike, and loved him so much that I replied:

"I didn't know you then."

Mike's eyebrows knotted in confusion and then he smiled. "You listened to my life story didn't you? And they say people in coma's don't hear anything."

"Yeah, its something like that." I smiled. A secretive smile. Mike smiled too, his perceptive nature sensing mystery.

"Well I think I ought to warn you," Mike began, his eyes glittering with intelligence and warmth.

"Of what?" I asked.

"I'm such hard work, you know. My ex-girlfriend kept saying that over and over. Do you think you could handle that?"



"Ex-girlfriend?" I asked.

"Yes, we finished last week. I found somebody else a lot better. You."

I laughed and he joined in and then he rose and kissed me on the mouth. The bitterness and tenderness of the time we had made love returned to me. I think he knew inside what he had been to me, what had happened. I think he knew at some deeper subconscious way what we had never had an opportunity of and could mean to each other.

"I'll leave you alone now, they won't let me stay beyond ten. Get better and I'll take you out for lunch at a nice cosy little restaurant I know. It'll be a celebration of you getting well again." Mike got up and walked to the door.

He walked out the door and closed it behind him. I saw his profile as he walked away and blew him a kiss. I suddenly realised I had left one of his questions unanswered.

"I know I can handle that" I whispered "I've been here before."

