



THURSDAY 16 OCT: 11:00 A.M.

Susan Collins, Head Teacher of Mayflower Academy, London, clasped her hands firmly together on her desk. It was a gesture that she hoped indicated her firm disapproval of the proposition that she was confronted with.

She looked up at John Dales and smiled. It was a disarming smile, polite but firm. Courteous, without yielding an inch of ground. The kind she reserved for parents who were rich and influential, but who, at the moment, were being obstinate.

John Dales smiled back at her.

"Mr Dales, as I understand it, you want your daughter, Vivienne, admitted into our school in the *middle* of the Autumn Term."

"Correct," he said, nodding slightly. His voice was soft and pleasant, almost musical. *Mellifluous*, thought Susan. *Yes, that was the right term for it.*

"But why?"

"Call me John," he said, still smiling. He was extremely handsome, she noted. According to the application form he had filled out online, he was forty-four, but his fresh, unlined face made him look not a day beyond thirty-five. His unblemished skin positively glowed. He was also broad-shouldered and muscular, in a relaxed, non-athletic sort of way.

But without question, his most charming aspect was his striking, light-blue eyes. And his gaze was hypnotic.

"Okay — John," said Susan, fighting to recover her thoughts. "I understand that your daughter goes to — I mean, *went* to — um ..." She glanced at the computer screen in front of her, "Carmel Collegiate in Coventry. You have just moved to Pinner, in North West London, from Coventry, so need to change her school. Fair enough. But why change in the *middle* of the term?"

John Dales looked at her solemnly, "Because Vivienne can no longer go to that school, Mrs Collins."

"Why not?"

"It is not safe for her anymore."

Susan frowned. "Not safe for her? What do you mean?"

"Vivienne's life could be in danger there, Mrs Collins."

Susan stared at him in astonishment. "What are you talking about? What danger? According to what you said in the admission form, she has been at that school for several years, so what is this danger all of a sudden?"

"The problem, Mrs Collins, is not the school itself, but where it is located. I mean, the *city*," said John.

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