

# Shades of a Promise

-by Judith Nolan

*Of expectation fails, and most oft where most it promises;  
and oft it hits where hope is coldest; and despair most sits.  
- William Shakespeare*

Elliot sat in the chair behind his desk, turning slowly. His expression was pensive, his concentration remote. It had all seemed like an impossible dream. But there had also been such promise in her words.

Catherine had stopped in the open doorway to his home office and looked back. "Next time you call I'll be in."

"Next time..." Elliot released his pent-up breath. He remembered his head snapping up, all his focus becoming intent on her. His analytical mind sought answers he couldn't define. "Why?" he'd finally demanded.

Catherine had held up the list in her hand. "Because you didn't put a price tag on this."

It had now been two weeks since that strange little scene had played out. Two weeks of silence. Elliot had not dared to call in all that time. He found his lack of courage at worst, appalling – at best, laughable. And he still wanted to know what she could possibly have been doing, demanding plastic explosives and tungsten carbide drill bits. He'd joked about hard rock mining. But there were strict controls on the use and distribution of the goods he'd given so freely. He'd broken every one of those rules without a second thought and Jack had demanded to know if his boss had truly lost his mind.

Elliot was aware Catherine could have shared that knowledge and crucified him; taken him out of her life forever. It could all have been some elaborate trap to discredit his up-coming testimony in the Avery case. Moreno could have done an even bigger deal behind his back to wipe the game-board clean of every developer, good or bad, and start afresh in the city. It was election year after all.

"Impossible..." Elliot's fists clenched onto the arms of his chair. He knew Catherine would never have consented to be a party to such an under-handed, dirty trick. Their last encounter played endlessly in his mind, like a broken record trapped in the same seam of relentless sound. But always he came back to the inescapable fact Catherine had come to him, she had asked him. She hadn't approached her father, or anyone with the power to make her curious wishes happen. Surely that counted as something. A gold star next to his name in her mental tally of those she could and could not trust with her intriguing secret.

Was there someone else? Elliot exhaled roughly. It could explain a lot about her mysterious life of shadows and half-truths.

Perhaps it was finally time to find out... He stopped turning. Facing his desk and its telephone, he planted his hands squarely, widely-spaced, on the vast expanse of polished mahogany. He drew a long, steady breath and released it slowly as he reached to lift the receiver.

“Maureen?” he questioned when his secretary answered the call. “Get me Catherine Chandler over at the D.A.’s office.”

He waited, impatiently tapping a beat with his fingertips on the desktop. The ringing tone droned endlessly against his ear. He was almost ready to give up when Catherine answered the call.

“Catherine Chandler,” she said breathily, as if she’d rushed to pick up.

“Cathy? It’s Elliot.” He hung there — eyes narrowed — waiting for her response, for her refusal to talk to him. The seconds ticked slowly by, underscored by his accelerating heartbeat.

“Elliot? Hi, how are you?” she finally replied. There was caution in her voice, an unspoken question of his intent. But she didn’t hang up. Progress...

“I’m fine.” Elliot almost smiled. Still she was wary of him. He swallowed tightly and began his new quest in earnest. “So, how about dinner tomorrow night? Are you free?”

Once again there was that significantly long pause. He could almost hear her mind racing, searching for clues; the hidden meaning of his request. Then she drew a deep breath, releasing it in thoughtful caution. “Dinner... Fine, what time? Where shall I meet you?”

After the arrangements had been made, Elliot replaced the receiver in its cradle. Catherine had honoured her promise. Maybe this time it was going to be all right. This time he would not make the same mistakes as he did before. He nodded in quiet satisfaction. This time it would be different...

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