Tomorrow Never Knows

By Lovely Rita & Jenny Wren,
with Penny Lane

Author's Note:

This is our sequel to "Yes It Is". Our first venture into writing a Beatles fanfiction was so much fun, we had to keep writing! Thank you to everyone who supported and enjoyed our first book. We hope you will like this one as well!

Rating: R for language, sex, & implied drug use.

Disclaimer: We don't own any of the Beatles, or the Beatles' music. This obviously never happened, and is a complete work of fiction.

Chapter One

June 1, 1967

Maggie ran her hands over the apple green satin of the jacket in front of her, smoothing it down even though there weren't any wrinkles to be seen. She frowned a bit as she tugged the trousers straight.

"Maybe you should buy it a drink first before going right for its trousers, luv," John whispered in her ear teasingly. Maggie swatted at him, but he danced out of her way. He grinned at her. "Luv, they look fine, now come have a drink and relax. There's a good girl."

"I just want them to look right," she protested.

Standing back she admired the four dressed costume forms in front of her, each displaying one of the Sgt Pepper costumes worn by the Beatles for their famous album cover photograph. It had been her idea to display them at the album release party they had organized for their friends. Maggie had always been interested in costume, and had actually worked part time in a theater in college. She still couldn't believe that she had access to these Beatle costumes, to study them to her heart's content.

“Careful there, luv. If you stare at them any longer, people might start thinking you love the costumes more than me.”

Maggie grinned. “Well, they already think you love Paul more than me so I’d say we’re even.”

John laughed at her. He had discovered her fascination with costumes not too long ago, and while he himself didn’t understand it, he loved watching her become entranced by them. The way she’d get lost in the clothing’s folds, the wheels that turned in her head as she took in every stitch, there was just something about it that he hadn’t seen in anyone else and it was one of the many things he loved about her.

Leaning over and giving her a quick kiss, John took her hand and dragged her to the bar. Maggie couldn’t help but get lost once more inside her mind, her thoughts still on the costumes and everything they represented. How odd that the unbelievable part of this whole thing was that she could geek out over the real Sgt Pepper costumes. She must be getting used to her new life. Because quite improbably, Maggie had recently found herself mixed up in time travel, which had left her voluntarily living 40 years or so in the past. Oh, and she was now John Lennon’s fiancé.

John and Maggie Sue hadn’t waited very long after she’d decided to stay in the past to get engaged – but they’d held off announcing it for as long as they could. They’d had to fill in their friends and family first – but they’d also enjoyed keeping their engagement private. Part of this was their reluctance to open themselves up to the inevitable firestorm - but there was no way to delay it forever. Too many people knew and eventually it would leak. One year to the day from Maggie’s arrival in 1966, on April 20, 1967, they’d let Brian announce it to the press.

The fan reaction was…well, it was the best that could be expected given the situation. She was engaged to their John. One of the few single Beatles. And she was American. At least she wasn't a short, older, band-wrecking, Japanese performance artist, Maggie had comforted herself at the time. Okay, well, she was short - but she certainly wasn't older than John - he was really a good 40 years her senior, though in this timeline they were both the same age, at 26.

And then there was Yoko. Maggie considered her a nemesis though she'd never actually set eyes on her in person. As far as she knew, John hadn't either as he had never mentioned her. Maggie had spent great deal of time desperately trying to recall every detail she could about John and Yoko's courtship. She had a good memory, and she'd read lots of books, but she didn't know what she might be forgetting. Maggie knew that in her original timeline John had met Yoko in November of '66 at Yoko's art show at the Indica Gallery in London. John had even mentioned meeting Yoko to Cyn, going so far as to call her a nutter. Maggie wasn't sure whether he was downplaying the event to Cynthia, or if he really hadn't quite known what to think of Yoko right away. Since he'd mentioned meeting Yoko to Cyn, Maggie felt fairly confident that he would have mentioned it to her as well. Plus, she'd been with John every time he'd been to the Indica – and she'd never so much as heard any mention of a show featuring Yoko's work. Everything had been quiet on that front, and maybe that meant that Yoko and John's paths simply wouldn't cross in this timeline. Already there had been substantial changes because of her presence here and maybe this was one of them.

Maggie sincerely hoped that her influence on the Beatles and any changes she wrought on the timeline would be positive. She knew there had been endless debate about Yoko: her seeming divisiveness, how much responsibility she bore for the Beatles' breakup, her part in John's heroin addiction, her use of John's legacy after his death. Maggie had her own opinions on Yoko as a fan, but now she had to admit she was more than slightly biased because of her personal involvement. If John met Yoko now, would the future patterns reassert themselves, leaving her jilted in Cynthia's place? Only worse - alone in a time not her own? Maggie tried to reassure herself – she had, after all, time traveled and against incredible odds, met and fallen in love with John. If anything, Maggie and John were the ones destined to be together. That was how she liked to rationalize it, anyway. Maybe it was selfish - but so be it. She had to be selfish about some things, didn't she? This was her life too, after all.

"You okay, luv?"

She didn't know how he did it. The few times that she had thought about Yoko and what John's life would be like without Maggie showing up, John had instinctively picked up on her apprehension. She wanted to tell him what was wrong, but she just couldn't. Something always stopped her.

Looking up at him, Maggie tried to give him an encouraging smile. "Perfect," she answered.

Her life here and now with John was a good one. Not only was she engaged to one of the 60's most eligible bachelors but she was also setting an unheard of precedent for a woman. She was the chief executive of the Beatles' Apple Corps. Brian and the Beatles had put the company in her

trust, and with her head for numbers and common sense, so far she had proved that trust to be well founded. The company was doing well, and she was (just barely) managing to balance her work duties with her Beatle fiancé duties.

The Beatles themselves were still going strong, and were working well together. Sgt Pepper had gone together smoothly and already Paul was bursting with ideas for their next album. When the last finishing touches had been put on the Sgt Pepper album, Brian Epstein had insisted on throwing a small dinner gathering as a pre-launch party. It would be just the Beatles family, some DJs, photographers, and journalists. In her own time, Maggie Sue had seen the pictures that those people had taken of the Beatles at this party, so she could hardly believe she was in the midst of it all.

She was unable to resist bringing her own camera and had even managed to snap a picture of Paul chatting with her pen pal, Linda Eastman, after she'd introduced the two of them. Maggie had insisted Linda fly over for a visit, timed so that she could come to any parties and, most importantly, fall in love with Paul. Linda had been happy to be invited - as a rock photographer, she hadn't wanted to miss the launch of a new Beatles album. Again Maggie smiled to herself - if only Paul and Linda knew what was in store for them. It was hard not to say anything, especially because she knew how much Jane loved Paul, and because Maggie herself had developed a friendship with Jane. She didn't want to see Jane get hurt, though she knew that was inevitable and not one bit Linda's fault, since Jane wanted a career – and Paul wanted to sleep with lots of women. Maggie also knew how perfect for each other Paul and Linda were, and how devoted Paul would be to her. Plus, after first meeting Linda back in the 1966 American tour,

Maggie couldn't help but like her too! She was a fellow American and she had good taste in men (Jim Morrison and Mick Jagger, plus she used to fancy John!).

Maggie had enjoyed herself at Brian's dinner party, even if the Beatles hadn't. Those kinds of events were work for them. Poor Paul never even got the chance to eat – every time he'd tried to get to the buffet table, another reporter cornered him. George had left early after a journalist had said something that had offended him. Maggie didn't catch what, but she had no doubt he'd tell her about it later. She and George were still as close as ever, though he had changed a bit since he'd come back from his trip to India. She'd expected it, of course, and even dreaded it a bit, having never understood his fixation with Indian spirituality.

George really had grown up since she'd first met him in 1964. He'd started asserting himself more – it was he that put a stop to the touring, though it hadn't taken much to get the others to agree that they were done too. George had also become more contentious towards Paul. She knew how that turned out. Paul's perfectionism and George's frustration with being treated like a second-tier Beatle would drive a huge, bitter wedge between them that would last for years. Though Maggie had known all this, she'd never really expected to see herself in the middle of it. Because of the closeness she and George shared, he expected her to take his side. She'd never been the best of friends with Paul and she really did think that George deserved more respect for his musical contributions to the group, but she wasn't a Beatle and she didn't want to be in the position she was. She wanted to keep peace, wanted the Beatles to last past 1970 and to not go through a period of hating each other. She smoothed things over when and where she could and

hoped for the best. Balancing her loyalties with George and John, in addition to her vow to not take sides, was difficult.

Leaning against the bar, Maggie half-listened to a conversation that John was having with a few of their close friends. Everyone seemed to be having a good time; much better than the time that they'd had at Brian's dinner party. Since the Beatles hadn't really gotten to enjoy themselves at Brian's, Maggie had proposed they throw their own party here in one of the big studios at EMI and invite all their friends. EMI had been a stuffy place when the Beatles had started recording there – but they were so big now that the studio gave them free reign. They'd had a few parties there during the making of Sgt Pepper, most notably to record the orchestra for A Day in the Life. She'd really enjoyed running around the studio with the Stones, Pattie and Marianne Faithful, Mal and Neil, making noise and singing. Watching classical musicians in tuxedos wear clown noses and gorilla foreheads and creating cacophonous noise…being a part of Sgt Pepper, that was something special.

Maggie was so proud and happy to have been able to witness the birth of such a monumental achievement. Sgt Pepper was done and it was being released into history. It was brilliant – there were changes from the album she'd known, but they were subtle. The album truly was Sgt Pepper, which brought her a huge sense of relief. Maggie had worried that her intervention and attitude towards drug use might rob posterity of this revolutionary album. She knew she'd curtailed John's consumption of drugs, though she doubted very much she had stopped it entirely.

George had called her one night in late March to say that John, suddenly fallen ill, had gone home with Paul and wouldn't be home in the morning. He'd protested a little

too strongly when she'd offered to go fetch John herself. Maggie had hung up the phone slowly, concerned that John was really with a woman – she knew well that the Beatles would always cover for him, even as much as they adored her. Their first loyalty was to John and their "Boys Club". Then she'd remembered that during the recording sessions for Sgt Pepper, John had accidentally taken some acid instead of an upper and had to be taken to Paul's for safekeeping. That was the night Paul had finally taken acid with John, his first time. As much as she didn't approve, she knew that it had been a powerful bonding experience for the two of them. Anything that could strengthen the bond between them was not something she could frown too heavily upon. She still had hopes that their relationship in future years wouldn't be as sour as it she had known it to be.

John had come home the next morning full of apologies and professions of faithfulness, but the fight he'd been expecting hadn't happened. Maggie had merely kissed him and given him a knowing look, which made him crack. "Dammit, woman," he'd cried. "You know something. You must. I expected to catch hell for not coming home last night."

She had promised herself she wouldn't let on how much she knew, but she couldn't resist. "Oh, I would never question the Emperor of Eternity. I'm sure he can be trusted," she'd snickered despite herself.

He'd stared at her for a minute, wondering if she'd actually been there last night watching he and Paul trip on acid together. The obvious answer had finally dawned on him. "Damned biographers," he grumbled. "Am I to have no more secrets, then?"

“None, whatsoever!” She put her arms around his waist.

“You’re not angry?” he asked tentatively, brushing her hair back from her eyes. He knew how she felt about drugs.

“I’m not your mother – or your jailer.” She shrugged. “You’re a grown man, John. And a Beatle. I know better than anyone how big a part drugs have played with you and the others. I know I can’t keep you from them completely – I just don’t want you to become addicted and unable to stop. You caused Cyn a lot of pain once; only this time it’ll be me who suffers when you withdraw from everything and everyone. Me and Paul, actually,” she corrected herself.

He hugged her back and rested his chin on her head. “It was an accident this time. I’m sorry. It won’t happen again, luv.”

“You can’t say that - I know that you enjoy the whole LSD trip thing. But I appreciate the sentiment,” she sighed. “It’s just… I don’t care if songs like “Cold Turkey” never get written – I just don’t want to lose you to drugs.”

“Cold Turkey? That sounds like a grim sort of song, doesn’t it?”

“Unfortunately, it’s also a pretty good one.”

“I mean it, luv. And…” he hesitated before adding, “I wanted to be sure you knew that I really was with Paul. I swear there were no women. We were alone.” He looked at her; anxious that she knew he hadn’t slipped and cheated on her.

Maggie knew what a struggle addiction, to both drugs and women, would be for this man. At the same time, there was

no point in replacing Yoko, only to be just as big of a controlling force in John's life. He was the sort who did need someone with common sense to pull him to the ground – but she didn't want to be a rock tied to his ankle either. She loved him for so earnestly trying to reassure her, for wanting her to know that he wanted to do right by her. It made her warm inside to know that he thought her worth fighting his inner nature for. She smiled up at him, and wanting to lighten the mood, waggled her eyebrows at him. "Alone with Paul, no chaperone, the two of you staring into each other's eyes? I hope he didn't take advantage of you in the state you were in. Unless you're into that?" It was an old joke.

John grabbed her and pressed her up against the wall, his body warm and hard against hers. He moved his face, so they were nose to nose, eyeball to eyeball, and batted his eyelashes at her. He was so close they tickled. "I've already told you, I've had him; he's no good! Besides, luv, if anyone can take my mind off of our Paulie's long girlish eyelashes, I'm sure it's you." His calloused fingers caressed her skin, and he kissed her deeply, making her forget everything else. Her head was always so full of thoughts and worries – but John always knew how to unburden her of all those things. When she was alone with him, she knew she was in the right place and time.

How could she feel otherwise, when being here allowed her to witness music history up close? These pleasant thoughts brought her mind back to the present. Here she was, on the eve of Sgt Pepper's release, John's arm casually draped over her shoulder, the two of them enjoying the Beatles' private party. No uninvited guests, no work, just pleasure. Music played through the speakers, both Sgt Pepper, as well as other favorite current songs. A large spread of food covered a decorated table, and she was sure the inevitable

party drugs were being circulated. Also present were the stars of the show - the brightly colored satin band uniforms Maggie had set up as decoration. And, of course, the Beatles themselves.

Maggie allowed herself to really relax into the moment. She smiled contentedly to herself, sneaking a look at the ruby engagement ring now worn on her left hand, and then up at John. Yes, life was good. Maggie gazed around, watching everyone around her having fun, dancing and laughing. Here she knew her worries could be safely put away for the rest of the night. What could go wrong? In such a happy moment, she could truly believe that everything was going to be just fine.

Chapter Two

Maggie set her glass down on the table with a clink of melting ice cubes and checked her watch. She'd been chatting with Peter Brown about Apple Corps for nearly 45 minutes! After the first five of those minutes, John's eyes had glazed over. "This is a party, luv – stop talking business," he'd scolded her. She knew he wasn't really upset with her, as there was a wink behind his scowl. With a kiss, he'd left her to Peter, seeking out a conversation more his speed. Maggie wouldn't have been surprised if he were planning on sneaking a few puffs off someone's joint either. She didn't even care, especially since this was a party. She'd had to come to a sort of peace about recreational drugs. She tried never to publicly criticize or nag John about using them and John's friends had accepted that she wasn't really into them herself. John was more likely to keep things at a minimum when she didn't push the issue or make him feel like she was controlling him.

Despite feeling a little guilty about talking business at a party, she'd allowed the conversation to continue - for her, talking about the Beatles was fun, not work at all! She couldn't believe it was her job to do nothing but deal with the Beatles all day long. Plus, Peter was a lovely man, and

she enjoyed his company immensely. He was capable and he had Brian's and the Beatles' approval. As soon as she was able, she'd moved him up in Apple to be her second in command. She felt just a teeny bit guilty, as once upon another time, he'd been the one in charge of Apple. But Apple was hers now, and she had no intention of relinquishing it. Peter had, as she'd known he would, proven his worth to her and was already starting to take things off her plate. The reduced workload was a relief to John as well as Maggie. Moreover, Maggie enjoyed working with Peter, and it made her feel like she might be able to pull off this whole crazy venture. Still, this was a party, and she knew they could probably talk all night if she allowed it.

Peter saw her glance at her watch. "I suppose it's getting late and I should let you mingle," he said with a smile.

She smiled back and him. "I should probably go find John so I can chase the girls away from him!"

"Too right," he laughed. "I'd better go find Brian – he was in a mood earlier and I want to make sure he's all right."

Maggie frowned at that. She'd been watching Brian closely – but she always worried that it wouldn't be close enough. She'd debated taking Peter into her confidence about where she was from – really from - and what she knew, but she wasn't sure how to approach telling him the truth without him thinking she was a nutter. Still, if Brian's life was on the line…

Maggie stopped herself from that train of thought abruptly. No, this was a party. No worrying tonight. She gave Peter a quick hug and sent him on his way.

Now, where was John? Too bad he wasn't wearing his Pepper coat – its bright green color would make him easy to find in the crowd. Not that what he was wearing was bland. These days, the Beatles favored brightly colored clothes in clashing colors and patterns. Seeing them show up to the studio each day in increasingly outlandish attire made Maggie Sue smile. She'd always been a jeans and t-shirts kind of girl (and frankly, couldn't afford better when she was in grad school) and where she'd come from, men definitely didn't dress in Carnaby Street fashion!

Threading her way through the crowd wasn't easy. An elbow jabbed her sharply in the upper arm. She turned around to glare at the offender and, not watching where she was going, ended up smacking right into Paul.

He grabbed her shoulders to steady her, his eyes crinkling into a smile when he recognized her. She looked up at him in surprise and instantly noticed his expression. Paul was smiling? At her? That was suspicious. She and Paul had never been close, though they got on much better now than they once had. Still, that particular smile of Paul's meant he wanted something. Maggie gave him a skeptical look, which made him laugh. He wrapped his arm around her shoulders and escorted her through the crowd until they found a quiet and less crowded spot so that they could talk.

"What do you want, Paul?" Maggie asked suspiciously, though she couldn't quite hide her smile. This was, after all, the real Paul McCartney standing in front of her, still sporting his Sgt Pepper mustache. Though he wasn't John, she had a tremendous respect for his musical talents.

"Want? Why do you think I want anything?" he said disingenuously.

She rolled her eyes, “Oh, come off it, Paul.”

“Fine,” he said, sighing and dropping the act. “I was wondering if you might be willing to tell me where your American friend Linda is staying while she’s in town?”

Maggie let out a little squeal, despite herself. She clapped her hand over her mouth, but it was too late.

Paul looked at her in surprise. This was not the reaction he’d expected.

“You want Linda’s number?!” Maggie asked, unable to completely hide her eagerness. “Are you going to try to get together with her? Take her for a drink, or, you know…” she waggled her eyebrows in her best John imitation. Maggie watched Paul back up a step. Oops. Well, she did have a tendency to get a little overzealous when it came to these boys.

“Uh…” Paul was unsure what the right answer was. Was Maggie pushing him at Linda, or was it some sort of trap because he’d asked for another woman’s number while he was still pre-engaged to someone else? Someone Maggie was friends with, no less.

“Isn’t Linda here?” Maggie swiveled around, scanning the crowd for her friend.

“Well…” Paul managed. He’d seen Linda earlier briefly, but was trying to play it cool. They’d spent a while chatting at Brian’s party the other night and had hit it off, but he didn’t want Linda to think he was trying too hard. Plus, he was, for all intents and purposes, engaged. They hadn’t made it official yet, but it was clearly where they were heading. Then again, while he and Jane weren’t unhappy,

they also wanted very different things and Paul was starting to think their relationship might have an expiration date on it. Plus, there were so many birds out there, why tie yourself down to one? Being in a serious relationship made him chafe for his freedom. He saw how John had been affected once he had tied himself down to Maggie Sue – hell, John had thrown a whiskey glass or two at him because of it - and Paul wanted no part of that. He thought this Linda might be the distraction he needed from his relationship problems.

"There she is!" Before Paul could react, Maggie had grabbed his arm and was towing him after her through the crowd.

"Maggie, I don't think…" But it was too late. He had to follow or be dragged - and being dragged was just plain undignified. Suddenly, he found himself being shoved into Linda; she would have been knocked over if he hadn't grabbed onto her.

"Oh, sorry, Linda, I didn't see you there!" Maggie chirped cheerfully at her friend. "You remember Paul, right?"

Linda, still in Paul's arms, looked over at Maggie in confusion, and then up at Paul. She blushed. Of course she knew who he was. He was the cute Beatle she'd spent the night talking to at Brian's party. The cute semi-engaged Beatle. But semi-engaged wasn't married…

"Sorry, about that, Lin," Paul said, apologetic. "I didn't mean to bump into you. Someone wasn't watching where they were going." He looked pointedly at Maggie, who was grinning like an idiot, clapping her hands together like one of those motorized monkey toys, and bouncing on her heels. What was she up to? Despite his confusion, Paul

took his time letting go of Linda, enjoying the feel of her slender form in his arms.

“Linda, Paul’s offered to drop you home tonight - I know I promised, but…” she trailed off, trying not to sound too evasive. She knew these two would eventually get together but she couldn’t help but give them a slight nudge in the right direction.

“I did?” Paul looked confused. “Oh, right, I did,” he managed to finish more suavely than he started, as he caught on to what Maggie was trying to do. He gave Linda a big smile, and she blushed again. Paul turned back to Maggie to give her the signal to get lost so he could hit on Linda, but she’d already disappeared. Shrugging, Paul turned back to Linda, glad he could focus on dazzling her with the famous McCartney charm without an audience.

Maggie giggled to herself as she ducked back into the crowd. Things were falling into place; Paul and Linda would fall in love, and all would be right with the world. Maggie knew Jane would be better off, though it would be hard on her at first. Maybe she would have a word with Paul about breaking it off with Jane like a gentleman. Her coming home to find him in bed with someone else was so tacky. Or maybe she could get Jane to break it off with Paul herself? Maggie made a mental note to call Jane (who was off shooting a movie) in the next day or so to feel the situation out.

“Hey luv, can I buy you a drink?” It was George, looking relaxed for a change.

“You certainly can, if you can tell me where John is.”

“Oh, he’s over at the bar. You know him, three drinks and he’s anyone’s. Or was that Paul?” George pondered for a minute.

“It’s both of them, and that’s what I’m afraid of!”

George chuckled, “I don’t think you really have to worry about John. I’ve never seen someone so head over heels.” He shook his head sadly, “All this monogamy is ruining his reputation as a Beatle!”

“I suppose you are making up for him?”

“Well, someone has to! You know, if you ever fancy a shag Miss Margaret, I could show you who’s a real Beatle…” he waggled his eyebrows at her suggestively, knowing that Maggie would never really accept that kind of invitation from him - or anyone not named “John Lennon” for that matter.

Maggie rolled her eyes at him. “You’re terrible.”

“I am. I really am.” George laughed at her. “I’m also drunk.”

“Really? I couldn’t tell,” she shot back with a sarcastic grin. She loved him dearly even if he was incorrigible. Maggie and George continued their companionable walk towards the bar.

Promising that he’d wrangle fresh drinks for them both, George left her briefly. The bar was packed with people, but she was sure he’d have no problem getting a bartender’s attention. Being a Beatle had its advantages she supposed. Through the throng of people, she could just

make out John standing at the other end of the bar. She smiled to herself at the sight of him.

George slipped back to her through the crowd, handing her a drink. Thanking him, she took a sip of it and gazed around, mentally trying to chart the best way through the crowd to John. “Let’s have lunch sometime this week,” George said seriously, having given up their old inside joke of him hitting on her. “I want to talk to you about maybe going to India in the fall…”

Maggie barely controlled her wince. She had known this would come up sooner or later, but she had hoped to stave it off for a little while longer. “Oh, I don’t know George. I mean, yes, of course we can have lunch, but I’m not sure about India,” she protested.

“What do you have against India?”

“Nothing, but it’s very hot and the poverty there is so rampant – I’d feel guilty and sad the entire time. Plus you know poor Ringo can’t eat the food there.”

“He can bring a suitcase of beans, he’ll be fine. You’re just making lame excuses – what is it really?” George was slightly exasperated. Of all people, he thought Maggie would get why India excited him so much. She was always the one that got him even when the others didn’t. But every time he brought up India, she changed the subject.

“It’s just…” Maggie didn’t know how to explain her issues with the whole crazy religious aspect of the Maharishi and meditation, how the whole thing smacked to her of a cult. She was a scientist and she simply didn’t believe in…

Maggie lost her train of thought when out of the corner of her eye she spotted a small, dark shadow flitting across the room. She frowned, trying to get her thoughts back in order.

“It’s not…” she began again, George looking at her expectantly. Just then, the dark shadow burst out of the crowd at the end of the bar, making a beeline straight for John. Suddenly Maggie recognized the shadow. Maggie’s vision tunneled and the drink slipped from her hand. It shattered on the floor, and despite the din of the party, sounded like a crash of ominous thunder in her ears.

Yoko.

Chapter Three

Maggie shut her eyes for a second. She had to be imagining things. There was no way Yoko could be here, at The Beatle's private Sgt Pepper party. She opened her eyes again and saw George staring at her with concern. Disoriented, Maggie scanned the room frantically. Where was John? He was still standing in the same place at the end of the bar, but now he was talking to a short Asian woman with a ratted cloud of dark hair. Maggie's vision tunneled.

"Yoko!" she cursed inwardly. It was the future trying to reassert itself. Well, she was damned if she was going to let that harpy get her hooks on her fiancé and break up her favorite band.

"Are you okay?" George was still looking at her with concern.

"I'm fine," Maggie said grimly. "Can you get someone to clean up this drink for me?" George nodded and gaped as he watched her march away into the crowd.

Maggie had to push and elbow, but by God she was going to get to John. No, she was going to get to Yoko and pull

her hair out. She was so focused that she didn't even notice she was being purposefully blocked. Frustrated, she glared up at whomever it was that impeding her progress.

"Hey sweetheart, what's your rush?"

Maggie groaned. "Mick, hi, gotta go, don't have time to play." Maggie was desperate to get past him. Trying to slide past and around him was useless, as Mick shadowed her, step for step.

"Oh, come on, luv, when are you going to dump that wanker? You know, baby, I'm here for you when you finally do. The Beatles are a shite band. They'll never amount to anything."

Maggie looked up, exasperated to see Mick Jagger grinning at her, clearly enjoying her discomfort. He liked to hit on her whenever they were at parties. It was a game they played every time they saw each other – Maggie wasn't unflattered by the attention, and Mick knew she'd never take the bait. However, they both knew that if Maggie ever indicated that she was interested, Mick would happily follow through with his offers.

Right now, Maggie didn't have the time or patience for any of this, and the longer she stood here and tried to get away from Mick, the harder it would be. Force wasn't going to cut it, nor would sheer honesty about where she was heading and why. Creativity was needed.

Maggie stepped close to Mick. His eyes lit up as she put a seductive smile on her lips. She reached up, and brushing aside his hair, whispered in his ear. "You're right Mick, I can't resist you any longer. Meet me in the Ladies Room in five minutes and you can teach me the difference between a

Stone and a Beatle." He raised an eyebrow at that. She raised one back and gestured towards the Ladies Room with her head. A smile on her lips, she mouthed, "I'll be right there."

Mick wasn't sure if she was kidding or not, but he had decided it wouldn't hurt to find out, in case she wasn't. Women could never resist him for long, after all. He knew Maggie would cave eventually. They all did.

Her smile faded the second he ambled off. She was too annoyed to feel very bad about sending him off like that, besides which, she was sure he'd find someone to screw in the bathroom without too much effort.

Pushing past the last few people between her and her goal, Maggie couldn't help but feel a mixture of both anger and fear clutch her heart. There in front of her were John and Yoko, deep in conversation. Yoko was practically attached to him like a barnacle. Damn, that woman was fast!

Bursting through the crowd, Maggie threw herself on John, wrapped her arms around his neck, and kissed him deeply. She was more than sure she was making a spectacle of herself but she didn't care. Her action forced Yoko to take a step back and that was all that mattered. *Take that, bitch!* she thought to herself. *He's mine, back off!*

John grinned delightedly at her when they were finally forced to come up for air. "What was that for, luv? Not that I mind!"

"I just missed you, is all," Maggie played with his hair, flirting her hardest and willing the woman next to him to get the message that she wasn't welcome. She knew she

was being rude, but she was desperate to scare this woman away.

“Do you want to get out of here?” she said, whispering suggestively into a man’s ear for the second time in five minutes, but this time very much meaning it.

“You worked so hard on making this party happen, I wouldn’t want to make you leave early, luv!” For a man who seemed to want sex constantly, he was being remarkably thick right now. Then John lowered his voice, so only she could hear. “Though if you want, we could always sneak into the loo…” He waggled his eyebrows at her.

And suddenly the John she knew was back. Unfortunately, Maggie knew Mick was presently waiting for her in the bathroom. Maggie would have to think of another way to get John away from Yoko.

“Who’s your friend, John?” Maggie asked casually, as if she didn’t know full well who Yoko was.

“Oh, this is Yoko Ono – she’s an artist!”

“Oh?” Maggie smiled sweetly at Yoko, while shooting darts with her eyes.

“I met her this afternoon…”

“This afternoon?” Maggie couldn’t help interrupting. “I thought you were at Paul’s.” Realizing her voice was sharp, she checked herself, forcing a smile onto her lips. She realized that she could easily cross the line and start sounding like a jealous shrew. She needed to be careful.

The last thing she needed was to drive John into Yoko's arms by acting possessive and bitchy.

"Oh, I was, but I stopped by the Indica on my way home. I wanted to take another look to see if I liked anything they had for that blank wall in our bedroom. And there was Yoko, setting up for her own exhibit!" John seemed proud at his own initiative. "Yoko talked me out of the piece I was looking at – she has all kinds of ideas for other things we could do in the bedroom instead of an old-fashioned painting."

I'll just bet, Maggie thought to herself. Yoko has an exhibit? She was supposed to have been there last November, not now. Was this yet another ramification of her time-travel? The ripples were endless it seemed.

"I have lots of ideas for the bedroom myself," she said, smiling up at John, trying not to clench her teeth too hard. "But we can talk about it later."

"Of course, luv. You should've seen all the great stuff Yoko has displayed!" John chattered on about climbing a ladder and hammering invisible nails, but Maggie had stopped listening and was working on killing Yoko with her brain. Yoko, showing no signs of dropping dead, looked back at her boldly. Maggie tuned back in just in time to hear John say, "….was telling her all about the new album - can you believe she didn't know who the Beatles were? Fancy that! And so I invited her to drop by the party if she wanted. And here she is! Maybe she can drop by the house next week to take a look at that space in the bedroom!" John beamed down at both of them, completely unaware of the silent battle that was taking place.

Yoko smiled passively up at him causing Maggie to renew her efforts at mentally trying to get Yoko to drop dead. John seemed as oblivious to Yoko's attempts to ensnare him with her wiles and as he was to Maggie's tighter-than-normal grip on his arm.

Maggie knew she had a big problem on her hands.

Chapter Three

A few days later…

"So what do you think, Mags, do I keep the mustache or not?"

Maggie and George were both seated cross-legged on the floor of George's music room, guitars resting in their laps.

Maggie stopped strumming her guitar, as she contemplated George's question. "I don't know, I kind of like it on you." She giggled, "I'm not sure about Paul's though." George laughed at that. Of course, he enjoyed any dig at Paul these days.

"Whose idea was the whole mustache thing anyway?"

"Paul's," George replied. "He said it would be like taking a vacation from ourselves."

Maggie suddenly flashed back mentally to her own time. Did George just inadvertently quote a Seinfeld episode? There would be another George on Seinfeld someday, she remembered. She missed the TV shows she had grown up with, though she looked forward to experiencing them again someday.

“Paul also has that scar on his lip from the moped accident he had, and the mustache was to cover that up. So vain.” George shook his head in mock disapproval.

“All of you Beatles are vain,” Maggie challenged him, though it was with a smile. “You and your fancy clothes and your hair having to be just so.” She reached over and ruffled his hair up. It had grown quite long lately. George tried in vain to smooth it again before looking her up and down.

“And there’s you in your sad, plain jeans. And quite shocking I might add. A proper lady would wear a skirt,” he threw back at her.

“What? They’re comfortable!” Maggie stated, looking down at her attire in protest. “And no one ever said I was a proper lady.”

“Isn’t that the truth,” George snorted. “Besides, you wear too much black. You need more color!”

“It’s slimming!” she protested. “You know, just because I don’t dress like a circus clown in plaid pants and striped tops like you guys do…” She stuck her tongue out at George. *Plus*, she thought, *I don’t wear as much black as some people. Stupid Yoko*. Maggie cursed silently again. “Let’s change the subject. What songs are you working on right now?”

“Let’s change the subject again,” George groaned. “I dunno, I’m so uninspired these days. Yet Lennon/McCartney keep pumping out the hits. They’re unstoppable. They probably have our whole next album done already. We’re starting on it right away, you know. Paul has some daft idea about a bus tour movie, and now

there's talk of a cartoon. They're sending people into the studio to observe us, even." He sounded bitter. Running his fingers over the fretboard of his acoustic guitar, he plucked out a melody that was very nearly "While My Guitar Gently Weeps". Maggie remembered when he'd played an early version of the song for her last year. It seemed he was still working on it. She knew it would be finished in its own time and it would be wonderful.

"Don't stress about it. The music will come when it's ready." Maggie smiled encouragingly.

Maggie knew the next album would be Magical Mystery Tour, and George had only really had one song on it, and it wasn't one of her favorites, though it wasn't bad. Yes, she loved the album, but the movie had indeed been terrible. Maybe with a scriptwriter and a director the movie could be salvaged. She was pretty sure she could talk Paul into listening to her – Paul knew she had Linda's ear, and he was still wanting to make a good impression her.

Maggie smiled inwardly. She was so gratified that Paul and Linda's feelings seemed mutual. Linda had flown home to New York not too long ago and Maggie knew that she and Paul were already missing each other. Maggie hadn't seen much of Linda after the party; she'd spent nearly every minute with him. He'd had even taken her to the airport, so Maggie hadn't really gotten to say a proper goodbye.

It was because of this that Linda had called Maggie once she'd gotten home, full of apologies.

"I'm a terrible friend! I'm so sorry I blew you off for a guy."

Maggie had to try and keep from laughing. “Yeah, but it wasn’t for just a guy, it was for a Beatle!”

“I’m a terrible friend!” Linda protested.

“No, it’s fine, Lin, don’t worry about it. You and Paul make a great couple, I was happy that you two hit it off.”

“Maggie, he’s engaged. To your friend, or did you forget that? Oh my God, I slept with an engaged man. I’m a terrible person.”

“Paul’s not engaged yet, Linda. And you’re not a terrible person. It’s pretty hard to resist those Beatles. I came close to sleeping with John when he was MARRIED, if it makes you feel any better,” Maggie confided.

“But you didn’t.”

“Well, no, but married is way worse than semi-engaged or whatever Paul is…”

“No, but you didn’t actually sleep with him, did you? Wait a sec; you fooled around with John when he was married? I thought you didn’t meet John until after he was divorced.”

Oops. Maggie kicked herself mentally. Slips were inevitable. Fortunately, this one was with Linda. How much should she tell Linda? Linda was a close enough friend that Maggie wanted to tell her the truth, but maybe over the phone wasn’t the best idea. Perhaps part of the truth would work.

“Actually, John and I met once before, in ‘64. We were at the same party, and we spent the evening talking. We were

very attracted to each other, and ended up kissing, but ultimately, I just couldn't go through with it. I couldn't do that to Cynthia. John put that poor woman through enough." It was the truth, even if not the whole truth.

"I never knew that!" Linda exclaimed.

"No one does! Well, Paul does, because he was at the party and saw us, but no one else. It's not really a story we wanted to share with reporters, besides which, John was with a lot of girls when he was with Cynthia. It's not like I was special."

Except, as it turned out, she had been. Maggie smiled, happy and amazed that that man was hers now. Unless Yoko had her way. Her smile instantly turned into a frown.

"But you obviously were special."

"Still, after the party, that was it, really. He was married, and I…well, I didn't belong in his circle. I'm still not sure I actually do, to be honest. I didn't see him again for two years." Well, it had been two years for John. Only 24 hours had passed for Maggie, and she'd missed him for every one of those hours. Especially since she thought he was dead. Due in part to Yoko!

"Not until that day at EMI, when you got lost looking for the bathroom and he helped you." Linda recounted the official version of the story John and Maggie told about how they had met. "Did he remember you from that party?"

Not only had John remembered her, he'd written a song about the red dress she had worn, along with a slew of other famous songs about being lonely, unhappy, and in love.

“He did – I couldn’t believe it – with the amount of women the Beatles go through, to remember one he’d kissed two years ago was really something.” Of course, there was more to it than that – they’d shared a lot more than just a kiss. It had, after all, been John’s picture that had drawn her back through time, and practically thrown her right into his arms. Maggie supposed their experience together in 1964, though brief, had been very much been memorable, and not just because of the amazing (if illicit) kiss they’d shared.

“Some people are just meant to be together,” Linda sighed romantically.

Maggie thought of John and Yoko and hoped that wasn’t always true. Though she just knew it was true for Paul and Linda.

“That’s right – and maybe you and Paul are two of them.” Maggie teased.

“But he’s practically engaged,” Linda groaned again.

“I love Jane, but she and Paul want completely different things. They’re going to break up eventually. It’s inevitable. Did I ever tell you about the dinner party we were at where Paul wanted the window open and Jane wanted it closed? One of them would open it, and then the other would get up and close it, but neither of them said a word about the window the whole night! Trust me, that sort of passive aggression is not a recipe for a sound marriage. ”

“Wow, no, that doesn’t sound very promising, does it? But I’m an ocean away, he’ll find someone else, even if he does become single again.” Linda moaned.

“First off, Lin, don’t pine for him and don’t try to pin him down. Play it cool. Make him come to you. I know he will.” Maggie knew that Linda’s bullheaded ways were what Paul would see to set her apart from the other girls. All these boys were looking for at heart was a woman that wouldn’t treat them like a Beatle, and instead treat them like a man. History had once proved that if Linda made Paul chase her, she would get him in no time. “Didn’t you two spend every second of the last few days together?”

“Yes,” Linda sighed.

“Well then, don’t give up hope! You’re the one for him, I just know it!”

“Just like you’re the one for John, right?” Linda quipped.

“Right,” Maggie said quietly, hoping it was still true.

She and Linda had hung up, with promises to talk again soon. Maggie had wanted to confide her fears about Yoko to Linda, but she hadn’t been able to vocalize them – not in a way that would hide the full extent of what Maggie knew.

Maggie felt more alone than she had in a long while. Who could she talk to? How much did she dare say to John? He was her soul mate, she knew that, and she knew she could trust him, but how would he react to learning that once upon a time, it had been Yoko who was his soul mate? Would he be angry that she had taken that away from him? After all, Maggie didn’t share his love of the avant-garde. Yoko did. Maggie could never be for him what Yoko was. Of course, Maggie was a whole lot of things Yoko wasn’t, but she didn’t know if John could or would appreciate that, not having any idea that at one time, his future had been completely dominated by this other woman.

Not long after, George had called her to come by for lunch and guitar, and she'd gladly accepted his offer. She'd wanted to glue herself to John after the party, for fear that John would meet up with Yoko again, but sadly, she'd decided that she couldn't baby-sit him for the rest of their lives together. If she was going to win John away from Yoko, it had to be John making a real choice for her. Besides, if he really wanted Yoko, he'd find a way to sneak out to see her. Maggie didn't want to force John to resort to that kind of subterfuge. Nor did she want to issue any ultimatums about Yoko – usually the people that issued them were the ones that lost in the end.

Before leaving for George's, she and John had had a most satisfactory interlude on the floor of the kitchen, not something they'd done before, as it was a very cold, hard, Mexican ceramic tile. If John had any intention of going out to see Yoko while she was with George, Maggie wanted him too tired to do anything more than talk.

George and Maggie had had a nice lunch, and then strummed their guitars, playing their favorite contemporary (non-Beatle) songs, chatting as they did so. She felt so comfortable with George, yet she still could not get herself to bring up her fears about Yoko.

Finally George called her on it. "What's wrong, Mags? You seem down."

Maggie was silent.

"You know you can tell me anything," he prompted.

"I don't know how to tell you this."

He looked worried. “Start at the beginning.”

Maggie had sworn she was not going to bring George into this. No one needed to get mixed up in the mess that she felt brewing in her head. No. Maggie just needed to play it calm and see what happened. After all, John and Yoko had just met. John wasn’t going to give Maggie up for a woman he had met at an art gallery. Maggie and he had overcome too much for that. Everything was going to be okay and in no way, shape or form, would she get anyone else involved in a drama that might not even happen.

“John’s met a woman,” she blurted out. So much for her resolve.

George stared at her for a moment before breaking out into a smile. “Is that all?” George laughed in relief. “John meets lots of women. We all do. But trust me, he doesn’t want any of them but you.”

Maggie was silent again. Then she said, quietly, “What if I told you that this woman was his wife – his soul mate - in my original timeline?”

“His wife?” George looked thoughtful for a moment, and then a cloud moved over his face. “Is this the wife that talked John out of wearing a bullet proof vest on December 8, 1980? The woman who is responsible for John’s murder?” He voice had risen and he was nearly shouting.

“Well, technically, she didn’t murder him. That freak whose name I won’t repeat was the one holding the gun. And in the initial timeline, neither of them knew he was going to be shot. But yes, after I…well… interfered, she was the one who talked him out of wearing the bulletproof vest. But now that I’ve come back to stay, we don’t know

what will happen anymore, do we? She's innocent. Of that, anyway."

"Who is this woman exactly?"

Maggie sighed and backed up. "Her name is Yoko Ono. She's a Japanese performance artist. In my original timeline, she and John fell in love, and John left Cynthia rather publicly for Yoko. She and John married and…" Here, Maggie paused before throwing caution to the wind and just telling George everything. "John brought Yoko into the studio, and she stayed glued to his side for your last several albums. Lots of people blame her for breaking up the Beatles. Clearly, you guys have and will have lots of other issues, but she was a very divisive force. It's why I've been so careful to not be that, especially in the studio. I try so hard to respect the boundaries. I love that you guys accept me the way you do. I'm… honored. But I don't want to be Yoko. I don't want to come between you." The tears were starting to come, making it difficult to talk.

George put his guitar down and moved next to Maggie. He put his arm around her and hugged her until she was ready to continue.

"None of you liked Yoko, in fact, hate would be putting it mildly towards the end there. After the Beatles ended, she and John did lots of controversial artistic and political things, made some crappy music together, and then had a son, which really isn't so bad, except that she tried to come between their son and Julian! And worse, she came between Julian and John."

Maggie sniffed and it took a second for her to be able to continue. "After John's death, she exploited his image and his art and was mercenary about everything to do with

John. Of course, I'm more than slightly biased in all this," she said bitterly. "What if she and John are meant to be together? What happens to me? What happens to John on December 8th? And if John does stay with me, will poor Sean never be born? Oh George," she cried. "I'm so lost and I don't know what to do. I was hoping that John and Yoko would never meet, but he's just met her, and he's intrigued by her crappy, crappy artwork. He's this close to bringing home a piece of it for our bedroom. Which I don't want her anywhere near, by the way."

The tears rolled down her face, which she tried to hide by burying her head in her hands.

"He loves you," George said stubbornly. "The man drank himself unconscious on tour so he could remain faithful to you. He didn't slip it to even one groupie. And believe me," George said with a bitter laugh, "I wished he would have, he was so unbearable to be around! He wouldn't do that for just anyone, you know. I don't care what happened in another timeline. You are the one who is here now, and besides which, we know how much you care for John, and that you would do anything to save him come 1980. You are the one we want for John."

George tried to get Maggie to meet his eyes. "It's going to be okay. He's not going to fall in love with Yoko. She sounds horrible."

Maggie smiled weakly at him. "You won't like her. She steals your biscuits."

"That bitch!"

George was gratified that Maggie stopped crying long enough to laugh at his joke before she started crying again.

He didn't know what else to do but let her cry. It wasn't his favorite shirt anyway, so he didn't mind it getting wet with tears. George thought Maggie might be over reacting a bit too - John would never throw Maggie over for this biscuit-stealing artist. John loved Maggie. Even if John hooked up with this Yoko, it didn't mean he would marry her. Pattie was George's muse, and though you couldn't call him faithful, she was the only one he could picture himself married to. It was just the way it would always be. Pattie and George, John and Maggie, and John, Paul, George, and Ringo. Whether he liked it or not, he knew his name would always be tied to that of his fellow Beatles. It was just the way it was. Some people were destined for each other.

Maggie appreciated George's sympathy, though she knew he thought she was overreacting. Well, maybe she was. But deep in the pit of her stomach, an uneasy feeling remained, and Maggie wasn't sure anything short of Yoko disappearing for good could make it go away.

Chapter Five

Previously. Sometime in May 1967

"Boys, I have the most fantastic news to report!" Brian Epstein swept into the studio. He was an infrequent visitor, so everyone stopped what they were doing, curious to hear his announcement.

Brian looked around, trying to build the drama, before finally saying, "Boys, you have been selected to represent England on a television program which, for the first time ever, will be transmitted live around the world via satellite!"

He was met with silence - and then the small sounds of everyone turning back to their business. Ringo fingered the rook in his hand, and then as quietly as he could, finished his move in the chess game he was playing against Maggie Sue. George went back to tuning the guitar he was holding, while John and Paul exchanged a look. The Beatles were long past wanting to be told what to do by their manager. Brian had a very different sensibility and adored performing for royalty and just generally being posh - but the Beatles wanted to be performing monkeys no more and just wanted to be left to their own musical devices. Maggie could tell that Paul was too wrapped up in the finishing touches of Sgt Pepper to care much about adding one more

thing to his plate. That meant if Brian wanted a new song, it was John's.

Awkward silence fell back over the studio, broken only by George plinking out tuning harmonics. He knew he'd never be asked for a song for something as important as a live TV broadcast anyway.

"Oh, okay, I'll do something for that," John finally offered. Brian gave a relieved smile. Maggie could tell John could care less about the assignment, but secretly, she was excited. He was about to write "All You Need Is Love" – a song that would be an anthem for the Summer of Love. Or he would if he could summon up the interest.

Poor Brian. He really was losing his grip on the band. It was sad in its own way, as Brian loved these Boys as he loved no one else – and it was worrisome, as Maggie knew his death wasn't far off. She was still unsure of the best way to handle it. Perhaps she ought to call a meeting with the band to see if they could try to be more sensitive to Brian, and to keep a better eye on him. Perhaps Peter could keep an eye on his drug intake. And she should have a conversation with Brian herself. Brian knew she was from the future - maybe she could convince him that he was in danger. She would just have to think about it some more. She had plenty of time to worry about it later.

Several Weeks Later…

John and Maggie Sue were in bed, each absorbed in a book. For all of John's disgust with formal education, he adored reading and Maggie adored that about him. Suddenly Maggie's eyes fell on the wall calendar. She had a Beatles one hung up on her bedside, much to John's chagrin. ("What?" she'd protested, "They're my favorite band!")

"John, how is the song for that television broadcast coming along? Isn't that coming up fairly soon?" Maggie knew that it was to be on June 25th, and that that date was fast approaching. She was also fairly sure John had long since forgotten about it.

"I dunno, when is it again?"

"In a few weeks…June 25th."

"Oh God, is it that close? Well, then, I suppose I'd better write something."

"What are you going to write?" Maggie suppressed her smile, but too late, John caught it.

"You already know what I'm going to write, don't you! If you tell me, it will save me some time, so spill it!"

"John! I can't do that! Besides, I have no idea. You didn't do a live broadcast in my timeline!" she lied unconvincingly.

"You lie! Give it over, Margaret Susan!"

John lunged for her, and she was just a few seconds late in squirming away. John wrestled her down onto the bed, holding both of her wrists with one of his hands, so his other was free to tickle her.

She laughed uncontrollably, as he ran his fingers over her sides, finding her sensitive spots. “Come on now, tell your Uncle Johnny what brilliant song he’s going to write.”

“Okay, okay, I’ll tell you!” she gasped.

He let her go.

“It’s about Swiss cheese and midgets!” she shouted as she leapt off the bed, still laughing. John was still quicker than her and he succeeded in bringing them both crashing to the floor, which was fortunately covered in soft 1960s shag carpeting.

“Well, if you’re not going to tell me what to write, Miss Margaret, then it is your job to inspire me!” John waggled his eyebrows at her while sliding his hand up her thigh.

“John! Stop that!” Maggie said giggling, while squirming under him. “It’s not going to get you anywhere. I’m not going to tell you!”

“Ah, luv, luv, luv – this is what you need. You’re wound too tight!” John replied while nibbling down her neck.

“No, John, I need to sleep. Unlike you I don’t get to show up at work whenever I want,” Maggie protested ineffectually. He really was hard to resist, and she found herself responding to the touch of his hands along her legs and hips, and his kisses, which were now working their way down her collarbone.

“No, what you need is love. From me. Right now.” John said, pausing to look up at her and grin.

“So, you’re saying all I need is love?” Maggie asked innocently, batting her eye lashes at John coquettishly.

“Yes…” John began, squinting his eyes at her as he analyzed her innocent expression. One he’d seen far too often. “Love is all you need.”

“Love is all I need?”

“Love is all you need!” And with that, John attacked her with kisses once again, and Maggie attacked right back.

It turned out that John was right. Love is all you need.

June 25th, 1967

In a moment of insanity, John had decreed that he would be singing the vocals to “All You Need Is Love” live. This was insane because of John’s incredibly poor memory when it came to lyrics. He’d managed to mess up the second verse to Help! on The Ed Sullivan show, and that hadn’t even been his first time forgetting lyrics on TV. With the camera set-up the way it was here, John couldn’t have someone off-camera hold lyrics in front of him. Paul, always trying to one-up John, declared that he would play his bass part live. George simply shrugged knowing that he’d now have to do his solo live as well. Everything else

had been pre-recorded, and after an intensive few weeks, was ready to go for the big day. This was no small feat thanks to all the sonic detail thrown into the song.

John, so confident before, was now very, very nervous. Maggie Sue stood with him, watching him chain smoke cigarette after cigarette. He'd cut down a bit on his smoking, partly in solidarity with George, but when he was under pressure or upset, the old habit came back in full force. All of the Beatles were dressed to the nines in Carnaby Street fashions – and this time Maggie Sue matched them. She would be in the crowd with their other musician friends, wives and girlfriends – and she couldn't go on the BBC as a Beatle fiancé dressed as a 2006 grad student. It would never do. Pattie had taken her out shopping and between her and Mary Quant, Maggie had been dressed appropriately for the occasion. John's only request in regards to her appearance was that her dress be red. Maggie had thought this rather romantic, and when Pattie had heard an abridged version of the story of her original red dress, she'd made sure Mary had a selection of red dresses available for Maggie to shop from.

Maggie smoothed her skirt down. It was shorter than she was used to, and when John had first seen it, it had made him leer delightfully at her. Right now, however, he was otherwise occupied.

"John!" Maggie scolded him. "Put the milk down!" He was swigging straight from a pint bottle.

"You sound like George Martin, luv. Stop nagging!" John looked at her over his granny glasses. "Or at least let me chew some gum if you don't want me to drink the milk."

“The milk’s not good for your voice and you’ll look awful chomping away on stage with the gum!” Maggie protested. She knew she was being unconvincing, as John had seen her put gum in her own mouth not long ago. Maggie resisted the urge to swallow it, hoping John had already forgotten.

“The milk worked well enough for Twist and Shout, didn’t it? And I like chewing gum. Helps the nerves,” John grumbled. “Luv, where’s my lighter? Go find one for me, there’s a good girl.” John patted his pockets, looking for his next cigarette.

Maggie sighed and gave up on talking some sense into John. He was nervous and stressed and she couldn’t blame him, though she knew he would do just fine. But when he was in a mood like this, it was better to let him alone.

George provided her with a lighter when asked, a guilty expression on his face. She gave him a hard look, but said nothing.

“Here you go,” she said, holding it out for John. Before he could grasp it, though, the lighter fell nervelessly from her fingers. Yoko bent over and picked it up, holding it up for John so she could light his cigarette.

“What are you doing here?” Maggie asked, uncaring that the question was rude.

“Luv, she’s here because I asked her to be here. Don’t be rude.” John was curt and it stung Maggie to be scolded in front of Yoko.

Yoko smiled silently at Maggie.

“I have to return George’s lighter.” Maggie plucked the lighter out of Yoko’s hand.

She had to leave before the tears started coming. That meant leaving the two of them alone together to talk about what a bitch she was. Maggie had sworn she wouldn’t snap at Yoko, but the woman had a way of silently appearing wherever was least convenient for Maggie. It brought out the worst in her – silently she begged John to understand why she was prickly around Yoko, but there was no way he could know why she was having the reaction she was. She was going to have to tell him, but she just couldn’t bring herself to do it. Not yet.

Maggie silently handed George the lighter. He looked closely at her, and noticing a tear running down her face, wiped it away gently with a callused finger. “What’s wrong, luv?”

“Yoko.”

“She’s here?”

“She’s always around lately. Every time I turn around at a party or a dinner, she’s glued to John’s side. It’s like she just lurks in the shadows, biding her time for the opportune moment to jump out and strike. I don’t know what to do.”

George gave her a sympathetic smile. “I don’t know. But I’ll give it some thought, okay? I have to run through my solo a few more times before this thing starts, but we’ll talk after.” He wrapped his arm around her in a last hug before ducking out to find a private place to practice.

Maggie watched him leave, feeling strangely forlorn.

“If you’re done distracting our lead guitarist, Miss Margaret…” John cleared his throat behind her.

Maggie whirled around, surprised to see him there, and sans Yoko.

“John!” He grinned at her. She wondered if his last harsh remarks to her were forgotten. But they weren't.

“I’m sorry if I snapped at you back there, luv. I’m just so nervous. What if I forget the words?” John wrapped his arms around her melodramatically. “Oh, God, I hope I get the words right.”

She smiled, glad that he wasn’t totally disregarding her feelings, even in the state he was in. And frankly, she had been rude, though once again, John couldn’t have any idea why. “It’s okay, John. And you’ll be fine. I know it. Remember? Future Girl?” She pointed at herself.

“You’re right, you’re right, I know you’re right. Wait, how does the song start again? What’s the first line?” John panicked.

“There’s nothing you can do that can’t be done…” she prompted.

“Right, right.” He repeated the line to himself a few times and then took another swig out of the milk bottle he was still gripping.

“Places, people!” a tech shouted.

“I have to go. Pray for me,” John whispered. Then a lecherous grin came on his face and he pulled her in for a passionate kiss. When the tech shouted for places a second

time, Maggie broke off the kiss unwillingly. Smiling, Maggie pushed John towards the other Beatles. "Go on! You'll be late." John gave her another quick peck, shoved the milk bottle at her, and ran off to join his bandmates.

Maggie had just sighed and put the bottle down on a nearby table when she realized she no longer had her gum in her mouth. *John!* A knowing smile crossed her face; clearly John had remembered that she'd had gum. It was okay, Maggie remembered seeing John chew gum in YouTube videos of All You Need is Love. *Some things you just can't change,* she thought with a smile, which faded when she recalled Yoko. The thought suddenly seemed an ominous harbinger.

No, thought Maggie. She would put all thoughts of Yoko aside for now – she wouldn't let tonight be ruined. Tonight was about peace and love, and it was just inappropriate to be focusing on the hope that Yoko would spontaneously combust. *All you need is love*, Maggie thought grimly, reciting the phrase again in her head like a mantra. *All you need is love*.

Chapter Six

In the end, John had resorted to scribbling the lyrics of his song on the back of an envelope, and a wire stand had been found for him. This small weakness of his, his poor memory for lyrics, was oddly endearing, as was, Maggie had to admit, the flower tucked behind Paul's ear. Paul looked so cheerful during the broadcast, so in his element. She didn't see any of the nerves that John or George had. Adding to her general goodwill towards Paul was the fact that he had been abnormally nice to her lately. She suspected it was at least in part so Maggie would give a good report of him to Linda. Even so, it was pleasant - Maggie had never wanted to be at odds with Paul, but Paul had taken an instant dislike to her and John's attachment to her. Things had been better over the last year, but it seemed that Linda had finally given them some common ground.

Maggie wished Linda could have been here, but she'd been unable to get away. Maggie had promised to take lots of pictures, and to call her afterwards to tell her about every detail. Maggie tried to memorize it all - Paul grinning and plucking away happily at his bass as John chomped on his gum - or rather *her* gum - and sang, hands clutching the headset he wore like a lifeline. George sat a little apart from

John and Paul wearing bright orange pants. He'd picked the brightest thing he owned, as a joke for her - though he'd nodded approvingly when he'd seen her new dress.

Maggie knew George was nervous as well despite the smile on his face during the broadcast. She and Pattie had squeezed each other's hands until he was past his solo, looking at each other in relief when he'd played it well. Ringo gamely pretended to hit his drums along with the pre-recorded track. Maggie didn't watch him as closely, partially afraid that if she did, Maureen would misinterpret her interest.

The song and the performance would be legendary and Maggie couldn't believe she not only got to witness it, but that she got to be in the broadcast itself. The only damper on it was the solitary black figure, like a blight amongst the crowd of colorful clothing and flowers. Not even the shower of confetti could wash away Maggie's unhappiness, and by the end of the song, she found herself in a sour mood. Being nervous for John, added to the stress of watching Yoko watch John, had made her just want to go home and hide under the covers. She wished there was a way to skip the after-party, but there was no way she was leaving John to Yoko.

After the broadcast was done Maggie was gratified that she had been the first one John had sought out.

"Did I do alright, luv?" he asked.

"Was it ever in doubt?" She smiled back.

"Always in motion the future is, isn't it?" John said, paraphrasing Yoda. Maggie had been unable to resist showing him her favorite Star Wars movies while he'd been with her in 2006. They were both counting down the days until they could see the first one again in 1977. "I'll be an old man of 37!" John had said. "I won't even be born yet!" Maggie had replied, and he'd groaned something about robbing the cradle.

Now the after-party was in full swing; it seemed like all of Swinging London was there. There had been so much tension built up around the live broadcast that everyone was letting loose and letting go. After their brief exchange, John had given her a big hug and kiss, and then sent her off to find Pattie, as he'd wanted to talk with George Martin and the other EMI techs to see if the recording was okay.

Pattie was near the bar, drinking a glass of wine. When she saw Maggie, she snagged another from a passing waiter.

"Here's to our Boys!" Pattie said, raising her glass and handing the other to Maggie.

"Cheers!" Maggie clinked Pattie's glass.

"I'm so relieved it went well!" Pattie mimed swooning. "George has been practicing like crazy all week."

"John has been reciting the lyrics over and over all week, though he ended up writing them down anyway!" Maggie giggled. "Paul didn't look nervous at all, though!"

"It's too bad Jane couldn't have been here to support him, not that he looked like he missed her."

"I know, Jane wanted to come, but she couldn't get away from the set."

"Did you talk to her recently?"

"Yup, just the other night." Maggie knew that Pattie was dying to know the real dirt on Jane and Paul, so she was purposefully vague, knowing it would drive Pattie crazy, but also knowing that she'd give in and give her the scoop.

"Okay, come on, Mags, do give it over. Did Jane say anything about Paul? I hear he's seeing someone on the side. Do you think she knows? Do you think she cares?"

"All right, all right," Maggie smiled. "We both know Jane and Paul want different things. It wasn't accidental that she took that movie in the US. I think she wanted some time apart from Paul to sort things out. I think she knows that something is up with him too. He was pushing her to get engaged until just recently. Now he's completely backed off the idea and hasn't brought it up in months. He even encouraged her to take this job - usually he just complains when she takes work that takes her this far away and for this long." Maggie didn't spill that she knew exactly why Paul was distracted and perfectly happy to have Jane a continent away.

"Hmm," Pattie was thoughtful. "That doesn't sound good for Jane. But maybe it's for the best. I'll miss her though. We had the most in common, of the wives, I mean." Pattie smiled to show she meant no offense to Maggie.

"I know; you and Jane do have the acting and modeling in common. But why will you miss her? Just because she and Paul may be over doesn't mean you can never see her again."

"It doesn't work that way with Beatle wives," Pattie said sadly. "It's just the way it is. We never see Cyn anymore, not that we had much in common anyway. But we did used to vacation together." Again, Pattie gave Maggie a big smile to soften her words.

"But, if you wanted to have tea with her or whatever, why don't you? I hope you aren't staying away for my sake. I certainly don't have any objection to any of you still seeing Cyn."

"Oh, John wouldn't like it," Pattie said quickly.

"I'm sure he wouldn't care. Besides, Paul still sees Julian..."

"It's just different," Pattie said. "You'll see." And that's all she would say on the subject.

Maggie looked at her watch - it'd been almost an hour since John had disappeared. He should have been bored of the technical talk 55 minutes ago. Maggie excused herself from Pattie so she could try to find him.

Pushing past someone wearing a large cardboard sign that spelled out "LOVE" in four different languages, she finally spotted John.

Maggie started to call out his name, but then she froze - he wasn't alone. Yoko was practically glued to his side. Unable to speak or move, Maggie studied them, forcing her brain to take them in, to process the scene logically. Maggie had decided that she'd been very irrational about the whole thing - something it was hard not to do, given what she knew. This time she was going to make her brain analyze the scene, to try to keep her emotions in check.

John was gesturing excitedly, occasionally leaning over towards Yoko, most likely to better hear her over the din of the crowd. He looked like anyone talking to a fellow party-goer, but at this point her brain choked on logic. This was JOHN AND YOKO. They looked natural together, like any of the hundreds of pictures she'd seen of the two of them over the course of their marriage. Pictures of them naked in bed together flashed through her mind. It was impossible to be dispassionate about John getting to better know the woman he would have spent his life with if Maggie hadn't interfered.

Maggie didn't know what to do - she wanted to scream and cry, to push Yoko away and make a scene, but there was no way she could do that. She didn't want to embarrass herself (or John) so publicly, in front of so many people. She was afraid if she went anywhere near them, she would end up snapping at Yoko, acting possessive or jealous. Should she try anyway, and risk not being able to control her behavior? She didn't think she could stand John calling her to task for her rudeness again, for him to take Yoko's side against her. She'd already had a very small taste of that and it had been unpleasant.

Maggie stood there, frozen with indecision, unable to keep the unhappiness from showing on her face.

After what seemed like eons, John glanced up from Yoko and spotted Maggie. From where she stood, Maggie could see his expression change. His brows creased in a frown - was he upset that Maggie was breaking up his time with Yoko? Was she an unwelcome interruption? Now Maggie really didn't know what to do. She wanted badly to fling her arms around him, and for him to wrap his arms around her, to know she was safe there.

But Yoko still stood there, looking implacable. Maggie's eyes dropped to the ground - she knew John must be able to sense the hostility towards Yoko radiating off her. She couldn't bring herself to look back up at him. Couldn't bear to see his frown, his disapproval. Suddenly, the room felt like it was closing on her. She needed air right now.

John watched as Maggie saw him, froze, and fled, looking very upset. Had someone upset her? Or was it him? Had he done something wrong without even realizing it? He'd simply gotten caught up in a conversation with Yoko about the Apple Boutique. He'd thought maybe they could feature some of her art in it, and he'd been telling Yoko what a wonderful job Maggie had done managing it, and how well it had been doing, when he'd spotted Maggie standing there, like a deer in headlights. And now she'd run off.

Concerned, John excused himself from Yoko and pushed his way into the crowd to find her.

Maggie slammed through the outer doors and stood panting in the darkness, trying to breathe the cool night air, letting it soothe her.

“Maggie, luv, you are a naughty girl.”

She jumped - Mick had been hiding in the shadows, smoking a joint.

"You scared me!" she accused. "What are you doing out here, anyway?" Maggie wasn't happy to see Mick – in fact,

she'd been trying to avoid him since their last exchange at the Pepper party. Plus, she just needed to be alone right now - now she'd have to hold her tears back. It would never do for Mick to see them.

Mick stood, stretching his lanky form. He offered her a puff of his joint politely, which Maggie declined equally politely. He wrapped a sinuous arm around her shoulder. “Naughty girl," he said again, shaking his finger at her. "Naughty to invite me to a rendezvous in the loo and then not have the decency to show. Tsk tsk," he said.

Maggie tried to hide how upset she was. "Sorry, Mick, I had somewhere to be."

“No worries, luv,” Mick shrugged. “I found some birds who were willing to console me for being stood up.” Mick licked his lips, gazing at Maggie thoughtfully. Maggie couldn’t help but notice a little more than the usual amount of lust in his eyes. Maybe she had taken the game up a level, by actually promising to meet up. “You are going to owe me one, though.”

Maggie couldn't keep the tears from her eyes anymore. She wiped her eyes furiously, ashamed for Mick to see her like this.

"Oh, luv, I'm sorry, don't cry," Mick said, taken aback. "I was only teasing."

"It's not you, it's...." she stopped herself before she said 'John'.

"It's that Beatle, isn't it," he said sympathetically. He shook his head. "The Beatles break hearts, and the Stones have to

put the pieces back together again. Don't worry, luv, I'll take care of you."

Mick's arm cradled her comfortingly, though she couldn't help notice that his hand was where it could brush casually across her breast.

Mick breathed into her ear, "Now, tell Uncle Mick where it hurts, and he'll kiss it and make it better..."

"Oh, stop it, Mick," Maggie said, slapping him lightly on the cheek. But she smiled at him, despite herself.

She heard the door beside her open, and she looked up, only to have the smile freeze on her face. It was John, a shocked express on his face. John probably couldn't see the tears still drying on her cheeks from where he stood. He would only see Maggie smiling with Mick leaning over her like they had been kissing in the dark.

Maggie glanced at Mick, who was studying the joint still held between the fingers of his left hand. The door slammed, indicating that John hadn't stuck around to sort out the scene that had been before him.

Shit!

Without another word, Maggie pushed Mick away and pulled the door open, frantically trying to catch John. She thought she spotted his light blue frock coat ahead of her to the right, and she followed it, but when she finally caught up, she realized it wasn't John. Where was he?

She looked around her desperately - he was gone.

Chapter Seven

"I can't believe you'd stoop to snogging a fucking Stone." John's voice rang sharply out of the dark.

Maggie had just unlocked and opened the front door to their house. The living room was pitch black. After an hour of fruitless searching at the party, Neil had taken her home. She figured he'd either be here - or off somewhere screwing Yoko to get back at her. No, that was unfair. She couldn't truly believe John, her John, would do something like that. Nor could she believe John would think she would kiss Mick for the same reasons.

Maggie stood in the dark living room silently, not knowing what to say.

John switched on a lamp. He was sitting on the floor, cross-legged.

She tried, "John, I didn't..."

"I saw you!" He accused her with his voice and his eyes.

Somewhere she found her own voice. "How the hell did you know what you were seeing? You ran off too quickly!"

"You seem to know a thing or two about that as well."

Once again, Maggie had no idea how to respond to that - how to bring up her fears and concerns about Yoko, without sounding merely like a jealous harpy. John was always surrounded by hundreds of girls, and she'd never been that bothered by it. Well, not like this, anyway. John had always gone out of his way to be faithful to her. To question him for this now seemed like a huge slap in the face. The problem was, it wasn't just any girl, it was YOKO.

"I..." But the words still stuck in her throat.

"You, what, luv?" he said bitterly. "You decided to get back at me for daring to talk to another woman by kissing that wanker?"

"No! I didn't kiss him, I swear." The tears were starting to come. "I...I know it looked that way from where you were standing, but I swear I didn't." Maggie sank down to her knees, tears running down her face. "I was upset when I saw you and Yoko together, so I ran outside to get some air. Mick was there, and he hit on me, though he backed off once he saw how upset I was. Once he saw I was crying, he tried to comfort me, but he was still being Mick, and he'd just made me laugh when you appeared. You ran off before I could explain to you..."

John sat, not saying a word or even moving a muscle.

"I would never do that, I love you. I don't want anyone else, it's always been you, just you," Maggie cried.

John looked down.

"I gave up everything to stay with you." She sniffed and tried to wipe the tears away.

"Are you going to throw that at me every time we get into a fight? Because that is going to get old very fast," he said coldly.

"I'm not trying to throw..."

"Oh, but you are." He looked down again, and Maggie realized he was looking at a single pill, resting on the carpet in front of him.

Maggie went cold. "What's that?"

"I believe the scientific name is lysergic acid diethylamide," he gave her a grin, but there was nothing friendly in it. "As a science type, I'm sure you know what that is, don't you? You're just in time. I was about to take it."

"LSD? But you promised..." she protested.

"Well, we all know it's harmless or our little precious Paulie wouldn't have taken it. He's even giving public interviews about it now. He was the last fucking one in the band to try it, and now it's like he fucking discovered it."

Maggie remembered this incident from her original timeline. Then, George and John had been very heavily into acid - and for Paul, who'd only just tried it to come out and mention taking it in an interview – well, the band hadn't liked that very much.

“Have you been taking LSD this whole time, behind my back, when you said you wouldn't?” She was so tired. Tired of fighting this, of keeping John from being the womanizing drug addict she remembered from her time but somehow loved anyway.

"How many times, John?" Maggie was angry, but knew she sounded defeated. She closed her eyes.

"Not nearly enough, especially if I'm going to compete with Paul," John said, picking up the pill. "I can't let him get the edge on me, can I? Do you want to take some with me, luv? Or are you still too much of a square? Maybe you'd better just leave while I take this, so you don't bring me down."

There it was again. John neatly hit upon everything she'd worried about with drugs. John was a rock icon and at least in her original timeline had practically been a poster child for the 60s drug culture. She was just a science nerd who was always the one saying "no thanks" to his friends. The fact was, she did worry about bringing everyone down, so she tried to be unobtrusive about not partaking. She'd always thought John didn't care - but clearly at some level he did, and his opinion was the one most important to her. On the other hand, shouldn’t her opinion matter to him?

Suddenly, Maggie found herself angry at the betrayal. "You promised you wouldn't take LSD anymore!" she shouted. Maggie grabbed her shoe off her foot and threw it at John, successfully knocking the pill from his hand. He clearly hadn't expected this and it made him just a few seconds slower than she at grabbing for the fallen pill. She ran and threw it into the kitchen sink, turning the water on full force, and stood there sobbing as it went down the drain.

Behind her, she heard the door slam. It was then she realized that they still hadn't brought up the one thing that had been the catalyst of their whole fight. Drugs, women, Mick - they were all just symptoms that something else was wrong. And she knew exactly what that something else was, even if John didn’t. Yoko.

Maggie went upstairs and ran a hot bath. Miserably, she sank down into the large tub and cried until she couldn't cry anymore. She was contemplating trying to get out to find a tissue, when a knock came at the bathroom door. John peeked his head in.

"What do you want?" she hiccupped.

John hung his head. "If it's all right with you, I'd like to apologize."

She shook her head in the affirmative. She wasn't mad at him anymore, just deeply sad that everything felt like such a hopeless mess.

John quickly stripped his clothes off and stepped into the tub behind her, making room for her to nestle against his chest.

"I'm such a bastard sometimes, aren't I? I'm so sorry, luv. I don't know what got into me."

"Why?" was all she could think to ask. To be honest, the fight hadn’t been surprising. What with Yoko’s intrusion in their lives, in some ways it had been brewing for a while. Added to that, she was with THE John Lennon. She could never really forget that though it was often easy to do so for a time. It was sometimes hard for her to reconcile the gentle, insecure man she loved with the one who’d put Bob

Wooler in the hospital on Paul's 21st birthday. True, John had never lifted a finger in violence towards her, and she felt that he'd mellowed considerably since his early 20s, but he could still cut just as effectively with his words. She didn't have to like it, or even put up with it meekly as Cynthia had for so many years, but she knew that this it was part of what came with being with John Lennon – the real one, not the fantasy of him.

For a moment, Maggie thought John wouldn't answer her. He was silent, his lips resting against her hair, breathing her in as he contemplated her one simple word. "When I saw you with Mick, all I could think was that you were somehow trying to get back at me," he said in a low voice. "But I guess I didn't know why - was it because I was talking to Yoko? Because talking was all I was doing. It hurt to see the accusation in your eyes, when you know I've done everything in my power to stay faithful to you. I know it's not a proud accomplishment, but I've never gone this long without slipping before. And I know I won't - I only want you. I know it's hard, but please trust me. Don't run away." He kissed her head.

"I do trust you, John. Believe it or not, I do. It's the women I don't trust. At least, not this one. Yoko...wants you. I can feel it. She's different than the others somehow." Maggie Sue knew this was the perfect opportunity to tell John everything, but she couldn't bear another argument tonight, couldn't bear to see the condemnation in John's eyes when he finally learned the truth about who Yoko was. John knew that he had been married to someone else in her timeline, post-Cynthia, but he didn't know much more than that - didn't know about how his and Yoko's actions had contributed to the breakup of his band, had alienated him from his friends and his son - how entangled he and Yoko had been. If he knew he could have that, as messed up was

it was, would he still want it? Was he drawn to Yoko because of what they were somehow destined to share? Or if it hadn't been Yoko, could it have just as easily been someone else?

"Oh, luv, you're imagining things. Besides, Yoko isn't even a fan of the Beatles - and you know I only shag fans," he joked. "Are there any Beatle People around at the present time?"

She giggled in spite of herself.

"That's better, luv." He curled a tendril of her hair around his finger. "Will you forgive me for being such an arse tonight?"

Maggie shifted around so she could look him in the eye. "Are you still going to take the LSD? I assume you have more of it."

"No." He was quiet for a minute. "It wouldn't have been any good tonight anyway. It's not a good idea to trip when you're not in a good place. I know you don't approve, luv, but when it's good, it's a fascinating experience. It's something I wish I could share with you. If you ever wanted to try it, I would take care of you..." He was tentative, afraid to start another fight while they were still making up from the last one.

"I know you would." It really wasn't even a question of whether she trusted John to take care of her. She did trust him. It was just that she was born in a time when she knew what the repercussions of taking LSD were. That and… and it just… Maggie tried to put her thoughts together. "Taking acid…it's just not me, and... I don't think I'm brave enough to try something that takes so long to get out of your

system. The idea of a bad trip..." She couldn't truly explain why she found the idea so off-putting. Maybe it was a result of being raised in the Just Say No era. Maybe she'd been programmed, or just had never been rebellious enough. Or maybe as a scientist, she'd been too afraid of doing something to damage her brain. She ran her finger over his arm, watching the water droplets scatter.

"But if I did try it, it would only be with you. I trust you," she said. He hugged her, knowing she meant what she said, and feeling pleased by it. He stayed silent, letting her continue. "It's....it's not the drug itself I necessarily have a problem with, because I know someone like Paul can take it or leave it. But trust me, I know that you will get caught up in it if you're not careful. I'm not trying to keep you off drugs just because I'm a prude or because I'm trying to be a buzzkill. I just..."

"I know, luv, I know," he soothed her. "You're always just looking out for me, and for Apple, and for the Beatles. I don't know what I'd do without you."

They were silent for a few minutes, though he continued to play with her hair.

Finally he said, "I'm well aware, by the way, of what you gave up for me by staying here. Or rather, what I took from you. I took your career away; I took your modern technology away. I took you away from everything you loved, just because I couldn't stand to be without you. God, I'm such a selfish bastard. I wouldn't blame you for leaving me. Just do me a favor, and don't leave me for Mick. I'd never hear the end of it," he said dully.

Maggie cupped his face with her hands, making him look at her. "I could never do that." Then she kissed him playfully

and added, “Besides, the Stones are a shite band; they'll never amount to anything.” John grinned at her, until she continued, “The Who, on the other hand..." John found the ticklish spot on her side. She only managed to gasp, "Keith Moon is kind of crazy, but maybe, Pete…" before the tickling was too much and she couldn't speak anymore.

"All right, all right," she wheezed. "I give in, you're the only 60s rock legend for me."

"That's better!" John stopped tickling her and moved her so she was on his lap, making some of the water splash out of the tub.

Maggie studied his face and then kissed him again, gently. "You didn't take away everything I loved. You're right here, aren't you?" He smiled at that. "I'm sorry, John - I do trust you. I guess I'm just as afraid of losing you as you are of me."

"You never have to worry about that, luv." Maggie wanted to believe him, and ultimately her brain decided that she had no other real option right now. It was growing significantly fuzzy, as John's strong hands stroked her body, one of them cupping a breast gently. He kissed her softly, and sensing her responding to his touch, kissed her more deeply, parting her lips with his tongue. His hands and then his tongue wandered along her slick, wet body, caressing her, teasing her. He pulled her closer, but no matter how close they were, it never felt like it was close enough. He had nearly lost her for good and he never wanted to let her go. Every time they fought, every time he pushed, he was afraid that this might be the time she decided that he wasn't worth it. And frankly, HE didn't believe that he was worth it. She'd promised never to leave, but he knew he was fully capable of driving her away. He

could never let that happen. As their bodies joined, he kissed her with every ounce of passion that he had.

Maggie knew this wouldn’t be their last fight, or the last time hurtful words were exchanged. She knew better than John did what he was like, and how easily he could wound. But this was her home, her reality, now, with him, and she didn't ever want that to change. Kissing him back with everything she had, she tried to squeeze the thought of Yoko out of her head. John was hers.

For now, her brain told her. For now - and for how long?

Chapter Eight

Late August, 1967

On the whole, the summer had been peaceful. After their big fight in June, John had gone out of his way to be attentive to her. There hadn't been any major events or parties, and as a result, they hadn't seen much of Yoko. She seemed to have beaten a retreat for the time being.

Maureen Starkey had just given birth to another boy on the 19th of August, and had been too preoccupied with the new baby to be much of a problem to Maggie, either. Maggie and John had spent the warm, golden summer days with Julian, and often Paul and Martha joined them. There were trips - Maggie and John took a vacation up to a farm Paul had recently bought in Scotland, and the whole group including the girlfriends and wives went to Greece for a week in July to check out an island the band wanted to buy. At home Pattie and George had hosted a few intimate get-togethers with just immediate Beatle family, and Jane finally finished her film project, and was back in town. She and Paul had never been demonstrative, so if they were on the verge of a breakup, it was undetectable. Maggie knew from her regular calls to Linda that she and Paul were often in touch - Maggie was just waiting for someone to finally make a real move. She wondered how long Paul and Jane's inevitable breakup would be dragged out.

One day back in July, Maggie had come across John scribbling song lyrics, a copy of Through The Looking Glass on the floor next to him.

"What are you working on?" she asked.

John covered up the page of lyrics. "Nothing! Don't you look yet, it's not ready, Future Girl."

"Oh, come on!" She picked up the book - it was open to The Walrus and the Carpenter. A big grin came over her face.

"Bloody hell, you know anyway, don't you," John grumbled. He thrust the papers at her. "You might as well have a look."

The page was covered with scribbles, some nonsense, but it was clear where the song was going. She scanned the page and then smiled up at him.

"Well, then?"

"It's going to be great," she said. "So...why exactly are you the walrus? I was always curious about that. Or are you the eggman? Whatever that is."

"I just liked that Lewis Carroll poem you're holding there, so I borrowed a few bits of it. The rest is mostly gibberish. Let those school kids analyze my lyrics in class now!" he said with glee.

Maggie laughed. "You do know the walrus is the bad guy in the poem, right?"

"Surely he isn't? Let me see that!" John grabbed the book from her, and read furiously for a minute. He looked up at Maggie. "Well, that's no good, is it?" John frowned.

"Why can't the walrus be the bad guy?"

"I guess he will just have to be 'cause I'm not changing it!"

"No, I'd definitely keep it as is."

John thought for a moment. "Maybe the walrus is Paul?" Maggie laughed immoderately leaving John to just shake his head at her since he clearly wasn't in on the joke.

All in all, there were no major upheavals that summer and the time passed quickly, until quite suddenly it was nearly the end of August.

The phone rang, breaking the silence of the house. Maggie put down her book with a sigh and answered it.

"Hey Mags, it's me," George said.

"Hey George, what's new?"

"I need to ask you a special favor. Will you listen before you object?" George didn't have any teasing in his voice like he usually did.

"Of course, George, what's up?" Maggie asked, mildly concerned.

"I know you don't approve of the Maharishi, though I don't understand why..."

Maggie nearly groaned. "Not this again, George..."

"You promised you'd listen!"

Maggie sighed. "Go ahead."

"Well, you remember when Pattie and I went to his lecture in June? I've kept in touch with him, and he's invited us all to go on a retreat with him in Wales on the 25th. I really want you to be there." Maggie was amused that it seemed to be a given that everyone else would agree to go. Where one of them went, they all went, it seemed.

Maggie was silent for a minute. She felt like she owed it to George to go along with this. She knew it was important to him, even if she thought that Maharishi and transcendental meditation was a lot of pseudo-religious crap.

"Of course I'll be there George. But just because I love you. Even so, I can't promise not to roll my eyes a lot."

"Thanks, luv. Just give it a chance. You never know, maybe you will get something out of it."

"I doubt it, but I'll try. For you." Maggie paused. "It's just...if you're looking for the answers to the universe, I don't think you're going to find them there. With him.

"But I have to try, don't I?" With that, George rang off.

Maggie picked up her book and started to read again when suddenly something in her brain clicked and she froze. A

weekend with the Maharishi in Wales? That was the weekend Brian Epstein had died.

Where had the time gone? She'd thought she had all the time in the world and now the fatal date was almost upon them and she had done nothing. She'd cursed herself for growing complacent and comfortable in her new life with John. She'd let time slip away from her. It was irresponsible, and if it cost Brian his life, she'd never forgive herself.

In a panic, she ran to find John. They needed to do something and fast.

"What do you remember, Mags?" Ringo asked.

Maggie and John had called an impromptu meeting of the Beatles to discuss what was to be done about Brian. They all crowded around the kitchen table, passing out tea and biscuits.

"He dies on the 27th, an overdose of pills, while the Beatles are in Wales with the Maharishi." Maggie was solemn. "It all slipped my mind ‘til George brought up the trip this weekend, and then it came back to me how little time was left. God, if this happens, I'm going to blame myself." She buried her head in her hands.

"No, luv, it's not your fault. Brian has had issues for years." John consoled her.

"Besides, there's still plenty of time, right?" Paul said. Maggie noticed that his old reticence about her knowledge of the future was gone.

"Not much. Maybe not enough." Maggie said, "What's the best course of action here?"

"I don't think we should all go see him, he'll think it's an ambush," said Ringo, taking a sip of his tea.

"John is the closest of all of us to Brian," George suggested, "They even went on vacation together, though John won't say a word of what all went on there."

"Never you mind that," said John, looking annoyed.

"It's okay, I've read all about it," Maggie couldn't help piping up and then wishing she hadn't.

"I clearly need to keep my mouth shut when talking to those biographers, don't I?" said John. "Some things should be private." He glared at George in disapproval for raising the subject, and simply hoped Maggie would catch the hint and not share her future knowledge for once.

"Oh, don't worry." Maggie waved her hands, blithely ignoring John's hints to drop this line of conversation. "I mean, there are a few different stories about what happened in Spain, but no one really knows for sure. And, well, in my time, when I was reading about it, both you are Brian were long dead - so there was no way for anyone to ever know the truth." Maggie said feeling uncomfortable as she realized that she was now talking about John's death.

"Isn't that the best way for two people keep a secret, then," Paul piped up. "If both are dead?"

There was an awkward silence. "Secret or no, I thought the goal here was to keep both John and Brian alive," Ringo said, breaking it.

"Right, so you and John should go see Brian, Maggie - he'll know to be careful, and then we can all have a nice weekend in Wales," said George. "I'm sure it will all be fine. If we know the future, what can go wrong?"

"Come in, come in," Brian said genially to Maggie and John, ushering them into his office. "Have a seat. Tea, either of you?"

"No thanks, Brian," John said. Maggie shifted nervously. She didn't know if it was possible to do this delicately. She was saved from indecision by John plunging right in.

"So, Brian," John said, sitting down on Brian's small couch, "As you know, Maggie came to us from the future. In her timeline, you died on August 27th. That's Sunday," he added for clarification.

"What?" Brian jumped up from his seat, as if he'd been bitten.

"We're here to warn you." John sat back, his mission done. Maggie sighed. He actually looked proud of himself.

"What happens to me?" Brian was pale. He sat down heavily.

"You have a pill overdose," said John.

"An overdose of pills?" Brian said disbelievingly. He laughed. "Thank God, I thought you meant to tell me I'd be hit by a bus." He paused for a second remembering that John's mother had been killed similarly, but moved on quickly. "People don't die from overdoses of pills. If they did, you Boys would all have been dead years ago."

People certainly did die from pill overdoses. Marilyn Monroe had, not long ago. Maggie even remembered that Brian had purposefully tried to overdose on pills before, but had lived. What exactly had the Beatle biographies said? She thought she remembered something about Peter Brown finding a suicide note, and Brian being unwilling to admit he'd tried to take his own life. Brian was either in denial, or simply not willing to admit to any weakness in front of John. Neither possibility surprised Maggie at all.

"We're serious, Brian," John said. "And what we did back then was besides the point."

"Is it? Because I remember you positively frothing at the mouth, and out of your mind on prellies. Mixed with plenty of alcohol, if I recall. And you were just fine," said Brian distastefully.

"I don't do that anymore, do I?" said John.

"Don't you? I honestly have no idea what you boys take anymore - but Paul made it charmingly clear in his most recent interview that you've all tried LSD. And I was there the first time you tried pot, remember? Don't tell me you've given that up."

"Don't try to turn this on me, Brian, we came here to warn you. You have a problem, and it's going to kill you."

Maggie watched as John began to get angry. She was unsurprised. This was Brian. No matter how much John made fun of him, no matter how badly he came down on him, it was still Brian. He would always be important to him and to them all.

"I most certainly don't have a problem." Brian's cool composure was starting to show signs of cracking as well. Brian turned on Maggie next. "Really, Margaret, I expected better of you really. To come in here with a story like this," he snapped.

"It's not a story," Maggie Sue said. She'd stayed quiet until now, feeling that this was largely between John and Brian, and given their complicated history, she was better off not being in the middle. "It's true, Brian. They're going to find your body on Sunday, and it will be too late to resuscitate you. There'll be bottles and bottles of pills around you and they won't be sure whether it was suicide or not, but in the end it'll be ruled an accidental overdose. You're taking too many pills, Brian. You have to stop. Please."

"Suicide? That's ridiculous. To think I would do that to Queenie." Queenie was Brian's beloved mother, and possibly the only reason he'd not followed through with his earlier attempts on his life.

"Maybe, maybe not," Maggie had no idea if Brian was aware of the extent of her knowledge of him, and how unhappy a man he was. She didn't even know if Brian knew that she was aware of his homosexuality, or his penchant for abusive men, or how difficult his struggle with his own identity had been for him. Surely he'd be mortified if he knew. He'd also be mortified that Maggie knew full well that he was, or at least had been in love with John, and had been rejected.

"Which leaves an overdose from my supposed problem with pills? I assure both of you that I don't have a problem. Nor is it any of your business what medications I choose to take. I will be fine. You should go on your weekend trip and I will see you when you get back."

"We can't leave it at that Brian," John said. "It's not good enough."

"Why do you care, anyway, John?" He laughed again wryly, and then said in a sad voice, "Actually, I think you've always made it quite clear that you don't."

"That's not true, Brian, and you know it," John said quietly, after a minute.

"I think I've heard enough. Both of you out." Brian said briskly, standing up from his chair and walking over to the door. Maggie was not surprised that Brian was unwilling to continue such a personal conversation, especially in front of her.

John and Maggie stood and walked to the door, as there seemed to be nothing else to do.

Maggie paused for a moment, an overwhelming feeling of helplessness consuming her. "Brian," she choked out. "I'm sorry. But please, please, just be careful," Maggie begged, tears starting to form in her eyes.

"I'll be fine, Margaret," Brian said firmly. "Thank you both for stopping by."

With that, Brian's door closed on them.

Chapter Nine

"I'll just have to stay home," Maggie said firmly, as they walked away from Brian's office. There would be no trip to Wales for her. She would stay home and save Brian, and not have to sit through a weekend of meditation with some hokey religious leader she didn't respect.

"Luv, you can't stay home," John said gently. "Brian's just going to shut off his phone if you ring him every hour to make sure he's still alive. He made it clear that he didn't want to talk about it anymore. But maybe he'll listen to Peter. "

Peter Brown was her second in command at Apple Corps. In her timeline he'd been a personal assistant to both Brian and The Beatles, taking over a lot of Brian's duties after his death. He'd also been heavily involved in Apple. Peter didn't have any idea that she was from the future, and much as she did trust him, Maggie preferred as few people as possible to know the truth. It was too risky. Hopefully they could convey their concern that Brian was in danger without having to delve into the sticky subject of time travel, and how or why they had such specific fears about Brian.

“Hello!” Peter looked up from his work, surprised to see Maggie and John at his office door.

“We need to talk, Peter. Do you have a minute?”

“Yes, of course. Come in.” Peter jumped out of his chair and ushered them into guest seats, before closing the door.

“It’s about Brian.” John said, cutting to the chase as usual.

“What about him?”

Maggie cut John off before he could blurt out something that would need too much explaining. She tried a different tactic. “We’re concerned about his drug use.”

“Drugs?” Maggie could understand his confusion. It was a bit odd to see a Beatle concerned with excess drug usage.

“Yes. We know he takes a lot of pills. Surely you know the little coughing motion he does to hide popping them in his mouth? Or the secret pill pockets in his suits?” Maggie said.

“How do you…” Peter started and then stopped. “How could you possibly…” Peter had known for some time that his boss took a great deal of pills. He hadn’t thought too much about it – he was hardly in the place to criticize or tell Brian what to do. Plus, nearly everyone associated with the Beatles took drugs in one form or another.

“How could I know about his suits? Let’s just say that Brian doesn’t have as many secrets as he thinks he has.” Maggie could certainly name more than one skeleton in his closet.

John continued, “Never mind that. We’re here because we have reason to believe that Brian is in danger.”

“Danger? From what? How do you know?” Peter looked alarmed.

“A pill overdose. Can we just call it a strong hunch?” Maggie asked.

“You think he’s going to overdose on pills.”

“Yes. And soon. This weekend. He’s… well, he has a problem, and he won’t admit it,” Maggie said. “I just have a really strong feeling that something bad is going to happen to him. It’s not so much of stretch, is it? You know how he can be.”

“Yes, I do know,” Peter said softly. “I would do anything I could for Brian. How can I help?”

Relieved that she wouldn’t have to play the time travel card (at least not yet), Maggie asked Peter to check up on Brian throughout the weekend. She also explained how badly Brian had taken John and Maggie trying to talk with him and warned Peter that Brian might think they had put him up to it. They encouraged Peter to be subtle, but that if he sensed something amiss to act on it as soon as possible. Peter gave them reassurances, and told them to have a good weekend trip to Wales. It would be easy for Peter to keep an eye on Brian, as he’d already been invited to spend the

weekend at Brian's country place in Kingsley Hill. It would all be fine.

That night, Maggie slept fitfully, finally waking up a start at 4am. Maggie saw that she was alone in bed. She was only momentarily puzzled by John's absence; she could hear the soft sounds of the piano from somewhere else in the house. Evidently John hadn't been able to sleep either. Maggie got up, and wandered out of the bedroom, following the music.

She found John in their music room, playing a melody that sounded a lot like the one she associated with the as-yet-unwritten "Imagine". When John saw her standing in the door, rubbing her eyes, he stopped playing. "Sorry, luv, did I wake you?"

"No, I was having trouble sleeping." Maggie noted the smoldering cigarette butt in the ashtray next to the piano, a sure sign that John was stressed as well.

"Worried about Brian?" he asked gently. She nodded wordlessly.

"Come here, luv," he patted the spot next to him on the piano bench.

Maggie padded over, bare feet chilly against the wood floor. She sat next to him and leaned her head on his shoulder, absorbing his comforting warmth. "What were you playing? It was pretty," she asked.

"Oh, just something I made up. I'm not sure what to do with it yet, though."

Maggie wondered if he'd still write Imagine later on or not. She loved the melody, but wasn't sure she agreed with the lyrics. She wasn't sure John did himself, as the lifestyle he'd led at the time hardly conveyed a lack of possessions, for one thing. She also hated the whole "Saint John" persona, which she suspected was at least partially due to his untimely death, which had practically made him a pop-culture martyr. If only she could save him, there was a chance he could be "just John", wasn't there? He'd always be famous, always be a rock icon, but she didn't want him to be infamous just because he was cut down in his prime. Maybe if Brian heeded her warning, maybe if she saved him, she'd feel like she had a real chance of saving John.

Maggie sniffed, feeling the tears well up in her eyes. It was all too much sometimes. The responsibility. The burden of her knowledge of the future. The uncertainty of how things would turn out now that she'd interfered.

"Oh, don't cry, luv. It'll be ok."

"I'm just so scared," she managed, tears streaming down her face now. Scared for Brian, scared for their future, and scared for all she was single-handedly changing.

"Don't be afraid."

As John spoke those words, he remembered the little song he'd written for Maggie after their last big fight. He'd written it as sort of an apology to her, to reassure her of his love. He knew his mood could turn on a dime, making him part Jekyll, part Hyde. He loathed that nasty side of himself, but sometimes it appeared without warning.

Though he felt a song was an inadequate gesture on his part, even though it was heartfelt, he'd been gratified that his tentative offering had been greeted with such surprised pleasure.

"Don't be afraid," he said again, to Maggie, and playing the opening chords, sang...

Don't be afraid,
It's just the wind and light.
Don't be afraid,
This house is very strange.
In the morning we'll be gone, don't be afraid.

We'll watch the dawn till the sun comes up,
Drinking coffee from our favourite cup.
Girl, you've been good to me so don't be afraid tonight.

Don't be afraid,
It's just the cats at play.
Don't be afraid,
They do it night and day, how very strange.
They've gone by the morning so don't be afraid of me.

We'll dream around till the dawn comes up,
Drinking coffee from our favourite cup.
Girl, you've been good to me, don't be afraid tonight.

Don't be afraid,
Don't be afraid…

Noticing that she was still sad, and wanting to make her laugh, he started making faces, and singing in a silly voice...

Don't be afraid,

Mr. Hyde, he's really gone away
Won't be back till next full moon
So we can bill and spoon
In June and croon, be-woon, be-woon, be
Can you stand it?

He laughed at his own silly rhymes, and she giggled at him in spite of herself.

Giving up on the piano, he kissed her. "Let's go back to bed, luv," he whispered.

"I'm not sure I can fall back asleep," she protested.

"Good!" he winked at her. "I wasn't thinking of sleeping either."

Friday, August 25, 1967

Though it was late summer, Maggie shivered a bit as she stood on the Euston Station train platform with John's hand tightly gripping her own. It felt a far cry from when Cynthia had stood here in her place. Then, John had been so unaware of her presence that he'd hopped on the train, not even noticing that she'd been left behind.

Maggie almost wished that she could be left behind. She still didn't want to go, and her worries about Brian continued to nag her.

"Brian will be okay, Mags," George said, reading her mind. He'd come up behind her, and put a friendly arm around her

shoulders, giving them a quick squeeze. "Morning, John." He nodded to his bandmate, who was standing on Maggie's other side. John nodded back.

“Is Ritchie here yet?” John asked George.

“I think he’s saying goodbye to Mo – she doesn’t want to leave the baby yet, so she’s not coming.”

“I figured as much.”

“She has the baby with her though, if you want to go say hello.”

“I think I’ll do that.” John kissed her on the cheek. “Don’t worry, I’ll be right back!” Maggie couldn’t help thinking of poor abandoned Cynthia again.

Once John was gone, she turned back to George. “You were saying everything was going to be okay?”

“It will, I know it.”

"How can you? Nothing feels certain anymore. I wish I could believe that it was, George. I just… I feel like I shouldn't be going away like nothing is wrong!"

"What do you think you could do if you stayed, exactly?"

"I don't know, I just..."

George was quiet for a minute. "Do you want to know what I think? I think you're just using Brian as an excuse because you don't want to go."

Maggie’s eyes widened. "I'm not..."

"Just admit it. You think this is stupid and you don't want to go. Just say it." George demanded.

“I…”

“Say it!”

"Fine,” she exploded finally. “I don't. But I told you I'd come and I'm here, aren't I? What else do you want?" She was so frustrated and tired. It sometimes felt like the demands on her emotional energy were endless. The Beatles were… well, they were the Beatles. They were used to always getting their way. No one ever told them ‘no’. The staff at EMI came and left at whatever crazy hour the Beatles wanted them to. Mal and Neil fetched and carried without question, even if it was in the middle of the night. The wives and girlfriends became nocturnal, so they could stay on the same crazy schedule as their Beatle did. Still, George was her friend, wasn’t he? Wasn’t this different? She wasn’t sure anymore.

"What do I want? How about I want you to respect the things that are important to me, even if you do think they're bloody stupid." With that, George walked off, leaving Maggie standing alone, blinking back her tears.

George continued his silent treatment of her as the weekend progressed.

Sad that she had hurt him, Maggie really tried. She knew that he was watching her, even if he wasn't speaking to her, and so she was careful not to roll her eyes during the Maharishi's lectures. She sat on her hands, rather than ask

questions that might expose her scorn. She gamely tried to meditate, even though her mind was racing with a thousand worries. No matter what she did, though, her heart just wasn't in it. During her hours of meditation, she tried to focus on whatever positive thoughts she could grasp at. Surely she couldn't give up all hope that Brian would listen. He knew that she was from the future, he had to know she was being truthful. The question was would he let pride and vanity (not to mention addiction) cloud his sense?

During their Sunday afternoon meditation, a worried face peered into their room. As soon as she saw it, Maggie's stomach dropped.

She knew.

She knew as she watched the man hold a whispered conversation with the Maharishi. She knew when the Maharishi turned around with a solemn expression on his face. She knew before he said anything. Any hope she'd held on to was now completely lost to her. She had failed.

She hadn't saved Brian.

And if she couldn't save Brian, then she had no control over the future at all. Could she really save anyone in the end? There was no real reason to believe that she could.

Maggie knew she would mourn Brian's loss keenly, but there were also fears that were deeper and more personal, and they left her besieged with doubts for the future. Despite her best efforts, would Maggie lose John to Yoko?

Or worse, would they all ultimately lose John to a crazed fan with a gun?

Chapter Ten

Maggie fled the room before she could hear the Maharishi make an announcement about Brian to the assembled group; she hadn't needed to hear it. Eventually someone would come after her, telling her the news, but right now, she couldn't be there. She couldn't watch the disappointment and the sadness cross the faces of the people that she loved.

Ultimately, it had been George to come find her, rather than John. John had known that she and George had been at odds, and when he saw George get up to follow her, he'd stayed back, knowing they needed to talk.

George found Maggie outside, sitting on a bench, her head in her hands. She turned around when she heard someone approaching. Seeing it was George, she turned away, unable to look at him. Quietly he sat down on the bench and put his arms around her in a hug, letting her cry against him.

"I knew it. I knew I should have stayed home. Why did you make me come here?" she sobbed.

George hugged her tightly to her chest, feeling her shake against him. He stroked her hair gently, and leaned his cheek on her head. “It’s none of our faults, you know. We couldn’t have changed it. You and John tried, he wouldn’t listen,” he said.

Maggie shook her head, unable to speak. She knew George was probably right. What else could she have done, short of tying Brian to a chair? Still, maybe if they’d approached Brian differently, or if she’d brought it up sooner, or more frequently, things could have been different. However it could have been, it was too late now, and there was no way to know for sure. The futility of these thoughts depressed Maggie utterly.

Hours or maybe days - Maggie wasn’t really sure - passed. Conversations were held in muted tones as they tried to figure out what to do. Maggie felt as if she were walking through it all in a haze. Eventually, it was decided that it was unwise for the Beatles to attend Brian Epstein’s funeral - it might create a media frenzy, and out of respect to Brian, the Beatles didn’t want the attention on themselves.

Maggie was glad not to have to go. She wasn’t sure she could have handled it anyway. Her guilt was overwhelming, as was her sense that all her efforts to make a difference would be ultimately futile. While at first she’d been inconsolable, now she felt mostly numb.

Since the Beatles couldn’t go to the funeral, instead they’d all gone up to Paul’s farm in Scotland so that they could mourn together in private. Maureen had stayed home with

the baby, and Jane was on another movie shoot and couldn't get away, but the band, plus Maggie and Pattie, and Neil and Mal, had slipped out of town as quietly as could be managed.

Maggie usually loved Paul's farm because it was so peaceful, but right now, it was almost too peaceful. Maggie had more time to think than she needed or wanted, and her head was spinning in circles. When she couldn't take it anymore, she tried to think of nothing at all, and just embrace the numbness. She had no more tears, no more words left, just a deep sadness that was hard for anyone to penetrate, including John.

George, who clearly still felt badly about their argument, was being especially kind to her. She felt bad for having blamed George for making her leave town that weekend. She knew it was unfair, and George had been quite right in his complaints about how she was treating his interest in the Maharishi, but coping with the insensibility of death was hard. It was much easier to have someone to blame, to be able to say that if she had been there, then Brian would still be alive, as if it were true, a fact. It was very hard for her to not be able to apply some sort of logic to the situation. Fortunately, George understood her need to find sense in all this, and had let her cry and rail against him, knowing that eventually she'd turn the blame away from him and onto herself. The problem was, once she'd stopped blaming him, and turned inward, it was hard to reach her at all.

On their first night at the farm, they all stayed up late getting drunk and reminiscing about Brian. Though everyone was sad, the Beatles were too irrepressible to stay solemn and respectful for long, and so they joked around and told funny stories. Maggie stayed quiet as she didn't

have a whole lot to add since she hadn't been there for the early days, though obviously she'd read enough about them in books. Every time she'd get involved in one of their stories, every time she felt enjoyment at seeing one of them act out some funny scene involving Brian, she'd catch herself and mentally pull back. *Brian was gone and it was all her fault*, she told herself sternly. She didn't deserve to laugh, or to enjoy the Beatles' animated storytelling. *Brian was dead, and she couldn't ever fix it.*

Talk inevitably turned to the future – the question of "what now?" hanging over them unanswered. Maggie was too tired to think about what she knew could happen – there'd be fights and lawsuits over Allen Klein, which would lead to the end of the Beatles. She had failed to save Brian, and maybe she couldn't save the Beatles either. She'd hoped that if she kept Brian alive, then maybe things wouldn't play out the same way this time around. She guessed that it was not to be.

"But why do we need a script?" Paul was saying. "We haven't seen one yet that we've liked, so I say we do it without one."

Clearly Paul was referring to the Magical Mystery Tour – the first real stumble for a group that could do no wrong. Maggie wanted to interrupt Paul, to tell him what a stupid idea it was to have no direction for their movie, how it would be largely disliked, the music aside, of course. But what was the point? *Let them make their mistakes*, she thought dully, *let them continue on whatever course they're supposed to be on. It's not like I can change anything anyway.*

After all, had she really changed anything for the better? Brian was dead. She wouldn't know if George and Linda

would be saved in the end, not until the 90s. Worse, she had no idea if she could really save John. Either he'd end up dumping her for Yoko, and continue down his preordained path to December 8, 1980, or he'd stay with her, and then there was no telling what the future would bring them.

The only thing that Maggie felt like she had any control over was Apple. It was the one piece of hope that she could make a positive difference. The boutique disaster had been averted for one thing, and Apple was doing quite well. That had to mean something, didn't it? Bitterly, she supposed that something would come along to change all that, to redirect Apple back to its original path. *The future will reassert itself somehow*, despair whispered in her ear. *All of your efforts will be for nothing.* She couldn't do anything to block it out. And so she stayed quiet and let Paul enthuse about renting a coach, filling it up with odd characters, and driving aimlessly around the countryside.

She went to bed when the party started to wind down. Besides acute guilt, she was feeling the effects of a few drinks too many. Unwilling to refuse any of the toasts to Brian, she'd done her best to keep up with the others, most of whom were champion drinkers. Maggie was not, and though she drank more that she usually did, there was no way she could match what the Beatles were throwing back. She only hoped she'd managed to drink enough to anesthetize herself. She'd remembered John drinking himself into senselessness on tour, and that sounded just like what she needed. Lying in bed later, she decided that she must not have had enough, as she didn't feel ready to pass out, she just felt vaguely nauseated. Whether it was alcohol or guilt pooling at the bottom of her stomach, she wasn't sure.

“Luv? Are you still awake?” Maggie sensed John standing just inside the doorway to their bedroom, most likely letting his eyes adjust to the darkness.

She was. Wide awake - but still paralyzed by sadness. It had a tight grip on her, wrapping itself around her throat and her lips, and so she was able to say nothing in reply to John. It was easier to just let him think she was asleep. Easier than saying the same things over and over again. *It was my fault. Brian’s dead. I should have been able to save him.* He would just tell her it wasn’t her fault, that everything would be okay – except that she wasn’t sure anything would be okay ever again.

She listened to John feel his way closer to the bed, cursing when he stubbed his toe on their suitcase. She heard the soft sounds of cloth moving against skin, of John stripping his clothes off. The bed creaked with his weight as he climbed in next to her.

She stayed silent, trying to breathe evenly, as he curled up behind her, his own breath warm on her neck. She could feel his warm, naked skin against her back when he wrapped her in his arms.

“Luv, you’re not fooling me, I know you’re awake,” he said quietly.

She opened her mouth to speak, but she didn’t know what to say.

“You need to stop this blaming yourself.”

Maggie waited for the bland platitudes to leave his lips. *It’s okay, it’s not your fault.*

But instead, John said, “It’s all shite, really. Look, if you hadn’t come back to the past, Brian would be dead anyway, wouldn’t he? Well, you gave him a second chance, and it’s his own fucking fault if he didn’t listen to you. God, if he weren’t dead, I would kill him myself.” John was angry, and she didn’t think it was purely alcohol-fueled, though she knew alcohol had a tendency to make him that way.

“Bloody hell, but I’m tired of losing people I love. Uncle George, Julia, Stu, Brian…” John sighed tiredly, his anger leaving him just as suddenly as it had come. “I don’t want to lose you too, luv – not to this. You want to hit something, to scream, to cry, but you won’t let yourself, you’re locked up so tight. I was like that after me mum died. Well, I let the anger out on occasion, but everything else I kept tightly in. It’s no good, luv. This numbness is no good, even if it helps hide the pain now. You need to feel again. Let me help you.”

He waited, and gave her time to process what he’d said, what he was offering.

“Please,” she said in a small voice, still unable to say more. But it was enough.

Still spooning her, he kissed her neck, moving his lips up to her earlobes, as his fingers moved down her body, caressing her skin. His hand slipped into her nightgown, and she could feel his body hard against her. He felt solid and real, despite the fact that he was John Lennon and this was 1967.

Maggie felt a sob lodge in her throat as she turned her body towards him. The grief that was inside her was so sharp, so acute, that it became overwhelming. It was the center of her being, becoming so prominent that it volleyed for her

attention, screaming and clawing its way forward, trying to burst forth. Not knowing what else to do, Maggie reached for John, wishing for any other feeling then this all-consuming guilt.

Leaning forward, she kissed him, pouring all her grief, all her anger, into this single point of contact. John's quick fingers had made short work of the buttons down the front of her nightgown, and soon her body was pressed against his, not a breath of room between them. She wasn't aware of much, except for the fact that this needed to end. The grief needed to dissipate into the night and the only way she knew how to do this was with the hope given by physical contact. John understood her need all too well.

The two of them came together in a fit of passion, moving as one, trying to keep at bay the demons that lurked in every corner of her being. All she knew was his touch, his smell, his sight. Everything about him enveloped her in a warm haze, chasing away the icy cold that had settled in her bones the second she'd known Brian was dead. For tonight, they were safe, they were one. Tomorrow? Well, no one ever truly knew what tomorrow might bring. *Least of all me*, Maggie thought sadly.

Though she was still sad, she felt safely anchored by the weight of John's warm arms. For the first time since Brian's death, she felt like she had come to a place of peace. Eyelids heavy, spent both physically and emotionally, Maggie finally slipped into a dreamless sleep.

Chapter Eleven

Early September, 1967

"Absolutely not!" Maggie stood up furiously from their breakfast table. "We've been throwing money at him for months, and has he even produced one solid thing? Well, that's it. No more! As long as I'm in charge of Apple, I will not let that man so much as breathe on my building."

"You work for us, luv," John reminded her, "And I want Magic Alex to be the one to build the new studio for the band." She hated that cold, caustic tone of voice – he didn't level it at her very often, but the few times he had, she hadn't enjoyed it. Nor did she plan on letting him get away with trying to cow her with it. Not this time, anyway.

"No, John," she retorted. "I don't work for you, I work for Brian…" Then, realizing what she'd said, she snapped her mouth shut. Maggie stood there for a moment, feeling her stomach clench at what she had been about to say. Not trusting herself to keep her emotions in check, she picked up her dishes and put them in the sink.

"Well, he's gone, isn't he?" John said, watching her carefully, knowing she was hiding her face from him. He knew the grief and guilt were still fresh, and while he was

cross that she wasn't giving him his way, he didn't want her to retreat back into the depression she'd been in lately.

"Yes, John," she said quietly. She leaned against the counter. "He's gone. Brian left me in charge – he wanted me to be the voice of reason, and the fact is, I'm not answerable to you. The company was set up to be that way. You all have input, and that's as it should be, but I can overrule you. I haven't so far, not on the Boutique idea, not even on the Flying Saucer." Maggie wished she'd been kidding on that last one. She continued, "But I have to put my foot down on this one. Trust me."

"Why do you hate him so much, luv?" John's voice was warmer now. He got up and went over to her, and peered down at her through his glasses. "He's harmless, isn't he?"

Maggie wasn't so sure.

Why did she hate Magic Alex so much? Truthfully, she'd hated him before she'd ever laid eyes on him and encountering him in person had done nothing to change her opinion. It was Magic Alex that had resurrected the idea of the Beatles buying a Greek island with John this past July. It was ridiculous, and she knew the Boys would lose interest in it five minutes later, but they'd all wanted it, and so she'd been forced to let them have their way. They'd gotten a good deal, and Maggie was keeping an eye on real estate prices, fairly certain they could make a profit on the island's inevitable sale. They'd taken a short trip to Greece in July to inspect this island, and though Maggie had enjoyed seeing Greece, she'd had to grit her teeth every time Magic Alex opened his mouth to make another wondrous claim.

Then there was the "artificial sun" he'd been commissioned by the Beatles to build for the opening of their Boutique. This great display would light up the night sky. Of course, when the time came for Magic Alex to deliver, he'd claimed there was not a strong enough of an energy supply to power it. This had been accepted by the Beatles without question. Maggie, though unsurprised, had fumed silently. She could have told them that he'd never follow through with this latest impossibility, but they'd all been curious to see what Alex would do. After all, it was only money, so why not throw it at Alex for a lark?

But the artificial sun wasn't the only thing Alex hadn't followed through with. There was always some futuristic electronic device he was "working on". One was a telephone that responded to its owner's voice and could identify who was calling. Maggie had sighed tiredly when John had come home eager over this one. He'd remembered that voice command and caller ID were used all the time in the future on computers and phones, but Maggie knew Magic Alex certainly hadn't been the one to invent it. "But if we give him some money, maybe he will!" John had said excitedly. "Wouldn't you love to have this stuff sooner than later?" "Fat chance," she'd grumbled back, but she'd cut Alex a check.

The list went on and on. There was the force field that would surround the Beatles' homes. An X-ray camera. This particular one resulted in Maggie giving John a very long lecture about X-ray astrophysics, until he agreed to cry "Uncle" if she'd only stop talking about things he didn't understand. There was paint that would make anything invisible, and paint that would make one's car change color with the flip of a switch. Magic Alex even took apart John's Rolls Royce and George's Ferrari Berlinetta so he could power a Flying Saucer with their engines. In the end,

of course, there had been no Flying Saucer – just two destroyed cars.

To Maggie, Magic Alex was worse than just a hanger-on. Worse than just a mooch. No, Magic Alex was a fountain of dangerous misinformation about science and engineering – and he was a bad influence on the Beatles, all of whom were looking for instant gratification. Real science and engineering didn't always result in instant results, and so the Beatles had no interest in it. What did reality matter when someone could make you empty promises that never needed to be fulfilled? That someone was Magic Alex, and naturally, the Beatles loved him. What's not to love when someone promises you loudspeaker wallpaper?

The Beatles laughed good-naturedly at her protests, and knowing that she was fighting a losing battle, Maggie simply cut Alex his checks, though she always made them for less than the Beatles asked. She'd also made the money conditional that he had to find outside lab space because she didn't want him anywhere near her building.

There was one more issue. Since failing to save Brian, Maggie felt like she had to exert control over something, and Apple was it. It was the only place she felt like she was making a positive difference these days, and it was worth the fight to keep Magic Alex from destroying it, from letting him turn Apple into what it might be in another timeline. She had saved it from failure, from losing money, from being a joke. And so she continued to fight for it, even if it meant fighting with John. Yes, she may have lost battles over Magic Alex, but she intended on winning the war.

It appeared that a key battle in this war would be about a new recording studio.

Maggie had soon realized with John, that a little knowledge was a dangerous thing. He'd picked up bits of knowledge during his time in the future, and one of these stray pieces of information had to do with how music was recorded. John had no idea how a modern recording studio really worked, but John did know that in the future there'd be no limit on how many tracks you had at your disposal. But that day was not now in 1967. Nor was that day even close off. Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" from 1975 had only used 24 tracks. However, 72 tracks were what Magic Alex had promised to John and John thought this was perfectly reasonable. This was why John had asked Maggie Sue to let Magic Alex build the Beatles a recording studio in the basement of the Apple building.

A recording studio in the basement, Maggie groaned inwardly when she'd heard the plan. The basement was next to where the subway roared by underground, vibrating everything. It was next to the heating unit for the building. Next to plumbing pipes that gurgled and swished water. It was incredibly poor placement for recording anything, never minding the fact that 72 recording tracks were currently an impossibility anyway.

Maggie decided that she'd put up with Magic Alex long enough, and this was the final straw. She knew from her original timeline that the studio would be a disaster until Geoff Emerick, the Beatles sound engineer, was put on the job. Being very knowledgeable in real sound engineering, he would pull off a miracle and make a real studio out of Alex's mess. Why couldn't they just have Geoff do the studio right the first time? Why did Magic Alex have to be involved? What would it take, how many failed projects did there have to be before the Beatles saw this charlatan for who he was?

Closing her eyes in frustration, Maggie let her head hang back in defeat for a moment as she tried to gather her wits. John's question was still hanging in the air, unanswered. "Why do I hate Magic Alex?" she asked John, turning to him with resolve in her eyes. "Because he makes promises he can't keep, yet you all hang on his every word. I don't like to see people I love get taken advantage of, and he is most certainly taking advantage of you."

John sighed. "Luv, it's our money, and there's lots of it. Why not see what he can do?"

"Because he never actually does anything! Name one thing he's actually produced!?"

John thought silently.

Maggie broke the silence, when it was obvious John had no answer. "Look, we've been through this same argument dozens of times. I have to get to work. Can we have another fight about this later?"

"So, we're done with this one, then?" John got up and moved towards her.

"I guess so," Maggie said, not altogether convinced that it was actually over. She still had no intention of giving in on the issue of this recording studio.

"Good, then we can move on to the best part," he grinned.

"And what's that?"

"Making up, of course!" With that, John's body was against hers; his hands held her face, and his lips pressed

against hers, his tongue teasing her mouth open. John's fingers tangled in her hair and then crept downwards, wandering over her body, pausing to rub here and stroke there. John pulled his head back, watching her reaction with interest. Her eyes were closed and she moaned softly as he ran his hands up under her skirt. Cupping her bum, he pulled her hard against him. He had to have her right now. But not on that floor. He hated that tile, it was too hard and cold. He bent to kiss her again, but she turned her face away.

"John, I'm going to be late!" But her voice was weak and unconvincing, and before she knew what was happening, she was being boosted up onto the counter.

Maggie decided she no longer cared if she missed her meeting, mostly because of where John's hands were and what they were doing, but she felt obligated to make one more token protest. "We have to stop! This dress was expensive, and I'm sitting in the butter dish!"

John pulled his lips away from her neck. "Not your dress!" He gasped in mock horror. "We'll have to get you out of it at once!" With a wicked look he added, "I'd better take my trousers off too, just to make sure they are safe from any breakfast foods." Unconcerned by the cost of her dress, he pulled it up over her head and tossed it onto the floor before asking in a concerned voice, "Must we keep your knickers safe as well?"

She giggled at that. "By all means!"

The floor was soon strewn with clothing, and John easily managed to make Maggie Sue forget Magic Alex entirely.

“Who do we want on the bus, then?” Paul said, sitting down at the table in the back of the studio. The Beatles were still hashing out their plans for the Magical Mystery Tour. Maggie, who had stopped by for tea, still wanted no part of it, and only listened half-interestedly. She was tired today. She and John had had another row over Magic Alex last night at dinner, and they’d spent half the night “making up” afterwards. Maggie suspected that John had started the fight (and ended it quickly) just for this reason. While she didn’t mind in the least, her mind was kind of fuzzy today, and she kept yawning.

“Well, Magic Alex, of course,” John shot a look over at Maggie, and catching her eye, winked at her, and waggled his eyebrows. “Unless Miss Margaret wants to fight me over that one?”

She rolled her eyes, but then grinned at him, “I’m too tired to fight about that anymore today! But maybe tomorrow, over breakfast?”

“You know, there are other people here,” George broke in. “Disgusting, you two are. We all realize you’re talking about sex, you know. You’re not fooling anyone.”

“Animals,” Paul agreed before getting back to business. He opened a book of actors that he’d acquired for this purpose and flipped through it. He paused and turned the book around to show the others. “How about Jessie Robins? Maybe she could be Ritchie’s auntie or something?”

“Oh, let’s have Neil Innes,” George added. “He could do something musical, maybe with his band?” Neil Innes was one of the Pythons and George loved their comedy.

“Don’t forget Victor Spinetti!” Ringo chimed in. He was sitting on the floor, replacing the head of one of his toms. Maggie yawned again as more names were listed.

“Oh, I met this great new artist,” John said suddenly. “She’s really unusual, and I think she’d be perfect. Her name is Yoko Ono.”

Maggie froze in mid-yawn.

“Yoko?” She struggled to keep her voice under control, but she knew that George at least could sense the strain in her tone. John seemed oblivious. After all, they’d never fought outright about Yoko, though Maggie had expressed some concern that Yoko was chasing John. After reassuring her, he’d obviously dismissed her worries as just that, and had forgotten all about it. Clearly he wasn’t sensing that Maggie was at all dismayed about the idea of Yoko being on their traveling bus.

“Sounds great, I’ll write her down,” Paul said.

“Maybe not, Paul,” George tried, looking at Maggie worriedly.

“We can just sort it out later.” Paul waved his hand at George, and continued. He took out a fresh piece of paper. “Now, when do we want to start filming? Maybe in a week or so? All we need is the coach and some cameras…”

“You’ll be there, right, luv?” John asked her that night, as they were lying in bed.

“Be where?” Maggie’s thoughts were far away.

“On the Tour. We decided to start filming on September 11, and we’ll probably go to the 25th or so.”

Maggie was quiet. It was bad enough that Magic Alex was going to be involved, but if Yoko was going to be there, she wanted no part of it. Did she have a choice though? Did she dare stay away and let John and Yoko share time together that might bond them together? Possibly forever?

Who was she kidding? It was going happen no matter what she did. Brian was dead, and John and Yoko would find a way to be together.

The thought made tears spring to her eyes. Hating herself for being so weak, for giving in so easily to despair, she started crying in earnest.

“Luv, what is it?” John rolled over and cradled her in his arms. “What’s wrong?”

She just shook her head. She still couldn’t tell him how much she resented Yoko’s presence, her intrusion into their lives. Instead she wept uncontrollably, and John did his best to comfort her.

“Is it Brian?” he asked gently.

She nodded her head. It was in a way – he was the key to this whole thing. Her inability to stop his death was what

had her doubting that she could change anything. She was so tired of fighting, she just wanted to give up and let the future take its course.

“When are you going to come for a visit?” Linda asked her the next day, during one of their regular phone conversations.

“I don’t know, things are so busy here, what with the new movie the Boys are starting.”

“Oh, that sounds exciting.”

“Actually, it’s going to be a major disaster,” she said dryly. “I mean, from what I can tell.” Maggie still forgot that she wasn’t supposed to know how Magical Mystery Tour turned out. “They don’t have a director or a script, or even a clear vision.”

“Oh,” said Linda, slightly puzzled.

“But the music is going to be amazing.”

“Well, I guess that’s what’s important in the end,” Linda mused. “When are they starting filming?”

“They are driving around the country in a bus somewhere between September 11th and 25th.”

Linda laughed. “Please tell me you are going to be on this bus!”

“I know it’s hard to believe, but I was hoping to find a way out of this one.”

“Well, why don’t you come and visit me then? Say that I desperately need you to help me pick out some clothes to impress Jim Morrison, who I will be shooting before his gig on the 17th.” Linda laughed. “Maybe we can rescue you and make Mr. McCartney jealous all at the same time!”

“How can I resist an offer like that?” Maggie replied with a laugh. Maybe it was time to let time and fate and destiny do what they wanted. Who was she to question any of this? When she came back from her trip, at least maybe she’d finally have some answers.

Chapter Twelve

Maggie Sue and Linda Eastman were both curled up on the couch in Linda's New York apartment. Linda's daughter Heather was in bed fast asleep, which gave the two women a chance to talk about grown-up things. It was hard to talk about sex and relationships in front of Linda's little girl, though coming up with euphemisms that Heather wouldn't catch on to had been amusing. However, they hadn't had much of a chance for a real talk so far – besides Heather's presence, Maggie's visit had been a whirlwind of sightseeing (1960s New York still fascinated her, though she'd given Linda the excuse that she hadn't done the touristy things when she'd actually lived here), shopping, parties, and trailing along to assist Linda with her photography gigs.

One of Linda's gigs was a shoot that Jim Morrison had arranged with her while he was in town for a show. (The show, as it turned out, was actually The Ed Sullivan Show. The performance would be legendary, with Jim controversially refusing to change the words to 'Light My Fire'.) Linda and Jim Morrison had first become friendly after she'd shot the band early in their career at a NY discotheque called the Ondine in 1966. Whenever the Doors were in town, Linda made an effort to go see them,

and Jim made an effort to see her as well. Maggie couldn't blame him. Linda had a talent for making people feel at ease, and that made her a natural confidant.

Linda had decided to shoot Jim at the Cloisters. Standing on the sidelines watching Linda work, Maggie felt a little in awe of her friend. She was also, she had to admit, in awe of Linda's subject. Afterwards, Linda invited Jim to come by the apartment to have a drink and relax, an offer he gratefully accepted. Maggie was wide-eyed at how casual their relationship seemed to be.

When they got back to Linda's apartment, Jim settled down on the couch and Linda asked Maggie for help in the kitchen. As soon as they were alone, Maggie whispered, "Hey Lin, did you know you have Jim Morrison sitting in your living room?" Maggie peeked to make sure Jim couldn't hear her and then turned back to Linda. "I didn't know you could just say, 'Hey Jim Morrison, want to come hang out?' and magically have him appear in your living room like that. Jim Morrison and the Doors are icons!"

Linda turned at looked at her, surprised. "You do remember that you're engaged to a Beatle, right? To THE John Lennon? One of the biggest rock icons in the world, if not the biggest? And you're freaked out by Jim?" She laughed.

Maggie blushed. Linda was right, it was pretty silly to be shy of Jim Morrison, when she hung out with the Beatles on a regular basis. "I actually forget who John really is sometimes," Maggie said. " He's just John to me now, you know? Well, most of the time. Believe me, it was completely apparent on tour that he was really and truly a Beatle. When something happens to remind that he is THE John Lennon, it kind of scares me."

“I actually do know what you mean, though I’ve only had a small taste of that with Paul. Sometimes he’s just this cute guy I like, and then I’ll see him on TV and I think, ‘Oh God, he’s a Beatle, isn’t he?”

Maggie smiled. It was a familiar sensation, but amplified, given the vantage point from which she’d first witnessed the Beatles. “At least you’d hung out with rock stars before. My life before John was so not Rock n’ Roll,” she admitted. “I’d never met anyone famous in my life. It still feels really strange to just be hanging out with music legends like it’s nothing.”

“Honestly, the Doors aren’t anything like the Beatles. They couldn’t even get arrested until recently! *Light My Fire* is huge, obviously, and getting on Ed Sullivan will be a big break, but icons? I don’t know about that!” Linda obviously had no idea what was coming for the band. *And not all of it was good*, Maggie thought soberly.

“In any case,” Linda said, still amused by Maggie being starstruck, “Don’t think of it as Jim Morrison, of The Doors, sitting out there. Tonight he’s just Jim…this cool guy who likes to talk about poetry and philosophy.”

“And if he’s like most rock stars, scoring with his groupies.” Maggie winked at her knowingly.

“I wouldn’t know anything about that,” Linda laughed at her.

“Oh no?”

“No! Scoring with your photographer is completely different than scoring with your groupies.” Linda grinned

at Maggie, and then picked up the tray of drinks and handed it to her. "Here, go give the Rock Legend a drink."

Jim had turned out to be really nice, and Maggie was sad to know that he only had a few years left. She wasn't sure there was anything she could do – neither he nor Linda knew her secret, and she didn't think she knew him well enough to come out and warn him to stay away from heroin. He would think she was crazy. Besides, from what she remembered, the circumstances surrounding his death had been somewhat mysterious. Because of this, the evening had been bittersweet and in the end, had made her sad about Brian again. She stopped this train of thought completely before it reached the inevitable and scary destination, which was that of John's ultimate fate. It was strange to think that Linda didn't know that in Maggie's time, both Jim and John had legendary status largely because of their sudden and early deaths.

Despite having had fun together during Maggie's visit, Linda had sensed that Maggie wasn't her usual self. Linda had given her some space, not wanting to intrude. She could tell that Maggie was here in NY seeking a sort of refuge or escape, though from what she didn't know. After a week and a half had elapsed, Linda had decided that she'd let enough time go by. It was time now to find out what Maggie was running from.

The apartment was quiet, soft music was playing on the background, and both women were nursing glasses of wine.

"Why are you really here?" Linda asked Maggie.

Maggie knew it was time to make a confession and to get Linda's advice, but she couldn't resist teasing Linda. "Why am I here? To see you of course!"

“You left fabulous sex with a Beatle to see me?”

“Wow, when you put it that way, it does seem pretty stupid,” Maggie smiled. After a second, her smile faded a bit. “Actually, I think I may have done something even stupider than that.”

“What?” Linda was immediately concerned for her friend.

Maggie sighed. “It’s this woman.”

“A woman?” Linda didn’t push, she just encouraged.

“As you no doubt know, the Beatles have a certain … reputation. I’m sure it’s no secret how many women they’ve been with, and being married has stopped none of them in that regard. But John…” Linda waited.

“Well, John was no different. If anything, he was probably one of the worst offenders. He did some really terrible things to his first wife.” Maggie played with her glass. “That doesn’t sound like a sound recipe for trust in our relationship, but I do trust him. He’s different now, with me.” She looked up at Linda. “Did you know that he used to drink himself unconscious on tour, just so he wouldn’t be tempted to cheat?”

“No! I didn’t!” Linda said, surprised.

“I wouldn’t ordinarily pat a man on the back for something so basic as not cheating – but…”

“Beatle,” supplied Linda.

“Yep. Beatle. And even more than that, John Lennon. For him to go to such lengths – and for me. It’s a big deal.”

Linda nodded.

“Which is why I feel so bad about being freaked out about this one woman. But she’s different. She’s not a groupie, or someone he would’ve once fucked after a concert and then forgotten about it. He’s interested in her, I can tell.”

“Why? How do you know?”

Maggie sighed. “She’s an avant-garde artist and he loves that crazy out-there stuff. He claims they’re just friends, but I just have this feeling…” Maggie wished she could say why she had it, but she still was unsure that Linda wouldn’t find her crazy. “It’s totally unfair, of course, because I’m such good friends with George, and John has been remarkably un-jealous about it. And also because John has done everything in his power to reassure me that he’s not interested in anyone else – but still, I just can’t shake this paranoia. Even if John’s not into her, she is SO into him, and she’s doing her damndest to steal him away. Do you know John even put her on that stupid Magical Mystery Tour bus? It kills me to think of them together.”

“What are you doing here with me then? Why aren’t you over there, pulling her hair out or something?”

Maggie smiled briefly at that. “Because I was so tired of fighting. Fighting with John over Apple, over drugs, trying to dance around the subject Yoko, so I wouldn’t come off like a jealous harpy. I just…I couldn’t do it anymore. I had to get away from it all for a bit. Clear my mind.”

“Has it helped?”

“I guess – it’s been nice to have a change of scenery, to have things distract me from losing Brian. But now I just feel stupid. What was I thinking, leaving the two of them there together?” Maggie groaned. “Actually, the problem is, I wasn’t thinking. I haven’t been able to think clearly since Brian…” She stopped, unable to say more without summoning tears. She could probably add crying to the list of things she was tired of.

“I didn’t realize you and Brian were so close,” Linda said carefully, watching Maggie fight with her emotions.

“I guess I knew him about as well as anyone – it’s just that … I knew he had pill problems, and I knew something could happen. I tried to help him, but it totally backfired, and now he’s dead and I feel so responsible. Added to that, I feel like…if I couldn’t help Brian, then I’m just powerless. I’m powerless to affect my own life. Powerless to keep Yoko away from John. So I left.” Maggie looked down. “I can’t control things, so I decided to just let them happen. It was easier that way.”

“Oh, hon.” Linda sat up and put her arms around Maggie and gave her a hug. “Well, I can’t blame you for worrying. I know if it were me marrying a Beatle, I’d probably never let him out of my sight!

“I know.” Maggie had to laugh at that.

“What?” Linda said a little defensively. “It’s a sound strategy. If you don’t want a Beatle to stray, just never let him out of your sight!”

“It’s just crazy enough to work! You’ll have to try that with Paul.” Maggie said knowingly.

“Oh, Paul. I don’t know, I don’t think it’s going to go anywhere with him. He’s such a playboy, and he’s already got a girlfriend. And I’m all the way over here, with a child to boot. It’s a lot to ask of a man like Paul.”

“Paul loves kids. And he loves you!”

Linda’s head snapped up. “Has he said anything?”

“Well, no. But I can tell.”

“Hmm. Well, it’s been a while since I’ve seen him. He said that maybe he’d come to visit in October or November, once the new film is done. He thought Jane might be away on another movie project then. Whether that will happen, we’ll see. Oh, Maggie – I’m just afraid he’s never going to break up with Jane.” Linda put her head in hands, then she looked up at Maggie. “I feel awful about it, you know. Here you are telling me how worried you are about your fiancé cheating, and here I am, Paul’s ‘other woman’.”

“It’s different,” Maggie said stubbornly. “You and Paul were meant to be.” Then she realized what she’d said. She could justify Paul cheating on Jane with Linda because she knew Linda and Paul were destined for each other. How were John and Yoko any different? John and Yoko were meant to be in her old timeline – how did she know they weren’t meant to be in this one? It always came back to that same question, over and over again. The tears welled up in her eyes at the thought that John was meant for anyone but her. She loved him so much.

“Oh hon, are you crying? What’s wrong? Do you hate me for cheating with Paul?”

“No, no, it’s not that. I told you, you’re meant to be. I know it.” Maggie sniffed. “But what if that’s true of John and Yo…her.” Maggie almost couldn’t finish the sentence. ‘John and Yoko’ just rolled off the tongue so naturally. She hated that.

“It’s not – I know it. I’ve seen you and John together. He adores you, and frankly, I think he’s the one afraid of losing you. He knows you’re the best thing that ever happened to him.”

“You’re just saying that because you’re my friend.”

“And because it’s true.” Linda said reassuringly. “I think you should go home, and fight for John. He belongs with you. Don’t let anyone tell you differently.”

“What if I fight and lose?” Maggie asked.

Linda was firm. “Then at least you went down fighting.”

Maggie thought about Linda’s words that night and finally decided that she was right. She hadn’t given up fighting for Apple, why was she giving up on John? Maybe John and Yoko were destined to be together – but Maggie wouldn’t let John go without a fight. She couldn’t give Yoko that satisfaction. If she lost John, Maggie knew she still had something – Apple would still be hers. She still cared about the Beatles, and she would make Apple work for them. And if history repeated itself and Yoko talked John out of the bullet-proof vest, Maggie intended to take John’s killer out with her bare hands if she had to. No matter what happened, she wanted John to be safe. The first time she had come here, back in 1964, she’d had no expectation of being with John, but she’d wanted to save him anyway.

Even though everything was different now, there was no reason that should change. She would try to save John no matter what happened. Either way, she wasn't going to roll over and make things easy for Yoko any more. Suddenly she felt better. Her resolution to save John at all costs was logical, and she felt her sense of control returning. She might not be able to control whether John chose her in the end, but she could certainly make her own choice.

Feeling her fighting spirit coming back at long last, Maggie decided to take Linda's advice and fly home early. Now that her decision was made, Maggie knew that she didn't want to spend one more second away from John.

Nervously, Maggie stood in front of their house. It was lit up and clearly John was at home. Maggie just prayed that she would find him alone. What if she walked inside only to find Yoko inside wearing her bathrobe? Clearly that would obligate Maggie to pull all of Yoko's hair out, and to eject her bodily.

Maggie walked up to the door and paused quietly for a moment listening. Inside she could hear John talking. Or was it the TV? Suddenly the door was yanked open, and John stood there, phone receiver in hand, cord stretched across the room.

"Luv?" John dropped the phone and grabbed her in a hug, barraging her with questions. "I heard a car pull up – did you take a cab from the airport? Why didn't you tell me, I could have sent a driver? You came home early? I missed you, did you miss me?"

Maggie hugged John back, relieved by her reception. Over John's shoulder, she could see into the living room. It was empty. She sighed in relief.

"Sorry I didn't get to the door sooner, luv, I was on the phone. With Linda actually. She called to see if you made it safely home. Oh, hold on, she's still on the line!"

John retrieved the receiver. "Linda, luv, sorry I dropped you there! Guess who just showed up?" He was quiet, listening to Linda for a moment, and then he turned to Maggie Sue. "Linda said to tell you "Kick her ass!" whatever that means." Maggie laughed and John made a face at her, as he put the phone back up to his ear. He listened for another minute and then laughed. "Thanks, luv, I think I'll do just that." He hung up the phone and then faced Maggie, with a familiar expression on his face.

"You'll do what?" Maggie asked, eyes wide.

John reached around behind Maggie and slammed the door shut, and then grabbed her and squeezed her tightly to him. Picking her up, he backed up until he hit the sofa, and then he tipped them both onto it. "This," he whispered in her ear. He paused to nibble on her earlobe, and then kissed her neck. "And this." Rolling her under him, he undid the buttons on her blouse, his fingers fumbling a bit, but ultimately succeeding in his mission. His fingers moved gently over her skin as did his tongue and lips, all of which left Maggie wondering why she had ever left in the first place. It was good to be home.

Chapter Thirteen

September 21, 1967

Maggie was happy to be back home, back in England and back in John's arms. The morning after she returned, John caught her up fully on how poorly the movie was going. This was unsurprising to Maggie, who while not knowing the specifics, knew that the Magical Mystery Tour had been plagued with problems. Apparently filming had not gone smoothly from Day One, starting with the coach being delayed because it was still being painted. On Day Two, the coach got stuck on a bridge. "Two days in and I was filmed absolutely losing it, screaming and cursing, and carrying on," John told Maggie. "I ripped the placards off the side of the coach and everything!" He seemed a little bit proud of this. "Paul had better not use that footage or I'll cripple him!" John pounded his left palm with his right fist mock-menacingly.

"I don't remember it being in the film," Maggie reassured him.

"Was my spaghetti scene?" he asked eagerly. He'd had a strange dream one night and had turned it into a scene in which he shoveled spaghetti onto a large woman's table.

“Yes,” Maggie had sighed. That bit of the movie had kind of grossed her out.

“What else was in it?” John was eager to know what Maggie remembered of the film.

“I…don’t remember,” she lied, knowing she’d never get away with it. She dug another armload of clothes out of her suitcase and dumped them on the bed so she could sort through them.

“Tell me, Miss Margaret! I know full well you remember!”

“Don’t be silly John, I don’t think I even saw it.” She tried to look focused on her unpacking.

“What kind of Beatles fan are you?” he asked accusingly.

“Would it make you feel better if I started screaming and tearing your shirt off?”

“It might,” John smirked at her.

“Would you settle for simple unbuttoning, rather than tearing?” she smiled at him, glad she had succeeded in distracting him from the uncomfortable truth that she hadn’t liked his movie all that much, even though she knew it ruined her credibility as a Beatles fan.

“I guess it’ll have to do. The tailor bills are getting so expensive from all the ripped clothes,” John said, grinning as she pulled his shirt off and then pushed him down on the bed, heedless of the laundry scattered all over it.

A little while later…

"Did the scene with Paul…" John only got half his sentence out before Maggie cut him off with a "No!"

"How about…"

"NO!" Obviously sex hadn't kept John distracted for long enough. "John, honestly, I only saw the film once, and I don't remember much about it specifically."

"Only once? Wait, you've seen Help! and A Hard Day's Night loads of times, but this one only once? Why?"

Maggie looked over at John. "You don't have a director or a script, right?"

"Right."

"And this film is just basically you guys riding around in a bus."

"A coach," he corrected her. "Right."

"Well, you do the math," Maggie swung her legs off the bed. Finding her bathrobe conveniently on the ground, she put it on and tried to collect the rest of her scattered clothes.

"Didn't you like anything about it?" John asked a little forlornly.

Maggie softened. "Well, it does have my favorite Beatle in it. And he wears a very sporty-looking hat." She ruffled his hair fondly.

“Well, I guess that’s okay, then.” He seemed slightly mollified.

“Oh, you thought I meant you? I was talking about Ringo,” she giggled.

“You’re going to pay for that, Miss Margaret!”

“You’ll have to catch me first!” And with that she threw her armload of clothes at John to try to slow him down and took off running. The master bath was too obvious, so she headed instead to the guest bath down the hall. She managed to lock door that led to the hall, but didn’t quite make it to the other door that connected with the guest room before John burst in.

“A ha! Thought you could escape, did you?” He grabbed her around the waist and lifted her up on his shoulder.

“John! Put me down!”

“Tell me you loved our film!”

“I ….” She was laughing too hard to get the words out.

“Say it!”

“Okay, okay, I loved your film!” She crossed her fingers behind her back.

“That’s better!” He put her down and kissed her forehead. “Really, I have no idea how it will turn out, but people have loved everything we’ve done so far, even things I thought were shite. What could go wrong?”

Maggie raised an eyebrow.

“Never mind, luv, never mind.” John turned around, eyeing the tub. “Fancy a bath?” he turned back to her with his own eyebrow raised.

“You don’t mean bath, and you know it!” She laughed at him. “You’re insatiable!”

“Well, someone has to console me. I’ve just been in a terrible film! My career in the movies is over. OVER!” He summoned up his best fake sobs, which weren’t terribly convincing, and never really had been.

She couldn’t help laughing. “Okay, okay, a nice, soothing bath it is!” she said and she started to run the water into the tub.

“I’ll get the bubbles!” John said, racing out of the room, leaving Maggie shaking her head in amusement.

A few days later…

Maggie hadn’t missed the entirety of filming, she was home from New York in time to watch the boys trooping down a staircase in a warehouse at West Malling Air Station in Maidstone Kent, singing “Your Mother Should Know”, which was one of her favorite songs from the album. At least she didn’t have to lie about loving the music they’d created for this movie, because she truly did. And even if the end product wasn’t fantastic, she enjoyed watching them film one of the video sequences, which were, frankly, the best part of the movie. She was sad

she'd missed watching them film "I Am The Walrus", but John looked very elegant in his "Your Mother Should Know" tux, and to her delight, not only was Yoko not present, but John ignored all 160 of the dancing girls hired for that number. Instead he stayed by her side when he could, and made faces at her from across the room when he couldn't.

Her happiness was somewhat diminished a few days later when Maggie found a postcard addressed to John in the mail. It said "Breathe at midnight," and was signed by Yoko. Maggie sighed. She was sure this was a crappy performance art project of some kind. Maggie's first instinct was to tear the postcard into teeny tiny bits and then bury the evidence in the back woods, but she couldn't bring herself to totally destroy it. Destroying someone else's mail was wrong. She still had her principles, didn't she?

Maggie thought for a minute, and then unable to resist leaving the postcard unmolested, she stuck it in the sink and ran the water over it until the ink smudged and ran, making it just barely legible. She pondered for a moment and then tossed a couple of other pieces of junk mail in the sink with it. Pulling them out, she patted them dry. They were still damp, but John wouldn't be home 'til tonight anyway. She'd just explain that the mail had gotten rained on, and she had no idea what that postcard was about. It was immature, but Maggie couldn't help herself. Yoko just brought out the worst in her.

Sure enough, John barely glanced at the mail, and didn't even question its bedraggled state. He'd been busy with recording sessions for the Magical Mystery tour, and was spending all his spare time at the studio. He was hardly home long enough to care about things like mail.

Maggie went with him to the studio a few times, wanting to see how "I Am The Walrus" was coming along. On one of these visits, George cornered her almost right away.

"Did you watch me on the telly, Mags?" he asked her eagerly .

"Of course I did – I wouldn't have missed it." George had gone on the "Frost Programme" the previous night, to talk about transcendental meditation. It was true that Maggie wouldn't have missed watching George, but she wished he'd been talking about music instead of that hokey religious crap he was still so into.

"What did you think?"

Maggie thought quickly – it wouldn't do to hesitate for too long. She settled on an old trick borrowed from Paula Abdul on American Idol (which George couldn't possibly know about yet) and complimented his appearance, therefore cleverly avoiding commenting on what had actually been coming out of his mouth.

"You looked really great, George!" What else could she say? He had spouted some mumbo jumbo about reincarnation and life and death being only relative to thought, whatever that meant. Even if Maggie hadn't been a scientist, she still would have had trouble with anything that sounded so New Agey and ridiculous.

"We're putting off India 'til after this album and film are all done, but we're definitely going. You'll come?" He sounded a bit hesitant asking, so Maggie was quick to answer in the affirmative.

“Of course I will.” Maggie meant it and also knew there was really no escaping it. The trip was important – she knew the Beatles had all written some amazing songs during their big trip to India. She didn’t have to like it, but it was meant to be, and so she would go along with it. For the good of the Beatles – and the good of her friendship with George.

For the good of her relationship with John, Maggie knew she had to tell him the truth about Yoko, but it was all too easy to come up with excuses not to. Sometimes things between her and John were so good that Maggie didn’t want to chance altering that by bringing up the subject of Yoko. At those times she thought she wouldn’t even have to, that Yoko would never be an issue. But then, Yoko would appear, and John would seem bemused by her, and Maggie’s insides would twist into knots. The question always seemed to be – would John want Yoko more if he knew the truth of who she’d been in Maggie’s original timeline? Could telling him even make a difference one way or the other? Once or twice, she’d started to try to tell him, but something would always stop her, either John would stop her lips with his own, or the words would stick in Maggie’s throat, and the opportune moment would pass away. Maggie knew she couldn’t hold this confession off forever. It had to be done – surely the perfect time would present itself, and when it did, the words would certainly come then.

Until that time, Maggie was alone in her fight against insecurity, and against Yoko’s advances. Yoko was… persistent. The postcards, phone calls – and once the housekeeper, Dot, had informed Maggie that a strange, bushy-haired Asian woman had talked her way into the house, insisting that she’d left a ring there the other day. Maggie didn’t know what to believe – had Yoko been in

their house before or was she bluffing? She trusted John, and didn't think he'd done anything with Yoko - at least not yet. But it certainly couldn't have been for lack of effort on Yoko's part.

The next day brought a second postcard from Yoko that said "Breathe at dawn." That one she tore up in to teeny tiny bits and buried in the woods behind the house. Principles be damned. Enough was enough.

Chapter Fourteen

October 9, 1967

"Happy Birthday, dear John…Happy Birthday to you!" Everyone sang as Maggie Sue put a chocolate cake topped by a plastic guitar in front of a beaming John. He closed his eyes, blew out the candles, and then looked up and winked at Maggie. Reaching over he pulled her onto his lap and hugged her.

"What did you wish for?" she asked, running her fingers through his hair, which was starting to get long again.

George watched John grin and whisper something in Maggie's ear that made her eyes go wide and her cheeks blush bright red. This made John laugh out loud. Maggie jumped up from his lap, seemingly in a huff, and leaned up against the table, head bowed away from John. George smirked when he saw what Maggie was really up to. When John, who looked surprisingly apologetic, leaned forward towards Maggie and opened his mouth to speak, Maggie surprised him by smearing icing from the cake across his nose. John reached out to grab her, but she danced away from him, laughing. Maggie raced off down the hallway with John in hot pursuit, a big smile on his face.

He shook his head - disgusting how those two were always at it. George had one guess what John's birthday wish had been, and it looked like it was about to be fulfilled. The ice cream would be melted before they rejoined the party, he supposed, but at least that left more for him. Since no one looked like they were going to take charge, George shrugged and cut himself a slab of cake, topping it with a scoop of ice cream. After a moment's thought, he made up a second plate. Motioning to Ringo, he carried the two desserts through the sliding glass door outside to the backyard and slapped them down on the picnic table. "Hey Ring," he called back inside, "Bring some forks!"

Ringo popped outside brandishing the appropriate silverwear a few minutes later. George pushed a slice of birthday cake over to him.

"Thanks, mate!" Ringo said. The two of them ate thoughtfully, keeping whatever thoughts they had to themselves. Ringo was the one to finally break the silence. "Where's Paul?" He'd seen John run off with Maggie Sue, but suddenly realized he hadn't seen Paul all night.

"Paul is…actually, I have no idea where Paul is. Last I saw, he was chatting up Maggie's
friend, Linda."

"The cute, blonde American?" Ringo asked.

"That's the one," George said.

"Again? Didn't he already…"

"Yup."

"Huh."

The two men sat silently again, their conversation about their bandmate's love life completely tapped out.

"Care for a smoke?" George reached into his pocked and pulled out a plastic baggie.

"Sure, mate, thanks." Ringo and George companionably shared a joint and continued to enjoy the mild, autumn evening and the relative quiet offered by the backyard.

Also enjoying some quiet away from the party were Paul and Linda. They were seated next to each other on the piano bench in John and Maggie's music room. Paul, in an effort to impress Linda, had offered to play her one of his new songs from the as-yet-unreleased Magical Mystery Tour album. "Fool on the Hill" was a wistful ballad, perfect for showing the birds his sensitive side. Linda had been suitably impressed, which made him feel pleased with himself. Paul knew he was a good songwriter, but for some reason Linda's opinion mattered to him, and it made him uncharacteristically unsure.

"You really liked it?" Paul asked, hating that he sounded so insecure. Was he or wasn't he a Beatle?

"I loved it," said Linda truthfully. Was Paul, the famous Beatle, actually unsure of himself? Surely not. This was the man who had written so many famous songs so effortlessly. Was it possible he didn't know how good he was? How could he not? "Would you play me another?" She suddenly felt shy, and nervously tucked her blonde hair

down behind one ear. Paul suddenly had the urge to reach out and repeat the gesture himself, imagining the feel of those smooth golden strands beneath his fingertips. Instead, spotting the vase of flowers on the piano, he reached out, grabbed one, and tucked it gently in her hair. She smiled at him, and he ducked his head, a little embarrassed by his tender display of affection.

He and Linda had slept together before, but somehow this little gesture felt so much more intimate. Linda was just supposed to be a diversion from his problems with Jane, but she was turning out to be rather a large complication. Paul was afraid he was actually falling for her. However, Jane was, and had been, such a large part of his life. He didn't know what to do – he didn't really want to break things off with Jane, but he found his thoughts more and more with Linda lately. In his weaker moments, he allowed himself to imagine what it would be like to be a family with Linda and Heather. He tried not to let his thoughts go down that path too often – talk about complications!

"Another song, then?" Paul said, trying to make his thoughts behave properly. Linda nodded, an eager smile on her face and Paul launched into a fast version of "Your Mother Should Know". Linda seemed to like it so much, that he played it a second time, making her sing along with him. She wasn't bad – and he found that he rather enjoyed harmonizing with her.

"Play something older next!" Linda requested.

Paul thought for a second, and settled on the perfect song immediately. He discarded it just as quickly, not sure he wanted to go down that path yet. *The hell with it*, he finally thought, figuring that that he'd gone this far, he might as well go one step further. He got up and grabbed one of

John's acoustic guitars. It didn't have a strap, and it was right-handed, so he knelt down in front of Linda, and propped it upside down on his knee. Strumming it a few times, he looked up at her and began to sing "I've Just Seen a Face". Though he hadn't written it with Linda in mind, it suited how he was starting to feel for her. Linda blushed as he sang, "*She's just the girl for me and I want all the world to see we've met…*" to her.

She applauded when he finished and he gave a quick bow to her before placing the guitar back on its stand. She patted the spot on the piano bench next to her, and he lost no time in accepting her invitation. "More?" she asked.

"More? You're insatiable, woman!" he teased. But he was happy – he loved performing for people, and Linda was currently his favorite audience. Paul ran his fingers up and down the keyboard. "Maybe I should write you a song," he said, hesitant.

"Really?" Linda said curiously.

"Well, I'd actually wanted to write you one as a birthday present, but I wasn't able to get away from filming to actually see you for your birthday. Though I wish I could have," he added. "Maybe I should do that now!"

Linda hadn't expected Paul to remember her birthday, let alone visit her for it. She knew from Maggie that they hadn't finished filming until the day after. Paul had called her though, which had delighted her. "See," Maggie had told her, "I told you he's into you!" And now Paul was writing songs for her? She couldn't wait to tell Maggie about this, so they could analyze every nuance of this conversation.

“You can just do that? Write a song just like that?” Linda asked. She knew John and Paul had written “I Wanna Be Your Man” on demand for the Stones, but she’d never seen Paul in action.

“If I have the right inspiration…” Paul smiled at her, doing his best to charm her. He hoped it was working. “Hmm, let’s see.” Paul actually did have a melody floating in his head, and he’d wanted to write a song to express how he felt about Linda, which was to say both entranced and confused as hell. He’d never been able to come up with the right words, but maybe something would come tonight. He thought the melody was more suited to the acoustic guitar, but Linda was sitting close to him, and he didn’t want to move to grab a guitar. Piano it would have to be. Paul picked out the melody, gaining confidence and playing more surely. “*La la la la la lovely Linda*,” Paul sang, adlibbing. He snuck a glance at her, and saw the delight on her face. She was indeed lovely, and noticing she still wore his flower, he continued, “…*with the lovely flowers in her hair. La la la la la lovely Linda…”*

He wasn’t sure where to go next with the song, but he needn’t have worried, because he suddenly found Linda’s arms wrapped around his neck and her lips pressed to his. The piano instantly forgotten, he kissed her back, using the opportunity to run his hands through her hair at last. He’d definitely have to write Linda more songs if this was going to be her reaction every time. *Bloody hell*, Paul thought hazily, *I am in deep over this one - and John’s never going to let me live it down.*

“I’m going to get you!” John called after Maggie. She laughed as she raced down the hallway and up the stairs. She could hear him behind her, and he was gaining ground. Maggie darted into the bathroom and started to close the door, but it was too late! She retreated to the back corner of the room, until her back was against the sink. Looking around for a weapon, and finding little to choose from, she finally grabbed the toothpaste and brandished it at him.

John had closed and locked the door and Maggie knew she was trapped. “I have toothpaste, and I’m not afraid to use it!” she giggled.

“Well, I have icing and I’m not afraid to use it!” he tossed back at her, pointing in mock anger at his nose. His long, famous John Lennon nose. Maggie shook her head quickly, trying to shake that feeling. She hated it when her John disappeared and she only saw Famous John. She knew that feeling might never go away – she’d spent too much of her life seeing pictures of the infamous Beatle who’d died the year she was born.

Though Maggie’s expression only altered for a split second, John caught it. He forgot about the icing on his nose in his need to make sure she was okay.

“Luv, what is it?” he said, circling her in his arms. He plucked the toothpaste from her hand and set it safely down.

“Nothing, it’s…”

“Ah,” he nodded. “Did Beatle John catch you unawares again? What was it brought it on this time?”

She smiled at him. “Your nose, actually.”

“My nose?”

“Yes, your nose is very…” She couldn’t resist making a Hard Day’s Night Reference.

“Is it?” He played along.

“I would have said so,” Maggie said seriously. She knew the whole movie by heart.

“You know him better.”

“He’s only a casual acquaintance.” Maggie stuck her finger out and wiped some of the icing off, unable to resist licking it off her finger. It was chocolate after all.

“That’s what you say!” John laughed. He grabbed a towel and cleaned the rest of the icing off his nose. He looked in the mirror to see if he’d gotten it all.

“What have you heard?” Maggie asked, curious to see how long they could go on quoting the dialogue from John’s movie. Frankly she was amazed he’d remembered this much of it. She knew how terrible his memory for lyrics was.

“It's all over the place!” John turned back to her, “But I wouldn't have it. I stuck up for you.”

“I knew I could rely on you.” She nodded in mock gratefulness at John.

“Of course,” John said, going off script, “You owe me one for desecrating the icing on my birthday cake.”

“What can I do to make up for it?” She smiled at him, knowing full well what he had in mind.

“Well, if you recall, I did make a birthday wish…”

Maggie looked up at him flirtatiously. “We’ll have to see if we can make it come true then! You are the birthday boy, after all…”

“Surely you don’t mean…” John tried to look aghast. “Right here? Right now? With a all those people downstairs? You wanton, hussy! I am shocked, shock…” John’s words were cut off by Maggie throwing her arms around his neck and kissing him passionately. When they came up for air, John inquired, “Have we done it in this bathroom yet, then?” Maggie raised her eyebrow and looked over at the tub. “Oh, yes. How could I forget? Well, I don’t think we have time for a bath right now, so we’ll just have to improvise. We do have a party waiting for us, you know, Miss Margaret.” He tried to look disapproving but failed miserably. He had absolutely no interest in the party right now. “Shocking, just sh…,” John managed to say, before his lips became otherwise occupied.

Maggie and John lay breathless on the bathroom rug. Maggie propped herself up on one elbow and looked over at John. “Did your wish come true?” she smirked. He turned on his side, and hooked his arm over her naked hip, pulling her towards him so he could kiss her. “Best birthday ever, luv. Best birthday ever.”

Chapter Fifteen

October 18, 1967... 11pm

Maggie stood looking into the blackness in front of her. She stepped forward, and then reaching behind her, pulled the door partially closed. The closet was nice and roomy, despite the large amount of clothes in it. Maggie sat down, arranged her skirt over her knees, and looked at her watch. It was 11pm now - how much time should she give John? Why had she felt so compelled to hide in Cilla Black's closet? Maggie sighed and decided she'd give it ten minutes and then she'd stop this ridiculousness.

Earlier that night... 6pm

"Smile for the cameras, luv!" John whispered to her.

"I can't, my cheeks hurt!" she whispered back. "How on Earth have you four managed this for so many years?"

“It was better than getting a real job?” he grinned at her. His smile was totally natural – hers felt plastered on.

Maggie Sue and John, along with the rest of the Beatles were at the premiere of John’s movie, “How I Won the War.” John was the star attraction, but as his fiancé, Maggie was getting a great deal of attention as well. Even after more than a year and a half with John, this still made her uncomfortable. She’d never have the easy way with reporters and photographers that the Beatles had – but she supposed that was part of what had made them famous in the first place.

No, she was no Beatle. But she was a Beatle fiancé, as well as the head of Apple Corps. Not only was there no way to avoid the press, but she needed them to like her. And so, as she and John strolled the red carpet, she smiled as best as she could, and posed for what seemed like a million pictures. John was decked out in his psychedelic best; actually both and he and George wore colorful jackets. Paul and Ringo were more conservatively dressed, though Maggie supposed that was relative. Maggie had never latched on to the Carnaby Street fashions the way the rest of the Beatles had, though she regularly surrendered herself into Mary Quant and Pattie Harrison’s care and let them pick out outfits that would make her look fashionable. Pattie adored fashion, and she loved dressing Maggie up. Maggie was just as happy to let Pattie – it was one less thing for her to worry about. Maggie knew little about what was fashionable in the 60s, and she could count on Pattie to make sure she looked the part she had to play in public.

There were so many famous people at this premiere – she was introduced to Jimi Hendrix, who, as it turned out was rather shy. He warmed up when she asked him about how

he developed his style of playing played left-handed with a right-handed guitar. As with Jim Morrison, getting to know Jimi left her with a sense of sadness, knowing that this talented, sweet man wouldn't have long left. But how could she possibly save them all?

Maggie also ran into Cass Elliot in the lounge attached to the ladies room in the theatre. Maggie was unable to help herself from bursting out with, "Oh my gosh, Cass Elliot? I'm such a big fan!" She was immediately mortified at the words that had left her mouth in such a rush. Cass, who had been rooting through her purse, looked up at her. "I'm so sorry," Maggie said, her face turning red. "I didn't mean to bother…"

"Oh, it's no bother," Cass said cheerfully. "You're John Lennon's fiancé, aren't you?"

"Yes, I'm Maggie Sue," Maggie offered her hand. Cass shook it vigorously.

"It's nice to meet you," Cass said, temporarily shifting her attention back to her purse again. "Ah, found it!" She held up a lighter victoriously. She flashed Maggie a big smile. "Now, where were we? Ah yes, you were going to tell me how you managed to end up in charge of a big operation like Apple!" Maggie cleared her throat, unsure how to respond, but she didn't have to worry, because Cass rescued her. "A woman AND an American running the Beatles. Far out!"

Maggie smiled, and Cass seemed so genuinely friendly that she felt at ease. "Thanks! I guess I was just in the right place at the right time. Brian needed someone, and I had the qualifications."

“Well, I think it’s great. Don’t let them get you down.”

Maggie knew Cass was referring to the people who’d implied she’d only gotten the job because she was sleeping with John, though sometimes they’d also had her sleeping with Brian, which was ridiculous given what Brian’s proclivities had been, not that they were truly public knowledge. Maggie brushed it off as best as she could – she knew the 60s were sexist for one thing. Frankly, Maggie was sure she would have been subjected to far worse on the internet in her own time. There was also the fact that Maggie simply had come out of nowhere – there was no way to deny those claims publicly, though privately, she knew that being given Apple had more to do with her knowledge of the future and her sharp brain than it did her relationship to John.

“I won’t.”

“I know people can say shitty things, believe me.” Cass gestured to her full-figure. “But fuck ‘em, you know?”

“Yeah.” Maggie agreed. “It’s easier said than done sometimes, though.” Even though she expected it, it was sometimes hard to take. She just kept reminding herself of how many people would kill to be in her position and to ignore the naysayers.

“Don’t I know it. One crazy diet after another, and whose approval am I looking for?”

“Denny’s?” Maggie was unable to stop the name from escaping her lips, despite herself. She’d felt sad for Cass, wished that Denny would have loved her more, seen past her outsides, that Cass wouldn’t have tried so many crazy diets, which, mixed with drugs, would cause her heart to

give out so young. “Sorry, that’s none of my business,” Maggie apologized, wishing she could drop through the floor.

Cass didn’t seem the least bit bothered by what Maggie had said. She laughed wryly. “Am I that obvious about him? Well, I suppose there are no secrets when you’re famous, right? Well, I don’t think there’s any hope there. I’ve thrown myself at him too many times in the past. I’m done with that. I’m just not enough for him. Or too much.” Cass looked down at herself again.

Maggie thought about that, and felt that she understood it. She often felt she wasn’t enough for John. Just by virtue of her presence, she’d forced him to change a lot about his lifestyle simply because she wasn’t comfortable with it. She would never be the one to join him on LSD trips, or relax into the pot and alcohol fueled parties that were so frequent. Maggie bet she knew someone else that would probably be very happy to take her place by John’s side, someone who was probably just waiting for Maggie to push John just a little too far. Could she really lose John that way? The doubts, which were never far off, invaded her mind once again.

Of course, Cass had never really had Denny, sadly, so it wasn’t quite the same situation. “Well, I think he’s an idiot.” Maggie said to Cass loyally.

“He is. He is. But I love ‘im anyway.”

The two women were silent for a moment, but it was a comfortable silence.

“Does your band have an album coming out soon?” Maggie asked, genuinely curious. She loved The Mamas and the

Papas, but had no more knowledge of their discography than she had of the Stones.

“I think in the spring? We’ve kind of been playing around with stuff. I actually kind of want us to do this old song “Dream a Little Dream”, but I’m not sure about it.”

“Oh, you have to!” Maggie exclaimed. Cass’s version of this was one of her favorite songs.

“Yeah?”

Maggie backpedaled slightly. “I mean, I think if you sang it as a ballad, it would really suit your voice.”

“I will have to try that.”

“I should let you go…” Maggie said, not wanting to keep Cass from grabbing a smoke, or whatever she’d been about to do with the lighter she was still holding.

“Sure. I found my lighter, but I need to bum a cigarette. I don’t suppose you have one?”

“No, sorry – but I’m sure someone else will.”

“No worries!” Cass rummaged back through her bag and found a pen and paper. “I’m in town for a few more days. I’d love to grab lunch sometime if you’re up for it. Here’s where I’m staying.” She wrote down her contact info and handed it to Maggie.

“Really? I’d love that!”

“Great!” Cass slung her bag back over her shoulder and Maggie followed her out of the room. “Later!” Cass waved

at her and Maggie could hear her humming “Dream a Little Dream” as she made her way across the theater lobby.

Maggie looked around for John, excited to tell him about meeting Cass. Her heart sank as she saw John talking to a small, dark figure. That woman was everywhere! Maggie just hoped she wouldn’t ask about the postcards she’d sent.

Maggie gritted her teeth and started to march across the room, ready to pull Yoko’s hair out of her head, when the lights in the lobby flashed, signifying that the movie was going to start shortly and that the audience should seat itself.

John waved goodbye to Yoko and came to meet Maggie, a smile on his lips. Maggie had the urge to cut and run, to get out of here and hide somewhere that had no Yoko. But no, she was done with that. She’d promised no more running, no more letting Yoko get the best of her. Maggie closed her eyes, and then put a big smile on her face. John was walking towards her and away from Yoko. That was enough, wasn’t it?

“Let’s go see my movie, luv!” John put his arm around Maggie Sue’s shoulders, and they started to walk into the theater together.

“Sounds good,” Maggie smiled at him. “Guess who I ran into?”

“Who?”

“Cass Elliot!”

John smiled at her obvious excitement. “Guess who I ran into?”

“Looked like Yoko to me,” Maggie said flatly, any excitement over Cass overshadowed by the appearance of her arch nemesis.

“Yes! She’s planning a new exhibit,” John said excitedly, either oblivious over Maggie’s change of tone, or choosing to ignore it. John continued to talk about Yoko’s plans for the exhibit, but Maggie couldn’t bear to listen. She nodded and smiled in the right places, or what she hoped were the right places. She hardly wanted to encourage his involvement with this exhibit but was afraid to come down too hard on Yoko and her “art”.

Maggie was grateful when the theater darkened and the movie began.

Later... 10:45 pm

After the movie, Cilla Black had invited everyone back to her house for a private party. Everyone who was anyone was there, and everyone wanted to congratulate John on his film. Maggie stood back and let him enjoy the attention – she had plenty of friends at the party, even outside of the Beatles circle, so she didn’t mind being left on her own. At least Maggie was fairly certain that Yoko hadn’t been invited, so she probably didn’t have to worry about Yoko attaching herself to John. She hoped. She wouldn’t put it past Yoko to gate crash.

This train of thought brought the conversation she’d had with Cass back to her. Was she enough for John? Cynthia

hadn't been, and look at what had happened to her. Maggie remembered something she'd read in one of her books. In her original timeline, just before John and Cynthia's marriage had ended, Cyn had hid in Cilla's closet at a party, waiting to see how long it would take for John to miss her and come looking for her. He'd never come, of course.

Suddenly Maggie realized that this incident hadn't occurred at just any party at Cilla's – it had been this one. At least now that the timeline had changed, Cyn would be spared the sad indignity of being completely overlooked by John. No, this time it was Maggie in Cyn's place.

An idea possessed her. An idea that was as irresistible as it was foolish. *No*, she told herself. *It is never a good idea to tempt fate*. But still, that small, but persistent voice of doubt in her head suggested that maybe if Maggie did the same thing that Cynthia had once done, maybe if John missed her, then she would know for sure that it would be different for her and John. *It is different*, the logical side of brain insisted, *you know it is*. But it was hard to fight the compulsion to try this little experiment, even if she knew she was just setting herself up for failure. *This is crazy*, her brain insisted. But it was too late for logic now, Maggie realized, as she found herself already creeping up the stairs.

11:23 pm

Sitting on the closet floor, watching the minutes tick by, she felt absolutely ridiculous. Why was she testing John? She deserved what she'd get if she kept this up. She knew

John loved her, didn't she? She'd been so sure of it, she'd stayed in the past to be with him. She hated that this thing with Yoko scared her so much, but the fact was, it frightened her to her very core. She loved John and though she knew he loved her too, ultimately what she needed was to know he loved her more than Yoko and the life that Yoko represented. She had come home from NY ready to fight for John, but she could hardly call hiding in Cilla Black's closet fighting, could she?

Just then, the door opened, and bright light hit her eyes, temporarily blinding her. Her hiding spot had been discovered. It was probably Cilla, and Maggie shuddered to imagine the pity in her eyes if she found out that Maggie had hid in her closet hoping John would leave the party to come find her.

Suddenly she was once again in darkness, the closet door now firmly shut.

"There you are, luv! I've been looking all over for you."

It was John. He had found her. Tears of relief flooded her eyes. He did love her. *I told you so*, her brain said smugly.

"I can't see a thing, luv – but that's okay, I'll just have to find you by feel." He settled down on the floor next to her, and she felt his hand brush her thigh and then her breast.

"Hey! You've found me, I'm right here. Now you're just taking advantage!" She laughed despite herself.

"Guilty as charged!" John said cheerfully, running his hand up her leg, and under her skirt.

“Don’t you want to know what I’m doing in Cilla’s closet?”

“Wardrobe, luv, it’s a wardrobe.” He was kissing her neck now.

“Fine, wardrobe.” She was losing her concentration.

“What are you doing then?” John nibbled on her earlobe.

“I was waiting for you to find me.”

“Well, it looks like I did!” John said. He didn’t seem to require any further explanation of her odd behavior, and since her lips were now fully occupied by John’s, Maggie was unable to speak anyway. It was okay, though. They no longer had any need for words. John’s actions spoke volumes, and Maggie was able to silence the doubt in her head once again. She hoped those doubts would never reappear, but somehow she knew that she hadn’t seen the last of them.

Chapter Sixteen

Autumn of 1967 had been a series of highs and lows for Maggie Sue. After her emotional breakdown over Brian, it had been wonderful to be reunited with John, and to watch some of the last of the Magical Mystery Tour being filmed. Recharged by her New York trip, it was very hard to keep her mouth shut at some of the decisions being made regarding the film, but Maggie felt it was too late to make suggestions now – the die had already been cast.

Despite being busy at Apple, when Maggie had heard that the band was working on Hello Goodbye, she made an effort to be at the studio on the right day to listen in.

Looking at her watch, Maggie thought she might even be in time to join the band for dinner. She opened the studio door carefully, not wanting to interrupt anything, but the band seemed as if they were on a break.

"Maggie!" John spotted her right away and ran over to give her a hug and a kiss.

"How's it going?"

John wrinkled his nose. “Fine, but Paul is pushing to have his song be the A side instead of “I Am The Walrus.”

“Do you want me to beat him up for you?” Maggie said lightly.

“You’d do that? Incite violence just for me? I knew there was something I liked about you!”

“Maybe we should just give peace a chance,” Maggie said smiling, knowing he wouldn’t really get the reference.

Watching the band record never lost its thrill for her. She remembered listening to the clips of studio chatter on the Anthology CDs, and here she had practically unrestricted access to hours of it.

October had also brought Brian’s memorial service at the New London Synagogue. The Beatles had all attended, and Maggie, feeling a bit less fragile than she had before, soldiered through it. For Brian’s sake, she felt she had to. She still felt guilty about not having saved him, but the truth was, it was over and done. She had to focus her efforts on the future. If she had failed Brian, then she couldn’t fail John.

Yoko continued to be a thorn in Maggie’s side. Yoko’s last postcard had come on John’s birthday. This one said to “Colour yourself. Wait for the spring to come. Let us know when it comes.” *Spring is never going to come for you,* Maggie thought at Yoko. Maggie ripped this card up and buried it with the rest of them. She felt horribly guilty for tampering with John’s mail. She knew it was wrong, but all was fair in love and war, wasn’t it? And this was certainly war.

It looked like Paul would indeed get his way with their new single, and "I Am The Walrus" would be on the B-side. John wasn't too happy and grumbled about Paul's song being silly, but nevertheless, he seemed to have fun shooting the promotional films Paul directed for "Hello Goodbye". Maggie, remembering the videos she had seen in her own time, got the Sgt Pepper costumes out of one of their closets, where she'd carefully stored them, and made sure they got used for the videos. She remembered the Beatles wearing the costumes in them, and while she might have screwed up a lot of things in the timeline, she had to make sure at least this one silly thing still happened.

Though John was still annoyed about his song being relegated to a B-side, he was delighted when he'd learned that "I Am The Walrus" had been banned by the BBC on both TV and radio.

"They were sure there must be a drug reference somewhere, and anyways, using the word "knickers" is obscene," John cackled as he explained the situation to Maggie Sue.

"Obscene? Really?" Maggie found it almost as funny as John did. If only the people running the TV and radio now knew what the future would bring in entertainment. "I Am The Walrus" was so tame in comparison.

"You don't find the mention of knickers, obscene, Miss Margaret?" John said pulling her closer.

"Not really – but maybe it's because we don't call them knickers where I'm from."

"Well, maybe the Americans won't ban my song then!"

“Maybe!”

“Speaking of knickers…” John said meaningfully.

“Were we?” Maggie replied, knowing exactly where this conversation was going to lead.

“We were! Now are you going to be a naughty girl and let your knickers down?”

“Only if you stop quoting your own lyrics,” she laughed.

“Deal!” John said, wrapping his arms around her and kissing her eagerly.

Time continued to fly and by November the Magical Mystery Tour film and album were done, though the film wouldn’t be premiered til Boxing Day, which was the day after Christmas. It was exciting for Maggie to watch the promotion for the album, to hear the fan reaction. The BBC played the whole album, even the banned “I Am The Walrus,” two days before its official release date, which was December 8th. The significance of the date made Maggie shudder, but she said nothing to John, hoping he wouldn’t notice.

The fan reaction to the album was no different than to any of the Beatles’s past albums. They loved it! Despite what she knew, Maggie couldn’t help but hope that the fans’ goodwill might extend to the film. John seemed unphased by the possibility of the film being disliked, but Maggie worried about how Paul would take the film’s inevitable poor reception by fans and critics alike.

“Stop worrying, luv! It will be fine!” John kissed Maggie on the forehead. “Now put your costume on or we’ll be late.”

“Late? Since when are you worried about being on time for anything?” Maggie teased him. The Magical Mystery Tour broadcast was still a week or so off and John was right. She needed to stop worrying. Sometimes she felt like it was all she did. Had she always been like this? Or was it chasing after the Beatles in a time not her own that had brought it on her? How could she not worry with all this responsibility, especially when she had failed Brian in such a big way? She supposed she had plenty of time for worrying later - tonight was just going to be fun. The Beatles were throwing a fancy dress ball (or a costume party, as it might have been called in America) to celebrate both the December holidays and Magical Mystery Tour’s imminent airing on TV.

John leaned over and examined his reflection in the mirror, fussing at the slicked back hair on either side of his head.

Maggie couldn’t help but giggle to see him dressed up like a late 50s Teddy Boy in jeans, Chuck Taylors, and a colorful leather jacket.

He turned and looked over at her when he heard her giggle. “Do you need help getting into your costume? Or getting out of it?”

“Stop doing that with your eyebrows!” He put one eyebrow down. “Both of them!” Maggie giggled again, “And no! I need to finish putting this costume on, not take any more of it off! And I thought you didn’t want to be late!”

John laughed, “I’d willingly be late for THAT.” He started winking at her. With both eyes.

Before he could intercept her, and make them miss the party entirely, Maggie grabbed her gown from where it was lying on the chair in the bedroom. She batted her eyes at John innocently. “I may need some help getting out of this outfit, but not ‘til AFTER the party. If you’re a good boy and wait ‘til then, I’ll let you unlace me.”

John cheered up at this thought, “Unlacing is good. I’m happy to unlace anything you want! Maybe we should leave the party early, then? Or just skip it altogether? What am I unlacing?” He grabbed her by the waist and spun her around, inspecting the 18th century undergarments she was currently wearing.

“The corset,” she smiled. “And it’s staying ON for now.” She held the gown up to John. “Can you help me with this?” The gown she was holding was made of gold silk that had hand-printed flowers on it. It had folds of fabric falling down from the back neckline in the French 18th century style, and once she’d wiggled into the sleeves, the gown rustled satisfyingly as it fell over the wide panniers at her sides. She adjusted it and then pinned the decorative stomacher to her front. “What do you think?” she asked, twirling around. She’d made it herself, in an effort to recapture some of her old theater costuming skills.

“I like the hair!” John said admiringly. “It’s very…tall.”

“So is yours!” she said, noting the way his hair spiked up on the top of his head.

“You look beautiful,” he said, his voice serious, but only for a second. “I can hardly wait to get you out of it!”

Maggie smiled and rolled her eyes. “Not now, I have to help Linda finish getting ready too!”

“Well, you’d better go help her then – Paul will be here to ride over with us soon. Oh! Wait!” John rummaged through a dresser drawer. “I almost forgot!”

“Forgot what?”

“Well, when you told me you were going as Marie Antoinette, I bought this for you. To go with your dress.” He offered her a black jewelry box.

Maggie was almost surprised – though John was unstintingly generous with his money, insisting she buy whatever she wanted or needed, he was often too preoccupied to think of things like gifts. She had been babbling excitedly about the gown she was making all month, but she had no idea he was actually paying attention to her. Maggie opened the box and found a beautiful necklace and earring set. It looked old.

“Wait, this looks real.”

“It is real! The jeweler who sold it to me told me it was. At least, for what I paid, it should be real!”

“John, it’s too expensive.”

“Luv, we have lots of money, remember? And thanks to you, Apple is doing beautifully. Let me spend some of my money on you. It’s my favorite thing to spend money on, you know.”

“I thought that was Rolls Royces. How many are you up to now?” She smiled at him, to show him she was joking.

“Never you mind that! We were talking about your jewelry and not my cars! Besides, you know it’s invest or it goes to taxes. I decided to invest.” He took the black box from her and gently pulled the diamond filigree necklace out. Her hair was too tall for him to lift it up and over her head, so he had her hold it to her neck, while he fastened it behind her. He handed her the matching earrings. “I’ll let you do these.”

“Thank you.” Maggie clutched the earrings with one hand, and wrapped her other around John’s neck. “I love you.”

“I love you too.” He kissed her gently. “You’d better go help Linda now or else I’ll definitely make us late!”

Paul had been asking after Linda almost constantly after John’s birthday party. He looked less and less happy when he was with Jane and they argued more and more. Actually, they weren’t so much arguments, Maggie realized, as incidents of amplified passive-aggressiveness. Paul looked relieved when he found out that Jane was going to be away for another film over the holidays. Maggie hadn’t managed to chat with Jane, but she suspected Jane was glad to get away as well. Why else would she take a project that filmed over Christmas? As soon as Paul had learned of Jane’s film, he’d started hinting to Maggie that Linda might enjoy coming to the ball they were throwing. Inside, Maggie was hopping up and down gleefully, and of course she’d invited Linda right away. To

torture Paul though, every time he hinted about the party, Maggie pretended like she'd forgotten about it, or that she wasn't sure that Linda would want to come. Finally Paul, who obviously couldn't stand it anymore, asked Maggie outright to invite Linda.

"Why don't you invite her yourself?" Maggie asked.

"I don't know, I thought she'd be more likely to come if you asked her. I'm afraid she'll say no, if I ask."

"Why?"

"She's funny like that."

"Oh, you mean she's not totally at your beck and call?" Maggie said wryly.

"Yeah! Why do you think that is?"

Beatles! Maggie thought silently, rolling her eyes. Well, good on Linda for making Paul come to her.

"Paul, I know you're a Beatle, but the world doesn't revolve around you. Linda's a busy woman, what with all those gigs shooting rock stars, and all. Plus Heather…"

"Rock stars? Which ones? Do you think she's seeing any of them?"

Maggie laughed to herself. It was obvious that Paul had it bad for Linda. Well, she would do everything she could to bring them together, but she couldn't help having fun with it too, especially after all the grief Paul had given John and Maggie for being inseparable early in their courtship.

“Hmm – well, she seemed pretty cozy with Jim Morrison, but he’s got a serious girlfriend, so I don’t think it’ll go anywhere,” Maggie said with a grin.

“That’s good,” Paul said, sounded relieved. “Ask her about the party, then?”

“Sure, Paul, I’ll try to remember to call her tomorrow.” Maggie smiled, knowing that Linda’s airplane tickets had long ago been purchased. Maggie had to admit it was nice having money – she was able to fly Linda over anytime they wanted to get together, just like it was nothing. Linda had protested at first, and offered to pay, but with the ridiculous amounts of money both Maggie and John had, she would have none of it. Besides soon enough, wouldn’t Linda be a part of the Beatle family anyway?

In the days before the big event, the two women had had excited phone conversations dissecting every conversation that had occurred between Maggie and Paul, and, of course, discussing what Linda should wear. Linda’s personal style was fairly simple, so they’d come up with the idea of a white and gold Grecian style dress like one Maggie had admired in the (admittedly bad) movie “Troy”. Maggie couldn’t tell her exactly where the design for the dress came from, of course. Linda still didn’t know Maggie was from the future, though she was itching to finally let go of her secret.

Linda didn’t have to know where the design of the dress came from however, to like the idea. Once she’d agreed to it, Maggie dropped hints at Paul.

“Come on, luv, just tell me what she’s wearing, “ Paul begged.

“We were thinking of a big furry pink bunny suit…”

“If you’re not going to be serious…” Paul was exasperated.

“Oh, I’m being serious,” Maggie said, trying to keep a straight face.

“I was never this bad with you and John.”

Maggie quirked an eyebrow.

“Fine, maybe I was. I’m sorry, okay? Just tell me what Linda is wearing.”

Maggie laughed and took pity on him. Once Paul had gotten the information he’d wanted out of Maggie, he’d had decided to wear a Roman centurion outfit that matched in Linda’s in idea, if not in actual time period or nationality.

John had wanted no part of 18th century men’s fashion, and begged off having to match Maggie Sue’s costume. After some initial threats of powdered wigs and tights, Maggie had let John “convince” her otherwise. He could be very persuasive when he wanted, though it was unnecessary. Maggie had expected John to dress like a Teddy Boy anyway, having already seen pictures of John at this party from her own time. She was curious what the others would be wearing, though, as photos of the whole group had been sparse in her time. She knew Pattie had gone as a harem girl, and that it had attracted John, so when Pattie had brought up the idea, Maggie had quickly made a few other suggestions. Why take chances? She had enough problems dealing with Yoko.

Maggie ducked her head into the guest room to see if Linda needed help getting ready. Linda was looking at her

reflection in the mirror, and adjusting the golden wreath on her head.

“Hey, do you need any help?”

Linda looked up. “Is this straight?”

“Let me see!” Maggie walked over to Linda and made a few adjustments on her costume before standing back. “You look beautiful! Paul won’t be able to resist you!”

“That was the idea, right?” Linda smiled. She twirled around, letting the folds of gold and white fabric swirl around her. “We’re really just good friends, of course – at least in public. There’ll be too many people that know Jane at this party. I feel like I have to be careful or people will talk.”

“People will talk no matter what. And, well, I hate to say it, but Paul’s been seen flirting with enough other girls over the years that it won’t be any surprise to see him flirting with you.”

Linda’s face fell. “You see? This is why I know it will never work with him. He’ll never be able to commit to just one woman. He certainly hasn’t been faithful to Jane, how could I expect him to be that way with me? If he ever breaks up with her,” she finished glumly.

“Just never let him out of your sight!” Maggie joked, trying to cheer Linda up. “Isn’t that the best way to keep a Beatle faithful?” Linda smiled a little at this. “Besides, you’re not Jane. I love her, but she and Paul ultimately want different things. I really think that you and Paul could have something special, and that he won’t need or want anything else. Trust me on that.”

“I don’t know why you’re so certain.”

Maggie wondered if this was the opening that she’d been looking for. She would so love to share her secret with Linda, who had become one of her best friends and closest confidants. She opened her mouth, with her carefully rehearsed speech on the tip of her tongue when the door burst open and two overly excited children ran in.

“Mommy, Mommy!” Heather said excitedly, jumping up and down. Julian, who was visiting for a few days, so that Heather would have a companion to play with, was bouncing around too. Julian was dressed up as a pirate, and Heather was wearing a princess dress – though, not wanting to be too different from Julian, she too had a toy sword strapped to her waist. Heather and Julian weren’t going to go to the adult party, but Maggie hadn’t wanted them to be left out of the fun.

Linda went over and hugged Heather and gave Julian a quick squeeze too. The kids couldn’t sit still for long and continued to bounce around the room. “Maggie, your hair is tall!” Julian shouted excitedly.

“Yes, it is! That’s how they wore it hundreds of years ago,” she explained.

“I like it!” The fact that Julian had echoed his father’s remarks made her smile.

She did her best to sound stern. “You kids have to promise to be good for Dot, okay? She has pizza for you for dinner.” Dot Jarlett was their housekeeper and she was very good with Julian. She’d been John and Cynthia’s housekeeper when they’d been married and currently Dot

split her time between both households. It worked out well for everyone concerned, and Julian always had someone to keep an eye on him when it was needed.

"Yay! Pizza!" Heather and Julian raced out of the room in search of Dot and their dinner.

Linda laughed. "They are a handful, aren't they? I'm so glad Julian was able to stay over to keep Heather company. My family is happy to watch her, but I think they are starting to ask questions about these frequent trips to England! Plus I just hate leaving her behind."

"I know. Well, Heather is welcome here anytime. Dot is always around if we need someone to watch her, and anyway, I think it's nice for Julian to have another playmate. I'm not sure how many friends he has from school – I think it's a bit strange for him, what with having a Beatle as a father. Heather doesn't seem aware of any of that, so I think she's good for him."

"I'm so glad you feel that way!" Linda put her arm around Maggie and hugged her.

"Well, I have to admit, I understand how isolating this whole Beatle thing can be, believe me! I'm just as grateful for your friendship!" Maggie knew the moment had passed to talk about being a time-traveler, though. It would have to wait for another time. It was just as well. She was still afraid Linda might just think her crazy. Maybe after she and Paul were married.

The doorbell chimed distantly. "That must be Paul!" Maggie exclaimed, "But wait, we have to keep him waiting long enough for us to make a grand entrance."

“Come on, ladies, it’s time to go.” John popped his head into the doorway.

“Tell Paul we’ll be down in a minute.” Maggie said, and Linda giggled.

John rolled his eyes, but went downstairs obediently.

Dot had already answered the door and Paul was standing there looking like an overgrown and out-of-season Trick-or-Treater. Not that Halloween was a big holiday in England, but Maggie had told John all about it as she was putting together all the costumes.

John burst out laughing when he saw Paul’s Roman centurion costume.

“What’s wrong with you, then?” Paul asked.

John was laughing so hard he had to sit down on the bottom step to catch his breath.

“Stop being a tosser and tell me what it is!” Paul was starting to get annoyed.

“You just seem to like your skirts, is all,” John wheezed. “First that maid’s uniform and now this!”

“At least my hair doesn’t look bloody stupid,” Paul grumbled. “I like my costume.” He looked down. “And Linda said I have nice legs.”

John whooped at that. “Macca, my boy, that woman has got you. And good.” He wiped the tears from his eyes.

“She does not! It’s just a fling!”

"You're wearing a skirt for her!"

"It's not a skirt, it's Roman!"

"And flings don't last this long. You've been mooning over her for what, six months now?"

"Seven. And what's it to you?" Paul had given up denying his prolonged interest in Linda. He knew he couldn't fool John, who was, after all, one of the people that knew him best in the world.

"After all the shite you put me through over Maggie?" John laughed. "Don't worry, I won't hold it against you. Much. I'm just glad to see you get a taste of it." He grinned.

They were silent for a minute, and then John said, "Are you going to do anything about Jane?"

"I wasn't going to, but then, I really did think this was just a casual thing with Linda." Paul waved his hand around. "You know how it is." The Beatles went through women like tissues when on tour. John had once been a part of that, and he knew very well how it was. He'd had countless affairs all while married to Cynthia. He shifted uncomfortably at the thought. Paul continued, "But I can't get her out of my head. I even asked her to think about moving here, so I could see her more often, but she just said 'no thanks' and that she didn't want to uproot Heather, and that she had a life in New York. So, it's probably hopeless anyway."

"You're afraid to break it off with Jane and find out that it was all for nothing?"

“Something like that. I’ve just been with Jane so long, and I don’t want to throw that away. But Linda…”

“If she’s the one, mate, don’t give up. I know Maggie, at least, is rooting for you two to get together.”

Paul raised an eyebrow. “Do you think she knows something? You know, about the future?”

“Probably, but she refuses to let me in on this one. Even my best powers of persuasion failed to produce anything. ” John smiled at the memory.

Paul rolled his eyes. It was always sex with those two. Silly, really to be so obsessed with one woman…

Paul heard a rustle from the top of the staircase. Looking up he saw Linda at the top of it, looking beautiful in gold and white. His jaw dropped and he gaped at her dumbly.

John looked up and saw Paul’s expression and burst out laughing again. Poor bugger. He was a goner for sure.

Chapter Seventeen

It would have been a party like any other, except for the odd array of costumed guests, most of whom looked dated to Maggie's modern eyes. Maggie was reminded of the Elizabeth Taylor interpretation of Cleopatra, which could have come from no other decade but the 60s. In such a way, this party was full of gypsies with heavy eyeliner, witches with beehive hairdos, and micro-minied Indians.

When they walked into the party, it was already in full swing. The Turtle's "Happy Together" was playing, and Paul pulled Linda out onto the dance floor almost immediately.

"Shall we join them?" John asked Maggie. He wasn't that much of a dancer, but he was happy to participate in any activity that required him to get close to his fiancé. Especially as he'd been unsuccessful with getting her unclothed earlier this evening.

"Sure!" she said happily. She loved this song and was glad it was one that wasn't due to come out 10 years from now. There was a great deal of music she missed, and she often thought regretfully of her iPod, which, without a cable to recharge it, was useless.

She and John moved onto the dance floor, and despite song being mid-tempo, he lost no time in wrapping his arms around her as if it were a slow dance. Maggie Sue accepted this with a sigh of mock disapproval – really, slow-dancing with John Lennon was no hardship. Even if he vaguely resembled Wolverine from X-men. Maggie smiled as she remembered the very first time they had danced together at that party in 1964. If only she had had any inkling of what was to come!

Paul and Linda only had eyes for each other. Paul thought she looked lovely in her gauzy white and gold costume, and he was gratified when she joked about his sexy legs. They alternated slow and fast dances, until both of them were tired and in need of refreshment.
Paul left Linda with John and Maggie Sue, who were also taking a break, to go in search of drinks for Linda and himself.

Recognizing Paul as one of the Beatles, the bartender took Paul's drink order quickly, but even so, Paul fidgeted, impatient to get back to Linda. He felt a tap on his shoulder, and out of the corner of his eye saw the flutter of a white sleeve. Had Linda come to find him? The woman couldn't stay away from him! Not that he minded.

He whirled around, "Lind…uh, Jane!" he amended. The petite redhead was standing there behind him, a confused look in her eyes. She was dressed in a flowing white gown, somewhat similar to Linda's, which was what had tricked him.

"Jane? What are you doing here? I thought you were… I mean, I'm really happy to see you, I'm just surprised is

all!" He gave her a quick peck on the cheek, hoping that would hide his discomfort.

"Well, surprising you is what I came to do," Jane said. Paul was acting strange, but she wasn't sure what it was. Probably it was just nerves – his film was coming out in a few days, and since it was his baby, he was the most invested in it of the group. "I was able to get some time off filming, and I felt badly missing the big bash. They found me this gown in wardrobe, so I could match your Marc Antony costume. Do you like it?" She twirled around, showing off her Cleopatra-inspired outfit.

"Yes! You look great!" he managed to say. What was he going to do now? Linda was waiting for him, and now here was Jane, dressed to match him like they were some sort of tragic lovers. Paul wasn't sure what kind of statement this was supposed to make about his and Jane's relationship. He would normally be happy to see Jane. He loved her, shared a history with her, but Linda…

The bartender chose that moment to hand Paul two drinks. He pondered them for only a brief minute before tossing his back quickly. Jane looked slightly shocked, but Paul had a feeling that one drink was not going to be anywhere enough tonight. He eyed the second one and considered downing it too, but he couldn't go back to Linda empty handed after all this time.

"Who is the other drink for?" she asked. Paul wasn't sure if there was suspicion in her eyes or if he was being paranoid.

He thought quickly. "Maggie Sue. Speaking of, let me go give this to her and then we'll go dance or something, okay? Why don't you order a drink, luv. I'll be right back."

“But I could go with…” Paul didn’t stick around for the rest of Jane’s protest. His only thought was to get the drink to Linda, without Jane seeing. What was he going to do? Linda was his date for this party, and he wanted to spend time with her – but that was impossible with Jane here now. And he couldn’t just admit to Linda that Jane had shown up and so their date was now off, could he? Could he work it out so neither woman knew the other one was here? The party was certainly big enough, maybe they wouldn’t even bump into each other – and then he could see both of them tonight. It would take some juggling, but was he a Beatle or wasn’t he? Yes, this would work just fine.

Linda smiled as she saw Paul approaching with her drink. “Here you go, luv!” he said, handing her the glass.

She sipped at it. “Thanks! Where’s yours?”

“I was thirsty,” he smiled at her.

“If you’re still thirsty, you could have some of mine,” Linda offered.

Maggie Sue smiled, seeing the two of them together. They obviously adored each other. Maybe Paul would finally figure out that Linda was the one for him, and he would finally break up with Jane. Maggie again felt guilty for wanting Paul to leave Jane, but they were just so wrong for each other. Everyone could see it, and she was willing to bet that even they could. But they’d been together for so long and their lives were entangled enough that their relationship wouldn’t be an easy thing to detach from. Added to that was the fact that Paul seemed unwilling to take a risk. If he could go from sure thing to sure thing, he would do it, but he seemed a bit unsure of Linda’s commitment to him and so he hesitated. Maggie thought

that he needed to earn Linda's trust and respect and that he'd never do that as long as he showed that hesitation. *The course of true love never did run smooth*, Maggie sighed to herself.

"Dance again, luv?" John asked Maggie. The Beach Boys' "Don't Worry Baby" had just come on, and John knew it was one of Maggie's favorites.

"I'd love to," she smiled back at him. Knowing Linda was safe with Paul, she gave them both a smile, and made her way back out to the dance floor with John.

Linda was still holding her glass out to Paul. Unable to stop himself, he swallowed the rest of her drink in one gulp. Yes, more alcohol was definitely what he needed. Drink now gone, Linda looked expectantly at Paul, waiting for him to ask her to dance again.

"Oh, look, it's George and Pattie," Paul said suddenly instead. "Let's go say hello."

"Okay," Linda said, a bit puzzled, but nevertheless happy to say hello to Paul's friends. She didn't know George very well, mostly because whenever she'd been at a Beatle event, Paul had always monopolized her time. Not that she'd minded. Maggie was always talking about George though, so it might be nice to get to know him better.

George was dressed as a pirate, complete with eye patch and hat, and Pattie as a gypsy. The pirate outfit was also Maggie's idea – George had agreed to it, after Maggie, seeing no harm in spoiling it, had told him about the Python skit he'd be in someday.

“Hello, mate,” Paul said to George. “Pattie,” he nodded his head at George’s wife. “You remember Linda, right? Linda, you’ve met George and Pattie, I think.”

“Yes, hello, nice to see you again.” Linda said, shaking their hands.

“Listen, I have to run to the loo,” Paul said suddenly, after a surreptitious glance at his watch. It’d been 9 minutes since he’d left Jane and she was going to be furious. “I’ll be right back.” He scurried off without waiting for Linda to reply.

“What’s wrong, luv?” George asked Linda, seeing the quizzical look on her face.

“Nothing – it’s just that Paul’s acting a little bit strange.”

“Paul IS a little bit strange,” George laughed.

“Stranger than usual?” Linda smiled back.

“Ooh, let me see your costume,” Pattie said, interrupting. “Did Maggie Sue have a hand in this? For someone that doesn’t pay much attention to fashion, she’s been talking about nothing but costumes for the last few weeks! Now spin around so I can see the whole thing!” Pattie commanded.

Linda, flattered, spun around, letting Pattie admire her dress.

“Maggie did make it, and she did a great job, didn’t she?” Linda said. A bit shyly, she added, “Did Maggie help you with your costume?”

“She did!” Pattie exclaimed. “I’d wanted to do this harem outfit, but then Maggie turned up this peasant blouse and waist cincher. We went through my stuff and found these huge hoop earrings and head scarf, so the costume went together pretty quickly. I like it!” Pattie said, tugging the blouse down a bit to better display her cleavage. George unconsciously smiled approvingly, which made Linda and Pattie both laugh at him.

Paul felt bad leaving Linda, but he had to find Jane. He moved around the edge of the crowd as quickly as he could to the bar room, where Jane was standing there, a drink in one hand, the other hand on her hip, and an unhappy expression on her face.

Paul skidded up to her, a bit breathless. “Sorry, luv. Big crowd and I kept getting stopped. Do you want to dance?” He grabbed the drink out of Jane’s hand and put it down on the tray of a passing waiter.

“But…” It was too late, Paul had her arm and was towing her towards the dance floor. He wrapped his arms around her waist, and she relaxed into his arms.

“How’s the film going, luv?” he asked her.

“Well, thanks.”

“Good.” He struggled to remember what film this was, and thought it’d be best if he kept his questions vague.

“Getting along with your co-stars, then?”

“Yes, of course,” Jane said. “I have to tell you this funny story though.” He tried to keep his mind on what she was telling him, and to laugh in the appropriate places, but his

mind was ticking away the minutes. He had to get back to Linda soon.

Paul spotted Ringo and Maggie dancing together out of the corner of his eye, and he maneuvered Jane over towards them.

"Ritchie! Good to see you!" Ringo, who was dressed as a cowboy, looked up from his conversation with Maggie.

"Hey, Paul," Ringo said.

Maggie looked over at Paul expecting to see Linda in his arms. Her eyes widened when she saw whom the woman in white was.

"Hi, Jane!" she said, trying to sound unsurprised. "We didn't expect to see you here!"

"Yes, well, I was able to get some time off of filming last minute, so I was able to come after all!"

While Maggie and Jane were talking, Paul mouthed "CUT IN!" to Ringo. Ringo, noticing that Paul was looking a little desperate, decided he'd better help the poor bastard. He'd noticed Paul with a blonde dressed in white on his arm earlier this evening – and now Jane was here also dressed in white… Clearly Paul was in over his head.

"Er, Paul," Ringo said a bit too jovially, "Mind if I cut in and dance with Jane?"

"Not at all," Paul said.

Maggie quickly caught on and added, "That sounds good, I haven't had a chance to dance with Paul yet."

Jane was forced to comply, but she gave Paul a hard look as he danced off with Maggie. Once he had some distance from Ringo and Jane, he pulled Maggie off the dance floor and behind a potted plant. "Maggie, luv, you have to help me."

"What's going on? Did Jane show up just to surprise you?"

"Yes! What am I going to do about Linda?"

"How is this my problem?" she said, exasperated. "You're the one who won't choose between them."

Paul hung his head for a minute. "I suppose it isn't your problem, but I…I really don't want to screw things up with Linda. I don't want her to have to watch me have to be with Jane when we'd planned on coming to this party together. But I can't be with Linda with Jane here now."

"Then why not go explain all this to her?"

Paul looked at Maggie like she had two heads. Maggie sighed. Paul really needed to be straight with both women and make some difficult choices. He couldn't keep going like this, trying to hold onto both relationships – he was only going to end up losing them both.

"Come on, luv, you're Linda's friend…"

"I'm Jane's friend too, actually," Maggie said. "Fine, I'll help you, but only because I'd like to avoid either of them being publicly embarrassed by you. What is your plan?"

"Plan? No real plan, I'll just make sure they stay on different sides of the room. There are enough people and

it's big enough that as long as neither one of them sees me with the other, it'll be fine."

Maggie looked at Paul dubiously. "If you say so."

"What could go wrong?" Paul said. "Let's see, Ringo will keep Jane occupied for a few minutes. Now, where did I leave Linda?" Paul looked peered across the room, as if trying to mentally retrace his steps.

Maggie groaned inwardly. This wasn't going to end well.

Chapter Eighteen

"Retrace your steps. Where do you last remember seeing her?" Maggie asked Paul.

"Losing Linda is not the same as losing car keys, you know," Paul said reproachfully.

"You're the one that doesn't know where she went. Do you want help or not?"

"Fine, fine. Let's see," Paul thought back. "I got Linda a drink, and then you and John left to dance, and then … ah! I left her with George and Pattie!"

He actually looked proud of himself. Maggie shook her head and sighing again said, "Well, you go retrieve her from George and Pattie, and I'll see if I can intercept Jane. If it isn't already too late," Not for the first time, Maggie wondered why she had willingly let herself get sucked into Paul's web of deception.

Paul found Linda still chatting with George and Pattie, though by this time, John had joined them.

"There you are!" Linda exclaimed.

“Sorry, there were a lot of people, and I kept getting stopped,” Paul replied, giving her the same excuse he’d given Jane.

“Have you seen my fiancé? John asked Paul. “I left her with Ringo, but that was ages ago. I hope they haven’t run off together. That would be terribly awkward for the band. Good drummers are so hard to come by,” he grinned.

Paul tried to smile back but he wasn’t in the mood for humor right now. He had to focus or everything would fall apart. “Don’t worry, mate – she’s with…” and managed to stop himself right before he said Jane’s name. “Er, “ he thought for a moment and then blurted out the first name that came to him. “She’s dancing with Mick.”

“She’s what?!” John said, snapping out of his mellow buzz. “I’ll cripple that son of a bitch if he so much as touches her!” He started to march off onto the dance floor to make sure there was no funny business going on between Mick and Maggie Sue. He trusted Maggie, but he didn’t trust Mick as far as he could throw him, which might be what happened when he got his hands on Mick.

Paul mouthed “Sorry!” at Linda and raced off after John before he did something stupid.

“John, wait!” He reached John and grabbed his arm. “She’s not with Mick, I made that up.”

“What? Who’s she with then?”

Paul looked around and spotted another decorative plant. He towed John towards the plant by the arm.

“Get off me, you stupid git! I’m not going to skulk behind that plant with you in plain view of everyone. They’ll think we’re up to something.”

“Is that internet talk from the future still bothering you?” Paul smirked.

“Not unless it bothers you,” John shot back.

“Not at all – I have no problem with the future thinking we’re lovers, unless you do.”

“Hey, I was the one that started some of those rumors, I’ll have you know.” He poked Paul in the chest with his finger for emphasis.

“Well, good for you, then.”

“Yes, it is.”

They stared at each other for a second, wondering how on Earth they had gotten to this point. They each remembered at the same time.

“Where is Maggie?”

“Jane is here!”

Both sentences were uttered simultaneously.

“Jane is here?”

“She’s with Jane.”

The answers also came together.

“Stop that, you silly nit,” John said. “So, Maggie’s not with Mick, she’s with Jane…who is here?”

“Yes, that’s what I’m trying to tell you. Jane decided to surprise me and just showed up – neither she nor Linda have seen each other yet and I’m trying to keep it that way. Maggie is helping to keep Jane busy right now, so I can spend time with Linda, but instead of doing that, I’m hiding behind this bloody great plant with you.”

John just gaped at him.

“So are you going to help me or not?”

“You’re on your own, son,” John said, starting to laugh at the absurdity of the situation. “You dug this hole, and now you’ll have to sit in it! Just pick one of them, man – you can’t keep doing this.”

“You’re a fine one to talk,” Paul said. “You spent years fooling around on Cynthia.”

“Yeah, but when I met the right one, I stopped all that. I made a choice.”

“Bloody hell, you did. As I recall it, Cynthia dumped your arse and you spent the next two years screwing random birds while writing depressing songs and just generally wallowing.”

“Be that as it may,” John said stiffly, “I got out of the safe relationship and it’s paid off. Maybe you should do the same thing. And if you don’t, maybe Jane will dump your arse as well.” And with that, John peered through the foliage, and, finding the coast was clear, left Paul to go in search of Maggie.

“Wanker,” Paul muttered after John, as he pushed his own way out of the big plant.

“Sorry, luv,” Paul said, when he’d made his way back to Linda, George, and Pattie. He smiled at Linda in apology, trying to be charming. “Do you want to get some air on the balcony, and let George and Pattie have a dance?”

“I’d love to,” Linda smiled at him. Her smile always got to him – there was just something about it. Every feature on her face was perfect. How could he give her up? He couldn’t, could he? Hoping Maggie was successfully keeping Jane occupied, Paul led Linda out onto the darkened balcony and took her in his arms.

Maggie threaded her way across the dance floor, trying to avoid being jabbed by overly enthusiastic dancers and trying to avoid bumping into people with her somewhat wide costume.

Where are Ringo and Jane? They have to be here somewhere, Maggie thought. *This party is too blasted big. No, wait – it’s a good thing it’s so big, because it’s the only way Paul has a hope in hell of keeping Linda and Jane from each other.*

Maggie saw a cowboy hat, and hoping it belonged to Ringo, tapped the shoulder of the person wearing it. The person turned his head – it was Ringo! Relief washed over Maggie – until she saw that he was dancing with a black-

braided Indian wearing a short, leather, beaded costume. Clearly Ringo was no longer dancing with Jane.

"Did you want to cut in, luv?" Ringo asked.

The Indian, who was, as it turned out, Maureen, gave her a sour look, which prompted Maggie to quickly say, "No, no – I was trying to find Jane – do you know where she went?"

"She went to try to find Paul. What's going …"

"Shit!" Maggie said under her breath, interrupting Ringo.

"What's wrong?" Maureen looked more interested now that she sensed drama

"Nothing, it's fine. I'll find her. Thanks."

Maggie knew that Ringo, who was in the same Beatle fraternity as Paul, would keep Paul's secret, but Maggie didn't want Maureen to know more than was necessary – as one of the Beatle wives, whatever she heard might get back to Jane.

She had to find Jane before Jane found Paul. Keeping her eyes peeled for women clad in flowing white gowns, Maggie worked her way through the party, smiling at the other guests, but trying not to get sucked into any conversations. At long last, Maggie spotted Jane, looking small and forlorn, standing next to a potted plant.

"Jane!"

"Hello. I don't suppose you've seen Paul, have you?" She looked resigned.

“Not recently,” Maggie said truthfully.

“Something is going on with him, but I can’t pinpoint what.”

“I think he’s just got a lot on his plate right now,” Maggie said, again truthfully.

“I’m sure that’s part of it,” Jane sighed. “Still, I feel like he’s avoiding me tonight. He keeps disappearing. I don’t know what I did.” She looked down. “Maybe it was a mistake to come tonight.”

“Oh, Jane, I’m sorry Paul’s being like this. I’m sure it’s nothing you did.” Maggie did feel bad for Jane. She really had done nothing to deserve this treatment, and though Maggie wanted Paul and Linda to get together, she didn’t want Jane to be hurt by it.

“I know I’m not around much these days,” Jane said, a little sadly. “I’ve just had so many offers for really good parts. I feel like I’m in a good place with my acting and I don’t want to give it up, but it’s getting harder to juggle Paul and my career. I don’t know that I’m enough for him. Maybe he’d be better off with someone else who is more… devoted. I don’t know, is that silly? How do you and John handle it? Isn’t John a bit like Paul, not liking being on his own and all that? You work long hours, don’t you?”

Maggie certainly knew something about not feeling like she was enough. Maggie answered, “Sometimes, yes, I do work long hours. It was worse when I’d just started with Apple though a lot of times my hours at work coincided with when John was busy at the studio anyway. But I can

tell you that John and I have had plenty of fights over Apple. I think he realizes that I need it though."

"I wish Paul could see that as well. I'm nothing without my acting. It's who I am."

"Have you told Paul any of this?"

"I'm not sure he listens when I do."

"Maybe it's worth trying again."

"You mean, if I want to make it work with him?"

"Well…" It wasn't precisely what she'd meant.

"You're right – I should. And I will. Maybe after this film, I'll take a bit of a break. I could use it, and maybe it will be good for Paul and I. I don't want him to find a replacement, after all, do I?" Jane smiled, but Maggie wasn't sure she was joking. "Thanks for the advice. We don't chat much anymore, do we? I've missed it. Maybe we should have lunch sometime, once I'm done with this picture."

"That would be great," Maggie managed.

"Are you staying in London for the holidays, or are you going back to Liverpool at all?"

"We're staying in London for Christmas, and of course for Boxing Day, because I'm sure the Boys will want to see Magical Mystery Tour together – but I think we'll take a short trip back to Liverpool after that so John can spend some time with his Aunt Mimi." Maggie replied. She was relieved to be on a topic not related at all to Paul and Jane's

relationship. Besides, John's family was interesting to Maggie, especially after all she'd read of it. Maggie had been nervous to meet the formidable Mimi for the first time (which had happened when they'd started telling friends and family about their engagement) but they had ended up getting along very well. Mimi seemed glad that John had chosen someone who was able to keep him grounded, and didn't tiptoe around his moods. Maggie hadn't been sure what to expect from Mimi based on what she'd read, but she knew John had a great affection for the woman that had raised him, and she was glad to have been pleasantly surprised.

Maggie had also gotten to know John's somewhat estranged father. John's history with Alf Lennon was complicated, and it had been Brian's death that had made John want to open the channels of communication again. Maggie was glad, and when she'd finally met Alf, it was easily apparent where John had gotten his charm. Alf was engaged to a woman much younger than him – much younger than John even. Pauline was sweet and seemed to genuinely love John's father, which was as inexplicable to Alf as it was to everyone else. They appeared to be happy together though, and Maggie hoped they would remain so. Maggie wasn't sure how long Alf and John would stay on good terms; though John had his ups and downs in both temperament and mood, he had undoubtedly mellowed in the past few years. Maggie decided to stay cautiously hopeful that their relationship could stay mended this time around.

Alf and Pauline were living in London in a flat that John paid for, and they were going to come over for Christmas dinner – another good reason to have Mimi safely away in Liverpool.

Explaining Maggie and John's somewhat complex holiday plans to Jane took a little while, and Maggie hoped that she'd kept Jane occupied long enough. Long enough for what, she couldn't be sure. Shouldn't Paul have made some excuse to Linda and come to find Jane by now?

"Well, it's been so nice to catch up, but I think I'd better be off, Maggie – I really do want to find Paul."

"I'll come with you. Maybe he's with John – I haven't seen him lately either."

The two of them wandered around the party, both keeping an eye out for Paul. Maggie wasn't sure what else she could do other than accompany Jane. Paul was on his own this time, and he certainly was going to get what he deserved if Jane caught him. Glancing around, Maggie happened to see Paul out of the corner of her eye. She was about to point him out to Jane when she realized that he was out on the balcony with Linda… kissing her!

"Jane, is that Paul? Over there?" Maggie hustled Jane past the balcony door, praying that Jane wouldn't look outside and see Paul and Linda together there.

"Where?" Jane peered where Maggie was pointing.

Maggie pointed at whatever was furthest from the balcony, where Paul and Linda were presumably still kissing. "Um, over there, near that plant. The one with the purple flowers."

"I'm not sure…"

“Why don’t you go check it out – I thought I saw John on the balcony, and I want to see if it was actually him. I’ll catch up with you later.”

“All right – I’ll see you later!”

Waving cheerily, Maggie gave Jane a smile, which faded the second Jane was gone. What the hell was Paul thinking? He could have easily been caught, and it would have been an ugly scene, one in which Maggie did not want to be involved. They’d avoided disaster, but only just. Paul needed to be more careful or he was never going to pull off this little “Three’s Company” style scheme he was attempting. Though Paul had never even heard of that ‘80s sitcom, Maggie thought he was playing the Jack Tripper role tonight perfectly. The problem with this, of course, was that on the TV show Jack Tripper never successfully pulled off any of these sorts of ploys. Paul was in over his head, and she wasn’t sure if he realized it or not. Sighing, Maggie headed back out to the balcony to try to see if she could talk some sense into him.

Chapter Nineteen

After making sure Jane was safely gone, Maggie made her way back to the balcony. From the door she could see that Paul and Linda were still there in the shadows kissing. Maggie had to resist the urge to burst through the door and shout, "What the hell are you thinking?" at Paul. But that would never do in front of Linda. Instead she walked calmly up to them, and cleared her throat, announcing her presence.

She had to clear it a second time before either of them noticed she was there.

"Oh, Maggie! Sorry!" Linda blushed.

Maggie smiled at her. She was going to kill Paul. "Paul, I need to talk to you. Lin, you don't mind if I steal him away for a minute, do you?"

"No, that's fine!"

"Great, thanks."

"Ow!" Paul yelped as she grabbed his arm firmly, and towed him back inside the ballroom. Another conveniently

placed plant gave them a place to talk and screened them from Linda and the rest of the party.

“What in the hell were you thinking?”

“What?” Paul asked, all innocence.

“Leaving Jane all alone, while you’re out here making out with someone else. Jane almost saw you, you know.”

“Jane wasn’t alone, you were with her,” Paul reminded her. “Ow!” Maggie tightened her grip again.

“Well, she wants to know where you are, and now she’s looking for you. You’d better damn well go find her. You said you didn’t want to be unfair to Linda, well, you’d better try being fair to Jane too.”

“I thought you wanted me and Linda together?”

“I do – but not with all this sneaking around. It’s beneath you, and it isn’t fair to either of them. Now, go find Jane. I’ll go back and keep Linda company.”

“Fine, fine,” Paul grumbled, and made his way through the crowd in the direction of the purple potted plant that Maggie pointed him towards.

“Everything all right?” Linda asked when Maggie stepped back onto the balcony.

“Fine. Paul just had to take care of something, but he’ll be back. Now, help me find John? I haven’t seen him in a while.”

“Sure!”

Setting out opposite the direction Paul had gone, Maggie and Linda wandered through the party, commenting on this costume or that, both keeping an eye out for Maggie's fiancé.

"There he is!" Linda said, pointing. Maggie looked over and right away her heart dropped into her stomach. John was talking to a familiar tiny dark figure.

"That's her! That's the woman I was telling you about," Maggie whispered, gripping Linda's arm.

"Uh-oh."

"He looks like he's into her, doesn't he?"

"Kinda. She looks into him, that's for sure. Jeez, could she stand any closer? Is she caressing his jacket?"

"That's it, let's go break this up," Maggie said grimly.

"I've got your back! Let me know if you want me to hold her down while you punch!"

Maggie flashed a grateful smile at her friend, and then marched over towards John.

"Hello," Maggie said, trying her best to sound casual.

John gave Maggie a bit smile. "Hi luv! I was looking for you, but then I ran into Yoko! You remember Yoko, right?"

"How could I forget?" Maggie said. Then, addressing Yoko, "I hope you got your ring back. I mailed it right out when Dot found it. I wanted to save you from having to

stop by to pick it up." The little ploys Yoko was pulling to try to see John were getting more and more bold. When Dot had told Maggie that a small black-clad Asian woman had been by the house and that a strange ring had turned up on the table near the door afterwards, Maggie had quickly figured out what Yoko had done. It wasn't going to work – Yoko's ring was posted back to her immediately, giving her no reason to drop by again to look for it.

"Oh, that was nice of you, luv," John beamed at Maggie, and she smiled back sweetly. Why was John so oblivious to what this woman was trying to pull? Or was it just an act on his part? She didn't know anymore.

"Where's your costume?" Maggie asked Yoko, who looked just as she always did.

"Oh, Yoko thinks that dressing up disguises our true inner selves and is a betrayal of who we are artistically," John answered, and then looked at Yoko. "Did I get that right?" Yoko nodded.

Okay, that's it, Maggie thought. She'd had about enough of Yoko and her artistic pretension. "John, can I talk to you, for a minute?"

"Sure, luv! Hey, wait!" Maggie wasted no time in dragging him off to somewhere more secluded. She would merely ask him about whether he'd seen Paul and fill him in on what was happened. She would not nag him about why he was talking with Yoko. No, she would control herself.

Linda watched John being dragged behind a screen of plants, and once they were out of sight, she and Yoko stood there together awkwardly.

“Well, I think I’m going to wander. It’s been nice to meet you,” Linda said even though they hadn’t been introduced and she wasn’t all that glad to meet her. She’d go find Paul, that’s what she’d do.

Once Maggie had successfully cornered John, she turned on him. “You have no idea what a nightmare this party has been. Jane’s here.”

“I know, Paul told me all about it.”

“Ugh, well, I’ve been trying to keep Jane occupied while Paul got some time in with Linda. Now I’ve just sent him back after Jane, and I’m supposed to be keeping Linda company.”

“Shouldn’t you be doing that instead of hiding behind this plant with me?” John said in stage whisper. “Not that I mind, of course, but I left Yoko just standing there and I don’t want to be rude.”

“Argh. What is it about Yoko? Why is she even here?” Maggie asked in utter frustration.

“Because I invited her. Don’t start this again, luv.”

“Don’t start what again?” Maggie said, knowing full well what he meant but wanting him to say it outright.

“I’ve told you. Yoko is a friend. I don’t tell you who you can be friends with, do I?”

Maggie shook her head stubbornly. “She’s after something. She’s after…”

“My money? Don’t worry, there’s plenty of it to go around.”

“You’re not actually giving her money, are you?”

“That’s not your business.” John’s voice grew cold.

“Actually it is. The Beatles are exactly my business. You’re my business. Jesus, John, we’re engaged. Or is that the problem? Your personal finances aren’t my business because we’re not married yet? I’m not your wife, so it’s none of my business? Of course, I guess what you spent on Yoko wasn’t any of Cyn’s business either, and she actually was your wife.” Maggie couldn’t help the words that rushed out of her mouth. Maggie knew when John had first proposed that they would get married when the time was right. There had never been a real reason to rush things. They were together and that was all that had mattered. Lately though, thanks to Yoko’s interference, Maggie wondered if there would ever be a right time. Why would John complicate things with Maggie by marrying her withYoko waiting in the wings?

“What did you just say? What does Yoko have to do with Cyn?” John looked confused. John clearly didn’t get what she meant by what she’d said, because he still had no idea that Yoko was the woman he’d originally left Cyn for. Yoko and Cyn and marriage in general was really more than Maggie wanted to get into standing behind a potted plant at a party, so she decided to try and change the subject.

“Never mind. We’ll talk about this later, okay?” She gave John a weak smile. “Let’s just get back to the party. I left Linda standing there, and I don’t want to be rude either.” Before John could say anything further, she stepped out

from behind the plant. She heard the leaves of the plant rustle as John followed her.

Linda wasn't anywhere to be seen, but Maggie spotted Paul almost right away – he was hard to miss as he wandered by in his armor and short skirt.

"Paul!" she called. He stopped and turned his head in her direction.

"Paul!" That sounded like Linda. Maggie watched as Paul turned in the direction of the blonde woman in white. He took a step towards her, holding out his hand. Linda reached for it.

"Paul?" Hearing his name for a third time, this time from behind him, Paul turned and looked to see a red-haired woman in white stood staring at him, a shocked expression on her face. Paul turned pale and dropped his hand.

Maggie watched in horror as Paul stood there, a woman in white on either side of him. Clearly Jane had no idea who Linda was, but could nevertheless tell that this strange woman was on familiar terms with Paul. Their costumes matched, after all. Linda knew very well who Jane was and seemed confused to see her here, and wearing a very similar costume.

Paul stood in the middle, looking back and forth at them both, unable to decide to whom he should speak first.

"Hello, luv!" Argh! It was Mick. Maggie tore herself away from watching the train wreck in front of her and gave him a glance. "Mick, you have really crappy timing. And what's with that wig? You look ridiculous."

“I’m a Beatle, luv! Wooooo!” He shook his head in imitation. “Do you want to shag me now?”

“Not really,” she said dryly. “Now hush for a minute, I’m in the middle of something. Or rather, Paul is.” Maggie turned back to watch Paul still standing between Jane and Linda.

Finally, Paul turned to his right. “Jane…” he said pleadingly. But he had waited too long. She turned her back on him and stormed off. He looked at Linda, half-expecting her to slap him or storm off in the other direction.

Instead she smiled sadly at him. “You know what, Paul? If you’re ever in New York, give me a call. I’ll see you later.” Linda shook her head at him. Maggie drew her breath in – Linda was so calm. She didn’t make a scene or give him ultimatums. Just said, “so long”. Linda, having spotted Maggie, walked away from Paul without a backwards glance.

“Hi Maggie.”

“Hi Lin. Are you okay?” Maggie didn’t want to make any gesture that might betray Linda to Paul, who was still watching.

“I’m fine.” Linda looked over at Mick, who was still standing next to Maggie. “Hey Mick, do you want to dance?”

“Always, luv.”

“Then let’s go,” Linda said smiling coyly at him. They’d known each other for a while, and Mick was always fun. He draped an arm over her shoulder, and as they walked

past Paul, laughing and chatting, Linda gave him a little wave.

Paul turned to Maggie, looking utterly devastated. Maggie just shook her head at him. She glanced behind her, where John stood, looking amused by Paul's misfortune. Paul turned away from Maggie and John and disappeared into the crowd; presumably he was going to find Jane.

"What's so funny?" Maggie asked John.

"Paul. Got what he deserved, didn't he?"

Maggie couldn't deny that - but Jane and Linda had both been hurt because of it, and that wasn't so funny.

"I'm going to go find Linda."

"She's with Mick, she's fine."

"She's not fine, she was just pretending to be fine so Paul wouldn't see how hurt she was."

"Really?"

"I guess it worked. If you can't see the difference, I'm sure Paul won't be able to either." Maggie wasn't sure what to say to John after that, but she needn't have worried. Yoko materialized out of nowhere and was now hovering inches from John.

"Yoko." Maggie said flatly.

"Luv," John said with warning in his voice. Maggie was in no mood for it. She opened her mouth but wasn't sure what would come out of it.

“Maggie?” It was Linda and Mick, back again. “Is Paul gone?”

“Yep. Are you okay?”

“Not really. Do you think we could go home early? I hate to…”

“Of course, Lin, of course. Let’s go.”

Mick protested to Maggie, “Leaving the party early? But I haven’t had a chance to dance with you yet, luv. Don’t you want to dance with Mick now that he’s dressed as your favorite rock star?”

“A cheap imitation if you ask me,” John muttered.

“I don’t think anyone did,” Mick grinned at him.

“Maggie needs to take Linda home, so she won’t be dancing with you, you wanker. Go hit on someone else’s girl.” John said. “And take off that ridiculous wig, while you’re at it!”

“Are you coming?” Maggie asked John.

“I’m going to stay for a bit. Chat with Yoko some more, plus I haven’t seen George or Ringo all night.”

“Fine.” Maggie gave John a wounded look, but didn’t know what else she could do. She couldn’t tell John he couldn’t stay - he was a grown man. And she didn’t want to make a scene in front of Yoko, who looked almost smug. Maggie wanted to punch her in the nose.

“Come on, Linda, let’s go. I’ll see you at home. John - don’t be too late?”

“I won’t, don’t worry.” He kissed her. “Just send the driver back after he drops you off, okay?”

“Sure.” Maggie gave him a last look before she and Linda started towards the door. John had already turned away and was talking animatedly to Yoko. Maggie felt something inside of her break.

“Hey, Mags, where are you going? I haven’t seen you all night!” It was George, looking dashing as a pirate. Maggie realized that she hadn’t really seen much of him tonight.

“Hey. Actually, Linda and I were just leaving.”

“Oh no! How come?”

“Linda’s not feeling well.” Maggie looked over at Linda for a second, before pulling George slightly aside. “It’s a really long story. I’ll tell you later. Can you do me a favor? I have to take Linda home but John wouldn’t come. He wanted to stay and talk to Yoko, who is apparently here. Can you please go keep an eye on them to make sure they don’t get too cozy?”

“No problem. I will make a massive pain of myself. You will never have seen such a clingy third wheel,” George promised her.

“Thanks,” Maggie said, smiling at him despite herself.

“I’ll call you tomorrow, okay?” He gave her a kiss on the cheek, and headed off in the direction that Maggie had indicated. John and Yoko were about to have company.

Chapter Twenty

Maggie and Linda were both quiet in the car on the way home, each lost in their own thoughts. Both were disappointed in the men in their lives; both had seemingly had another woman chosen over them.

Finally Linda spoke, breaking the silence. "I guess it's really over. Between Paul and I - I mean." Maggie didn't know how to respond, so she just let Linda talk. "I feel like such a fool. How could I think Paul and I had something real? He's still with Jane and he's never going to leave her. Tonight just proved the lengths he's willing to go to keep things just as they are."

"I'm so sorry, Linda. I really thought you and Paul were meant to be, but I don't think Paul deserves you right now. Maybe once he's grown up a bit…"

"Maybe. Well, I'm not going to sit around and wait for him. If he does grow up…"

"Or at least grows a pair…" Maggie added.

Linda smiled briefly. "…then maybe I'll reconsider. But I think until that day, I'm done."

Maggie was so sad at the thought that Linda and Paul might not ever get together. She had been counting on it since the moment she'd met Linda and discovered how well they got along. Maybe Maggie's presence in this timeline had screwed even that up, and the thought was depressing.

"Did you know?" Linda asked.

"Know what?"

"That Jane was there tonight."

"I had no idea that she was planning on showing up, but Paul told me that she had, yes."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I don't know. I guess I was just so focused on making sure you got to have Paul to yourself that I just didn't think. I just wanted him for you."

"You should have told me. That was humiliating."

Maggie hung her head. "I'm sorry, you're right, I should have. I was hoping to avoid either you or Jane being embarrassed, but that really backfired. I care about Jane too, you know. Neither of you deserves this. I just…I don't know. I guess I've been pushing too hard to get you and Paul together."

"Why do you want us together so badly? You and I will always be friends regardless of who we're with."

"I know that. I just… have a strong feeling about it. Can we leave it at that?"

“I guess so.”

Maggie wished she could just tell Linda everything, but she just wasn’t sure if that was a good idea. “Do you forgive me? I never meant for you to be hurt.”

“Of course.” Linda moved over on the car seat and hugged Maggie. “Are you okay? You don’t seem to have fared much better than I did tonight.”

“Stupid Yoko.”

“Wow, she’s very…silently aggressive, isn’t she?”

“Yep.”

“And John stayed at the party to talk with her.”

“Yep.”

“Wow.”

“Yep.”

“You don’t think they’ll…”

“Hook up?” Maggie supplied the words Linda had been trying to avoid.

“Well…”

“No, I don’t think he’ll go that far. At least not now, but who knows what could happen if they continue to grow closer? He says he doesn’t have feelings for Yoko, but he’s…intrigued. Interested. Fascinated. I don’t know…”

“I’m sorry I made you take me home early. It’s my fault he’s alone with Yoko right now.”

“Oh, they’re not alone, I made sure of that,” Maggie reassured Linda.

“Oh?”

“George promised to make a pest of himself,” Maggie managed a smile. “They won’t be able to have any sort of meaningful conversation tonight.”

“Good thinking! It’s nice that George is on your side. It’s a little…surprising considering the Boys’ club that the Beatles seem to have going.”

“Yeah, it is a little. But George doesn’t like Yoko any better than I do.”

“Why is that?”

All Linda’s questions seemed to point to the one thing that Maggie couldn’t tell her. Maggie’s big secret was the reason that Maggie knew who John and Yoko were to each other, the reason why George didn’t like Yoko, and the reason why Maggie knew that Paul and Linda were meant to be together.

“It’s a long story. I promise to tell you another time.”

The car pulled up to the house. Maggie sent the driver back to the party to wait for John, and Maggie and Linda trudged into the house. They might both still be miserable, but at least they had each other’s misery for company.

“John! Mate! I haven’t seen you all night!”

“Hey, George… hey….what are you doing?” George had squeezed himself between John and Yoko, which was no mean feat considering how close Yoko was standing to John. George draped a long arm around each of the other’s shoulders.

“So, this is the famous Yoko, eh? What do you say we all get better acquainted? If you know what I mean! ” He gave them both a big squeeze. Yoko grimaced, which made George’s grin all the wider.

“Are you high?” John asked.

“Always, my friend, always. Now what were we talking about?” George inquired.

“Yoko’s new exhibit.”

“Oh?” George said, mentally taking notes for Maggie Sue. “What kind of exhibit?”

“One that may not happen without the proper funding. That’s what Yoko and I were talking about when you showed up. Speaking of…” John pulled George aside, which forced him to let go of Yoko, “Bugger off, mate.”

“Nonsense, I’d love to hear about this exhibit. That you’re funding?”

“Just partly. And don’t you dare tell Maggie. She would flip out. She thinks there’s something going on between Yoko and I.”

George raised an eyebrow.

“There isn’t!” John insisted.

“John, I’ve known you way too long to believe that. You’ve fucked girls in every city in Europe, and half of those in America. Besides, it’s not like you’re married, right? Even Paul is carrying on behind Jane’s back. It’s no big deal.” George really didn’t think that sort of thing was a big deal. Hell, he did it and he was actually married. But somehow the thought of John carrying on with Yoko behind Maggie’s back was repellant to him. It was just…different somehow.

“There’s nothing going on. And if it’s no big deal, maybe I should ask you if there’s anything going on between you and my fiancé,” John said pointedly.

“Sorry, mate. We’re just friends. Like you and Yoko.” George grinned at John and then went back over to Yoko. “You’re an artist, eh? Let’s hear all about your art, then. Do you do paintings? Like watercolor? Oil? Paint by numbers?” Yoko shook her head in impatience with George and looked imploringly at John. John just shrugged his shoulders at her. He’d just have to meet with Yoko about this exhibit some other time.

"John!" Maggie called out. John turned and looked in her direction. He smiled at her.

Then, from behind him there came another voice. Another woman. "John!" He looked behind him. A small woman dressed in black stood there imperiously.

"John?" Maggie called again, questioningly.

John turned back to Maggie, shrugged, and then turned around and walked away.

"No, John, please!" Maggie cried. She felt herself sobbing, and then with great effort, she made herself wake up.

She sat up, breathing hard, still feeling like she was trapped in the dream, in which she'd been crying, knowing that John had chosen someone else leaving her behind with barely a backwards glance.

Turning on a light, Maggie looked over at the clock. It was late and John still wasn't home from the party. She'd never be able to fall back asleep now. Not after that dream. And not when she knew that she and John would have to talk about the elephant in the room. Yoko. It was time. Maggie had to come clean and tell John why Yoko bothered her so much. When he came home, she would finally do it.

Maggie opened a book and settled in to wait for John. Concentrating was hard though, as her thoughts were still very much on the events of this evening. It seemed as if Paul and Linda had come to a disastrous end, which was bad enough. Maggie didn't want the same thing to happen to her and John.

Maggie heard the front door open and close, which meant John was home. She hoped he hadn't been drinking as that always seemed to bring out the worst in him. Better he come home high than drunk, though she hoped he wasn't that either. Not when she needed to have this important conversation with him. She didn't think she could stand another ugly fight.

"Hey, luv," John said as he walked into their bedroom. "You're still up?" He shed his jacket right away.

"I had a nightmare," Maggie explained. "John…" Maggie began again uncertainly, not knowing how to approach him.

He approached her instead. "I missed you at the party, luv," he said, pulling her towards him and kissing her forehead.

"You did?"

"Of course! I had no one to dance with."

"How about Yoko?" Maggie couldn't resist saying sourly.

"Not again, luv, all right? Besides, George monopolized her all night! Can you believe it?"

Maggie could. Sweet George. She owed him yet again.

"What happened?"

"I don't know – he was acting strange. I don't know what he was on. He stayed by her side all night, even insisting on dancing with her. He practically dragged her onto the

dance floor, leaving me to keep poor Pattie entertained. She's concerned that George is interested in Yoko now."

"I don't think she needs to worry," Maggie said dryly. John was keeping Pattie company? Well, she'd rather worry about John and Pattie than John and Yoko. There was no question in her mind which combination was more dangerous. Maggie also really liked the mental picture George dragging Yoko onto the dance floor provided.

"Oh, and then I got accosted by Lulu, who was dressed as Shirley Temple. She saw you and Linda leaving early, and had seen us arguing behind that plant earlier, and she gave me an earful about how I should be treating you better. It was hard to take her seriously when she was waving an oversized lollipop at me."

Maggie giggled at the mental picture. She also remembered that in her original timeline, Lulu, who was a 60s pop singer, had done this to John for hitting on Pattie in front of Cynthia.

"Well, she was right!" Maggie scolded John, half-seriously. "I can't believe you ditched me for HER."

"I didn't ditch you, luv. You had to leave early with Linda, but there were people I wanted to stay and talk to."

"Right, like Yoko." Maggie knew that these jabs were exactly the wrong way to start a real dialogue about Yoko, but she couldn't help herself.

"I told you not to start this again, luv. Look, I don't want to argue with you anymore, all right?"

"But…"

“No more,” he said firmly, kissing her.

“John, I don’t want to argue either, but we have to talk, I have to tell you…”

But he just kissed her again, making it difficult for her to say anything more.

“It’s important,” she tried again.

“Not tonight, luv. I’m so tired.”

“John, please!”

“Whatever you have to say, it can wait. Just no more Yoko, no more fights, no more jealousy. I love you, that’s all there is too it, nothing else matters.”

“But…”

John kissed her again, a lingering kiss. His fingers started to undo her nightgown.

“I thought you were tired!”

“Actually, luv, I’m dying for a shower. My hair’s all sticky.” He ran his hands through his spiky hair. “I could use some company…” he hinted. Before getting up, he dropped kisses down Maggie’s neck. Pulling her nightgown aside, he ran his tongue teasingly over her breast. “Come join me, luv,” he said, and with that, he disappeared into the bathroom.

Maggie sighed. She had dreaded and avoided telling John about Yoko for so long, afraid that if he knew the truth

about who Yoko was, that that would make him all the more attracted. Now she had finally tried to tell him, and he couldn't be less interested in talking about it. She could hardly blame him for not wanting to fight about it – she didn't want any more fights either. He loved her, he had said it and shown it – maybe it was enough for now. She promised herself that if Yoko pushed harder, she would try to have a conversation with John then. What could it hurt to put it off – she'd waited this long, hadn't she?

Climbing off the bed, she made her way to the bathroom – she could hear John splashing around in the shower. *Was there anything better than a wet Beatle?* Maggie thought. If there was, she didn't want to know about it. John heard her approaching and peered out from behind the shower door. Shedding her nightgown, she reached her hand out and let John pull her into the curtain of warm water.

Chapter Twenty-One

Linda left the morning after the party, wanting desperately to put some distance between herself and Paul. Maggie walked Linda and Heather to their gate at the airport, something that still felt a little strange to her. She was used to post-9/11 security, and here security was nearly non-existent. The lack of security also worried Maggie a bit because if she were recognized, she wasn't sure if there would be help quickly forthcoming. However, at this early hour and without an actual Beatle present, she figured she'd be all right.

"Are you sure you can't stay longer, Lin?"

"No, I think it's time to go home." She smiled sadly, "I wish things could have gone differently. It's partly my own fault. I knew Paul had a girlfriend and I let myself get emotionally involved."

"Paul is emotionally involved too, you know. And who knows if he still has a girlfriend after last night?"

"Either way, I think we both just need time. I know you want us to get together, but even if Paul beckons to me again, I'm not going to just come running."

“No. I wouldn’t either,” Maggie admitted. “I’ll miss you. You’ll still come visit, won’t you?”

“Of course, and you’re always welcome in New York. You could even bring Julian sometime if his mum will let him. I’m sure Heather would love to see him. And of course John is always welcome.”

Maggie hugged both Linda and Heather and then sadly watched them board their plane home.

On the way back from the airport, Maggie dropped by Paul’s to see how he was faring. She found him massively hungover, unhappy, and confused. Though he richly deserved the miserable state he was in, she took pity on him when he begged her to stay and give him some advice. He did seem to genuinely feel badly for the spot he’d put Linda in, and even wondered if he should call her to apologize.

“I think an apology is an excellent idea. Do you have anything else to say to her? You know, about having a future together?” Maggie hinted.

“We can hardly have a future together if I haven’t broken it off with Jane yet, can I?”

“Didn’t Jane dump you last night?”

“No, no, it’s fine. I just explained that since she couldn’t make it to the party, that I’d escorted your friend to the party, that it was nothing serious.”

“That’s such a lie!” Maggie was outraged. “Nothing serious? Paul, you’re sleeping with her.”

“I know, like I said, it’s nothing serious.”

Beatles! Maggie thought again in frustration. Sex was nothing to them, obviously. It was unnerving how casual they were about it. Maggie often wondered if Paul, Ringo or George would even bat an eye if she’d made them a casual offer. Probably any or all of them would accept without so much as an awkward pause, and then afterwards, go about things like they were perfectly normal.

“That’s ridiculous, and I’d be willing to bet you have actual feelings for Linda too,” Maggie protested hotly.

“Be that as it may, Jane is just put out that I wasn’t more attentive, and she’ll come ‘round if I give it some more time.”

“Do you really want her to come around? Did you ever think that this might be the perfect opportunity to bring up the fact that you might not be right for each other?”

“Maggie, I just can’t break it off with Jane. Our lives are just too…bound up together.”

“What about Linda? Where does she fit into all this?”

“I don’t know. I’d hoped we could just keep things casual and on the side, and I don’t know, maybe we still can. She didn’t seem too angry at the party.”

“She was hurt, Paul. She was too proud to show you and everyone else, but she was hurt.”

“Did she say she was done with me?”

Maggie shifted uncomfortably. “It’s not my place to say. That’s between you and her. But I will tell you this – she’s not the sort that is going to be at your beck and call just because you’re Paul McCartney.”

Paul groaned and rested his forehead on the coolness of the table. “Mags, I don’t know what to do.” He lifted his head slightly. “Tell me what to do?”

“I’d love to, Paul – but you’re a grown man. I think you have to make up your own mind this time. You can’t keep things going they way they have been – you’re going to have to choose.”

“And you won’t tell me whether the Paul in your timeline chose Linda or Jane?”

“Nope, that’d be cheating. And I think we both know how I feel about that sort of thing.”

“Just do me a favor and don’t slag me off to Linda, okay?”

“Don’t worry. Anyway, I think you’ve done a good enough job of that yourself.”

“Thanks, luv. Now, go get me an aspirin, there’s a good girl.” Paul carefully laid his aching head back down onto the table.

December 26, 1967

“Quiet, everyone, it’s starting!” Paul shushed the room of people that were gathered at his house to watch the premiere of their new film. Everyone in the Beatles inner circle was there – except Jane. She was still upset with Paul and though Paul still seemed sure she would come around eventually, her absence was noticeable.

The film started.

Maggie hadn’t seen Magical Mystery Tour in a few years. She’d remembered being underwhelmed by it, and in black and white it was even more underwhelming.

It wasn’t all bad, of course – even as hard as Maggie had been on it over the last few months, she knew it had its moments. The music video of “I Am The Walrus” would be deservedly famous for its absurdity and distinctiveness. Most of the songs had a certain charm – it was just the randomness of the footage that stitched the musical bits together that made one scratch one’s head in puzzlement. Clearly this was no “A Hard Day’s Night”, and even “Help!” had a more cohesive narrative.

The band cheered when they saw themselves on screen and Maggie actually had a lot of fun watching them watch themselves. They mocked each other mercilessly, not seeming to realize that there might be more of that to come from outside of the group. Maggie greatly feared what the next day would bring.

The next day brought exactly what Maggie expected it might. The reviewers seemed almost surprised. After all, the Beatles had not yet had a false step musically or cinematically. No one knew what to do with this black and white, bizarre, and somewhat amateurish piece of work. The surprise quickly turned to anger and betrayal that the

Beatles had somehow let them down. Magical Mystery Tour was called self-indulgent, which it probably was, and the critics complained that it needed professional editing and directing – also no surprise. Apparently without any real news on Boxing Day, everyone was free to write scathing reviews about the movie and the Beatles in general.

Paul took most of the blame, and the group was only too happy to let him. Maggie didn't totally escape though – after all, she should have known, shouldn't she?

"Why didn't you tell us?" Paul grumbled at her, the next evening over dinner at Ringo's.

"Would you have listened?" Maggie demanded. "If I'd said that you needed a real director and a real film editor – or, how about, oh, I don't know, a script?"

"We could have fixed it, if we'd only known," Paul insisted stubbornly.

"Maybe, maybe not. Maybe there some things you can't change. Nothing I did saved Brian, so how do you know that my interference could have saved your precious film?"

"I guess we don't know that it would have helped," George replied, "But some warning might have been nice."

"Would you have listened?" Maggie glared around at them, finally settling her gaze on John. "I told you that the film wouldn't go over well, John, but you just said it would be fine. You were completely unconcerned. Did you even mention any of what I told you to the others?"

John looked away uncomfortably. He was used to being the one yelling and making a scene – it was odd to be on the receiving end of it. Of course he'd said nothing to Paul. In a way, he felt that interfering would have been cheating. He'd wanted to see how things would turn out if he let them proceed unmolested. It was what Maggie sometimes called the fatal flaw of the novel reader.

"And you," Maggie jabbed a finger at Paul. "You were so wrapped up in your plans, would you have even listened if I'd given you any input?" Tears were starting to come, as Maggie thought back to the days when they had been planning the film. Brian's loss still hurt, and like any half-healed wound, when you poked it, it brought pain. "Maybe I should have sat you all down and told you how your film would end up, but you know what? I'm not your prophet, and I'm not your savior. I can't save you all every time. I just can't. I'm just one person, and the future is changing all the time. I…" Unable to keep the tears back anymore, and unable to face these boys, these men, that she'd grown to love but felt powerless to protect, she simply left the table. She slipped out the front door and sat on the porch, letting the chilly wind cool the tears running down her face.

She heard the door open and close behind her. George sat down next to her and wrapped his arm around her, pulling her close. "It's shite, you know – thinking you can't make any difference. You already have. Maybe we couldn't save Brian…and I do mean we, you know. We all failed, including Brian. He's got to have some responsibility for his own life, doesn't he? But you're overlooking something. Haven't you saved Apple? The Boutique. You said that was originally a dismal failure, and it's doing quite well. Apple is doing beautifully and that's all you."

Maggie sniffed. “As happy as I am to have made Apple into something good for you, none of that matters if in the end I can’t save the people I love. And I won’t know any of that for years.”

“But you already have saved me,” George reassured her. “I’ve quit smoking, so you’ve already made a difference, haven’t you? If I don’t smoke, I won’t get lung cancer. Just knowing that was waiting for me...” he shuddered. “So you already have made a difference. As for John – well, we will do everything in our power to keep him safe. Who else – Mal? We’re forewarned about him. Ringo knows to keep an eye on Mo’s health. And Paul’s future wife…” George paused, the truth having dawned on him. “It’s Linda, isn’t it?” he said quietly. “Linda is the one that dies of breast cancer, not Jane.”

Maggie nodded her head miserably.

“Christ, he lost his mum to that, and he loses his wife too?”

Maggie nodded again.

“Well, even if Paul doesn’t marry her, you can still warn her. You haven’t told her any of this yet, have you?”

“No. I want to, but I’m afraid she’ll think I’m crazy.”

“You know we’ll all back you up.”

“I know. And I will tell her someday. But I just really, really wanted Paul and Linda to get together. They were married for 30 years in my original timeline. They were so amazing and happy together. But now…I…I just don’t think it’s going to happen. Since Brian died, everything

seems so up in the air. I've done nothing but doubt everything I was once so sure about. I feel…lost."

"I know losing Brian was huge. It was for all of us. Don't forget that we've been given direction by someone or another for years. It's hard to not know what move to make next when you've never had the freedom to figure it out for yourself. I know you feel like your changing everything has made it more difficult for you to help us and that scares you. But I think it's okay if we don't know the exact future – to know that nothing is set in stone – there's a certain freedom in that. It's the natural order of things."

"And I'm outside of that natural order."

"No, you're a part of it now. Either way, I just know that your being here is a good thing. I don't know what I'd do without you."

Maggie smiled at him. "And I can't imagine not knowing you."

George hugged Maggie again. "It'll all be okay somehow."

She leaned her head on his shoulder, and wiped her the lingering tears away. "I hope that's true, George. I really do."

Chapter Twenty-Two

By New Year's 1968, Jane had indeed forgiven Paul. Citing the need to spend some time together away from London, the two of them went visit Paul's dad in Liverpool for a little while. Paul appeared to have made his choice, and that was to work things out with Jane. Maggie couldn't do much but let it happen, though she wasn't happy about it. She'd already interfered enough. At least there'd been no Christmas engagement like there had been in her original timeline.

Not long after, George took off for a few weeks in Bombay to do some recording for a soundtrack he'd agreed to do for a movie called "Wonderwall." Maggie suspected he'd taken the job just to prove that he could compose a movie soundtrack just as well as Paul could. Plus George was given nearly complete freedom on the project and he leaped at the chance to use some of the Indian music he'd become so interested in.

George came back from India even more excited for the band's upcoming trip to visit the Maharishi's meditation center in Rishikesh, which had been scheduled for mid-February. George also came home with part of a new

Indian-inspired Beatles song, which he was calling "The Inner Light". Maggie didn't tell him, but that song was never one of her favorites. She just didn't get it.

In George's absence, the other Beatles had been busy on their own projects. John and Paul had spent some time sequestered in the music room at John and Maggie's house and Maggie heard, among other things, the sounds of Paul plunking out the beginnings of Lady Madonna on the piano. To all observers, Paul seemed to be pointedly staying away from love songs for the time being.

The band's friend Cilla Black was working on her own television show and Paul was helping her out with some music for it, while Ringo had been convinced to appear on the show itself, though that wouldn't be until mid-February.

Once George was home, the band also recorded a cameo for the Yellow Submarine movie. Maggie insisted that she be there as a representative of Apple, purely for business reasons, of course. It was hard for her to muffle her laughter, watching them mug for the camera and badly act their scripted dialogue. Paul's reference to "Fixing a Hole" especially made her laugh.

As Maggie watched, she considered the Beatles carefully, trying to remember how they had originally looked in early 1968. She recalled 1968 as a year of change, though she struggled a bit to remember when they'd all started growing their hair and beards out. Maggie hoped to influence them (and particularly John) away from some of their less attractive looks. Not that all of them looked terrible with facial hair – mostly it was just John's bushy Abbey Road beard that Maggie hated.

For now, she supposed they all seemed to look more or less the same as they had before the Sgt Pepper mustache phase. None of them but Ringo sported mustaches anymore, and their hair was still as shaggy as ever. John kept thinking he might want to grow his out and then changing his mind and getting it cut. Maggie didn't mind the longer hair, but when she asked nicely, he'd abandoned his plans for large muttonchops.

"How was I, luv?" John asked after they were done filming their part for Yellow Submarine. "Was my fear of the impending Blue Meanie invasion convincing?"

He put the telescope up to his glasses and peered at her through it. "Yes, definitely!" she giggled.

"What about me?" George demanded. "They gave me a whirly thing to play with." He held it up for her to inspect.

"That was very convincingly done as well!" Maggie said as solemnly as she could. Sometimes she felt like Wendy, with the Beatles as her Lost Boys. She guessed that made John her Peter Pan.

"I dropped the hole and now I can't find it!" she heard Ringo exclaim somewhere in the background.

"Don't worry, someone will come and pick it up later," Paul replied to him.

"As long as no one falls into it in the meantime!" Ringo said half-seriously. His slightly mournful tone of voice made her laugh, and she once again had to pinch herself to make sure she was really here in the 1960s hanging out with the Beatles.

“Looking forward to going to India, luv?” John asked Maggie a few nights later, when they were in bed, each armed with a book of their own. The trip was looming and Maggie needed to start packing soon, especially as they were going to be there for a while.

“That’s a loaded question,” Maggie smiled back at him.

“You know, you should really give this meditation stuff a try.” John put his book aside.

“Oh no, not you too?” Maggie groaned. “George has gotten to you, hasn’t he!”

“No, no,” he protested. “Well, maybe, just a little. I just keep thinking about the things the Maharishi told us in Wales. It seemed to help me to deal with the whole Brian thing. What if this fellow has the answers? What if we can learn them in India?”

“The answers to what? Life, the Universe and Everything?”

“Sure.”

“I already know the answer to Life, the Universe and Everything.”

“What is it then?”

“42.”

“I don’t get it,” John said, puzzled.

“Never mind. It’s from a book that hasn’t been published yet. The point is, I’m not sure there actually is a real answer to any of that stuff. And if you expect the Maharishi to whisper in your ear and tell you the secret to it all, I think you’re kidding yourself.”

John looked a little disappointed, as if that was exactly what he was hoping the Maharishi would do. “It’s still worth thinking about, isn’t it? Questioning things and trying to understand them.”

“Of course it is! That’s the whole reason I became a scientist and an astronomer,” Maggie said, “I wanted to understand how the universe works. To understand the rules that govern it.”

“Rules? Like love?” John smiled at her. “I hear it’s all you need.”

Maggie laughed. “There you go, quoting yourself again. I meant gravity, but love will do, I suppose. It’s not very scientific though.”

“Well, maybe there are other ways of understanding the universe besides science. Science can’t explain love, can it?”

“I guess not.”

“Ah, so if you’ll admit that much, then maybe you’ll admit that maybe the Maharishi has something.”

“Let’s not go crazy,” Maggie said dryly. “Look, John, I just don’t want to lose you to some sort of cult or hokey religion – that could be nearly as bad as drugs. You seem

to need something to latch onto – and the things you want to grasp at sometimes worry me."

"Luv, I can't explain it – it's just my need to find something I can depend on, that's stable, that explains why things are the way they are."

"I'm not sure such a thing exists. I'm not sure anything is really stable or dependable. Except love, of course," she allowed. "And gravity. You can always depend on gravity."

"I don't think that Maharishi is against love…or gravity."

"But I don't really know what else he's actually for. Besides using the Beatles to promote himself."

"Luv, luv, you're so cynical. You need to let go and let yourself see what else is out there - the things that aren't bound by laws and rules and science."

"Tune in, turn on, and drop out? No thanks. And if that was another invitation to try LSD, I'm going to have to pass."

"That's not what I meant. I'm not saying it right, but maybe it will come to me later." John shrugged.

"Do you need inspiration?" Maggie smiled at him.

"Luv, you're always inspiring," John said. With that, he turned out the light, threw Maggie's book on the floor, and pulled her close to him.

“What do you say to bringing back Derek Taylor to do press?” Neil asked.

“Tell me about him,” Maggie said immediately, jotting down a note on the pad of paper in front of her. “Did you like how he worked? Back when he was with the Beatles in the old days?” She knew the name of course, but she’d never met him.

“He’s got a good way with people, and he’s trustworthy. I thought that…”

The secretary peeked her head in Maggie Sue’s office. “John is on the phone. I told him you were in a meeting, but he said to go ahead and interrupt it.”

“Thanks, Jenny, tell him I’ll pick up in a minute.”

Maggie was indeed in the middle of a meeting, but everyone at Apple knew that a Beatle trumped any meeting, no matter how important. This one wasn’t terribly important, but Maggie thought her weekly staff meetings were very valuable. It kept everyone on the same page, everyone knew what was going on, and if there were problems, they didn’t get ignored.

It had been almost exactly a year since Brian had put Maggie Sue in charge of Apple Corps, and there had been a great many changes in that time. She’d been careful to choose her battles when making changes because she remembered reading how Allen Klein’s heavy hand had nearly destroyed the company and the goodwill that was created within these walls. She didn’t want that. But she also didn’t want the Beatles to be cheated out of their hard-earned money either. It was a hard line to walk sometimes, and she knew some of her decisions could make her

unpopular. There was also the matter of proving that she belonged here, that she hadn't been given the position simply because she was sleeping with John. It had helped to have Brian's backing in the beginning. She'd been on her way to being established when he'd passed away and she'd always be grateful for all he'd done for her.

Now, a year after she'd begun, she had people in place at Apple that she could trust. Peter Brown took care of some of the business and money aspects, and they met almost daily so that he could update her. The Beatles had asked her to put Neil Aspinall to work at Apple, and she'd been glad to do so, as she knew he was extremely trustworthy, loyal, and hardworking. He took care of a lot of the day-to-day running of the company. Peter Asher, Jane's brother, had recently become head of A&R, looking for new artists that the Beatles could record and promote. There were others too – and having this team of people with their heads on straight to help her run the company was a huge relief to Maggie.

Apple could be kind of crazy, especially now that the Beatles had opened things up to new talent. There was always something going on in the building, which had a sort of party atmosphere to it. Maggie didn't mind, as long as things got done, and as long as she knew where the money was going. This was, after all, the music industry, not Wall Street. It was supposed to be fun. She actually very much enjoyed the atmosphere, and thought she balanced the often hippie tendencies of the Beatles nicely. She made sure the atmosphere stayed fun and the band let her talk sense into them over their crazier ideas.

The Beatles themselves did stop in at Apple frequently, and they all had offices here, though Paul was the only daily visitor. Out of all of them, he was the one that took the idea

of running a company seriously, and he was always checking to make sure everyone from the receptionist to the top executives was doing okay. She appreciated his involvement, his friendliness, and complete lack of snobbery. John was easily the least interested in the business end of things, but since she was there, John spent more time at Apple than he would have otherwise.

You could always tell when a Beatle was present at Apple. The whole building would be abuzz, and the Apple Scruffs would be stationed outside hoping for a glimpse. Maggie knew by default they would hate her for being with John and taking one of their single Beatles off the market, so Maggie did her best to be friendly, and often when she came and went, she'd give little Beatle trinkets like buttons and stickers to the girls waiting.

Yes, here Maggie was, in the middle of it all. And she had a Beatle on hold on the phone waiting for her.

"Okay, Neil, let's look into the idea of hiring Derek back," Maggie decided. "I'd better take this call. Gentleman, we'll meet again next week. Thanks for your time!"

"Can you stop by when you're off the phone?" Peter Brown asked her. "I wanted to go over this month's invoices with you."

"Sure."

Maggie followed him out and asked the receptionist to transfer John's call to her office phone.

Sitting down at her desk, she picked up the receiver. "Hey, John, what's up?"

“Shame on you, putting a Beatle on hold!” he scolded her. There was laughter in his voice.

“I’m a big important Apple executive and you’re just a scruffy Liverpool musician!” she shot back at him.

“Can the big important executive spare some time to come down to the studio? Please? Please? Please?”

“Will there be Beatles there?”

“All four of them.”

“Well, I am a big Beatles fan. Do you think I’ll get to meet them?”

“I can guarantee it!”

Maggie whispered dramatically into the phone, “I think John is cute. Can you hook that up for me?”

“I don’t know, luv, he’s got a jealous fiancé!”

“Hey!” she said indignantly.

John laughed. “I mean, he’s terribly in love with his jealous fiancé, and he’s very, very faithful to her.”

“That’s better!”

“Can you come now?”

“How about in an hour?” Maggie looked at her calendar again.

“Work, work, work.”

“I know, I know!”

“See you soon, luv,” John said and rang off.

Maggie smiled to herself, and looked at her watch. She’d better get over to Peter Brown’s office so she wouldn’t be late. She was curious about why John wanted her at the studio, but she had a feeling whatever it was would be exciting.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Maggie peeked her head through the door of Studio 2. For once, she wasn't late. It'd been exactly an hour since she'd talked with John on the phone.

"You're just in time!" John called over to her when he spotted her.

Maggie waved at the other guys in the studio as she made her way over to John. "What are you up to?" she asked, looking at him fondly. He was propped up on a stool, with an acoustic guitar in his lap.

"A new song – inspired by you, of course. Though it's not exactly a love song, I'm sorry to say. I'll have to make that up to you later." He winked.

She laughed. "I look forward to hearing it! I wonder whether it will be for the first time?"

"Ah, will this one be new to you or not? That's the question!"

“We’ll see – either way, I will love it, I’m sure!” She kissed him, intending it to be a quick peck. He didn’t let her go, though, and the kiss deepened.

“Animals!” Paul said, good-naturedly as he walked past. “Get a room!”

Maggie and John broke apart from each other. John gave Paul a grin. “Jealous, are we, Macca? Don’t worry, I have a kiss saved for you!” He made a grab at Paul, who neatly avoided John with a practiced dodge.

“I’ll take a rain check, thanks, John luv,” Paul grinned back. He ran up the stairs to the sound booth and disappeared.

The distraction gone, John turned back to Maggie. “Shall we record a demo, then?”

“By all means!” she said, amused.

George Martin signaled from the booth to start a sound check, and John strummed and made silly noises into the mic. Finally, they were ready, and Maggie took a seat to watch John play his new song.

Words are flying out like
endless rain into a paper cup
They slither while they pass
They slip away across the universe
Pools of sorrow waves of joy
are drifting thorough my open mind
Possessing and caressing me…

Jai guru deva om
Nothing's gonna change my world

Nothing's gonna change my world
Nothing's gonna change my world
Nothing's gonna change my world

Images of broken light which
dance before me like a million eyes
That call me on and on across the universe
Thoughts meander like a
restless wind inside a letter box
they tumble blindly as
they make their way across the universe

Jai guru deva om
Nothing's gonna change my world
Nothing's gonna change my world
Nothing's gonna change my world
Nothing's gonna change my world

Sounds of laughter shades of life
are ringing through my open ears
exciting and inviting me
Limitless undying love which
shines around me like a million suns
It calls me on and on across the universe

Jai guru deva om
Nothing's gonna change my world
Nothing's gonna change my world
Nothing's gonna change my world
Nothing's gonna change my world
Jai guru deva
Jai guru deva

The gentle strums of the guitar faded out and Maggie was speechless. It was indeed a song she knew well, but now the song was put into a new context for her. She still

didn't get (and maybe would never get) the appeal of meditation and eastern religion, but she couldn't help but be touched by the poetic lyrics.

Maggie did have a romantic side. After all, it was what had made her attempt time travel in the first place. However, she was, ultimately, a trained scientist with a naturally logical mind. The unusual situation she'd been in the last few years had stretched her ability to use reason, but it hadn't completely dissolved it. Even if the thought of John and Yoko together made her completely illogical, she still had a sharp sense of skepticism. She felt she had to. There were too many people out there wanting to take advantage of the Beatles' good will, natural curiosity, and money. Maggie knew Magic Alex was a total and complete charlatan, but she wasn't sure what to think of the Maharishi. She wasn't sure she trusted him, and he was a little too quick to use the name of the Beatles to promote himself.

Despite this, she really did understand John (and George's) search for answers. The Beatles had started out thinking that if only they could achieve their dreams of money, fame, and success, then life would make sense. In reality, it only made everything more confusing, complicated, and empty.

After hearing John's song, Maggie was again reminded of why John felt this need to grasp the mysteries of life and to believe that love wouldn't end but would continue to flow even to the very ends of space and time. Yes, that she understood. After all, Maggie's very existence with John was inherently unexplainable. The connection between them had pulled them together through space and time, and more than once.

“Well, luv?” John asked Maggie quietly; he had seen that she was being slow to react to his song, which was a little unlike her. Normally, he could read her enthusiasm immediately.

Maggie got up slowly and gave John a hug. “I’ve heard that song at least a hundred times, but I think I finally get it now.”

“That’s what counts, isn’t it?” He gave her a relieved smile. She had liked his song. And more importantly, she had understood it. Music was his language, just as science was hers, and there was no reason why the two couldn’t intertwine to express ideas of a higher order. Maggie had once told him that people were made from the dust of the stars, and he thought that was the most lyrical thing he’d ever heard.

“I may better understand your quest for the big answers…” Maggie paused to see if anyone else was paying attention to their conversation and then moved closer to John, as if she had a secret to tell. He leaned in, and she said quietly into his ear, “….but I still think meditation is boring. And while we’re in India, I’m going to do my best to distract you from it.” To emphasize her point, she ran her fingers gently up his back to the nape of his neck.

“How are you going to do that?” John asked, though he already had a pretty good idea. Her fingers were gently massaging his neck, and he was struggling to remember what it was they were talking about.

Maggie leaned closer still and grazed his earlobe with her lips, which caused him to nearly drop the guitar. Softly she said, “I guess you’ll just have to wait and see!”

Before he could fully process her words, she pulled back, ruffled his hair, stuck out her tongue at him, and marched away. She had to get back to Apple. After all, if she was going to take a couple of weeks off to go to India, she had work to do.

Maggie glanced back at John when she got to the door and gave him her cheekiest smile.

"You'll pay for that tonight, woman!" he growled at her, shaking his fist playfully. It was a good thing she was standing as far away as she was or he'd have her on the floor now, audience or no.

"You're all talk, Lennon!" she called back to him.

"We'll see about that!"

"Get a room, you two!" Geoff Emerick called from the booth. "Ready for another take, John?"

Maggie laughed, waved up at Geoff, who waved good-naturedly down at her, and headed back to her office.

With Maggie Sue gone, John was able to focus on the business at hand. His song. John called up to Geoff, "What can we do to make the vocals on this sound less like me?"

Geoff came down the stairs to conference with John. "John, you sounded great singing it as you were, but I guess we can come up with some effect for your voice if you really want."

"I can hear the song in me head, but it never comes out that way I want it to sound." One take and John was already frustrated. He was gratified that the song spoke to Maggie,

but he wanted to be happy with the song too. That satisfaction was so elusive sometimes.

Numerous takes later and John was still unhappy. There were so many words in the song that the phrasing was difficult, and he ended up having to take breaths that broke up the flow of the song. At the end of the day, John decided to just shelve the song and pick it up again later.

Geoff thought John was being too…John. The version they'd recorded was beautiful and he hated the thought that it might be shelved indefinitely. He decided he'd speak to Maggie Sue and see if she could talk some sense into John. She usually could. In fact, Geoff had never seen anyone else who had such skill in handling the Beatles. She was the only one the Beatles would let interfere in the way they did things. EMI didn't quite know what to make of it sometimes, though by now they knew the Beatles' ways were unconventional. It was the little things that won Geoff over in the end. Unlike other bands, the Beatles had never included the EMI staff in dinner orders, and kept to themselves entirely during meals. Then Maggie had shown up, and without even consulting the boys, she'd made sure that the EMI staff was included and treated like friends instead of employees, and with that she'd won Geoff over. He'd been uncertain if the band would accept her changing the established order of things, but they didn't put up even a token protest. The Beatles were a tight club, but somehow she'd broken in, and Geoff was convinced that things were the better for everyone for it. Feeling better about their night's work, he puttered about the control booth, cleaning things up for the evening.

George Harrison left the studio trying his best to conceal his smile. He knew that his song, "The Inner Light", might have a good chance at being the B-side to Paul's "Lady

Madonna" if John couldn't finish "Across the Universe" in time for their next single's release. He knew they'd never give him an A-side, but a B-side was a step in the right direction.

Three days later…

"Hey Mags, got a minute?"

It was George on the phone.

"Sure, George. I was just trying to make a list of some last minute stuff I need to buy for the big trip. Maybe Pattie will want to help?"

"I'm quite sure Pattie would love to go shopping with you for things for India. I'll make sure she calls you when she gets home. She's out with her sister right now."

"I bet Jenny is excited about the trip too."

"Very much, but then who wouldn't be excited for an exclusive chance to hang out with the Beatles for several uninterrupted months? There are fans all over the world who would sell their right arm for this opportunity!" he teased.

"You Beatles are so humble!" Maggie laughed.

"I know, but it's hard when you're as great as we are."

“Well, you’re cuter than the Stones, but as musicians…?” She laughed, because she knew that George knew that she was a Beatles fan through and through.

“Hey, they were only doing covers before we came along and taught them how to write their own music!” George protested.

“Fine, fine, The Beatles are awesome and way better than the Stones in every way!” she said sarcastically, though she meant every word she said.

“That’s better. Now do you want to hear my news or not?”

“I’d love to. What’s going on?”

“We had a little visitor to the studio today. Do you want to guess?”

“Not really.”

“All right then, it was Yoko,” George said, and then he pulled the receiver away from his ear, because he didn’t want to be deafened by the shriek he knew would be forthcoming.

“What?! That bitch! You tell her …” Maggie couldn’t stop the string of invectives that passed her lips.

“Hold on, hold on. Let me tell you what happened! I think you’ll like how this story turns out,” he said.

“Okay, go ahead.” Maggie forced herself to calm down and listen.

“As you may remember, none of us are big on guests at the studio while we’re working.”

Maggie remembered Paul’s treatment of her the day she’d met the Beatles very well in fact. “Uh-huh,” she said.

“Well, John had apparently invited Yoko to come by the studio, and she stopped by today while we were working on a new song called ‘Hey Bulldog’.”

“Oh, I like that one!”

“Okay, it’s still weird that you know our songs before we even finish writing them.” George paused. “Anyway, we were really having a lot of fun with it - you should have seen John and Paul making all these funny barking noises! And then…Yoko showed up. After listening to us work on the rhythm track for five minutes, she wanted to know why all our songs ‘use exactly the same rhythm’ and why we didn’t ‘attempt something more adventurous’.”

“She didn’t!” Maggie gasped.

“Oh, she did. John was not too happy about it either. He brings a guest to watch and she criticizes our music? While it’s still in progress?”

“Wow. She’s got quite the nerve.”

“And that’s not the worst part!”

“Oh?”

“She stole some of my biscuits on the way out!”

“That bitch!” Maggie said for the second time.

“Yep, she and John got in an argument and she left. But before she did, she walked right past my amp, where I had the package of biscuits, and helped herself.”

“She’s got to be stopped, George.”

“I know. This biscuit stealing is reprehensible. Though I can’t say I wasn’t warned. In any case, it looks like she’s on the outs with John. He didn’t like her criticism of his song or of our band in general. And, in three days, we leave for India, and we will be Yoko-free ‘til at least March.”

“Words cannot express how happy that makes me.”

“You and me both. My biscuits are off-limits,” he said firmly.

He said this so seriously that Maggie lost it. She laughed so hard she started to hiccup.

“What? What did I say?” George asked, laughing helplessly himself at Maggie’s reaction.

Both of them were in good moods when they rang off. They would soon be in India, away from Yoko, and away from all the other obligations that could make being a Beatle so tiring. George couldn’t wait. Surprisingly, neither could Maggie. India would give her time with John apart from the million other distractions that they had to deal with on a daily basis. Maybe this time away would be good for them all.

It wasn’t until later that George remembered that he hadn’t ever told Maggie about John funding part of Yoko’s art exhibit. Oh well, it probably wasn’t important now anyway,

not after the ugly display he'd witnessed this afternoon. No, he was sure John and Yoko were done for good.

Chapter Twenty-Four

February 14, 1968

Maggie watched the ground fall away as their plane took off, bound for Delhi. She wondered when she'd see home again. Home. A funny concept really. Home should have been 2006 America, but now it was 1960s London. It had taken a long time to feel like she belonged there, but she finally did. And now she was leaving.

The Beatles weren't sure how long they would be in India. George wanted to stay indefinitely, and John was equally (and unsurprisingly) enthusiastic. Maggie's eyes had widened in panic when George had announced his desire for an extended stay at dinner one night, and Paul had quickly caught her eye in sympathy. He didn't want to stay indefinitely in India either. He had places to go and people to see and albums to write.

Maggie worried about leaving Apple for too long, even though she knew she would be leaving it in capable hands. She'd put Peter Brown in charge in the interim, with orders to call or send a telegram if there were anything urgent. Of course, Maggie had no idea if there were even phones where they were going. She hoped so, but guessed not. For the thousandth time, Maggie wished for the internet and her laptop.

Maggie vaguely remembered from her original timeline that the Beatles had traveled to India in two separate parties, however, after a great deal of discussion, this time they'd decided to go together. Their party was to include the band and their significant others, as well as Pattie's sister Jenny. At the last second, much to Maggie's dismay, Magic Alex had talked his way onto the plane. John was delighted, and Maggie less than. There was no doubt Magic Alex had lost some of his hold on the band, thanks to Maggie's efforts, but they all still liked him. Maggie gritted her teeth and tried to be polite, but his arrival put a damper on her excitement. She didn't want to spend the long trip to India fighting with John, so she ignored him as best as she could.

The band's two roadies were along for the adventure as well. Mal had flown on ahead so that he'd be there to take care of the band when they arrived in Delhi. Neil, on the other hand, had flown with them to be sure their needs on the flight were met. She'd felt bad that he'd had to revert to his roadie role when he'd finally started to take on a real role at Apple, but when she'd brought it up, he'd waved his hands and insisted that he was perfectly happy taking care of the band as he'd done since the beginning. He'd also volunteered to travel back and forth to London if need be, to bring news back and forth, as well as anything else from Apple that needed her attention. That seemed excessive to Maggie, but she did have a company to run, so she thanked him and accepted his offer of help. In addition, Tony Bramwell, who worked for Apple, volunteered to stay in Delhi to transmit cables and letters back and forth from home and the ashram. Maggie felt a little better that she wouldn't be completely cut off while they were in Rishikesh.

The flight to India was long, but there were definite advantages to traveling with the Beatles. Their plane was spacious, and they were also excellent traveling companions. Jokes, card games and naps with her head on John's shoulder filled up the time, and before she knew it, they had landed.

Mal was there to meet them at the airport with flower garlands in hand. Maggie gave him a big hug, glad to see him. Then she saw a bright flash, and realized that there were press and they were snapping pictures. Even in India, they couldn't escape it! The band posed gamely for a few minutes, before moving onwards to the Academy of Transcendental Meditation. The Maharishi's compound was private and the group looked forward to finally having some time to themselves away from the prying eyes of the public.

Maggie stared out the window of the stopped jeep. The view was disheartening. The stretch of road they were on looked forbidding and to the left and right were sheer drops, with not a guardrail in sight. It looked like there was no way forward. What now?

Everyone carefully piled out of the vehicles to survey the situation.

"Donkeys!" The guide pointed at a small path, and at which several donkeys were waiting. George went to investigate further while Maggie and Paul looked at each other and groaned. Everyone was exhausted after the long flight and the long drive overland by taxi, jeep, and now apparently,

donkey. It was also surprisingly chilly. Wasn't India supposed to be warm? Maggie shivered and wrapped her coat more tightly around herself.

With no other choice, the band mounted up, and after awhile on donkey-back finally came to a large river with a swinging suspension bridge over it. "No camels or elephants," she read the warning from a nearby sign out loud.

"Good thing we've only donkeys then, isn't it?" George smiled at her, before dismounting and following the guide onto the bridge. George was really in his element here and Maggie was slightly annoyed by it. Why wasn't he tired like everyone else?

As it turned out, the donkeys were to be left behind here and the rest of journey was on foot. Their luggage was to follow later by ox-cart. Maggie had no idea how they were going to get the oxcart over the bridge, but she supposed it would be somebody else's problem.

After a steep climb, at last the group arrived at where they would be staying for the foreseeable future. The Maharishi's Academy of Transcendental Meditation sat 150 feet above the Ganges River, surrounded on three sides by jungle-covered mountains.

There was a glass-walled dining area, a terraced lecture hall with gravel pathways, a swimming pool, and lest you think this the middle of nowhere, a heliport for the Maharishi's use. Maggie had an inkling where all the money the Maharashi solicited from his students was going. She was going to keep him from too much of the Beatles' money if it was at all within her power. He looked like he was doing just fine without it.

The central feature of the compound was a courtyard that was surrounded by six concrete lean-tos.

“They look like barracks,” grumbled Maggie under her breath.

“They’re like little chalets!” George said delightedly upon seeing them.

After some investigation, Maggie was pleased to see that the dorm rooms inside the barracks at least had modern bathrooms, though they were warned the water was not reliable and that the rooms had no heat.

“No heat? Well, I know one way we can stay warm,” John said upon seeing where he and Maggie were quartered. He eyed the large four-poster bed eagerly.

“That’s all you two are ever concerned about. Bed!” George said disgustedly, poking his head through their door. “I’d better not hear unseemly noises coming from here while I’m trying to meditate next door.”

“That sounds like a challenge, mate,” John grinned at him. “We’ll see if we can oblige – you know, the little woman here can’t help screaming the name of her favorite Beatle when we’re, you know…”

“Yes, it was very embarrassing the last time, when I started yelling Paul’s name,” Maggie interrupted, which made John let out an indignant noise and George crack up.

“Paul’s your favorite? Since when? Here I thought it was me.” George shook his head sadly.

“Ringo’s my favorite,” offered John.

“I don’t very well care which Beatle either of you get off on, just do it quietly,” George laughed, and left, pulling the door closed behind him.

“You’d better not let the John/Paul fans in the future know about this.” Maggie shook her finger at John. “They will be very disappointed.”

“Sorry, luv, but they’ll just have to accept that me heart belongs to Ringo.”

“As long as it’s just your heart!” Maggie laughed.

“Why, you wanton hussy!” John pretended he was horrified by her joke. “I’m shocked, just shock…” His words were cut off by Maggie’s lips. John wasted little time in kissing her back, and before Maggie knew it, he had her down on the large bed, and was reaching under her dress.

“Oh, Paul, don’t stop! That feels so good!” she shouted, which made John pause momentarily.

With a wicked expression on his face, John yelled, “Oh Ringo, Rrrringo!” in a deep baritone, rolling the R in the drummer’s name.

A loud thumping came from the other side of the apparently very thin wall. “You are a sick bastard, John Lennon!” they heard George call from his and Pattie’s room. “Sick!”

John and Maggie collapsed into giggles, which made proceeding with what they had been doing difficult, but not impossible.

After dinner that night, the Maharishi greeted the Beatles and their entourage and explained their schedule. Breakfast was from 7:00 to 11:00 am, which made the band happy, as none of them were particularly early risers. They could expect a communal breakfast, but the rest of the day, they were free to keep their own schedule of meditation, which he expected might be up to twelve hours per day. They would have to work up to that of course, and they would do so with his help.

"Twelve hours?" Maggie mouthed at Paul, who looked about as thrilled by the idea as she did.

The Beatles were three weeks behind in their instruction, so the Maharishi would provide extra classes in the afternoons. He would give lectures at 3:30 and 8:30 pm.

That night Maggie had trouble sleeping. The India she'd read about and seen pictures of had been full of Beatles in loose white outfits, wearing flowers and strumming guitars. That was the India she wanted. She didn't want to meditate for twelve hours a day or listen to lame lectures.

That night, as she gazed around what she was fast considering her cell, Maggie considered scratching marks in the wall to mark the passage of time until her sentence was up and she could go home.

One week later...

Time passed surprisingly fast here in Rishikesh. She'd started keeping a journal to record the minutia of the days in order to amuse herself. Plus someday, she told John, she'd need a big payday, and she'd need material for her tell-all book about life with the Beatles. He laughed and said that he'd be happy to illustrate the book for her, and proceeded to draw doodles of naked people from their group all over her notebook.

"You wait, this will fetch a fortune on ebay, someday!" she threatened.

"Oh yeah? How much would this drawing fetch, then?" He grabbed her wrist and drew a tiny naked John Lennon on her arm.

"John!" She pulled her arm back just before he started to draw a tiny naked Maggie next to the tiny naked John.

She was having a surprisingly good time here – she attended only the minimum number of lectures, and sometimes, if the weather was good, they were held in the open air of the flat sunroof.

The food was …interesting. Lunch and dinner were some sort of vegetarian soup, which proved too spicy for Ringo. Mal stockpiled eggs, and while the others drank their soup, Ringo ate the eggs that Mal made him. He still had a suitcase of beans from home, but he was rationing them out carefully.

Though the group was supposed to eat together in the morning and meditate most of the rest of the day with only short breaks, in reality, it went the other way. The Beatles, with their short attention spans could only seem to manage meditating 20 minutes before needing a long break. This excepted George, of course, who was the most serious and therefore, Maggie saw far less of him than she did the others. John, under George's tutelage tried his best to be diligent about meditation. Maggie, on the other hand, did her best to distract him.

When John was sitting on the bed, trying to focus, Maggie would always find a reason why she just had to change her clothes in the room. She made it a game to see how many layers had to come off before John lost interest in his meditation. Usually it only took one.

John had more than one distraction, however. Maggie walked in on John and Paul once. They were on the bed…strumming their guitars, clearly working on a new song.

"What's this?" Maggie demanded. "You're supposed to be meditating! I'm telling George on you!"

"George already knows – he thumped on the wall for a while, and then gave up and went to meditate somewhere else." John grinned at her and Paul shrugged innocently.

There were other people at the compound, some famous, some not. Mia Farrow and her sister Prudence were here. They both initially seemed annoyed that the quiet, religious atmosphere that had permeated the place prior to the Beatles' arrival had been broken. However, Mia later confided in Maggie that though it was distracting, she enjoyed the life that the cheerful chatter and singing

brought to the place. Maggie agreed. Tiptoeing around a church-like atmosphere was not what she wanted to be doing for the next few months, so she encouraged it as much as she could.

As it turned out, the group didn't really need her encouragement to break the silence of the compound. There was always music – in addition to the Beatles, Donovan and Mike Love of the Beach Boys were here, and it seemed like someone was playing guitar and singing someplace nearly all of the time. Who it was varied from hour to hour, as everyone did, gamely, try to find time to do a little meditation - even Maggie tried her best. But she got more of a sense of peace from the music than she did from the meditation.

There were other entertainments as well. Sometimes in the evenings, the Maharishi took them on excursions to Dehra Dun, the nearest village. Everyone had loose fitting outfits made for themselves by the local tailors, and the women all bought saris. Besides shopping, the group went to cafés, and Nagoli's, a restaurant that served forbidden and refreshing beakers of wine. Magic Alex even smuggled some back into the compound for later consumption.

The time passed quickly as the group bonded, talking, reading, lazing in the sun, and making music and love. Each couple seemed to be in harmony with each other, and Donovan was doing his best to couple with Jenny Boyd. There were enough people that it was relatively easy to avoid the ones Maggie didn't want to spend time with, namely Magic Alex and Maureen. Maureen was not enjoying herself – she had a phobia of bugs, and there were plenty of large bugs here. Maggie knew Mo and Ringo would be gone before long, and though she'd miss Ringo's

cheery presence, she couldn't wait to have Mo out of her hair.

Perhaps most surprising was the bond Maggie was forming with Paul. Like Maggie, Paul always preferred to be on the go. Slowing down for a time was fine, but after two weeks, Paul was ready to go back to work. Paul nearly always had a guitar within reach and paper always nearby so he could jot down song ideas. He had little to no interest in sitting around and staring at the back of his eyelids, so Maggie found him always willing to go on walks, or play guitar, or have long talks. For two people who'd never gotten along particularly well, it was a funny thing to suddenly be dependent on each other for their own sanity. With John starting to become harder to distract, Paul quickly and unexpectedly became her lifeline.

Chapter Twenty-Five

"Come on, then – tell me who I marry."

"Paul, I can't tell you that! Don't you want to be surprised?"

"Not really, luv."

Paul and Maggie were sitting together on the banks of the Ganges. The river was usually full of people, but the two of them had found a secluded spot that was perfect to hid in when they skipped out of the Maharishi's classes. Paul had brought his guitar - he was hardly ever apart from it if he could help it - and was picking out little riffs on it while they were talking.

"You'd make my life a lot easier if you'd just tell me if it's Linda or Jane."

"Since when do I ever make your life easy?"

"Too right." Paul smiled at her showing that he knew she was joking then he paused thoughtfully. "I don't know if I ever properly thanked you for trying to help me out, you

know, with Jane and Linda at the party. I never should have put you in the middle like that."

An actual and seemingly heartfelt apology from Paul? Sure it was months late, but maybe he was growing as a person. Or trying to. "Oh, it's okay, Paul."

That fateful party had been months ago and Maggie had mostly put it behind her, though not without some lingering regrets over which woman Paul seemed to have ultimately chosen.

"So, we're all right then? You and I?" Paul looked down at his guitar, avoiding Maggie's eyes. This clearly embarrassed him, and for a moment Maggie was tempted to press her advantage and tease him a bit, but her kinder side won out.

"Of course."

"Good!" Paul visibly brightened, and smiled up at her. "I know you and I have had our problems, especially in the beginning. But I wanted you to know that I was wrong about you. I think you're really good for John. He was really difficult when you were gone. He'd started with the LSD and he really liked it. I have this feeling that if you hadn't come back, that we might have lost him to it."

"You would've," Maggie said sadly. "Paul...I...well, thank you. For saying that. Sometimes I don't know if I'm doing any good here or not. Changing things like I have. I don't know if I will end up making them better or worse."

"Tell me then, what happened to John and Paul and the Beatles that you knew? I know bits of it. You know, like that we all came tragic ends..."

”Well,” Maggie smiled. “Despite all the bad stuff, you and Ringo were still going strong in 2006.”

“I hope that doesn’t change! Only it’d be nice if all four of us stayed alive this time around.” Wanting to lighten the mood a bit, Paul asked, “What do I do when I'm finished with this rock n' roll lifestyle?”

Maggie laughed. “You won't ever finish with it, Paul. In 2006, you'll be...” She paused to calculate his age. “...64! Just like the song.”

“Why do I have the feeling that I will regret writing that one?” He grimaced.

“They do make a big fuss about it, you know. When you're 64.” She grinned at him. “Anyway, you'll be 64 and still making albums and selling out stadiums.”

“Making albums, I can see, but selling out stadiums? It's not pathetic, a 60-year-old me, prancing around stage, still shaking his head and going 'oooooh'?” He shook his head and pursed his lips in imitation of his younger self.

“Are you kidding? No! The girls still love it! In college, my best friend Jenny and I went to one of your shows. We were screaming our heads off along with the rest of the 80,000 fans at the sold-out stadium concert.” Maggie smiled, and for a moment her eyes and thoughts were a million miles away as she remembered another life. Then she shook her head and looked back towards Paul. “It's obvious you love it, and you're still good at it, Paul. You were born for this. For music, for entertaining. You'll never stop, and that's a good thing. Your last album was

really good, and you would have had another due out sometime in 2007. I'm sorry I missed hearing it."

Paul blushed at her effusive praise for him. It was not something he expected to here from her. Lightly he said, "So it's not all tragedy for me, then?"

"Not all, no."

They were quiet for a moment, listening to the gentle sounds of the river and Paul's guitar. Maggie was broken out of her reverie when she realized that she recognized the melody Paul was playing. It was "Blackbird". She smiled knowingly to herself.

"You did say I lose my wife to breast cancer," Paul said, bringing her back to the conversation at hand.

"Yes."

"And you won't tell me if it's Linda or Jane?"

"I can't Paul. I promise I will tell you if it's one of them that will get sick - but not until you make a decision. And it has to be you, because I think that if you let me tell you who to marry, then you'll never really be happy. You'll feel like whoever it is was forced on you by destiny, and that you never had a say. Besides which, I get the feeling that making a mature adult decision like this would be a good experience for you." She smiled teasingly.

"You sound like me mum, now," Paul grumbled.

"Well, maybe you need that once in a while." Maggie's smile turned into a broad grin, before sobering again. "But I promise you this. I will do everything in my power to

make sure your wife, whoever she may be, doesn't die of cancer."

Paul nodded solemnly, taking her at her word. "Let me ask you this then. How am I supposed to decide? I care about them both."

"Maybe you should try and look at this logically."

"Oh, here we go. I've heard about you and your famous logic!"

"It's worth a try! Make a list. Pro and Con."

"All right then. Jane. Her family practically took me in. Pro. We've been together for a very long time. Pro. Or is that a Con?"

"She wants a career. That seems like a Con for you. Are you going to keep her from acting? I don't recommend that, by the way." Maggie eyed him, trying to gauge his reaction.

"Would I keep her from it? I don't think I could if I tried. But do I like her being away so much? No. I travel enough for the both of us. I want her with me."

"Her, or just someone?"

"I like being with her," Paul protested.

"Really?"

"Well..."

"You two can't even agree on the temperature of a room!" Maggie laughed and shook her head. "And how about kids?"

"Okay, okay. I get it. And I know you want me to pick Linda but..."

"But you and Jane have a history and losing that shared life and everything that it represents..."

"Con. I mean Pro. Christ, logic is confusing." He wiped the imaginary sweat off his brow, which made Maggie giggle.

"How about the pros and cons of Linda? You know, assuming she'd take you back."

"Of course she will. I'm a Beatle, aren't I?"

"Paul!" Maggie was immediately outraged at his flagrant use of the "Beatle card" until she realized that this time he was actually kidding.

"I think she would take me back if I showed I wanted more than a casual relationship, don't you?" Paul asked.

"Honestly? I don't know. But you've got a good shot at it I think, if she knows you're not playing around this time."

"That's why this decision is so important – either way I choose, I think it has to be for keeps," Paul said seriously. "And it's why we're applying logic to the situation, because we can do anything with logic on our side, right? Isn't that what you always say?"

“I guess,” Maggie said dubiously. Usually she was a big proponent of logic, but it was a different story with Paul wielding it.

“All right then, Linda loves kids. Pro. She's easy to be with, and the sex is amazing. Definite pro! ”

“Okay, that I didn't need to know.” Maggie wrinkled her nose.

“Oh, please! You and John are always at it. Don't think I didn't see you two sneaking into the loo on the airplane.”

“Oh my God.” Maggie covered her face with her hands in embarrassment.

Paul laughed at her discomfort. “It's all right, luv. Besides, I hear that it's my name you're calling out while you and John are...” He raised a suggestive eyebrow. Maggie hit him.

“Did George tell you about that? I’m going to kill him!”

Paul's lip quivered as he tried to keep a straight face. “No. It's just the walls are so very thin...”

“We're supposed to be talking about you and Linda, not me and John! Con!” Maggie pointed at Paul.

“All right,” he relented. “I haven't known her that long. She's American. Con.”

“How is being American a CON?” Maggie glared at Paul mockingly, but he waved her away, suddenly quite serious.

“What if I break it off with Jane and then it doesn't work out with Linda?”

“Ah, and now we come to the crux of the problem, right?”

“I guess so. Am I willing to risk it all on this?” Paul stopped playing his guitar and stared out across the river, as if perhaps its depths held the answer for him.

“How much risk is there really?”

“Well, I could stay with Jane, lose Linda, and then discover in six months, a year, 10 years, that Jane and I aren't suited and are desperately unhappy. By then, Linda will probably have moved on.”

“Maybe you'll find happiness with someone other than Linda or Jane. Did you ever think of that? It's not necessarily an either/or is it?”

She could tell the thought hadn’t occurred to Paul. “So I don't choose either of them?”

“I didn't say that! But it's possible.”

“This situation is complicated enough!” He rubbed his forehead with his hands, as if he was starting to get a headache.

“All right, let’s just focus on the two women at hand for now.”

“Okay, if I break things off with Jane, then I would what? Fly to New York and beg Linda to take me back? And then I've got to either move there, or talk her into uprooting her child and coming back to London, which is more practical,

because that's where the Beatles are. Where my career is." Paul paused. "You know, when you said I'd be playing stadiums when I'm 60, you didn't say that it was with the Beatles."

"No, I didn't." Maggie said softly. "But that was at least partly because John and George were no longer alive. I have hopes that maybe you guys might still play the occasional gig together in your dotage."

"That would be something to see!"

"It certainly would!" Maggie mused. "I'll be there in the front row if it happens."

"Might you be sitting in the front row with Linda?" Paul raised on eyebrow. "Or Jane?" He looked at Maggie hopefully for a hint.

"Paul," Maggie laughed, "That's not going to work! I'm not telling!"

"I must pick Linda, right? You've been really pushing us to get us together."

"Yes, but maybe that is just because Linda is my friend and I think she'll be way better for you than whoever you chose originally?"

"Damn it, woman! You're driving me crazy! Just tell me!" It was Paul's turn to bury his face in his hands. "I'm so tired. I haven't slept well all week. I'm smoking too much. Damned Sir Walter Raleigh and his bloody tobacco!" he shouted into the wind. "If I don't stop, I'll be the one with the bloody lung cancer, not George."

“Wow,” Maggie said, watching the impressive display of Paul's frustration.

“Sorry, luv. I just... I want to choose the right one.”

“Pros and Cons didn't help, eh?”

“I don't know. I guess I need to do some more thinking. Let's talk about something else. Tell me more about the Beatles-that-would-have-been.”

“You mean, if I hadn't stepped in and saved you all from yourselves?” Maggie grinned.

“Yes, our hero,” he said dryly. “Tell me about John.”

“Okay, well, John, as you may know, likes drugs.”

“Yes, we all do at that.”

“Yes, but you can take them or leave them, and I suspect George can too. Ringo, as I've told you, developed some pretty serious problems with alcohol. But John...the LSD, it totally consumed him. It made him very distant and not-all-there during Sgt Pepper. And it just got worse. Yo...er, his second wife was sort of responsible for getting him off of LSD.”

“Oh yeah?”

“And onto heroin.”

“Oh. That’s bad.”

“Yeah – as you know, it’s a pretty dangerous drug and super addictive. And he gets hooked and even further

removed from the band. It's why I've been such a stick-in-the-mud about drugs. He's got such an addictive personality and I don't want to lose him. Or you to lose him.”

“You started to stay a name.” He narrowed his eyes at her speculatively.

“No, I didn't.” She’d thought Paul had missed her slip, but he was clearly quicker than she gave him credit for.

“Yes, you did. You started to say his second wife's name. Yo...” Paul stopped. “Oh my God, he marries Yoko, doesn't he?'

There was no point in keeping the secret now. “Yes,” she sighed.

“That's why you've been so crazy about Yoko! John has no idea why you're so jealous of her.” The truth dawned on him. “Oh my God, you haven't told him!”

“No! And you can't tell him either. You have to promise not to!” Maggie was suddenly alarmed. If John found out, it had to come from her, not Paul.

“I won't, I won't. But why on earth haven't you told him?”

“Because I'm afraid if he finds out that his interest in Yoko will become…stronger. She had an odd hold on him. Once upon another time, she separated him from the band, from his son. She wasn't good for him – or for you or the Beatles. If he knows that in another time, that she was the one... Won't that make him all the more curious to see if she's the one this time too? ”

“I don't think you're giving him enough credit, luv. I've known John a long time, and I've never seen him the way he is when he's with you. He didn't cheat on you once while he was on tour. I'm not sure there was a day he was with Cynthia when he wasn't cheating.” Maggie looked up. Did Paul really think telling her how often her fiancé used to cheat was comforting?

“Forget Yoko.” Paul continued. “You're the one with the hold on him and as I told you before, I've come to think that's a good thing. You're keeping him clean, and involved in the band. You've got your fingers in our money, and you could make away with it all, but you haven't. In fact you’ve made us even more money. We’re all rich, thanks to you, even with the crippling taxes.”

He waved his hands excitedly. “The Boutique is running great, and somehow you sorted out that whole Stigwood mess after we lost Brian. You’re even trying to get our catalog back from Dick James.” It was Maggie’s turn to blush as he listed her accomplishments, “You've more than proven yourself to us, and we all trust you. You know I could never trust someone who tried to come between us and John. That's why I was so hard on you in the beginning. I thought that was what you were doing. But I was wrong.”

“Thanks, Paul. That means a lot.” She was both embarrassed and incredibly flattered by Paul’s words. She knew she was doing a good job at Apple, but she also had the benefit of knowing which things would really cost the Beatles if they weren’t taken care of sooner than later.

Paul reached out an arm and pulled her close to him and gave her a squeeze. “Trust me on this one, luv. John is yours. You should tell him the truth.”

There was more to it than just fear that John would go running into Yoko's open arms if he knew the truth – there was some underlying guilt on Yoko's behalf too. Whether or not she liked Yoko or her relationship with John, the truth was she had stolen Yoko's husband away. John had been Yoko's first. And Sean – Maggie had cost Yoko her son too. If John knew that his son was gone forever because of her… Admitting all this to herself was difficult. Admitting it to John was nearly impossible. She felt John was hers in so many ways, but by traveling back through time, really what she'd done was stolen him and changed all of their futures irrevocably.

Plus, she had tried to tell him. Half-heartedly, but her intentions had been good. John had known just how to distract her from something he hadn't wanted to talk about. Avoiding potentially unpleasantness was actually one of the things John did best. For a man that could be the source of unpleasantness, especially while drunk, he was actually very non-confrontational. Poor Pete Best was a prime example of that.

In any case, Maggie had to admit she'd employed her own distraction tactics here in India to get out of meditating, and to keep John from getting too deeply into it. Sex was clearly an effective diversion for both of them.

"I tried once," she told Paul, omitting why she had failed to get the truth out. "But he wasn't much interested in what I had to say about Yoko. I think he's tired of talking about her. But you're right. I need to try harder. To get this all out in the open finally."

"That makes both of us. I have the feeling that Jane and I are going to have it out soon as well."

“You’re going to pick Linda then?”

“I don't know.” Paul heaved a sigh. “But I know I can't see picking Jane unless we have a good long talk about the future and what we both want out of it.”

The sun was starting to set, which tinted the water with orange and red hues. The spot where they were sitting was so peaceful that it was with great reluctance that they got up to hike back up the path to the ashram for dinner.

“What do we say if someone asks where we were?” Maggie called to Paul, who was a few steps ahead of her.

“We were in completely separate spots, deep in meditation. It's easy to lose track of time when you're four hours in, you know,” Paul laughed.

“Only four hours? Please, I was up to five!”

“No way, I had it from a reliable source that you were goofing off down by the river with one of those no-good Beatles.”

“I hope it was with the cute one!”

“None other!” he batted his lashes at her.

“Oh my God, it's a Beatle!” Maggie shrieked, and grabbed for Paul. He evaded her easily – he'd had years of practice, after all. “Sorry, luv, this Beatle is taken! I think. I don’t even know anymore!” He gave her a quizzical look that made her laugh. “But let me introduce you to my mate, John. I think you might be just his type.”

“And what type is that?”

“Female.” He jumped back again before she could smack him.

“You've got good reflexes, Paulie. I'll give you that.”

“Years of fending off John,” he laughed.

“I guess that makes you his type too?” Laughing she pushed past him to scramble up the last part of the incline.

“I am not a bird!” he protested. “You're just jealous of my long eyelashes....”

“Well, that is true...” Maggie admitted. “They're very nice.”

“Thank you. See? It's much more fun now that we're friends, isn't it?”

Chapter Twenty-Six

"I'm so bloody tired, mate," Paul complained to John. They were hidden in Paul and Jane's room, secretly composing music instead of meditating. What they were doing in the bedroom was an open secret, and everyone just looked the other way when John and Paul disappeared together.

"Jane wearing you out?" John asked suggestively, winking at Paul. He lit up a cigarette, and offered Paul one.

"Just the opposite actually." Paul, being used to John, chose to be honest instead of offended by John's innuendo. "It's Linda wearing me out." Paul stuck the cigarette in his mouth and John leaned over and lit it for him.

"How's that?"

"She's in my head, John, and I can't get her out, no matter what I do. It was one thing back in England – there were always lots of birds to keep me entertained whenever I got alone with my thoughts, but here there's nothing to distract me. It's either trying to keep Jane pleased, or thinking about Linda." Paul took a puff off of his cigarette.

"Hmm…" John strummed his guitar thoughtfully and adlibbed, "*I'm so tired, I haven't slept a wink…*"

"*I'm so tired, my mind is on the blink…"* Paul neatly completed the rhyme.

John grinned at him and came up with another line. "*I wonder should I get up and fix myself a drink!"*

"*No, no, noooo*," Paul sang back at John, drawing the last note into a pained growl.

"I think we've got something here. Mind if I try to finish it?" John asked.

"By all means, mate. I'm living it; I don't want to write it."

"What are you working on, then?"

"A love song," Paul admitted.

"Which bird is it for?" John laughed.

Paul scowled. "Listen, do you want to hear the song or not?"

"Only if you sing it to me like you mean it!"

"Shut up, you wanker!" Strumming a bit first, Paul began, "Who knows how long I've loved you…"

"I've loved you since 1957, Macca," John interrupted in a high-pitched voice.

When Paul looked up and glared, John just batted his eyelashes until Paul cracked a helpless smile. "You're hopeless, Lennon. It's sad really, how you've been pining for me ever since the first moment you laid eyes on me at that Woolton church fete."

John snorted.

"It's all right John, I've written a love song for you too."

"Oh yeah?"

Paul jumped up, thumped a beat on his guitar, and screeched, "WHY DON'T WE DO IT IN THE ROAD…"

John fell over laughing, as Paul continued repeating the lyric.

"NO ONE WILL BE WATCHING US…" Paul tried to wrap up the song, only to have John join in on the last line and then call for another round. "Figures you'd like the joke song, John."

"It's your best one yet, and it's all mine, isn't it?" John cackled. "Again!"

Paul grinned his appreciation and began the blues chord progression again, John joining in on his own guitar this time.

Maggie whistled as she walked. She'd had "Why Don't We Do It In the Road" in her head ever since she'd walked in

on Paul and John jumping around Paul's room, loudly singing and banging on their guitars. They'd looked a little sheepish once they'd realized she was there, but she'd quickly closed the door behind her and demanded she be allowed to join them immediately. They'd sung another few choruses of it before they were laughing too hard to sing. After they'd calmed down and had caught their breaths, she'd kissed John, patted Paul on the head and left them to it.

Maggie thought she might go find George. Maybe if he wasn't busy meditating she could get him to show her a few new things on the sitar. Though she doubted she'd ever be very good at it, she found she was actually enjoying learning from George. She'd never been terribly interested in the sitar at home, but here it was different. Lost in her thoughts Maggie almost missed its distinctive sound wafting on the breeze. The music sounded like it was coming from near the swimming pool. Maggie smiled and headed in that direction.

As she got nearer, she heard a woman giggling and the sitar stop playing. Maggie frowned unconsciously. That didn't sound like Pattie…who was it then?

Maggie turned the corner and spied Maureen sitting with the sitar between her knees. George was behind her, his arms reaching around her body, trying to put her hands in the right places. Was on Earth was Maureen doing with George's instrument in her lap?

They hadn't seen Maggie yet, and she paused, observing them. She didn't like it one bit. She knew from what she'd read in her own time that they had had an affair which had ultimately contributed to the breakup of both their marriages. Maggie wasn't sure Mo had ever recovered

from losing Ringo. At the same time, Maggie thought it was a terrible double standard that Ringo and the boys could screw whomever they wanted, but the first time the woman strayed, it was over. Still, if she could prevent the heartache caused by this fruitless attraction, she would. She watched Maureen giggle again and look up at George with big brown eyes. It was definitely time to break things up.

"Hey, George, Maureen," she called as she strolled casually up to them.

Mo looked annoyed and made it obvious that Maggie was intruding.

"Hey, Mags," George grinned up at her. He seemed perfectly happy to have Maureen practically on his lap, but he didn't seem to be particularly interested in being monopolized by her. "I was just teaching Maureen a few basics on the sitar."

Maggie raised an eyebrow.

"George is a great teacher," Maureen dimpled. "But I think I'm a pretty hopeless student. What was it you were showing me again?" She was trying to pull George's attention back onto herself. Her hands ran up and down the length of the long instrument.

"Did you come looking for another lesson yourself?" George asked Maggie.

"Yes, but perhaps later?" She turned to Maureen, and said the only thing she could think of to get Maureen away from George. "Mo, Ringo is looking for you."

“Oh, I’ll find him later,” Maureen waved her hands dismissively. “We’re kind of in the middle of something here.”

“He wanted you now,” Maggie insisted. She crossed her arms and stood over Maureen until Maureen rolled her eyes and extricated herself from George.

“Come on,” Maggie said, and grabbed the other woman by the arm when Maureen hesitated over her good-bye to George.

“Ow!” Maureen protested as Maggie pulled her away. Maggie let go, but kept walking, making sure Maureen was following.

“Slow down. And where did you say Ritchie was?” Maureen stopped walking, forcing Maggie to stop as well.

They were out of sight and earshot of George, so Maggie was able to say what she’d dragged Mo away from George to say. “Oh, Ringo’s back at the ashram,” she evaded. “But you should really be careful, you know.” That was more to the point.

“Of what?”

“George is married. You’re married. Just…watch it.”

“I don’t think it’s any of your business.”

Maureen was right of course, it wasn’t. Nor could Maggie tell Mo what she knew of the future, which was the whole reason she objected to Maureen flirting with George.

“Besides,” Maureen added, “You’re with George an awful lot, aren’t you? So I hardly think you’re one to talk.”

“It’s different.”

“How is it? You spend more time with him than I do. Maybe you’re the one that should watch it. You’re engaged to John, aren’t you? And George, as you say, is married.”

“We’re just friends.”

“Just like John and Yoko, right?”

“What do you know about that?” Maggie demanded.

“I don’t know anything,” she said, a sly smile painting her face. “It’s none of my business, is it?” With that Maureen turned on her heel and walked away.

Damn, Maggie though to herself. What did Maureen mean by what she’d said about John and Yoko? What could she possibly know that wasn’t just an overheard rumor? Maggie supposed she deserved everything Maureen threw at her – but she couldn’t help not wanting George and Mo to develop some strange infatuation with each other. What was she supposed to do? She’d been passive over the Magical Mystery Tour after Brian’s death, but that hadn’t done anyone any favors.

Maggie sighed. She needed to be more patient with Maureen. She kept having to remind herself of how young Maureen was. She was only 21, a full six years younger than Maggie, John, and Ringo. Mo was immature because she was young. And she’d been possessive of Ringo with Maggie early on because to be a Beatle wife was to watch

your husband be fawned over by attractive women nearly all the time. By now, Mo had to know that Maggie had no designs on Ringo. Or George or Paul, for that matter.

Well, Maggie thought, whether or not she should have interfered between Mo and George, it was over and done, and if Maggie saw Mo all over George again, she'd probably do the same thing. There just wasn't any help for it.

"Four hours? I could do that standing on me head," John laughed. It was after dinner, and Maggie and the boys were sitting out by the pool, which was proving to be everyone's favorite meeting spot. Paul was picking out a tune on his ever-present guitar, the night was mild, and Maggie was enjoying dipping her feet in the cool water and listening to the boys banter.

"You could not – what's the longest you've actually meditated?" asked George.

"About five minutes, I'd say," Paul interjected. "Every time he sits down and closes his eyes, Maggie here takes her clothes off, and it's all over for John!"

"Paul!" Maggie blushed. Clearly she had no secrets here. "Who told?"

"Jane did, as she's trying to employ the same techniques as you, only it's my guitar she's trying to keep me from, not meditating. Says it's like I'm glued to it."

“What did you choose then, mate? Girls or guitars?” Ringo asked good-naturedly.

“Well, it was a tough choice, but of course girls won out.”

“Poor Paulie, having to be away from your guitar for two whole minutes!” Maggie winked at Paul. John, Ringo and George roared with laughter, and it was Paul’s turn to look shocked.

“Look at you, dirty Maggie Mae,” he threw back at her with a laugh. “Besides, it was at least five minutes.” Maggie grinned at him.

“Once I didn’t even bother to set my guitar down,” George said thoughtfully.

Maggie’s jaw dropped and she let out a helpless whoop of laughter herself. “Actually, I’d heard it was a ukelele, not a guitar,” she felt obliged to add. This made the others positively howl, and John actually had to take his glasses off to wipe the tears out of his eyes.

“What are you all laughing about?” It was Donovan, holding his own guitar and looking curious. He’d obviously wandered over, attracted by the noise.

“Music,” John said as blandly as he could, which sent them all into another round of convulsions. After wiping some more tears away, John put his glasses back on and looked up at a confused Donovan. “What are you up to, son?”

“I was looking for Jenny, so I could play her a song I wrote for her.”

“Good for you, mate. Just don’t let her distract you from it. Stay the course, stiff upper lip and all that,” John quipped.

“Stiff what?” Paul joked.

George added, “Hope he’s got more than two minutes of it in him!”

The rest of the group giggled as more double entendres and puns flew.

Donovan still had no idea what was going on. He decided to back away slowly, and leave them to whatever they were high on. As he retreated, behind him came more laughter. Beatles. He rolled his eyes, and focused on finding Jenny.

The next day, Paul found George alone, idly strumming his sitar and gazing off into the distance. Paul sat down next to him. “Do you have time to come by my room after dinner, George? John and I want to play you some of the songs we’re working on.”

“I don’t know,” George said dismissively. “Maybe.”

“We’ve got a lot of good stuff, mate. Maybe between all of us, we’ll even have enough for two albums. Maggie told me you had a few new ones too.”

“She did, did she?”

“Yeah. Told me I’d better give them a fair listen, or she’d wallop me. She’s violent, that one,” Paul added as an attempt at humor.

“That was nice of her. But I’m not sure I’m ready to show you my songs yet.” George loved that Maggie was promoting his work to Paul, but he had to be sure it was his best before Paul heard any of it, or it’d be no good. George’s head wasn’t really into Beatles music right now anyway. That could wait ‘til England. Or maybe until never for all he cared. India and meditation brought him more peace of mind than anything else he’d ever experienced. What did he need of the Beatles when he had this? What had the Beatles brought him besides tax problems and mobs of people that sought to violate his privacy?

“Oh come on, mate, I’d love to hear them.” Paul found that he actually meant what he said. “I’ve been thinking. Maybe we should call the new album “Umbrella”, like the album would be an umbrella over the whole thing…”

Suddenly George couldn’t take it anymore. Paul was disturbing his peace. Bringing the Beatles crowding back into his head, when he’d finally managed to get them out. “We’re not fucking here to do the next album,” George snarled at Paul. “We’re here to meditate.”

Paul looked at him, momentarily shocked into silence. “My mistake, George. My mistake.” Clearly the Beatles didn’t mean to George what they meant to Paul, and the Beatles were everything to Paul. Well, he’d tried to give George a chance, and if he didn’t want to take it, that was his prerogative. Paul left George to own devices and headed back to his room where he could bang on this guitar and write an angry song in peace.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

"Hey George, ready for another lesson?" Maggie called out. George was sitting alone by the pool and had his sitar out, but as she got closer, she could see the moody expression on his face. She loved George dearly, but George could be grumpy. He was increasingly so the more time he spent in India, which Maggie thought ironic. Wasn't he here looking for inner peace?

"What's wrong, George?"

"Nothing."

"Oh come on, don't give me that. What is it?"

"Paul."

"Oh? Did he shoot you down? I told him he'd better give your new songs a fair listen…"

"No, no, he did want to hear them. But that's just the problem."

"What?" Maggie sat down on the ground next to George and looked at him in puzzlement.

“I…I’m just not into Beatles music right now, okay? I don’t want to think about it. I just want to meditate and work on my sitar, and that’s it.”

“That’s a lie,” Maggie said shaking her head. “I know for a fact that you’ve been working on songs for the Beatles. Do you want me to name the ones you wrote for the White Al… er, for your next album while you were here in India? Because I can.”

George shrugged. “If you say so, but that’s still beside the point.”

“Actually I think it is exactly the point.”

George was quiet. She tried to catch his eye, but he wouldn’t meet her gaze.

“There’s more to life than the Beatles,” he said stubbornly.

“You’re right, there is.” She nodded. “But music is a part of you, and like it or not, the Beatles are a part of you too. The sooner you accept that, the happier you’ll be. You can try and escape this legacy, this burden, but you never will. So if I were you, I’d stop trying to fight it, and just let the music happen.”

She got up to go, but he reached out an arm and stopped her. “The truth is, I’m blocked. You say I wrote all these songs in India, but I don’t have even one finished. Just a bunch of starts that haven’t gone anywhere. What if it’s gone? My muse, or whatever you call it. What if I don’t have any songs left in me?”

“But I know you do.” Maggie smiled gently at him. “Trust me.” If she was certain of anything, she was certain that George was capable of writing beautiful songs.

“I’d like to believe you. I keep meditating and hoping that somewhere inside me, I can get rid of whatever is blocking the songs from coming out.”

“Is that what this is all about?” She waved her hands, gesturing at the ashram, at the river.

“No! Or not just. John told me he tried to explain it to you.”

“The search for the mysteries of the universe? Yeah, he did. And I get it on the surface, but that’s as deep as my understanding of this stuff goes.”

“Well, maybe you’d get a deeper understanding if you stopped sneaking off with Paul, or taking your clothes off in front of John.” George was starting to feel annoyance rising in him. No one seemed to get what he was doing here. Not Ringo, not Paul, and apparently not Maggie. He should have known better. She’d been against their trip to Wales to see the Maharishi, and maybe even still blamed George deep down for keeping her away while Brian died. Why would he think she’d want to come all the way to India just to aid George in his search for deeper meaning? And John – George felt sure he’d have an ally in John if only Maggie would stop distracting him.

“George, I’m sorry. But meditation just doesn’t work for me. Or Paul. We’re doers, not sit-and-thinkers.”

“Don’t you have a degree in astrophysics? Did that not require any sitting and thinking?”

“Well, yes, but it was more studying books and less navel-gazing.” She regretted using that word the second it came out of her mouth.

“Navel-gazing? Is that what you think I’m doing?” George was outraged.

“No, that’s not what I meant! It’s just…contemplating my insides doesn’t do for me what reading a book about science does. For Paul, I think he finds his peace in writing music and in entertaining. He needs to be social. I think Ringo is happy enough to be along for the ride here, but I doubt this is doing anything in particular for him other than allowing him to be a part of the team. Family is what’s important to Ringo, I think. And that includes us. John, well, I think you’d have a partner in meditation in John, but that’s the problem. You know as well as I do how John is. I’m fine with him being interested in eastern religion and meditation, but I don’t want him to be so interested I lose him to it. At least until he discovers the next ‘big thing’. Frankly, I also prefer that to not be Yoko.”

“I hardly think letting John meditate in peace while he’s here is really going to cause him to go over the edge.”

“Maybe, maybe not, but why tempt fate? We’ve done that enough for a lifetime.” Maggie paused. “Besides, look at Prudence Farrow. She was in so deep it took John and Paul writing a song to even get her out of her room. I really don’t want to deal with John getting himself into that sort of state.”

George looked unconvinced.

“Look, I’ll try not to get in the way of John’s meditation too much if you give songwriting a try,” Maggie finally

conceded. “Have some confidence in yourself and your abilities. Don’t let Lennon/McCartney psych you out.”

“I wish I had the confidence in myself that you seem to,” George said gloomily.

“George? Maggie? What are you up to?” It was John. Standing behind him was a smug looking Maureen. Maggie quickly realized that this was retaliation for yesterday. Mo had brought John over, hoping that they’d caught Maggie and George in a compromising enough position to cause John to be jealous. He’d written “Run for Your Life” after all, hadn’t he?

“Hey, John. We’re just talking about how Maggie has vowed to take her meditation more seriously, weren’t we?” George said, issuing a silent challenge to Maggie.

“We were also talking about all the Beatles songs George was writing.” Maggie beamed angelically back at him.

“Well, let’s hear all about them!” John said, plopping himself down on the ground next to Maggie and then looking at George expectantly.

Feeling a bit guilty, Maggie rescued George. “Maybe later, John – he’s in the middle of working out some new things right now, but I know he’ll want to share his songs with you and Paul when he’s done.”

“No worries, mate, we’ve all the time in the world, don’t we?” John grinned at George.

“Yeah.” George looked at Maggie reproachfully. “Plenty of time. Meditation now, songs later.”

“Indeed. Meditate all you want,” John grinned. “If you don’t mind, I’m going to take my fiancé to bed instead.”

George just shook his head, and Maggie flushed with a mixture of embarrassment and excitement.

“Come on, luv!” John got up and scooped Maggie up onto his shoulder, ignoring her laughing protests.

Maureen was dismayed. George was annoyed, she could tell, but John was oblivious to the fact that his fiancé had been having what looked to be a fairly intense and private conversation with his band mate. He hadn’t shown any jealousy whatever. This would never do.

“John, put me down!” Maggie laughed.

“I will as soon as I get you to the bedroom!”

“You’re an animal!”

“That’s what Paul tells me!”

“Well, he should know.”

“Naughty girl!”

Finally they were in their room, and the door was shut behind them. John slowly put Maggie down, enjoying the feel of her body close against his. He kissed her gently on the lips and then on the forehead, cheeks, and nose.

“What’s this? I expected you to throw me down on the bed and have your way with me.” She smiled up at him. She couldn’t say she would have minded that, but this was nice too.

“We’ve all the time in the world, luv, didn’t you hear?” John said tenderly.

“Hmm, time. A funny thing, isn’t it?” Gazing up at him, she cupped his face in her hands, and kissed him.

“Right now I’d like it to stand still, so we could spend forever here, just the two of us,” John said.

“Just like this?”

“Maybe with less clothes,” he smiled. He slowly unzipped her sundress and let it fall to the floor. He let her unbutton his shirt, and undo his trousers. He kissed her again and moved his hands over her body, running them over every curve.

Drawing her over to the bed, he pulled Maggie down next to him, where he encircled her with his arms. Slowly he made love to her, letting her soft sighs and then cries of pleasure guide him.

To John, India had been a haven from the real world. Maggie wasn’t working long hours at Apple, and he wasn’t working long hours in the studio. They were together without any of the pressures that might seek to pull them apart. John was starting to realize that one of those external forces might be Yoko. He’d found her art and her willingness to let herself be perceived as strange by others refreshing. John remembered that once upon a time he’d been rebellious and hadn’t cared two figs for his image.

Now he was a Beatle, and being a Beatle was all about image. And image was about selling records. This made Yoko like a breath of fresh air. However, since he'd agreed to finance Yoko's newest exhibit, he felt she'd been slightly pushy. His backing of her art exhibit was a favor – it didn't entitle Yoko to unlimited access to John's money or life. She didn't seem interested in respecting the boundaries. On the one hand, her forwardness was something he admired, but on the other, it was becoming intrusive. John hadn't known that Yoko had left a ring at his house in order to have an excuse to come back and see him. He'd only found that out when Maggie had mentioned it at the Magical Mystery Tour party. Maggie probably hadn't mentioned it for fear of starting another fight about Yoko, he realized a bit guiltily.

Yoko had also managed to invite herself to the studio and then she'd had the audacity to criticize his new song, of which she'd heard exactly five minutes. Paul had told her to mind her own business and Yoko had looked at John indignantly, waiting for him to come to her defense. When he hadn't, they'd argued, and she'd left. He'd taken off for India soon after.

Yoko had somehow found out their system of getting mail through Tony Bramwell in Delhi had been sending him postcards. At first, they had seemed like an apology of sorts, and so he'd sent her a few little notes in return. She'd clearly taken his gesture as a sign of encouragement and the postcards from Yoko came nearly every day now. John had taken to making sure he was the one that got to the mail first and had started hiding the postcards in one of his bags. If Maggie found them, there'd be a big scene and he didn't want to do anything to disturb their newfound peace. If he could stay here, in Maggie's arms forever, he would be content. John hardly ever felt content. He wasn't

content with the Beatles, with his songs, or with anything but Maggie.

"I love you, you know," he whispered to her. She stirred out of her drowse.

"I love you too." She was quiet for a moment and then she turned on her side and contemplated him. "We've been here a few weeks now. Have you found your answers yet?"

"To life, the universe and everything?"

She smiled. "Yes."

"Perhaps if someone would actually let me meditate…" he teased.

"You still think that's where the answers to everything are?"

"Actually, no. I'm starting to think that the answer is right here in front of me. It's you."

"Me?"

"You are what brings me peace inside. You are what makes my world make sense. I don't know why you were brought into my life. Maybe something or someone knew I needed you and brought you to me. I don't know who or what to thank for that, and I know I'm hardly deserving. But there it is. I can't account for it or explain it. And maybe I will never know the how or why. But…" He stopped when he saw that Maggie had tears in her eyes. Had he upset her? She threw her arms around him, and kissed him fiercely, which gave him his answer.

“I don’t know how or why we are together, either, but I know it’s right too,” she said. “Sometimes I’m afraid to question it, like it’s so ephemeral that it might slip away from me.”

“Nonsense. You will never lose me.”

“You say that now, but…”

“Never,” he said firmly. Words were words and he sought to reinforce what he’d said with his body. He rolled himself on top of her and began kissing her mouth, her neck, her breasts.

She was unable to resist John when he was like this, so loving, so tender. And so she didn’t. They spent a long and leisurely afternoon enjoying each other’s company, alternately talking and making love.

“Want to know what songs I’m working on?”

“Yes,” Maggie replied, curious. He’d written a random assortment of things in India the first time around, and she was unsure what would happen this time.

“I’ve done one that’s about me mum,” he said. “Would you like to hear it?”

“Sure!”

He reached over and grabbed his acoustic, which was on the floor next to the bed. Much like Paul, John was never very far from his guitar. John wasn’t known for being guitar virtuoso, but he’d actually been working on his technique, and Maggie could see the results of his practice as he started picking the opening chords of his new song.

"*Half of what I say is meaningless, but I say it just to reach you, Julia*," John sang softly. "*Julia, Julia, ocean child, calls me, so I sing a song of love, Julia…*"

Maggie froze. Ocean child? Ocean child was a reference to Yoko. That's what her name meant in Japanese, according to Beatles lore. Was John writing songs for Yoko? How could that be, especially after all the things he had just said to her this afternoon. Maggie had never felt more confused or unsure as she did this second. If she brought up Yoko now, she risked shattering what they had built. It would be a test of exactly how ephemeral their relationship was. John seemed confident that what they had was real and solid and true. Could "ocean child" mean something else? Was she jumping to conclusions?

Maggie tried to hide her doubts as John looked at her for approval. She smiled at him and praised the song. It was delicate and beautiful, and she let him know that he should be proud of it. Putting the guitar down, John pulled her back down on the bed. Hoping to squeeze thoughts of Yoko and doubt of John out of her head, she responded to his touch, trying to lose herself in moment. It very nearly worked.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

"Smile!"

Maggie squinted into the sun, and did her best to plaster a smile on her face. She was sitting cross-legged next to John, and they were lined up in front of the Maharishi with the other Beatles and their girlfriends and wives. Maggie remembered seeing the group picture from India; in fact, she remembered it being blown-up and used as a stage backdrop at a Beatles festival she and her best friend Jenny had attended when they were in college. Did that mean that someday in the future, her picture would be all over Beatles festivals, larger than life?

Oh, God. She was with the Beatles. She was engaged to a Beatle. She was the head of Apple Corps.

She started to panic and feel like she needed some air. A few more photos were snapped, and then she was finally free.

Pulling her sari up so she wouldn't trip, she moved away from the crowd of people so she could breathe. Her golden jewelry jingled a bit as she strolled along the perimeter of the compound. Looking behind her, she realized she was

being followed. It was Magic Alex. Maggie picked up her pace a bit and then gave up. What was she running from?

She paused and took in the view of the Ganges.

“Hello,” Alex said a bit unsurely as he approached Maggie.

“Hey.”

“Taking a walk?”

“Yep.”

“I had to get away from there, you know?” Alex tried. “It all just felt…”

“Fake?” Maggie offered.

“Yes. Fake.”

That was rich coming from one of the biggest charlatans she knew, but for once she agreed with Alex. On one level, Maggie marveled at being a part of such a famous Beatles moment. On another, she was still very distrustful of the Maharishi and his intentions.

“It feels like the Maharishi is using the Beatles for publicity. It’s like we all just took a publicity shot for him,” Alex continued in his accented English. “This whole compound is just strange. Four-poster beds? Masseurs? Servants? A helipad? What kind of ashram has that stuff? This is more like a resort. And one that’s not hurting for cash.”

“I can’t argue with you there.”

“You’re the one holding the purse strings, just keep holding them tight. That’s my advice.” The irony wasn’t lost on Alex. He’d been trying to get money out of the Beatles for years for his many projects, and this woman had fought him every step of the way. Alex knew that John’s fascination with him was fading. If the Beatles as a whole lost interest in him, he was done. Alex certainly didn’t want or need competition from the Maharishi. As it was, this fixation with the Indian religious leader had gone on long enough, and so here he was initiating a conversation with Maggie. She was the skeptical sort, and if Alex could encourage her natural skepticism of the Maharishi, he would.

“Thanks,” Maggie replied. She didn’t really have anything else to say to this man. Neither of them liked the Maharishi, but that didn’t make them best friends either. They both stood there uncomfortably for a moment, until Alex nodded at her and continued on his way.

Several nights later, a traveling cinema arrived in the local village square. It was a welcome glimpse of the outside world, even for George. Their entire party made their way down a dusty jungle path, the fading twilight lit by lanterns, which were swinging from their hands. Paul had, of course, brought his guitar and they all sang as they walked. He’d come up with a new up-tempo song that Maggie immediately recognized as Ob-la-di, Ob-la-da. She knew that song would later cause problems between the band members as Paul’s perfectionism would drive him to record it over and over again. But tonight, it was a happy song, and she sang along with him loudly. Paul grinned at her

once he realized that she knew the words without being told them.

It was a beautiful night, and one that Maggie would remember wistfully in the less peaceful days to come.

The first upheaval was between Paul and Jane. Maggie wasn't privy to their fight, as the always-civilized Jane had made sure it had taken place in private.

All she knew was that Jane had moved out of Paul's room and was only speaking to Paul when it was necessary to communicate. Maggie, not wanting to pry, had asked Jane if she were okay, but "fine" was all Jane would say. She acted normally towards everyone else in the party, but if Paul showed up, she would press her lips together and clam up.

Maggie thought she might get more information out of Paul if she could get him alone, but he proved elusive too. Clearly both parties needed time and space, so she stayed out of it and figured one or the other of them would talk when they were ready.

Though keeping mum about Paul, Jane was still friendly to Maggie otherwise. The two of them were out on the patio playing with George's sitar one afternoon, when they heard a terrible shriek come from one of the bungalows. It sounded like Maureen.

Jane ran towards the bungalows to see what was wrong, but before she got there, a weeping Mo appeared from inside.

"What's wrong?" Jane wrapped a comforting arm around Maureen.

“There are huge bugs in our room again. I just can’t take it anymore!” Mo broke down into loud sobs.

“Oh, Mo, it’s okay. Do you want me to get Ringo for you?” Jane patted her on the back soothingly.

“He’s in there killing them, but it doesn’t matter. You can kill them but there will just be more later.”

Ringo stepped outside. “It’s all right, luv, they’re dead.”

Mo ran over to him and buried her face in his chest. “I want to go home, Ritchie, I want to go home.”

“Okay, luv. I’m not sure my stomach can take much more of this food anyway.” He smiled down at his wife, who was now sniffling hopefully.

“Really?”

“We’ve been away from the kids long enough. Let’s go home.”

Over dinner, Ringo broke the news to the whole group. He and Maureen were going to leave the next morning. They wanted to see their children, Mo couldn’t take the bugs anymore, and he was tired of eating tinned beans and eggs.

“We’ll miss you, Rich,” George said. Everyone else echoed similar sentiments. Ringo truly was the most good-natured person Maggie had ever met. He was the heart of the band and he was universally loved. Maggie was sorry to see him go, even though she would be happy to have a break from Maureen. It made Maggie sad that she and Mo didn’t get along. Now that she and Paul were friends, it was the one blemish on her happy Beatle family. Maggie had to

admit it was partially her own fault for being so hard on Maureen over George. Maybe both of them would grow out of their childish dislike of each other eventually.

Early the next morning, everyone dragged themselves out of bed to see Mo and Ringo off. Jane showed up too, but with her suitcases.

"You're leaving too?" Maggie asked, dismayed. It shouldn't have been a surprise, seeing how far Jane and Paul's relationship had deteriorated, but she would miss spending time with Jane. As the most career-minded of the Beatle women, she and Jane had a lot in common, and she was often a sympathetic ear. Maggie wanted Paul and Linda to get together, but she just hated the pain this situation was causing everyone.

"It's best this way. Give me a ring when you get back to London." Jane hugged her tightly.

Paul, who was standing nearby, gave Jane a guilty look. After returning his gaze, she passed by him to hug John, and then George and Pattie and the others.

Ringo gave Maggie a bear hug and a kiss on the cheek; by contrast, she and Maureen gave each other only the most perfunctory hug, and that was solely for the sake of appearance.

Even more hugs and goodbyes were exchanged when Neil showed up with his bags. He was going to travel to London with Ringo, Mo, and Jane, and then come back a few days later once he'd been over to Apple and caught up on any pertinent news.

Mo had been afraid that they'd have to take the footpath and donkeys back, but instead, taxicabs had been called and brought up to the main entrance instead. Maggie was confused. Had their initial arrival been staged? Why the need for the footpath and bridge and the donkeys if you could drive right up to the front door? It was one more piece of an increasingly suspect puzzle.

Two other people left the same day Ringo, Mo, and Jane had, only it was for a one-day hunting excursion. "Did you see them?" John asked Maggie that night. "That middle-aged American lady and her teenaged son. They went out to shoot a few poor tigers, and then returned to commune with God."

"Can you think of a better way to commune with God than to kill some of his most beautiful creatures?"

"Too right. They'd make a good song, they would."

"Maybe you should go write one then," Maggie said, secretly pleased that it looked like Bungalow Bill would get written in this timeline. It was also going to be Yoko-free, if she could help it!

The next morning dawned bright and clear. John had decided he wanted to write the song about the hunters he'd seen the day before, so Maggie went to breakfast alone to give him some space. It was earlier than normal and no one else from their party was up yet, so she was surprised when Paul sat down next to her.

"Mind some company, luv?"

"Not at all!" She smiled at him. "I'm almost done eating, but I can wait for you if you want something."

“Actually, I already ate. Fancy a walk when you’re done?”

“Sure. Or do you just want to go down to the river?”

“Yeah, that’ll work.” Paul nodded. “Shall I go get my guitar and meet you in the usual spot?”

“Sounds like a plan!”

Maggie finished the rest of her breakfast and headed off to meet Paul. She could hear him picking Blackbird on his guitar again as she walked towards their hiding place.

“Hey, Paulie.”

“Hey, have a seat.”

Maggie sat next to him and gazed at the river while she listened to him play. She would miss this when they were back in cold and dreary London. Maybe coming to India hadn’t been a terrible idea after all.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

"Are you going to tell me what happened with Jane?" Maggie decided there was no point to easing into the subject.

"Nosy little thing, aren't you?" Paul smiled at her.

"Come on, I know you're dying to tell me, so we can dissect every detail."

"You've got to stop confusing me with a bird," Paul laughed and shook his head.

"Spill!"

"Okay, okay! Where shall I start?"

"At the beginning."

"All right, then. It all started in Liverpool on June 18, 1942..."

Maggie smacked Paul on the arm. "Not that far back!"

Paul grinned.

“Jane!” Maggie commanded with a smile.

“Right, so things were going okay between us. Not great, but all right. Until Jane started talking about her next film project, and how she wanted to get home before too long, because she’d gotten a letter from her agent offering her something she really wanted to take. I said I didn’t know if I wanted her to take another project just now…”

“You didn’t! Paul!”

“I was being honest!”

“You know how important acting is to Jane.”

“I’d hoped I was important to her too. I dunno, I guess I just felt like we should be focusing on our relationship right now, and her going off to shoot a film all the way over in America would not be helpful with that.”

“Okay, I guess you’ve got a point.”

“She didn’t think so. So then we had an argument where she accused me of not wanting to let her have career, and I couldn’t really deny it.” Paul shrugged and looked over at Maggie, waiting for another rebuke. When it didn’t come, he continued, “And then we got onto the subject of kids. I’m ready for them. I want a wife and a family in the next few years. She feels like her career is going well and doesn’t even want to think about kids yet. Maybe not ever.”

Maggie remained silent, knowing she couldn’t really add anything to what Paul had said. She still felt strongly that women had the right to a career of their choosing and to not be pressured into kids, but clearly the problem here was

that Paul and Jane were just not on the same page. They didn't want the same things out of life. Maybe they never would.

"Anyway, it was all just arguing, and we didn't settle anything. Jane was so furious she couldn't even look at me by the end. I guess I deserved it. I'm sure you would agree with Jane's take on things."

"To a point," Maggie admitted.

"I'm a northern man, I can't help wanting traditional things."

"So is John, but he's learned to adapt."

"I guess he's a better man than I." Paul was unable to keep the bitterness out of his voice.

"Honestly Paul, I don't think the problem is so much your attitudes towards women working, as it is that you and Jane just don't want the same things at the same time."

"You're probably giving me more credit than I deserve."

"Well, of course I am," Maggie smiled.

"I don't really have a problem with a woman working, you know. It's just..."

"You don't want your woman working?"

"I guess. My life is chaotic enough. Coordinating two people's busy careers is just beyond me right now."

“I understand.” She paused hesitantly, but then decided to go for it. “There’s also the issue of all the women you have on the side. Does Jane know about any of them?”

Paul smiled thinly. “I doubt she’s completely in the dark.”

“You know you’re going to have to stop all that, right? Either way you go, you can’t keep that up. Once you get serious with Jane, or whomever you settle down with for that matter, you just can’t. It’s not fair.”

“What if I can’t do that? If it’s too hard?”

Maggie smirked at Paul.
“Dirty Maggie Mae! Perhaps I should have used the word difficult?” Paul wagged his finger at Maggie, and she gave him her best angelic look.

“Maybe it wouldn’t be so DIFFICULT if you were with the right woman.”

Paul considered that for a minute. “Maybe,” he said finally.

“How did you and Jane leave things?”

“She said she thought it was better if we had our own rooms while we were here, and that she might go home earlier than later. Also that I had a lot of thinking to do, and that once I had thought about things, we could talk when we got back to London. She didn’t want to do any more talking ‘til then.”

“I guess Ringo and Mo leaving early gave her the out she wanted.”

“Yep.”

“And have you been thinking?”

“Yes, but I haven’t come to any conclusions. I guess I need more time.”

“Well, we’ve got nothing but that here.”

“True.”

Paul started picking out the tune of Blackbird again.

“New song?” Maggie asked.

“Do you recognize it?”

“I do.”

“Do you like it?” Paul fished for a hint.

“I do. You should finish it.”

“Might do. Might do.”

“John said you had written a love song too.”

“*Why Don’t We Do It In the Road?”* Paul grinned mischievously.

“No, not that one, there was another one,” Maggie laughed.

“Would you like to hear it?”

“I would.”

“All right then.” Paul strummed a few notes and began to sing in a mellow voice:

“Who knows how long I've loved you
You know I love you still
Will I wait a lonely lifetime
If you want me to I will

It’s for Linda! Maggie thought happily to herself.

For if I ever saw you
I didn't catch your name
But it never really mattered
I will always feel the same

Or for the idea of Linda, Maggie amended.

Love you forever, and forever
Love you with all my heart
Love you whenever we're together
Love you when we're apart

No, definitely for Linda.

And when at last I find you
Your song will fill the air
Sing it loud so I can hear you
Make it easy to be near you
For the things you do endear you
To me ah, you know I will
I will...

Whether it was for Linda or Jane or for some unnamed love Paul thought might be out there, it was a beautiful song, and Maggie was glad Paul had written it.

“Congratulations, mates!” It was Neil, who had burst into the dining room full of news from England.

“Neil! Good to have you back!” John greeted him.

“What are you congratulating us for?” Paul asked.

“Your Sgt Pepper album just won four Grammys!”

“Which ones?” George was curious even though Sgt Pepper had really been Paul and John's show, and like Ringo he sometimes felt if he deserved an award for Sgt Pepper, it would be for Most Improved Chess Game.

“Album of the Year, Album Cover, Sound Engineering, and Best Contemporary Album,” Maggie said automatically. Neil looked stunned, and Maggie winced, realizing that she’d just goofed by knowing something she shouldn’t have known. “I mean, that’s just a guess,” she added, hoping it would be enough to cover up her gaffe. Surely someone had known what categories they’d been nominated in...

“A good one,” Neil said. “You’re right on all counts.”

“Oh,” John said. “Well, that’s nice.” He grinned at Maggie, who was still blushing furiously.

Paul was thrilled, as Sgt Pepper had been his baby, and everyone was happy that Geoff Emerick had gotten an award for his sound engineering work on the album. It was well deserved. The mood amongst the group was high.

Champagne was found, and many toasts were made. George was also in a good mood because he'd gotten confirmation that his song, "The Inner Light" was going to be released as the B-side to "Lady Madonna" in just a few days. He felt something in him relax and unlock, and late that night, when everyone else was in bed, he sat out by the pool and finished the song that had been plaguing him for the last two years.

The next morning George noted with relief that Maggie was the only one up for breakfast. He'd been hoping to find her alone.

"Hey, do you have some time free after breakfast?"

"What's up? Sitar lesson? Or did you want to force me to meditate with you?" Maggie smiled.

"I finished a song. Would you listen?"

"Are you kidding? Of course! Let's go?"

"Don't you want to finish your breakfast?"

"I'll just take it with me!" Maggie grabbed the bread and a piece of fruit and as she got up, a servant whisked her plate away. "Where to?"

"Where are you and Paul always sneaking off to?"

"Oh, you want to see our secret hiding spot, do you? Do you know the secret password?"

“New Beatles Song,” George said dryly.

“That’ll do! Come on!” Maggie gestured with a grin.

Once they were settled in the sheltered spot by the river, George self-consciously strummed his guitar. “I’m still not sure about some of it, so don’t judge it too harshly,” he said.

“Don’t worry so much. I’m sure it will be great!” Maggie encouraged. Would it be Piggies, she wondered. Or Savoy Truffle? Neither of those songs were that personal, and George seemed unusually uncomfortable.

“All right then. I played a bit of it for you the day you came back from the future. But I didn’t quite know what to do about it, and it didn’t have words. I got the idea for the lyrics from a magazine I brought with me, and I finally finished the song last night.” He looked at Maggie, and she nodded her approval.

He cleared his throat and sang:

I look at you all see the love there that's sleeping
While my guitar gently weeps
I look at the floor and I see it needs sweeping
Still my guitar gently weeps

I don't know why nobody told you
How to unfold your love
I don't know how someone controlled you
They bought and sold you

I look at the world and I notice it's turning
While my guitar gently weeps

With every mistake we must surely be learning
Still my guitar gently weeps

I don't know how you were diverted
You were perverted too
I don't know how you were inverted
No one alerted you

I look from the wings at the play you are staging
While my guitar gently weeps
As I'm sitting here doing nothing but aging
Still my guitar gently weeps

Oh, it was the version from Anthology 3, Maggie breathed to herself. She loved the White Album version, but there was something about the acoustic rendition that was striking. She also loved the original last verse of the song. She wondered why he would change it. Maggie heaped as much praise and encouragement on George as she could, and he grinned and blushed, but seemed to absorb it eagerly. It appeared as if things between her and George were okay once again. She was glad their friendship was strong enough to withstand the ups and downs of life, or at least of life in India.

George was pleased that Maggie liked his new song. *Even if she didn't get some things about him*, George thought, *she got this*. It was enough.

Chapter Thirty

"Maggie, can I talk to you for a minute?" Maggie was on her way to meet Paul and didn't relish the idea of stopping to talk to Magic Alex. However, Alex rarely, if ever, approached her so she thought she'd better stop in case it was something important.

"What's up, Alex?" Maggie had to work to keep the impatience from her voice.

"Not here, in private."

The last thing she wanted was to go off someplace private with Alex. "Sorry, this is about as private as it's going to get." Maggie looked around the courtyard – there wasn't a soul in sight, though that didn't preclude someone from suddenly appearing.

"Fine." Alex looked around nervously. "Remember what I told you last time, about the Maharishi being after the Beatles' money?"

"Yes."

“Well, he just tried to bribe me to talk to the Beatles about tithing twenty-five percent of their money to him.”

“Twenty-five percent? That’s ridiculous!” While Maggie wasn’t terribly surprised, the sheer audacity of the Maharishi thinking he could get one of the Beatles’ party to talk them out of that kind of money outraged her. “Is he insane? That’s a hell of a lot of money.”

“He’s hoping for at least fifteen percent but offered me more money if I got them to go as high as twenty-five.

Maggie laughed. “Well, I can tell you he’s not going to get that kind of money from the Beatles. Not if I have anything to do with it. Why are you even telling me this, Alex? Why not just keep your mouth shut and collect what you can?”

“Because I know you’re not stupid, and I know there’s pretty much no way to talk you into what he wants me to. Besides, why would I want the Beatles money to go…outside the family, shall we say?”

“You’re not family, Alex.” A bold statement, but the truth.

Alex didn’t even flinch. “Neither is he. I think he’s become too familiar, and I mean to do something about it.”

“Do what?” Maggie wondered if their peaceful days in India were finally at an end. She knew that something was going to happen to make the Beatles want to leave suddenly – some allegations about the Maharishi’s inappropriate behavior towards one of the women here. It occurred to Maggie that perhaps Alex had been behind it originally. She guessed she would find out soon enough. He seemed very determined. In any case, Maggie was nearly ready to

go home. She had been away from Apple long enough. And she missed Julian and knew John did too.

“I’m not sure yet. But I’ll figure out something.”

“All right,” Maggie said dubiously. “Good luck with that.”

Alex nodded and left her standing there, not sure what she should think.

She didn’t trust the Maharishi and she’d be damned before he’d collect twenty-five percent of the Beatles’ earnings. But she didn’t trust Alex either. She wasn’t sure that she shouldn’t be trying to stop whatever little ploy Alex was going to use to discredit the Maharishi. The allegations against him had never been proven. On the other hand, Alex would be doing her dirty work for her. She didn’t relish the thought of trying to talk the Beatles, particularly George and John, out of giving the Maharishi money. A lot of money. She shrugged. Maybe she’d talk to Paul about it.

"We're leaving, Maharishi," John said quietly. Paul, George, and Maggie were standing slightly behind John, and George looked positively sick. Paul and Maggie exchanged glances, and she thought back to what had happened earlier in the day.

After talking with Alex, Maggie had taken a chance and told Paul what she knew. Of all the Beatles, Paul seemed to have the most common sense, and though he liked Alex, he’d never been as enchanted as John had been. They’d ultimately decided there wasn’t much they could do to stop

Alex from whatever he was planning, especially since they didn't know exactly what he was going to do. They would just have to wait and see what happened. Paul had also been suitably horrified at the thought of giving twenty-five percent of their money away to the Maharishi.

What did end up happening was not entirely unexpected. Word had gotten round that the Maharishi had made advances on a few of the women. Maggie had one guess who was spreading these rumors. The one thing she still wasn't sure of was what, if anything, the Maharishi had actually done. Was it like the age-old "chicken or the egg" debate? Alex spreads rumors of impropriety and after that, any woman in contact with the Maharishi would be programmed to misinterpret any move he made? Or had there already been whispers of unseemliness and Alex had merely been amplifying them? Maggie wasn't sure they would ever really know, but she suspected it was the former.

After the rumors got around to John and George, they called Paul and Maggie into a quick meeting.

"Have you heard?" John asked, when they'd all gathered together in secret in one of their rooms.

"We've no real proof," George protested. He didn't want to believe that this religious leader he respected could be guilty of such a thing.

"We have what Alex told us," John said. Maggie chanced a quick look at Paul, who met her eyes. He quirked a sardonic eyebrow at her. "And Mia Farrow said the Maharishi tried to put his arm around her and she'd been so frightened, she ran away."

“That’s not really proof of anything, John,” Maggie piped up. What was she doing? Why was she defending the Maharishi? She didn’t like him. Maybe her conscience was pricking her. The man’s name was being dragged through the mud, for something that Alex may have totally fabricated.

“She’s not the only one,” he said. “Wait, what do you know from the books you’ve read about us? Surely you must know something.”

“Er…” Maggie hated being put on the spot. What should she say? And why did she feel so compelled to edit things for John’s sake? Why had her instinct been to go to Paul about this and not John? *Because John would never believe anything bad about Magic Alex*, she answered herself. John was still waiting for her to answer his question. “Well, yes, basically this happened the first time around too. You guys left in a hurry after hearing these rumors about the Maharishi. I can’t say that anything was ever substantiated, but I don’t know if you can just disregard what these girls are saying.” Tentatively she ventured, “I’d just be sure it’s actually the girls saying it, that’s all.”

“What does that mean?”

“This is coming from Magic Alex, right?” Maggie braced for an argument. “What if he’s making it up?” There, she’d gotten it out.

“Luv, I know you don’t like him, but I don’t think he’d lie about this. What does he have to gain?”

“Really, John?” Maggie was unable to contain herself. “What does he have to gain? He hates sharing you with the

Maharishi. It's like a battle of the charlatans and the prize is the Beatles' money."

"The Maharishi is not a charlatan!" George interjected hotly.

"But he does want our money, George," Paul said. "Twenty-five percent of it."

"Twenty-five percent? Over my dead body," John was grim. He shook his head, disbelieving what he was hearing. Maggie was pleasantly surprised that he seemed as horrified about the amount of money as Maggie had.

"How do you know that?" George asked Paul.

"That's what Magic Alex told Maggie," Paul shrugged.

"How come Paul knows this and I don't?" John demanded. He turned and looked at Maggie.

"Because I knew you would accuse me of trying to discredit Alex just because I don't like him! Which is basically what you've just done!" Maggie tried to keep the bitterness from her voice, but knew she was mostly unsuccessful.

"But you told Paul?"

"Yes, because in this case I thought that he'd be the only one of you that could see things for what they are!" Maggie was exasperated. "George is blinded by his love of the culture and religion, and you… sometimes you are just blind."

John blinked, taken aback.

“I’m sorry,” Maggie tried to soften what she was saying. “It’s just that you are always willing to trust people and to give them the benefit of the doubt if you like them. And just because you like them doesn’t always mean that person is worthy of trust.”

John took this calmly, more calmly than Maggie expected. “If you remember, I believed you when you said you were from the future. Paulie, here, was the one who didn’t. And he was wrong.”

“Well, Paul’s not perfect either.”

“Hey!” Paul protested. “Leave me out of this!”

“Look, John, you don’t want to believe that Alex and the Maharishi might have hidden agendas. And you know that I am pretty skeptical of both of them. I thought Paul might be able to see the situation more clearly, since he wasn’t as invested as you and George, or as prejudiced as me.”

“So now what do we do? If we can’t trust Alex or the Maharishi, as you claim, whose side do we choose?”

“We choose our own side, I think, John,” Paul said.

“And what side is that?”

Paul shrugged his shoulders casually, neatly slipping into his role as diplomat. “Maybe it’s best that we just remove ourselves from the situation without coming out and calling either of them liars.”

Maggie nodded her head. “I wouldn’t accuse the Maharishi of anything. If he asks why we’re leaving, just make

something up. But I also wouldn't let Alex feed you any bullshit OR give him the impression that you're on to him. The Beatles have made tons of impulsive decisions. The decision to pack up and leave will just be seen as another one."

"Leave? I don't want to leave," George protested. But his protest was weak and it was apparent that his total faith in the Maharishi was being rocked.

"It's time, George." Maggie patted his shoulder gently. "You can't hide from the Beatles forever. This has been a nice break from it, but it's time to get back to real life."

"I guess…"

"Come on, lad, it'll be fine," Paul encouraged. He was afraid to say too much about his eagerness to get back to making a new album. George had bit his head off the last time he'd brought it up.

John looked at Maggie. She nodded. "All right, mates. Let's go home," he said finally.

"Are we sure about this? Maggie, you said you're not sure that the Maharishi is even guilty. What if Alex is making this all up?" George tried one last objection.

"Oh, I'm fairly certain he's making something up. But one thing I'm confident about is that the Maharishi wants your money. Alex told me he was bribed to talk you into giving up that twenty-five percent to the Maharishi's organization."

“He bribed Alex?” George looked shaken. “Brilliant. So either he’s a pervert or he’s using us for our money, or both.”

Maggie was silent.

“Let’s go home, George,” Paul said.

George shook his head slowly. “Right. I guess there’s nothing else to do. This is…disappointing.”

“I’m sorry, George,” Maggie said. “Try not to let this taint the time we spent here though.”

“I guess I need some time to think about this.”

“You can do it on the flight home. I think it’s now or never,” John said.

The four of them had walked over to the Maharishi’s house, and were able to get a private audience with him relatively quickly, which is how they came to be standing where they now were: with John, informing the Maharishi that they were leaving.

The Maharishi, misinterpreting John’s words, perhaps willfully, simply smiled at them before responding. “Certainly. Perhaps in several weeks time, yes?”

“No, now.” The Maharishi sobered at the look on John’s face.

“Why?”

"You're the cosmic one, you should know why," John shrugged. Nodding at the others, he turned and left and they all followed him.

Afraid that if they stayed, the Maharishi might start probing for a real answer about why they were leaving, they agreed it was best to go home as soon as possible. Silently, they all returned to their rooms to pack. George was left to break the news to Pattie. Paul said that he would tell Neil and Mal and ask Neil to tell Alex. They would meet in two hours at the front entrance, where they would have cabs summoned to take them back to Delhi.

Somewhat unexpectedly, their plan worked without a hitch. No one lifted so much as a finger to stop them. As they drove away, Maggie looked out the back window of the cab a little regretfully. She'd dreaded this trip and in the end, she'd had a really nice time. She'd gotten to know Paul better, and she felt closer to John. This experience had been as much of an escape for her as it had been for George. She was sorry it had ended the way it did – but on the other hand, home was waiting for her, and she could hardly wait to sleep in her own bed.

"Oh, Maharishi, what have you done?" John sang in a comical voice. "You've made a fool of everyone…" He smiled down at Maggie, who was sitting between him and Paul in the back seat of the cab.

"Not bad, that," Paul said. "You should work on it!"

"Maybe I will, " John mused.

"I'd take the Maharishi's name out of it," Maggie suggested. "Maybe use a girl's name instead."

“Any ideas, luv?”

“One. But I won’t tell you unless you guess it first,” she grinned at him.

“I think you’ll find you won’t be able to resist my powers of persuasion,” he said suggestively.

“Oh, please, save it for the airplane loo,” Paul rolled his eyes.

“Was that an offer, Paulie?” John leaned over Maggie to gave him a big smack on the cheek, and was swatted away by Paul. It was Maggie’s turn to roll her eyes, but she did it with a smile on her face.

They made it to the airport without any further incident, and Mal managed to get everyone on a flight home that evening. On the plane, the band powwowed about what they were going to say publicly about their reasons for leaving the ashram. Other than Ringo and Mo, who would be filled in, they decided that the Beatles as a whole would keep a code of silence about why they had left. There was no need to trash the Maharishi unnecessarily, or to make a big fuss. They would just put it round that they’d decided they were ready to come home and work on their next album. They figured the words “next album” would easily be the focus of any further questions. George sighed at this, but agreed. The Beatles would start their next album soon.

Chapter Thirty-One

It was their first quiet evening at home since returning from India. John was sprawled out on the bed reading, and Maggie was finally getting around to unpacking their suitcases. Dot had already taken most of the laundry away, but Maggie had a ton of souvenirs she wanted to unwrap herself. She had stuck a few things in John's shoulder bag, so she grabbed it and shook it out on the bed.

A few newspaper-wrapped bundles plopped gently out, as did a spray of colorful postcards. Maggie picked them up, curious. The postcards didn't appear to be souvenirs of India, they all had pictures of England on the front. That was strange. She turned them over, and then her vision tunneled – all she could see was the signature.

Yoko.

She flipped through the postcards. Every single one was from Yoko.

"What are these," she said in a brittle voice, before she could stop herself.

“What are what?” John looked up absently.

“These.” She held the stack between two shaking fingers, as far away from herself as she could.

He got up and took them from her.

“Just a few postcards from Yoko,” he shrugged.

“Just a few? There must be more than thirty of them!”

“What’s the big deal?”

“What’s the big deal? Do you really have to ask that?” Maggie’s voice rose despite herself.

“I told you, luv, we’re just friends.” John thought they were past this, but clearly they weren’t. How many times did he have to reassure her? What did she want from him?

“If you’re just friends, why did she send you a postcard a day?” Maggie struggled not to sound hysterical. She knew that would turn John off instantly, but it was hard to control of the rising panic. John and Yoko had exchanged postcards throughout his stay in India in her original timeline. Then he had come home and dumped Cynthia.

“How many postcards did you send back to her?” She was afraid of what the answer would be.

“I dunno, a few.”

“What, did you sneak out every day to mail her one, to tell her you were thinking of her and missing her?” Maggie was

unable to keep the paranoia out of her voice. She cringed listening to herself.

"Luv, you are being irrational." He warned her, his voice cold. "I've told you a hundred times I'm not interested in Yoko. I'll say it one more time, if you like. But it'll be the last time. I'm not going to talk about her with you again after this."

"You can't do that, you can't just refuse to talk about this."

"I can and I will, if it's clearly not something you can be… sane about."

"I can't help it," Maggie said, the tears starting to come. *Now*, her brain scolded her, *tell him now why Yoko scares you so much. He'll understand.*

Maybe it was time. Actually, it was past time. She opened up her mouth, but John cut her off. "You know, you're with George all the time. Alone. Maureen keeps whispering poisonous little bits of gossip to me, but I've never believed them."

"That's because they're not true!" Maggie wiped the tears away. "Besides, it isn't the same."

"How isn't it the same? You see far more of George than I do of Yoko. I didn't even go to our damned exhibit." John winced. That had been a poor choice of words.

Maggie's head snapped up. "Our exhibit? *OUR* exhibit? What do you mean by that?"

"Never mind that."

“No, tell me – what exhibit is this?” she demanded.

“Fine. Yoko needed money for a show, and I provided half of it. She wanted to put my name on it, but I knew you’d get upset and it would look bad, so I just had her call it ‘Yoko and Me’.” He crossed his arms defensively, daring her to challenge him.

“’Yoko and Me?’ Really? How could you? You... you sound like a … a couple.” *They were a couple once*, she reminded herself. She knew it. It would always be John and Yoko. There was even a song.

“I’m not going to even dignify that. You know very well I’m interested in her art, and that’s all.”

“Art? Her ‘art’ is not even art! What about that crappy postcard mailing she did? ‘Breathe at dawn’? That’s not art.”

“Wait, how did you know about that?”

“Because I took in the mail, that’s how.” Maggie felt herself grow cold. She realized that she’d said too much.

“I signed up to get the postcards, but I never got them, so I thought they were lost,” John said slowly. “But you saw them… wait, did you do something with them?” He sat down in the chair, rubbing his head tiredly.

Maggie looked guilty.

“I don’t even know what to say to you right now, that you could be so bloody disrespectful,” John said quietly. “Yoko has done nothing to deserve this kind of treatment, and neither have I. I know you’re friends with George, and I’ve

never stood in the way of that. But if you want that to continue with him, you'd better give Yoko and me the same respect."

"If I want that to continue with him? What the hell does that mean? You'll forbid me to see George?" Maggie was so indignant that she forgot that she really had been wrong to destroy John's mail even if it was THAT woman. Her voice rose to a shout. "You don't own me. I'm not some meek 60s woman you can control. I'll see whoever I want!"

"Then I'll see whoever I please too, if that's the way you want things," John said, his voice still low.

"That's not what I meant…"

"If you're going to be jealous for no reason, maybe I should give you one. Will that make you happy? If I go and fuck Yoko?" John threw his hands up in the air in frustration.

Maggie stepped in front of him, hands on her hips. "You wouldn't…"

"Push me far enough, luv, and I can't make any promises." John jabbed his index finger at her angrily. "It'd be what you expect of me anyway, wouldn't it? I'm just an arsehole who's cheated on his wife too many times to count. Why should you expect anything better?"

Maggie just gaped at him.

He turned abruptly. He'd had enough and he was done. "I'm going to the studio. Don't bother waiting up." He stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Maggie stood in shocked silence and listened as John stormed down the stairs and out the front door.

He was gone.

The instant she was alone, she berated herself. It was true that finding all those postcards from Yoko had been a shock, but John had told her and shown her time and time again that she was the one he loved. Why couldn't she believe it? And why couldn't she have gotten out the truth about Yoko? If only she had, she knew he would understand why she was so threatened by Yoko. If John knew what had happened to Cynthia after their return from India the first time, then he would surely see why she felt the way she did.

She had to catch him.

Maggie raced down the stairs, and out the door, but it was too late. His car had already pulled away.

She walked slowly back upstairs and sat down on the bed. The house was empty. Dot had left hours ago, leaving a

casserole for them to warm up for dinner. Food. She needed food.

Mindlessly, she put the casserole in the oven to heat and sat down at the table to think. Instead, she burst into tears.

She ate her dinner without tasting it; the food brought her no comfort at all. She washed her dish and put the leftovers in the fridge and then looked at the clock. John had not come back as she'd hoped he would. It was up to her. She was the one who owed him an apology, after all, for tampering with his mail, for not trusting him. She would go down to the studio and give it to him. And then she would explain why the thought of "John and Yoko" made her so crazy.

She grabbed her keys and wallet and hopped in her Mini Cooper and headed off to EMI.

She parked out front, and noted the lack of fans. Usually there were tons of fans whenever a Beatle was present. It was uncanny how they knew when one would be here. They wouldn't be expecting John, of course, so it wasn't too surprising to not see fans outside.

Maggie walked up to the front door, pausing a minute to look at it. She remembered the first time she had entered this building in 2006, excited to be going on a tour of EMI. Then she remembered standing in the rain, desperately pulling on the locked door, willing it to open so that she could go back in time again to save John after she'd failed the first time.

Today the door opened easily in her hand. She headed for Studio 2, the usual place where the Beatles recorded. It was empty. She ducked her head in each of the others, but

there was no sign of John or anyone else she knew. No one but a Beatle recorded at night anyway. She backtracked to the reception area, and inquired if anyone had seen John. Beatles didn't escape notice, so if he were here, someone would know. But the evening receptionist, who instantly recognized her, apologetically denied having seen John at all tonight.

John had said he was going to the studio, but he wasn't here. Where could he be? Maggie remembered their argument, particularly John's last words, with crystal-like clarity. Could he… no, he couldn't. She wouldn't even think that. Not yet anyway. The thought that perhaps she had succeeded in being the catalyst that actually brought John and Yoko together was too much to bear.

Maggie headed to Apple, to her office, where she could make some phone calls in peace. Why the hell hadn't they invented cell phones yet? If John had a cell, she could simply call him. But it didn't work that way here. She had to start with calling all of his friends.

Apple was relatively quiet at this time of night. A casual inquiry at reception told her that John had not been by here either.

Hopefully, Maggie poked her head in a few offices anyway. Peter Brown was gone for the day, but Neil was in. Maggie said a quick hello and then retreated to her own office.

She sat down at her desk and put her head in her hands. Who should she call first? Where was John most likely to go if he were in need of a place to hide? To Paul's maybe? She'd try him first.

“Hello?” It was Paul’s housekeeper.

“Hello, this is Maggie, is Paul at home?”

“Oh hello, dear. Sorry, but he’s had to leave town suddenly.”

“Is everything okay?” Maggie wished she could text him to find out what was going on. Communication in the 60s was frustratingly limited.

“I think so. He didn’t say much, just grabbed a small suitcase and told me he was heading to the airport. Mal went with him. That was a few hours ago.”

“I don’t suppose you’ve seen John tonight? He didn’t stop by or anything?”

“Sorry, no, I haven’t seen him.”

“All right, thanks.” Maggie hung up the phone puzzled and a little worried. Why would Paul race off to the airport like… wait, Linda! Maybe Paul had finally made up his mind and was racing off to New York to beg Linda’s forgiveness. The thought cheered her a bit, though it didn’t solve her current problem.

She tried George next. “Hey, luv, what’s new?” he asked.

“John isn’t over at your house, is he?”

“Nope, haven’t seen him. Why?”

“We had a fight,” she said in a small voice. “About Yoko.”

“Oh no!” He was instantly sympathetic. “You still haven’t told him, have you?”

“No. I found all these postcards from Yoko in his bag, and we got into a fight, and he left. He said he was going to the studio, but he’s not at there, or here at Apple, or at Paul’s.”

“I’m sure he’s around. Maybe he’s even at home waiting for you.”

“Maybe you’re right. I was just going to try Ringo, and then go home.”

“Do that. Pattie’s out of town, so I’m here by my lonesome. Call me if you need to talk later, okay?”

“I didn’t think Beatles were ever lonely. Or alone.” Maggie tried to joke.

George laughed. “I’ll call and have some dancing girls sent over, if it will please you.”

She managed a laugh, but it was obvious to George that she was worried.

“It will be okay, I know it,” he reassured her.

“If you say so.” She rang off with George and then dialed Ringo’s home number.

“Hello?”

“Hi Maureen. Is Ringo there?”

“Yes. What do you want?” Mo asked flatly.

Maggie sighed to herself. “I’m looking for John. He hasn’t been by, has he?” She tried to keep her voice light, not wanting Maureen to sense that anything was wrong.

“What, did he go missing on you?”

“No, I just need to find him to tell him something, and I’m not sure where he is. He’s not at the studio or Apple, and I’ve already tried George and Paul, but no luck.”

“Why don’t you try Paul’s flat?” Mo made the suggestion casually, but the implication was clear. Paul’s flat was the place the Beatles brought women. It had also been the place Maggie and John had lived happily together until they’d bought their house. Surely John wouldn’t bring a woman there, wouldn’t bring Yo... No! She couldn’t even think it! However, maybe it was where John was hiding out. She’d better check.

“Thanks, Mo, I’m sure I’ll find him.” Maggie tried to sound unconcerned.

After she hung up the phone, she grabbed her stuff and headed out to Paul’s flat.

Maggie didn’t have a key anymore, so she raised a hand to knock before she tried jiggling the doorknob. Wait - was that a voice?

She paused and listened and could just make out a man’s voice. It had a Liverpudlian cadence to it. John WAS here. Maybe he was calling the house to tell her where she was?

Maggie reached out to grab the doorknob and then froze when she heard a high-pitched giggle. John wasn't alone. Maggie's hand dropped to her side and she stood and listened despite herself. She couldn't make out any words, but there were clearly two voices talking – a woman and a Beatle. Paul was out of town, George and Ringo were at home, and even Mal and Neil had been accounted for. That left only one possibility.

Maggie strained her ears. There was laughter and then there was silence. Maggie stood there silently, cursing herself for being a fool. She should just open the door or at least knock, but she wasn't sure she could face seeing John there with Yoko. How could he do this to her, even during a fight? The silence was broken by noises from within the flat. Maggie stiffened when she realized what kind of noises they were. The woman cried out, the man moaned, and that was all Maggie could stand to hear. Clearly John and Yoko were in the flat having sex. She couldn't listen.

She fled to her car and sat there shaking, trying to pull herself together enough to drive home. How could John do this? And how could Maureen know he was here? Did Ringo know? Did everyone? Maggie laughed bitterly to herself. The Beatles were a boys club; she was foolish to believe she was different than the other wives and girlfriends.

She just couldn't believe John had finally gone through with the awful threat he had thrown at her during their fight, and to think that he could be so low as to hook up with Yoko in what had been their special place…it was unbearable.

Maggie oscillated between anger and deep sadness that the thing she had been so afraid of had finally happened. The

worst part was the fear that Maggie herself had been the cause of this. Why had she been so insecure? Why had she let Yoko come between her and John? She'd tried to fight Yoko for John, but all she'd done was shown John an ugly side – one she didn't know even existed until Yoko had appeared in their lives. Sometimes she didn't even recognize herself anymore.

Maggie cursed herself for all the many things she'd done to lose John. She'd been jealous, possessive, rude to Yoko (even if she'd deserved it), and she'd tampered with John's mail. She also knew she'd been a stick in the mud about drugs and parties. Sure, pot was illegal, but it had never killed anybody, had it? Could she not unbend from her rigid moral code enough to take a lousy puff of a joint at a party? God, she must be a total drag. No wonder John preferred Yoko. Yoko had no problem doing drugs.

She was tired, so tired. She was worn down and sick of fighting. She'd practically given up after Brian's death, but Linda had convinced her that it was worth it to keep fighting. Now that it was clear she'd pushed John into Yoko's arms, there was nothing worth fighting for. Or against.

Maggie made it home in one piece and sat in the car in their driveway, numb. But she knew the numbness would eventually lift and then the tears would come. She needed and wanted to keep that numb feeling, she couldn't bear a whole night of self-flagellating "if only's".

Once Maggie had gotten herself into the house, she headed straight for the liquor cabinet, which, by virtue of the fact that a Beatle lived here, was well-stocked. She sat down heavily on the floor in front of it, picked a bottle, unscrewed the cap, and took a swig. She grimaced as it

went down. The second sip went down a little easier. Her insides warmed and her muscles loosened a bit – and then, taking her a bit by surprise, a sob escaped her. She sat on the floor and cried, only pausing to sip from the bottle.

If I'm not careful, I'll drink the whole bottle, and that probably won't be good for me, she thought. *Who can I count on to drive me to the hospital in case of alcohol poisoning?* There was really one person she could call.

George was sprawled out on his couch reading a book on Indian philosophy and religion. Pattie was out of town with her sister, so he had the place to himself for a few days, which was nice. After his experience in India, he was eager for some time alone so he could practice some meditation techniques in peace.

The phone rang, and he was tempted to ignore it, but he was afraid it might be Maggie calling back. She'd called a few hours ago looking for John.

"Hello?"

"Are you alone?" Maggie wasn't sure how serious George was about the dancing girls.

"Yes, thank you. I was just finishing a book."

"Could you come over?" Maggie sniffled.

“What’s the matter?” George sat up. Maggie was clearly crying. That couldn’t mean anything good.

“Yoko. I think he’s left me for Yoko.”

“I’ll be right there.”

“George, wait…”

He paused.

“Can you please bring some pot?” She was so tired of trying to stay good – what had being good gotten her? Maybe if she’d been more willing to try things, to share in the things John enjoyed, this wouldn’t have happened. It’s not like pot was the same as heroin, was it?

“Are you sure?” George had never seen her smoke it – clearly she was in bad shape if she was asking for him to bring her some.

“Yes.”

George hung up the phone, grabbed a bag from his stash on the mantle, and hopped into his car.

Chapter Thirty-Three

George parked his Mini Cooper behind Maggie's and knocked on the side door. It swung open, and there was Maggie covered in tears and clutching a half empty bottle of liquor.

"Hi," she said.

"Are you alright?" He eyed the bottle warily – how much had she drunk? She had never been a heavy drinker, and if she'd really had half a bottle, she'd be unconscious by now. "How much of that have you had?"

Maggie looked at the bottle. "I don't know, but don't worry, it wasn't full when I started. I can't promise I won't try to finish it though." She stood back from the door. "Come on in."

George followed her in, closing the door behind them.

"I'm sorry to bother you – I know I'm probably keeping you from meditating or something," Maggie sniffled.

"It's alright."

“I need a tissue!” She looked upset by this prospect.

“Okay,” George said reassuringly. He looked around. “I don’t see any down here.”

“I think there are some upstairs in the bedroom,” Maggie said.

“Okay,” George said. “Let’s get them.”

“Okay,” Maggie nodded, wiping her eyes on her sleeve. She just stood here, so George turned her around, and hands on her shoulders, guided her upstairs. He sat her down on the bed, and seeing the box of tissues on the nightstand, offered it to her.

“Do you want to tell me what happened?” George asked.

“Well, like I started to tell you, we got in a big fight after I found all these postcards Yoko sent him while we were in India. There must have been 30 of them, and he admitted to sending her postcards too, though I don’t know how many.” Maggie got up and started pacing and waving the bottle around. “Then I found out that he funded one of her crappy exhibits and they even put his name on it.” Maggie stopped in front of George who was now sitting on the bed, holding the tissue box. She yanked one out and wiped her nose and eyes with it and then flung it away. “Well, it wasn’t his actual name, like ‘John and Yoko’s crappy, crappy art exhibit’. They called it ‘Yoko and Me’, like they were a couple or something.” George cringed a bit internally. He’d known about the exhibit and hadn’t told Maggie. He hadn’t seen a need since it had looked as if John were done with Yoko. Clearly she’d found out anyway.

Maggie grabbed another tissue out of the box. “And then he got mad at me for being jealous of their friendship since he’s not jealous of you and me.” Maggie waved the bottle in George’s direction.

“He’s not?” George was never sure – he knew John had been possessive of his women in the past, but for reasons he never understood, John had never complained about George and Maggie’s friendship. Was it because he’d been having Yoko on the side? Surely not. John seemed so dedicated to Maggie - which had been inconvenient for the band when they were on tour, admittedly.

“No, but then he said that if I didn’t let him see Yoko, he’d stop us from being friends, and then he said that maybe he should give me something to be jealous about, and how would I like it if he... if he went and fucked Yoko.” Tears ran down her face at the memory. She needed another tissue.

“But he was just angry, I’m sure he didn’t mean it.”

“I didn’t think so either. But I couldn’t find him and Mo suggested trying Paul’s flat. I don’t know why she did, or how she could have known…” Maggie’s voice broke. “Maybe she didn’t know, and it was just a good guess.” She shrugged.

“Was John at the flat?”

“Yes. Before I could knock on the door, I heard voices. He was there with an American woman – or at least a woman who wasn’t British. They were laughing and then they were…doing it. I could hear them through the door. I left. I didn’t know what else to do.” Maggie sat down on the bed next to George, sobbing.

He gently took the bottle away from her, and put his arm around her and let her cry. She finally looked up and said, plaintively. “George, I really want to get high.”

“Maybe it’s not a good idea, since you’re so upset.”

“Isn’t it supposed to make you laugh? Maybe it will make me find this mess funny.”

“I don’t know if it’ll do that, but I guess it can’t hurt. Maybe it will calm you down.”

Maggie watched as George skillfully rolled the joint together and taught her how to smoke it. She’d seen the others smoke these often enough that it wasn’t that hard to figure out. She coughed and choked a bit first, but pretty soon the smoke took effect and she calmed down enough to talk coherently again. At least, it felt coherent, but between the alcohol and the pot, she didn’t really feel like herself. Right now, however, that was okay. She didn’t want to be herself – she wanted to be anything but.

“Do you know we’ve never set a date to get married?” Maggie said suddenly. “I never cared about anything but being with him, so it never bothered me, but now all of a sudden it does. In my original timeline, he married Yoko as fast as he was able. Maybe the truth is, he doesn’t want to marry me. What’s the matter with me?” she asked George, tears forming in her eyes again.

“Aw, nothing,” George said. He adored Maggie, and if he weren’t already married and if John and Maggie hadn’t been so in love, he would have wanted her for himself.

“I’m difficult.”

“You’re challenging,” he softened her words with his own. “Actually, I think you’re very easy to be around.”

“Not at parties. I’m a giant stick in the mud.”

“No, you’re still easy to be around, even if it’s obvious you’re not comfortable around drugs. Speaking of, why the sudden change of heart about pot tonight?”

Maggie considered this for a second. “I’m too structured. I’m completely closed off.”

“But in a good way,” George teased her.

“No, no, I drove him away,” she insisted. In her drunken, high state, a horrifying afterthought occurred to her. “And I’m going to be forty!”

“When?” George was confused. Maggie was only twenty-seven.

“Someday!” Maggie grabbed another tissue and wiped fruitlessly at the tears streaming down from her eyes again.

“In thirteen years! Actually, weren’t you born in 1980? You won’t really be forty until 2020.”

Maggie shook her head. “Still, it’s there. Just sitting there like this big dead end. And it’s not the same for men. Charlie Chaplin had babies when he was seventy-three.”

“Yeah, but he was too old to pick them up!” George joked, not sure why the conversation had taken this strange turn. It must be the effect of the pot.

Maggie laughed at George's quip but then her laughs turned into sobs.

"'Aw, come here, come here, it's going to be okay." George wrapped her in a hug, and stroked her hair. "It's going to be fine, you'll see."

Maggie was crying against his chest and his shirt was starting to get significantly damp. Knowing she'd be worried about that he said preemptively, "Oh go ahead, this shirt isn't one of my favorites anyway." She had to laugh a bit at this, as George had told her this at least once before. George had always been there when she'd needed him, hadn't he? Her tears slowed a bit.

"It's going to be okay," he said again, a little helplessly. Wishing he could comfort her better. He kissed her forehead. "You're okay? I could go make some tea…" He could use some air himself. The smoke was making him feel relaxed and a bit sleepy, and this bed was looking comfortable.

But Maggie protested when he started to get up, "George, could you just hold me a little longer?"

"Sure." George was content to stay where she was, so he hugged her to him, and rocked her a bit. He kissed her forehead again and then looked down at her to see if she was still crying. Her face was resting on his neck. She wasn't crying, but she looked sad. He bent down to kiss her cheek, just as she looked back up at him. The movement had caused George's lips to nearly brush hers. George planted a light, friendly, kiss on her mouth. No big deal, they'd exchanged social kisses before. Yet somehow, this was different. He didn't know if it was the smoke or her proximity to him, or the fact that she and John appeared

to have broken up and she was so tender and vulnerable in his arms. Neither of them made a move to break away, and her lips were still invitingly close to his. He kissed her lightly once again, and then, feeling her respond to his touch, kissed her more deeply.

Gentle kisses turned passionate and then in the space of minutes, nearly frantic. Their limbs entwined as they half-pulled, half-pushed each other down on the bed.

For a moment Maggie's mind screamed at her to stop, but between the emotions, the alcohol, the pot, and the Beatle that was kissing her.... It was all too much and soon her mind stopped thinking, much less screaming anything at all.

Chapter Thirty-Four

Maggie opened her eyes and when she felt a stab of pain, she promptly closed them again. Her eyes felt gritty, like they'd been rubbed with sandpaper. Between the crying and the pot smoke it was no wonder they were irritated. Wait a minute, pot smoke? Maggie sat bolt upright as last night came back to her, and then had to run for the bathroom where she was very sick. Her head ached and her stomach clenched and unclenched. She'd never felt so hung over. What had she done? After brushing her teeth as gently as she could (even her gums hurt), Maggie crawled back to the bed and got under the covers, shivering.

Maggie cast her mind back to last night and tried to remember exactly what had happened. She remembered the horrible fight with John, and though she wished she could forget, she remembered standing outside the door to Paul's flat listening to John and Yoko laughing together, and then hearing those giggles turn quickly into gasps and moans of pleasure.

She'd come home upset, and called George and he had come over to console her and to help her get high. She'd gotten both high and drunk, and then…oh God. She and

George had kissed, and more than kissed they'd made out. She remembered sinking down onto the bed with him on top of her, and then…nothing. That was the last thing she remembered before waking up. Had they….taken things farther? Surely not. George was a married man, and she…well, she didn't know what she was right now. If John was going to leave her for Yoko, then Maggie could have no guilt about last night except for what she had done to Pattie. Of course, George had never had a problem sleeping with women other than his wife.

"Oh God," Maggie groaned. If she had slept with George, then she'd done the very thing she'd been unfair to Maureen about. Maureen had done nothing to deserve Maggie's suspicion yet. Maggie felt like the biggest hypocrite on the planet. Surely she and George hadn't really…. Maggie looked down at herself. At least she hadn't woken up naked. That would be really damning. But she was wearing a t-shirt and not much else. Oh God.

Just then, George strolled into the bedroom, whistling, and wearing nothing more than a towel from their guest bathroom.

"Oh, you're up!" he said, cheerfully, leaning over and giving her a quick peck on the forehead. "Do you think John would mind me borrowing some clothes?"

Probably not nearly so much as he'd mind George having borrowed his fiancé, Maggie thought grimly. Wait - was she still his fiancé? Not after he'd been with Yoko, that was for sure.

"No, help yourself," she said. She winced at the sound of her own voice. Her head was pounding. "Why don't you look like I feel?"

“A misspent youth,” he grinned at her, as he headed back to the guest bath with the spare change of clothes. “Come downstairs and I’ll make you something to eat.”

“I don’t think I could,” she replied, the nausea rising again.

“I’ll make you my hangover cure then,” he called back at her. “Hop in the shower first and then meet me downstairs.”

“Okay,” she managed. George was acting so casual, maybe nothing had happened. Then Maggie remembered how casually the Beatles treated sex. He’d probably act the same way whether they’d slept together or not. If only she could remember…

Standing in the shower, the hot water beating down on her, she thought about what a mess things had become. She’d lost John to Yoko, and followed that up with possibly sleeping with her friend’s husband, a man who also happened to be her own best friend AND a Beatle. What was she going to do? She didn’t know, but her head was pounding too badly to come up with any solutions.

She dressed slowly and walked carefully down the stairs, trying not to jar her head.

George was in the kitchen. “Here you go,” he handed her two aspirin and a glass of water. “Not too much water, now.”

Maggie sat on one of the barstools in the kitchen and took the pills. She put her head in her hands, unsure what to do now. She should probably ask George exactly what had happened, but she was embarrassed.

The door opened. Both Maggie and George looked up. It was John. And he wasn't alone.

He pulled the woman behind him into the room.

It was Linda.

Maggie gaped at them.

"John? What are…?" George tried, since Maggie was still speechless.

"Hi Maggie!" Linda smiled and hurried over to give her friend a hug.

Maggie hugged Linda back gingerly. "Hi Lin, what are… what are you doing here?"

"Paul and I, we're together! For real this time!" Linda was unable to keep her excitement contained.

"What? How?"

"Well, Mick called and said the Stones needed some photos done. He joked about doing a special 'centerfold' for me," Linda laughed. "At least, I think he was joking! I got on a plane and flew here. You'll never guess who I literally bumped into at Heathrow! Apparently Paul was on his way to New York to see me!" Linda gave Maggie a knowing smile – Maggie's long-ago advice about playing it cool had finally paid off.

"Paul was going to see you?" Maggie still had a splitting headache, but knowing that Paul had finally made up his mind and had chosen Linda made her smile. There'd be a

happy ending for one of them at least. Maggie guessed she herself would be joining Jane in the jilted girlfriend club soon enough. She hoped she and Linda would still be able to stay friends.

"Yes! He told me that he broke things off with Jane and that as soon as it was over, he went home, packed a bag, and rushed off to the airport. He said he couldn't wait another minute to see me, and that he hoped I would give him another chance."

"Oh Lin. I'm so happy for you." Maggie's eyes filled with tears.

"Thanks – but let's not be premature. I haven't agreed to anything just yet. I'm still not sure I'm ready to settle down, let alone with a Beatle. If Paul wants me for real, he has to show me he's serious. But for now this is nice. Besides, there's still Mick's centerfold shot, and I did bring my extra wide lens..." Linda grinned. "Anyway, it was wonderful to see Paul again. We couldn't wait to be alone together. We didn't even make it back to his house," she giggled. "We stopped at Paul's flat and had a little reunion there."

Maggie's head snapped up. "What?"

"We couldn't help ourselves! It'd been so long... We stayed at the flat last night and then went to the studio this morning so Paul could show me all the songs he wanted to work on, which is where we ran into John. John offered to take me home with him so I could see you. Paul's still at the studio. You know how he is."

"You were at the flat with Paul last night?" Maggie repeated.

“That’s right.” Linda looked puzzled.

Oh God, that meant it had been Linda and Paul she’d heard, not John and Yoko. But where had John been all night then? He certainly hadn’t gone straight to the studio after their fight.

Maggie allowed herself to hope, just a little. John hadn’t done anything with Yoko in Paul’s flat. However, Maggie and George had certainly done something, she just wasn’t sure exactly what. The nausea rose in Maggie’s stomach.

“I’ll be right back, Lin. I’m sorry, I’m just not feeling well this morning. But I’m really happy for you and Paul,” she managed before lurching out of her seat and making her way upstairs. She just hoped she’d be able to make it to the bathroom before she was sick. Again.

Chapter Thirty-Five

Maggie felt gentle hands hold her hair back while she threw up. There wasn't much left in her stomach.

"This seems familiar, doesn't it?" It was John. "I said it once, and I'll say it again, you do vomit very gracefully." He handed her a cool cloth. She wiped her face with it and sat down on the floor, unable to move.

She looked up at him, and had no idea what to say first. Finally, she said, "Where were you all night?"

"Ringo's."

Maggie started laughing. She laughed so hard she started crying. It made her head throb.

"Oh, luv, no. Don't cry." John sat down on the floor and took her into his arms. "I should have called. I was an arse to make you worry like that. I guess I thought you'd call there looking for me. But you never did."

"I did call. Mo told me you weren't there."

“She did what? I had no idea. I… I should have just… swallowed my pride and called you. Luv, I’m sorry.”

“Not as sorry as I am,” Maggie sniffled. “Maureen told me that you were at Paul’s flat. So I went over there and I heard...” She couldn’t speak anymore because remembering what she had heard made the tears start up again.

“You heard... oh, you heard Paul and Linda together?” John didn’t know where she was going with this, or why she was so clearly upset. Hadn’t she wanted Paul and Linda together all along? Linda might joke about being a free agent, but it was clear the girl had it bad for his Paulie.

She hiccoughed. “Yes, but I didn’t know it was them. Paul’s housekeeper told me he was at the airport. He was going out of town. Ringo and George were home. That left you. I thought that was you and Yoko. Together.”

“You mean...” John was momentarily shocked.

“Yes. I thought you did it to get back at me. When we were fighting, you said, would I be happy if ... if you...” Maggie couldn’t repeat his words.

“Oh, luv, I’m so sorry I made you think that for even a second. I’ve just never understood how you could be so threatened by Yoko. I’ve told you so many times that she’s just a friend, but you never seem to believe me.” He looked down. “I guess threatening to go sleep with her was exactly the wrong thing to have said and I’m sorry for that.”

John looked around the bedroom and saw all the tissues on the floor, as well as a nearly empty bottle of liquor. Maggie was sure the odor of pot smoke was still detectable.

“Looks like you had a rough night.” John had the grace to look ashamed.

“You have no idea.”

“I’m glad George was here to take care of you,” John said. Maggie winced slightly. “He’s a good friend,” John continued. “But you shouldn’t have needed to call him. I was wrong to say the things I did, and I never should have left you like that.”

He sighed and rubbed his hands through his hair. “I was just so angry that you didn’t trust me that I couldn’t think straight. I ended up just driving around. I must have driven for an hour. I didn’t really want to go to the studio, and Paul wasn’t home, so I ended up at Ringo’s. We hung out at his clubhouse bar and got pissed. Of course then I couldn’t very well drive home, and you hadn’t called yet looking for me. I figured you’d try everyone in the band and you’d figure out where I was eventually. When I didn’t hear from you, I figured you just didn’t want to find me yet. After the way I’d behaved I wouldn’t have blamed you for not wanting to speak to me. So I slept over at Ringo’s. I tried to stay away, to give you more time, so I stopped at the studio, which is where I ran into Paul and Linda. Paul was surprised to see me up so early, but he was too wrapped up in the song he was making a demo of to say much. It’s that new love song he wrote for Linda. ‘I Will,’ I think he’s calling it.”

“It’s a good song. He played it for me in India,” Maggie said, glad to be off the topic of George and what had happened last night. “I’m glad he finally figured out it was for her.”

“I’m not as good as Paul at writing straight out love songs, but I hope you liked “Julia”, since it was sort of for you.”

“It was?” Maggie said in surprise.

“Of course!”

“But...”

“Oh, I know it’s called ‘Julia’, but it was sort of my way of talking to me Mum about being okay now that I have you.”

“But... ‘ocean child’? That’s Yoko!”

“What? No, that’s you. I read in a book that Margaret means ‘pearl’, in Greek or something like that. And pearls are in oceans...” he trailed off lamely. “Okay, I know that’s kind of stretch, but it sounded poetic. Why on earth would you think that was about Yoko?”

“Because that’s what her name means in Japanese.”

“How do you know that?”

“I read it in a book,” Maggie threw her words at him.

“A book about Yoko?”

“A book about the Beatles!” Maggie was almost shouting by this point.

“Why would Yoko be in a book about the... Oh my God.” John felt as if a veil had been lifted and suddenly he could see clearly. “Yoko and I were...?”

“She was your second wife, the big love of your life.” Tears rolled down her face as she finally told John the truth. “You left Cynthia for her. Right after you came home from India. You and she exchanged post cards the whole time you were there. That’s why I freaked out when I saw them. When you got home from India, you sent Cynthia away with Magic Alex so you could have some time with Yoko, and Cyn came home to find Yoko wearing her bathrobe, and then you divorced her.” She was crying harder now. “I’m so sorry, John. I’ve done a lot of stupid things lately, but I think the worst is not telling you the truth. I was just so afraid.”

“I can’t win, can I?” John said dully. “No matter what I do, no matter how hard I try to change, there’s still that other me. You’ll never trust me because of the things he’s done.”

“I do trust you, John. You have changed - just look at your relationships with Julian and even your dad. She’s the one I don’t trust. She wants you. She pursued you in the other timeline and won. I’m terrified that she’s going to make you realize you want her and then you’ll leave me, just like you left Cyn.”

“You’re not Cyn, and I won’t ever leave you.”

“You say that now, but …”

“No, you and me, we are meant to be together. I was miserable without you, and these last few years have been better than I could ever have possibly imagined. I need you. I could never feel that way about anyone else. I told you that in India, luv. Didn’t you believe me then?” John answered his own question. “No, why would you? I followed that up by playing you a song you thought I wrote

for Yoko. What a mess. Luv, please believe me when I say it now. You will never lose me. Not to Yoko. Not to anyone! Oh, luv, why didn't you tell me this sooner?"

"I've wanted to tell you so many times, and I even tried once or twice, but I was always afraid, and I could never make myself get the words out. I was so afraid that if I told you, that you'd realize that she was the one who was meant for you and you'd leave me for her. But instead, I feel like I've spent the last year driving you to her anyway. And after we lost Brian…I felt that since we couldn't save him, maybe some things couldn't be stopped or changed. Some things were meant to be and you and Yoko were one of them. I didn't want that to be true."

She paused. "Do you remember when we were at that party in 1964 and you asked me about your marriage, and I told you that you'd leave Cynthia and Julian for a woman? Well, that woman was Yoko. She came between you and everyone you loved – she came between you and Julian, and you and Paul. Oh John, it's awful. The Beatles break up and end up hating each other..." Trying to get everything out was making her start to sob again.

"Oh, luv, I could never hate Ringo..." John joked soothingly. He gently brushed her hair back.

"Well, okay. No one ends up hating Ringo." Maggie managed a smile for him. "But you walked away from everyone in your life for her. Yoko was your soul mate."

"Slow down, luv, slow down. If it's true that Yoko breaks up my marriage and my band and keeps my son from me, then how does that make her my soul mate?"

“Because you both like avant garde art and music and you both support the same political causes and there was the whole hair/bed/peace thing …I don’t even know – I wasn’t there. All I know is that my whole life it was always ‘John and Yoko’.”

John was quiet. Another truth had just dawned on him. “Luv, you said that on the day I die…that when I died that I was coming home from the recording studio with my wife. That was Yoko?”

“Yes.”

“And when you came back to 1966 because you hadn’t saved me, you said that my wife was the one who talked me out of wearing the bullet proof vest. The one that YOU insisted I wear. The one I wanted to wear because you warned me. You also said she tried to convince me you weren’t real.”

“Yes.”

“What the bloody hell kind of soul mate does something like that?”

“What?”

“Luv, why would I want to marry someone who gets me killed out of some kind of weird sense of jealousy or need to control me? You are the one who time and time again has looked out for me. You risked a second trip to the past, not knowing if you could get home again, because you thought you hadn’t saved me. You’ve done everything you could to keep me off drugs, because you knew what they would do to me. You’ve saved me in every possible way. And you think I would choose Yoko over you?”

“Yes,” she said in a small voice.

“Having common interests is what makes someone a friend. That doesn’t make them my soul mate. Though I find some of Yoko’s ideas about art interesting, I also find her somewhat pushy. I didn’t like that she came to the house and tried to set up a way to see me again. I was going to try to make her back off some, but then we went out of town and it didn’t seem necessary. She was the one who started sending me postcards. I sent her one or two to be polite, but that was all. I didn’t intend on seeking her out when we got home.” John was subdued as he thought of how his relationship with Yoko had appeared from the outside. “I guess the John you knew didn’t make much of an effort to push Yoko away?”

“Hell no. You were like a moth to the flame. Poor Cyn never had a chance. But I know you guys were having problems, so that probably made Yoko that much more appealing.”

“Maybe I was easier for Yoko to push in the other timelines because of the drugs. You said I was pretty out of it then, yes?”

“Yes. You went from pills and alcohol to pot to LSD. By the time you got to LSD and Sgt Pepper, you’d pretty much checked out of things. I think India was a time of clarity for you, and it was during that time that you decided to leave Cynthia for Yoko. And then you and Yoko got into heroin. And then you quit the Beatles.”

“It seems like I threw away a lot of stuff for her, didn’t I.”

“Yes.”

“And you thought you were next.”

“How could I not? I didn’t save Brian. How could I expect to keep you from Yoko, especially when she was pursuing you so hard – and you didn’t even seem to see it? All those postcards… I’m so sorry I destroyed your mail. It was so wrong, but I just couldn’t stand the thought of her…”

“It’s okay, luv. I mean, it’s not okay, but I understand why you did it. Believe me, I spent my formative years being jealous of anyone who so much as looked at Cyn, and if some guy had been sending her postcards, I would have done a lot worse. Of course, that didn’t keep me from screwing around on her, did it? That’s a big part of this, isn’t it? My inescapable past?”

“I think it’s more my past than yours,” Maggie said honestly. “You may not believe it, but I do trust you, despite your past. I think the problem was really what I knew from MY past. I could never forget that I felt like I knew every detail of your courtship with Yoko. The “Yoko and Me” exhibit…”

“Ah.”

“And the postcards. And ‘Julia’.”

“Which was actually about you.”

“How could I know that the song would stay exactly the same, yet mean something different entirely? You wrote other songs in India for Yoko too, you know. There was one called ‘I’m So Tired’. I think you were trying to sort out whether you leave Cynthia and it was making you lose sleep.”

John laughed out loud. “I did write that one, luv! But I wrote it for Paul. He was the one losing sleeping trying to decide between Linda and Jane.”

Maggie felt a smile work at the corners of her mouth. “Really? Oh good. I did like that one.”

John smiled back at her. “So, Miss Margaret, any other lyrics you want to misinterpret?”

“How about the ‘Ballad of John and Yoko’?” she asked innocently.

“The ballad of what? Now you’re just making things up!”

“Actually, I’m not.”

“I wrote a song called “The Ballad of John and Yoko?”

“Yep.”

“Is it as self-indulgent as it sounds?”

“I’m afraid so. Though I actually do like the song. Maybe you’ll come up with the tune anyway and can use it for something else.”

“Like “The Ballad of John and Maggie”?

“Please, NO!”

“Okay, okay.” He put up his hands in surrender.

They were silent.

“I am sorry about last night,” John said seriously. “I never would have thrown Yoko in your face if I’d known the truth. I just wish you would have trusted me enough to tell me sooner.”

“I wish I had too – you just got so mad every time I brought her up.” She sighed and shook her head. “No, I still should have said something. I feel like I really messed things up between us. Things were so good until she came along. I just want to go back to how we were before.”

“We can’t go back... but we can go forward. Just believe me when I say that you’re the only one for me. No more jealousy for either of us. Just trust.”

Maggie nodded. *Don’t bring up George again*, she begged silently. Oh, please let nothing more than drunken kisses have happened with him. She could never tell John the truth. She and George really were just friends. What had happened with him had only been because she was drunk and high and thought she and John were done. She felt horribly guilty about it even so. Would relieving that guilt make it worth the pain she would cause John if she told him? What if telling him created a rift between him and George, and what if that caused the Beatles to break up? No, she could never tell him. It simply wouldn’t be fair to him or anyone else. She would just have to live with the guilt.

“In the interest of going forward, I propose two things, “ John said. “One, is that we forgive each other and let go of everything that’s happened until this moment. A fresh start.”

“That sounds wonderful,” Maggie said with relief.

“The other proposal is this. Miss Margaret, I don’t ever want to give you a reason to doubt me again. I would be lost without you. Please marry me?”

“John, I already told you I would, or have you forgotten that you’ve already asked me that?” She held up her hand with the ruby ring on it.

“I’ve never forgotten, but that’s not what I meant. I want you to marry me right now.”

“Now? Why now?”

“Well, when you know that want to spend the rest of your life with somebody, you want the rest of your life to start as soon as possible. Our life. Together. For better or worse ‘til death do we part.”

“Don’t say that word.”

“Which? Death?”

“Yes. I can’t bear the thought of you dying. The thought of losing you to Yoko was bad enough.”

“Luv, if I had left you for Yoko, when December 8, 1980 rolled around, what would you have done?”

“I would have beaten both Yoko AND that gunman senseless with my bare hands if I had to. Whatever I had to do to save you.”

“You would still try to save me even if I betrayed you?”

“I know what kind of man you are, John. The good and the bad. Knowing all that I know, from all the books and from

all our time together – I don't think there's anything that would have kept me away."

"I don't deserve you, luv."

"No, you don't deserve Yoko," she teased him.

"Saved again!" he laughed.

"Again? But I haven't really saved you yet. From being shot on that day."

"But we've changed things, haven't we? I'm not with Yoko, so I won't be in the wrong place in the wrong time in 1980, will I?"

"Maybe, but now it will be impossible to predict HIS whereabouts, won't it? We won't know what could happen or when."

"Well, that's life, isn't it, luv? For most of us, anyway. Knowing that there's no certainty in any of it…"

"That's the worst part. I knew what would happen to Brian, I warned him and I still didn't save him. What if I can't save you no matter what?

"Then that's the way it goes. What matters is that we keep trying."

"And we will," Maggie promised. A thought occurred to her. "Maybe we can hire a private detective sometime in the late 70s – we've got deep pockets, maybe we can make sure we keep tabs on HIS whereabouts. If we know what he's up to, we can be forewarned."

“That’s the spirit, luv! It’s not only me you know. There’s George to consider.” His eyes widened suddenly, as if he’d had a flash of insight. “Wait - Linda... she’s the one with the breast cancer?”

Maggie nodded. “And there’s Mal. And Maureen. I can’t let her die, even if part of this mess is her fault.”

“You should say something to her, luv. It wasn’t right what she did.”

“Maybe I will. I don’t want to be at odds with her like this. There are... reasons for how I feel about her, but I think I need to get past them. Or rather, get past MY past and the things I think I know about you all. Fresh start, as you said.”

“I think that’s a good idea.”

“There’s one more thing,” Maggie swallowed hard, wanting to skip this part, but in the interest of fairness, she had to tell him everything he’d lose by staying with her. “One more thing I’ve taken from you...You had a son with Yoko.”

John studied her for a moment, and then gave her a soft smile. “Maybe he will be our son this time around.”

“I’d like that,” she said, feeling suddenly shy.

“Shall we see what we can do about it?” John pulled her up from the floor.

“Now?”

“Now, later, tomorrow. It doesn’t matter, luv. I’ve told you. We have all the time in the world.”

“Tomorrow never knows, though, does it?” Maggie said, playing on the title of one of John’s songs.

He grinned and kissed her nose. “No, but today does. And today we are alive and together, and that is all I care about.” With that John pulled her close. “Will you marry me, then?”

“Of course I will.”

He lightly kissed her eyes and her nose, and then her lips. Her face was a bit puffy and red from crying, but he thought she’d never looked more beautiful. She was all his, and he swore he would do his best to see that she never cried because of him again.

George made Linda breakfast as she chattered about her night with Paul, and he managed to put together part of the story. Clearly John had not been with Yoko, and he hoped that Maggie and John were working things out upstairs. The fact that they hadn’t come back down yet was good. They were so right for each other - they just needed to learn to trust each other better. He hoped Maggie didn’t feel guilty about last night. She’d simply needed comforting, and he was happy he’d been there to do it.

What a mess this whole situation had been. Things were much simpler and less dramatic between he and Pattie;

there was no third party like Yoko to interfere in their relationship.

Paul popped in just as George had set the breakfast food on the table. Paul looked tentative when he saw two place settings. "Room for a third?"

George smiled at him. "There's always room for you, Paul." He found that he even meant it. George grabbed another plate and split the eggs three ways. Paul grinned back at George, and leaned over to kiss Linda.

"Hey, Paul," George said as they all sat down to eat. "Maybe after breakfast I can play you my new song."

"I'd like that, George. I really would."

Linda watched the two men studying each other. Maggie had said there'd been some tension between them in India. That was bound to happen, she supposed - especially in a band like this. But she knew that Paul loved the Beatles like nothing else. She leaned her head against Paul's shoulder, and he looked down at her and smiled.

Peacefully the three of them ate their breakfast. The sun broke through the clouds and poured through the window, bathing them in its light. George felt it warm him inside and out. The start of a new tune was floating in his head, and he thought he just might be able to turn it into a song. He smiled as he gazed out the window. It looked like it was going to be a beautiful day.

Epilogue

One week later...

The crowds pushed and shoved trying to get a glimpse of the happy couple. Girls were crying. It was tantamount to a National Tragedy for a Beatle to get married. And to an AMERICAN. Finally the couple escaped into their car, which slowly drove off.

John and Maggie watched, peeping through one of the windows of the Marylebone Register Office.

"Well, I guess Paul is officially off the market," John sighed. "I wouldn't have thought Linda would have caved so quickly!"

"You Beatles are awfully hard to resist..." Maggie giggled. "Are you sad to lose Paulie?"

"Well, he was me first love..."

Maggie pouted. "And what am I?"

"My wife!" he grinned at her, as he wrapped his arms around her and kissed her soundly. "Was it really just a few days ago that we were being pushed and shoved into a car by mourning fans, Mrs. Lennon?"

“Exactly four days ago, Mr. Lennon. Two Beatles married in less than the space of a week.” She shook her head. “It really is a national tragedy.”

“Just so you know, Mrs. Lennon,” John broke off to kiss her again, “I wouldn’t have minded if you’d kept your own name. Or I could have changed my middle name or something. I know women in your time have more options.”

“Thank you,” she said seriously. She knew he had changed his (admittedly hated) middle name to match Yoko’s last name, so she did appreciate the gesture and knew he meant what he said. It was the 60s and changing one’s name was conventional for women - but John was never a man for convention.

“Maybe I can use my own name professionally. After all, it wouldn’t look good to have a Mrs. Lennon running Apple, would it? What if she showed favoritism to her favorite Beatle?”

“Ringo?”

“Of course! Everyone loves Ringo!” She smiled at John and ran her fingers through his relatively short hair. She was relieved he didn’t look gaunt, like the John of the late 60s that she remembered. He looked young and healthy, and nearly like he had just stepped out of Help! – all except for the glasses he wore. In his wedding attire, he looked adorable, and perfect for his role as Paul’s best man. “But I’m happy to be Mrs. Lennon, otherwise, thank you!”

“Is that right, Mrs. Lennon?”

“That’s right. I’ll need your last name for credibility when I write my tell-all book.”

“Remember, you promised I could illustrate it.”

“All right.” She smiled at the thought of what such a book might look like.

“You know,” John said with a wink and a leer, “Sex does sell. How about we spend a week in Scotland and see if we can give you something good to write about.”

“It’s a deal!” Maggie said. “Wait, did Paul give you the use of his farm? Won’t he and Linda want it?”

“Oh, they’re going to honeymoon in America. After they see Heather and the rest of Linda’s family, they’re going to spend some time at Niagara Falls, because that is what American honeymooners do. Then they’re packing Linda and Heather’s life up and they are moving to England to stay.”

“That’s wonderful.”

“Let’s go home and get packed ourselves, Mrs. Lennon. We’ve got a train to catch!”

Hand in hand, they left the Register Office by the side entrance, where their car was waiting. Only a few fans had stuck around, and they made only a half-hearted attempt at keeping John and Maggie from getting in the car. What was the use? The Beatles were all married. They only thing they had left to live for was the Beatles’ next album.

Five weeks later...

Maggie woke up feeling vaguely nauseated. She sat up carefully. No, she was definitely going to throw up. She raced for the bathroom and made it just in time. She checked to make sure she hadn't woken John, and then rinsed her mouth out. She still didn't feel well.

Maggie studied her face in the mirror, and then her body. She was late, but she hadn't had any of the other symptoms of being pregnant until now. Tentatively she poked at her stomach. Could it be? Was she pregnant? If she were, she would be what, six weeks along?

She and John had been somewhat lackadaisical with their birth control for some time. Clearly all the Beatles were, as Cynthia and Mo had both been pregnant when they'd gotten married. Maggie wondered about Linda. She'd been pregnant when Paul had married her the first time around. Poor Pattie would never be able to get pregnant, but Maggie remembered that George and Olivia had married a month after Dhani was born.

John had said from the beginning that he'd be happy to have more children with Maggie, and that if it happened, it happened. Well, it looks like it had happened. Maggie sat down on the edge of the bath, clutching her stomach. Maybe this baby would be their Sean. She grimaced. She'd never liked the name, perhaps because of the association with Yoko.

George!

Thinking of him and Olivia brought the memory back. Six weeks ago, she may or may not have slept with George.

That meant that the only thing that was certain was that this baby's father was a Beatle.

Her head dropped into her hands and she had to force herself not to cry. What was she going to do now?

THE END

Please be sure to look for the third book in our trilogy:

Real Love

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