

Ms. Gloriella Desjardin
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Jack and Bristol, reporters for the Dunes Herald, waited patiently with their cameras and notepads nearby. Their van was parked outside the small estate of the prey that they had been assigned to cover, the reclusive Gloriella Desjardin—a mid-sixties heiress. She had been a media darling and disappeared into seclusion after reportedly undergoing a cosmetic procedure with bad results. Ms. Desjardin had not been seen in public since and has never granted anyone an interview.

A recent generous charitable gift given to a local homeless shelter by Gloriella however had received notice in the local media and resurrected her story. This prompted John Samuelson, the Dunes Chief Editor, to assign Jack and Bristol to bird dog the heiress to try get an interview with her.

Jack stubs out his cigarette on the heel of his shoe and tosses it onto the gathering pile of butts beside the news van that had been their camp for the past two days. He turns and leans on the driver's side window. "I hear this dame is a real wingnut—vegetarian, a cooty freak, wearing gloves all the time."

Bristol smirks. "More like a macadamia nut, I'd say. She might be a little strange, but she's rich as hell." She bit off a piece of peanut brittle and crunched it down as she stared at the mansion beyond the gate they were parked in front of. Then, while picking at a tooth with her chewed down finger nail where caramel was stuck, she thought she saw movement at one of the windows and froze, her mouth fixed in a dental pose. She watched to discern whether it was an illusion or had someone been watching them.

After a few minutes passed and Bristol had scrapped away the last bit of candy from her molar, the curtain in the tall window over the main entrance moved again. A gloved hand pulled the curtain back and a veiled face drifted into the bright late day sun painting that side of the building. A slight figure of a woman with light hair pulled back, stood in full view. Her left hand held the curtain to the side. The stoic figure looked directly at the van.

Bristol picked up the field glasses lying on the dashboard. With delicate adjustments, she brought the veiled face into perfect focus. Her hair held back with barrettes on each side and a white veil covering her nose and mouth, Gloriella was watching them. Her sad piercing eyes seemed fixed on her, Bristol thought. Wanting eyes... beckoning eyes... eyes seeking to meet another's... whispering eyes... whispering, *I want to be with you, but it can't.*

Then her head bent slowly forward in painful acceptance of her destiny. She turned from the window and slowly let the curtain erase her.

Bristol turned and looked at Jack, who was staring at the window. He said, "Did you see that?"

"Yeah, I had the glasses on her. Come on; let's go back to the office. We can't do this."

Jack hopped into the driver's seat and started the engine. "John's going to be pissed if we don't get a story out of this."

"Let him be pissed. We need to let this lady be."

"You got a story for me?" John Samuelson rocked back in the ancient solid oak executive chair, creaking as its old joints were exercised. He flicked the ashes off his cigarette into the large porcelain ashtray. A sign on it faced all visitors and read; *I'll smoke any damned where I want. If you don't like it, leave.* No one bothered to enforce the company wide, no smoking rule in the fourth floor northwest corner office that had been John Samuelson's domain for over thirty years.

Bristol and Jack stood before his cluttered desk with their camera satchels and brief cases strapped over their shoulders. Bristol shook her head. "I can't do this one boss. I looked into her eyes, and can't do this."

Jack just shrugged his shoulders deferring to his ranking partner. Bristol was an award-winning journalist eight years his senior and he is her apprentice.

“What the hell do you mean you looked into her eyes? Did you get to meet her?”

“No, John, we did not get to meet her, but we saw her at the window looking at us. She had this look, John. It’s hard to explain, but it was this look that drove a spike into my heart. I can’t bother this woman. She does so many kind and wonderful charitable things for the community and I think she just wants to be left alone.”

John’s phone rings and he holds up his hand to Jack and Bristol and picks up the receiver. “Dunes Herald, John Samuelson Chief Editor.” John swung his chair square to his desk and sat forward. “Ya, we had a reporting crew out there, as a matter of fact their standing in front of me right now. Uh-huh. Sure.” John covered the mouth piece and looked with an excited smile at Bristol. “Here, it’s for you.” Then he sat back and put his feet up on the desk and laced his fingers behind his head as he took a long drag off his cigarette.

“Hello, this is Bristol Shanahan.” She smiled when a sweet voice of compassion and innocence gently caressed the receiver. “Hello, Ms. Shanahan, this is Gloriella Desjardin. Were you the young lady sitting in the truck outside of my gate today?”

“Yes ma’am that was me.”

“Why did you leave?”

“Well” Bristol hesitated, uncertainty choked off her ability to formulate an appropriate answer.

“I understand that you are an award-winning journalist held in high regard by your contemporaries, Ms. Shanahan. Surely you are able to articulate an answer to such a simple question.” The impish teasing in Gloriella’s voice was comforting and Bristol smiled at herself, shaking her head in embarrassment for choking on the question. That Ms. Desjardin knew so much about her was flattering and gave her confidence to explain.

“I saw you in the window.”

“Yes, and I saw you and that young man.”

“Jack.”

Ms. Desjardin gave a little hmmm. “Yes, young cub reporter Jack Delaney. Tell him, for me, that his habit of smoking so much is disturbing. He should really consider quitting. You will do that for me won’t you, Ms. Shanahan, tell him that is?”

Jack watched Bristol turn toward him and nod her head affirmatively. “Yes ma’am, I’ll tell him.” Jack hiked his shoulders up and pathetically mouthed. “What?” Bristol shook her head no, whispering, “Later.”

“Tell me, Ms. Shanahan, what did you see in the window that made you leave me?”

Bristol looked directly at her boss and said. “A woman full of compassion who brings so much beauty to the world through her giving and generosity that it seemed the least the world owed her is the courtesy of the solitude she’s chosen.”

“Thank you for your kindness, Ms. Shanahan. You are a rare one. May I ask a favor of you?”

“Why, of course, Ms. Desjardin.”

“Would you join me for coffee some morning, I have a story to tell.”