

Bonkers

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Chapter 1

Linda Brogan swung the blue convertible around a tight corner. 'Left side of the road!' Jack Millar yelled from the passenger seat, fearing for his safety and the paintwork of his car.

She over-corrected, almost hit the kerb and corrected again.

'Jesus, Linda!' he yelled.

Her insides felt like jelly from the near miss. She hated – *hated* – being criticized. Jack was supposed to adore her, not disapprove – that was her husband, Dan's job. Linda's temper flared along with her insecurities. 'Why can't you drive on the right side of the road in New Zealand like everyone else?'

By everyone else, she meant the United States.

Relieved that she'd slowed down, Jack reached out to stroke her thigh through her trousers. 'Sorry, darling. I just thought you'd done more driving since you'd been here.'

Linda pouted. He didn't know she hadn't driven since Dan and her moved to New Zealand or that she'd never owned a driver's license, here or at home, because she couldn't pass the test. He didn't know she couldn't read and the only reason she could only tell her left from right was because she wore her watch on her left wrist and when she *tried* to write, she used her right hand.

Unlike Dan, Jack wasn't interested in her mind. Their relationship was mostly conducted in bed which was getting boring. Dan definitely had the edge on Jack in that department. She had to coax Jack to let her drive his precious vintage convertible.

The thrill of driving fed her reckless, miserable soul.

People who knew she was dumb were shocked when she managed to get a doctor to propose without getting pregnant first. The rest saw how she looked and weren't surprised at all.

Linda remembered the night she met Dan at a party. Remembered him leaning against the wall watching her quietly. His height made him hard to miss but it was the fact he didn't approach her or stare like every other guy in the room that made him stand out. Linda couldn't work out why he was different. She was dressed in a tiny white top and her tightest blue jeans and had the attention of every male in the room and plenty of their jealous girlfriends as well. So why not him?

He was a challenge she couldn't ignore; unlike the girlfriend glued to his side.

Initially, Linda went after Dan to prove a point, to reassure herself she was a desirable, valuable woman. Up close he was gorgeous and shy and smart. *Very* smart. There was a rocky moment when it became clear he saw through her act, that he saw *her*. Linda was hooked.

The early days of their marriage were wonderful. Linda felt cherished and safe, that she'd finally managed to escape her lowly upbringing. Dan came from a nice family and always wanted to be a doctor. He was adored by his patients and wanted to specialize in orthopaedic surgery. Linda spent their money on looking good and creating a beautiful home. Unfortunately, Dan saw filling it with kids as the next step in their story. They hadn't discussed having children before they got married; Dan assumed Linda would want a family and Linda didn't share she had no intention of ruining her figure or that the thought of sharing his love with somebody else terrified her.

Things started to unravel after that. Accepting the position at Auckland's Starship Children's hospital and moving down under

was Dan's final attempt to rescue their marriage but it hadn't worked. Linda saw even less of him. She didn't know anyone and rebuffed the overtures of friendship extended by the wives of Dan's colleagues. She was bored and angry and wanted to go home. Dan wouldn't budge.

Linda impatiently shook off Jack's stroking hand. Her rejection of the wives didn't extend to the husbands of Dan's colleagues. The affair with Jack was a last-ditch attempt to make Dan give in, and it didn't work either. He became even more distant. Last night, in desperation, Linda set things up at a barbecue they were invited to so that Dan would catch her with Jack, believing jealousy would bring Dan to his senses and he'd fight for her.

But he walked away. Looked at her in disgust and walked away leaving her to face the shocked, condemning stares of onlookers.

The urge to pee again was a reminder of another consequence of her hasty actions. She wanted to be Dan's wife, not the mother of Jack Millar's kid.

Linda's eyes filled with tears. She'd killed her marriage.

Dumb... dumb... dumb...

There was an intersection with a roundabout up ahead. Linda ignored the sign to give way to traffic and stamped on the gas pedal.

The blue convertible shot across the road. She saw the shocked face of the girl driving the car crossing the roundabout in front of her, heard Jack scream, and felt him make a grab for the steering wheel. She crashed into the door of the other car and shrieked in agony as the front of the convertible crumpled around her legs. There weren't any airbags to cushion her from the impact. Her forehead smashed against the windscreen. And the pain was gone.

The day had already started badly for the driver of the other car. Lisa Jackson's gynaecologist had delivered the news she'd been

dreading for years: her endometriosis had finally outfoxed the medical establishment. All the pills she'd taken and the painful, humiliating surgical procedures and suctioning and scraping Janice Millar had tried hadn't worked. The lining of her womb continued to go AWOL each month, escaping to places it had no right to be, leaving Lisa doubled over in agony and held captive by a cupful of fluid most women excreted with nothing more than some tummy cramps and a craving for chocolate.

All that was left was a hysterectomy. Her future was teaching other women's children. She'd never have any of her own.

The sunstrike was typically bad for an early night in March. It was nearly impossible to see out the windscreen, let alone keep an eye on the car in front. Lisa drove slowly, squinting at the white line in the middle of the road. She stopped at the roundabout near her house and checked to the right for traffic. A blue convertible driven by a woman with long, black streaming behind her seemed far enough away to drive on. Lisa turned onto the road circling the flower-crested concrete island at the centre of the roundabout.

Lisa never saw the blue car suddenly accelerate but she heard the sound of a car skidding as the driver stamped on the brakes to avoid colliding with the convertible when it failed to give way. She heard the squeal of brakes and the blare of car horns and saw the blue car hurtling towards her a split-second before it smashed into the car door.

The violence of the impact and the sickening sound of glass shattering and metal tearing made her scream. The door of her old Mazda caved inwards. Metal shards speared Lisa's right side and tore into her flesh.

And the world stopped.

Chapter 2

Lisa opened her eyes and looked about frantically for the blue car.

Where had it gone?

She touched her right side. It didn't hurt.

She wasn't in her car. She wasn't even on the road. She didn't recognize anything about the place she was in. Where *was* she?

Lisa whimpered. She had a very bad feeling about this.

Surely, she hadn't ...?

Wasn't there supposed to be a bright light at the end of a long tunnel, and voices urging her to head towards it?

She was lying on what felt like a divinely soft reclining chair. She couldn't recall ever feeling so comfortable in her life, in fact, if she took a moment to calm down, she felt warm, safe, and protected.

'Thank Christ!' Lisa mumbled fervently. 'At least I know I'm not dead.'

'We don't say that here, dear,' a female voice remarked pleasantly.

A woman with a blonde bouffant hairstyle reminiscent of a 'fifties lacquered helmet complete with a pink bow was sitting beside her, smiling complacently. She had pink-frosted cupid's-bow lips, blue eyes fringed with thick, black false eyelashes that resembled road sweepers, and a bright green silk scarf knotted about her neck. She sat with her knees primly together and her pink-tipped hands folded on her lap. A pink badge clipped to her white tunic read *Moira*.

She looked like an air stewardess. Lisa and her sister Sherry were convinced the only people who wore scarves were air stewardesses, bank tellers, supermarket-checkout girls and, of course, porn stars, although why a scarf was necessary when somebody was buck naked and getting it on for the camera was a mystery. They'd come to this conclusion after a hen party when one of the hens decided what was good for the boys would be good for the girls. Lisa and Sherry were so bored they invented the scarf theory to liven things up.

Moira definitely didn't look like porn-star material.

'We don't mind *Good Heavens* or, at a push, *Ye Gods*, but I'm afraid we find blasphemous use of His name upsetting and strongly discourage it,' Moira explained.

Lisa blinked. What the hell was she talking about?

'I heard that,' Moira said reprovingly.

She blinked again. Her eyelids seemed to have taken on a life of their own. 'Where on earth am I? What *is* this place?'

Moira smiled placidly. 'Hardly earth, dear.'

She wasn't making any sense. This did *not feel* right.

Lisa looked about anxiously. She seemed to be in some sort of room, but she couldn't see any walls or windows. The light was soft and she had the impression it was a busy place with a lot of people coming and going, but she couldn't see anybody apart from Moira.

Lisa sat up. She felt *weird*. Her body seemed to just flow into the new position without the usual shift and play of muscle and bone to get it there. Her heart began to pound, or at least it should have. She put her hand on her chest but couldn't feel anything. No vibration. No comforting thuds. The dull ache low in her belly was gone too. She couldn't remember the last time she'd been totally pain free.

'Where am I?' she quavered.

Moira laid a hand on her arm and murmured soothingly, 'You're

safe. That's the main thing — you're safe.'

'Who are you? Where's my mum and dad? I was in an accident! They'll be worried about me!'

'We know, dear.'

Something was very wrong. She was twenty-seven years old but right now Lisa needed her parents to make her feel safe.

Moira stroked her arm with a touch as soft as thistledown. It gave Lisa the creeps. She pulled her elbow against her side to avoid the other woman.

'Your parents won't be along until much later.' Moira soothed. 'But there are people on their way to collect you; people you know.'

Lisa decided Moira wasn't dealing with a full deck.

Moira looked offended.

A tall, solid-looking man wearing white trousers and a white tunic suddenly appeared beside them. He had a lot of dark auburn hair, twinkling blue eyes, and he was humming 'Stairway to Heaven' under his breath. His nametag read *George*.

He beamed at Lisa and asked, 'Alright, Lisa?' in a cockney accent.

She gazed at him helplessly. Who was he and was he going to be as weird as Moira? George laughed and winked at her. Lisa winced. So Moira wasn't the only one who could do the Vulcan mind meld.

George turned to Moira and lowered his voice. 'The other one will be coming through in a moment.'

'Yes,' She frowned. 'I just heard. I can't hand Lisa over until somebody arrives to collect her. It's against the rules.'

George's twinkly expression faded. 'We can't just leave her floating here,' he pointed out. 'Listen . . . can you hear that noise? That's the other one. She ain't coming quietly.'

Lisa was eavesdropping unashamedly. Did George just say they couldn't leave her *floating here*?

The sound of a female voice protesting loudly fractured the

calm, soft atmosphere. Several figures in white were attempting to usher someone gently past them. Lisa couldn't see what they were walking on or even *if* they were walking. She glimpsed a woman with long, black hair through a gap between the people in white. The woman looked as scared as Lisa felt. She was slapping furiously at her attendants.

'I shouldn't be here!' She shouted in an American accent. 'Take your hands off of me *now!*' She paused. 'How did you do that? I can feel you, but I can't see your hands! Who *are* you people?'

It was reassuring to know she wasn't the only person who was feeling freaked out by this place.

Lisa craned her neck to get a closer look at the woman. She was tall and slender and wore expensive looking silky mauve tank-top and black silk trousers. The white figures fluttered about her, alternately soothing and cajoling. One of them was carrying a baby boy with large, brown eyes. He looked on curiously, apparently unconcerned by the noise.

'Can't you take that child away?' the woman demanded angrily.

'No, Linda. He came with you.'

'Came with me? How could he? I've never set eyes on him in my life!'

Lisa detected an edge of hysteria in her voice.

The group surrounding Linda parted further, giving Lisa a clear view of her face. She had flawless white skin, big clear blue eyes and long black hair. Lisa sucked in a breath. It was the driver of the blue convertible.

She clutched at George and pointed. 'She hit me! In her car!'

He patted her shoulder. 'Don't let it worry you, Lisa. She'll be gone soon.'

Moira tutted. 'Oh dear, this is most irregular. They're not supposed to see each other. Wait here, I'm going to find out where Lisa's grandparents have got to.'

And she was gone.

Lisa gaped. Moira had just disappeared — she had literally vanished — and her grandparents were all dead. She stared at George in alarm.

He looked annoyed and muttered what sounded like ‘Silly cow’ under his breath before he reached out and patting her comfortingly on the shoulder again. ‘There now, don’t get yourself all worked up.’

He led her away from Linda and the group surrounding her. Lisa wasn’t aware of taking any steps, but she was moving, literally *floating* along. If she weren’t so scared, she might have enjoyed the experience. She felt better as the noise retreated; George made her feel safe.

He smiled down at her. ‘Might be better to try and not to think about that scarf joke.’

‘What scarf joke?’

‘I think you know the one I mean, the joke you had with Sherry.’

‘How- how did you know about that?’

And how did he know she had a sister called Sherry? Come to think of it, *how* did he and Moira know her name was Lisa?

‘I heard you,’ George answered as if she’d spoken out loud. ‘Just count your blessings Moira hasn’t yet. She tends to listen out for the blaspheming and swearing, but that doesn’t mean she won’t hear what you think of her scarf if you’re not careful.’ His eyes started twinkling again. ‘How about I tell you a joke?’

Lisa gave a slightly hysterical laugh. ‘OK.’

‘Good girl,’ he said approvingly. ‘My dog has no nose.’

She gazed at him in bewilderment. ‘How does he smell?’

‘Awful.’ George flung back his head, laughing uproariously.

Lisa laughed weakly at his ridiculous dad joke. It must be shock.

‘Have you ever heard of a racehorse called Dusty Carpet?’

‘Um . . . no, I don’t think so.’

‘It’s never been beaten.’

Once again, he roared with laughter.

Lisa laughed shrilly. ‘George?’

‘Yes?’

‘Am I dead? Is this heaven?’

He hesitated. ‘I’m sorry, mate. There’s rules about what I can tell you. I *can* tell you that this isn’t heaven. It’s sort of like a waiting room.’

‘So I’m not dead?’

He sighed and shook his head. ‘Can’t answer that.’

Lisa regarded him with growing frustration. ‘Are you an angel?’

‘I haven’t been here long enough. I’m . . . in training, shall we say?’

She pounced. ‘Hah! So you’re an angel-in-training?’

‘There aren’t any angels, Lisa — well, not like you mean.’

Lisa wondered why she hadn’t developed a thumping headache by now. She’d never felt so clear-headed, and so utterly confused.

George began humming ‘I’m an Angel in Paradise.’ Just her luck to get the only angel in training - or whatever he was - who told bad jokes and hummed. After a few bars, he changed to ‘Heaven on the Seventh Floor.’

Lisa jumped when Moira suddenly reappeared. Jesus Christ! The woman was like a bloody jack-in-the-box.

‘You really must stop that!’ Moira scolded and turned to George. ‘A quiet word, please, George?’ Her pink Cupid’s bow lips were pursed tight as an anal sphincter. Lisa had a feeling Moira wasn’t a fan of her, or of George’s little medley of hits either. *She leaned closer to eavesdrop on their conversation.*

‘It has been decided one of them will be going back,’ Moira said sotto voce.

‘Which one?’ George didn’t attempt to lower his voice. Lisa suspected he was making sure she could hear.

‘Lower your voice!’ Moira hissed. ‘I think it will be the *other one*.’

‘Her? I’ve seen her life play. Why should she get a second chance? She made her poor husband’s life a misery.’

‘That’s not for us to decide! I know you’re new, but you must understand there are rules that must be obeyed.’

‘Rules,’ George grumbled. ‘It’s wrong that the bad ’un gets another go round and the good ’un stays back.’

‘That’s none of your business,’ Moira insisted. ‘You stay with Lisa until word comes through and then escort back whomever is chosen.’

She disappeared again.

George was frowning. Lisa watched him. What did it mean that one of them had to go back? *Go back where?* She tried to form the words to ask but her mind felt like a scrabble board missing the letters.

‘Will you be alright if I leave you for a minute? I’ll come right back.’

Lisa shrugged. ‘OK.’

George disappeared.

She didn’t understand why she suddenly felt so calm. She didn’t know where she was or what had happened to her since she’d been hit by the car, and she was in the company of people who could vanish and reappear and read her thoughts. Her biggest concern was that her family would be worrying about her. Apart from that, she was in no hurry to leave George and his jokes.

Her recliner reappeared. Lisa settled into it gratefully. Soon, she’d wake up, at home, in bed. It would great if the visit to her gynaecologist had been a dream too.

George returned. Lisa waited patiently while he stood beside her thinking. Finally, he said, ‘Sometimes rules need to be broken.’

‘What do you mean?’ she asked warily. ‘George, you’re not going to do anything that’ll get you into trouble with Moira, are you?’

He grinned. ‘Not a lot she can do about it, is there?’

Lisa found herself on her feet again and George’s big hand in

the small of her back. He started to hum, 'Heaven Must Be Missing an Angel' as they drifted away from the calm, soft light towards a brighter one.

She was reluctant to leave the oasis of peace behind her. 'Where are we going?'

'Somewhere you should be. Just close your eyes, Lisa, love. Close your eyes . . .'

She was floating down a long tunnel, in the opposite direction this time, past all the other people she sensed around her but couldn't see. She popped out of the tunnel into bright lights and noise and saw her sister, Sherry standing in the middle of a corridor in her police uniform. She was struggling with another officer Lisa recognized as Dillon Taylor. Dillon been her boyfriend before the endometriosis took over her life.

Sherry was looking furious and desperate at the same time. Dillon wore the mask-like expression of somebody in deep shock hanging onto their self-control by their fingertips. He gripped Sherry tightly by the upper arms and told her repeatedly that she couldn't go in there.

Lisa reached out as she went by but couldn't stop. Her fingertips grazed Sherry's forearm, but Lisa couldn't feel her. 'Sherry!'

Sherry stopped struggling and turned sharply towards Lisa, a puzzled expression on her face. She looked at Dillon and demanded, 'Did you hear that? It sounded like Lisa!'

Lisa opened her mouth to try again when a tremendous force seemed to lift her up and fling her at the double doors behind Sherry and Dillon. She screamed, convinced she was going to smash into them and was suddenly she on the other side.

There were people in blue scrubs clustered around somebody on a trolley. Bags and plastic containers of fluid hung from poles attached to the bed and monitors flashed and beeped. A woman wearing a blue apron was guiding an x-ray machine out of a

doorway opposite. Lisa felt herself being sucked towards the bed. She was going to crash into the people and the person on the trolley. She flung up her arms and covered her face.



There was something in her throat and she was choking on it.

Lisa tried to raise her hands to claw at her mouth, but they seemed to be weighed down. She could feel something wrapped about her forearms, stopping her from lifting them. She couldn't get at the thing in her mouth, and she couldn't scream for help because of it. Inside her head, she cried out for George, but his warm, reassuring presence was gone.

There was a rush of activity around her, female voices speaking quickly, issuing orders.

‘ – coming round – ‘

‘ – give her a bolus and get her under again – ‘

Just before she began to slip away, Lisa heard someone say, ‘Better let her husband know she's come round.’

She hoped they would think to call her parents when they called the other woman's husband.



There were so many dreams. At least, Lisa thought they were dreams until she realized that the people who spoke to her were real. Sometimes she opened her eyes and looked at them before falling asleep again.

It was a strange twilight world. The lights were bright, and the people touching and talking to her wore dark-green uniforms and didn't speak quietly. They were kind in a brisk sort of way. Lisa wanted to ask them if they could read her mind, but she was too tired and couldn't stay awake. Part of her expected to see George and Moira, but this place wasn't imbued with a wonderful sense of peace, and she hurt everywhere.

Gradually, Lisa became more aware of her surroundings. Whenever she woke, she was lying in bed, and she was never alone. She guessed she must be in hospital and the voices and belonged to the nurses looking after her. Lisa began to recognize some of their faces and the routine of bed baths and turns from her left side to her right.

‘Don’t want you getting any bedsores, do we?’ one of them said by way of explanation.

Her throat really hurt. It was so sore she avoided swallowing, but the nurses kept making her sip water through a straw, explaining they wanted to get rid of her drip. What drip? Who cared about that when her throat felt as if somebody had taken a piece of sandpaper to it?

Her head hurt too. It felt as if it had swollen to twice its size, and there seemed to be something wrong with her right leg, too. Apart from that, Lisa was content to let them do what they wanted, provided she could fall back into the deep, dreamless oblivion of sleep.

Sometimes a man came to poke and prod her. He forced her to open her eyes and pay attention. Lisa didn’t like him. She tried to do as he asked, but the lure of sleep was seductive, and she let herself slip into it and away from his demands.

‘Time to get her out of here and onto the ward,’ Lisa heard him say as if she were a car that had broken down in an inconvenient place. ‘Let’s get her moved.’

Chapter 3

A plump nurse with dark-brown, curly hair said, ‘My name’s Nancy and I’ll be looking after you today.’

She placed a small, white plastic bulb attached to a lead in Lisa’s hand. ‘Here’s your call bell. I’ve safety-pinned it to the sheet so you won’t lose it. I’ll be popping in and out all morning. Once you’ve had your bath, we’ll get you up in a chair for an hour or so.’

The doctor who poked and prodded had got his way.

Lisa had been transferred along a bewildering series of corridors and in and out of elevators until she reached a room with a window and bright sunlight that hurt her eyes. The nurses were different, and they didn’t stay with her all the time.

Being left alone made her feel anxious. After wanting nothing more than to be left in peace, she now felt like a baby abandoned by its mother. Nancy’s maternal figure in its white uniform represented security.

The bath and hour sitting in a chair exhausted Lisa. She found out her right leg felt heavy because it was encased in a plaster cast from the knee down. When it came to plaster casts, Lisa was a pro; she’d been born with a left club foot and spent endless months in and out of plaster. The cast brought back memories of photos she’d seen of herself as a baby with her leg in plaster after operations to correct the deformity.

As for her head, it had gone from feeling like it was stuffed full of cotton wool to pounding as if the entire cast of *Riverdance* were

rehearsing inside her skull. It was hard to speak; her mouth didn't feel like it belonged to her. It felt odd. Her lips felt fuller, and her mouth seemed bigger. When she ran her tongue over them, her chipped upper incisor was perfectly smooth. It took several tries before she managed to tell Nancy that her head hurt. Her voice came out in a croak and her lips felt like they were made of stiff rubber when she tried to form the words.

When the nurse suggested a couple of Panadol, Lisa stared at her in disbelief. Surgical removal of her head was more what she'd had in mind.

Nancy gave Lisa two tablets and a loan of her sunglasses for the rest of the day. Lisa sat in the chair, holding her head and looking like one of the Blues Brothers while Nancy and another nurse named Chris stripped her bed and changed her nightdress.

'Why does my throat hurt so much?' she asked hoarsely.

'It's from the tube you had down your throat when you were in Intensive Care,' Nancy explained as she threaded Lisa's arm into a nightdress.

Lisa felt her meagre supply of energy dwindling. 'Intensive Care?'

'Yes. You were on a ventilator for nearly a week. The tube in your throat connected you to the machine.'

A machine had been breathing for her?

The nurses put her back to bed when her hour in the chair was up. Lisa was embarrassed by the personal nature of the things they were doing for her. She wondered where her mother and father were. 'My mum and dad? Where are they?'

Nancy shook her head. 'I don't know about your mum and dad, Linda. I thought all your relatives were in the States.'

Why would her parents be in America? They wouldn't have flown off on holiday while she was so sick. Where were Sherry and her brother, Ben? And why had Nancy called her Linda? Lisa

decided she must have misheard.

‘I thought we could wash your hair later today; it must feel horrible after all this time. Your husband brought in all your toiletries. You have some beautiful stuff, Linda.’

Lisa stared at Nancy’s departing back as she rushed off muttering about plastic bowls and towels.

There it was again — she’d called her Linda. And husband? Had Nancy said husband?

Her heart began to thump. When she put her hand against her chest, Lisa could feel it vibrating and thudding beneath her palm. It felt nothing like it had in the waiting room when she’d been feeling so frightened. She was definitely alive, but why was Nancy calling her Linda, and why on earth did she think she had a husband?

Linda. Linda. Linda.

Lisa gasped. She touched her hair and froze. It felt tangled and dirty but what concerned her the most was that it felt straight.

Straight.

She had straight hair.

She pulled a strand from behind her ear and was amazed to discover that it was long enough to reach the end of her nose, and she was downright shocked when she saw it was black.

Jet black.

A car accident and a week in intensive care couldn’t do that. It couldn’t take a mop of short, unruly blonde curls, straighten them out and turn them black. Could it?

Lisa smoothed a shaking hand backwards to a limp ponytail resting at the nape of her neck. Her hair would have grown in a week, but not this much.

Something was very wrong.

She noticed her hands and began to hyperventilate. They were long and elegant and some of the fingers had those acrylic nails

Sherry liked to treat herself to. And her left foot — the one not encased in plaster — was too far away to be her foot. Her legs weren't that long. Her family affectionately called her the runt of the litter because she was only five feet two inches tall.

Nancy returned carrying a blue plastic bowl and towels. 'Right, I'll just get your sponge bag out—'

She noticed Lisa's white face, dropped the bowl and towels on a chair and hurried to the top of the bed. 'Linda? Are you feeling dizzy? I'm just going to lower your head.' She reached for the lever at the side of the bed.

'No!' Lisa clutched her arm. 'Please, Nancy, please get me a mirror! I need a mirror!'

Her eyebrows shot up. 'A mirror?'

Lisa nodded desperately, still clinging to her arm.

Nancy hesitated and checked her pulse. 'Are you sure you're not feeling faint?'

'No!'

But Nancy wouldn't bring a mirror until she'd checked Lisa's blood pressure. 'I don't want you getting all upset about the way you look,' she warned with a faintly disapproving look. This wasn't the reaction she expected from a woman who'd been dragged back from death's door. 'You're hardly going to look a million dollars when you've been unconscious for a week.'

She reluctantly passed Lisa a small hand mirror.

Lisa strangled the slim handle in her fingers, terrified of what she might see.

'Well?' Nancy prompted. 'Do you want to see yourself or not? I won't have time to wash your hair if we don't get a move on.'

Taking a deep breath, Lisa raised the mirror.

Despite the bruising and unhealthy grey tinge of the skin, the face she saw was lovely. Jet-black hair parted in greasy strands across a smooth forehead. Large, blue eyes stared back at her. The

face had high cheekbones and a long, narrow nose above a lush, pink mouth.

It was the face of the woman she had seen in the waiting room.

The face of the woman driving the blue convertible.

The woman called Linda.

George had put her back into the wrong body.



Nancy didn't wash her hair. Instead, she called the doctor who prescribed something to calm her down and make her sleep.

It was evening when she finally woke. The only light in the room was from her overhead lamp, which somebody had tilted towards the wall so it wouldn't shine in her eyes. Lisa guessed that Nancy had done it; she'd been so kind when Lisa had broken down and sobbed. Nancy held her hand and stroked her hair until she fell asleep. 'There now, sweetheart. We'll soon have you looking your old self. You're a beautiful girl, but what's really important is you're alive.'

By then, Lisa had run out of sobs, so the tears just trickled down her face and into the pillow. How could she explain to a practical, sensible soul like Nancy how ironic her comment was in the circumstances?

She was alive, but inside another woman's body. How could something so unbelievable have happened? Lisa suspected George had disobeyed the rules and sent her back instead of Linda. She'd stolen Linda's life. Although that didn't seem so wrong when she considered that it was the other woman's reckless driving that had killed her in the first place.

Killed her? What was she thinking? She was here, alive. In the wrong body perhaps, but still alive.

I'm going mad. I'm going stark, raving mad, Lisa thought miserably. Tears begin to well again in her swollen eyes.

A faint sound near the bottom of her bed halted her plan to indulge in another crying fit. She raised her head listlessly to check where it came from.

A man sat in one of the orange plastic chairs that were standard hospital issue. Lisa couldn't see him properly because of her puffy eyes and the low light.

'You're awake,' he said in a deep voice with a pronounced American accent. Getting to his feet, he took the few steps needed to bring him alongside her and into the pool of light from the overhead lamp.

Lisa stared up at him and blinked.

He was very tall and dressed in a dark-green polo shirt and dark-grey chinos. His thick, dark hair needed cutting; it flopped onto his brow and curled over the collar of his shirt. It looked untidy, as if he had a habit of running his hand through it. He eyed her cautiously. He seemed to be waiting for her to say something.

Faced with yet another strange face in a day full of strange faces and experiences, Lisa was at a loss. She thought he must be one of the doctors — on a better day she would have been delighted to get one this good looking. But she didn't want to hear anything more that might add to her problems. Instead, she lowered her eyes and followed the impressive length of his legs from his belt buckle all the way down to his tasseled grey shoes.

'How do you get a pair of trousers to fit?' she said slowly in the voice that didn't sound like her own. She looked back up at him. 'Did the shop sew two pairs together?'

He stared at her in shock for a couple of beats before giving a reluctant laugh. It sounded harsh and cracked in the middle, as if he hadn't done it in a long time. 'I buy my clothes at a tall men's shop in the city.'

He collected the chair from the bottom of the bed and came to sit beside her. Close up, she saw that his eyes were grey, and he

looked tired and haggard.

‘How are you feeling?’

Lisa eyed him thoughtfully, wondering where he was going to fit into the puzzle. She realized the calmness she felt wouldn’t last. It was just her mind shutting down after everything that had happened today. She was numb. Frankly, she’d given up caring for the moment.

‘My head hurts. My leg hurts. Oh, and they stuffed some suppositories up my backside this afternoon. Apart from that, I’m bloody marvellous.’

She could tell she’d shocked him again. He tried to laugh and failed. His expression was troubled, as if he couldn’t figure something out. Lisa regarded him sympathetically. She felt like telling him she couldn’t figure it out either.

‘Do you know who I am?’ he asked.

‘No.’ Lisa stared back listlessly. ‘Do you know who I am?’

‘Uh huh.’ He tilted his head as if he were listening to her carefully. ‘You don’t recognize me at all?’

She tried to shake her head but changed her mind when pain stabbed her in the temples. ‘No. Why? Are you famous?’

He smiled fleetingly, showing the white even teeth Americans seemed to be blessed with, usually thanks to their love affair with orthodontics. ‘I’m Dan,’ he watched her closely. ‘Dan Brogan.’

Tears pooled in her eyes. Lisa was amazed she had any left. ‘Nice to meet you, Dan.’

‘Sssh. Don’t cry.’ He snagged a couple of tissues from the box on the locker and handed them to her.

‘Am I s’posed to know you?’ Lisa asked wearily after she’d blown her nose.

‘Mmm hmm.’

‘Are you one of my doctors?’

He shook his head.

She decided to take the plunge. 'Who do you think I am, Dan?'
He seemed fascinated by her voice. Lisa got the feeling it intrigued him just as much as what she was saying.

'Don't you know who you are?'

'Oh, I know who I am,' She was beginning to slur with tiredness. It was hard shaping words with Linda's mouth. 'It's just a matter of who everybody else thinks I am.'

Dan Brogan frowned. 'OK, you've lost me.'

'Tell me who you think I am!' She cried in frustration, then wished she hadn't because it made her head throb.

'You're Linda,' he said quietly. 'Linda Brogan.'

Lisa stared at him in dismay.

Brogan.

Maybe he was Linda's brother.

'Are you and Linda related?' She guessed that the way she was referring to Linda in the third person was adding to his confusion.

'I'm your husband, Linda.'

Lisa gaped. 'My husband? But I'm not married!'

'I'm afraid you are,' He insisted quietly.

Lisa suddenly noticed he was wearing a wedding band. 'No, you don't understand! I know it sounds mad but I'm not Linda! My name is Lisa! Lisa Jackson! I was put back in the wrong body by mistake. . .' She trailed off.

Dan stared at her in silence.

So now they'd lock her away with all the other nuts.

Well done, Lisa.

He dragged a hand through his hair and gripped the back of his head. 'How about we talk about this tomorrow?' he suggested at last. 'I'll talk to Rod Cameron, your neurosurgeon, and tell him how you feel. OK?'

Lisa was too shell-shocked to answer.

'Don't be too hard on yourself, Linda. You've spent the last week

in ICU with a head injury. It's hardly surprising you feel confused.'

Lisa gave a cracked laugh that ended on a sob. 'You can say that again.'

He reached out to give her hand a comforting pat. They both jumped at the unexpected jolt the contact gave them. Linda Brogan's husband snatched his hand back and didn't seem to know what to do with it for a few moments. Eventually he shoved it into the pocket of his chinos. 'I'll come back and see you tomorrow.'

Lisa didn't bother to answer.



Dan walked blindly down the corridor from Linda's room, his mind frantically searching for answers. Brain injuries weren't his specialty, but he knew enough to know it wasn't unheard of for people injured as seriously as Linda had been to experience some memory loss. The logical, educated part of his mind could accept this; he knew her recovery might be prolonged and incomplete. If the part of her brain responsible for speech had been damaged it could explain why she appeared to be finding it difficult to talk. She sounded nothing like herself. In fact, she spoke with the long, flat vowels of a New Zealander.

Linda never made self-deprecating jokes, so her remark about the suppositories was out of character. The one about his trousers too. She used to make cracks about his rumpled appearance, but her remarks had long ago stopped being given jokingly.

He felt as if he was the one who'd sustained a head injury. The woman in the bed looked at him as if he were a stranger; his heart squeeze when he saw the bruised, frightened look in her eyes. Linda worked hard to project an image of supreme self-confidence; Dan was one of the few people who knew the demons and low self-esteem that tormented her and how she fought back by manipulating the people around her. It was just one of many

reasons their marriage had failed. Dan hadn't forgotten what a consummate actress she was. A part of him wondered what she was up to this time. Was she fooling them all now?

The head injury must be the cause of her memory loss and bizarre claims. It had to be, unless he wanted to start believing her story about being put back in the wrong body.

It was either the head injury or something Dan had known for a long time. That his wife was a compulsive liar.