

**THE  
POSSESSION**

**A.K. KUYKENDALL**

## **Writer's Block: The Possession**

This is the first volume in the *Writer's Block* Trilogy

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# WRITER'S BLOCK

••• TRILOGY •••

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THE  
POSSESSION

A.K. KUYKENDALL





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The article is featured in Petrinovich's book *The Call, Awakening the Angelic Human* and provides a marvelous descriptive outlook on the Divine Drama. The article is enticing; Petrinovich engulfs you with the cold hands of her narrative and sweeps your thoughts into a probable and possible abyss, for which you'll never see the world around you the same.

Love, as always, to my wife Magdiel and our sons Felix, Kal-El, and Jor-El, who are my inspiration in everything I do and every choice I make. I also dedicate this to my mom Ruth, who always supported me in every endeavor. She is the reason I'm here at all and made me who I am today.

“The battle against the Devil, which is the principal task of Saint Michael the Archangel, is still being fought today, because the Devil is still alive and active in the world.”

*Pope John Paul II*

## Prologue

Back in its beginning, the entity that now resided within the beauty of an antique doll had predicted it needed a long-lasting fit for its existence. Call it vanity, if you will, but this *thing*, this creature, had reached from the dark ages – the time of its birth within the doll – into the future, where it had gathered from the modern world an image fitting of royalty. Although dolls representing humans have not yet been discovered at prehistoric sites, they were, quite possibly, the earliest of mankind’s playthings. Dolls delighted adults, but they served primarily as the ominous, mysteriously mute, and *sometimes* gentle presence through which children projected their fantasies and fears. Though none can fathom the motivation behind their creations, dolls have carried more fear throughout the ages than fantasies. The phenomenon can be compared to a caveman looking at his image in a mirror for the first time, then recoiling with enraged violence. Mirrors are a common necessity for modern-day man, but, then again, man has been conditioned to this form of magic.

The most poignant evidence of the timeless love children have for their dolls is the preserved body of a little girl found at Herculaneum, the ancient Roman city buried along with Pompeii during the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in A.D. 79. Excavators discovered the child still clutching her doll.

Most ancient Egyptian dolls that have survived were found nestled within the tombs of their young owners, little ones who clutched the miniature human figures as if they were the key to survival within the afterlife. Paddle-shaped dolls, discovered in tombs dating from 2000 B.C., were made of wood with hair fashioned from strands of clay beads, affixed to the heads with wax. Many were sadistic in appearance, thought to have clung onto the children they possessed in life.

Other Egyptian dolls had linen bodies with embroidered faces and thread or human hair. Ancient Greek and Roman dolls are documented to have been made of such materials as human and animal bone, ivory, wood, wax, terracotta, and lead. They were commonly sold in marketplaces and by itinerant merchants.

Unlike the priests of ancient Egypt, the Catholic Church frowned upon the practice of burying children with their toys, so very few dolls from the Middle Ages have been preserved in tombs.

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Some dolls, ranging from charred sticks wrapped in rags to exquisitely carved miniature sculptures, had been used for hexing or as playfully malicious tools to bring about suffering or the death of man over the years. They served as a ritualistic medium for the conjuring or for the healing by ancient witch doctors.

One particular doll, affectionately referred to as Christie, had a life-like image. Her glass eyes contained a beautiful blend of brown, green, and blue. Close up, the colors could be seen spinning and blending, giving her eyes a sheer, unique pulchritude in which one could get lost. Her flawless, creamy tanned skin had the feel and texture of a warm newborn baby after a bath.

Christie needed no introduction, for anyone who gazed upon her found her completely irresistible. Her beauty made everyone adore her. She connected herself to those whom she possessed, holding on, manipulating, as if she were playing an unorthodox, medieval game of chess. . . sacrificing her pawn at will.

When Christie possessed someone, she intertwined herself to that person's deep-rooted thoughts, aggravations, and fears, thus making it easier for her to dictate the providence of the souls needed for her survival. She had lived for millennia, feeding off her possessed. Wars had been fought, kingdoms had fallen, and blood had been spilled due to her manipulation, her want, and her evil.

Christie's history dated back to the 1300s in the small town of Berkshire, England.

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One stormy afternoon in Berkshire, the townspeople gathered to witness the end of Vivian Noose, a pregnant woman accused by the church of holding Lucifer's child within her.

Kitty Dossle, age four, looked on from a distance as she hung from the arm of her young mother, Maze Dossle. Kitty clutched a tattered hay-stuffed cloth doll in her hand. This doll had been a gift to Kitty from one of her mother's male suitors.

Maze Dossle, a wretched-looking prostitute, happened to have an irresistible oral fixation. Suitors in want of a getaway from their everyday marital lives called on her by the dozens. She'd been beautiful once with a sort of natural beauty that shone through her stringy hair and ragged clothing. She'd been tomboyish and innocent, capable of kicking ass and

breaking hearts at the same time.

Maze had reacted to her hard-working parents' inability to focus on raising her by venturing out with her peers into a world that gave her a sense of self and attention. First-love bloomed with a young stud, Cagin Vince, a boy of sixteen, two years older than Maze. A month after their courtship, reality slapped them both in the face: she was pregnant.

Despising the idea of societal embarrassment, her young male counterpart attempted to murder her by beating her unconscious, leaving her with welts and scars. Having managed to survive the ordeal, baby intact, she was tossed out onto the streets by her parents in the dead of winter to fend for herself and her unborn child. Although embarrassment and shame had been a part of their motivation, financially, they couldn't bear another hungry mouth.

"Mommy?" Kitty said.

"What do you want, little girl?"

"She's pregnant, isn't she?"

"Yes, she is," Maze responded, looking on as the men set the branches ablaze.

"Mommy, I don't want my Christie to see."

"Cover her eyes, then, little girl," her mother told her in an aggravated tone.

At the stake, Vivian Noose began to plead and scream for help, but no one gave a damn.

The townspeople spit at her and cursed her name. They threw stones as the blaze licked around her feet.

"Go back to hell where you came from!"

"You wicked wench!"

"No one cares of your suffering!"

"That child will not live within our holy covenant!"

"Die, you filthy serpent of Satan!"

On and on the crowd taunted, while the flesh of Vivian Noose's body began to peel, forming bubbly reddish blisters under her skin. As tears rolled down her face, evaporating in the intense heat, she looked upon the crowd. Everything seemed to slow as her skin melted from her body to reveal the painful sight of her meaty flesh. She could see the crowd throwing things at her, but she couldn't hear a thing.

As she died, the crowd suddenly became quiet.

An ominous sensation swept in, aggressively grabbing hold of each member of the gathered townspeople.

Within seconds of her passing, the eyes of Vivian Noose snapped open

in her charred body, and she lifted her head to look upon the crowd. Her eyes, burning coals, glittered white. A voice spoke through her, using her as its vessel. Vivian, the chosen, was burnt to a crisp and entirely unable to speak. No, it was someone... *something* else. Ferocious, it sounded – direct, full of fury.

“I thank you, for your hatred fuels me so. Damnation befalls this land and upon you. No matter the distance you travel, I will be your end. So say it, the shepherd.”

In a flash, the town’s population – presiding pastors, children, elders, and common folk – began to shake and contort in a kind of seizure that swept through them.

Abruptly, stillness fell.

The mob looked upon this hideous image with sudden empathy. “So say it, the flock,” the crowd shouted in unison. As one, they snapped out of this wicked trance, knowing nothing of what had happened, looking upon the still-smoldering body of Vivian Noose in the ominous silence.

Frightened, Kitty dropped Christie to the ground. Wrapping her arms tightly around her mother’s neck, she cried.

The stomach of Vivian Noose suddenly ripped open and a baby jackal fell forth, its eyes glowing red and its fangs razor-sharp.

Screams rang out as the crowd began to pull away in fear.

Maze, too, began to back away with her child.

The jackal threw its head to the sky and let out a blood-curdling shriek that sent the fear of God through the mob. When the howling stopped, the jackal gazed through the flames at the doll lying on the ground.

The stitched-cloth eyes of the doll began glowing red. Its features grew more beautiful, cleaner, and refined, taking on the appearance of an Eighteenth Century design, far more advanced than any creation of the 1300s. Upon the end of the doll’s morbid metamorphosis, its eyes slowly faded back to normal.

None of the onlookers noticed Christie as they gazed upon the beastly jackal before them. Within seconds, the jackal fell dead in the flames.

Suddenly, Kitty broke away from her mother and ran toward the burning mass.

Maze screamed for her to come back, fearing the church would believe her daughter to be in league with the beast.

Kitty snatched the doll off the ground just before her mother caught her and dragged her away, kicking and screaming. The doll, dragging along behind Kitty, slowly formed a wicked, unnoticed smile.

This was the beginning.

A.K. Kuykendall

Time moved on. Years, centuries, and millennia passed. Christie made her mark on whoever held her in his or her possession. She wreaked havoc on the weak and the strong, the stupid and the smart, and anyone she felt to be easy prey. Christie's hidden goal was to obtain enough souls to one day fulfill the prophecy of her beloved father, Satan.

# **Part I**

**The Written Development  
of the Stillingsworths**



# Chapter 1

Author Gregory Stillingsworth, immersed in his latest novel, tapped away at his typewriter in the domain of his home office, which sat on the second floor of his glamorous house in rural Michigan. Here, in his private home-away-from-home, he found the personal comfort that encouraged his drive to push every over-stressed cell in his brain to endure hour after hour of creative work.

Drops of sweat rolled down his forehead and poised at the tip of his nose. In the heat of his creation, he ignored the sweat. Here, in his most private moments, he was to be alone: a solitary artist pushing his fingers to strike words onto his canvas, creating a world that, right now, existed only within his storytelling mind. Later, he would worry about the fan letters he was receiving through his agent. For now, the world belonged solely to him, jealously possessive of his creation.

In this world of computers, files, and electronic transmissions, Gregory used a typewriter. This magical machine upon which he worked so diligently allowed him to do as he pleased. In this setting, at this task, he felt no less than a god.

In his element, Gregory allowed himself to be driven by what was in his heart: the love and affection toward his work, the passion for his characters, the admiration of places to which he might journey through his stories, and the honesty and truth that so effectively spoke through fiction. His love for his work occasionally revealed the jealous heart of a dragon, both lovingly and fiercely protective.

He leaned forward, rushing toward the conclusion of another masterpiece. Words flew onto the page, and when he looked them over later, every letter would be crisp and stark against the whiteness of the paper. That was important to him. He valued paper – paper upon which no ink would smear, no matter how many times he shuffled through to admire a phrase here, a sentence there, a character as he or she evolved through the pages. Quality was of the essence, and Gregory would work with no less.

He pulled the sheet out of the typewriter and checked it carefully, praying there were no errors, however minor. No pages were allowed to leave his hands until all errors had been corrected. Only then would he

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place his John Hancock upon the delivery form. This paper, so insignificant without the words that currently raced across the page, represented Gregory's livelihood in an astronomical manner. He obsessively checked and rechecked the type to be sure not a single flaw marred the snowy perfection of the stock and the crisp blackness of his words.

Finished with the page, he sat back a moment and wiped the sweat from his nose. He patted his typewriter, Buford, beaten and scarred by years of use. People sometimes asked him why he still cranked out his words on a typewriter after becoming a grossly successful author of seventy-three books. Certainly he had money to spare.

Taking a short break, he noticed the stack of dusty old journals sitting on a lower shelf. Moving across the office, he walked through the maze of the odds-and-ends he had collected over the years to trigger ideas and stories. At the shelf, he picked up the last hand-written journal, sat down on a creaky antique chair, and leafed through the pages.

~~~

### *Diary Entry #465*

*As I write, my whispery gabble leads the pencil in my hand as the motoring muscles that rope around my carpals, metacarpals, and phalanges, which draw their strength from the brachioradialis, forearm flexors, and the brachialis, struggle to keep up with my thoughts. This race is forever humorous. I feel a burning sensation as my fingers grip the pencil with zeal. I drown myself in my thoughts regularly, for my thoughts hum through me like the soothing sounds of the bulbul.*

*The smell of crushed lead bleeds from the number-two pencil as my hand grasps it, guided by my angelic, developing literary mind. Its remnants glide upon the unorthodox – medieval by comparison – recycled paper within my diary, affectionately known as my “morbid book.” Writing seems to come easily for me. I’m what some would call a “thinker” – a heavy one at that – as labeled by my parents. But let’s not talk of my relations and their forever harsh opinions of me. Thoughts and story ideas seem to bounce through my mind like*

*cotton balls, dancing around within a windy tunnel. Fascinating, these thoughts. Fascinating and utterly marvelous!*

*Writing was destined for me. I'm going to become a great writer. I'm going to shock the world with a story that will capture the true essence of fear and horror. I will bend the fabric of time and force another dimension of reality to rear its ugly head, to the utter amazement and heavily concentrated fascinations of civilized minds. I will fascinate with my approach. I will have a following to rival that of great leaders and fearless generals, in a time when one who lived by the sword fell also by that sharp edge, cast by an opposing warrior. My thoughts will prove themselves worthy with every letter, phrase, sentence, and paragraph. My thoughts will prove themselves worthy.*

*Worthy, I say. Worthy, indeed.*

*From what fathoms do these thoughts come? That question I cannot answer, yet speculation is not beyond me. I was but three years of age when these thoughts began to dance through my head, and, with great clarity, I comprehended every facet.*

*Strangely, as far back as my birth, the darkness never frightened me. There were times I could have sworn that, throughout the night, my room, as well as the outskirts of our home, was consumed by shadowy figures whispering my name. As they looked over me with seeming vengeance, I felt a calming comfort in the darkness around these shadowy things.*

*Oddly, I found it soothing and enriching. I found it compelling, with a pull that opened my mind to a world in the form of a large lock, with me the only key.*

*Writing was destined for me.*

*Writing is my destiny!*

~~~

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*Literature of the Twentieth Century had its share of ups and downs. Twenty-three publishers rejected Dr. Seuss; Richard Hooker's Mash was rejected by twenty-one; Kon-Tiki by Thor Heyerdahl, twenty; Jonathan Livingston Seagull by Richard Bach, eighteen; and Patrick Dennis's Auntie Mame, seventeen.*

*I feel that what these storytellers experienced, I never will, for I was born an artist of the written word, not a developing pawn in literature. I was conceived as this Messiah of the literary tapestry. My painstaking study in this field is unerring. I will surpass all in my path, and I will topple my would-be peers.*

*Writing was destined for me.*

*Writing is my destiny!*

~~~

Gregory grinned as the sudden memory of his fourteenth birthday slipped into his mind. He had been writing in this very journal when his bedroom doors had swung open.

His parents stood in the doorway. "Can't you put that pencil down for a minute, boy? Your mother and I got you something we know you'll like."

Gregory protested. "You guys, I'm not a kid anymore. I don't need anything but your love and affection."

The masculine voice rumbled again from the doorway. "You smartass. Take this before I break my foot off in your tail. You might be fourteen now, but you're still under our roof."

Gregory sighed. "Okay, okay. Enough with the lectures. What is it?" He accepted the offered package, a large, bulky box. As though time suddenly slowed down, he ripped the gift-wrap paper away.

Seeing the typewriter, Gregory couldn't catch his breath.

"Breathe, boy, *breathe*. Baby, I think he likes it."

"I think you're right . . . Gregory, *breathe*, knucklehead."

Gregory managed to stammer, "I just . . . I can't . . . I can't believe this, you guys. It's just what I wanted. I *love* you guys."

"We love you, too, sweetheart. We'll let you two be alone to get acquainted. Happy birthday, baby."

"Yeah, happy birthday, knucklehead."

"Thanks, Mom. Thanks, Dad."

Gregory's jaw hung nearly to the ground as tears pooled in his eyes. Without looking away from the amazing thing, he ripped a sheet of paper from his diary, ran it into the machine, and began to type:

*Diary entry #467*

*Hot damn, a typewriter. Happy birthday, indeed, Mom and Dad. Happy birthday, indeed.*

*You're beautiful. A little tattered and beaten, but a thing of sheer pulchritude. Hypnotizing, you are. You're the key to my self-chosen future. You're my friend. Now, what should I call you? What would be your name? Later for that. First I must care for you with the hands of a feather. Alluring, you are. Stimulating! Unquestionable pulchritude! What thought-yanking motivation, you are. I now shall use my bleeding number-two pencils as a guide for organizing my thoughts and not as a necessity. I'm now heavily armed to the tee. I'm ready to venture deep into my chosen shtick. I'm armed with an arsenal in comparison to none.*

*Writing was destined for me.*

*Writing is my destiny!*

*You and I forever; you and I together . . .*

Fourteen-year-old Gregory jumped. His head snapped up. He looked around the room. The voice had broken his focus like a whip-crack. He'd been fully immersed with his new typewriter. "What?" he blurted out, his heart pounding with fear from the voice. There was no one in the room.

*You and I forever; you and I together . . .*

"Who's saying that?" Gregory snapped, his heart beating so quickly his Flash Gordon t-shirt vibrated on his chest.

The voice came directly from in front of him. *You and I forever; you and I together . . .*

Gregory looked at his typewriter with fear and curiosity. "My God, is that you?" He started typing again.

*Diary Entry #468*

*A sudden change of events has just wickedly moved into the surface cortexes of my mind. Maybe more of my continuously morbid thoughts, I thought at first, but*

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*that has proved to be a fearfully stimulating revelation.*

*This gift of mine has spoken to me.*

*Oh, yes, I will be a great writer. These words I've heard from this, my gift. This can be nothing other than the beginning of an unstoppable relationship.*

*Writing is destined for me.*

*Writing is my destiny!*

~~~

Now, tossing the old journal back on the shelf, Gregory chided himself for the pause from his work. He put another sheet of paper in Buford and began typing away, feverishly filled with new inspiration.

~~~

On the other side of Gregory's office door, Jamie Stillingsworth knocked lightly to get his attention. Growing frustrated, she took a deep breath and knocked again. She had been attempting to coerce her husband out of his lair for fifteen minutes now. He had a book signing to attend, but, as usual, Gregory remained immersed in the completion of his new novel.

Under normal circumstances, Jamie knew not to disturb Gregory. She prided herself on her accommodation of his work habits. While most authors' wives longed to see their husbands look upon them with the same passion they bestowed upon each new manuscript, Jamie had adapted to the detachment and frequent eccentricities of this relationship. If she hadn't been able to do so, she suspected, there would *be* no relationship.

She figured that all writers had certain traditions and superstitions that made up the Chi, or energy force, of their work, as did anyone in any career. The curse on the family of Bruce Lee, she recalled, had created havoc within the lives of himself, his father, and possibly his son. In the Lees' world, one followed ritualistic traditions passed down through the generations. These traditions stayed one's existence. Actors, who tended to live psychologically-split lives in order to do their jobs, showed another example of queer tradition through craft. However, mentally disturbing as this may have been, they were usually able to live their lives without a hitch.

Jamie knew Gregory's traditions, the decades-driven superstitions he indulged in every time he closed his office door. In fact, Jamie knew Gregory's traditions almost *too* well, for she breathed his work in the same manner he did, only to a lesser degree. Jamie was more to Gregory than simply his wife, and she was well aware of it. She was the last piece of a highly complex puzzle and the guiding force that kept him together.

It certainly hadn't been easy. She was often lonely and had started to consider bringing up the "kid question." But something always told her to wait, and the words remained quiet behind the lips that always held a smile for her husband.

An exemplary, dedicated wife, Jamie had, in a way, become a secondhand author herself, understanding all the peculiar writer's quirks and boundaries. Thus, as she raised her fist to knock on the door once more, she frowned at the taboo. *But this is different.* Gregory's latest book, *Rapture in Season*, was in its fourth reprint. *Gregory must go to this signing.*

~~~

Lost in his thoughts, Gregory ignored the knocking and tapped away at the typewriter.

*The blood drips slowly from the fingertips of the carcass, flooding the canvas with red...*

The knocking persisted, but, hardly aware of the sound, Gregory stayed immersed in his story.

*Dr. Nuserus stands there in a state of shock, overlooking the dangling body. The blame could not be his own. He holds a blood-streaked axe in his hands. Bits and pieces of rotting flesh hang from the sharp blade. Suddenly...*

The pounding outside his door finally distracted him enough to elicit his response. "Honey," Gregory called, "give me a minute, please. I have to finish this."

Jamie responded in a frustrated tone, "But we're going to be late for the signing."

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"Yeah, yeah, yeah," Gregory muttered to himself, still lost in his emerging novel.

*Detectives Young and Fox bust through the door with the SWAT team at their heels, pointing their weapons straight at Dr. Nuserus' back.*

*"Drop the axe and get the fuck down on your knees," Fox shouts.*

*Dr. Nuserus turns around...*

Jamie's loud, perturbed sigh came through the door. "Honey, come on."

*...slowly, looking as though he's lost his mind, draped in blood and still bearing the axe.*

*"Put the axe down, you crazy son-of-a-bitch," Young warns.*

*Dr. Nuserus begins to scream at the top of his lungs. He lifts the axe and charges the detectives. At once, the whole SWAT team, along with Young and Fox, load a series of shots into him. The bullets penetrate his flesh with loud thumps.*

*In the aftermath, Little Cary Times, Dr. Nuserus' most recent captive, kneels frightened in the corner.*

*Detective Young picks her up with gentle ease and carries her out the door. "It's going to be okay," he says as Cary, still shaking with fear, grasps his shirt collar and lays her head on his shoulder. "The monster's dead."*

*"Thank you," Cary's sweet voice whispers in his ear.*

*Detective Young manages a grin, relieved that the monster is off the streets. The case that has taken them eight years to close is at its final hour.*

*He who writes is the martyr, seen through the eyes of the unsuspecting doll.*

THE END

"Wooooo, that's another one for the record books," Gregory told himself with great satisfaction. Rising from his chair and shuffling across the room, he opened his office door to a beauty far more magnificent than the famed Mona Lisa.



Jamie Stillingsworth, his wife of fifteen wonderful, love-bent years and adorned in a shimmering evening gown, stood at the door. A black gloss of hair lay gently upon her creamy skin.

Gregory allowed himself a moment to admire the fantastic beauty before him: eyes of subtle strength, legs and physique reminiscent of an angelic swan, the energizer of Gregory's world, his power pack, his Wonder Woman, his Sada, with the soothing voice of a songbird. She was his reason, his life, his world.

The glow in Gregory's heart for this woman hadn't faded a bit throughout their marriage. It was just as radiant as ever as he gazed upon her now. These loving attributes swept through the very depths of his soul. Impulsively, he enfolded Jamie in his arms and showered her with kisses. He danced her around the hallway in a foolish display of affection. Her delighted laughter was a joy to his ears and a chime in his heart.

In Gregory's world, Jamie fit completely. She was his full-time proofreader, personal attorney, and business-affairs liaison. These roles she served totally on her own volition, primarily because she trusted no one else to handle his fiscal properties without projecting personal agendas that could prove dangerous. In addition, Jamie seemed to hold an ecstatic love for reading Gregory's work and an even deeper love for Gregory himself.

Not so very long ago, Jamie had been a kick-ass defense attorney with an undergrad from Mississippi State University, where she had also obtained her master's degree. During her stint as a law major, she minored in technical literature. Upon completion of her master's, Jamie went on to obtain her law degree at Harvard.

She and Gregory had been an on-again, off-again couple since a mutual friend had initiated their meeting in college. After Jamie had finished school, the two decided to take their relationship to the next level. Following Jamie's graduation, they got engaged, but she had insisted they not jump that broom until she'd taken and passed the bar exam.

Gregory fretted not, as he knew her passion for her work was as intense as his own love of writing. He was a man who fully understood the meaning of personal goals, and he had marveled at the commitment he had seen in her eyes.

Jamie, now standing in her shimmering gown, brought him back to the moment with an adoring grin. "Rack one up for the record books, huh, honey?"

"How'd you guess?"

"Funny. Now, we have to get moving. Your signing's in less than an hour."

"Okay, okay." Gregory sighed, gently allowing her body to slide from his embrace. Pausing, he lovingly brushed a strand of hair from her face and tucked it behind her right ear. The moment seemed to stand still, and the universe balanced itself within this one moment. Their eyes locked and their hearts seemed to beat in unison.

The moment ended. With a sorry attempt at humor, Gregory drew his right foot up, paused dramatically, then skipped off to the bedroom like Tom in the infamous *Tom and Jerry* cartoons.

~~~

Jamie, smiling and feeling a glow in her heart, watched him. Her love for this marvel of a novelist was as permanent as a diamond, with all the beauty contained in its meaning and purpose. Every movement, touch, smile, and gesture was enough to make Jamie's day. Her love for this man was like something out of a fairy-tale romance.

While she waited for Gregory to dress, Jamie wandered into his office and started to read the end of his newly finished project. Turning page after page, she stood there, flabbergasted, smiling from ear to ear.

Moments later, from the corner of her eye, Jamie caught a glimpse of a figure leaning with one shoulder against the office door. She jumped. "Gregory," she scolded, holding a hand over her thumping heart. "Don't sneak up on me like that."

All suited up, her husband looked like a model who'd stepped right out of a current edition of *GQ*. He stood before her in his double-breasted, pearl-black tailored Armani suit.

Looking at him, Jamie wondered if she'd be able to make it through the night at the side of this "sexual moistener," as she would affectionately refer to him.

"I'm sorry," Gregory said, smiling, but not appearing very apologetic. "I just didn't want to disturb you." Pulling back his perfectly smooth, printed sleeve to reveal gold custom-printed cuff links, a gift from Jamie upon his last publication, he looked at his wristwatch. "You ready?"

"Yes, let's go," she replied, smiling at him fondly. "I don't know where you would be without me, Gregory."

He returned her smile, his eyes shining with warmth and love as he gazed upon her. "You know," he told her gently, "I was just thinking the same thing, sweetheart."

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Intertwining their fingers, they shared a brief, sweet kiss before heading downstairs and out of the house.