



On a clear day, Emma Hutch, thirty-three, could see forever – give or take a few yards. Technically, she had 20/20 vision in both eyes. If a normal-sighted person could spot a dog in the street from half a block away, Emma could read the license plate number on the truck that swerved to avoid hitting it. Emma’s hearing was also sharp. With the clarity of a diamond, she could eavesdrop on her neighbors talking, singing in the shower, or going at it. At her will, having learned over the years to filter out extraneous noise, she ignored them. Sometimes, though, she listened. Even more dynamic, Emma’s sense of smell had both strength and acuity. She could detect a pinch of cilantro in a stew or a waning blossom in the wind. Upon meeting new people, her nostrils could sniff out their essential goodness – or badness.

At six o’clock (on the nose), Emma opened the door of her apartment to Daphne Wittfield, a new client.

Instantly, her nasal membranes sprang to attention.

Daphne Wittfield smelled like money. Great green piles of it.

‘I am *so* glad to meet you,’ said Emma with a big smile, hopefully not too desperate. ‘Please, come in.’

The tall blond gave Emma the once-over twice. ‘You don’t look like a witch,’ said Daphne. Her eyes narrowed. Like every other part of her, they were narrow to begin with.

Emma was dressed in a black turtleneck, jeans, black high-heeled boots, and blue-tinted sunglasses. She said, ‘We gave up the pointy hats back in 1567.’

‘But you look harmless. Bloodless.’ Daphne paused. ‘That concerns me. And this apartment. It’s all white.’

Emma said, ‘Makes it easier to find myself.’ She waited for Daphne to laugh. Nothing. ‘Why don’t we sit? Get to know each other better.’

The two women walked across a white shag carpet to the plump white couch piled with white fluffy pillows. The blond shoved the pillows to the side and sat, crossing her long legs at the knee. Emma guessed Daphne was in her late twenties with skin as tight as an apple peel, puffy lips, a pert nose. Her buttery hair was expertly streaked. The client seemed custom designed from the top down. Then again, for all Emma knew, Daphne and her high, hard breasts were one hundred percent authentic. Emma didn’t have EPSP (Extra Plastic Surgery Perception).

She sat next to her client on the couch, smiled brightly, and rubbed her palms on her jeans. For some reason, Daphne made her nervous. Emma took a deep breath,

inhaling the client's odor of crisp bills. It calmed her down, but not enough.

'What's with the sunglasses?' Daphne asked. 'It's been dark out for an hour.'

Emma instinctively touched her blue shades. 'Most people find the color of my eyes to be a bit distracting.'

'Do they?' asked Daphne, amused (apparently, she was not *most people*). 'Let's see.'

Emma took off her glasses with a theatrical flourish. She almost said, 'Ta-da!'

The blond gasped when she set her eyes on Emma's. She recovered quickly and said, 'Yes, quite dramatic. Put the glasses back on now.'

Replacing them, Emma said, 'Before we get into the nitty-gritty, I have to object about the pace you want. I prefer to go slow. Do the research. Observe from a distance and then make contact.'

'On the phone you said you'd start immediately.'

'Pressure makes me nervous, and, frankly, I've felt queasy from the moment you walked in the door. But then again,' Emma reflected, 'it could be hunger.'

Daphne asked, 'Are you trying to jack up the fee?'

Emma hadn't thought of that. 'What if I am?'

'I offered double your usual rate.'

'But that was before we met.'

'It's been three minutes!' said Daphne. 'Are you the Good Witch or a judgmental bitch?'

'Can't I be both?' asked Emma.

Daphne checked her watch. Frowning impatiently, she reached into her black leather tote, extracting a manila envelope with the Crusher Advertising logo. From that she

removed a stack of one hundred dollar bills and fanned it like a deck of cards.

‘That explains the smell,’ said Emma.

With the authority and condescension of a Fortune 500 company vice president, which she was, Daphne said, ‘Five thousand now. Five thousand when the job is done. You will agree to work my case exclusively for two weeks. I want three hits a day, seven days a week. If you fail to secure me a first date in that time, you won’t get a second payment and I’ll trash your reputation all over town.’

Emma considered her options. She said, ‘I don’t work on Sundays.’

‘Three hits a day, six days a week,’ corrected Daphne. ‘I’ll get you access – invitations to parties and events, reservations at restaurants. It’s an aggressive approach. But I hate wasting time.’

Emma longed to grab the bills and rub them all over her naked body. Only an hour ago, just as the October sun set, she’d gone through her mail and found a third (‘final’) foreclosure warning from Citibank. But Emma hesitated. She had rules about new clients. They had to (1) have good referrals, (2) seem deserving of her help, and (3) be motivated purely by love. If Emma were to take the cash from Daphne, she’d be breaking at least two of her rules, and possibly three. Violating her principles would hurt Emma’s sense of ethics. But losing her beloved Greenwich Village one-bedroom would hurt much, much more.

She took the money, of course. Who wouldn’t? She took the money, and maybe she’d regret it later, but right now, Emma thought, holding the stack in her hand, she felt immense relief. And humble gratitude.

‘Thank you, Daphne,’ she gushed, squirreling the bills in her side table drawer. ‘I want you to know that this isn’t just a business transaction. We’re initiating a personal relationship, too. I provide my clients – my *friends* – with emotional services as well. A hand to hold. A shoulder to cry on. We can talk every day, a few times a day, if you need emotional support. I’m available. I listen.’

‘That’s nice,’ said Daphne. ‘Can we move this along?’

‘O-kay,’ said Emma. ‘Tell me about the man in question.’ She leaned forward, grinning. This was her favorite part of the interview, watching her clients’ faces light up when they spoke of love. Their excitement, the passion, the pure undiluted joy of mad attraction. Emma soaked it up with genuine empathy. She felt their excitement in her own blood. Vicarious thrill had been sustaining Emma for quite a while.

‘I’ve compiled some information about him,’ said Daphne. As she spoke, she pulled a blue plastic folder from her leather tote and passed it to Emma.

A plastic folder? This was the passion, the excitement? ‘Most women can’t shut up when I ask about the man.’

Daphne groaned. ‘I met him a month ago. He hired me to work on an advertising campaign for his new product. And that’s all I need to say. Five thousand dollars can do the talking for me.’

‘It’s definitely speaking my language,’ said Emma. ‘But, you see, I need to get a sense of the back story, the building of desire, the emotional longing.’

The client gave her a fishy look. ‘You get off on this, don’t you?’

Emma may have blushed. ‘What’s the big hurry? Why

two weeks or nothing? What happens if you don't get him by then? You'll dry up and blow away?'

'I'm impatient. I don't want to drag this out,' said Daphne (impatiently).

Emma knew she was striking her head against a brick wall to argue with Daphne. And the blond was a client, after all. Emma was in no position to piss off a paying customer. 'All right. Enough chat,' she said. 'Would you like to see a demonstration?'

Daphne said, 'I didn't come downtown because I like filth.'

'I have to touch you,' said Emma. 'Most clients prefer to hold hands. While we're doing that, try to clear your mind.'

'Do I have to close my eyes?' asked Daphne.

'You don't, no.' But Emma would have to close hers to concentrate. She fizzled when she tried to do it with her eyes open.

'Will the picture come in slowly, like adjusting a camera lens?' asked Daphne.

'It'll be sudden,' said Emma. 'People describe it as a pop.'

Daphne offered her right hand. She wore three rings, all of them heavily jeweled and expensive.

Emma never wore rings. They could catch on clothing and she needed fast hands. Plus, distinctive jewelry was identifiable and therefore reckless. Emma hid her memorable hair – bronze, long, wavy – under wigs. Her eyes were hidden behind tinted shades. Emma had tried colored contacts, tried desperately, prying her eyelid open, jabbing the lens in, blinking, tearing, cursing, sweating,

and giving up in frustration. So glasses would have to do. Her ample breasts also drew unwanted attention. Since it was her job to follow and surreptitiously fondle strange men in New York City, she often flattened her rack with Ace bandages.

Emma clasped Daphne's hand and considered what image to send. Daphne was in advertising, so commercial and corporate images were out. The blond probably wouldn't be amused by Mona Lisa with a mustache or the David with a tube sock. A wildlife scene? Emma closed her eyes.

Daphne said, 'Nothing's happening.'

'Just wait.'

'Okay, yes. I got it,' said Daphne.

Emma released Daphne's hand. She said, 'Was the image black and white or in color?'

'Black and white and red all over,' said Daphne.

Emma laughed.

'Tell me what I saw,' said Daphne.

'A lion eating a zebra.'

'Incredible,' said Daphne. 'Do it again.'

'What sort of image?' asked Emma. 'Funny, historical, sexy?'

'Sexy,' said Daphne.

Once again, Emma took her client's hand and closed her eyes.

'It's cloudy,' said Daphne. 'No, it's *steamy*.'

'Shhh,' said Emma.

The two women sat holding hands on the couch, both with their eyes closed, breathing shallowly. After a minute, Emma released her client's hand.

Daphne said, ‘Tell me.’

‘A man and woman in the shower. Her breasts are pressed against the wet, slippery glass shower door. One of his arms is tight around her waist, his other hand is cupping her . . .’

‘That’s enough,’ interrupted Daphne. ‘I’m convinced.’ She stood up, too excited by what she’d experienced to sit. She toured Emma’s living room office. ‘Your power,’ she asked. ‘What do you call it?’

‘I don’t like the word “power”,’ said Emma. ‘Makes me sound like a mutant.’

‘You are a mutant,’ said Daphne. ‘I’ve never seen orange eyes before. Except on a cat.’

‘They’re *amber*,’ corrected Emma. ‘And my *skill* is called telegraphopathy.’

‘Like a telegraph?’

Emma nodded. ‘I transmit images over a short distance – the distance between my brain and yours. I can’t receive. And I can’t send thoughts or words or movies. Only still pictures. Images can be powerful, though. And dangerous. Which is why I use my skill to help people. For the greatest good.’

‘Romantic love,’ said Daphne.

‘It’s all you need,’ said Emma, although she managed to muddle through without it.

‘Is that what you really believe, or the rap you give to clients?’ Daphne asked. She paused in front of a framed diploma on the white wall behind Emma’s desk. ‘Certificate of authenticity from the Berkeley School of Extrasensory Perception.’

‘According to my testers, I’m one of a kind,’ said Emma.

‘The only confirmed telegraphopathist in the world.’

Daphne asked, ‘Do you ever send the wrong picture?’

Emma shook her head. ‘I have complete control over what I send and when. Don’t worry about accidents. They never happen.’

‘You mentioned a contract?’ Daphne checked her watch again.

Emma went to her desk and found a standard contract printed on The Good Witch, Inc. stationery. She filled in the name, date, payment schedule, and handed the sheet to Daphne.

The blond read the contract on the spot and signed. Most women took a day. But Daphne did so hate to waste time.

‘Call me tomorrow after you’ve looked through the folder,’ said Daphne. ‘I have meetings all morning with the SlimBurn people, but I can get to your photographer’s studio in the early afternoon.’

Emma’s jaw dropped. ‘You do the ads for SlimBurn diet pills?’

The blond nodded. ‘You like them?’

‘I’ve seen them.’

‘We’re in the same kind of business, Emma,’ said Daphne, smugly. ‘We both use the power of image. I do it to sell a product. You do it for the greater good.’ She said the last two words with sirloin-thick sarcasm.

‘The *greatest* good,’ said Emma.

‘If you say so,’ mocked the blond.

‘I want you to swear right now that your intentions are honorable and that you are genuinely, humbly, painfully in love with this man,’ said Emma, pointing to the folder on the couch. ‘I won’t take the case otherwise.’

‘I am. In love with him,’ said Daphne.

Emma stared at her, wanting to believe. She inhaled deeply, looking for the odor of a lie, but could still only pick up the lingering scent of greenbacks. ‘The photographer’s studio is also on Waverly Place, right across the street,’ she said. ‘He’s got racks of costumes and props there, so you don’t need to bring anything.’ Emma handed Daphne a card with the address. ‘He’ll bill you separately.’

‘I’m looking forward to it,’ said Daphne. She picked up her tote and headed for the door. ‘One more question, before I go.’

‘Yes?’

‘Do you use your power – *skill*, whatever – to make men fall in love with you?’

‘Am I self-serving? Just the opposite, Daphne,’ said Emma. ‘I put all my energy and concentration into my job. I’m devoted to my clients and work around the clock on their cases. The truth is, I simply don’t have time for a love life of my own. Besides, I derive huge satisfaction from helping other women find happiness.’

The blond blinked. Then, with a loud snort, she started laughing and kept at it for way longer than necessary.

When she pulled herself together, Daphne asked, ‘Has that little speech fooled anyone? Ever?’



Brain fuzz. That's what Emma called the post-transmission cranial snowstorm. Along with that, she sometimes felt ravenously hungry (like now). Or desperately horny (like always).

She pulled off her boots, padded to the center of the room, placed a supportive hand over each tit, and jogged in place. Exercise was the only way to clear away the fuzz, something about blood flow to the brain.

'Wish I had my camera,' said a voice at the doorway.

Emma turned to see her best friend, the photographer Victor Armour. He'd let himself into her apartment (he had a key) with the stealth of a mouse.

He asked, 'Did I surprise you?'

With her super ears, Emma had heard the elevator doors opening on her floor, the footsteps in the hallway, the key tumbling into the lock, and the door creaking open.

‘You got me that time,’ she lied, still jogging in place. ‘Did you see a cool, leggy blond in a tight gray suit in the lobby?’

‘You pass the “talk test”,’ said Victor. ‘Just read about it in the *Times*. If you can exercise and talk at the same time, you are not a fat slob loser.’

‘I’ll cross that off my list,’ she said, stopping. ‘She’s coming to your studio tomorrow.’

‘The cool blond?’ he asked, flopping onto the couch. ‘Is she going to give me a hard time?’

‘Hard in all the right places,’ said Emma.

‘Really?’ he asked lasciviously. ‘Show me.’

He held out his hand, wanting Emma to put Daphne’s likeness into his head. She swatted it away and took a seat next to him. ‘I don’t transmit on command.’

Victor was both Emma’s confidant and her colleague. She funneled her clients to him. He snapped sexy photographs of the women, which Emma memorized and then implanted into the minds of the men they desired. Victor liked his job a little too much.

‘I thought you had a date tonight,’ he said.

‘It’s not a date,’ Emma corrected. ‘It’s drinks with a friend who happens to be male.’

‘Drinks?’ said Victor with disgust. ‘Who is this jerkoff? He can’t feed you?’

‘Hoffman Centry. Book editor at Ransom House. You met him.’ Victor gave her the blank look. ‘Two days ago. In front of the building?’

‘Oh, that guy.’ Victor grinned. ‘Totally your type. A sexless smurf you’ll never be attracted to, so you’re safe. Ah, yes, the picture is coming in clearly now. *He’s* not the

one withholding dinner. You're keeping it liquid. I'm sure he'd love to feed you.'

'A tube steak with relish?' she asked.

'A ham boner,' said Victor.

Emma said, 'Why does it always have to be about sex with you? Hoff and I are friends. I like spending time with him. He's smart and sweet. He smells like Elmer's glue.'

'What do I smell like tonight?'

She put her nose against Victor's neck and inhaled. 'You smell like . . . a stallion . . . cantering across an open prairie . . . a potent musk rising from your mighty flanks . . .'

'All that and a hint of Irish Spring,' he said. 'It's been six months since the last time you tried to have sex. You should give the smurf a chance. Maybe it'll be good with him.'

'I'm not up for another humiliation,' said Emma. 'It batters the soul. I'm a deeply sensitive person, as you know, Victor.'

'So you say, over and over again. Get in the shower,' he said. 'I'm choosing your outfit tonight.' He stood up, helping Emma to her feet. They went into her (white) bedroom in the back of the apartment. She ducked into the (white) bathroom while he threw open her closet doors.

Victor had an eye for frame, color, and content, which made him a talented photographer. But style was his sixth sense. He could reach into Emma's cluttered closet and pull out pieces that fit together into a cohesive, kooky whole. Left on her own, Emma would wear the same black dress and boots every time she went out.

Emma emerged from the shower to find half her clothes on the bed. Victor had not yet found an outfit to his

liking. She watched from the uncovered corner of the bed as he appraised her meager selection.

‘Black, black, faded black, graying black, pilling black,’ he said, pushing one hanger aside at a time. ‘Witches don’t have to wear black. You won’t be excommunicated from the coven if you wore, say, red or purple.’

Emma said, ‘I’m not in a coven. I’m the lone witch. And speaking of other, lesser witches, what’s the Monica update?’

He shrugged and said, ‘Her tits are small, she laughs like a donkey, and she doesn’t swallow.’

‘She should be shot,’ said Emma.

‘And get this: Monica said she didn’t believe a Greenwich Village photographer with a two hundred dollar haircut and low-rise jeans could be straight.’

‘Small-minded publicist,’ said Emma. ‘Anyone can see that you’re straight but not narrow.’

‘Well, I straightened her out,’ he said. ‘Monica will never come below 14th Street again. A-ha!’

Victor had found a red wrap dress under a pile of sweaters on a high shelf.

‘What is that?’ she asked.

‘You don’t know?’ He held it up to his chest. ‘Needs ironing.’

‘It’s one of my mother’s dresses,’ said Emma. When Emma’s mother died eight years ago, her dad had given her a bag with some of Anise’s clothes. The pieces had floated in and out (mainly out) of her awareness, unworn, overlooked. Until now.

‘It’s so red,’ said Emma. ‘And the material is too thin for October.’

‘Wear a coat,’ said Victor. ‘You do have an iron?’

‘Under the sink.’

He dropped the dress on the bed and went to get the iron. Emma touched the soft rayon, the scent of cinnamon rising from it, as if her mom were in the room. Emma’s heart clenched. She’d been grappling with her mother’s legacy for nearly a decade already. She preferred not to think about it, especially on not-dates. But she couldn’t easily push those thoughts to the back of her mind if she were wearing Mom’s clothes.

‘I’m not putting that on,’ she announced when Victor returned to the bedroom, a hot iron in his hand.

He said, ‘You’re wearing it.’ He put a towel on her dresser and the rayon frock upon it. In a few swift strokes, he made the dress look new. He wrapped it around her and tied the bow expertly just above her hip. A quarter inch of her lacy black bra showed. She started to pull up the neckline to cover it, but Victor said, ‘NO! Do not touch. Leave it exactly like that.’

Victor picked black patent pumps and red, sucking-on-cherries lipstick. He stroked the makeup on thick and blow-dried her bronze waves straight, training strands to dip into her décolletage.

He steered her toward the full-length mirror on the inside closet door.

‘Yes, this is a hell of a dress,’ she said, gazing at herself. ‘Yes, I am a hell of a woman.’

‘This Hoff won’t be able to keep his smurf mitts off you,’ said Victor. Seeing her expression, he added, ‘Keep thinking about how hot you look. Maybe you’ll excite yourself.’

‘You talk as if I don’t want a relationship, as if I purposefully date men I’m not attracted to. And it’s not a date. It’s drinks with a friend who is male.’

‘I thank God every day that you never jerked me around like this poor preppy,’ said Victor, turning on the TV. ‘My cable’s out. Don’t worry. I’ll be long gone by the time you bring home the smurf. And I’ll hang up these clothes so you can use the bed.’

She left him to his channel surfing. With a few free minutes before she had to leave, Emma went into the living room and opened the folder Daphne left for her.

The top sheet was an 8×10 glossy black and white publicity photo of the man she’d be stalking for the next two weeks. He wore a dark jacket, white shirt, and a skinny tie. No ring. Good. (Emma refused to work on married men.) She guessed he was in his mid to late thirties. His hair was dark brown or black, foppish, bangs hanging in his blue or green eyes. He was slender with fine bone structure. His expression was confident, but not effete, a mischievous schoolboy all grown up. In his eyes, she detected a mix of intelligence and ego.

It was an undeniably handsome face. Emma would come to know it as well as her own. She’d follow him. When opportunity presented itself, she’d touch him and transmit a sexy image of Daphne into his head. Emma had committed to three hits a day, except Sundays, for two weeks – or until he asked Daphne on a date, whichever came first.

If he were like sixty percent of the men Emma had worked on before, he would call Daphne within ten days. If a guy found himself picturing the same woman nearly

naked multiple times a day, day after day, he'd reach the logical conclusion that *he must be in love with her*. Or, at the very least, in lust. And it would follow that the man would ask his love/lust object on a date. Emma would receive a second payment. Then she'd wish her client the best of luck and bow out. As she explained before accepting any case, her job was to create the spark that the client would then fan into a flame. Once the relationship began, Emma's involvement ended. It was in the contract.

She looked up from the photo and around her cherished white sanctuary. Women in love had paid for every stick of furniture in it. Her income, like most freelancers', was cyclical. She'd been on a down swing for a while now. With her nest egg evaporated (another story), Emma hovered on the brink of losing what she loved most. She needed Daphne's money badly. This case had to go smoothly.

Victor wandered into the living room and into the galley kitchen. She watched him pull a Diet Coke out of the fridge.

Emma held up the glossy for him to see. 'My new target.'

Victor took a sip and glanced over. He then spit a mouthful of soda on the kitchen floor.

'Hey! I just Swiffered that!' she said.

He rushed over and snatched the photo from Emma's hand. Shaking it, he asked, 'You don't know who this is?'

She scanned the photo. No recognition. She looked down at the dossier stuffed with press clippings and an address list, including his home(s), office(s), favorite restaurants, dry cleaner, coffee shop, bank, movie theaters. She read the name on his bio.

‘William Dearborn,’ she said. ‘Oh.’

‘You’ve heard of him?’

‘Of course. I don’t live under a rock. I live on top of one.’

‘He’s an artist and designer. He invented the best-selling software for editing digital photographs. I use it every day! I collect postcards of his paintings! He’s a legend, a fucking genius, stinking rich. He’s slept with more beautiful women in the past week than I will in my lifetime.’ Victor got quiet. ‘He’s my idol,’ he whispered reverently. ‘I worship the shit on his shoes.’

‘This is bad,’ said Emma.

‘This is great! The cool blond – she’s after Dearborn?’ He was practically peeing his pants with excitement.

‘No wonder she’s paying me so well,’ said Emma. ‘How am I going to get near him? He’s probably got bodyguards.’ She remembered that Daphne said she’d help her get access to him. But what of his revolving bedroom door? Would his head be so crammed with libidinous memories that the Daphne pictures – however risqué – wouldn’t register? Emma didn’t have much experience meddling in the minds of visual artists. Dearborn’s logic was bound to be more circuitous.

Victor was thinking the same thing. ‘William Dearborn might be the one man on the planet who’s immune to your mental manipulation,’ he said.

‘Don’t underestimate me,’ she said.

He shook his head. ‘I’d never do that. But don’t underestimate him either.’