

Communication
-A Parapolice Story-

STELLA NOTECOR

Tatiana's reached a good place in her life: she's got a great job, a supportive family, and a perfect boyfriend. Plus she's a paranormal.

With her supersonic ears, she can hear a mouse squeak from half a mile away. You think she'd be able to hear the warning signs of a break-up too, but she's blindsided by her boyfriend Jordan's stance on kids and marriage.

Basically, he doesn't want them—ever. And if she wants him, she'd better be prepared to give them up too.

Tatiana has spent her whole life listening to people. She knows they don't always say what they mean. She's willing to compromise, but Jordan's going to have to meet her half-way.

Sometimes listening is more important than talking, and sometimes we speak with more than our words.

This SWEET 6,000 word short story is based on the PARAPOLICE series by Stella Notecor, which is coming soon. A two chapter excerpt from Book 1: The Bet is included with this story.

Want to read more about the Parapolice? Join Stella Notecor's mailing list at newsletter.stellanotecor.com to receive updates!

COMMUNICATION

By

Stella Notecor

Communication

Stella Notecor

© Copyright 2011 by Stella Notecor

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the author except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

Cover Image: Jimmy Thomas (romancenovelcovers.com)

This book is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This e-book may not be resold or given away. If you would like to share this book, please purchase an additional copy for each person with whom you share it. If you are reading this book and did not purchase it or have it purchased for you, please visit www.stellanotecor.com and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

Table of Contents

[Communication](#)

[About The Author](#)

[The Bet](#)

COMMUNICATION

~*~

Tatiana climbed into Jordan's car the instant it came to a complete stop. "Get me out of here!" she hissed, buckling up her seatbelt. Once she was settled, she tugged the bottom of her dress to straighten the skirt.

He grinned. "Hi, honey, how are you? Did you have a good day at work?" He turned his attention to the cars flowing past them. As soon as he saw an opening, he pulled away from the curb into New York City's rush hour traffic.

"Damn Hallmark actually makes cards for 'the anniversary of your father's death'." She pulled open her purse. The card's pastel blue envelope peeked out, and she glared at it. "Everyone in the whole office signed it. All day long, I heard them whispering, 'Did you hear about Tatiana Monroe's father?'" She rummaged around in her purse till she found her lipstick.

Sometimes it sucked having supersonic hearing. Tatiana loved being a paranormal, but the drawback was hearing things one should never hear. She'd never be able to forget the pity she'd heard in her co-worker's voices.

After pulling down the visor, she checked her hair in the mirror. She'd need to get it permed again—her natural curl was coming through. She smeared on another coat of her favorite lipstick, a pretty pink color that stood out nicely against her café au lait skin. Then she dumped her purse on the floor. They were headed to her mama's house for dinner; she didn't need any fancy makeup there. She cast a quick glance over at Jordan. His business suit was a little stuffy, and he needed a haircut to tame his afro, but he was presentable.

Jordan reached over and squeezed her thigh. "Your dad was the reason Stanton started his paranormal private investigator business, right?"

"Yeah... they were both cops in the 83rd Precinct. They were the only paranormals in their department." She smiled down at her lap. "They both wished they had more backup in the field who knew what to expect from paranormal criminals."

Jordan nodded. "No wonder your coworkers were talking about him. He's why they have their jobs."

"But it's been ten years..." Tatiana sighed. "I guess that's why it bothered me so much. I thought by now I'd be over this, but it still hurts."

Jordan gave her a sad smile. "I don't think anyone ever gets over losing a parent."

She looked away, ashamed of her whining. Dad had died a hero, and she was complaining about people remembering him that way. Jordan didn't talk about his parents much, but she knew his dad had committed suicide. Since his parents had divorced after his mother was admitted to a mental institution, Jordan and his sister were probably the only people who remembered his father with any kindness.

She clasped his hand and squeezed it tightly. "Sorry."

Jordan squeezed back, but he kept his eyes on the road. "You know, feeling pity is just as hard as hearing it."

"Sorry," she said again, but she didn't release his hand. Having an empath for a boyfriend was tricky. He could feel all of her emotions simply by being near her. She didn't want to treat him any differently than she had her other boyfriends, but she also didn't want to overwhelm him with her feelings. She consciously toned down her emotions without shielding them from him.

Glancing out the car window, she noticed they were pulling into Mama's neighborhood. "Are you sure you want to eat with us?" Mama, Tatiana, and Sean had eaten dinner together every anniversary. Sean had only been five when Dad died, and the dinner had become a way to help him remember their father. "We'll probably be a little depressing tonight."

Jordan slowed the car down as they approached Mama's apartment building. She and Dad had bought the place when they first got married. They'd planned on getting a nicer apartment, but after he died, Mama kept it for the memories. And the cheap rent.

"I love visiting your mom," Jordan said as he parked the car. "I'm not going to avoid her just because she might be sad."

Tatiana looked at the house again. The bright yellow curtains in the windows beckoned her inside. She remembered hanging those curtains with Dad. The happy memory brought a smile to her face.

"That's better," Jordan murmured. "Now, let's head inside. I spent all day listening to a bunch of lawyers fight over minutia. After that, I can handle anything."

~*~

Tatiana shouldn't have worried. Mama always knew how to cheer people up. They spent most of dinner laughing at stories she told about Dad.

Then, as they were getting ready to leave, Tatiana saw her pull Jordan aside. Groaning internally, she turned up her hearing.

"Jordan Cole, when are you gonna make an honest woman out of my baby girl?" Mama frowned at him.

Tatiana cringed. "Ma!" She hooked her arm around Jordan's. "Come on, let's go. The next thing you know, she'll be asking about grandkids." She tugged him towards the door.

Mama shook her head. "One day, baby girl. One day I'll get me some pudgy grandbabies. Though I'll probably have to wait for Sean to grow up first."

Tatiana rolled her eyes. "No guilt-tripping me." She kissed Mama on the cheek. "I'm only twenty-seven."

"That's old-age when it comes to eggs. And Jordan's thirty! Lord knows his swimmers aren't getting any younger."

Jordan coughed to cover up a laugh. Tatiana wanted to sink into the ground. They'd only been dating for six months. They hadn't talked about anything more serious than whose apartment they'd be sleeping in.

"I'll call you tomorrow, Mama." She opened the door and ushered Jordan outside. Mama kept squawking behind her about babies and advanced maternal age, but Tatiana ignored her, turning her hearing down to normal levels.

She'd heard it all before; Mama had been pestering her for grandkids for five years now. She didn't want to settle down yet—she had a great career and she wanted to enjoy her carefree life a little longer.

Though recently she had started thinking more about kids and marriage.

She waited until they had both climbed into the car and were pulling away from Mama's house before she spoke. "What do you think about getting married?" she asked quietly. "Not now, but in a couple of years."

Jordan gripped the steering wheel tighter. "I'm not interested."

She sucked in a breath. "Not at all?"

"No." He kept his eyes on the road ahead of him.

"I... why?"

"I watched my parents' marriage go up in flames."

"That doesn't mean you can't get married."

"No, it means that I don't want to."

"What if you're in love?"

Jordan came to a stop at a red light. His fingers drummed a staccato rhythm against the steering wheel. "I can feel emotions. I understand them pretty well. But the only one I've never been able to understand is love."

"Because it's incomprehensible."

"No, because it can't exist alone. Love is intertwined with hope and joy and lust and all these other emotions."

That made sense. Tatiana had never spontaneously loved someone without feeling anything else towards them. Love had always grown from some other emotion. "Isn't that a good thing? Don't you want to feel joy and lust towards someone you love?"

Jordan shook his head. "It's too easy for those emotions to change. Then love disappears."

"Love doesn't just disappear." Mama still loved Dad, even after all these years.

"All I know is, people fall out of love every day, and I don't want to be legally bound to someone when it happens."

Tatiana looked down at her hands. The middle fingernail on her left hand had a huge chip in the polish. Getting married had always been a given, something she'd do one day when she found the right guy. She'd met people before who claimed they'd never get married, but they

still had long-term partners and children. She wanted marriage and babies, but when it came down to it, she could compromise.

“Would you have kids with a girlfriend?”

He rubbed his forehead with one hand. “No.”

“Why?” The question burst out of her, the frustration she was feeling coloring her words. Jordan twitched at the sudden onslaught of emotion. She forced herself to cool down.

“Why?” she asked again, calmly.

“I got stuck in the middle of my parents' custody battle.”

“And you don't want to do that to your kids.”

“Exactly.” He glanced over at her. “Is that a deal breaker for you?”

She examined her fingernails again. The ugly chip on her left hand eclipsed the beauty of the other nails. His feelings were understandable after what he'd gone through, but she wanted kids someday. She wanted a family like hers, full of love and affection.

“I'll have to think about it,” she said at last.

He nodded. “I'm not planning on falling out of love. I'm just trying to be realistic.” He turned the corner and drove into the parking garage of her building. He parked in a guest spot, but he didn't kill his engine. “Am I still invited in?”

“Are you kidding? I've been thinking about tonight all week.” Her vibrator could attest to that.

He turned off the car. “Me too.” Leaning over, he kissed her hard.

She tangled her fingers in his slight afro. He'd have to cut it soon, but she liked playing with the tight curls. Her body thrummed. She pulled away. “I think we need to take this up to my place.”

“Race you to the door!”

Giggling, Tatiana grabbed her purse and hopped out of the car. She made a beeline for the elevator, but her heels slowed her down. Jordan arrived first and pressed the button.

They waited for the old elevator to descend. Thanks to a difficult murder case Jordan was working on, they hadn't been able to see each other for a week. She had missed him more than she expected.

“How's your case going?”

Jordan shrugged. “Since the existence of paranormals was revealed last year, a lot of laws have been challenged and upheld. We're hoping this one will be too.”

“What law is that?”

“The criminal in question is a shapeshifter who killed a man using his claws while shifted into a wolf. We want to set a precedent that claws and other non-human body parts are considered deadly weapons.”

Tatiana wrinkled her nose. One of her coworkers had worked the crime scene of that case, and the pictures he had circulated afterwards made it very clear that claws could be lethal.

“If non-human body parts are declared deadly weapons, then we'll be able to increase the manslaughter charges to murder charges.” The elevator arrived. Holding hands, they stepped inside. Jordan pressed the button for Tatiana's floor, then continued, “Once that precedent has been set...”

Tatiana smiled at him as he continued to babble. He didn't make as much money as an assistant district attorney as he could as a private lawyer, but he loved his job. They had met when she was called to testify in one of the first cases which openly involved paranormal activity. Jordan had taken on the case after he revealed to the district attorney that he was uniquely qualified for the position due to his own paranormal status.

Her attraction to him had been immediate, but it wasn't until she saw him attempting to protect paranormal rights while still getting a guilty sentence that she realized he was incredibly intelligent and caring. As soon as the trial ended, she had called him up and asked him to coffee.

Since then, things between them had been easy. Until that night, they hadn't argued about anything, but kids and marriage were big things to disagree on.

When they reached her floor, the elevator dinged. Jordan was still talking, and he continued as they walked down the hall, entered Tatiana's apartment, and headed for her bedroom.

At the door to her room, she stopped him. “No work in bed,” she murmured. She wanted to leave her worries at the door: work, her dad, marriage, and babies. Grabbing his tie, she hauled him down for a kiss.

As their lips met, heat spread throughout her body. His hands rose to her waist, pulling them together. Everywhere their bodies touched burned.

Tatiana undid his tie, then threw it aside and began attacking his jacket buttons. He echoed her movements, unzipping her dress and sliding it over her shoulders.

She let the dress slide down her arms and pool at her feet. Jordan's clothing joined it on the floor. She kicked the clothes to the side, then sent their shoes flying after. Clad in her undergarments, she sank to her knees.

Jordan groaned. “You are killing me.”

She winked. With his help, she removed his briefs. He stood before her, naked and ready.

Gorgeous. Tatiana leaned forward and licked him. He groaned, his hips jutting forward. She let her hands wander, memorizing the planes of his body.

She turned up her hearing. His breath came harsh and fast. His heartbeat pounded in his chest. She had done this to him. Warmth pooled between her legs, the feeling of power inflaming her.

Jordan clasped her arm and pulled her to her feet. “As much as I enjoy your mouth, I want more than that tonight.” He kissed her, his lips lingering as Tatiana maneuvered him towards the bed.

She fell back onto the mattress. Jordan paused to grab protection from her nightstand drawer, then he crawled into bed on top of her.

They joined, their bodies slipping into a comfortable rhythm with little effort. Tatiana kissed down Jordan's neck as he caressed her breasts. When he tweaked her nipples, she squeaked. In retaliation, she slid her hands to the middle of his back and tickled the sensitive spot just above his tailbone.

He laughed, pulling away from her touch. "Don't do that!"

"Why not?" She trailed her fingernails up his spine. He shuddered, his head coming to rest on her shoulder. "When I do that, I can hear your heartbeat race."

He nipped at her collarbone, making her shudder too. "And when I do that, I can feel your lust overflow."

Tugging lightly on his hair, she pulled him into a kiss. Their tongues danced as their bodies rocked together. Tatiana could hear Jordan's breathing quicken. He was getting close. She tingled all over, the knowledge of his pleasure increasing her own.

Jordan gasped so softly that the creaking of the bedsprings nearly hid it. Tatiana had been listening for it. She knew what it meant. He was close, ready even, but holding back for her.

She grasped his hand. Guiding him to her most sensitive spot, she showed him how to stimulate her. His touches grew more confident as warmth began to pool between her legs. She surrendered herself to her feelings.

The heat between her legs exploded, radiating frissons of ecstasy throughout her body. Jordan gasped again, loudly this time, as he picked up on her emotions. His hips stuttered to a halt as he reached his peak.

They held their positions for a long moment before Jordan flopped onto his side on the bed, separating them. Cool air rushed over Tatiana's flushed skin, accentuating the space between them.

She didn't like the distance. She wanted him back inside her. She wanted to be joined again, to somehow remain joined for the rest of their lives.

Jordan let out a long, low whistle. "Are you sure you aren't a succubus?"

"Quite sure." She enjoyed sex, but she certainly didn't use it to drink men's energy.

He shook his head. "I've never been with someone so passionate."

"We're just good together." His powers helped him figure out the best places to touch and taste in order to arouse her. She liked to think her ability to hear his body's clues gave her an extra edge in the bedroom too.

"Well, I'm beat. Mind if I sleep here?"

"Not at all." Tatiana was exhausted too. Between the anniversary, her coworkers, and their earlier discussion about marriage, she had been put through an emotional ringer. Unconsciousness sounded enticing.

They got ready for bed, taking quick showers and brushing their teeth. Tatiana found herself thinking about his earlier statements as she slipped on her nightgown.

She curled up in bed first. When Jordan climbed in behind her, she imagined totally falling for him, only to have him walk away without looking back. She'd end up alone without even kids to love.

"It's a deal breaker."

"Huh?" Jordan propped himself up so he could look over her shoulder.

"I've dreamed about having babies since I was a baby myself." She rolled onto her back, looking up at him. "I love you, but I can't give up on my dreams. Not both of them." She rested a hand on her stomach. She used to imagine putting her hand there one day only to have a tiny foot kick it. "I can understand not wanting to get married after you saw your parents' marriage fail. I can deal with never getting married. But I can't give up those dream babies."

He sighed. "I didn't think you could." He sat up. "I should go."

She looked over at his back. He pulled on his pants, then his shirt, without looking over his shoulder at her.

"I'll call you tomorrow?"

He stuck his feet in his shoes. "Sounds good. I'll take my suitcase tonight, but I've probably left a couple things lying around. I can swing by and grab them in a couple days."

"Oh. Okay." He wasn't fighting this at all. He wasn't fighting for her. "Lock the door when you leave." She rolled onto her side and stared at the wall.

He rustled around for another minute or two, gathering up his jacket and socks. Then he walked out of the bedroom. He paused at the door. "Night."

"Goodnight," she murmured. As he walked out of the room, she turned up her hearing.

His footsteps echoed down the hall, slow and heavy. She heard a jingle as he grabbed the spare door key off its hook. The front door opened, then closed. With a harsh clunk, the deadbolt turned. A few moments later, metal clattered against tile. He had shoved the keys through the crack beneath her door.

She couldn't hear him walk away, but she knew he was gone.

Her chest ached. She couldn't catch her breath. She gasped, trying to breathe. She took a deep breath, then another, and another, until she dissolved into a sobbing mess.

She had a great job as a private investigator. She had her mom and her brother for support. She had a fabulous best friend, a great apartment, and even a nice car. The only thing she wanted now was love, and every time she thought she found it, her hopes were shattered.

Their relationship had been so short, it was silly to cry over it, but she couldn't stop the tears. She had thought Jordan was the one. Until tonight, she had halfway expected to marry him one day, or at least date him for a very long time.

But he wasn't the man for her, not if being with him meant betraying her dreams.

~*~

Tatiana shifted the box of Jordan's things to her hip so she could rap on the front door. As she waited, she stepped beneath the overhang to hide from the burning summer sun. She could hear people laughing inside the brownstone, and she didn't have to wait long for the door to open.

Jordan peeked out. "Hey." He opened the door wide, exposing the kid perched on his hip. They shared the same dark chocolate skin tone and soft, fuzzy hair. "Come on in. I'm just babysitting my nephew."

She nodded, sighing inside when he grinned at the little boy. He was so good with kids; how could he not want his own? She walked in as he stepped back. The little boy stared at her with wide eyes. He stuck his thumb in his mouth as she caught his gaze.

Jordan lowered the boy to the ground and stepped forward to take the box from her. "Thanks for bringing this." He set the box on the hall table. "Let me go get your stuff."

He headed for the bedroom, leaving Tatiana alone with the little boy. She squatted down so she could meet his eyes.

"Hi, sweetie. What's your name?"

"Marc," he murmured around his thumb.

"I'm Tatiana. Are you having fun with your Uncle Jordan?"

Marc nodded. "Yeah. But then you came and he felt sad."

"You mean he looked sad?" Maybe he missed her as much as she missed him.

Marc pulled his thumb out of his mouth and shook his head. "No! He felt sad." He patted the middle of his chest.

"Marc! Come here!" Jordan called from the other room.

His eyes widening, Marc frowned. "Uh-oh. He's mad now!" The kid scurried out of the room.

Evidently the kid was an empath. Jordan hadn't sounded angry—in fact, he'd sounded very patient.

From the bedroom, she could hear them talking. Opening her hearing a little more, she could clearly make out their words.

"Are you sure you didn't touch that bag? I'm not going to yell at you if you moved it; I just need to know where it is."

"You gonna yell. You feel angry." A pause. "Are you mad at me?"

Bedsprings squeaked. "I'm upset about the situation." A sigh. "I'll shield now."

"You disappeared."

"Good. Now, tell me where you put the bag."

"I wanted to listen to the CD, so I put it in the living room."

More creaking springs. "You stay back here, okay? My friend doesn't know how to shield."

Actually, Tatiana did know how to shield her emotions from empaths. She took a deep breath and imagined all the windows and doors to her mind being sealed shut. She normally didn't bother, since she didn't care if people could feel her emotions, but she'd learned to shield for her job.

Jordan turned the corner into the living room and stopped short. "You... can you shield?"

"I'm a private investigator. Of course I can shield."

He leaned against the wall. "But you never... not around me."

"I believe in honesty in relationships." She gave him a half-smile. "A conviction you don't seem to share."

He shrugged. "I've tried explaining to other women. If I explain on the first date, they leave before dessert. If I explain later on, it leads to scenes like the other night. No matter when I do it, I know it's going to end the relationship." He pulled away from the wall and wandered over to the television. "I guess it's selfish, but I like to wait. It's nice to be with someone for a while."

He searched around the entertainment center until he pulled out a plastic bag. Tatiana took it, then waited while he pulled her favorite mixed CD out of the player.

"Sorry," he said as he handed it to her. "Marc's only four, and he doesn't understand personal belongings."

She tucked the CD where it wouldn't get scratched by her makeup or books. "It's fine. He's cute. He looks a lot like you."

Jordan ran a hand through his hair. "Yeah, I get that a lot."

"You're good with him too." She set her bag down at her feet. "How can you not want kids when you obviously like them?"

"Don't." His jaw tightened.

"Don't what? I'm just asking a question."

"And that question will lead to an argument, we'll both get upset, and then Marc has to deal with all those emotions."

Tatiana stretched her hearing again. The kid was humming, and she heard small things crashing against each other. "He's fine. We're both shielding; he can't feel us."

"And when our shields fail?"

She snorted. "I don't know about you, but my shields don't fail. Ever. Dropping my shields on a mission means dying."

"But if they did—"

"If they did, it'd be like any kid hearing adults fight. It's uncomfortable, but you get over it." Even her parents, as much as they loved each other, had argued. "Good parents don't fight in front of their children, and good parents of empaths would never broadcast their emotions."

He looked away, his lips thin and his forehead lined.

"But your parents did."

“Looking back, I think my dad was an empath, but we didn’t know about paranormals. I found out later.”

“So your dad didn’t know how to shield.”

Jordan shook his head. “He couldn’t keep other people’s emotions out, and he couldn’t keep his emotions in. And my mother was bipolar. Every time she got whacked out, so did he. My sister was older and moved out as soon as she turned eighteen. She tried to keep me at her place during the worst fighting, but she isn’t an empath. She had no idea how to help me emotionally.”

Tatiana laid a hand on his arm. “I’m sorry.” Being subjected to both of his parents’ wild emotions had likely injured his psyche in ways she couldn’t imagine. “I’m amazed you’re so balanced.”

He barked a laugh. “Sure. Being scared of marriage and kids is balanced.” He shrugged off her hand.

“Hey, you know who you are and what you want. You’re way ahead of most people who don’t think to want anything except 2.5 kids and a dog.” She stepped forward into his personal bubble. She pressed her palm to his face, loosening her shielding to let her admiration and respect slip through.

His eyes fluttered shut. “That’s exactly what I want.”

Tatiana sucked in a breath. “What?”

“I’m just afraid that I’d screw up my kids.”

“But you wouldn’t.” She paused until he opened his eyes. “Right now, you’re upset and anxious, but you’re obviously not broadcasting. I can hear Marc playing happily in the other room.”

“Sure, I’m shielding now. But what about those first sleepless nights with a newborn?” He looked away. “I’d end up one of those crazy dads on TV who shake their kid or drop it out a window.”

“No, you’d feel the baby’s fear, and it would stop you.” She grabbed his chin and turned his head until he faced her. “Your empathy would make you an amazing father.” She deepened her hearing. Marc was still playing, but she wasn’t listening for him. She was listening for Jordan’s heartbeat.

His heart was racing, his breathing shallow and fast. He was in fight-or-flight mode. Reasoning with him wouldn’t do anything at this point. With a sigh, she released his chin. “But my words can’t change you. You have to change yourself.”

Tatiana picked up her bag. She couldn’t give up her dreams of having kids one day for him, and she couldn’t expect him to change his worldview for her. Unless he truly wanted to have kids, he would grow to resent them. As much as she liked him, and as well as they got along, without similar goals, there was no future for them.

She pressed a kiss to his cheek. “If you decide that you want a family, let me know.”

He offered her a sad smile. "If I do, you'll be the first girl I call."

She squeezed his arm, then headed out the door. An old habit of hers kicked in, and she widened her hearing before opening the door. There was no danger on the other side, but she did pick up the sound of water running in the bathroom. A lot of water.

"Speaking of kids, Marc's playing in the tub."

Jordan grimaced. "Shit. Marc!" He dashed away, leaving her to let herself out.

Tatiana stepped outside and let the door swing shut behind her. The bright summer sun was setting, and the wind carried a brisk hint of autumn. She shivered, then tightened her grip on her bag. Time to go.

Summer was moving on, and so was she.

~*~

Summer turned into fall, and fall into winter. Rather than moping, Tatiana picked up some extra hours at work and started spending more time with her friends and family. Her mother sighed over having lost yet another potential son-in-law, but she didn't badger Tatiana about grandkids.

Tatiana knew she should start dating again, but any time her friends mentioned a cute guy they knew, she found herself thinking about Jordan. Something told her to wait just a little while longer before she gave up on him.

Her friends didn't agree.

"Come on, Tati, it's been, like, a year since you went on a date!" Jason cried. "You gotta go to the New Year's Eve party with us." He threw himself down on Tatiana's couch, his stilettos clattering on the tile floor. Jason had been wearing female bodies less often lately, but he had gone all out for the evening, giving himself curvy hips and huge boobs that were spilling out of the top of his tube dress. Tatiana thought his decision to go female had something to do with the way Adam's eyes were glued to his chest.

Honestly, she loved her friends, but having a gender-bending shapeshifter and a stoic psychic for best friends made for some interesting moments.

Adam calmly took a seat on the armchair, his gaze attached to his boyfriend's heaving bosoms. "Jason exaggerates, but it's been four months. It's time to move on." He tugged on his shirt sleeves, tidying his appearance.

Tatiana took a deep breath. It was New Year's Eve. In less than a month, she'd be twenty-eight. She couldn't wait forever. "All right, I'll come." Jason opened his mouth to cheer, and she cut him off. "I'm not going to scope for guys." She'd give Jordan one last night. Starting tomorrow, she'd be a new girl for the new year.

"Just come party and relax a little." Jason grabbed the TV remote from the coffee table. "Go get yourself prettied up. We've got half an hour till the party starts!"

While he and Adam fought over what channel some New Year's Eve special was on, Tatiana took a quick shower. After toweling off, she pulled out her favorite club dress, a slinky silver number.

She tied the halter behind her neck, then double checked to make sure her thong wasn't peeking out the top of the low-cut back. She slipped on a pair of heels—silver ones just tall enough to make her butt look amazing—and grabbed a sequined clutch. She dumped her wallet and phone into it, then headed for her living room.

Before she made it there, someone knocked on the front door. With a shrug, she dumped her purse on the entrance table and answered the door.

Jordan stood outside.

Tatiana squeezed the door knob. "Hi."

He cleared his throat. "I'm not ready for marriage."

"So you've said." She tried to close the door.

"Wait!" He grabbed the door and held it open. "I don't think I'll ever be ready for marriage. But I could be a dad."

For a moment, she wavered. Then she shook her head. "Not everyone wants kids. I respect that."

"I've been spending time with my nephew. I can shield around him, even when I'm angry."

"Being able to shield doesn't mean you should have kids."

"I like being around kids. I always have, but I was afraid of ending up like my parents."

In the other room, the television switched off. Jason and Adam were undoubtedly eavesdropping. Rolling her eyes, Tatiana looked away from Jordan's searching gaze. "Why tell me?"

"Because..." He took hold of her shoulders and turned her gently so he could look into her face. "I love you," he said quietly.

His gorgeous hazel eyes looked green and sincere in her poorly lit hallway. This would be so much easier if he weren't so perfect. But no one changed their beliefs, not this easily.

His fingers tightened on her bare shoulders. "You don't believe me."

"People can't change their beliefs."

"You said you could give up marriage."

"That's different. Marriage is a given for me, something you do because you're supposed to. I've never been emotionally attached to it."

"I've never been emotionally attached to not having kids."

"You just said you're afraid. Fear is an emotion!"

"I'm ready to face that fear."

She wanted to believe him, but how could she know that he wouldn't change his mind tomorrow?

Closing her eyes, she shut down all of her senses except one. Her hearing had never led her astray.

She could hear Adam and Jason in the living room, murmuring about whether they should leave. She couldn't help but smile when she realized Jason was trying to convince his boyfriend that eavesdropping was logical. When it came down to it, he was as big a gossip as her.

She deepened her hearing. The ticking of her kitchen clock became as loud as cannon fire. Her own breath became roaring wind. Her heartbeat became a heavy, rhythmic drumming.

Jordan's exhale rushed past her ears, but she couldn't locate his heartbeat. She stretched her hearing as far as it could go.

She still couldn't find his heartbeat. Dumbfounded, she opened her eyes. He was watching her, his steady gaze searching her face for her decision.

She took a step forward, her shoes clattering against the floor like thunder. Reaching out, she pressed a hand to his throat. As soon as she felt his heartbeat, she understood why she hadn't been able to find it.

She couldn't hear his heart because it was beating in time with hers.

Pulling her hearing back in, she slid her hand around the back of his neck. She pressed herself against him, standing on her tiptoes, until she thought she could feel his heart beating alongside her own. Then she tugged him into a kiss.

Someone cleared their throat.

Startled, Tatiana pulled away. Jason and Adam were standing in the doorway of the living room. Jason had on a lecherous smile, but Adam looked a little embarrassed to have interrupted.

"We're leaving for the party now," Adam said. "Would you like to join us?"

Tatiana caught Jordan's eye. He looked a little flustered. She probably should have mentioned Jason and Adam were in the living room.

"Another time," she murmured. "We're having our own party tonight."

She let Adam and Jason out, feeling Jordan's gaze on her.

As soon as she locked the door, he stepped behind her and wrapped an arm around her waist. She looked up at him, and he caught her lips with his own.

As they kissed, his hand slid up her side to her neck. He gently untied her dress, and she let it slip off to pool around her feet.

His hands came to rest at her hips. Hooking his fingers in her thong, he broke the kiss to tug them down to her ankles. She stepped out of them, and he threw them on top of her dress.

Clad in nothing but a pair of stilettos, she headed for her bedroom.

He stopped her in the doorway, grabbing her hand. "Wait."

She waited.

He searched her face. "What are we doing?"

She pressed a hand to his throat, feeling for his heartbeat. It thrummed steadily, still in time with her own. "I love you. This might be a mistake, but for you, I'm willing to try."

He closed his eyes. She wondered if he was feeling for her emotions.

When he opened his eyes, a fire burned in them.

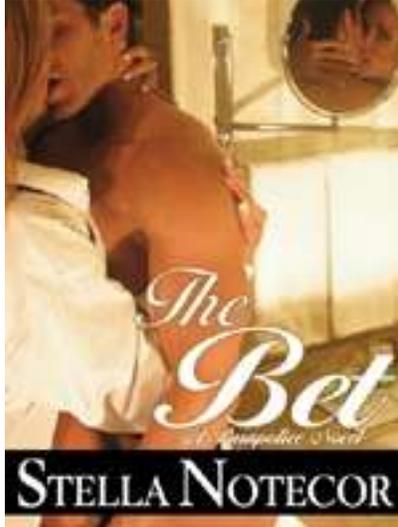
She let him steer her towards the bed with kisses. Speaking and listening were important for communication, but it was time to let her body and emotions do the talking.

About The Author

Stella Notecor believes that love has no boundaries. She writes romances about people, be they straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer.

If you are interested in reading more of her stories, please visit her website at www.stellanotecor.com or sign up for her newsletter at newsletter.stellanotecor.com.

THE BET



Coming Soon!

Jason joins the Stanton and Associates private investigation firm on a whim. His rash decision soon leads to another—he bets his new partner Adam one hundred dollars that he can hide from him in between working on their assignments. After all, Adam might be the best psychic Jason has ever met, but Jason has a wildcard up his sleeve.

He can shape-shift—and he isn't confined to his own gender.

With that in mind, Jason plans to win the bet by seducing Adam as a woman. Only, Adam's actually pretty awesome. And the sex is totally mind blowing. And Jason might be falling in love...

This SPICY story contains gender-bending, male/female sex, and male/male sex!

CHAPTER ONE

For a covert private investigator, Stanton's office was remarkably prominent. Jason crossed the lobby of the Lindsey building, noting the extravagant decorations. Gilded mirrors lined the walls and plush carpeting softened the floor beneath his feet. The Lindsey building was known throughout New York City for housing high profile businesses. He entered the elevator and read the list of the building tenants, who ranged from plastic surgeons to divorce attorneys to loan sharks.

"Stanton and Associates" headed the list. It was the only office on the top floor—the penthouse suite.

Jason pressed the button for the thirty-second floor and watched the elevator doors slide shut. A tiny ding announced that the elevator had begun to rise. He stared at his reflection in the shiny silver doors for a moment, then made a face at his messy blond curls. He blinked and the man looking back at him had thick, gorgeous brown hair. The elevator dinged again, and Jason winked at his new reflection. "Looks like this is our stop, gorgeous."

The doors slid open to reveal a bustling office. Jason approached the secretary at the front desk. "Good afternoon. I'm here to see Christopher Stanton."

She blinked at him. "Name?"

"Jason Keith." He offered his best smile.

She typed something into her computer and then shook her head. "You don't have an appointment. Have a seat over there—" she waved a hand towards some chairs along the wall "—and I'll call you when he can see you."

Jason sighed and sank into one of the chairs. It depressed him when he couldn't impress someone while in his most attractive morphs.

He glanced at his watch. Quarter to one. In a typical office, everyone would be coming back from lunch soon. He'd make his move then.

Settling in with an outdated sports magazine from the meager selection offered, Jason kept an eye on the elevator. As soon as he heard a soft ding, he prepared himself. A group of five stepped off the elevator. Jason stood up and slid into place behind them. He shifted, morphing into an old man with wrinkled skin and gray hair. He followed the group past the secretary, who didn't give him a second glance.

As they turned a corner, Jason fell away from the group and shifted again, this time into a young man with black hair and darkly tanned skin. Walking purposefully, as if he knew where he was going and had a right to be in the office, Jason started exploring. Each door was labeled with a name plate or two, and while Jason didn't spot Stanton's, he did recognize one name.

Jason popped his head in the door of a small office. "Excuse me, are you Dr. Taylor Carter?"

Dr. Carter, also known as Jim's best friend Ray, glanced up from his work. "How can I help you?" He absently ran a hand through his brown hair, mussing it more than it already had been.

From the deep wrinkles in Ray's forehead, Jason could tell he had been hard at work for a while.

Ray could definitely use a break, and Jason was well known for being good comic relief. "I was wondering if you could x-ray my head and tell me if my brain's broken."

Ray stared at him for a minute, then his brown eyes flashed silver behind his glasses. "Dammit, Jason! What are you doing here?"

Laughing, Jason stepped into the office and took a seat in front of Ray's desk. "I never could pull the wool over your eyes."

"Of course not. No one else I know has a metal plate in their head."

Nothing could be hidden from Ray's x-ray eyes, and Jason could only alter the soft tissues of his body. Ray would always know who Jason was. There was no reason to be someone else around him.

Jason shifted back into his genetic body, feeling more comfortable in his own skin.

Ray nodded. "Better, but you forgot the eyes."

Jason hadn't forgotten. When his eyes were properly hazel, he looked too much like his mother. He finished his shift with a sigh. "Happy?"

"Very. What are you doing here?"

Jason shrugged. "Nothing much. Just thought I'd come and visit you."

Ray smacked the papers he was holding down on his desk. "I never told you where I work. And how did you get by Christine?"

Jason hadn't realized Ray worked here until he saw the name on the door, but Ray didn't need to know that. "Christine?"

"The secretary at the front desk."

Jason smiled evilly and steepled his fingers. "I have my ways..." Ray stared at him silently until Jason squirmed in his seat. "I shifted and snuck in behind a group coming back from lunch."

Shaking his head, Ray sat back in his seat and crossed his arms. "Only you would sneak into a P.I.'s office. I'm surprised Christine let you by. Normally she sets anyone who tries that on fire."

That pretty blonde woman with gorgeous curves set people on fire? "What is this place? Stanton told me I'd fit in, but he didn't explain much."

"I knew the mystery would draw you in." Jason spun around to see Stanton standing in the doorway, his salt and pepper hair standing out in stark contrast to his midnight black suit.

He saluted the man. "Good afternoon, sir!"

Stanton chuckled. "Hello, Jason. Glad you decided to take me up on my offer." He motioned to the door. "Now, if you'll join me and leave Dr. Carter to work in peace, I'll explain what we do here."

“See you around, Ray.” Jason stood and followed Stanton out of the office, snickering when Ray let out a huge sigh. As he walked, he changed his eyes back to blue. The small change made him feel anonymous, as if he had slipped on a pair of sunglasses to obscure his face.

Stanton led him through the office, passing by the secretary's desk. “Thank you for letting me know Mr. Keith had arrived, Christine. He gets into trouble if left alone too long.”

Christine glared at Jason. “I can tell.”

Jason shrugged at her and smiled. She huffed and turned back to her work.

Stanton patted Jason on the shoulder and led him onward. When they were out of earshot, Stanton murmured, “A word of advice if you decide to join us: stay on Christine's good side. I might be in charge of this operation, but she's the power behind the scenes. If she doesn't like you, you'll find yourself assigned to a lot of crappy cases.” He paused in front of another office, a much larger one than Ray's, and pushed open the door. “This is my office.”

Huge windows covered two walls in the corner office and showed off a large chunk of the New York skyline, which glittered under the summer sun. Jason whistled appreciatively. “Nice!”

“You'd think so, but the glare is terrible in the mornings. And all the sunlight breaks down my leather furniture.”

Stanton flopped into a large armchair in front of the desk and gestured for Jason to take the seat opposite him. He sat, and the stiff leather molded comfortably around him.

Stanton fixed his gaze on Jason. “Judging by the nickname, you know about Carter's powers.”

Jason nodded. “He saved my ass one night after a bar fight when he told me I'd fractured my skull. The doctors said the injury should have killed me. Instead, I've got a metal plate in my head and an x-ray machine for a best friend.”

“What else have you discovered about us?”

Jason leaned back in his chair. “Well, you're ostentatious.” He nodded towards the windows, and Stanton chuckled. “But I've got no idea what you actually do. You said you're private investigators, but you've got Ray and a secretary who sets people on fire. And you want me, a shapeshifter, to join you.” This meeting was leaving Jason with more questions than answers. When Stanton had saved Jason from getting his ass kicked in a bar fight, he had betrayed himself as an old friend of Jason's mother. Jason had been ready to write him off—he didn't give a damn about people who thought he should be like his mom—but then Stanton had said something different.

Instead of remarking upon his heroic mother and wondering why Jason couldn't be more like her, Stanton said his mother saved twenty people—but he knew Jason could save hundreds. That had caught his attention. After ruminating on it for a week, Jason decided to accept Stanton's invitation to join his group.

It didn't hurt that Jason had gotten fired from his bartending job after the fight and was down to his last fifty bucks.

“You shapeshift. Christine controls fire. Dr. Carter sees through solid objects.” Stanton paused for a moment. “I can influence people's thoughts.”

Suddenly, it connected. “You've got a team of paranormals.”

Stanton relaxed into his chair. “I knew you'd figure it out.” He waved a hand towards the huge windows. “How many paranormals are there in New York? Tons, yet you never read stories in the newspaper about paranormal crimes. Someone has to clean up the streets, and normal cops don't even believe in us.”

Jason hadn't really thought about it before. He rarely spent time in the company of normals. The paranormal population was huge, especially in New York, and there was no reason to mix with normals if he didn't want to. “And you guys do it all.”

“Exactly. We work with local law enforcement, including the FBI and CIA, as parapolice— similar to the work paralegals do for lawyers and paramedics do for hospitals. Our budget is large; law enforcement agencies pay us for the investigations we solve, and we also take on private clients. My employees receive very comfortable salaries.” He folded his hands in his lap. “In return, they do anything I ask.”

Anything Stanton asked? It sounded a bit ominous, but he seemed trustworthy. If Ray was willing to work for him, then obviously he wasn't a bad guy. Jason took a deep breath. “Where do I sign up?”

Stanton locked gazes with him. “Are you sure you want to work here? This job requires secrecy and dedication. You won't have time to go bar hopping. Instead you'll spend your nights on stakeouts.”

Stakeouts sounded a heck of a lot more fun than sitting in the back of a bar getting smashed. “I'm in. When's payday?”

CHAPTER TWO

Tatiana stuck her head inside Adam's office. "Did you hear about Trina?"

Adam slumped in his chair. "I heard."

Trina was the fourth partner he'd lost in a year. Laura died after two months, though her heart attack was in no way his fault. Timothy ran off and eloped with his longdistance girlfriend after five months. Jackson lasted four months before he quit without telling anyone why.

Trina hadn't even made it a month before she had a mental breakdown.

Tatiana took a seat on the edge of Adam's desk and leaned over to pat him on the back. Her sympathy bled through her touch. "I'm sorry. You know it's not your fault, right?"

Adam did know. He could read his partners' minds, after all, and while none of them had particularly loved him, they hadn't hated him either. Their emotions toward him were ones he typically engendered in people—that of casual regard for an acquaintance. With his abilities, it was easier to avoid people than to make friends. Tatiana was the only person who had ever punched through his defenses, and he was fine with keeping it that way.

He clasped his hands together and let them rest on his desk. "I am merely concerned that this will complicate my latest assignment." Undercover work was easier with a partner, but Adam could handle the case on his own if he had to.

Squeezing his shoulder once more, Tatiana grinned. "Oh, I don't think you'll have to worry about that. We've got fresh blood in the office."

Adam glared at the empty desk on the other side of the office. He had cleared away Trina's things as soon as he heard she was leaving. He had hoped he'd have the room to himself for a little while. "I always end up with the trainees."

"Because you're the only one who doesn't complain." She hopped off the desk. "Squeaky wheel and all that. I'm gonna get back to work; Stanton just opened his door and they're headed this way." She was halfway out the door when she paused and tilted her head as if listening for something. A smirk blossomed on her face. "This one sounds like a real character!"

Adam felt like locking his door and pretending he was still at lunch. Avoiding his new partner wouldn't solve anything though, so he took a deep breath and rose from his seat. He stepped out of his office just as Stanton and a young man with incredibly messy blond hair rounded the corner. He nodded at them. "Good afternoon."

Stanton nodded in return. "Afternoon, Adam. Tatiana warn you we were coming?"

"Of course."

Turning to the man at his side, Stanton explained, "Tatiana is our resident gossip-monger."

"I heard that!" Tatiana's voice rang across the office, making the young man spin around to look for her.

Stanton just laughed. "I knew you would, and it's only the truth," he called to her. The man turned back towards Stanton, a curious look on his face. "Tatiana can hear sounds as low as a

mouse squeak from half a mile away,” Stanton explained. “Naturally, all the information she gathers gets disseminated rather quickly.”

The man flashed a quick smile, one which didn’t reach his dark blue eyes. “Naturally.”

Stanton wrapped his arm around the trainee’s shoulders. “Adam, this is Jason Keith, shapeshifter extraordinaire—” Jason smirked and suddenly he had dark chocolate skin and nappy black hair “—and your new partner.”

Just as quickly as he had shifted before, Jason morphed back into his blond persona. He took a step forward, offering his hand. Adam took advantage and pressed his hand to Jason’s. Under the guise of a handshake, he tried to read Jason’s surface thoughts and emotions.

Jason reverberated with self-assurance and curiosity. Adam couldn’t seem to get a grip on Jason’s thoughts though, and his touch made Adam feel... odd. He released Jason and tried to surreptitiously wipe his hand on his pants. Jason’s glare made it obvious that Adam hadn’t hidden the movement very well.

“Now that you’ve been introduced, I’ll leave you to orient Jason. He’ll be working with you on the Orion assignment.” Stanton gave them a jaunty wave and ambled away, leaving the two of them staring at each other.

Adam wasn’t sure what to do with Jason. All of his previous partners had been Cognetics like him, though their powers had ranged from precognition to clairvoyance. How was he supposed to work with a Morpher?

Jason didn’t seem to have any similar qualms. He pressed past Adam and into the office. The abrupt skin-to-skin contact made him itch all over.

“So, I guess I share this office with you?” Jason strode over to Trina’s now-empty desk and fell into the chair behind it. “It’s kinda small, isn’t it?”

Adam’s hands tried to clench into fists, and he had to force himself to relax. “It suits our purposes.” The two desks were small, but there was enough room to move around without bumping into each other. Adam entered the office, shutting the door behind him, and took his own seat. “Have you been briefed on our case?”

Jason nodded, and his appearance shifted. His muscles grew thick, and his skin darkened to a rich tan. His hair straightened and shrunk to a buzz cut, making him look like a stereotypical soldier. “I’m ready to kick some slave trader asses!”

Adam counted to five in his head before attempting to respond. “This is an extremely delicate assignment. If the Orion group discovers that we have located them, they will move before we can rescue the victims.” Forced prostitution was a huge issue among the paranormal society, and the Orion group trafficked more people than anyone else in New York. If they brought them down, they would undermine the city’s entire trafficking network.

Jason’s muscles deflated and his skin and hair returned to the bleached-blond look. “Jeeze. I was just making a joke.”

“This is no joking matter.” Adam took a calming breath. “Imagine the catastrophes that could occur if we went in to investigate and someone realized you were a shapeshifter.”

Jason crossed his arms. “No one has ever figured out who I am unless I wanted them to.”

Self-confidence rolled off of Jason in waves. He’d probably never faced a real challenge in his life. Adam wanted to shake him. He had seen people killed by the Orion Group. He had felt their lives draining out of their bodies, their emotions shifting to anger and pain as they died. He had met women who escaped from slave traders like the Orions. Being within twenty feet of them made Adam ill. The blatant despair embedded in their skin turned his stomach and made it impossible for him to breathe. Jason’s pretty smile and suave charm might have gotten him out of scrapes in the past, but the difference between the Orions and a bar brawl was the difference between a saber-toothed tiger and a kitten.

“You wouldn’t be able to trick the psychics that the Orions employ for twenty minutes, let alone the weeks you might be required to spend undercover.”

“Oh, really?” Jason raised an eyebrow.

“Indeed. I’m far less skilled than they are, and you couldn’t hide from me for more than a day.”

A smirk spread across Jason’s face. “Are you willing to bet on that?”

Adam didn’t normally take bets, but he would do anything to wipe away that smirk. “What are the restrictions?”

“Within a month, I’ll spend a day—spread over twenty-four nonconsecutive hours—shifted in your presence without you realizing it.”

Adam would uncover Jason within the first fifteen minutes. All it would take was a touch; Jason might be able to hide his thoughts, but he couldn’t hide his aura. Adam had just one caveat. “You must spend all twenty-four hours in a single body. No switching between people.”

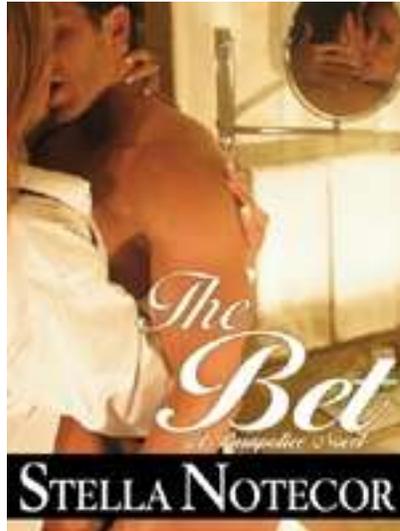
Jason’s smirk grew. “No problem. What do I get when I win?”

“When I win,” Adam said, “I get one hundred dollars.” And the satisfaction of crushing Jason’s ego.

Jason nodded slowly. “One hundred dollars sounds fair.” He stuck out his hand. “You’ve got yourself a deal.”

“You’re on.” Adam grasped Jason’s hand hard, the tingle of Jason’s aura buzzing under his skin and assuring Adam of his eminent victory.

Like The Preview?



[Click Here to Join the Author's Email Newsletter!](#)

You'll be among the first to receive free ebooks, news about sales, and information on upcoming releases by Stella Notecor!