



# Seven Signs

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The day of the sacking was like déjà vu.

When she walked into the office, Eve remembered her recent nightmare which seemed to be replaying in real life, and as she went through the motions it was as though she had no control. 1

# Chapter 1

Eve Featherstone loved the café just down the road, and she would often go there to relax at the end of her walk. It was a great place to escape and was always busy in the village where she lived. As she watched people come and go, it inspired her poetry as something caught her attention.

The staff treated Eve like she was part of the family, and there was even a treat for Maggie, who never left her side. Eve felt guilty leaving her at home and Maggie watched as she dressed each morning. She would meet Eve at the door, with her lead in her mouth and head off down the street, occasionally stopping to sniff the trees. They both knew the routine.

Eve often met Katherine there too, and they'd chat about how their week had been. Friends from school, Eve had found it hard to fit in, yet Katherine had recognised the soft soul she was, and coffee had been their way of catching up. They talked until it was time to go, and usually it was only light-hearted conversation, though Katherine sensed that Eve needed something deeper and more meaningful this time.

"I'm guessing it was a bad week?" she asked and could tell as soon as Eve sat down. The unbrushed hair, wrinkled clothes and the gloves to hide her psoriasis were all signs of Eve's anxiety, and she wore them like an old coat.

After leaving school, Eve decided she wanted to become a teacher herself-thinking she could make a difference to the lives of children who were bullied as she had been. It had given her a sense of purpose and her mantra was about creating a future where all kids felt supported.

She worked hard, and lessons were often held outdoors in the beautiful gardens which surrounded the school. Students wandered around with the birds chirping and bees buzzing, and they loved being unconfined by four walls. Eve encouraged them to write about their experiences and accepted 2 Cate Beresford every idea, but the principal disapproved of her teaching methods and he complained constantly.

"It's just not productive, Mrs Featherstone," he would say as he made up silly rules like 'no singing unless it was the national anthem' or 'writing times-tables for hours on end.'

Students were even kept in the classroom during their break, which meant they couldn't play for more than five minutes, so Eve encouraged them to be quiet, and they would sneak outside when Mr Grey wasn't watching.

He had caught them out lately though, and his relentless nagging about obeying directions was wearing her down. She found his attitude had become grumpier since his wife had passed away and lately, it was all too much. Eve thought about moving schools, though it would mean starting all over again with a new set of rules.

“Oh my gosh, Katherine, I don’t know where to start.”

Eve went on to talk about her week from hell, finding his bullying tactics harder to deal with after all the years of intimidation from her brother, Paul.

“Have you tried talking to Matt?”

“Yes, but he doesn’t listen.”

“Really? But did you tell him what happened?”

“Katherine, he keeps telling me I have a great career, and I should be grateful. But Mr Grey is awful and treats me like I’m one of the students.”

Katherine chuckled. “Well, you are still at school.”

Eve smiled at the comment. “I know, silly right?”

“You used to be passionate about making a difference. What happened?”

“I know, but lately I’ve been wondering whether I made the right career choice.”

Eve told Katherine that she was also tired of the humdrum of her life. She and Matt weren’t getting on lately, and along with putting up with Mr Grey’s annoying rules, she was feeling miserable. Her friend listened and tried to stay neutral.

“Why don’t you take a break then, Eve? You’ve been teaching long enough for long service, haven’t you? And you haven’t even used that new caravan you and Matt purchased, yet.”

“I don’t even know why we bought that thing. Matt’s too work oriented to make good use of it. He always says work can’t do without him.”

Eve pointed to her mouth gagging and rolled her eyes as Katherine laughed; though deep down, she knew how stubborn men could be. Her own Jim was always such a stick in the mud unless it was something he wanted to do, and she knew Matt could be the same.

Katherine didn’t know what to say and knew Eve could also be her own worst enemy. She knew it had been tough for Eve, growing up under Paul’s vindictive torture, and her mum had ignored her needs, so Katherine always tried to be there for her.

As they finished their second cup of coffee, Katherine stood to leave.

“I’ve got to go, Eve. Just sleep on it,” she said and gave her a quick peck on the cheek.

“You know things always work out.”

“Yes, I know. I’m tired too. Those rotten dreams have been annoying me again.”

Katherine nodded. She knew the toll these nightmares took and had tried to encourage Eve to see a counsellor about them, but Eve felt they were part of life and tried to ignore them as best she could.

As she wandered home, Eve thought about what Katherine had said and decided she wanted to start enjoying life, so hoped she could convince Matt.

They had bought the van on impulse at some caravan show, but it sat in their driveway like a first world symbol of luxury, and Eve decided it was time it

got used. Eve waited patiently until after they'd eaten lunch before broaching the subject lightly.

"Hey, honey. I wondered if we can talk?"

Eve instinctively knew Matt would take this as "I want something from you," and she flinched as she waited for his reply.

"What is it?" he asked with his look of "what now."

"I was wondering whether we could go away in the van? I've got school holidays coming up soon and thought it might be nice."

Eve knew Matt was never one to answer straight away, choosing to think about things first. It was an annoying habit, but Eve had learned to wait patiently.

"You know I can't take time off. Work is too busy."

"Yes, but," Matt cut her off.

"Well, I don't have time! Unlike teachers who get so many holidays, some people have to work," he retaliated and rose from the table.

Eve knew arguing was fruitless. Like Paul, Matt had a stubborn streak, and she'd learned when to pick her battles.

Annoyed that Matt refused to budge, she picked up Maggie's lead. "I'm going for a run," she called, heading out the door.

The retriever found it hard to keep up as Eve settled into a steady jog to work off her irritation. It was as though her body was on automatic pilot, and as each step paced the last, she lost track of time.

They'd eaten lunch late, and it was nearly winter's solstice as the evening began to close in. Maggie became exhausted from Eve's fast stride and without warning, stopped, refusing to move. Eve stood and glanced at her watch and surroundings, then realised how far she'd run.

"Your poor baby. I've gone too far, haven't I?"

She hugged the retriever and Maggie wagged her tail, stood up, then headed off towards home. Eve took this as a hint and walked at a slower pace. It was a quiet neighbourhood and Eve usually felt safe, though she'd wandered further than usual and needed to stop to find her bearings.

Googling the maps on her phone, Eve attempted to find mobile reception. As she stood there waiting, a shiver ran down her spine, and she had the strange sensation someone was watching. Eve looked around, but could only see the dark, empty houses, then realised there were no streetlights.

She turned to walk back the way she had come; though Eve could hear dogs growling and now, even Maggie appeared anxious.

As the last of the sun began to fade, it was becoming harder to see, so Eve shone the torch from her phone to light the way, but with each step, became more unsettled. Hearing a car engine start, she noticed a van parked on the opposite side of the street and although it was too dark to see inside, as she passed, its headlights came on, and the car door began to open.

"Come on, Maggie, time to run," and they raced the last section home.

Eve slammed the front door open and locked it behind her with some force. Although Matt had already gone upstairs to shower, Eve felt she was home

safe, and even Maggie seemed calmer as she waddled off to her usual corner, settling snugly into her bed. Still breathing heavily from her run, Seven Signs 5 she sat on the lounge and thought about the day's events.

It had been a long day as Eve realised she would have to persevere with Mr Grey and was annoyed with herself, running into the unknown streets.

As Eve headed for bed, she still felt uneasy and knew she was in for a restless night