

Read Me Like a Book

By : Going Nowhere Fast

One day in London city, Jayne Vodan stumbles across a package left for her in the library - but what happens when it is some sort of magic book? We're talking a book that reads people's minds and imprints their thoughts on paper for Jayne to see. Is this power a blessing, or curse? You just read and see...



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Chapter 1

I sit in the waiting room surrounded by white walls, posters and leaflets, bulletin boards and blue chairs. In the next room is the sound of numerous phones and the often cough, but there is the odd time when all is quiet. Sighing, I lean to my left and look at the piles of magazines, although none look actually interesting. I rummage through them, each cover with a professional photo of some model or a beautiful house with a swimming pool. That's what I want to do - photograph things like this, at Still Image for my new boss Hilda Kentwood. If I can get this job, that is. Only an interview now stands in my way.

"Jayne Vodan?"

An assistant comes through smartly dressed in a grey pinstripe suit, white top and black heels. Her hair is in a tight bun and is the same gold colour as her tanned skin. She smiles at me, assuming I am Jayne, as I'm the only one in the room.

"Yes?" I stand up, and she nods her head in the direction of the next room, holding open the door for me.

"If you'd like to follow me, Miss Kentwood will see you now."

We walk, heels echoing, across the marble floor through some reception room, the other assistants' busy leaning over their papers and on laptops. No one looks up, and just for a second I panic it might be because they're used to so many people trying to get the jobâand, perhaps, many failing to impress. What if I am one of those many?

The assistant nods her head and opens the head office doors for me, smiling with pearly white teeth similar to my own. It's terrifying knowing the head of Still Image is about to talk to me, ask me questions, pay attention to everything I say. From what I've researched, Hilda has opened a photographer position because her oldest employee retired and she is looking for someone with experience and determined nature.

"Good morning," Hilda smiles as I walk in. Behind me the assistant quietly shuts the doors and my temperature rises as if she's shut off all the air conditioning on this hot summers day.

Sitting down, I observe Kentwood as she scans me too. She has tanned skin like her assistant, a few wrinkles, brunette hair with a slight bounce and middle split, but what gets me most is her outfit. The tight dress she's in is bright pink with a black cardigan, but I can't see her shoes under the desk. Altogether she stands out from her plain surroundings of cream walls, files and sticky notes.

"Hello Jayne, as you know I'm Hilda Kentwood, head of Still Image, welcome."

"Thank you."

"Do you have your photos that one of my assistants asked you to bring?"

"Yes, and I have my reviews from past jobs," I open my bag from beneath my chair and dive in, bringing my blue folder out with a small make-up mirror to check my appearance is okay. My fringe is split and bouncy from where I've been fiddling with it, but the rest of my usual chestnut mess has remained straight and long. Mascara un-smudged, pink lipstick un-touched, I'm satisfied and quickly slip my mirror back in to my bag. Hilda has not noticed as she reads my reviews and experiences, looking slightly pleased, but not readable.

"This is wonderful," she grins, pointing out one of my early shots of the Eiffel Tower late night. I remember that as one beautiful scene, black skies, spread out stars.

"Thank you very much," I say, completely thrilled she's seen something good.

"So, why do you want to work here Jayne?"

"Well," I shift in my seat, "if I'm honest, I was a fan of your work in the nineties as a magazine photographer and found a lot of your work inspiring. I thought it would be a great opportunity to work for such a big name that I know I will work hard for."

Hilda's fiery hazel eyes light up and her laughter lines show as she smiles wide - she looks like a kind person.

"Who is this, could you tell me?"

Finger pressed to a photo of me and my best friend ZoÃ« at the club PURE, I can't help but draw a deep breath, "That's my best friend ZoÃ« Turner."

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The photo is definitely lively - ZoÃ« and me are side by side with neon lights in the background, faces smiling. Our eyes are both sour green but ZoÃ« has lighter hair than me and she has pointier features compared to my button nose and curved around eyebrows.

"Ah, you're a social person then? I need someone lovable for this position."

"Yes Miss Kentwood, I like to think I am."

"But judging from these other photos, I can see your serious side. Of course, I am impressed by this and your review from Alexander Prints, whom I have had the pleasure of meeting, is great! Also the other two reviews, Jayne."

I sigh with relief and sit upright, straightening my dark grey blazer and brushing bits from the bottom half of my lighter grey dress.

"Time is short," Hilda raises her plucked brow, "and I have to know no more. You may leave, and I will get back to you as soon as I've picked from my options. I'm a busy woman, Jayne, but I assure you I'll take time on this choice."

Both of us stand up and shake hands as she hands me my folder, and I tuck it in my bag ready to leave.

"Goodbye Jayne, I look forward to getting back to you. I have your home number."

"Bye, thanks for your time," I walk to the doors standing tall and open them in to a de-pressured placeâ The interview was short but it just goes to show Hilda gets straight to the point, and I can work with people like that.

Trotting from door to door, down the stairs and out the exit, I smell the car fumes of London and see big city buildings, crowds and a bright, sunny sky. This is exactly what I'm used to, and I really love it.

Un-doing my blazer and cramming it in to my medium sized black leather bag, I cross the street to a bookstore called Imprinted to collect a package from the owner, William. He rang me up a day ago telling me it has my name on it, but was left on his desk.

"Allo Jayne," he beams as I come in and the little bell rings. Will is a middle-aged man with pale skin, a baldhead, blue eyes and a baggy dress sense.

"Hey Will - so what are you on about a package for?"

"I found this on me desk," he hands me the rectangular object and I instantly recognise this as a hardback book. Ripping it open under the eye of Will, I find it has a red cover with no title and fresh white paper inside, only there are no words in it. None whatsoever.

"Is this a joke Will?" I sigh, and turn to him.

"I don't think it would be funny to give a good customer a plain book. No, I didn't do it."

Slanting my lips, eyebrows stitched, I say goodbye and leave, quizzical expression glued to my face as I put it in my bag on top of my blazer. Next to Imprinted is a cafÃ© called CafÃ© Nocturne, which I've never really visited. The outside is deep red and the silver tables outside give it a touch of class. I slouch on one chair around a two-seater table, and take out my blank book to see if any page has something on it. Maybe it's a diary or something, maybe it shouldn't have words.

Only, as I run my hand around the first page, something out of the ordinary happens - ink, blotches of it shrink in to make tiny imprint letters, form a sentence: *'Hello Jayne Elizabeth Vodan. A waiter is about to come to your table.'*

Dropping the book on the table in surprise, it echoes as it hits a spoon and it sounds as if I've just slammed my fists.

"Hello, are we having anything to drink?"

Jolting in shock, I look up at a waiter by my side, not taking in his face as I look back at the page; it's blank again.

"No, thank you, I'm leavingâ"

"Okay, have a nice day," the waiter walks to another table and I grab the book, thrusting it to the bottom of my bag. I pause for about ten seconds. What just happened? Surely a book didn't just predict somethingâ I must be going insane.

"Actually, waiter," I catch him just before he walks past me.

"Yes?"

"I will have that drink - what do you recommend, alcoholically?"

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Chapter 2

Thirty-five minutes later, and I'm a little tipsy. After the waiter gave me my bottle of some fancy French drink, I had three quarters of the bottle in one half hour. I don't usually drink, but I had such a shock I needed to relax. Only, turns out it was a really nice drink, soâ

My back aches from slouching in that chair outside the cafÃ©. Head pounding with alcohol, I make my way in my business outfit towards home, down the road to Little Edgington. Heels making it difficult to walk, bag weighing me down and sun burning me, my fantastic day has gone down the drain. And what after? A stupid book?

I stop in the middle of the path to open my bag and rapidly bring out the book. I'm being ridiculous, thinking that an inanimate object actually -

'Hello Jayne Elizabeth Vodan. The man behind you thinks you are really good looking.'

I stare at the little letters like they are some sort of gripping movie; I just can't take my eyes off them.

"Oh, God," I whisper, shutting the book tight and putting it in my bag quickly. Right, so the book did do some crazy voodoo, and I'm not going insane.

Remembering what it said, I look behind me and see a man on a bench with the darkest, curliest brown hair and the cutest freckles. He has light skin, grey eyes and the most stunning smile I've ever seen as he grins at the phone he's hunched over. But that smile probably belongs to another girl.

Suddenly, a light bulb shines over my stressed out head. What if this book can give me answers? Maybe I could discover exactly what everyone around me is thinking; maybe I could read people as if it's written on their face.

Before I can breathe more than once the book is out and in to my hand again. The smooth crimson cover makes my hand tingle as I touch it, as if there's magic inside. Opening it, I draw breath, and watch tiny blots of ink form together and make: *'Hello Jayne Elizabeth Vodan. The guy's name is Seth Robinson. He is single.'* "Seth?" I say out loud, without thinking. Eyebrows raised, he looks up from his phone and searches long before I can take my eyes off him. Spotting me, Seth looks back down and smiles to his side. I look down at the book, the words still on the page, and it carries on in front of my eyes, *'Seth does not smile because he thinks you said his name, but because of your beauty. He does not know who said it.'*

Laughing slightly, I shut the book and feel like I'm being nosy, but I can't help it. There's this wonderful power left to me by God knows whom, and I feel bigger and better than Superman already.

Carrying on home, I feel a whole lot better now I know what's going on. I still expect to wake up any second but I feel too realistic and lively to be asleep. My head has improved, and there's a spring in my step now my feet don't feel like they have a ball and chain on them. Even the shade of buildings has made me cool down tenfold.

Snap!

Behind me is a noise I know anywhere - a camera, digital, not phone for sure. Looking backward, Seth is there with a silver camera like my own, snapping away at surrounding buildings.

He's a photographer?

I take out my book, and flip to the first page: *'Hello Jayne Elizabeth Vodan. Seth works for Still Image as a travelling photographer. He is thinking about taking a photo of you.'*

Blushing, I realise I'm probably going to be working near him, and I don't like mixing business with pleasure. But, I suppose, photographing is my pleasure. I shut my book and put it away whilst looking after Seth as he disappears in to the distance, and in to crowds. To be honest, he *is* gorgeousâ

Daydreaming all the way back home, I absentmindedly put my key in to my bright red door and enter. The boiling hot kitchen and the realisation I forgot to leave all my windows open instantly greet me. My house isn't attached, so I have a lot of windows around the sides, but sometimes I don't have sense and leave them shut all day. Sure I could've been robbed if I left my windows open, but it'd be better than this heat. Plus, I have my dog Sally for protection.

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"Baby Sally, where are you?"

There's no barking reply, so I dump my keys on the side and open my kitchen window. As soon as she hears the keys dropping, Sally barks furiously and I hear her bound down the stairs. Obviously she picked this up quicker than her name.

"Hello babe," I say, all high-pitched and fussy. She jumps up my leg and runs around my small kitchen space hyperactively.

Sally is only just an adult, but she's definitely not tame. Her breed is Labrador, just like the Andrex Puppy, but cuter in my opinion. She barks at cats, the deliveryman and the T.V, which is annoying, but I love her anyway.

"Come on," I pat my leg and walk in to the hall with her, hang my bag on the coat peg to avoid Sally chewing it, and open the living room door. Now, this door to Sally is 'T.V door', and she knows I'm about to turn it on. She looks tense as she walks in, and I turn on my high definition T.V without wanting to think about what's coming next.

Yap! Yap! Yap!

Yeah, I thought so, Sally. God, sometimes I just wish I could read her mind and crack what she's on about. The one o'clock news is on for the next twenty minutes. I've missed ten minutes, but the news reporter is talking about some sort of agreement between America and Russia, so there's been nothing on I'm too interested in.

"Shut it, Sal," I complain to my dog as she continuously barks at my feet. I kick just in front of her, but she won't be quiet, and I'm missing all the news.

An idea suddenly floods over me. I've always wanted to know what she's thinking, and now I have a mind reading book. I heave myself up and Sally's ears stand on end as she follows me to the hallway. Heart rushing, I fish my hand in my bag for it and feel the smooth cover as I bring it out. I hear the buzz off the T.V in the next room, but Sally is overpowering it with a low growl, as if she knows the book is different. Opening the cover to the front page, I hold in my desire to shout out as the book appears to say *'Hello Jayne Elizabeth Vodan. Sally thinks this book is haunted.'*

Smiling, I look down at her. Still her ears stand up and her teeth are now bared, but I ignore her and bring the book with me as I get back to the living room. Sitting on my two-seater, brown, fabric sofa I watch the T.V as the screen changes to another reporter standing outside a row of attached houses in a small village.

The man is black and supposedly from India, judging on his accent. He has short, black hair and wide features on his face, but his body underneath the suit looks well built.

"Well as you can see I'm outside Alicia's house right now and, until the murderer is caught, her parents are trying their best to convince"

He carries on talking about something but I'm distracted by Sally's barking again. Tutting, I pat my lap so she jumps up on me and I rest the book on her furry back. She whines consistently, but eventually shuts up as I tickle her ear.

'Hello Jayne Elizabeth Vodan. The news reporter on T.V is Mohammed Ashya. He is thinking about his report and concentrating on what he has to say.'

"Well, that was obvious," I murmur, and Sally whines. The small text carries on suddenly, and I continue to read.

'Sally is wondering what you just said. She does not understand you.'

I laugh, tickling Sally's ears more and more until her tongue falls out of her mouth in pleasure. For a minute, I wonder why I was left this book, how amazing it is, ask myself what other powers it holds.

Next to my sofa, on the coffee table, my home phone rings loudly. Sally jumps and raises her ears again.

"Hello?" I pick it up, resting my head against it.

"Hey there, is this Jayne?"

I jolt at who it is.

"Miss Kentwood! Yes, speaking!"

"Ah, Jayne. I was wondering, could you come in tomorrow for me? I'm sorry it's such short notice, I know you're not an employee, I will pay you though."

"Um, of course, why, what did you have in mind for me to do?"

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"I need you to photograph the best bits of London, we're selling them to a magazine, would you mind? My worker is sick and this could promote yourself, of course."

"Absolutely, thank you!"

"Wonderful. See you tomorrow, darling!"

Chapter 3

Chapter 3

It was only yesterday I had pulled off an interview, found a magic book and got a reply from Hilda Kentwood. I have no idea what's going to happen today as I board an underground train to the Still Image building. I hope it's going to go well, at least. As I went to sleep last night I had a dream about what could happen today, and although it's a blur, I still remember it being good.

Surrounding sounds are annoying on today's underground train. It's half eight in the morning and there are school kids laughing loudly and pushing each other. One boy even pushes the end of the row of sitting people I'm on, and a small domino line starts. I know he didn't mean to, but I honestly feel like pushing them back and saying 'How do you like it then?'

Seeing as Still Image is only down the road from me, I leave the train shortly after the kids. I know it sounds lazy I got the train, but I'm so tired I can't walk properly. Last night I stayed up 'til eleven because my programme wouldn't record and I couldn't afford to miss it. Now, I regret it, because it wasn't the best episode I suppose.

I step in to the sunlight and out of the underground station. How long will these heat waves last? Lucky I planned ahead and decided to wear a strapless white dress and matching heels - white deflects heat. I feel cooler already.

"Newspaper anyone? Newspaper!" some guy in a yellow, neon jacket is calling and handing out newspapers. It's only a local newspaper so it's free. I walk to him and grab one, flattening it out as I carry on towards my destination. The headline is something about an important building being demolished, and there's a photo of it to the right. I look underneath it, hoping to get a name. It says '*Harold Jam*'.

"Jam?" I smirk. As immature as it is to laugh at a funny second name, I can't help but smile.

Seeing 'Still Image' in big, silver letters on the building I'm headed to, I fold the newspaper in two and carry it under my left arm whilst also carrying my bag. I haven't packed much apart from my camera, make-up, sunglasses and, of course, my book.

Hurrying across the road as the traffic stops, I take one last moment to check my appearance in the glass doors. Hair in a tight bun today, all of my face is visible and fresh, exactly what I was aiming for when I applied make-up this morning.

I open the right door and draw breath as I see the entrance reception. It's not small and boring like most places - it's big, and classy. The walls are white but have massive framed pictures that Hilda herself took on them. The reception desk has a glass top, surprisingly with no messy fingerprints, and is covered in vases and flowers. I sigh; why isn't every reception as nice as this?

"Hello," a woman says at the front desk as I march up to them.

"Hey, I'm appointed to see Hilda Kentwood at quarter to nine, my name is Jayne Vodan."

"Right, you only have five minutes anyway, so I'd go straight up if Miss Kentwood is ready. Hang on," she wrinkles her freckle-covered nose and flicks her bright, ginger hair with pedicure nails. Everyone in this place looks so smart and beautiful.

"Hilda, I have Jayne Vodan here to see you, should I send her up?" she presses a finger to a button on her phone and speaks through it. A faint reply comes through, "Send her up to my head reception, thanks," and then it goes off.

"Okay, Miss, if you would like to go to floor three and look straight on you'll see a door. Go through it to a waiting room, there's another door in front of you, go in and ask for Francesca. She'll go in and confirm Hilda wants you."

"Okay, thanks," I smile, and head off towards the elevator left hand side to the desk. I don't bother telling her I already know where it is, to save any embarrassment.

I slip in the lift alone, plenty of room to myself. God, even the elevator is fancy. Large mirrors cover the walls but the wall where the buttons are is red. The pole to hold on to is silver and smooth, unlike public ones with loads of marks and food stains.

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A small ding signals the opening of the doors after a minute or so. They slide open and my heels click against the floor as I walk out. The place is familiar, only this time I'm not pressured. I open the first door to the waiting room, and then do the same with the head reception door. It's only a small room, but it is well lit with natural light and has a nice breeze to it. Workers look up from their desk this time, but probably because I didn't come in with an assistant.

"Excuse me," I go to the nearest desk to a man with chocolate brown hair and a square jaw. He looks up from his laptop and raises both eyebrows.

"Yes?"

"Is Francesca in here?"

"Yeah, it's her," he points to the opposite desks, three along from him. The woman has black hair to her shoulder and a side fringe. Her face is just like a cat or something feline - her nose is button, her eyes pulled, but barely Chinese, and her mouth is small and thin. She even has freckles, which look like they should have whiskers coming out of.

"Scuse me, Francesca?"

She looks up and blinks, "Yes?"

"I was sent up here to see Hilda but the first floor reception said I have to see you first. You know, to confirm she wants me?"

"Ah, right," she says, her voice also deep and feline like. Fran gets up and shifts around her desk to open Kentwood's office doors. Before she can speak Hilda has seen me past her shoulder and stands up.

"Jayne, hello again!"

Obviously annoyed, Francesca turns on her heel and huffs back to her desk.

"Hi," I walk in and we shake hands, Hilda leaning over her desk.

"Right, Jayne, straight down to it. Today is a test for you, seeing as you've impressed me so far. I'm going to set you a task with one of my other workers to photograph the best bits of London. We're selling them to a magazine but if we fail to deliver," she walks around her desk to stand right next to me, and leans against it, "they won't buy. However, if they do, you'll get paid and a good impression on me. Okay?"

"Yeah, great, sure. Any places absolutely necessary?"

"No, just listen to my employee, he'll suggest. Oh, do you have a camera?"

"Yeah," I bring it out and put my newspaper in.

"Okay, if you could follow Shannon to where your helper will be - Shan!"

An older woman, supposedly Shannon, rises from her desk and walks to us. She is Asian and is wearing long, grey clothes, probably considered business-like in her country. She has a beauty spot above her lip to the left, and kind brown eyes. Her hair is black and wavy to her elbows.

"Yes, Hilda?" her accent is strong.

"Ah, could you take Miss Vodan to floor two to meet with Mr Robinson?"

I flinch - did she say whom I think she said?

"Yes, absolutely, if you'd like to come this way," she holds out her hand to the door, and I follow her with Hilda returning to her desk behind me. Shannon and I walk to the lift without saying a word to each other all the while. I'm the first one to press the lift button, and as we stand inside, things get awkward. For a moment I realise she is smaller than me and I feel embarrassed, but there's no reading her face.

Actuallyâ

I slyly slip my hand in to my bag and run my fingers over my book. I open it but don't take it out my bag, so it's dark inside. Just as the doors open and we walk out, the tiny blots of ink form together. They say *'Hello Jayne Elizabeth Vodan. Shannon Price is fed up with her job. She doesn't like the stress, and hates how Hilda always picks her as the tour guide.'*

I raise one eyebrow and look at her for just a second, but her expression doesn't change.

"Here we are," she breaks the silence. We're in a small room with the usual white walls, and it looks like a hallway. It's long and thin, and a lot of doors leading to offices are to the right.

"Cheers," I whisper, still feeling awkward.

"It's door six. I shouldn't go in, unfortunately the people on floor two don't like us upstairs," she laughs twice, and then puts her hands together and nods her head. Leaving me alone to find six, I close my book inside my

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bag and walk slowly, reading all the doors.

"Fourâ 'fiveâ 'six, ah," I knock and a reply doesn't come. I knock again, louder this time, and someone inside says, "Come in."

I take a deep breath. As I walk in, I see the gorgeous face that is Seth Robinson. The only difference is he's in work clothes.

Oh, my God.

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