

HOTWIFE EROTICA

Stalked

and

Watched

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"No level of physical beauty, sexual talent, genital endowment or availability will make a woman leave a good husband."

CHAPTER 1

The first snow of October: a time of pristine white beauty; and gut-wrenching terror.

I dropped my coffee cup and stumbled backwards from a horror that sent clammy chills down my back. I tried to scream for my husband through my panic. "B-Birk! Birk!"

He wouldn't be hearing me though, he was in the shower.

I ran from the sliding glass door leading onto our deck. I ran for the bedroom, eyes wildly scanning our ranch home.

The darkness of the early morning cast menacing shadows in the murk. My skin crawled as if covered with a million maggots.

I wailed in terror as I rushed into the bedroom.

I sensed fingers about to clamp down on my shoulder and screamed. But whether they hesitated or missed, I don't know. I found my hand on the barrel of the pump shotgun my husband kept by the bed. I spun, bringing the gun up to my shoulder, and swinging the barrel around to the intruder.

There was nothing there.

"Leslie!" Birk's hand reached for the barrel, even though I hadn't moved it from the doorway to the bedroom. "Leslie, what's wrong?"

I let him take the shotgun from me, but the hackles were still raised all over my back, neck and arms. I heaved in great lungfuls of ragged breaths. "There's... there's someone—"

He was wrapped in a towel about the waist. But he immediately brought up the shotgun and advanced to the door, barrel up and pointing.

I moved behind him.

"Where did you see him?"

"I don't know..."

He moved efficiently, swinging the gun through the arc of his vision, and flipping on lights as he went. His eyes took in the windows and doors. He didn't talk; he just moved. He lost the towel along the way and he didn't flinch or stop to pick it up.

I did, clutching the wet warmth to my chest.

He finished in the kitchen and shook his head.

Then he saw.

He had glanced first down at the shattered white coffee cup and the spill, but he couldn't miss the lighted, snow-covered deck out back. He saw the footprints.

His face scrunched together in anger and he tried the door. It was locked and he let out a breath. "It looks like someone came up and tried the door."

I couldn't talk; my teeth were chattering.

He sighed. "All right, I need to get dressed and I'll go outside to see where they go."

"You can't..."

"I will." His look, serious and deadly, was not meant for me. It was a promise.

I didn't want to be near the sliding glass door. I followed so close behind him I kicked his heels twice. "S-sorry."

He shrugged into his pants and jacket and picked up the shotgun again. He reached into the nightstand drawer and pulled out the revolver. "Here." He slapped it into my palm. "Wait in here. I'll call out when I come back in. Okay?"

I took a measured breath, but my worry switched from a possible intruder to my husband's safety. "Be careful... please."

He gave me a stern look of certainty and hefted the shotgun.

Then he left me alone in the bedroom. The weight of the Colt Python in my hand was a reminder of the danger, rather than an assurance of safety.

The rough edge of the trigger made me aware of the deadly danger that surrounded us. Not that this had happened before – it was the first time I had ever seen anything like it on our ranchette.

We had bought the place last year from someone who could no longer afford the payments. Ten or more years before, a developer had split off and subdivided some land bordering route three. Slivers of acreage were sectioned off and sold to raise cash.

Our lot was one of the two acre-wide by ten deep parcels that sat comfortably in the middle of all of it. The ranches were spaced just far enough away not to feel like a suburban subdivision.

We raised chickens. Many of the owners here did so. And there were turkeys, and sheep, and some horses. Only one had built a large greenhouse for crops.

Even the realtor who had represented the sale and purchase lived at the end of the subdivision.

And now we also had a trespasser – someone who had tried to gain entry into our home the previous night.

Rapist? Burglar? Murderer?

My mind envisioned no less and my hand holding the gun was slick with sweat.

I heard thumping as Birk walked out onto the back deck. The sun had still not risen – not this late in the year.

I picked up my cell phone and dialed 911.

The older female voice was almost instant. "Brown County Sheriff's Department, please state your emergency."

"I think someone is trying to break into my house."

"What is your address, ma'am?"

"133 E, Route 3."

"And your name?"

"Leslie Dawson."

"Are they still outside?"

"I don't know, my husband is outside checking."

"Did you see them trying to get in?"

"Yes, no... I saw footprints on our deck coming to the window."

"But you didn't see anyone?"

"No."

"Are you hearing any signs of attempted entry right now?"

"No."

There was a sigh. "The Route 3 stalker strikes again."

"Pardon?"

"Don't worry, honey. We know about him. I'll be sending Sheriff Redmond over later today. Will you be home?"

"All day. What time?"

"I imagine once he's poured his coffee, he'll take a drive over. Eight fifteen?"

"Yes, I'll be here."

"And there's no other signs right now that the trespasser is still around?"

"No... I don't think so."

"I can send Deputy Gonzales over but most of the calls about this person are logged around ten at night. Those footprints are probably from then."

"Oh..." I felt a wash of relief and also a sense of sickness settle over me. It had been that long ago?

"I can stay on the line if you like until your husband comes back in?"

"I... No, that won't be necessary."

"Don't hesitate to call again if there are any further developments."

"Yes, okay. Thank you."

I clicked off and waited for my husband. I felt foolish now for my reactions. But that sick feeling remained – that I had been asleep last night and someone had tried the door. Why else would the footsteps go right to the handle of the sliding glass door and turn away?

I heard thumping inside the house.

My husband's voice called out, "It's me, Leslie."

"Okay," I said loud enough to be heard. I put the revolver back in the nightstand.

Birk came into the bedroom, nose pink and mouth open and puffing air.

"Nothing. The footsteps come from the road and go back to the road. Whoever it was made a complete circuit around the house. Stood watching in one spot long enough to smoke a cigarette." He leaned the shotgun back into its place.

My hopes lifted. "They left evidence?"

"Sure, and footsteps, but other than trespassing, no crime was committed. The chickens are all okay and the vehicles untouched. The footsteps did nothing but circle the house."

"The sheriff will be coming later – around eight."

He nodded. "I'll be at work. Give them my number if they need me."

I nodded. "What do you think they want?"

"I don't know. But the footprints to the sliding glass door weren't the only close approaches. Whoever it was tried the windows and front door, too."

I shivered.

This was not good.

He said, "Keep the door locked. If you have to go out, carry the pistol."

CHAPTER 2

I heard the SUV pull in. It was a white Dodge Durango with the Brown County Sheriff markings and light bar on top.

I had a flash of feeling guilty as the sheriff got out and squinted around the yard.

He was a wiry man, tall and a little stooped. He put on his cowboy hat and brought his coffee with him to the front door.

I opened it before he knocked.

He scanned me with a quick pass over that judged me no threat. However, he loomed with that pose of immediate action, if necessary. "Mrs. Dawson?"

I nodded and stepped back to let him in.

He raised his large Styrofoam cup and came in. "Shelly tells me you had a visitor?" His eyes swept the entry and living room.

"Yes, I saw the footprints this morning. I was sort of panicked thinking he was still outside or maybe inside."

He nodded. "Show me."

I led him to the sliding glass door and indicated the footprints.

He grunted, looking at them and at the handle. "Looks like he tested the door." He didn't sound pleased or look it, either. "Let's go see where these lead."

I slid open the door. "There's a spot where he smoked a cigarette."

"And he left it there?"

"Yes."

"Interesting. Either not too bright or confident and arrogant." He led the way,

scanning the ground as he went. He was fast, checking the pauses in the footprints. "These are your husband's. Fresher print. See how those are iced over instead of powdery? And the old ones go to each window."

"Yes..."

"Your visitor was here last night. Fits with what's been reported around here recently."

"How many other ranches have been burglarized?"

He jerked a look at me. "None. He's been reported as more of a peeper."

"Why would he try our doors and windows and no one else's?"

His look was direct and calculating. He squatted down, still looking at me. "You tell me. Had anyone mad at you lately?"

"No."

"Jealous coworker?"

"I stay at home."

"Your husband?"

"He works at the feed and seed warehouse. He seems happy. Hasn't mentioned anything odd."

The sheriff grunted and poked at something with his pen. "Marlboro."

"Can't you identify him off that?"

"Maybe. Sometimes. Marlboro's dyes interfere sometimes with DNA testing. And if the man has no DNA record on file..."

"So it's worthless?"

"I didn't say that." He scooped it into an envelope with his pen. "Might be useful later." He pocketed the envelope and pulled out his notepad. Balancing his coffee on his knee, he wrote quickly on a blank page.

I rubbed my arms and looked around at our little ranch. Nothing had been disturbed, so the man wasn't after our property, but he was interested in getting inside the house. Chills rose up my arms and back. Is the man watching even now? I wondered.

The sheriff was done writing and pocketed the notepad. His coffee cup started to tilt and he caught it deftly as he rose. "Some of the other wives around here gather at the Downtown Diner. Can I lead you there and buy you a cup of coffee?"

"Coffee?"

"I'd like to introduce you to them. Might be you can put your heads together and find a connection that helps us collar this guy."

"Oh..." I didn't want to decline and give the sheriff some reason to doubt me. "Okay."

He gave a quick jerk of his chin downward in approval. "Good. Let me finish the circuit here and we'll take a drive." He moved around the rest of the house, studying the footprints and placement.

At the side of the house away from the sun, he squatted down and tapped on his phone. He held it over a print and tapped. "Nice print there... Has a symbol." He studied the picture on the phone with a scowl and twisted it this way and that. "Hmm."

I followed him around to the front.

"Tracks lead off to the road." He crossed the yard and onto Route 3, head moving both ways. He went to the other side and stopped, scanning the ground.

I waited by the mailbox.

He came back a moment later, still looking along the ground. "He didn't cross over. Got in a car or walked along the road. If he walked, he lives nearby."

I shuddered.

His eyes came up, professional and bright with courtesy. "You ready?"

"Let me grab my purse."

He sat in his Dodge and used the radio.

I came out and got into my truck.

Leaving gave me a sense of peace, but also a new worry. What if I came home and the man was there?

The Downtown Diner was at least sixty years old and still had a wooden door painted in a teal green from the middle part of last century. That much of it was flaked off around the handle didn't detract from the quirky charm and the warmth of the interior.

Heads turned our way from everywhere.

But it was like that here. It wasn't animosity, it was curiosity. Someone they knew?

The waitress had a lined face and old pink uniform that looked like it might have come from two or three garage sales over the years. "Good morning, Richard."

The sheriff tipped his hat. "Morning, Ruth. Would you be a dear and pour this young lady a cup of coffee? Put it on my tab."

She gave him a wry look. "Your coffees are free."

"And a good thing they are for that wicked brew you make."

She raised an eyebrow at him. "I personally taste every cup I serve."

A few of the patrons laughed at that.

I looked at her horrified. Yuck? But I realized she was joking.

Sheriff Redmond indicated three ladies at the counter and said to Ruth, "We have an addition to the club."

The eyes on the waitress went round and her amused demeanor descended into determination. "I'll pour her one right away."

Three heads swiveled back to regard us again. Or me. A tall black-haired woman who looked familiar, an older woman who also looked familiar – a neighbor of ours – and one I didn't recognize.

The sheriff touched my arm. "Leslie, this is Beth, Tina and Krista. Ladies? Meet Leslie. Maybe you all can find something common with the peeper." He lowered his voice to me. "You call me if anything new comes up, you hear?"

"Yes, thank you." I sat on the nearest stool.

The older lady, Tina, said, "You've been peeped, too?"

"Yes, he tried to get in."

Three sets of eyes went wide.

Beth sputtered, "Get in?"

"I saw the tracks in the snow this morning. Came right up to the sliding glass door."

Tina shuddered. "Ugh... gives me the willies."

Beth, the redhead I didn't recognize, said, "What address are you at?"

"133 E."

They looked back and forth amongst each other, pointing.

The woman I thought looked familiar gulped her coffee and said nothing.

Tina said, "He's expanding his territory. We're all in a row. Krista, Beth, me, and now you."

I pondered Krista, the familiar one. She looked a little uneasy. I was surprised when she got up and gathered her plate and cup. But instead of leaving, she came over and sat on my left side on the free stool.

She leaned into me, conspiratorially. "He tried to get in?" There was a suspicious tone to her voice.

I nodded.

She exhaled slowly and whispered, "I haven't told the others, but I think he's tried our doors, too."

"But not theirs?"

"No. They've just seen him crossing their property a couple times." Her fingers twitched nervously and I smelled the hint of cigarette smoke on her.

I said, "The sheriff thinks it might be a neighbor."

She laughed a short, bitter bark. "I hope not."

"I wonder if last night was the first time..."

She gave me several quick looks and looked away. "You're very pretty. Maybe he just noticed you."

I ignored the compliment, especially being that I didn't want to be pretty for a peeper.

She said, "Do you... remember me?"

I was at a loss for where. "I do... sort of. You look very familiar. I'm sorry."

She touched my arm. "Oh, no, don't be. I think we only saw each other once. My husband is Donny, the man who handled your real estate deal."

It dawned on me in a burst of fresh recollection. "Ohh... right."

She glanced around. "We've all hashed over this so many times... Would you like to come back to our ranch and have some real coffee over this? We're 133 A."

"Oh, uh... sure." For a moment, I felt like a detective on a case. Then I realized I didn't know crap.

She squeezed my arm and gave me such a bright smile I felt that she actually enjoyed the prospect of having me over for coffee.

As it was, I certainly didn't want to be alone in my home with a stalker around.
"Yes, I think that sounds like a fine idea."

CHAPTER 3

Krista was a tall one and she snatched a distressed black cowboy hat off the rack by the door. She looked adorable in it and it matched her black hair almost perfectly.

I commented, "I never thought of wearing a cowboy hat; thought it was only for the men."

She laughed, clean and teeth showing white despite being a smoker. "We're ranchers."

"That explains my truck."

"That's yours?" She pointed at my Ford flatbed.

"Yep."

"Way to go, girl."

She had a light and easy manner that I liked. I followed her back out to Route 3. Her ranch was the first on our side and actually had a lawn out front – covered in snow now.

Their home was bigger than ours and two story at the back. Their barn was new but their acreage in the back was empty.

I followed Krista inside.

She said, "Come sit while I make a fresh pot."

"How come you've not used the acreage?"

"We thought about chickens—"

"That's what we do."

She busied herself preparing the coffee machine. "Thought about horses, too. Donny wants chickens, I want horses. It's sort of a standoff."

"Oh..."

"I think the agenda is a peach orchard."

"Those will grow here in the snow?"

"Yup."

I was dumbfounded. "Oh, I didn't know."

"If we weren't wrestling over it, we could be trading you peaches for eggs."

"How long... has the peeper...?"

She glanced at the window. "I'd say two months, now."

"And he's tried to get in?"

She grabbed at her blouse in memory. "Twice I've seen him close. At our back door there and at the living room window. It's terrifying to be going about your business and suddenly see a dark shadow right in your face."

I shook my head. "I think I'd die. I dropped my coffee this morning just seeing the footprints."

"Yeah, definitely creepy."

"You don't know why he's picked you? Or me? Or the others?"

She shook her head. "No idea." She said it with such vehemence that I was startled. She added, "But it's only you and me that he's peeping. Beth and Tina have only seen him moving across their property."

"Why don't their husbands go out and catch him?"

"It might come to that. But who wants to risk going outside and getting killed?"

"Have they seen him with a gun?" I was alarmed.

"No, but gun, knife – what difference does it make?"

There was a rattle and opening of the front door.

I squawked in terror and jumped off the stool.

A man's voice called out, "Krista?"

"In here." She touched my shoulder. "It's just Donny. I'm sorry; I should've told you he might come home."

My heart was pounding. "Oh... sorry..."

"No, really, I'm the one who should be sorry. Here we are talking about all this..."

Donny came into the kitchen. His eyes lit on me and he stopped. A smile ghosted across his lips. "Oh... Hi. Mrs... Dawson, right?"

"Yes." I touched the coffee cup Krista had slid towards me; it was hot. "Leslie is fine."

His smile and nod was friendly. "I wish I'd known you were coming, I'd have arranged to be here—"

Krista interrupted. "She's had the peeper. He tried to get into her place last night."

His eyebrows descended in anger. "Someone needs to get him." His ferocity played equally well on his clean-shaven features. His sandy-blond hair and scowl made him look like some modern-day Viking.

"He'll get caught," Krista said, but she sounded worried.

He sighed. "I need to run up to Ridgeline and show a parcel there. Just stopped by to get my sheepskin coat." He pecked his wife on the lips. They were almost the same height. He was almost out of the kitchen when he leaned back in. "Hey, why don't you see if that ivory cowboy hat fits her?"

She raised her eyebrows. "Yeah, maybe..."

He winked at me and lifted a hand. "Nice to see you again, Leslie. I hope you stop by more often."

I don't know if that was just the realtor in him being nice or if he really meant it. I waved my fingers.

She gave me a suggestive smile. "Come on. Let's see if that hat fits you."

I started to shake my head. "Oh, I can't take a hat—"

"Nonsense. My ex-husband bought it for me not sure of my size. It's bought and paid for and just a little too tight on me. It looks like it might fit you."

"Your ex? And you kept the hat?"

She shrugged sheepishly. "Seemed childish to throw such a nice hat away. It's not the hat's fault he bought it; it was just too small for me. So... I want you to have it."

"But—"

"I'd be offended if you didn't take it."

I giggled. "Well, okay. If you don't think I'd look stupid in it."

"Not at all, should go great with that blonde hair. Natural, isn't it?"

I flipped a finger through it. "Yeah, sort of dull."

"It's a beautiful color." She led me to the guest bedroom. It was cold in there and smelled of new things rarely used. She reached up into the closet and took down a square box. Lifting the lid, she took out a soft-looking cowboy hat. She twisted to me and settled it like a crown on my head.

I felt her adjusting the angle. It felt slightly tight. I said so.

"Actually, it's supposed to fit tight. It'll adjust to the shape of your head as you wear it. The important thing is wind. You don't want to have to run off chasing your hat every little breeze that comes along."

"Oh."

"If it's a good fit, it should leave an impression on your forehead after a while."

"Oh."

She turned me to the mirror. "There you go."

It did look cute in a way, but made me look so tall. "I feel like I'm six foot tall now."

She laughed with delight. "Now you just have to convince that handsome man of yours to wear one."

"You remember Birk?"

She busied herself capping the box and carrying it out of the room. "I saw him the once. You looked like such a nice couple."

"Oh, thank you." I followed her back to the kitchen. "Are you sure you really want to give me this hat?"

She gave me a dry look. "It's not looking good on anyone sitting up there in the closet. Like I said, it was just a tad too small for me. Sometimes hats come like that."

"Why didn't you return it?"

She shrugged. "Hoping for someone like you to come along? I hope it becomes a token of our friendship."

I don't know why, but I got the feeling something was going unsaid.

CHAPTER 4

I giggled playfully as I posed naked for my husband later that night. I was wearing the cowboy hat.

He tapped a pic of me into his phone.

"Don't be sending that to all your friends, now."

"I don't have any friends."

I pouted. "I was kidding."

"I know. But I don't. No one wants to be friends with the manager."

"Aww, poor baby. Can I suck your dick and make it all better?"

He laughed and wiped his nose. "Is that a hint?"

"Do you need to get hit over the head with it to recognize one?"

He shrugged and acted as if it was a big decision to relent.

I attacked his dick when he got undressed. "Gimme this."

"Don't bite it off."

I growled and put my teeth on him.

"Ahh..."

I laughed on his shaft and began sucking it to life.

"That looks sexy with the hat on."

I pulled off and batted my eyelashes at him. "You think so? Maybe that's why she gave it to me."

"Well, whatever. I'm glad you're making friends."

I stroked him for a bit. "They both remembered you."

"I'm sure Donny did; it was a sale."

"She did, too. Remembered you were handsome."

"She did? Get out. I don't even remember what she looks like."

"Tall, black hair. Smaller up top than me."

He grinned. "Yes, you do have some delicious boobs."

I began sucking him again.

He muttered, "I think I really like that hat."

I smacked off him. "She said it went with my blonde hair. Hers is sort of a distressed black hat. Perfectly matches her hair." I sucked down on him.

"Are you two going to be the cowgirl duo?"

I hummed on his shaft, feeling the rigidity forming and swelling.

We rested like that for a few moments as I licked and sucked up and down.

I took over with my hand. "So, cowgirl huh? I think I can ride you."

He grinned. "Giddyup."

I frowned at the window. "Let me make sure the curtain is in place." There were places to see through if the two halves weren't perfectly arranged. I got up and went to the window. I rearranged the two halves to close off sight.

In case that peeper was out there.

On a self-dare, I opened the curtains.

And screamed.

There was a face not a foot from mine in the darkness outside.

I fell over backwards, clawing away from the window.

Birk shot out of bed and grabbed his pants.

I was frantic. "No, don't go outside!"

He was angry. "Why not? This is our property!" He was fastening his pants. He snatched up the shotgun.

I rolled away from the window and went to clutch onto him - not just to keep him in the house with me, but as a form of protection. "What if he's armed? Has a knife or a gun? Please don't."

He hesitated, considering. Then he moved slowly to the window. Using the barrel at the side of the curtain, he pushed it aside. He moved his head, peeking out down the length of the barrel.

I watched him looking. "Is he there?"

"No..." He pulled the drape open more and leaned close to the glass. "Nothing."

"He was there, I saw."

"I know, I saw a flash of face, too." He sighed. "Guess I'll check the rest of the house."

"Be careful."

He didn't answer.

I watched his naked back merge into the darkness of the hall.

I desperately wanted to forget what I had seen and experienced, but my thoughts were drawn back to the face. It had been a blur, really, smeared by the reflection of the light inside against the glass. A hint of a face. Clean shaven, maybe? Or a slight beard? There had been a hoodie or something covering the top of his head. Black overcoat?

I reached into the nightstand and pulled out the Python. The comforting weight

was a reminder that someone had been nearby without our knowledge.

Birk came back in and settled the shotgun beside the bed. "I went through the whole house – looked out all the windows. Whoever it was is gone."

With no new snow on the ground and most of it melted off, there wouldn't be much in the way of footprints to follow. Unless there was mud.

Or cigarettes.

I put the handgun away. "Please, let's get some motion detector lights?"

He nodded. "I can pick some up and install them Saturday." He removed his pants and eased onto the bed. "So, where were we?"

I blinked at him. I had come face to face with horror and he wanted to have sex? I shook my head. "I'm sorry..."

"Oh, come on. The bad guy is gone."

"Please, Birk, not now."

He looked down and nodded. "Okay. Okay."

I was in for a shock Friday morning.

CHAPTER 5

I kissed Birk goodbye for work Friday morning. Clouds were overhead, heavy and threatening. A chill in the air hinted at a suggestion of snow.

Maybe.

The Weather Channel reported a twenty percent chance of snow flurries.

Which meant, they didn't know crap about whether or not it was going to snow. They could confidently predict a half degree of climate warming fifty years into the future but couldn't accurately predict the temperature or precipitation even one day in advance.

I learned not to question these things.

What mattered to me was more immediate. Such as when I watched him drive out and onto Route 3.

Something caught my eye.

Something... different.

I saw it then as my husband accelerated out of view: something colored on the four-by-four mailbox post. I squinted at this distance, seeing something possibly wrapped around the weathered wood.

I walked out the open front door and headed to the mailbox. Looking around showed me nothing else out of the ordinary. No cigarette butts, no footprints where there normally weren't any.

And yet the gloom of the heavy clouds overhead made me nervous.

Was someone watching?

I looked across the road to the familiar ranches on the other side.

Nothing.

But was someone inside either in the house across from us or in the others a little distance away on either side? Or our side?

I did a slow spin, looking for anything that might catch my eye.

But there was only the thing on the mailbox post.

It was a bungee cord.

Nothing threatening by itself - but filling me with terror every step towards it I took.

There was a rolled paper, flattened in the middle where the cord held it. I slid it out. It was a gray construction paper that closely matched the color of the wooden post.

Had someone hoped I would see it and not my husband? Or vice-versa?

I didn't want to open and see what was in it outside where eyes might see. I walked back to the house as if speed-walking towards an errant child.

But this was no child I held in my grip.

I shut the door and flicked on the entry light. With trembling hands, I unrolled the paper.

I expected something written in blood.

I found quite the opposite.

In bold, blocky printing, the note read:

Leslie,

I have been watching you, wanting to make contact. You are so beautiful and I want you to know I see it.

I have never tried to break into your home.

You fascinate me and I want to know all that you are. I want to submerge myself in knowing you.

If you wish to exchange notes with me, tack up your response on the back of your chicken coop.

Much anticipation,

Your Secret Admirer

I read it again and thought to myself, What? Am I in high school again?

My first thought was to call the sheriff. But my prints were all over the paper, now. My second thought was to call my husband. But he was maybe just getting to work.

Many thoughts paraded through my head. Didn't the peeper know I was married? What could he hope to accomplish?

Where exactly did he think this could go?

I shook my head and read the note again and still found little sense in what I saw.

It just made no sense.

And yet... there was nothing distinctly threatening about the tone of the wording. Maybe silly, but wanting to know me was a lot different than claiming to want to own me. Or possess me. I had watched those CSI TV shows.

Was someone really peeping in our home because he was infatuated with me?

Me?

An odd warmth flooded me at the thought.

My first inclination was that the author of the note was sweet.

I shook my head. I didn't want to get... what? Stockholm Syndrome? But was I even a captive?

I took a picture of the note against my better judgment and sent it to my

husband.

Me: Check this out when you have a chance.

Me: I want to write a response, but will wait for you to get home.

I hit send.

Nine hours later, I was serving dinner. Nothing special: some pot roast and buttered green beans and corn.

Birk had the note splayed open in his fingers and was frowning at it. "Does the writing look strange to you?"

"Strange?" I dropped a big spoon of veggies on his plate.

"It's almost like a calligraphy flair..."

I leaned over and looked. "Flair? I don't see any—"

"See how the bottoms of the letters here and the tops over here have a hint of a curl? I think the writer is used to writing cursive."

"Everybody writes cursive."

"Sure, sure, but someone wanted to try disguising their writing."

I straightened. "Every criminal does. Ever see those newspaper cut-out letters?"

He grunted. "Yeah..."

I sat and picked up my fork and knife.

He said, "So what is it you were thinking of writing?"

"Well, if this guy really is infatuated with me, then he's not going to give up. I'm thinking I respond to the note. See where it leads."

He gave me a level look from under his eyelashes. "You know these things never turn out well. They always end up with someone dead."

"I know; I've watched TV. But if we don't find out more about this man, he may end up acting out of frustration – murdering all of us."

He spun the paper on the table with his fingers. "It's dangerous."

"It's already dangerous, but I don't want to be stalked in my own home." I knew he could see it, but he was worried. If I didn't lure the guy out into the open, disaster could surprise us. I wanted to be ready for it – maybe even head it off with timely information to the sheriff.

He nodded, slowly at first. "All right. I think you're right. If we can find out who this guy is..."

"Then we can tell the sheriff and he can arrest him."

"I doubt even coming up with an identity is enough to get him arrested. What's he done? Trespassed? Littered a single cigarette butt? Peeped in a window? We don't have Peeping Tom laws here."

"We don't?"

He shook his head. "We have guns instead."

I didn't laugh at his joke.

He said, "I don't like it, but go ahead and respond. It might be our only way to identify him before he goes off the deep end."

I pulled the note over to my side and considered it. What do I say? I need to encourage him? But not sound too eager...

After dinner, I rested my elbows on the counter and looked at the blank piece of paper. I twirled the pencil in my hand and frowned.

Birk was leaning on the other side, watching me. "Just write something careful."

Easy to say. I put pencil to paper.

I'm flattered. Why are you so secretive?

I spun the paper and pushed it at him. "What do you think?"

His eyebrows rose. "Kind of short... But I think this is realistic."

"Grab the flashlight."

"You want to put it out now? It's dark outside."

"What if he checks tonight? What if he expects something and gets nothing. What if that triggers him?"

He nodded as if he agreed. "What if he's out there right now?"

Darn you, don't get technical on me. "Come with me."

He gave me a sour look. "I wasn't going to let you go out alone."

I spread my hands. "Then... let's... go."

He sighed with exasperation but was moving.

There was darkness beyond the deck. A light snow was falling, but the flakes were big – melting as soon as they touched the ground.

I rolled the note up tight.

Birk pointed at the light. "I bought the detectors. Will put them up Saturday morning."

I shivered, and not because of the cold. While the motion detectors would bring a certain level of security, I almost dreaded being somewhere in the house and seeing a light come on near a window.

He led the way with the flashlight. Brilliant flares of white drifted down in the damp and chill air.

I felt as if eyes were watching me every step of the way, pressing in from the sides and behind. I twisted my head both ways, craning around to see... anything. All I could see was the faint falling of snow in the dark behind us. The lit deck confirmed the snowfall.

Faint flapping sounds started and stopped in the chicken coop. An occasional hen sound told us everything was normal for the resting chickens.

Birk stopped behind the coop and shined his flashlight around. "How are we going to attach—" His flashlight stopped on the back wall.

A single yellow thumb tack was stuck into the wood.

Tension tightened every muscle in my body and I could feel it radiating from his, too.

Just the idea some stalker had been back here to put the tack in place and had been standing here breathing made me feel icy cold.

My husband sighed.

I plucked at the tack with trembling fingers. It quickly twisted out of my grasp and fell. "Dammit." I squatted down and poked through the grass at the ground.

"You got it?"

"Yeah." I rose and tacked the note into place. "Let's get out of here."

"This is our property."

"I want to be inside." I didn't like that I was standing in the same spot the stalker had stood. It was not a good feeling.

CHAPTER 6

Birk put his coffee cup away and looked at the clock. "You want me to go check the coop before I go?"

"Why didn't you check when you fed the chickens?"

He shrugged. "Didn't know if that was something you wanted to do."

"You didn't even look?"

"I did. There's a note there but I can't tell if it's yours or a new one."

"Were there any footprints?"

"It was kinda dim..."

I sighed. "I'll go look."

"Want me to come with you?"

I shook my head. "Nah, if you didn't get jumped by the stalker when you were out there, I doubt he'd be hanging around waiting for me. Besides, Sheriff Redmond said the guy operated in the late evening."

"All right, if you're sure."

I kissed him. "You're putting those lights up tomorrow?"

"M'yep."

"Love you."

"Love you, too. Text me a pic of the note if it's new."

"Okay."

He picked up his jacket and headed out.

I watched him from the door. The bungee cord was still around the post of the mailbox, but it didn't look like there was any paper.

After he drove off, I shut and locked the door and went out back. The yard looked so... normal. Reinforced in me were my husband's words: "This is our property."

The chickens moved with curiosity when I entered the fenced off yard. A couple followed me as I went around to the back of the coop.

The note hung there, stabbed into the wall as if crucified.

It was not the paper I had tacked up last night. The paper I had written on was white. This was that gray construction paper.

I looked around, spinning frantically. Is he here? The two chickens flapped and scattered.

The blood pounded in my head with force and severity, blocking my hearing with the incessant thumping in my ear.

Nothing but the yard.

I took in several breaths and reached up to take the note. I did not drop the tack this time.

I left the chicken yard, trying to take comfort in the fact that the chickens would squawk if someone else came along at that moment. It was a pitiful protection that offered no safety.

Great, the last think I hear will be a chicken clucking at me...

I went into the house and locked the back door. But I went still inside the breakfast nook. What if the man had entered while I was at the chicken yard?

My eyes moved and my ears strained.

I moved slowly into the kitchen, keeping my steps silent.

Three sudden peeping blasts shredded my nerves, filled me with icy dread, and

made me scream.

The damned coffee maker had signaled it was shutting off.

Heart thumping wildly and spots swimming before my eyes, I ran for the bedroom as if the stalker was right on my heels. A keening wail was coming from my mouth that I could not stop. If I saw a face, I was going to die.

It was that simple.

I yanked the nightstand drawer open so fast and hard the whole drawer came out. I snatched up the Python and swung it all around.

I was ready to see the man now.

I was ready to shoot, and I was a good shot.

My finger squeezed gently on the trigger, but not enough to fire. I was back in control.

Leaving the drawer, I searched the entire house. I kept telling myself the stalker only operated by night. But what if he changed his method? What if he thought now was the time to strike?

The house was clear. I even checked the bathrooms and showers. All the closets.

I went back into the bedroom, cursing my foolishness. I cleaned up the drawer and replaced the revolver.

Sitting on the bed a moment later, shoulders shaking in silent sobs of relief, stress, and worry, I decided I didn't want to give up the security of the gun. I still hadn't read the note. It was sitting next to me.

What if he did break in? What if it was during the day?

I went around to my side of the bed and opened the bottom drawer of the nightstand. I pulled out the case and set it on the bed.

Flicking open the plastic tabs, I revealed my birthday present from three years ago: a Zastava EZ 9 in 9mm Parabellum. I lifted the gun from its case and felt

the cool steel and security.

I put the case back and left the gun on the bed. I went to the closet on my husband's side. He had a large drawer there with holsters. He had bought me one to wear on my belt.

I knew I would never wear it unless we went to a range, but here I was taking it from the drawer I knew I'd never open.

I took down a box of 9mm cartridges from the shelf.

Back at the bed, I loaded the gun and pulled back the slide. It snapped back forward with a satisfying metallic sound of a round entering the chamber. I slowly eased down the hammer.

I threaded the holster through my belt and buckled up. I slid my Zastava onto my hip.

Maybe sitting around the house all day would prove fruitless. A waste. Useless. Maybe Birk would laugh at me.

But what if I needed it? It wasn't going to do any good if it was unloaded in the case.

Anyway, I felt better. Maybe now, I would have a chance if confronted in my own home.

I headed towards the kitchen.

Three loud bangs on the front door made me jump three feet in the air.

I was a mess. I came down on my feet, legs already shaking with fright.

I'm okay; I've got a gun.

I went to the door and peeked out the peephole, holding my breath.

It was Krista in her black cowboy hat, looking worried.

I opened the door in a rush, glad she was here. "Krista—"

"Can I come in?" She was holding her arms together as if to keep warm.

"Of course."

She came in past me and saw my holstered gun. "That's a smart move."

I blew out a breath. "I just don't think I can live my life waiting for the stalker—"

"He was at our house last night." She gulped loudly.

I touched her arm. "He was? He was here, too."

She looked around as if looking for escape. "I was in the living room, going to go to bed, and he was just standing there out the window, looking in."

"Are you okay?"

There was water in her eyes – an unshed fear of what the future might hold. "I need to get a gun."

"Do you know how to use one?"

She shook her head.

"Then it's probably best you don't. Would you like some coffee?"

"Sure, sure. Please." She wiped her brow. "He just stood there. Looking. All hulking and threatening."

I led her into the kitchen. "Was Donny awake?"

She moved her head dismissively. "He went out, but the man was gone."

I thought of the note. "Has he... done anything weird?"

She coughed in disbelief. "Other than stand up against my window looking at me when I don't expect it? No."

"I'm sorry, Krista; I didn't mean it to sound like it wasn't scary. Have you ever seen him after midnight?"

She shook her head. "But who knows? We're asleep."

"The sheriff seems certain he operates before midnight."

"That's what everyone's saying."

I prepared the coffee machine and set out two cups. I sat with her while we waited. "Did you get a good look at his face?"

She shook her head in dejection. "He was just a figure. I couldn't make out details. It looked maybe like he was wearing a thick jacket, like one of those heavy winter rain coats or something."

"Color?"

"I couldn't tell. Dark."

"And no features?"

"His face might as well have been a pit of blackness. Ugh!" She shivered. "We need to catch this man."

An image in my head of a cartoon pit and Elmer Fudd falling into it flashed through. "He isn't going to go away, is he?"

She laughed and it was more of a sob. "I know how these things go—"

"Someone ends up dead."

She pursed her lips and stared at me with red-rimmed eyes. Her nod was somber.

I said, "There has to be something we can do."

"Maybe our husbands can do some kind of nightwatch thing. A little patrol or something around the time this guy is out and about."

I considered it. "That's an idea. I wouldn't want my husband out alone—"

"Me either."

"But together? That sounds like something to talk about." I poured the coffee

and handed her the cup.

"Thank you." She held her hands around the mug warming them. "Would you two like to come over tonight and talk about it?"

"I don't see why not."

"Birk won't mind?"

"Nah. What time?"

"Well... How about I make a chicken dinner?"

I was quiet, thinking.

She said, "I'm not a bad cook."

I laughed. "No, it's not that. What time do you eat?"

"Six."

"We eat a half hour earlier, but six sounds fine."

"Are you sure?"

I smiled at her and squeezed her arm. "Let's put the men to work after we've fed them."

She laughed then, and not with the earlier stress. She wiped at her eyes. "Yes, that always does work out better that way. Donny gets grouchy if he hasn't eaten."

"So does Birk."

We laughed together for a few seconds.

She said, "Do you think Birk will want to do something like a nightwatch with Donny?"

I knew my husband enough to speak for him. "He'd love to."

She let out a long and tired sigh. "I already feel better. It's like we're doing something."

"If we do nothing, we might as well be victims."

"But the police—"

"Don't always get there in time."

She nodded knowingly. "Only after someone is hurt..."

I squeezed her arm again. "Let's have faith in our husbands."

Her look was soft. "I like the sound of that, Leslie. I really do."

CHAPTER 7

After Krista left, I texted my husband about the get-together tonight and why.

Something nagged at me, but I wasn't grasping it.

After a few minutes, he called me.

I picked up the landline. "Hello?"

His voice was even and quick. "Hey."

"Did dinner sound all right with you?"

"Sure thing. Us men should be out and making sure things are safe. This sounds like a good start."

"Okay. You could've texted that back."

"I hadn't heard from you about the note? Was there a new one?"

It dawned on me what I was forgetting. Of course, the new note. "Oh, duh. Yes, I got one, but haven't read it yet."

"Huh. Well, scan it and send it. I gotta go."

"Okay, love you."

"Love you, too."

I hung up and went into the bedroom. I was moving a lot freer now that I was wearing my gun. I was not going to be killed in my own home.

I sat on the bed and clicked on the lamp. Unrolling the note, I read the few lines. And reread them again.

Leslie,

I'm so glad you're flattered. You should be; you're gorgeous. I can't help wondering what it would be like to kiss your lips.

Pure heaven.

Have you ever done it with another person watching?

Sorry, not much time tonight.

Yours truly,

Your Secret Admirer

Watching? As in the guy peeping through the window while my husband and I did it? I answered the question out loud. "You're the one who would know."

I took a picture and sent it to Birk.

Walking slowly into the kitchen, I pondered what I was going to write back. What was safe? What would trigger the stalker into rage? What would be the wrong thing to say?

Most likely, lashing out against the stalker was the bad move. Remembering all the TV crime dramas I'd watched, lashing out was always bad.

Yes, luring is much better. I slid a piece of paper over and picked up the pencil.

Dear Secret Admirer,

I'm sure you've probably seen me and my husband in the bedroom. Did it excite you? Or anger you?

How often do you watch?

Leslie

Short and sweet. Luring and revealing. I took a picture and sent it to my husband, too.

Then I went out back.

The chickens pecked around in the cold, but less so than normal. Feathers all fluffed out, they looked majestic. I petted the two friendly ones and they clucked at me.

Around the back of the coop waited the tack. Not feeling so vulnerable wearing my Zastava, I put my note up.

One of the hens let out a squawk around front. I moved quickly past the two hens at my feet and around the coop. My hand was on my gun.

There was no one to see.

One of the hens craned its neck to peck at another hen. It squawked again and flapped away some. The pecking hen followed.

I let out a breath and headed inside.

It was late in the day when I looked out the front window over the sink. Still very light, if cloudy, no one was on the road.

I stared out, feeling a sinking dread come over me and wash away my relief. My eyes were fixed and glassy. It was early afternoon. I had missed him because I wasn't looking. The mailbox stood like an accusation of my neglect for observation.

The bungee cord was gone.

Had the stalker been watching while I went out back to the chicken coop? Had I missed him somehow? Had he removed his bungee cord after seeing that I was going to keep corresponding with him?

Was my note already gone?

I raced out the back sliding glass door and down the steps of the deck. I sprinted across the yard deeper into the property. I burst through the gate of the chicken pen and scattered startled chickens.

I muttered, "Sorry, chicks."

Gun out, I leaned around the corner to the back of the coop.

Expecting I don't know what, my mind took a moment to grasp that the note tacked up there was mine. I became aware of the quiet yard and looked around in a panic.

Was the man watching me even now?

I looked over to where the barn would be, but the coop blocked the view. On the other side of the back of the coop were stacked railroad ties.

I went out of the chicken yard and around to the side with the ties. Long oiled wooden ties were stacked haphazardly.

I began searching.

Someone could hide among them, watching the back of the coop.

My search turned up two Marlboro cigarette butts.

Was he watching me tack up my note? But why didn't he take it? Had he watched me and my husband tack up the note the previous night?

I lifted a butt. It didn't look old, but how old do butts look like after a few hours? I dropped it and looked over to the barn. All the doors were shut, including the upper hayloft.

Should I search it?

Something in me did not want to open the doors.

I went back into the house. If the man had been here earlier in the day, he was gone now or he would've taken my note.

I stayed in the house until Birk got home.

He scrutinized my hip, but other than a pursing of his lips, said nothing.

"I want to search the barn."

"There's nothing out there." It was dismissive.

"What if the stalker is in there?"

He paused, thinking. "Hmm, okay. Maybe you have a point. Did you hear something?"

"No, but I found more cigarette butts."

"Near the barn?"

"No, I'm just suspicious of it. I found the butts over in the railroad ties."

He looked confused. "The ties...?"

"In plain view of the back of the coop."

His face lit up. "Oh..." He looked at my hip again. "I approve."

I smiled, feeling relieved. "Thank you."

"Let me wash up a little and we'll go check the barn before we go."

I followed him to the master bathroom. While he was washing his face and hands, I said, "The stalker is around during the day."

His hands stopped moving. "How do you know? Did you see him?"

"The original note was strapped to our mailbox with a bungee cord. It was still there when you left. It was gone a little after noon."

"And you didn't see anyone?"

"No, just Krista. But that makes sense; she said she saw the man last night. I think he's stalking both of us. But he's been stalking her longer. Maybe he follows her during the day..."

"That's not a pretty thought." He began brushing his teeth.

"I just don't see vehicles driving around looking strange. He must be a neighbor."

He finished. "Well, let's see what we see when we walk over to dinner."

"Are you going to wear your gun?"

"You've got yours. I'll let you protect me."

I scowled. "This isn't a joke."

"No, no it's not. But if we both show up armed over there, might look threatening."

"Oh. Should I take it off?"

His eyes sparkled. "No, leave it on. It looks sexy."

I coughed in utter annoyance.

At which, he broke out into amused laughter.

"Jerk."

CHAPTER 8

I peered around. "See anything?"

"A bunch of ranches."

"Be serious."

"It's getting hard to see."

We were walking into the setting sun.

I used the brim of my cowboy hat to block the sun. I still didn't see anything out of the ordinary.

The only person I saw was Beth, our neighbor, standing in her doorway. We waved to each other.

Birk said, "None of the other side of the street has reported seeing this man?"

I said, "I don't know. I was introduced by the sheriff to Beth, Krista, and Tina."

"Which one is Tina?"

"The old woman who lives alone. That house over there." I pointed.

"Convenient. All on the same side of the street."

I looked across. "I wonder if that means he lives on the other side? Like he won't soil his own side of the street?"

"I doubt anyone is that weird."

"Stalkers are weird."

He offered no rebuttal.

"There's Donny."

The realtor was leaning on the porch rail surveying the street like a lion over his domain. But he was wearing a broad smile, realtor style. His cowboy hat was a richer black than Krista's. He waved like a movie actor in an old western.

Birk said, "I don't think I've ever seen him frown."

"Be nice."

"I am being nice."

Men. Sometimes they just don't get it. "Smile, dear?"

"I'm grinning like a chimpanzee."

I elbowed him, hard, and was rewarded with a satisfying rush of air in pain.

"Relax, would you?"

I whispered, "We're all in this together."

Donny had come down the steps, hand extended. "Birk! And Leslie. Good to see you again."

My husband tried to be droll. "We just live down the street..."

The realtor didn't miss a beat. "Then we need to make this a habit." They were still shaking hands.

"Just say the word."

Donny's face turned mock-serious. "Captain, the word is given." He let go and took my hand, shaking gently. "Come on in, Krista's trying to burn down the kitchen. Should make good entertainment."

Despite his joviality, I saw his eyes peer beyond us and around before leading us inside.

The place was decorated in western fashion, lots of wood and leather – the walls dotted with dream catchers and photos of famous Indians and cowboys. A nice rock fireplace had antlers overhead and a shotgun just beneath it.

While the place wouldn't make it into Interior Design as a feature home, it certainly had all the comfort and charm dedicated to decorating it.

I didn't smell anything burning. I left the two men and went into the kitchen. Steel appliances set off against brick and a large hanging rack over a center island made the kitchen a wonderland of preparation.

Krista's smile was cheerful. "Hi, love." She was stirring rice.

"Anything new?"

She gave me a grateful look. "No, and I guess I'm not the only one worrying?"

"No, I am, too. Being stalked in my own home isn't what I call a wonderful life."

Her eyes bugged at me. "I know, right? But Donny doesn't think it's all that serious."

"He doesn't?"

"Well, he comes and goes sometimes during the day, so it's like he thinks he's watching over me. But what about when he leaves? I'm scared here alone."

"You could always come over our place. It's not like I do much except internet stuff."

Her eyebrow twitched. "Oh, like porn?"

I laughed. "No, just news and special interests."

"What kind of special interests?"

"Science, mostly. Archaeology."

"Science? Really?"

"Sure, I really like reading about other planets. The whole Mars thing is interesting."

"And that entertains you?"

I shrugged. "Mostly. Sometimes the real entertainment is in the comments section."

"How so?"

"You wouldn't believe how many posers come in claiming they know this and that because of science but they're just using the label to justify their positions and shut other people up."

She gave me a securitizing look. "What do you mean?"

"Well, real science is the Scientific Method: theory; experimentation; observation. A lot of posers just use the theory to claim science has decided something."

She gave me a dubious look. "That entertains you?"

"Better than cat videos, although I do laugh at those, too." I shrugged. "I like to think. To figure things out. I'll end up being a crossword puzzle genius in my old age if I dare ever buy one."

Her face softened and lit up. "My grandma used to spend hours doing those."

"I bet she would've loved the internet. There's so much to see."

Krista drained off the last of the water. "Poke your head out there and tell those two dinner is served."

I poked my head into the living room.

Donny held out his arms wide. "And this big open sky can be all yours for the price of just five hundred acres!"

Birk laughed. "Did he buy?"

"He sure did. Didn't even counter."

I said, "Dinner." I grinned at Donny's exuberance. He had an energy about him that bubbled up and made people smile. I could see what attracted Krista to him.

Donny removed his hat and ran his hand back through his hair. "We need to get

you a hat, Birk. You can't own a ranch without a cowboy hat; it's against the law."

My husband was game. "Jail time?"

"Don't let the sheriff find you without one."

Krista dished up chicken and rice.

It was a light meal and I approved.

She said, "There's more in the oven; don't be shy."

I judged my plate. "This will be plenty."

She winked at me. "We eat alike. Tell me you like salt."

I laughed. "I love salt."

"And pepper?"

"Blacken it up."

She clapped her hands and bounced in her chair. Then her face fell. "I was going to say I'm glad we were introduced... But maybe under better circumstances."

Her husband hung his hat near the back door on a peg next to Krista's hat.

A surge of tenderness tickled my heart at the symbolism of their hats being together. How sweet. I had set mine down on the extra chair.

Donny caught his wife's look. "Now, now. We have guests. Don't get morose."

"I can't help it."

He sat.

Birk and I picked up our forks, but we both paused.

Donny and Krista lowered their heads.

No way. I was stunned. I put down my fork and so did my husband.

The realtor said, "Thank you, Lord, for this meal and for your protection of our family and friends. May your blessings extend to our guests tonight as well. Amen."

Krista murmured, "Amen."

Both Birk and I said in unison, "Amen."

Donny looked at his plate. "Now let's see how badly Krista torched the chicken."

CHAPTER 9

Krista finished putting the dishes in the dishwasher.

I felt useless.

She asked, "Come outside with me? I need a smoke."

"I don't smoke, but sure." I picked up my hat and put it on.

Krista's look was pleased. She grabbed her hat, too. It went on as naturally as sunglasses.

We stepped out onto her back porch. It wasn't as big as our deck – only a few feet wide and several feet long. She leaned on the rail and fished a cigarette out of the red and white pack.

She lit and inhaled a deep breath. "What are we going to do?"

I adjusted my hat to match hers. "Survive." The determination in my heart would not be compromised.

"I'll drink to that."

"Or smoke to it?" I didn't mean anything by it.

She looked at her cigarette. "I know, I need to quit. I want to..."

"I don't mind you smoking." What other people had for habits was their business, not mine.

"Thank you."

"So where did you see the man last night?"

"Right here."

I got creeped out. "Eww..."

"If I'm scared to go out on my own porch..."

"That's sort of what Birk says: 'It's our property.' "

"Right. No one is going to move in on it and kick me out." She made a motion like she was stubbing the cigarette out, but it was only a quarter gone.

"Do you think it's someone from across the street?"

She looked at me with inquisitive eyes. "Why would you think that?"

"Well, the only people that have reported seeing him are on this side. Like maybe he doesn't want to soil his side of the street?"

She scratched her nose. "I don't know."

"Although he seems focused on you and me?"

Krista took a drag. "That's what I'm feeling, too. Why us? Tina and Beth have just seen him, but not looking in their windows. What kind of connection do we have?" She went still, cigarette posed near her mouth.

I asked hopefully, "Thought of something?"

There was a tremble in her fingers as she took a quick pull on the cigarette. "No, nothing."

"Anyway, I think I'd enjoy a little support. I can always make extra coffee."

"Oh, me coming over?"

"Yes."

"You really don't mind?"

"Birk is gone all day. Tomorrow and Sunday are the only days he's home during the week. I just don't feel very safe anymore."

She indicated my hip. "You have some support."

"I do, but what if he's hiding and sneaks up on me? I'd never get it out of the holster."

"At least it's something. What do you have there, anyway?"

"Nine millimeter. I thought I'd never wear it in a millions years. It was a gift from Birk."

"Thoughtful gift. I have a revolver. A .357 passed on to me from my father. Kicks like a son of a bitch."

"You have a holster?"

"No, but I suppose I can go buy one at Tilley's."

I had seen Tilley's gunstore in town. "We can wear together. Form our own little daily patrol."

She laughed and took a final drag. After blowing her smoke, she said, "I don't want to run around and run into him; I'd rather stay as far away as possible." She stubbed out the cigarette in an empty flowerpot on a stand. There were other cigarette butts in there. She said, "Let's go see what the boys are doing."

I paused going inside and looked down at the butts with curiosity. They were all Marlboros.

A heavy twig snapped out in the darkness, somewhere in the yard.

I froze, turning to peer out into the blackness. The snap had been sharp. No rabbit or even dog could have made a snap that loud. That had to come from something heavy, like a deer, or moose.

Or a man.

Krista said, "You coming?"

I suddenly didn't want to be out in the cold.

In the living room, the men were laughing.

Birk said, "So I told him, 'You could always grow your own corn to save the cost

of the seed. I have a bag of seed right over here for your crop...' "

Donny slapped his knee and laughed.

My husband said, "He didn't think it was funny."

"What did you do?"

"Let him find his way out. I wasn't going to sell to him seed for a buck a pound."

Krista planted fists on hips, feet spread. "Are you boys just joking around, or have you talked about what—"

Donny quieted her with a placating hand gesture. "We did. We will. The guy's been seen around ten to eleven. We're going to meet and walk up and down the street a few times to show our presence. Maybe we can turn something up."

I offered, "Maybe you can start now. I heard a twig snap out back."

Donny frowned. "A twig?"

"A large twig."

Birk was studying me. But he rose as if ready to pounce.

I clarified, "It was too loud to be something small."

My husband said, "Give me your gun."

I unholstered it and handed it to him. He stuck it in his belt.

Krista said, "You heard something out there?"

I nodded. "Just as we were coming in." I didn't mention the cigarettes.

Donny finally looked like he had taken the matter seriously. He patted my husband on the shoulder. "Let's go take a look."

"You have a gun?"

"Yeah, but it's locked up. You've got one; let's go."

I wondered what good a locked up gun was.

Krista and I watched them move out the sliding glass door.

She shivered next to me. "Will this ever end?"

I didn't know what to say; things kept getting worse. I hated the man outside, whoever he was. Hated him for making our lives hell. Who was he to interfere? What right did he have?

Krista surprised me by taking me into a hug. "I don't know why all this is happening, but I'm glad you're here."

I was very shocked – yet, at the same time, I yearned for the closeness she was giving. I relaxed with the hug and gripped her in return. Our warmth radiated between us and I was distinctly aware of her form pressed against mine. Also, her scent: perfume; the shampoo she used; the detergent in her clean clothes; the body wash...

I found myself intoxicated.

It was with no amount of resistance that she kissed me. It happened as naturally as if I were kissing Birk. But the effect was far different.

I soared, spinning and swirling as our tongues met and explored. Her soft lips pressed against mine seemed to be the most natural sensation in the world. I was aware of nothing except the heat of our bodies and the press of our mouths.

My heart began a slow acceleration as joy and motivation flooded my veins. Tingles erupted inside as the realization broadsided me that I was very much enjoying the kiss.

It made the heat hotter.

I didn't want the kiss to end.

I was so dizzy with euphoria that I didn't want it to ever end. I didn't care about the hint of sour cigarette flavor on her tongue. If anything, it added to the intensity of the connection between us.

She was taller. Different. Dark-haired. Small-breasted.

I was shorter, bigger-bosomed, and blonde.

None of that mattered.

Our graceful forms melded together, providing each other warmth and comfort.
We sought each other, and found something special.

CHAPTER 10

I was sitting, trying not to look embarrassed.

Krista said, "I'm... sorry."

"No..." I didn't want to sound eager, despite my shame. I had kissed a woman.

"No, don't be sorry..."

The men were coming back in.

I looked at her with searching eyes, half pleading for her to say nothing of what had happened here inside the house.

Donny said, "Someone was out there."

Krista went stiff. "Who?"

Birk handed me the gun. "Don't know, but we heard him running off."

I stood and holstered it. Then I clutched onto his arm for support. And maybe to remind myself I was married and shouldn't have kissed a woman.

Is that cheating? Cheating would be with a man, wouldn't it? I squeezed his arm tighter, suddenly wanting to be home with him alone to reinforce that I was his and he was mine.

A bandage on my bewildered conscience.

I said, "Maybe we should go. I feel like being home right now."

Donny pointed to Birk. "I'll get with you tomorrow? I need to show some land in the afternoon, but..." He waved his hand, palm down as if weighing options or shining a crystal ball. "Maybe after dinner? We can hike around and look tough."

My husband said, "Sounds good. Get yourself a gun."

"Oh, I have one. No worries. I'll be prepared."

I glanced guiltily to Krista. Her eyes on me were strained with concern. I couldn't say anything.

I needed to be home. I needed to talk to my man. Something inside me wasn't working like normal and I was sure he could fix it. He always did.

We left and walked along the road to our ranch.

Ten ranches on each side of Route 3. Twenty total ranches of twenty acres each: four hundred acres carved out of the much larger TB Ranch that stretched for miles in either direction.

It was a little island of homes and property, and someone in our little island was a stalker.

Who? There was nowhere else the man could come from without being in a vehicle and no one had seen a vehicle at any time. Nothing parked alone on the road. No extra vehicle parked in front no one recognized.

It had to come from within.

I thought of the cigarettes Krista smoked: Marlboros. Coincidence?

Surely, it must be. My husband and Donny had chased a man from the property – lost him in the darkness.

Inside our home, I clutched Birk's arm. I wanted to talk and feel his thoughts and emotions without dumping the entire mess in his lap. "Why don't we go to bed? I'm feeling..."

His smile told me he knew. "Oh? Sure."

In the bathroom, I brushed my teeth. I thought of the notes that had gone back and forth. I thought of the kiss. The man had wondered in the note if I had ever done it in front of someone while they watched.

Put off at first, a dangerous thrill tingled through me at the thought of Donny or Birk catching Krista and me kissing. Or even hugging.

What kind of reactions would that have raised?

Why did I feel so turned on by the thought of getting caught?

Strange, but sexy.

My mind was awlirl, but my pussy was aching. My nipples tingled with excitement.

I came out of the bathroom and let Birk use it.

Considering the bed, I began stripping. Was the man watching? I froze and looked at the drapes. There was a tiny slit that could be seen through. I stripped the rest of the way, going a little slower. In fact, I practically put on a damned show I was feeling so sultry.

I went to the curtains. I stayed there for a second considering. No, I don't want to know. Neither do I want to be frightened. But I wasn't frightened for some reason. Is he watching? Or is he over at Krista's watching her?

I turned, but as I did, I flicked the curtains. Being private with them required extra care to make sure the ends met. I had just upset that little apple cart and I knew a good inch of separation between the materials now existed.

I got onto the bed and my peripheral vision confirmed the parted drapes. The man, if he was there, would be able to see. Was he there? Would it serve to lure him out so he could be captured? Would this help him make a mistake?

And why was I so turned on that someone might be looking at my naked form this very second?

I liked it and I was breathing rapidly. It was as if I could feel little butterflies touching my body, grazing as they gazed.

And Krista's kiss tormented me with a pounding flutter in my chest.

Why had I been so consumed by it? Why had I liked it? Why had I wanted more?

Those questions evaporated suddenly as I sat, pulse pounding, and realized I

wanted to kiss her again.

Birk came out, cock swinging.

The sight of his manhood made me salivate to suck it.

He got on the bed and I attacked him, licking the head of his shaft and kissing it. I had kissed Krista not much more than a half hour before. My tongue on his cock having the memory of her kiss was electrifying. I pulled off, panting.

"What do you think of Krista?"

I desperately wanted to talk about her – to clear the air, but I think my hormones were raging with lust.

"She seems nice."

"You wouldn't mind if we were friends?"

He laughed. "No, why?"

Because I want to kiss her, okay? "Do you think she's pretty?"

He blinked at me with surprise.

I stroked him faster to take his mind off why I was asking.

He said, "Well, in a rougher sort of way, sure. But you're prettier."

I wanted him to agree with me, probably to assuage my conscience over the kiss. "Do you think she's sexy?"

He chuckled, but it caught in his throat. "Sure, I think she looks pretty good in her jeans."

I was happy to hear that. If he thought she was sexy, he couldn't rightly blame me for thinking so, too, right? I licked at the head of his erection. "Do you think she has sexy lips?" I sucked down on him slowly.

He closed his eyes and groaned. "If you're... trying to get me to imagine her sucking me, you're doing a good job."

My heart did a triple thump of sexy thunder. I liked what he said. I sucked faster and stroked his shaft. That she had kissed me and it was burned in my memory made me hot with desire. I formed an image of her here with me, kissing me and helping me lick his shaft.

Nasty. I love it. "Would you like her lips on your cock? Next to mine?"

He groaned louder. "That sounds really..."

I sucked more. "Really what?"

"Kinky," he breathed.

My eyes lit up. "You like that idea?"

He opened his eyes and sat up. There was a playful glint there. "Got some fantasy, huh?"

Not before tonight. "I don't know, I just thought it sounded... fun."

He pushed me down and moved down to lick me.

Was the stalker watching? Even though the man scared me, I had a feeling he wouldn't view what was happening as something that would enrage him. He had hinted at it in his note. Would this lure him out?

Birk's tongue licked up my clit and sent shuddering shivers up my body. Tingles erupted in my nipples and made me lift my hands to them.

He said, "Do you imagine Donny licking you?"

I jerked. That hadn't crossed my mind.

He asked, "Are you wanting to imagine his tongue doing this?"

I flushed with embarrassment – both at the idea of Donny and that I would rather imagine Krista doing it. "Um, I was wondering..."

"Hmm?" His tongue left sensational swirls slivering through me.

Would her tongue feel so good? "I was wondering what... her tongue would feel

like." I broke out in a clammy sweat. We had never talked about other people and he knew I wasn't lesbian. But the idea after tonight raised such a heat in me I couldn't sit still. "Is that... bad?"

He had frozen, looking along my body. His eyes barely cleared the swell of my breasts. "Her?" His tone was amused.

My panic pressed outward. "Don't laugh at me."

He flicked his tongue. "I wasn't laughing at you."

"I just thought she was sexy... I wondered..."

"I hadn't expected that from you, is all."

"Do you think I'm strange?"

He shook his head; I felt it against my inner thighs. "No, it sounds kinda kinky."

I was afraid, but I asked anyway. "Is that good?"

He lifted his head to affix me with his stare. "Everything with you is good, Leslie. Don't ever doubt it."

My body went into such a sudden state of relaxation that if I had been standing, I would've slumped to the floor in a pile. My husband loves me. Even with this weird Krista thing.

At his suggestion, I imagined her tongue on me. My pussy clenched ferociously with such a deep twinge that my legs and head lifted. I groaned with the delicious tension that twisted inside me.

As I experienced the exquisite imagery in my mind of Krista going down on me, I realized the subject hadn't been a hard one to raise with Birk. He hadn't reacted badly. He hadn't gotten angry. He hadn't looked at me weird.

He had accepted. Surprised, maybe, but he had accepted – and with such good grace and consideration that I felt foolish for being embarrassed.

And I should trust my husband, shouldn't I? Who else in all the world could I

trust, if not him?

I was lifted inside, wrung hard, and released. I cried out as a surprise orgasm swept over me, through me, and out of me. Happy and vocal with each pleasurable pounding pulse, I let go of my restraint and let the lust lash me with satisfaction.

I shook. I quivered. I trembled. And the thrills of release subsided, tingling their way to the ends of my feet and fingers. Finally, the tension was gone. Different tingles of gratification replaced the others and my body thrummed like a plucked guitar string.

A flush rose up my neck and face. Had the stalker seen? Was he looking right now through the drapes?

Even if he wasn't, it was sexy to think he was.

Would there be a note in the morning behind the coop? And why did I want there to be one? Was I in some sick cat and mouse game, deriving pleasure from something that should terrify me? But at this moment, I did not feel terrified.

No, if the stalker was watching, then he was watching, not entering to murder us all. Would this satisfy him? Or inflame him?

Birk moved up and inserted his erection into my pussy. My sensitive and satisfied lips opened and admitted him. I felt his thickness slide right in. No resistance. I welcomed him home.

He pushed deep and pressed.

I squeezed on the impaling thickness, satisfied with how he filled me.

His whisper startled me. "Should I be imagining what Krista feels like?"

That hadn't crossed my mind, either. Would it help me if he did? Would he be less likely to consider me wrong for kissing her? For wanting to kiss her again? If he imagined doing her, would it be something we shared? Make him less likely to reject me becoming... closer to her? I gasped and my pussy clamped on his cock. "Yes."

He closed his eyes over me and sighed as deeply as his cock was buried inside.

Was he really imagining Krista? I clamped on him unexpectedly and he moved – starting the in and out motions.

My pussy lips were massaged by his sliding shaft and I hummed with pleasure. "Are you... thinking about her?"

He gasped, eyes still closed. "Yes..."

A little thrill of danger and excitement danced inside. "Do you like it?" I wanted him to like it. I needed him to like it. It was the only way I could foresee going on and... kissing her again – without the guilt.

Yes, having him think of her was the perfect answer. If he thought of her like this, it was only fair that I did. Even if I had pushed him to do it for hidden reasons. No, I couldn't feel guilty over that if he came to accept me thinking of her and encouraged it. That might be the best thing possible. Who cared who thought of what first?

Who cared if the kiss came first if he liked it? I would tell him later to relieve my conscience, then it would all be perfect.

As easy as unzipping jeans.

He moved faster and deeper, and answered me, "Yes, I like it. She looks like she would fuck good."

My pussy clamped again, sending electric jolts up my insides. "If she was here, you'd do her?"

He groaned louder and pumped hard.

I coaxed him, "Yes do it. Fuck her hard. Cum in her." I was sure something like that would never happen, but I wanted him to cum while thinking of her. I wanted him to accept her as a sexual object of desire. Then I could, too.

He gasped, "Oh yeah... Cum deep... in her..." His hot splashes scalded me inside with his acceptance and swelled my satisfaction with success.

Now it would be an easy thing to do – to admit what had happened. "Birk..."

He was panting, still sending stray squirts into my pussy. "Huh?"

"I... actually kissed her earlier. It just sort of happened."

His face lost the slack satisfaction of having finished – it was replaced with surprise. "You did?"

I nodded. "We were scared and holding each other when you went out with Donny after the stalker. I'm not sure how it began, but we kissed."

"Are you serious?" He didn't sound angry; he sounded confused. "You've never mentioned liking women—"

"No, because I've never looked at a woman that way. I don't know; Krista is different. She seems so sexy and raw. And when she kissed me, I liked it."

"You going to dump me for a woman?"

I didn't like the doubt. "No, of course not. I love you. I just... wanted to share it with you."

He nodded. "Okay." He got up and went to clean off.

For some reason, it didn't feel perfect. Or maybe he was just surprised.

I looked at the drapes.

Was the stalker out there? Had my display aggravated him or satisfied him?

I reached over and took the Zastava from the nightstand and slid it under my pillow.

CHAPTER 11

It was Saturday, finally, and Birk was installing the motion detector lights.

Krista didn't come by for coffee and I was vaguely disappointed.

Did she think kissing me was a mistake?

Did Birk? He had been thoughtful all morning – distant in his own thoughts. Working out what I had told him? He hadn't been wearing a dreamy look on his face like he was fantasizing.

While he was doing the light at the front door, I went out the back and to the chicken yard. I entered the gate and went around to the back of the coop. A survey of the railroad ties several yards away revealed nothing.

I sniffed the air. No cigarette smell, either. But would it carry that far and overpower the smell of the chicken yard?

There was a gray note under the tack. I took it down and read it right there.

Leslie:

Thank you for the display. It meant a lot to me.

I have only seen a little bit of you with your husband. I try to watch as often as possible.

You are so gorgeous and I hope you don't think I'm strange. I want to reveal myself to you but it might be the wrong thing to do.

Know that I hold you dear in my heart.

Your Secret Admirer

I studied the writing. I turned it in the light. But nothing told me anything more than what was on the heavy paper.

The man had a flair in his printing. He also had a secret passion: being me. He sounded hopelessly romantic.

Or maybe that was all just the cover over the rot of insanity underneath. Could a murderer smooth talk? Certainly.

I went back to the house more confused than before. Still, I had left the drapes open for him and he had thanked me. He hadn't triggered on paper. But what wasn't I seeing? Could he be concealing it? Had I enraged him? But he was still signing as my secret admirer.

He sounded more like a teenage boy too shy to make himself known.

I sat at the dinette and considered a blank piece of paper.

Dear Secret Admirer,

You sound like such a nice man. Why not reveal yourself? What could it hurt?

Leslie

I really didn't know what else to do except continue prodding him.

I went back out and tacked it up.

I saw none of Krista all day Saturday.

Donny came by at six and knocked on the front door.

When Birk opened it to him, I saw that the light was working. He had installed a flood on it, too. Donny was blinking against the light.

He pointed up. "Not a bad idea. You ready to walk around?"

"Sure, let me get my gun."

Donny stepped in. His grin was lopsided and friendly. He even blushed a little. "Hi, Leslie."

I had kissed his wife. Would he know? Had she told him? As coolly as I could, I stepped to him, touched his shoulders, and kissed his cheek. "Hi, Donny."

Where's Krista?"

A shadowed look crossed his face. "She's not feeling too well. Decided to stay home."

Men were so easy to read. That something was wrong pained me inside with worry and doubt. Was Krista feeling guilty over the kiss? Had she told Donny? Was her husband disapproving? Had he told her to stay home?

However, his look wasn't accusing, just perplexed.

I assumed from this that she hadn't told him and he didn't know the reason why she suddenly felt ill.

But I knew why and it made my heart sink and hurt. I straightened his black leather vest and backed away.

He said, "She'll try to come by Monday morning."

I went to the kitchen without acknowledging him. I was distraught. Would she? Or was that just a lame excuse?

Birk called to me, "We're going out now."

"Okay."

I heard the door shut.

I didn't have her number or email. I could look up his business, but what if he had a separate business line? Real estate? Of course he did.

I could walk over there, but then what? Have her turn me away? What had happened?

I wanted to be near her. I wanted to feel her lips again – even if just to see that it had been a one-time thing and dull the second time around. At least I would know. It was as if the kiss was a part of a whole and I needed to see the rest of it to know if it really meant anything.

It left a hole.

They came back almost an hour later, seeing nothing.

Donny said, "One more go at ten?"

My husband said, "Yeah, I'll come your way and get you."

"Sure thing."

They found nothing at ten, either.

Sunday morning, the note I had tacked up was gone but there was no new note in its place.

Had I scared him off?

Sunday night I had my answer. Snow was expected around midnight. Birk was in the bathroom getting ready for bed. I was in my t-shirt and staring at the drapes.

Was the stalker really a shy kid?

Was it someone so hopelessly in love with me that all they could ever hope to attain was a glimpse of me through the drapes?

I got up and paused at the slight opening in the curtains.

If the stalker really was infatuated with me, then there wasn't anything to worry about, was there?

I opened the curtains and poked my head through.

I gasped, startled. My heart jumped and raced at the form of the man standing there. But the contents of his notes had me pausing, staring back at him.

The cherry of his cigarette flared as he took a drag. I couldn't make anything out except that his jacket had some kind of flaps on the shoulders. Like a duster or an Australian Outback raincoat. It went down to his feet. He was also wearing some kind of a brimmed hat.

We stared at each other and he didn't move. Neither did I.

Except that he puffed long on his cigarette. I could see the exhaled smoke, barely. Then the cigarette was flipping towards the window and bounced off it in a tiny flare of dying embers.

He had flicked the butt at me.

Something didn't feel right. At all.

Chills began to descend my back.

The figure backed away from the window and disappeared into the darkness.

CHAPTER 12

Monday morning was as normal as every workday.

Birk ate his eggs, drank his coffee, and kissed me goodbye. He had asked about the notes and I told him I hadn't received any new ones.

I hadn't.

When he had left, I holstered my gun and went out to the coop to check. There was no note.

So I still hadn't received a new one.

I was puzzled.

Had the stalker written the last note and then become enraged? Or had he already been enraged and was covering it? It was obvious something had changed, though.

Inside the house, I felt the loneliness of not knowing gnawing at my guts. There was much I was not knowing and it seemed as if each day made it worse.

The knock on the front door startled me.

I peeped out and saw Krista. For a moment, everything leapt in my heart and soul. I opened the door happily. "Hi."

She looked at me with haunted eyes. "Can I come in?"

"Of course. I made an extra pot of coffee in case you did come over."

She exhaled loudly. "I'm sorry about the weekend. Donny said you looked confused."

I locked the door and led her into the kitchen.

She said, "The man has been outside our windows every night."

"I saw him once, too."

She removed her hat and set it on a chair upside down. "I wish it was only once for me."

I poured the coffee, gently easing into my question. "Are you... sure... he hasn't done anything weird?"

"Other than scare the shit out of me looking through our windows and leaving cigarette butts lying around, no."

"He flicked his cigarette butt at the window. Right at me."

Krista shook her head. "I've never seen him do that."

"I was sort of staring at him."

She frowned. "You were staring at him or he was staring at you?"

"Both. I looked out the window and there he was. Other than jumping a little, I wasn't very scared. He was smoking and took a couple drags. Then he flicked the butt at me."

She turned in her chair and closed her eyes. "Wait, you were staring at each other? Through the window?"

"I didn't feel threatened."

Krista shivered violently and said, "Errrh."

I wasn't sure if I should tell her why – the whole notes thing. She hadn't indicated he was leaving messages for her.

Why me and not her? He had been watching her before me. Maybe he preferred blondes? Krista was beautiful for being black-haired. I didn't want to risk offending her by admitting Birk and I had used her for sex-talk – that he had thought she was sexy.

I diverted the conversation to where I really wanted it to go. "I thought you

stayed away because of... what happened Friday night."

Her eyes flashed to me and away. Then back. "Me? I think it was me that made the mistake. I'm sorry if what I did seemed too personal."

"Sorry? No... I..."

She scrutinized my face. "When you left, you looked sick. I thought I'd just ruined our friendship."

I coughed. "Is that why you stayed away all weekend?"

She swallowed, looking amazed. "Well, yes. And the stalker. I can't handle him looking in my windows anymore."

"Have you thought about a dog?"

"Yes. Donny doesn't like dogs in the house, though, and thinks it's cruel to leave an animal like that out in the snow."

"I don't blame him. I'd have a hard time seeing a dog out there in the cold."

"Why don't you guys have one?"

I said, "I love dogs. Other people's dogs. But I don't want one of my own. The care, the fleas, the grief when they die. No thanks."

"That's sad, dogs are so loyal."

"So are rats."

She laughed. "I don't see a barking rat chasing the stalker away."

"No..." I looked down into my coffee. "I wasn't... offended by what happened Friday."

She studied me quietly. "Are you sure? I thought all weekend that you hated me now."

"That's just not true." I fiddled with the rim of my cup. "I liked it." I felt the blush rise up my neck.

Krista swallowed visibly, but there was a hopeful glow to her face and a light in her eyes. "I did too. It was... pure heaven."

I couldn't help the smile that spread on my lips, but I couldn't bring myself to look at her.

She said, "I hope you don't mind, but I admitted it to Donny."

My eyes felt like they were going to bug out of my head. "You didn't."

She bit her lip and looked at me fearfully. "I'm sorry."

"What did he say?" My heart thumped hard in my chest with a fear almost as intense as when I had seen the footprints outside in the snow.

"He said I should come over this morning and talk to you."

I blinked several times. "Wait, what?"

"He said it would be a shame if I stayed away and let our friendship wither when it was just getting started."

I was amazed. "He said that?"

She nodded, watching me.

I sat up straighter and took a sip of coffee. My swallow was awkward and I coughed for a few seconds. "He... wasn't jealous?"

She turned her head slightly as if to hear better. "No, why would he be?"

"I... uh..."

"We're firm believers in the commandment, 'love your neighbors as you love yourself.' "

"Oh."

"You don't keep secrets from your husband, do you?"

How far can I get away with admitting...? "No. And yes, I told him about the

kiss."

She didn't seem surprised. "You told him when you came home Friday night?"

I nodded.

"How did he take it?"

"Not bad, not good."

Her face crumpled in confusion. "Not good?"

Except that he really liked imagining you sucking him. "He seemed just a little distant after I told him."

"Oh." She shrugged. "I wouldn't worry about that if I were you. Men need time to analyze things."

"How much time?"

"Depends, several hours to a week. If he's not yelling about it, he's fine with it. Just needs to sort it out."

I was dubious, even if what she said sounded right. "You sure?"

Her eyes flashed with promise. "Trust me."

"And Donny is fine with...?" Our kissing?

"He's overjoyed we're becoming friends."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously, Leslie. I'm not kidding."

The worries of the weekend wilted away and was replaced by a heady euphoria. Donny accepted the kiss. Birk had, but was thinking about it. And things were good between me and Krista.

I felt the smile return to my face, filled with satisfaction and contentment.

I had a strong feeling we were going to kiss again.

CHAPTER 13

It began snowing Monday afternoon. Krista had gone home as it started.

We had made no plans to combat the stalker, but neither had we kissed.

I was a little bit aggravated. Would the second kiss be a letdown? I was already determined to kiss her just so I could find out. I wanted to know: was it a onetime thing of surprise? Was that all it held? Would the second one erase the excitement I felt?

Birk's arrival brought in flakes of snow with him.

I kissed him, searching his face. Had he figured out what was on his mind? "Cheeseburgers are in the oven." I made messy homemade burgers. Cheese everywhere.

He nodded. His kiss hadn't been stiff.

After he removed his jacket, he settled into his dinette chair.

I set the cheeseburgers down. "You've been awful quiet since Friday night."

His face didn't change – which told me it was already on his mind to talk about it. Or he was still thinking about it. "I know, I'm sorry."

"Is anything wrong?"

"Not really. I guess it was just a bit of a shock for you to kiss a woman."

I deadpanned, "Would you rather I kissed a man?"

He laughed, leaning back a little, and just let it out. "Well, no, I guess not."

"It's not like I'm going to stop loving you because I kissed her."

"No, I know that. I'm happy you have a close friend like that, even if it's a bit

closer than I might have expected. I just wondered how it all fit into the talking we were doing Friday night."

"Oh?" I hadn't thought that was the issue.

"It was fun, but..."

"But?"

"I don't sit around all day wondering how great it would be to bone Krista."

"Oh. No, I didn't think you did. It was the kiss, Birk. The kiss made me bring her up because I wanted to tell you – I just didn't know how to do it."

"Ah, I see." He sounded relieved. "I wasn't sure if you were hinting at something real."

"That bothered you?"

"After, sure. During? It was exciting."

I was satisfied with his admission. "Pretty hot thinking about her? What she would be like?"

His grin was sheepish. "Stop it."

"Aw, does someone need some action later on?"

He chuckled.

I said, "Maybe I should buy a black wig."

He coughed. "Wicked woman."

"Would you like that?"

He gave me a level look. "I'm perfectly happy with you."

"I know, but just for fun?"

"I think I'm getting hard."

"Oh... done deal then." I was happy he was sharing these little secrets with me. That I could tickle his dick with a little wig-play sounded delicious. "I might need to get a black cowboy hat."

He was in the act of raising his cheeseburger to his mouth. "If you don't knock it off, the burgers will get cold because I'll be spanking you."

The dinner talk eased the air between us perceptibly and I cruised through the rest of the evening feeling more free and at ease than at any time since before this whole stalker thing started.

I had an understanding of and with my husband that settled well in my soul.

My soul, however, was upset before I went to change for bed. I was in the kitchen getting water for my nightstand when the deck light flared to life.

I froze, knowing it was the motion detector.

I was still wearing my gun. I moved around the counter to the sliding glass door.

Outside, the man stood – hands out as if caught or trying to maintain his balance. In one hand was a cell phone.

I knew Birk was in the bathroom. "Birk!" But I doubted he would hear me.

With a jerk, I unlatched the sliding glass door and yanked it open. I was rushing out into the snow before I could more than think that I wanted this over.

My hand lifted my gun out of its holster.

The man squawked and went falling over backwards trying to get away. The knee-length black coat fell open and the hood fell back from his face.

Her face.

I was pointing my gun at... "Krista?"

She was white with fear. "Don't shoot!"

I put away my gun in an instant. "You're the stalker?"

She shook her head vigorously and snatched her phone from where it had fallen. The phone was set to video.

I frowned at her. "Exactly what are you doing here?"

She groaned as if in fear and sorrow. "Oh... I'm sorry, Leslie. I didn't know how to go about all this." She blew a snowflake off her lips.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm your secret admirer."

"You? So you're the stalker?"

"No! I don't know who that is. But I'm the one leaving notes. I'm... sorry."

I looked back towards the sliding glass door. "Birk might be out any second. This might not look good."

She was shaking her head, looking afraid. "I'm sorry, Leslie. Really. I just get so turned on watching you."

It was a blow to my brain that I couldn't quite grip. I shook my head. "Maybe we should talk about this in the morning."

She gripped my forearm. "Could we? Come to my place, okay?"

I heard Birk call out for me.

I said to her in a whisper. "I'll come. Go on, get going before Birk sees you."

Her gratitude was a harsh and desperate whisper, "Oh, thank you. Thank you. I'll see you tomorrow." She ran into the falling snow and darkness.

I remembered the man at the window. He had been wearing a different coat. A duster style coat with shoulder flaps. He had also been wearing a wide-brimmed hat when he had flicked the cigarette at me. Krista had been wearing a hoodie coat.

As I scurried back into the kitchen, I realized that was what the face had been wearing when I was having sex with my husband.

So it was Krista watching us have sex.

My mind was numb and barely processing everything.

*No wonder the man acted differently at times. No wonder this made no sense.
There were two of them!*

CHAPTER 14

I walked the short distance along Route 3 to Krista's. The snow wasn't too deep and it made fresh snow noises as I walked through it. I waved at Tina as she swept off her porch.

I didn't know what I was in for. Was there more to Krista I didn't know? She certainly didn't seem like a danger. I supposed her whole secret admirer thing made a certain twisted sense; admitting to another woman you found her attractive might not go over well.

Instant friendship killer.

I was mildly flattered that it was her – and definitely glad it wasn't a weirdo. Except that Krista was a little bit strange for going about it this way.

Maybe we're all weird.

Us, them, the neighbors – the stalker.

Was it really all that weird to like someone? To want to be friends? To be attracted to them?

I knocked on her door.

She answered, looking very uncertain. "I'm sorry?" She bit her lip.

I came in. "Oh, stop it. I'm not mad."

"You're not?" She closed the door and sealed us into the warmth of their home.

I removed my jacket and snow boots and left them at the door. "Of course not. I guess I'm just curious about it all."

She said nothing, but her grunt of gratitude sounded suspiciously like a sob as she hugged me. It was a tight hug that didn't want to let go – the kind I felt myself give when I hugged my husband. She said in my ear, "Thank you."

When she pulled back, I looked into her red-rimmed eyes. "So you're my admirer?"

She tightened her lower lip and nodded. "And my husband, too."

"Donny? You're kidding."

She shook her head and pulled me into their kitchen. "Really."

I sat and took her coffee offering. "He's never looked at me—"

"I have a little confession to make."

"Little? As in littler than me thinking you were the stalker?"

She looked a bit nervous. "Donny and I are members of the Truelife Christian Congregation, you know."

"Okay?"

"We met a couple there a few years ago and we made very good friends with them – much like how we're becoming friends with you and Birk."

"Go on."

"Well, they moved out of state because he got transferred and we thought we'd never find anyone else who might befriend us."

"Don't you and Donny have lots of friends?"

"Sure, but... not close. Tom and Maria were really close."

"Close?"

"Like kissing close."

"Oh..." I understood now. "And you two think we would...?"

She put her hand on my wrist. "There was always something about you, Leslie. When I first saw you that time you were here signing the final papers with your husband, I was struck."

"You've thought about me for that long?"

She nodded.

"Why didn't you say something before?"

She laughed. "If I had knocked on your door and asked if you wanted to kiss..."

I shook my head.

She said, "So I just kept it to myself."

"But you've been... spying on me?"

"No, not the whole time. Goodness, no. I saw you pull into your ranch one day – about a week before you came into the diner. I walked over to say hello, but chickened out. I felt like I wanted to know who you were, but didn't know how to go about it. So I went back later that night and watched you moving around in the kitchen after dinner."

"Was I that interesting?"

"I'm embarrassed to admit, but I took a video of it so I could watch you without being a peeper. I showed it to my husband, too. That was it, I didn't go back after that – not until after we met in the diner. I just wanted something to remember you by. But when I saw you walk into the diner, it was like I had been given another opportunity. It makes me want to add Sheriff Redmond to my Christmas card list."

I laughed, then trailed off.

"What?"

I shook my head. "What about the stalker? Why has he started hanging around our place?"

"I don't know." She scooted her chair close to mine and leaned her forehead down onto my shoulder. "I'm sorry if I ever frightened you, Leslie. I just wanted to know who you were and didn't know how to go about it. People are so private now and more concerned with texting than meeting a new friend. But I've always

had this feeling about you."

And I had to admit, I had felt a very strange affinity to her, as well. From the very moment she sat next to me at the diner. "You didn't think to knock on our door?"

She straightened. "If someone knocked on my door, all smiles, and said they wanted to get to know us, I'd slam the door in their faces. Who does that weird kind of shit anymore?"

I laughed. "You're right."

Her voice lowered. "I just wanted to be friends."

"And we are... because of a stalker." I shook my head.

"Strange, isn't it? What it takes to meet people nowadays. Can you forgive me?"

I sighed. "I was never mad, Krista. Just shocked."

We drank the rest of the coffee in silence.

She kept looking at me and finally couldn't contain it any longer. "You said you had told Birk about the kiss. Was it... Was it while you two were in the bedroom?"

I remembered the note thanking me for the display. "You were watching... Yes, that's when I told him." I blushed.

Her eyes lit up. "Don't be embarrassed. Was it while you were doing things?"

I nodded.

She clasped her hands together and smiled wide. "He... reacted well?"

"Not too well after, but while we were... Uh, yeah, he reacted very well."

"Am I being too personal?"

"I think you're being delicate about what you saw."

"I am. I'm trying."

I laughed.

She said, "It excited you to part the curtains for me, didn't it?"

I nodded.

"I saw it in your look. Are you disappointed I wasn't a man? The real stalker?"

It was an odd question, but made me understand what I was feeling. No, I wasn't creeped out it was Krista. In fact, I was relieved. I grasped her hand. "I'm glad it was you."

That was all it took for an instant hug. Feeling her pressed against my breastbone and neck as we leaned towards each other in our chairs was a comforting connection so different than that of my husband's. And at the same time, so similar.

It was a new connection, one that wanted the trust it promised. One that needed the strength we could give it. I was ready.

She pulled back a little and we looked at each other. I could feel the heat of my face mingling and reflecting off hers. As if drawn like magnets, our lips met and we kissed.

I had wondered if the second kiss was going to be a letdown.

It wasn't. It was everything I remembered and yet offered more than the first. I was flooded with heat and peace. My thoughts and worries fled and left me only enjoying what was happening. I could smell her light makeup, her hair, her coffee. It was an intoxicating mixture that drove hooks into my very soul.

I surrendered willingly.

She broke in a pant and whispered in my ear. "Have you ever had a woman lick you?"

The heat of her mouth close to my ear sent shivers down my back. I said, "No..."

"I want to lick you. Can I? Can I show you what it's like? Please?"

Where I might have reacted immediately in the negative at such a request, there was that connection I felt to her that soothed away objections. I realized I wanted her tongue on me – it would be wonderful. "Yes..."

She moved her face back far enough to look me in the eyes. "Donny is here. He wants to watch."

I blinked, afraid. "He's here? Wait, he wants to watch?"

"I share everything with him. He sees how beautiful you are and it excites him, too. He wants to watch me lick you."

"I... uh..." Something about being watched thrilled me, but on my first licking by a woman?

"Don't say no. Come with me to the bedroom. He knows to keep his distance."

"I... I don't know that I want to say no. But I've never done anything like this before."

Her lips spread into a smile and she held out her hand. "Let me guide you. Come."

With anyone else? I would've run. With Krista? I rose from my chair slowly and let her take my hand.

CHAPTER 15

I entered the bedroom behind her.

Donny was on the bed in a dress shirt and house pants. He was reading something on his tablet. He put it down, removed his reading glasses and smiled. "Ah, my two favorite women in the whole world."

His easy and relaxed manner was contagious.

And yet, I suddenly wasn't so sure I wanted him watching Krista and me.

It was Krista's hand that stilled my thoughts. Would I not do the same for Birk? If I was here willing for my friend to pleasure me, what right did I have to deny her the same privilege I would assume mine? I wouldn't deny my husband, how could I deny hers?

I couldn't. I wouldn't.

Despite my hesitation – shyness, inhibitions, whatever – I was determined to follow her lead.

If Krista thought it was all right, was it not? Other than her shyness about liking me and being the secret admirer, she had been genuine with me. And when faced with her discovery, she had confessed all.

She hadn't run or lied, she had admitted everything. She could have covered over her secret with lies, but she hadn't. And she had begged me to understand.

I couldn't fault her. I don't know if I would've gone the secret admirer route, but I wasn't in that position. She had noticed me first, not the other way around.

Donny got off the bed and sat next to the dresser. He crossed one leg over the other and clasped his knee.

An audience... how embarrassing. But I would ask it of Krista if it was my husband. I took a deep breath and let it out slowly – not wanting to draw

attention to my uncertainty. No, I didn't want to be uncertain and I didn't want them to think I was.

I looked at Krista.

She was smiling. "I know what you're feeling. I was that way with Maria. I was in your shoes. She told me they weren't going to laugh at me. So I'll tell you the same thing she told me: don't worry, we aren't going to laugh at you. We're happy you're here and we want you here."

I nodded and tried to will my heart to stop beating so hard.

She plucked at my button and began unbuttoning it.

I let her, not so much uncertain now as to what was happening, but rather what they might expect me to be doing. Was I supposed to undress her?

She handled it all herself.

When I was naked, I kept most of my back towards Donny. Thankfully, he said nothing. If he had whistled or hooted, I think I would've died right there.

Krista undressed, then guided me to the bed.

I couldn't help it, I was shaking. I also couldn't stop myself from looking at her nakedness.

She whispered, "It's okay." Her lips brushed my neck and ear. One of her nipples brushed the side of my breast and sent goose bumps spreading. "I promise I don't bite. Lie back."

Her words had a very deep soothing effect on me because I knew that if she said it, she meant it. My surrender to her at that moment, standing in her bedroom, was a relief so vast that I almost sagged and fell to the bed.

Yes, I wanted to let go and place myself in her hands. It was as if everything had become clear and the way lit. It was like the comfort of resting my head against my familiar pillow after a long and weary day.

Stress left. The shaking stopped.

I parted my legs with some hesitation – not because I didn't want this to happen but because I didn't know if she wanted to guide me herself.

Her smile told me she was happy and pleased. I wasn't doing anything I wasn't supposed to. It was the warmth on her face and in her eyes that made me smile back.

Just a minute ago, a smile had been the farthest thing from my mind. I'm lying on their bed about to get licked! I wish Birk was here to see this. Now my previous reticence seemed silly. Why had I resisted? Why had I worried? What a waste.

Her tongue erased the slate of my self-reflection. Tentacles of stimulation spidered up my body in a rush so fast that I arched my back and gasped.

One lick and I was as tight as a bowstring.

It was not any different than feeling my husband lick me. No, it was rather that it wasn't my husband licking me that drew the familiar sensation to a new height. It was that it was my friend. And it felt so right that it was her.

Everything negative in me was gone. Everything shy and embarrassed was forgotten. Like turning on a light, her one lick had revealed to me how easy it was to be lying here and letting her do this.

So simple. So safe. So secure.

The next touch of her tongue had me quivering and letting my body slowly relax back down to the bed.

Donny said, "Are you hurting her?"

His concern was comical and I laughed.

Krista said, "Yeah, I'm chewing on her, okay? Just shut up."

The bed was shaking because I was laughing silently.

Donny was perplexed. "Is she crying? You're hurting her."

I couldn't stop the loud laughter that erupted from my throat.

Krista growled at him, "You're interrupting us here."

"Sorry."

Her tongue touched me again and torrents of tension swept up and through me in a whirlwind of satisfaction. I purred and moved my hands up to my nipples. They were hard, and tingling with excitement. As if my clit were the key to a clock, she wound me up tighter than a coil of wire. I was moaning freely in minutes.

Her husband said, "Does she taste good?"

Krista hummed, "Mm hmm." The vibration through her tongue twisted everything in me one notch tighter. I wasn't going to be able to take much more.

She pulled her tongue off me. "Leslie?"

I lifted my head. My mouth was open, panting. I blinked my eyes as the swoon inside receded a little. "H-huh?"

Her sweet look was like that of a little girl. "Is it okay if my husband tastes you?"

Twenty minutes before, I would have been frantic in rejection. But her question practically drenched me at the thought. I looked over at him. He had removed his house pants and was stroking his erection. The sight was so hot I gasped loudly. The ache inside me twisted around, gnawing deep. "Okay."

Just seeing his cock brought in a whole new level of intimacy and comfort. Why had I been worried?

He moved to me slowly, a happy smile on his face and promise in his eyes that he would help his wife pleasure me.

How had I gotten so lucky?

He said low, husky, "You are so beautiful." His normal enthusiasm was different now. Not friendly, but sexy. I had never seen this side of him and it was a deep

privilege.

His tongue touched me and I quivered. He licked up and down, more forceful than Krista.

I groaned as that tension tightened inside.

Then Krista was moving to join him. Her face moved in beside his and her tongue joined his in a licking frenzy that had my back arching high off the bed.

One tongue was fantastic. Two? I was going to faint. I had never felt such wonder in my life.

The ache grew so fierce I was groaning with the effort of pushing it over the edge. I needed that release.

Both stopped licking.

No! I was almost there. I panted rapidly, squirming on the bed.

Donny stood, gripping his erection and stroking it. His eyes were feverish and starving. "Leslie... may I?"

I knew what he wanted. I felt the relief close, tantalizing. I saw the hunger in his eyes for me and my pussy leaked in response. He was hungry for me. I was doing this to him. I was his sole focus.

I hissed, "Do it."

I was speared so fast I cried out in relief and surprise. His erection stabbed into my pussy and filled it with one long thrust. From empty to filled and fulfilled. I clamped on his shaft as he began moving it. I was so wet, he had no trouble sliding in and out of me.

His eyes closed in anguish. "Oh... so good..."

Krista settled next to me. "She feels good?"

Her husband was lost in his own world. "Oh, yeah. Better than I'd hoped."

Fingers reached between us and rubbed down over my clit and around his

thrusting cock. She murmured, "So sexy."

I lost it. I didn't have much of a grip on it anyway, and I had been desperate to find that release. I cried out as his cock rammed deep. Clamping convulsively, I writhed through an intense orgasm that shivered down my arms and vibrated my fingernails. I tossed my head side to side, feeling the immensity of the relief rolling through me.

Donny breathed, "Fuck, she's awesome."

Krista cooed, "Do you like her, love?"

"Yes."

My friend hummed contentedly and swung her leg over my face. She hung her head and looked down.

I blinked as she maneuvered her pussy over my face. With a tilt of her hips and a little more scooting, she brought herself down until she made contact with my lips.

I didn't need to be told; I was anticipating it. I opened my mouth and began licking her pussy. Her clit was hard and excited. I concentrated on it. Her hips moved much like mine had, but I could tell she was trying to keep still.

I heard her say, "I can taste her on you." And then wet sounds.

They were kissing.

Donny had slowed for it, and I alternated clamping my tingling pussy on his hardness and flicking my tongue across my friend's clit.

I had never licked a woman before but I found it easy. Her scent on my nose was clean and warm.

The sounds of their kissing caused several aftershocks in me and I bucked my hips up at her husband.

And thought of my husband, working, and not being able to enjoy this. Would he mind that I had gotten so involved? That Donny was in me? I wanted Birk here.

I wanted his touch to make this complete.

I wanted him here for it to be perfect.

The thickness in me moved faster.

I tried to hook his hips with my feet, but I couldn't get the right angle.

His hips hit me hard and stopped moving. He groaned and a surge of scalding wetness spread deep inside me.

I flicked my tongue rapidly side to side on her hard clit as he filled me. I was rewarded with a building trembling I felt through my tongue. Her gasps came louder and suddenly her thighs were shaking on my cheeks, squeezing with the force of her release.

It might not have been a synchronized finish between three people, but it felt like one of the most intimate things I had ever done in my life.

CHAPTER 16

I walked home with Krista. She was hugging my arm.

She squeezed, much like I would on the arm of my lover and sharing a thought. "I'm so glad you came over today. After last night, I thought everything was ruined."

"The stalker never left you any notes?"

"Nope."

"So every note I received must have been you?"

"I'm sure... But if you want, I'll look at what you have if you kept them."

"Sure, I'll show you." But I already knew they would all be hers. They were all on the same gray construction paper with the identical block printing with a touch of flair. Still, it made me wonder about the stalker.

Was he watching right now?

I looked around, scanning the ranch houses on either side of Route 3.

She whispered, "I know, I do the same. Trying to see if anyone's watching out their windows."

"He's always seen on this side." I indicated our side of the road to the north. The parcels were dotted with trees, but not many. Beyond the parcels was ranch land owned by TB Ranch. Hills forested with trees stretched beyond our parcels.

"What if he's up in the tree line?"

She looked. "I hadn't thought of that..." She stopped and having my arm hooked in hers made me stop, too.

"What?"

She was staring at the tree line with horror. "Oh no..." she breathed.

"What?"

She looked at me with panic. "TB Ranches are owned by Thomas Branton Brown. Oh crap, it's beginning to make sense."

"What?" I was beginning to sound like a parrot. "Tell me."

"TB Brown. He's the father of my ex-husband."

"Brown? The guy this county is named after?"

"Yes, my ex's grandfather."

"But—"

She pulled me suddenly. "Let's get to your house."

We were near anyway.

I let us in and locked the door. After a fast check of the living room, we went into the kitchen. I poured us some water and we sat. "Tell me."

"Eight years ago I divorced the most viciously jealous man whom God ever created. Do you remember Sleeping with the Enemy? Julia Roberts?"

"Yes."

"Well, it was almost as bad. There was no physical abuse, but I just couldn't take it anymore. He was smothering me. He had to have a minute-by-minute breakdown of everything I had done and who I had spoken to."

"Ew."

She nodded emphatically. "Yeah, ew. He went from gentleman to creep in sixty seconds right after our marriage. I didn't even get my wedding dress off before he began quizzing me about the groomsmen."

"And you think he's the stalker?"

"He promised to get me. But he was always slow and careful about doing things. Isn't it weird that the guy comes and goes without a vehicle?"

"He could live here."

"But he's only ever seen on this side. My house. And then crossing over to yours. Tina and Beth only saw him days before you did."

"Oh?"

Her face grew grim. "After I first scouted your house that night I saw you in the kitchen. Oh Leslie, I'm so sorry."

"You think you brought him to me?"

Krista's eyes were watering. "He must have followed me. He must have seen my interest in your house."

I looked out the sliding glass door to the north. "You think he's up there in the trees?" I wasn't so sure.

"TB Ranches are well laid out with roads. Just over that hill will be a road, I'm sure of it. It's a short hike to our properties."

I rose. "Let's go check."

She grabbed my arm. "Go onto their property? No."

"No, not theirs. Ours. There's snow on the ground. If he's coming from the trees up there, there will be tracks."

She squeezed my arm. "Yes, you're right."

"Come on." We put our coats back on and headed out back.

In the cold air and threatening overcast, we puffed little clouds of breath. I said, "Let's check my back area first."

She followed mutely.

Scrunching through the snow, we passed the chicken yard on the right and the

barn on the left.

I stopped and indicated the snow-covered railroad ties. "Did you wait over there for notes?"

She sounded guilty. "Yes, why?"

"Okay, no problem. You left cigarette butts there." I started walking again.

"Oh sorry."

"No, it's not a problem. I noticed you smoked Marlboros. So does the stalker."

"Gah!" She smacked her forehead. "Of course. So did Eathan."

"Quite a coincidence." I pointed. There were footprints leading up where we were heading.

She puffed with the effort of walking up the sloping rise towards the back of our twenty acres. "No, actually it isn't a coincidence. I started smoking his brand to attract him. Who knows, maybe he only noticed me because my adoption of his brand was some subliminal signal that I would do anything for him."

I grimaced. "Eww, sounds like a predator."

She coughed. "That's what I've been trying to say."

We climbed in silence following the footprints until we were at the barbed wire fence that ran the length of the subdivision. No two-strand weak barrier, it was a full three strand fencing with wooden posts and only occasional metal t-posts. It was solid and straight. Much money had gone into dividing the properties with a fence that wasn't going to go anywhere.

I puffed for air in the cold and looked along the fence.

I pointed.

Krista groaned.

In the northwest corner, the tracks crossed my fence and onto both properties.

We walked over to the corner. The wire clips on the middle strand had been removed from the nearest two fence posts. I pressed down on the barbed wire and it sank several inches where the footprints crossed over.

A man could easily duck through at that point. Very easily.

Krista said, "I'm feeling sick."

"If you gotta barf, do it on his side."

She laughed bitterly.

We looked along the fence line stretching west. Footprints in a straight line along the backs of the properties disappeared into the distance - towards Krista's property.

She groaned. "I should have convinced Donny to move out of state. I didn't think Eathan would find us."

I looked at her with a straight gaze. "You can find anything on the internet."

"What are we going to do?"

I led the way back down the gentle slope. "We tell our men. We know where he's coming from now; we can anticipate him."

"Is this a wise move?"

I stopped and turned towards her. "The cops only pick up the pieces. This is our only move if we don't want to be victims."

CHAPTER 17

I sat across from Birk and watched him.

His eyebrows were drawn down in deep thought. He blinked a couple of times. "But back on this point about you and Krista and Donny—"

I gripped his wrist and squeezed. "Listen to me. I found myself involved with Krista. I didn't know her husband was there, but it happened. I wanted you there. I wanted you to be with me. Understand me that I had no other thought at that moment except that with you there it would have been perfect."

He exhaled loudly and nodded. "I suppose you couldn't have texted?" Even he sounded doubtful of his offering.

"It didn't develop like that. They both told me the best thing I could do was talk to you and I'm doing it right now. I wanted you there. They want you there."

He took a deep breath. "Okay, about this Eathan guy..."

"Donny is coming over with Krista. Her ex has been stalking us from the larger ranch behind us."

"But that's like a hundred thousand acres—"

"All plowed out with roads along the perimeter. Just over the hilltop where you can't see them."

Birk frowned deeper. "And there's tracks?"

"You want to go see?" It was still light enough to see outside.

He squinted. "Yes, not that I doubt you. I just want to see this myself."

We got up and donned our coats. I made sure my gun was easily reachable.

I led him up the back of the property.

He moved along with me, almost even with my lead. "The three of you were together?"

I stopped and turned to him, gripping both sleeves of his jacket. "I didn't plan it."

"All right..." He nodded. "All right."

I shook him to make him understand. "I didn't plan it."

He nodded again, looking down.

I let go and started climbing again. "I wanted you there, with all my heart."

"I... understand."

I felt that he was hurt. But I wanted him to understand that I wanted it right – that there was no reason for him to be hurt.

I didn't want my husband hurting.

I wanted him with me, side-by-side into the sunset. I wanted him in my heart until the very end.

This was important to me.

No... not important. Of utmost importance.

I needed my man – my mate – with me in such an important part of my life. I had made a new friend and it involved something of which he approved. But it also included an additional factor he had not foreseen. Her attachments came with her and she was attached to Donny.

We reached the end of the property. I exhaled loudly and leaned over. "Ugh, twice in a day..." From my bent-over position, I pointed. "Over there."

I stretched and leaned hard over to work my muscles as he looked over the barbed wire fence.

He shook his head and tested the wire. It dipped down substantially. He shook his head again. "Son of a bitch." His jaw clenched.

I said, "We need to address this."

"Yeah, I know, but this... asshole is using our property. Trespassing."

Birk wasn't one to use profanity very often. I said, "That's what Donny wants to talk to you about."

He twisted towards me. "Not about you?" His arched eyebrow was indication he was upset.

I knew he was; I could feel it. I would be, too, if I were in his shoes. "He'll want to talk about that, too, but this is more important. Lives are at stake." I wanted him to understand.

He grimaced and looked down.

I think he did understand; he was just sore about not being involved in something that involved an invasion of his intimacy: me. "Yeah, I know..." He looked at the fence and the footprints. "All right."

I heard the resolve in his tone.

My cell phone chimed a text message.

Krista: Where are you? We're at your house

Me: Up in back. Coming down.

Krista: Ok

I said, "They're at the house."

He was already moving down the slope. "I think Donny and I are going to be spending a cold night."

"He comes between eight and ten usually."

He grunted. "Two hours in the cold? Well, shouldn't be too bad. I think... the barn and railroad ties are good places to watch from. Can see most anything passing between them."

The rest of the walk was in silence.

In the house, he kept his coat on while he let them in.

The two men eyed each other warily for a few seconds. Then Donny man-hugged my husband. "Sorry about getting things out of order, bud."

Birk grumbled, "Aw, knock it off. Come on, let's go out back."

Donny asked, "We're really gonna do this?"

"He has to be stopped. One way or the other. We can have the gals call the sheriff when we catch him." My husband slid the sliding glass door shut and their conversation was cut off from us.

Krista was holding her hands clasped in front of her. "Is everything okay?"

"I think so."

Outside, they were still on the deck. Donny and Birk both had their arms on each other's shoulders.

I pointed. "Seems like they're working it out just fine."

She giggled. "Do you think they'll man-kiss?"

I coughed. "Ew."

She gave me a piercing look. "Was I ew?"

"Of course not."

She moved towards the glass. "Are they going to start grabbing each other's dicks or are they going to make plans?"

I moved beside her and put my hip against hers. "Is Donny that way?"

She sounded scandalized. "No. I was just teasing."

"I don't think Birk is that way, either."

Krista said flippantly, "Not that there's anything wrong with that."

I snorted. "Okay, Seinfeld."

"Donny was really worried. It wasn't his plan to do you, you know. I mean, he wanted to ever since he met you, but—"

"He did?"

She nodded.

The men moved down the steps of the deck and she twisted to face me.

She said, "He said being near you like that made him lose control."

"Well, he did ask."

"Yes, but he wouldn't have asked. He wanted that to be something special where everyone understood and agreed beforehand."

I felt a little thrill that I had caused him to lose control.

She asked, "Do you think Birk would want to... with me?"

I wasn't sure if I wanted him to. In a way, I did. In another way, I wanted to leave it up to him. Yes, I wanted him to desire my friend. It had been hot talking about it and she and I had shared something between us. I wanted my husband to experience it.

But ultimately, it was up to him. It was all up to him, though I doubted he would put a stop to anything I had with Krista. And yet, having had Donny once, I wanted him again. There had been a special connection shared among the three of us that I wanted to continue sharing – and I wanted my husband to feel that, too.

I answered her, "I know he would like to, but he has to get through what happened today."

"Do you think he will?"

"Yeah, he will. But I'm not sure which way he'll swing. He's a very

understanding man. He was also very turned on thinking about you."

"Thinking about me? When?"

"Remember that night you watched us. The display?"

"Mm hmm."

"I told him to imagine it was you he was fucking."

Her pulse raced in her neck. "Oh my..." She shifted her hips and touched a finger to my blouse. "You two are so perfect..."

I laughed. "How often do you pretend to be me for Donny?"

"More times than I can count."

I giggled, but heat flooded my pussy and I felt the warmth rise up my neck in a flushed blush. I plucked at my shirt to get some air.

She laughed, eyes twinkling. After a moment, they softened. "If your husband swings our way, will you be all right if I'm with him?"

I searched her eyes as my mind shifted gears and thoughts so fast I couldn't keep up. "I don't know..." But I did have a sensation of wanting to share with Krista what he was like. It seemed odd to me that when I thought of wanting my husband to experience her, I was less sure. It was almost as if I wanted Krista to have the gift, but not Birk.

Then I felt sorry for my husband. Sorry for my selfishness in having done something so wonderful with Krista and Donny and not wanting Birk to experience that.

I said to her, "I want you to know what he's like..."

"But it's hard imagining letting your husband go to do it?"

I nodded.

"I was the same with Donny."

"How did you handle it?"

"I didn't. I just put my head down like a bull and charged into it. After it happened, I realized I had worried for nothing."

"How? Why?"

"Let me ask you, was Donny good?"

I shifted a little. "Yes."

"And do you suddenly love your husband any less?"

"No, of course not. In fact, it reminded me how much I love him."

"Right. Exactly. No matter how good Donny might be, no matter how handsome or funny or cute, you wouldn't stop loving your husband. Nor would you leave him."

"Nope."

"If you did leave him, there was something definitely wrong with your marriage."

"Right."

She held up her fingers. "Men might think with their dicks a little more, but it's the same. Donny thought you were great – and he has no plans to throw me out – because our marriage is about love, rather than convenience."

"So I shouldn't worry because I'm a good wife to him and he loves me?"

"Exactly. You and he both have all the love you need between each other. Sex with us is just extra. It's not necessary, it's just nice."

I looked down at the floor. That was exactly how I felt about Donny. I found myself nodding. "I think I get it."

She gripped my shoulders. "Good. If we didn't think you loved each other, none of this would ever have happened." She kissed my forehead.

The men came in, grim.

CHAPTER 18

Birk said, "I'll drive you."

Donny gave a curt nod. "Let's do it."

My husband passed us and muttered, "Getting guns."

Krista's eyes shifted to me, wide. When they had left through the front door, she said, "Are they going to duel?"

I coughed. "They're talking about the stalker."

There was a lilt of amusement in her voice. "Aw, don't spoil my fun." She opened her coat. "I have mine." She was wearing a pistol on her waist.

I patted my coat. "Me, too." We looked at each other for a few seconds, then both looked out the back. I said, "Are we overreacting? This isn't the army."

"You don't know Eathan."

"What? Is he a Rambo?"

"No, but he's very determined. I wouldn't doubt he's armed with something. Knife, gun, club."

The men came back ten minutes later. Donny was carrying a Winchester lever action and wearing his heavy sheepskin coat. With his cowboy hat, he looked like a real rancher and not a real estate agent.

My husband disappeared into the bedroom.

Donny took a breath and held it, looking at both of us.

Krista whispered, "How did it go?"

His eyes shifted faster to each of us. He shrugged. "Hard to say, but he wasn't

mad."

About what I had determined, too.

When Birk came out, he was wearing his navy blue parka. I could see the handle of the Colt Python in his lower pocket. He gave us all a look. "Hope he comes by tonight."

Krista shifted uneasily. "If he doesn't see me at our place, he'll probably come here."

He nodded and said to Donny. "You ready?"

"Yep. Let's catch us a stalker. It'll make one hell of a fishing story..."

Birk said to us, "You two keep an eye out. Be ready to call the sheriff as soon as you see anything."

I said, "Okay." I kissed his lips. "Be careful."

He gave me a grateful smile and a tiny nod. "This is our property. Leave the door open so you can hear."

His resolution reinforced my own.

We watched them go out the back and trigger the motion detector. Light flared and illuminated their backs.

"Be careful," I whispered.

The waiting began.

I sat with Krista in the unlit dinette area of the kitchen, staring out the sliding glass door into the dim light of nighttime snow. I had thought it would be impossible for the men to see anything out there, but I could make out dim shapes and the white of snow in the darkness.

The chill of the evening wasn't lingering outside – it was coming in full force and I was thankful for my coat. "How can they stand sitting out there in the cold?"

Krista said, "Men have this insane innate ability to sit in rain, slush, mud, a tree and wait for a buck to come along all without complaining."

I giggled. "Imagine that."

We kept it quiet though and I thought I was going to start shivering no matter how tightly I had my coat around me.

When it happened, it happened fast.

There was a shout. Then two more.

Krista and I were on our feet after only a second hesitation. We both crammed into the opening of the sliding glass door and fumbled over each other getting out onto the deck.

I saw a figure in the distance, but couldn't make it out. It was moving towards the railroad ties.

I led the way down the stairs with Krista stepping on my heels behind me. Once at the bottom, we broke into a run towards the chicken yard.

I heard my husband shout. "I got you in my sights, just surrender now!"

There was a sharp pop.

Birk shouted, "He's got a gun!"

More pops sounded in rapid succession.

Terror danced through me in a jarring sensation of panic. Krista and I crouched near the corner of the chicken yard, both of us panting. My heart was hammering so hard in my chest it hurt. What's going on? Birk?

I could see movement by the railroad ties but couldn't make out who it was.

A louder blast echoed from the barn and the crouched figure moved into the ties.

My husband yelled, "Give it up! Just surrender!" His shout helped me locate him.

I prodded Krista and spoke fast. "That's Birk over there. Donny's in the barn. That figure popping up right there is the stalker."

Her gun appeared in her hand.

I drew mine. "We'll need to move. I don't think it's good to try shooting through this wire." I pointed to the blackness several feet away. "The tree there. Come on."

We ran for the tree as a heavy blast sounded – almost as loud as the barn blast. It would be my husband's .357 magnum.

Settling behind the tree, Krista and I were able to peek around both sides of the trunk. I leaned out to the left, aiming my gun. The problem was, I couldn't see the sights. "Can you aim?"

Krista said, "Not for shit."

I saw the movement and pulled the trigger. The pop seemed timid compared to the heavier calibers.

Next to me, Krista fired twice. The closeness left my ears ringing, even though the tree was between my ear and her gun.

Things were happening too fast.

Three pops sounded and the tree above us splintered.

I let out an involuntary scream. "He's shooting at us." We both huddled behind the trunk.

Two more blasts sounded from my husband's Python.

Then we both saw movement. Striding out of the barn was Donny, lever action up and pointed. He was walking fast across the yard to the ties on the other side.

Krista wailed, "No!" Her fist yanked on my jacket and we stumbled out from behind the tree. She led the way, pistol pointed.

The Python sounded three more times.

A series of pops came from the stalker.

We were running, only yards from Donny.

He stopped, and brought his rifle up tight.

Krista was sobbing and pleading to who I didn't know. She brought her revolver up and began firing at the movement in the ties.

The stalker was standing, but I couldn't tell which way he was facing. I raised my gun and pulled the trigger as fast as I could. The stalker's arm came out, pointing at Donny.

The Winchester's blast was loud and the barrel kicked upwards.

Then everything went quiet.

My gun was empty and I wasn't thinking of the spare magazine in my pocket.

Krista raced to her husband and was yanking him around, patting on his jacket.

I remembered my spare and changed it out with fumbling fingers. I saw other movement at the far end of the ties. I didn't want to call out in case the stalker didn't know I was there. Neither did I want to be mistaken for the stalker.

I advanced a few steps at a time. So did my husband from the far end of the ties.

I was certain he saw me.

He called out, "Did you dial 911?"

I had forgotten. "No, I will." I had to raise my voice over the ringing in my ears. I pulled my phone and thumbed the emergency number.

Donny was pulling Krista with him, still holding the Winchester mostly up.

Birk advanced, too.

I couldn't see the stalker.

Donny said, "Get your phone out. Light him up."

I trotted forward, phone to my ear.

Krista brought her phone out and slid and tapped. Light burst forth and jittered over the ground as they moved forward.

The man was sprawled back in the snow, panting and wheezing and rattling. His eyes moved.

Krista breathed, "Eathan."

If her ex was trying to talk, he couldn't. Whatever effort he made was overcome by a rattling cough and wheezing sound. An automatic was in his hand, slide locked open and empty.

In his other hand was a spare magazine.

It dawned on me that he had been aiming at Donny and must have realized he was empty.

My husband was reloading his revolver, dropping as many bullets as he was getting into the cylinder. "Is he dead?"

The man's head rolled over to stare at him.

My phone repeated in my ear, "Brown County Sheriff's Department, please state your emergency."

But already there was a siren in the distance. Someone else must have called when the firing began.

CHAPTER 19

Sheriff Redmond surveyed the scene with a satisfaction that was as evident as the highbeams and spotlights of his Dodge. The flashlight he held up at his shoulder swiveled this way and that with his gaze.

His other hand was on his hip over his gun. He said, "You all did a mighty fine job. Neighbors said it was a warzone over here. You're lucky you hit him and not yourselves."

Donny said, "It was too dark, I had to get up close."

"Only one shot hit him, looks like."

Flashing lights moved past our ranch and towards us.

The sheriff shook his head. "Eathan Brown. This doesn't end well if he survives."

Eathan's rattle had gotten much worse.

"But that's a lung shot. Cardiovascular collapse could come at any second."

Paramedics rushed forward.

Sheriff Redmond said, "Ted."

One of the paramedics stopped. "Yes, Uncle Johnny?"

"You'll be doing the citizens of Brown County a big favor if you make sure to take the long way to the hospital. You got me?"

There was silence in the blazing lights for a few seconds.

The paramedic, a young man with hardly a whisker worth calling manly, said, "Sure thing, uncle. Sure thing."

The sheriff held out his arms to herd us to the side. He killed the flashlight and hooked it back on his belt. "Now you all listen here. Brown's going to want to know what's happened. We can't hide the details from him and he's going to learn names. I'll need all of you in the station in the morning making statements. I can see it was a gunfight and not a murder. So we need to have this done as clean as possible – paperwork in order and all reports filed. He did fire first, didn't he?"

Donny and Birk both said, "Yes."

The sheriff gave an approving nod. "Good. It was justified. We'll wrap up the formalities in the morning and that should be that. Outstanding job, folks."

I watched the stretcher lifted and carried to the ambulance. Eathan wasn't looking around or moving. He wasn't going to last the drive.

A part of me wondered if it had been worth taking the man's life. All he had done was looked. Had he carried his gun with the intention to use it? The sheriff had said it was a justified killing, but why wasn't that making me feel any better?

I settled in late that night, ears still faintly ringing, and tried to sleep. But the memory of pops and blasts drove away any meaningful rest.

Would it have been better to leave him alone? Let him peep? Or would he have eventually acted? Krista assured me his stalking was in preparation for action. But what kind of action? Deadly action? Or something less grave? The question plagued me, what if we had taken a life that hadn't necessarily needed to be taken?

My thoughts didn't ease after the statements were taken and the reports filed, despite the sympathetic reassurances by the sheriff and his deputies. All of them said the shock would pass.

I had morning coffees with Krista. It was all we talked about for a week. She helped me to understand that Eathan would not have ever stopped. It didn't make me feel any better.

It was around the middle of the third week that I realized we hadn't talked about the event in days. And I was sleeping better. That realization brought back a fresh wave of regret and numbness, but it passed quickly.

By the second month, I knew I was fairly over it. Still, it was a weight in my mind I might never shed. We had dinners together and they became happier and friendlier. At first, we just clung to each other's presence.

I think my husband was over it in a day. Maybe he was just strong. But he helped me along the path of recovery. I think my trauma was the deepest because all three were looking and talking to me when I would get quiet.

Krista was a crutch I could never thank enough. There for me all day if I needed it. We grocery shopped together. Ran errands and gradually resumed a normal life.

The pops died in my head, though I would always remember them. I was back to sleeping full nights by December.

Krista and I were putting Christmas presents under the tree when Donny and Birk came back from their forced banishment.

My husband was laughing, sporting a new cowboy hat like Donny's. He pulled it off his head. "Check this out. Ten-ex beaver cavalry hat." He handed it to me.

I was surprised how soft it was. "Wow..."

"Did we take long enough?"

"Yes, presents all wrapped. You bought that?"

My husband grinned. "No, Donny did. Said he was going to get me evicted if I didn't properly join the ranch club."

Krista mused, "Ten-ex beaver huh? Did he ask you out on a date after?"

I asked her, "Is ten-ex good?"

"Most hats are four-ex beaver. Not very soft. The more exes, the softer and pricier they are."

Birk said, "No, he didn't ask me out on a date."

Krista raised her eyebrows and shook her head. "I don't know, a purchase like

that and he'll expect you to put out."

My husband laughed. He stuck his hands on his hips and mimicked a woman's voice. "If you think you can get a piece just because you spend some money on me..."

Donny growled, "Shut up."

"Hey, you're beginning to sound like me."

"I don't have to take that insult from you. Put up your dukes." He mimicked boxing.

Both men started laughing boisterously.

Krista shook her head at me. "Men."

I corrected her, "Boys."

She giggled.

The tinkle of her voice warmed me inside as surely as the fireplace crackled nearby. I was whole and part of a whole. As much as I was a piece of my husband, I was also a piece of them.

I got up off the floor and knew it was time.

CHAPTER 20

I held my hand out to Krista.

She regarded me with curiosity but took it and let me pull her up.

I said, "I think I owe you something. The same thing I owe my husband."

Her eyes sparkled with question.

I reached for my husband's hand and wriggled my fingers.

He gave me almost the same look of curiosity and question as Krista. "What's up?"

"Something we never finished." I drew them in and pulled their hands together. I raised my eyebrow in suggestion.

Birk said, "Oh..." He squinted down at me. "You sure?"

"I think I've gotten past being traumatized. I've owed Krista this for too long."

She bit her lower lip and her eyes lit up like the twinkling lights on the Christmas tree. "Are you serious?"

I turned my attention completely to her and looked her straight in the eyes. "Don't break him." I kissed her cheek and neck.

Then I turned to Birk. I grabbed his shirt in my fist and shook him. "Don't embarrass me."

He mocked an annoyed look, but his eyes were soft. "You going to keep Donny busy so I can pinch his wife's butt?"

"I'll distract him."

He said to Krista, "You sure you want to do this?"

She sighed. "For so long you can't imagine."

Donny threw his hands in the air and said dramatically. "I buy him a hat and he bones my wife. I don't get it."

I laughed and moved over to him. I slapped my hand against his chest. "Don't scare them."

He put his arm around my shoulders but was looking at them. There was a proud light in his eyes as he watched Krista blush a deep red.

For all her drive and motivation for this, I was amused by her bashfulness.

They went down the hall to the master bedroom.

Donny sighed. "I thought that would never happen."

"You wanted it too? I thought it might just have been her impressing on you—"

His eyes were on me fast. "Oh no. I've been very anxious for it. My wife has been talking about him endlessly. I want her to experience him. At least then we'll have something new to talk about."

I put my arm around his waist and squeezed. "Care for a repeat of our little rendezvous?"

He blew out a breath. "I thought you'd never ask."

I pouted. "I'm sorry. Even Birk was going without sex. I just couldn't—"

His finger touched my lips. "Let's forget the bad. Let's embrace the good. You're a beautiful woman and I want to show you how beautiful you are."

Yes, I melted. Under that kind of onslaught, I stood no chance. My pussy became wet with desire. It wasn't love with Donny. Not like my love for my husband. This was a keen friendship, durable and easy. I pulled him. "Come on, the guest bedroom is free."

I shut the door, though I had noticed the master bedroom door shut. Did I need to shut it? I wasn't sure about the whole rules and regulations of what we were

doing. I bit back my curiosity.

Donny, however, was curious. "Are you positive about this?"

Why was everyone asking me? I took a breath and sighed. "I'm over—"

"I know. I mean the whole letting Krista and Birk—"

"I owe them, don't I?"

He considered me for a second. "Is that how you want to look at it?"

"Maybe, but I'm not belittling what they're doing. Your wife has been an amazing source of strength for me these past several weeks. So has Birk. So have you."

"We were all pulling for you."

I stepped to him and grabbed his leather vest. I shook him gently. "I know and that's why I say I owe them. I owe you. You've all been the sort of friends I need and I appreciate it. In the beginning, before... the event, I was determined to have Birk even the score because I had hurt him. Not badly, but enough I knew it had to be righted. I wasn't thinking straight."

"Straight?"

"I'm thinking straight now. I'm not doing this because of guilt; I'm doing this because I want to. It's a gift to everyone – just like your hat was to Birk. I can't tell you how much I saw the appreciation in him for what you did."

His smile was lopsided. "It's just a hat."

"It's more than a hat and you know it."

He sighed with contentment. "Why do I get the impression that trying to hide things from you is useless?"

"Thank you for that hat. Thank you for being friends." I stretched up and kissed him. "Now how about making me feel like a woman so your poor wife doesn't have to pretend to be me again?"

He laughed, leaning his head back. He held up his hands. "Okay, you got me."

Our lips met in a comforting and casual kiss that began warming me inside. Not that I was cold.

Until the kiss, I hadn't realized how much I was looking forward to being with him again. It was nice: I could be a sexual object for him and him for me. A friend in need and an exchange with his wife so elegant in its simplicity that there was no room for doubt.

I saw this for what it was – a backscratch. A helping hand traded and shared. After, he would go back to being with his wife and I was fine with that. I would have Birk again and we would have something new to talk about. I was more than fine with that; I was looking forward to it and I hadn't even gotten my clothes off yet.

I remedied that by stripping.

He was grinning widely at me. "What a dream."

"Oh, shut up."

He removed his clothing. "No, really. Just being in the same room with you and seeing you take off your clothes makes me hard."

I couldn't help but smile. It made me feel good. If anything he had satisfied my desire to feel like a woman with just those words. That I could evoke his erection and reaction just by being me was an incredible turn on.

That familiar ache of need and longing grew in my pussy.

I needed him in me.

I had entertained thoughts of sucking him and enjoying some foreplay, but he had cranked my desire past the point of play. "Shut up and get on the bed."

His dick was throbbing in the air. The effect on me was electric.

He was hard looking at me. He wanted me and his dick was ready.

For me.

Oh yes, I wanted it.

So much so that I barely gave thought to hoping my husband wasn't flubbing his chance with her.

Would I let him again? I didn't know. Maybe, maybe not. This was all something of a test. But I knew things worked with Donny, and I was ready to make it work again.

I pointed to the bed.

He settled onto his back with an amused smile.

I climbed over him, feeling my pussy's ache grow as I crawled over his legs.

He realized what I was going for and frowned. "You don't want any... oral?"

"No. Why, do you need any?"

"No, not at all. Just wondering—"

He cut off as I grabbed his dick and positioned at my entrance. I said, "Right now, I need this." I sat down hard and pushed.

His eyes went wide and he groaned loudly.

The initial pain of resistance at my lips was gone – replaced with the stretching sensation that satisfied the itch.

I closed my eyes and ground my hips down in circles. Feeling him hard in me was an incredible charge. It wasn't different than my husband – it's that it was different. Not because it felt different, but because it was different. The feeling was the same – that it was a different cock was the extra bonus.

That it was my best friend's husband – yes, she was my best friend – made it all the better. Same sex, bonus man. That I could share this with a man besides my husband was an extra benefit, not a replacement. That it was Krista's husband was all the more private and intimate.

A friendly thing.

Not for anyone else.

His warm hands on my hips spurred me on and I leaned on his chest and moved with vigor.

I panted with effort, fully enjoying the sensation of his hard sex in my soft confines. "Are you liking this?"

His smile returned. "What do you think?"

"Tell me."

His eyebrows twitched upwards. "Oh, I like it. A lot."

"Yeah?" His words made my ache intensify. I moved even faster. "You like it a lot?"

"More than you can imagine."

I was savage, thrusting backwards and driving myself onto his erection.

He moved fast, rising up and flipping me over.

My pussy clamped in response and my nipples tingled with tension.

He drove in and held it there for a moment. "You have such beautiful breasts."

I almost laughed. Men usually called them tits. I personally didn't care for the word. But my amusement was swept away by his tongue teasing my nipple. His cock throbbed deep in me at the same time and caused a reverberation of sensation between my pussy and breast.

I groaned quietly.

A tiny nibble tweaked the tension in my nipple before he moved to the other one.

Sensitive to being bitten, I offered him the other by raising my chest slightly. I trusted his nibble. I truly did. The same tweak to the other sent delicious shivers down my arms and back.

He left off my breasts and moved up. He gave me a quick kiss - tongue swiping against mine and no more than a tease – before resting on his hands and driving his cock into me.

I groaned as that thick hardness slammed in and out of me. "Oh... yes, do it. Use me."

He moaned with urgency and humped faster. He was lined up perfectly and his cock slid in and out in a smooth, straight line of sexual fervor.

I was having sex with my friend's husband and it was perfect. It was everything I wanted from him. Nothing like my husband for what was in my heart, but everything I needed right now in my pussy.

I gripped his arms, feeling the tension twist and turn. Building in me was a euphoric promise of relief.

I wanted to let go with him. I wanted to cum.

I wanted him to cum with me.

"Fuck me, Donny. Fuck me hard. Harder."

He gave me what I wanted. Like pressing on the pedal of a souped-up sports car, he responded with surprising vigor.

The mattress bounced beneath us. His hips slapped down into mine as I was launched up a liquid wall of lust. I twisted tight, tensing up with the imminence of release.

I don't know if he read me or not, but Donny began thrusting with savagery.

So unlike Donny. Happy, smiling, friendly Donny. His impacts to my hips and clit were made with grunting shoves that flipped me far over the edge.

I wasn't falling, I was sailing. And everything tumbled with the freedom of falling flight. I rushed down as relief raced through my body, only to be yanked taut and released again. And again.

I don't know what language I spoke in – all I knew is that I was calling out and

proclaiming the euphoria that engulfed me from pussy to head to toe.

Everything quivered until I was left limp and tingling.

I laughed a little – a burst of satisfaction that knew no other way to be expressed.

Donny groaned loudly and filled me, his hardness throbbing in me deep inside. He was still and panting. Then his hot spurts tickled my insides, sending a wash of scalding wetness flooding my pussy.

I felt him pulsing and squirting. I rested my hands on his back and stroked his skin as he finished and filled me with his lust.

It was so perfect that I wanted to cry. I wanted to laugh. I wanted to run and jump. I wanted to cuddle. All at once.

I ended up just smiling with supreme satisfaction. I accepted his kisses to my ear and neck. I embraced his warmth.

I enjoyed him.

Soon, I would go back to my husband. But for right now, I relaxed in Donny's arms.

EPILOGUE

I sat on the couch for almost an hour beyond the time Donny and I finished in the guest bedroom. My husband and Krista were shut in the master bedroom forever.

What were they doing in there?

I hadn't heard anything.

Even Donny was wondering. "Did they faint in there or something?"

I shrugged.

When the door opened, I expected my husband out first, but it was Krista.

She scurried out, quick-like, and plopped down next to me on the couch. I was instantly engulfed in a hug. She whispered into my ear, "Thank you." She kissed my neck and ear until I grew embarrassed.

I noticed Birk standing there looking amused.

I smelled him on her and it was something so intoxicating that I squirmed at the recognition. Whatever the reaction, my pussy sure liked it.

And yet, he looked no different. There was no strange inner glow to his eyes like I had expected. I don't know, I guess the mind thinks up some pretty weird things of which to be afraid.

He sat down on my other side and said to Donny, "She didn't bite it off, did she?"

I slapped his knee, hard.

"No, she didn't."

What a thing to ask. I scowled at him.

He responded by kissing my lips. Assaulted from this side now, I smelled the hints of her makeup on his face. I tasted the barest flavor of lipstick on his lips and tongue.

I think I swooned.

Having kissed Krista and enjoyed it, tasting her flavor on my husband was something I don't think I'll ever forget. It was a connection not unlike me lying under Donny and Krista that first time as they kissed over me.

I felt such a gushing warm rush of love and appreciation that my throat felt packed with cotton.

Birk slapped my knee with affection. "Let's say we crack a bottle of vodka? We can drink ourselves under the Christmas tree."

I wanted to kiss his face until he smothered. The joy inside was made all that more satisfying by the presence of friends.

Thank you for reading Stalked and Watched. I would beg for reviews, but that would be unseemly, wouldn't it?

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