

She looked around the little room around her. Apart from it being windowless and rather small, it was a pleasant room.

The full-size bed she sat on was covered in a quilt with a pretty flower pattern on black. At the head of the bed there was a small wooden dresser, only a bit taller than the bed, that one could imagine a guest might put their clothes for the weekend. A closet with sliding doors took up the entire back wall; a mirror was revealed when the doors were closed. On top of the dresser was a mini rock garden; fine sand, smooth pebbles and a tiny rake in a stone dish. A little desk with a little lamp sat across from the bed. A large picture of greenery with a babbling brook running through it hung over the desk.

She was staring at the door again and she forced herself to concentrate on her breathing and stare at the mini rock garden instead. She wanted to look relaxed when he came in, casually looking over her shoulder at the rock garden. Not staring intently at the door.

She heard the door open but she forced herself not to look over. She thought she felt the atmosphere in the room shift, felt the cool air from the next room rush into the stifled little room, but she knew that this was her imagination. Every room was meticulously temperature controlled.

"Dana," he said, his voice flat, neutral.

She turned to him as if he'd startled her from being deep in thought, then she forced the corners of her mouth upward into a smile. She had practiced this in the mirror earlier, making it look genuine. It was harder to pull off than she'd thought it would be, but she managed.

He scowled back at her, suspicious. He tensed, prepared for her to attack. He left the door open behind him as he walked slowly and carefully toward her. He made leaving the door open look absent minded, but she knew it had been deliberate. He kept his eyes steady, glaring into hers. Watching for the slightest waver. She wanted to glance at the door, but she did not.

He froze as she reached up toward him. She waited for him to continue toward her, then got up to reach him instead when he stayed still. She leaned up to kiss him gently, until she felt him relax, then she pulled him closer. She kissed him more urgently as she pulled him down onto the bed with her.

She sat up suddenly and straddled him. The quick motion made him tense up, but as she began unbuttoning her top, he relaxed again.

As she felt his erection against her leg, her skin crawled with disgust. But she forced herself to smile as she bent down to kiss him again.

She jumped up and quickly moved to the center of the room, halfway to the door, then spun around and began to do a little dance. He had already sat up and started to come after her, but relaxed again when she started dancing. She moved forward again, dancing, reaching toward him. Then moved past him toward the dresser.

She bent over and shook her ass at him as she took a handful of sand from the rock garden.

She raised both hands above her in fists, and spun around until she was in front of him again.

Then she threw the sand into his eyes as hard as she could and ran for the door. She heard him scream out in pain and anger as the sand hit his eyes. She felt his hand clutch the bottom of her shirt, but she let her arms slide out of it as she ran.

*The keys. Where would he keep the keys?* Her mind raced for the answer, and her eyes searched around wildly, looking for a likely place.

She hesitated for only a moment before she remembered that he used a code to enter his car.

He pushed a button for the ignition. There was no key. She would have to run.

She threw open the door and stumbled and nearly fell from the shock of the cold air against her half-naked body. It hurt, but she ran.

It didn't take long before the movement of her running, and the adrenaline from her fear, kept her warm enough to keep going. It was a very large estate and a very long driveway lined with stone walls. Trees were planted thickly to one side to create the illusion of a forest. It was half a mile to the end. He would be able to rinse his eyes and get in the car in less time than it would

take for her to get to the road.

She felt her body starting to resist keeping up her pace and she slowed to a jog.

She was a little more than halfway there when she heard the engine. She could tell he was driving fast. She pressed her back, her arms and legs, as hard as she could into the side of the tree; willed herself to be small and invisible.

He stopped nearly 100 yards away. She could hear him roughly pushing aside branches and shrubs in his search for her. But he didn't call out to her. That would be too normal.

She was well out of reach of his headlights, but this fact did nothing to slow her heart. She forced herself not to pant, afraid the sound would carry through the silence. She forced air through her nose as fast as she could to her burning lungs. Her body was hungry for oxygen, but she couldn't risk making a sound. Her lungs finally stopped hurting, and she told herself she had to start walking away. The grass was soft and he wouldn't hear her bare feet walking through it. It was too dark to see her from this distance. She couldn't get herself to move. Her panic ignoring her logical thoughts, telling her she should breathe slowly so he wouldn't see the rise and fall of her chest.

*He's only human, he can't see you. He's only human, he can't see you.*

She chanted this in her mind three more times before she could force herself away from the tree.

She turned away from him and walked carefully, not able to hear her own footsteps. She finally saw the shape of the stone wall, the place where a gate would normally be.

"Only people with things to hide need gates," she watched him smiling at her in her memory.

She remembered being surprised and impressed by this. Someone so honest and transparent was amazing to find.

*There was no way to know, she reassured herself. No indication of what he was.*

Now she knew that only sane people hide behind gates. Hide and lock their gates, safe from people like him.

She made herself keep walking, waiting for her strength to return enough to run again. She forced herself not to turn back, knowing if she did her panic would get the best of her and she would freeze up again. But she listened. Listened for the sound of the car door closing, knowing she would have to hide again when she heard it.

She kept hearing nothing and felt her panic rising again. She felt her heart beating harder, knew her adrenaline was rising and that it could propel her the rest of the way to the road.

The road was not safety. The road was lined with the gates of other estates, and although they were not as large as this one, the houses were still set far back at the end of driveways like the one she ran down now; out of earshot of the road. But it was out. And it was closer to safe.

She pictured herself running to the right when she reached the road. This road went in a giant circle; a circle with a barrier at the end that would prevent cars from making a complete circuit, but not person on foot. And the right was the shorter way round to reaching a street that would have shops and cars and people.

But she realized that's the way he would assume she would go. She should go to the left.

But once he'd turned right, and gotten to the main road, and not found her, wouldn't he turn back around? Wouldn't he double back and go to the left? And he was in a car. She might only be halfway there by the time he figured out she'd gone the other way. He would catch up to her. But maybe not. If he chose to go the wrong way, and if she managed to run most of the way, maybe she could make it.

She finally made it to the end, to the road. It filled her with hope that gave her the strength to run faster. She ran as fast as she could, wanting to be well out of sight before he got to the end of his driveway.

She listened hard. Listened for the car. Heard her steps as she ran, heard her heavy breathing.

She finally heard the car, in the distance. It was silent enough that she could still hear it from this far away. She kept running but her panic rose again. She waited for the sound to get fainter,

to tell her that her plan had worked, that he was driving in the opposite direction. She was already halfway there. She was making better time than she thought.

And finally she couldn't hear the car anymore. Finally the sound faded off. She pushed herself to continue running. She varied her pace, faster and slower as her body started to complain. But the adrenaline kept her going.

As she reached the barrier, she saw the headlights creeping along the road. He was going slowly, craning his neck to look around trees and bushes. She ducked down behind the barrier and listened to the engine. She worked to get her breath back in control as fast as she could.

*Just stay down. Just stay still. Wait until the engine fades away again. You'll be ok,* she told herself, forcing her breathing to remain slow and steady.

It seemed to take forever. It seemed like a lifetime when she heard him make a u-turn. So close to the barrier, in her mind's eye she could see him crane his neck and see her over the barrier.

But then the engine faded away again. As soon as she could hear it no longer, she jumped up and ran down the main road as fast as she could.

She finally saw the shops along either side of the road. She ran toward the closest one; an antique shop.

It was only now she remembered time. What time was it? Were the shops open? Lights in the windows were no indication. They all kept their lights on to deter thieves; to make sure that their cameras would get clear, well-lit footage if there was a theft.

She remembered it feeling like she'd waited longer than usual for him to come to her tonight.

And it was winter, which meant it was dark early. It could be five, which meant many of the shops would still be open, or it could be ten and they were long closed. Then she noticed the number of cars parked out front and felt a rush of relief. Whatever time it was, it was still early enough for the shops to still have customers.

She ran into the antique shop, moodily lit as most such places were.

The clerks just stood there, matching deer-in-headlights looks upon their faces.

"Help me!" she said to them, "Call the police!"

They just stood still and continued to stare. She remembered then that she was naked from the waist up. She covered herself with one arm and pointed toward the register and presumably a phone with the other and repeated, "Call the police!"

The clerks seemed to come back from their daze then, the one closest to the register rushing over to the phone.

"Are you alright?" the other one asked, moving cautiously toward her.

She glanced over her shoulder toward the window, then moved to a chair that couldn't be seen from the street.

"Yeah," she said, sitting down. "Yeah, I will be."