

# **Laura**

*By*

**Katy O'Reilly**

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# Chapter One

"All rise for the Honorable Justice Martin Noble. The Superior Court of the State of California is now in session!" The bailiff barked out the words that he had uttered thousands of time.

Judge Noble took his seat on the bench and the courtroom audience sat. "Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, have you reached a decision?"

A gray haired woman in a polka dot dress stood up. "Yes, your Honor we have."

"Would you please hand the bailiff your decision." The bailiff took the sealed envelope and handed it to the judge. He opened it and read it. When he was finished he gave it back to the bailiff. "Please have the Chairwoman read the decision."

Judge Noble looked at the bench in front of him. "Would the defendant please rise?"

A petite blonde in a red suit stood on shaky legs. Her attorney squeezed her shoulder.

The jury chairwoman looked extremely nervous and cleared her throat. "In the case of the State of California vs. Laura Taylor on the charge of first degree murder, we the jury find the defendant Not Guilty."

Judge Noble thanked the jurors and turned to Laura Taylor. "The defendant is released from custody and free to go."

Laura stood in shock tears flowing down her face, after 9 long months it was finally over. The

room began to spin and she sat down quickly and let the darkness descend around her.

The judge was thanking the jury and releasing them when he saw Laura faint. He turned to the bailiff, "We need help here, please call the paramedics."

Her attorney was kneeling next to her rubbing her wrists trying to bring her around. "Laura, Laura, it's okay, it's over." She lay slumped over the table motionless. Her sister and brother in law were in the courtroom and ran over to her, also trying to rouse her to no avail. The paramedics arrived and started her on oxygen.

"Will the officers clear the courtroom please?" Judge Noble came over to where the paramedics were working. "Would you be better in my chambers?"

They had Laura conscious by then. "Yes it would, she is fine but needs to rest a bit."

The paramedics lifted her up and carried her into the Judge's chambers. The judge turned to her family and attorney. "Please wait here and let her rest. I'd like to talk to her in private for a few minutes. I'll call you when she is ready to go."

Laura was feeling woozy but terribly embarrassed by the time the paramedics finished checking her over and left. She was still trembling and didn't know why the Judge wanted to talk to her. "I thought I heard you say I ..I could go? Is there something wrong?"

Judge Noble poured her a shot of brandy and handed it to her. "Drink this, it will help. No, there is nothing wrong and you are free to go. I wanted to talk to you a bit about your future, and any plans you may have. You do realize that your late husband's family are going to be vicious enemies?"

Laura sighed. "Yes, I know they are. They never believed that Frank was abusive. I told his sister that he was beating me and she refused to believe it, she said the bruises must have come from the

other man I was seeing. They were convinced Frank was telling them the truth that I was cheating on him. I don't think they believed any of the witnesses that testified for me. Right now I don't care about them, I just want to be left alone. I have no idea what I am going to do."

Martin looked at the young pretty blonde. If he were younger and single he would be very interested in getting to know her better. "Laura, if you would take a piece of advice, I think you should leave this area and make a life somewhere else. This is a small town and I don't think people will let you forget. The Taylor's will see to that. You will inherit a lot of money. Take it and make a life somewhere else."

Laura was beginning to get some color back and felt stronger. He did make sense. "Thank you Judge, I just might do that. But right now I just want to go home."

"I can imagine you do." Martin Noble opened the door and called in her attorney and family. "I'll have an officer escort you out the back way. I am sure the press has surrounded the entryway by now. Whenever you are ready, just let him know. You can stay here as long as you like." He turned to Laura's family. "Take care of her, she has been through a lot." He put his coat on and picked up his briefcase and left.

Betsy Frost hugged her sister. "Oh Laura, I am so happy this is over. You must come and stay with Ed and the kids and I. Re-start your life away from here."

John Bates her attorney agreed. "I will take care of all the paperwork and details for you on the inheritance. If you want to sell the house I'll help you also. But I don't think it will be a good thing for you to stay here."

Laura looked around at all of them. "Judge Noble just told me the same thing. I think you are all right, but I don't know where I want to go. I believe

Frank's mother when she said she would make sure this follows me my entire life. I don't think it will matter where I go. I need a few days to think."

"Ed and I will stay with you until then. You shouldn't be alone." Betsy was worried about her sister.

"That's fine but now, let's get out of here. I want to go home and have a big steak dinner. John, you are of course invited also." Laura rose and gathered her things together. "Oh, do I have to go back to the jail and get anything?"

John shook his head. "Not if you don't want to, I'll take care of it for you."

"Thank you! I don't want to ever see that place again. You all have been so good to me through this." Laura again was on the verge of tears.

John opened the door and the officer was waiting for them. "There is a mob out front. Do you have a car here?"

"I have mine in the underground garage." Ed told the officer.

"Good, we can get you down there and escort you out." The officer motioned them toward a side door. John stopped them. "I will go and face the press and meet you at home. I think I'll get your things at the jail now and clear up any paper work there. Laura, you rest and I'll see you later." He waited till they were out of sight, and then went out the front door of the courtroom.

When they reached Ed's car, Laura climbed in the back. The officer stopped her. "Ma'am, if you don't mind it would be best if you laid on the seat so you can't be seen."

As she was getting herself in position two police cars arrived one led the way out and one followed. There were crowds around the entrance and photographers, but they slipped by without being mobbed with the help of the police. As soon as they cleared the area, Laura sat up and looked out. She hadn't been out of the jail or courtroom in nine long

months. It was now April and she opened the window and sniffed the air. "Oh that smells so good! Fresh air."

By the time John arrived at the house with her belongings, Laura had showered and changed clothes and had the house open and airing. She had checked the patio and pool and made sure everything was okay. Neighbors in their yards stared at her. She waved and was ignored. 'No, this was not going to be a place she could stay. It only contained bad memories anyway.'

John hugged her and handed her a bouquet of flowers, a bottle of wine and champagne. Betsy had gone to the supermarket and restocked the refrigerator and cabinets and Ed had stayed with Laura and had the barbeque all set to fire up.

Several hours later they were all full and sipping champagne on the deck. "I don't think I have felt this good in so long. Just being outside is wonderful." Laura was taking it all in.

John rose. "I think it's time for me to head out. I'll call you tomorrow and check on things. Be prepared that you may get some hate calls. I would let the machine pick up all calls. If it is someone you want to talk to, then pick it up. Also if you don't want to give statements to the press, don't. You aren't obligated to in any way."

"Thanks John, you have been wonderful. I don't know how I would have made it through this without you." Laura hugged him and kissed him on the cheek.

Unfortunately John had been right; the phone rang almost continually the next day. There were even reporters sitting on the front lawn. Laura didn't wait for John to call her, she called him, "John, this is terrible, they are literally camped on the front lawn. I can't even go outside."

"Okay, I will file a restraining order and be there as soon as I have it. I will ask for police protection for a while also. I think Judge Noble will be more

than happy to arrange for that." John hung up and went into action.

An hour later he arrived with a squad car right behind him. "Ladies and Gentlemen, this officer has a restraining order requiring you to leave the property. Mrs. Taylor does not wish to make any statement to the press. I ask your cooperation in leaving her alone at this time."

Slowly the crowd dispersed and the officer sat in his car watching the house. John knocked on the door and Ed slowly and cautiously opened it. "Hi Ed, it's only me. I think the situation is cleared up now."

Laura hugged him. "Oh thanks John, this was horrid. You should hear some of the messages on the machine they are vicious. I have made up my mind I will not stay here. I haven't decided where to go yet, but by the end of tomorrow I intend to know."

Betsy heard her and looked worried. "Oh Laura, please come home with us. We would love to have you."

"I know Betsy, but I'm not going to subject your family to this type of harassment. You know the Taylors would figure that was where I was and just continue. No, I have to go somewhere far away."

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The rest of that day and the next morning, Laura spent on the Internet, researching different areas of the country. She had gone to college in the Midwest and always liked it there. She had intended to stay there and work after college but when she met Frank things changed. After a whirlwind courtship they married. Laura was so in love and thought it would last forever. It was only a few short months before Frank started abusing her.

She felt it must be something she was doing wrong and tried to please him in every way. It just made no difference. After two years she couldn't take it anymore. The end came when she finally told



him she was leaving and going to file for a divorce. They had just finished Sunday breakfast and she was cleaning up the kitchen. When she closed her eyes she could see it as clear as it was happening right then.

"No Laura, the only way you'll leave me is dead. Nobody leaves me!" Frank was looming over her pinning her to the sink. He started beating her and wouldn't stop. She finally got away from him and tried to run out the door. He grabbed her by the neck and was choking her. She was positive he really was going to kill her. She was backed up against the counter and reached behind her for a knife. When he realized what she was doing he released her just enough to grab for it. She plunged toward him and it pierced him in the heart, they said he died almost instantly. John had told her she was lucky he had choked her hard enough for bruises from his hands to show on her neck. Originally the police were satisfied it was self-defense, but the Taylor family pressured the State's Attorney to file murder charges.

Laura stood up from the computer shivering. "Lord, will I never be able to forget that day and all that happened."

Betsy was fixing sandwiches for lunch when Laura came into the kitchen. "Laura, you're pale and shaking, what's wrong?"

"Just a flashback, I'll be fine. I needed a break, my stomach is telling me its lunchtime."

"Sit down and I'll call Ed, everything is ready." Betsy bustled away to call Ed.

Laura smiled at her sister; she was really wonderful. Ed came in and sat down and they soon were enjoying fresh vegetable soup and sandwiches. Food all tasted so wonderful to Laura after the awful prison fare. "Betsy, you're wonderful! I just love your cooking."

Betsy blushed. "Oh Laura you know you cook just as well."

When they finished lunch Laura looked at Ed and Betsy, "I feel like going into town. I'd like to look for some books. Anyone want to go?"

Ed declined he was in the middle of a work project. Betsy frowned. "I was going to bake but you probably shouldn't go alone."

"Don't be silly. I'll be fine. I have to leave the house sometime. You stay here and I'll be back in an hour or so. Anything you want me to pick up?" Laura grabbed her purse and the car keys off the peg on the wall.

"No, I don't need anything, but be careful!" Betsy hugged her and Laura was on her way.

It felt great to be driving again. She rolled all the windows down and turned on the radio. It was wonderful to be free! Town wasn't crowded and she managed to find a parking space right in front of the bookstore. As she locked the car she noticed some people pointing and staring at her. She ignored them and walked into the store. The owner was an old friend of hers. Laura wondered what her reaction would be.

Marge Beckman looked up surprised when she saw Laura enter the store. She knew that most people were not going to be friendly but Laura was her friend. More than that, she knew that Frank was abusing her and all that happened wasn't Laura's fault. She came from around the counter, "Laura! How are you? I'm so glad to see you. We have to get together soon." Marge hugged Laura hard. Several customers in the store turned and frowned. Personally Marge didn't care. If they wanted to go somewhere else, then fine. She wasn't turning her back on Laura.

Laura hugged her friend back. "It's good to see you too Marge. I think I have an open calendar." She laughed.

"I'll give you a call." Marge went back behind the counter to help a customer and Laura walked over to the travel section.

There were a lot of books on the Midwest and various areas of it. Laura finally settled on one on Wisconsin and one on Michigan. She took them up to Marge and paid for them.

Marge called out as she left, "See you soon."

Laura was smiling as she left; she decided to walk down the street and window shop a bit. There was a great boutique she loved at the end of the block. It was exactly the type of thing she would love to own. After looking in all the windows, she turned and started back to her car. Right before she reached her car someone leaving a store, grabbed her arm.

Laura paled when she realized it was George Taylor, Frank's brother. "You may have fooled that jury lady, but believe me you will never rest until your dead. I will see to it."

Before Laura could say a word, he let go of her arm and crossed the street. Laura got in her car and locked all the doors. She had to sit there for a minute before she calmed enough to drive home.

Ed and Betsy were sitting outside when Laura returned. She waved to them and went inside to the office. Immediately she dialed John. "John, I ran into George Taylor when I was in town just now. He grabbed my arm and threatened me. He said I would never rest until I was dead and he would see to it."

"We can get a restraining order against the whole family, but I don't think it will stop them from harassing you anytime they get a chance. The best thing is to move away and change your name back to your maiden name. The sooner we can do it the better."

"You're right. Start whatever paperwork you need to do. I want the house sold and everything in it. None of it was ever really mine anyway." Laura discussed plans to come to his office in the next few days and sign whatever was necessary.

After she hung up, she browsed through her books. The places that appealed to her most were in Door County, Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. She read a little more and decided that Door County would be ideal. The Chamber of Commerce had a website listed so she signed on and browsed through it.

Door County was made up of little towns that relied mostly on the tourist trade. There were also farms and orchards. Cherries were a big crop there. Wineries and fishing also were plentiful. Each town was a bit different, but the one that appealed to her most was Fish Creek.

She selected that one and found that there were several shops for sale, also some condos, homes and cottages. Laura wrote down the numbers of the realtors and planned to call them the next day. Today she was tired and still a bit shaken from her encounter with George.

The next few days flew by. John had put house on the market and the realtors were sure it would sell quickly. Laura had contacted a realtor in Fish Creek and had a tentative appointment the following week. She had reservations at one of the nicer local hotels until she could find something permanent. John had pushed through her name change and she was once again, Laura Darby. It felt good, but strange too. Her accounts and charge cards were all closed and new ones opened in her new name at different banks.

The day came to say goodbye. Betsy and Ed had left the day before to return home. Betsy was teary eyed as she hugged Laura goodbye. "Now promise me you will call when you get there and keep in touch, I worry about you driving all that way alone."

"Don't worry Betsy, I'll be fine. You take care of Ed and the kids. I can't thank you enough for all you have done for me." Laura hugged and kissed both of them and watched till they were out of sight.

'Time for me to pack up and head on out myself.' Laura closed the door and made sure she had the alarm set. She had already packed some boxes and shipped them to Betsy to hold for her until she was settled, so there wasn't much left to pack. Laura went to bed early. She wanted to be gone before it got light and anyone saw her leave. John would have the realtors put the For Sale sign up after she left.

Laura loaded the car in the garage and was gone before dawn. When she finally reached the open road she breathed a sigh of relief.

## Chapter Two

Four days later she arrived in Fish Creek. She checked in and then called the realtor. "Hi, this is Laura Darby. I just arrived in Fish Creek. When can we get together to look at the properties?" After a bit of discussion they made an appointment for the next morning at ten.

Promptly at ten Laura walked into the office of Jane Douglas, the owner of Fish Creek Realty. She rose from her desk and walked over and shook hands with Laura. "It's so nice to meet you. I hope you had a good trip."

Laura smiled at her. She was a pleasant friendly person. "Yes, it was a bit long, but fine. I'm really anxious to get settled."

"Great, I thought I could give you a tour of the area, and a bit of its history and flavor. Then we can have lunch and I will show you the properties. I think there is one you will really find you'll like the best. It has always been a favorite of mine." Jane grabbed her keys and turned to the receptionist. "I will be back this afternoon. If there is an emergency you can reach me on the cell phone."

"I think we'll start by driving up the rest of the peninsula. You have seen it this far, but there are a few other nice little towns that I think you would enjoy seeing. Everything is so close you might even

find you want to live in one and work in another." Jane started the car and they were off.

Traffic was light and it only took about an hour to get to the other end of the peninsula. There was a ferry there that would take you over to an island that was also part of Door County. Laura decided to save Washington Island for another day. Jane pointed out all the items of interest and landmarks as they traveled.

"It's time for lunch, let's stop and then we can look at some of the properties." Jane pulled into a space near a quaint thatched roof restaurant. Laura looked at it and couldn't believe her eyes. "Is that really goats up there?"

Jane laughed. "Yes, I think this is probably the most photographed place in Door County. They keep the roof trimmed."

Laura liked Jane a lot. Over lunch they chatted and Jane told her she was married and lived in Fish Creek herself. "I do real estate and my husband is an accountant. We actually share the office."

After some gentle probing from Jane, Laura told her that she was a widow. She didn't mention the reason why, just that there were too many bad memories where she came from and she wanted a fresh start.

"You are certainly young enough to do that. What kind of business were you thinking of?"

"I majored in art and decorating in college. I love little boutiques and decorative accessories. I thought something along that line. This certainly seems the place where there would be an interest for that." Laura was feeling so at ease and comfortable with her decision.

"Yes that is true. And we have quite a few eligible bachelors too. Maybe you will fall in love again."

Laura's expression darkened at that. "No, I'm not looking to re-marry. I'm quite content being single. I can take care of myself quite well."

Jane frowned slightly at the worried look that Laura had. She sounded bitter, but decided not to pursue it at this time. With time she would probably change her mind. Also her cousin who happened to be the Chief of Police was single and in her mind the two would make a perfect match. David Johnson didn't miss much, and she knew he would know all about Laura soon. Jane paid for lunch and they were off to check over properties

They looked at maybe a half dozen different cottages and condos and several stores. None of them were quite what Laura had in mind. Jane laughed as they got back in the car at the look on Laura's face. "Don't worry we have plenty more to look at. Now that I have an idea of what you like it will be easier. Let's look at this last one today. It's the one I told you about, my favorite. Then we can start over tomorrow on some others."

Jane pulled up in front of a store on the main street in Fish Creek. The store was closed but still stocked. The name had been removed from the front of it. Laura was surprised.

"Did the owner just abandon this, leave the goods and all?"

"No, she died. Her heirs personally don't want to run the store, and have put the whole thing up for sale. They don't live anywhere near here and don't want to relocate either." Jane opened the door and turned on the light. Laura gasped in surprise. It was exactly the type of store she was looking for. She could add some things but this was perfect.

Jane smiled at her reaction. "I thought you might like it. There is more too, follow me."

Jane walked to the back of the store and opened the back door. Across a small yard and garden area was a darling cottage that was right on the water. Jane let them in and Laura felt immediately like she was at home. The furnishings were all in good shape and very homey and comfortable looking. The cottage was spotless. It was small but she didn't



need anything large. It had two bedrooms, a dining and living room and huge kitchen. There was even a deck and barbeque on the back of it.

"Oh Jane, this is perfect. I'm afraid to ask the price."

"That's the best part. The heirs want to get it off their hands. They are willing to sell the store and cottage as is for \$350,000. That includes all the goods and furniture."

Laura was astonished, she knew she could easily afford this. "I want it Jane, but I need to call my attorney in California first and arrange for him to transfer funds."

"Let's go back to the office. My husband is out at clients today and you can you his office. I'll start preparing the paperwork." Jane drove the short distance back to the office and within 15 minutes Laura was talking to John. She had explained the entire deal and the asking price.

"That certainly seems fair. Do you want a mortgage or do you want to pay it in cash. A mortgage would give you some business write off for taxes."

"I don't want anyone checking my credit right now, it will lead them to my old name and I prefer that not be known."

"Fine, I will transfer the money to wherever your agent wishes."

"Hold on John and I will ask her." Laura found Jane in her office and relayed the information. "How long will it take John?"

"It will be first thing in the morning." John hung up and Laura found Jane once again.

"I contacted the heirs Laura and told them about the deal. They are delighted. Since it is a cash transaction, their lawyer here can close immediately. I would say by the weekend you can move in." Jane handed Laura a stack of papers to sign. "I'll call you in the morning at the hotel as soon as I hear from the attorney."

Laura shook Jane's hand. "Thank you so much! I just love it and I really enjoyed our day."

"I did too and it will be nice to have you as a neighbor. We can get together again when you are settled." Jane walked Laura to her car and waved as she drove away."

"And just who was that pretty little thing that you spent the day with?" David Johnson asked his cousin.

"Where did you come from? I didn't see you." Jane was amazed he could just appear out of nowhere like that.

David laughed, "I was right down the street. Saw you come in a while ago. So who is she?"

"She is soon going to be our newest resident. She just bought the Daniels cottage and shop. She is a young widow from California, and has no interest in men, at least for now."

David smiled. "What's her name?"

"Laura Darby."

"Glad I got her plate number, guess I better check her out." David wrote her name down and started to walk away.

"David, just leave her be for a while, okay? I think she has had something terrible happen that made her leave and come here. Let her have some time."

David didn't answer just waved and walked away toward his office. "Anything going on?" He asked the switchboard operator.

"No, nothing it's been real quiet."

"Okay, Pete should be here in 30 minutes, I have some paperwork, and then I am off." David went to his office and closed the door. He looked at the notebook in his hand. "Hmm, Laura Darby, I think you and I are going to get better acquainted. Nothing like a challenge." David picked up the phone and called around to a few of the hotels. Finally he found the one Laura was registered in. Just so happened to have a great restaurant also.

"Can you tell me if she is booked for reservations for dinner?" David smiled at the reply. "Good make that for two, she doesn't know it yet but she will be having company."

The receptionist on the other end of the phone laughed. Everyone knew David Johnson well. She decided to help him out a bit. "Last night she came down and had wine in the lounge area before dinner. In fact she's coming down and heading there now."

David thanked her and hung up. Looking at his watch he calculated his timing. He had about 15 minutes to get home and change and be back there. "Piece of cake."

"I'm off, see you tomorrow, he yelled back at the receptionist as he walked out the door. Exactly 15 minutes later he was at the hotel and scanning the lounge. "Ah, there she is sitting all alone."

## Chapter Three

David walked over to her table and pulled out a chair and sat down. Laura looked up startled. "Don't be alarmed, I'm David Johnson, the Chief of Police. I understand you are our newest resident. I wanted to meet you."

Laura smiled at the exceedingly handsome man sitting across from her. With his blonde hair, and deep blue eyes and tall frame, about 6 feet 5 inches, he was drop dead handsome. More than a foot taller than her 5 foot 3 inches, he would loom over her.

Laura smiled and held out her hand. "My name is Laura Darby. I was with Jane Douglas today, I believe she said you were her cousin?"

"Yes, Jane and I were raised together after my parents died, so we are more like brother and sister."

The waitress came over and David ordered a beer and another wine for Laura. "So what brings you to Wisconsin from California? You know our winters here can be kind of fierce."

"I know. I went to Northwestern University so I'm familiar with your weather. My husband passed away and I decided I needed to find a new place, with no memories. I love it here so far and the house and shop I am buying are what I always wanted."

They chatted a bit more and Laura nervously looked at her watch. David jumped in. "Since it's dinner time, let me buy you dinner. A welcome from Fish Creek for our new resident."

Laura thought for a second. 'What harm would there be. I can be with a man and not have it turn into a relationship. I don't have to avoid all company of the opposite sex. Just not get involved.'

She looked at David who was waiting for her answer. "Thank you that would be lovely. I do have reservations here, perhaps they can change that to two."

"No problem, give me a second to take care of that." David was chuckling as he walked up to the desk and winked at the hostess. She just shook her head. "David Johnson, you are incorrigible."

"The table is ready, no problem at all." He pulled her chair out and took her arm and went to the dining room.

Dinner was marvelous; they both had chicken with a cherry wine sauce and wild rice. David ordered a bottle of wine and they drained the entire bottle. Even though it was spring, there was a nice fire crackling in the fireplace. Laura was totally relaxed and just loved listening to the stories about all the locals. By the time dinner was over she felt like she had known him forever. She had answered his probing questions vaguely without giving too much information. She wanted her entire past to stay there.

"It's still early how about an after dinner drink?" David pulled her chair out for her.

"I'd like that." Laura and David walked into the lounge; she didn't even realize that he was holding her hand, until he released it to pull out her chair. She looked at him but he didn't seem to think there was anything strange. 'I'm going to have to watch him and keep my distance.' Laura thought to herself.

Laura enjoyed chatting with him, but finally noted the time. "I think I best say good night David. I have enjoyed the evening. Thank you!"

"It was my pleasure. We will have to do this again sometime. I like to get to know our residents." David took her hand and kissed it. Laura could feel an electric bolt go through her. "I'm going to be really busy for a while, moving in and setting up and things, but I'm sure we will run into each other now and then." Laura thanked him again and almost ran up the stairs.

David watched her till she was out of sight. He settled the bill and walked slowly home. 'I wonder what Miss Darby is so nervous about? She enjoyed the evening but suddenly got as jumpy as a rabbit. Didn't really answer my questions either. I may have to find a bit more about her.' David smiled to himself. 'This could become very interesting.'

Laura woke early the next morning, she was dressed and had breakfast by nine. She knew it was probably too early but she had to call Jane to see if she had heard anything yet. Jane answered on the second ring.

"Hi Jane, this is Laura, I know I'm probably too early, but I just had to see if you heard anything yet."

"You are the early bird this morning. As a matter of fact, I have heard, as soon as they complete the paperwork this morning you will be the proud owner of the shop and house." Jane looked at her watch. "Why don't you meet me for lunch at noon and then we can go to the lawyer's office."

"That sounds great. Today is my treat. I'll make reservations here and you can meet me in the lobby." They finished making arrangements and Laura hung up. She hadn't been this happy in years. There were 3 hours until they met and Laura decided to do some shopping and get the feel of the other local stores. There were such a variety that

she knew her plans would fit well with the rest of the town.

Jane was waiting for her when she arrived back at the hotel. Laura was almost too excited to eat. "I looked around town today and I think my store will fit in nicely with the rest of the town. I just can't wait to get started."

"You certainly are enthusiastic. After the lawyers we'll stop by the chamber of commerce and introduce you. They can help you with a business license and all the paperwork to get going. Have you thought of a name yet?"

"No, I haven't really, but I want something catchy but quaint." Laura stopped eating and was thinking hard.

"How does Darby's Décor sound? I kind of like that." Laura looked at Jane for a reaction.

"That sounds great! It describes exactly what you are planning on selling."

Right after lunch they got in Jane's car and headed for the lawyers. The lawyer's office was several towns south, so it took them a while to get there. Laura fidgeted the whole time, she felt like a little kid anxious to get to the amusement park.

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The paperwork was all ready and in 30 minutes Laura was now the owner of her home and store. She felt she could float all the way back to Fish Creek. "I think I'm going to check out of the hotel and move into the house right away."

Jane laughed at her new friend. "I think you will need a few days to get the utilities turned on. We'll stop and do that now too."

"Oh, I totally forgot about that. That would be a necessity." Laura laughed at herself. Normally she was so thorough about things but in her excitement she really wasn't thinking about the basics.

By five o'clock Laura had a business license, had registered with the Chamber of Commerce and had

arranged for all the utilities to be on the next day. Jane dropped her off at the hotel. "Thank you so much Jane, you have really been a godsend to me. As soon as I'm settled I'll have you and your husband over for dinner."

Laura went up to her room and collapsed on the bed, she was exhausted. She made reservations in the hotel again for dinner; she was too tired to think of exploring other places tonight. There were so many things she needed to do, but the only thing she wanted right now was a nap.

An hour later she was awake and ready to go down stairs. "Hmmm, I wonder if David will show up again tonight."

David had been thinking about her all day. He knew Jane wasn't in the office, and with careful prying found out whom she was with and what they were doing, it wasn't coincidence that he was waiting at her office when she came back in.

"Hi David, what's up? I was just dropping some stuff off and heading home. Do you want to come to dinner? Maybe try and pry some information out of me about Laura Darby?" Jane loved to tease him.

"Well little cousin, since I had dinner with Ms. Darby last night, I probably know as much as you do. How did her closing go today?" David chuckled at the shocked look on Jane's face.

"David Johnson! You are the worst. I told you to give her some time."

."Too bad, I wanted to get to know her a bit, and now I am more interested than ever. She's very evasive about her past but she is beautiful and great company. I'm going to see to it that I get to know her much better and unlock her secrets." David stood up and stretched. "In fact, I think I will pass on that dinner and see if I can't just run into Laura after dinner."

Jane felt like throwing something at him as he walked out the door. "David, you better not hurt her! I think she has had too much of that already."



David ignored her and kept on going. Miss Laura Darby mystified him and it was time to find out a bit more. When he got back to his office, he pulled out his notebook. In a few minutes time he was running a check on the license plate of her car. "Okay, can you repeat that again please?"

The woman on the other end repeated what she told him earlier. "The car is registered to Laura Darby, 103 Palm Lane, Oakdale, California."

David thanked her and hung up. "Well that much checks out. Now let's try the criminal records." After a bit of calling and being transferred around he finally got his information. "No record of a Laura Darby."

His mind at ease about her background, he left to grab a bite to eat. By 7:30 he was sitting in the lounge at Laura's hotel. He already knew she was in the dining room and the hostess was alerted to tell her she had company waiting for her in the lounge.

Laura walked into the lounge hesitantly, her heart pounding. She didn't know anyone here, who could be waiting for her? The Taylor's couldn't have traced her so fast could they?

David saw her before she saw him. He was puzzled by the look of sheer terror on her face. "There is something she is hiding and I aim to find out what it is."

"Laura, over here." David stood up so she could see him better.

Laura walked over to him with a half smile. "I couldn't figure out who could be waiting for me."

"It's just me, didn't think I was that scary. You looked terrified." Dave pulled out a chair for her. "Why were you so scared?"

## Chapter Four

Laura didn't know what to say, her heart was still racing. "Oh I wasn't scared just mystified. I'm perfectly able to take care of myself."

David chuckled. "Okay, if you say so, what would you like to drink?"

Laura took a deep breath. "I'd like a B&B on crushed ice please. Is this still part of the official welcome to Fish Creek? I really wasn't expecting to see you."

"Nope, just wanted to see you." David ordered the drinks and leaned back in his chair so he could see her better. "Tell me about your day? I hear you are now an official resident of Fish Creek." Laura excitedly told him about her day and some of her plans.

David thoroughly enjoyed seeing her so excited; it was such a change from the terrified Laura who sat down earlier. Their drinks were finished so David made a suggestion. "How about going for a walk with me. I'll show you some of the other places in town for dinner or a few drinks, the local hangouts."

"Sure, I'll get my jacket and be right down." Laura headed upstairs while David paid the bill. When she rejoined him escorted her outside and started down the street. Before

Laura was even aware of it he was holding her hand. She started to protest but decided to let it be.

David showed her several restaurants and explained a bit about each one. "Let's stop here and I'll introduce you to some of the locals that I'm sure are here." David opened the door to a little bar almost on the waterfront.

Half the people there immediately greeted them; David really did now almost everyone in town on a first name basis. David casually put his arm around Laura's shoulder and introduced her to everyone. They sat at a table and David ordered them a drink.

"David all the people are so nice, but I will never remember all their names. I should they could become customers." Laura sighed deeply.

"Don't fret about it, in time you will. No one will expect you to remember all their names after one meeting anyway." David smiled at her; he was beginning to really like her.

They stayed there and visited for several hours. Everyone who joined them asked Laura about her store and plans. She never tired of repeating it, and was more enthusiastic each time. David about had to drag her out when it was time to go.

"Oh thank you David for taking me there. I had such a good time. I haven't had that much fun in so long." Laura was so bubbly and carefree. This was exactly the type of living she wanted to do.

David couldn't help but chuckle at her. "I'm glad you had a good time, that was the whole idea." By this time they were almost back to her hotel. David stopped and pulled her to him. Without warning he lowered his lips and claimed hers in a deep kiss. Laura's first instinct was to stiffen in his arms, but as he pulled her tighter she relaxed and returned the kiss. She felt like a lightning bolt had hit her.

When they finally separated Laura didn't quite know what to say. David hugged her again and whispered in her ear. "How about meeting again tomorrow night? I'll fix us dinner at my place. I can handle a barbeque quite well."

Laura didn't quite know what to say. She enjoyed the last two evenings but she just couldn't get involved again. That was the promise she made to herself, but at this moment she was enjoying being held and kissed.

"Oh David, I think that would be nice, but I am moving in tomorrow, and I may just be beat."

"I don't intend to take that as an excuse. You have to eat anyway and now you won't have to make it. I'll pick you up at 7:00 p.m." David pulled her against him and once more claimed her mouth with his.

This time when they separated Laura was almost weak in the knees. He grabbed her hand and walked her up to her hotel. After one more quick kiss he released her. "Sleep well, see you tomorrow."

Laura felt like she was floating on the way to her room. She got ready for bed and then sat thinking about the last two days. So much had happened in such a short time. Fish Creek was all she had hoped for. When her thoughts drifted to David, she smiled then frowned. "I'll have dinner tomorrow, but then we need to cool it for a while."

David walked home whistling. "If I didn't know better, I'd think I was falling for Laura."

The next day was Friday, as Laura checked out the hostess told her this would be a busy week. "It's one of the first weekends in the spring season. Wait until you see how many people there will be around. If you can get open, you should do a nice business."

"Thanks, but I don't know if I can swing that in one day." Laura signed her receipt and drove to her new home. She parked in the garage and quickly unloaded the car. Within the hour she had the house open and most of her things put away. She would ask Betsy to send her boxes as soon as she could.

"I think I'll call her now and give her my new address and phone number" Laura dialed the

number and Betsy answered right away. "Hi there, I'm in my new house and all unpacked." Laura told her all about it and the shop and all the nice people she had met. Intentionally she didn't mention David. The last thing she needed was Betsy getting all excited over it. They chatted for a few more minutes about Ed and the kids and what they were all doing.

"I better go Betsy, I still have tons of work to do in the store and errands to run. I'll look forward to receiving the boxes."

"Laura, before you go, I should tell you that the Douglas family has been trying to find you. Mrs. Douglas called one day while I was out and asked Danny where his aunt was. He didn't know so he told her you were on a trip. You were right about not telling the kids where you are."

Laura wasn't happy about this news at all. "That's disturbing, but to be expected. Thanks for letting me know. I'll call you in a few days." Laura hung up and sat there thinking. "How hard are they trying to find me, I wonder. I have too much to do here to worry about it." Laura sat at the table and made up a list of things she needed from the store. This was going to be one expensive shopping trip. Cleaning supplies and basic things for the pantry were all expensive. There were bigger items she needed as well; the local hardware store should be able to help with that.

It was after one before Laura had her lists finished and was ready to head out. She was amazed at the increase in traffic. The lady at the hotel had been right. She found the store and an hour later had a trunk full of groceries. The hardware store was next. They agreed to deliver the tools and ladder she had ordered along with a vacuum cleaner the next day.

Time flew as she busied herself putting things away. By five she had the house in good order and

the bed linens washed and changed and the towels freshly laundered and back in the linen closet.

"I still have a couple of hours, I think I'll start in the store." Laura opened the door and turned on the lights. There were so many things there she didn't quite know where to start. Clipboard in hand she started listing items in the storeroom. A lot of boxes had never been opened. One by one she opened them and examined the contents. Some of the things she liked and some she felt wouldn't fit with her plan at all. There were floor to ceiling shelves along the back wall and they had boxes stacked solid on them.

Laura was too short to reach them and some were pretty heavy. Lacking a ladder, she found a chair and when that was too short decided to stand on one of the shelves. The top boxes were now within reach.

She was so intent on reaching that box she didn't hear the door open. Just as she grabbed the box the shelf began to sway. Laura was trying to get down quickly when strong arms grabbed her and pushed the shelf back up.

"What in blazes do you think you were doing?" One angry David was glaring at her.

"You scared me! Don't sneak up on a person like that!" Laura was shaking. "What are you doing here?"

"Saving you from either seriously injuring or killing yourself. Plus it's 7:15 and I believe I said dinner at 7:00?"

Laura was shocked by the time and the tone in his voice. "Oh, I must have lost track of time. Let me clean up a bit and I'll be ready." She closed up the storeroom and store and they went back to her house.

"Take your time, I'll wait." David sat down in the living room.

"There's some wine and beer in the kitchen, help yourself." Laura headed for the shower.

When she came back 20 minutes later David was relaxing on the couch with a beer. He looked so natural there somehow. Laura shook her head to get rid of the thought. "I am not going to get involved." She repeated over and over to herself.

"Sorry, I'm so late, but I'm ready now." Laura picked up a jacket and her purse.

David set his glass in the sink and they left the house. He lived only a few blocks away so it was a short drive. "Here we are." David opened the door for her. "This is my castle"

Laura laughed. His castle was a small cottage with a deck facing the lake. She was surprised when he opened the door at how nicely it was decorated. "Did you do this yourself?"

Laughing David answered her, "Yes, don't you think men have the ability to decorate?"

Laura blushed. "I didn't mean that, it's lovely and usually men don't really care that much."

David poured her a wine. "Sit down before you put that foot in even deeper." They laughed and sat down on the couch together.

"I'll start the coals and then we should have some time to visit before dinner." David left and started the barbeque on the deck. Laura looked around the living room. There were some very nice painting of the local area; she would have to find out where he acquired them. She was still admiring the room when he came back and sat down next to her.

He put his arm around her and pulled her close. "Before I say anything else, I want to talk about how I found you in the store."

## Chapter Five

Laura stiffened; he had that tone in his voice again. "David, I am a grown woman, and am quite able to take care of myself. Thank you for being there, but I would have managed all by myself. I don't need a caretaker."

David looked at her without saying a word. She had no idea the thoughts that went racing through his head when he saw her. "Laura, you are indeed a grown woman. As for taking care of yourself you weren't doing a very good job this afternoon. You could very easily have pulled that shelf down on top of yourself. You would not have gotten out of the way in time." David pulled her closer to him. He didn't like her tone and stiffening at all.

"I am not planning on being your caretaker, young lady, but don't ever pull a stunt like that again. If you need help moving those boxes, call me. They are too heavy for you to move yourself. I'll come over tomorrow and move them for you. Now do you understand?" David held her close fighting the urge he had since he saw her on that shelf, to put her over his knee and paddle her good.

Laura relaxed a bit. "I'm sorry for spouting off. Thank you for saving me, I won't climb on things again, but you don't need to spend your time off helping."



"Too bad, you got a helper tomorrow whether you want it or not." David pulled her into a kiss and was pleased at her instant response.

The rest of the evening passed pleasantly and soon it was time to leave. When he got to her door he pulled her against him and kissed her again. She could have just lingered in that kiss forever. "Get some sleep, I'll be here at 9:30."

Laura thanked him for the evening and went in. She checked the locks and got ready for bed. After her full day of work she was exhausted and fell into a sound sleep.

Laura was up and dressed by 8:30, at 9:00 the hardware store delivered her order. After she had the coffee made and homemade muffins in the oven, she carried the ladder over to the store. The ladder was the perfect size. She climbed up easily and could now reach the top shelf. David had been right the box was too heavy for her to move. Climbing back down with a sigh she went back to the house.

Promptly at 9:30 David arrived. "Wow, fresh coffee and homemade muffins, I think I'm in heaven." He grabbed Laura around the waist and pulled her close to him. "Hmm, nice way to keep your help happy." He kissed her till she was once again almost weak in the knees.

Laura finally pulled away. "Sit!" She pulled a chair out for him, poured the coffee and put a muffin on a plate for him. Sitting down with him, she sipped her coffee.

"These muffins are delicious, Laura! I have never tasted better. Now that you have bribed me with food, what do we need to do."

Consulting her clipboard, Laura laid out the plans for the day. "I doubt we can finish this in one day, but if you can help move the heavy boxes I'll be able to do the rest myself. I got a ladder now, so if we just move the heavy boxes to the bottom, I'll be fine. I don't want to ruin your whole day off."

David scowled at her. "For the last time, I'm here because I want to be. I'll also be here tomorrow after church, so get used to it. Now, where do you want to start?"

"In the storeroom. I have to find out what inventory I have and what I can use." Laura grabbed her clipboard and they headed into the store. Several hours later they had all the heavy boxes down and opened. Some of the items were a pleasant surprise and others were clearly not what Laura would have wanted. Her mood was progressing steadily downhill as they worked on.

"I think it's time for a break and some lunch. You need to take a rest and regroup." David took the clipboard from her.

"David, I can't take a break any old time! I've got to get this done. If you're tired and bored then leave." Laura snapped at him and reached for the clipboard.

"I see. This is the way you take care of yourself? I think not. You're tired and cranky and clearly need to eat something. I'm not asking you, I'm telling you! We are going to lunch." David looked down on her fuming face.

Laura didn't know what to say or think. She was clearly irritated. "Fine, if you insist, but this isn't necessary." She didn't know why but she just couldn't seem to fight him.

After a lunch at a little local diner, they headed back and started in again. Finally by 5 o'clock they were finished with the storeroom. Laura looked exhausted. This time when David called a halt she didn't even argue.

"Why don't you hit the shower, while I run home and change. I'll be back with in half an hour with something great for dinner." David grabbed her close in a hug and kissed her.

Without waiting for a reply he was out the door. Laura stood there in shock. "Who does he think he is? Ordering me around like that?" She had to smile

though when she thought of his kisses. "I have got to get a grip on this. I am not going to get involved!"

David was back with a half hour and had showered and changed and had a grocery bag with him. Laura had set the table and was pouring a wine when he came in.

He leaned over and nuzzled her neck while placing the bag on the counter. "Okay, if you can handle making a salad, I will barbeque you the best ribs you've ever eaten."

"I do believe I can handle a salad, what else do you have in there?" Laura peeked in the bag and saw potatoes and some fresh beans.

"If you want, I'll make us some Potatoes Anna to go with that and fix the beans too. I do know how to cook." Laura grabbed the potatoes and put them in the sink.

"I don't want you fussing, you have been killing yourself all day. You need to rest." David was scowling at her.

"This is restful for me. It takes no time at all. Fix yourself something to drink and take care of the barbeque then we can sit and relax." Laura started peeling and thinly slicing the potatoes

Half an hour later, the potatoes were ready for the oven and the beans in a pan. David had made his special sauce and the ribs were browning on the barbeque. He called into the kitchen "Laura, come sit out here, it's still nice."

The evening was beautiful and by the time the sun had set they were ready for dinner. They were both hungry and most of the dinner was spent silently eating. Laura looked up and giggled. "You'd think we hadn't had a meal in a year. You do make great ribs David."

"The rest of dinner was great too. Those potatoes could become one of my favorites." David stood up and started clearing dishes. "You go sit down, I'll clean up and bring us a treat."

Laura was going to protest but decided it was fun to see a man clean up. In her short marriage she never had any help like that.

A short time later David appeared with two cups of Irish coffee for them complete with whipped cream.

"Where did you get that? I didn't see it in your bag?" Laura sipped the drink appreciatively.

David sat next to her and pulled her close. "I have ways of getting things done."

Laura had put some music on and they sat and listened and chatted. Laura remembered what he said about going to church the next day. She needed to find out where the Catholic Church was. That may not be where he was going, but he would surely know.

"David, you mentioned early about church tomorrow. I'd like to find the Catholic Church but haven't had time yet. Do you know where it is?"

"Sure, I'll pick you up at 7:30 and introduce you to St. Mary of the Sea, and even buy you breakfast afterward. Then we can dig in here." David pulled her closer and nuzzled her neck.

Laura just felt like putty in his hands when he did that. The rest of the evening was spent hugging and kissing. At ten David pulled away and stood up. "Time for us to get some sleep." He pulled her up and hand in hand walked to the back door. "Sleep well and I'll be here at 7:30 sharp." David kissed her once more and left.

"That man is making putty out of me. I have to stop this." Laura frowned and locked up and went to bed.

Promptly at 7:30 David was at her door. The church was on the other side of the peninsula, so David played tour director as they cut across to the other side. Laura was amazed at the number of homes and neighborhoods in the center of the peninsula. There was even a lake and recreational area.

"We get a lot of summer people here, campers and cottage rentals. Some stay for only a weekend, some for a week, and others for the whole summer. I get pretty busy on weekends especially in the summer. A lot of drunk and disorderly, especially among the younger crowd."

By the time David had explained everything and they were pulling in the parking lot. Laura was nervous as they walked into church. David was holding her hand and walked up to the priest standing in the vestibule.

"Father Dan, this is Laura Darby, Fish Creek's newest resident. Laura, this is Father Dan White, he is our pastor here."

Fr. Dan extended his hand to Laura, "Welcome to St. Mary's. If you want to stop by the rectory after mass we can get you registered."

"Thank you Father, I'd like that." Laura and David proceeded into church and sat down.

When mass was over David took Laura to the rectory and Fr. Dan invited them into his office. He gave Laura a card to fill out and while she was completing it chatted with David.

David made sure he got a look at the card as Laura was filling it out. There was nothing on it that gave him any different information than he already knew. As soon as she was finished they headed to a little restaurant on a cliff overlooking the beautiful sandy beaches on the Lake Michigan side of the peninsula.

They were back at the house by 10:00. "I brought a change of clothes with me to save time. I'll change in the other bedroom." David grabbed some jeans and a sweatshirt from the car and headed off. Laura went and changed and shortly after was ready for the day's work.

As they were leaving the house the phone rang. Laura jumped and paled. She stood motionless looking at the caller id. "Aren't you going to answer that?" David studied her carefully.

"I don't know who it is. I'll let the machine get it. Let's go." Laura tried to move David away, but he looked down and saw the number. He grabbed the phone up and Laura almost fainted. "Hi Jane, what's up?"

Laura had been gripping the table and her knuckles were white, another thing not lost on David. "That sounds wonderful! We'll be there at 7:00." David hung up and looked at Laura, "That was Jane, inviting us to dinner tonight. Want to share with me why you are so terrified of the phone?"

## Chapter Six

Laura sat down in the nearest chair. "It's nothing, I used to get strange phone calls and I guess I never got over it. Give me a minute and I'll be fine."

David got her a glass of water and squatted beside her chair. "Here drink this."

When Laura put the glass on the table, David took her chin in his hands and looked her in the eye. "I don't think you have quite told me the truth Laura. I know we haven't known each other long at all, but I care for you. If you are in trouble or have something or someone bothering you, I want you to tell me."

Laura bit her lip; there wasn't a way to tell him. "Thank you David, but everything is fine, just a bad memory. Let's get busy we're losing time."

David stood up and as Laura stood he pulled her against him. "I meant what I said, I want to know if someone or something is bothering you." He kissed her forehead and let her go.

They worked together without much conversation for the rest of the morning. At 1:00 Laura decided they needed a break. "Let's take a break and have something to eat. I'll never make it to dinner otherwise."

David had been studying her all morning. He kept noticing the worried frown appearing from time to time. Something was really bothering her and he

vowed one way or the other to find out. "Okay, I think that sounds good."

Laura fixed them some sandwiches and iced tea. Sitting down to eat she looked at David for the first time since the phone call incident. "What do you think Jane is serving for dinner? Should I make something to take?"

David smiled at her. "I don't know, but knowing Jane it will be good and I don't think you need worry about taking anything. I'll get a bottle of wine on our way over, that will be fine."

Now that the silence was broken they chatted through lunch and the rest of the afternoon as they worked. By 5:00 they had accomplished a lot. The entire inventory was done and Laura knew where she wanted things and what stock she needed to rearrange. She would definitely be able to open by next weekend.

David left to shower and change and Laura did the same. She was ready and waiting when he came back to pick her up. "Hmm you smell nice." He whispered in her ear as he hugged her.

"You don't smell so bad yourself." Laura laughed at him. She locked up and they were on their way.

Jane hugged David and greeted Laura warmly. "I'm so glad you're getting settled in so fast. Come in and meet my husband Jim." Jim Douglas came in from the deck to greet them. He was as tall as David and also quite handsome. "It's so nice to meet your Laura, I've heard so much about you in the last week."

Laura laughed, "It feels like a lot longer than a week, but I love it here."

"Jane, fix them a drink and we'll sit outside for a while. David, come see the best of the newest barbeques. I just got it last weekend." The men walked out to the deck and Laura followed Jane into the kitchen. "You have a lovely home here."



"Thanks we like it a lot. We bought the land a while ago and then built the house a year ago. I guess you could say it's my dream house."

The ladies chatted while Jane fixed a tray of drinks and snacks. Each carried a tray out to the deck. Laura felt like she had known these people forever, they were so down to earth and nice. Not at all like the pretentious friends of Frank's.

David noticed how relaxed she was by the end of the evening. Right before they left Laura mentioned that she was going into Green Bay during the week to see a wholesaler. "Jane, would you like to go? I love company on my shopping excursions."

"Oh that would be great! Just name the day."

Jim cleared his throat and quite calmly looked at Jane. "Aren't you forgetting something, Jane?"

Jane blushed at the reminder. "No Jim, I remember, I have to stick to the budget."

"Which means no purchases since you were over last month, right?" Jim had the sternest look Laura had ever seen.

Jane quite meekly answered him. "Yes, dear I know."

Laura looked at David and then Jim and Laura. No one seemed to think anything unusual had happened. "I'll call you tomorrow and confirm the day, but I think Wednesday will be the day." Laura hugged Jane and Jim goodnight and she and David left.

"David, I don't understand something. Jim seems like a nice guy, but what was that right before we left? He sure seemed pretty angry and Jane looked like she was afraid of him. He isn't abusing her is he?"

David almost laughed but he could hear the serious worried tone in Laura's voice. "No, he is far from abusing her, however he is the boss in the family. Jane tends to not think about money, and they are on a tight budget with the house right now.

He's given her a set budget she has to stick to. Ask her when you see her, she's fine."

"I..I hope so." Laura's voice was trembling as memories flashed back over her.

By this time they were back at Laura's house. David walked her up to the door and unlocked it. He hadn't intended on staying but when he saw Laura's face in the light he changed his mind. Gathering her into a hug he could feel her shaking.

"Laura, what's wrong? You're white as a ghost and shaking." David sat down on the couch and pulled her down next to him.

"I'm okay, just a bad memory." Laura snuggled into his warmth and felt safer than she had in a while.

David was perplexed. Twice in one day she had acted strangely and blamed it on 'bad memories' something wasn't right here. "Laura, I really wish you would tell me what is bothering you. I only want to help."

Laura took a deep breath and started to relax. "It's nothing you can help with David, it is just bad memories and in time they should go away."

David pulled her into a kiss and then stood up. "It's late and I have work tomorrow, and you have a lot to do too. I'll call you or stop by."

As soon as he left Laura slumped on the couch and started crying. "I should never have let him get this close. It's time to pull back. No one can know or I'll be an outcast." Finally she calmed down and locked up and went to bed, only to have nightmares all night long.

The next day was chilly and rainy, a perfect day to work in the store. Laura put all her energy into it and used work to drive off the memories and nightmares from the night before. She took a break about three and called Jane.

"Hi there, thanks again for last night it was wonderful. How does Wednesday sound? I can pick you up about 8:00 a.m. unless that's too early."

"That sounds great Laura, I don't have any appointments that day so we can make a day of it. I'll show you some of the other shopping areas there also."

They chatted for a while then hung up. Laura dove back into organizing shelves and display cases. All the stock she really wasn't interested in she had boxed and put back in the storeroom. Now that she knew what she had, she only needed to decide how she wanted to arrange the store and clean the cases. A planning session with drawings was in order.

Sitting in her living room she quickly drew up a rough plan of what she wanted. She was deep in thoughts and planning when the phone rang. It startled and she jumped. The number was a local number so she answered it.

"Hi there, I was wondering if you were going to pick up." David's voice was cheery on the other end.

"Hi, I was lost in plans and took me a minute. How are you today?" Laura was tired but tried to hide it in her voice. She looked at her watch and was shocked to see it was 8:00 already.

David chatted briefly about his day and asked about hers. "I got a lot done and now have to do some planning. I'm going to go into Green Bay on Wednesday. I think I want a table and some chairs so people will have a comfortable place to look at catalogs and samples. I also need a desk for the supply room. That will be my office too."

"If you aren't too tired Wednesday when you get back how about dinner?" David waited for her answer.

Laura paused. Really she could not afford to let her defenses down and get any more involved. She was already half in love with him. "I may be pretty beat after a day of shopping, I think we better not plan on it."

"Okay, then Friday night. I'll be there at 7:00 p.m. I'll stop by and see you before then. You sound

tired. Maybe you better make it an early night." David hung up the phone and sat puzzled staring at it. "Laura Darby, you are definitely hiding something, and trying to push me away. No way are you going to succeed."

"Damn him, was is he so pushy!" Laura slammed the phone down. He hadn't even given her a chance to say no. "I'll just tell him Friday that I appreciate his friendship, but I'm not ready for any kind of a relationship, I'm far too busy getting the business going."

Tuesday was a very productive day. Laura had cleaned and polished half of the display cases and everything was shaping up nicely. She stopped work early to plan a window display and make sure her lists were in order for the next day. Fortunately David hadn't called or stopped by.

Wednesday morning was bright and warm. Laura hummed to herself as she dressed and gathered her lists and drawings and left for Jane's. Jim answered the door when she rang the bell. Laura was still a bit apprehensive about him. "Hi, Jim! Is Jane ready?"

"I think she is almost ready, come on in and have a cup of coffee. I'm noted for making the best in town." Jim led her into the kitchen and poured her a cup.

"This is good! I'll have to get your secret." Laura tried a timid smile, but was wary around him.

Jane came in a few minutes later. "Hi Laura, sorry I'm running a few minutes late today. Blame it on hubby here. Ready?" Jane hugged and kissed Jim on the cheek.

"Remember, our discussion, no buying!" Jim hugged her back and patted her bottom.

Jane blushed and Laura tried not to react. She was extremely quiet though when they got in the car. Conversation was stilted for the first ten minutes.

Finally Jane asked her, "Laura, what's wrong? You seem very quiet and withdrawn. Did I do or say something that's bothering you?"

Laura sighed. "No, Jim did. Jane is he abusing you? I was worried the other night when he was talking about shopping and this morning when he reminded you and patted your bottom you looked very uncomfortable."

"No Laura, there is no way he is abusing me. I have no money sense at all. If I were in charge of our funds, we'd be broke. We decided a long time ago that he was in charge and I would obey his rules." Jane paused to see how Laura was taking the information.

She was a bit confused, but Jane seemed perfectly happy, not like she had when she was married to Frank. "I guess I understand, but what happens if you don't follow his rules? What would happen if you bought something today?"

Jane wasn't sure Laura was ready to hear the next part. "I try not to break them, but if I do and get caught I get spanked."

Laura almost lost control of the car. Quickly she pulled over to the side of the road. "You're kidding me, right?"

"No, I'm not. It's something we have agreed on, keeps peace in our household. It isn't abusive Laura, its done out of love, because he cares for me and wants us to be happy." Jane squeezed Laura's hand. "It really makes me feel secure and special."

Laura had tears in her eyes. "I hope so, because my husband beat me and it sure didn't make me feel loved or secure." The minute she had said it, she wished she could have eaten her words.

"Oh Laura, I'm so sorry! But this isn't like that at all. It is totally different. After a spanking I am forgiven and loved and held. It is nothing like a beating at all."

Laura took a few deep breaths and smiled over at Jane. "I guess it is different than a black eye and

bruises all over your body. Please forget I said anything." She started the car and continued on their way.

The rest of the day was happily spent at various wholesalers and shopping malls. They were at the last furniture wholesaler when Jane spotted a small antique trunk. "Oh Laura, this is just what I have wanted for the family room. Wouldn't it make a great coffee table?"

Laura checked it over and agreed. "Yes, it would be great Jane, and a good storage place too"

"Laura, Jim would kill me if I bought this. I promised no more purchases until he approves them first. He will never approve this." Jane was crestfallen.

Laura smiled. "I have an idea! I can buy it and store it in my storeroom until you get his okay. Then we can run it through the store."

"I guess we could do that. Okay that's a deal." The order was placed with the wholesaler and two happy ladies headed home, Laura was just going to drop Jane off and head home, but Jane insisted she come in for a drink.

"Okay, I will, but I can't stay too long. I have a lot to do yet."

Once they were sitting comfortably on the deck Jane decided to ask a question that had been bothering her. "Please don't think I'm being nosy, but I know you said you didn't want to get involved with anyone and weren't looking for a relationship, how does David figure into this? I know you haven't known each other long, but I do know David and he is very attracted to you. I have never seen him like this with anyone before."

Laura sighed. "I know. The truth is I really like him myself and could easily fall in love with him, maybe already have a bit, but I can't afford to get involved right now. It would just hurt him down the road. I'm trying to back off a bit, but he is

persistent. When I'm with him I can't think straight about it."

"Why would you hurt him? You aren't still married are you?"

"No, I'm definitely a widow. Part of it I told you this morning. My marriage was short, but terribly unhappy. I don't want to chance that again. Something about me, made him want to hurt me. He wasn't like that when we were dating or first married either."

Jane didn't know what to say. She could tell that Laura was really struggling with this. "I think you should just be honest with David and tell him you're not ready for a serious relationship. He will understand; he's a great man." The conversation turned to other things but Jane made a mental note to talk to David herself.

They lost track of time and before they knew it Jim was home. "Well our shoppers are back? Did you have a good day?"

Jane rose and gave him a hug and kiss. "Yes, it was a great day."

Jim hugged her and whispered in her ear, "Did you buy anything?"

Jane laughed and pulled away. "No I let Laura do all the buying. She got some great things for the store."

"Yes it was a profitable trip. Now I have got to get home. I have a lot to do before that stuff arrives." Laura picked up her purse and started out.

"Oh, I thought David was taking you to dinner tonight?" Jim smiled at her. "Don't tell me you've had a lover's quarrel already?"

Laura blushed. "No, we haven't had a quarrel, and we certainly aren't lovers. I'm dining alone tonight, thank you." Laura turned and stormed out.

## Chapter Seven

Jim turned to Jane after she left, "What happened here? I sure didn't mean to offend her."

"I know, let me fix you a drink and I'll explain." Jane left to fix Jim a drink while he changed clothes. A half hour later Jane finished telling him what she had learned about Laura that day.

"So, let me understand this. She was abused by her husband and thinks it is something in her, so she wants nothing to do with David, but admits she is falling in love with him?" Jim looked at Jane

"In a nutshell yes. She asked if you were abusing me, because of the lecture the other night and the way you patted my bottom this morning. I told her about our relationship and she almost wrecked the car. I think she finally understood the difference though. I didn't have the nerve to tell her David is of the same mindset."

"I'm of what mindset? Caught you talking about me again." David walked into the room grinning. "Since I was turned down for dinner, thought I'd mooch off you guys."

Jane blushed and jumped up. "I have to get dinner started, you talk to Jim."

David looked puzzled at how flustered his cousin was. "Okay Jim, spill it, what's going on?"

Jim cleared his throat. "I think you better get a beer first. Then we need to have a talk."



David grabbed a beer out of the refrigerator and joined Jim on the deck. "Okay, let's hear it, what's going on?"

"Apparently Laura asked Jane today if I was abusing her. She felt uncomfortable with my speech the other night and this morning a reminder pat to Jane's bottom before they left. Jane explained about our relationship and included the fact that she gets spanked."

David smiled. "Okay, so go on."

"I guess Laura was shocked and couldn't even drive. Pulled over to the side of the road. Her husband abused her, used to beat her up all the time. She finally calmed down and agreed that Jane wasn't being abused. However, when they got back here and Jane questioned her about you, she got upset again. Said something about you would only be hurt and she had to back away."

David was now frowning. "I got that idea the other night. But why on earth is she worried about me being hurt? Is she not a widow, still married?"

"Jane asked her that. She is definitely a widow, was only married for about two years. He has been dead almost a year. Laura wouldn't say why. Said she was half in love with you and can't think straight around you, so has to back away. I picked that brilliant time to come home and made things worse."

"What did you do?" David was upset and puzzled at this whole conversation.

"I said something about her having dinner with you. She said she wasn't and I asked her if you had a lover's quarrel. She got very upset and said you weren't lovers, hadn't quarreled and she was dining alone. Then stormed out." Jim shook his head. "Jane and I were pretty shocked."

Jane had rejoined them by now. "I'm sorry David, I didn't mean to upset her, but something is bothering her or even scaring her. I get the feeling

she is running from something, but I don't know what."

David stood and walked to the edge of the deck. "I intend to find out. Laura Darby's isn't getting away from me. I don't know how it happened so fast, but I love her and don't intend to let her push me away. If she keeps this up, she may find out first hand what a spanking is."

Laura was busy the next two days with the merchandise she had ordered and the final details before she opened on Saturday. With her opening day so close she was getting very nervous. The paper had run ads on the Grand Opening of Darby's Décor and some people had even stopped her on the street and said they couldn't wait to see it. Laura had been so busy she hadn't even thought about David until he appeared in the door at noon on Friday. She had intended to call him and tell him she wasn't going out with him that night and forgot.

When she turned around and saw him standing there, she jumped a foot. "David Johnson, you scared me! What are you doing here?"

"Is that anyway to greet the sheriff of this town?" David grabbed her and pulled her into a tight hug, then claimed her lips with his.

Laura was weak when he released her. "How did you get in?"

"I think we need to talk about some basic safety issues. Like closing and locking doors? Your back door was open and I walked in, just like anyone else could have. Laura, you have to be more careful." David had that stern look he had, when he caught her standing on the shelf

"David, this town is safe, you told me so yourself, you can climb down off your bandwagon anytime now. I told you before I am an adult and can take care of myself." Laura turned around and went into her office.

David was left standing there speechless. His first urge was to take her over his knee and paddle

the sass out of her and some sense in. That however, wasn't an option at this time. Instead he followed her into the office. "Young Lady, you and I are going to have a talk. David shut the door and sat down across the desk from her.

"David, I have work to do. In fact I'm so busy with getting ready for the opening tomorrow that I can't go out tonight. I think it will be a while before I have time to date anyone. I'm sorry I just don't have any feelings for you. It would be best if you just left now." Laura was trying to be as calm as she could and not give away her true feelings.

David just looked at her and got up. Instead of leaving he pulled her to her feet and wrapped his arms around her and kissed her more passionately than he ever had before. He could feel her tense then give in and respond. She was trembling when he finally stopped.

"Just what I thought. Laura Darby you are lying through your teeth. That kiss was not one from someone who has 'no feelings for me'. Now, we are going to dinner tonight and talk about a few things. I'll pick you up early, so be ready by five."

"David, I...I .." Laura was hushed by another crushing kiss.

"Yes, you are and that's the end of this discussion for now. Be ready!" David hugged her again and left.

Laura slumped in her chair. "How did I let myself get so involved?"

By five o'clock she had the shop finished and locked up and was ready and waiting for David. He rang the bell precisely at five. "Good evening!" He reached for her and kissed her. "All ready?"

"Yes, where are we going?" Laura grabbed her purse and jacket.

"For starters we are going to my place and talk. Then I'll surprise you." David held the door for her.

She was so flustered that she was almost to the car when David called to her. He was still standing

on the porch. "Haven't you forgotten something?" He was pointing to the door.

"Oh dear I forgot to lock it." Laura went back and locked it.

David said nothing until they were in the car. "Laura, you have got to start paying attention to details, like locking doors."

"I know, I'm sorry, you have me rattled." Laura looked down.

"If I find it unlocked again, you will be more than rattled I promise you." Once again David had that tone in his voice. Laura wasn't sure why, but when she heard it her stomach filled with butterflies.

David unlocked his door and ushered Laura in. "Have a seat and I'll get us some wine." Laura nervously sat down on the coach. She had no idea why she was nervous, except that David was acting very strange ever since noon.

"Here you go." David handed Laura a glass and sat down next to her. "Now, I am going to have a few things to say, and I want you to listen without interrupting me. Then you will have your chance, Okay?"

Laura nodded her head in agreement, feeling like a naughty child about to get a lecture.

"First thing you need to know, is that I love you." David stopped and watched her face.

Laura started to say something. "Nope, no comments yet. I know we haven't known each other long, but that's the way it is. I never intended to fall in love with anyone, but it happened. I had a long talk with Jane and Jim the other night after you, shall I say 'stormed' out of their house. Jane told me what she said when you asked if she was being abused. I also know about your past abuse. If that is why you are pushing me away, you must know I would never in a million years abuse anyone. I have seen too many cases of it, and I love locking up the scum that perpetrate it." David took a breath.

"But, I also do believe that a good spanking helps settle lots of issues and is not abusive. You have come very close before and twice today to being put over my knee and paddled. It may still happen yet. That being said, I am not going to stay away from you, we are going to have a relationship and if I have anything to say about it, and I will, we are getting married. Now, I want some answers from you." David sipped his wine and waited for Laura to talk.

Laura started to say something but tears sprang to her eyes instead. Before she could speak she was wrapped in David's arms crying her heart out. All the pent up bitterness and frustration from the past year seemed to be coming out now. Finally when she settled down David looked into her eyes. "Laura, what is it? I want to help you, but you must tell me."

"I....I don't know how." Laura jumped up and ran to the bathroom.

David was sitting patiently waiting when she returned. "Laura, you can tell me, one word at a time, or I can put you over my knee and spank it out of you. And don't for one minute think I won't."

"You'll hate me and never want anything to do with me. Let's just leave it here. I'm sorry David, I really am." Laura started crying again.

"All right I warned you and now we'll do it my way." David grabbed her and before she could even think she was across his knee and her skirt up over her back.

"NO, NO David, NO, Please, you can't do this!" Laura was desperately trying to get away, but David held her firmly in place.

"Yes I can young lady and you will learn right now when I say something I mean it." David pulled her panties down and began smacking her from cheek to cheek. He said nothing and let Laura yell and protest until she started crying hard. Stopping for a minute he asked her. "Do you love me?"

When she didn't answer immediately, he proceeded to give her ten more hard spansks, then paused. "Are you ready to talk and answer my questions?"

"Yeeeeesss, please stop, it hurts. I do love you David." Laura was sobbing so hard David could barely understand her. He immediately stopped and pulled her into his arms.

"Shhhh, it's over." David gently rubbed her back and kissed her forehead until she calmed down. "Now, are you ready to talk like an adult?"

"Yes." Laura sniffed. "David, I do love you, really, but I'm so afraid of hurting you."

"STOP IT! Right now. You love me and I love you, there isn't anything that can hurt that, except your not trusting me. I want to know what it is, before I get the hairbrush and continue our talk that way."

"I was married for two years to a man I fell madly in love with right after I graduated college. I thought it would be for life. He started beating me and putting me down within 6 months. I couldn't do anything to please him. He started having affairs, said I was so poor sexually he couldn't stand it." Laura took a sip of wine and a deep breath.

"David, it was horrid. I don't want that to happen again. Maybe he was right."

"Go on, you said you're a widow what happened?" David held her tighter.

"I finally couldn't stand it anymore and told him I was leaving. He said the only way I was leaving was dead. He attacked me and beat me something awful. I tried to run out the door and he grabbed me by the neck. I thought he was going to kill me. We were in the kitchen and I reached behind me and grabbed a knife. He saw it and let go to grab it. As he lunged I raised it up and it went into his heart. He died instantly." Laura was shaking and crying when she finished. "So now you know. I'm a murderer and not fit to have a life with you or

anyone else. I spent nine months in jail, so I have a record."

"Laura, listen to me. You are not a murderer. You're here free, there are no warrants for your arrest, you do not have a record, and you aren't a murderer. You acted in self defense." David held and rocked her till she calmed down again.

"You spent nine months in jail waiting to come to trial for something you didn't do? Why couldn't you get bail?"

"There was no bail. I had to wait it out." Laura was shaking again.

"Okay, now why are you afraid of the phone ringing? What or who are you running from?"

## Chapter Eight

"David there's more." Laura took a deep breath and told him about Frank's family and the threats. They meant what they said. I changed my name back to my maiden name and left town without anyone knowing. My sister told me last week they are trying to find me. If they do, David everyone will know and I'll have no friends or business. It would be bad for you too."

David pulled her tight into his arms and kissed her hard. "I'm so sorry, sweetie, but you will never have to worry about them again." David kept kissing her till she felt she would melt.

Finally David stopped. "If they do find you, it won't matter to anyone in this town. They know you for you, and would never hold something against you, that you were acquitted of. Now go wash your face and I'll take you to my favorite little restaurant."

While she was in the bathroom David quickly dimmed the lights in the dining room and lit the candles. He had set the table earlier and closed the door so Laura wouldn't see it.

Ready to warm in the oven was the same chicken with cherry sauce they had the first night together. He had ordered a complete meal from he restaurant. There were even appetizers.

By the time Laura returned the wine glasses had been refilled and a plate of appetizers on the table.



"What's this? I thought you said we were going out to your favorite restaurant?"

David chuckled. "We are, it's right here. Sit and join me."

Gingerly she sat down and David laughed again. "I see that I haven't lost my touch."

Laura frowned at him. "I must say that was a first for me. Hopefully the last too."

"If you behave it will be. Somehow I don't think so though." David pulled her into his arms and held her. "Just remember, I love you and would never harm you, ever."

The dinner was delicious and the evening passed too quickly for either of them. David dropped her off at her door and kissed her. "I'll be over tomorrow morning to provide some moral support. See you then."

Laura locked up and dropped into bed exhausted. Her emotions were drained and she was asleep before she had time to even think.

David was at Laura's door before she was even finished with breakfast. She had made some scones and muffins for the opening. David kissed her and snatched one.

Laura smiled and poured him some coffee. "Sit and enjoy it, we have a while yet before the opening. I'm so nervous."

"Don't be, it will be fine. I think the muffins and scones and coffee is a great idea though. People will love them." David took another and sat back and enjoyed it.

"They might, if there are any left!" Laura laughed and moved them out of his reach.

When they were finished David carried the muffins and coffee pot over to the store. Laura checked the cash register and phone lines to make sure everything was in order. Promptly at 10:00 she turned the closed sign to open and unlocked the door.

"Oh David, what if no one comes?" Laura was really anxious.

"They'll come, settle down!"

Soon the store was crowded with people, vacationers and locals as well. They were busy all day long. Finally at 5:00 p.m. when she flipped the sign and locked the door, she didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

"Congratulations, that was a great day!" David twirled her off the ground in a big hug. "What do you have to do now?"

"Settle the drawer and lock the money away in the safe." David watched as she deftly balanced the cash and went with her to her office as she locked it in the safe. As she was doing so he noticed the trunk sitting in the corner.

"What's that? How come you don't have it in the store, I would think it would be a good seller."

Laura blushed slightly. "Oh, I'm holding that for someone. I put it here to enjoy until then."

"Okay, but I hope they get it soon, it's a nice piece." What David didn't say was that he knew she was hiding something, and if he was right it involved his dear cousin, who had wanted a trunk for ages.

The next few weeks were spent getting into the routine of the store and spending evenings with David. Laura wasn't quite sure why he had made no attempt to progress their relationship any further. Since their talk that night, she had given up holding back and was more than ready for more.

Finally one night after they had been kissing for a while David pulled back and looked at her. "Laura, I want you more than anything, but I promised not to rush you. How are you feeling?"

"Oh David, I want you too, I have been waiting for you." Laura sighed and snuggled into his chest. "I was afraid to say anything, I didn't want you to think bad of me."

David without saying a word flipped her over and quickly bared her. "What did I tell you about hiding things from me, young lady?"

"No, David, I wasn't hiding." Laura squirmed remembering how hard he could spank.

"Yes, you did." David proceeded to warm her cheeks to a nice rosy glow. He wasn't spanking hard at all, and started rubbing in between.

Laura was alternating between ouches and sighs. David knew exactly what he was doing. After a few more spanks he pushed her further over and alternated between spanking and rubbing his hand between her thighs. She was more than ready for him.

"Laura, I love you and I'm not waiting anymore." David picked her up and carried her into the bedroom. He took his time disrobing her and kissing her everywhere. Laura thought she would die before he finished. Then he undressed himself.

David lowered himself on the bed next to her, he continued with his kissing and nibbling. He caught a nipple in his mouth and sucked till it was hard and then moved to the other. Slowly he worked his way down her body. Laura was moaning and without waiting any longer David covered her with his body and plunged in to her soft wetness.

Laura moved in time to David's thrusts, she had never been made love to like this before. With a loud moan she began to climax and David exploded with her. They lay wrapped in each other's arms for a long time just resting.

Laura moved first and ran her hands through the hair on David's chest then down his body to his manhood. Slowly she massaged until it once again sprang to life in her hand. This time she led the lovemaking and slowly and methodically they brought each other to climax again. "David, I love you so much, I wish we had done this so much sooner."

"Laura, don't ever believe that you aren't a wonderful sexy woman. You are all that any man could ever want." David pulled her close and they slept cuddled next to each other until morning.

The smell of coffee from the kitchen woke Laura. David wasn't in bed. She smiled and stretched in bed, relishing the memories of the night before. "Time to get up sleepy head, your store opens in one hour and I have to get to work." David pulled her up and kissed her deeply. "Hit the shower, and breakfast will be ready when you're out." He swatted her bottom and turned her to the bathroom.

While they were eating breakfast David studied Laura. "You are magnificent. Let's get married soon. I don't want any fuss, just you."

"Are you serious?" Laura's mouth was hanging open. He took her so by surprise.

"Yep, why wait? How soon can you be ready?"

Laura was still in a state of shock. "I guess we could do it in a month. It will give me time to tell my sister, she may want to come, and find a dress and get the shop a bit settled. Oh the shop! How can I close it this soon?"

David pulled her onto his lap. "We can get married and take our honeymoon later in the off season. A month it is. I'll call Father Dan and get the date. I'll tell Jane and Jim also. But now I have to go to work and so do you."

Laura couldn't resist calling Betsy as soon as she could after the store opened. Betsy was ecstatic. "Laura, I'm so happy for you. Are you sure he's okay? I would hate to see you hurt so again."

"Betsy, he is fine, he knows all about what happened and I know his family. They are nothing like the Taylor's at all. He's just a small town man and I love it here." Laura was smiling as she told Betsy all about him.

"Do you think you can come?" Laura really would like her to be there.

"I'll have to talk to Ed, but I think it might not be possible. He has a big job coming up and he might not be able to break away. But we will be there for a visit as soon as we can. I can't wait to meet him."

A customer came in so Laura had to hang up. The next call she made was to Jane. "Laura, David just left here. I am so excited and happy for you! This is wonderful news, don't you worry about a reception at all. I will handle the whole thing. When do you want to go shopping for a dress? Can I go with you?" Jane was talking a mile a minute.

"Are you free for lunch today? Then we can talk and make some plans." Laura was getting more excited all the time.

"Sure, I'll pick you up at noon." Jane hung up and went to see Jim. "I just talked to Laura, and she'll let me do the reception. David wants something small, but I think we need to invite some close friends. What do you think about having it at the club?"

Jim laughed. "Jane, this is their wedding, don't go overboard. Do what David and Laura say."

"But..."

"No buts young lady, understand?" Jim gave Jane the look she knew only too well.

"Sigh, all right, I'll do what they say." Jane left knowing she could talk Laura into more than David said.

At lunch Jane was still so excited she was talking a mile a minute. Laura had to laugh at her. "Calm down, you're more excited than I am."

"Oh I know, David said he just wants a very small affair but don't you think some of his oldest friends should be invited?" Jane almost held her breath waiting for a response.

"Jane, I haven't had a chance to even talk about that with him, but yes I think we should invite some of his friends. I'll talk to him this evening. He's coming over for dinner."

Jane was thoughtful as they drove back to the shop. "How about I pick up the trunk now. I'll pay you in cash so there's no trail. I'll tell Jim I found it at a garage sale."

"Sure thing, I have it in the storeroom so no one can see it." Laura totally forgot about David commenting on it.

As they were finishing putting the trunk in the car, Jane had another brilliant idea. "Why don't you and David come for dinner tomorrow night and we can talk about wedding plans?"

"Sounds good to me, I'll ask him, but I'm sure he wouldn't mind." Laura waved goodbye and went back into the store.

David was fine with Jane's plans for the reception and dinner the next night. "If I say no, I'll have two women hounding me. But we do want to keep it simple, right?"

Laura hugged him. "Of course."

"I called Father Dan today and we have an appointment to see him after mass on Sunday. You may want to post a delayed opening for then."

They were cuddling on the couch after dinner, when David suddenly got serious. "Laura, you do understand how our marriage will be don't you?"

Laura started to panic. "Yes, I thought so. What do you mean?"

David hugged her tight. "Stop shaking. I told you I would never abuse you. I meant that I would be the Head of the House. Final decisions will be mine, just like with Jane and Jim. If you lie to me or disobey me, you will find yourself getting spanked."

Laura relaxed. "Yes, I understand that, but just so you know, I rather liked that one last night, especially how it ended."

David got an evil smile on his face. "You did, did you? Spankings for misbehavior won't be as nice as last night. However, we can arrange for those spankings anytime. Like now." David grabbed her

and threw her over his shoulder and carried her into the bedroom.

Laura squealed and pretended to try and get away but soon was enjoying it every bit as much as the night before.

As soon as the store closed the next day Laura hurried to get ready for dinner at Jane's. David said he would be over as soon as he finished the day. Laura wasn't sure when that was exactly, so she wanted to be ready.

She was out of the shower and getting dressed by 5:30 when the doorbell rang. Laura threw on a robe and smiled when she saw David standing there. "Hi, I wasn't sure when to expect you. I'm not quite ready yet."

David pulled her close. "Hmmm, you smell so good, I could just eat you up."

Laura blushed at the memories of last night. "I'll hurry and finish dressing." David had other ideas though. Before she knew it her robe was at her feet and David was indeed eating her up with small nibbles everywhere. Laura was in heaven but worried about the time. "David! We'll be late."

"No we won't we have plenty of time." David was right and a half hour later they were both in the shower together.

David was dressed first and watched Laura dressing for a few minutes. "I'll go pour us a drink, and let you finish in peace."

Five minutes later Laura joined David in the living room. "What time do we have to be there?"

"I told Jane 7:30 cause I wanted some time alone with you first. There's something I want to do before we go."

Laura giggled. "Didn't we already do that?"

"That's not what I meant, this is something else." David fished in his jacket pocket and pulled out a small-carved wooden box. To Laura's experienced eye she knew it was very old. Her

breath was taken away when he opened it and took out a beautiful ruby and diamond ring.

"I want you to have this as your engagement ring. It has been in the family for years. It first belonged to my great-grandmother's."

"Oh David! It is gorgeous." Laura had tears in her eyes when he slipped it on her finger."

"Not as gorgeous as you are." David claimed her lips with his for a deep kiss.

"I don't know how you will feel about the next thing, but I don't want to be away from you anymore. I think for the few weeks remaining until we are legal, I should be here with you. We can decide what to do with my place anytime." David was a bit nervous waiting for her reaction.

"I agree, I don't want you to be anywhere but here either."

David laughed. "Good, then I'll go get the suitcase I packed and bring it in."

As soon as he was finished hanging up his uniforms and other clothes they were ready to leave. Laura giggled. "I'll make room in the drawers for your things tomorrow."

Jane was still in a state of excitement when they got to her house. She hugged Laura and David. "Oh, I am so happy for both of you! This is just wonderful!"

David picked her up and twirled her around. "Okay, cuz, just settle down. I know you have been waiting your entire life to see me settle down, and now you got your wish."

Jim came out and laughed at the scene in front of him. "I don't think anyone is going to calm her down tonight. He hugged Laura warmly. "Welcome to the family!"

Laura felt so at ease and special with these people, she couldn't help beaming. Jim took over. "Jane why don't you and Laura work on the appetizers and David and I will spend some time alone together."



Jane laughed, "Oh the male bonding thing huh? Okay, but we aren't leaving you alone long." Jane and Laura went to the kitchen while Jim and David grabbed a beer and went to the family room.

The first thing David noticed when he sat down, was the beautiful trunk now in place as a coffee table. "Wow, this is neat! Where did you get it? Was this the one Laura was holding for you?"

"No, Jane picked it up today at some garage sale for \$50. It looks to be a real treasure."

## Chapter Nine

David examined it more closely. He was positive this was the one from Laura's office. If so it meant that the two of them had been up to something and Laura had lied to him about it. "Jim, I don't want to start trouble but Laura had one of these in her office exactly like this, said she was holding it for someone. I think we are being had here."

Jim was concerned. "I hope not. Jane knows the budget. And swears she hasn't purchased anything since I stopped her."

"I have to know. I'm going back and check it out. I'll say I have a call. I'll be back in 20 minutes. Stall for me." David got up and peeked in the kitchen.

"Sorry gals, I got a call. I have to run into town for a minute I'll be back in twenty minutes."

"Oh David, be careful!" Laura had a scared look on her face.

David hugged and kissed her. "This is nothing, just a paper thing. I'll be back right away."

David drove as fast as he could. He unlocked the door to the shop and turned on the office lights. As he expected the trunk was gone. He then looked through her records for the day. There it was as clear as could be. 'Sale of one trunk to Jane Douglas, cash \$275.00.' David closed the ledger and turned off the lights and relocked the store and

headed back to Jane and Jim's, with a determined look on his face.

Laura greeted him warmly. "Is everything okay, you look upset?"

David decided to give her one last chance. "Everything's fine. Did you see the new trunk Jane has?"

"Oh yes, she got that at a garage sale for \$50.00 isn't it nice? I would say it's worth a lot more."

"Yes, I think about \$225.00 more." David took Laura's hand and they joined Jane and Jim in the family room.

No more was said about the trunk, but Laura wondered about his comment. They discussed wedding plans, and agreed on a reception for just close friends. David really wanted only the four of them, but agreed others would be hurt. It was decided that Jane and Jim would stand up for them, since Laura's sister couldn't come. After dinner Jane and Laura were cleaning up while the men relaxed in the family room.

Jim looked at David, "Okay, you've had that look all night, what did you find out?"

"I found out that the trunk I saw is no longer in the store and there is a record of a cash transaction to Jane Douglas for \$275.00 for one trunk. I think the garage sale was in Darby's Décor, and they are both lying to us."

Jim's face darkened immediately. "I think it's time we get to the bottom of this and I do mean the bottom. Laura is your responsibility, but I know one young lady who won't sit well for a few days."

"Jane, come here now. I need to talk to you!" Jim bellowed towards the kitchen.

Jane and Laura looked at each other. Jane quickly whispered to Laura, "You didn't tell David about the trunk did you?"

"No! Oh Jane, I forgot he saw it at the opening, but I didn't think he would remember. I hope not."

You go, and I'll finish up here." Laura started cleaning up the pans.

Jane entered the family room to see a thunderous look on Jim's face. "What's wrong Honey?"

"I'll tell you what's wrong. I think you have disobeyed and lied to me. This trunk didn't come from a garage sale, it was purchased a while ago by Laura and hidden till you paid cash for it, far more than \$50.00. What is the truth Jane?"

Jane crumbled. "Oh Jim, I saw it and wanted it so bad. It wouldn't have been there later. I'm sorry, but it is perfect in here."

At this point David left the room and found Laura in the kitchen. Standing over her glaring down, he took the towel from her hand. "Young lady, you and I need to have a talk, about a certain trunk. One you helped Jane buy. Helped her disobey and lied to me about. What did I tell you just tonight about that?" David pulled Laura to him and tilted her chin to make her look at him.

"Uh David, that was before I even really knew you. She wanted it and what harm is there? She saved the money." Laura knew David was really upset with her.

"The HARM? The HARM? You don't consider lying to me harmful? I asked you tonight where that trunk came from, said it looked like the one in your office. You said no, it was a garage sale find. You know what Laura? The trunk in your office is gone and you recorded a cash transaction to Jane for that trunk, far more than \$50.00. That is the harm!" David swatted her bottom hard.

"We are going home now, and you are unfortunately going to feel a real punishment spanking. I will NOT tolerate lies and deceit." David took her by the hand, and got her jacket and purse. They paused just long enough in the family room to see Jim scolding Jane.

"I'm sorry Jim, that Laura was part of this. I'll talk to you tomorrow." David pulled Laura out the door and to the car.

He said little on the way home. Laura was upset and starting to get a bit angry. "David, this isn't fair! You are mad at me for something that happened before we had any relationship. I was just helping a friend. So you are wrong!"

David turned and looked at her, but said nothing; they were pulling into her drive as she spoke. David parked the car and opened the door for Laura and took her arm and helped her out. "I want you to go get ready for bed. I will be in as soon as you are finished."

"David, you are being stupid! Now get off of it and let's talk. This is ridiculous. I am an adult, and can take care of myself." Laura stood hands on hips defying him.

David got a strange smile on his face. "Oh really?" Without another word, he picked her up and threw her over his shoulder and took her to the bedroom. He put her down and proceeded to undress her and scold the entire time. When he had her naked he pulled her over his lap and spanked her as hard as he could till she was squealing. "Now, you take a shower, and I want to see you with your nose in the corner holding your hairbrush when you are done. Then we will discuss honesty young lady."

Laura hurried to the bathroom. While she was in the shower, David fixed a drink and sat and waited in the living room. He saw her scurry into the bedroom and gave her 10 minutes before he went in. Pleased to see her in the corner, David sat on the bed. "Laura, come here!"

Laura turned and walked slowly to him. "I'm sorry David, I didn't mean to disobey you, I was just helping Jane."

David pulled her close and set her on his knee. "I know you were. However, you lied to me tonight.

You knew Jane was disobeying Jim. I will take into consideration that at the time you didn't know any better, but what I am punishing you for is the lie to me. Nothing more." David stood her up and put her over his knee. Quickly he lifted her nightgown exposing her bottom. He clamped her legs between his and started spanking hard with his hand.

"Laura, I will not tolerate lying from you ever. You may make a mistake and that's fine, but lying to me will never be acceptable. I don't like doing this, but you must understand the seriousness of lying." David stopped spanking and picked up the hairbrush.

Laura's bottom was already a deep pink and David raised the brush and brought it down hard on one cheek then the other. The crack of the paddle was interspersed with sobs and pleas from Laura. "I'll never lie to you again, oh please David, it hurts, I can't stand it."

When she quit struggling and was sobbing limply over her lap, David put the brush down and rubbed her hot sore bottom. It was dark and blotched from the ovals of the brush. She would feel this spanking for a few days.

"Sshhh, it's over Laura, and you're forgiven." David pulled her into his arms. Laura snuggled into his shoulder and cried like he had never heard her cry before.

"I'm soooooorry. Please don't leave me. I'm soooooorry." Laura was sobbing harder.

David held her tight and rocked her. "Laura, I love you. I would never leave you. I know your sorry and now you are forgiven." He rubbed her back and kissed her head and back gently till she calmed down.

David pulled the covers back and laid her gently on the bed. "Time for sleep." He kissed her gently and covered her.

"Aren't you coming to bed?" Laura sniffled

"Yes love I am. I'm just going to get ready and then I'll be here with you." David hugged and kissed her again and left to get ready for bed himself. Fifteen minutes later he climbed in beside her. She was sleeping but quietly crying in her sleep. David pulled her close and kissed her. "Laura, I love you and you are forgiven, it's over."

Laura sighed and snuggled tight against him. In a sleepy husky voice she replied, "I love you too David. I'll never lie to you again."

The next day, Laura found it very difficult to sit without wincing. Jane called her and related much the same story to her. Jim at first was going to make her return the trunk, but when he realized Laura would be unable to return it he relented. Before she hung up Jane told her. "But, he has all my credit cards, except the company one. I'm shut down till further notice. Nothing will go without his approval. I'm sorry I got you in trouble."

"That's okay Jane, I'm sure in a few days, I'll sit again." Both laughed and hung up

David and Laura fell into a routine in the next few weeks, each working and spending evenings and weekends together. He was able to stop home for lunch most days, and the shop was doing well. Weekend business had increased as the weather improved and more tourists appeared. Laura even had several jobs for decorating in a few of the local's homes and cottages.

Laura and Jane had shopped and found the perfect dresses for the wedding. Jim had even allowed the splurge for the special occasion. Laura was beaming with happiness almost constantly. David was so happy to see the frowns disappear.

Finally it was the day before the wedding. Laura could hardly wait to close the shop. After a lot of talking David and Laura agreed they would close for the weekend and spend two whole days together.

David was already home when Laura came in from the store. "Oh David, I'm so nervous." Laura hugged him hard.

"I am a bit myself, but it will be fine. I think we should make this an early night since we have to be up early tomorrow. Do you have your suitcase packed?"

"Yes, I'm all set. Are you sure I'm not intruding on Jane and Jim?" Laura had accepted Jane's invitation to stay at their house the night before. Jim would pick up David and they would meet at the church.

David pulled Laura to him and kissed her. "Don't be silly. Now, come let's go to dinner and then get you off to Jane's."

Laura woke early the next morning and got up. She was way too excited to think about sleeping any longer. Dressing in her jeans and sweatshirt, she decided to take a walk before Jane and Jim got up. She walked for what seemed like miles and then turned back to return to the house. As she passed a local Bed and Breakfast she noticed a car pull into the driveway, it had California plates. The couple in the car looked familiar and Laura's heart began to pound. Before the urge to run caught her, she calmed down and decided she may have seen them in the shop. After all visitors came from all over and she couldn't remember everyone who had ever been in her shop.

Laura continued on, unaware of the couple watching her, or of the photo they took as she walked by. When she was out of sight the woman turned to the man. "Do you really think that was Laura Taylor? I can't imagine what she would be doing here?"

"If it wasn't her, it was her twin. I think George will be very interested in this picture."



## Chapter Ten

Jim and Jane were both up when Laura returned. Jim looked at Laura quizzically, "Are you okay, you look a bit pale?"

"I'm fine, just nervous, I don't know if I can wait till 3:00 this afternoon." Laura took the coffee he offered and sat on the deck.

Jane called out from the kitchen, "Laura, call David, he called here a bit ago looking for you."

Laura picked up the kitchen phone and dialed. David answered on the first ring. "Where were you? I was worried, when Jane and Jim didn't know where you had gone."

"I couldn't sleep, so I got up and took a walk. I'm sorry I worried you. Are you okay?" Laura's heart was still beating a bit hard.

"I'm fine now. Just called to tell you how much I love you." David gave a big smooch into the phone. Laura laughed. "I love you too. I'll see you at the church, Jane is telling me to hurry off we have to be at the hairdressers. Love you David."

Laura ate her breakfast fast and she and Jane headed out to the hairdressers. They had appointments for hair and nails and facials and makeup. They would be gone till early afternoon. Jim would be dressing with David and they would all meet at the church.

By the time they were dressed and at the church Laura was so nervous she felt she just might

explode. She had never been this nervous in her life, not even waiting for the verdict in her trial to be read. All of that left her though as she walked down the aisle to David standing at the altar.

David took her arm and smiled at her as they turned to Father Dan. He read the vows and smiled at the old fashioned one David had requested regarding obedience. This was very rare these days and he was pleased that Laura had readily agreed to it. Finally he pronounced them husband and wife.

David turned and gathered Laura into a kiss that had her smoldering. "I love you Laura, he whispered to her when he finally broke away."

"I love you too David, so much." Laura was almost crying she was so happy.

The reception at the club was perfect. They had a small room overlooking the golf course and the 30 people attending were all of David and Jane's oldest and dearest friends. Laura felt completely accepted and welcomed. It was almost nine when they left the club.

Laura snuggled against him in the car. "So where are we staying?"

David hugged her close for a minute. "It's a surprise, but it isn't too far away."

They rode for about five minutes and David pulled into a driveway. It was a gorgeous B&B overlooking the lake. Laura was out of the car before David could open the door for her. "Oh David, this is beautiful! I haven't had anytime to explore this side of the peninsula."

David caught up with her and pulled her tight against him. "Well Mrs. Johnson, shall we check in?"

Laura had to laugh. "Oh that sounds so nice. Yes Mr. Johnson, let's check in. Then we can go exploring."

"I think not. That will wait until tomorrow. I have something else in mind for now." David picked her up and carried her up to the door. He set her on her feet and rang the bell.

The proprietor answered and smiling ushered them in. "The newlyweds! Congratulations, your room is ready. Breakfast is between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. tomorrow. If you need anything just let me know." She handed the keys to David and showed them the way to the stairs.

When they reached the door David stopped. "Close your eyes." When Laura had her eyes closed he opened the door, then picked her up and carried her into the room. He set her down, "Open your eyes!"

Laura opened her eyes and gasped. It was the most perfect suite she had ever seen. They were in a living room and a fire was burning in the fireplace. The furniture was comfy and accented with antiques. The bedroom had an old four-poster bed, with a step to get up to it. It was covered in quilts and pillows. Antiques were everywhere. "Oh David, this is wonderful! I never knew a place like this existed." Laura ran to the window and looked out. They had a perfect view of the lake.

David smiled. "I'm glad you like my surprise. Now there is champagne in a bucket in the bathroom and some flutes. You can pour that, while I get our bags."

The rest of the weekend was perfect. The breakfasts were delicious and all the other guests congratulated them. They walked hand in hand on the beach and explored a few lighthouses. There were many on the peninsula and Laura found out they were a favorite of David's. Laura was sad to leave Sunday afternoon.

"We can come back anytime we want. There are lots of places I want to show you yet, Mrs. Johnson, so no pouting!" David chuckled at her pout.

Monday morning they were up and back to their normal routine. The season was in full swing and Laura was busy every day. She had finished one client's home and that was bringing in a lot of other business as well.

A month had passed and Laura had almost forgotten all the bad times, until one day, she was sweeping the walk in front of the door before she opened. She looked up just in time to see a car go by with George Taylor in it. There was no doubt in her mind that was who it was. She ran into the store and tried to call David.

Pete answered the phone. "Sorry Laura, he just left on an errand. I'll have him call as soon as he comes back."

Laura hung up in a panic. "What can I do? I have customers due I have to open up."

The first customer was at the door, and Laura welcomed her in. They spent the next hour reviewing catalogs and looking at samples. "I'll draw up a proposal Mrs. Jennings, and call and make an appointment to bring it to you and look at the house."

After Peter had hung up with Laura a stranger approached the desk. "Yes Sir, can I help you?"

George Taylor but on his best smile and reached out his hand, "I hope so. My name is George Taylor and I'm looking for a relative of mine. I heard from friends that they thought she was here. We've lost touch. I have a picture of her here, her first name is Laura, but I don't know what last name she may be using."

George took the picture of Laura that his friend gave him and showed it to Pete. "Sure, I know her. That's Laura Darby, well Johnson now. She owns Darby's Décor on Main Street." Pete handed the picture back.

George thanked him and turned to go. Stopping in the middle of the door he turned back. "How much do you know about her? This seems to be a nice town; I'd hate to see people hurt. Did you say she was Johnson now? Did she get married?"

Pete was now a bit suspicious. "Yes she did about a month ago."

George shook his head sadly. "That's too bad. I hope her husband watches himself closely. She murdered her last husband in cold blood."

Pete looked up shocked. Something definitely wasn't right here. "I think maybe you should come back and talk to the Chief. He should be back in an hour."

"Thank you, I'll do just that." George smiled and left.

As soon as he was gone he tried to raise David on the radio. It took several tries before he got him. "Hi Pete, what's up?"

David's face muscles tightened as he listened to Pete. "How long ago was this?"

"About 30 minutes ago. Laura called right before he came in. She sounded a bit upset."

"Thanks Pete. If he comes back hold him, I'm going to check on Laura. I'm about 30 minutes away."

George left the police station and went to the office of Fish Creek Flash, the local newspaper. Since it was a small town newspaper there were only three people in the office. "May I see the editor please?" George once more flashed his best smile.

A tall thin man greeted George, "Hi, I'm Ben Gertsen, the Editor here, can I help you?"

"Yes, can we go somewhere private?" George looked around the office.

"We can use my office, this way please." Ben showed George into his office. After he sat down he looked at him. "What can I do for you?"

George told him who he was and why he was there, the whole story of Laura killing his brother. When he finished, he looked at Ben. "So that's it in a nutshell, I think the town should know and especially her new husband what type of person they are dealing with. She murdered him in cold blood for his money."

Ben Gertsen had known David since he was born, something wasn't right here. "Sir, I assume she was acquitted in a trial?"

"Well yes, but they didn't listen to the truth. She lied about my brother and they believed her. She is a murderer."

"Sir, I can't print any of this, it is slanderous. You should also know that her new husband is David Johnson who happens to be the Chief of Police here. I have known David since he was born. He would have checked out her background thoroughly the day she arrived here. This town happens to trust him implicitly and further more we like Laura. I suggest you go home and leave them be. Good day Sir!" Ben rose from his desk and escorted George out.

George was in a thunderous mood as he pulled up in from of Darby's Décor. There were no customers in the store and he could clearly see Laura working at one of the counters. He pushed open the door hard and slammed it shut. He locked it and turned the closed sign.

Laura looked up and turned pale. "GET OUT! NOW!"

George advanced on her. "I don't intend to get out. You thought you could hide, I told you there was no way. I'd find you and haunt you till you died. What is this place?" George looked around the shop. " You spent my brothers's money on this crap?"

He picked up a tea set and dropped it to the floor smashing it.

Laura was scared. She recognized that mood from Frank. His brother was no different. She tried to get from behind the counter and into her office, but George grabbed her. "Oh no you aren't getting away from me. I have some debts to pay for my brother." He slapped her so hard she fell on the floor. He then smashed several pieces of crystal

before he pulled her up and started slapping her again.

Laura was screaming and trying to fight back. "Stop it, you're nuts! People are going to hear and call the police. Just leave!"

"No, I'm not going to leave until you pay a lot more. Too bad your new hubby is out on business isn't it. By the time he gets back, I'll be long gone." George raised his hand to strike her again, only to be stopped by one furious Chief of Police. Before George knew what hit him David had grabbed him and had him on the ground and handcuffed. "Don't move!"

Laura was huddled on the ground sobbing. David picked her up and carried her over to the house. "It's okay, shhhh, I'm here." Laura was still sobbing when David picked up the phone and called Pete. "I need an ambulance and help here."

"No David, I don't want to go to the hospital, please, please!" Laura was clinging to him with the most terrified look on her face he had ever seen.

"Sweetie, you need to be checked over. I'll be with you." David held her and she was calming down when the paramedics and Pete arrived with another deputy.

"Laura, I will be right back, I need to show them where George Taylor is." David left and the paramedics started checking Laura over.

David walked with Pete and the other deputy to the store. Pete whistled when he saw the mess. "Man what happened?"

George was still on the floor. David roughly pulled him to his feet. "Arrest him for criminal trespass, damage to property and assault and battery. Be sure you read him his rights." Pete started walking him out while repeating his rights.

"I have to stay here with Laura, I'll check with you later." David hurried back to the house.

The paramedics were almost finished. "She isn't badly hurt, nothing is broken, but she is going to be

pretty bruised. I would check with the doctor, but I don't think she needs to be transported."

Laura breathed a huge sigh of relief and David thanked them. He sat and pulled Laura to him. "I'm sorry Laura, I'm so sorry he hurt you."

"I saw him come into town. I tried to call you." Laura started sobbing again.

"I know, Pete told me. He was at the police station too. I don't know where else he has been, but he blew it this time. He won't be bothering you anymore." David held and cuddled Laura, kissing her on the forehead till she was a bit calmer.

"I'm going to call the Doctor and have you checked out." David left her and went to the phone.

"NO, David, NO, I'm fine, I don't want to see a doctor, Please." Laura jumped up and tried to take the phone from him.

"Young Lady, you are seeing the doctor, now what is this nonsense about?" David set the phone down and held Laura to him.

"I don't like doctors. In jail they were so mean, I don't ever want to see one again." Laura was pleading with David.

"Laura, that is nonsense, and you are seeing one. Doc Adams is as gentle and nice as can be. I'm calling him." David held Laura with one arm and dialed the phone with the other.

David explained what had happened to the nurse. "Thanks, we'll be right over."

"Come on Laura, he will see you right away." David took Laura's arm and steered her out the door.

Laura pouted all the way to the doctor. When they got there, David pulled her to him. "Stop pouting, or when you get home you will have a sore bottom to match the other sore spots."

Laura smiled up at him through her bruised and tear stained face. "That's my girl, come on."

The doctor examined Laura and prescribed some ointment for the bruises. "She's fine, but going to



be stiff and sore for a few days. I'll give you a sedative for today. I want her to rest and not work until this weekend."

Laura said nothing in the doctor's office but protested to David when they got home. "David, I have appointments and the store to run? Who's going to take care of that?"

"Laura it will be closed and you can call and re-arrange your appointments. You are following the doctor's orders. I don't want to hear another word about it." David picked her up and carried her into the bedroom. "For starters you are going to take a nap. I have to go and check on things at the office. You'll be fine." David tucked her in and gave her two of the pills the doctor had sent home.

Laura didn't want a nap, but found herself relaxing and asleep almost before David left.

David walked into the station to find Ben Gersten there as well as the District Attorney and another man he didn't know. George Taylor was in the holding cell. "Okay, what's going on here?"

"I processed the papers on Mr. Taylor. He called his attorney who sent Mr. Brooks here. I think you know the rest of the people."

"David, can we talk in your office?" Sam Burns, the District Attorney, waited for his answer.

"Sure, this way." David led Sam and Mr. Brooks to his office and sat down, motioning the other two to sit also.

"So what do you want to talk about." David eyed Mr. Brooks suspiciously.

"Chief Johnson, I have talked to my client. He admits he was in the wrong and is willing to make reparations if you will drop the charges. A trial would be messy and would bring out all the things that happened in your wife's trial." Mr. Brooks sat back smugly in his chair.

Before David could reply, Sam interrupted. "David, I know how you feel, but it probably would be for the best. I doubt Laura, wants that all over

the peninsula. It's the kind of thing people will just grab up."

David ran his hands through his hair. "What are we talking about?"

Mr. Brooks cleared his throat. "My client will pay \$5,000 in damages and agree to never set foot here again, and to leave your wife alone."

"Take it David, it's for the best." Sam urged.

"All right, but I want that scumbag out of town right now." David stood and accepted the check and written agreement from the attorney. Ten minutes later George Taylor was gone.

Ben came over and tapped David on the shoulder. "I want you to know, that he came to me with the story today. Wanted it printed and I threw him out. Tell Laura not to worry, none of this will ever hit our paper."

"Thanks Ben, we really appreciate it. She has been through enough in the last year." David shook his hand.

"If everything is under control Pete, I'm signing out and going home. I don't want to leave her too long. Call in some of the others for the rest of the week. Laura and I are going to go away till Friday."

"Sure thing, relax I doubt we will have anymore excitement this week." Pete was already on the phone as David left.

Laura was still sleeping peacefully when David got home. He called the B&B where they had stayed the night they married and made reservations for the rest of the week.

David checked on Laura an hour later and she was just waking up. "How do you feel sleepy head?" David sat down on the bed next to her.

"Sore, but happy. Where is George?" Laura got a slight frown on her face.

"He is gone. You've got a check to cover damages and an agreement that he will leave you alone. That part of your life will never haunt you again. Plus, Ben Gertsen isn't going to print a thing

about it. I told you it would be fine." David bent down and gently kissed her.

"Now I have a surprise. We are going to spend the rest of the week at the B&B and relax. I packed your things and as soon as you wake up, we are on our way."

Laura reached up and pulled David down to her. "Oh David, have I told you how much I love you?"

"Yes, but a demonstration is always nice." David started nibbling on her neck.

"You got it!" Laura turned and started kissing him."

Three hours later they were back in the same room at the B&B. Laura was snuggled up against David on the porch. "I'm so glad I came to Fish Creek and met you."

"Mrs. Johnson, I am too, and this is where you are staying." David pulled her into a kiss and Laura relaxed. Yes, she was finally where she belonged.

