

Chapter Six

McConnellsburg, Pennsylvania

Kevin Butcher:

"Holy Shit!" I said. What the devil is Kristen doing here? Then it hit me: it had to be another of Aunt Deborah's twisted schemes. That bitch has been snooping around since she arrived. I had Kristen's number in my address book. Hell, she could have gotten it from my answering machine. I rose to my feet and wiped my hands on a shop cloth. Kristen still knew how to dress, and she looked like a pin-up in her miniskirt, tight shirt, and heels. I glanced at Andrew; he stared at Kristen with a stupid looking grin on his face.

I turned back to Kristen and said, "Hi, Kris, I didn't expect to see you anytime soon."

Kristen took two more steps to close the distance. Both steps were perfect examples of female fluidity and grace in motion. She reached out a hand, each nail perfectly manicured, and poked my chest. She said, "Kevin, you never call me anymore."

"I'm engaged, Kristen, and my fiancée is here." For a fleeting instant, I thought she looked disappointed. If so, she recovered fast enough.

"What a coincidence," she said, "I'm engaged, too. But I've always been more, um, flexible about relationships." Her tone became serious. "Some woman called and left a voice mail. She said you were dying to see me."

Damn Deborah, I needed to do something about her. What do I do with Kristen? How do I keep Rebecca away from her? Andrew is looking at her like she's.... Oh, wait; sometimes if you have two problems, they can cancel each other. I smiled and said, "Kris, I've forgotten my manners." I reach over and put my hand on Andrew's shoulder. "This is my fiancée's cousin, Andy."

Kristen couldn't help it; she had to turn on the charm for every man she met. It's the way she's wired. She lifted her gaze onto Andrew, and her bedroom eyes hit him like a freight train. Kristen held out her hand and said, "Hello, Andy. We've never met, have we?"

Andrew took her hand and raised it to his lips. He said, "You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen."

Kristen glanced at me, and I did my best to look jealous and hurt. I didn't need to be real convincing as subtlety is not one of her strong suits. I caught the wicked glint of triumph in her eyes as she took in my kicked puppy look. She'd show me what I missed. Kristen turned back to Andrew, "Tell me more, Andy, *you* have my complete attention."

Now, how do I keep those two talking? First, let me give them some space. I backed away several steps and almost bumped into Rebecca. I felt her warmth a moment before she took my arm. "What's going on, Kev?"

"Kristen decided to visit."

Rebecca rolled her eyes and said, "Oh, I'm pretty sure Aunt Deborah arranged this. She expected you and Kristen to run off together."

"Your aunt spends too much time fantasizing about my sex life." I nodded at Kristen and Andrew. "Those two together must be driving her crazy." A few moments later Deborah proved me right. The kitchen door opened and she called out for Andrew. She needed to call a second time before "Andy" stepped away from Kristen.

Kristen turned towards Rebecca and me. Her eyes locked onto Rebecca and she smiled. Her smile seemed genuine, even friendly; it had to be false.

Rebecca squeezed my arm and said, "Introduce us."

I asked, "Are you sure?" But Rebecca took the lead and stepped up to Kristen, dragging me along with her. I made the introductions.

"Rebecca, may I introduce Ms. Kristen Macleod. Kristen, this is my fiancée, Miss Rebecca Schmidt." They shook hands, and I watched Kristen, ready for her to misbehave.

Rebecca said, "It's a pleasure to meet you. Please call me Rebecca."

"Thank you, Rebecca, I'm Kristen. Look, I'm sorry, I didn't know about you and Kevin. I wouldn't even be here, except some woman called me."

Rebecca said, "It may have been my aunt who called you. She doesn't like Kevin and tries to stir things up. I've wanted to meet you. Can you stay for a bit?"

Kristen looked from Rebecca to me, and back to Rebecca. She smiled. "I have all afternoon, but are you sure about this?"

Rebecca turned to me and said, "Kev, you can get back to working on Andrew's car. Kristen and I will be on the porch." The two of them walked off. Did I want them talking to each other? Did I have a choice?

Deborah Barie:

Deborah seethed; would none of her plans come to fruition? She stood in the kitchen, glaring out through the window. Andrew stood stupefied before Kevin Butcher's former whore. Poor Rebecca had run outside to her "Kev." Now, she grasped his arm with such desperation. And Kristen, with that dress, was the perfect whore.

She would make one more attempt to get Andrew back on track. She had to call several times before he backed away from the whore. Andrew stepped into the kitchen. Even now, in Deborah's presence, Andrew's eyes tracked Kristen through the window.

Deborah said, "What is wrong with you? You need to stay focused."

He shook his head, "I think you're wrong about Kevin."

Deborah didn't give Andrew a chance to continue. She said, "I saw you speaking with his last whore. Kristen had a husband until Kevin had his way with her. He seduced her, the same as he seduced your cousin. When Kristen wanted to marry him, Kevin spurned her."

Outside in the driveway, Rebecca and Kristen stood talking. The two young women couldn't be more different. Deborah said, "You see your cousin and what the future has in store for her. Just as Kevin has made one a whore, he will do the same to the other."

Both girls walked together towards the porch. Kevin returned to Andrew's car. Andrew said, "How can you know all this?"

"Mr. Butcher has slept with both. You can ask him yourself."

Andrew stood straight. He stepped around his aunt and went back outside.

Kevin Butcher:

Andrew rejoined me a few minutes later. He alternated between watching me and stealing glances onto the porch. The ladies had taken seats where they could talk and keep an eye on us. He broke his silence and said, "Kristen is your *ex*-girlfriend? Man, Rebecca's a sweetheart, but Kristen is—I don't know what she is."

"Yeah, Kristen is something special."

How do I explain the difference? I said, "Kristen *is* all that and a bag of chips. Rebecca, however, is all that, a bag of chips, and a mug of hot chocolate while sitting in front of a fireplace on a cold winter night."

He frowned, and looked thoughtful. Then glanced up at the porch, both girls noticed and waved. With Kristen, you saw legs, legs, and more legs, a snug fitting T-shirt, and ringlets of dark brown hair. In contrast, Rebecca appeared willowy. Her long cotton dress covered everything but her calves and her worn sneakers. In deference to her aunt, Rebecca wore her blonde hair in a bun underneath a small white prayer veil. If one girl had a halo, and the other horns, you couldn't have had more difference.

I got back to work while Andrew kept to himself. The quiet stretched on, and I glanced up to check on him. He stared down at me, his face red. I said, "What?"

"You slept with Kristen, didn't you?"

"Where are you going with this?"

"You're a bastard, you know that?"

"Hey, my parents were married—before I was born." Andrew continued to look angry, "What are you mad about now?"

"You've slept with both of them."

Technically, Andrew had a point. In practice, Kristen and I never actually slept together. Oh, we snoozed for a few minutes between bouts, but she always left to go home to her husband. Not that I knew she had a husband, at least not at first. While Rebecca and I have slept together nearly every night since August. But, other than playing around, we hadn't "slept together, slept together." I answered his question honestly and said, "Yes, b—"

As I've mentioned before, Andrew stands a few inches taller than me, and he has a muscular build. I knew he had farm boy strength, but I didn't appreciate it in full until he grabbed me by the back of my pants and shirt. He hoisted me like a bale of hay and tried to throw me over the front of his van.

"—ut, WHOOOA!" I yelled. I didn't quite clear the car. Instead, my shoulder and hip landed on the hood and fender, and I bounced back onto the driveway.

From a distance, I heard the front door open. Rebecca and Kristen shouted their alarm. Much closer, Andrew bellowed, "I'm going to beat you to a pulp."

I shook my head to clear it, and scrambled up on top of his car, then back down over the other side. Crap, I didn't want to hurt him, but I didn't intend to take a beating. I let him chase me around his car before I backed away onto my lawn. I held my hands up, palms out. I said, "Andrew, I don't want to hurt you."

Aunt Deborah stepped out onto the porch. She yelled, "Smite him, Andrew. Smite him!" Andrew lowered his head and charged. I was in for a smiting.

Until now, I'd only tried this in a gym, on a padded floor with another trained martial artist. When Andrew reached for me, I grabbed the front of his shirt, planted a foot in his belly, and fell backwards. At the right moment, I kicked hard, and Andrew spun over my head, his arms, and legs flailing. He continued to bellow; only now his bellow had a plaintive sound.

Andrew hit the ground, hard, and the earth moved.

Rebecca ran up and knelt next to me. She said, "What happened? I've never seen anything like that. You threw Andrew over your head!" I tipped my head back to check on Andrew. Kristen knelt next to him asking about his condition. Someone, but not me, needed to tell her not to kneel and bend over wearing that skirt. Rebecca noticed where I looked and thumped my arm.

How can I explain this? "Um, Andrew suffered a misunderstanding."

Andrew groaned out, "I didn't misunderstand anything. You sleep with every woman you meet!"

I thought about Aunt Deborah standing there on my porch and shuddered. "I haven't slept with Aunt Deborah!"

Berks County District Attorney's Office:

"What do you have for me, Detective Robertson?" asked the new Berks County District Attorney. This new DA wanted to clean up the county He rubbed his hands together, eager to start.

"My young friend, Grainger Thomas, changed his statement. He has identified Ronald Thomas and Klaus Hanslein Junior as his assailants. Klaus administered the beating and Ronald devised this complicated little coverup."

The DA opened the folder and read Grainger's revised statement. He looked up and said, "All this because the younger Hanslein wanted his girlfriend back?"

"Not exactly; the younger Hanslein has a history of aberrant sexual behavior. On at least one occasion he sexually assaulted Miss Schmidt. They were never boyfriend and girlfriend."

"Sexual assault? Was he charged?"

Detective Robertson grimaced, "No sir, your predecessor declined to bring charges forward."

"Why do I think you left something unsaid, Detective?" Detective Robertson grinned but remained quiet. "All right then, breaking the Hanslein gang is near the top of my priority list. What do you want me to do?"

Detective Robertson smiled. The previous DA had been an honest politician, once bought, he stayed bought. This new DA was a breath of fresh air. "A reliable confidential informant reported Klaus Hanslein Junior and Ronald Thomas are in a cabin adjacent to the state game lands. Ownership of the cabin is complicated so we'll need a search warrant to allow us to enter the premises. We'll also need arrest warrants for both individuals." He handed over another folder. "This is my statement of probable cause and a statement from the confidential informant. Those coupled with Grainger Thomas's revised statement should get us the warrants."

"And I need to see the judge myself? Because you feel we have a leak, am I correct?"

"Yes sir, the fewer who know about this, the better. Sir, I have one more item." The DA made a "give it to me" gesture. "I promised Grainger I would ask you to not press charges against him."

"Yes, well he did take a severe beating. I will take that under advisement. What is his current status?"

"This may be a surprise, but..."

Kevin Butcher:

Rebecca helped me stand up, and we stepped over to check on Andrew. He looked embarrassed.

Andrew said, "Yeah, she got me again."

I offered him a hand, he took it, and I pulled him to his feet. Andrew kept my hand and said, "I'm sorry, Kevin, I should know better." We shook, and he shrugged towards Aunt Deborah. "She knows how to push my buttons."

"What did she tell you this time?"

Andy glanced at Rebecca and at Kristen before answering. He shook his head and said. "Just more of her bull and I fell for it."

"So, we're OK?"

"Yeah, I'm sorry."

"Hey, it's cool. Take a break; sit on the porch with the ladies. Rebecca, my hands are filthy, can you get him a drink and an Advil? I'll get Andy's car finished."

Rebecca brought the drinks. She then walked over to keep me company and hand me tools. Rebecca said, "Kristen told me her fiancé doesn't mind if she has flings, so long as she tells him all about it."

"I've heard about guys like that. It creeps me out. So, don't get any funny ideas."

I felt her hands on my shoulders a moment before she kissed the top of my head. She said, "I've got lots of ideas, but not about that." I nodded and kept working.

Several minutes later, Rebecca mused, "I don't know how Kristen can walk in those shoes."

"You could ask her. Maybe she'll give you lessons."

Rebecca paused and thought about it. "Would you want me to dress like her?"

For a moment, I imagined Rebecca dressed like Kristen. I filed the image away for future reference.

"Sweetheart, I love you just the way you are. Although, sometime after we're married, if you wanted to tart yourself up some night and surprise me, I don't think I'd turn you down."

She bumped me with her knee. "Maybe I'd want *you* to tart *yourself* up."

"Like a Chippendale?"

"What's a Chippendale?" Of course, Rebecca hadn't heard of the Chippendale dancers. Did I dare ask Kristen to take her to one of their shows? How worldly did I want my wife to be? Well, she can be as worldly as she wants to be.

"I'll show you a video later."

We finished Andrew's van at the same time the mail arrived. Rebecca checked and found the letter we waited for. Andrew needed to test drive his new brakes, and Kristen volunteered to go along. After they left, Rebecca and I washed up before retiring to the porch. Aunt Deborah had long since reentered the house to watch Doctor Oz, but she followed us outside.

"Do you think something happened to Andrew?" asked Rebecca. Most test drives take ten to fifteen minutes; Andrew and Kristen's "Test Drive" has lasted almost an hour. Rebecca and I sat in adjacent rocking chairs at the far end of the front porch.

I chuckled and said, "They may have stopped somewhere to 'talk'."

My fiancée reached over and gave my hand a squeeze. Aunt Deborah sat on the opposite end of the porch, glaring out at the road. Today had not been a good day for her. I spoke to Rebecca, but loud enough for her aunt to overhear. "Some people don't believe in love at first sight. But, after watching Andy and Kristen, I think it actually happens." Deborah twitched but disdained to respond.

Rebecca said, "Did you fall in love with me at first sight?" I caught her glance at her aunt. Now both of us were baiting her.

"I did, but I needed to be careful. Your dad is a big guy. I didn't want to end up like the punchline to a Farmer's Daughter joke."

Rebecca turned to me with a serious expression. She asked, "There are jokes about Farmer's Daughters?" It only then occurred to me she hadn't heard any of those jokes. She may not have heard any dirty jokes at all.

I said, "There are jokes about men, usually traveling salesmen, who fool around with the farmer's daughter. It often doesn't end well for the man."

"Can you tell me one?"

Aunt Deborah turned and said, "Yes Mr. Butcher, please tell us a Traveling Salesman and the Farmer's Daughter joke."

Uh oh, I thought about it and came up with an idea. Grinning, I glanced from Aunt Deborah to Rebecca. I said, "There are a bunch, but my favorite is the one about the traveling technician who needed to rent a room. The farmer had a lovely, blue-eyed, and blonde haired, daughter who tormented the technician with lewd suggestions."

Rebecca laughed and said, "I never made lewd suggestions!"

"Oh, it gets better; the farmer also had a crazy sister who spent all her time trying to keep the daughter away from—" The sound of a vehicle saved me from completing my story. Andrew's van pulled into the driveway and stopped. Kristen hopped out and walked towards us. Aunt Deborah strode towards Andrew, but he backed out and drove away. Deborah stood in the driveway and watched Andrew go.

Kristen said, "Andy and I are going back to my place to watch something on Netflix. It was nice meeting you, Rebecca. Give me a call sometime if you want to get a coffee. Bye!"

Deborah turned back and closed with Kristen. She demanded, "What have you done to Andrew?"

Kristen side-stepped to keep her distance from Deborah. She said, "I recognize your voice; you left the voice mail. Look, I don't know why you're stirring up shit for Rebecca and Kevin, but thanks helping me meet Andy."

"What about Andrew?" Deborah asked, but Kristen ignored her and left. Deborah stormed into the house.

The three of us spent the rest of the day packing. Aunt Deborah stewed and kept to herself. Rebecca and I took turns exchanging lewd suggestions and generally tormenting each other. Both of us had a lot

of fun. I found out Rebecca goes crazy if tickled behind her knees. I admit I'm a dog, but I love having a fiancée who only wears dresses. I couldn't wait to take her to the drive-in.

Later, fresh from our showers, we retired to our bed in the trailer. I teased Rebecca into picking out her favorite lewd suggestion.

Andrew didn't show in the morning, and he wouldn't answer anyone's phone calls. Deborah chose to return with us to the Schmidts' farm.

Travel with Aunt Deborah turned out to be challenging. For a woman of such an indomitable nature, she did not travel well. Besides a suddenly delicate constitution which needed frequent rest stops, she also issued commands intended to correct my poor driving skills. I pulled into every gas station and rest stop and waited while Deborah used the facilities.

During one of these stops, Rebecca asked me to buy some women's magazines for her to share with her friends. I bought copies of Cosmopolitan, Vogue, and Women's Health. If the cover mentioned an article about sex, I bought it. I also bought a copy of Playboy and made sure it sat on top of the stack. Rebecca eyed the bag, and I gave her a thumbs-up.

At the next restroom stop, Rebecca refused to go with Deborah to the bathroom.

Aunt Deborah said, "Come along, Rebecca."

Rebecca said, "No, thank you, I'll wait here with Kevin."

Deborah paused with one leg out of my truck. I imagined her worrying about leaving Rebecca alone with me. Rebecca tuned out her aunt and ignored further requests. Deborah scurried off to the bathroom.

Rebecca reached for the bag of magazines. She said, "I want to see what you bought." She looked inside. "Playboy? You bought Playboy?"

"It has great articles."

"Yeah, right." Rebecca flipped through the magazine and stopped near the center. "Oh, my goodness, she isn't wearing anything." She flipped another page. "She has a tattoo there? Wouldn't that hurt?"

"Let me see, I'll know if it's a tattoo."

"Never mind!" Rebecca's cheeks were a bright pink. She stuffed the Playboy back into the bag and removed another magazine, this time a Cosmopolitan. Rebecca scanned the cover then flipped pages looking for the index. While she read, she kicked her shoes off and turned sideways on the seat.

Traces of my fiancée's wildflower cologne wafted to me, and I entertained myself by rubbing her ankles. I caught her peeking around the magazine, and said, "If you were my wife, I'd have my way with you right here."

"Oh yeah? Here, in broad daylight?"

"I'd start by kissing you from your feet..." I picked up one of her feet and pressed my lips to her instep. When I looked up to see if she watched, I saw Aunt Deborah glaring at me from the outside of my truck.

Klaus Hanslein Senior, Hanslein Farm:

Joseph Waters, Klaus Hanslein Senior's longtime lawyer, brought up the next item of business. He said, "Our business partners in Philadelphia are asking about the next delivery."

"About time, when and where?" Klaus Senior asked.

"Next Thursday night, at the club in Fairhill."

"Shit, *next Thursday*? Fucking fine, but this is the *last* time I tie up so much cash. Hey, you got anything from the cops about my moron son?"

"Nah, it's all quiet."

"Huh."

"Have you decided what you want to do about them?"

"A smart man would have let Joey clean up the mess, but I'm too much of a kind-hearted and loving father."

"You don't think they'll fuck with the product we have stashed there?"

"Junior knows to stay out of the locked rooms. Still, someone needs to run some food up and check on them. I'll take care of it."

Kevin Butcher:

Rebecca called her mother after we exited the turnpike and gave her our ETA. Deborah continued to sleep but woke after I made the turn onto the Schmidts' gravel lane. Rebecca brightened as her house and parents came into view. Jonathan and Rachel stepped down from the porch as we came to a stop. Rebecca jumped out and ran to meet her parents.

By the time I rounded the front of my truck Jonathan and Rachel had their daughter wrapped up in a three-way hug.

Inside my truck, Deborah struggled with the seat belt. I opened the back door, reached across her and pushed the release. Deborah gasped and stiffened as my arm passed through her personal space. I said, "Don't flatter yourself; I want you out of my truck, and out of my life."

"That is easy to accomplish, Mr. Butcher. Break off your relationship with Rebecca and leave."

"Ha, no way. Hey, what do you think Andrew got into last night?"

"I pray Andrew's godliness shielded him from sin."

"If Andrew's godliness is on par with yours, Kristen might have had difficulty walking this morning."

Deborah stared for a few seconds as she parsed my meaning. Her stare became a hard glare, and her head snapped around to her brother. Deborah inhaled and said, "Jonathan!"

Jonathan, who was busy wiping Rebecca's face with his handkerchief, looked up to his sister. He said, "Yes, Deborah?"

"Mr. Butcher insulted me. He needs to leave." She said this with a rather imperious tone.

Jonathan glanced at his sister, then to me, and back to his daughter. Rebecca shook her head. Rachel glared at Deborah with a fierceness that belied her peaceful, non-confrontational, religion. Without looking up from his daughter, Jonathan said, "Deborah, I'm sure you're exhausted from your trip. You should lie down." Rachel nodded in agreement.

Deborah looked from Jonathan to Rachel, and back to Jonathan. She did not look at me. She said, "You don't mean that! You can't permit this," Deborah shrugged in my direction, "degenerate to insult me."

With a noticeable reluctance, Jonathan stepped away from his daughter. He patted Rebecca on her shoulder and stepped over to us. Ignoring his sister's words, he held out his hand, and we shook. He said, "Welcome home, Kevin."

"Thank you, Mr. Schmidt. It's nice to be here."

"Will you help me carry her bags inside and get everything put away?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Schmidt frowned and said, "A simple 'Yes' will do, and call me Jonathan from time to time, please. You are family."

I resisted the urge to glance at Deborah and gauge how well she took Jonathan's welcoming me back. But I already took a chance and claimed a victory. I'd take another shot at her later.

Jonathan and I started by double teaming Deborah's seemingly solid steamer trunk. As we climbed the front porch steps, Grainger Thomas stepped out and held the screen door open for us. Seeing Grainger here surprised me, and I stumbled. Jonathan paused to give me a chance to recover. He glanced at both of us and said, his voice deadpan, "You two know each other, don't you?"

As I passed Grainger, he and I exchanged wary nods. Jonathan filled me in on Grainger's defection as we maneuvered Deborah's trunk upstairs. I didn't know Mrs. Schmidt and Rebecca visited Grainger in the hospital. Then, after Rebecca and I left, Mrs. Schmidt continued her visits. Her unbiased compassion, without strings, touched Grainger, and he recanted his original story. After turning against his former associates, Grainger now feared for his life. The hospital released Grainger, and the Schmidts offered him a safe place to stay.

"Wait, why does Grainger fear for his life?"

"You don't know about Junior's father, Klaus Hanslein Senior. Let's get this luggage moved, and I'll tell you all about him." Jonathan led the way back to the truck. We picked up Grainger along the way.

My mind flashed back to that Friday night at the county fair. Rebecca struggling while Grainger and his brother Ronnie restrained her. Now Grainger wanted to be one of the good guys, and I was going to have to go along with it. I couldn't wait to hear what Rebecca thought.

The three of us made short work of the remaining luggage. Jonathan said, "I'm sorry we're bumping you and Rebecca out of your room. Rachel and I thought about keeping you in here and putting Deborah into Rebecca's room. But, this arrangement will keep my sister calmer. Rachel and I will talk to Deborah. In the meantime, please avoid stirring her up."

"It's your house, Jonathan, I'll behave as long as she does."

"I don't suppose you could maintain your calm even if she does not?"

"Mr. Schmidt, while your sister was our guest she pushed Rebecca and me pretty hard. She is no longer *our* guest, and I will find it difficult to maintain a courteous demeanor if she does not." My choice of a formal address did not go unnoticed.

"I understand. It might be easier if you understood Deborah better. She had a difficult experience as a teen, and it still affects her. I'll discuss it with Rachel; if she approves, we can tell you two the story."

With Jonathan's direction, we set up my travel trailer alongside their garage. He even snaked an extension cord through a window for power. The three of us pulled up chairs near the garage door.

Jonathan said, "Grainger, tell Kevin why you're afraid of the Hansleins."

Grainger looked up and said, "Klaus's dad is one of the big drug dealers in this area. He won't like me ratting out Junior."

Jonathan said, "Thank you, Grainger. Besides drugs and God knows what else, the Hansleins have also extorted the Mennonite farmers in this area. They know we are non-confrontational pacifists and take advantage of it. They threaten to harm our families or our farms unless we pay protection money."

"Including you?" I asked.

He nodded. "Including me. My father had an arrangement with Klaus Senior's father, Wilhelm Hanslein. Whatever those terms were, they died with my father. After Dad passed, Klaus Senior paid a call and explained the terms. You know about Klaus Junior's infatuation with Rebecca?" I nodded.

Grainger spoke up, "Junior hardly ever talks about anything else. He'll tell you how much he loves her and wants to fuck her. Then he'll talk about raping her and beating her to death." Jonathan and I stared at Grainger. When he finished talking, he noted our shocked expressions. "Oh shit," he said, "I'm sorry."

Jonathan shook his head and said, "Grainger, please, I don't think we needed to hear about it in so much detail." Grainger nodded and looked back down.

I said, "Grainger, we'll talk later. I want to hear *all* the details."

"Kevin," Jonathan said, "I hope you won't do anything confrontational."

"God helps those who help themselves," I said.

"That phrase is not from the Bible. It originated with a man named Algernon Sydney, back in the 1600s. Kevin, please do not resort to violence."

I remained non-committal, and Jonathan continued his story.

"Some time ago, Klaus Junior had the effrontery to call on me and ask permission to court Rebecca. I sent him packing. Several weeks passed before his father paid a visit. Senior offered to exempt me from his protection racket. I only needed to give my 'worthless' daughter to his son." Jonathan paused for a

moment. "Before I met Rachel, I courted a young woman named Naomi Miller. Naomi attracted the attention of Klaus Hanslein. His father, Wilhelm, paid Naomi's father to break off our courtship and marry her to Klaus Hanslein."

"Wait, Junior's mother was once your girlfriend?"

Jonathan nodded "Yes, she was. No one has seen Naomi in a long time. Some folks say she left an abusive husband. But I can't imagine Naomi leaving her child behind."

I shook my head and waited for Jonathan to continue.

"I might have lost Rachel to the Hansleins as well. I'll ask her, and if she agrees, we'll tell you that story also." Jonathan glanced towards the house and back to me. "When I gave you permission to court Rebecca, I did so with the expectation you would marry her and move away. Fulton County is far enough that you two can live in peace. And, if Junior did manage to find you, I had no doubt you could handle him."

Grainger laughed, "Oh, hell yeah! The last time, Kevin fucked him up bad! Junior pissed blood for over a week."

Jonathan looked over at Grainger and said, "Please don't say anything like that around the women."

Grainger looked startled. He said, "Oh shit, sorry."

Jonathan smiled and said. "You're doing fine. Try and think a little more before you speak." Turning back to Kevin he continued the story. "Senior hasn't been around asking for his money. Not that it matters; I'm not going to pay him in any case."

"Mr. Schmidt," Grainger interrupted. "that's not a good idea. Senior is pretty bad. I've heard stories."

"Grainger, if Senior comes around, you stay out of his way. Kevin, none of this means I want you to fight for me or to do anything crazy."

"All this sounds like the plot of a bad story."

"I wish it were."

"How much does everyone know?"

"Rachel knows it all, Rebecca very little. We did tell her about Junior asking to court her. Tommy's figured out some on his own."

"I'm worried about you and your family. What about the police?"

"The police? I don't know, Senior says he'd know if we called them. It isn't impossible he pays someone for information."

"What do you want me to do if Senior comes calling?"

"You stay out of it. He and I can discuss whatever he wants to talk about."

"I hear what you're saying, but Rebecca means too much to me. If someone threatens her, I'll do whatever is necessary to stop them. If Senior threatens you, or your family, I can't promise to stay out of it."

"Senior and his crew haven't been around in months

Deborah kept her brother buttonholed throughout dinner. Jonathan occasionally looked up at his daughter or me. After dinner, he gestured for me to follow him out onto the porch. We sat in adjacent rocking chairs.

"My sister had quite a story to tell me. Most of which I had already heard, but none of it distressed me with one exception." Jonathan paused to take a long swallow from his glass of iced green tea. He sat the glass down with care, making sure it sat close to the center of the coaster. He straightened and looked me in my eyes, and I began to feel concerned. What had she told him? Mr. Schmidt cleared his throat and asked, "Did you really kiss Rebecca's feet in public, in broad daylight?"

My cheeks must have blazed red, and for the first time, I felt glad for the earlier onset of nightfall. "I wasn't slobbering over her feet. We were in my truck and as part of a joke, I kissed her instep."

"And, you thought it would get a rise out of my sister? Well, you succeeded and scandalized Deborah. I trust you'll refrain from doing such things again?"

"I'll refrain from baiting your sister in the same manner."

Jonathan sighed and sipped his tea. He said, "I'm sorry for the misunderstanding that led to you leaving with Rebecca. I'm also sorry for sending my sister after you. Rebecca told me you behaved with restraint, even with intense provocation. I am proud of you for that. Some day, perhaps you'll forgive me and even forgive my sister."

"Rebecca and I discussed 'The Aunt Deborah problem' several times. She helped me to see it from a better perspective. She also urged me to be patient. Your daughter is an amazing woman." I took a sip from my tea and said. "As far as I'm concerned, you don't need to apologize for anything; your sister, well, I doubt I'll ever forgive her."

We both took a drink from our glasses. The cicadas sang in the near-by trees. Jonathan said, "Deborah is going to visit with friends this evening. After she leaves, Rachel and I will join you and Rebecca here on the porch and tell you stories."

Rebecca and I snuck out to the back porch after cleaning the kitchen. Several minutes later, Jonathan escorted his sister out to the family van. Deborah fussed non-stop, asking twice if the tank had enough gasoline, and if the tires had enough tread, and if the brakes were good. Mr. Schmidt assured his sister the tank was nearly full, and the van had recently passed the state mandated annual safety inspection. He came back a few minutes later, opened the kitchen door and called for Rachel to come out. Mrs. Schmidt stepped out carrying a crocheted shawl.

Rebecca and I held hands and sat close together on the glider. Rebecca had a home-made shawl draped across her shoulders. Mr. Schmidt moved two of the rocking chairs to form a small and close conversation area. I stood to help, but he waved me back down. Jonathan covered Rachel's shoulders with the shawl, and they both sat. Mr. Schmidt said, "Now then, Rachel and I have decided you two have what Kevin might call 'The need to know'."

Mrs. Schmidt said, "Does the military really say that? It sounds so serious."

I laughed and said, "I'm sure they do, but never at my lowly enlisted level."

Mr. Schmidt said, "Rachel, let's stay on track; we only have a limited amount of time." Rachel looked at her husband and stuck out her tongue. Jonathan smiled, leaned in, and whispered something into her ear. Rachel smiled and took her husband's hand. Mr. Schmidt said, "Where should I start?"

"You should start at the beginning, dear."

"Yes, well, some background first. Rachel, please jump in if I miss anything. Deborah and I did not have a good father. Joseph Schmidt verbally and physically abused my mother, my sister, and me. Mom may have tried to mitigate Dad's abuse, but I suspect he beat her into compliance. My father's conservative beliefs, and the church we attended, reinforced his authority. Deborah and I grew up in that unhealthy environment. I didn't learn it could be different until after I went to school."

Rachel interrupted, "Excuse me, but I'd like to add something. I've always worried about how Joseph may have abused Deborah. She never said anything, but he may have done things to her."

Jonathan nodded and said, "I hope he did not, but I can't say it wasn't in his character." Jonathan looked down for a moment before continuing. "School became a refuge for me, and later for Deborah as well. Both of us excelled because we clung to our time in school. Dad left us alone while we studied because our earning straight As enhanced his reputation as a father.

"After I graduated from high school, Penn State University offered me a scholarship. I wanted to accept it, but Dad wanted me to be a farmer. I have no regrets, because had I not been here, repairing the old tractor, I may never have met Rachel."

Berks County, Pennsylvania, Schmidt Farm, Summer 1997

Jonathan Schmidt:

Dad insisted I repair his old Farmall 560 gasoline tractor today. It had to be today as we would need it for the upcoming harvest. I argued the harvest wouldn't start for another month or two. But Dad wanted it done now.

Mom and Deborah had guests coming this afternoon, and asked Dad and me to stay out of the house. Dad grumbled he had no interest in listening to hens squawking. He told me to fix his tractor and drove off to spend the afternoon at the grange. The tractor stalled and sputtered, but I coaxed it over to the garage. It didn't take long to figure out the fuel line had a clog. Two weeks ago, Dad started using cheese cloth to filter the gasoline. Loose fibers must have gotten into the line. While I worked, a shiny black van drove up the lane and stopped in front of the house.

My mother recently joined the Bi-National Mennonite Women and made new friends. She invited one of those friends, and the friend's daughter, over for tea. Two women stepped out of the van. Compared to my mother and sister, these women dressed in a modest but relaxed fashion. Instead of wearing cape or prairie style dresses, they wore skirts and blouses. Both women wore their blonde hair twisted up into loose uncovered buns. The younger of the two women took my breath away. I had never seen a woman as beautiful. They noticed me watching, and I waved a greeting. Mom and Deborah stepped out onto the porch and invited their guests inside.

Later, while reassembling the tractor, I heard Deborah's voice. She said, "Jonathan gets so involved he doesn't pay any attention." I turned and found my sister and the blonde vision of loveliness. Deborah said, "Rachel, this is my brother Jonathan."

Rachel's eye color matched that of the perfect blue sky overhead, and my mind stopped working for a moment. Rachel extended her hand. I didn't even consider the filthy state of my hands, or how I reeked of gasoline. I took her hand in both of mine and said exactly what I thought, "Rachel, you are even more beautiful up close, and your eyes are my favorite shade of blue."

Deborah gasped and said, "Jonathan, you can't talk like that!"

Embarrassed that I spoke my thoughts aloud, I apologized. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that."

Rachel smiled and asked, "Are you sorry because you didn't mean it?"

"No, not at all, I meant every word."

Deborah pulled Rachel's arm, "Come on Rachel, he stinks. Let's get away from him."

Rachel held onto my hand until Deborah pulled her away. They walked towards the barn. Before disappearing around the corner, Rachel looked back and waved.

Dad arrived as Rachel and her mother walked to their van. My father stood to my side staring at the ladies in their very liberal fitted blouses and skirts. He shook his head and said, "Floozyes." Rachel cast about as if looking for something, or maybe someone. She spotted me and took a step in my direction, but at a word from her mother, she reversed her step and climbed into the van. That summer Deborah became friends with Rachel. I acquired a new job: ferrying the girls between our home and theirs.

Present time:

Rebecca said, "That's my favorite story." She glanced at Kevin and continued. "I used to dream of a handsome man telling me my eyes are his favorite color."

Kevin said, "Your eyes are cornflower blue; I noticed it right away. But I'm a Marine, sweetheart, my favorite color is green."

Jonathan said, "Rachel and I shared an attraction for each other." He glanced at Rachel before continuing. "We conducted ourselves in a respectful manner."

Berks County, Pennsylvania, Schmidt Farm, Summer 1997

Jonathan Schmidt:

One afternoon while working in the garage, I heard something. It sounded like Dad yelling at someone from inside our house. I stepped outside, in time to see Dad storm out of the house. He slammed the front door behind him, stomped down from the porch and strode towards me. Rather than confront

him, I returned to the work bench. When Dad passed the open garage door, he saw me rebuilding a 2-cycle engine. After waiting a few minutes, I slipped back outside and into the house. Earlier in the afternoon, Mom took the van to the grocery store. Deborah must have had chores because Mom left her behind. I found Deborah in the upstairs bathroom washing her face. She might have had the imprint of a hand fading from her cheek. Deborah glanced over and saw me standing there. She covered the marked side of her face with the washcloth.

Deborah growled, "What do you want?"

I asked, "Are you OK? Do you need anything?"

Deborah reached over and grabbed the door knob. Before she slammed the bathroom door in my face, she said, "Get away Jonathan, it was my own fault." The door stopped in its frame less than half an inch from my nose.

When Mom came home from the store, I carried the groceries for her. While we walked together, I told her about Dad and Deborah. Mom grimaced and said she'd take care of it. Afterwards, Deborah spent much more time with Rachel, and Rachel visited us more often. Dad never misbehaved in front of witnesses, and Rachel's presence kept him away from Deborah. Almost every day, I visited the Weigels, either dropping Deborah off or picking up Rachel. Rachel always found a few minutes to say hello.

Rachel and I grew closer without acknowledging anything. I learned to expect her warm smiles and borderline flirty behaviors. On those rare days that we didn't see each other, it felt as if my day lacked something vital. As the summer days and nights heated up so did our unofficial relationship. One evening near the beginning of August, I worked in the garage rebuilding a carburetor. The instructions covered part of the workbench, and I inventoried the parts. I noticed the scent of wildflowers. My father's garage harbored many odors, but none of them smelled like, "Rachel!" I swiveled full around on the work stool. Rachel stood there alone, completely unaccompanied, and looking perfectly lovely.

Her beautiful blue eyes glinted with amusement, and in her unique manner, she said, "Hi, Jonathan."

No one said my name quite the way she did. When I heard her, I wanted to take her somewhere private. Her not so innocent smile made me think she wouldn't mind if I did. She took a step forward, and closed the distance between us. Her hands lifted, and she laid them on the top of my legs. Rachel's hands felt

cool against my thighs, and I was all too aware of their locations. My voice sounded rough when I said, "It's nice to see you." She smiled, and I got the idea it might be OK to kiss her. But I didn't dare, the garage door was wide open, and Dad could be standing outside in the dark. I must have paused too long because she pouted.

Rachel said, "You need to pay more attention to what a girl wants."

"No doubt I do, but sophisticated ladies like you can be dangerous."

Her pout changed back to a smile and she changed the subject. "Deborah wants to play Scrabble; can you play with us?"

"Sure, that sounds like fun, but I need to clean this up first."

"I'll wait here with you."

We chatted while I cleaned up the work bench. "How is it you always smell like flowers?"

"Momma and I make perfume from whatever flowers are blooming. It isn't real perfume, but that's what we call it."

"It's lovely, and it suits you."

"I'll tell Momma you said so."

"Be careful doing that. Your Mom might not like a twenty-two-year-old commenting about your perfume."

"Daddy's six years older than my mother. I don't think she'd mind."

I did the math. "I'm seven years older than you."

"For now, but my birthday's coming up. Momma said I can date when I'm sixteen."

"I bet the line of boys waiting to take you out is around the block."

"Maybe, but a smart boy might want to reserve his spot early."

I had to pause while picking up the parts. I turned to Rachel, "Rachel Weigel, do you want me to ask you out?"

She blushed and looked everywhere but at me.

"Put my name on the list. Would dinner and a movie be a good start?"

"I'll add your name, but you'll have to meet my parents first."

I like playing Scrabble and usually do well. Tonight, Rachel's presence eroded my ability to concentrate. Deborah set up the board at one end of the kitchen table. The girls sat at right angles to me with Rachel on my left and Deborah on my right. At one point, I stretched my legs and brushed past Rachel's knees. She didn't say anything, but I saw her give me a quick mischievous smile. Soon enough her knee bumped against my leg and stayed in contact. Rachel's knee rubbed back and forth, and I lost all interest in the game *on* the table.

I jumped when Deborah thumped my arm. "Jonathan, pay attention, It's your turn."

The knee vanished. "Sorry." Rachel gave no evidence of her mischief. I scanned my letters and the board and decided on a word. I spelled "FRIEND," for twenty points.

Rachel perked up and laughed. She said, "Thank you, Jonathan." Then spelled, "GIRL" in front of my "FRIEND," for thirty points.

The knee came back. I gave in to temptation and reached under the table. My hand found Rachel's leg, just above her knee. She gasped, but she did not pull her leg back.

Deborah glanced up in concern. She asked Rachel, "Are you OK?"

Rachel bit her lip and nodded, "Um hmm."

My fingers caressed Rachel's thigh. She glanced over at me, and I gave her a small squeeze. I pulled my hand back in time to make my turn.

Deborah studied us with suspicious eyes.

I reached under the table once more. Rachel's free hand found mine and for a moment, our fingers intertwined. Deborah soon grew irritated at our shenanigans.

Present Time:

Rachel said, "I'll tell the next part, you're glossing over too many details."

Jonathan said, "Rebecca and Kevin don't need all the details, sweetheart."

Rachel patted Jonathan's hand. "Let's see, where were we?"

Berks County, Pennsylvania, Schmidt Farm, summer 1997

Rachel Weigel:

Yesterday evening, we played Scrabble, and Jonathan got flirty for the first time. When his large warm hand squeezed my thigh, a part of me lit up and demanded more. I now have a new appreciation for the word preoccupied. Deborah knew something happened, but I don't think she caught us.

We cleaned up after breakfast, and Mrs. Schmidt left to run a few errands. Deborah told me she didn't feel well and needed to lie down. I asked, "Do you need me to get something for you?"

"No, I'll be all right. If you're bored, you could look for my brother."

"If you're sure you won't mind?"

I slipped out through the front door. If I were Jonathan, where would I be? Well, I knew where I wanted him to be. Let's see, I stretched my knowledge of farm buildings. That is the barn and over there is the milk house.

As I reached the milk house door, I heard Joseph Schmidt yelling at Jonathan. The words, "Stupid boy" rang out clearly. I waited for the shouting to stop, and stepped inside. When my eyes adjusted to the

dimmer interior light, I saw Jonathan holding a floor broom and looking at me. His father, red faced, glared at me.

Jonathan smiled and said, "Rachel! What can we do for you?"

I glanced over at his father who still frowned at me, but his eyes seemed fixed on my chest. I don't remember being aware of a man staring at me in such a fashion before. Forcing my eyes back to Jonathan, I said, "Deborah's not feeling well and is laying down for a bit. I wondered if you might have the time to show me how all this works." I waved around the milk house.

Mr. Schmidt said, "I best check on my little Debbie." He turned to Jonathan and said, "Go ahead and show Miss Weigel around. Give her a fifty-cent—no, give her a five-dollar tour." Joseph strode out the door without looking back.

I watched Mr. Schmidt leave before turning back to Jonathan. I asked, "What's the five-dollar tour?"

Jonathan looked thoughtful after his father stepped out of view, but he smiled after turning back to me. He said, "Dad gave me permission to take my time showing you around. You're too late to see the morning milking, but I can bring you in for the one later today." He glanced down at my sneakers and said, "You'll want to borrow barn boots for that, Mom's or Deborah's might fit."

I walked up to Jonathan and said, "What are we going to do with all this time alone?"

What we weren't going to do was spoon. Mr. Business replaced last night's Mr. Flirty. Mr. Business had a near complete immunity to my charms. I tried my best pout, and it bounced off. Although, I managed to break through once. We stood close together while he explained, in agonizing detail, about some machine. He glanced over and caught me biting my lip. His eyes gleamed and the corners of his lips quirked up. We stood close together, and I knew he wanted to kiss me. But he held back.

I said, "Don't you like me?"

"Oh, I like you plenty. But I'm too old for you."

"I told you my parents won't mind!"

"Your dad would shoot me if he caught us doing what we both want to do."

"You make me so mad!" I almost stomped my foot. Still, he admitted he liked me. "I'll forgive you if you tell me what you'd like us to do."

"You don't give in, do you? I'd take you up in the hay loft and find a nice comfortable spot."

"And?"

"And find out how serious you are about this. Sometimes I think you might be teasing."

I leaned in and said, "I'm very serious about teasing you."

"Rachel, darling, if my dad catches me doing anything with you, he'll make life very difficult for us."

Joseph came back before Jonathan finished the tour. Still red faced, but now relaxed and pleasant. He asked if Jonathan had behaved himself and I assured him he had been a perfect gentleman, darn it.

Present Time:

Jonathan interrupted Rachel's story. He said, "Rebecca and Kevin aren't interested in all these unnecessary details."

Rebecca and Rachel laughed. I understood Jonathan's position. Rebecca said, "Momma, with Daddy being so difficult, how did you finally get him?"

"I gave him an ultimatum: treat me like a girlfriend, or I would find someone else. Your father, the most stubborn man I know, folded like an empty paper bag."

Rebecca glanced at me and back at her mother. "What was Daddy like as a boyfriend?"

"Hmm, I'd say he behaved much like your Kevin. Always proper when parents are about, and properly ardent otherwise."

"Rachel," Jonathan said, "You're embarrassing me."

Rachel patted her husband's hand. She said, "Your father is three different people: the loving father, that clever, intelligent, and stubborn young man, and my affectionate and ardent boyfriend. I'm a happier woman because I get to see all three every day."

Jonathan cleared his throat before saying, "Let's get back on track, please. After I bought my truck, I could visit Rachel. But, the closer Rachel and I became, the more it seemed to alienate Deborah."

Rachel said, "My parents relented and allowed Jonathan and me to have chaperoned dates. They decided Deborah made a suitable chaperone. Almost every Friday or Saturday night we found something to do."

Berks County, Pennsylvania, Schmidt Farm, Fall 1997

Rachel Weigel:

"The drive-in again?" Deborah whined. "We go there all the time. I sit up front and listen to you two slobbering in the back seat. One of these nights, I may turn around and see what it is you're up to."

"Or," Rachel said "you could find a boy to go with us. We can take turns in the back seat. It'll be fun. And, I don't mind you watching. Your brother is getting rather good at spooning."

"Oh, yuck! I need to wash out my brain. Thank you very much for that."

Rachel glanced around the lunchroom where their study hall took place. She said, "Any of the boys here would jump at the chance to go out with you."

Deborah looked down at the notes she should have been studying. "I'm not allowed to date anyone, ever."

"Your dad is so old fashioned. Look, it's simple, don't tell him you're dating. Jonathan can pick up whoever you like, or we could meet him at the drive-in. Who do you like? I'll talk to him for you."

"There is someone I like, but you can't ... I'll ask him, maybe he can meet us. But, you'll have to talk to Jonathan. He can't tell anyone."

"Now I'm curious. Who is he?"

"No, no, no, I'm not going to say. It's a secret."

If I kept my grades up, Jonathan could visit during the week. We spent about half of the time studying, and the other half out back on the glider. Jonathan asked about our Friday night plans.

"'Armageddon' is still playing at the drive-in. How many times have we seen it?" I asked.

He looked thoughtful before replying, "Is that what's been playing? All I remember is that song."

Jonathan's left arm wrapped around my shoulders, and the fingers of his right hand drew little circles on my knee. I said, "Deborah and I had an idea. What would you think if she met someone there?"

His fingers stopped moving. "What do you mean?"

"Deborah has someone she wants to see. But she's not allowed to date. If she meets her boy at the drive-in, we'd have the truck all to ourselves."

Jonathan looked thoughtful, and I knew he weighed the pros and cons. He thought everything through, and it drove me crazy. If I didn't distract him, he'd think himself out of it. I took his right hand with my left and slid it up my torso until his palm covered my left breast. Jonathan stopped talking, his fingers twitched, then he squeezed gently. Momma recently bought me a new brassiere without padding. I wore it tonight, and Jonathan could easily feel my excitement. His touch took my breath away. I said, "We'd be all alone for an hour or more."

Momma joined me at the front door while I waited for Jonathan and Deborah to arrive. She said, "You're going to see, 'Armageddon' again? It must be a good movie. What's it about?"

"Um, it's about an asteroid that hits the Earth."

"It hits the earth? I guess that explains the title. I should ask your father if he'd like to go, we could all fit in Jonathan's truck."

"Momma, no! You can't. We're going on a date!"

"Relax, Daughter, I'm pulling your leg. You know, you're not a proper girlfriend at all. You should make Jonathan wait ten or twenty minutes while you get ready. I hope he appreciates you."

Jonathan fiddled with the radio so we could listen to the movie. He turned to his sister and said, "Rachel said you're meeting someone here tonight?"

"He's going to try and be here after it gets dark."

"I feel like I need to meet him."

"You're not my parent. Stay out of my business."

"Whoa, sis, I'm just—"

"The only way you can go on dates is if I come along. I swear, Jonathan, if you screw this up for me, I'll—"

"OK, OK, you've made your point. Please, be careful."

I spoke up from the back seat. "Jonathan, give me some money. Deborah and I need to go to the ladies' room. I'll buy us popcorn and soda on the way back." Jonathan handed me a ten-dollar bill, and I said, "Come on, Deborah."

We walked to the concession stand, and Deborah watched the cars streaming in. I asked, "Is he here yet?"

She looked around and shook her head, "Not yet. Are you still going to do it?"

Earlier, I told Deborah of my plan to take off my bra and surprise Jonathan. Deborah thought it would be easier to approve of my plan if my boyfriend were not her brother.

A few cars entered while the cartoons played. One driver didn't shut off his headlights, and everyone honked their horns in protest. Well, everyone except Jonathan. Jonathan discovered I lacked a certain undergarment and I had all his attention. Deborah occupied the front seat and kept her head locked in the forward direction. I did my best to stifle any inappropriate sounds. After the cartoons, the previews played, and Deborah opened the passenger side door. She said, "I'm going for a walk; if I'm not back in fifteen minutes, I won't be back until the movie is over."

Jonathan said, "Be careful." Deborah slipped out, pushed the door closed behind her, and we were alone. Jonathan and I behaved ourselves, but we kept an eye on his dashboard clock. When the fifteen minutes were up, it was time to play. Jonathan's warm, strong hands had me so worked up I almost removed my remaining undergarment. Instead, Jonathan got something I read about in a *Cosmopolitan* magazine. An article titled, "One Thing Guaranteed to Drive Him Wild." I'm glad I bought a large Coke; that taste is going to take getting used to.

Deborah tapped on the window a few minutes after the movie credits scrolled up the screen. I grabbed her, and we walked to the ladies' room. Deborah found her boy, and they spent the first part of the movie spooning. They got busier during the second half, but she refused to give me details. She laughed when I said she might be moving too fast. Deborah replied she deserved to have fun with a boy every bit as much as I did. We had the ladies' room to ourselves and continued to talk while I restored my clothing. Deborah asked me what her brother and I had gotten up to. I told her all about it, including the horrible taste.

We continued to visit the drive-in every Friday or Saturday night. Deborah slipped out of the truck to visit her boyfriend while Jonathan and I had his truck to ourselves. Deborah's and her boyfriend's activities far outstripped mine and Jonathan's. Once we were two girls trading dreams and fantasies. Now, I found myself asking my far more experienced friend for advice.

Then came the night when this all came crashing down.

Jonathan started his truck because I told him I felt chilled. After he climbed into the back we snuggled under the blanket he kept in the back seat. Jonathan mused, "I wonder what Deborah has gotten herself up to by now?"

Without thinking about it, or maybe because I felt jealous of Deborah's experience. I said, "Everything; they've gone all the way, and then some."

Jonathan stiffened and said, "All the way?"

I nodded and sighed. Jonathan and I had discussed this in detail. Playing around, as he liked to call our activities, was one thing. But, That One Little Thing would wait for our wedding night. Deborah knew of my frustration with Jonathan over this and suggested an alternate. She reported the alternate to be nearly as good, but somewhat messy. If we wanted to try it, she suggested condoms, hand lotion for lube, and towels for cleaning up. I asked her if she tried it; she said yes, but the first time had been by accident. I couldn't imagine asking Jonathan to try it.

My revelation did not have the desired result. Instead of, "I guess we can do it, too." Jonathan decided he needed to meet his sister's boyfriend. I tried to change his mind and said, "No! She'll figure out I told you."

"Rach, if Deborah gets pregnant, I'm in big trouble. Dad will go crazy and blame me for it."

Present day:

Jonathan said, "The three of us had an ideal arrangement, and our drive-in dates went on into late fall. Then I learned Deborah and her boyfriend were behaving in an irresponsible manner. I needed to talk to them before something happened to get us all in serious trouble."

Rachel said, "Jonathan found out Deborah and her boyfriend were doing more than spoon!"

Jonathan glanced at Rachel, and said, "Rachel, we don't need to go into such detail." He turned back to us and sighed. "We had to find Deborah and her boyfriend."

Berks County, Pennsylvania, Schmidt Farm, Fall 1997

Rachel Weigel:

We must have looked like voyeurs sneaking around and peeking through the car windows. Fog covered some of the windows, but we could still glimpse the occupants.

A full-size sedan, with fogged up windows, rocked without sound in the far back corner of the lot. I felt ridiculous as we crept up on the vehicle. The back window remained free from fog. With the light from the movie screen, we saw enough. A female who looked a lot like Deborah lay on the back seat while a man kneeled between her legs. His hips moved back and forth with enough force to rock the car. While they had sex, the man grunted, "You're my dirty little whore." The female, sounding like Deborah, replied, "Fuck me, fuck your little slut."

Their obscene and demeaning language shocked me more than it did to see Deborah and her boyfriend having sex. Making love should be something beautiful, not angry and mean. I grasped Jonathan's arm and pulled him back. We needed to go back to his truck. Jonathan and I traded looks. He shook off my hand, stepped back to the car and pulled the back door open. I couldn't believe they didn't have the back door locked. As the car door opened, the interior dome light came on. Jonathan reached in and dragged the man out by his ankles. The man sputtered and cursed, but he had a face full of parking lot gravel. Inside the car, Deborah pulled her dress down. She twisted around looking for something on the car floor. Jonathan stretched and pulled his sister out with more care than he had her boyfriend.

Deborah steadied herself on the car door, faced her brother and said, "What are you doing here?" She spotted me and said, "You bitch, this is your doing. You couldn't get Jonathan to fuck you, so you decided to screw up my relationship."

Her accusation shocked me even more. "No, it's not like that," I said.

The man got to his feet, a condom dangled off the end of his shrinking penis. I recognized our biology teacher, and said to Deborah, "Mr. Murray is your boyfriend?"

Jonathan turned to Mr. Murray, "You're the biology teacher?" He looked at Mr. Murray's nudity and continued, "How appropriate."

Present Day:

Rachel Schmidt:

"I know we both felt foolish sneaking around and peeking into car windows. When we found them, they were, um, involved, and spoke to each other in a very disrespectful and demeaning fashion."

Rebecca asked, "They were fighting?"

Jonathan coughed and said, "No, they weren't fighting."

Rebecca looked confused and said, "I don't understand. What were they doing?"

Jonathan frowned and said, "What they were doing isn't important. Your mother and I both found it inappropriate and disgusting. We interrupted them and put a stop to it. I'm not proud of myself for how I reacted."

Rebecca turned to me and asked, "Do you know what they're talking about?"

I looked at my fiancée's parents, they both stared at me with flat expressions. I said, "Ah, um, I don't think it's anything we should discuss." Her father gave me a curt nod. Rebecca did not look convinced.

Jonathan continued the story. He said, "My sister never forgave us for interrupting them. Especially as her 'boyfriend' stopped seeing her. Our dating stopped as Deborah would have nothing to do with us. Rachel soon turned sixteen, and we resumed dating. Although with winter coming on, the drive-in became less of a viable option.

"At home, Deborah spoke to me only when necessary. I know our parents noticed it; one time Dad questioned me about it. He and I fought when I refused to discuss it. The next time he spoke to me, it came with his decision to break Rachel and me up. Dad said he decided the Weigels were unsuitable."

Rachel interrupted him and said, "You know, Deborah might have said something to your father. I've always thought his decision to break us up was too coincidental."

"You could be right, I should have considered it. Well, Dad put tremendous pressure on me to break off my relationship with Rachel. He and I fought several times, and both of us sported black eyes and cuts at the kitchen table. Rachel meant more to me than anything, I couldn't give her up." Rachel reached over and squeezed Jonathan's hand. "Then Dad stopped talking about Rachel, I thought he got over it. But I couldn't have been more wrong. My father soon taught me the adage, 'Old age and treachery will always defeat youth and skill.'"

Berks County, Pennsylvania, Schmidt Farm, February 12, 1998

Jonathan Schmidt:

Two weeks ago, my relationship with Dad had deteriorated as far as possible. We argued about Rachel, and he pushed me. I lost control and knocked him onto his behind. He sat there on the garage floor rubbing his chin and looking surprised. I told him I'd had enough and wouldn't be his punching bag anymore. When he tried to get up, I knocked him right back down and told him not to touch Mom or Deborah either. We glared at each other until he nodded. I backed away and allowed him to stand. Mom has been watching both of us, and she looks worried.

Since then we've not fought or argued. As far as I could tell, Dad hasn't gone after Mom or Deborah. Maybe, I should have stood up to him physically long ago. It has been a quiet two weeks, and I began to think the storm had passed.

After supper, I went to my room to read the latest *Hoard's Dairyman*. I had the pillows piled up just right, and I relaxed on my bed to read. I heard the phone ring, and a few moments later, Mom called out, "Jonathan, Rachel is on the phone!"

I rushed down the stairs, across the kitchen and slid to a stop at the wall phone. Mom shook her head at my antics. I picked up the phone. "Rachel?"

"Jonathan, you have to come get me right now!"

I glanced up at the clock, 8:30 PM. "Now? It's too late for me to come over, isn't it?"

"Don't come to the door, or honk your horn. Wait and I'll be out."

Mom glanced over frowning. I said to Rachel, "OK, I'll leave right now."

"I love you, bye." Click.

I stood there looking at the handset. Momma said, "Is something going on?"

"I don't know, but Rachel sounds upset."

I found dad leaning against the front of my truck. He had a smug, self-satisfied look on his face. As I walked past him to unlock my truck, he spoke. "Is there a problem with your little blonde floozy?"

His question filled me with dread. What did he know? I stopped with the key in the door lock, and said, "What's going on?"

"I ran into Wilhelm Hanslein and his boy Klaus the other day. They had one of their cousins with them. The cousin, I can't remember his name, but his last name wasn't Hanslein. He talked about Klaus's wife, Naomi, and how difficult it would be to find another woman as attractive. That's when I mentioned *your* floozy. The Hansleins have more than enough money to buy any woman for one of their own. I expect Mr. Weigel received an offer of a sizable bride price."

I must have stared at my father like a slack jawed idiot before I got my wits together. When I could speak, my voice came out low and quiet. I asked, "Why would you do such a thing?"

Dad turned to me grinning, still leaning against my truck. "I'll get a nice finder's fee, Boy. Just like I got for Naomi. You know, if you want a woman you can keep, you need to lower your standards. I don't know what all the attractive floozies see in you, but it's been good for my wallet."

Present day:

"I backed out of my parking spot so fast, Dad fell onto his behind. Then I picked up Rachel. The Hansleins had made a sizable offer for Rachel's hand; she overheard her parents talking about it." Jonathan paused to collect his thoughts. "Um, let's see, Dad had a stroke, and, ah, Rachel and I married. Dad passed away, and Mom and Deborah moved in with our relatives in Ohio. Oh, and after all that, we had you, Rebecca."

Rachel said, "Jonathan, you've glossed over more than a few things there." Rachel turned to Rebecca and me. She said, "Jonathan and I ran away and stayed in a hotel for the rest of the week. By Sunday we calmed down, and I called my mother. They found my note explaining why we ran away. Momma explained they had never considered accepting the Hanslein offer. By that time, I was pregnant with you, Rebecca. But we didn't know it yet. A few weeks later I told Jonathan I was pregnant and we told our parents. The news upset my mom and dad, but Jonathan's father flew into a rage. I had never seen anything like it. At the peak of his anger, he picked up the kitchen table with the intention of killing Jonathan with it. Instead, Joseph had a stroke. Jonathan stopped the table from falling onto his father. Joseph Schmidt passed away after our wedding. Jonathan's mother moved out to her family in Ohio and Deborah went with her."

Kevin Butcher:

Rachel stood and said, "I'm going to bed early. Come along when you can, Jonathan."

She pronounced Jonathan's name a little differently that I'd heard her say it before. Jonathan noticed as well. His head snapped around and he watched his wife walk into their house. Mr. Schmidt stood and I helped him put the chairs back. He bade us a good night and followed Rachel.

I turned to Rebecca and I'm certain her cheeks were pink. I said, "How about that?"

"My parents are incorrigible." We laughed together and went inside.

No one said anything to me about Rebecca's sleeping arrangements. I assumed with her Aunt here, Rebecca would sleep in the house. The downstairs bathroom sufficed for my needs. After brushing my

teeth and washing my face, I let myself out. Once inside my trailer, I turned on the LED night lights and went to bed, alone and unhappy about it.

I had been in bed for only a few minutes when Rebecca climbed into the trailer scowling at me. She wore my bathrobe and her fuzzy slippers and carried their kitchen flashlight. She said, "Why didn't you wait for me?" She set the flashlight on the countertop and shut it off.

"I didn't know you were still sleeping with me; you never said anything."

"You're silly, Kevin. We're engaged and still bundling." The LED nightlights produced enough illumination for me to see her shrug out of my robe. Underneath she wore one of my T-shirts and it hung down almost to mid-thigh. "You better have the bed warmed up." I lifted the comforter, and she slid underneath. We kissed, and Rebecca asked, "Do you have an alarm? I need to help Momma with breakfast." We set alarms on both of our phones and got down to some serious snuggling.

I had almost dropped off to sleep when Rebecca said, "Kev, I feel bad about Aunt Deborah."

"That makes one of us."

"I wish we could do something for her."

"Grainger owes us; we could send him to beat up Mr. Murray."

"That is *not* a good idea."

Interlude: Schmidt Farm Kitchen

Rachel and Deborah double-teamed the post breakfast clean up. Then Rachel went off to start some laundry. Deborah had some time to sit and enjoy her tea and maybe a biscuit. The tea kettle whistled, and Deborah shut off the burner. Her cup, complete with a sachet of her healthy herbal tea, sat on the sideboard ready for brewing. She poured the water with care, absorbed with the task at hand; she jumped when another cup slid next to hers. Rachel said, "Fill mine too, please."

They picked up their cups and sat at the kitchen table. Both women took the same seats they used when they were freshly minted friends of fifteen. The aroma from Deborah's tea wafted across the table and Rachel recoiled. She said, "How can you drink that?" Rachel leaned in with care and sniffed, "It smells like Jonathan's work socks soaked in camphor oil and..." she sniffed again "...citrus?"

"They recently added the essence of orange zest, and it adds a nice little zing. You should drink this, too, it may help you to live a longer and healthier life."

Rachel took the package and scanned the ingredients. She frowned and replied, "I'm uncertain I would want to live longer if I had to drink this." She placed the box back on the table.

Deborah opened a package of her green biscuits and offered it to Rachel. Rachel looked suspiciously at the contents before asking. "Are these healthy like your tea?"

"Goodness, no; why does everyone think that? These are vegetable and parmesan cheese. Very high in protein and tasty, try one."

Both women sat in silence crunching biscuits. The unexpected pleasant flavor surprised Rachel. After a few minutes, Deborah spoke. She said, "You know, everything I did, I did to keep Rebecca safe from abuse."

"Abuse from Kevin? Kevin is head over heel in love with his 'Becks'."

"I heard him refer to her as 'Becks'; it sounded disrespectful."

"It's a pet name! You can't say your Thomas didn't have one for you." Rachel watched Deborah's cheeks turn pink. Deborah looked away. Rachel leaned in close. "What did he call you?"

Deborah felt her cheeks warm as she blushed. She tried to cover it up by taking a drink of her tea, but Rachel knew her too well. Deborah considered her teacup and in a low voice answered, "He called me Snickerdoodle."

"Snickerdoodle cookies—not too sweet, crunchy on the outside and soft in the center. Thomas must have loved you; I'm so sorry you lost him."

"God made me barren and took away Thomas because of my sinfulness."

Rachel sat back in her seat. "That's ridiculous. You were fifteen years old, with an abusive father and no healthy options. It's no wonder another abusive adult lured you into his back seat. You do know that abused children are more susceptible to other abusers?"

"I've heard about it, but I never thought it applied to me."

The back door onto the porch squeaked open, and Rebecca's joyful laughter carried into the room. Her laughter became muffled, and she backed into the kitchen, fully engaged in a kiss with Kevin. Kevin's movement stopped as he noticed Rachel and Deborah watching from their seats at the table.

Concerned, Rebecca said, "What's wrong?" before following her fiancé's gaze into the room. She disengaged from Kevin and adjusted her prayer veil before speaking. She said, "Sorry Momma, Aunt Deborah." She added unnecessarily, "Kevin came home to get his lunch!"

Rachel said, "Your forgotten lunch is still in the 'fridge. Wash your hands and 'Becks' can get it out for you."

"Thank you." Kevin moved to the sink and Rebecca to the refrigerator.

"Do you want to eat inside or out on the porch?"

Kevin avoided looking at Deborah. He glanced at Rebecca who shrugged. He said, "Thank you, but I'll eat outside." Rebecca carried his lunch and a glass of iced green tea, and they went back outside.

Later in the afternoon, the three Schmidt ladies had supper preparations well in hand. Rebecca browned a flank steak in her mother's Dutch oven, while her mother and aunt chopped the vegetables.

Deborah said, "Why are we using a recipe from the internet? My recipe for beef and barley stew is better."

Rachel sighed; Deborah had been fussing ever since Kevin came home for lunch. God bless her, but she needed to settle down. Rachel said, "We've been over this already. Rebecca chose the recipe, and we agreed to help."

Rebecca wanted to reply, but her cell phone played the ring tone reserved for members of her posse, "Worth it" by Fifth Harmony. She answered her phone as fast as she could, but not before her mother and aunt noticed. Her mother looked interested, but Aunt Deborah scowled. The call didn't take long; the posse had tentative plans to get together. Now, if the parents would go along with it.

"Momma, Kevin offered to take us to see a movie, maybe at one of the drive-ins near Allentown. But if my friends can't go, do Kevin and I still need a chaperone?"

Deborah spoke up at once. She said, "Yes!"

Rachel glared at Deborah for a long moment before turning her head to Rebecca. She said, "You're engaged, so probably not. I'll have to talk with your father to be sure."

"This isn't a problem, Rachel, I can chaperone them," said Deborah.

"No thank you, Deborah. You've done more than enough." She looked up, giving Deborah a hard stare.

"Rachel, you are far too permissive. You should protect Rebecca from these worldly influences. Her cell phone, and that horrible music, are inappropriate."

"Deborah, you were fine before Kevin came home to pick up his lunch, now you have a bee in your bonnet. Out with it: what is your problem with my daughter's fiancé?"

"He's using her for his sexual gratification."

Rachel sighed and lifted her hand for silence. She said, "Rebecca, have you and Kevin had intercourse?"

"No, Momma."

"But you do fool around?"

"Yes, Momma."

"Has it been all one sided, or are both of you involved?"

"Most of the time it's both of us. Sometimes, just one. It depends, but it isn't one sided."

"I'm sorry I had to ask."

"It's fine, Momma. I'm not going to do anything behind your back."

Rachel stood and picked up the bowls of chopped and sliced vegetables. Rebecca lifted the lid from the Dutch oven and helped her mother dump the vegetables inside. Rachel said, "Give those a good stir and turn the stove down, then go find your father. Ask him if he thinks you and Kev need a chaperone. Tell him I don't feel you need one, but it's his decision."

Rebecca did as her mother asked. She turned the stove down and placed the lid back on the Dutch oven. Then she left via the back door to find her father.

"It sounds to me like they have a healthy relationship. It isn't abusive or a one-sided arrangement. If you had bothered to ask her, Rebecca might have told you."

"They shouldn't be doing any of that."

"True, but she is not involved in an abusive relationship."

"Your problem, Rachel, is you are overly permissive."

Jonathan Schmidt:

"You've done well, Grainger," said Jonathan Schmidt. Grainger always listened and asked questions. He kept asking until he understood. The cows seemed to calm with his touch. If Grainger kept learning, he could hire out as a farmhand. Goodness, I might have to start paying him!

"Thank you, Mr. Schmidt."

"I'm going to head over to the house; keep cleaning. I'll be back in a bit. We'll need the front-end loader to turn over the compost."

Rachel Schmidt:

"Overly permissive?"

"As a mother, you should protect your daughter from worldliness. Not encourage her to whore herself out."

Rachel's temper flared. She barely kept it under control. Through gritted teeth she replied. "My daughter is not a whore. Supporting her while she becomes an adult is not the same as encouraging her."

"Maybe slut is a more correct term; she isn't charging for her services, is she?"

Jonathan Schmidt:

As soon as Jonathan stepped out of the milk house, he spotted Rebecca walking towards him. They met half way across the barnyard. He opened his arms, and they embraced. He said, "I am going to miss you so much after you move away."

"I'll miss you, too, Daddy."

"Don't spend too much time missing me. You and Kevin will have a wonderful life. Listen, after you marry, family and friends will place a great deal of pressure on you to start a family. Don't do it! Take Kevin up on his offer to help you with college. Get a degree in anything you want. Then, you two can have all the babies you want."

"Thank you, Daddy. Kevin wants me to go back to school, but he'll support whatever I decide."

"There isn't anything more I could wish for you. So, what can I do for my beautiful daughter today?"

Rebecca asked him if she and Kevin still needed a chaperone, and gave him the message from her mother.

"Well, if your mother doesn't think you need one, that's fine with me." Jonathan looked up startled as a sudden commotion burst out of their house.

The front door of the house flew open, and Deborah ran out. Close behind her came Rachel. Deborah spotted Jonathan and turned towards him. The turn slowed her enough that Rachel closed the distance and grabbed Deborah's arm. Rachel planted her feet causing Deborah to spin around. The force of the spin threw Deborah backwards. She hit the ground with an "OOF," and cried out, "Rachel, no, don't do this!"

Rachel said, "I've had enough of your hypocritical hogwash. My daughter and her fiancé haven't done half of the things you did before you married. You did it all—and then some. My daughter may play around with her fiancé, but she never slutted around with her biology teacher!" With those words, Rachel threw herself onto Deborah.

Loud imprecations, grunts, and cries rose from the pair. Arms and legs flailed about as they struggled. Both combatants, equally unskilled in fighting, disdained any attempt at defensive measures. Every effort went towards striking their opponent.

Shocked, Rebecca stepped beside her father and said, "Aren't you going to stop them?"

"Not as long as your mother is winning."

Rebecca's mother kept the upper hand and managed to stay on top until, with a mighty heave, Deborah dislodged her. Deborah fired off a haymaker without any real power behind it but managed to tag Rachel's left eye. Deborah crowed, "I've wanted to do that since high school! Little Miss Privileged. You got the nice clothes, and you got to have a real boyfriend. It wouldn't have been so bad, but you had to flaunt it."

Rachel wiped her eyes and started at the smear of blood on her palm. As Deborah finished talking, Rachel said, "What are you talking about?" She stepped in and sank her left fist into Deborah's stomach.

"I never flaunted anything!" and followed up the left jab with her own right-handed haymaker to Deborah's nose.

Deborah reeled back and checked her nose before replying with her best Rachel impersonation, "'Jonathan is so good at spooning', and 'Jonathan gets me so hot and bothered', and 'Jonathan has such big hands', and 'Jonathan blah, blah, blah'. I had to hear it all the time."

Rebecca glanced over at her father, who managed to look more than a little embarrassed.

Rachel said, "You were my best friend, who else could I tell?"

Deborah looked down. "I wasn't a very good friend. Jealousy crept into my heart and poisoned everything. It made me weak and easy prey for—sinfulness."

"Deborah, can't we forgive each other?"

"Can you forgive me for taking out my anger on Rebecca?"

"Hmm, well, let me work on that."

Kevin Butcher:

Rebecca stood smiling and looking oh so beautiful while she waited for me. She bounced up and down in excitement as I pulled into my parking spot. As soon as my truck came to a stop, Rebecca climbed in on the passenger side. She gave me a wicked grin and said, "I couldn't wait for you to get home!"

I gave her my best 'Naughty Kevin' smile and said, "You are going to be the best wife ever. Let me guess, Doctor Kevin needs to make a house call?"

"What? No. Well, maybe later, but that's not what I'm talking about."

Crash and burn! "Oh, sorry. What's going on?"

"I can't say. We're not supposed to talk about it." She leaned across the seat and kissed me. "Doctor Kevin looks so disappointed. Don't worry, I'm sure something will need your attention."

"If it isn't me, what has you so excited?"

"I promised not to tell, but if you notice something odd, don't say anything."

"This is bizarre."

"You have no idea."

We stopped for a kiss at our normal spot. Then Rebecca took my arm and pulled me the rest of the way around to the kitchen door.

Tonight's supper smelled like beef stew or pot roast. Mrs. Schmidt and Deborah fussed over pots at the stove. Tommy sat in his usual spot with Grainger next to him. The three of us exchanged nods.

Mrs. Schmidt called out, "Wash your hands before you sit, supper is almost ready."

I busied myself at the sink. Rebecca patted my butt as she moved past to help with dinner. Mr. Schmidt joined me at the sink. If he caught his daughter patting my behind, he kept it to himself. We chatted about our day and then sat. The ladies brought supper to the table. They served Beef and Barley Stew with crusty dinner rolls. Mr. Schmidt said grace. After the prayer, I raised my head and noticed Rebecca, Tommy, and Grainger all watching me. As I scanned past Tommy and Jonathan, I noticed Aunt Deborah had two black eyes. I must have looked surprised because Rebecca let out a short laugh. My eyes snapped back to Rebecca who gave me a slight nod towards her mother. I scanned past Rebecca and saw her mother had a single black eye. Mrs. Schmidt gave me a look telling me to mind my own business. Tommy snorted, and Grainger chuckled; they both received official glares.

After dinner, Mr. Schmidt gestured for me to follow him to his living room. He said, "You missed all the excitement. The ladies had themselves a tussle."

"I saw the black eyes. Who won?"

"Everybody did. Well, not you, but Deborah and Rachel are talking like friends again. You'll still want to watch yourself around my sister. If she starts in on you, look me up, and I'll deal with her. One thing is certain; I used to think Rebecca got her temper from me. I know better now!"

"Would it help if I let Deborah take me outside for a tussle?"

"If I thought it would, I'd referee it for you."

Interlude: Hanslein Hunting Camp

"Dude, I am so fucking high."

"We need to put the pot back. Dad will kill us if he finds out we got into it."

Ronnie picked up the bag; they'd smoked almost half of it. Recollection of whose pot he'd been smoking percolated through—he sat up and moaned. "Shit, shit, shit, he will fucking kill me. I need to figure something out."

Klaus stood up and stretched, "You'll figure it out. I'm going to crash." He stood, wobbled back and forth, and staggered down the hall. "I'm too high to walk."

"BOOM, BOOM, BOOM." Ronnie's eyes snapped open. The door, someone pounded on the door. Shit, it's got to be Klaus's Dad or one of his guys. "Hang on, I'm coming."

At almost the same instant Klaus snapped awake. Who the fuck was pounding on the door? Shit, this couldn't be good. Instinct took over and Klaus slipped out through his bedroom window. From the front room, the door burst open and a loud voice called out, "POLICE, DON'T MOVE."

Ronnie found himself lying face down on the living room floor. The biggest state trooper he had ever seen held him down with a knee on his back. The trooper screamed, "DON'T RESIST. PUT YOUR HANDS BEHIND YOUR BACK." Ronnie couldn't put his hands behind his back fast enough.

Major John Pittsenbargar of the Pennsylvania State Police strode into the cabin. His eyes scanned the room, missing nothing. He noted the overturned coffee table, one end held up by a bent soda can. The cabin's interior reeked of marijuana smoke. One of the troopers escorted a perp towards the open door. He stopped the trooper with a gesture and asked, "Did you find the marijuana?"

"Sir, I didn't see anything, and the search warrant didn't cover drugs."

Pittsenbargar nodded, in Pennsylvania, the scent of burnt marijuana didn't qualify as sufficient probable cause to search a residence.

Another trooper called out from the hallway, "Major, we had to bust the locks on a couple of doors looking for the other perp. There are sealed boxes and bales, one smells suspicious."

Major Pittsenbargar called out, "No one opens anything until we get another warrant!"

Klaus Hanslein Senior:

HBO's *The Wire* taught Klaus Hanslein all about telephone security. He kept several TracFones for anonymous conversations. One of them rang, "Yeah?"

"We need to talk, now!" Klaus recognized his attorney's voice. Waters wouldn't call like this if it weren't important.

Klaus said, "I'm at the house."

Jonathan Schmidt:

"This is the compost site." Jonathan and Grainger faced several large piles of straw, wood chips, and sawdust. They rode out here on a tractor with a front-end loader attachment. "We need to turn over the compost."

"Isn't compost for grass clippings and stuff?"

"It is, but it's also how we dispose of our dead animals. Under each of those piles is a cow. There isn't much left after six months or so."

Klaus Hanslein Senior:

His lawyer, Joseph Waters, pulled a chair from the kitchen table and sat. He shook his head when Senior offered him a whisky. Waters said, "One of our guys at the courthouse called. The DA has a search warrant for your hunting camp. They are looking for drugs."

"You have to stop them; I need four or five hours to get it cleared out."

"Can't do it. The court already faxed the signed warrant to the state police. They may be searching your cabin right now. You need to decide: run or wait for the police to arrest you."

"If I'm arrested, can I beat the charges?"

"Depends on the charges. Remember, the new DA is not a friend."

"Shit! I'll call a couple of guys. Damn it! I need cash. What about my kid and his friend, did they have anything to do with this?"

"I don't know, yet."

"My kid is smart enough to keep his mouth shut, but that Ronnie—he's too fucking smart. He needs to go, got it?"

Waters nodded; he had contacts inside the different lockups.

End of Chapter Six.

Kevin and Rebecca will return in chapter 7.