

Kelly

(Inspired by Mike C, based on characters in his novel: “James”
Characters and situations copyright by Mike C, 2002)

Chapter 27

“Company, my ass,” said Todd, after Kelly had relayed Laura’s message. “I’m going to pull over and find out what the hell’s going on.”

Todd waited until the next turn in the road and signaled as he would if he were actually going to turn, but he slowed the Tracker down, then slammed on the brakes and was nearly out of the truck before it had stopped rolling. He stepped into the middle of the road all set for a confrontation with the driver of the gray Buick. Caught by surprise, the driver stomped on the gas and hopped a curb into the opposite lane to avoid hitting Todd. The Buick made an illegal turn and roared out of sight in the middle of the rush hour traffic coming off I-77 onto Cindy Lane.

Todd was furious! He hadn’t been able to read the dirt covered license plate, and he wasn’t willing to take a chance with such reckless driving that he could follow the Buick. He stayed parked on the side of the road for a while letting his anger die down. Kelly talked softly to him and stroked his arm. While waiting, they shared a cigarette and Kelly called Vanetta to let her know about the incident and to keep an eye out for anything suspicious.

Vanetta said she would call the security company and have them do a regular drive by for the next few nights, and Todd suggested they pull the video surveillance tapes of the studio the next morning and see if they could spot the car.

Satisfied that the studio and Vanetta would be safe, Kelly next called Laura and told her of what had happened.

Laura promised that she and the girls would keep their eyes peeled for any vehicle following them, and then asked the obvious. “What does this guy want?”

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

***“Fuck!***

***Stupid cocksucker just stepped right into the fucking road!”***

*For just a moment, he caressed the cold steel hardness of the snub-nosed .38 clipped in his shoulder holster. The boss wouldn't like it, but if shit went down, he knew HE was gonna be the one left standing. Damnitalltohell! Shoulda got rid of the freakin' car when he saw that kid with Ayres looking at him! But he liked the feeling of the big powerful car and it had room to stretch, so he put it off. Shit! Spending as many hours as he had watching Ayres, you wanted something comfortable. He knew the rules though, and he had broken them. Won't do that again! That was much too close for comfort, and he hoped like crap the Boss wouldn't get wind of it.*

*Now he had to get another one.*

*"Fuck! Hope he don't notice the alignment is all shot to hell," he thought as he drove across the border into South Carolina. Hitting the curb had caused the steering to become flaky. Shit! Now he would have to get an alignment on it or risk the wrath of his boss who had supplied him with the phony credentials and identification. Better tell the prick who supplied the stake out cars about it before he called the boss.*

*First thing he did was stop at a full service car wash. With his carryall in his hand, there was nothing left in the car but burger wrappers and beer cans - he told the crew there was a good tip if they did a great job. Suckers really went for it and he watched as first they cleaned the interior than rinsed off the carefully applied layers of dust and mud. It had taken him six trips to a self-serve car wash on the edge of town close to a dirt road to get the right effect. He had driven the car, soaking wet, down the dirt service road, following semis, getting the outside covered in shit. Had personally mucked up the rear plate so the numbers wouldn't be legible. His only concern had been that a cop might stop him for the plates, but by avoiding most major roads, he had managed to keep out of trouble. No speeding or anything else that would draw unwanted attention to him.*

*As soon as the car was clean inside and out, he quickly slipped behind the wheel and left with a squeal of tires and the screams of 'Muthafucka!' fading behind him. Forty-five minutes later, he was heading north in a dark green Intrepid. He said nothing about the steering, but he was sure the old bastard had spotted it and would bill the Boss. It wasn't as comfortable as the Buick, but it had dark tinted windows and he didn't have the time to argue with the old prick. He had to get back to make sure Ayres didn't skip!*

*He only took enough time to grab a bag of burgers and fries and a large coke. He ate most of one of the burgers while a kid filled the tank with gas, then went inside the party store next door to the gas station and bought a six pack of Bud, a six of Coke and a bag full of candy bars and other snacks to get him through the evening. He was hoping the garage he had used for the last week would still be empty as he sped back to Charlotte.*

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

Todd was mostly calmed down. He still had no idea of why someone would be tailing him or Kelly, but now he was sure they were being watched at both Kelly's place and at the studio. Obviously this was not a set up for a burglary, but Todd and Kelly could think of no reason why someone would be watching them. All they had to go on was G's message that somebody was looking for Todd but didn't want to be seen.

"It's not like we've made any enemies," Kelly said to Todd after she had bought a slab of steaks big enough to rebuild most of a cow with.

"Not unless 'Stan the Man' has connections," said Todd with a smile. "We'll know better tomorrow. We'll go through the tapes and see if we can spot the car."

"Only if he's driven by the front of the studio enough times to be caught on camera," Kelly said, "Otherwise, he would have had to drive right into the parking lot. I wonder if he would be that stupid?"

"We can only hope," said Todd.

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

Back at Kelly's, Laura, Cara, and Ami looked around carefully after parking the Accord. Laura took her personal belongings from the car, gave it a gentle kiss on the roof, thanking the car for having been so good to her, and promising that the new owner would treat it as well.

Ami and Cara thought it was cute the way that Laura treated the car like it had a personality, but also found it touching. It said a lot about Laura's character.

"That's only going to leave the three of you two vehicles to get around with," said Cara as they walked to the house.

"No, not really," said Laura. "Kelly's got a Grand Cherokee in the garage, but why waste the gas on something that size when mostly we just run errands around town?"

"And it's not like you guys are ever really alone either," said Ami, "besides, Todd also has the Hummer!"

"So you see," said Laura, "my car is just taking up space, and my sister could really use it."

"Are you close to your sisters?" Ami asked.

"I'm really close with all my family," said Laura, "but, yeah, Kat and I get along much better than other sisters I know. Wait till you meet her."

Cara and Ami changed into something comfortable yet conservative. No need to be shocking anybody tonight, especially Laura's family. They knew how much it meant to Laura to have them meet Todd in person, although no one had ever mentioned what Todd's role was in regard to Laura.

"Won't your folks wonder?" asked Cara.

"Not at all," said Laura. "Remember what I said about true love? If asked, I will say I stay here with Kelly, but they won't ask. All they will see is the happiness in my eyes. They won't question it at all."

"What about that rock you got on your finger?" asked Ami. "They're bound to notice that!"

"My sisters will notice, that's for sure!" said Laura, "but they won't say anything in front of my parents."

"Wow," was all that Ami could say.

They all heard Kelly and Todd pull in.

After Kelly put the steaks into a quick wine marinade, she and Laura went to shower and change. Todd looked at the clock and decided he had just enough time to join them. Cara and Ami headed for the living room with bottles of mineral water.

Todd was very deliberately soaping Laura's breasts using Kelly's hands. Laura was quivering as four hands massaged her boobs. She was dying for release, and then she felt Todd's hard cock sliding between her legs. With a moan she spread her legs, giving him the access he needed to get inside her with his slippery cock. She was glad that Kelly only used natural soap in her house. She didn't need any artificial perfumes or dyes inside her, just Todd's cock. She felt Kelly's lips on her own as she leaned her head back and sighed. God, this was heaven.

Todd had moved himself into a position where he could best satisfy both his lovers but Kelly had pointed his dick towards Laura. Soaping his cock up he let it slide between Laura's legs and when she opened them to allow him access to her sacred place, he had just slid in, feeling her natural lubrication mixing with the glycerin soap on his cock. He held her around the waist with his left arm, just feeling her hot cunt convulsing on his throbbing cock. When Kelly kissed Laura, he could feel her cunt start to spasm. She was so turned on!

Kelly was kissing Laura when she felt her lover's breathing become labored. Laura really got to the point of no return faster than anybody Kelly had ever known. Kelly became aroused easily, but Laura seemed almost to live in an aroused state. She slipped one hand over Laura's tit, toying with the nipple as her tongue slipped deep inside her mouth brushing against Laura's teeth from the inside! One deep moan was all Kelly

heard and then she felt Laura grab her by her own bush and start driving her fingers through the sparse pubic hair. Then Kelly felt Todd's hand on her ass, a finger searching for her back entrance as Laura took the lead in the kissing game now.

Kelly moaned as she felt Laura quickly find her most sensitive spot, and nearly jumped out of her skin when Laura's soapy fingers pinched and twisted her clit. Todd's finger picked that moment to slide into her ass and it was Kelly who was moaning and thrashing. She hadn't realized she was that close herself! It was something about being with the two people she loved most in the whole world that did this to her. Sex had never been so good as it was with her lovers and she could hardly wait for the end of September when she would marry both of them!

Todd slipped out of Laura, still hard and now throbbing. He still hadn't climaxed, and the two girls were in a serious tongue action clinch. Pushing on both their butts so their pubes were mashed, Todd slipped his lubricated cock between them and pumped just three times before he released his load.

Kelly and Laura could feel his hot seed splashing against their bodies and included him in their embrace and kiss. Kelly's hand slipped down and pumped Todd's cock till it finished spurting and then said, "Time to wash up, we're expecting company."

Laura gave Todd another deep soulful kiss and then said, "more to come, Sweetheart. Tonight!"

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

Todd was the first out of the shower, as he didn't have to worry about conditioner for his short hair. He took the time to shave, and then joined the girls in the bedroom where they were picking out something to wear.

Todd slipped on a pair of shorts and a T-shirt, then reclined on the bed to watch his fiancées get dressed. "You know," he said. "Watching you two get dressed is almost as erotic as watching you get undressed."

Kelly laughed as she dusted Laura in with a soft scented natural powder. "Admit it, Todd," she said. "You just like watching us, period!"

"Yeah, I guess I do," he said. "I'm the luckiest guy in the world."

Kelly and Laura pulled on matching shorts and Ts, and presented themselves for inspection. Todd just smiled. They both looked beautiful. Laura had sighed when she put on her bra, but at least, thanks to Kelly, it was a light and comfortable one. She had asked Doctor Myers about the need to wear one, the doctor having taken Laura on as a patient as well even though her practice was closed. Mary Ann had told her that bra or no bra, if she was destined to droop, she would. But she said that Laura had good muscle tone and unless she was going to do something that would cause her boobs to go

bouncing, she didn't need to worry about wearing one if she felt more comfortable without it.

"It's all a myth," Mary Ann had said about bras. "It helps the industry sell more, but it's all genetic. Nothing can change that except for surgery."

"You mean implants, right?" Laura had asked.

"Exactly. I hope you aren't the kind of girl who thinks gravity defying breasts are what matters most in this world."

"Hell, no!" said Laura. "I just wanted to make sure that I wasn't going to cause any damage by leaving it off."

"Only if you do something that causes them to bounce around a lot," said Mary Ann. "Otherwise, let nature take care of itself."

And as much as Laura liked feeling unencumbered, it was her parents coming to visit. She wasn't quite ready to show how much their little girl had changed.

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

The Williams family showed up just before 7:00. After introductions were made, Harry explained that he got stuck at work booking some jerk. "Sometimes I think I'd like to pack it all in," he said, as he gratefully accepted the beer offered by Todd.

"How long have you been on the force?" asked Todd.

"Twenty-five years come November," Harry said.

"Ever think of retiring?" asked Kelly.

Meg laughed. "He talks about it all the time," she said.

"Times have changed," said Harry. "It's not the same job any more. I started when I graduated High School in '76. Nowadays, I'm saying 'Sir' to kids half my age who joined after taking law courses in College. Meg told me I should take classes after work, but with the shifts the way they are, I didn't have the time, and then the kids came along and I wanted to spend as much time with them as I could. I won't get higher than my rank of Sergeant. The problem is, with only 25 years in, my pension won't be much of anything, and I don't want to end up as a rent a cop, but it's all I really know. It's gotten so bad that all I see is perps on every corner. Hell, when we pulled in here tonight, I could have sworn that there's a summons server parked across the street."

Todd sat up straight, as did Kelly and Laura. "Why's that, Harry?"

Harry set his beer down and looked carefully at his daughter and then at Kelly and Todd. “Now, I thought I was just in cop mode,” he said. “I mean, I haven’t met you before, Todd, but I have met Kelly and I know a lot about the two of you. I’ve never even seen a speeding ticket come through for either of you, and I would know.” Then he laughed. “Of course we all know about the ‘Speed Demon’ on roller blades here,” he said looking at Kelly, “but I also know all the process servers in town, and I didn’t recognize this one, nor have we gotten any information about someone from out of town. Are you in some sort of trouble?” he asked quietly.

“Dad,” said Laura, exasperation in her voice.

“No,” said Kelly to Laura. “Your dad’s only being protective of you and he has a right to ask.”

Todd spoke up. “No, sir. We’ve been followed the last couple of days by a gray Buick, and it nearly ran me over today on our way home, but we only became aware of it today. Then we realized that we’ve all felt like we’re being watched for a few days. There’s no reason for anybody to be watching us, and certainly no reason for anyone to serve a summons or otherwise.”

Harry let the silence drag on for a few moments, then finally said, “Okay. But it’s not a grey Buick; it’s a green Intrepid. And what happened today?”

Todd explained that once he knew for sure that he was being followed; he had stopped the Tracker to confront the guy. Find out what he wanted, and how the car had hopped the curb trying to avoid stopping.

“Probably changed cars knowing you could spot him now,” said Harry. “Can I borrow your phone?”

They had been sitting outside, waiting for the barbeque to warm up. Kat and the twins along with Cara and Ami had insisted on helping out with the meal and were inside scrubbing Yukon Gold potatoes and preparing corn for the barbeque. Laura got the cordless phone and handed it to her dad.

Harry dialed a number from memory. “Lew? Harry. I’ve got some nut stalking my daughter.” Harry listened for a minute then said, “Yeah, that would be great, Lew. He’s parked partially inside a garage, kitty corner to the south from where the Speed Demon lives. A dark green Intrepid.” Harry laughed. “Yeah, I’m having supper with her and her partner and my daughter.”

Harry blushed as he spoke low into the phone. “I am *not* shitting you. Meg’s here as well as the rest of the girls, and you should see the size of the steaks!”

Meg smiled and told Todd and Kelly that Lew was an old friend of Harry's. They'd been partners for a lot of years until Lew was put on desk duty after a drunk driver had rammed Lew's patrol car leaving him with slight limp.

"Feel free to have him stop off after they check out this guy," said Kelly to Harry.

"You hear that, Lew?" asked Harry. "The Speed Demon herself has invited you to stop in after you check this out. You got to see this illegal beer they have here!"

"Already?" said Harry. "Man, that was fast. Yeah, I'll wait for you out front."

Harry disconnected and told everyone that there was one squad car already located at the corner of the closest intersection, and another just a block further. Lew would be by in about five minutes in an unmarked.

Not wanting to worry the younger girls needlessly, Kelly made a pretense of showing off the house to Meg and Harry and Todd and Laura followed along till they got to the living room where Harry kept an eye out for his old partner to drive by. He explained that as soon as Lew made the car, the two squad cars would close in.

Within a few minutes of reaching the living room, they saw a plain brown Chevy Malibu drive by and then all hell broke loose. Appearing from the garage of a neighbor who was on vacation, a dark green Intrepid squealed its tires trying to get out and down Jane Street, but the squad car at the corner of Burris Ave blocked the street while the other squad car came roaring up from High Laurel. They had him blocked in, and Lew was in the middle. They watched as the driver tried to get out and run on foot, but the officer from the first cruiser had him in a few easy strides and down on the ground. A quick pat down, and the officer raised the pistol he found on the man and held it up for Lew to see.

Lew shook his head and walked over to the Intrepid. Without touching anything, he pointed out a number of things to the other officer. It took another ten minutes before another cruiser arrived and the suspect was taken away in handcuffs. A Charlotte police tow truck arrived to tow the vehicle and Lew finally was able to make it back to Kelly's.

"What's the deal, Lew?" asked Harry.

"He's not talking." Lew said. "Refuses to cooperate, but we have him on possession of an unregistered handgun, open alcohol in a moving vehicle, resisting arrest, and enough paraphernalia to hold him on a stalking charge. We'll have to wait for the judge to okay developing his film, but he's not getting out for some time to come. If he had brains, he would have left the gun in the car, but fleeing the scene with a gun, that was just plain stupid."

"Thanks, Lew," said Harry. "You remember the Speed Demon, don't you?"

“How can anyone forget Ms. Jennsen?” he asked, taking Kelly’s hand. Then he looked around and said, “Hi, Meg, Laura.”

“And this is her partner, Todd Ayres,” Harry said, introducing Todd.

“So, you really do exist,” said Lew. “We’ve been curious about you down at the precinct for years. We see your name on all kinds of stuff, especially the stuff for the kids, and of course the pictures in the magazines and such, but we never saw you. We had even considered visiting the studio to see if you were real.”

Todd laughed and assured Lew that he was real but that he preferred to stay behind the camera.

“So, what’s this I hear about illegal beer?” Lew asked.

“Definitely contraband stuff,” said Harry. Laura went and fetched a bottle after Lew had stepped inside and they had moved to the back yard.

“Now, Sergeant Williams, how can you tell this is contraband?” Kelly asked with a smirk.

“Simple,” said Harry, “no duty label!”

“Darn, caught red handed!” said Kelly.

Harry and Lew laughed.

“Don’t you worry about these lugs here,” said Meg. “They’ve been closing their eyes to a lot of Cuban cigars that are sold downtown. It seems a lot of officers enjoy their own little bit of contraband.”

Harry and Lew laughed again. “It’s damn good beer, though,” said Harry.

Lew finished his, and though he looked longingly at the steaks, he declined an invite to stay, saying he had to find out who was going to claim the stalker. See if he was willing to talk yet. After shaking hands once again, he drove off in his unmarked Chevy.

“I can’t believe Uncle Lew turning down a steak,” said Kat after the girls had been brought up to date.

“Speaking of which,” said Todd “is anybody hungry?”

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

An hour later, the dishes were in the sink and everyone was sitting back enjoying a drink. Meg had tea, as did Laura and Kelly. Todd and Harry were enjoying another Molson's in the sun, which was still visible from the back yard.

"There's nothing like a summer evening spent outdoors," said Harry. "I really enjoyed that meal. Thank you for inviting us over."

"It was our pleasure," said Kelly. "I'm just sorry that our problems caused the delay. I'm afraid you missed Enterprise."

"Actually," said Harry, "I'm taping it at home."

Todd laughed and said that he would catch it later on time shift cable. "It's just summer repeats anyway, but I want the network to know I'll still watch it, even the reruns," he said.

He excused himself and went inside for a minute, then returned bearing a large rectangular cardboard box. "I thought you might like to have this, Harry," he said presenting it to him.

Harry's eyes widened when he opened the box and saw its contents. "The *Enterprise NX-01*," he breathed.

"Thanks, Todd," he finally managed. "This is a collector's piece."

"Which is why I thought you might like it," said Todd.

"I love your studs, Honey," said Meg to Laura. "And Kelly's are identical!"

"Yes, I know," said Laura. "We're spoiled." Before her mother took the thought further, she pulled her car-keys from her pocket. "And this is my chance to spoil my little sister a bit. Kat, I'm turning the Accord over to you. I've signed the transfer slip, it's in the glove compartment, and I'm sure Dad will help you transfer the ownership and get the insurance set up in your name. Other than that, it's all yours, little sister," she smiled as she handed Kat the keys.

Kat gave Laura a huge hug. "Thanks, Laura," she said. "I don't know what to say."

"You don't have to say anything," Laura said quietly. "Just help mom and dad out as much as you can."

"You know I will," said Kat. "I just wish I could get a job so I could help out money-wise."

This was the perfect time, Kelly realized, it couldn't have been planned any better.

"Are you looking for some part time work that won't interfere with school?" asked Kelly.

"Yes," said Kat, "but jobs are so hard to find."

"Well, I just happen to know of an apartment building that is looking for someone to do things like vacuum the hallways and clean the glass doors and stuff like that. Would you be interested in something like that?"

"Oh, yeah!" said Kat.

"Do they only need a student?" asked Meg interestedly.

"Why's that, mom?" asked Laura.

"They're going to cut back my hours at the grocery store," Meg sighed.

"Fucking ingrates," mumbled Harry.

"Harry Williams, you watch your mouth," Meg said sharply, and then her tone softened. "I'm sorry, Harry. You know how I feel about it. I'm as mad as you are, but they're replacing all the senior staff with kids to save money. We'll just have to be careful for a while."

"Maybe not," said Kelly slowly.

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

No one had been aware of the financial problems Harry and Meg had faced in the last decade. Not even Laura, the oldest of the four girls.

A solemn discussion took place in Kelly's back yard as Meg explained that after the birth of the twins, she had required special medical treatment not covered by Harry's health plan. Interest rates at the time had been extremely high, and they had been forced to take out a mortgage for more than the value of their house.

Their bad luck combined with bad timing had seen all their savings and dreams disappear, and now, 14 years later, they still owed nearly as much as their house was worth. "That's why we could never take the kids anyplace like Disney World," Meg explained. "Neither of us have relatives with money and we wouldn't impose on them anyway."

“We thought we might get ahead a little with Meg working,” said Harry, “but now that’s being cut as well. You know how the police budget has been cut here, so any real chances of overtime are gone for me, and with the clamp down on cops working off hours on anything related to the public, all we’ve been able to keep up is our smiles.”

Todd and Kelly were really feeling bad for this wonderful couple that had done such a great job of raising a family and under such financial conditions. Finally, Todd, who was starting to feel his emotional balance threatening to leave, got up and grabbed the paperwork from Steve they had brought home from the office.

“Look,” he said. “I’ve already learned once this week how people can react to what they think is charity, so I’ll say this right from the beginning: this isn’t charity. The background is that Kelly and I converted some holdings into an apartment block for seniors. We need a manager, and ideally we want a live-in family to take care of the place. I can’t think of a better family for our purposes than you, if you think you might take it, you have to consider if it’s in your interests, too. Harry,” he said, looking at him. “You could take it on part-time, if you want to get your thirty years in. Wouldn’t do the image any harm, either,” he grinned, “having a serving police officer living there!”

“Anyway, your job would mainly be supervisory and collecting the rent. The major routine maintenance will be contracted out, as well as most repairs.”

“When Cathy mentioned wanting a job,” Kelly said, “I knew that I could organize her getting one with whoever took on the building. If you decide to do this, you can give all your daughters jobs.” Then she laughed. “All except Laura, of course. She’s already spoken for.”

Harry raised one eyebrow. “Nepotism?” he enquired mildly.

“Well, of course!” Todd laughed. Then he was serious for a moment. “We take care of Family,” he said.

Harry looked at him hard for a moment, and then leaned forward in his chair. “Thanks Todd, we really appreciate that,” he said, offering his hand.

Todd took his hand, while off to the side Kelly and Laura let their fingers entwine excitedly for a moment.

“It’s not really hard work,” continued Todd, “it’s just that we want somebody there all the time. We want to provide affordable safe housing for some of the seniors in this town who aren’t ready to finish off their days in a nursing home. Nobody should have to make that choice if they aren’t ready for it.”

“Why don’t you take some time to read the offer,” said Kelly. “We haven’t advertised for anyone yet, and the apartments are all empty right now. We intend to officially open it on the first of September.”

Kelly sat back and lit up one of her cigarettes. Laura had gone into the house with her sisters to discuss the music the Williams Sisters would be performing as the climax to the evening of family get together. An eerie silence had dropped on the back yard as Meg and Harry looked over the contract.

Without looking up, Meg said, “should you be smoking, Kelly?”

“No, she shouldn’t,” laughed Todd as he snatched the cigarette from Kelly’s hand and took it for himself.

“Hey!” said Kelly, surprised. She snatched the cigarette back from Todd. “Get your own,” she said with a laugh.

“I like them better coming from you,” he said.

Kelly exhaled, then looked at Meg. “Why did you say that, Meg?”

Laura came out at that moment and said, “Did you think I came by my strange intuition by chance, Kell?” Laura smiled at her mother. “I just hope that one day my abilities are as strong as mom’s.”

“So you knew?” Kelly asked Meg.

“The minute we arrived,” said Meg.

“Well, I only smoke a few a day, and my doctor said that considering my other health concerns, it wouldn’t harm the baby,” said Kelly.

“I know, dear,” said Meg softly. “I have the same problem. That’s largely what landed us in the situation we are in now.”

“What situation is that, mom,” Laura asked.

“We’re going to be moving soon, honey. We simply can’t afford to keep up the mortgage payments on the house on just your father’s salary.”

“Why didn’t you say something?” asked Laura. “I would have given you everything I have and everything I earn.”

“I don’t think that’s necessary, sweetheart,” said Harry. “It seems we might have already found a way out of our problems. But it is very sweet of you to offer.”

Todd had taken a cigarette for himself, wishing he could light a joint. His thoughts were churning. How could a couple like Harry and Meg have lived all these years going deeper and deeper in debt and yet shown their daughters such love and

attention? And yet, his parents, who had never really wanted for much of anything, why had they been so cold and distant?

Kelly could see Todd wondering. She might not be able to read his mind, but she knew what he was thinking. They had been lucky. If not for Todd's talent and determination, and her luck of having been born photogenic, they would have struggled all their lives. It seemed unfair to Kelly and then she heard Muriel's voice... *"Don't you fret about being successful, Kelly. You are doing things for others with your good fortune. Many will benefit from the goodness in your heart."*

Kelly shook her head. Where had that come from? Meg was smiling at her. Had she heard Muriel, too? Nah, couldn't be.

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

Cara and Ami spent most of the evening with the twins and Kat. After the excitement from the arrest had died down and supper being done, they had left the Williams girls to do something special for Kelly and her company. Ami remembered an old family dessert her mother used to make. If she remembered correctly it was called "Shattered Glass" and consisted of fruit, Jell-O, shredded coconut and whipped cream. She called her mother to get the recipe, becoming discouraged when she heard it was usually left overnight to set.

Her mother, sensing her disappointment, suggested going to a deli and buying pre-made Jell-O. With a few alterations to the recipe, she could pull it off in an hour if she had the ingredients. Ami and Cara cornered Kat.

"We need a ride to a deli," said Cara. Both she and Ami had spent so many years training in gymnastics that neither of them had ever had the time for Driver's Ed.

"Sure," said Kat. "I'm covered under the family policy, and the car is still in Laura's name, so let's go!" Sam and Jen decided to go along for the ride.

After explaining what she was looking for, Kat suggested to Ami that they go to one of the big supermarkets on Statesville Road. They were open later, and quite a few had deli departments.

As Kat drove, looking for an open supermarket, Cara asked if the girls were really going to sing tonight.

"You mean sing for our supper?" asked Jen with a smile.

"Sure. We like to sing," finished Sam. Ami looked back over the top of the front seat. Cara was sandwiched between identical bookends.

“I can see where you might fool other people,” said Ami, “but Cara and I have been in competition too long not to notice the little differences.”

Cara laughed. “I’ll bet you drive the boys at school nuts. But they wouldn’t really be looking at your teeth would they?”

Kat laughed from the driver’s seat. “I used to threaten to tattoo them just to be able to tell them apart, but it’s easy for the girls in our family. Dad can still be fooled though. But Jen is the quieter one. You can tell by the way she walks and talks. Sam is the more boisterous of the two. I can always tell which one’s coming into the room. What did you notice?”

“Jen has a small chip in her right eye tooth,” said Cara.

“And Sam has a dimple on her left cheek that looks like a crescent moon when she smiles,” said Ami.

“Wow!” said Cathy. “You guys really *don’t* miss a thing. This comes from competition in gymnastics? How long were you in it?”

“We retired just about two months ago,” said Cara. “Both Ami and me were in it for 12 years. That’s how we first met.”

“God, did your parents start you off while you guys were still in diapers?” asked Kat.

Ami laughed. “No. We were five when we got our first coach. But we were doing it for a year before that in an exercise class.”

“Why?” asked Sam. “I mean, I can understand doing it for fun, but why in the world would you start training full time at the age of five?”

“I’m not sure any more, Sam,” said Ami. “I think I wanted to do it, but now, I’ve been doing it so long, I don’t remember. We were very goal oriented.”

“And after all these years, you just decided to retire?” Kat was really curious.

“We didn’t have a lot of choice in it,” said Ami with a sigh. “We have a friend, Erin, who might make it all the way to the 2004 Olympics, but she’s a couple of years younger than us. Sometimes, it’s as much about when you were born as it is about the practice. Four years between the Big Game leaves a lot of time for growth and injuries.”

Kat pulled into the parking lot of a supermarket, and all five girls spilled out and ran into the store.

Ami found containers of ready-made Jell-O, most with fruit already in them. She sighed. It would not turn out as well as her mother's, but it would have to do. She bought five containers, one each of Lemon, Lime, Cherry, Orange, and Grape. The Cherry had real cherries in it, while the Orange had small slices of Mandarin orange slices in it. Thankfully the others were plain. Her mother had explained to her how to take a can of fruit cocktail and dry the fruit so it didn't cause the whipped cream to run, so she bought three large cans of expensive, exotic mixed fruits. A bag of desiccated coconut and a gallon of the thickest cream the store had, and at Cara's insistence, a gallon of frozen blueberry yogurt, with real blueberries. At the checkout, Ami used her debit card for the very first time.

As Kat pushed the speed limit to get back to Kelly's, across town another exchange was taking place.

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

*He hadn't told them his name. His fake I.D. hadn't stood up for more than ten minutes, and when he still refused to give his name, they had gotten rough with him.*

*What the fuck??? Stalking a cop's daughter??? The one dick had kept repeating that, saying that was the dumbest thing in the world to do. The other one kept smacking him on the back of the head, not hard enough to leave marks, but it still fuckin' hurt! But he had kept his mouth shut, even when they nearly busted his fingers printing him.*

*He had been physically tossed into a cell. Resisting arrest they said. Can't do that without a bit of bruising. He demanded a lawyer, but they just laughed at him. "You're nobody according to you. Well, nobody gets a lawyer without a name." And they had slammed the door to the cell.*

*Two hours later, the big cop, the one who had made him, the one driving the unmarked, he showed up.*

*"How're you doin', Eddie?" he had said. "Want a lawyer now? You can call one, but I'm afraid he won't be able to see you for a few days. We've got to make sure you're not a terrorist, and the judge said first we get to find out where you've been hiding out and print the film in your camera. Probably take us till next week. You sure are one dumb fuck! Should of told us your name instead of making us look it up the hard way. Just makes us look all the harder!" He was laughing as he walked away from the cell. Thirty minutes later, two big cops slapped handcuffs on him and dragged him up the stairs to a pay phone. His shins hurt where they had hit the stairs, and they threw him at the phone. Nobody around to say anything or see anything. He still didn't understand what the hell they meant by stalking a cop's daughter, but he knew it was going to be dangerous in jail.*

*He called collect, the phone rang seven times before the boss picked it up.*

***“It’s me ... Eddie. I’m in jail in Charlotte.”***

***“Fucking moron!” was all Eddie heard before the phone went dead.***

***Maybe he’d be safer if he stayed in jail.***

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

Ami drained the cans of fruit, saving the juice as Cara asked. Sam and Jen were fascinated by what Ami was doing and stuck around to help cut up the Jell-O into ½ inch cubes. Cara dumped the thick cream into a huge bowl and dug out Kelly’s blender. Adding some sugar, she beat the cream till it stiffened into a thick goo. Ami added the towel dried fruit to the cream, and Cara, the muscles on her arm showing the strain, folded it all in with a big wooden spoon. Ami then added the cubed Jell-O and sprinkled two cups of the desiccated coconut into the mix. If everybody could just hold off for another hour, it would be well set in the fridge.

After cleaning up the mess in the kitchen, Cara, Ami, and the twins went outside to rejoin the rest of the family.

“I hope nobody’s in a hurry to leave,” said Cara. “Ami’s just whipped us up a fancy dessert, but it’s got to set for a bit in the fridge.”

Harry laughed. “I’ve always got room for dessert,” he said with a broad smile.

His mood had lightened considerably. While he would wait to discuss it with Meg, he was already feeling a huge burden being lifted off his shoulders. They could sell the house and pay off the hospital bill that had haunted him for nearly 14 years. They could finally get that fresh start they had always dreamt about, and Meg wouldn’t have to punish herself working for minimum wage any more. He’d be able to do more with the kids and Meg. Hell, based on what Kelly had said about occupancy, they would earn more working together as a family than he did as a twenty-five year veteran on the force. And, he’d also get his pension. Forty-three wasn’t a bad age to start a new career. He knew a lot of cops who had burned out younger. Kelly had given him and Meg a set of keys that would let them take a look at the building and the manager’s apartment.

Turning to Todd, Harry said, “Have you got any more of that illegal beer floating around?”

“Hey!” said Ami. “No peeking in the fridge.”

“I’ll get them, daddy,” Laura said. “Todd? You want another? Kelly, do you want one now? Mom?”

Meg settled for a bottle of mineral water as she was driving home, but Kelly and Laura each had one as did Todd and Harry. Laura was happy. She had been right. Where there is true love, nobody questioned the reason. She knew her mom and dad had both seen the identical rings she and Kelly were wearing, but neither had said a word. The biggest surprise of the night had been when Kat and the twins had left with Ami and Cara, and Meg had told Kelly and Todd about the six months she had spent at a private sanitarium for treatment of an unusual anemic condition brought on by her last pregnancy, and severe depression.

Kat and the twins were preparing to serenade everyone. They were thrilled and enthralled with Todd and Kelly. They couldn't believe their good fortune and the opportunity to finally visit Disney World. They loved to sing, and Todd had promised to take a group picture of them before they ever hit the road with Robert and their back up band. Not that they were letting all this attention go to their heads. They knew firsthand what conditions they were facing going to nursing homes, and then Todd had sprung the big surprise by telling them if they were as good as Laura, he would finance and pay for them to travel all over both North and South Carolina.

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

Like Laura, Cathy, Samantha, and Jennifer had been raised in a loving house where jealousy just wasn't tolerated. They were happy for their older sister and loved seeing her new clothes and her chance to go to university. When Laura had told Kat the computer was going to stay at home for them to keep, they had been very happy. They realized how long and hard Laura had worked to buy the P-2, and then there had come the question of would they be willing to sing, as a trio? It had taken very little convincing on Kat's part for Sam and Jen to agree. They enjoyed entertaining seniors, and then when they were told that Todd and Kelly were going to take them to Disney World, they had screamed for joy! Not just a one or two day trip either but a full five days and they were flying down, and staying at a hotel right on the property!

Now, though, things seemed a bit different. During supper, when they happily chowed down on the biggest steaks they had ever seen, Kelly had mentioned a storage room full of brand new clothes, many of which would probably fit the three younger Williams girls. They were invited to come down and try them on. In the car ride with Cara and Ami, Jen had mentioned this and Ami had confirmed that the clothes were all big name designers. Cara had verified that there really was a huge storeroom, and that she and Ami had filled their own wardrobe with some of the best and newest designs. "All you need to buy for yourselves is your undies," said Cara.

Todd had mentioned publicity photos and costumes for the girls. He had said something along the line of costumes that would fit their style of music. They weren't exactly sure what he had in mind, but they all really liked Todd and understood why Laura looked so happy.

The sisters didn't understand why Todd and Kelly were willing to go to the expense they had to bring them to different seniors' homes and long term care facilities, but they had heard about the big new van that some teacher would be driving them in. This was just a little stranger than normal. Then after they had gotten back from the grocery store, their mom and dad seemed so much more relaxed than usual, and then their mom mentioned something about moving!

The girls, who had been singing publicly for about as long as Cara and Ami had been gymnasts, suffered no stage fright or apprehension, but they realized that this was something important to everybody. Kat looked at Jen and Sam, then said, "ready?"

Sam and Jen nodded and the three girls got up and stood before their attentive audience of seven. As natural as breathing, when Kat started the first word of the song they had chosen to start with, Sam and Jen joined in, blending a pure three-part harmony.

They started out in a slow gospel tempo...

**"This little light of mine,  
I'm going to let it shine.  
This little light of mine,  
I'm going to let it shine,  
This little light of mine,  
I'm going to let it shine,  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine."**

By the time the girls had reached the first chorus, they picked up the tempo and volume, clapping their hands in time and dancing on the beat. As Kat started to pull out the Southern gospel sound, Sam and Jen went to counter harmonies, filling not only the back yard with the strong vocals but much of the surrounding neighborhood as well.

Meg and Harry smiled with pride as the girls finished this first song and effortlessly slipped into the recently revived hit by Dolly Parton, Linda Ronstadt, and Emmylou Harris, "To know him is to love him."

Kelly and Todd sat back amazed at the vocal power of these three girls, their range and their ability to shift from one genre to another, all without any back up instrumentals. They didn't even get a chance to applaud as the girls went from one song to the next, though Todd started to chuckle when the three girls did their version of an old Beatles tune revived briefly in the 80's by the artist Tiffany. "I saw him standing there."

Todd was clapping with unbridled enthusiasm, as were Kelly, Ami, and Cara, when Kat, Sam, and Jen finished that song. To make it all perfect, neighbors from unseen yards surrounding Kelly's were clapping as well and numerous cries of "Encore" were heard.

"Thank you," said Kat laughing. "Our next performance will be..."

“On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August,” said Todd. “At our annual company BBQ and fun day at Carowinds Park. We’ll even try and get Laura to join you for a few songs.”

“It would be really special if you girls could open the celebration by singing the national anthem,” Kelly said.

“Does this mean you still want us to do this thing you were talking about?” asked Kat.

“Are you serious?” asked Todd. “You girls are going to be the headline act of our new venture. Kell, we have to get these girls costumed in something quick.”

“And this has no bearing on the other thing we were talking about?” asked Harry.

“None at all, Harry,” said Kelly. “If they’re willing to give of their talents for a good cause, we will not only take them to Disney World, but we’ll start a college trust fund for them as well, no matter what you and Meg decide on the other matter.”

“This is important to you, isn’t it, Kelly,” Meg said.

“More than you can imagine, Meg.”

“Because of Muriel?” Meg asked.

“Muriel? How do you know about Muriel?”

“Let’s just say I know things,” said Meg giving Kelly a big warm smile.

“Who’s ready for dessert?” asked Ami.

While everyone raved about the “Shattered Glass,” Ami kept apologizing that it wasn’t as good as her mother’s, and that next time she would be more prepared.

It was close to midnight when the Williams family finally left. Kat had driven off with Sam and Jen right after dessert, leaving their parents to talk with Laura, Todd, and Kelly. Ami and Cara had said goodnight to everyone and headed to their bedroom.

Meg had asked when would be a good time for the three younger sisters to get fitted for costumes, and Kelly had said Friday would probably be best, and they should be prepared to take home a car full of new clothes.

Harry was shaking his head. “I don’t understand why you two do the things you do,” he said. “Laura filled us in on this contest you’re starting in September, but like the summer camps and the other programs, once again, you’re not taking any credit for it.”

Todd shrugged slightly. “Would it make a difference in the end result, Harry?”

“We have no need for recognition,” added Kelly. “We seem to get enough of that just through our work. We just prefer to remain in the background.”

“Follow your heart, dear,” said Meg to Kelly as she headed out the door with Harry. “It will never steer you wrong. And listen to Muriel. She has something to tell you that you need to hear.”

“You *did* hear her,” said Kelly.

Meg just shrugged.

“How much **do** you know?” Kelly asked with a hint of worry.

“Probably more than a mother should know,” sighed Meg. “But Laura is happy, and she’s very much in love with you and with Todd.” Meg looked to see Todd and Harry talking by the car with Laura.

“I can’t predict the future, Kelly. I only see the here and now. Laura sees things that are to come, though she hasn’t fully developed her ability yet. Sometimes I pray that she never does.”

“I take it you don’t see your ability as a gift, then.”

Meg put her arm through Kelly’s. “Sometimes it can be a downright curse,” she said. “But I can see your heart, dear. You are a kind and loving person. Allow yourself to understand and believe this is who you have always been.”

Kelly gave her a hug, and said, “Thank you.”

Meg gave Kelly a kiss on the cheek. “I don’t understand everything I see,” she said, “but I recognize goodness, and I know love when I see it.”

***To be continued...***