

## 15. A DIM HOPE

The Roadhouse was more crowded than she had ever seen it. Nice weather makes people want to have fun. Tonight was no exception. Ray Worth was huddling in the crowd. He tried to make his presence as innocuous as possible. But Sienna wanted to confront him. To expose his hypocrisy.

“What are you doing here Deacon Worth?”

“I need to do my business in many out of the way places.”

He gave her a strange smile

Sienna attempted to contradict him, “But the only business that goes on here is the devil’s.”

“I see that you are plying your craft?”

“So is the wolf taking off his sheep’s garb.” She laughed as she walked over to the bar. She was approached by someone who had been talking to Ray earlier. She recognized the man from the gas station.

“It’s dangerous to even be here. I told you that you shouldn’t come back. Not now. It’s too soon.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

He didn’t seem belligerent just impatient with her.

“I can’t be seen talking to you.”

“Who the hell are you?” Come on, tell me your name.”

She wondered if this was the person who was shooting at her. If he actually knew who she was, he could be warning her. She wanted to ask him more, but he stormed out.

The bar light sent a glare on her face. It almost a spotlight. With her rich tan, she looked more ominous than ever. Even in the crowded bar, she was the focus of every conversation.

The next day, she went to the sheriff’s.

“Warren, I went to Adairsville. Why didn’t you follow up on my references for the apartment?”

“You paid cash so they only required one reference. We checked out the phone number but it had been disconnected. The person had moved. Sorry that lead turned into a dead end. But we do have some good news.”

Warren showed her a list of names.

“Only a few of the customers actually live her. Like Dale Simon.”

The name seemed to ring a bell for her. But she didn’t want to say anything. Warren had given her enough to work with. She needed to take it from there.

“Great. Thanks a lot.”

“I don’t know what else I can do for you.”

Dale Simon was an insurance broker. He prided himself on the success that he had achieved in the rugged locale. Many of his clients were resistant to the idea of insurance. They felt that they could fend for themselves without the support of some kind of *safety net*. Even though auto insurance was required by law, they did everything that they could to avoid wasting their frugal savings on such nonsense. Accidents were for the careless and the ill-fated. Sure, bad things happened to good people, but the overall reason was to teach everyone a lesson. If

pride went before a fall, no one was above its terrible results.

Dale used his charm to overcome the prejudices of the locals. He had a direct style. He didn't put on airs. His clothes were neat and pressed. But they were never ostentatious. He'd buy his suits at a nearby mall. He wasn't worried about impressing the world. He gave more credibility to a smile and a handshake.

Despite his easy-going manners, Dale felt that life had abandoned him to this penance. His mission had been limited and hid a more ambitious type. Down deep, he felt that his limited success was a sign that he was due more from life. He was looking for that one opportunity that would definitely reward his hard work. If his touch had not been golden, then he hoped that the heavens might one day rain down on him. He kept his eyes open for that opportunity.

Like so many desperate souls, he felt that he was living two lives. In one world he was this meek salesperson who felt gratified with his meager return. In the other world, he burned for a munificent payback. One day that opportunity would grace Cordelia. And he would be prepared. Until that day, he let his hunger secretly work its way into him.

He was married with a son and a daughter. He and his wife had seen better days. He never spoke a harsh word to her. He played the part of a loving father. His eyes seldom wandered. Still there was something troubling this restless soul. His wife Edna hardly knew of this side of him. She felt that he could be equally satisfied with the benefits from his home life and the rewards of his work. But he always looked beyond his family.

The light was now shining more fervently on Sienna. She could feel the imminence of her revelation. She didn't say anything to Warren. But it was starting to fall into place. The man at the gas station, the man in the Roadhouse, that was Dale Simon. She couldn't let on that she knew who he was. She had to take his warning to heart. What if she was indeed hiding something. Dale had only reminded her of that.

With his reminder came that faint glimmer of hope. She had recognized him last night. It wasn't just the time at the gas station. She knew this man, this Dale Simon. She felt that he knew her secret. But he had warned her to back off. He told her about the danger that he felt for himself. But it was also a warning to her as well.

Now her head was swirling with this news. The face was dominating her. Dale Simon. He was a man who hid in the shadows, a shadow of a man. But in her mind, he came to life. She wasn't afraid of him. Not at all. But he invited her consider some deeper fear. This fear was not part of her. It was almost as if she was being told to fear the authorities. That was why she said nothing to Warren. She was more than ever suspicious of everyone who worked in the sheriff's office.

She thought that she'd ask Lynette about Dale. She wouldn't connect these questions to anyone else.

Lynette had gone to work early so she made it home in the middle of the afternoon.

"What have you been doing?"

"Lynette, what can you tell me about Dale Simon."

"I don't know much. He has couple of kids. A really nice wife. I know that he travels a lot."

"Have you ever heard rumors about him?"

"He tries to be very charming. I know that Ray has helped him out a lot. Helped him get

new customers. I know that Dale helps insure homes for some of Ray's clients. "

"Maybe I should be clearer. Have you heard any gossip about him?"

"Cordelia's a small town. It's hard to hide things. That's why they say he's out of town so much. It give him a chance to pursue his other life. But there's been no real proof. His wife is a church-going woman. She refuses to consider her husband as anything but the dutiful provider for her family."

She couldn't get his image out of her mind. She knew him. She knew him all too well.

That night her dreams came back. Frightful dreams. Dale Simon was in those dreams. This time it didn't just seem like a dream. It seemed too real.

She knew Dale Simon. She had kissed those lips. It was all coming back to her. Yesterday, she had stepped out of a world of sin. But in her dreams she returned to that world again. That was her former identity. Now it challenged. She wrestle with that other identity to regain control of herself. The more that she did, the more she remembered Dale Simon.

Dale Simon knew that she was in Cordelia. He had made no effort to contact her. He only spoke of the dangers of their encounter. What was he hiding? He didn't make her feel weak. She only saw him as the pathetic weakling that he was.

She needed to find out why he had spent all this time hiding. Sienna had resolved to hide her knowledge from Warren. But what was Dale hiding from her?