

4. A CHILLING DESIRE

Sienna was walking the streets of Cordelia modeling her new clothes. They had never seen anyone like her. The kids thought that she was a star on a soap opera. They were all pointing.

“She looks great.”

“I wish that I could fit into those jeans.”

Ray Worth stared at her with eyes of resentment. He surveyed her body with a strange mix of desire and disgust. His gaze was intent as it missed nothing in her frame. He even believed that he could visually inspect her soul.

She seemed jittery as she noticed him staring. He thought her no good, but what could be made of his inordinate curiosity. Each time she looked over to try to catch him, he glanced away. She couldn't avoid the heat of his

Ray's tie was done up in a classic Windsor knot. He was impeccable to a T. He had taken utmost care in preparing himself at home. Occasionally, he would leave his desk to make sure the rigors have the day had not tampered with his guarded image. Even in the heat, he could stand there cool as a cucumber. She felt that there was something almost sociopathic in his mannerisms. It was what gave him the right to judge her so harshly. He felt that the watching eye had done its business on him so he could turn it to observe others.

For the moment, his eyes were still fixed on her skirt, hiked just above the knee, just at a point to ignite his passions. He could only condemn her wantonness. He knew that he would have to be selective in his criticism of her so he wouldn't appear to interested in her comings and goings.

Ray was in real estate, but he left little doubt that he considered his profession more of a vocation. He was even the deacon at his local church. He felt that he was only practicing what he preached. He brought with him an air of politeness. But no one could pierce that wall that he surrounded himself with. After all, he needed that distance so he could maintain his practice of moral judge.

Cordelia relied on that propensity of his to hold together the community. Without it, the small town would only degenerate into the trifling lawlessness of Atlanta. The town folk had made a decision to stay here, to keep out of the hullabaloo of the metropolis for just that reason. Little wonder that his attitude only encouraged some to flaunt the strict social conventions. To some he was doing no less than the same thing.

Again and again, he avoided her eyes. But his excitement only seemed to augment with each successive moment that he concentrated on her wickedness. Perhaps in her red scarf, he found certain confirmation of the view that he held of her. Any reasonable soul would come to the same conclusion. She was a loose woman who let her appetites govern all her waking seconds. Even if she was not actually committing acts of carnal intent, she was placing herself in the vicinity of mischief. At least, he could warn others about the terrible consequences of such pursuits.

It would be a while before she could be on her alone for very long. She wondered where Lynette was. All that she could think about was how weird Ray made her feel. Even though he was hiding somewhere, she could still feel his presence.

When Lynette picked her up, she had a great deal to tell her.

“There was this one guy who really gave me the creeps.”

“Believe me, Sienna, these guys are pretty harmless. A lot more bark than bite.”

“I hope so. Because someone wants more than a piece out of me.

“Let’s go get some sweet biscuits and tea. I know this lovely place on the city square.”

Mrs. Rose’s place had been there for years. Lynette went there when she was a girl. Her family would take her in town for Saturday shopping. She loved how Mrs. Rose made her feel like a grown woman.

As they sat drinking their tea, they looked out on the placid small town square. It surprised her that she had anything to worry about from these folks. Even Jack Worth only seemed like a passing threat.

She had another couple of cookies. She liked the biscuits almost more than the tea. The tea soaked in the tasty treats. They melted in her mouth.

Lynette was curious: “Tell me what it’s like to not remember who you are.”

“It’s not like I’ve forgotten everything. I still remember what I like. I have pretty much the same personality. At least, I assume that I do. But it’s the details that just don’t make sense. Faces, and names, and events. It’s all been wiped away.”

“Really. That sounds extraordinary.”

She felt that she was already a marvel for Lynette because she wasn’t from around here. This only added to the mystery. It was almost as if Lynette had this giant doll that she could dress up and teach. They were playing tea party.

“Is there anything else you’d like to do today, Sienna?”

“I think that I’d like a real drink.”

Her adulthood shocked Lynette.

“Now.”

“Not now. I just drank some tea. You’re off today and tomorrow.”

“Right. Then I work a double on Thursday. That’ll kill me. On my days off, I pretend that I don’t have to go back.”

“I’m doing that permanently.” They laughed in unison.

“Do you have a man, Lynette?”

“I take care of Jack.”

“You know what I mean. Jack’s your cousin.”

“I work too much to worry about it.”

“You only work too much so that you don’t have to think about it. Do you have a broken heart?”

“I’m not like that. When it happens, I let it happen. If not, I don’t let it take over my life.”

Lynette was so pragmatic about love. Sienna wondered if her own heart was more fickle. Or would she fall blindly and deep.

Lynette felt a little timid. But she wanted to run an idea past Sienna, “I’ve heard that a trauma can just shake something loose. It can make inhibitions disappear. You develop this incredible craving.”

Sienna laughed, “I hope that isn’t happening to me. I don’t want to become some kind of

sex fiend.”

“I felt weird saying that to you.”

“Don’t worry. I was wondering something the same. What if I was married? Or I’m supposed to be with some guy, and I don’t even know it. How would I even find out?”

Sienna felt badly for Lynette. She had deprived her passions for so long. You could see how her isolation had taken a toll. But she didn’t look worse for wear. She could take Sienna for a run for her money. Any guy would have to look twice.

Sienna thought about herself, how competitive she seemed. She already felt that Lynette was a rival. Her transformation hadn’t put a dent in that part of her personality. Why was she this way?

When they headed out for drinks that evening, she began to understand Lynette’s predicament. There were a few rugged types in the place. And some misplaced businessmen. But no one really struck her fancy. How could you go on without more of a material basis for a fantasy life? Sienna convinced herself that she wasn’t of this place. As she came back from the bar with drinks, someone almost bumped into her.

“Sorry, Mam.” He gave her the once over. He continued, “You look like you’d be more at home in one of those high class joints in Atlanta.”

It was more than a complement. He just couldn’t keep pace with her style. Did they all feel like that about her? Even if she wasn’t interested in these guys, it surprised her that none of them tried to approach her.

Maybe she needed to be more open-minded. Guys could read her body language. She just seemed closed in on herself. Too snotty to draw near. If she would let down her guard a bit, look like she was trying to have fun.

“Sienna, I’m only going to have one drink if I have to drive back.”

“Go ahead. Let yourself go.”

“That’s my fear, if I let myself go, I won’t be able to stop.”

Her comment hit Sienna, “I guess that’s how I feel too. That I don’t know where to stop. Like I’m falling down a bottomless pit. I’ll just keep falling and falling with nothing to catch my fall.”

Sienna continued talking. It made too much sense to Lynette: “That’s what your past is. It helps ground you. If you’re flying too high, it brings you down to a soft landing. Everything’s new for me. It’s all dazzling. I could get burned by love, and I wouldn’t even know it. If I’m racing so fast, I don’t know what will ever slow me down.”

Jack came by the next morning to see Lynette. She was still sleeping off the night before. Sienna met him on the porch.

“She wanted to be cautious. But the drinks kept flowing. Later on some guys came in. They kept buying us shots. I surprised that we made it back.”

Jack interjected, “For your sake, she needed to be careful.”

“It was OK. It was all in good fun.”

“For you right now, everything seems like fun. That’s how you get hurt. That the amnesiac’s curse. For you anyone could be your killer. You can’t tell anymore.”

Jack was putting the fear of the Lord into her. She tried to let it pass. Jack was even more hardened by work than Lynette. He had become naturally suspicious of everyone, even

himself.

“Jack, you needed to come with us. Really let down your hair.”

He laughed, “I’m not really the partying type. I don’t have the stamina.”

He still exercised an appeal for her. Perhaps this was what she lacked in the bar. A more substantial man. But she didn’t want to get involved with Jack. He just had a way of turning up all the time. He had put her in this place for just that reason. It gave him first crack at her. He had locked her up in his castle for his own use.

“You haven’t found anything about my case.”

“We’ve been going through some missing persons’ cases, but at this point, things depend on you. If you could just remember something.”

“That’s not really happening for me. I’m sort of a blank.”

She felt that there was someone out there that really hated her. But Cordelia hadn’t welcomed her with open arms. Just being out of her element almost made her a sitting duck for anyone around her. There were the women who seemed too jealous and the men who were too frustrated. Any of those emotions could be the basis for something worse. It was as if her persecution was continuing.

“Maybe the guy who was after you went on to some other victims.”

“We don’t even know that it was a guy.”

“I just assumed.”

“I know.”

He wanted to let her know that he was on the case. But what could he really do if she wouldn’t cooperate more. It’s just that her mind wasn’t an open book. And she didn’t know what she had to do to open it back up.

Jack had to get back to work.

“I don’t want to wake Lynette. Tell her that I stopped by.”

“She’s going to hate the fact that she missed you. I could wake her.”

“Don’t bother. I really wanted to see you.”

She felt flattered. But she wondered if this was unwanted attention.

Lynette woke up about an hour later, “I have the worst headache.”

“That’s the price of fun.”

“I don’t think that I could do this all the time. You don’t seem to be hardly affected.”

“I made myself some coffee.”

“No, it’s more than this. It seems like you do this sort of thing more often.”

“Are you calling me an alcoholic.”

“Not at all. You just seem to take it all in stride. I’ve had my days of tearing it up. You just seem to have a serious tolerance.”

“I think that you need it with the guys that you meet these days. Always trying to get you drunk and take advantage of you.”

“That doesn’t seem very positive. Where does all of this come from? I thought that you’ve forgotten all those fast hard lessons.”

“I don’t know what I remember and what I’ve forgotten.”

“I know how it’s getting frustrating. What could we do to make it easier for you? Would it help to go back to Adairville?”

“From the way that they tell it, I have no roots there. It might help.”

She wondered why she hadn't headed back there already. Then she realized how hard the recovery had been. This was one of the first few times that she had even ventured into town.

“We'll have to get you up and driving soon. You can't depend on me for a good time. I'm really no expert in that department.”

“Don't get down on yourself. You were going pretty strong by the time that we reached the last round.”

“We both were. I was feeling like the professional. But right now, I'm ready to throw in the towel. I need a long shower.”

“I assumed that you already took a shower.”

Lynette smiled, “I just took a bath in my own sorrows.”

Lynette was off for another day. She wanted to turn in early that evening so she would be well-rested for work, but there were a lot of hours left in the day to get things done.

“We need some good ribs. I know a great place up by the interstate. It's worth the drive.”

Before lunch, they stopped to get Siena some boots. Lynette kept her sunglasses on indoors. She was holding her coffee and trying to forget the night before.

“Those boots look great, darling.”

“You took a while coming in here.”

“My stomach feels queasy. I had a crazy night, girl. I feel like you too me to a rodeo.”

“I could really ride a few bull with these boots.”

“Yeah, I know a few who you could damage with those heels.”

They both looked at each other.

“I wish that we could take another pass this evening.”

“This little Philly is out to pasture for today.”

“After a good lunch, you'll think differently.”

Both girls were downing sweet tea with their meal. It brought them back to sanity.

“Dear, I was afraid that I was going to bring up my meal when I started.”

“You looked like you ate a whole pig.”

“I took my share.”

“Lynette, you've got some sauce streaked about your face.”

“Here, give me your compact. I want to see.” She took one look at herself. “I feel like one of those yahoos that we met last night.”

“I tell you that I could use a drink right now.”

“The strongest thing in here is tea.”

“I was just thinking out loud.”

“Another day.”

“You know what they say.”

“What do they say? I thought that you've been forgetting what they say.”

“They say that a good stiff drink cures a hangover.”

“They say the same thing about a walk in the sun. But I think that I would collapse at this point.”

“We are both stuffed with ribs.”

“You can say that again. If I ate like this all the time, I’d just blow up.”

“I feel like I’m going to explode.”

“Just don’t light a match around either of us.”

They both laughed.

Sienna felt completely comfortable around Lynette. Things had been different at the house. Lynette had been caring for her. Now they were on a more equal footing. They got along wonderfully.

She hoped that she was making progress towards a speedy recovery. But Sienna knew nothing about her past. She was just going along for the ride. There must be some signpost out there with her direction. She felt that she had already missed it.

Once she had a little more independence, she could start exploring on her own. Then something might snap. She just hated to be a target all along. She stayed awake on the porch after Lynette had turned in for bed. It hadn’t been that long since the accident. But all the cuts and bruises had healed. She had new clothes. Even the accident was retreating in the past. It was mixing with all the other things in her life that made no sense to her.

She could see the stars through the trees. The crickets were chirping. She was wearing a jacket. She felt all bundled up. It felt good.

She needed some kind of plan. Maybe she’d look for work around here. Or she could go back to her apartment. That seemed weirder than any option. At least, Lynette and Jack could watch out for her around here. If she went back, she could be heading into a trap.

Cordelia had seemed new to her. There was really no landmarks that helped ring a bell for her. It just blended into all the other confusion. She didn’t want more entanglements to obscure her vision. Things needed to stay clear.

As a long shot, she wondered if she should head down to Atlanta. But if she had no memories to guide her she could get eaten up by the bright lights and the big city. At least here, she could see her stars.