

PROLOGUE

Friday, June 11

At least he had a shower that worked, and a sofa to sleep on, too. At least there was food to eat and coffee to brew. At least whenever Dora came back, she'd help him figure out what to do.

Maybe.

He sat near the kitchen window, where he could see across the acres in front of Dora's little house. He could see up and down the road. He had pushed the kitchen table near the window to keep an eye on the road while he ate his meals and watched TV. He'd moved the TV in from the living room and brought a comfortable chair to put by the table.

He'd been at Dora's house since late Wednesday night. She'd obviously left in a hurry. Dresser drawers were open, showing blank spaces for her and Joe. Dirty dishes were stacked in the sink. Scott was also gone, and so were all his things.

Even the teddy bear that had been thrown into the trunk of the Camaro was gone. It made him uneasy. Who would have taken it? Maybe Dora had thrown it away.

Brian Atkins hunched over the table. If it hadn't been for the Camaro, he wouldn't have got into the mess he was in to begin with. He slammed his fist down on the table, thinking of Dora and Myra and the boss who fired him, leaving him in need of help—again.

That's when he heard about Myra. She was looking for a man. She wanted to find Scott's father, for some reason. She hadn't seemed to care before, but Brian knew it could be him.

Sitting at the table, he looked at the mirror down the hall, hanging on the bathroom door. He could see himself clearly. He was handsome, he thought, admiring his dark red hair and light brown beard. His tee-shirt, worn in the hot June weather, bared his arms and showed off the tattoos. He was lean and wiry, not too tall but not short either.

"Just right," he murmured, preening as he looked at the mirror. That's why he and Myra had got together in the first place, years ago.

Not that it lasted long. Someone had dumped her. Brian didn't understand why, but he saw the opportunity. Myra was jilted, lonely, and hurt. Brian stepped into the vacant space and became the man in her life.

For three weeks. It only took Myra that long to straighten things out in her mind. She broke up with him, withdrew into her father's house, and didn't appear in town. Brian had shrugged it off and didn't even try to see her. He went on with his life. It was some years before he ever heard about Myra's son Scott.

And now, Myra was looking for Scott's father. It maybe could have been him. He'd just lost another job and didn't have much money. The more he thought about it, the better he liked the idea. He was willing to get married, if Myra could provide a place for them to live.

Better than the abandoned trailer, his current place to stay.

So he'd hunted Myra down. She was in Cuero sometimes, visiting a lawyer, going to court. He appeared in front of her, dressed as well as possible, and charmed her into having lunch, then invited her to dinner on Sunday night.

She didn't want to leave Scott with her father who already didn't feel well. She didn't want Cathy and Marilyn to know about her date with Brian, either.

So they dropped Scott off at Dora's house, then traded Brian's old green Chevy for Dora's red Camaro, a powerful car with plenty of gas, and headed for San Antonio.