

The Spy and the Brat



T.L. Moore

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Dedications

This book is dedicated to my family who is the biggest part of my heart and at times the greatest cause of my insanity. I love you all very much and always remember that.

Also to my dog of ten years who just passed away last night. Heaven went to Heaven and she was dearly loved and will greatly be missed. She was part of our family and things will not be the same with her gone. But I know I will see her again, but until then she is running through fields of beautiful flowers up above. She is with my grandparents and my daddy who are keeping an eye on her until Mama's time comes to go home.

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Honorable mentions

This life that God has given me has been one very wild journey and though at times it has been hard I remind myself that life is truly a blessing. It amazes me how fast time flies and in a blink of an eye you look into the mirror and wonder who is that older stranger looking back at you. My journey has brought some very wonderful people into my life that will always be a part of me. Our hearts will be connected forevermore.

My children Desiree, Cameron and Branden, are so much a part of me that their very existence is the reason my heart beats within my chest. The love that I have for my children will last beyond this world and for eternity. Thank you, God, for blessing me with my very own little pieces of Heaven. I am beyond blessed and I am so proud of my children.

James Clenney who has brought sunshine into my life and thank you for the amazing artwork you did for the cover. You have a talent straight from God and never forget the promise he made you. God bless you always my friend.

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Here are a few more special people that have touched my heart beyond words. I am so glad God crossed our paths: Bob Sims, Aunt Mattie Lou Peterson, Liz Hall-Mendoza,

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Deborah Spiess-Seely, Joyce Caulkins, Jay Mathers, Travis Owen Bryan, Troy Lambert, Miss Bell (My first grade teacher), Miss Edwards (The school crossing guard), Ray Carter, Ester Howard, Geraldine O'Neal, Pastor Jon Magee, Kathy Deaton, Linda Scott, Lynda Hammock, Marie Payne, Mary Witucki-Seetaram, Jill Detray, Laura Shipley, Wolf Morgan, Tonya Rector-Rice, Hilda Salinas, Jane Irwin, Amy Irwin, Officer John Noel, Felicia McCarley-Plunkett, Don Kimrey, Patti Riordan D'Amico, Frisco Sullivan, Meri Stephens, M.J.

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1

Everything changed

On a cold winter's day a woman dressed in a pair of jeans, black boots, coat, hat, scarf and gloves is standing beside the water's edge. Her purse is draped over her shoulder as she stands there sipping on her coffee. Sadness is very apparent and her mind is a million miles away as she stares across the pond. She is missing someone dearly and the emptiness inside and confusion is the only things she feels at this exact moment in time.

A cold breeze shoots across her face and she shivers as she clutches her cup in her hands. The warmth from the cup brings her some relief from the chill, but her heart is beyond repair as a single tear slowly falls from her eye.

She is thinking of the past few months of her life and how so much has changed for her. A strong burst of wind shoots across her and she drops her cup of coffee. She jumps back and shakes her head and stares down at the cup. She crouches down and picks up her cup when she is startled by a whisper in her ear.

Starr Thomas is a thirty-five-year-old single mother of a very carefree little girl named Rosie. Her five-year-old keeps her very busy and gives her the strength to keep trying in a world where nothing ever seems to go right for her. Every time she thinks she has found a stitch of happiness in her life, it quickly unravels.

Starr's faith in God is her foundation not only in her life, but also her sanity. She knows God has a purpose for her and her child, but sometimes she thinks happiness and peace is not in his master plan for her. Too much pain in a very short period of time has taken a major toll on the young mother and she doesn't know how much more her heart can handle.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina is a beautiful place to live and though many people live there it has a very small town atmosphere. Downtown has many older buildings that have breathtaking murals painted on the side of them. Franklin Street will whisk you away with the sites and sounds, which

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include the old movie theater that was built in 1927.

The town center rests upon a hill and a beautiful inn now occupies the site where the New Hope chapel once stood. History flows throughout the whole town and its serenity cannot be denied. With the brick walkways, and the historic campus of the University of North Carolina; it is like having a piece of Heaven upon the earth.

A few months ago Starr moved from Birmingham, Alabama to North Carolina because she had lost everything: car, home, job, friends, money, and her husband. Starr had known Anthony Thomas since high school and married him on a whim after a night of him promising her the moon. She soon found out that not only did he lie about delivering her the moon, but he also had a wondering eye for the opposite sex.

Her siblings warned her against marrying him because anyone that knew Anthony Thomas, also knew he couldn't tell the truth if his life depended upon it. But instead of following her brain, she followed her heart and that was a very big mistake.

Starr and Anthony married before the justice of the peace on a very hot summer's day. His friend Scott and Scott's girlfriend Taylor was the only people who attended this very small and soon regretful union.

Starr noticed a very quick change in her new groom and the distance between them seemed to start on the night of their honeymoon. Anthony took her to a small hotel room on the outskirts of town.

The room had one twin bed and she wasn't sure if the red splattered upon the stained walls was old blood or paint. The floor was covered in some kind of substance that smelled like urine and looked like mold. Upon the wall was an old painting of a clown with big eyes that almost seemed to mysteriously follow you about the room. Everything about the small dimly lit room reminded her of something that had crawled out of an Alfred Hitchcock movie.

Anthony watched a football game for the first few hours and nothing she did could get his attention away from the television. She spent most of the night staring out the window and crying as her husband munched on chips and downed one beer after the other. Everything about their relationship changed as soon as she had become his wife. She fell asleep that night in an old torn chair beside the bed as she stared at the cheap gold band on her finger.

The next few years were no better and her life was filled with complete misery. Anthony worked long hours at the factory which left her in their small two bedroom house alone. The only friend she had was her sister Lynn who was a few years younger than her. Lynn could not stand Anthony and she had no issue with sharing how she felt with him. They would often argue and on more than one occasion Starr had to get in the middle of them to keep them from ripping each other apart.

Anthony would demand for his wife to stand up for him against her sister, but Starr loved Lynn very much and did not want in the middle of their disagreements. She also loved her husband, but she also knew what her sister said to him was nothing but the truth. It was a hard reality to face, but her husband was a lowlife, unfaithful, selfish, controlling man. A man who still acted like he was single and treated her like a piece of property.

After five years of a very unhappy marriage Starr discovered she was pregnant and thought that maybe this would change her husband for the better. She missed his laughter, his smiles and how he treated her like a princess. She missed who he once was years ago before they got married: her best friend.

The news of the baby was not good to Anthony and this hurt Starr very much. He threw a fit and yelled at her and complained that a baby was the last thing they needed in their lives. Her heart was beyond shattered as she listened to him rattling and raving about having to work overtime down at the factory. She didn't expect this from him and it threw her into a major depression for several days.

Anthony got even further away from her emotionally after the news of the pregnancy and he would stay gone from home days at a time. Starr didn't know exactly where he was staying, but her gut told her that wherever he was had something to do with another woman. There was no real evidence of this, but she just knew somehow that it was true.

The further along in her pregnancy that she got, the more remarks he would make about her weight. He said she was fat, unattractive, and she looked like a bloated cow and he would laugh at her as she cried uncontrollably. Her unhappiness seemed to fuel his cruelty toward her and many times he would simply walk up to her and spit in her face.

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Starr wouldn't tell her sister everything that would happen under her roof because she knew her sister had a very short fuse when it came to her husband. She was afraid that Lynn would do something very stupid or that Anthony could hurt her sister or even worse. So she kept the abuse to herself and very often she would cry out to God to help her escape the madness that had engulfed her.

Lynn confronted her sister often about her marriage and offered to help her move out and get away from her controlling husband. Starr would tell her things were getting better between her and Anthony and that she had to stay to try and save her marriage. Lynn didn't believe a single word that came out of her sister's mouth. She was so afraid that one day she would get a knock at the door from a police officer with the news that her sister was killed at the hands of her own husband.

About twice a week her older brother Cameron would call her from North Carolina. Her brother was a very outspoken man and threatened to make a trip down south to pay a much needed visit to his brother-in-law. Starr begged him not to come down and start anything with Anthony and that she had everything under control. Her brother made it perfectly clear that if that husband of hers ever laid a hand upon his little sister again that he would come down and without warning.

Starr loved Anthony with all her heart and soul and at the time she thought she was doing the right thing for the baby by staying with him. She prayed that once he held his flesh and blood in his arms that it would wake him up and change him. She knew that when the baby arrived and he didn't change that she would have to leave him. She might have put up with all his trash all those years, but she wasn't about to put her child through that nightmare too.

The day finally arrived when she went into full-blown labor in the middle of the grocery store. Lynn was with her at the time and rushed her to the hospital that was a few miles away. Her sister drove like a maniac and ran red lights, stop signs and almost ran over a man on a motorcycle. The labor pains were really intense as she held on tight and tried to reach Anthony on his cellular phone. She never could reach him as she screamed from pain into the phone.

Three hours later she gave birth to a beautiful seven-pound baby girl she named Rosie. She had her mother's

beauty and her daddy's dark hair and eyes. She was breathtakingly cute and Starr thanked God above for giving her the best gift she had ever received in her entire life. From that moment on little Rosie had her mother wrapped around her tiny fingertip.

Anthony in his dirty work uniform showed up at the hospital the following day. He entered the room while Starr rested in bed with the baby in her arms. He walked up to them and smiled and made a remark that he was glad that the baby looked like him and not like his very fat wife.

Starr stared at him and shook her head as her blue eyes filled with tears. He just laughed at her and told her to hand him his child. She couldn't believe how cold, how mean he was still being to her even after the birth of their little girl. She laid there in the bed sobbing as he walked around the room with the baby in his arms. She knew at that very instant there was no saving their marriage.

Anthony would glare at her, and then he would smile as he looked down into the face of Rosie. He sat down in a chair at the end of the bed and held the baby close to his chest. Starr smelled the lingering scent of a woman's perfume upon him, but she didn't say a word to him about it. It took her many years and much abuse to bring her to the point of not caring anymore.

The newness of the baby soon worn out with Anthony and he returned to his same old habits as before. He would drank, stay gone for days at a time and even when Starr lost her pregnancy weight he still made it clear to her how unattractive she was to him.

Over the next few years Starr was numb inside and stayed very depressed and her appearance showed just how depressed she had become. She didn't care what Anthony did or said anymore and she didn't care about herself either. Her blonde hair was long, tangled, oily, and looked like she hadn't brushed it in a very long time. She would wear oversized dresses with a flower pattern upon them and wouldn't change clothes for days in a row. She just didn't care anymore what she looked like or what he or anyone else thought about it.

Everything around her seemed to be rolling down hill and got even worse the day she learned that her sister was moving away. Lynn was offered a job in North Carolina and it was a job she couldn't turn down. Their brother Cameron had pulled a few strings with some people he knew at the

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corporate office and had gotten Lynn a very good job with better pay and benefits.

The news about her sister devastated Starr because she knew without Lynn there she would be completely alone. Both of her siblings tried to talk her into moving to North Carolina with her sister, but she refused. She sank even deeper into her dark world of depression.

The months slowly went by and the distance between not only her husband grew, but also with her siblings. Lynn would try to call her every day, but very seldom would Starr pick up the phone. She didn't want to talk to her sister or her brother and she just wanted to be left alone in her world that only consisted of her and her little girl.

Late one night Starr was alone in the living room watching television and feeling tired and ever so weak. The years of abuse had finally caught up with her and had taken a major toll on her mind and body. She had black circles around her eyes that were caused from stress and lack of sleep and her face was very pale. She was finding it harder and harder to keep up with Rosie that was so very full of energy.

The movie she was watching was about a woman who had finally found the happiness she deserved. It was a chick flick full of romance and before Starr realized what was happening, she was bawling her eyes out. She had given up on happiness, love, and romance all together along with her dreams, hopes and desires. Her heart was shattered within her chest and if it wasn't for her little girl who needed her so very much: she wanted to die.

Starr looked over on the coffee table and saw her grandmother's bible resting there covered in dust. Not only did the circumstances in her life rip away everything within her, but she also let it also rip away her faith in God. It had been months since she last prayed or even talked to God and she knew that the devil himself had a major role in everything that had crashed down upon her.

She got up from the sofa and down on her knees in front of the coffee table. With tears rolling down her face, she reached across and picked up the old bible. With everything within herself she cried out to God and right at that very second she released all the pain from her heart and soul.

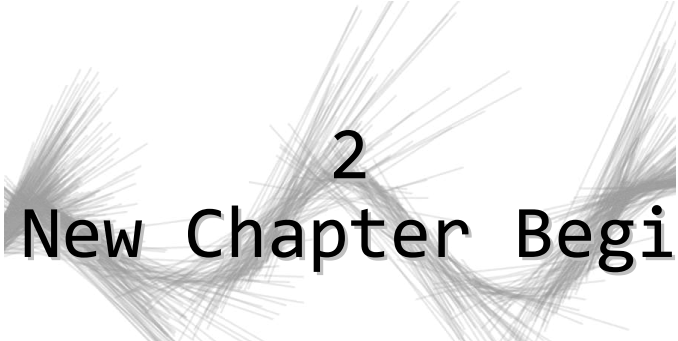
She wept for hours and the presence of God could not be denied as she sat there on the floor. For the first time in a very long time she wanted to live. She pulled herself together,

wiped away her tears and picked up the phone.

Starr made arrangements with her sister to go live with her in North Carolina. She packed up everything she could put in her suitcases and called the bus station. Later that evening a taxi pulled up in front of the house. With her little girl by her side and two stuffed suitcases she walked out of that small house with a smile upon her face.

She didn't bother writing a note or even call Anthony to let him know it was over for good. She figured it would take him a few days to even realize that she was gone and by that time she would be safe in North Carolina.

Starr and little Rosie got into the taxi and were ready to embark on the next chapter of their lives.



2

A New Chapter Begins

A few days later Starr was slowly getting settled into her sister's three bedroom house. The house was almost new and very spacious. Lynn had painted the walls purple and bought all new furniture for Rosie's bedroom. It was a little girl's paradise with dolls, stuffed animals and a little play kitchen in the corner of the room. Everything about the room was very bright and cheery and Lynn hoped it would help her little niece adjust to her new life.

Starr's bedroom at the end of the hallway was painted in a soft mint color and decorated with pictures of angels on the wall. The large bay window, which faced the east, would let the morning sun stream throughout the entire room. She loved the oversized bed with its laced pillows and thick quilt. When she lay upon it she felt as if she melted into the bed.

"Starr, wake up! You need to go register Rosie in school," Lynn said as she entered the bedroom. "Starr!" She reached down and picked up a suitcase that sat in the middle of the floor.

Starr mumbled something and rolled over to her other side.

Lynn set the suitcase against the wall. "Starr, get up! I already have Rosie dressed and ready." She walked over to the bed.

Starr opened one eye and closed it. "Okay," She replied.

Lynn sat down on the edge of the bed as she looked at her sister. "What time did you get to bed?"

"I don't remember," Starr whispered.

"Rise and shine!" Lynn reached over and shook her sister. "Get up!"

Starr made a growling sound as she opened her eyes and looked back at Lynn. "This reminds me of when we were

kids.”

Lynn laughed as she stood up. “Good! Now get up or you will make your daughter’s first day of school start really late.”

“Okay!” Starr snapped as she sat up on the bed. “Give me just a few more minutes. I am so very tired.” She flopped back down on the bed and pulled the covers up over her head.

“No! Get up now, Starr. Come on!” Lynn leaned across the bed and pulled the covers off of her.

“Lynn, stop it!” Starr shook her head. “Okay, I am awake now.”

“Good. Now get up and get ready and don’t forget Rosie’s birth certificate and shot record.” Lynn tossed the cover toward her sister.

“Yes, Mother.” Starr glared at her.

“You are still not a morning person I see,” Lynn laughingly said.

“You think?” Starr sat up.

“I know.”

“Mommy!” Rosie ran into the room and jumped on the bed.

Starr grinned as she said, “Good morning, baby.”

“I love you, Mommy.” Rosie wrapped her arms around her mother and rested her head against her chest.

“Oh, Rosie, I love you too.” Starr closed her eyes and hugged her little girl.

“Rosie, did you finish up your cereal and juice?” Lynn asked.

Rosie released her mother as she said, “I ate up all my yummy cereal, but the juice was so, so nasty, Aunt Lynn.” She turned around on the bed and sat down.

Lynn laughed. “But it is good for you.”

“Nah. It is nasty and makes me want to throw up,” Rose said in her sweet voice.

“What kind of juice was it, baby?” Starr reached over and placed her hand on Rosie’s shoulder.

Rosie turned her head around and looked into her mother’s face. “I don’t know, Mommy, but it was red and tasted yucky.”

“No, it does not, Rosie.” Lynn smiled.

Starr looked across at her sister and asked, “Lynn, don’t tell me you tried to give her that nasty tomato juice of

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yours?”

“Yes, I did.” Lynn shook her head. “I do not understand why anyone would not like tomato juice.

Rosie looked into her mother’s face as her mother looked straight at her and they both loudly replied, “Because it is nasty!” They giggled.

“Whatever, you two. Now hurry up and get ready,” Lynn said as she smiled.

“Mommy, you like my pretty new clothes Aunt Lynn got me for school?” Rosie jumped up from the bed and turned in a complete circle.

Starr smiled as she looked at her little girl modeling her new clothes. “They are very pretty, Rosie. You look so grownup.”

Rosie giggled as she jumped back onto the bed and gave her mother a big kiss on the cheek. “Now hurry up, Mommy. If you don’t hurry and get dressed it will make all the kids laugh at me.

“Is that a fact?” Starr smiled as she looked into her child’s brown eyes.

“Yes, Mommy.” Rosie nodded.

“Okay, then I will hurry and get ready because we don’t want the kids to laugh at you for being late.”

Rosie quickly gave her mother another tight hug, then she jumped up off the bed and ran out of the room.

“She’s growing up way too fast,” Starr said as she got out of bed.

“She sure is. Well, I am about to be late for work myself. I will be home around five. If you need anything just call my cell, okay?” Lynn walked to the bedroom door and turned around.

“Okay. Hey, Lynn.”

“Yeah?”

“Thanks for everything you are doing for me and Rosie. I can never repay you or Cameron.”

“Don’t want anything back from you, Sis. I just want you happy because that is what you and that little girl in there deserve.” Lynn smiled.

Tears came to Starr’s eyes as she looked at her sister. “Okay.”

“Have a good day and have a hot meal on the table for me when I get home.” Lynn laughed as she turned around and walked out of the room.

"Yeah, right!" Starr laughingly replied.

"Hurry up, Mommy!" Rosie shouted from the living room.

"Okay, baby. Mommy is slower than a snail in the mornings. I will be ready in a minute," Starr said as she walked over to her suitcase and picked it up. "I hate mornings." She walked over to the bed and placed the suitcase down upon it. "God, please give me the strength to do what I have to do here. I wonder if my loving, faithful husband even realizes we are gone yet?" She asked herself as she opened up the suitcase.

"Mommy, hurry up!" Rosie was growing very impatient with her mother.

"Okay, okay." Starr searched through her suitcase for something to wear. "Where are my jeans? Ugh!" She throws some clothes down on the bed. "Here they are." She picked up the jeans.

Starr hurried and dressed in a pair of jeans, white top, tennis shoes and a dark colored sweater. She rushed around the room trying to find all the paperwork that Rosie's new school would need. After she found the paperwork in one of the suitcases the bedroom looked like it was hit by a tornado. Clothes, shoes, makeup, hairbrushes and a few small stuffed animals were scattered all around the room.

Rosie with her new clothes, shoes and pink backpack on stood inside the front door. She was bubbling over with excitement as she waited on her very unorganized mother.

"I am coming, baby!" Starr with the papers in her hand grabbed her purse as she ran out of the bedroom.

"Mommy, hurry up! Mommy, please." Rosie opened the front door.

"I am here, Rosie!" Starr ran up behind her. "I am sorry, baby. I am just so tired and Mommy cannot think straight any more."

Rosie turned around and smiled. "It's okay, Mommy. Mommy, do you think the new kids will like me lots?" She looked up at her mother.

Starr's heart almost melted as she looked into the very worried face of her little girl. "They will like you super-duper lots." She got down on her knees.

Rosie smiled as she wrapped her arms around her mother. "I hope so, Mommy."

"They will, baby. They will." She hugged her tight. "You

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wanna say a prayer to Jesus?”

Rosie released her mother and nodded. “I sure do. I need Jesus to be with me today, Mommy.” She smiled.

“Jesus is always with you, Rosie. Always.” Starr grinned as she reached across and brushed a piece of Rosie’s brown hair out of her eyes.

“Can I say the prayer to Jesus, Mommy?”

“You sure can, baby.” Starr nodded, then she lowered her head and closed her eyes.

Rosie placed her hands together and looked up toward the ceiling. “Jesus, it is me, Rosie. I am kinda scared because I am going to a new school today. I don’t know anyone, Jesus, but I do know you. Mommy says you are always with me and that makes me very, very happy.”

Starr smiled as she peeked at Rosie who had a very serious expression upon her little face.

“Jesus, can you send me lots of angels today? I need help making new friends. I have no friends here at Aunt Lynn’s house. I had one friend far, far away and her name was Cynthia. I miss her so much. Anyhow, Jesus, I am late so I better go for now. I love you bunches.” Rosie placed her hand on her mouth and blew a kiss up to the ceiling.

Starr opened her eyes and placed her hand on Rosie’s cheek. “You are growing up too fast.”

“I am a big girl now, Mommy. Hey, you think Jesus heard me?”

“I know that Jesus heard your prayer and I know he loved it too.” Starr removed her hand from Rosie’s cheek and stood up.

Rosie smiled and said, “Let’s go, Mommy. I am ready, ready to make lots of new friends today.” She reached across and took a hold of her mother’s hand.

“Let me get the keys to the house.” Starr turned around and took a set of keys off a nail on the wall. “Now we can go.” She smiled at Rosie.

“Yee!” Rosie almost pulled her out the front door.

“Slow down, baby.” Starr laughed as she released Rosie’s hand. “Let me lock up the house.” She followed Rosie out the door.

“We can run all the way to school, Mommy!” Rosie turned around and looked at her mother.

“I don’t think so, Rosie. Mommy is in no shape to run anymore.” Starr placed the key into the keyhole.

"Mommy, you are scared I am faster than you, huh?" Rosie glanced behind her when she heard a school bus pass the house.

"Mommy knows you are faster than her." Starr placed the keys in her purse as she turned around.

"Why can't I ride the bus like those kids do?"

"Because your Aunt Lynn's house is only two blocks from the school and we can walk that," Starr said. She walked up to Rosie and took a hold of her hand.

"But I want to ride the bus like the big kids, Mommy."

"Not today, baby. Now let's go get you registered in school." Starr smiled down at her.

"Okay, Mommy." She started to walk really fast.

Starr laughed as she said, "Slow down. We still have plenty of time, baby."

"Mommy, you are so slow." Rosie pulled on her hand.

"And old! Slow down, baby!" Starr laughed as she tried to keep up with her very excited little girl.

Rosie pulled on her mother's arm all the way down the street as they talked and laughed along their way. One very happy little girl who couldn't wait to make new friends on her first day at her new school.

3

The Stranger in Black

About two hours later Starr finished registering Rosie in school and she was walking up the street toward her house. The happiness and excitement from her little girl that had found its way to her was slowly wearing off. She was thinking about her marriage, her life and everything that had gone so very wrong for such a long time. The sadness, the depression was slowly returning and all she wanted to do was go back to the house and back to bed.

The chilly wind flowed past her as she made her way up the walkway to the house. She stopped outside of the front door and looked in her purse for the keys.

"I know I put the keys in here somewhere," Starr said as she searched through her purse. "Where are you? Does anything ever go right for me?" She looked deeper inside the purse. "Okay, no keys are in here! Ugh! I am locked out and no way to get inside. Just wonderful!"

Starr grew more upset by the second as she stood outside of the house. She walked up to the door and kicked it. The door slowly creaked open as she stood there with a very strange look upon her tired face.

"I know for a fact that I locked that door." She walked closer to the door. "At least I think I locked it. I am losing my mind." Starr pushed the door completely open. "Hello? Anyone here?" She peeked inside. "Maybe I didn't lock it. I just want to go back to sleep." She entered the house and closed the door behind her.

Starr walked into the living room and froze in her tracks when she saw a kitchen chair lying in the middle of the floor. She glanced behind her when she heard what sounded like footsteps in the hallway. Fear and panic quickly set in.

"Oh, God. I think someone must have broken into the house," She whispered. She turned around as her heart

started to race. "I have to call 911." She turned back around and ran into the kitchen.

Starr picked up the phone and was just about to dial for help when she heard someone breathing right behind her. She was so frightened that she couldn't even scream as she stood there with the phone in her hand. Her eyes grew big and her jaw started to quiver when an arm in black clothing came out from behind her and removed the phone from her hand.

"Ma'am, that wouldn't be a very good idea."

Starr was breathing hard and fast as she said, "Who are you? Why are you in my sister's home? I am a child of Jesus Christ and you cannot harm me."

"That is good because I am a child of Jesus Christ too and I am not here to harm you."

"Huh?" Starr was confused. "I don't understand." She wiped a tear from her eye.

"You don't need to understand anything, Starr," The man said in his deep voice.

"How do you know my . . . my name?" She started to shake.

"That is not important right now, Starr. I am here to save you."

"What? Is this some kind of joke?" Starr slowly turned around to see the man who stood behind her.

Starr screamed and backed up against the kitchen table when she saw a tall man dressed all in black. The man took a step closer to her and she screamed even louder than before.

"Okay, okay. Please, do not do that, Starr. They will hear you," The man said as he raised his hand out in front of him. "I am not here to hurt you." He stepped back.

She looked him up and down as she replied, "Get out of here before I scream again. I do not know who you are or why you are here, but you need to leave and now!"

The man had a black cloth mask over his face and all she could see were his nose, lips, and brown eyes. He was a tall man, slender man with muscular arms and he had combat boots upon his feet. His pants, a long sleeve shirt, and belt was all in black and on his shoulder was a holster, which held a very big shiny gun.

Starr swallowed the lump in her throat. "Who are you? Are you robbing my sister's house?"

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The man scoffed, "No."

"Then get out of here before I call the police!"

The man threw the phone down and ran toward her and placed his hand over her mouth. "I told you to be silent."

She looked him straight in the eyes and instantly she knew in some kind of strange fashion that he wasn't there to harm her.

The man pulled her away from the table as his hand remained tightly over her lips. He turned her around and whispered in her ear, "Trust me and do as I say and everything will be okay. Do you understand that, Starr?"

Starr nervously nodded.

"Good. Now I am going to remove my hand, but do not say another word. Understand?"

Once again she nodded.

The man removed his hand from her mouth and she quickly turned around and slapped him across the face.

"Get out of this house you crazy man!" She raised her hand to slap him again.

He grabbed her arm and shook his head. "Feisty woman. I like that, but now isn't the time." He picked her up and threw her over his shoulder.

"Put me down! God, help me! Put me down you crazy nutcase!" Starr kicked and slapped him. "Put me down!" She kicked him again.

"Starr, stop it! Ouch! You don't . . . Ouch! Woman, stop hitting me!"

"No!" She punched him in the back. "Put me down!"

Starr continued to fight him to the best of her abilities when a loud boom came from the front of the house. She stopped fighting him as she remained draped over his shoulder like a rag doll.

"I told you not to make a sound, but no you wouldn't listen," The man angrily said.

"What just happened? This cannot be real. Am I on some kind of hidden camera show?"

The man shook his head as he ran toward the back door of the house. "This isn't any stupid reality show and believe me this is very real.

Starr screamed when another loud explosion echoed throughout the house. "What is happening here? Put me down!" She slapped him across the back.

"Fine!" The man stopped just inside of the closed back

door. "You want down, Miss Big-mouth? Here you go." He dropped her to the floor.

"Ouch!" She shouted when she hit the floor.

"I warned you, Starr, but you are a brat!" The man glanced behind him.

Starr looked up at him as she yelled, "Someone help me! There is a crazy man in my house and he is blowing up things! Help!"

The man shook his head once again as he said, "For someone so beautiful as you, you sure are dumb as a rock. You hear those people that are bombing your house? Do you?" He glared down at her.

Starr turned her head and looked toward the kitchen. "I don't hear any people, but I did hear something exploding and now I smell smoke." She looked up at him.

"Starr, I am here to protect you. Those people that are about to break into your home want you dead." He held his hand out toward her to help her up.

"What?" Starr laughs. "Even my sorry ex doesn't want me dead. Divorced maybe, but not dead. I don't know what kind of cruel joke this is, but I am not playing anymore!" She looked at his hand and slapped it away from her. "I do not need your help whoever you are."

"You need my help more than you realize, my dear." He walked away from her toward the kitchen.

"I am calling the police as soon as you leave!"

The man stopped in the middle of the kitchen. "Whatever floats your boat, you brat."

Starr moaned as she got up from the floor. "Just get out of here." She looked at him as he stood there with his back toward her.

A loud boom came from the front of the house and the sound of people talking in some foreign language could plainly be heard.

"Oh, my God. What's going on?" She helplessly looked at the man in black.

The man didn't look back at her as he replied, "They are after you, Starr. I want you to run out that door and do not look back, hear me?"

"I, uh . . . I don't know. This cannot be happening," Starr stuttered.

"It's happening all right. Now, go!" He turned his head and looked at her.

The Spy and the Brat

Starr trembled as she looked at the tall stranger and she jumped when the sound of breaking glass rang out from the living room. "Jesus, please save me. Please, Lord!"

"Run!" The man demanded.

Starr nodded and ran toward the back door. "This isn't happening." Her hand shook as she unlocked the door and slammed it open. "Who are you?" She looked at him.

The shouting from the intruders got louder and the chaos increased in the front of the house. Glass shattered, things were knocked over and everything sounded like a hurricane had just struck.

"I am your prince who rode in to save the day. Now go, Starr, and don't look back!" The man glanced at her, then he shouted and ran toward the front part of the house.

Starr stood there in shock as she listened to him shouting and slamming people around. She shook her head and ran out the door and just like he had told her, she didn't look back.

She ran and ran as the adrenaline rushed through her veins and she didn't stop until she ran out of breath. She bent over as she clenched her chest and looked back toward her house.

"God, what just happened? Who was that rude man?" Starr stood up straight and turned around. "I cannot believe that just happen. This isn't real. Can't be real."

Starr glanced around her then without warning a loud explosion knocked her to the ground. She screamed as she laid there and watched her sister's house go up in flames. She grabbed her chest as she continued to watch the flames reach up to the sky. Neighbors ran out of their houses to witness the nightmare that was unfolding before them.

"The man. The man tried to save me. God, I pray he got out. The man," Starr whimpered.

4

Snoring and Slobbering

Lynn entered the house as she loudly said, "Starr, hope you're hungry! I got us enough rice and egg-rolls to last until next week." She laughed as she closed the door behind her.

Lynn stopped and hung her keys on the nail on the wall, then she placed her purse down upon a small table. With a paper bag in her hands she walked toward the living room.

"Starr, where are you? I thought I would come home for lunch and surprise you. Starr?" She stopped in the middle of the room and she dropped the bag to the floor. "Starr, what are you doing?"

Lynn's mouth fell opened as she witnessed her sister lying face down in the middle of the kitchen table. Her arms and legs were sprawled out and her head was halfway dangling off the edge of the table. She was snoring loudly as her drool made its way to the kitchen floor.

"Starr, are you okay?" Lynn walked toward the kitchen. "Starr, wake up." She reached over and placed her hand on her back and shook her. "Starr, what are you doing on my table?" She shook her harder. "Starr, get off my table!"

Starr moaned. "Huh?"

"I do not know what just happened here, but get off my table!" Lynn shook her again.

Starr opened her eyes and raised her head. "What?" She looked up at her sister.

"I don't mind you making yourself at home, but this wasn't what I had in mind." Lynn placed her hand on her forehead and shook her head.

"What are you talking about?" Starr remembered what she just experienced and she screamed.

Lynn screamed as she jumped back from the table. "What is wrong with you?"