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KIND

TO YOUR NEIGHBORS

KAY

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Be Kind to Your Neighbors

Elaine Jones was looking for a fresh start. After a tumultuous breakup, she was ready for a quiet life. Her real estate agent touted the Crescent Hill subdivision as one of the quietest neighborhoods in River Edge. Elaine took her advice and purchased a home in the neighborhood. However, she finds that things aren't always as they appear to be.

CHAPTER 1

Crescent Hill subdivision is two miles from the interstate and fifteen minutes from South Towne Mall. It's home to a mixture of young families and seasoned retirees in the small town of River Edge.

Once you pass their expertly crafted "Welcome to Crescent Hill" sign, you're entering a community of well-manicured lawns, a recreation center, and a community pool.

It's not uncommon to see Melinda Bates tinkering with her flower garden. She's the "unofficial" overseer of the neighborhood. After losing her husband to cancer ten years ago, she makes it her mission to know what's going on. And, she always performs her detective work with a smile and endearing words.

Melinda was in the kitchen cooking dinner when she heard a large truck enter the neighborhood. She lowered the burner underneath the pot and hurried to her front window.

Two guys got out of the yellow moving truck and headed toward the back of the truck. Then, a black sports car pulled up to the mailbox. A long-legged blonde got out of the car and spoke to the guys.

Melinda shook her head and wrinkled her nose. She felt the leggy blonde didn't belong in her neighborhood. This blonde seemed like the type who'd draw the wrong attention. After ten minutes of gawking at her new neighbor, Melinda decided to finish cooking her dinner and eat. She'd get the details on the blonde later.

Elaine watched the movers bring in the last two boxes of her possessions. She ran her fingers through her long blonde hair and dreaded unpacking. Moving wasn't her cup of tea. However, she needed a change in scenery.

"Thanks, guys. You did a great job."

"You're welcome, Ms. Jones. Have a nice rest of the day." The guys let the door down on the back of the truck and slowly left the premises.

She watched them as they disappeared out of the neighborhood. When Elaine turned around to head inside the house, she stumbled when she heard a voice from behind her.

"Hello there."

Elaine turned around and smiled. "Hello." At five foot ten inches tall, she towered over the

petite, gray-haired older woman.

Melinda was taken by her beauty. "I didn't mean to startle you. I saw the movers leave and decided to come over and introduce myself. My name is Melinda Bates. And, you are?"

"Nice to meet you, Ms. Bates. My name is Elaine Jones. But you can call me Laney. Mostly everyone I know does."

"Nice to meet you, Laney. I'm sure you'll love it here. It's good that this house won't be vacant any longer."

"I'm sure I'll love it. How long was the house vacant?"

"I'd say about a year and a half."

"I see."

"Well, Laney, dear, I won't take any more of your time. I'm sure you have a lot of unpacking to do."

"Yes, I do. And again, it's nice meeting you. I'm sure we'll see a lot of each other."

"Yes, I'm sure we will. I'm three doors down. You can't miss my flower garden."

"I did notice how beautiful it is. You're quite the nurturer."

"Yes, I try to be. I was born with a green thumb and the passion of caring."

"Wow. I'm not much of a green thumb, but I love roses."

"Maybe, I can help you plant some roses around here."

"Maybe so. Thanks."

"No problem. I'm going to get out of your hair. Bye, dear."

"Bye, Ms. Bates." Elaine watched Melinda walk back to her house. She thought to herself that Melinda appeared to be nice. However, she felt something about her didn't feel right. Nevertheless, she set her thoughts aside and went inside the house.

Laney looked at all the boxes she had to empty. The dread started to give her a headache. She opted to calm her nerves with a glass of wine. Plus, she needed to anoint her new digs.

The movers did a great job of placing the boxes in the correct rooms. Her carefully labeled boxes were a roadmap to perfection. She kicked off her shoes and poured herself a glass of red wine.

Laney admired the roominess of her kitchen. The island was a perfect setup for future dinner parties. However, she wasn't sure if she'd be entertaining anyone. At this point, spending loads of time alone seem like the perfect prescription to free her mind.

Then, her phone vibrated. It was her friend, Celeste.

"Hey."

"Hey, you. So, I guess you're all settled in."

"I'm in, but not settled. You know I have a lot of stuff to put away."

"I know. You're such a hoarder."

"I'm not a hoarder. Remember, I donated a lot of my things. Besides, I had to hold onto a few mementos."

"Yes, I suppose. So, how's the neighborhood?"

"Earlier, I met my first neighbor. Her name is Ms. Bates. She appeared nice."

"That's great. Have you seen any guys yet?"

"The only guys I've seen were the movers. This neighborhood is low-key. I doubt I'd be surrounded by eligible men."

"You never know what could be hiding behind closed doors."

"You know, it's like you enjoy bringing creepiness into a conversation."

"I wasn't trying to be creepy. I'm just saying."

"Well, it's getting late. I think I'll call it a night. We'll chat tomorrow."

"Okay. You bet. Lock your doors and have a good night's rest."

"Will do. Good night."

Elaine put the sheets and comforter on her bed. Then, she changed into pajamas and went to bed.

CHAPTER 2

Elaine spent the weekend opening boxes and arranging furniture. She went to bed late on Sunday night and woke up with a splitting headache on Monday morning.

After a quick glance at the clock, she knew she wouldn't arrive at work on time. Elaine rolled over in bed and grabbed her cell phone.

"Hello, Bill. This is Laney. I'm sorry to call this late. However, I have a splitting headache."

"I'm sorry to hear that. It's okay. The presentation isn't until Wednesday. We can manage. You get better, okay?"

"Okay. Thanks, Bill."

"You bet."

She put the phone on the nightstand, swallowed two pain pills, and crawled under the covers. Minutes later, she dozed off to sleep.

At three-thirty, Elaine's doorbell woke her. She hurriedly put on sweatshirt and sweatpants and went to the door. Elaine peered through her peephole and saw a cute little brunette with three children in tow. They seemed harmless, so she opened the door.

"Hello there."

"Hi. I'm so sorry to bother you. I saw your car parked and thought I'd come over and introduce myself and my crew. My name is Eve. I live across the street. This is Josiah, Jessi, and Junebug."

"Hello, all. I'm Laney. Nice to meet you. Would you like to come in for a bit?"

"I don't know. I don't want to intrude."

"No intrusion. Can I get you all anything?"

"No but thank you. You have it so beautifully decorated. I bet you don't have kids, do you?"

"No, I don't. How could you tell?"

"The breakables are fully displayed. They're a no-no in my house. Oh, how I miss them. However, I adore my crew."

"They're well-behaved. You've done a great job with them."

"Thank you. I try. It's been hard since my divorce. However, I got it under control."

“I'm sorry to hear about your divorce. In fact, I just left a long-term relationship. So, I can sort of understand the transition. Except, of course, I don't have any children.”

“Oh, by the way, on Thursday, we're having a Homeowners' Association meeting at six o'clock in the evening. It'll be in the clubhouse. Will you be there?”

“Sure. I should be home from work at that time. I was supposed to be at work today, but I had a killer headache.”

“I'm glad you're feeling better. We'll get out of your hair. And, I'll see you on Thursday.”

“Sure thing. Bye everyone and I hope you have a great evening.” Elaine shut the door and turned on the television.

As soon as five o'clock arrived, Elaine left work, got into her car, and headed to the Homeowners' Association meeting.

The traffic gave her no mercy thanks to two vehicle accidents. She wouldn't be able to make it to the meeting on time. But she felt late was better than never.

Elaine parked near the rear of the clubhouse. When she walked through the door, everyone turned around and smiled. A flush of embarrassment filled her face as she took a seat in the back of the room.

Ten minutes later, the meeting ended.

Eve walked over to Elaine. “Don't worry, you didn't miss much. I'll introduce you to everyone.” Then, she cleared her throat, took Elaine by the hand, and walked to the middle of the room. “May I have everyone's attention for a moment?” Quietness filled the room. “Everyone, this is our new neighbor, Laney.”

They smiled and said, “Hello, Laney.”

“Hello, everyone. I'm sorry I was late. The traffic was killer.”

A tall, gray-haired man came up to her. “No apologies necessary. I'm Tom Williams, the head of the association.”

“It's nice to meet you.”

Then, a red-headed woman touched her on the shoulder. “Hi, Laney. I'm Caroline. Don't let Tom lead you down a dark hole.”

Elaine raised her eyebrows and pursed her lips.

Tom gave Caroline a stern look. “Now Caroline, let's not start any rumors. I'm a sensible soul.”

Caroline shook her head and laughed. “Okay Tom, I was just having a little fun. So, Laney, I'm two doors to the right of you. Come by anytime.”

“Thanks. Nice to meet you.”

“Same here. Well, I must get back to the kiddos so I can put them to bed.” Caroline gave Elaine a quick hug and left.

When Elaine decided to make her exit, she was interrupted by a tall, good-looking man dressed in a business suit. “Hello Laney, are you trying to high-tail it out of here?”

“Um, yes.”

He laughed. “I don't blame you. These meetings are usually boring. I'm Chad Swanson.”

“Hello, Mr. Swanson. Nice to meet you.” She stared into his blue eyes and felt herself floating

in the atmosphere.

“Laney, are you okay?”

“Yes, I am. It's been a long day. I need to get home and get some sleep.”

“Understandable. I'm glad you moved to the neighborhood.”

“Me, too.” Elaine smiled with fantasies of Chad in her head. She got into her car and went home.

CHAPTER 3

The smell of bacon and eggs filled the house. Brad made his way to the kitchen to fix a plate of Caroline's famous Saturday morning breakfast.

"Mmm, mmm, mmm. It smells good as always."

"I try my love."

"You've mastered it." Brad put a couple of pieces of bacon, eggs, hash browns, and toast on his plate." Then, he took a seat by Lizzie. "Look at my girl cleaning that plate."

"I sure am. It's good. Hey, mom, can I have another piece of bacon?"

"Sure Liz. Here you go."

"What about me? Look at my plate. I'm a growing boy and I'd like two more slices of toast and eggs, please." Alexander handed his plate to Caroline.

"I'm sorry about that. Here you go my growing young man. Is there anything else you'd like?"

"A refill of orange juice and I'll be good to go."

"Gotcha." She poured him another glass of orange juice and started eating. "Brad."

"Yes."

"I think we should have a cookout next Saturday. It'd be a nice way to welcome our new neighbor, Laney to the neighborhood."

"Sounds great. What time on Saturday?"

"I'm thinking around two o'clock in the afternoon."

"That's a great time. I can get Susanna to handle the bakery while I help you get everything ready."

"You're such an awesome husband."

"And, you're an awesome wife." He kissed her on the lips.

Lizzie and Alexander looked at them and pretended to gag.

"Now, now, you two. One day, many, many years from now, you'll be doing that to a special someone."

Lizzie got up from the table. "Mom, you and dad have totally grossed me out. I'm going to my room."

Alexander watched her walk away. Then, he looked at his mother. "I agree it was pretty gross. However, can I have one more piece of toast.?"

“Where do you put all of that food?”

Alexander rolled his eyes. “Physical activity. You know that soccer thing you pay for.”

“That's right. I forgot about that. At least, you're getting plenty of fuel for energy.”

“Yes, I am.”

Brad got up from the table. “Well, I'm heading to the bakery. I have a large order to complete by noon.”

“Okay. Don't work too hard.”

“I'll try not to. Bye, everyone.”

As Elaine pulled into the driveway, she noticed a card sticking out of her front door. She shut off the engine, grabbed her bag, and proceeded to satisfy her curiosity.

On the front of the ivory-colored envelope, someone handwrote Laney in black. Inside she found an invitation to a neighborhood cookout hosted by the Hudson family. She thought to herself how thoughtful it was for Caroline and Brad to go through the trouble of formally welcoming her to the neighborhood. Elaine electronically RSVP'd.

Later that evening, she binge-watched a couple of reality shows, took a relaxing bubble bath, and allowed classical music to put her to sleep.

Chad looked out his office window and stared as people scurried about their day. He thought about breaking his food delivery habit and decided to spend some time outside of the office.

Ten minutes later, he landed at the entrance of Jessica's Deli. When he walked through the door and looked to his right, he saw a familiar face at a table accompanied by an opened laptop. He walked over. “Laney?”

She looked up. For a few seconds, no sound came from her mouth. Then, she responded, “Chad, right?”

“Right.” He flashed a quick grin. “Is this seat occupied?”

“Well, sort of.” She moved her bag. “Go ahead and have a seat.”

“That'd be my pleasure. Fancy meeting you here.”

“Yes. This is one of my favorite places for lunch and I throw in a little work on the side.”

“I see. If you don't mind me asking, what do you do?”

“I'm a marketing executive with Stynes & Associates. What about you?”

“I'm a hedge fund manager.”

“Intriguing. You're a money man.”

“I try to be on top of maximizing my clients' returns.”

“Wow, I'm sold.”

“What are you sold on? Me or my profession?”

Elaine took a quick inhale and exhale. “Both.”

“Interesting. So, what are you doing after work?”

“Going home.”

“Great. I'm going home, too. Why don't you park your car when you get home and knock on

my door at seven o'clock?"

"What are you up to?"

"Not much. I want to show off my cooking skills. So, is it a dinner date?"

"I'll be there. Should I bring anything?"

"You're all that's required. Oh, and do you have any food aversions or allergies?"

"No, I don't. Thanks for asking."

"You're welcome. I want to make you happy not sick."

"Good goal. I better get back to work. You're making me lose focus."

"How so?"

"Never mind. I'll see you at seven."

"Great."

Elaine barely made it back to the office without fainting. Chad mesmerized her.

CHAPTER 4

Melinda woke up at six o'clock on Saturday morning and realized she needed to grab a few items from the grocery store. As she backed out of her driveway, her eyes traveled to Elaine and Chad kissing at his front door.

She shook her head and thought to herself that Laney sure moved quickly. However, she knew they both were single and entitled to romance. Melinda smiled and left the neighborhood.

“Chad,” Elaine mumbled with his tongue down her throat.

He pulled back. “Don't you like it?”

“That's the problem. I love it. However, we don't want everyone to see us tonguing each other.”

“It's early. Nobody's out. Besides, how about you come back inside for an encore?”

“No, I better not. I've got to rest up for the cookout.”

“Oh yeah, that's right. The one being thrown in your honor.”

“Yep.”

“Okay. I understand. How about a nightcap after the cookout?”

“I don't know. It seems you've got me under a spell, and I can't get enough of you. Did you slip something in my drink?”

“Look at me. Do I need to drug anyone? You've tested the merchandise, right?”

“I can't deny that you're a bona fide catch. By the way, do you have a hidden girlfriend?”

“No, I don't. However, I'm looking for a special, hot blonde about five foot ten.”

“Quit it. I'm heading back to my place. I'll see you at the cookout.”

“You bet.”

At one o'clock, Elaine stood in front of her closet perplexed on what to wear. She knew revealing clothes were a no. The sun's rays heated up the interior of her house and the outside temperature hovered near eighty degrees. When she thought her decision on what to wear would never materialize, a white romper caught her eye. The delicate lace trim screamed cookout time. It'd look good with her strappy white flats.

Elaine applied her sunscreen, dressed, and put her hair up in a ponytail. After performing a spin

around in front of the mirror, she headed to the Hudsons.

She could hear music and talking as she approached the driveway. A sign pointed her to the backyard.

As soon as her foot landed on the pathway toward the pool, Caroline walked over to her. "Here she is everyone. Say hello to Laney if you hadn't already met her and if you did." She turned to Elaine and giggled.

The group shouted, "Hello, Laney. Welcome."

Elaine smiled and addressed everyone. "Thank you."

Caroline took Elaine's hand and walked over to Brad. "This is my co-host, Brad, my wonderful husband."

He extended his hand with a smile. "Nice to meet you, Laney." Brad had to control his staring at her legs and feet. He had a secret thing for feet and Elaine's were appealing.

"Nice to meet you as well."

After an hour of chatting with her new neighbors and hanging out with some of their children, the excessive punch consumption required restroom attention. She spotted Caroline adding more plates and napkins to one of the tables and walked toward her. "I was wondering if I could use your restroom."

"Sure. No problem. Go through the kitchen and it'll be the first door on the right."

"Thank you so much."

"No problem."

Brad observed the interaction between them and decided to slip away into the house. He didn't care if anyone noticed because he figured it was his house and his business to go inside it.

When Elaine walked out of the bathroom and turned the corner, she walked into Brad and shrieked.

He placed his hands on her shoulders and looked into her eyes. "Sorry about that."

With enlarged eyes, she looked up at him. "It was me. I should've been paying attention."

"It's okay." He kissed her on the lips.

She stared at him and pulled away. "What are you doing? Your wife's outside."

"And? It's just a kiss unless you want more."

Her face reddened. Then, she stared into his eyes. "Listen, I don't know you. And what I do know I rather not interfere in. Whatever ideas you may have about me, you need to destroy them." She regained her composure and went outside.

Chad saw Elaine come out of the sliding doors looking upset. "Are you okay?"

"It's been a long afternoon. I'm going home."

"Okay."

She walked over to Caroline. "Thanks again for the cookout."

"I'm glad to have co-hosted it for you. Is everything okay?"

"I'm a little tired. The punch and the food were awesome. I think I went over my calorie quota."

"I'm sure you count calories. You probably could eat nonstop and never gain an ounce."

"Aren't you a comedian?"

"I wish. Well, get some rest and we'll chat another time."

“Will do.” She turned away from Caroline and waved goodbye to everyone.

Chad abruptly finished his conversation with Eve and joined Elaine. “Are you okay?”

“Yes. I’m a little tired.”

“I don’t know you seem bothered.”

“Don’t worry. I’m okay. Thanks for escorting me home.”

“My pleasure. Are you sure you don’t want me to deliver that encore tonight?”

“Yes, I’m sure. But I’ll hold a raincheck on it.”

“Locked in place with your name on it. So, can I at least get a good night kiss?”

“I guess a small one won’t hurt.”

He started with a slow, tempting kiss and climaxed with a passionate kiss that left Elaine in awe.

“Wow. That was a delightful good night kiss. You almost earned admission inside.”

“Geez. Maybe next time. Good night.”

“Good night.” She watched him walk away and shut the door.

After pushing the deadbolt into a locked position, she braced her back against the door and looked around the room. Then, she felt the need to remove her clothes at the door.

The thought of Brad’s hands on her shoulders left her feeling dirty and guilty. Elaine could still feel the moistness of the skin from his lips. She shuddered at the thought and headed to the bathroom to shower his touch away. Afterward, she put on a t-shirt and shorts.

When she stared into the mirror, glimpses of Brad filled the background. She couldn’t believe what he did and thought about what he could be capable of doing under different circumstances.

She grabbed a wine bottle and poured a glass of wine and sat on the couch. Elaine let the wine’s ingredients soothe her mind. Fifteen minutes later, she fell asleep on the couch.

Even though the cookout ended five hours earlier, it didn’t leave Stephen Smith’s mind. While he enjoyed mingling with the neighbors, he most enjoyed alone time. At fifty-five years old, he’d seen and experienced many things.

His mind went to Caroline. She didn’t know her husband was humiliating her in their own house. Stephen rolled his eyes and shook his head while he viewed a video of Brad and Elaine’s exchange.

He happened to volunteer to bring out more food when he saw Brad make his way inside the house shortly after Elaine entered the house. When Brad made his way to the hallway, Stephen readied his cell phone to capture any action. Never mind the fact he wished it was him who locked lips with Elaine.

Stephen sat at his desk and thought about Elaine. However, he knew she’d never give him a second look because he wore thick prescription glasses and didn’t possess the physique like Chad. But he figured it didn’t hurt for him to dream about snagging her.

CHAPTER 5

Things continued to remain heated between Elaine and Chad. She found herself spending most of her evenings with him.

When Elaine arrived home from work, she noticed her gate was slightly opened. She thought it was odd that it would be because she hadn't been in her backyard in weeks. However, she quickly squashed any further concern by going inside her house and getting ready for Chad time.

She showered and put on a tank top and a pair of jeans. Elaine went into the kitchen and prepared cheeseburgers and fries.

Fifteen minutes later, her doorbell rang. She opened the door to a light blue polo shirt wearing Chad with a bouquet of red roses. "Roses. It's movie night and you bring me roses."

"You don't like them?"

"Of course, I like them. I love them. They just seem so formal for tonight."

He shook his head and shut the door. "Laney, sometimes, I don't know what to say to you. Why can't you accept my romantic gesture?"

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to sound unappreciative. Are you ready for the gourmet cheeseburger and fries I prepared for you?"

"Yes, I'm starving, and all is forgiven." He sat on the couch and watched her fix their plates.

"Here you go. What would you like to drink?"

"I'll take a glass of wine."

"Coming right up."

She placed his glass on the coffee table and powered on the television. "I hope you'll like this movie. The movie critics gave it rave reviews."

"I'm sure I will. This burger is delicious, and the fries are addictive."

"I'm glad you like it." She ate her food and placed her plate on the table. Then, she moved closer to him and laid her head on his shoulder as they watched the movie.

Halfway through the movie, Chad started kissing her neck. She tilted her head backward and gave him access to the rest of her body. Minutes later, they ended up in her bedroom. They spent the next thirty minutes enjoying the after party.

Stephen woke up at three o'clock in the morning and powered up his laptop. He anxiously

wanted to see how his surveillance equipment worked.

Within minutes, he observed Elaine and Chad sleeping. He rolled his eyes at the sight of Chad and zoomed in on Elaine's face.

His intense stare resulted in drool dripping down his shirt. He wiped his mouth and thought of ways to get him closer to Elaine. He'd start by monitoring her comings and goings.

Stephen spent the next three weeks documenting her activity. He felt he knew her better than she knew herself.

Elaine stood in front of the seasonings in the grocery store for a bottle of Italian seasoning. Even though the bottles were alphabetized on the shelves, she scanned each shelf hoping to spot one out of its place. After five minutes of intense searching, she gave up and decided to get the next item on her list.

When she turned around, she bumped into Stephen. "Oh, hi there. I'm such a klutz sometimes. Sorry about that."

He looked at her and smiled. "You're no klutz. You can blame it on me for being behind you."

She looked at him with a half-smile and a strange feeling took over her body. "Well, it's great seeing you. I've got to finish grocery shopping."

"Do you need help?"

"No, I have it under control."

"Are you sure about that?"

"What do you mean?"

"I think you may need my assistance."

"No, I don't. And I don't have much time. I'm sorry."

"You should take my assistance."

"No, I shouldn't." She frowned and proceeded to walk away.

"I wonder what Caroline would say if she knew about you and Brad."

Elaine stopped in her tracks and turned around. "What are you talking about?"

"You know what I'm talking about. How was that lip lock with him?"

"It's not what you think."

"It doesn't matter what I think. If Caroline saw a video of it, she'd think a lot of things."

"Video? What video?"

"The video I have on my phone."

"What do you want from me?"

"I want to spend some time with you. And I know you keep busy with Chad."

"Are you following me?"

"No. I periodically see your interactions with him."

"Listen, Stephen, I must go. Please don't bother me again."

"So, you don't mind me showing the video to Caroline."

"No, I don't want you to show her. It'd complicate my friendship with her."

"Yes, it would. Why don't you join me for dinner tonight? If you have dinner with me, I won't show her."

“I already have plans.”

“Cancel them or else.”

She looked at him with disgust and fear. “Okay. I’ll cancel my plans. Where do you want to have dinner?”

“Meet me at Pierre’s at seven o’clock.”

“Okay. I’ll see you then.”

“Great.”

Elaine walked away feeling violated. Even though she didn’t do anything wrong, she felt guilty. And she didn’t want the video released. Elaine understood how thoughts could become twisted after viewing it.

Sitting across from Stephen made Elaine nauseated. She felt like she was participating in a scene from one of those old black-and-white movies. The thought of him touching her made her skin crawl.

Stephen took a sip of wine and looked at her. “So, how’s the food?”

“It’s great.”

“You’re quiet.”

“I’m a quiet kind of girl.”

“That’s hard to believe.”

“What makes you say that? You don’t know me.”

“I know your type.”

“My type? What’s my type?”

“Blonde and beautiful. You’re the type of person everyone wants to be around”

“You don’t know me. I’m low-key.”

“You may be at this moment. However, I bet you’re loud and crazy when drunk.”

“I don’t ever get drunk. It’s getting late. And I must get up early in the morning. Thanks for dinner.”

“You’re welcome. I’m sorry if I offended you.”

“I’m okay.” Elaine got up from the table and left him to take care of the bill.

As she drove home, she kept looking in her rear-view mirror. Then, she realized it didn’t matter because he’s one of her neighbors. A chill came over her body.

When she arrived home, she showered and went to bed.

CHAPTER 6

Elaine twirled the spaghetti on the fork and thought about Stephen holding the video against her.

Chad noticed her somber demeanor. “Are you okay?”

“Yes. I have a lot on my mind.”

“Do you mind telling me what’s bothering you?”

“It’s nothing but work. I have a huge campaign I’m working on. It’s got me rattled.” She lied but knew she couldn’t tell him.

“If you say so, but I think it’s something else. Are you enjoying your spaghetti?”

“It’s great. I love this garlic bread.”

“Awesome. Do you want to relax on the couch when you’re finished eating?”

“Sure.” She ate the last piece of bread, wiped her mouth, and washed her hands at the kitchen sink.

Chad turned on some music and took her into his arms. They slow danced. Then, he led her to the couch and caressed her body. He succeeded in melting her worries away.

At times, Elaine felt like a prisoner in her house. She dreaded leaving the confines of her home for fear of what awaited her outside.

Chad was the only neighbor she communicated with. She avoided Brad, Caroline, and the dreadful Stephen. Occasionally, she exchanged pleasantries with Melinda because Melinda was always a visible presence in the neighborhood.

After a long day at work and enduring the awful traffic, she decided a bubble bath was the perfect solution for a horrible day.

Elaine spent fifteen minutes scrubbing the tub. Then, she set up the scene. The candles, soft music, aromatic fragrance, and toasted bubbled water begged for her presence.

She put her hair up, slipped out of her clothes, and carefully situated herself among the bubbles. Elaine sipped on wine as sweat poured from her body.

When she closed her eyes, she felt at peace. The moment made her forget about the negatives in her life.

Dinner with Elaine wasn't enough for Stephen. He wanted to touch her skin. Capturing her images on his computer heightened his desire for her.

Stephen prided himself with sustaining self-control. However, he was losing the battle. He could no longer watch from a distance.

The desire for Elaine consumed him. Acting on his desires was his next step in fulfilling his fantasies.

After watching her for two hours, Stephen decided to make his move. He put on dark clothing and proceeded to her house.

Melinda happened to be outside with her dog, Princess when she noticed him walking down the street. She thought it was odd for him to be out in the wee hours of the morning dressed in dark clothes.

Melinda took Princess inside and grabbed her cell phone. Her detective senses were activated. She kept her eyes on Stephen.

When she saw him looking over into Elaine's back yard, her eyes enlarged. He unlatched the gate. Without hesitation, she called 911. When they arrived, Melinda directed them to the back yard and stood with the other officers in front of Elaine's house. The officers caught him attempting to pry open Elaine's sliding door.

One of the officers and Melinda went to Elaine's front door. The officer knocked on the door. "Ms. Jones."

Elaine woke from her sleep, put on a robe, and headed to the front door. "Yes."

"Ms. Jones, this is Officer Yates. I'm here with your neighbor, Melinda Bates. Would you mind talking with us for a moment?"

"Sure." Elaine opened the door and wondered what was so important for them to wake her from her glorious sleep. "What's going on?"

"Ms. Jones, I'm so sorry to bother you. However, Ms. Bates caught Stephen Smith trying to enter your home."

Elaine's mouth widened and her eyes enlarged. "Oh my. Thanks, Melinda."

"You're welcome. It's the least I could do. I'm glad you're okay. I can't believe he'd do such a horrible thing."

"Me, either." Elaine knew he was capable of things, but she never figured he'd do something as foolish as this.

"Ms. Jones. He's been arrested. We'll keep you updated on the case."

"Thank you, officer."

"You're welcome." The officer stood up and walked out of the house.

Melinda looked over at Elaine with tears in her eyes. "If it wasn't for Princess and her potty break, I don't know what would've happened." Then, she stood up.

Elaine walked over to Melinda and hugged her. "Thanks again, I'm grateful to you and Princess."

"Again, you're welcome. I'm going to let you get you back to sleep, dear. Hopefully, you'll be able to sleep. You're safe now." She smiled and exited through the front door.

Elaine walked outside and looked around the neighborhood. The police were gone, and all was quiet.

At six o'clock in the morning, Elaine heard a knock at her front door. Blue-eyed Chad stood at the door with roses, a bottle of wine, and a wrapped gift.

“What are you doing here so early in the morning?”

“What do you mean what am I doing here? Why didn't you call me?”

“Call you about what?”

“Take a step outside.”

The outside of Elaine's front door was littered with good wishes. It appeared that Melinda couldn't keep Stephen's shenanigans under wraps. The entire neighborhood knew about what had transpired in the wee hours.

“Oh, that.”

“Yes, that. You should've called me.”

“I'm okay. Don't worry about me. Come in. I want to take a look at the goodies you got for me.”

“Okay. You're acting calm for someone that could've been violated.”

“But I wasn't violated physically. You're such a sweetheart. Thanks for coming by. I'm okay.”

“I'm glad you are. I had a friend of mine do a background check on our neighbor, Stephen Smith. His real name is Mark Roberson. He'd been previously convicted of aggravated stalking of a woman five years ago. After serving time and paying a fine, he decided to reinvent himself. However, the old urges crept back when he saw you. It seems you reminded him of the woman he stalked and reignited his obsession. Also, the former homeowner of your house, Kelly Wynston was stalked by him. She never told anyone in the neighborhood and left to get away from him.”

“Geez. That's a lot to take in. I'm so glad he was stopped.” She hugged Chad.

“Me, too. Why don't we spend the rest of the day together?”

“Sounds great.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kay Hillery writes short stories under the name of Kay. Other short stories she's written are [*It's Time to Get Groceries*](#), [*Deceptive Beginnings*](#), [*Computer Blues*](#), and [*Mr. Trucker Man*](#).

Under the name K. Hillery, she wrote *He Was My Addiction*, *How I Feel Inside*, [*What I Feel*](#), [*From Inside Me*](#), [*Thoughts*](#), [*He Was My Addiction Revisited*](#), and [*How to Start a Blog*](#).

Her poems, blog posts, and short stories are featured on freedomtovent.com.