

Capri

Capers

by

Karen GoatKeeper

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The places and people depicted in this novel are fictional and not intended to resemble any real place or person.

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*For
Those Who
Enjoy a
Good Movie Serial
And
Melodrama*



Map of the State Forest and its roads surrounding and behind Harriet's place.

Acknowledgements

Much of this novel is fanciful as any good melodrama should be. Yet it is not a fantasy so many events have real devices and procedures. For these I spoke with and tapped the brains of a number of people who were kind enough to indulge my writing passion.

Staff at a local convenience store in Salem, MO, helped with the lottery and store information. The store in the novel is not based on this store but a compilation of many such stores I have known and worked in over the years.

How do you track ransom money? Some sort of homing device is an obvious answer. Rocky Mountain Tracking in Fort Collins, CO, answered my phone call and told me about some of the amazing tracking devices available today. Some really are small enough to fit in a money bundle. Many can be tracked much better than the ones in my fanciful story.

The USDA Forest Service, Mark Twain National forest, Salem Ranger District in Salem, MO, helped me devise the map. I imagined the cabins in the state forest. Indeed I made up the state forest in the story all together. It is doubtful the forestry personnel would leave such cabins in a state forest but perhaps my imagined forest was recently acquired so cabins were still there.

The Dent County Sheriff's Office, Salem, MO, answered some questions about police radios. Much of the police and sheriff activity in the story is made up to fit the story and likely not regular police procedure.

But then, this story does not pretend to be a true crime drama where each detail must be accurate. At heart this story is a melodrama full of old time action and cliff hangers. And those stories were always larger than life.

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Chapter 1 The Lottery Ticket

“Brian, do come look,” called Harriet. “This is so lovely.”

“Another property?”

“What a property. The perfect property. Just look.”

“It is nice,” Brian said as he looked admiringly at his wife’s waist length straight deep brown hair, her slim figure. How did he ever get her to go out with him let alone marry him? His hand slid down her hair and around her waist.

Harriet leaned into his hand and laughed. “Look at the screen.”

Brian looked over Harriet’s shoulder at the computer screen. “Where is this one?”

“Not far from here, just twelve miles out of town. It’s a hundred acres surrounded by the state forest.”

“It’s all woods then. No, I see pastures in that picture.”

“Here’s the description. One hundred twenty acres, mostly wooded, fifty acres of fenced pasture, perimeter fencing. Borders the state forest. Year round creek. Pond. Barn. Three bedroom house, two baths, recently remodeled. Only two hundred fifty thousand.”

“With that old house, I’ll bet they’d take two hundred or maybe one fifty.”

“You really think so?”

“At the rate we’re going, we can buy it about a hundred years from now.”

“Oh, honey, I’ll find a job and we can save up faster.”

“A part time minimum wage one like me? Without a diploma that’s all I can get.”

“I’ll have my HSE in another month. Then you can get yours.”

“That costs money too. I wish we would win the lottery.”

“Don’t say that,” gasped Harriet turning to face Brian. She looked for the handsome boy she had married. His face was thin and tired. His brown hair was too long and ragged from her attempts to cut it so they didn’t have to pay the barber. Even his jeans looked tired and worn. “Don’t wish like that.”

“Why not?”

“I read this story called “The Monkey’s Paw.” In it this woman wishes for money and the couple gets it. But it’s the insurance money from their son being killed because of the wish. We can save up the money.”

“Two hundred fifty thousand? You’re dreaming! After food and rent, we can’t even have a car or a television. If you weren’t working for your HSE, we wouldn’t even have a phone or Internet. You look at those properties for sale like we can own one. We’ve been saving for two years now and what have we got? One hundred dollars!”

“I like looking at them. Dreaming of owning one, of having our own goats and chickens like my grandmother had gives me hope. It makes today’s problems smaller.”

“Not me. That’s a beautiful place. I’d love to own it. I can’t, not now, not tomorrow, not ever. That’s the way it is.”

“Not forever. You’ll see. I’ll get a job. We can live on what you make and save all of mine.”

“I hate living this way! What job can you get? Cleaning houses? The burger place? Part time, minimum wage, just like me. A hundred years to save enough for that place, maybe more. I’m going out!”

Brian slammed the door, stomped across the sidewalk in front of the line of apartments and down the dark street. Harriet sighed and turned back to the computer

screen. Even the wonderful property had somehow lost its appeal. Looking at goats seemed hopeless too. She started checking for jobs in the area.

He's right, Harriet thought. She had to get that HSE and a good job! But how? Without a car she had to stay close to home. There wasn't much choice close to home. The job listings had even fewer choices.

How can I apply for a good job? thought Harriet. My clothes are old and worn just like Brian's. Even lipstick is a luxury. I can't afford to print a nice resume.

Despair washed over Harriet. She closed out the computer.

Like a stranger Harriet surveyed their apartment. One tiny bedroom crowded with a double bed and chest of drawers from the thrift store. One main room barely big enough for their one battered stuffed chair and the computer. A kitchen so small she didn't have to move to reach anything she wanted, barely bigger than the small round table in the middle. Cold in the winter with frost forming on the inside back wall. Hot in the summer and they couldn't afford to use the air conditioning.

Harriet sighed. Maybe Brian was right. Looking at those properties for sale was silly. They would never be able to buy one. It was her fault they married and dropped out their senior years. Her fault Brian didn't have his diploma and college scholarship. Her fault their families had disowned them. Tears formed in her eyes.

"I'm not going to cry over this," Harriet said firmly. "We're going to make it. I'll look for a part time job tomorrow. The burger place is hiring. Maybe I can find a house or two to clean." She settled into the old comfortable chair, opened her book and started to read. It was late. Surely Brian would walk off his anger and be back soon.

Brian mumbled griping to himself as he strode down the side of the street through occasional pools of light from streetlights attached to telephone poles. He felt guilty. Harriet loved looking at those properties and dreaming of owning a place. Usually he didn't mind but not tonight. His hours were cut. They could barely make ends meet now. What were they going to do? It would take all they'd saved to pay for Harriet's HSE.

"I really wish we'd win the lottery," Brian said aloud. He would buy a ticket. It was only a dollar. Did he have a dollar?

"What's that?" Brian slowed and looked. There were two quarters on the ground. He had two in his pocket.

"It's a sign. I'll buy that ticket."

Now Brian walked purposefully down the street, turned a corner, walked to the main street and crossed to the little gas station and market on the opposite corner. No cars or pickups were at the gas pumps or in the lot.

Brian paused at the door looking through the glass into the empty store, empty except for the clerk. She was a pretty blond with a curving figure reminding him of Harriet. He pulled the door open and walked inside.

Brian had never bought a lottery ticket before. He and Harriet had agreed to save that dollar a week. That's how they saved up a hundred dollars. Guilt nudged him.

The lottery ticket machine stood halfway down backed against the counter. Brian walked over and stood looking at the display, not for the first time. He was so tired of scraping by. It would be so nice to take Harriet out to dinner. Hopelessness swept over him.

There were so many kinds of tickets in the machine. It was so confusing. Which one was a lottery ticket? Were they all lottery tickets?

“The lottery’s up to forty-six million,” said the clerk draping herself over the counter to look at Brian. “Lots of people are buying tickets.”

“I guess lots of people buy tickets every week, Cheryl” said Brian reading her name tag.

“You don’t.” Cheryl laughed, a joyous cascade of sound. “You’re just standing there looking. Do you want to buy one?”

There was a time when Brian would look at a woman like Cheryl. Her figure would fill out a cheerleader’s outfit perfectly just like Harriet’s had three years ago before they dropped out and got married. She was thinner now. He was glad she hadn’t really been pregnant. Money was tight enough without a kid to pay for too.

Cheryl’s blond hair drawn up in a ponytail was falling in curls down across her shoulders. Harriet’s hair was so dark, almost black. That reminded him of their agreement to save that dollar a week.

Save a dollar a week. What a laugh. Fifty-two dollars a year. Anger flared again. He worked hard. It wasn’t his fault his pay was so low. Minimum wages were starvation wages.

“Yes. What do I do?”

“Which game?”

“The lottery I guess. The one for a dollar.”

“I do that over here. You have a dollar?”

“Four quarters.”

“You give me the quarters. I ring it up and hand you the ticket. Simple.”

Brian hesitated a moment then handed over the quarters. Cheryl rang it up on the register, did something on another machine and handed him his lottery ticket.

Brian took the ticket, turning it over in his hand. He sighed and slid the ticket into his pocket. It was so easy. The dollar was gone replaced by what was probably a worthless bit of paper.

“Thanks.” Brian turned to go.

A car with two men in it turned into the parking lot. It pulled up into a space to one side of the door.

“Leroy, I don’t want to shoot anyone. Why do we have these guns?”

“The clerk won’t think we’re serious without them, Roscoe.”

“I know you lost your job and I can’t find one, but I hate to rob a place. I don’t want to go to jail.”

“Roscoe, are you with me or not? Do you want some money or not?”

“I’m with you.”

“Then shut up and put the cap on. Be sure it covers your entire head, no hair showing under it. Don’t forget to put on the gloves.”

Roscoe pulled the ski mask over his face and sneezed. “It tickles my nose.”

“Too bad. There aren’t any cars so only the clerk should be in there. Hold your gun where she can see it. We’ll be in and out, no trouble, easy money.”

Leroy and Roscoe got out of their car and walked to the door.

Brian noticed the knit caps over the men’s faces as the taller one flung open the door and stepped inside waving his gun. The second one came in pushing the door closed. He looked out over the lot then turned waving his gun.

Brian stopped. He heard Cheryl gasp behind him.

“Quick, give us your money,” demanded the first man his voice sounding young as he pointed his gun at the clerk.

Cheryl paled. She opened the register drawer and a bell rang. She reached for a sack. Brian backed up along the counter.

“Stop!” snapped the second man pointing his gun at Brian.

Chapter 2 Where Is It?

Brian swallowed and started to raise his hands.

“Empty your pockets,” demanded the second man.

Brian lowered his hands to reach for his pockets. The sound of metal scraping on metal came from under the counter. Time seemed to stop.

“She’s got a gun!” screamed the first man. Brian’s ears exploded with the blast of a gun. He heard the clerk slam against the back wall.

Another explosion sounded. Brian felt himself hurled backward.

Leroy raced around the counter to stuff the money in the register into a sack. “Come on! Let’s get out of here.”

The two ran out the door almost leaping into their car.

“We weren’t supposed to shoot anyone!” cried Roscoe.

Leroy started the engine peeling out of the parking lot.

“Why did you have to shoot her?” asked Roscoe as he looked in the sack of money.

“You heard it. It sounded like a gun.”

“But it wasn’t. Now they’ll be after us for murder!”

“Roscoe Rascal, quit your griping. They can’t tell who we are. We wore gloves so there are no prints. We had our heads covered. So they’re dead. Big deal.”

“We’re up for murder for a lousy sixty bucks.”

“Quit griping.”

Harriet was almost asleep when she heard knocking on her door. Brian must have forgotten his key she thought drowsily as she unfolded her legs and got to her feet. He had been gone a long time.

Yawning Harriet opened the door. A police officer stood under the light. Fear gripped her.

“Brian? What’s happened to Brian?” Harriet heard herself ask.

Deputy Arthur Carlson pushed around the officer at the door. “Harriet.” He wrapped her in his arms motioning with his head for the other officer to leave.

After that everything seemed like a dream for days. She walked through the motions everyone else told her she needed to do. Arthur was ever at her side guiding her, helping her.

Without Brian there was no income at all. His family paid for Brian’s funeral. Brian’s mother made it plain they felt his death was her fault.

Harriet dry eyed and numb stood alone in the memorial chapel. Her parents hadn’t contacted her at all. When Brian’s parents came, they stayed on the other side of the chapel aisle. Some of Brian’s and her high school friends came by but didn’t stay long.

Afterwards Arthur drove her back to the apartment. Harriet walked into the apartment alone knowing she had to pack her things. The landlord had let her stay an extra month without rent but the month was half gone.

Harriet sat down in the one chair. Brian was gone. Her hopes of getting her HSE were gone. Her hopes of a good job went with them. Her head sank down into her hands and tears fell.

The room was dark when Harriet looked up again hearing a knock at the door. Her eyes felt swollen. Her face and blouse were wet. Habit drew her to the door which she opened.

“Arthur,” said Harriet.

“You need to eat something,” said Arthur as he entered the apartment. He carried a pizza box that filled the air with odors of tomatoes and cheese. Harriet’s stomach reminded her she hadn’t eaten since? She couldn’t remember.

“It’s Canadian bacon and onion. That’s your favorite, isn’t it?”

“It was. We don’t, didn’t go out much.”

Harriet followed Arthur into the kitchen. Tossed on the kitchen table was a bag of items the police had given her. Harriet picked it up. Brian’s wallet, his keys, a handkerchief dumped out onto the table. Harriet shook the bag. A lottery ticket fell out.

Harriet stared at it. Brian had been so angry that night. He was so tired of always being broke. He had gone into that store to buy a lottery ticket! She picked it up to tear it in half and throw it away.

“Wait, Harriet,” said Arthur as he slid the box onto the table.

“He died because of this stupid thing!” Tears started in Harriet’s eyes. “We agreed to save that money every week.”

“Yes, Brian died because he bought that ticket,” said Arthur. “Isn’t that reason to check it? The paper said there was a local winner. Why not that ticket?”

“Then you take it!” Harriet threw the ticket at Arthur bursting out crying again.

Arthur tucked the ticket into his shirt pocket and wrapped his arms around Harriet. Her head sank onto his shoulder. Time passed and her tears stopped again.

“Let’s eat,” said Arthur. “I’m on my dinner break and have to get back on patrol soon.”

Harriet’s stomach reminded her again it was empty. She got out two glasses to fill with milk. Arthur flipped open the pizza box releasing more aromas.

“What will you do now?” asked Arthur.

“Move back in with my parents I suppose,” answered Harriet looking over at Arthur, his sandy blond hair in a crew cut, his square jaw, his sad eyes, wondering why he was so attentive to her but glad he was. “I guess my father will let me. There isn’t anyplace else. I’ll look for a job.”

“Aren’t you going to get your HSE? Aren’t you almost done?”

“I was supposed to take the test next month. No, this month! Several of us were going to share a ride. But I still owe for it and the money’s gone.”

“I can loan it to you. It isn’t much, is it?”

“Oh, Arthur, you’ve done so much already. And it’s almost a hundred dollars.”

“I don’t mind. I have to get back to work. I’ll stop by and pay that money tomorrow. You need to study so you pass it.”

Two men sat in a car up the street watching the apartment row.

“How long will that deputy be in there?” mumbled Roscoe.

“It has to be this ticket.”

“Maybe he didn’t buy one.”

“The slip was still in the register.”

“Yeah. It still might not be the right one.”

“We’d have heard if someone else had the right one. No one keeps that a secret.”

“Maybe she doesn’t have it anymore.”

“What’s wrong with you? Don’t you want to be a millionaire?”

“You killed those people. We weren’t supposed to do that.”

“You want to get shot?”

“She didn’t have a gun.”

“It sounded like it. I wasn’t waiting to find out. Besides, no witnesses were left.”

“We’re doing fine robbing places in those other towns. Nobody’s looking for us in town. Why mess it up?”

“A few dollars here and a few dollars there isn’t a million. That ticket is worth millions.”

“That deputy is leaving.”

The men watched Arthur get in the sheriff’s car and drive off. Leroy counted off thirty seconds just in case the deputy came back then started his car and drove up to the apartment.

“Put on your cap and gloves, Roscoe,” said Leroy as he pulled his on. “Let’s go get that ticket.”

Leroy and Roscoe got out of the car walking quickly to the front door. Leroy tried the knob before knocking. It was unlocked. He turned the knob so the two could walk in.

Arthur had left. Harriet had heard the door shut behind him. The sheriff’s car started up and drove off. She sat there munching on the last piece of pizza. Her stomach was now full yet the rest of her felt empty.

That HSE had been so important to Brian. He had been the first to find a job so Harriet was to get her HSE first. Then he would get his and they could get better jobs. At least that was what they thought until the reality of budgeting showed them how hard it was to pay for anything. Maybe they should have applied for food stamps at least. Brian didn’t want to admit he couldn’t support them.

Arthur was being so good to her, Harriet thought. He had always been around, even in school. They dated their junior years. She could always talk to him about whatever bothered her.

Why had Arthur joined the sheriff’s office? Harriet had expected him to go off to college. He was so smart, a valedictorian at graduation, the graduation she and Brian should have stayed in school for. Despair tugged at her again but her tears were gone.

Gravel crunched outside as a vehicle pulled up. It had to be Arthur again. What could he have forgotten? All Harriet remembered him having was the box of pizza.

The door opened. Harriet shrugged. She should have gotten up and locked it when Arthur left.

“What did you forget, Arthur?” Harriet called as she swiveled in her chair to look toward the front room. The words froze in her throat as two men with knit caps over their heads burst into the kitchen. Her mouth dropped open to scream when she saw the guns pointing at her.

Chapter 3 It's Worth Millions

"Shut up!" Leroy ordered Harriet and slapped her face with his hand.

"There's the wallet," said Roscoe.

Harriet stared at the two. Their voices seemed familiar somehow. But they couldn't be. They must just be like the many boys' voices she remembered from school.

Roscoe dumped the contents of the wallet out on the table. No money. No change. A picture of Harriet. He opened each compartment to make sure everything was out.

"It's not here."

"Where is it?" demanded Leroy.

"Where is what?" asked Harriet. "We don't have any money."

"The lottery ticket! Where's the lottery ticket?"

"I got rid of it."

"Was it the winning ticket?"

"I don't know. I didn't look. Is that why you killed Brian?" Harriet's voice kept rising, hysteria creeping in. Leroy slapped her again. Tears slid down her cheeks.

Roscoe looked around. He found the wastebasket and dumped the contents on the floor. He kicked the trash around checking each sales slip. Harriet found herself thinking a lottery ticket did look a lot like a sales slip.

"It's not here."

"Check in the other room."

Roscoe walked into the other room. Harriet heard more trash land on the floor. Then a whisper of trash hitting the floor in the bedroom.

"It wasn't in there," reported Roscoe coming back into the kitchen.

"What did you do with the ticket?" demanded Leroy.

"I got rid of it."

"Where?"

"I gave it to someone."

"Who?"

"Just someone."

Leroy slapped her cheek hard. "Who?"

"I'll bet it was that deputy," said Roscoe.

"That right?"

Harriet's face must have told Leroy Arthur had the ticket.

"Who is he? What's his name?"

Harriet sat there. She wouldn't tell this man anything. She couldn't get Arthur killed.

Leroy slapped Harriet again. Her cheek stung and felt swollen. Blood was in her mouth from cuts in her cheeks where her teeth had sliced them.

"Wait," said Roscoe. "I know who it is - Arthur Carlson."

Harriet felt her mouth sag open. She could deny it. But it was too late.

"You're right," said Leroy. "I should've recognized him too."

"Let's get out of here."

"No, we can't leave her."

"You can't shoot her! The store was an accident. We thought she had a gun. This would be murder!"

"We can't leave her behind."

“Why not? She doesn’t know who we are. We can’t start killing all the people we rob. Let’s just get out of here.”

“Maybe you can’t. I can.” Leroy leveled his gun at Harriet. She looked at it and went cold inside. She saw his hand tighten. Roscoe knocked the gun aside.

“No! It’ll wake the neighbors and someone will see us leave. Let’s get out of here. Come on!”

“You come up with some excuse every time.”

“The neighbors are for real.”

“You say anything about us and I’ll be back,” growled Leroy.

Harriet sagged down in the chair as the door closed behind the two men. Arthur! She had to warn Arthur. She stumbled out to the front room to find the phone.

Leroy and Roscoe got in their car, pulled up the street a ways and parked.

“Shouldn’t we go to the sheriff’s office and watch for Carlson?” asked Roscoe.

“She’ll call him. He’ll come here.”

A short time later a vehicle pulled up in front of the apartment. Harriet peeked out a window. It was a police car. Officers were knocking on the door.

Harriet opened the door to talk to the officers. She saw a strange car down the street. Two people were in it. “What do you want?” she asked the officers.

“We got a call that two men had been in your apartment and threatened you.”

“I can’t talk about it. You must have the wrong address. Please leave.”

Just then a sheriff’s car pulled up. Arthur jumped out and ran over to Harriet.

“Please ask the officers to leave,” Harriet told Arthur. “Please.”

Arthur looked at her in surprise. “Are you all right?”

“Yes. Please get them to leave.”

Arthur shrugged turning to the officers. “I’ll take care of it.”

The officers returned to their car and left.

“They said they’d come back if I told about them.”

“I can protect you.”

“I think they’re down the street watching.”

Arthur looked up and down the street. He saw no one in any of the cars. “Are you sure?”

“I saw the car when the police came. It was over there. It’s gone now.”

“What did they want?”

“The lottery ticket. They know you have it. Arthur, they recognized you. They’re somebody we know!”

“Calm down. That just means they’re locals. Why the lottery ticket?”

“They think it’s the winning ticket. They said they thought the clerk had a gun, that’s why they shot her and Brian. One of them was going to shoot me but the other one didn’t let him. He said he’d be back if I told on them.”

“Let’s check that ticket.” Arthur pushed past her into the apartment. He sat down at the computer and started it up.

Slowly the Internet connected. Arthur tapped the desk impatiently. At last he was on the lottery site checking the ticket numbers.

“It is the winning ticket! Harriet, you won the lottery!”

“Just like “The Monkey’s Paw.” Brian wished we’d win the lottery. We did but he paid for it with his life.”

“I’m going to put the ticket in the Department safe for the night. You need to sign it.”

“I suppose I should. I don’t know if the money’s worth it.”

“You’ll be glad of it. I’m off in a couple of days. We can drive up to Jefferson City then.”

“You are going to so much trouble.”

“Harriet, it’s a lot of money. You need to make plans what to do with it tomorrow, before we go up to claim it. Why don’t you talk to Ben Greenback?”

“Why Ben Greenback?”

“He’s a financial guy now. Didn’t you know that?”

“I’ve lost touch with everyone in our class but you.”

Arthur tried not to look around. He knew why Harriet didn’t talk to anyone anymore. “No excuses now. You need to make some plans for that money. Ben Greenback will tell you what to do so go see him first thing tomorrow.”

“I will. You be careful. Those men really want that ticket.”

“Lock your door as soon as I leave.”

“I will.”

Harriet watched Arthur get in his sheriff’s car and drive away. Arthur had talked about his best friend when the two of them went out but never introduced them. She had gone to that summer dance with him, the night she met Brian. She closed and locked the door. Brian and she had clicked. It was as though no one else existed. Arthur was being so nice but she felt only an aching emptiness.

Arthur drove to the station parking lot. Brian bought the winning lottery ticket, he thought. Harriet would have millions. Like that night at the dance, he wouldn’t exist for her again.

As Arthur got out he noticed a car pulling to the curb half a block up. No one got out. There appeared to be two people in it.

Leroy and Roscoe had waited around the corner until Arthur drove by. They followed him and parked where they could see the sheriff’s office. They watched Arthur go inside.

“How are we going to get him to stop us?” asked Roscoe.

“You leave that to me,” answered Leroy. “As soon as we get out of town we should put those caps and gloves on again.”

Inside the station Arthur pulled the lottery ticket out of his pocket. The dispatcher looked up.

“Playing the lottery? Someone just won so the jackpot is small.”

“I know that Sandy. Brian Zeigenhirt bought this one just before that robbery. It was with his things. It’s the winning ticket.”

“The winning ticket? For real?”

“Those two men tried to get it from Brian’s wife tonight. I want to lock it up here at the station for the night.”

“I guess we can do that. Was Harriet hurt?”

“They threatened her with guns, slapped her a few times. She told me they thought the clerk had a gun. That’s why they shot Cheryl. And Brian because he was a witness.”

Sandy took the ticket, put it into a bag, labeled it and took it back to a safe place.

“You should be on patrol,” Sandy told Arthur when she came back.

“Those men know I have the ticket. A car pulled over to the curb when I came in here. There may be trouble.”

“Call in if you need backup.”

Arthur went back out and got into his patrol car.

“There he is,” said Roscoe.

The two men watched Arthur drive off. Leroy started the engine of their car to follow.

Arthur took his car back out on patrol. He'd noticed the car pull out behind him but it was far back. He turned to head out of town to get back to his patrol route. The road curved but Arthur hadn't seen the car turn to follow him so he relaxed and forgot about it. The houses got farther and farther apart as town disappeared behind him.

Headlights behind Arthur's car swerved to the left edge of the road. They jerked back to the right lane then drifted to the left again. It was late enough for patrons of the local bars to be going home.

Arthur saw a side road, pulled into it and around to face the main road turning off his headlights but leaving the motor running. The headlights came close, seemed to slow down but kept on going. The car was in the middle of the road but drifting left. Arthur waited then pulled out to follow turning his headlights back on.

The car jerked right again. It drifted left. It turned onto a side road. One house then another went by as Arthur continued following. The houses stopped and trees crowded in along the road. He reached down to call Sandy to let her know what was going on.

The car jerked right again stopping on the right shoulder. Arthur rolled up behind it still talking to Sandy. The license was covered with mud so he couldn't read it.

“I have a bad feeling about this,” Arthur said to Sandy.

“Be careful.”

Arthur loosened his revolver in its holster and stepped out of his car. He turned on his flashlight shining it on the car's driver side door. He walked toward the car calling for the driver to get out.

The door opened. The driver seemed to almost fall out of the door. Arthur stopped realizing a knit cap covered the man's head. His hand went to his revolver.

The passenger door opened. Arthur looked over. The driver suddenly straightened pointing a gun at Arthur. The passenger came back to point a gun at Arthur from the rear of the car. Knit caps covered both men's heads.

Chapter 4 Attorneys and Paperwork

“Keep your hand away from that gun,” warned the driver. “We just want the lottery ticket.”

“I don’t have it.”

“We know she gave it to you.”

“She did, after she signed it making her the only person who can claim the money. I left it at the station.”

“There’s someone coming,” said the passenger.

“Get in the car. You, deputy, get back to your car.”

The man’s gun went off. Arthur flinched wondering if he’d been shot but didn’t feel anything. Then he saw his patrol car sinking down. The man had shot out the front tire.

“Get in the car, deputy. I don’t want to shoot you.”

Arthur got into his patrol car. The man got into his car, backed it onto the road bumping into the patrol car and roared off down the road.

Deputy Gerald Trooper’s car rolled to a stop. “Arthur, you okay?”

“Fine, Gerald,” said Arthur. “Fine considering those murdering thieves got the drop on me. It’s a good thing you came by.”

“Got a call to make sure things were okay out here. Think they’ll come back?”

“Nah. I don’t have the lottery ticket anymore.”

“What lottery ticket?”

“The one Brian Zeigenhirt bought just before he was killed.”

“So what. Lots of people buy lottery tickets.”

“It’s the winning ticket.”

“No kidding? What bad luck. Buy the winning ticket and end up dead.”

“Will you give me a hand changing this tire?”

“Sure.”

Leroy sped off down the road. He knew it looped back out onto the highway several miles further on.

“Now what are we going to do?” asked Roscoe. “The ticket’s no good to us anymore.”

“We could grab her and make her sign part of the money over to us.”

“Carlson keeps a close watch on her. He was hooked on her in school.”

“So we let her claim the money. A couple of months from now, once she has the money, we’ll come up with something.”

“What’ll we do for money until then?”

“What we’ve been doing. Rob some more places in those other towns.”

“But no killing.”

“Roscoe, only the first one counts.”

“No more killing.”

Harriet woke up late the next morning. She called Arthur trying to gain a feeling of reality for the night before. Yes, he told her, she really did win the lottery. It would be a lot of money. She needed to make some plans. They would drive up to the lottery office tomorrow on his day off.

Brian would want her to have the money, thought Harriet. The idea of having money seemed strange after a couple of years with so little. She remembered that lovely property they had looked at that night. She would go look at it. She dressed. While

eating some toast and drinking the last of the milk, she started up the computer and wrote down the information about the property.

Ben Greenback came out of his office to greet Harriet when she timidly pushed the door open to look inside. "Come in. Harriet, it's been far too long since we've seen each other. Arthur said you might drop by today."

"Did he tell you why?"

"Something about you coming into money and needing some advice."

Harriet followed Mr. Greenback into his office thinking that before today he would barely speak to someone like her. Perhaps she was wrong. She would never know.

An hour later Harriet left with a list of places to go and what to do at each. Mr. Greenback had called a couple of attorneys to set up appointments early that afternoon. He said she needed to make out a temporary will to last until she had the money arranged. Then there was the paperwork to set up some trusts to handle a lot of the money. It was so confusing.

Harriet mentally added a stop for later in the afternoon. She looked at the paper with the information written on it. She was going to look over that property, that perfect place. She had trouble believing she could actually afford to buy it.

Then Harriet remembered she hadn't gotten the money or even signed the papers yet. It might still be only a dream, Brian's wish.

"Going my way?" asked Arthur pulling his car up to the curb. "Care for some lunch?"

"Oh, Arthur, I am so glad to see you," said Harriet. "Please tell me again that ticket is for real. I know Brian's dead and I miss him so."

"The ticket's real." Arthur sighed. He couldn't compete with a live Brian. How could he compete with a dead Brian? Not that this mattered. Harriet would have millions now and suitors almost as numerous. "Where do you want to go?"

"You pick. I haven't been out to eat in a couple of years."

"Brian said things were pretty tight for the two of you when I saw him a few weeks ago. He was saying his hours were being cut. I went by and paid for your HSE test. When is it?"

"It's next week. I'll pay you back. Brian hadn't told me his hours were cut. He was so angry that night about money or lack of it. He stormed out of the house and never came back."

Arthur pulled into a restaurant parking lot. "The food is pretty good here."

Over lunch Harriet told him about Ben Greenback and her afternoon appointments. "It seems so strange. I have nothing but I'm supposed to make out a will for all this money. I don't even know what a trust is."

"Why did Ben want you to make out a will?"

"In case something happens on our trip tomorrow."

"Nothing should. Those thugs know you signed the ticket so it's no good to them."

"One of them sounded familiar, like someone I'd heard someplace. I thought about school."

"Now that you mention it, one was familiar. Maybe it'll come to you or me."

"And that's the one who knew who you were. But the other one agreed. It's so confusing."

"They must be locals. They sounded young to me. We may have gone to school with them."

"You're sure they won't come back?"

“Not now. Maybe later after you’ve got the money.”

“Maybe they’ll get caught soon. They said they were robbing people.”

“I’ll have to check that out. It must not be around here.”

“Before Brian left that night we were looking at this perfect property. I liked looking and dreaming about owning a place. That’s when he got angry yelling we couldn’t ever have enough money to buy a place and wishing we could win the lottery. Maybe, if I didn’t look at things we couldn’t buy, Brian wouldn’t have stormed out that night.”

“You don’t know that. You said he was so tired of not having any money.”

“That’s true. Anyway, I thought I would go look it over later today.”

“I’m working tonight. Be sure you don’t go alone.”

“It’s listed with Freeholder’s Realty. I’ll go out with an agent.”

After lunch Arthur dropped Harriet off at the first attorney’s office. She read Mortimer Behest, Attorney, on the door. She opened it and walked in.

The secretary looked Harriet up and down. “Are you looking for someone?”

“I have an appointment at one with Mr. Behest.”

The secretary’s eyebrows rose giving her eyes a surprised look. “Mrs. Zeigenhirt?”

“Yes.”

Picking up a phone the secretary spoke, “Mr. Behest, a Mrs. Zeigenhirt is here to see you.”

Harriet winced at the sneer in the secretary’s voice. Harriet considered leaving but knew she had to make the proper arrangements. But Mr. Behest’s help was going to be temporary. There had to be other estate lawyers in town or nearby.

By the end of the meeting Harriet’s head was spinning trying to decide on all the details Mr. Behest needed decisions on. Who would inherit the money from her? Her parents. Anyone else? Harriet added Arthur and Brian’s parents. Charities? Harriet had always wanted a pet. While in high school she volunteered at the local shelter so she listed the Companion Home. Then she thought about how hard it was for her to pay for her HSE test. No, that wasn’t a charity. That would require a trust. On and on for almost an hour.

Harriet left Mr. Behest’s office with a pile of papers to go through that night and an appointment for early the next morning. She dreaded seeing the next attorney with more confusing decisions to make. Luckily the attorney’s office was just down the street. This door read August Bequest, Attorney. She sighed, opened the door and entered.

This secretary had trouble closing her mouth, swallowing and asking, “What do you want?”

“I have an appointment for two with Mr. Bequest.”

“Really? I’ll check.” The secretary looked at a book on her desk. “Mrs. Zeegenhit?”

“Zeigenhirt.”

The secretary sniffed and picked up the phone.

“Mrs. Zeigenhirt, what a pleasure it is to meet you,” said Mr. Bequest bustling his large body out of his office door.

The secretary stared at Harriet with her mouth open. Harriet thought Mr. Bequest must waddle when he walked down the street.

“Come right in. Ben said you needed some advice.”

Another hour passed. Now Harriet’s head spun with trusts, annuities, tax information and advice to find a good accountant. She left with yet another pile of

papers. Mr. Bequest did call out to his secretary so all of the papers were now in file folders.

All Harriet wanted to do was get away from all this money talk. She wished Arthur was around to talk to about all of this. He could be counted on to be level headed and thoughtful. Her mind was still fighting a feeling of unreality. She walked down the main street to Freeholder's Realty.

Here too those sitting at the desks looked Harriet up and down. Only one of the three stood up and walked over. The man was tall and well built with salon waved black hair, new creased dark brown pants and tan dress shirt.

Dan Janus looked Harriet up and down as he walked over. Her clothes were old but neat and clean. Her hair was waist length and surrounded her slim figure like a dark shawl. She couldn't have any money and was probably a waste of his time.

"I'm Dan Janus. Are you interested in buying or selling some property?"

"Harriet Zeigenhirt. I wanted to find out about some property listed on your website."

"Why don't you sit down over here?" Mr. Janus pulled out a chair for Harriet then went back around his desk and sat down. "Which property are you interested in?"

"It's a hundred acres by the state forest." Harriet thumbed through the file folders looking for the piece of paper with the description she had written out that morning. Finally she found it under all the papers Mr. Behest had given her. "It's one hundred twenty acres. Here's what was on the website."

"Oh, yes. This is one of my listings."

"It isn't sold yet, is it?"

"No, although several people have looked at it."

"Will you take me out to see it?" Harriet felt herself being looked at from around the room.

Dan Janus paused then smiled. "Certainly. My vehicle is parked outside."

Harriet relaxed into the rich golden brown seat of the top of the line white SUV. She looked for a way to open the window. It slid down with a whirr.

"Is that too far?" asked Mr. Janus.

"No, it's fine, Mr. Janus."

"Dan, please. I don't mind getting out of the office for a time. This place is nice and quiet. Tell me, are you really interested in buying the property or just out looking?"

Harriet felt tears in her eyes. All day people had been sneering at her. "I have some money coming in about a month from now. I am interested in buying the property."

Going to have money in about a month. He had heard that before. Zeigenhirt sounded familiar. That shooting, the man killed in the convenience store robbery. Had he bought the winning lottery ticket? Dan sat up straighter looking Harriet over again. Could she be the one?

Warm wind smelling of honeysuckle blew in as the SUV rolled down the highway headed out of town. Harriet closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She opened her eyes when the SUV turned onto a gravel road.

"This place is just twelve miles out of town?"

"About. The last two miles are gravel but it seems to be well maintained."

A few minutes later Dan slowed the SUV and turned left over a cattle guard onto a small drive with grass growing in the center between two ruts. "The drive is a bit rough, but it isn't long."

Harriet looked at the trees on both sides of the drive. The belt of trees stopped and the SUV rumbled over another cattle guard splitting barbed wire fencing going off along the edge of the trees. Pasture tall with seeding grasses spread out along the drive and to both sides. Another barbed wire fence and cattle guard split the pasture from the house and yard.

The SUV rumbled over the cattle guard as it entered the yard. Straight ahead was a house. Harriet looked at the old farmhouse.

The house was square with a roof sloping up from each side meeting in the center with a cupola and wind vane on the peak. A dormer window stuck out of the center of the roof over the porch roof that spanned the front of the house and seemed to turn the corners to continue around the house. Other dormers stuck out to each side.

The SUV pulled up in front of the house. Cream-colored siding made the house look neat and clean. The windows were framed in the same cream. A new dark brown shingled roof gleamed in the afternoon sun. The porch had four pillars once painted white holding up the front porch roof. A porch swing hung motionless at the porch corner to the right. A dogwood still sporting a few blossoms grew in the remains of a yard.

This wasn't a fairy tale house, just an old farmhouse. Memories vaguely recalled from when she was three or four and visiting her grandmother gave the house a comfortable look and feel. She looked for a flock of hens scratching in the yard but none were there. Only the cement scalloped edgings for long forgotten flower beds now filled with weeds still marked out what had been a well cared for place.

Harriet reluctantly slid out of the comfortable seat onto the packed dirt and scraggly grass in the yard. She started off walking to circle the house. She heard Dan close his door as she walked under the dogwood and around the house. As she rounded the corner, she could see trees along the back of the yard beyond the back fence. Harriet wondered if the creek was there too and walked toward the fence to get a better look.

Some old boards lay toward the fence. Harriet neared them trying to see and hear what she thought must be the creek. Something moved beside the boards. The sudden movement pulled her gaze down.

A dusty dark head rose up over a coil of thick body loops. The neck below the head flared out like a cobra's hood. Harriet heard it's tail pounding the ground only a yard in front of her.

Harriet screamed as the snake's head drew back. Any second it would strike! She screamed again.

Chapter 5 The Perfect Property

Dan pounded up behind her. His hands gripped her shoulders and jerked her back away from the snake.

The snake backed away still flaring its neck. Its body touched the boards. The snake was gone.

Harriet blinked. She was sure a snake had been right there in front of her. “Did you see the snake, Dan?”

“Yes. It’s under those boards. Are you all right?”

“I thought it was going to bite me,” Harriet said shuddering.

“A hognose looks really fierce but isn’t poisonous. I had a buddy at school who was really into snakes. He had some pet snakes.”

“Oh,” Harriet breathed deeply. “Not my kind of pet.”

“Mine either. Why don’t we take a look in the house?”

Dan ushered Harriet in the front door. Like the siding on the outside, paint and carpet dressed up the inside of an old farmhouse. The windows were new. The rooms were empty.

“An old couple lived here. Their children moved them into the city to be near where they lived.”

Harriet walked through the four rooms but didn’t go up the stairs. Her mind furnished the rooms as she remembered from long ago. Out one window she could see an old barn with a classic gambrel roof. All it needed was a coat of red paint to belong on a calendar page.

“Can we walk out to the barn?”

“It means walking through that grass.”

“I don’t mind. I want to see in the barn.”

Inside the barn was empty and had been for a long time. Dusty wisps of hay lay on the floor. Two lofts, one on each side of the barn had a few dusty bales of hay left on them. An old tractor covered with dust, cobwebs and bird droppings stood in the center of the floor. A flock of birds swooped out of the open door. More birds sat on the rafter beams.

“Those are barn swallows,” said Dan. “They put up those mud nests. They eat a lot of insects.”

“They have a lot to say about us being here.”

“You can see the barn is old but the foundations are sound. The structure looks good too.”

“I’d like to walk down to the creek.”

Dan shrugged. “It’s down across the pasture in the trees. You might pick up some ticks.”

Harriet walked out of the rear barn door back toward a line of trees running across the pasture. Dan followed behind hurrying to catch up.

“This pasture is ready to cut and bale for hay. You could have quite a few cows on fifty acres.”

“I want goats. Of course goats prefer browse like in the woods so some cows to eat the grass might be nice.”

Harriet reached a fence along the edge of the trees. Now she could hear the creek. It was fifteen or twenty feet past the edge of the trees with more trees on the other side.

“How do we get through this fence?”

“I’ll hold the wires for you.”

Harriet stepped through leaning down to put her head and shoulders through. She stood up and pulled her other leg through the fence. She held the wires for Dan.

The water was clear, flowing over a gravel bed. Minnows sped up and down away from Harriet as she walked by. Damselflies landed on bushes at the water’s edge. She stopped to look across the stream to a pasture reaching up the hill on the other side. Woods ringed that pasture.

A snort made Harriet jump. A deer leaped across the creek, over another fence and bounded up the hill into the woods. A squirrel scolded from up in a tree.

“The pond is up in the pasture off to our left,” said Dan. “It’s a ways out but we can circle by it on our way back to the house.”

Harriet walked along the creek. She could see past the trees to the old barn. Dan helped her through the fence and led her back across the pasture.

“The pond is up that rise,” said Dan. “This side is the high end. It’s lower around the side.”

The two walked along the steep rise until it was half as high then climbed up to the top. A large pond filled the space below the rim. Tiny ripples ruffled the surface of the water.

“The pond was stocked with catfish,” said Dan. “There may be some big ones still in there.”

“I’ve never been fishing. What is that long shed roof along the side of the barn?”

“I think it’s for storing tractors and equipment.”

Harriet followed Dan around the pond then back to the barn and into the yard. She wanted the property. How do you buy property? she wondered.

“What do you think?” asked Dan as he drove down the road toward town.

“It’s nice. The house and barn are old but look okay.”

“Shall we fill out some paperwork when we get back to the office?”

“I suppose so. Brian said the owners might take less because the house and barn are so old.”

“Brian? Is he your husband?”

“Yes. Was. He was killed last month.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“We were looking at this property just before he left the house.” Harriet choked. Tears ran down her cheeks. Dan handed her a fancy square box of tissues.

Harriet swallowed, blew her nose and dried her face. “Brian thought they might take one fifty for it.”

“We can make them an offer and find out.”

“Let’s do that.”

Dan arranged to fill in the figures after he made the offer. Harriet didn’t object as Dan seemed trustworthy. He was certain she was the lottery winner and could afford to pay the asking price. The more she paid, the bigger his commission.

Harriet got a call from Dan a week later saying the property owners thought her offer was too low. She raised it to two hundred thousand. This time Dan sent the offer on to the owners.

By the end of the May the owners and Harriet had agreed on two hundred twenty-five thousand for the property. Closing was in another two weeks. Dan handed the keys

over to Harriet and asked her out for dinner to celebrate. She accepted saying she could celebrate getting her HSE as well as finding a new home.

As August turned the fields yellow and white with wildflowers, Harriet was moved into the old house now fitted with a gas furnace and air conditioning. A new pickup truck sat under a new carport to the left in front of the house. Furniture like she remembered from long ago was in the rooms. The old battered chair, the only piece of furniture she brought from the apartment, sat in the front room.

Arthur sat with Harriet at the round wood kitchen table. "You shouldn't stay out here all alone. Those thugs are still loose. I'm sure they still want that lottery money."

"Lots of people are here almost every day. They fixed up the old barn. There's a new goat barn going up. Dan comes by to take me out Saturday evenings. And you come by other days."

"Do you like Dan?"

"He's charming. He can be fun. He's not Brian."

"I guess there isn't anyone else like Brian." Arthur looked down into his cup of coffee and frowned.

"Brian's gone. I'm still getting used to the idea. And there's the money. My life turned upside down that night."

"Going out with Dan helps?"

"Having friends visit helps. I miss Brian a lot. He's never coming back. Dan makes me laugh. I can talk to you. You make me feel good."

"I'm glad to help."

The conversation had gotten uncomfortable. Harriet suddenly realized Arthur was a bit jealous of Dan. Why were Dan and Arthur always around? Certainly she wasn't intending to encourage their attentions.

"Let's go look at the goat barn," said Harriet suddenly. She sprang to her feet.

"Sure," agreed Arthur.

"There are things I need done around here. Woven wire fences to replace the barbed wire. I want a chicken house and chickens. And I will need help with the goats and hay. I hate hiring these crews that come, do something and leave. Maybe I can hire a farm worker."

"You could put up a little house or bring in a trailer for someone to stay in. I know a family or two you might like."

"Look at my goat barn!" Harriet was almost dancing as she led the way out to it. She had gotten advice from her Internet goat groups about good goat barns for its design. Now it was taking shape. The foundations and walls were up and finished. The men were working on the roof.

Arthur looked at the building. It looked like a regular building from the outside. He didn't know anything about goats and didn't see why Harriet wanted some so badly.

"The section for the goats is facing south," said Harriet. "That way it will warm up quickly in the winter."

"Won't it get too hot in the summer?"

"The doors are designed so I can open the tops during the summer to cool it off."

"It has good foundations."

"I didn't want a pole barn building. I heard the poles could rot off and the walls fall down. Besides, it wouldn't match that lovely old barn. That's why I wanted those special

trusses with the bends in them. The goat barn doesn't need a gambrel roof but now it looks a bit like it has one."

"The old barn has a gambrel roof?"

"Yes. Do you see how it goes up steeply then bends to make the roof? That gives lots of loft space to store hay."

"Your house roof is different too."

"At first it looked strange to me. I've gotten used to it. I love that big square room upstairs."

Harriet and Arthur stepped inside the framed walls waiting for siding. Men were up on the trusses working on the roof.

"Here's where the hay will go," said Harriet pointing to the back of the barn. "It will be added insulation on the north side in the winter."

"The big door on the end will make unloading and stacking easy," remarked Arthur remembering hauling hay while he was in high school.

"There's where the buck will live," said Harriet pointing to the far end. "He'll have his own door and yard."

"Why not keep him with the herd?"

"So I can decide which does to breed and when. The does will be in this center section. The feed and milk room will be on this end with an outside door and doors for the goats and into where the hay is."

"Your goats will have a better barn than some houses I've seen."

"I--."

"Look out!" yelled a workman.

Harriet and Arthur looked up to see a board sliding off the trusses straight toward them!