

Angie threw her other shoe into the closet. It struck the wall with a satisfying thunk before dropping next to its twin. Men! They were idiots, every single one of them, hand to God. And the evening had been going so well.

After dessert, she'd been shocked when Chris had asked her to take a walk with him. Seeing Carter Anne's smug told-you-so smile had made Angie want to say no. Until she saw the look of pleasure in Bobby's eyes. Damn the man. She'd said yes.

Angie's hand hesitated at the drawer where she kept her pajamas. Okay. Fine. Maybe there had been a quiver in her stomach that she hadn't been able to suppress. She was woman enough to admit it, she decided, pulling her favorite oversized pajamas out and slipping into them. But she'd only said yes because of that look in her uncle's eyes. She'd known at the time what would happen. And she'd been right.

"It must be nice for you, living here in the middle of town." Chris commented as they walked down the street, the lights of town center shining around them.

"It's certainly convenient." Angie agreed. "Bobby and I can walk to work practically year 'round. 'Course he takes the squad car a lot. Makes it more official."

"Of course."

They walked a few steps in an awkward silence. Chris struggled to find something to say. Anything to talk about. "But not Carter Anne? She doesn't walk to work?" He rolled his eyes, grateful for the dark night.

"No. The school's too far for her to walk dressed for the office."

"As she was dressed tonight? Yeah, she wouldn't want to walk far dressed like that. Way too nice for a walk."

Angie looked down at her oversized coat and sturdy, comfortable shoes. Why in the world was she the one out here if all he was going to do was ask about Carter Anne?

“You work at the diner. Bobby’s the sheriff. What does Carter Anne do?”

They had reached the far side of town square, closer to the old Montgomery place than to her home. Angie stopped and looked at him. “She is the receptionist at the elementary school and takes classes at the community college two nights a week.

Although she doesn’t know exactly what she wants to do, she does know it isn’t stay here and be a receptionist for the rest of her life. She’s 21 years old and currently single.

Although we live with Bobby, he respects the fact that we are both adults so she doesn’t have a curfew. You’ll have to get her cell number from her directly. We do however only have one house phone and when it rings after midnight, Bobby tends to think it’s an emergency call so please be respectful. Is there anything else I can tell you about my sister?”

Chris stood, mouth hanging open. It might have been a while since he had felt surprised by anything but this woman had done it to him twice in a matter of hours. He smiled. He could learn to like this a lot.

“No.” He shook his head. “I think that just about covers it. I’m surprised to hear she doesn’t have men asking her out all the time.”

Angie pulled her coat around her tighter, crossing her arms in front of her chest. “I didn’t say she didn’t have suitors. I said she was currently single. Date too many men in a small town and you will get a reputation. She’s careful about that.”

“And what about you?” Chris asked. He reached out and uncrossed her arms.

“What about me?” Angie asked. She didn’t think the shivers running down her arms had anything to do with the temperature. What had she missed? Hadn’t he just been asking her about Carter Anne?

“Do you have...*suitors*?” Chris laughed at the old-fashioned word.

“Is it so funny to think that I might?” Angie spat.

“No.” Chris shook his head. This wasn’t going the way he’d planned. “I just ... too much competition, is all.”

“Ah.” Angie nodded stepping away from him. “I think I see now.”

But Chris could tell by the look in her eyes that she didn’t see. She didn’t see at all. Too many men, no, too many boys had ignored her kind of beauty for too long, only seeing the beauty of the thin, perfect sister. Well, he’d just see about showing her.

Slowly, he closed the distance between them. “Do you?” he asked, his voice low. “Do you really? Can you see what I see? Or do you only see what the boys here in town see? Your beautiful sister who will eventually transfer to a four year school, leaving you here with Bobby. Because that’s what I bet you see.”

His arms went around her, drawing her close. Those shoulders were as broad and as solid as they had looked under his jacket earlier in the day. For one moment, Angie thought about closing her eyes and giving in. He saw her indecision and lowered his mouth to hers.