

Readers, you will find that your friends have been busy since you last visited them in the pages of *And So To Sleep*. One of the bad guys has been released from prison and returns to the little northern Michigan town with revenge in his heart. When his plans go awry, he flees to a vineyard to hide. That sets the stage for the third book, *The Wrath of Grapes*.

And So To Dream

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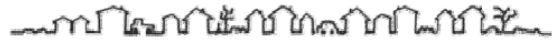
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The background of the cover is a photograph of a calm lake at dawn or dusk. A thick layer of mist hangs over the water, which reflects the sky and the surrounding trees. In the foreground, several tall, thin reeds or grasses are visible, some in sharp focus and others blurred. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

And So To Dream

Evelyn Allen Harper



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CHAPTER 1



FOR THE TENTH TIME today, and it was still early morning, Clara Clark's pudgy fingers wiped the non-existent dust off the nameplate and placed it precisely in the middle of her uncluttered desk. Tilting her head, she stepped back and critically observed her creation.

"Clara," called a voice from an adjoining office, "I really hate to bring this up again, but are you sure..."

Clara snatched the nameplate off the desk before her boss had a chance to see it. Pushing aside the remains of a candy bar that was lying on a partially ripped wedding picture, she stuffed the plaque into a drawer.

"Molly, if you're asking me if I'm scheduled to retake the real estate test, the answer is the same as it was the last hundred times you asked me!"

"I really don't mean to nag," a very pregnant Molly said from her office doorway, "but please tell me that you've been studying! I don't know how much longer Dr. Bell is going to let me work. I *really* need you to pass this time."

Clara, her face red, nodded. She had to thank Molly for not saying, "I told you so", when she failed her first attempt. Clara had been Molly's secretary at Allen Real Estate for so long she believed she knew everything she had to know to pass the test. Molly had tried to tell her otherwise, but Clara wouldn't listen. The shame of failing the first try had prodded her to study long and hard. Until she passed that test, the nameplate, Clara Clark, Realtor, would stay hidden in her drawer.

After Molly stepped back into her office, Clara picked up a fingernail file and her favorite catalog. Her ruby-tipped fingers flipped nimbly through the pages as she searched for the mythical outfit that would make her short and heavy body look tall and slender. The checkered outfit she was wearing today, according to the write-up in this same catalog, had promised to do that.

She had started ordering most of her clothes from this particular catalog after *the* mall incident. Because she had gained so much weight after her slime-ball husband divorced her, Clara had developed an aversion to three-way mirrors. That fatal day she had kept her eyes away from the mirrors while she struggled to stuff her body into a pair of stretch jeans. When curiosity won and she had allowed herself one glance at her three-way reflection, she burst into tears.

The sobbing sounds coming from the locked dressing room alarmed the salesperson. Her call for help brought the manager with a key. That day marked the end of Clara's mall shopping.

Today, she was intent on making a choice between two outfits that certainly made the models look tall and skinny. When the door opened, Clara raised her head, looked at the man standing in the doorway, and dropped both the nail file and the catalog.

The man grinned at her reaction. Tall, blond, with startling blue eyes and a blinding white smile, he had almost rendered Clara speechless. "M-m-may I help you?" she managed to ask.

"I certainly hope so," he replied. "My name is Samuel Tucker and I need to find something to rent. Can you help me?"

Clara shook her tightly curled blond head from side to side; that was easier than talking.

Surprised, the man's eyebrows raised. "You can't help me? I thought that's what you real estate people did."

Regaining her voice, Clara replied, "You're right, that *is* what we do. What I meant is that *I* can't help you."

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“And why is that?”

“Because I’m a secretary, not a salesperson.”

“And I’ll bet you’re a good one!” he said as he bent over her desk, flustering Clara even more as the aroma of his cologne wafted over her. He must have said something because it was obvious he was waiting for an answer. In her enchanted state, Clara hadn’t heard a word.

“What?” she asked.

“I said, if you can’t help me, is there someone here who can?”

The door to the inner office opened, and redheaded pregnant Molly filled the doorway. “Clara, I need you to...oh. I didn’t realize you had company.”

“He’s not company,” Clara replied, wishing Molly had stayed in her office a bit longer. “This man is looking for an agent.”

Molly studied the smiling, handsome man for a few moments before she held out her hand. “I’m Molly Hatch, the owner of Allen Real Estate. Let’s go into my office.”

It was certainly a nice smile, but Molly, who had been in this business for years, was experiencing an instant negative reaction to the man.

“How may I help you?” she asked.

Placing his hands on her desk, he leaned toward her. “My name is Samuel Tucker. I’ve just moved to town, and I need help finding something to rent.”

Waves of spicy cologne assaulted Molly’s pregnant nose as she reached for her listing book. “An apartment or a house?” Bile was inching up her throat; she swallowed hard.

“Definitely a house.”

“I’ll show you what’s available,” she said, while flipping through pages. “Then you can drive by them to see where they’re located. If one you like is in the right place and is in your price range,” she paused to

grab a breath that she didn't want, "I'll meet you there, and we can go through it together."

"You aren't going to drive with me to see these houses? I thought that's how it worked."

She pushed back her chair and stood up. "Well, yes, you're right. But since I'm quite busy, I'm going to let you drive around by yourself. When you find one you want to see inside, get back with me."

With that, she made copies of the listing tickets that gave the address, price, and information about the houses, handed them to Samuel, and ushered him out the door.

Molly ran to a window, opened it, and breathed deeply.

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