

A page-turner. A sequel to My Name Is Lisa. Thrilling. Gripping. Dramatic. A predator from the past seeking to destroy 13-year-old Lisa. Kidnapping; shocking twists, fear that can consume them; faith fighting its way onward through it all.

**Danger Lurks in the Shadows:
Norma Cape's Sequel To My Name is Lisa**

By Norma Cape

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Danger Lurks in the Shadows



Norma Cape's sequel
to *My Name Is Lisa*

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Chapter 1

It was three in the morning when the phone rang at the Blake home where Gary Blake resided with his wife, Shannon, their daughter, Lisa, and Butch, their ever-watchful German shepherd. Gary reached for the phone expecting it to be a call from headquarters. Although he had been a patrolman when he and Shannon were first married, Gary finished his coursework in criminal investigation and became a detective for the Pine Tree police department. He soon learned in his new job that it wasn't unusual to receive a call in the middle of the night.

"Hello," he said, stifling a yawn.

"You think it's over," said a voice in a gruff deep moan, "but it ident, you think she's safe, but she ain't." Then the caller did what Gary thought was supposed to be a laugh, but instead came out a hideous grumble, and the line went dead.

Shannon rolled over. "Who was that?" she asked sleepily as she reached for Gary.

"A wrong number," he lied, not wanting to upset her. Although he wanted to believe the call was just a prank, his gut instinct told him otherwise. He would tell Sarge about the call when he got to the precinct. In the meantime, he was happy to cuddle with Shannon in his arms, where he knew he would wake in the morning. Life was good and being married to Shannon had enriched it far more than he had anticipated. Being Lisa's dad was the icing on the cake.

"Did I hear the phone ring in the middle of the night?" Lisa asked as she came bouncing down the stairs. Almost three years had passed since Shannon and Gary's wedding, and Lisa's thirteenth birthday was just a couple of weeks away. She was no longer the tiny little girl she was when Gary found her. She

is 5'5" tall, almost as tall as Shannon, still slender and very pretty but more like a young lady now than a little girl.

"It was a wrong number," Shannon said, giving Lisa a quick peck on the cheek as she passed her heading for the refrigerator.

"I sure woke up hungry this morning," she said as she gulped down some orange juice. "Can we have pancakes for breakfast?"

"Not fair!" Gary whined. "I have to go in early, so I don't have time for breakfast."

"Too bad for you," Lisa teased, wiping fake tears. "Well, I guess we can have them in the morning," she said with a heavy sigh.

"I have a better idea," Gary said while pouring a cup of coffee. "Why don't we have them for dinner?"

"Don't forget that Nat, Bill, and the kids are coming for dinner," The Bowers are family friends. Sam, being the same age as Lisa's brother Billy would have been had he not been murdered, quickly became Lisa's first and now best friend.

"That's okay," Lisa said. "I know they would like Maggie's pancakes."

"Maggie's pancakes?" Shannon asked. "I can make them. I'm sure Maggie has other things to do," Shannon said, but as she turned, she caught the forlorn expressions on Lisa's and Gary's faces. "Are you saying that you don't like my pancakes?" Shannon asked, pretending to be upset.

"Well, it's just that yours are kind of..." Gary looked to Lisa for help.

"Well, it's just that you don't even have to chew Maggie's because they melt in your mouth and yours, well, yours are... kind of chewy."

"Don't worry," Maggie said as she entered the kitchen. "I'll teach you my secret, dear," as she gave Shannon a sympathetic hug.

Maggie had been a nanny for friends of Shannon's for several years. She moved in with Shannon after her employer's business transferred them out of the country which would have meant a permanent move for Maggie. Although she had no family to speak of, she did have a few special friends that she would miss terribly, so opted not to go. Besides, she loves her country and she had no desire to live anywhere else. Maggie traveled the world with her employers to care for their children. She has a library filled with books she has read that have helped her to be quite knowledgeable. She can carry on a conversation with dignitaries from other countries or with a room full of teenagers. Many of the books, as well as documentary tapes she has collected, have been useful as tools to help her teach Lisa about the culture in other countries. She also speaks several languages fluently which is a great advantage for Lisa, because having Maggie with her so much gives her adequate time to practice. Maggie has been the perfect nanny for Lisa as well as a companion and friend.

Because government policy prohibited social workers from taking in the children they worked with, Shannon requested Maggie become Lisa's temporary guardian, nanny, and teacher, which was granted. After Shannon and Gary were married, they had a small, but adequate, cottage built for Maggie just down a path that ran towards the woods in the back of the house. Since there is quite a bit of rain in their area, the contractors also put in a brick walkway that runs between the two homes and also to the back entrance to the three-car garage.

"Well, I certainly hope you'll teach her," Gary said. "I do love fluffy pancakes." He took Shannon in his arms and attempted to kiss her goodbye.

Shannon turned her face and playfully pushed Gary away. "You just said my pancakes are chewy and now you expect a kiss, she teased?"

“I didn’t say that,” Gary said. “Lisa did.”

Shannon playfully scolded him. “Yes, but you didn’t disagree!”

Gary persisted in his efforts to gain the kiss, and Lisa giggled as Shannon finally gave in.

* * *

After breakfast, Shannon left to run a few errands, and Lisa and Maggie went into the study to work on Lisa's schoolwork. She had already surpassed the other students in her public school. She had not only been learning the basics but had also been able to master Spanish, algebra, and American Sign Language. She was reading at a high school level, even though she was currently in the eighth grade.

Lisa had been locked in a room for the first ten years of her life—the first eight with Billy before his being murdered, and the last two alone. The only thing their mother did that made their lives bearable was to bring them boxes of books she would gather at garage sales and such. Although Billy was only five when they were shut in, times before had been better, and his mother had taught him to read as best she could. He was a smart little boy and did quite well for his age. As Lisa grew older, he taught her all he knew, and then, together, they continued to learn. Once they figured out what it was, their greatest treasure was a dictionary. It opened doors giving them the ability to read books that would take them on journeys and adventures all over the world and beyond. It was because of this passion that Lisa surpassed most children her age in her studies.

“You know, Lisa,” Maggie said thoughtfully, as she thumbed through some of Lisa's work, “I think if you were to take some courses this summer, you could skip the ninth grade altogether and go on to the tenth.”

"That means I could start college earlier, and maybe Sam would still be there."

"Yes, I believe he would," Maggie said, smiling to herself. Although Lisa and Sam have kept their relationship on a friendship basis, it is obvious to Maggie and Shannon that as they both matured their relationship continued to become a little more serious. Sam is respectful of their age difference seemed to be patiently waiting for her to mature to the age where the difference would no longer matter. Sam and Lisa have not only changed in their maturity but also their appearance. Lisa is no longer a short, little 10-year-old with little girl features. She is slowly blooming into a beautiful young lady. Sam too has changed in his maturity and appearance. Lucky for him, he has grown right along with Lisa and is now 5'11". Both are slender and fit, mostly due to their enjoyment of taking long walks in the beautiful parks and biking with their families through one of many bike trails throughout the Nashville area.

Maggie was deep in thought and Lisa was working on a report for history when the phone rang, startling them. They laughed as Lisa ran for the phone.

"Hello," Lisa said as she stifled a giggle.

"You just wait, little girl," the gruff voice whispered. "You think it's over, but it isn't. You think you're safe but you ain't." And then there was a wicked chuckle that sent chills up Lisa's spine.

Lisa slammed the phone down on the receiver and ran to Maggie. Seeing the sick, frightened expression on Lisa's face, Maggie reached for her and drew her into her arms. "What is it, Lisa? Who was that?"

"I'm not sure. He sounded so mean and creepy and... Maggie, he sounded like Delbert... but it couldn't have been him, could it?" Lisa looked past Maggie as if in deep thought. "It wasn't him. It was Pete, I know it was, it was Pete," she said

with a shudder. Tears filled her eyes as she repeated what the man said to her. "I'm scared, Maggie. Why would he call here and say something like that?"

"Oh, I'm sure it was just a prank call, dear, just someone who sounded like Pete. But if it will make you feel better, we'll call your dad and tell him about it."

* * *

Joe Harris and J.D. Tucker had been partners for several years and became quick friends with Gary when he joined the department. Gary had been with the police department in Tennessee for ten years before moving to Texas. He had started the courses needed to become a detective before making the move and decided to finish the last year in East Texas. Gary had driven through the area on a trip a few years back and decided he would prefer living in the smaller community nestled in the East Texas pines to the big city. The people were friendly, the fishing is great and anywhere you go is a drive in the country. Returning home, he stopped in Pine Tree to check out their police department, and to be sure he would have a job if he moved there. Meeting Mat Jordan 'Sarge', J.D., and Joe sealed the deal. The two senior detectives were quick to take Gary under their wing once he arrived, and in no time they became inseparable. All three men are now in their early forties. All were single when they met, although J.D. and Joe had been married before. There had been a fourth detective, but he retired a few months back and the department had not been able to find anyone they were satisfied with to replace him. Once Blake joined the force Sarge quit looking. He didn't need a patrolman but could not hire Blake as a detective until he finished his training and passed the exam. Until then Gary was allowed to work with J.D. and Joe to investigate a good many cases.

Joe picked up the phone on Gary's desk when it rang. "Gary is in the interrogation room with a prisoner, Lisa, but he's almost done." Detecting the concern in her voice he asked, "Is there something wrong, honey? Do you want me to get him?"

"Oh, no, it's okay. It's just that, well the phone rang, and when I answered it there was this, this man..."

Joe interrupted her. "You hang on, honey, I'll get your dad." Gary had told him, J.D., and Sarge about the call he had received in the middle of the night. Joe opened the door to the interrogation room just enough to stick his head in and call Gary out.

"He called back," Joe said.

"Who?" Gary asked still thinking of the prisoner he was with and not the call he had received in the night.

"Sounds like the guy who called you this morning only this time he got Lisa. She's on the phone now and pretty upset."

Gary rushed to his desk. "Lisa, it is okay, honey, but before you tell me what this man said, is Shannon home yet?"

"No, but Maggie is here. We were doing schoolwork when he called."

"Ok, let me talk to her for just a minute." Lisa handed the phone to Maggie.

"Yes, hello Gary," Maggie said, speaking as calmly as possible.

"Where are you standing, Maggie?"

"I'm in the foyer."

"I don't want to alarm you, and certainly not Lisa but I want you to walk into the study so she can't see the front door. After you give Lisa the phone, nonchalantly leave the room and go make sure the alarm is set. I'll call Shannon after I hang up so she'll know what's going on."

"What is it, Gary?" Maggie asked, still trying to sound calm.

“I’ll leave here in about fifteen minutes; we’ll talk when I get home. Let me talk to Lisa.”

Lisa followed Maggie into the study and was standing next to her anxiously waiting to talk to Gary. After handing her the phone, Maggie went into the foyer to set the alarm. Butch had followed Maggie, but then sensing something was wrong, he immediately went back to Lisa and sat down at her side. The retired police canine had lived with Gary until Lisa came along.

Lisa was found abandoned in an old house north of Pine Tree. A neighbor had gone over to the house when she noticed no car had been there for over two weeks. The piled-up trash and rank smell that came from the kitchen area had caused her to become suspicious, so she called the police. Gary was the officer who found Lisa, and Shannon was the social worker from Child Protective Services who helped him retrieve her from the house. After a three-week stay in the hospital, Lisa moved in with Shannon. As long as she had been in the hospital, she felt safe, but once in the country with no other houses close by, she felt vulnerable. She was sure the couple she had referred to as ‘the mother’ and ‘the man’ would go back to the house and find her gone. She was certain they could force her to return to them. Gary gave Butch to Lisa to help her feel safe. A few months after Lisa was found, the detectives finally got a lead on the couple’s whereabouts. They were arrested but not before Johnson ‘the man’ and his brother, Pete tried several times to abduct Lisa. Delbert remains tucked away in prison serving a life sentence with no possibility of parole. Although Angela, ‘the mother,’ was considered an accomplice in Billy’s murder, she made a bargain with the DA, giving them what they needed to convict Johnson. After a psychological evaluation, it was determined Angela was also a victim of Johnson’s abuse, and that she did what she did out of fear of him. She was also diagnosed as being socially backward and is now living at an

institution where she is receiving therapy. Once she is released, she will still have to serve at least five to fifteen years in state prison for child endangerment and mental abuse. Pete was never found.

When Maggie returned to the study, she found Lisa curled up on the couch, with Butch lying across her lap.

“Now I know there's something wrong because of the way Butch is acting,” Lisa said with concern in her voice. “What is it, Maggie? Was it him? Was it Pete?”

Maggie went over and sat as close to Lisa as she could, which wasn't easy with a one hundred- and twenty-five-pound dog in her lap. “I'm not sure who he was, sweetheart. Your daddy will be home soon and I'm sure he well let us know what is going on,” Maggie raised her voice and shrugged to lighten the mood, “if anything at all. I'm sure it was just some prankster.”

“It wasn't Delbert, was it? He isn't out of prison, is he?”

“No, that I know for certain. As I said, I'm sure it was just a prank call.”

Suddenly a loud shrill filled the house. Lisa screamed and covered her ears and Maggie raced to turn off the alarm, but Shannon beat her to it, switching it off at the garage door entrance.

“What is going on?” she asked. She glanced at Maggie and then Butch. “Why was the alarm set and why does Butch look like he is about to attack me?” When Butch was on duty, he didn't allow anyone to approach Lisa, not even Gary and Shannon, until she called him off.

Lisa ran to Shannon and threw her arms around her, at the same time telling Butch to stand down.

“What is it, Lisa?” Shannon asked as she stroked her hair.

“Didn't Daddy call you?” Lisa asked.

“Call me about what?”

Maggie interrupted before Lisa could speak. “Why don’t we go in the family room and sit down? Gary will be here in a few minutes. I think we should wait and talk about it when he gets home.”

“Talk about what?” Shannon persisted.

Lisa looked at Maggie for approval, but before she could say anything Gary burst in, and in an agitated tone asked, “Why isn’t the alarm set?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, Gary. Shannon just walked in and knowing you would be right behind her, I didn’t think it necessary to reset it.”

“It’s very important that we all get back into the habit of setting this thing—understood?” Gary asked as he searched each face.

Shannon placed her hands on her hips, “I want to know what is going on here?” Thinking the worst, “Has someone escaped from prison?”

Gary took Shannon by the arm and motioned for them all to go into the family room. “I’m sorry honey, but I didn’t tell you the truth about the call during the night. I wasn’t sure at the time who it was, and didn’t want to alarm you.” Gary stopped and looked at Lisa and then back at Shannon. “This morning I knew there was a possibility the call could have been a prank, but…” Gary paused and looked at Lisa. “His voice and that laugh, I’m almost positive it was Pete Johnson.”

“Wait a minute!” Shannon demanded. “Why would you think one call coming in the middle of the night would be Pete?”

Gary looked at Lisa and then back to Shannon. “He called again and this time Lisa answered the phone. He said the same thing to her as he did to me.”

“And that was?” Shannon asked impatiently.

“You think it’s over, but it isn’t… you think she’s safe, but she’s not.”

"Oh, Lisa," Shannon gasped as she reached for Lisa taking her into her arms. "I'm so sorry."

"It was Pete. I know it was," Lisa said, "I remember from the way he talked when he tried to take me when we were at the carnival and the other time."

"I never heard Pete talk," Gary said, "but Johnson had this unforgettable gruffness about his voice, he not only looked mean, but he also sounded mean. I agree with Lisa, this guy sounded just like him."

Lisa's voice quivered when she spoke and tears rolled down her cheeks. "I thought this was over," she said as she fell back on the couch. "Why is he coming around now?"

"I can't answer that, Lisa. In the meantime, we need to go back to being extra cautious around here. Sarge is sending someone over to put a tap on the phone. Lisa, I don't want you to answer the phone until we get this resolved. And remember, we have to be sure to keep the alarm set at all times."

Lisa sighed, "I guess that means not going outside without Butch again."

"No," Gary said. "It means not going outside at all without an adult with you. We already know Pete is very dangerous from the times he and Johnson tried to abduct you, Lisa. I can't imagine what is in this guy's head... where he plans to go with this threat. I just know we have to take him seriously and be conscientious of who is around you at all times."

"This means no trips to the mall or the movies without one of us, Lisa," Shannon added.

Now hoping to lighten the mood, Gary said, "Hey!" Startling everyone, he laughed. "Did you guys know it's snowing out there?"

"It's snowing?" Lisa said as she ran to the window.

"Lisa, be sure and stand back from the windows and to the side." *The house is on acreage with a front yard area that faces*

a beautiful pond that Shannon's father had put in mostly due to his love of fishing. As he grew older it was much more convenient to walk down to the pond and sit under his covered dock to fish than to drive to a lake and unload a boat. And, besides that, due to his sweet wife's fear of getting out on the water in a boat, she was much more likely to join him there. Because of the beautiful natural landscaping that surrounds the house and the pond, Shannon's parents had large picture windows installed in each room including the bedrooms.

"I know how much you love sitting in the window seat to read but, not now, not for a while anyway. I know it's going to be a drag not being able to go outside too and play with Butch in the snow."

"If it keeps snowing, can we go to Grandma and Grandpa's house? "It's safe there."

Ruth and Hank Walker, 'Grandma and Grandpa', live in a beautiful log house built on three acres of land in a gated retirement area outside of Pine Tree. The homes are built around a large private lake. Hank is the retired postal carrier who delivered mail in the area where Lisa was found. He and Hattie, a neighbor who lived next door were helpful in the search for Angela and Johnson. Ruth and Hank have no children and were quick to adopt Lisa and her extended family during the investigation. The rest of the extended family affectionately calls them mom and pop and has established the tradition of spending most holidays and family occasions with them.

"I think that is a great idea," Shannon said. "Why don't you go call them?"

Within minutes Lisa was back still holding the phone. "Grandma wants us to come for dinner."

"Here," Shannon said, as she reached for the phone, "let me talk to her."

“Thank you for the invitation, Mom, but Nat, Bill, and the kids are coming over later for dinner.”

“They are more than welcome to join us, dear. Why don’t you call Nat real quick and let me know? We have no plans for this afternoon so it would be fun to have you all over.”

When Shannon called Nat, she learned that Sam was home from school because of some kind of teacher’s day. Nat still home-schooled Lindy, who is the same age as Lisa. Bill works mostly from home, so plans were made for them to arrive by two. Gary was right; due to the snow; everyone’s spirits had been lifted.

“Bill is going to drive the Suburban so we can go to Mom and Pops together,” Shannon said as she turned to Maggie. “Of course, you know the invitation includes you.”

“Oh good,” Maggie said as she clapped her hands together. “This will be fun.”

“I have to go change,” Lisa said as she ran up the stairs with Butch at her heels.

“We need to eat lunch, Lisa,” Shannon called to her.

Lisa stopped at the top of the stairs and leaned over the rail. “Oh, Maggie, since we can’t have pancakes tonight, can we have them for lunch... please?”

Maggie laughed and said, “That sounds yummy to me. You go ahead and change, then come back down and help me.”

Gary could see the concern in Shannon’s eyes as she watched Lisa disappear up the stairs and down the hallway; he took her in his arms and held her.

“You know it was Pete that called, don’t you?” she asked as she stood with her head resting on his chest.

“Yes. I suppose I could be wrong, but he sounded too much like Delbert for it to be anyone else. Besides, Lisa knows his voice and she’s sure. Assuming it is Pete, I can’t imagine what he could be up to. Right now, all we can do is speculate and that

is a waste of time and energy. We'll just have to wait and see if he calls again."

About this time the doorbell rang. Butch charged down the stairs, running so fast he slid into the front door before Gary had a chance to open it. Gary patted him on the head and chuckled.

"You're a good dog, Butch."

Gary checked the peephole and recognized John Bishop, who would be placing the tap on the phones. After he let him in, Gary introduced him to Maggie and Shannon. "John, you're just in time for Maggie's pancakes, the best in all of east Texas."

"That sounds great," John said, "I haven't had good pancakes since—well, since I don't know when."

Lunch, of course, was delicious. Not much was said other than small talk as everyone was too busy stuffing their faces with Maggie's mouthwatering pancakes. Their choices were pancakes with pecans, bananas, blueberries, or plain, with selections of different types of hot syrups.

Sam and his family arrived just as John was leaving.

"Thank you, Maggie," John said, "I am gratefully miserable. I hope you won't mind if I have my wife Carol call you and beg for your recipe." He said with a pleading expression on his face.

Maggie laughed, "I look forward to her call, John, thank you."

"How are you doing, John?" (*It's a small town*) Bill asked as he entered the door, passing John on his way out.

"I'm miserable but happy," John smiled, "You missed some totally delicious pancakes."

Having experienced Maggie's pancakes, there are moans of disappointment from all of the Bowers family. "You ate pancakes, without us?" Bill scolded Gary.

"Sorry," Gary said, as he patted Bill on the shoulder, "next time."

“I’ll hold you to that.” Bill said, “I left the Suburban running so it will be warm for the drive over.”

Sam with his masculine build could easily play football but preferred baseball instead, to the relief of his parents what with the dangers of concussions that seem to be more in the news today than ever before. Since he was mostly homeschooled, he never played high school sports, just for the church team and for fun. He was always glad when an occasion arose for him to be able to spend time with Lisa. Although there was a difference in their ages, she was much more mature than most thirteen-year-old girls, yet she could still be a fun and sometimes silly little girl. Mostly, Sam liked that they could have serious and intelligent conversations, due to their both having an interest in reading and watching documentaries.

Maggie joined Sam and Lisa in the back seat. Butch had plenty of room on the floor in the area behind them. Lindy sat with Shannon and Gary in the middle seat. Having a four-wheel drive was a blessing as the snow continued to come down steadily but not so much that Bill couldn’t see to drive.

Sam and the girls spent the afternoon having snowball fights and building a snowman under the watchful eyes of the men, while the ladies helped Ruth with dinner. After dinner, Sam was able to take Lisa off to the side while everyone else relaxed in the den. Lindy tried to join them but left in a huff when Sam insisted she leave them alone for a bit.

Lisa and Sam sat on a bench seat in the window of a room used as a combination library and office. The door was left open so their families could see them.

After a few minutes of silence, Lisa asked, “What?”

“What do you mean what?” Sam asked.

“Well, you said you wanted to talk to me about something.”

“Oh, that, well,” Sam stammered. “Well...”

“You said that already,” Lisa said impatiently. “Well, what?”

“Well, we’re having a Valentine’s Dance at school in a couple of weeks. It’s a—well—it’s a Sweetheart Dance, and I was wondering—well, actually, I was hoping you might go with me.”

Lisa was taken aback by Sam’s question. She quickly stood and then sat down again. “You mean, like on a date?” she asked.

“Well, yes,” Sam said shyly. “You’re going to be thirteen. I know that is really too young to date, but you’ll be with me so it should be okay with your parents. Don’t you think it would be... I mean... that is if you want to go?”

“Yes, I would like to go.”

“Then, what is it?” Sam asked.

“Well, I guess the ‘sweetheart’ thing kind of threw me.”

Sam took Lisa’s hand. “You know you’ve always been my sweetheart,” Sam said with a slight grin on his face.

Lisa huffed. “Oh Sam, you’re teasing me now!”

Sam laughed although, in his heart, he knew the day would come that Lisa really would be his sweetheart.

It seemed as though every time Lisa and Sam left the room together, they returned holding hands. This time was no different. Sam released Lisa’s hand and walked boldly over to Gary. “I was wondering if I could ask you something?” he said, not quite so bold.

Bill and Nat glanced at one another, both suppressing a smile.

“What’s up?” Gary asked.

“Well...”

Lisa groaned. “He says that a lot.”

“I wanted to know if it would be okay if Lisa goes to the Valentine’s dance with me.”

“It’s not a Valentine’s Dance,” Lindy jumped in. “It’s a Sweetheart Dance. Hey, does that mean you and Lisa are sweethearts?”

“Lindy,” Nat scolded softly. “That will be quite enough, young lady.”

I know you have your license, Sam, but I’m not sure about Lisa going anywhere without the protection of an adult.

Gary told the Bowers about the call when the kids were outside so they were aware of the danger Lisa could be in. Lisa had not talked about it to Sam as, for now; she didn’t even want to think about it. She knew her parents were concerned so didn’t say anything.

“Nat and I are going to be chaperones at the dance, so they can ride with us,” Bill said. “Sam, I know you don’t think you and Lisa need a chaperone and, under normal circumstances, you would probably be right. Trust us for now and I’ll explain why later.”

“Gary, why don’t you and Shannon join us?” Nat asked.

Sam gave his mom a ‘great going, Mom’ look.

“Sam,” Gary said. “It isn’t that we don’t trust you, because we do. We trust both of you.”

“I know. It’s okay,” Sam said.

“What about me?” whined Lindy?

“I have a wonderful idea, Lindy,” Maggie said. “If it’s alright with your parents, you can bring one of your friends over and I’ll invite my friend Hanna and we can all go to a movie. I’m sure something is showing at the theater we would all enjoy. How does that sound?”

“That would be great,” Lindy said. “Is that alright with you, Mom?”

“Of course it is. Thank you, Maggie.”

So, the date was set. Lisa was going to go on her first date on her 13th birthday, Valentine’s Day, with her most special

Norma Cape

friend. Now all she has to do is buy something to wear and, more importantly, learn how to dance.

Chapter 2

The two weeks before the dance passed quickly. Sam returned several times to teach Lisa the latest teen style of dance steps. He was a good dancer and a patient teacher. Lisa, being a natural in the rhythm department, caught on quickly. There were two more calls during this time, but the caller stayed on the line for less than a minute. Although the calls were taped, there was not enough time to complete a trace. The calls had come during the day, each time catching Maggie off guard. Gary had hoped he would be home for the next call so that he might be able to stall the caller. In the meantime, there was plenty to do to keep everyone occupied.

Shannon took Lisa shopping for a new dress and shoes for the dance. When the day of the dance arrived, Lisa went to the beauty salon and had her hair trimmed. Lisa had a soft olive complexion, brown eyes, and dark brown hair that when cut in a short style compliments her pretty face. She also had her nails manicured and polished. Shannon had Maggie and Gary wait in the family room until Lisa was dressed and ready to come down. When she walked into the room, they both gasped. Lisa wore a pretty red chiffon dress, which complimented her complexion. The dress was sleeveless with a low cut back, and a front that reached around her neck and fastened at the back. The skirt of the dress hung loose, with an uneven hem falling just to her knees in the front and a little longer in the back which is a perfect style for her petite figure. Shannon and Gary surprised Lisa with a pretty pair of earrings and a matching bracelet. The earrings emphasized Lisa's long neck. Since she has such a lovely complexion, she wore only a little blush, eye makeup, and lipstick. She looked stunning. Even so, she didn't look over-dressed or too mature for her age.

Gary took Lisa's hand in his. "I can't believe our little girl is a teenager," he softly said to her. "I'm so proud of you, Lisa. You are so precious to your mom and me." Tears formed in his eyes, as he quickly cleared his throat and kissed her on her forehead. "You look radiant."

When the doorbell rang, Lisa's heart raced with excitement, she could hardly catch her breath.

Shannon placed her hand on Lisa's arms and said, "Take a deep breath... now, let it out slowly. (Lisa did as she was told) Remember, it's Sam, your best friend. The only thing different is that you are going on a date. Once you get together and start talking, you will see that it will be no different than any other time you two have spent time together, okay?"

Lisa relaxed a little. "Okay, thank you, Mama."

Sam walked into the family room followed by his mom, dad, and Lindy. He wore a winter white three-piece suit and looked quite handsome. He stopped abruptly when he saw Lisa.

"Wow!" he said.

"Wow!" Bill echoed as he almost ran into Sam.

"You look nice too, Sam," Lisa said.

Bill nudged Sam. "Close your mouth, Sam, and give Lisa her corsage," he said as he winked at Gary.

"Oh, I almost forgot," Sam said, realizing that he and Lisa were being watched, Sam spoke softly, "I bought you a corsage that you can wear on your wrist. That way it won't get messed up when we dance."

"Oh, thank you, Sam," Lisa said as she opened the little plastic container. "I bought you a boutonniere, a red one; it's on the bar."

"I'll get it," Maggie said.

The corsage was made up of miniature white carnations and babies' breath draped with a thin red ribbon that matched Lisa's dress. Sam's boutonniere had two miniature red carnations with

just a touch of babies' breath. Maggie pinned it onto Sam's jacket and then, after at least a dozen pictures were taken and they had donned their coats, they were ready to leave along with Maggie's friend Hanna who had just arrived. As he walked out the door, Gary set the alarm and patted Butch on the head with the instructions to 'guard.' He had previously installed a second alarm that was not connected to the phone system. If anyone were to cut the line and come in, Butch knew how to trigger the alarm so that it set off an ear-piercing siren located on top of the roof. There was a button downstairs in the kitchen, another one in the master bedroom, and one in Lisa's bedroom beside her bed. The house was secure.

* * *

The gym was decorated with red hearts, red and white streamers, and balloons. Long tables were covered with white tablecloths, with large bowls of different types of red Punch. There were platters of heart-shaped sugar cookies with red icing, and cupcakes with red icing and white sprinkles. The kids opted for a disk jockey instead of a live band so they could dance to the popular music of the day — some pop, but mostly country. As the evening progressed, it was clear to the disk jockey that pop music seemed to clear the dance floor, so it wasn't long before country became the music of the evening.

Although Lisa didn't attend public school, she made several friends she met at church and other typical small-town functions such as fund-raising events and picnics, Fourth of July festivals, and such. So, at nine o'clock when the announcement was made about the sweetheart couple for the evening, it came as no surprise when Sam and Lisa's names were called. The couple was given free tickets to the theater and a gift certificate for dinner at a local restaurant, which, of course, meant another date.

After the presentation, Lisa and Sam went to the center of the dance floor to lead the next dance. The song was Garth Brookes "To Make You Feel My Love." Sam could not have picked a better song had he been asked to choose. Others were supposed to join in after a few minutes, but the floor stayed clear as Lisa and Sam seemed to own it. They are oblivious to what was going on around them. It was a sweet moment in time for them.

"I believe my son is smitten with your daughter, Bill said to Gary."

"I believe my daughter is smitten with your son," Greg said, "I'm happy to say that I trust Sam to take it slow. Lisa is too young for a serious relationship, they both are."

"I can say, though, that I would not mind our being related through marriage at some much later date," Bill said with a grin.

"Ditto," Gary said.

Most of the songs were slow as the evening came to an end with just a few fast country favorites were thrown in.

Before the last dance, the disc jockey said, "I know a lot of you young folks have probably never heard this song before, but it has been a very popular song to play as the last dance for many, many years. I hope you like it and I hope it becomes a tradition at your dances. This one is also for any teachers and chaperons that would like to join the kids on the dance floor. The name of the song is "Goodnight, Sweetheart" and it's by a group I'm sure you have never heard of called The Spaniels.

"Oh," Shannon said, "I love that song."

"Well then, sweetheart, may I have the honor of this dance?" Gary said.

It would be the first of many dances the Blake's and the Bowers will chaperone in the coming years and at each one, Goodnight Sweetheart did become a favorite.

When the dance was over at 11:00 p.m., the younger kids said their goodnights and drifted out to their parents' cars, while the older group headed over to the local Dairy Queen for ice cream, and such, before heading home.

Upon arriving home, Shannon said to Bill and Nat, "I believe Maggie has snacks and coffee for us, so please come in and visit for a while before you go.

"Oh good," Sam said, "All that dancing made me hungry."

As soon as Maggie heard the chime signaling a car had entered the gate, she poured milk into a pot to heat for hot chocolate and sat things up to make decaffeinated cappuccino to serve with Lisa's birthday cake and ice cream. Everything else was ready for Lisa's surprise birthday party. Of course, Ruth and Hank were included in the surprise. Hank had parked their car at the other end of the house out of view of the road coming in.

Lisa was shocked and thrilled when she walked in the front door. There were birthday hugs all around. Before cake and ice cream, Lisa opened her gifts, which consisted of two CDs of her favorite performers from Lindy, a new shawl with mittens, a scarf, and a hat to match from Maggie, which she made using Lisa's favorite colors being different shades of purple and lavender.

"I must tell you, Lisa, Hanna helped with this project of love, she made the mittens."

"Oh, and I love mittens," Lisa said as she slipped one on her hand holding it up for all to see, "They are so much warmer than gloves."

"Why is that?" asked Lindy.

"Your body heat," Maggie explained, "with gloves, your fingers are separated so they rely solely on the glove to warm your hand but when you wear mittens your fingers keep each other warm."

“Well,” Lindy said, “as I live and learn. I’ll have to share this new information with my friends on Facebook. There has to be someone out there that didn’t know this besides me.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Sam teased.

Shannon and Gary gave Lisa a gift certificate for her favorite teen clothing, shoes, and accessory shop, *Don’t You Just Love It*, located in a little town outside of Longview. The owner, Margaret, who raised five girls and needed something to help her recover from empty nest syndrome, came up with the idea, with the help of a good friend and her oldest daughter. Her goal was to keep her shop stocked with teen fashions of today along with all the other day-to-day wear. She was also sure to have all sizes and styles that complemented the large range of teenage girl figures. Lisa, of course, was thrilled and hoped to have Lindy join her for a shopping date for new spring clothes. Although Lisa and Lindy were not the best of friends, she was Sam’s sister, and Lisa wanted them to be close. They both enjoyed shopping, so having that in common opened the door to a few fun times together.

There were more gifts from Ruth and Hank, and from Sarge and the detectives who could not be at the party, so sent their gifts via Gary, with the promise there would be cake saved for the three of them.

Maggie and Ruth served the cake, ice cream, and drinks, and then the adults relaxed around the fireplace in the family room while the children sat in front of the fireplace in Lisa’s room, eating and exchanging stories about their evening. Lindy told of the movie that she totally loved, and Sam and Lisa told of the dance, not going into much detail due to the teasing they didn’t want to hear from Lindy. When Nat called for the children to come down, Sam convinced Lindy and her friend to run on ahead so he could spend a minute alone with Lisa.

Sam took Lisa's hand in his, "Did you have a good time tonight?"

"Oh, Sam, it was wonderful. Thank you so much for inviting me. This has been the very best birthday ever."

This was only the third time Lisa had celebrated her birthday. Before she was rescued, she had only read about birthday parties in the storybooks she shared with Billy. She hadn't known when her birthday was until Angela was arrested and told the detectives.

"I have something for you," Sam said as he reached into his pocket.

"Oh Sam, tonight was enough," Lisa scolded, "You didn't have to buy me anything else."

"I know, but I wanted to," he said as he handed Lisa the package

Lisa opened the box and found a small white gold ring with a heart that dangled from it. "Oh, Sam, it's lovely."

Sam took the ring from Lisa. "You wear it on your little finger," he said as he slid the ring onto her finger.

"It fits perfect. How did you know what size to get?"

"Remember a few weeks ago when I tied a string around your finger?"

"You said people do that to help them remember things."

"That's true, but I did it to get your ring size. That's why I tied it in a knot so you would have to slide it off."

After Sam placed the ring on Lisa's finger, he continued to hold her hand. "You are so special to me, Lisa, and that's what I want you to remember every time you look at this ring, okay?"

"Yes, thank you, Sam. You are my most special friend in the world."

"I really want to kiss you, Lisa, but I know I shouldn't because I suppose you're too young. I've never kissed another

girl, and I won't. I know that someday you and I are going to be more than friends."

Sam hesitated, not sure of what Lisa would say but he had to know how she felt, he had to hear her say it.

"Do you feel that way too, Lisa?"

Lisa looked down, shy about the intimacy of Sam's question. "I know I see other boys sometimes, and I think they are cute, but I don't care about being any more than friends with them—not like with you."

Sam placed his hand under Lisa's chin and raised her head so he could look into her eyes, and then he kissed her lightly on her lips, allowing the kiss to linger for just a few seconds. Lisa's face flushed, and as he drew back, she quickly put her head down.

"I know I said I wasn't going to do that, but..."

"Come on, Sam," Nat called from downstairs. "It's time to go."

"I'm coming," he said, not loud enough for her to hear.

As he took Lisa's hand and walked with her downstairs he said, "Maybe in a couple of weeks we can use the tickets and go to dinner and a movie. Would you like to do that?"

"Oh yes, Sam, that would be fun."

"I guess we'll still have to be chaperoned, but that's okay. I don't mind."

"I don't either. I think that's best—for now anyway."

"Yeah, and besides, you are still kind of a baby," he teased.

"And you're what — an old man?" Lisa teased back.

As they reached the bottom of the stairs, the phone rang. Everyone froze and stared at the phone sitting on the bar. It was well after midnight, so it could mean only one thing.

Gary put his finger to his lips indicating silence and then picked up the receiver. "Hello."

“She looked perdy tonight in her little red dress, din’t she?” His voice was gruff as he whispered, then a sick chuckle. “You think it’s over, but it idn’t; you think I cain’t get to her, but I can.” Again, the evil chuckle as the line went dead.

Gary felt the hair rise on the back of his neck and his heart race. He felt nauseous and he felt angry, but he had to stay in control in front of Lisa. He took a deep breath, hung up the receiver, and then turned to face the others. “It was him. The department should call in a few minutes to let us know if they were able to trace the call.”

“You didn’t try and stall him,” Shannon said with a puzzled look.

“I know,” Gary said as he shook his head slightly as a signal to Shannon not to ask.

Sam placed his arm around Lisa and drew her closed to him. “I wish there was someplace Lisa could go until you catch this guy.”

“I don’t think it would matter,” Gary said. “I think he would find her. She’ll be safer here.”

The phone rang again causing everyone to jump and then laugh nervously.

“Yes,” Gary answered, expecting the call to be from the department.

“I know you got a trace on your phone,” the man whispered. “You’ll never find me... you’ll never see me... but I see you,” he chuckled. “Turn around, big man.”

Gary turned quickly, seeing instantly the open drapes that revealed in the full moon the acres of woods that stood not more than 200 feet beyond the house.

“Looks like somebody forgot to close them curtains,” he chuckled. In a coarse whisper, “I see you. I see you now.”

Gary slammed down the receiver. "Close the drapes," he demanded, "close them now, all of them. Bill, you and Sam check the ones upstairs."

Lisa was shaking uncontrollably. "You mean he's out there now?" she asked, fighting back tears.

As the others rushed about the house closing drapes, Gary took her in his arms. "I don't know, I don't know anything for sure, I just want the curtains closed."

Gary picked up the phone and called for a patrol car. "Bill, Hank, I don't want any of you to leave until the patrolmen get here. Maggie, I know the cottage has the same type of alarm system as ours, but I want you and Hanna to stay here tonight. Actually, I think I would feel better if you moved back in with us for a while."

Maggie started to question Gary, but after studying his face, decided now was not the time.

Once the drapes were closed and the alarm checked, everyone gathered in the family room.

Sam fought back tears — afraid for Lisa and what could happen to her.

"Are you sure no one can get in here?" he asked.

Lisa curled up between Gary and Sam, with Butch leaning against the sofa in front of her.

"I'm positive, not without setting off an alarm," Gary explained the two separate alarm systems. He also told them about the new fence around the property and special gates that had been installed at both entrances with intercoms. "No one can get in or out without our releasing the gates from the inside of the house or without using a remote." Gary turned his gaze towards the closed drapes. *Yet he could see us... how?*

Within ten minutes the officers were at the gate. After checking around the grounds as best they could in the dark of the night, the officers escorted the Chaney's and Walkers off

the property. Gary instructed them to watch; to be sure no one followed them home. “If you think there is someone, drive over to the police department. That should discourage them.” Before they left, Sam hugged Lisa and told her he would call her tomorrow.

When the officers returned, they escorted Maggie and Hanna to the cottage to get what they would need for the night and then brought them back to the house, where they immediately retired to the guest room.

“I’m afraid to be alone,” Lisa said.

“That’s understandable, sweetie,” Gary said. You can sleep on the couch in our room. I’ll have Butch sleep at the top of the stairs.”

While Lisa was in her room dressing for bed, Gary told Shannon what the caller said about seeing Lisa’s dress. Shannon’s hand went to her heart as she gasped.

“That isn’t the worst of it,” he whispered. “I turned to the window because he told me to. He said, ‘I see you; I see you now’.”

Shannon’s legs went limp beneath her as she dropped to the sofa beside them. “Oh, Gary, I am so frightened. Why is this man doing this?”

“I don’t know, but I do know I’m going to hire some private security for around here until we catch this guy.”

No one slept well that night. Gary drew the drapes back in the bedroom window and stood with his arms folded across his chest, staring out over the moonlit land before him. The trees, except for the pines, were still barren from winter. He could see shadows move in the dense underbrush but sensed that it was just a reflection of some normal activity of the natural habitat.

At least he hoped that was all it was.

Strange what a person’s imagination can do, assuming, of course, that it is your imagination.

Chapter 3

The next couple of weeks passed slowly. Lisa stayed inside most of the time—always under the watchful eyes of her family.

"I'm worried about Lisa," Maggie said, speaking softly to Shannon as they sat in the family room sipping hot tea. "She seems very quiet, not like herself at all. I think being locked up in the house all the time is depressing her. Of course, knowing that man is out there watching somewhere only makes things worse."

"I know," Shannon said thoughtfully. "I heard her talking to Sam the other night. I think he asked her if she wanted to go to dinner and a movie and she declined. I think I'll encourage her to go. She needs to get out and have some fun. I'm sure the caller won't try anything in a crowded restaurant or theater, right?" she added, looking to Maggie for confirmation.

"It's hard to say," Maggie said. "You remember, if this is Pete, that he and his brother tried to abduct Lisa at the carnival, and look how crowded it was there."

"Yes, but there can be such a thing as *too many* people for anyone to notice. There would be no way for anyone to get away with something like that at the restaurant or theater, especially if that person has someone else with her all the time. Of course, we are assuming here that he even wants to take her. He hasn't called since the dance, and even when he did, he never said anything about taking her."

"You're right, Shannon dear. He may not have anything planned at all. He may have just been in town for some reason and decided out of pure meanness to do something just to frighten us all."

Lisa had been standing in the doorway unnoticed by Shannon or Maggie.

“Do you really think that, Maggie? Do you think it could be over?” she asked.

Maggie patted the cushion beside her, indicating she wanted Lisa to join her on the couch. “I don’t know about that, Lisa, but what I do know is, I believe your mother and I are in agreement that we must still be very careful. We also feel that you cannot stay shut in indefinitely.”

“Lisa, I overheard you talking to Sam the other night on the phone in the kitchen,” Shannon said. “I believe he asked you to dinner and a movie, is that right?”

“Yes, I just don’t feel like doing anything.”

“Well, I think you should go regardless of how you feel,” Shannon said. “I do believe you are getting a little too depressed over all of this. You have got to pull yourself out of it, and I think spending time with Sam would be the breath of fresh air that you need.”

Lisa sighed, “Alright, if you think so; I guess I’ll go call him, but it is Wednesday and he may have made other plans.”

“Well, I have a feeling, for you, he would change those plans,” Maggie said as she lightly stroked Lisa’s back.

After Lisa left the room, Shannon said, “I guess I should have talked to Gary first, but something tells me he will agree with us. I guess we’ll find out.”

Butch followed Lisa up the stairs into her room. Once he saw she was settled on her bed, he walked over to her window and stuck his head through the drapes. Butch, being a retired K9, knew there was trouble lurking, so he did what he was trained to do, he stood to watch over Lisa ready to protect her at any risk.

When Sam answered the phone, Lisa said, “Hey you, how about dinner and a movie?”

“That would be great; do you have a movie in mind?”

“No, just something happy, a family type with a happy ending. You choose, okay, I know I’ll like whatever you pick.

Sam and Lisa spent the next thirty minutes talking about their studies, the dance, and anything but the man and the calls.

Sam makes Lisa laugh just as her brother Billy did. He makes her feel safe and protected, just as Billy did. He isn’t Billy though; he seems to be so much more but in a different way. Lisa was such a little girl when Billy was alive and in that room. Now she is older, and Sam isn’t so much older. He isn’t her brother; he is her very special friend, her very first friend after she was found. Billy treated Lisa like she was his little sister, as he should have, but Sam treats her almost as his equal. She is mature for her age, much more so than Sam’s sister, Lindy. Even though Lisa is only thirteen she knows what she feels for Sam is special and that she wants him to be a part of her life forever; she just isn’t sure in what way that will be.

Sam interrupted Lisa’s thoughts.

“Are you there?” he asks.

“Oh, yes, Sam, I’m sorry, I guess I was day-dreaming. What were you saying?”

Sam laughed, “Care to share those thoughts with me?”

“No,” Lisa said thoughtfully, “Not now anyway; maybe someday.”

Lisa heard Gary come in and told Sam she would call later after she found out how he felt about them going out. She went downstairs to greet him. As she walked into the kitchen, she overheard Shannon talking to him about her going out with Sam.

“I’m not sure if that’s such a good idea,” he said.

Lisa walked up to Gary and hugged him. “You know I do think I feel a little better just knowing we are going out this weekend.”

“So you talked to him, Lisa?” Shannon asked.

“Yes, he is going to check and see which movie we should go see and pick a place for dinner. Is that okay, Daddy?”

“Well, I guess anyone would get a case of cabin fever after being locked in the house for over two weeks,” Gary said. “I just want you to be safe,” he said, tilting Lisa’s face up to meet his gaze.

“You and Bill could go with them,” Shannon offered. “You don’t have to walk in with them, just be behind them. You can sit at a different table at the restaurant, and behind them at the theater. If this is Pete and he is around, he might see and recognize you, and decide to stay clear.”

“That would sure make me feel better,” Lisa said. “And Sam too, I think.”

“Alright, I’ll go call Bill,” Gary said.

“Let me talk to Nat when you’re done. I’ll invite her and Lindy over for dinner and a visit while you two are out.”

The mood in the house lifted after plans were made, and for a while, things felt almost normal again. Even Butch seemed to relax.

Sam thought Lisa would enjoy having dinner at Kelly’s, a small Mexican food restaurant not far from the theater in Pine Tree. The gift certificate they won at the dance was for a different restaurant, so of course, this meant yet another date. The restaurant was small and cozy, which made it easy for them to relax and enjoy their dinner for an hour and a half before the movie began. Lisa and Sam split a large order of chicken fajita nachos with a side order of guacamole, and they each had a glass of raspberry tea. Gary and Bill chose to indulge in the combo platter, consisting of a chicken and beef enchilada, a soft taco, and a hard taco. They also had raspberry tea. Sam and Lisa spent most of their time talking about their studies, how the weather was changing, and a few of the plays coming to town.

Lisa said, “I’ve not been to a live theater, have you?”

“Yes I have and I am surprised Maggie hasn’t taken you to one.”

“We’ve talked about it during the past few Christmases, but it seems like we get too busy doing other things. This year I would like to go.”

“Well, the best play ever is the Lion King. We drove into Dallas to see that one. It was great, Lisa. We have got to go see it when it comes our way again. If it doesn’t, well, we’ll just have to go where it’s playing. I know my parents wouldn’t mind seeing it again and if Gary and Shannon haven’t seen it, well, I know they would love it too. Anyway, I’m sure there will be some good plays coming here or maybe even to Dallas. Something else that would be fun to go to is the Walt Disney Ice Capades. You can Google it. It’s great and I think you will love it.”

Lisa was almost giddy. “Oh, Sam, the plays and the Ice Capades sound exciting, like something special to look forward to.”

“There are all kinds of Christmas activities we could attend that you haven’t been to before.

Just about all of the smaller towns around here have different kinds of celebrations such as parades, and such. I know in Jefferson there are a lot of old historical southern plantations that the owners decorate and open to the public during the holidays. That would be fun too.”

Lisa sighed. “Well, as I said, it’s something new to look forward to. Thank you, Sam; I don’t know what I would have done without you during all of this. You’re such a good friend.”

Sam took Lisa’s hand, “I’ll always be here for you, Lisa, that’s a given.” He smiled at her and then looked over to the table where Gary and Bill were sitting. Gary nodded his head slightly indicating they are ready to leave.

Gary walked out first, he watched for anything or anyone that looked suspicious. When he saw all was clear, he motioned for the others to join him.

When they arrived at the theater, Gary parked over to the side of the theatre, but not in an isolated area. There were plenty of other cars around them and streetlights. Lisa and Sam walked ahead with the men leisurely following, carefully keeping the two of them in sight. They had chosen to see an early pioneer adventure starring Gerald McRaney and Teri Garr.

“There is no way I can sit in that theater and smell popcorn without having a bag,” Sam said. “I’ll buy a medium size and a couple of bottles of water.”

Gary and Bill pretended to check out the candy bars while watching Lisa. After their big dinner, neither of them had a desire for a snack.

“Those Milk Duds look inviting, but I don’t think I could eat a thing,” Bill said.

“I know,” Gary chuckled, “I was just eyeballing the Junior Mints myself. I’ve got to watch my manly figure though.”

“I want to wash my hands before we go in,” Lisa said.

Sam looked around anxiously, remembering what happened the last time Lisa went into a restroom when he was supposed to be watching her. It was in the restroom at the carnival that Angela was able to abduct Lisa.

Gary cut Lisa off just as she approached the entrance of the restroom. “Wait, I have to check, Lisa.

Lisa gasped, “Oh my gosh, you’re not!”

“Excuse me, ladies,” Gary said loudly, at the same time showing his badge. “I just need to check things out in here — a security matter.”

Lisa was mortified. She could not believe her dad had just walked into the ladies' room right in front of her. She pretended not to know him, and, like the other ladies, acted shocked at his

presence. When Gary was satisfied all was safe, he left Lisa and the other red-faced ladies to their privacy. Upon his retreat, he found Sam and Bill leaning against the wall, weak with laughter. Lisa came out not long after totally ignoring them as she walked past with her head in the air. She walked into the theater where their movie was to be shown, with Sam at her heels and Gary and Bill close behind them.

“I’m sorry. I am so sorry,” Sam said as he continued to laugh uncontrollably. “I could just picture the look on your face when your dad walked in there.”

When they found seats, Sam sank into his, still weak with laughter. Lisa sank even deeper into hers, in an obvious huff. Sam’s laughter was contagious, though, and soon she was laughing too.

Although she was still fuming over her father doing such a thing, hearing Bill laughing behind them only added to Sam’s, and now Lisa’s, hysterical laughter. Soon the theater was dark and filled with ‘shushes’, which forced them to bring their laughter under control.

It didn’t take long for Lisa and Sam to become engaged in the movie. The scenic views were breathtaking. “I think this was filmed someplace in Kentucky, what with the rolling hills. We can stay and look at the credits.”

Sam looked over at Lisa for a moment taking in how pretty she looked in the soft light of the theater. He slowly reached over and took her hand. When he did, Lisa squeezed his hand and leaned in to be closer to him. They looked away from the screen just long enough to smile at each other and then went on to enjoy the movie.

“Wouldn’t you love living back in those days?” Lisa asked Sam as they walked slowly with the crowd, arm in arm, out of the theater. “I know life was hard, what with no television and

having to wash clothes and dishes by hand and all, but life was easier in a way too.”

“I know,” Sam said. “Families spent time together and depended on one another more back then. And friends were really important; they helped one another. At least we live in the country and don’t have all the hassles they do in the city, I guess.”

“We are lucky,” Lisa said. “We are close to our families and we do things with them. A lot of families don’t do that anymore. Everyone is too busy doing their own thing instead of enjoying one another.”

“Yep, and we have special friends that share the good times as well as the bad.”

Gary and Bill walked not far behind Lisa and Sam, keeping a close watch on them in the darkness of the evening. They too were discussing the movie and life in the days of the settlers. No one noticed the van as it moved up behind them. It slowly drove past, then screeched to a stop and the back doors flew open. Three men jumped out with shotguns aimed at Gary and Bill. Before either of the men could react, one grabbed Lisa up tight to his body and dragged her into the back of the van, all the while holding a pistol to her head. Sam grabbed at Lisa but was quickly separated from her with a hard blow to his shoulder.

A voice inside the van ordered, “Get the boy.”

Within seconds Sam was on the floor beside Lisa.

A gruff voice that Lisa recognized said, “You fight; we’ll kill you both, right now.”

The van took off, but before the door closed one of the armed men blew out the back tires of Gary’s SUV. People around them, not knowing what was going on, screamed and ducked for cover. In seconds it was over; they were gone. Gary and Bill stood in total disbelief. People were still screaming and

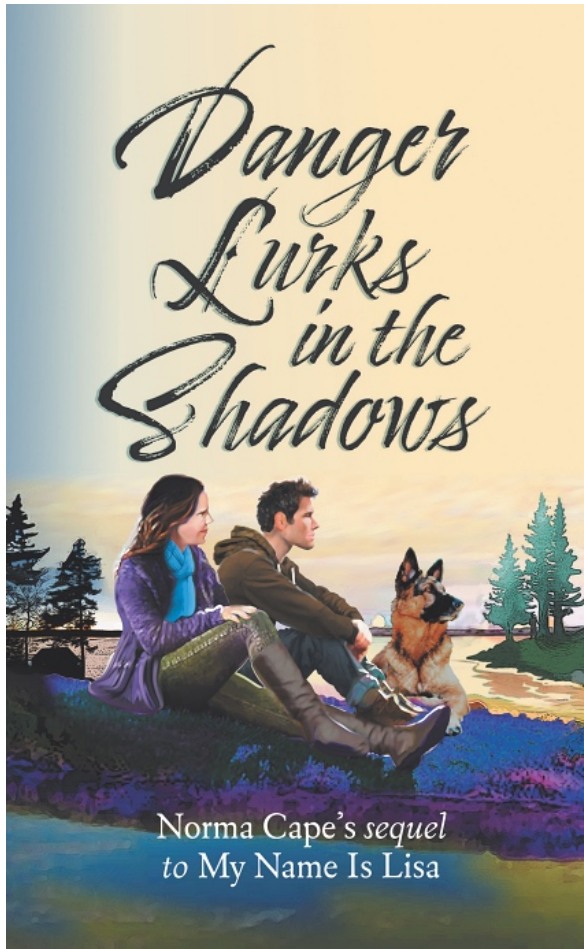
running but neither of them said or did anything but stand there and watch their children being driven off in the back of a van not knowing why they have been abducted or if they will ever see them again.

“What just happened?” Gary said, in momentarily shock. He turned and looked at Bill who is also in shock. Bill just looked at him and shook his head, unable to speak.

It took Gary only a second more to regain a portion of his composure. He grabbed the police phone from his jacket and punched in the direct line to Serge.

“He did it, Sarge; he took Lisa and Sam too! He grabbed them both right here in front of Bill and me! He did it!”

Gary’s last words were choked. He stopped a moment to compose himself and then gave Sarge as much information as he could. The license plate was covered with mud. The color of the van was so dark even under the streetlights there was no way to tell if it was black, forest green, or navy. The men’s faces were covered, so there was no description to be given; nothing, just a dark van with mud on the plate.



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