



*Four lives and four destinies were at stake. Mark thought nothing was more important than career. Lara believed family was more important. Zuzu wanted nothing but love. Brent considered money and power the most important of all things. Only God would know the outcome when these four lives collided.*

## **SUNSHOWER**

by Arlene Holland

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A scenic landscape featuring a bright sun, a rainbow, a flying bird, and a wooden pier extending into a body of water. The sun is positioned in the upper center, with a vibrant rainbow arching across the sky to its right. A small bird is captured in flight, positioned just below the letter 'o' in the word 'Sunshower'. The foreground shows a wooden pier extending from the bottom right towards the center of the frame. The water is calm and reflects the sky, with distant mountains visible on the horizon.

# Sunshower

Arlene Holland

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First Edition

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## CHAPTER 27

Saturday morning Lara, Adam, and Zuzu woke up early and began the seventy mile trip to Abilene for shopping and groceries.

“I found some really great sales, Zuzu. I can’t wait to stock our freezer. Plus, there’s a clothing sale at Old Navy. We’re going to have so much fun in the big city,” Lara said as she turned onto the interstate. She was determined to stick to her resolution to get out more.

“Uh-huh,” Zuzu said as she looked down at her phone for the umpteenth time. She tried to pay attention to her sister, but she hadn’t seen or heard from Mark since Wednesday. She spent most of the ride nodding in agreement, glancing at her phone, and sulking in silence.

Shopping didn’t improve her mood either. Zuzu bought a pair of overpriced jeans because she thought they made her butt look good and hoped Mark would notice. She also bought a blue, low-cut blouse she knew she would never wear. She left Abilene more depressed than when she had arrived.

“Do you think Mark is dating someone else?” Zuzu asked. They were on their way home. Lara’s excitement had diminished, and Adam was asleep. The girls were quiet; even the music was off.

Lara stared at the road. “I don’t know,” she answered. “Besides, what difference would it make? I mean it’s not like the two of you are in a relationship. You hardly know the guy.”

Zuzu groaned. “I know...I know. It’s just I wish we were a couple—I *really* like him.” She shook her head, leaned back against the head rest and closed her eyes. “I haven’t seen him since Wednesday. He’s probably found someone else more his type.”

“What do you think is Mark MacDonald’s type?” Lara inquired. She knew her sister well and Zuzu was overanalyzing, comparing herself to some imaginary woman and selling herself short.

Zuzu kept her eyes closed. “Oh, I don’t know...someone daring, sexy, and... interesting.” She opened her eyes and stared at Lara. “I picture him with someone smart, tall, exotic-looking and curvy, not short and boyish.” She bit her bottom lip. “Lara, I’m speechless when he’s around. It’s like my brain quits working. I’m surprised I don’t drool.”

Lara laughed. “Oh please, Zuzu, come on. You’re not boyish. You’re athletic, but not boyish. And, you’re smart...Is that what’s been bothering you all day? You need to stop putting yourself down.” She paused before adding, “Remember, when we all met that first night, he asked you to dance. He didn’t ask anyone else to dance all night, just *you*. He’s probably working late, and he is tired when he gets home. That’s all. Stop worrying; you will see him again.”

“I hope you’re right,” Zuzu said. “I sure hope you are right....”

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While the sisters were in Abilene, Brent drove by their house and noticed Zuzu’s Firebird was the only vehicle in the driveway. He parked alongside the curb and waited for a few

minutes as he looked around the neighborhood. Even though none of the neighbors were outside, he bolted for the Firebird, crouching as he ran. Lying on his back on the hot pavement, he scooted underneath the car where he had placed the tracker, but nothing was there. Frantically, he searched under the rest of the frame, but came up empty.

Brent grew more and more frustrated with each passing moment. His head spun until he couldn't remember what he had done with the tracker. He did put it on Zuzu's car, didn't he? Of course, he did. He was wasting precious time. He was sure one of them had found it and hid it inside the house—probably Zuzu—stupid cunt.

He dug in his pockets for the house key and walked around to the back door. His key wouldn't fit inside the lock; he flung it across the yard. Lara, that bitch, had changed the lock.

In his fury, he kicked the door as sweat dripped from his forehead. It wouldn't give; he pulled out his pocket knife and stuck the blade into the lock. He applied pressure to the left and then the right several times. As the blade on the knife began to bend, he heard a faint click. He rammed the door with his shoulder and it flew open, breaking the lock and the blade on his pocket knife.

Once inside the house, he ransacked the bedroom drawers and kitchen cabinets, scattering contents everywhere as he went from room to room. He was in a full-blown rage as he stomped back into the living room. He grabbed one end of the couch and shoved it as hard as he could. The heavy sofa landed in the middle of the living room. He removed the cushions and flung them into the kitchen. Family photographs scattered the living room floor as he raked his hand along the

shelves; the glass clinked and splintered. He stopped and looked around before he stomped out of the house.

Leaving the front door wide open, Brent got into his GTO and spun out, his tires squealing.

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At Sarah's house, he stripped off his clothes in the dark kitchen and left them on the floor. He was wringing wet with sweat, and needed a cold shower. After he showered, he stretched out naked on the bed and tried to think about the tracker. Where was it? He closed his eyes and let his mind drift to the night he had placed it under Zuzu's car.

Clearly the tracker was gone; he was sure of it. He supposed it could have fallen off, but he doubted it. No, the women had done something with it; they'd hidden it from him. He didn't care what he had to do; he was going to find it. He would have to go back and try again, search harder. Maybe it was stashed in the garage; he hadn't checked there.

At this moment, he knew he needed rest. Sleep might improve his memory. Tomorrow he would look again.

As he crawled under the covers, he laid an arm across his forehead and stared at the ceiling. Sleep didn't come to him for hours, and when it did, it was a restless night filled with disturbing dreams.

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When Zuzu flipped on the light inside their darkened home, they stood in shock so violating it felt as if they had been physically attacked. Unable to speak, Lara carried Adam to his room, his head draped on her shoulder as he slept.

Zuzu went from room to room, flipping on the lights and staring in horror at the destruction. She'd placed the groceries at the door before she'd turned on the lights, and now, she went back and gathered them to put away in the kitchen. The floor was littered with so much glass that she had to watch where she placed her feet.

After Lara put Adam to bed, she returned to the car and got the rest of the packages. She angrily shook her head. Brent had done it again, and he would get away with it—again. With her arms full, she walked into the kitchen where Zuzu was putting away canned foods.

“Brent’s looking for the tracker,” she said as she placed the groceries on the kitchen table. Angry tears stung her eyes as she turned to face Zuzu.

Zuzu picked up the cans Brent had scattered on the floor and put them back in the kitchen cabinet. “Well, the coward is gone now,” she said as she slammed the cabinet door shut. “Have you seen the back door? He tried to kick it in. The lock is broken, and it won’t close.” She flung her arms up into the air. “And the couch...what the hell? Why did he move that damn, heavy couch? It was pointless other than he wanted to prove he’s a very strong asshole! It’s going to take both of us to push it back where it was.”

Lara walked to the back door and attempted to shut it, but she couldn’t. The door didn’t hang straight. The lock would have to be replaced—again.

“I’m calling the cops,” she said from across the room. She placed her hands on her hips. “Don’t pick up another thing; I want them to see this mess. They’ve got to do something this time.”

Zuzu sucked in a sharp, quick breath. “Let’s think about it before you call,” she said. “We know he did this, but we don’t really have any proof, so maybe Brent will be questioned, but then he will be released. Do you want him any madder than he is already? What will he do the next time?” She wanted Brent stopped as much as Lara, but she couldn’t take the risk. The whole incident with the tracker and the marijuana joints needed to stay buried. “Besides, the cops will want to know what Brent was looking for.”

“Why is there always some reason I can’t report Brent to the cops? It’s always something. Are we going to sit back and let him terrorize us for the rest of our lives?” Lara ducked her head fighting back tears. “I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.”

“Well, if you want the cops to put him away,” Zuzu replied, “we need to get proof Brent is doing the vandalizing. We can set up a hidden camera and get him on tape next time.”

“Next time?” Lara shouted. “Are you kidding me?” Lara turned, picked up the couch cushions, and stuffed them back into the couch. Then, she stormed out in the direction of her bedroom. Zuzu heard the door slam.

“I’m going for a drive to clear my head,” Zuzu called out, doubtful Lara could hear her. She collected her purse, car keys and was out the door before Lara could stop her.

She wasn’t sure where she was going, but she knew she couldn’t stay in the house any longer. Zuzu was sick with guilt. Lara should call the cops on Brent; he deserved jail time for the things he’d done.

She pressed her lips together and wished there were something she could do to make Brent leave them alone. Suddenly she had an idea; she would go to the house Joe had described to her. She hit the gas and sped off. Maybe Brent still lived there....

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Rick and Mark were parked on the opposite side of the street half a block away from Sarah's house. They knew Brent was there, although they hadn't seen him, and the house was dark.

They were about to leave and check in on the women before they called it a night. It had been a long day getting supplies for Back Nine's remodel—something they needed to do while Zuzu and Lara were out of town.

Brent's GTO was parked along the curb under the street light when Zuzu flew past them and slid in behind it. They watched her get out of her car and open up her trunk.

"Wonder what she's looking for?" Mark asked as he peered through his night vision goggles. The dim illumination from the street light, and the light from inside the trunk offered the men little help.

"Hard to tell with her back to us," replied Rick as he also looked through his goggles. "Wait...I think it's a bat. Yep, the girl is swinging a bat."

"This can't be good. She looks pissed, and it makes me wonder what Brent did while we were getting supplies," Mark said as he lowered his goggles and glanced at Rick.

“Let’s hang back and make sure nobody gets hurt,” sighed Rick. Both men watched through their goggles as Zuzu circled the GTO swinging the bat.

Zuzu put all her weight behind the swing and made contact with the GTO driver’s door. The impact sent a jarring pain up her arm, but it barely made a dent on the classic car. Disappointed, she walked to the front of the car, swung low and smashed a headlight. A satisfied smile spread across her face as she let another swing hit the passenger side windshield. It didn’t shatter like she imagined, but spider-webbed cracks spread across from the point of impact. The entire windshield bowed inward; one tiny push would send glass shards all over the front passenger seat.

Mark and Rick saw Brent before Zuzu did. He sprinted out the front door and leaped over the steps wearing nothing but white boxer briefs.

“Damn you! Stop it, Zuzu! What the hell are you doing?” Brent shouted. Tiny gravel on the pavement bit the bottoms of his feet, but he didn’t seem to notice as he raced toward her.

“You tore up our house and broke our door,” she screamed and pointed the bat at Brent. She raised the bat to strike the car again, but Brent yanked it away from her and tossed it into the yard. She lifted her head to look him square in the eyes. She shoved a finger at his chest. “This is your warning Brent: stay away from us, and stay out of our home. If you tear up our stuff, I’m going to tear up yours.” Her voice began to tremble. “No one wants you, your drugs, or your whore.”

He pointed to the windshield. “Fuck you! You’re going to pay for this.”

She rolled her eyes. “I don’t think so.” She shook her head. “No, I’m not. Fix it yourself; you own a garage.”

Brent doubled up both fists and shook them so close to Zuzu’s face, he almost touched her nose. “You little bitch. I’d like to smash your face.”

“Do it. I’m not afraid of you,” Zuzu screamed with all the courage she could muster even though her knees shook. “Do it, you coward. After you do, I’ll make sure you only see Adam through supervised visits with Child Protective Services. Hit me!” She spread her arms and closed her eyes. “Go ahead, and knock me to the ground.”

Brent growled. “Bitch, I’ll lay you flat.” He raised his fist. His lips turned into a snarl and made a tight line across his teeth.

Mark didn’t wait another second. He bolted out of the cab, adrenaline pumping full speed, with Rick close behind. Mark waved his hands in the air as he shouted, “Hey, hey guys. Let’s not do anything you’re going to regret. Nobody needs to get hurt or go to jail.” His authoritative tone stopped Brent’s fist in mid-air.

Zuzu opened her eyes and gasped.

Brent wheeled around. “Who the hell are you?” His face was red with rage, his fists tight.

Mark wedged himself between them. With his hand on Zuzu’s hip, he guided her to stand behind him. He faced Brent as Rick caught up and stood at Mark’s right hand.

“What’s going on here?” Mark asked. His tone changed as he extended his hand to Brent. “I’m Mark MacDonald, and you must be Brent Haskins.”

Brent’s mouth gaped open as he absent-mindedly shook Mark’s hand, “Yeah. I’m Brent, but you still didn’t answer my question. Who the hell are you?” He turned his head to look at Rick. “And who are you?”

“We’re Zuzu’s friends, but I guess you could say I’m her boyfriend,” Mark answered as he continued to stand between Brent and Zuzu. His gaze locked on Brent.

Zuzu looked as surprised as Brent at the word “boyfriend”. She was thankful it was dark; her cheeks burned red hot.

“Boyfriend, huh.” Brent snorted. “Well, good luck with that one. She’s crazy—bat shit crazy. Look at what she did to my car. If I were you, I’d run like hell.”

Mark laughed. “Yeah, I know I’ve got my hands full.” He never took his eyes off of Brent. “I’d like to talk to you about the damage to your car, but first, could I talk to Zuzu, please?” He motioned towards Rick. “This is my partner, Rick Adler, and we’re both from Dallas. We have a little remodeling business. Maybe the two of you can try to settle something here without the cops while I speak with her.”

Brent sighed. “Sure, sure. Yeah, I’d rather not have the cops here while I’m standing in the middle of the street in my underwear because I’m sure I look as crazy as she is. I’ll do whatever it takes to get her off my ass. I don’t know what her problem is, and maybe you can figure her out.” Brent was

calmer; his fists were no longer clinched, and his face was a softer hue of red.

“Our door, you idiot,” Zuzu screamed as she peered out from behind Mark. “You broke into our house and broke the lock on the door. We can’t even close it. You trashed the whole house!”

Mark spun around, took her by the arm, and guided her to the Firebird. When he got to the driver’s door, he opened it with the intention of shoving her in and slamming it shut. Instead, he wheeled her around to face him as if she were a child in need of scolding. He looked down at her as he placed his hands on her shoulders.

“Don’t you know you could go to jail for what you’ve done,” he hissed. His stern gaze burned into hers. “You’re very lucky.”

Zuzu laughed. “He would never call the cops,” Zuzu said loud enough for everyone to hear and pointed to the GTO. “He’s a drug addict, and there’s probably dope in his car right now.”

Mark increased the pressure on her shoulders and gave her a strict shake. “Stop it, Zuzu. This isn’t how you go about getting through to guys like him.”

“I’ve found dope in his car before,” she said. “I know what I’m doing Mark, and I don’t need you to protect me. I’m not afraid of him.”

He bent down into her face. “You lie. I know you’re very afraid of him; you’re trembling. And if he’s using, it’s all the

more reason for you to stay away from him,” he said in a stern, soft voice.

Her chin began to quiver, and her eyes watered. “Then keep him away from us. Please, I’m begging you. Lara and I can’t take his shit anymore. You have got to stop him from terrorizing us. We’re so tired of being scared. I had to do...something. I had to try. He won’t leave us alone.”

Mark looked down at the ground and sighed. He rubbed a hand across his face. “He could have seriously hurt you, Zuzu,” he said as he looked into her eyes. “Please, go home. Let Rick and me handle this with Brent. Afterwards we’ll stop by and repair the door, or at least fix it where you can close it tonight.”

Zuzu couldn’t continue to meet his stare; she didn’t want him to see the tears sliding down her cheeks. She looked down and nodded. “Thank you,” she whispered. She quickly brushed away the tears. When she looked at him again, she was smiling. “So, you’re my boyfriend?” she asked as she cocked her head.

Mark returned the smile. “Yeah, about that. I guess I shouldn’t have said I was without discussing it with you first. I’ve been meaning to call you. I’ve just been busy.”

“No, it was perfect. I want you to be my boyfriend,” she said. “Okay, I’ll do as you asked. I’ll go home and wait for Rick and you to come by.”

He released her as she turned and slid into the driver’s seat. Mark stepped back, closed the door, and waved as he watched her drive away. He joined Brent and Rick as they discussed the GTO’s damage.

“Rick and I will be glad to help you fix the car,” Mark said.

“Thanks,” Brent said as he shook his head. “Guess I deserve what happened, but my car didn’t. Things have been very shaky between her sister and me. Our divorce will be final soon, and everything should cool down then. It’ll be alright; it’s just a couple of headlights and a windshield. I can fix it without much trouble. Thanks for making her leave before I did something I’d regret. Zuzu sure knows how to push my buttons.” He turned to face Mark. “Seriously, I’d think twice about getting involved with that one. She’s--.”

“Passionate,” Mark cut in as the hair on the back of his neck stiffened. If one more derogatory remark about Zuzu came out of Brent’s mouth, he was going to deck him.

“That’s not the word I was going to say, but yeah. One thing for certain—she lets you know how she feels.” He looked at his car and rubbed his chin. “No games with her.”

“Good to know,” Mark replied. He nodded to Rick. “It’s time we headed over to Zuzu’s place.” He turned his gaze to Brent. “She said you broke the door?” Mark asked.

“Um, I guess so. I was looking for something that belongs to me,” Brent said as he avoided Mark’s stare.

“Maybe next time it would be a good idea to ask first, and look for your stuff when the women are at home,” said Rick. “Less stressful, less fighting.”

“No, it’s always better for me to avoid them. They hate me.”

Rick shrugged. “Just a suggestion. Doesn’t make a shit to me. It’s your decision,” he said. “I wish we could have met under different circumstances. You were lucky we were driving around looking for houses in need of our services. We’re carpenters; keep us in mind if you hear of any remodeling work.”

“I will,” Brent said. “Listen, I overheard Zuzu tell you I’m a drug addict. I know how all this looks, but I’m really not a bad guy. The speed she found in my car wasn’t mine.”

“No judgment here,” said Rick. “I smoke a little weed now and then myself. I hope you found what you were looking for.”

The men turned to walk back to their pickup.

“Thanks again,” Brent called after them as he started back toward the house.

Abruptly, Mark turned around, “You got any?” he asked.

Brent was halfway to his front door when he heard Mark, and he turned his head. His eyes narrowed. “You a cop?” he asked.

Mark looked down at himself, and raised his hands to his shoulders, palms facing Brent. He laughed. “I saw Zuzu vandalize the hell out of your car. You admitted you broke into your ex-wife’s house. Do you think a cop would just let all that go?” He snorted. “You know what? Forget it. I’ve changed my mind.” He turned back around and began to follow Rick.

“Give me a minute,” Brent shouted as he sprinted to the house.

Mark called after him. “No, some other time. I don’t have any cash on me anyway.”

Brent didn’t hear him; he was already in the house. Mark looked at Rick and winked.

Seven minutes later, Brent came out wearing black shorts and flip flops. In his hand, he carried a single serving Fritos bag. “There’s almost a quarter in here,” he said as he handed it to Mark. “I don’t have any baggies.”

Mark took the bag, opened it, and peeked inside. He looked up and met Brent’s gaze. His eyes narrowed suspiciously. “What do I owe you?” Mark asked as he closed the bag.

“Consider it my payment for Lara’s door. And thanks for getting Zuzu off my ass. The whole thing never should have happened. I guess it’s my fault,” Brent said.

The men shook hands and turned to go their separate ways. Brent watched them walk away as he returned to his house. Rick slid into the driver’s seat and turned the ignition while Mark stashed the Frito bag in the glove compartment.

“This night couldn’t have turned out any better.” Rick laughed as he drove away from the curb. “I’m glad we were there to help Zuzu. You need to keep an eye on her. She could have been seriously hurt.”

“I know; she’s a spitfire. She’s worried about Lara and Adam,” said Mark. “We both know Brent was looking for the tracker. When Zuzu mentioned the dope she found in his car, it gave me the perfect opportunity to ask for some. The whole incident couldn’t have gone any smoother.”

“Yeah, that was too easy,” Rick laughed again, “He wants us on his side. The heterosexual human male is the most uncomplicated of the species.”

Rick pulled into Lara’s driveway and turned off the ignition. “Women, on the other hand....” He threw up his hands and laughed.

“Women....” Mark nodded and laughed. “Complicated as hell. Zuzu blew my mind when she baited Brent like that; she wanted him to hit her.” He shook his head. “He was mad enough to cause some serious damage,” he said as he closed the pickup door.

Rick grabbed the tool chest out of the back of the pickup and followed Mark to the front door. Zuzu answered before either of them could press the door bell.

“Come in,” she said. She pressed a finger to her closed lips. “Please don’t say a word about what I did to Brent’s GTO,” she whispered. She took a step back and held the door open. “We’re so grateful you’re here; otherwise, neither of us would have been able to sleep tonight.”

When the men stepped through the doorway, Rick’s jaw clenched in anger as he surveyed the destruction Brent had caused. Mark took a look around and saw the couch in the middle of the living room at an odd angle.

“Looks like the grandfather clock survived,” Mark said as he stepped in front of Rick and stood beside the couch.

“Yes, thank God,” Lara called out from the kitchen floor. She walked around the corner to greet them. “Thank you both so much for coming to our rescue. We’re lucky Zuzu caught

you in town.” She swept a hand around the room. “As you can see, my ex-husband still thinks he should be able to come and go as he pleases. I’ve changed the locks on the doors, but obviously, that didn’t stop him.” She walked back into the kitchen to finish sweeping the broken glass.

Rick sat the tool chest down beside the back door while Mark pushed the couch back against the wall. Rick stood and straightened for a moment and looked around again before he spoke. “I’m guessing Brent was looking for something?” he asked as his gaze fell upon Lara.

Lara dumped the glass pieces into the trash, “I don’t know what he was looking for; nothing here belongs to him.” She placed her hands on her hips and looked Rick directly in the eye. “He enjoys terrorizing us,” she said. “He’s crazy.”

Mark joined them in the kitchen. He pointed to the top of the door. “Looks like the upper hinge has been knocked loose. After we tighten the hinge screws, we might be able to close it for the night.” He turned toward Lara. “I’m sure if he left something here, he’s found it by now. I doubt he’ll break in again.”

Lara sighed. “We have no idea why he did this—he doesn’t need a reason. The divorce will be final in a few days and he is desperate,” she said.

Zuzu appeared from the hallway; she had been in the bedroom putting clothes back inside the drawers. “I told you guys that Brent’s a drug addict. He’s demented, and he doesn’t remember from day to day what he’s done.”

Mark tightened the screws while Rick beat the strike plate a few times with a hammer until it was no longer bent. Within

a few minutes, the door would close, but the locking mechanism was broken and would need to be replaced.

“We’ll come back tomorrow and fix the lock, but tonight, you’ll need to put a chair under the knob,” Rick said wiping beads of sweat off his brow with the back of his hand. He gathered his tools and placed them back in the toolbox.

“It’s late,” said Mark. He turned his gaze to Zuzu, “I hope you’re not going out again tonight.”

“No, I promise. I’m staying in and I’ll be going to bed very soon,” Zuzu replied. She was exhausted and wanted nothing more than to go to bed.

“Thanks for everything, guys,” Lara said. “I don’t know what we would have done without you.”

Rick picked up the toolbox and started for the front door with Mark behind him and Zuzu on Mark’s heels. Rick stepped outside and carried the toolbox to the pickup.

Mark stopped in the doorway and turned to face Zuzu. He placed his hands on her hips and pulled her close. He leaned over and whispered in her ear. “I was serious when I said I didn’t want you to go out again. He took a step back and looked into her eyes. “Please stay away from him.” He held her gaze until she dropped her head.

“Of course,” she said. “I promise. I’ll stay home and help Lara.” She nodded. “I promise.”

“Don’t go back to Brent’s...*ever*. Do you understand? Not by yourself.”

Zuzu nodded in agreement. “Okay, okay, I’ll never go to Brent’s again.”

Mark gave her a gentle hug and stepped outside into the night. “Will I see you tomorrow?” he asked.

“Absolutely,” she said. She wanted him to kiss her. When it was obvious he wasn’t, she didn’t wait for it to get awkward. “Goodnight,” she said. “Thanks again.” She closed the door, leaned against it, and closed her eyes, savoring the moment.

Mark walked to the pickup and got inside. He ran his fingers through his hair as Rick backed out of the driveway. Everything about this evening couldn’t have worked out any better—they’d gained trust with the women and had formed an alliance with Brent.

“We need to get Brent’s meth tested at the lab ASAP. I’ll call our guy tonight before I turn in,” Mark said as he opened the glove compartment and took out the Frito-Lay bag. “I have a gut feeling that once we find out more about his dope, we’ll know some details about the White Shadow tracker and the whereabouts of Eric Whitley.”

“I agree,” said Rick. He paused before adding, “I can tell you’re worried about Zuzu. Once we get started on the bar remodel, it will be it easier for you to keep an eye on her.”

“She’s desperate, Rick. Zuzu will do anything to protect her sister and nephew. After what she did tonight, we both know she’s willing to put her own life in danger. She’s not as tough as she wants everyone to think.” He shook his head. “This is getting too personal. I don’t want to lead her on. I should back off a bit.” He sighed. “I hope in a few weeks

we'll have the information we need and we can disappear. She'll be pissed for a day or two and then forget about me."

"You would be wise to stick to that plan, brother," said Rick. "I don't want to leave anyone bleeding here. We have a job to do, but we don't have to jack with people's emotions."

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Zuzu waited at the door until she heard the pickup drive away and skipped down the hall, past the grandfather clock and into the kitchen. She beamed from ear to ear as she watched Lara place a chair under the doorknob.

"Mark said I was his girlfriend tonight," Zuzu announced as she twirled a lock of hair.

"Don't you think he's too old for you?" Lara asked. "I mean, he's a grown man." She straightened and turned to look at her sister. Clearly, she had said the wrong thing. Zuzu was glaring at her.

Zuzu frowned. "No, I don't think he's too old for me," she snapped. "Oh, just say it. It's not our age difference—you don't think I'm mature enough for him, do you?" She stopped and waited for Lara's response.

Lara avoided Zuzu's stare. She walked into the living room and sat down on the couch and looked around the room. Nothing of value was broken. Things could be replaced, but the hole in her heart ached. She'd been wrong to think she could get away from Brent. She'd been naïve to believe she could enjoy a "normal" life. Nothing about her life was normal.

“He’s not too old for you, Zuzu,” Lara said as she folded her arms. “I’m sorry I sounded so mean. I shouldn’t have said anything.” She unfolded her arms, and looked down at her hands. She took a long, deep breath and blew it out all at once. “I don’t want you to get hurt. Please, don’t make the same mistakes I have.”

“I’m not you. For once, I’m not going to worry about it, Lara. I want to enjoy having a boyfriend without analyzing every little detail,” Zuzu said. “Try to be happy for me.” She turned in a huff and walked to her bedroom.



*Four lives and four destinies were at stake. Mark thought nothing was more important than career. Lara believed family was more important. Zuzu wanted nothing but love. Brent considered money and power the most important of all things. Only God would know the outcome when these four lives collided.*

## **SUNSHOWER**

by Arlene Holland

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