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Friday, April 5, 1974

“Cross my heart and hope to die.”

Immediately after Cindy Littleton finished making the vow, she wished the words back. Her fate hung in the balance and what did she do? She'd sounded more like a child of five than a mature fifteen year old. And she'd be stuck at home all evening, not out having fun.

Cindy watched Rod's face for the slightest change in expression. Staring into his brown eyes, she hoped they'd give away his answer.

Could she stay calm and polite if he said no? She didn't want to find out and willed him to say yes. Remember the power of positive thinking. Please, say yes. Gripping her hands behind her back, she could feel her pulse race. *Yes* became a litany repeated over and over in her mind.

“Okay,” Rod said barely above a whisper.

It worked! Cindy couldn't believe it.

Then, when she didn't see any change in his expression as he stood on the narrow parking strip between his car and the sidewalk, she wondered if she had imagined his reply.

Finally, his lips curved up slightly. Cindy took her first deep breath since making the vow not to act like a kid. She would be a model of maturity.

Okay did mean yes. The sudden urge to leap over the sidewalk and

hug Rod in gratitude surprised her. Cindy nodded and felt her cheeks flush.

Rod leaned back against the fender of his Chevy Impala. Looking over her shoulder toward the neighbor's elm tree, he grinned. His bright expression was so unexpected Cindy couldn't look away. What was he feeling? Who cares? Her first time would be tonight, thanks to Rod. And his Chevy.

Her first drive-in movie.

Today was turning out great. It was possibly the best day of her life. Better than the day her braces came off. Much better than the day she entered puberty. Better than the Sunday President Nixon came to town.

Temporary paralysis over, Cindy started pacing her front yard. She was ready.

As she turned toward the street and Rod, a gust of wind blew her hair into her face. When she moved her hands to capture the stray hair, she noticed her fingers were crossed. Had she done it before making the vow or had she crossed them for luck? Had Rod noticed?

Turning away from Rod, Cindy almost tripped over Rod's cousin, Chuck Peterson, who had been sitting on her front steps.

"Oh, Chuck. Sorry." Cindy stopped apologizing before she put her foot in her mouth.

"Didn't mean to scare you," Chuck said softly. He released his grip on her arm once she took a step back. Cindy tried to think of a reply.

The label jock had never fit Chuck, even though he lettered in wrestling and track. He never strutted or intimidated others to get his way. He didn't trade on his looks, those blue eyes from his Scandinavian mother, that trim athletic build or the surfer blond hair.

"Chuck, you're too little to scare her," Rod teased. "In another couple of months she's going to be looking down on you."

Now that she had permission to go with them to the drive-in Cindy wanted to jump in Rod's car and drive it herself. Too bad she couldn't drive.

“Rod, you’re not going take her tonight, are you?” Sandra had draped herself on one of the metal chairs on their huge porch.

Cindy stared at her sister, trying to gauge her mood. How much had she seen and heard? Had she been sitting there all the time?

“Wouldn’t think of leaving her behind,” Rod replied, looking at Cindy. “I haven’t seen enough of her lately.”

“Midge, some people don’t have to tag along like an unwanted parasite,” Sandra taunted. “Some people have a boyfriend who will want them there.”

“Aye,” Cindy said, imitating a sailor. “You’re a real pirate’s dream.”

“Cindy can’t be a Midge anymore,” Rod said, looking at Cindy’s five-foot, seven-inch body. “No one in their right mind would mistake her for a midget.” Rod lowered his voice—“Or a child.”

“Well, that explains it,” Cindy taunted, making a face at Sandra. But she wasn’t jealous of Sandra’s date, only her destination.

“Where’s Kevin?” Chuck asked, breaking the tension between the two sisters.

“Inside, looking for something.” Sandra said as she walked up to her sister. Moving her right hand to the top of Cindy’s head, she compared their heights. “I’m still a half head taller.”

Pretending to stretch, Cindy did part of the exercise that some girls do in the locker room. “I must, I must, I must develop my bust,” Cindy whispered so only Sandra could hear.

“I’m still a year and a day older than you,” Sandra said, smiling at Cindy.

“You wish.”

“I am. I was born in ’58 and you were born in ’59. And our birthdays are a day apart.”

“And you were the last baby of the year,” Cindy stated, becoming amused at the argument they’d repeated so often since Sandra skipped kindergarten at Sharpsteen. Even before she started reading early, Sandra always did things first. Talking. Walking. Crawling. Except one thing. And nothing Sandra tried made any difference.

The front door slammed before Sandra could reply. Kevin jumped the porch steps and started running for Rod's car. "Sorry it took me so long," he said quickly.

"Where's the fire?" Chuck asked, grinning.

Kevin stopped just before reaching the sidewalk. "We gotta get a good spot at the drive-in."

Chuck smiled again and pointed at the sun. "See that round thing up there?"

"Yeah. I see it. So?"

"Does it look close to the western horizon?" Chuck asked rhetorically, since it was over an hour till sunset.

Kevin looked toward the sun again but said nothing.

"Chuck was bored so we decided to hang out here for a while," Rod explained.

"To save money tonight, let's put Cindy in the trunk," Kevin suggested. "After the movie starts we'll let her out."

Rod looked puzzled for a moment. "They charge by the car."

"Okay," Kevin conceded. "Let's stuff her in the trunk just for practice."

"Don't forget you're living on borrowed time," Cindy said, referring to Kevin's recently attained adult status. "Be nice or I'll tell Mom and Dad you were cruel to me. Then you'll be out on the streets."

"No way." Kevin paused for a moment. "Besides, if it weren't for me you wouldn't exist."

"What! How's that?" Cindy asked.

"If I hadn't been born, then you wouldn't either."

Cindy refused to ask.

"You mean they'd be childless?" Chuck asked.

"Not necessarily. Just that the combinations of genes would have turned out differently. Therefore, no Cindy."

Behind Kevin's back, Sandra was circling her finger. Crazy.

When everyone started laughing and looking over Kevin's shoulder, he turned. Sandra stood for a moment, then looked over her shoulder as if trying to find what Kevin was looking for. As soon as

he turned away, she repeated the hand gesture. Kevin turned again, but not fast enough.

Cindy, Rod and Chuck were laughing continuously by the third time Kevin turned.

“What’s so funny? Random probability is a valid scientific theory.” Kevin looked ready to stomp his foot.

Following the others to Rod’s car, Cindy waited to see where they’d let her sit. Kevin walked to the trunk, paused and smiled at Cindy before getting in behind Rod. Meekly, she got in the back seat with Kevin. Then she smirked at Sandra who was still waiting for her date to show.

Sandra glanced around before sticking out her tongue.

“See you later, Sandra,” Chuck called out.

Sandra blushed.

Rod pulled away from the curb. They would be leaving Walla Walla behind and in a few minutes Cindy would at last be inside the drive-in.

At the first corner, she grabbed the door automatically. But her legs were finally long enough to use as a brace in a moving car. Which was a good thing because Rod didn’t slow down going around corners.

Cindy wanted to find out what movies were playing and a hundred other things. Opening her mouth to ask Kevin the first question, she changed her mind when she recognized the look on his face—all trespassers will be shot on sight, or upon speaking.

When the sound of the tires changed, Cindy looked up. They were crossing the Walla Walla River. The stateline between Washington and Oregon was at the top of the hill. Almost there.

Feeling the car slow, Cindy looked up again. Finally. They were pulling off the Milton-Freewater highway to get in line at the drive-in.

Wiping her sweating palms on the seat, Cindy looked around the drive-in as Rod drove toward the screen. There were already two or three cars in each row they passed.

"I told you we should've left earlier. The middle of the rows are filling up," Kevin complained. "Maybe we can still find a spot right in front of the snack bar."

"You want to park in the kiddie section?" Rod asked.

"There's a spot three spaces this side of the snack bar," Chuck said, pointing to where they should park. "The kiddie section's in the back."

Rod didn't say anything, but turned several rows behind the spot Chuck wanted.

Kevin started to speak.

"Driver's privilege," Rod interrupted.

From the looks on their faces, Cindy thought they could be debating something as important as whether Nixon should be impeached.

Rod nosed the car forward an inch at a time to tilt it at the correct angle to the screen. He took his foot off the brake and the car rolled back a few inches. Then the whole process had to be repeated. Three times.

It reminded Cindy of the story problems in geometry class. The image of Rod pacing off the distance to the screen, guessing its height and calculating angles popped into her head and refused to go away. She even pictured him standing with a leather holster on his belt to protect his slide rule.

"I should've stopped for food on the way. I could eat a horse," Rod said, patting his stomach.

"Why would the kiddie section be in the back?" Cindy asked, finally giving in to her curiosity.

Laughter was the only answer she got. They were still chuckling when they headed to the snack bar. Cindy didn't follow them.

"Kevin!" she yelled through the open window. "Can you buy me a box of Junior Mints?"

Kevin didn't even turn around to answer. He just shook his head and kept walking.

Alone in the car, Cindy stared at the screen, not wanting to miss a second of the movie. She ignored her growling stomach. It was better to wait till the butterflies passed.

The back door across from Cindy opened. Had Kevin decided to buy something for her? Not likely.

“Forget something, Kevin?” Her eyes remained fixed on the screen.

“It’s just me,” Rod said. “I decided to stay and keep you company.” He got in and leaned against the door.

Cindy glanced at him from the corner of her eye before returning her gaze to the blank screen.

“I’ve never been to a drive-in before. It’s nice of you to let me come with you tonight. I know Kevin wasn’t eager to have me tag along. Do you think Chuck minded? I couldn’t tell.”

“You are beautiful.”

Cindy continued staring at the screen, trying to think of something to say. “Have you noticed the place looks like an orchard? The stands look like trees and the speakers look like fruit.” Cindy couldn’t believe she had said something so stupid. Rod couldn’t want to talk to her.

“It’s true,” Rod stated softly. “You are beautiful.”

He hadn’t laughed at her like Kevin would have. Rod was really nice. Looking into his kind brown eyes, she noticed that he had a nice face.

“This spring is turning out great. I’m here at the drive-in for the first time. When Kevin moves to the basement in a few weeks, I’ll have a bedroom to myself. This summer I get my learner’s permit. Next fall I start high school. Life is great.”

“I’m embarrassing you,” Rod said. “I didn’t mean to.”

“No. I’m just excited about tonight.” Was she talking too much?

“Your hair is beautiful.” Rod reached over and caught a strand between his fingers.

“It’s the same as always. I’ve just been growing it out. At first it kept falling into my eyes. I felt like a sheep dog.”

“Sheep dogs aren’t beautiful,” Rod said, then smiled. “Besides I’ve never seen one this shade of brown.”

Cindy watched his hand playing with a strand of her hair. “Why

are you sitting in the back seat? This is your car, shouldn't you be in the front seat?"

"I'm the tallest."

"I'm the shortest. Should I move to the front seat?"

"No. You can see over Chuck's shoulder." That made no sense, but she didn't want this to be both the first and last time she went to the drive-in, so she said nothing.

Cindy never noticed before how tall and well-muscled Rod was. He had to be over six feet tall. Big, with average looks. A nice face, though. If she had to describe him in a few words, it would be light brown, the color of his eyes, hair and skin.

Kevin and Chuck came back with their hands full. They had pop, hot dogs, popcorn, and candy—Red Hots, M&Ms, Junior Mints, Milk Duds. Cindy's stomach growled.

"Rod, I got your pop, hot dog, Junior Mints and popcorn," Chuck said.

"Cindy, I bought something for you," Kevin said.

She regretted every bad thought she ever had about him.

He held out a small pop for her.

Setting her pop on the floor, she looked out the window. Rod was staring at her. Cindy could see his reflection in the window. Was he seeing her as a mature adult?

It seemed like forever that Rod had been one of Kevin's best friends. After her tenth birthday he had teased her about reaching the big one-oh and soon she would start lying about her age. When she got braces, she had gotten a short-lived crush on him when he defended her from Kevin's teasing.

A tap on the shoulder brought Cindy out of her thoughts. Rod silently offered his box of mints. She held out her hand so he could decide how many to share. Rod gave her the whole box.

Cindy smiled in gratitude, opened the box and popped two mints in her mouth. Sighing with pleasure, she let them melt on her tongue.

"What movie's playing first?" Rod asked after clearing his throat.

Kevin flipped through the coming-attractions flyer. "Puppet on a Chain; Soldier Blue; Kill, Kill, Kill. Next week Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid will be here."

Cindy had heard of next week's movie.

"Rod, are you sandbagging or is your bowling really getting worse?" Kevin asked.

"Don't worry about it. I'll be ready in time for the tournament. And I'll do it with a sixteen-pound ball."

"You should practice more often. This last winter you only bowled in league."

"There wasn't time with my class schedule." Rod turned toward Cindy for a moment.

She didn't think he even saw her. He was lost in his own thoughts. She couldn't imagine anything about bowling that would inspire deep thoughts.

"Well, maybe you're right. I'll think about spending more time at the bowling alley." Rod chewed on a kernel of popcorn. "But I'm not promising anything. College is my first priority."

The conversation moved to the performance of other league teams and Cindy tuned them out. She didn't understand why some guys got so serious about sports. As far as she was concerned, you either enjoyed playing a sport or you didn't. Who cares about scores and winning?

"I can't see the screen. Move the mirror." Rod shifted to the center of the back seat.

"The mirror's still in the way." He shifted farther, until his leg almost touched Cindy's. She tried to put more space between them but there wasn't any place left to move.

"Perfect." Rod moved his right arm behind Cindy. His arm didn't touch her shoulder, but she knew it was there. Glancing over Rod's lap, she noticed there was plenty of room over there. At the intermission she'd switch sides.

Leaning to the right to see over Chuck's shoulder, Cindy tried to

concentrate on the movie. Now that she was aware of Rod, his closeness made it difficult to think of anything else.

His arm moved forward to rest on her shoulder. Her muscles vibrating from his touch, Cindy broke the contact. She leaned forward, grabbed her pop, took a couple small sips and put it back on the floor. Rod's arm was resting on the top of the seat when she sat up.

Rod's arm moved forward so slowly that she jerked when it touched her shoulder. It felt like she had been zapped by an electrical charge. To break the contact, she leaned forward and to her left for a handful of popcorn.

His usual greeting was to put his arm over her shoulder and ask how his best girl was doing. Not once had it made her nervous. It was just her imagination and the newness of the drive-in. Nothing was different.

Rod's hand settled on her shoulder. He kept it still until her muscles relaxed. His hand moved on her shoulder during an important scene, causing her to miss something. When he stopped, she relaxed again.

She could tell people were chasing each other in the movie, but she couldn't remember the plot. As she stared at the screen, she started feeling warm. Was she coming down with something?

"Want anything from the snack bar?"

The movie had ended. Cindy didn't know whether the good guys had won.

Cindy stood at the entrance to the snack bar. A counter ran the whole width of the building. Teenagers took the orders and moved around quickly pouring pop, putting hot dogs in buns, grabbing boxes of popcorn and candy. It looked like fun.

The ten-foot space in front of the counter was filled with people. Most were standing in line. Others were leaving with their orders. A few just stood passing the time. Looking at everything again, she tried to memorize every detail.

"Excuse me."

Hearing a male voice directly behind her, Cindy realized she was blocking the entrance.

“Sorry.” Cindy stepped out of the doorway and tried to keep her face from turning red.

A lone guy walked by her. When he smiled at her, she couldn’t look away from his face. The impact was immediate and shocking, even though his face was shadowed by a short beard. Wow.

She refused to believe in anything as silly and immature as love at first sight.

When other girls claimed to have fallen in love instantly, Cindy laughed at their foolishness. Especially when they fell for the teen heartthrobs. How could you fall for someone you don’t know? Even Sandra sighed over her favorite actor.

But there was something different about this guy. Was it the way he moved? He radiated a sense of purpose without being overbearing or rude. Around six feet tall with light brown hair and a lean build. Nothing to detract from his appeal. He looked great in his T-shirt and jeans. Wow. It felt like she had just fallen in love.

Cindy automatically followed him as he got in line. Kevin, Rod and Chuck were forgotten. Food was forgotten. The movies were forgotten. Maybe he’d belch or do something equally disgusting and the feeling would go away. She hoped so. She wasn’t ready to meet Mr. Right.

Hadn’t there been boys she admired the first day of school and detested as soon as they opened their mouths? As Bev would say: teenage boys can be so immature.

“It was probably just a case of employees who acted on their own.”

The male voice behind her broke into her thoughts, but her eyes stayed on Mr. Right.

“Do you think they’d do something like that on their own?”

“At the store, the five-finger discount isn’t limited to customers. If the store manager can’t tell which employees will be honest, can we expect the President to have any better luck?”

When Mr. Right turned to speak with another guy heading out, she studied him carefully. Did he go to school with Kevin? Could she find his picture if she scanned last year's Wa-Hi annual?

"Watergate was more than your average burglary. They didn't go in looking for televisions and stereos."

"They weren't? Anyway, why would Nixon want to take the risk? He already had the election sewn up."

There was no answer to that.

In the lull, Mr. Right's words sounded clearly. "That tavern has too many underage drinkers. I'd rather go to another bar after the next movie." His voice was firm.

"Okay, so it's a little rowdy, but the beer is cold and cheap."

Looking for Mr. Right's picture in Kevin's annual would be pointless. He wouldn't be there. If he could drink legally, without heading east, he was at least twenty-one.

The conversations around her became an annoying buzz in her ears.

It was ridiculous, but Cindy felt her heart break. She was too young for him. What she would give to be able to skip years as easily as she could skip tracks on a record. He might be Mr. Right but she was Miss Wrong.

Looking around the snack bar for something to take her mind off her silly emotions, Cindy didn't follow as the line moved forward. She shook off her feelings as a flight of fancy and decided to join Kevin and the others.

"When are you going to let me drive your car?" Rod was talking to a guy heading out with a large pop, a small popcorn and a box of Junior Mints.

Cindy didn't recognize him. What car would Rod want to drive so badly? A foreign sports car?

"Not until you catch me in the right mood."

"Cindy. Hi!"

People turned at the loud greeting, including Rod's friend. Cindy

felt everyone's eyes on her and groaned. Why was this happening to her?

"Hello, Larry." Go away!

Larry Smythe, her sister's boyfriend, stood next to her holding a pop in one hand and a hot dog in the other. For several uncomfortable moments he stared at her as if he had forgotten what he was going to say next.

Cindy moved away from him as the line moved forward.

"Is Sandra here?" Larry didn't take his blue eyes off her as he followed her.

He couldn't be considered ugly, not in a classic sense, but there was something about him that repelled her.

"Didn't you bring her?" Cindy refused to look at him.

"Yes."

Cindy scanned the crowd. "There she is."

When he left, she let out a deep breath. The one ride she accepted from him still bothered her. It was only a short drive to the grocery store with Sandra in the front seat. When she got in the back seat, he adjusted his rear view mirror until it framed his eyes. He kept glancing at her. She couldn't remember anything he said, but couldn't forget the look in his eyes.

After that, she avoided him whenever possible. He continued to invite her. Sandra's eyes never seconded the invitation.

"Cindy, what do you want?" Rod asked.

They were at the front of the line. Kevin and Chuck were walking away with their orders.

Cindy wanted to sample everything. She glanced at the prices and sighed. "Small orange pop and small popcorn."

"Large root beer, your largest popcorn and a medium orange for her," Rod said to the clerk.

Cindy tugged on Rod's sleeve trying to get his attention but he ignored her.

Rod paid the clerk, took the order and walked toward the exit.

“On your first time at the drive-in you deserve to splurge. It’s my treat. We’ll share the popcorn.”

Cindy tried to give Rod some money for her share, but he wouldn’t take it. Giving up, she said, “Thank you.”

Rod took her pop with him so she could stop at the rest room behind the snack bar. Inside, Cindy noticed everything was clean but the fixtures were worn. While she was in the stall it was either read the scratched messages or close her eyes. She closed her eyes.

M. M. BLOES H. M. S.

“Well, how was it? I have to know.” The question was asked in a high, squeaking voice.

MARY JANE DO IT

Cindy squeezed her eyes shut tighter.

“He has one hot rod.” The other girl laughed.

“I knew it. Didn’t I tell you?” There was more laughter and the sound of agreement.

Was the girl with Rod’s friend? Now Cindy was really curious about which car he drove.

There were five girls waiting by the sinks. Cindy couldn’t tell which ones she had heard talking. They were all wearing shorts. Two wore halter tops.

As she headed out, she tried to remember where the car was parked. They had parked two rows behind the snack bar, but did that include the row next to the snack bar? At the second row she still didn’t see Rod’s car. The thought of giving Kevin a new incident he would use to embarrass her made her scan the row carefully before moving to the next one.

Rod was leaning against the left fender of his car and waving at her. Kevin and Chuck were in the front seat eating. They couldn’t see Rod had kept her from wandering the drive-in. Cindy smiled at him.

Rubbing her arms to hide goose bumps caused by the cool evening breeze, she thought about those girls in shorts and her jacket hanging in the hall closet at home.

Cindy got in the back seat as Rod held the door open. He had to give it a hard shove to get it unstuck so it would close. She rolled up the window and considered how to suggest his hinges needed oiling without offending him.

When she turned toward Rod, he was so close she almost knocked the pop from his hand before taking it from him. He put the popcorn box between his legs and told her to help herself.

A couple minutes later the previews started.

“Look at that, in three weeks they’re having a Horror-A-Rama.” Kevin was reading from the coming attractions flyer. “They’ll be showing four horror movies, starting with *The Creeping Flesh*. Doesn’t that sound great?”

“Let me have that.” Rod reached over the seat and pulled the flyer from Kevin’s hands. “Vampire Circus, Countess Dracula, A Reflection of Fear.”

“I bet the trapeze act works without a net,” Chuck said.

“Stakes and stones may break my bones, but falls will never kill me,” Cindy chanted.

“Do they have a magician who drives a stake through his own heart?” Kevin asked.

“Don’t be silly,” Rod stated. “A circus doesn’t have magicians.”

Cindy looked at her feet. At the first scream in the preview she stuck her thumbs in her ears. From the noise the guys made, she guessed they didn’t share her opinion of horror movies. Usually, she wouldn’t care what movies were playing, but there was no way she would sit through four horror movies.

When the previews ended, she took a handful of popcorn.

“Cindy, you should have been able to watch those previews,” Rod said, looking concerned. “Remember, bravery is the soul of wit.”

Cindy coughed as the popcorn went down the wrong way.

By the time the second movie started, she had eaten four handfuls of popcorn and Rod’s arm was resting on her shoulder. When he took her hair in his hand she made sure to lean over and get more popcorn.

Although Rod had bought her food at the snack bar, she still remembered her promise that she had to be quiet and not become a nuisance.

She followed the plot of the second movie. It was bloody but it moved quickly. Despite the late hour, she hadn't gotten cold at all in the car. It was like sitting next to a portable heater.

When the movie ended, Cindy was ready to go home and go to sleep. When Rod left the car, she expected him to get into the driver's seat. Instead, he headed toward the snack bar.

"Is Rod going to the rest room before we go home?" Cindy asked.

"No. We're staying for the third movie," Kevin replied impatiently. "If you want to go home now, you might catch Sandra and Larry before they leave."

"I wouldn't want to impose on their date."

Kevin snorted.

Skipping the snack bar, Cindy went to the rest room. There was a strange odor she tried to ignore. Cigarette butts, candy wrappers and paper towels littered the floor. Her eyelids were drooping and she almost fell asleep on the toilet.

When she got in the car, the back seat was empty, so she turned toward the center of the seat and leaned against the door with her legs up on the seat.

"Wake up!"

Cindy jerked upright, bumping the back of her head on the window. Why was Kevin yelling at her?

"The movie's over," Kevin said.

Looking around and blinking, she tried to clear her vision. This wasn't her bedroom. Where was she? After a moment the interior of Rod's car came into focus. Her legs were draped over Rod's lap and she dropped them to floor.

"Where do I put my trash?" Cindy asked, hoping to distract Kevin from teasing her.

"Throw it out the window. Be careful so nothing spills on the car,"

Rod answered.

“That’s littering.” She had been taught never to litter. Looking at the other cars, she saw everyone throwing trash on the ground. She pushed open the door and set hers on the ground, careful not to make a mess.

“Chuck, don’t forget to put the speaker back,” Rod said as he got out to switch places with her brother.

Rod didn’t take the main road back to town. Instead he drove west to the Old Milton-Freewater highway. Cindy struggled to stay awake. Blinking her eyes so the passing orchards would come into focus, she tried to see if there were any blossoms out yet. It would be a long time till the first crop was ready to be harvested. She could almost smell and taste her favorite: Bing cherries.

When Rod pulled into her driveway, Cindy almost fell out as she pushed her door wide open. Looking at her feet, she willed them to move.

“Come on, sleepyhead. Mom wouldn’t like it if she found you asleep on the lawn tomorrow morning.” Kevin smiled. “On second thought, I can keep her inside until noon.”

“Night. Thanks,” Cindy mumbled as she closed the car door. Kevin’s words and knowing Rod and Chuck were watching provided the energy she needed to get inside the house.

At the door to her bedroom she stared over Sandra’s side of the room. Careful not to wake Sandra, she took slow, careful steps and rolled onto her bed fully clothed. She pushed at her shoes until only her toes held them and then kicked them off, not caring where they landed. Hearing a thump followed by Sandra’s grumble told her where at least one fell.

Cindy knew she wasn’t the only one who was looking forward to having a room to herself.