

Chapter One

Annie Wates

Annie itched all over from the very bottoms of her feet to her scalp. She hoped the guy at whose house she'd spent the night did not have bedbugs. She dug around in his refrigerator looking for something to eat while scratching her stomach. All she could find were three beers, a jar of moldy mayonnaise, and a plastic squeeze bottle of mustard. She opened the vegetable drawer and immediately regretted it. There were two potatoes in there that had sprouted vines, a stalk of celery with black spots on it that looked cancerous, and a rotten-smelling onion. Hurriedly, she shut the drawer and grabbed the mustard jar. She found a loaf of bread with a couple of slices not covered in green mold and made herself a mustard sandwich. She washed it down with a beer. Empty calories were better than no calories.

The guy—she could not remember his name—told her that she could sleep in his apartment overnight, but she needed to be gone before he returned from work because his mother was coming over. It was an obvious lie. No self-respecting mother would visit a shithole place like this. The guy was a jerk and a lousy host. It took him ten minutes before he tried to rip her clothes off. She convinced him that they needed to get to know each other first.

"I got a six pack in the refrigerator."

It took him three beers and one-half joint before he passed out in front of a "Mary Tyler Moore" rerun.

What a lover boy.

She had at least hoped to get a little more than a moldy mustard sandwich in her before she left, but it didn't look like that was going to happen. Even his cupboards were bare.

She opened the guy's door and walked out into a bright sunny day. She stopped and sat down on the steps. She was in big trouble. Her money was all gone. "You only have enough money to go to Springfield, Missouri," the ticket-seller told her when she left California. She spent the three dollars left over on food, mostly junk, within the first three hours of the trip. She met the guy she had just left in Oklahoma, and although he was boring as hell, at least he was someone to whom she could talk. She didn't know anything about Springfield, and this guy was a student at a college there. *At least*, she had thought, *he'll give me a sense of the place*. Better than that, he offered her a place to stay overnight. He gave her the offer with a wink, but she needed food, money, and a place to stay for a while, and she was sure she could handle him. She thought about calling her mother for help, but she knew she could not do that. Even if her mother would send her money, Annie knew she would not use any of it, so she had accepted the guy's offer. *Well, that turned out great*. Her stomach complained, and she stood.

What now? She needed money fast, but how was she going to get it? She could try to find a job, but that took time, and how was she going to live until then. She thought about prostitution, but she was sure she would not be able to do that. First, she did not know if prostitution was even possible in Springfield, Missouri. Second, she was not sure how to go about it. Did she need a pimp first, or did she simply go out, stand on a street corner, and flag down prospective customers? She didn't even know how much to charge. Third, and the reason she hated most, was that she still believed in love. She was no virgin, but the only two times she had sex before had been for love: a darling boy in high school that she expected to love forever. They quickly realized that they were not suited, and they went separate ways. She met a boy in California who promised her the world and undying love. Unfortunately, the world he offered her was a miserable world of pain and abuse, and Annie had no choice but to leave. So here, she was,

but the fact that she had been unlucky in love, so far, had not shaken her belief that there was someone out there for her. As clichéd as it sounded, this was what she believed.

Well, I'll never discover what to do standing here reliving failed love affairs.

She started up the street and tried to figure out where she was. She knew she was somewhere near a college. The guy had told her that it was The University of Missouri Springfield, but she wasn't sure in what direction to go. She saw a few tall buildings on the near horizon and walked in that direction. Maybe she could meet an agreeable college student, and he or she would give her a meal and let her take a shower. A good night's sleep would be nice, too. *Yeah, sure, and while you're at it, God, how about a little money, love, and adventure, too?* It was difficult for her to stay positive. She hadn't slept well in the guy's bug-ridden bed the night before.

Finding Zack's missing daughter was easy enough; keeping her alive proved much more difficult. *Searching for Lilith* by Jude Roy <https://goo.gl/4Mfy3a>

A young boy realizes that telling the stories of his Cajun extended family was his destiny. *Lighted Windows* by Jude Roy <https://goo.gl/nrSVSo>

Raped twenty-one years earlier, she now wants to know who, but she never expected being arrested for murder. *Lisa's Rape* by Jude Roy <https://goo.gl/BkJyfA>

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