

Night and Day

By

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Chapter One

The stench of fuel filled the air as the train trudged to a stop at the Pineville Station, but oddly enough it filled Sadie Francis with a surge of excitement. If she thought the train ride was a pleasure, it was nothing compared with the thrill of stepping onto that platform and knowing that, finally, she was home.

Her *new* home. The one untouched by the past.

"Sadie! Sadie Francis!"

Instantly she recognized that voice. She half walked, half trotted through the crowds of friends and family gathered on the platform to meet incoming passengers. Sadie was moving so quickly that she had to hold on to her hat, which matched the same shade of pink as the polka dots in her white summer dress. Everything from her one suitcase to her shoes and the money in her pocketbook were gifts from her friend Linda, who was waving to her wildly as she hurried towards her. The only thing that belonged to her was that thin sliver of hope in her heart.

"Linda!" Her voice cracked slightly when she shouted the name and fell into her friend's arms, both of them laughing.

"Here, give me that, honey," Linda Fortenberry said, taking the suitcase from her hand. "How was your trip?"

"Oh, wonderful! Better than the last damn trip that lasted two years, sugar, that's for sure!" Sadie laughed.

"Well, that's all over now, honey. This way—Pop is waiting for us by the car." Her friend hooked her arm through Sadie's and led the way down the platform, zigzagging around others. "And the ride back isn't long, neither. It won't take us more than a few minutes to get there."

"Doesn't matter if it does. I've got all the time in the world today. Tomorrow, of course now, that's another story. I have to see that man about a job."

That is, if he's crazy enough to hire an ex-jailbird. Sadie refrained from adding that part. But just because she refused to say it out loud didn't make it a less discouraging fact.

"He's going to hire you on the spot. I know he is."

"Hope so. And just as soon as I'm on my feet, I'll pay you back for everything, Linda. Every last cent." She gave her friend a hug. "You know I appreciate it."

"Yeah. Listen, um, Sadie..." Her friend grinned, looking embarrassed. "You know that—that money's not from me. Just so you know."

"It's not from you?"

"Lord, no. Pop's been sick and I've had repairs to make on the house after that big storm we had last winter. We're not destitute or anything, but...well, the money's from someone else."

Sadie frowned. "Who?"

"Well, first promise me you won't be mad."

That didn't sound very promising. Just as she was about to open her mouth, Albert Fortenberry waved and called out to her from beside his 1941 Ford.

That brought back memories, all centering around the time Linda's father bought the car secondhand from their neighbor. It was a year or so after the war, sometime before Sadie got mixed up with the wrong man and subsequently made a total mess of her life. Pushing aside her reverie, she hurried to Albert Fortenberry—"Pop" to her, too, as Linda's longtime best friend—and greeted him with a hug and a respectful peck on the cheek.

“Little Sadie, I’ve missed you so much!” he exclaimed.

“I’ve missed you, too, Pop. Not so little anymore, though.” Sadie returned his smile. “We’re old women, Linda and me. But I turn twenty-eight before she does this year.”

“I know. We’ll have to marry you two girls off,” Pop said, his tone affectionate.

“Nah, Pop. I’m probably never getting married,” Linda sighed.

Poor Linda. She’d always believed she was ugly, and over the years she’d gone from a chubby little girl to an overweight young woman.

Even so, in Sadie’s mind her best friend was a good catch. A better cash than she was, certainly. She didn’t want to give it much thought, but she imagined most men, once they heard about her past, wouldn’t have considered her for anything other than a roll in the hay.

“Linda, if the money didn’t come from you then...who *did* it come from?” she whispered from the car’s backseat.

“Oh, Sadie, you’re going to be so mad at me. I just know you are.”

“Here we go!” Pop interrupted his favorite girls as he slid his pot belly behind the steering wheel. “First stop, your new home. We’ll let you get settled there and then I’ll be picking you up to come to our house for supper.”

“Is seven good?” Linda asked. “I’m making pot roast with mashed potatoes, gravy—the works!”

“Seven, yes, that sounds fine. I’ll be ready. Linda...” She wasn’t dropping the subject, her dread growing by the minute. “Who did that money come from?”

For a tense moment, Linda went silent. Then she replied, “You’ll see soon enough.”

* * *

From one of the second-floor rooms in the boarding house drifted the sweet voice of Mildred Bailey singing, “I’ve Got My Love to Keep Me Warm.” It seemed a little out of place listening to it on that summery July afternoon, but its familiarity and upbeat rhythm brought a smile to Sadie’s face. The door was opened a crack, enough for her to see its occupant, a pretty blonde of around twenty, who looked up as Sadie passed.

“We can listen to music?”

“Yes. As long as it’s not so loud it shakes the building,” Miss Johnson said, casting a stern glance at her. “And the music goes off by eight o’clock. Other rules you’ll need to follow: no liquor. I won’t abide that. No fighting with the other girls. And absolutely no men in your room. This is a boarding house, not a flophouse. Is that understood, young lady?”

“Yes, ma’am.” With the woman walking a few steps ahead of her, Sadie stuck her tongue out at the back of her head.

Old witch. Actually, she wasn’t that old, maybe around fifty. The temperature had to be in the 70s, and that biddy had every inch of her covered up in clothes that went out of style before the boys were shipped off to fight in Germany. Hair pinned up in a tight bun, not a bit of lipstick or rouge on her face, expression as severe as an old schoolmarm’s. Sadie snickered into her hand, thinking that Miss Johnson probably had never opened her legs to a man even once in her life.

And that was most likely what she needed most.

“Here we are, Missy. This is your room.” Miss Johnson worked the lock with a skeleton key, having to shake the door a bit before it came loose and opened. “I believe you’ll be comfortable here.”

“It’s very nice. Thank you.”

Sadie stood in the center of the room, already liking it. It sure beat that dingy, cramped old cell in the women’s prison, where she’d languished for nearly two years of her life. Two years that she would never get back.

The room was simply furnished but pleasant. A simple bed with pillows and a colorful, patchwork quilt...a dresser with a mirror...a nightstand and a door that, upon Sadie’s inspection, led into a small closet. Light and air filtered in through the room’s window, the sheer curtain billowing lazily with the touch of a breeze.

“I’ll expect payment on time,” Madame Never-Been-Kissed announced, “and for Pete’s sake, don’t lose your key. You girls can be such silly ninnies. Supper is at seven, unless you’ve made other plans—”

“I have.” Realizing she’d sounded curt, Sadie turned to her and added, “Tonight. But thank you. I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Please do. Once that dining room’s closed, you’re on your own or you go to bed without your supper. If you damage anything, you’ll pay for it.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Miss Johnson sighed and seemed to soften. “I think you’ll be very comfortable here. If you need anything, do let me know. Oh—and the bath is at the end of the hall. I expect you each to clean up after yourselves.”

“I will. The room’s real nice, ma’am. I do have one question, though...”

Sadie went to the window to see the view she’d have every morning after waking. Besides the view of the garden in the front courtyard, she got more than she bargained for.

Parked downstairs on the street in front of the boardinghouse was a blue sedan. Leaning against it with his hands in his pockets was a man. His head was down, his face obscured by his black fedora. He cut a dapper, even dashing figure in that tailored suit. Tall and lanky, with shoulders that seemed to go on forever in that jacket. When at last he lifted his head, his handsome face looked out at the Victorian boardinghouse before him. Then his gaze traveled up to that second-floor window where it met hers.

That was when Sadie recognized him. But, no. She had to be mistaken.

“Oh, Miss—Miss Johnson,” she stammered. “Who is that man down there?”

“Where?” The landlady stepped over to the window and stood beside her. “Oh, him. Why, Miss Francis, that’s Dan McCallister...your benefactor.”

“My benefactor? Oh, jeeppers...” She shook her head wildly. “No! Oh, *noooo!*”

“Miss Francis? Miss Francis! Where are you going?”

Sadie ignored the question, her adrenaline racing with each step as she bounded furiously down the staircase. She didn’t stop to think that she was causing a scene, one that she really couldn’t afford to cause, and certainly not in front of Miss Johnson. At that moment, she could only think of one thing: How great it would be to have a gun in her hand in that moment, just so she could rid the world of that infuriating man.

“Dan McCallister!” she bellowed out his name on the wraparound front porch. “You—you *bastard!*”

Those brown eyes widened for a second. Further aggravating her was that flicker of humor in them.

“Why, Miss Francis!” he called back. “I don’t believe that language is appropriate coming from a proper young lady. And it sure ain’t the way you should be greeting me after I’ve tried to help you.”

“You—you arrogant sonofabitch!” Sadie nearly stumbled coming down the steps. She headed right up to him and shoved an index finger into his chest. “Did I ask you for your damn help? Do you honestly believe, even for one moment, that I want your help? Are you listening, you no-good, lousy cop?”

“Yes, I’m listening.” The detective removed his hat and jerked his head in the direction of the boarding house. “And so are they.”

Whirling around on her heel, she cursed under her breath. Every single window on the top floor of the boarding house was open, and in each one was a young woman, peering down at her, most with their mouths opened in a big “O”. In the doorway stood Miss Johnson with her hands on her hips, looking on disapprovingly.

“I think you’d best behave yourself, young lady,” Detective McCallister admonished with a shake of his finger. “Anyway, I just passed by to see how you were doing in your new home.”

“You did this? You paid for this? *Why?*” Her green eyes flashed. “Is your conscience bothering you, you big creep? It *should*. You...liar! After what you did to me—”

“Sadie, we’ll talk about that later. Like I said, I wanted to make sure Linda and Pop got you here all right and that you go see Mr. Barrett about that job tomorrow.”

“You had something to do with that, too?” She groaned. “Oh, how I’d love to—well, I’m not going. That’s all. I don’t want your help. And I’m not going!”

“You’re not going where?”

“To see Barrett. I don’t want that job. I don’t want anything from you!”

She was seething, surely not thinking straight. Almost of its own volition, her hand flew up in the air and struck him hard against his left cheek. Behind her, even two floors up, the chorus of gasps pierced through the peace of that breezy summer afternoon.

Dan McCallister looked stunned at first, his expression quickly turning into stone. “You listen to me good, Sadie. You don’t have any family. You don’t know anybody in this town...except me.”

“*Wrong*. I know Linda and Pop—”

“Linda and old Pop are not in any position to help you. Even if they were, you and I both know you’re a handful. Now Mr. Barrett is expecting you tomorrow. He’s a good friend of mine and he’s willing to give you a chance.”

“If he’s a friend of yours, mister, then the hell with him!” she hissed, raising her hand again.

This time Dan’s hand was quicker, catching her by the wrist. Sadie stopped briefly, questioning her own sanity in challenging the detective, when he towered over her by almost a foot. In that instant she felt like the little dog that was big on bravado but short on common sense growling at the large, looming German shepherd who could swallow her whole.

But rather than growl, Detective McCallister drew closer and gave her a swarthy grin.

“You know, Sadie, honey, you need to watch your language,” he advised. “That’s not very ladylike. Not at all. With your swearing, you could make every sailor in the navy blush. Not a good first impression with these nice ladies here. Now you be a good girl and you go see Mr. Barrett tomorrow.”

“And what if I don’t?”

Easily, as if she were as light as a doll, Dan spun her around, wrapped his left arm around her waist, and bent her over. The motion damn well took her breath away.

What was he doing? An “*Ohhhh!*” escaped through her lips when she felt him rest that big hand of his across her behind. He was going to spank her—right there in front of all those girls, in front of Miss Johnson!

“Now are you going to be a good girl and promise me you’ll go tomorrow?” he posed the question, his deep, manly voice sweet as honey.

She had to strain to look back at him. Through clenched teeth she threatened, “The only thing I promise is to scratch those baby blues of yours out. Now take your paws off me, you—”

The soft fabric of her dress and that underwear offered little protection as the detective’s hand of steel met the lady’s tender bottom. Before she could catch herself, she yelped loudly.

“Promise me, Sadie!”

That *monster*. He’d said the words loud enough for his audience to hear. Bastard! Calmly, vigorously, taking his sweet time, he delivered spank after spank to her butt. What started out as an uncomfortable little sting was slowly but surely starting to hurt like hell.

What was worse, she could hear the other girls behind her, giggling at her expense. Now what was she supposed to do? Stay at that stupid boardinghouse? How could she show her face at the supper table after being spanked like that out in the open?

That big brute stopped, again letting his hand rest on her behind. Gently, he prompted, “Promise me, Sadie. Don’t make me hitch up your skirt in front of all these people.”

Oh, you would do that, too, wouldn’t you? You son of a whore!

She wanted to say that. But she didn’t dare. She tried to wriggle free from his iron hold, but it was impossible. Sadie had managed not to yelp and holler while he’d spanked her, but without the protection of her skirt, that was another matter entirely.

“Sadie?”

“*What?*” she snapped.

“Promise me.”

Snide, arrogant jerk. She would repay him every cent he’d given her—and clandestinely at that, without her knowledge. How she could manage to do that without any money to her name, having spent the last two years of her life in jail, she didn’t know. But she would. She was so mad at him, so mad at Linda and even Pop, she could spit.

“No? Okay, young lady. Have it your way.”

“*Noooo!*”

He didn’t make good on that threat to lift her skirt, though his hand was coming down even harder now. Closing her eyes, she bit down on her bottom lip, trying like crazy not to cry out. In that undignified position, bent over with her bottom up in the air, the world watching as Dan spanked her soundly, there was only one thing she could do to end that embarrassing—and painful—ordeal.

“Oh-oh-kay,” she conceded, each spank punctuating her words. “I—pruh—promise.”

As suddenly as it had started, the spanking stopped. “You’ll go see Jerry Barrett?”

“Yeah, yeah. I’ll go see him.”

“All right. That’s a good girl.” McCallister didn’t release her immediately, instead leaning over to deliver a whispered warning, “And you’d better keep that promise. I’d better not hear from Jerry that left him waiting all morning.”

She hadn’t gone to jail for murder. Thank goodness for that. In essence, she’d gone to prison for her own naiveté. Or to put it more bluntly, for being downright stupid.

But if she’d ever felt like killing a man, it was now. He’d lied to her when he said he’d help her. He’d used her to go after the man she’d been with at the time. Then Dan had let them

put her away like that. He'd let them cage her like an animal. She'd always thought that he hadn't given a rat's ass, either. That her losing a part of her young life in that terrible place had probably just been another notch on the detective's belt.

"Oh, Detective, I said I'd go tomorrow," she muttered. "So why don't you be a good Joe for once in your life and let me go?"

"I *am* a good Joe, Sadie. I know it hasn't always looked that way to you. Now..." He released his hold around her waist. "Behave yourself. Just remember: I've got my eye on you."

"Your *eye* isn't the part of you I'll be feeling tomorrow," she retorted, feeling stiff as she straightened up.

How dare he laugh! She hadn't meant it to be funny. And his eyes weren't the only ones she felt on her as she walked briskly, making a beeline for that front door. She passed by Miss Johnson, who stood rigid as a board with her hands clasped primly behind her back. Uncharacteristically, she bore a trace of a grin on her lips. Those nosey dames up at their windows were still gawking at her, even though the show was clearly over.

Sadie made it all the way up to her room and closed and locked the door behind herself. She wished she'd never have to step out of it again and face those awful women who lived there, but realistically, that wasn't going to happen. She was infuriated with them, even with Linda for betraying her like that.

Flinging herself face down across the bed, she moaned softly as she reached back her hand to rub her throbbing bottom. That man had spanked her but good. She hadn't been spanked in a long time. Never quite like that, either.

Not exactly the way she'd envisioned her first full day of freedom. And to think that she was saddled with a guardian she didn't need or want, the very man who'd put her lover behind bars and subsequently had gotten her sent to jail as well. The detective who'd wronged her was also suffering with a guilty conscience. How else to explain why he'd appointed himself her protector? A guardian angel with a crooked halo, that's what he was.

What a hell of an entrance back into society!