

— EVEN —
STRANGER

THE SEQUEL TO THE STRANGER



— MARY B ROSE —

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Read This First!

This story is the continuation of *The Stranger*.

If for some reason you have stumbled upon this copy before reading *The Stranger*, you might want to go back and procure a copy of *The Stranger* before reading *Even Stranger*.

While the two can be read separately, this story will contain spoilers for the first part. You'll find it a much more enjoyable reading experience to read them in order.

- *Part One – The Stranger*
- *Part Two – Even Stranger*

Even Stranger

Lady Nan is what the old residents called her; Old Nan is what the youngest of the residents called her. Folks supposed she was the oldest resident in the high mountain town of Baylor, but no one really knew how old she was.

Children giggled. Hushed whispers spoke rumors that she was a witch. The children's mothers would give their little ones a respectable swat and tell them 'it's not nice to say such things,' then make them apologize to the elderly woman for their insolent behaviors.

Old Nan would simply smile her nearly toothless grin. It made the children both nervous and giggly all at once. She would then nod in acknowledgment of their apologies. She rarely spoke; a woman of fewer and fewer words the older she got.

The town meeting was coming to its end. Old Nan sat at the back of the room in her special chair, a rocking chair made by Hal. He was not the only man skilled with a hammer and saw, but he was especially skilled at making furniture on occasion. A rare talent few other residents knew about.

She had never verbally complained about her old hips aching. One day, several years prior, she left the meeting with more of a hobble than usual, rubbing at her aching sides. The next meeting, the chair had simply appeared. It was adorned with an ornate wooden engraving of her name. No one knew who had brought it.

Old Nan looked Hal straight in the eye and winked at him. He smiled shyly, an uncharacteristic gesture for the austere man.

Old Nan sat there rocking gently, letting the voices and petty squabbles of the town concerns wash through and over her. So when the woman in the eccentric outfit and red fedora slipped through the back door, only Old Nan noticed.

She looked up and her wiry gray eyebrows rose, but she was neither surprised nor alarmed. She nodded and made eye contact with the beautiful woman, whose eyes were ice blue. The woman grinned, an impish smile. They studied each other for a moment, then The Stranger broke eye contact, surveyed the room, and slipped out as quickly as she had slipped in.

Old Nan continued to rock in her chair. She picked up her knitting and merely made a soft 'hmp' sound.

All that had just transpired went completely unnoticed by every other individual in the room.

Greta and Barb left the meeting early to return to their now shared establishment; the town tavern. After meetings it was normal to see many of the residents gather there for ale, late dinner, and conversation.

Greta had been the town baker for as long as anyone could remember, and Barb had been the sole owner of the town tavern and inn. They had combined their businesses into one and had become official partners in all aspects of their lives.

Although they declared themselves bonded in matrimony, there were some who thought it impossible for two women to be married and others who didn't give two blinks about it one way or the other.

For the first month after their return from their honeymoon in the city, it was the talk of the town. Neither of them could go anywhere without whispers and snide remarks from some of the more uptight citizens of Baylor. However, seeing as there were no laws restricting them from their union, they were free to live as they wanted.

Many of the more prudish factions, mostly women, quickly realized that if they didn't want to brew their own ale and bake their own bread, they'd

better come to terms with Greta and Barb being lovers, or they'd have to do without.

With time the sun finally rose and cycled through enough turns that Greta and Barb's 'scandalous' lives were no longer headline news. They simply became as much a fixture in the town as the ancient clock hanging over the town hall, and even the chattiest of the hens had moved on the next 'great town sensation.'

As the two walked hand in hand into their establishment, they didn't notice the woman in the white suit and red fedora standing at the corner of their building. She was quietly leaning against the last post on the porch, waiting for them to open.

The residents began to file in, and when the last of them was nestled cozily in the tavern, The Stranger slipped in and sat at the end of the bar. It was not surprising that she went unnoticed by all of them at first. Most of them were gathered around the hearth. Spring was not quite in full bloom, and nights still held a bit of winter chill.

The patrons were busy carrying on their emblazoned debates from the town meeting. They continued their arguing and laughing intermittently between sips of ale or bites of Greta's steaming hot stew in a freshly baked bread bowl. Those not gathered around the hearth were sitting in small groups at tiny tavern tables, deep in other topics of conversation.

The Stranger sat patiently.

Barb startled when she turned and saw the woman sitting there. She stopped dead with disbelief for a moment, taking in the woman's appearance.

She was dressed in a pristine white gabardine pants suit, tailored to fit every curve of her tall, thin, shapely body. Under the fedora you could see she had an impressive mane of dark tight curls flowing just past her shoulders. She had a heart-shaped face with extremely high rosy cheekbones. Her deep blood red pouty lips were a near perfect match to the color of the fedora she wore.

She was the kind of woman who didn't need to wear makeup because every feature was naturally highlighted on its own. Her accessories were both simple and flashy but complemented her 'everything' perfectly. She wore strange flat disk golden earrings which seemed plain enough but caught the light and glistened with an odd reflection. On her elegant neck hung a delicate gold chain.

Barb couldn't guess her age. She might have been very young or quite old with a propensity to hide age. It was impossible to tell. The woman sat on her bar stool with a posture that suggested both royalty and relaxation, as if she frequented their shabby little tavern like any other regular. Yet also with a haughtiness as if she were the owner and not Barb!

Barb regained her composure, walked over to The Stranger, and offered as genuine a smile as she could muster. "When did you sneak in, stranger?"

"Not too long ago. I've been enjoying the ambiance of your fine tavern."

"What brings you to Baylor?" Barb felt a strange mixture of being at ease and yet also highly suspicious of this traveler. The contradicting emotions bubbling up in her were alarming.

"Just a bit of business." Then she smiled a puckish smile.

It was not uncommon for them to get early spring hikers passing through. There were also the token honeymooners or urban dwellers, often looking to get away from the city. Since the city was only a days' trip outside of Baylor, it was not uncommon. However, this woman fit none of the earmark signals for a big city explorer looking to escape. Even the most uneducated urban visitor would have been dressed with more practicality than this woman.

While it was not like Barb to be inhospitable to any patron undeserving of it, there was something extremely off about this woman, and it extended beyond her apparel. She found herself being wary and cautious more so with her than their typical out-of-town traveler.

Barb studied her for a moment. She itched to pry further with more questions but did not want to seem rude.

“Anyone I can help you find?” Barb tried one last time for information. Although, even as she said the words, she had a gut feeling this woman desired to remain purposefully elusive.

“I’ll know them when I see them, but thanks for the offer.”

Barb ventured to lock eyes with The Stranger. Direct eye contact might intimidate her into revealing a bit more about herself? The Stranger boldly stared back with an unblinking gaze. The unnatural ice blue color of The Stranger’s eyes bore into Barb’s with a mesmerizing affect. She felt a wash of vertigo and blinked.

Then an eerie feeling crept in and across her mind, like a winter mist. She had seen those eyes before and experienced all of this before? Yet she was sure she had never met this woman. This was someone who made a lasting impression, someone you didn’t easily forget. The whole encounter held a familiarity Barb couldn’t quite place.

“Could I perhaps trouble you for a pint of your best house brew? And that stew looks divine. I’ll take a bowl of that as well.” The Stranger’s unblinking stare and saucy grin unnerved Barb. She nodded curtly, offered a tight smile, and walked away to fill a stein. She set it down and hurried back into the kitchen. She did not wish to look into those striking blue eyes a moment longer than she had to.

“Greta, darling, can you serve me up another bowl of your wonderful stew?”

“My goodness! Hungry tonight, aren’t they! Seconds already!”

“Not for any of the regulars. We have a traveler.”

Greta’s head popped up from her prep work for tomorrow’s baked goods. “A traveler?” This late in the day? This early in the spring?”

“She’s a strange one. And yet I —”

Greta wiped her hands on her dish towel and walked over to Barb. Sensing the discomfort in her beloved, she wrapped her arms around Barb’s waist. “Are you okay, my love?”

“I’m fine. I just have an off feeling about her.”

“Let me take the bread bowl out to her. I want to get a glimpse of her. Do I need to worry about her swooping in and stealing your heart? Is that what be troubling ya?” Greta lovingly joked.

“Not a chance.” Barb leaned in and planted a loving kiss on her wife’s lips. “It’s something else I can’t quite place. Go ahead and serve her. You’ll see.”

Greta dished out the stew and walked out onto the floor, peering around for the visitor. She spotted her immediately. She was sitting at the hearth in the circle with the other regular patrons. She seemed to have injected herself into their town debate by asking them various questions. She was acting as if she not only belonged among the residents, but carried on with such familiarity you’d instantly think she had forged lifelong bonds with the lot of them. Although as Greta watched the unusual scene unfolding, she marveled at the contradiction of how this woman stood out like a princess in a pig pen.

Greta stood back and only observed for a few beats. The woman had her long legs crossed and her black boots had a slightly inclined heel—not practical shoes at all for trekking up a mountain road, unless she had transportation. She seemed wealthy enough.

Suddenly the woman threw her head back and laughed with such a delightful sound it made Greta feel light and slightly intoxicated.

Greta scrutinized her and quickly understood why Barb was so perplexed; there was something very strange about her indeed.

Just as Greta was approaching her, the beautiful woman turned to Greta and said, “A round for everyone, if you please! On me!”

Greta forced a smile. Something that was contrary to her jovial nature. Inwardly she felt disconcerted at the warning bells firing off. She set the platter with the bread bowl before The Stranger. “I think you ordered this?”

“Ah yes. Thank you so very much.” The woman winked at Greta. Greta felt an irrational draw towards the woman, part of her wanting to pull up a chair and join in the festive atmosphere. The other part of her was screaming ‘get away fast!’ Suddenly she wanted nothing more than to put distance

between herself and the strange, beautiful woman. To escape before she felt further bewitched by the woman's peculiar charisma.

Dear Lord, I see what Barb means, Greta thought as she bustled away.

Greta joined Barb behind the bar to 'busy' herself with work. The tasks were busy work that could wait, but both of them were too unsettled to return to their actual tasks. The nature of their town was that they all looked after one another. Being the small and isolated community they were, it was only natural to feel a sense of responsibility for their fellow citizens.

Barb and Greta felt a mutual and motherly protectiveness over the patrons in their tavern at any given time, but especially in light of the events on that particular evening.

As the clock hands turned over and the hour grew late, the residents continued laughing and joking with The Stranger as if they had been comrades in war. They continued to fill their steins again and again, until Greta and Barb had to start cutting people off for fear of them getting sick.

It was an aberrant occurrence that their patrons were lacking in self-moderation. They usually only had to keep a close eye on a select few who had known drinking problems. On rare occasions, there might be a landmark birthday, holiday, or wedding where the celebrants would indulge a bit too much. Otherwise, the patrons were very modest and well contained.

Now looking at the room, it would appear that every last one of them was an alcoholic, incapable of holding their liquor. One had taken up a fiddle and was belting out a merry tune. Others were dancing around in jovial jigs. One man kept trying to stand on the table and tap his toes along to the rhythm of the music.

One of the school teachers, a solemn woman named Ms. Fletcher, who barely ever consumed more than a glass of mead, even on special occasions, was stumbling about. She was singing loudly and flushed from dancing. She was acting like a foolish teenager who had never drunk a drop of alcohol in her life.

When it became apparent to Barb and Greta that they were going to have to bring the party to an end, there were protests and outrageous cries from all of them. They acted as if Barb and Greta were misunderstanding parents ruining all their fun.

The strangest thing of all though, once the residents had been shuffled out the door and the room was empty, Greta and Barb looked at each other, feeling lost and confused. Both of them were thinking and feeling the same thing. They couldn't understand what had happened at all. They were trying to remember who or what had caused the patrons to act so strangely. They were certain there was an important facet to the evening's events going so sideways. Yet they couldn't seem to remember what it was.

By the time they had cleaned up the mess and turned in for the night, embracing each other warm in bed, they had forgotten all about The Stranger in the blood red fedora.

Ms. Fletcher rubbed at her temples. What had she been thinking? She had the worst hangover of her life. Why had she continued to drink stein after stein of the tavern mead? Why had any of them been drinking all night and acting like foolish adolescents? Thus far, dealing with the children had been nearly unbearable.

To make matters worse, it was their first day back from winter break, and none of them wanted to be in school. The children were loud and unruly. It would take them a day or two before they settled back into their normal routines.

When their first recess of the day arrived, one of her more precocious yet rascally students, a boy by the name of Adam, had looked at her standing in the doorway without making a motion to put on her coat.

“Aren’t you going out with us, Ms. Fletcher?”

“No, Adam, I need a moment of quiet. My head won’t quit. Behave yourself!”

“I will,” he said with all the sincerity a ten year old boy could muster.

Adam and his friends quickly took up a game of kickball, a favorite past time when they were free to play. Their game of ball began steadily moving closer and closer towards a woman in a white suit sitting on the other side of the outlying fence surrounding the schoolyard.

The game stopped by the fence where The Stranger stood. Two of the boys began to argue. They did not actually spot this eccentric woman standing quietly and observing them, until she had cleared her throat in an attempt to divert their attention away from their argument.

The argument fell silent and every boy turned at once to look at her. All their jaws dropped open in unison. They looked like a choir of boys about to begin singing but couldn’t get their voices to work.

“Seems to me like you need a referee,” The Stranger said.

“No, Adam just needs to stop cheating!” Oscar thrust his finger into Adam’s chest.

“I wasn’t cheating. It was a fair draw. It’s a tie!” Adam protested.

“No, it isn’t. I scored that last point.”

“It was out of bounds. It didn’t count.”

“Yes, it did.”

“No, it didn’t.”

"Boys!" The Stranger raised her voice. "There's a simple solution here. What you need is a tiebreaker."

"But it isn't a tie," Oscar whined.

“No, no. You’re not taking my meaning at all.”

The boys looked at each other, obviously perplexed.

“Then what do you mean?” Adam asked warily.

“What you need is game of sudden death to settle the argument itself. Whoever wins that game is the one who gets to decide if the point in your game of ball was in bounds or out. Do you understand now?”

The boys’ faces lit up at the words ‘sudden death’ being dropped as a potential solution to the dilemma. They weren’t sure what this meant, but it sounded like the kind of adventure ten year old boys went looking for.

“You let fate decide. Then it’s out of your hands and you go back to your game.” The Stranger’s face held a sweet, yet slightly sardonic expression.

“Sound good to me.” Adam chimed in first.

“I’m in.” Oscar agreed.

The other boys nodded enthusiastically. Then they stood waiting for The Stranger to tell them what to do next. An uncomfortable silence ensued as The Stranger merely continued to smile down at them. They looked to each other and then down at their shoes. Finally, one of the boys got up the courage to inquire further about this ‘sudden death’ concept.

“So how do we do it? This Fate death thing?” Adam asked.

“Oh, it’s quite simple really.”

“It is?”

“Yes.” She stopped looking at them and looked around surreptitiously as if she was searching for something. “All we need—is a—” she continued to scan her surroundings “—goat!”

“A goat?” Adam said incredulously.

“Well, two goats actually. And you seem to be in luck boys. There are several goats right over there.”

The boys all looked up at her and then at each other.

“What do we need goats for?”

“For the goat race of course.” The Stranger hoisted herself up on the fence, swung her legs around, and hopped down so that she was standing right in the middle of their circle now. “Go on over. Fetch two of the strongest and bring them back here.”

The boys hesitated. They weren't supposed to mess with the goats when they were at pasture, but on the other hand, this was an adult who was giving them instruction. Her gaze didn't falter. She remained calm, but her steely blue gaze produced an uneasiness in each of them.

Finally, Adam began walking over to the goats. Oscar, not wanting to be shown up by his pal, followed along. They both retrieved a goat and brought it back to the circle. Adam had chosen a large old nanny named Annabelle, and Oscar had a billy by the name of Joe. They both looked up at her expectantly, wondering what to do next.

"Good." Her face broke into a wide, impish grin. "Now each of you will need a 'chaser,' which means that each of you needs to pick one of your mates whose able to shout very loud and runs very fast."

Adam and Oscar looked to each other with wide eyes, both of them probably thinking the same exact thought: *'Is this lady serious?'*

"Go on now." The Stranger encouraged.

Adam again was the braver of the two. He chose Jon as his 'chaser,' and Oscar chose Robert.

"Alright, are we ready? This is going to be fun. Don't look like such pansies, boys." She clapped her hands together gleefully. "Now, the object of this contest is that Adam and Oscar will both ride on the goats they've chosen. Their 'chasers' will chase the goats around the field. The first rider to fall off is the loser, and the winner gets to decide how your previous game of ball was meant to be."

The boys couldn't believe their ears. That an adult would sanction such a raucous game was like a dream come true. Their eyes were glowing with excitement as The Stranger had Adam and Oscar line up their goats side by side in front of the fence, ready to run into the open field. The Stranger walked a bit of a way out from the goats.

She held her arms up and declared loudly, "On my mark, get set, go!" And she swung her arms down brusquely.

The 'chasers' were immediately at it, taking their posts completely to heart. Jon pinched and smacked at poor Annabelle. Robert tugged at Joe's ears and made clapping sounds. Adam clung to Annabelle as if he were on a ship mast and the ship was sinking fast. Annabelle was running and kicking. Oscar was valiantly clinging to Joe so tightly, he was having a hard time breathing.

The boys on the side cheered and rooted for their chosen team. The other children, even the girls, were now running over to see what all the noise was about. They quickly deciphered what the game was and began screaming and hollering as well.

Finally, Joe turned a hard right into the west side of the field and Oscar went tumbling off.

Adam was unaware of what was taking place concerning his competitor far behind him. Annabelle had darted off to the east side of the field, near the backyard of elderly couple, Frances and Samuel Miller. Just as the old fat nanny was approaching the dilapidated fence of the Miller's backyard, she came to a sudden halt, throwing Adam off her back. He landed with a sound thump to his head against the fence slat. He heard the soft rotten wood splinter, but didn't really pay any attention to it. He was too interested in finding out who had won.

"Ouch." Adam got up and rubbed his head. A small trickle of blood was dripping down his temple, but he didn't even notice it. He was too preoccupied with his victory. He knew immediately when he turned around that he had won. His face split into a wide grin of satisfaction.

No mind was paid to Annabelle and where she was headed as Adam went running back to his pals. He whooped and hollered with glee as he ran to his friends, declaring that the last point was out of bounds.

Just then, Ms. Fletcher came out to call the children in, causing Adam to stop and turn to face the other direction, towards the schoolhouse instead of his pals. As the other children moved along, Adam noticed that Oscar was dragging at a slower pace, holding his arm tightly to his chest. A feeling of discomfort began to settle in Adam's stomach, as if he'd just swallowed rocks.

“Boys! What on earth happened!” Ms. Fletcher’s shrill voice cried. She suddenly gripped at her own head from the jolt of pain that shot through her temples. “Adam, your head is bleeding! And what’s wrong with your arm, Oscar?”

Oscar was beginning to tear up. “I—my wrist. Ms. Fletcher—I—”

“Boys, what were you doing? You were only unattended for fifteen minutes... I swear...”

Adam could tell Ms. Fletcher was very cross with them, so he began to explain. It was a perfectly reasonable explanation. “The lady —” he turned to point, and there was no one there. He stopped in amazement.

Where did she go?

“What lady?” Ms. Fletcher looked around and then continued to brood over them.

“She was here! She told us to ride the goats! She was wearing a red hat. It was her idea!” Adam was adamant that he had to convince Ms. Fletcher.

“What nonsense. That’ll be enough from you young man!” Oscar was crying silently now, and Adam was wildly looking around, searching for the woman in the white suit and red hat. Yet, she had simply vanished.

Ms. Fletcher continued. “I’ll be sending word to your parents immediately that both of you will be punished for your mischief.”

Adam followed along feeling utterly defeated. “Yes ma’am.” He took one furtive glance over his shoulder and blinked rapidly. He could have sworn he saw a flash of that familiar red hat in the Miller’s backyard. But when he strained to see if it was his imagination or not, Ms. Fletcher already had him by the arm and was frog marching him inside.

Frances and Samuel had been married for so many years their memories began to bleed and fade into one another. Like oversaturated watercolors on a pallet. Similar to a paint pallet, there were colors of their relationship that were beautiful and vibrant, and other parts that were murky, messy, and undefined. All things considered, they had little to complain about in their marriage. They had a beautiful portrait of marriage to look back upon.

At the end of the coming week, they would be celebrating their fiftieth anniversary. It was typical of Frances to remember it was their anniversary, but Samuel, in his twilight years, had needed gentle reminders from Frances. She was happy to nudge him in the proper direction.

This year was the year Samuel would make up for all those other years he had forgotten. He had a plan hatching in his mind which he felt would invoke the greatest feelings of endearment in Frances and thereby cancel out all the previous years he had not quite done his due diligence.

On their wedding day fifty years ago, Frances had wanted simple mountain cornflowers for her bouquet at their wedding ceremony. These normally grew abundantly in the fields surrounding the town. However, the year of their wedding, the town was seeing a shortage of them, as was apt to happen from time to time, depending on weather patterns.

Young Samuel had woken extra early the morning of the wedding, hours earlier than the sun was due to rise, and donned his hiking gear, a backpack, and two metal pails. He trudged about a mile outside the city, expecting he would surely find the blossoms, but he did not.

He hiked on further and was still unable to find the beloved blue cornflowers that Frances desired. He picked up his pace and was nearly running up the mountain.

Finally, after six miles up and outside of his hometown, he found a mountain clearing with dozens and dozens of the beautiful blue cornflowers. He gathered as many as the buckets would fit and bolted all the way back to Baylor.

The ceremony was nearly about to begin when he came running up the road to the small white chapel. He burst into the church house, his chest heaving and sweat pouring down his flushed cheeks.

Frances was on the verge of tears, assuming she was being stood up and left at the altar. Then her gaze fell to the two buckets full of flowers. Her eyes filled with tears, and she ran down the aisle, throwing her arms around him. Suddenly she understood everything.

The townsfolk delayed the wedding by half an hour to place the flowers along the aisle and bundle up a simple yet beautiful bouquet of flowers for Frances. They were married with her one wish being fulfilled, in the little white chapel filled with the fragrance of her favorite flower.

It was a story neither of them grew weary of telling their children and grandchildren.

Every year for the first few years, Samuel would revive the memory on their anniversary by filling a pail with the indigo flowers and setting it on the table, the fireplace mantel, or the front porch where Frances might find it. He would always change up the location so it would surprise her.

Some years they grew plentiful and some years were scant. Between nature's prerogative to offer up the blue blossoms and life running interference, the years that Samuel was able to follow through with this romantic tradition became far and few between. In the past decade, the tradition had especially waned, as Samuel's knees and hips weren't what they used to be. He could no longer trudge high into the mountain when there was a shortage of the flowers around Baylor.

The year of their fiftieth, there was not a single cornflower in sight. Samuel knew Frances was heading down the mountain to the city to do errands two days before their anniversary. He had told her he was going to come along, but at the last minute feigned sickness, and Frances went alone.

As soon as she was gone, he put on his boots, his pack, and took two pails with him. He felt luck shining down on him, as it only required hiking about a mile outside of town to find a nice patch of the blossoms. He wasn't

able to fill both pails as full as he once had before. Hiking only those two miles had felt like the twelve miles he had traversed fifty years ago for his beautiful bride.

Worth it though. Every step... He thought as he ambled along at a leisurely pace. He stopped to rest every thirty minutes or so.

He took the pails back to their house, combined the flowers of both into one pail, and filled it with water. He placed the flowers in the root cellar to keep them fresh. He tucked them behind a crate that Frances would likely not see, and he hoped to high heaven she would not smell them if she ventured down into the cellar.

On the morning of their anniversary, he woke up earlier than Frances. He worked himself very slowly and quietly out of bed, crept downstairs, and placed the flowers on the back porch step. He knew she would head out to the garden first thing to collect herbs. Then she would find the bouquet. He fervently hoped it would be a delightful morning surprise.

He was very pleased with himself as he snuck back into the room and got back into bed. Frances was none the wiser.

As the old married couple were nestled in their bed, the neighboring meadow where the children played, was noisy and full of shrill laughter. Perhaps a bit louder than normal, but Samuel paid no mind to the ruckus.

It was unfortunate that Samuel had not stayed just a moment longer in his backyard. The old nanny Annabelle slowed down after throwing young Adam off her back. She was wriggling through the slats of the broken fence because her nose had led her to the scent of something most delicious: an entire buffet of cornflowers.

Annabelle devoured the flowers. It was a wonderful discovery after the trying morning she had just had. She then washed it all down with a cool drink of water from the bottom of the bucket.

As the goat waddled away, there was nothing but an empty bucket sitting on the stoop. Annabelle had thoroughly eaten every scrap of evidence that a bouquet had existed at all.

When Frances got up that day, she headed out to her garden and nearly tripped on the tin bucket. “What is this old thing doing here?” she could be heard mumbling to herself.

As Frances prepared Samuel’s favorite breakfast as a gift to him for their anniversary, she wondered if he would remember how special this year was for them.

They sat down to breakfast and Samuel was quiet. He had to suppress a grin as he waited with eager anticipation. When Frances said nothing, his excited demeanor began to wane.

Maybe it wasn’t enough? Or maybe she didn’t like them? I don’t see them anywhere, he thought sadly.

Francis ate quietly, stealing furtive glances at Samuel every now and again. *I suppose he did forget after all. Well, it’s been a good marriage and he’s a good man.*

Francis sighed and began to clear the dishes from the table.

Samuel began to feel self-conscious as he noticed Frances’s stoic behavior. It had obviously not been a grand enough gesture of romance. He felt so certain it was the perfect gift. He really couldn’t think of what else would have been better.

He wanted to say something, but he felt certain he had failed her.

Frances too had been certain that Samuel would not forget her on this landmark year, and yet he had. She began to think more on the matter and felt resentment brewing in her over the days that followed.

Over the next week, they both harbored their hurt and couldn’t seem to let it go, but also neither could they figure out a way to approach the subject tactfully. So their wounds festered and they snipped at each other for small and insignificant things. It didn’t seem as if it were going to get any better...

Old Lady Nan rocked gently back and forth in her special chair, enjoying the town meeting as always. She was none too surprised when The Stranger slipped again through the back door. Old Nan did not look up at her this time. She let The Stranger stand there. Just as the woman was about to leave, Old Nan spoke to her.

“Finally leaving?”

“Yes, I think my work is done here,” she said smugly.

“Wreaked enough havoc, have you, Mischief?”

The younger woman took a surprised step back. It was quite possibly the first time in her life she had been taken by surprise.

“Oh, don’t look so surprised. I knew exactly who you were the moment you stepped into our quiet mountain town.”

The Stranger’s eyes narrowed suspiciously. “Who are you, old woman?”

The old woman cracked a toothless smile and didn’t say anything for a beat or two as they each sized the other up. Finally, after some time, she returned to her knitting and simply replied, “I expect Perspective will be round soon enough. Clean up all your messes.”

The Stranger simply gawked in amazement.

Old Nan cut her eyes over, then said with a firmness very uncharacteristic of her normal tone, “Time for you to be going now.”

With that, Mischief bowed her head and slowly backed out of the room.

Old Nan smiled, picked up her knitting, and continued on with her work, mumbling and making a mental note that she needed to pay a visit to her beloved friends Frances and Samuel first thing tomorrow morning.

No one in the town could even remember when Nan had arrived or how long she had been there. For that matter, they didn’t even know her real name. If they had asked, she wouldn’t have told them. Because among the small town residents, ‘Nan’ was a name that seemed to fit better than Love.

About The Author



I studied writing at the "School of Hard Knocks" and "University of Life" getting my degrees in "Fine Arts of Common Sense" with a minor in "Epic Ass-Handing."

Being pansexual, I enjoy writing a variety of LGBTQ characters with diverse ethnicity and sexual orientations, and a pinch of magic thrown in for good measure: or in other words stories about everyday people in fantastic situations.

Essentially, I read a lot to keep the voices in my head quiet. I write a lot to keep the voices alive.

When I'm not writing, I'm supporting my husband and wife, (yes, you read that right - I'm polyamorous), being caretaker of minions, (losing track of how many - it's like they multiply), you might find me crocheting, watching Deadpool or South Park again, or attempting to be Defender of The Universe.

Slight Disclaimer: All Universes exist within my imagination. Any attempts to access it may result in serious mind-bending alterations. You've been warned! Happy reading!

Yours,
Mary Black Rose

PS - You can also find me writing Lesbian BDSM Romance under the pen name Mistress Black Rose

To learn more about me or my work, visit me at:

MsBlackRose.com
MaryBlackRose.com

About The Publisher



Black Rose Media Arts is the official publishing company for all works and content written by Mary Black Rose and Mistress Black Rose.

BRMA publishes LGBTQ, diverse, and possibly controversial books and content. Our works strive to enhance and broaden the perspectives of individuals, so we may perceive our differences as gifts to humanity, not challenges.