

**GARLAND ROSES**

**By:**

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Published by Kathryn L.M. Reynolds

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## **PREFACE**

Parts of Garland Roses were written a few years before 911 happened. There are a couple of airport scenes within my story, which may seem a tad far fetched, nowadays, because of the tight airport security restrictions which are currently set in place. However, at the time these scenes were written, airport security was nothing like it is today, and people were able and allowed to freely walk about airports, without question or concern.

Before 911, people were permitted to see friends and family members off to their destinations, inside the airport terminals, boarding gates, and lounges all the time. They were also allowed to visit and roam freely about the airport even if they were not there to fly themselves, or to send or pick up friends and family members who were flying in or out of the airport.

The airport settings within Garland Roses are integral parts of the storyline, so I could not remove or rewrite them without changing the flow of my story. Even though the airport/airline scenarios I wrote can no longer happen today, I elected to keep them in, because without them, it would change the flow of my storyline. I played with the idea of simply setting Garland Roses to take place when I first began writing it, which was in the early 1990's, but I found this was an impossibility to do as well, for I've incorporated so much of today's technology into this story.

This is why my characters are able to make use of laptops and cell phones and whatnot - even though the airport/airline scenarios I created within the pages of this book predate these advancements in communications and technology.

I just felt the need to explain this, so that any of you, my readers, who see these little discrepancies within my story, will understand why they are there, so you can enjoy this story without these inconsistencies bothering you.

## PROLOGUE

Shadow Creek Harbor Bluffs  
2523 Pine Arbor Road  
Shadow Creek, Washington  
Kathy's House – Mid-June

Trying to relax in the evening sunshine, Kathryn Rose Meadows lounged back on her patio's glider swing which faced her backyard, and absently watched the sailboats, ferries, and barges skimming across the choppy waters of the Puget Sound.

At least, she tried to relax. Unfortunately, she couldn't do so, not while some unknown lunatic who called himself, *The Doctor*, was still loose and possibly stalking her. Her nerves were shot all to hell, because of the creep - to the point that even her own shadow made her jumpy these days.

"Damn."

Kathy shifted uneasily on the glider, causing the two cats, who'd been contentedly curled up on her lap, to eye her indignantly when this movement disturbed their slumber. She scanned the surrounding area of her backyard more thoroughly. Even though it had been well over a month since she'd last heard from *The Doctor*, Kathy couldn't shake the uneasy feeling that he was still out there somewhere - just watching and waiting for the right time to attack.

Absently petting the two cats, Kathy pensively pondered her situation, and let out a jagged sigh. If only the police or the private detective agency she'd hired to investigate her case had been able to catch and apprehend the man, then maybe, -just maybe- she'd be able to relax and breathe easier again.

As it was, their attempts to nab the creep had proved unsuccessful, and she could *not* forget, no matter how hard she tried, the horrendous threats he'd made on her life. Nor could she lightly dismiss his last phone call to her, for the chilling tones in which he'd spoken had convinced her, as none of his previous calls had done, of his deadly intent.

The phone's ominous silence, in the aftermath of hearing it ring incessantly for days on end, at all hours of the day or night, only solidified her conviction that this time his threats were not merely idle ones.

"***IF only*** the police or detectives had identified the man..." She pensively thought to herself "...or had figured out the reason he'd stalked me in the first place - ***IF I*** only knew ***WHY*** he suddenly stopped calling..."

She didn't know if this stoppage meant he'd decided to leave her alone, or if there was a more menacing reason behind the "silence". Was this cessation of calls merely a pause before he made his final move...like the stealthy, speedy silence of a jungle cat just before it pounces on the prey it was stalking, or did it mean he'd decided to quit tormenting her?? If she only knew one way or the other, whether or not *The Doctor* was gone for good - never to bother her again -or- if he was circling in to make good on his deadly threats...

"**If only, if only, if only...**" Never had two words been more frighteningly useless than the phrase - "**If Only...**"

Bleep - Buzz - Bleep

With a sickening lurch in the pit of her stomach, Kathy was jolted back to her present surroundings, when the cell phone on the table beside her went off. Her abrupt movement caused the cats to leap off of her lap and gaze up at her in haughty, reproachful feline displeasure; while the mammoth-sized dog, lying at her feet, lifted his snout high into the air and howled like a coyote baying at the moon - something he always did, whenever the phone or doorbell rang.

When the phone rang a second time, Kathy stared frozenly at the instrument with mounting apprehension. On the third ring, she picked it up and gingerly depressed the talk button with visibly trembling fingers.

"Hello?"

"Hi Kath!"

Upon hearing the overly perky voice of Suzanne, the eldest of her three sisters, at the other end of the phone, Kathy breathed a relieved sigh. This relief, however, was short-lived. When the full import of who was calling sank in, Kathy's spirits took a swift nosedive!

Suzanne rarely phoned unless it was to impart unpleasant (unwanted) news, surprises, or requests to her baby sister. The jovial, almost cheery, inflection in her sister's voice, unsettled Kathy even more, for her sister rarely spoke in anything other than an overly refined and cultured (snobbish) intonation.

With an inward groan, and a wariness born from past experience, Kathy reluctantly greeted her sister, and was drawn into the following phone conversation...

"Hi Suzanne."

"Hey Squirt!" Suzanne gushingly replied, using a nickname Kathy secretly abhorred. Though Squirt, she supposed with wry resignation, was better than some of the other pet names her siblings usually bestowed upon her, (like - Sprite, Spud Bud, Sprout, Small Fry or Spritzzy). Being the shortest and youngest member of her family, apart from her ten year old brother, Benjamin, definitely had it's drawbacks, and this was one of them.

"What's up Suzanne?" Kathy queried unenthusiastically.

"Not much at the moment. How is everything going for you? I hear Shadow Creek's having some lovely weather right now - are you out enjoying it?" Suzanne queried conversationally.

The very fact that her sister hadn't immediately launched into *why* she was phoning, made Kathy distinctly uneasy and even more on guard.

"Everything **was** going fine Sue. I **was** sitting here, enjoying the sunny weather when you phoned." She lied, placing emphasis upon the past tense of her sentence.

Suzanne, either ignoring or not hearing the lack-luster quality of her sister's responses, began chatting in a deceptively amiable tone of voice.

"That's good to hear Kiddo." (Another pet name Kathy loathed) "Mom will be relieved to hear you're having some fun. You know how worried she's been about you lately. Come to think of it, mom and dad have both been overly worried about you for quite awhile now, though I don't know why. They won't discuss it with me..."

Sue added this last bit a trifle huffily, for she could sense something of importance was going on, which she was being kept ignorant of, and she intensely disliked being kept out of the loop like this. One of the things Sue prided herself on, was always being "in the know" of all important (or secret) family and social matters - and it irked her to no

end that whatever was going on with her baby sister, was not being shared with her!

Kathy knew exactly why her parents were worried about her, and she was also aware of how badly her sister wanted to know what was going on, but she wasn't about to enlighten her. The less who knew about *The Doctor's* phone calls and threats, the better it would be for all concerned, for it wasn't just herself he'd threatened - he'd threatened to go after anyone who tried to help her...especially if they were kin to her.

The only reason why her parents knew anything about her stalker, was because they'd inadvertently intercepted one of *The Doctor's* phone calls, when they'd dropped by to visit her for a few days, on their way to Canada. Up until then, Kathy had considered her stalker's calls to be relatively harmless, but her parents had thought otherwise. They'd urged her to summon the police.

Upon contacting the authorities, the officers she talked to had agreed with her parents assessment, about the seriousness of her situation. Unfortunately they'd been unable to do more than document her complaints and put them on report, for until the guy actually tried to harm her, and committed this crime, their hands were tied. Nor could they put a restraining order on her stalker, because his identity was unknown. They filed her report, and had given her it's case number.

However, they'd been concerned enough about her safety and welfare, that they'd advised her to learn some self defense, and perhaps hire the services of a bodyguard until her stalker was identified and apprehended - for her own protection. They'd also emphatically suggested she discuss her situation with a private detective, for while their hands were legally tied from helping her further, this would not be the case for someone in the private sector of their field. They then gave her a list of affordable agencies who would best be able to handle her case, and strongly urged her to contact one of them pronto.

Worried about their daughter's safety, Kathy's parents had urged her to do as the police suggested, and contact an investigation agency to handle her stalker situation. They'd also wanted her to hire a bodyguard, but she'd point blank refused that suggestion, for the very idea of having one was totally absurd to her - and so she told them. As for discussing her case with a private investigator, Kathy hadn't liked that idea either, for several reasons. The first and foremost one being that while she made a comfortable income from her home-based business of making and selling collectable dolls and figurines, she was by no means affluent enough to afford the services of a private investigator. Nor had she been entirely convinced - at that point in her stalker's reign of terror - that her situation was serious enough to merit such a step. Which was the second, if lesser of the two reasons, of why she'd been reluctant to hire a private detective to look into the matter.

However, to appease her parents, (and to insure they didn't hire a bodyguard to protect her), Kathy had perused the list of agencies the police had given her, and chosen the least expensive one to contact. She'd felt absurdly dumb when she'd dialed their number. Afterall, apart from fictional characters on TV, the only people she knew of who ever hired private detectives were lawyers, or people spying on cheating spouses to gain divorce or child custody rights. Since she fit into none of these categories, she felt it was ridiculous to contact, let alone consult or hire, an investigator for herself. However, to appease her parents, she'd done so. Several times after she'd made that call, Kathy had been tempted to cancel the interview, but for her parent's peace of mind she hadn't done

so.

Subsequently, Kathy had kept the appointment, even though she hadn't felt her situation was serious enough to warrant such a consultation. She'd planned on only consulting them that one time, and then reporting back to her parents that hiring a private eye was a no go. She'd had no intention of prolonging the interview, none at all about actually hiring them to investigate, but she hadn't taken into consideration her parent's involvement in the matter...

As soon as she'd arrived at the agency, Kathy had been greeted by a friendly receptionist, who'd then ushered her into a small conference room, where the agency held its initial consultations with prospective clients. Upon entering the room, Kathy had been considerably surprised to be greeted by not one, but two of the agency's detectives. She soon learned that her parents had called ahead (because they were afraid their daughter would've made too light of her situation to the detectives) and had spoken directly to the head of the agency - to insure their daughter's case was given top priority.

Which is why the agency had not only been apprised of her situation prior to her arrival, but by the time Kathy got there, two of the agency's best detectives had already been put in charge of her case. She was at first nonplused and embarrassed by this turn of events, but the agents had been more than understanding about this as well as about her qualms and uneasiness in confiding in them. Before she knew it, Kathy had found herself telling them about *The Doctor* and the threats he'd made on her life.

After questioning her for a considerable length of time, and listening to her account and jotting down everything she'd told them, the detectives had set the report aside for a minute, in order to address their first concern about her situation... which to her surprise, had not been about the threats her stalker had made upon her life, but her apparent disregard in taking those threats seriously. They'd impressed upon her the very real danger she was in, given the nature of the threats themselves.

The two agents had quickly made Kathy realize she was not dealing with some teenaged crank caller, but a seriously deranged individual who was acting with criminal intent. A person moreover, whose unbalanced mind could and most probably would try to make good on his intention to torture and kill her, for the threats themselves had been too horrifically detailed and graphic in nature, for them to believe otherwise. Thus she'd ended up hiring their services to look into her situation. However it proved to be a futile endeavor.

Even though they'd used every top notch surveillance technology and equipment at their disposal, not to mention their considerable investigative abilities and experience, the detectives had been unable to identify or locate *The Doctor's* whereabouts. They'd thoroughly investigated her case as best they could, but there had been little to go on.

The agents had done everything they could to identify and track down and trap her stalker. They'd put tracers on her phone lines, they'd had her install an extensive and expensive, top of the line security system on her property, and taught her basic self-defense tactics and evasive maneuvers. They'd detailed, documented, and filed every piece of information and evidence about her phantom caller that she could give them, along with the little they'd been able to dig up. They'd even sent this information to other investigative agencies, in the hopes that someone would be able to help them identify and stop *The Doctor* from stalking and threatening her, but this had only led to dead ends.

The agents had worked hard to discover the identity of her stalker, but without



success. They'd set up traps and worked with the police to catch and nab the guy, but to no avail - he continued to evade capture and detection each and every time. No matter how hard they tried, the detectives had been unable to identify or apprehend the man, for he'd always managed to stay one step ahead of them.

To make matters worse, after every failed attempt to identify or catch him, *The Doctor's* calls would increase, and his threats would become even more virulent and terrifying than they'd been before. However it wasn't until their third attempt to trap him, that *The Doctor* began to issue threats against the people who were trying to protect her and capture him. They were not idle threats either, for he'd been alarmingly well informed about who was helping her and how he could get to each and every one of them.

He not only addressed each detective by name, in his threatening phone calls, after their third attempt to catch him had failed, *The Doctor* also recited details about their professional and personal lives with such terrifying accuracy, it had considerably alarmed the agents. He knew every last detail of their lives - right down to the names of their families, friends and kids and even where their kids went to school, and what they did after school. How Kathy's stalker knew this information about them was as worrisome to the detectives, as were his escalating threats - which were no longer confined to their client.

*The Doctor's* threats became so bad, the agents had felt compelled to back off her case for her sake and theirs. While she'd understood their reasoning, their decision to quit her case (which is basically what they'd done, even though they'd kept her file open and continued to keep unobtrusive tabs on her and her situation from a distance) it had left Kathy feeling even more vulnerable and scared than she'd been before...

With a shake of her head, Kathy shook these unsettling memories away, and concentrated on what her sister was saying, as Sue doggedly continued on with her attempt to unravel the mystery behind their parent's apparent worry of her baby sister's welfare.

"You don't suppose it has anything to do with the rash of robberies your area has been experiencing lately do you?" Suzanne queried in a concerned but avidly curious tone.

"What are you talking about Sue? Mom and dad have no reason to be overly worried about me." Kathy lied, pretending ignorance of what her sister was talking about, as she continued on. "You must be imagining things Sue. Mom & Dad are not unduly concerned about me - at least no more than they are about anyone else in the family. They are simply fussing about the usual stuff they seem to worry about when it comes to all of us kids. They can't seem to comprehend the fact, that apart from Ben, we are all fully grown adults, and perfectly capable of taking care of our own lives without their help or interference.

"As for the rash of burglaries in my area..." Kathy added, as a means to divert her sister's attention away from puzzling over their parent's excessive concern regarding her welfare and safety. "...I'm not overly concerned about them, because so far all the robberies have been taking place in Shadow Crest, which is a considerable distance away from my own neighborhood. And even if I lived closer to *The Crest*, which I don't, the thief or thieves seem intent on only stealing the kind of expensive or exclusive artifacts, antiques, and jewelry, which are found in million dollar homes and mansions. There is

nothing in either my house or my neighbors, which would even remotely tempt a thief of this caliber...”

To change the topic completely, (because she didn't want to dwell on the burglaries, which were baffling Shadow Creek authorities, for these unsolved crimes only highlighted the frustrating fact that these same officials had been unable to solve her own run-in with the criminal element of Shadow Creek), Kathy asked her sister about her nieces, knowing how much Suzanne loved to talk about her daughters.

This ploy proved to be successful. However the longer Sue chatted about her daughters' latest accomplishments, instead of discussing the real reason she'd phoned, the more uneasy Kathy became. The very fact that Sue was taking so long to get to the point of her call, was making her decidedly nervous and wary.

Sue rambled on in this fashion, for several more minutes, before changing tactics (and topic) entirely by pretending to “suddenly” remember the real reason she'd called.

“Oh - I almost forgot - I have some really great news to share with you Kathy, and I bet you'll never guess what it is!” Sue exclaimed in a suspiciously jovial tone.

“You're pregnant again?”

“No, not this time! My news is even more important than that!”

“Monica is pregnant?” Kathy mused with wry humor, knowing the unlikelihood of this occurrence, as Monica, her third eldest sister, was very careful about such matters. Monica was not only an MD doctor, with a flourishing practice of her own, but in her spare time she volunteered her services at a shelter for unwed mothers and pregnant teenagers.

She counseled teenagers on a daily basis about the importance of using birth control and contraceptives, so the chances of her being pregnant was more than remote. Of course she *was* engaged to marry Tyler Ransome, and the two were madly in love with each other, so anything was possible, but the chances of Monica getting pregnant accidentally were extremely remote.

“Of course NOT! Monica and Tyler aren't even married yet...” Sue spluttered indignantly, for she was ultra conservative and prudish about such matters. Not to mention that she was something of a holier than thou hypocrite, who had no compassion or understanding of those who found themselves in such predicaments. Neither did Sue have a sense of humor.

“Whenever has that deterred someone from having a baby?” Kathy interrupted, deliberately misunderstanding and baiting her older sister, for she was well aware of her oldest sister's uncompromisingly prudish and hypocritical nature.

“HONESTLY KATH!!!” Suzanne exploded, her feathers completely ruffled by this unorthodox rejoinder. “I think you have an abominable sense of humor at times!! You **know** that's not what I meant!”

“Then you condone premarital...?” Kathy deliberately and shamelessly left the question open-ended, in order to provoke her sister still further, an endeavor which proved to be quite successful.

“Damn-It-All Kathy! That's not even remotely funny!! You know darn well that's not what I'm talking about!!! And in anticipation to your next question, nobody else in our family is expecting a baby, at least none I know about.”

“You mean you're not sure? Why Sue, I'm surprised at you! Normally no-one in the family or within your circle of friends knows before you do, whether or not someone is

pregnant, not even the expectant parents themselves!” Kathy intoned with mischievous glee, casting a jibe at her sister’s well known gossipy, nosey nature.

“**KATHRYN ROSE MEADOWS!!** I should just hang this phone up right now, and not let you in on the fabulous news I was told to give you!!” Sue spluttered in an utterly outraged tone of voice.

“I should be so lucky.” Kathy muttered darkly.

“What was that?! I swear Kathy - you’d try the patience of a Saint with that horrid attitude of yours, and Heaven knows I’m certainly no saint!”

“That’s for sure.” Kathy mumbled under her breath.

“**What** did you say?!” Suzanne enquired, her voice fairly quivering with outraged suspicion for she hadn’t quite caught what her sister had said, but she was ninety percent certain that it was something of an uncomplimentary nature.

“I didn’t say anything.” Kathy lied, before asking with a resigned sigh. “Sue why don’t you simply tell me what it is you’ve phoned about?”

Wisely deciding not to push her sister further, Sue continued in a peeved and affronted tone...

“**FINE!!** If I wasn’t commissioned by mom and dad to call you, I’d hang this phone up right now!!! As it is, they’ve nominated *Me* to be the official phone person for this year’s family reunion, so...”

“Ohmigod!! Is it **THAT** time of the year again?!” Kathy screeched in genuine alarm.

Due to all the problems she’d been having recently, (problems caused by her phantom caller), she’d completely forgotten about the dreaded upcoming reunion, until her sister just reminded her of it. Inwardly berating herself for not having prepared a legitimate excuse to avoid the reunion, Kathy listened with growing apprehension and dismay to her sister’s gleefully spoken pronouncements.

Well satisfied with the reaction she was getting, for she knew how much her baby sister disliked and dreaded big family gatherings, Sue continued on in a smug tone of voice... “Yeup! Mom and dad have made great plans for this year’s reunion, and I’ve been enlisted to help organize the big event! The date of the reunion is going to take place around the Fourth of July, so that everyone will be able to attend.”

“Also, dad is leasing a number of vans, for the duration of the reunion to accommodate the entire family. There will be no transportation problems this year, unlike last year’s fiasco!”

“Oh and Kath... ” - Sue paused here deliberately, for added impact, before continuing. - “...Mom and Dad expect everyone to attend the reunion! **No** excuses or exceptions will be accepted this year! And that’s a direct quote from mom!” Sue tacked this part on with considerable relish, for she was well aware of her youngest sister’s aversion of attending the annual family reunions. When the only response she got to this news, was a stony silence, Sue slyly added another clincher to her unwelcome revelations...

“I almost forgot. Mom also wanted me to tell you, Kathy, about the airline tickets she and dad are purchasing for anyone in the family who, and I quote, ‘...Cannot afford any major travel expenses this year, and who live too far away to visit easily or often...’ So you won’t be able to get out of attending the reunion this year, Kiddo, mom and dad have made sure of that!”

Kathy was self-employed, so both women knew she wouldn’t be able to use getting

time off from work or work related issues as an excuse to get out of attending the reunion. Nor could she use lack of funds as an excuse either - her parent's free air-fare offer had made sure of that! Her parents had deliberately waited to remind her of the upcoming reunion, until it was only a few weeks away. By waiting until now to remind her (and having Sue be the one to do this for them), they knew she wouldn't have time to come up with a legitimate excuse to avoid attending it, and the free airline tickets insured her attendance.

Suzanne paused a moment to let her sister fully absorb this intelligence, before dropping the crux of her bombshell. "...Oh and one more thing Kathy - Mom & Dad have also offered to provide extra tickets to anyone in the family who'd like to invite a particular friend or companion to accompany them to the reunion this year."

Kathy had no difficulty in deciphering the emphasis her elder sister had placed upon the word "particular", for both women were well aware of their parents penchant for matchmaking. Robert and Mary Meadows' main ambition in life, or so it seemed to their children, was to see their reluctant offspring firmly ensconced in holy matrimony - especially their youngest daughter, who had no desire to enter into such a state!

That they'd been remarkably successful in the past, having married off seven of their ten children, only made Kathy more determined to avoid any setting which could even remotely promote their matchmaking agenda, and big family gatherings, such as this year's reunion, was rife with all kinds of romantic possibilities, because these reunions invariably encompassed neighbors and family friends, along with any unattached and eligible man within a fifty mile radius of the Meadow's horse ranch in Colorado.

Had the reunions been family only events, then Kathy wouldn't have been so unenthusiastic or apprehensive about attending them. However, they were **never** family only events. Nope the Meadow Family Reunions were always chock full of friends, neighbors, and a multitude of both business and social acquaintances. Nor were these reunions conducted within a day or weekend. They were always about two weeks or more in duration, and full of all kinds of activities ranging from barbeques and trail rides, to golf and swimming parties and culminating in a big lavish party or extravaganza of some kind, at the end of them. And nine times out of ten, these 'grand finales' usually served the dual purpose of promoting or generating money and awareness for various charities as well - for her parents loved planning and holding charity fund raisers.

Last year's had been a western themed charity dance, and the year before that had been a charity trade auction which had auctioned off a variety of different services or goods donated from local businesses and trades people. From charity carnivals (full of games, rides, and booths - including a kissing one) to square dancing barbeques, and elaborately themed dances or balls...the Meadows Family Reunions were **far** from being family only affairs.

It was a well known fact that her parent's "family reunions" invariably turned into such huge charitable social and society events, that they ended up bearing little resemblance to anyone's idea of a family reunion! Which is why she'd avoided them like the plague in the past. In fact she would have done so this time round had she been prepared for it, but thanks to her stalker, Kathy didn't have any legitimate excuses ready that would allow her to miss the family reunion this year.

There was no way out of it. With sinking dismay, Kathy realized her luck had run out, for there was nothing she could do to avoid attending the reunion this year. Worse

yet, unless she brought a date along to the reunion, her parents would drag out every available bachelor they could lay their hands on, and parade them around for her perusal. Since she wasn't currently seeing anyone on a regular basis, there was no one she could ask to come with her, to act as a buffer .

On second thought, Kathy mused, it was fortunate she wasn't currently dating anyone at the moment, because if she had been seeing someone, she would've felt obliged to invite him to the reunion. There was **no way** she'd willingly bring any male friend of hers to the annual family gathering, to meet her marriage-minded parents! Worse yet, due to the way her parents had presented the free airfare, it would be impossible to resurrect the imaginary boyfriend she'd used in the past to keep her relatives at bay. If she did so, they'd expect her to produce him in person this time, by bringing him along to the reunion with her.

No matter how she looked at it, Kathy knew she was DOOMED!! Without the buffer-zone of a date, her love life (or lack of one) would be declared open season by her parents, and soon everyone would be taking pot-shots at it, for Mary and Robert Meadows had no qualms whatsoever about enlisting the aid of friends and family members, in their quest to change their youngest daughter's single status to a married one!

"...the Mulligans, Witherspoons, Huntingtons, and Osbournes plan to drop by..." Suzanne blithely continued on, unconcerned by her sister's adverse responses to her disclosures.

Sighing resignedly, Kathy glumly resumed listening to her older sister, as that lady droned on about the reunion. However, she wished she'd been paying closer attention to her sister's earlier ramblings, when Sue suddenly exclaimed -

"Oh Kathy!!! I can't believe I almost forgot to tell you the best part about the reunion! Monica and Tyler have finally set their wedding date! The wedding is going to take place at the end of the reunion, so that everyone will be able to attend the ceremony. It will be the grand finale of the reunion this year!! Isn't that the most fantastic news you've ever heard?!"

"Fantastic." Kathy parroted unenthusiastically, for while she was happy for her sister, and was delighted that Tyler would soon become her brother-in-law, she wasn't a bit happy about their proposed wedding date. A marriage ceremony and the following reception, was the very **last** place she wanted to be, when in the presence of her matchmaking relatives!

Suzanne rambled on for awhile longer, before the two sisters civilly bade each other good-bye and hung up. Placing the cordless phone on the table beside her, Kathy sank back onto the porch glider, and quietly mulled over the unwanted information she'd just received.

Her dog, Neo, (the one who'd bayed at the sound of her phone ringing earlier) was lying down beside the glider, and when she set the phone down on the table beside her, he sat up, and rested his giant snout on her lap. Idly patting the top of the dog's head, and scratching behind his big floppy ears, Kathy contemplated all she'd just learned.

Setting aside the grimmer aspects and ramifications of the phone call, she lifted her glass of iced tea in a silent salute to her parents, at the clever way they'd insured everyone's attendance to this year's reunion. As she and her older brother, Bruce, were the only members of the immediate family who were currently still single (besides their

ten year old brother, Ben) and who lived in states other than Colorado, Kathy knew precisely whom her parents were targeting with their free air-fare offers and their decree that no excuses to avoid the family reunion would be accepted this year. Her parents had made it abundantly clear that every family member's attendance to the reunion was mandatory this year, and they'd deliberately pulled the proverbial rug out from underneath their reluctant offspring.

She and Bruce had both successfully used the excuse of distance and finances, in order to avoid the family reunions in the past. Her sister Monica, before she met and fell in love with Tyler, had used these excuses too, in order to skip out on, or not show up at, past family reunions. Unfortunately, their parents were well aware of these facts, for not much got past Mary or Robert's eagle-eyed notice, especially when it came to their kids!

Armed with the knowledge of their offspring's reluctance to attend functions of this nature, and up on all the tactics and stratagems they'd used in the past to legitimately avoid attending them, Robert & Mary had outsmarted their kids this year. They'd made it virtually impossible for any of their offspring to anything BUT attend this year's reunion. Hence the free airfare offers.

On top of this, her parents had cleverly enlisted Suzanne to be the one to relate this decree to Bruce and herself, instead of themselves. By having Suzanne be the one to impart their edicts to their stubborn, staunchly single offspring, this had effectively stymied any and all chances Kathy or her brother had of being able to refuse to attend the reunion (which they might have been able to do had Mary or Robert contacted them directly).

However, her parents **knew** that by enlisting their gossipy, bossy daughter, Suzanne, to do their dirty work, neither of their youngest unmarried offspring would be able to come up with a good enough or legitimate excuse to get out of attending this year's reunion - not unless they wanted their real or faked excuses to become public knowledge.

Not to mention that their busybody sister was quite capable of railroading them into attending - for if there was one thing Sue excelled at - especially whenever she was put in charge of an important social function, she never took "No" for an answer, and woe to anyone who tried to do so! Tenacity and sheer mule-headed stubbornness was part and parcel of Sue's genetic makeup. Whenever she was put in charge of any important or prominent social event (especially when it involved their parents)- Sue turned into a one-woman commando squad. Suzanne was a virtual human bulldozer when it came to getting things done - and done to her complete and exacting specifications and expectations.

A fact Kathy's parents were quite aware of - hence their recruiting Sue into not only helping them organize the upcoming family reunion, but in steamrolling their reluctant offspring into attending it! The creative way her parents had boxed both her brother and herself in, was not very subtle, but it was definitely effective! With a rueful grin, Kathy mentally congratulated her parents on the clever way they'd masterfully planned and executed this major coup!

As the evening shadows lengthened, Kathy found herself thinking about and suddenly missing her parents. As she thought about them, the prospect of being with her family, even jam-packed with all their neighbors, friends, associates, and the inevitable legion of bachelors her parents would be sure to parade around, somehow didn't seem like such an awful idea after all. And the more she thought on it, the more appealing the

prospect of attending the family reunion became.

Consequently, this is how, some two and a half weeks later, Kathy found herself making arrangements with her next door neighbor, and best friend, Annie Smith, to take care of her pets while she was gone, and then driving almost three hours south to SeaTac International Airport, to board a commercial jet bound for Colorado. SeaTac was the closest major airport to her home, for while Shadow Creek had an airport of its own, it was used primarily for small, privately owned aircraft.

At Sea-Tac, Kathy parked her car in the airport's economy priced, long-term parking lot, and used an airport shuttle bus to taxi her to the drop off area for Western Eagle Airlines. After checking in her luggage, and going through security, Kathy walked down the long concourse terminal to the last gate, where she was to catch her flight.

Having flown many times before, she knew she'd have about an hour's wait, before her flight arrived, so she sat down on one of the airport's uncomfortable chairs, and pensively waited for its arrival. Which was an unnerving prospect, given her current circumstances.

As she pensively waited for her flight to arrive, Kathy found herself guardedly watching all the people around her. She kept a wary eye on (and a safe distance from) anyone who even remotely looked or acted like someone who could be in the medical profession. Even this far away from her home, Kathy found she couldn't erase *The Doctor* from her mind. Like a tongue probing a particularly painful canker sore, she couldn't stop thinking about him, or rather about the threats he'd made on her life, and because of this, Kathy couldn't help but watch everyone around her with an almost paranoid suspicion.

**It was a nerve-racking endeavor!**

In desperation, to get her mind off her nemesis, Kathy picked up a magazine, left behind by some other traveler, and flipped through it. There were several articles in the magazine about celebrities, and in one of the commentaries she noted with vague interest that the famous and highly popular, Garland Roses rock group was going to be performing a concert on the Fourth of July this year. Their concert would take place at the Candlewood Amphitheatre which was close to where her parents lived.

However, while she enjoyed Garland Roses' music, Kathy had no desire or plans to attend their concert in Colorado, so she philosophically shrugged her shoulders, and thought no more about the rock group, turning the page to read the next article in the magazine. Had she known how important the seven famous rock stars of Garland Roses would soon become to her, perhaps she would have paid more attention to this article, but as she did not, Kathy read blithely on, unaware of what fate held in store for her in the coming weeks ahead.

As soon as her flight was announced, Kathy set the magazine aside, and gathered together her carryon luggage, and promptly boarded the plane. Within a short time, the big airline jet was towed out of its gate and turned around, before taxiing to the runway....

As her flight took off, Kathy sank back in her assigned seat, and began to feel some of the tension ease from her body. It had been over a month since her last encounter with "*The Doctor*", and the farther away she flew from her home, the safer she began to feel, and for the first time in weeks, Kathy was able to sit back, relax and breathe easier again...

\*\*\*

Her peace of mind would have been completely shattered, had she been home just then, for as her plane soared high above the clouds of Washington, her answering machine kicked on. Deranged laughter rumbled out of the recorder, and echoed eerily around the empty expanse of her house. When the chilling sounds subsided, a disguised and menacing voice spoke up...

“Hey Dolly Lady - Guess what?! The Doctor is back, and **this** time, you **won't** escape the fun he has planned for you! **Let my games begin!** And let's start with a little riddle I created **just** for you...”

“Knock, Knock.”

” Who's there?”

“Why it's *The Doc!*”

“And what does *The Doctor* want with you ?”

“Why Miss Meadows, I'll give you a clue, but you'll need to listen carefully, for it's hidden in this poem I've created just to you!”

“My Roses are Red”

“In Blood-Like Hues”

“**Their** Thorns are all dead”

“And So Are **You...**”

More deranged laughter trickled out of the machine, before the menacing voice continued his sadistically poetic message, in a sickening sing-song tone...

“My Roses are Red”

“For Violence is Due,”

“Cause *The Doctor* Has Plans,”

“To Make **You**, Miss Meadows, **Dead Blue...**”

There was a long pause, and then in a totally altered and even more ominous tone, he added.

“You thought telling the cops about me, then having your phone lines tapped, and installing that fancy security system in your home, would save you! It's only made me madder Bitch, and all the more determined to get you!”

“And make no mistake, I **AM** going to get you, Dolly Witch, for when you **least** expect it, - you **ARE** going to get what you deserve! Those keystone cops will not be able to protect you this time, for if they try - I will eliminate them one by one until there's none left. And should I have to do this, you will pay dearly for their demise!”

“You've interfered in my business for the last time Bitch!! I can't wait to wrap my hands around your pretty throat to slit it inch by little inch with my pearl-handled switchblade, so I can watch you die a slow and agonizing death! Have you ever seen someone drown in their own blood before ? I have and it's not a pretty sight, but I'll enjoy watching **you** die this way...”

The man paused here significantly, before adding in an even deadlier, and more malevolent tone of voice.

“**It's time to even the score Meadows - be prepared to die....**”

The answering machine gave a whirring BEEP, and finished it's sinister recording.



## CHAPTER ONE

Candlewood Amphitheatre  
Candlewood, Colorado  
The Garland Roses' Forth Of July Concert

**'Unbelievable!'** Kathy grimly mused to herself. Here she was stuck in the middle of an outdoor concert arena - in blazing hot weather, surrounded by a huge mass of unruly teenagers, waiting for the concert's main attraction to begin. What made her angrier, was the fact that her current misery was completely due to her family's shenanigans! It simply wasn't fair!!

With a wry grimace, Kathy remembered the magazine article she'd read at the airport earlier in the week, while waiting for her flight to arrive, back in Washington. It had detailed tonight's Garland Roses concert. With a longsuffering sigh, she recalled noting the concert date and location with detached interest at the time, having been completely (and blissfully) unaware of her family's plans to lasso her into attending it! The irony of this, did not escape her notice.

Perhaps ignorance sometimes **was** bliss, Kathy mused to herself. Then again **had** she known in advance what her family had in store for her - she'd have fled as far away as she could, the instant she read that article, and hid out somewhere where her family could not find or reach her...like the farthest regions of Antarctica!

Kathy glumly gazed around the outdoor concert arena of the Candlewood Amphitheatre with glazed eyes and a disgruntled sigh. It was stifling hot and overly crowded, nor was she happy about being roped into chaperoning her three teenaged nieces, Cassie, Mandy, and Julie, to the Garland Roses concert.

Any peaceful feelings she'd experienced earlier in the week, when she'd left her home in Washington to visit her family in Colorado, had long since dissipated! In fact, they'd disappeared altogether, the second she'd walked off the plane six days ago, (was it only six? - it felt more like an eternity had passed since then) to be warmly greeted by her parents and a muscle-bound man (bachelor #1) whom they'd introduced to her and brought along with them, in a blatant matchmaking attempt.

Even worse, **he** had merely been the first of she didn't know how many eligible men (she'd lost count after the sixth one) her parents and family had brought out and paraded around her during the past four days...so many of them had there been!

She'd been dodging all these would-be Romeos, along with her family's matchmaking attempts, ever since she got off the plane! She was exhausted and nearly at the end of her patience (and sanity) because of it!!

And now here she was - stuck in the middle of a rock concert, in an outdoor auditorium, playing chaperone to three teenaged girls, in a desperate bid to dodge the latest of her parent's matchmaking stratagems. At the moment her nieces were busily cavorting with the other teens mingling in the crowd around them. They were having a terrific time, unlike their thoroughly disgruntled aunt!

Normally, Kathy would've enjoyed mixing with the younger set of her family, for they were a great bunch of kids, and she dearly loved them. Tonight though, she was in

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