

## Chapter 4

I headed off the highway to find some gas.

I looked around. It sure was green here.

Not like New York City.

And not like the green of the suburbs.

That green was false. Arranged. Landscaped.

Neatly ordered.

No. I was in the country now. This was different.

Natural.

Tall trees and green grass everywhere.

It was as different from my life as it could possibly be.

It was new for me. But I liked it.

It seemed peaceful.

Elise Leonard

Quiet.

Like life here would be simple. Without problems.

A part of me longed for that.

A large part of me.

Okay, to be honest? *All* of me longed for that.

A simple, quiet life? A peaceful life? Without stress? Without pain?

Was it possible?

I looked around.

I pulled my car off the road.

I stopped my car and opened my window.

The air smelled different here.

Better.

Cleaner.

I took deep breaths. My chest rose and fell with each breath.

I felt some strength come back into me.

It felt great!

I hadn't realized how shallow I'd been breathing.

How shallow I'd been breathing since Patti left.

## Start of a New Dan

It felt good to breathe fully.

Felt good to get clean air into my lungs.

Once again I wondered. Could life be simple?

Peaceful?

Was it possible?

Just then, a bird chirped loudly.

Like he was telling me. “Yes, Dan! *Yes*, it’s possible!”

I squinted and tried to find the bird.

But the trees were full.

He was well hidden.

“Good for you!” I called to the bird.

My voice rang out in the stillness.

It was so quiet there.

I must have startled the birds. Because three birds squawked and flew from the tree.

I watched and wondered.

Wondered which one had spoken to me.

They all looked alike. Just birds.

I wondered if birds looked at people and thought the same thing. To them we must all look alike. Just people.

Elise Leonard

Then my mind wandered to Patti.

Thoughts of Patti.

I wondered what it was about her that made me love her so.

I wondered why I missed her so.

I wondered why I couldn't seem to let her go. Even though it would be easier on me to do so.

I put my car in gear and eased back onto the country road.

My gas light was blinking now. I had to find gas.

Up ahead was a gas station.

I pulled in and got out of my car. Parking the car next to the pump.

There was no one else there. Plus, it didn't seem like there'd be a mad rush of customers. So I left the car there. Next to the pump.

In New York, you couldn't do that.

There were too many people.

Always someone coming up right behind you.

So you couldn't leave your car by the pump. It was rude.

## Start of a New Dan

Plus, you'd probably get shot.

The thought made me smile.

I don't know why. But it did.

Maybe because that would be the perfect way to end my pain.

Shot to death. At a gas station for not moving my car.

But there was no chance of that happening here.

Not out here in the boonies. Wherever "here" was.

I had no clue.