

# Chapter Two

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Earlier this morning we went shopping at the Safeway market, they recently upgraded it and we were able to re-stock for the coming week. God was it cold compared to our Aruban honeymoon. When we came home, Andrew unpacked and I reorganized the kitchen, then, my iPhone rang. Esther was checking in. She wanted to make sure that we arrived home safely and then asked if she and Sarah Arnold could bring their dogs over to play in our backyard. I think they actually wanted to hear about our honeymoon. Without asking Andrew, I told Esther, "Yes" that we'd love to meet our new neighbor, "Denny." I made lunch for both of us while Andrew finished unpacking, putting away our clothes from Aruba and stashing the suitcases downstairs. Thirty minutes later, without the doorbell ringing, I heard the commotion that little dogs create while waiting for a door to open. I've never experienced owning a dog, and other than Jane and Bryant's Queenie, their black Lab, I really knew nothing about dogs. This was all new to me.

Denny is a nine-week-old Klee Kai, a "miniature Husky". Apparently, Esther had been to the Denver AKC dog show with our

neighbor Sarah Arnold who owns Champy. There was a handler there who was showing a Klee Kai for the breeder from Montana. Fortuitously, the actual owner was present, so not only did Sarah and Esther meet him, but he graciously spent forty-five minutes with them discussing the breed. Esther was sold; she loved spending time with Sarah's dog Champy, but she felt it was time for her own pet. I think Esther recognized that living 100 yards away from us was wonderful, but we were starting a new life as husband and wife, and it was time for her to begin living more independently of us. This was her first step. She told me that Denny resembles both a small Siberian Husky and a Malamute. According to Esther's new vet, Denny weighed ten pounds, and he estimated that when fully grown he would be about eighteen pounds and measure about fifteen inches at his withers.

Denny scampered right over to the glass doors off the dining area that led to our deck and down to the yard. Champy followed, and like experienced visitors, Denny used his paws to whack at the glass doors until Andrew let the dogs outside. It was only forty degrees outside; Andrew and I added down parkas while Sarah and Esther both wore battery heated vests. Despite the full sun, it was a chilly winter day in Colorado. I noticed that Esther and Sarah lifted the dogs down the steps, more for Denny than Champy who was older and a master of steps, up or down. Once on the lawn, the dogs were intrigued by the smells, the water, our Koi fish, the variety of boulders and then Esther noticed our addition, the tea house. I explained that it was a gift from Andrew and built by the man who had designed our Japanese garden, Ebi Kondo. Sixty years ago, Ebi's grandfather had been hired by the city of Denver to con-

struct a Japanese Garden inside Denver's Botanical Gardens. His grandson, Ebi, still practiced his grandfather's designs. We all walked down to admire it up close. This was now "my" tea house, so I began to explain.

"I haven't named it yet, but this was a gift from Andrew. A few months ago, when our garden designer was reviewing steps to winterize our garden and Koi pond, he and Andrew came up with the idea. To make it a surprise, he built it himself while we were in Aruba. It has solar power for heat, light and has enough electrical storage to make tea while we enjoy its special tranquility."

Then, I slid open the doors to have everyone peak inside. Denny and Champy scampered over the bridge and looked in as well. Since there were no food odors yet, just the aroma of cedar, they were quickly bored and ran off to explore more of the gardens. Then I noticed that the Koi fish seemed excited by our company. Andrew fed the fish, and both dogs watched with confused expressions as little golden bodies appeared at the surface with open mouths looking up. They jostled each other for each bite.

When we walked back to the deck, Andrew set up two additional chairs. We sat on our deck and watched the dogs scurry about.

I began "We had a terrific time. Aruba was the perfect destination with the right temperature to walk, swim in their pools or the ocean, and dine on delicious food every evening. The Aruban people are all so friendly and helpful. Andrew found us a great destination boutique hotel, Ocean Z. Every day was better than the last, and I feel we have bonded."

Esther and Sarah both asked a few questions and I continued," But, now we're back to our realities. I told Andrew that I have to drive out to District Two office in Greeley tomorrow and stay over a few nights. Then I'll go down to the small town of Kit Larson. There's a small Troop office there that sits just off I-70 above the Oklahoma border. Our Troopers now suspect that this may be a route for fentanyl smuggling. I want to hear from them how they are doing with highway stops."

Andrew turned and asked Esther if she had found a trainer for Denny. Sarah replied that they had both met a local woman, Beth Ryan, who would do private training, starting this Thursday. The vet that Sarah had been using confirmed that Beth was a great choice for training. My husband went inside briefly and returned with coffee, snacks and a couple of plastic tubs to hold water for the dogs.

After our company had gone home, Andrew and I ate a quiet dinner together. I explained to him the details of where I was driving. He came downstairs with me after dinner and went over what I was packing into my Dodge Charger. Knowing I might run into bad weather, I had a prepared checklist for each car during our winters. My husband seemed overly protective and asked several times if I was sure I needed to make the visit. We made sure that the fuel tank was full and that I had the winter "extras" on board. Then Andrew and I walked back to the living room. He turned on our gas fireplace and snuggled next to me. "Abbi" I heard him begin, "I've been thinking about Carter Private Investigations. I really liked being with you on the Cripple Creek case. How would you feel about having me as your partner in the agency? You're not going to pay me, but I would feel that I was contributing to your success. If my

workload is light, I would really like to be with you and work cases together."

"Andrew" I began "I didn't know you had the interest; I know that you are uncomfortable about guns. Andrew, because I am a State Trooper, wherever I go, I always carry my pistol. You understand that this is part of my life whether I am a Trooper or Carter private detective that day. When we sit in either Jeep, if we are together, I have to be aware of my surroundings, I can't turn that off. If you are Ok with that, I would love to have you help me work my cases, but I don't want to ruin your law practice."

Andrew whispered softly that he just wanted and needed to be with me.

The next morning, I woke before Andrew. I gently woke him and asked if he wanted to go for our morning jog. We walked in Aruba but never made the time to jog. Now, with the temperature only thirty-five degrees, I waited a few minutes for Andrew to decide. Finally, as I was coming out of our bathroom, I heard, "Ok, I'm up, give me five. Was he really getting ready to go with me on a brisk morning jog." "It's thirty-five degrees out, but it's bright now" I announced, and then walked out to our kitchen and turn on the coffee brewer.

"Wow" I said to myself as my new husband walked in dressed to go jogging with me. Marriage does have benefits. We put on our vests, hats and gloves; I added my iPhone and Sig Sauer, and we were off. Andrew announced, "No snow yet but watch out for ice, Abbi."

When we reached the rear gate, I had to stop and turned to Andrew as we both stood by my tea house. I gave him a hug and kiss. "Thanks, it's perfect, my "kanji", it means tranquility in

Japanese." I whispered into Andrew's ear. Then, we crossed the street and entered my favorite jogging route in White Mountain Park. When I bought the condo, I didn't realize that most days I would be jogging alone. During this time of morning the park usually has no one. Now, I am happy to have Andrew by my side, and we are jogging at the same pace. It's great having my husband with me.

Forty-five minutes later, we were home, and I said to Andrew, "I need to shower first, then grab some coffee, I'll be off to District Two in Pueblo to see Major Lyons." I swallowed two sips of coffee and headed toward our bathroom while Andrew leisurely looked at his phone. Fifteen minutes later, I kissed Andrew goodbye and told him I would call him from the road. I reminded him I would be out tonight and tomorrow night, and planned to be home late Wednesday or midday Thursday.

The ride down to Pueblo was only about three and a half hours, but my job, like everyone else who is a Highway Patrol officer, is to observe. On a good portion of my drive on I-25, I remained in the right lane and kept my eyes tuned to what was happening. Although there was no snow it was bitter outside. I saw a car on the shoulder, and I pulled behind an older blue VW Tiguan SUV. The engine was running, and I could see at least one person, the driver. I put my emergency lights on, which for my black cruiser was a set of blue and red interior strobe lights on the front and rear interior decks. Then, by the book, I used the police radio to contact District Two and identified myself, gave my location by the mile marker, and asked for a uniformed officer to meet me for what appeared to be a stranded motorist. As a precaution, I opened my trunk and put on my tactical vest. The Troop office radioed back that that an

officer was enroute and gave an ETA of six minutes. I used the radio's pager speaker to announce myself to the driver, along with several safety directives. Then, I approached.

I touched the rear deck with my bare hand to print the car with my identity; then, used my baton to tap on the window. "Colorado Highway Patrol, driver please lower your window." There was no response. I struck the window again and raised my voice. Again, no response. I started to walk around to the other side when a marked Highway Patrol vehicle pulled up. I shouted over the road noise, "Lieutenant Carter, I called in a stranded motorist. The driver is unresponsive to lowering the window. Would you walk the vehicle again with me?"

"Trooper Ralph Henson ma'am, I mean Lieutenant, Yes, right away." The young Trooper cautiously walked to the passenger side, while keeping one hand on the grip of his Glock service pistol. As I walked toward the driver's window. Henson shouted to me, "There's a bullet hole through the passenger side window!"

"Open the doors with me!" I yelled. As we unlatched the doors, the driver made no sounds but fell into my arms, bleeding from her right side.

"Call EMS!" He used his radio attached to his shoulder epaulet and called for assistance. "11-41, 11-41, 10-53 south bound I-25, marker 153, one down." Henson ran back to his unit and retrieved his first aid kit. I carried the driver in my arms back to the rear of my car, and when Henson came to me, I directed him to reposition his cruiser to give us more highway protection. I asked him to get an ETA on the ambulance, and at the same time, I ripped open a trauma bandage from his first aid kit to try to stanch the bleeding. Fortunately,

moments later, his radio announced that the ambulance was enroute already on I-25 and was only a few minutes out. Then I screamed, "Henson, secure the driver's vehicle!"

As I prayed that she'd have enough time, I thought I heard the wail from a siren in the distance. Then I heard Henson yelling to me as he was carrying a young child in his arms. I told him to take the child to his cruiser, and lock his doors. "And after you make sure he's not wounded, turn on your heater full blast!"

I was on auto pilot but screamed, "Grab her purse, get her identity and then sit with her child."

It wasn't even noon, and now it was snowing.