

Eleven



HOPPING ON DANNI'S windowsill, two colorful birds chirped in the sunshine. But, not knowing a purple martin from a finch — a fact Joe would find both amusing *and* disappointing — Danni sent her easiest-to-grab footwear sailing. Crashing against the inside glass, the worn-out sneaker sent the spring visitors scattering. Danni was up. And, apparently, all was *not* well with her world. A restless night of tossing and turning had left her crankier than usual.

Unaware of her host's state of mind, April started with phase two of her early morning's mission. She'd already taken a shower — phase one. Now, it was time to cook breakfast. The rest of the day was to be spent looking for work and maybe doing more cleaning — phases three and

four. She jumped back as frost-covered sausage links in the frying pan sizzled. Reducing the flame under the sputtering, formerly-abandoned food, April opened the refrigerator. But, any notions of French toast quickly went down the drain – along with a foul, lumpy liquid Danni’s fridge claimed as milk. Gagging, she tossed the empty, white and blue carton and set four eggs on the counter – writing *MILK* on a blank sheet of paper.

Sliding her growing grocery list under a magnet, April inspected the icebox. Halloween candy decorated the fruit bin. Eggs, ketchup and beer on the top shelf indicated to the assessor that her hostess had little interest in being healthy.

Carrying two bags of edibles, Danni’s deejay neighbor, Scott, exited the building’s elevator and slowly headed up the hall. Chips, microwavable meals, pasta, canned goods, soda, beer, wine, cookies, cheese and coffee – all the foods the twenty-something bachelor wanted – filled his arms to near-overflowing. As a man who’d never coaxed an overnight, female visitor to stay beyond afternoon cereal, he assumed his buys were plenty. He didn’t *dislike* women’s company. He mostly questioned his conversation skills – when his club groupies sobered.

Danni’s neighbor of two years, Scott wasn’t a bad-looking guy. He was cocky, but insecure – with occasional good intentions. When he wasn’t out working at some dive,

most of his ploys entailed removing his pants — or at least *unzipping* them. He had no qualms about his behavior. Readying his keys, he listened for movement from Danni's unit while he dawdled. Easily unlocking his door, he inferred that his favorite girl was already up — cooking breakfast. Coveting an invitation, Scott conjured what she was wearing.

He'd always had an inclination for the wild ones. And the nightclubs provided plenty. But, none of them were quite like his wily temptress, he recalled. Even though she no longer gave him the time of day, Danni had been one of his preferred partners. They'd slept together *once*. Still, he figured their separation was solely based on his playmate's desire for more space. Rearranging his purchase, Scott entered his apartment, failing to notice his newspaper lying on the hall floor.

House music vibrated though Danni's bedroom wall. Scott was announcing his return. He wasn't giving up on wooing her — in his own way.

"Damn it. Turn that shit down!" an annoyed neighbor shouted.

Giving up on trying to sleep, Danni tossed back her covers. "I guess I'm gonna have to kill him," she explained, admiring April's egg-scrambling expertise. Sitting, she miserably set her head on the cool kitchen counter. "He's really left me no choice. But, the good news? There's not a

court in the world that would consider convicting me for doing it.”

“So, who’s the lucky corpse?” April joked. But, the truth *was* Danni despised herself for ever giving Scott that last-call, inebriated look.

“Someone you never need to know,” she admonished.

“Cream and sugar, right?” April happily extended a pre-mixed cup of coffee in Danni’s direction. Using the unopened, powdered creamer she’d found in a cabinet over the stove, she’d done some of her finest sleuthing work. She’d only missed by the sugar and cream. The artificial sweetener paled by comparison in Danni’s eyes. But, she hadn’t the heart to say she’d rather drink her hot coffee black. Instead, she took the cup. “Be careful. It’s probably too hot,” April warned as Danni drank. Unfazed, Danni gulped several sips.

“Oh yeah. I almost forgot.” It was her chance to repay some of April’s unasked acts of kindness. Setting down her coffee, Danni headed for the door.

“Where are you going?” April aspired to follow, but wanted Danni to *stay* more. She turned off the flame under the eggs. “You’re not really going to kill your neighbor, are you?” Suddenly nervous, she watched Danni open the door. The coast was clear – as far as Danni’s darting eyes could see.