

Ten



HOPPING ON DANNI'S outside windowsill, two colorful birds chirped and sang in the warm sunshine. But, not knowing a purple martin from a finch – a fact Joe would find both incredibly amusing *and* disappointing – Danni sent her easiest-to-grab footwear sailing. Crashing against the inside glass, the worn-out sneaker sent her spring visitors scattering.

Danni was up. And, apparently, all was not well in her world. A restless night of tossing and turning had left her even more cranky than usual. And the thought of breakfast, despite pleasant company, was becoming less and less desirable with each and every conscious second.

Unaware of her host's state of mind, April got 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 – phase two. And the rest of the day was supposed to be spent looking for work and maybe doing a little more cleaning – three and four.

She jumped back as the frost-covered sausage links – found at the back of the freezer – sizzled and popped in her frying pan. Turning down the heat, April opened the refrigerator. But, any notions of French toast quickly went down the drain – along with the chunky solution that Danni's fridge was claiming as milk. Gagging, April tossed the empty carton into the trash. And, setting four eggs on the counter, she wrote *MILK* on an unfinished grocery list.

Sliding the list under a refrigerator magnet, April felt slightly satisfied. There were a lot more things Danni needed in that house. But, an eager project leader had to begin her work somewhere.

Halloween candy in the fruit bin. Eggs, ketchup and beer on the shelf. April would never let Stephen eat like that nor anyone else. So, whether Danni liked it or not, some of the food in her home would be healthy. She just hoped Danni would like it. And she hoped that she'd eat it, too.

Carrying his own groceries, Danni's deejay neighbor, Scott, exited the building's elevator and made his way up the hall. Microwavable meals, canned goods, chips, soda, pasta and coffee – all the foods most twenty-something bachelors needed filled his bags to overflowing. As a man who seldom had a female visitor stay the night, Scott's buys were plenty.

Danni's neighbor of two years, Scott wasn't a bad looking guy. He was a little cocky. A lot insecure. With good intentions. But, most of those intentions resided in his pants. Reaching for his keys as he passed her unit, Scott listened for movement as he dawdled while unlocking his door. She was up, he inferred, delighted. By movement in Danni's kitchen, he assumed she was cooking her breakfast. Coveting an invitation, Scott pondered what she was wearing.

He'd always had a thing for the wild ones. And the nightclub scene provided plenty. But, none of them were quite like Danni, he recalled. Even though she no longer gave him the time of day, she was still one of his favorites. He figured she just needed more space.

Nearly dropping his bags, Scott entered his apartment, forgetting his newspaper on the floor and his common sense someplace else. House music vibrated through Danni's bedroom wall once again. Her neighbor was announcing his return. And he wanted her, specifically, to know it.

“Turn that shit down!” the neighbor on Scott’s other side shouted. Giving up on trying to go back to sleep, Danni tossed back her covers and plotted her day.

“I guess I’m just gonna have to kill him,” Danni explained, admiring April’s egg-scrambling expertise. Sitting, she miserably set her head on the kitchen counter. “He’s left me no choice. And there’s not a court in the world that would convict.”

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

“Someone you never need to know,” Danni clarified.

“Cream and sugar, right?” April offered. Pre-mixed, she happily extended a filled coffee cup in Danni’s direction. Using the unopened, powdered creamer she’d found in a cabinet over the stove, April had done some of her best sleuthing work. She’d only missed by the sugar and cream. Looking up, Danni hadn’t the heart to tell her guest she drank her coffee black. She took the cup. “Be careful,” April warned as Danni drank. “It’s hot.” To her surprise, Danni gulped several sips.

“Mm. I almost forgot.” It was Danni’s chance to make up for, in some small way, all the things April had done since