

# Tulips in the Sand

A Riley Matthews Mystery

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Tulips in the Sand  
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“Ok, here you go, Mrs. Murphy, just sign on the bottom and you’ll be all set.”

She smiled without thinking. A big grin that must have taken the sales girl by surprise because she asked, “Mrs. Murphy, is everything okay?”

“Oh, yes,” realizing her actions seemed odd, she added, “everything is just perfect.”

With that, she signed the charge receipt, took her package, mumbled a thank you and left the store. Once outside, the sun warmed her face, and her smile returned. She remembered the simple comment the sales girl had made which caused her to smile so happily. The simple action of calling her “Mrs. Murphy”, that was it, just hearing those words referring to her, was enough to cause her to be overcome with happiness and smile beyond control. As she continued down the tree lined street, she thought back to a time many years ago when becoming “Mrs. Murphy” seemed like a dream that would never come true.

## **Ten years earlier.**

It was Kim's idea to go to the Squeaky Hinge Bar and Grill. Riley had thought about it for a moment and was not too keen on the idea.

"Oh, Riley, come on! We'll go, listen to some music, have a drink or two and be home early. It's not a big deal, and it'll be fun."

"Okay Kim, we'll go, but you're driving."

"See you then, be ready" Riley said as she hung up the phone, chuckling to herself. For some reason the comment, "be ready" coming from Kim was amusing, since Kim was almost never on time. It was a standing joke that whatever time Kim said to be ready, figure fifteen more minutes before she would arrive. Looking at the clock Riley realized she had plenty of time to take a nap before tonight's outing. She set her alarm for 7 o'clock and dozed off.

Surprisingly enough, Kim was on time, eight thirty on the dot the doorbell rang. The girls did a last minute hair and makeup check and out the door they went.

The Squeaky Hinge was more than twenty minutes away, but Kim was sure it would be fun and worth the drive, so Riley agreed. Kim had found the place through some friends and figured it would do Riley some good to go someplace other than the normal local hangouts. Riley had been dating a local bartender, Tony and although he was nice enough, she was not sure if he was "the one" for her, he had his mood swings and was not always pleasant to be around. However she found by dating him no one asked her for ID when she went to a local bar and being twenty in a state where the legal drinking age is twenty-one, this was an added benefit. When Riley had asked Kim about getting in to the bar without ID, Kim said her friend Kelly knew the house band and had introduced her, so therefore they could walk in with them, no questions asked.

The Squeaky Hinge was a restaurant with a large bar area. It sat in the middle of a strip mall with a dozen or so other stores and restaurants, nothing special.

Their timing was impeccable, as they drove into the parking lot; Kim honked her horn at a guy unloading his truck.

"Hey Danny!" she yelled out the window, "how's it going?"

Riley looked at the man, he appeared to be in his late twenties or early thirties. He had a stocky build with brown hair. Riley was not sure as to what he was unloading from his truck, but they looked like large black boxes. Kim parked two spots over and as they got out of the car, Danny was headed towards them.

“Hey Kim, what’s up?” He leaned over to kiss her, it appeared he was going for the lips, but Kim was too quick and he got her cheek instead. He laughed, as though he was used to getting “the cheek” and then realized that there was another person standing with Kim. “Who’s your friend?”

Riley felt as though she was a piece of meat being checked out by a butcher. Danny was giving her the once over and she was not too thrilled with the inspection.

“This is my friend Riley.”

Danny smiled and leaned over to kiss Riley, again aiming for the lips. Riley, however, was aware of where he was going and turned her cheek to him; once again, Danny got “the cheek”.

“Nice to meet you,” he said. “Are you from here?”

Riley replied simply, not wanting to engage in conversation with this guy who seemed to enjoy talking to her chest. “Originally, up north, but I’ve been here a couple of years.”

Danny seemed satisfied with her answer. Either that or he was distracted by the time, because he asked no more questions. He turned back to his truck, grabbed another of the big black boxes, which Riley now realized were speakers and headed towards the back door.

“Come on, you two, grab something and follow me,” he said as he walked away.

“Here,” said Kim and handed Riley a duffel bag, “Come on!” She called behind her as she raced toward the open back door.

Once inside, Riley glanced around. “Not too bad, Kim, kind of family-ish in the day, party-ish at night type of place.”

“See, I told you you’d like it.”

“Ask me again in an hour, when your friend Danny stops ogling me.”

“Don’t flatter yourself; he does that to anything female. Good thing you’re not wearing a skirt or he’d be all over you like bees on honey.”

Riley was suddenly grateful she had chosen her jeans and sweater over the mini-skirt she had almost worn. “So, what kind of music does this band play?”

“Mostly older stuff, but every now and then they throw something new in. You’ll like it.”

Just then the hostess approached and asked, "how many?"

Kim answered her and within a moment she was off. They followed her to a booth near the stage. They sat down, smiled at the waiter and ordered a couple of drinks. While they waited for their drinks Riley noticed that Danny was the only one setting up on stage; everyone else had apparently set up and left the stage.

The smoky environment made Riley lose track of time, soon the band was playing and the dance floor was full. It seemed like only a few moments later when Danny announced the band was taking a break.

"Ok, Kim, I'll admit they are good."

"I knew you'd like them. Believe it or not, they all have other jobs; the band thing is just a weekend gig. Come on, I'll introduce you to everyone else."

"Let's skip that for now, I want to run to the ladies room. I'll be back in a minute." Riley got up and headed toward the flashing neon signs indicating men and women's rooms.

As she headed back to the table, Riley could see the band had already converged upon Kim and she seemed to be enjoying the attention. Riley decided to grab some fresh air before going back to sit with her. She spotted the front door and headed for it.

Outside the front door was a park bench, Riley was about to sit down when she heard a voice, "be careful, that bench is wet."

Riley turned in the direction of the voice and that's when she saw him. He was tall, over six feet, with black hair, blue eyes and a very sexy voice.

"Um, thanks," was all she managed to say.

"Quite welcome," was his reply. "I'm Taylor. And you are?" He extended his hand to shake hers.

"Riley Matthews." Her hand met his; she could not believe the intense feeling in her stomach at that very moment. She was at a loss for words.

"Riley. Pretty name for a pretty lady."

"Thanks," she heard herself utter as she leaned against the building for support. He was incredible. No one had ever called her a pretty lady before; in fact she had always considered herself to be quite plain. She had dark brown hair and

eyes, was a medium size four build and just over five foot six. Nothing special to look at, or so she had thought. Until tonight.

“Listen Riley, I’ve got to get back inside, but it’s been nice talking with you, maybe we can do it again sometime.”

“Yeah, sure, anytime,” she said.

He turned and walked back into the restaurant. In an instant he was gone, she was alone and the night air turned from cool to cold in just a brief moment. A chill ran through her spine and she turned to go back into the building.

“Riley, where were you?” Kim asked. “I was worried when you didn’t come back.”

“Sorry Kim. I took the long way to the john.” She sat down as the lights dimmed, signaling the band was about to start again.

As they sat and chatted, the band played behind them. One song blended into the next, Riley wasn’t listening very closely and she doubted Kim was either as they were engrossed in conversation, leaning into each other over the table trying to hear over the music. Until the voice spoke again. Riley was in mid sentence when she heard her name over the microphone. She turned and saw Taylor on stage, ‘where did he come from?’ she thought as she looked at the stage, ‘was he up there before and I just didn’t notice him? What is he saying?’ She listened more intently and heard him say his next song was for his brown-eyed girl, Riley.

She felt a blush come over her face as she glanced up and found Kim looking at her, asking “how do you know him?”

“I met him when I went outside during the break. I really didn’t think anything of it though,” she lied. She really had thought a lot of it. There was something about him that made her stomach do flip-flops. He was special.

They finished the song, sang a few more and announced they were ending for the night.

Riley looked at her watch, it was after one in the morning! They paid the bill, Kim said she was going to the ladies room and would be right back. Riley began to walk towards the back door, Danny was standing next to Taylor and she figured this was a good opportunity to say goodbye. She walked over. The two men turned and smiled at her.

“How did you like our music?” Danny asked.

“You guys sounded really good. Do you play every weekend?” Riley asked.

“Usually we do, occasionally Taylor’s wife throws a fit about him being out so late and then we have to skip a weekend to make her happy.” Danny chuckled and walked away, leaving Taylor looking embarrassed.

“Oh, you’re married.” It wasn’t even a question, more of a disappointed remark and Riley didn’t even know why she said it out loud, but she did.

“Couple of years. Her name is Jeni. I’ve also got a little girl, she’s two and her name is Kelsey.”

“That’s nice,” she replied as she looked for Kim to come back. All Riley wanted to do at that moment was crawl into a hole, especially since she looked at his hand and there was the ring, big as life, how did she miss it? Just then Kim rounded the corner and Riley felt relieved.

“I’d better go, it’s late and we have a long drive. Bye,” she said as she raced out the door towards Kim.

“Kim!” she shouted, “Let’s go.”

Kim looked up, surprised. “Is everything ok?”

“Yeah, I’m just tired,” she said as they walked to the car.

“Ok, it’s open,” Kim said as she unlocked the car doors.

Kim started the engine and waved to Danny as they drove out of the parking lot. Riley closed her eyes and never noticed Taylor standing at the back door, watching them leave.....