

## **FOUR, NO MORE**

*August 18, 2041*

Leaving the bookstore, I devised a plan to confront Serena. I called Aaron and Emily who repeatedly encouraged us to contact them if we wanted or needed a break from the twins for several hours. I needed them now, and they were thrilled to drop by the house in two hours' time, with their five-year-old daughter as an extra helper. When told of the babysitting arrangement, Serena adopted the guilty, doting mother persona for a minute or two before succumbing to the serenity of a break. She assumed, incorrectly, that I wanted us to steal time away from the twins for a long-overdue casual date. Ironically, Serena spent extra time primping when in fact she was getting ready for an interrogation.

"So, where are we going?" Serena asked several times between the house and driving away.

"You'll see, it's a secret," I replied, masking my anger and sadness. When we arrived at the park I had visited two days ago, I invited her to go for a walk.

"Oh, that's sweet. I really love this place."

Out of the car, she took my hand immediately. I feigned a connection without submitting to our finger play, and we began our march to the spot where I had stopped to read Compton's letter for the third time. Pointing to a large rock, I suggested we sit. My heart racing, I confronted my fears without delay, "Serena, I was curious, do you know a Father Daniel?"

A moment's hesitation preceded Serena's reply, "Father Daniel, ah, why do you ask?"

Because I was nearly certain Serena had gone to see Father Daniel at the hotel, and I had anticipated her response, I charged ahead, delivering my prepared remark with conviction, "This is not likely to go well, but it will probably be less painful if you're honest

now.” Delivering those words I peered into her eyes to convey my seriousness. I turned away with the intent of giving her space to make the next move. We sat there for several minutes waiting for the other to do or say something.

I broke the silence, determined it would be my last comment until she spoke. “Why don’t you tell me the full story about what happened? Everything.” I was in no mood to be gracious, but I was willing to hear her side of the story. I realized that framing the conversation this way would be disconcerting for her. Without knowing what I knew she would be second guessing herself about whether she was divulging too much information. Serena was smart; she knew I had set her up to confess and explain her motives, or risk obliterating our love to the point where we could never reconstruct something worth having.

She began slowly, “Yes, I know Father Daniel. We met at that cancer fundraiser I went to last year. We talked briefly about my research and I remember being really surprised when he told me he was thinking about leaving the priesthood.” She paused, hoping, I assume, that I might give her a clue about what I knew before she was forced to say more. My silence evidently told her I was not going to make this easy, so she added, “He was really interested in my research and he asked me if he could drop by the lab sometime and get a tour. I guess it was a couple weeks later that he called and we agreed that he could come by for a tour the next day. Well, the next day turned out to be a nightmare for me; it was the day my car got hit in the parking lot so I had to deal with the insurance guy; my lab tech went to the hospital after fainting at work that morning, and then some other things came up too. Anyway, when he called to confirm our meeting, I told him about my car and that I was swamped so he suggested we meet for lunch near the insurance agency instead. We met at Jansen’s and talked about my research some, but mostly about his wanting to leave the priesthood. He seemed kinda needy, just wanting someone to talk to. I’m not sure why he turned to me, but I listened and he was pretty open about it. And then we met up a couple more times for lunch over the next few months and we communicated a little through email. I didn’t tell you about it because I felt I should protect his privacy. I told him about