

WATCHDOLLS

by

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“It is remarkable how stunning you look.”

Kelly smiled, then blushed, not knowing how to respond to such a statement.

“And your smile ...”

“Stop it,” Kelly insisted. “You’re embarrassing me.”

Kelly gazed at Bryan Downing from across the dinner table and wondered how she had gotten so lucky to land a date with him. Her initial thought was fate, but since leaving an abusive husband, she no longer believed in fate. She had to be careful now. She had to remind herself to hold back her emotions and save something for herself. But the more she looked into Bryan’s eyes, his *caring* eyes, the more she felt herself irresistibly opening up.

Kelly was a decent looking woman. She was tall at 5’ 10” with long flowing auburn hair, a petite nose, slender shoulders to match her slender body. She was well aware of the pooch below her navel, but she vowed she would get one of those exercise machines on one of those late night infomercials.

After the divorce, she had spent the next several months alone in her bedroom watching and reading sappy romances. She didn’t leave the house for anything except the essentials and if it hadn’t been for her girlfriend telling her to quit moping around and to get on with her life, she would still be on her bed, mopping up her tears.

Kelly decided her friend was right. And once she was on her feet again, she looked into the services of a professional dating service. What harm could it do? She obviously couldn’t pick her mate herself. Luckily, the service set her up with Bryan Downing, quite possibly the cutest man alive.

Bryan was blessed with long, black, wavy hair, a short trimmed goatee and dark, daring, brown eyes. Devastatingly handsome.

“I’m embarrassing *you*?” Bryan asked, shaking his head. “I’m probably no better at this than you are. I’m a first-timer as well.”

Kelly smiled, and then asked him what he did for a living.

Bryan hesitated before answering. "I'm actually a car salesman," he said, pausing, and then breaking into short laughter.

"Really?" said Kelly, smirking. "What's so funny?"

Bryan waved his hands at her. "Nothing," he said. "Go on. I'm just being stupid." He smiled, his teeth glistening.

Kelly was transfixed on his teeth. She could easily see herself licking those pearly whites. "Don't you like your job?" she asked.

Bryan fidgeted with his fork. "Yeah, I guess." He looked into Kelly's sea of blue eyes. "But I don't just sell cars," he said. "I own the whole lot."

Kelly didn't quite understand, but smiled and nodded, nevertheless.

"My name is Bryan *Downing*," he said, stressing his last name.

Then it registered. "Oh!" said Kelly, finally realizing Bryan was the owner of the biggest auto mall in the state. "Holy shit," she said, quickly covering her mouth as if being caught doing something naughty.

"Yeah, it's a pretty big deal," he said. "I'm busy *all* the time. So that pretty much leaves me out of the dating pool."

Wow, Kelly thought. *Good looking AND rich*. "So why me?" she asked. "Or rather, why a dating service? You could get any woman you want."

"Because I'm tired of the old ritual of the fix-up and the bar thing," Bryan said. "That's just not my style, really." He paused and looked intently into Kelly's eyes. "But enough about me. What's up with you? You're the most gorgeous thing I've ever seen around here. Why are you here?" He smiled again, melting her.

"Pretty much the same thing," she said. "I'm coming off a divorce and I just wanted to try something different for a change."

"Well," said Bryan. "I'm certainly glad you did." He reached across the table and took hold of Kelly's hand, his thumb caressing her palm.

Kelly's smile brightened. "Me, too," she said, staring deep into his eyes. After a moment, she asked, "Would you excuse me, please?"

"Sure," said Bryan, taking her hand and rising with her.

Kelly glided past the arrangement of couples and into the restroom. She gazed at herself through the mirror as she adjusted her make-up. She was having very bad thoughts right now, but she was a big girl and could take responsibility for her actions. If she went home with him, she wondered if anyone, most notably her girlfriend, would think any less of her.

Also, there was the scare of the serial killer, who was making his rounds around the vicinity. She didn't know much about him because she hated to watch the news and read the paper. It was always filled with violence and negativity, things she could use less of in her mind. Besides, if she went home with Bryan, *he* would keep her safe, right?

Kelly returned to the table and finished her meal and drink. They talked and laughed, and she realized she had more in common with him than she ever thought possible.

She dropped her fork and when she bent over to pick it up, a wave of nausea fell over her. Suddenly she felt like vomiting. Her head began to swim and she found herself floating.

Probably too many drinks, she told herself. *I said I wasn't going to do that.*

“What’s wrong?” Bryan asked.

“Nothing,” she said. “I’m just feeling a bit woozy, I think.”

“Should I take you home?”

Kelly smiled, looking at her date. He seemed to be rising from his chair, then falling back into it. It was funny, but at the same time, it wasn’t.

“Let me take you home,” he said, signaling the waitress. “We can do this another time. I promise.”

Kelly’s heart went out to him. He was so sweet. She couldn’t have found a better man if they were lined up in front of her.

“Just tell me where you live and I’ll take you there,” said Bryan.

Kelly’s mind went to the stalking killer. Bryan would protect her. “Okay,” she said. “Whatever you say.” She took hold of his hand and shoulder as he led her out of the restaurant to his purple Jaguar. “Beautiful car,” she marveled, drunk, her feet falling over themselves.

She fell into the passenger seat, rattled off her address and fell hard into sleep.

Kelly awoke with that same sense of floating. She looked up and saw Bryan’s smiling face. She realized he was carrying her up a flight of stairs.

But there were no stairs in her house.

“Where are we?” she asked.

“Sssshhhhhh ... just relax,” came Bryan’s sweet, soothing voice.

Kelly’s eyes widened. She wanted to know where she was. The staircase was of elegant stature, twisting along a wall full of portraits of strange people. She began to wriggle in Bryan’s arms.

“This is my place,” he said. “It was closer and I thought you’d be more comfortable here. And safer, I think.”

Kelly could have sworn she had told him to take her to *her* house. There *could* have been a sight mix up, but she didn’t think so.

You were drunk, she reminded herself. Don’t you feel that headache? You wanted to go to his place and you told him so.

If she had, she was sorry. Right now she wanted to be tucked away in her own bed. She didn’t feel like being manipulated.

Bryan climbed the stairs and glided across the hallway with Kelly in his arms. He gazed into her eyes and embraced her with a long deep kiss.

The moment was magical. Fireworks exploded in Kelly’s head. He smelled so good. His touch was so soft. Suddenly she felt he could do anything to her and she wouldn’t mind.

Ravish me, she thought wickedly.

Bryan kicked open the double doors to his master suite and gently placed Kelly on the huge spread of red satin sheets.

She was overwhelmed by the magnitude of the bedroom, though she had little time to take in its beauty for Bryan was on top of her, smothering her with passionate kisses.

She no longer cared what happened from here on out. She was living in the moment and that was fine by her. She believed she had the greatest guy in the world taking care of her, making sure she was safe. How much more comfort did she need?

Kelly found herself ripping Bryan's clothes off. As she slid his pants off, his erect penis bobbed in front of her. She couldn't deny the fact that she wanted this just as much as Bryan, if not more. She slid him into her mouth.

Bryan's head lolled back and forth. Kelly felt him quiver as she tried wholeheartedly to swallow the head of his dick.

"You just don't know how good that feels," he said.

"Just shut up," she said.

After a few moments, Bryan returned the favor, pinning her feet behind her head, making her body favor that of a rocking chair.

Soon they were fucking so hard that Kelly's screams seemed to fill the entire universe. It was the best sex she could remember in her recent past. But then—

Bryan had begun to act strange. He was no longer concentrating on giving her the "big bad bone" as he called it. His attention fell on the surroundings of the room. His wild eyes circled around the room frantically as if he was experiencing a deep paranoia. He began to murmur. His sweat became cold, his skin clammy. Kelly could actually feel him shrink inside her. He came seconds later, then hurried out of the room, hiding his face, apologizing as he went.

Later that night, the two of them were fading into sleep. Bryan was softly snoring while Kelly snuggled up to his chest. She decided not to intervene and ask him what the hell went wrong, why he all of a sudden disassociated himself from the beautiful moment they were having. When he had returned from his episode, he seemed fine and acted as if nothing had happened.

Kelly thought she should leave well enough alone. If Bryan wanted to tell her, then he would.

Then, from somewhere in the house, a door slammed.

Kelly snapped awake and looked nervously around the room. The bedroom door was closed. Had it been closed the entire time? She didn't know. She thought the sound had come from out in the hallway.

Her mind flew to the latest news headlines, to the serial killer stalking the neighborhood. She didn't know precisely where she was in the city, but the authorities hadn't any leads. Kelly didn't think the killer could get into a house loaded with state of the art security equipment.

But a door slammed. Which meant someone was *inside* the house.

Maybe Bryan forgot to set the alarm. A good possibility knowing that he was carrying her and probably had other things on his mind.

That put Kelly into another train of thought. What if Bryan had intentionally brought her here to take advantage of her? The thought sickened her. Suddenly she felt violated. And then another thought popped into her mind. *Did Bryan rape me?*

"No," she whispered, shaking her head. It was consensual. She willingly sucked his dick because she *wanted* to, *needed* to. There was no rape involved. If anyone raped anyone, it was her to him. Though she tried to convince herself of

this, she still felt desecrated. She needed to get out. She needed to go home. It didn't matter what sounds were coming from the hallway, there was just one thing on her mind right now and that was to get home, to get underneath her covers and never come out for a very long time.

Then a thought occurred to her. What if Bryan had a guest? Someone he didn't tell her about? Maybe she should wake him and ask him. But he looked so peaceful. She didn't want to bother him. If so, then that was pretty shitty of him for not telling her. She could only imagine what they must have thought with her screaming the way she was earlier.

Kelly eased herself out of bed as quietly as she could and padded across the room to the door. She turned the knob slowly and pulled the door open just enough to slide through. She threw Bryan a quick glance before disappearing into the hallway.

The hallway was a few degrees cooler and much darker. The house itself was still and quiet. She strode down the small corridor in search of the much needed bathroom.

Kelly came to the first door on the left, turned the knob and found it locked. She looked down the hall and could see four more doors. She tried them all; locked.

At the far end of the hallway was another door, construed in darkness. *That has to be it*, she thought, wondering why it was so far from the bedroom, then wondering why a bedroom the size of Bryan's didn't have its own bathroom.

Kelly stepped along the thick carpet and just before she reached the door, it swung slightly ajar.

Her breath caught in her throat as goose bumps filtered across her skin. "Hello?" she managed, her heart pumping madly.

No answer.

She gathered her courage and sidled up to the small opening. She stared into the darkness of the room, then pushed the door open the rest of the way.

Her hand fumbled for a light switch.

Kelly flipped it, and then bright light flooded the large room. She gasped, her trembling hand moving up to cover her mouth.

Her vision was filled with the most repulsive images she had ever seen. She had opened a door into a world she never would have imagined Bryan partaking in.

The room was about forty square feet of endless smut, each wall lined with erotic posters. In one corner, there were shelves and tabletops of videos, incense, candles, and blow up dolls standing upright. Alongside them was an assortment of dildos. In another corner, there were colored locker boxes stacked upon each other. She, in no way, wanted to know what was inside them.

She stood trembling at the disgusting sight before her. She tried to convince herself that the Bryan Downing whom she met and wanted to care deeply for didn't really delve into these kinds of things. She thought herself absurd for being so naïve. She knew she didn't really know Bryan very well—just a couple hours, but what was she to expect? The perfect guy? Or course not. She knew there was no such thing, but it seemed to her that Bryan would have told her about this obsessive perversion of his. Wouldn't he?

Why would he? she thought. "My God."

There were stacks of magazines, predominately Playboys, piled up on one of the tables. From the massive amounts, she suspected Bryan had every one them since the famous Monroe issue.

There, up on the side wall, to the left of the door as she came in, were three centerfolds hanging gracefully, each with their own mounted candleholder on both sides—a kind of shrine for each of them.

There on the same wall were newspaper clippings. Kelly stepped over to them, her eyes scanning the headlines. “Oh, my God,” she whispered, her head filling with a panicky horror.

The headlines read: **8 FEMALES STILL MISSING: 2 FOUND DEAD, DECAPITATED!**

**ABDUCTOR STILL AT LARGE, NO LEADS!
KILLER IS ALPHABETICALLY KILLING HIS VICTIMS! NEXT IS
“K”!**

Goose bumps spread across Kelly’s body as her eyes skimmed the data. Simply put, she had to get out. And quick.

“See anything you like?” Bryan said behind her.

Kelly screamed, jumping back several feet at the sound of his voice.

Thinking quickly, she said, “I really ought to be going. It’s getting late and I have to work tomorrow morning.”

But as she headed toward the door, Bryan stepped in front of her, cutting her off. “No, please stay longer,” he insisted, closing the door behind him and sliding the dead bolt firmly into its latch. He smiled and looked around the room as if seeing it for the first time. “Well, what do you think? You like?”

Trying with all her mental might, not knowing what to say, Kelly decided to try her first response again. “I told you, I have to leave. I have to get up early and —“

“And I told *you*,” said Bryan, his deadly gaze fixed on her. “You’re not going anywhere.”

Kelly could feel a wave of tears coming on. She looked at Bryan with deep concern. Not for what he was, but for what he led her to believe. Finally, her tears broke. “Please,” she begged. “Let me go.” She sat down and exhausted the rest of her emotion into her hands, her body shaking as the realization of entrapment settled within her.

“You know too much, *Kelly!*” he said, stressing her name. “You just had to go snooping around, didn’t you, *Kelly?*”

Kelly looked up into Bryan’s diabolical eyes, those murderous eyes and asked, “Why?”

Ignoring the question, he went over to the locker boxes. “I want to show you something.” He took the top box down, unlatched it and swung the lid open.

Kelly dashed for the door. She got her hands on the dead bolt when suddenly Bryan’s hands covered hers, pressing hard on them. She screamed when she saw Bryan dangling a human head by the hair. Kelly ran back to the opposite wall, sobbing uncontrollably.

“This was Amy, my first,” Bryan said maniacally, holding the head up like a prized fish. “Boy! She sure was a scrapper!” He took out another one named “Betty” and then the next he called “Christy”.

But Kelly was no longer paying attention. How could it have come to this? How could she let herself get into these kinds of situations? She willingly went out on a blind date knowing there was a killer on the loose. Could she be any more ignorant?

She never thought it would happen to her. Women like her were strong and could take care of themselves. It was all a part of that independence thing.

As Bryan unloaded his past victims one by one, telling his little stories about each one of them, Kelly realized she was never going to see the outside world again. She would never see her friends or family again.

Right this second her father was in the hospital at Cleveland and she had promised him she would visit him this weekend because it could very likely be the last weekend of his life. Another wave of tears overtook her.

She had to stay strong. She would not let her situation get her down. Escape was a very real possibility. There was only a dead bolt standing between her and freedom. Surely she could find a way to get there. If not, she would have to be like Amy, a scrapper, and fight her way out. Surely there were things in this room she could use as weapons.

When Bryan was not looking, she bolted for the door. She managed to get her hand on the dead bolt when a bullet penetrated the wood beside her head. She screamed, feeling as if she had already been shot and then slid down the locked door, defeat feeling her mind. She continued to sob.

“I can see that I’m gonna have to call for my watchdolls,” said Bryan, putting the gun into his front jeans pocket. He called out three names and, one by one, they emerged from behind small pieces of furniture.

If Kelly were to survive, she didn’t think she would have been able to explain what she saw.

From behind the chairs and end tables came three little, doll-like *things*.

Kelly stared in shock. She didn’t know what they were or whether or not they were even real.

I’m hallucinating, she thought dismally, realizing what had happened—or what she *thought* had happened. *Bryan put a drug in my drink at the restaurant while I was in the bathroom.* That was the only explanation she could conjure up to explain what she was now witnessing.

The doll-like women, standing two feet tall, walked toward her. They were symmetrically perfect for their height in that they were beautiful. There was a blonde, a brunette, and a redhead. They approached Kelly with sour looks painted on their faces.

Though Kelly recognized these women from somewhere. She looked up at the wall where the shrines were and saw three pictures, but no women. It was as if the girls had jumped from the page.

That was the last thing Kelly remembered before blacking out.

Kelly came to and saw Bryan staring lackadaisically down at her. Her memory came flooding back and she began to scream, but not before Bryan could smash his hand down onto her mouth.

“Sssshhhhh ...” he hushed. “Screaming is futile at this point, my dear.”

Kelly struggled hysterically to no avail. She suddenly realized she was bound by ropes and naked.

“Now you have to promise me you won’t scream,” said Bryan.

Kelly looked into his eyes and realized this was a completely different Bryan from the one she knew—or *thought* she knew. She wondered if the mad man she was looking at did, indeed, kill all those women. She found it absurd, but on the other hand, after gazing into his maniacal eyes, she found it not hard to believe at all.

The three little women from her dream were standing atop a chair, their small white faces staring excitedly down at her naked body.

Kelly closed her eyes and willed them away, but when she opened them again, the tiny women still remained. She began to scream.

“Stop fucking screaming!” Bryan yelled, putting his hand back on her mouth.

Kelly did finally manage to stop.

Bryan lifted his sweaty hand from her mouth, waiting for her to scream again. “That’s good,” he said. “Now. These lovely girls are my very special playmates, my watchdolls as I have said.” He smiled cynically.

“What do you want?” Kelly asked, trying to keep her thoughts trained on Bryan and not those evil-looking watchdolls.

Bryan cocked his eyebrows at his playmates. “Jeanie,” he said.

The redhead jumped down from the chair, then Bryan helped her up onto the table in which Kelly was tied.

To Kelly, the sight was disgusting. It was as if the watchdolls were some sort of freak medical experiment. They looked like lanky Barbie dolls that have magically come to life.

Bryan helped the other two women to the space between Kelly’s bound legs.

Kelly wanted to kick them far across the room and smash their little faces in. *Only in my mind*, she thought. *They’re not real. They can’t be! This is absurd! My God, when am I going to get out of here?*

“She is pretty,” Jeanie admitted.

“Yeah, she’s not bad,” said Tina, the brunette. “She’s a brunette, like me. But I’m still prettier.”

“Both of you, shut up!” said Manda, the blonde. She walked along Kelly’s chest. “Listen to me, Kelly. I’m Manda. Bryan calls me ‘Amazing Manda’ because I can suck his big, huge cock like no other.” She leaned forward smiling, looking into Kelly’s eyes. “And I watched *you* do a good number on him, too.”

Kelly shuddered.

“I’m the brains of this operation,” said Manda. “And what I say goes. Without question, understand?”

Bryan nodded in agreement. It seemed that Bryan was under some kind of trance with the girls. It was like he was beside himself. He had no control. They

were using him as a puppet. *They* were most likely the ones responsible for the deaths. Not Bryan.

“So you’d best listen to me and do everything I say,” said Manda, pointing her tiny finger at Kelly.

“Okay,” Kelly agreed.

The three playmates smiled as did Bryan. “That’s good,” said Tina, looking to her counterparts. “What shall we do to her first?”

“She’s our new toy,” said Jeanie. “We’d like to fuck her just like you did, Bryan.”

“Yeah,” Tina agreed. “Like I said before, she isn’t as pretty as me, but she sure does have a nice looking pussy.”

Kelly writhed under the binding ropes. She couldn’t believe what these things were saying. She couldn’t help but bawl. She focused on Bryan. “Please don’t let them do this,” she begged.

The little women laughed, then Bryan joined in.

“At least untie me!” Kelly shouted. “I can’t enjoy anything tied up like this!” Already knowing she didn’t have much chance of survival, she was willing to do or say anything that would give her a fighting chance. Even if it was playing a lesbian for a period of time.

“Think we should?” Jeanie asked doubtfully.

The watchdolls huddled together while Bryan stood outside their small circle, seemingly brain dead.

“Bryan,” Kelly whispered.

Bryan didn’t acknowledge her. His eyes were bloodshot and staring off into space.

“Let’s untie her,” said Manda.

Kelly couldn’t believe her ears. Why were they doing this? Why were they giving her a golden opportunity?

Witchcraft.

Kelly wondered if that was what was powering these dolls.

“Bryan,” said Jeanie.

Bryan’s attention sparked at the sound of her voice.

They’ve got him programmed, Kelly thought. *My God.*

“Keep your gun on her,” said the redhead. “We don’t want her to try anything funny.”

The three playmates worked diligently at the ropes.

Kelly felt the tightness begin to loosen.

Bryan was ten feet away, gun poised on her.

The ropes were finally pulled from Kelly and she stood on her weak legs. She noticed the girls stood no higher than her thighs.

“We want you on the couch,” said Manda. She paused and looked toward the other girls. “Spread eagled,” she said.

Kelly hesitated, not knowing what to do. She looked over at Bryan again. His face was expressionless, his eyes vacant. “What have you done to Bryan?” she asked, her tone on the edge of demanding.

Jeanie smiled. “Nothing.” Then: “We gave him what he wanted, what he *craved.*”

Kelly waited impatiently for the answer.

“Sexual freedom,” said Jeanie, pushing Kelly backward onto the couch.

The watchdoll’s faces were marked with sheer perversion. It was a look that crossed the faces of horny, drunken men when they had the chance to see the forbidden pink of a beautiful young woman.

The playmates went to her, their tiny hands and fingers caressing Kelly’s entire body. They felt like spiders walking along her skin and when she felt the warm wetness of one of their tongues plunge inside her, she began to weep. She cried as her privacy was being invaded by something she had never thought imaginable.

Though, she held herself together, not with thoughts of escape, but by what she was going to do *once* she escaped.

As her joyous thoughts freed her, she suddenly felt sensuous. And then everything felt all right again ... as if none of this was happening. Was her mind playing tricks on her? Was this supposed to be a pleasant situation? In her heart, she knew that what was taking place was wrong, but still, there was that sensuousness. She had never had a woman go down on her before and there was something quite pleasant about it. Was it wrong to feel this way?

She knew she couldn’t sit here and ponder her sexuality. She had to think about getting out. She glanced over at the door, then at Bryan. He hadn’t moved. He sat statuesquely, holding his gun.

Kelly knew the playmates were trying to reel her in as the next victim, but she just couldn’t let that happen. At least not without a fight.

She was about to move when she felt an enormous pain at her crotch. She bellowed out at the sudden stinging and slapped at the redhead who was down there.

Jeanie rose up and smiled a bloody smile.

Hot liquid stung Kelly’s private parts. With a growing panic, she realized she’d been bitten.

Then, without hesitation, the other two playmates started to bite her.

Kelly screamed in agony as she beat at their heads with her fists, but she couldn’t get them away. All three girls were eating her, their small mouths ripping at her flesh.

“Bryan!” Kelly called. “Get them off! Get them off! Please!”

The watchdolls laughed as Kelly finally managed to get away. She ran toward the door, fumbled with the dead bolt, but it was somehow jammed.

Witchcraft.

She stared at it miserably and found that it was welded in place. She frantically began to beat at the door. “Help! Someone please help me!”

“You silly, bitch!” said Manda. “No one is going to help you! You’re the eleventh victim!”

The three little women advanced toward Kelly, who cowered against the locked door. “Please,” she said. But as she watched them, she looked into their

small, slanted eyes. They were different. They were wilder and more menacing than before. More demonic.

“What do you want?” Kelly shouted. “Why don’t you just leave me alone!” Beside her there was a table with a small lamp on it. She yanked the cord from the wall and threw the lamp at the women.

Her eyes must have deceived her because she thought she saw the lamp go *through* them as if they were ghosts.

Witches. Witchcraft.

“This can’t be happening,” she muttered morosely. She fled to Bryan, jerked the gun from his limp hand and leveled it toward the three little women.

The playmates laughed as they ambled toward Kelly.

Manda suddenly grabbed a poker from the fireplace and ran full speed toward Kelly. It seemed as if Manda *flew* through the air. The poker stabbed Kelly in the gut just before she had time to react.

Kelly’s gun flew from her hand as she tended to the obstruction in her midsection.

They’re more than witches, Kelly thought shrewdly. They’re some sort of demon.

Kelly wrenched the poker free, gasping for air. Was this it? Her head ached and her vision swam in and out of focus. She looked toward the watchdolls and saw that their bodies were changing.

My mind is playing tricks on me again, she thought. I’m dying.

But it wasn’t. Not at all. The playmates *were* changing. The soft light skin they once had was now rough and scaly. Their soft, manicured nails grew into long black talons. Their hair fell from their scalps in tangled wires. Silver spikes pushed up from the back of their necks. Their noses grew spouts filled with spiny teeth. Their eyes grew dark as tiny yellow slits opened in their centers.

“Oh my God,” Kelly whispered, her heart palpitating wildly inside her.

A low, guttural growl vented from the creatures’ throats.

Kelly turned to face Bryan as she clutched at the gaping wound in her stomach. She saw that his eyes were rolled back into his head. She spotted the gun lying on the floor and made a quick stab for it. She picked it up and pointed it at the lizard things in front of her.

“Don’t even *think* about coming near me!” she stammered at the small creatures.

The creatures did not heed her warning. They slowly advanced on her.

Kelly fired the gun, but to no avail. Like the lamp, the bullets seemed to have gone *through* them.

“NO!” Kelly screamed. “NO! NO! NO!” She rang off round after round, emptying the gun.

Bryan moaned beside her. His eyes shifted to the lizard things. “What have I done?” he grumbled. He looked around and saw Kelly in a disheveled mess. “Oh God. What happened?”

“Bryan,” said Kelly, looking into his eyes and seeing that whatever hold the watchdolls had on him was now gone. “Please,” she said. “You have to do something.”

Bryan faced the creatures.

The lizards immediately stopped.

“Get out of the way or we will kill you, too,” said one of the creatures in a deep, demonic tone.

“Then you’ll have to do it,” said Bryan. “I won’t let you kill another one!”

None of the creatures moved. Their small tails and tongues lashed about aimlessly.

Bryan turned toward Kelly. “Don’t worry, Kelly,” he said. “I won’t let them hurt you anymore.” He smiled and that was the smile Kelly remembered at the dinner table. That was the smile she had connected with. “They can’t survive if I don’t want them to,” he said. He closed his eyes, held his hands in the air and began to mumble something indecipherable.

The lizard creatures ranted and dashed toward him, their razor teeth bared.

“Bryan, watch out!” Kelly screamed.

The three creatures were in the air, their sharp talons exposed at Bryan. But as soon as they were within inches of Bryan’s head, they disappeared.

Bryan lowered his head and opened his eyes.

Kelly laughed and put down the gun. She knelt on the couch and put her hands to her stomach. The pain was incredible. She needed medical attention as soon as possible. She looked up into Bryan’s forgiving eyes. “Could you take me to a hospital? I need to go right now.”

Bryan crouched before Kelly, embracing her. “That’ll be no problem,” he said. “I want you to know that I’m truly sorry for what went on here tonight. I just hope that I can make it up to you somehow.”

Kelly looked at him, then at the spot where those ugly reptiles had been. Just like that, they were gone. Bryan had, indeed, made it up to her. She gazed into his deep brown eyes and found understanding. She understood that Bryan was a victim of his own imagination. She couldn’t in a million years explain it, but she understood it. And for whatever it was worth, she accepted it. Somehow, she and Bryan would work out all their problems because she knew deep in her heart there was a special place reserved just for him.

Bryan went to the door and unlocked it as if the welded bolt was never there. The nightmare was finally over.

Kelly knew one day they would be able to forget any of this had ever happened. And she longed greatly for that day. She buried her head into her bloody hands and exerted a joyous wave of tears.

“Kelly,” said Bryan. “There *is* just one more thing.”

Kelly raised her head and saw Manda, Jeanie, and Tina dwelling around Bryan’s knees. She saw a huge gun dangling from Bryan’s long, bony fingers. Her gaze floated up to Bryan’s face that distorted into an ugly array of disfigurement and deception.

It was the face of Satan.

“I guess bad guys *do* finish first,” he said, raising the gun and firing.

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