

Chapter 1

Holly Achison put down the binoculars and rubbed her eyes. How great it would be to take a nap. Ten minutes was all she needed. But it was impossible to relax, crouched down in a dusty cornfield. Worst of all, bugs and spiders were everywhere. She shuddered at the thought. At least she had a bottle of water with her.

Some spy she was. But that's just what she was doing. She'd left the motel early that morning to keep an eye on Joe Stevens.

Suddenly she felt something hard pressing against her back.

“Don't move,” a man's voice said.

Holly froze. Her heart was pounding.

“What's your name?” the man asked.

“Holly Achison,” she said. “I can explain what—”

“Shut up!” the man said. “Now get up slowly.”

When Holly stood and turned to look, she saw Joe Stevens. It was the man she was supposed to be spying on. He waved a pair of wire cutters in the air.

“What the—” Holly started to say.

“You thought it was a gun? I guess I scared you,” he said. “It serves you right.”

Holly glanced over her shoulder. She was looking at the spot where she thought Joe had been. Odd. There was the figure of a man near the fence. Or rather, what looked like a man’s figure.

“It’s a scarecrow,” Joe said, as if he were reading her thoughts. “It *was* me you first saw. I was repairing the fence. But then I spotted you. So I decided to use the scarecrow as a decoy. It threw you off, didn’t it?”

“It sure did,” Holly said, forcing a smile.

Holly could have strangled the man. Unfortunately she needed his help.

“I first saw you a week ago,” he said. “And ever since you’ve been following me. What do you want?”

“It’s a long story,” Holly said.

“Just give me the short version,” Joe said.

“It’s about what happened to you three years ago,” Holly said. “I need to talk to you about it.”

“I knew it! You’re a reporter,” he said. “You people in the media are all the same. You only cover one side of a story. None of you care about getting the facts right.”

“Look, I know you—”

“Freeze! Put your hands in the air.”

The voice startled Joe and Holly. They quickly turned to see who was there. A man wearing a uniform and dark glasses stood just a few feet away. He looked like a security guard.

“This is private property,” he said. “You people are trespassing.”

“I’m sorry,” Holly said. “I didn’t know.”

The guard raised his rifle and aimed it at Holly and Joe.

“This is a research facility. The work going on here is top secret.”

In a cornfield? That was odd.

“I have strict orders to shoot trespassers on sight,” he said. He was now looking down the barrel of the gun.

Chapter 2

Holly stepped to one side, out of the line of fire. But the guard shifted his aim. “I told you—”

At that moment Joe lunged forward and knocked the man to the ground. The rifle flew out of his hand. As he started to get up, Joe jabbed the wire cutters into the man’s arm. He cried out in pain and fell backward.

“Get the gun!” Joe shouted to Holly.

Holly ran up and grabbed the rifle, then quickly backed away. Joe got to his feet, pulling the guard up with him.

“Put the gun down, and I’ll forget this ever happened,” the guard said. “Otherwise, you’re going to regret it.”

“Be quiet,” Holly said. Then she turned to Joe. “Now what?”

“I’m going to tie him up,” Joe said. He pulled some wire out of his pocket.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” she asked. “We’re in enough trouble as it is.”

“There’s no time to argue,” he said. “This guy’s the type who shoots first and asks questions later. Besides, I’m only tying him up. Sooner or later someone will come looking for him. At least we’ll get out of here alive.”

The guard’s hands were now tied behind his back. Joe took the rifle from Holly and threw it as far as he could into the cornfield. Then he headed toward the road.

“Wait for me!” Holly called out.

Joe walked faster. “Go away!” he yelled over his shoulder.

“Who owns that cornfield?” Holly asked as she ran after Joe. “Is there really a research company there?”

Joe didn't answer. Holly followed him onto his property and over to the scarecrow. A silly smile and big brown eyes had been painted on its face.

Holly thought she would try to break the tension with a joke. "Now I see how I was fooled. The scarecrow looks a lot like you."

Joe couldn't help but smile. But then he got serious again. "He does his job. Why don't you go somewhere else and do yours?"

"Look, I *am* a reporter. But that's not why I'm here," Holly said.

"Oh sure," Joe said. He picked up the scarecrow and tossed it into the back of his pickup. "How did you get here? Did you walk from town?" he asked.

"My car is parked down the road," she said.

Joe took the wire cutters out of his pocket and put them into his toolbox. "There's no telling what that guard will do once he gets loose. I'm pretty sure that