

# WALK THE LINE

By

Jenny Plumb

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# CHAPTER ONE

Loud knocking at the front door woke Andie from a peaceful sleep. A glance at the alarm clock told her it was five-forty in the morning. When another burst of pounding rattled the door in its hinges, she tossed the covers off, and sat up. While she was putting her bathrobe on, David passed by her room on his way to the stairs. Nina was right behind him, but stopped to wait for Andie. The two women started down the stairs together, but stopped halfway when David opened the door and said, "How can I help you, officer?"

"I'm Officer Carver with the Portland Police. We were called about some shouting. Can I come in to see if everyone is all right?"

"Shouting, at our house?" David asked, clearly shocked.

"Yes, sir."

David shook his head. "That's completely untrue. We've been home all night, and there hasn't been any shouting whatsoever." He gestured to the women on the stairs and said, "It's just the three of us living here, and as you can see, we're all fine."

Officer Carver looked into the house past David, and his eyes lingered on Andie for a moment. He looked down at his notes, and then back at David. "Do you recognize the red car in your driveway?"

David leaned out towards the porch to look, but Andie couldn't see the driveway from the stairs. She started to move forward but Nina put a hand on her arm to keep her still.

"No," David said. "It's not ours, and it wasn't there when we went to bed."

"It was reported stolen last night," the cop said.

Andie gasped in shock. Nina's head whipped around to scrutinize the younger woman. Andie slowly shook her head at the questioning glance. She knew what both David and Nina were probably thinking, but the car had nothing to do with her.

Officer Carver looked up at Andie. "I'm going to need to ask you a few questions, Miss."

Feeling sick to her stomach, Andie shook her head more rapidly and her eyes darted back and forth between Nina and David. "I swear I didn't do it."

When neither of them responded immediately, Andie rushed down the last few steps to David's side and said, "I had nothing to do with this. I was in my room all night."

"Okay, I believe you," David reassured her, and put an arm around her shoulders.

"Name, address, and date of birth, Miss?" the officer asked.

"Andrea. Andrea Jacobson. I live here, and I'm twenty-two."

He scribbled down her info. "I'd like you to come to the station with me to answer some questions."

Andie's mind raced. She used to steal cars. She used to do plenty of illegal things, but that had all come to a screeching halt two years ago when she'd been caught during one of her thefts. She might have gone back to her criminal ways if her arrest hadn't coincided with meeting David and Nina, who had taken her in and helped keep her on the straight and narrow. Just last week she'd been released from her two-year long probation for grand theft auto. Then it hit her. *I'm being set up.* The cop had looked at her specifically, which meant he had some kind of

information that made her a suspect. That, on top of the bogus noise disturbance, meant someone had it in for her.

She'd been arrested enough times to know that if she refused to go to the station with the cop, he would either have to leave, or he'd have to arrest her, and once he looked up her name, he'd almost certainly be arresting her for probable cause. She didn't want to be hauled into the precinct wearing her pajamas, so she forced a smile and said, "Could I please change into some jeans first?"

Officer Carver looked at her pajamas and slowly nodded. "Yeah, but make it quick."

"Now wait just a minute..." David said, but Andie spun around and put a hand on his arm to stop him. He looked down at her, and she could see the worry in his frown.

"It's okay," Andie said with false confidence. "Let me change first, and call Nate as soon as you can."

While she headed up the stairs to change, she heard Officer Carver asking David and Nina for their basic information. She got dressed as quickly as possible, went to the bathroom, swished some mouthwash, and rushed back downstairs, all the while wondering who had set her up, and how she was going to stay out of prison.

Past the doorway, Andie could see the flashing lights of two other cop cars blocking the driveway, and Officer Carver was off the porch talking to another officer. A forensic team had already started looking for evidence in the red Ferrari parked in the driveway.

David and Nina were standing together by the door, looking out at the chaos with matching scowls. Andie gave them both a big hug at the same time and said, "Have Nate meet me at the station, please."

When Andie let go, Nina held her just a couple seconds longer and whispered, "We love you, sweetheart."

"I love you, too, Mom," Andie whispered. When she looked back at the driveway, she saw Officer Carver coming directly for her with narrowed eyes, and she knew he'd seen her record.

"I'm ready to go," she said, "but I won't be answering any questions until my lawyer, Nathaniel Parker, is in the room with me."

Carver got out his cuffs and said, "Andrea Jacobson, you're under arrest..."

She'd heard her Miranda rights plenty of times, and didn't bother to listen. She held her hands out so he could cuff her, and let him lead her away from the safety and comfort of the two people she'd grown to love as parents.

David clenched his jaw and forced himself not to yell as he watched his surrogate daughter being taken away by the cops. He felt his wife's shoulders shake, and she hid her face in his chest so none of the cops could see her crying. Even more pissed than before, David rubbed his wife's back and said to the new cop who had come up to the porch, "My wife and I would like to get dressed and call our lawyer."

The policeman nodded and said, "That's fine for now, but you'll both need to give a statement as soon as you're ready."

David nodded and shut the door. As soon as it was closed, he said, "You go get dressed. I'll call Nate."

Nina wiped her eyes and nodded, while David went to the landline and dialed his brother-in-law's number.

"Hello?" Nate answered, sounding groggy.

"Nate, it's David. Andie has been arrested."

"She just got off probation!" Nate groaned. "What happened?"

David told him what little he knew about the situation.

After a tentative pause, Nate asked, "Did she do it?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

David really thought about it before answering. "Yes, I'm sure."

"All right, I'm on my way to the station to meet her. Don't come to the station, and when you give your statement, keep it simple and direct. Don't elaborate. Just tell them when you all went to bed, and that you didn't see or hear anything else before they knocked on your door. This isn't the time to tell them about how you know Andie couldn't have done it, and it's not the time to tell them what a good person Andie is. Don't divulge any information voluntarily, and if they ask about things other than tonight, don't answer. I'll call you when I know more."

"Okay. Thanks, Nate." David hung up, and noticed Nina coming down the stairs. "Nate's on his way to meet her at the station."

"Oh, thank goodness."

David gave her the run down on how they should handle giving their statements, and then went to get dressed himself.

When he came back downstairs, she had a cup of coffee waiting for him. After he'd had a sip, Nina said, "It can't be a coincidence. The supposed noise disturbance, and the stolen car in the driveway."

"No," David said with certainty. "It can't."

"I believed her when she said she didn't do it. Did you?"

"She's lied to us before, but never about something like this. I believe her."

"Then she's being framed," Nina concluded.

"The only question is, by whom?"

"Clearly someone from her old life. Someone who knows what she used to do."

"But will the cops even look for someone else?" David asked. "They're going to see her record and convict her without even trying to find out who really did it."

"We should find out if her old boss, Steve, is still in jail," Nina said. "Andie said Steve would figure out who turned him in, and that he'd come after her."

David knew he was out of his depth with this situation. He didn't know how to find out if Steve was in jail, or how to figure out who might have set Andie up. But there were people out there who did know how to find that information. "What about a private investigator?"

"Hire someone to find out who did it?"

"Exactly. After Nate calls to let us know what's going on, we should ask him about hiring someone."

Nina nodded and smiled for the first time that morning. "That's brilliant, David. That's exactly what we should do, but we shouldn't wait. The cops are out there collecting evidence right now. We need to call someone right away, and I know who."

She rushed over to her laptop, and opened her email as she spoke. "Joshua Wilson is a private detective."

David snapped his fingers, and said, "That's right, he got his license didn't he! Do you have his number? We haven't really talked to him in... what's it been, two, maybe three years since he moved?"

"I email him sometimes, and Shelly still keeps in touch with him. Just last month she sent me a photo of his new business card, because she wanted me to convince him to get better ones." Nina was scrolling down her screen, and said, "Here! Here it is."

David went to look over her shoulder. "Should we ask Nate first? I don't want to do anything that might make things worse for Andie's case."

She looked up at him and said, "Nate has hired private detectives before if a case calls for it. I think we should call right now."

"Okay, let's do it." David walked to the phone again and said, "What's his number?"

Nina read it aloud, and then went to stand next to him. David put his arm around her and waited. He was about to hang up after the tenth ring with no voicemail option, but finally, someone answered.

"Hello?" a sleepy voice said.

"Hi, this is David Stinton. I'm trying to reach Josh Wilson."

"David Stinton? As in Nina's husband David?"

David smiled at hearing the familiar southern twang to Josh's voice. "That's right, she's right here with me."

"Hi, Josh," Nina said, slightly louder than usual.

"Okay," Josh said with worry, "It's great to hear from y'all, but it's six in the morning, so I'm guessing this isn't a social call."

"It's not," David confirmed. "We want to hire you as a private investigator. I don't know if Shelly has kept you up to date about us or not, but for the past couple of years, we've had a young woman living with us."

"Yeah, Shelly told me you had someone living at your house. A submissive, right? Amanda?"

"Andrea, and she's been accused of stealing a car. We believe she's being set up."

David could hear rustling on the other end of the phone and after a pause, Josh said, "Give me the details."

David explained the entire situation, including the fact that Andie had a record as a car thief.

After clarifying a few points, Josh said, "Before we go any further, I need to let you know that as a P.I., it's my job to find the truth. If I find evidence to clear Andie, then I'll present that to the courts. If I find evidence to convict her, then I'll present that to the courts. I won't lie or suppress evidence, so you should only hire me if you're certain that she's innocent."

"We're completely sure," David said without hesitation. After rehashing the entire thing with Josh, there was no longer any doubt in his mind that Andie was innocent.

"Okay, then I'll take the case. Are you still living in the same house?"

"Yes."

"I have an appointment this morning that I can't miss, so I'll be there in about three or four hours."

"Thank you, Josh, we really appreciate this."

"No need to thank me, David. You helped mentor me when I was new to the scene. I owe you."

David smiled. Josh had been quite green the first time they'd met. "I was happy to help. We'll see you in a few hours."

###

After Andie was booked, she'd asked for coffee, but the cops had refused to even acknowledge her request. Now she sat in the interrogation room waiting for Nate, and thought about how much her life had changed over the past two years.

The last time she'd been arrested, she hadn't expected a lawyer to be showing up to help. Last time there hadn't been people at home worrying about her, and wondering if she was okay. And last time, she'd actually been guilty of the crime she'd been arrested for. The only similarity was the sinking sense of dread in her stomach, telling her that there was no getting out of going to prison.

Someone knocked, and Andie focused on the present as Nate came into the room and asked to speak to his client in private.

"How are you holding up, Andie?" Nate asked once they were alone.

"I didn't do it."

He sat down beside her and put his hand over hers. "I believe you. So let's go over the whole night, step by step, so we can prove that to everyone."

She nodded, feeling marginally better, while Nate got out a pad of paper and a pen. Together they went over every aspect of her night. She'd been to work with David at the vet clinic from 8am to 5pm, and she'd stayed in the office for her lunch break. David had taken her to and from work in his car. She'd had dinner with David and Nina, and they'd watched some television before bed. She'd gone to bed around 11pm, and hadn't woken up until the police came.

After that, they went over everything the police had said and done at the house. Between the two of them, they deduced that the car had been reported stolen sometime last night, and that the person who'd taken it must look physically similar to Andie.

Nate looked over his notes and then flipped the page. "Who do you think would try to frame you?"

"The first on the list is my old boss, Steve. Probably even if he's still in prison. If not him, it could be any one of the guys who worked for him. Mikey was a mean son of a bitch; I wouldn't put something like this past him, but I don't think he's smart enough to pull it off alone. Kyle was smart enough, but I doubt he'd be vindictive. He probably had another gig the next week. He's just a thug with no special skills pertaining to cars. He could get a job as a bouncer at any bar."

"Give me a list of names, and short physical descriptions for each of the men who were working for Steve when you made the plea deal two years ago." A few minutes later, Nate had a list of twelve men, but he noticed one missing. "What about Hal?"

She frowned in thought for a few moments before shaking her head. "I can't imagine him doing that to me."

"I'm going to write him down anyway, just to be safe." Nate flipped the page again. "What about someone new? Someone at your job, or a new friend who knows about your past?"

Andie thought about her co-workers and her best friend Gina and chuckled. "There's no way any of them were involved."

"Okay." After clearing his throat, Nate said, "Have David and Nina taken you to any... uh... BDSM clubs where you might have met someone? Someone who could maybe be jealous of your relationship with them?"

Noticing Nate's blush made Andie blush bright red. She really liked Nate, and over the past two years, they'd gotten to know each other a little bit. But it always made her feel uncomfortable when Nina or David mentioned their kink in front of him. As far as Andie was



concerned, Nina's vanilla brother didn't need to know anything about that aspect of their lives, but Nina never filtered their conversations for his sake.

"No," she muttered while looking at the table in front of her. "Well... I mean yes, back when I turned twenty-one they took me to a club with them, and I met some nice people, and I uh... played with some of them at the club. But none of them seemed to be jealous or weird, and none of them asked me to do anything outside of the club. And we haven't been back since. It wasn't really my thing."

"Okay, good," Nate said, sounding relieved. "Is there anyone else you can think of? Anyone at all from your past who has a grudge? Maybe someone you stole from?"

"I can't think of anyone," she said. "I never used to get caught, so none of the people I stole from would know who to look for if they wanted revenge."

Nate nodded, checked all his notes and said, "All right, let's talk to the cops. You wait for me to nod before you answer anything."

She took a deep breath to calm her nerves and waited for Nate to get the police back in the room.

Two hours later, she was sitting in a holding cell, waiting impatiently for her arraignment, which wasn't scheduled until the following afternoon.

###

Three hours after making their phone calls, David and Nina were sitting on the couch, anxiously waiting for either Josh or Nate to arrive. Both Nina and David had cancelled their work for the day, and they had both given very basic statements to the cops. Then they were stuck with waiting and worrying.

A sharp rap at the door made Nina jump.

"Thank God," David muttered as he went to answer it. He couldn't stand sitting around and doing nothing while someone he loved was in distress, but he had no idea how to help Andie at this point. He opened the door and smiled with relief when he saw Josh on the other side. He held out his hand and said, "Josh, it's been a long time."

Josh transferred the briefcase he was holding to his left hand, and shook David's hand with his right. "Too long. When all of this is over, we'll have to get together for dinner."

"Sounds good." David gestured towards the living room, and Josh went in.

Nina stood to give Josh a quick kiss on the cheek and a hug. "Thank you for coming so quickly."

"Of course." He gave her a quick hug in return.

Nina sat back down on the couch and David sat beside her, while Josh sat in the armchair next to them. He pulled a laptop out of his briefcase, turned it on, and said, "I was pretty groggy this morning, so let's go over everything one more time, and I'll take better notes."

After they'd gone over the timeline of last night, they went over how they'd met Andie a couple of years ago when she'd accidentally hit a dog with a car she'd stolen, and then taken the dog to David's veterinary clinic. They went over her legal troubles and how Nate had helped to get her the plea deal so she didn't have to do any jail time. While they were talking about Andie's old boss, Steve, there was a knock on the door.

"That's probably Nate," Nina said as she went to answer it.

Nate came in with a grim expression. He opened his mouth to say something, but then noticed Josh, and closed it. He turned to his sister with a raised eyebrow.

Nina gestured towards Josh and said, "Nate, this is Josh. He's a private detective that we've hired to look into Andie's case." She turned to Josh. "Josh, this is Andie's lawyer, and my brother, Nate Parker."

Josh stood, and the two men shook hands.

"I think we met once before," Josh said. "A few years back, here at this house, when David and Nina had a barbecue for Fourth of July."

Nate tilted his head to the side and looked at Josh more closely. "I do remember the barbecue, but I can't say that I remember meeting you. Sorry."

"That's okay. We didn't really talk much, and there were a lot of people here." Josh fished one of his business cards out of his wallet and handed it to Nate. Nate took it and pulled one of his own cards out of the jacket pocket of his suit, handing it to Josh.

While Nate and Josh were talking, Nina had pulled a dining room chair into the living room so Nate would have a spot to sit.

"I should have guessed that you guys would call a P.I.," Nate said as he sat down in the offered chair. "I was going to suggest it, but I already had someone in mind." He turned to Josh. "No offence, but we need someone who has experience as a criminal defense investigator."

"No offence taken, that is my specialty. I would have told David to look for someone else if it wasn't."

Nate looked at him more closely. "I'm surprised I haven't seen you in court or at the station before."

"I've lived in Washington for the past three years, so you wouldn't have seen me, but when I started out, I had an office here in Oregon. I'm licensed for both states," Josh replied.

"Unless you have a strong objection, we'd like to stick with Josh," David said. "He understands our lifestyle, so there won't be any awkward questions or judgments surrounding that aspect of our relationship with Andie."

When Nate didn't respond right away, Josh added, "I was a cop in Texas before moving to Oregon, and I know more than one cop on the police force here. My father is still a cop. I know how to get the information we need while keeping the lines of communication open with the investigating officer."

Nate gave a nod of approval. "Sounds like you're the right man for the job." He got a pad of paper out of his overstuffed briefcase and handed it to Josh. "This is everything Andie could tell me about the people she used to work with. I'm positive that she's being set up. The false call to the cops about a noise disturbance was to get the police here to the house, where someone had already placed the stolen car. And whoever actually took the car either does look like Andie or was made up to look like Andie, because when the cop saw her in the house, he immediately decided she was a suspect. Since the cop asked her where she'd been earlier that night, the car must have been reported stolen just hours before the noise disturbance call."

Josh nodded while looking over the notes Nate had given him. "There are no female suspects on the list."

Nate shook his head. "It's either someone we haven't thought about yet, or more likely, one of the guys on the list has a girlfriend or relative that looks similar to Andie and they taught her how to steal the car." He leaned down and got a thick manila folder out of his briefcase. "This is a copy of Andie's previous trial, including the names of all the people who were arrested because of the plea deal she made."

"Okay," Josh said. "The first step is going to be looking up each of these guys on the Internet so I can narrow down the suspect list. Background checks, credit checks, property

records, social media accounts, etc. That's probably going to take the rest of the day. When is her arraignment?"

"Tomorrow at two. I'll submit a motion for discovery at the arraignment. If things go our way, we should have copies of the police reports to look over tomorrow evening or the next morning at the latest."

"Good." Josh nodded and held up the pad of paper. "Can I keep this?"

Nate turned to his sister. "Could you make copies for Josh?"

"Sure." She got up and took the notepad upstairs to their office to make the copies.

"Is there anything we can do?" David asked. "I hate feeling this... helpless."

Nate searched through his briefcase until he found the card he was looking for, and handed it to David. "You should call this bail bondsman and get ready to meet him tomorrow afternoon. With Andie's record, her bail is going to be at least triple what it was last time, if they even let her have bail."

"You think they won't?" David said, his stomach churning.

"It depends on the judge. I'd say there's an eighty percent chance she'll be allowed bail, and I'll do everything I can to make that happen."

"After her arraignment, I want to meet with her," Josh said. "Either here at the house if she's out, or at the jail if she's not."

"I can arrange for us to see her if she doesn't get bail," Nate said.

Josh nodded. "Hopefully by tomorrow morning, I'll have a suspect or two in mind."

Nina came back downstairs and handed Josh the copies. Josh stood and said, "I'm going to head to the office and start researching. We should set up a time to meet tomorrow."

Nate said, "I'd like to meet with you at the courthouse about an hour before the arraignment so we can go over what you've found out."

"That works for me." Josh turned to David. "Does that work for you guys?"

"We'll be there."

"All right, then I'll see you tomorrow." Josh shook hands with both men, and gave Nina a quick hug before he left.