

SEARCHING FOR HOME

CAL'S LAW BOOK FOUR



PK COREY



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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

CHAPTER 1



Jenny was worried about Allie, her friend and boss. She had been dealing with too much stress lately. Her most recent problem, with a creepy client, wasn't going to go away on its own. She was surprised that Allie hadn't texted today, and she wasn't answering Jenny's text, either. Giving in to her fears, Jenny called Cassie, Allie's mother-in-law. She wasn't planning to tell her Allie's problems, but she could possibly find out if Allie was safe at the moment.

"Jenny! I'm so happy you called," Cassie greeted her. "Lily's cooking ribs tonight, and we're hoping you and Cal can come to dinner."

"We'll definitely be there," Jenny agreed eagerly. "But listen, do you know if Allie's home?"

"Why, yes, dear. I saw her pull in just a minute ago."

"Great!" Jenny said with relief. "I needed to talk to her, but I wanted to wait until she got home."

"I'm going over whenever Sue gets here, to invite them to dinner, too. You need me to tell her anything?"

"No, I may just wait and talk to her tonight. Thanks, Cassie. I'll see you later."

Jenny felt better, knowing Allie was home. But she was still surprised she hadn't texted. Something was wrong. Jenny could feel it. But she didn't want to push. They could talk tonight.



ALLIE RAN into the house and slammed the door. She threw her bag on the table and just stood there breathing heavily. She didn't know whether to cry or scream in anger. She wanted a shower. Her skin fairly crawled where he had touched her. *Everything was going to be all right*, Allie kept repeating to herself. But nothing *felt* all right. She knew what could have happened, and the thought made her shudder.

In the shower, Allie tried to think only of the water pounding her body and the steam rising around her. It wasn't working. She could still see the smirk on his face and hear his laughter as she ran out. *Why hadn't she told him to go to hell or kneed him? Why had she been the one to run out as if she'd done something wrong?*

Allie stepped out and dried off quickly. As she slipped on shorts and a tee shirt, she made her way to the top floor. She headed up the secluded narrow staircase to the widow's walk on the roof and slipped through the door, collapsing into the canvas chair.

Allie felt herself relaxing just a little. This was her spot, her favorite place in the whole house. Her parents had allowed her to claim it when she was twelve and her little brother Drew and his friends were driving her crazy. It wasn't really a widow's walk, just a small upper deck, but Allie had read a book once that included a house with a widow's walk, and that's how she'd always thought of it.

When they'd first bought this house from her parents, she'd told her husband Ryan, "You can't go up there. It's my private space. You can take any room you want for a man-cave, but leave my little space to me."

"And why do you need such privacy?" he'd asked.

"Every woman needs a private spot," she'd told him. "It's where we go when we need to sort out our feelings, especially when our husbands make us mad."

"Then I can't imagine that you'd ever need it," Ryan had teased. "You have the perfect husband, after all." But he'd respected her request for privacy, and today, she really needed it.

From her perch, the view of the river was prominent and she loved watching it roll by. She could also see the other houses nearby, in what their friend Steve had begun calling The Landing. Steve had done his research and found that this area had been used as a landing, where boats had come in the 1800s to offload their goods and take on cotton and tobacco. Now all four families in this tight group referred to their collection of homes as The Landing.

In the house to the left of hers as you looked at the river, lived her in-laws. Allie knew that while this would be a horror to many, it was a joy to her. Allie had loved Cassie and Tom since the moment they'd moved in, before she'd even met Ryan. She couldn't have imagined being so close to a couple in their sixties, when she herself had only been sixteen at the time. But that was the way it had worked out. She loved having them next door. On the other side of Cassie's house was the home of Annie and Andy Holmes, nearly life-long friends of Cassie and Tom's.

If she looked to the right, Allie could see out over Sue and Steve's home and their little guesthouse. These people living on The Landing had a friendship that was deeper and more binding than family.

Sue was Cassie's oldest friend. She was a pistol, for sure. Though she could be caustic, she was sharp-witted and so much fun to be around. When you put Cassie, Sue and Annie together, you had to stand back—something was always bound to happen!

Lily, the fourth woman in this little group, rounded them out and made them manageable. Lily, a lovely woman of color in her mid-forties, had come to care for Sue when she was ill, but soon Lily was an integral part of the family. She had been hired by all

three families as a rotating housekeeper, cook and most importantly, a watchful eye over Cassie and Sue. She and her new husband, Henry, lived in the mother-in-law suite in Annie's home.

These four women were Allie's go-to people for advice, and she sure as hell needed some today. But they couldn't help her this time. Their solution, she was sure, would be to go, en masse, to find the bastard and cut his balls off. Not a bad solution, Allie believed, but not exactly realistic. So, she couldn't share this with them.

Allie reached back and opened her sturdy cooler. As she searched through the snacks, canned drinks, gum, mints and mouthwash, she found her pack of cigarettes and shook one out. With a flick of her lighter, she lit it and took a deep draw. This was the only space at home where she dared to smoke. Everyone on The Landing would have a fit if they knew. And Ryan, she had no doubt, would put her over his knee and spank her ass good if he found out.

But she was tired of always being the good girl. *Wasn't she allowed to have one vice of her own? Then again, did this count against her if no one else knew?*

Allie sat back with her cigarette and reluctantly thought of her afternoon. The solution should be simple. She'd never set foot in that house again. But it *wasn't* that simple.

The truth was she and Ryan were having money problems. Ryan's small lawn maintenance and design business was doing well, but he had *so* much money tied up in equipment. They had the house payment and a truck payment each month, not to mention the bank loan for all that equipment. There were workers' comp, and taxes, and payroll. Added to that, his work was seasonal, even if the bills weren't.

Allie had begun her own business, too. She'd named it Daniel's Home Cleaning, using her maiden name. They'd put too much into getting both companies off the ground to let anything derail them now. Business plans in college classes had looked so simple. In the college mock-ups, there were no demands for higher salaries, no

one ever missed work and no equipment ever broke down and had to be replaced. Her business degree was coming in handy, but she felt she was juggling so much. She had the same staggering paperwork Ryan had, the same business taxes, payroll, licensing and getting bonded. Then there were clients who didn't pay on time, last minute cancellations or rush jobs that 'had to be done today!' There was still so much to handle.

Opening a housecleaning service had seemed so simple in the beginning. She could clean a house. But cleaning houses and running a small business on top of that? That was getting to be too much. As hard as they both worked, they didn't seem to be getting ahead. She was sure they would, in time, but *when?*

In addition to all this, Ryan was also putting money away every month to pay off his college loan to Cassie and Tom. Cassie and Tom weren't Ryan's biological parents. In fact, they hadn't legally adopted him until he graduated from college. After his freshman year, Ryan's biological father had refused to pay for college unless Ryan went for the degree his father wanted. Ryan had told him no, insisting he'd quit school and work until he'd saved enough to return. Cassie and Tom had stepped in to help their young friend, persuading him accept their loan.

Ryan's biological father had gone to great lengths to try to hurt Cassie and Tom because he felt they were alienating his son from him. Ryan eventually chose to sever all ties with the man. Tom and Cassie had grown to love Ryan like their own, and they'd adopted him, even though he was a legal adult. They wanted him to be their son and heir.

With this adoption, Tom and Cassie considered the debt cancelled, but Ryan didn't see it that way and was determined to pay it off.

There had been a few heated discussions about it. Tom finally agreed, against Cassie's wishes, that Ryan could begin repaying the loan, though not until the business had been up and running for five years. But stubborn Ryan, despite the agreement, set aside the

amount he would have been paying each month, anyway. So, that, too, ate into their finances.

Allie's business had been struggling until Elizabeth Sullivan had come along. The Landing was in an old, but high-end, part of town. However, it was nothing compared to the new area that had recently been built along the waterfront where Elizabeth lived. These homes were huge and easy to clean, since they were mostly owned by young rich couples with no children. Allie could also charge top dollar. She'd started working for Elizabeth several months after getting the business started, and through her, she had acquired five more clients. She and Ryan had both been happy and relieved at the boost in their income.

Allie sighed and let her mind go to her biggest overall worry. Several weeks ago, Ryan had said they might have to sell the house and move to a cheap apartment. Allie's stomach churned at the very thought of it. She'd lived in this house all her life, but it was more than that. The thought of leaving the family at The Landing was more than she could take. She *had* to keep the money coming in.

Allie couldn't afford to lose Elizabeth's business or the rest of the accounts she'd brought to her. In a town as small as this, she couldn't afford to be blackballed by the elite.

But what was she going to do about Bradley Sullivan?