

DARN NOISY NEIGHBORS



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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



Phil Henderson was in his backyard on a beautiful late fall morning, mowing his lawn, which was something he actually enjoyed. He knew this would be one of the final times this year, if not the final time, before the cold weather set in. He was thoroughly enjoying the extraordinarily warm fall weather, when a large U-Haul truck pulled in next door at the vacant house, followed by a car that looked pretty full. Rumor had it the house had recently sold, so the moving van didn't really come as a surprise.

He kept one eye on the truck as he continued with his task, and watched as a young man, possibly in his mid-twenties, climbed out of the truck. A young woman about the same age emerged from the car, and together they opened the back of the truck. Soon they were making trip after trip into the house, carrying mostly smaller things and lots of boxes.

Phil finished the yard, put the mower away, and got a drink. He noticed the truck was still pretty full, including the bigger furniture, so he went next door to offer his help. "Good morning," he greeted. "You must be my new neighbors. I'm Phil Henderson."

"Nice to meet you, Phil. I'm Millie Malloy, and I'm actually your

new neighbor. This is my brother, Mike, who drew the short straw and wound up here helping me move.”

After shaking both their hands, Phil turned to Mike with a smile. “So, you drew the short straw?”

Mike laughed as he looked back at his sister. “Millie and I have an older brother, Mitch, and we were both going to move her in here today. But someone broke the front window and made their way into our company last night, and the police wanted one of us to go check it out and see if anything was stolen. He’s the president of the company, so he went. When he’s done talking with the police and securing the building, he’s planning on coming over to help me unload the furniture.”

Phil heard a cross between a harrumph and a snort, and turned back to look at Millie, who was shaking her head. “They’re both older than me,” she said, “and the two overprotective goons seem to think a lady is completely incapable of lifting anything over two pounds, and heaven forbid she try to help move her own furniture into her own house.”

Phil noticed the look Mike gave her, which looked like a warning to him, and the glare she returned. He had to smile a bit. This little lady was apparently used to two older brothers, and was definitely no pushover. While they were still glaring and warning each other he made a suggestion. “Millie, why don’t you show Mike and me where you want the furniture as we take it in?”

She narrowed her eyes as she looked at him. “Not you, too. I’m quite capable of helping to move this, you know.”

“Oh, I don’t doubt that for a minute,” Phil assured her. “I just thought since it’s your house you’ll be the one deciding where everything goes, and it’ll be easier to do that if we’re holding it while you’re sizing it up in relation to the room.” Without waiting for an answer, he walked into the truck, followed by Mike. He glanced up and saw the frustrated look on her face. “If you’d rather, you and Mike can bring the things in and I’ll direct you where to put them. Who knows? You might like my decorating.”

Mike laughed, and Millie looked a little sheepish. “Okay, okay, you made your point.”

Smiling at Mike, who was still laughing, the men continued on into the truck. They picked up the couch that seemed to be front and center, and headed toward the house. “Will you please get the door for us, Millie?”

She looked at her brother, ready to verbally lay into him, but he didn’t appear smug. He and Phil were talking about the nice weather. She looked from Phil to Mike, who were both smiling, and totally oblivious to her frustration. She sighed and quickly went to get the door. “Here in the living room, along that wall, please.”

Phil fought to control his smile when he heard the resignation in her voice. He definitely planned on getting to know his new neighbor better.

By the time Mitch got there the other three had the truck almost empty. He was a little surprised to see Mike and Phil talking like they’d been long-time buddies, but happy to see all three of them getting along well. While the three men carried in the last of the boxes, Millie directed them each to the right room. When the truck was empty, Mike collapsed into a chair in the living room, and Phil followed suit on the couch. Millie fell into the couch at the other end.

Mitch came in and looked at the three of them and laughed. “You three young folks look mighty old right this minute. Allow me, the oldest of the four of us, I might add, to get us each a beer.”

Mike had to chuckle at his words. “Well, old man, if you would have been here and made as many trips from the truck to the house as we did, you’d be sitting right here beside us.”

Mitch laughed and admitted Mike was probably right. He turned and headed toward his truck, but paused and turned to face Millie with a half grin, half serious expression. “Or maybe I should make it three beers and a Kool-Aid.”

Phil saw the seriousness in Mitch’s eyes, and to his surprise, the

feisty little Millie looked down at the floor and didn't say a word. Mitch went out to his truck and returned a minute later with four beers, which he passed out to Mike and Phil. When he got to Millie, he opened the beer and handed it to her. Phil saw kindness in his eyes, and was surprised again at Millie's response. She looked at him, meeting his eyes, and said, "Thank you, Mitch," as she took the offered bottle of beer.

Phil wondered what that was all about, but wasn't about to ask. If either of them wanted him to know, they'd tell him.

The four of them relaxed while they visited and the Malloy siblings got to know Phil better, and vice versa. As they were finishing their beers, Mitch stood up. "Well, Sis, since I got out of unloading most of the furniture, let me help you with some of your unpacking. If you show me where your plates and glasses go, I can unpack them. Then at least we'll have plates for when I call and order a pizza." He stopped as a thought came to him, and he turned to address Phil. "For some reason, Millie fell in love with this house and wanted to move out to the middle of nowhere. I never even thought of the possibility of not being able to have pizza delivered. She'll starve if no one delivers this far out of town."

Phil looked at Millie and gave her a reassuring smile. "Not to worry. There are actually two pizza shops and a Chinese place that deliver in this area."

Mitch looked relieved. "Oh, thank goodness. At least I won't have to worry about her starving out here."

Millie picked up a pillow she'd just unpacked and threw it at her oldest brother as he turned toward the kitchen. The pillow hit him in the back of the head. He quickly whirled around, but before he could establish a serious look, Mike and Millie burst out laughing. When Mitch saw them, and saw Phil trying his best not to laugh, he gave up and joined them. Laughing himself now, he picked up the pillow and looked at Millie, who quickly hid behind Phil.

Phil gladly ran interference for her. He was a big guy, slightly over six feet tall, and with broad, muscular shoulders he knew she'd

have no problem staying out of Mitch's line of fire. "Watching you three makes me realize again just how much us only child people miss out on," Phil said.

Moving together so easily Phil doubted it was their first time, Mike quickly moved behind Millie. Mitch threw him the pillow, but when Mike attempted to throw it at their sister, Phil quickly stepped in front of Millie and caught the pillow. He handed it to Millie as his phone rang.

He looked at the phone and frowned. "Hello? Yes, it is. It's where? Where are you? Okay, stay right there, don't move. I'll be there as soon as I can." Running toward the door he said, "Sorry, gotta go. I'll be back shortly and will explain then."

Millie and her brothers stood still, looking at each other. When he left, they went to the window and watched as he ran to his home, going in the back door. Less than a minute later he ran back out, got in his pickup and left, squealing his tires.

Mike was the first to recover enough to find his voice. "What the hell was that all about?"

"I don't know," Mitch answered. "What does he do for a living?"

"I don't know," Millie murmured. "We didn't talk about that. Do you think that had something to do with his job?"

"I don't know," Mitch admitted. "I guess we'll have to wait until he comes back to see." They were quiet for several moments, each lost in their own thoughts. "Well, let's get busy unpacking."

Millie took Mitch and Mike to the kitchen and showed them where she wanted her dishes, cookware, and pantry items. They got busy emptying boxes there, while she went to her bedroom to get her linens out and make her bed. Her next task was to get her clothes put away.

They were all busy and before any of them knew it, almost an hour had passed. Millie glanced out her bedroom window and saw Phil pull into his lane. She went to the kitchen to tell her brothers, and they were all watching the door, waiting for him when he walked in, carrying two pizzas.

Mitch was the first to speak. "Everything okay, Phil? You left in an awful big hurry."

Phil nodded. "Everything's fine. Let's have some pizza and I'll explain where I went."

Ten minutes later they were at the kitchen table with pizza and Coke. Phil noticed Mitch rather strongly suggested Millie try some Coke with her pizza instead of another beer, and she rather humbly agreed. Phil reached for a Coke, as well, and the other two followed suit.

When they were situated, Phil started his explanation. "As you alluded to earlier, Mitch, this housing development isn't in the city. It's outside city limits, so the only law enforcement that has jurisdiction is the county sheriff's department, of which I'm a deputy. People like living out here. It's a big development with large lots so you're not right on top of your neighbors like you are in town. So if anyone has a problem, they generally call me first. If I'm not available or not close, then they call the sheriff's department. There's generally not that much that happens around here, so it's not usually a big deal. Most of my calls have been for neighbors someone feels is making too much noise late at night, or some such thing."

"So the biggest thing I should worry about with Millie living here is the darn noisy neighbors?" Mitch asked.

Millie's hands were on her hips in an instant and she was glaring at her oldest brother. "Once again, Mitch, you don't have to worry so much about me. I'm a big girl now, I can take care of myself, you big lug."

"Millie, I've told you before, as your oldest brother I'm going to worry about you. That's all there is to it. You may as well get used to it and learn to accept it." There was a warm, friendly smile on his face, but Phil knew he meant every word of what he'd just said.

"So if I get married some day—"

"I'll gladly hand the responsibility of trying to keep you in line over to your husband, and all the worrying that goes along with it.

Then I'll shake his hand, wish him the best of luck, and give him a twelve pack of beer to get him started."

"Ha, ha, ha," Millie said. "Very funny. Now quit picking on me a minute so Phil can answer the question. I for one am interested in what happened tonight." She turned back to Phil. "Was this a noisy neighbor call?"

"No, not really. There's a lady that has eight cats, and her neighbor has two dogs, which is not a good combination. According to the county laws you have to keep any animals you have on your property. His dogs kept coming over to her property, chasing her cats anytime she let one outside. So I told him he was going to have to keep them over there or I'd have to start fining him every time they were on her property, and they could be taken away after so many violations. So he built a fence. But now the dogs keep getting out. He got a new dog a couple weeks ago, and this dog is more vicious. They got out again. The cats both made it up into a tree, but the dogs were between her and the house. The new dog was growling at her, so she climbed up onto the roof of her car and called me."

Phil could see the horror in Millie's eyes. "Oh, my goodness. Is she all right?"

"She is now. I'm not too fond of that new dog myself, so I stopped by the house and got my revolver, just in case. If the dogs' owner wasn't home to get them back himself, I wasn't sure exactly how I was going to do it, but I wasn't about to let her get hurt."

Mike and Mitch were listening closely, very obviously interested in the story, as well. "What happened?" Mike asked.

"Just as I got there, Brad, the dog owner, got home. As soon as he heard what was going on he went in his backyard and whistled. They all trotted home to him and he locked the gate they had gotten out through. The neighborhood's safe again," Phil said with a smile.

Mitch was obviously concerned. "Do these dogs get out often? How mean are they, and how close to here are they?"

Phil noticed Millie's interest in Mitch's questions, and tried to assure them both. "You don't need to worry about them. Actually, it turns out the one that seems vicious isn't his dog. He was dog sitting for a friend of his, and that friend's coming to pick the dog up later this afternoon. The two dogs he has are big fur balls, friendly as can be. The only time they even try to get out of his fence is if the cats are out next door. Then if you watch them, you can tell they're trying to play with the cats. The cats don't want to play, though, and that causes a problem."

Mitch looked relieved. "So I don't have to worry about vicious dogs getting out and attacking my little sister?"

"I've never seen any around," Phil assured him.

Mike nodded his head, obviously happy, as well, to hear that. He looked at Mitch as he said, "It's kind of comforting knowing she'll be living next to a sheriff's deputy."

Phil saw the pleased look on the men's faces, and the frustrated look on Millie's. In a move that was bolder than was normal for him, he went to Millie and put his arm around her, pulling her closer to him. "Your sister will be fine, guys. This is a good neighborhood, and if she needs anything I'll be right next door. I'll help you watch out for her." He looked down at her, and knowing her brothers wouldn't be able to see, he winked. He was happy when he felt her relax.

Both men seemed happy with that idea. "Thank you, Phil," Mitch said. "I appreciate knowing that." Mike nodded his head in agreement.

Phil was starting to see why Millie seemed so frustrated with her brothers, but wondered why they were so protective of her. Maybe he'd find out some day. For now, it surprised him a bit, but it felt good having her close to him.

The four of them finished their pizza, then worked a little while longer helping Millie get her house in order. After lots of handshakes and thank yous the brothers left, Mike returning the U-Haul, leaving Millie and Phil alone.

“Are you sure you have everything unpacked you’ll need tonight and tomorrow morning?”

“I’m sure,” Millie assured Phil. “Thank you so much for all your help.”

“Hey, that’s what neighbors are for,” he said with a grin.

“I want to thank you for helping assure my brothers I’ll be okay, too.”

“Not a problem. I get the feeling they—”

When he paused a moment, looking for the right word, she suggested, “Are way too overprotective of me? You’re right, they are.”

Phil chuckled and shrugged his shoulders. “Actually, I was going to say I get the feeling they care a great deal about you.”

She sighed. “Yes, they do,” she admitted, “and I love them for that. I really do. But sometimes they go a little too far.”

“They care about you too much?”

She looked up at him and saw the raised eyebrow, just like both of her brothers did when they were trying to make a point with her. “Oh, no, not you, too! Do not raise your eyebrow with me like that.”

“Like what?” He was pretty sure he knew what she was talking about, and had to laugh.

“Can you come in for a little bit? I’ll tell you what I mean and why they do it while we rest. After all the work you did today, you deserve to know a little bit about our family.”

“Sure, I’d like that. I have a bottle of wine at the house I can get.” Remembering the warning Mitch seemed to have given her, he added, “Or I’ve got some iced tea.”

“Some wine would be a fantastic way to relax after today, if you don’t mind,” she said.

“I’ll be right back with it.” When he turned toward his house she said, “And when you come back, I’ll explain the remark Mitch made about the beer, too.”

He smiled at her, then went to his house. While he gathered up

the wine, corkscrew and glasses he found himself thinking about Millie. She was just a little thing, but big on spunk. Phil sometimes felt as if he intimidated some women. He wasn't sure if it was his size, or his take-charge attitude, but neither of those was going to change, so he tended to shy away from women who seemed intimidated around him. He found himself smiling as he thought of Millie. Her big brawny brothers didn't seem to faze her in the least, so he was hopeful she'd stand up to him, as well.

He hoped so. Millie had a whole lot of the exact things he always looked for in a woman, but didn't often find. He wanted someone who would not only stand up to him, but go toe to toe with him if need be. But at the same time, she had to be willing to allow him to look after her, protect her. That part could be a problem with her. She wasn't too fond of her brothers doing that. But on the other hand, she had to be used to it, so maybe she wouldn't be overly fond of it, but would accept it.

They'd just have to see. He chuckled to himself. Here he was trying to figure out if she would accept his watching out for her, and they hadn't even spent any time alone yet to get to know each other. He planned on changing that shortly. If their evening went well today, he would ask her out for dinner. He was definitely interested in getting to know her better. She was cute as a button, with her dark blond hair with curls way down past her shoulders. She had it up in a ponytail so it was out of her way as she worked, but he bet it was gorgeous hanging free. Her brown eyes were full of sparkle and fun, and mischief. Something else he liked about her.

He hurried back over to her house, where she was waiting at her door, and invited him in. Shortly they were sitting on her couch, each with a glass of wine. "This wine's really good," she said. "Let me tell you why my brothers are so protective of me, and why Mitch felt the need to embarrass me about the beer. I don't tell just anyone this story, but after today I feel we're going to become good friends."

"I hope so," Phil said sincerely.

“Me, too. Anyway, if I tell you this, it’ll explain a lot of questions I know you either have now or will have as we get to know each other better.”

“Okay. That sounds ominous.”

She shrugged, and took another sip of wine before starting her story. “My mother got sick not too long before she found out she was pregnant with me. She was sick the whole time, and unfortunately she died when I was only a couple months old. So I was raised by my dad and older brothers. Mike was five and Mitch was seven when she died, and from the time I was real small I remember Dad telling them to watch out for me. And they did. Anywhere we went, one of them always held my hand and watched out for me. Then when I hit twelve or thirteen I went through what I guess you would say was a bit of a rebellious stage.”

“A rebellious stage?”

“Basically, I was feeling sorry for myself, thinking it wasn’t fair. My friends all had mothers that were teaching them how to put makeup on and shave their legs, and telling them how to act around boys, and I didn’t have one. So I started acting out. I had always been a daddy’s girl, so he always stood up for me, not really believing his little girl could do anything wrong. My brothers saw it and tried to talk to me, but I wasn’t much interested in what they had to say. Then our dad was killed in an accident, and Mitch was named my guardian.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, Millie.”

A mischievous grin crossed her face as she asked, “Sorry my dad was killed, or sorry Mitch was named my guardian?”

“I’m sorry to hear about your father,” he clarified. “And I’m starting to understand why your brothers care so much about you.”

“Yeah, I gave them a lot to worry about for a little while there, I think. Mitch was legally my guardian because he’d just turned twenty-one, but they tag teamed me the whole time I was growing up.”

“Were they just named your guardians, or did they volunteer?”

Millie was silent for several moments. Eventually she looked up at him with an odd expression on her face. "I never thought of that," she finally said. "I was too young to realize it, but Mitch would have had to agree. I mean, I don't know if he volunteered, but even if they asked him if he would, he had to agree to it. Wow. That's a lot for a twenty-one-year-old guy to take on."

"Yes, it is."

"He was away at college at the time, and I knew he came home and transferred to the local college, but I never realized he did that for me. He probably would have liked to have stayed at the college he was going to, but I'm sure he wouldn't have been able to do that and still be my guardian." She was quiet again. "If he wouldn't have agreed to do that, and given up his college to transfer back here, I would probably have gone to a foster home."

"I'm sure neither of your brothers wanted that."

Millie was quiet for several moments again. When she looked up, Phil could see unshed tears she was fighting to keep control of. "He came back home and finished college here, and Mike went to college here locally from the start, never had the chance to go off to college, and they did that for me. In return I was—"

"A real brat?"

Phil's attempt at lightening the mood worked. Millie looked up at him with a shocked look on her face. But seeing the smile in his eyes, she laughed. "Maybe," she admitted.

"Probably," he said with a chuckle. "But meeting them today and seeing how much they obviously think of you, I'm sure they haven't regretted a minute of it."

She looked up at him with an expression he couldn't decipher. "I can tell something's on your mind right now," he said. "What is it?" She didn't answer, and he tried again. "Go ahead and say it, or ask it."

"I'm not sure what I'm thinking right now, to be honest," she confessed. "You pointed out what they gave up to do that for me,

which I never thought of. Then when I felt bad about it, you made me feel better. Do you always know what to say?"

"Nope," he quickly said. "But I always mean what I say. I have a lot of respect for them taking on that responsibility as young men, and it's very plain to me how much you mean to them. I'd say your father was a good man and did a good job raising them. They took over then and finished the job he started when it came to raising you. I mean it when I say you're all three lucky to have each other."

"I agree," she said, deep in thought. She scooted over a little closer to him and added, "I think I'm lucky to have you as a neighbor, too."

He put his arm around her shoulders and pulled her a bit closer to him. "I was thinking the same thing about having you move in as the new neighbor." He leaned down and kissed the top of her head, and she leaned her head against his shoulder. Yep, he definitely felt lucky to have her move in next door.