

An excerpt from:

**DADDY'S GIRL**

by

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## ERIC SENDER, AKA ARLO

Eric Sender stepped outside onto the *loggia* to have a cigarette, an unfiltered *Delicado*. At four pesos a pack, they were almost cheap enough to be used as insulation, not that much insulation was needed in central México. As Sender touched a match to the end of it, he caught the girl's scent on the tips of his fingers. She lay sleeping in the room behind. He knew she didn't like cigarette smoke, although the marijuana hadn't bothered her earlier. The night sky above San Miguel de Allende caught no reflection from the sleeping town, so the stars were startlingly bright above the walled courtyard. It was a few minutes after one o'clock.

Although the world did not exactly match Alice's Restaurant, it often came close, especially if your standards weren't too high. Tonight Eric had wanted a virgin, and in the person of a girl named Lynn Washburn, he had found one. He didn't bother to ask himself why she had picked him. Her long, slender legs and meager breasts were not what he was used to, but they met his needs. While he considered this he chewed the nail on his right thumb, then pushed the fingers of his right hand through his lanky red hair.

Within the walls, the sconce lights at each door of the bed and breakfast were out, but the maze of pathways among the vegetation was lit at ground level. The only other lights were clustered at the door of the office, across the courtyard and beyond the fountain, which still bubbled softly. Sender shivered slightly in his black tee shirt. He'd had no jacket with him when he picked the girl up in the restaurant. Nights could be quite cool in January, often dipping to the low forties before dawn.

As he leaned against the wall next to the door, his eye caught a subtle movement within the arched opening in the wall that divided the courtyard from the one adjoining. The far one held the owner's quarters and the kitchen. He instinctively froze. In the darkness beneath the *loggia's* overhang, Eric was invisible, but stealth begets stealth. He cupped the cigarette so its lit end was out of view, and remained motionless.

The figure of a tall man detached itself from the opening and moved along the path following the wall. Reaching the covered walkway on the other side of the garden, he paused and looked back, but apparently saw no one. To Eric, the man was little more than a denser shadow as he moved past the row of rooms, until, as he reached the front of the office, he hesitated, stepped briefly into the light from the wall sconces, and stepped back again and off onto the garden path away from the light, regaining the shadows.

But Eric had caught a glimpse of the man's face, and thought he knew it. Not that he knew the man's name, only that he had seen him, quite possibly at El Pegaso, the same restaurant where he had picked up the girl now sleeping in the room behind him. Yes, it had to be the same man. He was a regular, often appearing with students from the Bellas Artes, one of the two local art schools, usually the girls.

Eric had the instincts of a bottom feeder and the eye of a buzzard circling high above the desert. He didn't know what this man's presence meant, but it had the shape and texture of an opportunity. When the man rounded the corner into the exit, Eric waited a moment, then crushed the cigarette beneath his foot and followed. Emerging into Privada de la Luna, the narrow lane outside the door, he followed the man after he reached the street beyond, saw him stay in the shadows as he moved along half a block or so, and then got into a car. Eric came up behind close enough to read the license number as the car's lights went on.

Walking home, he repeated the number to himself, committing it to memory. The girl would have to wake up alone. Maybe he would see her again, maybe not. But the man he had observed leaving would be a different story. "*You can get anything you want,*" he hummed to himself. Arlo Guthrie had gotten it right.

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