

Not a Good Day
for
NAMASTE

A TEXAS-SIZED MURDER MYSTERY
Book Two

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Published by Scrivenings Press LLC
15 Lucky Lane
Morrilton, Arkansas 72110
<https://ScriveningsPress.com>

Printed in the United States of America

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Paperback ISBN 978-1-64917-250-1

eBook ISBN 978-1-64917-251-8

Cover by Linda Fulkerson www.bookmarketinggraphics.com

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For Janie.

*Though heaven truly is better with you there, I'll always
miss you.*



Hearing the screech of tires quickly followed by the thud of somebody being run over isn't exactly how I planned to start my day. Then again, it probably wasn't how Ryan Matthison meant to start his day either, since he was the one who'd just been run over.

In the few seconds it took me to fling open the back door, the dark blue car that had just left tread marks on my fellow store owner was gone.

By the time I'd reached Ryan, dialing 911 as I ran, the sounds of the car had faded away. Putting my cell on speaker phone, I placed it next to my knee as I dropped down by Ryan, reaching for his wrist, wincing at the sight of blood mixed with dust that covered his face.

"911, what's your emergency?" Terri Townshend's strong voice filled the air as I finally found a pulse.

"Terri, it's Misty." Heart pounding, I forced myself to take a breath. "Ryan was just hit by a car behind my studio!"

"I've got Stetson and Jeff on the way," Terri said after a

pause. “They should be there in less than a minute. Can you find a pulse?”

“Yes,” I answered, shoving strands of blue hair away from my face as I bent over Ryan.

“It’s pretty faint, but it’s there. The car was dark blue and had two doors. It’s one of those that looks sporty from the front but like a standard sedan from behind.”

Typing in the information, Terri confirmed that Stetson and Jeff had arrived at the scene before hanging up. After seeing the condition Ryan was in, Jeff whipped out his cell phone, barking orders as he knelt next to me, opening his black leather medical bag.

“I need an ambulance in Flamingo Springs. Victim has multiple wounds—broken leg, collar bone, head injury, and possible internal bleeding.”

Scooting away, I watched as the doctor secured the hit and run victim. Taking Ryan’s pulse, Jeff instructed Stetson to apply pressure to the cut on Ryan’s thigh that was bleeding heavily.

“Be about fifteen minutes,” Jeff told Stetson. “We’re in luck. They were coming back from a call out in the boondocks. If they’d already made it back to Boulder, we’d be looking at a good forty-five-minute wait.”

Stetson grunted in reply, blood covering his hands as he pressed them to Ryan’s leg.

“This *would* have to happen the day Blaze leaves,” he muttered.

Glancing at me, his hazel eyes squinted in the early morning sunlight peeking over the roof of my studio.

“You hurt?” The words rasped from his chest, and when I shook my head, he jerked his chin toward Ryan. “Help me get this bleeding stopped. He’s got another cut up by his hip I need you to put pressure on.”

Moving forward, I knelt next to Ryan, my shoulder brushing Stetson's as I leaned forward and pressed my hands on the bloody spot. Muttering to himself, Stetson adjusted my hands before tending to the goose egg of a lump that was swelling over Ryan's left eye.

The residents of Flamingo Springs don't believe in early rising when the town isn't in the clutches of tourist season, and the cool morning was silent as we worked to keep Ryan's blood where it belonged—inside him. The knick-knack shop owner's face was pale and slightly sweaty, the material of his cargo shorts rough against my hands. Dust colored his dark locks a blond color, and it coated the fine hairs that covered his arms.

Even as I prayed under my breath, the wail of a siren started in the distance, and I took a deep breath, suddenly woozy. Swaying a bit, I leaned against Stetson, and he gave me a concerned look. It wasn't the sight of blood that bothered me. It was realizing I'd come upon the aftermath of an attempted murder against someone I considered a friend.

Steadying myself, I gave Stetson a nod, the siren growing louder as Jeff worked to stabilize Ryan. The ground beneath him was now a dark brown, the thirsty dust absorbing his blood, and I continued praying, pressing harder on Ryan's hip as it continued to bleed. The thick liquid welled up between my fingers, its metallic scent filled my nose and turned my stomach.

Ryan owned Flamingo Spring's Gift Shop and had seen a steady stream of business since opening day. The store was the kind found in every tourist town, offering knick-knacks and souvenirs at crazy prices, but no one complained. Where else could you find a flamingo keychain with your name on it? Or flamingo shaped flipflops? And his T-shirts, black with the hot pink sequined birds dancing all over them, were a town

favorite. Everyone had at least one in their closet, though some of us boasted quite a few more.

Ryan is the type of guy others enjoy doting on, and he loved the attention everyone showered on him. He opened his store as a means of income while he wrote a book on a new theory on quantum physics and quickly become Flamingo Springs' favorite business owner. It was a long process, he'd cheerfully told me one time as he'd wrapped a glass flamingo Christmas ornament up for me not long after he opened the store. The book would probably push a thousand pages, and he was lucky if he wrote half a page a day.

Even to me, an all-around optimist, the task seemed daunting. But Ryan was excited about it. And, as of last week when we'd talked about it over the pink mug I'd purchased to send to my pen pal in Montana, he was still just as eager. Blue eyes almost twinkling, he'd quoted formulas and theories and shown me various notes and sketches. Though I didn't understand a word he said, I'd laughed, his upbeat attitude catchy.

The entire town was rooting for him, and you didn't have to talk to him for more than a few minutes to know he wasn't your average guy. Mabel, Flamingo Spring's former favorite resident, had said she was going to paint a big sign and put it up on the Houston facing side of town so everyone who drove through would know we were home to the world's smartest guy. Everyone believed in him, but Mabel had believed in him the most.

My prayers faltered as my thoughts turned to Mabel. Prison is horrible at its best, and even though she deserved the life sentence she was currently serving, I still mourned for her and wished things had turned out differently.

The increasingly loud siren came full force at my ears as the ambulance rounded the corner of the hotel. The sound

stopped as paramedic coasted to a halt, and the sudden silence left a ringing in my ears as he and his co-worker jumped out of the van, unloading a stretcher. They ran to us, blue jumpsuits dark against the bright sky, and I was gently eased out of the way as they took over. Snapping on gloves, they ripped open packages of gauze, moving quickly as Jeff barked orders at them.

Almost as quickly as they'd arrived, they were gone, leaving dust swirling in the air and two, blood-soaked bandages on the ground that still bore the faint imprint of Ryan's body. Arms wrapped around my middle, I watched the ambulance turn the corner, lights flashing, the siren silent.

Gravel crunched as Stetson squatted down a few feet away from where Ryan had lain. With a gloved hand, he picked something up. Slipping it into a plastic baggie he'd pulled from his pocket, he stood, as the first of several curious residents appeared from the alley by my studio.

Staring at the ground, I noticed that my bare feet were flecked with little dots of dried blood, my nails sporting polka-dots. Big patches of crimson stained my galaxy-colored yoga pants, and I shivered, bare arms covered in goosebumps. Turning, I went inside my studio, not wanting to deal with the dozens of residents converging on Stetson.

By the time he'd secured the crime scene and shooed away curious onlookers, I'd changed into clean clothes, my soiled ones soaking in a bowl of peroxide in my.

I heard a knock on my back door just as I finished securing the end of my French braid, and I smoothed strands of the bright blue locks away from my face before letting Stetson in. Even under the best of circumstances I got butterflies around the tall deputy, and the fact he was interviewing me as a witness to an attempted murder made no difference.

"Can I get you something to drink?" I asked as he followed

me into the bright kitchen of my yoga studio. I made a vague gesture toward the fridge. “Water, coconut milk, coffee?”

“Water sounds good,” he replied after a pause, and once I’d filled two tall glasses, giving mine a squeeze of lemon juice and a sprinkle of salt, I joined him at the breakfast bar. Hopping up onto one of the stools, I made sure to keep one between us. The metal rungs were cool to the bottoms of my feet, and I took a moment to center myself, glancing around my kitchen.

The dark wooden cabinets gleamed in the bright light pouring in from the window above the sink, and I could smell the warm scent of cinnamon pushed into the air by the small diffuser on the end of the counter. Small pots of herbs lined the kitchen window, their bright green color a startling contrast against the white of the windowpane. It wasn’t until Stetson cleared his throat and set his now empty water glass on the granite counter that I realized my mind had wandered. I shook myself back to reality.

“Terri says you saw the car.” Placing his laptop on the counter, he opened it, tugging on his collar as he did so while outside. The new deputy, Chase, guarded the crime scene.

I recounted what I’d told Terri. “They were almost gone by the time I got outside and were too far away for me to get a look at the plates. Sorry I couldn’t read them.”

“It’s fine.” Stetson tapped a key on the computer, hat pushed back on his head, boot heels hooked on the stool’s bottom rung. Looking up, he frowned. “Did you hear anything before that? Arguing or raised voices?”

“No.” I met the deputy’s eyes, suddenly finding it hard to breathe as they stared into mine. “But I was singing at the top of my lungs, so there could have been.”

Against my will, my eyes dropped from his and traced his lean jaw, noting the dark stubble he’d neglected to shave. “Stetson, I know you can’t tell me a lot, but I’m pretty sure

whoever was driving that car meant to hit Ryan. He's way too banged up for it to be an accident, because no one in their right mind drives that fast behind the shops."

Stetson added more notes into his file before answering, throat working above the open collar of his tan shirt.

"Looks that way." Reaching into the bag he'd hung off the back of the barstool, he came up with the plastic baggie he'd used at the crime scene and handed it to me.

"Is that the color of the car?"

Carefully, I took the bag, not wanting to smudge the neat handwriting that filled the label stuck across it. A few crumbly blue flakes sat in one corner, along with what looked like some specks of rust. Handing it back, I nodded.

"It looks like it has some rust spots that got knocked loose on impact." Stetson paused, reading something on his laptop. "If you can give me the make of the car or as close as you can, I'll be able to give State Patrol a better description for the BOLO they're putting out." Placing the evidence bag back into the satchel, he closed his laptop and studied me.

"If you need to talk about what you just went through, I'm always available, and so is Terri." Arms crossed over his chest, he gave me a compassionate look, and I dropped my gaze to the floor I'd cleaned the night before.

"It's not exactly something I've witnessed or been a part of before," I admitted softly, glancing at my nails. Short as they were, they still bore faint traces of red under the edges, and I scrubbed them against my thigh, trying to erase the memory of Ryan's blood seeping into the ground.

After a long pause, I looked at Stetson to find he was still staring at me, gaze soft. Sliding off his bar stool, he reseated himself on the one next to me, and, after a moment's hesitation, rested a warm hand on my trembling knee.

"Misty," he whispered, meeting my eyes, "it's okay. You

don't have to pretend that what just happened isn't bothering you." He tightened his hand on my knee. "It's okay not to be okay right now."

Sniffing, I scrubbed at my eyes with the heels of my hands, face hot even as my stomach churned.

"It's not the blood or any of that," I said. "It was knowing that he might die and there would be nothing I could do to save him." Drawing in a long breath, I bit my lip. "I just felt so helpless, you know?"

Stetson nodded, his free hand making a rasping sound as he rubbed his unshaven chin.

"I do know, Misty. I've been there more times than I want to admit. But what you're feeling is normal." He inhaled, as if there were something else he wanted to say, then shook his head and removed his hand from my knee. Standing, he reached for his laptop, sliding it into his bag.

"Take it easy today and cancel some appointments if you can. I'll have more questions for you later, so stay around town and keep your phone on."

Following him as he walked to the backdoor, my bare feet made no sound on the hard flooring, but the noise of his boots striking wood rang out, intensifying the headache building behind my eyes.

"I'll do everything I can to remember what the car was," I told him.

He turned, one hand resting on the doorknob, the other touching the butt of his pistol. "That's fine." His eyes crinkled at the corners as he smiled. "Just don't stress yourself out, otherwise you'll really have a problem remembering. Best thing to do is just search the description in Google. Go through the images and see if you can find a match. But again, don't go crazy on it."

As he stepped outside, his phone rang. “Blaze ain’t gonna believe this,” he muttered.

Lips twisting into a wry grin, I shut the door after him. Flamingo Springs had experienced little crime since the whole fandango with Mabel months earlier, so for a hit and run to happen on the very day Blaze had left town on vacation held more than a touch of irony.

My thoughts turned to the tall sheriff who was currently in San Antonio with my dearest friend, Aubrey Turner, who owns the local bakery. This was her first time to meet Blaze’s parents, and she was more than a little freaked out about it. The New York native and former bull rider had grown close in the last few months, and I anticipated a proposal in the near future.

Once they returned from San Antonio, they planned to fly to New York for Christmas and visit her family, whom she hadn’t seen since she moved to Flamingo Springs almost four years ago.

It certainly seemed that love was in the air even though we were less than a week away from Thanksgiving. Usually a time for turkeys, it appeared as if victims of Cupid’s bow could be found on every corner. Lacey, owner of Beauty is You Salon, was currently seeing a local cowboy, and from what I’d heard from Jesse, who owned the grocery store, things were getting pretty serious, not that I thought it’d last. Lacey’s relationship was a rebound one, her new love interest a young businessman from Houston, who thought the world of her.

If Lacey’s former flame, Cody Jackson, had anything to say about Lacey moving on, he kept it to himself. Single and wild as ever, he’d recently come home with a gold belt from the latest rodeo championship he’d competed in, and I longed to have a counseling session with him. The reckless way he lived his life had the therapist in me both cringing and sobbing, and I