



BLIND TRUST

By Terri Blackstock

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Chapter One

The Bronco that had been riding Sherry Grayson's bumper since she'd left work was not the sole cause of her rising anger. But since it had been inappropriate to lash out at her roommate, Madeline, when she'd broken the news just fifteen minutes ago, she figured the Bronco was as good a target for her rancor as any.

Deliberately slowing to fifteen miles an hour in a forty-mile-an-hour zone, she crept along, hoping the driver behind her would get the message and pass her before she slammed her brakes to make him hit her from behind. It would serve him right. But wrecking her car wouldn't solve her problems, any more than bursting into tears would. And she didn't have the time nor the energy for either.

"Slow down," she muttered as tremors of anxiety coursed through her. She couldn't deal with a battle with a joyrider today. Yesterday, when life still had as much normalcy as it had had for the last eight months, she might have handled it better. But today.

"Get off my bumper!" Sherry blared, heat scoring her features when the Bronco almost bumped her. Heavy traffic detoured around them, but the driver would not pass her. It was an omen. An omen that she could no longer refuse to look back. After what she'd learned today, she would need strength from her past so that she could plunge forward.

According to her roommate, Clint Jessup was back from the black hole he'd vanished into without a trace eight months ago, and he intended to see her. The destructive driver behind her was a warning that life was going to be a bit rougher for a while. But she had braved rough times before; she could do it again.

Anxious to be rid of the vehicle that seemed bent on driving right through her, she made sharp turn onto a quieter street and breathed a shaky sigh of relief that she could drive the rest of the way in peace.

But a quick glance in the rearview mirror told her the Bronco was still behind her. Her pulse accelerated as the first light of understanding dawned on her. The Bronco was following her.

Driving fast enough to keep a car's distance between them, Sherry strained to make out the driver. A man no, two men sat silhouetted against the sun descending at their backs. The driver's shoulders squared with determination as he drove, and the passenger sat slumped against the door in a pose of utter boredom.

Panic surged through her. Making another quick turn while she held her breath, Sherry watched in her mirror as the Bronco barreled around the corner after her, the sun no longer making opaque shadows out of her pursuers. The driver's hair flapped into his face from the hard wind at his window, and she watched a hand come up to push it back into place. It was dark hair, full and tapering back from his face, and against the light through his back window she could see the slightest hint of curl.

She made another turn as the panic coiling in her stomach became more pronounced. The sun was blazing toward her now, and without slowing her speed, she held up a hand to shade her eyes and glanced in the mirror again, hoping to mentally record his features and report him to the police. Sherry clutched the steering wheel more tightly and waited for the bright glare to slide off the windshield and give her a clear view of his face as they rounded a curve. The open collar of the driver's shirt flapped against his neck, and a ray of sunlight caught a strip of gold draping down from his throat, illuminating it like the razor edge of a knife. Some familiar pain stabbed her heart, and she released her breath in a rush. The gold chain the engagement gift she had given him.

"No," she said aloud before her imagination carried her away. It wasn't him. It was just the knowledge that he was back that had made her heart conjure up images.

The sun descended behind the trees after its last blinding burst of orange, and suddenly the man came into full view through the mirror the beckoning mane of soft, dark hair, the determined set of full lips on a tanned face, the chain glistening more subtly against his neck. And as her punctured heart sank to her stomach, her eyes rose to the dark, riveting eyes that refused to let her go.

Clint Jessup's eyes.

Oh, dear God, I'm not ready for this. Physical danger she could bear, but Clint Jessup threatened something far worse.

Suddenly her driving became uninhibited, and her foot pounded the accelerator to the floor.

As if he knew he'd been recognized, Clint's teeth flashed between tight lips, and he sped up as well. His shoulders hunched forward as he clutched the steering wheel. Searching for another turnoff in hopes of getting back into the flow and security of heavy traffic, Sherry forced her eyes to stay on the road and away from the rearview mirror. But no sooner had she spotted a turnoff a mile up the deserted road than the heavy hum of his engine loomed up beside her.

Sherry kept her eyes off the vehicle trying to stop her and remained intent on reaching the turnoff. But Clint had other plans. She heard his gears shift, heard the passenger in his car shouting at him, heard the squeal of his tires as he found a last burst of speed and screeched sideways in front of her. Stomping on her brakes, she steered to the shoulder of the road, skidding to a stop just short of hitting him.

The driver's door of the Bronco slammed, and in seconds Clint was at her car. Before the thought of locking her door occurred to her, he was reaching for the handle, opening it, leaning inside. Sherry shoved him away and pushed out of the car, her heart pounding.

"You lunatic, are you trying to kill us?"

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