

Armed and Dangerous

by Jacki Ring

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“The escaped convict is considered to be armed and dangerous and should not be approached. He is six feet tall and weighs two hundred pounds. He has brown hair and eyes and his hair has been buzz cut.”

Lisa Hollister reached over and switched off her kitchen radio. “You’ll protect me, won’t you?” she asked the black and white border collie at her feet.

In the nine months that she’d been married to Jedd, the dog had become her most ardent admirer. Born and raised in the city, the past months had been an educational mixture of pleasure and pain for Lisa. Now she loved her new life and didn’t even mind days, like this one, when her in-laws were away, and Jedd had had to haul a load of cows to the sale leaving her and Skippy alone on the isolated ranch.

With the dishes finished Lisa slipped on a sweater and whistled to the dog. “Come on, Skippy. Let’s go gather the eggs.”

Lisa took pride in her chicken house. As always, she shooed the plump hens outside to their wire pen and slid down the tiny door that locked them out in the morning sun. She spent a few minutes cleaning the small building’s interior before collecting the eight brown eggs from the nests. Placing them in her egg basket, Lisa left the chicken house and pushed the heavy wooden door open wide in order to air out the building.

Lisa hadn’t been back in the house long when she heard the distant sounds of an approaching automobile.

“I wonder who that could be,” she told Skippy as the memory of the morning’s news bulletin flashed through her mind.

With her brain rapidly dismissing a short list of possible visitors, Lisa decided it was far better to be safe than sorry. She hurried to the gun cabinet and pulled out the shotgun Jedd had taught her to shoot. With a pounding heart and shaking hands she loaded the gun.

Watching from the kitchen window, Lisa saw the battered car come to a stop not far from her house. The car door swung open and a man dressed in denim jeans and shirt stepped out. Her mouth went dry. The stranger was an even six feet tall and weighed close to two hundred pounds. The sound of her thumping heart filled the silence as she noticed the color of his hair and took in the close buzz cut.

“It’s him, Skippy. I know it’s him.”

Lisa watched in near terror as the man strolled casually toward the barn. She suddenly realized with calm clarity that she was now in charge of her own destiny. Taking a deep breath, Lisa quickly and carefully made her plan.

Ordering the dog to keep quiet and stay by her side, Lisa stealthily crept out the back door and turned to follow the stranger. The short walk to the barn seemed to take forever as Lisa and Skippy approached it in near silence. She held the shotgun at shoulder height as she slipped through the door of the barn. There he was. He stood with his back to her less than ten feet away.

“Put your hands up in the air and don’t make any quick movements. I’ve got a gun and I’m not afraid to use it.” Lisa didn’t recognize her own voice. It was firm and forceful, not the wavering sound she’d expected. She watched as the man slowly slid his hands toward the rafters.

“Now turn around slowly.”

Skippy let out a low and menacing growl as the stranger moved in a half circle until his

face was illuminated by the sunlight filtering through the barn door. Lisa's heart did a flip as she noticed his eyes were the color of her morning coffee.

"Lady, I think you're making a big mistake." His voice was low and laced with amusement. That amusement renewed her sinking courage.

"I don't think so," she replied as she slowly backed from the barn. Stepping into the warming sun she kept the gun trained carefully on him. "Now walk slowly towards me," she instructed the man.

The stranger walked slowly through the door. Stopping just outside the barn he turned his eyes toward her.

"Lady, I'm telling you, you're making a big mistake. I'm not who you must think I am." The man's voice was no longer filled with amusement.

"Shut up or I'll pull this trigger," Lisa barked. "See that chicken house over there?"

The man turned in the direction she'd pointed with the shotgun. He nodded.

"March toward it. And remember to move slowly and keep your hands in the air."

Within seconds the stranger stood uncertainly in front of the small building.

"Step inside," Lisa ordered.

"In there?" Fear now filled his voice..

"Just do it," she yelled.

"Are you crazy? I told you I'm not who you must think I am."

"I know exactly who you and I am not crazy. Now get in the chicken house or I'll pull this trigger."

Lisa watched with satisfaction as the man stepped through the open door. Quickly, she grabbed the door and slammed it shut as she grasped the rusty padlock in her hand. She looped

the lock through both eyes of the latch and squeezed.

“Lady! You can’t lock me in here.”

Lisa ignored his plea and blocked out the rest of his words as she lowered the heavy shotgun with suddenly shaking hands and turned toward the house on weak legs.

“You stay there and watch him, Skippy. I’ll be right back.”

Lisa hurried to the house and called the sheriff. After being informed that he was out on another call and couldn’t possibly be there for at least an hour, Lisa returned to the chicken house and took up her post close to Skippy. The man inside had fallen silent, and an hour dragged by.

At last, Lisa’s ears picked up the sound of another approaching vehicle. This time, however, the sound was slightly different. She turned and peered down the road. Relief flooded her body as she picked out the familiar shape and color of Jedd’s pick-up and stock trailer followed closely by the dark brown car topped with lights.

“Honey! What on earth’s going on?” Jedd’s voice carried across the ranch yard as he ran towards her.

“It’s the sheriff, Mrs. Hollister,” another male voice boomed. “You can put the down the gun now.”

Jedd looked from Lisa to the sheriff and his deputy with uncertainty. “Would someone tell me what is going on?”

“It’s the escaped convict.” Lisa finally found her voice. “He came here this morning. Skippy and I locked him in the chicken house. Oh, Jedd, I’ve been so scared.” Lisa lowered the shotgun and fled to the safety of her husband’s embrace just as muffled yelling started up in the chicken house.

Lisa and Jedd watched as the sheriff and deputy slowly unlocked the padlock and swung

open the door to the chicken house. The stranger, now pale and obviously frightened, stepped into the bright sunshine.

“Donny!”

Lisa watched in bewilderment as her husband hurried to the man’s side.

“It’s alright,” Jedd spoke. “This is my old army buddy, Donny Dexter.”

As the sheriff and his deputy lowered their guns, Lisa watched her husband and his friend. Her face felt flushed with embarrassed heat as the events of the day came back to her. This man wasn’t an escaped convict. He was the friend who Jedd spoke about with warmth and amusement whenever he mentioned his stint in the army.

“Honey, come over and meet Donny.”

Lisa listened to her husband with chagrin. How could she face the innocent man she had so ruthlessly locked in the chicken house? Realizing she would have to face him sometime Lisa nervously made her way to Jedd’s side.

“I decided to look for you in the barn,” Donny was saying. “The place was so quiet I didn’t think anyone was around.”

“And Lisa mistook you for the escaped convict,” Jedd guessed.

“I am so sorry, Donny,” Lisa began. “I guess I acted before I even thought about it. I was so worried about being faced with an armed and dangerous man that I ended up being the one who was armed and dangerous. Can you ever forgive me?”

Donny’s face broke into a grin. “Now that it’s all over, it’s actually kind of funny. I can’t wait to tell the guys at the base.”

Donny’s laughter was infectious. Soon Jedd joined him and before long the sheriff and his deputy were roaring with laughter, too.

“Mrs. Hollister, I got to tell you,” Donny spoke. “You’ve got the cleanest chicken house I’ve ever been in.”

Lisa couldn’t help it. Her lips curved upwards in a natural smile and her laughter bubbled up uncontrollably, washing away her fears and her embarrassment.