



APRIL'S KISS IN THE MOONLIGHT  
BY  
JEAN C. JOACHIM

A Moonlight Series Novel



Dedication

To

My special friends in the summer community at Lake Huntington, New York. Thank you for your support and good wishes and in appreciation of Lake Huntington, one of the most beautiful places to live.

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# Chapter One

As April McKenna drove her small car around the bend and approached a tiny town, a good looking, big man with short, reddish brown hair stepped into the street and stuck out his thumb.

"Yeah, right, Mr. Serial Killer, like I'm going to give *you* a ride," she said aloud to herself, speeding up to pass him quickly but unable to direct her gaze away from his.

She averted her eyes hastily, trying instead to concentrate on sorting out her life. Driving the back roads from Willow Falls, NY to San Francisco gave April time to think. She had finished her MBA and was heading back for an internship in her father's company, prelude to a staid, boring, corporate life. The thought of such a future left her restless . . . and restlessness was fast turning to unhappiness. April didn't want to go back . . . didn't want to live her father's life. She wanted to break out, but didn't know how, she she'd always been the good girl, doing the right thing, what was expected of her.

With her mind occupied, she was driving on automatic pilot and saw the glass scattered in the road too late to avoid it. Her tire lasted another half mile before it blew. She pulled onto a muddy shoulder and got out of the car. She rummaged around in the car trunk having no idea where the spare tire or the jack were or even how to use them if she found them. She pulled out her cell phone only to remember she'd forgotten to recharge it before leaving school. Then she laughed when she realized there was no one to call anyway. *You're supposed to hang something white on the door handle when you need help.* April returned to the car, took off her white lace panties, the only white object she had and hung them on the door handle, closed the door and waited.

Only a few houses dotted the lonely country road, but acre after acre of green fields was bursting with ripe crops. Standing on tiptoe, she could barely make out a farmhouse in the distance. The tall corn stalks of late July blocked her car from view by anyone at the house.

Half an hour passed and no car came by. Was she about to spend the night there in her car? Then she saw him in the rear view mirror. It was Mr. Serial Killer, coming around the bend, and heading straight for her car. She felt panic rise in her chest as she locked all the doors and hunkered down.

He walked up to the car and knocked on the window, startling April, who jumped. When she turned to look at him, he was smiling at her.

"Flat?" He asked.

She nodded.

"Pop the trunk," he said.

*Can't you get inside the car through the trunk? He could attack me . . .*

"Take it easy. I'm not a mass murderer. Want to help you change your tire," he

called to her.

April popped the trunk. If she didn't want to spend the night alone in the dark, accepting his help was her only choice.

"Are these yours?" he asked, plucking her panties off the door handle and holding them up to the car window. The white lace bikinis looked ridiculously small in his large hand.

April felt heat seep into her face and knew she had turned several shades of red. Avoiding the stranger's gaze, she opened the car window and snatched the panties from him. He laughed, shook his head and headed for the trunk, as she struggled to put the panties back on while sitting in the front seat.

"Easier to jack up the car if you're not in it," he called to her.

Reluctantly, she got out of the car, keeping an eye on him and perched on a large rock at a safe distance to watch him, hugging her knees to her chest.

"Rusty," he said, extending his hand after taking off his backpack.

"April," she responded, wrinkling her nose with distaste at the sight of dirt coating his hand.

"Oh, yeah, sorry. Greasy." He wiped his hand on his jeans.

He worked for forty-five minutes, jacking up the car then changing the tire. April watched him with interest. As he began to sweat, he removed his T-shirt. April stared at his strong chest covered with reddish hair, feeling a desire to touch it. The muscles in Rusty's arms worked as he attached the jack and began to pump it up, moving the car higher and higher. He was tall, about six foot four inches, broad and strong. He shot her an easy grin from time to time.

"What's a beautiful woman like you doing stranded out here? Where you headed?" He asked, looking her over with appreciation in his eyes.

"San Francisco. You?" She said, blushing slightly under his gaze.

"I've got a week to get to Allentown for a job. At the rate I'm going, it'll take me a week to walk it." He worked the tire iron on the lug nuts.

She laughed. "Why kind of job?"

"Driving a truck to New York City and back. It pays well."

"You going to live in Allentown?"

"Of course. Where are you coming from?"

"Got my MBA from Kensington State University. Heading home."

"Going back to a job?"

"Uh . . . an internship. But I don't want to. I'm not sure what I want to do."

"After all that time with college and graduate school and you still don't know what you want to do? Heck . . . a lot of money down the drain."

"Education doesn't always tell you what you want to do in life."

"True enough. Still going home, eh?" He leaned against the car.

"It's expected."

"Car's ready. You should replace the dead tire because if this one blows, you're out of luck," he pointed out, putting his shirt back on.

"Thanks. Get in," she said, standing up, and brushing herself off.

"You giving me a ride?"

She shrugged and gave a nod.

"Well, I can promise not to strangle and murder you . . . but I might kiss you," he said.

"Thanks for fixing the tire. I'm taking you all the way to Allentown," she said.

"No way! You are? Fantastic."

"The least I can do . . . it's not far out of my way and . . . I'm in no hurry."

"Up for a little journey?" he asked her with a wicked grin on his face.

"Maybe." She looked him over, thinking about his offer of adventure.

"Let's get some food. There's a diner down the road a ways and I'm buying," he said, holding the door open for her.

She smiled up at him as he closed the car door.

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April opened her eyes and sat up, not totally aware of her surroundings. She was in the back seat of a car and it had been ten months since she'd met Rusty on the side of the road. Terrible pain tore through her midsection whenever she moved.

"You're up?" the woman driving the car said.

"Where am I?"

"Heading toward Pine Grove. I'm Sunny Foster, your mom's friend. I picked you up at the hospital an hour ago?"

April's head was fuzzy. She lay back down on the seat and closed her eyes; her dreams began. She saw her car with Rusty behind the wheel. She was walking . . . no running toward the car. There was a click, then an explosion. Debris went airborne, then a plastic garbage can came flying at her. She put up her arms to fend it off, but the force of the can slamming into her arms turned them into weapons, breaking one rib and bruising two more. The can knocked her on the ground where her head hit hard . . . she lost consciousness.

*Rusty! Rusty's dead. Yeah, Rusty's dead.* April's eyes fluttered open again for a few seconds then closed again, as she tried to disappear into sleep. It was too soon for her to face the truth about the horrible accident.

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