

**Discreet Fling**

**A Suzie Jensen Murder Mystery**

**David DeLee**

Dark Road Publishing

## **Copyright**

*Discreet Fling*, Copyright © 2011 by David DeLee

Excerpt from *Fatal Deception*, Copyright © 2011 by David DeLee

*Discreet Fling* is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any similarities or resemblance to actual events, locales or persons, living or dead, is wholly coincidental.

Dark Road Publishing

## Discreet Fling

KATHERINE CULBERTSON SAT at the linen-covered table for two, alone, waiting. Around her, waiters served other tables, couples mostly, though a few tables had three, four and five people dining there. At the bar, the bartender served drinks to men in business suits watching baseball on a TV hung from the ceiling with the sound turned down. The soft chime of glass and tableware, the rise and fall of whispered conversations and piped-in background music on low, together with the dim lighting and glow of candles, created an intimate, romantic ambiance.

Kat sat, twisting her diamond and gold wedding ring around her finger and debated whether to leave it on or remove the damn thing. *It's not like he doesn't know I'm married*, she thought, taking another nervous sip of her chilled white wine, a very nice Riesling Kabinett.

She'd put it out there, right on her profile. Married, two children, looking for a good time, no strings, no commitments. That was the whole point of the service, in fact, wasn't it?

"Hi. Katherine?"

Startled at the light touch of fingertips on her bare shoulder, she nearly spewed her wine across the table. God, she was a nervous wreck. Swallowing, she turned carefully in her seat. A handsome young man stood by her side, having appeared as if out of nowhere. He wore a dark business suit with a crisp white shirt and an elegant striped tie.

He smiled. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to frighten you."

"Brian." Kat swallowed, unnerved by how young her date appeared to be. Like, barely over the drinking age young. "No, no. It's fine. I was just...thinking." She started to get up.

He put a hand on her shoulder. Warm. Electrifying. Kat let go a soft, involuntary gasp.

"Don't," he said. "Please sit."

She settled back down, grateful, because suddenly her legs had gone all wobbly.

*This was a mistake.* How could this...*boy* be interested in her? She was easily twice his age.

He circled the table, pulled out the chair opposite her, undid his suit jacket's single button and sat down, smoothing his white and silver silk tie against his stomach. Since he was too young to be on the cover of *GQ*, Kat pictured this young man instead on an Abercrombie billboard, shirtless, wearing only cargo shorts, with the elastic band of his briefs showing peeking out.

Her face flushed hotly at the thought.

"Your profile picture doesn't do you justice," she blurted out, reaching for her wine glass. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean..."

He smiled and waved away her embarrassment. "Don't be. You're right. And I have to confess. I *am* younger than I put in my online profile. I used my dad's photograph and information. Everybody says I look exactly like him, only younger. Anyway, I'm sorry I lied. It's just some women your age..."

*Cougars*, she supplied. *Woman who are the same age as your mother*. But Kat let that go. Who was she to judge?

"I enjoy being with experienced women," he went on to explain. "If I'm truthful, it puts some women off. They don't take me seriously." He waved to the server. When he came over, Brian ordered a Murphy's Red and asked for a chilled glass.

"It's an Irish beer," he said, after the waiter had gone. "This is one of the few places around town where I can get it."

Kat took the opportunity to look around. The Dublin Avenue Grille was an upscale steak and ale restaurant in the Arena District a block from the Columbus Clipper's new stadium and Nationwide Arena. The wait time to get in on weekends was measured in hours, she'd heard, as the place didn't take reservations. But this Wednesday night, the restaurant was quiet, with only about a third of the tables occupied. Then too, the hour was late.

"It's been ages since I've eaten here. My husband and I used to come here when..." Kat dropped her eyes to the table, nervously twisting her wineglass by the stem. "Wow. I'm sorry. Was that in poor taste? I've only done this a time or two. I guess I don't have the proper protocols down." She felt herself blushing.

"It's fine. There's no protocol that I've discovered. How this goes is different with everyone." He covered her hand with a warm and reassuring touch and she decided that his etiquette was far more mature than his age suggested. Well-mannered, well-dressed, he was obviously from an affluent family. And clearly, of the two of them, he was the one with more experience.

He laughed. "That's part of the thrill, isn't it?" he confessed.

“I suppose,” Kat said, feeling a second, rising wave of apprehension.

He sat back. “If you’re not in it for the excitement, for the thrill, why are you out cheating on your husband?”

“Why?” she repeated. *Good question.* “You’re sure you want to hear about this?”

He nodded.

Kat had to be careful: otherwise, the floodgates would open up. Handling her feelings was like walking a tightrope. She loved Daniel, but she wanted—needed—more than he was willing to give. “I’m here because my husband ignores me. He travels a lot, and by that I mean all the time. But even when he’s home he’s not really there, not with me. He’s either working or he’s out playing golf with clients or with his buddies, or he’s watching sports. Too tired to do anything but relax, he says.”

She felt the tears coming and gulped them down hard, choking them back. She wouldn’t cry, God damn it. She’d shed enough tears over her failing marriage. So, not tonight. Not when she was determined to have a little fun, do something for herself for a change. “I’m here because I’m lonely.”

“Is he having an affair?” Brian asked, sounding almost too curious.

“I don’t know. I don’t think so.” She forced a smile. “But I don’t want to talk about him anymore. I’m here to have fun.”

“Fair enough.” He nodded his agreement. “But, what about your kids?”

She’d mentioned in her profile she had children. They were three and five. “What about them?” She stared at Brian blankly. *What an odd question to ask.*

“What would they think about all this? If they knew mommy was out on a date with another man. Out with someone other than their daddy.”

“I love my children and they love me. They would...my children have nothing to do with this. Leave them out of it.” Angry and now upset, Kat sipped at her wine. She took the moment to once again assess the young man across from her, initially charming and well-mannered, but now she sensed something about him was...off. “May I ask you a question?”

“Certainly,” he said, with a smile.

“What makes you want to be with a married woman, a woman nearly twice your age?”

He drank his beer, a stalling tactic Kat assumed, before he then changed the subject. “I’ve made you uncomfortable now, and I’m sorry. Why don’t we get out of here?”

Kat’s entire body tingled. But the sensation wasn’t the warm, anticipatory sort of tingle she’d when Brian first arrived. Nor was it the sort of electrical charge she got when things were going

really well on a date, that feeling of giddy exhilaration as she wondered and hoped about what would come next.

No.

This was the kind of tingle that said something was wrong. Very, very wrong. “I...don’t think so. I’m sorry, but I made a mistake coming here tonight.”

Brian stood up and peeled two fresh fifties from a money clip full of bills and dropped them on the table. Replacing the money clip in his pocket, he held out a hand to Kat. In his other hand, clutched tight to his side and angled away so no one else in the restaurant would notice it, he held a knife.

The weapon had a five-inch-long blade and was made of some kind of blackened metal.

When he leaned down as if to kiss her goodnight he whispered directly into her ear, his lips so close she felt his hot breath against the nape of her neck. She shivered at his tone as well as his words. “Get up now, or I’ll gut you right now.”

Kat stood as best she could, her legs so shaky she feared she’d collapse. With the blade pressed firmly into her side, he led her from the restaurant and out into the night.

\*\*\*

SHERIFF’S DEPUTY SUZIE JENSEN arrived on the scene three-and-a-half minutes after she got the call. The assigned Columbus PD sector car was 10-57, answering a request for back-up from units in German Village. Suzie was glad to respond. It had been a slow night.

The 911 call hadn’t revealed much information. A man who didn’t identify himself had simply said, “I need the police. Send the police right away.” Beyond that, the only thing else the operator could get was a location.

Arriving, she found a silver-haired man in a tuxedo stood at the corner where Nationwide Boulevard intersected with Neil Avenue. He smoked a cigarette, sucking the smoke into his lungs in great gasps. Suzie recognized the *maitre d’* of the Dublin Avenue Grille, from the few times she’d eaten there. Anthony or Andrew—something like that.

She’d rolled with emergency lights on, but hadn’t used her siren. Seeing her approach, the *maitre d’* waved frantically, directing her toward the alley off Neil, behind the businesses along the boulevard, behind the Dublin Avenue Grille.

Suzie swung the cruiser across the street and pulled up onto the curb. She parked facing oncoming traffic, but with the car mostly off the street. It was probably an unnecessary precaution,

though, considering traffic at that time of night was nearly nonexistent. At any rate, she left her emergency bar flashing and rolled down her window. “You called in the 911?”

The *maitre d'* leaned into the window.

“It’s Anthony, right?” she asked, trying to be friendly.

“Alistair actually, and yes, I called...” He looked the cruiser up and down, then looked back at Suzie, arching a thick, snow-white eyebrow. “...the *police*.”

*Really? He’s going to act like a sheriff’s deputy’s not a real cop.* “The Columbus sector car is backing up units in German Village,” Suzie explained, getting out. “A shooting, I think.”

She closed the cruiser door, slipped her baton into its ring and placed the Smokey-the-bear hat on her head, covering up her spiky blonde locks. *Maybe it’s my punk ‘do that’s got his panties all twisted up in a knot.*

“I apologize. You’re fine. As long as someone’s here.”

“What’s this about, Alistair?”

The man appeared extremely unnerved. Suzie remembered him as being exactly what you’d expect of a *maitre d'* in a place like the Grille. He’d been a smug, uppity asshole. But now, his hands were shaking and he was pale under his dark, tanning-salon tan.

“I’ll show you. This way.” He took a final drag from his cigarette before grinding it under shiny Scarpe DiBianco oxfords and leading Suzie into the service alley. The alley was wide, and by rights shouldn’t have been called an alley, based on the way it looked and how clean it was. I even had rows of low-cut hedges and little patches of grass lining either side, spaced between where heavy metal service doors accessed the businesses inside. *This is nicer than the green space around my condo, for Christ sake.*

About a hundred feet in, a dark-green dumpster rested on a concrete pad. Even the dumpster was spotless.

“Back here.” Alistair continued past the jut-out where the dumpster sat, waving Suzie along, encouraging her to keep up. “Here. Here.”

The alley—and Suzie was still having trouble thinking of it as such—was adequately lit with coned overhead lights above each service door, bathing the area in a diffused amber glow. Alistair stopped at the far side of the jut-out. His eyes went wide and he covered his mouth with his hand, repulsed again by whatever it was he saw.

Suzie approached the jut-out, giving it a wide berth still having no idea what Alistair was reacting to. Whatever it was, it couldn’t be good.

Suzie placed her hand on the butt of her service Glock, keeping the gun holstered but ready to draw. She stepped smartly around the concrete jut-out. Then her breath caught in her throat.

Crumpled in a pile in the corner between the building and the brick wall behind was a woman. A bloody, beaten, and very dead, woman.

Suzie knelt down besides the body, gingerly feeling the neck for a pulse. There wasn't one, and the flesh was unnaturally cool to the touch. When her fingers came back sticky with blood, Suzie immediately keyed her shoulder mic, calling in what she'd just found.

The woman had without a doubt been beaten to death. Viciously. Her face was covered in cuts—deep wounds across her cheeks and forehead that had been split open by the force of the pummeling. Her lips were swollen and bloody, misshapen, twisted into an ugly sneer. She had several teeth missing along with her other injuries. Suzie didn't see them lying around, so either they were on the ground underneath the body or had been swallowed during the battering she'd taken. Or they could have been taken by the perp as a souvenir.

Suzie sat on her haunches and shook her head, marveling, not for the first time, at a person's capacity to inflict such violence and pain on another human being. She was sickened by it. And as always, she wished she could do something to fix what had been done.

Keeping his distance, Alistair lit another cigarette with trembling hands and took a long, deep drag as if hoping that might erase the nightmarish sight.

\*\*\*

A COLUMBUS PD patrol unit arrived a short while later, followed in quick succession by the crime scene unit and the medical examiner. Each apologized for having taken so long processing the shooting victim in German Village. When it rains, it pours.

Working with the two Columbus uniforms, Suzie helped establish a crime scene perimeter by cordoning off both ends of the alley with yellow crime scene tape. One of the officers took up a posting at the Neil Avenue entrance where he would handle the crime scene sign-in log.

While waiting for the others to arrive, Suzie had conducted a preliminary field interview with Alistair, getting from him the particulars surrounding what he had found, when he'd found it and anything else he might have seen or heard. When the crime scene techs began scouring the area, setting down equipment and number markers, taking pictures, looking for clues, Alistair returned to the Grille, telling Suzie he would be available for follow-up questions if that became necessary. Suzie remained inside the perimeter, near the jut-out, jotting down notes of her own.

“Hey ya, Suzie.”

Suzie glanced up from her notebook, surprised to see Eugene Booker, a special agent with the state's Bureau of Criminal Investigations strolling toward her, wearing a well-tailored, thousand-dollar suit and looking as dapper as usual. She smiled. Okay, Booker was handsome as hell, too.

Booker was an ex-cop, and someone she'd worked a few cases with before. He was good people, and he was also a friend.

"Hey, yourself, good-looking. What brings the BCI down here?"

"You did, indirectly." He pointed around the jut-out. "The body's there?"

Suzie gave him a 'what's up' glance. "What's BCI's interest in a routine street murder?"

The Bureau of Criminal Investigations was a service of the Ohio attorney general's office. While it did have statewide jurisdiction, it only got involved in run-of-the-mill cases like this one when asked by local police to assist. Requests were usually made by smaller departments with few in-house resources. In this case, between the sheriff's investigators and the Columbus cops, there certainly was no need to call in the BCI.

The Bureau's Special Investigations Unit, to which Eugene Booker was assigned, also handled dignitary protection, fugitive apprehensions, police-involved shootings, corruption cases, cold case homicides and, as the thought struck her, chilling Suzie's spine, serial crimes.

Again, she asked, "What's going on, Book?"

He ducked around her without answering. "Show me," he said. "Then we'll talk."

The crime scene people had set up two powerful halogen lamps to illuminate the area. In the stark, white light, a tech was sketching the alley while two others were taking measurements, and a fourth was taking pictures. A female crime scene technician was crouched over the body. Taking notes, she balanced a clipboard on her knee. She looked up as Booker and Suzie approached. "Agent Booker. Deputy," she said.

Suzie nodded. It was clear Book knew her, which meant the CSU team dispatched belonged to BCI, not CPD. Interesting.

Book then said, "Tell me what you've got."