

# Spooked

By Deatri King-Bey

Thick clouds covered the full moon just as Leslie neared the secluded post office. Why the city had decided to place the small secondary post office in the middle of nowhere was beyond her. Granted, it was only a few miles from her home, but the convenience of the location was almost lost in its eerie surroundings. If she could only get off a few hours earlier so she wouldn't have to check her box after dark. Working from 7 A.M. to 9 P.M. Monday thru Saturday had cramped a lot more than her mail checking capabilities, but starting her own boutique was worth every moment.

As usual, the twenty-space customer parking lot was empty. After pulling into the spot closest to the door, Leslie quickly scanned the area. The trees and shrubs swayed in with the cool autumn breeze. No telling what kind of creatures were out on this night. She just hoped they were out somewhere else.

“This is silly.” Why it always scared her to check her box after dark was another mystery for her. It wasn't like bad things didn't happen during the day with tons of people around. Drawing in a few calming breaths, she scanned her surroundings one last time, turned off the car's ignition and rushed into the post office.

Mind on checking her box and getting back to her car before her irrational fear took over, Leslie quickly opened her box. A hand reached for her. Pure unadulterated terror filled her from head to toe. Screaming, she stumbled and fell back, then everything went black.

Beeping slowly woke Leslie. Disoriented, it took her a few moments to realize the hand sanitizer dispenser on the wall, the curtain pulled between the bed she was in and what she

assumed was another bed combined with the beeping meant she was most likely in a hospital, but why. Then it hit her. The hand!

Someone clearing his throat caught her attention. She glanced over and saw an incredibly handsome man who looked like he'd slept overnight in an extremely uncomfortable chair beside her bed.

"I'm sorry, I didn't want to spook you again—"

"You're the hand!" she cut in. "What...what happened? Why are you here? Why am I here?" Answers, she needed answers and needed them quickly.

"Long story short, I was placing mail in your box at the same time you opened your box. It all happened so fast. I heard you scream one second and fall to the ground the next. I rushed out to check on you, and you were on the floor. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to scare you."

"Oh no, you've done nothing wrong." Embarrassed beyond belief she'd allowed her overactive imagination to get the best of her, she just wanted to hide her face. And why did she have to act horror movie crazy in front of such an attractive man? Why couldn't he be some old codger?

Brows furrowed, she asked, "Why are you here and why did they allow you to stay?"

A devilish grin tipped his lips and the cutest dimples appeared. "Well, I kind of told the staff I'm your boyfriend, so they let me stay. I couldn't just leave you. This was my fault." He took her hand into his, and it didn't look scary at all. "I'm sorry."

Her heart simply melted. "You are entirely too sweet. I'm the one who is sorry." A nervous laugh escaped her. "Talk about over reacting. And you stayed all night. I feel so horrible." Suddenly self-conscious of the mess she must look, she smoothed her hair behind her ears.

“I guess the least I can do is introduce myself.” He bowed his head slightly. “Justin Barns at your service.”

“Leslie Johnson.” She crumpled the edge of the blanket between her fingers. “I’ve already ruined your night. You don’t have to stay. I’m sure you’re tired. I’ll be fine. Really.”

“After you’re released, I’m driving you home. I know it’s none of my business, but why do you check your mail so late?”

“I opened a clothing boutique two months ago. I open and close the store, so don’t have another time I can come.”

The worry in his eyes threw her. She was a stranger to him, yet he’d come in to be her protector of sorts, and she liked it. Since she’d moved to the small town, she hadn’t had time to make friends or actually socialize.

“I’ll tell you what,” he began, “with your permission, I’ll bring your mail to your boutique each evening.”

“I’d never ask—”

“You’re not asking, and this gives me an excuse to see you again.”

“I’d like that.”