

# The Shopkeeper

by TJ Skarbo

"There goes that slut Kerri Stanton," the immense woman behind the counter chuckled to her patron. "Who the hell does she think she is?"

Jen watched the woman and the redheaded patron as they lifted noses at the woman across the street. Jen watched the Kerri woman scurry down the sidewalk out of sight, almost as though the scornful mouthfuls of the women could travel the distance to her ears. Jen shook her head. One of the things she hated about the small mid-western towns was the absolute ignorance of the townsfolk.

"You know who I feel sorry for," the woman at the counter waited for the immense woman's full attention, "I feel sorry for her family, can you imagine what her mother would say?"

"Having such a black sheep in the family would be a burden." The blonde storekeeper nodded and wiped the heel of her hand over her leaking nose.

Jen tried to keep her mind on the groceries. What did it matter what some ignorant ill informed women have to say about some resident? It wasn't her battle, hell it wasn't as though the story wasn't known to everyone. Was only a week here and she too was included amongst the 'informed'. While many saw Kerri as a slut and the story as a scandal, Jen saw it as tragic. With the last thought she grabbed the last item on her list and brought the basket of goods to the cash register.

"Well hiya Jen, how have you been keepin'? That old place of Joes keeping you warm?"

"Needs a couple things fixed here and there but all in all I can't complain."

"Now you just let us know if you are in need of anything you hear?" She reached over the counter and patted Jens hand as though she was a schoolgirl and not a woman of 36. It was all Jen could stand; her blood began to give color to her cheeks as anger spread through her being.

"I have been standing just over there," Jen raised a hand and pointed to where she had been standing only moments ago. "While you both were blatantly cutting down that Kerri woman. Now in your second breath you offer to help me in my time of 'need'? Do you really think I would lower myself to accept the help of the likes of you? You have no idea what went on in that woman's life before or after 'the scandal'. In fact the only thing you are sure of are the words of people like you who have nothing else going on in their sad little miserable lives. So alone do you feel in your loveless marriages, that when another woman does discover herself and succumbs to her womanly desires that you are so consumed by jealousy you make her life a living hell, while all the time secretly admiring her. Down deep you admire her courage; to break from the shells you all cling to so tightly; as though the essence of life will be revealed to you if you just hold on long enough and tight enough. You so wish to be free of the bonds your mothers have imposed, and branded your souls with. Secretly you look at Kerri and the doubt of your mother's words well up into your spirit and soul, suddenly drowning you in fear and loathing as you think of the 20 years spent with a man who loves a six-pack more then the sound of your own voice; a man who sits in front of the TV and laughs at his own wind. Oh yes, down deep you admire her because she broke free and you will never admit it because if you do then you have to admit you have wasted your life away." Jen felt slightly winded but was spurned on by the immense woman's huge eyes.

“You know here and now I am saying that which you cannot. I bring forth ideas you have only allowed yourself to cry about in the comfort of the dark shadows of your bedroom. Go home, lock the door, run a hot bath and think. Think about the real reasons you feel the hate. The hate for Kerri and the hate I can see in your eyes at this moment. The hate you feel for the truth. When you have figured it out and can no longer hide the truth under your weight you will find happiness, you will find yourself and the wonderful women you can be. Do yourself a favor, and look at things from another angle. If after all I have said, you cannot see a valid point, answer one question. Honestly, would you if you had the power to, would you give the life you have led to your daughter or granddaughter? Would you want them to live the same exact life you have led? Would you want them to have the same sadness? If you find yourself thinking the answer is no that your life would not be ‘good’ enough for them, I wonder why you think it is good enough for you. What makes you think you deserve anything less? Find yourself and what makes you happy before you no longer know what it means.”

Jen dropped the bills onto the counter and grabbed the handles from the woman's hands. Both stood with mouths agape, as they watched her leave.

