

The DOMINO KING



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Sonny



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By
St. Clair Sonny



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Chapter One

Chad Martin stepped out of the Chinese restaurant, holding tightly to the bag that contained his favourite Chinese dinner. Slowly he began walking down the road, unaware of two young muggers who were paying him particular attention, one a Caucasian, and the other, an Afro-Caribbean.

Chad, a twenty-five-year-old Afro-Caribbean, was born and brought up in East London. Of average height, slender build, and handsome with a fair complexion, he looked somewhat depressed as he stopped by the kerb to wait for the traffic to clear. After waiting for a few minutes, Chad crossed the road.

Following some distance away were the two muggers.

It was about 7 p.m. in the middle of June. The weather was relatively warm. Chad walked down the steps to the subway on his way home. By the time he reached the subway, he realised the two muggers were following him. He looked around with some degree of apprehension, realising that no one else was around except him and the muggers. Chad gasped in horror and fear gripped his body when he realised the two muggers were walking closer towards him with deliberate intent. Chad made a valiant effort to run away from the muggers, but his weakening legs couldn't support his determination, and he stumbled to the ground.

Suddenly the muggers were upon him. The Caucasian mugger kicked him violently in the stomach, and he buckled in

pain. The Afro-Caribbean mugger grabbed his shirt collar and dragged his tired body to the wall while Chad still held tightly to the bag that contained his Chinese dinner.

“I want your money, sucker!” shouted the Afro-Caribbean mugger.

Chad, very much afraid, with his hands trembling, held his bag in his left hand and removed his wallet with his right hand.

The Caucasian mugger quickly grabbed the wallet, opened it rather impatiently, and took out £100 from the wallet. He placed the money in his pocket, threw Chad’s wallet to the ground, and eye-balled him. Then he said in a soft, menacing voice, “We’ll be looking out for you. You make sure you have more money the next time.” The Afro-Caribbean mugger violently pulled the bag from Chad’s hand, and the two muggers tucked into Chad’s dinner as they walked away in triumph.

Chad felt anger and humiliation as he watched them walk away. Nevertheless, he felt relieved that he was not physically hurt; only his pride was deeply wounded. He brushed off the dirt from his dishevelled clothes, picked up his wallet, placed it in his pocket, and made his way home.

Chad entered his one-bedroom flat, weary and confused, still unable to comprehend his dreadful experience. He entered his bedroom, removed his shoes, stripped to his vest and shorts, and dropped his tired body onto the bed. He closed his eyes and tried to relax. He struggled with his tired body and his weary mind, trying to analyse the past which had brought him to his present state.

Chad was once extremely ambitious, with a successful marketing business. He had owned a few properties, a BMW sports car, and had a very attractive fiancée. Now, Chad found himself struggling and alone. He had lost his successful business, his fiancée, his BMW, and his properties.

THE DOMINO KING

Chad grew up with Linda Knight. Like Chad, Linda, an Afro-Caribbean, was born and brought up in East London. Linda, now twenty-three, was a pretty, unassuming young woman, but she never went out of her way to look attractive. She was a good and reliable young woman, brought up properly in the Caribbean family tradition. Since leaving school, Linda had been working as a housing officer for Waltham Forest Council. Linda and Chad had a fairly good relationship, and on various occasions, had discussed plans of getting married, until Chad met Gloria Marshall while at the University of London studying for his degree in Business Studies.

Chad was completely smitten by Gloria the moment he set eyes on her. He knew instinctively that whatever he'd had with Linda no longer existed. Gloria was a stunningly beautiful young woman of twenty-one. She had a disarming smile, her lips sensuous and enchanting. She walked with a grace that attracted most men who set eyes on her. In the case of Chad, however, the attraction was much deeper.

Gloria, studying Social Science in the same university as Chad, was a year behind him. Gloria came from Bath and had a flat in the city of London while doing her studies.

Chad and Gloria started dating the same day they met. Within a week, he had asked her to marry him, and she had agreed. He bought her an engagement ring, and they had an engagement party, just the two of them.

The most difficult thing Chad had to do was to tell Linda about his engagement to Gloria. He knew very well that she would be deeply hurt. Linda was hurt, much more than he could imagine, when he told her while they were having a meal in a restaurant. Without finishing her meal, she ran away from the restaurant with tears in her eyes. When Chad rushed out after her, he couldn't see any sign of her.

Chad completed his studies and started a successful marketing business. Within six months, he had bought a four-bedroom house for him and Gloria. Their plan was to get married after Gloria completed her studies.

Chad waited patiently for Gloria during that time they had cemented their relationship. Chad was deeply in love with her and looked forward to a happy future. The day finally arrived when Gloria completed her studies. Chad booked a dinner table at the Hilton Hotel to celebrate.

The moment Chad walked into Gloria's flat he felt a sense of foreboding. As usual, she looked absolutely gorgeous in a tight-fitting skirt with an open top blouse. She certainly didn't look like an ordinary student. She looked at Chad with a gloomy expression. When he attempted to kiss her, she turned away in a polite fashion, avoiding contact.

Chad was taken aback, but he tried his best to overcome his embarrassment. "Are you ready?" he asked almost apologetically.

She gazed at him disdainfully, then looked away and replied, "I'm not coming with you. I'm going back to Bath."

"What do you mean you're going back to Bath?"

"My family are waiting for me in Bath," she replied. She looked at him searchingly. "My fiancé is coming to pick me up."

"Your fiancé?" asked Chad in complete shock. "I was under the impression that we were engaged to be married."

She went into the bedroom and returned with the engagement ring Chad had given to her. She handed it to him. Chad held the ring in his trembling fingers and looked at Gloria with hurt in his eyes. "What have I done to you?" he pleaded. "Why are you hurting me so much?"

When Gloria realised the state Chad was in, she felt some sympathy for him, but not enough to change her mind. She folded her arms defensively and said, "I'm sorry I hurt you . . .

THE DOMINO KING

I didn't mean to. I've been going out with Dave since I was sixteen. I was engaged to him before I came here. His father is one of the richest men in Bath. He bought us a seven-bedroom house as a present for our wedding. We're getting married next month. Everything has been arranged for us. There is nothing I can do."

He gazed at her, speechless and motionless. She looked at him, then at her watch, then said abruptly, "I'm sorry, but you have to leave. Dave is coming to pick me up any minute, and I don't want him to meet you here."

Her words wounded him enormously. With great difficulty, he managed to walk out of the flat.

Chad crawled into his car, which was parked a few hundred yards from Gloria's flat. He sat down heavily and dropped his head backwards. The pain, the shock, the disappointment, the rejection were all just too much. He couldn't stop the tears from gushing down his face. Feeling deeply ashamed, he got a handkerchief from his pocket and dried his tears with a trembling hand.

Suddenly Chad realised how much he had hurt Linda. He was still thinking of the pain he had caused her when a red convertible Mercedes drove past and stopped a few yards in front of him. He looked with interest because he knew the driver must be Dave, Gloria's fiancé. Chad watched as he went into Gloria's flat. After a few minutes, Dave and Gloria came out together with a couple of cases. Dave placed the cases at the back seat and sat in the front. Chad watched Gloria intently as she sat in the car and Dave drove away.

Chad knew in his heart that this would be the very last time he would ever see Gloria.

Some months later, while lying on his bed analysing his life, Chad became fully aware that the breakup of his relationship

with Gloria was one of the main factors responsible for his fall from grace.

Chad felt as if he had nothing to live for. He lost interest in his business. People he trusted took advantage of his predicament, and bills were not paid. This state of affairs continued until Chad lost everything. First he lost his business, then his properties and his car, and he still had outstanding debts. He managed to get a marketing job with the hope of paying his bills, but the worst was yet to come. Within the same week that he started his new job, he was sacked and made bankrupt—two big blows, both of which were morally damaging to his sense of self-worth.

Chad had to sign on, and was getting Job Seekers' Allowance and housing benefits to pay for his one-bedroom flat.

His friends deserted him. His best friend since the age of ten refused to meet him to discuss his problems. Even his family deserted him. His own mother had refused to speak to him ever since he broke his relationship with Linda.

His brothers and sisters deserted him because Chad refused to join the religion they were now practising. His dad had died about four years ago, and he now missed him more than ever.

Chad was on his own, no friends . . . no family. The only person who didn't completely turn away from Chad was the one person he had hurt so dreadfully: Linda Knight. No doubt, without Linda to help him, he would have ended up in a mental institution, though she was the last person he wanted around him because of what he had done to her. Sometimes feeling ashamed, he tried to stay away from her. But Linda was a determined young woman, and she did her very best to help Chad, to the annoyance of her parents, who constantly reminded her that Chad had broken her heart and left her for another woman who turned out to be engaged to someone else.

THE DOMINO KING

The analysis of his tormenting experiences, which had led him to his present state, made Chad feel much worse. The disappointments, the problems, the let-downs, all weighed heavily on his mind. Being mugged was the final nail in his coffin. He felt he had reached rock bottom. He could not go down any farther. He silently reminded himself that he couldn't sustain his life in his present state.

There must be a way out, he considered, a way to get permanent relief.

Chad developed suicidal tendencies and began considering an effective way to get the job done.

While Chad was deep in concentration, pondering the misery of his life, the phone rang loudly and insistently. He opened his eyes slowly and remained silent on the bed, and just let the phone ring.

The phone kept ringing while Chad prayed it would stop. But it didn't stop. Reluctantly he put on his trousers, entered the living room, and picked up the phone.

"Hello!" he said angrily.

A soft female voice said, "Hello, Chad."

He knew instinctively that it was Linda on the phone. Linda was the last person he wanted to speak to right now. Every time he saw Linda, every time Linda spoke to him, he was reminded of how badly he had treated her, and that did not make him feel any better.

After a brief conversation, Linda discovered that Chad was in a poor frame of mind. Worried and concerned, she asked him what the problem was, and he reluctantly related the incident with the muggers. Almost in tears, and feeling his pain, she said softly, "Thank God you're not badly hurt. Did you go to the hospital for a check-up?"

"No, I didn't. Please don't worry, Linda. I'm okay!"

After a brief silence, she said, "I do hope you reported the incident to the police!"

"No, I didn't report it. That would be a waste of time." To make her feel better, he added, "I was too tired. I wanted to come home and have a rest. I will report it tomorrow."

"You must be hungry! I'll come over to bring you some dinner and some money as soon as I can."

"No, please don't do that!" retorted Chad almost desperately. "There's no need to . . . Honestly, I'm fine. There's no need for you to come." He heard the click of the phone as Linda put down the receiver. Chad quickly put down the receiver, rushed into the bedroom, put his shirt on, and began cleaning the flat.

Linda rushed out of her bedroom after a quick change. Her mum, Sindy Knight, was waiting by the door with a serious expression. Sindy bore a striking resemblance to Linda. She was of average height, about forty-five years old. "Where are you going, my child, at this time of night? It's after 10 p.m."

"Mama, Chad had an accident. He was mugged, and the muggers took all his money. He's got no food. I'm going round to bring him some food."

Sindy was horrified. "Are you out of your mind? Have you forgotten what Chad did to you? He's not your concern. Let someone else look after him."

Linda gave her mum a searching look. "There's no one else to look after him, Mama. He's all alone. That's why I have to go to him. While I was talking to him over the phone, he sounded so depressed."

Sindy called out to her husband, Tony Knight, and explained the situation to him, while Linda was becoming very impatient, desperate to go and help Chad. Tony, about fifty-five, was rather tall with a heavy build.

THE DOMINO KING

He looked at Linda with a combination of anger, disappointment, and concern for his daughter. “Your mother is right, Linda,” he said, trying to control his anger. “You cannot go to him! If you give him a second chance, he will do the same thing to you again. Please don’t go, Linda.”

“Sorry, Daddy,” Linda replied. “I must go to him.”

Tony glanced at Linda and recognised the determination in her eyes. He could not control his anger anymore. In a loud tone of voice, he said while pointing his finger towards her, “You go to him . . . you don’t come back to my house!” He turned and walked away, leaving his wife and daughter in a state of shock.

Linda grabbed her handbag tightly, looked at Sindy, and without a word, went out and closed the door behind her. Linda stood staring at the door for a moment, wondering what she was doing. She was disobeying her parents, who had brought her up the right way, looked after her, cared for her. All this time she had never disobeyed her parents. Now she was about to disobey them to help a man who had let her down so badly. She still carried with her the psychological pain of that let-down.

But then she reminded herself that Chad needed her, and there was no one else to help him.

The conflicting emotions weighed heavily on her mind, and for a brief moment, she wanted to rush back into the house. Finally, she decided that whatever the circumstances, she must go to Chad.

Linda approached Chad’s flat carrying a bag in each hand and her handbag on her shoulder. Before she had time to ring the bell, Chad, who was obviously waiting for her, opened the door and welcomed her in. She rushed in, placed the bags on the table, and looked at Chad with tears in her eyes. She gently touched his arm in an effort to comfort him.

“Are you all right, Chad? I’m so sorry you got mugged.”

Chad looked at her sheepishly, saw the tears in her eyes, and felt a surge of energy going through his body as she touched him. Nodding his head, he answered, "I'm fine. With you here I'm feeling much better."

Linda felt reassured. "You must be starving! Get a couple of dishes and glasses so we can have something to eat and drink. I bought your favourite Chinese dinner and your favourite red wine."

Chad and Linda sat facing each other, enjoying their meal, taking occasional glances at each other across the table. Chad was clearly ravenous, and Linda couldn't stop gazing at him while he enjoyed his dinner.

After a thoroughly enjoyable meal, Linda was about to wash the dishes, but Chad objected. Finally, they agreed to wash the dishes together. Linda washed while Chad dried the dishes. With the kitchen clean, they entered the living room and sat close together on the sofa. As he sat next to her, Chad seemed to have forgotten all about his major problems. Like an angel, she had come to save him.

He was baffled and mystified by the fact that Linda had called him at that crucial time.

But Linda had problems of her own. Her dad had chucked her out because of Chad. She knew she couldn't tell Chad because of what he was going through. Telling him would only make matters worse. However, she was thinking of what she had to do tomorrow; for example, getting a flat of her own.

Suddenly Chad's expression became very serious. He faced Linda and said in a deliberate voice, "Why did you do it, Linda? My family and my friends have all turned their backs on me. These are the very people I have helped all my life . . . yet they've turned their backs on me. I haven't given you anything. I have hurt you so badly! Yet you're looking after me. I have nothing to give you."

THE DOMINO KING

She gazed at him sympathetically, and he could see the pain and sadness in her eyes.

“Why did you do it? Why do you have to worry about me?” he continued. He watched the tears cascading down her soft, trembling cheeks and felt angry with himself for bringing up the past, thus causing her even more pain and anguish.

Linda got up from the sofa, reached for some tissue in her bag, and dried her cheeks. Chad embraced her, and she rested her head on his shoulder. “I’m sorry . . . I didn’t mean to . . .” he confessed.

“I don’t know Chad,” Linda said, her voice breaking with emotion. “Maybe it’s because I love you. Maybe it’s because I still care. I wish I could help you more.”

He tried to kiss her, but she placed her fingers on his lips and said very gently, “Please don’t . . . not now. I haven’t got over the pain. Give me more time.”

He nodded his head and said, “Okay . . . I understand.”

Linda glanced at the clock on the wall and realised it was 1:30 a.m. “Chad, it’s getting very late and I’m tired. I’m . . .”

Chad intervened, “Yes, it’s late—you can stay over.” Chad noted her concerned expression. “Don’t worry, you will be quite safe. You can sleep on the bed. I’ll stay on the sofa.”

Chad went into the bedroom, changed the bed sheets, and returned to the living room. Linda was still standing with her arms folded. “You can go in now,” advised Chad.

“Thank you,” replied Linda. She kissed him on the cheek and said, “Good night.” She entered the bedroom and closed the door.

Chad reclined on the sofa and felt content that Linda, his guardian angel, was lying on his bed. He felt much better now, better than in the period of torment he had experienced just before she rang him.

When he woke up in the morning, Linda was already gone. He saw the money she had left on the table for him. When he checked it, he realised she had left him £100, the same amount the muggers had taken from him. He felt sad and humbled, and then a pang of remorse and fear gripped his body as he recalled his experience with the two muggers. Then he remembered Linda's contribution to his wellbeing, and he defiantly shook away the cobwebs of negative thoughts from his mind. He relaxed for a few hours, trying desperately to think positively. When he began to feel better, he took a shower, and then he went food shopping.

Chad was in the kitchen cooking a Caribbean meal. He wanted to surprise Linda when she came to see him. Suddenly, there was a rapid knock on the door. He cleaned his hands, turned off the cooker, and went to open the door. Tony pushed in past Chad, looking around, obviously in a very angry mood.

"Where is my daughter? What have you done to my daughter?" he shouted.

Chad was completely taken by surprise. "Your daughter is not here, Mr. Knight," he said calmly, trying his best not to inflame the situation.

"You hurt my daughter," Tony said, his eyes accusing. "You will hurt her again, but she won't listen. She won't listen to me."

Chad tried to maintain his composure as he responded, "Calm down, Mr. Knight! Please take a seat. I'm sure we can discuss this rationally."

Surprised by Chad's respect, Tony sat on the arm of an upholstered chair, trying to keep his temper under control. He couldn't bring himself to sit comfortably in the seat.

"Can I get you a drink?" Chad asked.

THE DOMINO KING

Feeling slightly guilty, Tony looked up at Chad and answered reluctantly, "I'll have a brandy."

Chad went into the kitchen and returned with a tray with a bottle of Martell brandy, a bottle of ginger ale, two crystal brandy glasses, and a bowl of ice cubes with a spoon, which he carefully placed on the table. He put some ice cubes in the two glasses, opened the bottle of brandy, and poured a measure of brandy into each glass. He opened the ginger ale, glanced at Tony, and asked, "Ginger ale?"

Tony nodded.

Chad poured the ginger ale and gave Tony one of the glasses. "Thank you," Tony said, grabbing the glass hastily. He took a long drink and breathed a sigh of relief. The drink was very good.

Chad sat opposite Tony on the sofa, crossed his legs, and had a sip of the brandy. He gave Tony a stern look and said, "Your daughter is a very special person, Mr. Knight. She has been very supportive of me when everyone else has turned their backs on me. She probably saved my life last night. I was in a terrible state, with all sorts of depressing thoughts when she called me and came round to help me. Tell me . . . don't you trust your daughter? Don't you know your daughter?"

Chad waited for a response, but Tony remained silent, his expression etched with remorse.

"Linda slept here last night," Chad stated.

Tony gave him an angry glance.

Chad saw the anger in his eyes and said apologetically, "Linda slept in my bedroom . . . I slept on the sofa. She went to bed about 1:30 a.m. I lay on the sofa a few hours before I fell asleep. When I woke up in the morning, she was gone."

After hearing Chad's explanation, Tony's anger turned to guilt and remorse. He took a gulp of brandy and then uttered in a choking voice, "My wife and I tried to stop her from coming

to you last night.” He lowered his head. “I told her not to come back to my house if she went to you. I couldn’t stop her. She came home sometime during the day while the wife and I were out, and took some of her stuff. My wife is in a state. We thought she was with you.”

Chad was surprised to find himself in the centre of a family row. At no time had Linda mentioned anything about a row with her parents. He knew instinctively that Linda hadn’t mentioned her problems because of what he was going through. *Typical of Linda*, he thought. *Always putting others first*. Nevertheless, Chad felt sorrowful, seeing how distraught Tony was about his daughter leaving without a word.

He tried to reassure Tony. “Please don’t worry. I’m sure Linda is okay. I’m expecting her later. I’ll have her call you or come ’round to give you an explanation.”

Tony emptied his glass, stood up slowly, and placed the empty glass on the tray. “Thank you,” he said, and he went out. Chad placed his glass on the tray, grabbed the tray, and hurried into the kitchen to resume his cooking.

Chad finally completed his cooking. He carefully prepared the table. Included in the preparation was a bottle of his favourite red wine. He put on the television and sat on the sofa waiting for Linda.

It was about 7 p.m. when the doorbell rang, which startled Chad. He turned off the television and went to the door. Linda walked in, looked at Chad, and kissed him on the cheek.

“How are you feeling today?” she asked with a degree of concern.

“I’m feeling wonderful,” he replied with a broad smile on his face.

“I wanted to cook for you, but I had no time, so I came ’round to take you to a restaurant for dinner.”

THE DOMINO KING

“No need to,” he responded. “I have cooked a very special meal for you,” he said with a smile, and then he gave her a serious glance. “But first, young lady, you have a lot of explaining to do. Your father was here accusing me of taking you away. Why didn’t you tell me you left home last night? I thought you were just visiting me.”

She took off her jacket and dropped it on the arm of the sofa with her bag. “I’m sorry,” she replied apologetically. “You have too many of your own problems to worry about. I couldn’t burden you with my problems. You understand, don’t you?”

“Yes, I’m afraid I do.”

She smiled at him, feeling satisfied. “It’s okay now. I got a flat close to you. I took a day off, and I have been busy sorting things out, buying bits and pieces. When I went to collect my stuff, my parents were not there. I went there later in the day before I came here. My parents were home then, and I explained everything. They want me to return home. But I told them it’s better for me to have my own flat. You can drop me home and see my flat later.”

Chad was pleased to learn that the problems between Linda and her parents were resolved. “Certainly,” he said. “I would love to see your new flat. I wish you had told me about it. I could have helped. I’m very sorry I caused problems between you and your parents.”

She stood close to him and touched his arm. “Please don’t worry about it. It’s okay.” She looked at the table, her eyes bright with happiness. “Now, what about that dinner? I’m starving! Do you want me to give you a hand?”

“No! No!” replied Chad, gesticulating with his hands. “You had a hard day. You sit down, and I will get you dinner.” She sat by the table, impressed. He opened the bottle of wine, poured her a glass and one for himself, and then they toasted. She had

a few sips. He had a gulp, dropped his glass, and went into the kitchen to carry out the food.

Chad meticulously placed a variety of dishes on the table, while Linda, impressed with his efforts, looked on with admiration. The dishes included macaroni and cheese with breadcrumbs, roasted potatoes, rice with red kidney beans, mixed vegetables, salmon, lamb, and chicken. Everything was cooked to perfection, and they enjoyed it thoroughly. Linda emptied her plate, grabbed her glass and drank some wine, and then looked at Chad, who was still eating.

“That was absolutely delicious. Thank you for a wonderful dinner.”

With a shy grin, he replied, “I’m glad you enjoyed it. I enjoyed it as well.”

Linda was about to get up to clear the table.

“No, you don’t,” Chad said firmly. Getting up from his chair, he filled her glass and said, “Why don’t you rest on the sofa? I will come and join you when I finish,” he added, looking into her eyes.

“All right then,” she said tantalisingly, and she stroked his cheek with her fingers. “Thank you.”

He watched as she dropped onto the sofa and settled into the cushioning softness. He felt good within himself and was proud to have Linda as a friend, a genuine friend. Then he reminded himself of the famous words of wisdom: A friend in need is a friend indeed.

Chad washed the dishes in a hurry, knowing Linda was waiting for him on the sofa. He poured some wine into his glass and sat next to Linda. She seemed pleased to have him join her. He sipped some wine, and then he became very serious, recollecting yesterday’s traumatic experience. He looked into her eyes searchingly and said, “You’re a very special person, Linda. I’m sorry I hurt you. I’ve never forgiven myself for the way I treated you. I wish I could turn the clock back.”

THE DOMINO KING

“Please, Chad, let’s forget it. We have to put all this behind us.” Stroking his cheeks tenderly, she said, “Let’s have a wonderful evening . . . no sad stories tonight.”

Making a complete recovery, Chad replied, “Whatever you say.”

She gave him a broad smile. “Let’s talk about you, and what kinds of things you like. What sport do you like? Do you still support Arsenal?”

“Yes,” Chad replied with glee in his eyes. “They’re great champions. I’m looking forward to a great season.”

“And you used to love playing dominoes?” she asked. She saw a gleam in his eyes as he answered.

“Yes, I used to love the game. My greatest moment was when I won a tournament with three key games. My partner won the first key game, and I won the following two key games. They used to call me the Domino King. There was so much excitement, and I felt so good that day.”

“What’s a key game?” she asked.

“If your winning domino matches both sides of the game, then you have a key game, and you get two games for it. For example, if your winning hand is five three, and on one side you have five and the other side you have three, then that’s a key game. My partner and I won a lot of tournaments all over the country. We lost a few. But my partner was one of the best. He went back to the Caribbean a few years ago, and then I lost interest in the game. I haven’t played since.”

“Would you like to go on a seaside trip with me on Saturday? You can make some new friends.”

“Why not?” he said, and he gave her an easy smile.

“It’s a date,” Linda said, and she told him excitedly about everything she wanted to do on the trip. Later in the evening, Chad dropped her home.

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