

Out of Uniform



Zoe Black

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Chapter One

Staten Island was not exactly the most exciting posting for a rookie cop. Then again, with almost a half-million people, it was bigger than most cities. Contrary to its reputation, it wasn't all sleepy residential streets. There were warehouses, office buildings and industrial parks.

It mostly WAS residential, and parkland, of course, and protected wetlands. And the crime rate was fairly low, but it existed, with about what you'd expect in a prosperous little city that size. Still, it was a fairly easy first posting, and not one Jamie McCloud would have chosen if consulted.

At twenty two, and now four and a half months out of the academy, she was looking for something a little more lively. Driving around watching for burglars and interceding in family arguments was not her idea of fun.

Doing it with John Rutherford was even less her idea of fun, though they had come to an arrangement of sorts. Rutherford was in his forties, literally twice her age. Like her he was tall, but also broad – in all directions.

He found her a lot more energetic than he would have preferred, being near retirement and wanting little more than a relaxing time. She found him an anchor weighing on her dreams of excitement and crime fighting.

They had resolved to not talk about politics, and to limit conversations about sports to hockey, baseball and football. Having been raised with two brothers and amid a horde of male cousins she was something of a sports fan, as well. But there would be no talk of golf. Ever.

She was much more interventionist than his hands off, laid back attitude would usually tolerate, and as he was the training officer she could do little but grumble and accept it. He didn't like making arrests because that entailed a lot of paperwork. He didn't like paperwork – unless he was looking for overtime that week.

Jamie didn't like overtime. She had a life after work, and became more than slightly annoyed when he reversed his laid back attitude in the final hour of their shifts in order to make a minor arrest which would guarantee they'd both be tied up in paperwork past their shift end. They hadn't yet resolved that issue in their relationship.

As far as sex went, neither of them had the slightest interest in introducing that into their conversations, except for Rutherford's continual snotty remarks about the other guys on their shift who were always hovering around her whenever they were at the station.

“That Collins guy seems to really want you, Jamie,” he said.

“Well, he can't have me,” she muttered, tapping away at the patrol car's computer keyboard as she idly ran license plates.

“He keeps asking me what kind of music and movies you like.”

“Uh huh.”

Staten Island had been issued new hybrid cars because they were fuel efficient. They weren't very fast, but then, Staten Island was generally not a high crime area and police pursuits were rare. The car still smelled somewhat fresh, which was unusual since police vehicles got as much use as taxis.

“I should probably write that up and post it on the bulletin board. So many guys asking me.”

“I don't date cops.”

“You've said that before. Nobody seems to be getting discouraged.”

“Hope springs eternal, I guess,” she said tonelessly, watching the houses outside as they drove past, then turning back to the keyboard.

“Good looking girl like you should have a boyfriend.”

“Why?” she asked, not looking up. “Maybe I should have a girlfriend,” she added dryly.

“Nahh, you ain't queer. I can tell.”

She turned to eye him with interest.

“You can? How? Is there, like a badge?”

“Well, most of them wear pretty short hair, for one thing.”

She shrugged. She had always had a love-hate relationship with her hair. It was red, but not that stylish red you saw in the movies, which came out of a bottle. Hers was more of a ginger color, and had drawn teasing as far back as she could remember.

On the other hand, it was thicker hair than was typical for a redhead, and mostly obedient, as long as she didn't try to get too creative. On the job she kept it pulled back and held firmly in place. Outside of work she let it spill free, where it hung down past her shoulders, with thick bangs covering most of her forehead.

She'd refused to dye it in the face of years of teasing, and now kept it long almost like a defiant flag flying over the walls of an unconquerable redoubt. Go ahead, say something about my hair, was the flinty-eyed look she gave people she met.

“Not every lesbian has short hair.”

“I've also ridden around with you for four and a half months now. I see what you watch and what you don't,” he said smugly.

“What's that mean?”

“It means you notice hot looking guys and you ignore hot looking girls. You look at hot looking guys the way Jefferson and Kirk and Steuban look at you, baby,” he said with a broad grin.

“I look at everything and everyone,” she said calmly.

“You watch them move,” he said with a smirk. “Just like the boys at the station watch you move.”

She sniffed disdainfully. “And just how would you know whether a guy was hot or not, huh?” she demanded.

“I may not want to put my hands on one but I can tell if a guy is handsome or not, honey,” he said with a laugh.

It was a quiet June evening when they drove down Delancy Street, and the sun hadn't quite set yet, which allowed her to spot the smoke which shouldn't have been there.

“Well I have no intention of dating any of those clowns. I don't need my sex life broadcast all over the precinct.”

“It wouldn't all be broadcast, just the highlights,” he said. “Like if you were a screamer, or into being tied up or stuff.”

She blinked as they passed a cross street, something catching her attention.

“Stop!”

Rutherford reflexively stepped on the brake, bending over and craning his neck to look out her window to where gray and black smoke was coming from an old Victorian home up the street. He backed up, then turned sharply and stepped on the gas.

Half a block up they pulled over in front of a clapboard Victorian. Rutherford got on the radio to call it in as she jumped out and ran to the front door. She rang and knocked but there was no reply.

She jumped off the porch and ran around the side, her eyes skimming the windows upstairs, and continued on to the rear yard. The house had a small dormer window in the attic. It was divided into six panes and two of them had been knocked out. Smoke drifted out of the openings, along with a small face.

“Help!”

“Oh fuck me!” she said.

She ran up to the door, yanking her expandable baton from her belt as she grabbed her radio.

“Rutherford! There's people trapped in the attic!” she shouted into it. “Expedite the fucking fire department!”

She smashed the back window, glad it was still cool enough for her to be wearing her leather gloves and patrol jacket, and reached in to undo the lock, then yanked the door open. Smoke poured out and she bent over to duck her head lower, coughing. She was wearing a black turtleneck under her uniform blouse, and she pulled the neck up over her nose and mouth as she ran inside.

There was no fire on the first floor that she could see, and the smoke wasn't that bad. She took the stairs two at a time to the second floor, and spotted the fire at the end of the hall. It was the stairs to the attic which were on fire! She felt a sense of outrage and frustration. The flames were heavy enough there was no way anyone was getting through without getting turned into a torch!

She turned and ran back downstairs, taking them five at a time, thanks to energy and long legs, threw open the front door and almost ran into Rutherford.

“What the fuck were you doing – ?!”

“There's someone in the attic!”

“The fire department is on its way!”

“Fuck that!”

She had a cousin who was a firefighter. He told her that if a house was on fire you either got out on your own or you died. It took about five minutes to die in a house fire and it took the fire department five minutes to get there and another five to set up before going in.

She ran around the back again, remembering what she'd seen in the yard beside this one, and Rutherford trailed behind her. There was a four foot high

chain link fence between the two yards. At six feet tall that was little hindrance for her. She hopped it and ran up to the back of the garage there, then grabbed the ladder propped against it.

Have to remind the owner that leaving ladders propped against the wall is an invitation to burglars, she thought almost automatically as she ran back to the fence with it. She threw it over and jumped after it as Rutherford stared up at the window.

“It ain't gonna reach anywhere near that high!”

She was afraid he was right but had to try. They carried the ladder to the wall and extended it as far as it would go. It reached most of the way up the second floor, but was a good ways short of the window. Even if she stood on the top of the ladder wouldn't be able to reach that far.

Her mind worked frantically, as she stepped back, then she grabbed the ladder.

Whoever was up there was screaming, more than one of them, so she could hardly make out the words.

“Help move it around front where the porch is!”

She and Rutherford ran the ladder around to the front yard and propped it against the front porch, then she scrambled up and jumped off onto the porch roof. She pulled the ladder up after her, with Rutherford pushing from below, then set it up on the porch roof propped against the wall and scrambled up onto the peaked roof.

“You're outa your fuckin' mind, McCloud!” Rutherford called.

Jamie ignored him, on an adrenaline rush.

When she was six her parents had enrolled her in gymnastics. She'd thrived up until adolescence and a major growth spurt. Tall, gangling girls didn't make for good gymnasts, but had continued as a hobby, and had, she thought, better than normal balance. But she'd sure never wanted to go

crawling around on sharply peaked roofs.

Balancing carefully, she ran up the roof to the top, moved along the peak and then down over where the window protruded while doing her best not to look down. She held the frame as she carefully but quickly made her way down to where she could turn and look into the window. There was not one, but four terrified faces staring up at her with enormous eyes. They looked like teenagers.

“Open the window!” she shouted.

“It won't open!” a girl screamed.

“It's painted shut!” a boy yelled.

“The door's on fire!” another one screamed. “I don't wanna die here!”

A fourth girl was simply crying hysterically.

She cursed viciously and yanked the expandable baton from her hip again.

“Get back!”

She leaned in, holding the peaked roof over the window and smashed out the glass of all six panes. That still left the inch wide wooden dividers in place like bars to a cell. She slid the baton back into her belt, then holding the roof with both hands for balance she brought her left foot up and smashed it down into the lowest piece.

She wasn't normally a fan of the heavy six inch tactical ATAC boots the department insisted on, but this time they came in handy. The wood broke cleanly. She smashed the bottom of her foot down on the second one, and the third, and one of the boys inside shoved and tore frantically at the vertical wood to force it aside.

With the glass out a lot more smoke was coming through now, too, and all four of the kids were coughing violently. She reached in and grabbed the closest by the scruff of the neck and yanked him bodily through the window.

Fortunately, he was a short, skinny Asian guy.

“Crawl up to the peak and sit there!” she yelled.

He crawled carefully up the roof and she reached in to help the next one, an Asian girl. The girl was crying and staring down at the grass below, and Jamie impatiently yanked her out the window just as she had the boy.

“No! I'll fall!”

“Crawl up to the peak,” she ordered, swinging the girl forward and around and steadying her until she obeyed.

Another girl was crawling through behind her, and Jamie helped steady her, then grabbed the last one and helped him through. The smoke was much worse now, and she could actually see flames licking up the inside of the door they had apparently closed against the stairwell fire. She was coughing herself and the boy looked dazed.

She yanked him forward and grabbed him when he lost his balance. Fortunately, she still had hold of the window frame. She swung him around and ordered him to climb to where the other three were perched atop the peak of the roof, then followed. She could hear the rapid pulse of a police siren set on priority, but unless it was ESU they weren't going to be any help, she thought.

She climbed up to the peak, then looked down.

“We're heading for the front porch,” she said, pointing to where the ladder stuck out a foot or so.

She grabbed the boy she'd just followed and held his arm as he slid awkwardly down the sloped roof towards the ladder, letting go only when he seemed to be okay. One by one she urged the others to follow him as the first boy began to climb down the ladder.

The shingles to her left seemed to be... melting and smoldering, and she gulped anxiously, pulse racing, as she slid slowly down the sloped roof. It

was a lot harder going down than it had been coming up, and she almost fell, but caught herself.

She reached the ladder, helped the Asian girl down, then swung around and climbed down herself as flames burst through the roof where it had been smoldering. She jumped to the porch roof then swung the ladder around and down to the ground, and helped them over the edge.

There was another blue and white there by then, along with a dozen civilians, all helpfully holding up phones to get souvenir pictures. She resisted giving them the finger. The four kids, all coughing heavily, and looking pretty frayed around the edges, descended the ladder, a couple of them falling the last few feet into the arms of the waiting cops. An emergency services truck, one of the Ford F550s, showed up as she started to climb down herself.

She could hear the deeper wail of a fire department siren as she scrambled down the ladder and almost fell. One of the other cops grabbed her and steadied her as Rutherford and the other led the kids away from the house.

The ESU guys were paramedics and pulled oxygen tanks out of their truck as she sat down heavily alongside the four kids.

“Holy shit!” she gasped, coughing herself.

“You are out of your mind,” Rutherford said wonderingly.

One of the paramedics shoved an oxygen mask against her face and she held it, breathing heavily for a bit before letting it fall away.

She turned and looked back at the house. Flames were becoming much stronger as they ate away at the roof, and smoke was pouring out of the house.

The deep, heavy wail of the fire engine sirens filled the air now, and a minute later the first pumper turned the corner, its red lights flashing and reflecting off the surrounding houses as it pulled to a stop.

She sat back, a little numb, the adrenaline high slowly leaking out of her as she watched them go through their familiar routine of dragging hose from the truck and putting on their gear. She shifted her eyes to the house. Flames were rising high from the roof now, and the house was definitely done for.

So was anyone still inside.

Another pumper arrived, then a ladder truck, as the street filled with firemen. It seemed to take forever before water started shooting up at the broken windows through which flames were licking up the walls.

Chapter Two

The lieutenant insisted on a hospital check-up, then she had to return to the precinct to write up her reports. And take a shower. She reeked of smoke. She stripped off her uniform in the locker room, which was empty, mid-shift, and headed for the showers.

Then she hesitated. She went to her friend Kathleen's locker, whose combination she knew, and opened it, then borrowed some shampoo and body-wash.

Getting clean felt good! The smell of smoke faded after the second shampoo. She stepped back, picked up the body-wash and poured more into her hand, then began to lather up for a second time.

It was then that Annie Delisle showed up. “Hey,” she said, standing in the doorway

Annie was one of those openly gay cops who had made no secret of their admiration for certain physical features on Jamie’s body since arriving. Most of that, she was sure, was to try and get a rise out of her, a sort of rookie hazing, but she wasn’t sure how much.

She forced the familiar calm look on her face and turned her head, making absolutely no attempt to hide anything, and ready for teasing and taunting. But there wasn't any.

“You did good, rookie,” the older woman said.

“Thank you,” she replied.

Delisle turned away, gave her a long, appreciative second look, accompanied by a wink and waggled eyebrows, then left.

Jamie finished her shower, wrapped a towel around her middle and then went back to the locker room. Cops could very easily foul up their uniforms

at work, so she, like most, kept a complete spare uniform, including shoes and underwear, in her locker.

She put on underwear and t-shirt, dried and brushed out her hair, then put on her uniform and went out to start in on her report.

She had just finished and was looking for Rutherford when she was called into the captain's office. A tall, slender man with gray hair, Captain Livingstone came out from behind his desk and threw his hand out.

“Congratulations, Officer McCloud,” he said, shaking her hand.

“Uhm, thank you, sir,” she said, feeling awkward.

“I'm submitting your name for a medal of valor. That was outstanding work.”

She blinked in surprise.

“I just did what I thought I had to, sir.”

“That, officer, is probably what should be the department's motto. We do what has to be done. And you were smart, too, shifting that ladder around front so you could use it to get up to the attic. The commissioner called and offers his own congratulations.

“Uhm, thank you, sir,” she said uncertainly.

“For a change, all those damn camera phones will get the department some decent publicity,” he said.

“Sir?”

“Someone has already posted a video of your rescue on the internet, McCloud, and it's been picked up by the local news. They want to interview you.”

Oh shit, she thought, frowning.

Her parents were not going to be happy. Maybe, she thought, it would be a brief report, and they wouldn't notice. Of course, her father and mother both came from relatively large families. She had more cousins, uncles, aunts, and nieces and nephews than she could shake a stick at. And a number of them were on the job.

If there was video, her parents would see it.

“Chief Rizzuto is on his way over, too.”

Chief, actually Assistant Chief Rizzuto was CO of Staten Island Borough and its four police precincts.

Jamie wasn't as wary of 'white shirts' as most young rookies would be, since she had several among her relatives, including her grandfather. But like other cops she felt the less attention she got from them the better.

“It was just a ... simple thing,” she said.

“It was a brave thing, a gutsy thing, a selfless thing. And the department needs to showcase good officers, especially given the way all the idiots seem to find a way to show off their stupidity in front of cameras.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Your grandfather will be proud of you, McCloud.”

“Yes, sir,” she said, a trifle wearily.

She got to go home early, which was nice, she supposed, though she wasn't sure why. Of course, despite it being hours since the fire she was still feeling an after-effect of the adrenaline rush. She felt a little twitchy on the subway, and was actually disappointed she got a seat since she'd have preferred to stand.

She walked from the station to her house, wanting to stretch her legs, wanting to move. She only slowed down when she got to her street and started thinking what she was going to say to her parents as to why she was home early.

She walked around the block a few times thinking about it.

There was no getting around that someone was going to tell them and show them the video if there was one. She would just have preferred to put it off until tomorrow. It only took her twice around the block to come up with a resolution, and it was so painfully simple she almost slapped herself.

She let herself into her brother's apartment instead. He was on the evening shift, too, after all.

Her family owned a brownstone in Brooklyn Heights – the whole brownstone, all five floors, including the basement. Her brother Dale had the basement. She had the top floor. On the one hand, he got to walk in and out by going down one short set of stairs, while she had to walk up three long flights of stairs. On the other hand, he had no view. It was a tossup as to who got screwed there, she thought.

One of the good things about being a woman – and there were bad things too – was that she usually didn't have to worry about dragging large objects up and down those stairs. That, after all, was what God created men for, especially young men who liked to flex their muscles and show how strong they were, even to their sisters or cousins.

It was in their DNA.

She had the whole top floor, though, which her father and uncles had renovated as one very nice apartment – well, a very nice apartment with no door. That was another reason to think Dale had it better than her. He had a door, an honest to God separate entrance. If he wanted to have a visitor he didn't have to parade them in front of three flights of family first.

And if he wanted them to stay over, well, nobody would likely notice, or care, even if they were female.

Sitting in the bay window reading the news on her iPad as she sipped her coffee and looked out on the tree-lined morning street balanced that nicely, though. Usually. Anyway, the rent was cheap, and she had done a

reasonable job training her parents not to hassle her too much. And it wasn't like she had a raucous sex life anyway.

But privacy, well, that wasn't something she got much of in her family. So if she came home early they'd certainly demand a reason. And since anything she made up would be exposed fairly soon there was no point in even trying.

She went to Dale's fridge and got a beer, though she wasn't normally much of a beer drinker, then peeled off her jacket and sat back heavily on his leather recliner.

Everything in his apartment was heavy dark wood and black leather, except, of course, for the flat screen on the wall. She turned it on and settled back, wondering if she wanted to search the internet instead for whatever video had been uploaded.

There was a naked woman giving a guy a blow job on the screen, and her eyes widened a bit in surprise. She looked down at the remote, then clicked the guide button and discovered, with a snort of derisive amusement, that Dale subscribed to a porn channel.

It didn't particularly surprise her, since by now she was inured to almost anything guys did or said or wanted about sex. They were like fumbling adolescents on a sugar high any time they got to touch her. Sometimes she wondered, in a jaundiced fashion, if having sex with girls might not be preferable.

She made a face as she eyed the action on the screen. The girl depicted was neither very pretty, in her opinion, nor very good at oral sex. If you were going to do something regularly, never mind make a career of it, you should damn well learn to do it well.

"Amateur," she sniffed, changing the channel.

She tossed the remote down, got up and walked across to the table where his laptop was set up, then turned it on. It didn't take long to warm up nor to find the YouTube video the captain had mentioned. It was taken from

the second floor window of the house to the right and behind the fire house.

It started with her at the window, kicking in the wooden slats, zoomed back to show how high above the ground it was, then zoomed in again as she leaned over and bodily pulled the first kid out through the window.

It was weirdly fascinating to be watching herself, and she felt a marvel at how fast and hard she'd pulled the kid. True, he was skinny, but he still must have weighed a hundred and fifty pounds. She worked out, of course, and like any female cop had to work extra hard on her upper body strength. But she figured the adrenaline must have been really pumping for her to yank him that easily.

She saw the other kid slip and her yanking him back and swinging him around, then the other two coming out. You could see the flames now amid the smoke, as they all climbed up onto the peak, then slid down the other side.

She found her heart was pounding, and drew a long drink from the bottle as the video ended. There was another video coming on behind it, and that turned out to have been taken from the ground in front of the house. They were just climbing down the ladder onto the porch, and there were sirens in the air.

She briefly skimmed the comments there already then made a face. She didn't consider herself heroic at all. She'd done just as she told the captain, what needed doing. And just about any other cop would have done the same thing. Okay, maybe not Rutherford. He wasn't a coward or anything, but his mind didn't move very fast, and she didn't think he'd have found the ladder on his own, much less thought to move it around to the porch, not in time anyway.

If there'd have been a way up there, though, he'd have gone. Anyone she'd met on the job would have, including those dummies who arrested the postman. It embarrassed her to see people calling her a hero, and she didn't think the people she worked with would like it either. Like her, they'd know any of them would have done the same thing, and nobody liked rookies getting swelled heads.

She finished the beer and got another, sighing. Rutherford wasn't going to like it either. Cops could be as cruel as children, and she had no doubt guys would be razzing him that he'd stayed down on the ground and let a girl go up. He'd have gotten that even if she was a guy, but a girl... the NYPD ranks were still hopelessly macho and sexist. Even most of the women.

She knew him well enough by now to know he'd be pissed at that. He'd know it wasn't her fault, but he'd still think she'd showed him up in front of everyone and be sulky for days.

She checked her cell phone, which she'd been ignoring, and saw nine text messages. She sighed and went through them. Thankfully, only two were about the fire. The first was from her grandfather, who was probably called by the Captain, or if not by the public relations captain. It was typically brusque.

Good job, Jamie, it said.

Thanks, granddad, but it wasn't any big deal, she replied.

The second was from Dale. Nice going, rookie. Knew you should be on TV.

I'm celebrating by drinking your beer, she typed back.

What are you doing in my place? Afraid to go home?

Yep, she said.

They're gonna find out. Granddad must know by now and he'll probably call them.

"Shit," she said.

He was probably right.

Dad's gonna shit a brick, she typed.

Won't be the first time. And don't drink all my beer.

Another text from her grandfather appeared.

You did a great thing. You saved four lives. I told you Staten Island was a good introduction to being a first responder.

I'd way rather be in Manhattan, she replied.

You'll get there, came the answer. *Sooner, rather than later.*

Easy for him to say, she thought in annoyance. He worked at One Police Plaza in Manhattan himself. Of course, it had been years since he'd had much to do with ordinary police work.

She went back to the TV and skimmed through the stations for a bit, then switched back to the porn station. She sniffed at how lousy the actors were as she watched it, but the fact was all that adrenaline had left her feeling distinctly... horny.

She picked up her phone again and flipped through the names on it, hesitated, then brushed her hand over the face of a grinning man with short dark hair. Michael and she had been friends and occasional lovers for several years. He was an engineer, and they made great tennis partners, great friends to watch a hockey game together, and great lovers.

Anything beyond that was out of the question. She couldn't stand how fussy he was about things. He was a perfectionist, and he got upset by things which she shrugged off.

But he was sexy, and smart, and could be fun.

She opened the door twenty minutes later to find him filling it.

"You called for a hot, steaming man?" he asked.

"I thought I ordered a pizza."

He smirked and held it out.

"You'll do," she said.

She slipped her fingers into his belt and pulled him into the apartment.

“How’s your brother feel about you having guests over?”

“What he doesn’t know won’t hurt me.”

She took the pizza from him and walked through the front room to the kitchen, with him looking around as he followed.

“Nice little place.”

She set the pizza down on the counter and opened it, and he came in behind her, wrapping his arms around her and stroking her stomach.

“So shouldn’t you be working?”

“I got off early,” she said.

“How come?”

His hands slid up the outside of her blouse and cupped her breasts as she reached up to the overhead cabinet to pull down a pair of plates.

“I felt like it.”

“And here I thought you were so... dedicated,” he said.

“Most of the time.”

The pizza smelled good, but his fingers felt good against her breasts, and she felt a thrumming heat rising down low in her belly. She felt his breath against the back of her neck, then his lips as she pulled open a drawer and took out a knife to cut the pizza.

“I’ve been brushing up on my skills,” he said.

“You have skills?”

“I’m not just a pretty face, baby.”

His left hand popped the clasp of her trousers and pushed down inside. It was a warm pressure against her through her panties, then it rose up and pushed down inside them and she inhaled sharply, hesitating before cutting a slice of the pizza.

“Sex with you is always a competition,” he said.

“And you always lose,” she said with a smile.

“I’ve got some new moves.”

“After eating,” she said.

He sighed and withdrew his hand, and she finished cutting the pizza and putting slices on two plates.

That was another reason she and he weren’t a couple. He was too... unaggressive. He mostly did what she wanted, even when he didn’t want to. When he was opposed he tended to sulk or get passive aggressive. That just wasn’t her style. She needed a man who was more of a man than he was... more of a man than she was, anyway.

“So how’s the cop biz?” he asked as they sat on the sofa eating pizza.

“You never run out of customers,” she replied.

“A comfortable, civil service sinecure,” he said with a shrug.

“Doing something I like.”

He slid closer to her as they finished, and his hand caressed her through her trousers again, then when she didn’t object, pushed down inside. His fingers were... talented, gentle, and he knew what she liked because she’d taught him over the years. She began to feel a rising pressure as he chewed his way along the nape of her neck and kneaded her breasts.

Then, eager to demonstrate his newfound abilities he slid her pants off and knelt before her, spreading her legs

Jamie lay her head back and sighed, feeling the heat rising comfortably around her, spreading out through her body. She ran her fingers through his hair, closing her eyes as the sexual pressure rose. His tongue was doing a series of swirly movements against her as his fingers pushed gently inside and curved up to find her G-spot.

Her hips began to grind against him as her chest rose and fell faster and harder.

His tongue began to make sharp little strokes against her, and he stroked the inside of her sex with his fingers, pressing up against the inside of her abdomen as her breath got ragged. The orgasm, when it came, was a deep rush of pleasure that swept over her and through her and left her gasping.

“Better?” he asked, eager, as always, for compliments.

She sighed, eyes slitted in languorous relaxation. If he left right then and there she’d be perfectly content, but of course, that wouldn’t be polite. And anyway, something inside her insisted on keeping him in his place.

She sat up, peeling her blouse up and off, then reaching back to undo her bra. She stood up, and was pleased by the look on his face and the bulge in his crotch.

“Let me show you what I can do, Mikey,” she said in a coquettish voice.

He rose up and they kissed as she undressed him. His hands roamed her body, kneading her buttocks, squeezing her breasts, and sliding through her hair, but as soon as she got him naked she pushed him down hard and he landed on the sofa, eyes wide and eager.

Smirking, she dropped to her knees, pushing his legs aside, then her face shifted. Her eyes got wider as she looked up at him through her bangs, then she leaned in, her tongue dipping out in slow, cat-licks up along his inner thighs. She drew her upper arms in against the sides of her breasts to push them out more fully, and let her soft hair slide along his thighs.

Setting the scene was not something Michael, or most other men, were

ever very good at. They mostly just wanted to get down to business without delay. But a prelude built up tension and desire, and, she admitted, she enjoyed the sense of power it gave her.

She let her cheek slide along his inner thigh, her tongue flicking out to stroke lightly across his balls, then pushed her face in against him, moaning low in her throat. She could already sense the sexual tension skyrocketing within him as she ignored his rigid cock.

She turned to his other thigh, pretending to ignore it, licking at it even as she let her cheek press against him and rub him back against his own abdomen. She sucked lightly on the flesh of his inner thigh, then turned her face slowly towards his hard, red manhood, pushing her lips in against it, opening them and mouthing the base.

Her hands slid up and down his thighs, then up his belly and over his chest as she let her lips and face massage his cock and balls. Her mouth opened and closed lightly as she turned her head to the side, mouthing him, caressing him.

Her hands slid down and she gripped the base of his long, rigid shaft, then, letting her eyes widen again, she looked up at him, giving him her innocent girl look as she let her tongue lick slowly up the length of him, swirling from side to side on the underside of the head.

Men, she thought with a certain satisfaction, were like putty in her hands. He was panting and wide-eyed, and she'd hardly touched him. She licked long slowly licks as she looked up at him, then dropped her eyes, rubbed him along her lips, then pursed them and let the head slowly force its way past.

She pushed down, feeling it sliding up along her tongue, sucking lightly now, her tongue moving from side to side as she began to bob up and down. Each downward movement went further, as the head pushed deeper into her mouth.

She pulled out, moaning softly, eyes slitted, rubbing him against her cheeks and lips, still squeezing the sides of her arms in against her breasts.

She rose upward, pulling him down, letting him press against her breasts, taking him in her hand and rubbing the head up and down against the center of her left breast.

He was clenching his teeth already, and she smiled cat-like. No, he just couldn't compete with her in the oral sex department. Never could, though in fact, he wasn't bad. He just wasn't... great.

Like her.

She took him into her mouth again and kept going, almost all the way down, halting with perhaps an inch of shaft left, his cock throbbing within her throat. Then, after hesitating long seconds, for effect, she pushed her lips down the rest of the way, and he cursed breathlessly, his hands on her head.

She moaned around him, her tongue stroking from side to side, then slid slowly up and back.

She could have extended it for quite some time if he had the endurance. He didn't, of course, and his climax was explosive as he jerked and spasmed in helpless pleasure.

She sat up, smugly eyeing him as he sprawled back, jaw slack, chest heaving.

Chapter Three

Midtown North was a not-particularly-distinguished-looking four story stone building on 54th street near 8th Avenue, a half a dozen or so blocks from Times Square. It was an eighty year old building, and the accommodations were not exactly luxurious. Despite that it was a much sought-after location among the officers of the New York City Police Department.

Midtown North handled Hell's Kitchen, the theater district and restaurant row. It policed the diamond district, and a number of key tourist areas, such as Rockefeller Center and Times Square. The work load was varied and interesting, and far preferable to most officers than patrolling the more depressing (and dangerous) areas of Alphabet City or the Bronx, where gangs ruled the streets.

Deputy Inspector John Tuttle had been in in charge for two years, and was now well-used to doing favors for those who wanted someone transferred in – and used to turning them down, as well. One had to be careful, however, when turning down a Deputy Police Commissioner.

There were a number of DPCs, of course, and their power varied widely. Tuttle wasn't much concerned about the DPC of Legal Matters, or the DPC of Information Technology, for example. And normally he'd not have cared much what DPC Lawrence McCloud of Training wanted either. Still, it didn't do to piss any of them off since they all knew each other well and played the back scratching game.

And you could never tell when someone as bright as McCloud reputedly was might wind up as DPC Operations, for example. The NYPD had a long and mostly honorable history of nepotism. Policing had often been a family business. It was not the least unusual to find children following their parents, who had followed their own parents onto the job.

Many cops had brothers, uncles, fathers, and cousins on the force,

despite the fact it was one of the city's more sought-after jobs and hundreds were turned down for every applicant accepted. If you had a relative you had inside information on what the NYPD was looking for, but you also had that intangible extra little bit of pull which tended to infuriate the fair hiring advocates.

That nepotism was as much responsible as racism for how long it took to get substantial numbers of Blacks and Hispanics on the force. But once they were on, they played the game, just as much as the Irish and Italians had, and still did.

Tuttle didn't have an issue with a certain degree of favoritism as long as it was done reasonably discretely, and as long as the favored relative knew their stuff. It was all the same to him who worked in his precinct as long as they were competent.

DPC McCloud's 'suggestion' that his granddaughter, officer Jamie McCloud be transferred to Midtown North and into Anti-Crime was not something which met with Tuttle's definition of discrete. Oh, he could have stuck her in a patrol car on the 12-8 shift, but for McCloud's suggestion she'd be perfect mingling with tourists and shoppers.

You didn't get too many tourists at St. Patrick's Cathedral at three in the morning.

He could just stick her in a patrol car anyway, but the McClouds were one of those families it wasn't considered good to annoy. In addition to the DPC there was his brother Jacob, who was an assistant chief at Brooklyn South, and several captains and lieutenants who were cousins and nephews scattered around.

He didn't have a problem with McCloud using his influence to get one of his relatives a good posting. Tuttle had done that himself in the past. Everyone did it. But he was really pushing it to get a rookie barely out of the academy into Anti-Crime in coveted Midtown.

The girl had done four months in a blue and white on Staten Island – which was not exactly a den of crime and violence. Granted, she'd made

something of a name rescuing those kids from the fire, which meant she had guts and initiative. But explaining to Lieutenant Foster, of Anti-Crime why she deserved to be moved into plainclothes was going to force him to keep a straight face while Foster gave him that disapproving look the man seemed to reserve especially for dumb ideas.

Then he'd start his objection with "Respectfully, sir" even though he was as disrespectful as he could get without risking insubordination charges. Tuttle didn't like Foster to begin with. The man presented himself as a paragon of virtue, like a stone wall of integrity amid the scheming, hustling multitudes of the NYPD.

Arrogant, self-righteous little shit.

And to make matters worse was the picture and description attached to her personnel folder. She was not going to blend into the woodwork anywhere, not a six foot tall redhead. Everyone in the damn precinct would notice her. Goddamn Irish. Or was she Scottish? He shrugged mentally. Like that mattered anyway.

You had to show unusual initiative to get into Anti-Crime, normally. It was considered an excellent positioning for a career path that headed you into the detective bureau. A rookie, and at four months she was still a rookie, would raise eyebrows, especially if she was a very noticeable six foot tall redhead.

Shit.

But there was no point complaining about the rain. You couldn't control the weather. And there was nothing much he was going to do about this, either. The McClouds would owe him a favor, which was not without value, and he'd just have to eat the complaints from below.

John Foster's face was gloomy as he walked into Anti-Crime, but no one gave that a second glance. That was pretty much his normal humor. Today he was especially gloomy, and irritated, and the only redeeming point of his

frustration was a certain sense of anticipation of who he was going to make feel even worse.

That would be Alaric Eugene Mueller, who Foster thought of as That Big Dumb Kraut. Sergeant Mueller was an unpleasant, middle aged, overweight man with a dyspeptic personality. He had almost thirty years on the job and Foster had suggested, discretely, he might like the weather in Florida, to no avail.

Mueller was three quarters bald, had a large nose, full lips, and a round face atop his six and a half foot body. He had a beer belly which Foster cynically thought large enough he hadn't seen his penis except in a mirror in a decade or two. He looked and sounded like a plodding flatfoot, nothing like a sharp, disciplined cop of the kind Foster approved of.

He didn't have a partner because no one could stand him, and vice versa. Forcing a rookie on him, and a girl half his age, would, Foster hoped with some sense of hope, give him a coronary.

Not that he wanted Mueller dead, of course. A small heart attack would do, force him to retire, and let Foster appoint someone more – appropriate – to the position, someone more high energy and dedicated to modern policing. Someone who would present the right image for today's N.Y.P.D.

Besides, the whole point of Anti-Crime was to blend in with the population. The population of Midtown North did not much run to badly dressed six and a half foot tall middle-aged men who looked like they hadn't held a job in decades.

Foster took his seat behind his desk, his pristine desk. You could work on one thing at a time and that was what should be on your desk. Foster highly disapproved of messy desks. Needless to say, Mueller's desk was overflowing with every manner of book, folder, file, box and knick-knack imaginable. Literally overflowing. Things were always falling over the edge.

He picked up his phone, irritated at the need. With most of his people he'd simply send an email saying "See me", but it could take Mueller quite some time to view his emails, notwithstanding that Ford had ordered all his

people to have a notification sound on their computer when his emails arrived.

“Sergeant Mueller, come see me,” he said as the receiver was picked up.

Foster was not a man who felt the need to chit-chat or engage in preliminary conversations. He hung up and examined the folder Tuttle had given him, glaring at the triangular face of the girl in the attached picture. He had, in fact, put in a request for more female officers some time back, as they blended in more easily in certain places, but this one was an unremarkable rookie.

And six foot redheads didn't blend in anywhere.

Mueller showed up, slovenly and slouching.

“Yeah?” he asked.

Foster glowered at him, then forced a thin smile. “Come in and close the door, Mueller.”

Mueller sighed and moved into the room, then closed the door behind him and folded his arms across his chest.

“It's Christmas, Mueller, and I'm Santa,” he said.

“Uh huh,” Mueller said suspiciously.

“You get what you've always wanted; a partner.”

Mueller's already closed face shut even tighter.

“What's better she's a rookie. Isn't that wonderful?”

Mueller's eyes shrank to two narrow pinpoints in his scowling face and he unfolded his arms, his hands, Foster noticed, clenched into two very large fists. Foster was not exactly a coward, but on the other hand, men the size of Mueller did tend to cause a certain level of anxiety when they were angry.

“But you can really thank Deputy Inspector Tuttle. He's the one who gave him to us. I pointed out that Anti-Crime wasn't generally open to rookies, and he said he'd pass that on to One Police Plaza, who recommended her to us. Feel free to go and yell at Tuttle, or call up One Police Plaza. They're rewarding her for being heroic and saving those kids from the fire last week. You probably heard about it somewhere.”

“Why me?” Mueller demanded.

“Can you count, Mueller? There are fifteen guys here, and the other fourteen have partners.”

“I'm a supervisor.”

“You're still a working cop and the only reason you don't have a partner is because you're so obnoxious. Now I'm giving you a rookie to be obnoxious too. Don't bother to thank me. I always try to do my best for you.”

Now that he thought about it, Foster began to feel much better about this appointment. The girl was practically fresh out of the academy, but from a police family. Either Mueller would say and do something around her to draw the ire of her grandfather, and Foster could get rid of him, or Mueller would have to walk the straight and narrow whenever the girl was around.

He doubted the stupid Kraut would be able to manage that for long!

A disciplinary hearing would draw a certain amount of short-term embarrassment, but he'd been documenting Mueller's transgressions since he'd arrived, and had mentioned his desire to get rid of the man to the Deputy Inspector – in writing – several times. He was covered.

He had long suspected Mueller of a lot worse than clothing and disciplinary infractions. He was fairly sure the man drank while on duty, took longer than he should for lunch, as well as other, non-scheduled breaks, and was the kind of old-time cop who probably took a certain amount of gratuities, if not outright bribes from the shopkeepers and criminals in the precinct.

It was very unlikely McCloud would ignore that. Even if she didn't want to make it official she'd tell her family, and Tuttle would have to get off his ass and transfer the bum out of Midtown North.

Yes, things could work out very well indeed.

“She arrives today. Familiarize her with the precinct, take her with you wherever you go,” he said with a narrow smile. “Teach her all that great old-time police work you know so well.”

Mueller gave him a long, tight-lipped look, then turned, opened the door and walked out.

Sergeant Dave Falcone had gotten into the habit, these last years on the desk, of keeping his concentration open, and not focusing too much on any one thing. He wanted to know any time anyone came through the front doors, for one thing. He wanted to be able to do a quick assessment of who and what they were and whether they posed a danger to him or anyone else in the lobby.

Midtown North was not Brooklyn South, but you never knew what might happen, especially in this day and age with crazy Muslims or crazy Black guys looking to shoot cops in revenge for real or imagined injustices, insults or offenses.

The girl who came through the door was unlikely to be a threat, but drew his eye immediately away from the overweight middle aged man complaining about his unjustified parking ticket. She was tall, graceful and young, for one thing. She had a head-full of thick, rust-colored hair for another.

There were a lot of fake blondes and redheads about, but there was no doubting the thick bangs spilling over the girl's forehead and the hair falling about her slender shoulders was the real thing. Nobody would get that color from a bottle. And it went with the triangular Celtic face.

A little more startling, she had a badge hanging from a lanyard around her neck. She had a file folder in one hand while the other was up at her shoulder holding the hook of a hangar from which dangled something hidden by a garment cover. Falcone had little doubt there was a uniform in there, despite the girl's youthful appearance.

He looked deliberately past the citizen and nodded his head at her.

“Reporting in?”

“Looking for Anti-Crime,” she said.

Falcone was a little surprised at that. She looked barely old enough to be a cop never mind in anti-crime.

“Third floor,” he said.

He didn't bother to examine her documents or badge. She might not look like a cop, but what else could she be? His twenty two years of cop experience did not rouse a single anxiety about what a respectably dressed six foot tall redheaded girl might get up to in a police station that she shouldn't.

He watched her walking away, though. The jacket was short enough to show a pretty nice butt in the jeans she was wearing. And she sure didn't look like she was playing for the other team. He'd have to mention her to Eddie (Slick Eddie) when he dropped by.

Mueller tensed as a girl appeared in the doorway. He felt an instant of duel emotions. The first was relief. She was at least tall enough to be a cop, and looked in decent shape. The second was astonishment. She sure didn't look like any cop he'd ever known, and she looked younger than his daughter!

She was wearing a brown, hip length jacket with epaulets, hanging open over a black sweater. She had green eyes, full lips, a slender nose, and straight, flyaway hair which hung several inches past the shoulders.

The looks were the first thing he noticed. The attitude was the second. She didn't act like a rookie. There was no sense in her of indecision, uncertainty or apprehension. She looked as calm and casual as a multi-year veteran, eyes quickly flitting about to take in the room as she walked through it towards Foster's glassed-in office.

She also didn't slouch, something tall men – and women – were prone to, something he'd gotten his head slapped for dozens of times in the academy before he learned to stand up straight and stop trying to hide his height.

Mueller watched her knock twice and step inside, then close the door behind, then watched her through the glass as she leaned over to shake his hand, then stood unmoving before FosDICK's desk.

Mueller's disappointment in the steady, relentless deterioration of the standards and cultural values of the NYPD was rarely interrupted. The proliferation of paper-pushers and lawyers, of policy and protocols, and the move away from ordinary, gut-level policing had totally changed the job since he'd been a rookie.

Then, most guys just wanted to do good and collect an honest wage. The pension was a huge benefit, of course. Most of the cops who went through the academy expected to be wearing a uniform till the day they pulled the pin and retired.

That wasn't the case anymore. Now the department was filled with eager young careerists who were always looking to get promoted and get ahead. Hell, you had to have two years of college just to apply, which was goddamn ridiculous. He'd never done a thing in 28 years on the job that needed college.

And once you'd got a college degree you figured you were entitled to more than sitting in a squad car and interacting with life's flotsam and jetsam all day long. You wanted a fancy office and a suit. To Mueller's mind that was the wrong kind of person to be a cop.

To be a cop you wanted someone big, strong, brave, and reasonably smart, willing to put his body between the sheep and the wolves. That was how Mueller had always seen the job, as a shepherd protecting the flock.

He hadn't had an issue when the department's equal opportunity office was set up and they started bringing in a lot of minorities. Some of the best cops Mueller knew were black and Hispanic. The women, though, just didn't have the physical ability to do most of the work, and usually didn't have the emotional strength either. There were rare exceptions, such as the sex crimes squad, where he was willing to admit it was handy to have women.

But if you had to break up a bar fight you wanted someone that looked more like him, not some skinny redhead half his weight. Although at least she wasn't as bad as some of the female cops he'd seen. There was a Chinese broad in the precinct who was barely over five feet tall, and an enormous black cop who waddled when she walked.

Mueller was willing to admit he carried more than a few extra pounds, but Carla Jefferson was a fucking blimp who barely fit in her chair and couldn't walk two blocks without getting out of breath. If she wasn't the head of the precinct's Guardians – the Black officers association – she'd have been bounced out on her fat ass long ago.

The door opened and Ford came out, doing little to hide a smirk, the prick.

“This is officer McCloud,” he said to the room at large. “She's going to be joining our team, and for now will be paired with Sergeant Mueller.”

There was an instant of silence from the dozen other men and one woman in the room, and Mueller knew their heads would all be turning to him. He heard Randy Baker coughing to cover a laugh, and sensed amusement from others around him.

Fuck you all, he thought grumpily.

“Take this desk. It's been empty for some time,” Foster said, pointing at the one in front of his own.

She sat down and he repressed a growl. The last thing he needed was someone sitting right in front of him staring at him. Not that he spent a lot of time at his desk, but even so. At least the wide screen monitors on the two

desks offered up some protection.

She looked at him, and her eyes widened slightly as she arched her eyebrows expressively.

“Hi,” he said reluctantly.

“Hello,” she replied.

“You two play nice now,” Foster said, returning to his office.

McCloud looked dubiously at the desk, which had been used more or less for storage for some months, and had a layer of dust over the papers and files stacked atop its surface.

“Welcome to Anti-Crime,” said a voice from behind her.

She swiveled around and a bald young black guy leaned forward over the desk, hand extended. She took it.

“Lyle Jefferson.”

The sole other woman in the room got up, sauntered over, and perched on the empty desk behind her. She was short and slim, with blonde hair, and somewhere in her late thirties. She wore loose khaki pants and a sweater.

She looked at McCloud and held out her hand. “Nora Richards.”

McCloud swiveled her chair around and shook Richards' hand.

“Jamie McCloud,” she said.

“Yeah, I saw you on TV,” she said.

Jamie made a face.

“Nice work. I’d have shit myself up there. I’m afraid of heights.”

“It wasn’t that hard,” she said. “The roof wasn’t that steep.”

“Don’t turn down compliments, McCloud,” a stocky Hispanic guy said as he came over. “You get few enough of them in this job.”

He held out his hand. “Geraldo Batista.”

She shook his head and smiled.

“Listen, Jamie,” Richards said, “In the days to come, when you start looking at him and being amazed by what he says and does, and you need a translator to understand what's behind his behavior, just come and see me. I've been studying him for the last two years. I think I'm gonna write a book.”

“I bet it'll be a long book,” Mueller growled. “You goddamn well talk enough.”

“See, that might be taken as offensive, but it's really a sign of affection. You have to learn to read the signs, kind of like a veterinarian who studies animals.”

“Don't vets have to examine the animals' shit do find out how well they're eating and stuff?” Lyle Jefferson asked from behind her.

There was general laughter and Richards shook his head.

“I only have to look at his shirt and keyboard to find out what he's been eating and drinking.”

There was more laughter. McCloud smiled lightly.

“Ignore her,” Mueller growled. “She's just jealous because I dress better than her.”

There was even more laughter.

A few others nearby got up and came over to shake hands, and then the rest got up to introduce themselves. Mueller watched them from under hooded eyes, particularly the younger men who acted far happier to greet a new cop than they should have. Just his luck she'd wind up taking up with one, and then crying over her broken romance. He sighed and wondered how

long it would be until she left for somewhere else and his world returned to peace and normality.

Chapter Four

“The important thing to remember is to not be a cop unless you have to be,” Mueller said as they walked down 50th Street. “You're here to intercept and react to crime as it happens. You blend into the crowd and the perps don't think there's any cops around, so you see it happening and can do something about it.”

She nodded silently.

“The most common crime in this precinct is larceny, about evenly split between petty and grand, depending on how much the stolen property is worth. Petty larceny is usually the pickpockets and thieves who hit up the tourists. Grand larceny is more likely to be stores and ATMs.”

He turned his head to make sure she was paying attention and saw her gazing up at the Rockefeller Center.

“You listening, McCloud?”

“I hear you,” she said calmly.

“The second most common crime is assault. You know the difference between 1st, 2nd and 3rd degree assault?”

She turned those green eyes on and raised an eyebrow.

His own eyes narrowed.

“First is a slap, second is a punch, third is the victim goes to the hospital,” she said.

“Close enough. About two thirds of our assaults are misdemeanor 3rd degree. Most of our higher level assaults are from the bars and involve drunks. We get some robberies too, but mostly third degree. It's a quiet little

precinct and we like it that way.”

“Doesn't seem that quiet.”

“The streets are fucking noisy but the tourists are safe,” he said, then hesitated, telling himself he should watch his mouth around her. “That's the way the mayor likes it,” he finished after a moment. “We get over fifty million tourists a year and they spend a shitload of money.”

His stomach rumbled and they halted at a street vendor so he could buy a hot dog. As they did, a blue and white slowed and then halted at the curb.

“Hey, Mueller. Having a father and daughter lunch?” Lenny Evans asked, leaning out the window.

“Eat me,” he replied as the car pulled away with the two cops inside laughing.

He glared after them, then turned to glare at the girl, who looked back calmly.

That calm look of hers was starting to irritate him.

“Partners are usually picked so they look like they would fit together,” he said. “Me and you don't fit worth a damn.”

“Except as relatives,” she said.

“I am not old enough to be your father,” he growled. “How old are you anyway?”

“Twenty two.”

He glared at her. He *was* actually old enough to be her father.

“How old are you?”

“None of your fucking business,” he snapped.

She raised those eyebrow again and he turned away and stuffed the hot dog into his mouth, wondering if she was going to report his filthy mouth to Foster.

“Excuse the French,” he said over his shoulder.

“That's okay. I'm fluent in French,” she replied.

He turned to look at her suspiciously.

“A lot of my relatives are cops.”

“Yeah? And what college did *you* go to?”

He meant it to sound sneering but it came out sounding more skeptical.

“I took Criminal Justice at St. Johns.”

“And you think that makes you a better cop?” he said.

“Than what?”

“Than someone who didn't,” he growled.

“Education comes in a lot of forms, Sergeant Mueller. It's almost always good, whatever form it takes. Better to know something than not to.”

“Just don't go thinking you know something because you went to college, rookie. You learn from being on the street here.”

She nodded calmly, irritating him again.

Mueller liked to think that one of his great talents as a cop was his ability to read people, and his new 'partner' was too much of a closed book. And he was aware his own emotions were only concealed when he put a major effort into doing so.

“So why did you get yourself transferred to Midtown North?” he asked challengingly. “You were a hero in Staten Island.”

“I got bored.”

“Maybe you should have tried the Bronx then.”

“I wasn't that bored,” she said dryly.

He snorted.

“Lots of young punks full of piss and vinegar want to go to the precincts where the action is, where all the gangs and violence are.”

“I'm not all that punk-ish,” she said.

“You wore a uniform?”

She raised those eyebrow again.

“With that hair?”

She shrugged. “I had to tie it back.”

“I'll bet.”

Her rust colored bangs were so thick and long most of her forehead was hidden, and her hair spilled over her shoulders. He could usually only see one eyebrow at a time, if that.

“You get into a wrestling match with some perp and he'll latch onto that hair,” he said.

“Then I'll break his arm,” she replied.

They passed the Waldorf Astoria and turned on Lexington.

“This is the border of Midtown North,” he said, waving to their right. “Whatever's over there is the 17th Precinct.”

They kept walking, passing other hotels, and he gestured towards a large synagogue on 55th.

“Watch this area for assholes,” he said.

“Assholes?”

“Assholes who don't like Jews.”

They turned on 59th, with tall to medium height buildings on both sides. The street was narrower here and sound of traffic was continuous, a low pitched rumbling which echoed back and forth between the high walls of the surrounding buildings even when there were few cars or trucks.

“This is as far north as the precinct goes. Other side is the nineteenth precinct. Then Central Park to the west.”

They stopped at Park Avenue.

“Lots of rich, entitled people around here,” he said. “Say one wrong thing to them and they'll be calling the station to complain. And it don't get any easier up ahead.”

They crossed Madison Avenue, continuing down the narrow canyon between tall, closely spaced buildings, then stopped for another light at Fifth Avenue.

“Watch the Apple store there,” he said, pointing to the building to their left. “Lots of punks like to hang around and snatch and run when a customer comes out with a new phone or computer.”

He pointed to the left, where large crowds were crossing the street, headed for Central Park.

“Jay walkers get hit by cars a lot here,” he said as they crossed on the other side.

They turned at the Plaza Hotel then turned again to go down 58th street. At 7th Avenue he flagged down a passing blue and white and climbed in the back seat.

"I'm tired of walking," he said, slightly out of breath.

"What am I, a fuckin' taxi?" the driver demanded.

"Larry Jones, meet uh... "McCloud," he said, slightly embarrassed.

The girl got in and gave him that look again.

"Jamie," she said.

"She just joined Anti-Crime," Mueller said reluctantly.

Jones, a broad shouldered, bald black man in his thirties grinned broadly.

"You're shitting me?"

The white cop sitting in the passenger seat snickered.

"This is Dunlop," Mueller said with a lazy gesture. "He's a midget."

"Fuck you, Mueller," the young cop replied. "Just cuz I ain't a giant like you."

He turned his eyes to Jamie. "Hey," he grinned. "I'm Tommy Dunlop. You look like you're gonna add some class to Anti-Crime."

"They could fuckin' use some," Jones said as he pulled into traffic.

"We're supposed to look like the citizens," Mueller said.

"Citizens who live in a box in an alley," Jones retorted.

"Take us to Times Square. I'm giving her the tour."

"So who you gonna be assigned to, Jamie?" Dunlop asked.

She jerked her head at Mueller and Dunlop gave her a doubletake, then did the same to Mueller.

“You're gonna partner with... him?!” he asked in disbelief.

“You're shitting me!” Jones said for the second time, looking in his rear view mirror.

“Something wrong with that?” Mueller demanded nastily.

“Well uhm, you usually don't take well to partners,” Dunlop said.

Mueller glared at him.

“Like a lone wolf,” Dunlop said hopefully.

“Like a fucking grizzly bear with constipation,” Jones said with a snort.

“Ha, fucking ha,” Mueller grumbled.

They passed West 51st Street and pedestrian traffic began to thicken.

“Where you come from, Jamie?” Dunlop asked with a toothy grin.

“Staten Island,” she said.

“Nice, relaxing place, great views,” he said.

She nodded.

“Action Central,” Dunlop said as they reached Times Square.

“Tourist Central,” said Jones.

They got out of the car, with Dunlop issuing her a friendly goodbye and suggesting they have lunch sometime. She nodded and smiled vaguely.

“Dunlop already has a girlfriend,” he said as they headed over to the Times Square police substation.

She shrugged.

“Never stops him from hitting on any female under forty who comes near him,” he went on.

They walked into the substation and he grudgingly introduced her to the cops there, who reacted much like the two patrol cops had. They left and headed down 42nd Street, with Mueller sourly pointing out various trouble areas.

“Basically you walk around and see what's to see. Keep your eye open for perps and trouble makers. That's any guy under fifty who doesn't look like a tourist, delivery guy or businessman. Especially if they're Black or Hispanic.”

He gave her a challenging look as if expecting her to get politically correct with him.

She ignored him.

“You can check the statistics any time you like. The captain loves statistics,” he said. “Ain't many redheads in em.”

“We Celts are a law-abiding people,” she said solemnly.

“Yeah, sure. Just keep you away from a bottle.”

“That's the Irish.”

“The Lieutenant said you was Irish.”

“The Lieutenant was mistaken. I'm Scottish.”

“I never heard the Scottish avoided alcohol,” he said with a snort.

“No, but we hold our liquor better than the Irish. Or if we don't the bagpipes sober us up.”

She smiled slightly.

They spent another hour walking around before he hitched a ride in

another blue and white, taking them back to the station.

“Hi,” said the front seat passenger, twisting around and leaning over the seat to hold out his hand. “Paul Haines! Where you from?”

She shook his hand lightly.

He was in his mid-twenties, healthy, wide shouldered, with perfect teeth (he was smiling broadly), a square jaw, and wavy brown hair.

“Staten Island,” she said unenthusiastically.

“Yeah? You’re gonna love it here in the big city, baby. We got it all here.”

“Staten Island is actually part of New York, Haines,” Mueller said grumpily.

Haines ignored him, his eyes fully on Jamie.

“You got long legs, Jamie,” he said. “Don’t see too many women as tall as you are.”

She shrugged and smiled.

“I love redheads. Every redhead I’ve ever known has been... energetic.”

Mueller gave him a confused look.

“Energetic?” asked the driver. “What the fuck does that mean?”

“I mean, like, high energy, like, great dancers and movers and athletic and... very, very sexy,” Haines said with a grin.

“Uh huh,” she said.

“I bet you were an athlete in school, Jamie.”

She shrugged. “Sometimes.”

“You play basketball? We play basketball in the gym every Friday night. We’re always looking for players.”

“I was more into track and field,” she said.

“Oh yeah, those long legs,” he said with an appreciative glance down.

“I got long legs, Haines, and you never talk about them,” Mueller said.

The driver laughed and Jamie snorted in amusement.

“I’m Calvin Brown,” he said over his shoulders.

“You got big bull elephant legs, Mueller,” Haines said. “I bet Jamie’s are more like... like a gazelle.”

“A gazelle?” the Brown said. “What’s a fucking gazelle?”

“It’s like a deer,” Haines said, then grinned at her. “A horny deer.”

“I think it’s just the males who have horns,” she said.

“Well, yeah, but I bet the females get horny too,” he said with a loud laugh.

He leered at her.

“That’s how nature works, right, Jamie? Can’t just be the guys who get horny!”

He wagged his eyebrows at her.

Jamie pointed her finger ahead of him, and then rolled it meaningfully towards his right. He laughed and turned around, but didn’t stay turned around. He was soon twisting back around again to look at her.

“Hey, you know, there’s a bar up a few blocks from the precinct where a lot of us hang around after shift. You should drop by tonight and I’ll introduce you around. It’s called uh...”

“Bar,” Brown said dryly.

“Well, yeah. I’m not sure what the real name is. I mean, it says Bar in big red neon letters over the door,” Haines said. “It’s on 54th between 10th and 11th streets.”

“Maybe sometime,” she said. “I have things to do tonight.”

“Sure. Any time! You can find me there most nights!”

He grinned at her for long seconds, and she raised her eyebrows and pointed her finger again. He laughed and turned around, but soon turned back.

“Hey, you know, there’s a fitness studio just a block east of the station,” he said. “It gives cops a special rate, and a lot of us work out there.”

He dropped his eyes from her face.

“You look... fit,” he said.

“I’ll keep it in mind,” she said calmly.

“Sure! You want to know where anything is just ask me! Just call me Google.”

She smiled tightly. And briefly.

They stopped at the station and she and Mueller got out. Haines rolled down the window and leaned out.

“Hey, Jamie, glad to have you in Midtown!” he called as the car drove away.

“Sad,” she said.

“He’s a player,” Mueller said.

She raised an eyebrow. “Successfully?”

“Some women seem to think he’s attractive.”

“Okay,” she said.

“I’ll show you other parts of the precinct when my feet aren’t tired,” he muttered. “It’s a big precinct.”

“Wide,” she said.

“Yeah, well.”

They headed into the station and through the lobby, which was crowded with a dozen elderly women for some reason.

“You don’t talk much, do you?” he said as they went up the stairs.

She raised her eyebrow, the one he could see through the bangs.

“Most women can’t keep their mouths shut,” he said.

“I speak when I have something to contribute to the conversation,” she said, after a moment. “Since you were showing me around the precinct I didn’t have a lot to contribute.”

He couldn’t argue with the sense of that but it still struck him as odd, how quiet she was.

They returned to the Anti-Crime offices, which were pretty much empty by then, and she sat down at the desk facing him. He started to check his email as she cleared out the junk which had been stashed in the empty drawers over the months since the last occupant, then went away.

When she returned it was with cleaning supplies, which she used to vigorously clean off the surface of the desk, the computer monitor and keyboard, and even the chair. By the time she got to the chair the three other cops in the room were looking on with varying degrees of disbelief. She ignored them, finished cleaning her work station, then disappeared with the cleaning supplies to wherever she’d found them.

Mueller looked down at his own keyboard, stained as it was with varying bits of liquid, with several keys sticky and crumbs between the keys, and rubbed his nose.

Women. You couldn't ever understand them. They were all crazy to one degree or another.

She returned with an armload of office supplies and spent some minutes arranging them within the drawers of her desk. Then she disappeared for a while to fill out forms with administration. When she returned she logged onto her computer and set to work doing... whatever it was she was doing.

It occurred to Mueller she hadn't said a word since they'd returned. That was odd in a guy, almost beyond belief from a woman. It was peaceful, and he was glad of it, but he couldn't help feeling this must be the calm before the storm. Once she settled in she'd probably chatter like the rest of them.

He gave some thought as to what to do with her. It wasn't easy. She'd have to be somewhere close to him, and he doubted that dick Foster would approve of his normal meandering course of patrol, which was rarely where he said he would be.

He'd take her out in an unmarked car later for a further tour of the precinct. He'd taken her on a walk first to see if she'd complain. Too damned many rookies seemed to think walking was beneath them. But that was really where you saw things.

After that, though, wherever she went he'd have to be. That meant he couldn't put her somewhere dull and boring or he'd fall asleep – not something he wanted to do around an earnest young rookie he didn't trust.

Anti-Crime wasn't there to deter crime. That was for blue and whites. They were sent to patrol areas where crime was expected. Looking at her long fingers flying over the keyboard, and the way she seemed to be working the computer so intently forced him to consider his own low comfort level with computers.

The Apple Store. She'd certainly blend in around there, and it was one of

the precinct's highest crime areas for larceny. It was also very close to Central Park, with lots of tourists around, lots to see, lots going on. He didn't look much like a tourist himself, he admitted, but if they were together then people would indeed assume she was his daughter. He wasn't as fair skinned as her but close enough.

He watched sourly as Kyle Waters from the detective squad came in to check with Tomas Fernandez, then introduced himself to her, his mouth wide and far too smiley.

Greasy bastard, Mueller thought as Waters tried unsuccessfully to flirt with her. She smiled benignly at him, nodded and said little in return. A little confused, Waters left, and Mueller snorted.

A woman who didn't feel the need to talk. He could get to like that.

Chapter Five

Jamie had two problems with sex, neither original. The first was that quick sex was rarely pleasing except on a purely narcissistic level in being able to make her partner's eyes bug out. The second was where to engage in it for a prolonged period of time so she could enjoy it on a physical level, as well.

She was not enough of a fan of sex to want to go somewhere and spend all evening doing it. Sex was, not to put too fine a point on it, the climax to an evening out (so to speak), not its focus. First came dinner and conversation, then a movie or theater or ... something, and then came sex to wrap things up in a nice, neat package.

Truth to tell she could do without the sex, most times anyway.

Diego Cardona felt otherwise, and she was willing to humor him. He was generally a fairly fun guy to have around. He was a year older than her, a firefighter, and had a lithely muscled body and handsome face. He annoyingly macho at times, though, which was why things between them hadn't gone further, and weren't likely to.

He was, in a way, the opposite of Michael. Where Michael was fussy and precise, Diego was messy and casual. Where Michael was passive, Diego was aggressive. She liked aggressive, of course, and found it very sexy, but only at certain times and in certain ways. She did not need a guy telling her how to run her life or assuming he had the right to make decisions for her.

Diego was willing to have sex anywhere, any time, for as long as she wanted – as long as they did it his way, of course. He was the man, and that was that. But if she was going to have sex towards the end of the evening, and get home in time for there to not be irritating questions asked by her annoyingly intrusive mother, it had to be fairly quick.

Unless, of course, it was at her place. That meant sneaking him up the

stairs, either the front or the back, depending on where her parents were. Sneaking him out again was fairly easy since everyone was usually asleep by then.

She returned home at ten, leaving Diego outside. She greeted her mother and father, finding the latter in his den paying bills and the former in the kitchen, experimenting with different kinds of rice. Upstairs, she saw the door to Colin's bedroom was closed, with loud music thumping away within.

Barring bad luck, then, the way was clear. She took out her iPad and texted him to come through, as she made her way back down the stairs to the first floor. He slipped in quickly, closing the door behind, and strolled up the stairs, a faint smile on his face. He might think this was slightly odd, but no man was going to turn down sex because he had to jump through a few hoops first.

Certainly not one who was going to get to sleep with her.

She nodded him up and he grinned and followed her. They passed the second floor quickly, and he hesitated on three, then continued, as he followed along behind her, up the stairs to the fourth and her 'apartment' without a door.

Her bedroom had one, however.

And it was there his aggressive macho attitude was welcomed.

As soon as he'd followed her in and closed the door he swung her around and shoved her hard against the door. His lips were on hers in an instant, almost bruising hard as his hands slid roughly through her hair, using the pull to force her head back.

She was not surprised. Diego could go from zero to sixty in two seconds flat, as she thought of it, and now that he'd controlled himself to act the suave model of self-restraint he was going to reward himself by going all out and letting his hunger have free reign.

Sex with Diego could be rough, and bruising – and wild and exciting.

With two floors and Colin's booming stereo separating them from her father she saw no need to urge restraint, either, and her arms slid around him, her hands digging into his ass while their lips fought each other for control in quickly spiraling excitement.

His nimble hands found the buttons down the front of her blouse before she was really even aware of what he was doing. He drew back sharply, jerking her around and shoving her chest into the wall, then yanked the open blouse back over her shoulder as she gasped in surprise.

His hand slapped her bottom sharply as she started to instinctively complain, then undid her bra and yanked it open, spinning her around again and filling his hands with her bare breasts as his lips crushed hers once again.

Her arms went over his shoulders this time, her hands in his hair as their tongues dueled, then she was pulling at his own shirt. In seconds they were naked, and she felt heat rolling up her body as their flesh slid together in rough, uneven motions. He was already hard, and pressed up against her belly as their lips continued to move hungrily together.

He pulled back suddenly, shoving her against the door again, both of them breathing raggedly. Suddenly he gripped her arm and spun her around again, shoving her face first against the door.

"Maybe I should search you, cop," he said, "Make sure you got no weapons on you."

Since she was naked it would be a very quick search, but Jamie wasn't paying much attention to logic, just then.

"Go ahead," she said, pushing her hips back and leaning forward, hands against the door.

"Hmmm," he said, his hands skimming down her back and over her buttocks. "Could be any number of dangerous things on this body."

She inhaled sharply as his hand followed the curve of her body in between her thighs, cupping her sex and stroking her.

“This feels like a weapon to me,” he said.

“It won’t hurt you,” she said.

She felt his fingers stroking up and down the line of her sex, then his other hand sliding over her hip and up under her left breast. His fingers squirmed up inside her as she closed her eyes and felt the heat deepening, a flush sliding down her face and chest.

He moved in behind her, and his hardness pushed between her thighs. He reached around her hip and grabbed himself, pulling his shaft up against her sex and stroking slowly back and forth and in and out between her thighs.

He was using the head to massage her clitoris as his teeth chewed on the nape of her neck, and she closed her eyes, grinding her buttocks into him until he gripped her hair and jerked it back. She gasped, eyes widening, her hands going up and back behind her to grasp his wrist.

He was being more aggressive than usual, and a part of her was thrilled by it, getting more aroused than normal. Another part of her was indignant, but not really in control at the time.

He shoved her into the door, which, given her position, meant her breasts into the door, making them ache as they pillowed out.

“Tell me you want my cock!” he growled, his fingers thrusting deeper inside her.

“I-I... do!” she gasped.

He pulled back and slapped her bottom, which was still pushed back, and she gasped in surprise, then felt a swirl of heat up through her lower belly.

“Say it!”

“I... want your cock!” she groaned.

He spun her around roughly and his right hand shot between her legs

again as his left shot up under her jaw, pinning her head back. She gasped, his fingers penetrating her once again, roughly. She was surprisingly wet, though, and her chest was rising and falling rapidly as his hand closed around her throat.

“Say it again.”

Jamie could feel her head pulsing as he closed his hand more tightly. He wasn't interfering with her breathing, but his fingers were pressing against the carotid arteries on either side of her neck. Then his thumb began to rapidly stroke across her clitoris.

Something caused her to restrain her natural impulses to push him back, or to use any of the numerous self-defense methods she knew to knock his hand away from her throat. She dropped her arms to her sides, instead, shuddering as the heat rose much higher than she was used to. He sank a third finger into her body and she moaned, feeling herself stretched.

“Say it!”

“I-I want your cock!” she gasped.

“Where?”

“Inside me!”

Her hips were grinding helplessly against his fingers and Jamie felt a sense of wonder as she realized she was near orgasm! She rarely came quickly, at least, not without using her own imagination and sex toys.

He gripped her upper arms in a firm, tight embrace, then backed up, pulling her with him, his arms in tight against his body. He turned her around, his eyes intense and filled with hunger, turned her, and half threw her onto the bed, then he was atop her, and in her, and she cried out in aching pleasure, throwing her arms around him.

His hands gripped her hair roughly, jerking her head back as his lips came down hard. She tasted blood but didn't care. His hips were already

rising and falling, faster and faster, and she drew her knees up and then let them fall apart, crying out weakly, and fighting to keep her voice down as the intensity of the pleasure sent heat rolling up and down her body.

The feel of him moving inside her was intoxicating, a dark, thrilling sense of heat, desire, need and passion sweeping over her as she cried out into his open mouth, and the orgasm took her.

It was a very busy street.

Jamie had long ago mastered what her uncle Jason called the Sentinel look. You positioned yourself so you could see as much as possible with as little movement as possible, and let your focus widen to just absorb everything, not focusing on anything in particular. If you focused on one thing, then something happening nearby might easily be missed.

You had to clear your head to do it and that meant you couldn't be daydreaming, so in a way, it took concentration. Concentrating on not concentrating on anything in particular was a concept it had taken her a while to understand, but once she had she'd quickly realized the potential.

If you didn't want anyone to notice you – which was hard if you were a six foot tall redhead – you had to position yourself next to something, preferably something bright and gaudy which drew the eye with colors and movement. She was leaning up against the metal side of a six foot high flashing LED sign which was showing different types of computers and phones, all in bright, shining colors.

She only moved to check her watch occasionally and look annoyed, so that anyone who *did* notice her would figure she was waiting for someone. She had an obvious iPod strapped to the middle of her belt, with earphone cords dangling down to it from her ears. She wasn't listening to music, though. The wires wrapped around the iPod then went along the underside of her belt to the radio in her hip pocket. The microphone wire ran down her sleeve and her watch went over it just behind the microphone, keeping it in place on the underside of her wrist.

Mueller was strolling up and down the block, now and then crossing it, then crossing back. They'd started out walking together, but then, after a while he'd decided they were too noticeable together and they'd separated.

She didn't see the issue, herself. It's not like the kind of low rent criminals who would be staking out the front of an electronics store would spend an hour or two studying the people around them before doing something. The crowd had completely changed a number of times since they'd arrived. Nobody was going to notice how long they'd been around except maybe a bored street vendor, and they were all pretty busy.

She wasn't bored. She'd always liked people-watching, and this was a prime location, with a wide and varied collection of humanity passing before her eyes. They certainly had nothing like it on Staten Island. Then again, she hadn't chosen Staten Island as her first assignment. Supposedly the system had done that, but she had no doubt her family had less than subtly influenced the system.

She'd been irritated but knew how the game was played. She had a number of cousins on the job, after all, not to mention Dale, and they pretty much all went through the same thing. One difference, though, was she hadn't needed the help of her family to get hired.

Partly that was due to equal opportunity laws and policies. They were always desperate for female recruits. A female recruit who was fluent in Spanish, was athletic, six feet tall, a fourth degree black belt in Jiu-jitsu, and a dead shot with a nine millimeter hand gun was virtually assured of being accepted to the academy if she had no criminal record, which she didn't, and the proper education, which she did.

She'd put a lot of thought into that, and into her future before joining the NYPD. She'd grown up around the stories, of course, but unlike her brother she didn't thrill to the thought of racing up and down street with siren wailing catching criminals. She'd been more interested through most of her teens, in other careers.

Until she'd found out more about them. All of them had something going for them, of course, but the one thing they lacked – the ones she was initially

interested in – was variety.

Jamie was notorious among her friends, which was, given how close her family was, mainly her cousins, for her patience. She always took the long view. When her grandfather on her mother's side had died, he'd divided his assets into eight trust funds for his eight grandchildren, none of whom had reached eighteen yet.

Since his assets had included a house in Brooklyn each of them had received just under a hundred thousand dollars. It was a tidy sum, but not huge, especially given house prices in New York. Most of her cousins had spent their money as soon as they reached twenty one and were given access to it. Jamie had invested hers in blue chip technology stocks – like Apple, ironically.

Why not? She didn't need the money, and if she just left it the hell alone, if she had the patience to do that, then by the time she was older, or maybe when she wanted to buy a place, it would have grown, maybe doubled, maybe tripled, maybe more.

Right now she lived at home rent free, which allowed her to save money. True, she couldn't have men over unless she really worked at sneaking them up the stairs. But that was probably just as well. She didn't have much of a sex life, and now was not the time to start.

She had been listening to cop gossip from her cousins, uncles, grandfather, and now brother for years now, and had no illusions about how female cops who slept around were thought of or treated. Oh it was wildly unfair given how slutty so many male cops behaved, but that was just the way it was.

She'd known being a cop meant entering a profession which, despite all the equal opportunity rules, was still semi-military and deeply sexist. That was one of the reasons she'd looked for something else. The problem was that almost everything else she was interested in meant spending her life in a cubicle tapping away at a computer.

Jamie liked computers, and was good with them, but there was a

restlessness to her if she stayed in one place for too long. And she didn't like being hemmed in and away from the light. She could take the jobs, and probably would enjoy them, for a while. But she didn't want to be looking for an entirely new profession in five or ten years, bored sick with what she was doing.

If you played your cards right you got to move around a lot on the job, both in physical terms, and in the possibility of transferring to new locations and new types of challenges. There was an awful lot of human interaction, too, as opposed to staring at a computer screen all day.

The downside of that was that a lot of that human interaction was with socially maladjusted people, and that included among the NYPD. Cops were not quite ... right. There was something about them all which separated them from normal human beings. Sometimes that resulted in an inability to communicate or understand those who hadn't been where they'd been or seen what they'd seen.

She thought she might be largely immune to that affect, though admittedly part of that was that she already found it difficult to understand a lot of people and why they acted the way they did. Most people seemed to be governed much more by their emotions than she was, and did and said a wild assortment of crazy things because of that.

That brought her back to the previous night, and that incredibly intense time with Diego. She was still bemused by it, and more than a little alarmed. Clearly his dumbass Latin machismo had been acting up to an even greater extent than normal. He'd even admitted as much later.

Her reaction, though, was more difficult to explain. It was true that as much as she insisted on being treated with respect, as an equal, in almost everything else, she had always been more willing to let a man lead in bed. She had never quite understood why, and didn't now.

Being manhandled like Diego had done was something she'd never really experienced before, at least not to the same extent. It had been... thrilling, on some level she didn't quite get. He'd acted very... dominant, which she was willing to concede, but only in play. There was no way Diego

would be able to push her around in anything else. She was too much of an A-type herself.

So why did she get off on it so much when he'd done it during sex? Why had she simply lain back and let him have his way, let him do as he wanted? That was something she couldn't quite grasp. She liked to understand what motivated people, the psychology behind their actions. It was a little galling that she didn't even understand her own.

In the aftermath she felt a little embarrassed, humbled. She prided herself on turning men into puddles of goo, on that self-satisfied smirk she felt as sprawled dazedly before her, giving in to her beauty and sexual skill. She was not used to the shoe being on the other foot, and since in her arrogance, and she recognized it as arrogance, she thought she was psychologically stronger and smarter than Diego, that just made it worse.

She felt like a tennis pro beaten in straight sets by an amateur. And she felt beaten, or at least, battered. She was sore in places she couldn't touch, as well as those she could. It was... weird. And that smug look on Diego's face hadn't made her any happier at the end.

She'd always thought herself the exception to the irrational way so many people behaved. She'd always looked down on people being controlled by their emotions into doing dumb things. People didn't always act rationally, and she'd never been able to quite figure out why. She thought she was different, a strong, clear thinker. That was one of the reasons the subject of psychology fascinated her, and one of the professions she'd been interested in getting into.

By the time it came to selecting a college course, though, she'd come to understand that explaining how illogical and just fucking dumb some things were to people wasn't necessarily going to cause them to agree, much less change their behavior. That was... frustrating. It would be even more frustrating if it was her job to convince people to stop acting like idiots and they refused.

Being a cop was kind of a variation on that. Broadly speaking. She would be a part of a system that was designed to get people to change their

antisocial behavior. And her only part of it was catching them at it. It was some other poor loser's job to try and punish them so they realized the error of their ways.

And it paid fairly well, all things considered. It had terrific job security and benefits. After five and a half years she could be pulling down close to a hundred thousand base pay to go with five and a half weeks of vacation a year. There were few white collar jobs which matched that, and none of them had the same level of job security.

Oh she'd considered becoming a lawyer, like her dad, but the idea of spending the next dozen or so years of her life as an overworked, underpaid gopher for senior lawyers did not fill her with enthusiasm. Law offices were sexist as hell, too. It was just a more genteel sexism. And you rarely saw daylight until you climbed the greasy ladder high enough to get near a window.

And spending all day in a cubicle or library was not conducive to good mental or physical health, in her opinion. Certainly it would drive *her* nuts. Maybe when she was middle aged she'd feel more like settling in and settling back. Until then she could enjoy the wild flow of colors and people moving past her vantage point.

That flow was constant, but there were exceptions. Like rocks in a current, they tended to stand out, like the two Hispanic guys smoking a cigarette sitting on the edge of the fountain. They didn't fit in. They clearly weren't tourists, and they didn't look like they worked anywhere in particular. They were also, as her uncle would put it, twitchy. Their eyes never left the entrance to the Apple store for long.

Several times they got up together and moved towards the store, even going so far as to walk after people. But then they'd stop and head back to the fountain. Several times one or the other, but never both, went into the Apple store, then came back out again to rejoin the other.

After a bit of time she decided they were looking for someone who would head south on East 58th street. That was a much quieter street than Fifth Avenue. There was also a subway station a couple of blocks down at

57th and Avenue of the Americas, where they could disappear and be miles away before their victim managed to call the cops and get a description out.

She flicked her eyes up Fifth Avenue and saw Mueller leaning against a lamppost, eyeing the square with profound disinterest. Had he noticed the Hispanic guys? Would he, old guy that he was, feel indignant that she had if he hadn't? You had to be careful of guys because they had this huge ego problem around women, especially young women. It didn't seem to change over time, either. They might act less like pigs as they neared middle age but that ego thing seemed to take a lot longer to calm down.

She brought her wrist up near her mouth and keyed her mike.

“Yeah?”

“See the two Hispanic guys at the fountain?”

“Which fountain? Never mind. Yeah.”

“I think they're waiting for someone they can trail onto East 58th so they can grab whatever he's got and then run to the subway on 57th.”

There was a long silence.

“Okay,” he said. “If they start moving you get ahead of them and I'll trail them from behind. Don't do anything until they do.”

“Right,” she said doubtfully.

If she'd had her preferences Mueller would be the one in front of them and she would trail behind. She'd been a track star in high school, and had kept up the running in college because athletics was a prime determinant in getting hired at the NYPD. She'd had to run a lot at the Academy, too, and that was only months back. She had her doubts about just how fast Mueller could move, or how long he could keep up that movement. Those Hispanic guys looked thin and wiry and fast.

She ambled across to the far corner of the building and propped herself

against the wall there, ostentatiously checking her watch again.

It was ten minutes more before they found their target, a thin, middle aged man in glasses who looked totally non-threatening, and was clutching a large bag as he left Apple. He headed straight towards her, and the two Latinos quickly rose and trailed along behind.

She eased around the corner then trotted a block up before stopping to ostensibly tie her shoe. She watched the middle aged guy in gray sport coat turn the corner and head towards her, a short few seconds later the Latinos, having moved quickly, arrived behind him.

They walked past where a row of pedicabs waited, their drivers sitting lazily waiting for customers, then continued up the street as she rose and started walking in the same direction. The building next to her had no doors, just blank windows, and she was betting this relatively pedestrian free area would be where they would hit him, despite the lack of cover.

Then the mark crossed the street, which must have seemed even better to the two predators following. Now there was cover behind parked vans and cars. Most of a block up, Jamie casually crossed the street herself, which gave her an excuse to look down it and see Mueller ambling along behind them. She saw him bring his hand to his mouth, something in it – his radio, no doubt, but she didn't hear anything.

The mark walked along the side of Bergdorf Goodman and next to a parked delivery van. The taller one grabbed him around the neck while the short one snatched the bag from his hand and ran. The tall one spun him around and shoved him against the truck then pelted down the street after his partner.

Jamie kept her back mostly turned to them, her head craned so she could see the short one racing towards her out of her peripheral vision. Then she turned suddenly and threw her shoulder into him.

She had stopped just short of a pair of UPS mailboxes. The shorter guy was sent careening into them – hard. He folded across the top with a sound of escaping breath, and the bag went flying forward, where Jamie quickly

snatched it just as he fell back onto his back gasping for breath.

Bag in hand she swept her jacket aside as she turned full on to his partner running up behind, displaying badge and gun. His eyes widened and he skidded to a stop, winding up on his ass before scrambling to his feet, turning, and running back the way he'd come.

Mueller didn't need to use leverage or time himself at all. He simply let the kid run past him, reached out and grabbed him by the scruff of the neck, swung him around and pushed him face down across the hood of a Buick.

Jamie looked down at the second guy, who still lay on his back, gasping and holding his chest.

“Having a bad day, sir?” she asked solicitously.

“Fuck you, puta,” he gasped weakly.

“Turn on your belly, sir. You'll find it easier to breath.”

He repeated his invitation.

“If I have to drop down onto my knees while you're in that position, I'm gonna make sure one of them comes down right on your nuts,” she said, eyes narrowing.

The Latino stared at her a moment, then with a further groan rolled onto his stomach.

“Hands behind your back so I can cuff you nice. Otherwise I'm gonna cuff you with my knee on the back of your neck.”

He brought his hands together behind his back and she squatted down and cuffed him, reading him his rights as she did.

“No habla ingles,” he muttered.

She promptly read him his rights in Spanish.

“Comprende, senor?”

She shifted her knee onto his back.

“Si!”

“Bueno.”

Mueller was dealing with the victim, who had run up, angrily (and safely) cursing the tall guy who was already cuffed as Mueller patted him down.

“Vamanos,” she said, reaching down and grabbing the little guy by the scruff of his jacket and helping pull him to his feet.

She marched him back a half block to where Mueller was, reaching them as a blue and white pulled over, lights flashing.

He looked at her as she walked up.

“And sometimes it's just that easy,” he said.

She shoved the shorter one against the hood with the first one.

“I haven't searched him,” she said.

Mueller nodded and patted the guy down. Generally female cops did pat downs on men only if there were no male officers available, and vice versa. It was less offensive for both parties and less likely to draw pain-in-the-ass complaints.

The two patrol cops came around the side of the Buick, and one put his hand under the taller perp's chin.

“I know you?” he said.

The perp glared at him.

“Rodriguez,” the second cop said.

“Oh yeah. The purse snatching. That was just last week. You must be on bail.”

“Bail's revoked,” said the second with a smirk.

“Knowing our fuckin' courts, you never know,” Mueller said.

“I'm Mark Roselli,” the first guy said to Jamie with a grin.

“Hey,” she said.

“This is my new... partner, Jamie McCloud,” Mueller said tonelessly.

The two cops grinned broadly.

“Lucky you, Mueller,” said Roselli. “Look what I get stuck with.”

He poked his thumb at his partner.

“Fuck you, Roselli,” the short, broad shouldered black man said, leaning forward to offer his hand.

Jamie took it.

“Paul David,” he said with a grin.

“Or David Paul,” Roselli said. “He's interchangeable.”

By then there were half a dozen civilians watching and holding up their smart phones, so after the patrol guys patted them down a second time they pushed the two into their car as an unmarked car pulled over, lights flashing.

Another of the Anti-Crime squad members, Collin Major, was driving. He was a skinny, sleazy looking guy with long blonde hair sprouting from under a cap. Mueller and Jamie got in, he in the front passenger seat of course, and they followed the blue and white back to the station.

Chapter Six

The time spent in processing a prisoner was legendary at the NYPD. There had been numerous attempts at improving it, but those efforts, which naturally involved better technology, had run into their own problems. How much of that was because cops liked it that way was open to debate. After all, making an arrest in the final hour of your shift guaranteed overtime since all the reports had to be done – by hand – before you could go home.

There were now computers to take some of the load off, to speed things up, reduce errors, and reduce overtime – when they worked, and when the cop wanted them to work. Since they'd made their arrest in the early afternoon there was no question of overtime, but Mueller didn't seem to mind. And Jamie didn't need overtime.

Since Jamie's arrestee complained about sore ribs, that required more reports, and he had to be sent off for X-rays. The Use of Force report didn't apply, as far as she was concerned. All she'd done was guide him to the side and he'd run into the mailboxes. It was the impact that had hurt him. Foster disagreed so she had to fill out one of those, too.

"I like your style," Mueller said. "But it does lead to more paperwork sometimes, and complaints. You can probably get away with it, though, since you're female."

She pondered that for a moment, then decided he was right. When she wrote the report she emphasized that the approaching male was moving at a high rate of speed which could have resulted in her being hurt if she tried to physically block him with her own body.

By the time they'd done with the paperwork there wasn't a lot of time left to do much else, so Mueller took out an unmarked car and drove her around the eastern section of the precinct, which ran down to the Hudson and the piers and docks there.

Jamie relaxed in the car, eyes moving over the street as they drove back down 54th street. It, like Midtown North, epitomized Manhattan. You could find anything there. The precinct house was sandwiched between, a rail control center and a supermarket. Banks, restaurants, stores, offices, and apartment buildings were all wildly mixed together up and down the street.

There was a kind of storefront Greek Orthodox Church across the street from the precinct house between an office tower and several five story apartment building. A dry cleaner and a restaurant occupied the ground floor of two of the apartments, with more stores and restaurants up the block.

One block east were more apartments, an auto repair shop and a music studio, as well as more stores. There was a bank on the corner just across the street to the west in the glass low rise office tower, facing a parking garage next to the theater. There were restaurants, a fitness studio, a hotel, and office buildings.

A lot of Manhattan was chaotic in that same sense, which was why she loved it. Still, she'd grown up in Brooklyn, and unless she got a lot richer than she expected in life she didn't think she'd be moving to Manhattan. Midtown rents started at roughly \$2500 for a studio or one bedroom and then rocketed up from there.

So she walked up a few blocks and then into the subway station at 57th and 7th to catch the N or Q lines back to Brooklyn Heights. One of the good things about working anti-Crime, she reflected, was you didn't need to change before or after work. She'd never really liked the uniform, though admittedly it went well with her hair.

She really should thank granddad for that. On the other hand, working the day shift meant the crush of rush hour was inevitable, and somebody on the crowded train managed to get his hand on her ass and yank it back before she could whirl and confront him.

Her grandfather had bought the brownstone back in the sixties. At the time it had been converted into five apartments. He'd moved into the first floor unit with her grandmother with a down payment gotten from his parents. He and his brothers had done some maintenance and renovations,

and then rented out the other four units, one of them to her uncle James.

He and James had bought several more Brownstones over the following years, and made pretty good money in them. Enough that he'd renovated the place again to expand his home, first to the second, floor, then the third, and finally the fourth. Five kids had helped persuade him of the need, and he had other properties to rent out anyway.

He'd moved out when her mom, his youngest child, had married, and had her stay and live there, though he'd continued to collect rent on the basement apartment. When he'd died a few years later, he'd left the place to her, and other brownstones to his other kids. The one he'd been living in had been sold and the proceeds gone into the trust fund for the grand-kids.

It was a typical brownstone, made of sandstone, with bay windows all the way up the side. The first floor was up a steep staircase, while the 'basement' was actually only a little below ground level through a separate door. Her mom had never joined that unit to the house, figuring four floors was more than enough for a family of five, and had rented it out until her brother Dale joined the force.

She trotted up the stone stairs and pushed open the door. That it was unlocked meant her dad wasn't home yet. Her mother had never paid much attention to such things, even after she'd married into a family made up largely of cops, firefighters, and the odd lawyer and dentist.

Her father had two brothers, both of whom were on the job. He also had three uncles, seven cousins, and now six nieces and nephews and two children on the job. Not to mention his father, her grandfather, who was responsible for moving her to Midtown North.

Having grown up with cop talk as much as she had he was, like her, slightly paranoid about things like locking doors and windows, even though he was now a successful contract lawyer in the financial district.

She locked the door behind her.

"I'm home!" she shouted.

There was no telling what floor her mother would be on. The building was long but narrow. The living room, dining room, kitchen and formal dining room were on the first floor. Her parents' bedroom, and her dad's office were on the second. There were three bedrooms on the third, one of which was for guests, one was a home gym, and the third was her brother Colin's. He was twenty, and still in college. When he graduated and got a job she supposed her parents would likely downsize and give him the third floor.

She had long decided this generosity was a calculated thing on her mother's part to keep her children living as close as possible, and on her father's part to keep her mother as happy as possible.

"Kitchen!" she heard.

She wandered through the front room and dining room to the kitchen. It had been renovated two years back and into a stylish gourmet kitchen where her parents could experiment on various Middle Eastern and Asian dishes. She caught an odd scent as she approached and frowned warily.

Her parents were always trying to persuade her to try things which looked like they should be at the bottom of a sewer and smelled worse. She much preferred basic meat and potatoes, to the despair of her parents' culinary ambitions.

"What horrible thing are you cooking up now?" she demanded.

"It's Szechwan shrimp with –."

"I'll go and get a burger."

Her mother rolled her eyes. "I made you some beef yakitori."

"The beef part sounds right. What the hell is yakitori?"

"Honestly, Jamie. It's simply skewered beef marinated in soy ginger sauce."

Jamie looked at her suspiciously.

Her mother looked nothing like her. She was a head shorter and very blonde, with a long, oval face. Her height, hair and Celtic looks came from her dad. And while her father was a cool, logical legal mind, her mother was a loopy hippy, or at least, how Jamie thought a loopy hippy would look and act.

Having a well-off father she had flower childed her way through a liberal arts program at Columbia and, having no particular need of a job, traveled the world picking up odd fashions, and food choices along the way. Now she spent time with various charities and causes, and had a fascination for new recipes.

How she and her father had ever come to be attached was something beyond Jamie's understanding, unless it was that 'opposites attract' thing. And that had certainly never worked for her. If a guy had the opposite choices and tastes to her she could rarely stand to be around him.

Granted, the two of them had developed this obsession over food together, but that had only come about in the last five years, thank God, since by then she was old enough to refuse to eat any of it. Or most of it, anyway.

“Did you have a nice day at work?”

“Uh huh. I really like Midtown.”

“At least you're not wearing that awful uniform anymore.”

“It wasn't so bad.”

“It was very militaristic.”

She shrugged and opened the fridge.

“Don't spoil your appetite.”

“I'm looking for alternatives in case I hate your soy ginger stuff.”

“You won't! It tastes delicious!”

“You think everything tastes delicious.”

'Speaking of delicious, when are you going to bring that nice Ryan over for dinner again?

“Uhm, never!” she said, closing the fridge. “You were even more embarrassing than usual.”

“You're too sensitive.”

“I'm too sensitive? You were dancing next to the kitchen table!”

“It was Mexican food and we had Mexican music on. I felt taken by the mood.”

“And you had to tell him that I have my own apartment and what goes on there is none of your business as long as it didn't get too noisy!”

“I was just being practical, dear. I didn't want him to be intimidated by the whole family being around thing.”

Jamie rolled her eyes.

“I don't think you get nearly enough sex.”

“I get more than enough as far as I'm concerned, thanks.”

The front door slammed.

“What's for dinner!?” someone called.

“Shrimp, you shrimp,” she called back.

Her brother Colin was two inches shorter than her, and just as fair, but took after her mother in hair and features.

He came into the kitchen and kissed her mother, then turned to her. “I can take you,” he said.

“Yeah? Think so?”

“Not in the kitchen,” her mother said firmly, raising her voice.

“Pansy ass lawyer,” she said, pushing him.

“Yeah? In ten years I'll be able to buy and sell your ass, flatfoot.”

“You'll need to be buying women's asses since you won't find any in those law books.”

He threw his shoulder against hers, knocking her aside, and she returned the favor as they stumbled out of the kitchen.

She was almost into the living room as the front door opened.

“Who left the front door unlocked?” her father demanded as he came in.

“The pansy,” she said.

Colin jumped on her back and she staggered, but then tilted to the side to dump him onto the sofa. He had his arms across her shoulders, though, and refused to let go so he pulled her over with him. She made sure she landed hard, and he cursed and tried to wrap her legs around him but she got an elbow into his ribs and he yelped and let go so she could scramble away.

“Grow up, you two,” he said in annoyance.

“I'm all growed up,” she said, jumping up and giving him a kiss.

She slid quickly around him so that when Colin tried to grab her he wound up almost running into their father, who put his hand out firmly.

“Colin. Be a man.”

“Ha!” she said.

“Recognize that girls are girls and you have to be the mature one.”

“Oh right,” she exclaimed.

She stuck her tongue out at Colin, then pulled it back to give her father an innocent look as he turned to frown at her. He sighed and headed for the kitchen while she and Colin made faces at each other. She went upstairs, then, taking the stairs two and three at a time.

She paused at the third floor, checked her watch, then continued up to her 'apartment'. It had a small kitchen, and its own dining room, a luxurious main bathroom and a huge bedroom up front with its bay window. There was also a nice living room with a sofa facing one of the fireplaces – the other being in her bedroom.

It did not, however, have any kind of door separating it from the rest of the house. Her father dismissed it as a waste of time, probably to please her mother. Her mother pointed out if she put in a door and locked it she'd have the clean the place herself, and do her own laundry.

The ceiling was fourteen feet high, and dark oak wainscoting covered the bottom of the walls in the front room and living room. The bay window in the bedroom was ten feet high and the light poured through it in the mornings.

She quickly stripped, put on sweatpants and a sweatshirt, and went down to the gym, where she spent half an hour exercising her upper body – exercise you didn't get walking around midtown Manhattan. That included chin-ups and more.

She had given up gymnastics soon after her growth spurt, since she'd been a gangling thing for those years, and a lot more awkward than her peers. But she could still pull herself up a bar and spin around it. Her father had made the chin-up bar much wider and stronger than it would normally need to be for his gymnast daughter, and she still found it great exercise to pull her entire body up over it, then swing down again.

She was hanging upside down with her legs curled over the bar when Dale sauntered in, still in uniform. He'd been in patrol for two years and had resisted suggestions he might like to explore other options. He was assigned

to Brooklyn's 83rd precinct.

“Hey,” she said.

He waved and leaned on the door jamb.

“So?”

“So what?”

“So how was your first day?”

“Yesterday was my first day.”

“Today was your first actual day.”

She sighed and then threw her arms up, her upper torso going with it until she could grab the bar, then jump down.

“Okay,” she said, a little breathless. “Everyone we meet seems to find it real funny that I was given to Mueller as a partner since he's managed to not have one for a while. I gather he's pretty bad tempered.”

He raised his eyebrows.

“He seems to be behaving himself so far, and seems to be trying to avoid cursing in front of me, though not very well. We made our first bust today. Two clowns staking out the Apple store on Fifth Avenue and doing a snatch and grab on a citizen when he came out.”

“Larceny two or three?”

“Two, but also assault, since they shoved him into a parked truck and he had to get stitches.”

He shook his head. “I'd rather drive around responding to calls than sit on a stakeout for hours waiting for something to happen.”

“It wasn't bad. We did wander around, and it was a nice day. You should

transfer to Manhattan.”

“I like the guys I work with.”

“You think your partner knows who granddad is?”

“Not yet.”

“That's good.”

“Nobody's given me any trouble so far. And maybe Mueller will stay nice until my sparkling personality wins him over.”

He grinned. “Your what? Personality? You have one? Since when.”

“Ha, ha,” she said. “Actually he seems confused I don't talk more.”

Dale laughed.

“He's like an old time cop, you know. I think he figures if I break a nail I'll cry.”

“You didn't tell him you only cry when the Rangers lose?”

“I'll save that for the fall. By then he'll be used to me.”

“No one gets used to you, Jamie. They just adapt and learn to cope.”

She gave him her middle finger.

Chapter Seven

The next day, they were in a car, and another pair of anti-crime cops were at the Apple store. They drove down near the docks on the east side of the precinct and did fairly boring surveillance work on a warehouse which was suspected of holding stolen merchandise. That was interrupted by a call from the station to return there.

More specifically, for her to return there.

She had no idea what it was about. They drove back to 54th street, and Lieutenant Foster sent her up to the detective squad to meet Sergeant Ramirez. He was in his late twenties with a shaved head but heavy, shaggy eyebrows.

“Officer McCloud,” he said, eyeing her in some surprise.

“You wanted me for some reason, Sergeant?”

“Yeah, it’s about that prisoner of yours from the other day, Manuel Hernandez.”

She looked at him without understanding.

“He says he has a tip on a big drug shipment which he’s willing to do a deal for. But he’ll only do it with you.”

“With me? Why me?”

“Because he says you were polite with him.”

“I body checked him into some mailboxes.”

He snorted in amusement. “He don’t hold that against you. That’s just business. He says you were honest and respectful. He’s willing to talk, but only to you.”

“Okay,” she said as he led her out into the hall and down to where the interview rooms were.

“You ever meet him before?” he asked in Spanish.

“Nope. Worked in Staten Island till this week.”

They went into the interview room, where the man was sitting behind a table. He looked at her and stood up, then smiled.

“I apologize again for my bad language, senorita,” he said in Spanish.

“Olvídalo,” she said. “I didn’t take offense.”

“You surprised me is all,” he said, sitting back down.

“Manuel Hernandez, this is Officer Jamie McCloud,” Ramirez said. “Of course, you’ve met.”

Hernandez snorted. “You have a strong shoulder, senorita.”

She smiled briefly.

“So about this drug deal, Senor Hernandez,” Ramirez said.

Hernandez nodded. “Five kilos coming in tonight,” he said.

“Mr. Hernandez does not wish to take the likely jail time for felony assault,” Ramirez said. “He’s willing to trade if we drop that down to misdemeanor assault.”

“Yeah, we didn’t intend to hurt that guy,” Hernandez said. “I mean, he wasn’t hurt bad or nothing, but Alex, he got a little excited,” he said.

“I gather the DA is agreeable?” she said, looking at Ramirez.

“If things are as Senor Hernandez says, yes.”

“Well that sounds fair to me,” she said.

“So if I tell you where this happens I get to walk,” Hernandez said, looking at her.

“If you tell us where this happens then your felony assault two drops to misdemeanor assault one. The punishment for misdemeanor assault is much lower than for felony assault. The maximum is one year. For felony assault it’s seven years.”

He looked at her doubtfully, then at Ramirez.

“Does that mean I get out or not?”

“If the Assistant District Attorney tells the judge you cut a deal then you’ll get whatever that deal says,” she replied.

“The ADA says you can skate,” Ramirez said. “So long as you’re telling the truth.”

“Yeah, man! I’m telling the truth! I’m in here, right? You’ll know if I’m lying!”

“Yeah, we will,” Ramirez said, scowling.

“Okay. Deal,” Hernandez said. “They’ll make the buy in a parking garage on West 57th street.”

“Who will?”

“Martinez, Rafael Martinez. The buyer is some gringo. I don’t know him.”

There was only one parking garage on West 57th street. They didn’t have a time, so they put a pair of detectives in a car on every floor and another out front. She and Ramirez took the third floor of the four floor garage and parked the unmarked car in a corner, keeping low.

“I wish he’d had a better idea of the time,” she said quietly.

“Just think of all the overtime you’re getting,” Ramirez said.

She made a face. They’d been parked there for three hours, with no radio or lights, slumped low in the car and with the nearest light turned off. And they had no idea if anything would even happen on this floor, or if it would all take place out of sight and be done before they got there.

“You never hear that police work is 90% boredom and 10% terror?”

“I heard something like that,” she said.

Every time a car drove onto the floor they both tensed and slid lower, and then when it passed by they relaxed in disappointment. Then a black Lexus drove onto the floor and parked. There was no movement from the car for ten minutes, and they kept still and quiet, with the radio turned low.

A Ford Taurus drove onto the floor, slowed, and then pulled in next to the Lexus. Ramirez, who held the radio, clicked the microphone button twice and held a small pair of, light enhancing binoculars to his eyes.

Jamie didn’t need them to see that the driver’s windows of the two cars were opened and the drivers apparently talking to each other. The driver of the Taurus handed a bag to the other driver, and after a short delay, got a smaller bag back.

“Go!” Ramirez said into the radio.

They didn’t move themselves yet. And nothing happened at first. Then a car drove down from the top level and pulled sideways across the ramp. Twenty seconds later another car came up from the floor below and pulled across the opening there, too. The stairway door opened and a pair of detectives came out, wearing nylon police jackets.

Only then did Ramirez start the engine and pull out, driving across to stop twenty yards away from the two cars.

“NYPD!” he called. “Put your hands out the windows!”

The Lexus pulled out with a screech of tires and raced down the lane

between cars, headed for the opposite side of the garage. The cars at the entrances stayed where they were, but the detectives ran to intercept it, except for she and Ramirez who remained with their guns pointed at the guy in the Ford.

“Come out of the car with your hands up!” Ramirez shouted.

Instead the driver came out with a gun in his hand, firing towards Ramirez’ voice, since he couldn’t possibly see much past their car’s headlights in the dimly lit garage. Ramirez dodged to his right, behind a pickup, while Jamie ran to the left, her pulse rate rocketing upward!

A lot of the detectives chasing the Lexus abruptly turned and ran back as their perp ran behind a row of cars and headed for the detective car blocking his exit. The cops there opened fire, and he went down quickly, before anyone else could get near him. That didn’t stop everyone else from converging, except that as she started to run after them Jamie saw movement out of the corner of her eye.

The Lexus had stopped on the other side of the garage when all the cops had turned and run back. She hadn’t been paying much attention, but now she saw a guy in a dark jacket running to the stairway and sprinted after him. The two detectives who had come out of the stairwell had run towards the first perp, so the second was able to yank open the door and disappear inside.

“Stop, police!” one of the detectives shouted, too late.

Jamie reached the door two seconds after the man had darted inside, and could already hear his heavy feet on the stairs as he took them three and four at a time. She ran down after him, doing the same, expecting him to come up against other detectives waiting at any moment.

He didn’t. He burst out onto the sidewalk and raced away up the street. At eleven at night there wasn’t much traffic, never mind pedestrian traffic, on West 57th street. What was more, it was a wide, well-lit street with nowhere to lose himself in as she ran out onto the street after him.

He gave it his best shot, though, and he was no slouch in the running

department. He ran west and she ran after him. At first she was only able to keep pace. He had long legs. But as she loosened up her stride lengthened and she began to quickly make up the distance. There were sirens sounding around them, though it was hard to tell where they were coming from.

She drew up to within a couple of feet of him, to where she could almost reach him, and then timed her lunge. She thrust up hard with her left foot, throwing herself forward so her raised right hit the small of his back. It overbalanced him and sent him tumbling across the street to land on his belly, gasping for breath.

She approached warily, gun drawn and pointed at him as he turned his head up at her.

“Hands behind your back, please,” she said.

He glared up at her, and for a few seconds she thought he was going to try something else, but instead he obeyed, putting his hands together behind his back. She approached carefully, pulling her cuffs out of her belt, then dropped down, one knee pinning his right forearm as she snapped the cuff around his left.

“Don’t move suddenly or I might wind up blowing out your spine,” she said.

He said nothing as she eased her knee aside and slid the cuff around his right wrist. Only then did she stuff the gun back into its holster and start patting him down. She looked around her in irritation. Where the fuck are those idiots, she thought, before returning to the perp.

“You have the right to remain silent,” she said, noting, with a certain degree of appreciation, that the guy had a very nice ass.

She ran her hands in under his arms, and into the pockets of his jacket, then flipped it up and pulled a gun in a skeleton holster from the small of his back.

“Bad boy,” she said. “These are illegal, you know.”

“I’m a federal agent,” he growled.

“You are, huh.”

She flipped his jacket up and pulled his wallet from his back pocket. There was nothing in it to indicate he was an agent of any kind.

“Badge handy somewhere?”

“I don’t keep it on me.”

“How sad for you.”

She continued searching him, running her hands down his legs – which, she noted, were very nicely muscled, to his ankles.

“Up on you knees, Mister agent,” she said, gripping him by the back of his collar.

He rose on his knees, turning his head to glower at her as she reached in and ran her hands along his chest and up around his collar.

“If you give up the right to remain silent, anything you say can and will be used against you.”

“I told you, I’m a federal agent.”

“So I heard. Did you understand the - .”

“Of course I fucking understood!”

“Now, now. No need to be rude,” she said.

A blue and light was coming down the street from the west, but before it reached the cross street in front of them another turned off it and the lights lit them up. Her suspect was in his late twenties, she thought, well-muscled from top to bottom, with a thick neck, broad shoulders, and a handsome, if unshaven face framed by collar length blonde hair.

“You play football, Mr. Federal Agent?”

He continued to glower at her as the blue and white pulled to a stop and the uniforms got out.

They picked him up, searched him again and put him in the back of their car, giving her a ride back to the station, as well.

He said nothing in the car, but wouldn't cooperate when they were trying to process him. So they stuck him in a cell to cool down a little. The uniforms closed the cell door and headed back to booking.

“Hey, Red,” he said.

She hesitated, then turned back.

“Seven two nine, fourteen twenty.”

She raised her eyebrows.

“My boss. Call him. And keep your lips zipped.”

“Uh huh.”

She left him there, feeling a little uncertain. Could he actually be a federal agent of some kind? If so why hadn't he said it earlier? Well, of course he had, when she'd busted him, but he hadn't said anything since the uniforms had joined them.

She went upstairs to the detective squad and found Ramirez.

He gave her a look. “Good catch, McCloud,” he said. “The people who were supposed to block the stairs blew their assignment.”

“He was a fast runner but I was faster,” she said with a half-smile.

“Lucky for us.”

She lowered her voice. “He also says he's a federal agent.”

Ramirez' eyes widened.

"He gave me a number, says it's his boss."

She wrote it down and handed to him.

"We'll check it out. He being processed?"

"No, he was passively resisting so they didn't wind up booking or printing him. They put him in a holding cell till he does what he's told."

Ramirez frowned and looked uncertain for a minute, then nodded. "Don't mention it to anyone else," he said, before turning and heading for his lieutenant's office.

She was still writing up her report when Ramirez came for her.

"Jamie," he said, jerking his head.

"I'm just finishing the arrest report."

"Delete it."

She let her eyes widen, and he nodded.

She deleted the report and got up, following him back into the detective's squad and then into the lieutenant's office.

Lieutenant Jacobson was slim, forty-something, bald down the middle of his head, and harried looking. He didn't speak until Ramirez closed the door behind her.

"McCloud. The guy you busted was a federal agent. That's not your fault or our fault. It's his fault. They're supposed to notify us whenever they do anything undercover in our precinct, and they failed to do so. I'm going to be meeting with him and his supervisor tomorrow morning and you can bet I will remind them of that – again."

“Yes, sir,” she said.

“Good job catching him, though. We would have looked like morons if he’d gotten away. You can bet we’d have heard it from them later.”

He glared at Ramirez.

“So what do I put in my report?”

“You saw a guy running out, you chased him, but he got away.”

She felt offended by the notion of that but confined herself to frowning.

“I’ll inform your lieutenant you did good work for us.”

“Yes, sir.”

That had been a complete waste of an evening, she thought. At least they’d apparently killed a perp and not a federal agent. She was pretty sure she’d have heard about it if it was otherwise.

Chapter Eight

She went in the next morning, feeling irritable. She liked her downtime and she'd had none to speak of. She expected to spend the day on her feet again, probably in Times Square, watching for pickpockets, scam artists and other lowlifes who preyed on tourists. The idea didn't thrill her.

Given her mood and where she would be working, she was wearing comfort clothes, which meant black leather sneakers, black turtleneck, and gray slacks. The turtleneck was lightweight and a tad form fitting, but she'd be wearing a jacket over it.

As soon as she got in, though, Foster told her to go to the Detectives Squad and see Lieutenant Jacobson. She only got halfway across the squad when Ramirez called her from a doorway and ushered her into an interview room.

Jacobson was there, along with a gray haired man in a suit, and the football player guy she'd arrested. He was uncuffed now, of course, and his longish hair was tied back in a ponytail. He scowled at her and she gave him a phony smile.

"Officer McCloud, this is Special Agent Daniel Lucas of the DEA," Jacobson said.

"We've met," she said.

Lucas frowned at her, then dropped his eyes, not to her chest, which she was used to, but her legs.

"This is Special Agent Dillon," he said of the older man.

"McCloud," the man said, looking at her strangely.

She nodded at him.

“Where’d you learn to run anyway?” Lucas demanded.

She looked at him curiously. “High school track team.”

Dillon smiled faintly. “He said you run like a cheetah, McCloud. Lucas is pretty fast himself, but you ran him down in no time.”

She smiled slightly, and Lucas frowned briefly, then his eyes narrowed as he looked her up and down.

“You look like you’re in shape in more ways than one,” he said.

Given there were three other men there, two of them supervisors, she couldn’t imagine that had been a come-on, and simply stared at him.

“Agent Lucas is involved in an investigation which last night’s... events, have thrown into some disarray,” Dillon said. “We’re looking into the movement of large amounts of drugs through a modeling agency on Fifth Avenue.

“I’ve been at this for almost six months,” Lucas said, glowering around. “I’ve gained the trust of one of the principals, but I know damn well he isn’t the guy in charge. I was making a buy for him. Then I was going to see where and how the drugs were moved.”

“So? We have the drugs.”

He shook his head. “The seller is known to the principals involved. His death is known. The press know there was a killing in the garage. It wasn’t kept a secret by your people. If I turn up with the drugs they’re going to think I killed the guy and am pulling some kind of double deal. They’ll likely cut my throat for me.”

“What he’s going to do is tell them the truth, except that he got away, which will match with the reports of the officers involved.”

“But that puts us back to square one, and they’re going to trust me less now. It might be a while before they let me in again to the same degree,” Lucas said, giving her an intense look.

“So?”

“That’s where you come in, officer,” Dillon said.

She blinked and looked at Jacobson.

“The DEA has asked for your assistance in this, which would involve a degree of undercover work, McCloud. What do you think?”

She hesitated. “Okay.”

“I can’t bring you straight into the agency. That would look too pat,” Lucas said. “But we do have a friend at another modeling agency, a small but respectable one, who is cooperating in this investigation. We can represent you as a model working for that agency, and my girlfriend. That reinforces my position, and I can arrange for you to do some modeling assignments with the girls from my agency, as well.”

“You want me to pretend I’m a model?” she asked, frowning. “Why me? Why not use some female DEA agent?”

“You’ve got the height and looks for it,” Lucas said. “And you’re the right age. That’s three for three. Do you have any idea how rare that is, how many tall, attractive young female agents the DEA in New York has to draw on?”

“One or two anyway,” she said.

“Do you know how many American women are five foot ten or over?” Dillon asked. “I looked it up. It’s 0.7%.”

“Really?”

“Really. And we don’t have that many female agents to begin with. So no, McCloud, we don’t have agents available at the moment who are model-tall, model-young, and model... hot.”

“I’m not exactly a model,” she said with a scowl.

“You’re more than attractive enough, especially once we get your hair done.”

“What’s wrong with my hair?” she demanded, eyes narrowing.

“Nothing, as far as I’m concerned,” Dillon said, holding his hands up in surrender.

“No model would have that shade of red,” Lucas said. “But I think you’ll look great as a blonde.”

“No way,” she said with a scowl.

“Blondes are ... ubiquitous in the industry, McCloud,” he said. “It’s almost a cliché, but people see a tall, attractive young blonde in designer clothes and you don’t have to convince them she’s a model. It’s the first thing they think of.”

“It will also help in case anyone remembers how a redheaded cop did that heroic fire rescue thing a week ago,” Jacobson said.

“I hate blondes,” she said irritably.

“You don’t have to commit your life to being a blonde,” he said, “Just the next couple of weeks. The investigation is at a critical moment, with a very large shipment expected soon.”

“This is an important investigation, McCloud,” Jacobson said. “And it won’t be full time. You’ll be dropping in from time to time, not every day, to play a role. The rest of your time you’ll still be working with anti-crime.”

Jamie sighed. She’d rather be wandering among the tourists looking for pickpockets than get her hair dyed blonde and pretend to be some sort of cupie doll, but it didn’t look like she really had much of in the way of options.

The modeling agency, the friendly one, was not large. It was, she was

told, a boutique agency, which specialized in certain subjects for print advertising: namely, body parts. That meant the pictures they took were of hands, or shoulders, or legs or feet, or sometimes butts and breasts, depending on whether bras or panty hose or rings and bracelets were being sold.

The first thing they did was to dye her hair and restyle it, which irritated her to no end since it was the sort of thing she'd been actively resisting for years. When they were done, her bangs were gone, and her hair was parted in the middle in a silky wave of golden blonde which flowed down around her cheeks and over her shoulders.

The assurance of the hair stylist that she looked 'fabulous' did nothing for her mood, as she was led into another room where the agent, a woman named Sharon Finley, had her change into a short, tight dress and high heels. She recognized the need, of course, but that didn't stop her resenting it as she changed and donned the ridiculous footwear.

"I hate high heels," she said, glaring down at the black pair with the four and a half inch stiletto heels.

"That's because you don't need them, dear, but in this industry, no model would be caught dead in flats except at the gym."

Jamie cursed under her breath but put the shoes on. She stood up, glowering, and Finley walked slowly around her.

"Yes, very good," she said. "You stand well."

Jamie eyed her doubtfully. "I lay down well, too. It's not that hard."

"You haven't noticed how many people have bad posture?"

Jamie shrugged.

Finley was on the far side of forty, though still quite trim and beautiful, almost as tall as her, but with short brown hair. She wore thin, purple framed glasses and a pair of black slacks to go with a black and white striped jersey

shirt.

“You’d make a very good swimsuit and lingerie model,” the woman said.

Jamie gave her a jaundiced look.

“You’re a little too buxom to be a good general fashion model.”

“You mean I’m not flat chested.”

Finley shrugged. “The dictates of the industry are what make the clothes hang well. They care little if that does not match up with real women’s bodies.”

“I am not going to go have pictures taken of me in lingerie,” she said with a steely look.

“Don’t be shy, dear. Use what God gave you.”

“God gave me more than a pair of breasts, thanks.”

“True. He gave you those delightfully long legs. They’ll look good under almost any skirt. Now let’s see how those legs move. Walk for me.”

“I know how to walk.”

“There is a particular way models walk, my dear,” the woman said tolerantly.

Jamie folded her arms across her chest and glowered at her.

“Let me see you walk. Walk briskly but not quickly across the floor and back,” Finley said.

Jamie turned and walked away from her.

“Not so fast.”

She slowed down, turned, glowering at Finley as she walked back.

“Again.”

With a sigh of annoyance, she walked away, then turned, and walked back once again.

“Again.”

“Maybe you should find a bigger room for me to walk in.”

“Again, girl,” Finley ordered.

Muttering, she walked to the far wall, turned, and walked back.

Finley pursed her lips, and Jamie’s scowl deepened. “What?” she demanded.

“You actually walk quite well.”

“I’ve been doing it most of my life.”

Finley snorted. “Your stride is very smooth, very determined. What is more your gaze is nearly perfect.”

“My what?”

“Your gaze, dear.”

Jamie stared at her.

“The model stride is one of confidence, a steady, brisk stride with eyes gazing straight ahead, seeing nothing. Some agencies, depending on the show, will want you to simply stare ahead as if looking into the distance. Others wish a determined and almost challenging gaze. You have that look down quite well.”

Jamie shrugged uncertainly.

“Remember that as you walk, you see no one. You are staring ahead as if no one is around you. You never notice the audience. You may look out over the audience, but never meet anyone’s eyes. The people there are invisible.”

“Okay.”

“Now, about lingerie.”

Jamie’s eyes narrowed.

“We can get you a few minimizer bras, which will help flatten your outline. But remember, a model is always dressed fashionably, including her underthings, which will be seen, at times, by other models and employees at Marxis.”

“At what?”

“Marxis is the agency you’ll be going to.”

“Look, I’m not exactly busty!” she said in exasperation.

“The standards of the modeling world are not always aligned with the real world. Remember that a substantial number of models are adolescents.”

Jamie rolled her eyes.

“And models always wear fashionable lingerie.”

“I promise not to wear white granny panties.”

“Thongs or G-strings, Ms. McCloud, and always matching your bra.”

‘Fine,’ she said, a trifle uncomfortably

“And not to put too fine a point on it, make sure your legs are very well-shaven every day, going *all* the way up.”

She gave Jamie a significant look and got a scowl in return.

“Is that really necessary?”

“Ha. You are a fashion model, remember. You live for style and fashion.”

“I’m a blonde airhead. I got you.”

“You’re also nineteen.”

“I’m twenty two.”

“You can pass for nineteen. The industry prefers younger girls.”

Jamie rolled her eyes. “I’m supposed to be Agent Lucas’ girlfriend. He’s got to be close to thirty.”

“Oh my dear, that hardly puts the two of you out of the norm in the industry,” Finley said with a broad smile. “Older men of power and younger, prettier women are the norm, not the exception. Although he is pretty... pretty,” she said with a slight smile.

“I bet no one asked him to pose in his underwear.”

“He actually was posing as a model. That's how we met. I sent him over there as a male torso model.”

“A male torso model? Seriously? There are such things?”

“Of course! It's very hard to get the right look in male torsos. If you don't work hard you get a fairly flat torso. Too many work too hard and look absurdly muscled. The gym look will give you a six pack and some lovely pectoral refinement, but while that's good in certain areas, it's clearly... well, unreal. It's not natural.”

“Daniel has the right kind of, well, manly torso. It's thick and nicely muscled, but it's not gym smooth, and not gym sharp. But he's transitioned into that of a staff member over there, responsible for set-up and herding girls here and there.”

“Herding, as in cows?”

“Herding, as in cats. It’s a difficult job at the best of times. Walk up and down. Get used to the high heels. I’ll be back.”

Jamie shook her head, but did as she was told. She’d had her time for high heels when younger, and rapidly outgrown them. Not only were they uncomfortable, but wearing them all-too-often made her tower over her dates. That didn’t bother her but it clearly did them.

Lucas came in as she was walking, and she scowled at him.

“You’re looking good,” he said. “The blonde suits you.”

“No, it actually doesn’t,” she snapped.

“I mean in the looks department. Maybe not in personality. I’m beginning to suspect the red hair suits your personality quite well.”

She glowered at him, turned her back, and walked towards the other wall.

“If you’d been a little less energetic last night you wouldn’t be here,” he said.

“If you’d been a little faster last night neither of us would be here,” she replied, turning back.

“You have very long... legs,” he said, looking down at them.

“You have a pony tail,” she replied, turning her back on him and walking towards the far wall.

“I’m playing a role,” he growled.

She turned and walked back. “You look kind of sleazy, actually, in that silk jacket and with a pony tail.”

“I’m supposed to look sleazy. Just like you’re supposed to look... hot.”

His tone changed on the last word, and she spun around and glowered at him.

“Am I going to have a problem with you?” she demanded.

“Problem? What problem?”

“Because I put you down before and I can do it again.”

He scowled back. “I wasn’t resisting. If I had, *officer*, you can bet things would have ended up differently.”

“They’d have ended up with your flat on your ass and me on top of you,” she said.

He grinned. “Well...” he said.

She flushed slightly, then turned and walked back towards the wall.

“Sharon is going to put you down as a leg model.”

She spun around. “A what?”

“This agency specializes in specific body parts for pictures. You have great legs. So you’re going to be a leg model.”

She shrugged and shook her head, but if he'd been a 'torso' model she supposed she couldn't really complain.

“She said she could have put you down as an ass model too but thought you might object.”

“There are models just for their ass?”

“Of course. You ever see catalogs, on-line or not, that show a pair of jeans or pants? Front and back? All they show is the waist down. You can be ugly as sin and still be an ass model if yours is the right shape.”

“At least I wouldn’t have to be blonde,” she muttered.

“What’s wrong with blondes? I like blondes!”

She rolled her eyes and turned around again.

“Any girl who thinks she needs to look sexier, who wants to be having more ‘fun’, who wants more attention, dyes her hair blonde,” she said. “So what kind of general population of blondes does that produce?”

“Friendly ones.”

She snorted.

“Needy,” she replied. “Slutty. Narcissistic.”

“Models,” he said with a grin.

“These shoes are insane. They’re already starting to make my feet hurt.”

“You’ll get used to them.”

“You don’t get it, Lucas. These kind of shoes *always* make your feet hurt. Women wear them anyway so it makes their butt look better and their legs look longer.”

“No sacrifice too great for love,” he said.

“I’m not looking for love.”

He leaned back against the wall and folded his arms across his chest.

“Everyone is looking for love, Officer.”

“And some of them are looking in the wrong places.”

“I don’t know. I’ve seen a lot of asses in my life that I loved.”

She rolled her eyes at him.

“Look, it’s true you can’t judge a book by its cover. But an attractive

cover might draw any sort of person to pick up the book and look inside. There's no saying what's inside will match what's outside, of course, but it gets the look anyway."

"Well, I don't need help getting picked up."

"That I believe," he said.

She turned and glared at him suspiciously.

"Let me get into something else about this job," he said. "Attitude."

"What about it?"

"The attitude of a model, a new model, is eager to please, and uhm..."

'Giggly?'

"Not necessarily, but not staring daggers at anyone who looks her way either."

She spun around, eyes glinting. "Are you suggesting I'm not friendly?"

"Like a porcupine," he said dryly.

"I can play flirty and smiley, Lucas. Trust me. I'm a girl. I've done it before."

"Smiley is good. You have nice teeth. Smile and seem friendly. It's a friendly industry."

Chapter Nine

“Your mouth is too big, and your chin is too small,” said a prissy, skinny blonde man in an affected voice.

If she weren't so startled she'd have said something... rude back at him. And if she hadn't steeled her face to be pleasant she'd have glared daggers into his skinny chest. As it was Jamie looked back blandly, as if she hadn't heard.

“Your tits are too big, too,” he said with an exaggerated eye-roll.

“She's here to model skirts, Eli,” Lucas said.

“Well, let's see your legs, then. Take off your pants,” Eli demanded impatiently.

They were in a dressing room at Maxis. Several long makeup tables were against the wall on one side, all with wide, brightly lit mirrors along the top. The left side of the room held racks of clothing while the front of the room was empty save for rolls of some kind of fabric hanging from the ceiling – backdrops for pictures.

Jamie was wondering how far the little fag would fly if she put her fist right between his eyes, and starting to feel the heat of anger in her face she hoped would look like embarrassment.

And there was some embarrassment. Because Lucas was still there. And while she had accepted, in theory, the notion of undressing in places like this in front of a lot of people, she had thought about them all being models and makeup people and hairdressers and photographers and the like. Industry people, in other words.

Getting undressed in front of Lucas, who was definitely not gay like the photographer, and was a sort of partner and sort of cop, was quite another

thing. She wasn't about to appear like a silly little shy girl, though, and blow the case by refusing. And she was supposed to be his girlfriend, so could hardly object. Besides, models couldn't be shy.

So she undid her dressy pants with the flared legs and slipped them down and off, then stood there in just her underwear as the gay photographer examined her legs. She wasn't looking at him doing it, though, but at Lucas, who was doing the same.

She felt the flush of both anger and embarrassment come to her face and... something a little more. Lucas was a very attractive man, after all, large, strong, handsome, and with a certain attitude which, though it grated on her a little, had a lot of self-confidence and toughness, which had always pushed her buttons.

"Yes, I suppose," Eli said. "She'll do."

He raised his eyes and looked at her chest.

"Lift your blouse, honey. I want to see your stomach," he said.

Jamie felt a further flush come to her face, but reluctantly pulled her blouse up to below her bra.

"Now this I like," Eli said, eyes brightening. "Most excellent. Do you model bellies, hon?"

She blinked at him uncertainly and saw Lucas nodding behind him.

"Yes, sir," she said.

"We're doing a bathing suit shoot next week. I think you'll be good for too. I love a flat belly."

He reached out and took her arm and turned her to the side, gazing down at her bottom.

"Yes, you'll be fine," he said in satisfaction. "You have a great ass."

He turned and left the room and Jamie glared after him, letting her top drop quickly down. She turned her eyes on Lucas, who shrugged.

“He’s like that. Very high strung,” he said.

“If I killed him would it hurt your investigation?”

“Yes. I need him. He’s nicely predictable. You can kill him afterward.”

“Stop staring at my legs!”

“I wasn’t staring!” he protested. “I was... looking, in a professional way.”

She snatched up her pants and pulled them on.

“What profession are you talking about?”

“Uhm, sometimes I forget,” he said. “I’ve been doing this for months, like I said.”

“Is that how they treat models around here?”

“Pretty much. It’s amazingly pitiless unless they’re dealing with higher end models who can walk out. They say exactly what they think and don’t care if it hurts anyone’s feelings.”

He looked around them.

“There’ll be a lot of girls at the shoot,” he said, lowering his voice. “Don’t ask anyone for drugs, but pay attention to non-models who come to talk to or give anything to the models. Especially anyone Hispanic. We’re pretty sure a Mexican group is behind this. You speak Spanish, right?”

She nodded.

“Pretend you don’t.”

She nodded understanding.

“In fact, pretend you’re as dumb as possible.”

She rolled her eyes.

“I know, I know. It’s a cliché. But you’ll blend in more and people won’t suspect you of anything. And you know, it’s not all that untrue. The girls at these places don’t, as a rule, spend a lot of time reading up on international news and discussing the economy. They’re... focused, on fashion and celebrity.”

“And sex.”

“Well, yeah, of course, but then aren’t we all?”

She raised her eyebrows and he smirked.

“This industry revolves around sex, McCloud. Sex sells, so sexy sells. That’s why the girls are hired to look sexy, to make the products seem sexy. Long female legs are sexy, not so much for what the picture shows but what it suggests.”

“You don’t think male legs are sexy?”

“The world is unfair, McCloud. The world doesn’t think men are sexy, or at least, Madison Avenue doesn’t. It’s focused on sexy women.”

“Sexy girls, you mean.”

He shrugged.

“And shouldn’t you be using my first name if you’re my boyfriend?”

“Right. Jamie. I’ll have to remember. I’m not used to working with someone.”

“And I’ll call you Danny Boy.”

He made a face. “Daniel will do. Daniel Pershing is my name.”

“Daniel? I don’t think I’d call my boyfriend Daniel. I’d call him Dan, or Danny.”

“Maybe but - .”

“Especially if I was a blonde airhead.”

“Fine,” he growled.

“And I’d probably play with his hair,” she said with a wide-eyed look, raising her hand and letting her fingers brush his long hair back.

“Your hair is in your eyes, honeybunch, precious, sweetums,” she said in a breathy voice.

“Don’t fuck around,” he said in annoyance, looking around them.

She liked that he was annoyed. There was something about the way his face looked when his eyes narrowed and his brows furrowed slightly, something dangerous, though not really, something hard and strong and determined, something that touched that same part of her which Diego’s manhandling had brushed up against.

Something that tightened her chest.

“I’m not fucking around. I’m in the character you want me to play,” she said in wide-eyed earnestness. “And if you use that tone of voice again I might get my feelings hurt and burst into tears.”

His eyes narrowed again, and she looked pouty.

“Is Danny mad at poor Jamie?” she asked in a sad little girl voice.

“You know, brats get spanked.”

“Oooh, kinky,” she said with a smirk. “Not sure you’re up to doing it unless I grant you permission, of course.”

His eyes flicked up and down, and he gave her a hard look she ignored,

or pretended to.

For all the effort she'd put into walking around in heels there was none involved in her first photo shoot. She simply stood against a white background while Eli took picture after picture from various angles of her wearing a variety of very short skirts.

Since Lucas wasn't in the room it felt more like a job than anything else. She whipped skirts on and off quickly, posing and turning as directed. Her facial expressions didn't matter since the pictures were only from the waist down so it was fairly simple. And very boring, after a very short time.

There were several other girls, and each would stand in front of the background briefly while Eli snapped rapid-fire shots, turn around while he snapped more, then move away and change while another girl immediately took her place. It was assembly line modeling, she thought.

Often she had to change tops, as well, so that the colors went with the colors of the skirts, and that slowed the changing down, but it still went quickly, and there was little time to chat with the other girls except when Eli stopped to change cameras or pull down a different color of background.

She was in the middle of one such change when Eli called across to her, and then left the camera to come over. She was half undressed at the time, and she turned uncertainly.

"Let me see your back!" he demanded.

He didn't wait but gripped her shoulder and quickly turned her away from him. She was only wearing a bra and thong at the time, but he was a far from threatening man, so she was more confused than anything else.

"Fabulous back!" he said.

And then without asking, he undid her bra! If she hadn't been so surprised she might well have broken her cover right then and there by

knocking him on his butt! Fortunately, she quickly regained her calm despite a sense of indignation.

“I need pictures of this! I can use it next week!”

“What?”

The camera went off behind her and the flash lit her back.

“I can’t believe they didn’t test your back,” he said. “You have a perfect back!”

Jamie was bemused, holding her bra against her chest as he snapped pictures of her bare back, then returned to the model still standing in her skirt before the background.

Weirdo, she thought with a mental shrug.

She’d had a lot of compliments in her life but no one had gone loopy over her back before. What kind of clothes did you sell with bare backs? Certain kinds of dresses which were backless, she supposed. She put on the next skirt and the top designed for it, and waited in line for her turn to have her picture taken.

The call came over the radio, shots fired and officers need assistance. Since she and Mueller were already in the east end watching an auto dealer the detectives thought was dealing in stolen cars, it was practically around the corner.

Mueller started the car and pulled away from the dealer, and didn’t turn on the lights and siren until they were on 12th avenue headed south. It took about a minute to pull up before a group of fifties era low rises on West 51st Street where a blue and white had pulled over to the sidewalk and a crowd had gathered.

Mueller pulled his gun out as he exited the car, so she did the same, eyes

skimming across the crowd and then across the street. People were shouting, though it was hard to hear above approaching sirens. She and Mueller pushed their way through a mostly black crowd to find two patrol cops standing over a black man laying on the sidewalk bleeding.

She didn't recognize either of the cops but they and Mueller knew each other.

"We tried to search him and he pulled a knife," one said as she safetied her glock and put it back into the holster on her hip.

"He didn't have no knife!" someone in the crowd shouted. "You put that there!"

"He had his hands up!" another voice shouted.

"Hands up, don't shoot!" said another angry voice.

Jamie looked around at them dubiously, wondering if any of them had actually seen anything.

"He was already handcuffed!" another voice yelled.

"White murdering motherfuckers!" shouted another.

There weren't a lot of Blacks in Midtown North, but this area in the Far East side nearer the docks had a fair population in the low rise apartments above shops and restaurants.

"Black lives matter!" shouted a short, fat woman, raising her hands up, and turning to the couple of dozen others assembled. "Black lives matter! Black lives matter!"

Half a dozen others took up the chant. Jamie made a face and tried to hear what Mueller and the cops were saying as another blue and white pulled up. But the fat woman pushed closer and she turned, irritated, and put her arm out.

"Get back," she ordered.

“You don’t tell me what to do, honky bitch!” the fat woman screamed.

Jamie reached into her belt and pulled out the expandable baton and pressed the button which unlocked it. It snapped out to its full twenty two inches, and she tapped it against her leg as she glowered at the woman.

“Black lives matter!” the woman yelled.

“Back your fat ass up,” Jamie replied, jabbing her in the chest with the baton.

The woman stumbled back and almost fell, glaring angrily.

More blue and whites were arriving, and one of the uniformed cops moved up beside her, his arms out to his sides.

“Back up! Back up!” he shouted, forcing the crowd back on that side.

“Cracker bastards!” someone shouted.

She swiveled her eyes to the sides, but as more cops flooded into the area, the bravery of the little crowd diminished noticeably. Though some of them kept chanting.

“Cameras make them feel brave,” said one of the cops.

There were, as usual, at least a dozen people holding up their cell phones to record what was happening. She moved back, now that there were more cops, and did her best to be unobtrusive. It was unlikely the videos would wind up anywhere but a little seen You Tube feed, but it still wasn’t a good time for her to get on camera as a cop.

Mueller soon got in the car, now that there were enough uniforms and supervisors there, and pulled away from the curb.

“Looks like a good shoot to me,” he said. “Glad it’s not me that has to go sit in with IA, though. That’s a pain in the ass.”

“You ever shoot anyone?”

“Yeah, when I was in the Bronx years ago.”

“He die?”

“No, but they don’t go any easier on you. Lucky for me the guy I shot was white.”

“White lives matter,” she said mockingly.

“Yeah, sure.”

They drove back to the auto body show and waited another several, uneventful and boring hours until their shift was over and they were replaced by the evening shift. Then she rode the subway back to Brooklyn.

The next morning she had another photo shoot, and Lucas picked her up in an Audi sports car.

“Nice wheels,” she said.

He shrugged. “Comes with the role.”

“Shouldn’t I have nice wheels?”

“You don’t need nice wheels. You got me.”

“Yeah, but do I want you?”

He smirked. “They all want me, baby.”

“Don’t think too much of yourself, do you, Dan-nie?”

He frowned at the use of the name but didn’t protest. “It is what it is,” he said.

“What is that? Your philosophy of life?”

“Close enough.”

“That photo shoot yesterday didn’t really give me any opportunity to talk to anyone.”

“No, that kind of thing is pretty rush-rush. It’s bargain basement. They take a bunch of pictures for on-line stores and catalogs. There’ll be a lot more delays today because your face goes in the picture which means makeup and hair.”

“Which means boring as shit.”

He shrugged. “Don’t you girls like that kind of thing?”

She rolled her eyes sideways at him. “Do you think the kind of girl who enjoys that kind of thing is more or less likely to become a cop, Dan-nie?”

“Well, I haven’t studied the matter, but I guess less.”

“Bright of you.”

“Just think of the opportunity for gossip.”

“So long as it’s not about the Kardashians.”

“You’re bright. Turn it onto the local personalities.”

“Won’t people get suspicious?”

“Nope. You’re a new girl looking to impress. You need to know who to impress and how to do it. Perfectly normal you’d want to know all about the people in charge and what they like so you could suck up.”

“Shouldn’t you have told me all that, honeybunch?”

“The guy supposedly in charge is Marko. He’s large and bald. Has a bit of a paunch on him but it’s hard to notice because his suits are so well-tailored. Just remember you’re my girlfriend and hopelessly devoted to me.”

“Sorry?”

“Marko likes to think of himself as a ladies man. That means he hits on all the girls and the ones who let him tend to get more work. He loves blondes so he’ll certainly hit on you. But you’re in love with me so he won’t pressure you to put out.”

“How much in love am I?”

He rolled his eyes at her. “Hopelessly devoted.”

“Really? Boy, I *must* be a dumb blonde.”

“You’ve never been hopelessly devoted to a man before?”

“Why would I be?”

“Most women aren’t that independent minded.”

“Most men aren’t worth being hopelessly devoted to, or even devoted to.”

“That’s not the way an airhead should think. An airhead should be more romantic.”

“You mean sluttier.”

“She should act sluttier but be more romantic.”

“Well, I’m not fucking Marco.”

“Of course not. You only have eyes for me. In that wide-eyed innocent, airhead blonde way of yours,” he said with a smirk.

“You’re definitely the only man in my life, Danny boy.”

“Daniel,” he said.

“Daniel sounds very... formal.”

“No one is listening.”

“Got to get into character. Wouldn’t want me to forget.”

He snorted.

“So do you have a girlfriend in real life?”

“Nope. Working undercover for months at a time? Not likely.”

“Didn’t think so.”

He frowned at her.

“You strike me as one of those loner types. You’ve probably got an apartment full of glass and chrome tables and black leather chairs, and women are creatures you hunt at the nightclub on your weekend off, bring to their places, then never call again.”

“You’ve been watching too many movies and reading too many feminist writers. I’m willing to concede I haven’t found a woman worth the little time I could devote to a more permanent relationship for a while, but I have a number of female – friends.”

She raised her eyebrows.

“I understand women. I know what motivates them, where they’re coming from.”

She laughed in amusement. “Honey, women don’t even understand ourselves, much less what motivates us.”

“Sometimes you have to step back a pace and see things from the outside to get a proper understanding.”

“Oh, so you understand women better than we do?” she asked with a grin.

“I’m a pretty good study in what makes people do and feel what they

do.”

Jamie felt an odd sense of affinity with his attitude since she’d long felt the same thing about herself. Of course, that didn’t mean he actually *did* know a damn thing about what motivated people.

He pulled into an underground garage and parked, and both got out.

“Remember, you’re a blonde airhead eager to please everyone here.”

“Okay, Dan-nie.”

He gave her that narrow eyed look and this time she felt a rush of something fluttering down low.

Chapter Ten

Lucas frowned and looked around.

“Where are the other girls?” he asked.

“I pushed that back until ten thirty,” Eli said. “I want to do some back shots of your girlfriend.”

Lucas looked at him in surprise. “Back shots?”

“You haven’t noticed Jamie has a gorgeous back?” Eli sniffed and shook his head. “Of course not. Your eyes were always on her tits, weren’t they? And if she was turned around they never went higher than her waist!”

He took a wary Jamie by the arm and pulled her over to the racks of clothing on the right. She saw, with some alarm, that they were filled with bathing suits, mostly bikinis, and lingerie. Eli picked up a lacy black robe, though, and pushed it at her.

“Take everything off and put this on.”

“I don’t do naked pictures,” she said.

He stared at her in surprise. “Who’s talking about naked pictures? I want your back, not your tits.”

He turned to give Lucas a disbelieving look.

“She’s kind of new at this,” Eli,” he said apologetically.

Eli snorted and moved off to adjust his camera, and she glared at Lucas, who shrugged helplessly in return. She moved behind a small screen and with her back to the room peeled off her blouse and then, hesitating, removed her bra.

She started to feel a strange sensation in her chest and belly at the thought of Eli taking... nearly naked pictures of her while Lucas was watching. She could not deny she was starting to find Lucas extremely attractive, on more levels than the purely physical. It went against her nature to show off her body, but on the other hand, she didn't have an awful lot of choice at the moment unless she wanted to blow her cover and this job over something... silly.

She pulled on the robe, checked to make sure it was suitably opaque, then slipped off her shoes and pants, then finally her panties. She stepped out around the screen, holding the ankle length robe together above her breasts.

"Good, sit there," Eli said, pointing at what looked like a round leather ottoman.

"No, no, back to me!" he called as she started to turn and sit.

She nodded and moved around to the other side, then sat down.

"Now lower the robe, but don't remove it," he called. "Let it hang on your arms at the elbows."

She gulped, feeling anxiety rising even as, oddly, her nipples hardened and her chest tightened. Lucas was back there, even if she wasn't looking. And while it was a little embarrassing barring herself like this to Eli, well, it's not like the man had any sexual interest in her.

His camera clicked several times, rapid-fire.

"Lower," he said.

She gulped and lowered her arms, feeling the soft material sliding down past her waist. Of course, the front of her body was naked above the waist, which produced its own strange swirling rush of emotions.

Then she gasped as Eli showed up right behind her, her hands instinctively rising to cover her breasts.

"Turn your head to your right."

His fingers combed her hair over her left shoulder as she turned her head to the right.

“And down,” he said, pressing against her head. “Not too much. There. Lower your arms a little more.”

She felt his hands pushing down on her arms and felt her heart beating faster, for the robe was just about down to her butt, if not lower in back!

He moved back and snapped more pictures, then hurried over again.

“Stand up,” he said.

She stood up and he pushed the ottoman away.

“Same position, looking down and to your right. Hold the left arm up and crooked to keep the robe up, lower your right.”

Her face was flushed as the robe slid down lower still, until she was certain part of her buttocks was showing. He turned her shoulders a bit to the right, too, then hurried back and took more shots.

How much, she wondered, could Lucas see? And what was he thinking?

“Excellent. Excellent,” Eli muttered loud enough for her to hear, as he snapped more pictures.

“Okay,” he said.

She pulled the robe up completely and then turned around, her arms across her chest, but Eli wasn’t even looking at her. He had already hurried over to the computer to look at how his pictures had come out.

Lucas, on the other hand, was looking at her, and his eyes looked... hungry.

That caused her chest to tighten further, and make her wonder what he looked like naked. He had very broad shoulders, after all, and a barrel chest.

He clearly worked out a lot. She felt her nipples tingling at the thought of running her fingers up and down his chest...

She flushed, and looked down to make sure the robe was entirely covering her. She had a helpless thought, though, of 'accidentally' showing him more. There was no way she was going to do it, of course, but the thought was delicious.

“Is that it?” she asked.

She saw Lucas frown and shake his head slightly. Eli turned and scowled at her. “Am I rushing you?” he demanded. “You have something better to do with your time?”

She shook her head mutely, managing not to scowl until he'd turned his eyes back to his computer. She imagined going over and smacking him on the back of the head the way he deserved, hard enough to shove his face into the monitor.

She pursed her lips and looked around, then, not feeling entirely comfortable going over to where Lucas was, moved back and sat down on an old leather sofa.

It was then that another man came into the room. He was in his late forties, perhaps, smoothly bald, with a round face and glasses. He was slender, but not skinny, though as he moved over beside Lucas he looked it. The two talked and looked at Eli, then at her, then the man said something that made Lucas laugh. They talked for another minute, then the man left and Lucas moved to follow him.

“Pershing. Don't go yet,” Eli said. “I want you in this next picture.”

Lucas looked back blankly. “I don't model,” he said.

Eli gave him an impatient look. “You don't model? You are a model!”

“I'm a production assistant.”

“Which means you do whatever odd jobs we want done, right? I want

you to go take your clothes off and sit on that couch so I can get another back shot of your girlfriend.”

“Excuse me?”

Eli shook his head and rolled his eyes, giving one of those “God give me patience” looks Jamie often saw from her mother.

“I want her sitting on a guy's lap, facing away from the camera. Is that hard? It might as well be you. You're here.”

“But I don't model anymore.”

“Fine! I don't need a model! I need a prop! She's the model, and you're the prop!”

Lucas moved forward reluctantly.

“Your face won't even be in the shot. It will be in shadow. I want some nice shadow in this shot. It will be in black and white.”

Lucas walked over beside her as she stood up warily.

“What do you want me to do?”

“Take off your clothes and sit on the sofa.”

“What, all of them?”

“Unless you're wearing boxers you can keep your shorts on.”

Jamie wasn't sure whether she should be relieved or disappointed. Her chest was tightening again as she backed up. She eyed Lucas uncertainly as he looked back, lips pursed, then peeled his shirt up and off. She managed to keep a straight face, but her eyes widened slightly. She remembered what Sharon Finley had said about his torso being strong and muscled but natural looking.

She had to agree. And she bit her lower lip slightly as he kicked off his

shoes and his hands went to the front of his jeans. She raised her eyes up and saw him watching her, but he didn't look so much embarrassed as... challenging. He unzipped and pushed his jeans down and her eyes widened again.

He was wearing very, very small black string bikini underwear. The bulge in them was very ... noticeable, even though he clearly wasn't particularly excited. He sat down on the sofa, scowling as Eli came over.

"No, slouch back," Eli said. "I want your head at the level of the top of the backrest, and your legs out before you. Stretch your left leg out further, foot flat on the floor. That's it."

Jamie's eyes were darting around, wanting to feast on what was before her but not wanting to be seen looking, let alone ogling.

"Okay, blonde girl, sit on his lap."

"Pardon!?" she gulped.

"Sit on his lap, facing him."

"Uhh..."

She was in a quandary. How could she protest when she was supposed to be Lucas' girlfriend!?

Nor was he any help. He simply raised his eyebrows.

If she fucked up this undercover role because of silly girlish shyness she was going to have a hard time getting her detective shield, she thought anxiously.

Holding the robe closed she carefully straddled Lucas, her knees sliding forward on the sofa cushion on either side of his body. She inched forward, trying not to actually sit in his lap.

"Move further forward," Eli said. "You're lovers, remember."

“What sort of picture is this for?” she asked.

“It's for a perfume and cologne, mens and womens, called Au Natural. Now take off the robe.”

“I don't do –.”

“Don't do nudity,” he said in exasperation. “Do you think my memory goes back about sixty seconds? It actually doesn't! And this is an ad! No bulging or dangly bits allowed. On the other hand, it's going to be sexy, seductive, sensual. So stop talking and take off the robe.”

Lucas looked uncertain as well, even anxious, but she was fairly sure that was over fear of what she was going to do. Models weren't shy – nor, in fact, was she. But exposing herself to Lucas was not something that she expected to do in the line of duty. Maybe later...

She drew in a deep breath, braced herself, and then opened the robe. She felt a jolt which was a mixture of embarrassment and a kind of hot rush flooding through her body as she bared herself to his eyes. Of course, this wasn't sexual – supposedly, but it sure seemed that way to her!

She stared at him menacingly as her mind swirled with confusing emotions, but felt her heart beating rapidly and her lower stomach thrumming. He stared, his eyes racing up her body, and he seemed to go a little breathless himself.

He looked away, rearranging his face, making it seem casual and amused, then turned it back, but his eyes swept up and down anyway. Jamie felt the flush to her face spreading down her chest, embarrassed and yet... feeling a wild sense of sexual heat and excitement at the same time.

“Back straight, blonde, but head down, looking at him, and hands on his belly,” Eli said. “Pershing, raise your right knee a bit. More. I need it to cover her ass, but only just.”

Jamie looked over her shoulder to see he'd moved his camera to shoot at an angle from her left rear, then looked back at Lucas.

“Drop your head back, Pershing,” Eli said.

“Pershing, move your right hand up to touch her hair. I need your forearm to hide the side of her breast,” he said.

He raised his hand, his fingers against her hair, but in doing so his forearm pressed against the side of her bare breast, and she felt another jolt of heat and sexual pressure there as she swallowed and tried to keep her features composed.

“Move a little further forward, blonde girl,” Eli said, after snapping several pictures.

Jamie felt a rush of reluctance and anticipation as she obeyed, for shifting forward put her directly over his crotch. Almost immediately she felt him starting to harden against her. That caused both her embarrassment... and arousal... to deepen.

“Pershing, lower your right hand a bit, like you're caressing her shoulder and upper arm.”

His eyes glinted as he obeyed, and Jamie felt another swirling wave of pressure and emotions for the palm of his hand was brushing the side of her breast as his hand moved.

“Head back, Pershing. Relax. Your body is too stiff.”

Jamie raised her eyebrows at him mockingly and he flushed.

“You're having wine, relaxing with your girlfriend, chatting softly.”

The camera snapped repeatedly.

“Don't be so... stiff,” she said in a soft, smug voice.

He glowered at her, then dropped his eyes to her breasts.

“Your nipples seem kind of hard given how warm it is in here, blonde girl,” he said softly.

“Just make sure you don't touch them, big boy.”

“Not until you beg me to.”

“You think that'll ever happen, *Dannie*?”

“Yeah. I'd take that bet, *blonde girl*.”

“Okay,” Eli said from behind. “Break and get dressed.”

She reached over for the robe, which was on the table next to him. That mean leaning forward, and his eyes never left her breasts until she sat back again and looked down at him. She smirked and ground herself against him as she swung the robe up and over her shoulders, then put it on.

She slid back off him and glanced down to see that he'd not only gotten rock hard but the head of his cock – before he quickly covered it, was pushing out across the waistband of his bikini underwear.

“String bikinis?” she asked taunting him.

“I'm playing a role,” he growled.

She smirked and pulled the robe around her as she slid back off and got to her feet. He sat up quickly, turning away from Eli, though the man was back at his computer by then, and grabbing his jeans.

“Maybe we'll do this again sometime,” he said as he pulled them on.

She sniffed and smirked, then strolled back behind the screen to get dressed. Once there she dropped her jaw and shook her head, raising her fingers up and examining them. She'd had to work very hard to keep them from moving on his stomach!

She took a deep breath and let it out, then another, before dropping the robe and stepping into her underwear. By the time she was dressed Lucas was standing behind Eli who was at his computer. She went over to join them and gazed at the picture herself.

It was, as Eli had promised, black and white, and neither of their faces was in it, which was a relief. Nor was any other part of her body which would normally be covered by a bathing suit. That too was a relief. In fact, the picture looked... hot. She felt the thrum in her lower belly growing more powerful once again.

She and Lucas looked so much like lovers! But not just lovers. There was a strange element of possession in the picture. As if she belonged to Lucas, and he to her. But it was more the former than the latter. It was... strange, but she thought the girl in that picture would do what she was told by that man, even though her face wasn't visible.

That muscular man slouching down in the sofa looked like the boss, the authority figure, and the girl straddling him looked like... his. Which was again strange, for she often used the female dominant position, and liked it, yet never before had it felt as if the man underneath were the one in charge. Even without the faces showing.

“You're good,” she murmured.

“Fucking right, I'm good,” Eli sniffed, still playing with shadows on the screen, lightening parts of the picture and darkening others.

They were on the left of the picture, not centered, and as she watched, a stylized text appeared on their right, saying Au Natural.

Lucas touched her shoulder and jerked his head, and they headed for the door.

“Let's not mention this in our reports,” he murmured.

“Fine by me.”

They left and punched the button for the elevator.

“I hate chrome unless it's on cars.”

She raised her eyebrows.

“I don't have any chrome and glass furniture.”

She nodded her understanding.

“I do have a leather sofa, though.”

She raised her eyebrows.

“Much softer one than in there.”

She gulped and pursed her lips.

“And it's black.”

“Nice to know,” she said.

“I uh, also have an apartment nearby.”

She looked at him.

“I mean, Dan Pershing has an apartment nearby, paid for by the agency.”

They got into the elevator and he pushed the button for the garage.

“Are you feeling horny, Dan Pershing, and looking to take your horniness out on me?”

Their eyes locked together for the longest time, and she waited for his to drop, for him to acknowledge just how deep in trouble he would be if she reported him coming onto her, especially after that photo shoot.

Instead he leaned in and kissed her.

More precisely, he leaned in until his lips were about a millimeter away from hers, and their lips brushed together ever so lightly. A moment later they brushed together more firmly, and then as if there was a chemical reaction, they seemed to fuse, to meld together as his body pressed her into the wall of the elevator.

Jamie felt an almost instant emotional and physical recall of the rough sex she'd had with Diego a few nights back. That sent heat flaring inside her, and made her temporarily breathless, even before Lucas' hands cupped her buttocks and pulled her in even more firmly against him!

Her right leg curled up around him as their tongues moved together with an almost violent hunger, and he squeezed up against her buttocks so strongly he half lifted her into the air. Then she was in the air entirely, her legs around him as she leaned down to continue the long, passionate kiss.

The elevator dinged for the garage, and the doors began to open. He dropped her and she stumbled slightly, before he caught her and led her out into the small hall, then into the garage.

Chapter Eleven

The apartment was not exactly impressive. It was in a sixties era four story building, and had been renovated. It was small, with a sleek little kitchenette, the floor was blonde wood and the furnishings were all Ikea modern. She didn't pay much attention to it, though.

As soon as they were inside he grabbed her ass and lifted her up. Her legs slid around him and she grabbed his shoulders, exulting in the sense of strength and power she saw.

"I'm going to pound you like a rug," he said.

"You think so?" she demanded, a trifle breathlessly.

Their eyes locked, and then his face seemed to close up. He let her down, but then his hands slid up her back to unzip the back of her dress. She held his eyes, doing nothing to help, but doing nothing to get in his way either.

He unzipped her dress, then pushed it back over her shoulders. It dropped to her waist, and his big hands pushed it down lower so it slid down her legs to pool around her ankles. He had no trouble undoing her bra, unlike Diego, she thought, who'd had to turn her around to see what he was doing.

Then he kissed her, roughly, his hand folded around the back of her neck. She kissed back, her hand rising to press against his muscled chest.

He grabbed her wrist, grabbed both wrists, and pulled them straight down to her sides, then pulled his lips back from hers, staring into her eyes. She felt a jolt of something dark and hungry inside as he leaned in to press his mouth against the nape of her neck. He chewed softly, sucked lightly, his tongue swirling as he moved down around her front, his jaw forcing hers up and back as he growled low in her throat and mock gripped the front of her neck in his jaw.

He moved lower, bending, kissing his way down the front of her body. He brought his teeth closed lightly against the soft flesh of her breast, then again, then again, on the other one, though he avoided her rigid nipples. He dropped to his knees, then, and kissed and lightly chewed his way down her stomach to her abdomen, then...

His face moved lower, and still holding her wrists in his large hands, he pressed his face in between her thighs, nipping lightly at her inner thigh so that she spread her legs wider apart. He gazed up the length of her body, then moved in and began to lick her right *there*, through the thin crotch of the thong.

The sensation was more teasing than anything else, at first. But as his tongue moistened her panties the sensation grew stronger. He opened his jaw, closing it on her sex, squeezing as his hot breath moved through the crotch and against her skin.

And still he held her wrists firmly at her sides.

Her legs were starting to get wobbly as she stared down at him. Then he abruptly stood up, releasing her wrists, but sweeping his arms around her as he pushed his broad left shoulder into her middle. She gasped as he lifted her up easily, dropping her belly-down across his shoulder.

Crack! His hand slapped her bottom sharply as he turned and headed into the bedroom. Then he gripped her thong and yanked it over her hips and down her legs.

“Hey!” she gasped. “What are you, Conan!?”

“Interesting idea. And you can be my slave girl,” he said.

She slapped at his back, then his ass, but that only brought another sharp slap to hers, and she yelped at the sting. She squirmed, but helplessly, for he easily held her legs pinned against his chest with one arm. And that turned her on! There weren't a lot of men strong enough to lift her and carry her this easily!

Suddenly her head and torso were flying up and back as he swung her up, and then he dropped her onto the edge of a long, low dresser! Instantly, his lips were on hers again, and she kissed back enthusiastically, moaning as he pushed himself into her and her body was forced back against the mirror behind her.

She grabbed at his chest, then at the buttons, tearing two of them.

He pulled back and he ripped open the front of his shirt, sending the remaining buttons popping, then tore it off and threw his body against her again.

Jamie gasped, feeling his hard, muscled chest pressing against her bare breasts as his hands raced up and down her back and through her hair. Their lips were crushed together again in a long, liquid kiss as she started to wrap her legs around his hips, but he drew back, roughly knocking her legs back then grabbing them and yanking.

Jamie gasped as she slid down onto her back on the top of the dresser, her buttocks over the edge as her head was jammed forward by the mirror. She watched him drop to his knees before her and look into her, then his mouth opened and closed on her sex.

He stared up the length of her body, sort of... humming, his mouth warm and moist as he massaged her with his lips and chewed lightly with his teeth. His tongue pushed out and his forearms forced her legs wide as he began to lap at her clitoris.

She hadn't expected Conan to be very good at oral sex. She was wrong. He was not only better than any man she'd ever had but he had the patience they all lacked. Oral sex did not seem to be a brief stopover, a duty or task to be gotten out of the way before he moved on to more pleasant things, not to him.

His tongue swept and circled and stroked and massaged as his lips folded around her and sucked rhythmically. His fingers pushed into her, thick and hard and long, turning and twisting, sliding in and out, reaching up and back to stroke the inside of her abdomen as she began to wriggle and writhe

and her hips rolled helplessly up against him.

She reached down to grab at his head, to push him down harder, and he brushed her hands aside, then captured her wrists, as he'd done before, jerking them down beside her hips. His shoulders and forearms kept her legs spread, the tendons in her inner thighs aching softly as his tongue swept across her and sent waves of heat and sexual pressure rolling up her body.

He licked faster, harder, longer, and each time he did her hips rolled up in helpless response, faster, harder, longer, until she felt as though she were being swept by overheated waves that had her mind tumbling and turning in helpless pleasure.

And then the orgasm swept through her, and she cried out, arching and twisting, her hips bucking against him, but her body tightly pressed and held in position by his heavy arms and hands. Her knees jerked and her feet flailed as her muscles spasmed again and again, and she barely kept from screaming at the intensity of the sensations tearing through her!

He left her gasping, dazed, and gulping in air, with her hair tangled and sprayed across her face. And yet, he hadn't even finished, showed no signs of finishing. He simply eased his licking, and abandoned her wrists to draw his hands lower. His thumbs pushed into her, spreading her apart, and his tongue moved downward and slid inside her.

Jamie groaned weakly, panting, and clawed her fingers out of her face as she stared down to see his eyes staring back. Yet his mouth was filled with her sex, and was moving against her, his lips massaging her even as his tongue flickered in and out.

“Y-You're not bad,” she said a bit breathlessly. “Not as good as me, of course.”

He stood up, scooped her up in his arms, turned and flung her onto the bed in one motion. It startled her and she landed on her stomach, and started to roll over. He didn't wait. He grabbed her and flipped her bodily onto her back, then crawled in between her legs as he shoved them roughly aside.

She reached up, her hands pressing against his chest, and he gripped her wrists, shoving them back against the bed behind her as he dropped down over her. He kissed his way up along the side of her throat, then pushed his upper torso up, grinding his jeans into her crotch as he grinned down at her.

“Tough girl, he said in a taunt.

She glared and tried to free her arms, but his hands were large and strong, and his weight was behind them as he leaned over her. Then he pulled her wrists together, holding them in one hand as he leaned forward and grabbed something at the head of the bed.

He drew it down and around her wrists, and she craned her head up and back, gasping as she realized it was some kind of long scarf only as it cinched tight around her wrists.

“Hey!” she exclaimed.

“Can't have my prisoner escaping,” he said in a purr.

“I'm not your prisoner!”

He leaned further over her, kissing his way down her now-bound arms to her shoulder. He jerked her hair up and back so that she gasped in startled pain, exposing her throat as his mouth moved back onto her neck, then down under it.

His hands caressed her breasts, squeezing them in together as he kissed his way down between them, down her belly and abdomen, and then, shifting himself lower, he forced her legs wide once more as he found her clitoris and began to massage it with his tongue.

Jamie pulled experimentally at the scarf, craning her head up and back again, then turning to look down at him once more as he pressed gripped her thighs and pulled them down and apart, taking long, long licks at her as his eyes again locked to hers.

Jamie had never experienced anything quite like it. It was something

resembling what Diego had done and yet, far stronger somehow. Diego was simply playing the macho role of his culture. Lucas, on the other hand, was a very powerful man, much more strong-minded than Diego, and, way more controlled.

Diego was a man she could play games with. She didn't think Lucas was playing. And that added a dark, crackling sexual edge to what was happening which she'd never felt before.

She'd also never felt oral sex like this before, never so persistent, never so good, and she felt her lower body starting to thrum with sexual energy once again as Lucas persisted, as he lodged his lower lip up against the bottom of his tongue to increase the force of his licks, and then as he simply lifted up on her thighs, raising her bottom a foot off the mattress as he laid his chest on his knees to lick faster.

He held her there effortlessly, as her chest got tighter and the sexual pressure mounted in her skull, until her breathing was ragged and her inner heat and racing pulse were starting to make her sweat! She moaned helplessly, her hips grinding, muscles spasming as her eyes closed into slits.

Without warning he dropped her, straightening and leaning forward. His fingers pushed roughly into her body as his other hand closed around her throat. Three large fingers pushed inside her and his thumb pressed against her clitoris with rapid little motions that had her crying out, gurgling in wild-fire pleasure as the orgasm spilled across her senses.

Her lower body bucked and jerked as she arched up and back, eyes wide as his hand tightened against her throat. The pressure in her skull was like nothing she'd ever felt, and the orgasm intensified into a howling storm of white-hot pleasure that battered her mind into dazed disbelief!

She shook and trembled, straining her wrists against the scarf above her head as the climax sent convulsions through her body, and then went limp, gasping as he released her throat and pulled his fingers from her body. He grinned at her as he sat back on his heels, drawing his fingers to his mouth and sliding them inside.

He reached down and undid his jeans and pushed them and his underwear down and off. His cock sprang up thickly erect, and she stared at it, impressed, despite herself.

She hadn't had an enormous number of lovers, of course, but she'd had enough to think she had an average of how big a man was. Lucas was definitely above average in both length and thickness. And he clearly knew it, grinning at her as she stared, stripping off his socks to be completely naked, then sliding slowly in and forward until he was over her, his soft skin over hard muscles sliding over her body.

His chest crushed her breasts as his fingers slid through her hair and he kissed her hard, long and passionately. She could feel his hardness squeezed against her belly and his as his lips moved against her, she felt a sense of dark wonder, for the sheer size and strength of the man crushing her – lightly – into the bed.

He kept most of his weight off her chest, but he simply loomed above her, atop her, and even without her wrists being restrained she would have felt a sense of helplessness against all that muscle and flesh and strength. The way he had manhandled her, flung her around so far, only added to that sense of being overpowered.

And while that normally would have set off her competitive instincts, and made her want to push back, all it did now was turn her insides to mush.

He eased back, guiding himself into her, and she shuddered, spreading her legs, drawing her knees back, groaning as she felt the lips of her sex forced in and then wide, wide apart. His thick, hot, hard cock pushed determinedly forward into her body.

She was, she realized with a sense of chagrin, sopping wet, and still thrumming with energy and heat as he pushed deeper. She fought to keep from showing the reaction she felt as he stretched her so wide. She ached, though not badly, but she could feel the silky walls of her sex being stretched wide, and the feeling was ... delicious!

The more she ached, the fuller she felt, the more she felt a sense of

almost exultation as he continued to kiss her.

“Oh!”

His fist yanked her hair up and back sharply, ruthlessly, and his mouth chewed in along the front of her throat, against her jugular, in fact, growling! At the same time he forced what surely had to be the final inch of his big cock into her overheated body and began to grind himself against her.

He'd bitten down on the front of her neck earlier, but not so strongly as now, and not with him inside her, and not with her tied and helpless and not with his heavy body pressing against her and... the feeling was so raw, so animalistic, that she felt herself go breathless despite the fact his teeth weren't biting in sharply enough to block her breathing.

He chewed his way lower, and his hands pressed in on the sides of her breasts as he began to close his lips and teeth against her soft flesh with long, slow, aching bites that made her gasp and moan helplessly. He licked his way across the center of her left breast, avoiding her rigid nipple, then circled it, repeatedly, before flicking his eyes up.

“Such lovely, pretty little pink nipples,” he said in a low purr. “So hard and long.”

He chewed his way down the side of her right breast, then licked circles around her areola.

“Beg me to touch them,” he said in a low growling, breath.

“T-Touch them!” she gasped weakly.

“Beg.”

“Please touch them!”

He pushed himself upright very quickly. For such a big man he moved so... fluidly, so rapidly, that it startled her. Now he straddled her belly, his knees clamped against her torso and his cock laying along her lower chest.

“Touch them? With what?” he asked.

His fingers and thumbs were suddenly rolling her stiff nipples between them, then she cried out as they closed tightly, pinching her, pulling upward.

“Oh! Ow! Don't!” she gasped.

“You said to touch them,” he said. “You begged me to touch them.”

He let them go, then rolled them between the pads of his fingers and thumbs again.

“You should make up your mind, blonde girl.”

He slid further up her body, his hard, slick cock pushing up between her breasts. He squeezed in from the sides to push them together around him as he leaned further forward.

“Blondes never can make up their minds, of course. Everyone knows what airheads they are,” he said.

She glared at him defiantly. Her answer was instinctive, automatic, one she'd been using for years, but in this case... unfortunate.

“Bite me!”

His eyebrows widened, and then he did one of those fast movements, throwing his hips backwards so he could bring his mouth down against the center of her left breast. His mouth opened wide and then closed, his teeth digging into her flesh harshly as she cried out.

“Ow! Ow! Don't!” she cried as his tongue whipped across her erect nipple.

He growled into her flesh, his teeth practically chewing at her breast!

Then he pulled up again, leering at her.

“Did you say something, prisoner?”

“I'm not – !”

His hand shot down around her throat, or more appropriately, up under her jaw, silencing her, and pinning her in place as he dropped his head low and crushed her lips with his.

Then he drew back again, his hips sliding backward as his hands trailed down her body and onto her thighs, then down her legs onto her ankles as he pulled her legs up. He held her ankles up and apart in a sharp V as he leaned his groin into her, his cock laying against, along and above her sex.

“Beg me to fuck you, Blondie.”

“Fuck me!” she said, panting.

“Beg.”

She stared at him, her mind hovering indecisively.

“Fuck you.”

He laughed and then pulled her legs up and together and used the leverage to flip her over onto her stomach.

Crack!

“Ow!” she yelped as his hand slapped sharply against her bottom.

“What did I say earlier about what happened to brats?” he demanded.

Crack! He brought his hand snapping down sharply again.

“Ow! Asshole!

Crack!

“I think you need to show a bit more respect, blonde girl.”

He kneaded her buttocks, then, as she wriggled and twisted, trying to

turn, pulled her legs apart and pressed his knees against them to pin her in place.

Crack!

“You have a great ass, Officer *Blonde*,” he said.

Crack!

“Ow! Stop it!”

Crack!

“Make me.”

Crack!

He slid his heavy body atop her as he'd done before, but letting more weight down. This time she felt his hard cock squeezed between her buttocks as he gripped her hair and pulled her head up and back to let his lips in against her. His other hand pushed under her abdomen, his fingers finding her clitoris.

“I think I'm going to make you my sex slave, blonde girl,” he said, his breath warm against her ear.

“Pervert,” she replied breathlessly.

“Yeah. What's your point?”

“Ah!” she gasped as he bit into the nape of her neck and sucked hungrily.

“Next time we have dinner before sex,” she gasped.

He snickered, and then his lips moved up along her back and down her spine, slowly, as he kissed and licked her. He slid his body off her and then jerked up on her hips, raising her butt into the air.

Crack!

“I know what you need, officer blonde. It's what all blondes need.”

She moaned weakly, pulling at the restraints as a wild dark surge of crackling sexual energy rolled up through her body. She felt the slick, mushroom head of his cock tracing up and down along the line of her sex, pressing in harder and then harder, until it slowly sank into her.

He started pumping, his hands on her hips holding her tightly, and Jamie felt a wild thrill at being so utterly full, felt an incredible rush of glittering excitement every time the head of his cock punched into what must surely be the back wall of her sex!

He thrust harder, his hips starting to slap against her upraised buttocks now, rocking them forward with more and more force. Every thrust sent a scalding rush of heat up through her body to spill like steam into her mind.

She moaned and gasped in helpless thrall to the rising sexual pleasure and tension and passion within herself. She felt herself sinking into a torpid, mindless world of pure pleasure, where nothing mattered but the wildfire pleasure filling her, where time narrowed into the next hard, deep thrust, and anticipation of the one after.

She cried out as she came, then cried out again as he yanked back on her hair, thrusting harder and faster, his hips pounding against her as she emptied her lungs of air then forgot how to inhale, nor cared.

Chapter Twelve

There was a certain tension in the air, though Jamie wasn't bothered much over it. The shooting of the black guy the other day was followed, coincidentally, by the shooting of another black man in Harlem the day after. At roll call, they were all warned to watch their backs.

“We still got those assholes who are being influenced by internet Islamist crap that tells them to go and find a cop and kill him – any cop,” Sergeant Dexter said to the shift that morning. “Now we also have threats from elements of the Black community for 'revenge' for the two mugs who got themselves shot.

“Criminal lives matter,” someone said, sotto voice.

“Just remember, they know who you are, but you don't know who they are, so keep your eyes out for anyone looking at you strangely, anyone who seems angry for no reason. “And not that I'd ever want to suggest racial profiling, but particularly watch your ass if he's a Black Muslim.”

“Uh, sergeant, aren't *you* a Black Muslim?” asked one of the uniforms.

“Sullivan, if you aren't watching your ass around me every single day you really are too dumb to be on the job,” Dexter growled to snickers. “But don't worry. I ain't gonna shoot it off. I might shove my size twelve boot up inside it, though.”

“He might like that,” someone said.

It was yet another reason to be grateful for not wearing a uniform, she thought as she slouched in a rear seat next to Mueller.

They were in a car today, which was a little easier on her legs, but worse on her nerves since the one area of life where she lacked patience was when forced to wait in line – for anything. Since Manhattan traffic generally

consisted of a series of lines, she found it frustrating. It was even more frustrating in that Mueller didn't know how to drive. Or, rather, he drove, as she thought of it, like an old woman. He drove slowly, carefully, and always within the speed limit.

Her own style of driving was closer to that of her style of walking, which was briskly moving ahead and past and around any obstacles in her way.

Fortunately, Mueller didn't seem to find the need to chat very much, which let her mull over what had happened yesterday afternoon. She had been doing a lot of that since she and Lucas had parted. In fact, it was hard to keep her mind off it.

On the one hand, it was an incredible sexual experience, possibly the most intense, wildly passionate and thrilling she'd ever had. On the other, he'd thrown her around like a rag doll and used her as roughly and in whatever way he wanted – without, of course, asking permission.

Her indignation at that was tempered by her confusion at having found that amazingly hot. Diego had been trying for what Lucas achieved, but she didn't think Lucas was even trying all that hard. That was, she didn't think he was play acting. His power trip sex was the way he always did it because that was what he wanted and liked.

She'd experienced bondage before, but that had been a kind of silly thing, and with a guy she hadn't had the least doubt she could beat up without much trouble. Being helpless before a guy like Lucas, with that incredible strength and the quick movement that suggested violence was way different.

The fact she didn't really know him that well, didn't know how he thought, didn't trust him, had made it all the more of a thrill, but a bit of a scary one. She'd never really been that helpless before, let alone with a guy she barely knew.

Then again, she rarely fell into bed with guys she barely knew.

But I do know him, sort of, she thought. They hadn't spent a lot of time

together, that was true, but there was something about him that made her feel a sort of connection on some level. Sometimes she did quickly connect with people, though mostly not. But she never really understood why she did or didn't.

So it had been a bit scary in putting herself at his mercy that way, but her admittedly brief reading of the man hadn't suggested anything that was dangerous to her. He was a bit... bossy, of course, but that was to be expected of a fed, especially an older, more experienced one who knew so much more about the case than she did.

She was not a small girl, and there weren't very many men who were strong enough to throw her around that easily. She admitted to herself that she'd found that extremely hot, even while being a little dazed by it at the time.

But that business at the end... that had been... wild. He'd used her like a bitch in heat, ridden her like he owned her, pounded himself into her with such incredible power and force, all while easily controlling her, slapping her, groping her and yanking on her hair that she'd been simply overwhelmed.

Shell shocked!

And the wild animal heat had been so intense it had practically fried her brain! She didn't think she'd ever felt that aroused in her life! And all through it he had simply pounded her, and pounded her, and she had climaxed repeatedly, to the point her insides ached and her chest burned and she'd almost passed out!

She was still sore inside! And she had bite marks on her breasts and the back of her neck!

She'd done almost nothing for him! It had been all him, doing as he pleased with her body. He hadn't even wanted oral sex from her, so she hadn't gotten a chance to turn things around and turn him into a ball of gasping, moaning, quivering male putty in her hands – and mouth, the way she enjoyed doing.

She felt highly indignant about that. After what he'd done to her the least he could have done was let her get her shot in. He didn't even have to let her tie him up!

They had just turned onto 53rd street, and were approaching the Museum of Modern Art when Mueller nudged her and she looked past him to two black men having an angry argument on the sidewalk. One was tall and beefy looking, with close cropped hair and glasses. He wore a short sleeved knit shirt and long khaki trousers, and looked like a tourist.

The other was wearing dirty gray pants and a sweatshirt. A black woman and a teenage girl who looked like her daughter were watching six feet away, both in dresses, and looking concerned at the angry gesticulations of the second man.

Mueller double parked and got out, and she sighed and followed. Making sure tourists didn't have a bad time was one of the priorities the mayor had laid on the commissioner lately. Not for the first time.

Mueller was wearing a wind breaker and baseball cap today, while she wore her brown jacket over a blue turtleneck meant to hide any marks on her neck. Mueller had a portable radio in his hand, because, as he'd told her a couple of days earlier, it was almost as good as flashing a badge to civilians, and conveyed authority just as well.

The angry black man in the sweatshirt was holding a broom and dustpan, and she marked him as either a city worker or someone working for one of the nearby shops, maybe even the grocer he was standing in front of. Maybe the tourist had littered, she thought casually.

She pulled out a pair of sunglasses as they stepped out of the shade, then leaned against a car and let Mueller do whatever he was going to do. The tourist didn't look like much of a threat. He looked like an accountant type. The worker wasn't about to go ballistic on a cop, especially one Mueller's size.

"... this fucker's disrespecting me!" the bald guy was shouting at Mueller.

“That was not my intention, sir,” the tourist said.

“Fuck you say!” the angry man replied. “You think I'm fuckin' invisible!”

“I wasn't watching where I was going. I've already apologized,” the other man said, frowning.

“Fuck your apology!”

“Hey, lower your voice,” Mueller growled. “What do you want him to do, reverse time? He bumped into you, so get over it.”

“He bumped into me? He fuckin' knocked me on my ass!”

“You look like you survived it. He's already apologized. Do you work somewhere around here?”

“Why? You gonna get me fired because I talked back to this high and mighty oreo!? A black man can't get no respect around here!”

“You get the respect you deserve, and if you keep shouting in my ear my respect is gonna go way down.”

“Yeah, well fuck you too!”

Jamie smiled slightly.

“Where do you work? Why are you sweeping the sidewalk?” Mueller demanded.

“Because my asshole boss told me to sweep the fucking sidewalk! You think I'm doing this because I like it!?” the man exclaimed angrily. “You think niggers like sweeping sidewalks!?”

“I'd appreciate it if you stopped using that word, sir,” the tourist said sternly.

“Yeah!? Well, fuck you, nigger!”

“And I'd appreciate it if you modified your language in front of my wife and daughter.”

“Sir, why don't you just walk on,” Mueller suggested. “I don't think you need to spend any more time with this... individual.”

“You mean nigger, don't you? Fuckin' honky cop bastard!”

“You get off the sidewalk,” Mueller ordered.

“Or what!? No niggers allowed on the sidewalk? Is that a law!?”

“You're creating a disturbance. If you don't get off the sidewalk I'll arrest you for that, and loitering.”

“Loitering!? You think I'm fucking' loitering!? Motherfucker, does this look like I'm fucking loitering!?” the man yelled, shaking his broom at Mueller.

Mueller made a little waving notice at the tourist who turned and ushered his family away.

“Yeah! Walk away, oreo! You think you're better than me!? Well, you ain't fuckin' better than me, motherfucker!”

Mueller grabbed him by the scruff of the neck with one hand and swung him around to shove him back against the building.

“You want to go to jail?!” he demanded.

He pulled him out and shoved him back hard enough the man's head went clunk against the siding.

“Do you?” he demanded.

“No, I don't wanna fuckin' go to jail!”

“Then get your ass off the sidewalk. Now!”

The man glared at him as Mueller let him go, then sullenly took his broom and long-handled dustpan and stalked into the grocer.

Jamie clapped slowly and mockingly as Mueller turned towards her, and he glowered.

“You were a big fucking help.”

“You didn't seem to need any help.”

Mueller glared around at the people who'd been watching. “If it wasn't for all the fucking cameras around I'd have kicked his ass a few times to school him.”

“That's old school policing,” she said with a smirk.

“And it worked,” he said as they got back into the unmarked car. “You kick a guy's ass and it teaches him better than if you take him to the station, put hours of paperwork in, and he gets out with a ticket to appear, which he'll likely throw away anyhow.”

They turned on Madison Avenue, then headed back west on 57th before pulling over and parking.

“I wanna stretch my legs,” Mueller said.

She shrugged and got out and they wanted down 57th to Fifth Avenue, then turned and headed for Trump Tower, which was another popular tourist destination. Bergdorf Goodman was just around the corner, and the Prada store was across the street, another popular site for snatch and grab types.

They went into the lobby of Trump Tower, looked around, but saw nothing amiss, so Mueller led them back out and around the block. Her eyes were drawn to the window of the Armani store and she really wished she was alone so she could cross over and take a closer look. She wasn't about to suggest it to Mueller, though. He didn't hold a lot of respect for high fashion.

She wondered if Lucas did. He was dressed nicely, of course, but then,

that was the role he was playing. Would he smirk and curl his lip if she bought an eight hundred dollar jacket?

But then Mueller stopped, staring right at the Armani store, or so she thought at first.

"I know that guy," he said, eyes narrowing.

"What guy?"

"The fat one with the coat. Go over and ask him if he has the time."

"What? Why?"

"I think he's a flasher."

"What?"

"Yeah, that's where I know him. I forget his name but I busted him before. He hangs around the high fashion stores looking for rich young women he can show his dingleberry to."

"What if I don't wanna see his dingleberry?"

"Well, he ain't gonna show it to me. So that just leaves you. Or we could just hang around and watch for a while until he spots a cute young teenager to traumatize for the rest of her life."

"If she can be traumatized by that she deserves it," Jamie said with a sniff.

But there wasn't an awful lot of choice, so she started across the street while he looked on. At least, she thought, it let her get close enough look at the clothes in the Armani windows. There was a gorgeous hounds-tooth blazer in the nearest window she really liked the look of, but the price was ridiculous.

She took out her phone, though, to take a picture, deciding she could look for knockoffs elsewhere later on. She was peripherally aware of their

chubby suspect sidling close to her, hands in pockets. She put the phone back in her pocket and pulled out her handcuffs as she turned to him and he let his jacket slide open.

Sure enough, his manhood, a good deal thinner than him, despite being erect, was sticking out of his open fly.

“Not impressed,” she said, matter-of-factly. “The one I had yesterday was much thicker and longer. You're under arrest.”

He turned quickly away but she grabbed him by the collar. A moment later he'd shrugged off the jacket, leaving it in her hand, and was running down the sidewalk, fumbling at his zipper. She sighed and trotted after him, not in much of a hurry. She doubted he could run a full block.

Mueller was jogging along on the other side of the street, and cut through traffic just as the fat man collapsed onto his knees, gasping for breath. Mueller reached him first and yanked him to his feet, then pushed him against a car to search him.

“I'm having a heart attack!” the man gasped.

“Oh you are not,” she sniffed.

“Go get the car,” Mueller said, tossing her the keys.

She nodded and went back past the Armani windows ... slowly, then crossed and walked back up the block and around the corner. Given she had to make two left turns in busy, if slow traffic she felt it was reasonable to turn on the lights.

There were blue and red lights in the grille and they flashed on and off in tandem with her headlights when she turned on the lights. There was also a fourteen inch light bar inside the windshield attached to the visor on the passenger side and in the rear window which had a series of rapidly flashing blue and red lights.

She started to ease the car out into traffic as oncoming cars slowed, and

then heard Mueller calling over the radio for an ambulance for a possible heart attack. She felt a jolt of surprise, and flipped the siren on, then did a quick turn onto Fifth and raced up the block. She slowed, angling in towards 56th until northbound traffic slowed and stopped, and zipped across to stop beside where Mueller was giving CPR to the fat man.

She jumped out of the car and then jerked to a stop, looking around. She ran across the street to the 56th street entrance to Trump Tower and hurried inside. There was a security guard not far inside the door and she grabbed him.

“Does this building have an AED?!” she demanded, flashing her badge.

“What?”

“An automatic external defibrillator. It's for –.”

“Yeah, yeah! It's on the wall by the front entrance!” he said, turning and sprinting away.

She ran after him and they darted around the tourists until he reached the wall where there was a box mounted behind a potted plant. He opened it and took out the blue box, handing it to her, and Jamie turned and ran back through the lobby and out the side door.

“Move!” she shouted at the backs of the people gathered around Mueller and the fat man.

She pushed roughly through those who were slow to move and dropped to her knees beside Mueller, who was still doing CPR, and opened the box.

“They're talking about putting one of these in every patrol car,” she muttered as she took out the sensor pads and tore off the foil.

He stopped and tore open the man's shirt to expose his pale chest, and she placed the pads against his chest and side where the diagram on the box indicated, then turned it on.

Mueller started to do CPR again and she waved him off.

“Do not touch patient. Analyzing heart rhythm,” the machine said in a robotic voice.

“Do not touch patient. Analyzing hearth rhythm,” it said again.

“Preparing to administer shock. Move away from patient,” it said after a pause.

“Shock will be delivered in three, two, one. Shock delivered. It is now safe to touch the patient.”

Mueller reached down to put his hand on the man's chest, but the little box objected again, telling him not to touch the patient.

“Make up yer fuckin' mind,” he growled.

“Do not touch patient. Analyzing heart rhythm,” it said.

Sirens were approaching, and she looked around but couldn't see anything through the lookie-loos.

“It is now safe to touch patient,” it said.

Mueller started CPR again, and the man's hands spasmed, then he gasped, eyes opening weakly. A siren pulled up nearby, and a few seconds later EMTs pushed through the crowd with their bags, dropping low to examine the man.

“He had no heart. Did CPR and shocked him,” Mueller said, breathing heavily himself as he sat back.

The Fire Department EMTs attached their own electrodes and put a mask over the man's face as Mueller rose with a grunt, and flicked his eyes at her.

“Gonna be a shitload of paperwork for this,” he muttered.

Chapter Thirteen

Jamie's mind felt numbed. She'd been listening to the girls on either side of her talk about various Real Housewives reality shows, and whether the women in the Housewives of D.C. Were more sophisticated than the Real Housewives of Atlanta or the Real Housewives of Orange County for what felt like an hour as their hair and makeup was done.

She wished she had her expandable baton so she could beat them both to death. The thought women like this were breeding and raising children was a frightening thought for the future.

"Can you believe the bullshit over Faye Resnick admitting she used to do cocaine?" the blonde on her right asked with a sneer.

"I doubt anyone on the Beverly Hills show didn't do coke sometime," the blonde on her left said.

"Fuck. I doubt anyone in this room didn't do coke sometime," the blonde on her right said.

"I doubt anyone in this room didn't do coke in the last week," the blonde on her left said with a girlish giggle.

"Not me," said her makeup lady. "I can't afford that shit."

"It's not much," said the blonde. "Just ask Marco. He's got tons."

"Yeah, but Marco doesn't want to fuck me," the makeup lady said.

The two girls in their chairs giggled.

"He does like to stick it into you," said the one on her left with a sigh.

"Sometimes he sticks the coke into you instead," said the other, giggling.

“Yeah, him and his big dildos. I told him, Marco, I have to walk with this thing inside me!”

“Ssht,” said the other girl.

They started talking about the Real Housewives of Beverly Hills, then, and stayed on the subject until the photographer's assistant came for her and led her up front to where he was taking pictures. This was a different photographer from Eli. He was a hairy chested Italian, which she could tell since his shirt was half open.

She posed for about ten minutes in a short party dress while he moved from side to side snapping pictures and having her change the position of her arms, legs and head minutely, swiveling her hips to left, then right

She went back to where the other two girls were. One passed her as she was called up to have her pictures taken, and the other, whose name, she recalled, was Lola, seemed to have been finished and was sitting alone. She looked around quickly, then eased in closer to the girl.

“Hey,” she said, getting her attention. “If you don't wanna screw Marco will he sell you some coke?”

The girl looked at her uncertainty. “I dunno,” she said. “I mean, I never asked.

“I don't have a lot of money,” Jamie said, frowning unhappily, “But my boyfriend works here.”

The girl shrugged. “You might be able to make some money from Marco if you want to do a little work for him.”

“Sex work?” she asked, making a face.

“Naw. Like, he needs to move some coke to other places around the city, you know. Sometimes he'll pay you in coke if you take it in your purse or sometimes... other places.”

She gave her a significant look, and gestured to her crotch.

Jamie giggled. "I smuggled hash in a dildo once when I came back from the Dominican Republic."

"Just make sure it ain't too long a dildo," Lola said, rolling her eyes.

"Yeah, especially if you have to sit down," Jamie said in agreement.

"Do you think Marco has any hash?"

"Honey, Marco has anything you need," the girl said with a smirk. "He supplies half the models in this city."

Jamie made herself look suitably impressed. "I bet he has a lot of money," she said.

"Tons."

"Does he have a nice car?"

"He's a player, honey," the Lola said tolerantly. "You can fuck him all you want but he's not going to settle for just one girlfriend."

"No, I already have a boyfriend," she said with a shrug. "I was just thinking is all."

She went over and the wardrobe woman handed her the next mini-dress for her to wear. It was very short, with a ruffled skirt, delicate spaghetti straps, and a plunging scoop neck which would make it impossible to wear a bra underneath.

"Uhm, you can't wear a bra under this, can you?"

The woman snorted and shook her head.

Bracing herself, Jamie turned towards the clothes racks and peeled off the dress she was wearing, handing it to the woman, then quickly took off her bra and pulled on the dress. She looked down in dismay. It showed far more cleavage than anything she'd ever wear in public, and the scoop neck meant

the amount of cleavage would only grow if she bent over or shifted positions.

“I think you need a bit of tape,” the woman said.

The woman peeled open one side of the dress, baring her breast, and casually placed a thin length of double sided tape on the inside, then pressed it firmly down against Jamie's breast so the material wouldn't slide back to reveal her nipple. Then she produced another piece of tape.

“I can do it,” Jamie said in annoyance.

She took the tape and pressed it up against the inside of the other side of the scoop neck, then pressed it down across the center of her breast, just to the inside of the nipple.

“Uhm, about this dress,” she said to the wardrobe lady.

“Oh yes,” the woman said.

She turned and found something on a shelf, then turned back to fasten a sparkly silver belt around Jamie's waist.

“There,” she said. “Much better.”

Jamie sighed and looked at herself in a mirror. There wasn't as much cleavage showing as there was when she looked down, but it was still awfully risqué. She went over to the makeup table and the girl there brushed at her hair and adjusted it in front with a bit of spray.

Then Lucas came into the room. She felt a flush come to her face, and her mind was busy with a confusing mix of emotions. She felt a burst of resentment. She had spent some time in competition with men, showing them she was every bit as good, as tough and as professional as they were. But it was hard to be an equal to another cop when she was dressed like some kind of bimbo and he was dressed... normally.

At the same time she felt a rush of heat, as if his presence had brought back an echo of the wild physical and emotional heat she'd experienced at his hands the other day. She remembered a lecturer at the academy talking about

how cocaine addicted people not because of chemical dependency but because the high was so great they simply had to keep experiencing that again.

And the high she'd felt the other day had been... intense!

He looked undeniably sexy in the blazer and jeans he wore as he strolled up to her, and she did her best to keep her face as composed and casual as his was. Up until his eyes flicked down into the scoop neck, that was, and his lips pulled up into a lazy smile of appreciation.

“You're looking very sexy today, blonde girl,” he said.

“Does that suggest I wasn't looking hot yesterday?” she replied tartly.

He leaned into her, very close, and she defiantly refused to lean back, but her heart began to beat even faster as his lips brushed her hair.

“You looked amazingly hot yesterday,” he said in a low voice. “And you felt and tasted and smelled and sounded hot, too.”

His arm slipped languidly around her and his hand cupped her buttocks and squeezed.

Jamie gasped, her hands pushing against his chest, but he raised his eyebrows innocently.

“You're my girlfriend, remember? People would expect us to act a little... affectionate together.”

“You think you're hot stuff, don't you?” she growled.

“I know I'm hot stuff, and unless you're a lot dumber than I think you are you know you're hot stuff too. How come you don't have a boyfriend?”

“Maybe they were afraid of a strong woman,” she said.

“I'm not afraid. I know how to handle strong women.”

“Uh huh, by tying them up?”

He grinned. “That's one way.”

“Next time I'll make you beg!”

“I don't think so, baby blonde.”

“You have a thing about blondes, don't you?” she demanded in a low voice.

“Mmm, sometimes.”

“Don't muss the dress,” the wardrobe woman said as she bustled past.

“I won't muss it. I might tear it off her but I won't muss it.”

Jamie flushed again.

“Those two blondes,” she said, nodding her heads at the two gathered together beside the window, “were talking about Marco getting girls to smuggle coke for them. The one on the right said he was supplying half the models in New York.”

“Pretty much what we suspect,” he said, leaning in to chew lightly along the underside of her ear.

“They sometimes smuggle the coke in... dildos,” she said into his ear.

He drew back and smirked at her. “Maybe I'll get you one.”

“What makes you think I don't already have one?”

“A big enough one, hollow, could hold quite a bit of coke,” he said.

“I was thinking of telling Marco I needed the extra money and ask him if he wanted me to move some stuff around.”

He smiled thinly. “You can't smuggle it in that way, or you'll have to

testify about it in court,” he said, giving her a significant look.

She bit her lower lip and nodded.

“Sometimes they just carry it in their purse.”

“I think the only time they'd use it in a body cavity would be places where purses are being checked at the door.

“Why would purses be checked?”

“Some places are wary of cameras, or of drugs, or of weapons, or all three.”

“Everyone with a smart phone has a camera.”

“They also confiscate those at the door. Some of these fashion designers have security that would put the CIA to shame.”

She was called up to the front to get her picture taken. Just as before, she took various poses as the photographer called them out, and he took multiple pictures before sending her back to the rear.

“I'll have to get some copies of those pictures,” he said.

The next dress was a dark green satin finish, very tight, very sleek, and another scoop neck, but one much more restrained. She gave Lucas a challenging look, then removed the belt and shrugged the straps of the white one off her shoulders.

“Let me help you with the tape,” he said, running his finger along them.

“I can – do it,” she gulped as he peeled the tape up.

He didn't remove it, though. Instead he pressed the two pieces down across her nipples again, then tugged, pulling them off as his eyes met hers.

Jamie felt a sudden jolt of heat, her nipples tingling and aching as he pressed the tape down again, and then tugged it up and off, then did it again.

She licked her lips and pushed him away, giving him a stern look as she slid the dress down off her hips and stepped out of it.

“If I was taking pictures it'd be like this,” he said as she straightened.

She felt another jolt at the heat in his eyes, then turned and quickly pulled on the green dress. It was much tighter across her hips and bottom, and fully covered her shoulders, though it left her arms bare. The right side crossed over the left so there wasn't a lot of cleavage unless he leaned forward. Even then it would only show on the left.

“I think you need a bit of tape,” he said, his hand going into the top of the dress.

She gasped as his hand cupped her bare breast and gave it a squeeze, then placed the tape down just barely to the side of her nipple. He grinned as he pressed the fabric in against it again before pulling his hand back.

“This is a sort of power dress,” he said, looking her up and down.

“Does it intimidate you?” she asked with a snort.

“Those amazingly long legs intimidate me. I'm going to have to do something with those.”

She frowned at him in confusion. “What does that mean?”

“It means I didn't pay enough attention to them yesterday. I'll make up for it today.”

“What if I'm busy today?”

“You aren't. You work for me, officer blonde,” he said softly.

“I do not,” she growled.

He grinned. “Call me... sir,” he said in a low, purring voice.

She felt another jolt in lower belly.

“In your dreams!” she said.

“I think my dreams would send you running screaming like a virgin.”

“How does a virgin scream?” she asked in amusement.

“Not like you do. You scream much differently.”

She flushed yet again. “I did not scream!” she snapped softly.

“You made a lot of noise.”

She glared at him.

“Maybe I should gag you. So the neighbors aren't alarmed.”

“Pervert.”

“Yeah. What's your point?”

He squeezed her bottom and pulled her body in against him suddenly.

“I'll show you my point later,” he said in a soft growl.

She went up front for more pictures, feeling more than slightly flustered. She wasn't used to men like Lucas, not used to being affected the way she was, and not used to feeling like the guy she was with was way ahead of her in terms of sophistication, strength, power and confidence.

Not to mention control.

She was, she admitted to herself, a tomboy, and always had been. That didn't mean she didn't enjoy making out with boys, but she'd never been one to go all girlish around them, never one to feel giggly or to defer to whatever it was they wanted to do. Her competitive nature always got in the way of that.

Only in this case she knew there was no point in trying to compete with Lucas. He was a fed with years more experience than her, clearly very smart

and savvy, and doubting that required a degree of self-delusion she wasn't capable of.

In terms of raw strength he was way ahead of her too. The one area she'd always excelled was in raw sexuality, for she'd never found any guy she'd dated or slept with to be nearly as ... hot, as they clearly found her. That had always given her a measure of sexual control she felt was absent in this relationship. And that made her uneasy and uncertain.

Why did she find him so hot?! He was certainly attractive, but she'd dated attractive guys before. He was older than she'd ever 'dated' before, of course, but not hugely so. But there was just something about him which simply assumed control, in a very casual but absolutely confident manner she couldn't understand.

She returned to where he was leaning against the wall on the other side of a rack of clothes, and felt a kind of haze of excitement around her as she approached, and as he watched her approach.

"I'll have to get some copies of those pictures, too," he said.

"You have a scrap book?"

He smiled lightly. "Maybe I'll take my own pictures."

The words were simple, but there was a suggestion behind them that made her nipples tingle.

"I don't think so," she said.

His arm swept around her and pulled her to him. She gasped, her hands going up against his chest as he looked at her.

"I think I can change your mind," he said softly.

"You think so?"

He grinned and shifted away from the wall, turning her as he turned himself until she was against the wall and hidden from the others by the rack

of clothes. His hand came off her ass and slid in between her legs in front, pushing up the short, tight dress until he could cup her sex.

Jamie gasped, jerking her head to the right, then left, looking around her even as she grasped his wrist.

“I think I know some convincing arguments,” he said as his fingers stroked her with quick, short movements.

“Are you crazy? Someone might see!” she gasped.

“And what would they see?”

His fingers tugged aside the crotch of her thong and pushed inside, and she gasped again, the sound emerging from her lips as a shocked squeak as his fingers found her clitoris.

“D-Danny!” she gasped.

“Daniel,” he said.

He pressed his fingers in on either side of her swollen little button and began to rub them in opposite directions as she felt a rush of heat and energy.

“D-Don't!” she gasped.

“Think I can make you come right here against the wall?” he asked in a low growl.

His other hand swept up around her hair and gripped it as he kissed her hard, and she moaned into his mouth, the heat spiraling up so rapidly she felt her legs getting rubbery as her hips began to grind helplessly against him!

He pulled back, his own face looking flushed, and looked around.

“Go out into the hall, to the handicapped washroom,” he said.

It was... an order, delivered with an intense look on his face!

“I-I – .”

“Do it!”

He turned and left and she drew in a few deep breaths, then told the wardrobe woman as she came back that she was going to the bathroom. The woman shrugged without care and she walked to the door to the hall and went outside.

Her chest was still tight and she suddenly felt very self-conscious out in the hall in the tiny, tight dress. She looked up its length and then walked, in the very high heels, to the door to the handicapped washroom and opened it.

He was waiting for her, and she felt the breath leave her as she stepped inside and turned to lock it.

His arms swept around her from behind and pulled her back against him, his left hand immediately sliding up and into the front of the dress to cup her bare breast while the right slid down between her legs. His breath was hot against the side of her face as he leaned in to kiss her roughly and passionately.

“Th-this is... c-crazy!” she moaned\

He jerked the skirt up and his hand plunged down the front of her tiny thong as his teeth chewed into the nape of her neck.

Her hips began to almost immediately spasm, and that made her buttocks grind back against his crotch. She could feel him hardening against her as her breathing got ragged and a crackling sexual electricity rippled up and down her body.

She spun her around suddenly and she gasped, feeling a sense of disorientation even as he grabbed the material of her thong and yanked it savagely out. She cried out in shock, her hips jerking forward involuntarily, then slapping back against the wall as his body pressed her roughly back.

He kissed her, his lips bruising, demanding, and his arms went firmly

around her, arms that were large, thick, muscular and enormously powerful! So much so she felt darkly, deliciously helpless within their grasp!

Their tongues moved together as he jerked up her skirt again, and then his knee forced her thighs apart before she felt his cock probing against her entrance. She moaned, another wild rush of heat and energy flooding her as he squatted and then thrust himself through the warm, moist lips of her sex.

“God!”

His hands dug into her buttocks, and he jerked her left leg up to open her wider as he pushed himself into her. As her leg curled up around his waist he lifted her completely into his arms! She grabbed his shoulders, continuing a kiss which was almost violent as she felt herself being impaled on his hard cock, and clenched her legs around him.

His fingers dug into her ass, jerking her up and down, and she began to use the muscles in her own legs as well. A frantic heat was making her heart race as he crushed her against the wall and she pulled herself higher on his body, her tongue fighting his as their lips moved roughly together.

She rode him there, trying to keep silent, her cries only partially swallowed by him as she thrilled to the feel of him thrusting up into her again and again!

He backed away, still clutching her in his arms, and then sat down on the toilet with her straddling him. His hands raced up her back and she felt the zipper below her neck yanked down. Then he was gripping the dress and peeling it up her body.

And off.

She was, she realized with a wild pulse of shocked heat and alarm, completely naked in a public bathroom, so close to the door she could hear the voices of passersby! The only thing she was wearing were the high heels!

This was insane! It was completely unlike her! Had the blonde dye seeped into her brain?!

And it didn't matter. The heat was on her, in her, like a fever, like an addiction! She was breathless and filled with an incredible sense of pressure, a pressure which needed to be released! She rode him, gasping, moaning, and then crying out as he yanked back roughly on her hair to force her back to arch, then began to chew and suck at the center of her swollen breasts!

He released her hair and she fell forward, her breasts against his face as he leaned into her. Then he stood up with her in his arms, swinging to the left, away from the door and dropping her onto her feet. He spun her around in an instant, and slapped her bottom as he shoved her upper body against the wall.

Her breasts pillowed out against the wall, and then he slapped her bottom again, making her yelp, before yanking her hips back. Her hands rose instinctively catching herself against the wall, and she recognized the position at once, of the one she had put perps in any number of times – up against the wall, with their legs spread!

Though not with their bottoms pulled out as sharply as Lucas was doing. She felt the spongy soft slickness of the head of his cock sliding up and down against her, then pushing inside, and she moaned weakly, heat thrilling her as he buried himself and started to thrust.

His hands came around her, one on her breast, the other between her legs as she felt his breath against the side of her throat. He began to kiss her, alternating with light bites and sucking at her flesh, while his hips slapped against her out-thrust buttocks again and again.

Jamie felt the pressure building and building so that it felt as though her mind were swimming in a bubbling, simmering liquid bath, then the sudden up-welling as the orgasm hit. She shuddered, her hips jerking back against him with growing violence.

The hand on her breast rose to clamp over her mouth as he thrust harder still, and she cried out, or tried to, as her body shuddered to the powerful thrusts and her muscles spasmed again and again and again!

Chapter Fourteen

She put the dress on again, noting, as she did, that Lucas hadn't even taken off his sports jacket, and felt a sense of resentment even amid the echo of the tremendous orgasm which had washed over her.

Lucas, meanwhile, was so casual she took it as smugness, and brooded about it. Did he think she was some cheap bimbo he could just put up against a wall and fuck any time he wanted? Did he think he was the sophisticated fed and she was a pathetic cop who was enthralled with how sophisticated he was?

She scooped up her thong and shoved it down the front of his shirt.

"Now I have no underwear," she said, glaring.

He shrugged. "You look fine naked."

"Easy for you to say!"

"Well, yeah, it is. Want me to give you my underwear?"

"I don't want your dirty underwear!"

He shrugged again.

"You owe me a thong."

He smiled slightly. "We can go up the street and I'll buy you some lingerie. You can pose for me."

"You wish," she muttered.

"Well, yeah."

"I'll wear what underwear I like, thanks, not what you like."

“What if we both like it?” he asked.

“Your liking or disliking it does not enter into the question,” she said as she tried to comb her hair back with her fingers.

“It does if I'm paying for it.”

“I don't need you to buy me underwear. I just need you to not destroy the underwear I'm wearing,” she said.

“Well, I can't promise that,” he said.

She looked at him in disbelief.

“When I want you naked, I want you naked fast.”

She flushed, feeling a strange little fluttering heat in her lower belly, then scowled because of it

He pulled out the thong and examined it, then tied the string, which had torn, together and presented it to her, hooked on his thumb.

“There. All better.”

She snatched it off him, glaring. “It is not all better!”

But she put it on anyway. The wardrobe lady probably wouldn't notice, and if it lasted until the end of the picture taking that would do.

If anyone noted anything odd about their absence they didn't say it. Then again, this wasn't exactly the kind of business where two people having sex on the premises would bring about the same sort of shock and disdain as it would at a bank or an insurance company – or the NYPD.

She modeled two more dresses, then they left. She was still feeling indignant as they got into the elevator, and batted away his hand each time it tried to squeeze her bottom. In the elevator, though, just as she strode into it,

the tied-together string came loose and her panties fell down around her ankle as he grinned in amusement.

She scowled and pulled it off her ankle, shoving it into her purse. She was wearing a blue dress with a loose skirt, but it wasn't nearly as short as the ones she'd been modeling in.

Or was until he turned and took her into his arms and his hands slid down her back.

Her complaints were swallowed by his mouth as he kissed her, and then her eyes widened as she felt him lift the skirt up to her waist in back so his other hand could freely knead her bottom. She struggled against him and managed to pull free and jerk her skirt down just as they reached the lobby.

“Pervert!”

“You want me,” he said smugly.

“You are so arrogant!”

“And you're not?”

“Why are we going out through the lobby?” she demanded as he strode out of the elevator.

“It's a lovely day. You don't like to walk?”

“You have a car in the garage.”

“Technically it's not my car.”

They stepped out onto the sidewalk and she gazed at him with a feeling of exasperation as he started down Fifth Avenue.

“Where are we going?”

“I'm hungry.”

She made a face, but really didn't have a lot of choice but to follow him a block down and into a bar.

“Bar food,” she muttered.

“They're good here. Get a wrap, or chicken fingers.”

“I think I can order for myself, thanks, *sir*.”

“See, I told you you'd call me sir.”

“I meant it sarcastically!”

“You only think you did,” he said with a smile.

They were shown to a table in a quiet corner and he ordered a scotch and soda. Jamie wasn't sure about what rules he was operating under, if any, but knew the NYPD didn't want her drinking while on duty, so ordered a coke.

“So how much longer is this role playing thing going to go on?” she asked grumpily.

“I've been thinking about your offer to carry for Marco.”

“Yeah?” she asked suspiciously.

“That might be a good idea. It fits with your character. You can honestly say the other girls told you about it. I make out like I have money but that doesn't mean you have. And if he wonders what you want the money for tell him my birthday is coming up.”

“Is it?”

He raised his eyebrows. “What does that matter?”

She shrugged.

He grinned. “If you're thinking of getting me a present, officer blonde, I can tell you exactly what I want.”

She let her eyes narrow.

“But don't worry about gift wrapping it. I'd like to do that myself.”

She frowned. “You want to gift wrap your present?”

“In a manner of speaking.”

He leaned in across the table. “Have you ever heard the phrase about being tied up in red tape?”

She frowned suspiciously and he grinned at her.

“I think you would look very... interesting... tied up... in ribbons,” he said.

She blushed and snorted as she drew her head back and looked around to make sure no one was listening.

“You *are* a pervert.”

“Naw, I'm just a bit kinky.”

“And a control freak.”

“Now you sound like my ex-wife.”

“You have an ex-wife? Some poor woman married you?”

“Silly of her, huh?”

“How long did that last, until you showed her your torture chamber?”

“I don't have a torture chamber, and she was actually a lot more into that sort of thing than I was... than I am.”

“Really?”

“She liked pain. I just like... control. And... art.”

“Art?”

“There's a certain art to rope bondage, for example.”

Her eyebrows rose quite high at how serious he seemed.

“If done properly, and on the right... model... it can look extremely erotic.”

“Uh huh. Hope you find one,” she said, showing none of the dark little rush of interest she felt.

They ordered. She defiantly did not order chicken fingers or a wrap. She got a burger and fries instead.

“You have to watch your figure now, officer blonde. You're a model, remember.”

“You worry about other things. I'll worry about my figure.”

“I'm your boyfriend. I have to watch your figure too.”

“You're not my boyfriend,” she sniffed.

He shrugged. “The job seems to be open.”

“Are you applying? Because you lack a few things I like in boyfriends.”

“What would that be? Obedience?”

“Well, now that you bring it up, a certain recognition that we're partners as opposed to my being the slave girl.”

He grinned. “I don't want a slave girl anyway.”

“Really? Coulda fooled me.”

“Now a sex slave, that's what I'm into.”

She snorted and again hid the hot little rush of heat she felt.

“I'm not about to be anyone's sex slave,” she said, her voice low but firm.

“Don't worry. It's only part-time. In everything but sex I'm a modern man. I'm even a feminist.”

“Oh you are so not a feminist!” she exclaimed.

“Why do you think that?”

“Give me a break!”

“What have I done that's questioned your abilities or independence?”

“You mean aside from spanking me for being a brat, and tying me up?” she said in a lowered voice.

“Oh that.”

“Oh that!”

“That's different.”

“Uh huh!”

“That's sex. In sex, you'd be my sex slave. The rest of the time not so much.”

“What is this, a job interview? I haven't applied, Mister Lucas!”

“You should. The job pays very well.”

“It would have to!”

“It pays in very intense orgasms,” he said.

She flushed and scowled, eyes flicking around.

“You have sex on the brain,” she said.

“All men do.”

“Maybe I'll become a lesbian.”

“Really? Now that I'd pay to see.”

She sniffed in amusement. “You and every other guy I know. I could probably make a porn video, sell it, and retire a millionaire.”

“Now who's being arrogant?”

“That's not me being arrogant, that's me being realistic about just how horny and perverted every guy I know is.”

“My ex liked to have me watch her with other women.”

“Your ex was as much a perve as you.”

He shrugged. “But it lacked a certain something. I mean, she was sexually jaded long before I ever met her. You, on the other hand...”

“What about me?” she demanded.

“You are like... a virgin.”

“A virgin? Sorry, but no.”

“Not a virgin, but inexperienced.”

“You were not exactly my first guy, Lucas.”

“Just your best,” he said smugly.

She shook her head in exasperation. “You are such an egotist!”

“No. I'm just confident of my abilities, including my ability to read women.”

“You think you can read me?”

Their food came and they spent the next few minutes mostly eating.

“You have brothers,” he said, “Or a macho father who spent a ton of time with you. You're a tomboy.”

She shrugged and took another bite of her burger, chewed and swallowed.

“I'm a cop. That's not much of a stretch.”

“You're very aware of your status, very determined that everyone think you're as good or better than they are at everything you all do, whether that's as a cop or at some other thing, like a sport. I'm pretty sure you played volleyball and basketball and were pretty competitive. But I bet you're more competitive with men than with women. That's much different than most women, you know.”

“No, but you're the expert on women,” she said, before taking another bite.

“You're very competitive with your brothers and with other cops. But inside you, you know very well you're not quite as good as they are.”

“I am too.”

He shook his head. “Given equal training, experience, and intelligence, and exempting special circumstances, you'll always be physically weaker than them, especially in upper body strength.”

“I outran you.”

“You outran me, but you couldn't outfight me. And you couldn't outfight most male cops who are in decent shape.”

She grinned coyly. “Think so?”

“Okay, you have a black belt. But that just goes into what I was saying.

Why did you put so much time and effort into getting that black belt? Most cops don't. They don't need to. You felt you needed to because men are stronger than you."

"How did you know I had a black belt?"

"You think we didn't review your file before taking you on?"

She made a face.

"So what? The point is that where I'm weaker I've done things, like getting a black belt, to make up for it. And I'm stronger in other areas."

"I agree."

She looked at him suspiciously.

"But you don't."

"I don't? You're a mind reader?"

"You feel this need to defend your reputation, to show that you're as good as any man because inside you doubt that you are."

"Ah, you're a psychiatrist now."

"Amateur only."

"Very amateur."

"But let me tell you what I think this means," he said, leaning forward. "You've always been afraid to really let yourself go when you're with a man, to just let it happen and go crazy. I bet your mind is always working, even during sex, thinking of how you need to protect your pride and dignity, and assert yourself so your partner feels you're as good as or better than them."

"You think I should just lay there like I'm a sex doll?"

He grinned. "You are a sex doll, doll. But no, that's not what I mean. I

mean that submitting to a man, letting him take control, is something that you've never done, and when you really do, fully and completely, you're going to have the most incredible sex of your life."

"Uh huh. What a line," she said.

"It's not a line."

"It's a line to get me to let you tie me up."

"I already tied you up."

"That's because you took me by surprise!"

"And what was the result?"

She shrugged, fighting not to show the effect as the memories played behind her eyes.

"It was okay."

He grinned lazily and she felt his foot sliding up the inside of her leg. She scowled and jerked her leg back.

"Stop it!"

"I want to make you scream."

"Uh huh. You're incredibly egotistical."

He shrugged, smiling. "You've said that before. My response is it's hard to be humble when you're perfect in every way."

"You think you're perfect in every way?"

"It's from a song."

She looked at him blankly.

“A country song.”

“Is there anything about me which has struck you as similar to a girl who would listen to country music?”

“Lots of different kinds of girls listen to country music.”

“Not in Manhattan.”

“Garth Brooks sells out Madison Square Gardens every time he shows up.”

“There's millions of people in this city. You could probably sell out Madison Square Gardens for Celtic music too.”

He sat back in his chair and sipped from his scotch.

“You're a prickly girl, officer blonde, but I like a challenge.”

“And stop calling me officer blonde,” she said, irritated.

He leaned in again, his voice low. “I want to tie you spreadeagled to my bed and spend about four hours making you come.”

Jamie flushed and her eyes flicked around again.

“It would take you that long, huh?”

“Repeatedly,” he said.

“You're obsessed.”

“No, I just think you're amazingly fucking hot.”

It was hard for her to complain about that.

She popped a french fry into her mouth.

“So how many times you think you could manage to make me come in

four hours, stud?”

He shrugged. “Ten, maybe twelve.”

She laughed in amusement and shook her head.

He wagged his fingers at her. “Magic fingers, baby,” he said. “And a really talented tongue.”

Chapter Fifteen

He grabbed her hand as they left the restaurant, to pull her in the other direction, south on Fifth.

She jerked her hand free in annoyance.

“Not very friendly are you,” he said.

“I don't go in for... public displays of affection,” she said in annoyance. “And I'm not sure I even like you, never mind feel any sort of *affection*.”

He threw his arm around her and pulled her in tight beside him as they walked.

“Come on, girlfriend. It's you and me forever.”

She pulled free of his arm with a tsk.

“Where are we going?”

He nodded at a lingerie store.

Jamie stopped dead. “Forget it!”

“I have an ulterior motive.”

“Duh!”

“Not that one. You want to talk to Marco it has to be with me not there.”

“So?”

“The only photo shoots Marco usually attends are the ones for lingerie and bikinis.”

“That figures,” she said, rolling her eyes.

“You are a shy, blushing young thing who feels awkward about modeling bikinis and lingerie.”

She opened her mouth to protest, the words if not the attitude, but he interrupted her.

“You don't want to do lingerie or bikini shots.”

“Of course not!”

“But I need you to so you can meet Marco on your own and have an excuse to talk to him. So I figured, hey, you get a bit of practice modeling for me.”

She scowled at him.

“I mean, hey, it's not like I haven't already seen, not to mention touched, every inch of your body already. If you can model lingerie for me and maybe the saleslady, it will make you feel a bit more casual about modeling bathing suits for Marco.”

“I'm not – .”

“Remember, I'm the rich punk and you're my airhead girlfriend. This is a good place to practice.”

“I don't want to be anyone's airhead girlfriend!” she exclaimed in frustration.

“No, of course not, but that's the role.”

“Isn't there some other way for me to approach Marco?”

“Not without making him more suspicious. This is perfect.”

“Where do these pictures go anyway?”

“Online retailers, mostly, not porn sites. Relax. They're too mild for porn sites.”

He pulled her into the lingerie shop and started looking over lingerie while she accompanied him, feeling stiff and resentful. But some of the lingerie was awfully cute and some of it was very sexy, though it made her a bit uncomfortable.

Jamie had always known she was attractive and that boys – men – found her hot. She enjoyed it, though tried to pretend otherwise. But she had never done anything ostentatious to seek that admiration. She didn't wear short skirts, or high heels. She didn't wear tight tops or show cleavage, and she didn't fuss over her underwear.

She had developed a certain self-image which had guided her for many years, and 'trying' too hard to look attractive went against the grain. If men found her attractive, well and good, but if not, who cared? Men were annoying and often exasperating, but could be fun. But only the right kind of man. And the right kind of man wouldn't give a damn, or so she told herself, what kind of underwear she was wearing.

She dressed to please herself, not men.

“I think you'd look fabulous in a baby doll.”

“What? I thought we were just buying a thong,” she growled, keeping her voice low.

“We're practicing. And I do think you'd look fabulous in a baby doll.”

“Good afternoon,” the sales lady said as she approached. “I'm Helena. Can I help you with anything?”

She was Asian and about thirty five, short and pretty, with long dark hair and glasses.

“Don't you think she'd look fabulous in a baby doll?” he asked her, nodding at one.

“Absolutely,” the sales lady said with a smile. “Black, I think, or blue.”

“Why don't we just try bra and panties first,” Jamie said firmly, glowering at both of them.

She tried on a set, flushing uncomfortably as Lucas examined her with a critical eye, and then summoned the sales lady for her opinion. The sales lady brought more sets, and she tried these on, modeling them for the two. As she did she felt less self-conscious, and, though she did her best not to show it, started to feel an unaccustomed sense of egotistical satisfaction at the flattery.

Some of the bras and panties were very sexy, not to mention revealing. The sales lady only brought panties which had thong or G-string bottoms – at Lucas' instruction. Then the woman brought a black baby doll set.

“A flyaway top would be best to reveal your midriff,” Helena said. “You have a great midriff, very sexy, and should show it off.”

“The more of her naked the better,” Lucas said with a smirk.

“Oh yes, she has a beautiful body,” Helena said.

Jamie shrugged a bit uncomfortably, eyeing the sales lady doubtfully as the woman hurried away. Sales persons were often prone to flattering how their customers looked, but the tone of her voice and the look on her face was beginning to cause her to suspect Helen played for the other team, so to speak.

The woman brought back the baby doll and panty set and Jamie went into the change room to try it on. The top was very small, and partly see through. The bottom was a G-string with a tiny, lacy V of fabric in front.

A flyaway top was basically a tiny bra with see-through lace falling down to her hips, but open in front so the slightest breeze would blow the two sides wider apart. And that was exactly what happened as she pulled back the curtain and stepped forward a bit.

Lucas grinned and nodded in approval. Helena seemed much more

appreciative, clapping her hands as she beamed.

“That's very sexy on you!” she exclaimed.

“I think the top is a bit small,” Jamie grumbled.

Helena stepped forward and ran her fingers along the bottom seam of the bra, then placed the tips of her fingers into the top, tugging sharply before withdrawing, her head shaking.

“No, it fits perfectly,” she said. “You're a perfect thirty-six-cup!”

Lucas raised his eyebrows at her in amusement and Jamie blushed slightly.

Jamie went back into the change room and removed the baby-doll, but was interrupted when Helena thrust something over the curtain.

“Try this on, Jamie,” she said.

Jamie took it from her. It certainly had more bulk to it than the baby doll. Once she'd examined it though she had to laugh.

“You're kidding,” she said.

“I think you'll look spectacular in it,” the woman exclaimed.

“A corset?”

It was a simple enough piece of white satin trimmed with pink lace at the top, and a matching G-string. The corset was very tight across her breasts, squeezing them together, and of course, was only meant to cover the lower half. Still, that was more coverage than some of the bras she'd tried on.

She shrugged and pulled open the curtain. The two of them stared at her, both of them widening their eyes.

“Oh my,” Helena said.

“I like that. We're buying it,” Lucas said flatly.

Jamie looked down uncertainly, then turned to look at the mirror. She didn't get it.

“Definitely buying that. You can wear it home,” Lucas said.

“Don't be ridiculous.”

“That corset was made for you, Jamie,” Helena said.

She did not, of course, wear it out of the store.

“I can't wait to see you in that corset again,” Lucas said as they walked back to the car.

“It's a ridiculous piece of... of... clothing!” Jamie exclaimed.

“I think Helena wanted you.”

Jamie sniffed disdainfully. “I've never really gotten why underwear is such a big deal. It's just underwear”

“You wear this and I'll wear my string bikinis,” he said, grinning.

She looked at him, exasperated. “What's the point of my wearing it for you?! You'd just tear it off!”

“Yeah, but I'd have a lot of fun doing it.”

She shook her head. “I have to get home.”

“Tomorrow,” he said. “You can model bathing suits, and hit Marco up for a deal. Then we'll celebrate at my place afterward.”

“Ten orgasms, huh?”

“Minimum.”

“Hmmm. And what about you?”

“I live to serve.”

“Yeah? Does that mean I don't have to call you sir?”

He grinned at her but didn't answer.

They got into his car back at the station. She got a lot of looks when she showed up in a short skirt and high heels, and quickly went to the locker room to change. Then she wrote up a quick report which did not feature lingerie shopping or sex in bathrooms, and left for the day, walking to the subway station.

Riding the subway had become somewhat more annoying since she'd gone blonde. At first she thought it was her imagination, but after several days now she realized she wasn't mistaken. There really were a lot more men watching her wherever she went – not excluding the precinct house. It was starting to get on her nerves.

It wasn't that she'd been ugly when she'd been a redhead (or rusthead as her brothers called her) but the blonde seemed to have triggered something in the DNA of the males she encountered. And since she didn't reciprocate she found it tiresome. The polite ones were the worst, since she felt something of an obligation to be polite in return when she refused to give them her phone number or name. The impolite ones were usually much easier to simply ignore or curse at.

Her route varied, she usually walked up 54th to Broadway, then turned up Broadway to 57th. It wasn't a long walk, by any means. Today she had just reached 55th and Broadway and was waiting at the streetlight when a skinny black guy several inches shorter and a decade older than her moved up alongside her, gave her a very ostentatious up and down look of approval, and made similarly approving sounds.

“Ungh uhm. You are fiiine, baby. What's your name?”

“Not interested,” she said.

“Not interested in what? Not interested in talking with a guy who thinks you’re a beautiful woman?” he asked, sounding indignant.

“Not interested in some strange guy coming onto me on a street corner,” she said.

“Baby, you should feel flattered a man like me appreciates how fine you look,” he said.

The light changed and she ignored him and headed across the street. He followed, trying to stay alongside her amid the crowds of pedestrians.

“My name is Abraham. You know what that means? It’s African, baby. It means father of nations.”

“And you probably aren’t even paying child support,” she said, walking faster.

He dodged around a large woman carrying a suitcase and zipped in beside her again.

“You ever been with an African, baby?”

“You speak very good English for an African,” she said.

“I ain’t from Africa, baby. I mean my people are from there.”

He was blocked by a stream of people coming out of a store but quickly caught up.

“You ever fucked with a black man, baby?”

“Bidh mi 'gad fhaicinn,” she said. “That’s Gaelic for none of your fucking business.”

It actually meant goodbye, or thereabouts, but she doubted he’d know the difference. She crossed 5th, shifting in closer to the wall so he couldn’t

edge in on her right. He was blocked by pedestrians coming the other way for most of the block, but caught up to walk alongside her on her left as she turned the corner onto 57th.

“I understand,” he said. “Too personal. Any sex with a Black man is a huge and private experience for a blonde girl. Alls I’m saying is if you go black, you never go back, you get my drift, baby?”

She ignored him and more pedestrians coming at them eased him back behind her for long enough she thought he’d gone, but then he was up there again, and she was starting to get annoyed. She didn’t feel the slightest bit threatened, but she was six feet tall, had a gun in a holster at the small of her back, and was a black belt.

If he acted like this with other women, though, some, if not most of them would have been embarrassed and quite possibly afraid. He had probably already crossed the border into criminal harassment by following her for several blocks. So when he came up beside her again she’d had enough.

“I always had this thing for blondes,” he said, “for helping beautiful blonde women learn how fine it could be to have all that soft skin pressed against a black man, you know, like ebony and ivory.”

They had just reached the subway entrance and she suddenly turned on him, shoving him hard against the glass and sweeping her jacket aside to reveal her badge.

“Listen, asshole,” she said, raising and hardening her voice. “Do you know it’s against the law to follow people on the streets? Do you know that’s called criminal harassment? Do you know I could bust your ass right now for it?”

“You’re a cop?! Shiiiit!”

She was attracting attention, of course, but at least none of those watching had their camera out.

“Yeah and I walk around here a lot and if I see you harassing anyone again you’re going to be back at the station telling all the big guys there in the holding cells how fine it is to be with a black man? You understand me?!”

“Yeah! Yeah! I didn’t mean nothing!”

“Then get your ass out of here!” she snapped.

He scurried away down the street and she glared after him.

“Fucking idiot,” she said in a low voice.

Fucking blonde hair, she said to herself, opening the door and heading down into the subway.

The challenging look on her face kept anyone else from even smiling at her as she rode home to Brooklyn. That didn't work, of course, when she got home.

“Hey, Blondie!” Colin greeted her as she came in.

She glared at him.

“What?”

“Don't fucking call me blondie!”

“Language!” her mother called from the other room.

“Yeah, language,” Colin said as if scandalized.

She gave him her middle finger to look at as she pulled off her shoes.

“You've gotten much trampier in your attitude since you became a blonde, Jamie,” he said sadly. “Bad language, crude gestures, sexier clothes. You're just not very ladylike anymore.”

She grabbed him, or tried to. He fended off her wrists but she swung her leg in and behind him to trip him up. He pulled her down as he fell, though,

but she managed to fall on top, and they wound up wrestling on the floor. He was bigger than her, and she didn't think it fair to employ any of the martial arts tricks she knew – at least not most of them, so she found it hard to pin him.

She did manage, after a lot of strenuous effort, to get him on his stomach, and pin one arm with her knee, but was having a hard time forcing the other up and back.

“That looks like police brutality to me,” said a voice.

She looked up, startled, then released him and jumped up.

“I didn't know you were here, grandpa,” she said, giving him a hug.

“They'd show you how to fight off beautiful blondes if you go to the academy, Colin,” he said with a grin.

“Most of them don't need to be fought off,” Colin grumbled.

“God, don't you start,” she sighed, scowling at her grandfather.

“What? You were a beautiful redhead and now you're a beautiful blonde. No big deal.”

He was a tall man, wearing a dark suit with a light blue shirt and red tie. His hair was gray and thinning but he had bright blue eyes and a strong jaw on his square face.

“I liked the red better, though,” he said.

“So did I!”

He shrugged. “After this undercover assignment you just go back to red.”

“Rust,” Colin said.

He edged back, smirking, as she swung on him.

“Dinner will be ready soon,” her grandfather said. “Do you two need to be seated at a special children's table?”

“No, grandpa,” she said.

“No, sir.” Colin added.

“So, Jamie, how are you finding things in Midtown north?” he asked with a genial smile.

“You arranged that, didn't you,” she said accusingly.

“That's where you said you wanted to go.”

“I didn't mean you should have me transferred to A
Anti-Crime!”

He put his arm around her and guided her towards the kitchen.

“You're always complaining about having to wear the hat. Now you don't have to,” he said.

She rolled her eyes. “Grandpa! I didn't mean you should have them put me in plainclothes. I mean, I like being in plainclothes but I've only been on the job five months.”

“There's no time in service requirement for anti-crime and I thought, professionally speaking, that you'd do very well there.”

“You're supposed to have at least a year in patrol.”

“Supposed to doesn't mean have to,” he said. “I think, honestly, that your temperament and skill set is more appropriate for plainclothes than patrol. “And if anyone disagrees they're welcome to come tell me.”

“Like they'll do that,” she said, exasperated.

“Then it's all good,” he said smugly, going over to the counter and

examining what her mother was working on.

“I could beat you up,” Colin said, coming up beside her. “I just wasn't trying.”

She sniffed derisively.

“I can beat you up. There isn't much doubt about that, junior.”

They turned as Dale came strolling into the room. He was two inches taller than her, and a good deal broader at the shoulders. In looks he took after their father and grandfather, with a strong, square jawed face and wavy brown hair.

He laughed briefly as he saw her, then made a wolf whistle. “Hot stuff,” he said.

“Yeah, sure.”

“It looks good on you.”

“I like my red hair, thanks.”

“Lots of models are blonde. How you liking being a model?”

“It's boring. And the models are air heads and coke heads.”

“Blondes have more fun,” Colin said.

“Some of them do.”

“Jamie, set the table,” her mother called. “Colin, come and stir this for me. Hello Dale, honey.”

She got the plates and utensils and started to set the dining room table while the familiar babble continued around her. Her father came in and greeted her, and as her mother and brothers brought food out to set in place everyone began to settle around the table. It was a familiar scene for Jamie, and reminded her just how wildly out of character for her things had been

over the past week.

So out of character she wasn't going to say a word to anyone about it.

It wasn't just the sex, which she'd never have spoken about, of course, but the whole uncomfortable modeling business, especially given the revealing nature of some of it – and what was soon to come.

She wondered where Lucas was eating that night, and if he was eating alone.

Chapter Sixteen

Times Square was filled with milling tourists, day and night. And that attracted a lot of strange people, like coyotes around a herd of sheep waiting to be plucked – or eaten. Of course, most of them were entirely legal. All the shops and restaurants and hotels with their extra high prices loved to gouge free spending tourists, as did the numerous street vendors, some legal and licensed, and many neither.

There was a strange assortment of people who dressed up in outlandish costumes hoping tourists would pay them to have their pictures taken together. They ranged from people dressed and painted in statue gray and bronze who pretended to be moving statues, a variety of cartoon characters, caped and masked super heroes, and others in various stages of undress, including virtually naked women with painted-on bathing suits, and a guy in a cowboy hat and his underwear.

Not all of them were entirely sane, and some were prone to screaming curses at people who took their pictures without paying. They were also competitors, and fights and arguments between them were not unknown.

In addition, of course, there was always a sprinkling of pickpockets, frauds, perverts and just mentally unbalanced who were capable of who knew what. Times Square was also a primary terrorist target, and the marked police vehicles and uniformed cops carried radiation detectors.

Anti-Crime didn't need to patrol in pairs there since the area was so heavily policed any trouble would draw backup in under one minute, sometimes, under thirty seconds, depending on where you were.

Times Square patrol was not simply the one large gathering, of course, but consisted of the general area where Broadway and 42nd Streets met, from 42nd to 47th streets. There were pubs, restaurants, fast food chains, clothing stores, souvenir shops, hotels, theaters, banks and indoor shopping arcades scattered throughout. And above it all, the legions of office workers in the

upper stories of the high rise buildings.

Jamie was wearing a loose, black hip length jacket, wearing gray cargo pants and a red tank top (the color of the day) over a black T-shirt. The color of the day was the designated color, changed every day, which every plainclothes officer had to wear visible on their person. It let other cops know who they were, or at least, helped out.

Just because you wore red today did not make you a cop. But if you had no visible red then a cop would assume you weren't on the job. Which could be a problem if you had a gun in your hand.

Jamie also had a red wristband, but that was invisible beneath the cuff of her sleeve. Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail and she wore a pair of reflective wraparound sunglasses.

Strolling was about the best speed for doing Times Square, but since she'd gone blonde she found that tended to attract too many hopeful males, where a brisk stride didn't give them time to act on impulse. A quick walk also served as decent exercise, of course, and let her cover more ground.

When she encountered trouble, it was on 43rd street, not far from Broadway. And it wasn't from one of the regular PITA hustlers, but a tourist, apparently from the Midwest. When tourists caused trouble it was almost caused by either booze or sex. In this case it was both.

She was standing by a pub's outdoor patio waiting for a break in traffic to cross the street when the tone of voices hit her and she turned her head curiously. There was a wrought iron rail around the patio, surrounding a dozen or so tables, all full. The two men in the far corner were slim, with short hair and in their early twenties. One was wearing a gorgeous gray silk suit with a purple tie, while the other, who looked like he weighed less than Jamie, and was a good deal shorter, was dressed in a white T-shirt with a rainbow across the chest, a short, black leather jacket, and very tight, skinny jeans.

She didn't have the best gaydar in the world, but it twanged the instant she saw them, even before she heard the one in the leather jacket, who was

ignoring the attempts of his friend to silence him, inviting the man at the next table to blow him.

The three men at the next table looked like football players, but without the long hair and sophistication Lucas had. These were young men, barely into their twenties, with very short hair, all wearing T-shirts and jeans. One had a big picture of an ear of corn on his chest. A second had Nebraska across his chest, while the third had a large 'N' on his baseball cap.

The two sides were thus fairly easily identified with one quick scan. The same scan showed the Nebraska boys had a number of empty beer bottles on their table, and that the guy wearing the ear of corn had an angry red face and was clenching his fists pretty tightly.

She moved further along the railing to get closer to the two tables.

“Did you know that corn makes a great dildo?” the skinny gay guy was saying with a broad sneer. “Of course, if you have a really tight ass it might be hard to –.”

The guy in the suit put his hand over his mouth and said something angry but low voiced into his ear while the guy in the corn shirt abruptly stood up, fists, clenched.

She pulled her badge out from under the tank-top and let it hang on her chest on its lanyard. “How are we all doing today?” she asked brightly. “It's lovely out, isn't it?”

The skinny little guy in the leather jacket angrily shrugged off his companion, then glowered at her. The big guy in the corn shirt scowled at her suspiciously but one of his companions grabbed his arm and abruptly jerked him back into his seat.

“We like our town nice and peaceful,” she said. “And our political and social discussions kept low and polite enough not to bother other people.”

“It was the little fag who was bugging us!” one of the guys at the Nebraska table complained. “We were just sitting here drinking!”

That was the opposite of what she'd thought had started the little argument and she looked doubtfully at the guy in the suit. His expression confirmed what the Corn husker supporter was saying and she frowned at his companion.

“Are you trying to commit suicide?” she asked.

“It's a free country!” the man replied angrily. “If I want to tell some farm boy homophobes what I think of them that's none of your fucking business! I saw the way they were looking at me!”

“That might be true, but if I think you're trying to commit suicide I'll have you strapped to a gurney and taken to a hospital for a psychiatric examination. Is that how you want to spend the rest of your day?”

He sniffed disdainfully. “My husband is a lawyer!” he said with a turned up lip. “You just go ahead and try!”

“You two seem to be about done with lunch. I would suggest you be on your way now,” she said to the guy in the suit.

“We were just leaving, officer,” he said.

“We are not leaving!” the other one yelled. “I want another drink! We don't have to go just because some slope browed troglodytes and some fucking vegetarian doesn't like how we behave!”

Jamie was leaning over the hip high fence at their table, and the little gay guy picked up what looked like a few pieces of lettuce from a salad.

“And you can get your skanky self away from my table!” he ordered as he tossed it at her face.

“Jeffrie!” his companion shouted, appalled.

Jamie batted the lettuce away, then reached over and grabbed the man by the front of his jacket, yanking him bodily up across the table and then right over the fence. When his feet dropped to the sidewalk in front of her she realized he was even shorter than she'd thought, barely coming up to her

chest as she shoved him back against the fence.

“Listen to me, you little asshole. You're going to get moving or I'm going to run you in for causing a disturbance and drunk and disorderly!” she snapped.

“We'll go! We're going, officer!” the other exclaimed as he threw money on the table and ran into the bar.

“You don't scare me!” the man gulped.

“That's because you're stupid and drunk and have no idea how violent I can be!” she told him with a perfectly straight face.

The other man came running out of the main entrance, skidding a little as he hurriedly ran along the sidewalk to where she held his companion pinned to the fence. She released the man and stepped back and the other man grabbed him bodily and yanked him along.

“Sorry, officer. He's usually not like this!” he said over his shoulder as he pulled him along.

She nodded at the man, and turned to the Nebraska guys.

“You're fucking hot!” the guy in the ball cap said.

“Thanks. Have a nice visit to New York,” she replied, turning and heading across the street.

“I want to marry you!” he shouted after her.

She waved idly behind her without turning around, and put the badge back under her shirt.

Fucking blonde hair, she thought to herself.

She continued along 43rd, then turned on Eight Avenue, then turned back again on 44th and followed it to Broadway, then spent some time wandering before she headed north and turned down 47th. It was quieter here

but as she walked along she spotted legs sticking out the open driver's door of a silver Lexus parked at the curb.

Once she got closer she saw it was a teenager, a Hispanic teenager, leaning over the driver's seat and pulling things out of the glove compartment.

His head was turning rapidly as he worked, looking out through the windscreen, then out the other window, then back to the glove compartment, then back around to the sidewalk. His eyes passed over her as unimportant, and turned away, but then jerked back as she stopped to look in on him.

"Hey," she said casually. "Lost something?"

"Yeah," he said, grabbing a pair of designer sunglasses and a pair of leather gloves and pulling back out of the car.

"You missed your leather gloves?" she asked, eyebrows raised. "Cold, huh?"

He tried to dodge past her and she put an arm out.

"Can I see your license and registration, sir?" she asked.

"You think I can't own no BMW?!" he demanded.

"I think you look barely old enough to drive, if even have a license yet."

He hesitated, then threw the glasses and gloves at her and ducked back into the car, which was not the direction she had anticipated him moving, grabbing the door and yanking it closed before she could react. She tried to open it but he'd locked it and was already climbing over to the passenger side. She quickly scooted around to intercept him and he hesitated, then climbed back over the center console. She moved back around to the driver's door.

"Come on out of there," she ordered.

"Fuck you, puta!"

She leaned over the window.

“You plan on staying there all day? Cause I'm not leaving,” she said.

“I can stay here as long as I want to!”

“Or until the guy who owns it comes back with the keys,” she said.

He looked around doubtfully, then glared at her again.

She pulled her radio out of her pocket.

“AC39, I need a wrecker at the two hundred block of West 47th to get a one five five suspect out of a locked car. I also need a car for transport for him.”

She picked up the gloves and sunglasses and examined them, then looked in at him.

“This is called resisting arrest, you know. It will get you in worse trouble than stealing a pair of gloves and sunglasses.”

He gave her the finger and she shrugged.

“Doesn't seem very bright to me. You're caught. Accept it and move on.”

It didn't take long for a blue and white to pull up, lights flashing. The lights went out and two black cops got out. The older one she vaguely recognized from seeing around the station because he had a very round bald head on his chubby body. She didn't know his name, but nodded recognition at him.

“What you got?” he asked.

She shrugged and held up the gloves and sunglasses.

“Punk in a car. He was grabbing stuff.”

To her surprise the round headed cop, whose name tag said Blare, took the sunglasses and gloves and examined them closely.

“Italian leather,” he said.

He looked at the tag and inside. “Rabbit fur. Very nice. Probably worth a couple of hundred bucks.”

“Oh, I'm liking these,” he said, looking at the sunglasses. “St Laurent. I'm thinking four, maybe five hundred bucks.”

He tried them on and bent to look in the BMW's side mirror.

“I let you have them for twenty bucks!” the kid in the car shouted through the glass.

The other cop took out his nightstick and tapped it against the glass.

“Open the door, asshole,” he said.

“Fuck you, negro,” the kid shouted.

“Want me to break the window?” he growled to his partner.

“You know how much a window on a BMW 6 series costs?” Blare demanded, straightening up and pulling off the sunglasses.

“I sent for a wrecker,” she said.

“I'm Lionel Blare,” the bald guy said, holding out his hand. “And you're the notorious Jamie McCloud.”

She shook hands, smiling lightly.

“Notorious?”

“As in a noted, and much talked about new colleague,” he said smoothly, “especially by the uhm, younger male members of the precinct.”

“Uh huh.”

“Everyone talks about EC,” the other one said with a casual smirk. “There ain't much of it around the station.”

“EC?”

“Wish I could afford a pair of sunglasses like this,” Blare said, interrupting them.

“You have an appreciation for the finer things in life, Officer Blare?”

“Lionel, please. And absolutely! I try educate my partner here but it's largely a hopeless case.”

His partner's tag said Peters. He was younger, though not much, probably in his late thirties, slender, with a narrow chin and dark, beady, unhappy looking eyes. He glared at the kid in the car, then at her.

“In the old days, you know, little bastards like this wouldn't dare mouth off because they knew we'd kick their asses.”

“Everyone's got a camera these days,” she said, sweeping her hand around at the pedestrians, some of whom had naturally stopped to watch.

The man grinned. “There's ways around that,” he said. “Once you get em on the ground you grind your knee into something tender, and tell them to quit resisting in a loud voice. If you hit the right spot they start jerking and pulling away, and then you can belt them one and tell them to quit resisting again.”

“I try to restrain his baser instincts,” Blare said, making a face. “But Michael is of the old school.”

“Negro!” the Spanish kid yelled.

“Greasy little wetback,” Peters said back.

The kid pumped his finger rapidly up and down at Peters, who drew his

fist back as if to punch it through the window.

“What the hell!? What are you doing with my car!?”

The man who appeared on the sidewalk was carrying a leather briefcase and wearing a very expensive gray suit. He was a youngish looking forty-something with an oval face, receding hairline and too-big brown eyes to go with his weak chin.

“This your car, sir?” Blare asked.

“Yes, it's my car! What is he doing in it!”

“Did you leave the door unlocked, sir?”

“Of course I didn't leave it unlocked!”

“Well, if you give me the keys we'll have the ahm, foreign infestation removed,” Blare said with a grin.

“Get out of my car!”

He held his hand up and the car's lights flashed. Blare pulled the driver's door open but the teenager threw himself into the back seat. Jamie pulled the rear door open and he scooted over to the other side, where Peters yanked open the door. The kid turned away but Peters reached in and grabbed his foot and dragged him bodily out the other side of the car.

The kid let out a stream of angry, Spanish profanity which Peters didn't understand, which Jamie thought was probably a good thing for the kid, and maybe for Peters too given all the phones being held up in front of people's faces now.

She and Blare converged on the other side of the car to help Peters with the wriggling, cursing, kicking teenager, and they quickly got him rolled onto his stomach and his hands cuffed behind his back.

They led him back onto the sidewalk, where Blare showed the man the gloves and sunglasses – which to the man's chagrin, were now evidence he'd

have to reclaim at the precinct.

“Fucking whore! You have to interrupt me!” the kid shouted at her in Spanish.

Peters was holding him by the collar but the kid lunged forward, letting the open jacket slide down his arms as he kicked at her. Jamie, irked, grabbed his foot and yanked it sharply up, then let it go. Peters let go of his collar at the same time and the kid fell heavily onto his ass.

Peters smiled contentedly at that, then dropped quickly to his knees to roll the kid over, pressing his knee heavily against the back of his neck to grind his face into the sidewalk.

“Quite resisting!” he said loudly.

“I'll get the leg restraints,” Blare said.

Jamie squatted and grabbed the kid's ankles, then brought them back together and bent them up and back to help hold him in place. The kid started cursing in Spanish again but Peters increased the pressure on his knee and that soon shut him up. Blare trussed his ankles up and back and then he and Peters picked him up and shoved him into the rear of their patrol car.

While he was leaning inside Peters gave the kid a shot in the gut for good measure, then closed the door behind him, smirking at her.

“I love it when they actually do resist,” he said. “You can get away with teaching them a lesson a lot easier then.”

Jamie nodded silently, though a bit warily. She wondered how many excessive use of force complaints he'd gotten.

Blare dealt with the BMW owner, who, rather than being grateful, was churlish and indignant that he had to go down to the station to file a report to get his stuff back. Dick, she thought, letting Blare, who seemed very smooth, deal with him.

“The world is full of dicks, isn't it?” she said to him as the man got into

his car and drove off.

“Unfortunately true, and you encounter an overabundance of them on the job.”

She pursed her lips and nodded. She didn't ask how long he'd been on the job because that would require she respond in kind. He had four five-year service stripes on his sleeve, his partner two of them. She was aware that though she was plainclothes she was still very much the rookie compared to cops like them.

“We'll take the evidence in with him and book him. I would suggest you check with sergeant Mueller about whether he feels you should go in now to do up your report or continue your patrol,” he said, not unkindly.

“I will,” she promised.

They drove off and she wandered back the way she'd come from, then took out her radio and called Mueller.

“What you got?” he asked.

“Nothing much. I just arrested a kid stealing stuff from a probably unlocked car. The uniforms took him away and will process him. You want me to go in and do up a report or keep on walking?”

“Anything in the arrest likely to get the attention of bosses?”

“Nope. Some teenager grabbing gloves and sunglasses from the car. And resisting arrest. Blare and Peters took him in.”

“Just keep on with your patrol for now. But make sure you're back at the station at least an hour before the shift ends.”

She nodded, put the phone away, and kept walking.

Chapter Seventeen

“Honestly, are a lot of women going to wear something like this in public?” she demanded.

The wardrobe lady, whose name, she had come to discover, was Andrea, simply shrugged. “Honey, if there's one thing I've learned over the years it's that there's absolutely no accounting for taste.”

Jamie made a face.

“Some girls are real show-offs, and there's a lot of back yard pools out there, too.”

The bikini she'd just pulled on was an orange leopard print with tiny triangle tops and bottoms which were very, very low on her hips. Thought at least it wasn't a G-string. The scrunch bottom covered perhaps half her buttocks – as long as she didn't bend over.

As with the other pictures she'd had taken, it was against a blue screen, which would allow them to Photoshop in a background image of a beach or pool. She waited for her turn, looking around for Marco, and he arrived just as she was called up.

She put on her best giggly blonde face and went up to pose. There wasn't a lot of variations to posing, apparently. There were perhaps half a dozen, usually with one or both arms raised. Then there was a back shot, which involved turning about two thirds away and pushing out your bottom.

She felt a little awkward with that, but was starting to get used to strangers seeing her in very little clothing.

She hurried back to change into the next suit as the next girl moved up, watching Marco as she did. He sat perched at one of the makeup tables, grinning, sometimes talking on the phone. He was middle aged, a little bulky,

with bushy eyebrows and thick, short, curly dark hair, and he wore an open necked shirt and a brown sports jacket.

From where he was sitting he could, with only a minimal turn of his head, also watch the girls changing into different bikinis. No changing room had been provided. The racks gave some privacy from the front of the room, but the area was open to the side – to where he sat.

Well, she thought, she was supposed to get him interested. And besides, if she turned her back to him he'd only see her butt, which, given the next suit she was supposed to try on was a tiny black and white string bikini with a G-string bottom, really didn't matter a whole lot.

She flushed slightly anyway as she dropped the existing suit and then stepped into the G-string and pulled it up. It didn't provide much coverage even then, however. It had the smallest crotch she'd seen in a suit, a tiny pocket which rose perhaps an inch above her sex.

The white strings spread out across her hips, crossing them so low she was doubtful the suit would even stay up if the wearer moved around very much. The triangle cups over her breast were small and centered, rather than off-centered along the outside of her breasts, as was usually the case. That mean the middle of her breasts was a little better covered, but there was a lot of 'side boob'.

She felt even more self-conscious in this suit, but gamely went up front to have her pictures taken, thinking anxiously about what would happen if the men at the station where she worked managed to get hold of such pictures.

That black cop the other day, Peters, had casually referred to her as “EC”, which she'd figured out, at last, meant Eye Candy. She didn't want to be eye candy! At least, not at the station! Nor did she want to contemplate what reputation she'd get if these pictures got out.

She was not enjoying this assignment. She knew, intellectually, it was more important, and would certainly look better on her record than grabbing some kid stealing from a car, or breaking up a fight before it started. A part of her, though, considered that to be real police work, keeping the peace, while

this... this was more... secondary.

Lucas was hot, of course, and there was no telling where that relationship was headed, but it was very... eye opening, and certainly exciting. He had possibilities, but she wasn't sure he'd ever make a decent boyfriend – unless she was willing to call him sir!

Marco seemed to be enjoying the show as she turned her hips one way, then the other, and slid her fingers through her hair as she arched her back a little. On her way back she gave him a dazzling smile, and felt her heart lurch as he slipped off the chair and came over to meet her on her way.

“You look pretty hot up there, babe,” he said.

“Uhm, thanks,” she said brightly. “Mister...”

“Just call me Marco, babe,” he said with a grin.

“Ohhh,” she said, “You're Mister Marco!”

“Just Marco, baby. You heard of me, huh?”

She gave him a pouty look and looked around furtively.

“Well, Lola was talking about you,” she said coquettishly.

“She was, huh? And what did she say?”

“She said... that you were ... hot,” she lied. “And that you sometimes gave girls... presents.”

“Presents, huh?”

She sniffed and waggled her eyes at him and he snorted in amusement.

“Yeah, sometimes.”

She looked around in an obviously furtive way again to make sure no one was nearby, then back at him. “She also said,” lowering her voice, “that

sometimes a girl could make a little extra money for uhm... being delivery girls for you.”

He frowned at her, then laughed.

She looked back brightly.

“I was just thinking for a second. What if she's a plant, and then I realized, there sure as fuck ain't no place to hide a microphone on that suit.”

She giggled girlishly.

He looked her up and down. “You came from the Danby agency, right, baby?”

She nodded her head rapidly.

“I might be able to arrange something for you. If you're a good girl.”

She looked crestfallen for a moment. “Oh, but... people tell me I'm a bad girl,” she said with sad eyes.

He laughed in amusement. “Just how bad are you, baby?”

“That depends,” she said, stretching the word out.

“Yeah, I bet it does. C'mere. Lemmie show you something.”

He made some sort of gesture at the wardrobe woman, who shook her head and rolled her eyes, then put his arm around Jamie and led her to the door.

Oh shit, was her first response. She was definitely NOT going to sleep with this guy to gain his confidence. Even if she was willing – which she definitely was not – something like that would get out, and would probably figure in any trial later. No way was she going to get on a stand and talk about that!

It felt very... weird out in the hall in the tiny bathing suit and stiletto

heels. There were people in suits and dresses walking by there as he led her some way along to an office.

“Wait till you see what I got for you, baby,” he said.

He opened the door and gestured her inside, and she followed warily, heart thumping louder and louder as she tried to figure out how she was going to dissuade him from anything sexual while still getting him to let her act as a drug carrier.

They were in fairly standard looking office, with a modern looking desk set painted a reddish brown before the window. The carpet was gray, with black pattern of lines, and a small sofa set against the side wall.

“What a nice office,” she said.

“It's a special office. You see something missing?”

She shook her head.

“No computer. No telephone. Nowhere to hide a microphone.”

“Why does that matter?”

He led her over to what looked like a square end table in the corner, turned, winked, and opened the door to reveal a safe.

“Guess what's in here?”

“Uhm, fun things?” she asked.

He laughed and shook his head. “A little money, that's all.”

She looked at him in surprise and he winked, squatted down and closed the door, then reached his hand down along the inside of the table where it sat near the corner and did something. He stood up and pulled and the thing rolled forward out of the way, then he squatted and lifted up the carpet in the corner.

“See? A safe hidden by a safe! Is that fucking funny or what?!”

“That's so smart!” she gushed.

He opened the safe and brought out what looked like several kilos of cocaine. They were the size and shape of thick paperback books, wrapped in plastic. He stood up and showed them to her.

“You know how much each one of these is worth, baby?”

“A lot!” she exclaimed, doing her best to look very impressed.

“This is the good stuff. Over thirty thousand bucks.”

“Wow!” she said.

He grinned and put all but one on the desk, then handed the other two her.

She took it, examining it.

“Of course, you got to hide it,” he said.

He took the top and pushed downward, so the lower edge pressed into her breasts.

“Hmm,” can't hide it in there,” he said.

He pushed it lower, the narrow edge of the wrapped cocaine sliding down her belly until it reached the string of her tiny bathing suit bottom.

“Not in there,” he said. “Or at least... not wrapped like this.”

“Uhm...”

He put the coke down and went back to the safe, then squatted down and took another package out. This one was thicker, narrower, and a little longer. It was rounded and tightly wrapped.

“Double wrapped,” he said.

“What does this remind you of, baby?”

“Uhm... I'm not sure,” she said.

He smirked and placed it against her abdomen.

“I bet it would be a tight fit,” he said.

“Uhm...”

The door opened and he quickly jerked the thing behind his back, moving forward to stand between what was on the desk and the doorway. Three people came in, all in suits. Two were very large and muscular looking men. The third was a very sleek looking Spanish woman in her late thirties. She had a beautiful rounded face and long dark hair, and was wearing a tailored white double breasted suit.

She looked at Jamie coldly, then at Marco even more coldly.

“What the fuck are you doing in here with this whore?” she demanded angrily, in Spanish.

Jamie did her best to appear not to understand a word.

“Uhm, this is Jamie,” Marco said with an ingratiating smile.

“Who the fuck is she?”

“Take it easy, Consuela! She's safe,” Marco said. “She's going to be a courier.”

“She is? Why? Because she gives good head? Who is she?”

“She's Dan's girlfriend, Dan Pershing. She works for the Danby Agency.”

The woman walked forward, scowling at her and Jamie smiled

hesitantly.

“Hello?” she said as if she had no idea what was happening.

The woman looked down the length of her nearly nude body and sniffed disdainfully.

Then she picked up the tube shaped cocaine packet and pushed it against her left breast.

“You think you can fit this inside you, girl?” she demanded.

“Ahm uhm, I uhm... well... I guess,” she said uncertainly. “I mean... it's kind of thick...”

The woman smirked. “Marco will get you wet. He's got a very agile tongue.”

“I uhm, Lola said you could carry stuff in your purse mostly,” she said.

“Lola has a big mouth,” the woman said. “But I know Lola. I don't know you.”

“I'm Danny's girlfriend!” she said brightly.

“Who I never heard of before,” the woman said with a steely gaze. “So I need to know you're working for the police.”

Marco laughed and the woman's head jerked around to glare at him.

“Uhm, no offense, Consuela, but really,” he said, waving his hand towards Jamie.

“You think because she's pretty and has nice tits she can't be a snitch?”

Marco shrugged. “I think Dan did her up against the wall in the bathroom the other day and the people in the room next door could hear the thumping.”

Jamie blushed.

“You want to make much money, yes?” the woman demanded of her.

“Jamie nodded her head rapidly.

“Then you stick this up your pussy. And Marco will supervise.”

“I don't think Danny would like that,” she said.

“I don't care what Danny likes. Marco has a big mouth and showed you stuff he shouldn't have. I want to make sure you aren't working for the cops. She slid her finger under the narrow string between Jamie's bikini cups and tugged it up and out.

“And you better convince me, little girl,” she said in a menacing voice. “You get what I'm saying?”

Jamie nodded her head rapidly, eyes wide.

The woman smirked, and then dropped her hand to caress her flat abdomen just above the tiny bikini bottoms. “Lots of room in here if you try,” she said, her voice turning silky.

She turned and poked her finger sharply into Marco's chest.

“See that she does it,” she said in rapid-fire Spanish. “Angelo and Luis will be right outside the door. If the bitch doesn't want to do it they'll take her somewhere until we can check her out more carefully. And I'm not happy with Pershing to begin with. If he bitches about it he's going to wind up in the Hudson.”

Marco looked smug. “I think I can provide the necessary... lubrication,” he said.

The woman snorted derisively, then turned and left, taking the two big goons with her.

“Don't worry, baby. I've seen Pershing's dick. It's not that much smaller

than this,” he said.

“You've seen him ... hard?” she asked in surprise.

“We've had some fun with models before,” he said.

Then he frowned. “Uhm, that was a while ago. I mean, he doesn't fuck around now that he's your boyfriend.”

He brought his hand up along her side, and around onto her left breast, squeezing it lightly before she pushed his hand away.

“Marco,” she said warningly, “Danny wouldn't like that.”

“This is strictly business, baby!” he protested. “Danny understands business!”

He took her arm and led her over to the sofa.

“Take a seat, baby, and watch my magic tongue go to work.”

Jamie had no intention of watching his magic tongue do anything whatsoever but she let herself be pushed onto the sofa as Marco settled on his knees before her. She eyed the door carefully as he licked his way up her thighs, then spread her legs apart and leered up at her.

She spread her legs a little wider, then slouched down as he grinned and licked up the center of the small bikini bottoms. She reached down to grab him under the chin and pull up as she jerked her thighs closed around his neck.

He gurgled as she squeezed her thighs tightly, throwing herself forward to let her weight help pin him down, and pressing her fingers in tightly at the sides of his throat to block the major blood vessels there. He twisted and writhed, at first, then tried to beat her off, raining blows on her hips and lower back as she bent forward to keep her head out of reach.

The trick wasn't in cutting off the air but in cutting off the flow of blood, and it didn't take very long before he went limp. She leapt to her feet and

locked the door, then scrambled to the window, grabbing the coke off the desk. She threw open the window, grateful this was an older building, and placed the coke on the ledge, then grabbed a dozen more kilos out of the safe and perched them precariously on the window ledge.

She kicked off her high heels and ran back to Marco, grunting with effort as she dragged him around the desk to the window, then picked up a vase from the coffee table next to the sofa and threw it across the room.

Almost immediately there was a thump as someone tried to open the door.

“Hey, Marco. What's going on?” a man demanded in Spanish.

There was no answer, of course. There was another thump at the door, then someone smashed it open. Thankfully, she'd held her arms up before her face in anticipation, and as the door swung back it struck her arms only a middling blow. She heard male curses, then the two goons ran across the room to where Marco lay, one of them grabbing the coke off the windowsill and then thrusting his head out to look around.

She, of course, darted around the door and ran down the hall. One of the goons shouted, and she ran faster, skidded to a stop by a stairwell door, then threw it open and took the stairs three and four at a time before emerging in another stairwell.

She ran straight down the hall, startling the people working there, and made the far stairwell just as the goon chasing her came out of the one behind her. She ran down another flight of stairs, and into the first empty office she saw, closing the door and grabbing the phone to call 911.

“This is badge four two six six one. Ten thirteen Zee” she hurriedly called into the phone when it was answered. “646 Fifth Avenue, tenth floor!”

Ten thirteen was the 'Assist officer' call, and adding the 'z' told them the officer would be in plainclothes. She'd never heard of a cop in clothes as plain as a bikini before, though.

She hung up as she heard heavy footsteps running towards the door. They went on by and she waited several long seconds, then pulled the door open, looked both ways, and ran back to the stairwell.

There was no way in hell she wanted to be dressed like this when the uniforms started to arrive! She had no idea where Lucas was but her clothes were back upstairs. She trotted back up three flights of stairs, pulled the hallway door open a crack and peered through.

Consuela, one of her goons, and a disheveled looking Marco were coming out of the room where she'd been modeling, together with Lucas. The goon was pressed very tightly against Lucas and she was fairly sure he had a gun on him. Consuela looked murderous, and Jamie froze for a long moment, her mind spinning its wheels.

She drew back, took a quick look around at the stairwell, then stepped back, yanked the door wide and started through. That brought all eyes around on her, of course. She squealed, looking shocked, and jerked back, letting the door slam behind her.

She stepped to the side, with her butt against the railing, waiting. A few seconds later the door slammed open and Marco ran through. The door slammed behind him of course just as he reached the top of the stairs and realized she was behind him. He turned, gaping at her as she threw her weight forward, her bare foot striking him in the center of the chest.

The blow threw him straight out and backwards over the stairs, and he landed heavily, tumbling end over end to wind up in a crumpled heap at the landing. She jumped down and quickly searched him, pulling a Sig Sauer 9mm out of a shoulder holster, and headed ran back up the stairs.

There was already a lot of noise coming from behind the door as she yanked it open again, gun before her. Consuela was picking herself up off the floor near the wall, and from her dazed condition she'd been flung into it. Lucas was wrestling with the other goon against the other wall. He had grabbed him from behind, one arm around his neck and the other extended upward, holding the other man's wrist aloft so his gun was pointed at the ceiling.

After a moment of indecision Jamie ran forward and kicked the goon in the balls, then turned rapidly to point the gun at Consuela, who was grabbing frantically at her purse.

“Police! Don't move!” She shouted.

The woman looked up at her, fury in her face, and her eyes rolled back to the purse an inch from her hand, then she slumped to the floor. Behind her, Lucas was straddling the goon, who was on his face on the floor, and pulling his arms up and back together behind him to pin them with his knees.

They did not, of course, have handcuffs.

“I called for assistance,” she said.

Chapter Eighteen

Ten minutes later she was sitting on the floor, still wearing the tiny bikini, with her hands cuffed behind her back, glowering at the growing number of police on the floor. Fifth Avenue was only three blocks from Lexington, which was the precinct border, and the first cops to show up were from the 17th precinct. She had no ID, of course, nor had Lucas, and they had no idea who she was and almost shot her before she hurriedly put down the gun.

The next pair were also from the 17th, though the two who came after that were from Midtown. They didn't recognize her, however. Then Haines and Brown, two cops who she'd met her first day in Midtown came onto the floor.

She groaned and shook her head. Lucas, who was sitting next to her, also cuffed, looked up the hall as the two men met with and talked to another of the cops. Haines looked down the hall, saw her, and his jaw dropped as his eyes went large and round.

“Holy shit! Jamie!?”

“Friend of yours?” Lucas asked dryly.

She sighed and got to her feet as Haines and a bemused Brown came over to them.

“I'm working undercover,” she growled. “You wanna get these fucking handcuffs off me so I can get dressed?”

Haines grinned. “Well... to be honest... not really,” he said, looking her up and down. “Fuck! I knew you were healthy!”

Her eyes narrowed. “Think carefully about your own future health, Haines,” she said in a low growl.

Brown laughed and motioned her to turn around.

She sighed and did so, knowing Haines would be delighted with the rear view, and Brown moved in to uncuff her. Then, with what dignity she could, she strode down the hall and back into the room to get her dress on. She didn't have time to do anything more than pull it over her head and down, then zip it up in back before the patrol lieutenant arrived and came into the room.

She turned with a sigh as the white shirt came over.

“You're working undercover... officer...?”

“McCloud,” she said. “I'm with Anti-crime. I've been working undercover with the DEA for the last week, that guy with the long hair out in the hall.”

“He's a fed?”

She nodded. “Agent Lucas. Lieutenant Jacobson set it up with Lieutenant Foster.”

The familiar names seemed to reassure him and he nodded as she found her own shoes and slipped them on. They went back into the hall and she identified Marco, who'd been found unconscious on the stairs, as one of the group. The second goon had gotten away, but they had seized about twenty five kilos of cocaine.

She followed him back into the hall, and was able to hurriedly explain to Lucas what had happened.

“Things moved a lot faster than I had expected,” he said, making a face. “And I didn't know Consuela was in this, let alone on top of Marco. I'm sorry I wasn't there to back you up.”

“Well, like you said, you didn't expect anything dangerous to happen today.”

“I hope this means this is over,” she said.

“Yeah, I'd say so. Even if there's someone above Consuela we're blown here. Not a bad haul, though.”

He grinned at her. “So do you think you would have managed – with the right tongue assisting – to get that kilo inside you?”

She glared at him. “I bet I could shove it up your ass, Lucas, given the proper lube.”

“Not my thing,” he said with a grin.

“Marco enjoyed telling me your dick was almost as big. Interesting he knew that.”

He shrugged. “This place, you can't fit in if you don't blend in. No guy who has a beautiful model thrown his way is going to tell her no thanks.”

“You could have pretended to be gay.”

He gave her an incredulous look. “Who'd believe that?” he demanded.

She shrugged. “Put some nice jell in that hair, shave your chest and balls... yeah, I can see it.”

His eyes narrowed. “Are you being a brat again? Because you remember what I said happens to brats, right?”

“Are you threatening to assault an officer?” she asked sternly.

“Not at all, officer blonde.”

She snorted. “That's one thing that's damn well going to change.”

“I like the blonde,” he said with a grin.

“Tough noogies.”

“Of course, you were a pretty hot redhead, too.”

“You bet your ass I was, gay boy.”

“You *are* looking for trouble, I see. What do you think all these cops would do if I pulled you across my knee and tanned your ass.”

“Uhm, shoot you.”

“I think Haines would applaud me.”

She shook her head. “This story will be all over the fucking station within an hour.”

“All he can say is you're gorgeous, and have a gorgeous body. That's not something to be embarrassed about, Jamie,” he said with a faint smile.

She felt a little rush of happiness at the complete confidence in his voice.

“Trying to suck up to me, huh?”

“I'll show you about sucking up,” he said. “Later.”

She snorted in amusement as Lieutenant Jacobson showed up along with Lucas' boss.

“So this is where you actually live,” she said.

“Yeah. I prefer it, believe me.”

It was an uninspiring brown brick midrise in the Bronx, at least on the outside. The inside had been somewhat modernized, though, and the galley kitchen was impressive, with granite counters and stainless steel appliances. The bedroom was large and comfortable looking, with a view into greenery outside.

“Not many people want to live on the ground floor,” he said. “So it's cheap.”

“Not many people want to live on the ground floor because this is a high crime area,” she snorted.

“I'm not too worried about that.”

“Cocky, aren't you?”

“Speaking of cock,” he said, swinging her around to pull her in against him.

“Excuse me, agent Lucas,” she said, pushing back against his chest. “But if I gave you the impression I was going to consent to immoral behavior just because I came to look at your apartment, I do apologize.”

“Well,” he said, sliding his hands down onto her buttocks and pulling her in tighter, “If necessary, I've got handcuffs.”

She smirked at him, feeling a flush coming to her face and a rush of adrenaline as her pulse rate quickened.

“You think you're man enough to get them on me?” she asked.

“I know I am.”

He tugged her shirt up out of her pants from behind.

“Uh huh.”

Jamie kept her arms down low, which prevented him from pulling the shirt higher. He reached for her belt and began to undo it, but she quickly turned her back on him.

“I think I'd rather watch TV,” she said.

His arms slipped around her from behind and his hands cupped her breasts as he kissed his way along the side of her throat. He slid his fingers in and began to undo the buttons down the front of the shirt.

Jamie drew her arms up across her chest to block him and tried to pull

away and his hands darted down to her belt to undo it. She squealed and twisted free but he grabbed her and yanked her back, throwing her on the bed and pouncing atop her.

He managed to wrestle her pants off, but she swung around and drew her knees back, then put her feet against his chest and shoved him off before turning and scrambling across to the other side of the bed, where she knelt, smirking at him.

He scrambled around the side of the bed and she threw herself forward to jump off the other side. He lunged and grabbed her ankle, though, yanking her back and slapping her bottom sharply.

“Ow! Bully!” she cried, twisting onto her back and trying to shove him back with her feet.

He pinned her arms down with his knees and succeeded in unbuttoning her blouse, pulling it open.

“I think you're getting in over your head, little boy,” she said.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. Your teeny little penis isn't going to do a thing for me. I'm used to real men!”

He pulled back and rolled her onto her stomach, then yanked her blouse up and off before undoing her bra.

“Or maybe women! I think I'd like to try a woman!” she said, almost succeeding in twisting free as he pulled the bra off.

“After me,” he said, putting a large hand against the center of her back and shoving her back to the bed.

“Well I'm sure that won't take long!”

He used her own cuffs to lock her wrists behind her back and then slid back off her, pulling her thong with him. She squirmed around and swung her

legs over the far end of the bed to stand up, grinning, naked and handcuffed.

“What about a movie? I'm bored,” she said.

He jerked his own shirt up and off, glowering at her, then undid his belt and hesitated. He pulled the belt free of the loops and doubled it in his hand, slapping it threateningly against the palm of his other hand.

“Sometimes I bite,” she warned.

“Ha.”

He tossed the belt down and undid his pants, then shoved them and his underwear down.

Jamie looked him up and down appreciatively.

“Not bad for a pansy,” she said.

“Pansy, huh?”

He picked up the belt again and moved around the bed. This time she didn't try to avoid him, but turned and smirked at him.

“On your knees, woman.”

“Say please.”

He picked up the belt and then put the tongue through the buckle to form a loop before dropping it over her head. He jerked on it to pull the belt tight around her neck, then pulled down and she gasped and stumbled to her knees. When she looked up, his cock was hard, throbbing, actually angled upward in his excitement, and the sight momentarily took the words from her mouth as she felt a jolt of hunger.

“You said you wanted to eat... slave girl?”

The words gave her another wild dark jolt of heat, especially given her hands were cuffed behind her back, and she looked up the length of his

muscle body and felt her insides thrum with energy.

She dropped her eyes and then pushed her mouth in against his balls, letting her tongue flutter out against him. She kissed him there, then began to suck, gently at first, then harder, widening her lips slowly as her tongue fluttered and licked, sucking his balls slowly into her mouth as she hummed around them.

He gulped but didn't speak, looking down at her as she sucked his balls, her tongue pushing them up against the roof of her mouth and massaging them until she slowly pulled back. She kept her lips fairly close, letting him ooze slowly out before she started to lick her way around the base of his shaft, then mouth the base.

“Do a good job, slave girl, and maybe I won't beat you,” he said.

She let her teeth nibble lightly at his shaft and rolled her flashing eyes up at him, then widened her lips, mouthing him sideways and sliding her lips down along the length to the tip. She let her face nudge him up higher and licked her way down along the underside of the shaft before mouthing his balls again.

Then she used her forehead and face to lift his stiff cock higher as she licked like it was an ice cream cone or a Popsicle, taking long slow licks up its length, licking harder as she went. She mouthed the head delicately, letting her tongue caress the soft skin, then sucked it in a bit at a time, until just the head was within her mouth.

She licked it, sucking, rolling her eyes up at him as he looked down with hungry eyes, then, without warning, she slid her lips forward, gulping down half his thick cock before stopping and sucking, sliding her mouth slowly back down until she held just the head within her lips once more.

His hands combed through her hair, then drew it up above her head into a thick mass he could hold in his fist, tugging firmly though lightly on it.

She sucked delicately, then harder, then slid her lips forward once again, this time taking the head deep into her mouth, until it was poised at the

entrance to her throat. She drew back once more, pulled free and licked her way up and down the underside again before taking him into her mouth.

She started to bob up and down now, taking a third of his cock into her mouth, then half, then, rolling her eyes up to see his reaction, she pushed forward and swallowed him, feeling the thick, slick flesh caressing the inside of her throat as she slid down to an inch or so from the base. She held there for long seconds, then pushed herself forward to wrap her lips tightly around the base.

His fist tightened its grip on her hair and she felt a wave of anxiety, but the heat inside her brushed it aside. She had never done this with her hands tied before, completely helpless to control just how deep or for how long she went. The way he was holding her hair, combined with her cuffed wrists, though, made her feel a wild rush of dark hunger and excitement.

“You're starting to impress me a little, slave girl,” he growled. “Maybe it will be worth my while to train you.”

She slid slowly back along his shaft, sucking and licking as she moved, then pushed forward all the way again, making him gasp as his cock was buried in her throat. She pulled back again, this time letting the head pop free into her mouth as she gulped in air.

She licked lightly, teasingly at the head, and then gasped as he jerked her forward by the hair even as he pulled at the belt, yanking her up and forward onto the bed. His big hands gripped her hips and yanked them into the air, then he slapped her bottom again.

“On your knees at the edge of the bed, slave girl,” he growled.

He reached forward, gripping her at the ribs and pulling her belly in close to her thighs as she panted excitedly. She felt his hands on her upraised buttocks, then he dropped to his knees next to the bed and she felt his tongue against her. Her eyes fluttered and she moaned low in her throat as his tongue probed within the mouth of her sex.

His fingers spread her open and his tongue licked hungrily, then slid

forward to where his lips could circle her swollen clitoris. She felt his fingers pushing into her as his tongue went to work, and the wild rush of heat and sexual energy grew more and more intense as she knelt there, cuffed and helpless, feeling a dark, glittering wall of hunger and passion closing around her.

His big fingers pushed deep, pumping in and out as he licked her, as he sucked her, and even the occasional stinging slaps to her buttocks only seemed to make the wild thrill more exciting. This was so different than the sex she was used to with other men, and so filled with animal heat!

He rose behind her and she felt the slick head of his cock moving up and down along the line of her sex, rubbing against her clitoris, then pushing forward.

Jamie felt a wild rush of excitement and raw pleasure as he pushed into her, something like euphoria gripping her mind at the erotic tactile pleasure of his flesh spreading and stretching her, then sliding deeper and deeper and then aching deeper!

He filled her to aching fullness as his hands slid down her body and he ground himself against her upraised buttocks. Then he began to pump, slowly at first, but with growing speed and energy, until his hips were slapping against her buttocks and she was being rocked forward by every thrust.

As he'd done before, he gripped her hair, this time gathering a thick length into his fist, then yanking up and back as he rode her, as he pounded into her, and Jamie's mouth opened in a series of helpless gasps of pleasure which grew louder as the sensations became more intense!

The orgasm blew through her mind as she rammed herself back against him, crying out in pleasure. Every deep thrust sent the orgasm floating higher and her mind spinning more wildly as he fell forward atop her, a hand shoving in under her chest to roughly grope her breast.

He pounded into her with bruising force until the orgasm had faded, then pulled out only to flip her onto her back with a single savage motion. He gathered in her legs and shoved them up and back, positioned himself at her

entrance, and then slid into her once more, lowering his heavy torso as he forced her legs back further and further.

The bulk of him seemed to fill the world over her head as she gasped helplessly, her legs pressing back against her shoulders now, elevating her buttocks as he thrust down with a passion which was rapidly giving way to uncontrollable animal lust! His big hands slid further down her legs until he was able to grip her slender ankles, then he straightened his powerful arms and let gravity help his hips pound down against her.

Another orgasm rocked her mind and body as she felt the backs of her feet pressing into the mattress above her head, as his hips slammed down against her buttocks again and again, sending them down towards the mattress, her spine then springing her back up to meet the next stroke.

It was wild and animalistic, and the heat soared within her as Jamie found her body and mind wrapped in a hurricane of sensation and heat. Another orgasm tore through her, and then another, before he finally half collapsed, half crushing her beneath him, and rolled off with heaving chest.

She lay there, panting herself, gasping, eyes slitted, moaning low in her throat for long seconds before she could speak.

“Th-that was only four,” she gasped weakly.

He sat up, still breathing heavily.

“We're just starting, slave girl, he said, eyes glittering.

THE END

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