



Forbidden Publications

# Goodnight Sweetheart



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GOODNIGHT, SWEETHEART

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Goodnight, Sweetheart

By

Emery LaRue

## Prologue

*New York*

"Something I can do for you, love?"

The woman walked slowly toward him, her hips swaying invitingly. She was a professional in her trade bringing pleasure to lonely men in any way they so desired if the price was right.

She stood before him now, her small hand touching his chest as her scent stole into his head. Cigarettes, a hint of alcohol and the perfume she used to hide the stench of sex and men. It mattered little to him. He always made sure he was protected.

"How much?"

"Depends on what you want. What you like?"

"I want it all."

"Then I want two hundred."

"Agreed."

"Come on then." She took his hand and he surveyed his surroundings once again. "I have a room reserved around the corner."

There wasn't a soul in sight at this late hour. He followed her into the room, his cock hard in anticipation. He would make it good for her. He always did. But tonight, he would give her so much more than pleasure.

When he closed the door behind them, he locked it silently. The room carried the odor of sex and stale smoke; the bed was messed and the sheets looked well used. He wouldn't lie on the bed, but it would serve his purpose.

He laid the money on the bedside table, and she began to remove her clothing, a shame such a lovely woman had to turn to life on the streets. Her breasts were high and round, implants more than likely. Her belly was smooth and flat, but she was almost painfully thin. Drugs, he thought, releasing his cock and watched as she dropped to her knees, taking him deep into her throat. She was good to be able to take so much of him.

Her mouth worked him, and he closed his eyes. It wasn't a prostitute on her knees before him. It was an auburn haired beauty. The thought of Veronica Chase was almost enough to cause him to spill. When the woman's mouth left his cock and licked his balls, he stopped her. He couldn't afford to leave any of his DNA.

"Kneel on the bed," he whispered, petting her blonde red curls.

She did as he asked; her ass presented to him as he pulled a condom from his slacks and covered himself. Standing between her spread thighs, he rubbed the head of his cock back and forth between her pussy and ass. She may be used to men, but he would bet his dick was a little more than she usually took into her body. He had always prided himself on his size. A good ten inches and as fat as a fist when he was fully aroused. Claspings her hips, he drove into her heat in one powerful stroke.

He moaned as she took him deep, and her muscles clamped around him. Her gasp did not go unnoticed, and he thrust against her hard, his hips slapping her ass with each lunge forward. She laid her head and shoulders on the bed, giving him free reign of her body. Without missing a beat, he fumbled in his pocket, and pulled out a pair of latex gloves. Once the gloves covered his hands, he placed his thumb to the opening of her ass and pushed inside.

The woman moaned, and he could tell she was enjoying what he was doing. Her

cunt gushed with moisture as he worked his thumb in time with his strokes. He smiled as the thought of bringing this woman to climax excited him. She was one that could fake her pleasure, but he felt the truth as she shivered around his cock.

"Damn, but that feels good." She gasped again as his cock and thumb pushed deeper into her.

"More?" he asked, his main goal now was her pleasure. "Do you want more?"

"Please." Her body shook.

He powered into her, removing his thumb and replacing it with two fingers. She cried out and bucked back against him, coming in long hard bursts that sent him over the edge. He ground into her, pumping until he was moaning the name of the woman who haunted his dreams.

As he pulled from her body, he was careful to remove the condom. He wrapped it in the tissue he carried, placing it in his pocket. She moaned and stretched, rolling to her back and smiled up at him.

"I should be paying you," she teased.

He said nothing as he hitched his pants and tucked himself back inside. He reached for the money on the stand and put it in his pocket.

"Now, wait a minute, baby. That's mine."

He leaned over her, his hands caressing her breasts, and she registered the look in his eyes and the feel of the latex on her skin.

"What the hell?" she started, but was cut off as his hands slowly tightened around her throat.

She struggled against him, but he held her tightly. Her body rolled under his hands. Her legs thrashed at his sides. Her lips turned an odd shade of gray, then purple as her eyes widened with fear and the knowledge she was about to die, bulged in a silent plea. Then, she lay still, and was quiet.

He caressed her cheek and laid her out on the bed, crossing her hands over her chest. The card he slipped into her hands would not go unnoticed.

Again, he looked at her, and wondered what his true love would say and do, if

she ever found out what she had driven him to do in her determination to avoid him. One last caress, across her cheek.

“Goodnight, Sweetheart,” he whispered as he left the room as silently as he had arrived.

## Chapter One

Detective Veronica “Ronnie” Chase sighed in relief. After close to eight months of stakeouts and undercover work, she could finally close this case. Drugs run rampant in the city, and this was just one of many, but it was one that would not be selling to the kids for a while. Wishing she could do more, she placed the file in the captain’s box.

Returning to her desk, she pulled the next off the stack of files building gradually higher. It was never ending. Drugs, rape, homicide, suicide, and abuse. Sometimes she wondered why she decided to be a cop, much less a detective. The feeling of taking just one more bad guy off the street outweighed the gloom of doom.

She jumped, startled from her thoughts when an overly large bouquet of flowers in a wide variety of colors thunked on her desk.

“Detective Chase?” The little man in the florist uniform asked, pulling out a yellow slip of paper.

“Yes.”

“I need you to sign for the card.”

“What?”

“These are for you, and to get the card, I need you to sign.”

She frowned at his tone. He talked slow, like she was slow. It was clear he was frustrated for whatever reason.

“Are you sure these are for me?”

He rolled his eyes and handed her the paper. Sure enough, they were for her. She signed her name and handed him the paper. He handed her the card and walked out without another word.



"Ronnie, is there something you're not telling me?" Brody Taylor, her partner for five years asked with a teasing glint in his eye.

"Now, Brody, I can't tell you all my secrets."

"Who are they from?"

She shrugged and opened the card, frowning. This was odd. No name, nothing. Just three words that caused a shiver to course through her, and she wasn't sure why.

"Another admirer, Ronnie?" Captain Joe Campbell asked, standing over her shoulder.

"Not sure what it is, Captain." She handed him the card.

Joe had been a friend of her father's, and was more like family than her own family. He and his wife both had loved her like their own since her dad had died on the job.

"Detective Ronnie Chase.

"Goodnight, Sweetheart."

He frowned and handed it back, a look of concern on his face.

"Ronnie, this worries me a little. The dealer you busted had friends."

"I'm not too worried, Joe. Most of his buddies were arrested." She smiled, and put the card in her desk drawer. "What do you have for me today?"

"We just got a call about a body in a hotel room downtown. Looks like a local prostitute pissed off the wrong guy. The patrol has set the perimeter and is waiting for you two."

"Are they sure it's a homicide?"

"Unless she strangled herself." He handed her the address. "You and Brody can take this one. Be very precise in your investigation. I have a feeling this may be more than your average ticked off john."

Brody groaned behind her and she had to suppress a giggle. Anytime the captain got a feeling, it was a hairy case.

"Let's go, Brody." She grabbed her jacket and radio, secured her firearm and waited patiently for her partner.

"Why do we have to pull all the dead hooker cases?"

"They're people too, and deserve justice."

Brody was a good cop, but she always suspected a judgmental one.

"Well, they're just asking for it you know."

Ronnie didn't comment, just led the way to the garage and their unit. In the academy she had connected with Brody right away. It seemed fitting they would be beat cops together, and now partners. They had even spent one foolish night together, a drunken mistake they both laughed about now. His wife however, hated Ronnie and was threatening to leave Brody if he didn't transfer. She had known about their one night together, but Brody was determined to stick it out. They were partners, and if Sarah couldn't accept that, then he felt he was better off without her.

Once they pulled into the street, she hit the lights. There really was no hurry, other than the crime scene itself. She had that chill again, and something was telling her this was bad.

"Did you get a hair cut?"

"Fine time for you to notice, Brody."

"Looks good on you."

"Thanks."

It had pained her to cut her long auburn hair. She had always considered it her best feature, but in their last case, it had almost cost her. Having long hair in a fight for your life was not recommended. So now, it rested safely on her shoulders.

They pulled into the parking area of the hotel and parked beside the squad cars. Without wasting another second, Ronnie grabbed her case and hurried to the crime scene. Flashing her badge, she was granted immediate access. She could hear Brody talking to the patrolmen, but she tuned it all out. Her focus was the woman on the bed and the area around her.

Slowly she made her way to her, making sure to disturb nothing. She placed the case on the floor and removed a pair of latex gloves. She took in all she could with her eyes first, noting the tangled bedding, the ash tray overflowing with cigarettes, and the

many condom wrappers on the floor. Somehow, she knew this killer would leave no DNA.

Then, she turned to her sense of smell: smoke, stale alcohol and sex.

It was the body that disturbed her. She was naked, but she looked to be laid out, or posed. Usually when someone is killed either by accident or in a moment of passion, there are signs of a struggle. This poor soul was lying on the bed like she folded her arms across her chest and had gone to sleep, her legs together, like a mortician would place a corpse in a casket for burial. No, something was not right here.

"Her name was Vicki Harper."

Ronnie jumped and spun around, her hand on her pistol. She sighed in relief and then an anger rose in her.

"Damn it, Becky," she gasped and her shoulders relaxed. "You know better."

"Ronnie, I have a feeling about this one."

"Yeah, me too."

Becky Campbell, the local medical examiner was not only a friend, she was family. It was Becky and Joe that had held her together through the death of her father. She also kept the captain walking the straight and narrow.

"A local prostitute. As far as I can tell, she was strangled. It will take a while to determine if she was sexually assaulted."

"She looks like she just went to sleep. I have no doubt the perp had sex with her, though I would bet my salary you won't find any of his semen."

"No, I don't think I will." Becky sighed. "I will be able to tell you more once I get her back to the morgue."

"No signs of a struggle are evident." Ronnie examined the body closely. "Wait a second. What is this?"

Carefully, she pried the small envelope from the woman's fingers. Her heart started to hammer in her chest, almost like a feeling of *deja vu*. Pulling out her utility knife, she sliced through the top, careful not to disturb the seal for DNA purposes. Her fingers trembled as she pulled the card from the envelope. She opened it, and felt the

blood pound in her temples.

"What does it say?"

"Detective Ronnie Chase

Goodnight, Sweetheart." Ronnie felt her knees go weak.

"Ronnie? What is it?"

"It's addressed to me, Becky. I received flowers today at the department, with the exact same card."

"Shit, Ronnie. Let Brody finish here. You need to get back to the station."

"No."

"No? Something is going on here, and you seem to be the target."

"We don't know that. It could be someone pissed because I sent their boss to prison."

"Regardless, we need to clear this here so I can get her to the morgue. Joe will have a shit fit over this one." Becky started the wrapping process of the victim's hands and feet. "Brody! Get your ass in here and help us clear this scene."

Brody stood in the doorway, his eyes on Ronnie.

"What's the problem? I'm kinda busy questioning witnesses."

"You found a witness?" Ronnie shook her head, hoping to clear it.

"No, but I might if I keep at it." He turned and went back to the crowd out front.

Ronnie was a little stunned at his abrupt attitude, but she knew his feelings on prostitutes. He thought they were a waste of time.

"He's having problems at home."

Becky grunted but said nothing.

"Really, he will come around."

"Ronnie, I understand he's your partner and I understand he has problems, but this could be a very real problem, too." Becky stood aside to allow the body's removal. Once they were alone again, she turned to Ronnie. "But you need to remember your last bust. He all but watched until you were almost killed before he stepped in. If his problems are that serious, maybe he needs a break."

"Becky, I love you, but he will be fine."

"Remember you said that when you need him the most."

Becky followed the body out and into the coroner's van.

Ronnie bagged the card and processed the scene, trying not to think about what the card could be telling. What did it mean? What was happening? She had no idea who Vicki Harper was. She was just another soul on the city streets trying to survive. Ronnie had never even arrested her. So there was no connection. But the card had to mean something.

"You ready for us?"

Ronnie turned and found the crime scene unit ready to process.

"Yes, and I want a lot of pictures, even if it seems unimportant."

"You've got it."

She removed her gloves and picked up her case. Outside, she scanned the area for her partner and found him in the car. Ronnie reached the car and tossed her case in the back.

"Thanks, partner." She pulled her seat belt across her chest and started the car. "I didn't need your help."

"I was talking to witnesses." He sighed. "I'm sorry, okay? I have a lot on my mind."

"Well, clear it. This is serious." She pulled into the traffic, wishing she could hit the lights.

"It's a dead hooker."

"With my name on her."

"What?"

"Forget it, Brody. It's just a dead hooker to you," she snapped. "Maybe we should consider a partner switch if Sarah and you are fighting over me."

"No. I won't let her or you tell me who my partner should be."

"It was only a suggestion. You don't need to be an asshole."

They were silent for the ride. Now, she sat beside her partner in the captain's

office. The scowl on Joe's face as he read the note told her a lot. But when he looked at Brody, she had a feeling her partner may be really pissed before they were done.

"What's going on with you, Brody?"

"Just personal problems." He sat in the chair like he would pour out of it. His jaws worked on a straw, and Ronnie wanted to shove it up his nose. He literally acted like he could care less.

"Ronnie could be a target. I need to know she can count on you."

"Nothing's gonna happen to Ronnie. This is just a sick game, and it's probably someone she arrested or pissed off."

"Maybe, but I refuse to take chances. I need a private word with Ronnie."

Brody stood and stretched, acting for all the world like he was bored. He walked out of the room without a glance to either Joe or Ronnie.

"What the hell is going on, Ronnie?"

"His wife wants him to transfer or get another partner."

"Do you want this case? You're obviously a player in it, though I don't know the game just yet."

"I want it. If I am a target, me working it may draw the killer out."

"Then you will have to work it with another partner."

"Joe, you can't do that to him."

"I can and I have. There is a transfer coming in tonight. I don't know what Brody is going through, and right now I don't care." He raised his hand to stop her argument.

"You tell him, or I will. But if you want this case, you work it with the new guy."

"Who is he?"

"You will have the details tomorrow morning. For now, use today to set up your case."

"Brody won't like this, Joe."

"I'm sure he won't. But he has issues, and needs to work them out before he can be trusted to have your back."

"But..."

"No. It's done. Now, do you tell him or do I?"

"What are his duties?"

"He can work the paper mill until he gets things in order."

Ronnie stood and left, knowing it was useless to argue. Brody wouldn't like it, but she knew it was the right thing to do. He hadn't been himself for several weeks now. Things had been so much easier when they were all in the academy. Sometimes you had to set aside being a friend and think like a partner.

It would not be easy. She and Brody had always been partners. Even when he thought they should be more, they parted as friends. One night together did not make a relationship, but they were damn good partners. At least she thought they were. If she were honest with herself, she would admit she didn't feel as safe as she once did. He seemed hesitant to step in when he needed to be at her back.

"Well, what's next?"

"Brody, could you please get rid of that damn straw?"

"Fine." He tossed it into the trash. "What's next?"

Ronnie sighed. She hated this, she really did. He acted like this was just another dead body. If it had been someone he thought important, he would be like a bloodhound, up the ass of every lead he could sniff out. But for this one, he seemed to think she wasn't worth his time.

"Joe is giving me the case."

"You mean us?"

"No, Brody. He is giving me the case, and another partner for it."

Ronnie watched his face and the anger that welled in his eyes. He looked ready to blow at any second.

"Just what the fuck is my job then?"

"The paper mill until you get your personal life figured out."

"Paperwork?" His voice was tight with anger. "He is assigning me to paperwork?"

"Look, I'm sorry, Brody. Maybe this way Sarah will relax."

He stood and left the office. Ronnie sighed and rubbed her eyes. It was going to be a long day. Tomorrow, she would have to break in a new partner. What a nightmare. A new case, a new partner, and a pissed off ex-partner. Could it get any better? She sure as hell couldn't see it getting any worse.



## Chapter Two

When Ronnie came into the office the next morning, she had her file and a copy ready for her new partner. Over and over, she prayed that the new guy wouldn't be a pain in the ass. She hated breaking in new partners. Luckily, it was only temporary. However, if the look on Brody's face was any indication, things were still hairy. Maybe temporary wasn't such a good thing.

"Morning, Brody."

"Ronnie."

The single word greeting told her all she needed to now. Brody was still pissed off and stewing. A note on her desk let her know the captain wanted to see her. Gathering her files, she stood, removed her jacket, and walked into the office.

"Morning, Joe."

"Come on in, Ronnie and have a seat."

"So where is the new super cop?" She sat and pinned Joe with the smile he knew meant she was being a smart ass. "Not late I hope."

"Ronnie, you will work with Detective Monroe, and you will pretend to like it."

"Yes, dad."

Joe's humph and look, told her that he didn't believe her for a second. But Ronnie loved Joe, and if it meant solving this case, she would try her best.

"Detective Danny Monroe is said to be one of the best. He not only specializes in homicide, but he's a damn good cop. I won't have to worry about you all day."

"Is that what this is about? My safety?"

"That, and the fact I know you will kill yourself to solve the case."

"I don't need a babysitter, Joe." Ronnie folded her hands like a spoiled child. "He has no idea of my style, and we will more than likely knock heads before we get along."

Joe was doing his best to hide the smile and the laughter in his eyes, but failed. The hair on her nape stood, and she knew the super cop was directly behind her. She turned her head and her mouth went dry.

A very tall, very well muscled man stood in the doorway. His short brown hair matched the determined look in his eyes. The man looked like the calendar boy for the hot cop's edition. He also held a look of amusement in those eyes. Well, this was just perfect. The mouth-watering super cop was also amused by her. She made herself look like an idiot.

"Detective Danny Monroe, this is Veronica Chase, affectionately known as Ronnie," Joe introduced, still smiling.

"Detective Chase." He held out a hand and she took it. "I look forward to working with you. But please refrain from knocking heads with me. Mine is very hard and likely to cause damage."

Ronnie shook his hand, her lips pulling into a fine line.

"I think you will find mine is just as hard."

He nodded, as if accepting the fact she was a stubborn ass. Danny took the seat beside her, and she all but threw his copy of the file to him.

"Can I trust you two cops to play nice together?"

"I will do my job, Joe, but I already have a partner."

Joe looked to Danny, who just nodded his head and perused the file. After a time, he shut the folder and turned his attention to Joe and Ronnie.

"This is just a hunch, but I think this guy has more on his mind than the victim."

"How so?" Joe gave Danny his full attention.

"He is telling us something." He looked to Ronnie. "It looks like you are part of the story."

"Do you think Ronnie is the main target?"

"I would bet that before this is over, she will be his main objective." His eyes

remained on her as she hid the shiver that coursed through her. "Who the hell did you piss off, Detective Chase?"

Her eyes flared and she pinned him with a look of contempt. She noticed the twinkle in his eye and couldn't believe he was teasing her.

"This is serious, Monroe. As for me pissing someone off, I do it daily."

"You're very good at your job, Ronnie."

Something about the way he said her name caused her nipples to tighten and the air in her lungs to become tight. She ran her fingers through her hair, hiding her reaction.

"So what we have here is someone who has his sights set on Ronnie. But why murder Vicky Harper?" Joe asked.

"He knows her. He is drawing her out, watching her work. He will know her every move before this is over." His eyes narrowed in thought. "I wish I could say differently, but he will kill again. There is a connection in some way, but I can't quite grab it yet."

Joe leaned back in his chair and Ronnie could tell he was deep in thought. She didn't like the look on his face.

"You can't take me off this case, Joe."

"What do you think, Monroe?"

"To hell with what he thinks." Ronnie stood, her anger evident in her stance. "This is my case. If you pull me off, I swear you will regret it the rest of your days. I will make life a living hell and Becky will help me."

"Sit down, Ronnie." He used that fatherly tone that always seemed to work. "I will hear what Monroe has to say."

Danny watched as Ronnie stiffly sat in her chair. Too bad, because the woman had an ass he wouldn't mind staring at a little longer. Ronnie Chase wasn't overly tall, about average. But her auburn hair was silky and he longed to touch it. Her green eyes flashed when she was angry, and he wondered how they would change with passion igniting her senses. Danny shifted in his seat, hoping to ease the ache behind his zipper.

"She needs to work the case. I don't think the killer would want it any other way." He noticed the surprise in his eyes. "I would recommend protection."

"I don't need protecting, and a squad car following my every move would not be my idea of drawing out a killer."

"I didn't say anything about a squad car. Damn, but you're a hot head ain't you?" He smiled at her scowl. "We will be partners until this case is solved. Let's try to work out the kinks."

"I agree." Joe said, drawing their attention. "Until this case is solved, you two will spend day and night together."

"What?" Ronnie gasped.

"I won't hear any arguments. You want this case?"

"You know I do."

"Then until it's solved, he either stays at your place or you at his."

"You can't be serious." She glared at the smile forming on Danny's face. "I don't need a watchdog."

"That's my condition, Ronnie. Take it, or leave the file."

She stood and paced the office. She could understand Joe's fear. He loved her like a daughter. But Ronnie had a feeling that being alone with Danny Monroe could play on her in more ways than one.

"You agree to this?" she asked him.

"I will do whatever it takes to solve the case and be sure we both come out alive."

Again, she paced, wondering what would be the outcome. Maybe he had a wife who would object.

"Are you married?"

"No, but if that's a proposal, I hardly know you."

"Oh, great. This is just great. You just had to saddle me with a jackass smart mouth." She glared at Joe. "Fine, but we stay at my place."

"Works for me."

Joe slapped the file closed and folded his hands on his desk.

"Good, now that it's settled, I want you two to get settled and clear the air." He looked pointedly at Ronnie. "I need you two to work together. Take today, go over the files, and work out the differences. I want a report and plan of action first thing in the morning."

"It's early yet."

"I have a feeling it will be an all day endeavor."

Ronnie spared Joe one last glance and marched from the room. Danny stood and smiled at the captain.

"She always like that?"

"Detective Monroe, Ronnie is good at her job. But I asked for your help because she means more to me than just another cop." He sighed. "All I ask is that you bear with it, solve this case, and try to keep her alive."

"Relax, Sir. I'm good at what I do." He caught site of Brody as Ronnie talked with him. "What's the story with her partner?"

"Pissed off and letting me know it. But he is going through some personal problems, and I can't trust him on this one."

"Understood. We will work it all out." He shook the captain's hand.

When he left the office, his and Ronnie's file tucked under his arm, he gave her the space she needed to talk with Brody. He even suffered the indignant glares the man sent his way. Finally, he had enough.

"Detective Chase, we really need to get a move on."

"Coming." She patted Brody shoulder. "It will be back to normal before you know it."

She grabbed her jacket and walked away, leaving Danny to follow. He did at his own pace, though it was easy enough. He enjoyed the view. Her tight black jeans clung to her body like a second skin, her t-shirt tucked neatly. But something about a woman with a side arm, and especially this woman, was a major turn on. Living with her may prove to be his toughest case yet.

She stopped at the unmarked sedan, and he opened the passenger door, climbing inside.

"Don't you need your vehicle?"

"Nope. Had a patrol drop me off. Figured I would get a ride wherever I needed to go."

"So what's first on the list?" She started the car, waiting for his answer.

"I guess I need to pack a bag. Then, we should settle in and study the file and come up with a plan of action by morning."

"Where is your place?"

He gave her the address, smiling inwardly at her sigh. She hated this, and he couldn't blame her. This case was turning her world upside down. But he was determined to work with her and solve the case. He had heard of her father. A very well respected man of the shield. A shame he had died the way he did. A bullet from a dealer's gun. He wondered if that was what put the fire and determination into her to solve the case.

"I promise to make this as painless as possible, Ronnie. I know you would rather it be different."

She sighed again, checking traffic before pulling onto the street.

"No, I owe you an apology. Between the case and Brody, it's just a lot to let settle." She smiled, though it didn't reach her eyes. "I will try to be more reasonable."

The ride to his apartment was silent. He invited her inside while he gathered what he would need for an undetermined stay. Ronnie looked around his living room, and had to admit he had very good taste. It looked nothing like a single man's typical apartment. His furniture was neat, dark colors to match the light colors of the walls and carpet. His wall hangings were of local artists. Ronnie loved the art of the locals. She bought a lot of hers from the students at the art institute. It was spacious, and it was clean.

When he walked from the back room, bag in hand, she once again appreciated just how handsome he was. She had no doubt he was a strong man. She was average

height, but he made her feel very small.

"Ready?"

"Just let me grab a few things from the kitchen."

She followed, watching as he loaded a box with food from the fridge and the freezer.

"What are you doing?"

"Well, I figure I should help on the food." He grinned, adding packages of steaks to the box. "I do like to eat."

"Yes, well, I hope you can cook it, too."

"You can't cook?"

"A microwave is as close as I get to gourmet."

"Well, maybe I can cook a dinner for you. I'm not half bad in the kitchen."

Ronnie couldn't help but grin. She would bet he was good in a lot of areas. She scolded herself for such thoughts.

Back in the car, he read through the file again, yet his eyes continued to stray to the woman beside him. She was not only beautiful, but she was a strong and determined woman who went after criminals with all she had. He knew his thoughts about her were unprofessional, but he couldn't seem to help himself. Even while packing his bag, he had thoughts of pulling her into his room and taking her against the wall before laying her on the bed. His mouth watered at the thought of tasting her. Danny knew he had to keep his mind on the case, but she was a damn fine distraction.

He glanced up from the file when she applied the breaks and pushed a button on her visor. She didn't live in an apartment, but a home in a very secluded neighborhood. He was surprised that he had missed the way to her place.

"I will have to pay more attention next time. I don't think I could find my way back here if I needed to."

"It's not so bad. Besides, after a day in the city, I enjoy the quiet nights." She closed the garage door behind the car. "Well, come on. Better unload you and get at those files."

The inside of her home was very simple, and he enjoyed her art on the walls. It was all ground floor, and he liked that idea. If someone tried to get in, he would have a faster reaction time.

"You can stay in the guest room. Just down the hall and to the right."

He nodded and went to unpack his bag. The room was comfortable and had a bedside table with a lamp and alarm, as well as a television set up across the room, all the comforts of home. He made quick work of unpacking, not wanting to be near a bed, especially the queen sized one that looked perfect for two. Once he was finished, he found her in the living room, scanning her file.

"I made coffee. Help yourself to whatever you like."

As Danny poured himself a cup, he wondered what she would say if what he would like was her beneath him. He hurried back, hoping the case would help take his mind off the woman he was going to be working day and night with.

"So, fill me in while I glance through it all again."

"Well, as you can see from the crime scene photos, it's not your typical homicide of a prostitute." She pointed out certain details. "There were no signs of a struggle, and he laid her out as if to make her comfortable."

"Do you have the card you found?"

"Just a photo. The lab has the card from the body as well as the one delivered to me."

He nodded, carefully looking at each photo.

"Any word yet on the assault kit?"

"No, and I doubt he left any trace behind." She sighed. "But I have no doubt that he had sex with her. DNA we will have, but it won't be his."

"You're probably right. But it will take time to locate and identify who have been with her. Each must be ruled out."

"This guy is smart, almost too smart. I have a feeling he is watching our every move." She looked at him. "Even though she was a prostitute, I plan to treat her with respect."



"I'm not one to judge a woman or a man for the choices they make to get by." He said without looking up. "She was human, and someone snuffed out her life. That's what this case is about."

A new kind of respect started to build inside of her. He was a good cop, and he would treat Vicky Harper with the respect she deserved.

Damn, but he was handsome. It had been so long since she had felt an instant attraction. He was her partner though, and she needed to remember that. Her body was reacting to him, and she knew that it would be a long case. She felt hot and very aware of him. Ronnie needed to get away for a little while.

"I'm gonna go and shower."

"It's mid afternoon."

"Well, I relax better after a shower." She lied and stood, making her way quickly down the hall.

Danny watched her go; his eyes narrowed at her behavior then, a thought hit him. Could she be as attracted to him as he to her? He knew he shouldn't act on it, but it would be fun to find out. He let his mind wander from the case, and to Veronica Chase.

## Chapter Three

Ronnie stood under the hot spray, letting it caress her aching breasts. Her body's reaction had been so strong to his natural appeal. Danny had done nothing to bring it on, it was just there. Her hands lingered on her body, the soap flowing down her form acting like a thousand little fingers. Her hair pinned up, she tilted her head back and allowed the sensations to take over.

Her body tightened and burned, and she followed the path of the suds between her thighs, finding and stroking her swollen clit. In her mind, it was Danny's hands and his mouth on her. Her breath hitched and she stroked herself a little faster.

In her fantasy world, he talked to her, telling her such erotic delights. She was close to the point of release. Her free hand rubbed a nipple, pinching lightly, rolling it between her fingers. Biting her lip, she tried to keep her gasp silent.

She pictured him behind her, his hands holding her breasts as his body thrust into hers, his mouth on her neck, gently nipping and kissing as he took her over the edge.

The heat inside her built higher until she was shaking with the release that took over. She hoped the shower muffled her gasp of pleasure.

Catching her breath, she turned off the shower and quickly toweled off. Her little play had taken the edge off, but the desire was still there. Glancing in the mirror, she hoped the flush would leave her face before she left the bathroom.

Dressing in shorts and a tight t-shirt, she wondered if she left her bra behind on purpose. Hoping, on some deep level of conscious, that she would entice him and make him want to touch her.

*"Don't be silly Ronnie. You're just comfortable. You're working a case."*

With a snort to her reflection, she left the bathroom and returned to her place at the coffee table, wondering where he had run off to. He came down the stairs then, dressed in cotton shorts and a muscle shirt that showed off his physique. For a moment, they stared at one another, and then he sat beside her.

*"So, what's your thought?"*

Danny swallowed the lump in his throat, hoping he could get a grasp on reality. His thoughts were anything but the case.

*"I think we are dealing with someone who planned this out down to the last detail."*

*"I agree."* She flipped through her notes. *"I think our first action should be to hit the lab, see what they have found, and maybe track down a witness or two."*

*"That sounds like a good plan of action."* He was staring at her, she could feel it.

Her eyes met his, and the next thing she knew they were on the floor, his mouth on hers and she was responding.

*"This is a bad idea."* She gasped, arching into his touch.

*"I know."*

*"We really should stop."*

He pulled his mouth away, looking into her eyes. She was right, he knew it. But damn she set him on fire. He sat up and ran his fingers through his hair.

*"I'm sorry; I don't know what came over me."*

*"Me either. Let's just forget it and move onto the case."* She sighed. *"I think I will order a pizza."*

Danny followed her with his eyes, trying to cool his body. She had responded to him like a woman long denied, and the reality of the situation slammed into him. This case could take months, and he didn't think he could keep his hands off her that long.

The pizza ordered and the case aside, they sat in the silence, watching the television. The case was all over the news. Apparently, someone had leaked to the press that this was no ordinary homicide. Her name, as well as Danny's, was mentioned as

the lead detectives.

"Damn. What I wouldn't give to know who let all that slip."

"It happens, Ronnie. No sense in getting riled."

"No, but I bet our killer is having a good laugh." She sighed, knowing he was right. "I'm heading to bed; feel free to whatever you like in the house."

For a moment they stared at one another, then she stood and walked down the hall. Her room was right across the hall from the guestroom. He wanted to follow her so damn bad. Danny loved women, but this particular one caused the lust to boil within him.

He switched off the television and went to his own bed. Stripping to his boxers, he lay on top of the blankets, his body hard and aching for the woman across the hall. He could see her, a thin shift barely covering her supple body. With a groan, he took himself in his hand.

Slowly he stroked himself, fantasizing about her beneath him while he drove into her in long, hard, and deep strokes. She would gasp and cry out his name, begging him for more. He could feel his balls tighten and bit his lip to hold back the deep moan of pleasure.

A loud crash from the living room brought him out of his fantasy, and he leapt from the bed, snagged his gun from the dresser and slowly opened the door. He could see Ronnie across the hall, her gun drawn and ready. He motioned for her to wait as he stepped slowly out and crouched. Ronnie came behind, covering over his shoulder.

Together they made their way to the living room, and Ronnie clicked the light on. On the floor in the center of the room was a brick with a note strapped to it. Glass littered the floor where it had been thrown through.

Danny picked up the brick, and removed the note while Ronnie called the station house.

"There could be prints on that."

"I don't think so, Ronnie. It's from our guy."

"What does it say?"

"Detective Ronnie Chase. Goodnight, Sweetheart." He glanced up. "Are they sending a unit?"

"I told them not to."

"Why?"

"Because I want this guy to know I'm not afraid."

Danny nodded, knowing the report would be logged. For now, they needed to cover the window.

"Got anything around here we can nail over this window?"

"In the garage. Several sheets of plywood are left from when I redid the guestroom."

It took the both of them, first cleaning up the glass and then hanging the plywood, but it was done. She was pissed off more than scared.

"Well, it's safe to say he knows where I live."

"Yes, he does." Danny bagged the letter and brick with what she had in the kitchen. "I am willing to bet he knows I'm here."

"Why?"

"It isn't even ten at night. He saw the lights go out and thought you were occupied."

Her eyes widened when what he was saying hit home, but it made perfect sense. Her eyes took in Danny, his hard body, all but bare other than the boxer shorts. He was built so beautifully. He was watching her as well, and Ronnie's face flamed to know she stood before him in her boy shorts and a t-shirt that barely covered her rump. He had moved closer to her, and she was very aware of the tension between them.

"I should go back to bed."

"You should."

"Goodnight, Danny."

She tried to move past him, and he caught her arm. When she looked into his face, she swallowed hard at what she saw in his eyes. He wanted her, and damn if she could refuse him if he touched her again. Ronnie wanted wild, hot, hard sex, and she

wanted it from him.

"Is that really what you want, Ronnie?"

"No."

It happened so fast, she had only enough time to catch her breath before his mouth took hers in a kiss she felt clear to her toes. His big hands pulled her shirt over her head and again he took her mouth. Ronnie wrapped her arms around his neck and returned the kiss, pressing her breasts into his chest. Danny moaned at the contact.

He lifted her and sat her on the kitchen counter, his mouth moving down her neck to her breasts. He gave her no time to breathe as he caught one nipple and drew it deep into his mouth with long lingering pulls that had her arching against him. When he moved to the other, she felt his fingers slide into the waistband of her boy shorts and rip the material away. Moisture flooded her at this show of domination.

Ronnie reached for his boxers and shoved them over his hips. When he stepped from them and his cock was freed, she took him in her hand, just as he took her mouth again. His size was impressive, and she knew he would fill her deep.

As she stroked him, he pushed one long finger into her, teasing her body until she was gasping. Then, he added another, and the bite of pain was adding to her pleasure.

He shifted her hips to the edge of the counter and removed his fingers. Ronnie guided him to her center and cried out as he pushed into her. His thrusts were hard, and he didn't stop until she had taken every inch of him.

"Damn, but that feels good." She gasped, catching her breath.

He said nothing as he nibbled her lips, allowing her time to adjust. Then, he moved in short little jabs that began to drive her crazy.

"Do you know just how hot and tight you feel around me?" he whispered in her ear. "Just as I knew you would be... hot, tight and wet for me."

His words caused her to tremble, and when he took her nipple again into his mouth, he thrust harder and longer. She gripped the counter hoping it would keep her grounded. Suddenly, he lifted her and she wrapped her legs around his waist. Then, he

laid her back on the table, took her knees and spread her wide open for him.

She held the edge of the table, taking his thrusts into her body and crying out with the pleasure and the pain. Danny was relentless, driving into her over and over again until she felt she would shatter. Just when she thought her release was upon her, he stopped and slowly pulled from her, and placed his mouth on her swollen and sensitive clit.

"Danny, stop. Please, no more."

"Oh, baby, there will be so much more." He lapped at her, taking her flavor into him. Keeping her on the edge. "So very much more."

For what seemed like hours, he brought her to peak only to slowly let her cool. She was near tears, wanting him so badly that her body ached deep inside. When he slid her closer to him, her legs dangling, she didn't have the strength to protest. Gently he turned her over, and once again slid himself deep inside of her.

He moved harder with each stroke, his hips slapping her ass as he worked her up again. When she tightened and screamed, he lay over her, his chest to her back, his mouth near her ear.

"Let me hear that again, Ronnie."

"It's too much. I can't come again." She panted.

"I plan to prove you wrong."

He was right, and Ronnie was suddenly pushing back against him, begging him for more. She shook and convulsed under him and he moved even harder.

"That's right, Ronnie. Take me with you."

Her inner muscles tightened almost painfully around him, and he joined her in the most fantastic climax of his life. He lay against her, breathing deeply and kissing her back as his body pulsed into her.

When his breathing calmed, he eased from her body. It only then struck him that he had not used a condom. That was one mistake he had never made, but Ronnie and her response had driven logic from his mind.

She retrieved her shirt, and tossed her panties into the trash. Her cheeks flamed

when she dared a look at him.

"I don't always do this, Danny."

"What?"

"Allow men I don't know to screw me in my kitchen."

"Oh? Where do you allow it?"

Her eyes snapped to his and he held his breath, waiting for her reaction. He was teasing her, and he hoped she knew it. Then her eyes sparkled as she sent him a sultry smile.

"Well, usually the garage or the shower."

He walked to her, pulled her against him and lightly kissed her lips.

"Well, I guess I have some catching up to do."

"You know if we continue, this will only complicate matters."

"No complications. I won't ask for more than you want to give." His eyes turned serious. "I hate to ask now, but are you on the pill?"

"Yes." Her cheeks darkened again. "Have been for years."

"I will try to be more prepared in the future. Maybe not tonight, but in the future." He lifted her into his arms and she yelped, wrapping her arms around his neck.

"Now, I believe you said something about a shower."

"I most certainly didn't invite you into my shower."

"Ronnie, baby, I'm so far from being done with you yet. I promise you won't regret it."

He placed her on her feet in the bathroom and started the shower. She admired his firm buttocks and lean form. She shivered, knowing just how strong he was. It sent a thrill throughout her body.

He turned to her and again removed her shirt, then opened the glass door for her. She stepped under the spray and let the warm water pour over her head and down her body. Danny's soapy hands caressed her back and then circled to her belly. He washed her breasts and then reached for the shampoo, washing her hair and helping her to rinse. When he soaped his hands again and caressed her between her thighs, she



leaned into him.

Ronnie leaned into his touch, then reached for the soap. Lathering her hands, she reached behind them and between them, returning the caress. She smiled as he came to life in her hands.

"Someone wants to play." She chuckled. "I think he likes me."

"Do you really think so? I'm not so sure."

Ronnie turned and smiled up into his eyes. Danny was handsome, but wet he was damn sexy. She stepped back and let the water wash away the soap, then her look turned wicked.

"What are you up to?"

"I think I may need to work on him a little. I mean, he seems to like me." She licked her lips and watched his eyes flare. "But a girl can never be too sure."

She lightly pushed against his chest until he took the hint, sitting on the built in bench. Ronnie dropped to her knees and raked her nails over his thighs. She loved the way his muscles tightened under her hands. She played with him, a teasing lick here, a gentle nip there. Danny was growling by the time she took him into her warm mouth.

She rolled him over her tongue, light suction on the head of him before taking him deeper with each stroke. His hands tangled in her hair as his hips jerked forward, urging her on. His moans and gasps were just as good as his hands on her body. She was so hot for him and increased the suction of her mouth.

His cock hit the back of her throat and she swallowed quickly, taking him into her even deeper. Chancing a glance, she saw him watching her, and it made her even more determined to please him.

"Enough, Ronnie."

She shook her head, not wanting to release him. She would bring him to the peak as he did her, and not allow his climax until she was ready.

"I'll come."

She only increased her movements, placing her hand around the thick base. When she felt him swell, and heard his gasp, she tightened her hold, stopping his

climax. She released him then, kissing his belly.

"Witch." He growled as he came to his feet, lifted her and turned, placing her back to the shower wall. "Play with fire baby, expect to be burned."

"I'm already on fire, Danny."

He took her against the shower wall, pounding into her, bringing her to a screaming release before taking his own. When her feet finally touched the floor, he rested his head in the curve of her neck.

"Someday, I will have to make love to you in the bed, the proper way."

"Proper? Who the hell wants proper?"

"Okay, slowly. I will have to love you slowly."

"No complaints here, big boy."

She yawned then, but her smile was a satisfied one.

They rinsed and turned off the water, drying one another and wrapped in towels. He followed her to her room. She looked at him, her brow raised and looking none too serious.

"Don't even think it, woman. I'm sleeping in here because I want to hold you."

She looked surprised at his answer, but said nothing as she retrieved a nightgown.

"You won't be needing that, Ronnie."

"I never sleep in the nude."

"After what we just shared, I intend to have your body next to mine, skin on skin." He dropped his towel and climbed into the bed. "Now get in here."

"Demanding one, aren't you?" She smiled as she climbed in beside him.

"I just know what I want." He pulled her to him and she laid her head on his chest. "And I want you beside me all night."

With a yawn and a smile, his body heat seeping into her, Ronnie drifted off into a peaceful sleep. Tonight, not even a killer could intrude.

## Chapter Four

Danny opened his eyes to the early morning light and the feel of soft curves against his own. A glance at the alarm said it was a few minutes away from sounding off. After the night they had shared, six in the morning seemed awful early. His body stirred at the memory and he pushed it away. No time for play this morning. They had a killer to track down.

Before the thought left his mind, the alarm sounded and Ronnie stirred, stretching like a lazy but content cat. He knew the minute last night came to her, because she stiffened. Not giving her the chance to make excuses, he quickly rolled her, coming over her and looked into her eyes. She was beautiful in the morning, her hair tussled and her lips still swollen from his kisses. Those lips had driven him insane last night.

"Morning." He kissed her lightly. "Sleep well?"

"What are you doing, Danny? We need to get to work."

"Is this the part where we pretend last night didn't happen?"

"Don't you think it's better this way? We both know nothing will come of it."

He frowned, wondering why her comment struck him in a funny way. That was all he wanted, sex, or at least, he thought so until this moment.

"What makes you say that?"

"It was sex, instant attraction that we gave into. I'm sure the need has passed."

"Has it?" He kissed her, deeply and with purpose. Her sigh and the way she held him to her said she didn't believe her own words. "I think it was more than that, Ronnie, but we can discuss that later. Now get your butt out of bed, woman."

He didn't wait to see her face, but he would bet her jaw had dropped. Naked as the day he was born, Danny went to the kitchen; started coffee and watched as she shuffled into the room, a blue silk robe covering her body.

"Would you put some clothes on?" She snapped, watching the coffee. Anything to keep from staring at him.

"Does my body offend you? I seem to remember you liked it very well last night."

She blushed, scowled and stomped from the room. He held onto his laughter until he knew she was in the shower. Ronnie was going to be more fun than he had first suspected.

He took his turn in the bathroom, though he switched to cold. Being in the shower was bringing back very pleasant memories best left forgotten for now. His body came to instant life with just the slightest thought.

Dressed for the day, he tried to hide his appreciation for the woman who could turn cop so quickly. Ronnie was all professional once that badge was in place. She dressed much like he did, jeans and shirts that went well with a jacket. He had always believed it ridiculous to wear a suit and expensive clothing. He had tried once, but running after a suspect through the city streets and often very dirty and polluted areas, made one believe that a six-month salary on a suit was not only a waste of money, but damn well insane.

She looked comfortable, professional, and ready to go on the hunt for a man who seemed to be twisted. Danny had to wonder if she was even afraid.

"Ronnie, does it scare you at all?"

"What?"

"That there seems to be a mad man out there with you on his mind?"

"Well, I don't like it. It makes this case personal." She rinsed her cup and set it in the sink. "But it makes me even more determined to find him. Am I scared? Sure I am, Danny. I'm no fool. Will I run? Not a chance."

"No. I don't believe running is in your nature."

"Ready to go?"

"Ready."

Danny had already made up his mind about last night. He would give her the space she needed, for now, but he had a taste of Veronica Chase, and he wanted more. The day would be long, but the nights would be just as good, if not better, than the previous one. He smiled to himself as he followed her out the door. It wasn't over by a long shot.

At the station house, they split. Ronnie checked on lab results of the crime scene and Danny sat at the desk next to Ronnie's that had been brought in for him. Unfortunately, it was across from the glowering Brody. He tried, he really did, but the looks coming from the detective was enough to rankle.

"Is there something you need, Brody?"

"You can give me my partner back."

"Look, the captain asked for me to join this investigation. Got a problem? Take it up with the man behind the big wooden door. It's right over there."

"There is nothing you're doing that I couldn't do." Brody glared. "Unless, of course, mattress play is involved."

"Watch it, detective. You're treading on very thin ice." Danny said, though he never glanced up from his file. "Ronnie is a good cop, and I don't think I like what your insinuating."

"Like the whole damn squad room isn't talking about the two of you."

Danny placed the file to the side and stood slowly. His body was relaxed, but the tension was evident in his tone.

"If the squad has something to gossip about, I could well imagine where they got their information."

"Piss off, Monroe. I have better things to think about and do, than to wonder how many times last night you got between Ronnie's thighs."

It was then that Danny noticed Ronnie. She had been standing directly behind Brody. His surprise must have been on his face, because Brody paled and turned.

The thud of a fist connecting with flesh sounded throughout the room.

"You son of a bitch! How long have we been partners? And would you mind telling me again why I put up with you?"

Brody rubbed his eye with the heel of his hand. It was already beginning to swell. Danny made a move to step between them, but Ronnie held him off.

"Thanks, but no thanks, Monroe. I can handle this myself."

"Damn it, Ronnie. If you weren't a woman I'd deck you for that." Brody sputtered and glared at her. "Had you been a man you'd be on your ass right now."

"You didn't have so much respect for me a few minutes ago. I can't believe your nerve. So come on, Brody." She let her jacket fall to the floor. "Give it your best shot. Why stop now? You already look like a jackass."

"Ah, come on Ronnie. I was just pissed."

"Well, so am I. I didn't ask for a new partner, though, I think I'm starting to see the benefits of the trade." She picked up her coat. "Stay the hell away from me, Brody Taylor. Stay the hell away from me and my case."

"Ronnie."

"No. You can go get bent, Brody. Until you figure out your problem, whatever it may be, we have nothing more to say."

Ronnie walked into Joe's office. Danny hadn't even noticed if the captain had seen the entire episode. Damn. Would Ronnie be penalized for striking a fellow officer? Danny didn't bother to say anymore to Brody. He turned and entered Joe's office.

Joe closed his door and took his place behind his desk. He didn't look angry, and look worried.

"Wanna tell me what all that was about? Or did I catch most of it?"

"Brody is being an ass." Ronnie said it as if she punched him daily. "He deserved what he got, Joe."

"I have no doubts, but if he decides to, he can make it very hard on you."

"Like his antics and his mouth have made any of this any easier."

"Alright, let's move on for now. We can cross that bridge when we come to it."

He flipped through the form on his desk. "What happened last night?"

"A brick broke my window."

"No shit, Ronnie." He turned to Danny. "Monroe, could you enlighten me? Or will you be a smart ass too?"

Danny covered his smile, but he really wanted to laugh. Ronnie was being cocky.

"It was about the time the lights were all out, then a crash. This was tied to the brick." He handed Joe the note. "I also have the brick bagged, but I doubt there will be any prints."

Joe read the note. The frown on his face was deeper now with concern.

"Anything from the lab?"

"No prints." Ronnie perked up now. She was all business in regards to the case. "The medical examiner, your lovely wife, did however say that there were signs of spermicide. Our perp used a condom. She was strangled after the sexual act, not during."

"Not a trace was left?"

"None. Even if she had performed oral sex on the perpetrator, any evidence would have been destroyed while she died." At his look, she explained. "In this case, the fear and the trauma may have caused the stomach acids to rise like bile."

"I see." Joe leaned back in his chair. "What or who are we dealing with here? This suspect has balls. To be close enough to throw a brick through the window of a lead detective's house and still we have nothing. Says he is intelligent. Knows what he is doing."

"Or, he could know the ins and outs of the job." Danny spoke up then. "He could very well be a cop."

Ronnie's eyes snapped to his and he could see what she was thinking.

"If you're about to suggest Brody, I would have to disagree."

"No, I wouldn't suggest it, but only for two reasons. One, he may be a jackass, but he is only angry at losing his partner. Secondly, in all honesty, I don't think he would have the brains or talent to be so discrete. The man is a ticking time bomb."

"He has had family problems."

"That's neither here nor there. But we can't rule out the possibility that we may be dealing with a suspect who knows procedure."

Joe stood and walked to the window in his office over looking the city. Lines of worry stood out on his face, making him look older than Ronnie could ever remember.

"Damn. I would hate to think one of our own could be involved." He looked at Danny and Ronnie. "Until we get something solid, the case will only be discussed between the two of you, me, and the medical examiner."

"Understood."

"Ronnie, whoever this guy is, you seem to be his target. No chances, do you get me? No guns blazing and playing the hero."

"I will be on my best behavior, captain."

"That will be the day." He shook his head and smiled. "Why don't you two start with the hotel owner where the body was found? Someone had to have seen this man, or at least Vicky Harper."

Brody tried again to speak with Ronnie, but she passed him without a glance. Danny didn't miss the look that crossed the man's face. It was stunned surprise, and then red-faced anger. There was something more to Brody's feelings for Ronnie, he was sure of it.

In the car, she was quiet, and Danny thought now was as good a time as any to figure out the puzzle that was Ronnie and Brody.

"What was between you two?"

"Who?"

"You and Brody."

She sighed, pulled into traffic, and headed in the direction of the crime scene.

"We were in the academy together, and even as beat cops, we were partners. Seemed only fitting when we advanced."

"And?"

"One drunken night, we went too far, and it was over the next day."



"Maybe for you."

"What are you talking about?" Her look said she genuinely didn't know that Brody had a thing for her.

"Ronnie, you may have let it go, but he still carries the torch."

"That's just ridiculous. He's married with kids."

Danny shook his head. She couldn't be that blind to what was really going on. Brody Taylor was a jealous man and saw Danny as a threat.

"Didn't you say they were on the outs?"

"Well, yes. His wife hates me, and is demanding he find another partner."

"And it doesn't strike you as odd that he seems to choose you over his wife and kids?"

Ronnie narrowed her eyes as she thought about it. Could it be possible? If so, how could she not have known?

"I think I need to have a talk with Brody."

"He looks at me like he wants to kill me. He's jealous that I was partnered with you."

"I will straighten it all out."

Danny stayed silent. He didn't like the feeling he had in his gut. All he wanted was to tell her to hell with Brody and let him think what he wanted. Then, take her back to her place and love her slowly. He never thought it would be possible, but he was very taken with this woman. He wouldn't say love, or falling in love, but he knew he would kill anyone who touched her. He considered Ronnie his. At least until this case was solved.

"Here we are," Ronnie said, pulling into the parking area. "What do you think our chances are?"

"Slim to none. You take the office, and I'll start a door to door."

"Fine. I can meet up with you afterwards."

Ronnie walked quickly to the office, wanting to put some distance between them. Detective Monroe had an odd way of making her shiver when he looked at her. She

knew it was desire and lust she felt. How she would survive this case, she was unsure. If the suspect didn't get her first, Danny just might.

The inside of the hotel office was what you would expect from a cheap movie. The red tacky carpet was a sick blend with the burnt orange walls. A very potent incense was burning, and she had smelled enough to know that it was a cover up for the distinct smell of the hash being smoked. She rang the bell, frowning as she wiped the dusty grease from her fingers onto her jeans.

The woman who appeared from behind the curtain coughed and waved her hand in the air. Ronnie wasn't surprised, considering the amount of smoke rolling out from behind her. She was a billboard for all the reasons not to smoke the wacky stuff. Her orange hair matched the walls, and her over sized sundress looked like a circus tent. The make-up on her face was not any better.

"By the hour or by the day?" Her voice was so rough; she could have passed for a man easily if a person didn't see her.

"Excuse me?"

"Do you want a room by the hour, or do you need it for the day?"

"Neither." Ronnie pulled her badge. "I'm Veronica Chase, a detective with the city police. I would like to ask you about the events of two nights past."

"I told them other cops all I know."

Ronnie watched her face and didn't miss the shift of her eyes. She was lying, and not very well.

"Look, I don't even want your name. All I want is a little information."

"What's in it for me?"

"How about I don't bust your ass for all the Mary Jane cooking up in the back room?"

Brightly painted blue eyelids rose before her eyes narrowed. Bright red lips clamped together, showing her defiance at being beat.

"Vicky Harper had men in and out of that room all the time. It was bound to happen sooner or later."

"She was a human being and died by the hands of a madman."

"Not my problem." She flicked the ash of her cigarette on the floor. "But if you wanna know if I saw who her last john was, I didn't."

Ronnie sighed, knowing the woman was hiding something, but to stand there and argue was wasting time. She pulled her cell phone from her jacket pocket.

"Here is my card. I'm sure, before the day is out, you will remember something."

As the woman watched, Ronnie dialed the number to the station house.

"Captain? Detective Chase here...no sir, the owner saw nothing on the night in question." Ronnie hid a grin, knowing circus lady was about to freak. "Sir, I am requesting a team of drug enforcement to this location. Yes, there is more than probable cause. Thank you, sir."

Ronnie disconnected the line and gave the woman her sweetest smile.

"You have about, oh, I would say, twenty minutes before the task force arrives with their dogs and other gadgets."

"I told you all I know."

"No, you didn't. And it's okay. One way or another, I will get my information." She turned to the door before she added. "But drug dealers make me sick. There is no way all that back there is just for you. I refuse to walk out of here, knowing that shit may be in the hands of a child by nightfall. Have a good day."

She left the indignant woman and felt a small lift in her step. If nothing else were accomplished today, another drug peddler would be arrested. She may not serve time, but she would be watched like a hawk.

Ronnie caught Danny as he was leaving the last room.

"Anything?" she asked, matching his stride to the car.

"Nothing. You get anything?"

"Nothing about our case. But the woman was a peddler and task force is on its way."

"Not a good way to earn cooperation."

"No, but I bet she thinks twice before stoking the fires again."

They climbed into the car, and examined their files again.

"Let's go talk the M E. Maybe Becky can shed some light."

"Works for me. We need to catch a break." He rubbed the bridge of his nose.

"But something tells me that he is about to hit again."

"Maybe this was just random. Maybe I really pissed someone off and he is striking out, making me look bad."

"I don't think so, baby."

"Okay, you're probably right." She started the car. "Oh, and Danny?"

"What?"

"Don't ever call me baby."

"Ten four boss lady."

She rolled her eyes and waved at the drug agents rolling in. As she pulled onto the street, she racked her brain on any possible suspects from the past that could have it out for her. She had arrested so many dealers, rapists, child predators and abusive spouses. She had brought in killers and crime boss hopefuls, but damn if she could think of even one with the smarts to pull this off so cleanly.

"Damn. I sure hate to think of another death all because some psycho has it out for me."

"What makes you think the perp is crazy?"

"You don't? A man choking the life out of another human being, all for the sake of getting to me?"

"For him, there could be many reasons. But the way I see it, if he is so damn crazy, why didn't he screw up? Even just a little. No, this guy is cunning and knows what he is doing."

"Do you really think it could be a cop?"

"I really do. A cop or someone who knows forensics and crime scene procedure."

Ronnie felt sick. If it were a cop, she would have to face the fact that not all of her fellow officers played for the right team. She knew there were some who played dirty, but she would hate to think that a cop would go so low as to kill the very people they

had vowed to protect and serve.

Walking into the M E building, Ronnie scrunched her nose at the smell of alcohol and disinfectant that was so potent. She hoped the odor would not be radiating from her when she left. She stopped at the front desk and presented her badge, along with Danny. It was habit, even though most of the workers knew her personally. The little blonde behind the desk smiled, but when her eyes settled on Danny, her breasts seemed to grow right out of her tiny blouse.

"Hi, Detective Chase," she said, but her eyes remained on Danny.

"Is Becky in?"

"Yes."

Ronnie rolled her eyes. She looked at Danny and could see he was clearly uncomfortable. Now that was funny.

"Jennifer? Hello?" Ronnie knocked on the counter. "Roll your tongue back up and please tell Becky we're here."

"Oh, sure thing, Ronnie." She picked up the phone. "Becky is in autopsy one. She says to come on back."

"Thank you. Let's go, Monroe."

Danny hurried to her side and resisted the urge to look back. He could feel the eyes of the girl on his back and wanted to cover his ass with his hands.

"You enjoyed that didn't you?"

"What?" Ronnie hoped her innocent tone covered her amusement.

"That girl is a walking hormone."

"You loved it."

"Jealous?"

"Not today, anyway. But, I can try again later."

"Smart ass."

"You know, I get that a lot."

Danny resisted, but he so wanted to slap her ass. One, to shut her up, and two, because he would just like to spank Ronnie Chase.

He had a feeling the little detective may like that. He promised to find out one day very soon.

## Chapter Five

"Come on in, Ronnie," Becky said from her place at the scrub sink. "I was just finishing up."

"Do you have time to talk about this case?"

"You bet. Who's your friend?"

"Detective Monroe, this is the incredible Becky Campbell." She shook his hand. "She's also Joe's wife."

"Everyone knows that, Ronnie." Becky smiled. "Let's go into the next room and I can take you step by step on what little I do know. It will be easier if I show you the body."

They each put on scrubs, masks and latex gloves. Ronnie listened intently, hoping to catch anything that would help them track this guy. The body of poor Vicky was her only chance at this point in time.

"Vicky Harper had no idea what was going to happen to her. There were no signs of a struggle at all, other than a few fibers under her nails. My guess would be the perp wore a wool coat, and she may have tried to break his hold by clutching the arms."

Danny and Ronnie both stood silently, waiting until the end of Becky's presentation. Becky removed the sheet, and worked her way down from head to toe.

"No head or facial wounds. There was some bruising to the back of the throat, but that's not uncommon really. Many johns tend to be rough with oral sex. No hair or fibers of any kind were found. Her mouth was clean. I even scraped her teeth. The bruising around her neck shows her manner of death. The perp slowly applied pressure until her wind was cut off. This took tremendous strength. It's actually not an easy

thing, to strangle a person to death, especially when they are alert. The color on her throat indicates the pressure was there and increased over a time span of minutes. No wounds, inside or out to the chest or abdomen. However, while examining her vagina for semen, I found fresh marks indicating her last client was not your average man. There was no trauma. Rape was not the crime. A condom was used. No other marks on her legs or any other part of her body.”

“So, basically, he had sex with her, then killed her, and then had the mind to clean up any evidence that may be likely.” Ronnie stated it as fact, not a question.

“I wish I had more for you, Ronnie. There is just nothing on her body that I can find.”

“Thanks, Becky.” She turned to Danny. “I have never felt so helpless.”

He nodded, understanding her desire to seek justice for this woman. Not to mention, for Danny, he hated the thought that if this guy wasn’t caught, it may be Ronnie on the table next. That thought caused something inside him to sit up and take notice. Over his dead body. Danny would watch her every second if he had to.

“All we can do now is head back to the station house and read the files again and again,” he said, putting away his notebook. “Something is there. We’re just not seeing it.”

Nodding, she hugged Becky and led the way out of the autopsy room. Danny hurried her out the front door, hoping to avoid the lusty Jennifer.

Ronnie remained quiet and deep in thought, so he opted to drive. She handed him the keys, climbed inside and laid her head back against the seat. It was odd, just one homicide victim, but she knew she had to work it like it had been a hundred. In her gut, she knew there would be more. Someone out there was making a statement. She shivered thinking of what Vicky must have gone through.

“You okay, Ronnie?”

“Yes, I just don’t know how to proceed.”

Danny didn’t either. It looked like they would have to wait for victim number two, but there was no way in hell he would say that to her.



As they made their way back to the station and to their desks, Ronnie noticed Brody's desk was empty. Frowning, she left Danny to the case file and walked into Joe's office.

"Where is, Brody?"

"He is taking a few weeks of paid leave. He was due and I thought it was a good idea." Joe shrugged. "He didn't like it, but I hoped it would help to fix any family issues."

"That was a good idea. I've been worried."

"I was worried too, Ronnie, for you. Right now, Brody can't be trusted to act."

"Okay. I didn't get anything from the hotel and neither did Danny. Becky took us on a step by step of the body. Nothing there either."

"What's your plan now?"

"We're going to pour over the file, see if anything might stand out that we may have missed."

"Fine. Keep me posted."

She nodded and returned to her desk, but her eyes kept straying to Brody's chair. It felt empty without him there. They had been friends and partners for so long. Could Danny have been right? Could Brody still want more from her? It made no sense though. Why would he marry Sarah, if he didn't love her? Shaking her head, she returned to the file on her desk and began to read everything, once again, line for line.

So deep in concentration, she didn't notice the delivery man until he thunked another vase of flowers in front of her.

"What's this?" She knew she sounded stupid, but it was the first thing that came to mind.

"F-l-o-w-e-r-s."

She narrowed her eyes at the little geek who had delivered the last batch. He was talking to her as if she were slow.

"Well, I can see that. So let's skip the pleasant chit chat and give me the damn paper so I can sign it," she snapped. "I'm sure you're late for the next Ass's -R- Us

convention."

"Whatever you say, lady."

"That's Detective Chase, you little ingrate." She signed her name and shoved it back into his hands. "Now go away before I arrest you for the simple pleasure of it."

He walked away, popping his chewing gum and in no hurry at all.

"Friend of yours?"

"The little monster delivered the last batch." Suddenly, she looked at the invoice. His name was scrolled across the bottom. "Danny, send a unit to pick him up. He may have seen the perp."

"I bet you don't want him to know that though."

"Nah. Let the little monkey think he's in trouble." Her smile faded as she read the card. "Oh, damn."

"I sent a unit, now let me see the card." He took it and read it to himself. "We better let Joe see this."

They walked into the captain's office and handed him the card.

"Detective Veronica Chase. Number one was for fun, number two was for you. Goodnight, Sweetheart."

Ronnie sat, putting her hands through her hair.

"He's gonna kill again." Joe said, laying the note aside.

"No, his number two victim is already dead." At the looks from Joe and Ronnie, he continued. "He said number two was for you. Not is for you. Past tense. She is already dead."

"So now we just have to wait to find the body." Ronnie stood and paced. "Damn. Maybe there is something I can do. Maybe I can set myself up as bait for this bastard."

"No."

"No?" She looked at Danny. "Who the hell do you think you are?"

His eyes narrowed but he remained silent. So she turned to Joe.

"Well, I'm your superior and I say no."

"Joe, more are going to die."

"I refuse to even discuss this." The phone rang, and Joe picked it up. When he hung up, his face was drawn. "Brody is going to jail."

"What?"

"He just caused Sarah to have a night in the hospital."

"What happened?"

"It looks like he beat her."

Ronnie hurried from the room and headed down to central booking. Joe waited until she was out of hearing distance before turning to Danny.

"I know she cares for him. They have been partners since they both graduated." He shook his head. "But if he hasn't gone off his rocker, I will eat my own shoe."

"I don't trust him. I think he has feelings beyond a partner for Ronnie."

"Stay with her, Monroe. She doesn't need to worry about Brody and a killer."

Danny nodded and left the room. He gave it ten minutes and followed.

\* \* \* \*

"What the hell happened?" Ronnie asked as she paced before her friend and partner. "You hit her?"

"I don't know exactly. One minute it was about my leave and the next you." he sighed. "I didn't mean for it to go so far."

"They are keeping her over night, Brody. And why in the hell would you fight over me? She is your wife. She should always come first."

"Everything will be fine. I posted my bail and will stay at the station house tonight."

"Brody, I just don't understand you. I have a killer after me, and instead of hunting him down, I am worrying about you."

"Who the hell asked you to be my mother?" he snapped, standing. "Like you said, we are partners. That don't make you my keeper."

"Maybe you need one."

"Piss off, Ronnie. Just go away."

"Oh, I will. The minute I am upstairs, I plan to request a change of partners."

"Fine. I really don't give a fuck anymore."

"Fine."

Ronnie slammed from the detaining room and barely missed knocking Danny on his ass. She could feel the tears in her eyes, and she didn't want him to see her like that.

"Whoa!" He caught his balance. "You okay?"

"I'm fine, just fine."

Danny tried to turn her face to his, but she pulled away. Taking her hand, he walked her down the hall to an empty break room. When he had her alone, he wrapped his arms around her and held her close to him. He could feel her body shaking, and he knew she was one that hated to cry.

"It's okay, Ronnie. You can have my shoulder and I won't tell a soul," he whispered, not letting her pull away. "You can't always be the strong one."

As if his words opened the lock on her heart, she started to cry. Ronnie cried for the victim that was found, the one yet to be found, and for a lost friend. It was too much for her to take in all at once. She wrapped her arms around Danny and let it all out.

After a time, she sniffed and slowly pulled back. He handed her a tissue from the counter and waited while she cleaned her face.

"Better?"

"Yes. Damn, I'm sorry. I usually don't break down like that."

"It's nice to know that you're human." He smiled.

She smiled and sniffed, then gasped when he kissed her lightly. When she didn't pull away, he kissed her again.

"We really shouldn't do this."

"But we are. And if you think for one minute that things are settled between us, you had better think again."

"Danny, we are partners."

"We are temporary partners, Ronnie. When the day is done, I plan to show you

the difference between partners by day and lovers by night."

He kissed her again, then left her standing alone in the break room. She touched her lips and another tingle rolled through her. If she didn't guard herself, she could get used to this. Wiping her eyes and making sure she was presentable; she left the room and walked back up the stairs. Danny was talking with Joe, and she could tell something was up.

"What's going on?" she asked when Danny handed her a radio and her jacket.

"Nothing serious, but Joe seems to think since we have no leads, that if we spend more time at your place, he may show himself."

"I doubt that."

"Never know what may be hiding in the bushes." He winked. "It's after four and I feel like I could eat a mule. Let's fire up the grill and enjoy a day off with pay."

"Fine, but you're the chef."

"Agreed."

\* \* \* \*

From his spot in the trees, he watched her, dressed in shorts with her tiny little top. Monroe was proving to be a challenge to his patience. It rankled him to see the man's hands on his Veronica. She was his; she just didn't know it, though he wanted her now for so much more than his lover.

He had watched them last night. Monroe had fucked her right on the kitchen table. She had loved every stroke of the other man inside of her body. He hadn't even used protection. She had better not come to him with that bastard's seed planted in her belly. She already needed to be punished for allowing his body near hers.

Oh, she would be punished. He would tie her to his bed and show her all the ways he could punish her, then he would fill her with himself. Every part of her beautiful body would be filled with him. He would show her what it was like to have a real man between her thighs.

Ronnie would be ready for her evening walk soon, and knowing Monroe would follow her, he couldn't make his move. But he left her a gift. Would she appreciate his gift?

He rubbed his hand over his crotch, hoping to ease the ache that Ronnie always caused when he saw her or thought about her. She would be worth the wait. She would be tight and hot, and she would beg him for the mercy only he could give her.

On silent feet, he walked deeper into the trees, far enough away from being seen, but close enough to see her surprise when she found his gift. He stiffened at the sound of her laughter, and of Monroe laughing with her. Just another reason to punish her.

Her punishment was growing by the day. He would make it so very sweet, and so sweetly painful.

## Chapter Six

"I have to admit, Danny. That was the best steak I have ever had."

"I do aim to please." He winked. "Bachelor life has its perks."

"I bet."

They cleared the outside table and carried the dishes inside. Ronnie felt so full she thought she might pop.

"I'm gonna need to take a walk and work off some of this food."

"I could help you work it off, and all from the comforts of home."

Danny stepped in behind her at the sink and pulled her back against his chest, kissing her neck and feeling her shiver. His hands roamed her belly and skimmed her breasts.

"What do you have in mind?"

"Lots." He continued kissing her neck, sliding his hand down the front of her shorts, stroking the soft curls his fingers threaded through. "Each and every thought with your pleasure in mind."

Her arms rose and she wrapped them around his neck. This position, with him behind her caused her breasts to arch and gave him a good view of her hard nipples through the t-shirt. His free hand covered one mound and he caressed it in time with his hand in her shorts.

He rubbed his cock into her backside, pulling her closer. Ronnie dropped one arm and reached between them. Her fingers made quick work of his fly and her hand slipped inside. When her fingers wrapped around him, he thrust into her hand. He increased the pressure of his own hand, and soon their hips moved in unison.

"You make me burn, Ronnie."

She turned her head and took his mouth with hers. She could feel the pulsing of his thick cock in her hand, and suddenly the thought of him coming for her this way was so erotic, her hips jerked and she gasped into his mouth.

"I'm so damn close, baby. You feel so good."

"Come for me, Danny."

Her words had the desired effect, and he groaned into her mouth, plunged two fingers into her, and came. She erupted with him, filling his hand with her release. Each pulsing jet from him coated her hand and her lower back.

It wasn't until their hearts slowed that they parted. Standing at the sink, they washed their hands, and then he pulled her to him again. His kiss was different than before. Like he was trying to tell her something but she was too lost to think about it.

"That's what I call an after dinner delight."

"And it was delightful." She returned his kiss. "Now, can we take that walk?"

"Anything for you, my lady." He reached into the kitchen drawer that hid his firearm. Checking to make sure it was loaded and the safety on, he tucked it into his pants. "Just in case."

She nodded, understanding they couldn't be too careful. But she needed to walk. She needed to clear her mind. So much was happening so fast, and now Danny was on her list of things to worry over. She could easily become addicted to the man.

The woods were her favorite place to go when things built up. This was the one place she could walk through, take her time, and let nature be her soothing balm. There had been times she had spent many hours just sitting, listening to the birds. Once she had found a small creek bed and had fallen asleep against a tree. The water had sounded so calming, trickling on its merry way. Like the stream, she wished her troubles could wash away. But that was not logical. So, she took what she could from the trees and its surroundings.

Having Danny with her was nice. He didn't say a word, just walked along beside her. For some reason, she was enjoying sharing this time with him. Maybe it would help



to sooth his worries as well. She refused to believe she was falling for the man. Sex was awesome, and his touch could ignite her desires in an instant. But surely what she felt was nothing like love. More like lust. It had to be. It was just too soon to even consider such an emotion. Wasn't it?

Danny took her hand and let her set the pace. Her heart picked up its pace with just that one simple touch and that handsome smile.

"It's very nice out here, Ronnie."

"These woods have been my haven for many years. After dad died and I bought a house outside the city, my very first night here was all I needed to regroup and move on."

"You still miss him, I know. My dad died when I was very young, but I miss my mother a lot."

"My dad was all I had. My mom walked out when life as a cop's wife got to hard." She laughed a little. "I always thought my dad being a cop was the most incredible thing. She never looked back, and I never looked for her."

"I have heard stories about your father." He squeezed her hand. "Hell of a good cop."

"That he was." Ronnie agreed. "I remember my first date. He scared the hell out of the boy, telling him he knew people, powerful people."

"And when you joined the academy?"

"He was very proud. My only regret is he never seen me make detective."

"He knows, and I would lay odds that he roots you on." He tugged her arm playfully. "And the saints cry when he cusses you for being reckless."

"Now, that would be something I can count on."

For a time they lapsed into silence, each enjoying the others company. Danny spotted a fallen tree about waist high and pulled her with him. He sat and tucked her between his thighs.

"Have I told you how beautiful I think you are?"

"No, I don't believe so." She smiled, her arms rested on his shoulders.

"How about sexy, desirable, and down right tasty?"

"Nope, not that either."

"I must be losing my ability to be charming." He cupped her face in his hands. "I think you are all that and more."

"Danny,"

She didn't finish as his lips took hers in a kiss so tender, she would have cried if it had made sense to do so. He didn't try to touch her in any other way, and something inside her began to crack. The part of her she had always hoped to save for that one special man was opening, and she was powerless to fight it.

He pulled away and she laid her head on his chest. His heart beat strong and steady. That was Danny, strong and steady. Something was happening between them and she didn't understand it. It was too soon, but it was there nonetheless.

"What's happening between us, Danny?" The minute she asked, she wished she hadn't.

"Well, I hope something special."

"Special?"

"Look, Ronnie. I don't understand it, and I have questioned it. But what I feel is beyond the sex or a partner relationship."

"So, I'm not the only one wondering if this is going somewhere?"

"No, you're not. But it makes me feel better to know you thought about it."

"I guess the date I have Friday night is off." She hid her smile when he stiffened. "I will call him later and tell him I can't go."

"You have been seeing someone?"

"Oh, it was nothing really."

"Ronnie." He tipped her chin and looked into her eyes. "I don't share. If you want to see where this leads, you better tell him and all the rest no."

"Or?"

"I'll kick their ass and spank yours."

She couldn't contain the giggle that soon became a chuckle.

"What is so funny?"

"You."

"Me? I mean it, Ronnie."

"I know, and that's what's so damn funny." She shook her head. "I don't have a date."

"What?"

"I was teasing you. You're the first man I have had anything to do with in almost a year." She flicked his ear with her finger. "So don't start getting all bossy."

"Why you little tease." He reached for her and she dodged. "You're gonna pay for that."

With a shriek, she turned and ran down the familiar path. It felt good to be so carefree, and Danny was fun to toy with. Inside she had a little doubt, but she did believe what he had said. If he wanted to see just where they could go, she was game.

Ronnie could hear him getting closer and she poured on a little more steam. When she reached her destination, a favorite little groove in a tree, she hunkered inside and waited.

Danny stopped when he reached the place he last saw her. Looking at the ground, he followed her footsteps up a small incline. Again, he paused and looked around. He heard her chuckle and turned, spotting her in the tree's deep groove. You could fit three of her in the thing, but something more caught his attention. His eyes narrowed, and he slowly walked forward.

"What is it? Scared of the bugs?"

"Ronnie, don't turn around. Just follow your steps and slowly walk to me."

"Danny?" She felt the tingle race down her spine. "What is it?"

"Baby, just do as I say. Ease yourself out, and walk to me. Don't turn or touch anything."

"Don't touch anything?" Her eyes grew wide. "Oh my god! There's a body in here with me, isn't there?"

"Ronnie"

"Oh my god!" She shouted and lunged from the tree. "Dust me off. Oh dear lord, make sure I don't have anything important clinging to me."

When she turned and looked back at the tree, for the first time in her career, she felt sick. Turning, she ran to another spot yards away and proceeded to be violently ill. She felt Danny's hand on her back, heard the click of the safety on his firearm, but it all seemed so far away.

"Will you be okay, Ronnie?"

"Sure." She half laughed. "Considering I just spent the better part of five minutes in a hollowed out tree with a dead body."

"I need to call Joe." He flipped the cell phone open, sighing when he got a signal. "At least this works out here."

Ronnie sat heavily on the ground, spitting the bile from her mouth and fighting to remain calm. The odds of this not being connected to the case was thin at best, but she could hope. She looked again to the tree, and it registered that this victim looked more like a doll. She was poised inside the groove, her hair flowing around her face. Even her dress looked like something you would see on a china doll, white and blue checkered. Her eyes were open and there was something odd about them, but she couldn't put her finger on it. The rest of her face was in shadow.

"Joe and the crime scene unit are on the way. He's picking up Becky and will be here within twenty minutes."

"Okay."

"You okay, baby?"

"Danny, I told you not to call me that."

He sat behind her on the ground, turning her face away from the body. Danny pulled her to him, hoping to soothe her.

"For right now, Ronnie, let me call you whatever the hell I want and comfort you."

She leaned into him and closed her eyes.

Danny stared at the poor woman in the tree. There was something more about

this one. Things just looked off. They would find out more when the others arrived.

"I have walked these woods for years and never even saw another soul." She was calmer now. "This son of a bitch knows my every move, Danny."

"I know, baby. Just relax for now." He stroked her back. "I have a feeling when the others arrive you will be all work again, the dedicated detective who has nerves of steel. So just let me be here for you right now."

"You gonna chase the demons away?"

"For you, I will."

Ronnie accepted his comfort and just sat quietly, breathing deeply and calming herself. She would need to examine the scene, but for now, she just wanted to stay right where she was.

The sound of vehicles drew them apart, and they both stood, directing the officers in their units. The minute Joe was out of the car she hurried to him.

"Before you ask anything, I need a mint."

"What?" he asked, but reached into his pocket for the peppermints he always carried. "You okay, Ronnie? You hate mints."

"Don't ask." At his look, she sighed. "I got sick, Joe."

"I see."

"I was in the damn tree with her body, Joe."

"It's alright, Ronnie. Let's just see what we can find out."

She chewed the mint and accepted another. It calmed her stomach and helped her to focus. It took an hour, but the area around the tree was inspected and processed. Then slowly, pulling by the feet, they removed the body from the tree.

"Here is her handbag." Becky handed it to Joe.

"Vivian Stewart." He read and looked at the picture on the ID. "It's her, but she's been done up a bit."

"What do you mean?" Becky asked. "I don't want to mess anything up if her appearance is changed."

"Well, in her photo she's blonde with blue eyes." He sighed. "And she don't

have a big 'W' on her forehead."

"That much I have guessed, Joe."

"Well, you asked honey."

Becky shook her head and started her examination. Starting with the feet, she worked her way up. The same as the other victim, only he changed her looks and painted her forehead.

"Strangled, just like the other. Here is the card." Becky handed it to Joe. "I am guessing the 'W' is painted with her blood. All I can do is take her to the morgue and see what I can find out. I will do a nail scraping here though. She appears to have more than dirt under her nails. Her hair has been colored and contacts in her eyes."

Ronnie watched them load the body, again feeling like she should be able to do something. Who was this sick bastard and why was he out for her?

"By the way, I am no detective, but I was wondering," Becky spoke up before she climbed into the van. "Does anyone else find it strange that so far, both the victims' names begin with the letter 'V'?"

She was gone then, leaving the others to ponder her words. Joe opened the card and read it aloud.

"Detective Ronnie Chase,  
A picture says 1000 words.  
Goodnight, Sweetheart."

Joe handed her the envelope that held the card, and a picture. Her eyes widened, and she leaned against Joe's cruiser.

"Do you recognize that picture, Ronnie?"

"It's my dining room table." She glanced at Danny who took the picture. "Son of a bitch."

"Why is this so important?" Joe looked puzzled, but she wasn't.

Ronnie straightened and walked away. It was too much. This was getting way out of hand.

"Monroe, do you know what it means?"

"Yes, sir. I do. But I think it's best left private."

Joe narrowed his eyes and then his cheeks flamed. He got the meaning, but Ronnie was like a daughter. The mental picture he got was anything but the two of them eating dinner on that table.

"Now, I am only saying this once, Monroe. I don't know what's between the two of you, and I won't make it my business unless she gets hurt."

"I hear you."

"It won't be me you have to worry about. But Becky will be on you faster than any whirlwind you have ever faced."

"I got you, Captain."

"Fine. See to her. I'll head over and see what Becky can come up with." He nodded to the picture. "Get that put away. It's evidence, but not any I want the whole squad to see."

Danny put the picture in his pocket and ran back down the path. When he entered the house, he heard the shower running. He was willing to leave her in peace until he heard her sob. His mind made up, he walked into the bathroom and stripped, stepped into the shower, and took the rag from her hands.

Her skin was bright red from the heat and the force she had used to wash herself. He soaped the rag and gently washed her back. She had brushed her teeth in the shower. Her toothbrush sat on the shower caddy. Danny washed her hair, and then stood with her under the spray.

"I couldn't get clean enough," she said, a hitch in her voice. "It was like I could feel parts of her on me."

"It's okay, Ronnie. You did nothing to bring this on. What you're feeling is guilt that she was in the tree and you couldn't stop it."

"The 'W' on her forehead. He was calling me a whore. He watched us together."

"Yes, and Joe is keeping all this quiet." He kissed her wet hair. "He is fixated on you, honey, and wants to make you suffer because it's me who was with you."

"Maybe we should avoid any contact until we catch this guy."

"Then, he would win. I won't let this madman keep me from you, and I won't let him get to you either." He hugged her tighter. "He will make a mistake, baby."

She nodded, returned his embrace and turned the shower off. Danny wrapped her in a towel and one about his waist. She smiled up at him, and he lifted her, and carried her into the bedroom. With one arm supporting her, he pulled the covers back and stood her on her feet, removing her towel and his own. Danny crawled into the bed, pulled her into the curve of his body and covered them both, her back against his chest, he stroked her hair, wondering at the changes in him.

For once in his life, he could see himself spending a lifetime with a woman. She would have to be hardheaded and know how to use a gun as well as he did. But today, he had seen her vulnerable and afraid. Danny wanted to hold her to him and protect her. He knew he would have to back off, she would want him to. But for now, she was accepting what he could offer.

He watched her eyes grow heavy, and he leaned in, kissing the side of her face.

"Just sleep, baby. I have you."

"I know you do."

Those four little words warmed him and he pulled her as tight to him as he could get her. One arm under her head, the other resting on her hip, he slept lightly. He had her.



## Chapter Seven

Ronnie woke slowly with the feel of Danny's warm body behind her. His cock rested in the valley between her thighs, and his hand held a breast. After the previous day's events, she felt better, and her body was ready for the magic only Danny could make her feel.

She arched her back, gasping when his rough thumb slowly slid across her nipple. She reached behind her to his hip, raking her nails across his flesh. His body grew hard, and her hand followed the path across her belly, between her legs, and caressed the head of his shaft. His warm lips touched her shoulder, and she relaxed against him.

His hips moved slowly, each stroke between her thighs made her want him even more. Danny pinched her nipple lightly, rolling it in his fingers. She cried out, pushing her breast into his hand. He made a mental note. She liked a small bite of pain.

Ronnie began rocking her hips against his, coating his cock in her warm essence that he was able to from her so easily. Her mind whirled with all the things she wanted him to do to her; to take control of her body and give her no choice as to the way he would please her.

Danny pulled her thigh over his hip. In this position, his hands were free to touch and roam at his leisure. She would not be able to touch him as she wanted. It would drive her crazy not being able to have any control.

He wrapped the hand that was beneath her head in her hair, holding her neck at an arch so his lips and teeth could have free rein. She was all but pinned to him. Still, he slowly moved back and forth against her wet heat, working her nipples until they

looked red, sensitive, and swollen.

She was so relaxed against him that when he drew back and pushed into her as deeply as he could, her climax was on her. He gritted his teeth, determined to hold on and build her up again. Her heat pulsing around him was almost too much. Danny wanted this time to be more. He wanted to love her slowly, and in some selfish way bind her heart to him.

When she calmed, he rolled with her until his body was pressed against her back. She lay on her stomach, legs slightly parted. Danny twined his fingers with hers, his covering the back of her hands as he began to move in long, deep strokes. His lips moved across her neck and back, keeping the pace slow and easy.

Ronnie's hips arched into his on every down stroke, and he had to control himself. He wanted to plunge into her over and over until they forgot everything but each other. But he continued to love her slowly. Her small cries and pleas sounded to him like the sweetest music. He could feel her trembling and released her hands, raising himself over her. His thrusts became stronger, and when her fists bunched in the comforter, he held her hips and brought her up on her knees. But still, he moved slowly.

"Please, Danny."

"What do you need, baby?"

"You know what I need."

"Tell me, Ronnie."

She cried out when he pushed against her harder, only to slow and ease his thrusts again. Her head rested on the bed, her hips in the air, ready to give him anything he wanted, as long as he eased the incredible ache inside her.

"Danny."

"Tell me, Ronnie."

"I need to come. Please let me come."

He reached around her body, and stroked her clit in time with his thrusts. Moisture gathered on his fingers, and just as she was about to climax, he stopped. Tears of frustration gathered in her eyes.

"Do you trust me to take care of you, Ronnie?"

"Yes."

"Then relax and feel. It will be better, sweeter, and hotter for the wait."

Taking a deep breath, she focused on the feel of him inside her. Her belly tensed and relaxed as her thighs shook. When his hand left her clit she protested, but he silenced her with a hard stroke. She stiffened at the feel of his finger against her anus. She had never been played with, or even considered taking a man there.

"Relax, baby, and trust me."

She nodded and forced her body to relax. His breathing was deeper now, and she knew he was holding onto his control for her. He stroked her, building her higher again, and she cried out at the feel of his long finger entering her where no other ever had.

"Danny." She gasped, not sure what was happening to her.

"Do you like that, Ronnie?" He slowly drew his finger in and out, just as his shaft worked slowly in and out of her heat. "Do you like the way this makes you feel?"

"Yes."

"It will only get better, baby." He gently worked another finger into her. "When you're ready, I will fill this sweet ass with more than my fingers."

His words and the burning pleasure of his invasion caused her to arch, and then she was pushing against him. She wanted more. Her hips rotated and he pushed against her ass harder, causing a cry to escape.

It seemed like forever, but it felt so damn good, she didn't protest. She reached down and stroked her clit with her own fingers. Her need was becoming so great, it was painful.

Danny watched her please her swollen and sensitive flesh, and his cock swelled. Gently, he removed his fingers, held her hips in his hands, and began to drive into her hard, fast, long strokes that had her knees coming off the bed.

The friction built, and her tight heat gripped him until he felt he might explode. Her head left the bed and she came on a long cry that sent him over the edge. With each

stroke, more of him poured into her until he felt as if his bones had melted. When her tremors eased, he collapsed beside her, wincing as his sensitive cock left her too quickly.

He laid there, arm over his eyes, hoping she would wake him like that more often. He wondered if he had tried too much too fast, but her sweet little ass was too much for him to ignore. She had never been touched there, he was sure of that. Her ass had gripped his fingers like a vice, and he groaned at the image his cock sent to his brain. He wanted to take her there, show her that forbidden pleasure, and spank her gently until the rounded globes turned a pretty pink while he took her higher and higher. The feel of her head on his chest brought him out of the fantasy.

"You okay, Ronnie?"

"Wonderful." She kissed his chest. "You make me feel so good."

"You liked that, didn't you?"

"It hurt at first, but then it felt amazing."

"Glad to hear it." There was a smile in his voice. "I have a lot of plans for you."

"Me?"

"Okay, they include me too, but I swear you won't be disappointed."

He felt her smile against his chest, and he threaded his fingers through her hair. He sighed when the bedside phone rang. Ronnie sat up, straddled his body and smiled. His cock was paying way too much attention to her in this position.

"Witch." He growled.

"Hello?" She said into the receiver. "Yes, Joe."

He reached up and tweaked her nipples and she tried to hide her giggle, swatting his hands away.

"That's wonderful. We will meet with Becky in another hour."

She hung up the phone and proceeded to tickle his sides. Laughing, Danny rolled and pinned her under him.

"Do you yield?" he asked, nuzzling her neck and causing her to squirm.

"Yes, yes, okay! I yield."

"So, what's up?"

"Becky found skin under the victim's nails. We need to go and get a report from her. I guess she found a few other things."

He kissed her quick and rose, heading to the bathroom.

"Hurry up, Danny. I want a shower too."

"You could join me," he said, peeking back around the doorframe.

"Yes, I could, but then we would be late. Now hurry up." She smiled, and the phone rang again.

"Popular this morning," he said, but something told him to wait. A gut feeling that this was something bad.

"Hello?"

"Detective Chase?"

"Yes. This is Veronica Chase. Who is this?"

She checked the caller ID and it was out of area. She motioned to Danny, who picked up the extension in the hall.

"Did you like my surprise?"

"Excuse me?"

"I know how much you love the woods and that silly tree." The man's voice took on a deep, sensual tone. "Did it please you?"

"Dead bodies never please me."

"Oh, but Danny Monroe pleased you just fine this morning, didn't he?"

She paled and rushed to the window, looking out at the trees beyond.

"Can't see me, can you, Sweetheart?"

"You son of a bitch! What in the fuck do you want from me?"

"Such language, Sweetheart. I will have to add that to your list for punishment."

"Then come and get me, you fucking psycho!" she shouted. "If you want me, here I am."

"Oh, I will have you, Ronnie, make no mistake. Before I am done, you will be begging for the sweet release only I can give you." He chuckled. "When I finally take you, you will wonder what you ever saw in that Monroe. I have other surprises in store

first."

"I will kill you first." She tried to calm herself. "I would much rather kill myself than have you touch me."

"We will see, Sweetheart. We will see." He chuckled. "I have been close enough to you to smell your perfume. Soon my love, soon." Another sigh. "For now, I have a small matter of evidence to hide. We can't end this game just yet."

He began to sing, and she hung up the phone. The chills rolled over her, and she sat heavy on the bed. She had a freaking psycho after her, one who loved to serenade. She had hung up the phone to the words of, *Goodnight, Sweetheart*.

"Hide Evidence?" What the hell did that mean?

"Let's get to the station." Danny said, keeping his opinion to himself. Things were about to get nasty.

\* \* \* \*

Danny kept his thoughts to himself while Joe laid down the law to Ronnie.

"No, I will not leave my house."

"Danny, he has followed your every move."

"All the more reason to stay. He will slip up. When he does, I have a bullet with his name all over it." She sighed. "Danny will be with me, and we can set up a watch around the house."

Joe conceded, but Danny could see it pained him.

"Becky has something for you. Looks like victim two got a swipe at the bastard."

Ronnie hugged the man who had been like a father to her.

"I will watch out and be careful, Joe. I'm a hot head, but not a stupid one."

"I know, Ronnie. Go on, and give Becky a kiss for me."

"Will do."

In the car she spoke to Danny about the phone call and the comment about the evidence.

"What do you think he meant?"

"Well, it makes me believe even more that we are dealing with a member of law enforcement."

"Okay, but who?"

"I have no idea."

"I saw that Brody was back at his desk." She sighed. "Looks like he and Sarah are calling it quits, but at least he is back to work. Maybe he will come around."

"Ronnie, did the voice sound familiar at all?"

"No. I would know if it was someone from our station. I talk to these guys daily."

"It's the comment about the evidence that disturbs me."

"How so?"

"Well, it just hit me that the only person who could know we had any would be, Becky." He frowned. "She would report it to Joe, and then he to us."

"He said he had evidence to hide. If the victim scratched him, and he didn't realize it until it was too late, he would realize he slipped up."

"Oh, shit." Danny hit the lights and raced the car through the city streets.

"Danny? What the hell. Slow down."

"Think about it, Ronnie. Where is that evidence?"

"With Becky. The M.E. always holds it until we sign for it." Her eyes widened as his meaning hit her. "He has evidence to hide."

"I hope to hell I'm wrong, but Becky may be in trouble."

"Son of a bitch, Danny. Drive faster."

Danny gunned the unit and Ronnie prayed. They swerved in and out of traffic, squealed around corners and made use of the sidewalks. They rounded the last corner, and Danny hit the breaks. It was bumper-to-bumper traffic.

"Damn it." He hit the steering wheel. "Hold on."

Danny took the one-way street to the right, blaring his horn. Ronnie took the com and began shouting orders to the pedestrians. "Get off the street! Get off the sidewalk!"

Finally, she resorted to, "Get the hell out of the way or get run down!"

"Should I radio, Joe?"

"We may be wrong, but if we're not we may need help."

"Right." She picked up the radio. "Dispatch, this is unit one. We are in route to the medical examiners office. We will need back up, paramedics, and Captain Joe Campbell."

"What is the nature of the emergency, unit one?"

"I hope I'm wrong, but Becky Campbell may be in trouble."

"Routing your information now. What is your ETA?"

"Five minutes. Now run this to the captain on foot if you have to, but get it there now." She panted. "Unit one out."

The tires rolled black smoke when they pulled into the lot. Everything looked like it should, but deep in his gut, Danny knew this would be bad.

"Okay, we go in together. I cover high, you cover low." He checked his weapon. "Ready?"

"Ready." She made sure there was a round in her chamber, and clicked off the safety. Her weapon carried over nine rounds. She'd unload them all in the bastard if he was in there with Becky.

"No heroics, Ronnie."

"I know my job, Danny. Now let's go. If Becky is in there and hurt, she needs help."

"One more thing, Ronnie." He hated to say this to her. "I know you love her, but you need to be ready for anything."

"She's not dead."

"I hope not. Now let's go."

Together they approached the front of the building. Slowly, they entered through the glass doors, guns drawn and ready.

"Is it always this quiet?" Danny whispered. "Where is Jennifer?"

"Let's hope she's on a break."



Making their way to the information desk, they peered over the counter. Ronnie frowned, noticing the papers on the floor. She patted Danny's arm and pointed to the floor.

"How do we get behind there?"

"This way." Ronnie led the way, carefully opening the side door. Danny followed closely.

There were signs of a struggle, blood smeared on the floor that led to a closed door behind the coffee machine.

Stepping around the tracks, they made their way to the door.

"Open it quickly, and get into position." Danny said, aiming his gun at the door.

Ronnie turned the knob and pushed it wide, crouching and aiming low. It was then she looked into the vacant eyes of Jennifer.

Danny hurried inside, checking the room. When he gave the all clear, Ronnie carefully checked for a pulse.

"She's dead. Looks like a blow to the head is what got her."

"Then we need to find Becky, and pray for a miracle."

Ronnie stood and hurried from the room.

"Slow down, Ronnie. We need to be cautious."

"Fuck cautious. If Becky is hurt I'm not wasting any time tip-toeing around."

"He may very well still be here?"

"I couldn't be that lucky," she snapped and walked briskly down the hall. "It's his game, he is making the rules. This is his way of hurting me."

Danny wanted to argue, but Ronnie wouldn't see reason. He followed her, watching her back. This was what he had feared. The woman was a hot head, and when she got this way, there was no talking to her.

"Where are the other workers?"

"This early, it usually is just the M.E. on duty and the receptionist."

He followed her into the first autopsy room. It had been turned upside down. The table was lying on its side, contents in the freezer thrown about the room, but no

sign of Becky. Each room proved empty. The only sign of trouble was each room had been ransacked.

“Where is she?”

“Where would she have met us this morning?”

“Her office. Then, she would have taken us to the body.” Ronnie smacked her head. “Becky has a safe room there. All M.E.’s in the city were provided with one when threats were made against them last year over evidence scandals.”

“Well, let’s go. Maybe she made it.”

Ronnie ran down the hall, heedless of the dangers. Her only thought was for the beautiful woman who had raised her as her own. Birthdays, graduations, and everything important in Ronnie’s life.

She threw the door to the office open, and the scream that came from her was all Danny needed to know, full of pain and outrage. He rounded the corner and looked to where Ronnie knelt on the floor.

It was Becky all right, or at least he thought so.

## Chapter Eight

"She's alive, Danny. Where the hell is that ambulance?"

"I'm on it." He pulled out his cell phone. "Dispatch, this is Monroe with unit one. I need an ETA on that ambulance to the M.E.'s office."

"ETA three minutes. Captain Campbell should be rolling in now with backup."

He disconnected and hurried to Ronnie, but spoke to Becky.

"Three minutes, Becky. Just hold on for us, okay?"

He thought she nodded, but her face was so badly bruised and bloody, he couldn't be sure. He also noticed blood on the front of her scrubs.

"Where else are you hurt, Becky?" He asked, but saw she couldn't answer. "Okay, that's okay. I'm going to open your scrubs to check your wounds."

Her lips moved and Ronnie leaned in to catch her words.

"Oh, Becky. Now's not the time for your jokes."

"What did she say?"

"She said, try to control yourself," Ronnie repeated and smiled through tears.

"I will be sure to do just that. Joe's on the way and will kick my ass."

Danny used his pocketknife and gently sliced the scrub shirt up the middle. Pulling it aside, he tried to hide his reaction. Ronnie saw the wounds and he shook his head, telling her to keep quiet.

"This ain't so bad." He smiled at Becky. "I've seen worse."

Her lips moved, and he could clearly make out her one word. "Liar", she rasped, but she smiled, being the ever-comforting Becky.

In truth, it was really bad. Becky had two deep holes in her chest and one long

gash across her abdomen. Her blood loss was great, and she was losing more. Danny stood and left the room, returning moments later with pads and gauze. By the time he packed the wounds, the paramedics could be heard down the hall.

Danny hurried back to the office door and waved them to where they waited. Joe rushed past them and hurried inside.

"Jesus, Becky." He knelt beside her in Ronnie's place. "Who did you piss off this time?"

Joe was trying to make light of the situation. His smile was sincere and he tried to hide his worry. He leaned down to hear her as she spoke.

"I love you, too. Now buck up and let's get through this."

Joe made room for the EMTs, but refused to budge from her side. Again, she was whispering, and the man starting her IV relayed the message.

"She says to look in the hidden drawer under her desk?"

"Hidden drawer?" Danny hurried to the desk, his hands roaming the underside. "Found it."

He pulled it out and retrieved the envelope, walking out into the hall to examine it. Ronnie was behind him.

"What is it?" she asked, one eye on him and the other on Becky.

"Evidence."

"What?"

"It's the evidence in the Vivian Stewart case. Nail scrapings and a single fingerprint."

"She almost died to save this for us." Ronnie sighed. "She may still."

"Don't think like that." He pulled her aside as they wheeled Becky out. "Let's meet them at the hospital."

He tucked the envelope into his inner pocket on his jacket.

"We'll meet you at the hospital, Joe."

He nodded, but continued on with Becky.

Ronnie left orders for the officers to lock the place down, and only the crime

scene unit was to enter. If anyone needed a medical examiner, they would have to go to the south side.

It was another hour before they could reach the hospital, and found Joe in the waiting room. He looked haggard, tired, and frightened.

"Any word yet?" Ronnie asked, sitting beside him and taking his hand.

"She's in surgery. One punctured lung, the other narrowly missed the main artery in the chest. They will have to remove her female organs. The cut was just too deep." He squeezed her hand. "She was almost gutted, Ronnie."

"I'm sorry, Joe." She blinked the tears away. "This is all my fault."

"Now, don't be thinking like that. It's the work of a man gone mad."

"He was after evidence, but he didn't get it."

"I know. She managed to hide it before he caught up to her."

"Why didn't she use the safety room?"

"The damn door jammed." He rested his head on the back of the chair. "The doctor says if she pulls through surgery, she will make it."

"She'll pull through. Our Becky is too strong do anything less."

Danny sat, watching the two of them. This was their time and he wouldn't intrude, but he knew Ronnie better than she knew herself. She wouldn't sit still long. In just the week they were together, he had almost figured her out. When she loved someone, she did all she could to protect and defend them, even avenge them.

That thought had him thinking deeper than he would like. Could she ever love him like that? Or would he always be Monroe, the cop, the partner? When he had looked at Becky, in the back of his mind, he saw Ronnie, broken and bleeding, fighting for her life. It made him sick, and it made him angry.

Ronnie was more to him than a partner, or even a cop. He would admit that to himself now. He was in love with the little hot head. Now, he not only had to catch a killer, he had to keep her alive. The thought of her no longer in his life was too much to even contemplate.

Danny stood and walked down the hall, bought three cups of coffee, and

returned to the waiting room. They thanked him and sat silently. It seemed like hours before the doctor appeared. His blood covered scrubs and tired eyes were enough to know that he had worked hard for Becky. But he had a smile on his face and Danny breathed a sigh of relief.

"How is she?" Joe jumped up and stood, holding his breath, waiting.

"She pulled through just fine, Joe. In the morning, we will move her to the ICU. Her blood loss was a problem, but we gave her a transfusion, and other than several weeks' recovery, she should be just fine."

"Can I see her?"

"Of course, but I have to ask that for the moment, only you enter the room." He gave Ronnie an apologetic look. "She is sedated, and will sleep through the night. But at the risk of any possible infection, the least contact the better."

"I understand." She looked to Joe. "I am assigning round the clock watch at her door, even in the ICU and recovery. We won't take the chance of her being alone for a moment."

"You see to it, Ronnie. I sent word that all orders are to come from you."

"Go sit with her, Joe. Give her my love."

He nodded and followed the doctor down the hall. Ronnie stood until she could no longer see them. Then, she wrapped her arms around her waist, sat in the chair and had a good cry. She didn't object to Danny resting his hand on her back.

"We were almost too late."

"But we made it in time. You need to remember that, Ronnie."

"We have to stop this guy."

"As soon as you're ready, we can go to the station." He looked at his watch, surprised at the time. "Well, we better just head home. We have the files and the evidence. We can pour over it with some dinner and call to check on Becky."

"I don't think I can eat."

"Too bad, you have to. Can't have you getting sick on me."

"Oh, Danny, I forgot about Jennifer." She looked horrified. "I didn't tell them

about Jennifer."

"I took care of it." He took her hand. "Now, let's get out of here."

"They found her? She's not still in that room?"

"No. The officers called the other M.E. and they were on their way to process."

"Alright."

Ronnie allowed Danny to pull her outside and to the car. When they stood at the passenger door, she threw herself in his arms and hugged him close to her. He returned the embrace, wondering what she was thinking.

"It's okay, baby. Becky will be fine."

"It's not that, Danny."

"Then tell me."

"Please don't die on me." Her voice was so small, he tightened his hold.

"Not a chance, baby."

He pulled away and took her face in his hands, kissing her gently. At least he knew that she cared for him. It filled him with hope that once this case was over, they wouldn't be.

Danny opened the door and closed it when she was inside. The drive was silent, but he could all but hear the wheels in her mind turning. Parking in the garage, he again pulled his weapon and searched the entire house before he let her inside.

"It's clear."

She nodded and walked inside, pacing and running her hands through her hair. He removed the envelope and placed it on the table, along with his firearm. He tossed his coat on the floor. He turned to face her, and lost his breath when she pushed him against the wall and kissed him deeply, her hands working fast as his shirt sailed to the floor.

She removed her shirt, dropped her jeans and returned to kissing him with so much aggression, he wondered if she had lost her senses. It was the fear driving her, he knew. Arousal was a common part of fear and grief, but Ronnie was attacking him like a woman gone mad. Damn if his body wasn't responding.

Her hands opened his fly and she dropped to her knees, wasting no time in taking him into her mouth. While she worked him, her hands pulled his jeans down until he could step out of them. Then, all her attention, hands and mouth, were on his cock.

Danny leaned against the wall, gasping at the raw lust raging through him. He wasn't sure what to do. All he could think of was that mouth working him like never before, but he needed to know what she wanted, what she needed.

"Ronnie," He caught her shoulders and pulled her to her feet. "What do you need? What's this all about?"

"I need you." Her hands returned to stroke him. "I need you inside me."

"If you wanted me to love you, baby, all you had to do was say so."

"I don't want you to love me right now, Danny." She nipped his chest. "I want you to fuck me. No gentle touches, no hesitating. Just fuck me and make me forget for awhile."

He knew what she meant. She didn't want to have any control. She wanted to depend on someone else for what she needed.

He lifted her and she wrapped her legs around his waist. Carrying her into the living room, he made sure all the shades were tightly closed, and then placed her on the soft carpet before the couch. She gasped when he tore her bra from her body, and ripped her panties away. He wouldn't hurt her, they both knew that, but he would give her what she wanted.

He waited one heartbeat, and then took her clit with his mouth, rolling and nipping and sucking while he pushed two fingers into her. She arched, crying out and begging him for more. When her juices coated his fingers, he pulled them from her heat and rimmed her anus. She pushed against his fingers and took him inside.

His mouth worked her clit while his fingers worked her ass. When her first climax took her, his arm held her hips down. While she shook and cried, he pushed a third finger into her. Over and over, he licked and sucked while his fingers stretched her.



He wouldn't let her body settle, as he removed his fingers and rolled her to her belly. He lifted her shoulders and placed them on the couch, her ass raised in the air for him. He gathered more of her sweet essence and again traced her ass, leaning over to whisper in her ear.

"Is this what you want, baby?" He started working two fingers in again.

"Yes."

"You need a little pain with your pleasure?"

"Please, Danny."

He seated his fingers inside her, then began to work them in and out, eventually adding a third finger as she began pushing against him. He was on fire for her and knew he wouldn't be able to stop if she wanted him to.

He pulled his fingers from her ass, and drove his cock deep inside of her slick, wet heat. Her pussy gripped him tight, and he drove her over the edge quickly, letting her coat his cock. Then, he pulled out, placed the head at her anus, and pushed inside the barest of an inch.

She gasped, arched her neck, and pushed against him. He had to grit his teeth and hold her hips to keep her from hurting herself.

"Easy, Ronnie. I will give you what you need."

"Now, Danny. Please, now."

Slowly he worked his cock into her. When she would tense, he would stop and stroke her breasts, her clit, nip her back. Then, when he thought he would never be fully inside her, she relaxed and took him to the hilt. Her cry and the arch of her body were of pleasure, not pain.

Danny cupped her breasts, and pulled her back against him. Slowly, he thrust into her, groaning at the tight grip of her ass as he worked her slowly. Her hands covered his on her breasts, and she took one, lowered it, and placed it on her clit. Ronnie kept her hand on his, showing him just how she liked to be stroked. His hips pushed up into her, and with each thrust, she gasped, taking all he had to give.

"You like that, Ronnie?"

"Hmm, yes."

"You feel so good, baby. Your ass feels so good."

"More, Danny. I want more."

"I don't want to hurt you."

"You won't. But please, just this once, let go and forget gentle."

He growled and nipped her neck, his hand leaving her clit and moving to her shoulder. He pushed her forward until her chest laid on the couch. Danny placed his hands on her hips, and lunged forward, once, hard.

"Again." She shouted. "Just like that, Danny."

He moved a little faster, a little harder, his head thrown back. Never had he felt anything so good. When he glanced down to where they joined, he lost a little more of his control. Danny brought one hand down and slapped her ass lightly. Ronnie asked for more.

He gave her what she wanted; tunneling in and out of her ass in hard, long, deep strokes while he turned her cheeks a pretty pink. His balls tightened, and he groaned, not wanting to come without her.

"Come for me, Ronnie."

"I'm so close, Danny. So close."

The sound of thigh slapping against thigh, skin on skin was erotic and sensual at the same time. It hit him then that Ronnie was exploring another side to her sexuality. She wanted to be dominated. Reaching up, he wrapped a fist in her hair and moved within her as hard as he dared, tilting her head back, causing her neck to arch. He could see the pleasure on her face, and gave her one simple command.

"Come for me, Ronnie. Do it now."

Her nails dug into the couch and her whole body tightened. He laid over her body, holding her as the tremors tore through her. His release was long and hard. His shout drowned her own. Her pulsing ass was too much for his sensitive body and he gently eased from her, but stayed draped over her.

He breathed heavily against her, still not believing he had taken her so roughly.

But she had been demanding tonight, and he had been helpless to resist. He shifted and sat on the floor, his back to the couch. When she made no move to join him, he pulled her into his lap. Ronnie hid her face in his neck, and he guessed she was embarrassed by her response to such an intimate act.

"You okay, Ronnie?"

"Yes," she whispered, nodding her head.

"What's wrong? Regrets?"

"No."

"Talk to me then."

She sighed and sat up and adjusted herself in his lap. His cock twitched and he mentally scolded his body.

"Do you think I was too wicked?"

"Wicked? You mean by attacking me as soon as we walked in the door?" He smiled and she blushed. "No, in fact, I liked it."

"And the other?"

"Other?"

"You know what I mean, Danny."

He pulled her to him and stroked her hair. He was falling more in love with her every time they touched.

"By other, do you mean offering me your body in ways you never before known? Or by me turning that pretty ass pink?"

"Yes."

"Tell me this. Did you like it?"

"Yes."

"Then no, that doesn't make me see you as wicked. I see you as a passionate, willing woman who I want to have in my life."

When she looked up at him, he knew it was true. He was in love with the little hot head and wanted to keep her, not just tomorrow, or for a few weeks of pleasure, but he wanted her beside him every night. He wanted to make love to her, and when she

needed him to, he wanted to be her every fantasy come true.

"I would like that too, Danny."

"Ronnie,"

What he would have said was cut off by the phone. She reached to the side table and picked it up, a look of apology on her face.

"Hello?"

"Ronnie?"

"Yes. Brody, is that you?"

"Sorry to bother you. I'm sure you were busy."

"What do you need?" She tried to ignore the tone in his voice. "As a matter of fact, I was in the middle of something and would like to get back to it."

"I bet," he snapped. "Look, Joe called me and asked that I make sure you secured the evidence."

"Of course I did. I know my job."

"I take it you secured it at your place?"

Ronnie frowned, not liking the feeling in her gut. What was he up to? It would be just like him to pull something on her because he was pissed.

"Tell Joe if he needs that information he can call me."

"What? You can't let your partner in on the secrets?"

Ronnie had enough. After all that she had been through, Brody and his attitude was the last straw.

"We are no longer partners. Get your life together and grow up, Brody."

Ronnie hung the phone up and looked to Danny. He had a smile on his face and clapped his hands.

"Bravo, Detective Chase. It's about time you told him what's what."

"Brody is the least of my worries." She straddled his lap. "Now, Detective Monroe, just where were we?"

"Right about here?" He kissed her cheek. "Or was it here?" He moved to her lips.

"Right there," she said against his lips. His cock rose between them, and she

lifted herself, slowly sliding him inside her. "Right here is good too."

"I couldn't agree more." He pulled her closer. "So, you're making love to me now?"

"That's the plan." She rocked her hips slowly, but already she was feeling the need for more, her body so close to that sweet explosion. "But I don't think it will last too long."

Their lips never parted as they slowly moved together. Even when they spoke, their lips remained pressed together.

"I think you're right." He gasped into her mouth, moaning as his body tightened. "I can't wait, Ronnie. I'm there."

His words, knowing he was coming inside her, was all she needed. They shared their breath as their bodies exploded together, lips joined in a never-ending kiss.

When it was over, they held one another, neither wanting to break the contact.

Ronnie was in love, and it scared her to death. What if one of them didn't survive? Someone was set on getting to her.

Ronnie?" He tipped her face to his, and looked into her eyes. "I don't know any other way to say this, but believe me when I say I love you."

"Say it again." Now that she heard it from his lips, she wasn't so frightened anymore.

"I don't know how it happened, or even when, but I do love you."

"Danny." She wrapped her arms around his neck. "I love you, too."

He released his breath on a hard sigh and hugged her so tight she thought she would break. But it felt wonderful. Knowing he returned her love was like a miracle to her tattered soul.

They stood, and then sat together under the blanket on the couch, talking and laughing as if they had known one another their entire lives. Well into the night this continued, until the phone ringing startled them both awake. They had drifted to sleep together, wrapped in the blanket.

Danny was the closest, so he answered the phone.

"Monroe."

Ronnie stood and padded to the bathroom. She wasn't the least bit tired now. Her body was well loved, though pleasantly sore in all the right spots. She smiled, remembering that he loved her. It couldn't get any better than this.

She walked back to the living room, and the look on his face said it just got worse.

"Becky?"

"No, she's fine. I just called about her."

"Then what has you looking so gloomy?"

"Two patrol men just found another victim."

Ronnie sighed and went to dress. Damn, but they had to find this man.

## Chapter Nine

"Valerie Shepard. Local prostitute and died in the same way as your other victims." Dr. Horatio said, covering the victim with the sheet. "Two differences from the last. I can't see any signs of a struggle, but I did find a long blonde hair. The victim is a red head. Also, along the back of the neck, are scratches."

"You've reviewed Becky's files, and we have the evidence she collected. Can we follow you and discuss the case at the morgue?" Danny asked, finally feeling they were onto something.

"Sure. I will be headed that way in a few minutes. Do you want me to take what you have?"

"No. Considering what happened to Becky, it's best we follow you and hold onto it."

"Suit yourself."

Danny fought a grin at the surly old man. A graying, portly sort of doctor with a no nonsense attitude. He liked the old goat.

They secured the scene and followed the M.E. in their unit.

"Another victim, another 'V'." Ronnie said, glancing out the window. "This has got to stop."

"I have a feeling things are about to turn around, baby. Just hang in there."

She sighed, hoping he was right.

Ronnie had been to the south side morgue a time or two, and as with the other, the disinfectant was strong, but they tried to cover it with pine scent. It literally smelled like a big dead pine tree.

"This way, detectives." He entered a room and workers left the body. "Grab some scrubs."

"Here is the evidence folder. We didn't have time to process it."

"Well, lucky for you I'm handy." He hit a button on the wall. "William, get your butt in here."

Before Dr. Horatio finished the order, a young, skinny teen walked into the room. He had to be older than he looked.

"Let me see the folder." He dumped the contents onto the table. "Okay, we have skin fibers and a single print on a contact lens. William, process these and run it. Lock the room you use. Bring the results back to me."

"Yes, sir." William picked up the contents and hurried from the room.

"Good kid, that William, but a bigger ass kisser you will never meet." Dr. Horatio said, then gloved up. "Okay, let's see what we've got."

As Becky had before him, he began at the head and worked his way down the body. His little recorder microphone strapped to his head, ready for him to record.

"Dr. Horatio, south side M.E. with Detectives Chase and Monroe. We all know why we are here. No obvious wounds to the scalp, or the face. Victim was strangled with enough force to cause constant bruising. By constant, I mean the bruises do not break in the front. They do however break at the back of the neck. Unlike victims one and two, three has obvious scratch marks where fingernails may have dug into the skin."

He paused, narrowing his eyes, and asked Danny to help roll her over. Danny complied.

"Pink specks are embedded in the scratches. Polish? Maybe. Test will be run to be sure."

He rolled her back over.

"No obvious signs of trauma to the chest or the abdomen, or the arms. However, the card is balled into victim's hands. I felt it best to await the removal at the morgue. I have removed the card and presented it to Detective Chase. Moving on, victim's legs



are scratched, but no indication as to the cause. Victim's vagina appears to have been untouched. Will examine further." He shut off his recorder and spoke to Danny and Ronnie.

"Something isn't clicking for me on this case."

"What are your thoughts?" Ronnie asked, hesitating to read the card in her hand.

"First, what does the card read?"

She opened it, her hands shaking. She closed her eyes and handed it to Danny.

"Well, this may be our last victim in the game." She said, her eyes going hard.

Danny read the card allowed.

"4 was not meant to be,

You have 1, 2 & 3

Now, you play with me.

Goodnight, Sweetheart

It's time you go."

"What does he mean by four?" Dr. Horatio asked.

"Jennifer. She was killed when Becky was attacked." Danny answered. "It seems he only has one in mind now."

"Let him come." Ronnie said calmly. "I can't stand this anymore."

William returned with the results, spoke to the examiner privately, and left with the pink fleck sample from the victim's neck.

"William will have the last test done in a few minutes. I want to examine the victim further. We can talk when he returns."

Danny took Ronnie to a quiet corner, away from the woman on the table. She looked ready to snap. What he wouldn't give to take all of this away. He hugged her, and she stepped away, her agitation was too great.

"I'm sorry, Danny. But I'm so damn angry right now I can't think straight."

"It's okay, Ronnie. I understand your frustration."

What a way to start the day. She was so lucky. What other woman out there in the world could boast about finding love, dead bodies and crazy people following her

all at the same time. She should throw a fucking party. Raking her hands through her hair, she spun a quickly when William walked through the door. One look at Ronnie, and he left the results and hauled ass.

"You're scaring my help, detective."

"Sorry."

"Okay, here is what we have people." He held up one slip. "The pink flecks on this victim's neck are indeed nail polish, Frosted Pink to be exact."

"Mean anything, Ronnie?" Danny asked. "This all seems to focus on an obsession for you."

"I haven't worn polish since the academy." She frowned. "But it was Frosted Pink."

"The skin under the victims nails, that would be victim two, is gonna surprise you."

"How so?"

"It's two people."

"What?"

"She dug in deep enough, at some point, on two attackers. Small traces of blood were found. We isolated the hormones, and found both male and female levels."

"You can do that with a tiny spot of blood?" Danny asked, amazed.

"I can do that with blood you can't even see."

"What about the contact lens found in two's eye?"

Dr. Horatio sighed, setting the paper aside. How do you tell an officer one of their own is involved in murders such as these?

"There was a single print on one contact lens. It was run through every database we have, as well as department records. There was a match."

"How close a match?"

"All points on the first finger of the right hand."

"Who did it match to?" Ronnie asked.

"Ronnie, you have to promise me you will be a professional about this."

"Dr. Horatio, who did it match to?"

"Brody Taylor."

Ronnie turned, took one step, and promptly fainted.

\* \* \* \*

Danny watched her on the break room couch while he filled in Joe on what they had learned.

"Yes, a perfect match to Brody, but he has someone working with him."

"What points to that?"

"Small amounts of trace blood under victim two's nails."

"How is Ronnie?"

"She will be fine." Danny wasn't about to tell him that she had fainted. "Would you be able to have Brody picked up and place him in the interrogation room?"

"I'll get right on it. You sure you don't want another to handle it?"

"Ronnie will want to do this herself."

"I can call the station from here. Keep me posted."

Danny hung up and returned to Ronnie. The cloth on her head had warmed and he removed it, stroking her cheek. Her eyes fluttered, and she sat up slowly.

"Tell me I heard wrong, Danny."

"I can't, Ronnie. I'm sorry, but Brody is being arrested as we speak."

"I want to talk to him."

"I figured as much. You feeling better?"

"Fine." Her voice was hard. "Let's just get this over with."

Danny drove, not even trying to talk to her. He couldn't decide if she was extremely sad or severely pissed off. She said nothing when he parked, nothing on the way inside the station, and nothing outside the room where Brody was being held. Danny entered first, and the minute she stepped through the door, she flew at her ex-partner.

"You son of a bitch! You filthy, murdering son of a bitch!" She screamed, ignoring Danny's attempts to pull her from Brody. "I'll put you through everything those victims went through."

Danny had her around the waist, holding her as she kicked, screamed and panted. As quick as it came over her, it was gone. She relaxed against him.

"You can let me go now, Danny."

"Remember, Ronnie, you're a cop."

"So was he." She sat at the table then, facing him. Danny took the seat beside her, ignoring the glare Brody sent his way. Blood trickled from his lip. "Why, Brody? Why did you do this?"

"For you, Sweetheart."

"Don't call me that," she snapped. "Who helped you?"

"That, I can't tell you."

"I know it's a woman."

"She didn't get involved until number two. She hated it that I fucked Vicky. Pissed her off but good." He smiled. "So I killed Vicky to please her, but it wasn't enough. She felt she may in someday be killing you, if she killed them herself."

"Is that why Vivian Stewart's appearance was changed?"

"Yes. She dyed her hair; put the contacts in her eyes. She watched me fuck her, and then she killed her." He glared. "No different than you fucking your new partner on your table."

"Who is she, Brody? Your print was on the contact lens. She setting you up?"

"No, she's just a stupid little bitch who screwed up."

"What I want to know is why you did all this?"

"How easy you forget that night at the academy." He looked to Danny. "She had me first, buddy. How do you think we compare? She screamed real pretty when I gave it to her."

Danny smiled and leaned back in his chair. Ronnie looked to him, and he read the truth in her eyes. Yes, she had a fling with Brody, but he would bet she didn't

remember all of that night.

"Well, since my intension's we're not to hurt her, I don't think there is one." Danny leaned forward. "How much you want to bet, that she don't even remember much of that night? I know she fell into your bed, Brody. You can't hurt me with that."

Brody turned his eyes on her, and she shivered. Had she ever really thought he was so caring?

"But I remember. I remember how you cried out, telling me to stop. I knew you didn't really want me to though. Oh no, Ronnie. You wanted every inch I gave you."

"I remember pain, Brody, but I blocked it out until now, and by your own admission, it was rape." She stood. "I know they have read you your rights. Do you want a lawyer?"

"Don't walk away from me, Sweetheart. We danced to that song that night, you know."

"You're completely off your rocker, you know that?"

"I loved you, Ronnie. From the moment I touched you, just a shake of your hand, I loved you," he said, almost sounding sincere. "And I had to watch you with those other guys, until finally, I had you. But still, you turned away. So, I found poor little lost souls to use in my fantasy, and you still loved it."

"No, Brody. I loved the man who was my partner. But I loved him in away you would not understand." She sighed. "Now, I will miss that man. He's dead to me."

As she walked out, Danny behind her, he started to whistle the tune she hoped never to hear again.

## Chapter Ten

"So it was Brody all along?" Joe asked from his chair at his wife's bedside.

Becky was healing well, but had to remain for another two weeks. Joe refused to leave her for a second.

"We can't get him to tell us who was his partner. We may never know," Danny said.

"Well, at least now maybe Ronnie is safe."

Ronnie walked up to the bed and kissed Becky's cheek.

"I need some coffee. Anyone else?"

"I could use a cup. I'll come with you."

"Relax. I think I can handle a few cups of coffee without getting myself in trouble. I have a pocket full of change and will hurry back." She left the room, a smile on her face.

"She seems to be taking it well." Becky whispered, it still hard to speak. "For a woman who just found out her partner was a killer with the hots for her."

"She's stronger than I gave her credit for."

"So, you gonna tell me what's up with the two of you?" Becky smiled.

"I won't hide it. I love her." Danny said, sitting in the empty chair. "It's mutual, and I hope to marry that woman someday."

"I can't see our Ronnie married, but I think you're good for her." She winked. "Take care of my girl, Monroe."

"I plan on it."

Idle chat resumed, everyone still not believing Brody was the man they had been

hunting. No ideas came to mind as to who the woman was who helped him. They had interviewed his wife, Sarah, and she had cried, saying she had no idea he was ever anything more than a good cop. She worried what she would do, as she was pregnant, in the early stages, with baby number three.

"The department will be sure she is taken care of." Joe had said. "Now, where did that girl get to? Only Ronnie could take thirty minutes to locate coffee."

"Thirty minutes?" Becky whispered. "She should be back way before now."

"Becky, don't start panicking. She may be chatting with a nurse or even looking at the babies." He smiled to reassure her. "You know how Ronnie likes babies."

"I have a bad feeling, Joe. She wouldn't be gone this long."

Danny stood, Becky's worry spilling over to him.

"I'll go hunt her down."

He left the room, making his way down the hall to the coffee machine. Each step he took had him even more worried. He reached the machine and saw no signs of Ronnie. He spotted something shiny on the floor under the coffee unit and knelt. Quarters, enough for three cups. Something was wrong.

He looked around and saw another quarter that led to the stairwell. What the hell was going on? His fear grew as he followed. The last of the quarters were found in the parking lot. He rushed back inside, told Joe what was happening and paced. Where would she have gone? No, not gone. Someone had taken her. But where? Suddenly, he knew. Her favorite place. The old hollowed out tree.

Asking Joe to send backup, Danny raced to the car and hit the lights.

"Please, God, let me get to her in time."

\* \* \* \*

Ronnie stood at the coffee machine, about to drop the quarters in when she felt the cold steel touch her back. She stiffened, but remained still.

"You think you're so smart, don't you?"

Ronnie knew that voice. Damn, had she been fooled all the way around?

"No, I don't."

"Let's go for a little ride, Detective Chase." When Ronnie hesitated, the sound of the hammer drawing back got her attention. "I will shoot you."

"Alright, just calm down." She pretended to pocket the change, but allowed most to drop to the floor. Danny was smart. He would figure it out, she hoped.

"Walk to the stairwell, and we will take the long way out."

Ronnie did as she was told, dropping change as she went.

"The blue sedan. Open the back door."

Ronnie complied, and then crumpled when her attacker hit her over the head with the butt of the gun.

"You thought you were so smart." The woman hissed, rolling Ronnie's limp body into the back seat. "Let's see who's smarter now."

\* \* \* \*

Ronnie woke with a major pain in her head. She became aware of two things right away. She was staked to the forest floor, in her favorite spot, or what used to be. She was also spread eagle and buck-naked.

"About time you joined the living, Veronica."

"Sarah? What are you doing?"

"Finishing the game, of course."

"Why?"

Sarah Taylor sighed and sat on a stump she had placed next to Ronnie. Her chin in her hand, she looked bored.

"Ronnie, no matter what I did, he always saw you when he was with me. I knew he was fucking whores on the side. They would do things for him I couldn't. Brody's cock is huge." She smiled. "But then, you know that. You did fuck him. I knew each time he came in me, he was wishing it was you."



"I'm sorry, Sarah."

"When the whores started looking more like his sweet, Ronnie, Auburn hair and green eyes, it was too much. You know, he would even dress them up like you?" She chuckled. "But then, I saw him after his first kill. I wanted to feel it, to fantasize what it would be like to take the life from your body. I agreed to his escapades, if he agreed I could watch and kill them myself."

"Sarah, I had no idea. I swear." She was helpless, and that caused her to panic. "What good would it be now? Brody is in jail, and to play the game, isn't he needed?"

"You mean to fuck you first?"

"Well, the others had been sexually used."

"Oh, simple little blind Ronnie." Sarah stood. "I don't need a dick to caress your body sexually."

Ronnie choked down the bile when Sarah knelt and touched her nipple, pinching it and rolling it between her fingers. She was so tired, and so scared. Her head ached, and she wanted to get her hands on Sarah so bad she could taste it.

"Lucky for you, I don't like to fuck women." She pulled her hand away, only to replace it with a knife. "What a beauty you are. Did you know, once, Brody was fucking me, and when he came, he cried out your name?"

"Please, Sarah, don't." Ronnie tensed when she ran the blade across her chest and around her nipples. "I honestly had no idea."

"It really matters little now. How do you think Danny will feel when he finds your bloody, lifeless body here in your woods?"

Enough was enough. Ronnie was going to die. She could accept that, but not being toyed with. She narrowed her eyes and spat at Sarah.

"Do it then, you stupid, weak, worthless bitch. Cut me to ribbons. Leave me here to die, but just fucking do it already. You're starting to bore me."

Ronnie bit her lip when the blade sliced just enough to the tender part of her breast to make it bleed. Then, it sliced the other.

"Oops, that will scar."

"What the fuck does it matter? I'm dead anyway." Ronnie cried out when she felt that blade draw across her abdomen. All the cuts were superficial, but left long enough and she would bleed to death.

Sarah licked her lips, her hand smearing the blood across Ronnie's chest and belly. Then, she sat across her chest, wrapping her hands around her throat. As she squeezed, Ronnie thought of Danny and how she wished for one more day. As she was about to pass out, Sarah released her.

"Not yet, Sweetheart." She slapped her cheeks. "Wake up for me."

"Fuck you."

Sarah backhanded her several times. Ronnie tasted the blood in her mouth and spat in Sarah's face. Again, those hands tightened, and Ronnie hoped it would end soon. But again, she stopped a moment too soon.

"Now be nice, Ronnie girl. I can see why Brody wanted you so bad. You have spirit." She leaned into her face. "Once, I agreed to let Brody fuck my ass. It hurt badly, but I wanted to please him. But he didn't know gentle, and the whole time I cried, he slammed into me, chanting your name."

"Save it, Sarah. It will never justify what you have done. You're just as crazy as he is. No man is worth this."

"My Brody was. The night he fucked you, he was with me in that bar." She stroked Ronnie's hair. "But he said he had to have you, before he would have me. It was easy enough to slip that mickey into your beer."

"Then you have no one to blame but you."

"But it wasn't enough for him. He wanted only you." Sarah's voice was hard, and she tightened her hold once again. "Goodnight, Sweetheart. It's time for you to go."

Ronnie struggled, a natural reaction. Tears slipped from her eyes as her lungs burned for air. Sarah's face began to blur, and just before the darkness took over, she could have sworn there was a gunshot.

\* \* \* \*

Danny ran as fast as his legs would carry him. The blue sedan ahead told him he was headed to the right place. He rounded the bend, pulled his weapon, and stared in horror at the scene before him. Sarah Taylor was choking the life out of Ronnie.

"Stop, Sarah, or I will shoot you down." His words went unheeded, so he took careful aim and fired.

Sarah screamed when the bullet penetrated her shoulder, knocking her off of Ronnie. Danny rushed forward, took a precious minute to cuff one hand to one foot on Sarah, and hurried to Ronnie. He checked for a pulse, and found nothing.

Using his knife, he cut the bonds holding her, then proceeded to give her CPR.

"Damn it, Ronnie. You wake up right now." he started compressions. "Open your eyes, Ronnie."

"The bitch is dead."

"You shut the hell up before I put another bullet in you, right between your cold eyes."

Danny balled up a fist and hit Ronnie over her heart hard. Then, he started breathing for her again.

"Come on, baby. Come back to me."

More compressions. More breathing.

Ronnie could feel the air reach her lungs, and another pain shot through her chest. What was happening to her?

"Ronnie, please... please wake up." Another bang to her chest.

Her eyes were heavy, but she slowly opened them to see Danny over her, tears on his face and panic in his eyes. When he caught her eyes on him, he broke out in hysterical laughter, pulling her to him. He rocked her in his arms.

"Oh, baby I thought you were gone for good."

The sound of sirens could be heard, and it struck her that she was naked. Her throat ached, but she managed to whisper to him.

"Danny, I need to cover myself."

"Oh, shit baby, I'm sorry." He pulled off his t-shirt and helped her ease into it.  
"This will have to do."

"Sarah?"

"She's alive. I cuffed her. She's lucky I got her in the shoulder."

"Thank you, Danny."

"For what?"

"Coming for me."

"Ronnie, I love you." He rocked her slowly. "I will always come for you."

"I'm so tired, Danny."

He tried to keep her awake, but her blood loss was catching up to her. The paramedics hurried forward and soon had a line started. Danny removed his cuffs and turned Sarah over to the medics for her shoulder.

"I finished the game." She smiled at Danny. "I killed the last piece."

"Check and mate, you stupid bitch." Danny said. "Ronnie is very much alive."

"No. She can't be." Sarah started to struggle. "Let me go. She has to die."

"Get her out of my site."

Danny rode in the ambulance with Ronnie. They treated her for blood loss and pain. Joe pulled a few strings so that Ronnie and Becky now shared a room.

"I swear you are never going for coffee again." Danny smiled, sitting beside her.  
"Not without me anyway."

"I'm just glad it's all over. I still can't believe Brody was a killer, much less Sarah."

"When Brody found out she tried to kill you, he was in a rage." Danny shook his head. "I guess you were never to truly have been touched. I think he really believed he loved you."

Ronnie sighed. It was all over, and now she could focus on her and Danny. Nurse's aides came in and took Becky for therapy. Joe took advantage to rush home for a shower. They were alone, and it was time to talk.

"What happens now, Danny?"

He took her hand and kissed it.

"When I thought I had lost you, I died inside. Everything I had ever wanted came to me in a rush, and I thought I would lose it all." He held up a hand. "Let me finish. I love you. I want to be with you."

"I love you, too. But I'm scarred now."

"What are you talking about?"

"My breasts and my belly are scared now."

"You think that changes anything?" He was gentle when he opened her hospital gown. It tied down the front so the doctors could watch her wounds easier. "You mean these?"

She nodded as his fingers traced the bandages on her body. Then, tears rolled down her face when he leaned in and kissed each in turn.

"I love you, Ronnie. All of you."

"Thank you, Danny." She stroked his hair. "I love you so much."

"Then, you will marry me?"

"Is that some kind of proposal?"

"Will you marry me?" He held his breath, waiting.

Ronnie wanted to laugh, cry and sing all at once. He loved her, all of her, and he wanted her for his wife. She couldn't resist a little tease.

"I guess I will have to call my date for Friday and let him know I can't go." His eyes narrowed, and she laughed. "Of course I will, Danny."

"You really are a witch."

"But you love me anyway."

"For the rest of my life, baby. For the rest of my life."

\* \* \* \*

Ronnie sat on the couch in her home, the one she now shared with Danny and watched the local news. Brody Taylor was sentenced to death, but the sentence was

overturned as the jury believed him to be insane. Sarah received the same sentence. Their attorneys had fought to have them sent to the same institution for the criminally insane, but the judge wouldn't even consider it.

Becky healed well, but was still recovering. Joe was with her almost every minute of every day. It was a shame it took such a tragedy for those two to realize they didn't spend near enough time together.

It had been a month, and she was home now, enjoying the tender care Danny was taking with her. She was also going insane herself, she wanted him so badly. But he was afraid he would hurt her.

Something had to give.

Danny came in, lifted her feet and sat, then put her feet back in his lap and began rubbing her feet. He put in for a permanent transfer and was now her full time partner. It was unusual for soon to be married officers to be partners. But they had both insisted, and Joe agreed.

"What's on your mind, Ronnie?"

"You."

"And what are you thinking?"

"That it's high time you did more to me than rub my feet."

"You're not healed."

"Danny, either you take care of me, or I will resort to taking care of myself."

Ronnie pulled her shirt over her head. It was long and baggy, just enough to cover her breasts and the part of her he had been aching to fill. Now, she was stark naked and he gritted his teeth.

"You're tempting me, woman."

"I should hope so." Her hands cupped her breasts and she rolled her nipples, watching his eyes flare. "I miss you, Danny. I want you to fill me."

One of her hands strayed between her legs, and she rubbed herself sensually, never taking her eyes from his.

Danny rose to his knees, placing one of her feet on the floor. She lay back, lifting

her other leg over the back of the couch. He slowly lowered his mouth, and gave her one long lick. She arched into his mouth.

"I missed your taste, Ronnie." He deepened the sensual kiss between her thighs. "I missed it so very much."

"Make love to me, Danny."

He loved her a little more with his tongue, then licked his way up her body, kissing her scars and taking her mouth in a scorching kiss. He released his cock, and she reached for him, stroking him with her soft hand. She guided him to her, wanting him to fill her.

Slowly, he pushed into her, taking her gasp into his mouth. He groaned at the feel of her. He had missed more than her taste.

Ronnie could cry at how carefully he made love to her. But it felt so good, having him inside her again. There was nothing between them now, except their love for one another. The case was solved; they planned to be married within a year.

She wrapped her arms around his back, arching into his body. When her release came, it was as sweet as his loving. She felt his release inside of her, and she moved her hips, taking it all from him.

Danny kissed her forehead, shifted to lay behind her on the couch, and wrapped her in his arms. She snuggled closer, rubbing her ass against his cock.

"Now stop that, Ronnie. You're in no way ready for that kind of loving."

"Maybe not, but I will be soon." She wiggled again. "If I have to suffer, so should you."

"You little minx."

"But you love me anyway."

"Forever, baby. Always and forever."

The End

## **Author Information**

Emery LaRue

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Growing up with a very talented grandfather, I knew I wanted to write. I love stories with strong and passionate characters, and the promise of true love. With two wonderful kids and my love for them, I stay busy with soccer and football. But I always find time to visit my new friends between the pages. Welcome to my world, I look forward to sharing it with you.

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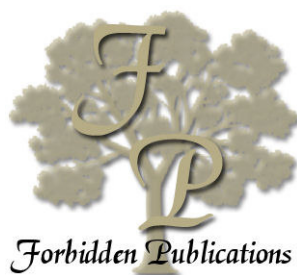
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