



## Praise for the writing of Marilyn Lee

### *A Thing Called Love, first edition*

Dan and Jamie are explosive together. *A Thing Called Love* is a highly erotic novel. Dan and Jamie are written with just enough sensitivity to make it tasteful . . . Ms. Lee has given it plenty of twists and turns to keep you interested.

-- Rita Hyatt, *Writers' Club Romance Group on AOL*

Marilyn Lee always writes a good story. Very fast-paced and direct. I look forward to your next book Marilyn!

-- Lisa, *Book Review Cafe*

Filled with passion, murder and lots of secrets, *A Thing Called Love* will grab you from the opening scene. Jamie is a strong, independent woman who has worked very hard to make it in a man's world as a detective. To have her world turn upside down is the last thing she expects...so are the feelings Dan ignites in her. With Ms. Lee's delightful writing, the reader feels her heartache as she goes about clearing her name. Dan is a hero who knows what he wants and sets out to get it. For a quick passion-filled story, don't miss out on Ms. Lee's *A Thing Called Love*; it's a wonderful sexy read.

-- Author, Review Site

*A Thing Called Love* was previously released by Renaissance Ebooks and has been revised and expanded in this version.

# A THING CALLED LOVE

Marilyn Lee

LooseId  
[www.loose-id.com](http://www.loose-id.com)

## Warning

This e-book contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language and may be considered offensive to some readers. Loose Id e-books are for sale to adults ONLY, as defined by the laws of the country in which you made your purchase. Please store your files wisely, where they cannot be accessed by under-aged readers.

\* \* \* \* \*

This book is rated:



Explicit descriptions of sexual activity and graphic language.

# A Thing Called Love

Marilyn Lee

This e-book is a work of fiction. While reference might be made to actual historical events or existing locations, the names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Published by  
Loose Id LLC  
1802 N Carson Street, Suite 212-29  
Carson City NV 89701-1215  
[www.loose-id.com](http://www.loose-id.com)

Copyright © 2004 by Marilyn Lee

All rights reserved. This copy is intended for the purchaser of this e-book ONLY. No part of this e-book may be reproduced or shared in any form, including, but not limited to printing, photocopying, faxing, or emailing without prior written permission from Loose Id LLC.

ISBN 1-59632-016-8

Available in Adobe PDF, HTML, MobiPocket, and MS Reader

Printed in the United States of America

Editor: Sheri Ross Fogarty  
Cover Artist: Angela Knight

## **Publisher's Note**

*A Thing Called Love* was previously released by Renaissance Ebooks. It has been substantially reedited, as well as expanded and revised for this version.

## Chapter One

Jamie Hanna's tawny face creased into a frown and she moved restlessly on the passenger side of the car. She slipped a hand between the seat and her back and released a small sigh of relief when her fingers touched the familiar, reassuring contours of her gun, resting in her waist holster.

Pulling her hand away, she cast a quick look around her. Dusk had fallen and none of the alley lamps worked. The fact that there were shadows everywhere and the car was in a darkened recess across from the building they were staking out didn't make her feel any better about their present situation.

This was just plain old Hillhower craziness at its worst. So why had she let him talk her into coming along? There were better and safer ways of making sergeant than this. She pulled her gaze away from the big dark building.

The man beside her lounged in the reclined driver's seat. To her annoyance, he looked cool and calm. The dark suit he wore fit him as if it had been made especially for him. She wondered uneasily how much it had cost. How could he afford it or the expensive handmade shoes on his salary? She knew the answer: he couldn't. She also knew what the implications were.

So what on God's green earth was she doing here? "Look, there's still time to do this the right way." She realized her voice revealed her unease and started again. She had learned the hard way the folly of showing any weakness with him. "We should call for backup."

"There isn't time." He kept his gaze on the building. "Besides, think how great this is gonna look in our jackets. It's gonna catapult us to the top of the sergeant's heap."

From her position on the passenger side, Jamie couldn't see down the length of the alley. Still, she knew the opening at either end was narrow enough to be blocked by a single large car or S.U.V. parked broadside. If things turned ugly, they'd be trapped with nowhere to go. Her especially. There wasn't even enough room in the recess for her to fully open her door.

And she suddenly had a really bad feeling. She couldn't suppress a shiver. "Look, Hillhower, I say we call for backup." She reached for the radio. "If this is as big as you say it is, there'll be enough glory to go around."

"No!" He straightened his seat and turned to face her so quickly, a lock of dark blond hair fell onto his forehead. His green eyes narrowed. "Look, Hanna, we're gonna do this alone. We pull this off and we'll both be detective sergeants before that hot little body of yours cools off. How does Detective Sergeant Hanna sound?"

She hesitated, her hand hovering over the radio. His reference to her body annoyed and embarrassed her. But she had to admit, Detective Sergeant Hanna had an undeniably nice ring. When all was said and done, she was as ambitious as Hillhower, although slightly more cautious. She wanted to live to enjoy any accolades resulting from this bust.

"OK, so it sounds good." She glanced around. "But we could get trapped here very easily."

On her side of the alley just beyond the recess were loading docks that had serviced the factory buildings, abandoned years earlier.



There was one building on the other side of the alley. The old Virtual Reality Club. The building was a huge, thirty-story high structure with broken windowpanes and graffiti covering almost every visible square inch.

She couldn't see any signs of life or light coming from the building. It appeared to be as deserted as the structures on her side of the alley. But if it really was totally deserted, why had Hillhower's informant claimed a big drug deal was going down there? And if it wasn't deserted, they needed backup. Most of all, she needed to be out of this alley with no place to go.

"Look, Hanna, you a cop or a scared little girl who wants her mommy when it gets dark?" Hillhower demanded in a condescending manner she knew was calculated to make her do just as he wanted.

Still, her shoulders stiffened and she yanked her hand back from the radio. "I'm as much cop as you are, Hillhower!" she snapped.

He flashed a quick, satisfied smile at her before turning back to face the building. "Never doubted it for a moment, Hanna," he said.

Knowing she'd allowed him to jerk her chain, she compressed her lips. Given a choice, he was the last person she would have chosen for a partner. But she hadn't been given a choice.

After nine years on the job and walking a beat and taking her lumps like every other cop in the precinct, no one but Hillhower had been willing to be her partner. For all his faults, he'd been the only one willing to give her a fair shake. Well, as fair a shake as he gave anyone.

"We pull this off and you and I are going places, Hanna." Hillhower's voice interrupted her thoughts. "Together." He turned his head suddenly. Smiling, he placed his hand over her clenched one on the armrest between them.

His hand felt big and warm over hers. She pulled her hand firmly from under his, then froze when he transferred his attentions to her knee. His palm seemed to burn through the material of her slacks. "You gonna be busy tonight, Hanna, love? June's still out of town and I'm feeling lonely and I'm betting you are too. You want some company to warm a lonely night and fill some other. . . needs?"

She sucked in a breath as he slowly trailed his hand up her thigh to cup his palm between her legs. She felt a tingle begin somewhere inside her. A hunger. A need. For a man. It had been so long since she'd felt Blair's big dark body on hers. In her. Hard and demanding and yet sweet and tender. Blair. Oh, Blair.

She felt weak and needful and totally unable to resist as Hillhower loosened her bulletproof vest. "How about giving ole Hillhower a taste of those big boobs of yours?" he asked, his voice deep and hypnotic.

She closed her eyes and sighed softly. Hillhower opened several buttons before sliding his big palm between her blouse and into her bra to tweak the nipple of one breast.

"You like that, don't you, Hanna, love?"

The sound of Hillhower's smug voice jolted her back to her senses. It was Blair she missed and needed. Blair. Not Hillhower fingering her in some back alley like a crack addict selling sex for a fix.

This wasn't the first time he'd attempted to touch her intimately, but it was the first time he'd done it on a stakeout. And the first time he'd come onto her since he and June became "a couple." His two previous seduction attempts had come after she'd been foolish enough to go out with him for a drink after their shift.

Furious that he had not only ignored her prior warnings to keep his hands to himself, but had also succeeded in arousing her, she placed her palms against his shoulders and gave him an angry, forceful shove. "You big jerk, don't you dare touch me again!"

"Hey!" Her shove sent him sprawling backwards against the driver's side door.

She glared at him and lifted her trembling hands to fumble with the buttons of her blouse. After several attempts, she gave up the effort and settled for refastening her vest. She'd take care of her blouse once she was back in her own car. And she was going to request a new assignment ASAP.

"Hey, before you decide you're not interested, let me show you what you'd be turning down, Sweetcakes."

Before she could speak, he straightened in his seat, unzipped his pants, and popped out his shaft. Despite her anger, she felt the lips of her sex convulse as her gaze zeroed in on his penis. It wasn't particularly long or overly thick, but it had been such a long time for her. She found she couldn't look away.

"What do you say, Sweetcakes? You want some of Pete here? He grows a lot bigger and thicker when he gets a little tender loving care."

A jolt of lust thundered through her body and down into her sex. God, it would be so wonderful to finally feel an aroused man inside her again. She only needed to unzip her own pants, recline her seat, wait for him to mount her, and slowly slide inside her body.

Holding his shaft in one hand, he stroked a finger down her cheek. "Come on, Hanna, love, I've been wanting to get between your legs since I saw you. Let ole' Pete here have a taste of brown sugar."

"This is not the time or place."

He pressed a finger against her lips. "This is the perfect time and place for a quickie. Come on, Sweetcakes. Relax."

Contemplating a quickie with him on a stakeout was madness. And yet she could not deny her hunger for sex. Dare she surrender to her needs? While she weighed the consequences of going with the flow of her growing desire, the back door of the building they'd been watching flew open and several men, clad in all black and armed with an alarming array of weapons erupted into the alley and opened fire.

"Hillhower! Watch out!" Just as she ducked and reached for her gun, she felt two bullets slam into her chest. Groaning, she was thrown back against the passenger door before she fell onto her side, stunned.

"Stop shooting! Stop shooting! Michael! You got her! You got her! Oh, my God! I'm hit. For the love of God, stop shooting!"

Jamie felt consciousness fading fast as Hillhower's frantic voice continued to scream. Her last thoughts were that he had set her up and they were both going to die.

## Chapter Two

"You really think she had something to do with it?"

"You know how they were found - him with his cock out, and her with her blouse unbuttoned under her vest, and her panties wet. What do you think?"

"That might add up to a little hanky panty on the job, Detective. That's a far cry from what you're suggesting."

"Is it? Well, let's look at the facts. He's dead - shot to pieces, and she's not. What do you think?"

Jamie's first thought was that the occupants of heaven sounded just like a couple of the guys from I.A.. The third voice, female, she didn't recognize. Then she became aware of a soreness in her chest. It hurt to breathe. But if she was breathing, she must be alive.

She opened her eyes and found herself staring up at a sterile white ceiling that could only belong in a hospital. She turned her head. Pain shot down the side of her jaw. She moaned and closed her eyes.

"Sshhh. She's awake."

"She's groggy. You think she heard us?" The first male voice sounded anxious.

"Detective Hanna, you awake?" the second male voice asked.

Being careful not to turn her head again, she opened her eyes. There were two detectives from Internal Affairs standing by the bed as well as a tall brunette she recognized as a Fraternal Order of Police lawyer.

The older man, Reed Howard, a tall blond going gray at the temples, stared coolly down at her. Howard hadn't gone out of his way to be unpleasant when they'd both been in the 8th. Nevertheless, she'd always known he didn't like having her in the department. Still, since she was in vice and he was now in Internal Affairs, his opinion of her had never mattered much.

The other detective, Jack Marhall, was of medium height with dark hair and of slender build. She'd met him when he'd investigated a shooting she and Hillhower had been involved in three years earlier. He'd been professional and fair. Their paths hadn't crossed again. She saw now that his dark eyes seemed sympathetic.

"Hey, Hanna. How are you feeling?" he asked.

"This isn't heaven," she said, testing her voice. It came out in a low, hoarse whisper she barely recognized. Her throat ached. Her chest ached. Her whole body ached.

Marhall smiled. "Afraid not. You're still among the living, thank God. It-"

"Enough with the tea and sympathy," Howard snapped. "We're here on official business, Hanna. This isn't a social call."

The harshness of his tone and his obvious lack of sympathy filled her with an almost overwhelming need to cry. She closed her eyes and bit her lip in an effort to fight off the urge.

"Detective Hanna?" She felt a hand lightly brush her arm. "I'm Diana Barrio from the F.O.P.. I'm here to advise you until you can make other arrangements. You don't have to answer any questions now if you're not up to it. And later-"

"Why should she mind answering a few questions, Counselor?" Howard sounded angry. "A cop. . . her partner. . . was killed and you're advising her to hide behind you? She doesn't need to hide behind you or anyone else unless she has something to hide."

Jamie kept her eyes closed, fighting to hold tears at bay.

"Give her a break, Howard." Marshall sounded annoyed. "She nearly got killed."

"Nearly, but not quite, and poor old Hillhower was killed with his cock hanging out of his damned pants!" Howard shot back. "We're here to ask some questions, Hanna. We need answers. Now."

So Hillhower was dead. He had tried to set her up. He was dead, but she had somehow survived. She should be jubilant. Happy. But she wasn't. They'd had problems, but they'd made detective together five years earlier. They'd been partners since. He'd even sat with her after Blair's death. The tears she'd been trying to keep at bay filled her eyes and spilled down her cheeks.

She heard Howard mutter several expletives. "Don't pull the tears routine, Hanna. You're a cop and you know you have to answer our questions."

"Not right now she doesn't," Diana Barrio insisted. "She has rights."

"To hell with her rights. Her partner's dead. The only right she has is to tell us everything she knows about it! Starting with why the hell she set him up."

"You don't know that she did, Detective," Diana Barrio responded. "And you're not going to harass her. If you want to question her, you'll do it later. When she's feeling better."

"When she's had time to get her lies together, you mean," Howard said bitterly.

Marshall answered in a quiet voice. "The counselor's right, Howard. We don't have to do this now. We're not going to do this now."

"What? You pulling rank?" Howard demanded.

"That's right. I'm pulling rank."

Howard uttered several more expletives, then Jamie heard the sound of him practically stomping out of the room.

She felt a hand gently touch her arm. "It's early days yet, Hanna. We'll come back in a day or two, when you're feeling better."

She opened her eyes and looked gratefully up at Marhall through a fresh wave of tears, but she couldn't speak past the ache in the throat.

He followed Howard out of the room, leaving her alone with Barrio.

"Detective, I strongly suggest that you exercise your right to remain silent. In the meantime, I'll see what I can do about keeping Howard away from you for a day or two."

She nodded mutely, thankfully.

"Ms. Karon has been notified and is flying in from L.A. to be with you. You take care of yourself, Detective." The older woman smiled, touched her arm lightly, and left the room.

Alone, Jamie allowed her tears to flow freely. She ached and was scared. Hillhower was dead and she seemed to be in trouble. Why else would Howard have been so hostile and the Fraternal Order of Police have sent a lawyer?

\* \* \* \* \*

Dan Janson looked up as Mike Neely came breezing through the newsroom and into his office. Closing the door behind him, Mike tossed himself into the lone chair in front of his desk.

Mike ran a hand through his short, dark hair and leaned against the back of the chair, playing with the camera around his neck.

Aware of an unwarranted irritation, Dan sat forward. "Well? I haven't got all day to wait while you sleep on the job! What did you find out?"

Mike straightened in his chair, a surprised look on his dark, unshaven face. "Hey, Chief. What's with the attitude?"



Dan fought for control and leaned back in his chair, letting some of the tension flow out of his shoulders. He clasped a hand below the base of his hairline and slowly rotated his neck. "Sorry. I'm wound a little tight."

"Why?" Mike frowned. "You know she's dirty."

"What did you find out?"

"Her partner's deader than a red brick."

"How about you tell me something I don't already know?" he asked shortly.

Mike shrugged. "Fine. She'll live, unfortunately. Seems she's one lucky bitch."

A tidal wave of relief washed over him. He narrowed his eyes and tightened his lips in an effort not to show it. "So she came away unscathed. Why is she in the hospital?"

"I didn't say she was unscathed, Chief. I said she'd live. She got hit a couple of times."

He felt an uncomfortable tightness in his chest. "Exactly how many times is a couple?"

Mike grimaced. "Obviously not enough to kill the bitch."

He slammed a fist down onto the desk. "Damn it, Mike! Will you cut the editorial and stick with the facts?"

Mike arched a brow at him. "What's with you, tonight? If I didn't know better, I'd think you had a thing for her."

He felt heat rising up the back of his neck. "What are you talking about? I've never even met the woman!"

Mike stared at him, a speculative look on his face. "But you've always seemed to take a very personal interest in her. Enough to-"

"Can that bull and answer my question. How many times was she hit?"

"Twice in the upper chest, twice on the top of her right shoulder, and one bullet creased her just beside her right eye."

Listening to the litany of injuries, Dan found it difficult not to wince.

"She's one lucky hot, dark chocolate mama."

A fresh wave of blood shot up Dan's neck. He leaned forward and spoke in a low, angry voice. "I'm only going to say this once, Mike. Don't go there."

Mike drew back. "Don't go where? You know what they were doing before they were hit. If she hadn't partially unbuckled her bulletproof vest, she would have been barely scratched!"

"That's not what I meant. Don't you make any disparaging racial remarks about her or anyone else in my presence. If you want to run around with a bunch of anti-social kooks in your spare time, that's your business, but don't bring that filth into this office."

He watched Mike's face redden and his eyes fill with resentment. "My friends aren't kooks," he said. "And some of them are very influential. Not the kind of people you'd want as enemies, Chief."

"I know a veiled threat when I hear one. And I know you have 'friends,' but don't think I'm going to listen to your white supremacist beliefs. Now that you've had your say, let's get back to the business at hand. What's her condition?"

Mike remained silent for several moments. Dan watched as he struggled to get control of his temper. "I'm told it's fairly good. Her bulletproof vest deflected the two shots to the chest and her shoulder. She has a few bruised ribs and she's battered a bit, but the key point is, she's alive."

"What did she have to say for herself?"

"They have a police guard outside her door. I couldn't get near her, but her bacon's just about burned. I saw two guys from I.A. and an F.O.P. mouthpiece coming out of her room. They did not look like happy campers."

He paused and smirked. "Won't be long now before another dirty cop bites the dust, Chief. Do we go ahead with that expose'?"

"Yeah." He tried to infuse some enthusiasm into his tone. "We're going ahead with it."

"Great." Mike grinned, rubbing his hands. "I love helping take down a dirty cop as much as you do."

"Yeah," he said again. He didn't want to. And he didn't like it, but they would print the info they'd gathered on corruption in the 8th. If that info implicated Jamie Hanna, it was her doing, not his.

"But first, I think we'd better try to get her side of the story."

Mike frowned. "You know she's going to claim innocence. The dirty ones always do."

"Maybe so, but your exposé can hardly be called fair and unbiased if we don't at least attempt to talk to her."

Mike grimaced. "Fine. I'll head back to the hospital."

"No. I'll go."

Mike paused in the process of rising from his seat. "You'll go? Why? Since when?"

He knew his motive for choosing to go to the hospital himself wouldn't hold up under close scrutiny, but he was going anyway. "I know the medical director at the hospital."

Mike subsided in his seat. "This is my story."

"I'm aware of that. I'll let you know what, if anything, I find out. OK?"

"I guess it'll have to be."

\* \* \* \* \*

Later that night, Dan stood at the side of the hospital bed, staring down at the woman lying there. Her hair was short and curled naturally against her head. She had beautiful dark skin and a wide, full-lipped mouth. Rather than being pretty, her face was interesting, even with the noticeable bullet crease near her right eye. Sleeping and without makeup, she looked defenseless and innocent.

He hardened himself. If there was one thing she was not, it was innocent. Mike was probably right. She had lured Hillhower to his death by tempting him into that alley with promises of sex.

He allowed his gaze to briefly sweep over her. She lay on her side, her knees slightly drawn toward her stomach. He could see the shapely contours of her body outlined under the sheet: large, firm breasts, curved hips, long, shapely legs, and a butt that looked firm and well padded. Nice. Very nice. No wonder Hillhower couldn't keep his cock in his pants with this woman tempting him with glimpses of her well-endowed body.

Just looking at her, Dan felt an annoying stirring in his groin. He'd never been particularly interested in black women, but he couldn't deny that he was interested in this woman. And had been for quite awhile.

"I think you'd better go. It's clear she's not going to wake any time soon."

He turned from the bed to face the only other occupant in the room: Tia Karon, a tall willowy black woman with long dark, shoulder length hair and skin the color of very creamed coffee. She was as flat-chested as a supermodel and had Caucasian-like thin lips and a narrow nose.

He glanced at his watch. Six-thirty. He'd already been there an hour and a half; most of that time spent staring down at Jamie Hanna. He nodded. "I guess you're right." He smiled and extended his hand. "Thank you for allowing me in to see her, Ms. Karon."

She flashed him a brief, nervous smile, revealing a set of white, unnaturally even teeth. "Well, as the closest thing Jamie has to family, I wanted you to meet her. See her so you'd know she had nothing to do with her partner's death."

He cast a wary look at her. How did she expect him to determine that from looks alone when the facts all said something very different? "And yet, her partner is the second man close to her to have died under mysterious circumstances in just over two years," he pointed out.

He watched as she blanched and glanced quickly toward the bed. "How can you bring that up? Jamie had nothing to do with Blair's death. It devastated her! And she was cleared."

But her gun had been used. He nodded slowly. "Yes, I know." The question was, had she been cleared because she was innocent or because the police had been protecting one of their own? Either way, another man close to her was now dead.

She clutched his arm, a pleading look in her dark eyes. "Then you won't write any articles implicating her? That's why I let you in."

It was clear she strongly believed in her friend's innocence, which was just as well. With the evidence against her, Jamie Hanna was going to need all the support she could get.

He stepped back so that her hand fell away from his arm. "While I appreciate that, I can't make any promises. I won't be the one writing the article--"

"Maybe not, but you control the paper."

"I control what goes into the editorial column," he corrected. "My reporters gather the facts and write their own stories."

At the sound of movement behind him, he glanced back to the bed where Jamie Hanna still slept. She turned in her sleep. The light sheet covering her fell aside. The hospital gown, usually opened in the back, was opened down the front. He felt himself hardening as he got a tantalizing view of her large, nearly grapefruit sized breasts and of her dark hair-covered mound before, with a small sound of dismay, her friend rushed forward and pulled the sheet back over her.

Still, he could clearly see the outline of her beautiful body under the sheet. What delights lay between those long, dark thighs, crowned by that glorious mass of thick black hair? Probably a very pretty, pink-lipped vagina, one that Hillhower had been fortunate enough to enjoy before he died.

"Don't you dare look at her like that!"

He forced himself to look away from the bed and encountered Tia Karon's outraged look.

"What kind of man are you, anyway?"

He shrugged. "A normal one." Having been separated for three and a half years and divorced for just over a year, he was relationship shy, but horny as hell.

"Will you please leave now so I can cover her properly?"

Feeling like a small boy who'd been caught playing with himself, he nodded and quickly left the room. As he walked to the parking lot, the image of Jamie Hannah's smooth dark body danced in his mind, teasing and tantalizing him.

\* \* \* \* \*

"You can't be serious. This is a joke. Right?"

Jamie glanced around the captain's small, dim gray office. They were all there: Captain Wilson, Lieutenant Harris, and Assistant District Attorney Karl Davis. The department's take-down-a-cop-squad. This meeting was definitely not a joke.

"Tell us again what you know about your partner's murder, Detective Hanna," ADA Davis invited.

She opened her mouth, then closed it as she saw the latest edition of *The Daily Tribune* prominently displayed on the captain's desk. IS MAVERICK DETECTIVE IMPLICATED IN AMBUSH SLAYING OF PARTNER? Underneath was her academy graduation picture, taken nine years earlier.

Her eyes narrowed as she read the byline. Mike Neely. Great. If she didn't find Hillhower's killers fast, Neely and Janson would have all of Lehigh Valley screaming for her badge.

"Maybe we should continue this conversation downstairs in the interrogation room, Detective," the ADA suggested when she remained silent.

She squared her shoulders and tried to control her pounding heart. "In the interrogation room? I guess I'd better get myself a lawyer."

"That's not necessary," the ADA went on, his green eyes not quite meeting hers. "We're all on the same side."

She glanced quickly at the lieutenant, then the captain - both in their late fifties and still unhappy at having the only precinct in Lehigh Valley with a female detective. A black female detective. Neither one of them would be sorry to see her hounded off the force. She wasn't sure they'd ever been on her side.

"Captain, am I being charged with Hillhower's murder?" she demanded, staring straight into Wilson's dull brown eyes.

Wilson cleared his throat and dropped his gaze. "No. Of course not. The ballistics reports clearly indicated that you and he were both shot from several feet away with some of the same weapons."

"Then what is this all about?"

He brought his gaze back to hers. "It's about your being found with your blouse open and him with his. . . pants down, so to speak. Maybe you'd like to tell us what happened."

Her cheeks burned. Why had she allowed Hillhower to touch her? Even if she managed to convince everyone she had nothing to do with his death, every cop in The Valley knew they'd been fooling around.

"I put everything I know in my report, sir." Well, not everything. But now that Hillhower was dead, she'd said all she needed to. She hoped. She would not reveal that she had suspected Hillhower was on the take -- unless she had no choice.

"I suggest you cooperate, Hanna."

She squinted at Harris. "I have cooperated, sir. Now," she tugged at the jacket of her dark blue trouser suit and shot to her feet, "I'm out of here!" She spun on her heel and headed toward the door.

"Hanna, where do you think you're going? You haven't been dismissed!" Harris yelled. "Get back here."

With her hand on the door, she turned. "You'd all better understand something about me. I know you all think that I lured Hillhower to his death. But get this straight: I had nothing to do with his death and I will not be hounded off the force for something I didn't do. I'm going to find Hillhower's killers. And if I were you, I'd stay out of my way, Lieutenant Harris." She allowed her gaze to touch briefly on each face in the room. "That goes for all of you!"

"Hanna!"

She yanked the door open and stepped through, resisting the urge to give the door a resounding slamming. She walked slowly across the squad room floor. She couldn't help noticing the abrupt cessation of conversation as her fellow officers stared at her. She saw anger on many faces, smirks on some and a combination of both in the expressions of others.

The common thread? They were all male. There were a few other women in the department, but they all worked different shifts and in different precincts. Although they'd occasionally met, they didn't spend enough time together to develop any real bond. She turned at the door to look back over the room. Every face was looking toward her, and there was not one sympathetic pair of eyes. They wouldn't help her prove her innocence. She squared her slim shoulders. She was on her own -- as usual.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dan Janson typed the last line of his morning column before saving it and pushing in his keyboard tray. He flexed his shoulders and sat back in the chair, yawning and stretching. He glanced through the open blinds of his glass-enclosed office. The newsroom beyond was nearly dark, all the reporters having left hours ago. Tom Smith, was on the graveyard shift, but he'd just headed out for dinner.



Of course, that was normal. Although he'd written about police corruption several times, besides the usual drug pushing and prostitution there wasn't much crime in Lehigh Valley. Located in one of Philadelphia's biggest suburbs, The Valley was one-fifth the size of Philadelphia, which was the fifth largest city in the country. Still, the murder of Detective Tony Hillhower was only the third murder in the whole valley in the last twenty years.

His thoughts were interrupted by a series of slamming doors, and he looked out into the newsroom. A tall woman in a dark blue suit purposefully picked her way through the maze of desks.

In a moment, the door of his office flew open and the woman stood in front of him. "Janson!" She flung a folded paper onto his desk. "I want to talk to you."

He glanced briefly at the copy of *The Tribune* before looking up at her. She looked much healthier since the last time he'd seen her. Her dusky skin was smooth and clear, her eyes a deep golden brown, her body curved and padded in all the right places. A sudden vision of her uncovered body flashed through his mind and a rush of heat shot up the back of his neck.

He shrugged. "So talk, Detective Hanna. But make it quick. It's been a long day and I'm tired."

"Oh, I'll bet you are. I suppose railroading an innocent person is tough work, Janson."

Giving Mike the go-ahead to implicate her in her partner's murder had given him no pleasure. "We did our jobs, Detective, which wouldn't have been necessary if you'd stuck to doing yours," he pointed out coolly.

"What?" She clenched her hands into fists, as if to keep from hitting him. "What did you say?"

He rose slowly and leaned across the desk to stare into her eyes. "You heard me. It wasn't your job to take bribes or to obstruct the law or to service your partner in a back alley on the time of the people who pay your salary. Your job, Detective, was protecting the

citizens of The Valley and keeping your partner alive. You failed miserably on both counts, didn't you? Although, I suppose your partner at least died happy."

She recoiled as if he'd struck her. For a moment, she stared at him, her mouth forming a small "o," her dark eyes wide.

Watching the anger, confusion, and embarrassment flit across her face, he wished he hadn't taken that cheap shot about her and Hillhower.

"I was not servicing him," she finally said in a low, tired tone.

He softened his voice, but didn't back down. "You have another explanation for your unbuttoned blouse and his penis being outside his pants?"

"I don't owe you any explanations."

She sounded defensive and his certainty that she'd used her considerable charms to lure Hillhower to that alley solidified. "That's right, Detective, nor does this paper or any of its employees owe you any."

"It wasn't the paper that implicated me in Hillhower's death. It was your latch dog, Mike Neely. Did you ever stop to ask yourself why he wrote those libelous lies? Have you bothered to check his affiliations?"

"If you're asking if I know that he has certain. . . friends that this paper and I don't condone, the answer is yes. But those affiliations did not factor into this article." He tapped the paper she'd thrown across his desk. "I would not allow that. If you're implying he distorted the article because you're black, forget it. He wrote it because it follows the facts."

"The facts? I'll give you the facts, Janson. I've never taken a bribe and I'd give my life protecting any person in The Valley, even the likes of you, Janson, and that hack you call a reporter. Of course, he's not the only hack around here."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"What editor worthy of the name would have allowed such unsubstantiated lies to see the light of day?"

A tide of blood burned the back of his neck. "Since you seem to have missed the point, Detective, allow me to point out that Neely didn't say you were dirty, nor did he say you had anything to do with your partner's murder."

"No, he just hinted and implied I did. And all without any facts whatsoever. That's what makes what you did so reprehensible! You have no proof. None of the garbage you allowed him to write about me is true! None of it!"

Holding onto his temper proved difficult. His journalistic integrity was one of his most precious possessions. He was not about to allow a dirty cop to trample on it. "None of it's true? Let me again remind you that you were not directly accused of anything. Neely obtained his information from reliable sources, Detective. Everything in the article is factual." He began to check each point off on his fingers. "An informant inside the Garsitti mob pointed the finger at a dirty detective in the 8th, most of The Valley's illicit activity happens in your district, you live above your means, and you can't account for your actions the night your partner was killed.

"What other conclusion can a reasonable person reach except that you're somehow involved in this mess up to your lovely neck?"

Her eyes seemed to boil with rage. "Don't get personal, Janson. And don't kid yourself. A reasonable person would get all the facts before condemning someone. Did it ever occur to you that you might have picked the wrong cop?"

He'd followed her career since her arrival in The Valley nearly ten years earlier, so he'd been reluctant to even consider that she might be dirty. In fact, until Hillhower's murder, although Mike had insisted she was the dirty one, he'd been uncertain which of the partners had been on the take.

"No." He shook his head. "One of you was dirty. If you were clean, you'd be the one dead."

She slammed her fist down on his desk. "But don't you see? I would have been the one killed if-" She broke off abruptly and stared at him with a look of dismay on her face.

"If what? If you know something that could help, you need to tell me, Detective."

Her laughter held no amusement. "Do you really think I'd give you any information to use against me?"

"I could help you."

She stabbed repeatedly at his shoulder with a finger. "I don't need your kind of help, Janson."

He looked down at her hand with its short, unpolished nails and long, lean fingers. They'd feel good on his face. Against his body. Caressing his cock and guiding it into her body as she'd apparently done with Hillhower.

What would it be like to kiss her soft, lush-looking lips? To caress her rump and make slow, sweet love to her while suckling at her breasts? Bracing himself against his desk with one hand, he caught her hand in his and brushed his lips over the back of her fingers. He felt her tremble as he pressed his tongue and then his lips into the palm of her hand. "Let me help you," he said softly.

He lifted her hand to his face and pressed his cheek against her palm, kissing her fingers as he did. "I know you're angry, but give me a chance to explain."

She gasped and jerked her hand away. Without taking her eyes off him, she stumbled backwards toward the door. "The only thing I'll give you is an unfriendly warning -- if you know what's good for you, get ready to print a retraction and stay out of my way. I don't want or need your help, Janson."

He watched her hurry across the newsroom before slumping back into his seat. He was surprised to see that the hand he lifted to run through his hair shook. And his breathing was shallow.

What a jerk! Coming onto her! As if she'd have any interest in the man who'd practically accused her of killing her partner. No way she'd ever look in his direction -- unless he helped clear her name. Assuming she was clean. He remembered the look on her face when he'd accused her of being dirty. Her dismay and anguish had seemed genuine. Was it possible she was clean? Was it possible that Mike had picked the wrong partner?

He shook his head. Mike was a professional. He didn't make mistakes of that magnitude. And yet, if she was clean and it hadn't been a mistake. . .

He sighed. Was he having second thoughts because he had a real doubt as to her guilt, or was he being driven by the desire to get on her good side so he could get to know her and perhaps get a chance to "do the nasty" with her, as Mark was fond of smirking?

Whatever his motives, he wasn't going to spend a lot of time second-guessing himself. Still, he consulted his handheld organizer, found the listing he wanted, and rapidly punched the number into the phone.

"Yeah?"

"Tom." He glanced briefly at his watch. "I know you're on dinner, but I need you back at the office ASAP."

"Yeah?" He heard the excitement in Tom's voice. "What's up, Chief?"

"I'm not sure," he admitted. "But I want to discuss the corruption in the 8th precinct with you."

"Sure, but that's Mike's baby. Shall I get him on the horn?"

"No." His response, swift and decisive, surprised him. Judging by the silence on the other end of the line, it surprised Tom as well.

"No? Ahh. . . OK. OK, but I don't know how much help I can be, Chief."

"You worked along with him on several occasions. I just want your impressions of the interviews you sat in on. OK?"

"OK. I'm on my way, Chief."

## Chapter Three

"So why did you think Mike was wrong about Hanna?"

Dan sat back in his seat and watched Tom Smith, young, dark-haired, and what his ex-wife Rachel would call a panty-wetting good looking man sit rigidly in the chair opposite his desk.

"I didn't say I thought he was wrong. I just thought, well, Hillhower was the one with the new cars, expensive clothes, and apartment. Besides, from the snitch sessions I sat in on, I just got the feeling that the cop on the take was a guy. I mean, come on, Chief, Hanna's female and she's black. She's the only black female detective in The Valley. What are the chances of her being able to keep a low profile if she were the dirty one?"

Dan put a hand on the back of his neck and rotated his head, trying to relieve some of his mounting tension. "Did you tell Mike you thought Hillhower was the dirty one?"

Tom nodded. "Sure."

"And? What was his response?"

Tom shrugged. "You know Mike, Chief. He was determined to pin it on Hanna."

Dan sat forward. "Pin it on her? Are you saying he deliberately set out to get her, regardless of where the evidence led?"

Tom licked his lips and took a deep breath. "Chief, I didn't say that exactly. I mean, he's an experienced investigative reporter. Obviously, there were signs pointing to her that I missed. I only sat in on some conversations with a few informants. They must have been more forthcoming when I wasn't present."

"I see. And would you have the name of some of those informants?"

Tom shook his head. "That's really something you should be asking Mike, Chief. They're his sources."

"I know that and I will ask him. But right now, I'm asking you for your impressions and for the names and contacts of any informants you know."

\* \* \* \* \*

Jamie looked up and down the dimly lit hallway outside Hillhower's apartment. The corridor was clear. She quickly inserted the small silver tool she'd pulled from her black jeans into the lock. A few twists and the door swung open.

All the proof she'd needed that Hillhower had been dirty was before her in the form of his extremely well furnished, luxurious apartment. What honest cop could afford this expensive place on a detective's salary? She had to resist the urge to kick off her running shoes as she moved across the ankle-deep cream carpet toward the den.

She frowned. Instead of behaving like a cop, she was thinking like that woman who had dissolved into a trembling mass of need at Janson's touch. And the only place that would get her was seduced. Seduced. Her mouth went dry and she bit her lip at the thought of being seduced by the tall, blond-haired, blue-eyed Janson.

Tia had told her how he'd stared at her in the hospital. At first she'd shared Tia's indignation, but now that she'd met him, she felt sort of. . . complimented. How shallow could she get? *OK, Hanna, get a grip*, she admonished herself. *Work now. Pleasure later. Maybe. But not with the likes of Dan Janson.*

She jimmied the lock on the center drawer of Hillhower's antique desk. Taking a deep breath, she slowly pulled the drawer open. Hillhower's bank statement was on top. It was dated just four weeks earlier. Her heart sank when she saw the balance. Ten thousand dollars. There were three other bank statements with a combined balance of \$9,000 for a total of \$19,000. No proof of graft there.

But it had to be there somewhere. Long before Neely had started to hint at corruption in the 8th, Jamie had begun to suspect that Hillhower was on the take. First there had been the remarks that life was easier on what he called opened-minded cops. Then there had been the three new luxury car in just four years. And the expensive suits and handmade shoes.

She frowned. What she needed was Hillhower's cell phone bills. With a listing of all the calls he'd made, she might be able to locate his snitches. Who in turn might be able to point her in the direction of who'd killed him.

But there were no cell phone records in the desk. Either Hillhower hadn't kept them or the department had seized them as evidence.

She slammed the last drawer of his desk shut and rose. Hillhower's apartment was huge, with five spacious rooms. If she was going to search it before someone realized she was there, she'd better get a move on.

The unmistakable sound of the apartment doorknob turning startled her. She glanced briefly toward the master light switch, located on the wall to the right of the door. She'd never reach it before the door opened.

She vaulted over the high back of the sofa into a crouch, pulled her nine-millimeter Beretta from her rear waist holster, and waited. The door inched slowly inward.

An eternity seemed to pass before she spotted Dan Janson in the open door way.

Along with relief that it wasn't some of her fellow officers came another feeling. A sudden remembrance of the feel of his mustache against her palm hit her. An unwilling



warmth radiated through her. She slowly licked her lips, then shook her head. Now was not the time to let her libido get out of control. He wasn't the man for her.

He leaned back against the door and looked directly at the sofa, almost as if he knew she crouched there. "Are you planning to cower behind that extremely expensive sofa all night, Detective Hanna?"

She froze in startled surprise, until she glanced over her shoulder. Then she uttered a small sound of annoyance. He'd seen her reflection in the uncurtained French doors behind her. With a groan of self-disgust, she slapped her gun in her holster and pushed herself to her feet. Ignoring his amused look, she vaulted over the sofa and advanced on him.

"Consider yourself lucky that I didn't blow your head off, Janson!" she snapped, stopping mere inches from him.

He was silent for several moments while his eyes slid slowly over her body. His gaze lingered briefly on her breasts and she overcame the urge to cross her arms over them. She hadn't felt so gauche since she was a teenager overly conscious of her ever-changing body.

Men had been noticing and staring at her breasts since she was fifteen. It annoyed the hell out of her -- usually. When a man she found attractive admired her breasts, she enjoyed the attention.

He smiled suddenly. His eyes twinkled and she saw that he had a dimple in his left cheek. "Consider yourself lucky, Detective." He tapped a big manila envelope he held. "If you'd like to come off your high horse, I think I have something to say you'd like to hear."

Another time, she would have found the subtle cologne he wore exhilarating. She might even have allowed herself to go weak in the knees at his nearness and even consider the insane idea of a possible romance with him. But romance was a luxury that she couldn't afford at the moment.

"Don't flatter yourself, Janson. Or evade the real issue. What are you doing here?"

"The same thing you're doing -- looking for the truth."

"The truth?" She shook her head. "You wouldn't recognize the truth if it slapped you square in the face. Besides, I thought you'd already decided on your version of the truth."

He sighed and shrugged. "I'm willing to concede that we. . . might have been overly hasty."

"Hot damn, that's big of you!" About to jab at his shoulder with an accusing finger, she thought better of it. She curled her fingers into a fist instead and shook it at him. "You decide that after you've practically accused me of murdering my own partner and trashed my reputation by implying I was sleeping with him?"

"We reported the news. Even you have to admit that we couldn't ignore the fact that the two of you had obviously been having sex."

"We did not have sex!"

"You mean he routinely sits on stakeouts with his penis hanging outside his pants? And you generally keep your blouse unbuttoned?"

His expression made it clear he didn't believe her. The idiot wouldn't know the truth if he tripped over it. She shook her head. "You know what? I don't care what you think. You've obviously already made up your mind. So just get out of here before I decide to arrest you."

"Didn't you hear what I said, Detective?" He tapped the envelope again. "I might be able to help you."

"I can do without your help, Janson." She reached past him and pulled open the apartment door. "Now out." Even if he hadn't implicated her in Hillhower's murder, she didn't know if she was equal to starting an interracial romance.

She remembered how close she'd come to giving in to Hillhower. That would have been strictly physical. Somehow she knew that it would be more than just sex with Janson. Despite everything he'd done to destroy her name and reputation, she found herself drawn to him on both a physical and an emotional level.

He shook his head. "You're making a mistake. I can help you."

"If you help me any more, Janson, I'm liable to be shot at dawn," she drawled. "Now out."

Just for a moment, he stood his ground, staring at her as if daring her to force him out. She stared back. She was angry enough to shove him out the door if that was the way he wanted it. Still, she suppressed a sigh of relief when he turned and walked away.

She leaned against the closed door, breathing deeply. *Get it together, Hanna. He is off limits for a lot of reasons. Forget him and get back to business.* She pushed herself away from the door and moved across the living room to continue her search.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dan groaned, stretched his legs as far as the S.U.V. allowed, and glanced at his watch. What was she doing up there? With the onset of dusk an hour earlier had come an uncomfortable twenty degree temperature drop. At this rate, he'd freeze before she finished her wild goose chase.

If he didn't feel so responsible for her plight, he'd be tempted to wash his hands of her. Oh, who was he kidding? He wasn't sticking around just to help clear her name. He could do that with the written word just as effectively as he'd allowed Mike to implicate her.

Granted, his credibility and reputation as a journalist might take a few hits, but then again, setting the record straight would probably gain him favor with people who realized he wasn't trying to cover his mistake. Mistake? He wasn't sure yet he had made a mistake. Maybe, as Mike thought, he was allowing his interest in Jamie Hanna to color his professional judgment.

He looked out the car window just in time to see the light in Hillhower's apartment finally go out.

Five minutes later, she stepped cautiously from the building and quickly headed down the other side of the street toward her car. He could tell by the slump of her shoulders that she hadn't been successful.

He jumped out of his S.U.V. and quickly walked after her. "Came up empty, didn't you?"

She stopped abruptly and swung around to confront him. His heartbeat sped up as he found himself staring at her gun. He raised his hands slowly, chest high, palms out. "Hey! Wait a minute."

For a moment, her eyes looked dark and angry, then, just as quickly as she'd drawn her gun, she put it away. She shook her head. "You shouldn't sneak up on a cop who recently saw her partner blown away unless you have a death wish. Now leave me alone." She walked away without another word.

He followed, touching her arm. She spun around to face him, her eyes narrowed. "Do not put your hands on me again, Janson."

He nodded, spreading his hands out, palms up. "OK. Look, Detective, I have spent the last hour waiting to talk to you. The least you can do is give me five minutes of your time."

He knew she was trained in the marital arts and held a third degree black belt. He half-expected her to use a judo maneuver to throw him onto his back or at the very least, threaten to. Instead, she stood staring up at him with those magnificent golden eyes half-hidden by her thick dark lashes. "OK, Janson. You have about four minutes and fifty seconds."

He grinned like a first class idiot. "I do? I mean. . . ah, it's a little cold to be standing around like this." He nodded toward his S.U.V.. "Could we go somewhere to have coffee?"

She ran a hand through her short dark hair. "Somewhere? Like where, Janson?"

He shrugged. "My house is available."

"In your dreams."

"OK. OK., " Her eyes didn't harden, so maybe he hadn't blown it. "Is Ms. Karon still in town?"

She frowned. "What's your interest in her?"

"I have none. I just thought if she's no longer in town, we could head to your apartment."

"Why should her presence there concern you?"

He suppressed a sigh. Damn, but she made a man work hard to get her attention. "It doesn't," he said. "Look, I just want to talk to you, to hear your side of the story."

"Well, hot damn. Isn't that something you should have done before you trashed me?"

"I did try. I visited you at the hospital."

"Speaking of which, I heard you had quite a show while you were there."

He grimaced. "What do you want me to say? You rolled over and suddenly I could see your breasts, your stomach, your thighs. . . everything."

"You could have looked away," she said coolly.

He shook his head. "No. I couldn't." He shrugged. "It would have been the chivalrous thing to do and I wanted to, but I couldn't."

"Why not?"

"I've been celibate for far too long and you have a . . . you're a stunning woman with a . . . beautiful body."

She shook her head and averted her gaze. "You know what? I don't have time for this."

"Look, I know we started off on a bad note and maybe it's my fault, but I want to make things right for you, if I can. To do that, we need to talk."

"So talk."

"Not here. As I said, it's cold out here. Your place?"

When she hesitated, he went on. "OK, so I shouldn't have stared at you. But that doesn't mean I can't keep my hands to myself. You can trust me, you know."

"What?" She laughed. "You're very foolish if you think that I'm physically afraid of you, Janson."

"I know about your martial arts skills. I know you can take care of yourself. I just meant that you could trust me to keep an open mind."

"Since when?"

He tilted his head to one side and smiled at her. "From now on. So what do you say? Will you at least listen to what I have to say?"

He was more than a little surprised when she nodded. "OK, Janson, but this had better be good."

He dared to slip his arm through hers. Not only didn't she pull away, but she trembled at his touch. He glanced down at her. It might be pleasant to lose himself in the depths of her deep gaze. "Do you suppose we could start over? Forget that article?"

"Don't you think that's asking rather a lot?"

The lack of anger in her voice encouraged him. "I know it is. But does that mean we can't?"

She shrugged. "I don't have time for this."

"Fine. Let's move on. Can I call you Jamie?"

"The name's Hanna, Janson."

"OK, but mine's Dan."

"I know what your name is." She moved several feet away before turning to look back at him.

He looked in her eyes and got lost in the possibilities in her dark gaze.

She gave a little shake of her head. "Don't get any ideas."

That warning came too late. His head was already filled with all sorts of sensual ideas he longed to explore with her.

She tilted her head. "Are you coming or not, Janson?"

"Hell, yeah."

Her gaze narrowed. "I'm warning you. Don't try anything with me."

"Or what?"

"I'll kick your ass."

Making love to her just might be worth an ass whipping. He arched a brow and followed her.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Tell me what really happened that night."

Jamie sank down into the numerous pillows on her sofa. She kicked off her shoes and glanced across her living room. It was strange to see Janson sitting in the dark green Queen Anne chair that she had designed her whole living room around. The chair was special because it had belonged to her father.

Janson was the last man she'd ever imagined would sit in her father's chair. She actually felt comfortable enough to take off her gun and relax with him there.

"Janson to Hanna. Come in. Over."

She smiled slightly, shaking her head. "Sorry. I was just trying to. . . well, never mind."

She watched as he half rose. "Perhaps I should join you on the sofa," he said softly. He glanced around her large apple green and cream-colored room. "You're probably having trouble hearing me from over there. I know I feel like we're miles apart."

She shook her head slowly. "I think you should stay right where you are." Then she wouldn't be tempted to throw herself into his arms. Man did she need to get laid bad.

"Ah, well." He resumed his seat, crossed his long legs and nodded. "You were going to tell me about the night Hillhower was killed."

She nodded curtly, her mood darkening. "It was around seven-thirty. We were staking out the back of the old Virtual Reality Club at Broad and South. Hillhower said he'd got a tip that a big deal was going to go down around eight o'clock."

He sat forward. "Hillhower said? Are you saying you were in that alley because he had a lead? It was Hillhower's lead, not yours?"

She nodded, wearily. "He got a call on his cell phone just as we were about to go off duty. He sort of blanched for a moment, then shrugged and said we had a tip that would take us to the top."

"Why didn't you call for backup?"

"I wanted to, but. . . " She closed her eyes as the horror of that night came rushing back with all the fury of a gale force wind. She recalled the impact of the bullets slamming into her body and shivered violently. She couldn't go on until she'd taken several deep, gasping breaths. "Anyway, he didn't want to. He said we could handle it. He thought it would look good on our sheets."

"You were worried about your sheets with a major bust about to go down?"

She straightened her shoulders. "Why not? You take chances, you make bold moves, do good work, and you get promoted. We were both working on making sergeant. We took chances. Now I'll be lucky if I can keep my freedom, let alone my shield."

"What's your official status with the department?"

She sighed. "Officially? I'm on sick leave."

"Ah huh. And unofficially?"

"I'm relieved of duty pending the outcome of the investigation."

"Which means what?"



"Normally I'd be on desk duty, but I haven't been medically cleared to return to work. Not even desk duty."

"Are you being paid?"

She gave him a wary look. "For now. I suppose you're going to tell me you think the taxpayers are being ripped off."

"No, I wasn't." He paused, studying her face. "Are you all right?"

"No! How can I be?" She held her right thumb and forefinger within a quarter of an inch of each other. "I'm this close to losing my shield and my job and possibly my freedom. Do you have any idea how hard I worked for my shield?"

She sucked in a deep breath. "It wouldn't be so bad if I'd actually done something. . . anything. . . wrong. But damn it, I haven't!"

"Jamie. . ." He drew his legs close to the chair, as if about to rise.

She held up a hand. "Stay where you are. And the name's Hanna."

He nodded curtly. "Fine. You were saying?"

She shrugged off his tone and cold gaze. "Ah. . . I had a really bad feeling."

"If you had a bad feeling, why were you there alone? Why didn't you call for backup?"

"Just how many times do you plan to ask the same question?"

"As many times as it takes to get a sensible answer."

"Did it ever occur to you that the answer appears senseless to you because you're not a cop bucking for a promotion?"

"No. News flash, Hanna: you don't have to be a cop to know when something makes sense."

She stared at him for a moment before shaking her head and going on. "We didn't call for backup, OK? Can we leave it alone now?"

He shrugged. "You know your failure to call for backup makes it look like you set him up."

She bounded off the sofa and stood staring at him. "You bonehead! You want to try believing he set me up?"

His answer, spoken in a quiet sincere voice, surprised her. "You have no idea how much I'd like to believe that."

She sank back onto the sofa. "What?"

"I want to believe you."

"Then why don't you?"

"As a matter of fact, I think I do, but there are several reasons others are going to find it difficult, if not impossible, to believe you." He pushed his left little finger back with his right index finger. "First-"

"I know what the reasons are," she said wearily. "First, he was killed while I survived. Second, I was wearing my vest and he wasn't. Third, one of us, according to you, was dirty."

"That's right." He sat forward. "And your explanations are?"

She shook her head. Why bother trying to explain to him? She reminded herself she was trying because, if he chose to, he could help clear her name. "I was very lucky. Remember, I was hit five times. He never wore a vest, and I am not now nor have I ever been on the take."

His eyes narrowed and his mouth tightened. She sighed. He clearly didn't find her arguments convincing. "Look, you want to hear the rest of the story or not?" When he nodded, she went on. "So there we were alone. I was a little. . . ah. . ."

"Uncomfortable? Afraid? What?"

She scrambled onto her knees and glared at him. "What's it to you if I was afraid? What - you writing a book?"

"No. Just an editorial that might help clear your name! Unless you're not interested."

"It wouldn't need clearing if you hadn't allowed your racist hack to dirty it, Janson! So don't expect me to be grateful if you somehow manage to clean up the mess you made!"

"You're priceless! No wonder you don't have a man in your life!"

She stared at him with her mouth open. How did he know she wasn't seeing anyone? Did he also know it was a sore spot for her? "That's a low blow, Janson. Even for you."

He sighed and nodded. "You're right again. And I'm wrong. Sorry."

To her dismay, tears filled her eyes. *Damn you, Hanna! Now is not the time to go feminine.* She dropped her head and looked away. She heard him rise and start across the floor. She told herself she was behaving like a silly heroine out of a nineteenth century romance novel, which didn't stop her from turning her face into his shoulder when he sat next to her. She didn't cry, but she clung to him.

His voice, soft and comforting, brushed her ear. "Anyone would have been afraid under those circumstances."

"But I'm not just anyone," she muttered, pulling away from him. "I get paid not to be afraid when other people would be. I'm a cop!"

"You're also a woman."

"I don't get paid to be a woman when I'm working."

He shrugged. "That doesn't change the fact that you are one. A very striking one."

Her heart pounded against her ribs. There were numerous reasons why she should throw him out of her apartment. *And you'd better think about and act on them, Hanna. Later. Much later.* She lifted her head and looked into his eyes. They were so intense, it was hard to look directly into them. But he had a beautiful gaze. The kind a tired, scared female cop could gladly lose herself in if she were unwise enough to let down her guard.

But she wouldn't. Not again. Blair had died because she'd let her guard down. Hillhower was dead and she'd been shot five times because she hadn't followed her instincts that urged they had no business in that alley alone. The same sense of self-preservation was

telling her that she had no business wanting to play Jungle Fever with Janson. Yet she longed to lean forward and surrender to her desire for sexual intimacy with him.

He slowly brushed his long fingers against the side of her breast. Instead of moving away from him, she froze and licked her lips as he cupped her breast in his palm. A rush of heat danced through her. She leaned forward, longing for more.

His lips touched the side of her neck in a series of butterfly kisses. "You can trust me," he promised, rubbing the palm of his hand against her breast.

Although he only touched one of her breasts, both of her nipples hardened, making the breath catch in her throat. It had been such a long time since a man had touched her. Her whole body ached with need and longing.

She lifted her head to look at him. "To do what?" she gasped.

"To do as little," his fingers tweaked her nipples, "or as much as you like." As he spoke, his hand slipped down her taut stomach to cup her mound.

She wore bikini briefs, pantyhose, and a pair of slacks. Yet, for the feelings of hunger invading her senses, he might have palmed her bare flesh.

The desire, the need to give into those feelings, nearly overwhelmed her, but she fought them off by reminding herself he was coming onto her because he thought of her as easy.

She pressed herself forward against his hand for a microsecond, then pulled back, her body feeling hot, her panties wet with lust. "Move your hand," she told him coolly, and slid along the sofa until she sat at the opposite end. She hunched her knees against her chest and wrapped her arms around them. She heard him sigh and turned so her back was against the arm and she was facing him.

He shook his head. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. . ."

"To what? Treat me like an easy lay?"

He raked a hand through his hair. "Are you an easy lay?"

"No!"

His firm nod surprised her. "Look, just because I'm attracted to you and made a pass, albeit a clumsy one, doesn't mean I think you're easy." He grinned suddenly. "Although, from my point of view, it would be nice if you were."

"Well, I'm not! Hillhower was found with his pants down because he was coming onto me -- again!"

"Again? He'd come onto you before?"

She rolled her eyes toward the ceiling. "That's generally what 'again' implies."

"And did he succeed?"

"Why do you want to know? Trying to gauge your own chances?"

He nodded slowly, looking directly into her eyes. "Did he succeed?"

"No, he didn't." He didn't need to know just how close she had come to succumbing to her sexual hunger.

"I see." He again ran a hand through his short hair. "Should I be discouraged?"

"You should drop the subject. You're the last man I'd discuss my personal life with."

"Why? Because I'm white?"

"Because you allowed your hack to trash my reputation and my integrity as a police officer. Is that reason enough for you?"

He sighed. "Yes," he admitted, surprising her. "But I can help undo some of the damage *The Tribune* did."

"Fine. Just don't expect me to be grateful."

"Fine! Maybe you can tell me why you went into that alley with him if he was always coming onto you?"

"I've already answered that question. We were bucking for promotion. It might sound like a dumb idea to you, but Hillhower wasn't always practical or logical. Sometimes he was

downright stupid. And you know what? I'm not responsible for big dumb blonds who can't keep their hands to themselves or their zippers up!"

"Maybe big dumb blonds find you irresistible," he said, his gaze catching and holding hers. "I know this one does."

Judging by her reaction to him and Hillhower, she apparently shared the attraction. But giving into it was not an option. "If you think you can listen without endless interruptions, I'll continue."

"Why do you have to be such a hard ass?"

Her cheeks burned. "I get paid to be a hard ass. What's your excuse?"

He shook his head, his gaze cold as dry ice. "By all means, go on, Detective Hanna."

At this rate she would certainly be spending that night and many more alone. She rose. "You know, I'm not really up to talking about this anymore."

He sighed and rose. "We need to talk about this."

"Not tonight. Tonight . . . I've had it."

## Chapter Four

Dan woke abruptly. He lay in the darkened room, uncertain what had awakened him or even where he was. Then he recognized the sound that had roused him. Muffled sobs. Throwing back the blanket covering him, he shot up from the sofa, feeling around for a light switch.

What he found was the sharp edge of an end table with his right shin. Swearing softly, he massaged his sore leg, the one he'd hurt playing football at Penn State. Then, urged on by the sounds of the continuing sobs, he stumbled around the dark room until he felt a closed door with his outstretched hands. Stepping to his left, he yanked the door open and found himself in a short, dimly lit hallway.

He moved quickly down the passageway, stopping outside the first closed door. With his hand on the doorknob he hesitated, listening. He heard only silence. He turned and started back down the hall. He'd reached the darkened living room when the sobbing started again.

He hesitated. Maybe if he waited a bit, she'd fall asleep. The sobbing continued. He slowly moved back down the passage and opened the door onto a darkened room.

He felt along the wall until he encountered a small, circular knob. He turned it and the big room was bathed in soft light from lamps on either side of the bed.

Jamie sat in the middle of the bed, clutching a light cover against her chest, tears steaming from her eyes. She turned her head and looked at him. "Please! Please!" she sobbed. "Don't! Oh, please, don't! Please!"

It took him a moment to realize that although she looked directly at him, her pleas weren't meant for him. Shaken by the anguish in her voice and the terror in her eyes, he hurried across the room. He sat on the side of the bed and shook her shoulder. "Hey, Hanna! It's all right. It's all right. Wake up!"

She responded by wrapping her arms around him and burrowing her face against his shoulder, her body still racked by sobs.

"Hey!" Trying not to react to her large firm breasts pressed against his chest, he enfolded her in his arms, gently rocking her. "It's all right, Jamie. It's all right. It was just a dream."

She continued to sob and cling to him, her hands spread across his back, pressing him closer, her face against his neck. "Please. Please, don't! Don't! Please!"

She needed comfort, not sex. He was hard put to remember that when he felt her nipples harden and her warm lips pressing soft kisses against his neck while her hands moved down his bare back to slip inside his boxers and stroke the top of his rump.

"Please. Please."

He felt the change in her body. He heard the need in her voice. She no longer sought comfort from him. She wanted more.

He released her and drew out of her arms. Although she no longer sobbed, tears still streamed down her cheeks. She looked scared and lonely, in need of comfort.

He swallowed disappointment and tried to rein in his desire. "It's all right. It was just a bad dream, but you're awake now." He caressed her cheek. "You're safe now. I'll make you a cup of tea and sit with you until you fall back to sleep."

He stood up.



"No!" She kicked the cover away and scrambled to her knees. "No! Blair! Don't go!" She grabbed at his right hand, clutching it between both of hers.

So Blair Martin was the cause of her nightmares and arousal. Great. He ached to make love to her and she lusted after a dead man. "Hanna, your eyes are open. I know you're awake. I'm not Blair." It took a huge effort not to snap at her.

"Stay with me," she said, just as if he hadn't spoken. "It's been so long. Make love to me."

"I am not Blair!" This time he made no effort to hide his anger.

"Stay with me, Blair." She released his hand, sat back on her knees and, treating him to an impish smile, pulled the short-sleeved pajama top over her head, exposing her breasts.

They were absolutely magnificent: twin dark, firm peaks with already hardened nipples. Below them, her stomach was flat and taunt. What lay beneath that stomach, under the shortie pajama bottoms made his cock stir.

He needed to leave. With his mind, he knew she wasn't in full control of herself. But with his cock suddenly aching, he didn't care about anything but sex. Especially when she abruptly lay back against the bed and slowly, sensuously, wiggled out of her bottoms, leaving her long, shapely body bare.

A blast of heat and desire shot down his groin. Her dark sumptuous body was like a drug flowing through his veins, intoxicating his senses; numbing all thought other than the desire to bed her.

"Make love to me, Blair. Please."

Even being called by another man's name couldn't stem the tide of his raising passion. He didn't care who she thought he was, as long as she let him make love to her.

He pulled off his boxers and his cock, heavy with need, popped out and hit his stomach. He sat on the side of the bed and cupped a palm against her cheek. "Hey. Are you sure you want to do this?"

She sighed and closed her eyes.

She was having second thoughts. Damn. Why had he asked? Why hadn't he just taken her at her word and made love to her? He allowed his hand to drop from her face and closed his own eyes.

"Yes."

The word, spoken in a low, breathless voice, surprised him. He opened his eyes. She stared at him, her gaze a mixture of desire and uncertainty.

"Yes? You did say yes?"

She nodded slowly.

He wanted to reassure her. He smiled and caressed her cheek.

She closed her eyes again and rubbed her face against his palm.

He paused, reluctant to destroy the mood, but. . . "Condom?"

"Oh. . . top. . . drawer."

He watched the blood flood her cheeks and felt a sudden, unexpected rush of tenderness intermingled with his growing passion. What a tantalizing woman: brave and tough yet shy, sweet, and sexy.

"Lights?" he asked softly.

She shook her head, averting her gaze.

He cupped her face in his palms. "Jamie, if you're not sure. . . "

"I am sure."

The question was why was she sure. Was it because even with her eyes open, she still thought of Blair Martin? He wanted her too badly to press any further. Besides, he planned to chase thoughts of Blair Martin right out of her head.

He lowered his forehead, brushing his lips over her face. She lifted her mouth, her lips already parted. He touched his mouth against hers. She made a small sound against his lips, stroking her fingers over his arms.

He nibbled at her lips, sliding a hand down between her thighs. She parted her legs and he cupped her pussy.

She trembled. "Hmmm!"

He slipped two fingers inside her, gently stroking into her wet warmth. Desire flared and he longed to thrust his cock deep inside her. He pulled away from her long enough to retrieve a small foil packet from the drawer.

She lay on the bed, watching, her teeth buried in her bottom lip as he slid the condom over his cock. When he had, he cupped his nuts, his gaze on her.

She parted her legs, reaching down a hand to part her pussy, exposing herself fully. Oh, damn, he had to have her. He lay on the bed beside her, turned off the lights, and took her in his arms, rolling them onto their sides.

He just held her against him for several long moments, savoring the feel of her warm nude body nestled against his. The tips of her breasts touched his chest, her flat stomach pressed his, and the coarse hair of her vagina caressed and beckoned his aching cock.

He tipped up her chin and drank deeply from the sweet warmth of her full, sensuous lips. The tip of her tongue brushed along his mouth, inviting exploration. He kissed her again, sliding a hand down to finger her clit and stroke her pussy.

With his lips locked on hers, and one arm around her, he rolled her onto her back. Maintaining contact with her mouth, he lifted his lower body, allowing her to settle on the bed and part her legs for him. Then he lowered his weight onto the firm contours of her body.

She moved her hips against his, her hands running over his back and against his rump, stirring his desire to a fever pitch and making his cock harder. "Please," she said softly. "Please."

He wanted to go slowly, to ensure that their first time together would be special for her. But it had been so long for him that he was afraid that once he was inside her, he would come too quickly, leaving her unfulfilled.

"In a moment," he said softly, and lowered his mouth against her breasts. He licked, kissed, and sucked each delicious orb, enjoying the feel and taste of her. Her nipples hardened even more under his mouth and his own desire increased.

She moaned softly, moving her hips against his and pressing his head closer.

He gave each breast a final playful nip and continued to kiss his way down her body. She gave a louder moan and shuddered when he parted her thighs and pressed a series of quick, greedy kisses against the outside of her vagina. Then he gently parted the lips and touched the tip of his tongue against her clit.

"Oh!"

The small sound was enough to urge him on. He began a tender but relentless assault on her clit and her pussy with his tongue, mouth, and fingers. With the sounds of her incessant moans of pleasure echoing in his ears and speeding up his heartbeat, he gripped her heaving hips in his hands and buried his face between her thighs, dipping his tongue inside the warm lips of her heated, quivering vagina.

"Ooooh!" She curled her fingers in his hair, wildly rotating her ass on the bed, her luscious pussy juices flowing against his lips and tongue.

She smelled musky and fragrant and his cock throbbed. He locked his mouth against her and lapped up the juice gushing from her body.

"Hmmm. Oh! Oh!"

Resisting the urge to lick her clean, he pressed a last hungry kiss against her pussy and withdrew his mouth. He licked and bit at her inner thighs, smiling when she moaned and shuddered. Then eager for pussy, he slid his body slowly up hers, rubbing his cock along her body as he did. Resting his weight on his extended arms, he settled himself between her thighs and slowly pressed his cock into the liquid heat of her sex.

That first sweet moment when he felt the walls surrounding him, parting for him, was magical. Halfway inside her tight warmth, he paused to enjoy the feelings rushing through him. It had been so long and she felt so good. So tight. So warm. So wet. So right and ready for him.

Breathing quickly, she thrust her hips upward. Taking the hint, he wrapped an arm around her waist and thrust back at her, sinking his cock deep inside her creamy warmth.

"Oh!" She wrapped her arms around him. He found her mouth, penetrated her lips with his tongue, and began a slow, sensual rhythm inside her tight, velvety pussy. She kissed him back, accepting both his tongue and his cock inside her body. Damn she felt so good.

In a matter of moments, they were making sweet, erotic love to each other. She gave of herself completely, kissing him deeply, sucking on his tongue, using her muscles to massage and caress his cock. She fought him on each upward movement of his hips, making him drag his cock out of her until only the head of his cock remained in her body. Each downward thrust of his cock into her body was met with a soft, gasping moan as she urged him as deep as possible.

Lust and passion warred with desire and need, overwhelming his senses until he felt lost in her. She was the center of his world. Thrusting repeatedly and feeling her shudder and whimper under him as she climaxed became his sole reason for living.

He rained hot, greedy kisses on her lips, clutched her hips in his hands, and shot his cock in and out of her with a lust for release he could no longer control.

She gasped against his lips, wrapped her long legs around his body, and shattered under him. Sliding his hands down her body, he clutched her ass in his palms, and thrust deep and hard into her climaxing pussy until his own release rushed over him with the force of a tidal wave, washing away all his inhibitions, leaving him content, weak, and hooked.

She lay under him, her lips pressed against his neck, her hands stroking down his back to his ass. Damn, that felt good. He groaned, rested his weight on her, and pressed his cheek against hers, still inside her.

They remained that way until his cock deflated. She made a small sound, pressing against his shoulders. He sighed, realizing his weight must be uncomfortable. He extended his arms, slowly lifting his body from hers. His cock cleared her pussy. He discarded the condom and lay back on the bed.

She turned on her side, facing him, her breasts pressing against his chest. He pressed a quick kiss against her mouth. "Are you all right?"

"Yes." She kissed his shoulder, and turned onto her side with her back facing him. He pulled the covers over her, moving behind her. He curled his body against her back. She settled back against him, her round, warm ass resting against his groin. Nice.

He cupped her breasts in his hands, enjoying how soft, yet heavy they felt. "You are so lovely, Jamie."

She surprised him by removing one of his hands from breasts and bringing it down to rest between her legs. Oh, damn, what a lovely way to fall asleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jamie lay with her eyes firmly shut, her body tense. She had to be dreaming. But the heavy arm thrown across her waist felt real, as did the weight and warmth of the body curled against her back. Not to mention the face pressed against her neck. Besides, she was naked. She sucked in a breath. As was he. She could feel his flaccid penis nestled against her buns.

Trying not to panic, she slowly opened her eyes. The arm resting across her was pale. White. The events of the night before rushed at her and she groaned. God help her, she'd done it. Against all reason, she'd slept with Janson - the man who thought she was dirty and a murderer.

*Damn it, Hanna! How could you do this?*

He stirred, moving closer, brushing his lips against her neck. A tingle of remembered pleasure danced along her nerve endings, obliterating rational thought. She turned and slipped her arms around him. Closing her eyes, she thought only of the pleasure he could give her.

She parted her lips when he bent and pressed his mouth against hers in a deep and demanding kiss. With no thought of denying him, she willingly rolled onto her back when he gently nudged her. He settled his hips against hers, resting his weight on his extended arms. "Morning."

She reluctantly opened her eyes and looked up into his smiling blue gaze. To her relief, his quizzical gaze held no trace of condemnation or censure. She relaxed and allowed a self-depreciating smile to touch her own lips. "I don't suppose there's any doubt that we. . . ah. . . slept together. Is there?"

He lowered his full weight onto her and kissed her slowly. "Afraid not." He nuzzled her neck. "Last night was. . . incredible. Even if you did think I was someone else."

A clear memory of calling him Blair surfaced and her cheeks burned.

He lifted his head and looked down at her. "You kept calling me Blair."

She hesitated, then shook her head decisively. "I had a nightmare about him. . . about his death."

His gaze softened. "I thought as much. Do you want to talk about it?"

"Yes. No! Not now. Not yet. I only mentioned the nightmare so you'd understand."

His body tensed on hers. "Understand what? That I was his stand-in?"

"No!" She moved her lower body slowly, sensually against his, trying to reassure him. "I know I called you Blair, but I knew who you were."

"Then why-"

A fresh wave of blood heated her cheeks, but she maintained his gaze. "It was easier to surrender to my desire for you if you thought that I thought you were Blair. Then you wouldn't think I was an easy lay."

His gaze searched hers. "But I'd already told you I didn't think you were easy."

"I know you had, but I didn't know if I could believe you."

"You could. . . you can." He lowered his head and kissed her cheek. "I promise that I don't think you're easy."

He sounded sincere and she sighed and closed her eyes, rubbing her cheek against his, loving the feel of his morning stubble against her face.

"However, that doesn't mean I didn't thoroughly enjoy last night. I hope you're not sorry."

She should be, but making love with him had been. . . she searched for a suitable word. Fantastic came to mind and she didn't dismiss it. "No."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm very sure." She wrapped her arms around his body and hugged him, smiling as his cock stirred against her leg. She shifted her body until his hardening flesh rested between her thighs.

"In that case, I can admit that I want you again," he whispered against her breasts.

There was no denying the moisture between her thighs or the desire contracting the muscles in her stomach. Later, when she was alone and sanity returned, she knew she'd regret her weakness. But just then, she didn't care. She lived only to feel his lips, his hands, and his body worshipping hers as if he had been born for the sole purpose of pleasuring her.

"I want you too," she admitted, trailing her fingertips down his back to his rump.



"Yeah? Then take me. I'm all yours," he whispered, nibbling at her lips.

She reached a trembling hand between their bodies until her eager fingers encountered his semi-erect cock. She curled her fingers around his hard flesh and began a slow pumping motion.

He uttered a string of inarticulate sounds and propelled his hips forward against her caressing fingers. Encouraged, she increased the speed of her hand until, with a shuddering growl, he removed her hand from him. He rolled away long enough to slip on a condom, then he was back between her thighs, his cock poised at her entrance.

Meeting his gaze, she confidently circled her fingers around him, lifted her hips, and slowly guided his thick length between the lips of her sex until he'd bottomed out inside her. Then she clung to him, rocking and moving her body and hips in time with his long measured strokes, loving the feel of him pulsing thick and hot inside her.

With her eyes closed and her head thrown back against the bed, her back arched, she let herself go. With each deliberate stroke of his heated cock into her body, delicious, uncontrollable waves of joy buffeted her. Her stomach muscles began contracting and an all-consuming glorious heat infused her whole body. In a matter of minutes, he drove her to the brink. Shuddering, she let her feelings have free rein until she was awash in a river of bliss, drowning in a sea of ecstatic delight.

Still flowing happily down an ocean of pure sexual enchantment, she was only vaguely aware of him calling out her name as he collapsed on top of her, clutching her under him, thrusting rapidly, deeply into her.

Wanting to please him as much as he'd pleased her, she slipped her legs around him and tightened her feminine muscles against the hard warmth of the cock driving ever deeper into her.

The force and fury of his movements created another unexpected surge of heat and desire in her that quickly engulfed her in a sensual vortex. Finding his mouth with hers, she kissed him and happily surfed the final, mind-numbing breaker with him.

Later, when she could think again, she lay cradled in his arms, her face pressed against his damp shoulder, listening to the steady rhythm of his heartbeat returning to normal.

He tipped up her chin and pressed a long, sweet kiss against her mouth. He whispered something to her that she didn't understand. But the sound of his voice, the feel of his arms around her, made her feel warm and protected.

For the first time since Blair's death, she felt there might still be some happiness left in the world. She kissed his chest, snuggled closer, and slept.

\* \* \* \* \*

"You can't really expect me to help you! Not after what you've done!"

Jamie sighed, slowly counted to ten, then focused her gaze on the pretty, tear-stained face of the blue-eyed blonde sitting across the small table from her in the dimly lit bar.

The first time Hillhower had introduced her to June Appleton, she'd thought the two of them were like a couple of Barbie dolls come to life - both blond, both beautiful. Both so sure that their good looks entitled them to whatever they wanted.

"I didn't do anything, June. You can't really think I had anything to do with his death. He was my partner. I would have given my life to save his had I been given the chance," she said.

June shook her head, sending her long hair flying around her face. "Well, what do you expect? I come back from a buying trip and find that my fiancé has been murdered, but you, the person charged with protecting him, escaped unscathed! And just how did you manage that, Jamie? Is it true what they're saying about you? Did you set him up?"

"No!" She hit her clenched fist against the tabletop. "I did not! Are you forgetting I was shot too?"

June took a deep swallow of her drink, a scotch on the rocks. "I'm not forgetting anything. So I shouldn't believe the papers when they say you set him up? What about when they say you two were fooling around before he was murdered. Should I disbelieve that too?"

Heat rose up Jamie's neck to her cheeks. She swallowed several times, but didn't look away. "I know it looks bad, June, but we did not have sex." She leaned forward. "June, please. I'm as anxious to find his killer as you are. More than you. My freedom, reputation, and career are on the line. But I need your help to make sure his killer doesn't get away."

June sighed, fresh tears filling her eyes. "What do you want to know?"

A surge of relief flowed over Jaime. If anyone could set her on the right track, June could. "I need you to be straight with me, June. I know this may be painful, but. . . who was paying him off?"

June blanched and recoiled. "He wasn't dirty!"

Jamie bit back an annoyed snort. "Look, June. He was good at his job. But we both know he was on the take. I need to know who paid him."

June's mouth compressed into a tight, angry line. "Where the hell do you get off calling Tony dirty? He partnered with you when no one else would. And he probably got killed for you. And now you have the nerve to call him dirty?"

"Buzz off, Hanna!" June picked up her glass and tossed the remaining contents into Jamie's face.

Jamie gasped, bounded to her feet, and stormed around the booth to stand over June, her hands clenched into fists. The desire to slap the other woman's face until it stung burned in her mind. June recoiled, throwing up her hands. Jamie took a deep breath and forced herself to step back.

Snatching a napkin from the table, she wiped her face. She then dabbed at the stain on the white silk blouse on which she'd spent way too much money. Ironically, it was one June had brought back from her last buying trip to Paris as part of the new stock of the department store chain for which she worked.

"When you change your mind and decide you want to help find Hillhower's killer, give me a call."

"Don't hold your breath."

Jamie turned and walked away, ignoring the snickers from several of the bar patrons. Once outside in the cool evening air, she hurried across the parking lot to her car, breathing deeply and fighting a longing to cry.

Lately, she always seemed on the verge of tears. Even worse was the desire to go running to Dan Janson for comfort and sex. She leaned against the headrest, closing her eyes. She found that she couldn't sleep in her bed without remembering the night and morning they'd spent there together.

Although he hadn't made any promises, she'd expected to see him again. At the very least, she thought he'd call her, if not to ask her out on an actual date, then just to make arrangements to sleep with her again. Just before they'd parted, he'd kissed her cheek and hugged her. Without saying a word, he'd somehow conveyed the thought that they would see each other again -- soon. But he'd made no effort to contact her. She'd known at the time that sleeping with him was a bad idea and that it was only a one-night stand, so she shouldn't now be feeling disappointed and hurt that he obviously had no desire to bed her again.

Reminding herself that he was her enemy and that a relationship with him, especially a sexual one, was bad news, did little to alleviate her desire for him. There didn't seem to be much she could do about the curious ache that increased as each day ended without a word from him.

She glanced at her watch. It was just after six. Where would he be now? Home or still at the newspaper? Or with another woman?

She didn't even know if there was another woman. She'd slept with him without knowing a thing about him. For all she knew, he might even be married! The thought was distasteful enough to shake her. Her mother had left her father for another man just after her sixteenth birthday. Her father had never been the same and she'd never forgiven her mother. Even now, when both her parents were dead from separate car accidents, she still felt the bitterness of her mother's betrayal. That she might, by sleeping with Janson, have betrayed another woman sickened her.

Sleeping with him had been big time stupid, but she didn't have time to fret over things she couldn't change. She had a lot of work to do to clear her name. She wouldn't get it done sitting and pining over Dan Janson. Giving her head a little shake, she started the car and drove off.

\* \* \* \* \*

"What do you mean you want to know who my sources are?"

Dan sat back in his chair and studied Mike Neely's agitated face briefly before looking beyond him. Out in the newsroom, he could see Tom sitting facing his office, his body tense, his jaw clenched.

He returned his attention to Mike. "I'm not convinced that Jamie Hanna is dirty. And if she's not dirty, it follows that she had nothing to do with Hillhower's murder."

Mike sat forward, his eyes narrowing. "The hell she didn't! She set him up and now he's dead. What more proof do you need that she's dirty?"

Dan remembered Jamie Hanna's reaction to the implication that she was corrupt. "And if she had nothing to do with his murder, your sources must have given you bad information, hence I'd like to know who they are."

Mike shook his head. "No. Nobody talks to my sources except me. If I give them up, I'll never be able to get anything out of them again. Take my word for it, Chief, she's dirty."

"But that's just it, Mike, it's not your word. It's the word of your snitches."

"They're straight. I did my homework. She's dirty."

"I don't think she is."

Mike shot to his feet. "What the hell is this? I mean, what is your interest in that. . . what's your interest?"

"My interest, Mike, is in the truth. I don't think she's dirty."

Mike's eyes narrowed and he leaned over the desk. "You don't think she's dirty. Well, damn, I'm impressed. You base that assumption on what? Endless hours of investigative reporting? A thorough look into her background? Maybe you've risked your hide talking to endless snitches with the mob with nothing to gain by lying? Or is your sudden conviction of her innocence based on something else? Like a desire to taste a little of that brown sugar Hillhower was sampling on a regular basis?"

Dan kept the muscles of his face relaxed, but was aware that the back of his neck was hot - burning, in fact. Sleeping with Jamie Hanna had been major league stupid. Still, he couldn't quite bring himself to regret it. Even now, five days later, he felt as if he could still taste the honey sweetness of her lips under his, hear her soft sounds of pleasure as they made love to each other.

Even more disturbing was lying sleepless the night before, worrying that she might be suffering through another nightmare with no one there to hold her and assure her that she was safe. Almost as strong as the urge to make love to her again was the one to make sure she felt safe and knew she wasn't alone.

But he'd decided to keep his distance until he had something more to offer than just a shoulder to cry on and an out of control libido.

He wondered uneasily if Mike knew he'd slept with her. What if his inability to control his passion exposed her to even more ridicule?

He leaned forward until his nose was just inches from Mike's. "Get out of my face," he said, his voice cool and as controlled as he could make it.

For a moment, Mike held his ground, his eyes cold and hard. Then, reluctantly, he withdrew and threw himself into the chair opposite Dan's desk.

Dan locked his gaze with Mike's. "Now, about those sources. . . ."

Mike shook his head. "No. My sources are confidential. If you don't trust my reporting, get yourself another reporter. Or since you don't think she's dirty, investigate yourself."

Dan sat back in his chair. "Good advice. I think I'll take it."

Mike blanched. "What?"

"I'll investigate myself."

"I wouldn't do that if I were you, Chief. It's been a while since you've been a reporter. It can be dangerous."

He shrugged. "Thanks for the warning, but I can take care of myself."

Mike's jaw clenched and he leaned forward in his seat. "You sure about that, Chief? If, by some wild stretch of the imagination, she's not dirty or involved in Hillhower's murder, you'll be exposing yourself to unnecessary danger. You have no idea how ruthless the people involved in this can be. . . to you personally."

"And you do?"

"Yes. I deal with them to get my stories. Don't think they'll hesitate to take you out if you make it necessary."

Dan felt a shiver along the back of his neck. There was no mistaking the implicit threat in Mike's words. "You deal with them to get your stories. . . or you deal with them when you socialize?"

He didn't much like the gleam in Mike's eyes or the slow smile spreading across the other man's face. "Don't ask questions you don't really want the answers to. Take it from me, Janson, and leave well enough alone. . . if you value your. . . safety."

"Are you threatening me, Neely?"

"Threatening you? Absolutely not. Just giving you a friendly warning." Still smiling, Mike rose and headed for the door.

Dan watched Mike weave his way through the newsroom, speaking to the other reporters and staff members on his way to the door. Once Mike had left the building, he got up, closed his office door, shut the shades, and returned to his seat.

Mike's attitude erased any lingering doubts about Jamie Hanna's innocence, which probably meant he'd been maneuvered into allowing Mike to falsely incriminate her. Well, he could undo what Mike had done.

He pulled his keyboard forward and began to write his editorial column. When he finished, he called Tom into his office.

"I asked Mike about his snitches," he said.

"And?"

"And he refused to divulge anything."

Tom's brows rose. "Can he do that?"

He struggled. "The point is, he has done it. So now I need you to tell me what you know. And I need that information now."

\* \* \* \* \*

"I guess I owe you an apology."

Jamie shook her head and waved her hand in dismissal. "No apology necessary, June. I'm just glad you called."



"Well, I wasn't going to, but. . . well. . . " She lay *The Tribune* on the small kitchen table between them. "After I read this, I thought I'd better come see you."

Jamie glanced at the headline of the editorial column: Was Detective Hanna Unjustly Tainted? It wasn't the all-out retraction she wanted, but it was a start. And it had brought June to her doorstep, ready to talk.

"Would you like a cup of coffee or something?"

"No. What I could really use is a drink."

"A drink? Oh. Ah, right. Will a beer do or would you rather have something stronger?"

"Actually, I'd like something a lot stronger, but I'm driving."

Jamie set a glass and a beer in front of June and sat opposite her again. She sipped her own glass of lemonade and resisted the urge to bombard June with a flurry of questions.

June finished half her beer before she looked at Jamie. "OK. I know that look. It's obvious you want to ask me questions and still more questions."

Jamie leaned forward. "I know this is hard for you, June, but-"

"I want whoever killed Tony to pay."

"So do I." Jamie pulled a notebook from her shirt pocket, picked up a pen from the table and looked at the other woman. "What can you tell me about his snitches?"

June's eyes widened. "About his snitches? Nothing."

"Nothing?" Jamie swallowed several times, aware of another distressing urge to cry. "But I thought-"

"Why would I know anything about his snitches? You were his partner. Don't you know?"

"No. Hill- Tony was always cagey with his snitches. He said every cop should have his own, independent of his partner." She had hoped to avoid coming right out and suggesting

Hillhower had been dirty again. She eyed June warily, wondering how best to broach the subject.

"What? No more questions?" June asked, sounding surprised. "Oh, I almost forgot. I thought you might want to look at these." She reached in her shoulder bag and put a big manila envelop on the kitchen table.

"What is it?" Jamie asked, already reaching for it.

"Some records Tony had at my place."

Jamie opened the envelope and quickly glanced through the contents. There were cell phone bills and several bank statements. Her gaze centered on the balance: two hundred, fifteen thousand dollars, and fourteen cents.

Bingo!

"Any help?"

Jamie looked up at June. "Yes. Yes. Thank you."

June sighed and stood up. "Good. Then keep them and please don't come asking me any questions about Tony's being dirty. He was a good cop. He might have had expensive tastes, but he was a good cop!"

## Chapter Five

When she and Janson came face to face again, Jamie's feeling stunned her - not just the desire and need and remembrance of the physical pleasure they'd shared. She felt something that disturbed her more, something she had never expected to feel with anyone other than Blair.

"Detective Hanna."

She could see that he was surprised to see her at his door. That was OK because she was surprised to find herself there. She hadn't set out to visit him, at least not on a conscious level. Still, the lack of warmth in his smile and welcome in his gaze chilled her.

She'd been a fool to come. Why had she thought he'd be interested in helping her clear herself? He probably thought he'd done all he needed to when he wrote his last editorial suggesting she might be innocent of any complicity in Hillhower's death.

He glanced quickly over his shoulder before stepping onto the front porch. He closed the door behind him. "What brings you here?"

Her gaze swept briefly over him. He wore a pair of faded jeans and a short-sleeved pullover. A five o'clock shadow covered his face. While he didn't appear to be dressed for a date, he wouldn't have closed his door if he were home alone.

She clutched the manila envelope to her chest like a shield against his unexpected coldness. "I've caught you at a bad time."

"I'm sorry. Yes."

"You're not alone." The words came out sounding like an accusation hurled by a wronged lover. She cringed inwardly and bit her lip.

He hesitated before slowly shaking his head. "No."

Her chest muscles constricted and she stared at him. There was a woman in his life. In his house. Now. To her complete and utter dismay, tears filled her eyes.

"Hey. Jamie." He reached out a hand, but she slapped it away and retreated to the porch steps.

"That's Hanna to you! You. . . ." Her throat closed and she turned and fled down the steps, ran the block to her car, tumbled inside, and leaned over the steering wheel. She made no effort to keep the tears at bay.

The sound of the pounding on the driver's side window startled and frightened her. She reacted instinctively, reaching for her gun and jerking her head up and around.

She saw Janson bending over, staring in at her. He motioned for her to roll the window down. She shook her head, put away the gun, and wiped at her face. "Go away and leave me alone."

He pounded on the window again. And then again, harder, until she was afraid it would break. She lowered the window and he reached in, unlocked the door, and urged her onto the sidewalk.

She made no protest when he drew her body against his and put his arms around her. He brushed his lips against her closed lids and her cheeks. "Don't," he said softly. "There's no need to cry. It's not what you think."

She wanted to struggle with him, hurt him. She should not allow him to hold her. Instead, she lifted her tear-stained face to his. "What do you want? Why did you follow me?"

Keeping one arm around her waist, he lifted his other hand and caressed her damp cheeks. "Because you've obviously got the wrong impression about who's at my house."

Although it was after sundown, they stood within feet of a streetlight and she could clearly see his face. She couldn't detect any guile or deceit in his gaze. Rather, she thought she saw what appeared to be concern for her.

He probably felt sorry for her now that she'd let him see how hard she'd fallen for him. How had she become so spineless and so shameless in such a short amount of time?

She pushed against his shoulders and he released her. "It's none of my concern. I shouldn't have come here. I'm sorry I bothered you."

She moved toward her car. His hand on her arm stopped her. She turned to face him. "What?"

"You haven't bothered me." He sighed. "Look, this is awkward."

She nodded. "I know. You obviously didn't expect or want to see me again and-"

"No!" He slid his hand down her arm and linked his fingers with hers. He gave her hand a quick squeeze. "That's not what I meant, Jamie."

"The name is Hanna!"

"Fine. Hanna. Hanna, honey." He reached behind her, rolled her window up, locked the door, pocketed her car keys, and turned to face her. "Now, we're going back to my house. There's someone there I want you to meet."

She tugged at his hand. "I'm not going anywhere with you."

He leaned down and pressed his mouth against hers. Her lips parted and he kissed her gently, tenderly. "Please. I promise it's not a woman."

"Then who's there?"

"Come fine out."

Feeling as if her life was spiraling out of control, she went.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dan watched Jamie and Mark size each other up. Mark's wide eyed, unblinking stare made it fairly certain that he found her attractive. Dan switched his gaze to Jamie. What did she think of Mark? Hopefully not that he was another big dumb blond.

"So Sport, wasn't there something you wanted to do?"

Mark turned to look at him. "Well, I guess I'll leave you two alone."

He nodded, ignoring the small smirk on Mark's face. "OK."

Both he and Jamie watched Mark leave the room, listening in silence to the sounds of his footsteps on the uncarpeted basement stairs.

"He's tall for a fourteen year old."

He nodded. "He's about six feet."

She made a quick circuit of the room, her short heels making soft clicking sounds on the hardwood floor. She paused in front of the French doors that led to the side garden. Then she turned to face him. "So, he's your son."

"Yes."

"You're married."

"Divorced," he countered. "Mark lives in West Virginia with his mom. We see each other on most holidays and once a month, so my time with him is precious."

She nodded. "Of course it is. I understand. I'm sorry I . . . I came."

"Don't be. It's just that it's my weekend with him and we have a guy weekend planned."

"Of course you do. I'll. . . ah. . . I'll get out of your hair so you two can get on with your. . . guy weekend. Say goodbye to him for me, will you?"

He stood watching his front door close, wanting to go after her once again. But he couldn't shortchange Mark.

He turned when he heard Mark running up the stairs. Moments later, Mark's blond head appeared around the door. "You alone, Dad?"

He nodded. "Yes. Sorry about that, Sport."

Mark struggled. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Tell you what?"

"You know. That you had a girlfriend."

He shook his head. "You're jumping to conclusions. I didn't say she was my anything."

"Oh." Mark smirked. "Way to go, Dad! Got your own personal booty call!"

"Mark! She's not a booty call!" he said sharply. "And I don't want to hear you talking that way about any woman."

"OK. OK, Dad! But you could have told me. I can handle it."

"Handle what?" he asked, wearily. "Her being black?"

"No. I'm down with that. I meant her being your girlfriend."

"So you're down with that, too?"

Mark nodded. "Yeah. I wouldn't have been a while back, but now that Mom has a boyfriend, I've finally realized you two aren't ever getting back together." He grimaced. "Besides, she really likes this Chad."

Dan digested the news of his ex-wife's love life in silence, not sure how he felt, knowing the woman he'd spend twelve years loving was with another man.

"Chad?" he repeated. "As in hanging Chad?"

Mark nodded, his lips turning up in a grin. "And get this Dad, he's from Florida!"

The two of them laughed. Mark sobered first. "So why'd you let her go?"

He shrugged. "This is our weekend."

"I know, but I'd like to get to know her. Why don't you call her back?"

He studied Mark's face, looking for signs of resentment. "Are you sure?"

"Sure. I want to ask her what being a cop is like."

He scowled. "You are not going to be a cop."

Mark shrugged. "We'll see, Dad. Are you going to call her or what?"

\* \* \* \* \*

"Great! Another dead-end! What do you think?"

"I think we need a break." Dan rotated his shoulders and glanced at Jamie. She sat next to him on the oversized double reclining love seat with his cordless phone and the contents of several manila envelopes between them.

She wore a pink silk pantsuit that clung to all the right places and complimented her dusky rose skin. She had a lovely, slender neck and pretty ears adorned with small diamond studs.

She looked up from the list of numbers they'd made from Hillhower's phone list and met his gaze. "You're staring. What?"

He shook his head, wondering what she'd say if he told her he wanted to pick her up, carry her to bed, and make no holds barred love to her until they were both exhausted.

But not with Mark in the house. His willingness to settle for holding her and watching her sleep surprised him.

He glanced at his watch. "It's after eleven and we're been at it for two hours. Let's call it a night."

He saw the disappointment on her face, but she nodded. "OK." She gathered the sheets together and slipped them back into the manila envelope, and sat forward, pushing the foot rest down and against the base of the chair.

When she stood up, he rose too. "I'll see you in the morning."

She nodded. "OK. Ah. . . good night."

She moved several feet away from him before turning suddenly to face him. "You're probably wondering why I came running to you tonight."

He shook his head. "Actually, I thought maybe you just wanted to talk."

"I don't normally. . . Normally I'm very self-sufficient. I can take care of myself. I don't want you to think I'm some sort of clinging vine who weeps all the time. I'm not and I don't."

He closed the distance between them and brushed the tips of his fingers against her cheeks. "You know what? I don't care why you came tonight. And I don't care how often you do or don't cry. I'm just glad you came."

She stared up at him. "But you had no intentions of coming to see me?"

He rubbed his thumbs against the corners of her mouth before cupping her face between his hands. "Not until I could help prove you're innocent."

Her eyes widened and she sucked in a breath. "I am innocent."

He nodded. "I know."



"How?"

He shrugged. "I don't know how I know. I just do."

She closed her eyes and leaned into him, burying her face against his shoulder. After a moment, she looked up at him, her gaze searching his. "I'd better go to bed."

Just looking into her dark eyes aroused him. "I wish I could go with you."

She shook her head and stepped away from him. "Maybe I should go home."

"And wake up alone in the middle of the night afraid? No. Stay. I promise you won't have to worry -- at least not with Mark in the house."

"Even if we were alone, our spending another night together wouldn't be a good idea."

One of his brows rose above the other. "Says who?"

"Me. We shouldn't have. . . " She paused, took a deep breath, and rushed on. "We shouldn't have slept together."

He glared at her. "God, I hate fickle women."

"I'm not fickle."

"Sleeping together was your idea and now you say it was a mistake? That's fickle."

"Recognizing and admitting a mistake doesn't make me fickle, Janson."

"Whatever."

She turned and headed towards the bedroom he'd shown her earlier. After emerging from the bathroom, she undressed and slipped into bed. Sleep eluded her and she lay thinking of Blair. All her hopes of happiness had died with him. Yet with Janson she felt. . .

She turned from her back onto her side, burying her face in the pillow. The less she considered a serious relationship with Janson, the better for them both. She drifted to sleep, her thoughts again on Blair.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Sshhh. Don't cry. It's all right. You're safe. You're safe."

Jamie's tears subsided and she realized several things at once: she was in Janson's guestroom, Janson was on the bed with her, they were both on their knees, and he was holding her in his arms. She wore shortie pajamas while he wore only pajama bottoms. She'd obviously had another nightmare.

"Dad? I heard her crying. Is she all right?"

Jamie closed her eyes as Janson lifted his head away from her neck and spoke to Mark. "She had a nightmare. She'll be OK."

"Can I get her anything?"

"Thanks, Sport, but she just needs to be held."

"OK. Night, Dad."

"Night, Sport."

She waited until she heard the bedroom door close before she lifted her head from his bare chest and looked around. The bedside clock read 3:20. She looked at him. He had broad shoulders that tapered into narrow hips. His chest was covered with a mass of fine blond hair that disappeared into the band of his pajamas.

The knowledge of what delights lay beneath his bottoms sent an unwanted thrill through her. She raised her eyes from his lower body and met his cold gaze..

"If you're all right, I'll see you in a few hours."

She swallowed several times, aware that her earlier remark expressing regret for having slept with him still annoyed him. She longed to say something to lessen the impact of her words. Yet, fearful of making him even cooler, she remained silent.

He got off the bed. His hand was on the doorknob when she next spoke. "Why didn't you call?"

"What?" He turned to look at her, his brows raised.

She bit her lip hard. Where had that question come from? She sank back against the pillows, pulling the cover up to her chin. "Why didn't you call me?" She hated how needy she sounded, but she had to know why he hadn't tried to contact her.

"Apparently because I had nothing to say to you," he said coolly.

His answer shocked her. She bit her lip as tears filled her eyes. "That's it?"

"You regret having slept with me. What do you want from me?"

She sucked in a breath. "I thought. . . I hoped you'd understand."

"Who says I don't?"

"You're angry."

"I'm not interested in talking about this. You've made your point."

She shook her head. "Maybe I should go."

"Now?"

She nodded.

He narrowed his eyes. "If you go now, Mark will hear you leave, then he'll spend the rest of the night worried about you. Please don't do anything else to upset him."

She stared at Dan, feeling tears run down her cheeks. "I didn't mean to scare him. I can't help having nightmares."

His gaze shifted to her cheeks and when he spoke, his voice was softer. "I know. I know. There's no need to cry. Go back to sleep. I'll see you in a couple of hours."

She longed to say something. . . anything to keep him there. But no words came. He left, leaving her feeling hurt, angry, and deserted. She punched a fist into the pillow and burrowed her head in the resultant dent. Why had she driven him away? If not for her earlier remark, he might have stayed and held her until she fell asleep. Now she had a feeling he'd never comfort her again.

Late the next morning, Jamie stood in the middle of the clearing at the base of the Pocono Mountains, wondering where her common sense and independence had gone. She glanced at the trees that stretched literally yards over her head, then looked back at the campsite where Mark sat cleaning the fish he and Dan had caught that morning.

As he worked, he bobbed and weaved from side to side in time to the strident music blasting from his battery-operated mini boom box. His taste in music left a lot to be desired, but his powers of persuasion were unequaled.

Why else would she have allowed herself to be talked into coming on a camping trip with him and his father? Especially since she knew Dan didn't want her along. Although he hadn't protested when Mark invited her, she'd seen the narrowing of his eyes and the tightening of his lips. They'd arrived at the campsite just after seven that morning. After setting up the tent and the portable toilet, Dan had made himself scarce.

She stared along the trail he'd taken over an hour earlier. After a couple of hundred yards, it wove around the base of the mountain and disappeared from view.

"Why don't you walk along the trail and tell Dad lunch will be ready in half an hour?"

She turned to find Mark watching her. She shrugged. "I don't know where he is and I might get lost."

"He's at the bluff overlooking the lake about a half a mile away. You can't get lost. The trail only goes to the lake."

She hesitated. She felt naked without her gun. But Dan had been adamant that she leave it. Although he'd taught Mark how to use a rifle and a gun for safety's sake when they were camping, he didn't want to encourage his son's fascination with guns. "Are there. . . any critters on the trail I should know about?"

"Just a few harmless snakes." Mark smiled. "And Dad. Are you going?"

She nodded, eager for a chance to make amends to Dan. "OK, if you're sure there's nothing hostile out here."

"We've been coming up here since I was a baby. I'm sure."

"OK. Then I'll go."

Mark's grin turned into a smirk. "You do that and I'll wait right here for you two. Don't worry if you're longer than half an hour."

Feeling heat rush up her cheeks, Jamie turned and slowly started along the path. She hadn't been in the woods since her father had taken her on a camping trip when she was twelve. Then she had enjoyed all the new sounds and smells, secure in the knowledge that her father was there to protect her from all harm. Now the sound of branches breaking under her booted feet, and overhanging tree limbs blocking most of the sunlight made her edgy. The smell of the earth and the occasional wildflowers hung heavy in the crisp afternoon air.

As she walked along the narrow path, edged by the base of the mountain on one side and the forest on the other, she tried to decide what she'd say when she found Dan. Should she apologize? Try to tease him into a better mood? Or just deliver Mark's message and retrace her steps back to camp?

She still hadn't decided when the path suddenly widened and she was bathed in warmth. She shaded her eyes and looked up. The trees had parted, revealing an almost cloudless sky.

The path before her was covered with earth and a grass verge that ringed a small mountain brook. On the other side of the stream, Dan lay sprawled out on his back, his hands behind his head, the bill of his ball cap pulled down over his face.

She stood staring at him for several silent moments, aware of a tightness in her chest, a tingling in her vagina. Just being near him made her feel lonely for him. She longed for his touch. His lips. She longed for the sound of his voice whispering in her ear. And yes, the delicious thrill of his thick cock slipping deep inside her body, filling a void and an ache. But it wasn't just sex, although that was great. She felt a need to just be with him.

Sucking in a deep, steadying breath, she started forward. A twig snapped under her boot and he sat up quickly, pushing the cap to the back of his head.

"Jamie! What are you doing here?" He half rose. "Is Mark all right?"

"Yes," she said quickly, anxious to chase the worried look from his face. She smiled. "He's cleaning the fish and scaring every animal with half an ear away with his boom box."

He sank back to the ground and looked at her, his gaze cool. "Then what are you doing here?"

"He asked me to tell you lunch will be ready soon."

"Thanks. I'll consider myself told. See you back at camp in a bit."

He was still angry. She shrugged, turned and took several steps back down the path, then stopped. This was crazy. Why should they go back separately? More, why should she be deprived of his company when she longed for it more than she'd thought possible?

When she turned back, she found him still sitting up, watching her. She shrugged, feeling vulnerable and afraid. She'd let herself really fall for Blair and look how that had ended. What if she let her guard down completely with Dan and found that he didn't feel as deeply for her as she felt for him?

Her pride urged her to walk away and not look back. Her heart had other ideas. "I'm sorry." Her voice quivered and she bit her lip, afraid she was going to cry. "I didn't mean it. Don't be angry. Please."

She waited, a knot of misery stuck in her throat. He would probably pretend to misunderstand and insist that she humiliate herself by explaining. Her willingness to do just that frightened her. Embarrassment would be a small price to pay if he would only smile at her.

Pleasure radiated through her when he grinned, sprang to his feet, quickly covered the distance between them, and wrapped his arms around her. She melted into him and lifted

her face to his. When his mouth, hot and demanding, covered hers, she parted her lips and eagerly returned his voracious kisses.

She made no protest when he lowered her to ground. She remained silent, even when the weight of his big body, settling on top of hers, caused several pieces of twigs and bark to bite into her legs and thighs. She closed her eyes and concentrated on the absolute joy of knowing he was about to make love to her again.

He nudged her legs apart and she could feel his hard warmth nestled between her thighs, pressing against her vagina. Still kissing and clinging to each other, they struggled to undo zippers and buttons. Just as she felt his freed penis pulsing against her bared clit, he froze, lifted his mouth from her naked breasts and looked down at her. "Damn, we can't."

Her whole body throbbed with wanting him. All her thoughts centered around the pleasure his cock pounding her pussy would give them both. "Why? Because of Mark?" she asked, disappointment rising like poison in her.

"No. Because I don't have a damned rubber," he said, his voice thick with frustration.

She sucked in a deep breath, then spoke in a rush. "I'm on the pill," she told him.

He searched her gaze. "I don't sleep with anyone without a rubber unless it's a serious, committed relationship."

Oh, God! He wanted another one-night stand. She closed her eyes on hurt tears and had the breath forcibly expelled from her lungs when he suddenly cupped her bare bottom in his hands, and plunged his hot cock balls deep into her quivering body.

She moaned and opened her eyes to find him staring down at her, his gaze like blue fire.

"Is this what you want?"

She nodded, sliding her hands down his back to cup over his taut ass. His girth stretching her felt so good. Digging her fingers into his cheeks, she ground her hips against his. A jolt of pleasure darted through her. Her lips parted and she arched into him, eagerly

fucking herself on his cock. She loved the feelings ripping through her as his hard shaft pushed into her.

He shuddered, lowered his head to her chest, sucked the tip of one breast into his mouth, withdrew slightly, and then pushed himself deep in her. A soft murmur escaping her lips, she tightened herself around him. In response, he gently sank his teeth into her breast. He slowly rotated his hips against hers, propelling his cock into her aching pussy.

She moaned, turning her head, pressing her lips against his hair. "Please."

He lifted his mouth from her breasts and claimed her lips, slipping his arms around her body. Kissing the breath from her lungs, he drove his powerful hips up and down against her, fucking into her in a frenzy of lust and desire.

Her pussy caught fire. The world faded away and she clung to him, her fingers gripping his tight, clenching buns. Delicious tendrils of pleasure danced through her as she mindlessly lifted her hips to encourage him to surge ever deeper, hold her ever tighter, pound ever harder.

Her lips clinging to his, she wrapped her legs around his body, eagerly welcoming his ravenous cock back into her until a flame of white heat engulfed her. Her stomach muscles clenched, and she moaned and cried out his name as her whole world tilted. The fire in her pussy burned out of control and she exploded into countless tiny pieces of pure, unadulterated fiery bliss. She surrendered completely, wallowing in ecstatic delight, her ability to think gone. Her world centered around him and the hard cock shooting jet after jet of seed deep into her satisfied pussy.

Moments later, he collapsed on top of her, still buried deep inside her. He kissed and sucked the side of her neck, whispering to her and rotating his hips against her.

The rush of passion satisfied, she became aware of the coolness of the air and the little bits of forest waste biting into her naked behind -- and the gravity of what she'd just done.



She flexed the muscles of her pussy, giving a gentle squeeze on his fast deflating cock. He groaned in protest and lifted his head to look down at her. "What?"

"We should get up and head back to camp before Mark comes looking for us," she said, averting her gaze.

He turned her face back to his. "That was incredible, Hanna, honey. I hope you're not going to tell me in a day or two that we shouldn't have done this," he teased, his eyes twinkling.

Heat rushed up her cheeks. "It's all well and good for you to be so amused," she complained. "You're a man."

He dipped his head and pressed a sweet kiss against her mouth. "Aren't you glad that I am?"

"Yes," she admitted.

"Good." He kissed her again, this time lightly, then slowly, with a groan, pulled out of her. Without his body on hers and his cock filling her, she felt empty and deprived.

They cleaned up as well as they could, rearranged their clothing and headed back to the camp. Jamie was silent on the return trip, painfully aware that although Dan had again expressed pleasure at sleeping with her, he'd said nothing about his feelings for her. For all she knew, beyond wanting to sleep with her, he had no feelings for her, which made her a fool for having slept with him again.

## Chapter Six

The ringing of the phone roused Dan from a deep sleep. Groaning, he rolled over from his stomach to his back and glanced at his bedside clock as he reached for the phone. Two a.m. He pressed the receiver against his ear. "What?" he murmured sleepily.

He came fully awake as a muffled voice followed several moments of heavy breathing. "If you know what's good for you, you'll keep your nose out of the Hillhower investigation."

Before he could reply, he heard a dial tone. Struggling into a sitting position, he reached over to turn on his bedside lamp. Then he punched "star 69." The voice on the other end announced that the call was outside his calling area.

Swearing softly, he slammed the receiver back on its cradle and fell back against his pillow, his heart thumping. He took several deep breaths.

He hadn't recognized the voice, but found himself wondering if the caller had been one of Mike's associates. Lately his relationship with Mike had been cool at best. Mike, too, had warned him not to try to clear Jamie. And now that it must be obvious to Mike and Hillhower's killers that he had an interest in clearing Jamie's reputation as well as her name, he was being warned in a way he couldn't ignore.

In the process of reaching over to turn off the light, his thoughts turned to Jamie. Was she sleeping soundly? Or was she even now in the midst of another nightmare? His growing concern for her made it difficult to get through a day without thinking of her.

Sighing, he sat up and reached for the phone. He punched in the number he'd recently memorized.

"Hello?"

A surprising warmth spread through him and he smiled at the sound of her sleep-slurred voice. "I'm sorry. I woke you."

"Oh. It's you. It's all right."

She sounded pleased and his smile turned into a grin. "I wondered how you were. You sleeping all right?"

"I was, until you so rudely interrupted me." Despite her words, her voice held a soft, pleased quality.

"I woke and thought I'd check on you before I went back to sleep."

"Oh." There was a short pause before she spoke again. "Since we're talking, thank you for the flowers."

He hadn't been sure about sending her flowers. Although they'd parted amicably enough after their return from the camping trip, she'd refused when he called the next day and asked her to have dinner with him. "Did you like them?"

"Yes. It was a nice surprise to come home and find such an elaborate bouquet waiting in the lobby for me."

He'd agonized over what message to send with the flowers and ending up just having his initials written on the accompanying card.

He slid down in bed. "How's the case coming?"

The pause this time was longer and he fought annoyance. She'd slept with him without the benefit of a condom, but wouldn't trust him with the details of her efforts to find her partner's killer?

Women. Who could understand them? Why was she keeping him at a distance? Why was it OK to sleep with him with or without a condom? But not OK to let him too close? Would she be so hesitant if he were black instead of white? That was a question they were going to have to deal with soon.

Her voice interrupted his thoughts. "Actually, I'm meeting one of Hillhower's snitches in a couple of hours."

"Alone?"

"Snitches are notorious for avoiding audiences," she said quietly.

"I know that," he said impatiently, "but for all you know, you might be meeting with the person who set up you and Hillhower!"

"Thanks for the concern, but I doubt that."

"You doubt it, but you don't know for sure."

"I'm sure enough to go alone."

"How can you be that sure?"

The pause this time made him grind his teeth. "I'm sure because, actually, it was Hillhower who set me up."

"What?"

"After the shooting started, there were things said that made me realize I was the killers' target."

"What? For crying out loud, Hanna! Why didn't you tell me?"

"You thought I was dirty," she pointed out.

"And have you told I.A.?"

"No."

"Why the hell not?"

"They think I'm dirty too."

"You're a silly little idiot!" he snapped. He sat up, pushing the covers away with his feet. "Get up. I'm on my way over."

"Now?"

"Now."

"There's no need! I don't need-"

"I'm on my way, Hanna!" he said curtly, and hung up on her protests. He dressed quickly and left the house. When she admitted him to her apartment half an hour later, she wore a touch-me-not attitude like a shield.

She closed her door, moving several feet away from him before she spoke. "You didn't need to come tearing over here in the middle of the night, Janson."

He considered her through a narrowed gaze. The last time they'd been alone together, she lay clinging to him, quivering in ecstasy as he kissed them both breathless and shot his come deep into her hot, tight, delicious pussy.

Now she stood staring at him, her dark eyes cool. Where the hell was his hug? His kiss? His damned hello? "Don't I even get to peck your lips?"

She compressed her lips instead. "If you came expecting a quick. . . fuck, you're going to be disappointed. This is business, Janson."

He leaned back against the door, staring at her. "How about a long fuck?"

Her dark eyes shot off sparks of annoyance. "Is that all you want from me, Janson? Am I supposed to drop my drawers and gape open my legs every time we meet?"

She aggravated the hell out of him with her hot then cold act. Yet he couldn't stop thinking of her and wondering what delights a future with her might hold. "Do whatever the

hell you like, Jamie. You want to fuck, fine, we'll fuck. You want to pretend that I'm a pervert for daring to mention sex to you, fine, I'm a pervert."

She shook her head. "I'm sorry. I'm just on edge. Can we just stick to business?"

"What if I want or need more than business with you?"

She bit her lip. "Do you?"

"I don't know."

She shrugged. "Then, let's stick to business. . . at least for now."

How the hell was he supposed to do that when he longed to sweep her up in his arms and carry her off to bed? "Fine. For now we'll concentrate on this snitch."

\* \* \* \* \*

The old warehouse near the riverfront took up the space of a full city block. Most of its windows were broken and it was dark and looked long abandoned. In the early light of the rising sun, it looked eerie. Just the sight of it reminded Jamie of the other abandoned building where she'd been shot and Hillhower had died.

"Tell me everything you remember about that night. And this time don't leave anything out."

She shifted in the passenger seat of Janson's S.U.V. and glanced at his profile. He stared straight ahead, his firm lips pressed into a tight, unsmiling line. What exactly was it about this man that made her want to drop her pants every time he looked at her? She'd always liked her men big, well-built, brown-eyed, and black. Granted, Janson was big and well-built, but he was so blond that his hair looked almost white in sunlight. And his eyes were a dark, intense blue. He had a way of looking at her with those intense blue eyes that made her feel as if he were looking past all her hurts and insecurities right into her soul.

When she didn't respond immediately, he turned to face her. "Well?"

She shrugged. "When the shooting started, I was hit several times. When I fell, I hit my head. Before I lost consciousness, I heard Hillhower begging someone to stop shooting because that someone had "got me." I knew then that he'd set me up."

"Why?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. I've been over and over everything a thousand times, but I can't come up with any reason he'd want me killed." A wave of misery washed over her and she stared at Dan, making no effort to hide her pain and confusion. "We were partners! I would have died to protect him! How could he set me up? How could he do that to me?"

His face softened and he reached out and caressed her cheek. Although he didn't speak, his touch acted like balm to her aching heart.

She turned her head and kissed his palm. Then, afraid that he'd think her weak, or worst would think her fickle, she pulled back from him and looked at her watch. "It's time," she said.

He nodded and turned off the engine. They got out of the S.U.V. and carefully picked their way across the broken-bottle, trash-covered pier. Once they reached the side door that led into the building, a set of huge, rotting wooden doors blocked their path. Through a hole big enough to peek through, Jamie glanced into the interior. The beginnings of daylight streamed in through broken windows and numerous holes in the roof. The floor was a mass of old mattresses, trash, and scurrying creatures. Her stomach lurched and she involuntarily jerked back.

She felt Janson's body behind her and studied herself. What was it about having him around that made her want to go all feminine and play the part of a helpless clinging vine to his conquering hero?

"I'll go first," he whispered.

"No." She turned to face him, her chin lifted so she could stare up into his eyes. "Let's not forget who's the cop here. I'll go first."

He squinted down at her. "All right. You go first - when hell freezes over." He urged her aside and pushed through the rotten door.

Seething, she quickly followed him. A combination of spoiled food, urine, and other foul odors immediately assailed her senses. Fighting back the urge to retch, she looked around the cavernous interior. Shadows hung everywhere and she was suddenly glad of Janson's solid presence beside her.

A series of soft wails reached her ears. She turned on the flashlight she carried and sent the bright beam over a mattress several feet away. Heat rushed up her neck as the beam landed. A naked man shoved himself vigorously into an equally nude woman who clung to him and made small, gasping sounds as they both reached their peak. Jamie, who'd never seen an adult movie, found the scene unfolding before her strangely erotic. Her breath caught in her throat as the man suddenly slammed his hips down against the woman, grabbed her behind and pounded her with a ferocity that left the woman moaning, and clearly climaxing.

Jamie stared, unable to look away. Was that how she and Janson looked when they made love? Did she sob like that as Janson repeated drove his thick cock deep into her greedy pussy, seeking his own satisfaction while pushing her over the edge of desire into a freefall of indescribable joy?

The man made a sound like a growl. "Oh, fuck, baby, here I come!" Thrusting and groaning, he fell onto the woman's still shuddering body, his buns clenching wildly as he continued to pump into her.

Then, so suddenly that it shocked her, the man stood up and turned to face them. He made no effort to cover himself. His bare cock, covered with their combined juices, jutted out from his body. He fondled himself, smiling at Jamie. "You next, baby?"



Shaking, Jamie turned off the flashlight and hastily stepped back through the door. Once outside, she took several long, cleansing breaths, deliberately avoiding looking at Janson when he followed her outside.. When she did look at him, she saw amusement on his face. She bit her lip. Now he would think her a pervert as well as easy.

He touched her shoulder. "Oh, no need to look like that. It was just a live sex show," he said. "If you've seen one, you've seen them all."

"I've never seen one," she muttered.

"No? Well, now you have."

She heard movement behind them. The man from the mattress stepped out through the hole in the doorway.

He had short, dark brown hair, brown eyes and looked about twenty. She saw his cock outlined along the side of the tight jeans he now wore. He was still pulling a heavy sweater over his bare chest as he grinned at Jamie. "Hey doll. Enjoy the show?"

"What the hell's that supposed to mean?" Janson demanded, staring coolly at the other man. "Why the hell should anyone enjoy watching you get your rocks off?" His eyes raked the man from head to toe. "From the look and smell of you, you could use a bath and some deodorant. Who the hell would enjoy watching you behave like a dog with a bitch in heat?"

The younger man flushed and glanced back at Jamie. Janson's intervention had given her time to regain her equilibrium. "You Street Fox?" she asked calmly.

He glared at her. "Who wants to know?"

She pulled two twenty dollar bills out of her jean pocket. "They do."

He grinned and reached for the money. "Street Fox at your service. You Hanna?"

She nodded. "You got anything for me?"

He shrugged. "Maybe. You got any more male friends besides Blondie there?"

She felt Janson stiffen beside her and her lips twitched. "Depends. Where can we talk?"

Street Fox jerked his head towards the building behind him. "In there."

Jamie thought of the woman lying on the mattress with her legs splayed wide, meowing like a satisfied cat. "Ah. . . I don't think so."

Street Fox glinted at her. "Either we talk in there or we don't talk."

Squaring her shoulders, she nodded. This time when Janson insisted on going first, she nodded gratefully and only followed when he called out that the coast was clear.

She saw no sign of the woman, but the smell of sex hung heavy in the air. Her nostrils flared slightly and she turned to look at Janson. He met her gaze and she blushed. Was he thinking what she was: that he'd like to be alone with her so they could make love until they were exhausted and then lay cuddling in each other arms as they fell asleep?

Street Fox lit several candles and urged them toward the center of the huge interior. Jamie spotted a large wooden table surrounded by several chairs.

Street Fox straddled one chair and grinned at her. "Have a seat, doll."

Ignoring the urge to object to being called "doll," she wiped as much dust from a seat as she could, turned the handkerchief over and sat on the edge of the chair. Janson moved to stand behind her, resting a hand on her shoulder.

His touch infused her with warmth and a sense of well-being. For a moment, she forgot all about Street Fox and why they were there. There was just Janson. She tilted her head back and flashed a quick smile up at him. "Thank you," she said softly.

He didn't answer. Not with words. But his smile, warm and intimate, reached out to surround and caress her.

"Hey, Blondie, want to give her a quick pop on my bed?"

Street Fox's crude suggestion snapped her back to reality. She tore her gaze away from Janson and glared at Street Fox. "What can you tell me?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Street Fox shrugged. "What you want to know?"

"Everything you know about Hillhower."

"He was a cop." He made cop sound like a dirty word. He sneered at Janson. "You wouldn't have liked him, Blondie."

"And why is that?"

"He was dirty." Street Fox spat on the floor. "And worse than that, I came back here one night and found him balling my woman. He didn't care that she didn't want him or that she was only seventeen. He was porking her like he hadn't had any in ages. She was sore for a week after he finished with her."

Jamie felt sick. The bitterness and anger in Street Fox's voice rang true. How could the man she'd entrusted her life to for five years have been so vile without her knowing it? She swallowed several times. "Are you saying he raped her?"

"Damn straight!" He spat again. "The fuck!"

"Why didn't you report it?"

"Oh, sure. Who was going to believe a couple of runaway kids?" His lips tightened as he stared at her. "You were his partner. Why didn't you do something? Why did you let him keep coming here, ripping into her like she was some damned sex toy?"

She recoiled. "I didn't know! How could I?"

"How could you not?" he challenged. "Wasn't it your job to know what he was doing?"

The venom in his voice momentarily silenced her.

Janson's hand tightened on her shoulder. "Look, she didn't know. If she had, she would have put a stop to it."

"Yeah right. And I bet she didn't know he was dirty either."

"As a matter of fact, she didn't. If she had, she wouldn't have almost been killed with him. And she wouldn't be here asking you to tell her what you know."

"I don't know squat except that I'm glad he's dead. He deserved to die!"

Jamie found her voice. "I'm sorry you think that, but I didn't deserve to be shot. I've never done anything but my best for the people of The Valley. Please. I need your help."

Street Fox shrugged. "Help costs."

"OK, but I need something for my money besides what I already know."

"Why don't you tell her about that slime ball's friends, Foxy?"

Jamie glanced over her shoulder. A small, slender brunette emerged from the shadows. The inside of the building was cold and damp, but the girl wore a sheer white one-piece catsuit. Her small breasts and pubic hair were both visible. The girl stopped next to Street Fox's chair, pushed out her chest, and smiled at Dan. "Hey, handsome. You're a big one. Why don't you move from behind that chair so I can see what you're packing?"

Janson swore softly. "I'm not into little girls."

"I'm eighteen years old," she protested.

"Frankly, I don't care how old you are. You're not my type."

A flush covered the girl's cheeks. She turned and fled back into the shadows.

Street Fox nodded, grinning. "Thanks, Blondie."

"What?" Janson sounded as surprised as Jamie felt.

"Sometimes Heather behaves like an alley cat, but she's my alley cat."

Jamie waved a hand. "What did she want you to tell me?"

He shrugged. "Your partner had some heavy friends."

"How heavy?"

He paused, looking uncomfortable. "You know. The kind that's always talking about white supremacy."

Jamie gaped at him. "What? If you're implying that Hillhower was a racist, you're wrong! He was my partner for five years! I would have known!"

"Yeah? Why? You claim you didn't know he was banging the sense out of Heather every chance he got. Why would you know that? Besides, I didn't say he was a racist, but his friends surely were."

"How do you know?"

"One night me and Heather decided to bang in the woods." He smirked at Janson. "It's great with the moon overhead and your girl underneath. Have you ever banged a woman in the woods, Blondie?"

Jamie thought of the quickie she and Janson had shared near the brook and channeled all her energies into not reacting. She resisted the urge to glance up at Janson.

"As a matter of fact, I have," Janson said quietly.

She wondered how many times he'd made love in the woods. And to whom. She gave herself a mental shake. He'd been married for twelve years and he and his family had often gone camping. He'd probably lost track of the number of times he'd made love in the woods - to a woman he loved.

"Yeah, I'll just bet you have too, doll."

"You were saying?" she asked curtly.

He grinned and shrugged. "After we finished, we wandered to a clearing where a cross was burning. And who do you think we saw sitting in his car watching but that partner of yours? When everything settled down, he got out and went over to one of the men and they laughed and slapped each other on the back. That's when me and Heather got out of there."

Jamie shook her head, trying to make sense of Street Fox's revelations. She remembered that cross burning. She and Hillhower had been assigned to the case. They'd questioned everyone within a ten-mile radius of the burning, but had come up empty. She remembered how frustrated she'd been and how his nonchalance had angered her.

"Who was the man you saw Hillhower with after the burning?"

He shrugged, frowning. "I don't know. Never saw him before, but Heather and me kept thinking we knew him. But we didn't."

"Can you describe the man you saw him with?"

"He was dark - dark hair, dark eyes, medium build. Maybe thirty. Nothing special about him."

"Can you tell me anything else at all?"

"Nope. That's it."

Jamie gave him another forty dollars along with her card. "If you think of anything else, call me."

"Sure, but calls cost money."

She nodded wearily. "I know. Just call and I'll take care of you." She stood, looked around the dismal interior, and looked back at him. "Look, you and Heather don't have to live here. There are places where the two of you can-"

"Forget it. Heather and me are fine here. Don't worry about us. You just worry that that slime ball's friends don't come looking for you."

She suppressed a shiver. "If you change your mind, call me, even if you don't have any new information."

\* \* \* \* \*

After they left the warehouse and the waterfront, Janson pulled his S.U.V. over to the side of road and turned to stare at her.

After a moment of silence, she shrugged. "What? Have you thought of something we should have asked?"

He shook his head. "No."

"Then what? Why are you staring?"

He put his arm along the seat behind her. His fingers brushed the back of her neck, sending a delicious shiver through her. "Let's go to my house."

"Your house?" She blinked at him. "What's at your house?"

"A big comfortable bed."

The muscles in her stomach clenched. "Oh? Don't you need to go to work?"

"What I need is to slowly undress you, kiss every inch of your delectable body and make love to you." She opened her mouth and he held up a hand to silence her. "I warn you if you tell me that you regret making love with me, I will absolutely be forced to kiss you into submission, toss you over my shoulder, carry you off against your will, and in Fox's elegant words, bang you senseless."

He cupped his hand against the back of her neck. "The choice is yours. Will you come along peacefully or am I going to have to get rough?"

The thought of surrendering to her ever present desire for him washed over her like a wet, erotic wave. But pleasure would have to come later. She smiled and shook her head. "Man, does that sound like a plan."

His gaze locked with hers. "But? I hear a 'but' in your voice."

"But I need a clear head right now. I have to decide what to do next."

He leaned over and brushed his lips against the side of her neck. "You know what they say: two heads are better than one. After we make love a few times, you can think all you like."

She leaned into him, savoring the feel of his caressing lips against her skin. She ached with the need to make love, but she couldn't be ruled by a desire for sex. She leaned away from him.

Looking resigned, he moved back to his seat. "No go, huh?"

She shook her head.

"Damn," he said softly as he started the engine. He drove in silence for several moments before casting a glance at her. "Where to?"

"Home, so I can pick up my car."

He nodded, watching the road. "And then?"

"And then I don't know. I need to think."

"For how long?"

She looked at his profile in surprise. "What?"

"How long will you be thinking? Will you be finished by dinner or bedtime? New plan. How about I let you think until around, say, six or seven, then I pick you up, take you out to dinner somewhere romantic, then we go home and make love?"

"OK. That could work, except, how about we skip the making love part?"

"But that's the best part," he protested.

She sighed. "I know."

"Then?"

"I just think we should skip the making love part."

"Why, when we do it so well together?"

She bit her lip and shook her head. If she told him the truth, he would probably blow his stack. "Please. Drop it."

"Fine. Consider it dropped."

He drove on for a mile or two, then abruptly pulled off the road and turned to face her. "I want to know why. If you're having a problem with us because I'm white, I want to know it now. Let's get it out in the open so we can deal with it honestly."

"That's not it."

"Then what?"

She shook her head. "It's not. . . safe."



"Not safe? Wh. . . Are you. . . Why not? Are you telling me you have some type of sexually transmitted-"

"No! No!"

"Then what?"

She covered her face with a hand. "I don't know what it is about you that makes me do things I later regret."

"Oh, God! Not the we-shouldn't-have-slept-together-again spiel."

"Well, we shouldn't have! At least not the last time. Especially not the last time."

"Because Mark was nearby?" He sighed and nodded. "I know, but when I saw you standing there looking so. . . I lost my head."

"That's not what I meant, Janson."

"Then for crying out loud, tell me what you mean. I can't read your mind!"

She averted her head. "I. . . I lied."

He turned her face back to him. "About what?"

"Being. . . on the pill."

"What? You lied about being on the pill? Why?"

"Because I wanted to make love and I thought you'd stop if I told you the truth."

"You thought right! Damn you! Mark is fourteen. What the hell made you think I might be interested in having another child?"

"I'm sorry."

"Sorry is nowhere damned good enough, Jamie! Who died and put you in control of my future? What the fuck were you thinking?"

She sucked in a breath, trying to swallow her disappointment at his reaction. His anger was justified. "I'm sorry I lied to you, but don't you think I feel bad enough without your hostility?"

"I don't give a fuck what you feel, Jamie! You had no right to lie to me! I am not interested in having another child!"

She bit her lip. "Do you think I welcome the possibility of possibly having a baby by a man who resents me, Janson?"

"I don't give a fuck what you think, Jamie!"

She touched his arm. "Dan -- "

He jerked away. "The less you say to me now, the better!"

He started the engine and sent his S.U.V. speeding down the road. At her apartment complex, he pulled up beside her car. When he kept the engine running and stared straight ahead, she pushed the passenger side door open and slipped out.

He reached over, pulled the open door from her fingers, slammed it shut, and drove off without a backward glance. She stood staring after his S.U.V. in silence before letting herself into the building and her apartment.

She had a feeling she'd seen the last of Dan Janson and the pain and anguish that certainly caused was almost enough to crush her spirit. She undressed, got into the shower and sobbed hysterically while the water cascaded over her head.

## Chapter Seven

"Can I speak to Jamie?"

With the phone pressed against his ear, Dan groaned and half buried his face in his pillow. "What makes you think she's here?"

"Well, with me out of the way, I'm sure you two are enjoying yourselves," Mark said. "So can I speak to her?"

"No," he said shortly. He glanced at his beside clock. It was nearly eleven-thirty. "And what are you doing up so late on a school night?"

"I couldn't sleep and I got to thinking of you and Jamie and wondering if she was all right. So can I speak to her?"

"She's not here."

That statement was greeted by a prolonged silence. "Oh. Well. Have you seen her since we went camping?"

"Yes. Once."

"Was she all right?"

Dan had a clear memory of Jamie's pained expression just before he angrily drove out of her apartment complex. He recalled feeling as if he'd been hit in the stomach with a sledge

hammer on hearing that she hadn't been on the pill when they'd had unprotected sex. That knowledge had been more than enough to dampen the memory of the joy and freedom he'd felt filling her with his seed, thinking he didn't have to worry about her getting pregnant.

How could he have been so stupid? Even if she had been on the pill, making love without a condom was a mistake he might have to spend the next eighteen years paying for.

"Dad? Was she all right?"

Dan blinked and forced his thoughts back to Mark. "Yes."

"When did you see her last?"

"Ten days ago."

"You mean she's been all by herself? What if she's been having nightmares, Dad?"

To Dan's annoyance, the same worry had been keeping him awake at night. "She's a big girl. She'll just have to learn to cope."

"But, Dad! I thought the two of you. . ."

"You thought what?"

"Well, when you were gone so long in the woods, I thought. . . well, you know what I thought."

He closed his eyes and cursed his inability to control himself. How could he preach to Mark about being responsible when he'd behaved like a wild teenager controlled by raging hormones ever since he'd met Jamie?

"Sport, how would you feel about having a baby brother or sister?"

"Wow, Dad! You got her pregnant!"

"I didn't say that," he said defensively. "I just asked you a question. You know it could happen one of these days - from my end or your mom's."

"Come on, Dad. I'm too old to have some little baby brat for a brother or sister."

He sighed. "So you wouldn't be too thrilled with the idea?"

"Well. . . I didn't say that. Actually, it might be kind of all right to have a little brat look up to me. After all, it'll only be for a few years. I'll be heading off to college after high school. So when's this brat coming?"

"Mark! I never said she was pregnant!"

"But she might be, or you wouldn't have asked me how I felt about a brother or sister. Which means you've been having unprotected sex. Now you know that's a big no-no, Dad. You're always telling me it's OK to be horny, but not OK to be stupid."

"I know." He sighed and waited for a long extended lecture from Mark.

"So you really like her, huh?"

"Yes."

"Well, anyway Dad, when you see her again, tell her I said hi and I'll see her when I come to visit you."

Dan sighed wearily. "Mark, you're jumping to conclusions. Who said I was going to see her again?"

"Well, aren't you?"

"I. . . I don't think so."

"But Dad, how can you not see her again if she's pregnant? You're not going to leave her pregnant alone, are you, Dad?"

The censure in Mark's voice stung him. "Look, Sport, I know what my responsibilities are, if she is pregnant. But right now, it's late."

"Don't leave her alone. Please. I know she's a cop, but she'll be afraid. Have nightmares and wake up crying. She'll need someone to hold her. She needs you, Dad."

Mark's pleas on her behalf only added to Dan's distress. "Look, Sport, I can appreciate that you're worried about her. I'm worried about her too. But I need you to trust me to do the right thing."

"OK, Dad. If you need to talk, you call me. No matter what time it is. OK?"

He smiled. "OK, Sport. Thanks."

"OK. Good night, Dad."

"Good night, Sport. Remember that I love you."

"Yeah, Dad. Me, too."

He hung up and lay staring at his close eyelids for a long time. He had finally drifted into a fretful sleep when the phone rang again. Without opening his eyes, he blindly reached for the handset. "What?"

"Word around The Valley is you're still trying to clear that dirty cop you've been balling. Drop it. This is the last warning you'll get."

"Buzz off you sick bastard!" He cut the connection and took the phone off the hook. He tried to drift back to sleep, but a combination of agitation and anxiety kept him awake. If the caller knew he'd slept with Jamie, then he could be watching one or both of them. In which case, she might be in danger.

He picked up the phone, cradled it briefly and dialed her number. The phone rang six times before she answered. "Yes?"

"Jamie."

"I don't want to talk to you." She sounded as weary as he felt.

"Yeah? Well, guess what? I don't really want to talk to you either."

"Fine!" she snapped, and hung up.

Driven by anger, he punched in her number. "Don't you hang up on me again," he said before she could speak. "This is not a social call."

"What do you want?"

"To see if you're OK."

She laughed. "Like you care."

He felt a tightness in his chest as he listened to her. He could hear the pain and confusion behind her anger. He'd hurt her. He regretted that. He bit back the urge to remind her that they were estranged because she'd lied to him. "I just got another crank call and I-

"Another? You've been getting crank calls? Have you reported them to the police?"

"You were mentioned and I wanted to warn you to be careful. The caller seemed to know that we. . . that we've been. . . intimate."

"Thanks for the warning, Janson, but I don't need your help. I don't need anything from you. I was a fool to ever think I could trust you."

"Wait a damn minute! This is my fault? I don't think so. I wasn't the one lying!"

"Maybe not, but you made me think I could trust you. . . count on you. . . but with the first mistake I make, you drop me like something nasty you found on your shoe!"

"You had no right to lie to me! No right, damn it! You took the choice of whether or not I'd become a father again away from me and that's not something I'm likely to forget or forgive!"

In the silence, he heard a faint noise he suspected was a snuffle. He heard her gulp in a series of deep shuddering breaths in an apparent effort to hold tears at bay. The sounds of her distress increased the tightness in his chest. "Damn it, don't start crying!"

She responded by hanging up on him. When he called back, he got a busy signal. He ripped the phone from the wall and tossed it across the room in frustration. He groaned and buried his face deep in his pillow. The thought that she was alone, crying, hating him, and thinking he'd deserted her, ate away at him until he could almost taste the bitterness.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Man, you look like you could use a good balling, doll. What's the matter? Blondie not taking care of business?"

Street Fox jerked his dark head toward the mattress where he and Heather slept while clutching his groin. "You look like you could use a taste of my sweet meat. Heather says this here's the best cock in the whole Valley. Spread those gorgeous long legs of yours, doll, and I'll give you a quick pop."

Jamie counted slowly to ten before she spoke. None of the problems in her life was Fox's fault. Still, she longed to rant and rave and scream at him until her throat ached.

"You said on the phone you'd remembered something," she reminded him, shifting uncomfortably on the dirty chair. The air was redolent with stale sex, making her long for Janson.

He shrugged. "After you and Blondie left a couple of weeks ago, Heather remembered the man with your dirt bag partner had a camera."

She stared at him. "A camera?" He'd dragged her there to tell her that? "You mean a throw away job?"

"Nah. This was an expensive one with all kinds of attachments. Heather's brother is into cameras so she knows a good one when she sees it. This was one like the pros use."

So the man Hillhower had met after the burning was a professional photographer. With that information and a description, it shouldn't be too hard to track him down.

Street Fox tilted his dark head and looked at her. "Good tip?"

"Good tip," she replied and handed him two twenties. At this rate, if she didn't find Hillhower's killer soon, she'd end up in the poor house.

He took the money, putting his hand over hers as he did. "Hey, doll, I've always wanted a taste of brown sugar. Let me give you a quick pop of my sweet meat before you leave. I guarantee you'll love it."

She jerked her hand from his and calmly rose to her feet. "Thanks for the generous offer, but I've got to go. If you think of anything else useful, call me."



After she left the warehouse, she drove to the biggest mall in The Valley. Even if the man in question was a professional and had his own darkroom, there was a slight chance someone in the Express Photo Shop might know him.

She waited until the elderly man with thinning gray hair and wire-framed glasses behind the counter was alone in the store before she approached. She smiled and briefly flashed her shield. "I wonder if you can help me."

He looked at her, his dark eyes wide behind the lenses of his glasses. "You're that cop that got shot down on 9th Street."

"Yes," she said wearily, tensing. Was he going to berate her for having lured Hillhower to his death?

"Damn shame." He squinted at her. "You all right now?"

She nodded, relaxing. "Yes. Thank you."

"Well, what can I do for you, Detective?"

"I'm wondering if you know of a pro photog who's medium height, has dark hair and eyes, is about thirty, and hangs out with white supremacists."

"White supremacists, huh? Can't say that I do, but I'm only here occasionally. You'll need to talk to my son who owns the business. Can't say I'm sure, but that description might fit a man I've seen here once or twice."

"It might? OK. When will your son be in?"

"He's out of town until the weekend. If you leave your card, I'll ask him to call you when he gets back."

"Thank you, sir. What's your son's name?"

"Brian Mills. I'm Bert."

"Thanks for your help, Mr. Mills."

"Always glad to help the police, Detective."

She smiled and left the store feeling a buzz of excitement for the first time since Hillhower's murder. She might be close to the solution. She could almost feel it. She spent the next two hours going to every other photo shop in town, but none of the owners seemed to know who the mysterious pro might be.

\* \* \* \* \*

After a long day of walking the waterfront trying to locate some of Hillhower's other snitches, Jamie headed home. She heard the phone as she opened her apartment door. Although tired, the thought that Janson might be calling her sent her dashing across the room to snatch the receiver off the hook. "Hello?"

"Jamie? Hi."

It took a moment for her to recognize the voice. When she did, confusion replaced disappointment. She sank down onto the chair near the phone. "Mark?"

"Yeah. How are you?"

"I'm. . . I'm fine. How are you?"

"Worried about you. When I talked to Dad several weeks ago, he told me you two weren't seeing each other anymore. Are you all right?"

"Sure." It was not a lie if she could find a way to deal with the misery that had become her constant companion since Janson had walked out of her life.

"Do you. . . like him?"

"Yes, but. . . yes."

"He likes you too. I know you might think he doesn't, but he does. But I just wanted to make sure you're all right and let you know that he won't let you down."

So why hadn't she seen or heard from him in over a month? "Mark, I really appreciate your calling. It means a lot to me."

"Can I call you again? Just to make sure you're OK?"

"Sure, if your parents don't object."

"Great. Then I'll talk to you again?"

"OK. Thanks for calling, Mark."

"Bye."

"Bye."

After her conversation with Mark, she undressed, filled the tub with bubble bath and oil, placed lighted candles along the inner edge of the tub, turned off the bathroom light, and slid her tired body into the warm slick water. With her head and neck cradled against her bathtub pillow, she thought of Janson and her heart ached. She had no luck with men. First Blair and now Janson. She'd given her heart away twice and had it broken each time.

She knew Janson had a legitimate gripe, but surely if he'd had any real feelings for her, he wouldn't have found walking away from her so very easy. She remembered the feel of his lips on hers, his arms around her, his cock throbbing in her, and tears flowed freely. She missed him and wanted him so much that every part of her body and heart ached for him. But this would be the last time she cried over a man and the last time she allowed one to hurt her. Even as she made the vow, she knew that given half a chance, she would turn into a weak clinging vine who begged for his attention.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dan closed the last of several photo albums filled with pictures of Mark. During the last two hours, he'd relived Mark's whole life from the first pictures his brother had taken of Mark in the delivery room, his first smile, his first step, his first little league game, his graduation from kindergarten, and his early graduation from middle school.

Looking through the albums had brought back all the good memories. Of course, there had been the sleepless nights when Mark was an infant and only slept an hour or two at a time. There'd been the fevers and colds, and normal childhood ailments. But they paled in

comparison with the unconditional love and joy being Mark's father gave him. Being a father had somehow completed him, made him feel needed in a way nothing else came close to. Why would doing it again be so bad? Especially if he did it with Jamie?

It was time he told her that if she was pregnant, he planned to stand by her. He put the albums back on the top shelf of his walk-in closet, grabbed his jacket, and left the house.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jamie extinguished the candles, stepped out of the tub, and wrapped a huge towel around her body just as her apartment buzzer sounded. She secured the towel and glanced at the clock on her bedside nightstand. Nearly nine o'clock. She picked up the phone. "Yes?"

Silence. About to hang up, she heard a throat being cleared. "Ah, Jamie?"

Her heart thumped and her knees shook. She sank down on the side of her bed. "Janson. Why are you calling?"

"We need to talk. I'm in the lobby. Buzz me in?"

She shook her head. "No. No. It's late, I'm not dressed, I haven't eaten, and. . . I don't want to see or talk to you again."

"I'll bet you don't. But I need and want to see and talk to you."

"I'm not buzzing you in."

He sighed. "Jamie--"

"That's Hanna to you!"

"OK. Hanna. Honey."

"No. Just plain Hanna."

"Let me in. Please. I know you're angry and hurt, but I can't do anything about that from the lobby. Let me in so we can talk."

"I don't want to talk to you!"

"I know, but I need to talk to you. If you like, you can curse me and call me every name in the book. Just let me talk to you?"

She bit her lip. His voice was soft and soothing. He sounded sincere and she wanted to believe him. "This is not a good idea. I-"

"Let me in. Please?"

She took a deep breath, put the receiver on the cradle and released the lobby door. Minutes later, the bell outside her apartment door rang.

She discarded the towel, pulled an oversized sweatshirt over her head, stepped into the matching bottoms, and went to the door. "Yes?"

"It's Dan."

She opened the door and stepped back. He came in, closed the door, and opened his arms. Tears filled her eyes and she stumbled forward. He hugged her, pressing his lips against her cheek. "I'm sorry, honey. I'm sorry. Please don't cry."

She pressed her cheek against his shoulder and wrapped her arms around him. She couldn't stop the flood of tears that streamed down her cheeks. "I'm sorry too! I know I shouldn't have lied to you. I just wanted to be with you! I'm so sorry!"

He cupped her face between his palms and stared down into her eyes. "It wasn't all your fault. I'm thirty-eight, honey. That's certainly old enough to know to take the necessary precautions regardless of any you might have taken."

Her lips trembled. "I know you don't want to be a father again and I'm sorry."

He used his thumbs to wipe at her damp cheeks. "I'll be whatever I need to be to support you and be there for you." He grinned down at her, his eyes warm with tenderness. "If that means being a father again, then. . . it's all right."

Her heart lurched. "Is it? Are you sure?"

"Yes. I admit I wasn't too crazy about the idea at first. I mean, Mark is almost grown. I thought my baby days were gone."

"I know and -- "

"I've had time to think and I know I want to be there for you. And I think I've done an OK job with Mark. Don't you?"

She nodded. "He's a great kid."

He smiled. "Yes he is. So, where do we stand?"

She dropped her head, but he lifted her chin, encouraging her to look at him. "I. . . I'm sorry."

She felt his exhalation against her lips.

"So that means what? You're pregnant?"

"I. . . I haven't been to see a doctor, but I missed my period and the home pregnancy test I took. . . I'm sorry."

The dazed look on his face brought a fresh rush of tears to her eyes. He took several deep breaths, then pulled her against him and held her. "Oh, God!" She could feel his heart thumping against her chest. "OK. OK. " He pulled back and looked down at her. "OK."

She pulled away from him. How could it be OK when he looked so stunned? "I'm so sorry, Dan. I never intended to force fatherhood on you." She shook her head. "Please let me explain. Several years ago, my GYN told me that I might have a problem getting pregnant because I have my period every twenty-two days. And I never got pregnant with Blair in a whole year of trying. So I didn't think there was any chance of my getting pregnant from one time with you."

"I guess doctors aren't always right, are they?" He shrugged, smiling suddenly. "Anything that's got you to finally call me Dan is a good thing. Yes?"

She laughed, even as the tears ran down her cheeks. She extended her arms. "I need you to hold me."

He wiped her damp cheeks. "And I need and want to hold you."

She looked up at him and saw her desire and need reflected in his blue gaze. "Just hold?"

His brushed his fingertips along her lips. "I think you know I want to do more than hold you. I've wanted to do more than that since the moment I saw you."

"So. . . ?" She took his free hand and placed it under her top, against her breasts. He curled his fingers around her flesh. "Hmmm. That feels so good."

"Yes?" He bent his head, his lips inches from hers. "I know something that will feel even better."

She moved his hand from her breasts over her stomach and into the band of her sweat bottoms. "So do I." She parted her legs. His hand slid lower, cupping her pussy. Heart racing, she stretched up, her lips parted.

He slipped an arm around her waist. As he drew her closer, he slipped two fingers inside her. "How does this feel?"

She ground her hips against his fingers, nibbling at his lips. "Like an appetizer. . . making me hungry for the main course."

"And what do you consider the main course?"

"Your bare cock buried deep inside me." She touched her tongue to his. "Deep inside."

"Bare?"

She drew back and looked at him. "There's no reason why we shouldn't. . . fuck without a condom now."

"No reason at all." He pulled her top off, exposing her breasts. He stared at her breasts for several long moments, running the tip of his tongue over his lips. "Oh, Jamie, you have such a lovely body. I want to see it all."

She nodded, pushing the bottoms of her sweats over her hips and legs. She kicked the bottoms off, standing naked before him, wet, and so ready to be fucked breathing was difficult. "Your turn."

He looked at her, his blue eyes alight with desire. He kept his gaze locked with hers as he ripped off his clothes. Naked and semi-aroused, he took her hand in his. "Let's go to bed."

They walked down the hall to the bedroom. Once there, he stood gazing at her, his blue eyes aflame with desire. "You are so lovely."

"So are you."

His gaze moved down her body. "You have such a pretty pussy."

Her heart thumped. "Would you like to. . . get to know it better?"

"Oh, hell yeah." He knelt in front of her, his head tilted so he could look up at her. "Pretty pink pussy. . . "

He extended the tip of his tongue, touching her clit.

She compressed her lips. "Hmmm."

"So pretty." Leaning closer, he parted the wet folds, inhaling deeply. "I love the way you smell when you're wet and ready for my cock. There's no aroma like it. You intoxicate my senses."

His words, spoken in that warm, husky voice did heighten her passions. A shudder shook her body. She cupped her hands over the back of his head. She rotated her hips and pushed them forward, pressing her pussy against his face.

His lips parted, his hands closed over her ass, and he rained hot, greedy kisses against the length of her pussy. He ate her slowly, licking, sucking, and nipping at her clit.

He turned his head, pressing his cheek against her. "This pretty pink, fragrant pussy is all mine."

"Yes! All yours! Take it. . . take your pussy!"

"My pussy. All mine!" He turned his lips back against her, sampling the pink flesh inside her folds.



A wall of heat and desire slammed into her. Her senses danced with pleasure. She parted her legs, pushing his head closer. His tongue flicked at her clit. His fingers closed on her hip. He slipped two fingers of his free hand inside her. Still kissing and licking her clit, he finger fucked her pussy.

Her lips parted and she moaned, her juices flowing freely, her pussy clenching around his fingers. He pulled his lips and fingers from her, leaving her feeling empty. He sat back on his haunches. Their gazes locking, he popped his fingers, wet with her juices into his mouth.

Watching the look of pleasure on his handsome face as he sucked her juices caused a fresh rush of moisture to seep out of her body down one thigh.

"Delicious." He palmed his cock and balls. "See anything you'd like to taste, honey?"

It had been ages since she'd had the pleasure of sucking Blair's thick, hot cock. She looked at Janson's shaft with its big, purple head. Her stomach muscles clenched, all thoughts of comparing the two vanishing. They were wonderfully different from each other. Besides, Blair was the past. . . maybe. . . just maybe Dan could be her future. She knelt in front of him.

She lowered her head, her tongue extended. She touched it to the big head of his shaft. A jolt of lust shot through her. Her pussy filling with moisture, she cupped her fingers around his nuts, and popped the tip of his cock between her lips and into her mouth.

Feeling his smooth, warm flesh sliding over her tongue inflamed her senses. She pressed her face against his groin, and took him balls deep into her eager mouth. He curled his fingers in her hair, lifted his hips, and fucked his cock in her mouth.

She loved the taste, smell, and feel of him. She sucked his cock, caressing and fondling his balls, burying her face in his pubic hair.

He groaned and shuddered. "Oh, shit, Jamie."

His fingers suddenly closed over her hips. He lifted her away from him, spinning her around and onto her back. Before she could protest that she wanted his cock back in her mouth, he lay over her, his cock and nuts dangling above her face.

She dipped several fingers in her pussy and parted her lips. "Give it to me."

He lowered his body, sliding his cock into her mouth.

She abandoned her masturbation to grip his hips. She slid her hands over his ass, closed her eyes, and sucked his sweet meat like it was an all day sucker. She loved the taste of his cock and the feel of his balls brushing against her face. She was going to make him come and come and when he did, she was going to swallow every drop.

Eager to feel his gushing into her mouth, she parted his taut cheeks and fingered his puckered asshole. He tensed, then shuddered. Encouraged, she worked the tip of a finger into the opening.

"Holy shit, Jamie!" He groaned and jerked his cock out of her mouth. He slid his body down hers, forced her legs apart, and thrust his hard cock deep into her with one hungry lunge. Making no effort to be gentle, he fucked her hard, deep, and furiously.

Loving each second of it, she wrapped her arms and legs around him, eagerly fucking her pussy around his cock. Wave after wave of lust thundered through her, spreading all through her body. The world tilted on its axis, and she exploded, sobbing and clinging to him.

He followed her, punched his cock into her, almost fighting her as he jetted his seed deep into her very satisfied pussy. She moaned and slumped against the carpet, her mind a jumble.

They lay on the floor together for several long moments, exchanging soft kisses before he groaned. "Let's go to bed."

She allowed him to urge her to her feet. They tumbled onto the bed together in a tangle of arms and legs. She felt warm and lethargic, yet restless.

He was asleep within minutes. She lay in the dark, unable to sleep. She hadn't let any man get close enough to matter to her for a long time. Now she had to admit that Janson had managed to do what no man other than Blair had ever done. Only with those two had she ever wanted to suck cock. She wanted to suck him and expose all her deepest feelings and emotions to him. How would he react if she did? Did she dare hope for a real future with Janson? Would he ever want more from her than a hot fuck? Tortured by uncertainties, she was still awake when he stirred later.

"Jamie?" He pulled her close. "All right?" he asked, sleepily.

She nodded and settled against his shoulder. "Yes."

"No nightmares?"

"No. I just can't sleep. I'm too excited."

He kissed the top of her head and lazily trailed a big hand down her back to cup her ass. "Yeah? Then how about you tell me what happened with you and Blair?"

In an effort to sidetrack him, she brushed her bare breasts against his chest. "I don't want to talk about that." She reached down to fondle his cock. "Let's fuck instead."

His breathing quickened and his hand clenched her bottom until it tingled. "Nice try, honey." He eased his cock away from her fingers. "But I need to know what happened between you two."

She sighed. "We were high school sweethearts in Philly. After two years of college, I decided I wanted to be a cop like my dad. Blair objected. He wanted a stay-at-home woman he could protect."

"Why was his wanting to protect you such a bad thing?"

"It wouldn't have been. . . had I been the type of woman who needed or wanted that. I'm not. He wanted to protect and smother me and I needed to be independent and self-reliant, so we broke up."

"Then what?"

"He finished college and I came here to sign up for the force. My dad was a cop here for ten years before Mom insisted we move to Philly. Four years ago, Blair called and asked to see me for old time's sake.

"I knew seeing him again was a mistake. . . that it would just open all the old wounds and renew the hurts, but he was my first real love. I couldn't say no. The moment I saw him, all the old feelings bubbled to the surface and I knew I still loved him.

"He kissed me and the next thing I knew, we were naked and had spent the entire weekend in bed."

He tensed under her. "Good lover, was he?"

"So are you."

He slapped her ass, making her cheek tingle. "You're just saying that because it's true."

She laughed, rubbing her cheek against his shoulder. "It is true." She fondled his cock. "Have I told you how much I love your cock?"

He slapped her ass again. "Nice, but I still want to know what happened."

She sighed. "OK. Ah. . . even though he didn't like me being a cop, and we knew a long distance relationship wouldn't be easy, he asked me to marry him and I accepted. His job as a computer programmer kept him on the road a lot. Like you. . . he was drop dead gorgeous. He had this wonderful smile and a voice that sent tingles all through me. Women found him irresistible and he. . . had a sexual. . . he needed sex almost constantly.

"When we were together, he nearly wore me out with his needs. Sometimes I'd wake up in the middle of the night and find him. . . fucking my ass because my pussy was sore."

"Without permission?"

She shrugged. "It wasn't rape, if that's what you mean. I knew he had needs and I had no problem satisfying them when I could."

He fondled her ass. "Do you enjoy anal sex?"

Her face burned. "Depends on whose cock is going up my ass. His I liked. . . "

His hands parted her cheeks. She bit her lip, breathing through her mouth as his finger probed her hole. "Only his?"

"You want to fuck my ass?"

He brushed his lips against hers. "Do you want me to?"

A shock of lust shot through her at the thought of the big, purple head of his cock forcing its way between her cheeks and into her ass. He was so thick. . . Lord how he would stretch her. When a lover really turned her on and made her willing to risk getting hurt, she loved to have her ass fucked. "Yes." She pulled out of his arms, turned on the bedside lamp, then lay on her stomach, her legs parted. "Fuck me."

"You're sure?"

"Yes!"

"Lube?"

"In the top drawer with the condoms."

She turned her head. Sitting on his hunches, his cock erect, he rolled a condom over himself. Then he covered his sheathed length with lube. She watched, her pussy convulsing.

Putting the lube aside, he took his pillow and urged it under her hips. She closed her eyes, pressing her cheek against the bed. His hands burned her skin as he stroked them over her ass and down the back of her thighs.

"Damn, Jamie, but you have a big, beautiful, black ass."

Feeling wanton, she smiled. "A big, beautiful, black ass, and a thick, hard, white cock. Sounds like a match made in heaven."

His mouth settled between her legs, kissing his way up her thighs to her pussy. He licked her length several times before he parted her cheeks. The tip of his tongue pressed against her ass hole.

She moaned.

Holding her cheeks apart with one hand, he lubed her bottom, allowing some of the lube to seep inside her hole. His finger followed. "Oh, damn! This is going to be good."

She moaned again, feeling a second finger sliding into her rear. "Oh, yes! It's been so long. . . feels good."

Biting and nibbling at her cheeks, he finger fucked her ass for several moments, driving her into a frenzy. Just as she was about to come, he eased his fingers out of her, lubed her up again, then pressed his cock at the entrance.

The breath caught in her throat and came out in a combination of pain and pleasure as he urged the thick head of his cock push past the resisting muscles of her hole, allowing it to slide slowly into her ass.

"Oooh. . . oooh. . . " She clenched her hands into fists at her side, pressing herself back against his groin. "Yes! Give it to me. Thrust it deep and fuck me hard and fast. Please! Don't worry about hurting me or being gentle. In my ass, I like it rough! Fuck me hard!"

Settling his entire weight on her, he drove his fingers into her pussy and slammed his cock up in her ass. Sucking the side of her neck, he rode her ass hard and fast.

She lay under him, moaning and sobbing with delight. She loved having her ass fucked and within a matter of moments, she screamed and came, her pussy gushing over his fingers, her ass clamping over his hot cock.

"Holy shit, you have a hot, sweet ass. Oh, mother fuck, here I come!"

He grabbed her hips, held them still and pounded his cock into her ass.

Pain intermingling with bliss, she reached back to clutch at his ass, as he emptied his seed inside her.

She moaned with pain as he eased out of her moments later. He discarded the condom and settled her against his body. "Damn, Jamie, where the hell have you been all my life? You have a sweet pussy, a wonderful mouth, and an incredible ass. You sure know how to please a man. No wonder Martin couldn't let you go."

At the mention of Blair, she stiffened.

He sighed. "I'm exhausted, but I want to hear the rest of the story."

She shook her head. "No."

He slapped her ass. "Yes. Tell me now and we wouldn't have to talk about it or him again unless you want to." His big palm crashing down on her ass made her shiver with need, scrambling her senses.

It took her a moment to remember where she'd left off before she spoke. "As I said, he was drop dead gorgeous and he had an incredible sexual appetite. One night when he was on a business trip, he met this woman in a strip bar and. . . went home with her. When I found out, I was so hurt, but he swore it would never happen again."

"And?"

"And because I loved him so much, I forgave him."

She paused and took a deep breath, trying not to lose herself in the painful memories. "But I found out that it *did* happen again. Several more times. So I broke off our engagement. He kept at me, telling me he loved me and the women meant nothing."

Jamie lifted her head and looked up at Dan in the darkened room. She couldn't see his face, but she could feel the comfort of his body against hers. "But how could I trust him again?"

He kissed her forehead and pressed her cheek back against his shoulder. "Go on, honey."

"On the day of his death, he called me, insisting that he had to see me." She shuddered. "I still loved him, even after all the cheating, so I went to his apartment in Philly. I wished I hadn't gone, but. . . If I'd known how things would end, I wouldn't have gone. Once there, he wanted to make love as if nothing had happened, as if I should just overlook the fact that he couldn't keep his zip up. But I wouldn't let him touch me, knowing that the next time he was on the road, he'd probably cheat again."

"I told him it was over between us. At first, he didn't believe me. He said we were in love and I had to forgive him. When he realized that this time I was serious, he grabbed my gun and said if I didn't forgive him, he'd kill himself."

A sob shuddered through Jamie. She balled her hands into fists and pressed them against his shoulders. "I was so hurt and so angry, I yelled at him to go ahead. And. . . and. . . he did! He did, Dan! He shot himself with my gun! And it was my fault!"

"Oh, no, honey. No. You didn't know. You couldn't have known he was serious." He gathered her in his arms and held her close, rocking and cradling her body against his. "It wasn't your fault, but cry if you need to. Get it out of your system."

She collapsed against him in a torrent of tears and sobs, releasing the years of pain and grief that had overwhelmed her.



## Chapter Eight

"Dark hair, dark eyes. About thirty. Medium build. No. No. Sorry. Can't say that description fits any professional photographers I know."

Jamie stared at Brian Mills in dismay. Like his father, he had thinning hair and wore glasses. "Are you sure? Your father was almost certain he'd seen you with a man fitting that description." She carefully watched his eyes. She'd found many people shifted their gaze when they were about to lie.

He nodded firmly, maintaining eye contact. "Most pros do their own developing and I'm happy to say I don't know any white supremacists."

Her shoulders slumped and she had to resist the urge to bang her fist against the counter. "Thanks." She started away, then turned back. "Is there anything you can tell me? Anything at all?"

"I'm sorry, but no."

She handed him her card. "Thanks. If you think of anything, please call me."

He nodded. "Will do."

Outside in the parking lot, she stood wondering what her next step should be. She could go back to Street Fox, but if he'd had anything for her, he'd have called. She glanced at her watch. It was nearly twelve o'clock. Maybe Janson would be free for lunch.

She smiled as she thought of him. She was happy, but still a little afraid that something would happen to come between them again. Although he had said he'd stand by her and she believed him, he hadn't mentioned anything about love.

In her car, she punched in his number. "Janson."

Her lips curved into a smile. "Hi."

"Hi yourself!"

Her smile widened. "I was wondering if you were free for lunch."

"Afraid not. I'm on my way to a staff meeting. Ah, how did your interview with Mills go?"

"Nowhere. He didn't know any more than his father."

"That's too bad. What now?"

"I think I'll go see June Appleton again and maybe Street Fox."

"Is that necessary?"

"What?"

"Seeing Street Fox? I wish you'd wait until I can go with you."

Her lips tightened. "Janson, I can take care of myself. I've been doing it for a long time now and I'll continue to do it."

"Yeah, I know. But I have a right to worry about you. Remember, I have a vested interest in keeping you safe and well."

"Is that the only reason you want me safe and well?"

"No! If you recall, I insisted on going with you to see Street Fox before I knew I had such a vested interest. So lighten up a little, OK?"

She nodded. "OK."

"Look, I have to go. Be careful and I'll see you later?"

She nodded again, this time smiling. "Yes."

"Your place or mine?"

She liked waking up in her bed with him lying naked behind her, holding her. "Mine. I'll make dinner."

"And I'll bring the wine and a raging libido."

"I can't drink," she reminded him, "but I'll gladly partake of that raging libido of yours."

She hung up on the sound of his warm, intimate laughter. Smiling, she drove to the mall and headed for the department store where June Appleton worked. Walking through the women's department, she paused beside a sleek black sleeveless dress. She glanced at the price tag. It was a little high, but she hadn't bought a dress in ages. On an impulse, she tried it on. It was a perfect fit. The soft silk material hugged her breasts, molded to her ribs and hips before ending just above her knees. With a pair of heels, her diamond stud earrings, and the silver choker her father had given her for her eighteenth birthday, it would be a dynamite outfit.

Of course she wouldn't look good in it for much longer. That was OK since she just wanted to look good for that night. She bought the dress before making her way to the third floor where the executive offices were housed. A young girl with long dark hair and green eyes looked up as she walked into the small office. "Good morning. May I help you?"

"Good morning. My name is Jamie Hanna. Is Ms. Appleton available?"

The receptionist looked at the bag in Jamie's right hand. "If this is about a purchase, ma'am, customer service will be happy to assist you. They're down the hall on your left."

Jamie smiled. "It's not about a purchase. If you'd just let Ms. Appleton know I'm here? The name's Jamie Hanna."

She looked skeptical, but nodded her head toward a leather sofa along one wall. "Have a seat, please."

Jamie sat down and waited while the receptionist spoke into the phone. Several minutes later, June appeared in the open doorway to the right of the receptionist desk.

"Jamie. This is a surprise."

Judging from her cool manner, it was an unpleasant one. Jamie rose. "I'm sure you're busy, but I'd really appreciate a few moments of your time."

June hesitated and seemed on the point of refusing before she nodded curtly. "Follow me."

Jamie followed her to a small office at the end of the corridor and sat in the single seat in front of June's small, neat desk. "I won't keep you long. I just have a couple more questions. Did Tony have any friends who are professional photographers? The man I'm wondering about has dark hair and eyes, medium build, and is around thirty."

June started to shake her head, then frowned. "You know, now that you mention it, I did see Tony with a man who fits your description a couple of times."

Jamie's heartbeat quickened. She licked her lips and leaned forward. "You did? What's his name?"

June shrugged. "I don't know. I saw them together twice, but Tony never introduced us."

"Then how do you know he's the guy?"

June shrugged again. "You said he was a professional photographer and this guy had an expensive camera the few times I saw him."

"Where did you see them together?"

To her surprise, June blushed and averted her gaze. "I don't think that's important."

"June, it might make all the difference."

She shook her head. "It won't."

"Will you let me decide?"

She glared at Jamie, a defiant look on her face. "You want to know? Fine. It was at a white supremacist rally. Satisfied?"

Jamie felt a chill and a sense of loss. She'd known Hillhower had problems with women. But a racist? "June, Tony was not a racist! He stepped in the line of fire to protect me more than once."

"I didn't say he was a racist! He wasn't. I said I saw the man you're talking about at one of those rallies. Tony was there because. . . " June's voice quivered and Jamie saw tears fill her eyes. "He was getting. . . payoffs. Satisfied? He was dirty! OK?"

Jamie pressed her lips together to still her own trembling. "For?"

Tears trickled down June's cheeks. "Drugs. The man you're talking about was running drugs to fund his skinhead beliefs. Tony didn't believe in that stuff, but he. . . he liked nice things and nobody ever got hurt. He was very careful."

She compressed her lips. It wouldn't do to scream at June that the people who'd had crosses burned on their property had been hurt. "June, I need to know who that man is."

June slammed a palm down on her desk. "I told you I don't know who he is. Now leave me alone!"

"I know this is difficult for you. It's difficult for me too. But June, this man may have had Tony murdered. Please. Help me. There must be something you can tell me."

"I can't. There's nothing else. Nothing! Nothing. . . except. . . wait a minute. I think I heard someone call him Michael."

"Michael what?"

"I don't know Michael what. You're a detective. You find him! Just don't come to see me again."

Jamie rose. "I'm leaving June, but you'll need to go to the police with this information."

June's eyes widened and she shot to her feet. "What? And ruin Tony's reputation! No!"

"Then I'll have to report what you've told me."

"And I'll deny it!"

"June! You want to protect Tony's reputation so much that you'd allow his killer to go unpunished?"

June fell back in her chair. "No."

"Then you'll call the police and report what you know?"

She nodded. "Yes."

\* \* \* \* \*

Dan watched the reporters get up and begin to file out of the conference room after their story meeting. "I'd like a word with you," he said before Mike left the room.

Mike swung back into the room, closed the door, and stared unblinkingly at him.  
"Yeah? What about?"

"I've been getting crank calls lately. I wondered if you might know anything about them?"

Mike's gaze narrowed and he shook his head. "Wouldn't know a thing about that, Chief. But I did warn you that there are people who wouldn't take kindly to your insistence on aligning yourself with a dirty cop."

"See, that's where I have a problem, Neely. She's not dirty and I'm damn sure you know that. Hell, I'll bet you've always known that."

"What I do know, Chief, is that you're sleeping with her and that'll get you both in more trouble than you're ready for."

"So, what? You gonna burn a cross on my lawn, Neely?"

"I don't burn crosses, Chief."

"No? But I'll bet you know plenty of people who do. Well, you can tell them that I'll see who the hell I like! A bunch of crank calls from some sick bastards isn't going to change that. And you are not going to use this paper to launch any more attacks on Detective Hanna's character."

Mike smirked at him. "That must be one hot black mama. Got some good stuff, huh, Chief?"

The blood rushed up the back of Dan's neck. The urge to leap out of his seat and smash his fist in the middle of Mike's face was difficult to resist. He clenched his hands into fists instead and stared silently, angrily at Mike until the other man shrugged and stalked out of the room.

Dan sank back in his seat, aware that he was trembling. Who the hell did Mike think he was to talk about Jamie as if she were some cheap lowlife who slept around? It galled him that he even felt like he had to defend Jamie against men like Mike who couldn't see beyond her skin color.

He knew there would be others among his acquaintances who might feel as Mike did, although they probably wouldn't be as open with their hostility as Mike. What he found rather surprising was the fact that he didn't much care what other people would think about his relationship with Jamie.

He'd been interested in her on a subliminal level since the first time he'd seen her nine years earlier at her graduation from the police academy. Of course, as a married man, he'd never acknowledged that interest or even planned to do anything about it. Even after his separation and divorce, he had made no effort to find out anything about her that didn't pertain to the story on corruption Mike was working on. But now that she was in his life and in his blood, he wasn't about to let her go.

Feeling a sudden need to talk to her, he went to his office and paged her.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Any particular reason you didn't report this information before now, Detective?"

Jamie met Jack Marshall's gaze head on. She'd come to see him straight after her meeting with June. "I didn't really have anything. And I guess, like Ms. Appleton, I didn't want to trash his reputation."

Jack Marshall's gaze narrowed. "Detective, you're telling me you wanted to protect the reputation of the man who set you up to be killed?"

She shrugged. "I know it sounds crazy, but right up until that night, he always had my back. And he was dead. I just didn't want to trash him."

"I see." Marshall got up and walked around the small interrogation room. He paused at the single barred window and looked at her. "Would you like an attorney?"

"No. I don't need one. I haven't done anything wrong."

She felt her pager vibrating. She quickly glanced down at the number. Janson. She returned the pager to her waist.

"Do you need to answer that, Detective?"

"Yes, but not now."

"I see. Well, have you turned up anything else in your own private investigation I should know about?"

His cool tone stung and Jamie, on the verge of telling him about Street Fox, changed her mind. "I think that's about it. Except you'll look into the crank calls Dan Janson's been getting?"

Marshall's brow rose. "That's hardly a job for I.A., Detective. And if you have any personal interest in Mr. Janson, I suggest you have him call 911 and report the calls himself."

Feeling as if the whole valley knew she and Janson were lovers, Jamie got to her feet. "I'll do that. If you have no further questions, I'll be on my way."



He shook his head. "But Detective, please. No more Lone Ranger. It could get you killed." His voice softened and a brief smile touched his lips. "And I certainly wouldn't want to see that happen. If there's anything that worries you, feel free to call me."

The offer touched her. "Thanks. Hearing you say that means a lot to me. I know everyone in the department thinks Hillhower and I were lovers and I led him into an ambush, but we weren't and I didn't."

It was shortly after two when she left Marhall. Janson wasn't due at her apartment until after six, so she bought a copy of *The Tribune*, and decided to make one last visit to Street Fox. If this visit didn't turn up anything new, she'd call Marhall and tell him about Street Fox.

Before she pulled out of the police parking lot, she called Janson. "Hi," she said when he answered. "I hope you're not going to tell me you can't make it tonight."

"No. I'll be there. Where are you?"

"I've just come from talking to I.A. and I'm on my way to the warehouse."

"I'll meet you there."

"That's not necessary."

"I didn't say it was. I just want to see you."

"What you mean is you want to protect me. And I appreciate that, and even like that you want to be my white knight. Since I met you, all I seem to do is cry. You probably think I'm a pitiful excuse for a cop. I'm not. Believe it or not, before the shooting, I hadn't cried since Blair's death. I like the fact that you're big and muscular and I feel safe with you, but I'm a cop and sometimes cops have to do dangerous things. I'm going alone. I need to get back in the saddle. I'm a cop. Can you handle that?"

"Yes, but to be honest with you, it's going to take me a little time. And while I'm working on it, I might be what you'd consider a little overprotective. Can you handle that?"

"For crying out loud! I knew becoming involved with a big dumb blond would be trouble!" She laughed.

He laughed too. "Yeah? Well, we'll see how dumb you think I am later."

She sobered. "Janson?"

"Yeah, Hanna?"

"I can't wait to see you."

"Same here, honey. Be careful."

"I will." She hung up before she told him she loved him. She had a feeling at this point in their relationship a confession of love would fall under the too much information category.

When she arrived at the warehouse, it was empty. She backed out the broken door and retraced her path to her car. Once there, she decided to wait. She opened the paper and began reading the financial section.

Half an hour later, she got out of the car and went back to the warehouse. Still no one home. She tossed the paper on the table and stalked out. She was going home to take a quick bath before she fixed dinner, put on her new dress, and waited for her white knight to come romance her.

He arrived later with flowers and chocolate. "Damn, you look. . . sexy as hell in that dress."

She smiled, running the tip of her tongue along her lips. "You think?"

"Oh, yeah, baby!" Slipping an arm around her waist, he drew her body against his. The kiss he pressed against her mouth sent a rush of moisture between her legs.

She gasped and drew away from him. She wiped a hand across the back of her mouth. "Wow! That was hot enough to melt the chocolate."

He laughed, licking at the side of her neck. "Do you have anything cooked or will I have to eat you?"

"Any particular part of me you're interested in eating?"

He nipped her ear. "Can you say pussy?"

She smiled. "I've had a busy day. Food first, sex later."

He scraped his teeth along her neck. "Killjoy!"

They ate and danced by candlelight before going to bed. He undressed her slowly, kissing and sucking her breasts as he did. Although he cupped his hand over her pussy, he didn't eat her as he had threatened. He slapped her on cheeks. "Damn, Jamie, you have a lovely ass. Let's go fuck."

She nodded and eagerly followed him to the bed.

\* \* \* \* \*

"You have such beautiful breasts."

"Mmm."

Dan lifted his upper body and glanced down at the vision before him. In the muted glow from the pink light bulbs in the bedside lamps, Jamie lay on her back, her dark sleek body stretched out beneath his.

He marveled how she could manage to look both sexy enough to give him a raging hard-on and shy at the same time. When he'd arrived an hour earlier and saw her in the black dress, a surge of tenderness fought for dominance with an equally strong burst of desire.

He shifted his body until his fully erect cock rested at the entrance of her pussy. He loved the feel of her pubic hair brushing against his. That feeling, along with the fragrant smell of her aroused body, was almost enough to make him lose control.

He lowered his weight until he could feel her large firm breasts against his chest, and gently, tenderly kissed her mouth. Her lips were soft and sweet and eagerly parted under his.

As they kissed, he felt her hands reaching between their bodies. He lifted his hips slightly and moaned when her fingers closed around his cock.

She teased the helmeted head against her clit several times before slowly feeding it into the warm cavern of her pussy. He opened his eyes and looked down at her, watching the play of emotions on her face as inch by inch, he plowed into her wet, liquid heat. Although it was difficult, he allowed her to control the rate of his descent. When he was fully seated in her, they both groaned, and she cupped her warm palms against his ass while lifting her hips against his.

"Dan."

That one word, murmured in a soft, pleading voice, urged him to movement. He wrapped one arm around her waist, the other around her shoulders, and thrust in and out of her, keeping his strokes slow and controlled. The desire to rage in her pussy was strong, but he wanted to show her tenderness as well as lust. He ground and rotated his hips against hers, kissing her lips until they were both breathless.

He withdrew from her sweet warmth as far as her clutching hands would allow, only to plunge back into her wet, clinging body again and again with a growing urgency until they moved as two parts of one whole. He dove and she heaved, flowering open for him and then massaging and caressing him as he bottomed out in her.

Being inside her created a hunger in him that slowly consumed him. Sex had never been this overwhelming with any other woman. His senses and his emotions were centered on her. Even as his orgasm built, he desired to please and cherish her. Coming before she did was not an option.

He clenched his teeth, trying to hold onto his control until he was sure she was satisfied. After what seemed an eternity, he felt the tremors begin around his aching cock and knew she was peaking. Letting himself go, he held her tightly under him as he shuddered and pumped her sweet body full of his seed. He couldn't ever remember having

such an intense and all consuming orgasm. Knowing he was climaxing directly into her body was an added thrill and probably accounted for the incredible feeling of delight, pleasure, and joy he felt.

They collapsed together, still kissing and holding each other. Several moments later, he realized she was crying. He pulled the covers over them and cradled her damp body against his. "Honey. Why are you crying? Was I too rough? Did I hurt you?"

"No," she sobbed, her face pressed against his shoulder.

He stroked her shoulders and back. "Then why are you crying?"

"I don't know," she whispered. "I've never. . . it's never felt so. . . so good before."

A feeling of pure male satisfaction engulfed him. There was nothing in the world quite as ego building as knowing he'd fully satisfied this beautiful passionate woman who had given herself so freely and fully to him, matching his sexual fervor while fulfilling all his needs and fantasies.

He lifted her chin and brushed his lips against her mouth, gently nipping her full bottom lip. He moved his hips lazily against hers. "That's because you've never had a big dumb blond before."

Laughing, she kissed him. As she did, she raked her fingers through his hair. "Oh, Dan! I. . . Oh, Dan. Dan, that was so good."

For a moment, he half expected her to say she loved him. His disappointment that she didn't was almost palpable. "Only good?"

She stirred against him. "What do you want me to say?"

If he had to tell her, her saying it wouldn't mean anything. "Nothing. I just thought -- "

"What? What did you think?"

"It doesn't matter." He closed his eyes. *Careful Janson or you'll find yourself in love alone.*

## Chapter Nine

In the dim light of dawn, Jamie saw that Dan was not only awake, but also smiling down at her. Her cheeks burned and her heart thundered as she remembered their lovemaking of the night before. She had been totally uninhibited, making no effort to hide her need and desire from him. He had plundered and ravaged and she had surrendered and welcomed him.

Now her lack of shame surprised her. She smiled and rubbed her cheek against his chest. "Hi," she murmured.

He bent his head and brushed his warm mouth against hers. "Hi yourself, honey."

*Brrring!* She groaned and leaned past him to answer the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hey, doll, that you?"

She sat up, holding the cover against her bare breasts. There was only one man who called her doll and there was only one reason he'd be calling. "Street Fox! You've got something?"

Dan sat up beside her and leaned close. She tilted the phone so he could hear. "Yeah, doll. I know the yo-yo you're looking for."

"Who?" She became aware that she was almost screaming in her excitement and paused to steady her voice. "What's his name?"

"Now, doll, there's a little manner of exchanging some of those male friends of yours and I don't mean Blondie."

"Fine. Fine. I have money. Just give me his name."

"I will. Meet me at the 'house. And doll, I'll give you a discount if you let me pop some of that brown sugar of yours."

She felt Dan stiffen beside her and shook her head, pressing her fingers against his lips to silence him. "I'm on my way."

"Great. And don't bring Blondie."

"Street -- " She broke off as the phone went dead in her ear. She slapped the receiver on its cradle and scrambled out of bed.

Dan got out on the other side, turned on the lights, and they both began looking for their clothes. She pulled a shirt over her head, slipped into a pair of jeans and her running shoes.

"I'll call you after I get the name." She stretched up to press a quick kiss against his mouth, grabbed her fanny pack and gun, and headed for the bedroom door.

He beat her there and leaned against it, his arms crossed.

She stopped within inches of his chest. "Dan, what are you doing? I've got to get going."

"Are you crazy? What makes you think I'm letting you go alone?"

"Dan, I don't have time for this. He said to come alone and I'm going alone."

"The hell you are!"

She pulled at his arm. "Janson, I'm going alone, so get out of the way!"

"You're not going alone! Who the hell do you think you are? Superwoman? Are you bulletproof? No! So you're not going alone."

"Janson! I have to go!" She tugged at his arm again. "Please move out of the way!"

"Jamie! Someone tried to kill you! How can you even think of going alone? Call the department and let them handle this."

"Call them and tell them what? The moment Street Fox sees anyone else pulling up, he'll be out the back door." She placed her palms against his chest. "And I wasn't the target of the hit."

"How do you know that?"

"If I'd been the intended target, once I was unconscious, they would have made sure I was dead -- as they did with Hillhower. I wasn't the target, Dan."

"Maybe not, but that didn't stop them from shooting you five times! Honey, I know you're a cop and I know you have to do your job, but this is crazy. Jamie, please. Please." He cupped her face between his palms and looked down at her. "I can't lose you."

She gazed up into his eyes and her heart soared. This was not just about sex. He was telling her without words the bond between them was so much stronger. She touched his face. "You're not going to lose me, but I have to go alone."

"Why? Why can't I come with you?"

"Because it's my job and I won't risk your safety! I'll be fine, Dan. I promise. Please trust me."

He threw his head back, groaned, and moved away from the door.

She kissed his cheek and squeezed his arm. "I'll be back. I promise. I love you!"

His head jerked around and she saw his eyes widen. She ran from the room without waiting for his response.

She found it difficult to keep her mind off Dan as she drove to the warehouse. She was sorry she'd blurted out her feelings. Especially since he hadn't responded in kind. When



would she learn that she couldn't keep trying to read messages in his gaze that probably weren't there? If he shared her feelings, there was nothing stopping him from saying so.

At the warehouse, Jamie parked her car and sat for several minutes to make sure no one had followed her and that there were no other vehicles in sight. When she was satisfied, she checked her gun, stuffed her cell phone in a fanny pack, palmed her flashlight, and headed toward the side door of the warehouse.

Outside the door, she felt a sudden chill. She wished briefly that she had allowed Dan to accompany her, but she shook the feeling off. She pressed her ear against a hole in the door, listening. She heard only silence. She extended an arm through one of many large holes in the door, and switched on her flashlight.

Only a small portion of the interior was bathed in the beam of the flashlight, but what she saw was pretty much what she'd seen on the other occasions she'd been there. After a quick glance over her shoulder to make sure she was still alone, she withdrew her arm from the hole and stepped through the much bigger one that served as the door.

As usual, the interior reeked of stale sex. There was no sign of Street Fox or Heather. Holding the light ahead of her, she moved towards the table. As she neared it, Street Fox appeared at her side. "Hey, doll! Glad to see you came alone."

Startled, she jumped and bit her lip hard to silence a shrill scream. She swung around to face him, sweeping out her free arm with the fist clenched to push him back. "Don't sneak up on me like that!"

"Hey!" he protested. "No need to get physical. I was just being friendly."

"Yeah, well, let's cut to the chase." She patted her fanny pack. "What's the name?"

To her annoyance, instead of answering, he moved around lighting candles. He paused at the table. "First, how much is the name worth to you?"

She felt a tingle along the back of her neck and suddenly all she wanted was to get out of there. She wasn't going to waste time trying to bargain. She mentally calculated how much cash she had on her. "Two hundred dollars."

"Oh, come on, doll. That's not very much for such a valuable name."

"It's all I have. Give me the name and I'll get you another hundred, but that's it."

"Promise?"

"Yes." She almost screamed the word at him. She felt as if her flesh was crawling. She'd been a fool to come alone. Something wasn't right here. She thought she heard a sound behind her and swung around, swinging her flashlight in a wide arc. She saw several rats running across the floor, but the sight of them did not reassure her.

"Relax, doll, and fork over the money."

She turned back and dug the money out of her fanny pack. He stuffed the bills in his jeans pocket without counting them. "And you'll bring the other hundred back?"

"Yes. Now give me the name."

To her surprise, he picked up a copy of *The Tribune* and she recognized several notes she'd made in the margins of the financial sections. "What is this? Some kind of joke?"

Street Fox grinned, turned the paper over and handed it to her. "There's your mystery man."

She aimed the beam down and found herself looking at Mike Neely's latest column on police corruption. She glinted at Street Fox. "Don't try and jerk my chain. If he's the mystery man, why didn't you say so before?"

He shrugged. "I didn't know who he was until I found this paper on the table. We knew when we saw him at the burning that he looked familiar, but me and Heather don't get to read the paper that often."

Jamie had a flash from the night of the shooting. Hillhower had called out to someone named Michael. Mike Neely fit the description Street Fox had given her perfectly and he

certainly had racist ties. But why would he have killed Hillhower who, according to June, had been protecting his drug operation?

She looked up at Street Fox. "Are you sure he's the man?"

"Yeah, I'm sure. Heather and I both saw him."

She glanced around her again. "Where is Heather?"

He shrugged. "Probably out letting someone give her a quick pop. Speaking of which, doll, you let me pop you and you can forget the other hundred."

Jamie heard the sound of a vehicle moving rapidly along the pier. Street Fox heard it too and they exchanged glances. "Are you expecting anyone else?"

He shook his head, blew out the candles, and knocked the flashlight from her hand. The flashlight bulb shattered on impact with the concrete floor. She heard Street Fox's steps retreating in the darkness and knew she'd walked into a trap.

Swearing softly, she stood still for a moment, trying to let her eyes adjust to the sudden darkness. She turned and began moving in the direction Street Fox had taken. Obviously there was another way out or somewhere she could take cover until she discovered the new arrival's identity. Afraid of bumping into something and tripping, she walked with her hands extended, alternatively sweeping each foot out to the side as she moved.

She'd only covered a few yards when she heard the sound of running feet outside on the pier, and then suddenly she was bathed in a shaft of light. She fumbled at her holster, swung around into a crouch with her gun extended in front of her.

She blinked, trying to see who held the light blinding her. From the silhouette, she knew it was a man of medium height and build who had some type of weapon in his free hand aimed at her. "Police." She spoke in a no nonsense tone. "Identify yourself, lower that light, and place your gun on the floor."

"Oh, I think you know who I am, Detective Hanna." He sounded amused. "But in case you don't, let me introduce myself. Michael Neely, at your service, ma'am." His voice

mocked her. "And I suggest you drop your gun before I blow a hole in your face so big that that white trash lover of yours won't recognize you on the coroner's slab."

Certain she was about to be seriously injured or maybe even killed, she said a silent prayer of thanks that Dan wouldn't have to die with her.

She was so scared, she could barely breathe. But her fear wasn't only for herself. If he killed her, he'd kill the baby growing inside her. There was no way she'd go down without a fight. If she and her baby were going to die, she was determined to do her best to take Neely with them.

"Lower your gun," she said again, surprised at how calm she sounded. Every muscle in her body throbbed with tension and her shoulders ached as if she'd been poised on her knees for hours instead of seconds. "You're not getting out of this unscathed. I always hit my target."

"So do I, and while you're blinded by my light, I can see you perfectly. Now drop your gun before I blow your head off your shoulders."

He slowly advanced toward her, away from the rotted out door. "I said lower your damned gun!"

"Stay where you are or I'll open fire," she warned. "You take another step and I'll start shooting."

He stopped several feet from her. "You're not getting out of here alive!" he snarled. "It was a mistake not to make sure you were dead before. I know you're wearing a bulletproof vest, so this time I intend to put a bullet smack in the middle of that black face of yours. Now this can be easy and quick, or it can be slow and painful. The choice is yours."

Sweat pooled under her clothes and along her brow. Soon it would blind her. It was now or never. She prepared to fire her gun. As she did, what felt like several rats ran across the back of her thighs. She screamed and exploded out of her crouch. As she did, she began firing. She knew she'd missed when several bullets slammed into her body. The gun flew

from her hands and the force of the bullets knocked her on her back. She felt a warmth spreading under her vest and knew she was bleeding.

She tried to sit up, but she couldn't move her shoulder. In the distance, she could hear sirens. Dan must have called the police. When she opened her eyes, Neely stood over her. The police wouldn't arrive in time to save her. She was going to die.

He lifted his arm and pointed his gun at her head. "Say good night, Hanna."

"No! Damn you, no! Get the hell away from her!" She heard shouting in the distance, then several quick explosions. She didn't feel the impact, but she must have been shot again. Several times. She was dying. She closed her eyes and surrendered to the darkness.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Jamie. Jamie. Oh, God, Jamie! Please don't die! Please! Hold on, honey. Hold on. Help's on the way."

She felt her head cradled and warm breath against her lips. She heard a voice begging her to hold on. It sounded like Dan.

She struggled up through layers of pain to open her eyes. Dan held her. She would at least get to die with the man she loved.

"Dan. . . I. . . love you."

"Oh, honey! I love you too!"

She wanted to smile, but she hurt too much. Fear suddenly clutched at her. "Dan, you have to get out of here. It's. . . Neely. He's in here. He'll kill you. . . you have to get out!"

"No. No, honey." He touched her cheek. "He's dead."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. Don't worry about him or anything else. Just promise me you'll hold on. Honey, I can hear the ambulance. It's coming along the pier now. Can you hear it?"

"Yes," she whispered, "but I don't think I can. . . hold on."

"Yes you can! Hold on, honey. Please."

She tried but couldn't fight back the darkness.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Are you sure you're all right?"

Jamie grimaced in pain and gingerly moved her left shoulder as she sought for a comfortable position against the pillows propped against the headboard. Although she'd been hit in her right shoulder, the left one was stiff from cradling the cordless phone between her ear and shoulder.

"Tia, I'm fine. Really. Mark's gone back to West Virginia, but Dan's still here treating me like an invalid."

"And so he should. Girl, are you sure you don't want me to fly in for a few more days?"

"And miss a chance to audition for that new soap?"

"There'll be other -- "

"No way. I'm fine, Tia. I'll see you in a few weeks when you can spare the time for a visit."

"And you're sure everything's OK with the baby?"

She glanced down at her no longer flat stomach. "Yes."

"Good, because I'm looking forward to being a Godmother. I warn you now, I'm going to spoil him or her rotten."

She smiled. "We'll talk about that when you get here."

"OK. You sound tired so I'll talk to you in a couple of days."

"OK. Bye."

"Finished?"

She looked up as Dan came into the bedroom. . . their bedroom. She smiled and nodded. He took the phone, placed it on his nightstand, and sat on the side of the bed.

"How are you feeling tonight?"

"Better. Thanks to you. Dan, I never really thanked you."

He widened his eyes. "For what? I could kick myself for not realizing Street Fox's photographer could actually have been a reporter who liked to take his own pictures."

"You had no way of knowing. What I can't believe is that I didn't ask."

"I knew Neely was bad news and he had some wacky friends, but I didn't think he was capable of murder. You have nothing to thank me for."

"You're kidding, right? I have lots of things to thank you for. You've made the last painful five weeks more bearable. I knew that you'd come visit me every day I spent in the hospital. And you and Mark have been great since I've been here."

She smiled at him. "But mostly I want to thank you for following me to the warehouse."

His eyes clouded over and he shook his head. "Why should you thank me for that? I should never have let you go alone. If I hadn't-"

She lifted her left hand and caressed his cheek. "If you hadn't, he'd have probably killed us both. As it was, you arrived just in time to keep him from finishing me off." She studied his face. "Are you OK with what you had to do?"

His lips tightened and he nodded. "I've never shot anyone before and I hope I never have to again, but I can't regret killing him. When I heard the shots and saw him standing over you, I. . . " He closed his eyes briefly. "I suppose shooting him three times with a rifle was overkill, especially since you'd already hit him twice, but I was so afraid he was going to kill you before I could stop him."

"And he wouldn't have stopped at killing me. He would have gone after Heather and Street Fox because they knew of his connection with Hillhower."

He touched her cheek. "Why do you look so sad? Hillhower set you up."

She nodded. "I know. At least he thought he was setting me up. But Neely was after him all along. I think he got too greedy and Neely got tired of paying for his expensive tastes."

"Oh, before I forget. I put Heather and Street Fox on a bus for Philly. They're both going back to school." He grinned at her. "Before he left, he asked me to be sure to remind you that anytime you want a quick pop to let him know. Seems he's still hankering for a taste of brown sugar."

"Really? Well, that's too bad. He's not my type. I like my men big, blond, and dumb," she teased.

His gaze searched hers. "Are you sure?"

"Oh, yeah. Dan, I thought I was going to die. I think I might have if you hadn't been there telling me you loved me." She looked into his eyes. "Did you. . . mean it? Or did you just say-"

He leaned forward and pressed his lips against hers, silencing her with a gentle kiss. "Yes, I meant it," he said softly. He pulled back and smiled at her. "The first time I saw you, I was mesmerized. After making love to you once, I was in love. I am in love."

"Dan, that's just sex," she protested, disappointed.

"No, it's not just sex. It's love. That's what makes the sex between us so incredible. Love. I love you."

She looked into his blue eyes and saw her love and desire reflected in his gaze. "I love you too."

"Enough to think about giving up being a cop?"

She shook her head. "I know the last couple of months have been rough, but I'd never been shot before Hillhower was killed."

"Maybe not, but you've been shot twice in the space of four months, Jamie."



She nodded. "I know and that has not been my favorite part of the job." She saw the anxiety in his eyes and hurried on. "But I love being a cop, Dan. It's really all I've ever wanted to do. It's part of who I am. I need you to understand that. Can you?"

He nodded with obvious reluctance. "I guess I'll have to get used to the idea."

"If it's any consolation, I'm probably going to get suspended for not informing I.A. about Street Fox."

He frowned. "What? Not with intent to dismiss?"

"No, but I won't be making sergeant anytime soon."

He stroked her cheek. "I'm sorry."

She shrugged. "So am I, but I'll get there, eventually, but that'll have to wait until after the baby."

"Speaking of babies, he or she will need a mother and a father."

"That would be me and you."

"A married mother and father."

Her chest muscles constricted. "What?"

"Will you think about marrying me?"

The breath caught in her throat and her heart beat so rapidly she could barely breathe. "Oh, Dan! Yes! Yes!"

He looked so relieved that she realized he'd been as unsure of her feelings for him as she'd been of his for her. "Yes? You're sure? No doubts about marrying a white guy?"

"None. When I thought I was dying, all I thought of was you and our baby. I don't care what color you are. You're the man I love. Do you have any doubts?"

"No. I just can't believe you want me too."

"Believe it, Blondie."

He leaned forward and kissed her. This time his mouth was warm and insistent.  
"Honey?"

She knew what he wanted. She wanted it too. It had been an eternity since they'd made love. Ignoring the dull ache in her shoulder, she eased down onto her back and smiled up at him. "Yes?"

He stretched out on the bed, facing her. He reached out and rubbed his palms against her breasts. "If we lay on our sides and I promise not to squeeze you, do you think you might be up to a quick pop? Or is it too soon?"

"Too soon?" She leaned against his caressing hands and sighed softly when he moved his hands under her top. "I've been dreaming about making love with you for weeks. But I am not into quick pops," she warned. "I want a long, slow all-nighter. And I want you on top of me."

"Not on top of you. I'm too heavy. I'll hurt your shoulder."

She reached out a hand and pressed his against her breasts. "The doctor said I wasn't exercising it enough." She grinned at him, feeling wanton and loving it. "I love the feel of your weight on me while you're deep inside me. It's a double thrill for me. I want you on top of me. All two hundred pounds of you."

"But honey, your shoulder."

"On top of me," she insisted.

He stood up and pulled off his clothes. Fearful of hurting her, he undressed her more slowly. Then, as she lay naked on his bed, he eased his big body onto hers.

It had been so long that just the feel of his erect cock was enough to send a rush of dampness between her legs. She cupped his shaft in her hands and guided the big head into her aching body.

With just half of his rod pulsing inside her, she had a mini climax. Hungry for more, she thrust up her hips, clutched his buns and cried out with bliss as he sank deep into her pussy. She wrapped her long legs around his hips and her arms around his shoulders.

"Oh, Dan! Dan! Yes! Yes! More!" She jerked at his shoulders and he allowed her to pull him downward until she felt his chest hair tickling her nipples.

It only took a few minutes of passionate, open mouth kisses and deep, rhythmic thrusts to push her to the brink of ecstasy. When her climax struck, it was so intense, she sobbed as it cascaded over her like a sensual steamroller. With tears streaming down her cheeks, she clung to him, cradling him as the force of his release buffeted his body.

When she could think again, her shoulder felt as if it were on fire, but the rest of her body felt languid and totally sated. And crushed. Once they were no long making love, he felt as if he weighed a ton.

She released a breath when he rolled off her and gently lifted her body on top of his. "Honey? Are you all right?"

She nodded, settling against him. "All right? I feel great."

He laughed and kissed the top of her head. "Me too, honey."

"Oh, Dan. If this gets any better, it'll kill me."

"Me too," he murmured, "but what a delicious way to go!"

 THE END 

~\*~

## Marilyn Lee

Marilyn lives, works, and writes on the East Coast of The US. In addition to thoroughly enjoying writing erotic romances in various genres, she enjoys roller-skating, spending time with her large, extended family, and rooting for all her favorite hometown sports teams. Her other interests include collecting *Doc Savage* pulp novels from the thirties and forties and collecting Marvel comics from the seventies and eighties (particularly *Thor* and *The Avengers*.) Her favorite TV shows are forensic shows, westerns (*Gunsmoke* and *Have Gun, Will Travel* are particular favorites), and mysteries (Charlie Chan movies in particular). Her all time favorite mystery movie is probably *Dead, Again*. She's seen nearly every vampire movie or television show ever made (*Forever Knight* and *Count Yorga, Vampires* are favorites).

Visit Marilyn on the Internet at [www.marilynlee.org](http://www.marilynlee.org) or e-mail her at Mlee2057@aol.com.

\* \* \* \* \*

Read on for a tantalizing glimpse of

*For The Love Of...*

by Kally Jo Surbeck

Available Now from Loose Id

It was cold. Dark and cold. The spitting snow should have cooled my raging hormones. The years of experience in the business should have steadied my racing heart. Or vice versa. But it didn't happen. I'd walked the perimeter. I'd climbed to the roof and secured the entire property. All systems were go, including my libido.

I needed a physical release of the tension coiling like a pit viper in my gut. Its venom leaked, making me sick. I thought the climb would help. I thought the cold would help. Nothing but Gabe's touch was going to ease my discomfort. I needed to know that things were O.K., even though they weren't. We were two of a kind, and if he didn't understand my need, no one ever would.

Now wasn't the time. I'd told Gabe that, and I was exactly on target. Our focus needed to be on the mission ahead. That was where our thoughts *should* be. But mine weren't. It was all his fault.

His words rang in my mind. Their echo hollow. This could be our last chance to be together. A bittersweet release, nothing more. Even if we both lived through the mission what kind of future was there for two ex-assassins? We'd never talked future. We didn't exactly trust each other. We had our own agendas.

None of it mattered. He'd crossed a sacred line and raised the notion of dying on a job. This job.

No one ever talked about it. Sure, we all thought it. Lying in wait, we'd contemplate worst-case scenarios. The What-If monster was a hit man's partner, but no one ever spoke the words. What if he was injured? What if he died?

I looked down at my watch. I'd wasted twenty-eight minutes scouting around. Thirty-two minutes left, give or take. I was going to make the most of it.

Gabe had removed all trace of our being in the lower level. There was an observation deck where the night auditor usually stayed. Rather like a small apartment that overlooked

the lower bay where I was supposed to wait for Hartgay and his Mountie contact to arrive. It looked like Gabe had moved all my equipment, computer and tote.

Taking the stairs by twos, I made up for lost time. It would have to be quick. The corner of my mouth tugged into a grin. Sometimes quick was exactly what the doctor ordered. Out of breath and patience, I stepped into the small room.

Gabe looked up from the paperback he was reading. "What's up?"

I closed the distance between us in a heartbeat--I counted--spun his chair to face me and straddled his lap. I'd never really thought of need and desire as forces, but that was before I sat on Gabe's lap and looked into his eyes. Then they were not only driving forces but full-blown compulsions.

Sinking my fingers deep into the thick layers of his hair, I tugged his head back and planted the kiss to end all kisses on the man.

I needed him. I craved a closeness only he could offer and a bonding of like souls. There was no one else on earth at that moment. Peeking at my watch, I released my hold on him. "You've got twenty minutes, hero. Show me what you can do."

He was already pulling off my shirt. "I only need ten."

The shirt popped over my head and landed on the floor in a heap. I cupped his chin. "Take twenty."

"Twenty minutes or twenty years. It will never be enough for me to show you how much I want you."

Twenty years? That was a lifetime in our business. My heart stopped beating, then thundered into action. He was just worked up about the job too. He couldn't mean what he said. He didn't know what he said. Pressing my lips to his with unchecked hunger, I attempted to silence his declarations. I didn't want to talk about feelings. I didn't want to think. I wanted to touch and feel. I wanted release, so my mind could be on doing my job and living to talk about it later.

With a sharp tug, I untucked his tee. My hands had a mind of their own. Starved for affection and ravenous for the feel of his skin next to mine. "Talk later. Love now."

\* \* \* \* \*

*What people are saying about*

## For The Love Of...

For The Love Of... has what every action loving woman out there is looking for: a gorgeous hero, great ammo, and one kick ass heroine. Ms. Surbeck's voice is new and refreshing and the plot has so many twists it will keep you guessing until the end. If you like your action hot and fast with biting humor, do yourself a HUGE favor and pick up For the Love of...

-- Melissa Schroeder, author of *A Little Harmless Sex* (Loose Id, Fall 2004)

For The Love Of... is a fast paced, action packed, take no prisoners version of the romance novel. Ms. Surbeck delivers witty dialogue and intriguing plot twists, realistic motivations and believable characters. Fabulous debut novel!

-- Cyndi Friberg, author of *Rebel Angels 1: Born of the Shadows* (Loose Id)

I loved this book! Mac is a quirky, funny, gadget-loving assassin with issues. Her mission to eliminate the bad guy, quit the business, and retire to the south Pacific is seriously complicated by the attractive presence of one Gabriel Zumbrenen. Do yourself a favor and curl up with For The Love Of... tonight. You'll thank yourself in the morning!

-- Stephanie Vaughan, author of *Dead Man's Party* (Loose Id, Fall 2004)

For the Love Of... is an intense, yet funny story. It'll keep you turning pages seeking all the answers. I laughed, I cried, and I loved every minute. There are gems in the publishing industry and there are diamonds -- this is a diamond.

-- Merzi Ross, author of *Mobile by Moonlight* (eXtasy Books, Fall 2004)