



Anne Brooke



**The Art
Of The
Delaneys**

THE ART OF THE DELANEYS

by

ANNE BROOKE

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Dedication

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THE ART OF THE DELANEYS

One week after my last encounter with the Delaney twins, I made up my mind I was going to make whatever was going on among the three of us stick. I think I'd known how I saw it for a while, but it was the first time I'd admitted to myself I might quite like them and me, whatever *that* meant, to be more than simply entertainment.

I was probably screwed before I even finished thinking the thought. Hell, my pleasant middle-class, middle-grade background hadn't prepared me in any way for wanting to make a go of it, at least for now, with two blokes rather than one and really, for this, I blamed my parents. I'd had a sheltered upbringing. They hadn't explained how to handle a threesome in sex education lessons at my school, or maybe I'd been sick on that day and had missed it. I wouldn't have been surprised.

It was crazy, though, wasn't it? The Delaneys were gangsters in all but name, they did God knows what with drugs and threats and dirty dealings, and they had beautiful men at their beck and call if they wanted them, I was sure of it. So what the hell were they doing with me? And, more importantly, just what *was* it that kept me so fascinated, fleeced and...well...fucked when it came to the tasty twins? What did it really say about me?

All these deep questions were crowding through my inadequate male brain as I was supposed to be packaging up the latest painting for one of Melissa's top-notch customers at the gallery. Struggling with philosophy must have been the reason why I didn't hear the gallery door open or the tap-tap of kitten heels on wood, or even feel the blast of early autumn air from the outside, until the woman herself was upon me.

"Liam? Just what on earth are you doing down there?"

"What? Oh, yes, well, hello, Melissa, I didn't hear you come in," I gabbled inanely for a while as I scrabbled around the floor gathering up brown tape and ribbon. Melissa always preferred it when I used ribbon as part of the wrapping. She thought it looked elegant.

"So I see," she said, depositing her Prada handbag on the office table and slipping off her red Blahniks. "But what I really need to know is just what the hell you think you're doing to that Lily Cooper?"

Lily Cooper was Melissa's top artist and the one currently in demand everywhere. She painted abstract wave-like shapes in blue and green mainly and in tiny separate patterns across the canvas. I always thought she was a cross between Bridget Riley and Rothko, but happier. Melissa, however, tended to snort when I let this little gem out, so I didn't say it much to gallery visitors, at least when the boss was in. I knew what was best for me, on the whole.

Right now, what was best for me was taking a very good look at Lily's latest offering and seeing what Melissa meant. It

didn't take long to see the problem. To my surprise, small wads of brown tape were dotted across the top of the picture frame as if someone had tried to give it a not very professional hairdo. I must have done it without realizing whilst trying to "think things through," which just goes to show no man should be allowed to do this without medical assistance on standby.

"God, sorry, Melissa." I stuttered a totally inadequate response, whilst vainly trying to unleash the balls of tape from their temporary home. "I must've been distracted. I'll make sure everything's okay before I send it off, I swear it, and at least I haven't messed up the painting itself..."

I trailed off. Melissa didn't take kindly to excuses. Right now, she was staring at me and frowning. I sat on my heels and gazed back at her.

"I'm sorry," I said, more simply this time. "I wasn't concentrating properly. I promise you I'll make sure it's perfect for the client, just how you like it."

My boss pursed her lips and nodded, accepting my statement for what it was, but I thought the storm clouds might just have eased a little. Thank goodness, as Melissa in full fury was an experience I'd much rather avoid if I could help it.

She tapped her perfectly manicured fingers on the desk.

"You're an idiot, Liam," she said, "but you're a hard worker and you're usually much better than this. Come into my office now and tell me what the hell is wrong with you."

Without waiting to see if I would follow--though I'd be a fool to dare otherwise--Melissa picked up her handbag and shoes and padded her way across the main office, out into the reception area and into her own suite of rooms. I made a slight detour to lock the entrance and switch the sign around, as she liked privacy for her little chats with me, of which there were many. Then I hurried to her office for what would no doubt be a severe dressing-down.

To my surprise, it wasn't as bad as I'd feared.

"What's on your mind, Liam?" she said, never one to linger before getting right to the heart of the matter. "Spit it out."

There were probably at least a hundred things I could have said possibly more suitable for a boss-employee conversation, but what came out was certainly the truth. And how many times does a bloke actually admit that?

"It's the Delaney twins," I said. "I'm involved with them, I think."

Melissa laughed. "You *think*? I'll have you know the hot gossip about your goings-on--and I mean that in the grossest sense of the word--with the Delaneys is the topic of choice in every hair salon, every boutique and every bar in town, my dear. Involved is, as far as I understand, a definite understatement."

I had the grace to blush. "That's not what I meant, Melissa. I meant I'm *involved*, I think, not just *involved*."

She blinked at me and her laugh vanished from her face. "Explain."

I wasn't sure what the right words were for saying something like this to your boss, so I decided simply to tell it as I saw it.

"It's not just a quick fuck," I said, "or rather quick fucks as obviously there are two of them rather than just one...not like other blokes I've had in the past, who only came in ones, as it were. At least I don't think it's like this. Because I really like them, you see, I mean *really* like them."

"God knows this probably isn't supposed to happen, but I like how they make me feel, and the whole danger thing? Well, it's hot, isn't it? But they're not bad to me, not terribly bad anyway, and, hell, they know how to give a bloke a good time. But the thing is, you know them a damn sight better than I do, so I need you to tell me: how do I keep them interested and how do I get them to see me as more than a good quality fuck? I need to know, Melissa."

By the time I'd finished, my boss's eyes were so wide I could probably have used them as dinner plates if I was so inclined. She snorted and flapped her hand across her face, as if to cool down.

"God, Liam, too much information. *Far* too much information."

"Sorry," I said, "but I couldn't think of any other way of putting it."

She sighed and rose to her feet in order to open the window. I was glad she did, as the breeze helped to cool me down, too, in all sorts of ways.

She paced up and down next to the desk for a few moments, and I could tell she was thinking. Whether it was how to solve my problem or how to get rid of a possibly insane employee, I couldn't tell. I just hoped it was the former, as I definitely needed the job.

Finally, she came to a halt and fixed her deep green eyes on me.

"Well," she said slowly, "funnily enough there might be something you can do to impress the Delaneys, but you'll need to be smart, subtle and quick. Do you think you can do any of those, Liam?"

"I've no idea," I said with admirable honesty, but not much sense, which probably put me out of the running for all three categories. "But I'll have a go if you think it might help."

She sat back down and drummed her fingernails briefly on the desk. "Well, it's like this..."

As Melissa explained the darker dealings of the Delaney brothers, something I hadn't realized she was quite so privy to, I was sure my eyes became wider and my expression more disbelieving. Certainly, she kept giving me contemplative glances as she continued to speak, but must have found something in my face that encouraged her to go on.

What she told me was this: whilst my favorite twins had been involved in local and not-so-local organized crime for generations--it was a family tradition, when all was said and done--their main interest had been in the usual: drugs, extortion, debt-collecting, fraud, prostitution and so on. The sort of activity

everyone knew about and most turned a blind eye to. Recently, however, they'd been making plans to expand their operations and had carried out some initial research into the many possibilities of art fraud.

"Art fraud?" I interrupted the boss in mid-flow, a cardinal sin which caused her to give me the evil eye, but I couldn't help myself. "Isn't it a bit risky? I mean, I know you're friendly with the Delaneys, and believe me I know I've every reason to be grateful for it. But this is your business, Melissa, so don't you want it to be above board?"

The evil eye became even more evil, if this was possible.

"Believe me, Liam," she said crisply, "my business is as above board as it needs to be, and I'll thank you not to say anything else, if you want to keep on being part of it."

"Yes, ma'am," I said, resisting the urge to salute, but sitting straighter in my seat anyway. You never knew how angry Melissa might get, but obviously today she had other things on her mind.

"And if we want to keep on being a business," she mused, turning to gaze out the window, "then we have to achieve a fine balancing act between being suitably legal and letting the Delaneys get what they want."

"Oh, yes," I said with rather more enthusiasm than was strictly necessary. "Because letting the Delaneys get what they want is *always* a good thing."

"Indeed. But passing swiftly on from *that*, Liam, this is the plan."

It didn't take long for her to tell me. It sounded more than a little underhanded to me, but my mother prided herself on having brought me up in as correct a fashion as possible. It wasn't her fault I was taking a walk on the shadowy side now and, hell, the Delaneys were worth it. Time to show them what I was made of then, and how wise they'd be to hang on to me.

"So, Liam?" Melissa prompted me when she'd finished.

I grinned at her, knowing exactly what my answer would be.

"I'll do it," I said. "You can rely on me, boss."

* * * *

Never let it be said the Delaneys did anything simply or by halves. Two nights after my conversation with Melissa, I made the call to them that would start everything off. It was the first time *I'd* made contact with *them* to start something off, as before, they'd either found me or called me with their requirements. And this time it wasn't to do with sex either, which was a novelty. Still, with my plans dovetailing with Melissa's, I was hoping sex wouldn't be entirely off the agenda either. It was all, as they say, to play for.

I used the number Johnny had given me, and he answered at once. "Delaney here."

His voice made my cock stiffen, and I wondered briefly if he and his brother might be up to phone sex at some point, but now probably wasn't the moment to ask. I pushed down my libido, literally, and focused on the matter in hand, as it were.

"Mr. Delaney, sir," I said, my voice croaking, so I had to clear my throat to carry on, "it's Liam."

"Ah, Liam." Johnny's tones flowed over me like honey over a rock on a warm summer day, or would have done if I'd been in the least way poetical. "Good to hear you. We've missed you, my brother and I."

I grabbed the nearest chair at that point and had to sit down before I fell down. Lucky then I was in the living room and not the kitchen where chairs were rather scarce.

"I miss you, too, Johnny," I said with a gulp, "and your brother as well. I'd love to see you both right now."

"Really?" He practically purred and I could sense his smile.

Weird how Johnny seemed to be more flirtatious on the phone than he was when you actually met him. Maybe it was because he wasn't with his twin, letting Mark do the talking, but what the heck did I know? I was a loved-up receptionist, not a psychiatrist.

A list of acts I could perform or let them perform on me the moment I did see the twins filled my head, but I managed to squash them down. Unlike my mind-of-its-own cock, which was in overdrive right now, but it couldn't be helped. I had to remember Melissa's parting shot: business before pleasure.

"Yes, really," I managed to say, "but there's something I need to discuss with you first, Mr. Delaney, if it's alright."

A pause followed, then, "Go ahead, Liam."

"I've been talking with Melissa," I said, trying to sound more confident than I would ever be in real life. "We're keen to help you with your new art project, assuming you're still interested

in branching out in that direction, sir. Seeing as we're the best gallery in town and you're the best...well...business consultants, Melissa thought it would be good to join forces in the way you outlined to her."

"I see," Johnny said slowly. "That's good to hear, Liam, and very interesting indeed. I'll put you on to Mark. He'll have the final say, of course."

"Of course," I echoed and then waited as Johnny put the phone on hold, presumably in order to tell Mark how things were.

After a while, the sound came back.

"Liam," a different voice said and, without thinking, I sat up even straighter.

Funny how Mark had the same effect on me as Melissa did. No wonder they got on so well.

"Mr. Delaney, sir," I replied.

"My brother tells me you're willing to help us in our new artistic ventures," Mark said.

I couldn't help but smile. "Mr. Delaney, I'm willing to help you in any ventures you and your brother might want. Anything at all. You only have to say the word, sir."

Again, I heard a small gasp at the end of the line, which was exactly the response I'd been hoping for. Or would have been if I hadn't actually been trying to focus on business. Funny how sex always got in the way when it came to the Delaneys...every time.

"Good." Mark's tone was crisp, and I could only be impressed at his powers of recovery. "In that case, be in the gallery

at eleven-thirty tonight. Make sure Melissa's there, too. Then, do everything we say and you'll find it'll be worth your while, Liam. Understood?"

"Yes, sir."

And that, as they say, was that.

* * * *

I was at the gallery by eleven. The last thing I wanted to do was risk being late, but Melissa was already there. Not that I could see her from the outside as all the hall lights were out, but the alarm wasn't primed, and when I stepped into the hallway, I could see a faint glimmer from under her office door.

I knocked softly on the polished wood.

"Come in, Liam," she called out.

God, but I wished I had her confidence, as I would definitely have checked who it was first.

"Good," she said when I walked in. "You're early. Are you ready?"

Wordless, I nodded. This was it then. We were really going to do something underhand and not strictly legal. Actually, not legal at all, when I came to think of it. Funny how excited I felt. Perhaps I was an artful dodger after all. I'd make the Delaneys proud of me yet.

Melissa took out a flashlight and switched off the room light. The glow made everything look faintly sinister.

"We're going to need light in the gallery, aren't we?" I whispered.

"Yes, at some stage. I know that," she retorted. "I'm not an idiot. And why are you whispering? Nobody's here but us. I've turned off the lights because I don't want people to see us from the street, but there's no way they can hear us, not with the door shut."

A pause, then, "You did shut the door, didn't you, Liam?"

"Of course, I did," I replied, unable to lift my voice above a whisper no matter what she said. There was something about the whole occasion that warranted secrecy and, anyway, I was rather enjoying it. "I'm not an idiot either."

She grimaced and didn't bother to reply. Instead she clip-clipped her way across the hall and into the largest room of her beloved gallery. I followed as closely as I could without actually falling over her feet. I didn't want to miss anything. On the way, I checked I had indeed shut the door. I had.

In the gallery, I stared at the farthest wall as Melissa highlighted each picture with her flashlight. Amongst the collection, there were a couple of Lily Coopers, alongside an abstract watercolor of chimneys against a silver sun. It definitely wasn't the moon, as the artist had been categorical about that. Painters could be strange sometimes.

"There's no telling which one it is," Melissa said, "until we see the picture the Delaneys are bringing with them. I just hope it's not a Cooper."

"No, me, too," I said and would have added more, but at that moment, the front door clicked open, and we heard the sound of

footsteps, at least two pair, in the hallway. The Delaneys had arrived.

Mark swept in, all blond hair and muscle, followed almost immediately by Johnny, who, of course, was equally all blond hair and muscle. Behind them were two henchmen, both carrying flashlights. I recognized one of them as Benjy, the chauffeur who'd driven me to the Delaney mansion for the sex party. I'd best keep away from him. I didn't want to cause any more damage.

"Evening, Melissa," Mark said, giving her a brief but friendly kiss on the cheek. "Thank you for helping us with our business ventures. We won't forget it."

Then, much to my surprise under the circumstances, Mark grabbed me, tilted back my head and thrust his tongue into my mouth. I staggered and almost fell, but he held me steady in his arms. God, it felt nice. He tasted of brandy and something uniquely himself. I'd temporarily forgotten how bloody good Mark was at kissing and how much he enjoyed it. Tonight, it was just what I needed to take my mind off the criminal activity Melissa and I were about to take part in. Sex could be an instant lift, as it were.

By the time Mark let me go, Melissa was humming tunelessly and playing with making patterns on the walls with her flashlight, and the two henchman were shuffling their feet and staring at the carpet.

Mark smiled. "Good to see you, Liam."

That was without a doubt the understatement of the day. All he had to do, really all *anyone* had to do, was cast their gaze

southward and they'd see how good I thought it was to see them. Next time I took part in a little dodgy dealing, I promised myself I'd wear a stronger pair of briefs.

Nothing much I could do but smile back at the elder twin and then make sure I didn't forget the younger one. Taking the few steps I needed to get to Johnny, I took him in my arms and kissed him, too. He groaned and rubbed his crotch against mine, which didn't need much encouragement by then.

Finally, when Mark coughed behind us, I let him go.

"Mr. Delaneys, sirs," I said, "never let it be said I want anyone to feel left out."

Johnny punched me on the arm, but in a friendly way, and Mark gave a short bark of laughter.

"Come on then," he said. "Let's do our business and then we can think about pleasure."

Mark nodded at Benjy, who brought out a parcel I hadn't seen from behind him. A rolled-up package wrapped in brown paper and string, it might as well have had the words *Piece of Fraudulent Artwork* emblazoned across it. I couldn't help chuckling. It looked like the henchman had copied it from some B Movie from the Hollywood years.

"What's the matter, Liam?" Johnny asked, and I shut up at once, and all the quicker when Mark gave me one of his glances.

"Nothing, sir," I said.

"In that case, keep quiet," Mark said.

Wise advice indeed.

So Melissa and I watched as the two retainers unwrapped the parcel and unrolled what was, at first glance, a vintage Cooper in the trademark shades of blue and green. Wavy, too. In fact, it was almost the exact replica of Lily's highest priced painting currently in pride of place in the main gallery, damn it.

"Oh," said Melissa, as she peered closer. "My best artist."

I felt my skin grow cold. I'd never imagined the Delaneys might want to start their new line in art fraud at the top, though I supposed, with their reputations, I should have been warned. They didn't get where they were today by being cautious. But I couldn't help myself--I hunkered down and stared at the picture, my heart beating fast. Benjy muttered something under his breath, but luckily didn't go for his gun at my daring. The last thing we wanted was a shoot-out at the gallery, especially as we were all trying so hard to go unnoticed.

"What are you doing?" Mark said, his tones clipped. "We need to get that on display, hide the real McCoy and do the deal. Our client will be here soon, and we'll all make a good profit. What could be better?"

"Yes, sir," I stuttered a reply, eyes still scanning the painting for easy errors. Damn it, but there were none. "I'm checking it is all."

Mark swore softly. "Melissa can do that, Liam. You make yourself useful and see there's nobody outside."

I sprang up, making sure the picture was safely back in Benjy's hands and began to trot obediently over to the window.

"No," Mark and Johnny said together, before Mark continued with, "Have some subtlety, for God's sake. You don't want to make it obvious you're looking."

"Yes, sir," I replied and sidled up the last few paces, as if stalking a potential customer. Outside, I couldn't see anything out of the ordinary. Just a couple of lads having a smoke under the farthest lamppost and a man with a briefcase striding past them.

Oh, hang on, though. Men with briefcases didn't usually stride anywhere in this part of town, and certainly not at this time of night.

"There's someone odd out there," I said, though, in all honesty, he probably wasn't as odd as the group of us in here, and Johnny was beside me in an instant.

His hand on my shoulder steadied me, and I felt his breath against my cheek as he pulled me back out of sight. He peered outside for a moment and then turned back to Mark, his hand still on my shoulder.

"It's our contact," he said. "He's early."

Mark swore softly and made a quick gesture toward the copy painting.

"Will it pass muster?" he said, glance darting between my boss and me.

"Yes, sir, I think so," I said, and Melissa nodded.

Everything then happened at double-quick speed.

The two henchmen jogged out of the room and down the corridor toward the front door with all the elegance and finesse of a

herd of marauding elephants, even though there were only two of them. Mark and Melissa, followed closely by Johnny, who was holding the copy painting clutched to his chest, headed to the gallery wall, the dazzling path of their flashlights lighting the way for them. I brought up the rear. Always play to your strengths is what I say.

As quickly as she could, Melissa snatched the real Lily Cooper off the wall and laid it on the floor, muttering under her breath as she struggled with the frame.

"Here, let me," I said. "I'm a highly skilled professional, don't you know."

All that training in making sure customers didn't stalk out of the gallery because they couldn't get the painting they wanted in the frame they desired in the two minutes they'd allocated for the sale finally came in handy. I completed the task in barely a matter of seconds.

Johnny whistled. "Impressive, Liam."

I couldn't help but blush as I glanced up at him. "I aim to please, Mr. Delaney, sir."

"Cut the chat, the two of you," Mark snapped, his hand on my shoulder bringing all flirtation to an instant close. "Our man is on his way."

Sure enough, I heard the sound of the front door opening and the henchmen making growling noises, which could have been polite greetings or the warning grunts of wild animals about to

attack. It was hard to tell, but I couldn't imagine it would be the latter. The Delaneys wouldn't want blood on Melissa's carpet.

I gave the real Cooper picture to my boss, who rolled it up smartly and tap-tapped her way across the floor toward the set of three nude statues. In the murky glimmer of the flashlights, they looked ghostly and hardly there at all, but they were joined at the base. Handy, indeed, as Melissa dropped the canvas behind them and then eased it deeper into the shadows with her foot. Nobody who wasn't looking deliberately would see it.

While she did that, I replaced the copy picture on the wall in its new frame, with Mark's help. Then, as the twins strode over toward the approaching sound of voices coming up the corridor, I switched on a couple of the wall lamps, angling them away from the windows so they'd be less likely to be spotted from the outside.

"What are you doing?" My boss practically hissed the words. "Aren't we supposed to be subtle?"

"I *am* being subtle," I whispered back my reply. "We don't want to look like we've anything to hide, do we?"

The twins must have thought the same as, just before our visitor entered the room, I got the tail-end of a brief smile from Johnny and a nod from Mark. *Result.*

"Mr. Sheridan," Mark said, his tone of voice a statement rather than a greeting, "we've managed to procure the piece you requested."

Mr. Sheridan? That just had to be an assumed name, surely? Luckily, I managed to turn my laugh into a cough. Once again,

now wasn't the time for jokes. Still, my sudden outbreak of throat clearing unfortunately had the result of bringing Mr. Sheridan's attention to me, not an outcome I thought I wanted on any level.

"Who's this?" He fixed me with the kind of look that would have turned a lesser man to jelly, so thank goodness the low light levels weakened the effect.

"This," said Mark in a tone outclassing Mr. Sheridan's glances by several streets, "is a close associate of ours. My brother and I trust him implicitly, so I'll thank you to be civil. Also he works here and is the right-hand man of the gallery owner."

Mark waved his hand at various points in order to make brief introductions, but I just stared at him. He trusted me. *Implicitly*. He and Johnny trusted me *implicitly*, and weren't afraid to say so, no matter who they were trying to impress or make new business deals with. God, I didn't think any of my past boyfriends had ever expressed such loyalty so openly, no matter how long I'd known them. Hell only knew what kind of relationship category the Delaneys and I fell into, if we fell into any, but already I knew how damn good it felt. I didn't want to lose it.

"Understood," Mr. Sheridan replied. "I'm grateful for the explanation. Now, let's see the painting. I don't want to waste any more time."

"Certainly," Melissa said. "This is it. The best Lily Cooper I have."

"I see," said Mr. Sheridan. "Give me some more light, if you may."

Mark nodded at me, and I angled the nearest lamp so as much light as possible fell on the painting in question. At the same time, the two henchmen trotted across to the window and lined themselves up against it. The width they were, I didn't think anyone from outside would be able to notice anything untoward. The twins certainly chose their bodyguards well.

Mr. Sheridan stared at the painting as if he was going to start licking it at any moment, and I glanced across at Melissa. God knows what she'd do if he did. No matter what sort of scam she was willing to take part in for the Delaneys' sake and no matter that this painting wasn't even real, there was no way my boss was anything but utterly committed to *her* artists. If Mr. Sheridan so much as breathed on the picture in the wrong way, I doubted he'd have many more breaths left in his body afterward.

Just as Melissa took a step forward, and I braced myself for the fray, Mr. Sheridan let out a small sigh, but luckily for him it wasn't in the direction of the painting.

"Yes," he said. "That's good. I can recognize her work anywhere. Lily Cooper is going to be big. Very big one day."

"So she is," Melissa said, and I could tell she wanted to add more, but Mark interrupted.

"The important question is how much you're willing to pay to have this picture for your own exclusive enjoyment, Mr. Sheridan," he said.

"Your reputation doesn't do you justice, Mr. Delaney," Mr. Sheridan replied. "I was told you don't make small talk, and you certainly don't. That suits me very well indeed."

That I could only agree with, as I had to say it more than suited me, too. So I kept quiet as Melissa passed the false Lily Cooper over to Mr. Sheridan. And I continued to watch in silence as Mr. Sheridan handed over more money to Mark than I was sure I'd seen in my entire lifetime, and as Mark handed a not insubstantial amount of said cash to Melissa. After giving it a thorough once-through, of course.

What surprised me and loosened my tongue was the fact Mark then walked over to me and began counting out some more of the money.

"Mr. Delaney, sir," I stammered. "Really, there's no need."

He stopped counting under his breath and gave me a sharp glance. Next to him, Johnny sighed. "Just take the cash, Liam. We can discuss it later."

I blinked, several conflicting ideas fighting for supremacy in my head. And as there wasn't a lot of space there, it didn't take long. "Yes, sir."

So I took the money Mark gave me and tried to stuff it into my pockets. Not a great plan when you were wearing jeans. Melissa tutted. "Give it to me. I'll keep it for you until tomorrow."

"No, really, thanks, boss. That's fine," I replied, shoving the rest of the bloody money down my shirt and hoping I wouldn't look too shapeless on the walk home.

Five minutes after that, Mr. Sheridan had gone, taking his new and not-quite-what-he-suspected acquisition with him, and I was reinstating the real Lily Cooper back where it belonged in a frame it hadn't anticipated wearing. Lord, but this wheeler-dealing lifestyle was exhausting. It was astonishing how good it looked on the Delaneys. If it had been me doing this all the time, I'm sure I'd have been a shadow of my former self by now.

"Right," said Mark when Johnny had given him the nod Mr. Sheridan was properly gone. "That's done then. Thank you, Melissa and Liam, for your help with this new venture. I hope you enjoy your well-earned profits."

It sounded like a dismissal, not something I had any notion of accepting, not without a fight anyway. So, as Melissa adjusted her beloved Cooper so it was perfectly aligned with the wall, I made my move.

"Mr. Delaney, sir," I said. "Mr. Delaney, haven't you and your brother, the other Mr. Delaney, forgotten something?"

Mark frowned. "What's that?"

Taking a deep breath, I strolled up to Mark. I didn't hurry, but I wasn't dawdling either. I stopped when I was close enough to smell the herbal traces of his aftershave. God, how I liked a bloke who cared about grooming, even while committing a crime. It definitely showed class and I was always a pushover for class, even with danger.

Slowly, I undid the top button of my shirt, then I reached over and kissed him. His tongue filled my mouth at once, and I felt

him slide his fingers across my chest, undoing the second and third buttons as well. Even in front of my boss, it felt good, though I did rather hope Mark wouldn't expect me to go all the way with her in the room.

Luckily, it appeared he didn't. After a few moments, Mark pushed me away just a little, whilst still keeping his grip on my shirt.

"What are you after, Liam?" he said, his voice rougher than usual.

I smiled. "Isn't it obvious, sir? I just thought that now you and your brother have done the deal, you might want to indulge in a celebration. If you see what I mean, sir."

Johnny laughed and Mark pulled me closer again, but gently.

"Oh yes," he whispered. "We know exactly what you mean. And we think it's a very, *very* good idea."

Melissa made a noise like an angry bird about to defend its nest, to the death if need be, all henchmen be damned, but Johnny was quick to reassure her.

"You know you're important to us, Melissa," he said.

"Whatever we do, nothing here in your gallery will be damaged. Trust us. We've never let you down."

I heard her sigh, but I couldn't see her, as the only object in my vision right then was Mark. But I tried to send all my most reassuring vibes her way. It must have worked as she turned on her heel--I caught the swing of her hair in the corner of my eye--and began tap-tapping toward the door.

"No, that's true, you never have," she said. "Liam, you have the key. For God's sake, lock up when you're done. And clean up, too."

"Yes, ma'am," I replied and then she was gone. Hell, I'd always admired a woman who made a swift exit. I just hoped the henchmen weren't going to be far behind her, as, when it came to the Delaneys, I was about done with an audience.

Mark must have caught the direction of my thought and been minded to care about it, too, as he made a dismissive gesture with his head, without even taking his eyes from mine.

"Go and wait in the car," he said with a growl to his two bodyguards. "Johnny and I will join you when we're good and ready. Now *move* it."

They did, but with not a tenth of the elegance Melissa could call on. Then, thank God, as my cock was seriously dying for attention right then, the Delaneys and I were alone.

I didn't mess about, but took hold of Mark's hand as I wound my arm round Johnny's waist.

"Do you want to come and see my office?" I asked them in what I hoped were my best seductive tones. "I think you'll like it there."

Then, without waiting for a response, I tugged them gently in the direction I wanted to go. Yes, I knew they were in charge, come what may, but, hell, what relationship didn't benefit from stirring up the power balance now and again? I did think for a heart-stopping moment that Mark might object, but Johnny stepped

eagerly alongside me, the both of us pulling his more reluctant brother after us.

I liked to think I could guarantee he wouldn't be quite so reluctant for long, though.

Luckily, I knew the gallery layout even in the dark and it didn't take long to reach my office, such as it was. Once inside, I made sure the blinds were secure, switched on the light, swept several piles of paperwork off my desk--some things were definitely more important than keeping the records up to date--and laid down on it with what I hoped was a fluid and elegant motion, but which, if I were being honest, was probably more of a frantic scrabble.

"Alright," I said, still using my would-be seductive voice, "now you've tied up the art deal, do you think you can manage to tie me up, too?"

Okay, not the greatest pun in the world, but it was the middle of the night and I was doing my best. Johnny leant over and kissed me.

"What with?" he murmured against my lips.

I didn't need to reply as his twin had already found the supply of packaging ribbon under the desk. I just hoped Melissa would forgive me the use of it, just this once.

Mark dangled the ribbon so both of us could see it. He smiled. "Take off Liam's clothes, Johnny. Slowly so he knows we're going to have a lot of fun with him tonight. After business comes pleasure, after all."

Johnny nodded and began to undo the rest of my shirt buttons. His hand on my skin was warm and soothing, something I was coming to expect from him. I groaned, and Mark grabbed my hair so my groan turned to a startled gasp. He leant in.

"No noise, Liam," he said. "Whatever happens, you've got to be silent. Understood?"

Yes, sir, I mouthed at him, unable to nod and uncertain when exactly he expected his ruling to begin. He seemed satisfied with my response and let me go. My heart was beating fast and I couldn't take my eyes from him, all the time feeling Johnny's fingers stroking my chest and stomach as he unpeeled my shirt from me. The money spilled out across the floor, but, by that stage, nobody cared. The combination of Mark's gaze and Johnny's touch was electric.

For Johnny to remove my shirt entirely, I had to half sit up. As I did so, Mark's lips met mine and his tongue filled my mouth again. I was desperate to groan my pleasure out, but forced it down and contented myself with touching whatever part of his body I could find whilst my arms were still free. He hadn't said I couldn't touch, so I was going to make the most of that allowance.

As Johnny's ministrations moved to my jeans and pants, I had to bite my lip and think of Melissa's tax returns to avoid any verbal embarrassment. I swore he took several hours to release my cock from its prison and it sprang out like a greyhound let loose on the track after he'd finally got my zipper down.

"God, you're beautiful," he whispered. "Mark and I are so lucky."

Then he licked my cock from base to tip, slowly and luxuriantly, and I had to stuff my fingers in my mouth to swallow down any sound.

Mark didn't allow that for long. He took the ribbon and tied it round one wrist and then another, before stretching out my arms and securing them to the table legs. The grain of the wood pressed into my back, which wasn't uncomfortable, but it limited my movement and made me aware of how vulnerable I was. That feeling wasn't unpleasant either and as long as I kept looking at him, the anticipation outweighed the uncertainty.

"You're doing very well, Liam," he said, with an unexpected caress across my cheek and chin. "I'm very proud of you. We both are."

His words brought a ridiculous grin to my face, which I couldn't seem to suppress. God, I must have looked stupid, grinning like an idiot whilst flat-out and butt-naked across a desk, but neither of the twins seemed to mind. Mark pinched my nipples, bringing both of them instantly to a hard nub, and played with my chest and stomach for a while, as Johnny continued to give my cock his full and delicious attention.

When I was beginning to think it couldn't get any better, whilst at the same time wanting more, much more, Mark's fingers left me, and I almost groaned at the terrible lack of contact. Then I heard the sound of a zipper being undone. I turned my head and

saw Mark easing down his trousers. He glanced at Johnny, still busy with my cock.

"Did you remember the condom and lube like I said?" he asked.

Johnny paused just long enough to answer. "Of course."

"Good," said Mark. "Then put them on and fuck him. I want to watch you do it."

Hell, that sounded fantastic. They'd better hurry up, though, as right then I was absolutely dying to come. There was no way I could make this game last for much longer. I wondered if Mark was only going to watch, but I didn't have to wait to find out.

"Keep your head turned toward me, Liam," he commanded, and I felt my heart pounding so hard in my chest that surely he must have heard it, must have known the effect they were having on me.

Without any more ado, Mark took hold of my head and pushed his cock right into my mouth and as far down my throat as he could get himself. The sudden shock of it made me want to gag, but I hung on, made myself accept it, took him in willingly and gratefully. With my hands tied, he had complete control over me, and how fast or how slowly he fucked my mouth. I gave him that control, yielding my throat to him or indeed any other part of my body he might want to have.

At the same time, Johnny undid his zipper and slicked himself up with the condom. Then he lifted my legs, placed himself against my arse, and pushed himself inside, too. I wanted

to moan, cry out, scream even, until the pain gave way to pleasure, but I had to remember to obey Mark, and in any case I couldn't make any sound as he was filling me up totally. I just had to lie there and take it. God, it was bliss. The best way to end a day at the office I'd ever experienced, that was for certain. I didn't think Melissa would agree to let me be fucked like this on her premises every night so I was determined to make the most of it.

"Focus, Liam, focus," Mark said with a growl as both he and his brother continued to thrust their ways into me. "I want you to give it to us, to Johnny and me. I want you to come for us, but remember: no sound. Come for us, Liam. Come for us quietly. You can do it."

In all honesty, I didn't know if I could or not. I'd never come quietly for anyone. When I shot my load, it had always been an automatic reaction to yell or groan, but I wanted to obey him. I wanted to bring him pleasure any way I could, more than anything. So, my pulse way off the scale by now, I gazed up at him, taking the confidence that I could do anything he wanted me to by the look in his eye, and then Johnny hit my sweet spot and I was coming.

I used Mark's cock in my mouth to hold back my shouts and moans, swallowing them down with his cum as my own hot spunk shot out of me over and over again, splattering my load over the desk and the floor and the shelf and Johnny, until the intense joy of it all overtook me. I felt as if I was flying through sunlight into the best and richest orgasm I'd ever had.

I might even have fainted--I don't know--though that would have been stupid for a bloke. But when next I was fully aware of anything outside my own body's happiness, I was lying on the desk with Mark's spunk sticky and warm over my face and chest, and with the feel of Johnny's cock slowly withdrawing from inside my arse.

I desperately wanted to talk, to tell them what that had meant to me, but I didn't know how long the requirement to be silent would last. When I looked at Mark, he was nodding.

"Well done, Liam," he said, his voice more than shaky, but still with that unmistakable note of command in it that I was coming to rely on. "Well done. You should be proud of yourself for that. You can talk now, if you wish."

"Thank you, thank you, sirs," I said, the words spilling out from my mouth almost as quickly as cum had exploded from my cock a few moments before. And nearly as out of control, too, as what I said next surprised even myself, but, God, I couldn't help but say it.

"I love you," I said, not fully able to judge the consequences of what was coming right out of my guts then, but realizing, astonishingly, how fitting it felt. "I love you. I love *both* of you, sirs."

And then, while I was still panting and trying to bring my blissful trembling under control, both the brothers became very, *very* still. Which was around about when I realized just how crazy I was being.

"Sorry, sirs," I whispered. "I didn't mean to say that. It was stupid and not true, of course. Why would it be? It was sex speaking, that's all. Just forget it. Please, sirs?"

I wasn't sure if my gabbling was making things any better and, besides, I couldn't imagine I was at my finest trying to explain myself whilst tied to a desk and splattered with cum. Mark must have thought the same as he shushed me with a mere click of his fingers.

"Shut up," he said, not looking at me, even though I was turning my head back and forth to try to follow his sudden pacing gait across my office floor. "Johnny, untie him so he can get dressed. Then we can leave."

"Mark, wait," Johnny said quietly, his fingers cool against my arm. "Don't you think there's more for us to say than that now?"

Mark cursed under his breath and banged his fist down on the desk, rather too near my arse than I would have liked, but there was no way I dared to object. Not when he was frowning and looking as if he'd love nothing more than to cut out my tongue and use it to stir his morning coffee. Hell, I'd do that for him myself, as long as it could be left in my mouth where it was meant to be. He only had to ask. Mark was in no mood for coffee, though.

"That's the second time you've questioned me where Liam is concerned, *little* brother," he said, spitting out the words as if they were bullets. Thank God, they weren't. "When did this change suddenly happen? And when will you get it into your head that

what's good for you, what's good for us all, is to let *me* do the thinking?"

"For God's sake," Johnny spat back, his sudden anger making me jump. Hell, I'd never seen him angry before. I was quite impressed. "Yes, you do the thinking, and that's how our business runs. But to make the right decisions, you need to understand all the facts and deal with them. You're not even *trying* to do that, are you?"

The two brothers faced off over my prostrate body, panting hard and glaring at each other as if each were the other's own worst enemy. This wasn't my idea of pillow talk, not that any of us were big fans of that anyway. Even so, I had to do something to break the tension before they got out any other concealed weapons, apart from their cocks, and it had to be fast.

"Please," I began with a stutter, "please, sirs, would you both find it easier if I got up?"

The twins stared down at me as if they'd forgotten I was there entirely. My mother always said that if I learned to blend into the background a bit more, I'd be a happier and more fulfilled individual. Right now, she might have been right. This time, though, I got away with it, as Mark muttered something under his breath and gestured at Johnny to undo the ribbons round my wrists. Which was a good thing as my arms were definitely starting to feel the pressure.

It struck me then that if the three of us survived the next few minutes, let alone hours, we might be well advised to get some

professional advice about knots, not to mention how to do the whole role-play thing properly. I didn't have any prior experience of all this stuff, and I suspected the twins didn't either. Though, bloody hell, we were all of us enjoying it. No complaints there.

When I was free, I eased myself off the table, then I began quietly picking up my clothes and putting them back on, whilst the twins fastened their zippers and smoothed down their hair.

I could still feel the tension in the room, however, and glanced at Johnny. He shook his head ever so slightly and nodded at Mark. I knew exactly what he meant and he was right. Mark was in charge of both of us and, now Johnny had had his say, it was up to his brother to make any decisions. Any more gabbling from me wouldn't help.

Finally, Mark broke the silence.

"Alright," he said, "I'm not an unreasonable man. Perhaps the three of us do need to talk. As long as *I* do most of the talking and the two of *you* do most of the listening, okay?"

"Yes, sir," I said automatically, while Johnny waved his hand in what I imagined must be a gesture of agreement.

"Good," Mark said, his gaze fixing on mine as if he'd never let me go, and I could tell you that *definitely* felt weird. "Now, Liam, let's get this straight once and for all. I know what you said was nothing but sex talking and what you need to know is that the Delaneys don't do love, under any circumstances. But Johnny and I have been discussing you, and the upshot is he and I might want more than just sex from you."

I blinked at him.

"Oh," I said, my mind desperately scrambling for what this new addition to the conversation might mean, if it didn't mean the sappy stuff. "I see. Well, I'm not sure how capable I am of doing more with your...business activities, though, I suppose, I've not done too badly tonight, but if that's what you want, sirs, then I'll certainly give it a go. As long as you don't get my boss too heavily involved because she's straight as an arrow and, even though she's let you do a dodgy deal this once, I don't think you should ask her a second time. Sirs, please?"

There I went again, all words and no sense of self-preservation. Would I ever learn? Oh, I was really asking for trouble tonight. While Johnny merely blinked, Mark's expression clouded over and he grabbed me by the shirt collar and gave me a quick shake.

"Never," he said, "*never* let me hear you refer to our business as *dodgy dealings*, if you want to live a long life as a happy and healthy man. Understood?"

"Yes, sir, of course, sir. I'm sorry. Me and my mouth, eh."

"Yes," Mark said, closing his eyes briefly and letting me go. "You and your mouth. *But* it's not what we meant. Yes, you've done well tonight and we're grateful to you and Melissa, but our business ethic is not to use an amateur, however talented, after something has begun. There's a county full of professionals willing to jump to whatever demand we might make once they see we're serious."

I nodded. "Yes, sir."

"And in any case," Mark continued, "what we actually want from you, Liam, as my brother and I have discussed is...is..."

"Is walks along the beach, romantic dinners in town, and evenings spent in just talking," Johnny finished his brother's sentence when Mark didn't seem capable of doing it himself.

Even so, it made no sense. This town was at least thirty miles from a beach, and the Delaneys didn't seem the talking types, never mind romance.

"What?" I said stupidly. "Don't you like fucking me?"

"Oh, for God's sake," Mark said with a groan. "I tell you, Johnny, the boy is impossible. Sexier than hell, yes, but impossible. Maybe we should just forget it and stick to what we know best, which is fucking, not dating."

Mark began pacing around the office again as Johnny and I watched him. Finally, Johnny shrugged, grabbed the nearest chair and sat down, pulling me into his lap as he did so. The chair being positioned as it was, Mark had no option but to stop his pacing and came to an abrupt halt near my desk. There he brought his clenched fist crashing down upon it for a second time.

I hoped he hadn't cracked the wood too severely because I'd never hear the end of it from Melissa if he had.

"Please, sir," I said, making sure my eyes were cast down. Sitting on Johnny's lap meant I couldn't kneel, but I wanted Mark to know I felt like I was kneeling to him. Though, actually, I

always felt that, and was thoroughly enjoying it, too. "Please, Mr. Delaney sir, may I speak?"

Mark made a hissing noise through his teeth. If I'd dared to glance upward, I was sure he'd be glaring at me. "Why the hell should I allow it when whatever you say deliberately twists what I say and doesn't answer the question?"

That seemed unfair, but before I could reply, Johnny spoke.

"Give Liam a chance." His fingers were rubbing my neck in a way that made me shiver. "All we've done is fuck him. We haven't exactly made it clear that we might want anything else, have we? Anyway, you're not the easiest person to be with, Mark."

"Nonsense!" was his twin's reply. "I'm the least complicated man on the planet."

Johnny grunted at this and I felt the intake of air as Mark seemed set to respond. Before the brothers came near to blows again, I leapt in with my own words of wisdom, such as they were.

"Sorry for talking again, sirs," I said as quickly as possible, "but I hate to see you argue. And sorry for being stupid earlier. I hadn't realized you felt that way about how things might be, that's all. I was trying to make you see I could do more than just fucking by being helpful to your business deals, too. I didn't know you might want that yourselves. The not just fucking thing, I mean. Because, if so, then that's nice. Sirs."

As soon as I'd reached the end of the muddle I was obviously making of all this, I shut up. God, relationships could be

hell, even with one person. With two, they were hell frozen over. Twice.

However, it might actually have worked, whatever it was I was saying, as, even without looking up to check, I could feel the tension in the air ease down a notch or two. Now I'd probably get a bit of a slapping rather than having my balls cut off with my own scissors. If I was lucky anyway.

"Okay," said Johnny, cutting in before either Mark or I could upset the tentative standoff. "What I suggest, with Mark's permission, is this: let's date for six weeks and see how it works out. How does that sound?"

Mark harrumphed, an expression of emotional commitment I hoped I'd be allowed to get used to. Actually, it might have been a yes, but I didn't want to count on it. I shifted ever so slightly closer to Johnny, just in case it all started to kick off again at any point.

Mark cleared his throat. "Liam!"

"Yes, *sir*." I snapped to attention, even while remaining on Johnny's lap. God, I could be good sometimes.

"Are you listening?"

"Yes, sir!"

"In that case," Mark said with a growl and fixing me with the kind of stare that could kill at fifty paces, maybe less, "you will at no point during the next six weeks see my brother and me as anything less than hard-nosed, kick-ass gangsters with the ability

to wipe you or anyone else we choose out of existence or run you out of town if we decide to. Understood?"

"Yes, sir, of course, sir." That went without saying. I knew the Delaneys' reputation and I knew as well that they'd earned it. "Understood."

Something in Mark's face softened then and I thought he might actually be smiling, though, as he usually looked grim, it was hard to tell, frankly. Then he leaned forward and stroked my cheek and I could tell then that, yes, he *was* smiling, thank God.

"Okay, Liam," he said. "If that's understood, then let's give whatever the three of us have some kind of chance. It might not be what anyone would call normal, but neither Johnny nor I have ever let being different bother us. So, from now on, the three of us are dating."

"Yes, *sirs*," I said putting one hand on Johnny's crotch and reaching out with the other to undo Mark's shirt. "In that case, please may we start now?"

And I'm pleased to say the answer to that wasn't in the negative either. The next six weeks were going to be one hell of a ride because, whatever else I was, I was determined to be the best damn date they'd ever had in their lives.

Anne Brooke

Anne Brooke's fiction has been shortlisted for the Harry Bowling Novel Award, the Royal Literary Fund Awards, and the Asham Award for Women Writers. She has also twice been the winner of the DSJT Charitable Trust Open Poetry Competition. She loves reading dark and quirky crime novels and has a secret passion for bird watching and chocolate. Preferably at the same time. She once took a balloon flight in Egypt but spent most of the time screaming, and she hopes she never has to do it again.

To learn more about Anne and her writing, please visit her website at: <http://www.annebrooke.com>

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