

First Time
but will it be the last kill?
Unfinished Business of Love, Volume 5



by

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FIRST TIME,
But will it be the last kill?

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CHAPTER ONE

HE HELD THE GUN ON THE MAN. “Don’t move, motherfucker!” he growled. He forced the barrel of the gun against the back of the man’s head. *Damn, this is easy!* he thought, grinning.

“Take anything you want. Just don’t kill me,” the man begged as he held trembling hands above his head in surrender. He slowly reached into the inner pocket of his cashmere jacket. “See, I have money,” he said weakly. He held his wallet above his head.

“I don’t want your fucking money, Mister.” *Do you think this is about money?* the gunman wanted to ask, but he didn’t. He wasn’t ready to tell him just yet.

“Just don’t hurt me. I got money...cards. Here, take it.” The man waved the wallet over his head. The bills and cards fell out, then fluttered to the ground at their feet.

The gunman’s eyes widened as he noted the hundred-dollar bills lying on the ground. “I don’t need your money, shithead!” He felt his anger building. *Who did this guy think he was, anyway...Donald Trump or somebody? The man didn’t have enough money in the world to stop him tonight. Tonight, he was going to do what he’d been hired to do.* He glanced up and down the lonely alley. *Good, it’s empty,* he mused. He could do what he needed to do with nobody to see him do it. Trash pickup was early tomorrow morning, so most of the shop owners set their trash out tonight along the dark corridor. The ungodly smells and the scrambling squeaking rats emanating from the place would keep the curiosity seekers at bay.

“Pick up the money, Dickhead! And stuff it.” The gunman shoved the gun hard into the back of the man’s neck to encourage him. “I said, pick it up, motherfucker!”

The man grunted from the pain at his neck.

The gunman’s anger faded as the man knelt down.

The man picked up the money with a shaking hand and then tried to jam all the bills into his front pockets. Suddenly, he stopped cramming the grimy money into his pockets and froze in place.

The gunman heard the sound of water...piss dripping on a shoe.

“Oh, God!” the man exclaimed softly.

The gunman realized that he'd pissed himself and grinned. "Can't hold your water, huh, motherfucker?"

Ashamed and scared, the man started to sob. "Don't kill me, please. I got a wife and two kids. Don't shoot...please," he whimpered. He remained on his knees, crying.

This is getting interesting, the gunman thought as he smiled. He wondered how long it would take before the man was ready to do the "anything" he'd mentioned early on. "Don't move, motherfucker," he said, moving closer to the back of the man's head and cocking the trigger loudly near his ear. This was starting to feel good. He could feel the heady rush of adrenaline racing through his veins.

"Please!" the man begged, flinching at the sound of the cocked trigger. "Don't do this. What did I do to you?" he argued weakly.

"What do you think you did, motherfucker?" the gunman asked. He could smell the man's strong, fear-filled sweat. It was good for his needs. He was feeling good – powerful. Most of all, he was hard. For a while, he'd almost given up this would work. He needed to feel the power coursing through him to make his dick throb. He rubbed the gun against the man's neck where it joined the top of his spine. He could feel the man's body shaking against his gun. The smell of fresh piss permeated the air. "Turn around and face me, shithead. I want you to see it coming."

The man rushed to obey. He turned around and knelt obediently on the ground, facing the gunman.

The man looked like he was praying, the gunman thought, looking down at him. He aimed the gun at his forehead, closed one eye, and pretended to take a shot with the handgun. "Bang, bang, you're dead."

The man whimpered, then pissed his pants again. "What do you want?" he sobbed before adding in a whisper, "I'll do anything."

"Anything, huh?" The gunman repeated the man's words with a grin. He moved the gun across the man's forehead lightly. This was taking less time than he thought it would. He moved the gun slowly down the man's nose and stopped at his nostrils. "You did say you'd do anything, right?" the gunman asked with a sneer. One hand dropped down to the front to his pants and he rubbed at his dick through the fabric of his pants. Oh yeah, this was going to be a good one; he could feel it. "Suck this, shithead." He rested the barrel of the gun on the man's lower lip then pressed on it. "Open up, motherfucker and suck on this. If you do a good job, you won't die tonight."

OOO MOTHERFUCKER! That's right, suck on the barrel, the gunman thought, pushing the gun against the man's teeth with a loud click. He held the man's head with one hand and forced the gun into his mouth with the other. The man's frightened eyes stared up at him with a silent plea and then his hands joined the gunman's hand as they lay on top of the gun. The man helped the gunman move the gun in and out of his own mouth in a rhythm that suited the gunman. The gunman watched the man's lips surround the inch and half diameter of the barrel and then his lips moved along the length. He tried to swallow the barrel and then released it. He closed his eyes, imagining what the man's mouth would feel like on his pecker. He released his hold on the man's head to unzip his pants and stick a hand inside his fly to play with himself. He opened an eye to make sure

the man didn't try anything and found the man eyeing his ballooning fly with wide, silent eyes. "You wanna see what I got for you, motherfucker?"

The man nodded slowly as his mouth moved along the weapon's length, measuring it with his lips, then lapping at it with his tongue. One of the man's hands moved down until it reached his own fly. He rubbed his crotch with his hand.

The gunman grinned when he noticed the pressure against the man's fly. "So much for the wife and kiddies, shithead. Looks like I found me a man that likes the same thing I do. Let's get to it." He pulled the zipper of his pants the rest of the way down and reached in to release his other weapon. The one-eyed monster popped out of his fly and stood facing the man. The gunman grasped his magenta-colored knob and rubbed it. He moved his hand back and forth over the length of it and sighed with pleasure, then flicked a drop of pre-jism at the man. "Wanna taste, shithead?"

The size and hardness of it grabbed the man's attention. He stopped tonguing the gun. *God, it's big*, he thought. *How am I gonna suck it without choking?* He nodded as his eyes measured the gunman's growing length. His hand moved a little faster on his own member. He was getting hard thinking about the taste of the gunman.

The gunman suddenly yanked the gun out of his mouth with a hard jerk that brought water to the man's eyes as he felt the gun catch the corner of his lip. The man's eyes widened with fear as his tongue and then a finger tested the injured area to see if it was bleeding. It was.

"Open your fucking mouth and suck my dick like your life depends on it," the gunman hissed, aiming the gun at the man's head and cocking the trigger. "Don't use your teeth, motherfucker, or I'll do it." He pushed the gun against the man's forehead as a reminder that he still had the power. The gunman watched as the man nodded and then licked at the blood in the corner of his mouth. He inhaled deeply and guided his throbbing dick into the man's mouth.

Fuck! His mouth feels good, the gunman thought as he pushed his one-eyed monster into the inviting warmth. He pulled out of the man's mouth and then quickly thrust forward with his hips again. He held the man's head steady, ignoring his gag reflex. He pushed until he could feel the back of the man's throat. It was soft and warm. The man tightened his lips around his dick. *Oh, shit! It's such a tight, deep hole*. His mouth was so tight, but he wanted the other hole to cum home to. He pulled out altogether. His dick jutted straight out like a laser beam targeting the man.

The gunman saw disappointment flash across the man's face when he removed his dick. *So he likes sucking cock*, the gunman thought with a smirk. *He oughta like this even better*, the gunman mused, pulling on his knob to make it harder. "Pull your pants down, motherfucker...all the way down, then get on your stomach and lift your ass up."

The gunman watched the man unbuckle his belt and then unzip his pants. He shimmied his hips until the pants dropped down. The bulging lump at his fly prevented the man's slacks from dropping to the ground.

"What's that, shithead?" the gunman asked, pointing to his erection with the gun.

The man shrugged and reached down to push the pants over his arousal until the barrel of the gun prevented him from pushing them further.

"I said, what's that?" The barrel of the gun poked at the man's hard-on.

“You know,” the man said, feeling more comfortable with the gunman. His hand boldly caressed the length of his cock through his purple silk boxers.

“Yeah, but I wanna hear you say it, shithead.” The gunman exhaled, watching the hand move up and down on the man’s dick. He wanted to reach out and feel the weight of the man’s balls in his hand. “Pull down your drawers too. Get on your fucking knees,” he ordered, waving the gun in front of the man. He watched as the man slowly pulled down his boxers as he maintained eye contact with him during the disrobing. The man’s dick was semi-hard, but if he kept playing with it, his cock looked sizable. The gunman felt his cock harden when he watched the man’s cheeks wiggle in front of him as he knelt down and then bent over. His naked ass presented a good target. The gunman spit on his dick as he drew closer.

The man reached up to grease his butt with spit and then opened his ass wider. His asshole looked puckered and pink.

It made the gunman’s one-eyed monster jerk in his hand. One hard shove, the gunman was up to his balls in ass. *Sweet Jesus, it’s tighter than the man’s mouth.* If he didn’t watch it, he was gonna cum before he wanted. The gunman pulled out to the tip of his dick, then rammed his way back into the man’s dark tunnel. He barely stifled a scream of delight. The man’s asshole felt so tight and so good. Fuck his mouth. *This is much better,* the gunman thought as he slammed into the warm pathway again. The man grunted when he pulled out and then slammed into him again. He could feel the heat building up in his loins. His dick was getting harder, which meant he was ready to cum, but he held off, reaching around the man’s waist. He touched the man’s hardness. “So you like this too, don’t you, motherfucker?” he whispered in the man’s ear.

The man groaned in answer as the gunman stroked his red knob, then ran a hand under his balls, cupping them. “Yes,” he gasped as the stroking continued on his aroused organ.

The gunman grinned. He still could get it up under the right circumstances. His own dick hardened a final time as he slammed into the man’s ass with more force than the first few times. His dick started jerking as he released a steady stream in the man’s ass. He howled his pleasure. “Fuck! Ooo fuck me, motherfucker!”

He buried his cum deep inside the man’s hairy shit tube while the man sprayed the ground with his jism. He frowned as he looked down at the man’s flabby ass jiggling under the street lamp with his dick buried deep inside. He suddenly realized he’d violated his own rules. *Never get close enough to your victim for them to see your face. Never, ever fuck one.* Christ, he shouldn’t have done this tonight. He glanced around the alleyway. At least nobody but the rats and stray alley cats saw them.

“Say hello to my little buddy, motherfucker!” the gunman remarked as he pressed the gun into the man’s right temple and pulled the trigger. He knew just where to shoot to do the least damage to the man’s face but still deliver a lethal shot. With this small caliber, the bullet would roam around inside the man’s brain, ripping tunnels through it. The bullet would kill him but leave no exit wound. The side of his face would only have a small entry wound.

He buried his dick inside the man’s ass as he felt the life draining out of him. He’d always wondered what it would be like to screw somebody as they died. He couldn’t believe it, but he was

hard again. He guided the man's deadweight onto his belly and propped his hands and arms under him to lift his ass up. He leaned over the dead man's back and drove his dick deep inside the still warm body. The man's dead ass was making rumbling and flapping sounds as air escaped, but he plugged it repeatedly with his dick.

This was a routine murder-for-hire. The man's lover didn't like him playing around on the side. At least, that was what she told him when she'd hired him. Something about the woman's reaction when he told her that her man was fucking anything with a hole didn't ring true. She didn't react with surprise when she learned what her man was doing. Did she already know what his sexual orientation was and was confirming it by using him to sniff out her man's bed partners? Hell, he didn't care how she used the information or who the victim was. This new job paid him well. He'd never have to work again.

The gunman looked at his watch, then down at the half-naked man and sighed. He'd never done anything like this before. He frowned as he felt the pressure of his briefs rubbing against his dick. He was hard again. It was almost dawn. He needed to get out of here before the trash collectors arrived and somebody discovered the body. Every time he started to leave, he got hard thinking about what he had just done and couldn't leave the man alone. It'd been a while between sex partners. He was grateful to find a willing partner. In his line of work, he couldn't maintain a normal relationship for long. He never knew when he'd get a call that might take him clear across the country for a day, a month, or a year. His absences depended on who the victim was and how much time he needed to research the victim's habits. He'd screwed the dead man in every way imaginable and he still couldn't get enough of him.

"One more time wouldn't hurt," he muttered, unzipping his fly. Which would be better this time? In his mouth, ass, or under his armpit? The gunman giggled at his options and decided to try another one that took him into dawn's second light. He realized he'd better go before he heard the sounds of trashcans banging against each other. "See ya later, man," he muttered, giving the man's balls a hard squeeze. "You were good...real good." He considered giving the man a goodbye kiss on the lips but decided that might get him excited again, so he simply stood staring down at the man, unable to leave.

The dead man was lying on his back, naked from the waist down except for his black shoes and socks. His dick was standing straight up and saluting the world with a magnificent hard-on. His legs were firm, the gunman thought, but not world-class muscular. His thighs and calf muscles needed a little work. He knew the perfect gym for the man to use too. The gym he had in mind was a cheap, no-frills place where nobody bothered you once you paid your locker fee. Serious weight lifters and boxers went there to work out. He used it because they didn't keep records. He needed a place to go to keep in shape.

In his line of work, he never knew when he might have to do a job that needed strong hands. He sighed. Strangulation was hard on your back and shoulder muscles if you weren't in shape. It looked like the man was starting to get a little paunch around his waist, but it didn't take away from his handsome looks. The gunman looked at that part of the man's belly, peeking through his formerly white shirt.

The gunman frowned and wondered if he should re-dress the man or leave him in his semi-nude glory. He decided to re-dress the man. He felt he owed him that much for all the pleasure he'd given him. He walked back to the middle of the alley to search for the man's navy blue jacket, gray slacks, and dark purple silk boxers. He found them where the man dropped them, hours ago. It was hard trying to pull the boxers and then the man's slacks over the stiff dick, but the gunman managed. Zipping up the pants was another problem that he finally resolved by forcing the swollen cock between the man's thighs, using them as weights to hold it down as he zipped the fly.

"There, shithead, I'm all done," he muttered softly, taking one last look at his lover. He shrugged and stuck a hand in his pocket, jingling his change. *I'm gonna be a half mil richer too!* he mused, whistling softly as he walked out of the alleyway.

CHAPTER TWO

DEVIN EYED THE CHUBBY-FACED, BROWN-SKINNED BOY of twelve as they sat in her kitchen. She was helping him with one of those math problems that measured time, distance, and workload. She always hated this math problem as much as the ones that showed you figures in 3D and you were expected to figure out what the shape would look like twisted inside out or upside down. “Kenny, I’ve got a headache looking at this one. You tell me how to do it.”

Kenny frowned, grunted, and then rested his head against an arm as it lay outstretched across the kitchen table. “Humph! You said you ‘member this from when you my age, Miss Dee. You gotta help me with this... crap.” He started to cuss and say “this shit,” but he knew she wouldn’t like it. He wouldn’t like what happened next. He’d be on punishment for weeks whenever he came over to see her. That meant no video games, no TV, and no using the internet or the cell phone Miss Dee had bought him. “My math teacher already don’t like me. If I don’t do this, he gonna really hate me now.”

Devin fluffed her dreadlocks with tired hands. The kid was right; she should be better at this by now. “Yeah, well, he’s not going to hate you, Kiddo. You just tell him you don’t understand the problem.”

“You the grown-up, Miss Dee. You supposed to know the answers to these cuz you old enough to know ‘em.”

“Yeah, yeah, help me with the dishes, Wise-guy.” Devin grinned at her charge. She rose from the table and gathered the plates they’d used for an early morning meal. She noticed he hadn’t drunk all of his milk and pointed to his half-full glass. “Hey, Kenny, drink the rest of your milk before you and your math problems drive me crazy.”

“Humph, my teacher says you can’t drive anybody crazy unless they already there. Anyway, I hate milk. I only drink it cuz you buy it ‘n say I gotta drink it.”

Kenny played with the rim of his glass, running clumsy fingers around the edge and eventually knocking the glass over. He watched in horror as the glass fell over and broke. Now glass shards mingled with fresh milk covered the kitchen floor area near the table. Kenny’s lower lip trembled and he covered his head with his arms. “You ain’t gonna hit me, are you, Miss Dee?” he whispered, seeing the angry look in her eyes. He’d never broken anything in her house before, so he didn’t know if she’d beat him like his mama and her boyfriends did when he misbehaved.

Devin walked around the table. She carefully avoided broken glass and spilled milk to squat down in front of the boy she had grown to love over the past two years. She reached out to stroke

his hair. “Kenny, Honey, don’t you know by now that everybody makes mistakes. I don’t care about the broken glass or the spilled milk. I care about you. Kiddo, I’d never hurt you. I love you too much for that. I’m not your mama.”

“You could be if you wanted to be, Miss Dee. The kids at the home say I should ask how come you ain’t my mama. Don’t you wanna be my mama no more?” Kenny whined.

Devin studied alert, dark brown eyes and sighed. “Kenny, we’ve talked about this before. Yes, I wanna do it, but I also wanna be sure this new job isn’t dangerous for me.”

Kenny rolled his eyes upward and then groaned dramatically. “How long is that gonna take before you know it ain’t dangerous, Miss Dee?”

Devin patted Kenny’s knee and then squeezed a chubby shoulder. “Let’s give it another month or two, okay?” she remarked before they cleaned up the broken glass and spilled milk together and then she drove him to school. She even had time to speak with his math teacher, offering an explanation for his incomplete work but promising to help him finish it over the upcoming weekend. That task finished, she strode out of Kenny’s school just in time to feel the cell phone in her jacket pocket vibrate against her pocket watch, making a tinkling sound.



“LIEUTENANT, WHAT DO YOU THINK HAPPENED TO THE GUY?” one of two detectives asked, watching the boss walk the crime scene and then stop to study the chalk outline of the body’s position.

“I’ll be damned if I know,” Lieutenant Amanda Graham remarked softly as she shrugged. The lieutenant stood up and shook her head sadly. “All we know is that some rich guy died here.” She sighed. “Did you find any witnesses?”

“Look around, Lieutenant. Do you think anybody would admit to being here at two in the morning?” the second detective replied in a tone filled with irritation. She spread her arms wide to include the entire alley that reeked of stale garbage.

The lieutenant groaned, thinking how there was no need for sarcasm today. “Chill out, Jones, I know you’re frustrated, but you aren’t doing the dead guy a favor if you can’t think things through because you’re pissed.”

“Yes, Ma’am!” Detective Devin Jones said, clicking her heels and giving the lieutenant a mock salute.

Lieutenant Amanda Graham rolled her eyes skyward and then sighed heavily. She didn’t say anything to her detective. Her detectives had a right to be upset, the way the brass was on this case like stink on shit. Her people had no witnesses. They had no motive for the murder either. They had no nothing! They were hanging on to the edge of the cliff by their fingertips. A good wind or a tiny shove would blow them all over. The mayor wanted this case over yesterday since the dead man was a major contributor to his reelection campaign. And the brass; well, the brass wanted a murderer caught. They didn’t care whether she and her men pinned the deed on some homeless

guy sleeping in the alley or the dead man's innocent relatives. They wanted an arrest. Just arrest somebody, anybody — it didn't matter. Get the perp.

Orders came from headquarters to solve the case soon, like yesterday soon. Her captain hinted strongly that he was willing to transfer her to traffic duty or the cold case unit if they didn't find the perp by the end of the week. He wanted to keep his job, so it didn't matter what happened to her if the case wasn't resolved quickly.

"Jones, take Thornton with you and start canvassing the neighborhood," Amanda ordered, watching her detective blow off steam for a few minutes.

Devin started to walk over to her partner. He was standing about twenty feet away with his hands in his pockets as he spoke with one of the crime scene investigators. Her lieutenant's voice stopped her and she turned around.

"One more thing, Jones. CSU said the back of his shirt and his boxers were dirty. His jacket and pants were clean." Amanda stroked her chin and a speculative gleam came into her eyes when she looked around the alleyway. "Something tells me that he undressed here for some reason."

"Maybe he had to take a piss?" Detective Jones replied.

Amanda frowned. "Why would taking a piss get his shirt and his drawers dirty? Don't guys just unzip, whip it out, piss, shake it, and then re-zip?"

Devin nodded. "Yeah, I see what you mean."

Amanda squinted in thought for a moment. "Check to see whether this is a spot people use for sex, Detective Jones."

Devin raised an eyebrow as she glanced around the deserted alley. "It's nasty and stinks like shit back here, LT. Why would anybody come back here to do it?"

"Exactly, Jones, nobody would. Whoever did our guy knew they wouldn't be disturbed for hours."

Devin thought about her lieutenant's words for a moment. She retraced her steps until she stood in front of the lieutenant. She nodded, grinning. "You're good, LT. I wouldn't have thought about it that way until you mentioned it. Do you think a pimp, a jealous lover or something killed our guy?"

Amanda frowned and rubbed her stomach. "I don't know yet, Jones. We don't have enough information to speculate. That's why I need you and Thornton to canvass the neighborhood."

Devin watched Amanda try to soothe her tummy and hid a grin. She knew the lieutenant from her days at the academy. Even back then, she used to rub her stomach when she was nervous or on to something. She'd love to ask her lieutenant what else did she find out from the ME's office, but she could wait until the lieutenant gave her a copy of their preliminary findings. "So what you think happened here, Mandy?" she asked softly, staring at her boss' hand as it moved across her belly. Her eyes returned to her lieutenant's face.

Amanda sighed. "I think somebody didn't like this guy and killed him here." She frowned. "The killer used a small caliber gun and got real close and personal." She closed her eyes. *The murder read almost like the killer wanted to damage his brain but not his face*, she mused silently. *Did that make murder personal?* she wondered but didn't express aloud.

Devin nodded. “Well, we know it’s not a robbery because we found a ten-thousand-dollar Rolex, a diamond pinky ring, credit cards, and about five thousand in cash on the vic. The lab guys found a couple of hundred-dollar bills lying over there.” She pointed to the middle of the alley near a dull street lamp. “No casings, so the killer knew enough to take the bullet casing.”

Amanda sighed. “The ME said they found some fluid mixed with a little blood on his penis, in his mouth, and in his ass. They’re running some tests to determine what it is.”

“Care to speculate, Mandy? Even though he had a wife, bet I can guess what the stuff is. He probably wanted a little something, something on the side. You know what I mean, don’t you?” Devin responded with a knowing wink and a shake of her hips. She wanted Amanda to say, “But the guy had a wife, so how could that be cum stains and blood in his asshole and his mouth?”

Most of all, she wanted Mandy Graham to recall that night fifteen years ago when she was ready to quit the academy and they’d spent a night loving each other. Their training instructors were being bastards to them and the other five female recruits, hoping they’d quit. It was a wonderful night. Amanda was one of the most responsive women she’d ever loved. But that was after a bottle of wine and a little encouragement. The next morning, Amanda made it clear she wanted a career in the department, period. She wanted to make lieutenant before she reached forty. She said thirty-five, if possible. After that, she saw captain bars on the horizon. She claimed she always dated men and that she was a committed heterosexual except for the one night when she turned to a friend for comfort.

After that night, Amanda treated her as though she didn’t exist, looking through her or around her when she wasn’t busy ignoring her greetings. By the time they graduated the academy, it was clear to Devin that Amanda wasn’t interested in any kind of relationship with her or any other female. Later on, whenever she’d hear about Amanda Graham’s latest exploits in her journey up the department’s career ladder, Devin wondered if Mandy ever thought about that night.

Today, Devin simply sighed as Lieutenant Amanda Graham stared at her steadily with cool eyes.

Amanda finally made a comment. “Don’t go there, Dev. We settled all that years ago. You know my feelings. They haven’t changed.” She sighed heavily with the weight of her lie. “I know you haven’t been in my squad long. You’re probably used to a different management style than I have, but I am your boss, Detective Jones. Don’t you forget that.”

Devin frowned as she studied Amanda’s face, searching for a sign that she was kidding. When Amanda continued to glare at her, she shrugged. “Yes, Ma’am, I forgot that...er, sorry.” She exhaled loudly when she realized that Amanda was right for calling her on her unprofessional remarks. “It won’t happen again, LT.” She glanced at her watch. “Thornton and I have some canvassing to do. Do you want me to call you when we finish?”

Amanda stopped glaring at Devin and cleared her throat. “Yes, that’d be nice, Detective Jones. Let me know before you visit the wife too.” She watched Devin’s long strides eat up the alley’s sidewalk in seconds.

Would Devin ever forget what happened between them? Would she? Fifteen years is a long time to remember an affair...a one-night stand. She sighed and tried to convince herself the

comfort she'd gotten from Devin Jones wasn't good. Christ, in the fifteen years since their affair...one-night stand, she hadn't found anyone that compared with the long-legged woman with the tender ways. Not that she was looking for a relationship with anyone, mind you. If she closed her eyes, she could still picture the scene between her and Devin Jones. It was the wrong time...wrong place.

She shook her head to clear it of such thoughts. The strong odor of urine permeating her nostrils helped. She sighed and then muttered, "There's nothing more I can do out here. It's time to let my squad do its work while I run their paperwork through the department's maze."



“COME ON, THORNTON. Let's go for a walk in Mr. Roger's neighborhood,” Devin joked and smiled at her partner, Warren Thornton, who'd just finished speaking with one of the crime scene investigators.

Detectives Jones and Thornton spent the better part of the day and into the next morning canvassing the neighborhood. They interviewed anybody whose apartment faced the alley and then they talked to the night people. The night people included nurses, doctors, office cleaners, maintenance staff, sanitation and transit workers, bus drivers, bartenders, pimps, prostitutes, junkies, albies, the homeless. It also included other cops that might have noticed something slightly odd on the night of the Pineborough murder. They even checked with Con-Ed and the phone companies to see if they had any work crews in the area that night.

“What a waste of time. Nothing turned up—a big, fat zero,” Detective Jones muttered wearily, sipping another cup of foul-tasting stationhouse coffee. She limped slightly as she moved from the coffeemaker to her ugly metal desk

The two days she and Warren spent on field interviews were a wasted effort. A cop never knew what might turn up if she looked under enough rocks and swept away enough layers of dirt. She sighed. That was the interesting thing about police work. You never knew from one day to the next what could happen. She used to think only the narcotics unit was like that...where you were always playing cop on the sly. With the narc unit, you did a little bit of this and plenty of that to convince somebody to show you a secret stash, introduce you to a supplier, tell you the location of the latest shipment...or whatever. No two days were the same. You were always thinking on your feet and suspicious of everybody. You had to be if you wanted to stay alive and a step ahead of the dealers and their friends.

As much as she loved undercover work, it scared her when she realized that she was becoming what she hated in other cops. She was becoming paranoid, cynical, and hard. Even her girlfriends avoided her. She didn't have a special woman. She frowned, thinking about her last memories of her work in the narcotics unit. Getting her cover blown was embarrassing and scary. She slid a hand down to her knee to rub the scar. Being shot topped her list of things never, ever to try again. She frowned as she sipped more of the stationhouse brew.

Her undercover work uncovered a mole in the department. Her information busted a dirty cop,

so her injuries weren't entirely for nothing... still, she'd feel better without the scars. Her lieutenant submitted her name for a medal that she didn't get, but she did get an offer from Captain Ortega to work homicide. The rehabilitation on her knee took several months and gave her a chance to think about her career in the department. She had several options available to her.

With her injury and her years in the department, she could retire on three-quarters of her salary if she wanted. She'd still be young enough to take on a second career. She could go back to school and earn that degree as she was always threatening to do. Or she could become an official parent to "Big K," Kenneth Sands, the troubled kid she'd almost busted for selling drugs two years ago. According to his counselors, Kenneth spent so much time at her house, they suggested she make it official. Either make the big leap to adopt him or become his foster parent. Devin couldn't decide between foster parenting or adopting Kenny. She was leaning toward adoption. With her job, she worried if something happened to her, who would care for him until he reached eighteen?

She saw him nearly every night to help him with his homework if her caseload allowed it. She loved Kenny, even though he was entering that uncertain period between adolescence and becoming an adult. He'd just turned twelve last month. He was going through some typical teenage dramas in school. Do my friends like me? Am I ever gonna get a girlfriend? School is stupid. Why do I have to go to school? Why is my math teacher always picking on me? How come I can't stay up later? Devin grinned at Kenny's list of questions. There were more, but she couldn't remember all of them. The "How come I can't stay with you all the time" question had her thinking about adoption versus fostering. She realized it didn't make sense to put off adopting Kenny. She had the time, space, and the money to support him. Most of all, she loved Kenny. She rubbed eyes tired from straining to read her notes on the Pineborough case. She was signing those papers tomorrow and calling his counselors with the news.

As far as her retirement plan went, she was glad that she decided to change the scenery while she considered her choices. That was one of the reasons she'd accepted Ortega's offer to work in robbery homicide. She still wasn't sure what else encouraged her to accept the change. Was it the chance to see Amanda every day or that a homicide cop was less likely to be in the middle of a gun battle that helped her decide? It didn't matter, did it? She was here in robbery homicide and she enjoyed the work. She discovered the same abilities she used to read a dealer's body language served her well in this unit too. She was a persistent cuss who liked to stay on a case until she resolved it. This Pineborough case wasn't going to be one of the easy ones. She could feel it in the aching knee she rubbed.



DETEKTIVE JONES FROWNED AGAIN as she and Warren conferred over their logbooks and notes. They were on their third...or was it their fourth mug of stationhouse coffee of this morning. She was too tired to care right now. She wiggled her nose and nearly spit out the last sip of coffee into the dull, gray metal wastebasket next to her desk. She grabbed a paper napkin and

used it to wipe at the bad taste in her mouth. “Goddamn, that’s bad. Is it just me or is this coffee getting worse, Warren?”

“It’s you, Detective Jones,” Detective Warren Thornton said in a high-pitched imitation of a woman’s voice as he grinned at Devin. “It’s all you, Honey,” he added, wiggling his eyebrows and giving her an exaggerated wink. He was repeating one of the prostitute’s phrases. They met her during their field interviews when they canvassed the neighborhood looking for witnesses. The cute hooker found Devin attractive enough to invite her home.

The hooker couldn’t offer anything to the case because she didn’t use the alley on garbage night. When Devin asked her about the alleyway, she wrinkled her nose in disgust. “That place is too nasty. I’d never go back there to do my business. The rats are this big.” She held her hands about twelve inches apart as she described the rats to Devin. She had directed her entire conversation to Devin and ignored him. He found the little hussy’s lack of protocol irritating to say the least since he considered himself a ladies’ man. Besides, he’d made detective two weeks earlier than Devin had. He should be the lead detective interviewing all the witnesses.

Devin covered a yawn. “Ha, ha, that’s funny, Warren. I’m cracking up. You know I’m not her type and she’s not mine.”

“Ah, but you could be in for a hot night of fun. The way you’ve been holding on to your stuff, it’s a wonder that it hasn’t shriveled up and blown away in a good wind. I say, use it all up while you’re still young. That way, you’ll have no regrets when you’re stretched out in that coffin.”

“Christ, Warren! Haven’t you heard of HIV or STDs? You get that from unprotected sex with somebody who has it or with a street hooker like What’s-her-name.”

Warren ran a finger down his notes. “Her name is Jeanine Tompkins. I have her address, in case you’re interested.” He stopped joking around to study Devin’s tired face. “Have you talked to her yet, Dev?”

Devin pretended a sudden interest in her mug of cold, bitter-tasting coffee. She stared moodily into the mug and sighed. “No, and I’m not going to either. Let it be, Warren, just let it be. I shouldn’t have told you about us. Fifteen years is a long time for anybody to yearn for a woman. Anyway, she looks and acts straight as an arrow to me.”

“Well, I think you ought to talk to her.”

“Yeah, well, I didn’t ask for your opinion of my love life, Detective. Did I?” Devin hissed, ending the conversation. Her hand fluffed short dreadlocks while her face screwed up, deep in thought. She missed seeing the lieutenant enter the squad room and stare at her two detectives.

Amanda noted the slumped shoulders of one detective and the rumpled day-old clothes of the other before she slipped into her office. She was hoping her two best detectives would turn up a witness in the Pineborough case. Maybe they did, she thought, studying them through the dirty gray blinds that surrounded two walls of her institutional green office. Judging by their body language, she doubted if they’d uncovered anything, but she was going to ask. She buzzed her PAA, Francine McDonald, on the ancient intercom in her office that worked when it felt like it.

“Franny, ask Jones and Thornton to come in,” Amanda said, twisting the plastic rod to close the blinds in her office. She was going to need a little privacy for this discussion. Two minutes

later, she heard a knock on her door. “Come.”

“You wanted to see us, LT?” Warren asked at the doorway to Amanda’s office.

Amanda looked up from her paperwork and frowned at Detective Thornton. “Yes, I did, Detective Thornton. My request was for both of you. Where’s your partner?”

“She was right behind me when I left my desk a second ago, LT.” His tall, broad frame perfectly covered Devin. When he turned around to look, Devin stood a few feet behind him with a hand in her jacket pocket. “Ah, there you are, Dev. LT was just asking about you.”

“Yeah, so I heard.” Devin glanced at Amanda. Their eyes met briefly, then her eyes slid to the wall of certificates and citations behind Amanda’s head. She hated these supervisory conferences. She felt uncomfortable from the minute she set foot in Amanda’s office until her feet were moving in the opposite direction out the door. She never knew where to look and how to act in front of her. If Amanda invited her to sit, she felt more comfortable standing. If Amanda didn’t mention seating arrangements at all, Devin sat where she could study her unnoticed for a few minutes while Warren did all the talking. He did the talking since he was smoother, friendlier, and more the lieutenant’s type.

“Come in, Detective Jones, and join the party,” Amanda said without a smile touching her lips. The humor didn’t reach her eyes either. *This is some party*, she thought glumly. Ortega implied her transfer out of homicide was imminent if she didn’t find a murder suspect in three days. Her two best detectives looked dead on their feet. And they didn’t have suspect number one. There was nothing to celebrate if Warren Thornton’s usually fun-loving manner had turned into a quiet politeness today. She regarded his low-key demeanor as a mark of the case’s impossible-to-solve status.

As for Detective Devin Jones, she expected her annoyingly sarcastic manner. She didn’t understand the woman’s attitude. Devin Jones was good at reading suspects. While she possessed an uncanny ability to anticipate the next move they’d make, her attitude toward authority sucked. She never said much during the case conferences. She allowed her partner, Warren Thornton, to do all the talking. That annoyed her since she prided herself in knowing how her detectives viewed a case and what methods they used to solve it. Knowing that kind of information allowed her to counsel her people when they came to her for advice. Everyone came to her but Devin Jones, who never asked her for anything.

Amanda sighed as she studied her two detectives. Today wasn’t the day and she wasn’t the one to mess with. “Where are we on the Pineborough case?”

Warren Thornton pulled a notebook out of his pocket as he sat down in the chair, while Devin Jones leaned against the far wall next to the door with her arms folded across her chest, watching her. “We interviewed ah...er...” His voice faded when he spotted the lieutenant signaling him to stop speaking.

“Thank you, Detective Thornton. Today, I want to hear from the lead detective in charge of the case. I’d appreciate it if you’d wait outside while I speak with your partner for a minute.”

“Sure, LT.” Warren Thornton rose, turned to the door, and then caught Devin’s eye and winked. “Tell her what we talked about, Dev,” he remarked, keeping his voice low as he exited.

Amanda remained seated as her eyes followed Thornton's progress leaving her office. She turned hard eyes on Devin. "Detective Jones, please take a seat so we can get this over with." She pointed to a chair directly in front of her desk.

Devin frowned and then moved to stand in front of Amanda's desk. "That's all right, LT. I prefer to remain standing."

Amanda sighed as she stared up into a sullen face with irritated eyes. "And I'd prefer it if you sat, Detective." When Devin still didn't settle into the chair, she added sternly, "That's not a request, Detective. That's an order!" She rose from her desk chair and came around to confront her detective.

Devin sighed heavily, then glared at her boss. "What the hell do you want from me, Lieutenant Graham?"

Amanda raised a finger to wag it under the tall detective's nose. "Number one, I want you to sit down instead of looming over me like you're a criminal looking to do me harm! Number two, give me a report on the Pineborough case that I can give the brass to keep them off my ass for the next few days. Number three, I'm riding with you and your partner to interview Lester Pineborough's widow. If I think it's necessary, I'll conduct the interview while you take notes. Is that clear, Detective Jones?" She studied the detective, noting how a glint of anger flashed in her eyes, but she still said nothing.

Devin issued a casual shrug before saying something she knew would set Amanda's teeth on edge and upset her belly as well. "Would you like me to salute you now or later, Ma'am?"

Amanda's eyes narrowed. Her hands flexed open, then balled into fists at her side. She wanted to feel her fist smash against her detective's insubordinate mouth right now. How did Devin do it? They hadn't been in the same room for longer than two minutes and they were at each other's throats. "What I want is for you to treat me with respect, Detective Jones! This brings us to number four. I don't know how you were used to doing things in your old unit, but you aren't there anymore. When you're the primary on your cases, I'll expect you to take the lead in our case conferences."

"Jesus!" Devin muttered softly, then groaned and rolled her eyes skyward. She made an exaggerated show of checking the time on her pocket watch. "How many more of your rules are there, Lieutenant?"

Amanda was ready to respond with a curse until she realized this was exactly what Devin wanted. Her eyes lit up when she spotted the unique silver watch and held a hand out. "May I see that?"

Devin bounced the watch in her palm, debating whether to honor Amanda's request. Her thumb smoothed across the face of the watch. What could it hurt? She unclipped the long silver chain and dropped it into her pocket. She plopped the watch into Amanda's hand. "It was my grandfather's watch, so be careful with it."

Amanda gingerly touched the lid and then pressed the tiny button on the side. She watched the lid flip up. The watch broke into a song. "It's beautiful." She frowned at the watch resting in her hand and then held it to an ear. "What's the song that it's playing?"

Devin shrugged. “My father told me that my grandmother, whose name was Irene, bought the watch for my grandfather. She said she wanted him to think about her when he was on the road. He worked as a Pullman porter for about fifty years. I think the song is ‘Goodnight, Irene.’”

“That’s a wonderful story. Are your grandparents still alive?” Amanda asked, walking over to her desk and picking up her glasses to read the inscription inside the lid. “To Walter, the love of my life, think of me when you wear it,” she recited aloud. She ran a finger over the inscription and sighed. “How long were they married?”

“Sixty-two years. He died four years ago. My grandmother died six months later. Our family doctor said she died of a heart attack, but I think she died of a broken heart. I don’t think she could bear to live without my grandfather.” Devin caught the surprised look in Amanda’s eyes. “It makes sense, don’t you think? I can understand missing somebody you loved for sixty-two years so much, you’d die rather than live without them.”

When Devin held her hand out for the watch, Amanda shook her head no. She put her glasses down, then walked around her desk. She stood in front of Devin for the second time this morning. This time, she wasn’t angry, just more informed about the woman standing uncomfortably in front of her. She closed the watch’s cover, then patted Devin’s pants leg, searching for the silver watch chain in her pocket. She found the chain and reached to pull it out carefully, then clipped the watch loop to the chain. She slipped the watch into Devin’s pocket and patted it in place, rubbing a sturdy thigh in the process.

“There, your grandfather’s watch is back in your pocket all safe and sound, Detective Jones. There’s not a scratch on it.” She glanced up in time to catch a look of raw need in Devin’s eyes for a moment until she looked away.

Devin’s shoulders stiffened. She cleared her throat of the lump of huskiness several times before she trusted her voice to speak. “Yes, Ma’am. Our appointment with the widow is for noon. We’d better leave now. It’ll take some time to get there.” Her hand shook slightly as she buttoned her jacket over the gun at her waist. She smoothed down the front of her jacket and adjusted the watch chain in her pocket again.

She suddenly found herself wanting to kiss the hand that had held her grandfather’s watch. It was the same hand that was balled into a fist only moments ago. She wanted to stick her tongue between the lips that had ordered her to sit down and kiss them until Mandy begged her to taste other places. It was a nice daydream that she was certain Lieutenant Amanda Graham would never allow to happen.



MR. SMITH PUNCHED IN SOME NUMBERS and spoke softly into the phone. “I’m so sorry to hear about your husband’s death.”

“Thank you for your sympathy.”

“I trust all went well with the arrangements.”

“Yes, it did, Mr. Smith. We’ll be posting the funeral arrangements in Wednesday’s paper. Good day to you, Mr. Smith.”

Margaret Lender Riggins Pineborough replied to an empty phone line without realizing the caller hung up after she answered yes. She wanted to scream, but she couldn’t with a police lieutenant and her gang marching up the walkway. They were here to tell her the same thing her lawyer had told her. They still hadn’t found Lester’s killer. She peeked out the window to study the three officers again. She knew the short woman in the lead with the good legs was Lieutenant Amanda Graham. Her lawyer had told her that much, then asked that she reschedule the interview until he could be there with her.

“No way,” she’d told him at the time. “I’m not paying you to lounge around, Dexter. I need you to review our international client list. I’ve got nothing to hide. I’m not worried about the police interview. Why should you be worried?”

She heard Dexter sigh heavily into the phone before he spoke. “Look, I know you and Les weren’t getting along lately, Maggie, but I’m sure if this hadn’t happened, you two woulda worked it out like you always did.”

Attorney Dexter Miller had known Lester Pineborough for most of his life. They lived next door to each other all their lives. He still couldn’t believe that his best friend was dead. His contacts at police headquarters called to tell him about finding Lester dead...murdered in an alleyway. He wanted to rush down to the scene of the crime to see Lester’s body for himself, but his police contact suggested that he wait until the police officially notified the immediate family. He closed his eyes for a moment. God, his friend at headquarters made Lester’s murder sound so final. It was for Les Pineborough, he thought with a touch of sadness.

Maggie frowned at Dexter’s words. *Oh sure, we could have gotten back together. In a pig’s ass, we would have. The bitch deserved to have his balls cut off and rammed down his throat for what he did.* She sighed. Now was not the time for thoughts of revenge. “You’re so right, Dexter. I’m so angry that he went and got himself killed in that alley.” She sniffed into a damp linen hanky, then blew her nose. “What in God’s name was he doing there at two a.m., Dex?”

“I don’t know, Maggie. I’m his lawyer, but you know he doesn’t tell me much these days.”

The bastard had probably met some new fuck in the alley to play danger games. Lester loved the riskiest of things. From the days when they were boys together, he wanted the fastest bikes, rollerblades, or skateboards. When they grew older, Dex matured while Les still wanted to seek risks. Les could afford the faster cars, biggest motorcycles, the most expensive Learjet aircrafts, and even faster women. When his father died, Les became the sole heir to the telecommunications company he’d created. He had all that, yet ended up dead in an alley where hookers took their clientele. *Jesus Christ, Lester, what was wrong with you?*

Dexter pictured the alleyway where the cops found Les murdered, without ever seeing the place. It was a dirty, poorly lit space, where nobody but lowlife junkies, drunks, and cheap hookers hung out. He’d bet the cops didn’t even venture back there unless somebody was dying or was drugged out of their minds or was a murdered wealthy man such as Les Pineborough. It was the perfect risky place for Les to end his final days. He sighed. Thank God, Maggie didn’t have to

visit the city's morgue to identify Lester's body. He hoped the detectives coming to interview Maggie wouldn't mention what was in the medical report his contact told him about.

"Maggie, are you sure you don't want me to postpone the interview a few days?"

"No, don't do that." Maggie sighed into the phone and her voice sounded a little weak. "I'll be fine, Dex. I'll even call you afterwards. How's that?"

"Okay, Maggie." Dexter exhaled. He knew when to give up the ghost and stop arguing with Maggie. "Please call me later."

Margret Lender Riggins Pineborough placed her right hand over her heart in a gesture her oldest and dearest friend couldn't see. "I will, Dex. I promise I'll call you when this nightmare is over."