

A romantic scene between a man and a woman in a bedroom. The woman, with dark hair, is wearing a red, off-the-shoulder, low-cut dress and is leaning over the man. The man is shirtless and lying on his back, looking up at the woman. They are in a close embrace, nearly kissing. The background shows a dark wooden headboard and a patterned pillow. The lighting is warm and intimate.

Blaze®

SHE WHO DARES, WINS

.....
CANDACE HAVENS



Candace Havens

She Who Dares, Wins

«HarperCollins»

Havens C.

She Who Dares, Wins / C. Havens — «HarperCollins»,

Well, it certainly wasn't the assignment detective Katie McClure was expecting. Traveling to London to protect an old scientist who'd been receiving death threats? Too easy. As it turns out, Dr. Macon Douglas is hot. The kind that makes Katie ponder her own kinds of experiments—namely ones that involve Mac being naked. But the death threats are real...along with the wicked chemistry that seems to sizzle and zap whenever they're together. Can Katie keep her professional thoughts in mind and keep Mac safe—or will she risk everything and dare to be bare?

Содержание

“Would you happen to know a Dr. Douglas?”	6
She Who Dares, Wins	7
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	8
Contents	9
Prologue	10
1	11
2	16
3	20
4	24
5	27
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	31

“Would you happen to know a Dr. Douglas?”

“He’s a scientist who works at the university. I’m supposed to meet him here, but I don’t know what he looks like. I assume he’s an older guy, probably with glasses.” Katie glanced around, searching for the man, hoping maybe she’d catch his eye and he’d introduce himself.

A man turned to face Katie. The only thing she saw was the devastating smile, and his azure eyes. For a moment she couldn’t breathe. Her heart stopped and heat spread through her lower extremities.

He’s freakin’ gorgeous.

“He was around earlier this evening, but I think he may have left.” The man smiled at her again then glanced around the pub. “I don’t see him. Why did you need him?”

Holy hell on a biscuit. If he smiles one more time like that I might have to jump him right here in the middle of the bar.

Katie was no prude, but it had been a long time since her body responded like this to a man, especially one she didn’t know.

If he can do that with a look, imagine what it would be like if he touched me...

Blaze

Dear Reader,

Have you ever been burned by love so badly that you thought you’d never have another relationship? Most of us have at some point in our lives and that’s what I wanted to explore in *She Who Dares, Wins*. We have Katie McClure, a private detective who hasn’t had a lot of luck in love. She finds herself falling hard for her client, Professor Macon Douglas, who is a deadly combination of smart, funny and incredibly hot. It’s her job to find out who’s behind the mysterious incidents that have put Mac’s life in danger.

Mac wants Katie, the sexiest bodyguard he’s ever seen, and he doesn’t care what he has to do to get her. His refusal to take the threats against him seriously drives Katie crazy. Can she save his life before it’s too late? Can he convince Katie that he’s worth putting all of her past troubles behind her? You’ll have to wait and see if she takes him up on his dare to love again.

Please email me at candacehavensbook@gmail.com and tell me what you think about the book. You can also find me on twitter.com/candacehavens and MySpace, Facebook and Live Journal. I look forward to hearing from you.

Enjoy!

Candace Havens

She Who Dares, Wins

Candace Havens



www.millsandboon.co.uk

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Award-winning author and columnist Candace “Candy” Havens lives in Texas with her mostly understanding husband, two children and two dogs, Scoobie and Gizmo. Candy is a nationally syndicated entertainment columnist for FYI Television. She has interviewed just about everyone in Hollywood from George Clooney and Orlando Bloom to Nicole Kidman and Kate Beckinsale. You can hear Candy weekly on The Big 96.3 in the Dallas–Fort Worth Area. Her popular online writer’s workshop has more than thirteen hundred students and provides free classes to professional and aspiring writers.

I’d like to dedicate this book to Shannon Canard and Rosemary Clement Moore, who are the best friends a girl ever had and share my love for the world of romance.

Contents

Prologue
Chapter 1
Chapter 2
Chapter 3
Chapter 4
Chapter 5
Chapter 6
Chapter 7
Chapter 8
Chapter 9
Chapter 10
Chapter 11
Chapter 12
Chapter 13
Chapter 14
Chapter 15
Chapter 16
Chapter 17
Chapter 18
Chapter 19
Chapter 20
Chapter 21
Chapter 22
Chapter 23
Chapter 24
Epilogue

Prologue

MACON BLINKED several times as the road blurred before him. “I shouldn’t have had a pint at the pub,” he whispered as he rubbed the bridge of his nose. But one lager didn’t explain the tiredness blanketing him, making it difficult to keep his eyes open.

The dark, curvy road was barely large enough for one car to pass, and for the third time in an hour he wondered about his sanity choosing to drive from London to the country so late at night to visit a greenhouse. The incessant rain didn’t help a damn thing. Macon reached to adjust his glasses but only managed to knock them off his nose.

Oh, hell.

Checking the rearview, he made sure no one was behind him before he reached down to grab the glasses.

Slamming them on his face, he glanced back at the road in time to see lights from an oncoming vehicle flash before him. He had no choice but to swerve.

His car raced over the embankment and into the trees, screeching tires and air bag powder in his eyes the last things he remembered.

1

KATIE'S STOMACH FLUTTERED with nervous energy as her fist tightened around her cell phone. This happened when she opened a new case. The excitement was heightened by her first transatlantic job for the agency, and the fact that she had no idea what lay ahead. The London taxi zipped away from the curb at Heathrow and into traffic. If she hadn't been holding the handle she would have been tossed to the other side of the seat.

Eventually they reached the city center and the driver called out, "Piccadilly Square" in an accent so heavy she could barely understand him. She nodded and stared down at her phone. Her boss and best friend at Stonegate Investigative Agency, Mariska, had emailed several files about their new client.

Unfortunately just as she'd been about to download case notes, Katie's phone had died midflight and she hadn't been able to recharge it thanks to checking the charger in with her bags. She had no idea what the man looked like, or any other information except where she was supposed to meet him.

And I'm already a half hour late.

The professor had been involved in an incident, which was why Katie was in London. Dr. Douglas, an environmental scientist, claimed he'd been run off the road and into a tree. Paint scrapes on his car were the only proof. While there had been alcohol in his system, it had been minimal. The police were tracking the paint, but they didn't have the whole story. The dean at the university where the professor worked wanted to keep the matter quiet, so the accident was being treated as a one-time event.

That wasn't the truth. It was the second time something life-threatening had happened to the professor in the past two weeks.

There had also been some odd phone calls to the dean intimating Douglas should stop his research, and the professor had been mugged the night before the last accident. The dean worried that they were dealing with a radical or worse, a terrorist group, but he didn't want to involve the police unless absolutely necessary.

"That's the high court." The driver interrupted her thoughts. "Fancy place for fancy folk. There is the museum." The cabbie continued his tour-guide duties and Katie wondered if it would be rude to pay him to stop talking.

Stop it. It's not his fault you're having a crappy day.

She glanced out the window so it at least looked as if she were interested, and tried to gather her thoughts.

It seemed from what information Katie had that the dean was concerned about protecting the university's reputation, rather than the safety of Dr. Douglas. Katie felt a little sorry for the old man.

The professor's research was classified by the British government, which meant Stonegate couldn't come up with much in that regard. Even the dean had refused to discuss it on the phone, telling them Katie would need special clearance once she arrived in London.

Whatever the project might be didn't really matter. Katie's job was to determine if there was a real threat, eliminate it and look after the dotty professor. This whole thing was a personal favor to the dean, who had been a dear friend of the mother of Katie's boss and best friend, Mariska.

If Katie had had her way, she would have avoided the trip and sent the case straight to Scotland Yard where it belonged, but the decision wasn't hers.

The taxi stopped on a brick-lined street in front of a pub straight out of a Dickens tale. Katie glanced at the meter and was shocked to see how much it was. Didn't matter where in the world you were, cabs were expensive. She tossed some pound notes to the driver and stepped out with her small rolling suitcase and laptop bag.

The Seven Stars, the pub where she was to meet the professor, looked exactly like what she thought an English pub would from the outside—dark wood with brass. It had an old-world feel. Rolling her case through the door, with her laptop bag on her shoulder, she stood there for a moment allowing her eyes to adjust. The smell of beer and food was comforting in a way, and she let herself relax for a few seconds while she surveyed the room.

She was a detective—she should be able to spot one dotty old professor.

It was seven-thirty and the place was crowded with people. She had wanted to meet the professor and the dean at the university, but Dr. Douglas had insisted on the pub. The place did have a familiarity about it, reminding her of her mom and dad's bar back in the Bronx.

The only things missing were her nosy, boisterous brothers and her adorable Grandpa Joe behind the bar telling his stories about walking the beat years ago. He was the family member she missed most. GJ, as she called him, was the only sane one in the bunch, and he insisted Katie follow her dreams no matter where they led her.

GJ, a former cop, had been the one to help her get into the academy back in the Bronx. He'd pushed her to be a detective, even when everyone else in her family thought it was a ludicrous idea. They believed she should settle down and have babies with Jay Spiloli.

Ugh. Remembering Jay made her gut churn with nastiness. She'd dated him for a couple of weeks, only to learn he'd been cheating on her the whole time with Missy Ringovitz. The night she found out, she made her brothers lock her in her room so she couldn't kill Jay. Her only satisfaction came the next day when she saw his face had taken a beating, probably due to her brothers' fists. Though they would never tell her the truth about it.

It didn't matter. Having babies with Jay was so not in the cards for her. She'd followed her grandpa's advice, and three years as a detective had prepared her for this job of a lifetime working at Stonegate, where she traveled the world solving cases.

She glanced around the room, but didn't see any dotty-looking prof types. Most of the people there were in their mid-thirties and wore three-piece suits. Even the women had donned heels with suits. A bunch of Wall Street types, only she was on the wrong continent.

Bartenders tend to know everything going on in their establishments. I might as well start there.

Katie headed for the intricately carved bar, which wasn't easy in the crowd with her laptop and suitcase in tow.

"Hey, would you happen to know a Dr. Douglas?" Katie maneuvered her suitcase between the bar stools. The bartender delivered a pint to the man next to her and looked up.

"I know a few, lass. It's a common name 'round here."

Well, hell.

"He's a scientist and works at the university. I'm supposed to meet him here, but I don't know what he looks like. I assume he's an older guy, probably with glasses." She glanced around searching for the man, hoping maybe she'd catch his eye and he'd introduce himself.

The bartender nodded. "Ah, I see." He moved in front of the man with the pint. "Don't suppose you've seen the doc?"

The man turned to face Katie. The only thing she saw for a few seconds was the devastating smile and his azure eyes. She couldn't breathe. Her heart stopped and heat spread through her lower extremities.

He's freakin' gorgeous.

"He was around earlier this evening, but I think he may have left." The hunk of hotness smiled at her again, then glanced around the pub. "I don't see him. Why did you need him?"

Holy hell on a biscuit. If he smiles like that again I might have to jump him right here in the middle of the bar.

Katie was no prude, but it had been a long time since her body had responded like that to a man, especially one she didn't know.

If he can do that with a look, imagine what it would be like if he touched me.

Her body quivered with the very thought of it.

When his right eyebrow rose, she realized she was supposed to say something. His words finally penetrated her sex-addled brain. “Wh-what? Oh—I...” she stammered. “I was only—” she checked her watch “—a half hour late. It took me forever to get through customs. So you know the professor?”

The hottie leaned an elbow against the bar. “I know of him.”

Katie chewed on her lip. “Hmm. Well, I guess I’ll have to find him at the university.”

“I wouldn’t bother. I’m sure he’s headed home to bed. It is almost eight,” he said as he looked at his watch.

The bartender grunted at that.

Katie deflated as she sat down on the stool next to the man. “I’m not surprised. It’s been that kind of day for me.” She’d almost missed her flight because of car trouble, her phone wasn’t working right and she’d missed the meeting with the professor.

“Sounds to me like you could use one of these.” The bartender set a pint in front of her.

“He’s right, you know.” The handsome man waved a hand toward the beer. “Nothing like a good pint to set the world right again.”

Katie worried about the professor’s safety, but she didn’t have any private contact info for him or the dean. All she had were the numbers for the university. Hopefully the old man had made it home safely.

She might as well have a drink and then head to the hotel so she could start fresh in the morning. She was already feeling the jet lag Mariska had warned her about. Her boss had insisted Katie try to sleep on the plane, but she could never get comfortable. A beer would help her relax and then she could get a good night’s rest.

“What the heck.” She held up her glass. “Cheers.”

THE SMOKY VOICE and New York accent were at odds with the petite brunette at Macon’s side. He had a difficult time believing this woman was Katie McClure, the bodyguard sent to protect him. He was an ass for not confessing his identity, but he wanted to have a little fun. If she were as good at her job as the dean said, she’d figure it out eventually.

“I must be tired.” She laughed. “I just realized you’re American. I’d say somewhere on the West Coast.”

He liked the deep throaty laugh, and she had the most beautiful chocolate eyes framed by long lashes. There was something in those eyes, a slight hardness, that told him she’d seen more than most people, but she looked far too young for that.

“You’re right. That’s quite an ear you have,” he said.

“I don’t know about that. I’m having the toughest time understanding people here, which makes me feel like an idiot, since we speak the same language.”

Macon laughed. “You get used to it eventually. I’m a surfer boy from Laguna, and I even picked up a few of the phrases. Caught myself saying ‘bloody hell’ the other day. And like America there are different types of accents. Some are easier to understand than others.”

“The Bronx where I grew up is a melting pot of accents and you never know what you might get when you say hello to someone.”

He liked this woman. Beyond the fact that she was gorgeous, her no-nonsense attitude and directness were refreshing.

“Well, fellow American. Don’t suppose you’d let me buy you dinner?” Macon surprised himself with the question. The words had burst out of his mouth before he could stop them. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d asked a woman out.

Her eyes flashed with surprise, and he expected a quick no.

She gave him the once-over. “I could eat.” She sniffed the air. “And if the food is half as good as it smells, I’m in.”

“Timothy, looks like we’ll need some menus. And perhaps a table,” Macon told the bartender.

Mac had rolled up his sleeves earlier in the evening, and when Katie put a hand on his arm, the skin-to-skin contact sent his libido into overdrive.

“Nah, I’m good sitting here at the bar.” She gave him a quick smile. “Done it most of my life.”

“Oh, really. I didn’t take you for the AA type.”

“You’re a funny one.” She smirked. “GJ, my grandpa, and my parents own a pub in the Bronx populated by their friends who are all cops. So I spent a lot of time there doing my homework at the bar or at one of the tables in the back.”

That explained why she’d gone into law enforcement. She still didn’t fit the big Amazon image he had in his head of the security agent sent to protect him. She was more ballerina than bodyguard.

Timothy handed them each a menu. Macon didn’t need to look at it, as he’d been eating there most nights for the past four years. It was close to his apartment and he was a big fan of the food.

She slipped off her jacket and he glimpsed her nearly perfect figure—a petite goddess in one amazing package. His body tightened with need and he had to think of nice cold showers in order to avoid her seeing just how happy he was to meet her.

He watched as she perused the menu. “If you like a good steak, they know how to do it right and the Caesar salad is one of my favorites,” he offered.

“That’ll work for me.” She handed the menu back to the bartender as he took their order.

“This place was pretty crowded earlier. Where did everyone go?” She twirled around on the bar stool, their knees rubbing together for a second, and again his body reacted. What was it about her? The scientist in him wondered about pheromones, but he forced himself to push those thoughts aside so he could answer her questions.

“Most of them work at the high court—barristers and clerks, and maybe a few judges. Everybody will have gone home to their families. In about an hour there will be an influx of partiers out for a good time. The crowd changes and it gets louder as the night goes on.”

She shook her head. “It really does feel like home—almost makes me miss it.”

“Almost?” From the way she said it, he could tell she had mixed feelings.

“Like most people, I have some family baggage.” She blew out a breath. “I’m Katie, by the way.” She stuck out a hand for him to shake.

“I’m M—” He’d almost said Macon. “Mac, that’s what my friends call me.”

The bartender grunted again as he put their salads on the bar.

“Wow! Now, that’s a salad.” She laughed at the sight of the large bowl filled to the brim with vegetables. The sound of her laugh was like a warm blanket wrapped around him—a warm sexy blanket.

He cleared his throat. “Roxy, the chef here, likes to make sure her customers are well fed.”

As they chatted through dinner he noticed she ate every bite of her meal, and she downed two more pints. But she was as clear-eyed as when she’d walked in.

Mac on the other hand was feeling the effects of the beer. He was far from drunk, but he was more relaxed than he’d been in months.

When they finished their meals, she opened her bag to pull out some pound notes.

“Hey, I’m buying you dinner, remember?” He handed the bills she’d put on the bar back to her.

Katie shook her head. “Nah. If you’d been a boring ass, I’d make you pay. But I had fun talking to you. We’ll go Dutch.”

Macon and the bartender both guffawed. “It’s difficult to argue with logic like that,” he said, “but I, as a gentleman, would feel less of a man if you paid.”

Katie rolled her eyes. “Men. You’re the same everywhere I go. Fine. Pay.” She held out her hand. “Thank you for a lovely meal.”

He took her hand in his. “I had more fun tonight than I’ve had in months. I can’t remember the last time I had a—” He’d been about to say date, which wasn’t the right word. “A good meal with a beautiful woman.”

She blushed. Now, that was unexpected.

“I wish you’d let me walk you to your next destination. It can be tough to get a taxi this time of night, and some of the streets can be a bit dodgy.”

She put her hands on her hips. “Mac, are you hitting on me?”

God, she was forthright. “Yes,” he answered honestly.

She laughed out loud. “What if you’re some kind of ax murderer and you’re only saying pretty things to get me alone?”

“Oh, I want you alone, but there are no axes in the picture. Besides, Timothy will vouch for me. Right?”

Timothy grunted and rolled his eyes. “He’s better than most.”

“Now, that’s a rousing referral if ever I heard one.” Katie smiled.

Macon knew he should tell her who he was, but he had a feeling if he did, this connection with her would be broken. He wanted her, and if it meant withholding information for the greater good, who was he to complain? It had been so long since he’d felt any kind of connection with anyone. For the past six years everything had been about his work. He deserved some fun.

Okay, he was an ass. But he wanted this woman, and the feeling persisted that if she knew the truth all bets would be off.

He grabbed her bag with one hand and held her hand with the other.

“So where are we off to next?” he said as they stepped out onto the sidewalk.

“To the Dorchester,” she replied breathlessly, another blush creeping up on her cheeks, but not connected with the London chill.

She’s so tough, but blushes. This woman intrigued him and he had to know more about her.

Macon had several blocks to convince her why spending the night with him would be the best thing that ever happened to her. And then he would tell her the truth.

2

KATIE STOOD BESIDE MAC on the elevator chewing her lip.

What am I doing?

When Mac had offered to take Katie's bags upstairs to her suite at the Dorchester, she'd known what he meant, and she wanted it. She wanted him. Knowing him for less than two hours didn't matter. They had a connection unlike any she'd ever experienced.

When she left New York, she'd been determined to change her life. She would no longer be consumed by work and she'd start dating again. It hadn't happened that way. The move to Texas to help Mariska settle in at the agency had left Katie with less free time than ever. Not that she minded at first. It had been exciting picking up the pieces and helping her friend keep the agency running.

Stonegate Investigative Agency was stronger than ever, and Katie didn't have to carry the success of the business on her shoulders. Well, she'd never been alone—her friends Chi and Makala had been there, too—but Katie had been responsible for the day-to-day operations.

The only time she'd kissed a guy in the past six months had been on a case when she'd gone undercover with a DEA agent. Sad, that was the only way she could get a man to touch her, but it was the truth. She was like some kind of social pariah when it came to the opposite sex.

Her mother had always said she was too tough, but Katie couldn't help it. That was her nature, and if a guy couldn't handle it, well, to hell with him.

But Mac was different. He saw her as a woman. He didn't have any preconceived notions about her past and he didn't seem to care about anything except the now.

The elevator dinged and the doors slid open.

Could she do this? Could she have a one-night stand in a foreign country with a man she barely knew?

His hand touched her back to lead her off the elevator and a shiver of delight warmed her.

Yes. She most definitely could spend a night with this stranger.

Everything about him, from his tall, lanky surfer-boy looks to his deep melodic voice, screamed hot juicy sex. Didn't she deserve one night with this man she knew instinctively could do dangerous and wonderful things to her?

They arrived at the door much too quickly. She slipped the key card in and the handle turned.

"Well, here we are." He handed her the bag. "Thank you for a great night. I'm more relaxed than I've been in months. I don't run into many Americans in my social circles, and it's been nice talking about home with you." He dazzled her with that smile again.

Wait. This was good-night? Katie was so confused. Had she read the signals wrong?

Then she saw it in his eyes—that moment where he was giving her an out. He didn't want to pressure her into anything, and it made her want him even more.

"We never had dessert," she said, her voice husky with need. She opened the door and pushed the case inside, holding the door for him to step through.

He watched her, as if he were trying to get a read.

She gave him a quick grin, and that was all it took.

Stepping in, he shut the door.

"Are you really hungry?" Mac asked as he brushed a hair away from her cheek. That brief touch sent shudders through her body.

Katie leaned back against the wall just inside the suite. The desire in his eyes made her belly tighten, and she didn't trust her voice, so she shook her head.

He leaned in and kissed her, teasing at first with light touches to her lips. Katie restrained herself from shoving him to the floor and taking him right then and there, as his kisses caused a tingling straight through her from where their lips met.

Mac was so much taller and she found herself rising to the tips of her toes so she could taste more of him. All the tiredness and worry slipped from her mind as his hands slid around her waist, pulling her toward him.

They tasted each other for a good five minutes. With their tongues dancing and exploring, she couldn't get enough of his steak-and-dark-beer-mixed-with-peppermint flavor.

She wound her arms around his neck. His erection pressed into her belly, giving her such a sense of power she nearly growled. Mac didn't know it, but he'd become her prey. She wanted him now, inside her.

"Too many clothes," she whispered against his lips. Pulling her arms away, she unbuttoned his shirt. When her nervous fingers fumbled, it took great restraint to keep from ripping the material so she could feel his skin.

He lifted his lips from hers and smiled. Gently shoving her hands away from his shirt, he reached for hers, sliding it off her shoulders and exposing her pink bra. He made quick work of her pants, which were wide legged and slipped to the floor.

Katie refused to let him have all the fun. She unzipped his jeans, the feel of him hard and tight against her palm as she groped him.

He moaned and moved her so he was against the wall to brace them. She stopped stroking him long enough to pull her boots off, but he stopped her.

"Leave them on," he said heavily as he tugged the panties past them.

He knelt, leaving a trail of kisses on her neck, breasts and stomach. When his tongue reached its destination, Katie threw her head back, balancing her hands on his shoulders as he laved her hot pink flesh with such precision that in mere seconds her body quaked with a mind-blowing orgasm.

Before Katie could pass out from the sheer pleasure of it, he scooped her up in his arms and tossed her gently onto the bed. Once again he knelt, teasing her until she writhed before him. Her boots wrapped around his shoulders as he continued to drive her to the brink, this time the orgasm so intense she saw tiny specks of light behind her eyes.

"I could watch you do that all night." Mac's voice was deeper than before. "And these boots—you're so damn gorgeous."

Katie couldn't hide her smile. His words made her feel empowered.

She reached for him. "I need you inside me, please, Mac. Please," she begged. She could no longer wait for his cock to give her the relief she needed.

"Not yet, love," he said as he slid up her body, bringing both her breasts to hard peaks with his mouth as his fingers pumped in and out of her pink flesh. She wasn't sure how much more she could take.

Her fingers grabbed his hair. "Now. I need you now."

That seemed to do it.

He yanked his shirt over his head and released his cock from his pants. He fumbled with something in his pocket and she realized he was grabbing a condom. At least he'd thought of it—she hadn't.

She sat up, took the package from his hand and ripped it open, sheathing him with the protection as fast as possible. He was long, hard and thick. She lifted her legs, still clad in the boots, up over his shoulders as she guided him into her.

When there was a long pause she worried for a second that maybe he was too big, but he pumped her gently a few times, covering his cock in her juices, and her body opened to him. The pace quickened and soon he was pounding her with such ferocity her body came unglued. When his finger touched her nub, she screamed her release.

The look of desire in his eyes as he watched her come sent waves of pleasure through her. Every muscle in her body tightened as he was bringing her to yet another orgasm.

"Come with me," she begged. "I want to watch you come with me."

The pounding increased and his thumb rubbed her nub again as Katie writhed on the bed, uncertain how much more her body could take, but she wanted him more than anything.

His blue eyes centered on her as he moaned, “Katie,” and she felt such power in those words.

“Yes, Mac. Come with me. Ohhhhhh.” She was lost then in the sensation of him, their bodies echoing the pleasure they both experienced. When he moaned her name again, his body stiffened with release just as her entire body quaked with an orgasm. This time she saw more tiny stars in her lids, and every muscle turned to rubber.

When he slid out, she moaned her complaint.

“Have to sit.” His words came out on a pant. “You’re amazing.”

“No.” She was still winded. “That was all you. I was along for the ride. One wonderful, wild ride.”

He took care of the condom, then lay beside her sideways, their legs hanging off the edge. Normally Katie would have felt the need to cover herself, but the way he looked at her as if she were a big piece of chocolate he couldn’t wait to devour made her comfortable in her own skin.

He put his arm behind her and pulled her closer to him. “Trust me when I tell you we were on that ride together.”

She snuggled into him, but couldn’t stifle a yawn.

“You’re tired.” He turned so he could see her face.

“Nah, that was a sign of contentment, nothing more.”

“Hmm.” He pulled away. “I think maybe we should get you ready for bed.”

She sighed. “We are in bed.”

He chuckled at that.

“True,” he said as he sat up, and then he reached down and slid her boots off.

Another yawn escaped. Damn. She didn’t want to fall asleep.

Mac picked her up with one arm so she was nestled against him. Using his other arm he pulled the covers back. “Let’s at least get you warm.”

Carefully he put her back down and moved her legs under the covers, intimate and sweet at the same time.

Something clicked for Katie. “Oh, wow. I’m probably keeping you from one of those quick exits guys like to make. Sorry, I don’t do this—uh, well, I’ve never slept with a guy I don’t really know.” She grinned. Katie wondered why she couldn’t shut up. Normally she wasn’t the talkative type, but her nerves had returned.

Mac touched her cheek. “No, I can promise you I don’t want to go right now.” He held her tighter and nuzzled his nose at her neck.

Katie sighed with contentment. Mac spoke the truth for now. She was good at reading people. Maybe he wouldn’t leave right away, but he would eventually. The idea made her a little sad.

“I have to say I’m kind of glad the professor wasn’t there tonight.”

A weird look passed over his face. “What do you mean?”

“I wouldn’t have met you, and we’d have missed this crazy-good night together. Thank you.”

He leaned down and kissed her. “It was definitely crazy good.”

She yawned again. “I’m about to fall asleep.” Her eyes were so heavy she could barely keep them open. “Damn you for being so good with the sex. You wore me out.”

This time he laughed out loud. He sat next to her, brushing the hair away from her face. “You have to take some of that blame, you know. You’re pretty damn good with the sex, too.”

Katie smiled with satisfaction. No one had ever said she was good in bed. Not that she’d had many lovers.

“I like you,” she said.

He kissed her again tenderly. “I like you, too.”

YOU'RE AN ASS. Mac couldn't believe he'd failed to tell Katie the truth before she fell asleep. He'd made mad, passionate love with her, and then he'd lied to her.

Not so much a lie as an omission. He had a feeling she wouldn't see it that way. What he'd done was wrong, and he knew it. The opportunity to tell her had come about more than once during their evening together, but their evening had been so perfect, he didn't want it to end. This had been one of the best nights of his life, and not just the sex. Though that had been incredible. He'd enjoyed their chat during dinner. She was honest and forthright, and he was absolutely charmed by her.

Sitting there for a moment on her bed, he watched her sleep. She was nothing short of gorgeous. From her head down to those purple-painted toenails he'd seen when he slipped her boots and socks off her feet.

Those boots. He took a deep breath. Katie's lithe body, naked with only those boots, was a memory burned into his brain for a lifetime.

That's good, since she's probably never going to speak to you again when she finds out the truth.

He'd figure something out. He had to, because after finding the woman of his dreams, he wasn't about to let her go. Katie was everything he hadn't known he wanted, and she was perfect. A combination of strength, femininity and sensuality, which stirred his baser instincts in a way no other woman had.

I need a strategy—a plan to keep Katie McClure in my life.

At least until he could see where this thing between them was going. She thought it a one-night stand, but he'd heard the disappointment in her voice. She still wanted him, and that was something perhaps he could use to his advantage.

His lab. He needed those familiar white and gray walls in order to think.

Macon left the Dorchester determined to find a way to make Katie forgive him.

3

FOR SOMEONE WHO THRIVED on punctuality, Katie had made a mess of her appointments the past twenty-four hours. After waking up at five in the morning, naked in her bed, it had taken her a few minutes to discern where she was. Mortified, she realized she'd fallen asleep while Mac was still there. By the time she'd opened her eyes he was long gone.

At first she was disappointed he hadn't left a note, but she quickly admonished herself. It was about the moment and having some fun—hadn't her friend Mar told her to do exactly that? Once this case was over, she'd been ordered to take some time off and relax. It had been years since Katie had had a vacation—she wasn't sure she remembered how.

In fact, she might stay at the Dorchester and enjoy the amenities. The two-bedroom suite Mar had insisted Katie stay in was bigger than her entire apartment in Texas, and it was the most luxurious place she'd ever slept in. There were two bedrooms in case she had to move the professor to a safer location. The bathtub alone was as big as a boat, and in the daylight she'd explored the cavernous suite to discover everything from state-of-the art electronics to a showerhead with so many different spouts it felt as if she was getting a massage.

She'd called the university at eight to set an appointment with the dean and the professor. The dean's assistant told her he wasn't in, but she did set a meeting with the professor. The appointment was for nine, and Katie was stuck in traffic that was worse than midtown Manhattan during rush hour.

Great. She couldn't call the school from the car because in her foggy state earlier in the morning, she'd accidentally plugged her phone and computer into the socket before she realized she'd used the wrong adapter. A zip and a pop later, both were fried.

Katie had congratulated herself for not tossing both of the electronics out the French doors of her suite. Using the hotel phone she'd called Mar and told her what had happened. Her friend had laughed.

"Even if you use the right adapter, half the time it'll fry your electronics. I should have warned you," Mar apologized.

"It's not your fault. I picked the package of adapters up at the airport, but I must have read the instructions wrong."

"No worries, Katie. We'll have new, fully loaded electronics to you by tomorrow."

Mar didn't know Katie's entire life was on her phone and computer. She felt naked without them. The upside was her busy family couldn't contact her. She'd find a way to phone or email her mom later and let her know she was safe. Otherwise, that would be all she heard for the next two months. No less than ten voice mails a day about what an ungrateful daughter she was.

Katie chuckled. More than once Mar had told her to appreciate how lucky she was to have a family who cared so much.

The McClures cared too much, as far as Katie was concerned.

While she waited in the cab she ran over the mental notes she'd made the day before. The professor's research had something to do with food sources for third world countries. For some reason, the government was involved and the project was under extreme security.

It was her job to determine if the threats were real and to protect him until they could figure out what was going on. She'd look after the dotty old man and see what she could find out. The physical evidence would be her first priority. There was so much more they could do now with the state-of-the-art labs at Stonegate.

"Almost there, miss, the building on the right," the cab driver said. In the heart of London she'd expected a bunch of historic buildings, since the college had been around a few hundred years. There were some of those across the street, but this science building was a modern expanse of glass and steel.

After paying the cab, she walked in. The redheaded security officer, with a name badge claiming he was George, checked her credentials carefully. Then he asked to see her bag, and he seemed to linger over the small pocket where she'd stored her makeup. Picking up her perfume, he sniffed and closed his eyes.

When he glanced up and saw her eyebrow up, he quickly put the perfume back and closed the bag.

"Good to go, then." He handed her an access card with his face flushed. "Use this in the lift to go to the third floor."

On the third floor she followed the numbers until she reached the steel door that read Lab 314. Using the card she entered.

"Please strip and step into the shower. Then walk through the back door, where you'll find a suit," a voice said through a speaker as soon as she entered a narrow hallway. It was all white with a shower and hooks on the wall. Katie rolled her eyes. "Is that really necessary? I'm here to see Professor Macon Douglas."

"Have you been traveling?" the voice said through the box.

"Yes."

"Then you'll have to wear a suit to talk to the professor. We can't risk spore contamination."

Great. Whatever.

She pulled off her black blazer and hopped on one foot and then the other so she could slip off her boots. The white T-shirt and dark jeans, her everyday uniform now, were next. If the pervy lab assistant watched her, he was about to get an eyeful as she lost the black thong and matching bra. Nudity wasn't something she was that modest about. She'd grown up in a house with brothers, where privacy was a luxury.

She stepped into the shower, surprised when a soft powdery mist coated her skin instead of water. The powder, which had a strange pine-and-earth scent, dissipated as soon as it touched her, but it left her feeling fresher than when she'd stepped in. After thirty seconds it shut off.

"I feel like I'm in some weird sci-fi movie," she whispered.

The metal door on the other side of the dry shower slid open and she made her way through into another room not much bigger than a walk-in closet. The suit the voice had mentioned was nothing more than sweats, none of which fit her five-foot-three, petite frame. She found the one labeled Small and tied the string as tight as she could around her waist. The sweatshirt swallowed her, and dark green was so not her color, but she pushed up the sleeves and made it work.

I should have demanded we meet in the dean's office. This is crazy.

Once she was dressed, another door clicked open and she pushed her way through into the lab, which was filled with computer equipment, strange machines and a giant dry erase board with all kinds of equations on it.

A man dressed in jeans had his back to her. He was tall and lanky and looked just like—

"What are you doing here?" Katie couldn't believe her eyes when he turned around.

"Hi," Mac said. "You...work here?"

He nodded.

"Are you Dr. Douglas's assistant? Why didn't you tell me last night?"

"I'm not his assistant exactly." Mac cleared his throat. He reached out a hand, "Hi, I'm Dr. Macon Douglas. I know I should have done that last night, but..."

Katie couldn't believe it. This had to be some crazy joke. She stared at his hand and back to his face, her brain failing to register what had happened.

Oh, hell, I slept with a client. Well, technically there was no sleeping involved.

It had been one of the most passionate nights of her life and it was all a farce.

Katie's jaw tightened. "So you misrepresented yourself to me so you could get into my pants."

Mac moved closer to her, but she took a step back.

He held up a hand. "It wasn't like that at all. At first it was a joke with Timothy the bartender. But then, well, I enjoyed your company and I had a feeling if I told you the truth that would be that."

Katie's nostrils flared, and her fist tightened ready to punch his nose so hard it would go out the back of his head. She forced herself to take a deep breath as she stared at him for a full twenty seconds, working hard to keep her temper under control. When all was said and done, he was a client and she had to be respectful. It was the only thing that kept her from kicking him in the nards and shoving a fist in his nose. She didn't like being made a fool of, and he'd done exactly that.

When Katie didn't speak, Mac reached a hand out to her again, but she shook her head.

"Katie, please. I felt such a connection with you last night. I know what I did was wrong, but to be honest you didn't disclose that much about yourself, either. We talked about our families, but never what we did for a living."

He could explain the situation as many ways as he wanted. She wasn't sure she could ever forgive him. Best to focus on the case, and try to forget the night before.

Yeah, like that's going to happen.

Katie pulled her shoulders back. "Dr. Douglas, do you have the voice recordings and copies of the letters involved with your case?"

"I... What?"

"The threats, do you have copies? Or did you give everything to the dean? I need to begin as quickly as possible so we can wrap this up." It was hard to sound professional while wearing giant green sweats, in addition to the whole being-humiliated thing, but she was a professional.

Damn him.

She'd have to put a dollar in the swear dog bank she had at home. As a cop in the Bronx her language had been colorful, but she'd been working hard on her abrasive nature so she didn't scare away the Stonegate clients. She'd bought the cute puppy bank to encourage her to clean up her mouth.

Mac stared at her as if she had two heads. "Do I need to repeat myself?" Katie asked, her tone clipped.

His enthusiasm deflated, and his eyebrows furrowed with concern. Good. It served him right.

"I have the originals of the two tapes and one of the letters. The dean has the rest."

"The rest? How long has this been going on?" She mentally checked the facts she had in her head. From what they'd been told by the dean, this had been happening for only a few weeks.

Mac cleared his throat again and moved toward a file cabinet. Pulling out a folder, he handed it to her. "The calls began about six months ago. The letters about two weeks ago, and to be honest it's nothing. Scientists run into this sort of thing all the time. It's nothing to be alarmed about."

Katie didn't believe that. "What do you mean it happens all the time?"

"Those of us who work on government-sponsored projects get threats all the time. The work is secretive and highly classified. People assume it's weapons of mass destruction, and that pushes them to do all kinds of things."

"That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard," Katie said. Though she had no doubt there were people in the world who would do exactly that. It was insane to threaten someone without having any clue as to what they were really working on.

"I assure you I'm speaking the truth." Mac acted as if he were offended.

"I don't doubt the validity of what you're saying, Dr. Douglas. I was calling the people who would do such a thing ridiculous, not you."

"Oh," he said.

She took out the plastic gloves she kept in her bag and slipped them on her hands. Opening the folder, she read the letter carefully.

"Stop your research or die!"

The words had been typed. She sniffed the paper. It had been printed off on a printer. Excellent. That was her first lead. "I'll need to take this and have it tested in our lab," she told the professor.

“I don’t know what good that will do, Katie. My fingerprints are all over it.”

She shook her head. “I’m not worried about prints, though I’ll have them check for those, too. I want to find out about the ink. If I know the source of the ink, that gives me the type of printer, and the watermark on the paper is easy to trace.”

After placing the paper in an evidence bag, she pulled out the flash drive with the calls on it. The dean and professor had digitally recorded the messages, which made it easier for her. Normally she’d pop it into her computer, but she couldn’t do that.

“Do you have a computer I can borrow? My laptop is down.” No reason to explain her idiocy to the man. “Sure.”

He reached under the table and pulled out a laptop. “You can use this as much as you want. We have two extras in the lab.”

“Thanks,” she said, not bothering to look up. She waited for the computer to boot up and attached the flash drive.

The voice was mechanical, and she knew immediately the caller had used a cheap synthesizer. The message was the same as the one on the paper.

“This person isn’t very original,” she said. Her office had the equipment to separate the voices, and there was a good chance they would be able to tell her in a matter of days if it were male or female and what kind of accent.

“I agree with you.” Mac sat on a stool at the end of the long steel table. He’d been watching her carefully while she worked, and it took everything she had not to look up at him. As mad as she was at him about his deception, their night had been unforgettable. At least the bulky sweats hid her perky nipples tight with the need for Mac’s touch. “That’s why I don’t think it’s that big of a deal.”

“I have to disagree. This, along with the accidents, makes me think we’re dealing with individuals or a small group who mean you harm. The threats are escalating, and that’s never good. You need to take these seriously. I have no doubt these people want you dead.”

4

MACON HAD LOST HIS MIND. It was as simple as that. This pint-size pixie told him someone wanted to kill him, and all he could think about was kissing her soft red lips. He'd had to sit down on the stool to keep her from seeing the hardness under his jeans, caused by the way she pursed her lips when she was thinking.

The woman was an enigma. One minute she was pure sex, the next a professional detective. He wasn't sure which one he liked best. Everything about her was sexy. Though he didn't think this was the right time to tell her so.

The emotions playing over her face when she'd realized what had happened the night before had been surprise, anger and then something he couldn't identify. He had a feeling she used that look when she had criminals under interrogation.

He'd royally screwed up. Still, he wouldn't change the night for anything. In fact, he'd do just about anything to make it happen again. Unfortunately, it would take a great deal of coaxing to get her to acquiesce. Katie had a tough side, and forgiving him would be difficult for her, which made him want to try all the more.

She'd listened to the recordings again, her face a mass of concentration. What was it about her that had him so tied up in knots?

The last thing he needed in his life was a complicated woman, and Katie was certainly that. He didn't have time for someone nosing into his life, especially with curves that—No. He needed to get rid of this woman and get back to work. As soon as he thought the words, he knew there was no way they were true. He wanted her again, and he wasn't ready to let her go just yet.

"You weren't what I expected." She glanced around his laboratory.

"What do you mean?" He was more than curious about that statement.

"To be honest, I expected the elderly professor type."

"Sorry to disappoint you," he said with a smile.

She didn't return it. Yes, she was one tough woman.

"Tell me again why you and the dean are keeping Scotland Yard out of this? Seems to me that would be the first place to turn."

Mac frowned. "We can't risk it right now," he said. "As I mentioned before, this is highly classified research. The cops would want to snoop into my work, and I'm at a crucial point right now. I can't afford someone accidentally leaking information. The dean didn't want to involve the police in order to protect the university's reputation. He knew I wasn't going to call anyone because of the nature of what I'm working on. You and your company were the dean's idea."

"I detect some sarcasm in there," she said as she popped the flash drive into another evidence bag. "The dean may very well have saved your life. As I mentioned before, these threats are real, and they will continue to escalate. It's important we find the culprits as quickly as possible before they can do any more harm."

"So what is your plan?"

"First, I'll send these off to the lab. We'll have results in a few days. I could send them somewhere here, but my forensic lab at the agency is state-of-the-art and one of the best in the world. If there's something to discover, they'll find it.

"Until then, we follow up on leads here. I need a list of everyone who may have had access to your research now and in the past."

"You don't think it's someone who would have worked in the lab, do you?"

She wrote something down on the notebook she carried. "Dr. Douglas, at this point everyone who has come in contact with you over the last year is a suspect."

She couldn't be serious. "There's no way it's someone here at the university."

Peering up from her notebook, she gave him a wary look. “You’re too trusting. Until we solve this case, no one comes into your lab except necessary personnel. With security like this, there shouldn’t be much trouble while you work,” she continued. “Have you had incidents in the lab?”

He shook his head. Every time she glanced at him, he wanted to reach out and touch her. Her auburn hair hung straight and shiny to her chin, and she shoved parts of it behind her ears. It was her voice, deep and filled with sex, that made his groin tighten even more, and his lungs struggle for air. There was a slight overpronunciation of certain vowels. He found it fascinating.

She snapped her fingers in front of his face and he realized he’d probably been staring at her like a cat after a canary. “Can you focus a minute and answer my questions? I need information. Has someone tried to hurt you here in the lab?”

“No, and they are not incidents. Unlike the dean, I do not believe what happened to me is related in any way. I have a long history of unfortunate mishaps. I have a tendency to bury my mind in my work and I don’t take notice of the world around me. I am a complete cliché and fully admit to being an absentminded professor. And unfortunately, I’m often in the wrong place at the wrong time. I consider it a quirky trait. The dean finds it bothersome.”

She grinned slightly at that as her pink fingernail tapped a distracting beat on the steel table. “So you weren’t mugged a block from the university and run off the road twice in the last two weeks?”

Before he could answer she held up a hand. “And there were phone calls to the dean’s voice mail. Both making comments that promised physical harm should you continue your research.” She crossed her arms over her chest.

He guessed if one were to line up the events in such a way, it might look as if something was going on.

“Yes, those things did happen.” Macon cleared his throat.

“Why don’t you let me decide what’s the best course of action, then?” She turned away from him. “The car accidents took place near a summer home? Correct? And you were mugged where?”

“About a block from my flat.” The woman was determined. He’d give her that.

His eyes followed her as she circled the lab. She was one of those people who found it difficult to stand still for more than a few moments. He could tell by the way she constantly moved or fidgeted. She glanced out the window as if she was searching for something. Then she returned to where he sat.

She started to speak and was interrupted by a large gurgling sound. Her olive-skinned cheeks turned a delightful shade of pink.

Macon glanced at his watch. “Let me guess—you skipped breakfast.”

She bit her lip. “I was busy solving some problems with work this morning.”

That meant she hadn’t eaten in more than twelve hours. He’d gone longer when working in the lab, but he knew it wasn’t healthy. There was also this strange part of him that wanted to take care of her. The least he could do was give her a decent meal after what he’d put her through today.

“Why don’t we head to the café at the student center?” He had started to mention a restaurant, but worried it was too early in the day for it to be open.

“I’m fine.” Her tone was clipped and professional. She’d been embarrassed.

“Well, I could use a snack. I haven’t had anything this morning.” He shoved his laptop into a bag with a couple of notebooks. He’d been working on several equations when she’d arrived. “Perhaps I’ll be better able to answer your questions with a full stomach.”

“I guess if you’re hungry, a break is okay. Though I had hoped to jump right in with the investigation.”

Macon shrugged. “An hour for a meal can’t hurt,” he said. “And I’ll keep my promise to answer any questions you might have.”

Leading the way, he pushed in the code for the exit. Once they were through the two sets of doors, he pointed to another entry. “If you go through there, you’ll find your clothing. I’ll meet you out in the hallway in a few minutes.”

She walked away, but stopped as her hand touched the doorknob. “What do I do with the sweat suit?”

“There’s a hamper to your right when you walk in. The cleaning staff takes care of them for me.”

“Thanks.”

Even in the oversize sweats the woman oozed sex, and as she walked away he remembered his hands on her backside the night before.

Concentrate, Macon admonished. Only days ago your purpose was to get rid of her. Answer her questions, help her to see logic, so by this time tomorrow she’ll be gone.

There was one problem. Macon wasn’t sure he wanted their time to end quite so quickly. The woman in the next room was an interesting specimen and unfortunately he wanted to know everything about her.

5

KATIE HAD HER HANDS FULL with Macon. Staring out the window of her hotel onto the busy London streets, she tried to gather her thoughts. She still couldn't believe he'd kept his identity from her. What a fool she'd been. If only she'd had a picture of him before that first meeting, things would have been so different. She could have beaten him at his own game—and missed out on one of the best nights of her life.

Part of her wanted to kill him, or at least seriously maim him for lying to her, but the other part wouldn't trade the sex for anything. She would never tell him so, but the way he'd stared at her as he made love to her and the way they'd connected was something she soon wouldn't forget. Katie took a deep breath.

But now was not the time to think about those incredible moments. The man was a client, with a rather serious case.

Katie had no doubt someone had tried to kill him. That he thought the threats were coincidences almost made her laugh. Moving to the desk, she sat down to go through the files the dean's office had gathered for her. Flipping open the file with the police reports from the accident, she read through them.

The professor hadn't mentioned that the last accident had landed him in the hospital for two days. He'd sustained a concussion and minor lacerations to the face. But the doctors had been concerned about the head injury. He'd lost consciousness for more than thirty minutes and suffered a pretty good blow to the head.

She'd noticed a couple of small scars on his forehead and cheek. He'd healed quickly. Katie tasted blood in her mouth and realized she'd bitten down on her lip too hard.

You're making it personal. That's never a good thing. If you want to help this guy you have to separate the man from the amazing sex. Otherwise you're going to miss something and you're going to get him killed.

Katie cleared her throat and closed her eyes for a moment. If she wanted to help Mac, she had to stay objective. She couldn't do that if she was lusting after him all the time.

Tapping her right index finger, she again focused on the files from the dean. There was something there, something she wasn't seeing. She yawned and glanced at the clock. Only four hours until she had to meet the professor at the lab to escort him home. She'd given him explicit instructions to stay at work until she arrived. He'd laughed at her and wondered aloud how a tiny thing like her could protect him if there really was evil out to get him.

She'd smiled patiently and opened the laptop again. Typing in a URL, she'd brought up a site with training videos for the academy to show him how lethal she could be. There were several of them, and she'd pulled up one of the advanced classes where she'd had to defend herself against four opponents. In a matter of seconds she had all four men, at least a foot taller than she was, on the mat.

"How is that possible?" the professor had whispered.

"Training," she'd said confidently. "You don't work in my field without knowing how to take care of business. So when I tell you to stay put, I mean it. Understand?"

He'd nodded, and then grinned.

"What?" she'd asked him.

"I didn't think it was possible, but seeing that made you even sexier. That's seriously hot what you just did. You're like a ninja woman."

She'd grunted and shut the laptop. The man was hopeless. Promising she'd be back at six to take him home, she'd left him in his office.

She had only four hours left. Four hours before facing the man who stoked her desire with a mere smile. Why did it have to be him? Any other man in the world, but no, it was Mac. And damned if she didn't feel for him more than she had any guy she'd ever met.

Four hours, and then she'd be on duty again until she hauled him back to the lab the next morning. She still felt jet-lagged. Her mind would be clearer if she rested for a short while. She had a glass of water and stuck the Do Not Disturb sign on the outer handle of the door. Two hours of sleep and she could go another twenty-four with no problem. She'd learned that at her former job, too—a police detective was always on call.

After stripping, she snuggled down under the sheets and did her best to clear her mind. It wasn't easy when she remembered the last time she'd been in this bed it had been with Mac. The way he made her feel sent shivers down her spine.

The way he'd made her come so many times she lost count.

She pounded the mattress below her. "Damn you, Mac. Why did you have to complicate everything?"

MAC HAD A PROBLEM no equation would ever solve. He had it bad for Katie. He couldn't stop thinking about her. pImages** of their lovemaking the night before would pop into his head at the most inopportune times. In the middle of separating a strain of bacteria so he could study it under the microscope, he'd remembered how she'd laughed at the pub. That throaty, sexy sound made him instantly hard.

Then there was the way she'd eaten all her steak and salad, without a thought. Most of the women he'd dated ate only the salad, and half of that. For such a petite thing, she'd really enjoyed the food and the beer. He respected that in an odd way.

Scrubbing his face with his hands, he groaned. He had to get the woman out of his head and focus. Now was not a good time for him to be distracted. He'd made serious inroads with his research in the past six months and he was on the cusp of something big.

Katie was definitely a distraction of epic proportions. Three times after she'd left earlier in the day, he'd pulled up the videos to watch her fight. She was absolutely ruthless when it came to making a kill. The exact opposite of what he'd seen the night before when they'd been making love. She'd been nothing but hot sex and sensuality, from her sexy moans to the way she looked in those stiletto boots. He had to make love to her again. His sanity depended on it.

Mac walked away from the microscope and paced. That's what he did when he had a problem. The movement often helped him to focus. The work had to come first. The dean expected him to present his first papers in the spring, and there was no time for any sort of delays.

But Katie filled his brain.

"What are you, some kind of stalker?" He continued his walk. "She slept with you. You lied. And now she's pissed off. She wouldn't touch you again ever, especially with her rule about clients. And have you noticed that you're talking to yourself out loud?"

Mac stopped and stared at the ceiling. This was nothing more than a schoolboy crush. He'd get over it. He had to. Everything he'd been working on the past few years depended on it. That was it. The best thing he could do would be to cooperate with her so she could see that this so-called case was nothing more than his propensity for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Then he could send her on her way and get back to work.

Yeah, right.

A KNOCK AT THE DOOR had Katie sitting straight up in bed wondering where she was. In half a second she remembered. London. The hotel. Mac. Jogging to the bathroom, she found the hotel robe and wrapped it around her naked body.

Someone knocked again.

“Just a minute,” she said. It had better be important, since the person had obviously ignored the Do Not Disturb sign. She glanced at the clock and saw that it was almost four. Rising on her toes, she squinted so she could see through the peephole.

Growling, she opened the door.

“I thought I told you to stay put. What the hell are you doing here?”

Mac stood staring, his eyes moving down to the swell of her breasts and back to her face, trying to hide a smile.

“Get in here,” she said, yanking him into the hotel room. “We had a deal—I come get you at six and take you to your home. What’s so difficult about that?”

“No need to be so cranky.” Mac moved to sit down on the sofa in the living room. “I didn’t know you’d be napping. I thought you’d be running around doing detective stuff.”

“I was, but then I realized I had to get some rest so I could protect you tonight. Would you like to explain why you are here?”

“I had to see you.”

Katie frowned, wondering what had been so important that he’d risk his life to see her. “Is it about your case? Did you remember something?”

“The case? Oh, yeah. The dean stopped by. He wanted me to give you these.” He pulled a couple of files out of his backpack. “They’re files about other programs that have been targeted at the university.”

“Thanks. So this is it? It couldn’t wait until six?” Frustrated, she pulled the robe tighter around her. “I need you to follow the rules, Professor, so I can do my job. That means doing what I ask so that we can both be safe.”

“I took a cab straight here,” he said by way of explanation. “I was never alone. It picked me up at the door of the science building and brought me straight here.”

Katie looked to the ceiling, sighed and sat down again. “Anyone could have grabbed you on your way up here. The lobby at this hotel is crowded at four, because they have high tea, something the Brits seem to favor. I know this because when I checked in the desk clerk told me that I would need reservations, as the place was usually packed.

“There’s the elevator, stairwell, any number of places someone could have been hiding, and you would never have seen them coming.”

She threw her hands up in frustration. “I can’t help you if you don’t take this seriously. I’m good at what I do, but I can’t do my job if you don’t cooperate. It’s that simple.”

“I thought I was taking precautions by calling the cab. Normally I would have walked the twenty blocks or so. I don’t see how someone could grab me in a room full of people or on a busy street.”

She leaned forward, putting her elbows on her knees, and then remembered she was wearing the robe, so she sat back up. “You were mugged on a busy street a little over a week ago.”

He shook his head. “That was kids acting tough. I gave them the few pounds I had and they took off.”

“One of them hit you from behind with a bottle—your second head injury in as many weeks. They also tried to take the backpack you had on your shoulder, which no doubt had your laptop, right?”

He nodded. “I’d done some work at the pub.”

“Right. Those kids were after more than your wallet. That was to keep you from catching on to what they really wanted. If that couple hadn’t come around the corner when they did, the kids might have run off with it. Do you understand? Someone wants your research. I think we’re dealing with people who know you and this is personal.”

Something clicked in her brain. “That’s it.” She walked over to the files she’d been looking at before. All the crimes against Mac had happened at the same time of day. At the desk she rummaged through the files again.

“Let me guess, you have a pretty solid routine. You get to the university at the same time every day, and you leave at the same time. Am I right?”

He stood. “Yes, why?”

“It’s simple. They know your schedule. It’s either someone who is watching you, which will make them easy for me to spot, or it’s someone close to you.”

She couldn’t help but smile. “I knew there was something I wasn’t seeing earlier. If they were terrorists, they wouldn’t be playing games. We’d either be talking about ransom or requesting your body back for the family.”

“Don’t pull any punches on my account.” Mac’s voice dripped with sarcasm.

“Oh, sorry. I was thinking out loud. I do that when I’m working a case. I apologize if I’ve frightened you.”

“Not at all,” Mac said. “I’m glad you’ve been able to put the dean’s crazy ideas about terrorists to rest.”

“No, he isn’t crazy. Someone does want to cause you bodily harm. The dean is absolutely correct about that. But it isn’t an outward threat.”

Mac shook his head. “But none of this makes any sense. My friends don’t have any reason to cause me harm. Most of them don’t even know what I do. My colleagues at the university are professionals who have their own concerns. We are very pleasant with one another.”

“Pleasant is an easy way to hide mercenary and evil,” Katie said, her hands going to her hips. Her mind was on the case, but it didn’t keep her from noticing the way his sweater hid his gorgeous abs, or the slight bulge in his pants her fingers ached to touch.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.