

Something About You

JULIE JAMES



BERKLEY SENSATION, NEW YORK

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Berkley Sensation Titles by Julie James

JUST THE SEXIEST MAN ALIVE
PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT
SOMETHING ABOUT YOU

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*To the jokers in the room next to me
at the JW Marriott San Francisco—
As you kept me awake with your antics,
this is the book I wrote in my head.*

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One

THIRTY THOUSAND HOTEL rooms in the city of Chicago, and Cameron Lynde managed to find one next door to a couple having a sex marathon.

“Yes! Oh yes! YES!”

Cameron pulled the pillow over her head, thinking—as she had been thinking for the past hour and half—that it had to end *sometime*. It was after three o’clock in the morning, and while she certainly had nothing against a good round of raucous hotel sex, this particular round had gone beyond raucous and into the ridiculous about fourteen “oh-God-oh-God-oh-Gods” ago. More important, even with the discounted rate they gave federal employees, overnights at the Peninsula weren’t typically within the monthly budget of an assistant U.S. attorney, and she was starting to get seriously POed that she couldn’t get a little peace and quiet.

Bam! Bam! Bam! The wall behind the king-sized bed shook with enough force to rattle her headboard, and Cameron cursed the hardwood floors that had brought her to such circumstances.

Earlier in the week, when the contractor had told her that she would need to stay off her refinished floors for twenty-four hours, she had decided to treat herself to some much-needed pampering. Just last week she had finished a grueling three-month racketeering trial against eleven defendants charged with various organized criminal activities, including seven murders and three attempted murders. The trial had been mentally exhausting for everyone involved, particularly her and the other assistant U.S. attorney who had prosecuted the case. So when she’d learned that she needed to be out of her house while the floors dried, she had seized on the opportunity to turn it into a weekend getaway.

Maybe other people would have gone somewhere more distant or exotic than a hotel three miles from home, but all Cameron had cared about was getting an incredibly overpriced but fantastical rejuvenating massage, followed by a tranquil night of R&R, and then in the morning a brunch buffet (again incredibly overpriced) where she could stuff herself to the point where she remembered why she made it a general habit to stay away from brunch buffets. And the perfect place for that was the Peninsula.

Or so she had thought.

“Such a big, bad man! Right there, oh yeah—right there, don’t stop!”

The pillow over her head did nothing to drown out the woman’s voice. Cameron closed her eyes in a silent plea. *Dear Mr. Big and Bad: Whatever the hell you’re doing, don’t you move from that spot until you get the job done.* She hadn’t prayed so hard for an orgasm since the first—and last—time she slept with Jim, the corporate wine buyer/artist who wanted to “find his way” but who didn’t seem to have a clue how to find his way around the key parts of the female body.

The moaning that had started around 1:30 A.M. was what had woken her up. In her groggy state, her first thought had been that someone in the room next door was sick. But quickly following those moans had been a second person’s moans, and then came the panting and the wall-banging and the hollering and then that part that sounded suspiciously like a butt cheek being spanked, and somewhere around that point she had clued into the true goings-on of room 1308.

WhaMA-WhaMA-WhaMA-WhaMA-WhaMA-WhaMA ...

The bed in the room next door increased its tempo against the wall, and the squeaking of the mattress reached a new, feverish pitch. Despite her annoyance, Cameron had to give the guy credit.

whoever he was, for having some serious staying power. Perhaps it was one of those Viagra situations she mused. She had heard somewhere that one little pill could get a man up and running for over for hours.

She yanked the pillow off her head and peered through the darkness at the clock on the nightstand next to the bed: 3:17. If she had to endure another two hours and fifteen minutes of this stuff, she just might have to kill someone—starting with the front desk clerk who had put her in this room in the first place. Weren't hotels supposed to skip the thirteenth floor, anyway? Right now she was wishing she was a more superstitious person and had asked to be assigned another room.

In fact, right now she was wishing she'd never come up with the whole weekend getaway idea and instead had just spent the night at Collin's or Amy's. At least then she'd be asleep instead of listening to the cacophonous symphony of grunting and squealing—oh yes, the girl was actually *squealing* now—that was the current soundtrack of her life. Plus, Collin made a mean cheddar and tomato egg-white omelet that, while likely not quite the equivalent of the delicacies one might find at the Peninsula buffet, would've reminded her why she'd made it a general habit to let him do all the cooking when the three of them lived together their senior year of college.

Wheewammawamma-BAM! Wheewammawamma-BAM!

Cameron sat up in bed and looked at the phone on the nightstand. She didn't want to be that kind of guest that complained about every little blemish in the hotel's five-star service. But the noise from the room next door had been going on for a long time now and at a certain point, she felt as though she was entitled to some sleep in her nearly four-hundred-dollar-per-night room. The only reason the hotel hadn't already received complaints, she guessed, was due to the fact that 1308 was a corner room with no one on the other side.

Cameron was just about to pick up the phone to call the front desk when, suddenly, she heard the man next door call out the glorious sounds of her salvation.

Smack! Smack!

“Oh shit, I'm coommmminngg!”

A loud groan. And then—

Blessed silence. Finally.

Cameron fell back onto the bed. *Thank you, thank you, Peninsula hotel gods, for granting me this tiny reprieve. I shall never again call your massages incredibly overpriced. Even if we all know it doesn't cost \$195 to rub lotion on someone's back. Just saying.*

She crawled under the covers and pulled the cream down duvet up to her chin. Her head sank into the pillows and she lay there for a few minutes as she began to drift off. Then she heard another noise next door—the sound of the door shutting.

Cameron tensed.

And then—

Nothing.

All remained blissfully still and silent, and her final thought before she fell asleep was on the significance of the sound of the door shutting.

She had a sneaking suspicion that somebody had just received a five-star booty call.

BAM!

Cameron shot up in bed, the sound from next door waking her right out of her sleep. She heard muffled squealing and the bed slammed against the wall again—harder and louder than ever—as if it

occupants were *really* going at it this time.

She looked at the clock: 4:08. She'd been given a whopping thirty-minute reprieve.

Not wasting another moment—frankly, she'd already given these jokers far too much of her valuable sleep time—she reached over and turned on the lamp next to the bed. She blinked as her eyes adjusted to the sudden burst of light. Then she grabbed the phone off the nightstand and dialed.

After one ring, a man answered pleasantly on the other end. “Good evening, Ms. Lynde. Thank you for calling Guest Services—how may we be of assistance?”

Cameron cleared her throat, her voice still hoarse as her words tumbled out. “Look, I don't want to be a jerk about this, but you guys have got to do something about the people in room 1308. They keep banging against the wall; there's been all sorts of moaning and shouting and spanking and it's been going on for, like, the last two hours. I've barely slept this entire night and it sounds like they're gearing up for round twenty or whatever, which is great for them but not so much for me, and I'm kind of at the point where enough is enough, you know?”

The voice on the other end was wholly unfazed, as if Guest Services at the Peninsula handled the fallout from five-star booty calls all the time.

“Of course, Ms. Lynde. I apologize for the inconvenience. I'll send up security to take care of the problem right away.”

“Thanks,” Cameron grumbled, not yet willing to be pacified that easily. She planned to speak to the manager in the morning, but for now all she wanted was a quiet room and some sleep.

She hung up the phone and waited. A few moments passed, then she glanced at the wall behind the bed. Things had fallen strangely silent in room 1308. She wondered if the occupants had heard her calling Guest Services to complain. Sure, the walls were thin (as she definitely had discovered firsthand), but were they *that* thin?

She heard the door to room 1308 open.

The bastards were making their escape.

Cameron flew out of bed and ran to her door, determined to at least get a look at the sex fiends. She pressed against the door and peered through the peephole just as the door to the other room shut. For a brief moment, she saw no one. Then—

A man stepped into view.

He moved quickly, appearing slightly distorted through the peephole. He had his back toward her as he passed by her room, so Cameron didn't get the greatest look. She didn't know what the typical sex fiend looked like, but this particular one was on the taller side and stylish in his jeans, black corduroy blazer, and gray hooded T-shirt. He wore the hood pulled up, which was kind of unusual. As the man crossed the hallway and pushed open the door to the stairwell, something struck her as oddly familiar. But then he disappeared into the stairwell before she could place it.

Cameron pulled away from the door. Something very strange was going on in room 1308 . . . Maybe the man had fled the scene because he'd heard her call Guest Services and was abandoning his partner to deal with the fallout alone. A married man, perhaps? Regardless, the woman in 1308 was going to have some serious 'splaining to do once hotel security arrived. Cameron figured—since she already was awake, that is—that she might as well just sit it out right there at the peephole and catch the final act. Not that she was eavesdropping or anything, but . . . okay, she was eavesdropping.

She didn't have to wait long. Two men dressed in suits, presumably hotel security, arrived within the next minute and knocked on the door to 1308. Cameron watched through the peephole as the security guards stared expectantly at the door, then shrugged at each other when there was no answer.

“Should we try again?” the shorter security guard asked.

The second guy nodded and knocked on the door. “Hotel security,” he called out.

No response.

“Are you sure this is the right room?” asked the second guy.

The first guy checked the room number, then nodded. “Yep. The person who complained said the noise was coming from room 1308.”

He glanced over at Cameron’s room. She took a step back as if they could see her through the door. She suddenly felt very aware of the fact that she was wearing only her University of Michigan T-shirt and underwear.

There was a pause.

“Well, I don’t hear a thing now,” Cameron heard the first guy say. He banged on the door a third time, louder still. “Security! Open up!”

Still nothing.

Cameron moved back to the door and looked out the peephole once again. She saw the security guards exchange looks of annoyance.

“They’re probably in the shower,” said the shorter guy.

“Probably going at it again,” the other one agreed.

The two men pressed their ears to the door. On her side of the door, Cameron listened for any sound of a shower running in the next room but heard nothing.

The taller security guard sighed. “You know the protocol—we have to go in.” Out of his pocket he pulled what presumably was some sort of master key card. He slid it into the lock and cracked open the door.

“Hello? Hotel security—anyone in here?” he called into the room.

He looked over his shoulder at his partner and shook his head. Nothing. He stepped farther in and gestured for the second guy to follow. Both men disappeared into the room, out of Cameron’s view, and the door slammed shut behind them.

There was a momentary pause, then Cameron heard one of the security men cry out through the adjoining wall.

“Holy shit!”

Her stomach dropped. She knew then that whatever had happened in 1308, it wasn’t good. Uncertain what she should do, she pressed her ear to the wall and listened.

“Try CPR while I call 9-1-1!” one of the men shouted.

Cameron flew off the bed—she knew CPR—and raced to the door. She threw it open just as the shorter security guy was running out of 1308.

Seeing her, he held up his hand, indicating she should stop right where she was. “Ma’am—please get back in your room.”

“But I heard—I thought I could help, I—”

“We’ve got it covered, ma’am. Now please step back into your room.” He rushed off.

Per the security’s guard order, Cameron remained in her doorway. She looked around and saw that other people in the nearby rooms had heard the commotion and were peering into the hallway with mixed expressions of trepidation and curiosity.

After what seemed like forever but what was probably only minutes, the shorter guy returned leading a pair of paramedics pulling a gurney.

As the trio raced past Cameron, she overheard the security guard explaining the situation. “We found her lying there on the bed . . . She was nonresponsive so we began CPR but it doesn’t look good . . .”

By this time, additional staff had arrived on the scene, and a woman in a gray suit identified herself as the hotel manager and asked everyone to remain in their rooms. Cameron overheard her tell the other members of the staff to keep the hallway and elevator bank clear. The thirteenth floor guests spoke amongst themselves in low murmurs, and Cameron caught snippets of conversations as a guest from one room would ask another if he or she knew what was happening.

A hush fell over the crowd when the paramedics reappeared in the doorway of room 1308. They moved quickly, pulling the gurney out into the hall.

This time, there was a person on that gurney.

As they hurried past Cameron, she caught a glimpse of the person—a quick glimpse, but enough to see that it was a woman, and also enough to see that she had long red hair that fanned out in stark contrast to the white of both the sheet on the gurney and the hotel bathrobe she wore. And, she saw enough to see that the woman wasn't moving.

While one of the paramedics pushed the gurney, the other ran alongside it, pumping oxygen through a handheld mask that covered the woman's face. The two security guards raced ahead of the paramedics, making sure the hallway was clear. Cameron—and apparently several of the other hotel guests as well—overheard the shorter guard saying something to the other about the police being on their way.

At the mention of the police, a minor commotion broke out. The hotel guests demanded to know what was happening.

The manager spoke above the fray. "I certainly understand that all of you have concerns, and I offer you our sincerest apologies for the disturbance." She addressed them in a calm, genteel tone that was remarkably similar to that of the man from Guest Services who Cameron had spoken on the phone with earlier. She wondered if they all talked that way to each other when no customers were around, or if they dropped the charm routine and that vague, quasi-European-even-though-I'm-from-Wisconsin accent the minute they hit the lunchroom.

"Unfortunately, at this point I can tell you only that the situation, obviously, is very serious and may be criminal in nature," the manager continued. "We will be turning this matter over to the police and we ask that everyone remain in their rooms until they arrive and assess the situation. It's likely the police will want to speak with some of you."

The manager's gaze fell directly upon Cameron. As the crowd fell back into their murmurs and whispers, she walked over. "Ms. Lynde, is it?"

Cameron nodded. "Yes."

The manager gestured to the door. "Would you mind if I escorted you back into your room, Ms. Lynde?" This was Polite-Peninsula-Hotel-speak for "You might as well get comfortable because your eavesdropping ass isn't going anywhere."

"Of course," Cameron said, still somewhat shell-shocked by the events that had transpired over the last few minutes. As an assistant U.S. attorney, she'd had plenty of exposure to the criminal element, but this was different. This was not some case she was reviewing through the objective eyes of a prosecutor; there were no evidence files neatly prepared by the FBI or crime scene photos taken after the fact. She had actually *heard* the crime this time; she had seen the victim firsthand and—thinking back to the man in the blazer and hooded T-shirt—very possibly the person who had harmed her as well.

The thought sent chills running down her spine.

Or, Cameron supposed, maybe the chill had something to do with the fact that she was still standing in the air-conditioned hallway wearing nothing but her T-shirt and underwear.

Classy.

~~With as much dignity as one could muster while braless and without any pants, Cameron tugged h~~
T-shirt down an extra half-inch and followed the hotel manager into her room.

Two

SOMETHING WASN'T RIGHT.

Cameron had been trapped inside her hotel room for nearly two hours while the Chicago Police Department supposedly conducted their investigation. She knew enough about crime scenes and witness questioning to know that this was not standard protocol.

For starters, nobody was telling her anything. The police had arrived shortly after the hotel manager escorted her back into her room. A middle-aged, slightly balding and extremely cranky Detective Slonsky introduced himself to Cameron and took a seat in the armchair in the corner of the hotel room and began to take her statement about what she had heard that night. Although she had at least been given two seconds of privacy to throw on yoga pants and a bra, she still found it awkward to be questioned by the police while sitting on a hastily made hotel bed.

The first thing Detective Slonsky noticed was the half-empty glass of wine that she had ordered from room service still sitting on the desk where she'd left it hours before. That, of course, had prompted several preliminary questions regarding her alcohol consumption over the course of the evening. After she seemingly managed to convince Slonsky that, no, she was not a raging alcoholic and, yes, her statement at least had a modicum of reliability, they moved past the booze issue and Slonsky commented on the fact that Slonsky had introduced himself as "Detective" instead of "Officer." Slonsky asked if that meant he was part of the homicide division. If for no other reason, she wanted to know what had happened to the girl in room 1308.

Slonsky's sole response was a level stare and a curt, "I'm the one asking the questions here, Ms. Lynde."

Cameron had just finished giving her statement when another plain-clothes detective stuck his head into the room. "Slonsky—you better get in here." He nodded in the direction of the room next door.

Slonsky stood and gave Cameron yet another level stare. She wondered if he practiced the look in his bathroom mirror.

"I'd appreciate it if you would remain in this room until I get back," he told her.

Cameron smiled. "Of course, Detective." She was debating whether to pull rank in order to start getting some answers, but she wasn't quite at that point. Yet. She'd been around cops and agents all her life and had a lot of respect for what they did. But the smile was to let Slonsky know that she wasn't getting to her. "I'm happy to cooperate in any way I can."

Slonsky eyed her suspiciously, probably trying to decide whether he heard a hint of sarcasm in her voice. She got that look a lot.

"Just stay in your room," he said as he made his exit.

The next time Cameron saw Detective Slonsky was a half hour later, when he dropped by her room to let her know that, due to certain "unexpected developments," she would not only have to remain in her room longer than anticipated, but that he was posting a guard at her door. He added that "it had been requested" that she not make any calls from either her cell phone or the hotel line until "they had finished questioning her."

For the first time, Cameron wondered whether she personally was in trouble. "Am I considered a *suspect* in this investigation?" she asked Slonsky.

"I didn't say that."

She noticed that wasn't officially a "no."

As Slonsky turned to leave, she threw another question at him. "Who are 'they'?"

He peered over his shoulder. "Excuse me?"

"You said I can't make any calls until 'they' finish questioning me," Cameron said. "Who were you referring to?"

The detective's expression said that he had no intention of answering that question. "We appreciate your continued cooperation, Ms. Lynde. That's all I can say for now."

A few minutes after Slonsky left, Cameron looked out her peephole and—sure enough—was treated to the view of the back of some man's head, presumably the guard he had stationed outside her door. She left the door and went back to sitting on the bed. Cameron glanced at the clock and saw that it was nearly 7:00 A.M. She turned on the television—Slonsky hadn't said anything about not watching TV after all—and hoped that maybe she would see something about whatever was happening on the news.

She was still pushing buttons on the remote, trying to figure out how to get past that damn hot "Welcome" screen, when the door to her room flew open once more.

Slonsky stuck his head in. "Sorry—no television either."

He shut the door.

"Stupid thin walls," Cameron muttered under her breath. Not that anyone was listening. Then again...

"Can I at least read a book, Detective Slonsky?" she asked the empty room.

A pause.

Then a voice came through the door, from the hallway.

"Sure."

And indeed the walls were so thin, Cameron could actually hear the faint trace of a smile in his answer.

"THIS IS GETTING ridiculous. I have rights, you know."

Cameron faced off against the cop guarding the door to her hotel room, determined to get some answers.

The young police officer nodded sympathetically. "I know, ma'am, and I do apologize, but I'm just following orders."

Maybe it was her frustration at being cooped up in her hotel room for what was now going on five—yes, *five*—hours, but Cameron was going to strangle the kid if he ma'am-ed her one more time. Slonsky was thirty-two years old, not sixty. Although she'd probably given up the right to be called "Miss" somewhere around the time she had started thinking of twenty-two-year-old man-boy police officers as kids.

Deciding that throttling a cop was probably not the best way to go when presumably dozens more stood right outside her door (she couldn't say for sure; she hadn't been permitted to even look out into the hallway, let alone step a toe out there), Cameron tried another tactic. The man-boy clearly responded to authority, maybe she could use that to her advantage.

"Look, I probably should've mentioned this earlier, but I'm an assistant U.S. attorney. I work out of the Chicago office—"

"If you live in Chicago, what are you doing spending the night in a hotel?" Officer Man-Boy interrupted.

"I'm redoing my hardwood floors. The point is—"

“Really?” He seemed very interested in this. “Because I’ve been trying to find somebody to update my bathroom. The people who owned the place before me put in this crazy black and white marble and gold fixtures and the place looks like something out of the Playboy Mansion. Mind if I ask how you found a contractor to take on a job that small?”

Cameron cocked her head. “Are you trying to sidetrack me with these questions, or do you just have some weird fascination with home improvement?”

“Possibly the former. I was under the distinct impression that you were about to become difficult.”

Cameron had to hide her smile. Officer Man-Boy may not have been as green as she’d thought.

“Here’s the thing,” she told him, “you can’t keep me here against my will, especially since I’ve already given my statement to Detective Slonsky. You know that, and more important, I know that. There’s clearly something unusual going on with this investigation, and while I’m willing to cooperate and give you guys a little leeway as a professional courtesy, I’m going to need some answers if you expect me to keep waiting here. And if you’re not the person who can give me those answers, that’s fine, but then I’d like it if you could go get Slonsky or whoever it is that I should be talking to.”

Officer Man-Boy was not unsympathetic. “Look—I know you’ve been stuck in this room for a long time, but the FBI guys said that they’re gonna talk to you as soon as they finish next door.”

“So it’s the FBI who’s running this, then?”

“I probably wasn’t supposed to say that.”

“Why do they have jurisdiction?” Cameron pressed. “This is a homicide case, right?”

Officer Man-Boy didn’t fall for the bait a second time. “I’m sorry, Ms. Lynde, but my hands are tied. The agent in charge of the investigation specifically said I’m not allowed to talk to you about this.”

“Then I think I should speak to the agent in charge. Who is it?” As a prosecutor for the Northern District of Illinois, she had worked with many of the FBI agents in Chicago.

“Some special agent—I didn’t catch his name,” Officer Man-Boy said. “Although I think he might know you. When he told me to guard this room, he said he felt bad for sticking me with you for that long.”

Cameron tried not to show any reaction, but that stung. True, she wasn’t exactly buddy-buddy with a lot of the FBI agents she worked with—many of them still blamed her for that incident three years ago—but with the exception of one particular agent who, fortunately, was miles away in Nevada or Nebraska or something, she hadn’t thought that anyone in the FBI disliked her enough to openly badmouth her.

Officer Man-Boy looked apologetic. “For what it’s worth, I don’t think you’re so bad.”

“Thanks. And did this unknown special agent who allegedly thinks he knows me have anything else to say?”

“Only that I should go get him if you start acting fussy.” He looked her over. “You’re going to start acting fussy now, aren’t you?”

Cameron folded her arms across her chest. “Yes, I think I am.” And it wouldn’t be an act. “You go find this agent, whoever he is, and tell him that the fussy woman in room 1307 is through being jerked around. And tell him that I would appreciate it very much if he could wrap up his little power trip and condescend to speak to me himself. Because *I* would like to know how long he expects me to sit here and wait.”

“For as long as I ask you to, Ms. Lynde.”

The voice came from the doorway.

Cameron had her back to the door, but she would’ve recognized that voice anywhere—low and

smooth as velvet.

It couldn't be.

She turned around and took in the man standing across the room from her. He looked exactly the same as he did the last time she'd seen him three years ago: tall, dark, and scowling.

She didn't bother to mask the animosity in her voice. "Agent Pallas . . . I didn't realize you were back in town. How was Nevada?"

"Nebraska."

From his icy look, Cameron knew that her day, which had already been off to a most inauspicious start, had just gotten about fifty times worse.

Three

CAMERON WATCHED WARILY as Jack, aka FBI Special Agent Pallas, looked over at Officer Man Boy.

“Thank you, Officer, I can take it from here,” he said.

The police officer made a hasty retreat, leaving her alone in the hotel room with Jack. His gaze was stone cold.

“This is quite a mess you’ve gotten yourself involved in.”

Cameron straightened up. Three years had passed, and he still managed to put her immediately on the defensive. “I wouldn’t know. Thanks to you, I have no clue what I’m involved in.” She paused, hating being out of the loop on whatever was going on. “What happened to the woman next door?”

“She’s dead.”

Cameron nodded. The presence of CPD detectives had pretty much given that away, but the confirmation of the woman’s death shocked her nevertheless. She suddenly felt an overwhelming urge to get out of that hotel room. But she forced herself not to show any reaction in front of Jack.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” she said simply.

He gestured to the chair in front of the desk. “Why don’t you take a seat? I need to ask you some questions.”

“Do you intend to interrogate me, Agent Pallas?”

“Do you intend to be uncooperative, Ms. Lynde?”

She laughed hollowly. “Why? Are you going to get rough with me?”

His eyes remained steely and dark. Cameron swallowed and made a mental note to be careful when taunting a man who carried a gun and blamed her for nearly wrecking his career.

She remembered the day three years ago when they’d first met to discuss the Martino case. She had never worked with Jack before; at that point she’d only been a prosecutor for a year and he had been working undercover that entire time. She had been surprised—but eagerly so—when her boss assigned her the Martino investigation, one of the most high-profile cases in the district. Rob Martin (aka Roberto Martino) was widely known by both the Bureau and the U.S. attorney’s office to be the head of one of the largest crime syndicates in Chicago. The problem had always been getting enough evidence to prove this.

Which is precisely where Special Agent Jack Pallas came in. Prior to their meeting, Cameron had learned from her boss that Jack had worked undercover for two years to infiltrate Martino’s organization, until the FBI had been forced to pull him out when his cover was blown. Her boss had not told her much about the extraction other than that Jack had been cornered in a warehouse by ten of Martino’s men, had fought his way out, and had been shot in the process. She’d learned one other thing—by the time FBI backup arrived, Jack had already managed to kill eight of Martino’s men.

He made quite an impression on her the first time he and his partner walked into her office. Cameron suspected nearly everyone who met Jack Pallas had the same reaction: with predatory brown eyes, nearly black hair, and dark facial scruff, he looked like the kind of guy that women—and men—should avoid in dark alleys. He had a cast on his right forearm, presumably an injury inflicted by Martino’s men, and he wore a navy T-shirt and jeans instead of the standard-issue suit and tie most agents were expected to wear. From the look of him, she was not at all surprised the FBI had chosen

him for undercover work.

And three years later—as he stood across from her in that hotel room that suddenly seemed far too small, with his eyes glittering with a low-simmering anger, and, yes, even despite the standard-issue suit and tie he wore this time—he looked not one bit less dangerous.

“I want to talk to a lawyer,” Cameron said.

“You are a lawyer,” he said. “And you’re not considered a suspect, so you’re not entitled to one anyway.”

“What am I considered, then?”

“A person of interest.”

This was bullshit. “Here’s the deal: I’m tired and not in the mood to play games. So if you don’t start telling me what’s going on, I’m walking,” Cameron said.

Jack eyed her yoga sweats and Michigan T-shirt, looking unconcerned with her threats. Thank God she wasn’t still hanging out in her underpants.

“You’re not going anywhere.” He pulled the chair out and gestured. “Take a seat.”

“Thanks, but no. I think I’ll just stick with the plan where I walk out.” Before he could call her bluff, Cameron grabbed her purse and headed for the door. The hell with her stuff, she’d get it later. “It was nice catching up with you, Agent Pallas. I’m glad to see those three years in Nebraska didn’t make you any less of an asshole.”

She threw open the door and nearly ran into a man standing in the doorway. He wore a well-cut gray suit and tie, appeared younger than Jack, and was African American.

He flashed Cameron a knock-out smile while precariously balancing three Starbucks cups in his hands. “Thanks for getting the door. What’d I miss?”

“I’m storming out. And I just called Agent Pallas an asshole.”

“Sounds like good times. Coffee?” He held the Starbucks out to her. “I’m Agent Wilkins.”

Cameron threw a knowing glance over her shoulder. “Good cop, bad cop? Is that the best you’re capable of, Jack?”

He stalked across the room and stopped in the doorway, towering over her. “You have no idea what I’m capable of,” he said darkly.

As he reached over and took one of the coffee cups from Wilkins, Cameron made a mental note to be careful when taunting a man who carried a gun, blamed her for nearly wrecking his career, *and* who was over a head taller than she was. She internally said a few profanities for her earlier decision to put on gym shoes; she needed at least three-inch heels to face off against Jack Pallas. Although that still would have only put her at his chin level. Not to mention that she would’ve looked like a major jackass wearing Manolos and yoga pants.

Wilkins gestured with the coffee cups. “Do you two know each other?”

“Ms. Lynde and I *almost* had the pleasure of working on a case together,” Jack said.

“Almost? What does that mean?” Wilkins turned to Cameron with a look of realization. “Wait a second—*Cameron Lynde*? I knew that name sounded familiar. Of course, from the U.S. attorney’s office.” His light brown eyes lit up as he laughed. “You’re the one that Jack said had—”

“I think we all recall just fine what Agent Pallas said,” Cameron interrupted. Three years ago, his words infamously had been broadcast all over the national news for nearly a week. She didn’t need to hear them again, particularly not with him standing right beside her. The experience had been embarrassing enough the first time around.

Wilkins nodded. “Sure, no problem.” He looked between her and Jack. “So . . . this is awkward.”

Changing the subject, Cameron pointed to the coffee. “Is that regular or decaf?”

“Regular. I heard you had a long night.”

She took one of the cups from him. She'd been up for twenty-three hours and adrenaline wasn't cutting it anymore. She took a sip, sighing gratefully. “Thank you.”

Wilkins took a sip of his coffee. “See, that's all we are, just three people having coffee and talking. So what do you say—think you might want to stay and chat with us about what happened last night?”

That almost got a smile out of Cameron. Wilkins, at least, appeared to be a pleasant, reasonable man. Too bad he'd drawn the short stick in his partner assignment.

“That's not half-bad,” she told him.

Wilkins grinned. “The coffee or the good-cop routine?”

“Both. If *you* would like to ask me some questions, Agent Wilkins, I'd be happy to cooperate.” Cameron brushed past Jack as she turned and headed back into the room. He and Wilkins followed her as she took a seat in front of the desk. She crossed her legs and faced the two FBI agents head-on.

“All right. Let's talk.”

IF IT HAD been anyone other than Cameron Lynde, Jack probably would've found her attitude amusing.

But since it *was* Cameron Lynde, he wasn't laughing. In fact, there wasn't anything about the situation that he found even remotely funny.

He decided to let Wilkins take the lead in questioning her about the events of the night before. Not because she very clearly wanted nothing to do with him—he could care less about Cameron Lynde's wishes—but rather because, not surprising given their history, she responded better to his partner than to him. The investigation was his focus, and he was not about to let personal issues get in the way.

When he and Wilkins had first arrived at the Peninsula and Detective Slonsky told them the name of the witness in room 1307, for a split second Jack had thought the whole thing was a setup, some sort of welcome-back prank for his return to Chicago. And he still had considered this a possibility when they entered the crime scene. There was no body, after all—Slonsky said the paramedics had taken the victim to Northwestern Memorial in an attempt to revive her.

Then he saw the videotape.

After that, it was pretty clear to Jack that the call he had received at 5:00 A.M. from his boss, asking him to check out CPD's claims of what they thought they might have stumbled into, was indeed not part of some elaborate joke. And his first priority at this point was to determine whether the FBI had jurisdiction over the matter.

Cameron Lynde was the key to answering that question. If Jack believed her story, the FBI would have no choice but to conduct its own investigation. For that reason, as much as he might've wanted nothing more than to pawn her off onto Wilkins, as the senior agent on the scene he knew that wasn't an option.

From his post in the corner of the room, Jack studied her. Not surprisingly, she looked exhausted. And for some reason, she seemed shorter than he remembered. Probably because all the times he'd seen her three years ago had been during work hours and she'd been wearing heels.

Yes, he remembered Cameron Lynde and her high heels . . . In fact, despite the fact that it had been three years since he'd last seen her, Jack was surprised at how accurate—and detailed—his memory of her had been: the long chestnut hair, the crystalline blue-green eyes, the attitude that he'd once—very briefly—found admirable.

Then again, he shouldn't be surprised he'd remembered those things. After all, he was an FBI agent.

and it was his job to remember details.

And, he supposed, it didn't hurt that Cameron Lynde was—some men other than him might say—fucking gorgeous.

Which, to Jack, only made it that much more annoying that she also happened to be a total bitch.

Thankfully, the long chestnut hair currently was pulled back into a ponytail, and the blue-green eyes had dulled a little given her lack of sleep. The yoga pants and Michigan T-shirt she wore were actually kind of cute, but because of the aforementioned bitch factor, he ignored this.

“So when they woke me up the second time,” Cameron was saying, “that’s when I decided to call Guest Services.”

“I want to step back for a moment.” Jack’s interruption from the corner of the room startled Cameron; it was the first time he’d spoken since she’d begun giving her statement.

“Tell me what you heard right before you fell asleep. Before the noises next door started up again,” he said.

Cameron hesitated. He knew she didn’t want to answer *his* questions—she probably didn’t want to say anything to him at all, in fact—but now that she’d started cooperating, she didn’t have much choice.

“I heard the door shut, as if someone was leaving the room,” she said.

“Are you sure it was the exterior door you heard?” Jack asked.

“Yes.”

“But you didn’t check to see if anyone left at that time?”

Cameron shook her head. “No. Then the room went quiet for a while. For about a half hour or so.”

“Tell me about the noises that woke you up.”

Cameron turned to face him now that he had taken over the questioning. “What would you like to know, Agent Pallas?” she asked mock-politely.

“I just told you. I’d like to know what you heard.”

“Pretty much the same things I heard coming from the room the first time,” she said with an air of defiance.

Jack cocked his head. “Really? You said the first time around you heard the people next door having sex.”

“Yes, I think the ass slapping and the screams of ‘I’m coming’ gave that away.”

Jack stepped out from the corner to approach her. “So when you woke up the second time, did you hear any asses being slapped?”

“No.”

From her expression, he could tell she didn’t enjoy being on the receiving end of a cross-examination. “How about the ‘I’m coming’ screams? Any more of those?”

“I heard squealing.”

“But no proclamations of impending orgasms?”

She glared. “You made your point, Agent Pallas.”

He drew closer and stared down at her. “My point, Ms. Lynde, is that I know you’re tired, but that’s no excuse for getting sloppy.”

Cameron’s eyes filled with anger. But then she paused for a moment, and nodded. “Fair enough.”

She looked over at the wall she shared with room 1308. “When I woke up the second time, I heard the bed banging against the wall, louder than before. But only a couple of times. Then like I said, I heard squealing.”

“A man or a woman’s voice?” Jack asked.

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