

Dez and Judy
By Kate Simon

Dez hit the alarm and rolled over. Sunday was a day off for him but he wanted to review his notes again before dinner at Mum and Dad's. He climbed out of bed and stretched, catching a glance of himself in the full length mirror. He patted his flat stomach and resolved no extra helpings of Mum's trifle. It was delicious but he was getting older now and it was harder to keep in shape. He was thirty years old and had promised himself he'd make inspector by now. But he was still a sergeant. The chief inspector told him he should relax, try and fit in more with his fellow officers. He'd tried. He went to pubs, but he didn't drink much. He wasn't up on the latest football scores. He'd rather have his nose in a book than watch his drunken colleagues argue over a game of darts.

He took a closer look in the mirror. His hair was getting a bit long. He'd need a trim by next week. He kept it regulation length but kept it a little longer on top. Ladies seemed to enjoy messing about with it. He snickered at the memory of the redhead last week who'd particularly enjoyed it. His colleagues would never believe that bookworm, stick in the mud Desmond Stratham, did quite well with the ladies.

He dropped to the floor and began his routine of pushups. After fifty pushups he did fifty sit ups. He believed it was his duty to keep as fit as possible. Chasing suspects was tough enough. He stood and went to the kitchen. He switched on the electric teapot and sat down at the table. Crime scene pictures were spread out in front of him. At least, he considered it a crime scene. No one else did. His chief inspector didn't. The coroner didn't. The death of David Wickham had been ruled a suicide, but Dez didn't buy it. He looked at the pictures of Wickham, dead on the pavement below his Gracechurch street office. His eyes were wide open, staring straight up. Everything pointed to suicide. Crushing debt and evidence of embezzlement was found. Dez had seen worse reasons to kill yourself. There was just one thing that kept nagging at him. Who kills themselves by jumping off a building backwards?

Sunday dinners at his parents weren't a command performance before the queen. They were worse. Every Sunday afternoon Dez got to listen to his father prattle on about all his duties at Her Majesty's High Court of Justice. Niles Stratham had spent his thirty

years in law working his way up the judicial system. It had been a source of great pride for the family when his father had been appointed a puisine judge in the Queens Bench Division. Niles had no doubt that he would be appointed Lord Chief Counsel when the current Lord Chief retired. A belief Niles had repeated at every Sunday dinner for the past ten years.

Niles had been none too pleased when Dez opted for the crime academy instead of Kings College for law school. He had the grades for it but that side of the law held no interest for Dez. It had been Niles desire for Dez to follow in his footsteps and eventually be a judge himself. He felt there was no greater calling than seeing justice served. Apparently finding and arresting the perpetrators wasn't quite the same.

"Hi, Mum," Dez said as he handed her a small bouquet of flowers.

"Oh, thank you sweetheart. You don't have to do that."

"You say that every week," he said with a smile. Emma Stratham was a kind woman who'd married between wars and raised him and his sister, Sarah, while their father worked. She doted on her children, giving Dez and his sister a loving home, even with an absent father.

"Hello everybody." Sarah Stratham was twenty six and in her first year with a law office in London. Dez was sure she'd be a famous barrister one day as she lived to argue.

"How's it going?" Dez asked, because their parents never did.

"Slogging along. Grunt work mostly. That's to be expected of the new man in the office."

"But you're not a man, dear," said Emma.

"I meant it as a general term, Mum. It means since I'm the newest I have to do what the senior associates assign to me."

"That's fine, dear," she said as she pulled the Sunday roast out of the oven.

Dez saw the look on Sarah's face and it galled him. He pulled her aside in the hall. "Don't let them get to you. You've worked hard for this and you've earned it. I know one day you'll be arguing in the High Court and you'll be brilliant. I'm very proud of you."

Sarah's eyes welled. She put her arms around her brother and whispered, "Thanks, Dez. I don't know what I'd do without you."

"What's all this?" Their father made an entrance as he always did.

"Hi, Dad," said Dez. Niles merely nodded.

"Hi, Dad," said Sarah as she gave him a little kiss on the cheek.

"Come in and sit down," called Emma. They took their places at the table just as they had always done. "Dez, darling, what's new with you?"

"Not much this week. Working on a curious case, but I haven't made any progress."

"I see a theme," muttered his father as he buttered a biscuit.

Dez shot him a look but knew it would do no good.

"Meeting any nice girls?"

"Not in his line of work," said Niles.

His mother, realizing this was spinning out quicker than usual, changed direction.

"What about you Emma?"

"Did I meet any nice girls?" she asked sweetly. Dez chuckled.

"Don't be rude, young lady," snapped her father.

"Sorry. Nothing new, Mum. I'm working long hours."

"There must be some nice men in your office. After all, they are barristers."

"So am I, Mum."

"Oh but that's not really the same, dear. You'll meet someone soon and then you can have a family."

Dez watched as her sister focused on a slice of roast beef she no longer wanted. They were both put the ringer every Sunday afternoon, but Sarah took the brunt of it. Their father had refused to pay for her schooling, claiming studying the law was a waste on a woman. Sarah was undeterred. She worked twice as hard and earned a scholarship. Everything she had she'd earned on her own and he was damn proud of her for it. He tossed his napkin on the table. "When is this going to stop?"

"What, dear?" asked Emma.

"This constant harping on Sarah to find a man. Why should she?"

"Every woman wants to be married, dear."

"Did you ever ask her what she wanted? Sarah has worked long and hard to get where she is and I am very proud of her."

"Thanks, Dez," Sarah whispered.

"This is nonsense," declared Niles. "She'll just do it until she finds some man. At

least maybe they'll be one real barrister in the family."

"I am a real barrister, Dad." Everyone turned to see Sarah stand up from the table. "I have the exact same degrees as every man in the office, except I had to work twice as hard for them. I had to wait tables in between my studies. Why? Because you said this was just a phase and you weren't sinking your money into my whims." She tossed down her napkin. "I've been working for this for ten years Dad. When does it stop being a whim? Fifteen years? Twenty? "

Dez stood up from the table. "Sarah, you want to grab a pint with your old brother?" "I'd love to," she smiled.

He held the door for Sarah as they walked out the front door. "That was well done, Sarah." It was then he saw her crying. He folded her in his arms. "Sarah, you are a brilliant woman and you know that. Things are changing fast and they can't or won't change with them. They don't understand it's 1967 not 1937. Honestly, they probably never will."

"Dez, I face this nonsense everyday. Men who pinch my bum and tell me to get coffee."

His face grew dark. "Someone touches you?"

"Dez, no. I handled it."

"How?"

"I sent the birthday flowers for his wife to his mistress."

Dez laughed. "And the wife?"

"She got a magnificent bracelet and two tickets to Ibiza."

He rubbed her shoulder and kept walking. "Brilliant."

It had been a blessedly quiet day at the station house. He'd spent most of the afternoon catching up on paperwork and watching the clock. Not because he was particularly anxious to get home. He was planning on talking to Wickham's office mate. If the Chief Inspector caught him looking into a closed case he could kiss his promotion goodbye. He changed into his suit and adjusted his tie. He took as much pride in his personal clothes as he did in his uniform. He felt a tidy appearance indicated an orderly mind.

It was after five p.m. when he entered the lobby of Williams and Grant Financial

Advisors. There was no one at the reception desk but there must be someone here. The door was unlocked.

"Hello?" he called. The internal door to the offices opened and a beautiful blonde woman opened the door. Now he truly understood the term breathtaking. Her long blonde hair reached well past her shoulders. She was five foot eight in heels, slender curves hidden under a simple dark green sheath dress. It only served to highlight her dazzling green eyes.

"Can I help you?" she asked.

Her American accent surprised him. "Ah," he stammered, unusual for him with women. "I'm Sergeant Stratham, London police." He held up his ID. "I'm here to speak with J.E. Brenner."

"Is this about David?" she asked.

"I'm sorry I can't discuss it. If you could tell Mr. Brenner I'm here." He didn't understand why she was smiling.

She extended her hand. "I'm J.E. Brenner. What can I do for you Sergeant?"

He paused again, before shaking her hand. "Ms. Brenner. I wonder if I may have a few moments of your time?" She smiled again and he was still confused.

"Not many men use the term Ms.," she said.

"I don't see why not. It is an English term."

"Is it?" she said, still smiling.

"Yes. It is derived from the term Mistress, which was used to describe a woman when her marital status is unknown. That term has negative connotations these days."

"Is that right?"

"Yes, it is."

She took a breath and lost her smile. "I assume you want to ask me about David."

"I do."

"I thought the investigation was closed."

"I have a few more questions."

"Fine, but I was about to leave. I didn't get lunch and I'm starving." Her smile returned. "Buy me dinner and I will answer all the questions you want."

Now it was Dez's turn to smile. "I'd be delighted."

"I'll get my things. Oh, and single," she said.

"Excuse me?"

"My marital status. But stick with Ms. I like it."

They walked into the Windsor Pub, three blocks from her office. It was an upscale place, given the location, but still had the neighborhood feel of any self-respecting pub.

A round, grey haired man behind the bar called out to her. "Oy! Judy, where you been?"

"Working hard, Sammy."

"The usual?"

"Please. And one for my friend."

They took seat at a booth toward the back. "Judy is it?"

"I'm sorry, sergeant. I do enjoy the look on people's face when they realize I'm not a man."

"How could there be any doubt? " he asked before thinking. Something he never did. Gratefully, all she did was smile.

She extended her hand again. "Judith Elizabeth Brenner of Richmond Virginia. My friends call me Judy."

"Desmond Stratham, of Chelsea. My friends call me Dez."

"Well, who do we have here?" asked the bartender as he brought them two pints.

"This is my new friend, Dez. Dez, this is Sammy. He owns the pub and looks out for me."

"Yes I do, young man," he said, doing an excellent job of appearing menacing.

"Oh, I don't think we have anything to worry about, Dez is a policeman." She a smile that if he'd been standing would have buckled his knees. "Do I have anything to worry about, Dez?"

"No," was all he could manage to say.

"You want your cottage pie?" he asked.

"Of course. Dez?"

"Make it two," he said

"Well, if I'm going to call you Dez you should call me Judy."

He smiled. "Thank you, Judy. But I do need to ask you a few questions."

"You're trying to find who murdered David," she said as she took a sip of her ale.

He was stunned. No one knew what he was investigating or why. "Why do you think he was murdered?"

"Who kills themselves by jumping off a building backwards?"

"Exactly!" he again said without thinking. This woman was muddling his ordered thoughts.

Judy set down her drink. "First things first. Let's get all the awkward questions you were going to ask me out of the way. No, I did not kill David. I had no reason to. We shared an office and that is all. I am sorry the man is dead but I don't mourn him. Frankly, I didn't much care for the man. He thought, despite the fact that I have all the same degrees and licenses he had, that I was his secretary. I accidentally spilled hot coffee in his lap more than once to disabuse him of that notion. I had no financial or career motives to kill him. I am the only child of a very wealthy businessman who likes me quite a bit and frankly, I adore him. Before I take over the family businesses Dad thought it would be good for me to have some real world experience without my loving mother constantly harping on me to find a man. Everything I've told you can be easily verified. Does that about cover it?"

Dez laughed. "Just about. You found the body, correct?"

Judy wrinkled her nose. "Yes. Nasty. It was about six a.m. It was still a bit dark so I had to walk towards him. The blood was still wet, so it must have happened shortly before I arrived. His skull was split open on the cobblestone so there was no mistaking he was dead. I went inside and called the police."

"Do you always get to work so early?"

"Usually. As a woman I have to work twice as long and hard as a man to get half the reward."

Dez sighed and took a sip of his ale. "I'm familiar with that."

"How would you be familiar with a woman's struggle in the workplace?"

"My sister is a barrister. Top of her class all through school but Dad wouldn't help pay for law school because he assumes she'll give it all up for a man. She earned scholarships and worked to get through school. She never gives up or gives in. I'm very proud of her." He caught a very different smile on Judy.

"You really are, aren't you?"

"Yes. She has a brilliant mind and isn't afraid to use it." He smiled. "I like that in a woman."

"Most men prefer a woman who defers to him," she said.

"Most men are idiots," he replied.

Judy smiled at him and Dez had a feeling things were about to get very interesting.

"Since you assumed it was murder I also assume you did a little poking around on your own," said Dez.

She stopped mid bite of her cottage pie and sat back against the booth. "You're very good, Dez."

He paused. From the look in her eyes he could tell she wasn't just talking about his investigative skills. This time he was the one who smiled. "You did, didn't you?"

"That depends," she said.

"On what?"

"On whether my poking around in David's accounts and personal finances will get me in trouble with the local constabulary."

Dez sat back and watched her for a moment. It was a simple trick for interrogating a witness to put them off balance. She was very smart. She had to have some valuable information for his investigation. The fact that she was remarkably beautiful was a nice bonus. A very nice bonus. "Well, Ms. Brenner I think we can overlook a minor transgression."

"Good to know," she smiled. "I have a file back at my apartment. Didn't think it would be wise to have it laying around the office."

"Another question. Can you get me to the roof of your building?"

"Why? The view is unremarkable."

"It hasn't rained in three days."

"And that is relevant how?"

"Wickham was killed three days ago. There might be some evidence left behind."

Judy smiled. "This I'd like to see."

Judy let them back into the building and took him to her office. It was a generic office, with ordinary furniture and art work. There were several file cabinets of information. Wickham's desk looked like he'd only stepped away from the office, not off the roof. "Nobody's been in here?"

"The police were here briefly but they didn't go through anything. Someone from his family is supposed to come tomorrow to pack his personal effects."

Dez had retrieved a case from his car. He set it on the floor and opened the top folds. He grabbed a pair of latex gloves from the cases and slipped them on.

"What are you doing?"

"These are surgical gloves. They will prevent me from transferring my fingerprints to anything I touch."

"Interesting," she said as she watched Dez go over Wickham's desk.

"Has anyone been in here beside the police?"

"No, just me."

Dez looked up at her and smiled. "What did you take?"

She blushed slightly. "Some files but I didn't exactly take them."

"Excuse me?"

She smiled and shrugged. "I made copies on the Xerox. I'm always making copies of something, so no one thought anything of it. They're at my apartment. I've been trying to sort them out."

"Fine. The roof?"

"Follow me," she said as she opened a door and walked up the stairs.

"Delighted to," he thought as he picked up his case. From this angle he had a lovely view of her backside, and a lovely backside it was. Judy was right, the view was unremarkable. What was interesting was the buildings were built so tight together that it would be easy to move from one roof to the next without ever going through the front door. Dez pulled a torch from his case and started walking around the roof, starting with where Wickham went over. He looked at the asphalt on the roof and ran his fingers over it. There were grooves and scratches on the surface.

"Judy will you hold this just here?" He handed her the torch and grabbed a camera

out of his bag.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Well, since I can't take the roof with me I'm going to photograph it." He photographed the section of roof and the last view Wickham had. He walked around the roof and looked in corners and behind heating and cooling vents. A gold fleck caught his eye. He flashed the torch at the gold and saw a button caught next to a vent pipe. He handed the torch to Judy and grabbed a plastic bag and long tweezers from his case. He retrieved the button and sealed it in the bag. "I think that's all I'm going to find up here. Let me know when you're available to go over the files."

"No time like the present. Follow me back to my flat and we can do it now."

Judy's flat was actually a townhouse in Belgravia, one of the richest sections of London. "When you said flat I was expecting a second floor place with maybe a terrace if you were lucky, not...this," said Dez.

"I knew I would be here for awhile and I didn't want to have to contend with pesky landlords or neighbors. It's a good investment."

Dez stopped in his tracks. "You own it?"

"Yes, what did you think?"

"You said your father was a businessman. I thought he might have bought it for you. People who own places like this usually, well, aren't people who look like you."

Judy laughed. "I think there was a compliment in there somewhere." She set down her briefcase and coat. "I've done very well with my investments. So well, in fact, my father has started taking my advice on his portfolio. Of course he tells his broker they are all his choices."

"His broker thinks your father is a genius." She smiled and his mind left the case behind.

"Can I get you anything? Tea?"

"Ah, American tea?"

"Don't be ridiculous. Fortnum and Mason Royal blend."

"Thanks, that would be great." He followed her into the kitchen where she plugged in the electric kettle. Maybe this Yank did know how to make a proper cuppa. Spread over

the kitchen table were pages and manila folders. "The files?"

She nodded as she poured the water into the pot. "I've been studying them for two days and I can't figure it out. There's something irregular about it but I can't put my finger on it. The only thing I'm sure of is what ever it is, David did not come up with it."

"Why do you say that?"

"David Wickham was an adequate manager at best. He lacked any imagination which is why he was assigned the clients who locked in their portfolios and made very few changes."

"What are we looking at?"

Judy set out the cups with the cream and sugar. "Large sums of money parked is really the only word to describe it. They sit in investments for short periods and then the investment dissolves and the money goes with it."

"Is that why they thought he was embezzling?"

"Yeah, but I don't think he was. Like I said, imagination to him was having Toad in the Hole instead of Shepard's pie on Thursday's." Dez smiled. "Seriously, there was no way David Wickham pulled this off."

"You sound as confounded as I've been the last three days," said Dez. "Let's step away for a moment." He stood and took her by the hand. He led her back to the living room and sat down on the couch. "Sometimes if I do something completely different, the answer will come to me."

Judy smiled. "Oh really? What do you usually do?"

"Go to the gym."

She looked him up and down. "You do seem very fit."

"Part of the job."

"Okay, you said different topic so I'm going to assume, since you are here in my living room at eight in the evening there is no one at home waiting for you."

"You assume correctly." He smiled. "And I will assume from our previous conversation that there is no one waiting impatiently for you back in the states."

She nodded.

"What about here? Is someone patiently waiting by the phone for your call?" She laughed and Dez had the thought it was a wonderful laugh, genuine and honest.

"Lord, no."

"Why Lord, no."

"The only men I meet are men in my line of work. If I want them to take me seriously I can't take them to bed."

Dez paused for a moment, wondering what he was getting into, but only for a moment. The rest of him pushed on. "How long have you been in London?"

"Nearly two years."

"You haven't seen anyone in all that time?"

"Too busy," she said. "What about you?"

"I date occasionally, but nothing serious." He looked at her as if she was a puzzle he could solve. "May I ask you a question?"

"Why stop now?"

"You may find it impertinent."

"I think I can handle it."

"I know women who are trying to be taken seriously in the workplace and they never look like you. They try not to look like you. Why are you different?" He was relieved when she smiled.

"That wasn't impertinent at all. I did try at first to wear dull suits and pin my hair up, but that's not me. This is what I look like and the world will just have to get used to it."

Dez took her hand. "You're not afraid of anything, are you?"

"Not much," she smiled. "That was Dad's doing. He wanted a son but I'm all he got so he decided he'd make the best of it. He taught me how to shoot a gun and throw a fastball."

"Fastball?"

"American baseball." She smiled at the memory. "Dad took me everywhere he would have taken a son, including to work."

"He sounds like a good man."

"The best." She threaded her fingers through his. "What about your parents?"

"My father is a judge with Her Majesty's High Court."

"Impressive," she said.

"So he tells me, every Sunday."

"What about your Mom?"

"She's a lovely woman but very old school."

Judy sighed. "I'm very familiar with that sort of thing. My mother has been obsessed with finding me a husband since I was sixteen."

"What does your father say about that?"

"He told my mother I had far too good a brain to waste away in suburbia."

Dez laughed. "How did she take that?"

"He was sleeping in the guest room for months," she smiled.

Her smile was unsettling Dez. He was never at a loss with women. He'd never felt outmatched until today. "Ms. Brenner, you seemed to be studying me like you did that file."

"Well, Sergeant Stratham, I find you fascinating."

"Is that so?"

"It is. Honestly, I can't say I've known many, but you don't seem to be a usual sort of policeman."

"What do I seem like?" he smiled.

"Like a professor, a very young, very good looking professor."

Dez smiled. "I think there's a compliment in there somewhere."

"There is," she whispered as she leaned in and gave him a kiss that was sweet and gentle. "Dez," she whispered. "Am I making you nervous?" She nipped at his ear.

"Just a tad," he said. "Good Lord," he thought. "She's driving me mad." He pulled back and studied her face. She was a bit flushed and her eyes had grown dark. "I can't seem to think clearly around you. That is an unfamiliar condition for me," he said.

Judy gave him another unsettling smile. "Good," she said as she pulled into a passionate kiss. Her tongue danced with his as she overwhelmed his senses. She stood and took him by the hand. "Dez, come with me." At that moment, he would have followed her into hell.

She led him upstairs to her bedroom. He barely registered the surroundings. All he could see was the smile of an incredibly beautiful woman. She turned her back to him and lifted her hair. He was glad she couldn't see the slight tremor in his hand as he pulled

her zipper down. She dropped her hair and turned to face him. She smiled as she dropped her dress to the ground. He couldn't help his gasp. She was stunning, beautiful curves, lovely long legs. From the look on her face she knew exactly what she was doing to him. He gave her a wicked grin while he pulled off his tie and unbuttoned his shirt. Now it was her turn to gasp.

Judy smiled as she walked towards him. She traced his chest with her fingertips, sliding her hands down his arms. "Oh my," she whispered. He cupped her face in his hands and took possession of her mouth. He pulled her close, letting her feel how much he wanted her. She looked up at him and smiled as she walked to her bed and pulled down the covers.

Dez kicked off his shoes and shed his socks and slacks. He enjoyed the wicked smile on her face when he shed his boxers. "Two can play this game," he thought. She reached behind her back and unhooked her bra. She slipped her panties down her lovely legs. She stood there, naked and smiling. "Checkmate," he said. "You win."

"What?" she tried to ask as he pushed her onto the bed while he kissed her. He lost what little coherent thoughts he had left as he explored her body with his mouth. He tasted and nipped at each delicious part of her. He took his time with her until neither of them could wait any longer. Dez thought he could go mad from wanting her. He thrust inside her and she met his passion with equal measure. Murmurs and moans soon became cries.

Once he'd regained his senses, Dez pulled her tight against his chest and kissed her forehead. "Well, Ms. Brenner, this is not a usual part of the interrogation process." She smiled and raised herself over him.

"Well, Sergeant Stratham, I'm not your usual kind of girl."

He stroked her cheek. "That is very true, Ms. Brenner."

She straddled his waist and leaned down for a deep kiss. She began a slow, tortuous exploration of his body. He closed his eyes and lost himself to the sensations of her lips and tongue on his skin. He gasped when she took him in her mouth driving him to near breaking point. He tried to flip her on her back but she resisted. She smiled as she straddled him, taking him back into her heat. She controlled each movement, riding him like he was a stallion at Ascot. He felt the orgasm rack her body and it sent him over

the edge. She collapsed on top of him, breathing heavily.

Dez stroked her back and whispered. "Definitely not a usual kind of girl."

Judy looked over at the sleeping Dez and smiled. What a delightful surprise. Under the proper British police veneer was all that passion. Not to mention all those lovely muscles. His chest was broad and tightly defined, leading down to a tight stomach and thighs like tree trunks. He spent a lot of time at that gym.

She wondered why him. Judy had been in London for two years. Two years living like a nun. Then she meets Dez and takes him to bed only a few hours after meeting him. She was no prude but this was definitely not her normal behavior. But this was no normal man. She enjoyed talking to him and he seemed genuinely pleased to talk to her. He engaged her in conversation as an equal, something she rarely got. Maybe it was because of his sister. He spoke about her with genuine respect and pride. She smiled thinking maybe she should send her some thank you flowers. One thing was certain. She wanted more of Desmond Stratham.

She ran a finger over his hair. It was thick and just a bit curly, meant for running your fingers through it. He probably had to keep his hair short as a policeman. A shame, really. It would be wonderful long.

"You're not asleep," he murmured.

"Neither are you."

He pulled her toward him for a kiss. "You're really very lovely," he whispered.

She didn't know why that touched her. Now she was the one off balance. She gave him another kiss. "I like being with you, Dez. Very much."

"Good. because I'd plan on see more of you. A lot more."

She laughed. "You sound awfully sure of yourself."

"Yes I am," he said with the certainty that defined him. He pushed her over on her back and covered her with his body. "I'm going to see a lot of you, Judy. Yes, I need your help with this case but I want to get to know you better." He brushed her hair off her cheek then he smiled. "It would be quite the time saver if you would agree to that now, so we can get back to more important matters." He kissed her neck and began another tour of her body.

"What would this seeing me entail? I never agree to anything without knowing the terms and conditions," she smiled.

"Well, it would involve having dinner together, take in a movie, an afternoon stroll through the park. Proper dates." He nipped at her shoulder.

"I can agree to those terms," she giggled. "It's been a long time since I've been on a proper date."

Dez looked into her eyes and smiled. "I will remedy that tomorrow. In the meantime, I have important matters to attend to," he said as he stroked her skin. She sighed, enjoying his skilled hands.

Judy's eye's flew open. "Dates!" she yelled. "Dez, that's it. It's the dates." She pushed him off and jumped out of bed. She grabbed a bathrobe off the bathroom door and pulled it tight around her. She looked at him and smiled. "Well, come on!" Dez pulled on his boxers and followed her down the stairs.

"Purse, where's my purse?" Dez saw it on the sideboard and handed to her. She pulled out an agenda and started examining the transaction codes. "Hah! That's it."

"Do you mind letting me in on it?" he asked.

She pointed to a string of numbers on top of each transaction confirmation. "You wouldn't know what these mean unless you work in the industry. These are the codes for the dates and times of the transactions that liquidated the assets. They all happened on Monday mornings between five and six a.m." She smiled. "That would be just as the New York markets open. That's proof David couldn't have done it. He was never in the office before nine a.m."

"So why was he there the morning he died?" asked Dez.

"It doesn't make sense. I would have seen anyone leaving at that hour."

"Not if he went over the roofs. They're very close together. That could be done easily." Dez looked at the papers. "Is there anyway to see who did the transactions?"

"No. There's one dealer code for our office. All the advisors use it. The transaction receipts come over the ticker in the office. So no way to know who placed the orders."

Dez picked up a receipt and looked at it. "Where does the money go? Once the asset is liquidated the funds need to be transferred somewhere."

Judy smiled. "You're right." She took the receipt back and looked at it again. "Damn.

Liquidated to cash and then transferred to a London account. I'd have to find out who owns the account."

He took the receipt and set it down on the table. "You've done enough for tonight. You've solved the first part. Now we just have to figure out the rest." He started to untie her robe. "Let's return to more important matters." He slid his hands up her back and pulled her close. "I should ask. Do you mind if I stay the night?"

She grinned. "Do you mean do I have a problem if my neighbors see a man leaving my house first thing in the morning?" She gave him a kiss. "No problem at all," she whispered as she dropped her bathrobe on the floor.

Judy tried reviewing the report on her desk but was too preoccupied. She'd gone through David's files and there was nothing to indicate he been transferring to his own accounts, let alone anyone else's. She needed to get into other files in the office but that would have to wait until after everyone had gone. In the meantime, she was smiling about her sore muscles and the reason for them. Dez was amazing. Smart, funny and very passionate. She was to meet him at the station tonight and they would go to dinner from there. Her direct line rang and she reached for the phone.

"Judith Brenner."

"Hello, angel," said a deep voice with a slight southern drawl.

"Hi Daddy. What a surprise."

"Can't a man call his baby girl?"

"Of course, Daddy. How are you?"

"I'm good but your mother is driving me mad."

Judy laughed. "What is it this time? The gardener trim the roses too low again?"

"No. She's convinced herself that you're miserable being alone in a foreign country."

"Daddy, it's not the middle of nowhere, it's London."

"I know that and you know that but there's no convincing your mother. I promised her we'd come visit you."

"Great," said Judy, trying to sound convincing. "I have plenty of room."

"What's his name?"

"Excuse me?"

"You forget how well I know you. You hesitated because there is someone in your life. Finally"

"Daddy, not you too."

"Don't get me wrong, darlin'. I don't suddenly want to lock you behind a white picket fence. But I'd like you to have someone in your life. You're too wonderful to walk through life by yourself."

Judy's eyes teared. "Thank you, Daddy."

"So what's his name?"

She laughed. "You're not going to let this go, are you?" She sighed. "Fine. His name is Desmond."

"Is he in banking?"

"No. He's a policeman. A sergeant."

"You like him."

"Yes, Daddy. He's very nice. He's smart and funny. He cares what I think."

"I can't wait to meet him."

"What?" she gasped.

"Your mother and I will be there next week. I'll call you when I know what time."

"Ahh, that's fine, Daddy. I'm looking forward to it."

Her father laughed. "No you're not, but I sure as hell am. I'll see you next week. Now you can call your boyfriend and tell him to get ready to meet your parents."

"Good Lord," she said.

Her father laughed harder. "See you next week, angel."

"Goodbye, Daddy." She hung up the phone and sighed. "Bloody hell." She laughed at herself. Her cursing like a Londoner would convince her mother she's been there too long.

Dez finished the paperwork on the domestic abuse case he'd handled today. A guy lost his job and decided to take his anger out on his wife. The guy was in jail and his wife was unconscious in the hospital. If she didn't wake up he could be charged with murder. If the wife recovered odds were she wouldn't press charges despite the fact that this wasn't the first time he'd done this. When he called the hospital to check on her he'd asked the doctor about any previous injuries. They'd found out there was evidence of multiple traumatic injuries. He really needed to clear his head.

Judy was going to meet him at the station and they'd catch dinner and discuss the case. He smiled thinking of her. She was unlike any woman he'd ever met. She was wickedly smart. Not to mention beautiful. Good Lord, she was beautiful. He didn't have a second change of clothes at the station so he'd have to wear his uniform tonight. He checked the clock and realized she'd be downstairs any minute.

He was about to check out at the desk when two of his squad approached. Arthur

had been a cop for twenty years. Charlie was a new kid, only on the job a few months, but he'd fit better with the squad than he ever had.

"Dez, we're going to O'Brien's. I'm going to show Charlie who's the greatest at darts," said Art.

"Yeah, come on Dez, it's about time you do something besides work."

"Thanks fellas but I can't tonight."

Arthur laughed. "Hot date?"

Dez signed out and faced Arthur. "As a matter of fact, yes." Both men exploded in laughter. "Yeah sure."

"Dez?"

All three turned to the door. Judy was standing in the station doorway. The street lights shown behind her, making her look nearly angelic.

"Is this your sister?" asked Charlie.

Arthur laughed and slapped his back. "Has to be. Nice try, Dez."

He caught a wicked smile on her face and knew she was up to something. She walked towards him with a bit more swing in her hips than he'd seen before. She gave him a quick kiss.

"Are you ready, darling?"

He fought a smile. "Yes, I am." He turned to his open mouthed colleagues. "See you tomorrow."

He walked Judy to the car park and opened the door for her. "Where did you park?"

"I didn't. I took a cab."

"You didn't have to do that?"

"Take a cab?"

"No. What you did in the station."

She shrugged. "I didn't like the way they were talking to you."

"I don't care what they think about my personal life." He smiled and gave her a kiss.
"but thank you."

Dez had made reservations at a restaurant close to his flat. It had excellent food and a quiet atmosphere. "Did you make anyone gobs of money today?"

"Actually, yes I did," she smiled. "Did you save a few citizens today." His smile faded. "I'm sorry Dez. I don't mean to pry."

"No, it's okay. Domestic cases are the worst. You find some woman beat to hell and you arrest the husband or boyfriend. Then they don't press charges only to let them do it again. I'll never understand it."

Judy reached for his hand. "I'm sorry, Dez. You must see some awful things."

"I do but then there are the occasional triumphs that remind you why you wanted to do the job." He tried to shake off his gloom. "Any more thoughts on our case?"

She smiled. "Our case?"

"Well, you are being exceedingly helpful," he said.

"You're right about the funds. I won't be able to tell where the money went until I can match it to a receiving account. There would be matching sums deposited to someone's account three days after the liquidations."

"Three days?"

"That's how long a transaction takes to settle. The quickest way to find it is to look in the master register."

"What's that?"

"It's where the controller lists all the transactions made and the fees, so the broker and the office can be paid. Once I find the account numbers we'll know who was making the trades."

"Judy, no."

"What? Why?"

"It's too dangerous. If you go nosing about and get caught...I hate to think of the repercussions. We'll figure another way."

"I'll be fine. I'll just wait until Friday. Everyone leaves early to get a jump on their weekends. It won't seem strange to anyone if I work late."

Dez squeezed Judy's hand. "Promise me you won't, Judy. Please. Promise me."

She pulled her hand back and sat back against her chair. "Fine."

He smiled. "Promise."

"I promise," she said grudgingly. "Did you get anything from what you collected?"

"Not really. There is definitely indication of a struggle."

"What about the button? You seemed very keen on it."

"It was a custom made button for Wheaton Academy. It's a very posh school with fiercely loyal alumni."

"So they wear buttons?"

"It's like a school tie."

Judy laughed. "English men."

"What about us?"

"You are a curious bunch."

"Is that a good thing or a bad thing?" She gave him a smile that made him want to forget about dinner.

"I haven't decided."

They enjoyed their meal and a very nice cabernet. He ordered a trifle for them both, explaining he was sure it was against the law to live in England and never had a trifle.

"Anything else happen today, besides figuring out how to get into mischief?"

Judy smiled. "Oh, I know all kinds of ways to get into mischief." Dez's spoon stopped midway between his dessert and his mouth. "I did get a phone call."

"From who," he said as he continued to destroy his dessert.

"My father. Seems he and my mother are coming to visit me."

"That's nice."

"Next week."

"I'm sure you'll enjoy that."

"He wants to meet you."

Dez set down his spoon, suddenly not hungry. "I beg your pardon."

"He said he could tell from the sound of my voice that I'd met someone. So I told him about you."

"How much did you tell him?"

"Just that I'd met someone I liked very much." She smiled. "Don't panic, Dez. You don't really have to meet them. We haven't known each other that long."

He sat back and smiled. "I like you too, very much. As I said, I plan on seeing a lot more of you to which you agreed under our specified terms and conditions. Your father sounds like an interesting man. I think I'd like to meet him."

Dez and Judy stopped at his flat so he could change out of his uniform. "I'll just be a moment," he said as he walked into his bedroom. "Would you like to go to a movie?"

"Not really," she said.

He turned around to see Judy standing in the doorway, smiling. "What would you like to do?"

She walked toward him. "Like I said, I know lots of way to get into mischief."

He walked over to his closet and hung up his uniform jacket. "So what mischief did you have in mind?"

"Oh, I think I can come up with something." She slipped her arms around his neck and gave him a deep kiss.

Once again, a part of him wondered why he was so muddled by Judy. The rest of him screamed for that part to shut up and go with it. He reached behind her and pulled her zipper down. She dropped her arms long enough for her dress to slip to the ground. He picked her dress off the ground and hung it in the closet. He caught her smiling at him.

"What?"

She slipped her arms around his neck. "The usual man wouldn't have stopped to hang up my dress.

He smiled as he slipped his arms around her waist and smiled. "I'm not a usual sort of man."

"No, you are not," she said before pulling him into a deep kiss. He led her toward his bed and sat her on the edge. He slipped her panties down her legs, then slipped off her bra. He stood back and just stared.

"What?" she smiled.

"My God, you're beautiful." He was delighted by her blush. He quickly got shed of the rest of his clothes. Judy slid back on the bed and reached out for him. He revisited all those lovely places he'd discovered last night. Her graceful neck, her delicious full breasts and her beautifully long legs. She moaned his name, gasping when he touched her.

"Dez, please now," she called and he lost himself inside her.

He held her close as she curled up next to him. Judy wasn't like any woman he'd known. Somehow being with her was different and he didn't know why. Confusion was a state unfamiliar to Desmond Stratham.

"Dez, it's someone from my office."

"Who?"

"Whoever killed David, it's someone from my office."

"Not necessarily. Someone in your office is definitely in on the scam, but it could have been the client."

"David figured out what was happening and they killed him," she said.

"That's the most likely scenario."

"Poor David," she said.

"I thought you didn't like him."

"I didn't. I meant the one time he's clever and it gets him killed." She leaned up on her shoulder. "Did anyone talk to any of the adjacent businesses? Maybe they found a door open that should have been locked?"

"You'd make an excellent police officer."

Judy smiled brightly. "You really think so?"

"Yes. You have an analytical brain. You see possibilities where others would not." She got a wicked smile he'd learned meant she was up to mischief. She slipped out of bed and walked to his closet. She pulled his uniform jacket off its hanger and slipped it on. She did the same with his hat. He gasped when she picked up his night stick and walked towards him. She smiled as she stood over him for a moment then straddled his waist.

"Well, Mr. Stratham, I'm Officer Brenner." She ran his nightstick up his chest. "I'm going to ask you some questions." He ran his hands up her waist, loving the view through his open jacket. She pushed his hands away from her with the nightstick. "I didn't say you could do that, Mr. Stratham."

He tried to hide his smile. "Sorry, ma'am."

She broke her stern character for a moment. "Too much?"

"No, actually. this is working for me," he said with a smile. Her wicked smile returned as she shifted her position from his waist to just below his hips.

"Well, well. What do we have here?" Evidence that this was working for him. She wrapped her hand around him and began to stroke him. He hissed through gritted teeth. "So Mr. Stratham, question number one. Are you always so affected by a woman in uniform?"

"No ma'am. Just you,"

"Good answer. Why are you so affected, Mr. Stratham?"

"Brains and beauty are a powerful combination." He tried to maintain control as she turned him to steel.

"Have you've known many women like me?"

He looked in her eyes and whispered, "There are no women like you." Judy smiled as she raised herself up and took him in. He couldn't contain his groan. She leaned over him and kissed him.

"Time to complete this interrogation," she whispered. She slipped his jacket off but left his hat on. He held on to her hips as she showed him Officer Brenner's fascinating interrogation technique.

Dez spent the next few days showing Judy his favorite spots in London. They made a tour of restaurants and clubs. Tonight Judy made him dinner at her place.

"You didn't have to go to all this bother," he said. "I shouldn't eat dessert," he said patting his stomach. "It's getting harder to keep in shape at my age."

"Oh no you don't Desmond Stratham! I got out of work early to make you a genuine American apple pie." She leaned over him and kissed him. "And I'll work it off you later." She cut pieces of the warm pie and set it on plates.

"It looks delicious," he said as he reached for the dish.

"Not yet," she said as she pulled a container out of the freezer. She scooped vanilla ice cream on each slice. "Now it's ready."

"Dear Lord, woman. Are you trying to get me fat?"

She stroked his cheek. "If you finish your dessert, Officer Brenner may need to interrogate you again."

Dez smiled broadly. He adored her wicked streak as it perfectly matched his own. He took a bite and rolled his eyes. The cold ice cream blended with the warm cinnamon of the pie. "Oh, this is amazing," he said as he took another bite.

"I'm glad you like it," she said as she tasted the pie.

Dez could tell she was distracted. "What's going on?"

"What?"

"You're biting your lower lip. You keep glancing at me and then turn you away. You want to tell me something, something I'm not going to like."

Judy set down her fork and smiled. "You are good. You're right." She took a breath and he knew he was really not going to like this.

"Are you ending it?" he asked.

"What? Oh, God no."

"That's a relief. So tell me before you chew off your lip."

"I know I promised not to investigate any further...but I did."

"Damn it, Judy!"

"Don't you want to know what I found out?"

"Of course I do."

"I didn't find who owns the main account but I did find deposits on the same day in another account. Twenty percent of the original amount."

"Commission."

"Exactly. That account is own by Robert Grant, senior partner."

"Can you tell where the money came from?"

"No. They were cash deposits."

Dez sat back against his chair and thought about possibilities. "Judy, you know those brochures businesses put together? The ones that list backgrounds and qualifications of employees."

"Yes."

"Do you have one here?"

"In my office. Finish your pie. I'll get it."

Judy came back a minute later with a glossy brochure in her hand. Dez took it and looked up Robert Grant. He smiled and pointed. "Look here."

She read the line in Grant's biography he'd pointed to. "Graduate of Wheaton Academy. Son of a Bitch."

"So we know who was getting the commission and we know who was on the roof."

Judy sat down in her chair. "Damn it."

"Exactly," He said smiling because she understood.

"Neither of these things are are proof he killed David," she said.

"He owns the building so he had every right to be on his roof. So what do we do now?"

"Honestly, I don't think there's anything we can do. There's only two ways left. We could prove Grant was on the roof when David went over. Or we find who he's doing business with. The client is laundering money through Grant. It's most likely drugs or gambling. They have a high cash flow. If we could prove either one I could bring Grant in for questioning."

"How do we do that?"

"We don't."

"What?"

"Judy, What evidence we have is not enough to get the case reopened."

"Can't you question people in the other buildings? Find which one he used as an exit."

"If I do that and it gets back to the station I'll loss my job."

"I'll do it," she said.

"No. Absolutely not." He stood and pulled her into his arms. "If Grant finds out you'll be in danger. In fact, it might be better if you left there. I don't like you being anywhere near this guy."

She gave him a soft kiss. "That may not be an issue soon."

"Why?"

"I think my father is coming here to tell me he's ready to retire and for me to take over. He promised my mother he'd retire when they were both still young enough to enjoy it. He turns sixty five next month."

Dez's heart skipped. Then he saw tears on her lashes. "I've known this was coming for a long time. I trained my whole life for it. I knew my time here would be limited." A tear slid down her cheek. "But now, I don't want to go back."

He wiped the tear from her cheek and whispered. "I don't want you to go." He gave her a gentle kiss. They would talk about it later. For now, this is what they both needed.

"Dez, what are we going to do?"

Dez held Judy close as he tried to find the right words. What could he say? He knew the only possible answer and he was sure she did too. He raised himself up on his shoulder and looked into her amazing eyes. They were green with fleck of gold and they turned emerald when she was excited. He brushed a stray curl from her cheek. "Sweetheart, if you were any other woman I'd tell you not to worry. We aren't sure what your father wants yet. But you are not the usual kind of girl." She managed a small smile. "Even if you don't have to go back now, you will have to go back one day. I don't want you to go back. I want you to stay in London and in my arms. But I can't ask you to give up what you've trained for your whole life. If you stayed for me you'd wind up hating me for it." He gave her a small kiss. "That would be worse than losing you." His heart ached at the sight of the tears running down her cheeks.

Judy tried to smile. "There are times I hate that you're so smart."

He smiled and gave her another kiss. "If I were a brave man I would say we should stop now." She gasped. "But I'm a selfish prat. This is what I propose. You and I spend as much time as possible together. Let's not waste what time we have."

She smiled despite her tears. "I accept your terms and conditions," she said before pulling him to her. This would be a night they would always remember.

Dez and Judy spent as much time as they could together. Dez had made a project of taking her to restaurants she'd never find in Richmond. Tonight would be Indian food and back to her place. She was giving her secretary some dictation when her private line rang.

"Judith Brenner."

"Hello angel."

She held the phone aside. "We'll finish this later, Wendy." She waited for the girl to close the door behind her. "Hi Daddy. How are you?"

"I'm good, baby. Your mother and I will be arriving at Heathrow at seven tomorrow night. TWA flight 305."

"That's great, Daddy. I'm looking forward to it," she said trying to make herself sound excited.

"How's your young policeman?"

"He's fine, Daddy."

"Am I going to get to meet him?"

"If you'd like. He said he'd enjoy meeting you."

"Well, good good. I'll see you Friday night. I have to run."

"Bye, Daddy."

She hung up the phone and stared at it. She had successfully put their visit out of her mind for the last week. She'd spent those days with Dez, having more fun than she'd ever had. They'd gone to dinner and the movies. She discovered she loved the National Gallery almost as much as he did. Now it was real. They were coming. Her phone rang again.

"Judith Brenner."

"Hello, darling."

"Dez, I'm so glad you called. I really needed to hear your voice."

"What's going on?"

"I just talked to my father. They're arriving at Heathrow tomorrow night."

"So I should cancel our dinner reservations for tomorrow."

"I guess so. They are arriving at seven. I'll send a car."

"No, we should meet them," he said.

"You want to meet them as soon as they get here?"

"I'm sure your father will want to meet me and I imagine he's told your mother about me."

"Most likely. My mother does not know the meaning of traveling light. Her luggage will never fit in either of our cars."

"So hire the car but have it pick us up first. I'll make dinner reservations for all of us at Browns. It's close to your place and the food is good but not so different from American food. I doubt your parents are ready for vindaloo."

"Are you sure you want to do this? You don't have to."

"Sweetheart, the least I can do is take my girlfriend's parents to dinner. But I'm just a policeman so you can pay for the car."

She smiled. It was the first time he'd referred to her as his girlfriend. "Desmond Stratham, you are a great deal more than just a policeman."

She heard him laugh. "See you at seven?"

"Make it six and let's do take away tonight. It's the last night you'll be able to stay over while they're here. My father is liberal but he's still a southern man. My mother would, to quote her, "die of apoplexy."

"You've discussed the subject of me sleeping with you?"

"God no. This statement covered cutting my hair, wearing blue jeans or voting for a Democrat. I believe this would fall into that category."

"I see," he said. "So I may have to charm your mother."

"I don't think you'll have a problem there," she said. "You are very charming."

"Thank you, darling but I'm with your mother about your hair."

Judy laughed. "I'll see you at six."

Dez wiped a speck of vindaloo off Judy's lip. He was glad she'd suggested staying in. If her father wanted her to go back with them this would be the last night they would spend together. He would make sure this would be a night they would both remember for the rest of their lives. He would not do the one thing that would make her leaving worse for both of them. He wouldn't tell her he was in love with her.

The dishes were cleared away and they were sipping a very nice merlot."Dez, This may be..."

Dez stood from the table and took her by the hand, pulling her up and into his arms. "Hush, sweetheart. We don't need to talk about it. Not now." He gave her a soft kiss. "You're so beautiful. You take my breath away." He kissed her with all the passion he had for her. If he couldn't tell her he would most certainly show her. He led her upstairs to her bedroom. He smiled when he saw the bed was already turned down. "So, you were pretty sure of yourself, Ms. Brenner."

Judy gave him her best wicked grin. "I was fairly certain, Sergeant." She slid her hands up his chest and whispered, "I think it's time you interrogated me."

He smiled and gave her a deep kiss, losing himself for a moment. He reached behind her and unzipped her dress, letting it fall to the ground. He slowly removed her heels, stockings and garters. Next came the bra and panties. He walked around her as she stood still. She moaned as his fingers ran up her naked body. She squealed when he scooped her up and tossed her on the bed. He quickly removed his clothes and straddled her.

"Well, Ms. Brenner," he said as he let his hands travel up her waist cupping her breasts. "I think it's time you answer my questions."

"Yes, Sergeant," she smiled.

"First question," he leaned over her and nipped at her neck and shoulder. "Do you like that, Ms. Brenner?"

"Oh yes, Sergeant," she whispered.

"Next question," he moved down to her breasts, kissing, licking, teasing hard with his hot breath. "Does that turn you on?"

"God yes, Sergeant," she moaned.

Dez whispered in her ear "Let's see if you're telling the truth." He reached between her legs and stroked her. "It's seems that your being truthful. Let's see just how far I need to take this interrogation before you break." He let his tongue travel the length of her long thighs. He used his tongue and fingers to torment her before finally taking her in his mouth. She writhed under him but he held her tight, not letting her back away from his tongue. She came apart under his mouth, crying his name. He rose up and held her face, forcing her to look at him. "Take what you want. Take what you need."

She wrapped her legs tight around his waist and pulled him deep inside her. She thrust up against him as she said, "Harder. Give me more."

Dez thought he'd gone mad, riding her so hard, but she kept urging him on. He couldn't have stopped if he'd wanted to. She dug her nails into his ass. Her pleas turned to moans until he felt her her entire body quake as her internal muscles squeezed him tight. He couldn't hold back any longer. He thought he screamed her name, but he couldn't be sure.

Dez woke and glanced at his watch. He looked over at Judy while she slept. No woman had ever meant as much to him as she did. The hell of it was, he knew no other woman ever would. She stirred and rolled over.

"Umm, how long have we been asleep?" she asked.

"About an hour."

"Oh, damn," she said. She smiled as she ran her hand over his arm. "I didn't want to waste any time sleeping tonight. What time do you have to be at work?"

He gave her a quick kiss and smiled. "Actually, it seems like I had a bit of holiday time built up. I got the weekend off."

Judy squealed and gave him a kiss. "I'll call off tomorrow. I've never taken a day off so I think they can survive without me tomorrow."

"I thought we could spend the day together. Maybe go to the Gallery. We still haven't gone through the Roman exhibits."

"I'd love to. My parents aren't getting in until seven tomorrow night." She stroked his cheek and whispered, "We'll have all day."

He smiled. "Now, we have all night."

Judy slept past eight a.m. but since they didn't go to sleep until four a.m. it was understandable. She woke to the smell of coffee and sausage and her growling stomach. She threw on her bathrobe and went downstairs. She stood in the doorway for the kitchen and watched Dez making breakfast wearing nothing but his boxers. He wiped a slash of grease off his hand.

"Mind the grease," she said. "I don't want you damaged." He turned and smiled. Her heart suddenly ached at the desire to see him just like this every morning. Always.

"Good morning, darling. The coffee is ready if you'd like to get the mugs and I'm just about done here."

Judy got plates and Dez served the sausages and eggs. "Thank you for doing this, sweetheart," she said.

"You're welcome. Are you as hungry as I am?"

"Starved." They laughed and devoured their breakfast. They talked about what to do with the rest of their day. Judy smiled as Dez talked about a few things they should check out at the Gallery. Seeing him across the table like that seemed so natural. "Why now?" she thought. "Why did I have to meet him now?" She forced a smile as he talked about the prison history of the Tower of London.

Dez held Judy's hand as they walked through the rooms they hadn't seen on their previous trips. She gasped turned a corner toward the Egyptian exhibit. Standing guard was a twenty foot high statue that had previously guarded a pyramid for several thousand years.

"My God, how did they move such a thing?" she said as she moved closer to him.

"I imagine very carefully," he smiled.

"It's giving me the creeps."

"Would you like to go? We've seen everything that we'd planned on."

"Yes please," she said as she backed away from the statue.

Dez smiled when they got outside. Judy had noticeably relaxed now that she wasn't transfixed by the ancient statue. "What would you like to do? How about lunch?" "What time is it?"

"Two."

"The car is picking us up at six." She gave him a soft kiss and whispered, "Let's go home."

He followed her into her house as she kicked off her shoes and tossed her purse. "Shall we order some lunch?"

Judy smiled and walked toward him. "Not now." She slipped her hands and pulled him into a searing kiss. "I need you, Dez."

He looked into her beautiful eyes and wondered how he would ever manage without her. But not now. They were together now and they wouldn't waste a moment.

Dez was nervous about meeting Judy's parents but he tried to remain calm. Judy's chewing on her bottom lip told him she was nervous enough for the both of them. "Sweetheart," he said. "It's going to be fine." He leaned in and gave her a quick kiss.

"There they are," she said as she pointed toward the gate.

Dez took a breath as saw a man, six foot three, with thinning gray hair coming toward them. Next to him was a petite woman in a pale yellow dress and jacket.

"Hi Daddy," said Judy as she through her arms around her father.

"Hello, angel," he said as he shot a side glance as Dez.

"Hi, Mom," she said as she gave her mother a kiss.

"Hello, dear."

Judy turned to Dez and took a breath. He gave her an encouraging smile. "Mom, Dad, this is Desmond Stratham. "

He extended his hand to Judy's father. "Mr. Brenner, it's a pleasure."

"I've heard a lot about you," he said.

Dez wasn't sure that was a good thing. He turned to Judy's mother. "Mrs. Brenner, A pleasure to meet you."

"Mr. Stratham," she said curtly.

"I can certainly see who Judy favors," he said with his most adorable smile. He always used it on his mother to get out of trouble. He was rewarded with a slight smile. "Let's get your luggage," he said with a smile. He thought he heard Roy grunt.

Judy had been right about renting a limo. Her mother's luggage would't have fit in

their cars even if they'd brought both. He was trying to remain calm as Roy Brenner watched him. He didn't quite know what to make of him yet. Her mother, Patricia, looked at him like he was a he was two day old fish.

"We'll drop off the luggage before we go to dinner," said Judy. "Dez made reservations at our favorite restaurant."

He smiled at her exaggeration. Brown's was their favorite, when they wanted to eat quickly and get back to the house for sex.

"So," Roy paused. "Dez, Judy tells us your a policeman."

"Yes sir. I'm a sergeant with the London Metropolitan Police."

"Do you find that...rewarding?"

"Yes sir. I do."

"You must see some awful things," said Patricia.

"Yes, ma'am I do. But nothing feels better than getting justice for a victim." Dez thought he caught a look from that might be taken as respect. Maybe not. Maybe he was just hoping for the best for Judy's sake.

"How did you two meet?" asked Patricia.

Judy covered his hand with hers. "We met during an investigation," she said.

Patricia looked shocked. "What kind of investigation?"

"My office mate died. Dez was looking into it."

"Oh my. He didn't question you did he?"

"Just routine questions, mother."

Dez gave Judy's hand a squeeze. "She was very helpful."

They arrived at Judy's house and Dez started grabbing baggage. He ran everything upstairs to the bedroom that had been made ready for her parents. He turned to see Judy in the doorway, smiling. She walked toward him and slipped her hands behind his neck.

"I know how difficult they can be but you're doing very well." She gave him a sweet kiss, which quickly deepened.

"Darling, I would love nothing better than to lock the door and continue this, but your parents are waiting for us."

Browns was an upscale restaurant with a traditional menu. Roy ordered a steak and Patricia chose a chicken dish. Dez and Judy both ordered the grilled cod. Dez snuck a glance at Patricia who seemed surprised her meal was good.

"So, Dez," Roy said with particular emphasis on Dez as if his name was a foreign language. "Where do you see yourself in ten years?"

"Daddy, please."

Dez reached over and covered her hand with his, to assure Judy but also to reinforce his connection to her. From the smirk of amusement, he'd made his point. "It's fine, Judy. Your father is understandably curious." He turned his attention back to Roy. "In ten years I hope to be a Chief Inspector of my own crime scene investigation unit."

"What is that?"

"Well, it doesn't exist yet, but in ten years I believe it will. We've been finding criminals with fingerprints for years. I believe in ten years time we'll be able to find a suspect from a single hair."

"Oh, that's impossible," said Patricia.

"It is now but I believe it won't be soon. Each of us has DNA in every cell in our body. Each person's DNA is unique. For instance," He nodded toward Roy. "Half of your DNA and half of Mrs. Brenner's DNA," he turned and smiled at Judy. "Both halves make up the amazing example of God's handiwork." He kissed the back of Judy's hand.

"Please, don't be vulgar," said her mother.

"Hush, Patty," said Roy then looked at Dez. "Explain."

"Scientists are working to map DNA. Looking for a way to identify each unique molecule. Once they do that they would be able to tell the difference between people from a single strand of hair or skin cells."

"Why didn't you go into science?" he asked.

"Because I wanted to combine science with law enforcement."

The server came to the table with the dessert menu and everyone scanned the menu. Roy glanced over the top of the menu at Dez. "What do you recommend?"

Dez held his gaze for a moment. "They have an excellent trifle. Almost as good as my Mums."

Roy looked at the server. "Four trifles."

After the trifles were enjoyed the server brought a folder with the bill. Roy tried to reach for it but Dez was faster. "No sir. You're my guests." Roy looked genuinely stunned. Dez glanced at Judy. She gave him a smile that said told him she was happy with him. That was all that really mattered.

Dez and Judy got coffee and tea set up in the kitchen as her parents made themselves comfortable in the living room. Judy watched as Dez set the tea and her heart ached. They knew when they started this there was a time limit. Watching him be domestic seemed so natural. She pushed the thought from her mind, or at least she tried.

He looked at her and smiled. "What is it, sweetheart?"

She slipped her arms around his waist. "Thank you for everything tonight. You're doing very well with Daddy."

"Am I? He's hard to read."

She gave him a quick kiss. "Usually my boyfriends would be shaking in their boots by now. Daddy can be very intimidating."

Judy called her parents to the kitchen when the coffee was ready. Normally she and Dez would have coffee in the living room but her mother thought eating or drinking in a living room was akin to being savages, or a Democrat. Judy poured her father a cup of coffee while Dez manned the teapot.

"Could I offer you some tea, Mrs. Brenner?"

"It's very good, mother. Fortnum and Mason. It's the what the queen drinks," said Judy.

"Well, maybe I could try a cup."

She caught her father smiling at her. He'd knew what she'd done. "Would you like some shortbread? It's quite good." She passed the plate to her mother who took a piece. She took a small taste and looked surprised, as if something not made in the States could be good.

"I suppose Judy has told you she's going to take over my business when I retire."

"Yes, sir. She did."

"Are you going to try and convince my girl to stay here?" Roy asked.

"Daddy, please."

"It's alright," he said as he covered her hand with his. "I know Judy has worked for this her whole life. She's trained for it. She's earned it. Most importantly, she wants it. I would never stand in the way of that."

"So you don't care about my daughter?" asked Patricia.

"I never said that." Dez smiled at Judy. "I care," he said softly.

Judy tried to keep her composure. She would not break down in front of her parents. She sat back against her chair. "Do you have any meetings tomorrow, Daddy?"

"Just the one with Wilton manufacturing. It shouldn't take too long. We could make a late lunch."

"How about lunch at the Windsor?" asked Judy. "Mom and I could go shopping and Dez could meet us there."

"Your parents may want time alone with you."

"No, no. That's fine. Meet us there at two," said Roy.

"That will be fine," said Dez. "But on that note I will be going. You've had a long day."

"I'll walk you out," said Judy. They got to the front door and she slipped her hands around his neck. "I'll miss you tonight," she whispered.

"I'll miss you too. Dez, about what you told my father."

He silenced her with a kiss. "We'll talk later, sweetheart. I promise."

Judy closed the door behind Dez and took a breath. She didn't think she could deal with a Spanish inquisition right now. She couldn't stop thinking about Dez had said. She walked back to the kitchen and began clearing the dishes. Her father put his hand on her shoulder.

"I like your young man," said Roy. "Patty, what do you think?"

"Well, he does have excellent manners," said Patricia.

Judy laughed. As far as her mother was concerned that was high praise. "I like him, too," she said quietly.

"Sweetheart, what are your plans?"

"I'm not sure."

"Yes you are," he said. "You have a plan. You've always had a plan. You drew up a seating chart for your teddy bear tea parties."

She smiled at the memory. "You're right, of course. I've been planning to take over Brenner Industries since that first time you took me to your office when I was ten. I plan on coming home as soon as you retire."

"That's next month," he said. "I've promised your mother I'd retire when we could still enjoy it."

Judy forced a smile she didn't feel. "That's wonderful. You both deserve it." She gave her father a kiss while she tried desperately not to cry.

Judy actually enjoyed shopping with her mother. Harrods was seven floors of upscale bounty her mother to pour over. Patricia Brenner was in her element. It also helped Judy keep her mind off Dez. She didn't know how she was going to say goodbye to the man she loved.

They arrived at Windsor's Pub just before two and found Dez waiting for them. He rose to greet them and kissed Judy's cheek. "Did you have a good time?"

"It was a very successful trip," said Judy.

"Apparently, judging from the packages you have."

Judy slid into the booth next to Dez and Patricia slid in the opposite side. She glanced up to see her father walk in the door. "Over here, Daddy."

Roy slipped into the booth next to his wife. "Did you ladies have a good day?"

"Very nice, dear. How was your meeting?" said Patricia.

"It went very well," said Roy. "Thanks to the preliminary meetings with you, Judy. They were very impressed with you and said they looked forward to working with you in the future."

"I'm glad," she said. She glanced over at Dez and saw a smile that made her heart skip. He was proud of her. She knew now what she was going to do.

Judy told Dez and her parents that she needed to stop in her office this morning. It was Sunday and there would be no one there to disturb her. Robert Grant had given her a key to the building because it was not uncommon for her to come in early or stay late.

She let herself in and checked to confirm she was the only one in the building. She had the number of the account she needed to track and hoped she could find something. She promised herself she wouldn't spend more than an hour. Anything longer and Dez might worry.

Judy knew the company assigned account reference numbers sequentially. She should be able to determine when the account was first established by finding accounts assigned on either side of the account she was looking for. She poured through records and found the account had been opened two years prior. Judy went through cabinets in the records room until she finally found it. It was the first check that opened the initial account. It was from Nicholas Crayson.

Her father was right about her. She always had a plan. Plans always meant thorough research. Before Judy took her position she'd done her homework, which included identifying the power brokers of London. She found it useful to know who to work with and who to avoid. Crayson was a business man with a notoriously shady reputation. It was suspected he made his money from trafficking in guns and drugs, but no one could ever prove it. Until now.

"Well, what do we have here?"

Judy looked up to see Robert Grant standing in the doorway of the records room.

Dez knocked on the door of Judy's townhouse. Normally he would just let himself in with his key but her parents were staying with her. He was surprised when Patricia opened the door.

"Oh, it's you, Dez."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," he said with a smile. "Who were you expecting?"

"I thought it might be Judy."

"Why would you think that?"

"Because she said she'd be back two hours ago."

"Where was she going?"

"Her office. She said she had some things to take care of."

Dez's heart began to race. "Did you call her office?"

"Yes, but she doesn't pick up."

Roy joined them in the entrance way. "Hello Dez. Is Judy with you?"

"No, your wife said she went to the office."

"She probably got caught up in the work. Happens to me all the time." Roy noticed the color had drained from Dez's face. "Are you alright, son?"

He forced a smile. "Fine sir. I'll run by her office and pry her away from her desk. We have dinner reservations." He nodded at Patricia and then at Roy. He could see Roy understood he was trying not to alarm his wife.

"We'll wait here. Call us when you manage to pull our girl away from her work."

"Will do, sir." Dez jumped into his car and sped to the offices of Williams and Grant.

"Well, aren't you the busy bee?" said Grant.

"You know how it is Robert. Our clients don't care about our days off."

"What are you working on?"

"Michael Wilton asked me to look into a company he's interested in acquiring."

"Why didn't he ask me?"

"Because he's done business with my father so he called me."

"Is that right?" Grant walked toward her and yanked the file from her hand. "Oh Judy. Haven't you heard curiosity killed the cat?" Judy tried to run around her but he

grabbed her and shoved her against the wall. "You know I didn't want to hire you but John insisted. Said the market was changing and we had to change with it."

Judy's heart was pounding. Robert had at least one hundred pounds on her. If she could keep him talking she might find an opening. "Why, Robert?"

"Why?" he laughed. "Money, of course."

"No. Why kill David?"

"The idiot stumbled across the trades. He wanted a cut."

"And you couldn't have that."

"Of course not. Someone like David wouldn't be able to keep his mouth shut."

"What about me?"

"You could but keep your mouth shut but you don't need to thanks to daddy's money."

"How are you going to explain my death?"

"Turns out you were having an affair with David. You couldn't bear life without him and jumped off the same roof."

"No one will believe you. Everyone knows I could barely tolerate him."

"Oh, a clever ruse to cover your affair which of course I will confirm."

"You really are a bastard."

Robert laughed. "Absolutely, but I'm a rich bastard." He pulled her by the arm and started dragging her from the file room. He pushed her against wall to open the roof door. He tried to hold the door while maintaining his grip on her. Judy used his off balance moment to drive her knee into his groin. He screamed and fell to the floor. She bolted down the stairs trying to get to the front door. Just as she reached for the door handle her hair was yanked violently.

"You bitch. Just for that I'm going to take my time with you."

She struggled against him fighting and scratching as best she could. It was then she heard pounding at the front door.

"Judy, are you in there? Judy open the door."

"Dez!" she screamed. The next sound she heard was the shattering of the front window. Dez jumped through the open window and launched himself at Robert, knocking him to the ground. Judy pushed herself out of the way as she saw Dez drive his fist into

Robert's face. Blood sprayed from Robert's nose as Dez continued to hit him.

"Dez, stop! That's enough." She pulled at his shoulders. Dez stood up over Robert's unconscious body. He pulled her into his arms and held her close.

"Are you okay?" he whispered.

"I'm fine." She couldn't tell whose heart was beating faster. Robert moaned on the floor.

Dez pulled off Robert's belt and used it to secure his hands behind his back. "Call my station. Tell them what happened and have them send a team."

Judy and Dez gave their statements to the Inspectors while Robert was taken away for booking. She told them how he'd confessed to killing David and money laundering for Crayson. She gave them the documents she'd found and promised to come in tomorrow to explain their significance. For now, she just wanted to go home.

Dez held open the door of his car and she got in the passenger side. He got in and started the engine. She reached her hand to his leg. "Dez, aren't you going to say anything?"

"What do you want me to say, Judy? That I knew the second your parents told me where you'd gone I knew what you were doing? That I was terrified you were in over your head? That when I heard your scream it was my worst nightmare come true. What part of that needs explanation?"

"I'm sorry I frightened you," she said softly. She was stunned when she saw tears welling in his eyes.

"Why did you do it?"

"I knew I was the only one who could prove what Robert had done."

"Judy, I...if anything had happened to you I wouldn't be able to bear it."

She touch his cheek and gave him a soft kiss. "I really am sorry."

It had taken a week to get through the publicity and paperwork from Robert Grant's arrest. He had tried to avoid the press but they'd cornered him outside the station. Pictures of him with the headline Policeman breaks money laundering scheme, crushes drug cartel appeared in the Times.

"Well if it isn't the genius policeman," said Arthur.

"Lay off, Arthur."

"I suppose the big wigs are going to promote you."

"I don't know what they're going to do but know I need to finish this report."

The Chief Inspector approached Dez glaring at Arthur. "Don't you have work to do?"

"Yes sir," he muttered as he slinked back to his desk.

"Stratham. My office. Now."

Dez parked his car near Judy's townhouse. He was supposed to be there for dinner with her parents. He wanted to meet them at a restaurant but Judy insisted on cooking. Williams and Grant was shut down until after the investigation was complete she said she had plenty of time. He sat in his car, looking at her front door. Soon, she'd be going back to the States. He would try to keep up a good front but the idea that she would be gone from his life was tearing him up. This was turning out to be a crap birthday.

He knocked on the door and immediately felt better at the sight of Judy's smile. "Hello, darling," he said as he gave her a soft kiss.

"Hi. What's wrong?"

He forced a smile. "Nothing."

"Like hell, " she said. "But we'll talk about it later. Dinner's almost ready."

Dez followed her to the living room. He froze when he saw his family sitting with the Brenners.

"Happy birthday, darling," said Judy.

"How did you know?"

"That was me, Dez," said his sister. "I rang her up to see if she wanted to help me with your birthday. To my great surprise, she didn't know about it."

"You know I never make a fuss," he said. More accurately, his parents never made a fuss so he learned not to bother at all.

Sarah smiled. "Well I say it's about time you did."

"Happy birthday, sweetheart," said his mother as she gave him a kiss.

"Thanks, Mum."

His father approached and extended his hand. "Happy birthday." This was a monumental expression of emotion for his father.

"Thanks, Dad."

Roy came forward and shook Dez's hand and patted his back. "Happy birthday, son"

"Thank you, sir."

"Best wishes, Dez," said Patricia.

"Thank you, ma'am."

"Let's sit down," said Judy. "Dinner's ready."

Judy chose a meal that would please most people, roast beef and potatoes. Dez just hoped his father wouldn't complain about the food. But asking Niles Stratham not to complain was like asking the rain to fall up.

"This is delicious, sweetheart," said Roy.

"Thanks, Daddy."

"So, Mrs. Stratham, Dez has been telling me about the developments in forensics. Was he always scientifically minded?" asked Roy. Niles made a dismissive noise as Emma spoke.

"Oh yes. If he wasn't reading Sherlock Holmes he was studying. When he was seven we got him a chemistry set. He burned the whiskers off the cat. Poor Smokey was never the same." Everyone laughed except Roy.

"Yes he did and it's been downhill ever since. He could have been a barrister. Instead he's just a cop."

"Just a cop?" said Roy. "Your son just brought down a criminal organization and captured a murderer." Niles made another dismissive noise. Roy looked like he was ready to wind up for a shouting match until Patricia put her hand on her husband's arm. She gave him a slight shake of her head to indicate he should stop. Dez smiled. It was nice to

have someone like Roy in your corner. "After everything you've done they should promote you, son."

"I appreciate the sentiment, Roy, but that doesn't seem to be in the cards. I've been transferred to the traffic division."

"What? said everyone at the table, except his father. He just shook his head and snickered.

"Apparently investigating a case my Chief Inspector had closed was impolitic. He was called on the carpet by his boss. He said I made him look bad."

"That's your problem, boy. You never listen to authority. Always going your own way."

"Going my own way has made me a very wealthy man," said Roy.

"Americans, you're all the same."

"Oh Niles, bugger off," said Emma. Sarah and Dez looked at each other with their mouths open. "This is our son's birthday and I won't see it ruined by a pompous blowhard. I, for one, am very proud of what he's done." She looked at her son and smiled. "Dez is a good man, kind and decent. I couldn't ask for a better son.

His eyes welled with tears as he smiled at his mother. He stood, walked to her and kissed her cheek. "Thanks, Mum," he whispered. He noticed his father was staring at his mother in stunned silence.

Judy broke the uncomfortable silence. "Before cake I think we should do presents."

"Cake and presents? You're spoiling me." Judy smiled at him and that was all he needed to forget about his father. "I'll help with the dishes." He stood and began clearing the table. He set down the dishes and waited for Judy to set down hers.

"I'm so sorry about your father, Dez. Your sister warned me but I couldn't imagine anyone treating you like that, especially today."

Dez pushed her into a hidden corner of the kitchen and pulled her to him. "Sweetheart, I couldn't have asked for a better day." Their kisses started soft and sweet quickly grew passionate. He might have taken her up the back staircase if he hadn't heard his sister clearing her throat.

"Looks like there's a party going on in here too."

Dez smiled and gave his sister a hug. "Thanks for all this."

"You're welcome, Dez. You deserve it." Sarah leaned in and whispered, "You deserve her too."

He felt endangered of losing the reins on his emotions. "Hey, somebody said there were presents to be had."

Judy smiled and led him into the living room. He took a seat on the couch and Judy sat next to him. The rest of the family piled in and took up seats.

"Mine first," said Sarah as she handed him a small box. He tore off the paper and gasped when he opened the box. It was a beautiful watch with an elegant coin face.

"Oh, Sarah. It's brilliant." He stood and hugged her. "Thank you."

"This one next," said his mother as she handed him a large box. He smiled as he opened the box. Inside was a hand made striped afghan. He pulled it out to show it off.

"Oh, that's lovely," said Patricia. "Did you make that?" Emma nodded. "My. I've never been that clever."

Roy took her hand and kissed it. "You're very clever at other things, Patty." Patricia favored him with a smile.

Dez gave his mother a hug. "I love you, Mum."

Emma touched his cheek. "I love you too, Dez."

Roy handed Dez a small book shaped package. "The man at the shop assured me this would be something you like."

Dez tore open the package. "The Washing Away of Wrongs. Oh sir, this is great." He sat next to Judy and showed her the book. "This is a translation of the very first forensic manual written in 1248." He stood and shook Roy's hand. "Thank you, sir. This is great."

"Mine next," said Judy. She pushed a large box toward him.

Dez laughed. "It's too heavy to be another afghan."

"Oh, I'm not as clever as your Mum."

Dez couldn't believe his eyes. There were four novels and five short story collections. They were all there and all first editions, the complete works of Sherlock Holmes. "Oh my God," he whispered. He pulled out *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and cautiously opened the cover. "Judy this is amazing. I can't believe you did this."

"You told me how much you loved the stories. I thought you'd like these."

Dez looked at her and fought the desire to tell her just how much he loved her. He

couldn't do that to her. He couldn't do it to himself. He leaned in and gave her a soft kiss. "Thank you, darling." He sat back against the couch and tried to compose himself. "Thank you everyone. It's been a great birthday."

They moved back to the dining room for cake and ice cream. Judy was serving coffee and tea when Dez noticed Roy was staring at him. "Do I have icing on my nose?" he asked.

Roy smiled. "No. I was just thinking about what you and I were discussing about forensics. You said you believe that it would be in every police department would have a forensic lab in just a few years."

"Yes, sir. I do. New tests and methods are being developed every day."

"I assume that means these labs will need products, test kits to conduct their investigations."

"I suppose so."

"What would you think about heading up a research and development lab at Brenner industries?"

"What?" Dez said, barely able to grasp what Roy was offering.

"You'd develop these tests. Figure out how to find the answers in criminal cases."

"I'm not a scientist."

"No, but you're passionate about your field. You'd hire the scientists who would help you develop your vision. " Roy leaned back in his chair and smiled. "If you want to go back to school William and Mary has an excellent science program. It's my alma mater," he said proudly.

"What's in it for you?" asked Niles.

"You heard your son, Niles. There'll be thousands of labs that will need the products he develops. Brenner Industries would sell him those products."

Dez looked at Judy who was just as stunned as he was. "Sir, why are you doing this?"

Roy smiled. "You mean other than to make money?" Dez nodded. "Because you're in love with my daughter."

Judy gasped. "Daddy, no."

"Hush angel, he's in love with you. I can see it every time he looks at you. It's the

same look I have when I look at my Patty." He smiled at his wife, who was blushing but smiling. "More importantly than loving her, you like her. You enjoy her company. You respect her. But that's not why I'm doing it. I'm doing it because you didn't tell her you loved her."

"I don't understand, Daddy."

"You didn't tell her because you didn't want to make it harder for her to leave. You put her first."

"It's also the same reason Judy didn't tell you she's in love with you."

Dez turned to Judy as was stunned and delighted to see her smile "You didn't tell Dez because you didn't want to make it harder on him to let you go. You put him first." Roy smiled at Dez. "Ball's in your court, son."

Dez looked at Judy and he knew everything he'd said was true. He touched her cheek. "Your father's right about me. I am in love with you."

Judy gave him a small laugh. "He's right about me too. I'm in love with you, Dez," she whispered.

He smiled and took her by the hand. "Come with me." He took her into the kitchen and pulled her into a deep kiss. "It's been so hard not to tell you."

"I wanted to tell you a dozen times," she said.

"What do you want, sweetheart? Do you want me to come with you?"

"More than anything, but would you be okay with leaving your family?"

"It will be hard, but they can come visit."

"Of course, they can," she smiled.

Dez smiled and pulled her hands to his lips and placed a kiss on them. "I know your father is a modern thinking man but I don't think even he would approve of us living together."

Judy smiled. "I doubt it."

"You see, that's a problem for me. I need to have you in my arms, in my bed," he whispered. "I need you by my side and I'll need you to be there for the rest of my life." He kissed her and smiled. "Ms. J.E. Brenner, of Richmond Virginia, U.S.A, will you please marry an English boy from Chelsea?"

"What are the terms and conditions?" she smiled. "I never agree to anything before

I know all the terms and conditions."

He wrapped his arms around her waist as she slipped her arms around his neck. "Well, the terms are a life long contract. the conditions would be," he gave her a soft kiss. "Friendship, laughter," he kissed her neck. "and a whole lot of passion."

Judy smiled and gave him a kiss. "I find those terms and conditions agreeable."

"I love you," he whispered.

"I love you too," she replied as they sealed their contract with a passionate kiss.

"Our families are waiting in the next room."

"Oh, let them wait," she said before pulling him back to her.

Dez was surprised he wasn't at all nervous. He checked his bow tie. Judy surprised him when she wanted a formal wedding. She said not doing it would give her mother apoplexy. He knew she really wanted it.

"Here, let me," said Niles. His father straighten Dez's tie and then patted his chest. "There now. You'll make a proper groom."

He smiled at the memory of asking his father to perform the ceremony. The only other time he'd ever seen his father so at a loss for words was when his mother told him to bugger off.

"Thanks, Dad." His father looked a bit pale and nervous. "Is everything okay?"

"Fine, fine." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small box. "Before we get you married off, ah, I want you to have this."

Dez opened it and in all his life was never so surprised. "Dad, this is your Royal Grenadiers ring."

"I've always meant to pass it on to you but now that you're going to America, well I don't want you to forget where you came from."

Dez slipped the ring on his right hand. "I never will, Dad. I promise."

"Good, good," his father muttered through a choked voice. "Dez, I don't know how to say, oh bollocks, I've always been bad at this sort of thing. I don't know how your mother's put up with me all these years."

Dez just smiled.

"Look son, I may not get to see you often now. I, I just want you to know," His father looked at him as if what he was about to say was a complete surprise. And it was, for both of them. "Son, I may not have said it, but, I've always loved you. I'm proud how you've turned out. You're not nearly the pompous ass your father is."

Dez laughed. "I love you too, Dad."

"Good, good. Well let's go get you married."

"Dad, one thing. Could you try to go a little easier on Sarah? She's got your brains and Mum's heart. She's going to have a brilliant career."

"Ah, women barristers. What is the world coming to?" He gave his son what passed on Niles Stratham as a smile. "I'll try."

He patted his father's back. "Good on 'ya, Dad. Good on 'ya."

Dez stood at the head of the aisle waiting for Judy. Patricia had staged a beautiful wedding chapel in the ballroom of one of the nicest hotels in London. The seats were filled with some of his police associates. Judy had a few friends from Williams and Grant. There were a good number of judges and lawyers among the guests. Niles Stratham's son getting married was apparently quite the event in the judiciary. There were a few family members from each side. Roy had flown in his sister and her family and Patricia's brother and his family. Most of Dez's family were people he rarely saw. The music started and the back door of the room opened. First his sister walked down the aisle as the maid of honor. Then he saw her. My God, she looked like an angel. She wore a full gown with flowing satin and a lace veil.

He stood there trying to listen to the words his father was saying but all he could think about was how much everything in his life had changed. Two months ago he was wondering how long it would take to get his next promotion. Now he was a former policeman about to go to America and start a new life. Judy turned toward him as they began to recite their vows. He was nervous about everything, a new job, a new country. She was the one thing of which he was absolutely sure.

Judy gave him a little shove. "That's your line, sergeant," she whispered.

Dez looked up at his father who mouthed "I do." He looked back at Judy she smiled. That was enough to quell his nerves. Dez looked at the woman who was going to make his life a crazy, maddening, joyful and exciting adventure. With her by his side they couldn't help but have a brilliant life.

"I do."