

REEL
Hollywood

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DEDICATION

To Lynn and Roy – my biggest fans

1.

His hands were in my hair, pulling me to him. His lips were at my neck, then my chin, then my mouth. I moaned, loving the feel of Reid's touch and enjoying the hunger he felt for me. We were finally going to do this. We were alone and there were no distractions. There was no one to barge in on us, no one to stand in our way. I knew I wanted him and I could feel how badly he wanted me. I felt his tongue sweep across mine and every pore of my body swelled. Damn, this guy was hot.

I ran my hands along the thick muscles in his arms and up to his shoulders. I grabbed them, rolling over on top of him, wanting to take advantage of him in every way possible. Suddenly I felt a sharp pain against my forehead. Then the ground fell out from under me and I was going down, fast and hard.

I awoke to find myself sprawled on the floor of Reid's living room, alone. Rubbing my head I realized that I had rolled off the couch and hit my head on the side table. Now I was seeing black spots as I tried to make sense of what had, or rather *hadn't* happened. Weren't we about to have sex? Why was I sleeping on his couch instead of his bed? I tried to reconstruct the night before in my mind piece by piece. I remembered watching the premiere episode, *my* episode of *Murder Live!* It was a new reality show in which I, as lead producer, along with my crew followed around two detectives as they solved a murder. Detective Reid had been one of the cops assigned to the case, and while our working relationship had started off rocky, it definitely heated up at the end. Spending nearly every waking moment together for a week straight could have gone one of

two ways. Reid and I both learned that the initial dislike we had for each other was easily overcome by an intense sexual desire that needed to be fulfilled. This outcome was preferable to the alternative, which involved killing each other by the end of the shoot.

Reid had invited the cast and crew over to his place to watch our episode's debut and afterwards we waited impatiently for everyone to go home. It wasn't our first romantic encounter, but it was the first time we would be truly alone. Thus far our timing had been questionable. Our first kiss was at my sister's wedding in front of my entire family. Our first sexual interlude had been interrupted when my cast and crew barged in on us. But last night we were alone, with no interruptions or complications, and most importantly, a lock on the front door. We had been kissing and then...well...I couldn't remember. I had a sinking suspicion that I'd fallen asleep right in the middle of things! The hours that we'd spent working to solve the last case had been brutal, not to mention all the hours I'd spent in the edit bay trying to pull the show together. It wouldn't have surprised me if my body's need for sleep had superseded my horribly neglected libido.

"Reid?" I called out, still rubbing the bruise on my head. I got up and looked in the kitchen. He had left a note on the table that simply read: *To be continued*. Damn! I had fallen asleep. I really was an idiot sometimes. Somehow my mind needed to get the message to my body that if it wanted sex badly enough to dream about it then it should probably stay awake when the opportunity presented itself!

I looked at the clock and saw that it was eight-thirty. I figured Reid had gone to work and I knew I needed to check in with my boss too. The reality of reality television was that you killed yourself to get your story and then had to jump right into the next one. If you didn't jump at each and every opportunity, you'd be replaced by someone younger, more eager, and more willing to work for peanuts. I was thirty now and my tolerance for the go-go-go mentality was waning. I had been working in the biz for eight years and sometimes I wondered if I should have my head examined for it. Reid had been a nice side effect of my current project, but there had been other men and other shows, and I knew from experience that these types of things didn't last. Still, I really liked this guy and I wanted to be careful not to screw this one up.

Reid was a little taller than I was with a chiseled chest and pecks that looked like firm pillows. His jaw line was hard and his eyes were dark, framed by thick eyebrows and the most amazing long lashes. He was a cop

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by trade, but he came from money just like I did. My mother was the former host of *L.A. Incorporated*, a popular entertainment news show, and Reid's father, ironically, was her agent. We had never met prior to the assignment, but in this town, the six-degrees-of-separation game was usually more like one or two. Everyone in LA was in the "business" and connected to each other in one way or another.

As for me, I was pretty average. I wasn't too fat and I wasn't too thin. I was tall, but short enough that I could wear heels. Not that I did of course – jeans and sneakers had become my work uniform. My eyes were blue and my hair hung just past my shoulders on the rare occasion that I wore it down. It was blonde, my natural color, which meant I couldn't stand up against the bleached bombshells in this town. Considering how incredibly hot I found Reid, I was still baffled that he was interested in me at all. Maybe it was because he was a cop, but Reid seemed to understand how my mind worked, which was a rare trait for most men. He understood my jokes, he laughed along with me at my mistakes, but it wasn't love yet. We hadn't even crossed home base so I wasn't going to let my head start worrying about feelings and emotions until my body had a chance to test the waters.

I picked up my cell phone and dialed my boss, Lenny. My episode was delivered and I needed to know what my next assignment would be. The network had ordered a total of thirteen episodes and they were already talking about season two. There were four producers on the rotation and I wanted to snag as many episodes as I could get. It wasn't because I loved my job – far from it. I had a little rivalry going with Missy, one of the other producers, and I was determined to beat her in every way possible.

"If it isn't my star producer," Lenny sang into the phone. He was a short, balding, perverted little weasel who had a tendency to get under my skin. "Did you have a nice evening with that detective? Is he nuzzling your neck right now?"

"That's none of your business."

"Sharpe, do you know what the number one rule in reality television is?"

I rolled my eyes. "Yes Lenny, I do."

"Care to share?" he baited.

“Participants aren’t our friends,” I said blandly.

“That’s right. So why is it that you and Detective Hot Pants are riding the big wave?”

“You only know about that because Missy has a big mouth,” I retorted.

Missy was ninety pounds at best with long stringy hair and a stick-up-her-ass attitude. She was in constant competition with me and willing to do almost anything to win. Her first case was an open and shut murder case with a ton of witnesses and everyone willing to talk. No suspense, no drama, no nothing. They bumped her episode when I swooped in with a doozy that won the hearts of the network executives. I should have known that Missy would tell Lenny about my relationship with Reid.

“Not true,” Lenny teased. “I was at your sister’s wedding, remember? I saw everything.”

I felt my face growing hot. Obviously Reid and I had chosen a poor location for our first kiss. We had just cracked our case and we were dancing closely and, well, one thing led to another. We were deprived of food and sleep, and we’d been flirting back and forth for days. It was nearly impossible to resist. Unfortunately the guest list at the wedding had consisted of my parents, Reid’s parents and, oh right, my boss.

“Cat got your tongue? Or perhaps that detective does.” Lenny laughed and then cleared his throat. “Anyway, I need to reassign you. Missy’s Hollywood cops were bad for TV so the department is giving us a new team. One’s a chick so that’ll be interesting.”

“Does that mean Reid is off the show?” I asked.

“No. Your lover boy played well last night, plus the network wives liked his butt so we’ll keep him around. Missy will take over Receda.”

“You’d better be kidding,” I said through gritted teeth. It infuriated me to no end to know that Missy would be taking over Reid’s Receda district. It was ridiculous to think that because she blew it with the Hollywood cops she should be handed my division and the cops that went with it.

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Detective Reid had been a hard nut to crack. His police chief “elected” him to be on the show. She was a friend of Lenny’s and owed him a favor. She ponied Reid up because he was gorgeous and a good cop to boot, but that didn’t mean he was happy about it. For the first several days he either refused to talk to me, called me every name in the book or acted like a complete asshole. His partner Foxy was a bit more gracious, but still didn’t approve of my constant meddling and *slightly* unethical approach to getting information. It wasn’t until they realized that a camera crew following them around might help solve the case that Reid began to warm up to me. Throw in a couple long stakeouts and more than one jaunt to Mexico and we were in love. Well, in lust at least.

“This is completely unfair!” I told Lenny.

“Sorry kid, those are the brakes. Next time don’t cross that line, unless it’s with that chick on your new assignment. Then make sure you videotape.”

“You’re disgusting.” I said and hung up. “Err!” I called out. I was seething. Missy was a snake and a cockroach and I couldn’t stand her. I felt sick as I thought about her spending day and night running around town with *my* man. I was staking my claim and I didn’t want her boney ass anywhere near him.

I lived under a mile from Reid’s place so I decided to stop at home to freshen up before heading to work. The trek to the office was a long one and even though I waited until almost ten to get on the freeway, I still crawled the whole way there. My car was a white 1992 Miata convertible and I loved it. Yes it was old and yes the A/C was broken, but you really can’t have a convertible and drive with the top up anyway – it’s a sacrilege. Luckily the San Fernando Valley was only about ninety degrees this morning and so the sweat on my back, though present, wasn’t plentiful enough to soak my shirt. Peeling myself off the sweat-soaked seats after a long ride tended to put me in a bad mood.

I checked my phone a couple times to see if Reid had called, but he hadn’t. I knew he was busy chasing down murderers, so I told myself not to get paranoid. After all, he wrote: *To be continued* on the note he left me, so he obviously wanted to see me again. I was sure he wouldn’t hold it against me that I’d fallen asleep as we were about to get busy. That kind of

thing probably happens all the time.

I arrived at the office at around eleven-thirty and saw my crew waiting for me. The production office was a modern warehouse that was all tricked out and funky for us creative types. There was a long row of cubicles on the ground floor on the left and edit bays on the right. Upstairs there was a kitchen area, a few more edit bays, and Lenny's office. It was a cool space but I was rarely there. The only time I got to experience it was between shoots or when I was chained to my edit bay. Beyond that I was out in the field, working around the clock, chasing down stories.

Mac and Manny were in the break room upstairs sitting at a table. As my camera and sound operator respectively, they didn't have an official desk in the production office. Their place was in the field. The office was nothing more than a pit-stop for them to restock on tape or equipment and grab a free cup of coffee. Mac and Manny were two guys I worked with a lot and I was grateful that Lenny hadn't given them to Missy too.

Mac was short for MacGyver. Of course that wasn't his real name, but rather one that he'd earned through a history of being the type of guy you wanted to have around in a tense situation. He had filmed reality shows and documentaries all over the world and was never shy to brag about his experiences. He existed on a diet of wheatgrass and bulgur wheat and was in perfect physical condition. Mac always had a survival kit with him and like a true boy scout, he was always prepared. He typically dressed in canvas pants that broke away at the knee and a tightly fitted T-shirt. He wore a fanny-pack too, but somehow he made it look macho. Mac and I respected each other, but we also got on each other's nerves. I didn't like his arrogance and he didn't like my bossiness.

While Mac and I would often bicker, Manny and I got along great. Of course Manny got along with everyone. He enjoyed a dose of reefer daily, which made him extremely laid back. He was a good sound operator and didn't mind working long hours either. I wasn't a huge fan of marijuana but he was able to function just fine so I turned a blind eye. Mac, on the other hand, liked to lecture him constantly about his body being a temple and all that.

I trudged up the steps to find my guys hunched over, sipping coffee. It wasn't morning, but I reasoned they were still feeling the effects of last night's celebration. "Rough night?" I asked them, already knowing the answer.

Manny looked up at me and smiled. He was a third generation Mexican American but still spoke with an accent. His long hair was pulled back into a low ponytail and braided in the way his mother had taught him. He was about my height, but stocky and he wore ripped jean shorts and a concert T-shirt for a Latin band. “Nah, Mamma Ganja got me through it,” he answered. “What about you, chica?”

“Actually my night kind of sucked. I guess you guys weren’t getting my not-so-subtle hints that you should leave?”

“Did you see any hints?” Manny asked Mac, smiling. “Chica, we didn’t see any hints. Besides, we were having a good time.”

“We left at like one,” Mac said to me. “You and Reid had the whole rest of the night.”

“Yeah, well it didn’t exactly go that way.” I frowned.

“Hang on, you didn’t close the deal?” Manny asked me.

I rolled my eyes. I had a habit of over-sharing and then embarrassing myself as a result of it. “Just forget it.”

“Don’t worry babe, you’ll get some,” Manny said with a smile. “Maybe you and Reid could go into one of those interrogation rooms and Mac and I could film you.”

I wasn’t sure I was comfortable with where this conversation was going. I looked at Mac to see if I could read his expression, but I couldn’t. Mac and I had kissed once a long time ago and we both had agreed it was a mistake. But when things started heating up between me and Reid, a bit of a jealous side had come out in Mac. He’d apologized and we’d gotten past it, but I didn’t think enough time had passed yet for me to be sharing the intimate details of my love life with Reid.

“I wouldn’t count on that happening,” I said, steering the conversation in another direction. “We’re not even gonna be paired up with Reid and Foxy anymore.”

I looked at Mac again, still not getting a good read on his reaction. He looked confused if anything.

“So who are we working with then?” Mac asked.

“Lenny assigned us to a new team at the Hollywood precinct and gave Reid to the ice princess.”

“Missy?” Manny asked with a frown.

“I hear my ears ringing,” Missy said from behind me. I stiffened, having a visceral reaction to the sound of her voice. “Thanks for warming up Detective Reid for me, Sharpe.”

I turned to face her spinney beak as she looked down at me. “Do you enjoy sloppy seconds?” I asked, keenly aware that I was stooping to her level.

“Sloppy they are. I heard about your *relationship* with him. When will you ever learn?”

“Don’t try to act all high and mighty,” I snapped, making no bones about my feelings for her. “You screwed up the Hollywood division so now we have to go in and clean it up. I saw your story in the edit, real suspenseful.”

“I guess nailing the talent gets you a better story. Maybe I should try it.”

The nerve in my forehead started to twitch and I felt my face getting flushed.

“Shut up puta,” Manny said from behind me. “You don’t know what you’re talking about.” He placed a warm hand on my shoulder, which both gave me comfort and held me back from clocking her in the face.

“Have you spoken to Reid yet?” I asked Missy through a clenched jaw, slightly concerned that I hadn’t heard from him yet today.

“I figured you would have told him, Sharpe. Or was it just a one-time thing?”

I decided I’d had enough of her. “He’s not broken in, just so you know. He is going to make it very difficult for you, trust me.” I spun

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around and walked toward the coffee pot, finished with this conversation. I stood there for a while waiting for her to leave, but I didn't hear her moving. I felt stupid just staring at the coffee pot so I started making myself a cup even though I really didn't want one. I stood there for a minute while it brewed, still sensing she was there.

Finally I turned around and saw her right behind me. "Can you just get out of here Missy?!"

"I'd like a cup," she said, pointing to the coffee pot.

I handed her mine. "Here you go, enjoy."

"Wow, thanks Sharpe," she exclaimed and set about adding milk and sugar to it. I rolled my eyes and sat down at the table with the guys.

"That one's psycho, eh, chica?" Manny said.

"I can hear you." Missy chided from behind us.

I threw my hands in the air and banged my head on the table in response.

2.

Lenny sat at his oversized desk watching a cut of one of the other producer's episodes. He had stacks of files and papers piled on his desk but it was just for visual drama. We didn't exactly spend a lot of time on research and fact checking in this industry.

I walked inside and sat across from him. "How did the show do last night?" I asked. I knew it was well produced, of course, but the number of people that actually watched channel six hundred and twelve was still in question.

"Good as it could," Lenny told me. The network is really pushing the promos and getting a buzz around the show. The viewership last night was high, likely due to those slow motion shots of your boyfriend they keep airing.

"Yeah, Reid isn't exactly loving those," I told him.

Lenny shrugged, not caring. I didn't really care either. He was hot, so let America know it! Lenny tossed me a thin file across his desk. I opened it to see the names of two police officers from the Hollywood division and some basic stats on each of them.

"Meet your new team," Lenny told me.

Looking at the file, I wasn't convinced these two were any better than the original two from Hollywood division. The male cop, Dennis

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“Hollywood” Johnson, had a photo included. Actually it was a professional headshot. He was African American and in good physical condition with short hair, large biceps, and a tough demeanor. I turned his headshot over to learn that he was 5’ 11”, thirty-six years old, and had done some bit parts on soap operas and sitcoms. I had a pretty good picture of who I was dealing with – a major pre-madonna. His partner Terry didn’t have a picture, but her stats stated that she had been a cop for nine years and a detective for one. She was unmarried and lived alone. I had a feeling Terry was probably more interested in girls than boys and made a mental note to tell her I was already seeing someone. Then again who I was kidding? I wasn’t that irresistible!

“What’s my deadline?” I asked.

“Last night the network doubled the order. They want to see episodes twice a week,” Lenny said.

“You didn’t tell me that!” I squealed feeling a mixture of excitement and pressure at the same time. “That’s crazy!”

“No kidding. Everything’s moving up. Missy’s got her gang-banger episode going tomorrow and I have to air this piece of crap Roy put together next Wednesday,” Lenny told me, motioning towards the TV screen. “Get me your story by Wednesday for air on Friday next week.”

“Wow, no rest for the weary,” I said.

In a perfect world, I would have two weeks or more to sit with my editor and craft my piece after the shooting wrapped. In this world, I had a week. It was Thursday today so that gave me almost seven days to get my footage and cut it together. So much for weekends! Build into that time for Lenny’s edits, the network’s edits, rendering time within the edit system, color correction, product logo blurring, naked body-part blurring, and final tweaks and I basically had a day to cut this thing together. Plus my story needed to be compelling. I didn’t want my episode being described to the other producers as a “piece of crap” like Roy’s was.

“Okay, I’ll make sure a bunch of people die in the next few days,” I told Lenny.

“They will. Three people are murdered every day in this town. You know where I learned that? Your episode! Who says reality shows aren’t

educational?!” Lenny cackled. He waved his hand towards the door and I took that as my cue to exit the premises. I’d been expecting praise for my episode pulling in good ratings for the series premiere, but I guess my show doing “as good as it could” would suffice for now. I knew deep in my heart that the network doubling the order had a lot to do with me. My episode was the only one that had aired so far, so that was a clear indicator. I made a mental note to call my father later, as he would give me the praise I needed.

I walked outside to find Mac and Manny loading up our production SUV. It was a large eight-passenger vehicle with three rows of seating and tons of storage in the back.

“Sharpe, check this out,” Mac said holding up a brand new ARRI video camera. “Lenny finally moved out of the dark ages. This thing records on a chip.”

“So no more running out of tape?” I smiled at Mac, recalling the confession scene he almost missed because his camera had run out of tape during the last shoot. “I just found out the network doubled the order. Lenny was probably feeling generous.”

“Works for me. This thing is way lighter too,” Mac said.

“Yeah, but it also means more work. The episodes are going to be airing twice a week now. We have to lock up the next story by Wednesday.”

“Twice a week?” Manny said, overhearing the conversation. “Mierda.”

The guys threw in the last remaining items into the trunk while I jumped in the front seat and put the A/C on full blast. Mac got behind the driver’s seat and Manny sat in the row behind us.

“So, who did they pair us with?” Mac asked me.

“A male cop who goes by the name Hollywood,” I explained. “Get this...he has an acting headshot with his profile.”

I pulled out the picture and flashed it to Mac who shook his head. “Shit. He’s gonna be a major pain-in-the-ass.”

“Yup,” I agreed.

Of all the bad things I knew about reality show contestants, the worst was when their heads started to swell and they convinced themselves that they were actually famous. Someone like me for example, might take thirty minutes to get ready, while a reality star would require two hours. Filming would constantly be delayed or stalled so they could stop to greet their adoring fans or check on their hair and makeup. It was very frustrating. I once worked on a makeover show in which the contestants weren't allowed to look in the mirror at all. It was one of the best experiences I've ever had.

“The other cop is a female,” I announced.

“Say what?” Manny said from the backseat.

“I wouldn't get too excited Manny,” I said. “She's probably more of a man than you are. Her name is Terry. It might as well be Randy or Pat. Do you know what I mean?”

“Oh yeah,” Mac agreed. “Terry is a bad one.”

“So I guess it'll just be a role-reversal,” I surmised. “Hollywood will be the woman and Terry will be the man. Maybe that's why they're partners.”

“A lot of crazy shit goes on in Hollywood.” Manny added. “Bunch of sickos.”

“Well then we should get an active case fast,” I said. “Let's hope so, we only have a week to get this in the can.”

We pulled onto the 405 and headed north towards Hollywood. It was a little after twelve and the traffic was relatively light. I looked down at my phone to see if I had any missed calls. I didn't.

We arrived at the station just before one o'clock. The station was covered in brick on the outside with the words LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT HOLLYWOOD STATION written in long metal letters. There were a bunch of cop cars parked on the tree-lined street and a banner hanging across the building that called for civilians to join the reserve

LAPD force. We pulled the SUV in to the back lot and hopped out.

We walked inside the lobby, which looked exactly as one would expect it to. There was a long desk with a metal countertop that stretched the length of the room with two cops at computers standing behind it. The desk was on an elevated platform, forcing you to look up at the cops, letting you know right away who was in charge. The floors were yellow linoleum tiles, which were dirty and old, and the ceiling was a drop-ceiling with florescent lighting. There was a faint smell of either urine or alcohol in the room and nobody looked happy to be there.

We approached a tall cop with graying hair standing at the desk and announced ourselves. He grunted, placed a call to our hosts, and escorted us through a locked door into the bowels of the building.

We walked through a narrow hallway filled with small offices on both sides. The yellow linoleum was now gray carpet but the florescent lighting remained. I was learning quickly that the flashy police stations you saw in the movies, didn't really exist. The stations I'd been in lately were dingy, smelly, and the kind of places that made working out in the field chasing criminals seem pretty darn appealing.

We came to the end of the hall and walked through a doorway into a large open room. There were maybe ten black desks arranged in two rows with computers at each. A few cops were sitting at them, typing on their keyboards.

“Over there.” The cop who was escorting us grunted and pointed to a policeman seated at his desk.

I recognized Detective Johnson right away from his head shot. He was dark skinned with strong muscular arms and a short, neat haircut. He had sunglasses resting on his head and wore a pair of fitted jeans with a tight gray T-shirt tucked into them and a flashy belt. I wasn't exactly a fashionista, but I knew the designer jeans he was wearing cost at least two hundred bucks.

“Detective Johnson?” I asked.

Johnson looked up at me with a big smile. “You must be my TV crew.”

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“Victoria Sharpe,” I said extending a hand. “I’ll be your producer. And this is Mac your camera man and Manny your sound operator.”

Hollywood stood up. He was close to six feet and had a really powerful presence. Usually actors lied about their height on their headshots, but not his guy, as he didn’t have to. Hollywood was tall and strong and was going to play great on TV. “You can call me Hollywood,” he said, shaking my hand.

“And you can call me Sharpe,” I told him.

He seemed enthusiastic and happy to be a part of this show, but I was cautious. While my last shoot ended well, it didn’t start that way. I’d gotten a little over-zealous in my quest to find a good story and may have crossed the line a time or two. If you asked Reid about my producing technique, he’d probably use words like “bossy,” “unethical,” maybe even call me a “menace to society.” I knew I needed to play it cool with these cops and tone back any instincts I might have to push the story forward.

“I hope we’re not interrupting you,” I told him. “We don’t want to get in the way.”

Hollywood smiled at me. “Not at all. I’m looking forward to working with you. I actually have a little bit of experience in this area.”

“Yes, I saw your headshot. You played a cop on TV and now you do the real thing, right?”

“Yeah. Thanks for noticing that. Hey, what did you think of my headshot? Did you like it?” Hollywood wanted to know.

“Oh, yeah it was very nice.”

“Very nice shot composition,” Mac added giving me a wink.

“Wow cool, thanks,” Hollywood said smiling widely. “So where do we start?”

He had a pleasant demeanor and was movie-star perfect. It was surprising that he didn’t get more acting work with those good looks, but looks weren’t everything – you needed luck too. Perhaps *my* luck was changing and this might work out just fine. “You can start by introducing

us to your partner. Is she around?”

“Oh yeah, she’s here.” Hollywood looked at me and lowered his voice. “Terry’s a little camera shy, do you know what I’m saying? It’s probably best that I do most of the talking on screen.”

I nodded imagining viewers would probably prefer looking at Hollywood anyway.

“Hey Terry?” Hollywood called out. “Film crew’s here.”

“One second,” I heard Terry say from behind her computer screen. She was seated across from Hollywood, one desk back, and wrapping up a call. We waited a moment before she stood up and walked over to us.

As she came into view, it was as if the world had started spinning in slow motion. She wore a black police uniform with a belt on her waist and a gun on her hip. She had a pair of aviator glasses hanging from a button on her shirt between two enormous breasts. Her long hair was auburn and her eyes were emerald green. She looked to be about my age, but much sexier. Her hair was wavy and pulled back loosely in a clip, and although she wore almost no makeup, her complexion was flawless.

I looked over at Mac and Manny who both had eyes bugging out of their heads. “Hummina-hummina!” Manny chanted.

Terry gave me an awkward smile and held out a limp hand. “I’m Terry Perkins.”

I stood there holding her hand and not saying anything. I had such a different image of her in my head that I couldn’t even determine if the person standing in front of me was real or not. Was this a bad joke someone was playing on me? It wouldn’t be the first time.

“Sharpe, you’re going to cut off the girl’s circulation,” Mac said to me.

I snapped out of it and released her hand. “I’m so sorry,” I said, turning red. “It’s very nice to meet you.”

“She goes by Sharpe and I’m Manny,” Manny said, swooping in. Instead of a handshake he went for the European double cheek kiss, even though he was Mexican.

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I got my wits about me enough to reprimand him. “Don’t hit on her.”

“Don’t be jealous baby,” Manny told me. “I’ve got lots of love to give.”

I rolled my eyes at him. I wasn’t interested in Manny and I wasn’t jealous either. I was just a little surprised.

Mac stepped forward next and greeted Terry with a warm hello. “Hi, I’m Hank, but everyone calls me Mac,” he said. “I look forward to working with you.”

“It’s nice to meet all of you,” Terry said, looking down. “You all have cool nicknames like Hollywood does. I’ll have to come up with something.” She struck me as a little introverted, but perhaps I was imagining it. Perhaps I was just desperately trying to find fault in her. “I’ve got a couple things to take care of, but I’m sure Hollywood can get you whatever you need,” she said and retreated back to her desk.

I turned to Hollywood. “Would it be okay if we set up some of our equipment in here? We’d like to do some interviews with you and Terry. Also, do you have an interrogation room that you use?”

“Sure thing, follow me.” Hollywood smiled.

Hollywood walked us around, giving us the lay of the land. He offered us two desks that weren’t in use to serve as our work stations. One was right across from Hollywood’s seat while the other was a few desks back. Each of the desks featured a metal bracket attached to the side of it and a guest chair. Hollywood explained that the bracket was so they could handcuff the bad guys to the desk while they were interviewing them.

Mac and Manny hung some lights around Hollywood and Terry’s desks, wired the interrogation room for sight and sound, and set up an interview confessional area in an un-used office. They also rigged their police car with a camera suspended from the rear view mirror so we could tape the cops as they headed to crime scenes. Terry worked the phones and her computer while Hollywood was engaged and interested, asking lots of questions.

By two o’clock we were ready to roll. Mac and Manny had lit the un-used office with moody lighting and some choice cop memorabilia in the

background. The shot looked nothing like an office, but rather a dark cave where the cops could do their deepest crime fighting.

The camera was positioned close to the subject, which allowed the background to fall into soft focus. My seat was an apple box located directly next to the camera's lens to give the illusion that the subject was speaking to camera, even though they were really speaking to me. I also kept a log of the footage we were capturing. We set the camera's time code to run according to the time of day, which made logging easy. I could simply write notes about what activity was happening and when. Whenever I heard a good sound bite I was sure to log it so the editor could find it easily later.

If this were a network show I would have had an associate producer to take care of silly things like getting releases signed and logging notes and time code, but alas this was cable, so I got to do it all.

Hollywood went first. He let me know that he had brought several different wardrobe options to choose from. He wanted to look his best. Actors could be annoying but they were also malleable and easily influenced. I asked if he would consider simply wearing his white undershirt. It made him look tough and hugged his muscles. Hollywood was game for whatever I suggested, which was refreshing and scary at the same time. "Sharpe, I was thinking about a tattoo. Would that make me look more street?" Hollywood asked. He pulled out an assortment of temporary tattoos.

"Nah," I said trying not to laugh. "It's a good thought but it'll be too hard to maintain continuity if you have it in some scenes and don't in others."

"Wow, you're good at this. I hadn't thought about that," Hollywood said and put them away.

"Okay so during this interview I want you to talk to me," I told Hollywood. "When I ask you a question, I need you to incorporate it into your answer because my voice won't air on the show. So if I say *Where did you grow up?* You should answer by saying *I grew up in...wherever you grew up.* Make sense?"

"Yup." Hollywood nodded.

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Mac's camera was on a tripod and he sat in a chair behind it. This was easy stuff for him. He had his shot, he just needed to press record. Manny had rigged a boom mic above him as it would capture the cleanest sound. He'd keep his headphones on to make sure the sound was clear because sometimes minor things like airplanes flying overhead could really mess up the audio.

"Let me get some tone," Manny said. We all hushed and sat still while Manny recorded the silence. It was important to record room tone, especially when you were cutting someone's words together in an edit. It filled the void and made fragmented sentences that we had spliced together sound much more natural. After a minute or so, Manny stopped recording. "Great, thanks," he said.

"Okay let's start rolling," I said. Mac pressed record and Manny re-fired his sound equipment.

"Speed," Mac told me, which was my cue to begin.

With interviews I liked to be relaxed. We had all the time in the world and there was no need to rush. I needed to ensure I got enough information to edit my piece, and that my subject was in a relaxed state of mind. "Okay Hollywood, tell me your name and where you're from," I began.

"My name is Detective Dennis Johnson, but everyone around here calls me Hollywood. I'm from Atlanta originally, and I've been a cop in Los Angeles for two years."

"Great," I said. "And what do you like about being a detective?"

Hollywood sat there for a moment, thinking. He shook his head and started smiling. "Uh, that's a tough one Sharpe." He let out a laugh. "I mean, this isn't really what I want to be doing. I guess we get OT and a lot of vacation days. That's probably not a good answer, right?"

I frowned. "Well, it's an honest one," I said. "But probably not one you would want your boss to hear when he watches the show. That's okay, we can skip that question. Let's talk about how playing a cop on TV made you want to be one in real life."

"Yeah sure," Hollywood said. "I, uh, I moved to Los Angeles when I

was eighteen. I was just a baby with all the hopes and dreams that most actors have when they move here. Back home I did pretty well with the ladies and so I thought I'd have a leg up in this town, you know based on my looks. Turns out the competition is intense. It's all about being in the right place at the right time. I landed a couple of gigs on soap operas and TV pilots, nothing major. I worked behind the bar at night to pay the bills, but I knew I couldn't do that forever. After fifteen years of struggling I realized I needed a job that was a little more permanent. I could always take a day off here and there if I had an audition. So I thought about police work. I'd played a cop on a soap and everyone told me how convincing I was. I figured why not try the real thing? Anyway that was a few years ago and I'm still here."

"Do you find that your acting skills help you with your police work?"

"My acting skills definitely help with police work. I can "act" like I'm really upset, or about to go crazy on somebody to scare them. Also, when I'm acting it makes all of the shit we see not seem so real, you know?"

I nodded. "Watch the language okay, but that was a great line. Can you re-say it without the swearing?"

Hollywood put on a serious face, getting into character. "Acting makes all the stuff I see... oh, sorry can I do that one again?"

I nodded.

"My acting makes all the garbage I see on this job not seem so real," Hollywood said with some grit in his voice. "How was that? I'm liking this tortured cop angle."

"That was great. Let's keep going. Tell me about your love life."

"I was a ladies' man back home in Atlanta, but in LA I live a life of solitude. I don't date much, I haven't for a while actually." Hollywood paused. "Wait, does that make me seem like a loser?"

I was glad Hollywood was a team player and all, but his pre-madonna side was starting to come out. "No, it's working for you. The women watching this will go crazy for you. Let's keep going. Why don't you date?"

"I don't know why I'm still single. I guess I haven't found the right

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girl. Maybe this job is making me jaded, seeing the bad in everyone. I don't know."

We continued back and forth for another hour and a half. Hollywood seemed to land on a dark, tainted soul angle, which was playing very well. In the moody lighting, this hunky muscle guy who was so affected by his work was about as good as it got. Even I wanted to go give him a hug and I knew everything he was saying was bullshit. Hollywood described his desire to please his father who worked hard his entire life and couldn't imagine a career where you got paid to have your picture taken or to say a few lines. He made up a story about a woman he dated in high school who was the love of his life and how he compared every woman he met to her. He said he hadn't been back to Atlanta since he left and doubted he'd ever be back. He wasn't going to return home a failure.

We wrapped up the session and Mac and Manny reset for Terry's interview.

I approached Terry who was sitting at her desk looking through a file. "Terry?"

She looked up at me with perfect hair and a sweet expression on her face. I may have been imagining it but I swore the light sparkled in her eyes. "Yes?"

"We're ready to interview you if you have time."

Terry studied my face making me feel ugly and small all at once. "Victoria, I'm okay with you taping me, but this is really Hollywood's time to shine, you know? I don't want to take away the spotlight from him."

Beautiful and a martyr? I couldn't take much more of this one. "You won't Terry, I just need you to answer a couple questions. This can't just be the Hollywood-show. You're part of this team too."

"Okay then, sure."

Terry sat in front of the camera looking gorgeous. I had the urge to spit in her hair to make it look greasy but I held myself back. I needed to put my emotions aside and focus on this interview.

Mac had set his frame in a medium shot capturing the top of her head to the bottom of her heaving breasts.

“Maybe go a little higher on the angle,” I told Mac.

“Sharpe come on, this looks great,” Mac responded.

“Just try it my way,” I said, tilting the angle to exclude her bosom. “There, that looks better.”

“Sharpe guys watch this too,” Mac whispered to me.

“Yes, but she doesn’t want to be portrayed as a sex symbol,” I whispered through clenched teeth.

Mac grabbed the camera away from me and tilted it back to the original angle. I gave him a dirty look, but finally relented. I was in charge, but sometimes Mac prevailed. I looked over at Terry and smiled. “Okay, ready to get started?”

“Sure,” Terry said, adjusting her hair.

“You look great baby. Don’t worry about it,” Manny told her. He was sitting on the floor next to the camera and she smiled down at him.

I sat down on my apple box and started my line of questioning. I started with the obvious stuff. She told me that she had been a cop for a long time and she joined the force because she wanted to work on her confidence. She had always been shy and thought the police force would toughen her up.

“Did it work?” I asked her.

“Yes I think so,” Terry admitted. “As a kid it was the family joke that my dad could always find me behind his legs, hiding from the world. I was so shy that I wouldn’t travel anywhere without my security doll, which I carried until I was in eighth grade. The kids used to tease me and if anyone ever spoke to me I’d turn bright red and run.”

“Really?” I asked, genuinely surprised. “You don’t seem that way to me at all now.”

“As I got older and a little more developed I started to get some attention from the opposite sex.” Terry looked down, embarrassed. “I can’t believe I am telling you this. I guess this feels like a therapy session. When I talk to my shrink stuff like this pours out.”

“That’s okay, it’s great. Keep going,” I told her, slightly encouraged that she had a little bit of crazy in her.

“Yeah, so anyway, after high school I enrolled in the academy. They gave me a really hard time when I first joined. The sergeants said I’d never survive as a cop. As a woman I was a minority and so I knew I had decent odds that I’d get hired after the training. My instructors would have me scream in their faces, or put me in charge of team drills, anything to build up my confidence. It worked. I knew I had to learn to be intimidating if I was going to survive.”

“What else do they do to toughen you up?” I asked.

“What didn’t they do? I had to do all these obstacle courses, shoot every type of gun. We used to have boxing matches with each other. They even unleashed one of the K9s on me one day to see how I’d do in an emergency situation. They made me clean up blood and guts from real crime scenes to test my resolve. I mean it was pretty brutal.”

“But you survived.”

“Yes, I survived and am stronger for it. I know I probably don’t come off as being very aggressive, but I’m light years away from where I started.”

“What do you think it was that made you shy as a kid?”

Terry smiled and looked down. “Look, I know the answer to that question. I’ve been in therapy most of my life, but I have no intention of stating it on a television show. Okay?”

“Whoa, I just felt some of that aggression, Terry,” I said smiling. I was truly intrigued by her and knew the audience would be too. “So tell me about being a female police officer,” I asked.

“Being a woman on the force can be hard sometimes. I have to let a lot of things roll off my back. The men can be pretty disrespectful at times. Not Hollywood of course, but some of the other cops.”

“Why don’t you just tell them to go to hell?” I asked.

“I will if they push me far enough. You have to understand that my version of aggression would probably seem like nothing to a normal person, but it’s still hard for me to do. I have to be pushed really hard to get to a *Go to Hell* kind of point.”

I interviewed Terry for a while longer. She said that she was also single and hadn’t dated in a while. I didn’t know what her psychological issues were and I didn’t want to get too personal. Something had obviously happened in her past to make her so shy, and I didn’t see the need to bring her back to that place. I wasn’t sure if whatever it was affected her relationships with men. She seemed to like the attention she was getting from Mac and Manny but I wasn’t sure if she would let it go beyond that. I wondered about her and Hollywood too. Did they have a past? They were both good looking people and would make a gorgeous couple. I wasn’t picking up any of that vibe between them. They had more of a brother-sister thing going on.

My thoughts were interrupted when I noticed Hollywood running towards me. “We’ve got a body,” he screamed excitedly.

It took me a minute to process his words. “Wow, that was fast.”

Mac winked at me. “Three murders a day in this town.”

“So they say,” I agreed. “Okay, let’s pack up this gear and roll out!”