

There was an old gray BMW across the street from my apartment house. I told Nick to wait a minute.

She had slid down in the driver's seat, probably uncomfortable as hell, only a black knit beret, a streak of gold and two bright green eyes visible. I exhaled my exasperation and worry. No sense in letting emotion run riot. Especially tonight.

Peachy grabbed her steering wheel and reached for a handhold to sit up straight and unlock the car door. I corralled her before she could swing both legs out.

God, what incredible gams this woman had, pleated skirt askew, sheer stockings and designer shoes. I shook my head. Don't look. Close your eyes if you have to.

"Peachy."

No answer.

"I have my eyes shut because I'm in love with you. Now listen to me, we're in some danger, maybe more than I can handle." I opened my eyes and fell silent. No good reason to fight a war of attrition that I'm probably going to lose. Everything clean and decent was right there in front of me. All I would have to do is walk around to the passenger side and get in, forget about Carly Dawn and the Spurls mob.

Peachy was wide awake, brain in high gear. "Let me help," she said with plenty of guts. "I'm a good witness, and I have a pretty fair idea where you're going. Ventura P.D. found Sturt's body. His daughter is missing. She might be at the club."

I softened a little and yielded to destiny. There was only one way to fix this.

"Will you marry me?"

Her face transformed to wonderment and yearning. "Yes, of course," she replied.

I nodded and kissed the bride-to-be, assuming that I was going to survive tonight's combat mission. A wonderful warm soft kiss, made by those who love deeply.

I cleared my throat and laid down the law. "Be aware that my wife is not going to be an equal when shit comes to holler. You have to do what I tell you, understood?"

Peachy nodded okay.

"Go home. Stay away from me tonight."

She pulled her leg back in, started her car, tried to smile. I shut the car door, said goodbye to everything I wanted in life. After a few blocks I lost sight of her.

Nick was leaning on the front fender of his Bentley. "Who's the babe?" he asked.

"Bookkeeper. Said I should file Chapter 7, stiff the credit card companies."

He had a good laugh. "Sure. At midnight. And she parked there for an hour to see if you came home with someone else for financial advice."

"Aw, shut up, let's get this over with."