

Her thoughts are interrupted when she catches a glimpse of a distant traffic cop in her side-view mirror patrolling the long line of vehicles behind her. Since he's heading in her direction she figures he will be shooing her away momentarily, so she puts the car in drive, rolls down the window to let in some cool air, and looks over her shoulder to merge into traffic.

Out of nowhere, a man's torso materializes at her window. "*Jeezus!*" Shannon huffs, stunned. Slamming her foot on the brake, she shrinks away from the man and, instinctively, her fingertips touch the weapon concealed at her waist.

She regains her senses quickly, realizing it's the same guy from the limousine in front of her who had been accompanied by an elderly Caucasian couple of wealthy stature and feeble health. Just moments ago, she'd absently watched them say their goodbyes.

Irritated, Shannon canvasses the scene, her almond shaped eyes dotting about in search of a viable reason for him to be at her door. There isn't one. *Here we go again*, she thinks, bracing herself for the flirting she assumes is on its way.

"Yes?"

The man leans down to the window and speaks in a pleasant baritone. "Hello. Lost in thought?"

Shannon can't help but notice how extremely good-looking he is, with rich caramel skin, long, thick eyelashes, and silky, black, deeply wavy hair. From what she can tell, he is about 6-feet-tall. A black trench coat overlaying a slate gray crew neck sweater and dark slacks hang from his proportionate musculature nicely.

However, unaffected by his looks and not one to be sold a bill of goods or a sorry old pickup line, Shannon responds tersely, "Nope! Excuse me." She inches the car forward, hoping he gets the hint.

"One moment, please!" he expresses, moving to impede her progress. Flashing a flawless set of teeth, he continues, "I know you've heard what I'm about to say probably more times than you can count, but I'm going to say it anyway. If you would get to know me, I guarantee you whoever put that frown on your face would be miserable to see you having so much fun."

His statement has to register. A second or two later, Shannon's face cracks. "Nice one," she comments, dropping her guard a tinge. *It surely isn't what I expected to hear. No typical drag about being beautiful. Nothing*

*sleazy*. It was kind of clever and somehow soothing in her present state of mind.

The man extends his hand. "I'm Carlos."

Before anyone can say another word, the ill-tempered traffic cop arrives on the scene, yelling at them from a car length away. "You two! Move it. Now!"

Carlos looks at the cop and rubs his neatly groomed French cut goatee. He tells Shannon, "Please, don't leave yet."

She watches as he approaches the cop and doesn't know why she's actually waiting. *Curiosity*, she supposes, shifting the car into park. Carlos and the cop exchange words, and he returns to her window. To her surprise, the cop plods on to other cars.

Intrigued, Shannon asks, "What did you say to him?"

"I... told him you rear-ended me, and we were exchanging information."

Shannon's jaw drops. "You did *what*?"

He raises his eyebrows guiltily and responds, "Yep." Reaching for his wallet, he pulls out his driver's license and a business card, then hands them to Shannon. Mischievously, he tells her, "Play along now. He's watching us."

She eyes Carlos with comical defiance. "I'm not showing you my driver's license."

"Why not? I showed you mine."

Shannon laughs, a succession of vibrant ha-yucks that conclude with a breathy inhale, and the cop, now a few cars ahead of them, looks sternly in their direction. Carlos turns and projects his voice. "A little difficulty here, but I believe we're almost done."

The cop starts to walk toward them, and to thwart his advancement, Carlos says, "Sir, we have it! Don't need any help." He turns back to Shannon, very amused by his own shenanigans. "I need your help here. Please don't let me go to jail for lying to this officer."