

**THE  
INTERSECTION  
OF LAW  
AND DESIRE**

*by*

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## CHAPTER 1

I cursed myself for being a good girl and promised that little old ladies would get no more favors from me. It was now 4:54 p.m. At three o'clock, I had been beyond ready to admit that business was slower than a dead turtle. Good girl or no, at five exactly I would be closed for the business day. I wouldn't be gone because I lived here. I could have been the kind of detective who earned enough to afford both an office and an apartment, but that would require taking too many of what I called the "Oh, shit" cases—husbands looking for wives who were probably in the local women's shelter, bosses who wanted to make sure their no-insurance, minimum wage employees didn't cheat them. So I now sat in my office/living room waiting for six minutes to slowly tick by. Sara Clavish, who had the other office (Cajun cookbooks) on this floor had asked if I could accept a package for her. I certainly owed her the favor. Ms. Clavish was a woman in her early sixties who still occasionally wore white gloves. Besides the cat feeding I could always depend on her for, a client had had some exotic toys shipped to me. I wasn't around, so the delivery person left them with Ms. Clavish. To claim that a package from Mons of Venus, Inc., wasn't for me would sound unbelievable, so I didn't. Ms. Clavish had handed it to me without even the hint of a lifted eyebrow. But I hadn't thought that her noon-ish request would trap me in the office until the dregs of the afternoon.

My clock-watching was interrupted by the phone. "Hello," I answered, skipping the "M. Knight Detective Agency" routine, since I assumed that it was too late in the day for clients.

"Hi...uh...Micky?" replied a hesitant young boy's voice.

"Patrick, how are you?"

"I'm fine, thank you," he answered, his voice relaxing as he was recognized.

I hadn't seen Patrick, a twelve-year-old boy, in about a month. His

mother Barbara and I were friends. While she had been doing physical therapy, I had insisted on being at the top of the list of people to stay with Patrick and Cissy, her kids. She needed physical therapy because she had been shot in the head. I had been with her when it happened. And although Barbara insists that I had saved her life, I still feel guilty that she almost died while I escaped with only cuts and bruises. She finished about five weeks ago. I had seen her a few times recently, but, my babysitting duty over, I hadn't seen Patrick or Cissy since.

"So, what's up? You miss me so much, you can't survive without hearing my dulcet tones?" I kidded Patrick.

"Well...no. I want to hire you." His voice was serious.

"Hire me?" I was caught off guard both by his request and his earnestness.

"Yes. That's if you're not too busy or anything."

"I might be able to work you in," I agreed. Busy was not a major problem.

"Maybe we can meet to discuss it?" he asked, trying his best to sound adult and businesslike.

After maneuvering around Little League and the like, we worked out a time. In the middle of this, my buzzer rang. I assumed it to be Ms. Clavish's tardy package, so without interrupting my conversation with Patrick, I buzzed open the downstairs door. The delivery person could huff and puff up three flights of stairs.

"You don't want to tell me what this is about?" I asked Patrick.

"Well," he hesitated for a moment, "it's sort of about Cissy. But I don't want to talk over the phone." Cissy was two and a half years younger than he was. For a brother and a sister, they were fairly close.

"Okay." I didn't push.

"Please don't tell my mom," was his final request.

My door swung open. For a moment I thought it was a rude delivery person, until I realized that it wasn't a package courier framed in my doorway.

As usual, her clothes were expensive, her hair perfectly styled, a shade of blond that I would have taken for natural if Cordelia hadn't shown me a picture of them as children at a family reunion. Her eyes were a blue that was enhanced by perfectly applied makeup. She had the self-assured poise of someone who has always had enough money to buy whatever she wanted.

"Karen Holloway," I said. "How nice to see you again. Don't tell me you've come to apologize for all the trouble you caused me."

My sarcasm was lost on her. “Micky, I want to hire you.”

“Pity. I’m closed for the day.” I stood up like I was about to leave.

“I’m serious. I do need your help.” Then she added, “I’ll pay you well for your time.”

If I were Nancy Drew, this would be the Case of the Boy and the Blond Bitch. Cases, that is. And a grown-up Nancy Drew to be using words that rhymed with witch. Timing and alliteration were the only links between the Boy and the Blond Bitch.

Karen had her checkbook out and was writing a check.

“You need my help? Well, my prayers have been answered,” I finally replied.

“Don’t you want this check?” Karen asked as she walked by me. She waved it in my face. It was for \$5,000.

“What are you doing here?” I countered. I sat down behind my desk, putting as much distance as I could between us.

I first met Karen last January when she had hired me, ostensibly to find her lost fiancé. The assignment was easy—he was working as a dancer in a gay bar. But, of course, Harry wasn’t her fiancé; he was her brother, and a few pictures of him dancing for the boys was enough to get him kicked out of rich grandpapa’s will. I decided that fair was fair and took advantage of Karen’s interest in my body to get some equally compromising pictures to hand over to her grandfather. I winced at the memory. I hadn’t actually handed them to him, but to his other granddaughter, Cordelia James.

I shook my head to clear the memory. It wasn’t one I was proud of. I reminded myself that at least Cordelia had had some idea of what I was when she became involved with me. It still seemed improbable that we were lovers.

“Will you help me?” Karen asked, making herself comfortable on my couch.

I sat at my desk, trying to answer that age-old question, “Now what?” I knew that Karen and Cordelia, who were first cousins, maintained a polite, if distant relationship. They didn’t run in the same circles, but occasionally Cordelia would make a token appearance at Karen’s uptown parties. However, I wasn’t sure what Cordelia really thought of Karen. What she might think of me for working for Karen, I was even less sure.

“You can’t seriously expect me to do anything for you, can you?” I told her. There, that should be blunt enough.

She could and it wasn’t. “Yes, I can. I’m asking you to help me and paying you good money for it,” she informed me. She put the check on my desk.

The money was, unfortunately, a major temptation. Cordelia had been the only grandkid without compromising pictures, and, despite her not wanting it, she had gotten the bulk of her grandfather's estate. She was also a doctor, and, although she was a low-priced internist, she still made a lot more than I did.

Conceding to reality that Karen was here, I said, "What help do you want?" I was also, I had to admit, just a bit curious about what Karen was up to that would lead her back to my office.

"So, you'll do it?" It was just barely a query.

"Check ain't cleared yet." I put my feet up on the desk and leaned back, refusing to be budged by her haste. Karen wasn't giving me much time to think about my original problem—did I really need the money enough to get tangled up with her again? My only other case, Patrick, didn't appear to be a real money maker. I reached one of those pragmatic compromises with myself—to take the money. It would buy Karen the time I spent listening to her and my effort in figuring out who to palm her off on.

"Call my bank. They'll vouch that it's good."

"Like last time?"

"I paid you."

"Eventually. And under duress," I reminded her.

"Why don't we go to the bank right now? I'll give it to you in cash."

"Why don't you go and get the cash and come back here?"

"Because I don't want to be carrying five thousand dollars in cash on me."

"Oh? But it's all right if I do?" I retorted. "Thanks, but no thanks, Karen. I'll let you know when it's cleared," I finished, a clear dismissal.

To anyone but Karen. "Please, I really do need your help. I don't know who else to turn to," she pleaded, an almost real sound of desperation in her tone.

"All right, Karen," I cut in. "What's your problem?" I asked brusquely.

"I lent some money out."

"And you want me to get it back?"

"No, not really. I don't care about the money. Much."

"So what's the problem?"

"He wants more money."

"Say no, Karen. Just say no."

"I can't. I sort of...made a deal."

"Yes?" I prompted.

"He promised a very good return on my money. I just had to commit

to a certain amount up front. And he has some collateral that I want back.”

“Karen,” I said as patiently as I could, “when you loan someone money, you don’t give them collateral, they give you collateral.”

“I know that. I’m out this money and I don’t want to lose any more.”

“Then maybe you should talk to your financial planner instead of me.”

“I can’t. It’s all...a bit irregular.”

“How irregular?” I demanded.

“Informal would be a better way to put it.”

“How informal?”

“I met him through the friend of a friend one night.”

“One night?”

“At a club.”

“A bar?” I asked sarcastically.

“No, of course not. A very nice private club,” Karen defended.

“Nice, huh?” As usual, it was going to be a struggle getting the truth out of Karen. I would, it appeared, earn the five thousand.

“Exclusive. Expensive. Only the right people go there.”

“How could the ‘right people’ do you wrong?” I asked rhetorically, then continued, “How informal was this investment? Did you sign anything?”

“No.”

“Did you agree to specific terms in front of witnesses?”

“No.”

“Karen,” I said, “you, of all people, would not pay me good money just to tell me that you made a bad and probably stupid loan. What do they have on you that makes you think you require my services?”

“Well,” she hedged, “nothing. Really, I don’t know.”

I let her sit in silence for a few moments before repeating, “What do they have on you?”

Karen crossed her legs, then opened her purse, taking as long as she could to dig out her lighter and cigarettes. “Smoke?” she offered.

“I don’t. And if you want to, you have to go outside. My cat’s allergic.”

“Oh.” She stopped in mid-cigarette light. Then took as long to put them back into her purse as she had taking them out.

“So, what do they have that you want back?” I questioned again, looking pointedly at my watch to indicate that she was running out of time and I was running out of patience.

“A picture,” was her less than elaborate answer.

“A picture? Rembrandt? Degas? Polaroid? Can we be a bit more specific?”

“Of me.”

“Of you doing what?” I asked pointedly.

“I’d...rather not say. It’s embarrassing.”

“Uh-huh.” Now we were getting down to it. “Let me indulge in some wild speculation. Is there any possibility you want me to get this picture back for you?”

“Yes, yes, that’s it. You will help me, won’t you?”

“You know, Karen,” I replied, “it would be impossible for me to recover a picture if I didn’t know what it was of.”

She sat still, a slight furrow of her brow the only sign of all the mental squirming she was doing. “I’m with a woman,” she finally conceded.

“Discussing Hannah Arendt’s concept of the banality of evil, I’m sure.”

“What?” Karen evidently didn’t read much philosophy.

“What are you and this female person doing?”

“Kissing and, well...” She trailed off ever so coyly.

“Karen,” I said, getting exasperated. “You don’t work, so you can’t get fired, and you own your own property, so you can’t get evicted. It can’t really hurt you if people find out that you kiss girls.”

“That’s sort of the problem,” she replied softly.

“Sort of?”

“I thought she was nineteen.”

“You what?” I demanded as I got the picture (pun intended). “How old is she?”

“Uh...sixteen. In a few weeks,” Karen added sotto voce.

“Karen!” I said sternly, standing up. But I couldn’t think of anyplace to go, so I sat back down again, scowling at her across my desk. “Literally a girl, huh?” I snarled. “I know you don’t have any morals; but, tell me, do you even have a concept of what one might be?”

“Look, I met her in the club,” Karen defended, ignoring my very pointed aspersion. “How could she have gotten in there if she wasn’t over eighteen? She told me she was a college student. What was I supposed to do? Card her? Besides, she started it.”

“How far did ‘it’ go?”

“As far...as it usually goes.”

“You had sex with a fifteen-year-old?”

“It wasn’t my idea. She did start it.”

“How did she start it?”

“Want me to show you?” Karen offered.

“No, words only,” I countered from behind the safety of my desk.

“She put her hand on my knee and told me she thought I was an attractive and intelligent woman. Then she suggested we go to one of the private rooms at the club. For when you really want to keep the riffraff out.”

“Unless they have cameras,” I observed.

“They didn’t take my picture there,” Karen told me. “Then she took off my bra and started sucking my tits and then I...”

“Karen,” I cut in, “skip the prurient details. When did they take your picture?”

“Oh,” she said, seeming to have enjoyed telling me the prurient details and disappointed that she was deprived of the chance. “We left the club and went to her place. They took a picture of us on her couch.”

“In flagrante delicto?”

“Ah...yes. She had her shirt off and I was kissing her breasts.”

“That’s a big uh-uh in this state.”

“Like a...felony?” Karen asked, a trace of fear edging into her voice. Her trust funds were tied to the lack of a criminal record.

“Yeah. Just for having sex with a woman. Let alone a minor.”

“Oh.” Then again, “Oh. Can you get the picture back?”

“No.”

“Oh. But...what will I do?”

“Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn.” I couldn’t resist.

“Damn it, Micky, help me,” she burst out, truly scared that she might lose her trust funds. “I have to meet Joey tomorrow night. What am I going to do?”

“You do have a few options. For example, you could go to the police and tell them you’re being blackmailed.”

“No, I can’t. If they see the photo, they would arrest me.”

“Maybe. That leaves two other choices.”

“Yes?”

“You could give Joey the money.”

“What’s the other choice?” Karen obviously didn’t like that one.

“Call his bluff. It’s not likely he’ll go to the cops and admit he was blackmailing you. And if he does...hire a good lawyer. Hope they believe that you really were set up.”

“Thanks,” she said disgustedly. “Those aren’t very good choices.”

“They’re the only ones you have as far as I’m concerned. I’m not going to risk a breaking-and-entering charge to save you from the consequences of pawing a fifteen-year-old.”

“Damn it,” she said in exasperation, reaching in her purse for her cigarettes, then catching herself and tossing them back down. “All right.”

“All right what?” I prompted.

“I’ll call his bluff. Will you go with me?”

“Do what?”

“Go with me tomorrow night. You should do something to earn your money.”

“I have done something to earn my money. Getting a semblance of the truth out of you is a major achievement.”

“Please, Micky. I’d feel a lot safer if you were there.”

“Okay,” I tersely agreed, less out of concern for her safety than to ensure she did the right thing. Not to mention that I couldn’t come up with anyone to foist this off onto.

We sorted out where and when to meet, and Karen outlined the dress code for me so I would fit in with the “right” people. Then, with repeated iterations of how busy I was, I hustled her out of my office.

After giving Karen enough time to get safely out of my neighborhood, I headed out. A package slip was stuck on the door. The delivery man didn’t even ring once. I got in my car, went to the bank machine, and deposited her check. I’d wasted my restful afternoon with Karen Holloway. I was not looking forward to tomorrow night. I’ve never hung around with the “right” people.