

One

"Perfect," Jeanne St. Amant muttered as the blue and red lights flashed behind her car. "Just what I need. My life just keeps getting better and better." First, she lost the starring role of a lifetime. Then she was forced to return to her small town beginnings and beg to live off the kindness of family. Now it looked like she was going to get a ticket.

Merging to the right, she looked for a safe place to pull over. This stretch of Airline Highway was nearly deserted at this time of afternoon. The canal lining this particular portion of the road was twenty feet deep in some places. Jeanne hated being this close to it, having heard awful stories of drivers accidentally entering the body of water.

"Please step out of the car with your license, registration and proof of insurance." The officer's deep voice ordered over his loud speaker startling Jeanne, and she jerked back, hitting the back of her head on the headrest. The ponytail holding her hair back loosened, and some of the rich brown hair pulled free. Used to always looking put together, she would have been quick to right the mess, but she was so preoccupied with her current situation she did not even notice the disarray.

Muttering under her breath, she unhooked her seatbelt and started rummaging through her purse for her license. Her wallet was hard to find because her hands were shaking. Worried the police officer might get annoyed, she dumped the contents of her purse onto the seat beside her. Pushing aside the old candy wrappers, receipts, make up, and tampons, she finally located her wallet and fumbled to pulled her license free.

"Miss, I need you to step out of the car with your license, registration and proof of insurance." The officer announced via his loud speaker again, and she almost dropped her license back into the mess on her seat.

Great, now the cop sounded aggravated. Well, he needed to chill out, Jeanne thought. She was doing her best to comply, but it took time to locate everything he demanded for her to gather. Those flashing lights were making it hard to concentrate, too. What the heck was he stopping her

for anyway? She was only going ten miles over the speed limit. Everyone knows a person can go up to ten miles above the posted speed.

Her glove compartment would not open when she tried to find her registration and insurance card. Worried the impatient cop might yell at her again, Jeanne started slamming her fist into the compartment. She finally managed to claw it open when a knock at her window caused her to scream and slam the compartment shut again. Seeing the tall police officer bending down, eyeing her sternly, Jeanne shrieked. Her license went flying as she raised her hands in the air.

One of the cop's dark eyebrows raised. He indicated toward her locked door. "Step out of the car, miss." Even though the window was up, he did not need to raise his voice. His no nonsense tone did suggest it was not wise to disobey. But it had been a long day, and Jeanne was already edgy.

Putting down her window, she took a few calming breaths. "If you would give me enough time, I can find all my information." There was just a bit of censor in her blue eyes. This was the perfect welcome back to her home parish in Louisiana.

He reached inside the open window to unlock her door. Opening it, he ordered her to step out of the car again. "Have you been drinking today, miss?"

"Drinking?" Jeanne stepped out of the car, and glared up at the policemen. He towered over her by several inches. "No, I have not been drinking, unless you count water. I've got three empty bottles in the back seat. I know Louisiana has a standing law against open containers being in the car when driving, but I assumed it only involved alcohol."

"Was that supposed to be a joke, miss?" He did not look amused.

Blowing out a frustrated sigh, she tried again. "Don't I have the right to know why you are pulling me over, officer?"

An adorable dimple appeared when one corner of his mouth inched up at her attitude. "You were going twelve miles over the posted speed limit, miss."

"No way," she insisted adamantly. "It was ten over at best."

Now the attractive officer gave her a full grin. If he was not being a pain in the ass, Jeanne knew she would find herself quite attracted to the blonde man. His square jaw was clean shaven and his brown eyes were rather nice-looking. "So you admit you were speeding?"

"I was within the ten-mile grace zone," she offered, staring up at him confidently.

"Miss, there is no grace zone. The speed limit is posted clearly; it's not a range of speeds, but a specific number established to insure the safety of drivers. Lots of things go into establishing the speed limit." Taking in the sight of the mess in her car, he raised his eyebrow again. "Did you ever manage to find your license?"

Frowning at his judgmental attitude, she turned and saw her license laying near the gas pedal. With her back to the officer, she bent over to retrieve it. Her unexpected movement to grab something out of sight put the officer on alert. He was prepared to react with force if she came up with a weapon. Braced for action or not, Officer Daniel Wright could not help but notice the lady's impressive, round ass. The urge to slap it was hard to deny, especially recalling her sassy little attitude.

Jeanne stood up and turned to give the officer her identification. He took it and tried to keep his expression neutral. Part of him had enjoyed eyeing her hot ass and wished it had taken her a bit longer to locate her license. "Jeannie St. Amant? This is a Tennessee license. Your plates are from out of state, too. Are you visiting family in the area?"

She had heard rumors cops ticketed outsiders at a higher rate than locals. "I'm visiting my brothers." Maybe having a few relatives in the region would help get her out of this small spot of trouble.

"Would you happen to be related to Matthew St. Amant?" the officer asked. He appeared to be searching her face, comparing it to her picture.

Something about the way he said her brother's name made Jeanne suspicious. Did his tone indicate he had a past relationship with her brother? Were they good friends or enemies? "Possibly." Jeanne decided to play it safe.

"Possibly? Either you are related to Matthew St. Amant or you aren't?"

"Well, if you like Matthew, I am his sister Jeanne."

A huge smile reached his brown eyes now. "And if I don't like him?"

"Then I don't know the son of a bitch."

They shared a laugh before Officer Daniel Wright got all stern again. "Jeannie..." he pronounced her name wrong again, and she rushed to correct him.

"It's pronounced *John*. My parents were very religious. My three older brothers' names are Matthew, Mark and Luke. You know... like in the authors of the gospels. I messed up their theme when I turned out to be a girl, but they just got creative with the spelling of John."

"My name is Daniel Wright. Jeanne, this section of road is very dangerous. Speeding has caused many drivers to lose control of their vehicles around this curve and end up in the canal. It amounts to a death sentence when that happens. Most people panic when their vehicle goes into the water because they don't know how to get out of their cars quickly enough."

"I have a special tool to knock out the glass if I ever end up going in the water." Jeanne felt the need to explain. She did not want Officer Hottie, as she thought of him, to think she was careless or anything. Looking at his hand, she saw no ring. If she would be staying in this area for a while, it would be nice to know some single men. Maybe moving back to LaPlace would not be so boring after all. Of course, she would only be hanging around until she saved enough cash to move out west. Her singing career had not panned out, but maybe she could try her hand at acting.

Officer Hottie seemed to question if she really was prepared in the unlikely event she ended up in the canal. "Where is it located, miss?"

Did he really just question her honesty? Jeanne's back stiffened. Here she was, thinking he was all handsome and hot, and he thought she was lying about being prepared. Jeanne started to look for the device, wanting to make him regret his assumption. "It's right here in the middle console..." Her bad luck was still holding up because the stupid tool was not there. "I mean I stashed it in my glove department so it would be easier to reach." The conviction in her voice would have come off so much better if Jeanne did not have to resort to attacking the now closed compartment with her small fist again.

Her sexy ass wiggled all around as she moved in the front seat searching, making the officer groan. He grabbed her hips and pulled her out of the vehicle so he could concentrate on his job. Nice hips, he had to admit to himself. They were full and easy to get a good grip on. The image of making love to her as she was on all fours, popped into his head. Those full hips would be perfect for holding on to as he moved inside her... Shaking his head, he forced himself to get back to his job. "If it took you as long to find that tool as it did to try to locate your papers, you'd drown for sure. You should place the tool someplace you can reach it quickly in an emergency situation. Mount it on the dash, if you have to, but keep it within arm's length."

Why did he have to sound so testy with her? He was the one who asked where she kept her 'window breaking thingee'. She was just trying to show him. Jeanne gave him a nasty glare, but forced herself not to snap back at him. She really could not afford to pay for a speeding ticket right now. As it was, she would be begging her brother to let her hang out in his guest house for a few

months. "You are right, of course. It was stupid to speed through this patch of the highway. I promise to be more careful in the future, Officer Wright."

"If you will give me your word that's true, I'll let you off with a warning this time."

Relief showed on her face, and Jeanne had the urge to reach up and kiss the stern looking officer on the cheek. Hell, he was so hot, she would not mind kissing him on his lips. But given her current lack of luck, he would probably make the wrong assumption and try to arrest her for prostitution.

"I assume you are friends with my brother, Matthew." Maybe she could get her brother to invite the hot man over sometime so they could meet in a better setting.

"Matthew and I served together in Afghanistan about ten years back." He seemed to start to say something more, but changed his mind. For a second, Jeanne was sure he was going to ask her out. Instead he gave her back her license and held her door open so she could get back inside. "Watch your speeding, Jeanne. I've pulled a few people from this section of the canal. I prefer never having to do so ever again."

Jeanne's brother seemed less than thrilled when his baby sister showed up at his doorstep unannounced. Against his better judgment, and with his wife Jan's encouragement, Matthew opened up the small mother-in-law cottage in back of his home for her. Matthew loved his sister, but he was not blind to her wild side.

He still remembered her packing up and leaving home shortly after her high school graduation. She was hell bent on becoming the hottest new country star in Nashville. Their parents had been heartbroken, hoping Jeanne would grow out of her childish dreams and go to college and settle down like their other children.

Apparently making it big in Nashville never happened, and Jeanne had ended up working various tourist attractions all along the Tennessee area. The closest she got to celebrity was a starring role in one of the attractions near Pigeon Forge. For a couple years, she enjoyed being a big star in the little town.

Jeanne had only returned home to St. John parish once in the five years she had been gone, and that was for their parents' funeral. Matthew remembered trying to get his baby sister to move back home at the time. He had promised his parents he would watch out for her. But Jeanne was

sure her big break was coming, and she left right after the funerals. It was anyone's guess how long she planned to stay this time.

She really was a good kid, Matthew knew in his heart. Being the only daughter and youngest member of the family, Jeanne had been used to getting lots of attention her whole life. She thrived on it, especially after discovering she had a singing voice people liked to praise. Jeanne had loved entertaining family members and visitors alike with her soulful singing and outrageous antics. Everyone spoiled her. Nobody imagined she would leave home to try to find the same adoration on a larger scale. While family and friends tended to overlook her stubborn behavior and hot headed temper, they were not so sure outsiders would do the same.

Yet, she managed to find her own little niche for the past few years. Something had happened recently, though, sending her running home to her family where she appeared to be trying to regroup. Matthew had not managed to get her to open up about what was going on yet. By the looks of how comfortably she was settling into his guest home, he would have a lot of time to get it out of her, though.

In the meantime, he just hoped she did not get involved in any of the mischief she was famous for in her younger days. Certainly, now that she was close to twenty-four, Jeanne had matured some. He was not sure how he would handle matters if she had not grown up all that much.

With five daughters of his own, all who looked up to Aunt Jeanne as their hero, Matthew would not be able to indulge in allowing his sister to set a poor role model. He would have to find a way to address any issues which arose. If she was his daughter, he would discipline her just like he did his own children. Somehow taking a belt to the backside of his grown sister just did not seem right.