

~ Bad Timing ~

by Mavis Applewater

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A special thank you goes out to my beta reader Mountain Girl.

As always this is for Heather.

It was just another night. My senses were on overdrive and I needed to find a little fun. What I considered fun back then usually came in a small blonde package. As I sat at the bar scanning the growing crowd, my fun walked in the front door. I had chosen a seat at the bar so that I could see everyone who entered the small woman's bar. Sadly my fun was already on the arm of another.

A slight stumbling block, I reasoned, as I observed the couple that chose a booth in the back away from prying eyes. Their lack of physical contact bolstered my courage. I held no doubt that they were, indeed, a couple. I could just sense the ennui that had settled in. Neither woman held that sparkle in their eyes that screamed, *'she's with me and I'm so lucky!'*

It was almost too easy; I deduced as the smaller blonde, the one I had set my sights on, approached the bar. "Hi," I offered politely as she tried to garner the bartender's attention.

"Hey," she nodded politely in response returning her attention to trying to get the bartender.

"Don't worry," I chuckled as I waved Maggie over. "I saw you come in with your girl."

"I didn't," she stammered ready to defend her easy dismissal of my greeting.

"You'd be right," I smiled confidently. "Maggie, the lady needs to place an order."

Maggie just rolled her eyes at me as she turned to the blonde. My new companion quickly placed her drink order as I lit up a cigarette. "So, should I even inquire as to what it is you are talking about?" She asked me her hazel eyes boring into me.

"When I greeted you, you assumed I was going to hit on you," I explained as she waved the puff of smoke I just expelled out of her face. "And you are correct."

"I'm with someone," she taunted me with a playful smile. "The fact that doesn't bother you tells me everything I need to know about you."

"Again your assumptions would be correct," I agreed with a cocky smile. "I'm arrogant, self centered and possess an unnatural fear of commitment. It is really pathetic when you think about it."

"Does this line of crap ever work for you?" She gaped at me amazed that I was behaving so boldly.

"All the time," I lied. The truth was I usually ended up being threatened by the girl friend or had a drink tossed in my face. Still I was encouraged by the fact that neither of these unsettling events had occurred. That and the way she was smiling at me.

"Liar," she taunted me as she scooped up her drinks and walked off.

"Pity," I sighed thinking that would be the end of it. Yet each time she returned I flirted with her. Much to my amazement she smiled at my antics. I learned that, like me, she was a student. Her name was Bess; the girlfriend's name was Sally. They didn't live together, but have been going together for over six months.

I was encouraged by the way she lingered longer and longer each time she came up to the bar. When she went into the ladies room I, naturally, followed. "You don't give up do you?" She blew out as she leaned against the sink.

"I would if I thought you weren't interested," I confessed being honest with her for the first time that night. I leaned against the sink next to her. I could feel her eyes on me.

"I don't cheat," she asserted as she folded her arms across her chest. "And Sally's getting really ticked off by how much time I'm spending with you."

"She isn't one of those possessive freaks is she?" I blurted out with concern.

"This coming from someone who followed me into the bathroom?" She laughed heartily.

"Told you I'm pathetic," I conceded with a bright grin. "She doesn't have to know," I encouraged, the tone of my voice conveying my desire.

"I'd know," she shot me down defiantly. "I liked talking with you tonight and I'd offer to do coffee or lunch, but frankly I don't trust you."

"You shouldn't," I readily agreed.

"That isn't going to work either," she scolded me.

"Not a game this time," I confessed. "I'm throwing in the towel. It was nice meeting you."

Then I did something that was completely out of character for me; I just walked away. I almost crashed into Sally as I walked out of the bathroom. The taller blonde did not look happy. I lingered by the doorway when I heard the shouting match begin. Once I was convinced that Bess wasn't in any danger I walked out of her life.

Again my actions were completely out of character. Normally, I would have kept at it until I wore the little blonde down. Or if I couldn't pry her away from her girlfriend, I'd be more than willing to share. There was just something so refreshing about Bess that I had no desire to screw around with her life.

That night was a turning point for me. I decided that it was time to grow up. What I really wanted was to find a Bess of my own. I never really did find the one who could light up my world with just a smile. Perhaps that is why, at times, my old snake like ways came crawling back.

From time to time Bess and I would cross paths. Despite her earlier proclamation we did share a cup of coffee now and then. I never made any inquiries regarding her relationship. I also never flirted with her again which was completely out of character for me. I just accepted the casual friendship she offered. At the time it was enough. She belonged to someone else and would never be with me. It was that simple. It also hurt like hell. There was just something special about Bess.

And so, here I sit, over a decade later, next to my client in an interrogation room at the local police station. Despite his protests we all know he is guilty. His guilt really doesn't bother me. What is nagging at me is the assistant D.A. sitting across from me. The night I first met her she had said that she was also pre-law. I just didn't know that ten years later sitting on opposite sides of the table would reunite us with her looking at me as if I was dirt.

I am trying to keep my focus on my client's dilemma and not how great she looks. "The police had no right to search Mr. Dickens' vehicle," I protest. What I really want to say is you look amazing and whatever happened to Sally? "The search was illegal," is all I can offer trying to keep my cool façade in place.

"Your client ran a stop sign," Bess protests looking right through me and my lies just as she did the first time we met.

"And that gave the police the right to search his trunk?" I fume. "Don't wait for the paperwork; I'll have this thrown out before lunch. Now if you don't mind I need a moment alone with my client."

Bess and the police give me a cold stare before leaving the room. "Cool," Brenner Dickens smiles at me.

"What in the fuck were you thinking?" I bellow at the son whose father is one of my firm's most influential clients.

"Hey?" He whines.

"You're on probation and you run a stop sign with a kilo of coke stashed in your car?" I continue not caring who his father is. "You must be a new kind of stupid."

"I thought you were on my side?" He sputters like a moron. "You're going to get this thrown out right?"

"Maybe," I growl. "Since you are on probation the police were well within their rights to check your car. The only thing I can hope for is that the arresting officer didn't know you are on probation which means no probable cause. If they did then you're going to jail."

I spend the rest of my morning in a courtroom arguing with Bess and a judge that the police didn't have probable cause to search my client's car. It turned out to be my lucky day when the traffic cop admitted that he was only suspicious of little Brenner's behavior, and the weasel got off once again. Without so much as a thank you Brenner swaggered out of the courtroom.

"Dumb ass," I mutter as I watch him leave.

"A fine greeting after all of these years," I hear snickered from beside me. I can't help smiling as I turn to her. "I'm the one who lost so why are you in such a bad mood?"

"Oh that?" I shake my head as I snap my briefcase shut. "My client is a spoiled, rich sociopath. So, buying me lunch?"

"Why would I do that?" She counters playfully.

"I won," I gloat as we step out of the courtroom.

"My God, you're still the same self centered, arrogant, piss ant I met in that bar," she grumbles as she leads me down the street.

"Am not," I gasp with mock indignation as I nudge her into the crowded restaurant. "Two," I instructed the hostess who immediately leads us to a table. "I'll have you know that I'm only mildly self-centered, and despite the fact I haven't been able to maintain a relationship, I've gotten over my commitment phobia."

"And what brought on this miraculous change?" She teases me. "Coffee," she politely requests from the waiter.

"Same," I nod. "You."

"Me?" She snorts with disbelief convinced I'm playing her.

"It is true," I confess. "I decided that I wasn't worthy of someone as special as you, so I changed," I can tell she doesn't believe me. "So, whatever happened to Sally?"

"We broke up right after she stormed into the bathroom that night," she shrugs as my heart skips a beat. "Then got back together a week later."

"Oh," I grumble before ordering a salad.

"I'm surprised that you remember her name," Bess offers after ordering a sandwich. "I barely do."

"Hold on I thought you said you got back together?" I inquire. I am suddenly wondering if I had blown my chance with her back in college.

"Not for long," Bess confesses. "If my relationship with her was as strong as we thought it was I wouldn't have spent most of the night talking to you."

"I knew that you were smitten," I taunt her as our lunch arrives.

"With you? Please," she scoffs at the notion as her hazel eyes twinkle with delight. "Tell me that your client base isn't all like the little punk you defended today?"

"No," I reassure her. "Most of my clients are good, honest people who need a good lawyer. Sadly little Brenner's Daddy is one of those people and he has more money than God. He is also too blind to see that his little boy has some very nasty habits."

"Such as?" She pries. I can't help smiling knowing that she is toying with me.

"Counselor, you know I can't tell you that," I dismiss her inquiry. "I don't want to talk about my client's obvious short comings. I'd rather talk about you. It has been a long time."

"Me?" She laughs lightly. "I'm just an overworked, under-paid civil servant. And you?"

"I'm an overworked, overpaid lawyer," I smirk. My heart is pounding steadily as I allow my gaze to drink in her beauty. How is possible that she has actually gotten much cuter over the passing years? I play with my salad as I ponder the possibilities. I try to conjure up something casual to say that will help me determine her current marital status. I have no intention of making the same mistake twice. "So, working at the D.A's office must make for some late nights?"

"No kidding," she sighs eying me carefully. I shrink back wondering if she has seen through me just as quickly as she did the first time we met. "Drives Tyler crazy."

"Tyler?" I grumble feeling rejected. I should have assumed that she would have someone special in her life.

"My dog," she smirks triumphantly as my gaze narrows. "If you want to know if I'm seeing someone why not just ask?"

"And avoid all this torture?" I quip. "The first time we met I made an ass out of myself. I just wanted to know before I ended up being shot down in the bathroom again. Trust me that wasn't a high point in my life."

"Why didn't you ever flirt with me again?" She curiously inquires.

"I thought you had a girlfriend," I acknowledge. "You made it perfectly clear that you are an honorable woman. Normally, that wouldn't have stopped me."

"It didn't stop you," she laughs. "Speaking of your persistence is this just lunch or are you trying to charm me again."

"This is just lunch," I insist. I am being honest despite the way my stomach is still fluttering. "We haven't seen one another in a very long time. We've both changed a lot over the years. I really enjoyed those long talks we shared back in school."

"You have changed," she grins. "There is a problem. We are on opposing sides of the judicial system."

"Oh but that can be a bonus," I encourage. "Next time you are the one prosecuting Brenner I have a reason to excuse myself. I really can't stand the little bastard," I add as I hand her my card. "I have to get back to work. Call me and next time I'll pay."

"You're still sticking me with the bill?" She gasps seemingly amused by my antics.

"I whooped your butt, remember?" I snicker as I slide the check over at her.

"Lawyers," she counters with a mock scowl as she tosses some money down onto the table. "Speaking of which, I'm due back in court."

I am whistling a happy tune as we go our separate ways. I am a little concerned that Bess will simply choose to forget about getting together. I will just have to wait and see what happens. Later that day I am poring over a case file when I receive an email from Bess. I am grinning like an idiot as I read it.

Annie,
I enjoyed lunch and look forward to seeing you again. How about dinner on Sunday?
Bess

It was short and simple, but it made my day. I quickly email her back accepting the invitation. I am walking on air all week until late Friday afternoon when I get a call from Brenner who has managed to get in trouble once again. "We meet again," Bess greets me with a broad smile as I enter the interrogation room.

"The interview is over," I shake my head as I look down at Brenner who is sporting a cocky sneer. "Ms. McRae can I speak to you outside?" I politely request as all of us, except Brenner,

shuffle out of the room. Bess and I step away from the police officers. "Are you handling this one?"

"Oh yeah," she responds eagerly. "This time it is murder."

"Oh crap," I blow out. "I just hate giving those up."

"You don't have to," she meekly offers.

"Let me think about it," I hedge. "Dinner with a cute blonde or defending a snotty, little scum bag. No one talks to him until his new lawyer arrives," I assert as I snap open my cell phone.

"I'll inform the cops," she beams. "Oh could you pick someone really lame?"

"No," I snicker at her suggestion.

Twenty agonizing minutes later I have a pounding headache. My boss has informed me that under no circumstances will I pawn the case off on another attorney. The police are glaring at me as I whisper my pleas to my boss. "Crap," I mutter as I finally concede defeat. I feel miserable as I approach Bess who is chatting on her own phone. She hangs up as I step over to her sporting a forlorn expression.

"I couldn't get switched either," she offers with a frown. My eyes widen as my heart skips a beat just knowing that she at least tried.

"I'm touched that you tried," I concede. "Let me have the arrest report and talk to my client. Any chance we can make a deal?"

"Not a chance in hell," she asserts confidently. "I've got him this time."

"Oh goodie," I laugh. "This could get interesting."

"It already is," she sighs. "After this is over you still owe me dinner."

"Absolutely," I agree whole-heartedly. "Now let me have a word with dumb ass."

Brenner is just sitting there without a care in the world. "Tell me everything," I demand as I slam my briefcase down. "And don't even think about lying to me."

"I didn't do anything," he whines as I tower over him. "The cops set me up."

I roll my eyes with disgust as I sit down and begin reviewing the arrest report. "Start talking," I demand once again as I scan the report. The more I read the more I am convinced that Brenner isn't going to just walk away this time.

"Some dude I don't even know just attacks me and I defended myself," Brenner sneers as if I am

inconveniencing him. "I got the gun away from him and protected myself."

"Try again," I snarl.

"It is the truth," he sniffs indignantly.

"Last chance," I caution him. He simply glares at me. "Fine, you don't want to help then don't. I'm certain you will make someone a lovely boyfriend at Walpole."

"Hey, I'm paying you don't forget that!" He threatens as I scoff.

"No, your Daddy is paying me," I correct him. "Stop lying. The gun is registered to your father. I know you know the guy because he was arrested with you two years ago when I got you off on that coke charge. The truth or I walk out of here."

Brenner seems to weigh his options before he spins his tale about how he and Fred got into an argument. According to Brenner the argument was over a girl that got out of hand and, before he knew what was happening, Fred pulled a gun on him. They struggled and it went off. I know he is lying, but it is the best I will ever get out of him. The bastard releases a stream of curses at me when I inform him that there is little to no chance he will get out on bail.

"Listen you little shit," I caution him. "You need to shut up. Starting now you are not to say anything to anyone but me. And try, at least, to look remorseful."

"Huh?" He stares up at me.

"For killing Fred," I remind him. "You grew up with him, at least try and look as if you are sorry that this tragedy occurred."

"Right." He agrees. His head bobs up and down like one of those bobble head dolls.

Bess is looking far too confident when I finally emerge from the room. "My client is ready to give his statement," I wearily inform her.

"Is he going to confess?" She eagerly inquires.

"No, this was a tragic accident," I flatly explain. "An argument between friends that got out of hand. Brenner was simply defending himself and the gun just went off."

"You're going into court with that?" She laughs at my plight.

"Are you offering a deal?" I prod.

"No," She sneers.

"Then I have no choice," I confess.

I manage to stave off Bess' and the police's badgering as Brenner repeats his fabrication. I feel defeated as we finish up. Brenner is beyond agitated when he discovers that his bail hearing won't be until Monday morning. "Next time don't kill someone on the weekend," I scold him before he is led away by the police.

"Freak," I mutter under my breath as I exit the police station.

"You say the nicest things," Bess chuckles as she steps up beside me. "You do know that the forensics will probably prove that the shooter was standing a good distance away from the victim."

"I don't know that," I correct her. "And neither do you, we will just have to wait."

"That's not all we have to wait for," she grumbles. "Why couldn't he have waited until Monday?"

"Why?" I ask thinking, even if Brenner had waited, we were just going to dinner. My face is flush as I realize what she is thinking. "Bess?" I begin coyly. "We're you planning on getting fresh with me?"

"Me?" She gapes. "Don't flatter yourself."

"Oh my mistake," I chuckle. "Cause here I was thinking that if you did and something happened on Sunday, one of us would have had to be removed from this case. Silly me."

"If that happened and that is a mighty big if, then yes, there would have been a conflict of interest that neither of our employers could ignore," she concedes as we remain standing in front of the police station. "I guess I'll see you Monday."

"Yeah," I grumble already regretting that my first course of action will be to file as many motions as possible in an effort to drag out the case. I ended up spending my Sunday night not enjoying a delightful dinner with Bess, but drafting endless motions that would save Brenner's sorry butt.

By Monday morning I am exhausted as I stand before the judge with Brenner by my side. I nudge him as he fidgets beside me while all of the charges are read. It is a lengthy list that included probation violation, possession of narcotics, discharging a firearm, and of course, murder in the first degree. "Not guilty," Brenner curtly responds when the judge requests his plea.

"People request remand," Bess confidently asserts.

"My client is an upstanding member of the community," I argue.

"Who is on probation and has the financial means to flee the jurisdiction," Bess confidently counters.

"He has never missed a court appearance," I explain knowing it is a lost cause.

"The defendant was in possession of narcotics and a firearm both of which are a violation of his probation," Bess effectively shoots me down.

"Remand without bail," the judge demands as his gavel echoes through the courtroom. "Trial is set for March seventeenth," he concludes as Brenner begins to complain.

"Shut up," I hiss under my breath before he is taken away.

"Round one," Bess shrugs.

"No," I correct her with a confident smile as I pull out my motions and start handing them to her one by one. "Motion to suppress the gun, Motion to dismiss, Motion to,"

"I get it," she cuts me off. "Just give them to me. You've had a busy weekend I see," she snickers as I hand over the stack of legal documents.

"Well I was supposed to have a hot date this weekend, but work got in the way," I quip as she quirks her eyebrow at me.

"Who said it was a date?" She taunts me.

"Wasn't it?" I tease her.

"I have to go," she sighs. "It seems I have a lot of reading to do. I'll see you in Judge Summer's chambers in a couple of days."

"Be still my beating heart," I jest as I gather up my briefcase. "Well, I'm off to meet with my client's parents. This should be fun. Again I have to ask any chance we can reduce this to manslaughter? My client swears it was an accident."

"Here you go," she boasts as she hands me a stack of files. "The medical examiner's reports, ballistics and forensics. The shooter was at least two feet above the victim."

"Above?" I swallow hard.

"Above as in the victim was on the floor and the shooter was standing above him," Bess gloats in the most undignified manner. "Oh and the victim had bruising on his chest, face and neck. Your client, as I recall, didn't have a mark on him."

"I never liked you," I drolly retort as I snap open my briefcase and shove the reports inside.

"Tsk," she teases before waving goodbye. I can't help watching the sway of her hips as she makes her departure. I sigh deeply before turning my attention towards Brenner's parents.

"We need to talk," I sternly instruct them.

My head is pounding as later that afternoon I sit in my office still trying to explain the gravity of the situation to Mr. and Mrs. Dickens. "What exactly are you saying?" Derrick Dickens implores. My jaw hangs open as I wonder if he has heard a word I've said over the past several hours. I take a calming breath before responding.

"What I am saying is it looks like Brenner is going to prison," I carefully explain. "More than likely for the rest of his life."

"How can that be?" Mrs. Dickens gasps horrified by what I have just told her.

"It was an accident," Mr. Dickens protests.

"No, I don't think it was," I explain softly hoping to get through to them. "According to the report Fred was lying on the floor and Brenner was standing above him."

"Those reports can be wrong," Mr. Dickens interjects.

"Yes," I nod in agreement. "And I am going to hire a bunch of experts to say just that. I think the only reasonable options at this point are for Brenner to either plead guilty and hope the judge will be lenient, or claim diminished capacity. I've already suggested these options to your son and he has rejected them."

"What is diminished capacity?" Mrs. Dickens inquires hopefully.

"I would claim that he was stoned and didn't know what he was doing," I explain as they frown at my suggestion. "It would drop the conviction to manslaughter, but he would still be convicted on the weapons and drug charges. If he behaves he could be out of prison in seven years."

"Seven years?" Mr. Dickens finally begins to understand.

"No, he's innocent," Mrs. Dickens refutes.

"And he rejected your advice?" Mr. Dickens prods me.

"Yes, perhaps you could discuss this with him?" I suggest. "Also if you could explain to him that his demeanor in the courtroom isn't helping I'd appreciate it."

"What do you mean?" Mr. Dickens asks.

"I mean he claims that he accidentally killed his friend, but his attitude screams that he isn't the least bit sorry it happened," I slowly point out to him. "If he keeps acting like a punk then he will spend the rest of his life in prison."

"Perhaps another lawyer will see things more clearly?" Mrs. Dickens questions as I silently pray that they will fire me.

"Agnes she is doing more than most," Mr. Dickens corrects her as my hopes are, once again, dashed. "It is more than apparent that you have our son's best interest at heart."

'Only because that is what you are paying me to do,' I silently note as they leave my office.

One week later I slump out of Judge Summer's chambers feeling defeated after he berated me for wasting his time with frivolous motions. "You had to try," Bess tries to reassure me. "So, can I look forward to a new strategy?"

"I wish," I grumble knowing that she is probably assuming I'd be working the diminished capacity angle. "My hands are tied. My client insists on the 'oops the gun just went off' defense."

"I'm sorry," Bess cringes.

"It is not over yet," I caution her. "You seem to forget that I just love a challenge."

"Oh I haven't forgotten," she whispers in a sultry tone as my body shivers.

"Why couldn't they just fire me?" I whisper as I watch her walking away.

It is one day before Brenner's trial is scheduled to begin and I am sitting in on the morning staff meeting dreading the moment when it is my turn to speak. "Annie how is the Dickens trial shaping up?" Mr. Mathers, the senior partner, asks as I cringe.

"Just waiting for the D.A to bend me over," I confess as my colleagues snicker. "Jury selection is over and we start tomorrow. The only thing I've managed to accomplish is to get the jury I was most comfortable with, and we have three experts who will dispute the findings that the victim was on the floor at the time of the shooting."

"Didn't we hire two dozen experts to review the findings?" Mathers questions me.

"Yes and only three have agreed with our theory," I grimace. "That alone should tell you how unimpressive their credentials are. I did manage to get one motion past the judge. McRae can't mention Brenner was on probation at the time. Prior bad acts and all."

"What happened to diminished capacity?" Mathers bristles. "The police failed to give him a blood test, and with his history of substance abuse it would be his best bet."

"Neither myself nor Brenner's parents could convince him," I reluctantly admit. "He wants nothing short of an acquittal. I do have a long list of witnesses' who will testify that the victim had a volatile temper. Under the heading of more bad news, our client wants to take the stand. Normally, with this type of defense it would be in his best interest, but as we all know Brenner

isn't the sharpest knife in the drawer so it could backfire. I've already started drafting the appeal notice."

"Based on?" Mathers questions me.

"In adequate counsel," I offer.

"No," Mathers shoots me down. "Find something else; I won't have you falling on the sword for this little piss ant. Draft the appeal, and if you lose I'll inform the Dickens that another firm will be handling Brenner's problems from now on. Just keep doing the best that you can and pray for a miracle."

The trial began and Bess was on fire. Even though I did manage to get my shots in the evidence was overwhelming. During the two weeks of testimony we fought tooth and nail each managing to annoy the other. Brenner did manage to at least look remorseful as he sat beside me. Fred's acquaintances did shed an unflattering light on the victim. It really got to Bess that I got their testimony in.

She was furious and sexy as hell as she argued that I was putting the victim on trial. It was the longest trial of my life. It actually looked as though I might be making some headway with some of the jurors when, against my better judgment, Brenner took the stand. When I questioned him he managed to sound sympathetic. That was until Bess had the opportunity to question him. She ripped him to shreds, even coaxing the little weasel into losing his temper at one point.

Each of us gave it our all during closing arguments. Even though I knew that I had already lost my jury I still tried. Bess seemed impressed as I delivered my impassioned plea. I sat in a room with the Dickens as Brenner boasted confidently that he would be a free man soon. I was too tired to argue with his delusions. Instead I leaned my head back watching the clock wandering how long it would take the jury to convict him.

I was only mildly surprised when the jury broke for the night. My only happy thought was I could wait for the verdict in the safe confines of my office and not have to listen to Brenner. It was the following morning when the call came. Brenner was shocked when he was found guilty on all charges except violating his probation, but I had already had that charge thrown out.

"Motion to set aside the jury's verdict?" I request.

"Denied," the judge sighs knowing that I had to ask. I read off a list of other motions all of which are shot down. "Sentencing two weeks from today."

The Dickens look devastated as they watched their only child being led away in chains. "I'm sorry," I apologize to them.

"Don't be," Mr. Dickens offers. "Over the years you've done everything you could in an effort to get us to wake up. I understand that after the sentencing your firm will no longer be handling Brenner's affairs. Any chance I can convince you to work on the appeal?"

"No," I politely decline. I watch as they leave the courtroom. The hair on the back of my neck prickles. I turn to find Bess standing beside me.

"You did a good job," she offers warmly as she extends her hand.

"Thanks," I accept as I shake her hand. My body warms the moment we touch cooling quickly as I release her hand.

"Did I hear correctly? You won't be representing Mr. Dickens during the appeal process?" There is something in the under-lying current of her tone that makes my stomach flutter.

"No," I scrunch my face at the very thought of wasting years of my life trying to get the little prick out of prison.

"Then your job is finished?" She slyly inquires her eyes lighting up. I love it and hate it when she does that. I love it because my insides warm and turn to mush. I hate it because I can't breathe and suddenly have trouble forming complete sentences.

"Almost," I manage to squeak out. "Pity," I mutter.

"I know," she sighs in agreement. "It wouldn't bode well for either of us to be seen out in public together before sentencing."

"Ethics really suck sometimes," I grumble as we pack up our belongings.

"Like the night we met," she mutters. My head snaps up as her statement sinks in.

"Now you tell me," I groan as we linger at the doorway with neither of us looking forward to the swarm of reporters awaiting us. "Two more weeks. Try to stay away from anymore of my clients between now and then."

"Keep your clients off my case load," she retorts with bright smile. "Time to face the press so you can tell them how I railroaded your client."

"You took the words right out of my mouth," I chuckle before we make our exit. My body tenses as the press manages to separate us.

It is the night before Brenner is to face the judge for what I hope is the last time. Now I sit in my office drafting the words I will offer to the judge in a last ditch effort to spare Brenner from spending the rest of his life behind bars. "Burning the midnight oil?" Mathers teases me as he struts into my office.

"That's what you pay me for," I offer half-heartedly wishing that it were already tomorrow.

"You did everything that you could," he reassures me as he sits. "You even managed to knock

the wind out of McRae's sails a few times. I need to talk to you about something that has come up. There may be a problem with Brenner's new counsel."

"Other than the fact that they are dumb enough or greedy enough to take him on as a client?" I jest as I set my pen down and watch my boss carefully. I already know I am not going to enjoy what is coming. His jaw clenches and he seems nervous. "Bob?" I urge him to just spit it out.

"When Brenner was first arrested you asked to be reassigned. May I inquire as to why you would do that?" He begins in a controlled tone.

"I don't like him," I bluntly respond knowing that isn't the answer he is seeking. "Are my ethics being called into question?"

"Possibly," he hedges. "There have been rumors."

"I'm sure that there has been," I concede. "You visited during the trial as did many of the partners. Did I ever fail to defend my client with the zealotry that the cannon of ethics requires?"

"Never," he asserts. "I just have to ask if the reason your wish to not represent Brenner was of a personal nature?"

"You're not going to like my answer," I toy with him, as his face turns grim. "Yes, originally I wanted out so I could pursue a personal relationship with Bess McRae. Now here is the part that is going to make you happy," I gloat. "Prior to this trial and during it I never shared a personal relationship with Bess."

"Never?" He chokes out still looking very grim.

"I met Bess during our under grad years," I begin. "I hit on her in a bar, and she and her date took a dim view of my actions. Occasionally we had coffee together. I hadn't seen or heard from her in over a decade until Brenner's last drug bust. I whooped her butt in court and made her buy me lunch. We had plans to meet for dinner when Brenner had the bad manners to kill someone. End of story."

"And now?" He curiously inquires.

"After tomorrow I wouldn't assign me to any cases where she is the opposing counsel," I boast. "During this trial both Bess and I went for the jugular and tomorrow morning we will again. How much of a problem is this going to cause?"

"If I was Brenner's new lawyer I'd work it for all it is worth," he cautions me.

"So would I," I agree with a smile. "Bob, just talk to Judge Summers; he'll go on record about how he had to yank us apart during numerous shouting matches in his chambers."

"And this girl still wants to date you?" He laughs. "Okay, we know it is coming so we can be

prepared. The only thing that upsets me is I can't send my toughest litigator after the D.A's strongest lawyer."

"Then again if it doesn't work out, who better to set up against her?" I whimsically offer as he laughs.

"The lawyer in me is going to pray for a very messy break up," he jokes. "As your friend I am hoping that the two of you will be very happy together."

"We haven't even been on a date yet," I correct him my anxiousness growing.

The following morning Judge Roland Summers is drumming his fingers on the bench as Bess and I argue vehemently until he finally slams down his gavel. "The bell has rung ladies," he booms out. "Fight is over. Brenner Dickens please stand so I can pronounce sentencing?"

Brenner is shaking as he stands for the first time since I had the misfortune of crossing paths with him. He actually looks nervous. His face is pale as he stares meekly up at the judge. "Brenner Dickens after having been found guilty on all charges, and your callous display of remorse I feel that it is in the best interest of justice to sentence you to the maximum sentence allowed by law. Life in prison without the possibility of parole," he slammed down the gavel once again as I blow out a sigh of relief.

Marcus Hood, Brenner's new attorney steps next to him and begins to console him. "Mr. Hood?" Judge Summers calls out. "I'm glad you are present. I received your notice of appeal."

"Yes your honor?" Marcus respectfully responds.

"Mr. Hood, Ms. McRae and Ms. Bauer in my chambers now," he demands as all of us release a collective grumble.

"You couldn't wait," I snap at Marcus as Bess steps up beside me while Brenner is escorted from the courtroom. "Bess," I begin as she holds up her hand and stops me.

"My boss already gave me a heads up," she explains as the three of us head toward the judge's chambers.

Judge Summers has shed his robe and is now sitting behind his desk. "What is this load of horse pucky?" He demands as he tosses a document at Marcus.

"Your honor," Marcus tentatively begins. "I believe that Ms. Bauer allowed her personal relationship with Ms. McRae to inhibit her duties."

"You do; do you?" Judge Summers sneers as he strokes his beard. "Mr. Hood, first off I've watched husbands and wives sit on opposite sides of the table and it isn't a problem."

"No disrespect your honor," Marcus continues as I watch. "There were other avenues of defense

that Ms. Bauer chose to ignore."

"Such as?" Summers goads him.

"Mr. Dickens' substance abuse," he confidently counters. "In all likelihood Mr. Dickens was under the influence of a controlled substance and not responsible for his actions. She allowed him to testify knowing that he would be an unsympathetic witness."

"Mr. Hood, a lot of arguing goes on behind closed doors during a trial," Summers begins with a gleam in his eye. "Thankfully there is always a stenographer present," he adds with cocky grin as he nods towards his ever-dutiful stenographer. "Ms. Bauer did everything she could to cut a deal, offer a different defense, and to keep her client off of the witness stand. He rejected all of her advice. Now for the two of you," he drones on. "Were you sleeping together before the trial?"

"No," Bess and I assert in unison.

"Were you sleeping together during the trial?" He presses.

Again we confidently respond in unison that nothing was going on. "There you have it, and it is now on record," Summers concludes. "If you choose to pursue this matter, I will be forced to testify that neither of these ladies acted unprofessionally. In fact I had to keep them from drawing blood more than once. Do you still wish to submit this appeal as it is written?"

"No sir," Marcus grunts as he picks up the document.

"You suck," Marcus grumbles at me as we step out into the corridor.

"What?" I wail as Bess snickers. "Tell me that wasn't your only game plan."

"Tell me as an officer of the court that everything you said in there was the truth?" He presses me as I feel my anger rising.

"It was the truth," I hiss.

"Mr. Hood, I find that question insulting," Bess cuts in. "Because you didn't bother to find out the truth both Ms. Bauer and I had to explain our sex lives to our employers and a judge. If you don't want to be facing the both of us in court I suggest you find another reason to appeal your client's case."

"My apologies," he quickly retreats. "I'm not looking forward to facing you during the next go round."

"You won't be," Bess offers confidently. "Hey we said it wasn't true not that it won't be true."

"Oh you are so sure of yourself," I taunt her.

"Oh yeah," she whispers softly as Marcus laughs.

"Just my luck," he sighs before leaving us alone.

"It is over," I blow out as the waves of exhaustion roll off of my body. "I am officially no longer Brenner Dickens attorney of record."

"Which means you owe me dinner," Bess retorts as I feel a new wave of pressure encompassing me. "Oh now that is frightened look."

"I err," I stammer helplessly. "It is just after all of the hurdles and questions and restraint I feel like a lot is riding on this meal."

My body heats up as she takes me by the hand. "For all of the teasing and taunting and everything else it is just dinner," she reassures me. "Whatever does or doesn't happen is up to us."

"Thank you," I blow out feeling relieved. "When did you want to go out?"

"A part of me wants to say right now," she murmurs softly. "I have to work. Is tonight too soon?"

"No, I'll pick you up at your office and we'll celebrate your victory," I shyly offer not wanting to let go of her hand. Somehow I manage to step away from her and leave.

It is just about six o'clock that night and I am sitting in my office with Pam, my co-worker, good friend, ex-lover and a multitude of other things. "You're making my head hurt," she sighs. I've just finished explaining the entire situation to her. I'm supposed to meet Bess in about half an hour. Somehow during the day, I felt all of the stress about this dinner coming back. Now I'm ready to explode.

Pam is just sitting there rubbing her head; I know that my persistent pacing is driving her nuts; I just can't seem to stop. "Annie, if you don't stop that you won't have to worry about your date. Because I will kill you," she wryly informs me in a tone that halts me in my tracks. "You should listen to what Bess told you earlier," she calmly instructs me. "It is just dinner." I open my mouth to protest, but she holds up her hand effectively cutting off anything I have to say. "Forget about ten years ago. Forget about the past few months and just go out to dinner with someone you find attractive."

"Just like that?" I squeak.

"Just like that," she bluntly counters. "Annie, you've been on a date before. You're good at it; I know I used to date you. What I find amazing is one you are so freaked, and two you really used to be a major jerk."

"I wasn't a jerk," I try to argue.

"A woman steps into a bar with her girlfriend and you thought nothing of hitting on her?" Pam chuckles. "I must say I'm glad you grew up before we got involved. And you were a smoker?"

"You have no idea how much at this very moment I wish I still was," I growl. "Should I bring flowers?"

"I don't know," she hesitates. "Is that what you're wearing?"

"Yes," I respond as I examine my work suit. "She's coming from work as well."

"Then that is okay," Pam concedes. "But bring flowers, no roses something casual."

"I seem to remember she liked irises," I supply.

"There you go," Pam waves me off. "Now go before you are late, and relax. Just act like you did at lunch a few months ago."

"Cocky, because I beat her in court?" I stutter.

"No, relaxed, you moron," Pam hisses at me before shoving me out the door.

I find myself standing outside her office door watching her work. I think she looks absolutely amazing with her reading glasses, and the way she keeps brushing her hair out of her face. "Are you just going to stand there all night or are you going to feed me?" She inquires without looking up.

"I haven't decided yet," I confess sighing happily as I cross the room. My heart skips a beat as she looks up and meets my gaze. "For you."

"Thank you," she gushes blushing ever so slightly. "You freaked again didn't you?"

"Yes," I timidly confess.

"So did I," she giggles. "Ten years and a very nasty court case is a lot to endure just to get to a first date." I sigh in agreement as she puts the flowers in a vase on her desk. I can't take my eyes off of her as she grabs her coat.

"Shall we?" I bolster my courage as I offer her my arm. I feel light headed when she links her arm in mine and blushes once again.

We are sitting in the comfortable restaurant around the corner from her work sipping wine as we wait for our meals. I am surprised at how completely at ease I feel. "I have to commend you on how hard you fought to get your client off," she comments as I watch her tiny fingers running along the rim of her wine glass. "I still can't believe you got the probation thrown out."

"Undo prejudice," I counter my gaze never leaving the sight of her fingers teasing her glass. "What did you mean earlier when you said that you've waited ten years for our first date?"

"You have no idea how dangerously close I came to accepting your advances on the night we met," she shyly confesses as I lift my gaze to meet hers. My body is suddenly on fire as she captures me in a smoldering gaze. "But I came there with someone else. Honoring my commitments is very important to me. Then after Sally and I split for good, and you and I would see one another, you never hit on me again. I just assumed the moment had passed."

"I was trying to do the right thing," I explain in a breathy tone. "You were spoken for or so I thought. I was happy just to be near you. I spent my time looking for someone just like you. I was clueless that there was someone like you sitting across the table waiting for me."

"I must say after watching and talking to you over the past couple of months I am very impressed with the adult version of you," she blushes once again. "Not that the gawky twenty year old who followed me into the bathroom wasn't charming."

"Tell me what you found so charming? My cocky, self centered attitude, the way I pestered you all night or was it, by chance, the way I followed you into the bathroom like a lost puppy?" I laugh at my former self.

"All of the above," she confesses as the waiter delivers our dinners.

"Here is to you whooping my butt," I toast her.

"And to new beginnings," she adds as we clink our wine glasses together.

"New beginnings," I echo as my heart soars.

Dinner is a thoroughly enchanting event as we talk and laugh. I feel so close to her and I am regretting that our evening is coming to an end. I escort her the three blocks to her apartment. We linger at the front door. My eyes drift to her lips as I feel her hands on the lapel of my coat. I don't want to leave, but unless she invites me in I will be forced to. "Can we do this again?" I whisper my eyes still focused on her slightly parted lips.

"Yes," she whimpers in response as we move in unison. Our lips brush lightly yet I feel it all the way down to my toes. I lean in and quickly reclaim her lips. I am filled with euphoric pleasure as I feel her lips moving passionately against my own. Our bodies press tightly together as she parts my lips with her tongue.

My tongue peeks out and greets hers and quickly we are battling for control. My hands cling tightly to her shoulders. I am fearful to release my hold on her knowing that I want to explore every inch of her body.

My knees buckle from the intensity of her kisses. We are breathless as the kiss finally ebbs. "Do you want to come in?" She chokes out as my stomach clenches.

"Yes," comes my breathy response as I drink in the delicate scent of her shampoo.

We become locked up in another searing kiss before she steps away and fumbles for her keys. I take a deep breath in a vain attempt to steady myself as I step into her apartment. I feel my heart and lower anatomy pulsating in the same demanding rhythm as she closes the door behind us.

I can't take my eyes off of her as she presses my body into the door. She molds her body against mine and I am helpless to resist. I moan as I feel her feathery kiss teasing my neck as I slip her coat off of her body. "Are we moving too fast?" She asks her voice filled with an aching need. She slips my coat down my shoulders and allows it to fall onto the floor next to hers.

"Ten years and a nasty murder trial, no we're not moving too fast," I encourage her as I wrap her up in a tender embrace. I allow my hands to roam up and down her back as I feel her tiny hands caressing my hips. I begin kissing her again lost in the sensation of her mouth as I feel my blouse being tugged out of my skirt. I kick off my shoes as I feel her doing the same.

We moan in unison as our kisses grow more passionate and she begins to unbutton my blouse. She whimpers as she brushes my blouse open. Her fingers begin to dance lightly against my flesh. I can barely stand as I become lost in her touch. I know that I have been smitten with Bess since the first moment I saw her. Now I know that my feelings for her run so much deeper. The feelings pulsating through my body transcends my usual raw animal need. For the first time in my life I want to make love.

"What are you thinking?" She whispers against my skin before she begins to kiss the valley between my breasts.

"I want to make love to you," I pant out as I feel her tongue tracing the swell of my breasts. My lungs become devoid of air as her hazel eyes gleam up at me while her tongue continues painting my breasts. She kisses the swell of my breasts lightly her fingers still dancing lightly against my flesh. Her eyes hold me in a fiery gaze as I lean helplessly against the hard wooden door.

Her breathing grows ragged as her tiny fingers begin to trace the lacy edges of my bra. The only sounds filling the room is our labored breath as her fingers drift along the soft material of my bra. I gasp loudly as I feel the tiny digits brushing against my nipple. She curls her fingers her touch growing as I feel the bud puckering in response. "I'm not going to fuck you," she promises as I feel her free hand massaging my backside. "I'm going to make love to you slowly. I want to touch and taste every inch of your body. Is that what you want?"

"Yes," I assert before capturing her lips. I pour every ounce of emotion into that one kiss. I feel her shudder in my embrace her fingers never stilling against my body. I am alive. Her simple, tender caressing is giving me life. I shiver as I feel her touch retreating from my body. I can barely stand as she takes me by the hand. We giggle as we trip over our coats as she leads me through the dark room.

I feel innocent and shy as we step into her bedroom. I step behind her and wrap my arms around

her waist. I feel her body sinking into mine as I nuzzle her neck. She moans deeply as I brush the long, blonde hair from her neck. Her moans grow deeper as I kiss and taste her soft inviting flesh. I nip her neck gently as her head falls against my chest. I whisper her name as my hands caress her stomach. The feel of her blouse fuels on my desire.

I gather the material in my hands; my lips still assaulting her neck as I pull her blouse from her skirt. My kisses turn fiery as I watch her unbuttoning her blouse. I press my erect nipples against her back as I peer over her shoulder. I watch as her blouse falls open revealing her milky white flesh to my appreciative gaze.

I slip the emerald blouse down to her shoulders. She turns in my embrace and claims my lips. I never knew that kissing could make me feel so complete. I feel my blouse falling from my body. We cling to one another nothing separating our bodies except the clothing that is still hiding our treasures from the other.

Our hands wander and explore the other. I feel my bra opening as I unclasp hers. Soon we are free each of us reaching out to caress the softness of the other's firm breasts. I feel her nipples hardening against my touch as I tease her. Bess' mouth tastes sweet as I refuse to stop kissing her. I feel the zipper on my skirt being lowered. My clit throbs anticipating the moment when I can feel all of her beneath me.

Her nipples brush playfully against my own while our hands slowly remove the other's clothing. We stumble across the room, falling onto the bed as we fumble to rid the last barriers between us. Finally I can see all of her. I lean back amazed by her beauty. "God you're so beautiful," she whimpers softly as I blush. I wonder if she will still think I'm beautiful when she sees me in my usual sleeping attire. Silently I laugh at the image of my Scooby Doo boxers, torn t-shirt, and not to mention the oversized bunny slippers. If she truly loves me then she'll accept my attire without question.

I run my fingers through her long, golden hair simply enjoying the soft, silky feel. My body erupts with goose bumps as I feel her blunt nails tracing my flesh. "What?" She smiles her fingers brushing gently against my nipple.

"I was just wondering what you normally wear to bed?" I smile over at her as I massage her scalp. She purrs like a kitten as she leans into my touch.

"I should say something sexy, like nothing at all or silk," she blushes. "Promise you won't laugh?"

"I promise," I vow as my fingers drift to her shoulders. My body tingles as I feel her shivering from my touch.

"I'm always cold at night," she blushes. "I wear this old flannel shirt and a pair of wool socks."

"You're perfect," I beam before drawing her in for another smoldering kiss.

"Why?" She gasps as her nimble fingers capture my nipple.

"Bunny slippers," I confess as she rolls me onto my back.

"Just when I thought you couldn't be any more adorable," she beams down at me as she straddles my body. She rolls her hips and I tremble as I feel her desire painting my flesh. I reach up drawing her to me. I need to kiss her again as she rocks gently against my body. I kiss her deeply our nipples brushing together.

She begins kissing my face, her mouth drifting lower as I drag my nails down her spine. She moans against my flesh as I feel her tongue flicker against my nipple. I am aching for her touch while our bodies gently sway. I slip my hand between our bodies as she captures my bud between her lips. She tenderly suckles me as I dip into her wetness.

Her desire coats my fingers as I part her. Our bodies melt together as I stroke her gently. I can feel her clit throbbing as I brush lightly against it. Her body arches and our eyes meet as I press my fingers against her warm, wet center. Silently she is pleading with me.

Bess cries out with pleasure as I slip inside of her. She thrusts against my touch as my thumb teases her engorged clit. I feel as if she has captured my soul as I pleasure her. She rides against my touch her face flush with desire. I fill my free hand with her firm backside guiding her to me. The movement of our bodies turns wild as I take her deeper and harder.

I feel my own desire flowing from my body while pleasuring her. I watch as I take her feeling all of her. I feel her tightening against my touch as our bodies thrust wildly. I can feel her falling over the edge and I take more. She is screaming out my name as she explodes against me. My skin is covered with her passion as I continue to pleasure her.

She is still chanting my name as she collapses against me. I still my movements allowing the last waves of passion to slip from her trembling body. Her eyes are glazed over as she looks up at me. She groans as my touch slips from her body.

She kisses me her teeth nipping on my bottom lip. I belong to her as I feel her savage kisses devouring me. Her mouth slips lower my flesh quivering as I feel her hands and lips tasting my skin. I am struggling to breathe as she suckles my nipples. My skin is wet from her touch as I feel her drifting lower. I quiver as I feel her hot breath tickling the dark curls of my mound.

I gladly open myself to her as I feel her body nestling between my thighs. I am on fire already lost as her tongue traces my thighs. She parts me with her tongue as I grip the bedding. My hips rise to meet her touch as I feel her flat tongue gliding along my sex. My fingers lace through her hair as I press her closer to my aching need. I cry out unaware of what I am saying as I feel her tongue pressing against my center.

My eyes snap shut as I feel her slipping inside of me. Her tongue wiggling at first before she begins plunging in and out of my core. Once again I know that I am speaking, yet I am clueless as to what words are escaping my lips. Although I suspect that I have called her a goddess and

screamed to the heavens.

I groan with disappointment as I feel her slipping from me. My groans quickly turn to pleasure as I feel her fingers replacing her tongue. Her lips capture my clit my body rising as I feel her teasing me with her teeth and her tongue. My mind is a blur as I feel my body exploding. I am unaware of anything except the feel of my body soaring and a persistent pounding in my ears.

Finally I drift back to earth as I realize that she is cradling me in her arms. The feel of her naked body pressing against my own reignite my desires. My mouth quickly captures her rose colored bud and I am teasing her. Our legs slip between the other's thighs. I can hear the rapid beating of her heart as we sway against one another, our passion becoming one. We are clinging tightly to the other as our bodies dance wildly.

I am amazed as we climax in unison. We hold one another our bodies covered with passion and sweat. "Stay?" She whispers as my embrace tightens.

"Yes," I murmur as we slip under the covers. The only regret I possess at this moment is that tomorrow is a workday. I feel her hair brushing my skin and soon we are touching once again. We break away from the other's touch only long enough to set the alarm clock. Soon we are wrapped up in the other's embrace our passion once again over riding our senses.

We are still making love as the alarm clock blares out. I hiss at the infernal contraption as she collapses beneath me. "Is it too soon to ask for a second date?" I eagerly inquire as she laughs.

"This weekend," she readily agrees. "So neither of us has to rush off to court."

"Smart and beautiful," I compliment her as I reluctantly slip out of her bed. As I leave her home I feel alive and alert despite the lack of sleep. Memories of the previous night and anticipation fill me as I rush home. Strange I feel that after all of the time it took to bring us together, that waiting a few days for the weekend to arrive feels like an eternity.

The End

Send comments to findingmavis@comcast.net

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