

## PAPERWORK

With a curse, Van shoved the pile of forms away. "I hate paperwork."

He threw his head back and shouted at the top of his voice, "I. Hate. Paperwork!"

The sound of his voice echoed against the walls of the Candy Store. Nobody was around to hear him, except for the collected cars, motor cycles and other bootie, all of which did not respond.

Several hours earlier, Billy had locked him in.

"You're behind on your paperwork," she'd coldly told him. "About three cases that still need to be filed. You're not getting out of here until you finish them. Capice?"

"Can't we hire someone to do it? Other departments have secretaries."

"We don't."

"Have I mentioned how much I hate doing paperwork?"

"Yes, Van, you have. About one million three thousand six hundred and nineteen times. You know what they say: when you do the crime, you gotta be prepared to do the time."

"I'd rather go to jail," Van had grunted below his breath, but Billy had heard him.

"Then consider yourself incarcerated until you're done." With those words his boss had marched out of the Candy Store and locked the door behind her.

Outside, the sun was shining. It was a beautiful spring day. He could think of a thousand things he'd rather do than sit here trying to answer questions he never quite understood, and fill out forms created by pencil pushers who had *no* idea of what really went down on the streets.

The weather forecast had said that the surf was up today. He longed to take one of the new boards to Manhattan Beach for some physical activity or chat with the pretty girls in skimpy bikinis who always seemed to flock to the beach on the first warm day of spring.

Or how about taking the Diablo out for a spin? See how the powerful engine would do on the twisting roads through the hills?

A shiny guitar, which reputedly once belonged to the late Jimmy Hendrix, begged him to tickle its strings. Hilary had left several messages on his voice mail. And Deaq held a pair of tickets for the Clippers game. They were playing the Hornets at the Staples Center.

So many things that would provide more fun than writing reports. But Billy had threatened to take him off the streets permanently if he didn't catch up on his paperwork. Had she made an idle threat? He'd rather not risk finding out.

So, he was alone in the Candy Store and bored to death.

"I really, really hate paperwork," he said once more for good measure, directing a glare filled with revulsion at the forms waiting to be filled out.

He rolled back his chair and stood up. When he stretched, the vertebrae popped along his spine. See? That's what sitting in a chair all day did to you. A man wasn't made to sit tight and write reports. A man was made to--

With an effort, he tore his thoughts away from what he should have liked to do on his Saturday afternoon. If he kept daydreaming, he'd never get the work done, and the daydreams would forever remain phantasms.

Maybe coffee was what he needed to get his groove back on.

Van walked to the coffee machine. He fussed over the ground coffee, where to find the filter, and what buttons to press and was pleased when the machine bubbled into action at last. Steaming water began to drip from its muzzle onto the grounds; the smell of caffeine quickly spread through the Candy Store. Take that, Deaq.

He wandered around the main area, waiting for the machine to finish and admiring the gleaming cars and motor cycles they had confiscated. Some of the bad guys did have good taste. Life at the Candy Store wasn't bad.

Except, of course, for the infernal paperwork.

At last, his aimless path brought him to a far-off corner where he rarely ever came. A door set in the wall led to Billy's private room. Sometimes, when a case was reaching its pinnacle, she would sleep here, not daring to go home.

Van tried the knob, not expecting it to turn. To his surprise, it did. What secrets would she hide in that room?

Glancing over his shoulder and swearing at himself at the same time for being silly -- nobody in their right mind would be here on a sunny Saturday -- he nudged the door and slipped inside.

The room spoke of Billy Chambers. It was neat and many beautiful things were on display. A queensized bed, covered in a blue satin spread, took up most of the space. Van also noticed a full length mirror across from the bed, a wardrobe closet, a dresser, and another door that he suspected led to a bathroom.

He opened the closet, revealing rows of Billy's clothes, suspended from wood hangers. Gucci, Prada, Versace. Some of the outfits he recognized from when she wore them. Others, he'd never seen before.

Next, he opened a dresser drawer and peered inside.

"Okaay..." Van gulped and shoved the drawer shut as fast as he could. It was filled with lacy underthings. It wasn't right to ogle your boss's underwear, was it?

Then again, was it right for said boss to lock you up on a great day to do brain-numbing work that could have waited for another time?

No, it wasn't right at all, and payback was a bitch.

Van pulled the drawer open again, slowly. What sort of things did women wear beneath their clothes? In general, he was more interested in getting those things off as quickly as he could than he was in studying them. This was a rare opportunity to learn more about the female psyche -- and his lieutenant's in particular. Obtaining knowledge could never hurt.

He took out a piece of black lace and held it up. What the heck was it? It took him several minutes to figure out it was a thong. Hard to determine without a woman's body molded in the appropriate places to give it perspective. The lace was incredibly light and pliable to his fingers.

He put the thong on the bed and continued to rummage through the drawer. He found more thongs and a couple of brassieres, most made of lace and satin but a few were practical cotton ones that Billy probably put on when she went running. He discarded the cotton bras and returned to the sexy samples. Like the panties, they were smooth beneath his fingers.

Being a woman couldn't be so terrible, could it, if they got to wear such velvety things on their bare skin.

What would it feel like?

He shoved the underwear back in the drawer and returned to his paperwork. But while he was writing the reports, sorting through his memories for events that took place three cases ago, the thought wormed its way into his conscious mind again and again.

At last, he threw the forms on the desk once more. He'd have no peace until he gave in to the treacherous voice in his head and discovered what it demanded to know. Besides, he hated paperwork; anything that could prove a distraction was welcome. Billy would never know, and really, it was her own fault, wasn't it?

*She* locked him into the Candy Store with the dullest task he could think of. *She* had failed to lock the door to her private room. So, *she* could never blame *him* for taking advantage, could she?

Invigorated with purpose, Van strode across the Candy Store's floor to the door in the corner and straight into Billy's room. Without hesitating, he opened the drawer and searched for the laciest, skimpiest, softest bra and thong he could find. He held them in his hands for a moment. How fragile they were; how easy would it be to rip them from a woman's body. Then he put the underwear down on the bed and stripped off his jeans and shirt.

He slid the thong up his legs, stiffening in fear when it groaned a protest against being stretched to its limits. The lace tickled his skin, and he giggled. Next was the brassiere. It was much harder to put on than the panties. He cursed the thing when it slipped free from his hands for a third time. How come it was so much easier to unhook the clasp than it was to fasten it? It didn't help that he lacked the appropriate curves to hold it into place, although Van didn't think of that until he finally managed to lock the clasp.

He caught sight of himself in the mirror and froze, a blush creeping onto his face, before he frowned. Something was missing. He turned away from the mirror and found a box of tissues. He grabbed a handful and wadded them into a ball, which he shoved inside the cups of the bra.

Much better. But not quite right yet.

He opened the closet and ran a hand over the clothes on the hangers. He settled on a Spandex top and short leather skirt, thinking the Spandex would be pliable enough to fit. He was narrow-hipped, so the skirt should not cause too much of a problem.

He clumsily struggled into the clothes, unfamiliar with the fastenings and straps, before

he faced the mirror again.

He grinned. Yes, definitely better. He twisted his face into a Billy-frown, then tried a smile. It wasn't quite right yet.

He found several pairs of high-heeled pumps on the closet's floor and squeezed his feet into a shiny red pair, thanking providence that he was a slim man and Billy had big feet. He tottered on the heels toward the dresser, searched Billy's make-up and decided on a lipstick as bright red as the heels. Strawberry red, the words were printed in gold on the cap. That ought to be the correct color. He pulled off the cap and liberally smeared the gloss on his mouth, pursed it for a moment to study the result, and, satisfied, put the lipstick down.

He struck a pose before the large mirror, testing several others until he found one that screamed *Billy*. He wiggled a finger at his reflection in the mirror.

"Donovan Ray, it's very naughty of you to go through my things," he said in a falsetto voice. "You'll do three more days of paperwork as punishment."

Roaring laughter rang through the room and Van whirled around so fast he tripped over the high heels.

Deaq was standing in the door opening, his face split from ear to ear in a grin, teeth gleaming white. He shuddered with laughter.

"Wha-- What are you doing here?" Van squeaked. He could feel his cheeks go hot and feared they would turn as red as his lips. Quickly, he dragged the back of his hand over his mouth, not realizing that in smearing the lipstick, he only made things worse.

"I -- came back -- to help you --," Deaq forced out in between bouts of helpless mirth, "with the -- paperwork. Looks like you don't need my help, Van--*nessa*." He exploded at the last word, and tears were streaming down his face.

"Ha ha, very funny," Van groused. "I was bored. B - o - r - e - d. That's all."

He wondered if he could manage to get out of Billy's things and put his clothes back on while Deaq was trying to regain his breath. He feared he'd never be able to do it without tearing a seam or something. And if Billy ever found out...

The thought was enough to make him grow pale and cold.

"Deaq..."

Deaq wiped the wetness from his cheeks. He perused Van's appearance for moment, bit his cheek to keep from bursting out once more, then nodded.

"My lips are sealed," he said. "Besides," his mouth twisted, "do you have any idea how much paperwork would be involved if I ever mentioned this to Billy?"

He turned from the room, heading for the Candy Store and leaving Van to contemplate.

"Hurry up, and let's get your paperwork out of the way," Deaq called over his shoulder. "Before you get into any more mischief."

Through the door opening, Van could hear Deaq chuckling. Still, he was grateful for his partner's presence. With Deaq's help, the task of writing the reports would go twice as fast. No, three times. With a little luck, he might be out of here before the sun set.

It was not such a bad day after all.

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