

A Spy For Help

Book 15 of the NEVER SAY SPY series

By Diane Henders

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The town of Silverside and all secret technologies are products of my imagination. If I'm abducted by grim-faced men wearing dark glasses, or if I die in an unexplained fiery car crash, you'll know I accidentally came a little too close to the truth.

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CHAPTER 1

My pulse thumped a little faster than necessary as I cruised toward the building. This was probably a bad idea.

But I had to do it sooner or later, and I wouldn't be able to relax until it was over.

My craven hands steered my car past the building for a second time instead of turning into the parking lot. I did have to deal with it, but not necessarily today...

I hissed out a breath of annoyance. Make up your mind, idiot. If somebody notices you circling the building, it'll only make things worse.

One more trip around the block stiffened my spine.

Okay, I was doing this.

Now.

I steered into the lot and parked. Before my inner coward could take over, I pried myself out of the driver's seat and strode across to the building's entrance.

Confident. In control.

Not intimidated at all, goddammit.

A gust of icy wind whipped my long hair across my face as though flagellating me for a bad decision. My little Glock weighed temptingly in my ankle holster; but it couldn't help me here.

Another blast of snow-laden wind pushed me through the door. I shot a glance around the warm and silent lobby, trying not to look furtive.

"Hey, Aydan! What are you doing here?" From behind the bulletproof glass of the Sirius Dynamics security wicket, Leo gave me a smile. "I thought you were on leave until January second."

"I am." I scurried over to sign in.

Just let me get up to my office without running into Dermott...

Pasting on a smile, I added, "I'm only here to file a report, and then I'm gone until the new year. I did a verbal report yesterday, but I want to get it down in writing while it's still fresh in my mind."

I spun the turntable containing the sign-in sheet. Come on, Leo, give me my security fob and let me sneak upstairs.

Oblivious to my psychic plea, Leo leaned forward and lowered his voice. "I heard you had a big blowup with Dermott yesterday. Tribunal with the chain of command; the whole enchilada."

I shook my head in equal parts chagrin and admiration. "Jeez, Leo, where do you get your intel?"

He grinned. "I overheard Dermott bitching about it this morning. Sounds like you made him look like a total ass."

With a giant effort of will, I managed not to say 'No, he did that all by himself'. I also didn't point out that Dermott should know better than to shoot his mouth off where he could be overheard.

Instead, I kept my face and voice neutral. “It was just a misunderstanding. We got it cleared up; no big deal.” I added a shrug that was probably a bit too casual. “Well, I’d better get that report done. The wind’s picking up outside and I want to get home before dark. There’s already a pretty bad ground drift on the highway.”

I imagined a telepathic connection with all my might. *Hand over the fucking fob, Leo!*

“Yeah,” he agreed, reaching for the control button in slow motion. “I hear it’s supposed to be pretty crappy weather this week. Wouldn’t you know it; right when everybody’s trying to get home for Christmas. Well, that’s Alberta for you. What else is new, eh?”

Suppressing my scream of frustration, I unclenched my teeth and managed a smile as the turntable delivered my security fob at last.

“Yep, no kidding.” I snatched up the fob and hurried for the stairs, tossing a bright “See you later” over my shoulder.

Mistake.

As I faced forward again I nearly ran into Dermott, who had just emerged from the secured area.

His normally ruddy complexion flushed to burgundy. “What the hell are you doing here?” he barked.

Shit, shit, shit!

I stayed expressionless, hoping he couldn’t hear my heart hammering. “I’m only in for a little while. I wanted to file my report while everything’s still fresh in my mind.”

“You’re supposed to be on stress leave.” His ominous tone fired another burst of adrenaline through my already-overloaded system.

Faking confidence for all I was worth, I gave him a smile. “Yep, you’re right. I’ll only be here long enough to file that report.”

I waved my fob at the reader, but Dermott’s large hand slapped onto the door, holding it closed.

“Get the hell out of this building,” he growled. “Right. Fucking. Now.”

My asshole-defense system spiked to DEFCON 1, delivering a burst of rage that drove my fist forward.

Fortunately it shot toward his hand, not his throat. A sharp tweak of his thumb startled him enough to ease his hold on the door, and I yanked it open and strode through.

“*Back off,*” I hissed as I passed him.

He didn’t, of course. The door had barely closed behind us when his hard grip clamped onto my arm, spinning me around.

I jerked free, snapping into a defensive position with my weight on the balls of my feet and my hands guarding my head in loose fists.

Thank you, muay thai videos. Please don’t let Dermott be a martial arts expert. This defensive position was pretty much the extent of my skills.

Doing my best badass imitation, I snarled, “Do you *really* want to go there with me?”

He paled and took a step backward. Thank God.

I made my voice strong and steady. “Now, we’re going to go up to your office and work this out. Without bloodshed. Move it.” I jerked my chin toward the stairs.

His fligid face creased into a sneer. "I'm the Director of Clandestine Operations. I don't take orders from fucking *agents*." He spat the word as if it was a foul insult.

"You're the *acting* DCO, and only for the next ten days," I growled. "And if you want to do this here in the hallway, then fine." I lowered my guard but stayed light on my feet in case he tried to sucker-punch me. Attempting a reasonable tone, I added, "I'm sorry you looked bad in front of the chain of command. I didn't mean for that to happen. We need to be able to work together, so what can we do to fix this?"

"You can die, bitch," he gritted, and shoved past me.

"Listen, dipshit!" I snapped at his receding back. "If you don't drop this stupid grudge and do your job, you're putting everybody at risk. Suck up your whiny-baby attitude and let's talk this out!"

Dermott's back went rigid and his hands curled into white-knuckled fists, but he kept walking without a reply. When he disappeared around the corner, I hissed out a long breath through my teeth.

"That went well," I said to nobody, and concentrated on steadying my shaking knees while I climbed the stairs.

My phone was already ringing when I arrived at my office. I hurried in for a cautious peek at the call display.

Not Dermott. Whew.

I picked up, trying for a breezy tone. "Hey, Leo. What's up?"

"Are you okay?"

"Of course; why wouldn't I be?"

"I was watching the security monitors. I saw what happened."

Shit.

He went on eagerly, “I thought you were going to deck him the way you decked Holt. You could have gotten away with it, you know. He attacked you first.”

I groaned. “No, he didn’t. I tweaked his thumb first, to get him to take his hand off the door. And anyway, I didn’t mean to hit Holt on Monday...”

Shit, had that only been three days ago? It felt like a lifetime.

Jerking my attention back to the conversation, I finished, “...and if I had taken a swing at Dermott, my ass would be in Dr. Rawling’s anger-management class so fast it would make my head spin.”

I didn’t bother to add ‘again’. One ten-week session had been more than enough for me; although if Rawling found out about this latest episode with Dermott, he might disagree.

Leo was talking again. Shit, I had to stop zoning out. Too tired.

“Sorry, what did you say?” I asked.

“I said, I’m saving a copy of the security footage just in case Dermott tries to make trouble for you. Don’t worry, I’m on your side.”

“Thanks, Leo. But we’re all supposed to be on the same side here.”

He snorted. “Tell that to Dermott.”

I didn’t have a good reply.

Twenty minutes later my worn-out brain had disgorged as much information as I could recall, and my aching heart shuddered away from

shock of my mother's tacit murder and espionage confession and the horrible memory of her lifeless body hitting the floor.

Feeling every one of my forty-eight years and then some, I dragged myself up from my desk and trudged over to peek into the hallway.

No sign of Dermott. Small mercies.

Squaring my shoulders, I held my head high and strode for the stairs.

I had just sunk into the safety of my car when my cell phone vibrated. I twitched guiltily, but a glance at the call display made me relax with a smile. Hellhound.

I started the car to get some heat into the already-frigid interior, and accepted the call. "Hi, Arnie."

"Hey, darlin'. Did ya get home okay?"

"Not yet. I went in to Sirius to file my report first. I'm just heading home now."

His momentary silence was just a fraction too long. "Was Dermott there?" he asked cautiously.

"Yep."

Another beat of silence. Then, "How'd that go for ya?"

I let out a sigh that felt like it came from my toes. "Not as well as I'd hoped. About as shitty as I'd expected." I considered. "Maybe a bit shittier. I probably shouldn't have lost my temper."

"Aw, fuck. Did ya shoot him?"

"Didn't even punch him," I said with a touch of pride.

Hellhound laughed. "Good job, darlin'." When he spoke again the smile was gone from his voice. "Anyway... the reason I'm callin', uh..."

Unease skittered up my backbone. "What's wrong?"

"Nothin'," he said hurriedly. "Nothin's wrong. I just, um... I got a... bit of a situation." He drew a deep breath. "I think I found Kathy."

"Wh-" I bit off my first reaction of 'who?' as realization struck. "*Kathy? Your sister?*"

Another deep breath came over the line, and when Hellhound spoke again there was a faint tremor in his voice. "Yeah. Yeah... I think so." His voice firmed. "Hell, I know it. It's her."

"Is she...?" I couldn't finish the sentence.

"She's alive."

A potent mixture of excitement and worry stopped my voice for a moment. Could Arnie's search finally be over after thirty long years? He'd be devastated if it was a case of mistaken identity. But what if it really was Kathy and she'd been avoiding him all this time? I knew exactly how much that would hurt.

I sucked in a shallow breath. "What... how... shit, I don't even know where to start. Have you contacted her yet?"

"Yeah, I left a message on her machine, an' she called me back."

I waited, but he didn't elaborate.

"So what did she say?" I prompted.

"She said she ain't Kathy, an' don't ever call her again."

* End of excerpt *

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