

Chapter 1

Carol Johnson stood tall in formation. With her gun on her right hip and her nightstick on her left, she felt nearly invincible. This impression of strength, however, did nothing to dissipate the insufferable heat. Although it was late September, it felt more like July at the Upstate New York college campus. Her upper lip grew heavy with perspiration.

She'd heard all the stories and seen all the newsreels of the last few years - Detroit, Watts, Chicago, Kent State and Vietnam. The country was still at war - abroad and at home. And for what? None of it made sense. It was 1972 and nothing had changed since the summer of love in '67, her high school graduation year. If anything, it felt like conditions had gotten worse. The war in Asia seemed to escalate to no end. The political and musical icons of the era were dying off. And the highest government office in the greatest country of the free world was under suspicion. No. Things were not getting better. Some days it felt as if Armageddon had finally arrived.

Carol enlisted with the police force to pay the bills. Simply put, being single without a man in her life, she'd needed work to make ends meet. The first job she took after graduation was as a secretary for the courthouse. It was far too tedious for her. She craved activity and since the only real movement involved was typing and making coffee for the magistrate, Carol realized she wanted more out of life.

At first, being a cop was just a job, too - something to earn an income and it had seemed as good as any, appealing to her stoic demeanor and solitary preferences. She had the strength and the stamina to walk a beat so the decision hadn't been a terribly difficult one. Besides, it had been the family business. Her father, who was a cop, had been proud of her decision, although reluctantly at first. He knew what the job entailed but he also knew of his daughter's abilities so Carol attacked it with a certain amount of relish.

The longer she was on the force, the more pride she felt. It went from a job to a career - from just a paycheck to a reason to get up in the morning. Each day was a challenge she could face and win, each battle deserving of her attention and finesse. She was a guardian of order in an age of upheaval.

Carol, always the peacemaker, hated to see the senseless eruption of violence. She wanted to find the middle ground for everyone involved. That's not to say she didn't understand the need for retaliation or a heavy hand. She'd been trained to use the strong-arm method when there was a time and a place for it. So it seemed only a natural conclusion that the tall woman would be standing here this day with sweat trickling between her shoulder blades, plastering jet-black bangs to her forehead.

After five years on the force, she wore her badge and her nametag proudly as she stood in formation overseeing a 'peaceful' demonstration that looked about to get ugly, perhaps even deadly. Carol had learned long ago how to inspect her surroundings without appearing to be watching. Cool blue eyes slid stealthily across the crowd of people in the field beyond. They were a rag tag bunch dressed in long, flowing dresses or bell-bottomed pants. Their long hair was free and blowing in the minimal breeze of the morning. Chanting and marching, the group advanced toward the administration building's steps where she stood.

The sun beat down uncharacteristically hot for the late fall but in a way, the officer was grateful. That meant the demonstrators were hot and sweaty, too, and that was just fine by her as misery does truly love company. Though their training classes suggested otherwise. In an uncomfortable situation, be it heat, rain or snow, things were more likely to get out of hand since tempers were high. An angry protest could become an angry mob at any moment and if that happened, she had to be prepared.

"Goddamn Hippies."

The voice of her partner, Randell, hissed in her ear, breaking into her wandering thoughts. It took the tall woman a full second to reel back in her traveling mind. He continued to speak as she took the time to survey her surroundings using her peripheral vision while watching the group advance.

"They should just let us open fire. Might increase the intelligence of the American gene pool," he smirked, keeping his eyes forward. Even without turning to him she could easily envision his narrow pinched face. His deep brown eyes would be glaring at the people around him, the distaste for this bunch evident in every feature. She'd seen that look from him before on several occasions and still despised it. Besides, she wasn't much older than the students out in the field.

He had told her once that she wasn't "one of those potheads" but she didn't quite feel like one of the boys, either. In many ways, Carol felt trapped between two worlds. She understood the protestors' points. She believed in their right to demonstrate. After all, that's what the country was founded upon - the right to speak freely without persecution. However, she also believed in authority - the right to be orderly without violating someone else's rights in the process of exercising your own.

Carol grinned at her partner without really doing more than slightly tilting her head. It was as a show of faith; brotherhood. It was not an agreement with his ideals. Unfortunately, her companions on the force always seemed to be itching to turn a rally violent, to control these kids and their beliefs and ideals with sheer force. Many of them had children who were doing the same things and protesting their parent's work, the job that put food on the table. Carol couldn't imagine going home to that kind of

criticism or being raised in a home where your voice wasn't heard. Sometimes being single and alone had its advantages.

Her partner didn't speak again, his wit already dried up for the day . . . perhaps the week. As the demonstrators came closer and closer, her comrades began to look around sizing up what was about to happen, checking their location. Perhaps they were checking out the man next to them, wondering if he would turn tail or stay for the battle that lay ahead. Even Carol found herself searching left and right, looking for anything that might be a hazard if a fight broke out. How many steps did the entrance have? How many rows of officers were behind her? Did everyone have his or her nightstick out? Silently and as quickly as possible her mind computed everything she might need in a matter of seconds.

"Eyes front!" the commander ordered his squad in a loud gravelly voice, his own nerves strung taut. Like his force, he'd heard all the stories, read the news articles, saw the newscasts. And he'd be damned if he was going to be caught up in one of those disasters. His paranoia forced him to rule with an iron fist and his troops responded to his snapped words. The police had enough bad press as it was; his team sure as hell wasn't going to add to it.

Carol complied readily, knowing she'd been wrong to break anyway. She even mildly cursed herself for her stupidity; she was better trained than to be sidetracked by a group of shouting people.

The dean stood on the steps alongside the officers with a bullhorn. "This building is closed!" he shouted. "You are ordered to leave these grounds immediately or face prosecution for trespassing."

Seconds passed, though it felt almost like a lifetime with the minimal breeze and the glaring sun. The group advanced, not heeding the warning. When they were within 20 feet, the group stopped their organized chant and gave a powerful yell.

They ran up toward the steps, hoping to get inside to form a sit-down strike Carol assumed. Leading the pack and heading straight toward her was a young blonde. Determined didn't even begin to describe the look she wore. Reflexively, Carol's hand tightened on her nightstick. Her legs subconsciously parted a bit more as she waited for impact.

The woman was petite, only reaching Carol's collarbone but well built. She had the gusto of a New York Jets linebacker although she lacked the physical size. Carol learned early on that looks could be deceiving. A determined perp, no matter how small, can fight with the strength of 10 men if he or she really wanted to. And female or not, this protester in front of her could pose just as much of a threat as anyone.

A loud shot rang out shattering the air around them and before Carol's mind comprehended what was happening, she advanced to meet the mob. For a split second she wondered if it was just herself who had moved. But looking around her, she noticed the formation had charged and the protesters scattered.

Colorful anti-war signs became weapons for some of the protesters. Others chose fists. With the police force in full riot gear it did little to harm them but a few protesters were old pros. They went for the legs, the only part not protected by the body armor. Before the blonde could get any ideas of doing the same, Carol instinctively grabbed the golden haired girl in front of her, wrapped talon like fingers around slender upper arms before turning her and forcing her to the ground.

Carol watched as feet and legs raced around them. To avoid getting trampled in the chaos, she rose up and placed a knee on the girl's lower back, pulling her arms behind her. Carol was easily able to subdue the young woman by holding the thin wrists together in one large hand leaving her free to reach for her cuffs with the other. She quickly patted her down to be sure she was clean. Her ice blue eyes caught the sight of a fallen sign that read "Make Love not War". With the battle going on around them Carol couldn't help but notice the irony of it all.

"You okay?" Randell called as he watched the tall woman begin handcuffing her perp.

Carol gave a quick nod, feeling in control with the subdued young woman. "Help the others!" she instructed, giving the man beside her permission to leave her without backup.

With a return nod that went undetected by Carol, he charged into battle, nightstick at the ready. Randell wasn't a fighting man like some on the force. He just wanted to put in his 25 years and go home. He was well on his way, but with the streets getting more and more explosive, Carol could feel his reluctance at times. But this was not one of them. He charged headlong into the melee. The sooner the crowd was controlled the safer it would be for everyone – himself included. Randell didn't look for a fight but he wasn't a coward who would run from one either. As annoying as she may have found some of his views, the man was a consummate professional and she appreciated having that on her side.

Continuing, Carol finished cuffing the young woman and read her the Miranda rights in a sure, strong voice. The procedure she had been taught recently was becoming more and more familiar although it felt like more bureaucratic red tape. She said the words so often now that they slipped easily from her lips as she snapped the metal rings into place.

"Why am I being arrested?" the young woman asked, growing irritated but moving minimally.

She apparently wasn't dumb enough to resist arrest and risk personal injury and that made Carol wonder how many times the girl had been through this already. She acted like a true 'professional'. The blonde tried to look over her shoulder at the woman on her back but her own hair fell in her face, impeding her view. In truth, she hadn't really looked at her before. In fact, she didn't care. Carol was just another cop.

"Trespassing for starters. You and your friends were asked politely to leave," Carol said after pulling the girl to her feet, surprising both of them with her ability to literally pick the slight form off the ground and plant her back on unsteady legs. Lighter than she looks, Carol mused. It's hard to tell under that flowing shirt.

The girl didn't fight Carol but she was no great help, either. They moved slowly toward the cruiser with her shuffling her sandaled feet, looking around at the foray the demonstration had become. Carol let it go, knowing they'd get to the car soon enough anyway and not eager to force a confrontation with the smaller woman. The officer saw her commander out of the corner of her eye and moved toward him, changing their direction slightly.

He was flustered and yelling, face red with stress and rage, eyes searching the melee before him to ensure nothing was getting out of hand.

"Permission to take the perpetrator to the station, sir?" Carol asked formally, stopping in front of him and dragging the girl forward for him to see.

"Permission granted, Johnson. Nice job," he grinned at her quickly before scowling at the young woman. He looked her up and down briskly, trying to intimidate her with narrowed eyes and a stern face but realized he was being unsuccessful. Her ho-hum attitude toward his attempt only enraged him more. He waved the two of them off and went back to surveying the scene beyond.

Carol opened the door and the young woman clambered inside without resisting, settling into the back seat as if it were familiar. She bounced slightly on the padded bench and even managed a grin of enjoyment, completely unconcerned with her situation. Carol climbed into the driver's seat and shook her head in amusement, somewhat intrigued by the young woman's upbeat attitude. The officer had barely made it down the block when the girl's soft voice drifted through the mesh partition dividing the front and back seats.

"How old are you?"

Carol looked into the rearview mirror and raised a slim dark eyebrow, unsure of the question.

"What?" she responded, not certain of the girl's motives. It wasn't the typical chitchat between an arresting officer and perp.

"I asked how old you are? I'd say about 23. It seems odd someone as young as yourself would already sell out to the establishment." The young woman spoke easily, meeting blue eyes with mist green in the rearview mirror before turning her head again to watch the passing scenery.

"I don't care what you think," Carol replied coldly, her icy blue eyes in the rearview mirror emphasizing her point.

"No one in the establishment does," the girl sighed, her voice sounding oddly defeated and conflicting starkly with her previously brash demeanor. "So why should you?"

As Carol came to a red light she turned to face the girl. "You know . . . you do have the right to remain silent."

The young woman chuckled heartily, re-establishing her prior confidence. "I'm waiving that right," she smiled wickedly, green eyes dancing. "So tell me . . . what does it take for a lady to become a cop? Were you raised Republican? Did you see too many episodes of the Mod Squad . . . What gives?"

"Are you looking to join the force?" Carol replied sarcastically, continuing their journey. "Cuz I can get you some brochures that you might find helpful."

"No," the girl grinned slyly, enjoying the teasing banter. "I'm looking to change the world. What do you do in your spare time?"

Silence fell in the car for the duration of the trip as the officer elected to not answer that question, knowing it was rhetorical anyway. The words of Carol's partner came back to her as she looked in the rearview mirror at the woman in the earth toned granny shirt and long tangled locks. "Goddamn hippies." But she still couldn't think it in the same hostile manner he'd spoken it.

