

Her ass was by far the finest he'd ever seen in this town.

Westen Township Sheriff, Gage Justice, pulled his cruiser in behind the brown sedan parked in the alley between the town's only bank and Gold's Foodmart. His deputy Cleetus was right. Someone was definitely digging around in the trash dumpster.

A satisfied smile of pure male appreciation split Gage's lips and a warmth spread over his body as he sat back and admired the view. This didn't look to be your typical dumpster diver. The woman stood tiptoe on the hood of her car, the top half of her body bent over and into the container's edge. The way the perp's jeans clung and stretched around her thighs and nice round bottom warmed more than his smile.

Oh, yeah. A man could spend all day holding those round cheeks in his hands. Wonder if the top half of her was as nice as the bottom?

He gave himself a mental shake. The more important question was why was she rifling through the trash?

Without making a sound, he eased himself out of the cruiser, leaving the door open. Careful not to step on anything to alert her of his presence, he moved past her car to stand just below her and off to the side. He looked at her feet.

*Awful small, even for a woman.*

The jeans clung to her legs, which weren't supermodel thin, but nicely shaped. He resisted the urge to reach up and squeeze her calves.

"Exactly what do you think you're doing?" he asked in his best bad-cop voice.

Startled, she jumped and lifted her top half out of the bin. For a brief second he caught sight of her face. It wasn't the kind that stopped men dead in their tracks, but the curious brown eyes, the arched dark eyebrows, and the soft lips rounded in an *O* of surprise caught his attention.

At that moment her foot slipped.

In almost slow motion her balance shifted. Dark hair flying about her, she waved her arms around in big helicopter circles, papers drifting down like confetti. She twisted to one side as if she meant to catch herself on the edge of the dumpster, only to slip again. This time that lovely butt came directly at him. Despite something wet dribbling down on his shirt, Gage shifted sideways and did the only gentlemanly thing he could do. He held out both arms to catch her.

Just as her bottom and thighs filled his arms, she threw her arm around his neck, emptying the contents of a brown paper bag on top of him. "Oh, crap! Thank you..." her voice trailed off

as she looked at him.

He couldn't help but smile. Her voice reminded him of a soft summer night, warm and whispery. "Gage Justice, Westen's Sheriff. You're welcome, Miss?"

"Sheriff Justice? That name's just too perfect." She laughed softly as she lifted the half-eaten chicken salad sandwich off his shoulder and tossed it back to the trash bin. Then she smiled—a genuine hundred-watt stunner from the heart. "I'm Roberta Roberts, but my friends call me Bobby."

Gage turned to set the shapely woman on the ground then glanced over her shoulder through the driver's window and froze.

The contents of her purse were scattered on the car's passenger seat. Peeking out of the bag was the butt-end of a gun.

"So, Bobby," he quickly set her on the ground and moved so he stood between her and the door handle, "want to tell me why you have a gun in the front seat of your car?"

"I'm a private investigator and I have a permit for my gun, Sheriff." She gave him another smile.

The words private investigator chilled whatever response he'd have for her. "Don't suppose you have some identification and a permit on you, do you?"

"They're in my bag."

She started to reach for the door handle, but he caught her arm to stop her. "I have to get them out to show you."

"How about I get your bag for you?"

"Sure. Help yourself."

"Don't mind if I do."

He released her and she stepped back, giving him a mutinous stare, those deep-brown eyes narrowed like a mad cat. Opening the door, he forced her to move away farther. Careful not to turn his back completely on her he retrieved her things, handing her the bag, but keeping her weapon in his hand.

Still casting him a rebellious look, she snatched her bag and dropped it onto the car hood, fishing around inside.

"I know it's in here. I put the permit in before leaving home."

"And where is home?" he asked, watching her rummage.

“Cincinnati,” she said, starting to pull items out—wallet, bottle of water, notebook, granola bar, collapsible umbrella, reading book, sunglasses, lipstick case—laying them on the hood of her car one at a time. Every time he thought she reached the bottom she’d pull something else out. She rifled through each set of folded papers. “I know it’s in here.”

“How big is that bag?”

She slanted her head toward him a moment, disgust in her eyes, before turning back to her mission. He fought hard to swallow the grin that itched to pop out at her schoolmarm expression, the gun in his hand reminding him of the seriousness of the situation.

Finally, she turned her bag upside down and shook. The only thing that fell out was a gum wrapper.

“I can’t find it.” Her shoulders slumped a little, she reached for her wallet. “I can show you my PI license.”

“How about we take a little trip over to the jail and I’ll run a check.” He gripped her arm and stopped her, turning her to face the car.