

Anthony Neil Smith

CASTLE DANGER

WOMAN ON ICE



When Engebretsen spoke, it was a quiet rumble. “He didn’t have a gun on him. He didn’t have anything.”

I nodded and clutched the lapels of my borrowed jacket together. “I know.”

“What was so important that you needed us to bring you in? Did you think we’d go easier on you?”

“I think I’d better wait just a little while longer.”

“You should wait for your lawyer.”

I lifted my chin. “He’s a very busy man, you know. He’s Mr. Worldwide.”

They looked at each other again, not sure how to take a single word I said. So I told them I was kidding. The union would send someone soon enough, I said.

It pained Haupt to hear Engebretsen tell me it would be okay, and we could wait if I wanted. I could tell by the way he furrowed

his brow. But Engebretsen was right. Any smart perp would've kept his mouth shut and waited. Same with smart cops.

Of course, I played dumb instead. "He had one when I shot him."

"Jesus." Haupt dropped his pen on his pad and rubbed his face. "Can we ... do we have to listen to this?"

"If that's what the officer wants, then yes. I suppose we do." He turned to me. "Is that what you want, Officer Jahnke?"

It felt like a taunt, him calling me 'Officer'. I took a sip of coffee, then held the paper cup in both hands. So warm.

"Remember, I'm the one who called 911. I've got nothing to hide. But someone else sure as shit does."

They had found me on my knees on the bank of the Mississippi River, a stone's throw from the Stone Arch Bridge, my new partner

flat on his back, two shots in his chest, frozen slush washing over him. The paramedics were frantically working to save him, all the way from where he'd fallen, across the parking lot to the ambulance, then up into the back. The doors slammed and off it screamed. I identified myself, since neither of us was in uniform and neither of us belonged there. The Twin Cities were not our turf.

At the sight of the cops, every eyewitness scrambled. I collapsed, exhausted from it all — the fight earlier and then actually having to shoot him. Asked for Haupt and Engebretsen. I didn't want to talk to any other cops. Only those two would do. I ended up scraped, bruised, and freezing wet in the backseat of the squad car. My cheeks still stung. My knees ached whenever I moved my legs.

I uncrossed and crossed them again. Once more, Haupt looked away.

Okay, so I uncrossed them again, feet flat on the ground, and smoothed my skirt on my lap. “Am I bothering you? Would you like me to wipe off my lipstick first?”

“And put on some goddamned pants.” Haupt got up and stormed out, slamming the door behind him.

Engebretsen stayed put. “He’ll be back.” He gave me a fatherly grin, as if seeing a man — no, a fellow cop — dressed as a woman was something he came across every day. Maybe he did. Seemed to me the rainbow glowed pretty bright downtown. Some of those gay bars and clubs have been there forever, since the fifties, at least. He couldn’t hide his discomfort entirely, but he was trying real hard. I admired him for that. He was the type of detective I would like to be someday, if only, well ... never mind.

Engebretsen asked, “More coffee, Manny?”

I smiled and handed over my cup. “Some Splenda, please?”

Haupt was back before Engebretsen could even take the cup. Slightly out of breath — and without bothering to close the door on all those lookie-loos out there trying to grab a peek of me — he went straight to Engebretsen and whispered into his ear. I didn’t need to hear his exact words to know what it was all about. I tried not to grin. Okay, maybe a little grin.

Engebretsen blinked. “The fuck?”

Haupt nodded. That brow of his was working overtime. Engebretsen stood and wagged a finger at me.

“Stay right here. We’ll be back.”

Before he left, he turned back for my coffee cup. A small kindness. Hopefully he’d