

Bobby went inside and found the baggage claim for Michaels' flight, keeping the sign low, facing into his leg. Once the passengers appeared, he sighed and held up the purple-inked poster board. His practiced eye looked the crowd over, taking in far more than people realized in the one or two seconds before he moved on to the next face. A businessman, alert enough to be arriving for his meeting; another one just ruffled enough to be arriving home from his meeting. Couples, families, men, women... Bobby's eye landed on one particular woman and stopped.

She was one handsome woman, all right. Short black hair that framed her face, softening what, on another woman, would be a too-hard jaw line; flawless makeup that didn't try to hide her age but enhanced her beauty; a crisp white shirt with French cuffs, even; black and gold cufflinks that matched the necklace and earrings she wore; and black tailored pants that covered long legs, made even longer by patent leather high heels. Her clear blue eyes were scanning the crowd and Bobby had just enough time to envy whomever she was looking for before her eyes met his. The corners of her mouth twitched in a small smile before Bobby looked away, back to the crowd.

With a shake of the head, he realized he'd been staring like a hormonal teenager. And worse, he'd been caught. Still, a woman like that had to be used to it, he rationalized. He supposed he could forgive himself for being human. Hell, might even allow himself another look before...

"Sheriff?" A voice to his right made him turn... and look straight into those crystal blue eyes of hers. They were even clearer up close, sharp and intelligent, but with a twinkle that said she knew he'd been looking. And, he realized, they were also level with

his. Those legs of hers *did* go all the way up. Fighting the urge to check them out again, Bobby held her gaze.

“Ma’am.” Bobby nodded, feeling the blush begin at his neck. If he was really lucky, she would ask directions. That sometimes happened when he was in uniform. And if was really unlucky, well, he probably deserved the scolding he would get. “How can I help you?”

“I believe you’re the man I’ve been looking for.” The woman smiled and stuck out her hand. “Michaela Howard.” A slight shiver went down her spine. It wasn’t often she was met by such a good looking man. She’d been met by old people, young people, men and women but this tall man in the Sheriff’s uniform, with his salt and pepper hair and striking hazel eyes that seemed to take in everything, including her...well, yes, it had been a long since she had been met by someone quite like this man.

“Nice to meet you, Miss Howard.” Bobby tried to shake her hand gently but her grip was firm. “But I’m afraid you have the wrong person.”

“Not if you’re Sheriff Robert Granger. Anyway, according to your,” she motioned to the sign and her lips twitched again, “very colorful sign, you’re looking for...”

Michaela’s voice trailed off at the look in Bobby’s eyes. She gasped with a laugh. “They didn’t *tell* you, did they? Oh damn, I’m so sorry.”

“Who didn’t tell me what?” Bobby had a sinking feeling in his gut. Surely he was wrong.

“Justin didn’t make it clear that *I’m* Howard Michaels,” Michaela said, motioning to the sign again. “Or that’s my *nom de plume*, rather.” She looked into the blank eyes staring back at her. “My pseudonym? Pen name? The name I write my books under?”

She tried a tease, hoping that would work. If he'd been handsome before, he was positively disarming when his slight blush colored his neck.

“I know what a *nom de plume* is, Ms. Howard. And a pseudonym.” Bobby’s voice was colder than he meant it to be but hand to God; first she lies about being a man, then she embarrasses him and now she’s insulting him? Big city author or no, he had some pride. “We’re not all hicks down here.”

“No, I...” Michaela stammered. This was going very badly. She took a deep breath. “I’m very sorry, Sheriff. I didn’t mean to offend or insult you.”

“No.” Bobby’s voice was still hard. “I don’t suppose you did. Mean to.”

Their eyes locked. Michaela hated the way this had started but damned if she was going to grovel just because this man had an ego as fragile as glass.