

Looking Good

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Chapter One

Virginia Faulkner was happy. At least she was as happy as she could be without her Leroy. She looked over at the large photo of him hanging on the wall opposite her favorite wingback chair. He had been in his dress uniform. Of course he had insisted that she be in one of the photos with him, so a small 8x10 was sitting on the shelf below his large one. That one had her wearing one of her silk kimono like dresses. It was dark blue, of course, to match his uniform.

“I miss him too.”

Ginny was startled out of her thoughts when Leroy’s life-long friend, Dean Adams, spoke. She did not look at him as she continued to gaze up at Leroy. But she was very much aware of Dean sitting near her in a matching wingback chair. She merely shook her head slightly.

“I cannot believe it has been eight years now. It seems as if it were just yesterday when he left here to go to the station that last morning.”

Dean smiled briefly and idly stroked his neatly trimmed beard. “I always thank God that he didn’t suffer. They said that he didn’t make a sound when he just laid his head down on his desk.”

“I know Dean, in many ways, that makes it so much better. But nothing will ever change the fact that he will never be here with me again.”

They were both silent for a few minutes. Ginny knew Dean very well. After all, the man had not only been Leroy’s best friend, but he had been there for her so much since Leroy died. She did not even have to look at Dean to picture him in her mind. He was, like Leroy, a year older than her. But even at seventy-four, the man still cut a fine figure. He had always had that dashing mustache which was now as white as his hair. Of course she did not quite approve of the beard he had grown since he retired. At least he kept it neatly trimmed and short.

Finally, Ginny turned to look at Dean but before she could say anything else, her babies stirred. They must have sensed her melancholy mood. A big black head was now on each of her chair arms with large dark eyes staring at her. They were always there, on each side of her chair.

Dean snorted. “Ginny, I swear that those two are almost as good at reading your mind as you are at reading everyone else’s minds.”

Ginny smiled fondly as she scratched their heads. They were matching Giant Schnauzers from the same litter. Yes, Fritz and Frieda were her pride and joy. They were, to her, the only children she’d ever had.

She giggled softly at what Dean had just said. “Oh Dean, you know that I do not read anyone’s mind. I just learn them so well that I can predict what they will do or say next.”

She smiled at him. “It is ever so much fun though, especially when they think I am reading their minds.”

When he did not comment, Ginny said, “Shall we go out into the garden? Carmen is coming now to serve our breakfast.”

Once they were settled at a small table with two chairs at it, Ginny looked around her. She so loved her garden. It had citrus, palm and huge saguaro cactus scattered around with many flowering bushes and smaller plants mixed in. It was always so peaceful for her to be out there.

“I so enjoy eating out here but I am afraid that our little dinner party later will have to be inside, such a shame. I do not mind the heat except when I cannot eat out here.”

Dean’s face took on a thoughtful look then. “Well, Ginny, it’s been a week now since Bob and Donna announced their engagement. I would say that little project was one of your quicker accomplishments.”

Ginny giggled again. “Oh Dean, you know that I had to do very little to bring those two together. It was rather humorous when Bob saw Donna for the first time. Why that boy fell in love with her right here in this garden that first day.”

Dean did not comment. That pleased her since she had more to say and he knew it.

“Then that sweet Donna simply could not resist the looks and charm of my Bobby.”

Dean chuckled along with her giggles then.

“So when will they be getting married?”

Ginny thought for a moment then said, “Donna wants to wait until she is finished with her Field Training which will be the middle of July. So I would say that we may be having three weddings, possibly together, sometime around the middle of September.”

Dean snorted again. “That reminds me. You still have two more couples to bring together. I would assume that you will kick off your second project this afternoon.”

Ginny continued to idly pet her babies and smiled fondly. “Oh yes, as you know the groundwork for this project has already been laid. You will remember that I have had our little Rachel sitting next to Tyler Randall several times already.”

“How well are they getting along so far?”

Ginny giggled a little louder than normal that time. “Oh, I would say that our boy from Las Vegas has more than a little maturing to do before Rachel will be paying much attention to him. I also think that the dear boy needs to make some major attitude adjustments as well before he will be suitable for our little Rachel, as you so appropriately called her.”

Dean laughed loudly. “And how do you plan to accomplish all of that Ginny?”

She so loved to discuss her plans with Dean. He never pushed her when she did not want to be pushed and he always knew just the right questions to ask.

“I would say that he has already begun to mature during his first four weeks on the police force. He has been in some rather intense situations. Of course, he has not had to shoot anyone the way Donna did recently. But he has been involved in breaking up several gang fights.”

“Okay. What about Rachel? How will you get her to accept the Randall boy?”

“Ah Rachel. She is such a darling girl. And to think that her father is one of the most cantankerous, pretentious old fools I have ever had the misfortune of knowing, even if he is only fifty-five.”

Dean laughed again. “Yes, Ginny, I would say that you have described Judge Willard Anderson to a tee.”

She continued as if he had not interrupted. “As much as I abhor divorce, I am not so sure that I can find it in me to completely condemn Emily for divorcing the man.”

Ginny had to stop to compose herself then. She was having thoughts that were not Christian. It was okay for Dean to see her this way but it was imperative that she not show any such weakness to others.

“Back to Rachel. I must be fair and say that Rachel is going to need to do a little maturing of her own and I am afraid that some of it is not going to be all that enjoyable for her.”

Dean looked closely at her face and she knew that he would not push her for details. He could see that she would not divulge any more at this time.

They had an enjoyable breakfast after that and Dean left promising to return for her party that afternoon.

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Driving home at four that Saturday morning, Tyler Randall was tired and this had only been the first night of his four-night workweek. What would he feel like by the time Tuesday morning came?

Well, all he wanted to do now was crash for about ten hours. But that wasn't going to happen. He had a command appearance to make this afternoon. He'd be lucky to get five or six hours sleep before he had to be at

Virginia Faulkner's house at noon. Ginny! He had to remember to call her Ginny. She fussed at anyone who didn't.

He knew better than to miss one of her parties. He'd been warned repeatedly around the police station that she was the power behind not only the chief but the mayor and many other city and county officials. So, he'd just get into bed quickly and hope for the best.

When his alarm woke him at eleven, Tyler didn't feel rested enough and wanted nothing more than to roll over and go back to sleep. But duty called. He laughed at that. What kind of a place had he landed in? Things sure weren't like this in Vegas. No little old lady could run things there. No sir, Metro PD was one of the top departments in the country and he couldn't wait until he could get on up there.

He had to admit that Rockland, Arizona wasn't that bad of a place. He didn't even mind that it was going to be from five to ten degrees warmer here in the summer. That was a good thing since tomorrow was June first. It had already hit a hundred a couple of times.

He hunted through his closet and found a shirt that was both presentable and clean to go with a fairly new pair of jeans. That was as dressed up as he was going to get. After all, it was supposed to be an informal party. Right?

Soon Tyler was parking his pickup in the parking area in front of Ginny's house which was set back from the street almost a hundred yards. It was a large one-story house. The whole front and both sides were desert landscaped. That seemed quite a contrast to the backyard, which Tyler knew was all one big garden with an eight-foot wall around it. The parking area looked as if it would hold about twenty cars.

He laughed as he approached the front door. The old girl must really throw a lot of parties to need that much parking.

As usual, the door was opened by Ginny's Hispanic housekeeper. He thought her name was Carmen. She just smiled at him and indicated that he should follow her. He didn't need directions to the library where Ginny held her gatherings now that it was too hot to have them in her garden. He'd been here half a dozen times already.

He noticed Ginny as soon as he entered the room. How could he not? She was, as usual, sitting in her large throne like chair in the middle of the far wall with her huge black dogs sitting alertly at her sides. He knew that you couldn't make any sudden moves around Ginny. He could tell by the way both dogs looked at him whenever he shook Ginny's hand. He wasn't about to do anything they didn't like.

So, he went straight up to Ginny and cautiously took her hand when she held it out to him. Sure enough, both dogs leaned slightly forward until he stepped back away from their mistress. Boy, wouldn't he love to have a dog that was as well trained as those two seemed to be.

He loved dogs and wished he could have one now. But his apartment building didn't allow pets.

Whoa, he'd better pay attention now since Ginny was talking to him.

"I am so pleased that you could join us today Tyler. I am sure you will enjoy yourself immensely."

"Yes, Ginny, I'm sure I will. I always do."

He had the sudden thought that Ginny would do well in a poker game with her unreadable face. That would be funny though since he knew she was one of those Christians who was against gambling of any kind. Okay, he could handle that, just don't talk about Vegas.

Ginny motioned toward a corner of the large room where the other rookies were all standing. But then, there was a man there who wasn't a police officer. Tyler knew him fairly well now. He was an Assistant County Attorney and also the fiancé of one of the rookies, Donna.

Man, he had wanted to get close to that girl but she just never seemed to take to him at all. Too bad! As he thought about it though, maybe it wouldn't have been such a good idea for him to hook up with Donna since her dad was a commander with a SO up north.

As he joined the group of four, he immediately realized that Sandy and Jake were arguing over something ... again. Those two seemed to be arguing over one thing or another all the time. He knew that something had

happened between the two of them back when they had all four been at the state police academy. Neither one would ever say what it was.

Oh well, that wasn't his problem. Sandy wasn't his type anyway. After all, he was six feet tall and the girl was just a couple of inches shorter than he was. He liked girls who had to look up at him, not one who would stand toe to toe with him and look him straight in the eye the way Sandy did with Jake.

Now, Donna was more his style, but he had to stop thinking about her. She seemed to be very happy with Bob Coleman. He hadn't been around the guy very much, mostly here at Ginny's. But he thought the guy was probably okay.

Donna looked up at him and smiled. "Hi Tyler. How did your shift go last night? I noticed that you ran late again."

She grinned up at him and added. "I'll bet you still got more sleep than I did. At least I usually get off right at eight since the day shift starts at seven."

He realized then who was missing. Rachel Anderson was usually at these little get-togethers of Ginny's. He looked around the room and Donna caught him and must have realized what he was doing.

"Rachel was supposed to get off at six this morning but she had to work half of the next shift. She should be getting here soon. I think she was planning to come straight here from the hospital."

Caught! He didn't like for others to know what he was thinking. That was one reason that Ginny Faulkner made him so nervous. The old girl always seemed to know his thoughts. That really bothered him.

Coleman turned to him then and said, "Have you come up with any more evidence on that drug bust you made the other night Tyler?"

Finally, a safe topic that he could hide in for a while. So he spent the next fifteen minutes talking about that case and a couple other cases of his that Bob was handling. And since Donna's shift and his overlapped between ten and two, she was also very active in the conversation.

But Sandy and Jake continued to talk or argue with each other, virtually ignoring the rest of them.

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Rachel Anderson was running on adrenaline that she was afraid wouldn't last much longer. She'd had to work over this morning for another nurse who'd had a sick child. Of course, Marilyn, the charge nurse, had promised her that she could get off at midnight tonight or even earlier if it wasn't too busy.

Ha! That was a laugh. She could not remember the last time a Saturday night at Rockland Memorial Hospital's emergency room wasn't busy. On top of that, she wouldn't be able to get much sleep before going back in at six that evening. She had promised Ginny that she'd be at her party this afternoon.

All she did when she got off at noon was to race home, take a shower, put on clean clothes and take off for Ginny's house. She knew that Ginny would be holding things up for her arrival but that couldn't be helped. Sure, she knew Ginny would understand but Rachel just didn't like to disappoint anyone, especially Ginny.

She had known Ginny Faulkner all her life. Ginny and her husband Leroy, the chief of police, had been good friends with her parents. So she'd spent many happy hours at Ginny's home and looked forward to today, even if she was overtired.

She then thought about how things had changed when Leroy died and then several years later, Rachel's mom had divorced her dad and moved back east. Rachel's dad had changed so much.

Enough of those thoughts, she had four new friends, thanks to Ginny. It was common knowledge around Rockland that Ginny was like a mother or grandmother to the entire Rockland Police Department. Some even said that Ginny had picked Harry Callaway to replace her husband as chief after he died. And, knowing Ginny as well as she did, Rachel didn't doubt any of it for a second.

As soon as Carmen opened the door, she pulled Rachel into a tight hug. Carmen was another one of her favorite people and who was almost like a mother to her. Carmen had been with Ginny for as long as Rachel

could remember. In fact, she had moved in with Ginny after Carmen's husband had died a little over a year after Leroy had.

When Rachel entered the library, Ginny saw her immediately, as if she'd been watching for her, then she cried out, "Oh Rachel, I am so pleased that you could make it today. I was not so sure when you had to work over this morning. Thank you for coming anyway."

Rachel shook her head. No one really seemed to know how Ginny knew so much but she always did. She'd even told Donna once recently that if Ginny wanted to, she could probably even tell you what you had for breakfast that morning. The dear sweet lady was just simply awesome.

"I am sure Rachel, that you will, of course, want to join your friends over there."

She motioned to a corner of the room where Donna and her fiancé, Bob, were talking with the other three rookies, Sandy, Jake and Tyler.

She thanked Ginny and headed that way. She almost laughed when Carmen intercepted her on the way, placing a glass of iced tea in her hand. She smiled her thanks to Carmen who grinned back at her and was gone again.

"Rachel! Hi! I heard you had to work over, so you're really pushing it by coming here today. Shouldn't you be sleeping? You still have to go in at six this evening, don't you?"

Rachel smiled at the rapid-fire questions from Donna. That was one thing she liked about her. She didn't need to ask how Donna knew she'd worked over. Ginny! She looked at her new friend. Donna was from Flagstaff and had moved down to Rockland to be on the police force.

Rachel was a year older than Donna who was five four just like Rachel. In fact, they were very similar in appearance except that Donna's brown hair was much lighter and longer than Rachel's which just reached her shoulders. They'd become instant best friends as soon as Donna had moved into the apartment across the hall from Rachel's.

"Oh, Donna, I'll be okay. I'll still be able to get two or three hours sleep before I go back in."

Donna grimaced. "Don't you think they're taking advantage of you down there?"

Rachel grinned back at her. "Sure they are, but the overtime is going a long way toward making the down payment on a house."

Bob spoke up then. "Are you looking for a house or maybe a townhouse like mine?"

"I'm not sure yet. Right now, I'm just saving up the money. I'll worry about making that decision when I do have enough for a down payment."

Rachel had grown up with Bob Coleman who was two years older and best friends with Rachel's older brother Ken. Bob was quite a contrast to Donna, in almost all ways. He was very tall. In fact, he was exactly a foot taller than both Donna and Rachel.

Bob had wavy black hair and a beautiful black mustache. Rachel had always looked up to him even more than she had her own brother who could be a nuisance at times. She'd often thought that with Bob's looks, he could have been a movie star.

The biggest problem Rachel and Bob always had was that Bob's dad, the mayor, and Rachel's dad, the judge, had been trying since she and Bob had been teenagers to get them together with the idea in mind that they would eventually get married.

Boy, was she ever glad that Donna had come along and taken care of that little problem for her. It wasn't that she didn't love Bob, but like a brother, not any other way.

She heard voices raised nearby and looked over to see Sandy and Jake going at it again. She laughed. When were those two ever going to realize that instead of fighting all the time, they should be getting together? She could tell that they were attracted to each other but both were desperately fighting that attraction.

She thought they would make a nice couple. Jake was a little over six feet with dark brown hair and eyes while Sandy was five ten with short pixie-cut blond hair. They really did look good together.

Then someone else stepped out from behind Sandy and Jake. Tyler Randall. She couldn't say why, but she just wasn't comfortable around Tyler and it certainly wasn't because he was a cop. All four of them were cops and even Bob was a county attorney. No, Tyler was from Las Vegas and he made it very clear to all that he was just waiting until he could leave Rockland and get on with the police department up there.

Therefore, Rachel didn't want to get too close to him since he was planning to leave as soon as he could.

He stepped up until he was directly in front of her. She couldn't very well ignore him now. She took a moment to look at him. Tyler was a little shorter than Jake which still made him about eight inches taller than Rachel, so she had to look up at him too. She always noticed his hair first. It was interesting in that the sides were brown and the top was a dark red. She figured he must have been kidded about it a lot when he was a boy.

"You're looking good today Rachel."

She was always suspicious of any guy who told her she looked good when she knew perfectly well that she did not. How could she? She hadn't slept for almost twenty-four hours.

"Thank you Tyler."

Well, what else could she say? She was glad when Donna came to her rescue by starting a new topic of conversation. Then soon after that, Ginny called them all into the dining room where Carmen had set up a buffet for them all to fill their plates and then they stood around and visited while they ate.

Rachel was able, with some help from Donna, to avoid being alone with Tyler again before she just had to go home and try to get a few hours of sleep.

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When Tyler left the party, he only had about an hour to get ready for his next shift. He was going to have a hard time getting used to his new schedule. Since he had graduated from the academy four weeks ago, he'd been on a shift that started at ten at night and went until eight in the morning.

Now that he was switching to a new Field Training Officer for the next three weeks, he was working the second shift which went from four in the afternoon until two in the morning. His whole sleeping pattern had been messed up.

He sure would be glad when he finished his FTO which consisted of three different FTOs for three weeks each and a tenth week with a sergeant. After that, he'd be out there on his own with only another six months until he finished his one year of probation. Then, hopefully, he would finally be able to get on with Metro PD. He couldn't wait. He missed his buddies back home, one of whom was on the force.

As soon as he walked into the squad room that afternoon, he noticed a large group of officers gathered together in the center of the room. What was going on now?

As he approached, he noticed that they were all standing around Tom Duncan. Tom had been wounded last week when they'd all had to storm a house where a hostage situation had been taking place.

Tom had been Donna's FTO and she had shot the guy who shot Tom. Wow! Tyler was still having a hard time imagining that little woman shooting someone that way.

He hadn't seen it happen since he'd been one of the ones coming in from the front of the house while Donna and some others had come in from the back.

To hear Tom talking now, Donna was some kind of hero. Regardless, she had just come back on regular duty after being on Admin. Leave for the shooting investigation. She had his old FTO now on the third shift.

Duncan looked pretty good. He'd been shot in the neck and was supposedly healing faster than expected. There was only a small bandage visible on his neck. Tyler heard him say that he would be back on patrol in another week or two at the most.

The group broke up when Tom left and Tyler followed them as they headed toward the briefing room.

At the beginning of each shift, the sergeant from the earlier shift would brief them on what all had happened on his shift then their sergeant would talk some before they hit the streets.

The sergeant for this shift was Gary Yates who was reported to be very strict and did everything exactly by the book. Tyler was going to have to get used to that too, since his last sergeant had been rather laid back.

As soon as the briefing was over, Sergeant Yates called out, "Randall, stay behind for a minute will you?"

Tyler waited while everyone else left the room. One of the female officers stayed too. Without looking at the woman, Yates looked up at Tyler and said, "Randall, you're going to need to switch FTOs. Baker went over to the White Team."

Tyler knew then who his new FTO was going to be. He took a good look at the other officer. She was about five eight and had a boyish kind of figure. He thought she must be close to thirty. Most of all, she was glaring at him as if she was mad at him. Why? What had he ever done to her? He didn't even know her name.

"Okay, Randall, this is Officer Kincaid, your new FTO. You two can get to know each other out there on patrol, so get going."

With that Yates left the room and Kincaid followed him. So, Tyler followed her ... all the way out through the squad room and into the compound where all the police vehicles were parked.

She tossed him a set of keys as she went around to the passenger side of a Crown Vic. "I assume you know this car well enough by now that I won't have to show you anything about it. Is that right?"

Well, Tyler was beginning to think that the next three weeks were going to be long for sure.

"I'm good."

She nodded and they both got in the car. He knew not to say anything until they'd cleared the compound. He'd learned that from his last FTO. The guy had been totally different once they were out on the streets. Maybe this one would be that way too. He could only hope so or it would definitely be a long three weeks.

Tyler had been partially correct in assuming Kincaid would start talking once they left the compound, but he sure hadn't expected what she did say.

They were several blocks away from the station when she started. "Okay, Randall, let's get a few things straight before we go very far. Okay?"

He waited, thinking that she probably didn't expect him to say anything yet anyway.

"First, I gotta ask you a question." He sneaked a peek her way and saw that she was glaring at him again. "What do you think of female cops?"

She continued to glare at him as if measuring his response. He laughed and quickly realized that wasn't a good thing to do. Her glare intensified.

"Okay, that's a fair enough question. I went through the academy with Donna Parker and Sandy Wells and I think that they're both going to make good cops."

He paused but she just glared silently.

"It looks like Donna has already proven herself to be a good cop. Tom Duncan sure sings her praises."

She still didn't say anything, so he tried for more. "To me, anyone who can go through the same training that I did deserves to be a cop just as much as I do."

"What do you think about the fact that right now, a female cop has control over your career, your future?"

That one sure stumped him. He hadn't really thought about it that way, but she was right. She did have a great deal of control over whether or not he made it through his field training. Oh man! That was a scary thought. This sure was going to be a long three weeks.

"I'm good with that. I assume you know your stuff or they wouldn't have made you a training officer."

She didn't talk for a while then she turned to him and said, "Back into that alley on the right and we'll see if you can do some traffic stops. The intersections on both ends of this block are really bad about people running the stop signs. You should be able to get some of those, if nothing else."

He did as he was told and he did indeed pull over two cars for running the stop sign.

After he finished writing the second citation, she said, "Enough of that for a while. Let's go get something to eat. Head for that diner across from the courthouse."