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tarnished image. The elaborate Abscam-style sting wasn't justified by the number of potential arrests, but it showed the FBI protecting the general public from a few rotten apples in a government agency—a government agency that was not the FBI.

The Chambers show had nailed rogue inspectors working near Salisbury, North Carolina; Springfield, Virginia; and Laurel, Maryland. But the FBI operation hit a snag when it moved north. Two weeks ago in New Jersey, Darcy had given the Bureau team a hard look, handed back the vehicle manifest, and waved them through the checkpoint without a physical inspection. The team had gotten the same treatment from two other inspectors. Sitting in the rest areas, Chambers had noted which trucks did get inspected. And he realized that all were driven by an unaccompanied trucker.

Chambers decided the crooked inspectors working in the rougher areas near New York City were more cautious than their southern counterparts. They didn't want to be outnumbered and they didn't want any credible witnesses to their extortion.

Which posed a problem for Chambers. Given that the extortion took place out-of-doors at a spot chosen by the inspector, filming was problematic. Nothing guaranteed they'd get usable video. Chambers insisted that in order to have an airtight court case, a law enforcement professional had to be physically present to see and hear cash being demanded. Chambers wouldn't run the op without an agent in the truck. But he needed one who'd appear harmless.

His solution was a female agent, one with good experience working under unusual cover. Dawna was the obvious choice, though Chambers didn't explain until later how he proposed to make a six-foot three-inch former college basketball player so non-threatening that Andrew Darcy would run his number in front of her.

Personally, Dawna thought the hair, eye makeup, and skimpy tank top were far from threat-free, but she'd confirmed over morning coffee that her new look was a passport to immediate acceptance in the "professional drivers only" section of the truck stop restaurant. The waitress called her "hon," the trucker who borrowed the ketchup called her "ma'am," and nobody told her to go sit with the civilians.

Joe drove slowly across the portable scales, stopping when he drew even with the uniformed New Jersey state trooper standing beside the roadway. The nameplate on his pocket read "C. S. Whitlock."

The glop in the tanker rolled back and forth like bathwater disturbed in the tub, sending tremors through the fifth wheel into the cab. The poodle yapped, high pitched, reminding Dawna that the

dog—cloyingly named Precious—was part of her cover. She sighed and lifted the animal into her lap. All black curly hair and warm doggy-smelling skin, Precious snuggled happily against Dawna's stomach, inexplicably drawn to the human who liked her least.

Trooper Whitlock ignored both Dawna and the dog. He wore aviator sunglasses and his face was shaded by his broad-brimmed Smokey Bear hat, but not enough to hide the last traces of adolescent acne. In his early twenties, Dawna guessed.

And bored, his voice told her. "Chauffeur's license, log book, and vehicle manifest," he recited. Joe handed over the paperwork. The trooper turned and walked ten feet to a state police van doing duty as a mobile office and passed the documents to a cluster of men inside.

One of whom had to be Darcy, picking his next victim.

Dawna bent lovingly over Precious, trying to look inconspicuous or at least poodle obsessed and not too observant.

Trooper Whitlock moved to the digital readout for the portable scale and conferred for a few seconds with the officer manning it. He stopped back at the mobile office before returning to the truck.

"You called this one pretty close," Whitlock said to Joe. "Better have enough fuel in your tanks to get to where you're going, you'll gross out if you pump in any more."

"Don't I know it," Joe said. "Been running near empty, to stay legal. If that ain't a pain, stopping for fuel ever' two hour."

Whitlock grunted and handed over the license and log book. Dawna knew the log recorded all the stops Joe had made en route from North Carolina and showed his fuel purchases. The log confirmed Joe's strategy for keeping the vehicle's gross weight below legal limits, but the cop was warning Joe that the New Jersey State Police would not relax their vigilance during the last leg of his journey.

Whitlock pointed to a twenty-foot-long, white-painted vehicle parked in the lot behind the state police van. "Pull around and park. Department of Transportation has your vehicle manifest. Inspector may have some questions for you." Making it clear that Whitlock and the state police would back up USDOT if the inspector didn't like Joe's answers.

Dawna felt a surge of adrenaline. Andrew Darcy was nibbling at the bait.

He'd find Joe hard to resist. He not only looked like he had money, he also looked foreign. The way Dawna figured it, with Joe in the driver's seat, the prevailing "potential terrorist" prejudices