



The Girl
IN THE
Silk GREEN DRESS

THE COMPLETE SERIES TO DATE FROM EACH EDITION.

THE GIRL IN THE

Silk Green Dress

Moonlight shimmered across the damp bitumen as I tread quietly down a deserted alleyway. The walls were littered with tattered posters that flapped pitifully at every hint of a breeze, and I kept my body close to them as I moved, avoiding murky puddles and ensuring each foot placement was as silent as the night.

It was certainly not easy to achieve in the stilettos I'd chosen; a pair of six-inch black pumps that were made to make heads turn. Well, that, and to ensure the woman who wore them was pained at every step she took. Oh, how I longed for my sneakers. But, alas, they would not have paired well with the sleek silk dress. There were few items in my wardrobe that varied from sweaters, track pants, and what one would consider lounge-wear, but I'd purchased this little number especially for tonight. I'd made an exception for the greater good.

I used a hand to smooth out the silky green fabric and sighed, causing a wispy cloud to emerge from my lips. It was colder than it felt tonight, but then, the cold rarely bothered me these days. It was hard to feel chilly when your body was in a constant state of hot flush. A woman at the age of 24 wasn't supposed to experience hot flushes, but then, *I was no ordinary woman.*

The crunch of a nearby footstep halted my movement. A crisp leaf or a sheet of paper, flattened against the pavement under a heavy boot. He was earlier than expected tonight. I couldn't see him, but I knew he was lurking around the corner at the end of the alley, waiting patiently for an unsuspecting pedestrian to cross his path.

I took a small breath, then lifted my chin in determination and moved forward, this time allowing my heels to announce their presence. They clicked firmly and purposefully against the hard ground, the sound bouncing off the walls and travelling down to the end of the lane where he concealed himself.

His cologne hit my nose before I rounded the corner. It was floral and applied too heavily; the kind of scent that left a bad taste in the back of your throat. He was leaning casually against the wall when I approached, talking animatedly into the phone against his ear.

When I came into his vision, he feigned surprise and then smiled lightly, the motion accentuating each crease on his weathered face.

"You all right, love?" It was a friendly tone; almost fatherly.

"Fine, thanks." I gave a nervous smile and pulled my handbag tighter underneath my arm. His eyes remained on me as I moved. The click of my heels hastened as I continued past him. And then, all too quickly, his hand jolted out towards me.

But I was ready.

The one distinct advantage of being a woman is that society expects you to be weak. A woman like me, barely 5 feet tall and significantly underweight, has even more in her favour. So, the last thing Mister Too Much Cologne expected was for me to use his grip on my forearm to pull him closer towards me and thrust the base of my palm firmly against his nose.



I felt the crunch as much as I heard it, and his pained cry told me the bone was well and truly broken. Before he could even think about retaliating I kicked his legs out from under him, causing him to land heavily on his tailbone.

Another cry told me he'd be down for a while, but just to be sure, I pulled a set of heavy-duty handcuffs from my bag, rolled him onto his stomach and secured his hands tightly behind his back.

His phone lay cracked on the ground beside him. Collecting it, I dialed in three numbers before pressing it to my ear.

"000, please state your emergency."

"I'd like to report a citizen's arrest," I glanced down at the groaning man on the ground. "A perpetrator of several assaults and robberies over the past few weeks. He's restrained and at the corner of George and William Streets."

I ended the call and dropped the phone to the ground.

"Who... are you?" The man wheezed, his face still stuck to the pavement.

I turned to make my way back to my car, pausing I replied, "Just a girl in a silk green dress."

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I didn't feel the exhaustion until I walked through the front door of my house. It was like a switch had been turned off and every limb just suddenly wanted to stop working. I managed to drag myself to the couch where I'd left my oxygen and looped the cannula tubing around my ear lobes and into my nostrils. I took in a long, deep breath, and then fell back into the couch, my body no longer wishing to be upright.

"Come on, lungs, don't let me down." I whispered, wrapping a throw rug around my body for added comfort. I didn't know how long I lay there, just focusing on steadying my breathing, but when I heard the front door unlock and my eyes fluttered open, warm sunlight was peeking through the slats of the blinds.

"Tell me you didn't sleep on the couch all night?" My housemate Kayla frowned down at me, her blonde ponytail loose and her blue uniform tarnished with dirt.

"Big night?" I asked.

She rolled her eyes. "Suspect did a runner through a muddy field. Idiot didn't stand a chance of escaping, but it didn't stop him from making three of us ruin our uniforms just to get to him."

I laughed and sat up slightly against the arm rest of the couch. "Anything else exciting happen during your shift?"

Kayla opened the fridge, analyzing the contents for a few minutes before pulling out a small tub of yoghurt.

"Yes, actually," she pulled a spoon from the kitchen drawer and dipped it into the tub. "That guy who's been attacking civilians in the CBD and stealing their wallets." She shoved a spoonful of yoghurt in her mouth.

"What about him?" I asked casually.

She swallowed and collected another scoop. "Someone took him down, made a citizen's arrest."

"Really?" I feigned surprise.

"Yeah, crazy, right! We've been tracking this guy for weeks, and some random ends up catching him."

"Crazy," I nodded, adjusting my oxygen tubing to hide the smile hinting at my lips.

Kayla lifted the cushion at my feet, peering under it. "You haven't seen a set of handcuffs lying about, have you?"

I shook my head innocently.

"Damn. It's the third set I've lost this month; the sergeant is going to kill me."

The girl in the silk green dress will return....

THE GIRL IN THE Silk Green Dress



Early mornings didn't agree with me. Even when I'd been healthy, I'd despised having to drag myself from the comfort of my bed, but now each day was a constant battle with my muscles which fought to stay immobile. Most days I wanted to give in and just let myself sleep the day away, but I knew the longer I stayed down, the harder it would be to get up. And for me, the only thing worse than living with a chronic health condition was not living at all.

Kayla's eyebrows raised as I trudged into the kitchen and flicked the kettle on. "You're up early."

I shrugged. "Big day today."

Her eyes narrowed as she shovelled a spoonful of Weetbix into her mouth. "Your walk test isn't until tomorrow."

I groaned internally at the thought of that. Since my diagnosis, I'd been required to complete regular **six-minute walk** tests to monitor my breathing and determine if my condition had progressed. After the week I'd had, I dreaded seeing the results of this one.



"I know it's tomorrow. I have something else in mind for today." I glanced at the blue shirt hanging on the back of one of our dining chairs. Usually anything that sat on the back of one of those chairs for longer than 24 hours was plucked up by Kayla and stuffed into the washing machine or folded into a drawer somewhere, but she hadn't dared touch this one.

Her eyes followed mine and her face dropped. "Do you really think that's a good idea?"

No. But what other option was there?

"I was two weeks away from graduating, Kayla. *Two. Weeks.*" Not to mention I was one of the top cadets of the year. I was well on my way towards a highly successful career in law enforcement before those assholes dismissed me because I got a little breathless during one of the final physicals.

"They can't recruit someone with a disability, babe." She gave me a sad smile. The kind of smile she *knew* I hated, because it held too much pity, and I'd be damned if I let anyone pity me. "It sucks, I know. But you can't pass the physical."

"I seem to recall beating your ass in the physical multiple times!" I filled my coffee cup a little too furiously, and hissed as I splashed my hand with boiling water.

"We can go again now, if you'd like?"

"Anytime." I sent her a fierce glare as I cooled my hand under the tap.

She chuckled. "Save your energy for the test tomorrow."

I'd need it, too. The last one was a real eye opener. It was an odd notion, from one day being able to effortlessly run laps of an oval to the next day being unable to climb a set of stairs without a breathing break.

"Will you give me a lift in?" I asked her nicely. As a new recruit, it didn't exactly reflect well on her reputation to be sneaking me into the academy.

"Sure," she sighed. "Just no complaints about my driving."

If I'd been driving, we could have left home twenty minutes later, but Kayla liked to drive ten kilometres below the limit and brake at every hint of an orange light. How she became interested in joining the force was beyond me; it certainly wasn't because she worshipped the car chases in *Lethal Weapon* like the rest of us.

Several heads turned to stare at me as we entered the building; **no uniform was capable of hiding the oxygen tank and nasal tubing**. If I'd been having a better day, I would have left both at home, but unfortunately my crime-stopping antics several nights before had taken its toll on my body. I'd need at least a few more days' recovery before I could leave this bad boy at home.



Kayla scanned her ID at the door, allowing us both access, before leaving me to face my battle.

"Good luck." Her raised eyebrows gave me little confidence.



Sergeant Williams was elbow deep in paperwork when I tapped on his office door. He had a muscular build despite his age, and buzzed-short greying hair that made him look more military than police force. I'd found him utterly terrifying during my orientation, before realising his steely looks were all just a cover. Right then, his frown didn't look like it could get any deeper, and I was hardly surprised. Paperwork was the bane of any officer's existence. We tended to enter the force for either the adrenaline rush or the excitement of solving a case; certainly not for the incident reports and filing duties.



He looked me up and down, raising an unimpressed eyebrow. "I'm going to have to revoke Miss Stone's ID card, aren't I?"

I shrugged. "You can, but you know I'll just find another way into the building."

He sighed deeply and pushed the papers in front of him to one side. "You have five minutes, and then I'm leaving for a meeting."

It didn't give me a lot of time to work with, but I was hardly going to say no. The man hadn't taken my calls or responded to any of my emails in the past three months, so I needed every second he would give me. I took a seat across from him and looked him straight in the eye.

"I'm the best recruit you have."

"You're the best recruit we *had*. You're no longer part of the academy."

I grit my teeth. "It's discrimination to dismiss me based on a disability."

"It's against Academy policy to accept recruits who have long-term health conditions that may affect their performance as an officer."

"My condition is not -"

"The medical staff have deemed your condition permanent."

I could feel the anger bubbling inside me, but fought to keep it at bay. Yelling would not fix this. "It's *not* permanent, it's -"

"Is there a cure?"

"No, but -"

"Has it negatively affected your fitness capabilities?"

"Well, yes, but I'm capable of -"

"We can't recruit someone with a compromising health condition."

My fist hit the desk before I even realised it was moving. "Just because my lungs are faulty, doesn't mean I'm bloody broken!" Well, there went my well-crafted plan of keeping calm. I took a deep, shuddering breath and looked at the Sergeant.

He didn't look shocked or angry by my outburst. It was as if he'd been expecting it.

"I'm still me. *Please*. Take me off the field work if you have to, but let me help with the case work. You know I have the brains for it."

"You're the smartest recruit we had," he gave me a small smile. "And I'm positive you have a bright future ahead of you. But it's not here. I'm sorry."

I left the Sergeant's office feeling more deflated than angry. I'd wanted to join the force since I was nine and I'd worked tirelessly to get myself there. I might have been capable of pursuing a different career, but I didn't *want* to do anything else. I was made for this.

Overhearing a case discussion down the hall, I unhooked my oxygen and moved silently into the back of the room. At least fifteen officers were scattered about the room, watching a briefing presentation on what seemed to be a major drug deal. It had to be a serious one to have this many officers involved. I spotted Kayla's blonde ponytail in the front, her head nodding eagerly as she took in the information.



Keeping quiet near the door, I absorbed as much of the case details as I could; learning more about the lead suspects, activity locations, and plan of action. Then, as the presentation came to a close, I collected a brief summary pack from the desk beside me and slipped back outside before anyone could spot me.

I was going to prove to Sergeant Williams that I wasn't *compromised*, and this case was going to help me do it.....

The Girl in the
Silk Green Dress
will return.....





People often assumed I became sick because of a bad habit like smoking or eating too much junk food; they failed to realise that you can do everything right and still wake up one day with a chronic disease. I personally blamed advertising; the quit smoking campaigns that make everyone think that the only way you get lung cancer is by smoking ten packs a day. On top of everything else, the last thing chronically ill people need is the pointed fingers of the public saying they only have themselves to blame.

The shopping attendant was an older lady sporting white-grey roots with dyed ends, and she eyed my oxygen with sympathy. "Oh, you poor dear," she cooed as she weighed and scanned a bag of oranges. "Such a young thing, too."

IT'S NOT LIKE I'M DEAD". I MUTTERED UNDER MY BREATH....

It took me a full week to read and assess the case documents I'd swiped from the meeting, which was convenient given that's also how long it took to regain my energy levels after my last vigilante act. My walk test had been an utterly abysmal effort. An elderly woman on her deathbed could have walked farther and faster than I had that day. I'd had to feign an excuse around overdoing the housework that week so that my doctor didn't presume my disease had progressed three stages. Instead, she'd given me a firm lecture about overexertion, and reminded me of the severity of my illness. One on oxygen hardly needs a reminder of how severe their illness is, but I hadn't told her that. Instead, I'd agreed to rest for the next fortnight and then retake my walk test to ensure a more accurate result.

Now that most of my energy had been restored, however, I was hardly going to sit around the house for another week.

I pushed my overfilled shopping trolley toward the checkout aisle and started placing an array of fruit and vegetables onto the conveyor belt. I'd been a ridiculously healthy eater before my diagnosis - you don't tend to make it into the police force without a healthy lifestyle - and since becoming unwell I'd continued to uphold my clean diet.

"It's not like I'm dead." I muttered under my breath, but gave her a meek smile anyway. With any luck, she'd give me a pity discount. I was still waiting on my disability pension to be approved, and my savings weren't going to get me through for much longer, especially with the ongoing medical bills which were fast accumulating. I watched as the price total increased on the checkout screen at every swipe of the attendant's hand and sighed. I needed to get back on the police force soon, or I'd have no choice but to find other means of making an income.

On the drive home, I contemplated the case brief pack I'd studied during the week. It was certainly no ordinary drug case, and I could see why the force had so many officers involved.





It was an elaborate operation with multiple players; one that would likely take months, if not years, to infiltrate. Sergeant Williams had small teams placed on each major player in the operation, investigating every relationship, every motive, and every activity. Organised crime was a complex jigsaw puzzle, and it was the force's job to put the pieces together. The only person Williams hadn't covered, for obvious reasons, was the suspected lead, Connor Merrick. It was a bottom-up approach – take out the legs so the body will fall; practical, but time-consuming, and time was not on my side.

Kayla's arms were firmly crossed as I stumbled through the front door, struggling to keep a hold on the heavy shopping bags in my arms. Hurrying over, she snatched several bags from me and gave me a stern look.

"That doesn't look like bedrest to me."

I scowled. "She said rest, not bedrest. If I have to lie in bed for one more day, I'll go mad." I dropped the remaining bags firmly onto the kitchen bench and began unpacking the fridge and freezer items.

"Oh, for crying out loud, will you go sit down!"

I threw my hands in the air and obeyed, partly because there was no point arguing with Kayla, but mostly because I was actually exhausted. I fell into the couch, and watched as she placed each item strategically into the fridge; dairy on the top shelf, meat on the bottom, greens in the drawers. I started to wonder if she'd sent me to the couch because she was concerned about my health, or if she just didn't want me messing up the layout of her fridge.

"I thought you were working today," I said idly.

Kayla glanced at the clock. "I start in an hour. It's likely going to be a long one, too."

I didn't need to ask why, my weeks' worth of reading was evidence enough of the time required for that case. I just needed to find a way in; a way I could contribute that would show I was worthy to be on the force, illness or not. If the case pack had taught me one thing, it was that I wasn't going to be able to take part in solving this crime without regular intel on the force's activity. As an ex-recruit there would be severe consequences if I was caught interfering with police business and there was only one way I could monitor the progress of the case, as much as I hated to do it...

I put on my best nonchalant voice and asked, "Any exciting new cases?"

Kayla nodded, as she continued packing away the groceries. "There's a good drug bust in the works, actually. They reckon it's at least a 12-month stint."

I grinned. "Ooh, tell me more!"

Kayla frowned. "You know I can't share the details of cases. It's a confidentiality breach."

I rolled my eyes dramatically. "Oh, come on, Miss goody two shoes, who am I going to tell anyway?"

She closed the fridge and sighed heavily. "I suppose you're right." She planted herself next to me on the couch. "You remember that house we raided at the start of the year?"



I nodded. They'd seized kilos of illicit drugs from that place and arrested two kids, barely of legal age. It had been plastered on the cover of every state-wide newspaper, particularly because the raid had been in one of the city's more prestigious suburbs amongst family homes and esteemed primary schools.

"We thought they'd been working alone, but we've discovered they're just two small fish in a very big ocean. It's opened the doors to an entire network of dealers across the city."

I saw her eyes light up. Not even orderly, sensible Kayla could hide her excitement for a case like this. It had the potential to be the case of the year, perhaps even the decade. It was the kind of case every new recruit would dream of being a part of. Even I felt a pang of jealousy, until I silently reminded myself that I, too, would be a part of this. I just had to find where I was best placed and make it happen.

"You're on the case?" I asked casually.

She nodded. "I've been chosen to assist on one of the investigative teams; I was the only first-year invited." She had the nerve to sound surprised, even slightly embarrassed.

"Every first-year there knows you belong on that team, Kayla."

She smiled and gave me a look that said she knew I belonged on that team, too.

"Have you started to think about other career paths?"

It was a question she'd breached with me before and I hadn't been ready to discuss it. I still wasn't ready now, but I needed to give her an answer; she was my best friend and she cared about my stability.

I shrugged. "My strength was fitness and durability. I don't really know where else I belong." For as long as I could remember, my skills had been physical. I'd aced every fitness test, excelled at one-to-one combat. It had made perfect sense to join the police force.

"You really don't see it, do you?" Kayla's brow furrowed. "I mean, sure, your fitness is what took you to the next level as a recruit, but that's not where your strength lies."

"What do you mean?"

"Your strength is people. You've always been able to read people, to know how they're going to act, how to influence them. That's what really made you the best. That's your power. You can do anything with that."

MY POWER WAS PEOPLE?

My power was people? I considered her words carefully before it dawned on me that she was right. I'd never been book smart, but I almost always knew how to assess a situation, a person's motives, and best navigate my way around it. Suddenly, I realised that I didn't need to be the strongest, the fittest, or even the fastest to work on this case. All I needed was to step into that power. And I was going to start at the top.

With Connor Merrick.





"I look ridiculous."

"It's not that bad..."

"Ri-di-cu-lous." I glared at Martin through the mirror as I enunciated each syllable of the word.

The blonde wig against my pale, blotchy skin made me look washed out and only accentuated the angry red patches on my neck and chest.

In the process of creating a disguise for my work on the Merrick case, I'd hoped I'd also have an opportunity for a drastic makeover. A chance to create a new me. The new, non-chronically ill, badass vigilante, me. But alas, it would take a miracle to make me look like a healthy human being, let alone a badass one.

My doctor had prescribed me with new meds a few weeks ago which, aside from bringing my blood pressure down in my lungs, also happened to cause an unpleasant rash to break out on my entire upper body. Now, people were not only staring at me because of my oxygen, but they were also keeping their distance in case I was contagious.

Perfect.

Every med I took had a shitty side effect; bloating, acne, mood swings, brain fog... the list just went on and on. I was still waiting on a prescription pack that read: "May cause enhanced beauty, hydrated skin, and increased intelligence." Like, as if the chronic condition community didn't struggle enough, we also had to inherit a collection of other symptoms in order to stay alive.

Martin sighed. "Well, if you'd give me more information about what you need a disguise for, I might be able to find you something more suitable."

That was not an option.

Martin was new to the force, just like I would have been if my lungs hadn't decided to stop working at full capacity. I'd helped him get through the physical when he was on the verge of failing. He was a serious tech whiz who was destined to join the cyber security team, but still had to pass a basic physical to get in and, sadly, the man could barely climb a set of stairs without losing his breath. And he had two fully operational lungs.

I'd dedicated my mornings back then to help him train and improve his track time, and when he'd finally passed his exam, he'd sworn he would repay the favour some day, but I'd never planned on cashing it in until now.

"It doesn't matter anyway," I snapped. "Nothing is going to be able to hide all of this." I gestured over the entirety of my body.

He frowned. "All of what?"

My eyes narrowed. "Oh, please, don't pretend like you don't know what I mean. Every male recruit used to swoon over my body when I was healthy, now the opposite sex only looks my way to try to figure out what's wrong with me."

"I was a male recruit back then and I can tell you I never swooned over your body."

"Yeah, well, that was because you knew I was out of your league," I jested.

"He let out a loud belly laugh. "That!" he grinned, "That right there is what got you so much male attention."

"What?"

"There are plenty of attractive women in the academy. It was never about your looks."

I blinked at him in confusion.

"It was your confidence and your sarcasm, and that I-don't-give-a-shit personality." His eyes traced over my oxygen tank, the patches of red skin on my upper arms, and the tubes at my nose. "All of this," he mimicked my earlier gesture, "is irrelevant. You're still one of a kind. A total badass."

I didn't even feel my feet move, but I was suddenly embracing Martin, my face smushed against his chest in what had to be the most affection I'd ever shown the man. But, damn, I'd needed to hear that.

Finding my composure, I pulled away, ripped the mess of false hair from my head and tossed it aside, straightening my own brown locks back into place.

"Screw the disguise," I turned to face Martin. "I need a favour."

His eyes widened slightly in surprise. Yeah, I wasn't the kind of person to ask for help. Ever.

"I need you to remove my history from the database."

"What?" He looked at me like I was crazy.

"Or temporarily hide it, at least."

"You can't be serious?"

Hell, maybe I was crazy. "I need anything that associates me with the force erased."

"Why would you want to delete that?"

My teeth found my bottom lip. "I can't say."

"You're going to risk me losing my job and you won't even tell me why?" He looked more disappointed than angry, and part of me wanted to tell him the truth, to let him work with me on this case. But the reality was that there was more risk involved for him than there was for me. He could claim deleted data as an accident and get away with a warning, but working unauthorised on a case? That could truly lose him his job.

"All I can tell you is that I'm trying to get back on the force."

"You're trying to get on the force... by removing any trace that you were ever interested in the force?"

"Yes."

He shook his head in disbelief. "Anything else?"

Well, now he mentioned it...

"Do you have access to the facial recognition database?"

"I'm going to regret saying this, but yes."

"I need you to change the name linked to my identity."

Martin handed me a freshly printed driver's license and let out a defeated sigh.

"I'm suddenly thinking all those early mornings training were a total waste of time, because I am definitely getting kicked off the force as a result of this."

I held the license up and examined the photo, slightly surprised by the comfort I felt staring into my own features.

"I sure hope it was worth it, Miss Lydia Samiels."



Taking a deep breath, I rapped my knuckles against the metal door in front of me, avoiding looking directly into the security camera above my head that I knew was zooming in on me. This garage was just one of the main locations where Merrick conducted his business, and the force was well aware of it, but lacked any significant evidence to conduct a raid. Two nights ago, they'd arrested one of Merrick's wheelmen on assault charges - a valuable piece of information Kayla had shared with me over a few glasses of wine - and this was the exact opportunity I'd been waiting for.

The door opened a crack, just enough to reveal the outline of a sturdy, heavily tattooed man, and the large gun in his hand.

"Heard you have an opening for a new driver," I said boldly.

His lips curved as he assessed me. "What, and you want to apply for the job?"

I nodded, keeping my face neutral even though I was internally reassessing my wardrobe choice. A colder-than-normal spring day, I'd donned tights and boots, and a cloaked green coat, but I was suddenly thinking I should have worn something more masculine. It wasn't exactly an industry that took women seriously.

"Who's your reference?"

"My... reference?" *Shit.*

"We only take new workers who are referred by our own contacts, for obvious reasons." He looked me up and down. "If you don't have one..."

My palm slammed against the door he'd started closing in my face. "I'm the best person for the job. Stick me in a driver's seat, and I'll prove it."

The man's eyes narrowed, but a voice sounded from behind him "Let her in, Diego."

The door widened, and I stepped inside, the smell of oil, sweat, and cigarettes immediately invading my nostrils. Thirty seconds inside and I already felt like it was harder to breathe. The absence of my oxygen tank only accentuated my need for a fuller breath of air.

The place appeared like any ordinary garage, with an assortment of cars, motorcycles and spare parts, and a handful of mechanics conducting their work. One of the men strolled towards me, a look of authority in his eyes.

He was young, likely in his late twenties, and attractive in a dangerous kind of way. The type of man any sensible girl would fantasise about, but avoid like the plague if she knew what was good for her. Tattoos snaked his forearms, trailing from his wrists to beneath the sleeves of his buttoned shirt. The pair of expensive looking beige pants he wore told me he was clearly not there to conduct any hands-on work. *Merrick?*

“What’s your name, girl?”

“Lydia.” I contemplated holding a hand out, then reconsidered. It didn’t seem like something someone applying for a job in this industry would do. “Lydia Samiels.”

“You barely look old enough to drive a car.”

“I’m more than old enough.” I countered, lifting my chin to appear taller.

His eyes trailed over me, his features a mix of suspicion and curiosity. He motioned to the blue Subaru WRX closest to me and tossed me a set of keys.

“You get one trial.”

One was all I’d need. I slid into the leather driver’s seat and pressed the key into the ignition, bringing the engine to life. It was definitely a more powerful car than the V8s we drove at the Academy, but not at all unfamiliar to me. My father had been fond of fast cars, and I’d had the pleasure of driving a number of them over the years. I smiled to myself as I felt the seat hum beneath me, and I let my foot gently press against the pedal, revving the engine playfully.

“Make the call,” my potential new boss muttered to the doorman, before sliding into the passenger seat beside me. “Do you know the Duke Hotel?”

I nodded. It was a central upmarket pub, only a few minutes away.

“Good. Take me there.”

I’d expected a more challenging drive to prove my abilities, but I didn’t dare question the man. Instead, I focused on making the ride as swift and smooth as possible. It was an easy midday drive with minimal traffic and barely any intersections. Almost too easy, I thought to myself as I closed the final distance between us and the Duke.

“Pull over here,” he instructed, and I slowed the car outside the entrance of the building.

“Well?” I asked hesitantly.

“If you can make it back to the garage, car in one piece, with no shadows, then the job is yours.”

“Shadows?” I frowned, then heard sirens in the distance.

He opened the passenger door and gave me an unsettling smile. “This is a stolen car, didn’t I tell you?”

My stomach turned. “Um, no, you failed to mention that.”

“The police have been searching for it for a few days now, particularly because it’s linked to a murder case.”

“What?” I glanced at the rear view mirror, seeing flashing red and blue lights fast approaching.

“Your trial starts now, Miss Samiels.”



Your trial starts now, Miss Samiels.

A million panicked thoughts rushed through my head before I realised there was no time to think. No time to even consider the consequences of what I did next. The accelerator hit the floor before I even registered my foot moving, and I sped through an orange traffic light just as it changed to red.

I knew immediately that I had two advantages over my pursuers. One: my car was faster than theirs. And two: they had safety regulations to abide by.

I glanced at the rear view mirror and, just as I'd expected, both police cars slowed, checking that traffic had stopped for them, before powering ahead through the lights.

Safety first. It was drilled into us at the academy from day one. The police force had enough negative press to deal with without the added drama of an avoidable hit-and-run during a high speed pursuit. All I had to do was focus on intersections and avoid killing anyone in the process. **Easy enough, right?**

I dropped two gears and took a sharp right turn onto a main road which I knew hosted a collection of traffic lights. I planted my foot. My tails followed. To my dismay, there was little traffic on the roads at this time of day, which meant I had a clear path and so did they. It was the first time I'd ever cursed a series of green lights.

Each set flashed as I flew through them at double the speed limit, and I felt the shocked eyes of pedestrians watching on from the footpaths.

The sirens blared. **Shit.** I needed to lose these guys before they called in for back up. Or **worse**, the Air Wing. I'd have no chance of outrunning a helicopter. But then, I'd completed the training. I knew they were likely already making the calls. In a matter of minutes there could be police cars blocking every street around me.

I was quickly starting to realise that Merrick and his crew had set me up to fail. There was no way they actually expected me to outrun the police. The bastard hadn't even given me a chance.

My breaths started to come hard and fast. I was going to get caught. My chest heaved. The academy would never take me back. I could end up in prison. **Martin** could end up in prison. I was inhaling too quickly, each breath too short and too quick. **Must. Calm. Down.**

As I changed to third gear and rounded another corner, flashing lights ahead caught my eye. But not the ones I'd been dreading. **A train?** I let out a sigh of relief and thanked the heavens. Someone up there must be rooting for me.

I urged the car forward, ignoring the lights behind me and focusing only on the ones ahead. If I could make it through the crossing in time, I'd be able to lose both police cars and make it back to the garage. The job would be mine.

My left foot hit the clutch and I changed to fourth gear. The train approached the crossing, but I was closer; I was sure.

“Come on, come on!” The engine roared and I changed to fifth. Adrenaline pulsed through me as my brain fought between fight and flight. It was going to be close, but I would make it. *I had to*. The horn of the oncoming train vibrated through me, and my heart was in my stomach as I flew through the barrier and over the railway line, mere moments before the carriage made impact.

I watched in the rear-view mirror, and let out a manic laugh as the long locomotive barrelled through, blocking the path of the police cars. I shook my head in disbelief. I'd actually made it.

It took less than five minutes for me to make it back to the garage, and I spent every second trying to regain a normal breathing pattern. My next 6 minute walk test review was going to be a complete disaster.

As I pulled into the driveway, I was greeted by the very man who'd sent me on this self-destructive mission. Standing in the doorway, his phone to his ear, he glanced up at me, a look of surprise crossing his features.

“**You son of a bitch!**” I hurled the keys at him as I stumbled out of the car on wobbly legs. My heart was still pounding furiously against my chest, and I was struggling to catch my breath again. Despite all of that, I powered forward, storming up to him until there was only a few inches between us. I had to strain my neck to look up at him, but I held my ground.

“I'll call you back,” he spoke into his phone before slipping it into his pocket.

“You set me up.” My voice shook, not with fear or adrenaline, but with undiluted anger. “You knew it would be impossible for me to make it back here.”

His right eyebrow rose. “And yet, here you are.” He glanced at his men who had all wandered outside to see what the commotion was about. “What are you all looking at?” he barked. “Get the car cleaned up.”

One of the younger lads quickly scrambled to collect the car keys from where they'd landed on the gravel floor, and the rest of them busied themselves, some heading back into the garage to continue their work.

He tilted his head to the side, considering me for a moment, before holding out his hand with a twisted smile. “You start Friday night. 8pm sharp.”

I stared at him for a moment. I'd expected some push back, but he was offering me the job. I cleared my throat and took his hand. “Thank you, Mr Merrick.”

He barked out a loud laugh that made me step back.

“You think Merrick interviews his own men?” He squeezed my hand tightly, drawing me back. “**I'm Ryker.**”

Not Merrick? My heart sank. But then, had I really thought it was going to be that easy? I smiled lightly, trying not to let my disappointment show, and he released his grip.

“I'll see you Friday.” I turned to leave.

“Oh, and Lydia?” Ryker's voice stopped me in my tracks. He was lighting a cigarette, his hands cupped around the flame. He inhaled deeply and then exhaled a slow cloud of smoke before his dark eyes met mine.

“Speak to me in front of my men like that again, and the cops will be the least of your concerns.”

*The Girl in the Silk Green
Dress Will Return...*