

“City Trash. Whatcha want?”

“Melanie, this is Sheriff Bud.”

Melanie Griggs weighed about four hundred pounds. Her job title was secretary, but she ran the operation from the front desk.

“Hey, Sheriff. Thanks for calling, but I’m busy tonight.”

Bud smiled and shook his head. She was something else. “Melanie, I need some information. How long has it been since you guys fired Brick?”

“About two months. Why?”

“When did he draw his last paycheck?” Bud asked.

“We paid him cash the day we let him go. Don’t want him coming back.”

“Has anyone seen him since?”

“Not around here. He didn’t exactly make a lot of friends,” Melanie replied.

“Okay. That’s all I need for now.” Bud swiveled back and forth in his chair and waited. Melanie had a ritual.

“Damn it, Bud. You call and get me all aflutter, and then you hang up on me, just like that?”

Bud waited a decent interval. “You should know by now, Melanie. That’s how I am.”

She took a noisy sip of coffee. “Always breaking my heart. Thanks a lot for calling.”

“Hey, you’re the one who’s busy tonight,” Bud said. He was grinning.

This time she made sure the sheriff heard her slurping her coffee. “Yeah, but you never even asked me to call it off.”

Bud chuckled. “Always good to talk to you, Melanie.”

“That does it. Don’t ever call me again. We’re finished.”

“How many times have you said that?”

“Yeah, well this time I mean it. Good-bye.”

She hung up on him. Bud laughed out loud. Melanie Griggs had been breaking up with him since first grade. She was getting pretty good at it.