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MOLL: GIRL FRIEND TO THE MOB

by Eleanor Darby Wright

I. CECILIA LUCIANO

I was almost glad when the phone rang. If I'd had to put up with one more minute of Kate's pouting about the kitchen, I'd likely have gone and found a gun somewhere.

"Ceel," he said. "I need you."

Only my brother can call me Ceel - it's said like 'Seal' - and live to tell a tale.

"Two hundred grand," I said automatically, doubling the amount that I normally asked. Kate shook

her head over the kitchen sink. The soap was two feet high and rising as she bashed the dishes together. But it was her job. She was my 'little woman', for the last ten weeks, anyway. I'd told her, from the start, that I didn't do dishes.

"In this case, it's worth it," Ernie growled down the phone, instantly getting my attention. "Put your butt on a plane and get down here."

So, I got, all the way to the beautiful Caribbean where my brother, Ernesto Luciano - who'd nicknamed himself Lucky, though we were no relation to the great man, the famous mobster - was waiting to meet me. I'm his less than favorite sister, Cecilia, his only sister. That he'd allowed me on the family Learjet told me something big was up. Maybe I should have asked for five hundred thousand, I thought.

The three gorillas with me were sweating like pigs as soon as we crossed the tarmac on St Paul's. I'd known what it was like at the old sugar plantation there and was in shorts and a halter top before we even took off from Kennedy.

"We ain't going upcountry," Ernie said, ignoring my outstretched arms. No brotherly hug or kiss was offered. He indicated the near door of a white limousine while he headed around to the other side. Johnny Steps, sly, dapper, thin as a snake, smiled at me from across the car as he opened the door for my brother to get in. I had to find the handle to open my side, myself.

"You're looking okay," Ernie said, as we moved off the runway, the gorillas in a station wagon behind.

I do keep in shape, not like Ernesto, who's running distinctly to fat, with a big belly like most of the other dons and consigliores I'd known in my years as daughter of a Mob family boss.

"Wish I could say the same for you, Ernie," I told him. His white suit was rumpled, his shirt open, his tie loose about his chest. His eyes were red-rimmed, haggard.

"I ain't slept in three days," Ernie growled at me, squinting his eyes. His mouth made an even thinner line that it normally did. He hates being called 'Ernie'. The boys, I know, call him Don Ernesto to his face but he's Ernie or the Lucky Man behind his back. The dons of the other families get a laugh out of calling him Lucky. Once, he told me I should call him Lucky. I'd spat in his face. He was twenty-five while I was ten.

"So tell me," I said.

He checked that the car windows were up, the partition with the driver and Johnny Steps secure, and the intercom off. I watched, amused, as we headed out the airport gate towards the main town itself, also called St Paul's, like the island.

"Two hundred million bucks," Ernie croaked at me. "A walking dead man got away with two hundred million."

"A walking dead man?" I asked slowly.

"When you catch him," my brother snarled, smashing a drink against the side of the car's interior cabinet.

I got it and knew why I was there. I said I was the daughter of a Mob boss. I was and I am. You can figure that out. My papa, Carmen Luciano, was a real don, not like my fat-assed brother. Papa had taught me everything I'd needed to know about being a trigger man, well, trigger person, in the business. I might even have amounted to something in the 'familia' if Papa hadn't been taken out in the first shots of the year-long war we fought with the Rostanos.

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I made my bones in that war. I made a rep that's been exaggerated often. I didn't kill fifty of the Rostanos, including Don Julio as well as Giuliano, the son, single-handedly. Of course, with those I helped to blow up, I probably did have a hand in over fifty 'terminations'.

I remembered that I'd wanted to kill my brother and had even pulled a gun on him when he told his button men and me that he'd made a deal with the surviving Rostanos. I'd called him every name under the sun in front of Johnny Steps and the other capos. That's when I found out that the family is not an equal opportunity employer. I was disarmed. I felt Johnny's piece in the middle of my back. I was booted out of the high family circles I'd always attended with Papa, and, when Ernie needed me, in the war.

Oh, I got some work right away. Johnny Steps had been there when I made my bones the first time. He threw me a few hits after that. He hadn't seemed to care about my different live-in girl friends, either. But my brother blew his top when he found out that my abnormal interests were known to many others, our guys and those in other mobs. I was 'The Dike', to guys like Johnny, and one of the family's top assets in settling family disputes.

"This walking dead man is on the island?" I asked, leaning over to get myself a vodka and orange.

Ernie didn't move at all to assist me. "He can't have got off," he said, not looking at me. You can always tell when Ernie is lieing. His eyebrows come together in the middle. "We closed down the harbour, the airport and the roads out of town. We were only three or four minutes away from catching him at the bank."

"He couldn't have carried off that amount of money," I said disbelievingly.

"He wired it out, blip, blip, blip, and it's gone. And we can't find it," Ernie said, still distracted, still unable to look at me.

"And whose money was it?" I asked.

Ernie's eyes lost their squint. He turned to me with a sneer on his face, but then remembered who he was talking to. "It was our laundering operation," he said shortly. "Too many eyes are on the Caymans and Bahamas lately."

"And you started this up," I said in wonder, "all on your own." Then it struck me, what it meant to him. "And you'll have to make it good."

Ernie winced and began to sweat even in the air-conditioned cool of the big car. Just how much does this family have in reserve, I wondered. If whoever Ernie was laundering for outside the family got wind of how much he'd lost, they'd call it in, for sure. Ernie would be lucky to live through such an event. Someone in the family, Johnny Steps most likely, would get him, if it hadn't already been assigned to some outsider.

"The money ain't so important," said Ernie, not meeting my eyes again. "Fulton has the records as well, computer disks. I gotta get those back."

"Jeez, Ernie!" I hissed, looking at my brother. "How dumb ...!"

"I know!" he yelled, cutting me off. "Just find him for me, will you? And then I'll cut his effing balls off!"

As you might have expected, the St Paul's police worked hand-in-glove with Ernie's boys. Ernie must have had seventy to a hundred of the family's soldiers on St Paul's, as well, looking for the crazy bastard who'd ripped him off. Jeremy William Fulton was his name. How come they couldn't find him?

It didn't take me long to see where the leak could be. You couldn't stop tourists going on and off the island. You could try to vet all of them. With all the cops and Ernie's men, no-one should have got by them. I only had to watch them in action once, however, to see how they searched every guy on the way out, leaving the women entirely alone.

I doctored a few photos with female hair, dark glasses and so on. We got a bite.

A stewardess on an incoming flight just said, "Oh!", as she looked at the picture or our Jeremy, long, dark hair covering his blonde, wavy locks.

I smiled at her. She was a cute redhead. I wondered how she looked in a bikini and if she'd like to be my little woman for a while. Kate I'd dumped when I left the mainland.

"We think our bank robber might have left, disguised as a woman," I said, watching her beautiful baby blues open wider.

She spoiled the pitch I might have made by turning to talk to Carl, the muscle with me, who was showing her a St Paul's police badge.

"I thought it funny that she wore so much makeup," the stew said with a pretty smile, all for Carl, while my heart rate dropped to normal, or close. Oh well, no accounting for taste. "And she was really a mess. In fact," she smiled, showing Carl pearly teeth, "I supposed that she didn't really care for herself, not, not," she smiled at me, "as your girl friend there," she was smiling, speaking to, and checking out Carl again, "and we flight attendants like to look after ourselves. You know, like real women do. I noticed that. She had hair on the back of her hands! Ugh, it was so gross. And she was so rude. She'd just gesture for what she wanted."

It was enough for me. I caught the next flight for Miami, taking Carl and some of Ernie's men from the airport. I called Ernie from Miami. He wasn't happy with me, as you might guess, but I chilled him when I related what had happened.

"He's out," I told Ernie flatly. "And he'll be hard to find. I need your guys for legwork here. You don't want me calling on Cavallo," the Miami don, "for help, do you?"

"No," Ernie snapped at me.

Just then, Carl came in, waving. We had a line on the sucker to New York, our home ground. The only problem was that we were two days behind him, or 'her'.

In New York, though, we had a lot of friends. I called in a lot of favors and sold a few more. This guy couldn't be using credit, I figured. He'd used cash, out of Miami, which is how we got a line on him so fast. So, we looked for single guys, paying cash, at all kinds of hotels, even though he might not have been staying in a hotel.

Only at the last moment did I realize that I'd fallen into the same trap as the guys monitoring the tourists leaving St Paul's. "Look for single girls as well," I said to Carl, who stared back at me.

I enlarged the photos we'd found at both airports. Yes, 'she' had had to leave the plane as a woman, hadn't she? And she was wearing gloves. 'She' looked very fashionable, really nice legs and cute figure. I wouldn't have kicked her out of bed. \

I'd have like to see a little more of her face. She had a mass of dark hair that covered her well, along with a cute, feminine scarf that concealed her neck. She must have had her ears pierced as well by the golden hoops and dangler that she was wearing. Oh, yes, very cute, I thought, as I added the best photos to the group Carl was sweeping up. Let's see you get away from us now with your two hundred mill, Miss Lovely-Legs, I thought smugly, wanting to meet this pretty bitch, alive, for a while, anyway.

We put his and 'her' pictures everywhere. I got Ernie to agree to fake a robbery, call in the police, and finger Fulton and 'her', his accomplice, his getaway driver. So, we got the regular cops to help us in the search for Miss Lovely-Legs, as well. We put fifty grand on his or 'her' head and then found he hadn't even gone into New York from the airport.

Another stew, yes, I can't get away from using old words, picked him out as a male passenger to Toronto, in Canada, but his name was Smith, wasn't it, she'd said. They'd laughed because it was her name, too. Oh, Miss Congeniality, we couldn't see your pretty legs, could we? Perhaps that's why, like the guys in St Paul's, we missed Miss Pretty Panties at first.

The official story to get the police looking for him and her was that Fulton had ripped off Ernie for a million and fled, official for the mob, that is. He was supposed to have grabbed it and run. Anyone who knows anything about such an operation wouldn't be fooled by such a weak cover story. But it did the trick in enlisting help. I got Ernie to pass the word that anyone who found Fulton, or his mistress - ooo, she was getting prettier, the more I looked at 'her' picture - with the missing million, could keep whatever the idiot still had left.

We got a lot of false leads. I told Ernie I needed more help. He screamed back at me, that the costs my operation was mounting, was like a man running up Everest.



"It'll cost you more if anyone but me gets your snatcher, you fool, you idiot, you imbecile!" I screamed at him. Those are the only things I called him that were fit to be repeated.

It was then I realized that, if I ever did catch up with this joker, I wasn't going to be that generous with Ernie. In fact, I was going to use those tapes of his monetary operations myself. I had some wonderful daydreams about what I'd do to my fat-assed brother when I had leverage on him.

It was tougher in Canada to track Fulton and, of course, with me being a woman. Yes, I was out of the family's natural territory, too, wasn't I? Well, it took a lot of greasing to get me on the inside of the hunt for him and her. But, finally, in the Benedict Lounge, on the fourth tip of the night, after five days and nights of chasing leads, Jeremy Fulton walked right by me, a cute, blonde girl hanging on to his arm.

She was just my type, long, blonde hair and lots of it. You could lose your hands, your body, your breasts in that mane. The body was great, too. Maybe a little too full in the breasts for my taste but I wouldn't have said, "No", to a bite or two, or just a little lick. The face, a little too hard again, experienced, a call girl just about at the end of her high class work, I thought.

Such a woman wouldn't normally put out for me. But some were surprisingly willing and eager. This one might be. Still, I had a job to do. Maybe I could attend to her later; maybe even get her number after she was through with this chump. She was leaning over him on the bar stool, whispering in his ear, cuddling her thigh to his.

Jeremy Fulton looked immensely pleased with himself. He looked around the bar to see who was watching him with the sexiest girl in the room. How proud

he was of himself. His green eyes sparkled in quite a handsome face when he smiled. He caught my eyes and suddenly choked, grasping tightly at the blonde's hand.

Oh, Mr Jeremy Fulton wasn't so handsome when he stared like that, thick eyebrows clenched together. There was no doubt that he recognized me. Anyone familiar with the Luciano family, and this guy must be, to be so close to the finances, must have heard about 'The Dike'. His only hope would be what he'd heard about the feud I had with my brother. Of course, he'd have to believe that it was true, as well.

II. JEREMY WILLIAM FULTON

I was feeling so great right up until I looked past pretty Marie - and there was The Dike looking at me, a smile on her curvaceous lips. My blood ran cold in fright as she moved her hand to her purse. I thought for sure she was going to pull out a gun and come at me, shooting.

Marie must have seen the panic on my face because she turned around, trying to figure out what was making me come so unglued. Cecilia Luciano got up then, picking up her purse, easing her way towards us, her eyes on me constantly. She looked every bit like a predatory, avenging wife or girl friend. I wanted to warn Marie but I was so petrified at the sight of this woman bearing down on us, the look on Cecilia's face telling me that she knew who I was.

"Hey," said Marie to The Dike. "I really didn't know."

Cecilia smiled at her as Marie shivered and let go of my hand. "Get lost," Cecilia Luciano said to the girl, for whom I'd already paid up front. Marie shuddered as The Dike took her hand and stroked it gently. Marie shot off the stool, giving me a wild look before taking off without a backward glance at me. I just sat there, frozen by Cecilia's determined approach.

Cecilia nodded at someone behind me. I turned and half saw a tall, athletic looking man taking off after Marie, drawing another guy after him, one with a battered face. I sat there, terrified, looking at Don Ernesto's sister, the most feared woman in the family I'd stolen two hundred mill from. In fact, she was the only woman I'd heard of who worked as an enforcer. Her reputation was unbelievable; and it wasn't just for the few women she'd killed.

"Jeremy, my love," The Dike said, slipping onto the seat vacated by Marie. She touched my knee just as Marie had. I jumped with fright. It suddenly occurred to me that I should run, immediately.

"I have every exit covered, darling," Cecilia Luciano murmured, giving me as sweet a smile as a woman ever has. She was very good-looking, hair dyed blonde, her dark eyes twinkling, everything about her, from her designer pantsuit to her perfume, expensive.

"Buy me a drink, darling," The Dike said, still smiling. Oh, I knew about her, how she'd got the nickname she had in Don Ernesto's mob. "You can definitely afford it, two hundred million times, right?"

I babbled something incomprehensible even to myself. I shuddered as I signalled to the bartender and ordered her a vodka and orange. I shivered as she chattered about the décor in the bar and how much she was enjoying Toronto. But why wasn't I staying at the York? I could certainly afford it, couldn't I?