

# The Spot

By Alison Clifford

Anton grunted as he dropped the load we'd been carrying, almost tearing my shoulder out of its socket as he did. The section of tarp I'd been grasping tore out of my sweaty hand, pulling at fingernails and twisting my whole body as for an instant I bore the entire weight. I couldn't, of course, so the load hit the ground—hard. I didn't care. I'd helped lug it far enough.

“This is the spot,” he said. “The GPS says so.”

“I don't get why we had to use a GPS?” I wiped my hands on my jeans as I peered at the device in his hand.

“The boss said he has to know exactly where it is.” Anton slid the GPS in a pocket and wiped his brow with his sleeve. “Now, we dig.”

“How about a break? That thing is heavy.”

“No time. We have to get this done quickly.”

“I get that.” I rubbed the hollow of my back as Anton untied the rope around our load. A wind blew through the trees, lifting the edge of the tarp and revealing two spades and white, bloodied feet and legs. “Will a five minutes kill?” A shot of ice ran through my veins as Anton looked up at me. “Okay, bad choice of words.”

“Stop whining and start digging.” Anton pulled out the shovels and passed one to me. I looked away from the partly exposed body as Anton walked around, surveying the area. “This is the spot,” he said, tapping the ground between two saplings.

I watched as Anton mapped a rough rectangle using his spade and then push it into the soft earth. I gave up the fight for a break and set to digging a hole. A grave. It didn't take long for the ache in my back to intensify and the sweat to again bead on my face and soaking my shirt. The night air added its touch, chilling the damp fabric that clung to my skin. Around us the trees rustled in the wind as we slowly dug down into the ground.

“How deep does it need to be,” I asked, leaning on my shovel to catch my breath stretching my aching back without it showing.

“Deeper than this.”

“How much?”

Anton tossed a spade of dirt to one side and paused, glancing up at me. “Keep digging.”

“I need to give my back a break.”

He wiped his face and sighed. “I don’t care. We have a job to do and we’d better do it.” He drove his spade into the ground again, a sharp clink freezing us both. We stared into the dark shadow of the hole.

“What was that?” I asked.

“How the hell would I know?” he snapped.

“Sounded like metal.”

“No kidding.”

Neither of us moved. I watched Anton as he stared down at the ground. He sure wasn’t hurrying to find out more.

“I’ll find out what it is.” Someone had to, and Anton wasn’t volunteering.

I tossed my spade out of the hole and crouched down. Anton eased his shovel out as I brushed away the soil around it. About an inch down I found the source of the sound—a metal buckle. I eased my fingers around it, but it didn’t loosen. The cold chill returned, my heart thudding as I scraped away more dirt. My fingers found the buckle was attached to a belt, which was attached to... “It’s another body!”

“FBI! Stay where you are! Get your hands in the air!”

The night disappeared under the harsh beams of hundreds of lights. Or so it seemed to me as I struggled to control my heart and regain my breath. Light shone straight in my eyes as I slumped in the hole, hands to my chest and gasping for air. Shouts rang out, but I couldn’t understand them. My arms were grabbed and I was hauled out of the hole. The blinding light dropped. I could see faces surrounding me. The fog of shock lifted as the cold metal of handcuffs circled my wrists. Two agents were examining our load, and I could hear Anton swearing behind me. And then I was being dragged away, stumbling over the uneven ground.

“Don’t say anything!” I heard Anton shout as he was led off in another direction. The agents leading me chuckled.

I found my voice. “Can you slow down? I’m going to fall over something at this rate.”

The agents immediately stopped, letting go of my arms. “You know how it goes,” one of them said. “We have to make it look as real as possible.”

“I know. There’s a second body already in the ground.”

“We heard you’d found something, so we waited.”

I held my arms out. “I think you can uncuff me now.”

“Sure.” The agent inserted the key and I was free. “Nice undercover work, Special Agent Richards. We’ve got enough to send them to jail this time,” he said.

I rubbed my wrists and smiled. “Thanks.”