

ANNIE

By James R. Winter

Hillside's my beat. Quiet. Small. Out of sight.

I'm one of six cops in this burg. I spend my days ticketing commuters on their way to and from Cincinnati. I've heard every excuse, every curse, every threat. And they all end up leaving their money in Hillside's coffers. That's my job.

Sometimes I get a looker. A soccer mom with some mileage left on her. A college student on her way to UC or Xavier, hair pulled back. They wear shorts in the spring and fall, those college girls.

And sometimes they're so willing to get out of those tickets. Willing to do anything. Willing to pick their kid up late. Willing to miss part of class. It's okay to be late for work at P&G when the big, bad policeman holds you up.

"Make me late," some of them say. "But don't ticket me."

It's amazing what they'll do. There's a place at the edge of town, just off US 50. It's a vacant lot surrounded by a lot of high brush. We go there a lot, these ladies so willing to avoid a ticket.

The soccer moms are the best. So willing, so compliant. "Make me forget him," they say, cursing their limp-dicked husbands. They have minivans and SUV's, plenty of room for me to make them feel young again.

The college girls, they tease. They balk. I take them anyway. After all, I have a gun. I think they like it, like the struggle, like having a real man inside them.

But I leave the professionals alone. The doctors, lawyers, corporate managers. They don't want out of the ticket. They don't want me to take them or make them forget their husbands. They're the ones who make Hillside the money. The soccer moms and college girls? They're my bonus, my treat.

My prey.

Until she showed up.

Her name was Annie. She worked for a big law firm downtown, but she dressed like a college girl on a job interview: Short tight skirt showing off her long legs, driving her Miata. Did I know better? Of course not. With that car and that smart mouth of hers, how would I? So what if I fudged her speed a bit? All I saw was her flowing black hair and those legs. I didn't want the ticket. I wanted the prey.

She showed me her business card. Never mind what it said on it. It spelled out "You're fucked." And then she made the offer. She was late back from court over in Clermont County. What was another hour or two? Bill it to her client. She knew a place, out of the way. Did I want to know what she learned at Tulane Law School? Or more specifically, in New Orleans? I followed her down 50 towards Mariemont to a forgotten flea trap called the Encantada. She had a room already, said it was a discreet place to have some fun. I agreed.

She asked me what I wanted to do. I grabbed her wrists, pulled her close, and snarled, "What do you think?"

"Do it," she whispered, and I threw her down on the bed.

As I climbed over her, a white light flashed. I turned to see a big guy, maybe 6'2", 6'3", with at least fifty pounds on me. A woman stood behind him in the closet. She had a shotgun.

I climbed off Annie, who lay there laughing.

"Aren't you sorry," she said, "you pulled over the lady with the shotgun?"

I'm fucked. Even if that bitch behind me didn't kill me, I'm fucked.

The big guy grabbed me, and I made no move for my gun or my mace. What could I do? The bitch in the closet looked ready to fill me with shot. The big guy threw me out the door onto the hood of my cruiser.

"By the time you call this in," he said, "your boss will have a picture."

Hillside's my beat. Until I get back to the station.

I hear Mt. Washington is hiring cops. Time for a new hunting ground.