

Catherine Foster preferred cats to people. I made that assessment shortly after I reported for my first assignment with the Pecan Point Humane Society: helping Catherine with the Trap-Neuter-Return program for feral felines.

When I arrived at her house at eight p.m. as scheduled, Catherine met me in the driveway in front of a rusted, dingy-white cargo van—the vehicle of choice for serial killers. Examining my neatly typed timesheet, she scrunched her flat face that reminded me of a Persian cat.

“Delores Diane Myer-Johansson sounds like too many names.” She ignored my extended hand.

“I go by DeeLo.” I smiled like a salesperson trying to close a deal but got nothing in return.

Her flinty blue eyes swept my small frame from head to toe, judging whether I had dressed appropriately for traipsing around in the woods at night. She’d told me to wear comfortable shoes and warm clothes but to put on layers. Nothing too new or fancy. I had complied, from my oldest cashmere sweater down to last season’s suede boots.

“Why do they always send me the criminals?” Catherine pushed a strand of stringy, shoulder-length blond hair behind her protruding ear.

I winced. *Criminal* sounded harsh.

“What?” She raised her never-been-plucked eyebrows. “You’re not here of your own volition.”

That wasn’t fair. I’d always loved animals and had owned cats until my marriage. When the county clerk gave me a list of approved charities where I could perform my community service, I’d been happy to find the Pecan Point Humane Society as one of my choices. Working with furry pets beat picking up trash along the highway in an orange jumpsuit. “I... I wanted to be here.”

Catherine took a pack of gum out of her jacket pocket and removed one stick. “Yeah, right. You’ll finish your forty hours or however much the judge sentenced you to, and then I’ll never see you again.” She peeled off the wrapper and popped the gum into her mouth.

I didn’t have a comeback. I’d always meant to do volunteer work, give back to the community. But between a full-time job, loose ends from my divorce and the move to Georgia from California, a mother in memory care—and of course, Barry—there was never time. Until now, when I had no choice.

“What did you do anyway?” Catherine heaved a small-animal wire trap into her van. The long, rectangular contraption looked almost as big as she was. “Speeding? Shoplifting?”

“D.U.I.” It came out a whisper.

“Drunk driving?” She almost dropped the trap as she whirled to face me. “How many people did you kill?”

“None! It was my first offense.”

“Once is too many. Guess the cops did something right for a change. Got you off the road.” She straightened the trap on the van’s floor and headed toward the open garage for another. “Well, don’t just stand there gawking. Earn your hours or I won’t sign your timesheet. Bring me another one of these traps, D.D.”

“D.D. isn’t—”

“I like it. Stands for Drunk Driver, doesn’t it?”

One of the volunteers had warned me not to let Catherine’s caustic personality rattle me.

D.D. is short for Delores Diane. I’ll pretend that’s what she meant. My new nickname.

The nightmare of my arrest replayed like a video loop for the hundredth time. Flashing blue lights in the rearview mirror. The dreaded order, “Step out of the car, ma’am.” Barry staring at me through the bars of a jail cell before he bailed me out, disappointment clouding his face.

Because of Catherine’s disheveled appearance, I expected her garage to be cluttered to match. But the concrete floor was spotless, and although the two-car space brimmed to capacity, every item was neatly labeled and stored on industrial-strength metal shelves or in white laminate cabinets. I lifted a trap from the stack she’d set out and carried it to her van.

“Are you an alcoholic?” Catherine smacked her gum as she took the trap I was carrying and stacked it on top of the others. “Guess you know there’s no drinking on this job.”

“I’m not an alcoholic. And I don’t make a habit of drinking and driving.” I hated that she judged me because of one infraction. “I made a mistake.”

“Ya think?” Catherine let out an exaggerated sigh.

If only... If only I hadn’t stayed for a second glass of wine. If I’d worn flats instead of my new stilettos. If I’d come to a full stop at that intersection. Barry always warned me about my rolling “California stops.”

Maybe if I’d acted more businesslike with the cop who stopped me. Flirting had spared me a speeding ticket several years ago, but it was the wrong move this time.

“You could have killed someone.”

“I know, but it’s a good thing I didn’t.” I met Catherine’s gaze. If our partnership was going to work, she’d have to cut me some slack. “Look, I can’t change what happened. But I’m trying to make amends.”

“And they sent you to me.”

I smiled. “And I’m happy to help. Just tell me what you need.”

With a grunt, she slammed the cargo door and headed toward the driver's seat. "Get in."

Bio:

Sharon Marchisello, author of the DeeLo Myer cat rescue mystery series, is a long-time volunteer and cat foster for the Fayette Humane Society (FHS). Because she earned a Master's in Professional Writing from the University of Southern California, her fellow volunteers tasked her with writing grants for FHS, including procuring funds to support Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate, Return. She's the author of two mysteries published by Sunbury Press—*Going Home* (2014) and *Secrets of the Galapagos* (2019). Sharon has written short stories, a nonfiction book about personal finance, training manuals, screenplays, a blog, and book reviews. She is an active member of Sisters in Crime, the Atlanta Writers Club, and the Hometown Novel Writers Association. Retired from a 27-year career with Delta Air Lines, she now lives in Peachtree City, Georgia, and serves on the board of directors for the Friends of the Peachtree City Library.

Blurb:

DeeLo Myer, newly transplanted from Los Angeles to Pecan Point, Georgia, gets sentenced to community service with the local humane society. She's paired with the judgmental Catherine Foster, a Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return (TNVR) guru who prefers feral cats to people. During DeeLo's first night on duty, she and Catherine are led by a cat to the strangled body of a local bookstore owner.

The cop who investigates seems less concerned with solving a homicide than with Catherine's violation of an antiquated animal ordinance rendering TNVR illegal. When he arrests Catherine for violating the ordinance and holds her as a murder suspect, DeeLo vows to prove Catherine's innocence and get the ridiculous law changed. How hard could it be? She enlists her boyfriend/boss and the resources of his law office. Her quest for justice and legislative change leads her to high-profile members of the community, some of whom have motives for murder.

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