

Jane Mallory was slightly disappointed by the Janissary HQ, or maybe her expectations had been too high. The complex of buildings just outside the city of Dubai were spacious and physically imposing, yes, but once inside, Jane was a little let-down by the mundanity of the interior. To her eyes, there was an insufficiency of jump-suited men driving golf carts, a lack of exotic weapons being tested in her vicinity and not nearly enough good coffee on hand. But the buildings were clean and air-conditioned, and she had to admit that those two factors were compensation enough. *Home, sweet home – at least for now.*

After a flurry of introductions, Jane had been hustled into a meeting with the logistical staff of the Janissary agency, over three hours ago. Their center of operations – a laboratory crowded with more equipment than Jane had seen during her budget-starved days of government service – came closer to what she expected for an Elite center of operations. She just wished she didn't have to go through the chore of being directly subjected to most of the machines in the room.

Jane understood why the Janissaries wanted to evaluate her skills with their own eyes (*and video cameras, and sticky little electrodes*, Jane thought irritably), but the thrill had worn off an hour into their meeting and crankiness had settled in. Jane desperately wanted some downtime to get over the insanely overcrowded flight from Cairo and the general stress of the half-year following her abrupt departure from the FBI, but until the lab-boys of Logistics had all their questions answered, rest would not be forthcoming.

At the moment, both Jane and the lab-boys were on their feet, as Jane had abruptly left the lab in response to a routine question. Refusing to answer the increasingly insistent inquiries of her reluctant companions, Jane hoped she could find what she was looking for before their patience broke entirely. *The last thing I need is to get fired on the first day of a new job.*

Jane rounded a corner and glanced down the door-lined hallway of the bureaucratic section of headquarters. *Good, there he is.*

Seeker lounged against a wall of painted cinderblocks outside the office of the Janissary's general manager. *Probably being reprimanded for something, if scuttlebutt is correct*, Jane thought, regarding the sandy-haired nova with a reputation for unsavory mayhem – and this in a group notoriously tolerant of mayhem.

"Hey, Black Widow, isn't it?" Seeker's lazy smile of greeting rubbed Jane the wrong way. It was a smile that suggested to her that she had been mentally undressed, fucked on the sofa and told to get a cab home in the space of a second. Jane wasn't really surprised that the unpleasant impression didn't improve with their second meeting.

"Yeah. Hi, again." Jane forced a smile. "You're just the guy I wanted. Hold still."

Grabbing Seeker by the shoulders Jane kissed him, just as the lab-geeks caught up to them. Ignoring their collective gasp of surprise, Jane held on to Seeker for a long moment – until he started to enthusiastically reciprocate – and then let him go.

Jane stepped back and regarded Seeker critically for a moment. Aside from an expression of blatant surprise, he was unharmed. Jane grinned at the lab techs. "He's still standing. So I guess the poisonous tongue is a voluntary thing, not a constant." She chuckled. "Good thing, too. I don't think celibacy would suit me."

*And if he'd fallen into a coma, I don't think I would have minded*, she didn't add. *He reminds me too much of what I used to lock up.*

One of the white-coats spoke. "Ah, Widow, that answers our question, certainly. Although, in future, that such tests should be conducted on *animals*."

Jane shrugged. "From what I hear about him," she nodded towards Seeker, "it just was."

“*Bitch.*” Jane winced at Seeker’s tone. *He can’t take a joke – duly noted.* Jane was, in fact, already certain that she had conscious control of her toxic abilities. *Well, almost certain...*

The white-coat continued. “If we could just get back to the lab...”

*Oh, God.* Jane fought off a wave of weariness. “No.” Her cooperative demeanor faded, replaced with the tone that had kept junior FBI agents in line for five years. “I’m tired. You’ve poked me and prodded me and seen every damn thing I can do under controlled circumstances. If there’s anything else you want to know, you can wait until the morning.” The logistics staff recognized the flat finality in her voice and quickly acquiesced, making collective noises about meeting again in the morning.

“I’ll get you for that, Widow,” Seeker’s voice was an ominous mutter from behind as she watched the lab-boys disperse.

*When in doubt, brazen it out.* “What for?” She replied, without turning to face him. “The best thrill you’ve had all day? That’s rather sad, don’t you think?” There was no response, but Jane could feel Seeker’s breath, heavy and angry. *Definitely can’t take a joke,* she thought.

Resolved not to look back, Jane made her way down the corridor towards her quarters. Repercussions, she could worry about tomorrow.