

# HELL'S HIGHWAY



*Gerri Hill*

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*by*  
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## CHAPTER ONE

“Will you hold still? I swear you’re worse than a child.”

Cameron winced as Andrea pulled out another stitch. “Need I remind you that you are neither a doctor nor a nurse,” she said.

Andrea looked up, giving her an incredulous look. “You have more scars than I can count and a penchant for jumping off cliffs and you’re complaining about my nursing skills?”

“It hurts.”

“Big baby,” Andrea murmured as she cut through another one.

“And two cliffs do not make a *penchant*,” she countered. “Besides, this one was not my fault.”

“No? Sticking with the rattlesnake story, are you?”

“I’m telling you, it was seven feet long, easy.”

Andrea smiled, then leaned closer and kissed her. “Then I’m glad you jumped. I’m just thankful there wasn’t a nasty cactus at the bottom like in Sedona.” She patted her arm. “All done. Let’s see if we can go a month without having to do this again.”

Cameron looked at the wound on her arm, now healed. It wasn’t much of a cut and if Andrea hadn’t been around, she knew she wouldn’t have even bothered with a doctor. But Andrea was around and ten stitches later, they were on their way. That was nine days ago as they’d left the canyons of Utah and headed for the cooler climate of Colorado while they waited for their next assignment.

She watched with a sense of contentment as Andrea scooped up Lola and kissed her before putting the purring black kitten on Cameron’s lap. She wasn’t certain how much longer she could refer to her as a kitten—she was growing so fast. She ran her fingers through the soft fur, reflecting on the last six weeks since they’d left Sedona. It still amazed her how easily she and Andrea had eased into their new life together.

They worked well as a team. That was obvious from the Patrick Doe case in Sedona. Murdock had given her the okay to add Andrea to their team despite his reservations, and their partnership continued to flourish. But it was their personal life, here in the motor home, which surprised her. They were able to separate the two whenever they were in the company of others. It was unspoken, yet they slipped into their professional roles without many disagreements. But once back here, they reverted back to Cameron and Andrea, friends and lovers still learning to coexist in this tiny space they shared with one spoiled cat.

“How soon before Murdock sends us out on another case?” Andrea asked as she started on their dinner.

“Hard to say. One time I went three weeks. Why?”

“I really need to get back to Sedona and do something with my stuff. Not that there’s much, but I do need more clothes.”

Cameron eyed the faded jeans she wore, her gaze lingering. Something about the sway of Andrea’s hips had mesmerized her from the beginning. She looked up guiltily as Andrea cleared her throat.

“You’re checking out my ass? Seriously Cameron?”

Cameron felt her face blush and she laughed. "What? I can't do that anymore?"

Andrea's expression softened and she walked over, leaning down to kiss her gently. She pulled away with a smile, then brushed the hair on Cameron's forehead affectionately.

"You can check out my ass any time you want. I love you, you know."

Cameron nodded. "Me too."

Andrea's gaze held hers for a moment longer, then she returned to the kitchen. Cameron's mind flashed back to earlier that afternoon when they'd come back from a short hike, only to find themselves in bed, satisfying the sexual need that had taken hold of them while they were out. Innocent touches, a brush of a hand, lingering glances, finally a kiss—all igniting the fire that seemed to always linger just below the surface. Cameron had to stop herself from taking Andrea right there next to the tree she had her pinned against. Andrea wouldn't have minded, she knew, as her hands had already crept under Cameron's shirt with a purpose. Andrea's eyes had been filled with heated desire as Cameron pulled away from her, nearly dragging her back to the motor home for their afternoon tryst.

Her musings came to an end as a soft beeping on the console told her Murdock was calling. She slipped on her headphones before answering.

"Cameron Ross," she said.

"Please hold," came the pleasantly animated voice of the automated secretary Murdock now used.

"Of course," she said, half expecting the computer to answer her.

"Cameron? Not interrupting anything, I hope."

"Now Murdock, what in the world would you possibly be interrupting?"

"Oh, Cameron," he said with a quiet laugh. "I know we did a rush job on getting Sullivan her credentials, but her file finally crossed my desk."

"And?"

"And I'm assuming you took the photo that was submitted?"

“Yeah. And?” she asked, glancing at Andrea who was pretending not to listen to the conversation.

“And you’re going to tell me this is strictly a *professional* arrangement?”

“Of course, Murdock. I know the rules for that sort of thing. You think I’d buck that?” She grinned at Andrea who had stopped pretending not to listen and now had turned around and leaned on the counter, blatantly watching her.

“I’m not even going to answer that, Cameron. Let’s do a video conference. It’s time I met her face to face. Besides, I’ve got some news. Five minutes.”

The call ended and Cameron removed her headset, a shy smile directed at Andrea. “Video conference. He wants to officially meet you.”

“Are we in trouble?”

“No. Rules are rules and he knows I break most of them. I’m sure he’s just curious, that’s all.” She flipped open her laptop, logging in quickly. “Five minutes,” she said.

“I’ll hold off on dinner then. I was just going to do a quick veggie burger and fries.”

Cameron wrinkled up her nose. “We could order pizza.”

Andrea made a face at her. “I draw the line at three times a week. Besides, I think we’re a little out of reach of pizza delivery. Thank God,” she added.

It was an ongoing battle with them—Cameron trying to see how many times a week she could get her beloved pizza and Andrea trying to get her to eat a little more variety. Before she could offer a retort, two quick beeps signaled that Murdock had logged in to their session. She smiled as his face came into focus.

“Hi Murdock, you’re looking well.”

“Thank you, Cameron. As are you.”

Cameron held Lola in her lap. “You’ve met Lola, of course,” she said, stroking the kitten’s fur.

“Yes, your little tiger. How about I meet your new partner?”

Cameron motioned for Andrea to join her on the loveseat. “Andrea, come meet the boss.”

Andrea smiled easily. "Special Agent Murdock, a pleasure to finally meet you."

"Deputy Sullivan," he said with a nod. "Or should I say *Agent* Sullivan. Welcome to the team."

"Thank you."

"I must commend you. I had nothing but compliments from the authorities at Canyonlands. Even in regard to Ross here. That's a first. I'll credit you with keeping her in line."

"I have found she's mostly all bark and no bite," Andrea said.

"Must you two discuss me as if I'm not here?" Cameron asked, feigning annoyance.

"Well, Special Agent Ross, it's just rare that I send you on an assignment and I don't receive a dozen complaints about you. Mostly from our own team," he added with a smile.

Her eyebrows shot up. "*Special* Agent Ross?"

"Yes. Our group finally warrants recognition, it seems. They've bumped up our status to that of real agents." His smile turned into a smirk. "We have more clout than they do and we finally get equal billing. And I have a title change as well. Director of Operations."

"A director, huh?"

He nodded. "They had to come up with something. That's the only thing that's changing. Andrea is technically on probation, so her title won't change for six months. And I'll have you know I had to pull some strings just for that. They apparently weren't impressed by her LAPD training." He looked directly at Andrea. "No offense."

"None taken."

"Are you finding the arrangements satisfactory? I'm sure it's a little cramped in there for the two of you." His eyes drifted to Cameron's lap. "And a cat."

"We've managed fine," Andrea said, with just a hint of a smile. "If we didn't get along so well, it might make it difficult."

"Yes, well, it was a rather rushed job. And a surprise. Ross was never one for partners. I was shocked she requested one now."

Cameron felt a hot blush light up her face as Andrea turned

suspicious eyes on her. She had told Andrea that Murdock was the one who insisted she take a partner, not the other way around.

“Really? Well that explains why she’s so bossy then,” Andrea said, her eyes questioning.

Cameron cleared her throat. “Have we had enough chit-chat? I assume you have an assignment,” she said.

“Unfortunately, yes. Where are you? Still in Utah?”

“We’re in southern Colorado,” she said. “Just outside of Durango.”

“I’ll need you to head west,” he said. “Two weeks ago a headless body was found twelve miles east of Barstow, California, along I-40,” he said matter-of-factly. “Unidentified female, naked. She was wrapped in a brown plastic tarp and dumped in the desert. A motorist stopped with a flat tire found her.”

“And the motorist has been cleared?”

“Thoroughly. Yesterday, a second body was found. This one just outside the boundary of Joshua Tree National Monument. Same as the first. Naked. No head.”

“Okay, help me with my geography. I’m assuming they’re close together?”

“Joshua Tree hits I-10 on its southern border,” Andrea supplied. “But the northern part would be closer to I-40. They’re both in the Mojave Desert, although Joshua Tree creeps into a southern desert—Colorado Desert, I believe.”

“I forgot you’re from LA, of course,” Murdock said. “You’re more familiar with that area than I am. The second body was found along I-10 near what they call the Cactus City rest area—near Indio—which I’m told is a major stopping point for travelers,” he said. “So the two sites aren’t that close.”

“So another serial killer,” Cameron said. “Great.”

“I don’t know if either of you are familiar with the FBI’s investigation of the Highway Serial Killings. They have a huge database that I’ve given both of you access to. The concentration is mainly along I-40, east of Oklahoma City. The database covers every body found dumped along an interstate highway. There are well over four hundred, if that gives you any idea,” he said.

“So multiple killers, obviously,” Andrea said.

“Yes. There could be dozens. But the two bodies found in

the desert are obviously linked. It'll give you a chance to play with your algorithms again, Cameron."

"Long-haul truckers?" Cameron asked. "That would seem obvious. They almost exclusively use the interstates."

"Most likely."

"Don't most trucks have GPS tracking now so their companies can keep up with them?" Andrea asked.

Murdock nodded. "Yes. However, there are thousands of companies and getting access to their records would require subpoenas if they weren't willing to volunteer the information. Not to mention the small companies which don't have GPS tracking. And then there are individual owners of trucks who contract out. It's an endless search."

"So the database is for information only?"

"They've been able to link some murders and they've arrested a few. Very few. I'll email you the links and you can take a look yourself."

"Okay. So who do we contact?"

"Riverside County Sheriff's Department is investigating the one in Cactus City. They have a substation and a coroner in Indio who did the autopsy. San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department is looking into the one found near Barstow. The county coroner did the post. I'll email you both files."

"And both victims are unidentified?" Cameron asked.

"Yes. One age eighteen to twenty-two. The other, twenty-five to thirty."

"Both departments know we're coming?"

"Yes. And from what I understand, they are both happy to hand it over to you. It's a cold case as far as they are concerned."

"So we have no resources?"

"I'm afraid you won't have the sheriff's department at your beck and call like you did in Sedona, no," he said. "For the investigation, we're on our own. They'll assist, of course, with backup if necessary. But both of these are very large counties, not only in population but also square miles. They're stretched thin. The bodies were found in remote, unpopulated areas in the desert. They've done a check through Missing Persons but

without a face, it's pretty useless. Frankly, there's not much to go on."

"And you naturally thought of me," Cameron said. "Thanks, Murdock."

"Well, I figured you were getting bored since you wrapped up the Canyonlands case so fast. By the way, I talked to your guy Jason at Quantico. He said to give him a call if you needed to do some searching in the database. He worked on the design of it. He said you can incorporate what you use now for your algorithms with it."

"That's what he said, huh?"

Murdock grinned. "No. He spewed off some technical mumbo jumbo crap but that's what I deduced from it."

Cameron nodded. "Are we on our own with the motor home too? Or do you have someplace in mind where we can park her?"

"I'm sorry but I don't. There's federal land all over out there, but everything is so remote, I have no idea where you'll want to be. When you find a spot, let me know. I can make arrangements for you, even in protected areas."

"Okay, Murdock. We'll head out in the morning."

He nodded. "One more thing. Reynolds is putting together his own team. He's taken Jack from Collie's old unit, the others are new. I've got him on standby for this one."

"Come on, Murdock. You know I don't—"

"You don't have a choice, Special Agent Ross," he said. "If these young women end up being locals, you're not exactly the one we want talking to the media."

Cameron rolled her eyes. "You're sending a whole team in to handle the media? That's about all they did in Phoenix, they should be good at it."

"Reynolds *is* good at it. Besides, I'm hoping this will be low profile. Unidentified victims won't have family members demanding answers. Reynolds and his team need something to get their feet wet with."

"Surely you don't expect *me* to handle that?"

"For some odd reason, Reynolds took a liking to you, despite the complaints he had about you. That's a first. I thought I'd take advantage of it."

"I don't want some newbie of a team following me around," she said. "I work alone."

"Then why did you insist you needed a partner?"

Cameron glanced sheepishly at Andrea, then back to Murdock. "Okay. Fine," she conceded.

Murdock laughed. "Like I said, Reynolds is on standby. I haven't deployed them yet. I'll wait for your first report before deciding what to do, but I need to get them some action."

"Okay," she said with a nod, knowing that was Murdock's way of saying Reynolds would be joining them in a few days.

"Welcome to the team, Andrea. Try to keep her in line. Safe travels."

He signed off before either of them could reply as was his habit. Cameron closed the laptop, embarrassed now to be alone with Andrea. Murdock had completely blown her cover.

"Anything you want to explain?"

Cameron shook her head. "I think Murdock pretty much covered it, don't you?" She stood, running her fingers nervously through her hair, trying to find the words to explain why she'd lied.

"So you thought you needed an excuse for me to come with you?"

"Didn't I? If I'd told you I didn't want to leave Sedona without you, would you have just given up your job and come with me?"

"I'm not sure. When you found me crying in the bathroom I was asking myself how I could just let you walk out of my life so easily." She shrugged. "I don't know what I would have done. I only know I was hurting because you were leaving."

"Well, this was all I could think of. I wanted you with me, but I knew you needed a purpose. Joining the team seemed to make sense. We work well together."

"Yes. And Murdock went along with it?"

Cameron took Andrea's hands and pulled her to her feet. "His team is ex-military but I convinced him your training in LAPD was sufficient." She squeezed tightly against Andrea's fingers. "I'm sorry I lied, Andi. But I just couldn't leave without you."

Andrea tilted her head, eyebrow cocked. “I pulled my weapon on my captain. Does he know that?”

“Yes, of course. Who do you think put together the files on you?”

She shook her head with a smile. “The thing that got me fired with LAPD probably helped get me hired with the FBI. Amazing.”

Cameron hesitated. “Are you angry? I mean, about the whole thing.”

“Of course not,” Andrea said. “Truth is, I think it’s sweet.”

“Sweet, huh? Well, it seems kinda silly now. I mean, I should have just told you how I felt and we could have talked about it.”

“But?”

“But I was afraid you’d turn me down,” she admitted honestly. “This way, if you said no, it was about the job and not about us.”

Andrea was studying her, and Cameron did her best not to shift uneasily under her gaze. It had seemed like a good idea at the time. Now, she was feeling a bit vulnerable over the whole thing.

Andrea’s gaze softened and she moved closer, linking her hands behind Cameron’s neck. She kissed her softly, then moved her mouth to her ear. “I love you,” she whispered before pulling away. “The thought of you and Lola walking out of my life was killing me. So I’m glad you asked Murdock to let you have a partner. And I’m even happier that I’m that partner.”

Cameron closed her eyes and held Andrea tightly, feeling the completeness she always felt with her. She’d thought—after Laurie died—that her chances of finding some happiness in her life were gone. But Andrea filled her, heart and soul. She’d only been half a person before Andrea. Andrea was the part that had been missing. She’d recovered after Laurie. That’s because, while she loved Laurie, it was never like this. She didn’t feel it deep in her soul like this. If anything happened to Andrea, she didn’t think she’d survive.

And that scared her to death.