

“Slow down, Rosco.” Jack pulled back on the leash for at least the tenth time to rein in his overly-excited chocolate lab. “We’ll be at the dog park in a minute. Sheesh!” Rosco just ignored him as usual and continued on—sniffing everything and *everybody* along the way, and hiking his leg when he felt the situation called for it. He just hoped the lady with the chihuahua would be able to get Rosco’s pee out of the little dog’s sweater.

Man, she was pissed. No pun intended.

“Okay, boy. Here we are.” He loved the city, but living in a one-room loft apartment with a dog the size of a small pony who liked to run and play... and run and play... and run and play didn’t quite go together. But he loved the big, goofy mutt and did what he could to make his life happy. So these daily visits to the local dog park where he could let him loose and expend some energy was worth not eating lunch. He grinned down at his best buddy and unhooked the leash. “Go!” Rosco wasted no time and took off at a run to do his usual meet and greet with the other dogs.

Jack let Rosco take a good fifteen minutes to explore, chase other dogs, and investigate each tree. It seemed his dog was popular with most of the other dogs, but not so much with the white poodle he attempted to get amorous with. Horny dog.

Speaking of horny...

Rosco wasn’t the only one who needed some attention of the feminine kind. How long had it been? Hell, maybe six months. Definitely too long. And definitely something he needed to correct—and soon. Not to mention his right hand was starting to get calloused.

It wasn’t that he didn’t come in contact with some nice, attractive women. He did. All the time. He just hadn’t felt a spark with anyone lately. And he needed a spark to get, well, sparky. He let out a sigh and pulled the bright yellow tennis ball from his jacket pocket and tossed it up and down in his hand.

“Rosco! Ball!” And just like that, his running, jumping—let me sniff your butt—dog turned and froze—only his eyes tracking the movement of the ball. Waiting. Anticipating. Jack enjoyed torturing him for just a few seconds before he threw it past Rosco’s location and laughed as he tore off after it.

That was how they spent the next several minutes—Jack throwing the ball and Rosco bringing it back—countless times—until Rosco was panting and the ball was slimy and gross. Thankfully, they had only lost it once that day versus the usual five or six. It was probably because Jack hadn’t thrown the ball as far as he usually did.

He looked down at his watch. It was getting close to one o’clock, so their hour was almost up. “Okay, one more,” he told Rosco when the dog dropped the ball in his hand. “I’ve got to get back to work.” Work being the loft where he had his own business as a graphic designer. Since it was his last throw, he decided to let Rosco have a good run and reared back, giving the ball one final great heave past where he had been throwing it—the ball going farther than he had actually

intended and heading towards a woman sitting on one of the benches across the park eating something.

“Shit!” He ran after Rosco who was already halfway to his target. “Hey, lady! Look out!” Several people looked up at his shout, including the brunette with a slice of pizza halfway to her mouth. But his warning was too late. The ball landed squarely in the box sitting on her lap with Rosco right behind it.

“Oh, no!” she yelled before jumping up from her seat and letting the box fall to the ground—where the ball promptly rolled out onto the grass. She still had the one slice hanging from her hand, and the closer he got he could see all the toppings had started sliding off as she looked down at the mess at her feet.

Rosco leaped toward the ball and grabbed it up and turned to bring it to him, but suddenly dropped it and began shaking his head. Jack sped up to see what was wrong—more worry setting in when the dog began sneezing.

“Hey! What did you do to my dog?” He didn’t take the time to get a good look at the woman, but dropped to his knees and ran his hands over Rosco who was drooling and sneezing even harder.

“What did I do to your dog?” she said with some heat. “Don’t you mean, what did *you* do to my lunch?”

He finally looked up into the woman’s face. And what a face it was—creamy skin with a few freckles, brown eyes, and full pink lips with a dab of pizza sauce in one corner. She frowned down at him, but then turned her attention to Rosco who had started a panting wheeze—her expression changing to one of concern.

She dropped her slice of pizza and went to her knees beside him, then lifted the sides of Rosco’s muzzle and inspected his gums before touching her fingers to his slightly swollen tongue. “Is your dog allergic to anything?”

“Just fish.”

“Oh, no,” she said. “My pizza had anchovies... And it’s on my hands. Shit!” She grabbed her purse from the bench and pulled out some hand sanitizer and cleansed her hands before reaching back in and bringing out an oversized bottle of water. “I need you to hold his jaws open and let me rinse his mouth out.”

Jack complied immediately and held open Rosco’s mouth the best he could as she poured water over his lips, gums, tongue, and teeth—using her fingers to scrub around the inside. When the water was almost gone, Rosco was breathing easier and his tongue looked normal.

“There ya go. You’re a good boy, aren’t you,” she said, finally letting Rosco drink the last of the water she held cupped in her hand. She looked up at Jack and smiled. “Luckily he

didn't swallow any of it because of the ball in his mouth, so it just touched the inside of his mouth." She frowned slightly. "I'm just glad I didn't make it worse when I first started examining him."

"I don't know how to thank you." Jack hugged Rosco and let him give him a few slobbery kisses before turning back to the woman who was still smiling at him when he looked back at her. "The least I can do is replace your pizza."

She looked at her watch, and then back at him. "It's after one and I'm going to be late getting back to the clinic if I don't leave now."

"Clinic?"

"Mmmhmm. The Carson Animal Clinic. I'm a vet." She smiled at him again and held out her hand. "Dr. Amy Carson."

Jack wanted to slap his forehead for not introducing himself to the woman who had saved his dog. "Hi," he said instead, giving her his hand. "Jack Martin."

"Nice to meet you Jack. And this is..."

"This is Rosco."

"Hello Rosco." She rubbed Rosco's head and gave Jack another smile—this one almost shy. "Well, um, I guess I'd better be going."

"Oh, sure," he said, standing and reaching out his hand. She took it and let him pull her up in front of him. She barely reached his chin. He needed to say something before she got away. "Well, since I can't get you another pizza now, how about tonight? I know a good little Italian restaurant close by."

She smiled at him again and licked her lips—her tongue finding the bit of sauce he had noticed earlier. And now he was jealous of marinara.

"Okay. I can do that," she said. "The clinic closes at six on Fridays. Give me the name and address and I'll meet you at say, seven?"

"Seven sounds good." He grinned down at Rosco and patted his head to hide his excitement.

She pulled a pen and pad from her purse and wrote down the address he gave her before looking at her watch again. "I really need to clean up the mess from the pizza and go."

"Don't let me keep you. And don't worry. I'll clean up."

“You’re sure?”

“Absolutely.”

“Okay, then,” She said grabbing her purse. “I’ll see you tonight.”

He watched her walk away and willed her to turn just once and give him another look—which she did—before hurrying away.

“Well, Rosco, my boy,” he said, grinning while he picked up the trash they’d made, “I think I just felt a spark.”