

Cross the Line

Blurred Lines, Book One

By

Jenny Plumb

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CHAPTER ONE

Andie sped down the street in the Mustang, weaving in and out of traffic. She grinned as the car in front of her turned, leaving a clear stretch of road. She glanced down to turn the radio on, and when her eyes went back to the road she saw a German Shepherd darting across the street. Adrenaline surged through her veins as she slammed on the brakes, but she knew she couldn't stop in time. There was a sickening *thunk* on impact, and the dog flew several feet through the air, landing in an ominously still heap on the pavement.

Andie quickly put the car in park, rushed over, and knelt beside the motionless dog; a young male who hadn't yet grown into his oversized paws. He had no collar, his eyes were closed, and a small pool of blood had formed on the cement from a gash in his right back leg. Her hand shook as she reached out to touch his chest, and she gasped with relief when she felt the dog breathing.

She'd been trained from an early age to stay calm in stressful and potentially dangerous situations, and to focus on getting a job done. That had never been a problem before, but she found it impossible to ignore her emotions in that moment. She scanned the immediate area for an owner, but none of the bystanders rushed to claim him. Looking further down the street, she saw a sign that read 'Stinton Hill Veterinary Clinic'. She lifted the dog as gently as possible, groaning under his weight, and started walking.

The clinic's glass doors automatically swished open for Andie and her limp burden. There were two people with cat carriers in the lobby, and a kind looking, middle-aged woman behind the counter.

As soon as the woman looked up from her paperwork and saw Andie holding the injured dog, she picked up the phone, pushed a button, and said, "We have an emergency, Dr. Stinton." Hanging up, she came around the counter to meet them, and said, "What happened?"

"I hit him with my car," Andie said. "I-I didn't see him until it was too late."

The door to the back room opened, and a man in scrubs came out.

"Car accident," the receptionist said briefly.

The doctor gestured for Andie to follow him as he opened the door to the back room, and said with practiced calm, "Did the tires roll over him, or did he get thrown from the car?"

"He was thrown from the car," Andie replied as she followed him through the door.

"Has he been unconscious the whole time?" He gestured for Andie to put the dog down on an exam table.

"Yes." Andie took a step back once she'd let go of the dog.

A woman in scrubs came over and put pressure on the open wound while the veterinarian took the dog's vitals.

"How long ago did it happen?" he asked, listening to the heartbeat.

"Not long," Andie said, staring at her hands. The dog's red blood stood out in stark contrast to her pale skin. The sight made her slightly queasy. "A couple of minutes ago. It happened right down the street." Her hands started to shake. "I saw your sign and walked in."

The man said quietly, "Vanessa."

Andie glanced at him with confusion, but he had already returned his attention to the dog. His assistant put an arm around Andie's shoulders and said, "Being in an accident can be a shock to the system. You need to sit down for a minute." She led Andie back to the lobby, and nodded to the woman at the front desk. "This is Clare. She'll look after you while we examine the dog." Vanessa was gone before Andie could reply.

Clare immediately got up and patted the younger woman's shoulder, guiding her into one of the chairs.

"Sit right here, honey," she said comfortingly. "Take a few deep breaths. You did the right thing by bringing him in." She handed Andie a couple of wet wipes and said, "Go ahead and clean yourself up, and then we'll get some paperwork started. The bathroom is down the hall."

Once Clare had returned to behind the counter, Andie closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and tried to calm down. Time was quickly slipping away. She had to act now, or accept the consequences of staying where she was. She wrestled with her conscience for several seconds before admitting that she couldn't leave the dog. Shaking her head at her own foolishness, she used the wet wipes to get most of the blood off her hands, and walked down the hall to the bathroom.

She washed her hands, pulled her cell phone out of her back pocket, and dialed her business associate, Steve. When he answered, she said, "I messed up."

"What do you mean you messed up?" he asked. "What happened?"

"I don't have the car, and I'm gonna get caught, but I'll keep my mouth shut."

"You don't have the car! God damn it Andie! You'd better not—"

She hung up on him, turned the phone off, and tossed it into the nearest trash can. Feeling acid in her throat, she rushed to one of the stalls to vomit. She barely made it to the toilet in time. Once her late lunch had been flushed, she rinsed her mouth while avoiding her own reflection. "Stupid," she muttered.

###

Dr. David Stinton and his assistant, Vanessa, worked for the next thirty minutes getting the dog x-rayed and stitching up his wound. Once he was sure the animal was stabilized, David went out to give the girl an update. He stopped in his tracks when he saw two uniformed police officers putting handcuffs on her.

She turned pleading eyes to him and spoke over the officer who was droning out her Miranda rights. "Is he gonna be okay?"

"What's going on here?" David demanded.

"The police arrived a few seconds ago," Clare said.

The officer who wasn't handcuffing the girl took a step towards David. "Hello, sir," he said. He pointed to the girl and asked, "Do you know this woman?"

"No."

Andie tried unsuccessfully to yank her arm out of the cop's grasp, and shouted, somewhat hysterically, "Is the fucking dog still alive, or did I just get caught for nothing?"

David's eyebrows went up in shock.

"Get her out of here!" the cop beside David said over his shoulder.

Frowning at the way the girl was being manhandled, David answered her. "He should make a full recovery. No broken bones, no internal bleeding."

"Thank God," she mumbled. While she was being forcefully led out, she yelled over her shoulder, "I'll pay for whatever procedures you need to do to help him." The officer dragged her out the door, but before it closed behind them, she added, "I'm good for it."

David glared at the officer, reading his name from the tag on his shirt. "Tell me what's

going on, Officer Ortiz. That girl looked like a minor to me."

"She's not," Officer Ortiz responded defensively.

Clare said, "According to the information she gave me, her name is Andrea Jacobson, and she's twenty."

David forced himself not to comment. He had difficulty considering most twenty-year-olds as adults, but he knew that had more to do with his own personal lifestyle than reality. Holding in his opinions, he asked, "What are the charges?"

"I can't discuss the case with you," Officer Ortiz said.

"They accused her of stealing a car," Clare said.

David scowled, not quite believing that was possible.

The cop pulled out a pad of paper. "I'd like to ask you some questions about the suspect."

David nodded his acceptance and told the man everything he knew, making sure to get the case number from Officer Ortiz before he left. As soon as the clinic door swished shut, David got out his cell phone and made a call.

###

When Andie's butt hit the backseat of the police car, she tried to forget the dog and focus on what her next move was going to be, but the image of the poor animal flying through the air still haunted her. She hated being in handcuffs, but cops tended to get pissed when she took them off, so she reluctantly left them in place. She especially hated having her hands cuffed behind her back, and while cops tended to get irritated when she adjusted how she was cuffed, they didn't usually rough her up because of it. She looked out the window to make sure no one was watching, and then wiggled her body so she could slip her cuffed hands under her butt and legs. Once her wrists were in front of her, she was able to think a little more clearly.

She'd been brought in for questioning many times and she had been arrested before, but the charges had never stuck. This time she knew they would, and the thought of going to prison made her stomach lurch. She thought about her father and hung her head. If he was still alive, he'd be extremely disappointed in her for getting caught like a common criminal, especially over something as sentimental as a wounded dog.

She took a deep breath, squared her shoulders, and let the vet's words calm her down. *He should make a full recovery. No broken bones, no internal bleeding.* She took another deep breath and muttered to herself, "First things first. Call the bank, get the dog taken care of, and

then worry about yourself." Having made that decision, she leaned back and willed her stomach to calm down.

Several minutes later, Officer Ortiz got into the squad car, and then looked back at Andie in disbelief when he noticed her hands.

She scowled back at him.

He got out, opened her door, grabbed her wrist, and got out the handcuff keys. He roughly unlocked them and said, "If I were you, I'd play by the rules this time, Andie. We caught you dead to rights with witnesses, and the charges are going to stick." He wrenched her hands behind her back, and cuffed them in place again. "Leave them behind your back!"

Andie winced as he shoved her back in the car and slammed the door. A few minutes later, both officers were in the front seat, and they were on their way to the station.

At the station, Andie tried demanding her phone call as soon as she was booked—before the banks closed. They let her have the call mere minutes before five o'clock. Sighing with relief, she called her bank.

"First National, this is Mike, how can I help you?"

"Hi Mike," Andie said, "may I please speak with Sally?"

"Can I tell her who's calling?"

"Andrea Cobb."

"Hold, please."

Andie waited and scanned the area, making sure no one was listening in on her conversation.

"Hello Miss Cobb, how can I help you today?" Sally said.

"I need a cashier's check for a thousand dollars hand-delivered first thing tomorrow morning to Stinton Hill Veterinary Clinic."

Once Andie was done with her phone call, she was taken into an interrogation room with Officer Ortiz, and a female detective she didn't recognize.

Ortiz said, "Wanna tell me why you stole the Mustang today?"

"You should know me better than that, Ortiz. I'm not gonna talk. Might as well get me a lawyer."

Ortiz chuckled and shook his head. "This time is different, and you know it. You have two options. Give up your partner and do a little time, or keep your mouth shut, and do a lot of time."

With a fake expression of innocence, Andie said, "I have no idea what you're talking about."

Ortiz slammed his hand down on the table. "The hell you don't! I want to know which chop shops you take the cars to! I want to know who arranges the sale! I want to know who tells you which cars to take!"

Andie shrugged her shoulders with a smirk on her face.

Ortiz moved to stand up, but the female detective put her hand on his arm. Andie turned to the woman, and saw pity in her eyes. Fiercely hating that expression, Andie leaned forward and hissed, "What are you looking at, lady?"

"A foolish child," the woman said simply.

"Listen up, you bitch, I know exactly who I am, and I don't need—"

There was a loud knock on the door to the interrogation room. Ortiz opened it and knew immediately from the suit and tie that the man on the other side was a lawyer.

"Yeah?" Officer Ortiz said.

"I'm looking for an..." the lawyer looked down at his file and said, "Andrea Jacobson, aka Andrea Miller, aka Anna Pope, aka Anita..."

"You found her," Ortiz said with disgust. He turned back to Andie and said, "Guess you do realize that it's different this time, if you used your call to get a lawyer."

"Not my lawyer," she said.

"Yes, actually, I am," the man said with a smile. He turned to Ortiz. "I'd like to speak to my client in private."

Cursing under his breath, Ortiz left the room, and the female detective followed him out. The lawyer shut the door and sat down across from Andie. He held out his hand to shake, but she eyed it distrustfully.

"Right," he said. "I'm your lawyer, Nathaniel Parker. You can call me Nate. I've been hired by my brother-in-law, David, to represent you."

"I don't know a David," Andie said.

"You met him a couple of hours ago. Dr. Stinton? He's the vet who worked on the German Shepherd you brought in."

"What?" she whispered, her eyes opened wide with shock.

"The dog is fine, by the way. I just spoke with David before coming in here. The dog is awake and alert."

"I don't understand," she said. "Why the hell would he hire you to be my lawyer? He doesn't even know me."

Nate chuckled. "David doesn't play by everyone else's rules. He's never asked me to represent anyone before, but let's just say the call didn't surprise me. You got caught because you wanted to save the dog. That makes you a good person according to David, no matter what else you might have done." He held her thick file up and added, "Which, apparently, is a lot."

Andie didn't know how to respond. She'd been responsible for getting herself out of trouble for so many years that she was unable to fathom why this David person would want to help her.

Unaffected by her lack of response, Nate started listing her alleged crimes. "Forgery, shoplifting, and grand theft auto, to name a few." He looked up at her and added, "You're a busy girl."

Trying to recover from her initial shock, Andie shrugged. "Never been convicted."

"Yet."

She slouched lower in her seat.

"Have you told the cops anything?" he asked.

"No, and I won't. They want me to make a deal, and rat out my... the person I allegedly work with, but that's never going to happen."

"Even if it means doing time?" he asked.

She looked him in the eye and nodded. He could see the conviction in her face, and said, "Okay then. We'll go with a different approach to your defense."

#

David got home later than usual, hoping that his wife, Nina, wasn't going to be annoyed. He felt the tension in his shoulders melt away when he smelled his wife's pot roast cooking. "I'm home," he called out as he hung up his jacket and put his keys on the side table by the door.

"In the kitchen," Nina called back.

He went in, stood behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her close. He kissed the side of her head and said, "Smells good."

She put down the spoon she'd been stirring with and turned in her husband's arms. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders and gave him a quick peck on the mouth. Turning back to the stove, she said gently, "You're late."

"I had an eventful day."

"Pour us both some wine, and tell me about it." She pointed with her spoon to the bottle of red wine on the counter.

He got out the glasses, and worked on getting the cork out while he talked. "I was finishing up for the day when a girl came in carrying an injured German Shepherd."

"Car accident?" Nina asked with sympathy.

"Yes. The dog had a pretty serious laceration, a possible concussion, and some bruising that will hurt for a while, but no broken bones."

"That's good."

"When I went out to give the girl the good news, I found the cops arresting her."

Nina stopped stirring and turned to look at her husband, curiously. "Cops?" she asked.

He handed her a glass of wine with a smile, and took a sip from his own glass. "That was my reaction, too," he said. "Turns out she stole the car."

"Really?" He nodded, and she muttered, "Wow."

"She stole the car, accidentally hit the dog, carried him to my clinic, and then stayed there to find out if he was okay, even though she had to know the cops would find her."

Nina gave her husband an assessing glance. They'd been married for almost ten years now, and she knew the way he thought. "How old was she?"

"Twenty."

"She's not one of our littles, David."

He sighed. "I know, but... she had this look in her eyes. I called Nate."

With a sigh of her own, Nina said, "Well, I suppose there's no harm in that."

"The dog had no chip, and no tags. Before the girl was hauled away, she said that she'd pay for any treatments he needed."

Nina shook her head with a smile. "You're a softie for anyone who loves animals."

He smiled, too. "You love that about me."

"You've got me there." She turned the burner down low, put a lid over the pan, and turned to her husband. With a twinkle in her eye, she said, "Johnny called. He wants to come to the cabin this weekend."

Standing up a little straighter, David said, "I can't even tell you how much I need that after today. I'm free all weekend, how about you?"

"I've already rescheduled my photo shoot."

He pulled her in close and kissed her more deeply. He ran a trail of kisses down her neck, and said, "I love you."

Breathing harder than usual, she said, "I love you, too."

"Do you want to call him back, or should I?"

"I think he'd like to hear from his Daddy. He sounded pretty needy over the phone."

Concerned, David pulled his head away from his wife's neck. "You think his parents came to visit again?"

With a frown, Nina said, "I'm almost positive it has something to do with them, but he had to get back to work when he called, so he couldn't talk about it."

David glanced at the pot on the stove. "How long until dinner is ready?"

"Half an hour."

He held out his hand to her. "Let's go call."

She followed him into the living room. He sat on the couch, pulled his wife onto his lap, and got out his cell phone. He dialed Johnny's number and waited for him to answer.

"John Palanski, how can I help you?"

"Hi Johnny, it's David."

"Hi, Daddy."

David smiled hearing those words, because he knew it meant Johnny was alone, and could talk freely. "Working late?" he asked.

"I'm driving home, and before you ask, yes I'm talking on the hands free."

"Good. Mommy told me you called earlier today."

"Yes, sir, I did."

David could hear the anxiety in Johnny's voice, and said, "We're free all weekend. We can meet you at the cabin at five o'clock this Friday."

"That sounds perfect. Thank you. Tell Mommy I said thank you, too."

David looked at Nina. "Johnny says thanks."

She leaned towards the phone and said, "You're welcome, sweetie. We can't wait to see you."

"We're always happy to see you, Johnny," David said carefully, trying to broach the upcoming subject gently. "But you just saw us two weeks ago, and usually we only meet once every couple of months, so Mommy and I are a little concerned. Did something happen?"

After a long silence, Johnny said, "My mother called to tell me that my sister is getting married."

"And?"

"She... she just went on and on about how I messed things up with Susan, and how I'm never going to find someone that good again. I know I shouldn't let it bother me, because she has no idea what really went on between us, but... it just does."

"Thanks for telling me, buddy," David said. "We'll work on it this weekend."

"I don't want to work on it, Daddy," Johnny with a whine. "I want to forget about it."

"I'm sure you do, but that won't help you in the long run, will it?" After a long silence, David changed his tone and said, "Ignoring your problems won't help you in the long run, will it, Johnny?"

"No, Daddy," he said softly.

"So we'll work on it."

"Yes, sir."

"Did you want to talk to Mommy before we hang up?"

"Yes please."

David handed the phone over, and listened to his wife remind Johnny to eat right and get enough sleep during the next few days before Friday.

###

Andie sat on the floor in the corner of the holding cell with her knees against her chest, trying to make herself as inconspicuous as possible. The other women had ignored her so far, and she was trying to keep it that way. She knew she should be thinking about her defense. The lawyer, Nate, had given her quite a few things to think about before her arraignment the next morning. But she couldn't stop thinking about Steve.

Steve had been her business associate since her father died five years previously, although she doubted Steve would see it that way. He'd be inclined to call himself her boss, and not just because she had been fifteen the first time she stole a car for him. Steve had not been pleased to see her getting out of the stolen car he'd ordered from her father. He'd been even less pleased when she told him that she'd been the one doing the hotwiring for her father since she was twelve.

Her throat tightened when she thought about her father. He'd had her late in life, and he had doted on her, treating her more like a granddaughter than a daughter. Whenever they had pulled long cons together, he usually told the mark that she was his grandchild, because it was easier for people to believe without question. He'd died of a massive heart attack when he was sixty-two, which had left her alone in the world at fifteen.

Clearing her throat, Andie took a deep breath and refused to think about the only parent she'd ever known. She focused her thoughts instead on Steve, and cringed when she imagined the things he'd have to say to her when she got out. Usually when she got arrested, he'd cuss her out, threaten never to use her again, and then order another car a week later, after he'd cooled down, because she was the best car thief he knew. But this time would be different. This time she'd spend more than one night in jail.

Needing a distraction, she rested her forehead on her knees, closed her eyes, and let her mind wander to the fantasy that made her the happiest. In the fantasy she didn't have to be self-reliant and ever vigilant just to stay alive, because someone else was in control and responsible for her. In her fantasy, that same someone encouraged her not to do illegal things, and punished her if she did.

Over the years, the man she pictured in that fantasy rarely had defined facial features. She wasn't thinking of anyone specific, just some imaginary dark-haired man who was several years her senior. Once in a while she'd put the face of an acquaintance on the fantasy man, but those times were few and far between. Tonight, while sitting on the cold cement of the cell floor, she had a moment of weakness, and put David's face on her fantasy man. Not just because he'd taken the initiative to get her a lawyer, but also because of the calm and gentle way he'd handled her panic over the dog. Andie knew that picturing him in that role was a bad idea, but she simply couldn't help herself.

###

David leaned back in his chair, took the last sip of his wine, and said, "I'm stuffed."

Nina poured a little more wine into her glass. "I have pictures to develop, so you're on dish duty."

Both their heads turned when the doorbell rang. David got up to answer it, and found his brother-in-law standing there. He opened the door wider, and said, "Hi Nate, how'd it go?"

Nate came in, took off his jacket, and set his briefcase down by the door. "Not as well as I'd hoped. That girl has a rap sheet like you wouldn't believe."

Nina waved him over to the dining room table, and said, "Come tell us all about it. Have you had any dinner yet?"

"Nope." Nate went in and took a seat at the table. David poured him some wine while Nina got him a plate and silverware. Once Nate had a few bites of food in him, he said, "Her name is Andrea Jacobson, as far as I can tell."

"As far as you can tell?" David asked.

"She's got quite a few aliases," Nate said after taking an appreciative sip of the wine. "But Andrea Jacobson is the name that comes up the most. Her juvie records are sealed, so there's no telling what kind of trouble she got into before she turned eighteen. But over the past two and a half years, she's been arrested ten times."

"Ten?" Nina asked with shock.

Nate nodded. "Forgery, shoplifting, home invasion, identity theft, and grand theft auto."

"Wow," Nina said.

David just shook his head, not wanting to believe it.

"The thing is, she's never been convicted. She's been charged, but she's always gotten off before."

"Did she tell you why she stole the car?" David asked.

"No. She doesn't trust me," Nate said, taking another bite. "Wouldn't divulge much of anything, which is going to make it difficult to get her off. But I'm positive she was told to steal it. She's not working alone. It wasn't any kind of innocent joy ride, although that's probably what we're going claim in court, since she won't give anyone up."

David sat forward in his chair and said, "Would it help if I said she could work at the clinic? Maybe do some community service for the no kill shelter?"

"David," Nina said, with a tired sigh.

He turned to her. "You didn't see her expression, honey. She needs someone to be on her side."

"That may be true," she said, "but again, she's not one of our littles."

Nate groaned. "Jeez, could you guys not talk about *that* while I'm eating."

"Shut up, Nate," Nina said with mild sincerity.

Nate frowned at his plate and took another bite. He'd known that his older sister was a *domme* since he was eighteen. Sixteen years ago, when she was at college studying photography, he'd decided to surprise her with a visit. He'd walked in without knocking, and found her spanking a guy twice her age. It had taken some time and several awkward conversations for him to understand what he'd walked in on. It still made him uncomfortable when she talked about her 'littles' in front of him, but she refused to go back in the closet once he knew.

Nina continued talking to her husband. "This girl is on her way to becoming a career criminal. She's not some lost little submissive looking for a dom."

"It's not about that," David said. "It's about doing the right thing. Maybe no one has ever stood up for her before. Maybe if I do that for her, she'll change." He saw the skeptical expression on his wife's face, and said softly, "I just feel the need to help her." He turned to Nate. "Would it help her case if I offered to let her work at my clinic?"

"Definitely," Nate said. "She has no known living relatives, according to the file, and she seemed to have a hard time keeping a straight face when I asked her about character witnesses."

"No living relatives at twenty?" Nina said. "Poor thing."

David smiled. His wife was just as likely to pick up strays as he was. "When is her bail hearing?" he asked.

"Tomorrow at eleven a.m."

"That's quick," Nina said with surprise.

"They're anxious to put her away," Nate said.

"Give me a call when it's over," David said, "and let me know if you get a date for the preliminary hearing, so I can clear my schedule."

"Sure thing," Nate said.