

An exclusive excerpt from...

ESPRESSO SHOT

A Coffeehouse Mystery

by Cleo Coyle

A NOTE FROM CLEO

Until this novel in my *Coffeehouse Mystery* series, I never thought Matt Allegro would ever say the following about Detective Mike Quinn: "I could kiss him." Well, he does in *Espresso Shot* — and this exclusive excerpt shows you why.

Here's the set up: After witnessing a shooting on the street the night before, Clare and Matt drop by the Greenwich Village police station. While there, Detective Mike Quinn notices them sitting in an interview room...

From Chapter 9

" . . . Anyway," Quinn said, "what are you two doing here? Helping ID the perp in last night's shooting?"

"Not exactly," I said.

Matt shifted in his seat and elbowed me lightly. "Tell him."

"Tell me *what*?" Quinn replied, spearing my ex-husband with a far less friendly cop stare than he'd bestowed on me.

“Okay, fine,” Matt said. “*I’ll* tell him.” Then my ex-husband unfolded his arms, relaxed his bristling attitude, and leaned toward Quinn. “I’d like your advice.”

Mike Quinn’s still-as-stone face registered genuine surprise maybe two times a year. This was one of those times. He listened quietly as Matt laid out the whole Breanne-in-peril theory again.

Amazingly, Quinn didn’t laugh. He didn’t put Matt down. He didn’t even “handle” him with one of those canned cop speeches reserved for city paranoids who call the NYPD about official conspiracies and UFOs.

“You know, *Allegro*,” he said instead. “I think you might be right to worry.”

“You *do*?” Now it was Matt’s turn to look genuinely surprised.

Quinn nodded. “I don’t like the mud on the SUV’s license plate. I don’t like the execution-style hit on the victim while she’s dressed up like your fiancée and walking right beside you. And I don’t like that your bride-to-be is a public figure who seems to make enemies of people who have something to lose.”

“Thank you!” Matt cried. He turned to me. “I could kiss him.”

Quinn’s eyebrow arched. “Sorry, big fella. It’s not the best neighborhood for that . . . unless you mean it.”

“So what do we do now?” Matt asked, palms up, gaze expectant.

I figured Quinn would volunteer to talk to Soles and Bass about running a side investigation on Breanne's possible enemies. But he didn't say anything close to that. What he said was—

“Use Clare.”

“What?!” I said.

“Clare?” Matt repeated.

“Yeah, Allegro, at the moment, you've got nothing concrete, right? The PD can't get involved with hunches. We need evidence. Have Clare stick close to Breanne this week, snoop around, look for something that might warrant police involvement.”

“I don't have time for that!” I said. “I have a business to run and a gourmet coffee-and-dessert bar to finalize before the end of the week!”

“Calm down,” Quinn said.

“Mike!” I wanted to throttle him.

“Allegro has some genuine hunches here, and you know I subscribe to the *Blink* theory on hunches.”

“*Blink* theory?” Matt said. “What's that?”

“It means you know more than you think you do,” I replied before Quinn started gassing on about it. “You take in a lot of data in the blink of an eye, which is why you're supposed to trust your flashes of inspiration. Those flashes are usually right. Malcolm Gladwell researched the theory and put it in his book.”

“*Blink?*” Matt nodded, looking pleased with himself. “Then I am right. Breanne is in danger.”

I shook my head. “That may not be true—”

“So find out,” Quinn said. His tone was pushy, almost taunting, yet his eyes seemed to be laughing—as if he were having *fun*!

“What is this? A schoolyard dare?”

Quinn ignored me and leaned toward Matt. “She’s good at it, you know. Clare has all the qualities we look for when we promote from the uniformed force, especially the four ‘*I*’s.”

“The four what?” Matt said.

“Inquisitiveness, imagination, insight, and an eye for detail.”

“That last one starts with an *E*,” I said flatly. “And what about intelligence?”

Quinn shook his head. “We don’t want intelligent cops on the force. We want smart ones.”

“There’s a difference?” Matt asked.

“She might be able to turn up a lead,” Quinn continued, ignoring the question. “Unless she does, the Fish Squad’s going to go after the usual suspects on the stripper.”

“Fish Squad?” Matt said.

“Soles and Bass. It’s what we call those two around here. Not to their faces, of course. Lori Soles has a sense of humor, but I wouldn’t repeat the term within ten feet of Sue Ellen—not if you value an intact skull.”

“Mike, come on!” I protested. “This is ridiculous—”

“Your ex-husband’s scared, sweetheart. Can’t you see that?”

Quinn’s tone was dead serious. His eyes were blue stones. I stared for a moment in dumbfounded disbelief. Oh, I didn’t doubt his words—I knew Matt was very worried. I just never thought I’d hear Mike Quinn express genuine concern for my ex-husband.

“It’s true. I am scared,” Matt confessed. “If you could have seen the way that SUV came right for Breanne on the sidewalk . . .” He shook his head and grimaced, his expression intensifying for a moment into a look of almost physical pain. “I think Quinn’s right. I think you should do this, Clare. Will you? For me? As a wedding gift?”

I couldn’t believe this was happening! “I’ll give it a *day*. But if I don’t turn up any leads, I’m off the case.”

That seemed good enough for Matt. He thanked me. Then he actually extended his hand across the table. “Thanks, Quinn. You’re not so bad.”

The detective shook Matt’s hand, declining to return the compliment. “Listen, Allegro,” he said instead, “can you give me a few minutes alone with Clare here? I’d like a word with her.”

“Yeah, sure,” Matt said. “And I’ll bet I know *which* word.”

“Matt!” I said.

He rolled his eyes. “I’ll meet you downstairs.”

As my ex stood and walked away, Quinn unfolded his lanky frame from the metal chair and crossed the little interview room to shut the door.

I rose, too, and stepped right up to him. “*Why* did you set me up, Mike? I don’t appreciate—”

His lips found mine before I could finish the sentence. Despite my complete and total annoyance with the man, my arms drifted north, circled his neck and hung on. He backed me against the wall and got serious . . .

When we finally parted, he smiled down at me. There were stray locks of chestnut hair on my cheek. His fingers brushed them aside, curled them around my ear.

“Tonight, sweetheart,” he said softly. “My place.”

“No way. I’m not forgiving you for this.”

“For what?” He knitted his brow—a shameful attempt to appear clueless.

“Don’t even *try* to play innocent with me. You’re obviously pissed that Matteo’s moved back in with me for a few days. Hooking me up to investigate Breanne is your pathetic ploy to steer me clear of the man.”

“You’re way too cynical, Cosi. You know that? I honestly think Allegro’s theory is worth checking out.”

I might have believed him, if I hadn’t caught his fleeting half-smile.

“You owe me, Quinn.” I poked his hard shoulder. “Do you *hear*?”

“Yeah, I hear. And I’ll make it up to you. I promise . . . starting *tonight*.”

I parted my lips to protest again, but once again Mike Quinn’s mouth was faster.

Chapter 10

There are things you do for people you *don’t* like because they’re attached to people you *do* like. Like a sarcastic sister-in-law who drives you nuts with her barely veiled insults. She’s never once thanked you for all the Christmas gifts you’ve sent her over the years, but you keep sending them because if you drop her off the family list, it’s the brother you love who’s going to get his ear chewed off about the slight.

Breanne Summour was like that for me now. She was not my favorite person. But she was about to become Matteo’s wife, and since *he* cared whether she lived or died, I was stuck caring, too. I know that sounds appalling, but I found the woman barely tolerable on a charitable day.

Still, I reminded myself, *she did come through for Joy*.

Last fall, when my daughter was falsely accused of murder, Breanne had used her VIP connections to secure Joy a top criminal defense attorney. I had to give Bree credit for that. After all, Randall Knox had taken embarrassing public swipes at

the woman for being connected to Matt. It must have been mortifying for her, yet she hung in there. I tried to keep that in mind as my ex began hustling me from West Tenth to Hudson.

“Where are we going, Matt?”

“Uptown. Bree’s having a final fitting of her wedding gown. I got hold of her on the cell while you were with Quinn.” Matt shot me a smirking glance. “What were you two *discussing* up there by the way?”

“Uh . . . the case.”

“Then why do you smell like the guy’s cheap drug store aftershave?”

“Mind your own business.”

“I am,” Matt said, as we race walked the tree-lined street. “You and Quinn *are* my business now that you’re going to help me figure out who wants to kill Breanne.”

“I wouldn’t count on Quinn this week. Not unless Breanne ODs on pain killers.”

“What are you talking about?!”

I told Matt about the OD Squad that Quinn was supervising.

“Well, then, Sherlock, I guess it’s up to *you* to figure this out.”

End of excerpt :)