

Doing It Right

L.M. Connolly

Before he became a jaguar shape-shifter and STORM agent, Jack Hargreaves was a librarian and archivist. Almost a geek. Working undercover in Oxford, England, Jack can almost believe he dreamed the last few years when his life turned around.

Except for sexy shape-shifter Shere, an Egyptian goddess with eyes of melting seduction and a body built for sin. And old friends who turn out not so friendly after all.

Shere already has a colleague—and lover—in Oliver, English lord, STORM agent and vampire. But when she sees Jack, all bets are off. She wants him badly, but she wants Oliver too. Can she have both?

What should be a routine operation rapidly goes bad, and Jack, Shere and Oliver, together with Chase Maynard, face danger that threatens them all and could blow the operation wide open. Along with their bodies, hearts and minds. Could Jack's first field operation become his last?

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Doing It Right Copyright © 2010 Lynne Connolly

Buy the Book Here:

[Amazon US](#)

[Amazon UK](#)

[iBooks](#)

[Nook](#)

[Kobo](#)

With the exception of quotes used in reviews, this book may not be reproduced or used in whole or in part by any means existing without written permission from the publisher,

Warning: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. No part of this book may be scanned, uploaded or distributed via the Internet or any other means, electronic or print, without the publisher's permission.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the author's imagination and used fictitiously.

Chapter One

Jack gazed up at the building where he'd spent ten years of his life studying and then working. He felt a sense of homecoming. Time rolled past in his mind's eye, the ivy-covered stone holding its secrets under bright spring sunshine. St. Thomas' College was as close to a home as he'd ever had. He'd never expected to visit it again, but here he was, back at the doors of his alma mater. He'd become a completely different person now.

Even his DNA had changed.

So much had happened to him while this building remained, its appearance exactly the same as ever.

He'd gone from archivist to shape-shifting secret agent, a being known by the world at large as a Talent. The people here knew him as Jack Hargreaves, archivist and mild-mannered librarian, not the super-being he had become. Nobody knew, except the people he worked with in STORM. The others, the ones who had known, were dead. He'd helped to kill them. He couldn't be sorry about that, because without his intervention, more people would have died. Innocent people. But it was as his colleagues had warned him—every kill stained the soul.

Jack hoped nobody would die on this job, his first solo assignment for STORM. Nobody needed to. A simple matter of studying the accounts of someone he thought he'd known well, but who held more secrets than he'd realized.

He smiled at the vision of the beautiful woman floating in his imagination, obscuring the sight of his old college. He'd loved Diana and now she was married to his erstwhile rival, Mickey, so for him this assignment was a way to lay the ghosts of his past to rest, make sure he'd closed the door on his desperate passion for Diana. Mickey's name appearing in the dossiers he'd studied after Bennett's death had shocked him rigid. At first, he'd thought it couldn't be the same Mickey Hightower. But it was. If Mickey had conspired with STORM's old enemy, Jack was here to make sure his involvement had died with Bennett. God, he hoped so.

Easy to apply to Mickey for help, to say he wanted to leave the States and return to England, to accept the temporary job Mickey offered him. Easy to seem helpless and needy, to feed Mickey's ego. Not so easy to come here and face his own personal demons. Being a despised geek, falling in love with a woman who'd rejected him, and losing a Fellowship to someone less deserving.

Now he was here he felt unaccountably nervous.

And he was late for work.

Jack walked to the end of the road, absorbing the air that seemed unique to Oxford. He used to tell his best friend Megan that he could live on the scent of the old books and the learning, and sometimes he'd make her try to smell it too.

At the end of the road, concealed by a mask of beech trees, stood the modern buildings usually referred to by the dons in a sneering tone as "the pods". At least, they'd been modern when built back in the eighties, but they were old enough now to look old-fashioned. They did appear like space-pods, the original crisp white of the concrete now a bit more weathered and stained with rain and bird droppings. In another fifty years, they'd blend in nicely, if they hadn't disintegrated completely. It was likely that Jack would be there to see it, but while they'd age even more, he'd look much the same as he did now.

He didn't check the paper in his pocket. He knew precisely which of the pods held the office he needed. He swiped the card they'd sent him and the door clicked open to his touch.

Inside, the futuristic design abruptly turned utilitarian. After the failure to sell the pods to the prestige customers they'd had in mind, the designers had fitted them out in a more economical fashion. Concrete stairs and bare metal handrails stretched before him. The vivid blue walls saved the interior from total institutionalism, but Jack found the color oppressive in the limited space. He climbed the stairs and found the office he was looking for.

He tapped on the door and opened it without waiting for a reply, mildly surprised to find it unlocked. He paused until the sole occupant looked up from her computer screen. Her eyes widened at the sight of him, and her surprise seemed real, although she must have been expecting him.

Jack closed the door and leaned against it. "Hello, Diana."

He enjoyed the way her eyes dilated and then returned to normal in a swift response of shock. When she smiled, he saw the lines at the corner of her mouth that indicated tension she was trying to hide. He opened his telepathy to read the outer part of her mind, the part everyone left open whether they were aware of it or not. He read turmoil, disturbance mingled with excitement. Nice that he could still excite somebody.

"Hello, Jack. Mickey told me you were coming, but I didn't think you'd arrive so early." Her voice, breathless and girly, sounded the same. It didn't affect him as once it might have done, with a desire to hold her close and protect her. Jack breathed a sigh of relief. One hurdle overcome. He no longer had the hots for Diana. Not the desperate hots, anyway. She'd been everything he wanted—once. Now, not so much. The knowledge gave him some relief as he watched her, examining his feelings. He didn't want to hold her, or kiss her, he didn't have that overwhelming desire to take care of her. It felt good.

Jack glanced down and checked his watch. "It's just before nine. I thought I'd give you time to open the office first." He grinned. "Hey, it's my first day in my new job. It's never a good idea to be late." He wondered if he'd have been happy staying in Oxford with Diana. Probably. At the time, he'd known where his life was taking him and Diana had fit in with his plans really well.

He shoved his hands in his pockets, stifling his wince at the feel of the cheap fabric. Part of his disguise, something the old Jack would have worn. He'd gone soft with his recently discovered addiction to expensive, well-cut garments. "How have you been?"

"Good, I've been good."

She looked good, but Diana had always excelled at appearances. With her upper-middle-class background, she knew how to look good and show nothing. Her fair hair brushed her shoulders; her blue eyes were limpid and innocent. "Me too."

"I'm sorry it didn't work out in America," she said, giving him a sympathetic grimace.

It had worked out, but not in a way he'd ever imagined. He shrugged. "It was an interesting experience. One I enjoyed."

She smiled tentatively, dropping her gaze in a shy gesture so typical of her, and pushed a strand of pale blonde hair away from her face. "You sound American, more than when you were here."

"They think I sound British over there. It comes from my transatlantic childhood." Not fitting in anywhere, one place or the other.

"Did you see much of your mother over there?"

"No more than I saw my father while I lived over here." It no longer bothered him that first boarding school and then university had been more like home to him than either his American mother or his British father's homes. "So I have another new start today." He kicked away from the wall and strolled toward her desk. It took only three paces. "How's everything been?"

He felt strange, as if he'd never been away. So much had happened, most of it in the last year or

so. Most of all, he could hardly believe that he'd been so in love with this woman that he'd have done anything for her. Anything. Now she looked like a pretty woman trying a little too hard. He could see the shadows under her eyes now, inadequately covered with makeup, and the deeper lines between her nose and mouth. And yet she remained polished, with freshly manicured nails, perfect pantsuit in a cool blue and a crisp white blouse without a spot on it.

Unlike her character, though even now Jack wasn't completely sure of her motives. She married Mickey Hightower, so she could be in the whole mess up to her pretty neck. Or she could be completely innocent of the way Mickey had worked with Bennett. Hence, here he was, leaning over to see what she had on her computer screen. Only difference was, he wasn't trying to peer down her cleavage any longer. Not that she was showing much. Not that he noticed. Much.

He glanced at her and smiled before returning his attention to the computer screen. He touched her shoulder. "Is this what you want me working on?"

"That, old sport," came another voice from the door, "is my decision, not hers. Unhand my wife this instant!"

Jack straightened, grinning broadly. "Hello, Mickey, it's good to see you."

Mickey strode across the room and grabbed Jack's hand, hauling him into an embrace and slapping his back with a hearty gesture of camaraderie Jack was far from sharing. Still, he responded in kind, then drew back as soon as he could.

"So how the fuck have you been?" Typical of Mickey to overdo the welcome.

"Fine, Mickey, fine. You look good." And he did. He wore a well-made suit, if not custom-made, then altered to fit. Mickey always had a taste for the flamboyant, though, and his garish tie reflected that in spades. Blue and yellow, with a splotched pattern that looked liked he'd been messy with his breakfast egg. Through eyes opened by the knowledge he'd gained, he could see the British flyboy, the spiv, hiding under the skin of the highly educated Mickey Hightower.

Mickey gave him an easy smile. "I'm glad to have you back. Even if it is only until you find your feet again." His smile turned superior. Jack didn't need to read his mind to know what he was thinking, but he did, just in case.

Cautiously, Jack slipped into the outer layer of Mickey's mind. If Mickey had contact with Talents, however peripheral, he'd know when someone probed his mind. But he showed no reaction to Jack's tentative intrusion, so Jack went ahead and read the outer layer.

Supercilious gloating filled it. Mickey had won the girl and the business, Jack giving way on both. Now Jack just had to grit his teeth and play his old role as unworldly academic until he had the information he needed, which hopefully wouldn't take that long.

"You're doing well then, Mickey?"

"Oh yes, can't complain. You should have stayed, Jack. You could have had some of this."

Jack glanced around the small office, noting the two extra desks crammed into the limited space, both with computers set up on them. *Two desks?* He hadn't realized Mickey employed anyone other than Diana. "I did get some great experience."

"At McIver University?"

Jack shrugged. "It gave me something for my résumé—my CV."

"It's okay, Jack, we speak American here."

Jack wasn't aware he sounded particularly American, but Mickey was the second person to comment today. Already it was getting old. He shrugged. "It was interesting."

"Megan Armstrong not with you?" Mickey smirked.

"She found somebody else. We were never serious about each other." Well, she wasn't about him, that was for sure. He and Megan made great friends, but lousy lovers. It had only taken one

night to realize that. “She needed a change of scene and McIver did it for her.” Another dilemma. Should he talk about Megan’s husband, Sandro? Did they know? As the first-elected Talented Senator, Sandro had made headlines. Let them make the connection if they wanted to. He’d cope with it if it happened.

On second thought, he could do better than that. Jack entered Mickey’s mind again and felt the restless intelligence, letting his mind slip unnoticed into the turmoil. One thing Mickey didn’t have was an organized mind. *Interesting*. So when Mickey said, “That reminds me, you must have been there when all that fuss happened. You know, the sleep clinic.” He’d worked out what to say.

Jack smiled. “Oh yes. Another part of the university to ours, but yeah, people came in the library and talked about it. I got pretty sick of it when the press came in and I banned them.”

“So you didn’t see any of it?”

They’d covered up Megan’s part in the affair, so it was unlikely Mickey had heard about that. Bennett, who’d been responsible for the mess, tended not to confide in his minions. “Not much. I knew the doctor involved, Johnson, but only because he used the library frequently.”

Mickey frowned. “I thought it was a Dr. Bennett?”

“It was, but I didn’t know him at all.” Jack shrugged. “I saw on the news that he died recently. He must have been sick back then.” Or shortly after, which was the truth. That bastard Bennett had wreaked death and injury on too many people. Jack couldn’t feel sorry that particular scourge had left the earth.

In case Mickey had learned something from the people he’d apparently mixed with, Jack kept his emotions clean, shoving his anger deep down where Mickey couldn’t reach them, even if he had learned any psi skills. Instead, he gave a smile. “Eventually I found myself in a rut. So I came home.”

He didn’t miss Diana’s scornful glance at him, nor did he respond to it. She’d dropped him for Mickey, the man with the better prospects as a meal ticket. Maybe she had loved Mickey best, Jack didn’t know, but when he’d asked her to take a chance with him, she’d said no. Turned him down flat.

“We’re glad to have you back,” Mickey said.

Yeah, so long as he kept to his rightful place. An assistant, “right-hand man” as Mickey described him in tooth-gratingly tedious terms. He’d volunteered for this assignment as soon as he’d seen Mickey’s name, hoping to lay some old ghosts to rest, but he was beginning to realize there might not be any ghosts to lay.

A new consciousness swept across them in a devastating tide of cool observance, and Jack recognized the sense as another Talent. Too late to hide. He’d hidden his sigil, the identifying sign burned into his mind, but the very orderliness and the way he’d stratified his mind into various layers would give him away. So he sent a welcoming signal and lifted his head.

And froze. Standing in the doorway was a statuesque beauty with olive skin and dark brown eyes he could drown in. Her sinuous pose suggested a woman in control of her sexuality, but the clothes said otherwise. She wore a cheap black skirt, the fibers glistening in the office light. Her equally nasty black blouse did her no favors. Jack’s senses went on alert. The same disguise he’d used when taking this badly paying job—the cheap clothes, the slight air of apologetic existence. A flicker of a smile crossed her lips before Mickey pushed past him, his hand outstretched. “Emuishéré, welcome. I didn’t expect you so early. You must have come straight off the plane.”

Much as he had, Jack recalled, but he hadn’t received a welcome like that. But he could understand why. The woman smoldered where she stood. “Actually, I drove down. I’m based in

London these days,” she said in a husky voice that made his cock stir.

He could almost see the smoke. He contacted her telepathically. *Hi.*

Who are you? Why is your sigil hidden? Her contact was firm and sure, easy.

Why is yours hidden? he countered, not willing to give an inch. Not all Talents were on the same side.

Okay, we’ll talk later. But I take it they don’t know you’re a Talent?

You take it right. At least she wasn’t about to expose him. Jack understood the unspoken agreement. She wouldn’t tell if he didn’t. Fair enough. So he stared, and let himself enjoy her.

Mickey shook her hand, retaining it for a moment before tugging her around to face his wife and Jack. “This is Emuishéré Baymoui. She’s planning to enroll in the doctoral program next term, but she needs a job until then. So I offered her one.” His smile broadened. “She’ll work alongside you, Jack. I don’t care how you two arrange it, just so I get results.”

Jack leaned against the empty desk behind him. “So what do you want, exactly?”

“More clients.” Mickey grinned. “I’ll take care of the ones we have already. You need to get more business. It takes research and an academic approach, but I want you to go to other colleges and get us more business. It’s time we expanded, and right now we’re dependent on St. Thomas’. If things work out, there’ll be permanent jobs up for grabs.”

At the salary he was paying Jack, there’d better be more money to go with it. Advanced cold calling, that was all this job was. Helping students and professors with their projects, doing the legwork and applying for all the grants available. For a fee. Jack wondered if Mickey was taking money from both ends, students and funding, but he guessed he’d find out. He offered his hand to the woman. “Jack Hargreaves. Just back from the States, in case you were wondering about the accent.”

“I wasn’t. Call me Shere.”

Mickey replied with a smooth smile. “It’d be a pleasure. It suits you.”

Shere concealed her exasperation, but the emotion shimmered through her mind. Jack sent her a note of sympathy, but she didn’t respond. He’d slipped into some of the courtesies Talents used so easily that sometimes it scared him. He touched her hand when she took his, but he didn’t linger as Mickey had, although he wanted to. She exuded warmth and he’d been so cold recently.

“With your name, it’s just as well you’re not from New Orleans,” he remarked with a smile.

She responded with one, but it didn’t reach her eyes. They held wariness. “I know. I’m Egyptian, and it doesn’t have the same meaning there.”

“I always wanted to go to Egypt. Maybe I will one day.”

She raised a slim, dark brow. “Maybe you will at that.”

He forced his attention away from Shere and toward Mickey. “So do you want us to get to work right away?”

“Might as well. I’ve arranged for you to have rooms at the Barbican Hotel for the first month. After that, you’re on your own, I’m afraid.” He gave Jack a grin more reminiscent of undergraduate Mickey than the man he’d turned into. Jack remembered the reckless, exciting companion with a pang. Before everything had gone to shit. “But you know your way around Oxford, after all.”

“I do. I’m sure we’ll both find something before the month’s up. But it’s nice of you to give us rooms in the best hotel in the city.”

Mickey waved his thanks aside. “No worries. They’ve given it a complete makeover in the last year, although not all the rooms are done yet. You should be comfortable there.”

“Yes, thank you.” Shere sounded suitably grateful. Jack was grateful, but for different reasons. If

Mickey hadn't given him the Barbican, or as it was now known, the Barbican Timothy, he'd have done it himself. If he hadn't known Mickey well, he'd have found a way of pushing him in that direction, but he'd guessed Mickey's penchant for flash would drive him to a gesture like that. Mickey was doing well by all accounts, his business prospering even better than it should. Which was why he was here.

The small room had three desks shoved against the wall with monitors, phones and little else on them. Everything stylish, black ash with chairs to match, everything fucking uncomfortable and difficult. But Jack took a seat and got to work.

Sitting next to this woman—this Talent—made him uncomfortable. Her barriers held too strongly and when he tried to communicate with her, she replied with a brief, *Later*.

He'd forgotten quite how tedious sitting at a desk could be. Which was strange, because he often acted as a researcher for STORM. Somehow, this was different. Maybe because Mickey was paying peanuts. Maybe because Mickey would take the credit, as he'd always done. No, that was unfair. Mickey had shared at first, but he'd used the key accounts to get ahead. Jack didn't blame him. He'd had his head up his ass in those days, set on a university career. Undergraduate, graduate, doctorate, Fellow, Professor, Chair. Then, presumably, coffin. Not that he'd made it more than halfway. And the coffin wouldn't come as soon as he'd supposed.

He didn't know if he was glad about that or not.

After making a list of possible clients that he had no intention of seriously following up on, he leaned back in his chair and stretched his arms above his head. The clock on the wall said four fifteen. *Enough*.

He got to his feet. "I'm turning in. I've had a long flight to get here and I don't think I'll get anything more done today."

Shere looked up, frowning. "You came straight here off the plane?"

He shrugged. "I had a room booked at the airport, but I didn't feel like sleeping then. I sure feel like sleeping now."

Liar.

Repressing a smile, he turned to her, the corner of his mouth quirked in query. That was the first time she'd contacted him telepathically instead of the other way about. "Are you staying?"

"Don't I have to stay until five?" Her demure smile didn't fool him for a minute.

He grinned. "I don't think Mickey will insist on your first day. Where are you parked?"

"Pretty close," she said.

He got to his feet. "Then you'd better come and get your car out of hock. If you're where I think, you don't have long before they close the place for the night. The hotel has a car park."

"And there's a public one nearby," Diana put in.

He started. Fuck, he'd forgotten she was there. The woman who'd once engrossed him to the point that he'd nearly lost his place on his doctoral course could now go almost unnoticed. He'd imagined himself so in love with her that nothing else mattered.

He really had to stop falling in love with every woman he met. That might have stopped with Carilla. It hadn't happened since, that was for sure.

"Yeah."

He glanced at Diana, remembering to smile. He shoved the heavy fall of hair back from his forehead and gave her a softer look. "Thanks." Might as well let her think he was still the sweet man she'd fallen for. Or he thought she'd fallen for. She smiled back, her expression and her senses shutting out the other woman. "Is Mickey still in his office?" He wanted to know if there was another exit.

“He’s still there. Shall I call him?”

“Don’t bother.” He crossed the room to Mickey’s office and tapped on the door, receiving an imperious “Come!” He opened the door and leaned against the doorjamb. “I’m calling it a day.”

Mickey made a point of consulting his watch, when he could have easily glanced at the time on the screen of his open laptop. “Sure. You need your sleep. Eight thirty tomorrow?”

“Sure.” Jack smiled. “See you.”

“Yeah. Take Shere with you, would you? Then you can check in at the hotel together.”

“No problem.”

End of Chapter One

Buy the Book Here:

[Amazon US](#)

[Amazon UK](#)

[iBooks](#)

[Nook](#)

[Kobo](#)

Where to find L.M. Connolly:-

Please visit my Website: <http://lmconnolly.com>

Follow my books on [Goodreads](#)

Like me on FaceBook - Follow me on Twitter @lynneconnolly

Subscribe to my [Newsletter](#)

Read my [Blog](#)

Email me here:- lynne@lynneconnolly.com

Also by L.M. Connolly

S.T.O.R.M. – secret agents who happen to be Talents (shapeshifters, vampires and sorcerers. The stories are set just after Talents come out to the world)

Red Alert

Red Heat

Red Shadow

Red Inferno

Doing It Right

Shifting Heat

Last Enchantment