

THY WILL BE DONE PART 1
by inspectorboxer

It was time to repent.

He knew her routine backwards and forwards. Had watched her for weeks when he'd discovered her need for salvation. She would be in her office now, even at this hour. She always worked late, was often the last to leave. Even with her lifestyle full of men and sex, she worked tirelessly on her cases, reveling in the ones she won, bitter in the ones she lost.

The taser in his hand was warm from his body heat and damp with his sweat. He slipped it from his pocket, caressed the handle with his thumb. It was easy to fool the security cameras and the guard would not be back for another twenty minutes. He had plenty of time to disable her and get her from the building. He would take her to his sacred place for she needed more saving than the others. Her wicked ways of the flesh needed to be driven from her body until she could be sent to the Father clean and pure. It didn't matter that the police had tainted his inner sanctum, his sanctuary. They had moved on from it already, leaving their fingerprint dust and yellow crime scene tape to fade and flutter in the wind. It was now nothing more than photos in a file to the officers who trampled through his most cherished space.

A noise made him pause in step and thought. He slipped effortlessly into the shadows and waited.

A figure emerged from the office ahead, moving jerkily toward the stairwell. The man was buttoning his shirt and, as he watched, the stranger ran his hands through his thick hair, taming it into some semblance of order. There was no curiosity about the man hurrying from the sinner's office. He waited until the door closed and the footsteps receded before moving into the low light again.

He frowned when he didn't hear the customary typing that should be coming from the office. The taser slowly came up in his hand as he cautiously peered inside.

For a moment, he thought the room was empty. Like a flash of fire, rage tore through him at having his plans denied. God wanted this of him, and he'd failed this night. He started to turn away when a glimpse of flesh captured his attention. Turning back, he stepped inside the office and approached the desk.

She was lying on the floor, her skirt hiked up lewdly around her waist, her desk supplies scattered haphazardly around her. Her shirt was torn open, her dark pantyhose ripped. At first, he thought she was merely sleeping, so unexpected it was to find her this way.

But she wasn't sleeping. The forming bruises on her neck attested to that.

The rage swelled again. He'd been denied. He'd failed. There was no way he could deliver God's chosen child back into the fold.

The elevator dinged, signaling a new arrival. He moved quickly, slipping out of the office and into the conference room across the hall. He watched and waited, his finger tightened on the taser's trigger.

What he saw made his heart soar.

She was like an angel, a fallen angel with her short blonde hair swept to the side as she came toward him. She was wearing a black skirt and light blue top with one too many buttons undone to reveal a smooth expanse of alabaster skin. He knew this woman. Knew that God was delivering her to him at precisely this moment.

He'd been wrong. He'd misunderstood the plan.

Nicole Honeycutt was not meant to be delivered clean and pure to the Father.

Jill Bernhardt was.

He turned around and saw a wide dry erase board on the wall and smiled. It was time to confuse his enemies. Time to throw those that would stop him from doing the Lord's work off his path.

He chose a red marker...

And began to write.

The club was gonna kill her.

At least they would if they ever found out.

Jill bit her lip as she accepted the badge from the security guard at the front desk and hurried toward the bank of elevators to her right. She caught one as a few junior associates at Abbott, Arbor and Honeycutt were leaving for the night. Both wore suits that Jill was certain would cost her a paycheck.

The elevator doors closed and she sighed, feeling relief that she didn't have to share the space with anyone. Jill stared at her reflection in the metal doors. Her face looked tired and pale, the recent events with her mother and stepfather having taken a lot out of her and leaving the physical evidence of that written all over her drawn features. As she studied herself, her nose wrinkled in reaction to the smell of cigar smoke, perfume and coffee. It permeated the air in the elevator along with a fourth, older scent.

Jill decided it was money.

She didn't want to think about how much of it she was about to turn down. If she thought too much about the money, it made her have second thoughts, and the last thing Jill wanted was second thoughts. She was going to tell Nicole Honeycutt thanks but no thanks. There wasn't enough money in the world to make her represent men like Billy Harris or the current whack-job they were chasing.

Men like her stepfather.

Jill shoved the thought of him aside, the memory of his hands on her. She'd thought she'd buried every last image of him from her childhood so deep she'd never find them, but his reappearance in her life had stirred those once still waters and dredged every ugly memory up to the surface.

She shifted uneasily. It felt like she was going into the enemy lair, especially after Abbott had represented her stepfather. If Jill had needed any further persuading, Abbott's defense of that bastard would have sealed the deal. She thought of Malcolm Abbott's face, of those bushy eyebrows and dull blue eyes, and hoped with fervor that she wouldn't run into him tonight.

The DDA swiped a hand through her bangs as the elevator ascended. Her hands were shaking, and she didn't know if it was because of the conversation she was about to have, or the thoughts of her stepfather that were raking her nerves raw.

Maybe it was because she was ashamed, ashamed that she'd even entertained Honeycutt's offer. Jill didn't want to think about how the girls would react. Lindsay would be the worst, probably taking it as a personal betrayal. And Claire... Jill shook her head. Claire would give her a verbal reaming for the ages.

The elevator dinged, and Jill stepped out on the tenth floor. The carpet was a deep wine color and so plush it swallowed her heels as she made her way toward the office at the end of the hall. That smell of money was much stronger here, and she wondered if piles of it weren't hidden in safes behind every piece of artwork she passed. She was tempted to peek but didn't want to trip any silent alarms. She glanced at her watch and noted with some satisfaction she was a few minutes early.

Jill knocked on the wall next to the door before rounding the corner, drawing up short when she discovered the office was vacant. "Shit," she muttered under her breath. She looked back the way she'd come, hoping to see Honeycutt headed her way, but the floor was eerily silent. She should have known Nicole would do this... make her wait. The woman loved her power trips and no doubt this was one of them.

Jill looked at her watch again. With a sigh, she flipped out her cell phone and punched in Honeycutt's number. She didn't feel like waiting, and if Honeycutt couldn't do her the courtesy of meeting her on time in person then she would...

Her train of thought ended there when she heard the soft ring of a cell phone from behind the desk. It was then that she truly took in the surface. Papers were scattered everywhere. A cup of pens and pencils had tipped on its side, spilling its contents all across the oak surface. The flat screen monitor hung at an odd angle and was facing away from where the user could see it. Jill's gaze was drawn to the floor, where the ringing seemed to be coming from, and she snapped her own phone shut.

It took Jill a few seconds to realize she was looking at a foot underneath the desk. The DDA blinked. Then blinked again.

"Nicole?" Jill moved forward as if in a fog, coming around the desk and looking down. A tiny, shocked sound emerged from her throat.

Nicole Honeycutt was sprawled on the floor, her eyes looking up into Jill's but seeing right through her... seeing something the attorney hoped she wouldn't see herself for a very long time. There were bruises darkening on the woman's throat, forming in the shape of fingertips. They made Jill think of her father, of the girl he just killed...

Jill nearly stumbled over the body in her haste to snatch up the phone on Honeycutt's desk. She pressed zero and tried to control the sudden shuddering of her body that had her teeth nearly clacking together. Jill kept her eyes focused on the phone, on anything but the cooling form beneath her.

"This is Deputy District Attorney Jill Bernhardt. I need you to call the police and lock this building down ASAP. No one gets in or out." She didn't explain as she hung up the phone before pulling out her own cell again. She hit speed dial on Lindsay Boxer's number.

Act I

"Seriously?" Claire huffed as she came bustling out of the stairwell, her kit in one hand and a slight sheen of sweat on her forehead. "You couldn't have restored power to the elevator?"

Lindsay gave her a half-hearted smirk. She'd already climbed the ten-story hike so she felt little sympathy. "We're working on it. The guard went a little overboard. Now they can't get them to come back on." She took the kit from a grateful Claire and motioned with her free hand toward an office at the end of the hall. They began to walk side by side. "It's Nicole Honeycutt," she informed her friend.

"I heard." Claire shook her head. "Small world."

"It's even smaller than you think," Lindsay said as she waited for Claire to pass her and

enter the office.

“Oh?”

“Jill found her.”

Claire glanced up sharply from where she'd just knelt next to the body. Several questions immediately sprang to mind, none of them having to do a damn bit with the case. She settled on the one that had her the most curious. “What was she doing here?”

Lindsay shrugged, wishing she had that answer herself. She had a few theories, all of them swirling around Malcolm Abbott and the whereabouts of Jill's missing stepfather. “Jacobi is with her.”

“Why aren't you?”

Lindsay set the kit down. “I need to focus on the case instead of a friend, no matter how much I would prefer to do otherwise.” She leaned back and crossed her arms, her leather jacket creaking a little as she did so. “I'll check in with her when Jacobi is done.”

Claire frowned, but she understood. She fought the urge to hurry. She wished she could set her job aside for just a few minutes to check on Jill. The last thing her friend needed was this, especially after everything Jill had just been through with her so-called family.

Claire began a preliminary exam of the body. She noted the bruising around the throat and could only imagine what had gone through Jill's mind at the sight. Lindsay hovered in the doorway behind her. Claire could almost feel Lindsay's impatient energy coming off the inspector in waves. A tiny smirk appeared. “So how is Cindy?” she asked innocently.

Lindsay stopped tapping her foot and looked at her. “You're asking me about Cindy now?” Her voice sounded incredulous as she slid her hands into the back pockets of her jeans.

“Why not now?” Claire asked as she checked Honeycutt's liver temperature to determine time of death.

Lindsay freed one hand and motioned at what Claire was doing. “You're sticking sharp, pointy things in a dead body. Now doesn't seem like a good time to talk about my love life.”

The medical examiner chuckled as she glanced at the results. “Well it's not like we've had much time to socialize lately.”

The inspector couldn't argue with that, but she could change the subject. She leaned against the doorway. “How long has she been dead?”

“Not long at all,” Claire murmured as she shook her head. She didn’t mourn Honeycutt. The woman was the antithesis of everything Claire believed in, but being a bitch was not a motive for murder, and it didn’t earn the woman the right to be brutalized like this.

They continued in silence, Claire performing her examination while Lindsay fidgeted with impatience. It was their routine, and Claire took an odd sort of comfort in it. Finally she got to her feet. “She was obviously strangled, but I won’t know for sure the cause of death until I open her up.”

“Inspector?”

Lindsay looked over her shoulder at Officer Sammy Cho. He was standing in the doorway across the hall. His youthful features looked upset, and the sight made Lindsay’s stomach drop. She felt a familiar fission of fear chase up her spine, and for a long moment, she couldn’t speak or move. “Don’t suppose you found the killer in there,” she finally asked when she rediscovered her voice.

“No. Just his calling card.”

Lindsay shot Claire a look, and the two of them stepped out of Honeycutt’s office and made their way reluctantly across the hall to what appeared to be a conference room. Just past the threshold, they both cursed.

Scrawled with a red marker across a dry erase board was the last thing either of them wanted to see.

Scripture.

Something cold washed over Lindsay as she stared at the words written in the color of blood. She’d felt the same sensation, the sick chill, at the crime scenes of all the Hallelujah Man’s other victims. Those victims’ faces flickered across her mind’s eye now, each of them frozen in their final moments of suffering. Except in the case of Felicia Watkins. Lindsay had the misfortune of knowing what her screams sounded like in stereo.

He’d been here, in this room, while Jill had been across the hall. They had been in the same space. On the same floor. Possibly at the same moment.

“This fucker is really starting to piss me off.”

The unexpected words snapped Lindsay out of her dark musings as she slowly turned her head and looked at Claire, her brown eyes like saucers. Cho seemed equally as stunned.

“What?” Claire sniped. “Like you both weren’t thinking it.”

Lindsay shook her head as if to clear it. “Go get the techs,” she ordered the other officer, her voice sounding suddenly exhausted. “Get ‘em in here. And do me a favor, Cho? Let the Lieutenant know?”

Cho nodded, but he didn’t look pleased with the latter request. Jacobi dipped his head in greeting at the younger man as he passed him on his way out the door.

“You might want to go check on Jill. She’s weirding out in the break room. And be nice to the girl when you find out why she was here. She did just find a body after all.” Jacobi caught sight of the scripture and frowned. “Damn. That’s not what I was hoping to see when I walked in here.”

Lindsay and Claire exchanged glances. “Why was she here?” Lindsay asked.

“I am not going to be the one to tell you that,” Jacobi replied. “You want to know, you’re going to have to go ask.”

Jill finding the body was a complication. Lindsay didn’t need complications. Her life had enough of them already. She glanced hopefully at Claire.

“I’ll go talk to her and find out,” Claire announced, reading the beseeching look in Lindsay’s tired eyes with practiced ease. She snapped off her gloves and gave Lindsay’s arm a squeeze as she passed.

“Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit... Therefore honor God with your body,” Lindsay read the scrawled scripture out loud. “Claire’s right. This guy is pissing me off.” She stepped closer to the words, noting that the marker that made them was conspicuously missing.

“He’s gonna run out of passages if he keeps it up,” Jacobi joked without humor.

Lindsay sighed. According to security, there was no way the killer had come down the stairwell or elevator once Jill had sounded the alarm. The building had locked down instantly.

Her brown gaze drifted to the window. Beyond the glass was an impressive and beautiful view of the Golden Gate Bridge. The sight made Lindsay yearn to be somewhere else, anywhere else. More and more, this case made her just want to run, to grab Cindy and get the hell away from San Francisco. Pursing her lips, she approached the expensive view, wondering if maybe the killer had somehow gone out the window and repelled down the outside wall. She put her gloved fingertips against the glass and started to lean forward only to jerk back when a familiar redhead suddenly appeared on the other side.

“Good Lord that girl gets around,” Jacobi muttered in slight awe when Cindy waved to them from the other side of the glass.

“How in the hell...?” Lindsay gave the window a nudge with her finger, unsurprised when it swung open and a gust of cold air brushed her face.

“Hey,” Cindy said breathlessly. Her cheeks were nearly as red as her hair. “Oh...” Her perkiness vanished when she saw the scripture. “Not another one.”

Lindsay stuck her head out the window and looked down, frowning when she saw scaffolding stretching down beneath her. She smelled the distinct odor of paint as the wind whipped her hair about her features. “You *climbed* up here?” She hoped she kept the horror out of her voice as she leaned back inside.

Cindy smirked.

“Cindy, you’re trespassing on a crime scene!”

“I am not!” Cindy protested. “I’m not *in* the crime scene. I’m outside the building. Where is the crime scene, by the way?” She stuck her head in the conference room and looked around curiously. “And who died?”

Lindsay put a finger on Cindy’s chest and pushed her lover back a step. “You have to go. Now.”

“Aw, c’mon. It took me ten minutes to climb up here.”

“Then it should take you about that long to climb down.”

“Inspectors?” Cho re-entered the room, just missing Cindy who dove for cover on the scaffolding platform.

“Whatcha got?” Jacobi asked as he and Lindsay eased in front of the open window.

“The Medical Examiner wants to see you both in the break room.”

“We’ll be right there.” Jacobi promised.

They waited for Cho to leave before both pivoted and watched Cindy’s head pop up over the window ledge.

“Just tell me who the victim is. I can at least get started on that angle. On this floor it’s got to be somebody good.” Cindy looked up at them both hopefully, the cool night breeze ruffling her hair.

Lindsay crossed her arms. “It was Honeycutt. Happy now?”

“Seriously?” Cindy scrambled back to her feet. “Nicole Honeycutt? The attorney from the Dow trial?”

“Seriously,” Jacobi replied. “And you seriously need to beat tracks out of here before you get caught and hauled in for questioning.”

“Wait a second.” Cindy held up a hand containing a reporter’s notebook and pointed it at the scripture. “Nicole Honeycutt was killed by the Hallelujah Man?” Cindy looked at the scripture again. Let the words and what they implied sink in. She thought of Felicia Watkins. The missing eye... the hot poker that had been driven into her again and again...

Cindy remembered how far she’d gone to save Jill’s reputation during the Dow trial. Her outburst in court, her investigation into Honeycutt when she realized how the defense attorney had planned to discredit Jill... It had all been so worth it, even the contempt of court mark on her record. She’d never thought there would be consequences for anyone else due to her actions.

Fatal consequences.

Had the Hallelujah Man made Honeycutt suffer like Felicia Watkins? The thought made Cindy shiver.

“Maybe,” Lindsay hedged. Her eyes narrowed as she noticed something change in her lover’s demeanor.

“How did she die?” Cindy’s voice was more subdued, and Lindsay almost had to strain to hear it.

“At first blush it looks like she was raped and strangled,” Jacobi told her.

Cindy frowned and her brows furrowed. “That’s it?”

Jacobi looked at her and crossed his arms.

“I mean,” Cindy hastened to explain as she swallowed around the sudden bile that seemed to have lodged in her throat. “Did he... make her...”

“Suffer?” Lindsay guessed.

Cindy nodded.

“It doesn’t look like it,” Lindsay admitted.

“So... what else can you tell me?” Cindy asked as she managed to slide back into reporter-mode, but not without a great deal of unease.

“For crying out loud, Cindy, we just got here,” Lindsay replied in a gruff and tired voice.

“So you think I should go?” Cindy suggested as she set her dark thoughts aside for the moment and focused reluctantly back on her job.

“That would be a good idea. You probably just found the killer’s escape route,” Lindsay informed her.

Cindy bit her lip. “So my fingerprints will be...”

“Uh-huh,” Lindsay drawled.

The reporter winced, trying in vain to gauge if her lover was truly upset. “Right. Going now.”

Lindsay stuck her head out the window and watched as Cindy started to descend. She frowned, not liking the idea of the reporter climbing down the rickety looking structure, especially in the dark. She stifled her protective instincts, knowing Cindy wouldn’t appreciate them. “Cindy,” her voice was softer when she said her lover’s name. For a moment, Lindsay forgot all about serial killers and dead bodies as she watched Cindy’s head tip back and her beautiful features come into view once more. The warm pang that hit Lindsay in the middle of her chest at the sight almost made her breathless.

“Meet us at Jill’s. She found the body,” Lindsay told her in a huskier than normal voice.

Cindy paused. She looked like she was about to change her mind, to climb back up the scaffolding and hurry inside to go find her friend. With a pained expression, she nodded and started reluctantly descending once more.

Lindsay didn’t move away until she saw her lover give her a little wave from the sidewalk. She smiled unconsciously.

“You are so far gone over that girl,” Jacobi pointed out. “It’d be sad if it weren’t so darn precious.”

Lindsay looked completely unapologetic when she leaned back inside and closed the window. “You’re just jealous, old man.” Brushing past him, she went in search of the break room. She ignored the scripture behind her, putting it out of her mind for a few minutes. Right now Jill needed her. Their damn killer was going to have to wait.

Claire and Jill were sitting side by side, but neither was talking when Lindsay entered the break room. Jill was staring at a cup of water in her hands. Claire was leaned back in her chair, her arms crossed, an angry look on her features.

“Um...” Lindsay looked from one woman to the other, feeling like she’d just walked in

on the calm before the storm... or maybe one's aftermath. "Problem?"

"Other than me finding a dead body you mean?" Jill asked dryly.

"Wait until you hear what she was doing here," Claire told Lindsay in a tight voice just as Jacobi appeared behind his partner.

"Tell me you were not sleeping with Nicole Honeycutt," Lindsay said with slight horror at the first thought that popped into her head.

Jill turned her head and glared at her. "Please."

Lindsay blew out a relieved breath as she pulled back a chair and sat down at the table with her two friends. Jacobi opted to lean in the doorway. "So... what were you doing here at this hour? You weren't here to talk to Malcolm Abbott were you? Maybe kick him in the shins?"

"I had an appointment," Jill said as her eyes returned guiltily to the contents of her cup.

"With Honeycutt?" Lindsay asked with some confusion. "Why would you be meeting her?"

"Jacobi didn't tell you?" Jill gave him a faintly accusing look, and he held up his hands.

"I was not going there," he confessed. "I didn't want them shooting the messenger."

"Go on," Claire said in a miffed tone. "Tell her."

Jill rubbed her forehead wearily. "It... we were going to... talk about a job."

"A job," Lindsay repeated slowly. "Wait... a job here? For you?" Her voice elevated in surprise and an edge of anger.

"I was here to turn her down," Jill explained.

"Nicole Honeycutt offered you a job, and you didn't tell us." Claire sniffed, clearly put out with her blonde friend.

"There was nothing to tell," Jill answered, her voice now more subdued. "And hello? I found a dead body! I mean... ick. A little comforting would be appreciated here!"

Claire sniffed again.

Jacobi shook his head at their antics.

So did Lindsay. She wanted to yell, wanted to feel hurt by Jill's actions, but the cop in

her wouldn't let it happen. Not now. Not yet. "Okay. Wait. Just... wait."

Jacobi crossed his arms. "So you were here for a job interview," he said in an effort to get the discussion back on track. He'd already been over this with Jill, but he knew he wasn't going to get anything else done until Lindsay had heard the details for herself.

"No," Jill said firmly. "I already had an interview of sorts. I was here to tell her thanks but no thanks."

"I can't believe you ever considered it!" Claire huffed. "She tried to ruin you. These are the people that represented your stepfather!"

"Claire," Lindsay snapped only to blink when she realized whom she was scolding. She cleared her throat. "What time were you supposed to meet?"

"Eight thirty."

"Were you on time?" Lindsay asked.

Jill nodded. "I was a few minutes early. I wanted to get it over with."

Lindsay gave Claire a look when the medical examiner started to comment. Claire lapsed into silence but didn't look happy about it. "Then what happened?"

"I walked in and she wasn't there. Well, she was there. She was just on the floor, and I didn't see her right away." Jill ran a hand over her eyes. "Was she raped?" She looked at Claire.

"Preliminary exam of the body would indicate that," Claire said in a quieter voice.

"Jesus," Jill whispered.

Lindsay glanced at Claire. "Did you tell her what was in the conference room?"

Claire shook her head. "I thought I should leave that to you."

"Please tell me there wasn't another body in there," Jill pleaded.

"You might think this is worse," Jacobi murmured.

Lindsay laced her fingers and leaned her elbows on the table. There was no easy way for her to break the news. "There was scripture written on a dry erase board..."

Jill's already pale skin went ghostly white. "Scripture," she said slowly. She swallowed as her gaze went to Jacobi's grizzled face then to Claire's tired eyes and finally back to Lindsay's deadly serious features. "You're telling me the Hallelujah Man killed her?"

“It’s looking that way. But we’ve been down this road before. So let’s not get ahead of ourselves,” Jacobi warned all of them.

“She was still warm!” Jill said as she jerked to her feet and started pacing. “I might have missed him by minutes! He could have been across the hall writing that while I was in her office!”

Lindsay didn’t want to think about that. It was too damn scary to contemplate. “We think he went out the window in the conference room. There is some scaffolding along the side of the building. Cindy found it,” Lindsay informed them before biting her lip.

Claire’s brow scrunched as she puzzled that out before her face cleared when she realized what Lindsay meant. “Don’t tell me she…”

“She did,” Jacobi replied before Lindsay could answer.

Claire put a hand over her eyes and shook her head.

“So why would HM kill Honeycutt?” Jill demanded, resorting to the abbreviated version of the killer’s name for expediency’s sake. “What was her sin?”

“Lust,” Lindsay pointed out bluntly. Jill spun to look at her, something in her eyes telling Lindsay that Jill did, in fact, know exactly what sin the attorney had committed. It was one her friend was intimately acquainted with herself.

“Jill… did you see anyone leaving… hear anything…”

Jill was already shaking her head. “It was so quiet I could hear myself breathing. There was no one up here but me… and maybe… him.” She wrapped her arms around herself as a sudden chill took her.

Lindsay stood and slipped out of her jacket, draping it around Jill’s shoulders. She pulled the sides together and gave Jill a hesitant smile. “All that matters is that you’re fine. Do you want to wait here until we finish up, or do you want me to have Cho take you home?”

“I’ll wait. I should go see the scripture…”

“Jill,” Lindsay started to protest.

“I’m okay,” Jill promised. “A little freaked, but I can still do my job.”

“This isn’t your job.”

The four of them turned to find Denise Kwon in the doorway. “Nicole Honeycutt’s

murder isn't your case, Bernhardt.”

“But...” Jill started to protest.

“No. You're a witness.” Denise looked at Lindsay. “Could you all give us some time alone? I need to speak with my Deputy District Attorney for a moment.”

Lindsay looked like she was about to tell Denise what she could do with her request when Jill squeezed her arm.

“That's fine.” Jill looked at Lindsay. “Come find me when you're done.”

Lindsay nodded reluctantly, but she gave Denise one more long, hard stare of warning before clearing the room with Jacobi and Claire.

“What do you want to know?” Jill asked, realizing that there were worse things than finding a dead body to worry about... like your boss finding out you'd interviewed for another job.

“Tell me you're joking.”

Jacobi sighed as he led Tom down the hallway. “This isn't the sort of thing I tend to joke about.” They stepped into the conference room, and Tom drew up short.

“Damnit!” Tom spat when he saw the scripture. He watched as Lindsay swiveled around to face him. She was crouched near one of the conference room chairs, staring up at the board, and his anger deflated instantly when he saw the shadows under her eyes, the fatigue in every line of her body. She was running herself into the ground trying to catch this guy, and it killed Tom to see it. It was happening again. Another killer was consuming Lindsay's life, taking pieces of his ex-wife's soul with each new victim.

A part of him wanted to shake her, to make her see reason. The rest of him wanted to hold her close and protect her, even now, even after everything they'd been through.

But Tom knew his days of comforting Lindsay Boxer were behind him. All he could be, especially in this moment, was her boss. He pointed at the dry erase board. “So he's racked up another one.”

“Maybe,” Lindsay conceded. She was studying him closely as if she were reading his thoughts.

“That doesn't look like a maybe to me, Boxer.”

“You didn't see Honeycutt's body,” Lindsay told him. “You remember Felicia Watkins?”

How he was escalating and what he did to her? Honeycutt just had some bruises around her neck. Besides, you're the one who keeps telling me not to jump to conclusions."

Tom rocked back on his heels at the rebuke then nodded. "Fair enough. So you think he went down the scaffolding?"

"It's being dusted for prints now," Jacobi told him.

Lindsay wondered if she should mention the fact that a certain reporter's prints were likely to show up all over the place. She decided it could wait. She could just have the techs exclude those prints, and Tom would never have to know.

"And I heard Jill found the body?"

Lindsay nodded. "She had them lock down the building. We searched top to bottom. Anyone who was still here has been rounded up and questioned. Fortunately that wasn't too many on a Friday at 8:30."

"And Claire?"

"Back at the morgue with Honeycutt," Jacobi said.

Tom scraped his hands through his short hair. "The press is gonna be all over this one."

Lindsay bit her lip, thinking that one member of the press in particular already was. "Like the press hasn't been all over the others?" she asked dryly.

"You think she got her killed?" Tom wondered abruptly.

"Huh?" Lindsay asked in confusion.

"Thomas. That stunt she pulled in court, the article she wrote on Honeycutt..."

Lindsay shot instantly to her feet. "This is not Cindy's fault."

Jacobi moved a step closer, sensing a storm brewing.

"How can you say that?" Tom pointed at the scripture. "The Hallelujah Man kills another victim, and we all know what sin Nicole Honeycutt is guilty of. And how do we know? Oh that's right. Thomas' article."

"The only one responsible here for Nicole Honeycutt's rape and murder is the person who killed her." Lindsay felt a trickle of fear that he was right, but more than anything she felt rage. Rage that another life had been lost, that she'd been too late and too stupid to stop it. Rage that Tom kept getting in her way, slowing her down. Rage that he would dare talk about Cindy like she was some clueless, irresponsible child.

Lindsay knew she'd been guilty of that in the beginning, of underestimating Cindy. She'd treated her like a kid, too young to know much about how the world really worked. Then Lindsay's father had died, and Cindy had been there with a wisdom beyond her years. Everything had changed between them the night of the funeral. Lindsay had never been able to look at Cindy the same way again.

"I know she's your friend, Lindsay, but you're letting that cloud your judgment."

"Nothing is clouding my judgment," Lindsay countered angrily.

"Like hell, Boxer. As your boss, I'm hereby ordering you to stay away from that reporter." Tom crossed his arms and waited for the explosion to follow.

"Oh Lord," Jacobi muttered. He put his hand on Tom's elbow, hoping he could defuse the situation before tempers boiled over and everyone's frustration with the case got the better of them. "Lieutenant, maybe we should step outside and just..."

"You're ordering me?" Lindsay responded with ice in her voice. "Are you kidding? Do you know how many cases Cindy Thomas has helped us crack?"

Tom was very aware, just as he was aware of how much time his ex-wife seemed to spend around the redhead. He didn't like how close they stood together, how Lindsay's face lit up whenever that reporter walked into the bullpen. He knew he was letting jealousy color his actions, but he was too frustrated by this killer and watching Lindsay break herself to catch him to care.

"What's the matter, Linz?" Tom sneered. "Have you forgotten how to work a case without her? Maybe she's the one who should wear the badge..." The rest of Tom's sentence was cut short as he was slapped across the face. He staggered back, smacking into the wall with the force of the blow.

Jacobi closed his eyes and swore.

Tom touched his bottom lip shocked to see it was bleeding. He felt a touch of remorse for egging her on, but what was done was done. "You're off this case. In fact, you're on suspension."

"Good," Lindsay muttered, surprised she meant it. "Maybe I can finally get something done for a change," she snarled as she shoved past him. She managed an apologetic look for Jacobi, then spun around in the doorway to say one last thing. "And by the way, *Lieutenant*, asking me to stay away from Cindy Thomas is like asking Niagara not to fall."

"And why is that?" Tom shot back as he wiped the blood from his lip.

“Considering we share a bed almost every night that could be a little hard.” Lindsay had the satisfaction of watching Tom’s eyes bulge. She didn’t savor the moment, though, as she turned and stalked away, determined not to shake her stinging hand until she was out of his line of sight.

Lindsay slammed the door to her SUV and gripped her steering wheel so hard it squeaked under her hands. Needing an outlet for her frustration, she pounded the wheel several times and only stopped when it started to hurt.

“Damnit. Damnit!!”

She closed her eyes and leaned back against the headrest, trying to get her temper under control. When the passenger side door suddenly opened, Lindsay almost came out of her skin.

“Are you out of your mind?” Jill demanded as she scrambled inside. “You got yourself suspended! And hello? You were supposed to be my ride home.”

Lindsay blinked at her, not sure what to address first. “I was going to call you to come down,” she said defensively. “And you have no right to give me grief,” Lindsay countered. “Miss ‘I was offered a big defense attorney gig and didn’t tell my friends about it.’”

Jill was undeterred by Lindsay’s ire. “Jacobi gave me the heads up and told me to, and I quote, ‘go after the fool girl and slap some sense into her.’” Doing as ordered, Jill reached across the console and smacked Lindsay on the back of the head.

“Hey!”

“How could you get suspended?” Jill asked with disbelief. “I found the body! I’m a part of this case, I’m freaked the hell out, I’m counting on you, and you go get yourself thrown off the force!!!”

Lindsay wilted a little under Jill’s anger. She rarely saw Jill this mad and almost never at her. She didn’t much like it. “Did Jacobi tell you why I got suspended?”

“He said you popped Tom in the mouth. Not that I haven’t been tempted a time or two myself, Linz, but...”

“He told me I had to stay away from Cindy. He thinks Cindy got Honeycutt killed because of what she did in the Dow trial.”

Jill stilled, her anger evaporating. “What she did for me, you mean,” she said quietly. She slumped back in the seat. The thought that the trial could have led to Nicole’s death

never crossed her mind, but now it made perfect, sad sense. “Oh God.” She frowned. “So Tom is saying this is somehow Cindy’s fault?”

Lindsay simply raised an eyebrow.

“What the hell did you just slap him for? You should have punched his lights out.”

“Thank you.” Lindsay shifted in her seat and started the car. She wasn’t sure what she was supposed to do now, but she knew she wasn’t letting this case go. It owned her now. It owned all of them. Badge or no badge, she was seeing this one through to the bitter end.

Jill felt something cold bump her shoulder, and she looked up to see Claire offering her a long-necked bottle of beer. She smiled and took it gratefully as her friend eased around her and settled in a chair to her left. Lindsay was pacing by the front door of Jill’s apartment, checking her watch every ten seconds.

The DDA let her head drop back against the couch and sighed. It was nearly five o’clock in the morning. Way too late, or too early depending on how you looked at it, to be drinking beer, but damn if she didn’t need one. “What a bitch of a day.” She took a long drag on the bottle as she watched Lindsay pivot and head back for the door.

“You’re going to wear out those boots, sweetheart,” Claire informed the antsy detective.

Lindsay rolled her eyes in Claire’s direction, but she didn’t take the bait.

The knowledge that Lindsay was technically not an inspector at the moment was too difficult to process at this early of an hour, Claire decided. Lindsay oozed cop out of her pores and that still hadn’t changed, even if her friend’s status on the force was currently shaky. The phone call from a miffed Jacobi informing her of Lindsay’s impetuous actions with Tom still seemed like some sort of dream.

Lindsay glanced at her watch again and whipped out her cell phone one more time, making sure she hadn’t missed a call. Claire and Jill watched her then shared a knowing smirk.

“So whipped,” Jill whispered.

“I heard that,” Lindsay fired back.

“So how are you holding up, sweetheart?” Claire asked the blonde. “You look like you could sleep for a week.”

“That good? I feel like I could sleep for a month.” Jill brought the bottle to her lips and

took another sip.

“Honey?” Claire began slowly as Jill’s blue gaze fixed on her. “Why didn’t you tell us about the job?”

Lindsay didn’t add anything to the question, but she turned toward them as she continued to pace.

“I was...” Jill took a breath. She’d hoped under the circumstances that she would be excused from this line of questioning for the rest of the night. “It just seems like there are a lot of changes happening lately.” She glanced at Lindsay from under her blonde bangs and watched her best friend’s gaze drop to the floor. “Honeycutt made the offer, and there was a hell of a lot of money involved.”

“And you wondered if maybe you should make a change of your own,” Claire guessed. “Jill, you would have been on the other side of the club. Those people defended...”

“I know,” Jill cut her off. “Which was why it took me all of ten minutes to decide it wasn’t for me. Then everything happened with my stepfather, and I never really got a chance to talk to any of you about it. Then I felt too guilty to talk to you about it.” She sighed. “We all have our moments of stupidity. This was one of mine.”

Claire smiled and patted Jill’s arm. That earned her a grateful look from the blonde.

“Now can we go back to talking about the serial killer who was probably standing across the hall while I was calling you?” Jill asked Lindsay. “Because I’m sort of still wiggling out about that.”

Lindsay’s gaze went to Claire as her friend leaned forward, a bottle of beer in her hands. The medical examiner was staring at the label, her thoughts clearly on something troubling. Claire had left them at the crime scene and followed Honeycutt’s body to the morgue, knowing the case would be assigned the highest priority.

“What?” Lindsay asked slowly.

Claire’s head came back up, and she found both friends watching her. Her eyes widened marginally. “What what?”

“You have that look,” Jill commented.

“What look?” Claire leaned back in her chair.

“The look like you know something and aren’t telling.” Lindsay cocked her head to the side as she pinned Claire with her most patient expression, the one that said she would keep staring until the subject of her gaze relented and spilled her guts.

Claire sighed. "I just... thought I'd wait and share my findings when we were all here." She tried to look innocent and apparently failed when both Jill and Lindsay crossed their arms and gave her expectant looks. "Okay, fine. I don't think it was him."

Lindsay's arms dropped, and she slapped her thighs with her hands. "You have got to be kidding me!"

Jill brought her cold bottle to her suddenly throbbing forehead.

"Hear me out," Claire began.

"No. *No*," Lindsay said again. "How many copycats are we gonna have?"

Claire pursed her lips as Jill just shook her head.

"He was there," Lindsay announced. "I felt it. Tell me you didn't feel it when you were in that conference room. Tell me," she demanded of them.

"Lindsay..." Claire began.

A knock at the door had the detective spinning and rushing to open it. Cindy was standing there, her red hair slightly mussed from the gentle rainstorm that had started up outside.

"Hey," the reporter said out of breath. "Sorry I'm late. I thought I'd get us some food." She hesitated when she saw Lindsay's tight features. "What?"

"You couldn't have called?" Lindsay demanded.

"Were you worried?" Cindy asked in surprise.

Lindsay straightened. "No."

Jill and Claire snorted.

Lindsay glared at them before snatching the white bag with the prominent Papa Joe's label out of Cindy's hands. "Get in here."

Cindy trotted inside, ushered in with Lindsay's hand on the small of her back. "I sent you a text message," the reporter claimed.

"No you didn't." Lindsay retrieved her phone and looked down at it. There, at the top of the screen, was the little envelope icon that said she had a message. She stuffed the phone back in her pocket without looking at it.

Cindy smirked as she stepped away from her lover and went to Jill. She sat down on the

couch and slid her arms around her friend, giving her a swift, hard hug. “You okay?”

Jill hugged her back, ignoring the light misting of rain on her friend’s jacket. Cindy smelled sweet and familiar, and something about her scent settled Jill’s nerves a fraction. She held up her beer when Cindy leaned back. “A few more of these, and I’ll be great.” She brushed a lock of Cindy’s wet hair out of the girl’s features. “What about you? You were the one scaling tall buildings, young lady.”

Cindy smiled. “The wind made it a little tricky at times. I thought I was going to get blown off for a second there,” she confessed.

Lindsay’s head came up from where she was rooting around in the bag. “Okay. Can you not share that with us please?”

Jill bumped Cindy with her elbow, fully aware that the reporter was pulling Lindsay’s leg even if their inspector friend was too clueless to notice.

Lindsay produced four Styrofoam containers from the sack, each with one of their names scrawled across the top. She handed them out, along with the plastic cutlery, and for a brief span of time they did nothing but eat. Cindy got up to fetch a beer of her own, and Lindsay wondered if she should be impressed with her lover’s restraint or worried. She expected Cindy to be all over Jill with questions, but so far the reporter had been silent on the subject.

“No one says a word about my suspension.” Lindsay pointed a fork at Jill and Claire while warning them in a whisper. “I’ll tell her when we get home.”

They both held up their hands in surrender.

Cindy returned with four bottles, handing out a fresh one to each of her friends before cracking open her own and taking a sip. She settled next to Jill as Lindsay moved closer, perching on the armrest of the couch so they could be side by side.

“So what were you doing there?” Cindy finally asked.

“We don’t want to talk about that,” Claire said. “I just stopped being mad.”

Jill rolled her eyes. “I was going to turn Honeycutt down. She offered me a job.”

Cindy chewed on a French fry. “And here I thought the woman had no taste,” she teased faintly.

Jill smiled.

“Can’t blame her for trying to get you onboard. Your conviction rate when you’re lead chair on a case is like through the roof.”

Jill glanced at her other two friends as if to say, “so there.”

“Of course, I’d have been pissed if you went to the dark side,” Cindy offered casually.

Lindsay tilted her head and smirked right back at the attorney.

“Well there was really never any danger in that,” Jill answered sheepishly around a mouthful of salad.

Cindy nodded as she popped another fry into her mouth. Lindsay frowned, realizing that her lover was being a little too subdued. Calling Cindy out on behavior didn’t seem like a good idea, however, at least not with an audience. Besides, she had something she was keeping from the redhead as well.

“All right,” Claire said as they finally got down to business. “I was just telling the girls that I don’t think the Hallelujah Man did this one.”

Cindy paused with her beer almost to her lips. “How many copycats are we gonna have?”

Lindsay smiled at how much she and Cindy were alike at times, then turned slightly bashful when she noticed Jill’s sparkling blue eyes meet her gaze knowingly.

“Nicole Honeycutt was raped and strangled. Someone used their bare hands.” Claire set her food down and eased back in the chair. “Now does that sound like our guy’s modus operandi?”

“No,” the other three women groaned.

Each of them was briefly silent as they remembered the video of Felicia Watkins’ murder in all its gruesome glory. What the killer had done to her, the sound of her screams. If the Hallelujah Man was behind Honeycutt’s murder, the attorney had gotten off very, very easy.

“So what’s with the scripture?” Lindsay finally demanded. “It feels like him.”

“Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit... Therefore honor God with your body,” Cindy recalled from memory. “Corinthians I think.”

“You think?” Claire drawled.

“I can’t remember everything,” Cindy protested before taking another swig of her beer. She leaned back into Lindsay and was rewarded when one of her lover’s hands came to rest on her shoulder and squeezed before rubbing her back gently.

Jill watched them for a moment, aching a little at what they had and she didn't. She tore her gaze away and stuffed the emotion down. "Was there anything there? Anything at all that could tie this to the Hallelujah Man?"

Claire shrugged. "Fibers were found on the body and in the conference room."

"Tyrian purple fibers?" Lindsay asked.

Another shrug. "First glance at the fibers found under the victim's nails didn't look like it. But there was a tiny swatch of something caught in the windowsill. That looked much more promising."

Lindsay frowned. "So we can put him in the conference room but not the office? What the hell?"

"Let's wait for the test results, Linz," Claire cautioned.

Jill sighed, and all eyes turned on her.

"Whoa," the attorney murmured, startled to suddenly be the focus of everyone's attention. "Just tired guys."

"You sure you're all right?" Cindy asked quietly.

"I've had way better days, but, sadly enough, I've also had worse. I'm fine," Jill vowed as she polished off her beer. "And not that this isn't completely fascinating, but I'm about to fall asleep sitting up. Can we all crash for a while and come at this fresh in a few hours?"

Lindsay seemed reluctant to let it go, but she felt Cindy press more tightly against her, and she kept her protests to herself. "Sure," she said quietly.

"Are you okay here by yourself?" Claire asked as Jill and Lindsay got to their feet. "You can stay with me and the boys, or I can crash on the couch..."

Jill grabbed Claire's hand and squeezed. "I love you," Jill said sincerely. "Now please go away."

Claire smiled as she leaned over and kissed her blonde friend on the forehead. "You call if you need anything."

"I will," Jill promised. She accepted another hug from Cindy and then Lindsay who offered her a reassuring smile as she leaned back. For a moment, their history floated between them, and Jill felt her world stabilize. "Thanks," she whispered in response to everything Lindsay had communicated to her in a simple look.

Lindsay nodded. "I'll call you in a few hours."

"Not too few hours," Jill reminded her.

Lindsay was the last out the door behind Cindy and Claire. She waved before motioning at the locks as she shut the door behind her. Jill rolled her eyes but wearily hauled herself off the sofa and went to the door, sliding the security chain and deadbolt home.

She began to unbutton her shirt, only stopping to turn on the security alarm, before almost staggering with fatigue toward her bedroom.

She didn't notice the man on the roof one building over, watching her every move through a telescope.

Act II

Lindsay sighed as she unclipped her badge and gun and set both on the nightstand. She stared at the brass star, letting her thumb run over the rough surface. She made a mental note to meet Jacobi tomorrow to hand in her gun and shield. It was a testament to how high tempers had been running that she hadn't thrown both at Tom, or that he hadn't asked for either. With a second sigh, she reached for the clutch piece strapped to her left ankle.

Her backup piece now resting next to her issued firearm, Lindsay found herself swaying a little in place, feeling like she could fall asleep standing up. Her gaze slid guiltily to her lover's back. Cindy was sitting on the other side of the bed in the process of kicking off her shoes. She'd already shed her jacket, and her fingers were working on the buttons of her shirt. Lindsay's lips quirked as she moved to stand in front of the redhead. "Need some help?" she drawled.

Cindy tipped her head back, a sleepy smile on her features, but there was something in her eyes that Lindsay couldn't put her finger on. Not yet. She had an inkling, but she decided to wait her lover out and let Cindy tell her what was wrong when she was ready.

"Are you offering your assistance, officer?"

Officer. Guilt panged in the pit of Lindsay's gut, but it didn't reflect on her face. This wasn't the moment to share her shaky employment status with Cindy. Lindsay began to unbutton Cindy's shirt, letting her knuckles graze the soft skin underneath. Her fatigue ebbed, replaced by a sudden wash of want. "Well," she teased, her voice low and soothing. "My job is to protect... and serve." She leaned down as the shirt came free, easing it off Cindy's shoulders as she kissed her lover with simple passion.

Cindy made a sound in the back of her throat as her arms went around Lindsay's neck,

pulling the lanky detective down on top of her. Lindsay rolled them both further onto the bed before fumbling with Cindy's jeans as her lover's hands began undressing her in kind.

Finally naked, they slid together, belly to belly as need and instinct took over. Lindsay felt her mind blank from the night's troubles as Cindy's thigh slipped between her own.

"Love you," Cindy whispered between heated kisses, and Lindsay felt her heart soar with the soft words. She knew something was bothering her lover, just as she knew Cindy wanted Lindsay to help her forget whatever it was if only for a short time.

"Love you, too," Lindsay purred against the redhead's lips before her mouth moved lower.

And lower still.

Sometime later, they lay wrapped up in each other, both on the edge of sleep without the ability to tumble over it. Lindsay fought the return of her fatigue, waiting out the silence for Cindy to confess what was wrong. It took another five minutes before the reporter shifted closer and admitted in a halting voice what was troubling her.

"Do you think I got her killed?" Cindy's voice was so quiet Lindsay had to strain to hear it.

Lindsay closed her eyes. It was bad enough that Tom had come to that conclusion. It broke her heart to hear Cindy voice it. She said nothing, sensing that Cindy wasn't done talking.

"The article I wrote on Honeycutt... I put her promiscuity out there for all to see," the reporter continued.

Lindsay put her chin on Cindy's head and pulled her closer. "What happened to her isn't your fault," Lindsay murmured into sweet smelling hair.

Cindy turned her head and nuzzled her features into the curve of Lindsay's neck, breathing in the scent of her lover's perfume. "How would he have known about her?" she protested. "I told him, Linz. I might as well have offered her up on a silver platter."

Tom certainly seemed to think Cindy had. Lindsay stifled her anger at her ex and used her fingers to tilt Cindy's face up to meet hers. "You didn't do anything wrong."

"Feels like I did," the redhead said in a hushed voice. "I just have this horrible feeling in the pit of my stomach that I led him to her. That I got her killed."

Lindsay studied her in the muted dawn light. She could tell Cindy had been crying, and she cursed herself for not noticing it sooner. "Sweetheart, the only person responsible for

Nicole Honeycutt's death is the person who killed her. As for her lifestyle... she chose the way she wanted to live with all the risks involved."

"Are you saying she was asking for it?" Cindy's voice elevated and was tinted with outrage.

"Of course not," Lindsay's told her gently.

"Because it could have been Jill," Cindy said in a more subdued tone. "I mean, she wasn't paying for sex or anything, but..."

"I know," Lindsay's own voice was quiet. The thought had crossed her mind more times than she wanted to think about in the last several hours. "But it wasn't. We're not even certain it was HM yet."

"It's him. I can feel it just like you can." Cindy's hand went to the cross she was wearing at her throat, and she played with it nervously. "I want this over, Lindsay."

Lindsay hushed her and drew her close once more. "I do, too."

"I want him stopped. I want him stopped before he consumes you any more than he already has. Before he hurts anyone else."

Lindsay closed her eyes, not bothering to disagree or disassemble. She simply held Cindy tighter. It was the one thing she knew she could do right today. She sighed. "Listen, um... I have something to tell you. Promise you won't get mad?" She could feel Cindy go still for a long moment, then the reporter was propping herself up on one elbow to look down at her.

"What did you do?"

"What makes you assume I did something?" Lindsay replied.

"Because you sound guilty."

"I don't..."

"Linz, I've known you for a year and memorized every inflection of your voice. I know what a guilty Inspector Boxer sounds like."

Lindsay was both simultaneously charmed and chastised. "Technically," she said slowly. "I might not be an inspector at the moment."

Both of Cindy's eyebrows scrunched together in consternation. "Huh?"

Lindsay sighed again. "Tom and I got into it at the crime scene."

Cindy said nothing, just watched Lindsay with concern.

“He said some things, I said some things... then I might have... sorta... slapped him.” Lindsay gave her lover her most innocent face.

Whiskey-brown eyes widened in disbelief. All trace of Cindy’s guilt fled with the revelation, replaced by shock and curiosity. “You hit him?” Her lover shrugged and looked sheepish. “Lindsay, what in the hell?”

Something about that struck her as funny, and Lindsay started chuckling.

“It’s not funny!” Cindy protested. “Linz, you’re telling me you got suspended!”

Whether it was fatigue, shock or just a morbid sense of humor, Lindsay wasn’t sure, but she found herself laughing harder. It only got worse when Cindy grew irked with her, and the redhead’s hands skimmed down Lindsay’s waist to find her most ticklish spots. The taller woman squirmed and giggled.

“Lindsay Boxer, I may be small, but I know your weak spots, and I will exploit them,” Cindy vowed as she dug her fingers in. “You are so telling me what your ex said to you to make you... mmph...” Cindy was abruptly silenced as Lindsay surged upward and found her lips unerringly. The teasing touch slowed and became more sensual as the kiss deepened, and Cindy forgot all about articles, murder and Tom Hogan.

For a little while.

Lindsay yawned so widely her jaw cracked.

“Ouch,” Claire muttered as she handed her tall friend a large coffee.

All four of them were bleary-eyed as they accepted their cups from the Medical Examiner. Jill sunk into one chair, Cindy into the other. Lindsay settled on the armrest next to the redhead.

Claire perched on her desk and stirred her coffee without enthusiasm. “I don’t know about all of you, but I could have used a few more hours sleep.”

Jill merely grunted and sipped from her cup.

“Did you get any rest?” Cindy asked the blonde.

Jill shrugged. “As much as I could under the circumstances. I finally took something to help me. Good thing I don’t have court today.” She took another swallow of her coffee

and looked at Claire. “That is if Denise even lets me out of my office ever again. I thought finding a body was bad enough. I think if Denise thought she could get away with it she’d turn me into one.”

Cindy winced, not as used to the Jill/Denise dynamic and all its shifting nuances like Claire and Lindsay were.

“All right. I’m semi-lucid. Tell me what the results are on the fibers.” Jill held her hand out and made a “gimme” gesture with it.

“Well this will wake you up,” Claire promised. She handed the file to Jill who flipped it open and read the contents as Lindsay and Cindy looked on expectantly.

Jill frowned.

“Care to share with the class, Ms. Bernhardt?” Lindsay teased.

Jill handed the folder to Cindy who slipped her glasses on to read it. Lindsay looked over her shoulder.

“So what does that mean?” Jill asked, not sure her exhausted brain was processing terribly well at the moment.

“It means the fibers found at the window were the same ones found at the Hallelujah Man’s other crime scenes, but the fibers found under Nicole’s nails weren’t a match.” Cindy looked at Claire. “Right?”

“You get a gold star,” Claire said with a smile barely visible over the rim of her coffee cup.

“But he was there. In the conference room?” Lindsay asked for clarification.

“It would seem so, but there is no proof he was ever in Nicole Honeycutt’s office. Granted, the fibers under the victim’s nails could have come from something else he was wearing.” Claire sighed.

Lindsay sat back and exchanged glances with Jill. This case was puzzling the hell out of her. It felt off. Wrong. Like HM had been hiding out in the conference room while someone else was killing Honeycutt. “So... what? He was writing scripture while someone else was raping and killing Nicole? Does he have a partner now?” she wondered aloud.

“A disciple?” Jill suggested without humor.

“The woman does have her enemies,” Cindy murmured. “Wouldn’t surprise me if two people showed up to kill her on the same night.”

Jill tunneled her hands through her hair before massaging the back of her neck. “Okay. So let’s assume HM is the killer for now. Nicole definitely fits the “lust” criteria he would be looking for. The purple fibers are a match to the other crime scenes so we know he was at least there. Like you said,” Jill’s gaze went to Claire, “the other fibers could be from another article of clothing.”

“But think about the murder,” Lindsay argued. “The motive is there but the method doesn’t match. Not even remotely.”

“What if…” Cindy bit her lip and hesitated.

“What if what?” Lindsay prompted.

“It is a law firm.”

“So,” Jill replied with an edge to her voice.

“Is it possible that someone there could have found out the particulars of the case… the elements that are being kept from the media?”

“You saying someone from the police department or the DA’s office shared that information with a defense attorney?” Jill asked incredulously.

“You share that information with a reporter,” Cindy pointed out.

They all looked at each other.

“Well that’s a sobering thought,” Claire murmured before swallowing more coffee. “Someone could know about the fibers and the scripture and planted both?”

“It’s just…” Cindy rubbed the back of her neck absently then jumped a little when Lindsay’s hand, warm from holding the coffee, slipped under her hair and took over. Cindy cleared her throat, and she blushed a little at Claire and Jill’s sudden grins. Lindsay seemed oblivious to their amusement. “It’s just that from what you told me… if it was the Hallelujah Man then Nicole must have repented pretty damn fast.”

Jill looked at Lindsay who was staring at the cup of coffee in her hand. “Do you think it’s him?”

Lindsay took a deep breath and blew it out before looking at Jill. “In my gut… I know he was there.”

“That was your chance to say, ‘No, Jill. It wasn’t him. Don’t worry about it.’” Jill gave her friend an exasperated look.

Lindsay pursed her lips. "On the bright side, at least we don't have to worry about figuring out who he'll go after for lust now," she muttered in disgust.

"Was there anything else forensics found at the scene?" Cindy asked.

Claire smiled. "That's the good news."

"Thank God," Lindsay said. "I need some. Tell me the guy left DNA." Claire's smile widened, and Lindsay almost gaped at her. "He left DNA?"

"Is he in the system?" Jill leaned forward eagerly.

"Doesn't look like it," Claire admitted. "But if we can get a sample to compare it to..."

Lindsay gave Cindy a swift kiss on the head before practically racing out the door. "I'm on it!"

"You're gonna need a warrant!" Jill shouted after her.

"Um... hate to state the obvious here," Cindy added once her lover was gone. "But how is she going to get a warrant when she's on suspension?"

Claire's eyebrows hiked before she took another sip of coffee.

Jill nodded once. "Right. Maybe I should go get started on that."

Cindy and Claire exchanged rueful glances when the attorney left before sharing their coffee in companionable silence.

"Ms. Bernhardt."

Jill hesitated in the hallway as a uniformed man came jogging up to her. She recognized him as one of the bailiffs she so often saw in the courtrooms below. "David, right?"

He smiled at being remembered. "Yes, ma'am. Ms. Kwon is looking for you. She's got everybody beating the bushes to find you."

"I thought Denise was in court."

"She is."

"Shit." Jill glanced at her watch, wondering what she'd forgotten or what surprise her boss was about to spring on her. Denise could be a vindictive bitch, and finding out that Jill would have left the Hall for a high paying job that pitted them against each other...

Jill shook her head and almost shuddered at the thought. “I bet you have no idea why she’s hunting for me.”

“No, ma’am.” He smiled again, and Jill actually thought he was kind of cute. He was tall and broad, just how she liked them, and had interesting silver, grey eyes. She wondered why she’d never really paid any attention to him before, but thought now might be a good time to start.

She set her concerns about Denise aside for a moment, deciding a little distraction after work might be just what she needed... and he wasn’t wearing a wedding band. “So...”

“Jill!”

Jill pursed her lips at Lindsay’s shout and let go of the idea of dinner and drinks with a man in uniform for now. “Sorry,” she said regretfully. “I’ll see you around.”

He chuckled and smiled again. “Probably in court this week.”

“Maybe I’ll get lucky and it will be sooner.”

His eyes danced a little at that, and he dipped his head once and gave Lindsay a friendly wave before leaving Jill alone as Lindsay came trotting up. Jill watched him go, a speculative smile on her lips.

“Your timing sucks,” Jill told Lindsay before she could speak.

Lindsay shut her mouth on what she was about to say then darted a look at the retreating man. “Oops.” She tilted her head as she watched him go. “Nice ass,” she had to admit.

Jill waved her off. “Let me guess. You realized you can’t actually execute a warrant now?”

They started walking shoulder to shoulder.

“I made it as far as my car before I remembered.” Lindsay looked sheepish. “I was sort of hoping you could...”

“I was on my way when the bailiff caught me. Denise is looking for me.”

“Uh-oh.”

“Yeah,” Jill agreed. “You want me to meet Jacobi at the firm with the warrant?”

“You think you can get one by Denise?” Lindsay asked.

“We’re about to find out.”

“Well if you hurry, maybe you can still grab lunch with tall, dark and handsome back there,” Lindsay teased.

“I do like the way you think.”

“There are few things I like more than taking DNA samples,” Jacobi said drolly as he swabbed another person’s inner cheek with a Q-tip before placing it in an evidence container and handing it to Cho for proper labeling.

“Glad to hear that,” Jill played along. She checked her sheet. “You have fifty three more employees to go.”

Jacobi shot the attorney a look then sighed. He glanced down the row of employees in front of him. They were going floor by floor at the law firm, collecting samples to compare against Claire’s findings. He had ten left before he could move up to the third floor.

The third floor of a ten-story building.

“Jesus,” he both prayed and cursed.

Jill smiled just a little. “Well if your partner hadn’t gotten herself suspended...”

“Don’t remind me.” Jacobi suddenly held up one finger as the young man in front of him started to protest. “Ah-ah. I don’t want to hear one word of legal mumbo jumbo come out of your mouth. We have a warrant, and nothing you say will be any different than what the other two floors of lawyers haven’t said already.” The young man opened his mouth wider and let Jacobi take his sample. “Thank you.”

Jill hid her smile by dipping her head and rubbing her nose.

“So how did you get Denise to let you execute a warrant on a case she didn’t want you working?”

“I’m a brilliant attorney. I used my amazing skill with words to sway her to my side.”

Jacobi turned his head and looked at her.

“Not buying it, huh?” Jill shrugged. “I promised her I’d help her with some of her paperwork over the next three weekends.”

“And that was enough to make her cave?”

“You should see how much paperwork we’re talking about.” Jill shuddered theatrically. Actually, Denise had yielded with surprising little resistance. Perhaps her boss had thought things over and realized Jill made the most sense on this case. Whatever the reason, Jill knew a little extra paperwork was worth it to be back in the mix.

“Don’t suppose you want to come help me out with mine,” Jacobi joked as he swabbed another employee’s cheek.

Jill chuckled, pleased to be in Warren Jacobi’s friendly albeit gruff company. “So Lindsay really hit Tom?” She kept her voice low as she watched Cho label another sample and file it accordingly.

“Smacked him right in the kisser,” Jacobi said with a weary sigh as he took another swab from a tiny little redheaded clerk that reminded him of a certain reporter. “She told you what he said and about whom?”

“Yeah,” Jill replied, appreciating the fact that they were in mixed company and couldn’t say the reporter’s name. “I’d have punched him... or kneed him in the nuts.”

Jacobi winced, as did a few of the male employees in earshot. “Good thing he was dealing with her then. And here I thought she was showing no restraint.”

Jill sighed. “Do you agree with what he said?”

Jacobi glanced at her, sympathy clear in his gaze. “Not at all. The only person responsible is the one who did this.”

Jill nodded, believing the same thing herself but feeling marginally better for the confirmation. “She’s not going to believe that, though.”

“I know,” Jacobi said. “I’d have a hard time with it if I were in her shoes.” He handed another sample to Cho and felt a ray of hope that he had only two people left on this floor. “Good thing she has friends like you to keep her from dwelling on it too much,” he pointed out over his shoulder.

Jill paused at the comment before smiling. “Damn right,” she told him and was rewarded with his chuckle. She made a mental note to plan a night out with just her and Cindy. They could drink, share Lindsay stories... Her smile widened as she imagined the fear of God the thought would put in their tall, sexy friend.

She wondered if Cindy had tomorrow night open...

Act III

Words blurred as Cindy stared at her computer screen. Her eyes were scratchy from a lack of sleep, and she wanted to do nothing more than lay her head down on her keyboard at the Register and take a nap.

She sighed and slipped her glasses off. There were only a handful of sentences to look at for three hours of work anyway. Guilt over Honeycutt, worry about Jill and Lindsay, and her deplorable lack of quality snooze time was making it hard to focus on anything let alone her story.

It felt dirty, writing a follow up to the original piece she'd laid to bed in the wee hours of morning while her friends had been at the crime scene and morgue. Last night she'd been running on a mixture of adrenaline and stubbornness, but today both were conspicuously missing. She felt like she was making a living off someone else's misfortune. And since she was pretty damn sure she'd been responsible for Honeycutt's death that made it so very much worse.

With a groan, Cindy let her forehead smack down onto her desk. It hurt, but she was too tired to care.

"That bad, huh?"

Cindy's head snapped back up at the familiar voice she never expected to hear in the bullpen of reporters. She jumped to her feet, banging her knees on the side of her desk and nearly toppling over in her haste to stand. "Tom?"

Lindsay's current boss and ex-husband looked as uncomfortable as she felt. He slipped his hands into the pockets of his trench coat. "Is there somewhere we could... talk?"

Cindy glanced around and watched curious gazes skitter away. She wanted some place private, but she also wanted to remain in full view at the same time. She was sleeping with Tom's ex-wife, and the man had a gun after all. "Uh... yeah. We can..." She motioned with her head at the editor's empty office.

Tom followed her, doing his best to ignore the eyes that tracked their progress. He stepped inside the office before moving aside so Cindy could shut the door.

The reporter clasped her hands behind her back to keep from fidgeting. "So..." She noticed his split lip, and her gaze moved off before he could catch her staring. "What... brings you by?" she asked with false cheeriness.

Tom pursed his lips as he looked at her. Thomas looked exhausted, but that fact did little to hide her beauty. He could easily see how the inner light that radiated from the younger woman could seduce someone. As dark a place as Lindsay went to at times, he wondered if it was that light that had first drawn her to the reporter. "So you and Lindsay..." he began uncertainly before wincing. He hadn't meant to bring up the topic like that if at all.

Cindy blinked and swallowed hard. Lindsay hadn't bothered to mention that Tom was in the know about them. She made a mental note to kick her lover in the shins later.

"I know... it's not really my business," Tom said hesitantly. He scratched the back of his head in discomfort. "I guess... I just..." Tom sighed. "Please don't hurt her," he finally blurted.

Cindy took in a sharp breath. "I would never do that," she answered. *Not like you did*, she mentally added but didn't vocalize. She frowned, puzzled by the direction of the conversation.

"I know I really don't have the right to care anymore..." Tom stared at the floor for a moment. "But I do." He looked at her then. "I do care about her and that will never stop."

Was that a challenge or a statement of fact? Cindy wasn't sure. "I know that," she replied slowly. "But she's not yours anymore," Cindy told him, echoing Heather's words to Lindsay the night of the wedding.

"You think she's yours?" Tom asked, truly curious.

Did she? Cindy asked her soul and came back with the answer instantly. "Completely."

Tom's gaze dropped and his jaw clenched for a moment before it finally relaxed. "She told you what happened last night?"

The change in subject wasn't lost on the reporter, and her stomach clenched in reaction. She couldn't blame Tom for still loving Lindsay, but she hated that he did. He was supposed to be married and happy now. He'd devastated a part of Lindsay to get that way. The thought that he might realize he'd made a mistake... that he might come crawling back to the woman they both loved... it made Cindy's heart hurt. "She told me you argued. That she hit you and you suspended her," she managed to get out without sounding as upset by this visit as she was.

"I said some things to her about you."

Cindy went still. She didn't have to guess what Tom had said. Whatever he'd vocalized, she was equally sure it was the truth. She opened her mouth to tell him so.

"I shouldn't have."

Cindy's teeth came together in an audible click. "Okay. You are so confusing the hell out of me right now," she confessed in exasperation.

Tom chuckled abruptly at that. "Sorry." He sighed. "Look. What happened to

Honeycutt is not your fault.”

“But you told Lindsay it was,” Cindy guessed. Her stomach started to settle as she realized Lindsay’s defense of her had been absolute and apparently violent. Her gaze went back to Tom’s split lip and a tiny, inappropriate grin appeared.

“I knew it would piss her off.”

Cindy’s brow furrowed. “If you knew it would piss her off then why did you...?” Her face suddenly cleared. “Tom!” She yelled and ignored all her co-workers who turned and looked at them, hearing her muffled but still elevated voice through the glass. “You egged her on on purpose?”

He held up his hands. “Hear me out...”

“No! Being a cop means everything to her. You reinstate her right now!”

“So she can what, Thomas?” Tom’s voice was harder now. “You want her to walk this path again? You want her sliding further into the dark mind of a serial killer? You haven’t seen how far gone she’ll get. You’ll lose her in there. I’m trying to keep this from happening again!”

Cindy shook her head. “Tom, I appreciate that you care. I even think you have the right to care, but you don’t have the right to mess with Lindsay’s life and job.”

“Even if I’m trying to save both?”

That drew Cindy up short. It was a point she didn’t want to concede even if she privately agreed with it. The idea of losing Lindsay the way Tom had terrified her. She thought of Lindsay’s attic, of all those victims’ faces plastered all over the walls, their lips sewn shut. She swallowed. “We don’t have that right...” she said weakly.

“We love her,” Tom disagreed. “Doesn’t that give us the right?”

Cindy wasn’t sure what the answer was so she said nothing at all.

“Anyway,” Tom spoke quietly, seeing that he’d rattled her. He hoped he’d gotten her thinking about things, that maybe he’d found an unlikely ally in keeping Lindsay from slipping too far from them. “I wanted to say I’m sorry for what I said last night. It wasn’t fair, and it’s not what I think about you.”

Cindy stared at him for a long moment. “What do you think about me?”

“I think you’re an annoyingly perky, pain-in-the-ass reporter who pokes her nose in places where it doesn’t belong, and as stubborn as a mule.”

Cindy blinked.

“And I think you might just be the damned best thing to ever happen to Lindsay in her life.”

Cindy blinked again.

“So don’t screw it up, Thomas.” Tom gave her a final long, lingering look. “Not like I did.” Without another word he yanked open the door and left her standing in her editor’s office too stunned to move.

Lindsay sat at her kitchen table, Martha at her feet snoring softly. She had the files for the Hallelujah Man cases spread out before her, the files she’d conveniently forgotten to return to Tom while she was on suspension. If he wanted them that badly, he could come and get them, along with her badge and weapon, she’d decided hours ago. So far he’d not even so much as called her. Coward.

She rubbed her forehead, trying in vain to put her concerns about Cindy’s mental state out of her mind so she could focus on the investigation. Lindsay knew all too well what guilt over doing your job felt like. She just wished Cindy had never had to experience it. Her lover’s motives for exposing Honeycutt’s sex life may have had a selfish tint, but that didn’t stop it from being a story worth publishing.

The truth was the truth, though, and the truth was that Cindy’s actions in court could have led to HM killing Nicole Honeycutt. It was a bitter pill to swallow, and Lindsay chased the metaphor down with a very real sip of beer.

She sighed and looked at the photographs from the crime scene again. It was the damndest thing. When she looked at Nicole Honeycutt’s body, at what was done to her, she didn’t feel HM’s presence. When she looked at some of the other case files like Blake’s or Dellan’s, their killer’s touch was all over them. Evil seemed to have been captured on film, soaked into the photograph and would ooze onto Lindsay’s fingertips as she studied the pictures from every angle until her eyes were about to cross.

She thought of Tyrian purple silk... recordings of John Paul II... of brutality and scripture...

Of life and death.

What made him chose his victims? They all crossed his path in some way. She had a strong suspicion it was through the killer’s profession, but she’d given up the idea that they were looking for some sort of figure with a position in any church. They’d looked hard at every priest to every altar boy in the San Francisco area and nothing, nothing had popped back on any of them that would suggest they could be their killer.

He was a wannabe, Lindsay knew, and more than one detective was looking at seminary school rejects, going back as much as twenty years.

Lindsay looked at the photo of Nicole Honeycutt and sighed. HM did not kill her. She knew it in her guts. Knew it as surely as she knew herself. The proof was in the motive and lack of physical evidence tying him to the crime scene. After what he'd done to Watkins, his appetite for brutality would have only increased. There was no sign of that here.

Honeycutt's murder was merciful in comparison to what the Hallelujah Man's other victims had endured.

Lindsay picked up a photo of the scripture in the conference room. She felt the familiar chill she'd first experienced when she'd held the Bible found in Chris Blake's fridge. This was his handiwork. Why was he there? Why did he not kill Honeycutt? Did he have a disciple as Jill suggested? Someone he was training...

Lindsay slapped the photo on the table and leaned back in her chair. Her mind was trying to latch onto something elusive, something that was tickling the base of her brain and scurrying around in the dark recesses of her mind. She just couldn't seem to shine a light on whatever it was.

She closed her eyes then rubbed them wearily. When her cell phone rang, she nearly came out of her skin. "Jesus," she muttered as she snatched up her phone and flipped it open. "Boxer," she snapped.

"And hello to you, too," Claire drawled.

Lindsay sighed before pinching the bridge of her nose. "Sorry. I was lost in thought and the phone scared the hell out of me. What's up?"

"DNA just came in on the employees. Thought you'd want to know."

Lindsay snorted. "Tell me again why I need a badge when I have the club?"

"Sweetie, you are the badge," Claire answered, unwillingly to play along.

"I used to be, anyway," Lindsay muttered. "Anything else kick back at this point?"

"You know you could talk to Tom. Apologize."

Lindsay rolled her eyes at Claire's persistence. "Not gonna happen. He had it coming." She glanced at the bruise that had formed on the fleshy part of her palm and wondered what Tom looked like today.

“Lindsay,” Claire sighed her friend’s name. “Do you really want to have your hands tied right now? Jill’s connection to this case... Cindy’s issues with what happened... This really isn’t a good time for you to be out of the mix.”

Lindsay looked at all the photographs in front of her. Leave it to Claire to be the voice of reason, even when she didn’t want to hear it. “I’ll talk to him tomorrow.”

“Something wrong with your phone today?”

Lindsay rolled her eyes again. “Can I please hold onto my pride for another 24 hours?”

Claire chuckled. “Alright. You asked if anything else had kicked back. Nothing yet. Oh, and Jill somehow managed to talk Denise into letting her back on the case.”

“That’s fortuitous,” Lindsay drawled, thinking with a smirk that she might be able to put Tom off for another whole day if she had Jill to rely on.

“Indeed. You meeting us at Papa Joe’s tonight to compare notes? Say around six?”

“Not like I have anything else to do.”

“Hey.”

Jill’s head popped up behind the stacks of paperwork on her desk. “Hey.” She smiled at the welcome sight of her favorite reporter. “Aren’t you a sight for sore eyes?”

Cindy tilted her head at the compliment. “If you say so. I think I look like a college sorority girl coming off a three day bender.” The reporter moved into the office, flopping ungracefully in one of Jill’s chairs. “Have you heard from Lindsay?”

“Only about six times today.”

“Only six?” Cindy joked. “I can multiple that by two.”

“Claire might beat us both combined.”

“We so need to get her reinstated or she’s gonna drive us insane.” Cindy closed her eyes, and Jill thought she was going to fall asleep right there in the chair.

The attorney smiled at her younger friend. Cindy had been adorable from the moment she’d met her, but Jill hadn’t been so sure that she’d wanted the spunky redhead in the club. Maybe some part of her knew that Lindsay would be drawn to her, that Lindsay would seek Cindy’s innate goodness like a moth to a flame. Sometimes she still resented Cindy just a little, resented her for taking up so much of her best friend’s time, but then

Cindy would give her that innocent, wide-eyed look, and Jill would feel her irritation and jealousy evaporate into the ether.

“Tough day, Lois Lane?”

“Ugh.” Cindy rocked forward in the chair and let her forehead rap slightly on Jill’s desk.

Jill cocked her head at this behavior. “Okay.”

“Tom came to see me,” Cindy said in a muffled voice, her forehead still resting on the edge of Jill’s desk.

Blue eyes opened wide at the news. “Whoa.”

Cindy lifted her head enough to look at the attorney. “He said he was sorry for what he said to Lindsay.”

“Double whoa,” Jill replied.

Cindy bit her lip. “He said he egged her on.”

Jill leaned back in her chair. Her friend had apparently had quite an eventful afternoon. She was almost jealous when she thought about how she’d spent hers, although she wouldn’t trade making Malcolm Abbott give her a DNA sample for anything. “And you’re wondering if you should tell her.”

“Should I?”

“Only if you want to visit your girlfriend in jail for homicide.”

Cindy groaned again and covered her eyes with her hands.

“Cindy, Lindsay isn’t an idiot. I’m sure she’s at least suspicious that Tom did that on purpose.”

“Then why is she letting him get away with it?” Cindy dropped her hands then noticed all the file folders for the first time. “Good grief. It looks like the file room barfed on your desk.”

“Not a far off description. I’m going to be digging out for the rest of the week.” Jill didn’t bother to tell Cindy most of the paperwork was Denise’s.

Cindy winced in sympathy. “He knows about me and Linz,” she confessed in a softer voice.

“It was only a matter of time,” Jill answered when she’d gotten over her shock at the

news, which she hoped hadn't manifested itself on her face.

"I can't get mad at him for what he said to her last night. It's not as if it isn't true." Cindy looked at her hands. "I've never... I've never been responsible for getting someone killed before."

"Cindy..."

"I mean... I know words can inspire... move people... terrify them... I just never thought my words would kill someone." Cindy swallowed.

"They didn't." Jill's voice was firm. "You reported a story..."

"A story I wouldn't have touched or even known about if I hadn't been looking for leverage for you..."

"Then it's my fault that Nicole is dead," Jill answered pragmatically.

"Oh, c'mon," Cindy protested.

"No. If you're going to apply the logic that your story got Honeycutt killed then I can apply the same logic that says my sex life is what got us all into this mess."

Cindy opened her mouth then closed it. Opened again. "That's not fair."

Jill hiked an eyebrow at her.

"But I..."

"Like being a martyr?" Jill suggested.

"Hey!"

Jill leaned back in her chair and crossed her arms. "Our actions have consequences, Cindy. Would you have done anything differently, knowing what you know now?"

"That's not fair, either," Cindy said in a quieter voice. "If I hadn't done that your reputation..."

"If you hadn't done that, I would not be sitting behind this desk. Dow probably would have gotten off. A man who killed two people that we know about. And let's not forget the other killers we've stopped since then." Jill leaned forward again and put her elbows on the desk. "You did what you thought you had to do, and I am grateful that you did it, but you need to remember in the end the person responsible for killing Nicole Honeycutt is the man who wrapped his fingers around her throat and squeezed the life out of her."

Cindy sighed. “So what you’re saying is I should stop making her death about me.”

Jill wagged her head from side to side. “Not exactly but that will do.”

“Get over myself?” Cindy suggested.

Jill pointed at her. “That’s more the phrase I had in mind.”

The reporter chuckled then popped up from her chair, displaying way more energy than when she came in. She walked behind the desk and gave Jill a hard hug. “Thanks.”

Jill smiled. “What are friends for?”

“I’m lucky to have some good ones,” Cindy admitted as she planted a noisy kiss on the top of the attorney’s head.

“Yes, as a matter of fact you are. So lucky in fact that we’re going out tomorrow night – just me and you.”

Cindy stepped back. “We are?”

“Yep. No Claire and definitely no Lindsay. Just me, you, drinks and maybe some dancing.”

Cindy took a breath and considered her reply. “Um... why?”

“Why not? Besides... I thought it was high time we talked about Lindsay,” Jill said with a smirk. She reached for her coffee and took a sip.

“Like about how you used to sleep together?”

Jill managed to spit her coffee back into her cup instead of all over the reports on her desk. “She told you that?!”

Cindy crossed her arms. “A blind man could see you two have history,” Cindy said with a roll of her eyes. “Only people who’ve slept together stand as close as you two do and touch each other with such familiarity.”

Jill just gaped at her.

“What? It’s part of my job to read people.”

“And it doesn’t bother you? Me and Lindsay having ‘history’?” Jill put air quotes around the last word.

“Should it?” The reporter asked. “I sort of assumed you were okay with me and Linz

when you never made any effort to get between us. If anything you seemed to support it.”

“I did. I do!” Jill shook her head. “I just... I didn’t want it to make you uncomfortable.”

“It doesn’t,” Cindy confessed breezily.

Jill brushed her bangs out of her eyes. “You never cease to amaze me, Thomas.”

Cindy smiled, pleased by that. “So these Lindsay stories you want to swap... can we talk about the juicier ones now?”

Jill slowly smiled, her expression anything but innocent.

The reporter.

The cop.

The medical examiner.

They flittered in and out of Jill Bernhardt’s days and nights. Her office. Her home. One of them always seemed to be there or as close as the phone she wore on her hip. They were like an odd family.

A club.

He frowned as he watched Cindy Thomas emerge from Jill’s office. It was so hard to find his moment, the moment where he would whisk Jill away from her life of sin and begin the process of cleansing her soul. There was little that was routine about her life that he had seen so far. He could only wait and watch, knowing that when the time came God would be sure that he was ready.

Perhaps her girl’s night out with the reporter tomorrow evening. He slipped off the headphones as Jill began to type again. He entered the date and time they’d set for their get together into his calendar.

Maybe their night out would end with Jill Bernhardt in the safe arms of the Lord.

The thought made him smile.

Act IV

Cindy bounded up the front steps to Lindsay's place only to freeze when she saw the bouquet of white roses. Her steps faltered, and she almost tripped on the last stair before catching the rail and righting herself.

"This is getting so old," she grouched. She plucked out the card and read it, feeling the familiar stab of insecurity lance through her when she saw Pete's handwriting. When was the guy going to get a clue?

Better yet, when was Lindsay going to get a restraining order?

Cindy unlocked her lover's door then shouldered it open, stooping to heft the vase into her hands before stepping inside. She kicked the door closed with her booted foot before making her way to the kitchen, setting the roses in the sink. They weren't hers to throw away even though she felt like flushing them down the garbage disposal.

The lock on the front door turned again, and Cindy pivoted in time to see Lindsay arrive with Martha. Her lover smiled when she saw her.

"Hey," Lindsay said brightly. She unclipped Martha's leash and let the dog wander off to her water bowl. "I wasn't expecting to see you so early." She entered the kitchen and wrapped her arms around Cindy's waist, pulling her closer. Her eyes dipped to the sink and her features lost their humor. "Damnit."

"That was just the response I was hoping for," Cindy confessed with a tiny grin as those insecurities scampered back into the dark hole they'd crawled out of. She playfully pinched Lindsay's backside and was delighted when her lover jumped. "Do you think he'd get the picture if we invited him over, and I planted a kiss on you right in front of him?"

"I'm not sure Pete would get the picture if I punched him with it." Lindsay fingered one of the roses, her other arm still wrapped around her lover. "This is starting to weird me out a little."

Cindy eased back and looked up into Lindsay's face. "Seriously?"

Lindsay tilted her features and looked down at the redhead. "Cindy, if I were investigating a case where a suspect was behaving like this... I'd have the guy under surveillance 24/7."

"That's... an unhappy thought."

Lindsay shrugged. "I'll go talk to him one last time."

"And if that doesn't work?"

Lindsay reached up and pushed a stray lock of red hair behind Cindy's ear. "If that

doesn't work, I'll get legal on his ass."

Cindy smiled. "Sic Jill on him."

"That would be cold." Lindsay's eyes sparkled. "And really fun to watch."

They reluctantly released each other and wandered into the living room, flopping down together on the couch. Cindy snuggled up against her taller companion who grinned like an idiot in reaction. They stayed that way for a few quiet, content minutes until Lindsay sighed.

"So can we just talk about the case for like ten minutes?"

Cindy smiled. "What do you want to know?"

"Let's start with anything... everything. I hate being out of the loop like this. I thought me getting thrown off the force would be a good thing. No Tom to worry about. No rules getting in the way..."

"No access to files... background checks... no ability to talk to witnesses..." Cindy added lightly.

Lindsay almost stomped her foot like a little kid. "I really didn't consider all the angles to this slapping my boss thing," she confessed. "It just seemed like a really good idea at the time."

"Because of what he said about me?" Cindy asked innocently.

Lindsay turned her head where it rested against the back of the couch and looked at the redhead. "Jacobi told you?" She asked incredulously.

Cindy took a breath. "No. Tom did."

Lindsay's brow furrowed. She eased up into a sitting position. "Tom told you? When did that happen?"

"When he came to see me at the paper today." Cindy kept her voice casual.

"He what?" Lindsay's voice had dropped to its lowest register.

"You sound so sexy when you talk like that," Cindy commented, her thoughts briefly wandering a much more sensual path.

Lindsay tilted her head and gave her lover a tame version of the laser vision.

"Sorry. Tom came to see me at work. It was no big deal."

“What did he want?”

Cindy shrugged, wishing now that she'd kept her mouth shut on this topic. “Just to chat. So let me tell you what I dug up on Honeycutt today...”

“Not so fast.” Lindsay put her hand over the reporter's notebook Cindy had just retrieved from her jacket pocket. “You are not getting off that easy, young lady.”

“What are you, my mother?” Cindy tried to tease. The laser vision ratcheted up in intensity and Cindy wilted. “He came to apologize.”

“For what?”

“For what he said about me to you. About me being... you know... responsible for Honeycutt's death,” Cindy finished a little more quietly.

Lindsay looked at her for a silent minute. “Okay,” she said slowly. “He owed you an apology so I really don't have a problem with that.”

“Linz? What would you do if I told you Tom egged you on to get you kicked off the force? That it was his own misguided and utterly clueless way of trying to keep you physically and mentally safe?”

Lindsay's lips quirked. “I knew it the moment after I hit him that I'd walked right into it.”

“You knew he was setting you up?” Cindy asked in shock.

The taller woman shrugged. “I figured. Right now we're both in a holding pattern,” she explained. “Waiting to see who will come crawling to the other to make up first.”

“Is that what you did when you were married?”

“Yeah,” Lindsay's voice was wistful. “It's about who can hold out the longest. I just have to wait for him to show a sign of weakness, then I'll pounce and have an apology and my badge back in no time.”

Cindy rolled her eyes. Lindsay's competitive streak was a mile wide. The only thing wider was her stubborn one. “I think he already did, Lindsay. He just went through me.”

Lindsay considered that. She hated that Tom had done an end-run around her, but she couldn't blame him. He'd probably satisfied a little curiosity about Cindy in the process. He was a total pain in the ass, but he was a good man at heart and an even better detective. Sometimes she forgot about that. “So tell me what you found out about Honeycutt.”

It was Cindy's turn to be reluctant to let the conversation go, but she did. "Well she was still paying for it. My exposé didn't slow her down in the least." She flipped open her notebook, and Lindsay scooted closer. "I've been nosing around some of the other lawyers and junior associates, they all say that she's been edgy lately. More snappish than usual."

"Well that must have been completely terrifying," Lindsay drawled. "The woman was already like a pit viper."

"Tell me about it." Cindy flipped a page in her notepad.

"So she wasn't dating anyone?"

"Not that I could find out, but that doesn't mean there wasn't someone." Cindy thumbed through some more pages. "There was a restraining order she took out on a Derek Metcalf about a year ago. Jacobi found that out."

"Yeah? What's the deal with him?"

"Brother of a murder victim. Honeycutt got the killer off on a technicality."

"Ouch," Lindsay hissed. "I'd be pissed too."

"Considering he's in Iraq, I think he's got a pretty tight alibi. There are some junior associates worth looking into, though. Apparently Honeycutt was running some sort of competition among a few of them that weren't showing much promise."

"What sort of competition?"

"She gave them all one case. The murder of Alyssa Silver. Did you hear about that one?"

"In LA, yeah. She was raped and murdered, her body dismembered and left inside an oil drum. I heard they had the ex easy on that one."

"The police do," Cindy confirmed, "but Honeycutt told the associates that only the person who figured out a way to get the ex-husband cleared would get to keep their job."

Lindsay blinked and sucked in a breath. She felt disgust curl in her stomach. "They would have gone after the case like tigers thrown a slab of red meat. Screw the victim. Just do whatever it takes to let her killer walk."

"Exactly. There are three of them. Two are men. Jason Abbott and Adam Pollard."

"Abbott?" Lindsay zeroed in on the name instantly.

“Yep. Malcolm Abbott’s son.”

Lindsay’s darker angels liked the idea of Malcolm Abbott’s son being a potential killer. It would serve the self-righteous bastard right, and she would get to give a little payback when she hauled Jason Abbott into custody. “Junior associates, huh?” Lindsay considered that. “Does Jacobi know what you found out?”

“And Claire,” Cindy replied. “Figured their DNA samples could move to the top of the list. Although you would think a lawyer would be smart enough not to leave DNA.”

In Lindsay’s experience, a lot of people weren’t terribly smart when it came to murder. So many things happened in the heat of the moment. Tempers boiled over and people reacted, lashing out to stop the source of their anger, sometimes with fatal results.

Lindsay kissed her lover’s forehead. “Maybe you should wear a badge,” Lindsay commented, remembering the words Tom had used to get himself slapped. She played with Cindy’s hair, loving the way the fiery red strands felt between her fingers.

Cindy blinked at her. “Huh?”

Bright and early the next morning, Lindsay took a deep breath and swallowed her pride before stepping into Tom’s office. He was on the phone, and his voice faltered when he saw her, but he waved her in after a hesitant moment.

Lindsay stuffed her hands in the back of her jeans and waited, her eyes on the windows and not on her ex-husband as he wrapped up a call with his current wife. When he hung up she finally turned to face him. “How’s Heather?”

Tom picked up a pen and started fiddling with it. “She’s good.”

They stared at each other a moment.

“How’s Cindy?” Tom finally asked.

Lindsay gave him points for the question. “She’s dealing. She feels guilty about Honeycutt, though.”

Tom leaned back in his chair. “She’s never been this involved in a case before. Seen the things she’s seen firsthand.”

Lindsay was surprised to be having this conversation with her ex-husband, but she didn’t show it. “She was there for Kiss-Me-Not...”

“Not like she’s been involved with the Hallelujah Man,” Tom cut her off gently. “She didn’t have the access to the scenes like she does now. Don’t forget she was right there with us when we saw Felicia Watkins’ murder on all those video screens.”

“Don’t remind me,” Lindsay replied. She pulled her hands out of her pockets and ran her palms down her legs before easing into one of Tom’s chairs. “I shouldn’t have let her past the crime scene tape.”

“Why did you?” Tom asked. “Because you’re sleeping with her or because you thought she was just another member of your investigative team?”

Lindsay fidgeted. It was a damn good question. One she’d been asking herself ever since the moment she’s instructed Cho to let Cindy inside the crime scene. “I don’t know,” she admitted. “Maybe a bit of both. I rely on her both personally and professionally for a lot. Maybe too much.”

Tom regarded her for a string of heartbeats before getting to his feet and coming around to lean on the front of his desk. He crossed his arms and looked down at the woman he once loved so much it hurt to look at her.

Time had tempered that, but it hadn’t erased it.

“Linz, I did what I had to do.”

“I know you think you did,” Lindsay somewhat agreed. “But this is not the Kiss-Me-Not Killer, Tom. Things are different this time.”

“How are they different? You’re obsessed all over again. You’re losing sleep and weight. Your temper is getting shorter and shorter...”

“Maybe you’re just getting more annoying,” Lindsay suggested with a brief grin.

Tom paused and flashed her a quick smile before growing serious again. “Linz, I don’t want this case to ruin you the way Harris did. He came between us, our marriage...”

“He came between us because we let him,” Lindsay informed him. “We let him, Tom.”

“And you don’t think this guy is going to get between you and Thomas? You’re falling back into old, destructive habits.”

“What do you think I did last night?” Lindsay asked gently.

“Please tell me you weren’t up in that attic of yours.”

“The attic doesn’t have anything but Christmas decorations up there right now.”

Tom seemed surprised by that. “Ok. I’ll bite. What were you doing?”

“Cindy and I curled up on the couch and watched a movie. We shared a bowl of popcorn and a bottle of wine then went to bed.” Lindsay didn’t bother to tell him what happened after they slipped beneath the covers. That would just be cruel.

“You did that in the middle of a murder investigation?” Tom asked slowly and with obvious disbelief.

“I’m always in the middle of a murder investigation,” Lindsay countered. “Cindy...” Lindsay thought of her lover with her tempting smiles and dancing eyes. “Cindy pulls me out of all that death and helps me live, Tom. It’s not the same. I’m...”

“Not the same with her,” Tom guessed. He felt the expected flare of jealousy, but it was paired with a measure of hope and honest happiness for his ex-wife.

“Yeah,” Lindsay agreed, knowing that her admission had to hurt and wishing there were a way to soften the blow.

Tom pushed off the desk and returned to his seat behind it. He picked up his phone. “I’d give you your badge back but since you never turned it in...”

Lindsay slowly smiled before getting to her feet. She felt a moment of regret for what she’d lost with him, what they’d lost together. She moved to the door as Tom asked for the mayor. She turned and looked at him once more, feeling the door to that part of her past finally click shut. “Thanks,” she mouthed to him.

He seemed to understand she was talking about more than the badge. “It was my pleasure,” he answered. His focus turned to the phone. “Morning, sir, just checking in as you requested.”

Lindsay left him to play politics and started down the stairs, giving a hopeful looking Jacobi a thumbs up. He pumped his fist and gave her a high-five when she reached their desks.

“Okay, old man. Where are we?”

“Claire just called. She says she has some results we’ll want to see.”

“By all means then,” Lindsay replied. “Lead on.”

Cindy and Jill were already waiting for them when Lindsay and Jacobi arrived.

“About time!” Cindy protested. “Claire wouldn’t tell us until you got here!”

“Speaking of you being here...” Jill none too subtly grabbed the corner of Lindsay’s jacket and lifted it. She spied the brass shield on Lindsay’s hip and smiled. “Ah yes,” she drawled. “I thought the world felt safer this morning.”

Lindsay rolled her eyes just as Claire hustled into the room, a file folder in hand. “What do you have?”

“Am I supposed to be telling you?” Claire teased.

“She’s been re-badged,” Cindy announced before making a hurry up gesture at the medical examiner. “Come on. Who did it?”

“Is she always this impatient?” Jill asked as she leaned into Lindsay. “If you catch my drift?”

Lindsay moved away from Jill who seemed to be in a mood this morning and clamped her palm over Cindy’s mouth. “Whenever you’re ready, Claire.”

Jacobi and Claire chuckled as Claire opened the file. “We have your DNA match. Sort of.”

“Sort of?” Lindsay took the file, releasing Cindy in the process. The reporter stood up on tiptoe so she could read the report in Lindsay’s hands.

“A paternal match?” Lindsay looked at Claire. “You’re saying this DNA matches the *father* of the killer?”

“Yep.”

Cindy looked at Jacobi. “It’s Malcolm Abbott’s DNA sample.”

“And Jason Abbott works for his daddy and with Nicole Honeycutt.” Jacobi smiled. “I love it when they’re this easy.”

“Wait.” Jill held up a hand. “Don’t we have Jason’s DNA?”

Claire shook her head. “I looked for it after Cindy told me to. His sample wasn’t in here.”

“He ran,” Lindsay deduced. “He killed Nicole and ran. He forgot his father could tie him to the evidence.”

“What an idiot,” Cindy muttered.

Lindsay winked at her as she closed the file before handing it back to Claire. “Now we

just have to find him and figure out what connection he has to HM.”

“If any,” Jill murmured.

“I’ll head back to the Register. See what I can dig up,” Cindy announced before squeezing Lindsay’s arm as she passed and made a direct line for the door.

“And I’ll get the warrants started,” Jill added as she followed.

Lindsay looked at Jacobi. “And we’ll go talk to the proud father.”

They all left Claire to her solitude. “And I’ll enjoy my cup of coffee,” she said to the empty room.

He accessed an image of Jason Abbott on his computer as he listened to the women hustle out of the morgue to perform their roles in catching a killer.

Blonde, ruggedly handsome, the type of man women swooned over, he decided when the photo revealed itself. He leaned in close, studying the man’s eyes, seeing something in them that made him feel like there was a kinship between them.

He remembered his face now, seeing Abbott as he’d fled Nicole Honeycutt’s office. He’d been ready to kill the man who had stopped him from fulfilling God’s plan. Now he wanted to thank him, thank him for helping him see the truth and his true mission.

Jill Bernhardt.

Her name rolled around in his brain as his lips spoke it reverently. Tonight was the night. Tonight he would follow her and the reporter. Tonight he would begin the process of saving her, cleansing her soul to make her clean and pure for the Father.

And God help anyone who got in his way.

TO BE CONTINUED...