

## *Teaser*

“I never thought there was a killer out there who could scare me more than Kiss-Me-Not,” Lindsay murmured. She sat on the old, faded sofa, her shoulders slumped and her brown eyes rimmed with red and deep, dark circles. She looked like she hadn’t had a decent night’s sleep in days... maybe weeks.

The psychiatrist tilted his head. “Does he?”

“Scare me?” Lindsay asked. “Yes,” she whispered. *Hell yes*, her thoughts added.

“He’s made it personal.”

“So did Harris. He killed my father.”

“But this is different,” the shrink pointed out gently.

“Yeah.” Lindsay’s voice was a faint imitation of itself. “This one is different.”

Lindsay stood, crossing to the window before sliding her hands into the back pockets of her jeans. She looked out over the city, the city it was her sworn duty to protect, and felt like a failure. She didn’t care about the majority of the people going about their lives below, even though any one of them could be the Hallelujah Man’s next victim. Today her thoughts were only for three people. Three women she’d left surrounded by death in her attic.

Lindsay felt like a coward coming here, like she was weak. But she couldn’t unburden herself on her friends and her lover. Not after what happened to Jill. There was too much emotion, too much guilt for them to deal with her coming apart at the seams now, even though they all knew she was unraveling... that she’d be unraveling for years. Did Jill, Claire and Cindy see she was hanging on by a thread now? If they did, none of them were calling her on it.

Cindy had been unusually quiet since the night she and Jill were attacked. The reporter was spending a disturbing amount of time up in the attic, and Lindsay found herself in the odd position of seeing how obsessed she must have looked to Tom and her friends with the Kiss-Me-Not case. It seemed like fitting karma that she should watch someone she loved withdraw further and further, sinking down into the mind of a killer in order to stop him.

And Lindsay had no idea what to say, what to do, to make it better. Especially when witnessing Cindy’s obsession only fueled Lindsay’s own desire to stop Arnold to a deadly degree. She could only watch and go down that dark tunnel with her lover, holding her hand when necessary and chasing after Arnold’s shadow.

Everything would go back to the way it was if she could just catch the bastard.

“What are you thinking about right now?”

Lindsay rolled her eyes at the question. “A friend.”

“DDA Bernhardt?”

Lindsay counted to ten and weighed her answer. “My girlfriend.” She glanced back at him, expecting a reaction, but he simply looked at her with polite interest. She was slightly disappointed that she hadn’t shocked him.

“What about her?” He asked mildly.

Lindsay leaned against the windowsill. “The case is taking a lot out of her.”

“Is she another police officer?”

Lindsay shook her head. “Although she’d make a damn good one,” she said with a faint smile.

He leaned forward. “So why were you thinking of her just now?”

The inspector took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Every case steals something from you. Most of the time, it’s a tiny piece of your soul. When you’re lucky and you catch the guy, you see the family get closure, you might get that piece back.”

“Most of the time?”

Lindsay’s gaze went inward. “But sometimes you lose more. Sometimes a case takes someone you love... takes you away from someone you love.”

“Is this case taking you away, Lindsay?”

“It has on occasion,” Lindsay admitted. “But I’m afraid... I’m afraid of what it’s doing to her.”

“So she’s somehow involved in the investigation?” He guessed.

Lindsay nodded as she watched him scribble down more notes. She really wished he wouldn’t do that. It made her feel even more self-conscious than she already was. Sighing, she turned her gaze back to the window. “He’s out there somewhere,” Lindsay finally continued when the shrink’s silence got to be too much. She thought too much in the silences. It was better to keep talking, keep moving.

“I suspect so.”

“I know his name, his face, where he lives. I shot him twice. *Twice.*” Lindsay fixed her gaze on the Golden Gate Bridge some distance away on the horizon as she braced her hands on either side of the windowpane. “Why haven’t I found him? Where is he?”

The psychiatrist leaned back and watched her. Fatigue was etched in every line of her body and yet she still fidgeted, still possessed the reckless urge to move, to act. “And what will you do if you catch him?”

“I *will* catch him.” Lindsay’s voice was cold as she turned to look at him. “It’s just a matter of time.”

“Okay. What will you do *when* you catch him?”

Lindsay had to look away. She couldn’t reveal her plans for David Arnold, plans that involved her putting one more bullet in the bastard. He’d pay for hurting Jill... for hurting Cindy. “My job,” she finally answered, but it felt like a lie.

“That’s the most important thing to you, isn’t it? Your job?”

The question sent Lindsay into chaos as her heart and mind warred with each other. “Used to be,” she murmured. The inspector fell silent, unwilling to say more on the matter.

“How is Deputy District Attorney Bernhardt doing?” The doctor astutely changed the subject after jotting some notes on the pad of paper resting in his lap.

“She’s fine,” Lindsay replied tightly, cursing herself for coming here and feeling way out of line for even talking about Jill with this man. Her gaze landed on the door as she considered walking out.

“Are you sure about that?”

Lindsay spun to look at him more fully. “She’s my best friend. I would know if she’s fine or not.” He merely regarded her placidly, and something about his lack of reaction grated on Lindsay’s nerves.

“You don’t know. Do you?” He asked carefully. “Just like you don’t know where Arnold has gone to ground.”

Lindsay swallowed hard and mentally cursed the man for reading her so accurately. It was unnerving, someone knowing her so well just by what she said or didn’t say. “She won’t talk about it. Not even to Claire.”

“Is Claire someone she trusts absolutely?”

The inspector nodded. “No one keeps a secret like Claire. No one keeps a confidence

like she does.”

“Then how do you know Jill hasn’t talked to her?”

Lindsay frowned then glanced at the doctor again. There was a slight teasing tone to his voice, and her body relaxed marginally in reaction to it. He had a point. “Touché.”

He smiled and dipped his head in response. “Inspector,” he said slowly. “You’ve had an unimaginable year. The end of the Kiss-Me-Not case, the death of your father, another serial killer to contend with, and now the abduction of one of your closest friends.” He waited until Lindsay looked at him with dark, haunted eyes before he motioned her toward the couch again. “You would have to be crazy not to want to talk to a shrink. Your being here is a good sign.”

Lindsay stared at him for almost a minute before snorting. She didn’t sit, however, choosing to look back at the view, a soft sigh escaping her as she did so. “I’m not sure I can do this,” she confessed in a hushed voice.

“Do what? This session?”

The inspector shook her head. She looked at the floor and took a breath, finally admitting something that had kept her up at night since Jill’s abduction two weeks ago.

“I’m not sure I can keep being a cop.”

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David didn’t understand.

Was it a test from God that he felt so much pain? He’d been forced to remove the bullet from his own side. The other had passed cleanly through his shoulder. His training as a paramedic had come in handy, but his lack of access to medication had made practicing his skills an experience in sheer agony.

“Oh God,” he cried out as he knelt in the small, empty chapel. “Why have thou forsaken me?”

David thought of Jill Bernhardt. He’d failed to save her. Was this his punishment? This endless pain? The growing infection that was beginning to contaminate him from the inside out? The wound at his side was an angry red. He needed antibiotics. He needed food.

Tonight, David decided, he would have both. He would do what it took to procure them. And when his strength returned, Jill Bernhardt would be delivered to the Lord. It was his only way to return to his Father’s good graces.

“Thy will be done,” David promised.

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### *Act I*

The voice came to her faint and repetitive. Some distant part of her realized it was her name being called, but Jill’s gaze was fixed on the photograph of the crucifixion at St. Vicente’s. For hours she’d looked up into those anguished eyes and she’d prayed; prayed shamelessly to a God that she hadn’t known she’d still believed in until her life was in peril and her body was being endlessly abused.

And her prayers had been answered.

Jill was sitting there now, in Lindsay’s musty attic, the afternoon sun sheeting through the windowpane and warming her back nicely. Four other victims hadn’t been as lucky. It put the pain she was still enduring into perspective.

A paperclip struck her in the chest and Jill blinked, her head coming up in surprise. Claire and Cindy were watching her, and it was clear by the grin on Cindy’s face that she’d been the one to get Jill’s attention. “Huh?”

“Well that was articulate,” Claire jibed before smiling and taking another sip of her cooling coffee. “You were a million miles away, sweetheart. You okay?” She eased herself down on a stack of boxes and crossed her ankles.

“Yeah,” Jill said, her voice husky. She cleared her throat and slid the photograph inside a folder. “Sorry. Just blanked out there for a second.”

“Claire and I can handle this,” Cindy offered, not for the first time that day, or that week even. “You should be home resting.”

Jill rolled her eyes. “You try resting when there is some religious whack-job out there who might still want to kill you because of your sex life.” There was no rebuke in Jill’s tone, just a statement of fact. “I don’t understand how he’s managing to hide. Where the hell is he?”

Cindy plopped down on a rickety chair only to nearly hop out of it when it shifted and almost toppled her over backward. She managed to right herself before smiling sheepishly at her grinning friends. The reporter cleared her throat and tried to look like she didn’t feel like an idiot. “We’ll find him.”

Jill shook her head. “I’m going crazy,” she announced. “All I do is spend my days watching soap operas or looking at crime scene photographs. Denise won’t let me come back until she gets the all clear from the doctor.”

Cindy frowned. "I thought your doctor gave you a clean bill of health... that all you were dealing with now was residual soreness and bruising."

Jill hesitated. "Not that doctor," she admitted before tapping her temple.

"Really?" Claire drawled with interest.

Both Claire and Cindy leaned forward, and Jill looked from one to the other in consternation. "Hello? Why is that so interesting?"

"You're seeing a shrink," Claire pointed out. "And you think that's *not* interesting?"

The attorney sighed. "Denise insisted."

"You know," Cindy said as she turned to look at Claire. "I'm kind of starting to like Denise."

"Don't you dare," Jill warned her as she stood and stretched. "Denise is sent from Satan to make my life hell. Like her and you like the devil."

Claire grinned. "She helped us find Arnold, kept you from quitting your job, is making sure you take care of yourself... yeah. Denise is being a real witch," Claire agreed mockingly.

Jill's answer was to stick her tongue out at one of her oldest friends.

A knock below had them all frowning. One by one they descended from the attic and made their way to the front door. Claire peered through the peephole then swore softly.

"What?" Jill demanded. She took a turn as well, peeking through the hole then leaning back to glance at Claire then Cindy. "This is gonna stop." Jill yanked open the door, startling Pete Raynor so badly he jumped. There was a bouquet of white roses in his hands.

Pete froze when he saw the three women looking back at him. Finally his face eased into an embarrassed smile. "Hi."

"Look," Jill said without preamble. "It's time to buy a clue. Seriously, scone-boy, leave Lindsay alone."

Cindy swallowed and glanced between Claire and Jill, wishing she could just blend into the woodwork.

"She's the love of my life," Pete started as if they should know that.

"Sweetie." It was Claire's turn to talk. "You knew her for two weeks."

“But...”

“No,” Jill and Claire said at the same time.

Cindy thought it would have been funny if the whole situation didn't make her feel so damn uncomfortable. “Maybe you should leave,” she suggested timidly.

“Is Lindsay here?” Pete asked, ignoring the reporter. “Can I just talk to her for a minute?” He started to step into the apartment.

Cindy took a step back and both Claire and Jill noticed. They stepped between the reporter and Lindsay's ex-boyfriend, blocking his path.

Claire put a hand on his chest to stop his progress before he could cross the threshold. “I don't think that's a good idea,” she said in her best “mom is not amused” voice. “Lindsay has had a tough few months and she doesn't need you adding to it.”

“But I want to help,” Pete protested as his gaze went to Jill. “I've come by your place a few times. I just wanted to tell you how sorry I am about what happened, that I'm glad you're okay.”

Jill's blue eyes didn't soften in the least. “I appreciate that.” There was a notable lack of sincerity in her voice. “But, Pete, you and Lindsay are over. You need to let things go.”

“But I...”

“Pete,” Jill's voice hardened suddenly. “Back off, or I'm going to get legal on your ass.”

He frowned as his gaze went from one woman to the other. None of them looked remotely friendly. His eyes lingered on Cindy too long to be casually observing before he nodded once and held up his hands. Pete smiled.

“I'm leaving,” he announced breezily. “Sorry to interrupt.” He started to walk away.

Cindy pushed between her friends and picked up the vase of flowers he'd left behind. “Pete.” He turned and she shoved the vase into his hands. “Lindsay doesn't want these.”

His usually friendly eyes grew colder as his gaze locked with Cindy's. “I think Linz is just confused. She'll remember what she wants, eventually. She just needs a little... persuading.”

It felt like a threat. Cindy knew she was overreacting, but the knowledge didn't stop a chill from skittering down her spine. “Leave her alone.”

Pete just smiled as he dipped his head at them before leaving.

Cindy stepped back in the apartment and closed and locked the door.

“Jill,” Claire said after a lengthy silence among them.

The attorney took in a slow breath and tamped down her anger at Pete. “Yeah?”

“Get legal on his ass anyway.”

The attorney nodded in wholehearted agreement.

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“Linz!”

Lindsay pivoted on her heel and looked up. She nodded as Tom beckoned her up only to wince when he disappeared back into his office. “Great,” she grumped. “What did I do now?” With a quick glance around for her seemingly absent partner, Lindsay reluctantly climbed the steps and entered Tom’s office. She was startled to find he wasn’t alone.

A woman sat on the other side of Tom’s desk. Her hair was a light, wavy brown that cascaded a few inches past her shoulders. She was maybe thirty-five with an attractive profile and toned calves to die for on full display thanks to her knee-length dark skirt. Something about her screamed “cop” as loud as a police wailer even if she wasn’t really dressed for chasing down perps.

“Linz,” Tom said with a smile. “Meet Inspector Margaret Snow.”

Lindsay blinked stupidly before shifting her gaze to the newcomer. “Oh. She’s... you’re...” Lindsay tried to make words come out of her mouth as the woman stood and offered her hand.

“Starting here in homicide today,” Snow helped her out. “Please, though, call me Maggie.”

Her grip was as cold as her name and almost crushing, Lindsay thought. She returned the gesture and pressure in equal measure as they sized each other up. “Sorry. I didn’t know we were getting someone new today.”

“You should check your in-box from time to time,” Tom jabbed playfully.

“After Arnold is in custody, I’ll get right on that,” Lindsay volleyed.

Snow smiled. Lindsay noticed she had what could only be described as arctic blue eyes, and she shook her head a little at her mind’s odd fixation on all things chilly this morning. “Nice to meet you.”

“Likewise. Lieutenant Hogan has been telling me all about the case you’ve been working, the Hallelujah Man.”

Lindsay eased her hands into the back pockets of her jeans, feeling a mild pang in her side where a bullet had grazed her two weeks earlier. A flare of protectiveness rose over her case even though a half hour ago she’d been wondering if she could even do the job anymore. If this woman thought she was going to make a name for herself in the department by coming in and trying to take over... “Oh really?”

Snow kept smiling. “I imagine I’ll be working plenty of other cases, but if there is anything I can do to help... even if it’s to pull paperwork, let me know.”

Lindsay hesitated, wondering if she should feel sheepish for her initial distrustful reaction, but decided it wasn’t worth the effort. She still wasn’t convinced this woman was honestly interested in helping anyone but herself. Snow would get her chance to prove herself, but Lindsay didn’t trust blindly just because someone wore a badge. What happened between Cindy and Graham had taught her that lesson loud and clear. “Hopefully he’ll simply turn up dead in an alley somewhere.”

“But you don’t think he will,” Snow guessed.

Lindsay glanced at Tom before looking back at the newcomer. “I think evil is harder to kill than we’d like.”

Snow tipped her head at that. “We had a killer like this guy in LA. Murdered seven people before he was stopped.”

“Hopefully our body count won’t get that high,” Tom added to the conversation. “Linz put two bullet holes in him. That’ll make it hard for him to snatch anyone, let alone torture them in the manner he prefers.”

“Can’t argue with that,” Snow agreed. “Nice shooting, Tex.”

*Tex?* Lindsay’s eyebrows shot skyward, but she opted not to comment. Instead, she glanced at Tom and smiled sweetly causing him to wince in reaction.

“So...” Tom said nervously as he cleared his throat. “Linz, why don’t you show Inspector Snow to her desk? I put her in her Fong’s old chair.”

At that moment, Lindsay actually missed Fong and his propensity to stare at her ass. He’d moved to narcotics six weeks ago. “Sure,” she said slowly. Lindsay motioned toward the door and waited for Snow to walk out before looking back at Tom.

“Tex?” Lindsay hissed in a harsh whisper.

Her ex-husband just gave her a pained smile.

Lindsay joined the new detective on the stairs.

“Nice place you guys have here. The room has character. I worked out of a cinder block building in LA,” Snow commented as they descended almost side-by-side.

“We like it,” Lindsay replied, feeling inane. She motioned toward an empty workspace. “This is it. Your new home away from home.”

Snow dropped her purse in the chair and regarded the desk and the view she had of the bullpen. “This will work quite nicely.”

“I doubt you’ll be spending much time sitting here,” Lindsay informed her.

“Wouldn’t be doing my job otherwise,” Snow agreed. She looked at Lindsay. “I meant what I said up there. If there is anything you need with this serial killer case...”

“Look,” Lindsay cut her off politely but firmly. “I appreciate the offer, but this case isn’t about making a name for yourself. It’s about stopping a killer.”

“I get that,” Snow replied with the first edge to her voice that Lindsay had heard. “But who says you can’t do both?”

“I do,” Lindsay answered. “I’m the primary on this case, and until that changes, I say what goes. You got your ambitions to one day sit in Tom’s chair? Fine. But if your ambition crosses one of my cases, I’ll make sure you get busted back to uniform. We clear?”

Snow smiled. “You don’t mess around, Tex.”

“Don’t call me Tex,” Lindsay told her.

“Linz then?” Snow asked cheekily.

Lindsay smiled. “Only my friends call me that.”

“And your boss,” Snow added.

Lindsay’s smile darkened. “Something tells me you already know why he gets that privilege.”

“A little friendly competition never hurt anybody,” Snow told her. “Lighten up, Lindsay. I’m still about finding justice for the victim first. Ambition comes second. And there is nothing wrong with having a little.”

“Knock yourself out.”

“You should be flattered,” Snow told her as Lindsay started to walk away. “I only compete with the best.”

Lindsay merely tossed a wave over her shoulder and kept going.

“See you around, Tex,” the new inspector called after her.

Lindsay’s teeth ground together but she didn’t respond. She vowed that Snow better stay the hell out of her way. Nothing and no one would come between Lindsay and her final showdown with Arnold. A score needed to be settled, and Lindsay intended to settle it with a bullet.

Everyone had best just stay out of the line of fire.

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“Sit.”

Cindy did as she was told. When Claire commanded you like that you obeyed without question, even if it made you feel like a misbehaving puppy. The reporter settled on Lindsay’s couch and watched as Jill sank into the orange leather chair as Claire took up residence beside the redhead. “I...”

“Ah!” Claire held up a hand, and Cindy lapsed into instant, surprised silence. “Do not even try to con me, young lady.”

“Con you?” Cindy asked only to grimace at how lame her attempt to sound clueless came off.

“The way you reacted to Pete,” Claire continued. “Cindy, honey, you seemed almost afraid of him.”

Cindy licked her lips and shot a quick look at Jill that Claire didn’t miss.

“You know what this is about?” Claire demanded of the blonde.

Jill’s blue eyes widened. “Uh...”

Claire shook her head. “Spill. What are you two keeping from me and, I strongly suspect, the absent Inspector Boxer?”

The reporter sighed and looked to Jill once more.

Jill leaned forward and put her elbows on her knees. “Pete came to see Cindy his first

night back in San Francisco. He cornered her in the parking lot at the Register.”

Claire absorbed that. “Before or after he went to see Lindsay?”

“Before,” Cindy replied quietly.

“Did he threaten you?”

“No! God, no!” Cindy said quickly. “It was just... he caught me off guard. He wanted me to help get her back...”

“Cindy,” Jill started. “Something about Pete is scaring you. Are you sure he didn’t say something? Do something?”

Cindy flapped her hands. “He just... it’s something in his eyes... the way he looks at me.”

“Like you’re in his way,” Jill commented. She noted Claire’s startled look. “To him she is, Claire. Cindy is the competition, and Pete seems like he’s in this to win.”

“He doesn’t have a snowball’s chance in hell,” Claire answered. “You’ve seen the way Lindsay looks at her. She never even looked at Tom like that.”

“I know,” Jill agreed. “But muffin man hasn’t picked up the ringing clue phone yet. All he has to do is take one look at Lindsay around her and even a blind man could see she’s loopy in love.”

“Hello,” Cindy timidly interjected. “Sitting right here listening to you talk about me and my girlfriend like I wasn’t.”

“Honey,” Claire said as her attention shifted back to the reporter. “Something about Pete gave me the willies today.”

“Seriously?” Jill asked in surprise.

“Is that bad?” Cindy wondered.

“When Claire gets the willies about someone? It’s like Armageddon time.” Jill looked thoughtful. “Maybe I should call the office, get them started on a restraining order.”

“Lindsay doesn’t know he talked to you that night, does she?” Claire asked the reporter gently.

Cindy shook her head.

“Linz doesn’t know that Cindy saw Pete kiss her that night, either,” Jill added. She

looked at Cindy. “We never really got the chance to talk about this again after...” The attorney trailed off, remembering the moment where she’d stepped out of the club and found Arnold on top of Cindy. A second or two later and the reporter would have been dead. Jill’s blue eyes tracked to the fading bruise at Cindy’s temple. It, and the one along her left cheek, was obscured mostly by makeup and healing nicely.

“We’ve had more to worry about than Pete Raynor,” Cindy said. “He’s annoying, but he’s not dangerous.”

“Are you sure about that?” Claire asked.

“You saw him just now...” Cindy started.

“Cindy.” Jill paused to find the right words. “You’re afraid of him. Not because you think he’ll come between you and Lindsay, but because there is something about him that makes you physically frightened. Do not take that instinct lightly.”

Cindy looked from one friend to the other before rubbing her hands across her face in frustration. “I just don’t know what to do!”

“Have you told Lindsay about the kiss?” Claire wanted to know.

“What do you think?” Jill huffed with a roll of her eyes. “They’re the perfect match. Both of them keeping stuff from each other all the time.”

“Hey!” Cindy dropped her hands and looked at Jill in consternation.

“You telling me you don’t?” The attorney asked blandly.

“Cindy.” Claire put her hand on the reporter’s knee and waited for her dark brown eyes to turn her way again. “That’s why you ran off to New Faith, isn’t it?”

The redhead squirmed a little before reluctantly nodding. “I just...” Cindy went silent for so long the others almost thought she’d decided not to talk. Finally she took a breath and started again. “I keep waiting for the other shoe to fall,” she slowly confessed.

“The other shoe?” Claire prompted.

“Look at me,” Cindy said. “I’m nothing all that special. I talk too much. Get myself into trouble at every turn. Get myself arrested at every other turn.” Cindy studied her linked hands where they rested in her lap. “I pinch myself everyday because I can’t believe Lindsay could love me... not the way I love her.”

“Honey...” Claire murmured.

“I know she loves me,” Cindy hastened to say. “It’s just...”

“When you want something this much it makes you that much more afraid you’ll lose it,” Jill said with quiet understanding.

Cindy nodded. “And then there is Pete... and Tom... and...” She shook her head. “I just... I guess I keep waiting for Lindsay to come to her senses.”

“She did,” Claire told her with a wry grin. “When she opened up her heart and let you in.”

Cindy’s eyes brimmed with tears that didn’t quite spill over. “I’m so scared something is going to take her from me... someone...”

“Not gonna happen,” Jill announced with conviction. “Aside from the fact that Lindsay loves you more than anything, Claire and I would so kick her ass.”

Cindy laughed and dabbed at her eyes.

“I think the two of us together could take her,” Claire said drolly.

Jill looked from one friend to the other. “Now let’s talk about what we’re going to do about creepy Pete. I’m getting sticky from all this sap.”

Cindy had to nod, feeling grateful for the presence of her friends at that moment. At least Pete was something they could actually handle right now, unlike David Arnold who had apparently vanished into the ether.

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“Tex.”

Jacobi sighed dramatically and rolled his eyes. “You really need to let this go.”

“She called me *Tex*, Jacobi,” Lindsay groused from her position in the passenger seat. They’d just done another sweep of St. Vincente’s and had settled in the car.

“I know. You’ve mentioned it five times already.”

“Where does she get off calling me anything but Inspector, Boxer, or Lindsay? I told her she could call me Lindsay. I should have kept my mouth shut.”

Jacobi was wishing his partner would do that now. “I’ve heard Cindy call you Tex from time to time.”

“That’s different. That’s sweet and affectionate and...” Lindsay screwed up her face in a scowl. “Gah! I don’t like this woman already!”

Jacobi chuckled. “Where to now, partner?” The past two weeks, other officers had been checking on the spots David Arnold had been known to reside. Today, Lindsay had wanted to give them another try herself. They’d run by Arnold’s apartment, the unused rooms of the Hall, the church. So far nothing had popped. Arnold had just vanished. Jacobi kept waiting for the call that his body had been found rotting somewhere.

Lindsay stared out the windshield at the empty buildings around them. “You think he’s in one of these? Watching us?”

“They’ve been checked, Linz.”

“Maybe they need to be checked again.”

“We don’t have warrants.”

“We could get ‘em.”

“You wanna call Denise or shall I?”

Lindsay scowled again.

“You are in a mood this morning,” Jacobi informed her.

“I want this over,” Lindsay grumped. “I want to know where the bastard is. I want to get on with my life without having to worry that he’s gonna make another run at Jill or anyone else.”

“We all want that, Linz,” Jacobi answered her with the patience of a saint. “He’ll turn up.”

“What if he doesn’t?” Lindsay finally voiced her fear out loud. “I keep promising Jill we’ll catch the son-of-a-bitch, but what if we don’t?” The threat of failure seemed to hang over Lindsay like a pall these last two weeks. Hell, the whole year, really, she thought bitterly.

It was a fear of Jacobi’s as well, but he refused to admit it. “Not going to happen. We’ll find him. No matter what it takes, we’ll find him. You, me and that little club of yours.”

Lindsay gave him the laser vision and he just chuckled. He yanked the key out of the ignition. “You know... screw the warrants. Let’s have a look around those buildings. I’m sure we can find an open door or window.”

“Or we can make one that way,” Lindsay replied with a sly smile.

“I did not hear you suggest that.”

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On the third building, they hit pay dirt.

“Lindsay!”

The inspector jerked as her name echoed in the rafters. They were currently prowling around inside an old warehouse that smelled of rust and rotting wood. Lindsay was checking the front office while Jacobi was in the back. She stepped out of the room and shined her flashlight toward the general area she knew her partner was in. The distance was enough that the beam of light barely lit Jacobi’s face.

“You need to see this,” he shouted to her.

Lindsay’s heart kicked against her ribs as she broke into a jog toward her partner’s position. Her boots sounded like rifle shots on the concrete in the empty space. He waited until she was almost to him before he stepped through a doorway.

“What did you find?” she asked, slightly breathless, as she rounded the corner.

Jacobi grimly pointed to a bookcase. “The other cops must have missed this on the first sweep. Look at the floor.”

Lindsay glanced down, seeing a sliding pattern in the dirt and grime. It looked fresh. “Someone moved it.”

“Recently,” Jacobi agreed.

Lindsay un-holstered her gun and pointed it at the bookshelf. She nodded at Jacobi who grabbed one side and gave it a tug. It swung open easily, and the older detective stepped back and drew his own weapon as they shined their flashlights inside.

It was empty.

“Damnit,” Lindsay hissed. She glanced inside, noting the shelving. Someone, at some point, had been up to no good with this little room she was sure. Now, though, it was empty.

“Wait.” Jacobi moved forward into the space, his flashlight illuminating something on the floor. Lindsay watched him as she slipped her weapon back into her holster. Her breath caught when he lifted the item with a pencil.

It was a rag soaked in blood.

Lindsay smiled darkly. “I knew I hit the bastard.”

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“Denise!”

The Acting District Attorney paused in the hallway and sighed. Reluctantly she turned around to find Jill Bernhardt jogging toward her. Jill looked much better than the last time Denise had seen her in the courtroom two weeks ago when the blonde had been covered in bruises, scratches and abrasions. Jill’s skin had regained more of its usual glow and her blue eyes were as vibrant as always. “DDA Bernhardt.”

Jill smiled at the formal greeting. She really had no idea what was going to come out of Denise’s mouth at any given moment. It was one of the few things she found fascinating about her boss. “Hi.”

Denise raised one elegant eyebrow and waited. She’d spoken with Jill numerous times by phone since the attorney’s attack and the topic was always the same. “I haven’t heard from the shrink, Jill.”

“You will,” Jill promised as she pointed her finger at Denise with conviction. “I just came from another session, actually. Dr. Frasier said I could get back to work.”

“Oh really?” Skepticism dripped from Denise’s voice.

“Well... soon. She said I need a few more sessions still. She wants to...” Jill hesitated. “She wants to talk about William Carter.”

Some of Denise’s rigidity relaxed with Jill’s honesty. “That’s... probably a good thing,” she admitted.

“I don’t know about good,” Jill said with a weak smile, “But probably necessary.”

“So what brings you by?” Denise asked as she got to the point. As good as it was to see Jill looking more like herself, she was due back in court in twenty.

“I need a search warrant.”

Denise crossed her arms. “Bernhardt, maybe you don’t fully understand how medical leave works...”

“I was hoping you would execute it,” Jill said seriously.

Denise’s brow knitted in consternation. “What in the hell are you talking about?”

Jill licked her lips before tugging Denise inside an empty office. “Inspectors Jacobi and Boxer... took a look... around some of the empty buildings near St. Vincente’s.”

“Took a look? You mean they broke in?” Denise’s voice elevated. “Are they trying to blow this case?!”

“They’re trying to catch the guy who beat me with a fucking Bible, Denise,” Jill replied, her voice colder. “And they found something. I’m asking you to legal this up so we can use it if we need it. As soon as they found something they backed out, left it alone until we could get a warrant.”

Denise shook her head in disgust. “You need to learn a thing or two about the law, Jill.”

“And maybe you need to learn a thing or two about friendship,” Jill countered.

“We’re not friends,” Denise fired back only to swallow around the strange lump that seemed to have formed in her throat.

“I didn’t say we were,” Jill conceded feeling oddly disappointed with Denise’s words. “But Lindsay and Jacobi are putting themselves on the line for me to catch this guy. You want Arnold to kill someone else because Linz and Warren didn’t follow procedure to the letter?”

Denise stared at her hard for a disconcerting moment. With an exasperated breath, she shoved the files in her arms into Jill’s hands. “Better get to Judge Lyman’s courtroom and ask for a continuance.”

Jill glanced down at her sneakers, jeans, and light blue sweater. “I can’t...”

“If I’m going to bend the law, you sure as hell can show up a little underdressed to represent it.” Denise stomped away in a huff.

Jill watched Denise go and shook her head when her boss was out of sight. “I will never get that woman,” she muttered before heading for Lyman’s bench.

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## ***ACT II***

Lindsay Boxer and Warren Jacobi were leaning against a silver SUV when Denise arrived at the warehouse. The crime lab was already there as were several uniformed officers. At least they all appeared to be waiting and weren’t prowling around where they weren’t supposed to be.

The attorney got out of her car and watched as Lindsay shoved off the SUV and sauntered closer. Denise made no move to meet her halfway, waiting expectantly for Lindsay to come to her.

“You got it?” Lindsay asked.

“Of course. But you have no idea the tap dancing I had to do to get it.” Denise slapped the papers into Lindsay’s palm. “You owe me, Inspector. And don’t think I’ll forget that you sent Jill to do your dirty work.”

Lindsay straightened, stung a little by the rebuke. “She offered.”

“And you gladly accepted, I’m sure.” Denise glanced around. She noted the old church, but her eyes didn’t linger on it. Watkins had died screaming in there. And Jill... Denise swallowed and looked away. “Where is it?”

The inspector tamped down her anger and pointed at the front of the warehouse.

“Let’s get this over with.” Denise marched away from them.

Lindsay glanced back at Jacobi who raised his eyebrows in mild surprise as the attorney led them toward their crime scene. With a sigh, Lindsay fell in step behind the other woman.

“Thank you,” Lindsay managed to ground out. “For helping us with this one.”

“This has nothing to do with you. If it were any other case, I would have told you to go fuck yourself for breaking and entering,” Denise replied, her voice low so the other officers wouldn’t hear. “But this bastard was right under my nose. He swore in my witnesses. I want him hung by his balls from the highest cross I can find. If that means bending the law to make it happen, then I’ll do it.”

Lindsay blinked but wisely chose to remain silent. They arrived at the entrance to the warehouse and Denise motioned toward the door as two uniformed officers stepped up with a battering ram. It seemed like overkill since Denise knew there was an unlocked door or window somewhere, but they had to make it look good for the courts.

“Take it down,” Denise ordered.

Minutes later, they were inside and the bloody rag was being bagged and tagged. There was evidence of more blood and a lot of it once the techs got some lights into the room. Denise hung back, watching the proceedings with a combination of hope and anger. The cops were swarming all over the room, paying her no attention whatsoever.

A noise to her left made the attorney turn her head. What she saw made her go deathly still. Staring up at her from behind a grate in the floor was a pair of silver gray eyes. They blinked at her then just as suddenly disappeared as their owner turned and fled.

For a long moment, Denise couldn’t find her voice, couldn’t move. Her whole body felt paralyzed with shock, but then some angry part of her brain started yelling at her to

move, to stop him...

“Lindsay!”

The inspector turned in surprise where she’d been talking to Jacobi.

Denise pointed at the grate, unable to do anything more.

It took Lindsay about half a second to understand. She shouted orders to the other officers as she came running, drawing her weapon and pointing it down at the grate. Lindsay saw nothing and gave Denise a quick look. “You’re sure?” she demanded.

Denise nodded vigorously.

Lindsay toed the edge of the grate, flipping it over. She eased to the edge, shone her flashlight into the hole. There was a tunnel below and the impression of two fresh footprints was visible in her beam of light. “Shit.” Without thinking, she re-holstered her weapon and clambered down the short ladder.

“Lindsay!” Jacobi shouted as he tried to catch up. He cursed his partner’s name then scrambled after her.

Denise took a step back until her back hit the wall. She’d just looked into the eyes of the devil, she realized as the attorney started to shake all over. Denise thought seeing him wouldn’t affect her, but knowing what he did to Jill... she was both terrified and so enraged she could barely think.

Cobwebs brushed Lindsay’s features with a ghostly touch as she ran down the tunnel. The inspector had her gun out again as well as her flashlight, searching in vain for any sign of Arnold. The smell of age, dirt and stone made the air feel thick to breathe. The tunnel branched off every so often, and Lindsay would slow each time, easing around those corners and making herself as small a target as possible. Every time, the tunnels were empty.

“Lindsay!” Jacobi shouted again as he finally caught sight of his partner and hurried to catch up. “What in the Sam Hill do you think you’re...”

The bullet impacted the wall next to Lindsay’s head, and she ducked before firing blindly into the darkness. Behind her, she heard Jacobi go down, and she hoped he was merely seeking cover. Her ears rang from the gunfire in the underground space and some distracted part of her brain realized she was going to have a hard time hearing the next few days.

“David Arnold!” Lindsay yelled into the dark tunnel. “This is Inspector Lindsay Boxer with the San Francisco Police Department. I order you to put down the gun and...”

More bullets struck the wall next to Lindsay and she dodged, feeling a few chips of stone or brick sting her cheek. She fired toward the area where she was sure she'd seen a muzzle flash then waited. Distantly, she heard running.

“Jacobi?”

“I'm good,” her partner replied, but he sounded pissed.

They started after Arnold. Lindsay heard a bang up ahead, like a door being thrown open. There was a glimpse of sunlight followed by the return of darkness. She picked up the pace, feeling rage driving her. When she rounded the corner where she was sure he was hiding, Lindsay did it with gunshots.

“Lindsay!” Jacobi shouted in horror.

When the echoes faded, the only sound was harsh breathing. Jacobi pointed his flashlight up to reveal a trapdoor. He knew there was no point going through it. Arnold was either long gone, or was waiting to pick them off like fish in a barrel when they tried to come through. He swung the flashlight around to illuminate Lindsay's bleeding features.

“What in the hell?” he demanded.

Lindsay shoved past him, furious that Arnold had gotten away. Again.

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Cindy could tell simply by her lover's walk that Lindsay was upset. Her brown eyes were locked on the inspector's figure, watching her pace back and forth as she spoke into her cell phone. It was times like this that their respective positions really sucked, the reporter mused. She itched to duck under the police tape and skirt the patrol officers that were milling about to get to Lindsay's side. Watching the tense set of Lindsay's body was causing Cindy's back to tighten in empathy.

Lindsay pivoted then seemed to do a double take when she spied Cindy waiting not so patiently behind the crime scene tape. A tiny lift of Lindsay's lips made the whole world seem better, the reporter decided, and Cindy dipped her head and offered an encouraging smile of her own.

The redhead was so lost in observing Lindsay that when a hand landed on her shoulder, startling her so badly she dropped her notepad, Cindy almost screamed.

“Ms. Thomas, if you would come with me.”

Cindy blinked and looked at Warren Jacobi like he'd grown a second head. She stooped to pick up her notebook, wondering why he sounded so formal, before following along.

“What did you do this time, Thomas?” One of the other reporters asked and the men and women around him chuckled.

Cindy ignored him and trotted after the fast walking Jacobi. She assumed he was going to sneak her back to talk to Lindsay so she was a little surprised when he detoured and took her around the corner behind a crumbling building, out of the line of sight of the entire scene. “Inspector Jacobi,” she teased, continuing his formalness and going so far as to drop her voice to a manly-sounding register. “What’s going on?”

“What’s going on is your girlfriend is losing her damn mind,” Jacobi replied as he put his hands on his hips. “She was running around in that damn tunnel getting us both shot at.”

Cindy’s breath hitched at the mere thought of someone shooting at either of them. “Tunnels?” The reporter blurted instead of addressing the obvious.

“Cindy, can the questions right now. I’m serious. I’m not talking to you as a reporter. I’m talking to you as the one person who can get Lindsay to see some damn reason.”

Cindy took a deep breath, unsettled by how upset Jacobi clearly was. And he was saying “damn” a lot which never bode well. When Jacobi started cussing in earnest then he had to be seriously pissed. “Was it wrong to chase the suspect?”

“It is when the damn tunnel is as black as pitch and there is nowhere to get out of the damn line of fire.” Jacobi snatched off his glasses and rubbed furiously at his eyes. They still bothered him from the dust and dirt that had been down there, some of which still liberally covered his clothes. “That’s not what worries me most, though,” he admitted.

The reporter felt the bottom of her stomach drop. “This sounds bad.”

“It is bad, very bad, as in I’m leaving it out of my report so Lindsay doesn’t get fired bad.”

Cindy licked her lips and braced herself to hear something she was sure she didn’t want to hear. “What happened?” she asked again.

Jacobi sighed. “We thought we had him cornered. Lindsay…”

And suddenly Cindy knew what her lover had done. Just like the night when they’d first come face to face with Arnold, when he’d been on top of Jill about to do God only knew what with that pipe. “She went in shooting,” she guessed.

Jacobi nodded, his surprise at her response clear on his face. “She wasn’t trying to apprehend him, Cindy. Lindsay was trying to kill him and damn near got us both killed in the process.”

The redhead swallowed and looked back the way they’d come. Cindy was feeling almost

ill, and she fingered the barely visible bruise at her temple as a headache began to throb behind her eyes. “Warren...”

Jacobi realized he’d upset her, and he stepped closer, putting his hands on her shoulders. “Talk to her,” he told her. “Make her understand that she is not a judge, jury and executioner.”

“She won’t listen.”

“Cindy...”

“It’s Jill, Jacobi. Arnold would have raped her... tortured her... *murdered* her. There is nothing I can say that would stop Lindsay from putting a bullet in him if she got the chance.” A single tear slipped down her cheek. “I’m not so sure I wouldn’t go in shooting either...” The truth made her shudder.

“Hey.”

At the sound of her lover’s voice, Cindy wiped her face. She could hear Lindsay’s boots crunching on gravel as the inspector came closer. A moment later, Cindy took a deep breath of Lindsay’s perfume, and it had the odd effect of making her feel both warm and unsettled.

“Any luck?” Jacobi asked casually as he gave Cindy a second to compose herself.

“Still canvassing.” Lindsay drew even with Cindy only to frown when she got a look at her profile. “You okay?”

“Yeah,” Cindy answered as she turned to face Lindsay, hoping this would be one of the rare times she could get something past her perceptive lover. Cindy frowned when she saw bleeding scratches on Lindsay’s cheek. “Are *you* okay?”

Lindsay’s hand reflexively went to the injury. “Fine.” She forced a smile as her gaze went to the stewing Jacobi. Her jaws clenched when she deduced what the pair had probably been discussing. “Not interrupting anything, am I?” Lindsay asked her partner, her eyes narrowing.

“Not at all,” Jacobi answered dryly. “Take care, Thomas.” Jacobi moved past them both and left without another word.

“He told you.” Lindsay’s accent was as thick as her voice was rough.

Cindy looked up into Lindsay’s eyes. “You did the same thing inside the church.”

“He was about to hit Jill with a pipe. Was I just supposed to let him while I took the time to properly identify myself?” Lindsay snapped.

“If you’re going to yell at me for caring about you, I have other things to do,” Cindy replied softly.

Cindy couldn’t have shut Lindsay up any faster if she’d slapped her, Lindsay thought. Her head rocked back and she blew out a frustrated breath as she jammed her hands into the back pockets of her jeans. “He got away again,” she said tightly.

“I know.” Cindy’s voice was soft, soothing.

“He’s still out there. He could still come after Jill.”

“I know.”

“Cindy...” Lindsay couldn’t look at her as she focused her gaze on the ground. “I can’t... I can’t promise you I won’t...”

“Kill him?” Cindy asked.

Lindsay nodded.

“That’s not what scares me, Linz.”

Lindsay’s head came back up and she looked at the reporter in surprise. “It’s not?” she blurted.

“What scares me...” Cindy’s lower lip began to quiver as tears pooled in her eyes and slipped unchecked down her cheeks. “What scares me is how much I want you to.”

Lindsay went deathly still. All the anger, the feelings of failure, and the rage at Arnold... they all dissolved in the wake of that one almost whispered sentence. Lindsay swallowed as she felt bile rise up in the back of her throat. What had this case done to Cindy? What had *she* done to Cindy? There were no words... nothing Lindsay could think to say that would make either of them feel any better in that moment.

“It isn’t you,” Cindy got out, thinking that there was a better place and time for this talk. “Don’t think this is about something you’ve done to me... that you’ve tainted me or...”

“How am I not supposed to think that?” Lindsay asked, her voice huskier and deeper than normal. “You never felt like this before you...”

“The man who shot my father,” Cindy cut her off. “He didn’t get the death penalty. He might even get out on parole in another ten years.” She wouldn’t meet Lindsay’s gaze but she could feel it boring into her. “I asked you to step back up into that attic, Linz. You didn’t want to go. Maybe... maybe I’m the one who’s doing the tainting here.”

Lindsay could feel her body shaking. She shook her head. “No...”

“I have to go,” the reporter announced. Without another word, Cindy turned and fled, leaving a shocked Lindsay too stunned to follow.

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The sun had slipped below the horizon hours ago by the time Lindsay finally let herself into her dark apartment. She closed the door behind her and waited, listening for sounds of Cindy moving about the space, waiting to feel that wave of warmth she always experienced just knowing the reporter was there... waiting.

Silence beat back at her, and Lindsay closed her eyes. Cindy hadn't answered her phone the rest of the day and the lack of contact was driving Lindsay nearly insane. The silver lining was that she was so busy worrying about her lover that she'd barely thought about Arnold slipping through her fingers again. Lindsay just needed to see Cindy, hear her voice, know that they were going to be okay...

The inspector slowly slid down the door, drawing her knees to her chest just as Martha came around the corner and happily trotted up to her owner. The dog slowed as she came closer then whined when she saw the tears tracking down Lindsay's face. She began licking them, catching them with a sloppy tongue that made Lindsay laugh just a little through her tears.

Lindsay buried her face in the scruff of the dog's neck and Martha let her, as if the dog understood that her human just needed a moment. Martha's head came down on Lindsay's shoulder and they simply stayed that way for several minutes.

“Thanks,” Lindsay finally whispered as she kissed the dog on the head.

Martha whined again.

“You miss your buddy? Me too...” Lindsay's voice broke and she cleared her throat. “Maybe she'll be back tomorrow.” The thought that maybe Cindy wouldn't be was so terrifying Lindsay could barely breathe. “When did I get to need her so much, huh, girl?” She ran her hands through the dog's thick coat. “This place feels so empty without her now, doesn't it?”

And so did she, Lindsay had to admit.

Deciding some alcohol was in order, Lindsay slowly got to her feet and moved toward the kitchen. She was on her third glass of Scotch when a knock at the door drew her attention.

Her heart leapt into her throat and she moved quickly to answer it, hoping Cindy had finally decided to talk. Flinging the door open, Lindsay went stock still when she saw

who was on the other side.

“Pete.”

“Hey,” he said gently as he took in her features. “You okay?”

Lindsay shook her head then laughed bitterly. “Perfect,” she said. “Just perfect.”

He moved past her as if he’d been invited in, as if it were perfectly natural for him to be in her home. Lindsay couldn’t believe the gall of the man as she followed him into the kitchen. He picked up the bottle of scotch as he sat down.

“Trouble in paradise?” he asked with a slight smile that should have been comforting but only managed to aggravate the inspector further.

Once she would have found that smile welcoming. Once she found it sexy as hell. Now she just wanted to wipe it right off his face. “I am not in the mood for company, Pete.”

“So you’re keeping company with a bottle instead? Just because we’re not dating anymore doesn’t mean I can’t listen, Linz.”

“Pete...” Lindsay tried to control her rising temper. “You need to go. Now.”

He picked up her cell phone and fiddled with it between his fingers. “I bet you took my number out of this already, huh?”

Lindsay’s jaw set and she rolled her shoulders, trying in vain to loosen up some of the almost unbearable tension that had settled in them when she’d seen him on the other side of the door. “Look... I really can’t do this tonight...”

Pete sighed and dropped his hands into his lap. “Why won’t you just talk to me?” he asked. “You broke up with me over the damn Internet, Lindsay.”

“I know it wasn’t the best way to handle it...”

“I mean... you aren’t even giving us a chance to be friends here.” Pete shook his head and looked up at her. “I still care about you, Linz. I came over here to talk... to try to understand... but you’re clearly hurting right now. You can talk to me.”

“No I can’t,” Lindsay said but her tone had softened marginally. “I appreciate the offer but...”

“But you’re upset about... your girlfriend...” he said slowly.

“Pete...”

“What happened with you and Cindy?”

Lindsay took a slow, measured breath. She’d suspected that Pete had figured it out, the man wasn’t stupid, but it still made her uncomfortable that he knew. “You need to go.”

“Lindsay...”

“Please, Pete. I promise I’ll call and we can talk at some point... just not tonight.”

He sighed again then got to his feet. He still fiddled with her cell phone for another moment, spinning it between his fingers. “I really wish I knew if I was still in here,” he said with a sad smile as he set it on the table. “Goodnight, Lindsay.”

She stood there, listening to him leave. Her fingers snatched up her phone when the door closed and she flipped it open, thumbing through the numbers until she came to his. With two presses of a button he was gone. She wished it could be that easy to get him out of her life.

Lindsay walked and fed the dog but opted to skip dinner herself. She called Cindy three more times to no avail. Her lover clearly didn’t want to talk. Lindsay knew she wasn’t being fair about the whole thing. There were plenty of times where she didn’t want to share and had just closed off, but being on the other side of it was driving her crazy.

There was nothing left to do but get ready for bed so Lindsay did so with little enthusiasm. Finally she stood next to her bed in maroon shorts and a matching t-shirt. She picked up the phone next to her bed and tried Cindy’s number one last time.

It immediately went to voicemail.

Something inside Lindsay snapped. She flung the phone and watched it shatter against the wall. It wasn’t enough to satisfy her anger, to ease the maelstrom of frustration raging inside her, so she started grabbing at anything she could get her hands on. She threw pillows, a vase, her keys... toppling over bottles on her dresser, sending glass shattering in every direction as the vase busted through the mirror and turned her reflection into thousands of broken shards.

She grabbed her badge off the nightstand and hurled it with all her might, mentally cursing the gold shield that she both loved and loathed now, blaming it for every bad thing that had happened to her in the last year.

It slammed into her vent with enough force to sound like a rifle shot. Lindsay turned back to her dresser to grab the lamp.

Behind her, something clattered and fell over inside the vent.

The inspector slowly turned around, her anger still simmering just under the surface, but

the cop in her was too curious about the sound to ignore it. She grabbed a chair and pulled it below the vent before standing up and looking inside.

What she saw made her boiling temper ice over.

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### *ACT III*

“Who is it?”

“Open the door, Skipper.”

Cindy sighed and banged her head against the wood. After calling her boss and feigning something close to a terminal case of food poisoning, Cindy had retreated to her apartment to hole up, drink, and eat an entire tube of cookie dough, without baking it. She was miserable, and she wanted to be left to wallow in her misery. Cindy felt like that’s what she deserved after leaving Lindsay like that today, knowing what was probably going through her lover’s mind right now.

“Cindy,” Claire’s voice was warm and beckoning. “Open the door.”

With a sigh, Cindy yielded and unlocked the numerous locks to allow her friend entrance. She was caught off guard when she found Jill standing next to Claire. “You both came? Who is with Lindsay?”

“Actually,” Jill said as she moved past the redhead, sneaking a quick, impressed glance at Cindy’s exposed legs where they stretched out from underneath a maroon San Francisco 49ers jersey, “a whole squad of crime scene techs is keeping Linz company right now.”

“What?” Cindy’s head swiveled in Jill’s direction, as Claire entered and shut the door behind them.

“Get dressed, sweetheart,” Claire instructed.

“Wait. What happened? Is Lindsay okay?” Cindy’s gaze went back and forth between her friends.

“I’m not going to say she’s fine,” Claire told her honestly. “But she’s not physically hurt.”

Cindy felt her heart jerking in her chest from fear. “I don’t... what...”

“Get dressed,” Jill said this time. “We’ll explain in the car.”

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“A camera.”

With her protective detail in the car behind them, Jill drove toward Lindsay’s apartment, leaving Claire to handle Cindy in the backseat.

“In the vent in Lindsay’s bedroom,” Claire said again as she waited patiently for Cindy to process what she was telling her. Before they left, the reporter had quickly changed into jeans, sneakers and a dark green sweater. She looked like a fresh-faced college student rather than one of the city’s premiere crime reporters, Claire thought.

“So someone was... watching...” Cindy swallowed hard.

Claire and Jill said nothing.

“Oh my God,” Cindy breathed.

Claire slipped an arm around the reporter’s shoulders and pulled her in close. Her gaze met Jill’s in the rearview mirror. Jill shook her head and sighed before refocusing her attention on the road.

“Banner year for the club,” the attorney murmured under her breath. In a strange way, Jill was almost glad to have this new problem to focus on. It gave her something to think about other than her own problems for a change. Still, if she found out who violated Lindsay and Cindy like that, she was going to get so legal on their ass they would be lucky if they could sit down for a month when she was finished.

“Cindy, Lindsay seems upset about a lot more than this.” Claire kept her voice gentle. “Why would she send us to get you instead of just calling herself?”

Cindy closed her eyes and seemed to shrink into the leather of Jill’s backseat. She missed the worried look the attorney shot her in the mirror. “We... had a fight.”

“A pretty good one, I’m guessing,” Claire replied.

Cindy shook her head. “A really, really bad one. I think I...” The reporter swallowed again only to lurch forward suddenly. “Stop the car.”

Jill slammed on the brakes just as Cindy bolted from the backseat, stumbling out onto the deserted sidewalk and heaving into someone’s trashcan. The blonde winced and looked away, wishing she could ignore the noise as well.

Claire scurried out after Cindy and murmured reassuring words until the reporter finally sagged against her. She waved at the two officers that had pulled up behind them to stay in their car.

“I really shouldn’t have eaten the whole tube,” Cindy muttered.

“What?”

“Never mind.”

Claire ducked back into the car and took the bottle of water Jill was offering. “Drink this, sweetie.” She handed the bottle to Cindy.

Cindy did as she was told as she leaned heavily against the car, her legs wobbling.  
“Sorry.”

“What happened between you and Linz today, hon?” Claire brushed Cindy’s hair away from her sweating features.

Brokenly, Cindy told her about the church, about what happened in the tunnels and about her own reaction to what Lindsay had done. Claire listened motionless. Jill leaned back in the front seat, listening to every word intently.

“Cindy...” Claire whispered when the reporter was finished.

Tears slipped from the reporter’s eyes. “Everybody thinks that I’m this... perky... happy-go-lucky girl... that I don’t have any darker angels.” She looked up at Claire, her brown eyes full of pain. “I never... I thought being a part of us... of what we do would satisfy that craving for justice.”

“Are you saying it doesn’t?” Claire asked softly.

“Usually,” Cindy admitted. “But this time... when he would have...” Cindy swallowed and took a deep breath, willing herself not to get sick again. “He went after Jill, and that was unforgivable. What he would have done...” Cindy moved away from the car so she could see both of them. “And now look what I’ve done. I pulled Lindsay back into that attic...”

“Cindy.” Jill got out of the car and joined her friends on the sidewalk. “Lindsay has plenty of her own darker angels. We all do. You didn’t push her to this. This has been coming since Kiss-Me-Not murdered his first victim.”

“I don’t want to be this person I’m turning into,” Cindy confessed. “I don’t want to encourage her to be a killer.”

Jill and Claire glanced at each other. Hearing those words come out of that sweet face shook them both.

“We so need group therapy,” Jill announced suddenly.

They looked at each other for a string of heartbeats then burst into laughter.

It felt so good it almost hurt. Cindy wrapped her arms around the two women and held them close as they all giggled helplessly, laughing at things that weren't even remotely funny. Sometimes the truth was so ludicrous there was simply no other choice.

When their laughter wound down they still held one another, each acutely aware they needed to get to Lindsay's but that this moment was equally as important.

"We all have those moments," Claire spoke into the quiet. "Those moments where we want vengeance so much that we can taste it. It's a part of what makes us human. We want to hurt those that hurt the ones we love... because that love is so strong and we would do anything we could to protect it."

Jill and Cindy looked at each other, understanding that Claire was talking from her own experience. Ed, her husband, forever confined to his wheelchair because some bastard had put a bullet in his back while Ed had been doing his job. His shooter had never been caught.

Then there was William Carter who'd taken away Jill's childhood and her ability to ever completely trust a man.

And Cindy, wishing she could go back and shake sense into a poor woman who was too scared to file charges against her abusive husband. In the end it had cost her her life, the life of Cindy's father who had tried to save her, and Cindy a piece of her soul.

"Guess we all have our demons, huh?" the reporter asked in a rough voice.

"We wouldn't be so damn good at what we do without them," Jill said with conviction.

Cindy nodded, feeling more centered than she had in months. Her turmoil had been building ever since she'd seen Teresa Watkins tortured on those big screens. She felt like she'd failed the woman, that she had somehow been responsible for not figuring out who the Hallelujah Man was before he'd claimed Watkins so brutally as his next victim.

The reporter realized she understood Lindsay Boxer better in this moment than she had in any other. She cleared her throat. "Thanks guys."

"What are friends for?" Claire asked right before she kissed her friend on the temple.

They slowly got back into the car, and Jill couldn't help the silly grin she was sporting. No doubt her protective detail was thinking they had all just lost their minds. Their report on the evening's activities was one Jill actually wished she could read.

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The pain meds swam through his system, putting a warm, liquid barrier between him and the lancing agony he'd been immersed in.

Arnold let the syringe roll from his grip to clatter on the table. He'd waited patiently in the ambulance bay for his chance, slipping inside one of the rigs the first moment he could and raiding their supplies. Cameras would catch his actions but he knew he'd be gone before anyone was alerted.

So what if they knew it was him? Who he was...

There had been a newspaper in the ambulance. It was a few days old, but he'd seen the headline above a picture of his own face. They were calling him a killer. A murderer. They didn't understand what he was trying to do. He was saving souls, not destroying them. Why didn't people understand?

He studied the reporter's byline with blurry eyes. Cindy Thomas. He'd wondered if she lived after he'd had to subdue her in the alley. Even now, he could remember how sweet she smelled, how fiery her red hair had been splayed out across the asphalt as he'd reluctantly raised the rock to bash her skull in. He'd hated to do it, but he felt certain her soul was safe, and she was between him and Jill Bernhardt. Thomas was her friend, surely she would have understood in the end... would have thanked him for giving Jill eternal life rather than her being condemned to an eternity of torment.

Arnold tucked the paper into his backpack. He decided even in his drug-induced fog that he needed to set Cindy Thomas straight. He needed to make her understand. She could help him. Maybe she was the only one who could.

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Inspector Maggie Snow perused the space curiously. She never would have guessed that Lindsay Boxer had a flair for color and decoration but the evidence showed she clearly did. Snow filed that away for further consideration later as her eyes took in the dog curled up protectively at Boxer's feet. Lindsay was sitting at her kitchen table with their Lieutenant who was taking notes as the inspector absently petted the dog on the head.

Snow felt bad for Boxer in that moment. True, Lindsay was top dog at the precinct and Snow had every intention of outshining her before the year was over, but she wouldn't wish this kind of intrusion on anyone, especially not someone coming off the year Boxer had just endured.

"Tex," Snow greeted as she entered the kitchen.

Lindsay just tilted her head and looked at her for a long moment. "Hollywood," she replied with a sarcastic smile.

Snow's lips twitched and she nodded. Lindsay was going to make this competition fun.

“Sorry about all this.”

Lindsay rubbed her bottom lip and sighed. “I’m not much thrilled about it, either.” She glanced at her watch, wondering what was taking the girls so long. “Did they find anything else?”

Snow eased into a chair at the table and let Martha sniff her fingers. The dog seemed to reluctantly approve and gave them a little lick. “Another camera in the living room vent. Same make and model as the one we found in here and your bedroom. A few bugs.” She laced her fingers and put her hands on the table. “We got them all.”

Tom flipped his notepad shut. “Let us put you up in a hotel tonight, Linz. I know you won’t get any sleep here.”

Lindsay turned her head and looked at him. “You know I’m not the only apartment you need to sweep,” she told him as if Snow wasn’t at the table.

He licked his lips and nodded. “I figured we’d tell them when they got here.”

“How do you know they’re coming?”

Tom just smiled, and Lindsay found herself hesitantly returning the gesture.

“Someone want to let me in on the joke?” Snow asked.

There was a commotion at the front door. Lindsay glanced up and was rewarded with the sight of her lover who came all but flying into the room, a patrol officer hot on her heels. Jill caught him and held him back, clearing Cindy’s path to Lindsay who clamored to her feet and caught the reporter in a crushing hug.

Tom had to look away.

“I’m sorry,” Cindy’s voice was muffled from where her head was buried against Lindsay’s shoulder. “Linz...”

Lindsay shushed her, all the trials of the day melting away in Cindy’s welcome embrace. “Me, too,” Lindsay confessed as she rubbed Cindy’s back, savoring the heat of her. Cindy’s presence eased her nerves like a sedative. “I’m glad you’re here.”

Snow got to her feet, startled by what she was witnessing. She felt like an intruder and decided to step out to give the two a moment. She ran into someone and turned to apologize, only to have her words die on her tongue.

“Sorry,” Jill said with a hesitant smile for the woman she’d just crashed into. Jill blushed slightly when she realized she was being openly appraised. “Um...”

“No,” Snow said as she snapped out of the spell she seemed to have fallen under. “My bad. Completely.”

“I don’t think we’ve met,” Jill said slowly. “I’m DDA Jill Bernhardt.”

“Inspector Maggie Snow. Just started today.”

“Ah. Explains why I’ve never seen you before.” Jill’s gaze slipped past the attractive woman and her eyes brightened when she saw Lindsay and Cindy in a hug so tight they looked like a crowbar couldn’t pull them apart. She grinned helplessly in response.

Maggie turned her head and noticed where Jill was looking. “Striking pair,” she ventured.

Sharp blue eyes returned to Maggie’s features. “You have no idea,” Jill teased.

Claire stepped up behind them and smiled when she saw the scene in the kitchen. “Now that does a weary soul a right nice thing to see.”

“Doesn’t it, though?” Jill asked. “Dr. Claire Washburn, meet Inspector Maggie Snow.”

Claire held out her hand and Maggie took it with a firm grip. “Nice to meet you, Maggie,” Claire said. “I’m the medical examiner.”

“Likewise,” Maggie replied, liking the woman instantly. “I wish it could have been under different circumstances.”

“You and me both,” Claire agreed. “Excuse me.” She moved toward the kitchen, nodding in greeting to Tom who looked grateful to have someone to talk to as Cindy and Lindsay continued to murmur words for only each other to hear.

“I’m an idiot, I’m an idiot, I’m an idiot,” Cindy kept repeating until Lindsay laughed softly. The reporter tipped her head back and looked up into Lindsay’s soft smile. That smile always did things to her, melted her insides and made her thoughts turn to a puddle of mush. “I’m sorry,” she whispered.

Lindsay cupped her cheek with her left hand. “You have nothing to be sorry for.”

“I do. I should have...” Cindy shook her head then glanced around noticing with some embarrassment that they were the center of attention as several officers averted their gaze. “Maybe we should talk about this somewhere else.”

Lindsay chuckled again before kissing Cindy’s forehead. The relief she felt at having Cindy in her arms made their current situation infinitely more bearable. “Claire and Jill told you?”

“Yeah.” Cindy reluctantly eased back. “God, Linz... he saw us...” She waved her hands if that explained everything.

Lindsay couldn't help but smirk. “Well he certainly got quite a show,” she murmured only loud enough for Cindy to hear. She almost laughed when her lover turned scarlet.

“Good Lord,” Claire muttered. “What did you say to get a blush like that out of the girl?”

Tom motioned Jill over and Maggie followed. He waited until he had them all together. “Jill, Claire... Thomas,” his voice hesitated only briefly on Cindy's name. “We're going to send squads over to check your places as well.”

“You think the Hallelujah Man is behind this?” Claire asked.

“Maybe.”

Jill raked her hands through her hair and sighed.

Maggie wanted to smack herself for not putting it together faster. Bernhardt was the DDA the killer had almost claimed as his next victim. She studied Jill's profile before her eyes traveled to the fading bruises that wrapped around the woman's pale wrists. Her estimation of the woman rose a notch. Now she was impressed with her beauty and her bravery.

“We'll put all of you up somewhere.” Tom glanced down at Martha. “Martha can come home with me. Heather keeps pestering me about getting a dog. She can try yours out for twenty four hours,” he joked faintly with his ex-wife.

Martha growled.

“That dog would do things to your shoes just for fun,” Jacobi announced as he arrived and moved into the center of the group. “Martha can come with me, right girl?”

The dog thumped her tail in happy response.

“You okay?” Jacobi asked his partner.

Lindsay nodded, her emotions too all over the place to feel anything but numb at the moment.

They all talked for a few more minutes before disbanding and leaving Lindsay to pack a few items. Cindy followed her lover into the bedroom only to freeze in the doorway when she saw the level of destruction.

“Hello.”

Lindsay looked sheepish. “I got... a little... upset.”

Cindy picked up Lindsay’s badge and looked at her for a long, understanding moment. “I went home and ate a tube of cookie dough and drank.”

The mental picture made Lindsay laugh. “I think your way of handling frustration is much better than mine.”

“Tell that to Jill,” Cindy answered. “I almost puked in her car on the way over here.”

Lindsay just looked at her for a long, sweet moment. She put her stuff down and moved closer, wrapping her long arms around her lover. “I know we’re not okay right now,” she said in a low voice. “But I want us to be. I need us to be.”

The redhead nodded, reassured beyond measure by the words. “Me, too,” she agreed softly. “I don’t want to be without you in my life.”

The words brought tears to Lindsay’s eyes. “I’m not coming back here,” Lindsay admitted. “My space being violated once was bad enough. Twice...”

“Yeah,” Cindy sighed. “At least you know you didn’t lock Martha in the closet now.”

The inspector considered that, realizing that they could pinpoint the exact day that someone had started monitoring them. “I’m going to get a new place.”

“Makes sense,” Cindy told her.

Lindsay took a breath and swallowed, feeling light-headed over the decision she’d just reached in her mind and heart. “I want you to get one with me.”

Cindy’s eyes widened.

“You don’t have to answer right now...”

“Yes,” Cindy whispered.

“Just like that?” Lindsay asked in wonder.

“Just like that,” Cindy agreed solemnly. “I would so kiss you right now to prove it, but I really need a mint.”

Lindsay snorted before pulling her into a hug and holding on, a ray of hope pushing back some of the darkness that had sent her into a destructive tailspin hours ago. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

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The next morning Jill, Claire, Lindsay and Cindy gathered in Tom's office to hear what the techs had found the night before. Tom was waiting with them since Maggie had offered to look into the matter, and it was her report they were about to hear.

The new inspector strode in five minutes late and gave Tom an apologetic smile. "Sorry. Needed to check on something."

"Well?" Lindsay asked impatiently.

"No cameras at either Ms. Thomas' apartment or Dr. Washburn's."

"What about mine?" Jill asked.

"Nothing we could find, but we checked the roofs of some neighboring buildings. It looks like someone might have been watching you from there." Maggie flipped open the folder she'd walked in with. "Here is the really weird part."

"Besides the cameras and listening equipment?" Jill asked. "There is something weirder than that?"

Everyone smiled just a fraction.

Maggie handed the folder to Lindsay rather than their boss. "The equipment found in DDA Bernhardt's office after her abduction doesn't match the equipment found in your apartment."

Lindsay frowned and looked at the inventory of evidence. "Fingerprints?" she asked as she flipped through the rest of the report.

"On the camera and bug at the Hall. Nothing on those found in your apartment," Maggie told them.

"Arnold's fingerprints?" Lindsay's frown deepened.

Maggie nodded.

"What is it, Linz?" Claire asked.

"Why buy different models of camera and listening devices? And why would Arnold keep his prints off the equipment in my apartment but not off the stuff at the Hall?"

"You got someone else that might be watching you?" Maggie asked matter-of-factly.

A name flashed through Lindsay's mind but she quickly dismissed it. She was being

paranoid, she decided.

“Pete,” Jill and Claire said in unison.

Cindy looked caught, and she knew she was about to have her whole run-in with the muffin man outed.

“C’mon,” Lindsay said. “Be serious. He’s annoying but...”

Tom looked at the women. “Wait. Pete Raynor? Lindsay’s boyfriend?”

“Ex.” Cindy shrugged when all eyes turned on her. “Ex-boyfriend. Just wanted to clear that up.”

Lindsay winked at her before turning to face the others. “He wouldn’t do this.” She thought of Pete mentioning Cindy by name last night and a chill took her.

“You need to tell her what happened,” Jill said to Cindy.

“Tell who what?” Lindsay asked before glancing back at her lover.

“Pete... came to see me his first night back in the city. He’d been waiting for me in the parking lot at the Register.” Cindy found it tough to maintain eye contact.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Lindsay asked, her voice holding more hurt than anger.

“I was going to, but when I showed up at your apartment...” Cindy swallowed.

The inspector closed her eyes, realizing instinctively what Cindy had witnessed, what had caused her lover to withdraw that night and had sent Cindy running off to the New Faith compound. “Dammit...”

“It’s not like he threatened me or anything,” Cindy hastened to add. “He creeped me out, but I don’t see Pete sneaking into Lindsay’s apartment and putting cameras in her vents.”

“We can’t rule it out,” Tom spoke with authority on the subject. “Inspector Snow, you still want to look into this?”

Maggie nodded. “Sure.”

“Start with Pete Raynor, he’s a contractor. Get me everything you can on the guy.” Tom didn’t bother to tell her he had his own folder already pulled on Pete and sitting in the bottom of his desk drawer. He’d give her that when Lindsay left.

Maggie nodded and with a dip of her head at the others she left.

Lindsay pinched the bridge of her nose as a headache bloomed behind her eyes. She didn't know what to deal with first. With a sigh, she focused on the current investigation. "What turned up in the tunnels?"

Tom sat up in his chair. "They're prohibition tunnels, but since Thomas's paper ran a front page story about them I'm sure you already knew that."

"I took the afternoon off," Cindy stated. "I haven't even seen the paper this morning."

Tom picked up the one on his desk and tossed it to her. Cindy opened it and started reading.

"We've got every treasure hunter in the city trying to get down in those tunnels now. The city didn't know this stretch of them was there." Tom scratched the stubble on his cheek. He was still in the same clothes as last night, having spent the night at the precinct much to his wife's displeasure.

"Any of them leading anywhere interesting?" Jill asked.

"If by interesting you mean churches or other religious places in which this nut case might take refuge? No."

Jacobi stuck his head in the office. "Morning all."

"Morning, Jacobi," Lindsay greeted, her voice gruff but friendly.

"Got something you'll want to see."

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Lindsay backed the video up and watched it again. Arnold was in the back of an ambulance at Mission Cross North Hospital, raiding it for supplies. He moved stiffly, like he was in pain, and Lindsay took grim satisfaction from that.

"When was this taken?" she asked.

"Last night," Jacobi informed her and Tom. The others were out in the bullpen. Jacobi had wisely decided Jill didn't need to see the footage, and the other members of the club were smart enough to catch on and distract her.

"He's hurting," Lindsay said.

"He grabbed a lot of pain meds," Jacobi agreed as he consulted the police report. "Some antibiotics, too."

"Any of those tunnels open up near the hospital?" Tom asked.

Lindsay reached back and grabbed the folder on the table she was sitting on, sliding the findings toward her and flipping it open. She snorted in surprise.

“What?” Jacobi asked.

“One of the tunnels opens up two doors down from Papa Joe’s.”

Jacobi and Tom failed to see the significance as Lindsay shook her head.

“Closest one is about six blocks from the hospital. There was an opening in the back of a closed restaurant. Says here the owner came in this morning and damn near fell down the hole.” Lindsay slapped the file closed. “He’s got to be somewhere close to there. He’d be exhausted after yesterday. He’s medicated, in pain...”

“I agree. I’ll send some units to check out the area.” Tom left.

“You okay?” Jacobi asked when their boss was gone.

“Tired,” Lindsay confessed. She put her hand on Jacobi’s when it came to rest on her shoulder and squeezed. “But we’re closing in. I can feel it.”

“Linz...”

“I know,” she said softly. “I’m sorry about yesterday.”

“We’re going to talk more about this,” he promised before he squeezed again and left the way he’d come, knowing this wasn’t the time to talk about it further. He cleared his throat as he opened the door so Lindsay would look up and see Jill standing there. She reached across and snapped off the monitor as Jill stepped inside and shut the door.

“Hey,” Lindsay greeted carefully.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you about Pete and Cindy,” Jill said.

Lindsay nodded. “I understand. She’s your friend too.”

“You mad at her?”

Lindsay’s mouth formed a wry grin. “I’m so relieved that she still wants to be a part of my life that she could commit felony B & E right now, and I’d forgive her.”

Jill smiled briefly before her face became serious once more. “I need to talk to you for a minute.”

“Okay,” Lindsay said slowly as she watched her blonde friend come closer. Jill settled

next to her, and Lindsay could tell whatever Jill wanted to talk about was serious.

“What will you do when you catch him?” Jill finally asked.

The shrink had asked her the same question. Lindsay swallowed and looked away. Obviously Cindy had shared the topic of their argument yesterday with their friends. She couldn't meet those blue eyes, but she could feel them on her profile, assessing. Lindsay kept her gaze focused on the edge of the table where her forefinger traced the pattern in the wood grain between them. “What do you want me to do?” she evaded but was truly curious about Jill's response.

“I don't want you to kill him, Lindsay.” Jill's voice was firm and held the weight of her conviction behind it.

Lindsay's head came up. “He hurt you. He would have...” Lindsay shook her head not wanting to dwell on what could have happened. “He would have killed you... killed Cindy... Think about what he's done to his victims. What he's done to...”

“You. Think about what he's done to you, Linz. You want the man dead. You want him dead because he's evaded you, killed more people on your watch, and made it even more personal with Cindy and me. This isn't about you doing your job, it isn't about searching for some vengeance for me... this is about you, Lindsay, about your need for revenge.”

Jill grabbed her friend's arm and dragged Lindsay up and to the door, opening it and pulling Lindsay out into the hallway where she could see Cindy and Claire chatting at Lindsay's desk. “Look at her, Linz. Look at Cindy. That is the best damn thing that has ever happened to you. So help me, if you fuck up something as beautiful as what you two have for something as ugly as revenge... Don't call me. Don't talk to me. We're over. Done.”

Lindsay could only look at Cindy's beautiful profile as Jill continued.

“For what it's worth,” Jill said in a quieter voice. “I need him alive. I need him to be caught... to go to trial. If you kill him, you rob me of that. You rob me of the chance to find the closure I need, Linz. I was the one he beat. I was the one he would have raped and killed. Don't take this from me, Lindsay. When you find him, and you will find him, do not kill him unless you have to in order to save your own life.”

“He deserves to die,” Lindsay retaliated weakly.

“He does,” Jill agreed. “He deserves to burn in hell. But it is not your place to kill him. You're a cop.”

“Maybe I don't want to be a cop anymore,” Lindsay murmured. Her gaze shifted to Jill and she was startled to see how angry she looked. “I don't know if I can be a cop anymore. Not after all this. Not after Harris.”

Jill swallowed. "Maybe you shouldn't be," she agreed. "You sure as hell aren't acting like one and you sure as hell don't sound like one. You sound like a killer." Jill gripped Lindsay's arm so hard the inspector winced. "Do you love her, Lindsay?"

"What kind of question is that?" Lindsay demanded, her anger finally starting to surface.

"Just answer it."

"Yes."

"Then don't kill him for her."

"She wants me to kill him," Lindsay confessed in a bitter whisper.

"A part of her does, just like a part of me does and a part of Claire... but it's not the logical part, Lindsay. We all love you and your soul is more important to us than his death." Jill held her ground when Lindsay looked at her with a lost expression. "Do. Not. Kill. Him. Promise me."

Lindsay took in an aching breath.

"You promise me, Lindsay," Jill pleaded as tears gathered in her eyes and her voice shook. "I know you. Mentally, emotionally, hell, even biblically... you promise me, because I know you'll keep your word. You want to do this for me? Stop him for me? Then bring him in alive and give me and the law the chance to make him pay."

Lindsay closed her eyes and felt all the energy drain from her body. The thirst for revenge had been the only source of strength she'd had left to draw on, but she couldn't deny Jill this request. With the memory of Cindy's face swimming before her closed eyes, she knew she didn't want to. "I promise."

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### *ACT IV*

Long after Jill, Cindy and Claire left, Lindsay sat at her desk, her thoughts and emotions churning. She knew she should be making phone calls, canvassing the neighborhood where they suspected Arnold was hiding, hell, maybe she should even try to track down Pete, but all Lindsay could do was sit there and stare into space. The inspector was finally facing what the year had done to her. The damage Harris had caused her by killing her father. The parts of her psyche Arnold had wounded as he claimed more and more victims until Lindsay had been forced to watch every moment of Teresa Watkins death. Could she keep doing this? Keep being a cop?

Did she want to?

“Linz?”

Lindsay snapped out of her trance and looked up into the worried features of her ex-husband. “Tom.” She had to clear her throat.

“You okay?”

Slowly Lindsay shook her head when she realized the magnitude of what was at stake. More than her relationship with Cindy, Lindsay knew her very soul was hanging in the balance. Catching David Arnold wasn’t going to save it.

Lindsay took a breath. “I…” She swallowed, feeling the words stick in her throat.

“Hey.” Tom settled on the edge of her desk. “What is it?”

“I need some time,” Lindsay said in a faint voice as her pride began to scream in protest. For once, she didn’t listen to it.

“Time for what?” Tom asked.

“To grieve for my father. To get my head on straight about Harris. To decide if I can keep doing this job.” Lindsay looked up at him, seeing shock and something more reflected in his gaze.

“After Arnold is in a cell you can have it. You take as long as you need.”

Lindsay shook her head. “There will always be someone to take his place, Tom. Another Harris. Another Arnold…”

“He attacked Cindy and Jill,” Tom protested, barely able to believe what he was hearing.

“Which is exactly why I shouldn’t be on this case,” Lindsay countered. “I promised Jill I wouldn’t kill Arnold. I can’t keep that promise if I catch him.”

Tom went cold at the words. He licked his dry lips. “Linz… you’re a good cop…”

“I am,” Lindsay agreed. “Give me a shot at staying that way,” she pleaded.

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Jacobi had been a relief. When Lindsay had told him her plans he’d smiled instead of yelled. Hugged her instead of slugged her. Lindsay had known he’d been worried about her, but apparently his concern had been graver than she’d realized. He’d been all too happy to look after Martha for a spell.

She'd called Claire on her way to the Register. Her plans had been met with shocked silence followed by a heavy sigh of relief. Claire had sounded like she'd had tears in her voice when she told Lindsay to take whatever time she needed.

A rueful smile edged onto Lindsay's features as she got into the elevator, a duffle bag slung over her shoulder. Apparently all her friends had been secretly hoping she'd come to this point a lot sooner. Once they had gotten over the shock that she'd finally gotten to this point at all, they were giving her their blessing.

She could only wonder what Jill and Cindy would think.

Would they think she was running? Giving up? Or would they see it for the last ditch effort Lindsay needed to save herself? To save all of them and what they meant to each other?

The doors parted and Lindsay entered the bullpen of reporters, heading toward Cindy's desk. Her steps faltered when she saw Jill sitting on the edge of it. Cindy was nowhere to be seen. She cleared her throat and Jill glanced up in surprise.

"Hey," Jill greeted hesitantly.

"Hey." Lindsay sat the duffle bag down on the floor and watched as Jill's eyes tracked to it then back to her face.

"Going somewhere?" The attorney joked.

Lindsay cleared her throat. This was the part she hated the most, the part she feared the most. Would Jill think she was abandoning her at a time like this? Was she? "Actually, maybe."

One blonde eyebrow rose expressively.

"Where's Cindy?" Lindsay asked with a look around.

"Getting coffee." Jill tilted her head. "So..." She motioned at the bag. "What's up?"

Lindsay slipped her hands into the back pockets of her jeans. "I need to ask a favor."

Jill took a breath and sat up a little straighter. "Okay," she replied, her voice soft.

"I need you to let me go."

Jill blinked, not sure she understood what Lindsay meant. "Let you go?"

"Away for a while." Lindsay looked at the floor. "I'll stay if you ask me to. I don't..." She took in an uneven breath. "I don't want you to think..."

Jill eased off the desk. “You’re taking some time,” she guessed, her voice sounding fragile. She wasn’t sure how she felt about this, about Lindsay leaving now of all times, but after she’d ditched Lindsay during the darkest days of the Kiss-Me-Not case Jill really didn’t think she had any right to ask the other woman to hang around.

Lindsay nodded, the motion jerky. “I... want a shot at keeping my promise to you,” she confessed.

“Lindsay...”

“But... you know I’ll stay. All you have to do is tell me to. I... I feel like I’m letting you down here... it’s just...”

“You’re drowning,” Jill said in understanding. “You have been for a long time, Linz.”

Lindsay nodded again and had to look anywhere but at Jill’s accepting gaze. “I feel like I’m failing you. Again.”

“This isn’t failing me,” Jill promised her. She forced Lindsay’s hands out of her pockets and held them between her own. “Lindsay, I’m so scared you’re going to do anything to catch this guy. I’m scared you’re going to end up on a slab in Claire’s office before it’s over with.”

The inspector swallowed and cast her gaze about for the reporter once more before her eyes locked on Jill’s. “I don’t want to let you down.”

“You dying would do that,” Jill said bluntly. “And the way you’ve been going... Cindy slowed it down, Linz, but Arnold taking me sped it back up. You’ve been on a one way trip to hell ever since the Kiss-Me-Not killer claimed his first victim.”

Lindsay didn’t deny it, and Jill saw that as a breakthrough she and Claire never thought they’d witness.

“Honey,” Jill said softly. “I don’t just want you to take the time, I need you to. I need you in my life, Linz. So does Claire.” Jill’s blue eyes lifted and caught sight of Cindy headed their way. “And so does Lois Lane over there.”

Her eyes brightening with unshed tears, Lindsay smiled weakly as Jill leaned over and kissed her softly on the lips.

“Hey!” Cindy said as she walked up. “No kissing my girlfriend,” she joked.

Jill smiled as she took a cup of coffee from the redhead. “She’s all yours. I actually need to visit the ladies room.” She smiled encouragingly at Lindsay, deciding this really was for the best, before she left her two friends alone.

Cindy watched her go, not sure what she felt at seeing Jill kiss Lindsay with such easy familiarity. “So... what was that about?”

Lindsay turned to look at her. “Um... I think I just got her blessing.”

“Blessing?”

“To run away with you for a week.”

Cindy blinked and stared at her lover. “What?” Her phone rang and Cindy jumped, her heart starting to hammer as she considered Lindsay’s words. “Hang on.” She snatched up the receiver. “Crime desk, Cindy Thomas.”

“I’m glad you survived.”

For a string of heartbeats, Cindy felt like she couldn’t breathe. “David?” she said more for Lindsay’s benefit than to be polite. “Is that you?”

Lindsay moved closer, slipping her cell phone out and punching Jacobi’s number. “I need a trace on this number now,” she almost whispered before rattling off Cindy’s number by memory.

“You remember my voice.” It was a statement rather than a question. “I’m sorry for what I had to do to you,” Arnold continued. “But you’re her friend. I know you understand. You did what you had to do to save her in court. Now I must do what I have to in order to save her soul.”

Cindy stalled as Lindsay made a motion with her hand to keep him talking. “And beating her with a pipe was going to save her soul?”

“I just want her to know the kingdom of Heaven.” His voice was weak and he sounded like he was in pain.

Cindy swallowed the bile she could feel rising in her throat. She glanced helplessly at Lindsay. “You were going to kill her.”

“It’s the only way. Don’t you understand? I had to drive the sin from her. Make her repent so she could know the glory of God. Please, you have to make your readers understand. Your paper calls me a murderer, a serial killer. It isn’t true.”

“Jacobi?” Lindsay demanded as she saw Jill returning.

“We’re closing in. Keep him talking,” her partner replied.

Lindsay met Cindy’s gaze and held it.

“Can we meet somewhere?” Cindy suggested as she tried to ignore Jill. If she focused on her friend she’d lose it. “You can tell me your side of the story.”

Jill stiffened when she realized what was happening... who was on the other end of the phone. Lindsay gripped her hand and kept her grounded, kept her from running away in fear.

“I only wanted to save her,” Arnold said and he began to cry. “I’ve failed her. I failed God.”

Cindy shuddered and looked beseechingly at Lindsay.

“Got him!” Jacobi’s voice was loud enough to be heard by the three of them. “Corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Main. Payphone.”

Lindsay squeezed Jill’s hand and gave Cindy one last long look. “On my way,” she said in a low voice to her partner before snapping the phone closed. “Keep him talking,” she whispered to her lover before pivoting and running away.

Cindy glanced at Jill who looked like she was ready to chase after Lindsay. Something was going on between them, some secret that made the reporter sick to think about. Jill looked terrified for Lindsay, and it took everything Cindy had not to hang up the phone and run after her lover. “Tell me how you failed, David,” Cindy managed. She closed her eyes as she began to listen to the ramblings of a madman.

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Why didn’t she understand?

David held onto the side of the phone booth, gripping it as pain pulsed through him. He could feel one of his bandages soaking through as his stitches gave way and his blood began to flow anew. “Please,” he begged. “Help me save her. You have to help me save her. You risked your career for her. You risked your life. Help me save her immortal soul. Bring her to me. You have to...”

A hand came down, terminating the call. David turned his head and looked into the blue eyes of the person suddenly next to him.

“Brother,” the newcomer said. “God has sent me to help.” He smiled.

David shook his head in confusion. It was getting so hard to think clearly. The pain was too much. It was everywhere. “God sent you?” he asked weakly, hopefully.

“Yes.” The man smiled, his sky blue eyes crinkling at the corners. “You can call me Peter.”

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Blood was everywhere when Lindsay arrived a mere minute before the black and whites. It was smeared on the receiver, drops of it peppered the concrete at her feet, but there was no sign of the man who'd left them.

Lindsay pivoted, her dark eyes looking everywhere for him, for some place for him to hide. But there was nothing.

Nothing.

She yelled and kicked at the phone, sending the receiver dangling and swaying haphazardly. The dial tone mocked her as she stepped away, turning her back on yet another failure. Cindy had called her, had warned her when Arnold had just abruptly hung up. He'd had a thirty second head start on her. Thirty damn seconds.

Jacobi pulled up, brakes screeching. He bolted from the car only to slow down as Lindsay shook her head.

"He knew we were coming."

"He knew we were tracing the call," Jacobi guessed as other squad cars began to descend on the area.

Lindsay shook her head and kept pacing. "He kept talking to Cindy. He wasn't thinking clearly. Dammit!" She kicked Jacobi's police issue vehicle.

Jacobi looked less than pleased but he didn't scold her. "It's like someone tipped him off."

"Who in the hell would tip this guy off?" she demanded.

Jacobi had no answer.

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"Have a seat, brother."

David did as he was told, settling into the pew with relief. The church he found himself in was under renovation. Plastic sheeting protected the stained glass, causing the afternoon sunlight to bathe the sanctuary in gauzy, muted colors. Warm air blew in from the open doorways and sawdust drifted lazily around him. The room smelled of Murphy's oil and wood, two scents that soothed his frenzied soul. "You are a saint among men, Peter."

Peter merely smiled. "Call me Pete, and I doubt many would think so."

"God sent you. He sent you to save me so I can continue to do my work." David bent forward and crossed himself as he stared longingly at the beautiful crucifixion before him. It was larger than the one at St. Vincent's, its colors vibrant and beckoning.

"Jill Bernhardt," Pete said softly.

"Yes." David nodded vigorously as sweat began to trickle down the sides of his face. "I must save her."

Pete moved behind him, his eyes fixed on the crucifix as well. "She has sinned much," he agreed.

"But her soul can still be saved."

"Perhaps," Pete said. "But right now, the only soul you should worry about is your own."

David felt the rosary come around his throat. He was jerked backward, into Pete's larger bulk, as his saint turned into his destroyer. David choked, feeling his lungs scream for air. He clawed at the man behind him, but he was too weak to fight for long, had lost too much blood to put up much of a struggle.

Pete tightened his makeshift garrote, smiling as blood began to ooze from under the rosary and slip down Arnold's neck. "You should have stayed away from Jill Bernhardt," he breathed. "She's a friend, you know," he said casually. "But you know your greatest sin?" he whispered into Arnold's ear. "You hurt Lindsay Boxer."

Arnold pawed weakly at Pete's hold as his body began to shudder and thrash.

"And Lindsay Boxer is mine." With a twist, Pete snapped the man's neck, smiling in satisfaction as Arnold's body slumped to the floor of the sanctuary. He looked back up at the crucifix and his smile broadened. "You like your imagery, Dave," Pete said to the dead man. "Well so do I. Nothing like a little dramatic flair to capture the police and press' attention."

He left San Francisco's latest serial killer on the floor and went in search of rope. He had work to do.

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Cindy, Jill and Claire turned at the chime of the elevator, relieved to see Lindsay walk through the doors when they parted.

Lindsay's gaze went to Jill first and she shook her head.

Jill closed her eyes and sank back down onto the corner of Cindy's desk. She wasn't sure what to feel. Fear that Arnold was still out there or relief that Lindsay hadn't killed him.

Cindy met Lindsay halfway, wrapping her arms around the taller woman and just holding her. "What happened?" she murmured into the sweet smelling skin on Lindsay's neck.

"I think someone tipped him off," Lindsay admitted. "Witnesses saw a black panel van pull up. They said a blonde-haired man in his mid-thirties got out and hung up the phone."

"And he drove Arnold away?" Cindy asked incredulously, still not releasing her hold on her lover. Her hands mapped the familiar territory of Lindsay's back and she was pleased when she felt some of the tension leaving Lindsay's tall frame.

"Yeah."

"So maybe Arnold does have a disciple," Claire pondered out loud.

Lindsay looked at her. "He got help. That much is at least true."

"Who would help that guy?" Jill wanted to know.

Lindsay shook her head again and pulled Cindy tighter. She looked at her duffle bag that was sitting next to Cindy's desk, exactly where she'd left it, before running off after Arnold.

Jill noticed where Lindsay was looking, could see the expression of longing enter her friend's eyes. "It's okay, Lindsay," she promised. "You should still go."

Cindy turned around in confusion. "Go where?"

"I came here to run away with you for a week," Lindsay admitted wearily.

The reporter's head snapped back in Lindsay's direction. "What?"

"I should never have worked this case," Lindsay admitted. "Not after my dad, after Harris... I let my pride get in the way, and I put us all at risk."

"Linz..." Claire began.

Lindsay held up her hand. "I need to take some time. Figure some things out. Not the least of which is if I still want to keep being a cop."

Cindy swallowed and watched her lover worriedly. "Lindsay..." She shook her head. She'd known Lindsay was retreating further and further into her dark thoughts, but she'd naively believed she could hold onto her, keep at least one foot planted in the light.

“You should go,” Jill said again before her eyes drifted to Cindy. “Both of you. This case has torn all of us up. Hell this year has torn all of us up. We should all go the hell away.”

“And leave Arnold out there?” Cindy asked almost angrily.

“The entire San Francisco Police Department is looking for him,” Jill replied. “What makes us so damn special that we think we could find him first?”

“So that’s it? You’re all just giving up?” Cindy couldn’t believe it. “After all we’ve been through? After all he put us through? You would just walk away?” She felt Lindsay’s touch on her shoulder and she turned to look at her lover again.

“Cindy, we’re just trying to...” Lindsay sighed. “We’re trying to save our souls here,” she confessed, appreciating the irony of the statement given the killer they were chasing. “You can’t tell me that this case hasn’t hurt you... that it’s not weighing on you...”

“I thought you’d stop at nothing to catch this guy. That you’d kill yourself to stop him before he hurt anyone else.” Cindy was shaking as she spoke.

“The old me would have,” Lindsay admitted. “But then I fell in love with you.” Lindsay swallowed. “And I don’t... I’m not ready to...”

“And she wants a life with you,” Jill said for her inarticulate friend. “She’s not all about the job anymore.”

Lindsay cupped Cindy’s cheeks, her thumbs lightly skimming the smooth skin. “We’ll stay until they catch him or until he turns up dead. But the minute we know he’s been found...”

“You’ll take me away?” Cindy asked with a hesitant smile.

“Wherever you want to go,” Lindsay vowed.

Both confused and hopeful, Cindy sank back into Lindsay’s embrace.

The inspector looked at her friends over the top of the reporter’s head. They were both smiling tiredly at her.

“About time you figured it all out, skipper,” Claire murmured.

“I had a little help from my friends,” Lindsay said as she looked at Jill and winked. The attorney’s smile became more pronounced.

Claire’s phone chose that moment to buzz. She unclipped it and answered. “Washburn.”

The others watched the medical examiner as she listened, her smile vanishing as her gaze jerked up to Lindsay's brown eyes.

"I'll be right there." Claire hung up, her heart hammering as she weighed what to share after the heavy moment they had all found themselves in.

"What is it?" Jill asked.

"It's Arnold," Claire said slowly.

"What about him?" Lindsay demanded.

"His body was found in St. Michael's Church... the one that's being renovated three blocks down from the Hall."

All four women went silent as they absorbed the news.

Slowly, Jill slipped from the desk, picked up the duffle bag and handed it to Lindsay. "Time to go," she said softly.

"I should go to the scene," Lindsay murmured.

"I need to write the story," Cindy protested.

"You need to be together," Claire disagreed. "You need to go live and get away from all this death for a while."

Lindsay looked at Jill as if asking permission.

"There'll always be another case, another story." Jill smiled as she tried to process that she was free now, safe. She was also angry, angry that she'd been deprived of justice. She pushed the thoughts to the back of her mind, deciding she'd ride with Claire to the scene and see Arnold's corpse for herself. Then she could let go of the fear. For now, her friends were more important. "Go, you two." She touched Lindsay's shoulder. "I'm safe now. He can't hurt me anymore."

Lindsay took a breath and looked at Cindy. "How about it, Lois Lane? You willing to run away with me?"

Cindy finally smiled, feeling the weight of the last six months slip from her shoulders. "Take me away, officer."

The smile that transformed Lindsay's face was a sight to behold.

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“You really don’t have to do this,” Claire told Jill as they made their way past sawhorses and lumber to climb the steps of the church. St. Michael’s was small but pretty and Claire was angry that Arnold had gotten to die in such a Godly, beautiful place. Sometimes there was no justice in the world.

But it wasn’t her place to understand God’s plan. She just had to accept it and hope at some point she would figure it all out.

“Yes, I do,” Jill vowed. She brushed a lock of her hair out of her eyes as the wind whipped up. She could smell sawdust and paint as they stepped inside. “So where do you think they’re going?”

“Lindsay and Cindy?” Claire asked as they ducked under another round of police tape.

“Yeah,” Jill said almost on a sigh.

“Does it matter?” Claire replied, hoping her friends were beating tracks out of San Francisco as they spoke.

Jill’s blue eyes tracked to Claire’s face and she flashed a tiny, brief smile. “Lucky bastards,” she joked faintly.

“Ah-ah,” Claire remonstrated. “House of the Lord.”

Jill rolled her eyes as several police officers moved aside for them. They were suddenly in the church, and Jill felt her breath catch as she heard Claire’s do the same.

David Arnold had not died from the gunshot wounds he’d received in his gunfight with Lindsay. He was roped to the crucifixion in a disturbing parody of Christ. Even his feet and hands had been staked into the religious symbol.

“Mother of God,” Claire whispered.

“DDA Bernhardt.” Inspector Maggie Snow’s voice made them both tear their horrified gazes away from the scene. “You shouldn’t be here,” Maggie said as she reached Jill’s side. She grabbed the attorney’s elbow and tried to lead her from the room, but Jill jerked free.

“If there is anyone who deserves to see this, it’s me,” Jill countered roughly. She brushed past the inspector and moved toward Arnold’s body. He was hanging considerably high and his features weren’t easy to make out, but Jill knew it was him. She would never forget that face. Her steps slowed, as she got closer, as she got a better look at his features. Something was wrong. Something was off. Arnold’s chin was against his chest, partially obscuring the lower half of his face, but there was an odd shadow...

A shiver wracked Jill's body when she thought about what that shadow reminded her of...

"Jill," Claire spoke finally. "Maybe..." She lapsed into silence as her friend walked to the front of the church. Claire glanced worriedly at the inspector.

Maggie pointed at the ladder they'd set up next to the body. "Thought you'd want a look before we cut him down." She took a breath. "Sorry to call you in on this one, Doc."

"I was on duty," Claire replied without rancor.

"Should I call in Boxer?"

Claire hesitated. "No," she said in almost a whisper. She would catch heat when Lindsay got back, but that was okay. With a sigh, Claire followed Jill.

The medical examiner hesitated next to her friend. They both stared at the body for a long, silent moment. Claire finally turned her head and looked for confirmation of what she was seeing from Jill. Jill's blue eyes were wide and terrified when they met Claire's. They couldn't be seeing what they thought they were.

They just couldn't.

A few minutes later, Claire was at the top of the ladder. She wasn't especially fond of heights and her grip on the wood was almost painful. Claire hadn't looked at Arnold once as she climbed, keeping her eyes focused on the rungs instead. Now she had to look, had to do her job, and Claire took a deep breath and prepared to gaze into the dead features of the man who had almost ruined everything that mattered to her.

Nothing could have prepared her, however, for what she saw when she finally looked upon him. It hadn't been a shadow. It hadn't been a trick of the light. She and Jill had seen what they were both afraid they had. The shock was so intense, the ensuing wave of horror so terrifying she almost toppled off the ladder.

"Claire?" Jill's voice was sharp and strained as she saw the ladder shudder.

"What is it?" Snow yelled up to the medical examiner.

Claire felt a heaviness press down on her chest as angry tears sprang to her eyes. She looked down at Jill, saw her friend's eyes narrow as the truth was silently conveyed. Claire licked her lips; her voice was ragged when she spoke.

"His lips are sewn shut."

FADE TO BLACK