

Teaser

He surveyed his sanctuary.

The sinners had trampled all over his most hallowed ground. He knew they'd find it, would violate it with their crime scene tape, their fingerprint dust. They'd peered into every corner, touched every pew. He thought he could almost smell the stench of their sweat where it had soaked through their polyester uniforms.

His eyes lifted as the late afternoon sunlight broke through the grimy stained glass and bathed the old, cracked and dust-covered Christ figure above. The crucifixion hung at an angle, as if it were looming over the parishioners long since gone, searching the rows where no believers were left to be found.

He saw it as a sign. The light breaking through meant his quest to bring another sinner into the glory of the kingdom of Heaven must be nigh. Soon he would bring her here. Soon he would drive the sin from her soul in this very room.

He adjusted the tattered stole around his neck. He always wore it here. His memento. His gift that had been blessed by the hand of God. At night he wore it around his neck, tucked into the collar of his coat as if it were a scarf to help him ward off the chill of the San Francisco air.

No one ever looked at him twice. Not even the police who knew by now about the material and the rare, expensive color it was dyed.

He looked ordinary. Even handsome. He blended and mingled with the sinners because God wanted it so. He wanted him to know and understand sin so he could rid others of it.

Tonight he would begin the journey to bring another soul home.

Tonight, one way or another, Jill Bernhardt would begin her path back to righteousness.

“Hey!”

Cindy Thomas had her head buried in her new BlackBerry when she heard the familiar voice call out. She glanced up, smiling as Jill hurried to catch up. “I was just about to call you.”

Jill narrowed her eyes. “Better not be to cancel on me. I’ve been looking forward to tonight all day.” She nudged Cindy with her shoulder as they walked side by side through one of the many corridors of the Hall.

Cindy smiled. "Wouldn't dream of it," she promised. "I could use a few drinks," she added dryly.

Jill tilted her head. "Oh? Trouble in paradise?"

Cindy shrugged then came swinging around to face Jill when the attorney abruptly stopped and grabbed her elbow. "Hey now!"

"Spill. I have ways of making you talk. Don't make me waste them by plying you with alcohol and taking advantage of you."

Cindy leaned back and looked at Jill with amusement.

"Not that kind of advantage," Jill corrected when she interpreted the reporter's look. "Although you do look hot in your tight jeans and preppy little cardigan." Jill winked and playfully tucked her finger in the "V" of Cindy's sweater and tugged, dragging the reporter forward a step. Cindy swatted her hand and Jill chuckled. "Besides, Linz would crucify me."

Cindy tucked an errant strand of hair behind her ear. "I wouldn't be so sure of that," she muttered.

Jill crossed her arms and looked at the reporter like she was crazy. "Well I am, missy. Lindsay would kick my ass to Texas if I laid a finger on you." She dipped her head, trying to make eye contact with the reporter who was suddenly trying very hard to do the opposite. "Talk to me," Jill said a little more seriously. "What's going on? Is Lindsay withdrawing from you again? Do I need to talk to her?"

"No," Cindy answered quickly. "It's not... it isn't exactly Lindsay. It's just... it's... it's Pete."

"Pete?" Jill's blonde eyebrows elevated and she dropped her arms to let her hands rest on her hips. "What did he do now?"

"He's not exactly giving up."

"Still? He hasn't gotten a clue?"

"I got to Lindsay's last night and there was another bouquet of white roses in front of the door."

Jill frowned. Pete was starting to creep her out a little, and she suddenly regretted ever nudging her friend in the contractor's direction. "Cindy, you know Lindsay is devoted to you..." she began.

"I know," Cindy cut her off in a voice that almost managed to sound casual. "It's just..."

She sighed and flapped her hands in frustration. “Why isn’t Lindsay being more firm with the guy? He just keeps hanging around. And then there was that night in the parking garage...”

Jill’s blue gaze sharpened. “What? What night in the parking garage?”

Cindy looked caught when she realized what she’d revealed. “Never mind,” she replied a little too quickly. Inwardly she cursed her inability to lie.

“No, no. Don’t you ‘never mind’ me,” Jill said, her voice growing more serious. She grabbed a handful of Cindy’s sleeve and tugged the reporter to the side of the hallway out of the throng of people that just let out of a nearby courtroom. “Tell me what happened.”

Cindy looked around as if she were hoping a riot would break out and give her the distraction she needed to avoid the conversation. “The night Pete first showed up back in San Francisco,” she began with a sigh.

“Yeah,” Jill prompted.

“He didn’t go see Lindsay first.”

Jill took a slow breath, her unease with the Pete situation growing. Her blue eyes studied Cindy with worry. “Did he... confront you?”

“Sort of.” Cindy rubbed the back of her neck and fidgeted a little.

The reporter always looked like a school kid waiting for the recess bell to ring when she did that, Jill mused. The thought almost made her smile.

“He caught me in the parking garage at the Register. He was waiting for me.”

“Creepy,” Jill commented.

“Yeah. He weirded me out a little. He said he knew Lindsay was seeing someone and wanted to know who it was. He hoped that I would help him get back in her good graces.”

Jill snorted. “Keep hoping, muffin man,” she muttered and was rewarded with a fraction of a smile from Cindy. “Do you think he meant it, or do you think he was already on to the two of you?”

Cindy shrugged. “I don’t know. The whole thing just left me really wiggled out. Then I got to Lindsay’s that night...” She faltered when she remembered seeing Pete kiss Lindsay, the image forever burned into her brain.

“And...” Jill asked. This had been right before Cindy went skipping town to go play in

the New Faith compound. Something told Jill the two things were related.

“I saw him kiss her,” Cindy admitted.

Jill’s jaw tightened as her teeth clamped together hard. She wanted to smack Lindsay at that moment, but clearly her friend’s heart lay with the little redheaded reporter and not scone boy. Maybe there was more to the story. Maybe Pete had planted one on Lindsay without permission. Jill sure as hell hoped so, but she wished Lindsay had slugged him. “Cindy...”

“Look.” Cindy waved her hands as if the issue were nothing to be concerned with. “This is stupid. We’ve got Jason Abbott to find. I actually dropped by to see if I could catch some of the other attorneys, to try to drum up a lead.”

“It’s not stupid if it’s still bothering you,” Jill said sincerely. “We’ll talk about it tonight, okay?”

Cindy seemed to relax at the offer. “Thanks.”

“Now let’s go get this prick so we can enjoy our evening,” Jill announced.

Cindy smiled and readjusted her purse before heading out into the morning sunlight as Jill turned and headed for a courtroom back the way she’d come.

Neither noticed the man who’d watched their whole exchange from the shadows.

Act 1

“That’s absurd.” Malcolm Abbott scoffed as he leaned back in his chair. “My son would never harm a soul. He doesn’t have the backbone for it. And he certainly wouldn’t harm Nicole.”

“And why is that?” Lindsay asked.

“He was scared shitless of her. All the junior associates were.”

Lindsay exchanged glances with her partner. Neither of them had any affection for Malcolm Abbott after what he’d put Jill through. They’d already talked to the attorney and his law partner, Matthew Arbor, the night of Honeycutt’s murder. Neither man had seemed broken up about the woman’s death, but they’d been plenty worried about the loss of income that would result from her demise. Lindsay had hoped not to repeat the experience of talking to him ever again and yet here they were. “Well DNA says otherwise,” she informed Abbott. “Now we can do this the easy way or the hard way.”

Abbott stared at her with disdain. He had washed-out blue eyes, receding gray hair and a mustache thick enough to lose his whole upper lip in. His suit, however, was impeccable and probably cost as much as a small car, Lindsay thought. She wanted to tell him to do something about his disturbingly bushy eyebrows but she refrained. It would be too easy to make this case personal, to get a little revenge for Jill. A part of her was self-aware enough to know she was looking forward to putting Jason away and his crimes had nothing to do with it.

“The easy way is that you tell us where your son is, and we go get him quietly and without incident,” Jacobi explained.

“And the hard way?” Abbott sneered.

“That involves lots of press,” Lindsay answered sweetly.

Abbott crossed his arms and eyed Lindsay with new appreciation. “You play rough. I like that.” He reached for his phone.

Lindsay turned her head to look at Jacobi. “Ok. Eew,” she muttered.

Jacobi’s eyebrows hiked, but he didn’t reply.

“Jason? It’s your father. Where are you? You missed work yesterday and today...” Abbott listened quietly. “I see. Very well. Be sure to be back tomorrow.” He hung up.

“Well?” Lindsay asked.

“He’s at his mother’s home by the pool. Working on his tan, I imagine.”

“Working on his tan?” Lindsay spat five minutes later when they slipped into the car. “What is wrong with these people?”

“I hope I never figure that out,” Jacobi drawled as he flipped on the lights and hit the siren. Abbott’s ex-wife’s home was only three miles away. With any luck, they’d have the little junior shit in central booking before lunch.

“Jason Abbott?”

He was ripped, Lindsay had to admit. He was perhaps twenty-six, maybe pushing as much as twenty-eight. He shielded his eyes as he looked up at her, the movement making his impressive six-pack ripple. Lindsay decided he looked a bit like an Adonis sunning himself there. A very pretty, very stupid Adonis.

“Yeah?”

“Stand up,” Jacobi ordered him.

“Why?”

Lindsay held up her badge. “San Francisco PD. Jason Abbott, you are under arrest for the murder of Nicole Honeycutt.”

He looked at her for a long moment. Suddenly he rolled off his lounge chair and started to run.

“You’ve gotta be kidding me,” Lindsay growled. She took off after him, knowing he wouldn’t cover as much ground with his bare feet on concrete as she would in her boots. It took less than ten long strides before she cut him off, knocking him sideways into the pool. She almost followed, but she managed to catch her balance just in time.

“Damn,” Jacobi said with a chuckle. “I was hoping to see you do that underwater cuffing trick again.” He slipped his gun out of his holster and pointed it at Abbott. “Come on, son. Get out of the pool and don’t do anything stupid... er...” Jacobi added.

Lindsay cuffed the snarling Abbott as he emerged from the shallow end. She wondered what hell they were going to catch from the motor pool for getting the back seat soaked. At the moment, she really didn’t care. “Jason Abbott, you are under arrest for the murder of Nicole Honeycutt,” she repeated. “You have the right to remain silent...”

“I know my rights, bitch.”

Lindsay shook her head and kept going. No way was she letting this one off on a technicality.

No damn way.

Jill shook her head as she studied Jason Abbott through the one-way glass. He was handsome in a preppy, frat-boy sort of way. His sun-bleached blonde hair was a tad too long and swept to the side, hanging down low and bringing out the blue of his eyes. It was those pale baby blues that would tell a woman something wasn’t right if they were smart enough to really look at what shined through them.

“What a shit,” Jill muttered to Lindsay. “Takes after his father in the winning personality department.”

Lindsay glanced at her as she waited for Jacobi. “You can tell that just by looking at him?”

“It’s in his eyes. He thinks this is a game. Wonder if he thinks daddy is going to swoop in and get him off.” Jill’s voice grew harder as she spoke.

“Jill,” Lindsay began slowly. “Don’t let this get personal.” It sounded hollow, Lindsay knew. If she were making it personal, she could only imagine how Jill felt.

Sharp blue eyes fastened on Lindsay’s face. “It is personal, but not in the way you’re thinking. I found the body this kid left behind. I know who his father is, Linz. I know what he put me through, but it was the job. Just like Honeycutt. What she tried to do to me in court... it was the job. I didn’t like it, but I understood it.”

Lindsay relaxed and felt a swell of pride and a tiny bit abashed. Apparently her friend was being more of an adult about this than she was. “It was the job,” she agreed. “But that didn’t stop me from wanting to punch the guy for you.”

Jill gave Lindsay a slow smile. For an instant, Lindsay remembered the effect that particular grin once had on her. Her own eyes sparkled.

Jill felt the familiar odd mixture of regret and warmth chase through her with the look in Lindsay’s eyes. “Well,” she confessed, “I did enjoy getting a DNA sample out of the bastard.”

Lindsay chuckled and nodded. “That’s my girl.”

The attorney shook her head. “I believe that distinction belongs to a certain perky redhead,” Jill teased.

Lindsay took a breath, feeling the need to say something, to address the history between them for once with words and not just looks.

“Don’t,” Jill begged softly when she sensed where Lindsay was going. “Leave it where it belongs, okay?” She smiled to take any sting out of her words.

Lindsay reluctantly nodded. “For whatever it’s worth,” she said in a low voice. “I’m sorry if I hurt you.”

The attorney had to look back at Abbott so Lindsay wouldn’t see her tears. She’d waited years to hear those words, and now she realized she’d never needed to. “We’re good, Linz. We always have been.”

The inspector cleared her throat and the moment between them burst like a soap bubble. “So. You think daddy will ride in to rescue Junior?”

Jill took a shaky breath. “I don’t know. Malcolm is a first class ass, but he loves the law. From all the rumor and gossip I’ve heard come out of that firm, he never did Jason any favors.”

“What kind of an attorney is Jason? Do you know?” Lindsay watched the lawyer in question fidget on the other side of the glass.

“Adequate at best.” Jill shook her head as she felt her emotions beginning to stabilize. “I don’t know. I just don’t see daddy prying his son out of this one.”

“As far as I’m concerned, there is no crowbar big enough for that task.” Lindsay winked at her best friend as Jacobi finally joined them, followed closely by Tom. “Hey,” Lindsay greeted her ex-husband politely.

“Hey.” Tom smiled. “Jill.”

“Tom,” Jill drawled sweetly; her eyes were narrow and shooting daggers.

Tom cleared his throat and pretended to be fascinated by their suspect. “So that’s him?”

“No,” Lindsay said. “I just thought he was so cute I had to arrest him and tuck him away some place until I was done for the day.”

Jacobi chuckled.

Tom fidgeted and tried not to blush as Lindsay moved past him and into the interrogation room.

“So lame,” Jill told him as they went shoulder to shoulder to watch.

Tom just crossed his arms and tried to look like he was in charge.

“FYI,” Jill announced. “Lindsay may have forgiven you for tossing her off the force, but I haven’t.”

“Really,” Tom drawled. “I would never have guessed.” Self-consciously he looked away from Jill and turned his attention to the show that was about to begin on the other side of the glass. There was nothing like watching Lindsay making a killer sweat.

“Hey there, Jason,” Lindsay greeted the suspect as she closed the door. “Dried off, yet?”

Abbott glared at her. He was in prison orange jumpsuit, the only dry clothes on hand since he couldn’t exactly sit there in wet swim trunks.

“Maybe the undies are still a little damp,” Jacobi suggested.

Lindsay slapped a folder down on the table, and Abbott twitched as his gaze swung back to her. “I want to make this short and quick, Jason. I have bigger fish to fry than you. We know you killed Nicole Honeycutt. We have DNA evidence that shows you raped

her.”

“You don’t have my DNA,” Abbott snarled. “So whatever game you’re trying to pull you can go screw yourself.”

“You’re a lawyer, Jason,” Jacobi said. “You should know all about DNA.”

“I know you can’t match what you don’t have,” Jason replied with a smug smile.

“We have your dad’s,” Lindsay pointed out.

Jason’s smile faltered.

“Forgot about that didn’t you, son?” Jacobi asked. “What do you think led us to you?”

“I want a lawyer,” Jason snapped as he closed off, seeming to shrink back in the chair as if he were making himself a smaller target.

“You want your daddy?” Lindsay suggested. “Does daddy need to come and help little Jason out of a nasty bind?”

“Shut up, bitch. I know my rights.”

Lindsay stopped playing. Jill watched her best friend’s eyes darken and the muscles along her shoulders tense and ripple, and she prayed Lindsay wouldn’t hit the guy. She shook her head. “Someone is so about to get it,” Jill commented casually.

“And you know what I know?” Lindsay purred. “I know I have a warrant for your DNA.”

Jacobi held up the Q-tip. “I’m going to like taking this one.”

“I know that I have you for resisting arrest,” Lindsay continued. “I know your dad told us just where to find you.”

Jason seemed to wilt further into his chair.

“Daddy isn’t going to help you this time,” Lindsay told him with satisfaction. “Now you know how this can go, Jason. Either you cooperate and the judge shows you a shred of mercy, or you don’t, and I make sure the DA’s office throws everything they have at you.”

Jason shifted in his chair.

“So what’s it going to be? I can leave this room and get you a lawyer, or you can tell me what happened the night Nicole Honeycutt died, and I’ll be sure to tell the judge you

were a good little boy.”

His blue eyes glinted when he looked up at her, and Lindsay saw what Jill meant. There was a coldness to them that was almost unnerving. Almost, she reiterated mentally. She leaned in close, went practically nose-to-nose with him.

“Glare at me all you want,” Lindsay said in a low voice. “I’ve gone toe-to-toe with much scarier bastards than you.” She held his gaze until he looked away. “Tell me what happened, or he and I are out the door,” Lindsay said as she motioned to Jacobi. “And your luck runs out completely.”

“She was asking for it,” Jason finally snarled.

“Are we to understand you’re waiving your right to counsel?” Jacobi asked in a droll voice.

“Fuck you, old man,” Jason growled. “I don’t need counsel. I’m my own counsel.”

Lindsay gave him a predatory smile. There was nothing she liked better than watching some arrogant bastard hang himself with his own pride. “She was asking for it, huh?”

“Come on. Like you don’t read the papers. You know she was a slut. She wanted it. Liked what I could do for her.”

Lindsay’s back teeth gnashed together but outwardly she seemed unaffected by his words. “Tell me, Jason, have you read the papers since the murder?”

“I didn’t murder her,” he snapped.

“Have you read the papers?” Lindsay insisted.

“No. I didn’t want to see what they were saying about her, okay?” He spat and shifted in his chair again.

“There was scripture found on the wall in the conference room, Jason. The press thinks the Hallelujah Man killed her. And your DNA is gonna match the sample from the victim. What do you think the press and the legal system will make of that?” Lindsay leaned on the table and waited for the bravado to pop like a balloon and she wasn’t disappointed.

Jason’s blue eyes widened as his gaze darted back and forth between the two inspectors. “I... I didn’t write...”

“How many murders are we up to now, Jacobi?” Lindsay asked casually.

“Let’s see,” Jacobi held up his hand and started ticking off names with his fingers.

“There was Blake, Dellan, Martin, Watkins...”

“Death penalty for any one of those murders,” Lindsay said with perverse satisfaction as she watched Jason squirm. “But I’m thinking the legal system will give you a lethal injection for murdering a member of the San Francisco bar.”

“I didn’t murder her!” Jason yelled. “It was a fucking accident, alright?”

“Tell me,” Lindsay demanded moving in close again.

“She liked it rough,” Jason complained. “Giving her what she wanted kept me ahead of the pack. It got me special treatment.”

“Your daddy didn’t get you that?” Jacobi asked.

“Hell no,” Jason whined. “Made me start in the damn mailroom and pay my way through law school. He never gave me nothing.”

“Poor baby,” Lindsay said with disgust almost under her breath.

“She was a total fucking nympho,” Jason told them. “Every damn day she cornered me. In her office. In the bathroom. In the file room.”

“And you were tired of being Nicole’s sex toy?” Jacobi asked. “A strapping guy like yourself?”

“She was killing *me*,” Jason told them. “She wanted it rough Friday night so I made it rough. It’s just... she kept egging me on... telling me I would never be good enough to make partner... that I wouldn’t be there if it wasn’t for my dad.”

“So you started squeezing harder and harder,” Lindsay prompted.

“I just wanted her to shut up, okay? I wanted her to stop saying that. I just wanted her to get off so I could go have a life on a Friday night.” He was quiet for a moment. “Then she started clawing at my arms, but she didn’t leave a mark on me. She always made me do her in my best suits.” He laughed and shook his head. “I realized she couldn’t breathe.”

Lindsay and Jacobi just waited.

Jill took a breath behind the glass and glanced at Tom who was watching her in the reflection.

“She was starting to panic. I was scaring her. Little old Jason was suddenly more powerful than her. Little old Jason was suddenly the one in charge.”

“And it felt good,” Lindsay suggested.

“It felt *great*,” Abbott corrected. “And suddenly I realized I could make her shut up forever.”

“Well you certainly did that,” Lindsay told him. “But you threw away your career and your life to do it.”

“We’ll see,” was all he said on the subject. “But those other people... I didn’t kill them. I never even knew them. And I sure as hell didn’t stick around and write fucking scripture on the damn wall.”

Wall, not dry erase board, Jill noted.

“I’ve never read a damn Bible in my life,” Abbott continued without remorse.

“That’s alright,” Jacobi replied. “You’ll have plenty of time to find God where you’re going.”

Jill stepped back from the glass and turned, having heard enough. She could feel Tom watching her, almost sense the words he wanted to say to her, but they caught in his throat as she froze in place, coming face to face with Malcolm Abbott.

“Ms. Bernhardt,” the defense attorney said civilly.

“Mr. Abbott.” Jill swallowed. “Are you here as counsel for your son?”

Malcolm looked past Jill. He watched Lindsay and Jacobi with Jason for several quiet moments. “I don’t have a son,” he finally replied.

Jill sucked in a sharp breath. “You would defend a man like my stepfather, a man who would...” She licked her lips and steeled her nerves. “But you won’t defend your own son?”

Malcolm looked at Jill. “Defending your father was business. This is family.”

Jill glanced back at Jason before looking at his father one last time. “Business,” she said slowly. “You know, for a moment, I thought we almost had something in common.” She shook her head. “My mistake.” She brushed past him.

Tom started after her, shooting Abbott a glare as he passed.

“Ms. Bernhardt,” Abbott called after her. He waited until Tom and Jill turned to look at him. “We can’t choose our family,” he pointed out. “But we can pretend like the less desirable members of it don’t exist. That... that is something we do have in common.”

Jill's blue eyes tracked to Lindsay where the tall, lithe woman was working behind the glass. She smiled. "Actually, Malcolm, you can choose your family. It just took me a while to figure that out." She pivoted on her heel and walked away, feeling lighter than she had in weeks.

Act II

She didn't kill her.

Cindy closed the door to her apartment and leaned against it. She'd just put her article about the arrest of Jason Abbott to bed a little over an hour ago. They were still no closer to catching the Hallelujah Man and were even more perplexed than before about his ties to the Honeycutt murder, but right now all that mattered to Cindy was that her words had not ended the attorney's life.

She took a deep breath and pushed off the door, heading for her bedroom with a lighter step than she'd possessed that morning. Her space felt weird and unfamiliar as she moved through it. Most of her time seemed to be spent at Lindsay's lately and that was a good thing. Maybe Lindsay would even ask her to move in.

Cindy almost laughed at the thought then wondered why she should think that was funny. She entered the bedroom and headed for the shower, peeling off her sweater followed by her shirt. She left a trail of clothes, kicking off her shoes and jeans before turning on the spray. She removed her watch as the water heated before stepping inside the warm stream of water and sighed.

It felt like heaven.

She grabbed her soap and began to scrub the last few days worth of grime off her skin. The club had been going full throttle since Jill had found Honeycutt's body, and she'd not bothered to bathe since yesterday morning. It felt good to get clean, and Cindy took a minute to just stand in the warm water and let it beat down on her tense shoulders.

Something alerted her, perhaps the tiny draft of cold air that hit the backs of her thighs. She turned her head and found Lindsay Boxer peering around the shower curtain with a smirk the size of Texas. "What are you doing?" Cindy asked as she felt a faint blush rise to her skin at Lindsay's frank appreciation. "You could have scared the hell out of..." Cindy trailed off as her ability to form a coherent sentence went right down the drain.

Lindsay pulled back the curtain before slipping inside. She sauntered up to Cindy, easing her arms around her lover's waist before bringing their bodies together in a warm, wet, and soapy slide. "Hi," she purred in a deep, husky voice.

Cindy was embarrassed when all she could manage was a tiny squeak in response. She

got over it quickly, however, when Lindsay dipped her head and kissed her, the warm water spilling over their joined bodies.

The reporter took a shaky breath when they parted. “Hi,” she finally managed in a near whisper. Her hands were wandering, the soap easing her touch across Lindsay’s skin. Her lover made a soft sound of approval so Cindy curled one hand behind Lindsay’s neck and brought their lips together again for another long, leisurely kiss.

The shower ended with Lindsay on her knees, and Cindy hoping that her bathroom walls were soundproof. She heard the water shut off, and a second later the reporter was wrapped in a towel as Lindsay’s smirk made a return appearance.

“You seem very satisfied with yourself, Inspector,” Cindy said into the curve of Lindsay’s neck before nibbling the skin. She heard Lindsay’s breath catch.

“I am,” Lindsay confessed with a lazy smile as she grabbed another towel and stepped away from Cindy to dry herself off.

The reporter frowned at the loss of contact. She followed Lindsay as her lover moved into the bedroom. Cindy took a quick glance at the clock and determined she had about a half hour window. Taking a little running jump, she tackled a startled Lindsay onto the bed before kissing her breathless. “My turn,” Cindy told her before descending on warm, damp flesh, determined to make the most of every minute.

Lindsay was almost pouting. Cindy would have thought it was adorable if she wasn’t in such a hurry. Her lover was propped up in her bed, the sheet pulled up indignantly to her chin. Lindsay was watching her with pursed lips as Cindy slipped on a pair of figure-hugging jeans followed by a tight, light blue sweater.

“You’re being a big baby.”

Lindsay didn’t deny it. “I just thought we could spend the whole evening together. Abbott’s in custody. There isn’t much else we can do about HM tonight... and do you have to dress like that to go out with Jill?”

Cindy looked down at herself. “Why? Do I look bad?”

“I’m afraid Jill might try to jump you,” Lindsay harrumphed.

Cindy grinned as she slipped her feet into some black, knee-high boots. “I won’t be out too late.”

Lindsay actually did pout this time as she leaned over, grasping one of Cindy’s belt loops and tugging her lover onto the bed. “Come on,” she pleaded. “Call her and reschedule.”

Cindy kissed her delicately before pulling away. “No.” She bounded back to her feet as Lindsay sighed and flopped against the pillows. “Besides,” she announced. “You’re one of the main topics of conversation,” she told Lindsay as she picked up her purse and keys.

Lindsay’s head lifted. “I’m what?”

“Not every day you get all the juicy dirt on your lover from her ex-girlfriend,” Cindy teased with a quick wink.

“Wait... what?” Lindsay tried to scramble out of the bed only to get her feet tangled in the sheets. By the time she freed herself, she could hear Cindy’s light laughter as the reporter shut and locked the front door.

“So not cool,” Lindsay muttered as she sank onto the mattress. She reached over and snatched her jacket off a nearby chair in order to retrieve her cell phone. She flipped it open and hit speed dial on Jill’s number.

“Hey, sexy,” Jill greeted. “Where is that cute little...”

“Be very careful what stories you share tonight, Bernhardt,” Lindsay warned her in a no nonsense voice. “I will hurt you if you talk about the incident in the park.”

There was a moment of stunned silence on the other end of the phone followed by a slow, seductive chuckle. “Forgot about the park,” Jill said. “Thanks for reminding me.”

“Jill...” Lindsay swore and collapsed back on the bed when Jill cheekily disconnected.

“I am so screwed,” the inspector told the ceiling.

“Hey there!”

Cindy jumped a little at the voice that was suddenly next to her ear and the warm breath that blew across the side of her throat. She turned her head and met Jill’s dancing blue eyes up close. “Hi!” She yelled back over the steady thump of music.

They were in one of the trendier downtown nightclubs. Cindy had been frankly shocked that she’d been waved inside, but she wasn’t going to think too hard about it. Not that Jill was going to give her a chance. Her friend grabbed her hand and led her to the center of the dance floor, putting them square in the middle of a mass of moving bodies.

Jill danced close so she could be heard over the music. “This is just what I needed after this day!”

Cindy smiled. "I left Lindsay in a panic!"

Jill's smile got huge and Cindy laughed. "She called me!" Jill informed her. "Reminded me of this *great* story I have to tell you!"

Feeling cheeky, Cindy threw her arms around Jill's neck, and the two moved in time to the music. Cindy had to admit when Jill turned those warm blue eyes on her that she found the attorney attractive. Maybe if she hadn't met Lindsay first... She chuckled a little to herself at the thought.

Jill was pleasantly surprised at Cindy's behavior. She knew they were attracting a lot of attention as they moved together so comfortably. She had no doubt that she would have more than one offer of a threesome before the night was over. The thought made her eyes sparkle as she playfully pulled Cindy closer, the redhead laughing at her actions.

How long had it been since she'd had a friend like Cindy? Jill tried to remember. Perhaps she never really had. Cindy never judged her. She was just there, steadfast and unyielding. She accepted Jill for the whole of who she was, and Jill was grateful for that. "Glad you're here, Lois Lane!" Jill shouted.

Cindy's eyes betrayed her amusement. "Glad to be here, Counselor!" She shouted back.

Three hours later they were in a booth as far as they could get from the dance floor. A mostly empty pitcher of beer sat on the table between them, their third of the night. Jill felt pleasantly buzzed, both from the alcohol and Cindy's welcome company. They'd spent the last hour talking about Lindsay, with Jill sharing stories she had never told a soul, not even Claire.

"Oh my God," Cindy said as she wiped her eyes and hiccupped from laughing so hard. "Lindsay has an indecent exposure arrest on her record?"

Jill swallowed the remaining mouthful of beer in her glass. "Nah. It got thrown out. But that uniformed officer sure got a nice view of her ass through the window of the car, though."

They looked at each other before bursting into another fit of giggles.

Jill blew out a breath and tried to sober up a little. "Okay. Let's talk about muffin man."

Cindy groaned. "Let's not. Don't ruin a good night by talking about him."

"Cindy," Jill started more seriously. "He's being... weird."

"You don't have to tell me that." The reporter sighed as she watched the throng of dancers. Her throat hurt from yelling over the music. "Let's go get a cup of coffee somewhere quieter and we'll talk about it. Okay?"

Jill tossed some bills on the table and they got up. “Let’s go out the back. We can cut across the alley. Papa Joe’s is only four blocks from here.”

Cindy nodded.

“I’ll meet you out back. Ladies room,” Jill explained.

Cindy nodded again then headed for the back door of the club. The cool night air felt wonderful as she stepped outside, and she took a deep lungful of it. She instantly regretted it when all she smelled was trash from a nearby dumpster. She slipped her phone out of her pocket and looked down at the screen. She’d missed five calls from Lindsay.

“Paranoid, much?” She asked her absent lover with a grin.

A scuffling sound made the reporter turn.

Pain exploded on the side of Cindy’s head. She dropped to her knees, seeing streaks of brilliant white flashing across the inside of her eyelids. Some part of her brain was screaming warnings, ordering her to get her hands up, to defend herself. She felt another blow, this one connecting hard against her jaw. The streaks in her vision went nova then blackness descended, sucking her down into oblivion. She didn’t even feel it when her body struck the pavement.

She didn’t hear Jill scream, either.

“Would you sit down, sweetheart? You’re making *me* nervous.”

Lindsay flapped her hands before slumping into one of Claire’s chairs. The medical examiner was working late, catching up on some reports that had fallen by the wayside in their pursuit of the Hallelujah Man.

“They’re alone together, Claire,” Lindsay whined.

“I’m aware. It’s hardly the first time, Linz,” Claire commented as she continued to type.

“But they’re alone and talking about me!”

Claire chuckled.

“It isn’t funny.”

Claire pursed her lips and tried not to laugh.

“Okay, it’s a little funny,” Lindsay admitted. She banged her head on the back of the chair. “Cindy is going to have so much ammunition on me...”

“You know,” Claire pointed out. “You are a detective. I’m sure if you dug into Cindy’s past a little...”

Lindsay hesitated at the suggestion, feeling the allure of having her curiosity satisfied. “I couldn’t do that,” she confessed reluctantly.

“Good to hear,” Claire replied with a quick glance at her fidgety friend. “So you think you have Abbott lock, stock and barrel?” she asked as a way to distract Lindsay from her nerves.

“Yeah,” Lindsay sighed. “Still gets us no closer to nabbing the Hallelujah Man, though.”

“So you’re convinced Abbott didn’t write the scripture?”

Lindsay nodded. “That kid is as dumb as a box of rocks.”

“That kid is as old as Cindy,” Claire pointed out with humor.

Lindsay stuck her tongue out at the medical examiner and Claire chuckled.

“I just don’t get it. It feels like him, Claire,” Lindsay said as she returned to the subject.

Claire stopped typing and swiveled in her chair to face the detective. “Okay. So Abbott isn’t working with HM.”

“I don’t think so,” Lindsay said slowly.

“So if we’re to assume that HM wrote the scripture on the wall...”

“Then Cindy was right, and two people had designs on murdering Nicole Honeycutt on the same night.”

Claire leaned back in her chair. “Obviously Abbott got there first.”

“Obviously.” Lindsay frowned. “So HM gets there during, maybe after the murder...”

“Finds the body and then...” Claire continued.

Tendrils of ice snaked through Lindsay’s veins as she slowly sat up. She swallowed hard against the nausea that clutched her stomach in a sudden vice-like grip. “Then he heard the elevator.”

“He hid when Jill arrived,” Claire said. “That is not a thought I like.”

Lindsay was slowly shaking her head as she eased up out of Claire’s chair. Her whole body was shaking. “HM hid, Claire. He hid and watched.”

“Watched....?” Claire’s features cleared and she sucked down a cold breath. “Oh my god, Linz.”

“He wrote the scripture on the board to throw us off. But the words weren’t about Honeycutt...” Lindsay could hear the tears that threatened in her voice.

“Jill must have seemed like a sign from God after finding Honeycutt. Oh my God,” Claire said again. “He wrote the scripture for Jill.”

At first she didn’t know what she was seeing. Jill’s brain was too addled with alcohol to truly process the sight of Cindy on the ground, a man looming over her with a rock in his hands. A man she recognized.

David Arnold.

His name came to her in a flash. The bailiff from the Hall. The man she’d flirted with the day before.

He had the makeshift weapon poised, ready to bash the back of her friend’s head in.

Jill screamed as his intent finally sunk in. He pivoted, throwing the rock away as he came at her. His hand went to his pocket, and Jill didn’t hesitate, running at him head first. She slammed into him, taking them both off their feet. She had her keys in her hand, and she tried to gouge at his eyes, but he was too strong. She succeeded in slashing his cheek, but there was no time for grim satisfaction as his blood was spilled. She kneed him hard once, twice. Arnold groaned then renewed his efforts, finally tossing her off.

His scarf went with her as Jill grabbed at something to hold onto. She glanced down at it in shock, knowing the material, recognizing the color instantly even through the haze of alcohol.

It was a fucking stole.

Then electricity arced through her body as the probes from the Taser struck her chest. There was a moment of pain, more than she had ever known, and then mercifully nothing at all.

When Tom entered the bullpen it was hopping for ten o'clock at night. His eyes instantly took in Lindsay in the center of the chaos, her cell phone pressed to one ear, her work phone to the other. She flipped the cell phone closed, and he watched as she stared at it for a long, worried moment. He had no doubts about whom she was trying to reach. Jacobi had informed him an hour ago about the development with the Hallelujah Man. Cops were swarming the bars and clubs trying to find Jill Bernhardt before a killer got to her first.

Tom's intention had been to come in right away, but a call from a beat cop had forced him to take a detour. He swallowed hard at the heavy news he was about to deliver and slowly made his way toward Lindsay.

His ex-wife made eye contact, but she said nothing to him as she continued to listen to the voice on the other end of the phone.

"Linz," he said gently.

His tone caught her attention, and she shifted her gaze back to him instantly. He saw the fear enter her eyes and wished there was something he could say that would make it go away. Instead he knew he was about to make what she was feeling so much worse.

Lindsay hung up and looked at him. "Tell me."

"A uni..." Tom swallowed again. "A uni found Cindy about half an hour ago."

The room seemed to still as all eyes turned on them.

Tom watched Lindsay try to hold it together. The emotion that stormed in her eyes made him ache for her. "She'd been attacked. She was in an alley," Tom continued as Lindsay swayed in place. "She'd been beaten."

Jacobi grabbed his partner's arm to steady her. "Where is she?" Jacobi demanded when Lindsay seemed incapable of speaking.

Tom sighed. "Interview one. She wouldn't let them transport her to the damn hospital..." He didn't get to finish as Lindsay shoved past him and ran for the interview rooms.

Jacobi closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "I thought you were gonna say she was..." He licked his lips. "Jill?"

Tom shook his head. "We found her purse."

"Jesus." Jacobi slumped onto the desk.

Lindsay burst into room, startling a groggy Cindy who jerked where she sat at the table. There was a nasty bruise on her lover's jaw. Blood had oozed down from a gash at Cindy's hairline, leaving garish streaks down the side of her face and ending in a rust-colored blotch on the reporter's blue sweater.

The inspector sunk to her knees. They were too shaky to hold her anyway as she threw her arms around her lover and pulled her in close. "Oh God," she whispered into Cindy's hair.

Cindy weakly clung to her. Her head felt like someone had clubbed her with a brick, which probably wasn't far off from the truth. "Ouch," she managed in a somewhat light voice for Lindsay's sake.

Lindsay eased back and looked at her, wishing for Claire who suddenly seemed to materialize on command. The medical examiner set a bag on the table then forced Lindsay to move out of the way.

"Hey, skipper," Claire said soothingly. "Let me look at you."

"He has her," Cindy said quietly as Claire dabbed at the wound.

"He does," Claire told them both. "They found her purse where they found you."

Cindy closed her eyes as tears streamed down her face.

"Tell me what happened," Lindsay pleaded.

So Cindy did, relating the important details of the night.

"Did you see him?" Lindsay asked.

The tears came harder now as Cindy slowly shook her head. "Just a flash of his face. Nothing that would help. He blindsided me. Oh God, Linz. He has her."

Lindsay swallowed hard. Fear made her feel like she was about to come out of her skin. "We'll get her back."

"What if he's hurting her?" Cindy asked.

Claire hushed them both, but the fact that her hands were shaking wasn't lost on any of them. "Honey, you need to be at the hospital."

"No."

"Cindy," Lindsay started.

“No,” the reporter’s voice was firmer this time. “Not until we have her back.” She looked at Claire. “Drive me to my office?”

“Why?” Claire asked. “Sweetheart...”

“I can do the most good from there.”

Lindsay sank back to her knees at Cindy’s side. “I need to know you’re okay. You want to do the most good? Go with Claire to the hospital.”

Cindy’s gaze met Lindsay’s and held.

“I’ll stay here then. Give me a phone and a desk. I need to do something, Linz. Please,” Cindy practically begged.

Lindsay looked up into Claire’s features.

“I’ll stay with her,” Claire announced.

Lindsay reluctantly nodded. “You stay in here. I’ll get you a phone.”

Everything hurt.

Jill’s eyes slowly blinked open. Her mouth was painfully dry, and as she tried to lick her lips she realized she must have bitten her tongue at some point. She tried to move and realized she was on a hard, worn carpeted floor, but her hands were tied behind her head. She craned her neck around and saw what was binding her wrists.

The stole.

A shudder wracked her body when the full magnitude of her situation came ramming home with the sight. The stole was wrapped around a heavy, wooden table leg. She jerked hard but the table didn’t even budge.

Her blue eyes took in her surroundings as she frantically searched for something, anything to get her out of this mess. It was then she realized that she was alone.

“Cindy?” she whispered into the darkness. There was no answer, and Jill felt grief well up inside her when she remembered her friend lying motionless on the ground of an alley. “No,” she moaned.

She could hear faint sounds as the structure she was in settled around her. It was so dark she could barely see, only moonlight from a nearby window offering any illumination.

She tipped her head back and almost screamed when she saw a figure looking down at her.

Jill had seen him before, in the pictures from the Watkins' crime scene. Jesus on the cross, hanging above the sanctuary in San Vincente's. The sight made Jill think of rats and what was done to Watkins' body. Suddenly every little sound around her made her tense.

Jill closed her eyes and focused. She had to think about nothing but surviving.

Right now it had to be all that mattered.

Denise was waiting for them when they entered the lobby of the Hall the next morning. Lindsay merely nodded at her, too tired for formalities.

"Counselor," Jacobi managed as a greeting. They'd seen Denise last night, of course. The attorney had stormed the bullpen when she'd been informed of Jill's abduction. When she'd learned who likely had her employee, Denise's knees had nearly buckled.

But now she was back in cool, iron control. Denise handed Lindsay a thick, padded envelope. "Everything is there. Her calendar, contacts, current cases.... Your people are sweeping her office now. I assume they'll take the computer."

"They will," Jacobi said as Lindsay slipped open the envelope and Jill's calendar came sliding out. He watched his partner as Lindsay opened it, studied the neat, precise handwriting inside. He saw her swallow once, twice. "Linz..."

The inspector looked up and met Denise's gaze. "Thanks for your cooperation."

"Anything," Denise said instantly. "Whatever you need."

Lindsay nodded.

"Lindsay," Denise said hesitantly as they started to walk away.

Lindsay was too weary to be surprised at being addressed so informally but some part of her brain was aware of the oddity.

"You'll find her," Denise said with conviction. "I know it."

The surprising faith got through some of the fog that seemed to shroud Lindsay's thoughts. She nodded again. "You're damn right I will," she promised.

Denise dipped her head once then went back the way she came.

Jacobi frowned. "Tell you what. Give me five minutes. I'm going to check in with the techs and see what ground they've covered."

Lindsay sighed but nodded. She wanted a minute or two to go through Jill's effects, and she needed to check in with Cindy. She walked outside and stood there on the steps of the Hall, the pleasantly cool February wind whipping her long hair around her drawn features. She was running on fumes, so tired she wasn't sure how she was still standing, but she couldn't rest. If she slept, Jill died.

It was as simple as that.

Even now, as she waited for Jacobi, she could feel time slipping through her fingers. She thought of Dellan who'd been beaten for three weeks. Of Martin, crushed beneath the weight of thousands of coins. Of Watkins, raped, beaten, her eye gouged out, the sound of those terror-and agony-filled screams.

Was Jill screaming right now?

Lindsay shut her eyes as she felt the shakes of fear shiver through her body. She prayed for her friend, prayed for some kind of clue that would lead her to Jill in time. The irony that Jill was in the hands of a man who fancied himself an instrument of the God she was begging for help was not lost on her.

Jacobi touched her elbow, and her eyes fluttered open as she turned her head to look at him.

"Linz, you need sleep," he told her.

She shook her head. "When we have her back."

He didn't bother to argue. He just nodded, his own eyes haunted as they watched the people come and go up the steps of the Hall. "Look at them all," he murmured.

Lindsay did. There was a lot of activity in court that day. Jill should have been among those faces, hurrying up the steps in her too-high heels as she headed for court. The sudden aching to see that sight brought tears to Lindsay's eyes.

"All walks of life coming and going today," Jacobi mused aloud. He shook his head. "Hard to tell who is good and evil among all those faces. One hell of a spot to people watch, though."

The wind, the murmur of voices, the traffic from the street, Lindsay felt all the sounds coalesce and slip into the background as her mind zeroed in on the clue she'd been missing. Maybe God answered prayers after all.

“Son-of-a-bitch.”

Jacobi seemed to have had the same realization as she did. He looked at her. “The bastard doesn’t work in a church. He works in the *Hall*.”

Act III

They scrambled to their desks. Lindsay snatched up Robert Dellan’s file and flipped it open as she reached for her phone with the other hand. She punched in his widow’s number. It took four rings before a timid voice answered.

“Ms. Dellan?” Lindsay said in a rush as she watched Jacobi snatch up his own phone and start dialing. “This is Inspector Lindsay Boxer.”

There was a beat of frosty silence, and Lindsay winced. Apparently Child Protective Services had been by. “I need you to answer one question for me, and I’ll let you go.”

“Fine.”

“Was your husband ever in court?”

There was a slow breath on the other end, and Lindsay could tell the woman was weighing whether or not to tell the truth. “Yes. Some of his vendors sued him to get their money when his company went under.”

“Thank you.” Lindsay hung up and picked up Chris Blake’s file, repeating the process.

When they were done, only Travis Martin remained, but there was no one left living to call. Jacobi thumbed the file.

“All of them were in court,” he said. “Blake was wrongly sued for supposedly stealing someone’s idea for a restaurant. Watkins was sued over copyright infringement. Dellan for skipping out on paying his vendors.”

Lindsay looked at the file as her mind sorted through where to start tracking down the information they needed. She slapped her forehead when she suddenly realized they didn’t need to bother. “His job.”

“What?” Jacobi asked.

“Even if Martin was sued somewhere down the line... the bank he worked for was two blocks north of the Hall. They’re on the same damn street.”

“Martin probably walked by there everyday.”

Excitement bubbled between them as they realized they finally had the break they needed. Lindsay just hoped it was coming soon enough to save Jill. “You tell Tom. I’m headed back to the Hall. We’re gonna need warrants.”

“We’ll get started on the backgrounds of all the male employees,” Jacobi told her.

“From judges to janitors,” Lindsay called out over her shoulder.

Jacobi picked up the phone and started dialing.

“Denise!”

The attorney turned her head at the sound of Lindsay Boxer’s voice. The inspector looked wired and restless, a complete about-face from this morning, as she hurried down the corridor toward her. Denise dismissed the DDA she’d been speaking with and met her halfway. “Do you have news? Did you find her?”

“Not yet,” Lindsay confessed out of breath. “But I need your help.”

“Anything,” Denise said instantly.

“We know where he works,” Lindsay announced.

Denise’s breath caught. “Where?”

“Here.”

Denise gaped at her and felt her ire rise at the mere suggestion.

“We know all of the victims were sued except Martin, and his bank is two blocks up the street,” Lindsay told her. “If he works here, or he’s one of the regulars in the gallery, he would have seen all of them, heard all about them, sat in judgment right here on all of them.”

“Oh my God,” Denise whispered as she realized Lindsay could be right. “You mean he’s been under our noses this whole time?” Her voice elevated in outrage.

“I need you to get warrants. We need to look into the backgrounds of every male working in the building. The murders took too much strength for a woman,” Lindsay quickly added when she realized Denise was about to object. “He’s here, Denise.”

Denise felt the odd mixture of fear and hope tumble around in her chest. She nodded. “I’ll get started on whatever warrants we need. In the meantime, I’ll free up as many

members of the female staff as I can to start reviewing records. If he's an employee here, we'll find him," she vowed.

"Look for someone who has been rejected from seminary school. Someone with strong religious ties in his background," Lindsay told her.

"We will. We'll find him," she vowed.

Lindsay put her hand on Denise's arm, appreciating the worry she could see in the attorney's eyes. "The faster the better. He's already had her almost fourteen hours."

Denise nodded, biting back the angry retort she wanted to make. She knew how long the killer had Jill in his possession. At times she felt like she could feel every tick of the clock inside her head. She watched Lindsay hurry away, feeling sick at the thought that the bastard had been so close. She probably passed him in the halls, probably knew his damn name.

And he had Jill.

But she'd be damned if she let him keep her.

Jill was shivering.

She was still damp from the last bucket of water he'd thrown all over her. There was no heat in the sanctuary, and the cool, dusty air blew without mercy over her chilled skin. Her whole body ached from its struggle to remain warm over the last few hours. She was starving, and her head and ribs stung so much she could barely think.

Jill had never known physical misery like this, and the thought that it was only going to get worse was terrifying.

Arnold was starting slow. Taunting her. He'd kicked her a few times. Doused her in water every few hours as he slowly tried to break down her spirit. She was doing her best not to give him the satisfaction. She had to hold on for as long as she could. Lindsay would be looking for her. She just had to give her friend time.

Jill thought of Cindy and tears burned her eyes. She had no idea if the reporter was alive or dead. When she'd seen her there on the ground, Jill had felt a wrenching pain in her chest that hurt worse than anything Arnold had done to her so far.

"Please," she whispered more for Cindy than herself as her gaze peered up at the crucifixion overhead. "Please God."

"Yes," a voice came out of the darkness making Jill tense. "You should pray."

This time Arnold held a Bible rather than a bucket, and Jill thought she was about to get another one of his sermons. She never thought he would start beating her with it.

Denise watched them. There were twelve women in a room working feverishly, all of them determined to ferret out a killer that had been among them. He had used this place to find his victims, and Denise wanted to crucify the religious son-of-a-bitch for that. As far as she was concerned, the law was as sacred as any religion, and she would nail this bastard's ass to the wall when she found out who'd perverted both for his own twisted means.

With a sigh, she headed back to her office, pausing a moment in Jill's doorway. She could smell the DDA's lingering perfume and the scent did something funny to Denise's stomach. She glanced behind her, half expecting Jill to be standing there. The sight of an empty hallway made her swallow hard. "Hang on, Jill," she whispered before moving back down the hall toward her own space.

Denise settled into her own chair and pulled down another folder off the top of her pile of files. She'd been at it for five hours when she'd taken a break to walk down the hall to check on the others. She flipped open the file and began to read.

Her heart skipped a beat when she saw this employee used to work as a paramedic. Didn't they say the killer would have to have a pretty good working knowledge of anatomy to inflict the injuries he did without killing the victims? And then there was his knowledge of drugs...

Denise read further then picked up the phone and made a few calls. Within twenty minutes she had what she needed. She felt like someone had lit a fire in her as she slammed the phone down.

"Gotcha, you son-of-a-bitch." Denise snatched up her cell phone and searched for Lindsay Boxer's number. After four rings it went to voicemail. Denise flipped her phone shut with a curse.

She tried Jacobi. Tom Hogan. No one was answering their damn phones.

A thought struck her, and she skimmed through her list of numbers before dialing the editor of the Register. Jill wasn't the only one with friends at the paper.

Lindsay was talking to Tom on her cell phone as Cindy watched the buildings race by. They were driving back to the scene of Jill's abduction, to see if the location might jar any additional memories for the reporter. "Check vendors, too. I know it's a hell of a lot

of people!” Lindsay suddenly snapped. “But one of them has Jill, damnit!”

Cindy put her hand on Lindsay’s knee and squeezed in reassurance. She heard Lindsay take a deep breath.

“Please,” Lindsay said, now in a more subdued voice. “Denise is working the angle, too. Cindy has the Register on it. With our combined forces, we should be able to find this guy and quick.”

Cindy’s phone rang. She glanced down at the caller ID and sighed when she saw her editor’s name. She flipped the phone open. “Don’t fire me,” she said in a rush. “I really can’t worry about my job right now so you can just...”

“Thomas?” Denise Kwon’s voice was crisp and clear as it cut her off.

Cindy blinked, puzzled, and resisted the urge to check the caller ID again. “Denise?”

Lindsay’s head swiveled in surprise in Cindy’s direction.

“Is Boxer with you?” Denise demanded.

Cindy glanced at Lindsay. “She’s on the phone with Tom.”

“Thomas, I got him.”

Cindy drew in a sharp breath and whipped open her notebook and clicked her pen. For a moment she forgot all about her fear for Jill and her own distracting pain. “Go.”

“His name is David Arnold. He was rejected from five different seminary schools. His father was a lawyer for the Vatican. When he retired, Pope John Paul II gave him a blessed parting gift.”

“A Tyrian purple stole,” Cindy guessed as a fission of excitement skittered up her spine. “Oh my God, Denise.”

“He’s a bailiff,” Denise continued in a rush, and Cindy could hear the tears of frustration and fear in the other woman’s voice. “He’s a fucking *bailiff*.”

Cindy had a flash of her attacker’s face, of his silver, grey eyes. She had gotten a look at him after all. She’d seen him before. “He was at the Dow trial...”

“He lead you away in cuffs, Thomas,” Denise replied.

A shudder ripped through Cindy’s small frame, and she was only faintly aware of Lindsay telling Tom to shut up and hold on.

“Cindy,” Lindsay asked, her voice tight.

“Cindy,” Denise’s voice seemed to echo. “The church where Felicia Watkins was murdered? Arnold’s father was a member. He was their biggest donor.”

It all connected. Cindy felt it all snap into place. “Thank you,” she told Denise before hanging up and relaying the information to Lindsay.

Lindsay slammed on the brakes and jerked on the wheel, causing the vehicle to do a virtual 180-degree turn. The siren came on and the police lights sent flashes of blue and red across the buildings and street as Lindsay floored it and went back the way they’d come.

“You don’t really think he would go back to San Vincente’s, do you?” Cindy asked as she held on.

Lindsay finished telling Tom where to meet them with backup then snapped her phone closed and dropped it into her lap. “He did,” she said in a strained voice. “I know he did.”

“How?” Cindy asked softly.

Lindsay didn’t answer. She wasn’t sure she knew how herself.

“Claire?”

The medical examiner glanced up as Tom Hogan stuck his head in the door. The look on his face, the nervous energy radiating from his body, told her all she needed to know. She grabbed her purse.

“They found her,” she whispered.

“Maybe,” Tom said as he guided her out of the door with his hand in the small of her back.

“Do I need my kit?” she asked in a fearful voice.

“Let’s hope not,” he tried to reassure her. “I just thought you’d want to be there one way or the other.”

“You thought right,” she answered as they hurried toward his car.

The stole around her wrists went taught as Jill yanked hard and struggled for all she was worth. He was moving toward her with deliberate intent. Her eyes fixed on his belt buckle as she heard him loosen it, sliding the leather out and away. He set it aside then picked up a metal pipe that had been sitting on the altar.

“Nnnnn,” Jill tried to scream but the scarf he’d gagged her with an hour before slid further back in her throat as she bucked her body. She started choking, fighting for breath even as she continued to thrash wildly in an attempt to free herself. She knew his intent. Knew what he was going to cure her of.

Her sin.

He began chanting. The games were over. He was tired of toying with her. Now he was going to get down to his real reason for bringing her here. The beatings, the starvation, the excruciating cold, they were all about to feel like nothing.

The heavy table scooted an inch, scraping loud and long as she twisted, the sound echoing in the rafters of the church. When Jill looked up she saw Jesus looking down, his sad eyes a silent statement on what was about to happen.

Not even God could help her now.

“Stay in the car.”

“You’re crazy,” Cindy blurted. She sucked in a breath when Lindsay turned the full wattage of her laser vision on her, but she held her ground. “Jill is in there.”

“We don’t know that.”

“You don’t have backup.”

“Cindy...”

“I can yell really loud if I have to,” the reporter promised. She watched, confused as Lindsay’s hands went to the cuff of her jeans and rolled it up. She didn’t see the clutch piece until Lindsay was handing it to her. “Oh jeez.”

Lindsay said nothing as she thrust the gun into Cindy’s hands before quickly getting out of the car, hoping like hell backup would hurry.

Cindy scrambled out after her, the unfamiliar weight of the weapon a tangible reminder of how reckless she was being. It didn’t matter. Jill needed her, and she would pull the trigger as many times as she had to and at as many people to save her friend and protect Lindsay.

She just hoped she could actually hit something.

Lindsay didn't know how she knew he was in the church. She just did. It was the same feeling she got at all the other crime scenes. The sense of someone walking over her grave as Cindy had described it back at the Blake crime scene all those months ago. Lindsay tried the handle and was unsurprised when it turned easily in her hand. "You stay behind me," she ordered in a harsh whisper.

"Okay," Cindy said without conviction.

There was no time to reassure her, Lindsay realized. No time for goodbyes or declarations of love. Lindsay shouldered the door open and stepped inside, her gun sweeping the area along with the beam from her flashlight.

A muted noise reached her. It sounded like a muffled cry, desperate and weak. Lindsay's whole body jerked at the sound, and it took every honed instinct in her body to keep herself from running blindly toward it.

Cindy had no such reservations. She started past Lindsay, but Lindsay's arm shot out, blocking her progress. For a moment their faces were lit from the reflection of the flashlight beam off the faded white walls. Lindsay shook her head, and Cindy reluctantly nodded and moved behind her once more.

Lindsay felt her whole body beginning to quake in fear of what she'd find. Would she find Jill burned? Maimed? Would he assault her the way he'd assaulted his last victim? The woman whose pride had led to her downfall in this very church?

She thought of rats and cages and burrowing... The urge to wretch was overpowering.

"Please God," Lindsay heard Cindy whisper into the darkness.

They made their way carefully through the back of the church, past the door to the basement where another woman had died, and toward the string of sounds they could hear from the sanctuary.

Sanctuary. The name seemed horribly ironic to the reporter as she shifted her sweaty grip on the gun. She could hear a man's voice ahead of them, but she couldn't make out what he was saying. She could, however, hear the distinct sound of heavy wood scraping across the stone floor. She could hear Jill's muted, terrified cries with crystal clarity. Then there was the sound of something striking flesh and Jill screamed.

All training went out the window. Lindsay surged forward and kicked in the door that led to the altar. She saw a flash of his face as he lifted his gaze to meet hers. He was on top of Jill. Lindsay saw the pipe in his right hand, the one he'd just used to strike her best friend.

Her vision went red and her finger tightened on the trigger.

“Lindsay!” Cindy’s shout was drowned out by the retort from the gun as it bucked in Lindsay’s hand.

The killer jerked as if he’d been struck, tumbling off Jill’s thrashing body and rolling down the small set of steps before crashing into a pew. He staggered to his feet and bolted for the front of the church.

“Police officer!” Lindsay belatedly yelled as she sprang into motion after him. She’d taken no more than five steps when she saw a flash of metal and ducked, dragging Cindy down with her as bullets sprayed above their heads. Lindsay returned fire, squeezing off three rounds that boomed in the cavernous space.

“Stay with her!” Lindsay shouted as she went after him, her long legs not even bothering with the stairs as she leapt from the pulpit and ran up the nearest row of aged and rotting pews.

Cindy didn’t have to be told twice. She was at Jill’s side instantly, and Jill wanted to weep in relief at the sight of her. She could hear shouts from the front of the church, then the distinct sound of more gunfire. Muzzle flashes lit up the inside of the church, and Jill found her vision blocked as Cindy threw her small frame over her, shielding her from any more harm. There was a loud bang, like a door being thrown open with force, then quiet settled once more.

Jill whimpered and Cindy reacted, moving back and yanking at the scarf in her mouth, tearing it away and letting Jill suck in her first lungful of fresh air in an hour. She coughed and struggled weakly, needing to be free.

“Shhh.” Cindy reached for the fabric binding Jill’s wrists...

And froze.

It was a stole. A silk, purple stole.

Tyrian purple, her mind corrected and Cindy clamped her teeth together to keep from becoming ill. Her stomach twisted at seeing something so sacred used for something so vile. Seeing it used like that on Jill took the sight to a new level of disgust. “Let me get something to cut this...” She started to stand only to sink back into a crouch next to her friend when Jill cried out.

“Don’t leave me,” Jill whimpered. “Don’t leave me.”

“It’s okay,” Cindy promised as she glanced worriedly over her shoulder for any sign of Lindsay. She could hear sirens in the distance and prayed for them to hurry. She ran a

hand through Jill's hair, trying to soothe her friend, trying to soothe them both. "It's okay. Help is coming. I won't leave you."

"Oh God..." Jill visibly shuddered.

Cindy stood and peeled off her jacket before kneeling once more and using it to cover Jill's partially exposed body. The bastard had cut open Jill's shirt, leaving her in nothing but her bra and skirt. Cindy's gaze sought something, anything that could help her cut Jill loose. She wanted her friend out of here, wanted her covered before the cops came inside. Tipping her head back, Cindy found herself looking up into the downturned face of Jesus on the cross, his features covered with dust and grime. A shiver tore through the reporter, and she jerked her eyes away from the sight, not wanting to think about what the figure had witnessed this night.

Jill's belt was loose and so was the zipper on her skirt. Cindy felt the bile rise in her throat again when she thought about the killer straddling Jill as she and Lindsay arrived. "Jill... did he...?" Cindy couldn't make herself ask the question, but relief swept through her so sweet and strong it made her dizzy when Jill viciously shook her head. "Thank God..."

"The bailiff."

"What?" Cindy eased closer, Jill's voice hard to understand it was so raspy from screaming. Cindy noted the bruises on Jill's pale features, could see blood staining the side of the attorney's shirt. "Where in the hell are the paramedics?" She cried out to the church.

"The bailiff... in the Dow trial..." Jill was shaking so hard her teeth were chattering.

Cindy went rigid as she remembered his face, remembered him with his hand on one side of a Bible, hers on the other. "We know."

Jill nodded as the tears came again.

The door banged open and Cindy spun, pointing the small handgun toward the sound. Suddenly the weight of the weapon in her hand felt right, welcome, and she sighted down it with conviction, hoping the next face she saw would be the man who attacked her best friend.

She moved to put herself between the door and Jill, doing her best to shield the other woman. Her hands were shockingly steady.

Lindsay kept her head low and switched off her flashlight as she bounded out into the night. He'd taken a few more shots inside the church and so had she. By now they'd

both reloaded. She listened for sounds of footfalls, of breathing, but the night was shockingly quiet. She heard a click and she dove for the ground, feeling asphalt tear at her palms and cheek as shots punched into the door behind her.

She sprang to her feet when she heard him turn and run somewhere to her left. His shadow was briefly visible as he passed close to a streetlight. Lindsay zeroed in on him and ran.

“Police officer!” she yelled out of habit. Following procedure wasn’t going to matter, she decided as she gave chase. She had no intention of letting him live to see his day in court.

The old, abandoned buildings were like a maze, and Lindsay admitted he had her at a distinct disadvantage. She was on his turf, running around in the dark. It wasn’t smart. It was about the dumbest thing she’d ever done, but she was not letting him get away, even if he took her down with him.

Easing along one wall, she turned, staying low, and pointed her gun down an alley. Empty. She swore mentally and started for the next building.

There was a loud pop then pain bloomed along with a spreading pattern of blood on Lindsay’s left side. She sank to one knee and returned fire in the general direction of the shot, taking grim satisfaction when she heard her bullet strike flesh and a muted scream followed.

She fired again, hoping to kill him or at least keep him down. Lindsay staggered to her feet and ran blindly, firing as she went. She heard a car door close, an engine turn over; then a white panel van came hurtling out of the darkness. Lindsay swore and threw herself out of the way, rolling over the hood of a beat up, blue Chevy as the van crashed into the side where she’d just been standing and roared away into the night.

Lindsay landed painfully on her knees and had to stay there for several agonizing breaths. She gripped her side, feeling the warmth of the blood under her shirt and jacket. She’d hit him twice, though, damnit. He was in worse shape than she was.

With a groan, Lindsay put her hand on the hood of the car to haul herself up before heading back toward the church at an unsteady jog. She’d have Tom check every hospital, every backroom doctor they knew about. They knew his name, his face, and he was running wounded. It was only a matter of time.

“Cindy,” Jill’s voice was a harsh, ragged whisper.

Cindy shushed her as she positioned her feet shoulder width apart and tightened her finger on the trigger. He wasn’t getting to Jill, not again. The pain in her own head was

enough to make tears spill from her eyes, but she didn't move.

Suddenly a familiar figure entered a streak of moonlight, and Cindy wanted to collapse in relief at the sweet sight of Lindsay's familiar stride. "Thank God," she breathed.

Lindsay came jogging into the room, re-holstering her weapon as she approached. She watched as Cindy's shoulders relaxed and the gun dipped in the redhead's hands. At Cindy's questioning look she shook her head. "Got away," she said tightly as she drew even with her lover. She glanced at the gun then gave Cindy a fleeting look before moving to Jill. She dropped to her knees, wincing in pain as she did so before taking out the knife she carried and using it to slice through the stole.

Jill's arms dropped when released then came up and around Lindsay's neck in a fierce hug as she surged upward, needing to feel safe, needing to know Lindsay was real.

"I'm so sorry," Lindsay murmured into the crook of Jill's neck as she felt her friend tremble. She wasn't sure what she was apologizing for... that the killer had gotten away... that she hadn't stopped him sooner... Lindsay only knew that she felt like a failure and her mistakes had nearly cost Jill her life. "Oh God, Jill, I'm sorry."

Jill began sobbing in Lindsay's arms, her whole body shuddering with the force of her cries. Lindsay wrapped more of her body around her, holding her for all she was worth, not even aware when her own tears began to fall. The thought that she could be contaminating evidence on the floor, on Jill's clothes... it didn't matter. All that mattered was Jill.

Red and blue lights began to flash through the dull stained glass, bringing it to life with harsh flickers of color. Cindy came around Jill's other side and knelt next to her, putting one arm around her friend and the other around her lover. Cindy's features looked stricken, made all the more dramatic by the lurid bruises on her face as she and Lindsay locked gazes.

They knew him... his address... his face... But the knowledge had come at too high of a price.

Doors opened, voices entered. The first round of the nightmare was over.

The second was beginning.

A rape kit.

The doctors had insisted it was necessary. Jill could be lying that he hadn't touched her. She could have been so traumatized she didn't remember the assault. The cop in Lindsay knew they were right. The friend in her hated it with every fiber of her being.

Jill had already been violated enough. Her sense of safety was lost, her trust shredded. Lindsay didn't want to think what Jill must feel toward her. Damn it she was Jill's best friend. Her best friend the cop, and she'd failed to protect her.

There had to have been a clue. Something she missed. Something that could have prevented Jill from going through hell. Lindsay refused to think there was nothing she could have done, that the day's events were somehow a fate that could not be changed.

Cindy appeared with a cup of coffee and Lindsay took it without enthusiasm as her lover settled next to her in a chair. The doctors had absconded with both of them when they arrived, insisting that they get a closer look at her lover's bruises and the nasty gash Claire had already expertly tended on her forehead. Cindy had not been amused to discover Lindsay had an injury of her own and had hid it by zipping up her jacket. Lindsay decided she was lucky her lover was injured, or Cindy might have hurt her further.

Both of them were now sporting brand new bandages. Cindy had a small one on her temple just below her hairline, a replacement for the Band-aid Claire had provided the night before. Lindsay's was along her side, under her bloodstained shirt. Thankfully the bullet had merely grazed her. It was more of a nasty burn than anything.

"I got a call from my editor," the reporter said in a hushed voice in deference to the other people in the waiting room.

Lindsay turned her head and looked at her.

"He has everyone beating the bushes to find the guy."

"They should leave that to the police," Lindsay said wearily. "Tom has everyone he can spare all over it."

"I know," Cindy agreed. "But the more people there are looking for this guy the faster we catch him." She took a sip of her own coffee, so tired she could barely keep her eyes open. Her gaze wandered to the double doors at the end of the hallway as she longed for word on Jill.

Lindsay continued to watch her. Cindy seemed to have aged ten years in one night and a part of her ached for her lover. The rest of her was too tired to do anything about it.

"He wants me to come in," Cindy finally continued. "To write the article since I was there."

Lindsay swallowed her first reaction and held her breath.

Cindy put her head on the inspector's shoulder. "I told him to go to hell." She sipped her

coffee. “I am so fired.”

Lindsay studied the red hair under her chin and smiled with pride. “He fired you?”

“Not yet. But he’s probably gonna. Can’t say I’m all that concerned, honestly.” Cindy eased back when she felt a soft kiss on her head. “I can’t believe he stood right there in front of me in court.”

“He stood right in front of all of us,” Lindsay murmured, not even phased by the sudden change in topics.

They lapsed into silence for so long Lindsay thought Cindy had fallen asleep until the reporter spoke.

“Lindsay?”

“Yeah?”

“Jill is going to be okay, right?”

The worry in Cindy’s voice cut right to the heart of Lindsay’s own concerns. “We’ll make sure she is,” she vowed.

“Hey.”

The lovers glanced up as Claire came bustling down the hall. The medical examiner had arrived on the scene early and had fussed over all of them. She’d also been the one to bust Lindsay for hiding her injury when she’d seen her tall friend move the wrong way and blanch. Both started to stand, but Claire motioned at them to stay seated.

“How is she?” Lindsay asked.

“She’s hanging in there. Wants to go home as you can well imagine.” Claire sat on the edge of the table in the waiting room. “You two should both be admitted as well.”

“It’s just a scratch,” both Cindy and Lindsay said in unison then looked at each other.

Claire almost smiled. “I thought you would want to know. The rape kit came back negative.”

Lindsay closed her eyes as Cindy gripped her hand and squeezed. The inspector suddenly shuddered hard with relief, and she instantly felt Cindy move closer as Claire sank to her knees on the floor and hugged her.

All the fear, all the frustration... it came rushing forth in a flood of unleashed emotion Lindsay couldn’t stop. She was too damn tired to fight it.

“You got there in time, sweetheart,” Claire murmured in Lindsay’s ear just as the first sob was torn loose from her friend. “You got there in time.”

Act IV

Hours later, Claire sat on her back porch, arms hugged to her body against the morning chill as the sun slowly rose. She needed to see it before she gave in to the heavy desire for sleep. Needed to see the beckoning light of a new day to know yesterday was finally over.

It had taken all her considerable persuasive skill to get Cindy and Lindsay to leave. She didn’t tell them that Jill didn’t want to see either of them. Her blonde friend didn’t need any more reminders of the night, and she seemed to be feeling a measure of embarrassment with the way she’d reacted when the pair had shown up to save her.

Strangely, Claire realized, it was that embarrassment that made Claire think Jill would be okay. If she was worrying about appearances after everything she’d been through then that was a sign of normalcy peeking through. But the attorney had scared the hell out of her when she’d first arrived at the hospital. When the doctors and nurses had been performing their tests...

Claire closed her eyes, remembering how docile her friend had been. It was as if all the fire in Jill’s soul had been extinguished. Jill suffered through everything in silence, her blue eyes occasionally meeting Claire’s who had sat beside her through the whole thing.

The anguish she’d seen in those eyes would haunt her. Claire knew it. She only wished she knew what to say, what to do, to make it go away. What was more worrisome was how quiet Jill had been. She’d barely said a word.

In all the years Claire had known the attorney there was only one thing that made Jill fall into silences like that. Guilt.

Claire knew in the pit of her soul that Jill blamed herself for what happened to her, blamed her choices, her lifestyle... even though time after time Jill had stood before a judge and jury and said the victim’s choices were never to blame for an attack and delivered every word with conviction... this was different. This time Jill was the victim.

“Hey.”

Claire glanced up and only managed a meager smile for her husband. He rolled out onto the porch in his wheelchair and arranged himself next to her, offering her a blanket that she accepted gratefully.

“I’d tell you to come back inside...” he began before his voice faded into nothing.

“Yeah,” she answered in a faint voice.

“I remember this one really bad night years before I met you. A bust went bad. Six cops died.”

Claire turned her head and looked at him.

“I needed to see the sun come up, too. Needed to know that day was over. Needed to know life still went on.”

Claire gave him a watery smile then got up from her chair before sliding onto Ed’s lap and wrapping the blanket around them both. “Just a few more minutes,” she whispered into the familiar smelling skin of his throat.

“As long as you need,” was his understanding reply.

Cindy stared at Lindsay’s clutch piece. It sat on the nightstand, next to her lover’s service weapon and badge. The gun was smaller than Lindsay’s 9mm but no less lethal in the right hands.

Cindy picked it up, cradled the small revolver. She wasn’t even sure what kind of gun it was, what name Lindsay would rattle off for it. She only knew that the gun didn’t frighten her anymore. In fact, it made her feel more settled to hold it, to feel the textured grip in her palm. Her dad had carried a weapon similar to this one. He’d offered to show her how to use it, but she’d always had a healthy respect for the weapons and what they could do. In other words, they scared the hell out of her. But she hadn’t hesitated when Jill’s life had been at stake. She’d pulled the weapon and aimed it with every intention of firing it.

That would have been fine, she thought as she slid the gun back into the ankle holster. What worried her was the thought that she would have fired it even if the killer had been unarmed. What had this case done to her? That it had changed something fundamental inside her was a given. Cindy just wasn’t sure what that something was. She only knew that it felt like some small part of her had died.

Warm lips were suddenly on her neck, and Cindy closed her eyes, leaning back into Lindsay’s heat with relief.

“Why are you staring at my guns?” Lindsay asked quietly against the soft skin of Cindy’s throat. She’d just stepped out of the shower, and the towel she had wrapped around her was scant protection against the chilly morning air. “Don’t tell me you have a secret fetish,” she teased, trying to lighten the heavy mood they were both in since getting home

in the middle of the night and falling into an exhausted but restless slumber.

Cindy smiled and turned in Lindsay's arms. "I have a secret fetish or two," she replied with a weak smirk. "But they have nothing to do with your guns."

"Oh my," Lindsay drawled. She dipped her head and kissed the reporter, meaning the gesture as more an affirmation than the beginnings of a seduction, but Cindy's enthusiastic response soon had the inspector out of breath and warmed up quite nicely. They parted slowly, and Lindsay looked down into Cindy's warm, whiskey-colored eyes and felt her whole world stabilize. "I love you," she whispered. "I am so damn lucky to have you."

Cindy blinked. "Likewise. Now do me a favor?"

"Anything," Lindsay promised.

"Make me forget last night. Make me forget this case. Just for a little while?" Cindy stared up hopefully at her lover as her hands parted the ends of the towel keeping her from Lindsay's warm, damp skin.

Lindsay stared at her lover; frightened by the need she could hear in Cindy's voice. The case had taken a toll on the reporter, had taken a toll on all of them, but knowing the light in her lover's soul had been dimmed, even just a little, made Lindsay's heart ache. She threaded her hands through Cindy's hair and kissed her again, losing herself in Cindy's heat and touch.

The reporter wasn't the only one who needed to forget for just a little while.

The courtroom sat empty.

Denise Kwon knew she only had twenty minutes or so before that would change and that was fine. She was in no mood to linger, but she'd had to come here. Had to see and remember.

David Arnold.

Such an innocuous name for such a cold-blooded killer. She'd seen him, of course. Every attorney that worked in the Hall had seen him. He'd sworn in her witnesses for months. He'd sworn in Jill.

Jill.

The attorney put her hand on the witness box and remembered seeing Jill sit in that chair, remembered Nicole Honeycutt's best efforts to parade Jill's love life out there for all to

see. In doing so, the defense attorney had led Jill straight to a killer.

Denise heard the doors open and close behind her and turned her head, expecting the first on-looker of the day to be arriving, looking for the best seat. She went still when she saw who was standing there.

Jill was in jeans and a loose white sweater. She looked exhausted and pale save for the lurid bruises on her face and the vivid blue of her eyes. She stared at Denise for a long, silent moment.

“All those months,” Jill finally croaked.

Denise didn't move or speak. She didn't know what to say.

“All those months we looked for him, and he was right under my nose. He was in court with me. I passed him in the halls...” Jill slowly came down the center aisle and opened the swinging door that separated the gallery from the bench. “I flirted with the son-of-a-bitch.”

“Jill,” Denise finally found her voice only to find she didn't know what to say with it. She watched as Jill passed her before stepping up into the witness box. Denise flinched when she saw the hideous abrasions on the blonde's wrists. She'd read the police report, knew what caused them.

Jill slowly sat and looked out at the empty gallery. “I want to say it started here, but it didn't.” She looked at Denise. “I want to say this is Nicole's fault. That she put my choices out there to be judged.”

Denise sensed where this was going, and she put her hands on the witness box. “What happened to you was not your fault.”

“Wasn't it?” Jill shook her head. “I'm a slut,” she stated bluntly. “I'll do anything that moves. Isn't that the office gossip?”

“Stop it,” Denise warned. “He's insane. Arnold is insane. Who you sleep with doesn't matter. Your choices don't matter.”

“They do matter!” Jill shouted at her and had the perverse satisfaction of seeing Denise Kwon shocked speechless. “I would never have been on his radar if I hadn't made the choices I made.”

“You never would have been on his radar if your stepfather had left you the hell alone!” Denise bellowed back.

Jill went still, staring wide-eyed at her boss. Denise's gaze couldn't hold her own, and she stared hard at the floor before taking a deep breath. She didn't know what to say as

she watched Denise try to rein in her anger.

Denise finally looked at her again. “Look. I’m way out of line, but we’ve both seen it in one too many cases, Bernhardt. I’m not a shrink, Jill, but I’ve been at this job long enough to know what your sex life probably compensates for.”

Jill jerked when Denise’s hand suddenly covered one of her own. Her gaze leapt to Denise’s, seeing a human being looking back out at her rather than a boss. That look tempered her anger and the fear that she knew Denise was right.

“You know it too, Jill.” Denise held her gaze. “You’ve just never cared.” She watched as her subordinate swallowed. The topic was inappropriate, Denise knew, and as much as she wanted Jill to place blame where blame was due, it wasn’t Denise’s place to guide her there. She changed the subject. “Know why I’m so hard on you, Bernhardt?”

“Because you hate me?” Jill asked bluntly, too tired and still too much in shock to care about Denise’s reaction.

“Because I see a hell of an attorney in you. Maybe one of the best this city has ever seen. You have a thirst for justice and a drive that doesn’t quit even when it should.”

“How can you say that?” Jill asked. “I gave up on Lindsay with the Kiss-Me-Not Killer. I damn near got myself raped and murdered by another one...” She swallowed and willed her hands not to shake, especially when Denise’s grip on one of them tightened. “I’m an idiot. I flirted with him. I fucking flirted with him!”

“Jill.”

Jill ripped her hand out of Denise’s grip and got to her feet. “I’m not fit to be an attorney if I can’t see a killer when he’s right in front of me.” She brushed past her boss on shaky legs and was almost to the door when Denise’s voice stopped her cold.

“Why did you come here?”

Jill put her hand on the old oak door then turned her head to look at Denise. She wanted nothing more than to be out of the room suddenly and the pain in her wrists and ribs was beginning to ramp up as her medication wore off. She watched as Denise approached, stopping only a few feet away, so close she could smell her boss’ perfume.

“You came here, Jill, to court. The place where you come alive and realize all the potential God gave you.”

“Don’t talk to me about God,” Jill croaked.

Denise took one more step. “He gave you your gifts as an attorney, Jill,” Denise said simply. “And he gave you the friends who saved your life last night.”

Jill's eyes started to tear again and she looked away. She didn't know if Denise believed her words or was simply being the brilliant attorney she was and making her want to believe the lie. "He made the man who tried to take it all away."

"He made him," Denise agreed. "But the devil owned him." Denise watched her, waiting for Jill's gaze to finally meet her own again. "Don't let him win in the end, Jill. Don't let him take your life from you." She offered a slight, hesitant smile. "And I don't want to lose you."

Jill's gaze sharpened.

"As an attorney," Denise clarified, obviously realizing how personal that sounded.

Jill blinked a few times, almost wanting to laugh at the idea her mind had jumped on at Denise's words. She took a breath and looked around the courtroom. "How can I...?"

"Jill," Denise interrupted. "He worked here for thirteen months. Before that he was a paramedic. Not a patient, not an attorney, not a judge or even a single cop that sat in this courtroom knew. What makes you so damn special that you should have seen what the rest of us couldn't?"

Leave it to Denise to use brutal honesty to be persuasive, Jill thought, but she was grateful for it. It made sense, got past the arguments her wounded psyche wanted to throw up as a defense. "Harsh," Jill finally answered but she couldn't hide the tiniest of grins.

Denise took a deep breath in relief at seeing that smile. "When have you known me to be anything else, Bernhardt?" she asked practically.

Jill studied her for a quiet moment, seeing her boss a little differently. "Right now," Jill answered softly. "Thank you."

Denise seemed uncomfortable with the gratitude. She fidgeted before nodding once. "Well. I have court in twenty minutes."

Jill knew that wasn't true, but she nodded anyway. "Don't let me keep you." She stepped aside and smiled to herself as Denise hurried away.

Alone in the courtroom finally, Jill took it in. The polished wood, the marble, even the sound the air made as it moved around the room was all as familiar to Jill as her own heartbeat. For the first time in her career, Jill realized how much a church and a courtroom had in common.

Denise was right. About everything. Most importantly, Jill admitted that she belonged here. She was herself here more than she was anywhere else. David Arnold was not

going to take this away from her.

Jill sat in the closest row and relaxed for the first time in days. They knew his name. They knew his face. He was wounded. They were closing in now. It was just a matter of time until they stopped him.

Just a matter of time, she told herself with hardening resolve.

She sighed, knowing she needed to get back to her apartment. If any of the girls showed up there and found her missing they would have a conniption. She had promised the sun, the moon and the stars to the doctors at Mission Cross North Hospital if they would just let her go home to her own space to recover, that she would stay there and not leave her bed for days.

Bless Jacobi for stepping in and offering to stay with her along with the protective detail she'd been assigned until Arnold was caught. She appreciated the muscle the two young officers represented, but they were also a constant reminder that the man who tried to kill her was still roaming the streets of San Francisco.

Jill heard the door open behind her, and she resisted the urge to turn and see who it was. Some part of her already knew, and her lips creased into a hesitant smile.

A minute later, Lindsay eased down into the row behind her. "Hey," she said softly.

"Hey," Jill answered.

Lindsay leaned forward and rested her elbows on the back of the pew Jill was seated in. She could see Jill's profile with ease and was grateful to see the small smile she was sporting. "You're supposed to be at home. Resting."

Jill glanced at her watch. It was ten minutes to eleven. The courtroom would be crawling with people in short order. "I got bored." Jill's eyes narrowed, and she took a sniff of her friend. "Have you started wearing Cindy's perfume?" She watched out of the corner of her eye as Lindsay's cheeks turned scarlet, and the inspector scratched at the back of her neck self-consciously.

"How did you know to look for me here?" Jill asked when Lindsay couldn't seem to formulate a response. "You ask the protective detail or did you just know this is where I'd be?" She turned her head and looked at the dark-haired woman, her thoughts still on Denise's words.

Lindsay considered that. "First place I looked," she admitted.

Jill nodded. "But not because of him," Jill said. "Not because Arnold worked here."

"No," Lindsay agreed. "I don't think of him here. I think of you."

Jill turned a little more then winced as her abused ribs protested. Going home and taking some more meds and resting was probably a damn good idea. When she looked at her friend again Lindsay's features were stricken. "This isn't your fault."

"I just..."

"Lindsay, don't." Jill's voice was stern. "I'm dealing with enough right now. Don't make me deal with your misplaced guilt, too."

Lindsay closed her mouth then looked at her hands for a moment. "I'm sorry." She felt like crying. Like running until she couldn't go another step. "I just wanted to make sure you're okay."

"I'm not okay," Jill said. She met Lindsay's worried gaze without flinching. "But I will be."

That pretty much summed it up for all of them, Lindsay thought. "It's almost over," she promised. She scooted closer and put her head down on Jill's shoulder. "We'll stop him." When Jill tilted her own head to rest against Lindsay's it almost broke her. The relief that swept through her at feeling Jill alive and whole right next to her was so palpable Lindsay felt like she could almost touch it like a physical thing.

"Of course we will," Jill agreed with a trace of humor. "We're a club after all."

At first, Lindsay had been shocked by Cindy's request. Of all the things she'd ever imagined the reporter might ask her to do, the lines she might ask Lindsay to blur, this wasn't one of them.

But after she'd stormed from the apartment, left Cindy near tears to take a long walk around the neighborhood alone, Lindsay began to understand. She didn't want to step over that line again. Lindsay had been inching closer and closer to the edge of it since the Hallelujah Man's first murder. She had to admit both feet were planted firmly on it since Jill's abduction. Now Cindy was not only asking Lindsay to take that final step that would tip her from driven to relentlessly obsessed, but her lover was already on the other side and holding out her hand to help.

When Lindsay had returned home after driving Jill back to her apartment she'd found the reporter in the last place she'd expected.

The attic.

The chalkboard's surface that had so recently been wiped clean of the names of Kiss-Me-Not's victims was now covered with Cindy's neat handwriting. Seeing the names of

HM's victims, including Jill's, had hit Lindsay like a visceral punch in the gut. It had sent her reeling, and she'd refused to listen as Cindy had tried to explain.

So Lindsay had fled into the afternoon, needing air, needing distance, and needing perspective.

She realized what Cindy was doing wasn't a choice the reporter wanted to make. There was no way Cindy would ask her to cross that line again unless Lindsay needed to, and maybe Cindy needed her to as well.

Lindsay took a breath and mentally steeled herself as she opened the front door before ascending the steps to her apartment. She let herself in quietly, pausing in the hallway to see if she could hear her lover. A rustling from upstairs settled her nerves a fraction. At least Cindy hadn't left. God help her if the day ever came when that happened.

Lindsay climbed the steps to the second floor then glanced up at the attic opening and frowned. She heard a box move across the wood floor above followed by the low murmur of someone talking. She climbed the steps, her boots clomping loudly on each one, until she emerged once more in this little corner of a killer's mind that she'd once shaped for herself.

Cindy straightened, a smudge of dust on her right cheek. She had a box of photocopied case files at her feet and one folder was open loosely in her hands. "Hey," she greeted carefully.

"Hey," Lindsay said slowly. She turned her head and met Claire's steady gaze, feeling it anchor her in the storm of emotion she'd climbed up there with.

"Hi, sweetheart," Claire said.

Lindsay felt the unexpected burn of tears and shame. Claire and Jill knew about this space, but they'd never seen it, never been allowed to be tainted by it or to know the full spectrum of her obsession with Kiss-Me-Not. Lindsay was more grateful to Cindy now than ever that they'd taken every last scrap of that killer down from the walls.

Lindsay cleared her throat and put her hands in the back pocket of her jeans. Her gaze cut to Cindy. "Sorry," was all she offered.

It was enough. Cindy smiled. "Me, too."

Lindsay glanced back to Claire only to suddenly have her hands full of a box as the medical examiner thrust it at her. "Watkins," Claire said. "Why don't you start putting her up on that wall behind you?"

Lindsay looked at the lid before her gaze tracked back up to Claire's face. "You're helping?" she blurted in surprise.

“I’m helping,” Claire replied and for a moment their gazes held and the past floated between them, the regret and weight of mistakes on both sides hanging heavy in the air.

Lindsay had to swallow past the lump in her throat. She nodded. “Thanks.” Her voice was almost a whisper.

“Should have done this the first time,” Claire confessed, her own eyes shining. “Besides, you two should be resting given those injuries of yours. I’m here to make sure you don’t overdo it.”

More footsteps sounded on the stairs to the attic, and Lindsay didn’t have to be a cop to guess who they belonged to. She set the box aside and all of them clustered around the opening, waiting for Jill’s blonde head to emerge. Lindsay took the DDA’s hand and helped her the rest of the way, flinching a little when Jill grimaced in pain.

“The inner sanctum,” Jill drawled when she was standing next to them. She looked around, her gaze fixing briefly on her own name on the board before skittering off and taking in the rest of the space. “Yep. Good, creepy spot for this.”

Cindy slipped her arm around Jill and gently squeezed. “You didn’t have to come.”

“My name is on that board,” Jill said. “I had to come.” She held up a brown paper bag. “But I also need to be marginally drunk for this.”

Claire smiled. “Now you’re talking.” She took the bag and peeked inside at the two six packs of cold beers.

“Wait,” Cindy said. “Should you be drinking while you’re on pain medication?”

“Don’t be a killjoy, Lois Lane. Besides, we’re all on pain meds but Claire,” Jill teased tiredly and the others felt relief sweep through them at the flash of Jill’s personality peeking through. “We got a doctor here.”

“One or two should be fine with what you’re taking. No more,” Claire informed her.

Jill rolled her eyes as she accepted her first cold bottle of the night. Cindy and Claire moved off to return to what they were doing, leaving Lindsay and Jill alone for the moment. Their gazes met and held.

“You didn’t have to come,” Lindsay said in a low tone, echoing Cindy’s words.

“When I got the call from Cindy, I almost didn’t.” Jill glanced at the board again. “Wasn’t crazy about seeing my own life scattered among all the victims up here.”

“Then why did you?” Lindsay asked in a huskier voice.

“Because I’m not letting you go this alone,” Jill answered honestly as she took her first sip of beer. “I should have been here the last time. Maybe we would have caught Kiss-Me-Not sooner. Hell, maybe you could have left your attic as a storage space instead of a shrine to a killer. Maybe your dad...” Jill paused, then took a deep breath. “We know who he is, Lindsay. Let’s put our heads together and stop the bastard before he hurts anyone else.”

“I never wanted you and Claire to be a part of this.” Lindsay glanced at Cindy. “Or her, either.” Her voice was weak.

“Honey,” Jill said as she stepped closer, the bruises on her face a little more apparent as she stepped into the sunlight filtering through the window. “We’ve always been a part of this. And we will never leave you to walk any of this path alone again.”

They were unaware that Claire and Cindy were watching with small, hesitant smiles as Jill and Lindsay clinked their bottles of beer together in wordless truce as past hurts were finally laid to rest.

“All right,” Claire announced, breaking the moment. “Let’s get started. We’ve got work to do.”

FADE TO BLACK