

Episode 7: Hiding In Plain Sight

Teaser

The sounds of two voices, loud and angry, slipped through an open third floor window. The echo drifted above and below the apartment where the combatants squared off against each other; their yells blending together, neither person taking any time to actually let the other speak. It seemed unlikely to anyone who heard the argument that either one of them would even be able to hear what the other one was saying.

The brunette exited the building and grinned. Everything was going perfectly according to plan.

They'd fallen for the trap and now it was only a matter of time before everything fell into place.

Joe Minor, who lived in the apartment directly below the fighting couple, walked from his car towards the building and glanced up just as something flew out of the third-floor window, apparently thrown in anger.

He exchanged a grimace of understanding with his neighbor as they approached each other on the sidewalk. "Are they winding up or winding down?" Joe asked. "Sounds like they've been going at it for a while."

"They actually just started, scarily enough. They sure built up really quickly, though."

"Great," Joe sighed. "Think it would be too rude if I go pound on their door and tell them to shut the hell up?"

"Just be careful," the brunette replied with a small smile. "You don't want them to turn things around and start yelling at you instead of each other."

"True," Joe admitted with a nod. "Well, have a good night. I just got home from work, but maybe I should follow your lead and just head out again."

"You have a good night, too. And good luck avoiding the racket."

With a last friendly wave to each other, they went their separate ways.

The shouting started to escalate, and the brunette's grin only widened at the sound of a plate shattering. It had certainly come in handy that they both had quite a temper.

Now, it was only a matter of waiting a bit longer.

Then, it would be time to strike.

Act I:

Claire smiled as she looked around the dinner table, her two boys engaged in a debate with Ed over the pros and cons of the Warriors' current point guard, Ellis Vanderholt, and their new rookie sensation, Max Freeman. Claire chimed in with a vote for Vanderholt, surprising the men of the family with the fact that she even knew who he was.

Her recent vacation had been good for all of them, Claire mused. A chance for herself to regroup a bit after all the myriad of recent traumas; a chance for Ed, Nate, and Derek to spend quality time with each other, just the three of them, without the stress that Claire sometimes couldn't help but bring home from her job.

She was just about to ask if they were ready for dessert when she was interrupted by the ringing of their phone. She thought about simply not answering, but as much as she might like to pretend otherwise at the moment, she couldn't just ignore things when work came calling. Maybe, if she were lucky, her first instinct would be wrong, anyway, and it wasn't even related to work.

"Hello?"

In any case, Claire's option of ignoring the call disappeared as she noticed that Nate had already run to answer the phone.

"Mom, it's for you!" he called out.

"Claire, hi, it's Tom," came the expected greeting. "Sorry to pull you away from your family this evening, but we need you downtown. A woman's been found dead in her apartment."

With a sigh, Claire asked for the location and jotted it down on a notepad that was lying near the phone. "Okay, I'll be down there soon as I can."

So much for the relaxing evening Claire had been looking forward to.

"We're talking to the neighbors now," Jacobi explained as Lindsay walked into Maya Castillo's apartment. "We're trying to find out if any of them saw or heard anything. So far, the most we've got is that she and her boyfriend tended to fight a lot."

"A suspect already, how nice. So where is he?" Lindsay asked, nodding to Claire as she entered Maya's bedroom and got her first look at the body, sprawled across the carpet, several gunshot wounds to the chest.

“We’re not sure, but we’re trying to track him down. They seemed to be at least partially cohabitating, so reason says that he’ll be back before too long, unless he has a particular reason to stay away.”

“Sounds good. Claire, what have you got for us?” Lindsay placed her hand on Claire’s shoulder and squatted down to get a closer look at the body.

“Looks pretty straightforward, to be honest,” Claire responded. “Two gunshot wounds, fired at close range. I’ll need to bring her back to the morgue before I can say anything decisively, but it’s looking like your basic shoot-and-run. Killer fired off two rounds point blank and then hightailed it out of here. I’d be surprised if this was premeditated. Those usually involve some kind of attempt to clean things up a bit more.”

Lindsay nodded as she stood back up, taking her time as she walked around the body, looking for anything that might stand out.

Jacobi opened his mouth to ask a question, but before he got the chance, another voice called out squeamishly. “Eww. I hate blood. Remind me again why I chose a career that involves looking at lots of blood?”

Everyone in the room turned to see that D.D.A. Jill Bernhardt had joined the group.

Claire smirked. “Because how else would you get to become friends with such cool people as all of us?”

Jill merely grimaced in response. “Who found her? Can I go talk to that person, who presumably isn’t in this room?”

Jacobi looked down at his notes before responding, “Brittany Devine, lives two floors down. Apparently she feeds the fish when Maya’s out of town, and there was a mix-up over some dates.”

“Great,” Jill responded, her eyes shifting away from the body. “I’ll go find Brittany, then.”

The blonde exhaled as she left the room. It wasn’t only to avoid the gruesome scene that she’d wanted to escape as quickly as possible. She hated to admit it, but things were still occasionally a little bit awkward with Lindsay since Jill had accidentally mistaken the inspector’s girlfriend for her own. They’d both pretended that the awkwardness wasn’t there, but...

Jill sighed. As if she didn’t already have enough women connected to her mess of a love life; Maggie and Denise were plenty, she certainly didn’t need to add Cindy to the mix.

She and Lindsay had gotten through plenty of tricky situations before, though, and she knew they'd be fine after this one as well.

It didn't take her long to locate the girl who'd found the body. Brittany Devine was a pretty, young woman, all long legs and wide, shell-shocked eyes. Probably living on her own for the first time, Jill guessed. What an introduction to independent living, coming across your dead neighbor.

"Brittany? Hi, I'm with the district attorney's office. I know it's been a rough night, but could you tell me what happened?" Jill smiled sympathetically, hoping that at least the girl wouldn't be too distressed to talk.

Big green eyes blinked slowly, before focusing on Jill. "Maya..." she began, and then lapsed into silence again. Jill simply waited, allowing Brittany to continue at her own pace. "Maya's dead, isn't she? She looked dead... I didn't look long, and it's not like I know what dead people look like, but... she really looked dead."

"I'm sorry you had to see her like that. Did you know her well?" Jill asked.

"Not really." Brittany took a deep breath, a bit of color returning to her cheeks. "We were friendly enough, but not really friends, if you know what I mean."

"And you fed her fish?" prompted Jill.

"Yeah, she's really particular about them. They're just fish, if you ask me, what do they care whether they get fed right on time or not, you know? But still, Maya hates – well, 'hated,' I guess I should say, huh?"

The 'lost' look returned to Brittany's features for a moment before she took a deep breath and continued, "Maya hated the thought of them going hungry for even a little while. So I don't know why, but somehow I had in mind that she was going to be out of town this weekend, and I was about to be late to feed them, so instead of double-checking my calendar, I just went up there. And that's when... That's when..."

"I only need to bother you for a little while longer," Jill interrupted, hoping to keep the girl on track. "What can you tell me about Maya's social life?"

"I got the impression that she worked a lot, but sometimes I'd see the same group of friends coming to stop by every once in a while. I never actually met any of them, though. You're really asking about Jeremy, though, I assume."

"Jeremy?"

The frown that crossed Brittany's face before she continued was only a preview of what was coming. "Yeah, Jeremy Grayson. He's Maya's boyfriend. I don't really know him personally or anything, but he and Maya have a tendency to fight. A *lot*. And they're the

kind of fights where everyone in the building knows about it because the two of them will scream at the top of their lungs at each other. Just a few days ago, they were going at it again.”

“Do you know what they were fighting about this time?” the attorney asked.

“Sometimes I can’t tell at all what they’re saying, but other times I can’t help but hear it all. This time, I think one of them thought the other was cheating on them or something like that, but I was trying not to listen in and don’t really know any details, so don’t quote me on that. I wasn’t here the whole time anyway.”

“Great, thank you for your help, Brittany. Let me know if you think of anything else,” Jill finished, handing over her business card.

Unknowingly copying Lindsay’s line of thought, Jill smiled inwardly at the possibility of a suspect so early on.

Maybe they’d actually catch a break with an easy case, for once. They could certainly use a few of those, given what still lay ahead.

Jill’s thoughts darkened as her mind turned to Pete Raynor and the nightmare that his upcoming trial was sure to be. Part of her wanted to simply let him rot in his jail cell forever, where neither she nor any of her friends would have to see or think about him ever again. The other part of her wanted to let him rot in hell instead.

Lindsay turned the key to Cindy’s apartment and was greeted with two of her favorite sounds: Martha barking happily and Cindy laughing.

Taking off her coat, Lindsay rounded the corner into the living room as the Border collie wagged her tail and hurried over as soon as she caught sight of the inspector.

Lindsay felt a brief flash of something – it felt suspiciously like jealousy, but she didn’t like to call it that – when she looked up from petting Martha to see that Cindy’s laughter was a result of talking with someone on the phone. It instantly disappeared, though, when the redhead turned and Cindy’s smile immediately widened at the sight of her lover. It was the smile that Cindy gave only to Lindsay, and the inspector knew for a fact that she would never tire of seeing it.

“Hey babe,” Lindsay whispered as Cindy crossed the room and brought their lips together, holding the phone away from her ear for a moment.

“Lindsay just got home. You want to talk to her?” Cindy spoke into the receiver. “Okay then, see you tomorrow, Jill.”

The flash of something reappeared for a second. *Keep cool*, Lindsay told herself. *It's not Jill or Cindy's fault that Jill had to go and hit her damn head. And hey, for once Jill actually showed some good taste.*

Lindsay knew that any feelings of jealousy were completely irrational, but sometimes she simply couldn't stop herself. Having a visual image of Jill wrapped up in Cindy's arms certainly didn't help either. Still, she resolved to let the issue go.

"That was Jill," Cindy explained unnecessarily. "Apparently you left your cell phone at the scene, so she was just calling to say that she has it."

Lindsay reached into her pocket, finding an emptiness that confirmed Jill's story. "I must have put it down after Tom called for an update. I should get a new one, anyway. Whenever I use it now, I keep thinking I smell peanut butter."

Cindy laughed, bringing a bright smile to Lindsay's lips. "So I don't see your computer out," the inspector continued. "Does that mean you finished your article on time?"

"Got it in just under the wire," confirmed Cindy. "I was going to follow after you, but then Jill called, so I knew I was too late for that. But now you're back, so you can tell me details of what I missed!"

Cindy sounded a bit too excited about the prospect of details from a crime scene, in Lindsay's opinion. Besides, she had a different activity for them in mind, and a much more pleasurable one at that.

"Details can wait, don't you think? We're not going to solve any murders tonight, and this one's all pretty boring at this point anyway."

"You know I never think the details are boring, Linz," Cindy protested. "And come on, I hate it when I have to miss crime scenes. Especially when the only reason is because my editor decided to move up a deadline at the last minute."

"How can you say 'especially' when this is the first time you've missed a crime scene for that reason?" Lindsay wondered aloud, still trying to keep her mind focused away from the details that Cindy wanted, in order to preserve her mood.

"Whatever, technicalities," Cindy countered with a wave of her hand. "Why are you refusing me details? The only reason I'm dating you is for the inside scoop; you should know that by now." The reporter smirked teasingly, the adoration in her eyes betraying her true motive for being with the inspector.

Lindsay merely stared at her girlfriend, a slow smile gracing her lips. "It's getting late," she muttered softly, reaching up to smooth a hand down Cindy's cheek. "Details can wait, don't you think?"

Cindy swallowed audibly as Lindsay's gaze shifted from amused to smoldering.

"Right," she finally agreed. "Who cares about details anyway?"

Without another word, Lindsay grabbed her lover's hand and gently but quickly led her down the hall and into the bedroom.

Martha followed along behind, only to come up short when the door was summarily shut in front of her. Apparently her people needed to be alone for a little while.

"Enjoy your vacation, Bernhardt?"

Jill looked up from her desk, surprised to see Denise at the door to her office. Maybe the idea that her boss had been avoiding her lately had simply been her imagination. Especially considering the fact that she'd actually asked a nice question, instead of throwing out her usual biting comment.

"Um, yes, I did. Thank you," Jill managed, after taking too long to respond and earning a raise in Denise's left eyebrow as a result.

"How nice for you. You may not have noticed, but you're not on vacation anymore." So much for a softer side of Denise, Jill thought to herself, as her boss glared at her. "I need to see more progress coming out of this office."

"Well, with all due respect, everything seems to be on track, so I'm not sure where you think I'm falling behind," Jill commented in confusion.

"This newest case from last night. I hear there's a suspect, but you haven't been able to find him yet. Why aren't you doing more about that?" asked Denise, arms crossed in front of her chest.

Jill merely frowned. "Well, because locating suspects isn't my job?"

"Don't get smart with me, Bernhardt," Denise practically growled.

Sighing, Jill continued, "We're giving him a bit more time to show up on his own, as well as continuing to try to find anyone who knows where he is. If nothing comes up, we'll secure a search warrant for his apartment. At the same time, detectives are looking for any other leads or suspects."

"Your *girlfriend* on this one?" The second word was practically spit out.

"Lindsay, my friend who happens to be a girl, is. Not my girlfriend, though," Jill replied calmly.

“Fine,” Denise huffed. “Make sure you stay professional at all times, especially when you do end up working with Detective Snow.” With that, the Acting District Attorney turned to leave the office.

Jill couldn't stop the look of puzzlement she shot towards Denise. “Have I ever-” Jill's sentence was interrupted by Denise shutting the door behind her. “Not been?” she finished with a sigh to the empty room. “Right. How crazy to think that a few kisses might change some things,” the attorney muttered to herself. “Everything's back to normal.”

A part of her realized that she was disappointed, but Jill refused to think any further on the confusing subject.

A few hours later, the club convened down at the morgue for Claire's report.

“Well, nothing strange has come up at this point. As I suspected, cause of death is certainly the two shots to the chest,” Claire explained.

Unconsciously, Lindsay reached out for Cindy's hand, holding on tight. Jill and Claire made eye contact with the redhead as well and smiled affectionately. They shared a quiet moment, no need for words, all extremely grateful that the club's personal experience with gunshot wounds hadn't ended as tragically as Maya Castillo's.

With a deep breath, Claire continued, “One bullet lodged in her stomach, while the other went straight through, creating some bone fragments along the way, which nicked at her heart, causing a relatively quick death. I believe that a single bullet was found on the scene?”

Lindsay nodded. “From a .357 Magnum revolver, yeah. We haven't found the actual gun yet, though.”

“Well that caliber matches the bullet that I recovered, so no mystery there,” added Claire.

“Time of death?” Jill asked. “How long had she been there before she was found?”

“She was most likely found within two hours, so I'm putting time of death around 6pm, or a little before that,” the medical examiner reported.

“And no one heard any gunshots going off?” Jill's forehead creased in confusion. “At that time of day, and especially considering there were two of them, you'd think that *someone* would have heard *something*.”

“Unless there happened to be some kind of siren, like from an ambulance or a police car, outside the building right at that time,” Cindy suggested, causing all three of her friends to turn and look at her, questioning looks all around.

“And where’d you get that idea?” Lindsay inquired.

“Police scanner,” was Cindy’s sole explanation, as if that was enough to clue everyone else in. When it became obvious that it wasn’t, Cindy continued. “Well, I’m hopelessly addicted to that thing, as you all know, and I also remember everything I hear, as you also all know, so... Around 5:30, yesterday, a call came in requesting an ambulance. Maya lived right by the hospital, right? So maybe, as luck would have it, she got shot right as the ambulance drove by.”

Lindsay could only shake her head in amazement. “You’re a handy girl to have around, you know that?”

Cindy beamed. “About time you finally admitted it.”

Act II:

A pair of eyes peeked through the curtains, carefully watching the comings and goings of the official personnel – various police officers, crime scene investigators, and technicians.

It was difficult, having to guess at the progress they might be making and resisting the urge to simply go up and ask someone. It might not set off any alarms – simply playing the role of a concerned neighbor, nothing more – but then again, it might. And there could be no risk of that, no matter what. They probably wouldn't actually say anything anyway, even if they were asked.

So no matter how maddening it was to keep still, there were simply no other options. Just keep quiet, don't make any waves.

Hide in plain sight.

“So tell us about Jeremy.”

In a tiny office located in the building that housed P&T Advertising, Jacobi and Lindsay sat across from Darren Wang, the supposed best friend of Maya's boyfriend, who remained unaccounted for.

“J's a good guy. We met freshman year of college, have been friends ever since. I lived in D.C. right after school, but moved out here six and a half years ago.”

“What was his relationship with Maya like?” Jacobi questioned.

A shadow of sadness crept over Darren's face. “It's awful, what happened to her. But I know Jeremy, he would never kill her,” he insisted.

“Just answer the question, Darren,” Lindsay prodded gently. “What was their relationship like?”

He ran a shaky hand through his hair and took a deep breath before responding. “They only met because of me, you know. Maya and I used to work together, before she switched companies. I was actually trying to get with her at one point myself, but Jeremy was always quite the charmer and swooped in before I could make my move.” With a sigh, he went on, “But they were good together. Sure, they each had more of a temper than was good for them, but they loved each other, no doubt about it.”

“Were you jealous?”

Darren looked confused for a moment, before it clicked. “What, of Jeremy, you mean? Because he got Maya and I didn’t?”

At the inspectors’ expectant looks, the graphic designer raised his left hand, fingers spread, obviously meant to show off the ring around his finger. “I’m happily married now,” he explained simply, as if that alone made him immune to jealousy.

“That may be, but it doesn’t answer the question,” Jacobi pointed out. “So were you jealous of Jeremy or not?”

“No, I was not jealous of Jeremy,” Darren stated, as a hint of irritation crept into his tone at having to answer the question twice. “I liked Maya, but we never would have really worked. She was too high maintenance for me, and I’m guessing that I wasn’t ambitious enough for her.”

“And were those issues with Maya and Jeremy as well? You say they each had too much of a temper; what did they fight about?” Lindsay wanted to know.

“To be perfectly honest, the list of things that the two of them could argue about is too long to get into,” Darren admitted. “It seemed like every other time I talked with J, there was a new issue with him and Maya, or the re-occurrence of an old issue. They always made up, though,” he hurried to add. “They didn’t let things fester between them or anything like that, they didn’t hold grudges.”

“What were they fighting about recently?”

“Uh, I believe that the last thing I heard about was that they couldn’t decide whether their next vacation together should be through wine country, which is what he wanted, or to Yosemite, which is what she wanted. That was about a week ago, I think.”

Suspecting that Darren certainly wouldn’t bring it up on his own, Lindsay bluntly asked, “Were either of them cheating on the other?”

The graphic designer’s eyes widened, but Lindsay couldn’t decide whether it was in sincere surprise or in anxiety.

“Cheating?” he repeated. “No, not that I knew of. Where’d you hear that?”

Ignoring the question, Jacobi went on, “Where is Jeremy now?”

“I honestly don’t know,” Darren replied. “Sometimes after arguments with Maya, he just goes off somewhere to cool down and doesn’t tell anyone where he’s going ahead of time. And I’ve tried calling his cell but haven’t gotten an answer.”

Before another question could be asked, Lindsay’s phone interrupted the proceedings.

“I’m kind of busy right now, Tom,” she stated gruffly into the phone, after having glanced down at the caller ID.

Her annoyance at the disruption faded away, however, as Tom explained the reason behind the call.

“We’ve found the murder weapon, Linz.”

Jill was the last to arrive at Papa Joe’s, sliding into their regular booth next to Claire.

“Welcome,” Claire handed the blonde a martini they’d already ordered for her. “We’re talking about guns,” the M.E. explained casually. She was always amused by what went for “normal” conversation topics within their group.

Lindsay and Cindy each smiled at the blonde before Lindsay continued where she’d left off. “So, the revolver was found stashed in some bushes, a good ten blocks away from the apartment.”

“Meaning he leaves the building on foot,” Jill jumped right in, not missing a beat.

Cindy interrupted, “Or drives away, but then pulls over to dump the murder weapon.”

“And he just ditches the gun when he feels he’s far enough away from the crime scene,” Jill finished speculating. “You can say for sure that it’s the right gun?” She looked questioningly at Lindsay.

Lindsay nodded, taking a sip of her drink. “Yep, we got enough for experts to verify that it was the gun that was used to shoot Maya. And to make matters nice and tidy for us, the gun is registered to Jeremy Grayson.”

“So Jeremy has motive, presuming the last argument they had was bad enough, a weapon, he was seen at the apartment that morning, at least... All we need now is the man himself,” Cindy concluded.

“What did you get from talking to the best friend?” Claire asked Lindsay.

“Nothing much,” the inspector admitted. “There was something kind of twitchy about him, though.” She paused. “It’s possible that Maya was cheating on Jeremy with him. That would put him cheating on his wife, too. Or maybe that’s totally wrong, and it’s as simple him thinking or even knowing that Jeremy killed Maya, and he’s trying to protect the guy.”

“Meaning we may or may not have a second suspect?” Claire chimed in. “Maybe Maya was going to either tell about her affair with the best friend or break things off, so he kills her. And hey, maybe the reason Jeremy hasn’t shown up is because this Darren guy killed

him too, for some reason – jealousy, self-defense after Jeremy found out about the affair; when you think about it, we’ve got motive for him, too.”

“He didn’t strike me as the murdering type,” added Lindsay, “but I guess you really never know.”

Silence took over as each woman considered the case, before Jill spoke up again. “Well enough about murder anyway, a girl can only think about death for so long in a day. So what about you lovebirds,” she gestured to her friends across the table. “You found a new place to stay yet, or you both still shacking up at Cindy’s?”

“We’re looking at some places later this week, but still ‘shacking up’ for now,” Cindy responded. “I’ve found some places that I think look good, Lindsay’s found some more that she likes... So we’ll check them out, see if we can find one together.”

“I can’t believe you guys are *moving in* together!” Jill exclaimed. “I mean, I *can*, because you’re perfect. And you’re already living together anyway. But still! You two better not go all ‘old married couple’ on me. No offense, Claire, but I really need to know that there will still be some friends around where there’s at least the *possibility* of convincing them to come out with me.”

“Why? You thinking you’re going to be single again sometime soon?” Lindsay asked hopefully. “Are you and Hollywood having problems?”

Jill sighed. “No, we’re fine. Sorry to disappoint you all.”

“You deserve more than ‘fine,’ Jill.” Cindy smiled gently. “And this isn’t even about our disliking Maggie.” At Jill’s disbelieving look, Cindy shrugged and admitted, “Okay, it kind of is about that. But *still!* It just seems like there are so many other people out there who’d be better suited for you. I mean, even *Denise*, of all people, has been warming up to you, and if you can make her like you, then you can make *anyone* like you!”

Jill almost choked on her drink and her face flushed quickly, due to both the sting of the alcohol and her surprise at just how close Cindy had unknowingly come to her little secret.

Unable to hold back a small laugh of amusement, Claire tried to cover it with a cough, as she then patted Jill on the back.

Lindsay looked suspiciously back and forth between the two women across from her. “What was that all about?” the inspector questioned.

“*Nothing*. Nothing at all,” Jill hurried to respond.

Cindy had picked up on her friends’ odd reactions as well. “Ooh, secrets. And you know something!” she accused Claire. “That’s not fair!”

Claire remained silent, choosing to merely look pointedly towards the attorney.

Knowing that her friends wouldn't let this go until she spilled the details, Jill rolled her eyes and gave up the pretense. "Okay, okay, fine. Denise *may* have kissed me a little while ago."

It was Lindsay's turn to choke on her drink, her eyes widening in surprise.

"Denise did *what*?"

Figuring she might as well get it all out there, Jill ignored Lindsay and continued, "And I *may* have kissed her at some point after that."

Claire looked down into her Cosmo as she murmured, "Not to mention the sex dream." It really wasn't her place to say anything, but in Claire's opinion, it was about time everyone else got in on the secret.

Cindy grinned gleefully. "Who had a sex dream? You? About Denise?" she asked Jill. "This is so exciting!"

Jill could feel her anxiety increasing as the conversation went on. "No," she pronounced. "This is *not* 'exciting.' She's my boss! And I'm dating someone else! And... Christ, she's *Denise!*"

Claire reached over, placed her palm over the back of Jill's hand, and squeezed. "So?" she asked soothingly. "You know, I can't say I saw it coming, but you two could actually be good for each other."

Jill took a deep breath and closed her eyes, her mind suddenly flooded with the still-vivid memories – the feel of Denise's warm body pressed against her, the taste of wine-soaked lips, the scent of Denise's perfume that lingered in the air after the Acting District Attorney silently left Jill's office.

"I don't suppose Maggie knows about you and Denise, though, does she?" Cindy inquired, now more subdued in the face of her friend's obvious confusion.

Jill's eyes opened again at the mention of her girlfriend. "No, she doesn't, and I don't care how much you all don't like Maggie, if one of you lets this slip to her, I'll... I don't know, I'll egg your cars." She paused, before adding, "There is no 'me and Denise' anyway. She treated me like shit today, like nothing's changed."

Lindsay, Claire, and Cindy exchanged a look at the noticeable sound of regret in Jill's voice.

“Don’t forget that this is Denise that we’re talking about, Jill,” Claire said lightly. “The woman certainly isn’t used to appearing vulnerable, especially not to you, so it only makes sense that she’d try to build up those walls again. You can’t expect her to turn all warm and fuzzy overnight.”

Jill frowned. She had to admit, the thought of a “warm and fuzzy” Denise just felt strange.

Lindsay was still having trouble wrapping her mind around this new bit of information. “Can I just check that I heard things right? Denise *kissed* you? And you kissed her?”

Her three friends simply rolled their eyes in amusement and ignored her.

“But I’m sure that if you put in the effort, you could definitely tear those walls down,” Cindy added with an encouraging smile.

“You’re all just biased because you don’t like Maggie,” Jill protested. Though she couldn’t deny the effect Denise had on her, Jill nevertheless had honest feelings for Maggie as well. “If you just gave her a chance, I bet you’d actually like her. So she made a mistake. A big one. But none of us are exactly perfect either, are we?”

The resulting silence was answer enough.

After several moments without anyone speaking, Claire raised her glass. “Now don’t think this means that I’m happy about your current choice in dating partner. Because I’m not. But still, you know we love you no matter what, and always will. So here’s to imperfection, then.”

Jill smiled gratefully, happy for the sound of four glasses clinking together.

Cindy walked up the steps to the Hall of Justice, when she suddenly felt a burning pain explode from her chest. It was enough to make her stumble and then immediately stop her forward movement, able only to hold out one hand in front of her, as though she might fall, as the other reached to clutch at the center of her chest, her fingers splayed as widely as possible as she tried to push the pain back inside.

Then, suddenly, she was falling, falling backwards, as if in slow motion. It felt like she’d never stop falling until, just as suddenly as before, she did.

Claire and Lindsay hovered hazily above her, with Jill appearing moments later over Lindsay’s shoulder. They were saying something – well, their mouths were moving, at least – but Cindy couldn’t make out the words.

Couldn't hear anything beyond the pounding of her heart and the blood rushing through her ears.

She looked down at herself, sprawled across the steps. Blood pouring out of her body.

Then someone pressed the rewind button, and it happened all over again. This time she looked up before she fell, just in time to see Charlie Gifford standing at the top of the steps, gun raised in front of him and pointing directly toward her.

Then, suddenly, she was falling, falling backwards into the abyss.

Hazy faces, unheard voices. Blood rushing out of her body.

Rewind.

This time Pete Raynor stood at the top of the steps, a large grin spreading across his face. He pointed a bouquet of white roses towards her, and a bullet shot out from within the too-perfect petals.

For the first time, she could actually hear someone speak.

"You'll never be rid of me," he said. "Neither one of you will be. Not completely. Never."

His grin only widened as he turned to hand the roses to Lindsay, who stood beside him, smiling, dressed in her wedding gown.

There was a scream. Cindy thought it might have come from her own lips.

Then, suddenly, she was falling, falling backwards, always falling backwards.

She blinked, slowly, and when she opened her eyes, she was still falling, but Lindsay was gone from her view.

Cindy felt a burst of panic, Lindsay's disappearance causing more worry than the near-blinding pain in her chest.

But then the series of events shifted yet again, this time for the better; this time, someone broke her fall, as Cindy felt a warm body reach around her, instead of the cold, hard steps.

That comfortable warmth, familiar smell; Cindy finally felt herself relax back into Lindsay's arms.

She wasn't bleeding anymore as she regained her feet, and Cindy turned to find her lover, who was no longer wearing the wedding dress but was instead clothed in her favorite

combination of jeans and leather jacket. Lindsay smiled reassuringly. Even without words, the message of 'you're safe now' came perfectly across loud and clear. Unable to help herself, Cindy simply took a step forward, wrapping her arms tightly around Lindsay's body and burying her face in the soft folds of Lindsay's jacket.

When she pulled back, Lindsay's expression had shifted from comforting to concerned.

Cindy was about to ask what was wrong, when Lindsay began to speak first, reaching out to lightly shake the redhead by the shoulders. "Cindy? Cindy, baby, can you hear me? Are you okay?"

The reporter blinked in confusion. What was going on?

Before Cindy's very eyes, Lindsay started to fade away, along with all the additional people and surroundings around her.

Brown eyes blinked open, and Cindy found herself lying in her own bed, an anxious-looking Lindsay at her side.

"What happened?" she asked uncertainly. Images flashed through her head, but she couldn't quite make sense of any of it.

"You were having a bad dream," Lindsay explained, an element of relief in her eyes, now that Cindy was awake. Her hand brushed some hair out of Cindy's face, and then ran soothingly up and down her lover's arm.

Then it all came back, and Cindy felt her breath hitch at the memory.

The pain. The panic...

Pete. Cindy couldn't stop the shudder that ran through her body at the image of Pete and that bouquet of roses, a single bullet emerging and hurtling straight towards her.

Something about this latest gunshot victim must have stirred up some old emotions related to her own experience, with all the Pete-related-trauma added in for good measure.

The end of Pete's upcoming trial couldn't come soon enough, in Cindy's opinion. In spite of dream-Pete's warning, maybe then they could finally be rid of him and his hold on their lives.

"It was awful," Cindy whispered. "But I'm okay now," she reassured Lindsay with a smile. "Even in my dreams, you always make sure that I'm okay."

“Yeah, so I’m thinking a definite ‘no’ on that one,” Lindsay declared, as she and Cindy headed back to Lindsay’s jeep after another apartment viewing.

“And I wholeheartedly concur,” Cindy agreed. “I mean, I’m certainly on the smaller side of people sizes, but even *I* thought that was too small.

What had been described as a “cozy” downtown apartment turned out to be so small that Lindsay felt like she could barely extend her arms fully when standing in the kitchen, and there was only enough room in the bedroom for a twin bed and a small dresser. Cindy had jokingly suggested they get bunk beds again, like in the cabin.

They were gradually learning the lingo and euphemisms for apartment hunting, though. “Cozy” meant really small. “Above average condition” was an indication that, although the place might look like it was in pretty good shape, it probably was in desperate need of a new paint job and new carpets. “Bayside view” implied that there was one window where a sliver of water could barely be seen between two other buildings that otherwise blocked most of the view. “Vintage décor” was code for tacky retro furniture and lamps. And “low maintenance front yard” meant that the grass was paved over with concrete.

Needless to say, apartment hunting was not going too well.

“Okay, so how about one more today?” Cindy suggested. “Then we’ll resume our search for the missing boyfriend.”

Lindsay smiled in amusement. “You make us sound like Sherlock Holmes, or an Agatha Christie story – The Search for the Missing Boyfriend.”

“Well, you’ll crack the case, no question. I have no doubt that you could outwit old Sherlock or Miss Marple any day,” Cindy joked as they climbed out of the car to view their next prospect.

Surprisingly, they found it to be much better than the others; although expectations had certainly lowered over the course of the previous showings, this one actually seemed to be a lot closer to matching their criteria.

“I could set up a little office for myself in here,” Cindy called out, envisioning where she’d put her desk, and figuring there’d still be enough room right next to it for her filing cabinet.

Lindsay strolled slowly through the empty rooms, simply taking in the layout of the place. There actually *was* a nice view from this one; no false advertising for once. There was plenty of space, too. As much as they loved each other, they both knew that stuffing two strong, independent women, plus a dog, inside a cramped apartment wasn’t too good of an idea.

It was located relatively close to both the Hall and the Register, but still far enough away that they wouldn't have to spend all their time, both living and working, in the same part of the city.

Of the two of them, Cindy always had the more vivid imagination, but Lindsay could definitely see them there; see this space becoming something that would represent them both.

For Lindsay, "home" was wherever Cindy was. Even before the explosion forced her hand and necessitated her move, Lindsay's old apartment had already stopped feeling like a home. Too many bad things had happened there. Too many complicated memories. But still, Cindy's apartment wasn't fully "home," either; Lindsay knew that Cindy didn't see it that way, but Lindsay couldn't help but feel like an intruder most of the time. Lindsay couldn't help but feel like it was still very much Cindy's own space, and Lindsay just happened to be there too.

While she hadn't been too excited about the actual task of finding a new place for them to live, Lindsay suddenly found herself feeling almost giddy at the prospect of an impending fresh start for the two of them. It felt more real, now. Now that they'd found a place that actually seemed like it might work.

Lindsay found Cindy standing in front of a large window in what would probably be considered as the living room. The inspector slid up behind her lover, wrapping her arms around Cindy's waist, and smiled at the way the redhead instantly relaxed back into her body.

They made eye contact in the reflection in the window. "Martha would like it here too," Cindy declared knowingly. "She could sit all day by this window and watch all the squirrels in that tree."

Lindsay laughed. "You're right, she *would* enjoy that."

"Plus..." Cindy began, before twisting her head to glance back at the realtor. A blush began to creep across Cindy's face, and she bit off the rest of her sentence.

"Plus what?" Lindsay asked, lightly poking the reporter in the side.

Cindy squirmed away from the poke, before adding quietly, "Plus, they have a really big shower here."

The statement could have easily been seen as entirely innocent, if it weren't for Cindy's rapidly spreading blush.

Lindsay grinned wolfishly. "Oh yeah?" Her voice dropped to a deep, sexy rasp, and her grin only widened when Cindy shivered slightly in her arms. "Well, that's something we could certainly get some use out of."

Cindy could only swallow audibly in response.

Lindsay merely smiled again and leaned down to place a light kiss on Cindy's flushed cheek.

"Come on," she began regretfully. "We should get back to the real world. As much as I'd love to just stay and plan our house together...or give that large shower a try," Lindsay added in a whisper, unable to stop herself.

With a regretful sigh, Cindy turned around within Lindsay's arms. "But there are suspects to find and crimes to solve. I know." She reached up to kiss Lindsay soundly, and then pulled away, taking another quick look around the place before going to speak to the realtor.

They wouldn't decide on a place in one day, but things were definitely looking up. Soon, Lindsay knew, she'd have a real home again, and this one was already guaranteed to be so much better than the last.

I really must be crazy, the blonde D.D.A. thought to herself.

Maggie had come by her office to ask her out to dinner that night, and Jill had been happy to accept, but she'd felt guilty about being caught daydreaming. Maggie had no idea that, just before she'd entered the other woman's office, Jill's thoughts hadn't been occupied by her, but rather a certain Asian lawyer instead.

The brunette was everything that Jill should want – at times sweet and kind, at times adventurous and something of a bad-ass, not to mention sexy and beautiful. And to add icing on the cake, she seemed to really like Jill and genuinely care for her.

Aside from the whole accusing-Lindsay fiasco, Maggie was doing everything right; just like Luke had done.

Luke and Hanson before, now Maggie and Denise. Certainly she and Maggie were nowhere close to as far along as she and Luke had been, and she and Denise hadn't actually slept together or anything, but other than those two exceptions, the similarities were somewhat disconcerting. Maybe Jill could never simply be satisfied with committing fully to just one person; maybe she always needed someone off to the side, someone outside the relationship to fantasize about.

Then again, maybe it was all in her head, and Jill could be normal like everyone else, if she only tried harder.

Or maybe Jill should just find some nice shrink to date for a while. Get some free therapy out of it, and maybe even find some real answers along the way.

All of this passed through the blonde's head quickly, as she simultaneously worked out plans with Maggie.

They were interrupted, however, by a quick knock at the door, and Cindy walked in before waiting for an answer.

The reporter opened her mouth to speak, only to come up short when she noticed that Jill wasn't alone.

"You know," Jill began conversationally, "you should really learn to actually wait for an answer when you knock on a door, Cindy. You never know what you might walk in on. It might not be open for public viewing." She glanced suggestively at Maggie before turning to wink at the obviously flustered redhead.

"Right," Cindy muttered, a blush rapidly spreading across her face at Jill's insinuation. "I'll leave you two to...whatever, then."

It might make her a bad friend, but Jill had to admit that teasing Cindy always amused her to no end.

She waited a beat before calling out to the retreating reporter, "We've been perfectly decent, Cindy, you have nothing to worry about. So come on, what's up?"

Somewhat warily, Cindy turned back and once again approached her friend, with barely a glance towards Maggie, who sat perched on the corner of Jill's desk.

"Sorry to bother you. I was just wondering if I could snag you for a ride, actually," Cindy explained. "I need to get back home, but Lindsay's busy doing inspector-y things and Maggie's in the shop getting inspected."

"Maggie's what?" For the first time since Cindy had entered the room, Inspector Snow spoke up. Jill couldn't help but crack up at the understandably confused look on her girlfriend's face.

"Oh no, not you," Cindy hastened to clarify, awkwardly waving her hand in front of her and finally making actual eye contact with the inspector. "I'm talking about my car. My car's name is Maggie." She paused, but felt the need to add, "I named her way before I ever met you."

"Right. Okay then, good to know," Maggie responded with an arched eyebrow.

Turning back to Jill, Cindy repeated her request. "So do you have a bit of time to spare, or are you busy?"

“If you can wait until after 5, then I’m your girl,” Jill replied. “Before that, I’m really sorry, but I have this deposition I need to get through, and I can’t really afford to take off from here until I’m done.”

“No problem, I totally understand. Just thought I’d give it a shot,” responded Cindy. “I’ll just take a cab or something.”

“I’ve got some time, so I’ll drive you,” Maggie spoke up again.

“You’ll what?” Both Cindy and Jill asked in unison, turning to stare at the brunette in surprise.

Maggie chuckled at the twin reactions. “I’ll drive you,” she repeated. “Don’t worry, I’m perfectly harmless. I may have horrible cop instincts, as you like to imply, Cindy, but I think I can manage to give you a ride. If you can handle being in my presence for more than a few minutes, that is.”

“Um, thanks. You really don’t have to do that, though,” Cindy finally replied after a long pause. “A cab is fine, really.”

Maggie shrugged. “I can get you where you’re going quicker and cheaper, but if you decide that you want to waste your time and money just because you can’t stand me, then be my guest.”

Cindy sighed and glanced at Jill, who mouthed “Don’t be stupid” at her.

Practically sulking, Cindy finally agreed. “Fine. Thanks for offering,” she said grudgingly.

“Great!” Jill smiled, clapping her hands together. “Now you two can bond!” In spite of her statement, Jill placed the likelihood of that happening right around 2%.

Cindy and Maggie looked at each other guardedly, and then spoke simultaneously.

“I don’t think so.”

“Don’t count on it.”

“Tox screen came back,” Claire declared, as soon as Lindsay walked into the M.E.’s office.

“Anything interesting?”

“Potentially, but not necessarily,” Claire answered somewhat cryptically. At Lindsay’s questioning look, she continued, “Maya had a lot of alcohol in her system. Way above the legal limit.”

A puzzled expression came over Lindsay’s face. “That’s weird. We didn’t find any empty bottles or cans at her apartment.”

“Yeah, I wasn’t sure, but didn’t think that you had,” Claire nodded.

Lindsay remained quiet for a moment, gears turning. “You’re positive about those results?” she inquired.

“Tox screen doesn’t lie. Your girl Maya was drunk as a skunk.”

Beginning to slowly pace, Lindsay went through her thought process aloud. “So what does that mean? It’s possible that she was out drinking before coming home and getting killed. But a neighbor says he saw her enter the building around 4pm. That’s enough time to get drunk at home, but not much time to leave and drink elsewhere, then come back and be dead by 6. Second possibility is that someone got her drunk and took the bottles with him for some reason.”

She paused for a bit before continuing. “If the killer did that, though, that doesn’t fit our theory. If we’re dealing with a jealous and angry boyfriend who kills his girlfriend as a ‘crime of passion’ kind of thing, why would he get her drunk beforehand, and then dispose of the bottles?”

Claire had no answer for Lindsay, and she had a feeling the question was rhetorical anyway.

“It might not actually mean anything that she was drunk,” Lindsay went on. “But it’s odd, right?”

“Definitely odd,” Claire confirmed.

Before Lindsay could continue to piece the puzzle together, her phone rang and she quickly glanced at its display.

“Jacobi, I want to talk something through with you,” Lindsay began.

“Linz, we can talk about whatever it is later, but right now, I think you should come on back up to your desk,” responded Jacobi.

“What? Why?”

There was a pause at the other end. “Just come on up. You’ll understand when you get here.”

Frowning, Lindsay hung up, and then turned back to Claire. “Something’s happened. I need to get back to my desk.”

“Go ahead. We’re not going to figure this out right now anyway.”

With a nod of thanks to Claire, Lindsay hurried out of her friend’s office and back up to the bullpen.

When she got there, she found Jacobi sitting with a man, probably in his early thirties. He looked vaguely familiar, but Lindsay couldn’t quite place him. He stood shifting back and forth on the balls of his feet, hands stuffed nervously into his pockets.

He looked up as Lindsay approached. “Inspector Boxer?” he inquired.

“Yeah,” she drawled out slowly, still trying to figure out what was going on. “How can I help you?”

The man cleared his throat, glancing over at Jacobi and then back at Lindsay.

“My name’s Jeremy Grayson.”

Act III:

A figure paced back and forth in a darkened room.

What was taking the police so long?? The case had been set up perfectly for them, practically dropped right in their lap.

But still, no arrest had been made. Were they all just stupid and incompetent, or did they suspect that something else was going on? But how could they suspect anything, when everything had been totally accounted for? There should be no reason to suspect anyone other than Jeremy.

Trying to act normal all the time was getting increasingly difficult, though. The urge to bolt was simultaneously getting stronger.

But no, just wait a little longer. Have to see the whole thing through.

The two occupants in Maggie Snow's car sat silently, each staring out the window, away from each other.

Maggie had attempted to make some small talk earlier, but while it usually seemed like the red-headed reporter would never shut up, the opposite seemed to be true in this case. Maggie was done trying to make nice.

Maggie did break the silence, however, as they sat at a red light.

"Hey, isn't that one of the guys Tex interviewed for her latest case?" she asked, noticing a man hurrying down the sidewalk, looking conspicuously around him.

That caught Cindy's attention. "Who?" she asked. "And how would you know?"

Maggie pointed him out. "Jill showed me the case file, and there was a picture of him. I'm good with faces," she explained. "That's the suspect's best friend, I'm pretty sure. He sure looks kind of sketchy, doesn't he?"

Both women watched him for a moment, before the light turned green and Maggie drove on through the intersection.

"Let me out," Cindy demanded after a beat.

"What?" Maggie asked, confused.

"I said for you to let me out," Cindy repeated. "I want to go follow that guy. He looks like he's up to something, and he was mentioned as a possible suspect."

Maggie could only laugh. “Your girlfriend would totally kill me if I let you go off on your own to follow some strange guy.”

The reporter only debated with herself briefly before adding, “So come with me, then.”

“What?” Maggie repeated. Jill had told her about Cindy’s tendency for impulsive behavior, but this was her first actual experience with it.

“Come with me! You’re right, Linz will kill you if you let me go alone, so come with me. If he’s doing something he shouldn’t be, and we help with the case, then you’ll earn some extra brownie points. And let’s be honest, you could really use some of those. But if he’s doing something totally harmless, we simply don’t have to tell anyone about it, and no harm done.”

Maggie certainly wasn’t sure about this, but Cindy did have a point. And an opportunity to go after a potential suspect like this, out on the streets, was always tempting.

Able to see that Maggie was seriously considering it, Cindy pushed on. “Come on, you know you want to. Plus, you’ll make Jill happy because you can tell her that we spent some quality time with each other!”

Maggie wondered in amusement if anyone ever actually said “no” to the persuasive reporter. Without saying anything at first, she pulled her car over to the side of the road and parked.

“Okay,” she declared. “I’m in.”

Jeremy Grayson sat alone in an interview room, anxiously bouncing his leg up and down as he waited for something to happen.

On the other side of the two-way mirror, Lindsay, Jacobi, Tom, and Jill stood watching him.

“So how are we going to do this?” Lindsay asked her partner. “Come right at him with the accusations, or ease into it?”

“Ease into it, I’d say,” Jacobi voiced his opinion. “He’s looked pretty spooked since he got here. So we start off slow, wait for him to let his guard down briefly, then go for the kill.”

Jill agreed. “I’m with Jacobi. And be careful with how fast you go at him, because I think we’d all rather have this chat without a defense attorney showing up and not letting him say anything,” she advised.

Both inspectors nodded, before going to join Jeremy. As soon as they entered the room, his head popped up from where he'd been leaning it against the table.

"Is she really dead?" he demanded right away, his voice a mixture of pain and disbelief.

Lindsay nodded curtly. "She is, I'm sorry."

Jacobi took a seat on the other side of the table, while Lindsay stayed standing, leaning casually back against the door, arms crossed in front of her chest.

"How'd you hear about it?" Jacobi questioned. "And why did you decide to come in?"

Jeremy ran a shaky hand over his short hair, taking a deep breath before responding. "I, uh... I'd missed a bunch of calls from a friend of mine, and when I called him back, he told me. Told me that she was dead. Told me that you think I killed her."

His voice trembled, and then broke at the end. Lindsay cynically wondered how long he'd been practicing that show of emotion.

Jeremy looked down at his own hand, making a fist and grimacing slightly. Looking over at him, Lindsay noticed that his knuckles were a brighter shade of red than they should have been.

"Get into a fight recently?" she asked nonchalantly.

"When Darren told me..." He lapsed into silence for a bit. "I didn't believe him. I *couldn't*. I mean, I'd just seen her alive. So I met up with him in person, and he said it again. And... I'm not proud of this now, but I punched him. I just didn't want to hear – couldn't bear to hear – the things he was saying."

"Where have you been, Mr. Grayson?" Jacobi questioned next, his voice remaining soft and calm.

"I have a sailboat I like to take out when I've got a lot on my mind," he mumbled, looking down at the floor. "I keep it stocked so I can stay out there for a while and have plenty of food and water and whatever. I was out of cell phone range, though, so that's how I missed everything."

"When did you leave shore?"

"What day is today, Thursday?" At Jacobi's nod, he continued, "Well, so I guess it was Tuesday night, then."

Lindsay and Jacobi shared a look. The night Maya was killed. How convenient.

“Don’t you have a job, Mr. Grayson?” Lindsay asked. “How can you just take off for a few days in the middle of the week?”

“I’m self-employed, so I set my own hours. I’ll work some weekends to make up for this.”

“So what time did you leave on Tuesday?” inquired Jacobi.

Jeremy shrugged. “I don’t know, around 8 at night, or somewhere around there?”

“I don’t know much about sailing, but seems like that would be pretty late for heading out,” Lindsay commented. “Any reason you decided to leave then, and not the next morning?”

Jeremy sat still for a while, staring unseeingly at the table in front of him, clearly lost in thought. The inspectors let him be for a bit, until Jacobi cleared his throat, causing Jeremy to sit up straighter and meet their eyes once again.

“Maya and I fought a lot, I’m sure you’ve heard that by now,” Jeremy admitted frankly. “We’d had a big fight on Monday, and then the issue came up again the next day.” He sighed and continued, “God, that sounds really bad now, doesn’t it? So on Tuesday, I went for a long run to try to clear my head. That didn’t work, so I went home and watched some mindless television for a while. Then I drove around aimlessly for a while. Nothing was working, so even though it was on the later side, I decided to take the boat out anyway, because that almost always succeeds in taking my mind off things and relaxing me. The moon was clear that night and I’ve sailed in the dark plenty of times before, so the time of night wasn’t an issue.”

Lindsay wondered idly if there were video cameras down at the docks to verify his story. “What had that last fight been about?” she asked.

Once again, Jeremy merely sat quietly at first, until Lindsay had to speak up again. “Mr. Grayson, we’re trying to find out who killed your girlfriend. Wasting time is not something that we want to do right now.”

Finally, he seemed to snap out of his thoughtful daze.

He ran his hand over his face before replying softly, “I thought she might be cheating on me.”

“Why’d you think that?” Lindsay pushed.

“There was some guy from work she’d been talking with a lot more, recently. Not just about work stuff either, they’d actually text each other regularly. I didn’t like it, but she said they were just friends, and I believed her for a while. Then on Monday, I...”

He paused, taking a deep, pained breath before continuing. “She keeps space in her closet for some of my clothes, and I found a men’s shirt there that wasn’t mine. I figured that he’d been there and left his shirt for whatever reason, and she’d washed it and just put it in there, without realizing it wasn’t mine.”

“And what did she say about it when you confronted her?” asked Jacobi.

Jeremy let out a short, pained laugh. “Oh, she denied it. Said that I was delusional. Paranoid. She tried to explain it away by saying that she’d never touched any of the shirts in there, and it was probably one of those shirts that my mother had given me, but I never wear, so that’s why I hadn’t recognized it. It can’t be true, though. If I never wear it, why would I keep it? She had nothing to say to that. Just yelled at me for not trusting her.”

“Man, that doesn’t look too good. Must have made you real angry,” Jacobi prodded. Time to get to the hard stuff.

“Yeah, of course it did,” Jeremy agreed, his voice rising in volume for the first time. “She was cheating on me and didn’t even have the decency to admit it.”

Lindsay moved from her position by the door, starting to slowly circle around the room. “So you leave there Monday night, understandably pissed off. You have a night to mull it over, let it stew in your head for a while.”

Jacobi took over. “So you head back the next day, still pissed off, and she *still* won’t admit to anything, will she? No, she still keeps to that high road, maintaining that she did nothing wrong, when you *know* that she did. That can’t be easy to take. Even the most reasonable of guys wouldn’t deal with that well.”

“So what’s a guy like you to do?” Lindsay went on. “You certainly couldn’t let her get away with that. So in a moment of anger, you kill her, flee the scene, go home to pack up some stuff, and then head out to your boat, to make sure no one finds you for a few days and you can figure things out, right?”

Jeremy, whose face had been getting redder and redder as the inspectors carried on, finally exploded. “I didn’t kill her!” he yelled, pounding a fist down on the table.

Lindsay and Jacobi both remained perfectly calm in spite of the outburst. Jacobi merely shrugged. “Right, our little story doesn’t make any sense at all. I’m sure there’s a much better explanation out there, right?”

“I want a lawyer,” Jeremy grumbled darkly, studiously ignoring the two inspectors as he simply stared at the wall opposite him.

Tilting her head at him, Lindsay muttered, “Yeah, you’re gonna need one.”

Cindy and Maggie walked side by side, trailing Darren Wang from a safe distance.

“Is that supposed to be your ‘stealthy’ walk?” Maggie asked in amusement, noting Cindy’s habit of almost ducking every time Darren seemed like he might be turning to look behind him. “Bit of advice – when you try too hard to not be seen, people only notice you more. Remember, that’s why I noticed this guy in the first place. He was acting weird. Just act normal, and no one will take a second look.”

Cindy sighed. “I’m usually better at this. It’s different, doing it with a cop, who’s actually been trained in tailing people.”

“Just keep reminding yourself that I’m horrible at my job,” Maggie suggested with a self-deprecating wink.

“I never said you were horrible at your job,” Cindy replied somewhat guiltily. “Just that you made a really bad judgment call when you decided that, of all people, Lindsay Boxer was a prime suspect.”

“Fair enough, I can acknowledge that now. But everyone seems obviously innocent to the people that love them. Doesn’t mean they always are. I wouldn’t be doing my job if I didn’t go after every hunch. And I have a feeling that you know a little something about following hunches, Ms. Thomas,” Maggie teased.

Cindy glanced at Maggie out of the corner of her eye, but refused to acknowledge the inspector’s point, if only out of spite and continued loyalty to Lindsay.

Maggie didn’t seem to expect a response anyway. “He’s going inside that building,” she noted, pulling Cindy’s attention back to the man they were following.

The building in question turned out to be a medium-sized jewelry store.

After a moment’s hesitation, Maggie grabbed Cindy by the hand and muttered, “I’m only doing this because we have to stay inconspicuous, but still be able to talk with each other,” before pulling the reporter into the shop.

Cindy had no idea what Maggie was talking about, until they had entered the store, but Maggie still hadn’t let go of her hand.

Oh, Cindy realized with dread. *She wants us to play a couple*. The small smirk at the corner of Maggie’s lips confirmed Cindy’s suspicion that another reason for the inspector’s spur of the moment choice of deception was because Maggie knew it would drive Cindy crazy.

They quietly walked around the various display cases, always maintaining a good position to keep an eye on Darren. The man didn’t seem to actually be in the store to look

at jewelry; it was more like he was waiting for someone. He seemed near-oblivious to everyone else around him, making it easier for Cindy and Maggie to watch him, while they kept up their own charade of pretending to look at various necklaces, bracelets, and rings.

After what felt like a long time of nothing happening, Cindy was growing antsy. “Time to push things forward,” she whispered to Maggie.

The inspector merely frowned at her. “What are you talking about?” she whispered back.

“We need to make contact with him. Get closer to him. Get a better feel from him about what’s going on.”

Maggie’s eyes widened. “What? No, we can’t do that! Cindy, stop!”

Before Maggie could fully register what was happening, Cindy was already moving them steadily in Darren’s direction, and Maggie had to stop talking in order to avoid being overheard.

Putting on her friendliest smile, Cindy approached Darren, coming up right next to him.

“Hi, I’m really sorry to bother you, but you didn’t look too busy, so I thought it might be okay,” Cindy began innocently. Darren’s head jerked over to her, obviously startled to find someone actually talking to him.

He looked over at Maggie as well, who gave him a forced smile. She rolled her eyes at Cindy to show him that this hadn’t been her idea.

Still not saying anything and looking increasingly confused as well as anxious, he looked back to Cindy as she prattled on, “I hope this isn’t too forward of me, but I was just wondering if you could do us a little favor.”

Lindsay, Jill, Claire, and Jacobi sat in Claire’s office – the mutually agreed upon best meeting place, thanks to Claire’s candy jar.

Cindy wasn’t answering her phone, but Lindsay made a conscious effort not to worry, repeatedly telling herself that there was probably a logical explanation. She brought Jacobi to the meeting instead, as honorary club member.

They’d all had a busy afternoon since Jeremy Grayson had decided to finally show up at the Hall.

“Well, it didn’t take long to figure out who the potential cheating partner at Maya’s work is,” Jacobi reported. “As for why none of her colleagues thought to mention that she was

particularly close with this Luís Gonzalez guy when we talked to them earlier? I have no idea. But as soon as I asked specifically if there was ever any rumored relationship between Maya and another co-worker, everyone mentioned Gonzalez, almost immediately.”

“He’s got an airtight alibi, though,” Lindsay continued. “Fifty people, as well as video cameras, place him at his cousin’s birthday party. It was held at a reception hall at the opposite side of the city from where Maya lives. No way he’d have time to commit the murder and still be seen in as much security footage as he is.”

“So do you think she was actually cheating on Jeremy with him?” Claire asked.

Both inspectors shrugged. “Hard to say one way or the other,” Lindsay replied. “He says that they were just friends and that it never turned sexual. Just that they had a lot in common, and each liked having a friend who also spoke Spanish.”

“So, if we believe him and Maya, then there was no affair. And if we believe Jeremy and his thing about the shirt, then there was,” Jill concluded.

“The only thing I can add seems to imply that there wasn’t any affair,” Claire spoke up. “She was on the pill and apparently decided that meant they didn’t need extra protection. There were traces of semen belonging to one man, and one man only. Just a few minutes ago, I was able to finish the analysis which showed a DNA match with Jeremy Grayson. I can’t rule out the possibility that, for whatever reason, she used a condom with one guy, and not with the other, though.”

“Well, it doesn’t much matter whether she was *actually* cheating on him or not,” Jacobi added. “The point is that Jeremy *thought* that she was.”

“I’ve been working on getting various warrants,” was Jill’s input to the investigation. “The most important one is for Grayson’s boat. I’m expecting a call about it any minute now, actually. Maybe we’ll get lucky, and he’ll have left some evidence lying around.”

As soon as Jill finished speaking, everyone looked up as the door to Claire’s office opened and Tom poked his head in.

“Hey guys. Anyone seen Inspector Snow?” he asked.

There were three shaking heads, before Jill spoke up. “Uh, last I knew, she was going to give Cindy a ride.”

Everyone quickly turned and stared at the blonde in surprise.

“She *what?*” Lindsay demanded. Hollywood and Cindy in a confined space definitely didn’t sound like a good idea.

Jill sighed, inwardly amused at everyone's shocked reactions. "Cindy needed a ride, I couldn't give her one, and so Maggie was kind enough to offer."

Claire raised a doubtful eyebrow. "And Cindy actually said 'yes'?"

"It may have taken a little bit of prodding," Jill admitted slowly, "but yes, Cindy left of her own volition."

Even Jacobi knew that putting those two together was bound to produce some fireworks, and probably not in a good way. "And you let it happen?" he asked.

"Oh come on, you guys!" Jill scoffed. "I know they're not the best of friends, but they're both adults, they can handle themselves. It's not like I sent them off to go have a catfight or something."

"That would be kind of awesome to watch," Tom admitted.

"Shut up, Tom," was the unanimous response from the three women, as Jacobi simply laughed.

Jill looked down at her watch and frowned as she realized how late it was. "That's weird; Maggie should have definitely been back by now."

Lindsay dropped her head down into one hand. "Jill," she muttered, "if your girlfriend killed mine..." She paused, considering. "Or if my girlfriend killed yours, and so now mine has to go to jail, I'll never forgive you."

As if on cue, Lindsay's phone rang. She looked down at the caller ID and exhaled in relief. "It's Cindy," she announced.

"Cindy, where are you?" she asked as soon as she picked up.

"Linz, tell Jill not to be mad at me, okay? And if you could not be mad at me, too, that would be great. You'll probably thank me, though."

Lindsay looked in concern towards Jill, the expression on her face causing the D.D.A. to sit up straighter and lean forward, as she started to feel nervous for the first time about what might have happened with Maggie and Cindy sharing a car.

"Cindy, what are you talking about? Are you okay? What happened?"

"I'm fine," Cindy verified quickly, but there was a long pause before she continued, speaking very quickly and not taking a breath until she'd finished. "But we went to follow the guy, and it was totally fine until the other guys showed up, but then they got mad and a fight broke out, and because of me, Maggie got accidentally punched in the

face, and now her nose won't stop bleeding, and she's arrested all three guys, but I think maybe she should see a doctor, because she may have broken her nose."

Act IV:

It was almost time. Everything was finally falling into place.

The media had started reporting on the case, so at least there was a bit more information out there. No longer the feeling of being completely in the dark.

According to an article by Cindy Thomas, “a suspect” was already in custody for questioning. Most people probably weren’t supposed to know who the “suspect” was.

Poor Jeremy. Really nothing but a pawn in this game. He was a tough guy, though, he’d be fine.

Soon it would be done, though. Soon it would be official. Game over.

It had been a fun game, but the anxiety had proven to be stronger than anticipated.

Soon, though. Soon it would be time for the final step.

“Ow! Will you stop that?!”

Claire sighed. Maggie Snow was proving to be a very difficult patient.

“If you would just hold *still*, then this would be a lot simpler, and a lot less painful. For both of us.”

In spite of Claire’s statement, Maggie simply couldn’t seem to stop squirming. Getting fed up, Claire threatened, “Don’t make me tranquilize you!” and the inspector finally managed to settle down. She wasn’t sure whether the medical examiner would actually go so far as to sedate her, but she had no desire to find out.

“*Finally*,” Claire breathed out gratefully. “Now I can actually get a better look at things, without you constantly getting in the way.”

“Yeah, I just thought I’d make you appreciate your job more. I bet most of your patients don’t move around and talk back,” Maggie joked, wincing as Claire examined her nose and black eye.

Claire chuckled. “No, they sure don’t.”

Shifting her gaze over to Jill, who stood next to her, holding her hand tightly while trying not to look at the blood, Maggie said, “I give up, by the way. No more attempting to ‘bond’ with your friends, as you put it. It’s proving to be hazardous to my health.”

Lindsay snorted in amusement, but tried to cover it up with a fake cough.

“So... What exactly happened, again?” she asked, looking pointedly at Cindy. “I’ll admit that I didn’t quite catch everything that you said on the phone.”

Cindy stood beside Lindsay, watching Claire and Maggie carefully. She felt a mixture of guilt, concern, and something related to not wanting to feel either guilt or concern. Her facial expression mirrored her conflict over the issue, with her face twisted into a unique configuration of sympathy and indifference. This was Maggie Snow, after all – the one who had *accused Lindsay of murder* – and things would certainly be a lot easier if Cindy hadn’t started to actually kind of like the woman.

Taking a deep breath, Cindy turned to focus on her friends as she explained what had happened. “We were following Darren Wang, because Maggie noticed him, and he was acting all sketchy. As far as either of us knew, he was still a suspect, and you know how I just can’t resist situations like that.”

Everyone chuckled lightly, and Cindy continued to tell the story, with the only major interruption coming when the fact that they had pretended to be a couple came up. Lindsay wasn’t too happy about that part (“How come you have to keep pretending that *other* people are your girlfriend?”), but she let it go pretty quickly. For now, anyway.

Eventually, Cindy managed to make it to the point where they had approached Darren directly.

“So I was my usual charming self and just asked for his opinion on a few different pieces of jewelry. You know, just as a means of getting closer to whatever was going on. He didn’t say much, but then two new guys showed up, and they came straight for us. Maggie just barely pulled me out of the way before they got right up in Darren’s face.”

Lindsay cringed, half amused and half concerned. “Seriously, how is that you always find yourself right in the middle of things like this? Is there some kind of magnetic force between you and trouble?”

“Sure seems like it,” Maggie responded. Turning to Jill, she asked, “Tell me again why you let me leave with her?”

Cindy cleared her throat conspicuously. “*Anyway...*” she went on. “It was hard to follow what they were arguing about, but we caught on to the fact that one of the new guys owned the store, and Darren seemed to owe him a significant amount of cash. So I don’t know what it was that pushed things from a shouting match to a physical fight, but it wasn’t long before the first punch was thrown.”

Claire tried to hold back a smirk as she continued to carefully examine Maggie’s nose. She had a feeling she knew where this story was going.

“So then Maggie pulls me out of the way to make sure I won’t get hurt. Thanks for that, by the way,” Cindy added guiltily to Maggie, who simply nodded resignedly. “But okay, so Maggie steps in, ready to break things up.”

“If only it had been that simple,” Maggie interrupted with a sigh.

Cindy smiled sympathetically as she went on, “Just as she gets up to them, though, one of the newcomers throws a punch towards Darren. And as luck would have it, he manages to duck right at the perfect moment, with the punch landing... Well, you can see where it landed,” she concluded with a grimace, gesturing towards Maggie’s bruises.

“It was pretty impressive, actually,” Cindy admitted, “the way Maggie just got pissed off at them all right afterwards and went around arresting people, all the while with blood streaming down her face. Impressive, in a gruesome kind of way, that is,” the reporter finished.

Jill looked like she might be sick at the thought of it. “And one punch did all that damage?” she asked warily.

“He was wearing several rings,” Maggie grumbled unhappily. “One of the perks of owning a jewelry store, I guess.”

“After all the excitement, we were able to figure out that the whole thing had nothing to do with our case anyway, by the way,” Cindy sheepishly admitted. “Wang has a gambling problem, apparently, and he owes those guys money. That’s all there was to it.”

“What did you arrest them for?” Claire asked Maggie.

“Disorderly conduct, assaulting a police officer, and pissing me off,” the inspector replied matter-of-factly.

Lindsay chuckled. “You know we can’t hold them on that last one. Sorry.”

Maggie just shrugged, a small smirk appearing across her bruised face.

“Well, I don’t think you broke it, but it’s too early to really be able to tell,” reported Claire. “Once the swelling goes down in a few days, I’ll take another look. In the meantime, take some pain meds and nasal decongestants, and you’ll be fine in no time. If it turns out to be worse than I think it is, we’ll take things from there. If it starts to bleed again, though, you call me right away.”

Maggie nodded. “So I’m good to go, Doc?”

“Good to go,” Claire confirmed.

“Well, Cindy,” Maggie began, turning towards the reporter, “it’s been fun, but remind me never to offer you a ride again.”

“I am so, *so* sorry,” Cindy replied. “I feel really awful.”

Maggie shrugged again. “I’ll survive.”

The two rival inspectors made eye contact, as Lindsay attempted, but largely failed, to hide her amusement about the whole thing.

“You look great,” Lindsay teased.

“Don’t you dare laugh at me, Tex,” Maggie warned good-naturedly. “Be glad I didn’t let your girl follow this guy on her own.”

Lindsay nodded to concede the point, but still couldn’t stop the small laugh that escaped her throat. “Well, Hollywood, now you’ve learned about our Cindy’s tendency for coming up with unusual ways to find trouble.” Lindsay draped her arm around Cindy’s shoulders proudly. For once, she couldn’t find it in herself to be upset about her girlfriend’s habit of getting herself into a mess of a situation.

Jill, who’d been largely quiet since she first laid eyes on Maggie’s bloodied nose, finally spoke up. “What do you say we take a rain check on that dinner reservation for tonight? We can just go back to your place so you can relax. I’d say you’ve earned it today.”

Now that all the blood was gone, the attorney found herself strangely turned on by the thought of nursing her girlfriend back to health, especially after she’d gone up against three guys and lived to tell about it.

“Sounds perfect,” Maggie responded gratefully.

“Come on, then, Crooked. Let’s go get out of here, and I’ll take care of you.”

Lindsay, Cindy, and Claire all laughed as they heard Maggie protest, “My nose is *not* crooked!”

The next morning, Claire was happy to read the newspaper and drink her coffee in peace for a little while, since it was Ed’s turn to get the boys ready for school.

She smiled warmly as her husband entered the kitchen, a relaxed quiet having settled over the house now that Nate and Derek were gone for the day. He filled his own mug of coffee and joined her at the table.

“So how’s your latest case going?” he asked.

Claire smiled. For a long time, Ed had seemed to dread having to talk about her job. It reminded him too much of everything he'd lost. He'd been getting better, though. His therapist had encouraged him to show a greater interest in Claire's work, and he'd been surprised to find that doing so didn't hurt as much as it used to. He actually enjoyed hearing about some of the cases, enjoyed hearing about how his wife and her friends went about solving each crime.

"It's been all right," Claire responded. "We've got a suspect – seems pretty obvious that he did it – but we can't fully prove it yet."

She went through the details of the case for him, reminding herself again of the strange fact about the alcohol in Maya's system.

"I talked with Lindsay about it the other day, but neither of us could quite put it together," she explained. "If Maya was upset about the fight with her boyfriend and decided to get drunk, then fine, but where's the evidence of it? Where are the bottles, what did she drink?"

"Maybe she just recycled them or threw them out right away," Ed guessed.

"But only the bottles or cans, and not the other recycling and trash that was found in her kitchen?"

"So someone else must have gotten rid of them," he concluded.

Claire nodded. "Yeah, that's what we came up with too. But why? It just doesn't really make sense."

They both sat in contemplation for a little while, until Ed spoke up again. "Sounds to me like there's someone out there who doesn't want his DNA to be found inside that apartment."

Lindsay emerged into the morning sun from below-deck on Jeremy Grayson's boat.

A warm breeze came off the bay, the sun was shining, and the fog was lifting to reveal a gorgeous view. It was a beautiful day in San Francisco.

Lindsay barely even noticed, though, as all she felt was mounting frustration. They'd been searching Jeremy's boat for an hour, but there was nothing to be found. *Nothing*.

Lindsay sighed and leaned back against the hull of the ship. They had means, motive, the murder weapon in Grayson's name... They had his fingerprints on the gun, but that didn't have to mean anything. Of *course* his fingerprints would be on it, it was *his* gun. It had

Maya's fingerprints, too, since he reported that he had mostly bought it for his girlfriend to use in self-defense. If Jeremy was telling the truth, that explained why the gun was at her apartment, not his. Didn't do Maya much good in the end, though.

Did they have enough to convict him? A confession would be nice, but Jeremy was still playing the innocent card. She felt confident that Jill could get a rise out of him on the stand, though. That would certainly help their case.

What would also help would be if Claire came up with something from her analysis of the clothes that Jeremy had been wearing on Tuesday.

"Please tell me that you have something good to report," Lindsay entreated Claire as she and Cindy entered the morgue, followed closely behind by Jill.

Lindsay sighed in defeat when Claire's negative facial expression said it all.

"I have nothing to help you, but at least I have nothing to hurt you, either," Claire stated once all four women stood together. "On one hand, there's no trace of any gunshot residue, on either his clothes or his hands. On the other hand, that isn't actually that surprising and doesn't really mean anything. He was out on the water for quite some time. That's a lot of exposure to air, wind, and water. With that much time alone elapsing since the shooting, he wouldn't have to do all that much to get rid of any GSR evidence. But out on a boat? Well, he wouldn't have to do anything; the elements would most likely do it for him."

"A defense attorney will argue that no gunshot residue means that he didn't fire a gun," Jill pointed out.

"But I guarantee that you can get any expert to testify that, under these particular conditions, a lack of gunshot residue doesn't actually mean anything conclusive," Claire added.

"So basically," Cindy concluded, "we're pretty much nowhere, in terms of actual, physical evidence."

Jill was working in her office when Denise walked in without knocking.

"Is there a good reason why your girlfriend is walking around with a swollen nose and black eye?" Denise inquired quizzically. "She and Lindsay didn't actually start *fighting*, did they?"

“And ‘good morning’ to you too, Denise,” Jill replied. “But no, they haven’t started fighting.” She paused, wondering how she could quickly explain what had happened. “It’s a long story.”

“Something we don’t have time for, right now. I need you to come with me. The District Attorney’s re-election campaign is starting up soon, and I need you to help me start the process of convincing Noah Valentine to come work as campaign manager. You have an hour before we leave.”

Jill blinked in confusion. “Wait, what? Why me? I don’t know anything about this, and I’m just a D.D.A.”

Denise sighed, as if the answer should be obvious enough. “You’re intelligent, well-spoken, and have a high conviction rate. You’re a good example of what’s up-and-coming in this office.”

As surprised as she was by Denise’s praise, Jill couldn’t help but beam. “Well thank-” she began, before Denise interrupted.

“Plus,” she added, pointedly looking down from Jill’s face to the three undone buttons on Jill’s blouse and the generous amount of skin visible, “Noah tends to like the more attractive lawyers.”

Flushing, Jill began to do up her shirt further, before Denise admonished, “No-no. Don’t do that. Leave it as is. We leave in an hour, so I suggest you take the time to do some research on both our lovely D.A. and on Mr. Valentine.”

Jill sighed as Denise left, unsure whether to be offended or flattered that Denise had called her “attractive.”

Jill hadn’t even thought about how she should actually have been nervous about the fact that Noah Valentine might be late, which would mean that it would just be her and Denise, sitting together at a nice restaurant, alone.

Neither woman said anything for a while, both very aware of the fact that it almost felt like a date.

Jill wondered if now was the time to bring up her confusion over where the two of them stood, what Denise actually wanted. What she herself wanted, for that matter.

Before she got the chance to do so, however, their waitress came over, and Jill was momentarily distracted. The girl looked familiar, but Jill couldn’t quite place her.

It became clear that the waitress recognized Jill as well, when her eyes widened at the sight of the blonde attorney, and she almost tripped over her own feet.

“Uh, hi,” the waitress murmured awkwardly. “You’re the lawyer, right?”

“Yeah.” Jill drew out the word slowly, still trying to figure out how they knew each other. Denise merely watched the two women interestedly, arching an eyebrow in curiosity.

Suddenly, everything clicked, and Jill snapped her fingers and pointed at the waitress once she figured it out. “You live in Maya’s building,” she stated.

“Right, I’m Brittany,” the waitress confirmed. “You asked me a bunch of questions that night.”

“Yeah, now I remember,” Jill nodded. “Brittany, this is the Acting District Attorney, Denise Kwon. Denise, this is a witness in the Castillo case.”

“Nice to meet you” Denise said coldly, still looking back and forth between the two women.

“Yeah, you too. Um, I’ll just go get your orders, then,” Brittany said, fidgeting somewhat uncomfortably. “Oh wait, you haven’t actually ordered yet. What would you like?”

“We’re still waiting for someone, so we’re fine for now,” Jill explained. She frowned in slight confusion as Brittany quickly hurried away.

Denise waited a beat, and then asked, “Did you actually sleep with a witness, Bernhardt?”

Jill nearly choked on the water she was drinking. “*What?*” she sputtered. “No!”

She hadn’t slept with *that* particular waitress, anyway, she mentally added.

“Hmm. She sure was nervous around you. I wonder why.”

Jill shrugged, checking to make sure she hadn’t spit water anywhere. “Who knows? I certainly didn’t sleep with her, though. Maybe she just doesn’t like lawyers. I don’t remember her being particularly nervous when I interviewed her, though. Or, I don’t know, maybe I just remind her of the time she came across her dead neighbor. Not too good of a memory, I’d imagine.”

“No, I don’t think it was that,” Denise said. “Something about you being here seemed to throw her off. It was very odd to watch.”

Before they could continue to speculate any further, Noah Valentine finally showed up, and Jill received quick confirmation of why she'd been invited along to lunch. Upon shaking her hand, the campaign manager's eyes almost immediately dropped down towards her chest, and Jill had to try very hard to keep smiling and not pull away from the guy.

It was going to be a long meal.

Cindy, Lindsay, Claire, and Jill sat quietly in their usual booth at Papa Joe's.

"What if we have the wrong guy," Claire murmured softly.

"But who else could it possibly be?" Lindsay lamented. "No one else makes any sense, or if they do, like Luís Gonzalez, we know for a fact that they didn't do it."

"I know it might not mean anything, and I might just be nitpicking, but the alcohol thing is still bothering me," Claire admitted. "It just doesn't feel right. I was talking with Ed this morning, and the conclusion he came to was that someone didn't want their fingerprints found, so that's why there were no bottles or cans anywhere in the apartment. Whoever Maya got drunk with, that person didn't want us to know about it."

Jill was quiet for another moment, lost in thought, before she surprised everyone by asking, "Has Tuesday's trash been collected yet?"

"Um, no, I don't think so," Cindy replied, looking at Jill strangely. "Why?"

Looking up from her coffee, Jill suggested, "Then we should get someone to go through Brittany Devine's trash and recycling."

Three confused stares were the only responses Jill received.

"Brittany Devine, the girl who found Maya's body. I randomly ran across her today, and I didn't fully notice it at the time, but Denise picked up on the fact that she was acting really strangely around me."

"Like she might have something to hide?" Lindsay asked hopefully.

Jill nodded. "It's a long shot, but maybe."

"She's the one who fed the fish, right? So she'd have a key to Maya's apartment," Cindy pointed out.

"Did she have an alibi?" asked Claire.

Jill shrugged sheepishly. “Not really. She was alone in her apartment. But half of the people in the building were alone in their apartments, and we already had a promising suspect to focus on.”

A moment passed, as ideas started to sink in.

“Shit, you guys might actually have something here.” Lindsay took a deep breath, her mind jumping forward to what steps to take next. “Jill, think you could get us a quick warrant for her apartment?”

“On it,” the attorney replied, already reaching for her phone to start making the appropriate calls.

“I’ll get Jacobi and we’ll go bring her in for questioning, then,” Lindsay stated.

“And I’ll get a tech team ready for digging through some trash and taking fingerprints on anything we might find,” Claire added.

“And I’ll...” Cindy started, unsure how to finish her sentence. “Think of something.”

With that, all four women threw some cash down on the table and then hurried out of the diner.

“We have a problem,” Lindsay stated as soon as Jill picked up her phone. “Apparently Brittany took off from the restaurant soon after you left. No one there knows where she went or why she left. We went by her apartment, but she’s not there either.”

“Shit,” Jill muttered. “Okay, a team just left to confiscate her trash, now we’ll work on getting access to her phone and credit card records. And I’ve got Cindy here helping however she can. We’ll find her, Linz.”

“I know we will,” Lindsay replied, speaking more confidently than she actually felt. If Brittany was fleeing, then they might not have much time.

“You and Jacobi just be ready to go as soon as we figure this out.”

“That’s what we were planning on,” Lindsay confirmed. “Just hurry, Jill. We don’t want to lose her trail.”

“I know,” Jill replied, immediately hanging up her phone before dialing Brittany’s phone company and getting Cindy to check with the credit card company.

Jill and Cindy sat with various forms and sheets spread out around Jill's office, when Claire burst in. Cindy quickly lowered her body over the loose sheets in front of her, just barely stopping them from scattering at the draft caused by Claire's entrance.

"Sorry, skipper," Claire muttered, before sharing her big news. "We've got it. Two large, bottles of tequila were found in the trash, fingerprints all over them, belonging to both Maya Castillo and Brittany Devine."

"But this doesn't make any sense!" Jill protested. "I know I was the one who suggested we look at her, but why on earth would Brittany kill Maya?"

Claire shrugged. "Jealousy, maybe? We can worry about motive later. For now, we just concentrate on finding her. So, how can I help on this end?"

"Okay guys, look at this," Cindy spoke up, pointing to the information on her laptop. "A few days ago, Brittany made a payment to Delta Airlines. Then this afternoon, she placed a phone call to Delta. And a little bit after that, another payment to the airline is recorded." She paused, her hope sinking a bit at the implications. "I'm guessing that she's changed her flight to an earlier time, and I'd even bet you that she's trying to leave the country."

After only half a second of hesitation, Jill picked up her phone again.

"Linz? Get to the airport. Now!"

Jacobi hurried to speak to security as Lindsay set off on a sprint through the airport. She held her phone tightly to her ear as Cindy talked her through where to go.

"Okay, we're taking a bit of a gamble here, but Delta international flights leave from Boarding Area A, so head in that direction," Cindy directed her lover as she studied the layout of San Francisco International Airport.

"How do we not know what flight she's on yet?" Lindsay huffed.

"It's a little more complicated than we'd like. She didn't use her own name. But Jill's on the phone with Delta right now."

"Fine, I need to stop talking now. I'm putting you on speaker, so just yell if you need me." Lindsay pressed the appropriate button, and then lowered her arm and pushed herself to go faster.

She skidded to a halt, however, when she came up to a crowd waiting in the security line. Her eyes quickly scanned the area, searching for tall, brunette women.

Not immediately seeing anyone who matched the picture she'd memorized and knowing that it would take too long to look at everyone individually, Lindsay merely pulled out her badge and yelled out, "SFPD! Out of the way!"

No one immediately bolted, which would have made things easier, but everyone did turn and stare. Groaning in frustration, Lindsay finally just moved forward, forcefully pushing herself through the mass of bodies before her.

At the front of the line, Lindsay flashed her badge again and sprinted through the metal detector. She could hear the alarms her gun had set off, as well as the shouts of confusion, but she couldn't afford to stop, even as she turned to see that several security officers were now chasing after her as well.

She only faltered a step when she very lightly heard someone calling her name, only belatedly realizing that it was Cindy.

"Gate A12, Lindsay! A12! They're boarding *now*!"

"Got it!" Lindsay replied, immediately stuffing her phone into her pocket to free up her hands. The urgency in Cindy's voice pushed her to go even faster.

She deftly dodged the people and luggage crowding the concourse, until she finally spotted the gate up ahead of her.

"SFPD! No one else gets on that plane!" she called out as loudly as she could.

Among those people who turned to stare included one familiar-looking brunette, whose eyes widened at the sight of the sprinting inspector.

Brittany Devine dropped her suitcase and made a run for it, heading perpendicular from Lindsay's direct path. Lindsay caught sight of her immediately, though, and quickly changed course.

Finally, Lindsay started to gain ground, but was still just a little too far out of reach. At the last moment, she took a giant leap over a suitcase, tackling Brittany in mid-air. She quickly stood up and unceremoniously yanked Brittany up to her feet and immediately snapped handcuffs on her suspect.

"Brittany Devine," Lindsay began, panting out a breath almost every other word. "You are...under...arrest...for...the murder...of...Maya Castillo."

She breathlessly read Brittany her rights and then turned around, practically dragging Brittany behind her. Lindsay was greeted by the sight of Jacobi, riding up on an airport golf cart.

Lindsay merely glared at her partner as he smirked in amusement.

“Great job, Boxer!” he called out, clapping her on the shoulder once he stood up and approached her.

“I hate you,” she muttered lowly.

Jacobi let out a big booming laugh. “Yeah, I know,” he grinned. “But here, you two can get prime seating for the way back,” he offered, motioning towards the golf cart.

Lindsay chuckled. “What, you going to walk back, old man?”

“Hell no,” Jacobi scoffed. “I’ll just call for another one,” he added with a wink.

“Well come on, then, Miss Devine. Our ride awaits us.” Lindsay led the way, pulling Brittany along by the arm.

They sat quietly at first, before Lindsay couldn’t help herself. “So, you still have the right to remain silent and all that, but I have to ask... Why did you do it?”

Brittany, who hadn’t said a single word since Lindsay had tackled her to the ground, remained stoically silent at first, and Lindsay gave up hope of getting anything out of her.

“I did it because I wanted to know if I could,” Brittany finally murmured, a creepy smile gracing her lips, as she stared off into space.

“Um. What?” Lindsay was sure she’d misunderstood the other woman.

“I’ve gotten away with a lot of things in my life, Inspector. And I mean, a *lot*. I’ve lied, I’ve cheated, I’ve stolen things. But no one ever suspects me. I look too nice, too innocent. Just blame someone else, and people always believe me.”

Brittany blinked, turning to look at the inspector with a bright, charming smile. It was true, Lindsay realized in horror. No one would ever think to suspect her of doing anything bad, doing anyone any harm. Then Brittany blinked again, and it was like she was a totally different person. Her smile faded, her eyes darkened... It was like everything in her features turned hard.

That creepy smile came back, though, as she continued, “So I decided to up the stakes, you know? See if I could pull off something bigger. More exciting. It was thrilling, planning the whole thing out. It was like a big social experiment, really.”

Lindsay felt like she might be sick. A murderer who kills, just to see if she could pull it off?

“Why them? Why pick Maya and Jeremy?” Lindsay spat out in disgust.

Brittany merely shrugged. "Why not? They were there. They were the easiest target. And I helped her all the time, feeding those damn fish. But she barely even thanked me. Barely even acknowledged me. So yeah, I didn't particularly care for them, and they were my best chance for getting away with it. I almost did it, too," she muttered proudly. "If it hadn't been for that damn lawyer at the restaurant. I'm good when I can plan everything out; it's the unexpected that flusters me, and I hadn't expected to run into her again. But still, just another ten minutes or so, and I would've been gone. Then you'd never hear from me again."

Lindsay had to force herself not to do something she'd later regret, like assault the lunatic that sat next to her.

"You *almost* did it," Lindsay growled out. "But almost isn't good enough, now is it?"

Brittany just smiled.

"So, she used her key to plant the spare shirt in the closet, then later got Maya drunk, under the pretense of sympathizing about Jeremy," Lindsay explained to the group crowded around her desk. "Being drunk, Maya couldn't react as fast when Brittany pulled the gun on her. Brittany boasted that she'd come across it months earlier, when she was snooping around the apartment."

"God, that's really disturbing, that someone would actually *do* that," Cindy murmured, as everyone else nodded in agreement.

Lindsay couldn't help but let her thoughts drift to someone else she knew who'd looked and acted perfectly charming, but had proven to be anything but.

She was distracted, however, when she caught some movement out of the corner of her eye. Maggie entered the bullpen, and Lindsay grinned as she called out to her, "Still looking great, Hollywood!"

Maggie didn't even bother looking over, but merely raised her middle finger in response. "So I hear that your 'obvious' suspect turned out to not be a killer after all," Inspector Snow commented. She looked towards the club and pantomimed thinking seriously. "Hmm, I wonder if his friends will *ever* forgive you," she questioned pointedly, before continuing on to her own desk.

They all felt a twinge of guilt, but before anyone could respond, their attention was drawn elsewhere as Lindsay's office phone rang.

"Inspector Boxer," she answered.

“Great, I finally got through to you,” a male voice on the other end stated. “My name is Detective Scott, and I’d like to talk some things over with you, if you’ve got some spare time.”

“Uh, what about?” Lindsay inquired.

“Well, there’s no real easy way to say this, so I’ll just go ahead. I work out of the Portland, Oregon Police Department, and we’ve got some unsolved murders here that we think might relate to you.”

Lindsay felt a sinking feeling in her heart, but couldn’t quite put her finger on where she thought this was going.

Detective Scott didn’t wait for a reply. There was really no way to sugarcoat his suspicion.

“We think Pete Raynor may be our killer, too.”

FADE TO BLACK