

Episode 4: In God We Trust

The sound of a door unlocking echoed in the big, empty foyer, breaking through the complete stillness of the house. Heels clacked onto the marble floor as a tall woman with long bleach-blond hair entered and gazed around with narrowed eyes and pursed lips.

The front door was not even fully shut behind her again, though, before she called out sharply, “Travis! Travis, where the fuck are you, you fucker?”

Resounding silence was the only response, and the woman’s voice quieted to an angry mumble as she continued to herself, “Goddamn piece of shit. Where is he? If he’s just been in here screwing someone this whole time, I’ll fucking kill him.”

Her hunt proved unsuccessful through the master bedroom, kitchen, and den, before she decided to try the indoor pool room. Her first glance showed the open space to be empty of people, but as she turned to leave, something caught her eye.

“What the hell?” She frowned in confusion at the sight of the hot tub, which appeared to be filled with...something that definitely wasn’t water, and that didn’t even appear to be liquid. Moving forward, she could only roll her eyes as she got close enough to identify the objects glinting from within the hot tub. “You’ve got to be shitting me,” she scoffed.

Her chuckle contained no amusement, as she reached out her hand to run her fingers over the large coins that reached all the way to the rim of the jacuzzi. “Only *Travis* would want to literally *bathe* himself in money,” she murmured. “Selfish bastard.”

Testing its depth, the woman submerged her whole hand into the metallic bath. She jumped back, startled, when her touch came into contact with something that had a decidedly different feel to it. Curious, she reached back inside, feeling around until she found something that she could grasp onto. She pulled upwards, freeing it from its confinement.

As the limp hand and arm came into view, the woman immediately dropped it and staggered backwards, promptly falling into a faint.

Act I:

D.D.A. Jill Bernhardt’s eyes widened as she drove up to the address she’d been given. The mansion was located in one of the wealthiest areas of San Francisco, sitting near the top of a hill in Pacific Heights, with an open view of the bay. Jill didn’t even want to know how much a place like that would cost, with its Italian neoclassical architecture and three-car garage off to the side.

Still, Jill supposed that she really couldn’t be too jealous of the guy. Not even the super-

rich could avoid getting killed sometimes.

Knowing that Travis Martin's story didn't end well didn't stop Jill's impressed whistle as she entered the house, though. If anything, the interior surpassed the exterior in terms of lavish decor.

A cop on his way outside pointed her in the direction of the indoor pool, where she received a curt nod of welcome from Inspector Fong. Jill smiled in response but was inwardly disappointed. Her job was always more bearable, and usually a lot easier, when Lindsay and Jacobi were on the case.

Claire Washburn looked up from her work, glad to see that her friend had arrived. They made eye contact over Inspector Fong's shoulder, and Claire was about to call Jill over when someone on the other side of the room beat her to it.

"Deputy D.A. Bernhardt! We've got something here you might want to see."

Claire watched Jill for a moment longer and then turned back to the body in front of her, taking pictures as more and more of the corpse became visible. He had been found buried, quite literally, in a hot tub full of money. An increasingly large pile of coins was being collected to the side, as they worked to unearth their latest victim.

Whatever had happened – and Claire was in no way sure of what that might be, at this point – it was a strange way to die, to be sure.

Making her way around the edge of the pool and towards the officer who had called her over, Jill commented teasingly, "I sure hope you didn't call me all the way over here just to keep me from seeing the body. I'm getting better about that, I swear."

Officer Foley's expression remained solemn, though, as he simply handed Jill an evidence bag, containing a single check, taped to a piece of cardboard for support. "We found this in the safe," he explained, nodding his head behind him.

A glance over his shoulder revealed a safe embedded in the wall with its door open and its contents emptied. "It was left closed," Foley continued, "but already set to the right combination. All that was in there was this, and a single coin. We've bagged that, too, but I don't know what makes it so special. It's only a buck."

Jill's gaze briefly returned to the officer's, before she broke the eye contact to look down at the object in her hands; there was something written across the face of it, the bright red ink noticeable right away.

Bringing it closer to her face, Jill's eyes quickly scanned across the scrawled message.

"Dammit!"

The loud and sudden exclamation caused Claire to jump, and a number of unis looked over curiously as well.

Claire arched an eyebrow in confusion as Jill – normally so professional while on the job – marched over to Claire’s side, shoving an evidence bag into her hands.

Clenching her jaw and crossing her arms tightly in front of her chest, Jill remained silent, not sure how to answer the unasked questions that lay beneath the M.E.’s curious stare.

It was only then that Jill even noticed the body, visible just behind Claire. It wasn’t gory, at least, but the sight was certainly disturbing, especially since Jill hadn’t taken the time to prepare herself. Claire couldn’t help but smile slightly at the almost comically disconcerted expression that crossed the attorney’s face.

Lowering her gaze to the item Jill had handed her, Claire read the words aloud, her voice coming out no stronger than a whisper.

“For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. Timothy, chapter six, verse ten.”

Claire closed her eyes tightly, taking in a deep, shaky breath, immediately understanding Jill’s earlier outburst and barely resisting the urge to utter a few expletives of her own. Her hands curled into fists, as she set down the evidence with obvious disgust. “Oh God, not another one,” she murmured miserably.

“Looks like it.” Jill, who had been tightly pinching the bridge of her nose, took a step forward and dropped her forehead down onto Claire’s shoulder.

They stood still for a moment as Claire reached up to gently stroke Jill’s hair. It was rare that they allowed their friendship to show through so clearly at a crime scene, but if ever there was time for an exception, they both figured that this situation certainly qualified.

Releasing a frustrated sigh, Jill straightened up again and reached for her BlackBerry, quickly scrolling to the appropriate number.

“*Boxer.*”

“Hey, it’s me,” Jill announced softly. “I got called in this afternoon, and I know you’re probably busy with something else, but...” Jill paused, trying to decide how best to continue. “I just think you’re going to want to be here for this one.”

Cindy was bored. And tired. She hadn’t been able to sleep well the previous night; she could sense that it was her dreams that kept waking her up, but her consciousness failed

to hold on to any concrete remnants of the hazy memories. She had finally crawled out of bed a little before six in the morning, when it became clear that sleep had fully abandoned her.

Listening to her police scanner had proved more interesting than staring blankly at her ceiling, anyway.

So now Cindy lingered just beyond the police tape, bored out of her mind.

She'd received a gruff nod from both Lindsay and Jacobi when they first saw her, but Officer Cho seemed to be taking his position of police-tape-guard-dog more seriously than usual, and none of Cindy's standard tricks for getting closer to things were working.

It wouldn't have been so bad if she could have actually seen anything that was going on, but the arrangement of tall police officers crowded into a long and narrow alleyway seemed to be conspiring against her.

Cindy couldn't even hope for any help from her other two best friends, since she hadn't seen anyone from the D.A.'s office, and she'd managed to catch sight of that other M.E. – the one whose name she didn't know, but whom she automatically resented, simply by virtue of not being Claire. Cindy couldn't even imagine – didn't *want* to imagine – what it would have been like if Claire had decided to go to San Diego.

Still, she was determined not to give up on the current situation. Eventually, Lindsay would come and tell her something, right? If Lindsay didn't want Cindy wandering off to investigate things on her own, the least the inspector could do would be to provide something, *anything*, to help appease Cindy's editor and her own continuous curiosity.

Or maybe Cindy should just work on coming up with some new diversionary tactics for getting past Cho.

Finally, a frowning Lindsay appeared, phone pressed tightly to her ear.

“Where exactly are you?” she demanded. “Give me an address.”

Lindsay stuffed her hands into her pockets, searching unsuccessfully for something to write with. “Whoa, whoa, hold up a sec. I can't find a damn pen.”

A loud cough caught her attention, and she looked up to find Cindy watching her. Before Lindsay could say anything, the redhead simply chucked a pen at her. Lindsay caught it with one hand, just barely able to keep hold of her phone at the same time, and offered a small smile in thanks before turning her focus back to Jill's voice on the other end.

“Okay, go,” she continued, cradling the phone against her shoulder and scribbling Jill's directions on the back of her hand.

After hanging up with Jill, Lindsay quietly explained the situation to Jacobi and then promptly called Tom; getting them transferred to the Martin case took a bit of finagling, but she managed to persuade him within a few minutes.

Cindy kept her eyes on the inspector throughout both phone calls, but was largely unable to hear what Lindsay was saying, as she turned to face back towards the crime scene.

Her earlier boredom had fled in favor of curiosity and concern, though, and she was itching to know what had placed that firm scowl onto Lindsay's face.

Lindsay turned around again and, with a jerk of the head towards Jacobi to alert him of the success of her second call, was ready to move out. Officer Cho lifted the yellow tape for her, and she ducked under, pausing for a moment beside Cindy.

Cindy stared back, waiting hopefully for Lindsay to clue her in. The peace between the two of them was still somewhat fragile since they'd talked things out during their latest conversation from opposite sides of the holding cell, and Cindy hated the fact that she still sometimes felt like she was walking on eggshells around Lindsay.

A small smile tugged at the corners of Lindsay's mouth, and she turned to address Cho. "You know, you could have arrested her if you wanted to," she commented idly, nodding towards the reporter.

Cindy felt her face instantly flush red. Normally, she might have simply laughed the statement off, but she'd been in a pissy mood for most of the day, and Lindsay really wasn't helping.

"What the *hell*, Lindsay?" she exploded. "I have done *nothing* wrong! You haven't even given me a chance to, because I've just been *standing* here, doing *nothing*, waiting around for you to come throw me a bone."

"Cindy..." Lindsay murmured softly, only just managing to hold back a grin.

Cindy ignored her, steamrolling right over whatever else Lindsay wanted to say. "You can't just go around arresting me simply because you feel like it! I know that's your idea of a good time – 'I know! Let's throw Cindy in the holding cell, because I feel like exerting my authority today!' – but there is nothing that you can arrest me for this time! There's been no breaking, or entering, or..."

"Cindy..." Lindsay tried again.

"...tampering, or petty theft, or assault, or battery, or solicitation, or drug trafficking, or drug possession, or drug creation, or I dunno, whatever other random charge you could come up with. Presumably there *has* been a murder, or else none of us would be here right now, but I'm not the one who did it, and I wouldn't know anything about it *anyway*, because you refuse to tell me anything! Besides, I-

“Cindy!”

Something in Lindsay’s voice made Cindy instantly stop talking this time. She stared up at Lindsay defiantly, gritting her teeth when Lindsay brought her hand up in front of her face, obviously trying to hide a smirk. Cho simply looked back and forth between the two of them, eyes wide.

“Drug *creation*?” Lindsay asked curiously. She eyed the fiery redhead, half-worried that Cindy would physically attack her if she pushed much harder. Cindy was pretty cute all riled up, though, Lindsay had to admit.

Cindy frowned, almost pouting now. “Yeah, like whatever it is that they do in meth labs and stuff. I was trying to come up with all the absurd things that you might feel like arresting me for, but couldn’t think of the appropriate word.”

“Hmm. I believe you’re looking for ‘methamphetamine production’ or maybe ‘marijuana cultivation.’” Lindsay helpfully suggested. “And Cindy?”

“What, Lindsay?” Cindy asked, sighing in frustration.

“Look at the sign behind you.”

Cindy simply stared at Lindsay in confusion for a beat, before whirling around to look up at the building behind her, as Lindsay watched on in amusement.

Directly above Cindy’s head, a sign was affixed: “No loitering. Police take notice.”

Cindy groaned. “Seriously, Lindsay? Loitering? You’ve got to be kidding me.”

Lindsay simply flashed a wide grin and then turned to walk on towards her car. Jacobi stood waiting by his own vehicle with an obvious ‘What the hell is taking you so long?’ look on his face.

“Um, Inspector Boxer?” Cho called out to her retreating back. “You don’t actually want me to arrest her...do you?”

Laughing, Lindsay replied, “No, Officer Cho, I don’t.” She took another few steps before calling over her shoulder, “Hey, Thomas! You coming, or not?”

At that, Cindy’s sulk disappeared as she lifted her eyebrows in surprise. With a parting glance towards Cho, she hurried after the tall brunette. She had no idea where they were going, but Lindsay had invited her along, and that was all that mattered.

Jill, Claire, and Lindsay stood around Travis Martin's hot tub, the former staring determinedly at the wall, while the other two gazed at the body that lay stuffed into the bottom. Martin had been quite a tall man, and it was not a comfortable fit, as evidenced by the cramped arrangement of the legs and head.

Lindsay, having already been shown the latest evidence, hadn't said a single word since she'd stomped over a few minutes earlier and ordered a few unis out of her way. Her friends stood to either side of her, calmly waiting for her to speak.

Finally, Lindsay raked an agitated hand through her hair. "Talk to me, Claire," she uttered, her voice low and rough.

Taking a deep breath, Claire began. "Our vic has been ID'd as Travis Martin, thirty-four years old. He was discovered by Charlotte Davis, Martin's ex-wife. As for cause of death, I can't say for sure quite yet. You can see prominent bruising around his neck..."

"So he was strangled?" Lindsay interrupted.

"No, I don't think so," Claire answered slowly. She pointed to the area in question as she continued, "The bruises are too high up on his neck. It's more consistent with what you'd see after a hanging, but so far there's no corroborating evidence for that."

"All right. What else?"

"Well, I think it's safe to say that both of his legs are broken. Limbs are simply not meant to bend that way."

A small whimper could be heard from Jill, who'd accidentally let her eyes drift down to see the awkward positioning of Martin's legs.

"I'm assuming the killer did so in order to make the guy fit in there," Claire went on. "The irregular bruising over the rest of his body is most likely from the weight of all the coins that were dumped over him. Each one may be quite small, but put together – we're talking thousands of coins, here – they'd really add up to a lot of weight and pressure. Plus, there wouldn't have been much, if any, air under there. If he was still alive when he was stuffed in here..." Claire paused, suppressing a shudder at the thought. "Well, if the panic didn't kill him, the lack of air would've gotten him pretty quickly."

Sighing, Lindsay had one more question for the moment. "Time of death?" she asked.

"Again, I'll be able to give you something more definitive once I cut him open, but I'd say that you're looking at a 24- to 36-hour timeframe," Claire explained.

The three of them lapsed into silence, as Lindsay took a deep breath and then suddenly spurred into movement, pacing back and forth. It was bad enough when they'd "only" had two unsolved murders by this psycho. Now a third body had shown up, and there was

still no obvious connection between any of them. It was like the beginning of Kiss-Me-Not all over again, except the bodies were piling up a lot quicker this time.

Shaking her head, Lindsay forced herself away from that line of thought. Billy Harris had stolen five years of her life, not to mention her own father, and she simply couldn't start thinking that this would be the start of yet another five years and countless lives lost in pursuit of a killer.

Just one step at a time.

"Okay," Lindsay murmured, almost to herself. Turning to Claire, she continued, "You said the ex-wife found him? Where is she?"

Before Claire could answer, a new voice joined their conversation.

"She's been taken to Mission Cross North."

The three women turned to find Warren Jacobi approaching them. "Hello, ladies," he greeted Jill and Claire.

"The hospital?" Jill asked, her brow furrowing. "Why'd she get taken there?"

"I just finished going over things with Inspector Fong, and apparently she hit her head pretty bad. She fainted when she first found the guy and then called in the police once she came to again," Jacobi explained. "I figured we'd finish up here, and then head on over."

"Sure," Lindsay agreed.

Growing increasingly antsy, Jill decided that she needed a slight change of scenery.

"Hey, do you know if Cindy's here?" she asked Lindsay. "I called her shortly after talking with you, and she said that she was already on her way."

"Uh, yeah," Lindsay replied distractedly, "I told her to park around the corner somewhere and wait for us by her car."

"I'm gonna go find her. Let her know what's going on."

With that, Jill hurried from the room, not slowing down until she burst out of the house, taking in a long deep breath of fresh air.

She exited the building just in time to see Tom Hogan pull into the driveway. He met her on the top step, where Jill stood waiting for her heart rate to calm down.

"You okay?" he asked with a frown.

“There’s a serial killer on the loose in San Francisco. He’s already killed three times, that we know of, and there’s nothing logical to tie these victims together, other than their killer’s habit of leaving a line of scripture at the scene.” Jill paused a moment, glaring at the lieutenant. “So no, Tom, I’m not okay.”

Jill moved forward, now fully understanding Lindsay’s need to bolt when they’d found the body of Chris Blake.

The killing of Travis Martin had rattled Jill more than the other two, somehow, though she couldn’t exactly explain why. The scene with Blake had simply been gross, and Jill hadn’t been able to focus on much beyond holding on to the contents of her stomach; then she hadn’t had to see Dellan’s body at all, and she’d been somewhat successful in her attempts to ignore the fact that the multitude of red stains all over the warehouse had actually come from a human being.

This one shouldn’t have been that bad. As crime scenes went, the one she’d just left, while certainly far from pretty, was relatively tame, all things considered. Jill had certainly seen a lot worse before.

Still, there was something especially unsettling about the whole thing. Maybe it was the fact that there was no denying the seriousness of the situation at this point. Chris Blake and Robert Dellan were so different from each other, it had been at least somewhat plausible to think that they really hadn’t been killed by the same person. Jill still didn’t know anything substantial about this latest victim, but three murders, all left with a line from the Bible? There was no way that it could be written off as a coincidence.

With that thought, Jill took another deep breath and then went off in search of Cindy. Hopefully the energetic reporter would be able to lift her spirits.

As Tom walked onto the scene his eyes were immediately and automatically drawn to Lindsay. It was still habit, after all these years, to look for her first. He had a feeling that she wasn’t going to be happy with what he had to say this time, though. Striding forward, he just jumped right in.

“Inspectors. M.E. Washburn,” he nodded to each of them in turn. “Look, I’m just going to come right out and say this. I’ve already been filled in on all the details, and I know what you’re thinking, but I don’t think we can say for sure that we’re dealing with the same guy as the one with Blake and Dellan. Right now, I want you to treat this just like a normal case.”

His abrupt statement was met with silence at first, before Lindsay and Claire spoke at the same time. “*What?*” they exclaimed.

“Lieutenant,” Jacobi began a beat later, “with all due respect, you can’t honestly think

that this is just a coincidence, can you?”

Tom swallowed audibly and defensively crossed his arms in front of his chest, eyeing the three incredulous faces in front of him. “All I’m saying,” he continued, “is that we don’t know for sure. If you find anything to definitively connect the three of them, then I will fully back you up.”

“Uh, how about the Bible thing,” Claire commented wryly. “I’d say that’s pretty definitive.”

“It’s not physical evidence,” Tom countered. “I want physical evidence. Without that, we could just as easily be dealing with anyone who wanted Martin dead and happens to have access to any kind of news outlet. Info about this ‘Hallelujah Man’ has been all over the place. The Bible quotation could have been purposely left as a way to throw us off.”

“*Or*, you just don’t want to deal with the ramifications of another serial killer,” Lindsay practically growled. Her instincts told her that this was the same guy as before, and her instincts were rarely wrong. “I’m guessing that the higher-ups don’t want to call this what it is, because then people might start to panic. Goddammit, Tom! Treating this like any other case is just a waste of time, when we should be looking for connections between the three of them!”

“And automatically ignoring the possibility that this is someone different is just irresponsible!” Tom argued.

The ring of Lindsay’s phone interrupted any further dialogue. She thought about ignoring it but a glance down at the caller ID made her respond.

“Jill, you just left here five minutes ago,” she began right away. “What could you possibly need to call me for?”

There was a pause on the other line, and then Jill spoke, her voice sounding somewhat confused. “*Um, Linz? I’m at Cindy’s car, but I’ve looked all around and I can’t find her anywhere.*”

Act II:

Claire and Lindsay found Jill about a block away from the house, standing by Cindy’s little red – and clearly empty – car. Lindsay ducked down anyway, looking in through all the windows, and then straightening up to gaze around.

“What, do you not believe me?” Jill asked. “I told you, she’s not here.”

“She probably just got bored and went to walk around or something,” Claire suggested. If

that was the case, she had to admit that she couldn't really blame Cindy for not wanting to simply sit still and wait for the other three to come find her. Sometimes she felt bad for the poor girl, the only one of them without a "legitimate" reason for coming directly onto crime scenes, even if she was just as dedicated to solving the crimes as the rest of them.

Still, Cindy could have chosen better timing, instead of wandering off again so soon after the truce with Lindsay and Jill.

"Well we've only been in there for, what, a half hour?" Lindsay thought aloud.
"Hopefully that damn girl hasn't gone too far."

Lindsay willed herself not to panic. She knew that Claire was probably right, but the fact remained that Cindy was MIA, and Lindsay always felt a hell of a lot more comfortable when she knew the exact location of the inquisitive reporter.

"Hey guys, what are we talking about?"

Jill jumped about a foot in the air as Cindy's voice appeared suddenly behind her.

"*Jesus*, Cindy. What is *up* with you and the sneaking up on people?"

Clearly not anticipating the fire in Jill's voice, Cindy took a step backwards. "Um, sorry?" she murmured, her eyebrows arching up towards her hairline.

Three pairs of eyes turned to focus intently on the petite redhead, her sudden appearance met with a combination of relief, amusement, and annoyance.

"Where the hell have you been?" Lindsay demanded. "I told you to just wait for us here!"

"Well, yeah, but..." Cindy paused, looking around warily at her friends. "Come on, Linz, how long have you known me? You didn't actually *expect* me to, did you?" she scoffed.

Claire couldn't hold back the snort of laughter at Cindy's explanation. "She's got a point, there, Lindsay. Since when has our Lois Lane ever sat still for very long, especially when there are so many other interesting things she could be doing instead?"

"And sorry I snapped at you," Jill said, whose expression had softened once she got over how startled she'd been at Cindy's unexpected arrival. "But you *do* seem to have a knack for walking ridiculously quietly." She smirked. "Maybe we should give you a little bell to carry around with you all the time. That way we'd be able to keep track of you better."

Cindy narrowed her eyes and did her best to scowl at that suggestion, but the look only made Jill's grin widen.

Catching sight of Lindsay's still-annoyed expression, Jill addressed her, "Oh lighten up, Linz. No harm done, and before you say anything, this is a *completely* different situation

than the thing at the school. I don't think we're expecting to find any mortal danger around here right at the moment."

Lindsay merely grunted in a way that could possibly be interpreted as agreement, but her eyes did relax noticeably.

Cindy's gaze met Lindsay's, clearly searching to see if they were okay. Now that she thought about it, maybe it had been stupid to leave when Lindsay had so clearly asked her not to. Still, she really hadn't thought that Lindsay would expect her to stay in one place. She'd already done enough waiting around for one day, and she honestly didn't think it was fair of Lindsay to try to keep her inactive.

Lindsay smiled at her, finally, and at the sight of it, Cindy released the breath that she hadn't quite realized she'd been holding. They were going to be okay.

"Well, now that you're back, where did you go off to, anyway?" Claire asked.

Feeling more relaxed now that she felt like Lindsay wasn't too mad at her, Cindy remembered the thing that had her hurrying back to her car in the first place.

"Well," she began, "I knew that I couldn't go anywhere where you 'important' people were, but I managed to sneak around the back of the house. A door back there was open, so I went in and made my way upstairs."

"Of course you did. I swear, you're going to give me a heart attack one of these days." Lindsay shook her head ruefully, but the smile in her eyes showed that she wasn't really upset. "Didn't you tell me just today that there wouldn't be any breaking or entering?"

"I told you that there *hadn't* been breaking or entering, not that there *wouldn't* be," Cindy corrected lightly, though she did at least have the good grace to look a bit sheepish.

Lindsay smiled. Part of her wanted to fall back on her default mode and start yelling again, but she'd been making a serious effort not to overreact as much as usual. When it came to the newest member of their club, it seemed that Lindsay's overprotective streak ran a mile wide, but she was coming to understand that trying to stifle Cindy too much was a danger all on its own.

"Well did your snooping at least provide anything interesting?" Jill inquired.

"Possibly," Cindy replied. "It's nothing to connect the murders, but it could be a place to start, at least. I ended up in some kind of office or something upstairs – and don't worry, I didn't actually touch anything – but I found a 'To Do list' that Martin had left for himself, dated a little over two weeks ago. Number one on the list is 'Get rid of the issue with Mel.' It was underlined three times and had the digits 4715 written out next to it."

Nodding, Lindsay easily shifted from concerned friend to inspector on the job. "Great.

Now if we're lucky, that'll be part of a phone number or some kind of address."

"We can cross-reference that, both the name and the number, with Martin's phone and email contacts, work colleagues, that kind of thing," Jill supplied.

"See?" Cindy questioned cheekily. "Now if I had just sat here this whole time, you wouldn't have a name to look for yet."

"Yeah, yeah. Good job, Thomas," Lindsay acknowledged grudgingly, rolling her eyes. Before she could stop herself, she reached out to pull Cindy to her, their shoulders bumping together in a brief, one-armed hug. The action surprised herself almost as much as it surprised Cindy.

"Just don't do it again," Lindsay added, knowing full well that the order would be promptly ignored.

"Okay," Lindsay continued as they made their way back towards Martin's house. "So ignoring Tom for now, we've got the scripture left at each scene, that random coin-

"Wait, what random coin?" Cindy interrupted.

"A single dollar coin was left with the line from the Bible this time," Jill explained.

"It was different than the others, though," Lindsay added. "Dollar coins are thicker than quarters, and there's usually writing around the edge of them, but it had been worn away or something on this one."

"He had a 'Godless' coin? Cool!" Cindy exclaimed. "Those are really rare."

"A what?" Jill asked, confused.

"When they first started making these new dollar coins, some of them were made incorrectly. They're supposed to have inscriptions – including, notably, 'In God We Trust' – around the edge. But this batch of so-called 'Godless' coins were defective, and got through into circulation without the inscriptions."

"So that goes with the theme of these victims being without God and needing to be 'saved,'" Claire nodded, her disgusted expression showing what she thought of the killer's apparent frame of mind.

Claire stood calmly in front of the autopsy table and closed her eyes, taking in a deep breath. As strange and morbid as it might seem, the morgue was still one of her most

reliable places for finding some peace in the midst of her chaotic life. No one else really understood it, but there was something about the stillness that let Claire reach a degree of focus that was calming in its own way.

She could use some more focus in her life, lately.

Claire's eyes remained closed, as she allowed her worries to gradually fall away, if only momentarily. Her relationship with Ed was better than it had been a mere five days earlier, but these kinds of things certainly didn't fix themselves overnight. Here, though, she didn't have to worry about Ed, or the Hallelujah Man's rising body count. Lindsay and Jacobi had gone to question the victim's ex-wife, so she didn't even have to worry about dealing with the inspector's tendency to hover during autopsies, either. Here, Claire's only concerns were the body on her table and the story that he had to tell.

Opening her eyes, the medical examiner considered Travis Martin's corpse, having already catalogued all the damage visible to the naked eye. But now it was time to dig a little deeper. Time to find out what Mr. Martin had to say.

Taking in a deep breath, Claire raised her scalpel and began to cut.

"What were you doing when you found your ex-husband, Ms. Davis?"

Inspectors Boxer and Jacobi stood on either side of the hospital bed where Charlotte Davis was being held for a few hours to make sure the symptoms of her concussion didn't get any worse.

"The bastard stood me up! We were supposed to go out for dinner two nights ago, but he never showed. So I went to find him. Thought I'd bitch him out a little," the blonde explained. "I tried to corner him after work, but then I found out he had called in some 'vacation' time, and hadn't been around for the last week and a half. I figured that meant he'd found some new chick and couldn't be bothered to drag his ass out of bed. I still had an extra key to his place, so I decided to stop by for an impromptu visit this morning."

"You were supposed to go out to dinner?" Jacobi inquired. "You *were* divorced, right? Did you still go out very often?"

"No, this was going to be the first time in a while," she replied. "I called him a few weeks ago. Said I missed him and all that bullshit. I didn't really expect him to, but he invited me out to dinner. Our schedules didn't match until just recently, though."

Lindsay frowned in confusion. It didn't sound like the woman had a very high opinion of her ex-husband, so the whole story wasn't making much sense.

"Why did you call him in the first place?" she asked. "Our records show that you were

the one to file for divorce.”

Charlotte shot Lindsay a sardonic look. “Honey, have you *seen* that man’s house? Monogamy wasn’t exactly Travis’ strong suit, sure, but let’s just say that I missed the benefits that came along with the title of ‘Mrs. Martin’ – monetary benefits, to be exact, but he sure knew what he was doing in bed, too.”

Lindsay grimaced slightly. Too much information.

“Right.” Lindsay decided to switch topics. “Well what do you know about the other people in his life – family, friends, anyone he didn’t get along with too well?”

“He was an only child, as far as I know. Parents live in California, I think, but somewhere south of here. Travis never really liked to talk about his family much.”

“But you must’ve met them at some point. At your wedding, at least,” Jacobi prompted.

“Well sure, I brought it up when we were doing the invitations and stuff, but it was up to Travis, really, and he didn’t want them to be there. So no, I’ve never met ‘em,” Charlotte elaborated.

Suddenly remembering Cindy’s earlier find, Lindsay asked abruptly, “Does the name ‘Mel’ mean anything to you?”

“Mel? No, I don’t know anyone named that. I haven’t exactly been up to date on his ever-changing social circle, though. There was one buddy of his he hung out with all the damn time, though. What was his name?” She paused, thinking to herself. “Tuck. Tuck something. They worked together. He should be able to tell you more than I can.”

A nod from Jacobi let Lindsay know that he had all he wanted for the time being. “Great. Well, thank you for your time, Ms. Davis. We’ll let you know if we have any more questions for you.”

As they made their way out of the hospital, Jacobi turned to Lindsay and asked, “So what do you think?”

“I think any rich bachelors in San Francisco need to watch out for that one,” Lindsay replied without hesitation, eliciting a chuckle from Jacobi. “Nah,” Lindsay continued, “she seems harmless enough. Martin’s death certainly doesn’t do her any good, so I doubt she means much for us.”

“Sounds like he didn’t get along too well with the parents, though,” Jacobi added. “That’ll make the next-of-kin visit a little more interesting.”

Jill didn't bother looking up when she heard a sharp knocking at the door to her office.

"Come in," she called out distractedly. Spread out on her desk were the records from Travis Martin's phone, along with his extensive list of email contacts. So far she hadn't found anything that could potentially relate to either the name 'Mel' or those digits that Cindy had found. She'd noticed that he hadn't made any calls from his phone over the last twelve days, though, which was a bit strange.

Acting D.A. Denise Kwon cleared her throat impatiently, finally causing Jill to meet her gaze. "What are you doing?" she demanded. "Have you gotten that deposition for the Ramirez trial like I told you to?"

Jill blinked, needing a moment to shift gears in her head and remember what Denise was talking about. *Shit*, she had meant to follow up on that earlier, but had gotten caught up in this latest case instead.

"Uh, no, not yet. I'm waiting for Carney, Ramirez's attorney, to get back to me," she lied. "Right now I've been working on the Martin case."

"The Martin case? That just came in this morning," Denise protested, her annoyance evident in her voice. "The detectives don't even have a suspect yet, do they? What could you possibly be needed for at this stage of things?"

"I-" Jill began defensively.

"I need you to do *your* job, Jill," Denise interrupted, "not the job of the SFPD. Whatever it is that you're looking into, I'm sure your friends are fully capable of doing it for themselves."

"That's not the point," Jill argued. She knew that she should probably just let it go and do whatever Denise told her to do, but she wasn't in the mood to play the role of Denise's favorite punching bag. "While the detectives on the Martin case are doing the initial interviews, I'm checking up on another lead, so we can move this thing forward at a faster pace. *My job*, Denise, is to put together the best case I possibly can, and that is *exactly* what I'm doing. No, we don't have a suspect yet, but we're talking about another potential serial killer out there! I'm not going to just sit around and ignore the case completely until we find a suspect. The more I know about what's going on, the more involved I am with the entire process, the more likely we are to have a successful trial!"

Denise simply glared at her for a moment, but Jill refused to look away. Sure, maybe she could have gotten the deposition earlier, but Jill was not about to apologize for devoting extra time to an important case like this one.

It felt like they were still just running around in the dark with this thing. Lindsay had explained how Tom was making them officially ignore the Bible connection for now, but that didn't mean that they weren't all still thinking about the cases as connected; it was

just the major question of *why* that continued to elude them. It was partly the fact that she didn't fully know what they were dealing with that had her obsessing over details more than she normally might have.

"From what I hear," Denise said coldly, "there's no physical evidence connecting these murders. Unless some comes up, I'd suggest that you avoid throwing around the term 'serial killer' so carelessly. Right now, as far as I'm concerned, the Martin case should be way down on your to-do list. I'll keep you on the case, but don't make me regret it, Jill. After the last time you were lead counsel, I'm starting to doubt your judgment," Denise continued, alluding to Jill's previous case, which had ended in an acquittal.

"Oh, bullshit, the Waters trial was *not* my fault, and you know it!" Jill called after her boss's retreating form.

"Get me that deposition, Jill!" Denise's voice floated back through the open door to Jill's office, as her heels could be heard clicking down the hallway.

Sighing, Jill picked up the phone and dialed the number for the defense attorney in Denise's case.

Jacobi handed a cup of coffee to Aaron Tucker, and then leaned against Lindsay's desk. Having tried unsuccessfully to contact Martin's parents, Lindsay and Jacobi had next managed to track down "Tuck," the friend and co-worker.

"So, Mr. Tucker," Lindsay began. "We understand that you were well-acquainted with Travis Martin."

The investment banker offered a charming smile, staring directly at Lindsay. "Please, call me Tuck, Inspector." Lindsay smiled wanly in return. "But yeah, Travis and I were pretty good buddies. We worked the same shifts three days a week, and would hang out a bunch outside of work, watching football or going out to a bar to meet women." He paused, shaking his head, as his smile faded. "It's crazy, man, what happened to him."

"What can you tell us about him?" Jacobi asked, frowning at the way that Tuck was eyeing his partner. "Anyone you can think of that he didn't get along with?"

He shrugged. "Travis was a good guy. But he was a 'different girl every other night' kind of guy, and he was also a big fan of all the things he could buy with the ton of money he earned. I got the impression he didn't grow up with that much money. So now he had more than he knew what to do with – I mean, the guy collected rare stamps and coins, not because he particularly *liked* them, but just because he *could*! And his success, I think, made it so that he had no respect for anyone who, in his eyes, didn't work hard enough to make something of themselves. So, there are two types of people who didn't like Travis – the one-night stands who wanted more, and the less-fortunate, who were jealous of him."

“Anyone in particular, *Mr. Tucker*?” Lindsay asked, making a point of keeping things formal, instead of using the suggested nickname.

“There was this one chick. She first started coming to the bank almost a year ago, I think. Travis wasn’t there when she came the first time, but I was, and she made me take down her name and number and give it to Travis. Said it was really important that he call her.”

“Do you remember her name?” Lindsay interjected.

“No, sorry. Like I said, this was a while ago. Anyway, I gave him the note, but I guess he didn’t call her, because then she just kept showing up. She managed to miss his shifts a bunch of times in a row, and then when he was finally there, they went back to his office for, I dunno, maybe ten minutes? She left, all upset, and he wouldn’t talk about it. She kept coming by, though, but he refused to say anything to her. Maybe a month or so later, she just stopped. But then, about two months ago, she showed up again! She didn’t come by as often as before, but she did keep trying to see him somewhat regularly.”

“So did you ever find out what she wanted from him?” Lindsay frowned. Whatever it was, the woman had been quite persistent.

“No,” he replied, obviously disappointed. “I tried to get it out of him, but Travis absolutely refused to tell me anything.”

“How about describing her? Could you do that?” Jacobi inquired, taking out a pen and some paper.

“Sure. African-American, maybe late twenties or early thirties-ish, always wore her hair in a ponytail, pretty, but a little too skinny for my tastes.”

Lindsay rolled her eyes. “We don’t care whether or not you wanted to sleep with her, we just want to know what she looked like.”

The man simply grinned. “Right. Well, that’s about all I remember about her. Sorry.”

Jacobi nodded. “Well thank you for your time, Mr. Tucker. We’ll let you know if we have any more questions.”

Jacobi waited until the banker was out of sight before speaking. “Lovely. So now we’ve got a new mystery girl to find.”

“And don’t forget the rare coin collection,” Lindsay added. “Seems like we might want to find that too.”

Cindy was the first one to arrive down at the morgue after Claire called them all that evening, but was soon followed by Lindsay.

“Hey, any luck with the case yet?” Cindy asked the inspector, as they waited for Claire to get off the phone and Jill to arrive.

“Nothing so far, but we’ve got some potential stuff. We haven’t been able to get in contact with the parents yet, but they’re a potential angle to follow up on. Plus, some CSIs went back to Martin’s place; we missed a drawer with a false bottom that had this rare coin collection in it, and they were able to lift a bit of thread that got caught in the corner. Apparently, the man had not one, but *three* of those Godless coin things,” Lindsay explained. “What about you? Get yourself into any more trouble?” she drawled teasingly.

“Ha ha, Linz.” Cindy rolled her eyes. “No, I only seem to get into trouble when you’re around. With so little to go on, I haven’t really been able to do much, though. I tried doing a search of all the addresses that include 4715 in them and looking at the people who lived there, but that wasn’t really going anywhere. Then I started looking into the money thing; I mean most people, even the ones with rare coin collections, don’t exactly have thousands of dollar coins just lying around, so...”

Cindy paused, suddenly noticing that a strange expression had crossed Lindsay’s face as she eyed the redhead contemplatively, seemingly not even fully paying attention to what Cindy was saying.

Unsure what was going through the inspector’s head, Cindy asked, “Okay, why are you looking at me like that?”

The question seemed to break Lindsay from her brief daze, as her eyes focused back onto Cindy’s. “Huh? Oh, nothing. It’s just...” Lindsay paused, looking away in embarrassment. “You look nice,” she admitted, saying it quickly, as if the three words were connected into one.

Cindy laughed, though she remained slightly confused. “And you say that like A, that’s a bad thing, and B, I usually look like crap.”

“No,” Lindsay hurried to assure her. “You always look nice, your outfit is just...nice...er than usual.”

Lindsay could feel a slight blush creeping over her face. She wished she’d just kept her mouth shut. It was true, though – Cindy wore a simple, but quite flattering, white skirt that reached to just above her knees; the bit of smoky eyeliner was certainly something new; and the silky green shirt somehow seemed to bring out previously-unnoticed flecks of hazel in Cindy’s eyes, as well as show off a generous hint of cleavage.

Lindsay swallowed audibly, figuring that her suddenly increased heart rate and slight discomfort simply resulted from seeing her friend dressed in a way that seemed so

intentionally sexualized. She was used to it with Jill, but definitely not Cindy.

“Um, thanks,” Cindy murmured, self-consciously tilting her head to scratch behind her ear.

Just then Jill interrupted the odd tension as she strode into the morgue. “Sorry I’m late. Denise is on another power-trip and keeps making me do all this random crap for her.”

Lindsay and Cindy both turned to Jill gratefully. “Hey,” Lindsay exclaimed, a bit too eagerly, causing Jill to shoot her a strange look.

“Hey,” she replied, drawing out the word slowly. Her eyes turned to Cindy, and a smirk lit up her face. “Well look at you!” she exclaimed. “Lois Lane’s got a hot date!” she added with a wink. Well this was sure to be interesting, she mused.

Lindsay’s face whipped back around to Cindy, whose face instantly flushed at Jill’s words.

“You’re going on a date?” Lindsay asked, unsure why she was so surprised by the mere idea. Of course that was why Cindy was all dressed up – to go on a date with one of her “people.”

“Um,” Cindy began, crossing her arms in front of her chest and looking back and forth between Lindsay and Jill. “Yeah. Just going out for dinner,” she shrugged.

“What’s going on?” Claire asked as she reentered the room after finishing her phone call with Ed. She looked around at her friends, taking in the uncomfortable looks on Cindy’s and Lindsay’s faces, and the amused sparkle in Jill’s.

“Cindy’s got a date tonight,” Jill explained.

“Ah,” Claire commented, sharing a look of understanding with Jill. “Well have fun!”

Cindy smiled in gratitude. She couldn’t figure out what the deal was with Lindsay, who’d been acting strange almost as soon as she’d arrived, but at least Claire and Jill were encouraging. It’d been a while since she’d last gone out on a date, so she was already nervous enough without such a big deal being made of it.

“So what kind of *person* are you going out with?” Lindsay inquired, her voice a bit harder than it’d been earlier.

Cindy turned to simply stare at her for a moment, her blush deepening. She knew what Lindsay meant, but the question irked her enough to make her reject a simple answer.

“What kind of person? Oh you know, just your normal kind of person – smart, nice, tall, good-looking, grew up in Denver.” She made a point of making no references to gender,

causing Lindsay to frown. “Is that what you meant?” she asked innocently.

Lindsay rolled her eyes. “You know what I meant,” she accused.

There was a slightly tense moment of silence, and Claire wondered if she should try to defuse the situation or simply let them get this out of their system.

Before Claire could think of anything to say, though, Cindy sighed and gave in. “Her name’s Ellen. She’s a web designer,” she admitted simply.

Unable to stop herself, Lindsay practically snorted out a short laugh. “Her name’s Ellen?” she asked, cocking an eyebrow.

“Lindsay...” Jill warned, guessing where Lindsay was headed, but really hoping that her friend wouldn’t actually go there.

“What’s wrong with that?” Cindy prompted. “Do you have something against people named Ellen?”

“No, it’s a great name.” Lindsay smirked. “It’s just kind of funny. I mean, it’s just got to be like the gayest name out there, right?” she joked. “I mean, stereotypically.”

Claire and Jill could only gape at Lindsay in stunned silence, hardly able to believe that the inspector was actually sinking to such levels, joking in such bad taste. They both looked over to Cindy, anxiously waiting to see the reporter’s reaction.

Offering a weak smile, Cindy rolled her eyes. She really didn’t know what to make of Lindsay’s odd behavior. Should she be amused? Offended? “Right,” she replied warily, deciding to give her the benefit of the doubt for the time being. “Very funny, Linz.”

Later, Lindsay would acknowledge that this was the point where she probably should have just stopped talking. Instead, she went on, “I’ve been meaning to ask you, by the way, do you have a ‘type’?”

“A ‘type’?” Cindy repeated flatly.

“Yeah. You know, who do you like more: blonds, brunettes, or other redheads; blue eyes or green. That kind of thing,” Lindsay supplied, even as her heart beat uncomfortably in her chest. She wasn’t quite sure where the question had come from. She had idly wondered before, but certainly had never meant to actually bring it up.

“I dunno, Lindsay,” Cindy replied uncomfortably, almost squirming in place. She could feel the color slowly draining from her face. Lindsay’s tone remained light, but there was just something that seemed “off” about the whole conversation.

“It just seems like you’d *need* to have one,” Lindsay elaborated. “I mean, if you can’t

even rely on gender to weed some people out, you must have *some* other way of narrowing down your potential dating pool!”

Jill grimaced. The line of questioning could have *almost* been purely innocent, an honest curiosity about how bisexuality “worked.” But there was no denying that there was more to it than that in this instance.

Cindy stared hard at the inspector, finally sick of Lindsay’s attitude. “It’s called personality, Lindsay. I try not to date *jackasses*.”

Cindy’s unexpected reply caused Jill to laugh out loud, before quickly covering her mouth when Claire whacked her on the arm.

Jill’s laughter managed to break the tension, though, as Lindsay looked sheepishly down at the floor before grinning sincerely as she looked back up at Cindy, an apology held within her eyes, even if it wasn’t quite voiced aloud. “Yeah, that works,” she drawled.

Cindy simply stared back at her.

“Well!” Claire clapped her hands together. “Now that we’ve got *that* all settled, why don’t we talk about our latest dead body?”

Act III:

“Right.” Lindsay couldn’t believe she’d allowed herself to get sidetracked for so long. “What have you got?” she asked Claire.

Leading the way over to the autopsy table, Claire lifted part of the sheet covering Travis Martin’s body. “Well the first things that came up were, yes, more bruises. There are some more that I hadn’t noticed right away, since they were almost hidden underneath all the others.” Claire indicated Martin’s wrists and ankles as she continued, “These ones here are different. Older. See?”

“I’ll just take your word for it,” Jill murmured, as Lindsay and Cindy crowded in closer to see where Claire pointed.

“He was tied up,” Lindsay guessed. She’d certainly seen the familiar lines of darkened skin on a few too many murder victims.

“For almost two whole weeks,” Claire agreed. “The bindings were removed before he was killed, though.”

“Huh. Martin took some vacation time that would fit with that time period,” Lindsay pointed out. “The killer could have forced him to call in the time off, holding him captive

here during that time.”

“He didn’t use his phone over the last week and a half, either,” Jill added, a thoughtful frown crossing her face. “And then they just...what?” she continued. “Sat around and had a little chat for two weeks?”

Cindy took a moment to gaze over the rest of Martin’s body, her mind running quickly through various theories, only to promptly discard most of them when they didn’t make much sense. “The bruising around his neck...” she began.

“Definitely isn’t from the same thing he was tied up with,” Claire supplied. It was the one major piece in the puzzle that still wasn’t making any sense. The mysterious neck bruising bothered Claire; any unexplained injury never sat well with her.

“You said earlier that Martin’s death probably happened really quickly,” Lindsay jumped in, starting to pace back and forth. “That’s different from the Blake and Dellan murders, when the killer really drew things out. So, let’s say he wanted to prolong the torture, here. Who knows what the killer could have done during those two weeks, but I can bet it wasn’t too pleasant.”

Knowing that it wasn’t what Lindsay wanted to hear, Claire went ahead anyway. “Just to play devil’s advocate here, but what if Tom’s right, and it’s a different killer?”

Lindsay just scowled.

“Well maybe the killer just needed time to get everything ready,” Cindy suggested. “Dollar coins aren’t exactly the most common form of currency, especially in the amount that we’re talking about.”

Lindsay stopped pacing as Jill added, “Good point. Where do people even *get* that many dollar coins? The mint? We could look into any large orders made recently.”

“Already on top of it,” Cindy informed them. “The problem with that, though, is that there are collectors who regularly make major purchases, and banks and some retailers will stock up. Plus, the killer could have simply gone to a bank with bills and had them exchanged into coins, either all in one go, or even going to different banks at different times. He wouldn’t have even needed to be a member of the bank. If he knows what he’s doing, which it seems like he does, it’s unlikely that he made just one ginormous order. So yeah, all that just complicates things, but like I said, I’m looking into it.”

Unable to resist, Jill teased, “I can’t believe you’re a writer for a living, and yet you just used the word ‘ginormous.’”

Claire and Lindsay chuckled lightly, before Claire continued, “Well, going off of Cindy’s theory, let’s say it’s possible that our killer used those two weeks to get all that money together. He keeps Martin alive, but only in order to kill him with style.”

“God, I can’t even imagine.” Cindy shuddered. “You’re tied up, and maybe you even have to watch as, little by little, the man holding you hostage prepares to kill you.”

“Speaking of which,” Claire interjected, “some very interesting results came back from the tox screen. It’s possible that Martin may not have died as quickly as I first thought.”

Lindsay looked over sharply. “What do you mean?” she asked.

Claire moved to the side of the room, grabbing the tox screen report from another table. “There was one major abnormality that came back. Martin had rocuronium bromide in his system,” Claire reported, handing over the test results.

“You say that like we’re supposed to know what you’re talking about,” Jill noted dryly.

“Rocuronium, also known as Zemuron, is a muscle relaxant, commonly used as part of modern anesthesia. It acts as a paralyzing agent, with rapid onset and intermediate duration,” Claire explained.

“So...what does that mean? Why would the killer have used it?” Lindsay asked, trying to wrap her mind around what Claire was saying.

“Good question,” Claire nodded. “My best guess is that the killer wanted Martin fully incapacitated. With the dosage in question, he would have been conscious, but unable to move *at all*, for thirty minutes to an hour. The whole thing would have been terrifying; when drugs similar to this one are used by paramedics in the field, the patients are often given something along the lines of valium as well, to ease the trauma.”

“Well did the drug itself kill him?” Lindsay pressed.

“It’s possible. The autopsy shows that cause of death was asphyxiation. There have been no records of someone overdosing on this drug, but theoretically, a large enough dosage *could* affect the respiratory muscles, making it impossible to breathe,” Claire confirmed.

Lindsay opened her mouth to speak, but Claire cut her off. “And before you ask, I’m still in the process of testing the damage to his lungs, so I can’t tell you yet exactly when he died or how long the whole thing took. He could have been smothered in coins right away and died within five to fifteen minutes, or if administered correctly, maintenance doses could have dragged the whole thing out for hours. I just figured you’d want to hear about the tox screen results. You certainly can’t just buy rocuronium over the counter, so you may be looking for someone with access to a hospital, which would have it in stock.”

“I remember reading about a robbery at Mission Cross North a little while ago,” Cindy supplied. “I can look to see if rocuronium was among the things that went missing.”

Lindsay nodded. It wasn’t a lot, but it was something.

Cindy pulled into the restaurant's parking lot, glancing down at her watch to see that she was about ten minutes late. Once inside the building, a quick search through the room revealed Ellen, smiling at her from a booth tucked away in the corner.

"Hey!" Ellen greeted her warmly, standing up at Cindy's approach and lightly kissing her on the cheek.

"I hope you haven't been waiting too long." Cindy smiled apologetically.

"No, not at all," Ellen assured her. "I went ahead and ordered us some wine, though. Pinot grigio still your favorite?"

Cindy grinned, both grateful and impressed that Ellen had even remembered. A glass of wine sounded perfect right about then.

Right on time, the waiter showed up, pouring them each a glass and then taking their orders. Cindy went first. She'd barely gotten there, but had been to the family-owned Italian place several times before and already knew what she wanted. When Ellen turned to the waiter next, ordering her own meal, Cindy took a moment to simply gaze – subtly, she hoped – at her date. They'd shared a few late-night phone calls recently, but it had been a while since they had actually gotten together in person.

Ellen looked good, Cindy mused, her jet black hair a bit longer than the last time they'd seen each other, but still beautiful in its stark contrast with Ellen's pale, smooth skin. Ellen turned back to Cindy, and they locked eyes as Cindy blushed at having been caught looking. It still took her a moment before she managed to look away, though; she'd always been mesmerized by Ellen's eyes. The combination of long, dark hair, pale skin, and bright blue eyes certainly made an intriguingly beautiful whole.

"So what have you been up to?" Ellen asked once the waiter had left again. "I haven't gotten a chance to read through the Register yet today – I usually read it with dinner – so I don't know about your latest exploits in the crime world of San Francisco."

Cindy laughed. "With dinner? Most people read the paper in the morning, you know."

"Yeah, but I'm allergic to mornings, remember?" Ellen winked.

"Of course, you and your vampire-like tendencies," Cindy teased with a smile. It was nice, being able to have a simple, carefree conversation with someone who wasn't in any way involved with her job. Wanting to avoid talking about work in general, and this latest case in particular, she continued, "But no, nothing too exciting in the crime world lately. Just your everyday murderers and rapists," she joked.

It was a lie, of course, but Ellen went with it, deftly changing the topic.

As Claire was washing the dishes after dinner, she felt Ed's approach behind her even before she heard the wheels of his chair hit the tile floor. Glancing over her shoulder, she offered him a tired smile. He cleared his throat, and Claire shut off the water, turning around to face him fully.

"Claire, I..." he began hesitantly, looking down at the floor. "I went down to the station today. When the boys were at school."

Claire frowned in surprise. Ed rarely returned to his old workplace anymore; it reminded him too much of all that he'd had before he was shot.

"I got a referral from the doctor on the force," he continued, finally meeting Claire's gaze. "For a therapist."

Claire's expression softened, full of relief and gratefulness. "That's great," she replied encouragingly.

"I'm not promising anything, but I'll give it a shot. I talked with the guy on the phone today, too, and he suggested that you come to a session." Ed's eyes returned to the floor.

"Of course," she answered quietly, but firmly. Claire could easily see Ed's discomfort with the situation, but he was *trying*, and that meant the world.

Lindsay entered her apartment with a sigh, tossing her keys onto the counter and greeting Martha, who'd perked her head up in interest at the first sound of a key in the lock.

"Hey, girl, how was your day? Better than mine, I hope."

Martha lowered her head back down to her paws, eyes following Lindsay around the apartment as the inspector removed her jacket and went to hang it in the closet, and then retrieved a beer from the fridge.

Lindsay really needed to find a more active conversation partner, she thought wryly to herself. She moved over to the couch, plopping herself down and turning on the TV, as Martha shifted over to settle her head on Lindsay's knee. Lindsay obligingly scratched behind Martha's ears, idly flipping through the channels until she found something that looked vaguely interesting.

She found her mind wandering at the first set of commercials, though, and her thoughts turned involuntarily to Cindy. Once Cindy had left for her date, Jill and Claire had

immediately and forcefully chastised the inspector for her earlier grilling of the young reporter. Lindsay honestly hadn't meant to seem homophobic in her questions about Cindy's love life, but she acknowledged that it could have come across that way.

Lindsay didn't really know what had gotten into her. There was just something about the thought of Cindy even *having* a love life, regardless of gender, that threw Lindsay off.

Her thoughts turned back to when she'd first found out about Cindy's sexual orientation, recalling how at that time, too, she'd almost made it sound like she wasn't okay with the whole 'dating women' thing. Maybe she should call Cindy. Make sure she wasn't too offended by their latest conversation.

Lindsay reached for her phone and had almost finished dialing when she remembered that now was not a good time for calling the reporter. Interrupting Cindy's date was definitely *not* something that Lindsay wanted to do.

She stood up abruptly, eliciting a small bark of annoyance from the dislodged dog. The thought of sitting still within her quiet apartment suddenly no longer appealed to her.

"What do you say, Martha? Wanna go for a run?" Martha wagged her tail in agreement, and Lindsay went to change into sweats. She definitely had some excess energy to burn.

"So this Lindsay," Ellen asked as she and Cindy stood up from their table, "is she your ex or something?"

"What?" Cindy looked over at Ellen sharply. "No!" she immediately insisted.

Ellen chuckled at Cindy's adamant response. "Sorry. It's just...the way you were talking about her. I was just curious."

"No," Cindy repeated. "Lindsay's just a friend. She's straight. And even if she wasn't..." Cindy could feel herself blushing, and was grateful for the darkness as they made their way out of the restaurant. "She's just a friend," she finished awkwardly.

She wondered what had made Ellen think such a thing. She went through their earlier conversation in her head; it had been a highly pleasant evening, with good food, good wine, and good company. Sure, Lindsay had come up in conversation a few times, but so had Cindy's other friends, and the reporter didn't think that she'd said anything particularly different about Lindsay.

They walked in comfortable silence to Cindy's car, Ellen's shoulder brushing up gently against Cindy's. "Well it's still pretty early," Ellen pointed out. "You wanna come over for another glass of wine, or coffee, or something?"

Cindy broke off her train of thought. “Uh, sure. Sounds good,” she replied after a brief moment’s consideration. In spite of the early start to her day, Cindy was feeling wide awake, and she wasn’t quite ready to head back to her empty apartment just yet. “I have to get up early tomorrow, but I can stay for a little while,” she added.

“Great. You can just follow me, then.” Ellen grinned and then went off to her own car, lightly touching Cindy’s hand as she walked away.

Cindy had been to Ellen’s apartment once before, a small but comfortable place in the Haight-Ashbury district. Once they arrived, Cindy felt a light blush crawl up her cheeks as Ellen told her to go make herself comfortable in the living room, while she went to fetch them some wine. Cindy pushed away the memory of the last time she had been on that couch, and forced herself to focus on the present.

Ellen seemed to understand somehow that this evening wouldn’t be ending the same way, though, and Cindy was grateful both that they could avoid an awkward conversation about it and that Ellen still wanted to spend time with her anyway.

Their conversation was friendly and relaxed, and before Cindy knew it, almost two hours had passed. She looked down at her watch, noting the time with surprise.

“Shit, I should go. I have an article due tomorrow that’s going to need a lot of work. I had a really good time tonight, though.” She smiled sincerely, causing Ellen to offer a genuine smile in return.

“Me too. We should do this again sometime.”

Cindy nodded as they both stood up, Ellen going to retrieve Cindy’s jacket as they walked out of the living room.

“You sure you’re okay to drive?” Ellen inquired, hesitating by the doorway.

“Totally. It’s been enough time since our last drink,” Cindy assured her.

With a nod, Ellen opened the front door, and Cindy stepped through before turning back around once more. She opened her mouth to say goodnight, but before any words could escape, Ellen leaned down to capture Cindy’s lips in a kiss.

It caught Cindy by surprise, and her hand reached up reflexively to clasp onto Ellen’s shoulder, steadying herself. The kiss was relatively short, but deep, and the pressure of Ellen’s lips against her own caused a small shiver to pass through Cindy’s body. Ellen pulled back after a moment, lightly licking her lips with a contented smile, as Cindy’s eyes fluttered open.

“We should do this again sometime,” Ellen repeated meaningfully, a new husky quality to her voice.

Cindy swallowed and could only nod again in response. There was something particularly sexy about the normally laid-back web designer taking charge. “I’ll... or you can...” Cindy stopped to clear her throat, embarrassed by how flustered she felt. “We’ll talk,” she agreed. “Goodnight, Ellen.”

“Goodnight, Cindy.”

With that, Cindy turned and made her way down from the third floor, taking in a deep breath once she got outside the building. A light rain had begun to fall, and Cindy took a moment to breathe in the cool smell of wet grass before she made a mad dash to her car.

Lindsay stepped from the bathroom after her shower, running a towel through her hair. The rain had managed to cut her run short, which did nothing to improve her restless mood. Though she hadn’t been planning on it, she had found herself jogging by Cindy’s building – the distinct lack of light coming from the reporter’s apartment had caused her to pick up the pace, focusing solely on the pounding of her feet against the pavement.

She glanced at her phone. It was just this nagging feeling of guilt that had her wanting to talk to the young redhead, Lindsay told herself. She’d just call Cindy’s landline and leave a message, she decided. That way, Lindsay could do her part in resolving the tension she’d stupidly created, but since Cindy wasn’t home, Lindsay wouldn’t have to worry about interrupting anything. The issue would then be in Cindy’s hands, and the girl could either call Lindsay back or just forget the whole thing.

“Hello?”

Lindsay was silent. She had been so sure that Cindy wouldn’t pick up, so the unexpected response caused her to promptly forget everything she’d meant to say.

“Helloooo? Sean, is that you again? You’ve really got to stop calling me like this.”

“There’s someone named Sean who keeps calling you?” Lindsay spoke suddenly, eliciting a squeak of surprise from Cindy.

“Lindsay? Way to scare the crap out of me!”

Deciding to ignore that last statement, Lindsay continued, “Seriously, who’s this Sean?”

Lindsay could just barely hear Cindy’s mumble of, “Weirdest start to a conversation, *ever!*” before she raised her voice to a normal level to explain, “He’s perfectly harmless, I swear. He’s just the sixteen-year-old kid in one of the families that lives down the hall. I think he has a crush on me.”

“Yeah, well the last ‘harmless’ guy who had a crush on you *kidnapped* you, if I remember correctly, so excuse me for wanting to ask about him,” Lindsay commented good-naturedly.

Cindy laughed lightly, adding, “I told him that I’d tell his parents if he called again, and since you’re *not* him, the fact remains that he hasn’t called since. If he attempts to kidnap me, though, I’ll be sure to let you know.”

“I’d appreciate that.” Lindsay smiled, relieved that it was still easy to talk with Cindy.

“So what’s up?” Cindy asked. “And why’d you call this phone, by the way? You never call this phone.”

“Oh. Well...” Lindsay hesitated, unsure how to answer. “I just thought you’d still be out, so I figured it would be better to leave you a message here.”

“Nope,” Cindy replied, “I’m back home. Obviously.”

It suddenly occurred to Lindsay that maybe Cindy might not be alone at the moment. That maybe there was an entirely different reason for the lights being turned off in Cindy’s apartment than the one she’d assumed. She flushed, not wanting to let her thoughts go there.

Seemingly understanding Lindsay’s return to silence, Cindy continued, “I got back, by myself, a little while ago.”

Lindsay exhaled in relief. “Right. I mean, it’s none of my business.” She paused, trying to think of a way to get off the phone. She had called with the intent of apologizing, but now that Cindy was actually on the line, Lindsay wasn’t sure that she even wanted to bring the issue up again. “Well I was just calling because, you know, after you left tonight, the rest of us, uh, decided to meet up at Papa Joe’s tomorrow. I just thought you should know.”

There was a moment of silence before Cindy replied, “You called me. On my landline. A little before midnight. Just to tell me that? Linz, I’m sure I’ll see you, Jill, or Claire at some point tomorrow. Why didn’t you just wait to tell me then?”

Lindsay couldn’t think of a good answer quick enough. “I’m sorry about earlier,” she blurted out in a rush, cringing slightly. Apologizing always made her feel awkward. “I shouldn’t have bugged you about your date.”

“Um... Okay.” Cindy didn’t seem to know what else to say.

“I just... I don’t know why I called.” Lindsay released a frustrated sigh. This was not going the way she’d wanted it to. “I just,” she began again, “wanted to make sure I hadn’t offended you too badly. Jill made me promise that I’d apologize, so that’s why I called, I guess. Sorry.” Lindsay felt like banging her head against the wall. Why was this so hard?

The other line was silent for so long that Lindsay wasn't sure if anyone was still there. "Cindy?" she asked tentatively.

The word had barely escaped Lindsay's mouth before Cindy's voice returned. "Are you apologizing because Jill made you promise that you would, or are you apologizing because you're sorry?" Her tone was forceful, but quiet.

"The second one," Lindsay admitted, her voice squeezing past the uncomfortable lump in her throat. "I *know* that I was being a jackass. I can't even explain what made me keep talking. You have this weird effect on me, Thomas, where my inner filter seems to be broken." Lindsay paused. "Case in point, I can't quite believe I just admitted that to you."

Cindy was quiet for another long moment, but when she spoke, Lindsay could hear the smile in Cindy's voice. "I'll tell you what. You pick up the tab at Papa Joe's tomorrow, and we'll call it even."

Lindsay smiled. "Deal."

When she woke up the next day, Lindsay felt disoriented. This seemed to happen most mornings, lately. It was the same feeling she got when she woke up in a room that wasn't hers, and it would take her a minute to figure out where the hell she was.

The feeling was disconcerting, especially knowing that she really *was* in her own room. But the blue-gray walls had been painted a forest green, the bed had been replaced and was set in a different position, and the rug on the floor was new.

The room may have been in her house, but it certainly didn't feel like the one she'd been sleeping in for years.

Still, it was better than how she'd felt those first few weeks after she'd come home to find Corinne Stevens' body lying on her bed. Spending more than ten minutes in the room had been enough to make her feel sick, with the image of Corinne's corpse tainting the entire room. She'd finally gotten around to redecorating after the hostage situation at the school, when Jill had asked to sleep on the couch, unwittingly getting in the way of Lindsay's attempts to hide from Kiss-Me-Not's ghosts. Still, even with a new bed, it had taken her almost another week before she could stand to actually sleep in it.

Lindsay wondered how long it would take her to get used to the new arrangement of her bedroom, how long it would take before the room started feel like her own again.

When she got to the bullpen that morning, Jacobi sat waiting at his desk, peering curiously at her over the top of some papers in his hand.

“Did we get a lead that you failed to tell me about?” he asked, eyebrows raised.

Lindsay could only frown in confusion. “Huh?” she managed.

“One of the tech guys dropped this off for you,” Jacobi explained. “Apparently, you made a request for information on...” He paused as his gaze lowered once again to the forms in front of him. “Web designers named Ellen,” he finished.

Lindsay blushed and her eyes widened in embarrassment, having completely forgotten about that. “Never mind, it’s nothing,” she said in a rush, before reaching to grab the files from out of Jacobi’s hands. She twisted to hastily shove the papers into one of her drawers, turning back around to face Jacobi, who merely arched an eyebrow at her.

“You’re a strange woman, Lindsay Boxer,” he drawled.

“Yeah, but you love me anyway, old man,” she teased, flashing him a grin.

“You promised me that you’d take it easy, Ms. Thomas. I’m serious about that. Your injury isn’t healing as quickly as I’d like.” Cindy’s doctor stared at her sternly as Cindy pulled her shirt back over her head and then re-buttoned her vest.

Cindy took a deep breath and then looked up with a smile. “I *am* being careful. Really,” she asserted as cheerfully and energetically as she could manage. These examinations always left her feeling even more sore than usual, which made her claim that she was doing just fine a little harder to pull off.

Dr. Pruitt frowned. “Well you’re not being careful *enough*. If you want to get back to being at one hundred percent sooner, then you need to slow down more *now*. Stop pushing your limits.”

Cindy nodded contritely. She’d been told the same thing before, but it hadn’t quite stuck yet. She knew that she should, but she just *couldn’t* slow down. Not now. It might mean a little more pain and a longer recovery, but she could handle it. She had to handle it.

Heading towards the elevators, something caught Cindy’s eye. She stared at the numbers outside the room to her left, trying to figure out why they had caught her attention.

A thought struck her – it was pretty unlikely, sure, but *maybe* – so she continued on to the elevators and got off on the fourth floor, instead of the lobby. She quickly found a directory for the floor, and her eyes swept quickly across it, until she found the room number she was looking for: 4715.

Smiling, she made her way over to the front desk of the dermatology department. “Hi,” she greeted. “I’d like to make an appointment with Dr. Melissa Freeman.”

A knock at her door caused Jill to look up from her desk to see Lindsay peek her head inside the office.

“Hey, Jill. You busy?” Lindsay asked as she walked into the room.

Jill sighed and ran a tired hand across her forehead. “Yes, actually, I am.”

It was only 11:30, but she’d been working non-stop since she stepped into the Hall at 7:45 that morning. Lindsay was actually pretty lucky that she’d come at a time when Jill was in her office at all. It felt like she’d been running all over the city for most of the morning, doing various tasks for Denise.

“Well this won’t take too long. I just need you to see if you can find some more info on Martin’s parents. We still haven’t been able to get in touch with them, and there isn’t much that we’ve been able to learn about them beyond the basics, so I could use your help on this one. Just let me know if you find anything, okay?” Lindsay smiled and, figuring that there was nothing else to be discussed, started back towards the door.

She stopped, though, when Jill replied simply, “No, Lindsay.”

Lindsay turned around again and eyed Jill in confusion. “No?”

Jill sat with her eyes closed, pinching the bridge of her nose. “No.” She sighed again, before looking back up at Lindsay. “I can’t let you know when I find something, because I can’t look into it for you. I’ve got too many other things to do, Lindsay. Denise has me *swamped* with work.”

Lindsay blinked. “I didn’t think I’d have to remind you how important this case is. We need every lead we can get, Jill.”

“I know that, but there’s nothing I can do! As far as most people are concerned, this case is no more important than any other. Regardless, it’s still a long way from any kind of trial, so Denise has all but *forbid* me to work on this case. I’m sorry, Lindsay. I just can’t help you right now. If I find some spare time, I’ll do what I can, but don’t expect much.”

Lindsay simply stared at Jill for a moment, her brow furrowed. “You’re really not going to work on this case, today?” she asked flatly. “*You* were even assigned to the case before *I* was, this is bullshit.”

“Linz, you know I’d rather be working with you, Claire, and Cindy, but that’s just not the D.A. office’s priority right now.” Jill shrugged helplessly. “I don’t know what else to tell you. I have to do my job.”

“Fine,” Lindsay huffed. She knew that she couldn’t really be mad at Jill, but it was frustrating nonetheless. “I’ll keep you updated, assuming you still want to hear where we are with the case.”

Jill nodded. “Of *course*.” Lindsay turned once again to leave the office, but Jill felt compelled to add, “I’m not giving up on this, Linz. I’m still right in this, right with you.”

“I know.” Lindsay smiled briefly and then disappeared around the door, leaving Jill to bang her head down on her desk.

A beep of Lindsay’s phone let her know that she had a message waiting for her. She started to reach for it, but a look from Jacobi quickly reminded her of his thoughts on talking on the phone while driving, so she let it go.

Her partner, sitting in the passenger seat, glanced down at the phone for her. “It was your reporter friend,” he explained.

Lindsay frowned, wondering why Cindy had called. She itched to pull over and listen to the message, but knew that she should simply keep driving. They were on their way to the home of Daniel and Louise Martin, parents of the victim. Attempts to contact the family had remained unsuccessful, so their arrival would have to be unannounced. They simply couldn’t wait any longer to get in touch with these people. Lindsay just hoped that the drive outside the city would prove to be useful in some way.

When they pulled up to the Martins’ last known address, however, Lindsay took a moment to dial her voicemail, and was greeted by Cindy’s excited voice.

“Lindsay! Hey, I think I found ‘Mel’! Lucky for me, there was a late cancellation of an appointment, so a little past noon, I’m going to meet Dr. Melissa Freeman. I’ll let you all know if I find out anything interesting. Bye!”

A doctor. Lindsay immediately thought back to Claire’s hunch that their killer might’ve had access to a hospital. She looked down at her watch; it was almost 12:30, so there was no chance of talking to Cindy beforehand. She’d simply have to wait to see what the reporter came up with.

Putting her phone away again, Lindsay walked with Jacobi up to the front door of the small house. She looked around, really noticing her surroundings for the first time since she’d gotten out of her jeep.

The difference between Travis Martin’s home and that of his parents was almost obscene. The single-floor house was quite run-down, with a careless paint job, a drain pipe that just barely clung to the side of the house, and an obvious need for repairs to the roof.

“I guess our victim didn’t exactly like to share his wealth, huh?” Lindsay asked dryly.

“Looks like it,” Jacobi agreed as he first tried the doorbell, which didn’t work, and then reached up to knock firmly against the door. He tried again when no one answered, while Lindsay went to look around the back.

“There’s a car back here,” she called out. “Engine’s still warm, so there should be someone home.”

As Lindsay came back around the front, Jacobi tried the door and found that it was unlocked. Taking a step inside, he called into the empty hallway, “Hello? Mr. and Mrs. Martin? We’re Inspectors Jacobi and Boxer, from the San Francisco Police Department.”

The voice that called back to them sounded wild and panicked. “Back here! Help!”

Act IV:

Cindy smiled as she entered Dr. Melissa Freeman’s office, room 4715. The woman stood and came around from behind her desk. “Hi. Ms. Thomas, right?”

“Cindy, yeah. Thanks for seeing me on short notice,” Cindy replied, already starting to make mental notes, beginning first with forming a picture of the doctor in her head.

“Not a problem. So what can I do for you, Cindy?”

“Well I’ve got this mole,” Cindy began. “I’m not sure when I first noticed it, exactly, but I know it wasn’t there last summer. I thought I should finally have it checked out.”

Of course, Cindy had already been assured that it was perfectly benign, but no one else had to know that for now. She was glad that this potential Mel hadn’t turned out to be a surgeon or something like that, since that would have made her current reconnaissance mission a bit more complicated.

Melissa nodded. “It’s always a good idea to check into these things. Let’s have a look.”

For the second time in one day, Cindy removed her vest and top, revealing the small mole just below her left breast. She noticed as the doctor’s eyes were immediately drawn to the prominent scar on Cindy’s chest.

“I know that isn’t what you’re here to see me for, but mind if I ask what that lovely scar is from? It looks relatively new.”

Cindy shrugged. “Oh, you know. I just got shot in the chest a little while ago,” she explained nonchalantly.

Melissa's gaze shifted quickly up to Cindy's face, her eyes widening in surprised alarm. Cindy smiled reassuringly. "Don't worry, I don't plan to get shot again anytime soon."

The dermatologist simply stared at Cindy for a moment longer. "Yeah, I'd say that's a good idea," she finally replied haltingly, before looking again at Cindy's mole.

No longer feeling the need to maintain eye contact, Cindy tried to surreptitiously glance around the room, unsure what she was looking for, but looking nonetheless. Her eyes landed on a photograph on the wall, showing an infant boy, cradled in a pair of arms and staring out at the camera in wide-eyed interest.

"Is that your son?" Cindy asked, as something in her mind clicked. There was something about the child that seemed vaguely familiar, but she couldn't quite put her finger on it.

Melissa turned around to see where Cindy was indicating, and then smiled fondly. "Yep, that's my little Mikey."

"He's adorable! How old is he?" she questioned, the threads of an idea starting to weave together in her head.

"Just hit nine weeks."

It was then that Cindy noticed the hints of exhaustion that covered the dermatologist's face; her beautiful mocha skin marred only slightly by the dark bags under her eyes.

"He has gorgeous eyes," Cindy commented, watching Melissa carefully.

The new mother's smile dimmed slightly. "Mmm," she murmured. "Dangerous eyes," she continued quietly to herself.

"Well congratulations," Cindy smiled warmly. "You and your husband must be very proud," she added, again curious as to what the response would be.

Melissa laughed somewhat stiffly and then raised her left hand in the air, wiggling her ring-less ring finger. "I'm not married, actually."

"Shit, that was horrible of me to just assume like that," Cindy apologized. "I should even know better, since my sister is actually raising her two-year-old daughter on her own now, too. You single mothers... I only have a vague sense of how much work you have to deal with everyday. It's really inspiring." Cindy decided to stop there, hoping that she wasn't laying it on too thick.

Her statement seemed to do the trick, though, as Dr. Freeman visibly appeared to relax a bit more. She glanced back at the picture of her son. "Yeah, it's a lot of work," she agreed. "But he's worth it."

Both inspectors reached instinctively for their guns and then quickly made their way in the direction of the voice that had called out to them.

In a bedroom at the far end of the house, they were confronted with the sight of two women, one lying unconscious on the ground, the other hovering anxiously over the first.

“What happened?” Lindsay demanded, lowering her weapon.

“I don’t know! She just collapsed!” The panicked woman turned to face the inspectors, tears running unchecked down her cheeks. Jacobi leaned down to check for a pulse as she continued, “Please, you’ve got to *do* something! She’s my baby sister. Oh, Louise...”

The name registered in Lindsay’s mind as that of Travis Martin’s mother.

Having verified that the unconscious woman was still alive, Jacobi immediately called for an ambulance as Lindsay pulled the distraught sister into the next room.

“Okay, ma’am, you’ve got to try to calm down, all right? Help is on the way. Now come here, look at me. Don’t look back at her, my partner is taking care of her. Now walk me through what happened.”

The woman, Sara Johnson, took a deep breath and managed to ramble her way through a few details.

Louise Martin had been seriously ill for quite a while, apparently, but neither she nor her husband had health insurance, and there was no way that they could afford to pay for any medical care out of their own pocket. They didn’t even really know what was wrong with her; just that she was sick, and they didn’t know how to make her better.

So while Daniel went to work every day, Sara would come from the next town over to look after her sister as best she could. It was her car that Lindsay had seen parked outside.

The ambulance showed up before long, giving Sara just enough time to finish explaining how Louise’s breathing had suddenly become more labored, and she’d collapsed to the ground right before Lindsay and Jacobi’s arrival.

After that it took them a bit of time to track down the construction site where Daniel Martin was working that day. It wasn’t fun, informing the man both that his wife was in critical condition at the local hospital, and that his son had been killed.

After giving him some time with his wife, though, they were finally able to make use of an empty room nearby to do what they came for and ask Daniel some questions.

“Mr. Martin, can you tell us about your relationship with Travis?” Jacobi began.

Daniel frowned. He was a tall man, like his son, and was in great shape, his muscles well-toned from doing hard labor for a living, though his skin was weathered from a combination of age and too much time spent working outside.

“As far as I’m concerned, I haven’t had a son for a long time,” he practically growled. “I work hard, but I never went to college, and haven’t had the best luck when it comes to making money. Travis always resented me for not being able to give him more of the nicer things in life. He was a smart kid, good with math, and we were able to send him to college, but just barely. Then, as soon as he started earning some cash on his own, it was like he’d disappeared off the planet. Wouldn’t come home anymore, or even just give us a call, and wouldn’t answer any of our attempts to contact him or see him. He wanted nothing to do with us. That damn kid pretty much broke his poor mother’s heart, but we got used to it, eventually. Moved on with our lives. But then she got sick.”

Daniel paused when his voice started to shake, taking in a deep breath before continuing. “I didn’t have a phone number for him anymore, but I’d managed to get hold of his address. I sent him so many letters, trying to get him to help with medical bills, but I never heard from him. I don’t even know if he opened them, or what. I like to think that he didn’t; like to think that he would have helped if he’d known. I even went up there once, but he threatened to call the cops on me. If Louise dies...” He stopped speaking again, turning his face to the side to blink back a few tears. When he faced forward again, there was a new coldness in his eyes. “If she dies, it’ll be his fault,” he muttered bitterly. “He’ll have been the one that killed her.”

Lindsay was exhausted by the time she finally made it back to her desk. She hadn’t been expecting the visit with the Martins to last so long. Her shoulders slumped when, the very second she settled down into her chair, Tom stepped around his door and called out to her. “Inspector Boxer! My office, please.”

Sighing, she pulled herself to her feet once again and made her way upstairs.

“Just wanted an update on the Martin case,” Tom explained. “Did you find the parents?”

He frowned as Lindsay quickly recapped her afternoon.

“What did you do with the father?” Tom asked once Lindsay finished.

“What did I *do* with him?” Lindsay repeated, confused. “I left him at the bedside of his sick wife. What else would I have done with him?”

Tom’s frown deepened as he shook his head in frustration. “Lindsay, from what you just told me, he sounds like a definite suspect in this murder! There was a lot of bad blood

between him and our victim, and as next of kin, he stood to gain *a lot* from his son's death. And now that we've contacted him, he may be a flight risk!"

Lindsay scoffed. "His wife is in the hospital, in critical condition. The doctor said something's wrong with her heart; cardiomyopa-something. I highly doubt that either of them are going anywhere anytime soon. Besides, I don't care how much bad blood there was between them, I just don't buy it that a man would drug his own son, purposely make the death last longer than it needed to, and then stuff him into a hot tub full of money. Daniel Martin may have been angry, but he wasn't crazy enough to go through all that just to throw us off track a little."

"But you don't know any of that for sure," Tom persisted, his voice rising in volume. "I never thought I'd have to say this, but you're being careless with this case! But as far as you're concerned, this is all just a waste of time, right? None of these people you're questioning could *possibly* be our guy, because you're still looking for your goddamn serial killer!"

"Look, I told you from the beginning that treating this like a regular case is bullshit!" Lindsay spat back, her own voice rising as well and her hands curling into agitated fists.

"Yeah, and maybe I should have taken you off this case right then and there! I know you trust your instincts, and that's usually a good thing, but you're letting them blind you! It's like you see everything through these serial-killer-tinted lenses, Lindsay. I'm not saying that you *are* wrong, necessarily, but you *might* be, and you've got to start at least considering that possibility!"

"Jesus, Tom," Lindsay snapped, "don't you think I'd rather there *wasn't* another serial killer out there? Of course I would! But that's not the case here, and I *know* it!"

Tom released an aggravated groan, running a hand roughly over his face. He paused before continuing, his voice slightly lower, but still firm as he stared angrily at Lindsay. "Until you can *prove* it to me, you will investigate this case according to protocol, or I'm taking you off of it. That's all there is to it. Now go do your *job*, Lindsay."

Clearly dismissed, Lindsay stormed out of Tom's office, just barely resisting the urge to slam the door on her way out. She stopped briefly in her tracks as every one of her colleagues swiveled their gazes away from her, obviously trying to look busy.

"Ding dong!"

Jill looked up in confusion as she heard someone make the distinct sound of a doorbell from outside her office.

"Um, come in?" she called out curiously.

Cindy entered with a wide grin on her face. “I didn’t have a bell to carry around with me, but I figured that a makeshift doorbell would do the trick of alerting you to my presence, so I wouldn’t scare the crap out of you again,” she explained.

Jill rolled her eyes, but couldn’t help but laugh lightly. “Thanks, I appreciate the effort,” she replied wryly, smirking as Cindy came and plopped down into the chair across from her. Jill leaned back in her own chair and pushed some of her paperwork to the side. She was definitely ready for a break. “So what’s up?” she asked.

“Well, I came by for two reasons – one, to verify how much I can actually say about Martin’s murder in my article, and two...” Cindy leaned in conspiratorially as she continued, “to share my new information regarding the mysterious ‘Mel.’”

“One, you should ask Lindsay, and two, spill it! Did you tell the others to come by?”

“Claire was in the middle of doing something medical examiner-y but said she’d be up here soon, and Lindsay...” Cindy paused for a beat, a thoughtful expression crossing her face. “There was a bunch of yelling going on between Lindsay and her Mr. Boss Man... I couldn’t hear any specific words, but since no one was yelling *at* me, for once, I thought I should just avoid the situation.”

Jill chuckled. “Probably a wise decision. But come on, you can’t tell me that you have new information, and then expect me to just wait for the others to show up. What’d you find out?”

Cindy fidgeted. “But then I’ll have to say it again when Claire shows up, and then *again* whenever it’s safe to go get Lindsay,” she whined. “Can’t you just wait?”

“Fine,” Jill huffed. “Oh, how was your date last night, by the way?” she asked. “You’ve seen this girl before, right? So I take it you must like her?”

“You are *such* a lawyer,” Cindy laughed. “Jumping right in with the questions. But yeah, the date was good.” Cindy paused thoughtfully. “I do like her. She’s very laid-back, easy to get along with, you know? But also really smart and funny. She’s great.”

“You going to see her again?”

Cindy hesitated a bit before answering, “Maybe. I don’t know. Probably.” She was almost confused by her own response. The date *had* been great, and she *did* like Ellen a lot... So why wasn’t she more enthusiastic about it?

“Well you know the next question.” Jill smirked. “I always have to ask. Sex?”

Cindy blushed, even though she should have been used to Jill’s bluntness by that point. “Didn’t happen,” she replied simply.

“So you put out on the first date, but not the second?” Jill raised an eyebrow, acting scandalized and releasing a mock-gasp. “Why Cindy Thomas, you’re a hussy *and* a tease!” Jill joked, a light-hearted sparkle in her eye.

Cindy’s blush deepened. “No, it wasn’t like that, I swear. *Anyway...* how are you? You looked stressed when I first came in.”

“Nice not-so-subtle segue, Thomas. Want to change the subject, huh?” When Cindy simply regarded Jill expectantly, Jill sighed and continued, “It’s just Denise. And this case. And Lindsay. Linz wanted me to look into some stuff on Martin’s parents today, but I had to say no, because I’m too busy working on this other case for Denise.”

“I’m sure Lindsay understands that you have other things to do, Jill,” Cindy interjected.

“Yeah, usually I think she does, but sometimes I’m not sure. And with these last cases in particular, with the dangers of another potential serial killer... It just brings back a lot of bad memories. I don’t want her to think that I’m quitting on her. Again.”

“Jill...” Cindy began, but the attorney simply held up one hand, wanting to continue before Cindy commented.

“I really am right there with Lindsay on this one. I do think that we’re dealing with the same killer on all three of these murders, and I don’t think that he’s done killing. But on the other hand, what if Tom and Denise are right? And what if I’m focusing too much on the Blake, Dellan, and Martin murders, to the detriment of any other cases that came across my desk?”

Jill paused, staring off into space. Cindy simply waited, sensing that Jill wasn’t done yet. “Denise brought up the Waters case today,” she finally added quietly, briefly meeting Cindy’s eyes.

No longer able to remain silent, Cindy piped up, “Oh, that’s a low blow. Jill, we’ve talked about this already. There was no way that you could have known Brian would change his testimony right when you put him on the stand!”

“That’s the thing, though, maybe I should have!” Jill exclaimed. “Maybe I could have prepped him better, or worked with him longer, or, I don’t know, *something!* I mean, he was only seventeen years old, and now that I’ve been up there on the witness stand, I really understand how frightening it can be when you’ve never been there before. Not to mention the fact that he had to testify against his own brother. I *knew* that it was risky, but I put him up there anyway, because he was the best witness I had, and he seemed so confident. Plus, I definitely had Blake and Dellan in the back of my mind at that point. I *thought* I gave that trial everything I had, but I don’t know, Cindy. Maybe I didn’t.”

Cindy got up out of her chair and quickly moved around to Jill’s side of the desk. Her

heart ached, hating how much her friend was beating herself up over this. She had thought that Jill had gotten over this latest lost case, but Denise had obviously opened up the wound again.

She crouched down in front of Jill and took one of the attorney's hands in both of her own. "Listen to me, Jill. 'Tell you when you're wrong, even when you don't want to hear it,' right? Well you're not wrong this time. Every day, I get to see how much energy you pour into each and every case that you get. Just because you had Blake and Dellan in the back of your mind doesn't mean that you didn't do everything you could. Every time a witness takes the stand, you're taking a risk. Sometimes more than others, sure, but no one knows how they're going to react to the situation until they get there, and no amount of prepping can fully prepare for that," Cindy said sincerely.

Jill smiled weakly. "I guess. It's just, I hate that I lost my hand in what should have been such a sure thing. Thanks for the pep talk, though," she murmured.

Cindy didn't let go of Jill's hand right away, but they both turned when Jill's door suddenly opened and Claire walked in. She arched an eyebrow at the almost-intimate position of her two friends.

"Claire! Hey!" Cindy greeted after a beat as she stood up again and squeezed Jill's hand once before releasing it.

Jill attempted to pull herself together, taking in a deep breath, closing her eyes, and quickly running a hand through her short hair before she turned to fully face Claire.

"What did I miss?" Claire asked, still looking back and forth between Jill and Cindy. She wasn't quite sure what she had walked in on.

"Just me freaking out, and Cindy being a good friend is all," Jill sighed with a smile. "But now that you're here, Claire... Cindy, why don't you go fetch Lindsay, and then we can all head over to Papa Joe's," she suggested.

Lindsay looked exhausted when Cindy found her in the break room, pouring herself a cup of stale coffee. "What?" the inspector rasped, harsher than she'd intended, when the redhead came into view.

"Papa Joe's?" Cindy replied simply.

"Mmm," Lindsay grunted, grateful for a reason to get out of there. "Let's go." She led the way out of the Hall, with Cindy hurrying to keep up with her long strides.

Just then Cindy's phone rang, but Lindsay didn't really pay any attention until she heard Cindy say, "Saturday night? ... No, that's fine. ... Yeah, it'll be fun! ... 'K, see you soon."

Lindsay stopped for a moment, turning to stare at Cindy. “Another date?” she asked with forced nonchalance. “That’s cool. Hope you have fun!” She smiled awkwardly.

Cindy snorted. “Trying not to be a jackass anymore, huh? I appreciate the effort, Linz, but that was *Claire*. I’m going to babysit her kids on Saturday. She’d meant to ask me earlier, but forgot, so wanted to call me while she was thinking of it.”

“Oh. Right.” Lindsay grinned sheepishly, the exchange leaving her strangely relieved.

Once the four friends had settled into a booth at Papa Joe’s, Cindy was practically bouncing in excitement as she began to relay how she’d discovered Dr. Freeman, and the conversation they’d had earlier that day.

“Wait, you have a sister who’s a single mom?” Jill interrupted when Cindy got to that point in the story. “How did I not know that? Aren’t you an only child?”

“Huh?” Cindy replied, momentarily thrown off by the question. “Oh! No, I don’t have a sister. I just made that up. I wanted to stay on her good side, you know? Keep her talking to me, instead of getting offended when it seemed like I’d assumed that she needed a husband to raise a child.”

“Right,” Lindsay drawled, clearly amused. “How come you can lie so well to strangers, but you fail so spectacularly at it when dealing with the three of us?” she inquired.

Cindy looked at her with an expression that clearly conveyed what a stupid question she thought that was. “Because I actually *care* about you guys. Lying to people I don’t know is easy!” she insisted. “Anyway, the key thing here is that this Melissa Freeman has a young kid, and she’s single. She also matches the description that Aaron Tucker gave of the woman who kept bugging Travis Martin. Her son, whose skin is significantly lighter than her own, is a little older than two months, which fits around when this woman started showing up at Martin’s office again.”

“I’m not quite following you, here,” Claire spoke up. “What’s your point, exactly?”

Cindy smiled smugly, reaching into her purse to pull out a photograph of Travis Martin. “This is the picture I’m using in my article. My *point*, is that little Mikey Freeman’s eyes?” Cindy pointed meaningfully to Travis’ face. “Look exactly like his father’s.”

The next day, Lindsay and Jacobi sat opposite Melissa Freeman in one of the interrogation rooms as Tom and Denise watched from the other side of the mirror.

“So Dr. Freeman, how did you know Travis Martin?” Lindsay began.

Melissa sighed, clearly unhappy to be there. “I met him at a bar one night, about eleven months ago. We hit it off, we had sex, and apparently something went wrong with the condom, because nine months later, I had a newborn baby boy.”

“But that wasn’t all,” Jacobi added. “We have information that you practically stalked the man for a significant length of time.”

“*Stalking* is a bit of an exaggeration, Inspector,” Melissa scoffed. “I just wanted to talk to him. I didn’t know his address, I didn’t know his phone number. I just knew his name and that he worked in an investment bank somewhere in the financial district.”

“That’s a lot to not know about the man you claim to be the father of your child,” Lindsay commented.

Melissa shot Lindsay a dry look. “I’m sure I don’t need to tell you that being the best of friends isn’t exactly a prerequisite for conceiving a child together. Anyway, once I found out that I was pregnant, it took me a little while, but I eventually tracked him down.”

“But he wouldn’t talk with you,” Lindsay prompted. Between his parents and now this, it seemed that Travis Martin had quite the tradition of trying to simply ignore his problems.

“Right. It took me about a *month* before I could even let him know about the baby.”

“You were sure that Travis was the father?” Jacobi asked.

“I don’t exactly make a habit of one-night-stands, and I haven’t been dating anyone, so yeah, there was no doubt,” Melissa declared.

“So if you don’t make a habit of one-night-stands, what was different about the night you met Travis?” Lindsay questioned.

Melissa looked embarrassed as she replied, “Look. Alcohol and my decision-making capabilities... they don’t exactly have a great history together. I don’t drink heavily very often, but when I do, I tend to get somewhat...” She paused, looking for the right word. “*Impulsive*, I guess, would be the nice way to put it. The day after I turned 21, I woke up with purple hair. I got my first tattoo when I graduated from med school. And the day that I got into my top choice residency program? There was this *gorgeous* guy at the bar, obviously really successful, buying me drinks, and paying me a lot of attention.” She shrugged. “What can I say? He seemed like a good idea at the time.”

Lindsay nodded. “Martin had the digits 4715 written down next to your name. Why?”

“That’s my office number at the hospital. It was the only place he would actually meet up with me. He figured that I wouldn’t dare make a big scene at work,” Melissa explained.

“And how did he react when you finally told him about your pregnancy?” asked Jacobi.

Melissa frowned bitterly. “He basically just blew me off. Said it couldn’t be his, and that I had to stay the hell away from him. I tried to get him to take a paternity test, but he flat-out refused. I didn’t want or need him to be a part of raising the kid, I just wanted a little financial help, you know? It’s not like he couldn’t afford it! And I still have a lot of loans to pay off from medical school, so cash flow wasn’t – still *isn’t* – the easiest thing for me. But his lawyer basically threatened to drown me in red tape and lots of expenses that I couldn’t afford. And with trying to keep up with work and everything, I just didn’t have the time to deal with it all. So for the time being, I dropped it.”

“For the time being?” Jacobi pressed.

“Once Mikey was born,” she continued, “I just thought... if you look in my son’s eyes, you really can’t deny who his father is. So I thought, maybe if Travis could just *see* Michael, it might, I don’t know, inspire some kind of paternal instinct or something.”

“But it didn’t work, did it?” Jacobi leaned forward, resting his forearms on the table. “Martin still wanted nothing to do with you or your son. He refused to take any kind of responsibility, and in doing so, was essentially stealing the child support money that you should have been receiving. He was *stealing* from your son.”

“If what you say is true,” Lindsay went on, “and Martin really was the father, then that makes your son next-of-kin. That means that you’d be getting a hell of a lot more money than just child support. Not a bad deal, really, when you think about it.”

Both inspectors stared closely at Melissa, who appeared slightly confused. Her eyes widened in surprised as she realized what they were implying. “Are you trying to say that I...? Look, I may not have liked Travis very much, but I didn’t *kill* him.” She looked back and forth between Lindsay and Jacobi’s impassive faces. “Do I need a lawyer?” she asked worriedly.

“No.” Lindsay shook her head. “We’re just trying to clear up some things. That’s all for now, Doctor, but we’ll be in touch.”

It took a moment before Melissa stood up from the table. Either the idea that she might be a murder suspect honestly hadn’t occurred to her, or she was a damn good actress.

As Lindsay exited the room, Tom caught her by the arm. Still annoyed at him, she merely glared at his hand until he released his grip.

“Linz, I just thought you should know. We just got a call that Louise Martin is dead.”

Unsure how to respond, she could only come up with, “Shit. Really? Wow.” Her thoughts turned to Daniel Martin and his intense expressions whenever he spoke about his wife.

She sighed. “Well, Daniel Martin lost his wife today, but it’s looking like he may have also gained a grandson.”

With that, she went in search of Claire, needing to look into post-mortem paternity tests.

It was a few hours later when the club reconvened down at the morgue.

“You got the results from the paternity test?” Lindsay asked right away.

“That and more,” Claire replied. “Yes, Travis Martin was definitely the father, but I don’t think that Melissa Freeman killed him.”

Cindy cocked her head to the side. “She had motive. She definitely had access to the hospital and could easily have stolen all that stuff. She’s also smart enough to come up with the whole ‘frame the Hallelujah Man’ thing.”

“Okay, just bear with me here. Remember that rocuronium can be administered multiple times, to prolong its effects. I have reason to believe that our killer did in fact use the drug in this way,” Claire pronounced. “Now, in order to *not* kill your patient, the key point is to wait until the person regains twenty-five percent of their muscle control.”

“But our guy *did* want to kill the ‘patient.’” Jill pointed out.

Claire had a certain glint in her eye – the one that she always got when she had figured out something complicated. The specifics of what that might be, though, remained largely unclear to anyone else. Sometimes Jill seriously didn’t understand Claire, with her fascination with chemicals, and death, and death caused by chemicals.

“He may have wanted Martin dead, but I’m guessing that he wouldn’t have wanted to kill him just using the drug. If that was the case, why go through all the fuss with the money, and the jacuzzi, and all that?” Claire asked. “And what caused the bruising around his neck? It all seems awfully complicated for a simple copycat.”

Figuring that Claire hadn’t meant the question rhetorically, Cindy responded, “I don’t know about the neck thing, but going with the idea that we’re dealing with the same killer for the moment, these murders are done in highly symbolic ways. Blake loved food, so the Hallelujah Man used food to kill him; then he turned Dellan’s violence against him. He stages these deaths very carefully. Letting Martin die without ‘all the fuss’ would go against that symbolism.”

“And not only that,” Lindsay jumped in, catching on to Claire’s thinking, “but letting him die from the drug alone would also go against the M.O. of the others. Martin was quite the fan of money, so the *money* had to be what killed him.”

“Which goes back to what you said at the crime scene,” Jill spoke next. “That if Martin had still been alive when he was put in that hot tub, either the panic or the lack of air would’ve killed him. So he was basically buried alive beneath a load of money? That’s seriously messed up.”

“My tests do show that cause of death is asphyxiation, like I said, but while his lungs showed definite strain, if he’d had air, Martin would’ve been fine,” Claire supplied.

“Then why use the rocuronium at all? Just to induce paralysis and keep him from fighting back?” Cindy asked.

Claire nodded. “That, and to scare the hell out of him. The experience would’ve been akin to torture. Now the final piece of the puzzle brings us back to these mysterious bruises on his neck. If you remember, I mentioned that the pattern is similar to what you’d see after a hanging. Gravity pulls the body down, while the rope holds the body up. In this case, imagine that he was already down – down in the bottom of the hot tub, to be exact – but something pulled him back up. It’s the same type of pressure on the body. And if you look very closely right around his jaw...”

Claire brought out some close-up photographs she’d taken of the body, but Lindsay and Cindy were the only ones to crowd in closer as Jill chose to warily look over their shoulders from farther back.

“It almost looks like the shape of a thumb,” Cindy pointed out, an element of excited surprise in her voice.

“Indeed it does. The bruising is asymmetrical, which is what you’d expect, if someone had grabbed him around the neck with one hand – the thumb goes on one side of the neck, as the other fingers go on the other,” Claire explained. “At first I thought it was simply part of the irregular bruising caused by the coins. On corpses, though, deeper bruises become more prominent with time, and this pattern then emerged.”

Jill frowned, deeply disturbed by the whole conversation. “And you said that the killer would have had to wait until the drug at least partially wore off before giving another dose, right? Then Martin would have been able to move somewhat, or even talk, maybe. So the killer drowns him in money, but keeps pulling him back out again, not letting him die until Martin confesses, or repents, or whatever the hell this psycho wants from his victims, and then he shoves him back in there one last time, finally ending the torture.”

Complete silence followed Jill’s summary, each woman going through it all in her head.

The glint from Claire’s eye had disappeared. They were right, she was sure of it, but the excitement of discovery had fled in the face of her disgust at what it all meant.

There was one thing they could take away from all this, at least. Inhaling deeply, Claire turned to Lindsay. “Well, you can tell your partner and your lieutenant that you’re

looking for a very strong, right-handed man.”

Once again, Lindsay thought immediately of Daniel Martin – his strong frame, his intensely bitter anger, his right hand that he used to sign various forms while she was with him. Most of what Claire had said did seem to point towards a definite connection between the three murders, but still... Suddenly, she couldn't escape the thought of a man willing to do anything to try to save his wife, including killing his own son in order to inherit enough money for medical care.

Lindsay's shoulders fell as a wave of guilt and self-doubt washed over her.

What if Tom was right?

Lindsay was largely silent, stewing in her own thoughts, as she drove back out to Daniel Martin's place. From the passenger seat, Jacobi continued to try to get in touch with the man, which they'd been attempting for several hours before deciding that a return trek was necessary. With each passing minute, Lindsay grew increasingly antsy, so they'd left as soon as Denise had let Jill up for air long enough for her to secure a search warrant.

If Tom was right – if Daniel Martin had killed his son and had now fled – Lindsay didn't know what she'd do. She felt almost sick at the thought. Lindsay's instinct was the best weapon that she had going in her favor. If she couldn't fully rely on that anymore, it would be almost crippling.

In case Martin was around and didn't take kindly to their arrival, Lindsay parked about a block away from the house. As they approached the rest of the way on foot, they found Daniel's beat-up truck sitting outside, confirming the need for precautions.

At least it appeared that the fleeing part hadn't come true. Lindsay had given up trying to guess what they might find inside, though.

Sharing a look, both inspectors drew their weapons, silently opening the unlocked front door and making their way inside. The stillness and quiet of the house made Lindsay feel like every step she took was deafening, as they efficiently made their way through the small home. She breathed deeply through her nose and followed Jacobi around a corner, feeling the familiar rush of adrenaline coursing through her body.

In the last room, the same one where they had first found Louise Martin and her sister, Daniel Martin sat by himself in a corner, staring silently at the bed in front of him and loosely clasping a gun in his hands. He didn't bother looking up when the inspectors entered the room, and Lindsay couldn't be sure whether he even noticed them.

“Mr. Martin,” she called out softly, her eyes trained on his hands, watching for any sudden movement. “Mr. Martin, why don't you put that gun down.”

There was a long moment of silence before Daniel answered, though he still didn't look at either of them. "My wife died today," he whispered, his voice a weak imitation of what it had been a day earlier.

"We're very sorry for your loss," Jacobi murmured soothingly after a beat. "We thought we might talk a little more about your son, though."

"Do you think this is my punishment?" Daniel asked beseechingly, finally staring up at them with tears glistening in his eyes.

Lindsay held her breath as Jacobi carefully questioned, "Punishment for what?"

Daniel's gaze turned to the gun in his hands, giving Lindsay and Jacobi a chance to slowly inch closer, as he went on, "I lied to you yesterday. I said I only went to Travis' place once, but I lied. Louise was getting worse, so I drove back up there five days ago, trying one more time to talk some sense into Travis. I just broke in this time, hoping to finally force him to listen to me. I even brought this gun, thinking I'd threaten him a little. But when I found him, he wasn't alone."

Lindsay's heart skipped a beat. "Daniel, if you saw something, it's really important that--"

Daniel ignored her completely. "I heard my son begging for his life. My own son. *Begging.*" Lindsay opened her mouth to speak again but closed it when Daniel's grip on the gun tightened. "But I left him there," he continued, barely more than a whisper. "I thought about how much more he could do for us dead than alive, and I just turned around and left. Neither of them saw me."

"Daniel, you can turn this all around. Make it better. Please, Daniel, if you could describe the man you saw with Travis..." Lindsay pled. "Right now, that's all I want."

Daniel whipped his head back up to stare at Lindsay through bloodshot eyes. "All I want is my wife back!" he yelled brokenly.

The rest happened so quickly, Lindsay and Jacobi didn't have time to react.

"*No!*" they called out simultaneously, as Daniel raised the gun to his temple and fired.

Lindsay sat by herself in her darkened apartment, leaning on the kitchen table and holding her head in one hand.

He had *seen* him. Daniel Martin had *seen* the killer, but now it was too late.

She looked up as her front door opened and Jill, Cindy, and Claire quietly entered. She

really should take back that spare key, she thought bitterly to herself. Without a word, her friends came and settled themselves around the table with her, each of them reaching to place a warm hand on top of hers.

Lindsay inhaled deeply. “I don’t suppose you have any good news for me, do you?” she asked, her scratchy voice coming from low in her throat.

Jill, Cindy, and Claire all exchanged looks, wondering if now was the time to go into what they’d figured out.

Noticing their expressions, Lindsay sat up straighter, shaking off her melancholy from the recent turn of events. “What is it?” she demanded. “Tell me.”

“Okay,” Claire began. “So you know those fibers that were found at the Blake scene? Well tests have come back, and the new bit of thread that was recovered from Travis Martin’s house is essentially *identical*. Same properties, dye composition, everything. They’re definitely from the same piece of clothing: Something purple, made from silk.”

“So that’s it.” Lindsay exhaled. “The physical evidence we’ve needed. It’s really the same guy.” She almost wanted to feel relieved, but couldn’t. Her instincts hadn’t completely failed her, but another death at the hands of a serial killer wasn’t exactly a good thing. “It just makes no sense, though!” she added in frustration. “How is he picking his victims? There’s no pattern to it! Blake was a great guy. Dellan wasn’t. And now with Martin – he may have been a greedy asshole, but that’s not exactly a crime.”

Suddenly, Cindy’s eyes brightened. All the talk about scripture, religion, and God... Something clicked. “But it *is* a sin,” she murmured.

“Yeah, well so is murder, last I checked,” Lindsay grumbled in frustration.

Claire locked eyes with Cindy. “But murder’s not a *deadly* sin,” she added, with Cindy nodding in agreement.

Jill and Lindsay turned to stare at the other two, realizing that they were on to something.

“The seven deadly sins,” Claire continued. “Gluttony. That’s Blake.”

“Wrath is Dellan,” Cindy added. “And greed for Martin.”

There was a long moment of silence as they let that sink in. “Three out of seven,” Lindsay finally spoke. “I’m blanking, what are the others?”

“Sloth, envy, pride, and lust,” Cindy recited softly.

“Four more,” Jill whispered in horror. “We have four more of these to look forward to.”

Lindsay ran an unsteady hand through her hair, before straightening up and staring each of her friends in the eye.

“No,” she articulated as confidently as she could. “Not if-” She paused, swallowed, and then started again. “Not *when* we stop him first.”

FADE TO BLACK