

Sins of the Father, Sins of the Daughter  
by Riley LaShea

**TEASER**

When engaging in wayward activity, likely to result in some form of serious trouble, it's best to do it with very little fear and as few witnesses as possible. Understanding this better than the general population, Cindy found herself, yet again, one of the few people who had bowed out of the celebratory luncheon thrown by the paper's top execs in honor of their recent EPpy.

The clicks and subdued grumbles coming from the office of her boss served as an unfortunate reminder that there was at least one person at the paper who might be more diligent than she was. But that was hardly grounds for surrender. Cindy was quite accomplished at getting away with subversive behavior under the noses of people whose jobs it was to catch her at it and reprimand her accordingly. She also knew the man in question well enough to trust he was much more interested in ensuring the paper was put to bed with a warm glass of milk and pleasant bedtime story than anything she might have stayed behind to do in the absence of her co-workers.

"Okay. Here they are," her always willing partner-in-crime whispered over his shoulder.

Cindy grasped, with barely controlled anticipation, for the mouse in his hand, pouting as it glided out of her reach just before she made contact.

"You know I'm not supposed to do this right?" Danny reminded her. The delivery was deceptively stern, but his blue eyes regarded her with unmistakable amusement.

"Yeah Danny," she nodded quickly. "I'm well-versed in the rules. You have to know them pretty well to break them as regularly as I do."

"Then why do you always ask me to do it?"

"Why'd you stay behind when you could be dining on prime rib and lobster to celebrate your contribution to The San Francisco Register's award-winning website?" she lobbed back.

He didn't respond to the question. Just smiled at her with a small shake of his head.

"Because you want to," she answered for him. "It sucks to snap all kinds of good shots at a crime scene, have two pulled for the story, while the rest go off into digital file cabinet limbo, never to be seen or heard from again." Cindy managed to finagle the mouse from his hand. "You've got to show yourself off to someone. And I'm a willing audience."

"Yeah? You think that's why I want to, huh?" he asked.

“I know it is,” she replied, scrolling and clicking through images at a breakneck pace, ever aware of the possibility that the boss might decide to take a mind-clearing stroll through the office.

Danny grunted casually, backing away to lean against the edge of the desk behind her. “You know you’re going to owe me a drink for this, right?”

“Sure,” Cindy agreed without argument.

Several crime scenes. At least two dozen photographs of each. Black and white snapshots that were eye-openers to say the least.

“Do you like darts?”

“Huh,” Cindy returned distractedly, her eyes holding on a blonde in the picture, experiencing a strange sense of déjà vu, though she knew she’d never seen the woman before in real life.

“Darts? Do you like to play?”

“Um...” Cindy scrolled back up, reopening a picture she’d already looked at, instantly realizing why the woman from the photograph four rows down seemed so familiar. “Maybe,” she uttered, eyes moving back and forth between the images.

Leaving the pictures open, Cindy returned to the thumbnails, opening and closing until she found the woman again. In another photograph. At another crime scene. Jumping between the shots several times, she determined she was actually seeing what she thought she was seeing.

“I’ve got a great technique. I’d love to show you.”

“That sounds good,” Cindy responded distractedly.

On a mission, she moved through the entire folder, sitting back in disbelief once she’d uncovered comparable images from every crime scene. She wrote down the slide numbers, and turned to find Danny behind her, with a grin that seemed somehow out of place in their current surroundings.

“Could you print these for me?” she asked.

Caught off guard by the request, Danny’s smile faded as he took the list, glancing in the direction of the boss’ office. Cindy could practically see a scale in his head weighing the consequences.

“Yeah, sure,” he finally conceded.

Closing all evidence of their transgressions on her computer, Cindy followed Danny to his. At the sound of the photo printer humming to life on his desk, Danny’s eyes darted around the room, and he plucked each photo off the printer as quickly as it finished.

“Thanks,” Cindy said as Danny turned and handed the lot to her. “I owe you a drink.”

“I think you owe me a whole dinner now,” he said with an uneasy laugh.

“Deal,” Cindy agreed, taking the prints from his hand with a smile before heading to her desk.

Even the most expensive meal in San Francisco would be well worth it. How often did a few photographs blow a huge, ongoing case wide open?

## **ACT I**

Lindsay smoothed her fingers across her eyelids, trying in vain to rub away the massive throbbing behind them.

No new bodies in three weeks should have been a blessing. But considering Dellan was held for three weeks, beaten a little everyday and left to suffer the injuries, it wasn't exactly cause for celebration. It was possible that Hallelujah Man – because apparently every serial killer in her career had to have a pet name – hadn't struck again, or it was possible that he already had someone and was slowly torturing them. Even if Dellan may have deserved everything he had gotten, and that really wasn't her place to say, there was no way of knowing if the next victim would be more Dellan or more Blake. And maybe it shouldn't make a difference. Either way, it was her job to find the killer.

He wasn't going to stop. Not on his own. For that to happen, there would have to be guilt, and it was difficult to feel guilty and justified at the same time. Those words he left behind, the Bible verses so carefully selected and tailored to each crime, those were his justification. Remorse was too much to hope for.

So, apparently, was a decent piece of evidence.

Grateful as she was that the fibers found with Blake and Martin provided the physical evidence needed to force Tom to pull his head out of his ass and admit that they were dealing with another serial killer, they did very little to help solve the crimes. In fact, they seemed so much more hindrance than help that she almost wished they hadn't found them at all. Then Tom could go back to living in his little fantasy world where there were acceptable hiatuses between serial killers, and she could pretend that she'd been wrong all along, and the Biblical associations with the three deaths were just a disturbing coincidence.

The silk fibers possessed no distinguishing properties at all besides the color, which, worse than being common, was virtually non-existent.

Tyrian purple. First harvested by the ancient Phoenicians from mucous secretions of sea snails, exploited for the aesthetic pleasure of royalty and the incredibly wealthy, with a value several times that of gold. Useless information stuck in Lindsay's head due solely to the fact that Cindy was so fascinated by the historical significance, and remarkable exclusivity, of the dye.

Lindsay would love to have shared in her excitement, but when the stakes were this high, it was kind of difficult to appreciate the puzzle. She would rather someone just tell her the solution.

Though still sporadically produced, Tyrian purple was hardly used in modern times. Certainly not in anything average or everyday. No silk shirts, scarves, sheets. Nothing common or readily available. So what incredibly expensive item those threads came from, and what in the hell it was doing in San Francisco, was anybody's guess.

"Linz, you still with us?" Jill asked quietly.

Lindsay looked up, meeting a worried gaze. Turning toward Claire in an effort to avoid the look, she wasn't all that surprised to find that Claire's expression wasn't any different.

"Yeah," she answered. "So, Jacobi and I have a few new leads."

"That's good," Claire said at once.

"We're going to check them out," Lindsay told them, nodding distractedly, pausing to chew her lower lip for a half a second. "So, I might not be able to make dinner."

"No," Claire's firm response verified Lindsay's fear that she wouldn't get out of the morgue without a debate.

"Claire, I have to work."

"You've been working. For weeks. We all have." Seeing Lindsay preparing to interrupt, Claire raised a finger to her. "We planned this. Everyone agreed. We are doing dinner. It will not kill you to take a few hours."

"Yeah, well, it might kill someone else," Lindsay mumbled, wrapping her arms around herself, trying to fight the sudden chill creeping over her.

"Do you really believe that you are going to solve this case tonight?" Claire asked.

Lindsay sighed. Of course they weren't going to solve the case tonight, especially with the laughably bad intel they had. But at least she would feel like she was doing something. She couldn't just sit around and wait for another clue, knowing that it would come attached to a fourth dead body.

"You really should take a night off, Linz," Jill took Claire's side. "You never know when a plague might come along and wipe out your entire office, and you'll be forced into the kind of schedule you're keeping. It could be oozing down the elevator shaft as we speak."

"How many people are out now?" Claire asked.

“How many people are out?” Jill countered, voice and eyebrow rising in unison. “There are only four of us left, two clerks, me, and, as my fabulous luck would have it, Denise.”

“That virus is supposed to be seriously unpleasant,” Claire made a face. “You’re lucky you escaped it.”

“Since I’m the only person with a law degree left in an office with Denise, I think I’d prefer vomiting up my organs.”

Lindsay snorted quietly. “You’d want to throw up every time you threw up.”

Jill tossed Lindsay a playful glare, so normal it seemed abnormal in their current reality.

“Well, I feel fine.”

“You’d better,” Claire uttered, leaving zero room for argument. “Because we ARE having dinner. No excuses. It’s going down.”

“Are we scheduled for a rumble I don’t know about?” Cindy came through the door, her gaze meeting Lindsay’s at a distance. A single soft smile and the pounding in Lindsay’s head eased to a dull thud, the insistent chill gradually dissipating. Something else she couldn’t quite deal with at the moment, she chalked it up to coincidence.

“There will only be a rumble if I get stood up tonight,” Claire answered her.

Lindsay reluctantly pulled her eyes from Cindy to meet Claire’s unyielding expression.

“Understood. We’re going to dinner,” she conceded, stopping short of grabbing the lab report beside her and making it her white flag. “Which means I should probably get back to work.”

“Actually,” Cindy cut in as Lindsay pushed up from the counter. “I have something for you.”

“A lead?” Lindsay asked hopefully

“Yeah. It’s…”

“Thank God,” Lindsay interrupted, drifting in Cindy’s direction. “What is it?”

“It’s not about HM, Linz,” Cindy quickly informed her, though, as she watched Lindsay’s face fall, she desperately wished that she had something that could help Lindsay find the religious freak and bring him in. “It’s about the arsons in Potrero Hill.”

Tugging the photos free of her bag, Cindy nodded toward Claire’s office, heading in that direction, realizing after a few steps that she wasn’t being followed.

“That’s not my case. No one has died in them,” Lindsay stated.

Somewhat slighted, and somewhat irritated, Cindy turned back and tried to remember who it was she was dealing with.

“Well it is my story, so could I get five minutes?” she gently requested. “Please?”

Shame hitting her like a battering ram to the esophagus, Lindsay took a steadying breath and looked Cindy in the eye. “Yes. Of course you can,” she murmured. “I’m sorry.”

Jill and Claire watched as they disappeared into Claire’s office, then, through mutual, unspoken agreement, Claire stripped off her gloves and they went in pursuit.

Cindy spread the 8x10s over Claire’s desk with care, ensuring the important parts were visible.

“What am I looking at?” Lindsay said softly, positioning herself behind Cindy, and gazing over her shoulder.

“These are photos from all nine fires,” Cindy’s voice came out an abnormal rasp, and she paused to clear her throat, “that are attributed to the Potrero arsonist.”

Lindsay nodded her understanding, though Cindy couldn’t see it. Distracted by a scent she couldn’t identify, it took her a moment to process the common object in the photos.

“Who is this woman?” Lindsay questioned, hand brushing Cindy’s hip as she leaned in to point.

Flanking the desk across from them, but seemingly unseen, Jill and Claire exchanged a look.

“I don’t know,” Cindy responded, trying to keep her voice steady. “But I do know she’s not a cop, a firefighter or any other city employee, and she’s been at every crime scene.”

“Where did you get these?” Lindsay husked close enough to Cindy’s ear that goose bumps broke out down her neck.

“Staff photographer,” Cindy answered, sliding out from in front of Lindsay. She escaped the imposing presence and turned to rest on the edge of Claire’s desk.

“And no one noticed before now?” Lindsay asked.

“When a story is going to press, there is a limited amount of time,” Cindy explained, looking up at her, slightly light-headed. “The editor chooses the photos for the article and the rest are filed in Never Never Land. But they reassigned the story to me, and I figured out a while ago that the editors rarely remember what they chose. If you make friends with the photographers, you can usually make a substitution and no one is any the wiser.”

“So you went back through all the old photos,” Lindsay deduced.

“Of course,” Cindy responded.

Jill and Claire chuckled, and Cindy spun around to grin at them. Turning back to Lindsay, she was more than surprised to see the light smile on her face too.

“Couldn’t you get fired for that?” Lindsay wondered aloud.

“Better fired for quality than commended for tripe,” Cindy shrugged.

“That’s my girl,” Lindsay shook her head, returning her attention to the evidence. Only the ensuing silence made her realize how it might have sounded to everyone else in the room. Incredibly grateful when her phone buzzed on her hip, Lindsay reached for it, grimacing slightly when she glanced down at the text.

“Jacobi’s been waiting for me for twenty minutes.”

“Sorry,” Cindy cringed. “I know it’s not your case, but I thought maybe you could, you know, pass it along. Maybe they can stop the fires.”

“Sure,” Lindsay agreed, gathering up the copies. “I can keep these?”

“Yeah. But when you finish with them, just…” Cindy made a ripping motion. “Get rid of them. They don’t exist.”

“The usual then,” Lindsay smiled. The urge to stay warring with the overwhelming need to make something – anything – happen with the Dellan, Blake and Martin cases, she slowly started away. “I’ll see you tonight,” she promised, getting as far as the doorway before her conscience got the better of her and she eased back around. “Thanks for the tip.”

“That’s what I do,” Cindy shrugged.

Lindsay actually laughed lightly as she took her leave. Watching the place where she’d been long after she was gone, Cindy finally turned to Jill and Claire, both of whom were staring so intently at her it was as if they’d been taking lessons in laser vision from Lindsay.

“What?” she asked, fidgeting under their probing stares.

“Nothing,” Jill shook her head. “Awesome work, Nancy Drew. I should probably get back to work too. Denise is expecting the work of ten Jills.”

She was already halfway out the door. She could have pretended she didn’t hear the question and left Claire to fend it herself, but the vulnerability in Cindy’s voice drew Jill to a halt.

“Is this how it started before?”

As Jill turned back, Claire’s desperate eyes swung her way, and Cindy looked back and forth between them as if they were trying to hide something from her.

“Come on you guys,” she pleaded. “Is it?”

Feeling a responsibility to make Cindy less worried, Jill stepped back into the room.

“This isn’t Kiss-Me-Not, Cindy. Things will be different this time.”

“Will they?” Cindy questioned. “I have barely seen Lindsay in like two weeks. I’ve hardly seen any of you. We haven’t been hanging out. We’ve had hardly any club meetings.”

“It’s not a club,” Claire said, cracking a grin when Jill’s voice harmonized perfectly.

“It just…” Cindy uttered weakly. “It feels like she’s pulling away.”

“She’s not pulling away from you.” The words were out of Jill’s mouth before she had a chance to censor them, though part of her was glad it was out in the open.

“She isn’t?” Cindy begged reassurance, her fear at the thought as blatant as she wore all of her emotions.

“No,” Jill said simply. From what she’d witnessed, when Cindy was in the room, Lindsay’s rule of thumb was less about creating distance and more about eliminating it. But it really wasn’t her place to share that.

Claire shook her head in silent agreement. The unanimous assurance seemed to work as Cindy tentatively nodded.

Feeling as if she’d just won a big case, with all the relief and exhaustion that went with it, Jill tilted her head toward the door. “Gotta go,” she declared. “Don’t forget dinner. Apparently there are no excuses.”

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Blue and purple are not the same color. That had never bothered Lindsay before, but she’d never before had to waste half an hour of her life trying to explain the fact to Tom. When he wanted to know why she and Jacobi had left to look at choir robes and didn’t bring one back to test against the fibers, Lindsay actually thought the answer really was that simple. The robes were blue, and blue and purple are not the same color. Apparently, Tom thought it needed thirty minutes of repetitive explanation.

What had he expected? Did he really think that they would find a robe dyed with a substance several times the worth of gold in a high school in Oakland? They would be getting along better if they could both just admit that, right now, her job was more about collecting a paycheck than solving actual crimes. She would chase unlikely leads, she would even stoop to listening to the tip line, but she couldn’t make impossible connections just to appease him.

As much as she wanted to find Hallelujah Man and get him off the streets, the conversation with Tom was so exasperating, she was actually glad she had somewhere to go outside of work. It was only when she stopped at her desk to grab her jacket and keys that she remembered the photos. Figuring it would take only a minute to drop them with the lead officer, Lindsay snatched them up, and headed down the hall.

The department was busy, but not busy enough to justify waiting five minutes with no acknowledgment. Annoyed, she approached the nearest desk.

“Hey. Is your Lieutenant in?”

Barely looking up at her, the guy didn’t bother to return her greeting.

“Nope,” he said shortly, looking back down.

“Well, could you tell me who’s investigating the Potrero arsons?” she requested.

The guy looked up at her again, hesitating, and glanced away for a moment before focusing back on her, humorlessly.

“Clifford and Bryan,” he answered.

Lindsay would have thanked him if it felt anything like she was being assisted. Instead, she got the distinct feeling she was being brushed off. Turning to scan the room for Clifford and Bryan’s nameplates, she saw two men already coming forward to meet with her. Clifford and Bryan, she assumed, though she didn’t know who was who.

“I’ve got something for you,” she informed them, holding the photos out in offering.

“Yeah? What?” either Clifford or Bryan, whichever one it was, asked, leaving the photographs dangling in Lindsay’s hand.

“They’re pictures from your crime scenes,” she responded.

“We have pictures from the crime scenes,” Clifford or Bryan returned, crossing his arms across his broad chest.

“You don’t have these ones,” Lindsay explained.

“And what’s so special about those?”

Trying not to roll her eyes, and wondering if the other guy ever spoke, Lindsay brandished the photos again to no avail. “Look at them,” she said.

Neither Clifford nor Bryan took them, and a growing sense of discomfort twinged at the back of her mind.

“What are you doing here?” the arm-crossed spokesman for the duo asked her.

“Passing along evidence about your case,” she stated plainly. “I would hope you would do the same for me.”

“Not all of us have a need to one-up everyone else on the force.”

It shouldn't have, but the clipped reply surprised her. There was some departmental rivalry, but what exactly she'd done to piss off the entire property crimes division, she wasn't sure.

“I have information pertinent to your case. I would think you'd be grateful for it.”

“Where'd it come from?”

Lindsay felt challenged, and she combated the desire to just turn around and leave.

“A source,” she answered him smoothly.

“Seems like you have a lot of sources none of the rest of us have access to.” It seemed an accusation. “The Potrero... that's Bucci territory isn't it? Aren't they friends of your family? Dominic Bucci and your old man, they were tight weren't they?”

Heart constricting at the unexpected mention of her father, Lindsay set her jaw tight against remembered sorrow.

“Guess they wouldn't want to see their livelihood going up in flames. Did they promise you a few thousand if you could keep them in business?”

If it hadn't been such a long day, she might have stayed and taken the abuse, but she was far too tired and overwhelmed to deal with their crap.

“You know what,” Lindsay said, not caring if it was giving up. “Use it, don't use it. It really doesn't matter to me. But since you have brought in a dozen men in a row for questioning, I'm guessing you don't have the slightest idea what you're looking for.”

“We're good,” the spokesman declared, refusing the offered items with resounding finality.

“They'll be at my desk if you need them,” Lindsay forfeited, walking off.

“I try to keep my distance from dirty cops' kids.”

It was an arrow in her back, but she pretended it didn't sting as she walked out of the room to the sound of laughter. Halfway down the hall, she was pummeled by the fact that the anger wasn't strong enough to keep the pain at bay. She hadn't thought about that part of her father's past in recent months. After his death, any indiscretions in his life really didn't seem all that important.

Refusing them the satisfaction of reducing her to tears, she stalked down the hall to her desk, throwing the photos in a drawer. Whether or not they solved their case really wasn't her problem.

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Logically, Jill knew that Denise was going to be pissed. Realistically, she also knew that it would be easier to deal with her anger after the fact than get permission beforehand. That in mind, Jill peered out her office door before stepping into the hallway and rushing to the restroom.

Preoccupied with making sure Denise was nowhere in the vicinity, it wasn't until the door closed that she heard the telltale signs of someone vomiting. Just what she wanted to witness before going to eat.

"How are you doing?" the woman on her knees paused in throwing up long enough to ask the woman holding her hair back.

"I think I'm getting it too," the standing woman responded.

Jill looked to the door, debating whether to run to the bathroom upstairs.

"How is it only Denise and Jill have avoided this?" the woman on the floor's voice echoed in the toilet.

"Denise isn't human." The assessment might have made Jill chuckle if the follow-up didn't completely dampen her humor. "And from what I've heard about Bernhardt, she's probably taking a cocktail of antibiotics for STDs that could keep anything away."

Part of her still wanted to slip back out, silently, and act as if she hadn't heard. Then there was the part that was above these people in rank and wanted to see them squirm.

"Hasn't anyone ever told you not to believe everything you hear," she called out to them.

"Ms. Bernhardt," the standing woman glanced back, though it must have upset the other clerk more, who promptly threw up again.

"Formalities now? Really?" Jill inquired. "If you're sick, you should go home."

Too proud to flee, she went into a stall, trying to ignore the sound, smell, and bad will from a few stalls down. Emerging a minute later, the two women were waiting for her by the sinks, one barely standing. They watched her wash her hands, looking anxious to say something to fix it, and even more anxious to keep their mouths shut.

"I'll tell Denise you're leaving," Jill told them, grabbing a paper towel and not waiting for a reply. Whatever they had to say, she was ninety percent certain that she didn't want to hear it.

Despite her act that she couldn't wait to get to Denise's office and report, she'd actually intended the conversation to take place when she returned from meeting Lindsay, Cindy, and Claire for dinner. As her misfortune would have it, though, Denise was standing in the hall, just outside her office, as Jill turned the corner. Feeling suddenly caged, Jill slowed automatically, trying not to glance around for the nearest escape route.

"I think we've just lost what was left of the team. There's some definite illness happening in the ladies' room," she conveyed.

"Better them than you," Denise hurriedly stated, indifferent to the update. "I need you to prep witnesses tomorrow."

"For what?"

"The Dobbs Trial."

"That's not my case."

"But the trial starts Wednesday, and who knows when Allen will be up to coming back to work. Life goes on. People continue to break the law, forcing us to prosecute, despite the state of the D.A.'s office," Denise declared with little emotion. "Unless, of course, you're too busy with whatever else it is you're working on."

Jill had known this was coming. She was actually surprised it had taken this long to get there.

"You said that it was fine for me to integrate Hallelujah Man into my caseload. We know now that it's a serial killer and that does still make it a priority," she reminded Denise, not fully thinking it through before adding, "You didn't change that, right?"

Denise leveled her with a stare and Jill almost wished she could take the words back.

"It is a priority," Denise acknowledged, "if there is a case to prosecute. You don't even have a suspect. The Dobbs case is solid, if our witnesses don't drop the ball. You have plenty of time before you need to think about your serial killer."

"Depends if you mean time before we go to trial or time before he murders someone else."

"Stopping him from murdering someone isn't your job, Jill," Denise stated, launching into attorney mode. "You are so intent on helping your friends catch these guys. What does it get you? It seems like every time Inspector Boxer asks for your help, you're almost killed, which would be a lot of paperwork for me. Maybe you should consider what kind of friends ask you to risk your job and your life on a weekly basis."

"They don't have to ask," Jill responded immediately. "And, you know, since they don't get smashed and expose my private life in public, I guess I should really be grateful."

She'd gone too far. The look on Denise's face was testament to that fact. In the quiet and uncomfortable aftermath, she should have said something deferential, humbly apologized for her unexpected outburst. It may have been her only hope of still having a job.

Before she could make a completely insincere apology, her phone rang. Guessing who it would be, considering it was well after normal working hours, Jill ignored it in a concerted effort to save her ass, staring at Denise and waiting for whatever the queen of torture might inflict on her.

"Aren't you going to get that?" Denise asked coldly. "Could be about a serial killer. I know how much you hate those."

Well aware that Denise wouldn't quit until she picked up her phone, Jill set her shoulders and stepped into her office, grabbing it on the fourth ring. The display clearly showed Claire's name, but Jill tried for discretion.

"Bernhardt," she answered.

"Formal, but okay," Claire teased. "I tried to call your cell. Where were you?"

"Restroom," Jill answered simply.

"So are you on your way now?"

Feeling Denise's presence inside her office, Jill fought the urge to look over her shoulder.

"I have some things I really need to take care of here," she tried.

"No excuses," Claire reminded her.

"Give me the phone," Cindy's distant voice commanded, there was a scuffle, and Cindy took over. "Jill, we have essential business. We do. Now come drink."

"Listen, I'm going to call you back, okay?"

Hearing the beginnings of a protest, Jill hung up quickly, knowing her friend well enough to hit the DND button before her phone could ring again. Bracing herself as she would for a volatile storm, she turned to face Denise.

"Somewhere you need to be," Denise questioned, far too congenially to be authentic.

"No," Jill shook her head.

Denise stared at her, the goal, Jill was certain, to make her feel as uneasy as possible. She hated that it worked.

"You should go," Denise finally uttered. "It could be important."

The wise thing would have been to say that it wasn't. But pretending that her job was more important to her than her friends was something she wasn't going to feign on Denise's behalf for even a second.

Knowing it might be a very poor move, and feeling kind of like a pawn facing down Denise's all-powerful queen, Jill walked behind her desk and grabbed what she needed. "I'll see you later," she said, slightly troubled when Denise didn't say anything in response, but just nodded slowly as she walked past her out the door.

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"I am so fired," Jill moaned, head dropping to her forearm on the tabletop.

"Denise isn't going to fire you," Lindsay tried to assure her.

"Can she fire you?" Cindy asked, far too chipperly in Jill's opinion. "She's just, like, a temp, right?"

Lindsay and Claire laughed at the entirely off-the-mark depiction, but Jill was far less humored.

"Acting D.A. isn't just like a temp," she informed Cindy. "Yes, she can most definitely fire me."

"I can't believe you said all that to her," Lindsay drawled. "Awesome."

"First of all, Linz, you're well beyond tipsy," Jill asserted. "I know this, because you never use the word awesome."

"I do!" Cindy interjected.

"Second," Jill ignored her. "I very likely just cost myself my job, and if I get fired, I will never get another job with the city. Which means I'll have no choice but to become a defense attorney. Which means you'll have to revoke my club membership."

"Is it a club or not?" Cindy turned to Lindsay in clear confusion. "You all say it's not and then you call it that. It's mean and confusing. Especially when I've been drinking."

Laughing, Lindsay leaned toward Cindy, her forehead meeting Cindy's in a gentle bump.

"It's not a club," Claire's voice drew Jill's gaze from the affectionate display. "And that's not true Jill. I don't think they even check references of the janitorial staff."

"Claire!" Jill shrieked.

Cindy and Lindsay looked up dumbfounded, before both bursting into laughter.

"I'm so sorry," Claire said, putting her hand in front of her mouth as if she couldn't believe she'd just spoken that aloud. "That's not my role."

“No, it’s not. You’re supposed to be supportive and motherly, and…” Jill finally broke into laughter. “I can’t believe you said that.”

After a silent moment of companionable drinking, Cindy looked over at Lindsay.

“Did you give those pictures to the detectives working on the arsons?”

“Yeah,” Lindsay said, sobering at the mention.

“And?” Cindy prodded when Lindsay didn’t bother filling in any blanks.

“They didn’t want my help,” Lindsay pushed her drink away, sitting back in the booth. It was a tell that she would never admit to having, but that her friends knew meant she was upset.

“What did they say?” Cindy asked quietly.

“Nothing,” Lindsay returned.

“Lindsay, did they say something to you?” Claire joined the interrogation.

One look at Jill confirmed that if they didn’t get an answer, she’d voice the next inquiry. Grabbing her glass, Lindsay refused to let it get to her again.

“They said I was like my dad… a dirty cop,” she divulged, looking up to meet three pairs of equally pitying eyes and immediately looked away again. “Eventually, they’ll use it, when there’ve been a few more fires, and they still haven’t made an arrest.”

“Linz, I’m sorry,” Cindy whispered.

“It’s not your fault,” Lindsay returned, eyes holding with Cindy’s guilty ones for a moment before sliding away. “Now what in the hell is with this Tyrian purple? They don’t even use it anymore. What is this guy? A king? A time traveler?”

“Can’t we have one night off from this? Please,” Claire pleaded, waving down the waitress as she passed. “Get her another drink.”

“I’m just saying,” Lindsay continued, despite the protest. “It doesn’t make any sense. It’s completely illogical.”

“What about this is logical Linz?” Jill asked. “What about any serial killer is ever logical?”

Lindsay closed her eyes against the question, but it was still there, as effective as if she had mentioned Kiss-Me-Not by name. For a moment, she felt lost beneath the overwhelming responsibility of finding a man who’d left no helpful clues, who would certainly kill again before they had him in custody. Then, she felt Cindy’s hand, warm through the denim of her jeans,

lightly squeeze her thigh, and the feeling somewhat abated. Opening her eyes, Lindsay focused on the glass in her hands, thankful when Cindy's hand stayed where it was, grounding her.

"There was a reason Billy Harris did the things he did," she murmured.

"It didn't make it logical," Jill argued. "It gave it a basis, but what he did with that basis was only logical to him."

"Linz," Cindy softly got her attention, breath catching when Lindsay looked over at her, silently pleading for some kind of answer. "He probably thinks he is being logical. If he believes he's doing what God wants him to do, that's a pretty basic principle of Christian logic."

"I guess it doesn't matter how flawed his logic is," Claire quietly added.

Sadly, both of those things were right. This man thought that he was doing the work God asked of him, but he was wrong. At least no God that she knew would ask for such a sign of faith.

"I just wish..." Lindsay struggled with the admission. "I wish I had some idea."

After a swift, internal debate, Cindy glanced around the table. She wasn't planning to share this, not yet, but Lindsay looked like she needed something, no matter how useless it might be.

"Actually, I did have one thing," she stated.

"You do?" Lindsay asked.

"It's a tiny little nothing," Cindy responded, not wanting Lindsay to get her hopes up. "I wasn't even sure if I was going to tell you. I mean, I don't know if it really even matters."

"Cindy," Lindsay interrupted gently. "What is it?"

"It's possible that there's a pattern to the murders right?" Cindy queried, looking at Lindsay for agreement, and swallowing nervously at just how intently those eyes were already studying her.

"You think there's a pattern?"

"Yeah, maybe. It's..." Cindy hesitated. "Hold on. Let me show you."

Digging in her bag, she found the visual aids she'd created in case she ever decided to tell the rest of the club this, one of her many unsubstantiated theories.

After a moment of watching Cindy search excitedly, and Lindsay wait impatiently with the hope of getting some kind of insight into this psychopath's mind, Claire and Jill shook their heads at each other. There was no denying Lindsay and Cindy really were cut from the same mold.

"Did you know that each of the seven deadly sins has a color associated with it?" Cindy asked, holding a small stack of index cards against her chest, without revealing them.

“No,” Lindsay shook her head.

“Well, they do,” Cindy responded. “Each sin is correlated with a color of the rainbow. Seven sins. Seven colors.” She looked down at the index cards, pulling the first one off the top of the pile. “Wrath, Dellan, the first murder,” she said, laying the card on the table.

Wrath was written in all caps across the card. Beneath, there were details of the murder, including name, location, and the select Bible verse in its entirety. The card was colored red.

“Gluttony, Blake, the second murder,” Cindy said, laying down the card filled with the details of Blake’s murder, which was orange. “And greed. Martin, the most recent murder.” She dropped Martin’s yellow index card beneath Blake’s and looked up expectantly.

It took a moment for the colors to sink in. When they did, Claire looked across the table at Cindy. “They’re in order,” she stated.

“They’re in order so far,” Cindy agreed.

“So, green,” Lindsay deduced, recalling the pneumonic device for the color spectrum. “Envy?”

Cindy laid down the next index card, green with ‘envy’ written in block letters across it. “Green is envy,” she nodded. “I don’t know how that can possibly help. Knowing a pattern isn’t going to make it any easier to catch this guy. It’s just the way my mind works. It’s where I find comfort. But maybe it’s not anything -”

Lindsay’s extraordinarily warm hand gently clutching her forearm ceased the rambling at once.

“It’s more than we had five minutes ago,” Lindsay asserted.

Cindy met her gaze, unflinchingly, until unexpected buzzing drew both of their attention to Jill. Suddenly tense, Jill reached into her bag, pulling out her cell phone with much the same enthusiasm she would hold a severed hand. She didn’t have to tell them. The panicked expression was revelation enough.

“Bernhardt,” she answered, her voice hoarse.

Cindy, Lindsay, and Claire all looked at each other, then all eyes turned to Jill.

“I understand,” Jill said quietly. “Of course. I’ll see you then.”

“Denise wants you back there?” Lindsay asked as Jill hung up.

“No,” Jill informed them. “She’s actually going home for the night. She wants to see me in her office tomorrow morning.” She dropped her phone back down beside her, and her head into her hands. “I am so fired.”

Fearing there wasn't much else she could do for her, because if Denise decided to go on the warpath, there would be no stopping it, Claire reached over to rub soothing circles on Jill's back.

"You're not fired. Relax," Lindsay said, with very little conviction. "It'll be fine."

Wearily, Jill glanced up at Lindsay. "Because Denise is known for being such a forgiving person?"

Waiting for any further words of encouragement, Jill instead got three equally morose expressions. For the amount of optimism about her odds in a room with Denise, she may as well have been already fired.

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## ACT II

"Happy Halloween," Tom announced to open their morning meeting, "which means we can expect a marked increase in vandalism, theft, and assaults."

"Can you ruin Christmas too?" a voice whispered from somewhere at the back of the room.

Lindsay glanced over at Jacobi, who gave her an amused smirk in return.

"Everybody who doesn't have an active, priority case is in uniform and on the streets tonight. Everybody who does have an active case, you're staying in, but you are on call," Tom instructed, before holding up a file. "We do have one new case. It is a definite priority. The Potrero arsons have been reassigned to homicide."

Lindsay looked up sharply. "Why?" she asked weakly, well aware there was only one possible reason.

"The fire last night was in a tenement on Humboldt. About forty minutes ago, a woman's body was found in one of the rooms," Tom stated the facts of the case with a practiced dispassion. "Probably one of the homeless who couldn't get out."

His account was loudly interrupted by Lindsay kicking the nearest desk, sending it scraping a few inches across the floor. Looking up, Lindsay discovered every eye in the room looking at her as if she was crazy.

"Lindsay?" Tom inquired carefully. "Something wrong?"

Lindsay shook her head, jaw clenching angrily. Tom watched her for a moment, waiting for her to be more forthcoming, though he knew it was too much to ask for, before returning to the task at hand.

"Fong, Cortez..." he started.

“Jacobi and I will take it,” Lindsay interrupted again.

Staring across the room at her, Tom weighed whether or not to just hand Lindsay the file and let her get whatever was going on with her out of her system without him.

“Okay, that’s it,” he said finally. “Everyone’s dismissed. Lindsay, Jacobi, upstairs in my office.”

Jacobi lifted his eyebrow to her in silent question, and Lindsay returned what she hoped was a reassuring look as they followed Tom up the stairs and into his office. Highly anticipating a long-winded tirade about how not to talk to him in front of the rest of the squad, Lindsay was rather surprised when Tom just studied her.

“What’s wrong Linz?”

She could tell the truth. If she disclosed what happened, there would be some serious hell to pay, none of it hers. Clifford and Bryan would get their asses handed to them for refusing evidence that might have solved their case before someone died. They might even lose their jobs. There was some sort of poetic justice in that.

“Nothin’,” Lindsay shook her head, aware that the room knew she was lying.

“Don’t you think you have your hands full right now?” Tom questioned carefully.

“I have a big lead on this case,” Lindsay informed him.

Tom’s eyes narrowed as he leaned forward on the edge of his desk. “What kind of lead?”

“You’re just going to have to trust me, Tom,” Lindsay responded, defensively. “I know what I’m doing.”

“You had a lead on this case and you didn’t give it to the investigating officers?” Tom demanded.

Lindsay looked away. She wasn’t going to go out of her way to get anyone into trouble, but, considering the interaction they’d had, she wasn’t going to lie to protect them either. Regardless, her refusal to answer was more than enough for Tom to reach the correct conclusion.

“They wouldn’t take the lead from you?” he heatedly asked, the anger less on her behalf than on behalf of the woman who died as a result of the petty decision.

“Tom, can we just move forward, please?” Lindsay argued. “Work with what we have. Nothing you do now will change what’s already happened.”

There was plenty he wasn’t being told. Tom knew that. Part of his duty was chastising subordinates for piss poor decisions, but if Lindsay wasn’t going to tell him the whole story,

there wasn't much he could do. Trying to talk it out of her would be a waste of all of their time. If there was one thing Lindsay didn't do, it was crack under interrogation.

"Have you discussed this with your partner?" he tried instead. "Jacobi may be less inclined to be overloaded with both a serial killer and a serial arsonist."

"He's going to have to trust me too," Lindsay replied, looking over at Jacobi beseechingly.

"If she thinks we need another case to keep from getting bored, who am I to question?" Jacobi offered.

Lindsay smiled at how unfailingly Jacobi always had her back, but Tom still looked less than inclined to say yes to either of them.

"Just assign us the case, Tom," Lindsay insisted. "Trust me."

"Fine," Tom conceded, sighing heavily. "It's yours. If you need any help..."

Lindsay grabbed the presented case file from Tom's hand.

"We've got it," she assured him. "Thanks."

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Having a deep understanding of the nausea that had gone around the office, but knowing that hers was due solely to her shot nerves, Jill marched up to the door of Denise's office as if she was in a funeral procession. And maybe she was. Death to her career.

Despite an irrational hope that Denise wouldn't show up for her own scheduled appointment, Jill found her sitting in her office, already at work. Choking down the dread, she tried to look normal, giving up on the charade when she realized it was futile. Walking into a meeting with a fifty-fifty chance of coming out jobless wasn't normal. Pretending that it wouldn't alter that fact.

Denise looked up at her before she had a chance to knock. Or run away screaming.

"Jill, come in," she said, brusquely waving her forward.

Though there was no one around to witness the agonizing exchange that was about to take place, it was out of habit that Jill shut the door behind her in preparation for the impending rant. She sat down across from Denise's desk, forcing herself to sit up straight and look Denise in the eye.

"How was your night?" Denise asked her.

Impossible to tell if she was being sincere or cutting, considering it was Denise, Jill thought it safe to assume she didn't really care either way.

“Fine,” she answered in the simplest possible manner, knowing the more she said the more likely she was to shoot herself in the foot.

“Patterson, Lawrence, and Allen have all called to say they’ll be in today, so you can go,” Denise informed her with little dithering and even less emotion.

Thoroughly numb, Jill was at a loss. Anticipating it, and yet not anticipating it, she tried to think of something to say that didn’t end in the words “heartless bitch” or turn into groveling for her job.

“So will my final check be direct deposited or paper?” she asked in a daze.

Denise looked stunned, as if she’d just been slapped in the face. Jill wondered for a second if some of her not too subconscious anger had come to fruition, and she had, in fact, slapped her without realizing it.

“I’m not firing you,” Denise uttered.

“You’re not?” Jill asked in confusion

“Why would I fire someone who covered for the entire staff with me, Jill?” Denise posed, not trying in the least to hide the irritation. “Use your brain.”

“But you said I needed to go,” Jill recapped.

“You do,” Denise reiterated. “You’ve worked overtime ten days in a row, and almost sixty hours in the past three. Take a couple of days off.”

If she didn’t think Denise would take it as being mocked, Jill would have done what felt appropriate, tilted her head to the side and tried to clear her ears. Since she couldn’t, she just kept staring at Denise as if she were sprouting horns, or, more improbably, a halo.

“You know, just because I don’t keep any,” Denise stated quietly, “doesn’t mean I’m going to fire you for having friends.”

Not really sure how to respond to that without creating danger to her well-being, Jill decided her safest course of action was to simply not acknowledge it had been said.

“You should take some time off too,” she recommended instead.

“Then who will make all of these idiots do their jobs right?” Denise bounced right back, every bit as merciless as ever. “Could you give everyone’s work back to them before you take off?”

“Yeah, no problem,” Jill agreed, trying to determine if the majority of the conversation she’d just had was real or if it had taken place only in her head. Not that it mattered. Denise would deny any part that made her seem vulnerable if the subject ever came up again.

Without being told so, Jill knew that she was dismissed. Not bothering with the formality of saying goodbye, Denise simply returned to her work. Relatively confused, but grateful for the outcome nonetheless, Jill slowly got up and walked to the door, bothered by the lingering notion that there was something important left unsaid between them. Feeling a little like she was throwing her arms up in surrender before a trigger-happy firing squad, she turned back anyway.

“I’m sorry about what I said,” she asserted. Oddly enough, it seemed to be true.

Denise looked up at Jill in her doorway, surprised that she wasn’t gone yet, and even more surprised that she actually believed the apology. Unable to hold Jill’s gaze, she dropped her eyes back to the paperwork in front of her.

“Yeah, well, so am I,” she stated so quietly it was almost a whisper.

“I’ll see you in a few days.”

“Yep, I’ll see ya,” Denise responded, anxious to get Jill out of her office as quickly as possible.

Jill did her the service of going, trying to shake free of her mental confusion as she walked down the hall. She still wasn’t entirely sure what had just taken place. All she knew was that what she’d expected hadn’t happened, and what had happened, she never, in a million years, would have expected.

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Lindsay and Jacobi spent the majority of their morning talking to reluctant witnesses. After badgering what felt like nearly all of the residents of Potrero Hill, they’d found half a dozen people who claimed to have seen the blonde from Cindy’s photographs walking up and down 25<sup>th</sup> Street throughout the day. That was their only lead. It might have felt a bit better if the majority of their witnesses weren’t the type of people for whom it was hard to take at their word, and if they hadn’t wasted so much time. At this point, the blonde could easily be back in her apartment, celebrating a hard day’s pacing with a frozen dinner and a wine cooler.

In the passenger seat, Jacobi thumbed through the 8x10s, trying to memorize the features of the obviously genius woman who let herself be photographed at several different crime scenes, her face clearly visible in the majority of them.

“So, what did they say to you?” he asked without looking up, the pictures sliding through his hands in a cadenced pattern.

“It doesn’t matter,” Lindsay answered.

“It does matter if it was something shitty and insulting,” Jacobi ceased in his movements to look up at her. Under the guise of keeping her eyes on the road, Lindsay avoided the concentrated gaze.

“It’s really not a big deal, Jacobi,” she murmured.

“It is to me,” Jacobi returned.

Unable to play off the declaration as if it meant nothing to her, Lindsay finally gave in and looked his way. Jacobi was a portrait in patience, just waiting for her to come clean in her own time. It was his way, and it was rare that it didn’t work on her.

“They wanted to know where I got my information,” she started slowly, “and since I couldn’t exactly tell them about Cindy they assumed my contacts were criminal... like my dad.”

The fact that Jacobi didn’t immediately say anything was not, unfortunately, a sign that he was really thinking things through before he went all raging fury on her.

“Who did?” he asked with a deliberate calm that usually indicated he was on that threshold of being too enraged to speak.

“That is really not important,” Lindsay said, hoping to pull him back from the ledge.

Jacobi wasn’t having it.

“If you don’t tell me, I’m just going to look through the case file and see who was originally on it.”

Knowing he would do exactly that, Lindsay shook her head, and wished she’d never said anything.

“Clifford or Bryan,” she disclosed. “I don’t know which was which. Only one of them did any talking, and, after a while, I stopped worrying about who was who, since they seemed to share only one brain between them.”

Though she refused to look, Lindsay could feel Jacobi’s eyes on her, trying to read her thoughts. And he would with perfect precision. He always did.

“They get to you?” he asked quietly.

“Well, it’s not like I can exactly dispute what they said,” Lindsay returned just as softly. “As far as I know, they’re right about him.”

“But they’re wrong about you.”

“That doesn’t make any difference. We’re judged by the company we keep,” Lindsay uttered, before glancing at Jacobi with a smile. “That’s why I make a habit of hanging out with you.”

Jacobi finally smiled, with a slight shake of his head, and palmed her shoulder long enough to be reassuring without being cloying before returning to the photos.

Slowing down as they crossed Potrero Street, Lindsay looked for somewhere to park. She was at once distracted by a scruffy man, with a wildly unkempt beard, leaning against the fence surrounding a vacant patch of land. Though she couldn't quite place him, the man struck her as uncannily familiar. As she watched, a guy who looked as if he was probably born straight onto the streets approached and the man who looked familiar pulled something from his pocket and handed it to him.

"You've got to be kidding me," Jacobi murmured next to her. "It can't possibly be this easy".

Lindsay turned in Jacobi's direction to see what she'd missed, and Jacobi pointed out the window at a blonde just up the street.

"That woman look familiar to you?"

One look from Cindy's embezzled photograph to the woman standing on the sidewalk was all it took to confirm. Pulling to the side of the road, Lindsay double-parked, and she and Jacobi climbed out of her SUV. Hands resting on their service weapons just in case, they approached the blonde cautiously, though the woman's extraordinarily focused inspection of the rundown theater in front of her made their stealthy approach completely unnecessary.

"Whatcha lookin' at," Lindsay asked her, in an admittedly sarcastic manner.

The woman turned to look at her, presumably amazed to see someone standing right next to her. Lindsay displayed her badge and the blonde's eyes went so wide, Lindsay half-expected a confession to come tumbling out of her irises.

"Let's take a ride into the station and have a conversation," Jacobi proposed, closing his cuffs around the woman's wrists before she seemed to comprehend what was happening.

Jacobi hauled the easily-arrestable blonde toward the car, and Lindsay turned to follow, her eyes drawn to the other side of the street as the man by the fence stirred. Jimmying a cane from where he had wedged it in the fence close by, he brought it down as a crutch beside him and started limping away. Though she still had no idea who he was, all at once Lindsay remembered where she'd seen him before.

"You ready?" Jacobi asked.

Lindsay turned to find him standing inside the open passenger door, the blonde already safely belted in the backseat of the car. Glancing across the street, she watched the man limp off down the sidewalk.

"Can you do me a favor?" she requested, walking over to Jacobi and pulling her keys from her pocket.

"Depends what you're asking," Jacobi responded.

Lindsay grabbed his hand and pressed her keys into his palm.

“Take her back to the station?” she asked. “There’s something I need to take care of.”

Jacobi really wanted to tell her to get her ass back in the car. She could tell he did. But something on her face must have made him change his mind before any words reached his lips.

“How are you going to get back?”

“I’m a big girl with a big gun,” Lindsay reminded him, looking across the street again to make sure the man with the cane hadn’t yet disappeared. “I’ll be fine.”

Sighing, Jacobi closed the door and walked around to the driver’s side, looking at Lindsay over the hood.

“Don’t get yourself into trouble,” he ordered.

“Don’t plan on it,” Lindsay assured him.

With a shake of his head, as if he knew that he shouldn’t, Jacobi got into the driver’s seat and pulled away from the curb. As soon as he turned the corner, Lindsay jogged across the street in pursuit of the man with the cane. His disability working to her advantage, within a block Lindsay had caught up.

“Hey,” she called to him when she was within hearing distance.

He looked over his shoulder, and she would swear he started to limp faster.

“Hey,” Lindsay yelled again, running ahead to obstruct his path. “What are you, deaf?” she asked. “Or just scared of cops?”

“Shit!” he said, pulling to a halt, his greasy black bangs falling into his eyes. “What do you want?”

“I just want to talk to you,” Lindsay promised, though it didn’t seem to bring him any comfort.

“Yeah, what about?” he asked, looking around with a series of rapid head movements, a practiced technique undoubtedly fostered by rampant paranoia.

“I’ve seen you before,” Lindsay informed him.

He was shaking his head in denial before she even finished the sentence. “You’ve got me confused with someone else.”

“No,” Lindsay corrected. “I’ve seen you before. More than once. With my dad.”

Wrought with the ties of daily drug use, he couldn't hold still, looking around continuously and shifting back and forth as much as his bum leg would allow, his cane tapping in an arrhythmic beat against the concrete.

"I don't know you, lady," he said, shaking his head, "and I don't know your dad."

"His name was Martin Boxer."

Recognition flashed through the man's eyes, giving him away even before he glanced anxiously around again. "Never heard of him," he lied.

"We can have this conversation at the precinct if you'd rather," Lindsay threatened.

The guy looked trapped. He was. After a moment's hesitation, in which if he could have physically escaped he would have made the attempt, the man exhaled in frustration and cast Lindsay a nervous scowl.

"I knew your dad, okay," he admitted hesitantly.

"How did you know him?" Lindsay demanded.

"We sort of worked together," the man responded, glancing away.

It was exactly what Lindsay didn't want to hear. In a way, she might have been better off letting the guy flee. There were some things it was better not to know.

"Bucci family?" she inquired.

The man's already remarkable paranoia increased tenfold. His eyes darted around again, and he looked practically terrified by what-if scenarios.

"Listen, what do you want to know?" he hissed. "Being seen with you doesn't exactly keep me alive. You know what I'm sayin'?"

Lindsay looked around. They were drawing attention from a couple of different directions, though there was no reason for them to necessarily make her for a cop. So maybe the guy wasn't entirely paranoid. Though there were no immediate threats that she could see, there was information that she needed to extract from this guy before anyone decided to kill him.

"Come with me," she said, taking him by the arm and tugging him down the street as fast as he could manage.

Lindsay turned them onto the first side street and when they passed the first small coffee shop, she swung open the door and pulled him inside. Other than the lone employee, who barely took the time to raise her head as they entered, the place was deserted. But the guy still looked as if he would rather be anywhere else on earth.

“Who are you?” Lindsay asked as she turned to face him.

“Nobody,” the guy tried, then seemed to realize from her expression that he’d be wise to keep talking. “I just worked for your father from time to time, you know, on an irregular basis.”

“What did you do for him exactly?” Lindsay questioned.

The man glanced over at the counter, but the worker was still very content to ignore them.

“If we have to talk about this, could we at least sit down?” the man asked.

Lindsay’s gaze fell to the cane, and, suffering a momentary bout of humanity, she motioned him to the nearest table. The pained grunt he made as he slid into the chair was genuine, and Lindsay almost felt bad for dragging him down the street.

“And can I get a coffee?”

The sympathy diminished. Aggravated, but wanting to keep him talking, Lindsay went to the counter, keeping a watch on him as she waited for the listless worker to actually do her job. She traded two dollars for the small cup, not terribly surprised when the worker forgot her change, and thumped the cup down in front of her high maintenance ward.

“Bitter,” he shuddered, taking a drink.

“Now tell me how you helped my father,” Lindsay demanded, sitting across from him.

He looked up at Lindsay and realized at once he’d pressed his luck as far as it would go.

“I was able to get in places he couldn’t,” he stated simply.

“Okay,” Lindsay nodded, molding her next words with ultimate care to make sure they provided sufficient intimidation. “You’re going to be a lot more cooperative or we’re going to move back out to the street and I’m going to pin my badge to my jacket.”

Lindsay saw the undisguised fear as a welcome sign that she would stop being jerked around.

“Fine,” the guy muttered irately and looked up at her, his guard dropping for a moment. “So, Marty... you said was. What happened?”

“He died a few months ago,” Lindsay granted him, unsure if he actually deserved to know.

The man nodded slowly, taking another drink with a shudder, and was all of a sudden considerably more human.

“Where I grew up, there were only two ways to be safe,” he began, playing with the paper cup. “You joined a gang or you became a cop. The people I knew were in gangs. I didn’t want that life.”

He glanced up, looking surprisingly sincere, and Lindsay nodded for him to continue.

“When I was thirteen, I was hit by a stray bullet,” he shook his head. “There was no way I could pass the physical to be a cop. So I started hanging around crime scenes, trying to help where I could. Nobody wanted my help.” He gave a small laugh. “Then, one day, I knew the guys who robbed a liquor store in my neighborhood, and killed the clerk. I told your dad. He didn’t want my help either at first. But I just kept coming around. I kept finding him what he needed.”

“You made yourself indispensable,” Lindsay said softly. It seemed an oddly familiar story.

The man shrugged. “He came around, let me help out. And, in return, he let me carry and promised he’d step up if I ever had to use it. Just having a piece that you can use if you have to makes all the difference some places.”

“So you weren’t a go-between between him and Dominic Bucci?” Lindsay asked the question she really wanted to know, terrified of what the answer might be.

The guy laughed uncomfortably, his eyes sliding to the disinterested employee.

“Lady, I’m no mobster.”

What she expected to hear, she wasn’t sure, but she didn’t feel like she’d gotten what she wanted. Fairly certain there was a lot he wasn’t telling her, Lindsay stood up anyway.

“I have to go,” she said. “I need your name. Tell me the truth. You do not want to lie to me.”

“Banks.”

“You got a first name?” Lindsay prodded.

“Leo.”

There wasn’t a lot of trust lost between them, but required elsewhere, Lindsay decided for the time being she would have to take him at his word.

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One of the greatest perks of Cindy’s job was that research looked like research whether she was trying to find a unique angle in the Potrero arson locales, so that she didn’t have to keep updating the same “Buildings torched on the Hill. No known Pattern. One dead.” article, or if she was searching for anyone in the bay area who had been envious to the point of making recent headlines.

Phone vibrating in her bag, Cindy got a hold of it, smiling at the caller ID before she flipped it open.

“Hey,” she answered.

“Hey,” Lindsay returned, sounding tired. She’d been sounding that way a lot lately. “I thought you’d want to know, we found the blonde.”

“Already?” Cindy asked in amazement. “I knew it would probably be handed over to Homicide, but I didn’t think you’d get it.”

“Well, I had some inside information,” Lindsay said softly, and, despite everything, Cindy could hear a small smile in her voice. “I can’t believe I haven’t heard from you by now. It’s still your article right?”

“Yeah,” Cindy confirmed, glancing at the dueling windows on her computer screen with a sigh. “But I haven’t exactly been primo crime reporter today.”

“Why? Is something wrong?” Lindsay asked, smile fading into not-so-subtle worry.

Which made Cindy smile. Even if she didn’t want to give Lindsay further cause for concern. Sometimes it was hard to tell how much Lindsay cared. And sometimes it was impossible not to.

“No. I’m just busy,” Cindy semi-lied, anticipating Lindsay’s question about what she was busy doing, and trying to cut it off at the pass. “What’s that noise?”

“I’m on the train.”

“Is the SFPD going green?”

Lindsay laughed softly, and Cindy felt as if she’d scored a small victory. Making Lindsay laugh wasn’t all that easy these days.

“Jacobi took my car,” Lindsay responded.

There was something in her tone, something tenuous and guarded, which she undoubtedly would have preferred for Cindy to just ignore. But turning a blind eye, or ear, to Lindsay’s suffering wasn’t exactly in her nature.

“What’s going on Linz?” she gently queried, half expecting Lindsay not to answer, or to play whatever it was off.

Cindy could hear the sound of the train mixed with the faint rustle of Lindsay’s leather jacket, and envisioned Lindsay shifting around in her seat.

“I just…” Lindsay faltered. “I talked to this guy. I remembered seeing him with my dad.”

Cindy stared at her screen without seeing it, wholly attentive to the voice on the other end of the line. “Okay,” she whispered.

“He said that he helped my dad on his cases. You know, kind of like you do?” Lindsay lingered on the thought, taking a deep breath before she continued. “I thought he might work for the Bucci family.”

Cindy really wished that they were having this conversation in person, where she could do something to eliminate the unnatural fragility in Lindsay’s voice. But there was also some awe in the fact that Lindsay wasn’t trying to conceal it from her.

“You thought it would prove your dad was guilty of what they said he did?” Cindy deduced.

“I just want to know the truth,” Lindsay confessed so quietly that the screeching of the train as it slowed into a station nearly drowned her out.

“So did he?”

“He said that he didn’t.”

“You don’t believe him?”

“I don’t know what to believe. I just got a feeling he wasn’t telling me everything,” Lindsay sighed. “All that stuff yesterday, it brought everything back up, you know?”

Though Lindsay couldn’t see it, Cindy nodded, sorry once again that she’d asked Lindsay to play courier. She should have sent the photos anonymously, and if she had it to do over... Sadly, there were no do-overs. There was, however, atonement.

“The guy you talked to,” Cindy asked, “what’s his name?”

“He said it’s Leo Banks,” Lindsay responded. “Who knows if that’s true?”

Authentic or not, Cindy scribbled the name down on a scrap piece of paper on her desk, and drew a line under it, pen hovering in anticipation of more.

“Can you describe him?”

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### ACT III

Jacobi looked up as Lindsay walked in, watching her carefully composed approach. Her unruffled demeanor was artificial, but if she was faking calm, it meant she didn’t want to talk about it.

“Everything alright?” he asked simply, proved right in his theory that Lindsay wasn’t in a sharing mood when she forced a smile, and threw back, “Yeah. I’m good.”

Knowing that was all he was getting, Jacobi nodded and stood up. "Then you owe me big time," he announced. "Barbie started crying the second I got into the car and was still crying when I left her in the interview room."

"About what?"

"I don't know. Why do women do anything?" Jacobi shook his head, smirking when Lindsay gave him a predicted glower. "I didn't ask."

"Well, let's go ask," Lindsay proposed, grabbing the photos and file from the edge of Jacobi's desk and leading him toward the interrogation room.

As she reached the door, Jacobi tapped her lightly on the shoulder, and Lindsay paused before cracking the door.

"I wasn't making the obvious joke," he informed her. "I did get her name out of her."

Curious, Lindsay popped open the case file and snapped it closed again, looking up at Jacobi blankly, and let them into the room.

The weeping blonde looked up with a startled squeal as they entered. Lindsay glanced over at Jacobi, wordlessly asking what was wrong with her. He threw a hand in the air and shook his head as if he wasn't going to begin to try to decipher this woman's emotional breakdown.

Indebted, after letting Jacobi endure miles alone in a car with the shrillest crying she'd ever encountered, Lindsay decided it was her duty to pull actual words out of the blonde.

Stepping forward to the table, she threw the photos down, pleased when they fanned out in a rather dramatic fashion in front of the woman. It almost looked like she'd planned it that way.

"So... Barbie... do you want to explain what you were doing at all of the Potrero fires?"

Wincing, and trying not to plug her ears, when the woman wailed in apparent agony at the question, Lindsay thought for a second she might be hallucinating the words.

"I knew I was gonna get caught."

Glancing in Jacobi's direction to make sure that he'd heard them too, Lindsay took his stunned appearance as verification.

"So, you admit you set the fires?" Lindsay questioned disbelievingly.

"You know I did," Barbie howled.

Perplexed, Lindsay dropped down into a chair. "Uh, why?" she asked.

“All those buildings were ugly,” Barbie answered as if it was the most logical explanation in the world (but what about anything was ever logical?). “I thought if I got rid of them, they’d put up something nice.”

“You killed someone,” Jacobi sternly reminded her.

“It was an accident!” Barbie burst into forceful tears again.

Five minutes later, she’d written and signed her confession, and, just like that, a month of arsons that terrorized the Potrero was brought to a close.

“The bad news is, she’s going to prison,” Jacobi said, watching the woman sobbing her way to central booking, pawned off on a passing officer who was already headed that way. “The good news is, she gets my vote for interogatee of the year. I say we send her a fruit basket once she gets a permanent cell.”

With a genuine laugh, Lindsay tapped Jacobi’s shoulder with the file.

“I’m going to take what we have to Jill,” she said, “and let Cindy know we’ve arrested Barbie.”

Jacobi nodded his go-ahead. “You’re good, right?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Lindsay assured him. “I’m good.”

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After getting Cindy’s voice mail, and leaving the fine points of Barbie’s arrest, including all the little details that no other reporter would be privy to about her weepy confession to give Cindy’s version of the story a little extra zing, Lindsay made it to Jill’s door. Getting no answer to her knock, she tried the handle, and found the door locked.

Not letting it unsettle her, she turned to find a frazzled associate of Jill’s rushing down the hallway.

“Patterson,” Lindsay called out to him.

“Inspector Boxer,” he greeted without slowing up.

“Do you know where Jill is?” Lindsay asked, falling into stride beside him.

He shook his head. “Haven’t seen her all day. Sorry.”

Stopping, Lindsay let Patterson continue down the hall without her. Shooting a glare in the direction of Denise’s office, she whirled away and headed for the elevator.

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“Claire,” Lindsay called out as she entered the morgue.

“Lindsay,” Claire spiritedly exclaimed back, scraping at the cheek of their charred victim with a swab.

Sidetracking for a moment, Lindsay acknowledged the nameless victim lying between them.

“Do you know who she is?”

“No ID, more than likely no one looking for her,” Claire exhaled. “It will be a while.”

“The fire-starter was trying to beautify the city,” Lindsay enlightened her.

“You should bring her down here,” Claire said sharply. “Let her have a look.”

“Yeah,” Lindsay agreed completely. “Have you heard from Jill? I tried to call. She didn’t answer.”

“She’s at the gym,” Claire answered, eyes running vigilantly down the dead woman’s blackened face.

“Denise fired her?!?” Lindsay incorrectly surmised.

“No,” Claire said slowly, looking up. “She gave her the day off.”

Experiencing a sensation much like the earth decided to stop and rotate backwards for the hundredth time that day, Lindsay shook her head to clear it and eyed Claire.

“Denise punished Jill’s insubordination with a vacation day?”

“Apparently,” Claire stated. “And now Jill has decided we all need to go to a Halloween party with her tonight. She said she was going to call you.”

“Actually I did have a message I forgot to check,” Lindsay acknowledged. “But I’ve spent all day working on this case. I should probably get back on the more pressing one, see if I can make a dent.”

“You’d rather stay on this case that’s going nowhere tonight than have an evening out with your friends?” Claire posed.

Lindsay felt as if she was being questioned by a sage.

“Way to be optimistic, Claire,” Lindsay playfully chided, smiling over at her. “You’re going?”

“I’m going to try.”

“Ed?” Lindsay reasoned.

“Now’s not a good time to push,” Claire acknowledged. “I should probably just stay in and watch a movie with my husband.”

Hoping things would be more stable for them soon, Lindsay nodded her understanding.

“But you should go,” Claire advised, trying to look innocent as she added, “Cindy’s going.”

“She is?” Lindsay asked, biting her lip when she realized she might have seemed too eager.

“Does that surprise you?”

“No,” Lindsay tried for nonchalance. “I guess not.” Picking at the seam on her jeans, she tried not to ask the question nagging at her. Losing the battle, she glanced around the room to avoid looking at Claire. “So, Cindy’s going with Jill?”

Infinitely proud of her restraint, Claire managed not to smirk victoriously.

“We’re all invited, Linz,” she reminded her. “You should go. It’ll be fun.”

“Maybe I will,” Lindsay said with casual interest, knowing very well where she would end up tonight.

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“Clifford or Bryan?” Jacobi called out, wondering how exactly property crimes was so busy when almost all of homicide was on the street.

Since the entire department seemed to be taking the night off, he was expecting it when the two men got up from their desks, glanced at each other and moved in his direction.

“No, it’s okay. Really. I can tell you from here,” Jacobi shouted across the bullpen to them, halting their progress. “I just wanted to let you know, Inspector Boxer and I already made an arrest on your arson case. After a month, I’m sure you’re glad to know it’s finally closed.”

Clifford and Bryan looked at each other furiously and looked back at Jacobi, which, oddly enough, did little to dampen his good mood.

“Barbie’s already confessed even,” Jacobi informed them against their will. “It took less than twelve hours. How many hours did you put in?”

Jacobi scanned the crowd he’d brought to their feet. Extraordinarily outmanned, but too incensed to care, he shrugged at Clifford and Bryan. “So, I figure there are two possibilities here. One, Lindsay really *is* that exceptional. Or two,” he paused long enough for them to gnash their teeth and sound their inner growls, “the both of you are total screw-ups. I’ll let you decide.”

Stopping short of saluting them before walking out, reasoning it might go just a little too far, Jacobi knew he hadn't helped interdepartmental relations, and that Lindsay's girl power ideals would openly cringe. But he also knew Tom would say to screw interdepartmental relations, and that Linz would be secretly satisfied.

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She was going to owe Danny an incredible amount of favors after this, Cindy thought, looking through the folders he'd opened on her computer with his own highly-trackable password.

"So I was thinking?" he asked from behind her. "How about tonight?"

Cindy frowned as she pulled up a photograph, saving it with the several others into the folder she'd created on her desktop.

"Tonight?" she asked.

"Darts," Danny expounded. "Drinks. That dinner you owe me."

Cindy paused in what she was doing, feeling, somewhere along the way, she'd neglected to comprehend an exchange that had taken place, which really wasn't all that surprising. Pretty sure that she wasn't just being invited to dinner with a coworker, Cindy turned around to meet Danny's confident expression.

"Danny," she started, hoping she wasn't about to embarrass both of them. "I'm with someone."

His shocked disappointment told her she hadn't misconstrued anything. At least not in the course of their current conversation.

"Really?" he asked. "I thought you were single."

"I'm not," Cindy replied.

What was making her lie to him, she wasn't entirely sure. He was a nice enough guy. He wasn't unattractive. And, while she may have been on more than one date with the same person recently, she wouldn't say she and Ellen were a couple. Yet, she'd just claimed she was part of one... with an evidently imaginary other half.

"Oh, okay," Danny smiled modestly. "My mistake. Sorry." He dithered uncomfortably for a few seconds, then motioned toward her computer. "Could you just sign me out when you're done?"

"Sure," Cindy agreed.

Anxious to escape, Danny shot off toward his desk, and Cindy felt utterly guilty for paying so little attention that she'd created a decidedly awkward situation.

Spinning back toward her computer, and staring at the incontrovertible facts before her, she determined she had sufficient evidence. And she knew that she would have to tell Lindsay. That's why she'd done her investigating after all, so Lindsay could know the truth. But there was no denying it would have been an easier task if the truth were more pleasant.

Logging out of the system and closing the folder of doom, Cindy returned to her article. A few relatively easy-flowing paragraphs about Barbie and her virulent crying fits later, her phone vibrated across her desk and she caught it on its way to the floor.

"Cindy Thomas," she answered distractedly.

"I know you don't always answer your phone like that," an unexpected voice returned.

One hand still hovering over her keyboard, Cindy tried to orient herself.

"Ellen... hi."

"Hi," Ellen responded. "What are you up to?"

"My eyeballs in work," Cindy answered.

That wasn't exactly true either. She only had to finish her article, and she was ninety percent there. Apparently, her filter of truth was having a major malfunction.

"I guess you don't have time for a drink then," Ellen replied, disappointed.

Cindy really did have to meet Jill. That wasn't a lie. If she really wanted to, though, she could squeeze in one drink on the way. If she really wanted to, she could even invite Ellen to the party. Jill wouldn't mind.

"I really can't tonight. I'm sorry," she heard herself saying, despite all of that.

"That's too bad," Ellen replied. "I haven't seen you in a while. It's been over a week since I've even talked to you."

Was that true? Cindy wondered, trying to think back. She guessed it was.

"Sorry, I've been really busy."

"It's okay," Ellen was too forgiving. "I know you have things to do. But you're going to call me, right?"

Whether or not she should battled in Cindy's mind, though she wasn't sure why not calling was even a consideration. What reason did she have not to?

"Yeah, of course," she promised. "I'll call you soon."

“Okay,” Ellen breathed. “Bye.”

“Bye,” Cindy uttered, hanging up.

What in the hell was wrong with her? Turning down two potential dates in the course of a few hours. And for what exactly? Another serial killer, occasional nights out with her core group of friends, and the rest spent alone eating frozen dinners and working through her personal time? If she finished up quickly enough, she might even be able to squeeze in appetizers with that drink.

With a sigh, she grabbed her phone and scrolled through her contacts, selecting Ellen’s number, her thumb pausing over send for a long moment. Maybe Ellen wasn’t her perfect soul mate. Maybe she was asking for too much. And maybe perfect soul mates only existed in new age self-help books.

With sudden resolve, Cindy pressed the button and waited for Ellen to pick up.

“Cindy.”

Cindy looked up sharply, her phone falling from her ear to her desk. Chasing it around with her hands, and finally getting a hold of it, she was almost positive she heard a muffled hello as she snapped it closed.

“Linz,” she said. “You scared the hell out of me.”

Face flushed and chest heaving, Cindy looked up at her. Despite her intense curiosity as to why Cindy had an eye patch resting on her forehead above her eye and a black bandana on her head, Lindsay withheld all questions.

“Sorry,” Lindsay stated honestly. “I did come from the front though. I thought you’d see me.”

“I’m just a little distracted,” Cindy muttered.

Fists burrowing into her pockets, Lindsay smiled down at her adorably flustered friend. Cindy’s cell shuddered in her hand, and Lindsay picked up on the muted buzz, glancing toward it.

“Do you need to get that?” she asked.

“No, it’s nothing,” Cindy responded, silencing the phone. “So, what are you doing here?”

“We’re going to a party with Jill,” Lindsay surprised her by saying. “I thought you might want a ride.”

“Oh,” Cindy replied, rather stunned by the explanation. “You’re coming?”

“If that’s alright,” Lindsay answered, oddly coy.

“Yeah,” Cindy exclaimed, getting to her feet at once.

Struck dumb when confronted full-on with the rest of Cindy's inspired ensemble, Lindsay wondered if Cindy had been wearing that all day at work. It wasn't that she was showing anything sacred, but the flimsy gauze-like shirt was both extremely low-cut and practically see-through, the black ruffled skirt was entirely too short, and the black corset left nothing to the imagination, pushing everything up and out for inspection by all.

Gaze trailing down to the knee high black boots that completed her pirate guise, Lindsay realized just how long she'd been inspecting and pulled her eyes back up, trying with exceeding difficulty to keep her eyes on Cindy's face.

"What are you wearing?" she teased, needing to pretend that Cindy's choice of clothing was amusing.

"It's called a costume," Cindy informed her. "Where's yours?"

"You're kidding, right?" Lindsay countered.

"Linz, it's a costume party," Cindy declared. "You're really not going to dress up?"

Her lower lip protruded into a small pout, and Lindsay really wished she'd stopped on the way to buy a costume.

"I didn't know I'd end up going to a costume party tonight," she stated honestly.

Still unsatisfied, Cindy glanced toward her computer, her eyes catching on her incomplete article, which reminded her of the other work she'd finished up not long before Lindsay's arrival.

"What's wrong?" Lindsay questioned.

Knowing her expression gave her away, Cindy decided she really needed to work on her blank slate look.

"I can tell you tomorrow," she replied.

"Or you can tell me now," Lindsay insisted, albeit gently.

Even if she tried to argue, she would never win, so Cindy gave in and opened the folder on her desktop, bringing up the first photo. "Is this Leo?" she asked.

Clearly surprised by the inquiry, Lindsay walked around Cindy's desk. Mentally deducting a few years from the man she'd talked to earlier in the day, she compared him to the image on Cindy's computer. "Yeah, that's him."

Cindy looked back at her, visibly apprehensive. "And he told you he wasn't involved with the Bucci family right?"

“That’s what he said, yeah.”

Wondering if she was doing the right thing, especially in the midst of everything else that was going on in their lives, Cindy clicked through the remaining photos, all of them showing Leo with Dominic Bucci at events across the city. At list’s end, she glanced up at Lindsay again, watching a very ugly rage rise beneath the very attractive surface.

“Now, we don’t know exactly what this means,” Cindy tried for damage control.

“It means the little shit lied to me, and I’m gonna go kick his ass,” Lindsay summarized.

“Okay,” Cindy conceded, catching Lindsay’s arm and effectively thwarting her departure attempt. “If that’s what you think you should do, I’m fine with it. But can I come with you?”

Still holding on, Cindy looked up imploringly, and Lindsay couldn’t say no.

“Come on,” she said, tilting her head toward the door, but found herself still held captive.

“I need to finish my article first,” Cindy admitted timidly.

With a duped sigh, Lindsay settled against the edge of Cindy’s desk.

“Type fast, Thomas,” she ordered, crossing her arms and trying her best to intimidate.

Cindy dropped down into her chair, finished her article with astonishing speed, emailed it to her editor, shut down her computer, and got up just in time to silence her phone again.

“You’re popular tonight,” Lindsay declared as she drew to full height, making Cindy feel as daunted as usual.

“It’s the pirate thing,” Cindy quipped, turning her phone off completely and dropping it in her bag. “Let’s go.”

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## ACT IV

Leo leaned against the brick wall of a dilapidated building, cane propped beside him. Evidently not as paranoid as Lindsay had diagnosed him to be, he didn’t even seem to notice that the SUV pulling slowly up the road toward him was the same one that had parked here earlier and from which two cops had emerged.

“Hey Leo!” Lindsay shouted out the window.

Pretending not to hear or see her, though she was directly in his line of vision and yelled plenty loud enough, Leo seized his cane and started off. Lindsay came to a stop, watching his attempt at

flight. Why he thought he could escape her when he couldn't before was beyond her, but it was a noble effort.

"Get in the car," she called out to him, in a relatively pleasant manner.

"Can't do that," Leo shook his head, barely glancing her way.

Lindsay threw open her door and climbed out, catching up to him in several easy strides, and, to a chorus of obscenity-laden protests, dragged him back to the SUV. She stopped to grab his cane and toss it into the backseat before cuffing him.

"Ah, come on," Leo said in disbelief.

"Didn't you know they've got a new apple fritter at Café la Ritz?" Lindsay asked with misleading indulgence. "I'm buying."

She chucked him in the back with his cane and hopped into the driver's seat.

Cursing, Leo struggled upright, glancing to the passenger's seat and getting an eyeful of sexy pirate. Feeling substantially better about his situation, he grinned up at Cindy.

"Hey."

"Hey," Cindy returned, turning back to the front.

Stretching forward, Leo happily ogled Cindy's generously exposed cleavage, until the rearview mirror moved, and he was met with a look that clearly threatened his manhood. Sliding back against the seat, he decided to cut his losses and try not to get thrown in the clink.

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"Coffee. Chocolate croissant. Start talking," Lindsay ordered, dropping the items before Leo on the table and waiting for Cindy to take a seat before sitting down beside her.

"What about the apple thing?" Leo inquired.

"Eat. Talk," Lindsay refused to negotiate.

"About what?" Leo responded dumbly.

"Why did you lie to me about working with the Buccis?"

The name was like a red hot prod, Leo gave such a start, looking around as if a dozen strapping Italians were going to crawl out of the woodwork and whack him on the spot.

"I didn't lie to you," Leo lied again.

“I have pictures that say you did,” Lindsay informed him. “Either they’re lying or you are, and I know what my money’s on.”

“Listen, it’s not like you’re thinkin’,” Leo claimed.

“Really?” Lindsay countered, unmoved. “What am I thinkin’?”

Leo looked so honestly terrified that Cindy almost felt bad for him when he looked over at her for help. She wouldn’t want to be on the receiving end of this grilling by Lindsay. She’d endured enough of her own to know just how unfun they were.

“My father went down for helping the Bucci family,” Lindsay reminded him in a slow, measured voice when Leo didn’t respond. “You worked for them. You already told me you worked for my father. So I guess it doesn’t take a lot of thinking. Were you his go-between or not?”

“Not!” Leo retorted. “I already told you that.”

“Yeah, well, now tell me the truth,” Lindsay shot back.

Cindy watched Lindsay carefully for any sign that she was going to do something that she would regret. Or that she wouldn’t regret, but would cost her her job. It was a struggle not to touch her, try to rub away some of the palpable tension, but she knew that the last thing Lindsay wanted right now was to show any sign of weakness.

“The Bucci family was taking down the city. You remember that. They were untouchable,” Leo started, obviously realizing he’d reached the end of his options. “The cops had no idea what to do about them. It was bad.”

Lindsay nodded slowly, and Leo took a deep breath. Cindy was glad to see she wasn’t the only one Lindsay made nervous.

“I was working with your old man at the time,” Leo continued. “I knew that I could get inside. I mean, look at me. I’m a long-lost cousin if ever one existed. Marty didn’t want me to, but I convinced him. It worked,” Leo shrugged. “They bought it. After a few months, I was seeing everything. I was able to give your dad a heap of evidence.”

Lindsay’s jaw tightened imperceptibly, and Cindy let her knee fall against Lindsay’s, watching her face soften slightly as she glanced sidelong in her direction.

“They were days from taking them down,” Leo explained. “And I got made, talking to your dad in some white damn suburb where nobody from this neighborhood had reason to be.” Still panicky at the memory, Leo glanced out the window. “Marty told me to tell the Buccis I got nabbed by the police, but kept my mouth shut. He said he’d take care of the rest. The next thing I know, the evidence goes missing, your dad is off the force, and it’s in the newspapers that he’s on the take.”

Aware that what he was saying was the full truth this time, Lindsay stared across the table at Leo, trying to articulate her thoughts. “So he destroyed the evidence to save your life?” she finally breathed.

Leo nodded. “If he’d brought the Buccis down then, they would have known it was me. And you’d be talking to me through a... you know one of those people who talk to dead people. “

“Schizophrenics?” Lindsay filled in.

Cindy struggled not to laugh. “I think he means a medium, Linz.”

“Yeah like that,” Leo said.

“So my father was never involved with the Buccis?” Lindsay had to make sure.

“Only as far as I was involved. And only to try to stop them. Whatever Marty did, whatever they think he did, he didn’t do it for no Buccis. He did it to save my life,” Leo shook his head. “I don’t know why.”

“I do,” Lindsay enlightened him. “If he let something happen to you while you were trying to help him when he could’ve stopped it, it would have been like putting a gun to your head himself.”

Breath catching, Cindy stared at Lindsay, feeling as if she was getting a secret glimpse of the internal workings of Lindsay Boxer.

“I wanted to do it,” Leo reminded her.

“That doesn’t change anything,” Lindsay whispered. “He could have said no. He didn’t. You were his responsibility.”

“It was a good time,” Leo smiled, then looked up nervously. “Not, you know, a good time like a good time, but a good time in my life.”

Lindsay and Leo looked across the table at each other, two strangers with extraordinarily different lives, sharing an intensely profound connection.

“So what have you done since?”

The husked question drew Cindy’s attention to Lindsay’s face and she watched the clouds roll in.

“What?” Leo seemed to know the moment was over and he was screwed again.

“My father did the right thing. He lost his job, his world,” Lindsay faltered, pain rushing in, “he lost a lot... for you. Tell me you’re worth it.”

“Is she for real?” Leo shot at Cindy.

Lindsay was out of her seat and around the table before anyone else saw it coming. She yanked Leo up, shoving him face down on the table, and reached into his pocket to pull out a small baggie that she threw down right in front of his face.

“Is this what you’ve been doing since?” she questioned harshly. “Thought you didn’t want that life.”

“Those aren’t mine,” Leo stupidly responded.

“No. Not anymore,” Lindsay agreed, pulling him around, her fingers grasping tightly to his shirt.

“Come on. Easy,” Leo pleaded.

“Linz,” Cindy breathed, hand reaching out and pausing in the air between them.

“I’m going to let you walk too,” Lindsay vowed. “One time. My father thought you were worth saving. Now you’re going to prove him right. You were doing something decent. Do something decent. I’ll be watching. If I see you doing anything illegal again, I’m going to reopen the case and I know just where to find you and make you a witness. The Buccis aren’t as powerful as they used to be, but I trust they’ll still protect themselves.”

Released without warning, Leo fell back into the table. Lindsay grabbed the pilfered baggie and pocketed it. “Eat that,” she clapped Leo on the arm. “It’s the house specialty.”

Entirely unsure of what had just happened, Cindy hesitated when Lindsay’s hand reached out to her, before taking it. When she did, Lindsay pulled her away from the table and back out into the night.

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Serial killers. Humanity from normally inhumane people. Some things came out of nowhere. Then there were the things Jill could count on. Like Derek, the bartender, making her drink exactly right, like the drink in her hand, and some bold guy trying within fifteen minutes of her walking through the door, like the one on the stool beside her.

“You here alone, Bumblebee?”

Other than the bumblebee part, which wasn’t all that inspired considering she was in fact dressed as one, it was a typical opener, lacking panache, but it could have been worse.

“I’m meeting some friends,” Jill returned. “They’re running late. They do this. It’s a thing.”

“So can we dance then?”

“Wow,” Jill replied, making out the guy’s costume, a priest’s cassock complete with silver stole and rosary, in the dim light of the club. “Does God permit that kind of thing?”

“I think He would excommunicate me for not taking this divine opportunity,” the guy answered.

Quite possibly the worst line she’d ever heard, Jill couldn’t find it in her to care or come up with a snarky rejoinder. After her week, he could be as uncreative as he wanted to be.

“Come on, Father. Let’s dance,” she consented, grabbing the priest’s hand and pulling him onto the dance floor.

The music and the drink were a relaxing combination. If she had someone familiar there to share them with, it would have been even better, but Claire hadn’t made any promises, and Lindsay and Cindy, well, God only knew where they were together. Maybe she should ask her priest friend, and see if he could get an ETA.

The lights were a pulsing rainbow of colors. Jill closed her eyes and let herself get lost in the feel of the beat and the hard foreign body in front of her. Because it felt good. And too many things had felt bad lately.

She was pulled into a kiss, hands instinctively grasping the fabric hanging down on either side of the guy’s chest. She still didn’t know his name, she realized. Not that it mattered that much. There was a fifty-fifty chance she’d forget it by morning. Just ask her co-workers. They seemed to know all about her promiscuous sex life.

Pulling away, she watched light play off his face. If he looked as strapping as he felt, he really should have gone for Adonis, instead of hiding all of that sculpted muscle beneath an unflattering robe. Though, she had to admit, the priest thing was kind of hot. Dropping her eyes to her hands where they still held the stole, Jill watched it change colors in the intermittent lights. Red. Blue. Green. Orange. Yellow. Purple.

Jill jolted, feelings steady arms close around her.

“You okay?” the guy asked, as if he cared any further than her being well enough to make it to his bed.

The silky fabric soft in her hands, Jill watched the color scheme replay. Red. Blue. Green. Orange. Yellow. Purple.

Purple silk.

“Oh my God,” she breathed.

“We haven’t even gotten to the good part yet,” the guy returned.

Feeling slightly dizzy, Jill pulled his arms from around her and backed away slowly.

“I have to go. I’m sorry,” she said quickly, rushing off to the sound of his frustrated appeal.

Heading toward the exit and her cell, locked safely in her glove compartment, Jill stopped abruptly at the sound of her name.

Not hiding her shock very well when she turned to find Ed and Claire together, her smile was partly genuine and partly put on.

“Claire... Ed, hey,” she greeted them.

“Hey,” Ed said back.

Claire’s smile, however, dulled instantly.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

“Nothing,” Jill waved her off. She didn’t want to do this. Not now. Not with Ed out of the house and them together and everything right with their world, even for just this one moment. Dressed up as a king and queen, ingeniously incorporating Ed’s chair as a throne, they looked incredible together. “I’m so glad you came out with Claire.”

“Me too,” Ed grinned.

“Jill?” Claire questioned, determinedly.

Jill knew she couldn’t hide anything from Claire, but she tried frantically to come up with a believable lie. One look at Claire, though, and she knew even her most believable lie wouldn’t be believed.

“It’s nothing that can’t wait,” she finally said.

“What is it?” Claire refused to give in.

Casting a glance at Ed, and feeling like a thorn in their precarious relationship, Jill gave into the inevitable. Meeting Claire’s concerned gaze, she lifted one shoulder in an apologetic shrug.

“I think I know what the fibers might be from.”

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A block from the café, halfway to the car, Cindy finally found some semblance of balance. Feeling Lindsay’s fingers still wrapped solidly around her own, she glanced down at their hands before raising her eyes to Lindsay’s surprisingly serene profile.

“Is that why you always get so mad at me when I do things you think are stupid?” she gently asked. “You feel responsible for me?”

It was hardly the only reason, but it didn’t make it any less true.

“If anything happens to you because you are trying to help me, I won’t be able to live with that,” Lindsay admitted.

“Linz, even if you didn’t want my help, I would still do what I do,” Cindy replied. “You know that, right? I want to do it. Sometimes, it has nothing to do with you. Sometimes, it’s just about justice.”

“And when you ask your friend for confidential information on a serial killer who nearly destroyed my life or put your job at risk to show me pictures so that I can find out the truth about my dad?” Lindsay inquired.

“Okay. Maybe sometimes it’s for you,” Cindy confessed shamelessly.

They moved in silence past buildings tagged with gang graffiti and other paraphernalia of hard street life, Cindy replaying in her mind what they’d just learned, having no idea how Lindsay must feel.

“Your Dad was innocent,” Cindy stated softly.

“Yeah,” Lindsay rasped, pride coating her voice. “He’s kind of a hero, even if no one knows.”

“You know,” Cindy murmured, squeezing Lindsay’s hand.

Lindsay looked over at her, with an indecipherable expression that made Cindy’s heart rate pick up immeasurably.

“I’m sorry about the comparison,” Lindsay uttered. “You’re nothing like that guy. I mean, we need you, but I have no doubts that, if you didn’t have us, you’d be fine on your own.”

That was so indescribably wrong, Cindy didn’t know where to begin denying, so she simply shifted her hand around in Lindsay’s, interlocking her fingers with Lindsay’s longer ones, and leaned her head against a strong shoulder.

“Well, I totally will not be resorting to drugs, if that’s what you’re trying to say. No matter what,” Cindy solemnly vowed. “Prostitution... that’s my game.”

Lindsay laughed unguardedly. “Is that right?” she asked.

“Totally,” Cindy confirmed. “Three hundred dollars, I rock your world for an hour.”

“That’s steep,” Lindsay returned. Cindy could feel her moving around, but she was too content where she was to raise her head and investigate. A few seconds later, her attention was drawn to Lindsay thumbing apart three twenty dollar bills. “Damn, I’ve only got sixty on me. What can I get for that?”

Lifting her head carefully off of Lindsay’s shoulder and trying not to blush, Cindy glanced up.

“Don’t worry,” she said casually. “I do discounts for hotness. You could totally have me for sixty.”

Suddenly releasing Cindy’s hand, Lindsay dug in her back pocket, coming out with another bill.

“I found another ten,” she announced merrily, adding it to rest. “Do I get something extra for that?”

Wondering how many additional pockets Lindsay might find cash in, how soon she could be up to that original three-hundred dollars, and fighting the warm crimson that was now undeniably creeping along her neck, Cindy wandered toward the curb and away from her oddly exuberant friend. It felt like divine providence when her eye was instantly drawn to a small copper circle lying on the sidewalk, and with child-like excitement she started after it.

“Are you sure you want to pick something up off this street?” Lindsay questioned.

Still bent in picking up mode, Cindy glanced over her shoulder.

“I found a penny,” she revealed.

“A penny? Seriously?”

“It’s heads up,” Cindy explained. “I figure we need all the luck we can get right now.”

No sooner did Cindy speak those fate-tempting words than several things happened in rapid succession. Cindy scooped up the penny, a taxi from out of nowhere squealed around the corner, hit a puddle on the side of the road, and splashed Cindy full on.

A few feet behind her, Lindsay could only watch events unfold, frozen in place, until Cindy turned toward her, dripping all over, penny raised between her fingers, and she couldn’t stop the laughter from bubbling up out of her.

Cindy gave her a disbelieving look.

“I’m sorry,” Lindsay said, trying to get her laughter under control to no avail. “It’s just so funny. The irony.”

“And the fact that I’m dripping water head to toe,” Cindy added for her.

“That too,” Lindsay agreed, clearing the distance between them.

Cindy pulled the flimsy gauze that was serving as stand-in for a real shirt up to wipe her face, the short fabric pulling free of the corset, instantly drawing Lindsay’s eyes to exposed skin and Cindy’s neutral-colored bra. The cool night feeling suddenly balmy, Lindsay glanced around to make sure no one else was bearing witness, relieved to find that they were still alone, before returning her eyes to the sight. Once directed there, though, her gaze went straight for the scar,

the faintly warped skin on Cindy's chest, a stark reminder of how close they'd come to finding out if they could make it without Cindy.

Head popping back up out of the gauze obstruction, Cindy noticed the focused attention. Lindsay wasn't exactly being shy in her observance. Like always, it felt melodramatic and morbid and like pity, and made Cindy entirely uncomfortable. Carefully, she tucked the shirt back in, covering her scar and all of its reminders.

Lindsay felt that familiar twinge, a seizing desire that, with everything that was happening, she'd valiantly tried to toss aside and not acknowledge. She'd disregarded it expertly for some time, and it would be wise to uphold that precedent. But she couldn't. Not tonight. Tonight, she was too greedy. And Cindy was far too beautiful.

"Penny for your thoughts," Cindy brandished the dull coin, trying, Lindsay suspected, to regress as smoothly as possible, pull them away from the edge so that they didn't have to go there. Not right now.

But despite her noble efforts, Cindy was hopeful, looking up at her expectantly, waiting for what was there between them to become something tangible that they could bodily feel. Lindsay didn't have to do much soul-searching to recognize how much she wanted that too. She'd waited too long to repair her relationship with her dad. She didn't want to make the same mistake when it came to moving forward with Cindy.

One hand covering Cindy's penny-wielding fist, Lindsay's other raised to a damp cheek, fingers sliding along a firm jaw line and meeting wet tendrils of red hair. With little hesitancy her thumb cleared away muddy water from a full lower lip. Cindy inhaled sharply, the discharge rushing cool air against Lindsay's skin.

Then Cindy's lips were under hers, opening instantly and eagerly, equally giving and accepting, and Lindsay couldn't remember all of her reasons for resisting the temptation.

World spinning around her, Cindy clutched at the back of Lindsay's jacket, searching for traction, and gasped against the unrelenting mouth assailing her own as she felt Lindsay's body press flush against her. Lindsay's tongue seized the opportunity, rushing in to tangle with Cindy's in an intimate duel that persisted with neither side giving an inch until they absolutely had to.

Breaking apart minutes later, Lindsay felt Cindy panting softly against her lips and shivering forcefully against her. Feeling a little shaky herself, but fearing that Cindy's might be from wearing wet clothes in the chilly night air, Lindsay shucked her jacket, pulled it around Cindy's shoulders and ran her hands up and down Cindy's arms in an effort to warm her.

Cindy opened her eyes and looked up at her, and Lindsay saw something astonishing in them. It almost seemed like the closing scenes of a movie, seconds before “The End” faded in on the screen. But, somehow Lindsay knew that it was more of an ill-timed, complicated start.

Trying not to curse aloud when her phone stridently interrupted, Lindsay blindly reached for it, eyes locked with Cindy’s. Finally pulling the hardware free of her hip, she glanced down.

“Jill,” she murmured.

“She’s probably wondering when we’re going to get there,” Cindy responded softly.

“Yeah,” Lindsay breathed, fighting the urge to ignore the call, and flipped open her phone. “Hey, we’re on our way.”

“Let’s meet somewhere we can talk instead,” Jill returned.

“Why?”

Cindy watched the concern pass over Lindsay’s face and it was instinct to move closer to her. Lindsay reached out for her in response, hand landing lightly on Cindy’s hip.

“Alright. We’ll be there soon,” Lindsay said into the phone, closing it one-handed, and smiling a little as she took in Cindy’s costume. “I hate telling you this, but you’re a little overdressed. Jill wants us to meet her and Claire back at my place.”

“Why?” Cindy asked.

Eyes running over Cindy’s soaked bandana and down her face, Lindsay really wished the night could end differently, but the reality of their lives ensured there would be many nights that would end too abruptly. And never for any good reason.

“She’s got something on Hallelujah Man.”