

= BOOK IV =

The Whole Truth.

Chapter 96

THE NIGHT FOLLOWING JENKS'S ARRAIGNMENT, Chief Mercer had gotten the skybox at PacBell from one of his wealthy buddies. He invited several of us, including me, Raleigh, and Cheery, to a Giants game. It was a warm summer evening. They were playing the Cards. My father would have loved it.

I didn't really want to go, didn't want to feel on display as the cop who'd caught Jenks, but Mercer pressed.

And it was Mark McGuire and all, so I put on a wind breaker and went along for the ride.

All evening long, Chris and I kept sneaking looks at each other. There was a special energy in the box, a glowing ring around just him and me.

The game was background noise. In the third, Mighty Mac hit one off Ortiz that went out of sight and almost landed in the bay. The stadium cheered wildly, even for a Card. In the fourth, Barry Bonds tied it with a shot of his own.

Chris and I couldn't stop watching each other. We had our legs up on the same chair, like schoolkids, and every once in a while our calves brushed together. Jesus, this was better than the ball game.

Finally, he winked at me. "Want something to drink?" he said.

He went over to the bowl of drinks, which was elevated from the seats, and I followed. The others didn't look back. As soon as we were out of sight, he placed his hands on my thighs and kissed me. I felt on fire. "You want to hang around?"

"Still beer left," I joked.

His hand brushed against the side of my breast, and I felt a tremor.

Soft hands. My breath quickened. A flicker of sweat broke through on my neck.

Chris kissed me again. He drew me in close, and I felt the cadence of a heart pounding between us. I didn't know if it was his or mine.

"Can't wait," he said.

"Okay, let's get out of here."

"No." He shook his head. "I meant I can't wait."

"Oh, Jesus." I sighed. I couldn't hold back. My whole body was heating up to the boiling point. I glanced down at Cheery and Mercer and the two Mill Valley types. This is crazy, Lindsay.

But everything lately was crazy, everything speeding out of control.

It seemed as if every natural force in the universe was driving Chris and me to find a secluded spot. There was a bathroom in the skybox, barely large enough to put on makeup in. We didn't care.

Chris led me into the bathroom while the baseball crowd roared at something. We could barely squeeze in. Jesus, I could not believe I was doing this here. He unbuttoned my blouse, I unfastened his belt.

Our thighs were pressed tightly together.

Gently, Chris lifted me onto him. I felt as if a shooting star had exploded in my veins. Chris was up against the counter; I was in the palms of his hands; we were squeezed into this tiny space, but we were in a perfect rhythm.

A crowd roar echoed in from outside: Maybe McGuire had hit another, maybe Bonds had robbed him—who cared. We kept rocking, Chris and I. I couldn't breathe. My body was slick with sweat. I couldn't stop.

Chris kept it going, I gripped on tight, and in a moment we both gasped.

Two hero cops, I thought.

It was the best, the freest, the most excited I had ever felt. Chris rested his forehead on my shoulder. I kissed his cheek, his neck.

Then the strangest thought took hold of me. I began to laugh, a mixture of laughter and exhausted sighs. We were pinned there, spent, a few feet from my boss. I was giggling like a damn fool. I was going to get us caught!

“What's so funny?” Chris whispered.

I was thinking of Claire and Cindy. And what we had just done.

“I think I just made the list,” I said.

Chapter 97

THE NEXT DAY, Jenks asked to meet again. Jill and I went to see him on the tenth floor. We wondered what was up. This time, there was no cat and mouse, no bullshit at all. Leff was there, but he rose, humbly, as soon as we came in.

Jenks looked far less threatening in his gray prison garb. The worried look on his face was a clear message.

“My client wants to make a statement,” Leff announced as soon as we sat down.

I was thinking, This is it. He wants to make a deal. He's seen how ridiculous it is to play this game.

But he came out with something unexpected.

“I'm being framed!” Jenks announced angrily.

It took about a half second for Jill's glance to bump into mine.

“I have to hear this again,” she said. “What's going on?” She looked at Jenks, then at Leff.

“We've got your client tied to all three crime scenes; we've got him in Cleveland at the time of the last murder; we've got him lying about a prior relationship with Kathy Kogut, one of the last victims; we've got his book detailing an astonishingly

similar criminal pattern; we've got his facial hairs matched to one found in another victim's vagina.

"And you're claiming he's being framed?"

"What I'm claiming," Jenks said, ashen faced, "is that I'm being set up."

"Listen, Mr. Jenks," Jill said, still looking at Leff, "I've been doing this eight years. I've built cases on hundreds of criminals, put over fifty murderers behind bars myself. I've never seen such a preponderance of evidence implicating a suspect. Our case is so airtight it can't breathe."

"I realize that." Jenks sighed. "And that I've given you every reason to find my plea implausible. I've lied about being in Cleveland, my relationship with Kathy. On the others, I can't even account for my whereabouts. But I also know setups. I've mapped out more of them than anybody. I'm a master at this. And I assure you, someone is setting me up."

I shook my head with disbelief. "Who, Mr. Jenks?"

Jenks sucked in a long breath. He actually looked scared. "I don't know."

"Someone hates you enough to set all this up?" Jill couldn't hold back a snicker. "The little I know of you, I might buy that." She turned to Leff. "You looking forward to presenting this case?"

"Just hear him out, Ms. Bernhardt," the lawyer pleaded.

"Look," Jenks said, "I know what you think of me. I'm guilty of many things. Selfishness, cruelty, adultery. I have a temper; sometimes I can't hold it in. And with women ... you can probably line up a dozen of them who would help put me away for these murders. But clear as that is, I did not kill these people. Any of them. Someone is trying to set me up. That's the truth. Someone has done a brilliant job."

Chapter 98

"YOU BUY ANY OF THAT SHIT?" Jill smirked at me as we waited for the elevator outside Jenks's holding cell.

"I might buy that he somehow believes it," I told her.

"Give me a break. He'd be better off going for insanity. If Nicholas Jenks wants to narrow down a list of people who might want to set him up, he might as well start with anyone he ever fucked."

I laughed, agreeing that the list would be long. Then the elevator door opened and, to my surprise, out walked Chessy Jenks. She was dressed in a long, taupe summer dress. I immediately noticed how pretty she was.

Our eyes met in an awkward, silent moment. I had just arrested her husband. My crime-scene team had ripped apart her house. She would have every reason to look at me with complete disdain—but she didn't.

"I'm here to see my husband," she said in a shaky voice.

I stiffly introduced her to Jill, then I pointed her to the visiting area. At that moment, she seemed about as alone and confused as anyone I had ever seen.

"Sherman tells me there's a lot of evidence," she said.

I nodded politely. I don't know why I felt something for her, other than she seemed a young, vulnerable woman whose fate had been to fall in love with a monster.

"Nick didn't do this, Inspector," Chessy Jenks said.

Her outburst surprised me. "It's only natural for a wife to want to defend her husband," I acknowledged. "If you have some concrete alibi..."

She shook her head. "No alibi. Only that I know my husband."

The elevator door had closed, and Jill and I stood there waiting again.

As in hospitals, it would take minutes for it to go down and come back up. Chessy Jenks didn't make a move to walk away.

"My husband's not a simple man. He can be very tough. I know he's made enemies. I know how he came at you. From the outside, it must be very hard to believe this, but there are times when he's also capable of tenderness, incredible generosity, and love."

"I don't mean to sound unsympathetic, Ms. Jenks," Jill stepped in, "but under the circumstances you really shouldn't be talking with us."

"I have nothing to hide," she came back. Then she looked downcast. "I already know what you know."

I was dumbfounded. I already know what you know?

"I spoke with Joanna," Chessy Jenks continued. "She told me you'd been by. I know what she told you about him. She's bitter. She's got every right to be. But she doesn't know Nick like I do."

"You should review the evidence, Ms. Jenks," I told her.

She shook her head. "Guns... maybe, Inspector. If that's all there was. But a knife. That first murder. Slicing that poor couple to bits. Nick can't even fillet a fish."

My first thought was that she was young and deluded. How had Jenks described it? Impressionable... but something struck me as curious.

"You said that you and Joanna talk?"

"We have. A lot more in the past year. I've even had her over. When Nick was away, of course. I know she was bitter after the divorce. I know he hurt her. But it's sort of our own support group."

"Your husband knew about this?" I asked.

She forced a smile. "He didn't even mind. He still likes Joanna. And, Inspector, she's still in love with him."

The elevator returned and we said good-bye. As the door closed, I looked at Jill. Her eyes were wide and her tongue was puffing out her cheek.

"Whole fucking family gives me the creeps," she said with a shudder.

Chapter 99

I KNEW IT the minute Medved walked in the office. I saw it in his face. He didn't have to say a word "I'm afraid I can't be very positive, Lindsay," he said, meeting

my eyes. “Your red count continues to decline. The dizzy spells, the fatigue, blood in your chest. The disease is progressing.”

“Progressing?”

Medved nodded soberly. “Stage three.”

The words thundered in my head, bringing with them the fear of the increased treatments I dreaded. “What's the next step?” I asked weakly.

“We can give it one more month,” Medved said. “Your count's twenty-four hundred. If it continues to decline, your strength will start to go. You'll have to be hospitalized.”

I could hardly comprehend what he was saying; it was all crashing in my brain so fast. A month. That's too close. Too fast. Things were just starting to work out now that Jenks had been arrested. Everything else, everything I wanted to hold on to, was resolving, too.

A month—four lousy weeks.

When I got back to the office, a few of the guys were standing around grinning at me. There was a beautiful bouquet of flowers on my desk.

Wildflowers.

I smelled them, taking in the sweet, natural scent. I read the card.

There's a hill of these where I have a cabin up at Heavenly.

Tomorrow's Friday. Take the day off. Let's go there.

It was signed Chris.

It sounded like what I needed. The mountains. Chris. I would have to tell him, now that the truth would come clear soon.

My phone rang. It was Chris. “So?” No doubt someone in the office, playing cupid, had alerted him that I was back.

“Haven't opened your card yet.” I bit my lip. “Too many others to sort through.”

I heard a disappointed sigh, let it linger just a moment. “But on the chance you were asking me away, the answer is, I'd love to. It sounds great. Let's be on the road by eight.”

“Late riser,” he said. “I was hoping we'd beat the morning rush.”

“I was talking tonight.”

I had a month. I was thinking, Mountain air, running streams, and wildflowers is a good way to begin.

Chapter 100

WE SPENT THE NEXT TWO DAYS as if we were in a beautiful dream.

Chris's cabin was funky and charming, a redwood A frame ski chalet on Mason Ridge overlooking Heavenly. We hiked in the woods with Sweet Martha, took the tram to the top of the mountain, and walked all the way down. We grilled swordfish on the deck.

In between, we made love in the comfort of his large four poster bed, on the sheepskin rug in front of the wood burning stove, in the chilly thrill of the outdoor

shower. We laughed and played and touched each other like teenagers, discovering love again.

But I was no starry-eyed adolescent. I knew exactly what was taking place. I felt the steady, undeniable current rising inside me like a river spilling over its banks. I felt helpless.

Saturday, Chris promised me a day I would never forget.

We drove down to Lake Tahoe, to a quaint marina on the California side. He had rented a platform boat, an old puttering wooden barge. We bought sandwiches and a bottle of chardonnay, and went out to the middle of the lake. The water calm and turquoise, the sky cloudless and bright. All around, the rocky tips of snow-capped mountains ringed the lake like a crown.

We moored, and for a while it was our own private world. Chris and I stripped down to our suits. I figured we'd kick back, enjoy the wine in the sun, look at the view, but Chris had sort of an expectant, dare-you look in his eye. He ran his hands through the frigid water.

"No way," I said, shaking my head. "It's got to be fifty degrees."

"Yeah, but it's a dry cold," he teased.

"Right," I chortled. "You go, then. Catch me a coho if you see one swim by."

He came toward me with playful menace in his eyes. "You can catch one yourself."

"Not a chance." I shook my head in defiance. But I was laughing, too.

As he stepped forward, I backed to the rear of the craft until I ran out of room.

He put his arms around me. I felt the tingle of his skin on mine.

"It's sort of an initiation," he said.

"An initiation for what?"

"Exclusive club. Anyone who wants to be in it has to jump in."

"Then leave me out." I laughed, squirming in his strong arms. With only weak resistance, he yanked me up on the cushion seat in the stern of the boat.

"Shit, Chris," I cried as he took hold of my hand.

"Geronimo works better," he said, pulling at me. I screamed, "You bastard!" and we toppled in.

The water was freezing, a total, invigorating rush. We hit the surface together, and I screamed in his face, "Goddamn you!" Then he kissed me in the water and all at once I felt no chill. I held on to him, at first for warmth, but also because I never wanted to let him go. I felt a trust for him that was so complete it was almost scary. Fifty degrees, but I was burning up.

"Check this out," I dared him, kicking free of his grasp. There was an orange boat marker bobbing fifty yards away. "Race you to that buoy."

Then I cut out, surprising him with my speed.

Chris tried to keep up with steady, muscular strokes, but I blew him away.

Near the buoy I slowed, waited for him to catch up.

Chris looked totally confounded. "Where'd you learn to swim?"

"South San Francisco YMCA; fourteen-, fifteen-, sixteen year-old division champ." I laughed. "No one could keep up. Looks like I still have it."

Moments later, we had guided the boat to a private, shady cove near the shore. Chris cut the engine and put up a canvas shade around the cabin that was

supposed to protect us from the sun. With hated breath, we crept inside, blocked off from anyone's view.

I let him slowly unfasten my bathing suit, and he licked beads of water off my arms and breasts. Then I kneeled down and unbuttoned his shorts. We didn't have to speak. Our bodies were saying everything. I lay back, pulling Chris onto me.

I had never felt so connected to another person, or to a place. I arched against him silently, the lake lapping gently at our sides. I thought, If I speak, it will change everything.

Afterward I just lay there, tremors of warmth radiating through my body. I never wanted this to end, but I knew that it had to end.

Reality always gets in the way, doesn't it?

Chapter 101

SOMETIME THAT EVENING, I found myself starting to cry.

I had made spaghetti carbonara, and we ate in the moonlight on the deck with a bottle of pinot noir. Chris put a cello concerto by Dvorak on the stereo, but eventually we switched to the Dixie Chicks.

As we ate, Chris asked about where and how I had grown up.

I told him about my mom, and how my dad had left when I was just a kid; how she had worked as a bookkeeper at the Emporium for twenty years.

How I had practically raised my sister.

"Mom died of breast cancer when she was only fifty." The irony of this certainly wasn't lost on me.

"What about your father? I want to know everything about you."

I took a sip of wine, then told him how I'd only seen him twice since I was thirteen. At my mother's funeral. And the day I became a cop. "He sat in the back, apart from everybody else."

Suddenly, my blood became hot with long-buried feelings. "What was he doing there?" I looked up, my eyes moist. "Why did he spoil it?"

"You ever want to see him?"

I didn't answer. Something was starting to take shape in my head. My mind drifted, struck by the fact that here I was, maybe the happiest I had been, but it was all built on a lie. I was blinking back the impact of what was going through my mind. Not doing real well.

Chris reached over and grasped my hand. "I'm sorry, Lindsay. I had no right to..."

"That's not it," I whispered, and squeezed his hand. I knew it was time to really trust him, time to finally give myself over to Chris.

But I was scared, my cheeks trembling, my eyes holding back tears.

"I have something to tell you," I said. "This is a little heavy, Chris."

I looked at him with all the earnestness and trust my worried eyes could manage. "Remember when I almost fainted in the room with Jenks?"

Chris nodded. Now he looked a little worried. His forehead was furrowed with deep lines.

“Everyone thought I was just freaked out, but it wasn't that. I'm sick, Chris. I may have to go into the hospital soon.”

I saw the light in his eyes suddenly dim. He started to speak, but I put my finger to his lips.

“Just listen to me for a minute. Okay?”

“Okay. I'm sorry.”

I poured out everything about Negli's. I was not responding to treatments. Hope was fading. What Medved had warned only days before. I was in stage three, serious. A bone marrow transplant might be next.

I didn't cry. I told him straight out, like a cop. I wanted to give him hope, to show him I was fighting, to show him I was the strong person I thought he loved.

When I was done, I clasped his hands and took a monumental breath. “The truth is, I could die soon, Chris.”

Our hands were tightly entwined. Our eyes locked. We couldn't have been more in touch.

Then he placed his hand gently on my cheek and rubbed it. He didn't say a word, just took me and held me in the power and softness of his hands and drew me to him.

And that's what made me cry. He was a good person. I might lose him.

And I cried for all the things we might never do.

I cried and cried, and with each sob he pressed me harder. He kept whispering, “It's all right, Lindsay. It's all right. Ills all right.”

“I should've told you,” I said.

“I understand why you didn't. How long have you known?”

I told him. “Since the day we met. I feel so ashamed.”

“Don't be ashamed,” he said. “How could you know you could trust me?”

“I trusted you pretty quickly. I didn't trust myself,”

“Well, now you do,” Chris whispered.

Chapter 102

I THINK WE ROCKED ALL NIGHT. We laughed some, cried some. I don't even remember how I woke up in bed.

The following day, I barely left his touch. With all that was threatening, all that seemed uncertain, I felt so safe and sure in his arms. I never wanted to leave.

But something else happened during that weekend—apart from Negli's, apart from Chris and me. Something gripping, invading my sense of comfort and security.

It was something Jacobi had said that planted the thought.

One of those thrown-out remarks you didn't pay much attention to but somehow got filed away in your mind. Then it comes back at the oddest time, with more force and logic than before.

It was Sunday night. The weekend was over. Chris had driven me home.

Hard as it was to leave him, I needed to be alone for a while, to take inventory of the weekend, to figure out what I would do next.

I unpacked, made some tea, curled up on my couch with Her Sweetness. My mind wandered to the murder case.

Nicholas Jenks was behind me now. Only the countless reports to fill out. Even though he was still ranting about being set up. it was just more insanity, more lies.

It was then that Jacobi's words snaked into my brain.

Good collar; he'd said, early Tuesday morning.

He had that annoying, persistent look in his eyes. Just remember, he'd called after me, it was the champagne match, that got you, on your way... Why do you think Jenks left that champagne?

I was barely paying attention. Jenks was locked away. The case was a slam dunk. I was thinking about the night before, and Chris. I stopped on the stairs and turned to him. I don't fe now Warren. We've been over this. Heat of the moment, maybe.

You're right. He nodded. That must be why he didn't ball up the jacket and take it with him, too.

I looked at him, like, Why are we going through this now? Jenfes needed a clean tux jacket to get out of the hotel undetected. The DNA match on the hair made it all academic, anyway.

Then he said it. You ever read the whole book? he asked.

Which book?

Jenks's book *Always a Bridesmaid*.

The parts that matter, I replied. Why?

He said, I don't fe now it just sort of stuck with me. Like I said, my wife happens to be a fan. There were some copies of the manuscript around, so I took one home. It was interesting how it all came out in the end.

I looked at him, trying to figure out where all this was heading.

It was a setup, Jacob! said. This Phillip Campbell guy, he gets off.

He pins the whole thing on someone else.

Days later, Warren's words came creeping back into my mind. A setup.

He pins the whole thing on someone else.

It was ridiculous, I told myself, that I was even dignifying this scenario, running through it in my mind. Everything was solid, airtight.

Setup, I found myself thinking again.

"I must be an idiot," I said aloud. "Jenks is clinging to any story he can to wiggle his way out of this."

I got up, brought my tea into the bathroom, began to wash my face.

In the morning I would tell Cheery about my disease. I had some time coming. I would face this thing head-on. Now that the case was complete, it was the right time. Now that the case was complete!

I went into the bedroom, ripped the tags off a "Little Bit of Heaven," a T-shirt Chris had bought me. I got into bed, and Martha came around for her hug.

Memories of the weekend began to drift in my head. I closed my eyes. I could hardly wait to share it with the girls.

Then a thought from out of the blue hit me. I shot up as if I'd had a nightmare. I stiffened. "Oh, no. Oh, Jesus, no," I whispered.

When Jenks had lunged at me at his house, he had swung with his left hand.

When he'd offered me a drink, he'd picked up the pitcher with his left hand.

Impossible, I thought. This can't be happening.

Claire was certain David Brandt's killer had been right handed.

Chapter 103

JILL, CLAIRE, AND CINDY looked at me as if I were insane.

The words had barely tumbled out of my mouth. "What if Jenks is right? What if someone is trying to set him up?"

"That's a crock!" snapped Jill. "Jenks is desperate and only moderately clever. We've got him!"

"I can't believe you're saying this," exclaimed Cindy. "You're the one who found him. You're the one who made the case."

"I know. I know it seems crazy. Hopefully, it is crazy. Just hear me out."

I took them through Jacobi's comment about the novel, then my lightning bolt about Jenks's left-handedness.

"Proves nothing," Jill said.

"I can't get past the science, Lindsay," Claire said with a shake of her head. "We've got his goddamn DNA at the scene."

"Look," I protested, "I want the guy as much as anybody. But now that we have all this evidence—well—it's just so neat. The jacket, the champagne. Jenks has set up complicated murders in his books. Why would he leave clues behind?"

"Because he's a sick bastard, Lindsay. Because he's an arrogant prick who's connected to all three crimes."

Jill nodded. "He's a writer. He's an amateur at actually doing anything. He just fucked up."

"You saw his reactions, Jill. They were deeper than simply desperation. I've seen killers on death row still in denial. This was more unsettling. Like disbelief."

Jill stood up, her icy blue eyes spearing down at me. "Why, Lindsay, why the sudden about-face?"

For the first time I felt alone and separated from the people I had most learned to trust. "No one could possibly hate this man more than I do," I declared. "I hunted him. I saw what he did to those women."

I turned to Claire. "You said the killer was right-handed."

"Probably right-handed," Claire came back.

"What if he simply held the knife in his other hand?" proposed Cindy.

"Cindy, if you were going to kill someone," I said, "someone larger and stronger, would you go at him with your opposite hand?"

"Maybe not," injected Jill, "but you're throwing all this up in the face of facts. Evidence and reason, Lindsay. All the things we worked to assemble. What you're giving me back is a set of hypotheticals."

"Jenks holds his pitcher with his left hand. Phillip Campbell sets someone up at the end of his book." Lindsay, we have the guy pinned to three double murders. I need you firm on this." Her jaw was quivering. "I need you to testify."

I didn't know how to defend myself. I had wanted to nail Jenks as eagerly as any one of us. More. But now, after being so sure, I couldn't put it away, the sudden doubt.

Did we have the right man?

"We still haven't uncovered a weapon," I said to Jill.

"We don't need a weapon, Lindsay. We have his hair inside one of the victims!"

Suddenly, we were aware that people from other tables were looking at us. Jill huffed and sat back down. Claire put her arms around my shoulders.

I puffed a deep breath into my cheeks, slumped back against the cushion of the booth.

Finally, Cindy said, "We've been behind you all the way. We're not going to abandon you now."

Jill shook her head. "You want me to let him go, guys, while we reopen the case? If we don't try him, Cleveland will."

"I don't want you to let him go," I said. "I only want to be one hundred percent sure."

"I am sure," Jill replied, her eyes ablaze.

I sought out Claire, and even she had a skeptical expression fixed firmly in my direction. "There's an awful lot of physical evidence that makes it pretty clear."

"If this gets out," Jill warned, "you can toss my career out with the cat litter. Bennett wants this guy's blood on the courthouse wall."

"Look at it this way," Cindy said, chuckling, "if Lindsay's right, and you send Jenks up, they'll be studying this case as a *how not to* for twenty years to come."

Numbly, we looked around the table. It was as if we were staring at the pieces of some shattered, irreplaceable vase.

"Okay, so if it's not him," Claire said with a sigh, "then how do we go about proving who it is?"

It was as if we were all the way back at the beginning—all the way back at the first crime. I felt awful.

"What was the thing that nailed our suspicion on Jenks?" I asked.

"The hair," said Claire.

"Not quite. We had to get to him before we knew who it belonged to."

"Merrill Shortley," Jill said. "Jenks and Merrill? You think?"

I shook my head. "We still needed one more thing before we could take him in."

Cindy said, "*Always a Bridesmaid*. His first wife."

I nodded slowly as I left Susie's.

Chapter 104

OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS, I went back over everything we had on Joanna Wade.

First, I reread the domestic complaint she had filed against Jenks. I looked at pictures of Joanna taken at the station, bruised, puffy faced. I read through the officers' account of what they found at the scene. Exchanges laced with invectives. Jenks swinging wildly, clearly enraged. He had to be subdued, resisted arrest.

The report was signed by two officers from Northern, Samuel Delgado and Anthony Fazziola.

The following day, I went back out to visit Greg Marks, Jenks's former agent. He was even more surprised at my visit when I told him I was there on a different aspect of Jenks's past. "Joanna?" he replied with an amused smile. "Bad judge of men, Inspector, but a worse judge of timing."

He explained that their divorce had been finalized only six months before *Crossed Wire* hit the stands. He said the book sold nearly a million copies in hardcover alone. "To have to put up with Nicholas through all the lean years, then come away with barely more than cab fare..." He shook his head. "The settlement was a pittance compared to what it would've been if they had filed a year later."

What he told me painted a different picture of the woman I had met in the gym. She seemed to have put it all behind her.

"She felt used, dropped like worn baggage. Joanna had put him through school, supported him when he first started writing. When Nick bagged law school, she even went back to her job."

"And afterward," I asked, "did she continue to hate him?"

"I believe she continued to try and sue him. After they split up, she tried to sue him for a lien against future earnings. Nonperformance, breach of contract. Anything she could find."

I felt sorry for Joanna Wade. But could it drive her to that kind of revenge? Could it cause her to kill six people?

The following day, I obtained a copy of the divorce proceedings from County Records. Through the usual boilerplate, I got the sense it was an especially bitter case. She was seeking three million dollars judgment against future earnings. She ended up with five thousand a month, escalating to ten if Jenks's earnings substantially increased.

I couldn't believe the bizarre transformation that was starting to take over my mind.

It had been Joanna who had first mentioned the book. Who felt cheated, spurned, and carried a resentment far deeper than what she had revealed. Joanna, the Tac-Bo instructor who was strong enough to take down a man twice her size. Who even had access to the Jenkses' home.

It seemed crazy to be thinking this way. More than preposterous it was impossible.

The murders were committed by a male, by Nicholas Jenks.

Chapter 105

THE NEXT DAY, as we shared a hot dog and a pretzel in front of City Hall, I told Chris what I had found.

He looked at me in much the same way the girls had a few days before.

Shock, confusion. Disbelief. But he didn't get negative.

"She could've set the whole thing up," I said. "She knew about the book. She lobbed it out there for us to find. She knew Jenks's taste—champagne, clothes—his involvement with Sparrow Ridge. She even had access to the house."

"I might buy it," he said, "but these murders were committed by a man. Jenks, Lindsay. We even have him on film."

"Or someone made up to look like Jenks. Every sighting of him was inconclusive."

"Lindsay, the DNA was a match. "

"I spoke to the officers who went to the house when he beat Joanna," I pressed on. "They said, as enraged as Jenks was, she was dishing it right back to him, just as strong. They had to restrain her as they took him away in the car."

"She dropped the charges, Lindsay. She got tired of being abused. She may not have gotten what she deserved, but she filed and started a new life."

"That's just it, Chris. She didn't file. It was Jenks who left her. She sacrificed everything for Jenks. Marks described her as a model of co dependency I could see Chris wanted to believe, but he was unconvinced. I had a man in jail with almost incontrovertible evidence against him. And here I was unraveling everything. What was the matter with me?"

Then, out of the blue, something came back to me, something I had filed away long ago. Laurie Birnbaum, the witness from the Brandt wedding.

How she had described the man she saw. Something strange... The beard made him seem older, but the rest of him was young.

Joanna Wade, medium-height, right-handed, the Tac-Bo instructor, was strong enough to handle a man twice her size. And Jenks's nine millimeter. He said he hadn't seen it in years. At the house in Montana... The records showed he had bought the gun ten years ago. When he was married to Joanna.

"You should see her," I said with rising conviction. "She's tough enough to handle any of us. She's the one link who knew about everything: wine, clothes, Always a Bridesmaid. She had the means to pull it all together. The photos, the sightings were inconclusive.

What if it was her, Chris?"

I was holding his hand—my mind racing with the possibilities—when I felt a sudden, awful tightness in my chest. I thought it was the shock of what I had just proposed, but it hit me with the speed of an oncoming train.

Vertigo, nausea. It swept from my stomach to my head.

"Lindsay?" Chris said. I felt his hand bracing my shoulder.

"I feel kind of weird," I muttered. The sweats, a rush, then terrible light-headedness. As if armies were marching and clashing in my chest.

"Lindsay?" he said again, this time with real concern.

I leaned into him. This was the weirdest, scariest sensation. I felt both momentarily robbed of strength and then back in control; lucid, then very woozy again.

I saw Chris, and then I didn't.

I saw who killed the brides and grooms. And then it faded away.
I felt myself falling toward the sidewalk.

Chapter 106

I FOUND MYSELF COMING TO on a wooden park bench in Chris's arms. He held me tightly while my strength returned.

Orenthaler had warned me. It was stage three. Crunch time in my body.

I didn't know which held more apprehension for me: going on chemo and gearing up for a bone marrow transplant or feeling my strength eaten away from the inside.

You can't let it win.

"I'm okay," I told him, my voice getting stronger. "I was told to expect this."

"You're trying to do too much, Lindsay. Now you're talking about reopening a whole new investigation."

I took a deep breath and nodded. "I just need to be strong enough to see this through."

We sat there for a while. I could feel the color in my face reviving, the strength in my limbs returning. Chris held me, cuddled me tenderly. We must've looked like two lovers trying to find privacy in a very public place.

Finally, he said, "What you were describing, Lindsay, about Joanna, you really think it's true?"

It could still add up to nothing. She hadn't lied about her separation from Jenks. Or about her current relationship with both him and Chessy. Had she concealed a bitter hatred? She had the knowledge, the means.

"I think the killer is still out there," I said.

Chapter 107

I DECIDED TO TAKE A HUGE RISK. It could knock the lid right off my case.

I decided to run what I suspected by Jenks.

I met him in the same visiting room. He was accompanied by his lawyer, Leff. He didn't want to meet, convinced there was no longer a point in talking with the police. And I didn't want to convey my true intent and end up feeding their defense arguments if I was wrong.

Jenks seemed sullen, almost depressed. His cool and meticulous appearance had deteriorated into an edgy, unshaven mess.

"What do you want now?" he sneered, barely meeting my eyes.

"I want to know if you were able to come up with anyone who would like to see you in here," I said.

"Pounding the lid on my coffin?" he said with a mirthless smile.

"Let's just say, in the interest of doing my duty, I'm giving you one final chance to pry it back open."

Jenks snorted skeptically. "Sherman tells me I'm about to be charged in Napa with two more murders. Isn't that great? If this is an offer of assistance, I think I'll take my chances on proving it myself."

"I didn't come here to trap you, Mr. Jenks. I came to hear you out."

Leff leaned over and whispered in his ear. He seemed to be encouraging Jenks to talk.

The prisoner looked up with a disgusted glare. "Someone's running around, intent to look like me, familiar with my first novel. This person also wants to see me suffer. Is it so hard to figure out?"

"I'm willing to hear any names," I told him.

"Greg Marks."

"Your former agent?"

"He feels like I owe him my fucking career. I've cost him millions. Since I left, he hasn't gotten a worthwhile client. And he's violent. Marks belongs to a shooting club."

"How would he have gotten his hands on your clothing? Or been able to get a sample of your hair?"

"You find that out. You're the police."

"Did he know you'd be in Cleveland that night? Did he know about you and Kathy Kogut?"

"Nick is merely proposing," Leff cut in, "that other possibilities do exist for who could be behind these crimes."

I shifted in my seat. "Who else knew about the book?"

Jenks twitched. "It wasn't something I paraded around. Couple of old friends. My first wife, Joanna..."

"Any of them have any reason to want to set you up?"

Jenks sighed uncomfortably. "My divorce, as you may know, was not exactly what they call mutually agreeable. No doubt there was a time Joanna would've been delighted to find me on a deserted road while she was cruising along at sixty. But now that she's back on her feet, with a new life, now that she's even gotten to know Chessy... I don't think so. No. It isn't Joanna. Trust me on that."

I ignored the remark and looked firmly into his eyes. "You told me your ex-wife's been to your house."

"Maybe once or twice."

"So, she'd have access to certain things. Maybe the wine? Maybe what was in your closet?"

Jenks seemed to contemplate the possibility for a moment, then his mouth crinkled into a contemptuous smile. "Impossible. No. It isn't Joanna."

"How can you be so sure?"

He looked at me as if he were stating an understood fact. "Joanna loved me. She still does. Why do you think she hangs around, covets a relationship with my new wife? Because she misses the view? It's because she cannot replace what I gave her. How I loved her. She is empty without me."

"What do you think?" he snorted. "Joanna's been holding specimens of my hair in a jar ever since we were divorced?" He sat there, stroking his beard, while the

resolve on his face softened into a glimmer of possibility. "Someone has it in for me... but Joanna... she was just a little clerk when I met her. She didn't know Ralph Lauren from JCPenneys. I gave her self-esteem. I devoted myself to her, and she to me. She sacrificed for me, even worked two jobs when I decided to write."

It was hard to think of Jenks as anything other than the ruthless bastard who was responsible for these horrible crimes, but I pressed on. "You said the tuxedo was an old suit. You

didn't even recognize it. And the gun, Mr. Jenks, the nine millimeter. You said you hadn't seen it in years. That you thought it was kept somewhere at your house in Montana. Are you so sure this might not have been planned for some time?"

I could see Jenks subtly shifting his expression as he came around to the impossible conclusion.

"You said that when you started writing, Joanna took a second job to help support you. Just what sort of work?"

Jenks stared up toward the ceiling, then he seemed to remember.

"She worked at Saks."

Chapter 108

SLOWLY, UNAVOIDABLY, I was starting to feel as if I were on the wrong airplane, heading to the wrong city.

Against all logic, I was growing surer and surer that Nicholas Jenks might not be the killer. Oh, brother!

I had to figure out what to do. Jenks in handcuffs was the lead picture in both Time and Newsweek. He was being arraigned in Napa for two additional murders the following day. Maybe I should just stay on the wrong plane, get out of town, never show my face in San Francisco again.

I got the girls together. I took them through the mosaic that was starting to come clear: the acrimonious contest over the divorce,

Joanna's sense of being discarded, her direct access to the victims through her contacts at Saks.

"She was an assistant store manager," I told them. "Coincidence?"

"Get me proof," Jill said. "Because as of now, I have proof against Nick Jenks. All the proof I need."

I could hear the worry and frustration in her voice. The whole country was watching this case, watching her every move. We had worked so hard to sell Mercer and her boss, Sinclair, on the idea that it was Jenks. And now, after all that—to propose a new theory and suspect.

"Authorize a search," I told Jill. "Joanna Wade's house. Something has to be there. The missing rings, a weapon, details on the victims.

It's the only way we'll ever pin it down."

“Authorize a search on what basis? Suspicion of new evidence? I can't do that without blowing this case wide open again. If we show we're not even sure, how can I convince a jury?”

“We could check where she worked,” proposed Cindy. “See if she had specific access to information on the brides.”

“That's circumstantial. It's crap,” Jill cried. “One of my neighbors works at Saks. Maybe she's the murderer.”

“You can't go through with this,” argued Cindy, “if we still have doubt.”

“You have doubt,” said Jill. “What I have is everything in place for a slam-dunk conviction. To you, it's a story, you follow it where it leads. My whole career is on the line.”

Cindy looked stunned. “You think I'm here for just the story? You think I sat on every lead, agonized over not being able to go to copy, just so I could wind up with the book rights later on?”

“C'mon girls,” said Claire, her arm on Cindy's shoulder. “We have to be together on this.”

Slowly, Jill's intense blue eyes softened. She turned to Cindy. “I'm sorry,” she said. “It's just that when this gets out, Leff will be able to plant huge doubts in that jury's mind.”

“But we can't back down now just because it's bad tactics,” said Claire. “There could be a murderer out there, a multiple murderer.”

I said to Jill, “Authorize a search. C'mon, Jill.”

I had never seen Jill look so upset. Everything she had achieved in her career, everything she stood for, was being placed squarely on the line. She shook her head. “Let's try it Cindy's way. We'll start with Saks, check Joanna out there.”

“Thank you, Jill,” I said. “You're the best.”

She exhaled resignedly. “Find out if she's had any contact with anyone who had access to those names. Connect Joanna with those names, and I'll get you what you want. But if you can't, be prepared to fry Jenks.”

From across the table, I took her hand. She gripped mine. We exchanged a nervous smile.

Jill finally joked, “Personally, I hope all you come back with is the hot item to be featured in the next Christmas catalog.”

Claire laughed loudly. “Now that wouldn't be a total loss, would it?”

Chapter 109

THE FOLLOWING DAY, the day Nicholas Jenks was set to be arraigned for the murders of Rebecca and Michael De George, I set out to track down a new killer.

I couldn't let Jenks know we were looking that closely at Joanna. Of course, I didn't want Joanna to know we were focusing suspicion on her, either. And I didn't want to face Mercer's or Roth's reactions.

With all this going on, it was my Medved day, too. After that spell in the park with Chris three days before, I had gone for a blood test.

Medved called back himself, told me he wanted me to come in. Being called in again like that scared me. Like that first time with Dr. Roy.

That morning, Medved kept me waiting. When he finally called me in, there was another doctor in his office—older, with white hair and bushy white eyebrows. He introduced himself as Dr. Robert Yatto.

The sight of a new doctor sent a chill through me. He could only be there to talk about the bone marrow procedure.

“Dr. Yatto is head of hematology at Moffett,” Medved said. “I asked him to look at your latest sample.”

Yatto smiled. “How are you feeling, Lindsay?”

“Sometimes okay, sometimes incredibly weak,” I answered. My chest felt tight. Why did I have to go through this with someone new?

“Tell me about the other day.”

I did my best to recount the reeling spell I'd had in City Hall Park.

“Any emissions of blood?” Yatto asked matter-of-factly “No, not lately.”

“Vomiting?”

“Not since last week.”

Dr. Yatto got up, came across the desk to me. “Do you mind?” he asked, as he cradled my face in his hands. He expressionlessly pressed my cheeks with his thumb, pulled down my eyes and peered into my pupils, under my lids.

“I know I'm getting worse,” I said.

Yatto released my face, nodded toward Medved.

Then, for the first time since I'd started seeing him, Medved actually smiled.

“It's not getting worse, Lindsay. That's why I asked Bob to consult. Your erythrocytic count jumped back up. To twenty eight hundred.”

I gave a double take to make sure I had heard right. That it wasn't some kind of wishful dream I was playing out in my own mind. “But the spells... the hot and cold flashes? The other day, I felt like a war was going on in me.”

“There is a war,” Dr. Yatto said. “You're reproducing cells. The other day, that wasn't Negli's talking. That was you. That's how it feels to heal.”

I was stunned. My throat was dry. “Say that again?”

“It's working, Lindsay,” Medved said. “Your red blood count has increased for the second time in a row. I didn't want to tell you in case it was an error, but as Dr. Yatto said, you're building new cells.”

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. “This is real? I can trust this?” I asked.

“This is very real,” Medved said with a nod.

I stood up, my whole body shaking, tingling with disbelief. For a moment, all the joys that I had suppressed—a chance at my career, running on Marina Green, a life with Chris—came tumbling through my brain. For so long, I had been so scared to let them free. Now, they seemed to burst out of me.

Medved leaned forward and warned, “You're not cured, Lindsay. We'll continue the treatments, twice a week. But this is hopeful. More than hopeful, Lindsay. This is good.”

“I don't know what to say.” My body was totally numb. “I don't know what to do.”

“If I were you,” Dr. Yatto said, “I'd bring to mind the one thing you might've thought you'd miss most, and go do that today.”

I wandered out of the office in a haze. Down the elevator, through the sterile lobby, into a flowered courtyard that overlooked Golden Gate Park.

The sky was bluer than I'd ever seen it, the air off the bay sweeter and cooler and more pure. I stood there, just hearing the beautiful sounds of my own breaths.

Something crept back into my life that had been away, something I never thought I would embrace again.

Hope.

Chapter 110

"I HAVE SOMETHING TO TELL YOU," I said to Chris on the phone, my voice ringing with urgency. "Can you meet me for lunch?"

"Sure. You bet. Where?" No doubt he thought I had some important news to break on the case.

"Casa Boxer," I said with a smile.

"That urgent, huh?" Chris laughed into the phone. "I must be starting to have a bad effect on you. When should I come?"

"I'm waiting now."

It took him barely fifteen minutes to arrive at the door. I'd stopped on the way at Nestor's bakery and picked up some freshly baked cinnamon buns. Then I popped a bottle of Piper-Heidsieck that I had saved in my fridge.

Never in six years had I bugged out on a case in the middle of the afternoon. Especially one of this magnitude. But I felt no guilt, none at all. I thought of the craziest way I could break the good news.

I met him at the door, wrapped in a bedsheet. His big blue eyes went wide with surprise.

"I'll need to see some ID." I grinned.

"Have you been drinking?" he said.

"No, but we're about to." I pulled him into the bedroom.

At the sight of the champagne, he shook his head. "What is it you want to tell me?"

"Later," I said. I poured him a glass and began to unfasten the buttons of his shirt. "But trust me, it's good."

"It's your birthday?" he said smiling.

I let the bedsheet drop. "I would never do this for just my birthday."

"My birthday, then."

"Don't ask. I'll tell you later."

"You broke the case," he exclaimed. "It was Joanna. You found something that broke the case."

I put my fingers to his lips. "Tell me that you love me."

"I do love you," he said.

"Tell me again, like you did at Heavenly. Tell me that you won't ever leave me."

Maybe he sensed it was Negli's talking, some crazy hysteria, or that I just needed to feel close. He hugged me. "I won't leave you, Lindsay.

I'm right here."

I took his shirt off—slowly, very slowly—then his trousers. He must've felt like the delivery boy who had stumbled into a sure thing.

He was as hard as a rock.

I brought a glass of champagne to his lips, and we both took a sip from it.

"Okay, I'll just go with this. Shouldn't be too difficult," he said.

I drew him to the bed, and for the next hour we did the one thing I knew I would have missed most in the world.

We were in the middle of things when I felt the first terrifying rumbling.

At first it was so weird, as if the bed had speeded up and was rocking faster than we were; then there was a deep, grinding sound coming from all directions, as if we were in an echo chamber; then the sound of glass breaking—my kitchen, a picture frame falling off the wall—and I knew, we knew.

"It's a goddamn quake," I said.

I had been through many of these—anyone who lived here had—but it was startling and terrifying every time. You never knew if this was the Big One.

It wasn't. The room shook, a few dishes broke. Outside, I heard the bleat of horns and triggered car alarms. The whole thing lasted maybe twenty seconds—two, three, four vibrating tremors.

I ran to the window. The city was still there. There was a rumble, like a massive humpback whale breaching underground.

Then it was still—eerie, insecure, as if the whole town were holding on for balance.

I heard wailing sirens, the sound of voices shouting on the street.

"You think we should go?" I asked.

"Probably... we're cops." He touched me again, and suddenly I was tingling all over, and we melted into each other's arms. "What the heck, we're Homicide, anyway."

We kissed, and once again we were locked into a single, intertwined shape. I started to laugh. The list, I was thinking. The skybox.

Now an earthquake. This suckers starting to get pretty long.

My beeper went off. I cursed, rolled over, glanced at the screen.

It was the office.

"Code one eleven," I told Chris.

Emergency Alert.

"Shit," I muttered, "it's just an earthquake."

I sat up, pulled the sheet over me, called in on the phone next to the bed.

It was Roth buzzing me. Roth never buzzed me. What was going on?

Immediately, I transferred to his line.

"Where are you?" he asked.

"Dusting off some debris," I said, and smiled toward Chris.

"Get in here. Get in here fast," he barked.

"What's going on, Sam? This about the quake?"

"Uh-uh," he replied. "Worse. Nicholas Jenks has escaped."

Chapter 111

AS HE SAT SHACKLED TO THE SEAT of the police van on the way back from Napa, Nicholas Jenks watched the impassive eyes of the patrolman across from him. He plotted, schemed. He wondered how much it would take to buy his freedom.

One million? Two million? After all, what did the fool take home?

Forty grand a year?

He figured the steely-eyed officer was someone above reproach, whose commitment to his duty was unquestioned. If he were writing it, that's who he would have put in the car with him.

Five million, then. He smirked.

If he were writing it. That notion possessed a cold, punishing irony for him. He had written it.

Jenks shifted in his restraints—wrists cuffed, torso strapped to the seat. Only minutes earlier, he had stood in the redbrick courthouse in Santa Rosa while the prosecutor in her little Liz Claiborne suit pointed her finger at him. Over and over, she accused him of things only a mind as cultivated as his would think up and do.

All he could do was stare coldly while she accused him of being this monster. Sometime, he'd like to lock her in the law library and show her what he was really capable of.

Jenks caught a glimpse of the sky and the sun-browned hills through the narrow window in the rear door and tried to get a fix on their bearings. Novato. Just hitting Marin.

He pressed his face to the steel restraining wall. He had to get out.

If he were writing it, there would always be a way out.

He looked at the guard. So what was the story, Joe Friday? What happened next?

“You married?” he asked.

The policeman stared through him at first, then he nodded.

“Kids?”

“Two.” He nodded again, even breaking a slight smile.

No matter how hard they tried to resist, they were always fascinated to talk with the monster. The guy who killed the honeymooners. They could tell their wives and friends, justify the miserable six hundred a week they brought home. He was a celebrity.

“Wife work?” Jenks probed.

The cop nodded. “Teacher. Business ed. Eighth grade.”

Business ed, huh? Maybe he would understand a business proposition.

“My wife used to work,” Jenks grunted back. “My first wife. In retail. My current wife worked, too, in television. Course, now she only works out.”

The remark produced a snicker. The tight-assed bastard was loosening up.

Jenks saw a landmark he recognized. Twenty minutes from the Golden Gate Bridge. There wasn't much time left.

He glanced out the window at the patrol car following them. There was another in front. A bitter resignation took hold. There was no way out. No elegant escape. That was in his books. This was life. He was screwed.

Then, out of nowhere, the police van lurched violently. Jenks was hurled forward in his seat, toward the guard across from him. For a second, he wondered what was going on, then the van lurched again. He heard a chilling rumbling sound outside.

It's a fucking quake.

Jenks could see the lead police car swerve to avoid the charge of another car. Then it skidded off the road.

One of the cops yelled, "Shit," but the van continued on.

Jenks spun around in panic, trying to hold on to anything that was fixed in the compartment. The van was bucking and jolting.

The police car following them jumped over a sudden hump in the highway and, to his total amazement, flipped. The driver of Jenks's van looked behind him in shock.

Then suddenly the other cop in front screamed for the driver to stop.

An eighteen-wheeler was breached in their way. They were headed right toward it. The van swerved, and when it did, the road buckled again.

Then they were out of control—flying.

I am going to die here, Nicholas Jenks thought. Die here, without anyone ever knowing the whole truth.

The van crashed into the stanchions of a Conoco station. It screeched to a stop, spinning twice on its side. The officer across from him was hurled against the metal wall. He was writhing and moaning as he looked at Jenks.

"Don't move," the officer panted.

How the hell could he? He was still shackled to the seat.

Then came this horrid wrenching sound, and they both looked up. The towering steel light above the station toppled like a redwood and crashed down on them. It smashed through the door of the van, striking the officer in back, probably killing him on impact.

Jenks was sure he would be killed—all the smoke, the screams, the twisting of metal.

But he wasn't. He was clear. The streetlight had torn a hole in the side of the car, ripped his restraints right out of the seat. He was able to kick himself free, even with shackled hands and feet, and push himself through the gaping hole.

People were running in the street, screaming in panic. Motorists pulled off the road, some dazed, others jumping out of their vehicles to help.

This was it! He knew if he didn't run he would replay this moment for the rest of his life.

Nicholas Jenks crawled out of the van, dazed and disoriented. He spotted no cops. Only frightened passersby streaking past. He limped out and joined the chaotic street scene.

I'm free! Jenks exulted.

And I know who's setting me up. The cops won't get it in a million years.

Chapter 112

IT TOOK ABOUT THREE MINUTES for Chris and me to throw on clothes and head back to the Hall. In the rush, I never told him my news.

By disaster standards, the quake was nothing much—unless you had spent the past five weeks tracking down the country's most notorious killer.

Most of the damage ended up confined to shattered storefronts and traffic accidents north of the city, but as we pushed our way through the clamoring throng of press in the Hall's lobby, the quake's biggest news crackled with the fierceness of a live wire:

The bride and groom killer was free,

Nicholas Jenks had managed to flee after the police van taking him back to jail had flipped over outside Novato, the result of a chain of automobile accidents caused by the tremor. The policeman guarding him had been fatally injured. Two more, in the front seat of the overturned van, were hospitalized.

A huge command center was set up down the hall from Homicide. Roth himself took charge. The place was crawling with brass from downtown and, of course, the press.

An APB was released, Jenks's description and photo distributed to cops on both sides of the bridge. All city exits and highway tolls were being monitored; traffic slowed to a crawl. Airports, hotels, and car-rental ports were put on alert.

Since we had tracked Nicholas Jenks down originally, Raleigh and I found ourselves at the center of the search.

We placed an immediate surveillance on his residence. Cops spread out all over the Sea Cliff area, from the Presidio to Lands End.

In searches like this, the first six hours were critical. The key was to contain Jenks in the grid where he had bolted, not let him contact anyone who could help him. He had no resources, no funds, no one to take him in. Jenks couldn't stay on the loose—unless he was a lot craftier than I thought he was.

The escape left me stunned. The man I had hunted down was free, but I was also left conflicted. Were we hunting the right man?

Everyone had a theory about where he might head: the wine country, east into Nevada. I had my own theory. I didn't think he'd head back to the house. He was too smart, and there was nothing to be gained there.

I asked Roth if I could borrow Jacobi and Paul Chin, to play out a hunch.

I took Jacobi aside. "I need you to do me a big favor, Warren." I asked him to do surveillance outside Joanna Wade's apartment on Russian Hill. I asked Chin to do the same outside the house of Jenks's former agent, Greg Marks.

If Jenks really believed he was being set up, those were two places he might go.

Jacob! gave me a look as if I were sending him out on another champagne lead. The entire corps of inspectors was following up leads.

"What the hell, Lindsay... why?"

I needed him to trust me. "Because it struck me as funny, too," I said, begging his support, "why Jenks would leave that damn tuxedo jacket behind. I think he might go after Joanna. Trust me on it."

With Warren and Paul Chin in place, there was nothing I could do except monitor the wires. Six hours into the search, there was still no sign of Nicholas Jenks.

Chapter 113

AROUND FOUR, I saw Jill pushing her way through the crowd buzzing outside my office. She looked ready to kill somebody, probably me.

"I'm glad you're here," I said grabbing her. "Trust me, please, Jill."

"Cindy's downstairs," she said. "Let's go talk."

We sneaked out and were able to find Cindy amid a throng of reporters clawing at anyone who came down from the third floor. We called Claire, and in five minutes we were sitting around a table at a coffee shop just down the block. Jenks's escape had thrown all of my speculations into disarray.

"You still believe he's innocent?" Jill pressed the issue immediately.

"That depends on where he turns up next." I informed them that I had stationed a couple of men around the homes of Greg Marks and Joanna Wade.

"Even now?" Jill shook her head and looked close to blowing.

"Innocent men don't run from police custody, Find say."

"Innocent people might," I said. "If they don't believe the justice system is being just!"

Claire looked around with a nervous swallow. "Ladies, it strikes me we're entering into very sensitive territory here, all right? We've got a manhunt trying to locate Jenks -he could be shot on sight- and at the same time, we're talking about trying to firm up a case against someone else. If this comes out, heads will roll. I'm looking at some of those pretty heads right now."

"If you really believe this, Lindsay, you need to take it to someone," Jill lectured me. "Roth. Mercer."

"Mercer's away. And right now, everybody's focused on locating Jenks.

Anyway, who the hell would believe this? As you say, all I have is a bunch of hypotheticals."

"Have you told Raleigh?" asked Claire.

I nodded.

"What does he think?"

"Right now, he can't get past the hair. Jenks's escape didn't help my case."

"I knew there was something I liked about that guy." Jill finally smiled thinly.

I looked at Claire for support.

"It's hard to argue your side of things, Lindsay," she said with a sigh. "That said, your instincts are usually good."

"So then bust in on Joanna, like Lindsay proposed," said Cindy. The more I was around her, the more I loved her.

Things had suddenly gotten very sticky in the way of accountability. I turned to Claire. "Is there anything we might have missed that could implicate Joanna?"

She shook her head. "We've been through all that. All the evidence points the finger directly at Nicholas Jenks."

"Claire, I'm talking about something that was there, right in front of us, that we just didn't see."

"I want to be with you on this, Lindsay," Claire said, "but we've been through it. Everything."

"There's got to be something. Something that could tell us if the killer is male or female. If Joanna did it, she's no different from any killer I've tracked down. She left something. We just haven't seen it. Jenks did—or someone did for him—and we found him."

"And we ought to be out looking for him now," urged Jill, "before we end up with couple number four."

I felt alone, but I just couldn't surrender. It wouldn't be right.

"Please," I begged Claire, "go through everything on? more time. I think we've got the wrong man."

Chapter 114

IN THE LIGHT of the makeup mirror, the killer sat transfixed by soft blue eyes that were about to become gray.

The first thing was to smear her hair until all the blond had been dyed away, then brush it back smooth, a hundred times, until it had lost its luster and shine.

"You forced me into this," she said to the changing face. "Forced me to come out one more time. I should have expected as much. You love games, don't you, Nick?"

With a cotton swab, she applied the base, a clear, sticky balm with a glue like smell. She dabbed it over her temples, down the curve of her chin, in the soft space between her upper lip and her nose.

Then, with a tweezer, she matted on the hair. Tufts of reddish brown.

The face was almost complete. But the eyes... anyone could see they were still hers.

She slipped out a pair of tinted contacts from the case, moistening them, stretching her lids to insert each one.

She blinked, well satisfied with the result.

The familiarity was gone. The change was complete. Her eyes now reflected a steely, lifeless gray.

Nicholas's color.

She was him.

Chapter 115

CLAIRE'S CALL WOKE ME out of a deep sleep.

"Come down here," her voice commanded.

I blinked groggily at the clock. It was ten after five. "Come down where?" I moaned.

"I'm at the damn office. In the damn lab. The guard at the front counter will let you in. Come right now."

I heard the urgency in her voice, and it took only seconds for me to come to my senses. "You're at the lab?"

"Since two-thirty, sleepyhead. It's about Nicholas Jenks. I think I found something, and Lindsay, it is a mind blower. At that hour, it didn't take me more than ten minutes to get to the morgue. I parked in the circular area outside the coroner's entrance reserved for official vehicles. I rushed in, my hair uncombed, dressed in a sweatshirt and jeans.

The guard buzzed me in and let me through. He was expecting me. Claire met me at the entrance to the lab.

"Okay," I said, "my expectations are high."

She didn't answer. Only pressed me up against the door of the lab, without a word of greeting or explanation.

"We're back at the Hyatt," she started in. "Murder number one. David Brandt is about to open the door.

"Pretend you're the groom," she said, placing her hand on my shoulder and gently easing me into place, "and I'll be the killer. I surprise you as you open the door, and stab- right handed, not that it makes any difference now."

She thrust her fist into the space under my left breast. "So you fall, and that's where we find you, later, at the scene."

I nodded, letting her know that I was following along so far.

"So what do we find around you?" she asked, wide eyed.

I made a mental picture of the scene. "Champagne bottle, tuxedo jacket."

"True, but that's not where I'm headed."

"Blood... a lot of blood."

"Closer. Remember, he died of a cardiac, electromechanical collapse.

We simply assumed he was scared to death."

I stood up, gazed down at the floor. Then suddenly I saw it as if I were there with the body.

"Urine."

"Right!" exclaimed Claire. "We find a small residue of urine. On his shoes, on the floor. About six cubic centimeters' worth, that I was able to save. It seemed logical that it belonged to the groom- voiding is a natural response to sudden fear, or death. But I was thinking last night, there were traces of urine in Cleveland, too. And here, back at the Hyatt, I never even had it tested. Why would I? I always assumed it was from David Brandt.

"But if you were here, crumpled on the floor, and I was the killer standing above you, and the pee was here," she said, pointing to the floor around me, "who the hell's urine would it be?"

Our eyes locked in one of those shining moments of epiphany. "The killer's," I said.

Claire smiled at her bright student. "The annals of forensic medicine are rich with examples of murderers 'getting off when they kill, so peeing isn't so far-fetched. Your nerves would be on end. And good old compulsive me, obsessive

down to the last detail, refrigerates it in a vial, never knowing what for. And the thing that makes this all come together is, urine can be tested.”

“Tested? For what?”

“For sex, Lindsay. Urine can reveal sex.”

“Jesus, Claire.” I was stunned.

She took me into the lab to a counter with two microscopes, some chemicals in bottles, and a device I recognized from college chemistry classes as a centrifuge.

“There aren't any flashing gender signs in urine, but there are things to look for. First, I took a sample and spun it down in the centrifuge with this KOH stain, which is something we can use to isolate impurities in blood cultures.” She motioned for me to look in the first scope.

“See ... these tiny, filament like branches with little clusters of cells like grapes. *Candida albi* cans I looked at her blankly.

“Yeast cells, honey. This urine's laced with high deposits of yeast.

Boys don't get them.”

I started to smile, but before I could even reply, she dragged me on.

“Then I put the other sample under the scope and brought it up three thousand mag. Check this out.”

I lowered myself over the scope and squinted in.

“You see those dark, crescent-shaped cells swimming around?” Claire asked.

“Uh-huh.”

“Red blood cells. Lots of them.”

I lifted my head from the scope and looked at her.

“They wouldn't show up in a man's urine. Not to anywhere near this degree. Not unless they've got a bleeding kidney, which to my knowledge, none of our principals show any signs of.”

“Or”—I shook my head slowly—“unless the killer was menstruating.”

Chapter 116

I STARED AT CLAIRE as the information settled in my mind. All along, Nicholas Jenks had been telling the truth.

He hadn't been in the room when David and Melanie Brandt were killed that night. Nor in Napa. Probably not even near the Hall of Fame in Cleveland. I had hated Jenks so much I couldn't see past it. None of us had been able to get past the fact that we wanted him to be guilty.

All the evidence—the hair, the jacket, the champagne—had been an incredible deception. Jenks was a master of the surprise ending, but someone had set the master up.

I put my arms around Claire and hugged her. “You're the best.”

“You're damn right I am. I don't know what it proves,” she answered, patting my back, “but the person standing over that poor boy at the murder scene was a woman. And I'm just as sure that she stabbed David Brandt to death with her right hand.”

My mind was spinning. Jenks was loose, hundreds of cops on the chase—and he was innocent.

“So?” Claire looked at me and smiled.

“It's the second-best news I've heard lately,” I said.

“Second best?”

I took her hand. I told Claire what Medved had shared with me. We hugged again. We even did a little victory dance. Then both of us got back to work.

Chapter 117

UPSTAIRS AT MY DESK, I radioed Jacobi. Poor guy, he was still sitting outside Joanna Wade's home at the corner of Filbert and Hyde. “You all right, Warren?”

“Nothing that a shower and a couple of hours of sleep wouldn't improve.”

“Tell me what's going on.”

“What's going on?” Jacobi recited, as if he were resentfully going over his log. “Four-fifteen yesterday afternoon, target comes out, struts down the block to Gold's Gym. Six-ten, target reemerges, proceeds down block to Pasqua Coffee, comes out with plastic bag. I suspect it's Almond Roast. Goes into the Contempo Casuals boutique, comes out empty. I gotta figure the new fall stuff hasn't arrived yet, Boxer. She makes her way home. Lights go on on the third floor. Is it chicken I smell? I don't know—I'm so fucking hungry I might be dreaming. Lights go out about ten-twenty-five. Since then, she's been doing what I'd like to be doing. Why you got me out here like a rookie, Lindsay?”

“Because Nicholas Jenks is going to try to find his ex-wife. He believes she's setting him up. I think he knows that Joanna is the murderer.”

“You trying to cheer me up, Boxer? Bring meaning into my life?”

“Maybe. And how's this... I think she is, too. I want to know immediately if you spot Jenks.”

Chris Raleigh came in about eight, tossing a surprised look at my bleary eyes and disheveled appearance. “You should try a brush in the morning.”

“Claire called me at five-ten. I was in the morgue at five thirty.”

He looked at me funny. “What the hell for?”

“It's a little hard to explain. I want you to meet some friends of mine.”

“Friends? At eight in the morning?”

“Uh-huh. My girlfriends.”

He looked completely confused. “What am I not following here?”

“Chris.” I seized his arm. “I think we broke the case.”

Chapter 118

AN HOUR LATER, I got everyone together on the Jenks case, hopefully for the last time.

There had been a few alleged sightings of Nicholas Jenks—in Tiburon down by the marina, and south of Market, huddled around a gathering of homeless men. Both of them proved false. He had eluded us, and the longer he remained free, the greater the speculation.

We got together in a vacant interrogation room that Sex Crimes sometimes used. Claire smuggled Cindy up from the lobby, then we rang down Jill.

"I see we've loosened the requirements," Jill commented, when she came in and saw Chris.

Raleigh looked surprised, too. "Don't mind me, I'm just the token male."

"You remember Claire, and Jill Bernhardt from the district attorney's office," I said. "Cindy you may recall from Napa. The team."

Slowly, Chris looked from one face to another until he settled on me.

"You've been working on this independently of the task force?"

"Don't ask," said Jill, plunking herself down in a wooden chair. "Just listen."

In the cramped, narrow room, all eyes turned to me. I looked at Claire. "You want to begin?"

She nodded, scanned the group as if she were presenting at a medical conference. "On Lindsay's urging, I spent all last night going through the three case files; I was looking for anything that would implicate Joanna. At first, nothing. Other than coming to the same conclusion I had before—that from the angle of the first victims' wounds, the killer was right-handed. Jenks is left-handed. But it was clear that it wouldn't stick.

"Then something struck me that I had never noticed before. At both the first and third crime scenes there were traces of urine. Individually, I guess neither the medical examiner in Cleveland nor I ever thought much of it. But as I thought through the crimes scenes in my head, the locations of these deposits didn't make any sense. Early this morning, very early, I rushed down here and performed some tests."

There was barely a breath in the room.

"The urine we found at the Grand Hyatt demonstrated large deposits of yeast, as well as atypically large counts of red blood cells. Red blood cells in that amount appear in the urine during menstruation.

Coupled with the yeast, there's no doubt in my mind that the urine was a woman's. A woman killed David Brandt, and I have no doubt we'll find a woman was in the stall in Cleveland, too."

Jill blinked, dumbfounded. Cindy's bright red lips parted in an incredulous half smile.

Raleigh just shook his head.

"Jenks didn't do it," I said. "Joanna must have. He abused her, then he dumped her for his new wife, Chessy, just as he was about to strike it rich. Joanna tried to sue him twice, unsuccessfully. Ended up with a settlement many times smaller than she would have gotten a year later. She watched him gain celebrity and wealth, and a new, seemingly happy, life."

Chris, looked amazed. "You really believe a woman could physically put this off? The first victims were stabbed, the second were dragged twenty, thirty yards to where they were dumped."

You haven't seen her, I believe. "She knew how to set Jenks up. She knew his tastes, investments, and had access to his possessions. She even worked at Saks."

Chris chipped in, "She was one of the few people who would've been aware of *Always a Bridesmaid*."

I nodded toward Jill. "She had the motive, and I'm damned sure she had the desire."

A really heavy silence filled the room: "So how do you want to play this?" Chris finally said. "Half the force is looking for Jenks." I'll want to inform Mercer, try to get Jenks brought in without sjwraeone killing him. Then I want to go ahead and pierce Joannas cover. Phone calls, owfat cards. If she was in Cleveland, something will have her seen. I think you'd agree now," I said to Jill, "we have enough to authorize a search."

Jill nodded at first hesitantly, thea with more resolve. "It's just impossible to believe that after all this, we now have to defend that bastard."

Suddenly, there was a loud rap on the glass window of the door. John Keresty, an inspector on the task force, broke in onus.

"It's Jenks... He's just been sighted. He's up in Pacific Heights."

Chapter 119

RALEIGH AND I LEAPED UP, almost as one, racing back to the command center.

It appeared Jenks had been seen in the lobby of a small hotel called the El Drisco. A bellboy spotted him. Free of his cuffs. Now he was on the streets, somewhere up in Pacific Heights.

Why there? My mind ratcheted through the possibilities. Then it became clear.

Greg Marks lived up there.

I radioed Paul Chin, who was still sitting surveillance on the agent's brownstone. "Paul, be on the alert," I told him. "Jenks may be headed your way. He was seen in Pacific Heights."

There was a beep on my cell phone. It was Jacobi. Everything was happening at once.

"Boxer, there's an All Available Units on Jenks up in the Heights about a mile from here. I'm headed up there."

"Warren, don't leave," I shouted into the receiver. I still believed Joanna was the murderer. I couldn't leave her unmonitored—especially with Jenks on the loose. "Stay at your post."

"This takes precedence," Jacobi argued. "Besides, nothing's happening here. I'll call a radio car to relieve."

"Jacobi," I shouted, but he had already signed off and was on his way to the Heights. I turned to Chris. "Warren's left Joanna's."

Suddenly, Karen, our civilian clerical, shouted for me. "Lindsay, call for you on one."

"We're headed out," I hollered back to her. I had strapped on my gun, grabbed the keys to my car. "Who is it?"

"Says you'd want to talk to him about the Jenks case," Karen said.

"Says his name is Phillip Campbell."

Chapter 120

I FROZE, FIXED ON RALEIGH, and lunged back toward my desk.

I signaled Karen to put it through. At the same time, I hissed under my breath to Raleigh, "Start a trace."

I waited in a trance; seconds could mean the difference. The breath was tightening in my chest. Then I picked up.

"You know who this is," Nicholas Jenks's arrogant voice declared.

"I know who it is. Where are you?"

"Not a chance, Inspector. I only called to let you know, whatever happens, I didn't kill any of them. I'm not a murderer."

"I know that," I told him.

He seemed surprised. "You know...?"

I couldn't let Jenks know who it was. Not with him on the loose. "I promise, we can prove it wasn't you. Tell me where you are."

"Hey, guess what? I don't believe you," Jenks declared. "Besides, it's too late. I told you I'd take this into my own hands. I'm going to solve these murders for you."

Jenks could hang up any moment and we'd lose him. This was my only chance. "Jenks, I'll meet you. Anywhere you want."

"Why would I want to meet you? I've seen enough of you to last a lifetime."

"Because I know who did it," I told him.

What he said next jolted me.

"So do I."

And then he hung up.

Chapter 121

SIXTH... MARKET... TAYLOR... the streets shot by, the top hat on the roof of Chris Raleigh's car flashing wildly.

His.

Hyde.

We shot up Larkin, climbing through the lights, then rocked over the bumps as we careened over Nob Hill. In a matter of minutes, we arrived in Russian Hill.

Joanna lived on the top floor of a town house on the corner of Filbert and Hyde. We were no longer waiting to flush her out.

Jenks was loose; he had probably homed in on her. Now it was a matter of preventing more killing.

We slowed, cut the lights as we wove through the quiet, hilly streets.

The house had been unguarded for maybe fifteen minutes. I didn't know if Joanna was up there. Or where the hell Jenks was.

Chris pulled to the curb. We checked our guns and decided how to proceed.

Then I saw a sight that tore the breath from my lungs.

Chris saw it, too. "Christ, he's here."

From a narrow alley two houses away, a man in a beard and baggy sport coat emerged. He looked both ways as he hit the street, then he made his way down the block.

It was Jenks.

Raleigh pulled out his gun and reached for the door. I looked closer in disbelief, grabbed onto him. "Wait. Look again, Chris."

We both gaped in amazement. He had the same look: the short reddish-gray hair, the same unmistakable beard.

But it wasn't Jenks.

The figure was thinner, fairer; the hair was slicked back, hiding a longer length, not cut short. I could see that much.

It was a woman.

"That's Joanna," I said.

"Where's Jenks?" Chris grunted. "This just keeps getting creepier."

We watched the figure slink down the block as a frenzy of possibilities ran through my mind. This was creepy.

"I'll follow her," said Chris. "You go upstairs. Make sure it's her, Lindsay. I'll radio for support. Go on, Lindsay. Go."

The next moment, I was out of the car, crossing the street toward Joanna's apartment. Chris eased the Taurus down the block.

I pushed random buttons until a woman's angry voice replied. I identified myself, and a gray-haired woman emerged from the apartment next to the front door. She announced that she was the landlady.

I badged her, got her to locate a key pronto. Then I told her to get back in her apartment.

I had my gun out, took off the safety. A film of hot sweat was building up on my face and neck.

I reached Joanna's apartment on the third floor. My heart was pounding. Careful, Lindsay, a voice inside me said, then came a cautioning chill. Could Nicholas Jenks be here?

I had certainly entered enough hostile environments during my police career. None worse than this. I inserted the key, turned, and when the lock caught, pushed the door with my foot.

It swung open... revealing the bright, stylishly decorated apartment of Joanna Wade.

"Anyone here?" I shouted.

No one answered.

There was no one in the living room. Same for the dining room, kitchen. A coffee mug in the sink. The *Chronicle* out and folded to the Datebook section.

No sign that I was in the home of a psycho. That bothered me.

I moved on. Magazines—Food and Wine, San Francisco—on the coffee table. A few yoga posture books.

In the bedroom, the bed, unmade. The entire place had a relaxed, unforbidding feel.

Joanna Wade lived like any ordinary woman. She read, had coffee in her kitchen, taught exercise, paid her bills. Killers were preoccupied with their victims. This didn't make sense.

I turned into the master bath.

“Oh, damn it!” The case had made a last, irrevocable turn.

On the floor, in her workout tights, was Joanna Wade.

She was leaned against the tub looking at me, but not really—actually, she was still looking at her killer. Her eyes were wide and terrified.

He had used a knife. Jenks? If not him, then who?

“Oh, Christ,” I gasped. My head was spinning and it hurt.

I hurried over to her, but there was nothing I could do. Everything had twisted again. I knelt over the dead woman as a final, shuddering thought filled my mind:

If it wasn't Joanna, who was Chris following?

Chapter 122

WITHIN MINUTES, two blue-and-whites screeched to a stop outside. I directed the patrol officers upstairs to the grisly body of Joanna, but my thoughts had turned to Chris. And whoever he was'nt showing.

I had been up in the apartment for ten, maybe twelve minutes, without a word from him. I was worried. He was following a murderer, and a murderer who had just killed Joanna Wade.

I ran downstairs to an open patrol car. I called in what had happened to Command Central. A riot of doubts was crashing in my mind.

Could it somehow have been Jenks after all? Could Jill have been right?

Was he manipulating us, right from the start? Had he set everything up, even the sighting in Pacific Heights?

But if it was him, why? Why, after I had told him I believed him? Why would he kill her now? Was Joanna's death some thing I could have prevented? What in hell was going on? Where was Chris, damn it?

My cell phone finally beeped. To my relief it was Chris.

“Where are you? You had me scared to death. Don't do that to me.”

“Down by the marina. The suspect's in a blue Saab.”

“Chris, be careful. It's not Joanna. Joanna's dead. She was stabbed a bunch of times in her apartment.”

“Dead?” he repeated. I could feel the frantic question slowly sinking into his mind. “Then who the hell is driving the Saab up ahead of me?”

“Tell me where you are exactly.”

“Chestnut and Scott. The suspect just pulled up to the curb. The suspect is getting out of the car.”

Somehow, this sounded familiar. Chestnut and Scott? What was down there? In the tumult of blue-and-whites screeching up in front of Joanna's building and reporting in, I raked my mind for a connection.

“He's heading away from the car, Lindsay. He's starting to run.”

Then it hit me. The photo I had picked up at Jenks's house. The beautiful and unmistakable moonlit dome. The Palace of Fine Arts.

It was where he had been married.

“I think I know where he's going!” I shouted. “The Palace of Fine Arts.”

Chapter 123

I TOOK OFF IN THE RADIO CAR with the siren blaring all the way to the Presidio.

It took me no more than seven minutes, with traffic wildly shifting out of my way, to speed down Lombard over to Richardson to the south tip of the Presidio. Up ahead, the golden rotunda of the Palace of Fine Arts loomed powerfully above a calm, gleaming pond.

I saw Chris's blue Taurus pulled up diagonally across from the tip of the park and jackknifed the patrol car to a halt next to it. I didn't see a sign of any other cops.

Why hadn't any backup arrived? What the hell was going on now?

I clicked my gun off safety and made my way into the park underneath the giant rotunda. No way I was waiting.

I was startled by people running toward me, away from the rotunda grounds.

“Someone's shooting,” one of them screamed.

Suddenly, my legs were flying. “Everyone out! I'm San Francisco police!” I screamed as I bumped through the people rushing by.

“Maniac with a gun,” one of them yelled.

I ran around the pond alongside a massive marble colonnade. There was no sound up ahead. No more shots.

Leading with my gun, I rounded corners until I was in sight of the main rotunda. Huge Corinthian columns soared above me, capped with ornate heroic carvings.

I could hear voices in the distance: a woman's mocking tone: “It's just you and me, Nick. Imagine that. Isn't it romantic?”

And a man's voice, Jenks's: “Look at you, you're pathetic. As always.”

The voices echoed out of the huge dome of the main rotunda.

Where was Chris? And where was our backup?

Cops should have been here by now. I held my breath, straining to hear the first police siren.

Every step I took, I heard my own footsteps echoing to the roof.

“What do you want?” I heard Jenks's cry reverberating off the stone.

Then the woman shouting back, "I want you to remember them. All the women you fucked."

Still no sign of Chris. I was tight with worry.

I decided to go around the side of a row of low arches that ran down to where the voices were coming from. I ducked around the corner of the colonnade.

Then I saw Chris.

He was sitting there, propped against a pillar, watching everything unfold.

My first reaction was to say something like, Chris, get down, someone will see you. It was one of those slow-motion perceptions where my eyes were faster than my mind.

Then I was seized with horrible fright, nausea, and sadness.

Chris wasn't watching, and he wasn't hiding.

The front of his shirt was covered with blood.

All my police training nearly gave way. I wanted to scream, to cry out. It took everything I had to hold it in.

Two dark bloodstains were soaking through Chris's shirt. My legs were paralyzed. Somehow I forced myself over to him. I knelt down. My heart was pounding.

Chris's eyes were remote, his face as gray as stone. I checked for a pulse and felt the slightest rhythm of a heartbeat.

"Oh, Chris, no." I stifled a sob.

When I spoke, he looked up, eyes glimmering as he saw my face. His lips parted into a weak smile. His breath wheezed, heavy and labored.

My eyes filled with tears. I applied pressure to the holes in his chest, trying to push back the blood. "Oh, Chris, hang in there. Hang in there. I'll get help."

He reached for my arm. He tried to speak, but it was only a weak, guttural whisper.

"Don't talk. Please."

I raced back to the patrol car and fumbled with the transmitter until I heard Dispatch. "Officer down, officer down," I shouted. "Four-oh-six. I repeat, four-oh-six!" The statewide call for alarm. "Officer shot, rotunda of the Palace of Fine Arts. Need immediate EMS and SWAT backup. Possible Nicholas Jenks sighting. Second officer on the scene inside. Repeat, four-oh-six, emergency."

As soon as the dispatcher repeated the location back to me with a "Copy," I threw down the transmitter and headed back inside.

When I got to him, Chris was still holding on to small breaths. A bubble of blood popped on his lip. "I love you, Chris," I whispered, squeezing his hand.

Voices rang out ahead in the rotunda. I couldn't make them out, but it was the same man and woman. Then there was a gunshot.

"Go," Chris whispered. "I'm holding on."

Our hands touched.

"I've got rear," he muttered with a smile. Then he pushed me away.

I scurried ahead, my gun drawn, glancing back twice. Chris was watching-watching my back.

I ran in a low crouch all the way down the length of the row of columns closest in, clear up to the side of the main rotunda. The voices echoed, intensified. My eyes were riveted.

They were straight across the basilica. Jenks, in a plain white shirt. He was holding one arm, bleeding. He'd been shot. And across from him, holding a gun and dressed in a man's clothes, Chessy Jenks.

Chapter 124

SHE LOOKED like a bizarre disfigurement of the beautiful woman she was. Her hair was matted and dyed gray and red. Her face still carried the marks of her disguise, a man's sideburns and flecks of a red beard.

She was holding a gun tightly, pointing it directly at him. "I have a present for you, Nick."

"A present?" Jenks said in desperation. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"That's why we're here. I want to renew our vows."

Chessy took a small pouch out of her jacket and tossed it at his feet.

"Go ahead. Open it."

Nicholas Jenks knelt stiffly and picked up the pouch. He opened it, the contents spilling into his palm. His eyes bulged in horror.

The six missing rings.

"Chessy, Christ," he said. "You're out of your mind. What do you want me to do with these?" He held out a ring. "These will put you in the gas chamber." "No, Nick," Chessy said, shaking her head. "I want you to swallow them. Get rid of the evidence for me."

Jenks's face twitched in apprehension. "You want me to what?"

"Swallow them. Each one is someone you've destroyed. Someone whose beauty you've killed. They were innocent. Like me. Little girls on our wedding days. You killed us all, Nick—me, Kathy, Joanna. So now give us something back. With this ring, I do pledge."

Jenks glared and shouted at her. "That's enough, Chessy!"

"I'll say when it's enough. You love games, so play the game. Play my game this time. Swallow them." She pointed the gun. "No sense pretending I won't shoot, is there, dear?"

Jenks took one of the rings, raised it to his lips. His hand was shaking badly.

"That was Melanie, Nicky. You would've liked her. Athletic a skier... a diver. Your type, huh? She fought me to the end. But you don't like us to fight, do you? You like to be in total control."

She cocked the gun and leveled it at Jenks's head.

Jenks put the ring in his mouth. With a sickened expression, he forced it down his throat.

Chessy was losing it. She was sobbing, trembling. I didn't think I could wait any longer.

"Police," I yelled. I stepped forward, two hands on my38, leveling it at her.

She spun at me, not even showing surprise, then back to Jenks. "He has to be punished!"

"It's over," I said, carefully advancing toward her. "Please, Chessy, no more killing. "

As if she suddenly realized what she had become, the sickening things she'd done, she looked at me. "I'm sorry... I'm sorry for everything that happened—except this!"

She fired, at Jenks. I fired, too, at her.

Chessy's slender body flew backward, hitting the wall hard and crumpling against it. Her beautiful eyes widened, and her mouth sagged open.

I looked and saw that she'd missed Jenks. He was staring at her in disbelief. He didn't think she could do it, didn't think she hated him that much. He still believed he controlled Chessy, and probably that she loved him.

I hurried to her, but it was too late. Her eyes were already glazed, and the blood was streaming from her chest. I held her head and thought that she was so beautiful—like Melanie, Rebecca, Kathy- and now she was dead, too.

Nicholas Jenks turned toward me with a gasp of relief. "I told you... I told you I was innocent."

I looked at him in disgust. Eight people were dead. The brides and grooms, Joanna, now his own wife. I told you I was innocent? Is that what he thought?

I swung, my fist catching him square in the teeth. I felt something shatter as Jenks dropped to his knees. "So much for innocence, Jenks!"

Chapter 125

I WAS RUNNING AND I REALIZED that I no longer knew exactly what I was doing, where I was. Somehow my instincts brought me back to where Chris had been shot.

He was still up against the pillar in the same position. He looked as if he'd been waiting for me to return.

I rushed up to him, knelt down as close as I could get. I could see police and the EMS medical crew finally arriving. What took them so long?

"What happened?" Chris whispered. I could barely hear him.

"I got her, Chris. Chessy Jenks was the killer."

He managed to nod his head. "That's my girl," he whispered.

Then Chris smiled faintly and he died on me.

I never would have imagined, or dreamed, that Chris would be the first to die. That was the most terrible and dreadful shock. I was the sick one, the one whom death had brushed against.

I put my head down close to his chest. There was no movement, no breath, just a terrifying stillness. Everything seemed so unreal.

Then the medics were working on Chris, doing heroic, useless things, and I just sat there holding his hand.

I felt hollowed out and empty and incredibly sad. I was sobbing, but I had something to say to him; I had to tell Chris one last thing.

"Medved told me, Chris. I'm going to be okay."

Chapter 126

I COULDN'T GO NEAR MY OFFICE at the Hall. I was given a one-week leave. I figured I'd take another of my own time on top of that. I sat around, watched some videos of old movies, went for my treatments, took a jog or two down by the marina.

I even cooked and sat out on the terrace overlooking the bay, just as I had with Chris that first night. On one of those nights, I got really drunk and started playing with my gun. It was Sweet Martha who talked me off the ledge. That, and the fact that if I killed myself, I would be betraying Chris's memory. I couldn't do that. Also, the girls would never have forgiven me, right?

I felt a hole tear at my heart, larger and more painful than anything I had ever felt, even with Negli's. I felt a void of connection, of commitment. Claire called me three times a day, but I just couldn't speak for very long, not even to her.

"It wasn't you, Lindsay. There was nothing you could've done," she consoled.

"I kind of know that," I replied. But I just couldn't convince myself it was true.

Mostly, I tried to persuade myself I still felt a sense of purpose.

The bride and groom murders were solved. Nicholas Jenks was shamelessly milking his celebrity status on Dateline and 20/20. My Negli's seemed to be in remission. Chris was gone. I tried to think of what I would do next. Nothing very appealing came to mind.

Then I remembered what I had told Claire when my fears of Negli's were the strongest. Nailing this guy was the one clear thing that gave me the strength to go on.

It wasn't just about right or wrong. It wasn't about guilt or innocence. It was about what I was good at, and what I loved to do.

Four days after the shooting, I went to Chris's funeral. It was in a Catholic church out in Hayward, where he was from.

I took my place in the ranks with Roth and Jacobi. With Chief Mercer, who was dressed in blues.

But my heart was aching so bad. I wanted to be up near Chris. I wanted to be next to him.

I watched his ex-wife and his two boys struggling to keep it together.

I was thinking about how very close I had come to their lives. And they didn't know it.

Hero cop, they were eulogizing him.

He was a marketing guy, I thought, smiling. And then I started to cry.

Of all people, I felt Jacobi grasp my hand. And of all the improbable things, I found myself holding his back. Go ahead, he seemed to be saying. Go ahead and weep.

Afterward, at the graveside, I went up to Chris's ex-wife, Marion. "I wanted to meet you," I said. "I was with him when he died."

She looked at me with the fragile courage only another woman could understand.

"I know who you are," she said with a compassionate smile. "You are pretty. Chris told me you were pretty. And smart."

I smiled and took her hand. We both squeezed hard.

"He also said you were very brave."

I felt my eyes well up. Then she took my arm and said the one thing I wanted most to hear.

"Why don't you stand with us, Lindsay."

The department gave Chris a hero's burial. Sad, mournful bagpipers opened the ceremony. Row after row of cops in dress blues. A twenty-one-gun salute.

When it was over, I found myself walking back to the car, wondering what in God's name I was going to do next.

At the cemetery gates I spotted Cindy and Jill and Claire. They were waiting there for me.

I didn't move. I stood there, my legs trembling badly. They could see that if they didn't make the first move, I could break down.

"Why don't you ride back with us?" Claire said.

My voice cracked. I could barely utter the words. "It was supposed to be me, not him," I said to them. Then one by one they all hugged me.

I put my arms around all of them and melted into their embrace as deeply as I could. All four of us were crying. "Don't ever leave me, guys."

"Leave?" Jill said with wide eyes.

"None of us," promised Cindy. "We're a team, remember? We will always be together."

Claire took hold of my arm.

"We love you, sweetie," she whispered.

The four of us walked arm in arm out of the cemetery. A cooling breeze was blowing in our faces, drying our tears.

At six o'clock that night, I was back inside the halls of the Hall of Justice.

There was something important I had to do.

In the lobby, almost the first thing you see, there's a large marble plaque. On it are ninety-three names, the names and dates of ninety-one men and two women who wore the uniform of the SFPD and died in the line of duty. A mason is working on the plaque.

It's an unwritten rule on the force, you never count them. But tonight, I did. Ninety-three, starting with James S. Coonts on October 5, 1878, when the SFPD was first formed.

Tomorrow there will be one more: Christopher John Raleigh. The mayor will be there; Mercer, too. The reporters who cover the city beat.

Marion and the boys. They will memorialize him as a hero cop. I will be there, too.

But tonight, I don't want speeches or ceremonies. Tonight, I want it to be just him and me.

The mason finishes up the engraving of his name. I wait while he sands the marble, vacuums away the last particle of dust. Then I walk up and run my hand over the smooth marble. Over his name.

Christopher John Raleigh.

The mason looks at me. He can see the pain welling in my eyes. "You knew him, huh?"

I nod, and from somewhere deep in my heart, a smile comes forth. I knew him.

"Partner," I say.

Epilogue

Gourde Grace

I HAVE COME TO LEARN that murder investigations always have loose ends and questions that cry out to be answered. Always.

But not this time.

I was home one night about a month after we buried Chris. I had finished dinner for one, fed and walked Her Sweetness, when there was a knock on the door, a single, authoritative rap.

I hadn't buzzed anyone up from downstairs, so I went and looked through the peephole before I opened up. I couldn't believe my eyes. It was Nicholas Jenks.

He had on a blue blazer over a white shirt and dark gray slacks. He looked as arrogant and obnoxious as ever.

"Aren't you going to let me in?" he asked, then smiled as if to say, Of course you are. You can't resist, can you?

"No, actually I'm not," I told him. I walked away from the door. "Get lost, asshole."

Jenks knocked again, and I stopped walking. "We have nothing to talk about," I called loudly enough for him to hear.

"Oh, but we do," Jenks called back. "You blew it, Inspector. I'm here to tell you how."

I froze. I could feel my eyes blazing, heat burning the back of my neck. I walked back to the door, paused, then opened it, my heart beating fast. You blew it.

He was smiling, or maybe laughing at me. "I'm celebrating," he said.

"I'm a happy fella! Guess how come?"

"Don't tell me, because you're a bachelor again."

"Well, there's that. But I also just sold North American rights to my latest book. Eight million dollars. Then the movies paid four. This one's nonfiction, Lindsay. Guess the subject. Go ahead, take a stab."

I wanted desperately to punch Jenks out again. "And I'm the one you have to share your news with? How goddamn sad for you."

Jenks continued to grin. "Actually, I came here to share something else. You are the only one I want to share this with. Do I have your attention yet, Lindsay? You blew it big time, babe."

He was so creepy and inappropriate that he was scaring me. I didn't want him to see it. What did he mean, I blew it?

"I'd offer you a drink, but I hate your guts." I smirked.

He threw up his hands, imitated my smirk. "You know, I feel exactly the same thing toward you. That's why I wanted to tell you this, Lindsay, only you." He lowered his voice to a whisper. "Chessy did what I told her to do, right up until the very end. The murders? We were playing a terrible, wonderful game. Tragic husband and wife kill happy, innocent husbands and wives. We were living out the plot of a novel. My novel. You blew it, Lindsay. I got away clean. I'm free. I'm so free. And now I'm richer than ever."

He stared at me, then he started to laugh. It was probably the most sickening sound I'd heard in my life.

"It's true. Chessy would do anything I wanted her to do. All of them would—that's why I picked them. I used to play a game where they barked like dogs. They loved it. Want to play, Lindsay? Ruff, ruff?"

I glared at him. "Don't you feel kind of inadequate—playing your father's old games? Joanna told me."

"I took things way past anything my father ever imagined. I've done it all, Inspector, and I got away with it. I planned every murder. Doesn't that make your fucking skin crawl? Doesn't it make you feel inadequate?"

Suddenly, Jenks was putting on plastic gloves he took out of his jacket pockets. What the hell?

"This is perfect, too," he said. "I'm not here, Lindsay. I'm with this sweet little liar of a bitch in Tahoe. I have an alibi bought and paid for. Perfect crimes, Lindsay. My specialty."

As I turned to run, Jenks took out a knife. "I want to feel this going inside you, Lindsay. Deep. The coup de grace."

"Help!" I screamed, but then he hit me hard. I was shocked at how fast he moved and how powerful he was.

I slammed into a living room wall and almost went out. Martha instinctively went after him. I'd never seen her bare her teeth before. He lashed out and cut her shoulder. Martha fell over, whining horribly.

"Stay away, Martha!" I screamed at her.

Jenks picked me up and threw me into my bedroom. He shut the door.

"There was supposed to be another bride and groom murder while I was in jail. New evidence was going to slowly reveal itself. It would become clear that I was innocent—framed. Then I'd write the book! But Chessy turned around and double-crossed me. I never respected her more, Lindsay. I almost loved her for it. She showed some goddamn guts for once!"

I crawled away from Jenks, but he could see there was nowhere for me to go in the bedroom. I thought I might have a broken rib.

"You'll have to kill me first," I told him in a hoarse whisper.

"Okay." He grinned. "Glad to oblige. My pleasure."

I crawled hand over hand toward my bed, the side facing a window on the bay. It was hard to breathe.

Jenks came after me.

"Stop, Jenks!" I yelled at the top of my voice. "Stop right there, Jenks!"

He didn't stop. Why should he? He slashed back and forth with the knife. Christ, he was enjoying this. He was laughing. Another perfect murder.

I reached under the bed to where I'd fastened a holster and revolver, my home security system.

I didn't have time to aim, but I didn't have to. Nicholas Jenks was stunned, the knife poised over his left shoulder.

I fired three times. Jenks screamed, his gray eyes bulged in disbelief, then he collapsed dead on top of me. "Burn in hell," I whispered.

I called Claire first—the medical examiner; then Cindy—the best crime reporter in San Francisco; then Jill—my lawyer.

The girls came running.

*** End of Book IV ***

