

RESCUE AT INSPIRATION POINT

KATE MCLACHLAN



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by

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Acknowledgments

The characters in this book are figments of my imagination despite the fact that more than one of my friends believes she is Bennie. Expo '74, however, was real. At the time, Spokane was the smallest city ever to hold a World's Fair, and to those of us who lived here then and remember, it became as big a part of our lives as our parents, our siblings, our friends, our high schools. It defined us and still does. There is before Expo and there is after. Ask anyone who lived here then what they remember of Expo, and you'll hear stories specific and sharp, like those told when people are asked where they were when John Lennon was shot, when the Twin Towers were hit, or--around here--when Mount St. Helen's blew. No murder ever occurred at Expo, as far as I know, but People's Park was real, and so were the Yippies. I didn't enjoy Expo much. Like Bennie, I thought it was too educational and boring, and I don't remember the carnival. But I love that Expo was here, and I love the legacy it left in the heart of downtown Spokane--the sprawling and magnificent Riverfront Park. When I walk through Riverfront Park, I find myself wishing I could go back in time and see it again the way it was when Expo was here. So I did. In addition to Expo '74 and the city of Spokane, I need to thank my good friends Carol and Michelle. They read whatever I ask them to read. And thank you to Tonie, of course, my first reader, my last reader, my best reader, my wife.

For Tonie Spokane had a story to tell and someone had to listen.

~Dawn Bowers, *Expo '74 World's Fair Spokane*, 1974

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Chapter One

Van -- 1988

VAN'S ARM ITCHED where the blood dried. She flexed it cautiously to ease the tormenting prickle and watched glistening cracks develop, bright rivers against the dried red crust at the top. There was a lot of blood.

She shivered on the concrete floor. Though it was daylight outside, the warehouse was dim. Van squinted and saw an empty wooden pallet behind a row of crates only a few feet away. Its platform was at least three inches off the frigid floor. She shouldn't move, but she was so cold. She crawled awkwardly toward it, trying not to use the injured arm or her burned leg. She pulled herself onto the pallet, rolled onto her butt, and scooted herself back. She leaned against the boxes of food stacked behind the pallet and let her legs rest on the wooden slats. She slouched down a bit to ensure her feet stuck out past the crates beside her. When the rescuers finally showed up, she didn't want them to miss her.

She peeked over her shoulder. Canned peaches.

She heard victims moaning and crying in other parts of the warehouse, but she couldn't see them. They were too spread out. She had landed in the row farthest back from the entrance, where only bulk foods were stored. She considered making some noise to announce her presence. She gave an experimental groan but quit, embarrassed.

"I want my mommy!" one victim howled from near the front of the warehouse.

"Shut up, Jason!" a female voice shrilled from the next row over.

Van leaned to the left and peered between a stack of 100 pound bags of rice and rows of gigantic peanut butter jars, and tried to spot the speaker.

The girl was young, maybe 17 years old, wearing too much makeup, her glossy dark hair pulled back into a pony tail high on her head. A large clot of drying blood marred her right cheek and dripped down her neck. "I swear, if you don't shut up, I'm going to come over there and stuff this bag of potato flakes down your throat."

"If you can walk, why don't you get up and go find us some rescuers?" Jason asked.

"I can't," the girl said. "I'm unconscious."

"Well, I'm conscious and I'm in great pain," Jason said and cried again, "I want my mommy!"

Van glanced at her own tag, which was pinned to her chest. She was conscious too, with a compound fracture of the right arm, severe burns on the left leg, and difficulty breathing due to fumes from the plane crash. The fake blood obviously signified the arm injury, and the smear of black oil on the leg of her gray sweatpants would let them know about the leg burn, but when the rescuers finally did arrive, she was going to have to cough to let them know about the breathing problem. Van scrunched her nose in discomfort. How had she gotten herself into this? These high school kids were actors. They were having a blast with their pretend injuries, but Van was no actress. She was a lawyer, for crying out loud. She wasn't a natural victim.

"What *is* taking them so long?" a voice asked plaintively some time later from a different corner of the warehouse.

Van wondered the same thing. She'd never been in this part of the prison before, but she knew it was very close to the crash site. You'd think someone would have reached the food warehouse long before now. She didn't have anything to write with, but she made a mental note to mention the long response time in her debriefing session. It was cold and uncomfortable in the warehouse. If someone didn't show up soon, there could be a very real danger of someone getting sick from this drill. Didn't they realize that?

Finally, excited voices could be heard nearing the warehouse, a large door slid open, and sunlight flooded the front half of the warehouse.

"Here's some," a voice called out. Prison guards rushed in, and the kids stepped up their acting, the conscious ones moaning and groaning as if they were in the throes of giving birth. To twins. Feeling foolish, Van tried again to give a little groan. God, she sounded so fake next to these kids. She couldn't do it. Let them find her on their own. That was part of the exercise, after all. Surely not every conscious plane crash victim would be a moaner. She settled back patiently to wait. She knew she'd be one of the last rescued, since she was at the back of the warehouse. Suddenly screams rang out from the center of the building, screams not of pain, but of rage and terror.

"Take that, you Nazi bastard!"

"Look out, he's got a shank!"

"Oh, damn, he got me. Right in the heart."

"Get him!"

Scuffling and grunts ensued, along with more high pitched screeching. "Get off of me, you sons of bitches. Police abuse! Police abuse!"

"You should fall down, Mike," a voice advised. "You wouldn't really be able to stand around watching if you got stabbed in the heart."

"I'm not falling down," Mike said. "I'm a rescuer, not a damn actor."

"C'mon, Mike. We have to rescue you too, now. It's part of the drill. We can't do our part if you won't do what you're supposed to do."

"Hell, no. *You* fall down, if you think it's so damn important."

"I'm not one who got stabbed."

Van wished again for a notebook and a pen. Mike. She needed to remember that name. What a jerk. All the expense and time and trouble that went into this simulation, all the people who were inconvenienced, to put it mildly, not the least of whom was Van herself, and he wouldn't do his little part to make it as authentic as possible. The point of the training experience wasn't just to rescue victims of a plane crash, but to rescue victims of a plane crash *inside the prison*. The purpose of the exercise would be lost if that factor weren't taken into consideration. Among the victims of the mock plane crash were inmates and prison staff who were on the ground. It stood to reason that some of the inmates would pose a security risk, which is why some of the actors had been secretly told to play the part of inmates.

Eventually the rest of the officers chose to ignore Mike and focused instead on assessing and removing victims of the crash.

Van made more mental notes. It seemed logical to her that a sweep of the building should have been done immediately, and all the victims who could quickly be removed should have been taken out. Victims like her. Instead, they seemed to be focusing on one victim at a time, starting with the nearest, before moving on to the next. One by one Van heard the moaning kids being carted out on stretchers. Occasionally one was so badly injured that immediate medical treatment had to be given, despite the urgency of clearing and securing the area.

As the victims were removed, the building grew quieter. Finally, Van was the only victim left, and she prepared herself for her turn. She tried out a fake cough.

"Ka, ka!" She sounded like a choking crow.

"Hack! Hack!" A puking dog.

Finally, she settled on just saying the word. "Cough. Cough, cough." She was a lawyer, not an actor, damn it. "Cough, cough!"

Where were they? It had been some time since the last victim was carried out. The warehouse was silent.

Did they forget about her?

"Cough, cough!" Louder now. "Hello? Cough! Cough?"

Damn it! They forgot about her. What time was it, anyway? She'd been up since 5:00 am, at the prison since 6:00, and stuck in this frigid ugly warehouse since 7:00. She was tired of it, and her stomach rumbled. It must be nearly lunch time already. She scooted off the wooden pallet, stood up, and strode to the end of the aisle where she could see the empty doorway. Hands on her hips, broken arm and burned leg forgotten, she shouted. "Hello! Anybody out there? Help! Help!"

A moment later a startled face above a navy blue prison guard uniform appeared in the open doorway. "I found her," he called out to the other rescuers. He stepped in and moved toward Van, smiling a bit sheepishly. "We knew we were one short, but we couldn't figure out where we missed someone."

Van shrugged and silently took note of the name on his badge. Derek Jones. She wouldn't say anything now, but wait until she wrote her report.

"Jones, wait," another guard called behind him. "Don't approach alone. She could be an inmate." Jones paused, startled, and waited for two other guards to join him.

"Oh, for heaven's sake," Van said, exasperated. She returned to her assigned spot in the back aisle and lay down on the cold concrete. They approached cautiously, one from the front and one from each side.

"Broken arm," one assessed quickly. "Compound fracture. And a bad burn on the left leg."

"Cough, cough," Van said dutifully.

"Some difficulty breathing," another rescuer noted. "We have to get her out of here."

"Sure she's not armed?"

They quickly frisked her. Derek knelt before her and said solemnly, "We know you're hurt, but we're out of stretchers. We're going to get you out of here, but we need you to help us. We'll lift you up, then you try to put weight on your good leg. We'll try not to hurt your bad arm. Understand?"

Van nodded, equally solemn. "Cough, cough."

She was lifted up, and two arms around her waist half carried her as she hobbled on one leg out of the warehouse. A spontaneous cheer went up among a small group of staff and observers when Van, the last victim, appeared. Van scanned the group for Patsy, but couldn't see her. Several of the observers had clip boards and made notations of the time. Van hoped they docked the rescuers plenty for taking so long in finding her.

The sun had risen while she'd been in the warehouse, and the glare was blinding, but it was still cold, no more than 40 degrees, and the wind cut through Van's threadbare sweat suit as if it weren't there. She shivered as they escorted her to the medical station, where she was handed off to medics.

"You've been exposed to harmful chemicals, ma'am," a nurse said briskly. "We'll need to remove your clothing and hose you off."

She'd been warned about this part and was prepared. She stood still on one leg and let them peel off her shoes, cut away her oil stained sweat pants, then the top, leaving Van standing in the bathing suit she'd worn underneath. The water would be warm, she'd been assured, but the drenching would be real.

"Stand right there." The nurse guided Van to a spot on the pavement beside a drain. Van balanced on her unburned leg, her good hand clutching a blue tarp set up behind her to catch the spray, and

braced herself. A blast of icy water smashed into her chest and instantly pummeled the air out of her lungs.

"Aaargh! It's cold!" she gasped, but she didn't have enough air in her lungs to make much actual sound. She reeled back on both legs, all pretense of injuries forgotten, and fell against the tarp. "It's cold!" she shrieked, more forcefully this time, but her timing was off. A spray of water hit her in the face, choking her as she tried to scream, and still no one heard. The water was so cold it hurt, like hammer blows striking her body. Everything moved in slow motion as the hose wielder swept the torrent up and down, ensuring that every inch of Van was thoroughly drenched. She wheeled and tried to dodge the spray, but the heavy tarp blocked her way. "It's too cold!" she shrieked again, finally loud enough to be heard. "It's too cold!"

"No, it's not," the nurse said. "We're using warm water."

"It's freezing cold!" Van shouted angrily. "Turn it off!"

The nurse reached her hand out and wiggled her fingers in the spray. She gasped and pulled her hand back, immediately sticking it into her armpit to warm it. "It *is* cold." She held her other hand up to the hose wielder to stop him. "Turn it off, Myers. What happened to the warm water?" The officer named Myers directed the hose away from Van and finally shut the water off. He shrugged. "I guess it ran out."

"Oh, good Lord," the nurse said, exasperated. She turned back to Van and shrugged. "Sorry about that."

"C-c-cold," Van implored, shivering. The icy wind gusted against her bare flesh, and her skin burned as if she was being scrubbed with sand paper. "T-too c-cold!"

"Good Lord," the nurse said again. "I need some towels and a blanket over here!"

"Can't," Myers said. "We used all of 'em already."

"What about those, Sergeant?" The nurse pointed to a stack of blankets neatly folded in the bed of a nearby truck.

"Those aren't really here," Myers said. "This is a realistic drill. We only get to use what we really would have on hand."

Myers, Van recited to herself. She shifted from stinging bare foot to stinging bare foot, trying to ease the pain caused by the icy wet concrete. Remember that name. Sergeant Myers.

"Here's the real situation, Sergeant." The nurse's voice had grown angry as well. "This poor woman is *really* going to get hypothermia if we don't *really* get her warm and dry. I don't care if this is just a drill. She needs real towels and blankets."

"I don't know," Sergeant Myers said dubiously. "I'll have to check with the lieutenant."

Wracked with shivers and teeth chattering, Van followed his gaze and saw a row of staff and observers watching the exchange with their clip boards poised, making notes. This time, Patsy stood with them, her eyes on Van. And she was laughing.

Chapter Two

Patsy -- 1988

"THEY'RE ALL GOING in my report," Van said. "Every single one of them, including this one." Van nudged Patsy's thigh with her slippered foot. "She just stood there laughing while I froze to death right before her eyes."

"You didn't die." Patsy laughed again as she took Van's feet in her hands and placed them on her lap. She kneaded Van's toes gently. "I had to laugh. You may have been cold, but you looked *hot*. You should have seen your girls stand at attention. And I swear I didn't know the hot water had run out. I thought you were just playing it up."

"The hot water did *not* run out," Van said. "They did it on purpose. Because I'm the lawyer. They think it's funny to torture me."

"Why were you part of it, anyway?" Jill sat on a pillow in front of the wood stove, arms wrapped around her legs, her back just inches away from the hot cast iron. "It doesn't seem like that would be part of a lawyer's job."

Jill spun an unlit cigarette in her fingers. Patsy eyed it hungrily. It was nearly a month since she'd had one, and for the most part it was going okay, but seeing Jill's cigarette brought out the cravings.

"It was this one's bright idea." Van nodded her head at Patsy. "She volunteered me."

"She had to be there anyway," Patsy said. "We always have our lawyer come watch Mock Ops, to spot liability issues. You would have been bored if you had to just stand around observing for three whole days. You know you would have."

"I would *not* have been bored." Van lips grew pouty. "I love spotting liability issues. And there were a lot of them, believe me. Like letting the lawyer get hypothermia. Bad idea. Lawyers like to sue, you know."

"You can't sue us," Patsy said. "You're *our* lawyer."

"You'd be surprised who I can sue," Van said darkly. "You'd better hope I don't get pneumonia."

"You do look a little flushed," Inez said. She sat in the wooden rocker, her feet propped on a brick in front of the stove. Inez had quit smoking the day after Van returned from 2008, and she'd never looked back. But then she'd always been an amateur smoker anyway.

Inez wasn't the only one affected by Van's little trip into the future that summer. They'd all been changed in some way. Jill seemed to take the whole time travel thing a lot more seriously, for one thing, and had stopped experimenting on her friends with it. Thank God. Van herself had changed in ways Patsy wasn't comfortable thinking about, and it wasn't just that she came back tanned and tattooed and pierced. Van had lived in the future an entire month, after all, even though it was only a few minutes from Patsy's perspective. When Van got that dreamy faraway look on her face, Patsy knew she was thinking about the future, almost like she missed it.

Then there was the hat.

And of course that was the day Patsy quit drinking. She liked to think she would have quit anyway, but she was probably kidding herself. When she was tempted to drink, it wasn't her great willpower that stopped her. It was the look in Van's eyes when she thought about the Patsy she'd met twenty years in the future. That look scared the shit out of Patsy.

"Your cheeks are pink," Inez said. "Maybe you do have a fever."

"No, I'm just getting too hot now." Van unwrapped herself from the quilt she'd been huddled under. "Finally. I thought I'd never get warm." She sat forward and fanned her face. "I'll be fine tomorrow."

"You'd better be," Patsy said, "or we'll have to get another hostage." She leaned forward and ran her fingers against Van's pink cheek. It was warm, but not too much so. Van tilted her head so her

cheek rested momentarily in Patsy's hand, and Patsy felt a surge of relief. Van wasn't really angry.

"Why? What's tomorrow?" Jill asked.

"It's top secret," Patsy said. "Nobody gets to know ahead of time what's going to happen. Even I don't know the details."

Inez rolled her eyes. "Who are we going to tell? You're the only person we know who even works at the prison."

"And you're dying to tell anyway." Van kicked her slippers off and nestling her bare feet back into Patsy's lap.

"It's hostage day," Patsy said with relish. "Van's the hostage, and I get to be the negotiator."

"That's actually a very big deal," Van said. "They normally don't let anyone under the rank of lieutenant be the hostage negotiator. But Patsy's in the running for a lieutenant position. They're letting her do this exercise as part of the interview."

"Audition's more like it." Patsy scowled. "If I were a man they wouldn't make me 'try out' for the part like this."

"Maybe," Inez said. "But lieutenant? That's impressive."

"I know." Patsy grinned in spite of herself. It wasn't usual to require candidates for promotion to prove themselves in quite this way, and she knew they were only doing it this time because she was a woman. Still, she couldn't help being excited about it. She'd participated in Mock Ops before and had seen hostage negotiators at work, and she'd studied the negotiators' manual frontward and backward. She was as ready as she'd ever be. If she got the promotion, she'd be the first female lieutenant at Eastern Washington State Prison.

"You'll do great." Van pulled Patsy's head toward her for a quick kiss. "You'll be the best damned hostage negotiator they've ever seen. I know it."

"Why do you need someone to play hostage?" Jill asked. "You don't need a hostage to practice being a hostage negotiator, do you? You just need someone to act like they took a hostage."

"She's more for the benefit of other people, to make it realistic," Patsy said. "I'm not the only one practicing tomorrow. It's practice for the guards, and we have SWAT guys who've come in from all over the state for this. They need to practice sneaking up to the scene, sniping, things like that."

"They'll probably dangle me by me toes from the tower, just for fun," Van said.

Patsy glanced up, surprised. "It's at the tower?"

Van slapped her hand over her mouth.

"The tower. Cool!" Patsy said.

Van removed her hand from her mouth. "Crap. Don't let them know I told you that."

"We're not supposed to know anything ahead of time," Patsy told Jill and Inez. "I knew there was going to be a hostage, but that's all. The SWAT guys don't even know that much. Mock Ops is a realistic drill."

"So realistic they won't give you a real blanket when you're freezing if there wasn't really supposed to be a blanket there," Van said.

"Do they know you two are a couple?" Inez asked.

"God, no," Patsy said. "I'll never make lieutenant if they find out I'm boinking the lawyer."

Inez heaved a sigh and changed the subject dramatically. "Grace is still dating Waverly."

Van sent her a look of pity and regret. "I never should have said anything."

"Oh no, I'm glad you did," Inez said. "It's just frustrating watching her with Waverly when I know she's destined for me. They're so bad together."

"They are bad together," Patsy agreed. "They just don't know it yet."

"You don't know she's destined for you, Inez," Van said. "All you know is that when I disappeared for twenty years, you two ended up together. But I didn't disappear after all, so now we don't know what's going to happen."

"That's right," Jill said. "RIP doesn't show the future that *is* going to happen. It only shows what will happen under a particular set of circumstances. The future Van saw only existed *if* Van disappeared for twenty years. Since she didn't disappear, that future didn't happen. Won't happen, I mean."

"It happened to Van," Patsy said grimly. It may have been a future that didn't really exist, but Van spent real time there.

Inez nodded to show that she understood, but Patsy knew she didn't. She'd seen it before when Inez set her hopes on something-- *someone*, rather--usually someone unattainable. She lost all sense of reason, obsessed over signs, wasted opportunities to meet women who genuinely were interested in her, and would end up sabotaging any chance of making a real relationship with the woman in her sights. Despite the fact that Inez had spent fifteen happy years with Grace in Van's fake future, there was a very real possibility that Inez would ruin any chance of happiness with Grace by obsessing it to death. Van was right. She never should have said anything to Inez.

"There's likely to be a U-Haul announcement any day now," Patsy warned. "Waverly's already waited longer than normal, for her."

"Maybe it's because Grace isn't willing," Inez said hopefully. "Something in her *knows* Waverly isn't right for her. I'm trying to be her friend, but Waverly gets all possessive. If I call just to say hi, Waverly acts like I'm trying to steal Grace away from her."

"You *are*," Patsy said.

Inez waved that detail aside with a flap of her hand. "There's nothing wrong with being a friend. I'm not going to force Grace to do anything she doesn't want to do."

"Kendra's been calling me," Jill said, as if announcing her doom. "Just to say hi."

"That's nice," Van said. "Maybe she wants to be your friend."

Jill shot a troubled glance from Van to Inez and asked softly, "But what kind of friend?"

Patsy tried not to laugh. "She can't make you do anything you don't want to do."

Jill nodded, but didn't look reassured. She stuck the cigarette in her mouth and felt in her pocket for her lighter.

"But she's straight," Inez said. "She's still married to that man."

"I'm not sure," Jill said. "She's been hanging out a lot with Bennie Sanchez."

Van's toes, which had been wriggling, grew still. Patsy's grip on Van's ankles tightened. Inez glanced from face to face and sent a chastising glare toward Jill, who was getting up to head outside for a smoke and didn't see it.

Only clueless Jill would bring up that name here. Neither Bennie Sanchez nor her name was welcome in Patsy's home. The only sign of Bennie allowed in the house was the hat. The hat Van had worn back from her trip into the future. The hat that had Bennie's signature scrawled inside. The hat that hung on the hook above the mirror on Van's side of the bed and had haunted and taunted Patsy every single day for the last three months. The hat that Patsy lacked the nerve to ask Van to get rid of. Because she was afraid Van might say no.

Chapter Three

Bennie -- 1988

BENNIE EXAMINED HER assortment of dildos and wondered which one Lucy would prefer. Lucy was a small woman, but she didn't have a small appetite, so the tiny pink one was out. The giant orange one would split a little woman like Lucy wide open. Just looking at it made Bennie shudder. She didn't know why women liked that one, but some did. And Bennie always gave women what they wanted.

She was a pretty good judge of just what would make a woman happy. They didn't all like dildos, of course. Some women preferred the tongue. Bennie licked her lips. She enjoyed the tongue herself. And fingers were popular with the more conservative girls. She flexed her long fingers as she caressed the supple leather of her black harness. Definitely the black leather harness. She slipped it into her backpack.

Someday, she vowed, she would make love to a woman the way *she* wanted to, rather than the way they wanted her to. She felt a tingle of pleasure just thinking about it. No equipment, no awkward positions, no gels or creams needed. Just Bennie herself, aroused and engorged, sliding her clit up and down inside the slick folds of the woman she loved.

Despite herself she thought of Van and, almost without volition, her hand slipped down to her crotch. Cursing, she pulled her hand back and stuck it into her pocket, where it would do no harm. Van was off limits. Even thinking about Van had to stop. It's not as if anything had ever really happened between them. They'd never even kissed. There was just that almost-kiss, that one time.

Ever since the incident on Van's deck, the day of Patsy's fiftieth birthday party, Van had made it clear that she would have nothing to do with Bennie. She wouldn't return Bennie's phone calls, she wouldn't meet her eyes when they both happened to be at the same social function, and the one time Bennie marched right up to her to confront her about it, Van had just said coldly, "No, Bennie," and turned right around and walked away.

There were times, though, when Van didn't think Bennie was aware, that Van gazed at her with what Bennie swore was a look of love. She would stare at Bennie as if she were seeing not just Bennie, but something more, something bigger and better and precious. Once Bennie even caught Van wiping a tear as she turned away. How was she supposed to forget about Van and move on with her life, seeing *that*?

It was agony.

Bennie grabbed both the blue and the green dildos, along with a small bottle of lube, and stuffed them in her bag. She'd let Lucy decide. That's what tonight was all about, right? Pleasing Lucy? Twenty-eight years old, and Bennie still had never had the nerve to tell a woman about the sort of intimacy she really craved. It was embarrassing.

Toothpaste, clean underwear, and a t-shirt, and she was ready. She ran down the stairs, dropped her backpack onto the back seat of her little old black Volkswagen Beetle, and fired it up. The worst thing about living in Spokane was that she couldn't ride her bike all year around. The roads weren't icy yet, but it was still too cold for a motorcycle. Someday she'd have the money to buy a better babe-mobile than the bug, but at least it was black.

The radio picked up Tracy Chapman singing "Fast Car," and Bennie cranked it up. Her next car would have a CD player, for sure. She was on her way to pick up Lucy and together they'd swing by to get Kendra and take her to the party. Kendra was so funny. Thirty-nine years old, married with kids, and she was sneaking around meeting lesbians, trying to get up the nerve to sleep with one. She'd even come on to Bennie once, but Bennie nipped that right away. Kendra was a friend of Van's. Bennie wasn't about to mark her territory that close to Van.

Kendra would have no problem finding a woman to take her to bed, though. She was beautiful. She wore too much make up, but so did most women. You couldn't convince them that they looked better without it. Kendra actually sold the stuff, Mary Kay Cosmetics, so she probably had to use it as part of her job.

Bennie pulled up in front of Lucy's apartment complex and killed the engine, but left the backpack in the car. That was for later. She took the stairs two at a time up to Lucy's.

The door opened and Lucy stood there, petite and curvaceous, sky blue eyes, and golden curls all the way down to her ass. Which was barely covered by a very short and very tight denim skirt.

"Come in, Bennie. I'm sorry, but I'm not quite ready to go yet."

"That's all right." Bennie stepped inside. "I'm a little early. Take your time."

"Oh, I will." Lucy shut the door. Before Bennie could move, Lucy wrapped her arms around Bennie's neck and slung one leg around the back of Bennie's thighs. Bennie fell against the door as Lucy closed in with a kiss.

Bennie recovered in seconds. She grasped Lucy's ass with both hands, and lifted her up so their groins pressed against each other. Lucy shifted so her legs wound around Bennie's hips and thrust herself hard against her. Bennie's hips jerked. She had a moment to regret the backpack in the car downstairs, but suddenly Lucy broke off the kiss, released her hold, and slid down Bennie's body to land on her knees.

"There's just one more thing I have to do," Lucy whispered. She unbuttoned Bennie's jeans.

"Oh, God," Bennie gasped, as her jeans were pulled down to her knees. Lucy rained soft little kisses on Bennie's belly, her thighs, her hairline. Bennie tried to spread her legs, but they were trapped by the jeans. She couldn't move as Lucy closed in and kissed Bennie's engorged clitoris.

"Oh, God."

Lucy sucked, and Bennie grabbed the doorknob with one hand to hold herself up as her legs threatened to give way. She wrapped her other hand in Lucy's golden hair as her head moved rhythmically at Bennie's crotch. "Ohhh, ohhhhhh, God!" Deep waves thrummed up Bennie's thighs, through her crotch, one after another, and her legs weakened to the point that it seemed the only thing holding Bennie up was Lucy's mouth.

Bennie pushed Lucy's head away when her hips began bucking. She didn't want her thrusts to hurt Lucy. Lucy sat back on her heels, placed her thumb where her mouth had been, and flicked it quickly. She smiled, lips glistening, and watched Bennie come.

When Bennie's legs were strong enough to hold her, she let go of the door knob and reached both hands down to lift Lucy to her feet. The top of her head reached Bennie's shoulder.

"Kendra can wait," Bennie whispered.

Chapter Four

Van -- 1988

"THAT'S OUR TOWER, right there." Sergeant Martin pointed to the tower on Van's right. The catwalk was at least twenty feet high and surrounded the prison yard. The walls of the catwalk were sturdy chain link, and they were reinforced with curls of razor wire on the top. No prisoner would be getting into that catwalk--even if he could scale the wall to reach it--without shedding a little blood.

Van glanced down into the prison yard as they walked. "Will any prisoners be out there?"

"Normally they would be," Martin said, "but not today. We're keeping them all on lockdown, due to Mock Ops."

That hardly seemed fair to the prisoners, but Van was glad of it. The prison was scary enough, even behind the reassuring razor wire, without the thought of murderers and rapists running around below.

The tower was at the end of the catwalk in the northeast corner of the yard. The bottom of it was ten feet higher than the floor of the catwalk. There was no visible means of accessing it, and even if there were, a locked gate stood between the catwalk and the bottom of the tower. Martin pulled his radio from his pocket and pushed the button.

"Tower 4, come in Tower 4, Sergeant Martin here, over."

"Tower 4 here. Sergeant Grogan. Over."

"I'm here with the hostage. Over."

"Coming down. Out."

Van heard a sound and looked up. The tower was a concrete hexagon, with tiny window slits in the sides, like those in a castle. Light might get through those narrow windows, and arrows perhaps, or bullets, but not much else. They were wide enough for a man's hand, though. She watched as one emerged from a slit above her. A thick white rope dropped down. A giant iron key, like the kind seen in old prison movies, dangled from the end of it. Martin took the key, unlocked the gate that blocked the tower, ushered Van through, followed her, and locked the gate behind them. Martin gave the rope two tugs, and it was pulled back up. Van felt like she was being let into the boys' secret tree house.

"It's kind of primitive," she said.

"Sometimes the old ways are the best," Martin said.

They were now inside a chain link and razor wire cage, with the floor of the tower above them.

Another sound made Van look up again. A trap door in the bottom of the tower opened. A face peeked down, followed by a lightweight aluminum ladder. It dropped down about six feet.

Martin reached up and pulled, and the ladder extended another four feet to the ground.

"After you," Martin said.

It was a good thing they let her wear jeans to play hostage. She couldn't possibly have climbed the ladder in a skirt without revealing everything underneath it. She wished she could blow a kiss to Patsy, who she knew was watching, since this was the last time she'd see her until the drill was over. She knew Patsy would be a great negotiator, but she couldn't help being nervous for her anyway. Van contented herself with a quick wave in the direction of the Administration Building, no more than a hundred yards to their right, outside the prison fence. Patsy would know it was for her, and the rest of them would just assume the lady lawyer was being friendly.

Van reached the top of the ladder and poked her head into the tower room. Grogan was there to give her a hand, and she scrambled the rest of the way. Martin followed. Grogan pulled the ladder up, condensing it as he did so, hung it from two rungs on the wall, and closed the trap door.

Sergeant Martin made the introductions. "Sergeant Grogan, this is our hostage. Van--what was it again?"

"Van Hollinger." She held out her hand. "Pleased to meet you, Sergeant Grogan."

"She's also our lady lawyer," Martin said. "So behave yourself."

Grogan smiled and shook her hand, but he also nodded thanks to Martin for the warning, and Van knew they weren't kidding. She was used to the reaction. Despite the fact that she was their lawyer, prison staff still acted like she was out to sue them the minute they weren't looking.

Van turned herself in a circle and took stock of what would be her home for the next several hours. Each side of the tower room was around six feet long. There were two 'windows' in each of the six walls, about four inches wide and two feet tall. They let in a surprising amount of light, but it was still inevitably dim in the room. It didn't help that the walls and floor were unpainted cement and the furniture was dark gray steel. Van's eyes stopped at the far corner.

"Is that the bathroom?" she asked, aghast. It was an uncovered toilet bolted into the wall. Next to it was a tiny ancient porcelain sink with brown rust stains beneath the faucet visible from clear across the room. There were no walls around the toilet, not even a curtain.

"We don't normally get ladies up here," Grogan said.

"We can rig something up, if you need to use it," Martin said hastily. "Maybe move the desk over, or--" He glanced around, at a loss.

"The room's designed to maintain a full clear view in every direction at all times," Sergeant Grogan said, slipping quickly into a professional demeanor. "That's why there can't be any walls around the toilet. You have to be able to see what's going on out there, even when you're, um, busy there."

"I see."

"You'll notice," Martin said, "there's nothing in front of the walls. The furniture's all away from them, and things are stored in the corners here, where they won't block the views. That's so we can get to the wall instantly if we need to, with a binocular or rifle, without having to push anything out of our way."

Van nodded. The room was sparsely furnished. A desk was the largest item. On its surface were a phone, an open log book, a cup with pencils, and a pencil sharpener. A metal swivel stool sat in front of it. A small round table to the side was covered in coffee rings, a napkin dispenser, salt and pepper shakers, and crumbs. Tucked into the nearest corner were a miniature fridge and a shelf with a hotplate, an assortment of plates, and a utensil drawer. On the opposite side of the room was a side table with a pair of binoculars and a rifle on it, and a swivel stool next to it. The two swivel stools were the only places to sit. Except, of course, for the toilet.

Van eyed the backless stools. "They don't want you to get very comfortable up here, do they?"

"Comfort is dangerous, ma'am," Sergeant Grogan said. "This is the last place in the world where you want to be relaxed. Vigilance is the purpose of the tower."

"Call me Van." She peered out the slit in the nearest wall. She had a view into the empty yard. A baseball field, basketball court, picnic tables at one end, and pay telephones mounted to walls underneath an overhang. "Nice. You can see everything from here."

"That's exactly right, ma'am--er, Van," Sergeant Grogan said.

She moved to the other side of the room and looked through a slit facing east. Van saw the large window in the Superintendent's Conference Room in the Administration Building. That room was being used as the War Room today. Patsy was in there, waiting for the games to begin.

Grogan's radio crackled. "Tower 4, come in Tower 4. Over."

"This is Tower 4. Over."

"They're ready. Time to move. Over."

"Copy that. Out." Sergeant Grogan slipped his radio back onto his belt. "Ready?" They nodded.

"It's time to roll."

Chapter Five

Patsy -- 1988

PATSY TRIED NOT to let her nervousness show as she took a seat at the conference table, which was going to serve as Command Central. The War Room. It was crowded with people in uniforms, the sharp navy blue of prison staff, green and gray of the SWAT team, and orange vests of the observers. Patsy wore her ordinary navy blue uniform pants and shirt, with her badge on her chest and her sergeant's stripes on the sleeve. This was a realistic drill, so her dress uniform was unnecessary, she'd decided.

Self-confidence was the most essential attribute for a woman in a man's field, more important than intelligence or strength or charm or beauty. That was one thing she'd learned in her twenty years of prison work. Just like dogs, prisoners smell fear, and so do male coworkers, at least in a prison. They'd pounce at the first sign of fear and either chew it out of you or let it kill you.

She'd started in the women's prison, back in the days when women weren't allowed to work in the men's. When the state passed the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972, they had to let women vie for jobs in the men's prison. Back then the pay was a lot higher in the men's prisons, and the opportunities for promotion were greater too. Patsy was one of the first to make the jump. From the Superintendent on down, they didn't want her there, and they didn't bother to hide it. They put her out in Unit H to start, Hell Unit they called it, where the worst prisoners, short of those in the Hole, were kept. Hell Unit was no place for a new guard, even if she did have experience at the women's prison, and she knew they were hoping she'd fail. But she hadn't. She hadn't let them smell her fear, neither the prisoners nor the guards, and eventually she'd won their respect, at least enough so that she could continue doing her job, and stay alive doing it.

They were still at it, in their own way, and she would not let them smell fear now. Making her 'audition' for the lieutenant's job, that was a new one. But she'd handle it the same way she'd handled Hell Unit. She wouldn't let them smell her fear, and she'd do such a damn fine job of it, they'd have to give her the promotion.

"All right everyone, listen up," Captain Padgett announced from the head of the table. "We have a busy day ahead of us, so let's not waste any time. I want to introduce you to the mastermind of this little shindig, straight from Headquarters, this is Ed Sharp. Ed, you want to say a few words to these folks?"

"Thank you." Sharp was the only person not in uniform except for the superintendent and his secretary. His voice was soft, and everyone quieted so they could hear him. "Thanks ahead of time, everyone, for your participation in this training exercise today. A lot of work goes into a simulation like this, and its success or failure depends entirely on you folks. I just want to remind you, I know you've been told over and over, but I need to say it again, this is a realistic drill. Most of you only know a little bit about what's going to happen today, and you'll find out the rest as the day goes on. Be alert, be flexible, be smart. I already know you're smart, or you wouldn't be in this room. Don't treat this training exercise as a joke. A situation like the one you're going to encounter today could actually happen in this prison. Incidents like this one have happened in other prisons around the country, around the world. Some of them have ended quietly with nobody getting hurt, but some of them ended as disasters. I don't want to say too much, because I don't want to give anything away. Just try to do everything you can to make this drill end without any injuries. Thank you."

There was an awkward rustling as people tried to decide whether to clap, but in the end no one did, and Captain Padgett spoke again, his voice booming after Sharp's. "One thing that's *not* realistic today is that we already ordered donuts. In real life, you know, it'd probably all happen right before lunch or you'd be on the pot or something, when the call came in." Polite laughter greeted the Captain's little joke. "But we're not going to make it *that* realistic. Help yourself to a donut, have some coffee, and go to the bathroom. We'll be starting soon."

But Patsy wasn't given time for a break.

"Breshears, Bryant, meet me in the back," Captain Padgett said. Patsy snagged a maple bar and headed toward the door at the far end of the conference room. Sergeant Bryant, who'd been one of the first black sergeants at the prison, joined her with a glazed in his own hand.

"One of those for me?" Padgett asked, joining them. "Or are you two just thinking about your own bellies?"

Patsy and Bryant exchanged looks and Bryant hesitantly held his donut toward Padgett.

"Oh, forget it," Padgett said, apparently disgusted with the offer. "Get in here." They followed him through the doorway into a small room that adjoined the War Room. "This is Negotiations Central. You can't be in the War Room with the others because it'll get too loud in there.

Breshears, you're the primary negotiator today. Bryant, you'll be secondary. I assume you've studied the manual and have some idea of how this works."

An uneasy thought crossed Patsy's mind. She eyed Bryant speculatively. A woman and a black man. Were they *both* auditioning? Perhaps the decision had already been made that the next lieutenant was going to be a minority, and the only question remaining was which one. Well, at least she was primary negotiator. She'd better be. She had at least fifteen years on Bryant.

"You do the negotiating," Padgett continued, "but I call the shots. Nothing gets decided except through me, you got that? If the hostage takers want a pack of cigarettes, a candy bar, toilet paper, I don't care what it is, you don't promise a thing without checking with me first.

Understand?"

"Yes sir."

"Yes sir."

Patsy knew from her training that Padgett wasn't just on a power trip, though his demeanor suggested he was enjoying it. Checking with the commander before promising anything was a legitimate negotiating tool. For one thing, it helped the negotiator bond with the hostage taker. The negotiator could convince the hostage taker that she was really doing all she could to help him get what he wanted, but that her hands were simply tied by the powers that be, a situation

most hostage takers could easily identify with. It also slowed the pace of negotiations, which was a proven tactic for wearing hostage takers down and keeping hostages alive. For every request, they would have to check with Padgett, and Padgett would have to check with the Superintendent. That was how it worked.

"Breshears, you sit here. You used this equipment before?" Patsy sat in the padded leather swivel chair and examined the equipment on the desk in front of her.

"Yes sir. I'm familiar with it."

"Good. Bryant, you too?"

"Yes sir."

"All right then, get yourselves situated. We'll be starting any minute." Padgett left the room. Negotiator's tools are simple. There was a phone equipped with a headset, mute button, and speaker phone, as well as a tape recorder that would automatically make a record of every conversation that took place on the phone. An empty log book, several pads of paper, and a cup full of sharpened pencils. Patsy knew her writing hand would be cramped by the end of the day, since she was required to log everything that was said and done while the negotiations continued. A copy of the negotiator's handbook was next to the log, open to the checklist for initial contacts. The two-way radio was set to a special frequency that would not be interrupted by other radio calls. As soon as contact was made by telephone, Patsy was supposed to convince the hostage taker to allow a radio to be brought to the room for communication purposes. The radio itself wasn't necessary, but the bug planted inside it was. Once the radio was in the room, she and Bryant and the rest of the command center would be able to listen in on what was happening at the hostage site even when they weren't connected by telephone. Bryant's side of the desk was similarly equipped with an empty log, pencils, and a telephone. As the secondary negotiator, Bryant was primarily responsible for logging events.

Patsy set her maple bar down on its napkin, picked up a pencil, and neatly wrote the date on the top of the first page of the log. It would probably be the last neat writing the log would see.

Bryant sat in the chair beside Patsy's and took a pencil from the cup. "So, uh, did you take the lieutenant's exam?"

"Yep."

Bryant wrote the date at the top of his log as well. "Looks like they pretty much already made up their minds. Making you lead negotiator."

"No. If their minds were made up, neither one of us would be here," Patsy said. "They're making us fucking try out."

Bryant raised his brows. "They don't always do this?"

"Hell, no." Patsy took a bite of her maple bar and, with her mouth full, said, "White boys don't audition."

"Shit," Bryant said without heat. "Don't know why I'm surprised. Hey, something's going on."

Their desks were shoved up against a large plate glass window through which they could see the prison fence, the catwalk, and the tower. Patsy watched Van making her way along the catwalk on top of the prison wall with Sergeant Martin. They reached the gate to the tower and waited for the key to be lowered, then the ladder. Van pushed herself up onto the first rung, stopped briefly, and threw a wave at the Administration Building. Patsy smiled. That wave was for her.

She wanted to laugh at the sight of Van climbing into the tower in her jeans and her old down red coat with the crossed duct tape patch on the back, which made her look for all the world like a marksman's target. She was so happy that morning to be able to wear jeans to work. She'd come a long way since the first time Patsy had met her, more than six years ago now.

Patsy had been sued by a prisoner for--what was it that time? There were so many lawsuits, over the stupidest things. Pruno, that was it. A prisoner had sued her for letting him get drunk on pruno, which caused him to get thrown into the Hole, which made him miss his trailer visit with his wife. He only got one trailer visit a year, his one big chance to have real sex, and he'd missed it, so he had to blame someone. He'd sued Patsy. She didn't do her job properly, he alleged, since she failed to find his hidden stash of pruno when she searched his cell, which is why he became drunk in the first place. Van was assigned to represent her, still so wet behind the ears she didn't even know what pruno was.

"What is pruno?" Van had asked, so earnest and serious in her little black suit and pumps, a soft blue blouse with a big bow at the neck like all women lawyers wore back then to prove they were tough, but feminine. Her red hair was pulled back in a tight French braid, but little curls escaped and framed her face.

"Prison rotgut," Patsy said.

"Rotgut?" Van's forehead wrinkled, but she carefully wrote the word on her yellow legal pad and underlined it.

"Alcohol. They make it with a little fruit, a little bread, some water, put it in a container, and let it ferment."

"Like wine?"

Patsy watched Van write 'fruit+bread+water=ferment' on her pad. "No, not like wine. Wine is good. Pruno tastes like piss." She wondered if Van would write 'piss' on her legal pad, but instead she peeked up at Patsy with a glint of humor.

"You've tasted it?"

Patsy smiled. "Pruno? Or piss?"

Van laughed, and Patsy decided she was adorable. The thought must have shown on her face, because Van suddenly blushed bright red and looked down at her pad, serious again, and she'd asked her next question.

"Someone's coming down from the tower," Bryant said now. "Who is that? Grogan?"

"Yeah," Patsy said. "Makes sense. He's a tower officer."

They both watched as the silent tableau played out before them. Sergeant Grogan climbed down the ladder and unlocked the tower gate, walked through it, and was turning to close it again and lock it when two figures came running toward him from the south end of the catwalk. He wheeled around and they were on him, quickly overpowering him. He crumpled to the ground. One of the 'prisoners' rushed through the gate and leaped for the ladder, which was being pulled back up through the trap door. He caught a rung and pulled it down again while the other 'prisoner' grabbed Grogan's rifle and the key. He sped through the gate, locked it behind him, and followed the other man up the ladder to the tower room. The ladder was pulled up again. Only then did Grogan stumble to his feet and make his way unsteadily along the catwalk, one hand to his head, the other bracing himself against the chain link wall.

"Give the man an Oscar," Patsy said.

"Yeah." They heard some applause from the other room. Command Center was impressed as well.

Padgett stepped through the doorway. "They started a little early," he said. "It doesn't matter. We're ready. Average time between a hostage taking and the first phone contact is normally forty-five minutes, but we're going to play with time today so we can fit everything in. Go ahead, Breshears, make the call."

Patsy put the headset on, her heart suddenly thumping as if this were real, and dialed the four digits to the tower room. Bryant put his headset on as well so he could listen in. They both took careful note of the time in their logs. No one answered the phone.

"No answer," Bryant carefully wrote on the first line of his log.

"That's pretty common," Padgett said. "Hostage takers don't expect the first call. They need to get used to the idea. Try again, Breshears." Patsy dialed again. Sure enough, the phone was picked up this time.

"What!" a man shouted, his voice sharp and high pitched.

"Sir, my name is Patrice Breshears. I'm a sergeant here at the prison. I know something's happening there in the tower room. What's going on?" Patsy was pleased at how calm she sounded. Just like the manual said, the negotiator must remain calm at all times.

"What the fuck you think's going on?" he shrieked, his voice wobbly with tension. "We got hostages! We'll kill 'em! We will! You give us what we want!"

Patsy and Bryant exchanged glances. He gave a thumbs up to show how impressed he was. Patsy nodded. Who would have thought these guys could act so well?

"We don't want anyone to get hurt," Patsy said automatically, then referred to her list. The first task of a negotiator is to try to determine the identity of the hostage taker. Once you know that, background checks can begin, bargaining chips can be developed, family members--sometimes the best friend to negotiators--can be located and brought to the scene to try to convince the hostage taker to surrender. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"You know who I am! You all heard of me! And I'm the one in charge here, you understand me? I'm in charge!"

"I hear you," Patsy said. "But who are you?"

"You know about me! You heard of the Expo Killer!"

Patsy looked at Bryant, puzzled. Of course she knew about the Expo Killer. Everyone did.

Bryant shrugged and wrote, "What is your name?" quickly on a piece of paper.

"I do know about the Expo Killer," Patsy reassured him. "But what is your name?"

"You know my God damn name, bitch! And you know what I fucking want! I ain't talking to you no more."

The line went dead.

Whew! Patsy blew out a breath and sat back. For a first contact that--well, that didn't go so well.

This was going to be more difficult than she thought. And what did he mean about being the Expo Killer? Sure, she knew about the Expo Killer, the most notorious prisoner on death row.

But this was a drill.

And the Expo Killer was real.

Chapter Six

Van -- 1988

THE THIN MAN slammed the phone down and, as if that was his cue, the brawny one removed his suffocating hand from Van's mouth and shoved her hard to the floor, near where Sergeant Martin lay bleeding. This was taking realism too far, Van thought, as she landed on her hands and knees, though with another part of her mind she was aware that this was not, could not, be part of the simulation. Something had gone very, very wrong.

She touched Martin's face. He was very pale, and the wound on his head bled profusely. Van was too familiar with fake blood to mistake it. This blood was real.

"He needs help," she said, looking up. The brawny man was watching the thin man, so Van turned her attention to him as well. "He's badly hurt. For real," she added, as if to convince them this wasn't a drill.

The thin man glanced dismissively at Martin, then stared down with an almost incredulous expression at the rifle he held in his hands.

"We did it, man," the brawny man exulted. "Fuckin' A, we did it. Whoo whoo!" He did a funny little dance, made awkward by his size and odd clothing. They both wore prison guard uniforms, but it was obvious that they weren't in the correct size. The pants on the brawny man were so tight they wouldn't even button and were held up by a straining belt. Only two buttons on the shirt were buttoned, and underneath it Van saw the beige t-shirt all prisoners wore. The thin man fared no better. His pants were far too wide and short, bunched up at his waist and bagging underneath. He too had only buttoned a couple of buttons on his shirt and wore the prisoner t-shirt beneath it. Neither had shoes but instead wore the felt slippers that were standard issue to prisoners housed in isolation. The Hole.

How the hell had they managed to get out of there? And when the prison was on lockdown, no less. But despite the impossibility of it, these were genuine prisoners. The drill had turned real. She was a hostage.

"He needs medical treatment," Van said again. She tried to find a pulse in his neck, but with no luck. He was warm, and the wound on his head still oozed blood, so she assumed he was alive, but that was about the extent of her medical knowledge. "Please."

"Would you shut the hell up?" the thin man screeched suddenly. The phone rang again, and the thin man jumped. He pointed at Van. "Shut her the hell up."

The brawny man pointed Grogan's rifle at Van.

"Not that, you dipwad," the thin man shouted. The phone rang again. "Gag her or something. I can't talk with her yacking away like that."

The brawny man scanned the room and snatched a grimy kitchen towel from a hook beside the hotplate.

"No, no, please," Van said. "I won't talk. Please!"

The phone rang again. Van willed the thin man to answer it. It had to be Patsy. Van wanted to shout at her, let her know this was a real hostage situation or, if Patsy already knew that, to let her know she was all right. But the thin man refused to answer.

The big man found a steak knife and used it to start tears in the dish towel. He ripped it into strips and advanced on Van.

"No," Van pleaded, holding up her hands to ward him off. She felt tears start in her eyes. "I won't talk, please!"

Ignoring her, the brawny man grabbed her hands and jerked them roughly behind her, wrapped the towel strips tightly around her wrists, and used another strip to bind her ankles together. All the while, the phone rang, unanswered, as the thin man stood there, silently watching the other man tie Van up. When Van was immobile, he pulled off her sneakers and socks, baring her feet,

took one of the socks, and jammed it roughly into Van's mouth, tying it tightly into place with the last strip of towel.

Immediately, she couldn't breathe. Her mouth was blocked off and her nose was plugged with tears. Frantically, she tried to push air from her lungs through her nose. After a desperate moment, she was able to get air. She sagged in relief, uncaring about the mucus dripping down her face, thrilled merely with the privilege of being able to breathe.

The phone had stopped ringing.

Don't cry, Van told herself. Whatever you do, don't cry. When you're gagged, crying can kill you. "There." The man stepped back and examined his handiwork, clearly pleased with the sight of Van bound and gagged on the floor before him. "That ought to do it."

Van met his eyes but quickly looked away. Eyes are the windows to the soul, they say. Based on her one short glimpse, this man's soul was already burning in hell.

Just don't cry, she told herself.

Then, like a child, the brawny man clapped his hands twice and, with a cumbersome pirouette, turned to the thin man. "What's next, Stu?"

Stu shot him an annoyed glance but said nothing. He shouldered his rifle, edged sideways up to one of the windows, and peered out.

"What's happening?"

"Nothing yet, as far as I can see," Stu answered.

Van knew that wasn't true. Even if they still thought this was a training exercise, there was plenty of activity out there. SWAT guys were obtaining plans and maps of the tower to assess points of penetration, snipers would be moving into position, and the negotiators would be trying to determine the identities of the hostage takers, gathering profiles, contacting family members, and determining the next move in the negotiation.

On cue, the phone rang.

This time, Stu answered it. "What?" His voice wasn't as high this time. He'd had time to cool down and think a bit.

Through her labored breathing, Van heard a tiny voice on the other end. Patsy. Don't cry. Don't cry.

"I already told you that, bitch! Don't play dumb with me. You know damn well who I am."

He gave a short laugh. "She wants to know who *you* are, Rudy," he said to the other man.

"Should I tell her?" Without giving him a chance to respond, Stu spoke again into the phone,

"Rudy Hedge, from death row, same as me. We both got demands, we got nothing to lose, and we got two hostages. One of 'em's already hurt, so don't think we ain't serious."

He listened a moment, then said in a fake falsetto, "Oh, I'm so glad you understand my *feelings*. I feel so much better now."

Rudy giggled.

Van could not stop the tears. Death row. Stu was right, they had nothing to lose.

Chapter Seven

Patsy -- 1988

PATSY GAVE THE tower the finger, and Bryant stifled a laugh.

"*What a bastard,*" she wrote on a note. Bryant nodded, ripped the note off the top of the pad, crumpled it up, and shoved it into his pocket. At the end of the day they'd have to turn over all notes, no matter how trivial, so when they wrote something they didn't want Padgett to see, they got rid of it immediately. This was the third note Bryant had stuffed in his pocket, and it wasn't even nine o'clock.

This hostage taker was a piece of work. First, he calls himself the Expo Killer, which was definitely not part of the simulation. They never used identities of real inmates. They could get sued for that. Even guys on death row could sue for libel or slander or whatever it was. Van must be spitting bullets listening to this. Then he has to go and be so snotty, making fun of Patsy's attempts to build rapport. Building rapport was one of the first things on the list, damn it.

"I really am trying to understand," Patsy said into the phone. "I want to help you, Stuart. Sorry, I mean, Stu." Who'd think a fake prisoner would get so uptight about his name? "I don't want anyone to get hurt. Any worse," she added quickly, when she remembered that he'd said one hostage was already injured. "But you haven't told me your demands yet."

"What do you think our demands are? We want to live, for Christ's sake!"

Bryant wrote rapidly in his log book. He was already on the third page. Patsy wrote on hers, "*Wants to live--duh.*"

"I unders--" She broke off. That line hadn't worked so well last time. "I mean, I get that. But how--uh, you want to be taken off death row, is that it? You want your sentence changed?"

"No," Stu said. "It's too late for that. We want more, now. Like a helicopter. And a million dollars." The other prisoner spoke in the background. "Two million dollars."

Oh, for God's sake. Where were the demands to talk to a loved one? Demands for political amnesty? Demands for pizza and beer? Those were the examples given in the handbook.

"Okay, let me make sure I got that right," Patsy said slowly, as if his demands were too complex for her to understand the first time. "You want a helicopter and two million dollars. You know, I'll see what I can do, Stu, but I'll have to check with my command about it."

The door from Command opened, and Patsy looked up. It was Padgett, and he was pale and shaking. He opened his mouth to speak, but his words were mere whispers.

"Yeah, you see what you can do, Patrice," Stu said.

Patsy leaned forward to better hear what Padgett was saying.

"It's real," he whispered. He cleared his throat and said more clearly, "It's real. They're real prisoners."

"What?" Patsy asked.

"You heard me!" Stu shouted.

Padgett repeated hoarsely. "They're real prisoners. It's a real hostage situation."

"No." Patsy shook her head, uncomprehending. It couldn't be real. It couldn't be real because Van was over there, and Van wasn't a real hostage.

"What the fuck do you mean, *no*?" Stu shouted, outraged. "You haven't even asked yet."

"No," Patsy said again, her blood chilling in her veins. It couldn't be real. She wasn't a real hostage negotiator, and Van wasn't a real hostage. But then she recalled how realistically the hostage takers had overpowered Grogan, how realistic Stu sounded on the phone, even now, as he yelled at her.

Bryant shook her arm. "Talk to him," he whispered urgently. "*Talk to him*. It's more important now than ever."

Patsy caught her breath. Bryant was right. My God, Bryant was right. Van was over there, she was a hostage, and one of the hostages was already hurt.

"Um, Stu?" Her voice shook uncontrollably.

"What's going on over there?" Stu asked suspiciously. "What are you doing?"

"Uh, I'm sorry, Stu." Patsy tried to regain control of her voice. "It's just, bear with me. This is my first time being a hostage negotiator."

"So? It's my first time taking hostages."

"Stu, you said one of the hostages was hurt? Which one, Stu? How badly?"

"Real bad," Stu said with relish. "He'll probably die if he doesn't get help soon, so you better get that helicopter here right away, and the money. Hop to it, Patrice."

The line went dead.

He. '*He'll probably die*,' he'd said. It wasn't Van. Through her terror, Patsy felt immense relief. She removed the headset and placed it carefully on the stand, then swiveled her chair slowly around and stared numbly at Padgett.

"They found Grogan unconscious," Padgett explained rapidly. "Just out of our line of sight, apparently, he keeled over. No one knew it wasn't an act. It was the guys who were supposed to be the hostage takers who found him. We all wondered why it started so early."

"But we're on lockdown," Bryant said. "How'd they get out when we're on lockdown?"

"It backfired on us," Padgett said. "These guys are on death row. They're always isolated, so the lockdown didn't affect them. They must have heard about the drill somehow. They overpowered the guards and took their uniforms. Because of the lockdown, we were on no-movement, so none of the gates were watched as closely as they normally are. These guys knew what they were doing."

Patsy hardly listened. She was replaying conversations with Stu in her head. They'd kill the hostages, he said. They had nothing to lose. They were on death row. And it was all true. Why had it been so silent in the background? Patsy hadn't given it any thought before. She'd assumed it was Van's role to be silent when they were on the phone. But if she was really a hostage, why didn't she call out for help? How were they keeping her quiet?

With a groan, Patsy dropped her head onto her hands, then jerked it up again as the phone rang. It was the tower.

She wheeled her chair rapidly away from the desk, holding her hands up before her and shaking her head. "No, I can't. I can't do it. I can't!" Not with Van as a hostage, not for real. "I'm not a real negotiator."

A hand clamped down on her shoulder, stopping her backward roll. "Breshears," Padgett said sternly, "you're the closest thing we have. This is too important for you to get all nervous now." Nervous. Oh God. Patsy gave a shaky laugh.

Meanwhile, the phone continued to ring, and finally Bryant picked it up.

"Hello, Stu," he said. "No, no, don't hang up. You got the right number. She--" Bryant looked over his shoulder at Patsy, who still adamantly shook her head. "She had to step away from the phone for a minute. Can I help you? My name's Thomas Bryant and I'm the other negotiator." Bryant slumped in his chair and put the phone down. "He hung up. He said he'll only talk to Patrice."

Patsy gazed at the tower. She imagined she could see movement through the little windows, though she knew it was impossible. What were they doing over there? Was Van okay?

There was only one way to find out.

Slowly, reluctantly, Patsy wheeled her chair back over to the desk, picked up the headset, and settled it over her ears. She dialed the four digits to the tower room, and when Stu picked up the phone, she said calmly, "Sorry, Stu, I had to go to the bathroom. What do you need?"

Chapter Eight

Kendra -- 1988

"PAUL." KENDRA'S VOICE was firm, assertive, confident. "I need to get something off my chest."

No, that wouldn't work. Paul would just smile and say, "Here, let me help you," and reach for the buttons of her blouse.

She kept one eye on *All My Children* as she folded the top of the white paper bag over two times, stapled the order sheet to it, set it aside on the dining room table, and reached for the next order.

Eyeliners, Blue Midnight. Foundation, Desert Dusk. Lipstick, Shimmering Cherry. Oh, Shimmering Cherry, that was a good one. Kendra had ordered one of those for herself. She rifled through the boxes on the dining room table and slipped the items into the bag.

"Paul," she tried again, holding an eyeliner pencil out for emphasis. "I have to tell you something. I love you very much, but the problem is you have a penis."

Hm, that was perhaps a bit abrupt. Maybe she should ease into it a bit more gently. Besides, she didn't mind the penis, really. The problem wasn't the penis itself, it was just that it wasn't attached to a woman.

"I like women," she said earnestly to Erica Kane, who spoke with equal earnestness to someone off screen. Erica would understand, Kendra thought. Well, maybe not the liking women part, but she would definitely understand how a marriage could fail, even with a husband as nice as Paul. Erica had been married how many times already? Sometimes things just didn't work out, no matter how hard you tried.

A soft smile flitted across Kendra's face as she thought about last night. So many beautiful women at that party, and several of them had flirted with her, some outrageously so. Like that tall, athletic woman with the perky little titties. Some women have boobs. Some women have breasts. This woman had titties. She wore a tight ribbed tank top, the cotton so thin you could see the rim of her areolas right through it, no bra. She came up to Kendra, chest thrust out, and 'accidentally' brushed her nipples right across Kendra's arm even before she introduced herself. Then she played dumb and acted like she hadn't done anything, but Kendra didn't let her get away with that.

"You need a license to drive those things?" she'd asked, crossing her arms and staring boldly at the woman's nipples. The woman's smile faltered, and she looked uncertain for a moment, but then Kendra smiled at her and she relaxed, laughed, and followed Kendra around, smitten, for the rest of the evening.

Kendra ignored her for the most part, acted cool, but the truth was she really did want to reach out and touch those titties. She wanted to stroke them, pinch them, lick, kiss, and rub them. Oh, God. She was getting hot just thinking about those damn nipples, and she couldn't even remember the woman's name. Sheila? Sharon? Something like that. Kendra really just needed to get laid. By a woman. But first, she needed to do something about Paul.

That woman Bennie brought with her sure was cute. Lucy. It was obvious she only had eyes for Bennie. Too bad for Lucy, though. Kendra hadn't known Bennie very long, but she'd figured out early on that, although Bennie would take her pleasure where she could get it, her heart was out of reach. She was stuck on Van.

Kendra sighed, stapled the top of the bag, and reached for the next order. Four lipsticks, Kissed Carnation. Why four all the same? Oh, it was Mrs. Packard. She had four granddaughters, and she always bought them the same thing, so they wouldn't argue. Unfortunately, they all had different coloring. Kissed Carnation would look great on the darker girls, but Angela was going to be all washed out. Kendra could never convince Mrs. Packard to buy them different colors. "I don't have any favorites," she insisted. Poor kids.

Kendra rummaged for the Kissed Carnation. It was too bad Bennie was so hung up on Van. Seventeen years was a pretty big difference in age, and besides, Van was with Patsy. Maybe those weren't insurmountable problems, but they weren't negligible ones either. But Bennie was only twenty-eight. Not a baby, but still too young to understand that the best thing she could do was open her heart and move on with her life. There was no point in yearning over someone you couldn't have.

Like Jill, for instance. Sure, Kendra was interested in Jill. And yes, she was pursuing her in a *friendly* kind of way. But Kendra wasn't going to waste the sexual peak of her life yearning over someone who may not reciprocate her feelings for years, if ever. After all, Van's message from Old Kendra, as Kendra thought of her future self, simply was that Kendra shouldn't be afraid to take a chance on Jill, that she was worth it. But that future only existed when Van had disappeared for twenty years. It stood to reason that Jill would have been profoundly affected by Van's disappearance, since it was her fault, and that without that event in her life Jill would turn out differently.

Maybe, Kendra thought, she wouldn't even like Jill if she got to know her better. She certainly wasn't going to wait around for Jill when so many luscious lovely women were eager to give Kendra what she wanted. After she figured out what to do about Paul, that is. And she'd better figure it out soon. Before long, the new orders were going to dry up, and Paul was going to realize that those weren't make-up sales parties Kendra was going to two or three times a week. "Paul," she said as she firmly stapled Mrs. Packard's order to the package, "I like girls." Suddenly *All My Children* was interrupted for a breaking news announcement, and Kendra glanced up at the eager young man on the screen.

"This just in. There's a hostage situation going on at the Eastern Washington State Prison. Three guards have been injured and transported to local hospitals. There is no word yet on their conditions. One source said that two hostages are being held in a prison tower. Two prisoners are unaccounted for and are suspected of holding the hostages. One of those prisoners is the notorious Expo Killer, the man convicted of killing a police officer at our own Worlds' Fair in 1974. As this station reported first last week, the Expo Killer's final appeal has been denied, and he is scheduled to be executed next month. This has been breaking news. Watch for the complete story on the News at Noon. We will now return you to your regularly scheduled program."

Eastern Washington State Prison. Wasn't that where Patsy worked? Jill should know about this. Kendra glanced at the clock. Jill would be at work for several hours still. Someone needed to tell her what was going on. Kendra reached for her purse and found the little red leather address book inside. She had only called Jill at work once, and she'd received such a cold reception that she'd never dared do it again. The lab where Jill worked had an unpublished number, and Jill had only given it to Kendra after she'd begged, "For emergencies." This was one, she told herself. "Jill Durgan, please," she told the receptionist.

"One moment."

Kendra drummed her manicured fingers on the table while she waited, watching the light reflect off the opalescent polish. The thought crossed her mind that maybe she was making this out to be more urgent than it really was, creating an excuse to call Jill just so she could get her attention for a moment. But she'd never been that sort of girl. Oh God, she hoped she wasn't turning into that sort of girl.

"Jill here."

"Jill! Hi, this is Kendra."

"Oh. Hi, Kendra." She wasn't happy Kendra had called, Kendra could tell it from her voice.

"Listen," she said quickly, before Jill could cut her off. "I know you don't like to be bothered at work, but this is important. Doesn't Patsy work out at Eastern Washington State Prison?"

"Yes."

"Well, there's a hostage situation going on out there. It was just on the news."

"Oh, that's not real," Jill said. "It's just a drill."

"What?"

"Patsy told us about it last night. Mock Ops, they call it. It's just for practice."

"But it was just on the news," Kendra said, confused. "They're reporting it like it was real."

"Huh." Jill seemed to find Kendra's news mildly interesting. "They're going to be embarrassed when the truth comes out."

"Yeah, but, Jill, they said three guards have been taken to the hospital."

"Huh," Jill said again after a moment of silence. "That's taking it pretty far for a drill."

"So it might be real," Kendra suggested, still unable to disbelieve the television news.

"No," Jill said. "It's what they call a realistic drill. They wouldn't even give Van a blanket yesterday when she was freezing because there wasn't really supposed to be a blanket there. They must have decided to transport the guards to the hospital for realism."

"What was Van doing there?"

"She was supposed to observe," Jill said. "She had to be there anyway, because she's their lawyer, but Patsy got her in as one of the hostages."

"*What?*"

"It's not real, Kendra," Jill repeated. "Don't worry about it."

Kendra sighed and rolled her eyes at Jill's crude attempt at reassurance. "Sure, all right. I'm sorry I bothered you at work."

"No, you didn't. I mean, that's all right. I mean, I'm glad, uh, if this was real, I'd be glad. I mean, I'd want you to call me."

Kendra thought a moment. "Well then, you're welcome, Jill."

She heard a tiny breath of laughter from the other line and felt like she'd won a prize.

"Thank you, Kendra."

"Bye, Jill."

"Bye."

Kendra hung up the phone and smiled.

Chapter Nine

Patsy -- 1988

"THEY JUST BROUGHT me a nice sandwich over here, Stu," Patsy said, eyeing the thick roast beef with a feeling of nausea. How could she possibly eat, knowing that Van could not? "It made me realize you must be hungry too. You want us to send some sandwiches over there?"

There was a pause, and Patsy thought maybe this time she had him hooked. Normally the tower guards brought their lunches up with them and kept them in the little refrigerator, but today was Mock Ops. One of the perks of participating in a Mock Ops hostage scenario was that the hostage takers got to negotiate for food for themselves and the hostages, and they usually negotiated for a feast. Today there would be little, if any, food in the tower. If Stu allowed them to deliver food, maybe they could slip the bug into it somehow.

Patsy had failed completely at convincing Stu to let them deliver the bugged radio. Without a bug up there, they were still in the dark about the condition of the hostages. Hostages. God! That was *Van* up there with those assholes. Once again, as she had done numerous times in the last three hours, Patsy tamped down the panic. She could not let her feelings guide her actions here. She had to stay calm. The best hope for Van was a peaceful ending to the hostage situation, and the best hope for a peaceful ending was a successful negotiation. And Stu refused to negotiate with anyone but Patsy.

"We don't want no sandwiches," Stu said sullenly.

"What is it you want?" Patsy felt a surge of hope. "We can order something."

After a low exchange with the other hostage taker, who they'd learned was named Rudolph "Rudy" Hedge, Stu came back on the line. "We want Papa Joes."

"Papa Joes? You mean, from Zips? You want hamburgers?"

"Yeah, they still got Zips out there, don't they? The hamburger with ham on it. It's called a Papa Joe, ain't it?"

"Uh, yes, yes, Zips is still here. Good choice. Papa Joes are excellent."

"Yeah, we want four of them, two for each of us, and lots of fries. With tarter sauce. And a couple of Cokes."

Bryant scrawled the order on a page of the log.

"And what about for the hostages?" Patsy asked in a matter of fact voice, and held her breath.

"Oh yeah." Stu sighed thoughtfully, and said, "Okay, make it five. The guy ain't hungry right now. Five Papa Joes."

Van doesn't like Papa Joes, Patsy thought, as she watched Bryant write it down. She thinks ham has no business being in a hamburger. Van should speak up right about now, ask for a cheeseburger instead, with extra pickles, like she always orders. Why doesn't she say something? Why doesn't she tell them? But it was silent on the other end.

"Okay, Stu," Patsy said, getting down to business. "We're ordering the food, but before we bring it to you we need to know that the hostages are all right. Let me talk to one of them."

"Fuck you." He hung up the phone.

Patsy took the headset off and placed it on the desk with shaking fingers. "Stu doesn't like to be told what to do."

Bryant passed the food order to Padgett, who handed it off to someone in the next room. "Call it in," Padgett barked, "and take a police escort. I want that food back here in twenty minutes!" He accepted some papers from another officer and returned to the negotiator's room. "Finally got the history on Rudy Hedge." He skimmed the paper, shook his head, and handed it to Patsy.

Bryant read over Patsy's shoulder as she read the report. "Oh Christ," Bryant said softly. When Patsy made no move to flip to page two, he took the report from her nerveless fingers, and continued reading. "Assault, rape, murder. Jesus, this guy's a real winner."

Patsy stared unseeing at her lap. Her attempts at quelling her panic were growing more feeble. They'd already known Stu's history, given the publicity of his crime and the recent denial of his death sentence appeal. Stuart Shannon had killed a police officer at Expo 74, Spokane's World's Fair, fourteen years ago. Prior to that he'd only had some petty drug offenses. He would never have been sentenced to death for his single conviction of first degree murder, except that his victim had been a police officer, a fact Stu apparently hadn't known until afterwards. The law was clear, though. The sentence for killing a police officer was death. Stu had fought it for years in the courts, claiming he was innocent, but his last appeal to the Supreme Court had been denied just weeks before. Stu was going to hang.

But at least Stu was a logical thinker. He could be reasoned with. He'd ordered a hamburger for Van, after all.

Rudy, on the other hand, was a psychopath.

Chapter Ten

Van -- 1988

VAN LAY ON her side with her eyes closed, concentrating on breathing just enough to stay alive. The sock pressed against the back of her throat and gagged her, making breathing difficult. Once, she'd gagged so strongly she thought she might throw up. Panic stricken, she'd quelled the impulse and forced herself to take the tiny shallow breaths allowed by her constricted throat. Even if Stu or Rudy noticed or cared, she didn't trust either of them to move quickly enough to remove the gag to prevent her from choking on her own vomit. So she lay as still as possible, concentrating on nothing but taking one tiny breath after another.

Stu had ordered her a hamburger. Never mind that it was a Papa Joe. She could always pick off the ham. She wasn't hungry, but ordering the burger meant he didn't intend to keep her gagged forever. She couldn't eat with a sock in her mouth.

She heard movement. She opened her eyes and saw Stu moving toward her. He must have been thinking the same thing. He stooped before her and wrestled with the knot at the back of her head.

"What are you doing?" Rudy asked.

"She can't eat with a sock in her mouth."

"Why are you feeding her?"

"We don't want her to die on us, Rudy. Hostages are no good dead."

The band around her head loosened, and Stu stood and moved away. Van shook her head and thrust with her tongue at the sock, but it was stuck. She breathed in deeply through her nose and coughed and was finally able to dislodge the sock enough to spit it out.

The relief was immense. Van rolled onto her back, stared at the ceiling, and took in huge gulping breaths. She felt the oxygen soak into her bloodstream and muscles like water soaking into a sponge. She savored the air and the relief. *Hostages are no good dead.* Heavenly words.

But now that she could breathe, other complaints made themselves known. Her mouth was unbearably dry, her head pounded from lack of oxygen, her shoulders ached from being pulled behind her back, the ties binding her wrists cut painfully into her flesh, and she couldn't feel her hands at all. And she had to pee.

She sat up, using the wall behind her as a prop. More alert now, with the influx of oxygen, she looked at her captors.

Rudy stood at the window that faced the Administration Building, a rifle propped against his massive thigh, and smoked a cigarette he'd found in Sergeant Martin's pocket. As Van watched, he lifted the rifle, pointed it out the window, and said, "Pow."

"No shooting yet," Stu said.

"I'm just pretending."

"Fine. Just hold off on the real stuff, okay?"

Rudy shrugged and lifted the rifle again. "Pow."

"Can I get a drink of water?" Van asked. Her voice was raspy. She addressed her question to Stu. He was obviously the one in charge.

Stu hesitated a moment, then went to the grungy sink and turned on the cold water tap. A trickle of water dripped out. He nodded Van over.

Using the wall, she squirmed her way up to her feet. Her ankles were not as tightly bound as her wrists. She moved one foot, then the other, and was able inch her way to the sink. She leaned over and tucked her head into the sink with her mouth directed upward to catch the water. She lapped like a dog, slurping in as much air as water. When she could hold no more, she stood up again, belched the air she had swallowed, and said softly, "Excuse me."

Stu turned off the water and nodded at her spot on the floor, where the gag and sock still lay.

Van hesitated. "I need to use the bathroom." She'd had too much coffee that morning, and holding it in was becoming painful. Both men had already used the toilet once, standing before it to urinate thick yellow streams. Stu had flushed, but Rudy hadn't.

Stu looked thoughtful for a moment, as if trying to think how Van's request could be accomplished.

"Will you untie me?" she asked.

Stu shook his head. "I'm not untying you for that." Hesitantly, he reached out to unbutton the top of her jeans.

"Let me do it," Rudy said quickly.

"No!" Van shot a pleading look at Stu. Rudy gave her the creeps.

"C'mon, Stu," Rudy pleaded. "So far this hasn't been any fun at all."

Stu made an exasperated sound, but back away and waved Rudy forward. "But no touching," he warned, chilling Van with his need to give such a directive.

Van shrank back as Rudy advanced on her, but with her hands tied behind her, there was nothing she could do. Rudy crouched in front of her and set the rifle on the floor beside him. He grinned up at Van, stuck his tongue out and wagged it back and forth, dampening the paper of the cigarette he had clenched between his teeth, and reached for her waist. Van shuddered and closed her eyes. She felt his hands unbutton her jeans and draw the zipper down. He tucked his fingers over the waistband on both sides of her hips and tugged at her jeans. Her panties came part way down as well, but got stuck halfway. Van opened her eyes to see Rudy dip one finger over the elastic band of the panties to pull those down too.

"No touching," Van whispered.

Rudy's eyes swiveled up to meet Van's, and she shuddered. Words were not necessary to convey the message she saw in his eyes. Quite clearly, if Stu hadn't been there, Rudy would have done whatever he wanted with her, and if she didn't like it, he'd enjoy it all the better.

Quickly, Van sat on the toilet. Of course, as badly as she had needed to pee only a moment before, suddenly she could not. She closed her eyes and willed herself to forget where she was, forget that Rudy was watching her, and finally she was able to let loose a stream. When she was finished, she stood up and silently endured Rudy pulling her panties and jeans back up, grateful that he hadn't thought to offer to wipe her. She couldn't have borne that.

Stu watched them from the stool he'd carefully placed upon the trap door in the floor. He wasn't going to let anyone surprise them from below. Mercifully, he seemed to have forgotten about the gag. Van hobbled back to the spot where she'd lain for so long, next to Martin, who lay pale and unconscious still. She slid down the wall to sit next to him.

Her head no longer pounded so vigorously. She wasn't thirsty, she didn't have to pee, and she could breathe. Her shoulders and wrists still ached, and she still could not feel her hands, but on the whole, she was in a much better position than she had been a few minutes earlier. Feeling almost cheerful, she watched Stu shift his gaze repeatedly from her to Martin to Rudy to the phone.

She contemplated starting a conversation with Stu. She'd learned enough from Mock Ops to know that hostages were more likely to survive if they were able to make friends with the hostage takers. But she was afraid. If she said something, Stu might remember the sock. So they sat in silence. Stu, Rudy, Van, and Martin, and waited for their Papa Joes to arrive.

Chapter Eleven

Inez -- 1988

INEZ TOSSED NINETY-SIX ungraded essays on the similarities and differences between the armies of the North and the South during the Civil War onto the passenger seat of her white Ford Festiva. She tucked herself into the driver's seat and zipped out of the teachers' parking lot as fast

as the tiny car could zip. She was so *sick* of eighth graders. Why did they have to challenge every single solitary thing she said or did?

"Take out your books," she would say.

"Why?" They whined. "How come we never get films? Mr. Peterson shows films every day."

"Open your books to page seventy-nine," she said.

"Seventy-nine! We already read this page. How come we gotta read it again?"

"Take out your notebooks."

"But you said we were gonna use our notebooks on Friday," they argued. "Today's only Tuesday. You never said we had to bring our notebooks on *Tuesdays*."

"The sky is blue," she said occasionally, just to test them.

Without pause, the challenges came fast and easy. "Uh uh, Miss Schafer, it's more gray. There's clouds all over it. The sky's not really blue anyway, it's just a reflection from all the water on the Earth."

For crying out loud. Why did everything have to be so blasted *hard* all the time?

Then, as she found herself doing more and more frequently these days, as soon as she was free from the mind-consuming pressures of school, she thought about Grace. From Grace, her thoughts entered their customary spiral into despondency about her life. Her love life, to be exact. Or the lack thereof, to be precise.

She was the only fifty-year-old woman she knew who had never--*never*--had a genuine long-term relationship with another person. And she wasn't very picky about what counted as a genuine long-term relationship. Living together in the same home for a year or more would count. But in all her fifty years, Inez had never managed to do it. She'd made it nine months once. She'd thought that one was really it, until the day that Marcie came home and told her she was moving out because it really wasn't working out between them, was it? Inez had been stunned.

Okay, she'd recovered from Marcie pretty quickly, it turned out, which suggested that Marcie may have been right. Inez must not have been in love with her as much as she'd thought. But *why*? And then there was Tracy, just last year. They'd only dated a few months, but what months those were. So much passion, so much fun, so much *love*. Yes, she had truly cared about Tracy, truly loved her, trusted her. And then Tracy had abruptly left her for another woman. That one really took a toll. And again, *why*? No one else seemed to have this problem. Obviously, there was something wrong with her. She didn't know what it was, but there had to be something. Jill was fifty as well, and she'd never had a genuine long-term relationship either. But that was different. Jill never even tried. No one could say the same of Inez. Lord knows, she tried. That old saying about getting back up on the horse every time it bucked you off--Inez took that to heart. No matter how many times she got knocked down, she got right back up and dated someone else. Until recently, she'd never had any difficulty finding someone else to date. Now that she was fifty, though, it seemed there weren't nearly as many eligible women around eager to date her. Her throat tickled, and she sniffed. Must be getting a cold.

She knew what they all thought of her at school. She was the spinster schoolmarm of *Little House on the Prairie* days. The Eliza Jane Wilder of 1988. Of course, she wasn't 'out' at school. At least once a year some well-meaning soul would try to set her up on a date with a man they knew. It used to be their sons, their nephews, their friends, but more often now it was their widowed brothers-in-law, their divorced cousins, their recently released (but he didn't do it!) uncles. She always said no, she wasn't interested, and they walked away puzzled but resigned to her oddness. Asexual, that's what they thought of her. If only they knew.

Grace gave her hope, though. It wasn't just that she liked Grace, or was attracted to her, or felt they were destined to be soul mates, though all that was true. Inez had felt all those things before, many times, for women who turned out to be dead wrong for her. She didn't trust her feelings any more, which is why she was fairly indiscriminate about who she dated. Like Kendra. What the heck had she been thinking *there*? No, her hope about Grace stemmed from what Van saw when she took her trip into the future last summer. Van saw that Inez and Grace actually had a genuine long-term relationship. A *real* relationship for fifteen years. If it could happen in that reality, why not now?

Inez understood that the future Van saw wasn't necessarily the future that was going to occur. It couldn't be. For one thing, that future Inez never would have spent so much time mooning over Grace! She was only doing so now because Van had given her a hint that the type of relationship she longed for was possible with Grace. If, in Van's alternate reality, Inez and Grace had a genuine long-term relationship, that meant, didn't it, that there was really nothing wrong with Inez?

She felt tears of self-pity gather in the corners of her eyes, and her sinuses filled. She was so pathetic. She heard her mother's singsong voice in her head. "Poor little Eeyore. Nobody likes you, everybody hates you, might as well go out and eat worms." It used to make her so *angry* when her mother sang that to her. And really, what a horrible song to sing to a child. But Inez had to acknowledge that she did have a tendency to indulge in grand bouts of self-pity at times. Impatient with herself, she wiped her eyes, cranked up the radio, and jabbed at buttons, searching for something to distract her.

"Why does every song have to be about love?" she shouted out inside her car. "Doesn't anybody ever think about anything else?" In desperation, she switched to the AM frequency. Religion? No. News? No. Sports? No.

Wait, what was that? She pushed the button back to find the news station again.

"--was intended to be a simulated training exercise, but apparently two of the prisoners learned of it and managed to create an actual hostage situation. The prison won't confirm the identities of the hostages, but it appears that one is a guard and one is a civilian who was participating in the training exercise. Again, one of the prisoners is the notorious Expo Killer, whose final death sentence appeal was denied last month. We'll bring you more news on this developing story as we learn it. Now back to your regular programming."

Inez was nearly home, but she whipped her little car into a u-turn and headed immediately toward Jill's house. A civilian participating in the training exercise? Oh, dear Lord, dear Lord, were any civilians participating in the training exercise except *Van*?

Jill lived in Hillyard, a former railroad town that had incorporated itself into the city of Spokane fifty years earlier. The neighborhood consisted of mostly old, small, and functional houses, intended for hardworking railroad employees with small but steady salaries. Jill's house was smaller than most, a shotgun house with just one bedroom and a living room on one side of the center hallway, and a kitchen and bathroom on the other. It didn't matter to Jill. All she did in it was sleep and store her clothing and some food. Most of her time was spent in the shop out back. The shop was easily twice as large as the house. It had initially been a tiny one-car garage, but Jill had knocked down a wall and expanded it until it nearly consumed the back yard. Inside she had a carpeted living area with a couch, television, and stereo, a kitchenette with a mini refrigerator, a microwave oven, a toaster, and a hot plate, and a bathroom with a toilet, sink, and shower. But by far the largest part of the shop was devoted to RIP, Jill's time travel machine. Rapid Intertemporal Projector was Jill's official name for it, but everyone who knew about it just

called it RIP. From the outside, it looked just like a pick-up camper, which is how it had started its life. Inside, though, it was nothing like a camper.

Jill's car wasn't in her driveway when Inez got there, but a light blue minivan was parked out front. Inez pulled up behind it and got out. A couple of kids rough-housed inside the minivan. As she watched, one of them hit the other over the head with a McDonald's Happy Meal bag. Fries fell out, and the other kid dived for the floor to retrieve them. The driver's door opened and Kendra hopped out.

"Jill's not home yet," Kendra said. "Have you talked to her? Did you hear about the prison?"

"I heard it on the radio. That's why I'm here."

"You haven't talked to Jill? Or Patsy?" Kendra asked anxiously. "I called Jill earlier, but she said it was just a drill. It doesn't sound like a drill to me."

"You talked to Jill? At work?"

"Yes, but that was before the news said it was a drill that went bad. Jill told me not to worry about it, but I can't help it. It sounds real to me."

"There was a drill." Inez wondered how Kendra had managed to get Jill to cough up her work phone number. "Patsy and Van told us about it last night."

"So you haven't talked to Jill today?"

"No," Inez said. "I haven't talked to Jill." She couldn't have called Jill even if she'd wanted to, since Jill had never given Inez her work number. "It could still be part of the drill. Maybe the news people are confused."

The minivan, which had never been still, gave a sudden lurch as the children inside leaped from one side to the other. Kendra swung around and opened the sliding door on the side. "Are you done eating? Okay, then get out, run around, lose some of that energy." What sounded like half a dozen shrieking boys erupted from the van, though it turned out to be only two, both younger than the boys Inez taught. They galloped down the sidewalk. "Stay on this block!" Kendra yelled after them. She turned back to Inez and continued, as if there'd been no interruption. "I first heard it on the news before noon. If it was a mistake, wouldn't they have corrected it by now?"

Despite her misery only moments before at the thought of her solitary life, Inez sent up a silent brief prayer of thanks that she'd only dated Kendra a couple of times before that budding relationship shriveled on the vine. Kendra was beautiful, no doubt about that, with her golden wavy hair and magnificent figure, but she was still married to a man, for crying out loud, and those *boys*. Inez couldn't bear the thought of working with eighth graders all day long and coming home to those wild young boys. On top of that was Kendra's annoying habit of asking these pesky questions, as if Inez had any more information than she did.

"How would I know? They've made mistakes before."

"Yeah," Kendra agreed doubtfully. "I wish Jill would get home."

Fortunately, before Inez could snap that Jill would know no more than she did, Jill's Chevy Suburban rounded the corner and pulled into her driveway. Inez suspected her Festiva would fit inside Jill's Suburban three or four times over, but Jill apparently needed the large vehicle to haul mysterious equipment, supplies, and parts for RIP. Jill stepped down from the rig, glanced at Kendra who hurried toward her, and looked at Inez. Jill typically wore a serious expression, but the concern on her face as she met Inez's eyes confirmed Inez's worst fears. Inez moved toward the pair, noting with part of her mind the way Kendra placed her hand on Jill's arm and the way Jill absently let her, as if she were used to it.

"You think it's real?" Inez asked.

"I think so," Jill said.

"Fuck," Kendra said, her fingers clutching Jill's sleeve. "I told you so."

Jill patted Kendra's hand in silent acknowledgement. "Let's turn on the TV." Without glancing at the house, Jill unlocked the front door to the shop and led the way in. She turned on the TV, and they all sank onto the couch, Kendra in the middle. They watched in stunned silence as the story unfolded before them. All three local news stations were covering the story, and they switched from one to the other to try to glean as much information as they could.

Inez finally spoke. "Has anyone tried to call Patsy? We're just assuming the hostage is Van. Maybe it's not."

Jill inclined her head in unspoken permission toward the bright red wall phone, so old it still had a dial. Inez pushed herself up and moved, slowed by dread, to the phone. If the hostage wasn't Van, wouldn't one of them have called? She dialed Patsy and Van's number and listened to it ring. Eventually the answering machine picked up.

"This is Inez. I'm over at Jill's. Call us when you get in." She hung up and returned to the vigil on the couch.

It grew dark as they watched. At one point the boys came in, breathless and sweaty. They were apparently familiar with Jill's shop. They used the bathroom, got a drink of water, grabbed a paper towel to wipe their faces. One of them plopped down on the floor in front of the television and watched the news along with the adults without comment. The other, the littler one, roamed around the living area and gazed longingly at the workshop where RIP and an assortment of interesting tools resided, but he didn't venture there. Apparently ground rules had already been established. Finally he settled himself with a box of what appeared to be broken glass tubes and began sorting them into configurations on the floor.

"Kevin, leave those alone," Kendra said.

Jill glanced over at him. "It's all right. Those are already broken. He can't hurt them."

"I'm more concerned about *them* hurting *him*," Kendra said dryly.

Jill looked surprised and then embarrassed as she accepted Kendra's gentle reprimand. Inez watched the interplay with interest. There was more going on between these two than she'd realized. She suspected Jill herself had no idea how far Kendra had insinuated herself into Jill's life, and how easily and naturally Jill was letting her. Inez felt a renewed pang of self-pity. That would leave only me, she thought. She gave herself a mental shake. As if that mattered right now.

Eventually it grew too dark for the television cameras trained on the tower to pick up anything but an occasional glimmer of light, and finally, one by one, the stations gave up. They announced that they would be returning to regularly scheduled programming, but would break in as soon as there was new information to report about the hostage situation.

Kendra rose from the couch with a sigh. "I should take these boys home. Kevin, pick those things up. Don't cut yourself."

Suddenly the phone rang, and they all jumped. Jill rose quickly and practically lunged for it.

"Hello?" She listened a moment and slumped against the wall. "Oh, hi, Grace."

Inez caught her breath. She rose quickly and went to stand next to Jill. "Let me talk to her." She gestured urgently for Jill to hand over the phone.

Jill turned her back on Inez. "We don't know anything for sure, but we think one of the hostages is Van. She was going to be part of the drill."

Inez followed Jill around in a circle and again gestured for the phone. She heard Grace's voice, high pitched with concern.

"Patsy was part of the drill too," Jill said. "She was the negotiator. We haven't heard from either one of them." Jill brushed Inez's frantic hands aside. "I don't know. Stop it, Inez! Yeah. Here, I'm going to let you talk to her." She thrust the phone at Inez.

Inez took it gratefully. "Hi, Grace."

"Inez? Are you okay?"

The simple question took Inez's breath away. With all that was going on, amid the great worry about Van and Patsy, Grace's first thought was to ask Inez if *she* was okay. "I'm fine. We're worried, but we haven't actually heard that it's Van."

"You sound--have you been crying?"

"No, no, I'm just a little stuffed up."

"Oh. Waverly's going to die if it turns out it's Van."

"Is Waverly there?"

"No, but she's on her way over. I called her when I saw it on the news and remembered that Patsy works at a prison. I wondered if Patsy might be involved, but it never occurred to me Van would be there too."

"Maybe it's not her," Inez said again.

"Nobody's answering their phone."

"Yeah."

"Is there anything we can do? For you, or for them? I know Waverly will want to do whatever she can."

"I don't know what anyone can do right now. Just watch and pray."

"What about their dog? Can we go check on their dog?"

"Sadie! I never thought of her. Yeah, someone needs to take care of Sadie, at least until we know if they'll be coming home tonight."

"Do they leave her out during the day?"

"No, I think they keep her in. Because of skunks and things out there. You'll need a key. Jill, do you have a key to Patsy and Van's?" Jill nodded. "Yeah, there's a key here. Can you come pick it up? Do you know how to get here?"

By the time Inez had given Grace the directions to Jill's and hung up the phone, Kendra had her boys packed into the minivan and was standing in the doorway jingling her keys.

"I'm going to come back after I take the boys home," Kendra said. "I'll bring some food. You need to eat."

"You don't have to," Jill said. "I have food."

"Top Ramen is not food," Kendra said. "I'll be back." She stepped out and closed the door behind her.

Jill blinked solemnly and then cast a self-conscious look at Inez.

"Yeah," Inez said. Then, feeling generous because, after all, Grace was coming over, she added,

"I think she likes you."

A corner of Jill's mouth quirked up.

Chapter Twelve

Van -- 1988

VAN ROCKED HER shoulders side to side as much as she could with her wrists bound behind her, trying to minimize the strain, but she could only manage a slight movement that did little to ease the pain. Her shoulders had been pulled back for over eight hours straight, and what had started as mild discomfort had progressed from throbbing and aching to the point now where it was a deep radiating pain that consumed her entire body. Except for her hands, of course, which she could not feel. She pushed that thought away. Best not to think about that.

She listened to Stu negotiating again on the phone with Patsy. Patrice, he called her. It was odd to hear him calling her Patrice, though it was her real name. It was, in fact, how Patsy had first been introduced to Van seven years ago, when Van had represented her in that first early case.

"Pepperoni, black olives, mushrooms, green peppers."

"I want Canadian bacon and pineapple," Rudy said.

"Gross, man," Stu said. "I don't want no pineapple juice touching my pizza."

"Let's get two pizzas."

"Good idea. We want two pizzas, both large."

Van wondered if Patsy had realized how much of a negotiator's time was spent taking food orders.

"Oh, hell," Stu said mildly. He sighed and looked toward Van. "She wants to know what you want."

Van smiled. Patsy was trying to find out if she was all right. "Cheese and tomato," she said promptly. Patsy would know that no one but Van would order that particular combination.

"That's disgusting." Stu turned back to the phone. "She wants cheese and tomato."

"And beer," Rudy said. "Get some beer. I'm God damned sick of pruno."

"And beer," Stu repeated. "A six pack of beer."

"Two six packs," Rudy said. "And cigarettes."

"Not two, man," Stu said. "We have to stay sober. One six pack's enough."

"Then I get four cans," Rudy said. "Three ain't enough for me."

"You don't need four cans," Stu argued. "Jesus, Rudy, you haven't had nothing but pruno in years, three should be enough."

Van rocked back on her butt and leaned her shoulders against the wall, trying to find another position to ease the pain. She remembered the first time she'd ever heard of pruno. It was in that same early lawsuit against Patsy, *Pierson v. Breshears, et.al.* Pierson was a prisoner who'd lost his visitation privileges with his wife because he'd gotten drunk on pruno. He'd sued Patsy for violation of his civil rights and loss of consortium. It was Patsy's fault, he alleged, because she'd done a routine search of his cell the day before, and she hadn't found his hidden stash of pruno. If she'd done a better job of searching his cell, she'd have found the pruno, he wouldn't have gotten drunk, and he wouldn't have lost his privileges. Prisoner logic.

The case had no merit, and Van should have been able to dismiss it with a simple motion. But the clinic at the local law school, always eager to find a pro bono case to exercise their students' skills, picked up the case and decided to represent Pierson. The law school clinic liked such lawsuits. It was such a bad case for them, they had no pressure to win it, and they knew that even if they lost, the prison wouldn't come after them for attorney fees. They got relatively free practice without any risk.

They'd ordered a deposition of Patsy, which was annoying. But in defending the deposition, Van got to know Patsy a little better, so it was a good thing in the end.

"Just look at it as part of your job," Van had advised Patsy. "Don't let them push your buttons. They might try. Some attorneys think they aren't earning their pay if they don't make the witnesses angry or make them cry."

"Do you do that?" Patsy asked.

"Nah," Van said dismissively. "I'm the other sort of attorney. I think you get more with honey."

Patsy smiled. "I'm glad to hear it."

The deposition took place at the law school. Van and Patsy met in the parking lot and entered the building together. Patsy wore her uniform, and it looked good on her. Van chastised herself for being a cliché, but she couldn't stop staring at Patsy's shoulders, her waist, her hips. The uniform emphasized her athletic figure, her vitality, and her strength. And Van didn't know what it was about the thick leather utility belt with its mysterious attachments, but it fascinated her. She was relieved when Patsy held the door for her to go first so that she wouldn't get caught staring.

They entered the conference room and sat beside each other on one side of the table. Van pulled a legal pad and her favorite pen from her bag and wrote "Deposition of Breshears" across the top, along with the date. Moments later the law student, Matthew Basket, entered. He wore an expensive three piece suit, a fresh slicked back conservative haircut, and a very fierce expression.

Van rose. "Hello, Mr. Basket." She smiled and shook his hand.

"I'm Van Hollinger, attorney for Officer Breshears and the prison."

He glared at her hand as if suspecting a trap, but reluctantly slid his hand into hers for a very brief moment. He gave Patsy a curt nod, sat down at the table, and opened a shiny new briefcase. Patsy raised her eyebrows at Van. Good. Patsy had already taken this fellow's measure. He was full of posturing and scared shitless. That didn't mean, though, that he couldn't make the deposition a very unpleasant experience.

A slouching middle-aged man with a long gray pony-tail and a thin wiry beard burst into the room. He tossed a curling yellow pad on the table and grabbed Van's hand. "Miss Hollinger, I assume?" His was a two-handed shake, one hand gripping hers, the other resting on top of their clasped hands as if to give them both a hug. "I'm Daniel Webster, Clinic Adviser. I know, I know, I should go by Dan or Danny, so people don't think I'm kidding, but I've always gone by Daniel. My parents were simple people, good hearts but little education. They never even heard of the real Daniel Webster when they named me. And you must be Officer Breshears. Thank you so much for coming over here today."

"I didn't think I had a choice," Patsy said good naturedly. "Something about a subpoena?"

"Of course," Webster said cheerfully. He sat down next to Basket, across from Van. He looked more like Basket's client than his advisor. Only his suit prevented him from looking like one of his homeless clients, but barely, since it was dirty and ill-fitting and he only wore a clip-on tie.

"But we still appreciate your cooperation. You wouldn't believe how many people we have to get contempt orders for."

Asshole, Van thought. In his bumbling cheerful way, he was trying to be as intimidating as Basket. But Patsy raised her eyebrows again at Van, and she knew Patsy wasn't so easily intimidated.

The deposition was tape recorded. A notary from the law school came in and placed Patsy under oath, and the questioning began. Basket asked the questions from a lengthy typed list he had prepared, while Webster doodled on his yellow pad. The early questioning consisted of the

customary background information, education, special training, work history. Basket read them from his list and Patsy answered smoothly. When they reached the questions about the incident with the pruno, Basket's demeanor changed, and as a result, so did Patsy's.

"You've been trained at conducting cell searches?" Basket asked.

"I have."

"And did you pass the training?"

"It wasn't that sort of training."

"It's a yes or no question. Did you pass the training?"

"There was no pass or fail. It was just training."

"Just answer the question," Basket said.

"I did. There was no pass or fail."

"Yes or no?" Basket asked, his voice rising.

"Objection," Van said. "The question has been asked and answered."

"She hasn't answered it," Basket said.

"She has, Mr. Basket. Not all questions can be answered with a yes or a no."

"This is a yes or no question."

"My objection stands."

Webster wrote a note on his yellow pad and pushed it toward Basket, who read it and reluctantly abandoned the question.

"So in this 'training' you had, were you trained to look for pruno?"

"I was trained to look for contraband," Patsy answered.

"So you were trained to look for pruno?"

"Pruno is contraband. I was trained to look for all contraband."

Basket sighed heavily. "It's a yes or no question, Mrs. Breshears."

"Is my mother here?"

Basket blinked, then said with exaggerated courtesy, "I'm sorry. It's a yes or no question, *Officer* Breshears."

"Yes."

He frowned. "Yes, what?"

"Yes, sir."

"No! I mean--"

Van felt a bubble of laughter in her throat and tamped it down. Patsy didn't need a lawyer, she needed a referee. She was playing with Basket like a cat with a bug.

Basket fumbled through his notes to find his place. "Yes, you were trained to look for pruno?"

"Yes, I was trained to look for all contraband."

"But when you searched Miguel Pierson's cell that day, April 14, 1980, you didn't find any contraband, did you?"

"Yes, I did," Patsy answered.

Basket glanced up, clearly surprised. "You did?"

"I did."

"What did you find?"

"I found some porn."

"You found pruno?"

"No, I found porno. Porn. Pornography," she said slowly. "The contraband kind."

"Where was this contraband porno?"

"On the shelf above the desk."

"And where was the pruno?"

"I didn't find any pruno."

"Isn't it true that Mr. Pierson's stash of pruno was later found on the shelf above his desk?"

"I believe that's true," Patsy said. "I wasn't there."

"So the pruno was next to the porno?"

"I believe so."

"So why didn't you find the pruno?"

"I don't know. Maybe I was distracted by the porno."

Van laughed. She couldn't help it. She quickly tried to disguise it as a cough, but the glare Basket shot her let her know she didn't succeed.

"Did you look at the pornography?"

"God, no."

"Why not?"

"Because it's disgusting."

"Couldn't there have been contraband hidden *inside* the porno?"

"Yes."

"So why didn't you look inside it?"

"I confiscated it. That means I took it," Patsy explained kindly. "So I could search it later."

"Why didn't you search it while you were in his cell?"

"I didn't have gloves on."

"So?"

"I wasn't about to search his porn with my bare hands." Patsy leaned forward and said conspiratorially, "Sometimes, these guys play with their peters when they look at their porno. And drink pruno."

This time Van's effort at disguising her laughter caused her to choke and she entered a genuine coughing fit.

"Objection!" Basket yelled.

"You can't object," Van choked out. "They're your questions."

"But she's not taking this seriously."

"What do you have against alliteration?"

"We can call the judge," Webster said, speaking for the first time since the deposition began.

"Get an order."

"An order for what?" Van asked. "She's answered every single question he's asked. She can answer in iambic pentameter if she wants to."

"Let's take a five minute break." Webster stood and strode from the room. Basket grabbed his notes and followed, slumped and humbled.

Van hit the stop button on the tape recorder and let her laughter erupt.

"How am I doing?" Patsy asked, watching Van with a smile.

"You're fabulous!" Van said, and Patsy's smile grew.

They grinned at each other, and Van realized she had an additional reason for wanting to get this case dismissed. As soon as the case was dismissed, she would be relieved of the rules governing attorney-client conduct. She wanted to get to know Patsy better.

"I keep telling you," Stu yelled into the phone, bringing Van abruptly back to the present. "You're not listening to me. I want you to find out who did it. It wasn't me. It *wasn't me*. There was another guy there. Find him."

Stu paused a moment as Patsy spoke to him on the other end. Van's eyes stung at the thought of Patsy so near, and yet impossibly far away. She wished she could speak to her, hear her voice, reassure her that she was all right. Even if she wasn't, Van thought, trying once again to feel something from her hands. She knew Patsy must be in agony as well.

"They never even tried." Stu's voice was low and unsteady with anger and his effort to keep himself restrained. "They saw me with the gun and never even looked for anybody else. Make them go back, Patrice. Make them re-open the case and *look* this time." He slammed down the phone and stood, slumped over it, breathing hard.

"And beer," Rudy said, and snorted.

Stu really sounded betrayed, Van thought. He wasn't asking for money and to just be set free, like Rudy was. He wanted his case reopened. He wanted them to investigate further. Would he ask that if he was guilty? Maybe, if it was just a delaying tactic. After all, he was scheduled to hang in a month. If they reopened the investigation, even if they found nothing new, it would buy him some time. But he seemed genuinely aggrieved that they hadn't conducted a thorough investigation the first time.

"Are you innocent?" Van asked. It was the first time she had spoken in hours, except to say cheese and tomato. It had grown dark. Stu had switched off the overhead lights, moved the lamp underneath the desk, and covered the shade with a towel for good measure. They had some light, but it was dim. Stu and Rudy both looked her way when she spoke, but she couldn't see their expressions.

"You mean, did I kill that cop?" Stu asked. "Hell no. I didn't kill no one. I had no reason to kill a cop. I didn't even know him."

"I'm innocent, too," Rudy said. "By reason of insanity. Ha ha!"

"What evidence did they have?" Van asked. She ignored Rudy, as did Stu. She was relieved Stu was talking to her. The last time she'd tried to speak, he'd threatened her with the gag again, which terrified her enough to keep her silent for hours. Maybe he was getting bored talking only to Rudy and Patsy.

"Circumstantial evidence, that's all they had," Stu answered. "They shouldn't be able to hang someone on circumstantial evidence. But when it's a cop, it just don't matter. They gotta hang someone." He sat on one of the stools and leaned back against the wall. "God, why don't they have any decent chairs up here?"

"What circumstantial evidence?" Van asked.

"Why're you so interested all of a sudden?"

"You could say I have a vested interest," Van said.

Stu gave a little laugh. "Yeah, I guess you do. My fingerprints were on the gun, all right? I never denied that. I picked up the gun. It was a stupid thing to do. Duh. I wouldn't have done it if I wasn't stoned, but I was. I saw the guy lying there. Shit, I didn't know he was a cop. I was just surprised. I picked up the gun, and then all of a sudden there were cops all around me. And that's all she wrote."

"But there was another guy there?"

"There was, just a minute before. I told them, but nobody believed me. Hell, they didn't even hardly look. They just kind of looked around and didn't see anyone else and then they arrested me. They never even tried to find the other guy."

"How are they supposed to find him now?" Van asked.

"How the hell should I know?" Stu asked angrily, and Van regretted asking. She didn't want to make him angry. "I don't give a *fuck* how they do it. Maybe someone fucked up the investigation,

maybe someone bought someone off, it happens in the movies all the time. I just want them to *look* at it."

Van wondered if Patsy could do that. It didn't seem too much to ask. Check out the old investigation, see if there were any flaws, see if something more could be done. What harm would there be? Maybe that would be enough to make Stu release them.

She stared at the still form of Sergeant Martin. She knew he was still alive. She sat with her leg pressed against him so that she felt his body heat and the slight movement of his breathing, but he hadn't stirred since the moment he was struck down.

She took a breath and decided to take a chance. "Stu," she said in a quavering voice. "I'm afraid for my hands."

"Huh?"

"My hands. I can't feel them. There's no circulation. I'm afraid--"

"Oh come on, they're not tied that tight," Stu said, though he wasn't the one who had tied them and had no way of knowing.

"They are," Van said.

"Wah wah, poor wittle baby," Rudy said.

Stu stood and walked over to Van. "Get up." He grabbed Van's arm to help her up and spun her around. She felt Stu touching something behind her near where her hands should be, but it was as if he was touching a piece of wood connected to her somehow. "Oh, Jesus, Rudy," Stu said.

"Don't untie her," Rudy protested. "They cuff us up all the time."

"Not like this, they don't. Jesus." Stu stepped over to the kitchen area, opened the utility drawer, and grabbed the steak knife. He returned and sawed at the bindings around Van's wrists.

The moment of release was jarringly painful, as Van's shoulders slid forward from the forced back position, but it felt good at the same time. She brought her hands in front of her. She could see them, but they were like foreign objects hanging from the ends of her arms. She tucked her left forearm underneath her right and raised her right hand to her face. It felt dead against her cheek.

"Now, don't try anything," Stu said.

Van gave a feeble laugh. "I don't think you have to worry about that."

Chapter Thirteen

Bennie -- 1988

"I KNEW YOU'D like it if you gave it a chance," said Bennie.

"Who said I liked it? It was disgusting," Lucy said.

"Oh, c'mon, you were screaming bloody murder."

"And that means I liked it? Did it ever occur to you that screaming bloody murder might be a *bad* sign? I thought it was horrible."

"What about the jumping up and down and hollering 'kill him, kill him?'" Bennie asked. "I suppose that was because you hated it too?"

"Oh, puck you," Lucy said, bumping Bennie's hip with her own as they walked toward the exit of the Spokane Coliseum.

"No, puck *you*." Bennie nudged her back with her own hip.

"Oh, original, Bennie. Puck you."

"Wait 'til we get home," Bennie said, leaning close and speaking in a low voice directly into Lucy's ear. "I'll puck you six ways to Sunday."

"Six ways to Sunday? What does *that* mean?"

"I don't know," Bennie confessed. "It's something my grandma used to say."

Lucy eyed her with astonishment. "Your grandma used to say she'd puck you six ways to Sunday?"

Bennie smiled and shook her head. Lucy was a constant challenge. Captivating and fun, certainly, but she used words like a rapier, and she was always up for a little swordplay. Bennie couldn't keep up, and she no longer tried. Instead, she just smiled, let Lucy get her little hits, and took her reward later, in bed. Lucy was phenomenal in bed.

"You sure you don't want a souvenir pennant?" Bennie asked, trying to divert Lucy's attention.

Lucy eyed the red and black Spokane Chiefs Hockey Team pennants dubiously, but she didn't say no, so Bennie bought one for her. Lucy hadn't asked for anything else the entire evening, and Bennie felt strange taking a girl to a game without buying her something. She felt better seeing Lucy wave the pennant as they made their way to the car.

"Six ways to Sunday." Lucy tucked herself into the passenger seat of Bennie's bug and tossed the pennant into the back seat. "Does that mean you're going to puck me six different ways? Or six times? Or from now until Sunday? Six different ways from now until Sunday, that would be a lot of pucking, Bennie, since it's only Tuesday."

Bennie had a theory that whenever she thought about someone who had died, it was because the person on the other side was thinking about her, watching over her, acting as a sort of guardian angel. It had always been a comforting theory in the past, but this was one time she hoped she was wrong. *Sorry Grandma*, she apologized into the sky. If Grandma heard this raunchy conversation about her innocent words, she'd roll over in her grave, if she had one. Which she didn't, since Grandma had been cremated.

Bennie wasn't about to back down in front of Lucy, though, no matter how it made Grandma roll.

"I will puck you six different ways, six times a day, every single day between now and Sunday and beyond, little girl. I will make you scream bloody murder. The good kind."

"Oooh." Lucy rubbed her hands together and gave an exaggerated shiver. "I can't wait."

It was a short drive to Bennie's apartment. Bennie entertained herself by trying to get one hand into Lucy's pants while she drove, laughing as Lucy tried to prevent her.

"Hands on the wheel, Bennie," Lucy directed. "Two and ten. Two and ten!"

By the time they got upstairs and she had unlocked the door, Bennie was ready to tear Lucy's clothes right off her tight little body, and Lucy seemed just as ravenous with desire.

Bennie walked Lucy backward to the couch and toppled her onto it, following with her own body. She thrust her tongue into Lucy's mouth, swept it roughly across Lucy's, while her hands pushed Lucy's shirt up, revealing a black silky bra. She pulled Lucy's shirt over her head, and lowered her mouth to Lucy's breast. She nuzzled one nipple through the sheer black material, licking, sucking, and nipping it with her teeth, while her other hand blindly and expertly unfastened Lucy's jeans and slipped inside.

"Oh, God, Bennie," Lucy whimpered. "Fuck me, Bennie, fuck me *now*."

Bennie needed no urging. Dropping to her knees, she grabbed both sides of Lucy's jeans and pulled them off and over her feet, revealing Lucy's surprisingly lush and full hips for such a small woman, the triangle of blond hair glistening with moisture. Lucy dropped her legs apart, revealing her swollen and dripping pink lips, and brought one finger down to touch herself. Her own touch made her hips buck.

"Hurry, Bennie," she groaned. "Fuck me quick!"

Bennie leaned over to grab her backpack with one hand and pulled out the green dildo. It turned out Lucy liked the green one. There was no time for the harness. She'd have to hold it with her hand, but she'd be damned if she'd do it with her pants on. She wrenched her jeans open and was tugging them down when the phone rang.

"Christ."

"Ignore it," Lucy whimpered, and Bennie chose to do just that.

But on the fourth ring, just as Bennie had the flat end of the dildo pressed to her own crotch with one hand and was lowering herself into Lucy, the answering machine picked up.

"Bennie? It's Kendra. I don't know if you've seen the news about the hostages taken at the prison? I thought you'd want to know, before they announce it on the news, one of the hostages is Van."

Bennie froze.

"We know she's alive, but we don't know much else. I'm heading over to Jill's right now, so if you want to call me back, you can reach me there. But I'll call you if we learn anything new. Bye."

Bennie stood up and lunged for the phone, but she was hampered by the jeans around her knees, missed it, and fell. She leapt up, yanked on her jeans, and turned to Lucy.

"Bennie?" Lucy asked, her voice small.

Bennie would never forget the picture Lucy presented right then. Who could? Naked, legs splayed, the dildo dropped where Bennie had left it, its tip still prodding Lucy's wet flesh. Her face was flushed, her lips red and swollen from Bennie's rough kisses. Even as Bennie watched, Lucy's eyes grew moist with unshed tears. "Bennie?" she asked again, trying to sit up. The dildo dropped and rolled against Lucy's leg.

"I'm sorry, doll," Bennie said huskily, wondering even as she said it if this was a moment she would forever regret. "I have to go."

Lucy flushed dark red. Suddenly modest, she closed her legs, curled in on herself, and reached blindly for her shirt.

"Here." Bennie reached to help her.

"No," Lucy said sharply. "I'll do it myself." Avoiding Bennie's gaze, she dressed quickly and in silence, dabbing her eyes with her shirt as she did so.

Bennie watched helplessly. She was being a shit, but there was nothing else she could do. If ever she had wondered whether Lucy might take the place of Van in her heart, the question was answered now. If she genuinely cared about Lucy, she'd tell her now. She'd share her feelings, tell her about Van, tell her that her heart was stuck on someone she couldn't have and that she needed help getting it unstuck. She'd give Lucy a chance.

Instead, when Lucy stopped at the door and asked, "She's the one, isn't she?" Bennie dropped her eyes in acknowledgement and said nothing.

As soon as Lucy left, Bennie hopped into her car and sped off to Jill's house, her stomach knotted with fear. She hadn't known about any hostage situation, hadn't heard the news all day. "We know she's alive," Kendra had said, as if that was supposed to reassure her. My God, how could

Bennie have just gone so blithely on with her day, had such a good time at the hockey game, fucked Lucy, and all the while Van's life was in jeopardy? Why hadn't she sensed something was wrong? She should've sensed something. She pounded the steering wheel at the lights and cursed the slow drivers. She didn't know what she would do when she reached Jill's, but she felt an urgency to get there. She had to do something to help Van.

Bennie had never actually been to Jill's house before, but she knew where it was because she'd taken Kendra on a drive-by once on her motorcycle. Several cars were parked on the street and in the driveway, as if Jill were having a party. Bennie recognized Kendra's blue minivan and parked behind it. She ran to the door of the tiny house, rang the bell and knocked, but no one answered. It appeared empty. She rushed around the house and saw lights on in the window of the large shop behind it. She rapped on the door, and it was opened by Kendra.

"Bennie?" Kendra looked surprised to see her there.

"I came," Bennie said, gazing past Kendra into the large room beyond. "I came to find out what you know. Do you know anything?"

Kendra stepped aside, and Bennie moved into the room. A small sitting area dominated the front of the shop. The women sat around a low coffee table, upon which sat a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken. The air was blue with cigarette smoke.

Inez, Grace, and Waverly sat in a row on the couch. Inez and Grace looked worried, but Waverly was clearly distraught. Her face was wet, her eyes red, and she pressed a fistful of tissues to her mouth. Jill sat on the floor at the end of the table. She placed the chicken leg she'd been gnawing onto a napkin, licked her fingers, and rose from her cross-legged position in one smooth movement. She moved toward Bennie, but before she could say anything, Waverly erupted behind her.

"*You.*" Waverly rose to her feet. Grace appeared startled and rose quickly also. "What the hell are you doing here?"

Bennie spared her a quick glance, but focused her attention on Jill. "Do you know anything?"

Jill shook her head. "We only know what we've heard on the news. Van's a hostage, and she's alive. That's all they've said."

"You get the hell out of here!" Waverly pushed forward, her voice clogged with tears. "You shouldn't be here."

"Whoa, whoa, *whoa.*" Jill moved between Waverly and Bennie. Bennie stepped back, surprised. Where did *that* come from? She hardly knew Waverly.

"Come back and sit down." Grace put her hand on Waverly's arm and gently pulled her back to the couch.

"She shouldn't be here," Waverly moaned, but she let herself be led to the couch. "She tried to break Van and Patsy up, remember?" She dropped her head into her hands and wept. Grace sat next to her and draped her arm over Waverly's shoulders.

"Don't cry," Grace pled. "You're upsetting us all."

Bennie turned again to Jill. "I want to help. Anything I can do. What can I do?"

Jill shook her head. "There's nothing any of us can do right now. If there were something we could do, we'd do it."

"I need to do something," Bennie said desperately. "Anything."

"You can leave, bitch," Waverly said thickly.

"Hush, Waverly," Grace said.

"She tried to break them up. She's got no business here."

"Maybe," Inez said slowly, moving her eyes from Grace and Waverly to Bennie, "the best thing you can do right now is to stay away."

Bennie felt as if she'd been punched. She loved Van. Her first instinct on learning that Van was a hostage was to be with others who loved Van. She hadn't considered that she might not be welcome.

"Bennie," Kendra said softly, putting her hand on Bennie's arm. "Maybe it would easier--" The telephone rang.

Jill dived for it. "Hello? It's Patsy!"

"Shh, shh! Everyone quiet!" Inez whispered urgently, though no one had made a sound. Even Waverly silenced her sobbing. They rose from the couch, and all five women crept forward to listen to Jill's conversation.

"What's happening?" Jill asked. The women watched anxiously as Jill's somber expression grew more grim. "Oh, no," she said, shaking her head. Waverly whimpered, and Grace shushed her.

"Oh, no." Waverly whimpered again, and this time no one stopped her. "Well, that's good news at least," and they breathed a tiny sigh. "Of course we will. Grace and Waverly already brought her over here." She glanced at Sadie, who slept unconcerned in front of the television. "Let us know if you need anything else. We're all here, at my shop. We'll be here. You bet. Bye." She hung up the phone.

"What?" Inez whispered.

"Van's alive," Jill said first. "And they think she's okay."

"They *think*?" Bennie asked.

"When the prisoners ordered pizza, Patsy asked what kind they should get for Van, and they said tomato and cheese."

Waverly caught her breath. "Van loves tomato and cheese pizza."

"Yeah, that's what Patsy said. So she knew Van was okay, at least when they ordered the food."

"How long ago was that?" Bennie asked.

"I don't know," Jill said. "She doesn't think it's going to be over soon. The prisoners have asked for pillows and blankets. She wanted someone to go take care of Sadie. Patsy can't leave, she has to be the negotiator. She's the first one the guy talked to, back when they still thought it was a drill, and now he won't talk to anyone else. So Patsy can't leave the phone, except for little bathroom breaks."

"That must be so hard," Grace said softly. "To be the negotiator when it's her lover who's with those monsters."

"Yeah, but the worst part," Jill said, "is that nobody knows about them, Van and Patsy I mean. No one knows they're a couple. Patsy's bosses and the other negotiator, they don't think Van's anything but the lawyer. And Patsy can't tell them. She has to act like Van's just an ordinary person."

"Poor Patsy," Inez breathed, tears forming in her eyes.

Bennie wanted to scream. They were all so concerned about Patsy, who was admittedly in a tough situation, but at least she was *safe*. Meanwhile, anything could be happening to Van. All they knew was that earlier--when, one hour ago? two hours ago?--Van was able to say tomato and cheese. What consolation was that?

"We have to do something," Bennie said urgently.

The women looked at her in surprise as if they'd forgotten she was still there. "What can we do?" Kendra asked.

"We can't exactly break down the prison walls," Inez said dryly. She sneezed and sniffed. "They have experts working on this."

"We're taking care of the dog," Grace said.

"What do you think *you* could do?" Waverly asked.

"We can't just sit here doing nothing," Bennie said.

"But, Bennie," Kendra said reasonably, "I really don't think there's anything we *can* do."

"If there was something we could do," Jill said again, "we'd do it."

"We can pray," Inez said in a small voice.

"Jesus Christ!" Bennie shouted, and spun around, fists clenched, anxious to vent her fury on something. Or someone. Her eyes lit on Waverly. "And what the fuck is your problem?"

Waverly flinched and red spots of anger arose in her cheeks. "As if you don't know."

"What kind of answer is that?" Bennie demanded. "Are you in the third grade?"

"You tried to break Van and Patsy up."

"So what if I did?" Bennie asked. "What's that to you?" She wheeled around to the other women who watched the exchange, wide-eyed. "I love Van, all right? I. Love. Van. So what's it to you? Patsy can be mad at me about that, if she wants. Patsy can *hate* me if she wants to. But the rest of you? It's none of your God damned business."

"That's enough," Inez said sharply. "Really, Bennie, the best thing you can do right now is leave." Bennie clenched her lips and breathed heavily through her nose as she glared at the women, all seemingly in agreement that Bennie should not be there. Even Kendra tugged at Bennie's arm, urging her toward the door.

"C'mon, Bennie," Kendra said. "I'll call you the second we hear anything, you know I will." Bennie followed her on stiff legs toward the door. She was clearly not welcome, yet she was reluctant to leave. She stopped at the door and looked at them, five women united in their love for Van, joined together in their vigil. Maybe there was nothing any of them could do for Van right then. But at least they got to wait together and support each other in dealing with their fear and grief. Bennie moved into the black night and stalked toward her car, waving a backward hand at Kendra's whispered, "I'll call you." She sat in the driver's seat and blinked back the tears before starting the engine and driving slowly home, wondering how she would put in the long hours waiting for word of Van.

Alone.

Chapter Fourteen

Patsy -- 1988

"WE'VE GOT RUDY'S grandmother here," Patsy told Stu. "She wants to talk to Rudy."

Silence greeted her. A moment later Stu said, "What the hell for?"

"She's his grandmother, Stu," Patsy said reasonably. "Will you put him on the line?"

They'd been trying to get Rudy on the phone since the hostage taking began, but Stu refused to let him talk. It was a long shot, given Rudy's history, but it was always possible that Rudy would

be more amenable to ending the hostage situation than Stu was. Or maybe he was more afraid or more angry or more stupid. Maybe there was something about Rudy they could manipulate to get this thing over with and get Van out of there. But they'd never know if they couldn't even get him on the phone.

"No," Stu said bluntly. "She don't need to talk to him."

"Don't you think Rudy should be the one to decide that?"

"No," Stu said again, but at the same time Patsy heard Rudy's voice in the background asking, "Who is it?"

"Let me talk to him," Muriel Pigeon said.

Patsy exchanged a look with Bryant, who shrugged. What could it hurt?

Muriel was already sitting in Bryant's chair, where they'd put her as soon as she hobbled into the room balancing herself with two canes. She was a tiny frail woman with a hunched back and few wispy white hairs curling over a pink scalp. She wore a threadbare yellow cotton housedress that nearly reached her ankles and dirty white Keds with holes cut out of the side to allow freedom for her immense bunions. She could have been ninety, but Patsy knew from her visitor records that she was only seventy-four.

"Here, Mrs. Pigeon," Bryant said, "use this." Bryant settled his headset over her ears and reached over her to push a button. "Go ahead. He can hear you now."

"Hello?" Muriel said in a loud but quavering voice. "Can you hear me?" Patsy listened on her own headset as Stu gave a heavy sigh. "Who is this?" Muriel demanded. "Is my Rudy there?"

"He's busy," Stu said shortly. "He can't talk right now." But again Patsy heard in the background Rudy's voice asking, "Who is it?"

"Who is this?" Muriel asked again. "Are you that Expo Killer they been talking about? I remember when that happened. I went to Expo myself once, but it was before you killed that guy. I took my littlest grandkids. Rudy was too big, he didn't want to go with me. I was only, how old was I then? That was back in '74, so I was only sixty, I guess. But I remember my feet hurting me pretty bad, so I went and sat on those steps, you remember those steps down into the water, where all the ducks hang out now? Where was it you killed that guy? I can't remember. This was before you did it. You remember those steps? Those kids just went hog wild. They wouldn't mind me no matter what I said, and I wasn't about to get up from those steps, that water felt so good on my feet. I took 'em down there to buy us all a Bavarian waffle. Strawberries and whipped cream. I would have bought 'em all a Bavarian waffle, but they only wanted money for rides. The little shits. I wouldn't give 'em any, so they just grabbed my purse and ran off with it. I didn't even have money for the bus home. I had to walk the whole way, four miles, and my feet hurt so bad. Rudy beat those kids hard for me when I told him. The little shits. Two of 'em's in prison now, too. I never did eat a Bavarian waffle."

"Oh, for Christ's sake," Stu said, exasperated. "Here, Rudy, your grandmother wants to talk to you."

Patsy and Bryant exchanged a tiny smile. They should have brought in the secret weapon of Muriel a long time ago. Who knew such a tiny dried up body could hold so many words inside it?

"Gramma?" Rudy's voice came on the line for the first time. "That you?"

"It's me," Muriel said, as if not happy about it. "What you gone and done now, Rudy? They woke me up early and brought me down here on account of you. I sleep in real late now, you know. Sleep's about the only time I don't hurt."

"It's okay, Gramma," Rudy said eagerly. "I'm gonna get a million dollars. I'll give some to you too. You can go to the doctor if you want."

"A million dollars?" Muriel asked skeptically. "How you gonna get a million dollars?"

"We got us some hostages," Rudy said, as cheerfully as if he'd just won the lottery. "They gotta give us money if they want 'em back. Alive, anyhow."

"Really? A million dollars?" Muriel asked again, but this time with interest.

"Ask him about the hostages," Patsy whispered urgently, exchanging another glance with Bryant. This wasn't going exactly the way it was supposed to. If Rudy really thought he was going to get away with a million dollars to share with his grandmother, he was living in a fantasy world. And if Muriel believed him, that was even worse. But Patsy wasn't about to tell either of them that.

"Tell him not to hurt them."

"You're not going to kill them hostages, are you Rudy?" Muriel asked obligingly.

Rudy giggled.

"Don't you laugh at me like that," Muriel said sharply. "You just get hold of yourself. Those hostages won't be worth nothing to you if you kill 'em."

Rudy giggled again. Muriel looked at Patsy and made a helpless expression. "Not much I can do with him when he starts laughing like that."

Bryant quickly turned off Muriel's speaker button and Patsy pushed hers on. "Rudy, this is Patrice. I'm the one who's been talking to Stu. He won't let us talk to the hostages, but you will, won't you?" She was hoping Rudy wouldn't like the implication that Stu was in charge and would let her talk to Van just to spite Stu. But instead, Rudy giggled his high-pitched giggle once more, and Patsy shuddered at the creepy sound. The bastard was crazy. "Let me talk to the woman, Rudy," Patsy said firmly. Maybe he would respond to a direct order.

"That's enough." Stu was back on the line. "Rudy's done talking. Send his grandma home." He hung up the phone.

Patsy slumped. What a waste of time that was. All the effort to obtain Rudy's visitation records, locate his grandmother, roust her out of bed and haul her down here, and all for nothing. They were going to even greater lengths to bring Stu's old girlfriend in from Missoula, but Patsy wasn't ready to tell Stu about that. It would still be a couple of hours before she arrived, and it could end up just as futile as this effort. One step at a time. That's all they could do. At least Van was still alive. Rudy apparently understood that concept, anyway. The hostages needed to be kept alive in order to get the million dollars.

"It's a bad sign when Rudy starts laughing like that," Muriel said. "He must be off his meds." Great.

Bryant helped Muriel out of the chair and handed her over to Captain Padgett, who thanked her for her help and passed her off to someone in the other room. They heard her reedy voice telling someone that her grandson was going to get a million dollars.

Patsy removed her headset and rubbed her hands roughly over her eyes, her temples, her neck. Her headache was back in full force, and her neck and back were killing her. She rolled her head on her shoulders and glanced at the clock. Seven a.m. She'd been awake now for over twenty-four hours. And it was almost twenty-four hours since the tower was stormed and Van was taken hostage. Almost twenty-four hours since she'd spoken to Van.

Patsy grabbed the pack of cigarettes Bryant had left on the table and shook one out. It was the ninth or tenth one she'd taken already. She should just buy a pack. Fuck quitting. She lit the cigarette, took a deep drag, held it a long moment and blew out the smoke. She leaned her head back in her chair. She was so tired. She tried to remember the last time twenty-four hours had

passed without speaking to Van. Not for years, she realized. In fact, not since they first got together over six years ago. They always managed to talk on the phone at least once a day since then, even when one of them was away on business for days at a time. Patsy closed her burning eyes.

Like most lesbian couples, Patsy and Van had a lot of anniversary dates. There was the first time they met, their first kiss, the first date, the first time they made love. Everything but a wedding date, in fact, which may have been why all the other dates were so important to them. For some couples, those events might all happen on just one or two days, but that's not how it happened with Patsy and Van. One step at a time. Patsy smiled, as she recalled their first kiss.

The lawsuit against Patsy had dragged on. Van called her every few weeks to give her an update, but after the first few minutes, the conversation would evolve into different subjects. The weather, car trouble, pets, it hardly mattered what the subject was. They always ended up laughing and reluctant to end the conversation. Finally, one of them would suggest that they ought to get back to work, and they'd hang up. That would be it for a couple more weeks, until Van called with another update.

She was becoming a nice friend, Patsy had decided. Too bad she was straight. At least, she was almost certain Van was straight. But she couldn't help trying to glean hints from their conversations, and she caught herself weaving tiny mundane facts into a theory that Van was lesbian, available, and hot for Patsy. Van talked about pets, for example, but no kids. She mentioned car trouble, but no husband to help her with them. "I took a vacation to the Oregon Coast," she said once, not "*We* took a vacation." They were small things, but they were enough to make Patsy wonder, just a little.

Then one Friday night the speculating all came to an end. Patsy had gone with Inez and her current girlfriend down to Roo's, the local gay bar. It was late when they got there, nearly eleven, and the place was packed. Men dominated the areas closest to the door, so Patsy and Inez and Inez's date--what was her name?--wove their way through the sweaty male bodies to reach the billiards room, where the women hung out. And there she was.

Van stood off to the side near a wall, surrounded by women, but standing as if alone. She held a bottle of beer in one hand, but it hung as if forgotten by her side as she swayed back and forth to the music, her eyes off in the distance, her lips now and then mouthing the words to the song. She wore tight faded blue jeans and a little green and white striped jersey. Her strawberry red hair hung free for once, curling on her shoulders and around her face.

Patsy abandoned Inez and her date without a backward glance and veered directly to Van. She would never forget the expression on Van's face as she saw Patsy approach, the moment of recognition followed immediately by an unmistakable look of pure joy.

"Officer Breshears!" Van said, her words overly precise and slightly loud, and Patsy realized Van was a bit drunk.

Patsy laughed in delight. "Counselor," she said. "What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?"

"Waiting for you, I think," Van said. They grinned at each other.

"Are you here with anyone?"

"No," Van said. "I mean, yes, but no. She's just a friend."

"Uh huh. Does she know that?"

Van considered a moment and said, "I'd better go remind her."

Patsy nodded. "I'll wait right here." She watched as Van carefully made her way to the end of the pool table where a too skinny woman with unfortunately frizzy hair crowed over her last shot.

Van spoke to her, the woman glanced at Patsy, then said something hurtful to Van, gauging by the color that suddenly appeared on Van's face. Van just nodded, though, and returned to Patsy's side. "I hope you can give me a ride home," Van said simply.

"Of course," Patsy said, committing Inez without hesitation.

They spent the rest of the evening together, but they didn't kiss until the end of it, and then it was on Van's front porch, with Inez and her date sitting in the car in the driveway, like they were teenagers escorted by their chaperons. Their lips met that first time with a tenderness and intimacy that took Patsy's breath away.

"You have my number," Patsy whispered.

Van nodded. "I'll call you."

Patsy left her standing there on her porch and slipped into Inez's back seat in a daze. Part of her wondered if Van really would call her, or if Van would wake up in the morning cursing herself for getting drunk enough to spend the evening with that woman prison guard. But another part of Patsy knew without a doubt that Van would call her. And she did, the very next day. It took a bit longer for them to actually date and become a couple, because Van insisted they must wait until the lawsuit was behind them, but from that day forward, they spoke at least once every day. Every day--until now.

Patsy opened her eyes. She'd been half dozing. The cigarette had nearly burned away, and a pile of gray ash puddled on the floor beneath her hand. She took one quick drag and sat forward to stub it out in Bryant's ashtray. Someone had made a sign and taped it to the wall beside the negotiator's desk: "The goal is to end the hostage situation peacefully, not quickly. Time is on your side. A hurried negotiation is a fatal negotiation. Don't rush." The letters were black, shaded with blue, the last two words underlined in red. Someone had too much time on his hands, Patsy thought.

Don't rush. It was good advice. Textbook. The longer the standoff lasted, the more likely it was to end peacefully. A long hostage situation allowed time for the hostage taker and the hostage to bond. It became much more difficult to kill a hostage who had become a real person to the hostage taker. Some hostages bonded so closely that after a while they developed an allegiance toward the hostage takers. There was even a name for it now: the Stockholm Syndrome, after a situation that occurred in Stockholm, Sweden, when hostages were held for several days and ended up taking the side of the hostage takers.

Don't rush. It was such good advice, and yet so very, very difficult to apply when it was Van who was over there in the tower. The longer the standoff lasted, the more likely she was to survive. Meanwhile, Patsy had to trust Van to do her part. Van was a smart woman. She would be doing what she could to bond with her captors. She would do whatever she needed to do to stay alive. But what sort of treatment was she enduring while she was there? That unanswered question made the wait excruciating. As much as Patsy longed to rush the tower and force the bastards to let Van go free, it wasn't possible. The painstaking dance of negotiating must continue, step by arduous step.

She'd worry less if Rudy weren't such a crazy bastard.

Chapter Fifteen

Van -- 1988

STU DIDN'T WANT to speak with his old girlfriend. Van found that very curious. She was reminded of a play she'd read in her freshman English class. In the play, a killer on death row had a visit from his sister. The killer convinced the sister that he wasn't her brother after all, even though he really was, because he didn't want his family knowing that he was a killer. Instead, he chose to die alone and unloved and let his family go on believing he had died courageously in the war. Van had thought it was the most dramatic story she had ever read, far more interesting than the story of Romeo and Juliet, which had her friends all swooning. As far as Van was concerned, Romeo and Juliet were boring teenagers who could have had everything they wanted if only they'd had a little bit of self-restraint.

Van wondered why Stu was so reluctant to talk to his girlfriend. He'd apparently had visits with her off and on throughout his years in prison, and only now was he refusing to speak with her. Van developed a theory and decided to cautiously test it out.

"Does your girlfriend believe you're innocent?" she asked from her nest on the floor. They'd established early on that she was not to move from her spot without permission. She had tried once to hobble to the toilet without asking first and had been tackled so hard by Rudy that the air left her lungs and she lay gasping for breath beneath Rudy's heavy body. He had grinned down at her as she wheezed and had taken advantage of his position to grind his hips into hers. Stu had had to tell him twice to get off her.

Now she sat placidly on her spot, legs stretched out before her, still bound at the ankles, and only moved from it when she had permission to use the toilet. She did that as infrequently as possible, keeping her liquid intake to a bare minimum as an aid to that goal. Although her hands were free, they were practically useless, and Rudy still had to unzip Van's pants and pull them down in order for her to use the toilet. His expressions and gestures grew more obscene each time, and Van suspected it was just a matter of time before he violated Stu's 'no touching' rule.

Her nest was more comfortable since they'd been provided with pillows and blankets. Not long after Stu had removed her wrist restraints, Van's hands began to throb. At first she'd welcomed the pain as a sign that her hands were not dead, but the pain grew more excruciating as the hours passed, and the hands remained unresponsive to commands from Van's brain to move. For much of the night, she had sat on her pillow with her hands cradled in her lap and rocked, trying to ignore the pain and quell the fear that she may never regain the use of her hands, until finally Rudy had snapped and told her to "Stop that fucking rocking!" More recently, the pain had subsided, but her hands remained unresponsive. Just moments before, she thought she had detected a slight movement of one finger on her left hand. When she tried to recreate the movement, she was unable to do so.

Stu raised his head and glared at her blearily from where he sat in his own nest of pillow and blankets. It was Rudy's turn to keep watch and Stu's chance to sleep, but Stu hadn't yet closed his eyes. Of the three of them, Rudy was the only one who had really slept.

"She's not my girlfriend," Stu said.

"Sorry," Van said. "Your friend? Does she think you're innocent?"

"Of course she thinks I'm innocent. She knows I am."

"She knows you've never killed anyone?" Van asked.

"I just said that."

"Except for him?" She nodded at the still figure lying beneath a blanket beside her.

"I didn't kill him," Stu said.

Van said nothing.

"He's not dead."

"He will be," Van said. "He'll die soon if he doesn't get to a hospital."

Stu ignored her.

"Is that why you don't want to talk to your friend?" Van asked. "Because you're not innocent any more?"

"Fuck you," Stu said. "And shut up. I'm trying to sleep." He closed his eyes.

Rudy slowly circled the tower room, peering from the slotted windows with his rifle on his shoulder. Van avoided looking at him as much as possible, because when she did, as often as not she found him watching her, which made her shudder. This time, though, Rudy wasn't paying any attention to her. Van peeked down at the fingers curled in her lap and once again ordered them to move. Was that a twitch? It was the same finger on the left hand. She was pretty sure she saw it twitch.

In the drawer beneath the shelf that held the hot plate was a knife. It was a flimsy little steak knife, but it was a knife. Stu had used it to cut Van's wrist restraints, and then he had put it back. She watched him do it and knew exactly where it was. But a knife would do Van no good if she couldn't grip it. Right now, she wouldn't even be able to open the drawer. She again ordered her fingers to move.

Nerve damage. That must be what was wrong with her hands.

They certainly could feel pain, but somehow her hands no longer would accept signals from her brain. If she kept trying, kept ordering her fingers to move, maybe eventually they would respond. She wouldn't give up. If the promise of the knife in the drawer wasn't enough to will her fingers to move, the thought of Rudy pulling her pants down to watch her pee one more time just might be.

Rudy grabbed a Rubbermaid tumbler from a table, moved to the sink, and turned on the cold water spigot. Nothing happened. He twisted it off and wrenched it on again. He did the same with the hot water spigot and nothing happened there either.

"They turned off the water," Rudy said.

Stu jerked, awakened from the doze he had just slipped into. "What?"

"They turned off the fucking water." Rudy twirled the spigots again to show Stu.

"That bitch." Stu jumped up and immediately reached for the phone, dialing quickly. "What the hell gives?" He paced as far as the telephone cord would let him, more agitated than he'd been since the first hour of the hostage taking. "Don't fuck with me, Patrice! You know God damned well what I'm talking about. Where's the God damn water?" He listened for a moment, and when he spoke again, his voice was higher. "I'm not making no fucking deal with you. You don't understand, bitch, *I'm* in charge here. *I* say what the deal is, not you."

Go, Patsy, go. Van rooted silently. She wished she had the nerve to shout it out loud, but she was afraid of the gag. She'd scooted it with her heel behind her and tucked it underneath her blankets, hoping they wouldn't think of it again if it was out of sight. But if anything made them consider gagging her again, it would be shouting to Patsy while Stu was on the phone.

"I don't care if she flew in from Mars, I'm not talking to her. How many times I gotta say that? No!" He slammed down the phone, breathing heavily.

"What are they gonna do about our water?" Rudy asked.

"They want to make a fucking deal." Stu kicked his own pillow against the wall. "Either we let one of *them* go," he said, jerking his head toward Van and Martin, "or I talk to my--friend."

"Then they'll turn the water back on?" Rudy asked. "Shit, man, talk to her then. What's the big deal? I'm thirsty. The beer's all gone."

"I'm not talking to her." Stu spun around and glared at Van, then transferred his gaze to Martin.

"But we could give them him."

"No way, Stu. You said he's worth a million dollars."

"Only if he's alive," Stu said. "We gotta get rid of him anyway. I've been thinking it for a while now. If he's still alive when we release him, they can't say *we* killed him. Besides, we'll still have one hostage."

"But we need *two* million dollars," Rudy said with mathematical logic. "One for each of them, a million for you and a million for me."

"It don't matter, Rudy," Stu said, growing exasperated. "We can get two million for her. And you can have my share."

"Really?" Rudy asked. "I can have all the money?"

"Yeah, I'm not doing this for the money. But we're gonna have to get this guy out of here first. Let me think a minute." Stu paced for just a moment, frowning, then pulled the phone toward him. "Okay, Patrice, here's the deal. We're gonna bring a hostage out, the hurt one. You keep everyone away, and I'll bring him down the ladder, and then I'm gonna take him halfway down the walkway and leave him there. No tricks. Rudy here's gonna have his rifle aimed right at this lady here, and he's been wanting to shoot somebody all day long. One false move and she loses a foot. Two false moves and she's dead. You understand? Nobody comes and gets the guy until I'm back up in the tower. Got it? Okay." He put the phone down.

Rudy aimed his rifle at Van's right foot. "Pow," he said.

"Put that down," Stu said impatiently. "You're gonna have to help me." He scanned the tower room. "We gotta restrain her first. She'll be in our way." He grabbed a set of handcuffs they'd found the day before when they jimmed open a locked cabinet. Van wished they'd found them sooner. They could have used them on her then, instead of cutting off her circulation with the ties. Stu tossed the cuffs to Rudy. "Lock her up. Lock her arms around something so she can't move, like a table leg. No, the desk leg. It's heavier."

Rudy set his rifle down and advanced on Van with the handcuffs. "Not my hands," she cried, instinctively putting them behind her back. "Not my hands!"

Rudy's eyes gleamed at her protests and he laughed his crazy laugh, "Hee hee!" He reached behind her and roughly grabbed both hands, whipped her around on her back, and dragged her across the floor to the desk. He placed Van's hands over her head on both sides of the desk leg and slapped the cuffs around her wrists.

"Not too tight," Stu warned, but he was too late. Rudy had already jammed the cuffs as tightly as he could around Van's bruised wrists.

"My hands!" Van screamed. "They're too tight!"

"Well, deal with it, it'll only be for a few minutes," Stu said dismissively. "Okay, Rudy, I'm going down the ladder, just like when I go get the food, but I'm gonna be carrying this guy over my shoulder. When I get down, you pull the ladder up just to make sure nobody can sneak up here while I'm taking the guy down the walkway. When I come back, you put the ladder back down for me. And if they try anything, you shoot her in the foot. I'm not kidding. They need to know we mean business. Understand?"

"Yep," Rudy nodded, grinning.

Stu whipped the blanket off Sergeant Martin, who looked dead already, his face waxy white. Rudy opened the trap door and lowered the ladder. Stu stepped down a couple of rungs, then signaled Rudy to bring Martin over.

"Fireman style," Stu advised.

"Whooh whooh!" Rudy made a siren sound as he lowered Martin by one arm and one leg to drape over Stu's shoulders. He knelt by the trap door until Stu reached the bottom, then pulled the ladder up behind him and closed the trap door. Still kneeling, he swiveled his head and aimed his crazed eyes at Van. "Whooh whooh!"

Van tried not to look at him. He'd been waiting for this, she knew. They both knew it. He'd just been waiting for a moment alone with her. He rose and stood above her.

"You're supposed to be keeping watch," she said. "To see if they try anything."

"I don't want to." Rudy dropped to his knees beside her. "He's not the boss of me." He reached out and wrenched her shirt up, then her bra, exposing both breasts. "Hee hee." He reached out and pinched one nipple, twisted the other painfully, and laughed when she grimaced.

"Don't, please," Van begged, though she knew that was what he wanted her to do. She thought rapidly. "I have AIDS. You'll catch it from me. You know what AIDS is? It'll kill you."

"Unh unh," he sneered. "Only gay guys get AIDS."

"I am gay," she said quickly. "I'm a lesbian. That's how I got AIDS. Lots of lesbians get it. That's why my hands are like this," Van improvised. God, she just needed to slow him down a little. Stu couldn't be gone long, could he? She just needed to stall him until Stu got back. "They're paralyzed. The extremities go first. This just speeded it up."

He paused a moment, doubtful, then shook his head and reached for the zipper of her jeans.

"Your extremities will go first too," she said. "Your hands and feet and, and your penis. That's an extremity too. It'll freeze up, just like my hands."

Again he looked doubtful, but already Stu's voice came from below.

"Rudy. the ladder!"

"Fuck," Rudy said. He paused a moment, but chose to ignore Stu. He reached again for Van's jeans.

"God damn it, Rudy, put down the God damned ladder!"

"Fuck you!" Rudy yelled, suddenly enraged. He clenched his fist, but stood up, wrenched the trap door open, and practically threw the ladder down.

Stu ran up the ladder, pulled it up behind him, and slammed the trap door closed. He stood, panting and angry, and saw Van lying with her arms stretched above her head, her breasts exposed. "God damn it, Rudy. What the hell are you thinking?"

"*You*," Rudy suddenly roared, his finger thrust into Stu's face, "are not the boss of me."

"No," Stu agreed. He hurried to Van. "I'm not the boss of you." He pulled Van's shirt down, grabbed the key from the desk, and unlocked the handcuffs. "Stand up." He put his arms underneath Van's armpits and lifted her to her feet. He faced Rudy, who stood watching them with an angry pout. "You're right, I'm not the boss of you," he said sternly, "but I am smarter than you, aren't I?" Rudy huffed an acknowledgment. "This was all my idea, right? Not yours. When I tell you to do something, it's because I know what needs to be done, all right? If you don't do what I say, you won't get the million dollars."

"Two million dollars," Rudy said.

"Right," Stu said, "two million dollars."

Rudy looked down at the floor and shuffled back to his stool to watch out the window, apparently acquiescent.

Van wasn't fooled. Stu was gradually losing his hold over Rudy. And the moment Stu lost control of Rudy, it would be all over for Van. She hobbled back to her spot, feeling very alone now that the still and silent sergeant was gone. She slid down the wall to the floor, hunched into a fetal position, and cradled her injured hands again in her lap. She tried not to rock. Rudy didn't like rocking.

Chapter Sixteen

Jill -- 1988

FLAT ON HER back, Jill kicked with her foot and rolled slowly and silently back and forth on the dolly she'd wheeled underneath RIP. She examined the wires, the connections, and the tubes on RIP's underside, but not with any real concern. RIP was in excellent shape. Jill just needed a moment of peace and quiet, a place to think, and underneath RIP was the best place she'd found. Jill's shop had somehow become Command Central for all of Patsy and Van's friends as they awaited word on the hostage crisis. It made sense, since that was the number Patsy would call if there were any developments, but Jill couldn't help but feel invaded. The shop was her haven, her place of refuge, her sanctuary, and ever since she got home from work yesterday, there had been people hanging around it. At one point, so many women hovered around the shop there wasn't even floor space in the living area for them all to sit, and those who didn't know Jill very well wandered into the workshop area itself, eyeing RIP curiously.

Jill nearly lost it then, but Kendra came to her rescue. "If there's carpet on the floor, you're okay," she'd explained as gently and clearly as she had to her boys the first time they'd been over. "But the linoleum's off limits." They'd given Jill strange looks, but as long as they minded, she didn't care what they thought of her.

The shop was quiet now. Most of the women had gone to work. Even Inez had gone home in the early hours, when it became apparent that she was coming down with a bad cold, to take some medicine and try to sleep it away. Like Jill, she had taken the day off work. They couldn't bear to be away from the phone in case Patsy called to tell them everything was all right--or not. Only Kendra sat in the living area now, watching a soap opera turned low on the television. Every half hour, the station gave an update on the hostage crisis.

A hostage had been released a couple of hours earlier, and they'd been nearly giddy with relief, believing it must be Van. But it turned out to be a male prison guard who had been hurt during the takeover. He'd been whisked away to the hospital and was in critical condition with a head injury. It was a severe disappointment that Van was still held hostage. But it was a good sign, Jill thought, that the hostage takers apparently didn't want their hostages to die.

Jill grasped the edge of RIP's side and rolled silently out from underneath. She saw the top of Kendra's head over the back of the couch, golden hair shimmering in the light from the window. Now and then it shook or nodded in response to some action by one of the characters on the television, and once Jill heard her whisper, "No, not him. The other one." It made Jill smile. She

would never understand the allure of soap operas, but the way Kendra watched them was sort of cute.

Jill pulled herself back underneath RIP and again examined its lower workings, her mind returning to the problem of how she could help rescue Van. Two million dollars and a helicopter. That's what the hostage takers were demanding, according to the news reports. Ideas flitted through Jill's mind. Maybe she could send someone into the future in RIP and have her learn the winning lottery numbers, then come back and buy a lottery ticket. Instant millionaire. But didn't it take a while to actually get your hands on lottery money? They'd probably never let her pay off the hostage takers anyway, even if she did have two million dollars and a helicopter. Paying off hostage takers only encouraged more hostage takings. Everyone who watched television knew that.

Jill reached up and tried to tighten a screw with her fingers, though she knew it was already tight. She was immensely proud of RIP. Her Rapid Intertemporal Projector. Her time machine. People had been trying forever, but as far as she knew, Jill was the only person to have actually succeeded in sending a person to another time, even though it had been an accident. There could be others who had done it, she supposed. After all, she wasn't going around telling anyone about RIP, so maybe the others weren't telling either. Maybe they were aware, as Jill was, that a time machine came with a host of worrisome questions. The invention came first, along with its exciting possibilities, but shortly thereafter followed the awesome responsibility of it.

Back in college they used to tease themselves with questions like, if you could go back in time and kill Hitler and prevent the Holocaust, would you do it? The question fascinated them, not only because of the ramifications it held for history, but also because of the way it made them probe themselves, their own ideas of right and wrong, their beliefs in fate, in God, and their purpose in life. Jill, like many, had veered back and forth between yes and no, usually deciding that yes, she would sacrifice herself, perhaps even her immortal soul, to kill Hitler and prevent the misery he inflicted upon millions.

But that was only pretend. Now that she knew time travel was possible, the questions became more difficult to answer. It wasn't that the Holocaust became any less horrific, or Hitler any more worthy to live, or Jill's own soul any more valuable than it was before. What made it a more difficult question was the follow up question: What would happen if Hitler *had* been killed? It was easy to assume that the alternate reality would have been better, but was that true? What if, by changing history, what followed was actually worse? It was hard to imagine something worse than the Holocaust, but Jill didn't doubt humans were capable of creating such a thing.

RIP was Jill's creation, and she had to use it responsibly. She would not allow it to be used for profit, to pick the winning lottery numbers or take a sneak peek at the stock market. She wouldn't allow it to fall into the hands of the government, which would no doubt find a way to use it for destructive purposes. She wouldn't allow it to be used simply to satisfy a sense of curiosity or for fun.

But Van's life was at stake. If she could save Van with RIP, Jill would do it.

The phone rang. Jill shoved herself out from under RIP. Kendra muted the television and swung her head around, her eyes meeting Jill's. It had to be Patsy. Their friends were under strict orders not to call Jill's phone. No one wanted Patsy to get a busy signal when she called.

Kendra rushed to the phone. "Hello?" She smiled. "It's her. It's Patsy. Is everything all right?" Her smile faded. "Oh. Oh, I'm sorry. Yes, she's here." Kendra handed the phone to Jill, but she leaned her head in closely so she could still hear.

"Patsy?" Jill asked. "Is there news?"

"No, no news," Patsy said, her voice raspy. "The fuckers won't budge an inch. And I still haven't talked to Van."

"But she's alive?"

"She was a couple of hours ago. You heard they released the other hostage?"

"Yes, we saw it on the news. That's a good sign, isn't it? They don't want anyone to die."

"They wanted water," Patsy said dryly. "These assholes I'm working with turned the water off and didn't even tell me. They're playing games with these fuckers. Van's just a pawn to them." Her voice shook with fatigue or fear or perhaps both.

The door to the shop opened and Inez came in, her nose and eyes red. She saw them on the phone and her eyes lit up. Kendra motioned her over, and she came to stand beside both of them, her ear toward the phone.

"Are you getting any closer?" Jill asked.

"God, I don't know," Patsy said wearily. "We got one of them to talk to his grandmother, but she's on his side now, wants him to get his million dollars. The other one's old girlfriend is here, but he won't talk to her."

"What if we could get the two million dollars and a helicopter?" Jill asked.

Patsy gave a short laugh. "How are you going to do that?"

"I was thinking of using RIP," Jill said, keeping her voice matter of fact, avoiding the surprised looks from Kendra and Inez.

Patsy was silent a moment, then said, "No, Jill, that wouldn't work. The state could come up with two million dollars and a helicopter if they wanted to, but they won't hand it over. It wouldn't help Van anyway. The Expo Killer's not interested in money."

"What does he want?"

"He wants them to reopen his case," Patsy said, exasperated, "and prove that he's innocent. He wants them to find the guy who really did it, for Christ's sake. They won't do it, not without new evidence. That murder was fourteen years ago. It's not like they can go back in time and--" Patsy stopped.

Kendra caught her breath. Jill glanced down at Kendra's face, only inches away. Her eyes were crystal blue, her lashes long and dark, her skin flawless, and her lips full and red. As Jill watched, Kendra tucked her bottom lip underneath her teeth, her expression anxious.

"I don't see why not," Jill said, turning away from Kendra. Kendra was too distracting. She looked instead at Inez, who frowned and shook her head, but Jill chose to ignore her. "I've been working on RIP a lot lately. I'm pretty sure I've figured out how to send someone back."

After a long pause, Patsy said, "*Pretty* sure?"

"It's worth trying." Jill said.

Patsy was silent another moment. "If you can really send someone back, send someone to stop Van from going into that fucking tower."

"I can't do that," Jill said. "We can't change what's already happened. But what we can do is send someone to observe what happened, then report back to us."

"Fat lot of good that'll do Van."

"It's better than doing nothing, isn't it? We can find out if someone else did do it. Find out who he is."

"I can't believe we're even talking about this," Patsy said. But with a shaky sob, she added, "Yes. Yes, you're right. Try it. Do whatever you can."

Jill took a deep breath, uncertain if she felt more relief or dread. "Okay. What do you know about the murder? Exactly when and where and how."

"You've heard about it," Patsy said. "It took place during Expo, at night. The victim was a cop. They caught him red handed, practically. He was standing over the body with the gun in his hand, and nobody else was around."

"No witnesses?"

"No. He says he didn't do it, that there was another guy there, and that he just picked up the gun afterward. But the security guards showed up right after the gun was fired. If there'd been anyone else around, they would have seen him."

"Who can we send back to 1974?" Jill thought rapidly. "I can't go. I have to be here to bring the person back."

"I can't leave here," Patsy said. "He won't talk to anyone but me."

Kendra put her hand on Jill's arm. "Send me."

"No," Jill said sharply. "It's too dangerous. You have kids. I've never sent anyone back in time. There's no guarantee I'd be able to bring you back."

"I'll go," Inez said quickly, her voice thick with phlegm.

Jill shook her head. "You can't go like that."

"I'll take some medicine," Inez insisted. And then she sneezed.

"That's no good," Jill said. "We need someone who can hide and observe without being noticed. What if you sneeze when you're there?"

"Well, who else is there?" Kendra asked. "It has to be someone who would risk getting stuck back there."

"Waverly?" Inez suggested. "She was in love with Van once."

"No she wasn't," Patsy said. "She just thought she was. It has to be someone who loves Van like I do."

"Nobody loves Van like you do, Patsy," Jill said.

Patsy heaved a sigh. "No, there is one person who I think maybe does."

After a moment, Kendra asked hesitantly, "Bennie?"

Patsy gave a sad little laugh. "Guessed it in one."

Jill considered. "She's young and strong. That's a plus."

"She doesn't have any kids," Kendra added.

"And she's not sick," Inez said.

"She'll do anything for Van," Patsy said resignedly. "I know what that girl feels. She's exactly like me. Ask her."

"But she doesn't know about RIP," Jill protested. "She doesn't even know Van went into the future before."

"You'll have to tell her," Patsy said.

"She won't believe me," Jill said. "You never did. Not until Van disappeared."

"So convince her," Patsy said. Someone spoke in the background. "Shit. He's calling. Listen, I gotta go. But do this," she said quickly. "Go to my house. Look on the mirror on Van's side of the bed. There's a white baseball cap hanging from it, the one Van wore back from the future. Show Bennie that hat. I have to go."

She hung up, leaving Jill and Kendra and Inez staring at each other over the red telephone. Slowly, Jill hung it up.

"She's right," Kendra said. "Bennie would do anything for Van."

Jill sighed, frustrated. "I hate telling someone else about RIP."

"I know." Kendra reached up and brushed the back of her fingers against Jill's cheek. "But Bennie's really a good kid. I think you can trust her."

"Besides," Inez said, stifling another sneeze. "Who else is there?"
There was no one else. Jill heaved a sigh of resignation. "All right. All right, I'll call her."

Chapter Seventeen

Bennie -- 1988

BENNIE PLACED THE palms of her hands over her burning eyes and rubbed vigorously, but the green and black lines on the screen of her Apple IIe still swam before her, nearly nauseating her. She'd been staring at it most of the night and half the day as well. She was trying to master the new software program that would allow her to draft objects on the computer. She'd decided if she was going to break into the male dominated field of drafting, which she fully intended to do, she was going to need an edge. She'd already taken all the drafting courses offered at Spokane Community College. She was the only woman in the program, and she was one of only two students who still hadn't landed a drafting job. The other guy had barely scraped a passing grade, while Bennie had graduated second in her class. It was pretty obvious why she hadn't been hired. She didn't have a penis. Hah! That's what they thought. She had a whole drawer full of them. Computers were the key. They were the wave of the future. If she could do her drafting on the computer while the other guys were still using pencils and rulers, she'd be sure to get hired, no matter how many penises those other guys had.

But Bennie couldn't concentrate on drafting. She kept thinking about Van in the hands of those prisoners, suffering God only knew what. She kept the TV on and listened for breaking news as she worked. Announcements were few and far between, but she wasn't going to risk missing one. The new computer program was complex and required more attention than Bennie was prepared to give it. Eventually, just as the sun was rising, she'd given up, removed the drafting program, and instead inserted her Labyrinth floppy. Maybe a game would be easier on her tired brain. But she was rapidly coming to the realization that Labyrinth wasn't designed to entertain tired brains. Not for the first time, Bennie eyed her new Nintendo Entertainment System with longing. Super Mario Brothers was exactly the sort of distraction she needed. Mario and Luigi would take her mind off the worst of her anxieties about Van while she waited for breaking news. The problem was, the Nintendo only worked on the TV. If she played Super Mario Brothers, she wouldn't be able to listen for breaking news, which would defeat the purpose of remaining awake. She'd called in sick to work. Let someone else hold the Stop sign at the construction site for once. But she was starting to wonder how long she could keep her vigil up. What if Van was kept a hostage for days? Bennie would have to sleep some time. What was the point of catching the news as soon as it broke, anyway? That wasn't going to help Van. But there was nothing else she could do, so Bennie resolved not to give in yet. Van was held hostage. The least Bennie could do was stay awake and worry about her.

Suddenly the phone rang. Bennie snatched it up.

"Yes?"

"Hi Bennie. This is Jill."

"Is there news?" Bennie asked quickly.

"No, no news, exactly."

"What is it?"

"Can you come over? There's something I want to talk to you about."

"What is it?" Bennie asked again.

"I can't tell you over the phone. But it's something that might help Van."

"I'll be there in twenty minutes."

Bennie hung up the phone, grabbed her coat and keys, and was out the door without even switching off the computer or the television, her weariness forgotten. At last, there was something she could *do*. She didn't care what it was. If it would help Van, she would do it. All the cars that had been parked at Jill's house the evening before were gone. Bennie went directly to the shop this time. Before she could even knock on the door, it opened, and Jill stood there.

"Come in," Jill said, stepping back.

Bennie entered. The shop was empty of people. "What's going on?"

"It's kind of complicated." Jill stepped over to the kitchen area. The Mr. Coffee was spitting and hissing. "You want a cup of coffee?"

Bennie didn't know Jill very well, but she knew that it was Jill's nature to be direct to the point of being abrupt. This diffidence was unusual.

"Sure," Bennie said. "Black."

Jill poured a cup for each of them, handed one to Bennie, perched herself on a stool next to the counter, and lit a cigarette. Bennie propped her hip on the edge of the couch, took a sip, and said, "So? What is it? How can I help Van?"

"The Expo Killer wants someone to prove that he didn't kill that cop back in '74," Jill said. "He won't release Van until someone finds evidence to get his case retried."

Bennie took another sip and waited for Jill to go on, but Jill just lifted her own cup and watched Bennie. "So?" Bennie asked again. "Why'd you call me? You need a private detective." A thought occurred to her. "You need money? Is that why you called me? I don't have much cash, but I have some things I could sell."

Jill shook her head. "Not a private detective."

Bennie took a too large gulp of coffee and burned her tongue. She stood up and set her cup down, exasperated. Coffee spilled onto the counter. "What, then? You want me to get some evidence? I'm no detective. That murder was fourteen years ago."

"I know." Jill flicked an ash from her cigarette. "What we need is a witness."

"A witness? Was there one?"

"Not yet."

"Huh?"

"You remember Patsy's birthday party?" Jill asked.

Bennie blinked at the abrupt change in subject. "Of course I do," she said shortly, knowing full well that Jill knew she remembered it. How could she forget it? That was the day she'd nearly kissed Van, practically come to blows with Patsy, and in the end she'd been ordered off the property. She hadn't had a kind word from Van since. "What's that got to do with anything?" She wiped the spilled coffee with a sponge from the sink.

"Have you noticed anything different about Van since that day?"

Bennie froze. It had never occurred to her that anyone else might have noticed Van's cold shoulder toward her. And Jill, of all people? Jill wasn't exactly the observant sort. "No," Bennie lied slowly. "I can't say I have."

"Well, she is different," Jill said. "Something happened that day, after you left."

Bennie examined Jill with interest. Was she finally going to learn the reason Van had been ignoring her?

Jill stood abruptly, put her cup down, and smashed her cigarette in the ashtray. She walked quickly from the living area into the workshop, motioning for Bennie to follow. "I want to show you my truck."

Again, Bennie blinked at the sudden change of subject, but she was hooked and didn't want to give Jill a reason to stop talking. She meekly followed Jill onto the linoleum floor, stood beside her with her hands shoved in her pockets, and examined the little red Toyota pickup with the mismatched brown and yellow camper perched on its bed.

"Nice camper," Bennie said politely.

"Not exactly." Jill opened the door to the truck, climbed inside, turned the key, and pushed some buttons. A noise made Bennie look up. A thick steel pole emerged from the center of the roof of the camper and rose nearly three feet toward the tall ceiling of the shop. When it stopped moving upward, a dozen or more steel fingers separated themselves from the pole and bent farther upward, making a ring of prongs pointing skyward. Near the front of the camper, another steel pole emerged, this one laden with wires and topped with an upside down silver bowl. When it had extended to its full length, Jill hopped down from the truck and moved toward the back of the camper. The door in the back of the camper was heavy gray metal, obviously not original with the camper. It was attached with thick welds and heavy bolts. Two padlocks hung open on a hatch. Jill opened the door and Bennie peered inside.

It wasn't a camper. Large black computers lined the walls, flickering with tiny green and amber lights and dials. Bubbles flowed upward in tubes in the corners, and a humming noise indicated busy activity. It was cramped, with barely room for a person inside, and only one small metal stool sat in the center of the tiny laboratory. Bennie looked at Jill.

"It's a Rapid Intertemporal Projector," Jill said, her brown eyes dark and serious behind her glasses. "I call it RIP. Some people call it a time machine."

Bennie waited for the laugh, the shrug, the smile, something to indicate Jill was joking, but it didn't come. "Oh, come on," Bennie said, finally.

"I've been conducting experiments with it for quite some time," Jill said, ignoring Bennie's reaction. "Patsy and Inez and Van have been helping me." She closed the door of the camper and returned to the cab of the truck to retract the antenna and the dish. Bennie watched her movements in silence. When the vehicle once again resembled an ordinary camper, Jill shut off the engine, returned to the counter, and picked up her cup of coffee.

"There's no such thing as a time machine," Bennie said, slowly following.

"I don't think there has been," Jill agreed, "until now."

Bennie moved to the front of the couch and sat. Jill was a mad scientist. Emphasis on the mad. Just like the guy on *Back to the Future*. But if she knew what happened to change Van, Bennie wanted to know about it. "What happened at Patsy's party?" Bennie asked. "After I left?"

"It was Patsy's turn to go into RIP," Jill said. "They'd been taking turns. But she'd gone off somewhere. There'd been a fight," Jill explained, as if Bennie hadn't been the one who'd caused it. Had Jill forgotten that? "So Van decided to take Patsy's turn." An unusually vulnerable expression crossed Jill's face. "RIP had never actually worked before. I didn't expect it to that

time. But something went wrong. I got distracted. Van went into the future. Twenty years. To two thousand eight."

"Two thousand *eight*?"

"Yeah. But I was able to bring her back. Send her back, I mean.

At least, the *future* me was able to send her back. She was only gone for a few minutes, our time, but she was in the future for a month."

Jill was just plain nuts. Cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs. This whole thing was a waste of Bennie's time. She'd be better off staring at her computer, trying to keep Van safe just by staying awake. She stood up to leave, but the door opened and Kendra rushed in.

"Oh good, you're here," Kendra said, seeing Bennie. "I have some money. All from '74 or earlier. The bank teller thought I was crazy. And I have the hat." She looked at Jill. "How much have you told her?"

"I told her about RIP," Jill said.

Bennie stared at Kendra in disbelief. "*You* believe this crap?"

Kendra put her hand on Bennie's arm. "I was there, Bennie," she said earnestly. "When Van came back from the future. It's real."

"Van was different after that," Jill said, drawing Bennie's attention back to the aspect of the story Bennie was most willing to believe. If they knew a reason for Van's treatment of Bennie after that day, Bennie wanted to know about it.

"She was." Kendra nodded emphatically. "She had different clothes on, and her hair was different, and she was all tanned."

"So she changed her clothes and hair," Bennie said reasonably. "Put on some make-up."

"She had a tan," Kendra corrected. "And her freckles were out. And she had her nose pierced."

"She was only gone a few minutes," Jill said.

"And she was wearing this." Kendra thrust a white baseball cap into Bennie's hands. Bennie turned it over in her hands. It was made with stiff white cloth. "Champions" was stitched across the front in dark green letters. A large "S" was embroidered beneath "Champions", with a "20" on the left of it and "04" on the right. On the back of the cap was more embroidery, "WNBA Finals," with a logo of a woman playing basketball.

"An NBA for women?" Bennie asked. She'd never heard of such a thing, and she generally kept up-to-date on women's sports.

"In two thousand and four," Kendra said, pointing to the numbers on the front.

Bennie shook her head. "Those numbers could mean anything." Then she flipped the cap over and froze. On the inner band of the hat, in black ink, was a familiar signature. "*Bennie Sanchez*."

"Isn't that your signature?" Kendra asked.

"Someone must have copied it," Bennie protested weakly.

"But why would they?" Jill asked. "On a hat that won't exist for another sixteen years."

On the underside of the cap's bill was a silver sticker of the logo again, a woman playing basketball. As she turned the cap, the sticker reflected green, blue, and orange colors back to her, and if she held it just right, designs of basketballs could be seen as well, as if they were bouncing, an elaborate version of the hologram rings she used to get in Cracker Jacks boxes. Sewn all around the lining of the cap was a thin strip of black cloth with embedded letters that repeated "WNBA FINALS" over and over in white thread.

"It would be a neat trick," Bennie murmured, thinking about the trouble someone would have to have gone to in order to create such a hat, and then to fake Bennie's signature on it. And for what?

"Nobody's trying to trick you," Jill said. "We just want you to understand that RIP is genuine."

"We don't need to trick you into trying to help Van, do we Bennie?" Kendra asked. "If there's even a *chance* you can help Van, don't you want to try?"

Bennie looked up, hat forgotten, as she recalled why she was there in the first place. Kendra was right. "What can I do?"

Jill leaned so far over on her stool Bennie thought she might fall off. In a voice barely more than a whisper, she said, "I can send you back there. To 1974. To witness the Expo murder."

Bennie stared. Travel back to 1974?

"I'd do it," Kendra said, "but I have to think about my boys."

The door opened and Inez came in, a half dozen sheets of paper in her hands. "I got some articles," she said, "from the '74 newspapers."

Inez was in on this craziness? Inez was the sensible one. She was a school teacher, for Christ's sake. Half the time, when Bennie spoke to her, she felt she ought to raise her hand first, Inez was so respectable. How could she believe in this nonsense?

"Have you told her?" Inez asked, coming forward to sit on the couch. The hand that didn't hold the newspaper articles clutched a wad of damp tissues.

"We told her." Kendra put her hand on Bennie's arm. "But she's not convinced."

"It's all true." Inez said. "I was there when Van came back. It seems unbelievable, I know, but there's no other explanation. She was only gone for a few minutes to us, but she was actually in the future for four weeks."

Jill joined Inez on the couch. "What have you got? Does it say the exact time and place?"

"Yes, look here." Inez held out one of the articles. "It shows the actual murder scene. Inspiration Point at Riverfront Park. That was before it was a park, of course. It was still the Expo Fairgrounds, but Inspiration Point was there, on Canada Island. And this one shows the time. At exactly 10:56 p.m. on July 14, 1974, security guards heard a gunshot. They rushed to the scene and found Stuart Shannon standing over the body of an off-duty police officer with the gun in his hands."

"He said the real murderer dropped it." Jill included Bennie in the conversation, as if she were part of it. "He said he just picked the gun up, right before the guards arrived. They didn't find anyone else around, but he says they never looked. If he's telling the truth, then you should be able to see who really did it."

"If you'll agree to go," Inez said, watching Bennie with some sympathy in her red, watery eyes.

"I know it's a lot to ask, Bennie. I'd go, but I've got this terrible cold. I might sneeze at just the wrong moment and ruin everything." As if to prove her point, Inez gave three hearty sneezes in a row and blew her nose again into her wad of tissues.

"It's very important," Jill said, "that you don't change anything that happened back then. Just witness it, don't actually *do* anything. Well, except eat and sleep. But nothing else."

"We got you some money," Kendra said, showing the small roll of bills she'd brought in. "All of it's dated before 1974, so it won't freak people out when you spend it. It's not much, three hundred and fifty dollars, but it's all we could get our hands on at such short notice."

"Why would I need three hundred and fifty dollars just to witness a murder?" Bennie asked, speaking for the first time since Inez arrived. Not that she actually *could* go back in time to witness the murder. That was crazy.

There was an awkward moment as Jill, Kendra, and Inez exchanged uneasy looks. Finally, Jill spoke. "I'll have to send you back the night before the murder. So you can scout it out and make

sure you get in the right place to watch when it all occurs. So you'll need some money for food, and maybe a place to stay. And also--"

"It does involve some risk," Inez said.

"I've never actually sent someone back in time," Jill said. "The *future* me did it, in two thousand eight, but *I* haven't. I'm pretty sure I have all the bugs worked out, though."

Bennie raised her eyebrows. "You're *pretty* sure?"

"The money's for you to live on," Kendra said apologetically. "In case you can't come back."

"I really don't think that will be a problem," Jill said quickly. "As long as you follow my instructions exactly."

"In case I don't come back?" Bennie asked, incredulous. "You think I'm going to let you send me back to 1974 and get *stuck* back there?"

"If you don't really believe it will work," Inez said, with the practiced manipulation of a middle school teacher, "what's the harm in trying? Humor us, Bennie."

Kendra squeezed Bennie's arm. "If there's a chance it'll save Van? Won't you try?"

That was it, right there. It was all a bunch of bullshit. Of course it was. But if there was even the remotest chance it could work, even a slight possibility that Bennie could do something to help rescue Van, how could she not try? It was better than staring at her computer screen for hours on end.

Abruptly, Bennie grabbed Jill's phone and started dialing a number.

Jill jumped up in a panic. "Don't tell anyone!"

Bennie shook her head to reassure Jill. The phone was answered.

"Lo?"

"Hi Dad," Bennie said, "Hey, I have a trivia question for you."

"Sure thing. Shoot."

"Who won the World's Series in 1974?"

"World Series in '74? Let's see, '74--" His voice trailed off as he attempted to retrieve the information from his immense memory banks. Bennie wasn't worried. Her father excelled at Trivial Pursuit anyway, but in the Sports Category he was king. "That was World's Fair year, wasn't it? That's right, I remember. The games were all in California, Oakland and LA. That was a big deal. You could go to all the games without even switching hotels. Not that I got to go. The Oakland A's won it, though, third time in a row for them. Haven't won it since."

"Great." Bennie grabbed a pencil from Jill's counter and scrawled the answer on a paper napkin.

"And how about the Superbowl?"

"In '74?"

"No, '75, I guess. For the '74 season."

"Okay, let's think. I got to count back, that would have been IX. Superbowl IX. Superbowl was still pretty new back then. Pittsburgh Steelers, believe it or not, over the Vikings. That was a sad game. Minnesota just couldn't play."

Bennie wrote it down. "Okay. Thanks, Dad. Oh, and Dad?" Bennie suddenly felt embarrassed, but she had to do it. Just in case. "I love you, Dad. Tell Mom too, okay?"

There was silence as her father processed the words that generally remained unspoken in their family. Then he said awkwardly, "Uh, yeah, sure, we love you too, Bennie. I hope you win your trivia game."

"Thanks, Dad." Bennie hung up the phone and shoved the napkin into her back pocket. The three women watched her. "So I can place some bets. In case I get stuck back there," she explained.

"I'm not going to try to get by on a measly three hundred and fifty dollars."

"Then you'll do it?" Kendra asked.

For answer, Bennie took the roll of bills from Kendra's hands and shoved it into her pocket as well.

"But if you bet on the games, it'll change history," Jill said anxiously.

"If she gets stuck back there, that'll change history too," Inez pointed out. "You have to let the girl live."

Jill didn't appear convinced but said, "Well, I'm pretty sure you won't get stuck."

"You can't wear those clothes, though," Kendra said. "They wore real bright colors in '74. And bell bottoms."

"What's that got to do with anything?" Bennie asked irritably. She looked down at herself. Black jeans, black leather Reeboks, long-sleeved blue chambray work shirt, black denim jacket.

"It's the seventies," Kendra said. "You'll stand out like a sore thumb dressed like that. You need some white bell bottoms or something, and a psychedelic shirt."

"It'll be the middle of July, too," Inez pointed out. "It'll be hot."

"You could wear hot pants," Kendra said. "And a halter top."

"I'll wear what I have on," Bennie said shortly. She turned to Jill. "When do we start?"

"Right away," Jill said, suddenly all business. She grabbed the newspaper articles Inez had copied and headed for the back of the shop. "I'll need to program the coordinates, but I can't do that until we get to the park." She unlocked and slid open the large shop doors at the back of the building.

"I'll meet you at the park," Kendra called, grabbing her keys.

"You don't need to be there," Jill said.

"Yes, I do!" Kendra ran out the front door toward her car.

"I'll stay here," Inez said. "Someone has to stay by the phone."

"Lock up after we leave. And don't tell anyone where we are." Jill hopped up into the cab of the truck, started the engine, and slowly backed RIP into the alley behind the shop. Inez followed and reached for the door to slide it closed.

Jill rolled down the truck window and called to Bennie. "Well? What're you waiting for?"

"What about my car?"

"Leave it here," Jill said. "We'll be back in a couple of hours."

A couple of hours. Right. Go to 1974, spend the night, witness a murder, return to 1988, and get back to Jill's house, all in a couple of hours. Looney Toons. They were all Looney Toons. Bennie wondered what made Van want to hang around with them.

Nevertheless, she climbed into the cab of the truck, and Jill took off. The dashboard was unlike any Bennie had ever seen, with its many switches, dials, levers, and buttons, but Bennie didn't pay much attention to it. Instead, she played with the white WNBA cap that she still held in her hand and tried to listen to Jill's instructions about travelling through time.

"It's vitally important that you don't do anything to change history," Jill said. "You just can't begin to imagine the impact one small change can make in what follows. Have you ever heard of the butterfly effect? It's the theory that, if a butterfly flaps its wings on one side of the world, it can create a tornado on the other side of the world, just by making imperceptible changes in the air currents. It's like that. Anything you do in 1974 could have that kind of effect. It may not be felt instantly, but it could change the world. That's one of the things I'd like to experiment on with RIP. Not now, of course, but someday it would be good to see if RIP could be used to undo some of the problems in the world. Like pollution. Imagine if we had understood the effects of pollution *before* it damaged the earth? That would be worth investigating, don't you think?"

Van wore the cap back from the future, Kendra said. From 2008. If that was true, what was Van doing with it there? They must have known each other then, been friends, even. Why else would Van wear Bennie's cap? Bennie would be forty-eight years old in 2008, three years older than Van was now. A perfect match.

If Jill's RIP machine really worked, and *if* Bennie ended up back in 1974, and *if* Bennie actually got stuck back there, it wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing.

Bennie calculated. In 1974, she'd only been fourteen years old. Van would have been thirty-one. Bennie winced. Based on that calculation, there was some merit to Van's admonition that Bennie was too young for her. But if Bennie--the *real* Bennie that is, the twenty-eight year old Bennie--got stuck in 1974, she'd only be three years younger than Van. Another perfect match. She could look Van up and meet her while Van was still available, *before* she had a chance to meet Patsy. If Patsy wasn't in the picture, Bennie knew without a doubt she would be able to win Van's love. She smiled. Maybe getting stuck in 1974 was actually a *good* idea. She'd make sure Van was nowhere near that prison in 1988, and she'd never be taken hostage in the first place.

It would be sad for Bennie's parents, of course, if Bennie dropped out of sight. Maybe there would be a way to let them know. Send them a message of some sort. Or, wait a minute. If Bennie got stuck in 1974, then in 1988 she'd still be around, she'd just be older. She'd be, what, forty-two by then? She could go visit them and explain it all to them in person. They'd freak out, of course, when she suddenly showed up fourteen years older, but it wouldn't be like she was dead or anything.

"Are you listening to me?" Jill demanded.

"Of course," Bennie said, startled back to the present. If it really was the present. She frowned. How could she explain something like that to her parents? It was impossible.

"We're going to want to pick you up the instant after the murder occurs," Jill said, "so you won't be in any danger of getting hurt, or caught by the police, or anything. We need to select the spot very carefully. I have to pick you up at the exact same spot I drop you off. I hope to develop more flexibility with a bit more research, but right now that's all I can manage. Here take this chalk." Jill handed Bennie a blue square of pool cue chalk. "As soon as you land in 1974, drop it on the ground and crush it with your foot. It'll mark the spot. It shouldn't be raining or anything, not on July 14, so you'll be able to find the exact same spot right after the murder. Here." She tapped the sheaf of photocopies that lay on the seat between them. "See if it tells in here exactly where the body was found."

Bennie shoved the cap into her jacket pocket and picked up the papers. There were several long articles. The killing of a cop was always big news, and that it happened on the grounds of the World's Fair made this one particularly sensational. Without reading, Bennie studied the accompanying photographs and skimmed their captions. "Here it is." She pulled out a grainy black and white copy of a photo showing a crude outline of a body next to a rock.

"Great," Jill said. "I'm going to park here first. Let's check out Inspiration Point. Bring that picture with you."

Bennie glanced up to see that they had already arrived at Riverfront Park. Jill had driven to the north side of the park and pulled into a metered space near the Old Flour Mill, which now housed a cluster of eclectic shops and an upscale restaurant. They climbed from the truck, and Jill plugged a dime into the meter.

"We'll be right back," Jill said. "This way."

They were entering the park through what Bennie always thought of as the back side. It was the side farthest from the downtown area, the side used by maintenance crews to enter and exit. The

area was barren of tourist enticements like the Carousel and popcorn stands that fronted the south side. It was a cool and blustery autumn day. The lunch hour was over, and there were few people around. They crossed into the park on a bridge that was originally designed for cars but which had been restricted to pedestrians since Expo. The Spokane River rushed by beneath them, the water not as turbulent as it would be in the spring or summer, but by no means tame.

"This is perfect," Jill said. "Look, we're already on Canada Island. And here's Inspiration Point." A plaque was fixed to the end of the bridge.

INSPIRATION POINT Commemorating Spokane's Christian Pioneers Dedicated 1974

"Who are Spokane's Christian pioneers?" Bennie asked, peering down the long winding path toward the end of the Point. The path was paved concrete, fairly narrow, and lined on both sides with a waist-high wall built of volcanic rocks.

"I don't know." Jill stretched her arms out on both sides of her and tried to touch the walls with her fingers. She couldn't quite reach. "I think RIP will fit. It's going to be a tight squeeze, though."

They walked down the path as it curved around to the Point overlooking the water. The path was less than fifty yards long. They reached the end, and Bennie wheeled in a circle. "You may be able to get RIP down here," she said, "but I don't know how you're going to get it back up." The Point itself was almost round, perhaps fifteen feet across, with a large boulder nearly three feet in diameter embedded into the concrete at the north end. Bennie peeked over the wall. It was a straight drop thirty feet down to the rocky river bed.

Jill held out her hand. "Let me see the picture."

Bennie gave her the photocopy.

"The body was found right by this big rock," Jill said. She measured with her eyes. "I'll back RIP down. You can help me. And I'll stop it right here." She pointed to a spot on the ground. "Give me that chalk back."

Bennie handed the blue cube to Jill, who knelt on the ground and drew a line across the concrete, no more than four feet from the boulder.

"I'll back RIP up to here," Jill said. "You'll land right about here." She made a little blue X about two feet farther away. "Somewhere around here should give you a good view of the murder."

"Should give the murderer a good view of me, too."

"You'll be hiding. And it'll be dark," Jill said. "But you have to be close enough to see." She went to the end of the Point and peered down over the wall. She frowned and continued walking around the Point, peering over the side, until she'd gone about a third of the way around. "Here," she said, pointing to the ground on the other side of the wall. "You can hide behind this wall and watch the murder from here."

Bennie joined her and looked down. There was a ledge of rocky dirt about two feet wide, on the other side of the wall. There was no barrier between it and a plummet to the river below. The water frothed as it hit the wall and swirled around the scattered rocks. A few spindly shrubs clung to the earth, providing a bare minimum of protection. Lovely.

"But as soon as the murder occurs, you have to climb back over the wall and stand on the chalk mark so that RIP can pick you up. I'll have RIP ready so it'll grab you on the chalk mark. Okay?" Bennie looked from the narrow hiding spot to the boulder where the body was found to the little blue X on the ground, all so close together, and tried to imagine it. It seemed pretty risky to her.

But, of course, it would only be risky if she actually went to 1974, and if she actually witnessed the murder, and if she didn't decide to stay back there to woo Van. What the hell.

"Beam me up, Scotty."

Jill smiled. "Good. Then let's get RIP."

Kendra ran up as soon as they arrived back at the truck. "I couldn't find a place to park," she said breathlessly. "I finally had to *pay*. Here, Bennie, wear this." She handed Bennie a filmy white cotton blouse held together in front with a pink cord loosely threaded through yellow embroidered holes that reached nearly to the waist, sleeves that flared into a bell shape at the wrist, and another flare ruffled at the bottom near the hip. The edges of the ruffles were embroidered with pink and yellow flowers.

"I'm not wearing *this*." Bennie thrust the blouse back into Kendra's hands.

"But, Bennie, you can't go back to 1974 dressed like that," Kendra said, nearly in tears. "You'll look like a freak. *Please*."

"Christ. Fine," Bennie quickly removed her jacket and handed it to Jill. What's the worst that could happen? It's not like she was going to see anyone she knew back there. She shivered as she removed her denim shirt, leaving her only in her white Fruit of the Loom tank top. Kendra reached for the bottom of the tank and Bennie slapped her hands. "Stop it, woman, that's my underwear."

"Oh, sorry." Kendra bit her lip. "Oh, it'll be all right, I guess. Here."

Bennie ducked and held out her arms so that Kendra could drop the cotton shirt over her head. The ruffles settled against the backs of her hands. "Now I look like a freak," she grumbled. She reached for her jacket.

"Oh, no, not the jacket," Kendra protested.

"It's cold," Bennie said.

"It won't be in July."

"At night?"

"Oh," Kendra moaned. "I knew I should have grabbed that poncho."

"*No*. I have to draw the line somewhere. No poncho."

"The jacket's fine," Jill said. "She can carry it during the day. Now we need to get moving. Take Kendra down to the Point. You can both guide me."

Bennie and Kendra walked back over the bridge to Inspiration Point, while Jill fired up the truck. A large sign on the end of the bridge said, "No Vehicles Allowed," but they all ignored it. No one was there to stop them, and they wouldn't be going far.

"This is Inspiration Point," Bennie said, when they reached head of the path.

Kendra read the plaque. "Who are Spokane's Christian Pioneers?"

"I have no idea."

They watched RIP rumble toward them. Jill continued past the entrance to the path, then stopped and slowly backed up. Bennie stood against the left wall while Kendra stood against the right, and they both slowly stepped backward, guiding Jill as she backed down the path. There was room for the truck to clear both walls, but the camper was wider than the body of the truck. For the most part, the camper was high enough off the ground that it cleared the top of the wall, but in a couple of spots the bottom edge scraped against the top of the rocks. It was cosmetic damage, and Jill ignored it.

When the back of RIP reached the blue chalk line, Bennie waved Jill to a halt. Jill was able to open the door wide enough to let her slip out, but the wall blocked her from going around the camper to join Bennie and Kendra. Apparently without a second thought and no peeks down at

the river below, Jill stepped onto the top of the rock wall and balanced her way back to the end of the camper, where she hopped down.

"I just have a couple of things to do still." Jill opened the back of RIP and climbed inside.

Bennie and Kendra stood in the circle of Inspiration Point. Bennie surveyed what she could see of the rest of Riverfront Park, across the river. The entire park covered a hundred acres and spanned many city blocks of the downtown area. What she could see from the Point was green grass and moderate sized trees, most of them planted after Expo 74, when the fairgrounds were converted into the park. It was a beautifully serene scene.

"Were you in Spokane during Expo 74?" Bennie asked Kendra.

Kendra shook her head. "We lived in Germany then. Paul was still in the Air Force. Were you here?"

Bennie nodded. "I was fourteen. I remember coming down here a few times. But most of it bored me. It was too educational. I just wanted to swim and play softball all summer long."

Kendra smiled at her. "You were too young to appreciate it. Maybe you'll appreciate it more this time."

Bennie gave a short laugh of disbelief. "Yeah, right."

Jill climbed down from the camper. "Okay, Bennie, it's ready for you. Sit on that stool and don't move. You should be in 1974 before you know it."

Bennie felt a tremor of anxiety, the same sort she felt right before a root canal or a pap smear. She knew it wasn't going to be the end of the world, but she just wanted it over with. On an impulse, she leaned down and kissed Kendra on the cheek. She turned to Jill and held out her hand. It was just possible she might not see them again, or at least not for years. Might was well say good-bye properly.

"Remember," Jill said, "do nothing. Just watch. And crush the chalk as soon as you land, in the exact spot. And climb over the wall and move to the chalk mark as soon as the murder is done. Got that?"

"Got it." Bennie climbed into the computerized camper and sat on the little metal stool, the piece of chalk clenched in her hand. Jill closed the door and latched it, and Bennie was encased in darkness, the only light coming from the tiny lights that flickered and buzzed and the soft glow that came from the tubes in the corner. She felt a small tremor as Jill climbed back into the truck, and the engine roared to life.

Bennie took a deep breath. Nothing was going to happen. Almost certainly nothing was going to happen. In another minute or two, the door would open and Jill and Kendra would sheepishly admit that they couldn't really send someone back in time. It was just a hope, a dream. In a minute it would all be over.

But meanwhile, her pulse was racing a bit too rapidly for comfort, and her breath came faster. She wished it was all over now, and she could go home and stare at the computer and try to keep Van safe by staying awake. In a minute--

Bennie heard a loud bang. She felt as if someone tackled her from behind. She flew from the stool and landed hard on her hands and knees.

She was on concrete. Next to a rock. In the middle of the night.

Chapter Eighteen

Inez -- 1988

"*THE ARMIES OF the North and the South during the American Civil War had many similarities as well as many differences,*" Inez read for perhaps the fiftieth time, and she positively ached from the tedium of it. She'd fed them the line, of course, but she'd written it on the chalkboard as an *example* of a topic sentence, not the *only* topic sentence that could ever possibly start an essay comparing and contrasting the armies of the Civil War. But nearly every single paper began with the same words or a bland variation of them. Except for little skip-a-grade Melissa's, of course. She'd started her essay with a sonnet, if Inez recalled her Poetry 101 correctly.

*All soldiers marching off, a war to fight,
In jackets clad in blue and some in gray,
Like battles fought with toys when boys at play,
With no doubt in their minds each side was right.
No thought of how they'd eat or where to sleep,
They marched without a care inside their souls,
Not hesitant to fill their foes with holes
And toss their bodies into rotting heaps.
But when the battle raged in real life,
Cannons boomed and bullets tore the sky,
And soldiers died without a chance to cry,
It was too late to run from all the strife.
And when the corpses all lay still in mud,
The blue and gray alike were red with blood.*

Little show off. Inez couldn't figure out why Melissa was even in her class. It was obvious she should have been in the gifted class. She must have had measles during testing week.

The essays were spread out before her on Jill's coffee table. Six stacks so far. The obvious A's--Melissa's, of course--on the left and the obvious F's on the right, B's, C's, and D's ranged in the middle, and in a sideways stack in the corner were those essays she was going to have to reread before putting them into a category. That stack was by far the largest.

"Oh, Lord," Inez moaned, dropping the current essay back onto the table. She put her hands up to her aching eyes and held them there. She didn't want to read another essay comparing and contrasting the armies of the Civil War. She couldn't concentrate on the armies of any war. She couldn't concentrate on anything. Not only was it agonizing sitting here alone waiting for Jill and Bennie to come back, or for the phone to ring with news about Van, or for a special news bulletin to flash on the TV, but her head was pounding, her nose was raw, and she thought she might be getting a fever. Why *should* she care about the similarities and differences of the armies of the Civil War?

There was a knock at the door and Inez got up to open it, eager for the distraction, *any* distraction to take her away from the essays. If she'd thought to make a wish before opening the door, it

would have been that it would be Grace standing there. So when she opened the door, and Grace stood before her with her arms wrapped around a large crock pot, Inez blinked in disbelief, wondering if she was perhaps delirious from her cold.

Grace wore a hesitant smile.

"Grace?" Inez asked finally. She peeked behind Grace to see if Waverly was with her, but no. Grace was all alone.

Grace's smile faltered as Inez continued to stand with her jaw dropped open. "I brought you some soup," she said.

"Soup?"

"I thought you might need something to eat."

Still, Inez just stood there, dumfounded, until Grace said, "It's kind of heavy. Can I put it down?"

"Of course, yes, come in." Inez backed up and let Grace enter the shop. Finally grasping Grace's words, she asked, "You brought soup?"

"Yes." Grace set the crock pot on the tiny counter, unplugged a toaster, and plugged the crock pot in. She leaned a hip against the counter and looked at Inez. "Chicken soup. Homemade."

Inez was astounded. "You made chicken soup for *me*? How did you know I was sick?"

Grace raised her brows. "You're sick?"

"Oh, you didn't--" Inez trailed off, flushed and embarrassed at her assumption. Of course Grace hadn't made the soup for *her*, she'd made it for everyone. Damn cold. It was making her stupid.

"You do look a little hot." Like an angel dropped from heaven, Grace came over and raised her hand to Inez's face. Inez closed her eyes, smiled, and let herself enjoy the feel of Grace's cool little fingers on her cheek, her forehead, her neck. "You might have a fever. You should probably go home and go to bed."

Inez opened her eyes and basked in the concern she saw in Grace's eyes. "I can't. I have to stay here in case Patsy calls."

"Why? Where's Jill?" Grace asked, scanning the empty shop.

"Jill?"

Grace nodded. "I'm surprised she's not here. She didn't go to work, did she?"

She should have prepared a lie ahead of time, Inez realized, too late. Now, with her head thick and heavy from her cold and too many essays and Grace's soft brown doe eyes looking at her like that, she couldn't think at all. "No. Um, she, uh, she had some errands to run."

This time Grace raised only her right eyebrow. "Errands? In her camper?"

"Camper?" Inez looked around at the empty back of the shop as if she'd just noticed RIP was gone. "Oh, yeah, she took the camper. To do her errands."

"With Bennie?"

"Huh?"

"Isn't that Bennie's car out there? The black bug?"

"Oh, yeah, right. Yes." Inez nodded with confidence. "Yes, she took Bennie with her. In the camper. To do her errands."

This time Grace's eyebrows twitched, and Inez wondered what the twitch signified. Confusion? Dismay? Anger? Someday, she resolved, she would know Grace's eyebrow twitches better than she knew the back of her own hand. She'd be able to track Grace's moods by those volatile eyebrows. The angle of the eyebrow sweep, the depth of the furrow, the speed of the twitch, the number of brows involved. But that day was not here yet, and she couldn't tell if the twitch meant that Grace suspected Inez was lying. What kind of woman was she, anyway, to lie to the

woman she intended to spend the rest of her life with? What sort of relationship trauma was she causing by starting it off with a lie? She bit her lip.

"Inez, is everything okay?" Grace asked.

Inez realized she'd been staring again. "Oh, yes, everything's fine. It's, ah, it's just this cold."

Grace gave a small but doubtful nod, as if she were not quite satisfied with Inez's answer. "Well it's feed a cold, starve a fever, right? The soup needs about another hour in the crock pot to finish heating up. I hope it makes you feel better." She moved for the door.

"No, don't go." Inez grabbed Grace's arm. Grace glanced at her in surprise, and Inez dropped her hand. "Sorry. But I'd love it if you'd stay a while and keep me company. Please, Grace. It'll help me stay awake, while I listen for the phone."

"Won't the ringing of the phone wake you up?"

"I'm a very heavy sleeper," Inez said. "And I've been grading essays. *Eighth* grade essays. They're putting me to sleep."

Grace smiled. "I can stay a little while." She let herself be led to the couch. "Maybe until Jill and Bennie get back. What are the essays about?"

"The Civil War." Inez rolled her eyes. "It's so boring."

"Really?" Grace's brows rose. "I think the Civil War is interesting."

"Me too," Inez admitted quickly. "I *love* history."

"You're the teacher," Grace pointed out. "If you think it's boring, can't you teach it a different way to make it more interesting?"

"Yes, I can. I do. I mean, it's not really boring. I don't know why I said that. I think the Civil War is fascinating. The North, the South, the middle even, all of it. Really, really interesting."

"Inez, have you taken some cold medicine or something?"

"No," Inez said, somewhat mournfully. "I can't. It would make me sleepy. And I have to stay awake."

"Right, to answer the phone." Grace scanned the shop again, brows furrowed in what was clearly dissatisfaction. "I think it's strange that they left you here alone, with you so sick, just so they could go do errands. At a time like this? Couldn't one of them have stayed here so you could go home? Or at least stayed here with you?"

"I don't mind," Inez said. "I'm not that sleepy. It's just these essays. And I'm really not that sick." Her nose tickled suddenly, and she grabbed a tissue just in time to catch a sneeze. "How's Sadie?"

"She's okay. A little homesick, I think. Waverly's cats are afraid of her, so I'm keeping her at my place."

"So, um, Waverly didn't come with you?" Inez blew her nose.

"She's working," Grace said absently. With sudden irritation, she added, "What kind of errands do they have that are so important they have to do them *now*, while you're sick and Van's still a hostage?"

She's lovely, Inez saw with surprise and pleasure. She was so accustomed to longing for the *idea* of Grace, so dazzled by the mere presence of her when she was around, that she'd not before paid a great deal of attention to the details of her. With no Waverly watching her vigilantly to ensure she didn't pay too much attention, Inez was finally able to thoroughly examine Grace, and she was delighted by what she saw. Grace wore no make-up, no jewelry, no earrings even. Her dark brown hair was cut simply and short, but she was beautiful, like Audrey Hepburn, and with the most amazingly expressive eyebrows. Her brown eyes sparked with anger and her cheeks were

pink. Was her outrage, or at least some of it, brought on by concern for Inez? The thought made Inez warm inside.

"Don't they realize Patsy could call at any time?" Grace asked. "You're in no condition to be in charge here."

She's so delicate, Inez marveled, and aptly named, as she watched the narrow wrists and tiny fingers sweep about as Grace gestured her ire.

"Do you love Waverly?" Inez asked abruptly.

Grace's brows both shot up and the left one quirked with amusement. "Um, none of your business?"

"Oh. I was rude, wasn't I? I'm sorry."

Grace smiled. "It's okay. You're sick. I'll give you a free pass this once."

"Remember when we sat in the hot tub at Patsy's party?" Inez asked.

"Of course."

"You talked about Waverly then," Inez reminded her. "You weren't so sure you even liked her."

"I told you that?"

"Uh huh. So I just wondered if, you know, things were better," Inez said. "I mean, you're still dating her, all these months later."

Grace stared for a moment at the muted television, and Inez thought she wasn't going to answer. Finally she said, "Waverly just took some getting used to, that's all. She's a woman with a lot of energy. She likes to go out dancing and partying, or skating or skiing or camping. It's always something. And I like to stay home and garden or read or sew. So it took a while to work out our differences. But I like her. She's good to me."

"But do you love her?"

Grace shot Inez an exasperated look. "That free pass isn't unlimited, you know."

"Oh, please." Inez drew her legs up on the couch and curled them underneath her, facing Grace.

"Aren't we friends? This is just girl talk. It'll help pass the time."

Grace shook her head, but gave in. "All right." She kicked off her shoes and curled her own legs underneath her. She swiveled so that she was facing Inez on the other end of the couch. "There's more than one kind of love, you know."

"What do you mean?"

"Waverly is kind to me. We don't fight."

"Don't fight? What's that got to do with love?"

"I didn't say it did," Grace said. "But it's easier to love someone you don't fight with than someone you do, isn't it?"

"I guess," Inez said doubtfully.

"Come on," Grace said. "You're not a fighter."

"No, I hate fighting. But," Inez frowned, "there's got to be more than that. More than just not fighting. That's not love."

"So? What's so great about love?" Grace asked a bit impatiently. "I don't need love. I don't particularly want love. I've been loved, and I didn't like how it felt."

Inez was taken aback. "Well, then," she said, trying to make sense of Grace's words, "that must not have really been love. Love should make you feel good."

"Love isn't everything."

"Yes, it is."

Grace smiled slightly. "No, Inez, it isn't."

Inez sat back against the arm of the couch and tried to assimilate this new idea. Van had told her that in the future she'd been in, in 2008, Grace and Inez had spent fifteen happy years together. Inez just assumed that meant they'd been in love. How else *could* they have been happy together for fifteen years? Inez scrutinized Grace, who was watching her now with an amused expression. Maybe Grace *thought* love wasn't everything, but Inez could teach her differently. It was possible. She had to have done it in their alternate lives, the ones that Van saw, because there was simply no way Inez could be happy in a relationship for fifteen years without love.

"What about passion?" Inez asked. "What about sex?"

Grace's smile grew. She seemed to be enjoying Inez's perplexity. "A little sex goes a long way, really."

"No," Inez said, shaking her head. "That's the wrong answer, Grace. If you're not having passionate sex with Waverly, and you're not in love with her, you shouldn't be with her at all."

"Why not?" Grace challenged, suddenly serious. "She's a good companion. She's fun. She doesn't hurt me. Why isn't that enough?"

"Because it's a waste," Inez said, exasperated. "It's a waste of *her* time, if nothing else. She deserves to be with someone who loves her."

"She wants to be with me."

"She wants you to *love* her," Inez corrected.

"How do you know?"

"It's what everybody wants," Inez said.

"Not me."

Inez absorbed that. "What did you mean, she doesn't hurt you?"

Grace slowly dropped her leg onto the floor and stared at the silent television. After a long moment, she said, "Have you ever been with someone who hurt you?"

"Sure, I've been with women who hurt me," Inez said slowly. "Not *physically*, though."

"My husband used to beat me up," Grace said, her voice matter-of-fact. "It went on for years, and it was bad. Not quite *The Burning Bed*, but not far from it. He put me in the hospital more than once. He broke my arm, scalded me with boiling water and gave me third degree burns, gave me a concussion twice, and lots of black eyes and fat lips and bruises. And he loved me."

Inez felt goose bumps rise up on her arms at Grace's recitation. Grace's eyes challenged her to say something, but all Inez could do was whisper, "That wasn't love, Grace."

"The absence of pain is enough for me," Grace said. "I can go to sleep with Waverly at night, and I don't have to worry about being hauled out of bed at midnight and thrown down the stairs. I can tease her without having her fly into a rage. I can give her a playful punch in the arm, and she doesn't turn around and backhand me across the face. What do I care about love? I have peace. I don't have

to live in fear. That's better than love."

Inez shook her head, her eyes stinging with tears. "No, it's not."

"How can you say that?" Grace demanded. "You've obviously never lived with an abuser, or you wouldn't say that." She uncurled her legs and thrust her feet back into her shoes.

"You can have both," Inez said quickly. "You can have love *and* not live in fear. *I would never* hurt you, Grace, but I--" She stopped short of saying *I would love you*, but Grace filled in the blank.

"Don't say that!" Grace stood up and looked down at Inez, eyes blazing and stern warnings in her face and voice. "Don't say it, Inez. Not if you want to be my friend."

But Inez could not help herself. "Waverly's not the only one who would be good to you."

"Damn it!" Grace swung around quickly and strode to the door. "Damn it, Inez. Why couldn't you just be my friend?" She stormed out, slamming the door behind her. Inez leaped from the couch. "Grace, wait. I will be your friend." She ran through the doorway. "Don't go, *please*. Give me one minute. I can be your friend!" The door fell closed behind her as she chased after Grace. Moments later, in the empty shop, the phone rang.

Chapter Nineteen

Bennie -- 1974

THE FIRST THING Bennie noticed, other than the instant darkness and the stinging in her hands, was that she wasn't alone. Two other people were on Inspiration Point with her, and they were engaged in a struggle. Bennie drew herself up to a standing position and took a quick silent step backward, her immediate thought being to get away undetected. Then she heard one of the figures, the smaller one, shout out in pain.

"Ouch! Let me go. Let go. You're hurting me."

It was the voice of a young girl, and the person grappling with her was a man considerably larger than she was. The girl kicked out and made contact with the man's shin.

"Bitch," the man said. Holding her steady with one hand, he brought his other back in a fist, ready to strike.

"Hey!" Bennie called out. "Stop that!"

The man dropped his fist and wheeled around in surprise. "Where the hell--?"

The girl took the opportunity to wriggle out of the man's grasp. She ducked around him and took off running up the path away from the Point.

"Run!" she yelled as she zipped past Bennie.

The man moved toward Bennie. His stance and his face, or what she could see of it in the moonlight, were clearly menacing. Running didn't seem a bad idea, and there was no time to ponder any alternatives. She whipped around and took off after the girl. She heard the man's footsteps behind her. He was chasing her! And he was very close. One good tackle and he'd have her. She put forth a burst of speed and widened the distance between them.

The girl was wearing shorts, and her pale legs flashed directional signals to Bennie. She ducked into a dark space between two small buildings on her right. Bennie followed, completely disoriented. They were in what would later become Riverfront Park, where Bennie was used to seeing expansive green lawns and wide open spaces. But right now it was the middle of the World's Fair, and everywhere were clusters of exhibition buildings, flower stands, concession booths, signs, and garbage cans. They had to be on Canada Island still, since they hadn't crossed a bridge, but Bennie had no idea where on the tiny island they were.

"In here," the girl whispered, and ducked again through a narrow passage. Bennie followed as she heard panting behind her.

They came out behind an exhibit built like a log cabin. The girl hopped up onto a stone wall and ran along the top of it.

Bennie hesitated. She couldn't see well in the darkness, but she remembered that the other side of the wall was nearly a sheer drop down into the river. She again heard the man coming close behind her. There was nowhere else to go, and the top of the wall was a good twelve inches wide. Jill had done it just a few minutes ago, without any hesitation. Bennie pulled herself up and walked quickly, keeping her eyes focused on the girl ahead of her.

The flashing legs reached the end of the wall and flitted to the ground at the east end of Canada Island, an area Bennie recognized by the narrow suspension foot bridge leading to the north bank of the river.

"This way." The girl ran out onto the bridge, and Bennie followed. When they were about half way across the fifty foot span, the girl stopped and looked back at the island.

"Ha ha!" she crowed loudly and flipped the middle fingers of both hands high into the air. Bennie looked back and saw the man standing beside the wall next to the log building, silently watching them, apparently not desperate enough to climb onto the wall to continue the chase. The girl jogged the rest of the way across the swaying bridge, and Bennie hurried to keep up.

The bridge ended abruptly at the edge of a well-lit circle of bright blue and yellow pup tents, perhaps twelve of them, with a lodge-pole building at one end. A sign on the building identified it as the *Expo 74 Boy Scout Encampment*. Without hesitation, the girl ran straight through the center of the circle of tents to the other side of the camp. Bennie paused at the edge and scanned the camp for movement, leery of calling attention to herself.

"Come on!" the girl called softly from the other edge of the circle, waving Bennie toward her. Bennie's moment of hesitation cost her. A man in scouting shorts and a green t-shirt appeared at the entrance of the lodge, a flashlight in his hand, and a moment later the bright beam of light swept across the camp. The girl vanished, and Bennie backed quickly away, just before the light would have reached her. By backing away, Bennie had put herself back on the foot bridge leading to Canada Island. Squinting, she could make out the figure of the chasing man coming across it toward her.

"Christ," she whispered. Not two minutes into 1974, and she'd already fucked up royally. *Do nothing*, Jill had said. *Just observe, don't change anything*. Over and over she'd said it. And what had Bennie done not ten seconds after landing? She'd interfered with the girl and that man and changed history forever, for all she knew. Now she was stuck between Canada Island and the Boy Scout camp, a menacing man behind her and a vigilant scoutmaster in front. She was stuck. "Psst."

Bennie looked down. The girl was underneath the foot bridge, on the bank of the river behind the Boy Scout camp. She gestured for Bennie to join her. Bennie's choices were limited. The least desirable of them was trundling toward her on the bridge, and again she had no time to think. Taking a deep breath, Bennie pulled herself over the steel ropes that supported the bridge and dropped to the earth below. The bank was no more than three feet beneath the bridge at that point, but it sloped toward the river far below. As soon as she landed, Bennie's sneakers began to slide. Skinny arms wrapped themselves around her and slowed her slide enough to allow Bennie to catch her footing. The girl let go and started running again, this time along the river bank behind the Boy Scout encampment. Bennie followed, dodging the beam of the flashlight that still played over the pup tents.

At the far edge of the Boy Scout encampment was a chain link fence designed to prevent people from entering the Expo grounds illegally. The girl stooped and lifted a corner of it where it had

been loosened. She ducked through and held the fencing up for Bennie. Bennie got onto her hands and knees and crawled through the hole. She stood and watched the girl place the fencing back so that the opening wasn't noticeable.

Bennie could still see the shadowy outline of the man on the foot bridge, nearly at the end of it, and the light from the Boy Scout leader's flashlight still danced around the camp. If he pointed it in their direction, he would light them up.

"C'mon," the girl said, and again they ran, this time on a dirt path along the north side of the river. The path was about a quarter mile long and ended at the back parking lot of a north shore building. The parking lot itself led to a city street. Finally, the girl slowed to a walk, stopped, and put her hands on her knees to catch her breath. Bennie was relieved to see she wasn't the only one gasping for air. She was in good shape for a twenty-eight-year-old, but she wasn't sure how much longer she could have kept up with this skinny kid.

"Wahoo!" the girl sang triumphantly, as if the chase had been a game. "We did it!"

"Did what?" Bennie asked, still gasping for breath.

"We got away from him."

"Who was that guy?"

"My step-father." Bitter hatred dripped from her voice.

"What were you fighting about?"

"He was trying to kill me."

"Oh," Bennie said. "Right." She examined the girl in the light from a street lamp. She was tall, but not nearly as tall as Bennie's five ten, and she was skinny, with a child-like fragility. She had long fair hair parted in the center and hanging straight down the sides of her face, like Peggy Lipton of *The Mod Squad*. Bennie was reminded of high school when all the girls who could wore their hair like that. Bennie wasn't one of them. "What were you doing there in the middle of the night?"

"Nothing." She still had the voice of child. "What were *you* doing there? I didn't even see you show up. All of a sudden you were just there."

"Nothing," Bennie said, giving the girl a non-answer back. She'd caught her breath and was ready to move on. Now that she'd made it safely out of the Expo grounds, she didn't need to engage in a conversation with this girl. She'd already broken Jill's cardinal rule of *do nothing*, but she didn't need to make it any worse. "I have to get going. You take care of yourself, okay."

Bennie turned away from the girl and headed north, up a street she recognized. She was on Lincoln. Around the corner to the right was the Hostess Bakery Shop, and if it was the middle of the day, heavenly smells would waft from it and make her crave some Hostess cupcakes. But it wasn't the middle of the day. It was the middle of the night, and she had just run through the fairgrounds of the 1974 World's Fair. Not ten minutes had passed since she'd landed on Inspiration Point, but they'd been a busy ten minutes, and it was only now that Bennie grasped the import of what had just occurred.

She was in 1974. Jill's time-travel machine really worked.

She heard movement behind her and spun around, heart thumping, half expecting to see the man with his arm raised to strike her. But it was the girl, no more than ten feet behind her.

"What are you doing?" Bennie asked.

"Nothing."

"Why are you following me?"

"It's a free country."

"Go home," Bennie said. "You should be in bed."

"Mind your own bees wax. I can follow you if I want."

Bennie decided to ignore her. If she walked long enough, the girl would give up and go home. Bennie continued north past the bakery and wondered if she should turn west toward Monroe or east toward Division Street. Monroe was much closer, but Division was more likely to have a cheap motel she could stay in for the night. She tried to envision Monroe as it was in 1974, but it was too long ago, and she'd been too young.

"Where are you going?" the girl asked, closer now.

"Nowhere. Stop following me."

A few paces farther on, the girl shouted angrily from behind her. "I saved you. Twice. Three times, if you count the Boy Scout."

"No, I saved *you*."

"Only once," the girl argued. Her anger vanished as rapidly as it had appeared. "I know a place we can sleep for free. And get free food too."

"No thanks." Sleep sounded good, though. She hadn't slept at all the night before, and she had nearly twenty-four hours to get through before she needed to return to Inspiration Point and witness the murder. The thought of spending some of her measly three hundred and fifty dollars on a motel room was painful, since for all she knew she'd be stuck here in '74 indefinitely. Especially since-- fuck! The chalk. She'd forgotten to crush the chalk when she landed. Oh, Christ. She felt her pockets. She must have dropped it somewhere, but God only knew where. Now how would she know where to stand after the murder so that Jill could pick her up? Damn. Nope, she really shouldn't waste any money on a motel room, no matter how exhausted she was. If she was stuck in 1974, she was going to need every penny she had.

"You sleep outside under the stars there." The girl had caught up to Bennie and walked beside her now, chatting as if they'd been strolling together all along. "I heard they keep extra blankets around for people who just show up. And lots of really good food. It's a Yippie camp."

"Yippie?"

"Yeah," the girl said eagerly, happy to have caught Bennie's attention. "They're like hippies, only newer."

"I know what a Yippie is." There'd been a Yippie Camp in Spokane during Expo. Bennie remembered her parents talking about it, and not with favor. She hadn't paid much attention to it then, but she'd learned more since. Yippies were a lot like hippies, except they had a political agenda that could turn violent. During Expo they'd camped in a forested area just west of the city where Latah Creek joined up with the Spokane River. City officials had set it aside for the Yippies, to try to contain the influx of young drifters who came to town for the fair and to keep an eye on them in case they tried to cause trouble. People's Park, the kids had called it, and the name stuck. Thousands of young people had camped out there the summer of 1974, and in 1988 it was still the place where nomads and homeless people camped when they had nowhere else to go. It was the place where nude bathing, secretive sex, and drug deals were common place. "I don't want to go there," Bennie said.

"Fine," the girl said, a flounce in her voice. "I'll just go by myself."

The girl stopped and put her hands on her skinny hips in an obvious challenge.

"Fine," Bennie said.

"Fine."

Bennie continued on alone and left the girl standing there. She expected to hear the girl shuffling behind her any moment, and when she didn't, she turned around. The girl was half a block away, moving south.

"How old are you?" Bennie called after her.

The girl stopped. "Fourteen. How old are you?"

Fourteen. Jesus. Bennie thought of herself at fourteen. She'd still had a bedtime, for Christ's sake, and thought it was a treat to stay up until midnight on New Year's Eve. And here this kid was, out alone in the middle of the night, fighting with her step-father, who no doubt had just been trying to take her home. She had no business being alone out here this time of night.

Do nothing, Jill had said. But it was too late to heed that advice. She'd already done something, and the result of it was this kid standing before her in a thin little tank top, denim cutoffs, and strappy pair of white leather sandals. How had she run in those things? Bennie didn't know if the kid was worse off or better because of her intervention, but it was too late to worry about that now. She'd prevented the man from taking the girl home, and because of that action the kid was adrift alone in the middle of the night.

When Bennie said nothing, the girl whipped around again, her hair flying out in a fan, and continued walking south. "I'm going without you," she shouted over her shoulder in warning, the same sort a mother gives a toddler who refused to come along.

Bennie sighed. Free food and a place to sleep under the stars. It wasn't a bad deal.

"Wait for me," Bennie called. "I'm coming with you."

Chapter Twenty

Patsy -- 1988

PATSY LET THE phone ring a dozen times, more, unable to believe her friends had abandoned her. "We'll be waiting here," they'd told her. "We'll be at Jill's shop. Anything we can do, anything you want, call us here. We're here for you." What bull shit!

She slammed the handset down into the cradle and shoved her way out of the phone booth, heard the tinkle of the quarter drop into the change return, and wheeled back around to scoop it out.

She was running out of quarters. She could use any of the phones in the Administration Building for free, but she would risk having someone barge in on her, so she snatched her chance when she could to use the phone booth outside.

God damned useless friends. She pushed through the glass doors back into the building, unlocked the door to the stairs, and ran up them two at a time, fury feeding her stiff muscles. Here she was, nearly--what, thirty hours?--into this hostage crisis, trying to negotiate with the bastards, trying to keep her cool, trying to keep up a façade in front of everyone, act as though Van was nothing but an ordinary hostage rather than Patsy's reason for living, for God's sake. All she wanted was a moment stolen during a quick bathroom break to call the women who were supposed to understand, the women who knew what she was going through, who should have realized that her very life hung in the balance out there in the tower. And they couldn't be bothered to answer the fucking phone.

Patsy slammed into the ladies room, even though she'd gone before she went downstairs. She just needed another minute. She didn't think she could talk to that bastard Stu right now without

letting her fury get the better of her. She ran cold water in the sink and splashed it on her face, not caring that it was wetting her hair and the front of her uniform. She was no longer in regulation anyway. After more than thirty hours in the same clothes her collar was open, the sleeves rolled up, a spill of coffee adorned her left breast, and a sour smell arose from her unwashed body. A few splashes of water weren't going to make any difference.

She leaned closer to the mirror. She looked like shit. Every minute of her fifty years showed on her face. Exhaustion made her eyes red, her skin was pasty white, dark circles pouched beneath her eyes, her hair was limp and dull, and the wrinkles-- Jesus. She'd aged ten years since yesterday.

God, she wanted a drink. Was God testing her? Or maybe he was just playing a big old joke. Nearly three months had passed since a drop of liquor had crossed Patsy's lips. It had been a difficult three months, but not nearly as bad as she thought it would be. In another way, the last three months had been pretty blissful. Van had been particularly attentive and affectionate since her return from 1988, and she went out of her way to make it as easy as possible for Patsy to avoid the booze. Patsy frequently wondered, though, how well she'd fare if things weren't quite so smooth. What if she were faced with a stressful situation? Would she be able to stay away from alcohol then?

Well, the joke was on God. This had to be the most stressful situation imaginable, and under any other circumstances Patsy might have cracked. She might have given in and just had one drink. But Van's life was in her hands. As long as there was a chance Patsy could help keep Van safe, there was no way she was going to fuck it up just for a little nip. And if she could make it through *this* sober, she could make it through anything. As long as Van came out alive. If she didn't--well, then all bets were off.

The door opened and Captain Padgett entered the ladies room. Patsy whipped around quickly to face him. "Captain? Is he on the phone?" she asked, already moving toward the door. She could think of no other reason for the Captain to barge in on her like that in the ladies room, though even then she would expect him to send someone else.

"No, hold up there Breshears, relax," Captain Padgett said, putting a hand out. "He's not on the phone. I just wanted a word with you. In private."

Patsy couldn't help a glance around the room at the pink toilet stall doors, the pastel tiles, the Kotex machine. Captain Padgett wasn't a tall man, but he was broad and brawny, built like a gorilla. He was very out of place. Patsy leaned a hip against the sink and pretended to relax.

"I've been watching you, Breshears," Captain Padgett said. "You're getting a little edgy."

No shit, she thought, but she merely said, "Sir?"

He moved a bit farther into the room, close enough that Patsy could smell his stale odor. He hadn't had a break since yesterday morning either. "I know this is a tough situation for you," he said in an understatement, but then added, "especially for you."

"Especially for me?" she asked warily. "Why? Because I'm a woman?"

"No, not because you're a woman." Captain Padgett waved a hand dismissively.

"Because I'm just a sergeant?"

"Because I know that's your woman out there," he said bluntly.

The words hit Patsy like a blow to the stomach. She put a hand to her belly and stared at him, breathless and wordless. She thought briefly about denying it, but it was already too late. The words he'd used, "that's your woman out there," had brought instant tears to Patsy's eyes, providing all the confirmation he'd needed, if he'd needed any. That *was* her woman out there, and it was such a painful relief, like picking a scab, to hear someone say it out loud.

"But you've got to hold it together, Breshears," he continued, "if you want to get her out of there safely. You're doing a good job. We're in day two and nobody's been killed yet. That's good negotiating, all right?"

Patsy nodded and reached a quick finger up to catch a tear before it fell. She would *not* cry in front of the captain.

"Look," he said gently, "I know it's hard on you, keeping everything held in while you're negotiating so hard to try to get her released, but you have got to keep your cool. If you lose it, you risk losing her. Understand?"

Patsy nodded again, not trusting herself to speak.

"You're not the only queer out here, you know," he said, his voice barely more than a whisper.

"Not by a long shot."

Patsy stared, shocked at the blunt words. She knew she wasn't the only dyke who worked at the prison, but she'd had no idea the brass were aware of it. "Are you going to report it?"

He gave a small smile and shook his head. "I didn't become captain by being stupid. Now I want you to go give it another try with the old girlfriend, see if you can get him to talk to her, all right?"

"Yes, sir," Patsy said huskily. She started past him for the door, but he stopped her with a hand on her arm.

"You need to talk to someone, feel free to use the phone in my office," he said. "I've given orders you're not to be disturbed."

"Thank you, sir."

"Good luck out there, Lieutenant."

She nodded, not trusting herself to speak, left the bathroom, and returned to the negotiation room. She felt much calmer than she had when she ran up the stairs. It was an immense relief just to know that someone--aside from her friends--was aware of what she was going through. She wasn't even angry at her friends any more. Of course they hadn't abandoned her. She knew them too well to think they'd have done that. There must have been a good reason no one answered the phone, but she didn't have time to find out what it was right then. She had to try to get Stu to talk to his girlfriend.

It wasn't until Patsy was back in her chair sliding the headphones over her ears that it struck her. Did Captain Padgett just call her *Lieutenant*?

Chapter Twenty-One

Bennie -- 1974

"MY NAME'S HANNAH," the girl said as they made their way through the dark downtown streets. "What's yours?"

"Bennie."

"Bennie? That's a boy's name."

"Not this time."

"How old are you?"

"None of your business."

"I told *you*."

"You're a kid," Bennie pointed out. "Didn't anyone ever tell you not to ask a lady her age?"

"Yeah, but you don't much seem like--" Hannah trailed off.

"A lady?" Bennie finished for her.

"Not very," Hannah said. "You have short hair and a boy's name. And your clothes--"

"I'm twenty eight," Bennie said.

"Are you married?"

"No."

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

"No."

The downtown streets were silent and empty, but now and then they'd hear a door slam or a can rattle from being kicked or blown in the wind, and Hannah would jump. She stayed close by Bennie's side. Once, when a car came down the street, Hannah ducked into the nearest doorway and waited for it to pass.

"Why are you running away?" Bennie asked.

Hannah ignored her and skipped several paces ahead. Then a man coughed somewhere nearby, and Hannah stopped and waited for Bennie to catch up to her.

"You hate your step-father?" Bennie guessed.

Hannah rolled her eyes and said, "Duh," making it two syllables.

They reached the edge of downtown where the city dropped down into Peaceful Valley, one of the oldest Spokane neighborhoods and also one of the most impoverished. Cars sped above their heads across the Maple Street Toll Bridge. The cars that were parked on the street appeared ancient to Bennie. She was distracted by what she was certain was a genuine 1964 Ford Mustang, the first year Mustangs were made, parked in front of one of the decrepit little houses. It still had the original red paint. And why wouldn't it? If this was 1974, the car was only ten years old. To them, it must have been nothing more than a ten-year-old used car. To Bennie, it was the ultimate babe-mobile. She peered through the window and saw an 8track player in the dash. She squinted, trying to read the names on the tapes sitting on the passenger seat.

"What are you looking at?" Hannah asked.

"Huh? Oh, nothing." Bennie rejoined Hannah and they continued walking. "You know, lots of people hate their stepparents. Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel, Snow White. You're not very original."

Hannah skipped forward and back beside her, as if matching Bennie's pace was impossible. She didn't answer.

"You only have four years to go until you're eighteen and can leave home."

"I'm not living with *him* for four more years," Hannah said.

"What about your mom?"

"Hah!"

"You really have a way with words, don't you?"

Hannah laughed.

"Why do you hate him?" Bennie asked.

"Why do you think?"

Bennie could think of lots of reasons, from inane to morbid, but she wasn't sure she wanted to know, so she didn't press it.

"What were you doing down there, anyway?" Bennie asked. "In the middle of the night?"

"I was hungry."

"The fair was closed."

"Duh."

"What was your step-father doing there?"

"It's his moonlighting job. He security guards it."

"Maybe he was just doing his job then," Bennie suggested. "When he grabbed you. You were trespassing, after all."

"No way. He was trying to kill me."

Right. "Do you have a plan?" Bennie asked. "Beyond tonight, I mean?"

Hannah shrugged. "I can take care of myself."

Uh huh. Well, she wasn't Bennie's problem. She'd try to keep the kid safe tonight, if she could, but by this time tomorrow night she'd be back in 1988. Maybe. Maybe she wouldn't. But if she weren't, she'd have enough on her plate figuring how to take care of herself-- and finding Van--to worry about a little runaway.

It was cool for July. The temperature must have been in the mid-forties. The unexpected run had made Bennie sweat, but now that they were walking, she was more comfortable. Hannah, though, wore nothing but her tank top and shorts, and she had no meat on her bones. She hugged her arms to herself to keep warm as she hopped along beside Bennie.

Bennie stripped off her jacket. "Here, put this on."

"Geez, thanks, Bennie." The jacket hung loosely from her shoulders and nearly hid her shorts.

"Ooh, this is a neat jacket. Where'd you get it?"

"I forget." *So there, Kendra*, Bennie thought, *my jacket is cool even in 1974*. But as if Kendra were getting back at her, the cool air instantly permeated the thin cloth of Kendra's silly cotton blouse and made Bennie shiver.

Barely a mile from downtown, they reached the dirt road entrance to People's Park. Bennie hadn't realized how near the park was to the city. She sniffed appreciatively the fresh summer night air, a mixture of pine trees and river. It was a smell she associated with Van. This was how it smelled out at Van's cabin. Van woke up to this smell every morning. Except this morning, when she'd woken up in the prison tower. Bennie wondered what it smelled like in there. She felt worry churn in her stomach and took another deep breath. Smelling the air here made her feel closer to Van somehow.

The path into the park was black, the moonlight shielded by the trees, and Bennie wished for a flashlight. Hannah grabbed onto her arm at some point, and Bennie let her. At least they couldn't get lost. If they wandered off the road, they'd hit a tree. Eventually, they smelled wood smoke. A camp fire flickered in the distance, and a moment later they saw another. By the time they reached the first camp fire, they could see half a dozen fires scattered in small clearings just off the road.

A small tent was set up next to the first fire, which was banked low, but there was no sign of a person. Further on, at the second fire, there was no tent at all, only a couple of sleeping bags with still forms inside them. At the third, a man sat hunched over before the fire. He looked up when they approached.

"Main camp's over there on the right," he mumbled, not questioning their presence.

"Thanks."

They followed his directions and soon found a larger camp fire, around which several men and women sat talking quietly, sometimes laughing. A lean-to built against a large tree appeared to

serve as a kitchen, currently quiet, and a little farther on a large parachute draped between several trees to provide shelter for a large number of people sleeping on the ground. One man slowly strummed a guitar. A strong odor of marijuana permeated the air.

A man who looked remarkably like Jesus Christ glanced up when Bennie and Hannah approached the fire. He smiled. "Welcome." He gestured to a spot on the ground next to him. Hannah immediately plopped down beside him. Bennie lowered herself more slowly on Hannah's other side. The warmth from the fire felt good.

"Barbara's telling a story," the Jesus-like man said, and so they politely listened. Barbara's voice was soft and soothing, her story about a woman's quest for her lover, missing in the war, and the lessons she learned from those she met while on her journey. Her words were punctuated by the gentle ripples of the guitar strings. It seemed to Bennie, after a moment, that even the flames of the fire licked the air in rhythm to the words and the tune. Sudden clapping and laughter made Bennie start. She'd been drowsing, her chin resting upon her knees.

"You hungry?" the Jesus man asked.

"Starving," Hannah said.

"Kitchen's closed," he said, "but cook always leaves a pot on the stove for nighttime guests. Help yourselves." He gestured to the lean-to behind them.

"C'mon, Bennie," Hannah said, standing up in one fluid motion. "Let's get some."

Bennie would rather have found a blanket and curled up beneath the parachute. Until she sat down beside the fire, she'd had no idea how exhausted she was. But Hannah was hungry, so she followed her to the kitchen where a large pot sat warming on a camp stove turned down low. Stew of some sort simmered. A stack of bowls sat beside the pot, and a tray of cheap silverware was next to them.

Hannah grabbed the largest bowl from the stack and filled it to the brim with stew. Bennie dished herself a smaller serving, and they returned to the fire. The man with the guitar was playing softly again, and the crowd swayed with the music and hummed as they gazed into the fire.

"Think the brownies are done?" someone asked. The Jesus man got up and swung a metal bar rigged up by the fire. At the end of the bar, nearly over the flames, was a Dutch oven. The man used a long fork to lift the lid off the pot. He sniffed.

"I think they're ready," he said.

The fire gazers got up, grabbed spoons, and crowded around the pot. They took turns digging their spoons into it and coming up with doughy gobs of chocolate brownie, not cool enough yet to be set. The Jesus man scooped a huge ladle of the stuff out and, smiling, held it out toward Hannah and Bennie. "Brownies?"

"Yeah!" Hannah grabbed the ladle from him. She brought the chocolate to her lips, but it was too hot to eat, so she blew on it.

Bennie had a sudden suspicion. "Are those pot brownies?" she asked the Jesus man.

"Of course."

Bennie reached out and took the ladle from Hannah's hand just as she was about to bite.

"Hey! I didn't get any."

"You don't want this." She handed the spoon back to the Jesus man. "She's only fourteen."

"So?" Hannah demanded. "I'm old enough to eat some goll damn brownies."

"What'd you bring her down here for, then?" the man asked, grumpy at having his offering rejected.

Good question. "Those brownies have pot in them," Bennie told Hannah. "You're not old enough for pot."

"I don't care," the girl said, then bit her lip and looked at Bennie uncertainly. "Wait. What do you mean? You mean there's marijuana in those brownies?"

"Yeah, marijuana."

"Gross," Hannah said. "Isn't there any without marijuana?"

Jesus man looked as if he'd never heard of brownies without pot. "Hell no."

"Can you taste the pot?" Hannah asked.

"It doesn't matter," Bennie said. "You're too young for pot brownies."

Jesus man looked at Hannah sympathetically. "Maybe next time you should leave your babysitter at home."

"She's not my babysitter."

"Fine." Bennie was weary of the argument. She *wasn't* Hannah's babysitter. Why did she even stop her from eating the damned brownies in the first place? She wasn't Bennie's responsibility. Let her dope herself up with pot brownies if she wanted to. Bennie was leaving tomorrow anyway, one way or another. "I'm going to sleep." She turned and practically stumbled in her weariness toward the parachute.

She'd only gone a few feet, though, when Hannah caught up with her. "Wait for me," Hannah said. "I wasn't really going to eat any of those brownies."

"Good."

A small pile of clean blankets was stacked near the edge of the parachute. Bennie and Hannah each chose one and found themselves a space among the dozens of people sleeping there. The ground beneath the parachute was covered with a large canvas tarp. Bennie lay down, wrapped her blanket around her like a cocoon, tucked her head into her arm, and closed her eyes. The last thing she was aware of was Hannah's bony body curling itself up against her back, keeping her warm.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Van -- 1988

THE MINUTE SHE got word that *Pierson v. Breshears, et.al.* had been dismissed, Van called Patsy.

"We just got the order. The case was dismissed."

"Great! When do you get off work?" Patsy asked, not wasting a moment to inquire about the judge's ruling.

"Five o'clock," Van said.

"I'll pick you up at your place, five-thirty."

Van smiled. "Make it six. I'd like to shower."

The silence that greeted that remark spoke volumes. "Okay," Patsy said after a moment, her voice a bit strained. "I'll see you at six then."

She arrived at six on the dot. Van opened the door and smiled. It was clear that Patsy had taken the time to shower as well. Van could still smell the soap on her, and the ends of her hair curled

with dampness at her neck. She wore pressed black slacks and a yellow silk shirt that looked brand new, with a black necktie knotted loosely below the open collar. She was gorgeous.

"Come in."

Patsy entered and examined Van's living room as if measuring her future. Van was living in her a furnished rental house and she had to quell an urge to run around and point out, "*That is mine, but this is not. Don't judge me by this. It's not me.*" But then Patsy turned her gaze on Van, and none of that mattered. The anticipation between them was palpable. Patsy moved toward Van, and Van moved toward Patsy, and next they were kissing and holding each other, and everything was perfect.

Patsy was five eight, three inches taller than Van. Her shoulders were broader and her arms were longer, and Van felt precious nestled in them. She broke their kiss only to reach her hand up to Patsy's face, to run her fingers over Patsy's lips, and to tuck a damp strand of fine brown hair behind Patsy's ear. Patsy smiled at Van with a combination of disbelief and utter confidence. Van shared her feelings. It was unbelievable only because it was so right. They kissed again, and soon found themselves on the couch, Patsy lying on her back with Van on top of her, prevented from rolling off by Patsy's strong arms around her.

Van wore the red peasant skirt she'd bought years before on impulse but had never worn because it was flashy and feminine and short. It took Patsy's roaming hands only seconds to reach under the skirt and push it up to Van's waist, leaving Van's bottom exposed to the air, protected only by the thin film of string bikini panties. Patsy's fingers caressed the roundness of Van's ass, then reached farther and stroked from behind the crease between Van's cheeks.

Van throbbed. "Patsy," she gasped.

"I know," Patsy said, breathless as well. "I know, baby." She slid her fingers underneath the thin elastic band and dipped them inside.

"Oh!" Van cried out and tried to press herself closer to the reach of Patsy's fingers. "Oh, God, Patsy!"

Patsy stroked Van deeply until Van trembled. Patsy slid quickly out from underneath, dropped to her knees beside the couch, and flipped Van onto her back. She pulled Van's panties off, spread her legs apart and brought her mouth to Van's wet center.

"Oh my God." Van moaned at the exquisite feel of Patsy's tongue on her clitoris. Patsy licked and sucked, drawing waves of pleasure from deep in Van's core. The intensity grew until Van thought she couldn't bear it any more, but then Patsy dipped her mouth lower, to kiss and lick Van's lips and suck at the center of her, allowing the intensity throbbing at her clit to subside. Then Patsy returned to Van's clit, and this time Van felt the unstoppable rise of her orgasm surge from deep inside her.

"Oh, God, Patsy, don't stop! Don't stop!" Van groaned and felt the pressure build stronger and stronger until finally it was crashing through her, and *she* was crashing, her crotch was smashing into Patsy's face over and over and over again. And Patsy held on and took every thrust and throb of Van's orgasm into her mouth.

When it was done, Van's legs dropped limply on both sides of Patsy's shoulders. "Oh, my God," Van said weakly. "How did you do that?"

Patsy looked up, Van's cream dripping from her chin, and grinned. "I had a little help, I think." She wagged her damp chin back and forth. "I need a towel. Or two. You are one lusty lady."

"Oh God," Van said again, this time with some embarrassment. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry, baby," Patsy said. "I love every drop of you."

Her words caused them both to still. It was the first time the word 'love' had been mentioned between them, and they paused a moment to let it settle around them and see how it felt. They smiled at each other, almost shyly, which was odd, considering their current positions. The word settled just fine.

They ate dinner next, suddenly ravenous. Van, not normally domestic, enjoyed flitting around the kitchen while Patsy watched, making her feel sexy. Tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches filled them up, and then they headed for the bedroom. Van was eager for a taste of Patsy.

"Put these on," Patsy said, wrapping strips of cloth around Van's wrists. "Trust me." She tightened the bands.

"No," Van whimpered. "It hurts."

"Trust me," she said. And the bands grew tighter and tighter, and the pain in her wrists and hands grew more intense.

"No, stop. I don't want them. It hurts too much. My hands!"

"Trust me."

"No, please stop. *No!*"

Van woke with a start.

"What the fuck's wrong with you?" Rudy asked.

The present crashed back at her. Van was dismayed to find herself still a hostage in the tower room, but relieved that the part about Patsy tying her up had just been a dream. The dream had got it all wrong.

It was just that her hands hurt. In sleep, she had incorporated her pain into her dream and turned it around. Her hands hurt so badly. They throbbed with sharp pains that felt like poking needles. That was a good sign, she told herself. The more feeling they got back the less likely the nerves in her hands were irreparably damaged, right? Sitting cross-legged on the floor, Van dropped her hands into the cavern created by her legs, wiggled her fingers, and nearly crowed with her success. She was able to get at least a twitch out of every single finger and both thumbs.

Van glanced at the clock. Three-thirty in the afternoon of their second day in the tower. "Did anything happen while I was asleep?"

"Nah." Stu rose from his stool, moved away from the window, and stretched. He gave a groan of frustration.

Over a day and a half spent in the tower room. Van knew she wasn't the only one who was weary of their close quarters, the long tedious hours, the endless threat of violence, the constant fear and dread. Stu felt it as well. They were alike in that, and it made him less strange to her. Like they had something in common.

Only Rudy didn't seem to sense any impending violence or doom. He simply grew increasingly impatient at each delay it took to get him his helicopter and his two million dollars. He didn't understand there was more at stake than money and freedom, that if they lost the gamble of this hostage taking, he and Stu were going to die. Stu tried to keep him consoled with beer and fast food, but the time would come when Rudy would not be satisfied with those transient bribes. Van worried about what Rudy would do when that time came. Rudy didn't fear the threat of violence. Rudy *was* a threat of violence.

"The courts close at five," Stu said, staring at the clock himself and calculating. "If they haven't got a judge to sign an order reopening my case by then, they won't."

"Not necessarily," Van said quickly, not wanting Stu to lose hope. A hopeless Stu would have nothing left to lose. "Sometimes it's easier to get orders signed *after* the court closes. Judges aren't so busy then."

Stu looked doubtful. "If they were going to get it signed, I think they could have done it by then. We need to send them a signal, something to show them we mean business."

Van didn't like the sound of that.

"Let's cut off her finger," Rudy suggested from his blanket across the room from Van. "Throw it out the window at them. They'll take us serious then, I'll bet."

Van glanced at Stu, ready to share a smile at Rudy's absurd suggestion. But Stu didn't smile. Instead, he stared at her thoughtfully, as if seriously considering the idea.

"That would just make them angry," Van said quickly. "Really, Stu, you'll ruin your chances if you do that. I'm sure they're going to get the order signed. You don't want to do anything to screw that up."

"I met a guy here a few years ago," Stu said, "he was in for fraud. He cut off his own finger for the insurance money."

"Stu, no." He *couldn't* be serious. "He was crazy, he must have been. You can't just cut off a finger like that."

"It was only a little finger." Stu wagged his own pinky finger back and forth. "Besides, you won't even feel it. You said your hands are numb."

Van stared, aghast. Should she confess that feeling had returned to her hands? Throw herself on Stu's mercy?

"Do I get to do it?" Rudy asked eagerly.

"We'll wait 'til five," Stu said reasonably. "Give 'em a chance to get the order signed."

"Then can I?" Rudy asked.

"Yeah," Stu said. "If we have to do it, you get the honors, buddy."

Van sat back, jerking her eyes away from Rudy's gleeful leering face, and frantically wriggled her painful fingers in the well created by her crossed legs. There's a knife in the drawer, she reminded herself. She stretched her fingers and tried to imagine them grasping the handle. She glanced at the clock. Three-thirty-five. She had less than an hour and a half to get the knife.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Bennie -- 1974

BENNIE OPENED HER eyes and saw stripes of vibrant blue and red and yellow glow above her where the sun shone through gaps in the trees to dapple the parachute. The colorful cloth was attached to branches of four giant pine trees that cornered the tarp upon which she lay. She was barely awake, but she felt a nearly overwhelming impulse to leap up and climb one of those trees.

Bennie could not speak for the rest of humankind but she was absolutely certain that she, at least, was descended from apes. It was the only explanation for her periodic desire to leap into the nearest tree and climb. Just climb. Arms embracing thick branches, undeterred by the scratchiness of the bark, legs flung up over her head, flinging her body from limb to limb, strong fingers pulling her along, toes gripping the tiniest crevasses, all body parts cooperating to haul

her up to the top of the tree, where she would brace herself with her feet and fling her arms up above her head in victory. The champ. The chimp champ.

At least, that was how she imagined it. In reality, if all the conditions were right, if the branch was the correct thickness and exactly the right height off the ground, if her hands were not slippery with sweat and her athletic shoes had just the right size toe grip, she just might be able to scramble into a tree via the lowest branch. From there she could haul herself up another branch or two. She'd been a great climber as a child. Family legend told that Bennie had been found once on top of the refrigerator before she could even walk, and no one had a clue how she'd gotten there. But Bennie had to acknowledge that already, at twenty-eight, the best of her climbing days were behind her.

The urge never left her, though. Especially when, like now, she was driven by a physical urge to do something and there was nothing she could do. All she wanted to do was save Van from the clutches of those monsters in the tower. The muscles in her arms and legs pulsed with urgency, ready to leap into action, to save the day, to scale the walls of the tower, to rescue the girl, find purchase in the cracks in the wall with her bare toes if need be, in order to save Van. Instead, she was stuck with an entire day to fill before she could perform her lone small act of rescue--hiding behind a wall to watch a murder.

She sat up, her view shifting away from the bright colors of the canopy. She'd woken late. All the other bodies that had slept beneath the parachute had vanished. Blankets were neatly folded into a stack on a pallet at the edge of the tarp. Bennie rose, folded her blanket, and added it to the stack. She was amazed she had slept so soundly on the hard ground.

The camp was a bustle of activity. A large group of campers sat around the fire pit talking and laughing, though the day was already warm and the fire was banked low. Another group worked busily in and around the make-shift kitchen. Breakfast was over. Dishes were being rinsed in a large tub of water and passed on to persons wielding towels. With an egalitarian spirit somewhat surprising for 1974, as many men were doing the dishes as women. A tray of biscuits and a tub of margarine sat on a table beside the kitchen.

Bennie used one of two crude outhouses set up on the edge of the camp, then wandered over to the kitchen area, lured by the hope of coffee. Even this early in the day, the odor of marijuana hovered, distracting Bennie from even the powerful scent of brewing coffee until she was right on top of it. A woman in a filmy sundress stood beside the plain board counter, pouring dark brew from a tin percolator into a cup. Smiling, she wordlessly handed the percolator to Bennie and walked away. Bennie nearly dropped the pot when she saw that the woman wore nothing underneath her nearly transparent dress. Then she realized she was wasting her time leering at the near-naked, as three *truly* naked and dripping wet women ambled toward her, laughing and shaking their wet hair. Droplets of water on their skin, their breasts, the tufts of hair at their groins, caught the sun and glinted, making them appear as if they'd been dusted with sparkles. Not for the first time, Bennie was grateful she didn't actually have a penis, as she wouldn't have been able to hide her sudden arousal. However, just behind the three women strode a small group of men, also naked and dripping wet. Their penises were in varying stages of engorgement as they followed the naked women, and no one seemed embarrassed by it at all. Bennie felt like a Puritan.

Jesus, where was Hannah?

Bennie finished pouring coffee into a thick white mug, grabbed a biscuit, and headed toward the river. There was a lot of commotion in that area. Carefully, so as not to spill the coffee, she maneuvered her way down the slope of ground to where it leveled off at a sandy beach right

before it sloped again into the water. The sun struck Bennie as she stepped out of the trees and she raised her face to it, welcoming the summer heat. Yesterday it had been blustery October. Men and women sprawled about the beach on blankets and towels, or right on the sand, in various stages of undress, several of them completely naked. Score one for Kendra, Bennie thought. She felt like a freak in her long black jeans and leather shoes. Even Kendra's filmy white blouse was too much for this crowd, and Bennie considered taking it off and just wearing her tank tee--it was underwear, but it was more than most of these women were wearing--but she was distracted by a shriek coming from the river.

The man who'd tried to give them the brownies the night before stood laughing waist deep in the water. His resemblance to Jesus was diminished not only by his narrow bare chest and his dripping wet beard, but also by the long skinny legs that appeared to dangle from each of his ears. The legs belonged to Hannah, who perched upon his shoulders and clutched his head with her thighs for balance as she tried to shove a woman off the shoulders of another man into the water. They were playing chicken.

Hannah had removed her shirt, but Bennie was relieved to see she still wore a bra and her denim cut-offs. At least she wasn't naked. Just then Hannah saw Bennie watching her, and she waved frantically in her direction. "Bennie! You're awake!" she shouted. The other woman took advantage of Hannah's momentary distraction and gave her a hard shove. Hannah shrieked and toppled off the shoulders of her steed into the river. She rose, laughing, and waded through the water toward Bennie.

"I thought you'd never wake up," Hannah announced cheerfully. "Breakfast was hours ago." She emerged onto the bank, water pouring from her hair and skin and the little bit of clothing she wore. In the light of day, she appeared younger than she had the night before. Her eyes were pale gray, silver almost, with dark lashes, and her mouth was wide, too large for her narrow face. She might as well have been naked, Bennie saw. Her bra was little more than a training bra, transparent from the water, and far too small to contain her growing breasts, which bulged out the top and along the sides of the thin triangles of cloth. Her cut-offs, as well, were too small. The waistband cut tightly into her little belly, and the seam between her legs rode high and tight against her crotch, creating what was sometimes crudely referred to as a camel toe.

"Have you been wearing those clothes since you were twelve?" Bennie asked grumpily.

Hannah frowned. "Huh?"

"Where's your shirt?"

"Over here." Hannah moved to a tiny pile of clothing, picked up a yellow tank top, and pulled it over her head. It was tight as well, and it would not protect Hannah's sharp bony shoulders, already red from the sun, from burning further, but at least it covered up the useless bra. "You know," Hannah said, in the voice all teens use when they're humoring adults, "there are naked people all over this beach. I don't really think it matters if I don't wear a shirt."

"It matters to me," Bennie said curtly, sounding like her mother. "What are you doing with *that*?" Hannah had picked up Bennie's jacket, now gritty with sand, and in one hand she held the white cap, the one Van had supposedly brought back from 2008. No, Bennie amended, not supposedly. Now that Bennie had actually been transported back to 1974, she could no longer pretend that the cap wasn't genuine. Van *had* brought it back from 2008.

"This?" Hannah plopped the hat on her wet head. "I found it in your pocket."

"Give it to me." Bennie snatched it off Hannah's head. "Oh, Christ. Look what you did." Across the bill of the cap in the shape of a thumbprint was a greasy smear of butter and jam, decorated now with a sprinkling of dark brown sand. She slapped the hat against her thigh. The sand didn't

budge, but the coffee in her mug spilled over onto Bennie's fingers. A drop of it splashed onto the cap as well. "Christ!" Bennie said again, more forcefully this time, and glared at Hannah.

"Sor-ry," Hannah said, singing the two syllables in a teenaged parody of remorse.

"Sorry, my ass," Bennie said harshly. "Who said you could wear this?"

"You said I could wear your coat."

"*Coat.*" Bennie said scathingly. "Does this look like a coat to you? Jesus Christ, Hannah, look at it."

"Hey, chill, man," a voice said behind her. Bennie wheeled around. It was Jesus man, barefoot and wearing a wet pair of cut-offs barely bigger than Hannah's. "No need to yell at her. She didn't do it on purpose."

"Yeah, well, it's still ruined," Bennie said sullenly, not willing to be talked out of her mood by this half-dressed hippie with bloodshot eyes. He didn't look a thing like Jesus, she decided.

"It's a hat, man."

Bennie studied the hat and tried to control her anger. It wasn't just any hat. It had travelled from 2008 to 1988 and now to 1974. More importantly, it had travelled from some future Bennie to Van, and back again to Bennie. It was Bennie's only link to Van right now, and she cherished it.

"I can clean it for you," Hannah offered, reaching for the hat. She looked very young. The morning sun shone unkindly on a cluster of inflamed pimples on her forehead, and the anxious expression on her face made Bennie feel as if she alone held the key to Hannah's happiness, like the parent who has the power to say yes, you may have a friend spend the night. How had Bennie so suddenly achieved that sort of parental authority?

"No, thanks," Bennie said shortly. She took her jacket from Hannah, juggled her half empty coffee cup, and stuffed the hat back into the pocket. "Never mind. It's fine." She turned and climbed the rise back toward camp. She'd have another cup of coffee, maybe another biscuit, and then she'd be on her way. She wasn't certain of the time, but the sun was already high. Expo would be open soon, if it wasn't already, and she could check out Canada Island in the daylight, make sure there really was a good hiding place nearby.

"You're not mad at me, are you?"

Bennie glanced behind her. Hannah was following her. She was barefoot. Her dirty white sandals dangling by the straps from one hand.

"No, I'm not mad at you," Bennie said.

"Oh, good." Hannah scurried up to walk beside Bennie as she made her way back to the kitchen.

"I'll buy you a new hat, if it'll make you feel better. Where'd you get it? I don't have any money right now, but I know how I can get some."

There were only so many ways a teeny bopper runaway could make money, and none of them struck Bennie as a good idea. "How?"

Hannah smiled, happy once again to have captured Bennie's interest. "I can model," she said serenely. "Look at me. I'm tall and skinny. That's what they like. Lots of guys have asked me to model for them. One guy was going to give me thirty dollars."

"Really?" Bennie asked. "Did you do it?"

Hannah made a face. "I told him I had to ask my mom first. She said no, but I called him anyway. But the phone number he gave me didn't work. I must have wrote it down wrong."

"Uh huh." Bennie was chilled at the girl's naivety. She'd never survive on her own. As she had the night before, Bennie wondered if she had done the girl any favors by stopping the apparent abduction she'd interrupted when she'd landed on Inspiration Point. She should have let the evil step-father take her.

They reached the kitchen, and Bennie poured some sludge from the bottom of the percolator into her cup. Hannah took a biscuit, split it open, and spooned a dollop of jam onto each side. She put the two halves together, squishing the pools of jam between them, and took a big bite. Jam spilled out the sides of the biscuit and the sides of her mouth. Bennie snagged a biscuit for herself between two fingers, walked over to the tarp where they had slept, sank down cross-legged onto it, and sipped her bitter coffee. Hannah followed and sat next to her.

"How long has it been since you ran away from home?" Bennie asked.

Hannah, chewing madly, held up two fingers.

"Two what?" Bennie asked. "Days? Weeks? Months?"

Hannah nodded and said thickly, "Days."

"Two days? That's not very long. Maybe you can still go back home."

Hannah frowned deeply, swallowed her mouthful of biscuit with an audible gulp, and said, "No way. I'm never going back there."

"I don't think you realize how bad it can be out here for kids on their own," Bennie said. She sounded like a preachy old adult. But she'd brought Hannah here. How could she just leave her alone in People's Park to fend for herself? Bennie couldn't take care of her.

"I can take care of myself," Hannah said complacently, licking jam from her fingers.

"How?" Bennie asked again. "Modeling? You know, those guys don't really just want you to model. Or if they do, they want you to do it with your clothes off."

Hannah looked skeptical for moment, then shrugged. "So? Some famous art is of naked women."

"You're not a woman. You're just a kid, and no famous artists are running around Spokane asking kids to model naked for them."

"A lot of models are my age," Hannah argued. "Even on *Seventeen*, a lot of those models are my age."

"Well, nobody from *Seventeen* is running around Spokane looking for models either."

"How do you know? They might."

Bennie sighed and gave up the argument. "What's so bad at home that you'd rather be here?" she asked instead. "Wearing the same clothes every day, shitting in outhouses, sleeping on the ground? This place is gonna lose its charm real fast."

Hannah sighed and dropped the remains of her jam-filled biscuit into the grass beside the edge of the tarp. She gave Bennie a look that was old and tired, and Bennie hardly needed to hear the words to know her story. She'd half suspected it all along.

"You want to know why I won't go home?" Hannah gazed solemnly at Bennie, blinked, and turned her big gray eyes back to the dropped biscuit, where ants had suddenly converged. She spoke in a quiet rush, her words slurring in her hurry to get them out, "I will never go home because my step-father is a fucking asshole who comes into my room at night and crawls into my bed with me and puts his hands all over me. And he puts my hands all over him, and he tells me he wants to love me the way a man loves a woman." She stopped and took a deep breath. She raised her forearms and held out her hands, fingers spread apart, as if she'd touched something distasteful, and stared directly at Bennie. "I will never go home again because I don't want to touch his fucking fat dick any more."

Bennie slumped with sadness. She wasn't surprised. She had known a lot of women in her life, many of them very intimately, and frequently they told her about their hurtful pasts. She knew that stories such as Hannah's were far too common. But as sad as it made her to hear such stories from grown women, it was far worse to see this girl with wounds so fresh, forced to scramble for

survival on the streets because it was safer than returning home. Those women had escaped, though most were still haunted. Hannah's escape was not yet secured.

But what could Bennie do about it? She was returning to 1988 in a few hours, probably. What she wanted to do was hunt down the son of a bitch and kill him, and for a moment she let her mind play with that thought. She could kill Hannah's step-father, then run to Inspiration Point and witness the murder and get whipped back to 1988. It would be the perfect crime. She'd never get caught.

But Jill's words came back to her. *Do nothing*. Killing someone would be a pretty significant deviation from that directive. Besides, how would she do it? She didn't have a gun, and what if Jill's time machine didn't work and Bennie got stuck in 1974? Getting caught would then be possible, maybe even probable. She wouldn't be able to pursue Van if she was languishing in prison.

Hannah was staring at her again with that anxious look, and Bennie realized that she'd not spoken since Hannah's big revelation. "I'm sorry," Bennie said, then added the words she knew Hannah needed most to hear, "none of that was your fault."

Hannah sighed with relief.

"Did he ever--?"

"No, I never let him go all the way," Hannah said quickly. "But you see why I can't go home?"

"What about your mom? Have you told her?"

Hannah grimaced. "I told her. But she's *in lo-o-ove*. They've only been married a few months. She doesn't believe me."

Bennie wanted to urge Hannah to report it to a hotline, to seek help, maybe go to a women's shelter, but she wasn't certain those support systems were even available in 1974 or, if they were, whether they'd do more harm than good for a girl in Hannah's situation. Didn't they send girls like Hannah to detention centers back then? Bennie cast her mind back to what she knew of the world of 1974, but she'd only been fourteen herself. All she could remember with any clarity was her outrage when *The Partridge Family* was cancelled.

"What are you going to do?" Bennie asked, feeling helpless. She was only in the decade for a few more hours, she had things to do, and her muscles were quivering with the need to get going. Hannah turned her striking eyes on Bennie. "Where do you live?"

"Oh, no," Bennie said quickly. "I don't live anywhere around here. You can't come with me."

Hannah frowned. "I never said I wanted to."

Bennie took a deep breath and blew it out. "Hannah, I wish I could help you. I really do. I'm very sorry about your situation. But--" After a moment's thought, Bennie stood up, reached into her pocket, and found the money Kendra had given her. "Look, I can't give you much, but take this." She handed Hannah three twenty dollar bills, hesitated a moment, and handed her two more.

Hannah's eyes grew wide. "A hundred *dollars*?"

"Spend it wisely," Bennie urged, wondering how she could best protect the kid with just a few words. "Don't take any modeling jobs from strange men, okay? And don't eat any pot brownies. At least not until you're sixteen," she added reasonably.

Hannah rose to her knees, and stuffed the bills into the front pocket of her damp cut-offs.

Bennie felt sick about leaving the girl alone. She was a baby, and a hundred dollars wouldn't last more than a few days, not even at 1974 prices. "I have to go now. There's something I have to do, and I probably won't be coming back here."

A worried pucker formed between Hannah's brows, but she just shrugged. "Don't worry about it. I think I'll just stay here, for a while anyway. Stu said I could."

"Stu?"

"Yeah." Hannah nodded her head at Jesus man, the man who'd shared the pot brownies, the man who'd perched a half naked Hannah on his shoulders in the river. "That's him, over there. Stu's nice. He won't let anything happen to me."

At that moment Stu was sitting beside the fire, still clad in his damp cutoffs, passing a doobie to a topless woman sitting on the log beside him.

Bennie was not reassured at all.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Kendra -- 1988

KENDRA STOOD ALONE at the end of Inspiration Point, the pathway back to the park blocked by RIP. The camper gave a shudder, and a moment later Jill turned off the engine. Unable to contain her curiosity, Kendra reached for the latch on the door. Remarkably, Jill hadn't locked it. Could it be that she actually trusted Kendra not to open it? Before she could act on her impulse, she heard the door of the truck open and Jill called out, "It's unlocked. Check and see if she's gone."

With an undeserved feeling of virtue for having waited for permission, Kendra pulled the latch and opened the door. RIP was empty.

"She's gone," Kendra confirmed.

The truck door slammed. Jill came around RIP, walking her hands along the side of the camper as she balanced on the rock wall. She jumped down beside Kendra and peered into RIP herself. Jill's trust only went so far, it seemed. The scientist in her had to verify the results herself.

Jill closed the door and looked at Kendra, her eyes sparkling. She had to be anxious about Bennie, Kendra knew, and about Van as well, but there was no doubt Jill was excited too. The last time she'd sent someone off in RIP, it had been an accident, and Jill had been mortified. This time it was planned, and Jill could barely contain her excitement as she waited for the results of the experiment.

"It looks like it worked," Jill said, with obvious restraint.

"How long do we wait before bringing her back?"

"Thirty minutes should do it." Jill stuck her hands in the pockets of her jacket and slouched against the back of RIP in a simulation of relaxation, but her shoulders were tense. She glanced from Kendra to the river on both sides of the Point. The wind whipped Jill's short dark hair around her head, turned her cheeks pink, and enhanced the sparkle in her eyes.

Kendra had an inspiration. They were on Inspiration Point, after all, and according to Van, old Kendra wanted young Kendra to take a chance on Jill. Kendra peered across the water at the grassy area on the south side of the river and the walkways on the north. Both were empty of observers. She perched her butt on the rock in the middle of the Point and patted the spot beside her.

"Sit with me?"

With nothing else to do for the next thirty minutes, and nowhere to go, Jill had no excuse not to. The rock wasn't really big enough for side-by-side butts, but she readily propped one butt cheek next to Kendra's.

"Brrr," Kendra said, shivering. "That wind sure is cold."

"Oh." Jill looked at her in surprise. "Do you want to sit in the truck? I'll help you walk on the wall."

"No," Kendra said patiently. "I'd rather sit here on this rock with you."

"Oh." Jill was either perplexed, or pretending to be. "Oh. All right."

Kendra leaned against Jill. "Oh, you're warm!"

Jill hesitated, but then did the right thing. She put her arm around Kendra's shoulder and pressed her more tightly to her side. "Is that better?"

"Oh, yes." Kendra snuggled a little farther into Jill's embrace. She couldn't see Jill's face to gauge her reaction, so she had to rely on her body. She wriggled again, just a bit, against Jill's side, and she thought she felt Jill relax slightly to accommodate Kendra's body next to hers.

A moment later, as she'd hoped, Jill spoke. "Um, Kendra?" Kendra glanced up, thrilled at the expression she read on Jill's face, a combination of trepidation, resolution, and maybe even desire. "There's something I've been wanting to--"

"Hey!"

Jill dropped her arm and jumped away as if she'd been bitten. Kendra nearly slid off the rock at the sudden lack of support.

"Hey!" It was a man's voice, an angry one, coming from the other side of RIP. "You can't park this thing here."

Jill stared at Kendra, her eyes wide and her mouth open. They were in an area forbidden to vehicles in broad daylight in a downtown city park. They should have expected to be challenged, but apparently it was a variable Jill had not considered.

"What should we do?" Jill whispered.

Kendra put a hand on Jill's arm to reassure her. "It's okay!" She called out. "We're moving it."

"We can't move it," Jill whispered urgently. "It has to stay in the exact same place so it can pick Bennie up."

"Well, hurry it up," the man shouted, "What the hell? Can't you read? *No vehicles!*"

"Yeah, yeah, we're going to move it, but--" Kendra thought rapidly. "We don't have a key."

"Huh? Yee gawds, how'd you get it down here then?"

"We had the key," Kendra improvised quickly, "but I dropped it."

"Dropped it?"

"Yeah. In the river."

"How'd you drop the key into the river?"

"I--I mean I threw it. I was mad. I do that when I get mad. I throw things." Kendra suddenly had a completely inappropriate urge to burst out laughing. Jill stared at her in awe.

"Yee gawds," the man said in disgust. "I'm calling a tow truck then, and you're paying for it."

"No, wait!" Kendra called. She just had to buy them a half hour. "You don't need to do that. My husband's coming. He's bringing the spare key."

A pause greeted this, as the man mulled it over. Then, skeptically, "How does your husband know you threw the key into the river?"

Kendra was blank. "Um--"

"I called him," Jill said. She hopped up onto the wall, bracing herself against the side of RIP as she had before, and walked toward the man.

"Look out, lady. What the hell? You could fall in the river that way."

"I know," Jill said. "I ran to a phone and called her husband and then I came back. He should be here in a few minutes. No more than a half hour."

"Oh, for crying out loud." The man sighed gustily. "He better be. If you're not out of here in a half hour, I'm calling a tow truck. And you're paying!"

"He'll be here," Kendra called out. "He's mad at me. He's a very fast driver when he's angry."

Jill came around RIP and hopped down from the wall, her eyes bulging with fear. "He's leaving," she whispered, as if she couldn't believe their luck.

Kendra giggled.

"Shhh," Jill whispered urgently. "Don't let him hear you."

Jill's vehemence only made Kendra want to laugh more. She tried to repress it, and it came out a snort, which struck her as hilarious. She clutched Jill's shoulder and slumped against her, laughing uncontrollably. Jill tried to quiet her, first by pressing her fingers to Kendra's lips, then, when that didn't work, by pulling Kendra's face into her chest to muffle the sound.

"Hush, Kendra," Jill said, but something in her voice made Kendra look up. Jill, too, was trying not to laugh.

Kendra pressed her face back into Jill's chest and howled. There they stood, shaking and clinging to each other, trying to keep their laughter silent. When one of them would start to calm down, they would exchange a glance, and they were off again.

Finally, they quieted. Kendra wiped her eyes with her sleeve, peeked up, and realized that she'd landed exactly where she'd tried to before, right in the circle of Jill's arms.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Bennie -- 1974

BENNIE STROLLED WITH her hands in her pockets and her head down, wrestling with her conscience. How could she have left Hannah back there at People's Park with those naked druggies? She was only a kid, and she wouldn't have been there at all if Bennie hadn't taken her there. Well, maybe she would have. Still, Bennie could at least have given her more than a hundred dollars. What was Bennie holding onto the money for, anyway? Sure, she might get stuck in 1974, and then she'd need it, but what if she didn't get stuck here? How was she supposed to live with herself if she returned to 1988 with her pockets still full of money and the memory of Hannah, penniless and alone in 1974, smoking pot with Stu and "modeling" for survival? After all, even if Bennie did stay in 1974, she was a hell of a lot better equipped to take care of herself than Hannah was. In fact, if Bennie didn't return to 1988, she could go down to People's Park and haul Hannah out of there, take her somewhere safe. Meanwhile, Bennie resolved, she'd return to the park sometime before nightfall, before it was time to observe the murder, find Hannah, and give her *all* the money. If Bennie decided to return to 1988, if she even could, she wouldn't need the money. If she didn't return to 1988, she would go back to the park, find Hannah, take the money back, and they'd figure something out together.

But first, Bennie had things to do. Her walking had brought her near the Expo fairgrounds. A long line of people waited patiently in front of the giant red butterfly that marked the southwest entrance. Bennie glanced at the clock at the top of the old train depot tower, the only remnant of the decrepit train station that used to be there. It had been razed to make way for Expo. Five minutes to ten. The fair was just about to open.

She could have crossed the Monroe Street Bridge to enter from the north, making it a quick trip to Canada Island. Instead, Bennie bypassed the line and continued on. She had plenty of time to go to the fair. First things first.

She walked two blocks south, away from the fair, into the center of downtown. She stopped at a newspaper box and examined the headlines of *The Spokesman Review*. Richard Nixon was still president, she saw, but barely. She wondered what the people on the street would say if she told them their president was about to resign. It was a Sunday paper. How very strange to leave 1988 on a Thursday and wake up the next morning on a Sunday.

On the corner of Howard and Riverside, just outside the glass doors of J.J. Newberry's, she found what she was looking for. She entered the phone booth and butted the hinged door closed behind her. She opened the phone book, flipped to the Hs, and found it immediately: Hollinger, Vanessa L., 721 E. Sinto, Apt. C, 555-2241.

Bennie's heart pounded. It was almost too easy. Van was here in 1974, and she lived no more than two miles away from where Bennie was standing right at that moment. She could walk there. Bennie fumbled in her pocket for a quarter. No, a dime, she amended, glancing at the phone. Phone calls were a dime in 1974. She dropped the coin in the slot and dialed the phone number. The action was senseless. She had no intention of speaking if Van answered and every intention of hanging up if that happened. But she couldn't resist the temptation to hear Van's voice. Would she sound different? Van was only thirty-one years old in 1974. How much did a voice change in fourteen years?

The question would remain unanswered, at least for a while longer. The phone was not picked up, and the machines that could do it for you weren't around yet. The phone rang into the empty Apt.

C. On the tenth ring, Bennie hung up and fished her dime out of the coin return. After peeking around for any observers, she ripped the page from the phone book and folded it into her back pocket. She pulled the doors of the booth open and stepped out into the sunshine.

East Sinto was near Gonzaga University. Van must still be in law school. Bennie turned her steps in that direction and began walking again, relieved to have a destination, a purpose, a mission for her jumpy muscles. She'd worry about Hannah, Canada Island, the murder, and returning to 1988 later. For now, she was going to find Van. After all, depending on what happened when she found her, maybe Canada Island, the murder, and returning to 1988 would no longer matter. Van might know how to help Hannah, too.

A spring entered her step. She pulled the formerly white WNBA cap from her jacket pocket, shook it out, and put it on her head. She hooked her jacket onto a finger and slung it over her shoulder. It felt marvelous to be out in the warm sunshine again, having just flown in, so to speak, from blustery October only the day before. She felt almost as if she were on vacation. Jill should market RIP for vacations, Bennie thought. She could charge a thousand dollars, or more even, and people who had no time for vacations could get into RIP, be transported to another time for a week, or a month, or however long they wanted to be. They could do anything they wanted. Sleep in, sun bathe, drink, party. Then Jill would bring them back to the present.

They'd return less than an hour after they'd left, but they'd be all rested and refreshed from their week or month off, all without missing a day of work.

Their wives and husbands and kids wouldn't even know they'd been gone. Think of the trouble people could get into. It was a definite money maker.

After walking a few minutes, Bennie stopped, took off the WNBA cap, pulled Kendra's goofy blouse up over her head, wadded it up, and stuffed it into one of the jacket pockets. She put the hat back on and continued, enjoying the warm sun on her bare arms and shoulders. Maybe she'd get a tan. She felt practically naked in nothing but her thin ribbed tank tee. She peeked down at her chest. Her breasts pressed against the thin material, revealing nearly everything. Jesus, she *was* practically naked. But it was the summer of 1974. Practically naked was no big deal.

When she reached Van's block, though, her step slowed, and she pulled the crumpled blouse out of her pocket and back over her head. She didn't want Van's first impression of Bennie to be of her nipples. Later maybe. Bennie was relieved that the blouse was made of material that was supposed to be wrinkled. She didn't want Van to meet her all rumped, either.

The house Van lived in was old, probably built around 1900. Very old, by Spokane standards, since in 1974 Spokane itself wasn't even a hundred years old yet. The house wasn't large, but it had a turret on one corner and a large wrap-around porch with columns, suggesting that the first owner was interested in projecting an image of wealth. Probably an early Gonzaga professor or lawyer.

Now, however, it was the home of students living in apartments A, B, and C. Three mailboxes were nailed to the outside wall of the house next to the door. Bennie trod up the steps and double checked Apt. C. *V. Hollinger*. Cautious girl, Bennie was glad to see. Let visitors suspect she was a Victor or a Vern.

The front door was unlocked, so Bennie opened it and entered. She was in a small foyer with heavy wooden doors on each side. *Apt. A* was stenciled in black paint directly onto the dark wood of the door on the left, and *Apt. B* was stenciled onto the door on the right. In front of Bennie was a set of stairs, more dark wood with a clear plastic runner nailed to it, and a matching banister at least seven inches wide running up the side. Someone had nailed a brass "C" into the end of the banister and scratched an arrow pointing upward into the wood. In 1974, Spokane hadn't yet learned to value its old houses.

Bennie ascended the stairs. At the top was a door with the same black paint stenciling. *Apt. C*. There was no sign of a bell, so she knocked. *I'm looking for someone*, she would say. *Is this where Susan Smith lives?* Or maybe *Have you seen a cat running around here?* Something like that. It didn't really matter what she said. She just needed to see Van, to hear her voice, to make sure she was real. But there was no answer. She knocked again, harder. No response. Damn. Bennie went back downstairs and onto the porch. She sat on the top step, discouraged. What was she supposed to do now? She was at a loss. It wasn't just that she wanted to see Van and hear Van's voice. What she really wanted was for Van to help her make up her mind. Should she return to 1988 and try to rescue Van from the clutches of the murderer in the tower, or should she stay in 1974 and try to prevent Van from ever getting into his clutches in the first place? She'd hoped meeting Van would give her a clue as to what she should do. Bennie didn't need much. If Van was approachable, pleased to meet her, found her interesting, Bennie would stay. If, on the other hand, Van had no time in 1974 for the likes of Bennie, Bennie would return to 1988. If returning was even possible, given that Bennie wasn't exactly sure where RIP was supposed to pick her up. She might be stuck in 1974 whether she wanted to be or not.

Why had she expected Van to be home, anyway? It was midmorning on a beautiful sunny Sunday in July. Why would she be sitting at home all alone in apartment C waiting for a butch stranger in a flowered blouse to come knock on her door and ask about a missing cat? But Van was a law student, Bennie reminded herself. She'd known some law students in the past, even dated one. Law students were not like other people. For a law student, a sunny Sunday morning in July wasn't much different from a blustery day in October or any other day. If she wasn't home studying, Bennie had a pretty good idea where she might be. She stood up, brushed off her butt, and headed down the stairs, energized once more.

Gonzaga Law School was housed in a dark, low building that looked like it had once been an elementary school. As Bennie had suspected, the building was unlocked. She entered the law school and stood in the empty hallway. Like in an elementary school, there were classroom doors up and down the hallway on both sides. Bennie walked down the hall, peeking through the narrow panes of glass in the doors as she went. Many of the rooms were empty, but just as many had groups of students in them studying, arguing, and writing outlines on the chalkboard. Most of the students were men, and none had Van's red, curly hair.

At the end of the hall was the law library. Unlike those in the study groups, these students were silent and solitary, pouring over books two or three inches thick, hands to their heads as if trying to press knowledge into them. Bennie examined the students at the tables, wandered up and down the aisles of books, peered into study carrels. No Van.

Bennie left the law school, defeated. She was on her own. Van would not be able to help her. She was hungry, thirsty, and hot. She sat on a bench outside the law school, put her jacket down beside her and the WNBA cap on top of it. She grabbed the bottom of the flowered blouse, again yanked it over her head, and dropped it beside the cap. She stuck her legs out in front of her, crossed at the ankles, stretched her arms out along the back of the bench, and tilted her head back, eyes closed. The sun was soothing on her face and arms and chest, but her legs and feet were stiflingly hot in the black jeans and shoes. If she had some scissors, she'd make herself some cutoffs.

But wait. She had her knife on her, didn't she? In one quick motion, Bennie sat up, opened her eyes, and reached for her pocket. And froze. Standing on the sidewalk in front of her, watching her curiously, was Van. There was no doubt it was Van. She had the same freckled nose, the same plump red lips, the same green eyes that she averted as soon as Bennie caught her staring. She started to move past Bennie and into the law school, her arms full of books.

"Wait," Bennie said. Van stopped and glanced over her shoulder, curls bouncing. They weren't Van's normal curls. Instead of letting her hair curl naturally, as she did in 1988, Van had obviously straightened it, then somehow manufactured large waves at the ends as it fell past her shoulders. She must have ironed it, then slept on orange juice cans. She was wearing Seafarer pants, the seamless bellbottoms like the ones sailors wore. Bennie had a sudden memory of hounding her mother to take her to Two Swabbies to buy a pair for back-to-school right before she started high school. In 1974, in fact. Seafarers were all the rage that year, and the way they hugged Van's hips, Bennie could see why. Seafarers fit Van the way Seafarers were supposed to fit.

"What is it?" Van asked, when Bennie said nothing.

Bennie stood up quickly and tried to remember her prepared questions. *Does Susan Smith live here?* No, that wouldn't work. "I've lost my cat," she blurted.

Instant sympathy showed in Van's eyes. "Oh, I'm sorry." She shrugged as best she could with her arms full of books. "I haven't seen one."

Bennie stepped toward her. "Can I help you carry your books?"

"Oh, no. Thanks anyway." Van smiled and stepped toward the law school. "I'm here already." Bennie hurried past her and opened the door for her. Before Van could step through, though, a man came rushing up behind her.

"Sorry, babe, I had to park on the next block." He was tall and lanky with long hair and a long mustache, and he, too, wore a pair of Seafarers. He stopped when he saw Bennie, swept his eyes over her hair and her chest, then made a show of reaching up and grabbing hold of the door himself and opening it even farther. "Here you go, babe."

Van glanced from him to Bennie and started through the door. When she was halfway through the man put his hand on Van's arm and stopped her. She looked up. He leaned down, put his hand on her chin, and gave her a deep, long kiss. He raised his head, and Van gazed up at him with shining eyes. She glanced briefly at Bennie, blushed, ducked her head, and entered the law school. The man gave Bennie a hard look and followed Van inside.

He couldn't have marked his territory more clearly than if he'd raised his leg and pissed on her. Bennie wasn't bothered by that. Men were often threatened by her, and they did what men did. They couldn't help it. What did bother Bennie, though, was the expression in Van's eyes when he did it. She was in love with him. Bennie hadn't expected that.

Van may have been intrigued by Bennie. But she wasn't ready for her.

Bennie returned to the bench to gather her things. She saw the pile of clothing, glanced down at her chest, and groaned. She'd forgotten she was wearing just the tank. No wonder Van had stared like that when she'd seen Bennie on the bench, arms spread out, chest thrust toward the sun like a goddess. Bennie's erect nipples made little peaks in the front of the shirt, and the dark outline of her aureole showed clearly through the thin white cotton. Talk about a first impression.

"Hey."

Bennie spun around. Van stood in the doorway of the law school, absurd curls draped over her shoulders. Too late, Bennie hunched her shoulders modestly.

"Do I know you from somewhere?" Van asked. "You seem familiar to me."

Bennie grinned, cheered by the question. "No," she said. "Not yet."

Van frowned a bit, as if puzzled, nodded once, and ducked back into the building.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Bennie -- 1974

BY THE TIME Bennie reached People's Park, she was ravenous. She was feeling far too frugal to spend any of her remaining two hundred and fifty dollars on food when she could eat for free. She'd missed lunch, of course, but a plate of peanut butter sandwiches wrapped in waxed paper was set out for late comers. She grabbed one and sat on a rock beside the cold fire pit to eat. After a moment, Bennie sensed eyes upon her and glanced up. Hannah stood statue-still at the top of the trail leading from the beach, staring at Bennie in disbelief. When she saw Bennie look

her way, she flushed and tried to assume an expression of nonchalance. She sauntered over and sat on a rock beside Bennie.

"What are you doing here?" Hannah picked up a charred stick and dug it into the cold ashes. "I thought you left."

"Oh, come on," Bennie chided. "You didn't really think I'd leave you here all alone, did you?"

Hannah frowned slightly, started to shake her head, changed it to a nod, then changed it quickly back to a shake. She was smart enough to suspect Bennie was full of shit, but young enough to not be completely certain of it. "I can take care of myself," she said.

"Mmm," Bennie murmured noncommittally through a mouthful of peanut butter. Hannah'd kept her shirt on this time, but it was soaked. Her skinny shoulders and arms and legs were bright red from the sun. She couldn't take care of a kitten, let alone herself.

Bennie smiled as she chewed, feeling indulgent. Now that she'd decided to stay in 1974, she wasn't so worried about Hannah. Van wasn't ready for Bennie yet, that was obvious, but she would be. And when she was, Bennie would be there waiting for her. There was no reason Bennie couldn't get a job, rent a room somewhere, and when they came around she'd bet everything she had on the World Series and the Super Bowl. Then, when she had a little money, she'd find the lesbian community in Spokane. Maybe she'd look up Patsy and Inez and Jill. Why not? They didn't know her from Adam, and they were only, what, thirty five? Thirty-six years old? Not too old to be friends with Bennie. If they met under friendlier circumstances, Bennie thought she might actually like Patsy. And when Van showed up in their little community, which she eventually would, Bennie and Patsy would be on an even playing field. If you could call it even, since Bennie knew, from deep in her soul, that if given a fair and free choice between Bennie and Patsy, Van would choose Bennie.

They were connected on too deep a level for her not to. Hell, Van had practically recognized Bennie that morning, and she'd never even seen her before.

Meanwhile, Bennie could make sure Hannah landed somewhere safe. Now that she wasn't going back to 1988, Bennie felt rich with time. She could easily spend some on Hannah.

"I won't leave you here," Bennie said after swallowing. "We'll find a good place for you to live, a safe place. Not today, but maybe tomorrow. Okay?"

Hannah bit her lip and nodded uncertainly, clearly wanting to believe Bennie, but not quite managing it. She stretched her long legs out toward the non-existent fire. "Where'd you go? You missed lunch. There were cookies, but they're all gone."

"There was something I had to do," Bennie said. "I'll just have to eat two sandwiches instead."

"Want me to get you one?" Hannah hopped up and was gone without waiting for an answer. She returned with two wrapped sandwiches and handed one to Bennie. "I got one for myself too. It's been a long time since lunch."

"Thanks." Bennie's own years of teenage voraciousness were not very far behind her, but still she marveled at Hannah's appetite. "There's one more thing I have to do this afternoon."

Hannah looked up quickly, trepidation in her eyes.

"I have to go to the fair."

Hannah gave a relieved laugh and finished unwrapping her sandwich. "Neat. Can I go with you?"

"It costs a lot to get in," Bennie said. "We're going to need all our money just to get by for a while."

"We don't have to pay," Hannah scoffed. "Remember how we got out last night? I get in that way all the time."

Bennie started to argue, then thought of the advantage of saving the entrance fee and changed her mind. "What if we get caught?"

"They just kick you out," Hannah said. "But nobody ever watches there." She studied Bennie, trying to gauge her reaction. "So? Can I go?"

Bennie considered. All she needed to do was check out Canada Island. She still planned to go watch the murder that night, that hadn't changed, even though she had no intention of returning to 1988. After all, what if, despite Bennie's best attempts to stop her, Van still somehow ended up as the killer's hostage in 1988? It couldn't hurt for Bennie to know the truth about the murder.

"Sure, I guess so," Bennie said.

"Yeah! Can Stu come with us?"

Bennie laughed. How did she become a parent all of a sudden? "I don't care. Stu's a grown man. He can do whatever he wants."

"Oh, good." Hannah hopped up. "I'll go tell him. He likes a girl who sings there. She's an Up With People singer. But he's afraid to go see her by himself." She ran off, and Bennie finished her second sandwich.

In the end, Bennie chickened out and paid to get into the fair, while Hannah and Stu snuck in through the fence by the Boy Scout encampment. She grew concerned, at the last minute, that if she were caught sneaking in, she could be arrested or banned from reentering the fairgrounds, and thus miss her chance to witness the murder. It was worth the four dollar entrance fee to eliminate the risk of that. "Meet me on Canada Island," she told Hannah and Stu. "At Inspiration Point."

She entered from the northern side, the side nearest Canada Island, but still by the time Bennie reached Inspiration Point, Hannah and Stu had been waiting there for some time and Hannah, at least, was ready to leave.

"It took you long enough." Hannah hopped off the rock where she'd been sitting. "I hate this place. Why'd you want to meet here?"

"Wait a minute," Bennie said. "I need to look around."

"Why?" Hannah asked, clearly disliking the idea.

"Hey, you're the one who wanted to come with me. I didn't make you. Just give me a minute, okay?"

Hannah sighed heavily and went to lean against the rock wall next to Stu, who slouched there smoking a cigarette. "Inspiring," he said agreeably, nodding at the view.

"Yeah." Bennie turned her attention to the location where the murder would take place that night.

At its widest, the Point was no more than eight feet across, and it was crowded with an elderly couple, a family of five from Japan, and a pair of young lovers who sauntered with their hands glued into each other's back pockets. But even with all the footsteps that had crossed the Point already that day, the blue chalk mark on the pavement was easily visible. The chalk had been in her hand when she landed, Bennie realized, and she'd fallen forward onto her hands and knees. She didn't recall dropping the chalk, but she must have. Either she crushed it with her hand when she fell, or the chalk flipped from her hand and was crushed later by someone's foot. Based on the location of the blue smear and by her hazy memories of where she had landed the night before, Bennie suspected she had crushed it with her hand. It fit with the spot RIP had backed into as well, in 1988. Still, Bennie was glad she had decided to stay in 1974, because if she was counting on returning to 1988, she really didn't know where she was supposed to stand.

She peeked over the sides of the rock wall to the water below. Less vegetation clung to the ledge than had been there in 1988. Fewer hiding places. The tiny shelf of earth was frighteningly small,

and the drop to the rocks below almost certainly deadly. But since she no longer had to worry about rushing to the blue chalk mark to get picked up by RIP, why hide behind the rock wall at all? In fact, if she did watch the murder from there and *didn't* return to 1988, she'd certainly be found by the police, maybe even arrested for the murder herself. The police had searched the area, the newspapers said, and they'd found no one around but the Expo Killer. It was the most damning piece of evidence against him. It would be much better for her to watch the murder from farther away. She turned and studied the path. All she needed to do, she realized, was watch the entrance to Inspiration Point. There was no other way in. When she saw who entered the rock-walled path right before the murder, she'd know who the murderer was. Then she could skedaddle as soon as the gun was fired, so she wouldn't be found by the police when they searched the area.

"Can we go now?" Hannah asked plaintively. Though it was hot and her clothing had completely dried, she had her arms wrapped around herself as if cold, and she danced from one foot to another like she had to go to the bathroom. "This place gives me the creeps."

"Sure." Bennie reached out and gave Hannah a quick one-armed hug. Hannah's last experience on the Point hadn't been pleasant. Bennie probably shouldn't have let her come. "Just let me check something out this way."

Bennie walked slowly up the path, scouting for hiding places. Hannah skipped beside her, happy now they were leaving the Point, and Stu slouched peaceably behind them, content to be part of their little trio without contributing to it. Just beyond the end of the path was a children's play area, the centerpiece of which was a giant wooden moose built with recycled materials. Children climbed up a ladder into the moose's tail, crawled through its cavernous body, and slid down a massive moose tongue to the ground. Its mouth was pointed directly at the entrance to Inspiration Point.

Bennie pointed to the moose. "Let's go down the slide."

"Neat!" Hannah rushed forward and joined the line of small children. Gangly and tall, she looked out of place among the little kids, but not as out of place as Bennie knew she and Stu looked, waiting in line behind Hannah. She ignored the curious stares of the parents and waited her turn, trying to envision the area at night.

The moose wasn't as large as it appeared at first glance. Bennie had to stoop to get inside. It was dark and crowded with the bodies of children, but when she had it to herself, it would be spacious enough. From the mouth's opening, she had a clear view of the entrance to Inspiration Point. It was perfect. She followed Hannah down the slide, whooping as she went. They turned to watch Stu and laughed as he slid awkwardly down, his legs hanging over the sides of the slide and his cigarette still dangling from his mouth. He gave them a grin with the half of his mouth not clenching the cigarette butt.

"Wanna go again?" Hannah asked.

"Not me," Stu said. "I think I got a sliver in my butt." He pawed at the seat of his jeans.

"I think once was enough for me too," Bennie said.

"That's what I like about you guys," Hannah said, skipping between them. "You're not afraid to do fun things just because you're grown up."

"Well, *I'm* grown up," Bennie said, "but I'm not so sure about Stu." She laughed, feeling carefree. She had a plan for the future, sort of, and nothing to do now until ten o'clock. They were at the World's Fair. She might as well take advantage of it. "What do you want to do?"

"We have to go see Up With People," Hannah said. "Stu's girlfriend sings there."

"She's not my girlfriend," Stu said.

"Stu has a girlfriend," Hannah sang, laughing and dodging away from him as if he'd tried to grab her, though he hadn't.

Just before they left Canada Island, Bennie stopped and spun back around. "Hannah, how dark was it here?" she asked, indicating the entrance to Inspiration Point. A lamp post stood just opposite the entrance. She tried to picture what it had looked like the night before, but everything had happened too quickly. "Was that lit last night?"

Hannah stopped laughing and glanced from the lamp post to the Point to Bennie. "Why are you so interested in this place?"

"Humor me, will you?"

Hannah frowned but answered, "It was lit, I think."

"Good," Bennie said and started across the bridge to the rest of the fairgrounds. "Let's go meet Stu's girlfriend."

"She's not my girlfriend!"

Bennie's memories of Expo 74 were fuzzy, but what she did remember was dull. She'd gone with her parents, who'd dragged her from one country's exhibit hall to another to learn about garbage landfills, air pollution, and overpopulation. Expo 74 was "The Environmental World's Fair," and concepts that were accepted almost routinely in 1988--"reduce, reuse, recycle"--were fresh and nearly bizarre in 1974. Recycle? It was a new word to many. Bennie recalled a school project in which she and her classmates had studied the concept of recycling, then collected aluminum cans, enough to fill the back of a pickup truck, and delivered them to a recycling plant. They got their picture in the paper. But it was still years before families, or even schools, started routinely recycling their own cans and bottles. Recycling for *real* was still just too weird.

Gazing around her now, though, Bennie realized her memories of Expo didn't do it justice. There was a lot more going on than just environmental education. Food from around the world, games, hot air balloons, sky rides, and music and performers of all kinds. She didn't remember all that. She'd been too busy sulking probably, because she had to hang with her parents. But no parent was around this time, and neither Hannah nor Stu was about to suggest they spend their time learning about the perils of strip mining, mercury poisoning, or litter. This time, she was going to have fun.

"Up With People doesn't start again until three," Hannah said, so they stopped at the U.S. Pavilion and watched the Imax movie.

Bennie nearly got sick from the simulated flight through the Grand Canyon. "I can't believe they provide barf bags for a *movie*."

"I wish I was high, man," Stu said. "It's better when you're high."

"Don't listen to him, Hannah," Bennie said, and Hannah laughed.

They watched a group of Native Americans carve a totem pole, fed the automated garbage eating goat, and fished for coins in one of the many abstract fountains, until finally it was time to go see Up With People. Hannah squirmed her way through the crowd and found them places to sit on the concrete edge of a fountain. Bennie sat on Hannah's right and Stu sat on her left.

"What does she look like?" Hannah asked.

"She's cute," Stu said with a bashful smile.

"Oh, that's a big help." She turned to Bennie and said solemnly, "Look for the cute one."

Bennie gave Hannah a thumb's up. Finding cute girls was Bennie's specialty. Suddenly, without warning, a burst of light and sound and people erupted onto the stage, and Bennie jumped.

Christ. No wonder they were sponsored by the Energy Pavilion. Bennie didn't think she'd ever seen so much energy in one place before, and it all came from this group of bouncing, singing,

smiling young people. How did they keep smiling while they sang? Each wore a version of the same outfit, the girls in short flippy yellow and red dresses, the boys in tight yellow bell bottoms and red mesh vests. Bennie suspected they were supposed to be *hip* or *mod* or whatever the word was back then, but they tried a bit too hard. They looked more like clowns.

Bennie glanced at her companions. Hannah's jaw had dropped open and her eyes were wide. She appeared more scared than entertained. Stu, for once, had no cigarette of any sort, and his mouth hung open in a bemused grin. Bennie laughed. It was just too funny. Up With People, from what Bennie knew, was an extremely conservative youth singing group, so strict that girls and boys weren't even allowed to share a bus seat. They were sent to perform around the world as a moral balance against the wicked counterculture of hippies, druggies, Yippies. People like Stu. Fortunately, Up With People sang so loudly that no one but Hannah noticed Bennie was laughing.

"What's so funny?" Hannah asked, but Bennie just shook her head and tried to stop. Hannah shrugged and pointed to one of the girls on stage. "I think it's that one."

Bennie followed the direction of Hannah's finger, compared it with the direction of Stu's smitten gaze, and decided Hannah was right. The object of Stu's desire had wavy brown hair that reached just past her shoulders, big brown eyes, and an expression of pure sweetness that managed to survive even the perpetual smile. She *was* cute. The girl swung her head and flipped her hair to the music right along with everyone, and smiled her sweet smile indiscriminately at the crowd, but it seemed to Bennie that her gaze strayed more than it should have in Stu's direction.

"I think she likes him too," Bennie said to Hannah, and Hannah nodded.

The show lasted thirty minutes. By the time the peppy show was done, Bennie felt as if her nerves were coated in Twinkie cream filling. She stood to leave, but Hannah grabbed her arm.

"We can't go yet," she said. "We have to wait for Candy to come out."

"Candy? You're kidding, right?"

"Uh uh. That's her name."

Stu had risen and moved toward the door the dancers had skipped into. He was one of a large crowd of people waiting there. Up With People groupies. Who would have thought it? A few minutes later, singers began trickling out and meeting up with friends. Finally, Candy emerged, looking far more *hip*, in Bennie's opinion, in a short, sleeveless, red and white gingham shift than she had in her garish flippy dress. She had nice legs.

Bennie watched as Stu approached Candy. She smiled shyly at him, her staged exuberance gone. She shook her head at something he said, then peeked warily over at Bennie and Hannah. She smiled hesitantly and gave a little finger wave, looked doubtfully back at Stu, then nodded in concession. Bennie suddenly understood. Stu wasn't 'afraid' of seeing Candy by himself, he needed Bennie and Hannah with him so that Candy would even dare to come out with him. He was using them! After considering for a moment, Bennie decided she didn't mind. After all, she'd played the same trick on girls more than once. Sometimes they just needed to think there was safety in numbers. This girl looked young, but she had to be at least eighteen, if she was traveling with Up With People. She'd be all right.

"What are you laughing at now?" Hannah asked.

"Nothing," Bennie said. "I'm just happy."

Stu brought Candy over to meet them. "These are my friends, Bennie and Hannah," Stu said.

"Candy's going to the carnival with us."

"Yeah!" Hannah punched the air with both fists. "I love the carnival."

Bennie abruptly stopped laughing. There was a carnival? She felt immediate outrage at her parents. What other Expo pleasures had they deprived her of? How could she have gone to Expo at the age of 14 and not have known there was a carnival?

It turned out the carnival was in the far eastern corner of the fairgrounds, past an unsightly construction site in an area that Bennie hadn't even realized was part of the fair. As they headed in that direction, Bennie joked with Candy and tried to get her to relax. She acted as if going to the carnival with Stu was the first step on the road to perdition. But it was still only mid-afternoon. Her virginity wasn't going to be threatened by attending a carnival in broad daylight, even if it was with a druggie, a runaway, and a lesbian.

To get to the carnival, they had to pass the Washington State Pavilion, and it was there that Bennie saw a large poster that announced *The Carpenters, Here Tonight!!!* Bennie smiled. The Carpenters. God, how she'd loved the Carpenters. Especially Karen. She'd had such a crush on Karen Carpenter. When had her taste changed from skinny girls with straight brown hair to voluptuous redheads like Van? She remembered how excited she'd been when she'd actually gotten to go see the Carpenters in person. It had been--Bennie stopped, stunned. It had been at Expo 74. It had been on the same day that her parents had dragged her through all the educational pavilions, Bennie suddenly recalled. Her dad had gone home early, but she and her mother had stayed, eaten dinner at the fair, and then gone to see the Carpenters. She stared at the crowd gathering outside the entrance to the Opera House.

She was in there! Bennie found herself scanning the crowd for her fourteen-year-old self, then stopped and looked quickly away, panicked. What if she saw herself in the crowd? What would happen? Jill hadn't prepped her for this. Could two versions of the same person even be in the same place at the same time? What if she saw herself and it made her brain explode? Made *both* their brains explode? Who knew what might happen? As far as Bennie knew, no one had ever been in this situation before. *Anything* could happen.

She felt the same apprehension she'd felt when she watched the Apollo moon landing on TV the summer she was nine. Her friend Virginia had a color TV, so all the kids in the neighborhood had gone there to watch it, though the transmission was all in black and white anyway. That had been briefly disappointing, but they forgot about it as they watched the door to the capsule open and Neil Armstrong step out with his big boots onto the surface of the moon. At that moment, Bennie had jumped up and run from the house into the front yard. Virginia's mother had thought Bennie was scared, but she wasn't. She just wanted to see what was going to happen. Nobody had ever stepped on the moon before, and no one knew, not even the grown ups, what might happen when someone did. It was something that had never happened before, ever, in the whole history of the world. The moon could explode, or the sky could change colors. Who knew? It turned out nothing much did happen. The moon didn't explode, gravity didn't end, life on earth continued exactly the same as it always had, as far as Bennie could tell. But still, anything *could* have happened. Just like now.

Except this time, she was scared.

"Bennie?" Hannah came back to where Bennie stood, staring fixedly in the direction opposite the crowd lining up for the Carpenters. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Bennie said. Her voice sounded high even to herself. She cleared her throat and forced herself to calm down. "Nothing," she said again, more firmly. She wasn't in that crowd outside the Opera House. It was too early. She and her mother wouldn't have gone to the Opera House until later in the evening. Her mother hated standing in lines.

But young Bennie was there, at the fair, somewhere, right at that very minute. This was a complication Bennie hadn't considered. If she stayed in 1974, she would always risk running into her younger self at any time, or her mother or father or brother, at least if she stayed in Spokane. And if she didn't stay in Spokane, it could defeat the whole purpose of remaining in 1974, since she wouldn't be around at the critical moment to befriend Van. This was going to require some thought.

Meanwhile, she couldn't stay at the fair, not when she *knew* her younger self was there.

"I have to go," she said suddenly.

Hannah looked stricken. "No, Bennie!" She grabbed Bennie's arm.

"Just back to camp," Bennie said hastily. "I'm not going away, Hannah. I just can't stay here at the fair any longer."

"Why not?"

Bennie shook her head. "I can't explain. I--" She broke off and dug in her pocket. "Here." She tried to hand Hannah a twenty dollar bill. "For the carnival. I'll meet you back at camp."

"No." Hannah put her hands behind her back and refused the money. "I'm staying with you."

"Why? You love the carnival. I'm not going anywhere but camp, I promise."

Hannah shook her head. "I'm staying with you."

When had Hannah become so attached? They'd known each other less than twenty-four hours, and already she was terrified that Bennie was going to leave her. "What about Stu and Candy?"

They glanced at the couple who waited for them a few feet away. They were holding hands, smiling at each other. "They don't need me," Hannah said.

"All right." Bennie shoved the twenty back into her pocket. "Come on then. It doesn't make any difference to me."

Hannah sighed with relief. They left the fairgrounds and headed back to People's Park.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Patsy -- 1988

"DO YOU TRUST me?" Van whispered.

"I do," Patsy answered. "Of course I do."

"Then take your hands away and let me do this."

Patsy removed her hands from Van's head and spread her arms out to the sides of the bed. Relax, she told herself. Relax and trust. Van dropped her head down again between Patsy's spread legs.

Patsy felt Van's fingers first, gently caressing her inner thighs. Not too gently, though. No tickling, which Patsy hated. Van stroked with sure soft fingers that moved slowly closer and closer to the center where Patsy's thighs met. Then Van's tongue replaced the fingers, lapping just along the outer edge of Patsy's swollen lips. Patsy's breathing grew fast, and she congratulated herself for remaining calm and trusting.

"Patsy."

Patsy opened her eyes. Van peeked up at her, her eyes cresting Patsy's pelvis, and Patsy's hands were buried in Van's hair.

"Sorry." Patsy released her hold on Van's head and spread her arms again. "I do trust you, Van, I swear I do. It's just habit, I guess." The habit of a lifetime, Patsy acknowledged. The only woman who controlled what happened to Patsy was Patsy. She rarely let a woman love her the way Van wanted to, but when she did, Patsy controlled even that. With her hands on the woman's head, she could control how fast, how far, when to stop, when to start. How could she relax otherwise, and enjoy it? But that didn't work with Van. Van didn't want to be controlled.

"Do you trust me, Patsy?" Van asked again. "I mean, *really* trust me?"

Patsy gazed at Van. She had raised herself up onto her knees, and the sight of her took Patsy's breath away. The room was lit only by a cluster of candles on the dresser, and Van's body was all curves and dips and shadows. The candlelight glinted off Van's hair, her eyes, her lips, and off a bit of moisture in the curls that nestled between Van's legs. She was the most beautiful thing Patsy had ever seen.

"I do trust you, Van," Patsy said, and her voice shook with the truth of it. "I've never trusted anyone the way I trust you. I just can't keep my hands away."

"It's okay," Van said softly. She let her feet drop to the floor and walked, naked, over to her dresser. She opened a drawer, took something from it, and returned to stand beside Patsy. "I don't want you to worry about a thing." Van took Patsy's wrist and wrapped something cool and smooth around it. Patsy craned her head to see. It was a scarf. Van was wrapping Patsy's wrist in a flowered scarf. Patsy's arm twitched, and Van placed a hand on her shoulder. "Trust me." Patsy tried to relax as Van tied first one wrist, then the other, to the headboard. Patsy couldn't believe what was happening. Van was tying her up, and Patsy was letting her!

When Patsy's arms were secured above her head, Van stood at the foot of the bed, ran her eyes over Patsy's prone and bound body, and smiled at her. "Comfortable?"

Patsy had never been particularly modest. She had no trouble being the first to strip, enjoyed parading around the house naked, even entertained a woman once by masturbating in front of her. But this was different. She had never felt more exposed or more vulnerable in her life. Her skin felt singed as Van's eyes roamed over her body. Her breathing came fast, and she tried to slow it. She tugged at her wrists, but the bands did not give. Patsy throbbed and felt a gush between her legs.

Van's smile widened. "Let's try this again." She climbed back onto the bed. She crawled up and kissed Patsy on the mouth, the ears, the neck, the breasts, then between, beneath, and around each breast as well. With Patsy in her power, Van's lovemaking slowed down. She seemed to enjoy playing with Patsy's body, and Patsy was powerless to stop her.

When Van again reached the juncture of Patsy's thighs, she spread Patsy's legs wide and resumed her stroking. She moved her tongue up the left side of Patsy's vulva, then down the right, reversed the pattern, and circled Patsy's center, not quite landing. Patsy whimpered, tugged at her restraints, bucked her hips, but there was nothing she could do. She wasn't in control.

Finally, Van's tongue dipped into Patsy's moist center and lapped upward. Patsy arched and groaned. She tried to squirm her hips away, but Van held tight. Van's tongue moved quickly and she didn't let up. Patsy screamed, the sensation more intense than any she'd ever felt before. "Oh ba--ba--baby!"

Van licked and probed and sucked. The feeling was too intense. Patsy tried to pull away again, but Van didn't let her. Van knew what she was doing. She was taking Patsy to a place Patsy had never let any woman take her before. A moment later, a deep throbbing pulse jerked Patsy's hips

completely off the bed, the walls of her vagina spasmed. The earth was quaking in Patsy's vulva. She felt the giant wave of her orgasm swelling from deep inside her, growing larger and deeper and stronger, until it crashed over her and knocked her flat. She screamed and clenched and rode the wave, moaning and throbbing and thrusting her hips, her arms yanking hard against the scarves, while Van's tongue pressed and lapped and loved until finally, breathless and sweating, Patsy collapsed onto the mattress. She opened her eyes.

Van grinned at her, her face dripping with come and triumph. "Good?"

"Oh, baby," Patsy moaned. She closed her eyes again. "Oh my God!"

"Breshears? Hey Breshears, you awake?"

Patsy opened her eyes.

Standing over her was Sergeant Bryant, a wary expression on his face. "You okay?" he asked again. "You were kind of whimpering or something in your sleep."

Patsy felt her neck and ears burn. Jesus Christ! She sat up and threw the blanket toward the foot of the cot. Fifty years old and she was having a wet dream, in front of a *man*, for God's sake. And with Van still held hostage a hundred yards away. What the hell was wrong with her? Patsy groaned, rubbed her hands roughly over her face, and tried to push away the memories of the first time Van tied her up. Now was not the time. She'd slept a bit, but she didn't feel rested. Her body still throbbed with the memory of Van making love to her, but her head and neck and shoulders all ached as if she'd been balancing a globe up there, like Atlas.

"Sorry to wake you," Bryant said. "They're bringing Hamlin in again."

"What the fuck for?" Patsy asked harshly. "He won't talk to her."

"You got a better idea?"

Patsy didn't. She stood up and rolled her head back and forth, trying to ease tense muscles.

"What time is it?"

"Ten to four," Bryant said agreeably, though the clock was as visible to Patsy as it was to him.

"Nearly happy hour. Maybe we can negotiate with some more beer or something."

"If we were dealing with Rudy, maybe. It won't work with Stu." Patsy sat down in her chair and swiveled it to stare out the window at the silent tower. "I wish to God I knew what would work with Stu."

"Find the real killer," Bryant suggested.

"I got my people working on that," Patsy said lightly, as if she was joking, and Bryant smiled.

The door opened. Captain Padgett stood there. He stepped back and let Mrs. Hamlin enter before him. "Breshears, Bryant," he said. "Mrs. Hamlin's willing to give it another try. See if you can get him to talk to her this time."

"Any luck with that court order, Sir?" Patsy asked.

Padgett grimaced. "It's not as simple as it sounds. There's politics involved. Even the governor's got an opinion."

Patsy's jaw clenched, her fists clenched, her entire body clenched. "Why?" she demanded tightly.

"We're not asking them to let the fu--" She broke off with a glance at Mrs. Hamlin. She took a breath and tried again. "They don't have to release him. Just reopen the damned case."

"We're trying, Breshears," Padgett said gloomily. "But we can only do what we can do. What you need to do is get Shannon to talk to Mrs. Hamlin, here. See if she can talk him down." With a nod, he stepped back out of the room and closed the door.

"Thank you for coming again, Mrs. Hamlin," Bryant said politely.

Patsy didn't know how he stayed so calm. The circles under his eyes didn't show, given his dark skin, but Patsy knew they were there. They were both exhausted, but Bryant never stopped being

polite and reasonable. He should have been the lead negotiator, not Patsy. Shit, he should be the one they promoted to lieutenant.

"Please," Mrs. Hamlin said "call me Candy." She smiled at both of them. "I feel like we're friends, I'm getting to know you both so well."

Not on your life, Patsy thought. Mrs. Candy Hamlin was exactly the sort of woman who would run screaming the other way if she ever got to know Patsy well. The quintessential PTA president, Cub Scout leader, Sunday school teacher, she would not be caught dead being friends with a lesbian. She probably voted the way her husband told her to at every election. Her Republican husband. She wore a skirt and heels to a *prison*, for God's sake. The most radical thing about her was that her ears were pierced. No, Patsy amended, the most radical thing about her was that her ex-boyfriend was currently holding Van hostage.

"Okay, Candy," Bryant said smoothly, "we're going to call him again in a minute. No guarantees we'll get through to him, but we'll keep trying."

"I know," Candy said. "I just want to do whatever I can to help. I wish I could do more. I feel so sorry for that woman out there."

"Does your husband know you're here?" Patsy asked abruptly. Bryant shot her a sharp look, but Patsy ignored him. They'd already tried to get Stu to talk to Candy twice before. If they were going to convince him to talk to her this time, they'd have to figure out which buttons to push.

"Of course," Candy said. "He's the one who answered the phone when your Captain called about this whole thing."

"Does he know you've been visiting the Expo Killer twice a year for the last fourteen years?"

Candy blushed but didn't look away, earning just a smidge of Patsy's respect. "He does now," she said. "I had to tell him before he heard it on the news."

"He's okay with you coming here, trying to save your ex-boyfriend?"

"Stu was never my boyfriend," Candy said.

Patsy frowned. "Then who is he? What is he to you?"

"Have a seat, Candy," Bryant interrupted, gesturing toward his chair. "Please."

Candy sat, crossed her ankles to the side like a beauty queen, and smoothed her skirt down so that it reached her knees. Her brown hair was cut in a short glossy cap, and she wore just a hint of mascara and lip gloss. She rested her purse in her lap and clasped her fingers together over it. She looked like a minister's wife. With nice legs.

"I hardly knew Stu before that day," she said. "He used to come watch my shows. I sang with Up With People. That whole summer of '74 we sang at Expo every day. After the shows he'd try to get me to go play at the fair with him, but I wouldn't do it. We were warned not to go off alone with boys. I thought he was real cute, and he was very sweet to me, but I was scared to go out with him. He looked like a hippie, you know? Actually," she laughed, "he looked like Jesus. That kind of made me want to trust him, but he looked like a hippie too, so I was scared. But that day, he had these two girls with him."

"What day was that?" Bryant asked quickly.

"Right before the murder. The police officer was killed that night."

"Where were you when that happened?" Patsy asked. "Did you see anything?" As if the police wouldn't have covered this ground long ago.

"Who were the girls?" Bryant added.

"I'm trying to tell you," Candy said. "One of them was just a kid, and the other one, well, she wasn't a hippie or anything. She was older than us, and she looked kind of reliable, you know?"

So I thought it would be safe to go with him. But we hadn't even made it to the carnival yet when all of a sudden the girls said they had to leave."

"They ditched you?" Bryant asked.

"It was a ploy," Patsy said dismissively.

"No, it wasn't." Candy shook her head earnestly. "Stu was surprised, he really was, and he was so worried that I would think he'd tricked me. I could tell he really didn't know they were going to leave like that. Anyway, by then I'd already decided to go ahead and hang out with him, even if it was just the two of us. And we had the best time." Candy smiled reminiscently. "He didn't have any money, but he was so charming. He talked people into giving us rides and free tries at the games and even food. And he was a perfect gentleman. He never even tried to kiss me, and he had me back at the pavilion by seven."

"And then?" Patsy asked.

Candy frowned slightly. "Then nothing. The next day I heard he was arrested for killing that police officer." She bit her lip. "I don't know if he did it or not, you know? I hardly knew him, but I never would have thought he used drugs. They say he was high that night, and I guess he was. In fact, he admits he was. But gosh, I can tell you this. Stu was a gentle and sweet man. Maybe he did kill that police officer, I don't know. But if he did, he didn't mean to. It had to have been an accident or the drugs working in his body, making him do it. He was only there trying to help those girls. He's not a violent person. He's a good man. I've visited him twice a year ever since he was arrested because I believe that, whether he's guilty or not."

"That *good man*," Patsy said harshly, "sent a guard to the hospital with a critical head injury. That *good man* has been holding an innocent woman hostage in that tower for thirty-six hours."

"I know." Tears pooled in Candy's eyes. "I'm so sorry about that. But he's not like that, really. If only he would let me talk to him, maybe I could get him to let her go." She blinked, and the tears spilled down her cheeks. "I'm the only one who stood by him. Did you know that? I'm the *only one*. And I only knew him that one day. His family abandoned him when he got arrested. That broke his heart. And those girls never came forward to tell the police why he was there that night. It might not have helped him, but they didn't even try."

Patsy gave a deep sigh, uninterested in professions of Stu's sweet goodness. She glanced again at the clock. "Well, let's give this another shot." She put her headset on and nodded to Candy to do the same with Bryant's. "I'm not going to tell him you're on the line this time," Patsy said. "I'm going to talk to him for a minute, and when I give you the nod, you just start talking to him, okay? *Hi Stu, this is Candy. I'm worried about you.* That sort of thing. With luck, he'll be so captivated by the sound of your voice, he won't hang up. Okay?"

Candy nodded. "Okay."

Patsy punched in the numbers.

"Pete's Pizza. May I take your order?"

Patsy nearly hung up, but then she heard a chuckle and realized it was Stu, making a joke. Candy started to laugh, and Patsy said quickly, to cover the sound, "Good news, Stu. The governor's working on that court order for you."

But she hadn't been quick enough.

"Who's that?" Stu asked sharply.

Patsy exchanged a glance with Bryant and nodded at Candy.

"It's me, Stu. It's Candy."

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Bennie -- 1974

BENNIE DRIED THE last dish, set it on the stack on the counter, and draped the soggy towel over the rack someone had painstakingly crafted from twigs. It was getting dark already, which meant it had to be around nine o'clock. Bennie knew she had to get back into the Expo grounds by ten, or she'd end up sneaking in under the fence whether she wanted to or not. Unfortunately, she had a giant teenaged albatross hanging around her neck.

"What next?" Hannah bypassed the towel and dried her hands on the seat of her filthy shorts.

"Nothing." Bennie had hoped that by volunteering for kitchen chores, she'd be able to shake Hannah off, but instead Hannah had volunteered right alongside her, even going so far as to haul away the grossest of the kitchen garbage to the dumpster. She wasn't letting Bennie out of her sight. "It's about time for bed, don't you think?"

From Hannah's expression, she had apparently never heard anything so absurd. "It's barely dark. Nobody's in bed yet."

"Maybe I'll take a shower," Bennie said next, eyeing the makeshift shower stalls that had been erected at the edge of camp. She could pretend she was going to the showers and instead sneak off around the back of the curtained area.

"Good idea," Hannah said "I feel really grungy."

"Um, on second thought, I--hey look," she said with relief, "Stu's back."

Hannah smiled. "Oh good. I gotta find out how it went with Candy." She hurried over and joined Stu at the circle around the fire. Bennie followed more slowly.

"You look happy," Hannah announced to Stu. "How'd it go? Does she like you?"

Stu did look happy and, in fact, could barely stop smiling long enough to take a toke from a cigarette handed to him by another camper. He inhaled deeply, held the smoke, and let his breath out slowly. "God, that's good," he said finally. "I haven't been high all day."

"What's the matter?" Bennie asked, smiling. "Candy not a dooper?"

"Nope. She's anti-drugs." Stu chuckled. "She thinks I am too. She's so damn cute."

"What are you going to do?" Hannah asked with some concern.

She perched on a camp rock next to Stu. "Are you going to quit using drugs?"

"Why would I do that?" Stu asked, reaching again for the cigarette. "She likes me. I think I can get her to change her mind. Once she tries it, I know she'll like it."

"That's not true," Bennie said quickly, again feeling an awkward need to be parental. "Don't try it, Hannah. You won't like it."

Hannah laughed up at her. "Don't worry, Bennie. I'm not going to start smoking pot just because I'm friends with Stu."

"Good." Bennie thought a moment. "I'll bet Stu's hungry. Is there any macaroni left?"

Hannah popped up. "I don't know. I'll check."

As soon as she was gone, Bennie put her hand on Stu's shoulder. "Stu, I need a favor."

He smiled up at her, in a happy daze from the pot or from Candy, or both. "Sure, what's up?" "There's something I have to do tonight, and Hannah can't come with me. Will you keep an eye on her, keep her busy? Don't let her follow me. I'll be back before morning. Can you do that?" "Sure, I'll babysit for you." He turned his smile to Hannah, who already hurried up with a bowl of macaroni and cheese. "Thanks. You're a good kid." He took a couple of quick bites. Bennie tried to think of something to keep Hannah occupied long enough to let her slip out of camp. "Are you guys going to make brownies again tonight?" she asked. "Maybe you can let Hannah make a separate batch, a clean batch? You'd like that, wouldn't you, Hannah?" Hannah shrugged. "I guess."

"It's too early," Stu said. "We don't even have the fire built up yet."

Bennie thought some more. "You ready to take a shower, Hannah?"

"If you are."

"No." That wouldn't work. The idea was to shake her off. "Maybe in a bit."

"We should go swimming," Stu said.

Hannah's eyes widened. "Swimming? At night?"

"Why not?" Stu said. "I'm too sweaty to sleep. Anyone want to join me? Maybe we can get up a game of night chicken."

Hannah gazed at Bennie, an anxious question in her eyes.

"Not me," Bennie said, holding her hands up in resistance. "I'm too tired." Hannah slumped in disappointment, and Bennie said quickly, "You go ahead, Hannah. Don't hang back because of me."

"Yeah, come with me, Hannah," Stu said.

"Really?" Hannah asked, as if she truly needed Bennie's permission.

"Take some shampoo with you," Bennie advised. "You can wash your hair."

Apparently reassured by the parental admonition, Hannah made a face at Bennie and readily skipped off with Stu, asking, "What did you and Candy do? Did you kiss her?"

Bennie took a few slow steps toward the sleeping canopy. When Hannah and Stu disappeared from sight, she snatched her jacket from where it marked their sleeping spot and veered quickly toward the road. She trotted up the road out of the park and headed for Expo.

She reached the gate, breathless, at nine thirty-five. There was no line. "Park closes in twenty-five minutes," the ticket seller warned.

"I know." She paid her four dollars and hurried to Canada Island. It had grown nearly completely dark and, as she'd hoped, the children's play area was empty. Bennie peered around and saw no one, so she climbed up into the hind end of the wooden moose. She peeked out its head toward the entrance to Inspiration Point and saw that it was well lit. She smiled and settled back into the moose's belly. She would stay right where she was for the next couple of hours, just until the murderer showed up. She'd make note of who it was and then hightail it out of there.

She wondered what Jill and Kendra would think when she didn't show up again in RIP.

Although, if Bennie didn't show up, that meant there was never any reason to send her back to 1974 in the first place, since Bennie would make damn sure Van never went into that tower to get taken hostage. But if there was never any reason in 1988 to send Bennie back to 1974, how did she get here? She shook her head. It was too complicated. That was the sort of thing Jill could figure out, not Bennie.

It was dark inside the moose. Peering down, Bennie saw her legs and feet, still clad in black, blend into the dark wood. Kendra's blouse, however, stood out like Caspar the Ghost. If anyone peeked inside the moose, he couldn't help but see her. She hunched up onto her knees and tucked

the embroidered hem of the blouse into her jeans, dismayed at the sour odor rising from her body. Was it two days now since she'd showered? And it was hot in 1974. As soon as she got back to camp, she was taking a shower, no matter how late it was. She pulled on the black jacket and buttoned it up to her neck. There, that was better. She was invisible. She reached into the pocket of the jacket to tuck the white cap out of sight, but the pocket was empty. Damn that Hannah. She must have snatched the cap again.

Almost before she knew it, the fair was empty and closed. She knew security guards were around, though, so she stayed put. She rolled over onto her tummy, her chin on her hands, and watched the entrance to Inspiration Point. The murder wouldn't occur for another hour or more, but who knew when the victim or the murderer actually showed up at Inspiration Point? They may have hung out down there for a while before one shot the other. Bennie didn't intend to miss it.

She passed the time by fantasizing about her future, the new one that was starting over again in 1974. She should have asked her dad about more World Series and Super Bowls than just one. She could become a millionaire if she played this right. She could take her winnings from the '74 games and invest it in the stock market. What would have been a profitable investment in 1974? Computers, probably, but it might take a while for those to pay off. Bennie remembered Christmas the year she was in the eighth grade. One of her big presents that year had been a calculator, and she'd been thrilled with it. It added, subtracted, multiplied, and divided, and it may have calculated percentages, but that was about it, and it was the size of a paperback book. Maybe she should invest in IBM. Or Xerox, that might be a good one. She remembered how disappointed she and friends had been when their high school had finally gotten a photocopy machine. No more sniffing the heady ink from freshly printed dittos. Yeah, Xerox would be a good investment.

She wished she had a watch. She had no idea how much time had passed. It felt like hours, but was probably not even ten-thirty yet. She fought off drowsiness and the need to pee. This entire venture would be pointless if she missed the critical moment because she was in the bathroom or snoozing inside a moose. She pulled out her pocket knife and scratched "Bennie was here" on the inside belly of the moose, using her sense of touch to get the spacing right, while she kept her eyes on the entrance to Inspiration Point.

Betting on the World Series was a sure way to make money, but that was still a good three months away. How was she going to live until then, and what was she going to do about Hannah? Maybe she shouldn't have so rashly promised Hannah she'd take care of her when she didn't even know how she was going to take care of herself. Well, she still had nearly two hundred and fifty dollars, not counting the hundred she'd given Hannah. She remembered a friend of hers renting a little apartment in downtown Spokane in '77 or '78 for only around seventy-five dollars a month. It was a crummy little apartment, but still. They could get by, if Hannah didn't eat too much.

Bennie heard a sound. She lifted her head. A security guard sauntered across the bridge. He held a large flashlight in his hand and pointed it at the shadowed areas to his left and right as he passed them, but not as if he expected to actually see anything. Bennie held her breath until he passed, but he didn't even try to look in the moose.

She relaxed and tried to recall when she had obtained her first social security card. Did she have one in 1974, and if so, could she use the same number now to get a job? They didn't really need to see the actual card, did they? She sure hoped not, because she didn't have it.

Suddenly another figure crossed the bridge toward Canada Island, this one obviously in a hurry. Bennie froze and watched, as still as the moose itself, until the figure reached the light cast by the lamp.

Christ. What the hell was Hannah doing there? Oh fuck. Instantly, Bennie knew exactly what Hannah was doing there. It was written all over her anxious little face. She had escaped Stu and was looking for Bennie. Without hesitation, Hannah turned down the lane toward Inspiration Point, apparently thinking she'd find Bennie there.

Bennie scrambled to her knees and slid down the tongue of the moose, face first, and landed in an awkward pile at the bottom. She lurched to her feet and started to run toward the Point. She had to get Hannah out of there before the murderer showed up.

But before Bennie had taken even two steps, another figure appeared in the circle of light at the entrance to Inspiration Point. He, too, was in a hurry and obviously had seen Hannah. He veered and followed her down the path.

Bennie ran. So many things were going wrong all of a sudden that she didn't have a clue what she should do, except for one thing. She had to get Hannah out of there. Before she'd even reached the entrance to the Point, though, Bennie heard Hannah cry out.

"Let me go!"

"Hey!" Bennie called, running forward. "Leave her alone!"

Hannah tried to cry out again, but was choked off. Bennie reached the end of the path. In the circle of Inspiration Point was the same man who'd tried to grab Hannah the night before. This time he held Hannah tightly, an arm pressed hard against her neck. Hannah grabbed with both hands at his arm, trying desperately to pull it away from her windpipe.

Bennie skidded to a stop. "Let her go."

Hannah's step-father took a quick step back and held up his other hand. Bennie froze. He held a gun, and it was pointed directly at her. "You again," he said with a grim smile. "Stay away. I'd love an excuse to shoot you."

Bennie looked quickly from the man to Hannah, whose escape attempts were growing more feeble. "She can't breathe," Bennie said.

"Good," he said, and Bennie knew then that Hannah hadn't been kidding when she said her step-father was trying to kill her.

"Step over there," he said, using his gun to direct Bennie to one side of the circle. He was trying to clear her from the path so that he could leave with Hannah. But Hannah couldn't breathe. Did he really think Bennie was just going to step aside and let him drag the strangled girl away?

"No." Bennie took a step toward him, gambling that he wouldn't shoot.

She would never know if he would have shot or not, because at that moment Hannah lifted her legs off the ground and let herself dangle heavily from his right arm. Suddenly unbalanced, he lurched to the side, and Bennie pounced on his gun arm. She leaned heavily on it and pressed it down toward the ground.

The man released Hannah and brought his right arm around to grab at Bennie.

"Run, Hannah, run!" Bennie shouted.

Hannah needed no encouragement. Coughing and gasping for breath, she loped up the path and out of sight.

Suddenly the man's free hand was at Bennie's throat, and it was her turn to be choked. He pressed hard against her windpipe, trying to pry her off his arm, but she refused to release her hold. If he got his gun arm free, she was as good as dead. She concentrated all her strength and attention on controlling the arm that held the gun. She let all her weight fall against him, against

that arm, ignoring the pain at her throat. He jerked, trying to shake her off, and pushed her back against the rock.

The gun went off. They both went still, and Bennie tried to assess whether she'd been shot. She didn't release her hold on the man's arm, but his grip on her throat eased. She gasped for breath, and gasped again as the man fell slowly forward, his weight falling against her. She ducked quickly out of the way, and he fell against the rock, then slid down onto the ground beside it.

It was a familiar scene. She'd seen it once before, just yesterday, in fact, in the grainy black and white photograph of the newspaper article the day after the Expo murder.

Bennie dropped the gun and stumbled backward. Suddenly, she felt as if she were tackled. She was lifted off her feet, and everything went black.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Van -- 1988

"I WAS TRIPPING, of course," Stu said. His eyes were red with fatigue and he still looked stoned, though fourteen years had passed. He perched on his stool, balancing on its two back legs, one hand hovering over the edge of the desk to catch himself if he started to fall, the other waving the rifle through the air as he tried to balance, like a tight rope walker holding a pole. "I wouldn't have lost track of the girl like that if I wasn't so high. Someone brought a bag of 'shrooms, and I thought, what the hell? You know what that's like. I forgot about the girl. One minute she was there, playing in the water, laughing and shit, and then she was just gone. I knew she must have went to the fairgrounds looking for Bennie, so that's where I went. Snuck through the fence like we did the first time, and crossed over to Canada Island. There was this place that jutted out over the water. Bennie was real interested in it, so I figured that must have been where Hannah went. Sure enough, soon as I got there, Hannah ran right past me like she was on fire, crying and scared. I was gonna go after her, but then I heard the gunshot. I looked down at that dead end and I saw somebody standing there. I started on down toward him, but then he just disappeared. I swear he just vanished into thin air. I was coming down by then, and I know I didn't imagine it. I saw the cop lying there on the ground, bleeding to death, and the gun was on the ground right next to him. Jesus, I don't know what I was thinking. It had to be the 'shrooms. I couldn't figure out where that other guy went, and I was so confused. I just bent down and picked up that gun. Stupid ass thing to do. But I never killed no one."

Van sat cross-legged on the floor, her blanket wrapped around her like an Indian chief, and exercised her fingers beneath it. She could understand why the police had never believed Stu's story. But Van did. "What did she look like?"

"Who, Hannah?"

"No. Bennie."

"Oh, hell, that was years ago." Stu scrunched his face up, trying to remember. "She was tall, short hair, kind of muscular, for a girl. But pretty, too."

How many tall, pretty, muscular girls named Bennie were there? Van only knew of one. But Bennie would have just been a kid back in 1974.

"She was kind of dark, Mexican looking, you know? And she wore these black jeans with tight ankles. Popular now, I guess, but back then they were just funny looking."

Van closed her eyes. Oh, Bennie, *Bennie*, what are you doing in 1974? Jill must have sent her back. They must have used RIP. They were trying to save her, somehow, back at the start of it all. Van's eyes stung and she blinked back tears.

She was so damned tired of being a hostage. The room stank. *She* stank. Her body ached from lying on the floor, her head ached from lack of sleep. She was sick of eating junk food and of peeing in front of Rudy. She glanced at Rudy who at the moment drooled where he lay sleeping. She was tired of being afraid.

"Did you tell Candy what happened?" Van asked, trying to keep Stu talking. Bennie might be trying to save her from way back in 1974, but Van couldn't count on that. She had to do everything she could to save herself right here in 1988, and one of her meager tools was the rapport she was building with Stu. He wouldn't hurt her if she was his friend, would he? "Does she believe you?"

"She heard it on the news," Stu said. "Came to visit me right away, which nobody else did. She wasn't so worried about whether I killed the guy or not. She was more upset that the newspaper said I was on drugs. She wanted to go to the police and vouch for me. She said she knew I wasn't high because she was with me until seven-thirty that night, and I was just fine." Stu gave a little laugh. "Like I couldn't have gotten high between seven-thirty and midnight. She was so cute."

"She must really like you, to stand by you all this time. After just that one date."

"Yeah." A bitter smile twisting Stu's lips. "Dumb kid."

"She must be worried about you," Van said cautiously. "She must wonder why you won't talk to her." The last phone call between Stu and Patsy had ended badly, with Stu slamming down the phone and refusing to pick it up again when it rang. Van gathered it was because Patsy had Candy with her on the line. Van didn't want to upset the tenuous rapport she was building with Stu, but she also wanted to encourage him to answer the phone the next time it rang. She was afraid of what Stu and Rudy might do if they lost hope altogether.

After a moment, Van asked, "How will you answer the phone next time?"

"What do you mean?"

"'Pete's Pizza,' that was pretty funny," Van said, and was pleased when Stu smiled agreement.

"How are you going to top that?"

Stu shrugged, but entered into the game. "I don't know. Maybe 'Ding Dong's Chinese Take-Out?'"

"How about, 'This is the operator. *Snort. Snort.*' Like Earnestine."

Stu smiled appreciatively, then said, "I got one. 'Nine-one-one. What's your emergency?'"

Given their situation, that struck Van as particularly funny. She giggled, and Stu joined in. A moment later, they were both laughing out loud.

"Shh." Stu glanced at Rudy, and they quieted down quickly. They both preferred Rudy asleep. Stu resumed his balancing act, keeping one eye on the window and one on his hand hovering over the table. Rudy snored in earnest. There wouldn't likely be a better time, Van decided.

"I have to pee," she said softly.

Stu grabbed the table to still himself and glanced at Rudy.

"No," she said quickly. "Don't wake him. I think I can do it by myself now."

Stu raised his eyebrows. "Your hands better?"

"A little. Enough to undo my pants, I think." She rose to her feet with her blanket still draped around her shoulders and moved toward the toilet, as if Stu's acquiescence were a given, which apparently it was. He resumed balancing. Van reached the toilet and fumbled awkwardly with her button and zipper, exaggerating the uselessness of her fingers, but she needn't have bothered. Stu was paying scant attention. As she peed, she eyed the layout of the tower room. She'd made her plans hours ago, but this was the first time she'd really been able to examine the layout from this angle.

From where she sat on the toilet, Rudy sprawled on the floor to her left, parallel with the wall that faced north. Stu balanced at the table on the eastern side of the room. He could easily see Van if he looked to his right, but he didn't seem very concerned about her. Her own sleeping spot was on the southwest corner of the room. Normally, when Rudy helped her pee, Van made a straight bee line from the toilet back to her corner, in order to get rid of Rudy as soon as possible. That route took her around the left side of the little table next to the tiny kitchen area. But if she walked on the right side of the table, she'd pass the mini fridge, the hot plate, the silverware drawer. The steak knife. The route was different from her normal route by only a couple of feet. Rudy would have noticed immediately, but Stu, who had never been as interested in Van's toilet visits as Rudy, might not.

Van stood, wiped herself for the first time since becoming a hostage, and pulled her pants up, zipping and buttoning them with an ease that surprised and gratified her. She wrapped the blanket around her like a cloak again and slowly shuffled back toward her sleeping spot. As she veered to the right around the table, she tensed, wondering if Stu would say anything, but he did not. She slowed as she reached the kitchen area. She pretended to stare out the slotted window as she reached for the silverware drawer, the blanket cloaking her movements.

"What are you doing?" Stu asked suddenly.

"Just looking out the window," Van said casually. The drawer slid open and Van reached her hand inside.

"Well, don't," Stu said, irritably. "You got no business over there."

"Oh, okay," Van said, as if it made no difference to her. She let her wrist silently push the drawer closed again and continued her path back to her sleeping spot, her heart pounding. She dropped to the floor, again sat cross-legged with the blanket wrapped around her, and smoothly tucked the knife behind her back.

Chapter Thirty

Jill -- 1988

JILL SAT IN the cab of the truck, the engine running and her heart racing. Whether her heart raced because she was about to find out if she'd succeeded in bringing Bennie back from 1974, or because the red faced maintenance man was stalking toward RIP with a security guard behind him, or because of the way Kendra had felt in her arms, Jill didn't know. She knew which one put

the stupid grin on her face, but she was powerless to do anything about that. She tried to assume a serious expression, but she could not do it.

"Hey!" the maintenance man yelled. "Didn't I tell you to get that thing out of here? We're getting a tow truck and you're gonna pay."

A heavy thump rocked RIP. Jill heard the back door of the camper open and slam shut. Kendra's voice called out. "She's back. Hit it!"

Jill hit the gas, and RIP surged forward, the sides scraping against the rock wall. The maintenance man and security guard stopped in their tracks at RIP's sudden movement. Jill waved at them as she drove past, her grin still pasted to her face. She heard Kendra's voice calling out to the men.

"I found a spare key. Can you believe it? I had it with me all the time."

Jill glanced in the side mirror. Kendra hustled behind RIP, the distance between them growing rapidly as Jill barreled away. Jill smiled at the picture Kendra made, with her hair flapping and her breasts bouncing, as she tried to run in boots not meant for speed.

She drove only as far as the street parking in front of the Flour Mill, just outside the park. By the time she'd parked the truck, climbed out, and reached the back of RIP, Kendra was already jogging up.

"She's in there," Kendra gasped, nodding toward the door. "That's all I saw."

Jill felt her heart race from a cause unrelated to Kendra as she reached for RIP's door. Had she really succeeded in sending Bennie back in time and returning her to the present? She opened the door.

Bennie sat on the stool in the dark camper, her hands stretched out on both sides where she'd braced herself during the rocky ride. She rose and stumbled forward. Jill and Kendra backed up, and Bennie almost fell out of the back of RIP. She stood and looked around her, blinking at the light as if she'd just emerged from a cave.

She stared at Jill and Kendra, and an expression of despair crossed her face.

"Oh God. I'm in 1988 again, aren't I?"

Kendra nodded.

Bennie groaned, closed her eyes, and slumped back against the rear wall of RIP.

"What's wrong, Bennie?" Kendra asked.

"Did you land in 1974?" Jill asked at the same time.

Bennie opened her eyes. "Can you send me back?"

"Why?" Jill asked.

"Bennie, what happened?" Kendra asked, leaning beside Bennie. "Did you see the murder?"

"Who did it?" Jill asked. "Who killed the officer?"

"Oh, my God," Bennie moaned. She covered her face with her hands and slid down RIP until she was squatting on her heels. "Oh, my God!"

"Bennie!" Kendra dropped to her knees beside Bennie and wrapped her arms around Bennie's shoulders. She looked up at Jill as if asking for help.

Jill squatted in front of Bennie as well. Bennie smelled strongly of wood smoke and dirt and sweat, reminding Jill of Girl Scout camp. Bennie had certainly been somewhere.

"Bennie," she said, trying to sound firm, but gentle. She put her hand on Bennie's shoulder. "This is important. It's why we sent you back there in the first place. Did you go to 1974?"

Bennie nodded.

Jill couldn't help feeling a thrill of success. "Did you see the murder?"

"Who did it, Bennie?" Kendra asked softly.

Bennie dropped her hands and let them fall to the ground, defeated. She looked at them with misery in her eyes. "I did it," she said. "I killed him."

Kendra gasped. She wrapped her arm more tightly around Bennie's shoulders. "*No.*"

Jill rose and stared at Bennie, stunned. Her brain scrambled to figure out how Bennie's words fit into her understanding of how time travel worked. How could Bennie have committed the murder? Did her presence at the scene somehow prevent the real murderer from doing the killing? Did Bennie change history? Jill turned and ran for the cab of the truck. She opened the door, grabbed the photocopied newspaper articles from the seat, and ran back to Kendra and Bennie. She skimmed them quickly.

"The articles haven't changed," she said.

Kendra glanced up. "What do you mean?"

"She didn't change history," Jill said. "Listen. 'Shannon reported that he saw another man at the scene. According to Shannon, the man, who was dressed all in black, vanished suddenly right after the shot was fired. Police searched the area but could find no evidence to support Shannon's statements. The only way out of Inspiration Point was over the side, but no one could have survived such a fall, and no body was recovered beneath it.'"

Bennie slowly rose to her feet, her eyes wide and dark.

They stared at her, in her black jeans, black shoes, and black denim jacket, buttoned all the way up to her neck.

"The man in black," Kendra whispered.

Bennie crossed her arms tightly in front of her chest in an uncharacteristic display of anxiety. "I couldn't do what you told me," she said to Jill. "I couldn't do 'nothing'. There was this girl. A runaway, fourteen years old. Her step-father was messing with her, and he was trying to--"

Bennie broke off, wretched despair in her face. "Oh, God, what's Hannah going to do? I told her I wouldn't leave her. Fuck!" Her despair changed to anger. Bennie unfolded her arms, turned, and punched the side of RIP, hard.

"Hey, hey, hey!" Jill reached out to stop her but was too late to prevent a fist-sized dent in RIP's backside.

"Don't, Bennie," Kendra said gently. She grabbed Bennie's hands in hers and held them tightly.

"Don't hurt yourself. Tell us what happened."

"He grabbed Hannah," Bennie said. "He was trying to--I don't know, at first I thought he was just trying to take her home, but then he--I think he was going to kill her. She said he was, but I didn't believe her, until... I tried to stop him. He pulled a gun on me, and I tried to get it away from him. I didn't mean to kill him."

"Of course you didn't," Kendra said. "It was an accident."

Bennie released Kendra's hands and leaned over to examine the photocopies Jill held. "Stu didn't kill him," she said, indicating the photograph of the Expo Killer. "Why didn't he tell them it was me?" She frowned. "It was dark. I don't think he ever saw me in this jacket. Hannah wore it that first night." Bennie unbuttoned the jacket to reveal Kendra's filthy blouse underneath. "He only saw me in this."

Jill's thoughts swirled at the implications of what Bennie said. Jill had been so worried about Bennie somehow changing history when she went back to 1974. But she'd had it all wrong. Bennie couldn't change history, apparently, because it had already happened. Bennie was *part* of the history. Which meant RIP and Jill were a part of that history. Even though RIP didn't exist yet in 1974.

"I have to tell the police," Bennie announced. "They have to let Stu go."

"No," Jill said urgently.

"Why not? Isn't that why I went back?" Bennie demanded. "To find out who did it? Now we know. I'll turn myself in. They'll have to let Stu go, and he'll release Van."

"No," Jill said again. "You can't tell the police. They'd find out about RIP."

"I don't give a shit about RIP," Bennie said angrily. "What about Van? What about Stu? He's spent the last fourteen years in prison for a crime I committed."

"They won't believe you," Jill said. "How old were you in 1974? You were a kid. They'd think you were crazy if you said you did it."

"I'll describe it," Bennie said. "I'll give them details they haven't released to the public. There are always details. I'll *make* them believe me."

"Why are you so eager to go to prison?" Jill asked.

"Why are you so hell-bent on preventing me from saving Van? Isn't that why you sent me back?"

Jill ground her teeth. It was, of course, why she had sent Bennie back, but she hadn't expected it to turn out like *this*. If Bennie told the police she'd traveled through time, if she told them about RIP-- well, they'd think she was crazy, of course. But on the off-chance they believed her, they'd come after RIP. And once the government got their hands on RIP and learned what it could do, anything could happen. It would be out of Jill's control. She'd risk her own life before she let that happen.

Kendra, who had been watching Jill and Bennie as if watching a tennis match, suddenly spoke.

"There was another witness to the murder."

Jill and Bennie looked at her.

"The girl," Kendra said. "Hannah. She was there, right? You said her step-father grabbed her. She'll be all grown up by now. She could tell the police that Stu didn't do it."

"Yeah," Jill said eagerly. "Find the girl, Bennie. If she tells them Stu didn't do it, you won't have to."

"Hannah?" Bennie asked, looking suddenly vulnerable. She crossed her arms across her chest again and said in a small voice, "How would I find her? I don't even know her last name."

"Sure you do." Kendra took the photocopies from Jill and turned to the second page. "Here it is.

"The victim is survived by a wife, Esther Garwood, two sons from a previous marriage, Theodore and Lars Garwood, and a step-daughter, Hannah Regan. That's her." She thrust the photocopies at Jill. "Hang on a second." She wheeled and ran up the steps into the Flour Mill. Moments later she emerged, a page ripped from the telephone book in one hand, and hopped down the stairs to join them.

"Hannah Regan's not in the book," Kendra said. "But Esther Garwood is. Here, I circled it." She held the page out to Bennie.

Bennie stared at the ground with her arms crossed and her shoulders hunched, as if she were cold or afraid.

Take the paper, Bennie, Jill urged silently. Find the witness. Save Van. Set Stu free. Just don't tell them about RIP.

"Take it, Bennie," Kendra urged. "Go find Hannah."

Slowly, reluctantly, Bennie unfolded her arms and took the paper.

Chapter Thirty-One

Bennie -- 1988

BENNIE WAS SCARED. She wanted very much to find Hannah. She wanted to see how she was, see what kind of woman she became, but at the same time she was terrified of what she might find, and it would be her fault. She hadn't meant to, but she had abandoned Hannah that night. A fourteen-year-old kid, running scared, all alone in the middle of the night. Bennie had promised she wouldn't leave her. She hadn't even given her the rest of the money. Over two hundred dollars was still in Bennie's pocket.

Jill drove Bennie back to her house so that Bennie could use the phone and pick up her car. When it came right down to it, though, Bennie didn't have the nerve to dial the number for Esther Garwood's home.

"What difference does it make if I call or you?" Bennie asked plaintively, and Kendra took pity on her and made the call, while Jill explained what had happened to a sniffing Inez.

"It's busy," Kendra said. She hung up and tried again.

"Doesn't she have call waiting?" Bennie asked.

"Apparently not." Kendra hung up again. "But she doesn't live that far away."

Bennie scanned the page from the phone book. 1027 W. Frederick. No more than three miles from Jill's house. She glanced up. Kendra, Jill, and Inez watched her expectantly.

"All right, I'm going," Bennie said irritably. She snatched up the paper and her keys and went out to her car. As much as she regretted her return to 1988, she had to admit it was nice to have her own wheels again. She didn't have to worry about how she was going to get around, where she was going to live, *how* she was going to live. But what about Hannah?

The setting sun was in Bennie's eyes, which were already gritty with fatigue, and she blinked frequently as she drove toward Hannah's mother's house. She tried to figure out how much sleep she'd gotten in the last few days, but with the time changing around on her each time she'd time-traveled, she couldn't even figure out how many days she was talking about. Two? Three? Three and a half?

She tried to distract herself from one worry by chewing on another. It was 4:30 already. Van had been held hostage now for nearly thirty-six hours. How was she holding up? It was hard to believe that it was *Stu* who held her captive in the tower. She tried to picture mild-mannered Stu holding a rifle on anyone. He hadn't even liked it when Bennie'd snapped at Hannah about smudging jam on her cap. What was it he had said? *Chill, man, it's only a hat.* He must have changed after fourteen years in prison. And why wouldn't he? Bennie was wracked with guilt. He was in that tower because of Bennie. *Van* was in that tower because of Bennie. Everything was Bennie's fault. If only she could have stayed in 1974, perhaps she could have saved *Van and Hannah*. Instead, she had saved neither.

Before she knew it, Bennie had reached Frederick. Her heart beat quickly as she parked in front of 1027. It was a modest bungalow, hardly immaculate, but not falling apart either. Black marigolds slumped in a ring around a tree in the front yard and along the edge of the sidewalk, evidence that there had been color in the yard before the fall freeze. Bennie started up the walk. She tried to envision a grown up Hannah opening the door. A strong and healthy and happy Hannah. A Hannah who would not blame Bennie for abandoning her all those years before. A Hannah to whom nothing bad had happened after Bennie left her there all alone. Maybe, when Bennie disappeared, Hannah had simply returned home and told her mom again what her step-

father was doing to her, and her mom believed her this time and kicked him out--oh wait. Hannah's stepfather was dead. Bennie had killed him. That was her fault too.

Bennie rang the bell. Hannah didn't answer. Instead, an older woman opened the door, a telephone receiver clamped between her ear and her shoulder, the long cord stretching out of sight. She had a cigarette clenched between her teeth, and she wiped her hands on a dish towel. She had Hannah's distinctive gray eyes. She interrupted her conversation long enough to lift her chin a half-inch from the receiver and ask, "Help you?"

"I'm looking for Hannah," Bennie said.

The woman frowned, annoyed. "She hasn't lived here for years."

"Do you know where I could find her?"

The woman sighed heavily and said, "Just a sec, Dee." She glanced at the clock, covered the mouthpiece with her hand, and said to Bennie, "Check Cavalry Women's Shelter. That's where she usually is this time of day." She put the receiver back up to her ear and kicked the door shut. Bennie's heart sank. Cavalry Women's Shelter. Where the homeless women went to get a hot meal. Fourteen years later and Hannah was *still* on the streets? What the hell had happened to her after Bennie left? Bennie ran to her car and gunned it down the street.

Cavalry Women's Shelter was on the outskirts of downtown, little more than a mile from Esther Garwood's house and less than that from Canada Island. Bennie wondered if Hannah had grown up in that house. Its proximity to Riverfront Park would explain Hannah's familiarity with the illicit back entry into Expo. Bennie parked a block from the shelter. She left the car unlocked so no one would be tempted to break a window. There was nothing in the car worth stealing. She strode quickly toward the shelter, but slowed when she saw the line of women and children already snaking around the corner of the building, waiting for dinner time.

She scanned each woman's face as she walked passed the queue. Most were too old, or were the wrong color, or were too short to be Hannah. The few who weren't looked nothing like her. Bennie reached the front of the line by the locked double doors. She slumped, heartsick, and turned away. She stopped, turned again toward the doors, and stepped forward.

"Hey, no cuts," someone behind her muttered.

Bennie rapped her knuckles on the window.

"It ain't open yet," another woman pointed out.

"Hannah!" Bennie hollered. She slapped the flat of her hand on the pane, twice. "Hannah!"

The woman inside glanced up. Even through the dirty glass, from a distance of thirty feet and fourteen years, Bennie recognized her. Her hair was darker and shorter, and her long red sweater and blue jeans revealed no trace of the bony girl figure, but there was no doubt about it. She was Hannah.

Hannah recognized Bennie at the same moment. Her jaw dropped, she took an involuntary step back, and shook her head.

"It's me, Bennie. I need to talk to you."

Hannah looked around quickly, as if searching for help, but there was no one around. Her hesitation lasted only a moment. Suddenly, with firm decision, she plunked a stack of plates onto the table and marched toward the door, a resolute expression on her face. She angrily twisted the lock, wrenched the door open, grabbed Bennie's arm, and pulled her inside. Bennie stumbled forward into the dining hall, and Hannah slammed and locked the door behind her, ignoring the complaints of unfairness from the women outside. She turned and faced Bennie, her hands on her hips and her chest heaving.

"*You*," she accused with loathing.

Bennie gave a nervous laugh. "Yeah." She examined Hannah quickly and was thrilled to see clarity in her eyes, a fresh complexion, obvious vigor and energy and strength. Whatever Bennie had feared for Hannah, it had not come to pass. The woman standing before her was vibrant and healthy and whole. And very, very angry.

"How dare you come here?" Hannah demanded. After a thoughtful moment, she reached out, put her hands on Bennie's shoulders, and gave a hard shove. "How dare you?"

Bennie stumbled backward but recovered quickly. "I can explain. I didn't mean to leave you that night, I swear it."

"Yeah, right."

"I couldn't help it."

"You promised. I needed you, Bennie."

"I know, I know you did, but--" Bennie stopped, wondering how much Hannah recalled or understood of what happened that night. "I have to tell you something."

Hannah glared, crossed her arms in front of her chest, and waited for Bennie to speak.

"It's kind of hard to explain," Bennie said. Hannah sighed impatiently and uncrossed her arms.

"No, wait, look at me," Bennie said quickly. "Look, I'm wearing the same clothes I was wearing that day. Remember?"

Hannah took in Bennie's clothes, but without recognition. She crossed her arms again and tapped the toe of her boot impatiently.

"I didn't run off that night, Hannah," Bennie said in a near whisper. "I was--I was--I was from the future. I mean, I was from now. I was only back there for one night, and then I was trans--transported, I guess. To the future. I mean to now." She floundered, unnerved by the recoil in Hannah's face.

"I don't have time for this," Hannah said shortly, and turned away.

"No, wait." Bennie hurried around to Hannah's front and put an arm out to stop her. "Look at my face, Hannah. I haven't changed at all. I'm the same age I was then. Think about it. We're the same age now."

Hannah didn't seem to be listening. Instead, with a puzzled expression on her face, she sniffed. She leaned forward and sniffed again, more deeply, at Bennie's jacket. Her face grew slack, and she stared at Bennie, her eyes wide with surprise.

"I'm telling you the truth, Hannah," Bennie said softly, desperately. "I was only sent back there for one night. I thought I could stay. I *meant* to stay. I was going to take care of you. But I didn't know--I couldn't-- It turned out I couldn't stay."

"Hannah?" A woman had come out from the kitchen and stood beside the table Hannah had been setting. She looked concerned. "Is everything all right?"

Hannah came to a sudden decision. "I need a few minutes, Carol." She disappeared through a door and returned, pulling on a blue down jacket. "Let's walk." She opened the front door, stepped out, and quickly headed across the street. The women standing in line watched them curiously, and a few called out.

"Hey, Hannah!"

"Where're you going Hannah?"

"Who's that woman?"

Hannah ignored them. She stepped briskly without talking, her hands in her pockets and her head down. Her legs, no longer toothpick thin, moved rapidly, the heels of her boots hammering on the sidewalk. Bennie found herself hustling to keep up.

There was a tavern on the corner. "Can we go in here?" Bennie asked. "I'll buy you a drink."

Hannah gave her a caustic look. "I'm not going in *there*." She glanced behind her. Bennie followed her gaze. Even from a block away, she saw that the women lined up outside the shelter still watched them.

Hannah rounded the corner and headed toward downtown.

"I have to talk to you about something," Bennie said. "It's very urgent."

Hannah ignored her. After another half block, she stopped and faced a door "We'll go in here." She pushed through the door.

It was an old hotel, the kind that most people wouldn't recognize as a hotel. Instead of a lobby, there was only a hallway. On the left side was an open door with a sign beside it that read *Manager*. Through the doorway, Bennie saw a small black and white television showing *Wheel of Fortune*. Shoved up against the wall on the right of the hallway were two dusty stuffed chairs separated by a small round table. Hannah headed for the chairs, taking off her coat as she walked. She draped the coat over the back of one of the chairs, sat down, crossed one leg over the other, and folded her hands on her knee.

"Okay, Bennie," she said briskly. "Talk."

Bennie sat in the chair facing Hannah, somewhat unnerved by this grown up woman. Her expression was hard and unforgiving, her jaw firm, her wide mouth set in a strong flat line, and her eyes steely. Bennie had the feeling that if she said the wrong thing, Hannah would simply stand up, walk away, and never give her another chance.

Bennie cleared her throat and wished that Hannah had agreed to talk over a drink. "I don't know," she started, "how much you remember about the night I left?"

"Enough."

"Oh, okay. Then you remember--"

"Show me your driver's license," Hannah interrupted.

Bennie reached into her back pocket, pulled out her thin wallet, and handed it over. Hannah opened it and silently examined the license inside. She handed it back and, for the first time, really examined Bennie's face. Bennie sat still and let herself be scrutinized, taking the opportunity, meanwhile, to examine Hannah.

Hannah's platinum blond hair had turned to dark honey. It was cut to just above her shoulders, and she'd styled it to sweep like wings out and away from her face. She wore silver hoop earrings, and a thin leather cord with a tiny wooden cross hung from her neck. Her red sweater was loose and long and supple, the belt at the waist emphasizing her full breasts and hips. Her fingers were long and strong, the nails unpolished and trimmed short. She wore no ring. The legs of her snug jeans were tucked into low brown leather boots, scuffed and serviceable. Finally, Bennie returned her gaze to Hannah's face.

She was a striking woman. Her mouth, still wide, now fit her face, her lips were full and red, and her eyes were simply beautiful. At that moment, however, those beautiful eyes were examining Bennie with a great deal of skepticism.

"How have you stayed so young?" Hannah asked.

"I told you, I'm the same age I was then. No time has passed. It's the same *day* for me."

"How old were you then?"

"Twenty-eight," Bennie said patiently. "The same age I am now."

A corner of Hannah's mouth turned up. "I thought you were so old."

"No," Bennie said, heartened by the tiny smile. "You were just very young."

Hannah glanced quickly away and erased all expression from her face. "Um hmm," she said. Bennie ached to see that the memory of that time was still painful for Hannah. She craved to ask about it, but there was no time.

"About that night," Bennie said, "you remember Stu being there?"

"I know Stu was there," Hannah said, examining her fingers. "He killed my step-father."

"Yeah, but--" Bennie hesitated and continued slowly, "but you know Stu didn't really do it, right?"

Hannah looked at Bennie with an expression of mild inquiry.

"Hannah, you know who really killed your step-father, right?"

Hannah's expression didn't change, and Bennie felt her stomach churn as she realized she was going to have to say it out loud.

"You know--you and I know," she lowered her voice to a whisper, "*I* killed him."

Hannah's face grew wary, and she shook her head slightly. "The police said Stu did it."

"They only said that because they never found anyone else there. But there was someone else there. You know there was," Bennie said urgently. "Remember? He grabbed you, and I fought him for the gun, and you ran. And then I killed him. Don't you remember, Hannah? You ran up the path, but only a few seconds had passed. You have to have heard the shot."

Hannah shook her head. "No, the police wouldn't be that wrong.

Stu killed him."

"How could it have been Stu?" Bennie asked. "Think about it, Hannah. You and I were the only ones there."

"No," Hannah said again, but with less certainty this time. "Stu was there. I saw him."

"Where? Where did you see him?"

"I ran past him." Hannah frowned, bit her lip, and stared at her hands. "You told me to run, so I did. I was running away, and I ran right past him."

"When was that?" Bennie asked. "Was it before or after the shot was fired?"

"I don't remember," Hannah said irritably. She glared at Bennie. "I was already pretty traumatized, you know. My step-father was trying to kill me! I was just a kid, after all, pregnant, no one but *you* to lean on, and you just disappeared. How can you expect me to remember every detail?"

Bennie sat back, stunned. She felt as if she'd just been socked in the gut. "You were pregnant?" Hannah face grew stony again.

"But you said he never actually--"

"I wasn't about to tell you he did *that* to me," Hannah said bitterly.

"So you--"

"I lied, Bennie," Hannah said. "I lied."

Chapter Thirty-Two

Van -- 1988

RUDY WATCHED THE clock. Stu watched the phone. Van watched them both. It was two minutes to five. Rudy had woken up twenty minutes earlier, and the first thing he'd said was, "Is it time? Can I cut off her finger now?"

"Not until five o'clock," had been Stu's disheartening reply, "but only if they don't get a court order."

Even since then, Rudy had been loudly counting the minutes as they ticked away, seemingly unaware that he was the only one in the room looking forward to five o'clock.

"I thought we were becoming friends," Van said.

"It's just a pinky," Stu said, but he refused to look at her when he said it.

Van fingered the knife behind her back. The handle was plastic and the blade was so flimsy it bent when Van pressed it against the floor, but it was all she had.

"One more minute," Rudy announced gleefully.

Van was terrified, but strangely calm at the same time. The way she handled the next few minutes was far too important to let fear get in her way. She willed the fear back, the same way she had the first time she had to argue a case before the Washington State Supreme Court. There was no room for fear.

In any case, her goal was simple. If Rudy tried to cut off her finger, she would try to kill him.

One of them would win. Maybe it would be her.

Suddenly the phone rang, and all three of them jumped.

Stu lunged for the phone. "What?" he barked. "No, I don't give a fuck about dinner. Where's that court order?" A moment later he yelled, "That's what you said last time. Why should I believe you now?"

Rudy, for some reason, was able to deduce from Stu's side of the conversation that the court order had not materialized. He stood up and grinned at Van.

"We're not playing games any more," Stu shouted.

The clock struck five, and Rudy advanced toward the drawer where the knife had been.

Van stood up and let her blanket fall to the ground behind her. She kicked the blanket back and held the knife along the side of her leg, slightly behind her, where Rudy could not see it.

"We're going to send you a clear message this time," Stu warned.

"Hey," Rudy said. "Where's the knife?" He looked puzzled then glanced sharply at Van. She cursed the sudden acuity of Rudy's brain. He'd realized in an instant where the knife must have gone. Enraged, Rudy didn't bother waiting for instruction from Stu. "You *bitch!*" He lunged for Van.

"No!" Van screamed, and she brought the knife forward just as Rudy's hands reached her. She slashed hard at one of them. Blood poured, but Rudy ignored it. He clenched his bare hand around the blade and pulled it easily from Van's weakened grip.

But Rudy was no longer interested in the knife. He flung it away and grabbed Van around the throat with his giant mitts. He squeezed and Van felt her feet lift off the ground. She could not breathe, and the blood in her head pounded for release. Van clawed at Rudy's hands, and the left one, the one made slippery from blood, gave way.

Rudy wiped the bloody hand on his shirt. Van thrashed against him like a hooked fish and managed to slip from the grip of his single hand. She fell, landed on her butt, and crab-walked backwards to get away, but she wasn't quick enough.

Rudy threw himself, screaming, through the air and landed flat on top of Van, crushing the air from her lungs. Her body clamored for breath, but she was helpless. She saw Rudy's giant fist

slamming toward her face. She turned away and felt his fist crash into the side of her head. Her ear exploded in pain.

Suddenly, the crushing weight of Rudy was lifted from her, and she was able to suck in a tiny thread of air. She became aware of Stu's voice.

"Get out!" he screamed. "Right behind you, behind you!"

Van sucked in another wheezing breath and glanced up. Rudy was on his knees beside her, but he stared at Stu, who stood with part of a broken stool in one hand and a rifle, held by the barrel, in the other. Rudy had a bloody gash on the side of his head, and pieces of the stool were scattered about.

"Get out," Stu yelled again at Van. "He'll kill you!"

Van looked around. The trap door was open. Stu must have done it. It was only inches from her head. She flung herself over, reached quickly for the edge, and pulled herself to it. Rudy bellowed and grabbed her hair, pulling her back, but Stu swung the stock of the rifle at Rudy's arm and knocked his grip free.

"Go!" Stu screamed.

Van felt Rudy lunge again, but whether he lunged for her or for Stu she didn't know, because by then she was diving through the trap door and falling through the air. Sounds crashed above her, a rifle fired, and she felt blinding pain as she landed on the ground. Everything went black.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Bennie -- 1988

BENNIE TRIED TO process this new information, her guilt at abandoning Hannah in 1974 magnified with the realization of just how much Hannah had needed her to stay. There had been clues, she realized. The voracious appetite, the protruding belly on her skinny frame, the breasts that bulged out of her little bra. Why hadn't she seen it?

"I don't know if he was really trying to kill me," Hannah said softly. "But I know he was trying to kill my baby. He knew if I had the baby, there'd be no hiding what he did to me. He wanted me to have an abortion, and I refused. He was going to force me. That's why I ran away."

"Oh, Hannah," Bennie moaned. She ached for what Hannah had gone through, both before and after Bennie showed up in her life. "I had no idea."

Hannah shrugged one shoulder in a movement reminiscent of her younger self. "I didn't want you to. Would it have made any difference?"

Bennie thought a moment. "I don't know. Maybe. I would have been kinder to you, I hope. And I would have given you all my money."

That made Hannah laugh.

Emboldened by the laughter, Bennie asked, "What did you do? Where did you go? Did you have the baby?"

"I went home," Hannah said. "I didn't have any choice. I went back to People's Park at first. But you didn't come back. Stu didn't come back. I didn't know what to do. And then the police came

and told me my step-father was dead and they took me home. I didn't find out for a long time that Stu did it."

"Except," Bennie said quietly. "Stu didn't do it."

Hannah frowned. "What difference does it make now? It was a long time ago."

"Have you seen the news?" Bennie asked. "The hostage crisis at the prison? Did you see what he's done?"

"I don't like the news," Hannah said. "It's too negative. I don't need that in my life."

"He's in trouble," Bennie said. "He's holding a woman hostage. He says he won't let her go until they reopen his case and find who really killed your step-father."

Hannah peered around the hallway as if there were something interesting to see there. She said nothing.

"It's why I went back to 1974 in the first place. I was supposed to witness the murder and report back. We wanted to see if we could get the case reopened, so he'd let Van go. We didn't know," Bennie lowered her voice, "that *I* was going to be the one who did it."

Hannah's expression revealed disbelief, but she only asked, "Why you?"

"The woman he's holding hostage," Bennie said, trying to keep her voice steady, "is a good friend of mine."

"I'm sorry."

Bennie leaned forward. "You can help her, Hannah. It's what I've come to ask you."

Hannah looked wary. "How?"

"You were *there*," Bennie said quickly. "You're the witness we need. I'd go to the police myself, if I could, and tell them that I did it, but they'd never believe me. I can't explain time travel to them. *You* don't even believe me, and you knew me back then. But you could go to them, tell them what happened. You don't have to say *who* rescued you from your step-father that night, just that it wasn't Stu. That should be enough to at least get them to reopen the investigation."

"I can't do that." Hannah shook her head. "I'd have to explain why he was after me, what he was doing to me." She put her hands to her cheeks as if they were suddenly feverish. "I can't do it."

"People's lives are at stake, Hannah," Bennie said urgently. "Not just Stu's." Bennie's voice cracked. She took a deep breath, shook her head, and cleared her throat. "All you have to do is tell them that Stu couldn't have done it because he wasn't there."

"He *was* there," Hannah said firmly, letting her hands fall back into her lap.

"Not when the murder occurred," Bennie reminded her. "He showed up later, remember?"

"No," Hannah said, clearly frustrated. "I *don't* remember! How do I even know you're telling me the truth? How do I know this isn't all a trick? Maybe Stu hired you because you *look* like Bennie, and you made your jacket smell like *that*, and you've made up this whole story to try to make me be a witness to something that didn't even happen."

Bennie sat back, frustrated, and tried to think of something she could say that would convince Hannah she was telling the truth. She caught a sound from the little black and white television in the manager's office. Bennie stood up and moved quickly to the open doorway.

"--Repeat, this is breaking news. The hostage crisis at the prison is over. At least one prisoner is confirmed dead. It has been reported that the hostage was wounded, it is not known yet how seriously, and has been transported to Sacred Heart Hospital. We're gathering details and will break in again when we have further information. We now return you to your regularly scheduled program."

"Oh my God." Bennie turned to Hannah, who sat very still in her chair, watching Bennie.

"Hannah, I have to go."

Hannah bit her lip.

"I'll be back," Bennie said, backing already toward the door. "I will, I promise."

Hannah nodded, her expression blank, and said coolly, "Of course."

Bennie fled to her car.

Chapter Thirty-Four

Patsy -- 1988

"I THOUGHT SHE'D been shot." Patsy paced in the emergency waiting room on wobbly legs. "I saw her drop and I heard the gunshot at the same time, and she didn't move. Christ." She took another drag from her cigarette and then leaned over Inez to stub it out in the ashtray. Her fingers trembled, from fear or weariness or too much caffeine or maybe all three. The adrenaline still coursed through her. She couldn't stop walking or talking about it. "They wouldn't let me go to her. Who am I? I'm just the fucking negotiator. I had to stand there at the window and watch." Inez patted Patsy's shoulder as she passed, but Patsy hardly noticed. The scene replayed in her mind, over and over. The screaming over the phone, Van's voice crying out, the prisoners shouting, a gunshot, and then Van's body dropping from the tower to land in a crumpled heap. Patsy and Bryant had both leaped up, screaming themselves, and lunged for the window, as if they could reach out and help. Patsy's fingernails scratched against the glass, trying to will Van to move. "All we could do was watch. The next thing I know, the SWAT team's there, climbing into the tower, and the medics grabbed Van and ran her out of there so fast, I could hardly see her." "But she wasn't shot?" Kendra asked. She sat on the orange naugahyde couch. Jill perched on the arm beside her.

Patsy shook her head and tapped another cigarette out of the pack. Jill took the lighter from Patsy's hand, flicked it with her thumb, and held the flame steady for her. "Thanks," Patsy mumbled, stopping to lean the cigarette into the flame. She took a drag and blew out the smoke with a heavy sigh. "They said the prisoners turned on each other. One of them got shot. That might have been what I heard. That was probably it. I can't remember how many shots I heard." "So she wasn't shot?" Inez asked again.

"I don't *know*. They had an ambulance on stand-by, so they just put her in it and took off. They didn't wait for anyone." A wave of weariness swept over Patsy. She suddenly felt like weeping. "But I know she's alive. When they put her in the ambulance, Padgett was out there. He said she gave him a thumbs up. She gave a thumbs up," she said again, her voice trembling, "so at least I know she's alive."

"You know more than that," Inez said. "She was trying to send you a message. She was telling you she's all right."

Patsy grimaced, fretful at Inez's calm assumption that Van was all right. How the hell did she know that? Patsy glanced at Jill and Kendra, and for the first time, noticed Jill's hand on Kendra's shoulder. "What the fuck's up with you two?" she demanded. Jill sat up straight and removed her

hand, as if she'd been caught doing something illicit, but Kendra only looked smug. "Never mind," Patsy said. "I already know." She resumed pacing.

What the hell was taking them so long? Every time she turned around, she looked at the open door of the waiting room, hoping to see a doctor there, but it was always empty. She was lucky to be there at all, though. Bryant and the rest of them had to go immediately into debriefing, exhausted as they were. But Captain Padgett had kicked Patsy out of the room. *Call in with a report on the hostage, Breshears, he'd ordered, as soon as you know how she is.* He couldn't have kept her there. He must have known that.

Finally there was movement at the waiting room door. Patsy glanced up hopefully, but it wasn't a doctor. Bennie stood in the doorway. It must have started raining, because her hair was wet, and she was panting as if she'd been running. She looked straight at Patsy.

"How is she?"

"We don't know," Inez said. "We're waiting for the doctor. We know she's alive, though. She gave a thumbs up."

Bennie gave a shaky sigh and came into the room. She slumped on the couch beside Kendra. She looked like shit, Patsy thought. Like she hadn't slept or bathed in days. She looked as bad as Patsy felt.

"Did you find the girl?" Kendra asked.

"Not that it matters any more," Jill added.

"It matters," Bennie said shortly.

"What girl?" Patsy asked.

"Bennie found a witness," Inez said.

The words were simple, but Patsy stilled as their meaning sank in. A witness. To the murder? Had they really managed to send Bennie back to 1974? Patsy glanced at Jill, who raised her eyebrows at Patsy in confirmation. Jesus. No wonder Bennie looked so tired.

"Is there a Patsy in here?"

Patsy swung back at the sound. A nurse stood in the doorway. "I'm Patsy."

"She's asking for you." The nurse turned and started down the hall, assuming Patsy would follow. Patsy hurried after. "How is she?"

"I'll let her tell you that herself," the nurse said. "We have her in here for now. We're just waiting for a room." She led Patsy to an examination room. "We've given her something for the pain. She may not be completely lucid in a bit." Patsy nodded and slipped past the nurse into the room.

Van lay on the examination table. She was dressed in a hospital gown, covered by a sheet, and an IV line was taped to her hand. Her eyes were closed. Patsy crept forward, her heart in her throat.

Van's face was pale, and she had dark gray circles beneath her eyes. There were bruises at her neck and a bit of dried blood beneath one ear. *Oh my baby, she thought, what did they do to you?*

"Van?" she whispered.

Van opened her eyes, saw Patsy, and smiled. "Hi," Van said, her voice scratchy. "You look like shit, darling."

Patsy collapsed onto a stool beside the bed. She gave a short laugh, but it quickly turned to tears. She dropped her face onto the sheet beside Van, afraid to touch her, and sobbed. "Oh, Van."

"Hey, hey, don't cry." Patsy felt Van's hand rest on her head. "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. You don't look like shit, really." Patsy didn't laugh, and a moment later Van said, "Sorry. I'm all right, Patsy."

Patsy looked up and examined Van's face again. "Are you? Really?"

"I really am. I have a couple of cracked ribs, is all, and my hands--" Van trailed off and raised her hands to examine them. Dark bruises circled her wrists like bracelets. "They're better."

"There's blood." Patsy pointed to Van's ear.

Van grimaced. "That must be Rudy's. Will you wash it off?"

Patsy grabbed a couple of tissues from a nearby cart, blew her nose in one and wet the other at the sink. She dabbed gently at the crusty spot beneath Van's ear. It came right off. The ear was swollen and red, but there was no wound beneath it. Patsy wished she could press her lips to Van's ear, her skin, her eyes, her lips, but the door was open and anyone could enter at any time. Instead, she ran her fingers lightly along the side of Van's face, across her lips, down to the bruises on her neck. Someone's fingers had done that. Patsy tried to tamp down the anger that simmered in her gut. This wasn't the time for it.

"What's this for?" Patsy asked, indicating the IV.

"I'm just a little dehydrated," Van said.

"What?" The anger bubbled again. "They had plenty of water up there. I made sure of it. That goddamned Stu!"

"It wasn't his fault," Van said quickly. "I--I chose not to drink anything." She glanced away from Patsy, her expression suddenly vulnerable, and Patsy knew that, while her experience in the tower may not have broken her, Van was definitely bruised. Before Patsy could pursue it further, there was a knock at the door.

Patsy glanced at the doorway and quickly stood up. "Captain Padgett!"

"You didn't call in, Breshears," he said shortly.

"I know, sir. I just got in here myself. I was going to--"

"Take it easy, Breshears. I just wanted to check on the patient myself." He turned to Van, his expression gentle. "How are you doing, Miss Hollinger?"

Van glanced from Captain Padgett to Patsy. "This is Captain Padgett, Van. He worked very hard to get you released."

Van looked back at Padgett. "They're just keeping me overnight," she said. "For observation mostly."

He nodded. "I'm glad to hear it." He turned back to Patsy. "You did good work up there, Breshears."

Patsy clenched her jaw. "I beg to differ, sir. If they hadn't turned on each other, she'd still be up there."

"No. They wouldn't have turned on each other like that if you hadn't kept the situation stable for so long," Padgett pointed out. "You know how it works. The longer a hostage situation goes on, the more likely it is to end peacefully. You did the right thing by containing things as long as you did. And you," he said to Van, "did exactly the right thing by bonding with the hostage taker. In the end, it saved your life. Shannon risked his life in order to get you out of there."

"How is he?" Concern was evident in Van's voice. Her bond with Stu was apparently more than just a negotiation tool.

Patsy exchanged a look with Padgett. "I'm sorry, Miss Hollinger," Padgett said gently. "He's dead."

"Oh." Van's voice was small. "Poor Stu. I don't think he killed that cop."

"Um hm," Padgett said uneasily. "Well, anyway, I just wanted to see how you were, Miss Hollinger, and congratulate you both on a job well done. Debriefing tomorrow at oh eight hundred, Lieutenant."

"Yes sir."

He nodded at them each and backed out of the room.

"Did he just call you Lieutenant?"

"Yeah," Patsy said, a little uneasily. "He's been doing that lately."

"I'd say that's a very good sign," Van said.

Patsy grinned.

"What about Rudy?" Van asked. "Is he dead too?"

"Critical condition, I heard," Patsy said.

"I hope he dies," Van said, and Patsy made a note to herself to find out what that God damned fucking Rudy did to Van.

The nurse came in. "Ready to move to your room?"

"Sure," Van said.

"We'll take her up through the gurney transport," the nurse said, dismissing Patsy. "We'll meet you up there in a few minutes. Room 504."

"Okay." Patsy regretted not kissing Van when she had the chance. She backed out of the room and wandered down the hall to the emergency waiting room. She stood in the doorway a moment, unobserved. Grace had shown up while Patsy was gone, but there was no sign of Waverly. Grace and Inez sat in chairs pulled close together facing each other, their knees and foreheads nearly touching, obviously in a deep conversation. Jill sat on the couch beside Kendra, a bemused look on her face as Kendra whispered something in her ear. Jesus. Take Patsy and Van out of the picture for a day and a half, and all hell breaks loose with these girls.

Patsy looked at the only other person in the room, Bennie, who sat with her elbows on her knees in front of a round coffee table, a thousand piece jigsaw puzzle spread out before her. She wasn't looking at the puzzle, though. She stared at Patsy, an anxious question in her eyes. Patsy gave a silent jerk of her head, and Bennie rose and joined Patsy in the hall.

"Is she all right?"

"She will be," Patsy said. "They're keeping her overnight."

Bennie bit her lip and blinked rapidly. Patsy was tempted to offer her some comfort. If anyone understood how Bennie felt, Patsy did.

"Do you want to see her?"

Bennie looked at Patsy, clearly surprised. "Can I?"

For answer, Patsy turned and headed for the elevator. "They're putting her in Room 504." They watched the numbers light up above the elevator doors. "So," Patsy said, "Inez said you found a witness?"

"Yeah," Bennie said.

"Did Stu do it?"

"No."

"God damn it." The elevator doors opened and they stepped in. "Do you know who did it?"

Bennie looked at Patsy, her expression pained, and said nothing.

"Poor fucker," Patsy said. "He's dead, you know."

"Stu?"

Patsy nodded.

"Damn it." Bennie closed her eyes, a frown between her brows. "He was my friend."

Patsy tried to wrap her mind around that. She knew time travel was real, she knew Bennie went back to 1974, but still, it was hard to assimilate that she'd actually met Stu back there, the same Stu who'd held Van hostage all this time, and befriended him.

The elevator stopped on the fifth floor. They stepped out and found Room 504 right around the corner. The nurse was just leaving. "She's getting a little loopy," she said with a twinkle, and left them.

Patsy opened the door and ushered Bennie in.

Chapter Thirty-Five

Bennie -- 1988

PATSY LET THE door fall closed, and Bennie found herself alone in the private hospital room with Van. Bennie stepped toward the bed, and Van opened her eyes.

"Bennie!" Van smiled happily, as if she'd just run into her at a party. "What are you doing here?"

Bennie had to laugh. Van was definitely a little loopy. "I came to see you."

Van examined Bennie's face and sobered instantly at what she saw. "What's wrong?"

Where to start? Bennie wondered, but all she said was, "I've been a little worried about you."

"Oh. Please don't be. I'm fine."

She didn't look fine. She was as pale as the sheet, the only color in her face coming from the purple smudges beneath her eyes and the black and blue bruises at her neck. Did Stu do that to her? It was incomprehensible.

"Tell you what," Van said, with an air of making a deal, "If you won't worry about me, I won't worry about you."

"Why would you worry about me?"

"Because you look--" Van hesitated.

"Like hell?" Bennie suggested.

Van frowned. "I was going to say mournful."

Bennie nodded. It was a good word for how she felt. She reached out and picked up Van's hand where it rested on the bedspread. The wrist was bruised and swollen.

"I hear you got to meet the Expo Killer," Bennie said hesitantly, prepared to abandon the topic if it upset Van.

Van just nodded, though, and looked a bit mournful herself. "Stu? Yeah."

"Did he do this?" Bennie ran her finger softly along the bruises beneath Van's chin.

"No, Stu didn't hurt me. That was Rudy."

Bennie was relieved. She didn't want Stu to have changed that much because of her.

"Did you know Stu's dead?" Van asked.

"Yeah, I heard."

"I don't think he killed that cop."

"No, he didn't."

"Were you there?"

"Yeah."

Van accepted Bennie's word without question.

Bennie held Van's hand very gently and wondered if it was quite fair to press Van when she was obviously so vulnerable. But this was the first time since July that Van had even let her come close. When would she get another chance?

"Van," she asked gently, "why have you been avoiding me?"

Van blinked. "Oh, yeah." She tried to pull her hand back, but she was weak as a kitten and Bennie didn't let go.

"Why, Van?"

"*You* know," Van said, avoiding Bennie's gaze. "I told you before."

"No," Bennie said. "I don't know. When did you tell me?"

Van frowned anxiously. "I can't tell you--"

"Was it in the future?" Bennie guessed. "When you went to two thousand eight?"

"You know about that?"

"Jill and Kendra told me," Bennie said. "What happened there, Van?"

Van gave her a warm, drowsy smile. "You rescued me."

"Rescued you? From what?"

"You took care of me," Van said. "I didn't have anywhere to live or any money or anything. You took me in."

"I'm glad." Bennie was thankful that her future self was able to be there for Van when she needed help, but she needed to know more. "What else?" she pressed. "Tell me."

"Well, you bought me things, clothes and an iPod and a tattoo. You bought me this one sundress," Van reminisced in a dreamy voice. "It made me feel so sexy."

Bennie nearly choked with the longing to have been there, but all she said was, "You got a tattoo?"

"Um hm," Van said. "I'll show you someday. I can't show you right now."

Bennie smiled. "Where is it?" Van gave her a coy look, which made Bennie laugh. "So tell me again. Why have you been avoiding me?"

Anxiety returned to Van's face. "I told you. I love Patsy," Van said slowly, as if explaining something to a small child or an idiot.

"I get that," Bennie said patiently. "But why do you have to avoid *me*?"

"Because," Van said, as if it were obvious, "I love you, too."

Bennie's legs weakened suddenly and she dropped her butt onto the side of the bed. Van gasped, and Bennie hopped back up. "Oh, Christ! Oh, Van, I'm sorry."

"No, no," Van said in a tight voice. She patted the side of the bed. "It's okay. Sit down, Bennie. But *gently*."

"Where are you hurt?"

"My ribs," Van said. "They're just cracked. It's okay."

Bennie had suffered cracked ribs herself in the past and knew that it was not okay, but she eased herself back onto the side of the bed, watching Van's face carefully as she did so. When Van didn't wince, Bennie relaxed slightly.

"You love me?" Bennie asked, finally letting a ripple of delight surge through her.

Van turned her eyes away and examined the IV that snaked into her other hand. "We loved each other," she whispered. "In two thousand eight."

"What do you mean?" Bennie thought she would explode from not knowing. "Tell me, Van. Did we--Did we make love?"

Van looked back at Bennie and gave her familiar flirtatious smile. "I've seen *your* tattoo."

Bennie raised her hand to her left breast, where a blue butterfly flew. She wondered what the butterfly looked like, what her *breast* looked like, twenty years in the future. "Lots of people have seen my tattoo."

"I'm not talking about the butterfly." Van tugged again at her hand, and this time Bennie let her go. "I'm talking about the one you're going to get right here." She placed her hand on Bennie's lap and ran a finger along the crease of her inner thigh. Bennie took a deep, shaky breath as shivers sparkled up her spine. "Your favorite place to kiss a woman," Van added.

"How do you know that?" Bennie's voice was barely more than a whisper.

"You told me," Van said. "And you kissed me there."

"I don't believe you." Bennie shook her head. "I would never forget something like that."

"You didn't forget it," Van said drowsily, dropping her hand back onto the sheet, "because it didn't happen to you. It only happened to me."

"Damn."

"And--," Van said, with a tormenting smile, "I know how you like to make love to a woman. Best."

"How?" Bennie whispered. Van couldn't know that, because Bennie had never shared it with another soul. Bennie freely shared her tongue and her fingers and her dildos, but she did not share her greatest desire. She had never shared that.

"You rub yourself between my legs," Van whispered. She blinked heavily and licked her lips.

"And you grow. And then you slide yourself inside me."

Bennie sat mesmerized as she listened to Van describe the one way Bennie had always longed to make love to a woman, but had never yet dared. And she'd done it with *Van*.

"*Fuck*," Bennie said forcefully. She hopped up off the bed, too agitated to sit still. "You mean I made love to you, like *that*, and I didn't even get to *be there*?"

"Oh, you were there," Van said, chuckling sleepily. "You were definitely *there*."

"But I don't get to remember it," Bennie said, anguished. She finally got to make love to a woman--to *Van*--like *that*, and it was all wasted on future Bennie, a woman who didn't exist, would never exist. What Van remembered happening in two thousand eight was never actually going to happen, because Van came back. What Van remembered was never going to happen to anyone but her. Bennie drooped sadly.

"But Bennie?" Van whispered, struggling to keep her eyes open. "Don't tell Patsy. Okay?"

Bennie didn't answer, and Van wrenched her eyes open to ask again. "Please, Bennie? Don't tell Patsy."

"I won't, Van," Bennie assured her, feeling sad. "I won't tell Patsy."

Van gave a small smile of thanks and closed her eyes. She was falling asleep.

"Van?" Bennie whispered.

"Hm?"

"Did you like it? When I made love to you that way? Did you like it?"

Van smiled but didn't open her eyes. "Mm hmm. I liked it a lot."

Bennie bent down and kissed Van on her forehead. Then, emboldened, she kissed her on the lips. She felt Van's lips move softly against hers, but they didn't part. Bennie stood up and moved quietly toward the door, but before she reached it, Van spoke again.

"Bennie?"

Bennie turned. "Yes?"

"Invest in Microsoft," Van said without opening her eyes. "It'll make you rich." And then she was asleep.

Bennie opened the door and stepped out. Patsy stood propped up against the opposite wall apparently asleep on her feet, but she opened her eyes when she heard Bennie emerge.

"She's asleep," Bennie said softly.

Patsy gave a nod and moved toward the door, but as she passed Bennie she stopped and put a hand on Bennie's arm.

"Thank you," Patsy said.

"For what?"

"For going to 1974, to help Van," Patsy said.

"It didn't help Van."

"It might have, if this other thing hadn't happened," Patsy said. "It was a brave thing to do."

Bennie nodded and stepped back to let Patsy enter Van's room.

Bennie wandered down the hall past the door to the waiting room. It was empty. The women had all gone home. Bennie wondered briefly whether Kendra had gone home to her husband or home with Jill, whether Inez and Grace were becoming an item, and whether Waverly knew anything about it. God, relationships were messy.

Bennie went out to find her car. She thought briefly about calling Lucy, asking forgiveness for running out on her the other night, just so she wouldn't have to go home alone. She quickly discarded the idea. Lucy was about sex, and Bennie was simply not in the mood.

The rain had stopped and the moon peeked out, light gleaming off the wet, black streets. Bennie ambled toward the lot where she'd parked the car, her hands in her pockets and her head down. Patsy was right. It *was* a brave thing, going back in time like that. Brave and foolish. And inevitable, apparently, since it seemed it had actually already happened before Bennie even got involved. It just hadn't happened to *her* yet. Had she ever really had any choice? And it was all for nothing in the end. Worse than nothing. If Bennie hadn't gone back to 1974, none of the rest of it would have happened. Bennie would not have killed Hannah's step-father, Stu wouldn't have been arrested for a murder he didn't commit, Van wouldn't have been taken hostage and wouldn't now be lying in a hospital bed all wounded and bruised. And Hannah--

Bennie slid into her car, turned the key, flipped on the wiper blades, and watched the sheets of water pour off her windshield. What would have happened to Hannah if Bennie hadn't gone back to 1974? Would her step-father have taken her home to suffer more abuse? Would he have killed her, like Hannah believed back then? Would he have forced her to have an abortion? *Did* she have an abortion?

Bennie pulled the car out of the lot and headed north, back toward Cavalry Women's Shelter. The car had no clock and Bennie didn't wear a watch, but she didn't think it was very late. Seven? Seven-thirty? Hannah might still be there.

Bennie parked across the street. She got out, closed the door, and leaned back against it, ignoring the dampness that seeped through the seat of her jeans. The line of women was gone. Bennie could see just enough through the windows to make out that the large room had been cleared of tables and was now filled with folding beds and cots. Women were stringing sheets to simulate walls, creating an illusion of private rooms.

As if she'd been watching for her, the front door opened and Hannah slipped out, pulling on her coat as she did so. She headed straight across the street toward Bennie's car. Bennie pulled herself up to her full height and took a deep breath, preparing herself for whatever Hannah might say. Hannah stopped in front of Bennie. She was nearly as tall as Bennie, and when their eyes met, they were just inches apart from each other.

"I remember now," Hannah said. "You killed my step-father."

Bennie swallowed, feeling suddenly very fragile, afraid of what Hannah might say. One wrong word now would shatter her.

"Thank you."

Bennie caught her breath. It wasn't what she'd expected. Suddenly, the tight band of misery and guilt that had been suffocating her since her return to 1988 released, and Bennie nearly crumpled from the relief of it. Tears pooled in her eyes, and a moment later she was sobbing into Hannah's shoulder, with Hannah's arms wrapped around her and Hannah's voice whispering in her ear, "It's okay, Bennie. It's okay."

Eventually, Bennie stopped crying. She pulled herself away and wiped her face on the sleeve of her jacket.

"Sorry," Bennie said, her voice choked with tears.

"It's okay."

"It's just that, for me," Bennie tried to explain, "it just happened. You know? It just happened a few hours ago."

Hannah bit her lip, apparently still uncomfortable talking about time travel, but she reached her hand into her pocket. "I have something for you." She pulled out a white object and handed it to Bennie.

Even in the dim light from the moon and the street lights, Bennie could see that the 2004 WNBA cap had aged considerably since she'd last seen it the day before. The material was limp, the colors faded, and new stains had joined the dim jelly stain Hannah had made that morning at People's Park. "Where'd you get this?"

"I went home and got it after you left," Hannah said. "My apartment's not far from here."

"You kept it all this time?"

"It was all I had to remember you by," Hannah said, and Bennie nearly wept again. "I always wondered what these numbers meant."

"Twenty-oh-four," Bennie said. "I think it's supposed to be the year."

Hannah gave a tentative smile. "It's hard to believe. Time travel."

"I know," Bennie said. "It's hard for me too, and I've done it."

"The letters," Hannah said, "WNBA. My son thinks it might be something like the NBA, but for women."

"Your son?"

Hannah nodded. "He's a big basketball fan. Michael Jordan and all that."

"How old is he?" Bennie asked, her heart in her throat.

"Thirteen," Hannah said. "Same age I was when I met you."

"What? You were thirteen?" Bennie reeled. "You told me you were fourteen."

"Bennie," Hannah chided. "I lied. I thought if you knew I was only thirteen, you'd turn me over to the police for sure."

"Oh. But if you were the ripe old age of fourteen, I wouldn't?"

Hannah gave a little laugh. "It seemed a lot older to me."

Jesus, Bennie thought, *thirteen*. No wonder she'd latched on so tightly to Bennie. Thirteen years old, all alone, and pregnant. "I wish I could have stayed," Bennie said. "I wish I could have helped you."

"Yeah, me too," Hannah said. "But you did help me in a way. You made it possible for me to go back home, to have my baby, and raise my son. I couldn't have done any of that if you hadn't-- done what you did."

Bennie stared at Hannah for a long moment, at her beautiful gray eyes, her generous smile, her honey hair whipping about in the wind, and she realized Hannah was right. Bennie understood, finally, why she *really* went back to 1974. She didn't go back in time in order to save Van. Van managed to save herself without any help from Bennie. But her trip back in time wasn't futile. It wasn't for nothing. It was for Hannah. Hannah and her son.

The door to Cavalry Women's Shelter opened again, and a skinny boy with dark hair stepped out. He was wearing a Seattle Seahawks jacket at least two sizes too large and immense white athletic shoes. "Mom?" he called.

Hannah waved him over. "Come over here, Ben. I want you to meet an old friend of mine."

About the Author

Kate McLachlan is the author of the Goldie award-winning *Rip Van Dyke*, the first book in the RIP time-travel series. Kate lives in Eastern Washington with her wife, two dogs, and two cats. After teaching in the public schools for fourteen years, she developed a case of temporary insanity and entered law school. All she really wanted to do was write stories but, despite the common misperception, legal briefs are not fiction, and Kate's creative urge was not satisfied by her day job. She writes novels for the joy it brings to her and for the joy she hopes it will bring to others.

Kate welcomes e-mails from readers: kate@katemclachlan.com.

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