



## Part 2 - Blind Justice

# The Concession

"He's dead."

Jenny's fork hit her plate with an unfortunate clatter that silenced the tables around them, the glares of those nearby fixing on her accusingly.

Catherine smiled innocently at a few of the more sombre faces. Some of them smiled in return, as if to offer sympathetic moral support. The rest slowly returned to their own quiet conversations, leaving Jenny to gather her composure, with only Catherine's anxious eyes watching her.

When Jenny looked at Catherine again, there was shock and surprise in her expression. This had been the last thing she had expected to hear.

"When... How?" was all she could manage.

"Two weeks ago," she said quietly. "Cancer."

Jenny could only shake her head in disbelief. "He was so damn young, Cathy."

"I know."

"Did he have any family?"

Catherine nodded. "He didn't die alone. There were people there to share the final days with him, and a very special friend to share the final moments. He was very brave."

"I wish you had told me. I could have helped. My dad..."

Catherine knew that Jenny's father had died after a long struggle against the same disease, but that he had fought every step of the way. The price of that struggle had been a painful, lingering death and a shattered family. 'No, you couldn't,' she heard herself thinking.

"I know you could," she heard herself saying. "But Devin was a very special kind of person. He wanted to face this battle in his own way. I did what I could for him while he was alive. After he died, I needed time by myself."

"Was he married?"

Catherine shook her head. "He was a free spirit, Jen. There was no time for anything that confining."

"At least he wasn't alone when ..."

"He wasn't."

"Did he... suffer badly?" Jenny asked, tears filling her eyes at her own dark memory.

"No. He was heavily sedated. He didn't suffer."

Jenny wiped her eyes with her napkin, fighting back visions she had not faced for many years. She smiled slightly. "Thank God for that." She paused, her voice dropping lower. "We all knew something was dreadfully wrong, but no one felt you were ready to talk about it."

"I'm still not."

"When you resigned, I was so stunned, Cathy. You loved your work so much."

"I still do."

"Then... why?"

Catherine shook her head slowly. "I can't talk about it. It's nothing personal, nothing that you should take offense at. I just need to work this out myself."

Jenny's nod of understanding and acknowledgement came slowly, her silence forged by years of friendship and a certainty that to press further would only cause needless pain. She knew Catherine well enough to know when to stop.

"If I can do anything... anything to help you, Cathy..."

A grateful smile and a single nod were her answer.

\*\*\*\*\*

'Two weeks...' Catherine thought to herself, safely back within the confines of her apartment. Those two simple words hid so much... left so much unacknowledged. Time had brought no lessening of her discontent, no acceptance of the losses in her life, no relief from the nagging fear that haunted her like a shadow. She had looked back at the past two weeks many times and found no answer, no single event to trigger and fuel her apprehension. It felt like a law of nature now, to be borne and accepted without question, without hope of alteration. And yet, it seemed to feed on her strength -- on her will to survive and to break free - and the harder she fought, the more strength it consumed.

She had not gone to the tunnels since the night of Devin's death. She told herself it was to allow Vincent, Father, the others time to mourn and time to begin the healing process she knew would be long and difficult. And she knew, even as she held this thought, that it was a lie.

She knew that Vincent would need many months to regain his strength, his sense of a life lived in and for itself. She could not help him through this transformation, this acknowledgement that his strongest link to childhood and to the world beyond the darkness was gone forever. Devin had been his eyes and ears to landscapes he would never walk. To vistas he would never see. He had been Vincent's restlessness personified, granted the strength to pursue his own vision and the determination to allow no word of obligation or guilt to deflect him from his personal odyssey. And in this strength, this determination,

Vincent had found a window to the world.

'He gave Vincent things I never could... never can.' Catherine thought, the pain of this confession gnawing deeper inside her. She knew that her love for Vincent could never fill the void left by the loss of one so important. No matter how much time they spent together, how many concerts they enjoyed together beneath the stage, how many poems and stories they read aloud to each other, how many quiet walks they shared -- that it could never provide the emotional bond that Devin's life had forged. She could find no words for the feeling save the thought that, while she was a pillar in Vincent's life, Devin had been the foundation. She shuddered at the thought of the fate of pillars without foundation, destined to sink slowly into the soft earth.

Word had come from below the day after Devin's death that he was to be cremated. His ashes had been placed in a freshly-baked clay urn and mounted on a stone pedestal with a fire kept permanently lit below it, a fire in which his friends and acquaintances could feed their final letters of eulogy and farewell, a Tunnel World custom of many years standing. She had prepared her letter but had not summoned the strength to face this most final of partings. She had sent a message to Father through a helper, a brief acknowledgement of her wish to pay her respects, but respectfully explaining that she would face the moment at a time of her own choosing.

Devin's scrapbook lay before her on the coffee table, pregnant with photographs and pages crammed with words of discovery and fulfillment. She had read through the book slowly, alternately facing a few pages one day, huge chunks of pages the next. She found the scrapbook strangely compelling, as if it held a secret, not of Devin's life, but to her own - a secret she felt she must discover. 'Devin understood that,' she thought. She knew that, in some wordless way, Devin had understood something about her -- about her relationship with Vincent -- that both of them missed, were too close to see. She scanned the words and photographs of his life in search of the answer, driven by the same relentlessness that had driven its author, and the same obsession.

The days had melted as quickly as the remnants of the first winter storm. She had found no direction for her life now, no clear pathway to take or goal to strive towards. The days ahead seemed as gray and empty as the days behind. Only Jenny's insistence on seeing her for lunch today had drawn her out of her seclusion. She had managed to keep their conversation to mundane matters, not permitting any of Jenny's half-hearted leading questions or dropped hints to lead the conversation into personal matters. Catherine knew that, while her body may have left the apartment, Catherine Chandler hadn't.

She stood and walked to the main window. All traces of the storm had long since vanished, save the ceaseless grey of the clouds that had invaded the city and not relented in their siege. 'If only the sun would come out,' she thought. She tried to hold to the thought that the arrival of sunshine would drive the grey from her soul, would fill her with shafts of light and the promise of warmth and a new day. She tried to hold the thought, but it flickered and died half-born. She knew it was evasion, a conscious attempt to avoid the responsibility of making a choice.

'Vincent.' she thought, looking down at the entrance to another world -- another life. She wanted to lie in his arms, to rest her weary body against his and gather strength from his face, from his words, from his being -- but she knew that she would not go to him now, that to demand that he be strong for her now was impossible. He had no strength to spare now -- she knew that -- and she accepted it.

But deep within her, fighting through her wish, was the knowledge that even if he possessed the strength she needed now, she would not go to him. She knew that she must find the strength, the will to continue, from within -- and that until she found it, she would not venture below.

\*\*\*\*\*

"When do we get to read the stone?" Jamie said quietly.

Vincent continued to gaze ahead of him, his chin resting on arms folded around his knees, his knees drawn into his chest, the cold face of rock and mist beside the Waterfalls at his back

"At the ceremony," he answered softly. "Kanin told me that was Devin's wish."

Jamie sat down beside her friend, tossing an occasional flat stone towards the turbulent stream below, with no thought of its fate or any purpose save the pleasure the motion of her arm and her shoulder gave her. She put her left hand on his shoulder and leaned against him. Vincent turned and kissed her hair gently, his arm encircling her warmly. Their friendship had always been like this -- genuine, tender, bounded by years of trust and secure in their understanding that they were alike, able to speak without words and feel without touch.

Vincent suddenly understood why Devin had chosen Jamie to be with him at the end.

"Do you miss him?"

He nodded slowly. "Every day I come here, to the place where we spent those countless hours. Back when we thought the hours truly were limitless. I listen for him in the winds and in the roar of the water against the rocks."

"If his spirit could be anywhere, this is where it would be." Jamie said.

"Do you remember the day you almost drowned?" Vincent asked.

"I remember who pushed me in!" Jamie said indignantly. "But I know he didn't mean it. I guess it was my own fault that I went out past the markers."

Vincent turned to her, his arm remaining firmly around her shoulder. "I remember he reached you just before you would have entered the Razor Run. You were so frightened and so angry at yourself. You thought you were strong enough to fight the current. I remember how hurt you were that it was Devin who saved you."

"It was always Devin who got us in trouble and it was always Devin who found the way out. I hated him for always being so damn good at the things he did."

Vincent laughed. "You pretended to hate him so much, yet you wanted to be just like him."

He saw the look of angry denial cross Jamie's face, replaced slowly by a softer acknowledgement of the truth of his words. "I didn't really hate him. There was just so much of him that was what I wanted to be. It hurt to see all that energy and ability wasted. He could have been such a great man."

"He was, Jamie, in many ways. His gift was a mind that wanted to do everything, to be everywhere. He was born into a world where such gifts aren't needed anymore. Centuries ago, he would have made a great explorer."

"Or a great writer."

Vincent stood up slowly, pulling Jamie to her feet with him. He walked to the edge of the pathway, the spray thick now, wafting past them and swirling against the roof of the cavern, then down in great cold fingers of mist.

"When is the ceremony?" Jamie asked.

"In ten days."

"Where? The Catacombs?"

Vincent shook his head. "He wanted that, but you know the law. Kanin and I thought of a more appropriate resting spot for Devin, a spot where he would never be alone, where people would see his stone every day, read it, and remember."

"Where?" she repeated eagerly.

"At the junction to the new South Tunnel project. Kanin and I are working on a special burial chamber and a special rock platform that rises from the floor of the tunnel. The stone will rest there, his ashes buried in an alcove above."

Jamie hugged Vincent warmly, her arms saying more than her words could. "Devin would like that"

\*\*\*\*\*

Sleep had become difficult now. The love of his brother, the discord over his suicide, the subtle anger and resentment against Catherine that he had noticed in Father and in other of his friends, the weeks without her -- feeling her emotional pain and loneliness but knowing that she did not want to face him -- all had joined forces in a seemingly endless battle against healing and acceptance.

He had written his letter of farewell to Devin days ago, but had not gone to the funeral pyre to burn it. Something kept him from the spot, almost as if his going there would make Devin's death more final, more real. He knew Devin had been right in not wanting him there at the end, but he knew also that the burden of that absence would haunt him for the rest of his life. Like any other childhood trauma, it would always be with him.

His restlessness fed on itself in those days that followed. Everyone wanted to help, not understanding that even their offers were intrusions on the solace he needed. Father had tried to speak of it to him, had tried to recall happier days from their childhood, but Vincent had not responded to Father's words. That was all they were to him now -- words -- to be heard, considered, then forgotten like so many other random noises which haunted the tunnels. They reached no part of him that could respond now.

He missed Catherine terribly now. 'If I could only see her, just a glimpse...' he found himself thinking more and more. Now, on this night, it drove him from sleep, to full dress and cloak, to the tunnels, to the world above. It drove him recklessly onward, with no thought of words or music or touch. All he needed was to see her, to know that she was still there, alive, waiting.

It seemed so little to wish for.

\*\*\*\*\*

"You cheated, Alan!" There was mock anger in his words, but joy and exasperation in the tone. It was an accusation delivered almost as a declaration of love.

"I won that game fair and square, Mark. He was just a sore loser."

Their conversation was hushed now as they walked along Eighth Avenue, the lights of the diners and bookstores and bars fading behind them as they entered the darkness between the streets. There were still some lighted windows and lofts in the buildings around them but their feeble glow failed to reach the sidewalks. It was dark here, and the ever-fading glow of lights behind them seemed to sap the sound of their conversation.

"He's one of the best chess players in the Village."

"Yeah, and one of the most vocal about it! I just got tired of hearing how great he was especially when it came from his own mouth."

"I thought he'd die when you tossed your rook down the board and said 'checkmate'. He kept looking for a way out. It was like he was slipping of a ledge and trying to find a handhold. It was great!"

Alan stopped, the feeble light from a nearby streetlamp glinting off his copper-coloured hair. His smile shone in the dark though his glance seemed to miss his companion. "You really topped the banana split with a cherry when you told him I was blind."

Mark looked at him warmly, his hand reaching for his companion's and drawing it to his mouth. He traced the outlines of his smile slowly and Alan smiled in return. "He deserved it. And so did you."

"What did I deserve?"

Mark kissed Alan's hand gently and held it in his own. "You deserved every bit of the admiration they gave you. You made that creep eat his words. You showed them how special you are. You beat them all at their own game."

"Me? Special? Hardly. He could beat the pants off me at horseshoes." Alan laughed softly, then drew Mark closer. "Of course, I'd want you to be there to console me!"

Mark drew him into an embrace, his arms pressing Alan against him, his hand gently caressing his companion's hair and neck. "I'll always be there for you." He said softly.

They walked on in silence, towards the high-rise buildings that flanked the west side of the city.

\*\*\*\*\*

They had been silent for a long time, content in each other's presence and in the sheer exertion of the extended walk on such a cold night. They had stopped for coffee at a grungy diner in the forties, but the warming effect of the coffee had worn off now. Mark drew his leather jacket tighter around him and pulled Alan's sheepskin collar tighter around his companion's neck. As the wind grew colder, Mark took his white scarf and wrapped it around Alan's exposed neck. Alan had laughed off his offer to find a cab to take them the rest of the way home. It seemed such a quiet, peaceful night. He saw no need to spoil it by wasting money on some smelly, grungy cab.

"I'm really sorry about last week." Mark said suddenly.

Alan was quiet for a few moments, then stopped and turned to his companion. "Come on, Mark. We've been together too long for this."

"I had no right to say those things to you. It was..."

"It was this latest commission, I know. I understand. I let it get to me, too."

"Not as badly as I did."

"Look, I know how much you wanted this project. I know how many hours you've spent trying to get this work just right... You haven't seen any of your friends for months; you haven't left the loft for weeks until tonight. You cracked. It could happen to anybody."

"Well, it's finished. Now we can begin thinking about that place upstate."

Alan's voice dropped as if he weren't quite sure he had heard. "You mean, the summer..."

"Yep."

Alan threw his arms around Mark happily, his exuberance spilling over to his companion who returned the gesture happily.

"When do we start packing?" Alan said breathlessly, his hold not relinquishing for a moment.

Mark laughed. "Next week, if you like. It's ours. We've earned it."

Alan drew back slowly, then pressed his forehead against Mark's. Mark inclined his head to meet Alan's, and the two of them stood in the darkness, touching, their hands saying what they could not speak. "I love you," he said softly. Mark's firm, gentle hand on Alan's neck was the sole reply.

"So what have we here!?"



The words leapt out of the darkness, surrounding them, filling the air with the malignant sense of unseen eyes stealing visions they were not meant to see.

Alan and Mark drew back slowly and looked around. Ahead of them, their approach muffled by wind and celebration, were three young men. They did not seem particularly menacing, their dress was not rough or unkempt, their appearance was not unusual or out of place with the neighbourhood. They seemed to be three normal, neighbourhood men. Their seemingly normal voices comforted Alan, frightened Mark.

"A couple a lovebirds!" said one of the others, a slight lisp sounding on the final 's'.

"Ain't it sweet," said the third, a more pronounced accent drawing out the 's' of sweet. Their motive was unmistakable now.

"What do you want?" Mark demanded, his voice betraying no fear or subservience.

Two of the young men moved quickly behind Mark and Alan, cutting off potential retreat. They did not realize that Alan could not flee them.

"How about a kiss, sweetie!" the first man said, pursing his lips and making childish kissing sounds in the darkness. "Your friend here tells us you kiss soooooo goooooood."

The final words were drawn out, spoken in a feminine cant. Mark hoped they were merely drunk.

"Why don 't you find some little old lady to pester and leave us alone?" Alan said quickly. He made a move to walk forward, but in the time it took for him to finish his sentence the two men behind them had grabbed them and wrenched their arms behind their backs. Alan did not resist, but Mark tried to free himself -- until he heard the faint click of steel against steel and saw the flash of a blade held before him. The first attacker held the knife to Mark's throat, his taunting manner gone now, a look of blank fury taking its place.

"Mark! Are you all right?" Alan said.

"What's with him?" one of the men said, his voice harsh and cold as the wind.

"He's blind. Leave him alone!" Mark said, his anger rising now.

"Well, whaddya' know!" the man said, slowly moving the knife towards Alan's eyes. He brought the blade close to each eye, but Alan made no move to back away, no move to avoid the knife. He did not flinch. His eyes did not follow the movement of the blade.

"Leave him alone, you fuckin' creep!" Mark said, twisting and fighting against the iron grip holding him erect and helpless.

"Hey Johnny, ya' hear what the fag called you!"

The knife flew quickly to Mark's throat, the sharp edge pressed so tightly that Mark dared not breathe, for fear it would cut him.

"You know what we do with faggots in this neighbourhood?" the man asked slowly.

"Yeah," Mark spat at their assailants. "The things you can't get your girlfriend's to do to you!"

Understanding came slowly, but it did come.

"You son of a..." the man said, drawing the knife back quickly and drawing it across Mark's body, as if to slash him across the chest. His movement came too slowly. Mark had wrestled free of his restraint and turned towards Alan, but by turning he was facing the knife as it swung towards him. Almost soundlessly, the blade tore through his chest -- the hilt of the handle crashing into his chest, the sound of it echoing against the building.

Alan heard the sound. He sensed what it was. His screams filled the street around them, the pent-up terror of his unseen attackers unleashed in one desperate, anguished cry for help. He heard the sound of "Mark!" echo around them.

In that moment, a more frightening sound filled the air around them. It came from an alleyway nearby. The sound was savage, ferocious, inhuman. The roar added to the sound of Alan's cry, strengthened it, added its own power.

"Let's get outta' here!".. one of them said, though Alan could not tell which. He could hear only his own scream filling his mind, and could sense only his own terror of what might happen to him at any moment.

"What about him?" came another voice.

The sound of approaching footsteps made its way into Alan's consciousness, though too faintly to be heard by his assailants.

"Forget him. He can't see. Run! Somebody's coming!"

He felt the grip on him ease, then disappear. The three men ran quickly into the small park across the street and vanished into the darkness. Alan could hear footsteps approach. He drew back in terror. His back pressed against the stone wall behind him.

"Don 't be afraid. I won't hurt you."

Alan slowly crept forward, feeling along the sidewalk. His fingers came to Mark's body, lying prone on the grimy sidewalk. Slowly, his fingers worked their way upwards to his chest. They stopped when they reached the knife, still buried in the chest. Blood was seeping through the material of the jacket, covering Alan's fingers, his hands. He savagely grabbed the knife and pulled it from Mark's body.

Then he reared back and screamed, his cry of anguish echoing against the walls, against the trees, against the sky.

Lights appeared in several nearby windows.

"Don't be afraid. Help is coming," the voice said.

"Please help my lover," Alan said softly, groping in the darkness to find Mark, to touch Mark. "He's hurt. Please help him."

The sound of a siren could be heard now, several blocks away, its wail growing closer. "I cannot stay. Help is coming."

"Please wait We need your help. You must have seen them."

"Yes, I did. But I cannot stay here. I will tell you a name. Can you remember it?"

"Please don't leave us!

"I must go. Catherine Chandler. Remember that name. She can help you. Repeat it to me."

"Catherine Chandler," Alan repeated, the words sounding hopeless and helpless.

The siren was close now, approaching rapidly. Another sounded in the distance behind them.

"I must go. Remember... Catherine Chandler. She will help you."

Alan could hear the footsteps depart rapidly, in the direction from which they had come. In seconds, he was alone again..

When the police arrived, they found Alan clutching Mark's lifeless form in his arms the bloody knife beside him.

\*\*\*\*\*

"What can I do for ya', lady?"

A sunrise phone call from a stranger, two quick cups of under-brewed coffee, a frenzied cab ride with a driver who spoke no English and was as acquainted with American currency as with its grammar, and a heel broken on the flight of stairs climbed due to a broken elevator had left Catherine in no mood for condescension.

"You can get your ass out of that chair and give me a copy of the Tresco arrest report," she said, slapping her briefcase on the counter and yanking her gloves off abruptly, her eyes flashing.

The sergeant eyed her warily, made a movement to respond, thought better of it, and shuffled back to a stack of file folders on a desk behind him. He found the file she had requested, noted her identification, then lazily picked up the phone and slowly dialed an extension, his snail's pace the only gesture of defiance he could muster. He whistled insolently as the number rang, looking up occasionally at her and whistling louder each time.

"Yom, Tony. Bring the faggot in solitary to interrogation room four. Yeah, she's here." he said, eyeing Catherine with ill-disguised contempt.

He threw the phone back into its cradle and nodded to the hallway behind her.

"Now I understand why they call you 'pigs'," she muttered, gathering up her briefcase and gloves. "Sometimes, it's accurate," she added, walking away rapidly, permitting no answer. She could hear only unintelligible muttering behind her as she passed several doorways and made her way to the interrogation room.

Inside, she dropped into a chair and threw her belongings onto the long table. She glanced quickly at the arrest report, learning that the man who had called her was named Alan Tresco, that he lived only five blocks from her, that he was 37 years old. and that he was accused of murdering a 39 year old man named Mark Ventura. She looked at the victim 's name with a start -- she had heard this name before, but she could not remember in what context.

She opened her briefcase and began jotting down some preliminary notes, her scrawl barely legible even to herself. She walked to a coffee maker behind her and poured herself a cup, downing it as quickly as she could. As she started to pour herself another cup, the sound of the door opening made her whirl around.

She could not believe what she saw.

She saw the most beautiful man she had ever seen standing in the doorway, clad in a dull blue jumpsuit. His hair was the hue of sunlit copper -- blond and red and brown tangled together to form a shade she had never seen before. His forehead was high, his eyebrows strong and of a slightly darker hue than his hair. The eyes were deep set, a lustrous green, the eyelashes thick and full. The mouth was sensual, fluid, set over a strong jaw.

"Miss Chandler?"

"I'm Catherine Chandler." she said, walking forward slowly and taking his extended hand. He shook her hand firmly and she noted that his fingers seemed to linger longer than was normal, seemed to move slowly over hers. The feeling was fleeting, however. He did not seem to note it, his eyes remaining fixed on her politely.

He moved slowly to the chair opposite her, his fingers preceding him slightly. He felt his way to the chair and sat down. The escorting officer stood in the open doorway, waiting. Catherine fixed him with a cold stare that required no answer. Slowly, he backed out of the room and closed the door behind him. His shadow remained for a moment on the translucent glass of the door, then faded away with his footsteps.

"Can I get you some coffee?"

"Sure." Alan said eagerly. "They don't exactly have great cuisine downstairs." She laughed easily, quickly pouring the coffee.

"How do you like it?"

"Regular," he answered easily.

She added some powdered creamer and two lumps of sugar and set it in front of him. He slowly moved his hands forward, slowly feeling along the table top.

Suddenly, Catherine understood why the handshake had seemed strange, why his hands seemed to precede him. Slowly, gently, she moved her hands forward and guided his hands to the cup. He smiled slightly, taking the Styrofoam cup into his hands and drinking it down in one gulp.

"How long have you been blind, Alan?" she asked quietly.

"Since I was twenty."

"What happened?"

For the first time, she sensed uneasiness in him. "I'd rather not answer that... not right now."

Catherine opened the folder again and scanned it, the sound of rustling paper filling the room. Alan seemed perfectly at ease during the silence, his eyes never leaving her.

"We're neighbours, Alan. I live four blocks north of you."

"We love this part of the city. It took us so many years to work our way up from the hovel we used to rent in the Village. It was so dirty there, so much crime..." He stopped abruptly. "Maybe we should have stayed. We thought we'd be safer uptown." His tone was changing now. There were the first traces of anger and loss. "Have you ever been attacked, Miss Chandler?" he asked quietly.

She looked up quickly, startled. The story of her attack had been front page news for days. Yet she could tell the question was sincere -- he did not know.

"Yes, Alan. And call me Cathy."

"Then you understand how it feels."

The anger. The loss of control and the blaming of oneself. The guilt. She understood.

"Alan, I need for you to tell me exactly what happened to you. Don't leave anything out."

He leaned forward, folding his arms in front of him and looking downwards. "Can't you just read what it says?" he asked, his voice plaintive, pleading.

"I need to hear it from you, Alan. I need to understand what happened from your perspective. I won't find it in the words typed here," she said, rustling the pages. "I'll learn a great deal more from you telling it to me in your own words, in your own way."

He nodded. "I understand... Cathy," he said slowly. She leaned forward and placed her hand reassuringly on his. He smiled in return.

"We spent the evening at the Christopher Street Chess Club. Mark loved the game. We went every Wednesday night. I played a game against one of the better players there. Beat him pretty badly. We left at about 10:30. We walked up Eighth Avenue for a while, stopped at a diner near Fortieth for coffee. We stayed for about twenty minutes, then continued up Eighth. We were about a block from home. We had stopped for a minute. Mark had just finished a major commission..."

"Mark Ventura. The sculptor?" Catherine asked suddenly. Now she knew why she recognized the name.

"Yes. You know his work?" Alan asked eagerly.

"I have an original of his in my living room." she answered solemnly. "He was very talented."

"Yes. He had just completed work on a major assignment. We were making plans to move to upstate New York. It's a dream we've both had ever since we met."

"What happened next?"

Alan's face grew harder now, the terror returning as he relived the dreadful moments of the attack. "We were standing in the dark. Mark had just told me that we could afford the new place. We were embracing, celebrating. Suddenly, there were three guys surrounding us."

"What did they say?"

"The usual homophobic crap. Nothing we haven't heard before. They didn't seem all that dangerous, not until two of them grabbed us, pinned our arms behind us. I couldn't see what happened, but I could hear. Things turned ugly. I could hear a switchblade knife open. Mark got very quiet. Then I could sense something being held right in front of my eyes. I'm pretty sure it was the knife. The guy holding me started to twist my arms. Mark got angry -- he was always so protective of me." Alan's voice was breaking now, tears were welling in his eyes as he continued. "The guy said something about 'what guys like him did with faggots' and Mark gave his stock answer to that particular insult. Then I heard the guy with the knife swear. I think he lunged, but I can't be sure. I heard Mark struggle, then I heard..." He stopped.

Catherine studied Alan's face intently. "What did you hear?"

Alan's face was contorted now, the tears streaming down his face. His hands were clenched into tight fists at the vision his words tried to name.

"I heard the knife go into him. I could hear the handle as it struck his chest. I heard Mark moan once. I remember I screamed. I tried to break free. I didn't care what they did to me. I wanted to help Mark. And then I heard the other sound."

"What sound?"

"I've never heard anything like it before. It was like a scream, but it wasn't human. It was so loud, it filled the air around us. The guy holding me let go and they scattered into the park."

"Do you have any idea what the sound was?"

"No. All I know is that it happened just as I screamed. Maybe it was an echo. I don't know."

Catherine read the end of the statement in the police report. She quickly checked the box labelled 'WITNESSES'. It was blank.

"So no one else saw what happened?"

"That's not true," Alan said slowly. "Someone saw what happened. He came rushing up just after those creeps ran away."

She scanned the police report again. Nothing. No mention of a witness. No mention of anyone else near the crime scene.

"Did you tell the interrogators this?"

"Yes. I don't think he believed me."

"There's no record of him in the report, Alan. Did this witness give you his name?"

"No, Cathy. He gave me your name."

A cold shudder ran rough her body. The folder dropped from her hands, the papers scattering on the table in front of her. "What did he say?"

"He said that you would help, that you would know what to do. He told me to remember your name, to say it aloud. I begged him to stay, but he said he couldn't."

"Do you remember anything about him, anything unusual, that stood out?"

Alan paused for only a second, his eyes brightening. His voice was different now, there was hope there, and certainty. "That voice...I'll never forget that voice."

In the silence of the room, Alan could hear her stand and slowly walk to the end of the room. "Are you all right?" he asked after a few moments. He could sense uneasiness in the silence.

"I'm fine, Alan. It will be all right." He could not see her face. She was grateful for that much.

\*\*\*\*\*

An hour later, Catherine emerged from the interrogation room. She walked quickly, with the singleness of purpose of a rocket -- and with as little concern for the target. She found her target in the person of the same useless sergeant.

"What time is Alan Trescoe's arraignment and bail hearing?"

The man did not look up. "You'll have to ask Lieutenant Connor. He gets in at ten."

She pulled a card from her carrying case and clipped it to the file. She also wrote her name and number on the manila folder in longhand, to guard against any administrative accidents. "I want to hear from him as soon as he arrives," she said, tossing the folder at him. It landed with a thud on the desk upsetting a coffee cup, the dark brown liquid spilling over the newspaper page spread before him. He glared at her.

"Sorry," she said contemptuously. "You know how poorly coordinated we girls are." She was out the door before he could answer.

\*\*\*\*\*

She knew he would be there even before she turned the corner that led from her basement into the tunnels. She knew she had not been followed on her way home and was certain that Joe's surveillance of her could not legally extend into the building without a court order. She knew she could not risk using the park entrance to the tunnels.

He was standing in the darkness, waiting for her. They stood before each other for several long moments, then she moved slowly and embraced him, resting her head against his massive chest. He sighed deeply, his arms slowly drawing her close to him, the unacknowledged need of her fighting its way past his efforts to control.

"I'm sorry, Vincent. These past weeks..."

"I understand, Catherine. Don't speak of that now. That is not what brings you here."

She reluctantly pulled away from him. She walked to the opposite side of the tunnels and slowly slid to the floor, her back braced against the wall of the foundation. Vincent moved to sit beside her.

"How is he?"

She sighed, shaking her head slowly. "Not good. They don't believe his story about the attack. The police believe he killed the man."

"He didn't, Catherine. I saw the attack."

"What did you see, Vincent?"

"Three men attacked them. One of them held a knife to the throat of the dark-haired man. There were words exchanged... words of hatred. It happened so fast. The man with the knife was going to slash the dark-haired guy. He twisted free, trying to protect the other man. The knife went into his chest. I remember the other man screamed. I cried out and tried to reach them, but the attackers fled into the little park on the other side of the street. I lost them in the darkness. The screams had attracted a lot of attention - lights were going on in the building next to us. I heard the sirens start. I knew I couldn't stay. I gave him your name -- it was all I could think of to do, Catherine."



"You did the right thing."

"I should have stopped them before..."

"You couldn't know, Vincent. Alan told me that the attack was over in seconds. He said he thought they were only going to rob and taunt them. He didn't think they were intent on killing anyone."

"When I first heard those hateful words... I should have done something." Catherine shook her head "Did you think the attack was a robbery?"

"It was more than that. These men cared for each other, Catherine. They were sharing a happy moment together. They were harming no one." He shook his head, anger filling his voice. "I can understand robbery. I can't understand what I saw last night."

"You understand what these men were to each other?"

Vincent nodded. "Completely, Catherine. What is there that any human being who has ever loved could fail to understand?"

"I wish it were that simple, Vincent." Catherine turned to him, anger framing her words. "The police made no mention of a witness in their interrogation report, even though Alan told them about you. When I bring it up with them, they'll claim there was no corroborating evidence of a witness, no trace of a witness."

"But surely the police will want to know there are three killers stalking that neighbourhood?"

She shook her head sadly. "This is a case of a gay man dead and his lover beside him with a bloody knife. That's all they'll see. They won't give this case a second glance, Vincent. If the victim were wealthy, white, female..." She stood up, driven by her anger... and guilt. "If it had been someone like me. But I can tell you what the attitude will be when I confront them about this, 'some faggot kills his lover... who cares?'"

Vincent stood quickly and moved to her, his hands slowly drawing her into an embrace.

"This can't be allowed to happen, Catherine. What can I do to help you?"

"Nothing... not until I know more. I need to find out what Alan's bail will be. I'm going to post bond for him, but I can't do it directly."

"Is there anyone who can help you?"

"I need to talk with Elliot Burch," she answered -- her voice resigned, reluctant.

\*\*\*\*\*

Joe threw a thick sheaf of papers on the desk and flopped into a chair with a noisy thud. He rubbed his eyes vigorously, two sleepless nights finally exacting their toll.

"Well?"

"What have you got? Anything concrete?"

"Nothing definite. but a lot of paths to take. I don't know, John. Just when it seems there could be a logical explanation for something, another question pops up. There's nothing to go on in any one case, but when you add them up..."

Moreno thumbed through the papers slowly, noting quickly those items that Joe had marked with highlight pen. "Surveillance? I thought I told you..."

"Nothing major, John. Just me and one private investigator. I only want to keep an eye on her building. If Devin comes back, I want to ask him a few questions."

"You think he'll talk to you?"

Joe shook his head. "I doubt it, but maybe if I imply that his secrecy is affecting Cathy, maybe he'll open up a little."

"What else are you doing?"

"We've got his photograph from his credentials assignment here. I'm having it matched against photographs from all New York papers back to the late 1940's. Maybe we can find out more about him if we can discover who his parents were. There's nothing in state or federal files on him."

"What makes you think you'll find anything using photo comparison?"

"He said his father was still living -- and I get the impression he comes from a wealthy background. He's incredibly intelligent, well-dressed, well-read. Maybe his father is prominent enough to have appeared in some article or feature. It's worth a try."

"How long will it take?"

"Several weeks, at least."

Moreno leaned back, eyeing Joe intently. "Where do you think this is leading?"

"You got me, John. But there's something going on. I just want to be sure Cathy isn't mixed up in anything that might...." He broke off, reluctant to continue.

"Just how personal is this, Joe?"

He stood up quickly, grabbing his jacket and heading to the door. He turned back slowly. certain he could control his voice. "Catherine Chandler is my best friend, John. I'd want her to do the same for me, no matter what the consequences."

The door closed softly behind him.

\*\*\*\*\*

"A Miss Chandler to see you, Mr Burch."

Elliot sat back in his chair, taken aback. It was the last name he expected to hear. "Send her in," he said, his voice strange, low.

He stood up as she entered the room, but stopped halfway when he saw her face. It was obviously not a social call. He stifled the casual greeting he had planned, instead pointing to the chair in front of his desk and sitting back down slowly. He waited patiently.

"Thank you for seeing me, Elliot."

"You know you're always welcome in this office, Cathy."

She reached into her briefcase and pulled out a small piece of paper. Without a word, she placed it on the desk in front of him. He could see that it was a letter of credit. When he looked closely at it, he could see it was drawn on a numbered account and that it was for \$1,000,000.

"I want you to post bond for a client," she said, her eyes never leaving his face.

Elliot picked the draft up and studied it closely. He looked at her intently. He could tell she was not bluffing.

"Why me? Why can't you post this yourself?"

"It's for my client."

"I see. Who are you defending that you can afford to risk this much?"

"Alan Trescoe."

"The guy who killed Mark Ventura?"

"He didn't kill Ventura. They were both victims of a hate crime."

"That's not what the police seem to think."

"Authorities can be wrong." She leaned forward slightly, watching his face. "You should know that better than anyone."

He smiled at her, a light, laughing acknowledgement his only answer.

"I heard you left the DA's office. Are you sure you can afford this?" he said, holding the draft in his hand.

"I have no financial problems, Elliot. You seem to forget my father left a thriving law practice..."

"And just why are you doing this, Cathy?"

"I know he's innocent."

"And just how do you know that?"

"There was a witness. A witness I trust."

"What witness?"

"The same 'witness' who saved our lives at the waterfront two years ago."

He studied the draft for a long moment, then folded it and put it in his breast pocket. Leaning back in his massive leather chair, he studied her closely for a few moments. She seemed more tense than would be expected, like the cocked hammer of a pistol ready to explode. There were dark circles around her eyes that make-up could not disguise and a set to her jaw that he had never seen before. She seemed to be fighting to maintain a control that had once been natural, second-nature. He knew her well enough to know that there was more to this change than the Trescoe case.

"What happened to your career in public service?" he asked slowly.

She looked for any sign of scorn or sarcasm in his face -- there was none. "We disagreed."

"So Joe told me."

Her eyes widened a bit. Her voice broke slightly. "Joe came to see you?"

"We had a long talk. I've never seen Joe so solicitous of a man he despises. You'd have thought he was looking for a campaign contribution or a political endorsement." He smiled to himself, the impish smile that had so amused her in the early days of their relationship. "I had a good time."

"What did he want to know?"

"He asked me about you. About our relationship. About a man named Devin Wells, alias Jeff Radler, alias Derek Sanders, alias about ten other names."

Her tone grew icy. "What did you tell him?"

"The truth."

"What truth is that, Elliot?"

"The truth that anything I knew about you was none of his business – that our relationship was none of anyone's business -- and that I don't know a thing about Devin or Jeff or Derek or any of the other assorted names he threw at me. Then I showed him the door."

"Did he mention that he'd had me followed?"

Elliot shook his head slowly. "He said he was keeping an eye on you. He sounded concerned. I don't think he knows anything about the tunnels beneath the park."

She inclined her head slightly, hiding her eyes. "Thank you, Elliot"

"For what?"

"For keeping your word"

"It's a sad world where keeping one's word is considered out of the ordinary." He stood up, indicating their time together was exhausted. "I'll have the bail posted as soon as the preliminary hearing is over."

She rose and extended her hand. He took it tentatively and raised it to his lips. The kiss was soft, impersonal. At the door, she turned to him. "You're a good man, Elliot"

\*\*\*\*\*

It had taken her four days, but she had arranged bail for Alan Trescoe.

It had been a challenge from the start. The investigating officer had been of little help. He had dismissed Catherine's complaints about the interrogations with obvious disdain, claiming that there was no evidence of a witness to the crime, nor had any of the people awakened by the scream seen or heard anyone. She had insisted that the interrogation tape be made available to her, but she had learned little from it that Alan had not already told her. Only the manner of the questioning officers angered her. She had been in that chair before and knew firsthand how their questioning of Alan was different, less inquisitive, more accusatory, than her interrogation had been five years ago.

The preliminary hearing had been difficult. The judge hearing the case was a ruthless disciplinarian. He had accepted Alan's plea of 'Not Guilty' to the charges of murder in the First Degree and manslaughter in the Second Degree and set bail at \$500,000 cash or \$1 million in negotiable securities. Elliot had been as good as his word. There had been some questions by the district attorney representative as to the motive for such a high bail payment from someone with no history or connection to the defendant, but Catherine had strenuously objected that the question of motive for payment of bail was irrelevant. The judge had agreed, noting that there was little or no likelihood of flight. After hours of legal manoeuvring and dogfighting, the judge had set jury selection to begin in two weeks.

She had asked Alan if he might like to stay with a friend during the discovery process, but he had quickly refused.

"I want to go home, Cathy " he had said simply, in a tone that brooked no argument.

He had asked her why she had agreed to defend him so quickly. She had explained quietly that she believed in his innocence. When he asked about the mysterious stranger who had come to his aid, she deflected the topic subtly. She could only promise that, through his efforts, Alan would regain his freedom. She could not explain how that could be accomplished. She did not know that herself.

She had accompanied him home from Riker's Island after his bond had been posted, helping him avoid the beginnings of the media circus that she was certain would begin when news of his release spread. The spacious loft apartment was bathed in sunlight, lush with meticulously-maintained plants, adorned with beautifully sculpted pieces of marble and clay. There were fewer statues than she expected, more books, and a scruffy orange tabby cat that pretended to answer to the name 'Herkimer' and showered Alan with affection and cat hair in equal doses.

"Tell me about Mark," Cathy said, taking the cup of hot tea he prepared for her, his movements expert, focused, unhurried. He hesitated, stroking Herkimer and sighing deeply.

"I need to know. If it's too painful now, I'll understand."

"It's okay, Cathy. I had blessed days of solitary confinement to get rid of the worst of the hurt."

"How long were you together?"

"We were married..."

Catherine's gasp of surprise cut him short, and he smiled. "Yes, you heard me. Why are you surprised?"

"I didn't think it was possible here... not yet."

"Legally, no. But there are thousands of marriages performed every year of gay couples. You just aren't going to see it on The Family Channel unless it's part of a desperate plea for money to keep the hordes from the sanctified gates."

"I understand. I'm sorry."

He laughed aloud, Herkimer looking up quickly, then flopping back into his lap. "For what?"

"For....," She stopped, unable to explain why. "I guess for sounding so stupid."

"Forget it. When Mark asked me to marry him, I did the same thing."

"When was that?"

There was a pause, as if to store up energy for what was known to be a difficult journey. "We met upstate, at a summer seminar at Cornell. Have you ever been to Ithaca?"

"Yes. Several times. It's a beautiful place." She tried to catch herself, but failed.

"It was the year after... after I lost the use of my eyes. I was visiting a friend at college. I had just graduated, just written my first play. It was going to be produced that winter off-Broadway. I was really happy. Eager to get on with my life. I thought I would spend a quiet, relaxing summer on the lake, just soaking up sunshine and white wine. I ended up with Mark."

"How did you meet?"

"At an art show. Some of his work was on display at a gallery in Skaneateles. I was there with some friends. He saw me touching his statues -- he didn't understand why I had to touch them in order to see them. He was sure I was going to throw it against a wall or try to steal it or something. I couldn't really tell him, since every other word out of his mouth began with either 's' or 'f'. We got him calmed down and offered to take him out for dinner. Every guy there was coming on to him. I listened to them trying to out manoeuvre each other, enjoying every phony moment of it."

Catherine's laugh punctuated the smile that had found its way to Alan's face. "I understand completely. It can get pretty silly sometimes."

"He kept ending off every advance, verbally puncturing every bit of 'art babble' they threw at him. Finally, he said to me, 'What did you think of my work?'"

"What did you say?"

"I told him I thought it was adolescent, unfocused, more potential than actual. You could have heard a pin drop. The guy sitting next to me kicked my shin with his foot. I'm not sure why."

"What did Mark do?"

He fell silent for a moment, as if he were reliving the moment in his mind. His eyes seemed distant now catching a vision of their own. "He laughed. He kept laughing, longer and louder. Everybody thought he was drunk. Eventually he stopped and said 'Finally, an honest fairy!' I don't know how long the whooping and laughing went on, but it was quite a scene. He asked me out the next day. I spent the summer at his cottage on Cayuga Lake. In four months, we were together in a flat in the Village." He waved his hands to indicate the room they sat in. "That was sixteen years ago."

Catherine shook her head sadly. "None of my friends have stayed together that long."

"Mine either."

They laughed together. Herkimer rolled on his back, demanding his stomach be rubbed. Alan's hand lazily drew back and forth over the soft orange fur.

"Don't get the wrong impression, Cathy. We had our share of problems. There were times I wanted to throw every movable object in this place at Mark. He could be obstinate, pig-headed, vain. He could turn sullen very quickly. At times he found it difficult to deal with my blindness. Mark was very visual. It takes a while for me to form visual images with my hands and fingers. Patience was not one of Mark's virtues."

"What were his virtues?"

Alan thought for a few moments. "He was generous, intelligent, gifted. He was truly interested in my writing. He listened to me which was probably the most important of all. And he was always there for me. He was my protector."

"I understand," Catherine said softly.

"And he was so damn sexy... Oh, sorry, Cathy." She could see his cheeks turning the colour of the ball of fur in his lap.

She chuckled, the sound of it bringing on a hint of a smile in Alan. "That's okay I'm a big girl now, Alan. I know all the grown-up stuff."

"Like I said, we were married... as married as we could be given current law... in a ceremony at a local MCC chapter."

"MCC?" she asked.

"Metropolitan Community Church. It's a church for gay people and their friends and companions. We met their requirements, so we received approval and were married in 1979."

"What requirements?" she asked, genuinely interested and curious.

"We had to live together for one year, monogamously. We had to obtain sworn statements from three different individuals that we were a stable, loving couple. We had to have remained with the same employer or the same field for three years."

"Christ, if straight people had to do all that." she chuckled.

"There would be fewer divorces and screwed up families and children."

She noted the ring on his left index finger. "Did Mark give you the ring you wear?"

Alan nodded. He took it off slowly, handing it to her. She looked inside the band. There, engraved in tiny letters, was the phrase, 'WE SEE WHAT IS IMPORTANT'. A date appeared beneath it -- June 14, 1979. She handed it back to him. It was back on his finger in the same movement.

She explained to him that she wanted him to create a record of every disagreement, every fight as he could remember. She also asked for all the financial information available for as far back as he could remember. She demanded photos, letters, work histories, names and addresses of friends as well as any enemies he might be able to name.

"Do you still go to church?" she asked.

"No. Not for some time now."



"Can you get me the name of the minister who presided at the ceremony and the names of your friends who submitted the statements you needed?"

"No. The minister and two of the men are dead. I don't think I have to tell you why. The third friend died in Colorado during a skiing trip four years ago."

"It's okay, Alan. Just get me everything else I asked for. We'll need it."

She took their cups to the kitchen and rinsed them placing the white porcelain mugs in a strainer in the sink. She noted a special telephone mounted on the wall, with buttons whose function she could not guess. A red flashing light blinked incessantly on the side of the phone, and a big red '1' stood out in the display window.

"You have a message waiting!" she called from the kitchen.

"Hit the 'ANNOUNCE' button," he answered.

She pressed the button. There was a pause, then a man's voice filled the apartment. 'Your lover requests your presence tonight at the club for dinner and chess. We will take no prisoners. Call me at the studio before you leave.' A pause. 'I love you. Ciao' A click. Silence.

Alan had pulled Herkimer up to his chest with both hands, hugging him hard, his knees drawn up. He rubbed his face and eyes in the cat's fur.

Catherine walked to him slowly, sitting down next to him. "Alan, I..."

"Could we talk tomorrow, Cathy?" She caught traces of tears in his eyes. She thought the cat's fur might be the culprit, but she knew better. She gathered her coat and briefcase. "I want you to save that tape, Alan. It may be important later."

He stood up and walked with her to the door in silence. He pulled the door open for her slowly, then stood leaning against the jamb. "Do you think I could ever erase that tape!" He was looking directly at her, his smile gone.

She leaned forward and kissed him on the cheek, her hand on his shoulder for a moment of support. "I'll call you tomorrow."

As she walked slowly down the hallway, she could hear an unrestrained sob and a subdued meow from Herkimer.

\*\*\*\*\*

Darkness was falling when Catherine's cab pulled up in front of her building. The doorman rushed to open her door for her as he always did. She passed him two singles as she always did, his tip of his cap and a slight bow to her a silent thank you.

"Oh, Miss Chandler!" She turned.

"Someone asked about you a few minutes ago. He's waiting for you inside."

"Did he give you a name?"

"John Moreno."

"Thanks." she threw over her shoulder, rushing through the door before he could open it for her.

The elevator arrived just as she was about to press the button. The ride to the eighteenth floor was over in seconds. The doors opened slowly, her shoulder smashing into the door guards as she forced her way from the car. She burst around the corner, to find John sitting in the decorative chair in the hallway outside her door, reading the evening paper. At the sound of her approach, he had lowered the pages. His expression was friendly, but there was more there that she could not read. He had never come to her apartment before.

"John!" she said breathlessly. "What are you doing here?"

He folded the paper quickly and stood up, his head tilted to one side, as if he were certain she knew the purpose of his visit and was slightly annoyed at having to play a game he felt was unnecessary.

"Got any coffee, Cathy? Joe tells me you make an excellent cup of coffee."

She pulled the key from her briefcase and thrust it into the lock, her mind racing now. 'Watch out,' she heard herself say, over and over. 'Act naturally.'

"Come in," she heard herself saying, more calmly than she would have thought possible.

She offered him a seat, then vanished into the kitchen to prepare a tray. The task of preparing the coffee and the tray served to keep her hands steady, but she noticed that it was difficult to keep the coffee in the mugs as she took the tray to the living room. This man was a friend but he could also be a source of more danger than Joe. In his desire to know, and with his professional power, he could instigate an investigation that would be difficult to counter. He could expose her link to the Tunnel World, given time. She knew now that this would be her chance to buy more of that valuable commodity -- a chance to undo what Devin's careless words had done.

She placed the tray carefully on the table and poured them each a cup, her hands steadier now. John took a sip and smiled.

"Joe was right."

"Thanks. Joe always was a good judge of coffee."

"And of character?"

She smiled. "Even better."

"Then you understand the position I'm in." He looked at her but could read nothing in her smile nor in her eyes. There was no strain evident in her face, in her gestures, in her voice. She was looking at him attentively, waiting.

"Joe is digging deeper than I would have liked, Cathy, but he seems certain that Devin was hiding a criminal past -- and that you're sheltering him now. It's tenuous, but there's enough there to keep him moving. Every question answered brings up two more."

"I thought I explained you in my resignation letter, John. My private life is private. I took an oath when you hired me, John. I don't engage in criminal activity. I don't shelter anyone who does. If Joe can't believe that, there's nothing I can do."

"Joe thinks you're lying."

"That's his prerogative."

"I know. I don't think you're lying, Cathy. But I *do* think you're hiding something that affected your duties as an assistant district attorney. I don't think you're a criminal, Cathy, but I think Devin was -- and I think he may be using you."

"Devin is a friend, John. What he does when he's away from me is his own concern."

"No, Cathy. After the stunt he pulled, it's *our* business. It will be until we're satisfied that he's done nothing to put you or our department at risk."

"Isn't that superfluous, John? I've resigned. I haven't seen Devin in weeks. I have a new job to do that has nothing to do with either you or Joe. How can any of this matter now?"

"Well, you're mostly correct there, Cathy. I'm afraid that your new job *does* have something to do with Joe."

"What are you talking about, John?" she said quickly. He merely sat and took another sip of coffee giving her time to consider his words. Slowly, a look of disbelief came over her face. She could hardly speak. "You don't mean that Joe.... You didn't assign him to the Trescoe prosecution!!"

John returned the empty cup to its saucer and the saucer to the tray, his eyes never leaving Catherine's face.

She could only stare at him. "Why, John?"

"This is going to be a major case, Cathy. Lots of media attention. Press everywhere. I owed Joe for pulling him off the Nolen prosecution. I didn't suspect that you were going to be defending the guy".

"Can't you reassign?"

"No way. Joe is it on this one."

"You understand that Joe is investigating me in his spare time..."

"On his own, with no department approval or assistance, Catherine. Remember that"

"Do you really think that's ethical, John? An attorney investigating his opponent when the discovery phase of a major trial is just beginning? Do you really expect me to be able to act in a professional manner?"

John stood up slowly, gathering his coat and his newspaper. "I expect you to act as professionally in this matter as you always did as my best assistant DA."

She wasn't certain whether this was intended as a rebuke or a compliment until she looked at his face carefully. There was regret there, and a sense of pride. For a moment she felt guilty that he had to suffer for Joe's actions.

"I wish it could be different, John. I wish..."

"Look, Cathy. I don't agree with what Joe is doing. I can't tell him what he can do on his own time. I'll see that he doesn't use the District Attorney's office as a tool, but I do have to back him in this prosecution. I just wanted to warn you what you would be up against. You may want to think about help in this one, Cathy. Joe may see this as a stepping-stone to better things."

"Do you think Alan Trescoe is guilty, John?"

He stood by the door. He put his hand on the knob, then turned to her. "Joe believes he is That's what matters. Please keep in touch, Cathy," he said sadly, pulling the door shut behind him.

\*\*\*\*\*

Vincent's sleep had been fitful brief periods of restfulness punctuated by long stretches of restlessness. The air in his chamber seemed thick and oppressive. Slowly, he opened his eyes, then jerked awake. A candle was burning on his desk. A shadowed figure as sitting in the chair next to his bed.

"Catherine..." he said, exhaling quickly his heart racing. "You startled me."

She did not answer. He sat up quickly, concerned. "What is it?"

The silence went unbroken. Looking more closely, he could see that her cheeks were glistening. He understood. Sitting up, he slowly reached for her.

She moved to the bed, sitting on the edge and melting into his arms, the shaking of her shoulders the only sign of the struggle going on within her. Her arms did not respond, did not move to embrace him. She seemed limp, listless, almost like a child's doll.

"I wanted to see you tonight, Vincent. Just see you. I didn't mean to wake you."

"You didn't," he whispered into her hair, caressing her gently.

He drew back, his arms holding onto her shoulders, his grasp gentle, but firm. She seemed calmer now, her tears had stopped.

"It's been difficult. First losing Devin, now this trial". She paused. "John Moreno came to see me tonight."

"The District Attorney?"

"Yes. He told me that Joe is going to act as prosecuting attorney against Alan."

Vincent shook his head slowly, his eyes lowered. "I see. Did he say why?"

She shook her head, not wanting to explain the politics and the career implications of his reasoning. She wanted to keep the ways of the world above as far from this place as she could. Ambition realized through controversial cases, professional climbing through prosecution of an innocent man -- these were concepts she knew Vincent would never understand.

"Perhaps John is smarter than you give him credit for, Catherine."

She looked at him, her glance curious, questioning. "What do you mean?"

"He knows that your anger at Joe is strong. This will give you a chance to release it constructively. What better opportunity to prove your strength than to fight him in a court of law. "

"I hadn't thought of that. If he wanted to choose someone I'll fight every step of the way, he couldn't have made a wiser choice."

"Does he think Alan is guilty?"

"I asked him that. He wouldn't answer me, but I think he thinks there's more to the case than the police are saying."

"What about Joe?"

"I know he's still digging. I'm being very careful above. He won't be able to follow me. Our building is completely secure. He would need a search warrant to set up surveillance and Moreno won't let him go that far."

"You 'll have to see him soon, won't you?"

"Yes. The discovery process begins in a few days."

"What about Alan. What are you going to tell him?"

"About you?"

"About why I cannot be there to testify on his behalf."

"I hadn't thought of that. What can I say to him that he can possibly understand? He knows that you know me."

"Not really. He knows that I know you. There's a difference."

She shook her head in reply to the unstated suggestion in his words. "I won't lie to him, Vincent. He's already been mistreated by the police. I'm not going to make things worse."

"How will you defend him, Catherine?"

"As honestly and competently as I can."

"Will that be enough?"

She stood up quickly, walking to the desk, the candlelight momentarily obscured by her shadow playing across the chamber wall. "I don't know. I haven't seen what Joe has come up with against Alan. From what Alan told me, there isn't anything to find."

"I wish there was someone above who could help you."

A strange look came over her face, half-visible in the darkness. "Maybe there is."

\*\*\*\*\*

Sunlight touched the top of the trees, cutting great diagonal swaths of yellow and black against the brilliant blue of the sky. A light snow had fallen during the night -- not enough to cover everything in a mantle of white - only enough to coat the treetops, the windshields, the great awnings of the buildings. The wind had died with the storm, leaving the air cold and invigorating. Great clouds came from the grates on the street, from the exhausts of cars and the mouths of pedestrians. The chill made the morning seem cleaner.

Catherine swung her car into the early morning traffic heading north. There were few cars this early on a Saturday. She made her way easily to Interstate 95, headed across the Triborough Bridge, then swung north into Connecticut. A thick bundle of folders lay on the seat beside her, along with her purse and a small package exquisitely wrapped with silver foil and white ribbon.

As the miles accumulated behind her the buildings fell away, replaced by acres of trees, clear blue lakes, rolling hills. There were lawns here and there, stretches of small farms and neat orderly rows of houses and streets. The countryside seemed to rush at her from both sides of the car, the twisting country road ahead of her free of traffic.

Faint wisps of memory were clouding her thoughts now, an occasional vista rekindling thoughts of a childhood spent in this place. She passed the spires of familiar churches, the battered, weather-worn fruit and vegetable stands where, as a little girl, she had traded her precious hoard of quarters for bags of apples and plastic glasses of cold, tangy cider. There were still leaves on a few of the trees, but their

desperate grasp on their branches doomed to be broken by the gales to come. There was green here too, the stands of pine seeming out of place, surrounded by their seemingly dead and dying brothers. Their needles had caught the same snow as the city, tracing the shapes of the branches in intricate white patterns.

She passed through the small town where she had grown up. She passed the familiar landmarks without stopping -- the house where she had lived for eighteen years, the schools where she had forged her childhood friendships, the tiny shops where jars of penny candy and trays of chocolate chip cookies still wove their spell over young and old alike. She did not stop.

A few miles beyond the village square, the road shot upwards to a ridge of sandstone cliffs, the bare rock visible through the branches of the trees. As she neared an overlook point, the clean, varnished shape of a modern redwood home shone through the dark stand of trees standing against the sky beyond and below the cliff. Catherine swung the car carefully onto the dirt road that led from the road towards the house, shielding her eyes against the sun that filled the sky beyond the trees. She pulled the car next to a red Porsche parked outside a garage made of the same clean redwood. The last traces of snow were melting now.

She stepped from the car, careful not to drop anything on the still-damp ground. The earth was matted with brown pine needles and the crisp smell of burning logs filled the morning air. Faint wisps of smoke came from a small chimney. As she moved up the flagstone sidewalk towards the door, it opened slowly and a man stepped onto the raised porch. She stopped short.

The man was rugged-looking, dark brown hair going to slight grey at the temples framing a deeply tanned, handsome face. He was dressed casually, faded denim jeans and a white t-shirt under a worn denim jacket. A cigarette dangled casually from one hand, a spatula from the other.

"Hi, Chandler."

She smiled in return. "Hi, Dayce."

She climbed the remaining steps, her eyes never leaving his face. She stopped in the open doorway, studying him intently. "You look terrific. Even with the moustache."

"I remember you never liked men with facial hair."

She laughed, throwing her free arm around him affectionately. He returned the embrace careful not to let the spatula or the cigarette inflict any damage to her expensive coat. He escorted her inside, closing the door softly behind them. She revelled in the warmth of the fire in the massive fireplace and in the smell of home cooking.

"Don't tell me how long it's been."

"Five years, Chandler." She shot a mock glare at him, an innocent smile his only answer.

"You're just in time for a late breakfast, as usual. Join me."

"You got enough meals at our place to last a lifetime. It's payback time."

She set the briefcase on a chair in the living room and looked around. The cavernous room was sparsely furnished, but each piece was perfectly suited to its location and to the other pieces in the room. There was a leather sofa with solid oak trim, two hand-carved wood chairs, a media centre formed of fragile metal bracing and clear glass shelving. The walls were covered with elegant watercolours. In a corner of the room near the fire place stood a marble statue. She recognized the statue as a work by Mark Ventura. Numerous hanging plants filled the rafters overhead, an occasional skylight filling the rafters with a golden glow of reflected wood.

She followed him into the kitchen, a massive pedestal oak table with six chairs the only touch of rusticity. All else was modern, from the quartz-burner stove to the microwave, from the black glass-doored refrigerator to the metallic shelves. The door swung shut behind them, the solid oak of the side facing the living room a stark contrast to the white ceramic that faced her now. She opened the door to study the other side, then closed it softly behind her, a look of amazement on her face.

"Custom-made. I like to maintain proper decor," he answered in reply to her unstated question.

"I don't think I've ever seen a door like this before," she said.

"Christian made it six years ago. Took quite a long time. I remember we only had two or three knock-down, drag-out fights while he was working on it"

He put a fresh cup of coffee in front of her, a simple white ceramic mug like the ones found in old diners and elegant kitchen shops. She took a sip eagerly. She had forgotten how hungry she was until she caught the aroma of food cooking. She watched as he expertly cracked eggs, sliced bacon, chopped vegetables, squeezed oranges -- seemingly simultaneously.

"Who taught you to do that?"

"I did." He turned to her, his expression jocular. "Remember, Chandler, I taught myself everything I know."

"Didn't Christian teach you anything?"

"Yeah. To live alone."

"You're still hopeless, Dayce. I think I said that to you the last time I saw you."

"I'm not hopeless, Chandler. I'm happy. I'm just not happy doing things your way."

"And what way is that?"

He turned, fixing her with a steely glare. "The right way."

She stood up casually, joining him at the stove. She watched as he resumed his work. There was an economy to his movements, an ease which made a few simple moves appear to accomplish more than she thought possible. She understood now why she had always loved this man, even as a child. No



matter what he chose to do, he was able to focus his energies on his one chosen task, to the exclusion of all else, and to shape the individual parts of the task into a logical whole. Whether it was the construction of a tree fort, the erection of a lemonade stand, the design and construction of the house around them, the achievement of a degree in law, the preparation of a simple meal -- the forms did not matter to him, the act of achieving them were his most eloquent expression of self -- a supremely self-confident and strong self that sought no permission or justification to act. Whatever she thought of his past, this man was the one image called to mind when she thought of what it meant to be man.

They ate at a leisurely pace, speaking of their childhood spent in these forested hills, of people they had grown up with, then apart from. She discovered that he was one of only a few classmates who had chosen to remain in the wilds of north-western Connecticut -- the rest having fled to the cities, to the jobs their social position seemed to demand. She was certain that Dayce was happier for having stayed behind. She felt a tinge of jealousy for his choice, for his happiness.

"You never told me why you asked me to the senior prom," she said, finishing the last of her omelette.

"I liked you."

That was part of the key to him, she thought. Anyone else would expound for long minutes on all the usual reasons why anyone asked anyone else to a social event, the truth interspersed with polite lies and evasions. Only this man would answer her honestly simply, with no thought to the accepted or the expected.'

"You must admit, it must have been difficult for you. Didn't you think I might have had more in mind than a simple walk along the road and a goodnight kiss on the hand?"

He laughed. "Not at all. It was one of the nicest nights of my life. No sexual pressure. No expectations beyond a wonderful evening's talk with someone I loved. Why should it have been difficult? You knew I was gay."

"But you didn't know that at the time."

He looked at her as a teacher looks at a prized pupil who hastily spouts an incorrect answer to a question. She knew that he knew she was lying.

"All right, I admit I knew."

"Of course you did. That's why you agreed to go. You weren't really interested in that other kind of evening you felt you were expected to want"

This was another key to him, she thought -- a key that explained their unusual friendship. He had found in her a kindred spirit, someone who could conform to social norms only to the extent that was required for survival. He had sensed in her rebelliousness against convention like his own, though not as strong. Whatever their conflicts with each other, they stood together against a world they found too conventional, too restrictive.

Dayce cleared the breakfast dishes away, poured them each a fresh cup of coffee and led her to the living room. She sat on the sofa near her briefcase, looking around quickly for a place to set her mug. She pulled a magazine closer to her and set the hot mug on it, Dayce flopped into an easy chair, one leg thrown insolently up over the arm.

She took the tiny package from the briefcase and slowly extended her hand towards him. He looked at the gaily wrapped package for a moment and smiled, then reached forward for it. He unwrapped it carefully, not ripping at the paper but unfolding it carefully. Catherine watched him, the incongruity striking her suddenly. The sight of this ruggedly built, muscular man treating the package as if it were a lace doily amused her. She laughed softly as he finished freeing the paper and removed the bow. He looked up at her, smiling impishly. His expression was that of a child on Christmas morning.

He opened the package slowly, then tossed the lid on the coffee table and lifted the square of cotton that served to protect the object inside the box.

He glanced up at her, a look of surprise on his face. "This is beautiful, Chandler. Thank you." He lifted the old bracelet from the box and clasped it around his wrist slowly. The polished links stood in sharp contrast to the dark tan of his skin, the black hair of his lower arm.

"I felt it might make up for the infrequency of my letters these past five years. I'm truly sorry for that."

"It doesn't, but it cushions the disappointment."

"Good. Anyway, if you agree to my request, we'll be spending a lot of time together."

"I knew there was an ulterior motive behind your visit." he said, his tone self-congratulatory, as if he were keeping score on himself and could mark off another correct answer. "What can I do for you, Chandler?"

She reached for her briefcase, pulling a thick folder from it. She handed it to Dayce. He sat back and perused the first sheets slowly. It seemed that he had known almost immediately what she was going to ask of him.

"I was sorry to hear about Mark Ventura." He nodded to the statue in the corner. "That's one of his works. I've always admired his form of expression."

"I have one of his works, too. He was very talented." She paused. "Did you know he was gay?"

He chuckled. "We all knew he was gay. Mark wasn't exactly Mr Discretion. Especially in the early days. He was..."

Suddenly he understood. He closed the file and threw his head back, his laughter filling the room, echoing off the ceiling. It went on for many long seconds.

"God, Chandler, I never knew my sleazy past would come back to haunt me through you!" His laughter returned, though more subdued. "And you said those years were wasted."

"I never said it was sleazy."

"Of course not. Not directly. Only in your tone and your expression when you found out."

"It wasn't for me to judge you, Dayce."

"You're damn right about that. You seem to forget a few things." He rose and walked to the fireplace, throwing another log on the dying flames and bringing the fire to life again. The flame rose with his anger. "I wanted to be a lawyer more than anything. There was nothing else to be done. I didn't have mommy and daddy to foot the bills for private colleges and room and board, I had a mind and a body and I used both to full advantage.

Columbia wanted my mind and half the men in Manhattan wanted my body." He turned, his expression softer once he caught sight of Catherine's face. So we all got what we wanted. I got my degree and the reputation as the best male hustler in New York City."

"I'm sorry, Dayce. I know how painful it was for you that summer."

"That summer? It was sheer hell for seven long years. It was sex and books, eighteen to twenty hours a day, without letup. Some of the books I found useful. Some of the men I found interesting. But most of it was torture."

"You know that my father would have helped you."

He glared at her. "You know better than that, old friend. Maybe some people can accept charity and live with themselves. I'm not one of them."

"I'm sorry. I didn't want to get you angry. That's not why I'm here."

His face softened. "Why are you here, Cathy?" The softened sound of her first name, pronounced by him for the first time, told her the worst was over... for now.

"I'm defending his lover."

"Alan? What's he charged with?"

"Murder, first. Manslaughter, second"

Dayce looked at her as if she had just uttered the most ridiculous fiction she could devise as a statement of fact "That's absurd. Alan worshipped Mark."

"I believe that but the circumstances of his arrest are going to be difficult to overcome. Leaning over the body, the bloody knife next to him, covered with his fingerprints."

"No witnesses?"

She considered for a moment. "None that we can use."

"What the hell does *that* mean?"

"It means that we can't use the only witness. His testimony would be too easily impeached. Anyway, he can't come forward. He'd be at personal risk.

"A felon?"

"No. Let's just say that it would place him in great jeopardy. I can't force him to appear. I wouldn't if I could."

"So what are you going to rely on? Character witnesses? Background?"

"Yes. I can't figure out what they're going to use as motive. I still haven't questioned Alan thoroughly. There may be something we don't know."

"Why me, Cathy? How can I help?"

"I'm not experienced in individual defence. You are. You and Alan are both gay. I know it shouldn't make a difference, but you and I both know that it does. You would know the questions to ask the areas to explore, the avenues to follow that I wouldn't think of. You can also gather information from sources that I can't reach."

He was looking at her, nodding slightly at each statement.

"And I trust you completely," she added.

He looked down at the folder. "Give me an hour or so to read this. Why not go walk the ridge, like we used to. I'll let you know after I read this."

She nodded, pulling her parka on and heading for the back door slowly. She stopped by the chair and bent down to kiss him on the top of the head, a wordless 'thank you'. He reached up and squeezed her hand gently, the gold bands of her gift glinting in the light of the flames behind them.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dead leaves were everywhere, their crunch magnified by the brown pine needles and the crispness of the late morning air. Her breath went white in front of her, the chill magnified as she approached the ridge behind Dayce's house. She thrust her hands deep into her parka coat pockets, protection against the persistent updraft that haunted the overlook.

The trees ended abruptly, the deep blue of the sky filling the space above and ahead of her. She stopped close to the edge, the withered grass reaching to her knees, whipping against her legs. There were rocks scattered along the ridge, some flattened intentionally to serve as makeshift benches. She moved slowly to a large, flat stone near the edge of the precipice that marked the spot where ground met sky. She pushed the remnants of the previous night's snow flurry from the rock and sat facing the valley spread out before her.

The panorama was a montage of late fall and early winter colours, blended haphazardly. The dull grey of the tree limbs stood in dull contrast to the patches of yellow and orange scattered here and there in random pools of colour, like pieces of candy corn scattered on the ground. She could spot several small ponds, their water dark blue against the spread of grey, their shorelines traced in white stone. Some of the dark patches moved quickly across the tapestry, the shadows of the low clouds like transparent waves.

A hundred feet below her the trees tended to pine, their green branches an affront to the forests beyond and the stone face that towered over them. Catherine stood slowly, taking a large stone from near her foot and dropping it off the edge. She watched as it shrunk to pebble-size, counting the seconds before it joined the piles of cracked and jagged rock below. She got nearly to three before the echo rang up to her and out over the valley. She remembered the last time she had stood here, - the last stone she had watched fall from this cliff...

"It is not!" she said hotly. She could be headstrong when she knew she was right. The young man looked at her insolently. She hated it when he looked at her like that, his face seeming to relish and ridicule her at the same time. "I say it is. I can prove it."

"How?"

He grabbed a large rock and stood at the precipice. Turning to her, he ordered her to count the number of seconds on her watch after he said the word "Go". She glanced at her watch, amused. She heard his shouted command and watched the rock disappear over the edge. When she heard his insistent "Stop!", she looked up.

"Not quite three seconds."

He appeared lost in thought for a moment He smiled. "Then it's over 100 feet. The rock accelerated at 32 feet per second per second. So one second is 32 feet, two seconds is 96 feet, so almost three seconds means it's over 150 feet - probably close to 200 feet..."

She shrugged. "All right I give up."

"You always do, Chandler. Too easily."

They sat together on the flat stone bench, the sun just topping the trees on the distant horizon. There were still stars visible in the sky above and behind them, but they were dying rapidly in the onslaught of morning. The morning calls of birds filled the forest around them, the thick green branches alive with song. Now and then, a dark, winged shape would flutter over and past them, lifted on the updrafts from the valley below.

Catherine gazed at the man beside her, still in awe of him. She was drawn and repelled at the same time, drawn by his intelligence and his independence and his honesty, repelled by the choices he had made to achieve his life's goal. No, not repelled, but afraid, afraid and helpless in the face of what she could not understand. She caught the deep hues of green in his eyes, the sharp white of his smile. He was as she would have envisioned the perfect man, and as unreachable as the last of the stars flickering out overhead. She had buried the pain of that realization long ago, only an occasional ember flickering to life inside her, to die as rapidly.

"It was a beautiful service, Dayce. I've never been to a night funeral before."

"It's what Christian wanted."

She put her arm around him slowly, rocking him gently, playfully. "How are you holding up?"

He returned the embrace playfully. "Fine. It wasn't exactly unexpected."

"I didn't see his parents there. Or yours..."

"You never will. Not ever again."

"There's no chance of a reconciliation?"

"None whatever. They made their choice years ago. I don't even know if they're still alive. And could care less."

"What about his parents. What was their excuse?"

"I never thought you needed an excuse when AIDS is concerned. Maybe they were afraid to breathe the same air as the rest of us. His parents are carbon copies of mine. They deserve each other."

"I'm sorry, Dayce. I wish things could have been different. I can't understand human beings who could do such things to their own children."

"You were lucky, Chandler. Don't ever forget that."

She held him closer, her head resting on his shoulder. "I know."

They were silent for several minutes, the line of dawn creeping across the floor of the valley towards the cliffs.

"What will you do now?"

She could feel him exhale softly, his chest rising quickly, then falling. "What I've always done. Take on a few new clients. Finish the house. Maybe finish the book I always wanted to write." He looked down at her. "I'll keep busy."

"You're going to stay here?"

"Of course. This is my home."

"I thought it might be hard to stay here, what with the memories."

"We built this place from scratch. I'll never leave here, not while I'm alive."

Catherine looked out over the valley, now awash with colour and light. "I just want you to be happy, Dayce."

He squeezed her shoulder with his hand, drawing her closer to him. "I will be, Cathy. As long as I have friends like you." ...

"Chandler!"

The sound of it came from just over her shoulder, shocking her back to the present. She turned quickly. Dayce stood towering over her, a strange look on his face.

"I've been calling you for fifteen minutes. I thought you'd fallen."

She shook her head slowly. "I was just thinking of the last time we sat here."

He sat down beside her, a white scarf thrown around his neck, thick rawhide gloves drawn over his hands.

"I think it was the day we buried Christian."

"Yes."

"You know, there are nights in late fall when I swear I can hear his voice in the winds up here."

Catherine sensed for the first time some vulnerability, some part of him that had not healed nor been buried so deep that she could not reach it. "You miss him, don't you?"

He nodded. "Sometimes. Mostly on days like this. He'd take a break from his drafting and I would throw the depositions aside and we'd walk these cliffs like the two of us did when we were kids. It was the only time I really felt comfortable with any man in my life. He really understood me, maybe better than you do. He never threw my past in my face. God knows I gave him ample opportunity to do it. He was smart enough to know when I wanted to be apart and secure enough to understand that it wasn't meant to hurt him." He stood up, tossing a few rocks casually over the rim, not looking at her. "He was the only thing I ever loved, Cathy. Except you."

She stood and walked to him, embracing him warmly, her touch light, her smile accepting. "I love you too, Dayce. I always have."

He pulled back, fixing her with a mock glare. "If you dare say anything about it being a shame..."

She laughed. "I won't. I promise."

He turned and guided her back towards the house, their arms remaining locked around each other's waist. "Come on back inside. I have some questions for you if we're going to defend Alan Trescoe."

\*\*\*\*\*

Dayce's study was a light wood-filled room of bookshelves and computer paraphernalia. There were rows and rows of shelves, crammed with books. There were law books, case books, modern novels, classic anthologies, bound leather volumes of Shakespeare and Milton and Proust. There were watercolours on the walls, two reproductions of Wyeth paintings including her favourite, 'Christina's World', and two modern posters of the winner of the Mr Universe Contest from the past two years.

Dayce plopped casually into a cushioned oak chair, one leg thrown over the armrest as was his custom. In front of him was the folder that Catherine had given him, a high end Macintosh computer, and various pieces of peripheral equipment. She could see that the modem was active, the screen of the computer alive with a colour menu from an information service she did not recognize. She pulled a small wicker stool next to him and sat down, pulling her coat and gloves off throwing them on the other chair.

"What's this?"

"IDNetwork. I'm just doing some preliminary work on Alan and Mark. I want to see if any surprises are waiting for us."

"Us?"

"Us. Let's see if it's going to be difficult"

He punched in Alan Trescoe's name and social security number. The modem lights flashed a few times, the screen apparently frozen. After a few seconds, the letters NR appeared at the base of the screen.

"No Record. Good. Now let's see about Mark."

He entered Mark Ventura's personal information and pressed the 'ENTER' key. The wait was longer this time, the activity lights flashing sporadically. Eventually, the screen went blank and a new screen was drawn before them with a list of Mark Ventura's background. The sight was not a pretty one.

---

Ventura, Mark Donald  
156-76-9980 23Xcf556792S45.00001121DFD

---

|          |                    |  |
|----------|--------------------|--|
| 7/4/77   | DWI                | 1 yr. probation  |
| 9/1/78   | DWI                | license susp   |
| 2/1/80   | ASSAULT            | charge dropped   |
| 4/8/85   | ASSAULT            | 2 yr. probation  |
| 10/10/88 | AGGRAVATED ASSAULT | 30 days jail<br>(suspended)<br>\$1000 fine<br>5 yr probation |

\*\*\*\*\*EOF EOF EOF EOF EOF EOF EOF EOF EOF EOF EOF\*\*\*\*\*

---



Dayce sighed heavily. "This isn't going to be easy."

"We need to ask Alan about these."

"I'll wager the DWI's are from his early twenties, just after college. The assaults are probably encounters with gay-bashers. It's the aggravated assault that piques my interest."

"Alan told me that Mark was volatile. He never mentioned these cases."

"I'll get onto INFONET and try to get the particulars of these cases. It's going to be tough ."

"When can you come to the city?"

"I'll drive back with you tonight. Let's get started."

# The Consummation

Dayce followed Catherine into her apartment, setting his bulging leather bags on the floor and hanging his suit transport on the brass coat rack. He loosened the scarf around his neck and paused just inside the door, just studying the apartment carefully. He then spent several minutes walking through the rooms, looking at the artwork, the furnishings, the books, the records. He spent a few moments on the balcony looking out over the city and the black, unlit expanse of Central Park, but the wind and cold drove quickly back inside the apartment. Catherine stood quietly near the door to the kitchen watching as he familiarized himself with her home.

He sat on one of the sofas casually, unzipping his cashmere jacket and pulling his gloves off carefully. "You do have coffee, I assume?" he said.

"You assume correctly. Give me a minute."

She vanished into the kitchen. Midway through her preparation, she heard the strains of a Brahms waltz wafting quietly from the living room. She smiled to herself. Dayce had found the stereo and her CD's. She remembered how much he hated the 'annoying din of a quiet room,' as he was fond of saying. She was grateful that he shared her love of classical music.

"I admire your taste!" she said loudly enough for him to hear through the closed door.

She finished putting the tray together, adding the touch of a vase of white carnations from the kitchen table. She backed through the door, setting the tray on the coffee table and sitting opposite him. He poured them each a cup, adding milk and sugar to his own, just milk to hers.

"You remembered," she said, taking the mug from him.

He smiled. "You still have the best taste of any woman I know, Chandler." She knew what was coming next. "Of course, that number is fairly small."

She picked up a sugar cube from the tray and threw it at him playfully.

"I notice you have a Ventura statue yourself," he said, his glance falling on a figurine on one of her glass étagère's. "He was a genius. When did you first hear of his work?"

"Just after college. My father took me to an exhibition of up-and-coming artist down in SoHo. I saw his work and fell in love with it at once. I was drawn to that one. I couldn't stop looking at it" The statue was of a naked tree, a cat lazing sleepily on one of its lower branches, a dark hole halfway up the trunk, home to a barely-visible squirrel inside. A distinctive, brazen 'MV' stood out on the base of the statue.

The sounds of the joyous melody built around them. They relaxed easily into the music and into the quiet enjoyment of the moment. They were silent for a long time, the final strains of the music fading away slowly and breaking their silence with its own.

"Nice," he said softly, lifting his head slowly. He walked to the stereo and found the "MUTE" button, cutting off the opening crescendo of the next piece. "So when do we talk to Alan?"

"Tomorrow evening. He's making dinner for us. Or so he told me."

"Sounds like a talented man."

"He says he's been cooking for two years. Says Mark couldn't defrost a vegetable if the instructions were written on a sauna mirror!"

"I believe him."

He fell silent for a moment, then sat on the sofa next to her. He looked at her directly no pretence in his eyes, no sign of mercy in his features. "I have a question for you, Chandler, and I want the truth. All of it. Up front." He paused for a moment as she nodded. "Why did you ask me to help you in this case? What can I do for you that you can't do for yourself?"

She did not break eye contact, did not protest vainly that her only motive was friendship or his superior ability as a trial lawyer. She knew she owed him the truth.

"You have experience in the gay community in this city. I don't. You may have had... experiences with people involved in the defence or the prosecution. You know a lot of people who exist on the edge of the law. I don't." She kept watching his face for some reaction, some sign that her words were reaching him on some level. His expression did not change. "You've lived in a world I can't understand, a society I can't enter without your help. Alan is a part of that world. So was Mark." She paused. She knew she had to say what he wanted her to say. "I never tried to understand your world, Dayce. I never thought I needed to. I was wrong. You've had to survive in my kind of world all your life, you and Alan and Mark and every other gay man and woman. You didn't ask for that. It was as if it was expected of you. Now I need to enter your world, your way of life - and I'm not equipped to do it. I'm as blind in your world as Alan is in ours. You're the only guide I have." Her tone was just calm, with no trace of pleading. "And you're the only person I trust right now."

He looked at her, his expression calm, his features melting into a placid acceptance of her explanation.

"Looks like we have a dinner date tomorrow night, Chandler."

\*\*\*\*\*

The green flicker of the computer screen was the brighter light source in the room, a feeble white glow from a reading lamp on the desk lost in the phosphorescence. A craggy, salt-and-pepper haired man sat at the console, placing newspaper photographs on a scanning machine and feeding the images into the computer. It took nearly a minute for the images to appear on the right side of the screen, rendered in perfect greyscale. It took another two minutes for the computer to analyse the scanned image against the photograph of Devin Wells on the left side of the screen. With each photograph, the screen matched the graphic lines and vectors of facial features into a percentage match calculation. The results had been disappointing for the past two weeks. Endless fourteen hour days had brought no results.

It was late when a scanned image analysis brought the computer to life. The newspaper was dated May 29, 1953. The photograph was from a story on page two of a New York daily. The image was large enough for analysis and carried a brief caption. The graphic and vector analysis lines were brought together to form overlapping collections of lines, the two images nearly indistinguishable. The computer beeped relentlessly, the screen flashing a relentless message:

MATCH CERTAINTY: 96.445%  
 MATCH CERTAINTY: 96.445%  
 MATCH CERTAINTY: 96.445%

MATCH CERTAINTY: 96.445%

MATCH CERTAINTY: 96.445%

The man selected a command from one of the menus. Instantly, a laser printer sprang to life, producing a perfect image of the scanned face and the result of the data analysis. He entered a name beneath the scanned image on the printout:

JACOB WELLS

He picked up the phone on his desk and quickly dialled a number.

“Joe? It’s Tenzia. We’ve found a match.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Dayce wrote quickly in a small spiral notebook, noting the name beside each mailbox in the lobby of Alan’s building. There were only six other living spaces in the building, four apartments and another loft that mirrored Alan’s, separated by a wall of red brick.

“What’s that for?”

“I have my reasons. If anyone has anything to hide before we question them. I want to know it.”

“We’ll certainly find that out during the discovery phase, Dayce.”

“I have files that Joe *doesn’t* have, Chandler.”

They were silent during the ride up to Alan’s loft, the elevator fairly clean, but poorly lit – a low-wattage bulb struggling valiantly to overcome the gloom. There were cigarette butts on the floor, along with bits of paper and assorted indistinguishable bits in the corners.

“Lousy maintenance.” Catherine said, trying to avoid looking down.

It took the ancient mechanism a long time to reach the sixth floor. The unmistakable sound of steel cables straining against weight and age filled the car. They were grateful when the light went off behind the ‘6’ and the doors clattered open. They stepped off slightly faster than normal.

They were assaulted by the aroma as soon as they turned towards Alan’s loft, the smell of tomato sauce and a combination of herbs they could only guess. It grew stronger as they approached his door.

“I told you.” she said.

Alan opened the door as Dayce reached to knock. He was wearing faded cut-off jeans and a Hawaiian shirt, an apron covering his waist and thighs, small red smears on the front. He held a wooden spoon in one hand, half-coated with sauce.

“I need an opinion,” he said easily.

They looked at each other uncertainly, then Dayce shrugged and leaned forward and took the sauce into his mouth. Catherine noticed that he instinctively reached for Alan’s hand to steady it. The reaction was swift.

“It’s sensational.”

“You must be Dayce.”

“Alan, may I present Dayce DiCenzo? Dayce, Alan Trescoe.”

Alan smiled in their general direction, stepping back quickly. “This is no place for formal introductions. Come on inside.”

He rushed back to the kitchen, replacing the lid on a huge, bubbling vat of tomato sauce. They watched in fascination as he reached for the temperature control, turning the flame down to low. They watched as he rapidly placed a loaf of bread in the oven and turned the timer on. He grabbed a bottle of wine from the refrigerator and placed it on the tray on the counter next to him. He joined his guests, setting the tray on the massive square oak table in the centre of the room.

“I hope you like a ’79 Chablis.”

He took the corkscrew and expertly removed the cork, feeling for the tip of the first crystal glass and, having found it, half-filled all three glasses. He offered Catherine the first glass. Dayce took the remaining one.

“That’s amazing. How did you know where Catherine was sitting?”

Alan laughed. “I doubt you wear Chanel, Dayce. Also, your breathing is louder than Catherine’s. You’re sitting right here,” he pointed directly at Dayce. “Catherine is here.” He shifted his hand to indicate where Catherine sat.

“You’re good.” Dayce said appreciatively. “Your talent may come in handy during the trial.”

“I’ll tell you something else, if you like.”

“What?”

“We both use the same cologne.”

“You must go crazy on crowded subways in the summer. I can barely tolerate it myself, and my sense of smell is lousy.”

“I don’t ride the subways alone, and never at rush hour.”

“Smart.” Catherine said.

He took a sip of wine, leaning back and sighing deeply.

“Tired?”

“Not really. This is my first time off my feet since I got up this morning. Between shopping and cleaning and cooking, I’ve been going for hours.”

Catherine noticed that Dayce was as overcome by Alan’s beauty as she had been, though to a depth and in directions she could only guess. ‘Well, Alan certainly dressed for the occasion,’ she found herself saying to herself. Dayce was looking at Alan intently. In the silence he eventually turned to look at

Catherine, smiling and nodding silently in acknowledgement of her unstated accusation. She smiled slightly in return.

"You're very quiet." Alan said suddenly.

Dayce laughed slightly. "I'm sorry. I was just..." Catherine's smile was vicious, enjoying the predicament. "You should be a model, Alan." Was his way out.

His easy laughter put Dayce at his ease. "That's nice of you to say. Mark always tried to convince me to go into that field, but I'm sure he would never have *really* approved. He was extremely jealous."

"I can why." Dayce said.

"He never had any reason to fear that. I mean, let's face it, I can't exactly cruise like other guys. My methods are a little too, shall we say, personal."

"You'd be eaten alive." Dayce said slowly. "Be glad you didn't follow his advice."

"Oh, were you a model?"

He paused, hesitant. He did not know how much Catherine had told Alan. He decided to play it safe. "Of a sort."

Alan let the moment pass, sensing it wasn't the time or place to press further.

"And now you're an attorney?"

"Yes."

"Why are you defending me? I'm a total stranger to you."

"Because I think you're innocent. And because Chandler here asked me to help you."

"Do you think we have a chance?"

"Of course. All the evidence is circumstantial, easy to read more than one way. A lot will depend on what kind of a jury we can hammer out."

"What do you mean?"

Catherine broke in. "I know the prosecuting attorney in this case, Alan. He'll do everything in his power to stack the jury with people unsympathetic to homosexuality. Dayce and I will have to keep the worst offenders off. But we won't be able to keep all of them off. It may be an uphill battle."

"But what does my sexual preference have to do with it?"

She sighed. "Nothing and everything. If this had happened to your *girlfriend*, our job would be easier. It's unfair, it's unjust, it's obscene, but there it is."

"But why would they think I would do anything to Mark? I love him." They both noted that he used the present tense, almost unconsciously.

"We'll find that out when we meet with the prosecution on Friday morning. He'll present us with the evidence he plans to use against you. We'll have the chance to counter all of it."

The timer went off in the kitchen, it's 'ding' echoing throughout the loft. Alan jumped up and ran to the other room. "We eat in three minutes!" he called out, maniacally transferring sauce to dish, pasta to plates, bread from the oven to a lined wicker basket.

Dayce downed the last of his wine, then leaned over to Catherine. His voice was low, muffled by distance and the clatter from the kitchen.

"His independence is amazing."

"I know." She whispered back.

"It may be his undoing."

She looked at him, surprise replacing her smile of agreement.

\*\*\*\*\*

Alan sliced through the cheesecake expertly, serving each of his guests a large wedge of the strawberry-covered dessert. Dayce refilled their coffee cups and passed Catherine the creamer and sugar bowl. They noticed that Alan took no dessert.

"You don't like cheesecake?" Catherine asked.

"I don't eat desserts. Too sweet. Coffee is enough for me."

They each took a forkful and sampled it. Their exchanged glances were of surprise and relish. "Did you make this?" Catherine asked.

"Nope. A good friend made it for me. I told her that special company was coming."

"The two of you should open a catering business, Alan. Dinner was fantastic." Dayce said, the sound of his fork slicing through the cheesecake and hitting the plate accenting his compliment "Where did you learn to cook like that?"

"My mother. She was old world Italian."

"Actually, I didn't mean that." Dayce's voice dropped a little. "I meant..."

"You meant how can a blind person do all this?"

"Yes."

Alan leaned back in his chair. "I was sighted for twenty-one years, Dayce. I lived with Mark for sixteen. I can walk directly to anything in this loft. It's not as difficult as you might think. You learn to use senses you didn't rely on before."

"What about when you go out? I notice you don't have a seeing-eye dog."

"I use my cane on short trips. I never went more than two blocks from home without Mark or another friend. We have our groceries delivered. The laundry is in the building.

A shot of orange flashed past them and leaped on the sofa.

"Herkimer! Hiya, sweetie." Alan rubbed the cat affectionately, nuzzling his thick orange coat with his nose and forehead. Herkimer seemed more intent on the cheese tray on the table than on the stroking from Alan. Dayce and Catherine watched as he swiftly gobbled down two wedges of Brie and part of a soda cracker.

"Beautiful cat." Dayce said. He leaned forward and scratched him behind the ears. "Listen, Alan, I have to ask you some things that may be uncomfortable for you."

He nuzzled Herkimer closer. "Go ahead."

"It's about Mark's past legal problems."

"You mean his drinking and his fights?"

"How many were there, Alan?" Catherine asked softly.

"Five, I think. At least those are the ones I knew about. He was charged with driving while intoxicated twice, back in college and just after. He did a lot of drugging and boozing at school. He went cold turkey after the second offense. He never took a drink after that. He wouldn't even drink wine with dinner."

"And the assaults?"

"The first was a guy who came on to him at a party. He wouldn't take 'No' for an answer, so Mark decked him. The police were called, but the guy dropped the charge. I guess he was too embarrassed to admit a faggot knocked his lights out." Dayce chuckled softly. Alan noticed. "Does that sound silly?"

"Oh no," Dayce said easily. "I've knocked more than a few guys around when they chose not to believe what I was saying. I understand how Mark felt."

"The second was more serious. Three jocks in a bar where they didn't belong. They ingratiated themselves to Mark and another friend of ours. They followed them out of the bar and kept pestering, them. Finally, one of them attacked Mark. The others went after our friend. Mark broke the one guy's nose and right arm, then turned on the others. The friend panicked and ran. When the cops arrived, it was their word against Mark's. He got probation.

"What about the friend?"

"He was married, with a family. He couldn't take the chance of being discovered."

"What about the aggravated assault? That would seem to be the most severe of the three..."

Alan shook his head, his sigh audible. "I never really found out about that one. All I know is that involved a police officer." Dayce snapped to attention at these words. "He would only tell me that the guy got what he deserved. It was obvious he didn't want to discuss it and I didn't press him.

"What do you think happened?" Catherine asked .



"I think it was another guy who came on to him and was rejected only this guy had more power over the outcome of the case." He paused. "I don't think Mark was cheating on me. He wasn't like that."

"Don't worry. We'll find out all about that one." Dayce said eagerly, making notations in the file folder on his knee.

"You were both faithful over the entire length of your relationship?" Dayce asked, looking at Catherine intently.

"I was. Which is all I can be absolutely certain of. I'm as certain as possible that Mark was. There were a lot of people who would have been anxious to tell me if he hadn't been. There was never a word, never even a rumour. Mark was very puritanical in some areas. He had no sympathy for any of our friends who fooled around. And he told them so."

"Now, Alan, I want you to think very carefully about this next question. And please don't hide anything from us. Your life may depend on it."

"I will."

"Can you think of any motive you could be accused of having to kill Mark?"

For the long moments that Alan was silent, absorbed in thought, Catherine noticed his hands on the cat. They were relaxed, lazing through the fur sensuously, alive to the feel of flesh on fur. There was no pause, no break, no motion which indicated surprise at the question or unease over the implications of his answer. Dayce concentrated on Alan's face. There was no protest, no forced indignation, no reluctance to face the necessity of considering this question and answering it. They both reached the same conclusion through different routes -- this man was innocent. They would have reached the same conclusion whether or not there had been a witness.

"I can't think of any motive," Alan answered softly. "I know we are each the other's beneficiary in our wills, but those were drawn up years ago. I have some money, enough to survive here. Mark was secretive about his money. I know I will acquire all his work and any commissions that were due, but to the best of my knowledge, these were minimal. We both have standard life insurance policies through our credit cards, but they're only for \$100,000 or so. I'm not strapped for cash. I know Mark wasn't. He had just closed a deal on a major commission."

"Who with?"

"The Metropolitan Arts Centre. He was designing a statue for the lobby of their new building on Fiftieth."

Dayce made more jottings in his notebook.

"Can you tell us who Mark's lawyer was?"

"Catherine has his name. He's been a friend of the family for years."

"Do you have a lawyer?"

"Not before now. Mark handled all the legal stuff. He wanted me free to concentrate on my writing."

"What have you written?" Dayce asked.

Alan leaned back against the cushions of the sofa, smiling. "Four plays, all produced off-Broadway. And one book of short stories. There's a copy on the small table next to the desk."

Dayce walked to the table and picked up a stark, black-jacketed book. He looked at the cover. 'BEYOND THE LIGHT' stood out in bold relief on the jacket, the name 'ALAN TRESKOE' appeared at the bottom, in smaller type.

"What's it about?"

"Short stories on what it's like to lose one's eyesight. Sort of a before-and-after look at the world."

"Can I borrow this?" Dayce asked softly.

"You can have it. I have plenty." He paused, then added jokingly, "That copy's autographed."

Dayce placed the book in his briefcase and returned to the sofa. "Does the book explain how you lost your eyesight, Alan?"

There was an ominous silence in the room. Alan shifted uncomfortably, as if the question evoked memories too distasteful to bear. Herkimer rolled over in protest, snuggling into the valley between Alan's leg and the cushion. "I don't like talking about it," he answered, his voice barely audible.

Dayce moved to sit next to him putting his arm around Alan's shoulders. "I know it's difficult, but we have to know. It may help us keep you out of prison. It's important that you tell us." He paused, his touch gentle and reassuring on Alan's shoulder. "It won't go any further than it has to, Alan. I promise."

He sat upright, his back stiffening, his face hardening in anticipation. "All right."

Dayce sat back slowly, his hand leaving Alan's shoulder slowly, reluctantly.

"I was a sophomore in college. I belonged to a fraternity. Everything was fine, until one of the house members found out I was gay. One night, after a party, four of my 'brothers' thought it would be fun to kidnap me and haul me out of town and dump me on some country road and make me walk back to campus. That's how it started out." They could both see that he was trembling slightly now, his tone dropping. The words were coming slower now, the effort behind them more tangible, more physical. "They took me to the gymnasium instead. They had changed their minds. They had been drinking beer and shots for an hour. That's when their mood turned ugly. I heard one of them say they were gonna see to it that I never never laid eyes on any man again. I thought they were just joking around, but their voices had changed. There was ugliness to them now, that phony bravado that only groups of three or more straight men seem to crave..."

Catherine was watching Dayce's face now. She could sense a building anger there, as if he understood something beyond Alan's words, beyond the ugly image he was painting.

"They tied my legs and hands. They forced my eyes apart with some instrument they use in medical experiments to keep an animal's eyes open. They put me into one of those tanning beds. They lowered the cover and switched it on. The timer was limited to 60 minutes, but after 20 minutes, it didn't matter. The security guard heard me screaming, but by the time he got me out of there, it was too late. The optic nerves had been destroyed"

Dayce had lowered his head, his hand covering his eyes. Catherine could see, through her own horrified reaction, the tensed muscles in his hands and his arms. She knew he was fighting a murderous impulse, that only the fact they were in a stranger's home prevented his grabbing the nearest object and hurling it against a wall or through a window.

"Jesus," Dayce muttered. "What did they do to the scum?"

"Two were expelled. One served a year in prison for 'malicious mischief'. The fourth was one of the kind who don't serve time in jails -- not our kind of jails. Apparently daddy had lots and lots of money. He walked away scott free. Last I heard, he was a doctor somewhere in California."

There was an unnatural lightness to Alan's voice, but his eyes betrayed him. There were tears there, the unexpressed anger of God knew how many years fighting its way out. Dayce put an arm around Alan and drew him close. The gesture of kindness breached the final wall of the emotional dam. Alan dissolved into Dayce's arms, the strength of those arms restrained now, offering comfort and solace. Dayce's contempt and Alan's anger were spent in the silence. Catherine understood - this was a moment when the two of them needed each other, were alone together in the room, despite her presence.

Herkimer stretched out between them, on his back, trusting and content.

"I'm sorry," Alan said quietly, pulling back from Dayce and walking to the kitchen.

Catherine looked to Dayce for help. He nodded towards Alan. She caught up to him as he pulled a tissue from a dispenser on the counter and wiped his eyes.

"Is there anything we can do?" she asked gently.

"No. This always happens when I talk about that night. Fortunately, I don't talk about it that often." He was smiling now, the worst of the memory faced and accepted now.

"Well, listen, you've done enough for one night. We're going to clean this place up for you.

"You don't have to do that, you guys. I can probably do it faster than the two of you put together.

She would have none of it. She placed one hand firmly on each shoulder and bodily forced him onto a wicker chair. "Sit down." she commanded. "Dayce, get your butt in here and help me with these dishes!"

He sprang into the kitchen, his laugh mirroring Alan's. "Yes, ma'am!" he answered, in the tone of a cadet trying to please a drill sergeant.

"Tough broad," Alan joked.

"When she needs to be." Dayce acknowledged, winking at her mischievously..

\*\*\*\*\*

The wind had risen as they moved quickly across the intersection to Fifth Avenue and started walking towards Catherine's building. There were flakes of snow in the wind - not enough to constitute a flurry, merely enough to send notice of reinforcements to follow. In the chill and darkness that enveloped them, they felt safe and secure. Few braved nights such as this on foot in the city, fewer still the cab-

filled streets of midtown. They had spoken little since leaving Alan's apartment. There seemed to be little to say.

As they entered her building, Dayce made a movement to escort her to the elevator but her arm caught his and held him back. He looked at her, puzzled.

"We're not going upstairs. Not yet."

"Where are we going?"

"You told me on the way back from Connecticut that you wanted to meet the witness."

His expression seemed to say he thought she was joking. Her answer was to walk towards the inky blackness of the staircase that led to the basement. She turned to face him. "Well?"

"Where are we going, Chandler?"

"To a special place."

They vanished into the darkness, leaving the warmth and safety of the lobby behind. She was glad she could not see Dayce's expression in the darkness.

\*\*\*\*\*

Catherine unlocked the metal doorway that led to the staircase leading to the tunnel entrance. An eerie blue light filled the shaft, throwing Dayce's shadow onto the brick wall behind him. He watched she slid easily onto the ladder and started down. He joined her, careful to avoid stepping on her hands. He pulled the metal door shut behind them replacing the lock she had left dangling on the top rung and securing it. She waited for him at the foot of the ladder.

Ahead of them, the brick foundation of the building had been broken apart. Beyond lay the naked stone of a tunnel. She walked forward slowly, holding her open hand behind her. Dayce took her hand tentatively. They walked through the shattered wall and into the dimly-lit tunnel beyond. Ahead of them lay a pitch black stretch of open rock. Twenty feet distant was a rock opening and the dim outline of a passageway. There was a light source beyond, but Dayce could not guess its source.

Catherine sat down slowly, leaning back against the wet stone. Dayce sat down beside her.

"What *is* this place?"

"You 'll know soon."

"Where's your witness?"

"He'll come. He knows I'm here."

"How will he get in? Does he have a key to the door?"

She smiled at him, her upturned mouth barely visible in the darkness. "He doesn't need a key, Dayce. He'll come from there." She pointed to the tunnel beyond.

"Is he expecting us?"

"He's expecting me. But you must understand what we're dealing with here, Dayce. There's no way I can explain it. You have to see for yourself." She turned to look at him intently. "Remember what I said about trust?"

He chuckled. "I would never do anything to betray you, Chandler. You know it. Whatever you show me here, whatever I learn from your witness, it will remain confidential."

"And if you feel the witness is our only hope?"

He stared at her, amused more by her serious tone than by her transparent effort at posing a difficult ethical question.

"My word of honour comes first, ahead of anything else, Chandler. You should know that by now. You wouldn't put me in this position if there was any question about Alan's guilt. You're not that naïve."

"I just want you to understand." She said softly.

"Your motives?"

She shook her head. "My life."

The sound of footsteps in the passage beyond echoed around them, breaking the silence that greeted her answer. They stood up at the sound of the footsteps, their eyes squinting in the darkness, but still unable to pierce the blackness of the unlit passage between them and the outline of the tunnel beyond.

Suddenly a massive black shape loomed in the outline of the opening. Even in the darkness, Dayce could make out the folds of a cape and long strands of hair. The figure was tall, his presence could be felt in the darkness, the sound of his breathing deep and slow.

"Vincent." Catherine said softly. The figure moved closer, into the pitch black of the passageway. "It's all right, Vincent. You have nothing to fear from this man. This man is a friend."

The silence was unbroken for many seconds. Then Vincent's voice filled the air around them. "I know."

Dayce stepped back slightly, struck by the depth of this voice, by something in its tone. It wasn't fear. It was more like what he might call awe if he felt he were capable of experiencing what most people regarded as 'awe'. He moved next to Catherine, his eyes wide.

"Do you know me?" Dayce asked.

You are a friend of Catherine's. That's all I need to know."

"You know why we're here?"

"I imagine you have questions."

"Yes. I need to know what you saw that night and why you can't testify for our client."

"I will answer all your questions. In time."

"Come into the light." Dayce said.

"No. Vincent's tone left no room for argument "Not yet."

"Why? Are you afraid?"

"No. I don't want you to be afraid."

Catherine clamped a hand on Dayce's and squeezed. The message was unmistakable. He decided not to inquire further.

"Vincent, I want you to tell us what you saw that night. From the beginning."  
All right...

\*\*\*\*\*

They listened silently, not interrupting Vincent as he described what he had seen that night. He described the conversation, the confrontation by the three men, the verbal and physical assault, the stabbing. He explained that he had screamed in an attempt to ward off further attacks and that the three men had fled into the small park across the street from them. He explained that he had tried to help Alan, but that the sound of police sirens had forced him away from the scene. He admitted having given Alan Catherine's name. Dayce listened intently, not moving or interrupting. He waited until Vincent fell silent before speaking.

"What were you doing in that alley at that hour?" he asked.

"I was on my way to see Catherine."

"So you two knew each other before that night?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

Vincent paused. Catherine answered slowly. "Five years."

"Why did we have to meet here? Why couldn't you come to her apartment?"

"Because it isn't safe above."

"Above..." It was clear that he didn't understand.

"You and Catherine live above, in the world of light and open space. This is my world."

"You *live* down here?"

"Yes."

Dayce stood slowly, his eyes never leaving the apparition before them. "Why?"

Vincent stood up. He moved towards them slowly, light catching more of his features as he approached. The glint of his eyes shone even in the darkness. As he came closer, Dayce could make out the tattered clothing, the patches of leather, the folds of a cape made from a crazy quilt of discarded

pieces of material. He saw the massive chest covered by a white cross-stitch tunic, the thick muscles of the neck. His glance moved to the face slowly. At the same moment, the reflected light from behind them caught Vincent's face. He stood before them, the hood of his cape around his shoulders, his gentle glance on Dayce.

Dayce instinctively started to step back, but he never completed the motion. He stood transfixed, turning over in his mind the possibilities that might explain the creature before him. He felt no fear, no sense of revulsion. He found Vincent's face strangely compelling, a wondrous combination of animal strength in the bone structure, warmth and compassion in the all-too-human eyes.

He moved forward slowly, raising his hand to touch Vincent's face. He moved his fingers over the forehead, down the nose, over the cheeks and down to the neck, as if to satisfy himself that this man wasn't wearing an elaborate mask. He knew the gesture was senseless before it was completed.

He looked to Catherine slowly. Many unanswered questions in her life were clear to him now.

"Vincent found you in the park, didn't he?" She nodded. "You were with him those ten days." Another nod.

He turned to face Vincent, his tone a strange combination of wonder and gratitude. "You saved Catherine's life?"

"Not alone. There were others."

He looked over Vincent's shoulder to the passage beyond. "There are others down here?"

Vincent nodded slowly.

"How far do these tunnels go?"

"No one knows. They spread out in all directions from the city. They reach down miles into the earth below our feet" Vincent stepped forward. "You understand now why I cannot help you?"

Dayce nodded. "I understand. I gave Catherine my word. I don't go back on my word. Besides, you've already helped Alan. Through you, he found Catherine."

Vincent looked at Catherine affectionately, his eyes warm, forgiving. "Yes."

Dayce understood that he had seen as much as Catherine had needed to show him. He walked slowly to the ladder. "I'll wait for you upstairs, Cathy."

He stood looking for a long moment, reluctant to let Vincent out of his sight. "Will we meet again, Vincent?"

"Whenever you wish. You are welcome here."

Dayce smiled, his perfect teeth visible in the blue light. He turned and ascended the ladder. They heard the metal door swing shut behind him.

\*\*\*\*\*

Catherine longed to remain in Vincent's arms. She found there the first peace and contentment she had known for many days. The pain of Devin's death still hung between them like a thick fog, their sorrow receding, only to build again in moments of quiet and solitude. There was no way to escape the feeling of loss. In the warmth and safety of his embrace, nothing seemed to exist save their love for each other.

"He seems like a decent man."

She pulled back and looked up at him. "He is."

"I'm sure you can trust him."

"I would never have brought him here if I didn't. I would entrust my life with Dayce."

"A wonderfully strong name. It matches his face." He paused. "What is he to you, Catherine?"

"I've known Dayce most of my life. We grew up together. He's my best friend in the world above."

"Were you ever in love? Before?"

She laughed. "Yes, I was, Vincent. For a long time. But I was young. Young and naive."

"He did not feel as you did?"

"He cares for me deeply, Vincent. But a romantic relationship between us was impossible." She saw his look of confusion, of surprise that any man would be unable to love her. "He's homosexual, Vincent."

Vincent nodded silently.

"Are you surprised?"

"No. You speak as if that were something alien to my world. It isn't."

"I didn't mean to be stupid. Of course..."

"What is natural in your world is natural in ours, Catherine. Remember that."

"I've spent too many years fighting the anger and hatred above, Vincent. It makes me defensive. I should leave those feelings behind when I come here, but I can't. I'm sorry."

"You fight those things by standing firmly beside your friends. Do not stand silent when you see injustice. If you do, you stand just as guilty as those who hate and fear. It is the hardest thing in your world, Catherine, to stand against injustice."

"Dayce has never needed my help. He can take care of himself quite well. He's so like you, Vincent."

"Like me?" Vincent asked, astonished.

"Yes. He's strong, intelligent, compassionate. He defends those he loves and does not remain silent when he sees people hurt."

"And you love him?"



She smiled. "Of course. As much as I love you, Vincent." She looked at him, her smile softening, her hand extended to him. He touched her fingers, their hands touched, slid along the other's arm. She reached for his face, drawing him close to her. Her lips met his softly, her hand on his face. She drew a single finger to his lips, tracing them gently, feeling his hot breath against her skin. His eyes were shining in the half-light, his pounding heart visible through his shirt. They revelled in the sensuality of this moment.

"Well, almost as much," she added, smiling. He smiled in answer, drawing her closer.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Well, now the past five years make sense," Dayce said, looking up at her as she entered the apartment and pulled off her coat.

She walked to the sofa, sitting beside him. "I want you to understand it's important."

"I have about a thousand questions, Chandler."

"I will answer what I can." she said.

He leaned against the cushion, his head resting on the cushion, his arm crooked for support. He studied her for a moment, unsure of where to begin.

"He saved your life."

"Yes."

"There are others in those tunnels I take it?"

"Many others..."

"How do they survive?"

"There are those above who know of the Tunnel World. They're called 'helpers'. They provide food, clothing, books, other necessities. They communicate using the pipelines of the city."

"Are there more like... like Vincent?"

"You mean physically?"

"Yes."

She shook her head. "No. Vincent seems to be one-of-a-kind."

His tone became more serious now, more sombre. "What is Vincent?"

She sighed deeply, shaking her head. "I can't answer that question, Dayce. I don't know where to begin, even how to begin. He can speak four languages, is as intelligent as any person I've ever met above, is sentient, practices a code of morality and ethics based on natural law and non-aggression."

"Does he rule this Tunnel World?"

"No. One of the men who founded it is head of a Tunnel Council. They have their own set of laws and principles."

He shook his head slowly. "What kind of people live below?"

"The castaways from this world. Many are artisans, older people forced to leave their productive jobs, young people who choose not to follow in their parent's footsteps, pioneers who seek a safe, secure world free of crime and hunger. Children who want to learn a simpler way of life. Victims of aggression and hatred above." She watched his face.

"You love Vincent, don't you?"

It was said simply as a matter-of-fact. She was more pleased by his tone of acceptance than by his words. She nodded gently.

"I can understand why."

"He spent ten days at my bedside, Dayce. Reading to me. Reassuring me. Calming me when I was frightened. My head was bandaged. I couldn't see. You can't imagine the terror of waking up from... from..." She couldn't find a word for it. "And to wake up blind, in a world you can only hear."

"No, I can't." He looked at her intently. "Alan could, though."

"Yes, he could."

He stood up slowly and walked to the balcony doors. She followed. He opened them slowly and walked onto the balcony, stepping to the parapet. He spread his arms out, his hands closing around the cold flagstone. She stood beside him, the wind losing its battle to force them away from the wall. He looked out over the park.

"Beneath this city... all that time, it was right in front of me."

She looked puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"All those nights back in college, when I longed for a place to run. A place as far from this city as could imagine. Those endless hours spent with people I was indifferent to, faking an excitement and a bond that didn't exist, that could never exist. Listening to the horror stories from my friends who face endless abuse, beatings, death. Staying strong for people who had lost the will to live, to make their last days as comfortable as mine were unbearable. Not having anyone to turn to when I needed comfort. And now to find out it was within my reach, right here below us." He lowered his head.

She took his hand in hers, kissing it softly. She pressed it to her chest softly, her voice gentle. "What about Christian?"

She could see his eyes even in the darkness, the pain still there but accepted, a part of his character.

"He was my touchstone, Cathy. The closest I've ever come to it. I loved him very much and I know he loved me. I miss him like hell. We helped each other, were good to each other, which is more than most people get in this fuckin' world."

"Someday, Dayce. He's out there for you. Just like he was for me."

She put an arm around his waist, drawing his arm around her shoulder -- two friends fighting the cold of the wind and the city in each other's warmth, outlined by the lights of the city beyond.

\*\*\*\*\*

Friday dawned dark and snowy, the fringes of a Nor'easter brushing the city promising a weekend of heavy snow and bitter cold.

Catherine showed no reaction as she and Dayce entered the District Attorney offices, no sense of regret or moment of reminiscence. She did not look in the direction of her old desk, occupied now by a young male intern. They walked directly to John Moreno's office. His secretary announced them, then escorted them to a conference room nearby. A tray with coffee and cinnamon rolls stood ready.

Dayce poured them each a cup of coffee. They shed their snow-covered coats and rubbed their hands, trying to force the numbness away.

"How does it feel to be back here?"

"Nothing special. I left this behind."

"Maybe you'll tell me why on the way home."

"I can tell you now. An old friend here decided to overstep his authority."

"How?"

"He suspects me of withholding information on a man who falsified credentials to obtain a job here. It's a long story, but in the end no harm was done and he resigned after drafting a fairly decent brief."

"So why the harassment?"

"The man was born and raised in the tunnels. He returned to the city because he was dying of cancer and wanted to spend his final days with Vincent and his father and the rest of us who knew him. He made a mistake and told Joe his real name. Now Joe is convinced I'm aiding and abetting a criminal of some kind."

"He doesn't know you very well, then."

She laughed. "He followed this man and me to another tunnel entrance in the park. When this man went in and I didn't follow, he waited. Of course, the man never emerged. That's when Joe started digging."

"And you resigned when you found out?"

"The moment I found out he followed us, I quit."

"What was this guy's name?"

"His real name was Devin Wells. He assumed many others"

Dayce was about to say something when the door to the conference room opened. Joe entered, carrying a thick stack of manila folders and sealed envelopes. He set the papers in front of Catherine, his glance measuring her response and resigning itself to mere professional acknowledgement. He stared at Dayce with a look indicating some long forgotten familiarity.

"I know Miss Chandler. I think I know who you are."

"Dayce DiCenzo," he said coolly, extending his hand formally. Joe returned the gesture, then got himself a cup of coffee and sat opposite them.

"You've got quite a task cut out for yourselves." Joe started.

"We can manage. What I'm having trouble with is what motive you assume Alan had to kill anyone."

"The universal one, Cathy. Money."

"What money? Alan didn't need money. They were fairly comfortable before the attack."

"Come on, Cathy. Comfortable is one thing, but one million dollars is something else. I know for a fact your client wasn't that comfortable."

"Neither of them was worth anywhere near that much. What are you driving at?" Dayce said quickly.

Joe pulled a folder from the stack and pushed it towards Dayce. He opened it and read quickly. Joe looked at Catherine intently, but she would not turn to face him.

"When did this surface?"

Joe chuckled. "Last week. The underwriter is hopping mad that a policy less than a week old should come into play in such unusual circumstances. It will make Alan Trescoe a fairly wealthy man. That is, if we don't put him away first."

"What is it?" Catherine asked.

He pushed the papers towards her. She read them slowly, shocked and dismayed. They constituted a life insurance policy on Mark Ventura for one million dollars, naming Alan Trescoe as sole beneficiary. She looked at Dayce with surprise and alarm.

"Didn't your guy tell you about this little item?" Joe asked sarcastically.

"What our client has or has not discussed with us will come out at trial." Dayce said slowly.

"Jury selection is Monday. I assume you'll both be there."

"Of course."

"We're anxious to get this case wrapped up." Joe said insolently.

"So are we." Catherine said "We hate to see an innocent man persecuted."

Joe fixed Catherine with an impertinent stare. "As we see it, the only innocent person in this case was Mark Ventura."

"That will be for the jury to decide."

"Yeah, Mr DiCenzo, I guess it will." He paused for a moment. "Could you excuse us for a moment please? I have a few things I want to ask Miss Chandler."

"If it concerns our client..."

"It doesn't."

"It's all right, Dayce. I'll join you downstairs in a few minutes."

He gathered the folders into his briefcase, donned his coat and scarf and left them alone. Joe waited in the silence. Catherine merely stared at him. She could not guess his motive.

"Well, how have you been?"

She fixed him with a look of scorn and disgust. "Surely you didn't want to see me alone to ask about my personal life. Aren't your detectives giving you complete reports?"

He shook his head. "I'm not interested in your personal life, Cathy. Unless it involves people or events that this office should know about. Such as Devin Wells."

"Well, you won't have to worry about Devin any longer, Joe."

"Really? And what name has he assumed now?"

She sighed. "Devin Wells has been dead for nearly a month, Joe." She paused, watching as his expression registered an answer he had not expected.

"Do you expect me to believe that?"

She shrugged. "I don't give a damn what you believe. The death certificate was entered and signed by Peter Alcott. You do still trust him, don't you? No private detectives shadowing him?"

"He seemed fine."

He wasn't 'fine', Joe. He was terminally ill with cancer."

He seemed genuinely surprised, genuinely sorry. His voice betrayed both these emotions. "Cathy, I'm sorry. I wish you had told me."

"I wish you had asked." Her tone did not change. She could not grant him the empathy he seemed to wish to share, could not weaken in this moment. He stood at the window, apparently lost in thought. She gathered her things together and pulled her coat and scarf on. "Anything else you want to know? I've got work to do."

He turned, the window framing him, snow pelting the panes softly. "Yes. What can you tell me about *Jacob Wells*?"

She felt a scram rise in her throat, but she fought to stifle it. Her muscles tensed. She could not guess how he had found out, how he had pieced the puzzle together. 'I must be careful' sounded over and

over in her mind; along with the insistent feeling that she must escape this room, this building, but most of all Joe's perceptive glance.

With the greatest effort, she pulled her scarf tight around her neck and yanked her gloves over her fingers. When she dared face him again, he had not moved. His expression was unchanged. He had seen the violent reaction to the question. He was not surprised by her answer.

"I can tell you nothing."

She remained calm as she left the conference room, calm as she crossed the office filled with former colleagues and passed through the doorway. She remained calm until she reached the stairs. At the moment the door closed behind her, she ran down the stairs, desperate to escape, like an animal trapped in a maze.

\*\*\*\*\*

She pushed aside Dayce's questions, reaching for the top folder of the stack that sat on the table before them. A waitress appeared and set her salad before her, but she did not notice. She needed to focus on another life now, another person's problems.

"What have they got?" she asked.

"Not much, but what they have could be devastating. First, there's the matter of this insurance policy. Alan didn't tell us about this."

"I don't think he knew. Look at the date that Mark endorsed it. Less than a week before he was killed."

"We'll ask Alan tonight. I don't think he knew about it either, but will a jury buy that." He paused shuffling his legal pad, marking off items as he went. "Then there's their downstairs neighbour. He claims he heard a terrific fight a few days before the attack. Claims he heard Alan threaten Mark with death."

"Now, *that* I don't believe."

"Neither do I. But the guy is a family man, wife, two kids – one of them mentally handicapped. We have to find out what he heard."

"Anything else?"

"There's the usual stuff – no footprints, no fibres, no evidence of a witness. The fingerprints on the knife were Alan's, the blood on Alan's hands was Mark's. The knife was similar to some of those in Mark's studio.

"He was a sculptor. He worked with knives and other sharp instruments often."

"This still looks bad, Chandler. There's a great deal of circumstantial evidence here. I think the key is going to be what kind of jury we got."

"What do you plan to do on Monday?"

"We'll have a limited number of absolute and discretionary challenges. We can only keep so many individuals off the panel. We can eliminate the outright bigots and religious zealots fairly easily. It's the subtle ones that we have to be careful about."

"What are we aiming for?"

"Didn't they teach you anything at Columbia?"

She smiled slightly, breaking the tenseness. "A few things. Remember, my specialty is corporate law."

He laughed. "We have to aim for a mostly female jury, if we can. Preferably college educated. Definitely single."

"That'll be difficult."

"What we have to keep off the jury are single, blue-collar men. We won't have a chance with that type of panel."

"Isn't that a little prejudicial?"

He shook his head. "I know men, Chandler. I've had enough of them in my experience. They haunt the gay bars and the back alleys and the sex emporiums by night and spend their days bragging about their girlfriends and their sexual conquests. They're chameleons, changing their sexual colour to suit their audience. They're dangerous people. All people without self-respect and the courage to face their true natures are dangerous. We can't afford to have them on our jury." He paused. "Joe knows all this, probably subconsciously. He'll try to stack this jury with blue-collar bigots. We have to prevent that."

"And if we can't?" she asked.

"We can." He answered. "We have to."

\*\*\*\*\*

Dayce rode alone in the elevator up to Alan's loft. He had bundled Catherine into a taxi for home with instructions to start work on their lists of witnesses and questions. He carried two folders under his arm.

He knocked softly on the heavy metal door to the loft. He heard a faint "Come on in!" from inside and pulled the door open.

Alan sat on the floor, Herkimer by his side. Stacks of playing cards were spread before him, arranged in lopsided piles -- some face-up, some face-down. It looked like some bizarre solitaire layout.

"What are you playing?"

"Double-Cross. It's a form of solitaire."

"Braille cards?"

"Uh-huh."

He sat down beside Alan, giving in to Herkimer's insistent meowing and rubbing against his waist and back. He pulled Herkimer to his lap, his hands involuntarily running over the cat's back and scratching behind his ears. This seemed to satisfy him. His meowing faded to a soft purr, faintly audible over the rattling of the snowflakes against the windows all around them.

"Don 't spoil him, Dayce. He's just a big ham."

"I think it's too late to spoil him."

Alan laughed softly. He transferred a black seven onto a red nine.

"A black seven on a red nine?" Dayce asked.

"This game deals with odd cards and even cards. Black odds go under the next red odd and so forth. It's definitely a challenge."

Dayce unzipped his coat and threw it and his scarf aside. He lay the folders in front of him and opened the first slowly.

"I have some questions for you. Some things we need to clear up before Chandler and I map our strategy."

Alan looked faintly puzzled. "Why do you call her by her last name?"

"I've always called her that. It's my way of expressing affection for her. If I were indifferent to her, I'd call her Catherine. Or Miss Chandler."

"And what's her expression of affection for you?"

"She tried calling me 'DD' once. I nipped that in the bud."

Alan's laugh filled the room. "I can understand why." He returned to his game. "What do you need to know?"

"Did Mark tell you anything about the terms of his latest commission?"

He shook his head. "He told me we would have enough to buy a summer cabin we had our eyes on, upstate. He didn't tell me how much his fee was."

"Did he mention anything about an insurance policy the client insisted on?"

"No."

"It was for two million dollars. One million was designated to cover their fee should he die before the work was completed. He insisted on a one million dollar rider that named you his beneficiary."

"He what?!"

"Eight days before his death, he signed the policy. You are to receive one million dollars in the event of his death."

The cards fell from Alan's hand in a heap. He looked frightened, hurt.



"He mentioned nothing about this to you?"

"No." Shock permeated his voice -- shock and disbelief. "They think I murdered Mark for money?"

"That's part of their motive."

"I didn't know he did that! I don't *want* their damn money!"

Dayce put a hand on Alan's arm, calming him. "I believe you. I just wanted to be sure."

Alan's features softened at Dayce's touch. He nodded, his eyes still staring straight ahead. "What else do you need to know?"

"Your downstairs neighbour..."

"You mean Ethridge?"

"You know him?"

"Not well. He and Mark were constantly bickering. He's a real jerk."

"What did he and Mark 'bicker ' about?"

"He's a real gay-baiter. He would make remarks to Mark and our friends whenever they shared the elevator. He has a real chip on his shoulder. I tried talking to him once. He seemed fairly normal, until he found out who my lover was. Then he turned into a raving lunatic. Said something about faggots ruining his life."

Dayce snapped to attention, jotting notes on the folder. "Did he ever say what that meant?"

"No. Mark went down one evening to try to establish a truce, but the guy went nuts. His little girl answered the door -- the brain-damaged one. He went crazy when Mark knelt down to talk to her. Grabbed her away and started yelling. Mark warned him about harassing our friends and told him to stay out of our way. That's the last time I know Mark ever talked to him."

"When was this?"

Alan thought hard. "Four years ago."

"Well, he claims you and Mark fought a few nights before the accident. He claims he heard you threaten to kill Mark."

He leaped to his feet, shaking violently. "That bastard!"

Dayce was stunned by the reaction. He stood quickly, putting an arm around Alan's quaking shoulders.

"What is it?" he asked.

Alan's laugh was ugly, bitter. "We had one of our semi-annual fights, but it was nothing out of the ordinary. You have to understand, Dayce. A blind man and an artist living together can be explosive. Mark was very independent. That night, I thought he was being a little too independent. As usual, it

was something silly that set it off. I started screaming at him, but it wasn't serious. I never threatened him. As a matter of fact..." He hesitated, reluctant to go on for some reason.

"You can tell me, Alan. Believe me, I'm thoroughly nonplussed."

"As a matter of fact." he continued, calmer now at a sight of his own, "the fight degenerated into a dish-throwing contest, then to a food-throwing contest. We ended up in bed together. It was probably the best sex we'd had in months."

Dayce chuckled. "I understand, Alan. Tension often does that. What better outlet for it than sex?"

"I never threatened Mark, not once in sixteen years..."

"So this guy is lying."

"Through his teeth."

"Okay. We'll get to the bottom of it. Don't worry."

"What about our other neighbours?"

"Catherine will interview all of them thoroughly, but you've got to remember, Alan. Two of the four households are either gay males or lesbian couples."

"What difference does that make? My damn sex life isn't on trial."

"It matters, Alan. I know it shouldn't, but it will to the jury. There's no way to avoid that."

"Why does it have to come up?"

"We'll object, Alan, but we can't do that until the prosecutor has already said it. A jury can't blot that out once it's been heard, no matter how much we object. All we can do is try to anticipate him and undo whatever damage he tries to inflict"

"What about our friends?"

"They'll help. But the same problem exists."

Alan rubbed his eyes with the backs of his hands. "You know, when I did jury duty back in '78, I didn't give a damn about the defendant's sex life. I didn't care if he slept with farm animals. All I cared about was the evidence." He shook his head sadly. "This is some payback."

Dayce stood leaning against the expanse of a window made translucent by the snow beyond. He had felt this pain before. He knew its source. He knew the insidiousness of expecting justice from a world that could deliver only judgment and ridicule, oppression and scorn. This was a pain he could not help Alan face. He knew that slowly, imperceptibly, Alan would change -- that his love of life and his expectations of good will from those around him would slowly die, to be replaced by... He started. He could not name what they would be replaced by, not in words -- only by a vague acknowledgement that a discontent to rival his own stood at the end of this road.

He walked to Alan slowly, embracing him warmly. "We're going to win this thing, Alan. You're not going to suffer at their hands again. I can promise you that"

Alan returned the embrace, finding solace in the words of a man he trusted. What Dayce felt was the wordless certainty that this man was different in some way was worth protecting from a world he himself had not found the strength to fight.

They stood together for a long time, invisible to the snow-filled world beyond the windows.

\*\*\*\*\*

"You must eat. Please. William made your favourite dishes tonight!"

Mary knelt in front of Father. He sat at an old mahogany desk in his chamber, the light of two tallow candles throwing a faint glow on the stone around them. A sheaf of papers before him bore many lines of writing. There were many half-read volumes spread around the chamber, lying on his unmade bed, on the desk, on the floor.

"I'm not hungry, Mary."

She put a hand on his arm, leaning forward to try to catch sight of his face. What she saw in his eyes, in the accented wrinkles, in the stooped shoulders and sagging jowls, was anguish unrelieved by time, a pain more tangible through sight than words. She had never seen him this beaten, this morose -- not even after Margaret's death. This was a loss more difficult to face, more debilitating -- because his love for Margaret had found expression in their every word and touch. Whatever he felt for his son had always remained buried, unexpressed in life. She understood, in some uncertain part of herself, that his anger and opposition had stemmed from this -- from his unrealized moments of affection that would never find expression now

"You haven't moved from this chamber in almost a month. You won't see anyone. You've neglected the children, your duties to the Council. You've ignored Vincent and Catherine. We need you with us now. You have to face this."

He looked at her as if he vaguely remembered her face. He seemed to be living in another world, a world of his own creation. Her words did not seem to reach anything in him that could respond or understand.

"Vincent ignored my wishes. Catherine and Peter Alcott helped my only son take his own life. How do you expect me to feel after such a betrayal?"

"They did not betray you. It was Devin's decision."

He shook his head.

She knew it was useless. She left the tray of food near him, pulling the cover aside and pouring him a glass of cold water. At the entrance to the chamber, she turned.

"The farewell ceremony is in two days. I just thought I'd remind you." He did not acknowledge her. "What shall I tell the others?"

"I'll be there."

"Good."

She turned away sadly, carrying the pain of one she loved with her.

\*\*\*\*\*

Catherine had made her way through the storm to the main drainage tunnel, confident that she could not be followed through the curtain of white. She watched as her footprints vanished quickly behind her. Once inside the tunnel, she brushed the melting snow from her hair and shoulders. She waited until her trail vanished back into the pristine white carpet, then moved forward to the junction. She pulled the lever quickly, standing aside as the great stone door opened. She was through the grate, the door closing behind her, in moments.

Vincent was sitting on the tunnel floor, awaiting her.

"Don't worry," she said, pushing her wet, matted hair away from her forehead and cheeks. "I wasn't followed. There's a terrible storm above."

"I know. I walked to the end of the tunnel when I sensed your approach."

She walked to him slowly, falling into his arms without a word. He held her for a long time, the shivering slowly abating as he enfolded her in his cape. He massaged her shoulders gently. She could feel the tension drain, replaced by a beautiful feeling of calm and trust.

She looked up at him, her eyes more eloquent than any words she could speak. Slowly, gently, they knelt together, their lips slowly drawing close, then touching gently, then locking together hungrily. Her arms caressed his back, his shoulders, his face -- greedily drinking in his strength, his warmth. He supported her with his arms, drawing her against him, the length of his body pressed against hers.

The days behind them did not matter now, did not exist for either of them. They were together. Something in both of them understood that this was what they needed now, an escape from the losses of the days behind, from the battles of the days ahead. Even the cold and wet of this place, the damp stone and feeble light, did not seem to matter. There was only this moment, this need driving them farther than they dared dream.

They spoke through their fingers, through their mouths, through naked skin against naked skin -- and the barriers that had stood so long between them began to melt away as quickly as the last flakes of snow in her hair. This was the strength she had sought, the affirmation of life she had sought through the pain of so many days.

In that moment when the upward streak of motion joined their bodies, the shock of pleasure shook them both, united them in a single sensation, a single motive. There were no questions to be asked, no permissions sought. There was only the naked essence of their bond made real, the triumph of the will to live and to love.

They stood together at the end of the drainage tunnel, caught for a moment between the violence of the storm raging outside and the turmoil of their thoughts. She could feel the words filling her mind. The thoughts unexpressed for years, the breaking of the final barrier between them unleashing a flood of emotions restrained and desires unfulfilled -- only to find fulfilment in the midst of darkness within and without. She had not expected it to come like this, so suddenly, so violently, but she knew in the depths of her soul that this was its proper first expression. She felt clean now, clean and strong.

When she turned to face him, he faced her, his face lit by some inner light. His eyes were clear, open, no trace of remorse or shame standing between them. She felt as if she were seeing him for the first

time now, the tentative sensuality of their hours together realized, forever a part of their minds and their hearts. No matter what happened now between them, they had this hour together -- this hour of union more complete than any spoken vow or soulful glance.

"How do you feel?" she asked

"Alive." he answered softly. "Complete." He looked deeply into her eyes. "Human."

She took his hand and touched it to her lips, then clasped it between her own, as a final acknowledgement of what his answer meant to her, to both of them. She would never be afraid for him again.

He drew her to him, their embrace more intimate now, more comforting. They stood together for a long time, invisible to the snow-shrouded city beyond them.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dayce was sitting in the chair near her front door, reading a newspaper. He looked up at the sound of the elevator doors opening, smiling at Catherine as she rounded the corner. She pulled up short, then remembered.

"I need to give you my spare key. I'm sorry." she said, pushing the door open ahead of them.

"That might be nice. So, you find out anything new?"

She smiled to herself. "Not really. What did Alan have to say?"

Dayce spoke rapidly, ridding himself of his winter wear and pulling the files from his briefcase as he spoke. "It's what we expected. He says Mark told him nothing about the insurance policy. Claims he had no idea what the terms of his latest commission were."

"Do you believe him?"

"Absolutely. He was shocked. Claims he doesn't want the money."

"Anything else?"

Dayce covered the neighbour's allegation and Alan's history of the feud that occasioned it. She shook her head in disgust. "where does that leave us?"

"It leaves us with a convictable client at the mercy of the jury. It won't be easy."  
the .

"Well, let's get down to business. We've got three days to plan our strategy." She cleared off the table between them and pulled a fresh legal pad from her case. "How about dinner."

"Chinese?"

"Sounds great." Dayce headed for the kitchen eagerly. "You know where everything is?"

"If I get lost. I'll let you know."

\*\*\*\*\*

Sunday dawned bright and crystalline, the blue of the sky melding with the snow that covered the park like a down comforter, still pristine in the morning stillness. No one ventured forth to challenge the deep drifts, some nearly three feet deep, that rippled through the park. The empty expanse looked like the bottom of a sandy stream, the ripples reflecting the sunrays upwards, the shadows falling away to the west.

The past two days and nights stretched behind them now like the shadows in the park. They had compiled lists of people whose records would require subpoenas, lists of witnesses to depose, organizations to contact, character references to check.

Dayce had compiled a list of preliminary questions for each prospective juror, instructing her on what answers would indicate an acceptable juror. Some of the questions seemed superfluous to her, but she did not question their inclusion on the list. This was Dayce's gift, the ability to unmask troublesome jurors before they were empanelled.

Catherine would concentrate on interviewing the character witnesses and the neighbours. They decided that her less confrontational approach might provide more information of use to the defence.

They spent the afternoon listening to classical music, reminiscing about high school friends and events, losing themselves in the past and in their friendship.

As the shadows lengthened and the first lights winked on in the buildings around them, Catherine pulled on her coat and scarf. She took a letter from her desk and carefully put in her inside pocket. She explained to Dayce that this was the night of Devin's final farewell ceremony, that she had to go to the world below to pay her final respects. She knew what to expect and he did not disappoint her. He pleaded to go with her, his pitiful begging like a kid faced with an irresistible toy. She tried to remain firm, but their years of closeness had permitted each of them to learn the other's vulnerable points. He knew exactly what to say and how to say it. She buckled, more angry at herself than with him.

It took them over two hours to make the long journey to the South Junction, many of those minutes spent in rapt awe at the sights that she had long ago accepted as the normal, she expected. It was nice to see Dayce reacting as a child would, to sights he could never have imagined, to discovering a new world for the first time. She was proud of him, and a little jealous.

Vincent met them at the foot of the South Well, his expression unchanged when he saw that Dayce had accompanied her. He extended his hand to Dayce. Their handshake was long, their eyes never parting. Their mutual trust and ease seemed natural, as if they had known each other for many years.

They spoke little as they headed to the site of the ceremony. Vincent held Catherine's hand in his own, their fingers tightening once in a while, in silent acknowledgement and anticipation.

At the South Junction, there was a small group gathered. Devin's closest friends were there, as were Father, Mary, Jamie. A huge stone square had been hewn in the rock wall, the centre carved even deeper and covered by a huge piece of fabric. A stone altar stood before the carving, a square hole hewn deep into the centre, a small pile of stones next to the rough obelisk. A small fire burned on a rock shelf halfway up the monument, kept alive by dry sticks added by one of the children.

Catherine introduced Dayce to everyone. Everyone welcomed him warmly, answered his questions, asked of his life above. He was quickly swallowed in conversations with Jamie and Kanin. Only Father seemed distant, shaking his hand brusquely, his head down. Catherine thought she caught a flicker of

recognition on Dayce's face as he shook Father's hand, but it was gone in an instant. She noticed, however, that Father had not used his name. He was the only person at the ceremony who did so.

Vincent strode forward after a few minutes, a silence falling over the group as he stood beside the platform. He lifted the urn which held Devin's ashes and slowly poured them into the chiselled central shaft of the obelisk. Each person then knelt before the monument and placed their letters of farewell in the flames. A few prayed silently. Jamie was unsuccessful at hiding her tears, her pages lifting from the pyre and sailing aloft in great glowing ashes, only to flash into cinders and fall back. Mary guided Father to the fire, their letters immolated together. There were no speeches, no eulogies. There was only each individual's final, personal goodbye to one they had love, still loved. Catherine burned her letter last, Dayce watching her, his eyes unmoving, respectful, proud.

As the final bits of parchment burned to extinction, the fire on the ledge was allowed to quietly burn itself out. The sticks cracked in the cool air as the flames vanished, the red glow fading quickly to orange, to brown, to black.

As the fire died, Vincent stepped forward; he removed the fabric that protected the stone carving slowly.

There expertly mounted within the chiselled stone square, Devin's final words stood in relief against the jagged rock, the words he had chosen sharp and polished on the marble square of Kanin's design. They stood reading the words silently, some in the gathering falling prey to emotions they could no longer contain, some simply lowering their heads in acknowledgement and final acceptance. Only Father moved. He turned and walked away slowly, his shoulders stooped, his cane clattering against the stone floor as he walked away.

Catherine read the stone in silence, then looked at Vincent. There were tears in his eyes, but he did not break. He had faced the words the night Devin had died. It was easier to face them again, here, in silent homage to his brother.

On the stone stood the words Devin had so carefully chosen to be his final legacy to the Tunnel World and to those he loved most:

THE RIVER REMAINS BOUNDED IN ITS RUN TO  
SAND AND SEA, IMPRISONED IN THE GRIP OF  
EARTH AND WIND.

ITS ANGER CHAINED AND CHANNELED. ITS  
FURY SPENT IN FREEDOM SOUGHT FROM  
NATURE'S GENTLE STONE CARESS.

IT DOES NOT RAGE AGAIST THE STONE, NOR  
LONG FOR PATHS THE NORTH WIND CLAIMS. IT  
TRAVELS ON... SUFFICIENT FREE... TO BEAR  
COLD STONE AND GENTLE BREEZE'S JOYS

AND IN THAT UNION, FIND ITS OWN RELEASE.

# The Confrontation

Catherine sank to the overstuffed booth quickly, glad to be off her feet. She breathed a long sigh of relief that this day was over. Dayce sat across from her, arms folded, head down. She could not tell if it was exhaustion or defeat or both.

"What do you think?"

He shook his head slowly, not raising his head from his arms.

"How much trouble are we in?"

He slowly pulled himself upright, stretching his arms out along the back of the booth, his head resting on the back. He looked at the ceiling intently, hesitant to look her in the eye. She knew from years of experience that this was a bad sign.

"We've got eight jurors who have probably already made up their minds. We've got three sympathetic jurors who may be able to reach an objective verdict. And we've got one unknown quantity -- the college professor. He was a tough read."

"I've never seen Joe so determined."

"He asked all the right questions. He knew exactly who to push for and who to let go. He played it perfectly. I was impressed."

She looked at him, surprised. Dayce rarely paid colleagues compliments. Yet she knew he was being honest, respecting professionalism and ability in another that equalled his own.

"Now what? What's our strategy with this jury?"

He sighed. "We have to find some weakness in the case, some flaw that will force them to judge their witnesses in the same light they're going to judge Alan. I think the keys will lie with Alan's state of mind the night of the attack and with the reason the neighbour is lying about what he heard during their fight. If we can prove that Alan knew nothing about the insurance money and can discredit the neighbour, we have a shot. If we can't..."

Catherine shuddered. "I can only imagine what would happen to Alan in prison."

"He's not going to prison, Chandler!" The fury in his tone was startling. She saw something in his eyes that went beyond mere professional determination to do his best for a client. She had seen this kind of fury in his eyes only once before -- on a summer night just before college was to begin. She understood the reasons for his fury that night many years ago and its consequences. She could not understand his vehemence now, unless...

"Dayce, are your feelings for Alan more than professional?"

He looked at her intently, ignoring her question. She could see nothing in his face.



"Catherine, you cannot begin to imagine what will happen to that man in prison. Whatever your worst thoughts are, it will be ten times worse. That is *not* going to happen.

The waitress appeared quietly, standing aside to let the conversation at the table to cease. She had been there for some moments, unseen, almost invisible in her deference and her indifference. She merely stood quietly, waiting.

"Two coffees, please." Catherine muttered not looking up. The waitress scribbled briefly and took their menus politely, and shuffled off without a word.

"Sorry," Dayce said. "I shouldn't get so worked up. It isn't your fault. After all, you paid your dues in system too. You understand how the game is played."

"I didn't leave because of 'the system', Dayce. I left because someone I trusted acted behind my back and threatened people I love

"Come on, Chandler. You left because Joe made a professional choice you couldn't accept. When it came down to friendship and trust or his professional obligations, you lost. That's why you left."

"I still believe in the system. I have to. It's the best thing we have. Until someone comes up with a better way to do things..."

"You were more honest than that when you walked out. There are some things beyond the province of law. Someday, you'll know what they are."

"Tell me what they are."

He shook his head. "Some knowledge can't be taught."

The waitress appeared silently beside them, as if she had materialized out of thin air. Neither had seen her approach. She placed their coffee mugs gently on the table, along with creamers and packets of sugar, then vanished again. She had not spoken a word.

"I'll handle the character references. You take the neighbours." He dumped sugar and cream into his coffee, tasting several times until he found a combination that made the liquid palatable. It took several attempts. "We have sixty days to prepare."

"I guess I'd better rent a cot. You'll want to stay in the city."

He looked up quickly. "No, Cathy. We'd end up killing each other in an apartment that small. I'll stay with Alan. He's going to need someone with him now."

"Dayce..."

"Spare me. He's alone now, and facing a potential trip to the electric chair. He needs someone with him." He looked at her, answering her unspoken warning. "I am a professional. Anything I may feel or come to feel for Alan will be my responsibility, but it won't interfere with the job we have to do. And it won't go any further than that.

"Have you discussed this with Alan?"

"Yes. He's afraid to be alone. He wants me there."

She nodded, knowing she was guilty of the same kind of bigotry in her attitude that Dayce had fought against for years. She knew he would do nothing to jeopardize Alan or himself, that he would fight to protect his client as doggedly as she fought to protect those she loved. What he felt was secondary, would remain secondary to their purpose. She could not fault him for wanting to be close to this man. She understood his motives and feelings too well.

\*\*\*\*\*

Catherine's interviews with the tenants of the building where the attack had occurred had been fruitless. The woman who had called the emergency number had been most helpful, setting the time of the attack to the minute, certain that she had heard two screams outside her window. The second more piercing, more pained than the first. She had gone to the window less than one minute after being awakened, but had seen no second person on the street below -- only a body and a man huddled over it. She conceded that it would only take a few seconds for someone to flee into the small, block-square park across the street. She had watched as the police arrived, the first car had arrived within five minutes. The second was there seconds later. She saw the officers pull Alan away from the body, his screams ringing along the street, to her windows, to the park beyond. He had begged the officers to go after the men he claimed had attacked them, but it had been obvious that they did not believe him. No one had moved into the park in the half hour she spent at the window.

"Did you write down any of the car numbers?" she asked.

"No, but I remember the number on top of the second car." The old woman blushed slightly. "It was my birthday."

"What was it?" Catherine leaned forward, lowering her voice in confidence. "Only you and I will have to know."

"517. I was born in May of 1917."

A family farther down the hall had heard the scream, but could not be certain that there was more than one. The first scream had awakened the wife, who had roused her husband. He had gone to the window within two minutes of the attack, but he had also seen only the body and Alan leaning over it. more than one. No witnesses, no attackers. He verified that for the duration of his time at the window, that no officers had ventured into the park. He did not remember the number of the first patrol car to arrive.

"Can you think of anything else, either of you might have heard.?"

The husband shook his head. His wife thought for a few moments then spoke tentatively, "I remember our daughter said something strange at breakfast the next morning."

"What was that?"

"She said she heard a lion outside her window. I guess it was just the man's scream. From what we've read in the paper, he had reason to."

"A lion?" Catherine asked.

"Yes, she said it sounded like the roars she heard at the zoo. I felt she must have been dreaming."

Catherine tried to look nonplussed. "Do you think Alan Trescoe is innocent?"

"Alan Trescoe has lived in this neighbourhood for a long time. We often saw he and Mark walking in the park. I just can't believe what they say happened really happened like that."

"They were affectionate?"

"Always."

The neighbours in Alan's building were even more certain of their belief in his innocence. A single gentleman who had lived in the building for forty years was adamant that Alan could not possibly have hurt Mark. A lesbian couple across the hall were more subdued, but just as certain. "They were the most stable male couple we knew." Her lover nodded in agreement. "We're extremely private people. They understood that." A middle-aged widow told of Alan's many visits to her apartment, keeping her company after first her husband, then her son had passed on. "He saved me from many a lonely night, Miss Chandler." she said, her voice pregnant with affection and pride. "He brought me casserole dishes, played cards with me, talked to me when no one else would." "What about Mark?" Catherine asked. "He was more private, more subdued than Alan. He was Alan's protector. He was hard to get to know, but his feelings for Alan were genuine. That was easy to see."

Her spirits were high as she approached the door of the loft beneath Alan's. The name stood emblazoned on the door in light-sensitive letters -- 'ETHRIDGE'. Tentatively, she pressed the buzzer.

A tiny face with wide eyes and long, dark brown bangs opened the door and stood staring up at her. There were purple smears of jam around her mouth and a single bread crumb stuck to her lower lip.

"Hi!" Her voice was bright, trusting. Catherine found herself smiling.

"Is your mommy home?"

A middle-aged woman appeared in the hallway, she pulled the door open slightly, placing an arm on the little girl's shoulder.

"May I help you."

"Mrs Ethridge?"

"Yes, I'm Ruth Ethridge. What can I do for you?" she asked, eyeing Catherine's briefcase warily.

Catherine pulled a business card from her carrier and handed it to the woman. "I am Catherine Chandler. I represent Alan Trescoe."

The woman took the card, read it quickly and dropped it into her pocket of her apron.

"What can I do for you?"

"I was wondering if I could ask you a few questions about Mark Ventura."

She looked distinctly uncomfortable. Her voice dropped to a whisper. "I really can't tell you much. My husband talked to the District Attorney. Maybe you should talk to him. Please come in."

She stepped aside, the little girl stepping backwards uncertainly, clinging to her mother's hand for support. The woman led Catherine to the living room. Catherine sat in an overstuffed chair, loosening

her jacket slowly. The little girl ran up to her, her little hands pounding on the side of the chair. "What's this?" she asked, reaching for Catherine's briefcase.

"Come away, Jennifer. It's bedtime." The little girl reluctantly walked away, taking her mother's hand. She looked back a few times as the woman led her out of the room, her eyes still wide, curious.

Catherine looked around the room, her eyes taking in the furniture, the paintings on the wall, the few books and fewer light fixtures. The room was dim, there were few decorative items to be seen, no plants, no magazines. The furniture was rather old, with signs of wear on the arms and cushions. The walls were a dull grey, the wood floors dull and scratched.

"What can I do for you?"

A man stood at the hallway entrance, clad in old jeans and a wrinkled sweatshirt. He did not smile or move closer.

"Mr. Ethridge?"

"Right. What do you want?"

"

I'm Catherine Chand..."

"Yeah, yeah... my wife told me who and what you are. I can't really tell you anything I haven't already told the DA."

"You didn't tell them why you harboured such ill-will towards Mark Ventura..."

He walked slowly towards the front door, his tone as indifferent as the décor. "I'll be glad to explain that on the witness stand. In the meantime..."

He had reached the front door. He opened it and stood staring at Catherine. The message was unmistakable.

"Tom, please don't do this." She had re-entered the living room, looking embarrassed and anxious at the same time.

"Shut up." He screamed. "You, please leave."

Catherine stood slowly, gathered her things together. The woman followed her to the door, her hands shaking slightly.

"I'm sorry we couldn't help you," she said.

"So am I."

She noticed that Mr Ethridge was looking down at the floor, ignoring both of them. From behind her, she heard a sound.

"Get back to bed!" Tom screamed at the tiny face that had crept up behind them and peered around the corner, curious and frightened.

He turned to Catherine, his face distorted by rage. "That bastard and his kind have done enough damage. Now get out of here."

The slam of the door rang through the hallway. Catherine could hear the woman's plaintive voice slowly fade to silence begging for calm. She heard a child's cry, faint from distance, a cry of fright and pain.

\*\*\*\*\*

Vincent walked towards Father's chamber slowly, hesitantly. He understood something of Father's pain and wish to retreat, but the days had stretched to weeks, then to over a month. He understood that in solitude and reflection could lie salvation, or madness.

Mary had been as attentive as Father would permit, but her duties with the children left Father alone for long stretches of time. She had begged Vincent to talk with him, to reason with him somehow. She had admitted defeat, her words unable to breach the wall of silence imposed since the night of Devin's death.

As Vincent entered, he noticed the darkness first. A single candle burned on Father's desk. Its feeble light making the chamber seem darker than the tunnels outside. There were books strewn everywhere, papers scattered in disarray on the desk and floor. A tray of food by the door, untouched.

Father sat hunched over his desk, writing furiously. He turned slowly expecting to see Mary. When he recognized Vincent he threw his pen down and pushed the papers aside, his gesture more one of futility than concealment. He did not stand, did not smile. His face was as lifeless as the stone around them.

"What do you want, Vincent?"

He stood next to the desk, fixing Father with an accusing stare "What we *all* want, Father. To understand."

Father shook his head, rubbing his eyes gently, his shoulders sagging "What is it you don't understand?"

"You're ignoring the children. You're indifferent to your friends, to Mary... to me."

"Indifferent!" Father snorted the word, his face coming to life. "A strange word coming from any of you. Where was your concern when I begged you not to kill my son."

Vincent knelt down slowly, his arms resting on Father's knee. He looked up into the old man's eyes intently. "We didn't kill Devin."

He laughed the sound strangely bitter and ugly. "*My best friend* provided the drugs. *Catherine* brought them here. *You* failed to support me in my wish to help Devin live." He fell silent for a moment, not looking at Vincent. "You're *all* responsible in your own small ways."

Vincent winced, the pain of his own unhealed wounds returning, Father's words like a blow across the freshly opened scar. He knew it was hopeless to go on.

"Father, how long do you intend to remain exiled in this chamber? Hate us if you must. Blame us for your loss. Carry your anger and your pain to your dying day, if you must. But do not hurt the children, the people who rely on you, the newcomers who need your guidance and support."

He stood up, looking down at Father with pity. He had never felt this for this man before. He shuddered at the ugliness of the feeling, the anger it kindled in him.

"Devin's life was his to live. His to end. Perhaps your anger is really guilt, Father. Guilt over never accepting Devin as he was. Guilt over the love you never gave him, the time you lost by driving him away from all of us." Father looked up quickly, his eyes bright with rage. "The guilt is still within you, Father, growing stronger. Only now you drive away those who love you. Those who can help you."

"Get out!"

Father had shot to his feet, his hands shaking with fury, his hands drawn into fists. He looked frail in the darkness, yet an unreleased fury filled the chamber.

Vincent shook his head sadly and walked out without a word.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Hi Cathy!"

There was genuine joy in Alan's voice. He moved aside, letting her enter the apartment, closing the door behind her with a flourish.

Dayce was stretched out on the sofa napping. There were mountains of papers stacked on the table before him, a Beethoven sonata filling the room with light, joyful music, and a huge blob of orange on Dayce's back, the comatose form of Herkimer stretched out in the valley that separated skin and sofa cushion. Catherine chuckled at the sight.

"What a group!" she said, pulling her coat off slowly. "I don't know who's lazier, him or the cat."

"The cat," came a sleepy, raspy reply from somewhere in the direction of the sofa. It was difficult to know which of them had spoken, the words were so similar to purring.

She chuckled softly. "Who's been taking care of whom here, Alan?" she asked, sitting in the overstuffed chair across from the sofa.

"Actually, this is the first day that Dayce hasn't put in almost twenty hours. I know he was up until sunrise today. He's been pushing really hard."

Dayce slowly rolled towards her. Herkimer vanished from sight momentarily, then awoke with a start and climbed out from behind him, his claws sinking into Dayce's back and side.

"Ow!"

"I forgot to mention we never had him declawed."

Dayce rubbed his side gingerly, fixing Herkimer with a steely glare. "So I noticed."

"He still doesn't understand cats, Cathy. Just ask anyone who owns a cat who's *really* in control of the household"

"I feed strays all the time. I just don't let them inside the house."

Dayce rubbed the sleep from his eyes and sat upright. He sniffed the air cautiously.

"What's that?"

"That's dinner. Meat loaf. Care to join us, Cathy?"

"Sure. Thanks."

Alan returned to the kitchen. The sound of plates pulled from shelves, glasses arranged on a tray, silverware stacked neatly on dishes, filled the apartment. "We eat in ten minutes."

"Anything I can do?" Catherine offered.

"Just relax. Make yourselves drinks if you want..."

"What can I getcha', Chandler?"

"Seven and 7."

He pulled himself up, still slightly groggy. Herkimer walked over the coffee table and jumped onto Catherine's lap, rubbing her affectionately -- his purr filling the living room. She stroked his bright orange fur slowly, luxuriantly. She watched as Dayce filled two glasses with ice and mixed their drinks. He handed her a glass, then plopped down onto the floor, his legs crossed.

"So what have you got for us?"

Catherine took a long sip, then set the glass on a magazine on the table. She pulled a legal pad from the briefcase on the floor beside her.

"Some interesting stuff. Two witnesses remember hearing two screams at the time of the attack. We have a witness who will testify that the police never went near the park in the minute's right after the attack. She says she heard Alan begging them to look for the attackers and that they ignored him."

"That's what he told me. 'To serve and protect!'" He snorted the words disgustedly. "What they really mean is 'To serve and protect wealthy white people.'"

"Everyone in the building had nothing but kind words for Mark and Alan -- with one exception."

"I'm working on Ethridge."

She leaned forward, curious. "What have you got?"

"I've got friends looking into Mr Tom Ethridge. There's something wrong with his story. Alan says that what this creep says is a total fabrication. Now we need to find out why he would do that."

"Prejudice?"

"I don't think so. He and his family never had any trouble with any of the other residents. Why single out Mark and Alan?"

"No complaints at all from the other tenants?"

"None to me. What did they tell you?"

She sighed "Exactly the same thing."

"What did he tell you when you talked to him?"

"He threw me out."

Dayce shook his head sadly. "If he's being honest, why won't he talk to us? Does he really think we'll accept that story of his and not do everything to discredit him?"

"Maybe he can't be discredited."

He looked at her intently, his glance composed, sombre. "Anyone can be discredited, Chandler. You just have to know what to look for. And where to find it"

\*\*\*\*\*

Joe sat lazily behind his desk, his feet resting next to his desk lamp, an occasional dart flying lazily from his hand towards the dart board on the opposite wall. One dart had fallen harmlessly to the floor and another had lodged in his raincoat hanging on a hook behind the door. His mind was not on the game. As he released the final dart, the door opened cautiously. The dart landed dead centre -- on a map of Staten Island.

"Is it safe?" came a voice from behind the door.

"Yeah, John. Come on in."

Moreno entered in stages, first his head, then his shoulders, finally his body. He had been a victim of Joe's errant dart throws before. Seeing it was safe, he moved quickly to the chair opposite Joe and sat down slowly.

"You wanted to see me?"

"Take a look at that." Joe said, lifting his right leg and slowly easing the folder towards John.

He read the file carefully. Turning the page, he looked at the computer graphic images on the sheet before him. The rest of the folder was filled with legal depositions and other documents from various federal agencies.

"Interesting."

"It gets better. Look at the last page."

Moreno thumbed to the final document in the folder. He looked up, surprised.

A federal warrant? Joe, this warrant is almost forty years old."

"It's still active."

"How can that be?"



Joe shrugged. "All I know is that this is one of only four warrants from 1953 still carried in FBI and NSA files. carried in FBI and NSA files. Apparently they still want this guy."

"And you think he's still alive?"

"I know he's still alive. He's Devin Wells' father."

"What makes you think he's still alive? And even if he is, how can you be sure he's still living in New York City?"

"Because Devin said so. He told me his father was still alive and that he had come back to New York City to see his family. And if you had seen the look on Chandler's face when I mentioned his name, you would be sure, too. I'm telling you, John, this man is still alive and well. Hell, he'd only be in his sixties now."

Moreno threw the folder back on the desk. "What do you propose?"

Joe stood up and walked to retrieve the darts. He did not look at Moreno as he spoke. "I think Catherine knows where this guy is."

"She was a friend of his son, Joe. Why does that automatically make her knowledgeable about the guy's father?"

"When I confronted her with the name Jacob Wells, her face told me everything I need to know. She knows who and where he is, John."

Moreno was struck by a sudden thought. He retrieved the folder and flipped to a page near the middle. "Have you verified this death certificate?"

"Yes. Devin Wells is dead. Cancer."

"But you intend to pursue this federal warrant?"

"Yes. On my own, if necessary."

Moreno nodded a few times and threw the folder back on the desk, his gesture one of finality. "Not on my time, Joe. If you do this, it has to be without official sanction. I can't have one of my employees carrying on an official investigation of an opposing attorney just as a major case is about to go to trial."

Joe nodded, his hands behind his head, his body sprawled back in his chair lazily. "I understand, John. I wouldn't worry about the trial, though. We've got a sure conviction".

"I don't know, Joe. Catherine is a damned good lawyer. And Dayce DiCenzo is ruthless."

Joe resumed his game, flicking the darts across the room, his aim now deadly. His first shot found the centre ring.

"So am I." he answered."

\*\*\*\*\*

Dayce and Catherine had finished the dinner dishes and cleaned the kitchen thoroughly. Alan had fed Herkimer the last of the table scraps. Now they sat around the huge oak coffee table, steaming cups of coffee beside them, the lights of the city ablaze on three sides.

Alan relaxed in a chair, a pair of headphones clamped around his ears. He was listening to music, lost in the beauty of a classical symphony.

Dayce worked quietly on a witness list, assigning himself to either himself or Catherine to the task of questioning or cross-examination. Herkimer lay curled in his lap, alert and playful, a paw reaching up occasionally to bat at the tip of the pen

Catherine sat across from Dayce, trying to work out the expected prosecution witnesses. It was an exhausting job, much of which would not prove useful in court. She threw her pencil down exhausted by hours of work. She took a sip of coffee and looked across the table at Dayce. He sat head in his hands, obviously lost in thought. She studied him intently – the broad shoulders, the strong fingers and arms covered with a fine mesh of hair, the muscles obvious, even in relaxation. His hair was beginning to go grey. His skin still carried a hint of a tan from a summer spent in the Connecticut sun. She thought of the last time she had seen him like this, lost in thought, obvious to everything around him – a summer day long ago...

"Dayce!" she called.

The boy sitting on the stone bench did not hear her. She walked closer, her steps crunching through the dry summer grass, her hands reaching to push aside the tree branches overgrown with late summer foliage.

As she reached the tree line, the sun and sky broke through together, flooding her eyes with sunlight, her skin with warmth. The valley was spread before her, a mat of multi-hued green stretched as far as the eye could see. The dark shadows of clouds raced across the valley floor in an endless game of tag, the shapes changing continuously as they sped eastward towards the sea. She looked around her cautiously. They were alone on the ridge. No one lived anywhere near this place. It had always been their special place, from childhood. He had often spoken of building a castle here, a fortress from which he could survey the world below. She had always laughed at the thought of living in such a remote spot, miles from the nearest house, the nearest village. She wanted it to always remain their refuge, their secret retreat from the world.

She walked quietly behind the boy sitting on the rock bench, placing her hand on his shoulder. He started, drawing away instinctively, his movements seemingly touched by revulsion, by hatred of any human touch. She had never seen him act like this before.

"Oh, it's you." He said apologetically. He took her hand, pulling her towards him. He made room for her on the bench. She looked at him, concern replacing the happiness she had felt during her climb up the ridge. He did not look at her.

"What's the matter?" She asked.

He looked out over the valley, his jaw set in anger. "They threw me out."

"Who?"

"My parents."

She looked at him in disbelief.

"Without a cent. No car, no books, nothing but the clothes I could fit into a suitcase and my own savings. Nothing else."

"Dayce, I don't believe it. Why?"

He looked at her as if the question were more of an insult to him than the rejection.

She looked down, her voice dropping. "You told them..." It was more a statement than a question.

"Uh-huh." He paused, throwing a few stones over the edge of the ridge haphazardly, not caring where they landed. "So much for honesty and integrity."

"I thought I knew your parents better than that, Dayce. I never would have believed they could do such a thing." She put an arm around his shoulder, but he pulled away quickly and walked to the edge of the cliff, not looking at her.

"You're incredibly naive, Chandler."

She did not know how to answer him, how to comfort him. For the first time in her life, this man seemed like a stranger to her.

"Dad was quite vocal about it. Seems I destroyed his dream or something like that. I guess it hurt him that I might consider my life as my property, not his. He said if their friends found out, it would be the end of their social standing."

"What did you say to him?"

He turned, looking directly at her for the first time. "Fuck your social standing."

"What about your mother. Of all the people in the world..."

"Of all the people in the world she was even worse than dad. I can deal with confrontation, with a good clean fight with an equal. But you can't answer phrases like 'curable disease' and 'friends who can help you' and 'lead a normal life'. Those words are like acid, Chandler. They ate away any chance of reconciliation, any chance for respect or love. That kind of syrupy condescension maybe all right for a kindergarten teacher to use with a class of five year olds."

"What did you say to her?"

"I didn't say a word to her, Chandler. I walked to her and slapped her face."

"How could you do that, Dayce. She doesn't know any better..."

"If I really believed that, Chandler. I wouldn't have slapped her. But you and I know she *does* know better.

Only she knows better as long as it's somebody else's child. Gives her a warm feeling, to feel pity and empathy for some poor soul whose son or daughter is afflicted with this 'curable disease' while basking in the glow of her own 'normal healthy' son. She's a hypocrite, Chandler. They deserve each other."

She shook her head sadly. "What will you do now?"

He turned back towards the valley, tossing stray pebbles into the chasm. "What do you mean? Classes start in six days."

She walked to his side, her arm grasping his and turning it towards her. He turned slowly, she could feel resistance in the muscles of his arm, his shoulder.

"How? With no money?"

"I'll get by, Chandler. Believe me. And someday, I'm going to be back here. I'll be everything they always wanted me to be. I'm going to build the home I always said I would build -- right here on this ridge. As far away from those bastards and everyone like them as I can get, but close enough to serve as a constant reminder." He turned to her, the sunlight playing off his tanned skin, glinting in his deep-set green eyes. "Don't worry, Chandler. I'll get by."

"How? College and rent and food will cost thousands. New York City is not cheap. You'll be alone. Where will you get the money?" He did not answer. "Maybe we can talk to my father..."

"No! Don't ever speak to me of a loan. From you or anyone else."

"Then where will you get the money? How will you survive?"

He looked down at her, his glance almost gentle. "Any way I can."

He had never explained how he worked his way through law school. He had deflected her every question about how he managed to survive. She had always assumed that he had taken out student loans to fund his college and post-graduate work. She knew he had a superlative scholastic record, near the top of his class.

The truth had come to her slowly, through her futile efforts to block out that which she could not believe. She had heard the persistent rumours from their acquaintances, first adamantly denying them, then slowly considering through persistent hearing, then finally acknowledging by purchasing a copy of a local singles newspaper catering to gay men and women. There, in the models and escorts section, was a photograph of Dayce, from the waist up – a sensual, suggestive photo -- along with a telephone number and the logos of several major credit cards. She had turned away from the page, slamming the magazine shut, as if her action could wipe the truth out of existence. She felt a murderous fury rising within her, but its object was not Dayce. It was a world where a man like Dayce felt there was no alternative to his actions, to a world where parent could turn against child in the face of a stranger's opinion, to an existence where the most important aspects of a human soul were secondary to the methods each human soul employed to express its most intimate thoughts – to a world where what a person was took second place to whom and how a person expressed physical affection. To a world gone mad.

She remembered the night she had decided to confront him, to plead with him, to do anything she could to... she never could figure out what it was she wanted to prevent. She only knew that she had to see him, to try to understand. He had answered her call pleasantly, no trace of uneasiness or discomfort in his voice. When he opened his apartment door to her, many of her fears had subsided. The place was beautifully appointed; clean, bright with light and greenery. It was not as she had imagined the homes of such people... She forced the thought from her mind as they sat and talked. When she finally took the magazine ad from her purse and handed it to him, he had smiled. She had expected anything but that. He listened patiently as she tried to convince him of the danger, of the

health risks, of the emotionally numbing course he had chosen. He let her finish. He listened as he always did, completely, not interrupting, not trying to tell her how she felt, not divulging a single clue to what he was feeling inside. When she finished, he merely looked at her for a few moments, then said quietly, "Everything you see in this room is paid for. So is my postgraduate work. But remember this, Cathy. It was paid for with money alone. Not a single emotional cent has been invested in this. I would never pretend to tell you how to be a corporate lawyer. Don't tell me how to be a hustler." She knew that argument was useless, that he had made his decision, and that in some ways he was right. "I wish it didn't have to be like this," she had said. "So do I." he answered.

She knew, several years later, that her fears had been groundless. She knew it on a summer's day, on a ledge overlooking a Connecticut valley, when she watched as Dayce and some of his friends worked to erect his home, a modern blend of redwood and glass and brick that marked the culmination of his vow of years before. The house rose behind her, the cool of the grey stone ledge under her cotton dress penetrating to her skin, her bones, the sunlight flooding the valley before and below her with the first wave of summer heat. She saw Dayce atop a beam, his body naked but for a pair of torn cutoffs, his well-muscled torso glistening in the sunlight, his eyes fixed on the shape rising about him, and his glance looking past her, to the valley beyond, to the horizon. In that moment, his face seemed more beautiful than she had ever seen it. The secret pain of years of frustration washed away, his features as solid and clean as the stone beneath her. It was the closest she had ever come to seeing rapture made real in a human face, in a human countenance, and it swept away her fear that his road had led him to self-contempt or regret. This was the Dayce she had always known, trusted, loved...

"Chandler!"

The cry snapped her to attention. She nearly upset her coffee mug at the sharpness of the sound, and at its proximity.

"Sorry" she said, shaking her head. "I was daydreaming."

"We thought you were asleep. It only took five screams to snap you out of it." Dayce said, twisting a pencil in his fingers.

"I was thinking about Connecticut."

"You miss home?" Alan asked. The sound of Dayce's scream had reached him through the headphones. He sat, the plastic ovals at his shoulders.

"Yes." Catherine and Dayce answered simultaneously. They looked at each other and laughed.

"I knew you'd come around, Chandler." Dayce said easily. "What have you come up with?" he asked, reaching for her work.

She handed her notes to him and sat back as he read. Herkimer forced his way onto Alan's lap, his meowing subsiding as Alan's stroking of his head and belly increased.

"This is great. I think we have a shot if you can get in to Ethridge's wife and talk to her. Think you can get in there tomorrow?"

"I can try. She seemed far more open than the husband."

"Good. We've only got one more week before we go to trial. We need to know what happened that made her husband embellish on the truth."

"I hate to intrude on this family, Dayce. The wife seems confused and she's got two little girls to take care of, one of them mentally retarded. It can't be easy for her."

"You've got to try to get to her, Chandler. She may be our best hope. We need to discredit her husband's testimony."

"And what if we end up destroying her family in the process?"

His answer was the look on his face as he stared at her. There was no mercy, no empathy to soften the set of his jaw, the ruthlessness in his eyes. It was a more eloquent answer than any words he could use. She held his glance consciously, letting him see that she understood his answer, and accepted it.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Mrs Ethridge?"

Catherine had spoken it softly, almost as if she were afraid that sound would prove more frightening than recognition. The woman turned, then stopped short.

"Hello."

May I speak with you for a few minutes? I promise to leave the moment you feel uncomfortable."

The woman looked uneasy, but she nodded. "I only have a few minutes. My daughter should be out shortly."

They stood before the iron gate of a school in the west fifties, a school of special education. Catherine knew that this woman's other daughter was a client here.

"I'm sorry about the other night." The woman said, genuine shame in her voice. "Tom isn't usually that rude."

"I understand." Catherine answered slowly. "I should have called first." She took a business card from her pocket and handed it to the woman. "You should have this, just in case."

She took the card and quickly thrust it into her coat pocket. "Thanks. Tom found the other one and tore it to bits. He's been in such a state these last few months. Ever since the killing..."

"Did you hear the fight your husband claims to have heard?"

"No. I was visiting my sister and her family. He was home alone. Tom is funny that way, he needs time alone sometimes. He always has."

"Did he tell you about it when you got back?"

"No. Only after the police and DA representatives came to question us. He was with them for a long time, alone. I had nothing to tell them, so I left him with them. I took the girls for a walk."

"What can you tell me about Mark Ventura or Alan Trescoe? Anything you can think of."

“They were both nice young men. Mark was a little loud sometimes, but you expect that with artists. He and Alan were always together, except for when Mark went on interviews. I never saw Alan without Mark.”

“They were close?”

“Very close. And very affectionate.”

Did that bother you?”

“No. Why should it?”

“What about your children?”

“I’ve taught my children that affection is a wonderful thing. They get so little of it from their...” She caught herself and shook her head, as if to dispel an unpleasant thought. “They were very respectful when they saw the girls. I was never concerned.”

“You’re the exception.” There was no response. “What about your husband. He seems to hold a different opinion.”

“He didn’t always. He used to be so easy-going, so empathetic. He was editor of his college paper. You should read some of his editorials...” She paused, as if this were irrelevant. “Then he changed.”

“Why?”

“After Hillary was born. When she was diagnosed as mentally retarded, something happened to Tom. It was like a light switch was thrown somewhere inside him. The lights went out. I tried to help him, but...”

“What did the doctors say?”

“I was diagnosed with herpes simplex just after Hillary was born. We never found out how I had contracted it.” She paused, reluctant to continue, as if this were a shameful confession of personal guilt.

“And your husband blamed himself?” She nodded. “And you say he changed just after Hillary was born?”

“Yes. He became intolerant, judgmental. He became distant from Jennifer. He withdrew from me too. The more I questioned him, the more distant he became. He started complaining about all the gays in our building, then on our block, then in the city. Eventually, he was having trouble getting along with anyone. I tried to get him to see a family therapist with me, but he wouldn’t. He just continued to insist that he was fine, that he would handle things his own way.”

“Was he ever abusive to you?” She shook her head. “To the children?”

“Never. Not physically. He would yell sometimes, but I never felt that we were in danger like that. He just withdrew completely. He’s been like this for four years. And it just gets worse every year.”

The street around them was filling with children and parents. The bell had sounded and children were pouring out the side of the building. Eventually, a little girl in a red parka and white scarf appeared and

ran to them, flinging her arms around the woman's legs. Mrs Ethridge picked the little girl up and hugged her, holding her in her arms gently. Catherine smiled at the little girl. It was returned quickly, trustingly.

"Is your name Hillary?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Well, your mother was right. You are a very pretty little girl." The warmth was genuine. Hillary hid her face on her mother's shoulder, her cheeks turning red.

"I really must go, Miss Chandler. Maybe I can call you, if there's anything else you need to know..."

She shook her head. "That's okay. You've been very kind." She touched the tip of Hillary's nose with her gloved finger and smiled. An impish chuckle was her answer.

"Thank you, Mrs Ethridge."

"I wish I could have been of more help". She paused, then moved quickly to her car parked at the curb. She strapped Hillary in securely. Jennifer waved at Catherine from the front seat. Catherine waved back and continued to wave as the car sped past her and off into the gathering twilight, Jennifer's face pressed to the window.

\*\*\*\*\*

It was so comfortable here, in the twilight of Vincent's chamber, the light of a torch in the passageway outside throwing a dim shadow against the stone over his bed. The reflected light from the stained glass window played across his face, scattering into a rainbow more subtle, more beautiful than any she had ever seen above. She wanted to lay here with him through the night, through the days ahead. It was her only solace.

She felt his hand on her face, saw his shining eyes, felt his breath coming slower now, the last trace of their intimacy fading. Now they merely looked at each other in the darkness, seeing less than they knew was there, but knowing through touch what the darkness left unrevealed

He pulled the comforter from around her shoulder, the light accentuating the curve of her arm, her waist, her thighs. Pools of shadow remained unrevealed. She did not move, she did not look away from him. She belonged to him. The finality of those words, accepted and acknowledged within her, had found their most intimate expression. She would never be afraid of him -- for him -- again.

She pulled herself up onto her side, leaning on her left arm, facing him. "I'm sorry, Vincent."

"For what?"

"For so many things I feared, so many things I took for granted."

He sat up, the comforter falling away from his massive shoulders. She could see the beads of sweat in the dim light, the muscles still filled with the last traces of unrelieved tension. His voice was as gentle as the touch of his fingers on her naked arm. "Catherine, these past weeks have been the most peaceful of my life. You've granted me something I never thought I would find. I have nothing to forgive you for."



"I love you so much. All my life, I've had a great many things given to me simply because my name was Catherine Chandler. Jobs. Money. Prestige. None of it earned but all of it accepted. I never felt I deserved any of it." She looked up into his eyes now, a note of wonder creeping into her voice. "I feel that you -- our time together -- is the first of life's gifts I've ever deserved."

"What do you mean, dearest?"

"Vincent, I've been with others before you. You know that now." He nodded slowly no trace of sorrow or judgment in his eyes, simply an acknowledgement of fact. "I could have had many others. But I couldn't. Even the few I have been with... I never felt anything of value in them, felt that I had achieved anything beyond simple pleasure. There was never an answer in my own soul to their words or to their touch. With you..." She paused, groping for the words, searching for meaning in the rush of new emotions she felt rising in her like a tide. "...with you, I feel as if I deserve being with you, that I'm worthy of the pleasure we share, in some way I can't describe. I feel cleaner right now than I ever have before in my life."

He took her hands in his, kissing her fingers gently. "Catherine, all things occur in their proper time. I believe that with all my heart. We both knew when the time was right, when we would need to go beyond words, beyond touch. Don't blame yourself for the years we had to wait. They made this time now valuable. Had it been otherwise, I would have meant no more to you than the others."

"But you always have, Vincent, from the first."

"As you have with me."

"There were so many nights when I wanted to feel this -- this utter peace and complete safety. This satisfaction. I know you suffered too, Vincent. Probably worse than I."

He nodded slowly.

"I only wish it could have happened sooner. It would have made so many nights easier to bear."

He held her against his chest, feeling her hair against his chest, her lips moving to his arm, her hand moving around his waist slowly. He lay back slowly, the comforter falling away from them, her mouth on his chest, her hand moving slowly down his thigh. He could feel her tongue against his flesh, moving slowly down his chest, to the finely matted hair on his stomach, then down again. His soft moan filled the chamber. The torch in the passageway outside died in that instant, almost as if his breath had reached out to extinguish it.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dayce awoke with a start, the sound of something hitting the floor in the kitchen jarring him out of a sound sleep. He struggled to find the light switch in the darkness, throwing the blanket aside and reaching behind the sofa to the long table where a reading lamp stood ready to flood the room with light. The light burst forth, but it came from the kitchen. He could make out Alan's pyjama-clad figure through the hue of sleep and brightness.

"I'm sorry," Alan said softly. "I didn't mean to wake you."

"What's the matter?"

"I couldn't sleep. I was getting a glass of warm milk."

Dayce rubbed the grit from his eyes, struggling to his feet against legs that seemed possessed of a mind of their own, a mind bent on remaining asleep. He overcame the resistance, struggling to one of the wicker stools. "That sounds good to me. Is there enough for two?"

"Sure..." Alan retrieved the fallen mug and grabbed another from the cupboard, closing the door slowly, as if Dayce were still asleep. He poured them each a mugful of the steaming liquid from the saucepan on the stove.

"What's the matter?" Dayce asked, taking the mugs and walking back into the living room.

Alan followed slowly. Dayce helped him to the sofa, sitting beside him with his legs crossed meditation-style. He handed Alan one of the mugs.

"I'm scared. I don't know what to expect."

"You'll do fine. Just remember everything I told you. You remain completely silent, no matter what you hear any witness say. Catherine and I will handle them. Don't show anger at anything you hear either. Remain impassive. You can show sorrow or despair or any positive emotion, but bury any anger you feel. It will work against you. We'll handle the anger. The jury is allowed to hate Catherine and me so long as they feel empathy for you."

"Am I going to testify?"

"Do you want to?"

"Yes."

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. If we think they've failed to provide enough evidence to convict, we'll keep you off the stand. If we think they have a shot..."

"Do they have a shot?"

The question was a naked plea. "With juries today, with bigotry and hatred everywhere in this psycho ward we call a culture, they always have a shot, Alan. You could be Mother Theresa and they could probably find a jury to convict you of loitering."

"I trust you and Cathy. I guess I'm just being silly."

Alan finished the last of his milk, then turned to Dayce as he set the mug on the coffee table. "Can I ask you something?"

"Anything."

"What's your and Catherine's story? How long have you known each other?"

"Twenty-nine years."

"You grew up together?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever...."

Dayce laughed. "No, Alan. That's why we're such good friends."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that sex and friendship are different things, Alan. I'm far closer to my friends than to any of my ex-lovers. Sex partners are a dime-a-dozen. Friends are priceless."

"I think I know what you mean. I loved Mark so much, for so many years... but there were some things I couldn't talk about with him."

"I understand."

"Mark never could. He always swore he could talk to me about anything."

"Maybe he was an exception, Alan. I can't say. I only know that I would give my life for Catherine Chandler. I don't know a single ex-lover I can make the same statement for."

"She means that much to you?"

"She saw me through some pretty rough times, Alan. Maybe someday I'll tell you about some of them."

Alan's smile faded slowly, the look of an unasked question spreading across his face.

"What is it, Alan?" Dayce asked intently.

"Can I look at you?"

"Look at me..."

"Catherine told me what you look like, but I see in other ways." He raised his hands upwards until they were level with Dayce's eyes. "I want to see what the man who holds my life in his hands looks like."

"All right." Dayce said softly, putting his mug aside and guiding Alan's outstretched hands forward.

Dayce could feel Alan's fingers move slowly from his forehead across his eyes and nose, down to the mouth, across and down the moustache, to the lips, to the chin and the strong jawline. He watched as Alan's face softened into a look that was almost surprise.

"You're a very handsome man. Cathy was right."

He chuckled.. "*Chandler* said that?"

"Yeah. She said you were the great hopeless case of her life."

Dayce laughed louder at this, shaking his head slowly. He took Alan's hands in his own. "Are you sure she meant what you think she did?"

"I think so." He smiled in answer to Dayce's laugh. "Have you ever been in love, Dayce?"

It was so unexpected, so out-of-context. Dayce was struck silent for a moment. Alan frowned in the silence, afraid that his question had caused pain. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to..."

"It's okay. You surprised me."

"It's just that you have so much to offer. You're so devoted to Catherine, to your friendship. I just wondered if you've shared that with anyone else in your life."

"No."

He drew his hands away, bowing his head. "I shouldn't have asked. I'm sorry."

Dayce reached out and drew his blanket around Alan's shoulder, then drew Alan to his side slowly, his arms encircling him gently, affectionately. "It's okay, Alan. You're allowed to ask whatever you like. Anything you want to know, I'll tell you."

Alan rested his head on Dayce's shoulder, the thick folds of the blanket cushioning him, Dayce's arm running up and along his shoulder, his arm. He felt safe now, safe and protected. "Thank you," he said softly. "Don't let me fall asleep here, OK?" His voice was touched by a childlike trust and an earnestness borne of despair.

"I won't," Dayce answered softly. He continued to caress Alan's shoulder, his head resting against Alan's, his eyes filling with tears. They sat together like this for a long time, each drawing strength from the other. Each finding in those long moments the comfort they needed.

\*\*\*\*\*

The publicity had subsided in the weeks following Alan Trescoe's arrest. As the trial date approached, the disparate elements of New York society had risen in a body on both sides of the case. There were gay rights groups, loudly trumpeting Alan's innocence and victimization at the hands of a ruthless, bigoted police department and an uncaring, victory driven prosecuting attorney. Various right-wing groups had come to the defence of the officers, claiming that they had done more than their duty in their handling of the case, seeing that it was just a fag artist who had been killed and that it had to be the lover's act. "After all," one group claimed. "Who could care enough about a faggot to kill one?" There were letters to the editor, commentaries on major networks as well as minor sermons on morality, cries for justice from all corners of the city. The chorus grew in volume, reaching a crescendo on the morning of the first day of the trial. For all the disparate elements in the chorus, they shared a common trait. None of them knew the truth.

Catherine, Dayce and Alan had arrived early at the courthouse, slipping in through a secluded entrance, avoiding the cameras and microphones of the media swarming the main entrance and the parking deck. They sat in a conference room between the judge's chambers and the courtroom, sipping coffee and eating fresh pastries. They were silent, each absorbed in their own thoughts. Catherine read from a copy of *The Scarlett Letter*. Dayce perused an architectural magazine idly, dog-eared an occasional page. Alan listened to a cassette tape of Judy Collins, lost in the beauty of words woven in an aural tapestry as colourful as a Navajo blanket.

A half hour before the scheduled start of the trial, they had moved to the defence table in the courtroom. A crowd had already begun to gather, the hiss of their conversation fading to absolute silence as Alan appeared in the hallway and moved slowly to the chair behind the massive oak table. He was aware of the silence, but did not react. He did not turn towards the gallery.

Joe appeared shortly after they had entered, walking to the prosecution's table. He spread his folders out neatly, put his briefcase on the empty chair beside him, and looked over towards Catherine. She sensed his gaze. She did not look up.

The jury was ushered into the jury box, their eyes remaining down, not looking at the assembled crowd, the attorneys, or the defendant. They seemed uneasy, unable to keep their eyes on a single object for more than a few moments, like cats loose in a roomful of mice.

"All rise!" the closer bailiff announced. Everyone in the room stood, the sound of chairs being pushed back echoing around them for a moment. The judge swept into the chamber precisely at 9:00 am, followed by two armed guards. One of the men took up a position at the rear entry doors to the courtroom. The other stood next to the witness box. The stenographer started the rhythmic tapping on the transcriber.

"Proceed." The judge said, not looking up.

"Joe Maxwell for the state, your honour."

Dayce DiCenzo and Catherine Chandler for the defence, your honour."

"Your opening statement, Mr Maxwell?"

Joe rose and addressed the jury for only a few minutes, stating that the evidence would show overwhelmingly that the death of Mark Ventura had been a deliberate act on the part of the defendant – that the motive was monetary – and that there was sufficient evidence to indicate premeditation. He acknowledged the defendant's blindness, but cautioned the jury against any hesitance in delivering a verdict of guilty solely because the murderer was impaired. "However handicapped Alan Trescoe is, ladies and gentlemen, he was sufficiently accurate to plunge a knife into another man's chest." There was a soft rumble throughout the courtroom at this remark. The judge called for silence.

"The state calls Dale Williams."

A police officer rose and walked to the stand. He was in full uniform. He was sworn and took his seat uneasily. He appeared uncomfortable.

"State your name."

"Dale Williams."

"And your occupation?"

"Patrol officer for the City of New York Police Department."

"You were on duty the night of November 20 of last year?"

"I was."

"Do you remember what occurred at approximately midnight that night?"

The officer took a small pad from his coat pocket and flipped the cover over.

"Objection!" Dayce's voice filled the room. Even the witness was stunned into immobility, the notebook hanging limp in his hand. "The witness was asked if he remembered what occurred. I see no reason for someone who claims to remember an event to need to study notes."

"Sustained." The judge turned to the witness. "You can refer to notes when required for clarification, but try to tell us what you recall from memory."

He returned the notebook to his coat pocket slowly. "We got a call over the car radio a few minutes past 12.00. We were the closest unit to the location, so we 10-4'd the call and red-lighted to the location."

"Could you explain 'red-lighted'?"

"We had our lights on and our siren going the whole way."

"How long did it take you to get to the location requested?"

"Less than four minutes."

"You logged your arrival time?"

"Yes, that's right."

"What did you see?"

"I saw a man sprawled on the sidewalk. Another man was kneeling over him. There was blood soaking through the clothes of the man lying on the sidewalk. While my partner pulled the other man away, I looked to see how badly wounded the guy on the sidewalk was. I could detect no pulse or respiration."

"Was there anything to indicate the cause of death?"

"There was a knife lying next to the victim. I bagged it immediately and marked it."

"Did you know the identity of either of these men?"

"Not at the time. The victim was carrying a wallet. I cordoned off the body and would allow no one to touch anything at the scene."

"You know now who the victim was?"

"Yes. Mark Ventura."

"Is the other man in this courtroom today?"

"Yes, he is. He's sitting right over there." The witness pointed directly at Alan.

"Did the defendant say anything to you?"

"Yes. He begged us to help his lover. He fought against my partner's grasp, but we managed to keep him away from the body and the knife."

"Did he say anything else?"

"He said that they had been attacked by three men and that they had run off into the park."

"Did you see any sign of a struggle on either Mark or the defendant?"

"No."

"No torn clothing?" No dishevelled hair? No other wounds, scratches, abrasions?"

"None."

"What happened next?"

"A backup unit arrived within a minute of our arrival. We secured the defendant and briefed the team on the situation. The ambulance arrived a few minutes later, but there was nothing to be done. We read the defendant his rights and took him to the station once the backup unit arrived."

"You left a perfect crime scene?"

:"Yes. No one touched anything other than the knife. I handled the knife very carefully in isolating it from possible manipulation. I bagged it myself and initialled the seal."

"No further questions."

The judge merely glanced at Dayce. He rose to begin his cross-examination, a sheaf of papers in his hand.

"Officer Williams, I hold here in my hand your typewritten report of the events of that night. Do you recognize it?"

He glanced at the papers. "Yes, this is my report."

"Your memory is exemplary, officer. There is no single point in your testimony that is contradicted by your official report of the incident."

"I remember it pretty well."

"Yes, that's obvious. Perhaps too well." He turned to the witness, his face grim. "You stated that the defendant pleaded with you to help him... that they had been attacked by three men."

"Yes."

"And what was your response to this plea?"

The witness looked confused. He shifted in his chair. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, Mr Williams, did you immediately call for more officers to search the park across the street?"

"No."

"Did you send your partner to search the park?"

"No."

"Did you see fit to search the park yourself in the moments after your arrival?"

"No, I didn't."

Dayce leaned against the railing that fronted the witness stand, his arms crossed, his glance never leaving the officer's face. "Why is that, officer?"

"I was involved in securing the crime scene and trying to save a life, if I could."

"Laudable. And exactly what the book orders you to do."

"Yes."

"What about your partner? Certainly he could have taken a few moments to place a radio call for more backup?"

"No. He had to restrain the defendant. He was out of control."

So your partner had to restrain Alan?"

"That's right. He wanted to get at the body."

"Didn't you testify that he claimed the man was his lover?"

"That's right."

"Is there anything unusual in a person wanting to comfort the person they love – especially when they know they've been hurt?" The officer fell silent. "Is there anything unusual in such a desire?"

"I guess not."

"You guess not," Dayce said, disdain obvious in his tone. "If the victim had been a woman and her husband wanted to 'get at the body', would you have been quite so..."

"Objection! Argumentative."

"Sustained."

Dayce turned to the witness angrily. "Let me put it this way, officer. In the entire span of your presence at the scene of this event, did you once ever call in for officers to search the park or send any officers there yourself or inform anyone of the defendant's claim that they had been attacked by a gang of men?"

"No."

"And why is that?"

"I didn't see any sign of an attack."

"You had a body on the sidewalk with a stab wound in the chest and a delirious man claiming they were attacked and *you didn't see any signs of an attack?*"

"I saw a body and a man covered with blood kneeling beside a knife. I acted in what I thought was the proper manner."

"Tell us, officer. Did the fact that the defendant's plea made it obvious that they were a homosexual couple play any part in your apparent decision to try and convict the defendant there on that street – by refusing to take any action that might exonerate him?"

"No. I saw no reason to perform a search. Besides, even if there had been an attack we could never have caught them."



“Well, we’ll never know now, will we, Officer Williams?” Dayce said slowly, looking at the jury. “I have no more questions, your honour.”

Williams left the stand and vanished through the guarded doorway, relief evident in the speed of his departure and in the sound of a repressed sigh of relief as he disappeared.

The next five witnesses were all officers who had arrived at the crime scene in the first minutes. The lines of questioning and cross-examination followed similar lines. All the officers reported the same scene. Dayce challenged each of them on their apparent unwillingness to search the park. Their stories were like carbon copies. No one had bothered to search the park. There was no evidence of a struggle. No, they claimed they didn’t treat the defendant differently because he was gay. While it was evident that there was general acceptance of their stories, there was also widespread disbelief that their treatment would have been the same had the people involved been a heterosexual couple. Even the witness sounded unsure of themselves, their denials voiced with too much emphasis, too much righteous indignation – as if they were trying to convince themselves instead of a jury.

As Dayce finished his questioning of the final police officer, the judge called for a recess for lunch. The spectators shuffled out slowly, having heard nothing spectacular in the morning’s testimony. Even the reporters seemed to be moving in slow motion.

As Catherine filled her briefcase with paperwork, a manila folder landed on the table with a thud. She looked up, startled. Joe stood looking at her, his face incredibly, touched by respect and affection. It seemed as if the past months had never happened, as if he expected her to respond in kind. She answered him silently by refusing to touch the folder.

“You should take this, Cathy. It’s important.”

“Unless it will help Dayce and me defend Alan Trescoe, I’m not interested.” She said, reaching for her papers and ignoring the sealed envelope.

“You and Dayce DiCenzo. Who would have thought it.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” she asked, not looking up.

“Oh. I don’t know, Chandler. Your friendship is, um, legendary in legal circles, but I didn’t know you went in for rough trade.”

He had kept his voice low, deliberately, certain that the others could not hear him. He was wrong. Dayce stepped beside Catherine quickly, fixing Joe with an angry glare. Joe backed away slightly, his movement involuntary. Part of him knew he was no match for this man.

“I’d say that what Miss Chandler goes for is none of your concern, counsellor.” The diffidence of his tone was clouded by a repressed violence that bespoke of what he would have liked to have done were they not in a courtroom.

“I see. Don’t you think it’s odd that someone who used to advertise is defending your right to privacy, Chandler? Ironic, isn’t it?”

“I don’t recognize your face, Maxwell. I don’t think you were ever a client. But I’m sure *lots* of your *friends* have been. Sprawled across my leather sofa, legs spread, getting from me what their wives and girlfriends couldn’t give them – aren’t equipped to give them. But getting something else, too, eh Maxwell?”

Joe’s face was still blank, but it was blankness imposed through an act of will, not the gentle, easy, unforced blankness of genuine indifference. Dayce’s words had had their intended effect.

"You're as transparent as a window, Maxwell. Christ, why don't you come out and say it. Be a man. Admit that this is all because Cathy wouldn't give the time of day, let alone what you were *trying* to get from her."

"Stop it, both of you!" Catherine shouted, moving between Dayce and Joe, sensing that Joe's self-control was about to fail him. She looked at Joe intently. "Get the hell out of here, Joe. Now! Or I'll call the bailiff and have you in judge's chambers for harassment."

He backed off; straightening his suit by hunching his shoulders, like a prize fighter sizing up his opponent across a ring. He looked at Catherine for a few seconds more, trying to tell her in glance what he could not in words. "Read the stuff," he said softly, then turned and left the room.

Dayce reached for the folder, but her hand clasped his wrists and threw it aside. "That doesn't have your name on it, Dayce. Understand?"

"It may be important."

"I'll be the judge of whether it's important. Is that clear?"

She went back to packing her briefcase.

"Why are you mad at me? He's *your* old friend, not mine."

"You shouldn't have said that to Joe."

"Oh? I see. He's allowed to say whatever he wants to you, but..."

"I can take care of myself, Dayce..."

"Oh? I didn't see much evidence of that. Exactly when were you planning to say anything?"

"I can handle Joe Maxwell."

Dayce looked at her, his eyes flashing a look she knew to be dangerous coming from this man. "So can I."

"He's just trying to rattle us. Hell, it's one of the oldest games in the book. You know that."

"I know it. I also know how to play any game that Joe Maxwell can dream up far better than he can. You should be grateful. I was giving your friend fair warning. I can do a hell of a lot more damage to him than he ever can to me. Next time he'll know better."

He looked at the envelope on the table, untouched. "What do you suppose that is?"

"Probably something about me his private investigator has dug up. I'll look at it tonight, at home." She saw his look and confirmed sombrely, "...if it's anything to do with this case, I'll let you know."

"Thanks." He turned to Alan, who had moved a respectable distance away to let them speak in private. "Come on, Alan. Let's the three of us get some lunch."

\*\*\*\*\*

The afternoon session began with testimony from the officers who had taken care of Alan at the precinct during his four days of incarceration. All testified that he had been a model prisoner, quiet, obedient, and

completely consistent in his statements to his interrogators. Their testimony had added little to the proceedings. There were no surprises.

It was after three o'clock when the prosecution called the first of the two detectives who had investigated the case in detail.

Don Rosten took the stand, his pinstripe blue suit impeccable, his dark hair combed back over a strong forehead, his face dark, sombre with years of delving into the darkness that haunted people's lives, the emotionless eyes filled with enormous intelligence – and enormous indifference. He was thirty-five years old. His eyes seemed much older.

He explained the procedures he and his partner had followed at the crime scene that night, in their interrogation of Trescoe at the jail, in their search of the loft and their sifting of personal and business records for both victim and defendant. His testimony took the better part of an hour, the courtroom listening in rapt attention while a professional explained the minute procedures his job entailed – the glamour most expected reduced to drudgery, rote and mechanical obedience to legal convention. When he finished, not a person in the room did not understand the nature of the lifelessness of his eyes, the lack of emotion in his voice.

"Your witness." Joe said softly after fifty-five minutes of questioning.

Dayce rose slowly and approached the stand slowly, his manner calm, his voice reassuring, empathetic.

"I only have a few areas to cover with you, Don. Relax."

His words struck the room, like a window opened in summer to a cool refreshing breeze. Everyone shifted, loosened their collars, crossed their legs, stretched their arms. It was almost as if the weight of his testimony had struck everyone motionless, numb – and it had taken Dayce's calm authoritative granting of permission to release the pent-up tension. The room seemed to breathe a sigh of relief, of gratitude.

"You stated that you conducted no search of the park for anything out of the ordinary that night. Why not?"

"The officers on scene were of the opinion that it was unnecessary. It was well below freezing, the ground was frozen. There would have been no footprints."

"How long after the first police car arrived did you and your partner get to the scene?"

"About fifty minutes."

"How many officers were there when you arrived?"

"Four."

"And how many medical?"

"None. They had departed with the victim earlier."

"Where was the defendant?"

"He was sitting in the back of one of the cruisers."

"Was he handcuffed?"

"Yes. He had already been read his rights by the arresting officer."

"He was *handcuffed!*?"

"Yes."

Dayce looked at the jury. A few of them shifted uneasily, their faces troubled. He turned back to the witness. "Why was he handcuffed? Did these officers think that a *blind man* was going to attempt to escape?"

"I couldn't say, Mr DiCenzo. I didn't know the man was blind until we got to the station later to question him."

"The officers never told you?"

"No."

Dayce leaned against the railing in front of the jury, shaking his head slowly, a deep sigh filling the room. He was silent for a few moments, then turned and leaned on the railing, his arms crossed against his chest. "How long was your interrogation of Alan Trescoe?"

"About four hours, as I recall."

"Was he cooperative?"

"Yes, he answered every question."

"No evasion. No contradictions?"

"No, none."

"Did you, in your subsequent investigation, uncover any instance of the defendant's lying to you during interrogation?"

"Only one."

"And what was that, detective?"

"We asked the defendant if there were any way he would benefit from the death of his lover. The word *lover* was pronounced with the same pitch, the same tone as the rest of his testimony. Everyone noticed this. Even Dayce noted this as he listened. He knew there was no prejudice in this witness. It made several planned questions unnecessary. "He had answered no, but we discovered a life insurance policy issued by Nantucket Mutual Life, covering the life of Mark Ventura, with the defendant as sole beneficiary. The amount of insurance was 2 million dollars. His client received 1 million as compensation for his final commission. The other 1 million was earmarked for Alan Trescoe."

"Did you ask the defendant about this?"

"Two days later, during our second interrogation. He claimed he did not know about the policy."

"Don, can you tell us what date the policy went into effect?"

"Yes. November 12 of last year."

“And the date of the murder was November 20 of last year. Is that correct?”

“Yes.”

“Did it occur to you that Mark Ventura may not have told our client about the policy before the night of the incident?”

“Yes. We regarded it as possible.”

“Mr Rosten. I want you to answer this question as honestly as you can, based on your experience with criminals, liars and other people who try to deceive you on a regular basis. When the defendant told you he did not know anything about this insurance policy, did you believe him?”

“Objection! Irrelevant!”

“Overruled. You may answer.”

The witness looked at Dayce, his face completely relaxed. “I believed him.”

Dayce walked slowly back to the defence table. “Redirect.” He shot at Joe as he passed, then sat down.

Joe sprang to the floor like a cat springing on a chipmunk. “Inspector, if you believed this, why did you recommend charges be brought against Alan Trescoe?”

“Because I’ve been fooled in the past, Mr Maxwell. I judge people’s honesty by their eyes. Obviously that wouldn’t have been effective in this case. My statement was based solely on emotion.”

“You still think the defendant could have known about this policy and convincingly lied to you?”

“Like I said before. I’ve been fooled before. It’s possible.”

“Thank you. No more questions.”

The witness left the courtroom to a general low buzzing of conversation among the spectators. “The state calls John Kincaid.”

John Kincaid had been Don Rosten’s partner in the Trescoe investigation. He was portly, his thinning hair combed in a futile effort to hide the huge bald place that stretched nearly from ear to ear, the few thin strands of hair looking like some emaciated wig. His expression was less revealing than his partner’s, more unsettling, more suspicious. He looked as if every word spoken was measured, considered, and found wanting. He had a furtive manner reminiscent of a used car salesman – or a child molester.

Joe’s interrogation of this witness was far shorter, covering only the most basic points of the previous witness’s story. He sped quickly through his list of questions anxious to get onto someone more sympathetic.

The only point of disagreement had cropped up over interpretation of the defendant’s truthfulness in regard to the insurance policy. Where Don Rosten had been inclined to believe the defendant had no prior knowledge of the policy, John Kincaid was more certain.

"You feel that the defendant was lying about having no knowledge of the aforementioned policy?"

"Yes. I got the distinct impression he was lying to us."

"What gave you that impression?"

"He didn't want to talk about the policy at all. He was nervous when we talked about it. He kept shifting in his seat. It seemed to be the only thing that bothered him."

"So you thought you had found a valid motive for the defendant to kill Mark Ventura?"

He laughed. "Hell, a million dollars could probably get a lot of people who were otherwise law-abiding to..."

"Objection!" Catherine's and Dayce's voices filled the chamber simultaneously .

"Sustained." The judge turned to the witness. "You will please confine your answers to the questions asked."

"Sorry." He said, clasping his hands together in his lap, his body shrinking together like that of a chastised child. "Yes, I think the defendant was fully aware of the policy and that it served as a perfectly understandable motive for murder."

"Your witness."

Catherine stood up slowly, pulling a file folder from one of the stacks in front of her.

"Mr Kincaid, how long have you been a detective?"

"One year."

"And your partner, Don Rosten?"

"Nine years."

"How many murder investigations have you partnered?"

"Three."

She opened the folder in front of her. "In your first investigation, you needed that..."

"Objection! Irrelevant!"

"Your honour, the prosecution has raised the issue of these men's "feeling" about my client's veracity. I merely want the jury to hear of the results of this witness' 'feelings' in other murder investigations as a matter of public record.

"Objection overruled. The witness will answer the questions."

Catherine turned back to the witness, her eyes clear and steady, like those of a tigress about to spring from the undergrowth and bring down her quarry. "In your first investigation, you testified that the

individual being indicted was lying to you about his whereabouts the night of the murder in question. Will you tell the court, please, the result of that 'feeling' of yours."

He lowered his head, avoiding the jury and Catherine as well, focusing on the railing before him. "I was wrong."

"Was the man you interrogated, in fact exactly where he claimed to have been, on the night in question?"

"Yes."

"So you were totally wrong in your 'feeling' about the man's truthfulness to you on that occasion?"

"Yes." He said quietly.

She flipped several pages in the folder and continued relentlessly. "And on your second investigation, you pressed hard to prevent charges from being filed against the suspect, claiming you were certain he was telling the truth when he claimed, to answer to your questions to have been out of the country?"

I didn't press hard. I merely recommended that we not press charges because we didn't have enough evidence to convict."

"Were charges ever filed?"

He nodded. "The witness must answer verbally." The judge said softly.

"Yes." He said, his tone becoming more angry, as if he felt he was being cornered and now had to stand and fight back against his attacker.

"What was the outcome of this trial?"

"The defendant was acquitted. However, it was never proven that his alibi was true."

"The jury chose to believe the defendant, did they not?"

"I would never claim to read a jury's mind, counsellor. I think they didn't see enough evidence to convict him."

"So it could be safely stated that your record to date has been fairly poor in judging the honesty of the subjects of your investigations."

"I was wrong once and a jury failed to convict the other. I wouldn't call that poor."

"It hardly stands as an impressive achievement, Mr Kincaid."

"Objection!"

"Withdrawn." She closed the folder and approached the witness box slowly, spreading her arms out over the railing, as if she wanted to encircle him. "Mr Kincaid, will you tell the jury just how long you have been a practicing 'Born Again Christian?'"

"Objection!" Joe was on his feet, his face distorted by anger. "This is outrageously irrelevant."

"Your honour, the witness' predisposition to judge my client is clearly relevant. It has been established in previous testimony that everyone at that precinct knew that my client was gay and that he was the subject of not a little heckling by some of the officers there. I merely wish to discover if this witness; religious beliefs concerning homosexuality may have played a part in his apparent mistrust of my client's honesty during their investigation."

"You will both approach the bench."

They moved to the side of the podium, the judge leaning over to them and away from the microphone so as not to be heard. He lowered his voice to a whisper.

"Miss Chandler, the form your question was entirely improper. You are flirting with a contempt citation."

She bowed her head apologetically. "Sorry, your honour." It was part of the game and they all knew it. The damage had already been done.

"Your honour, this witness' religious beliefs are not relevant to his professional evaluation of the defendant. There is nothing in his professional record to suggest any prejudice against gays. He has never had a complaint lodged against him. I see no reason to draw his religion into this trial."

"Neither do I." The judge turned to Catherine. "Had there been some record of prior act on this witnesses part to indicate a predisposition to prejudice, I would allow this line of questioning. However, seeing that there is no basis for belief that this witness is predisposed to lie, I will not allow you to go further with this. It is not relevant."

"Let the record show that I object to this and that my objection is continuing."

"So noted."

"No further questions, your honour." Catherine said, heading back to the defence table.

Joe shadowed her, the judge's words filling the room. "Objection sustained. The jury will ignore any religious information imparted by Miss Chandler's question and Mr Maxwell 's objection. You are not to assume the question stated a fact nor that the objection indicated a wish, on the part of the prosecutor to hide any information of relevance. You are to act as if the question were never asked..."

Dayce smiled at Catherine as she sat down beside him. He leaned over to her, his voice low. "Nice job, Chandler."

\*\*\*\*\*

The three of them sat in a diner near the courthouse, enjoying a classic American dinner of cheeseburgers, fries and chocolate milkshakes.

"How did we do today?" Alan asked, taking a bite of his burger.

"Pretty well, I think," Dayce said. "We got Kincaid's religious bias into the jury's minds. Even though they aren't supposed to consider it, they really have no choice now. You can't 'unhear' something."

"I took a chance doing it that way. The judge could have come down harder," Catherine added.



"You got it in. That's the important point. Tomorrow we get to the rough stuff."

"How are you going to handle Ethridge?"

"With brass knuckles."

"If we only had something to discredit his testimony. The things his wife told me won't do it"

Dayce pulled an envelope from his jacket pocket and threw it at Catherine across the table. "'This will,'" he said intently.

She opened the envelope and looked at the papers inside.

"My God!"

"That's what I said when he told me."

"Joe will object every step of the way on this."

"Let him. It goes directly to motive."

Catherine shook her head slowly, sadly. "This will destroy his family..."

"I know. That's why I want you to handle the cross-examination."

Catherine went pale. "*Me?* Why me?"

"Because it will look better to the jury coming from a woman. And you have to be every bit as ruthless about it as I would in your place."

Alan had been listening intently. "What did you find, Dayce?"

"I found Tom Ethridge's Achilles' Heel, Alan." He looked at Catherine, no shred of sympathy showing in his features. "And Cathy is going to drive the spear home."

\*\*\*\*\*

Catherine sat at her desk, the strains of a German requiem filling the apartment. She had prepared a list of questions for tomorrow; the questions she knew would destroy a man and his family. She sat looking at the words, struggling to find a means of making the words less ugly, less destructive. Her struggle had been in vain.

Fighting frustration, anger, and fatigue, she pulled a sweater over her sweatsuit and headed below. As she made her way through the basement, through the tunnel entrance, and down through the maze of passages, she found her frustration and anger slowly diminishing, as if distance from the world where such means were necessary were enough to wipe them out of existence. She did not want Vincent to see her as she had been above - she did not want to burden him with any more than he could carry.

As she entered his chamber, she found herself smiling in anticipation, almost as if the act of smiling could erase the purpose of her visit. Yet she saw the concern in Vincent's eyes as he rose to greet her. She knew he had felt what she had felt before, that the anger and frustration, though muted, had

reached him -- had touched him in a way she could not decipher. He seemed reluctant to approach her for a moment. This was a reluctance she had never known him to feel before.

She moved to him slowly and found herself drawn into his arms. She pressed close to him, allowing him to support her. He held her tightly, his arms around her shoulders and her waist, his lips touching her hair gently.

"I don't know what to do, Vincent."

She pulled away from him slowly and walked to the bed, her shoulders stooped and her voice listless, drained.

"Tell me what's troubling you," Vincent offered, pulling a bench close to the bed and sitting in front of her, his hands clasping hers gently, in token support.

"Dayce has uncovered information that could vindicate Alan Trescoe."

"That's wonderful, Catherine."

She looked up at him. Her eyes dark and joyless. "If I use it, it means the destruction of a man, his wife and possibly their two little girls."

Vincent fell silent, not answering her.

"Dayce feels that I should be the one to do this."

"And you don't want to do it?"

She nodded, looking away quickly. "I have an obligation to Alan, but I've talked to this woman, to her children. It will devastate them. I don't want to be a party to it."

"Have you told Dayce how you feel?"

"Yes. He insists that it will sit better with the jury if I do the questioning. And I know he's right...."

"What are you going to do, Catherine?"

She stood up, fighting her reluctance to leave the comfort and safety of Vincent's bed. She paced the chamber slowly. "I don't know."

He reached for her hand as she passed him, stopping her short. He looked up at her, his touch gentle but his voice firm, certain. "You must do everything you can for Alan. You cannot allow him to suffer for an action he did not commit"

She did not answer him. She lowered her eyes. "You know what you have to do, Catherine."

She looked up, her eyes lifeless. "I don't know if I can do it."

"You can, Catherine. You find yourself in this position through no fault of your own. You must do whatever is necessary to see that justice is done."

"At such a cost?"

"At any cost, Catherine."

\*\*\*\*\*

The courtroom was filled to capacity -- the rumours of bitter and bloody confrontation having swept the city like the smell of blood in a shark tank -- and with similar results. There was rowdiness to the tone now, an edge like that of an archer just before he is to release his arrow. Most did not care what target the arrows might wound, they merely were drawn to fever pitch by the prospect of the wounding itself.

As Catherine made her way to the defence table, she surveyed the crowd. Her glance came to a halt when she spied Ruth Ethridge sitting on the aisle a few rows behind the prosecution table. Their eyes met for a few moments. Catherine tried to smile, but she could not complete the motion. She fought an overwhelming desire to speak to her, to advise her to leave the courtroom, but knew it was futile. She looked closely for either of the children, but they were nowhere to be seen. It was cold comfort.

Joe walked confidently to his desk, then moved slowly to Catherine's side. "Where's the other half of your team?"

"He'll be here." She looked up quickly. "Did you have anything important to say to me?"

"Did you look over the stuff I left with you?"

She shook her head. "I have more important things to do right now, Joe. Foremost among them to keep you from sending an innocent man to prison."

Joe chuckled "There are no innocent men at this table, Chandler."

She looked up quickly. "I agree with you, Joe." She looked to her left, then back at him, smiling now. "But then, there are no men at this table right now."

"You know what I meant."

"Yes, I do..." came a strong, deep voice from behind them. "And if you aren't out of my partner's face in exactly one second, there's going to be a medical emergency in this courtroom."

Dayce guided Alan behind Catherine and towards her chair, but his eyes never left Joe's face.

"Now, Maxwell. Get the hell away from this table."

Joe backed away slowly, but nodded his head, his eyes fixed on Catherine as he backed away. "This isn't over, Catherine. And he won't be able to save you."

Catherine grabbed Dayce's arm to restrain him, anticipating his lunge forward, but he had remained standing still, his arms taut, ready. She could feel his muscle tensed, ready to explode in a punch she knew would put Joe in a hospital. The tension slowly died, unrelieved.

"What have you done to him, Dayce? I've never seen Joe act like this before." He sighed. "We've tangled before. It's not important now."

The door opened to the back of the courtroom. The bailiff entered slowly, the crowd rising automatically. The judge seated himself quickly and struck the gavel once. The crowd acted as one, seating itself in a single motion, like a group of marionettes controlled by a single string.

"Proceed. Mr Maxwell."

"The state calls Thomas Ethridge to the stand."

The back door of the courtroom opened and the bailiff called the name. Thomas Ethridge entered quickly, keeping his eyes straight ahead. Catherine noticed that he did not look at his wife as he passed her. He was dressed in a dark blue business suit, expensive, with a bright red tie as accent. He looked far different than he had that night when he had thrown her out of his apartment.

He took the oath, his 'I do' barely audible. He did not seem nervous, but there was a strange sense of the forced in his movement, as if he had been coached on how to appear calm and credible. It was like the not-quite-polished act of a first year drama student.

Dayce leaned over to Catherine. "He's scared as hell." He whispered.

"How can you tell?"

"He acts like every straight man who ever showed up on my doorstep, Catherine. It's a look I've seen thousands of times before." He leaned back slowly, smiling. "'He's vulnerable.'"

Joe worked his way through the basic information -- employment, scholastic history, length of residence in the building. There was nothing unusual in any of it. The crowd waited.

"Do you remember an event that took place the night of November 5 of last year?"

"Yes sir."

"Can you tell us what happened at approximately nine o'clock that evening?"

"I was reading in the living room. My wife was visiting relatives. The children were asleep. Suddenly, I heard raised voices from the loft above. The voices were agitated; they kept getting louder and louder. It sounded like a pretty bad fight"

"Could you make out anything that was being said?"

"Not at first. But as the fight escalated, I could make out what was being said."

"And what was the fight about?"

"Something about not spending enough time together. I couldn't tell who said what to whom at that point."

"What happened next?"

"I heard the sound of breaking glass or something similar. I distinctly heard one of them say 'I could kill you!' really loud. There was some more breaking of glass, then silence. After a few minutes, I knew the fight was over..."

"Did you hear either Mark Ventura or the defendant leave the apartment?"

"No. There wasn't a sound after the last of the sounds of breaking glass, or whatever it was. I listened very closely..."

"And you distinctly heard the word 'kill' used?"

"Yes."

"Could you tell who used this phrase?"

"Objection! The witness testified he couldn't discern voices."

"Sustained..."

"But you definitely heard the word 'kill' used by one of the residents of the apartment just one week before the death of Mark Ventura?"

"Yes. I heard it distinctly."

"Your witness," Joe shot at Catherine, taking his seat.

Catherine stood slowly, hesitantly. The crowd hunched forward expectantly. They knew this was the confrontation they had been waiting for.

"Mr Ethridge," she began, her voice calm, almost friendly. "Have you and I ever met before this morning?"

"Objection. Irrelevant."

"Hardly, your honour. This has a direct bearing on the witness' predisposition towards my client. I am merely trying to establish the witness' mental state as it bears on his testimony here today and his cooperation with prosecution versus the defence."

"Are you claiming prejudice on the part of the prosecution, Miss Chandler?"

"No, your honour. However, my question will show that the witness carries a predisposition towards my client, completely apart from his testimony here today."

"Objection overruled. Keep this brief, Miss Chandler. I will order a halt if I feel you are straying from your stated purpose."

She nodded, then turned to the witness. "We're waiting, Mr. Ethridge."

"Yeah. I've seen you before."

"Would you tell the jury where?"

"At my apartment."

"And what was the purpose of my visit there?"

He was silent. He shifted his position in his chair, his hands in his lap. "I don't know."

"And why don't you know, Mr Ethridge?"

He paused. "I asked you to leave."

"You did not even extend the courtesy of asking the purpose of my visit to you, am I correct?"

"I knew what you wanted. You wanted to badger my wife and me with questions to try to save your client!"

"Your Honour!" Catherine said quickly.

"Mr Ethridge, you will please confine your answers to the questions asked and leave your interpretations out of your answers. Is this clear?"

"Yes. I'm sorry."

Catherine moved closer, leaning against the railing but facing the jury, not looking at the witness. "You refused to answer a single question about what you heard that night for me."

"Yes."

"But you were very forthcoming with the DA's office, am I right?"

"Yes."

"Why is that, Mr Ethridge?"

He paused. "I was sick of the whole thing. I told them everything I knew. I didn't want to go over it again. Besides, they told me you would be given a transcript of my statement. Why go over it again?"

"Why does 'going over it' bother you, Mr Ethridge?"

"I don't like to get involved in other people's troubles."

"That didn't stop you from listening in, did it, Mr Ethridge?"

He was silent. "In fact, you put your book down and listened pretty closely, didn't you?"

"Yeah. I guess so. I was curious."

"I see," Catherine said, walking towards the jury. "You don't like to get involved unless it involves eavesdropping, I suppose."

"Objection..."

"Withdrawn. Mr. Ethridge, how long have you and your wife been married?"

"Twelve years."

"Have you once, in those twelve years, ever used the word 'kill' to her?"

"No."

"Come on, Mr Ethridge. You've never threatened to kill your wife, even in fun?"

"No."

"You've never said, in exasperation, 'Honey, I could kill you!'"

"Not like I heard it said that night."

"I see. So you *have* jokingly used that expression before?"

"Yes. Who hasn't? But it was a joke then. When I heard it during the fight, it wasn't being said in fun. It sounded serious."

"I see. You're not psychic, are you, Mr Ethridge?"

"Of course not."

"So your statement that the word was uttered as a threat is simply your personal interpretation, is it not?"

"It sounded like that to me."

"And you stand by that assessment?"

"I do."

"Mr Ethridge, is it your opinion that the fight ended in silence, unresolved?"

"Yes."

"Would it surprise you if I were to tell you that Mr Ventura and the defendant made love within minutes of the end of this 'fight'?"

"Nothing gays do would surprise me, Miss Chandler."

She turned to him. "That's an interesting answer, Mr Ethridge. Could you elaborate on it, please?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you seem to be an authority on what 'gays' do, judging from your response."

"Objection. The witness' expertise on homosexuality is irrelevant."

"Your honour, the witness made a statement. I simply want to learn the basis for that statement."

"The witness will answer." the judge said sternly, waving Joe's unpronounced objection off.

"I meant that everybody knows how sex-oriented gays are. I can believe they would jump into bed together at a time like that"

Catherine walked back to the defence table slowly. A thin folder of papers lay near the edge. She looked down at it intently; knowing that to pick it up would commit her to a path she did not want to take. She ignored the folder, turning instead and leaning back against the edge of the table.

"You're a family man, Mr Ethridge?"

"Yes."

"You're proud of your wife, your children?"

"Yes."

"You would never do anything to hurt your family, am I right?"

The witness shifted uneasily in his seat, but his voice did not change. "Never."

"You would do anything to protect your family from harm?"

"Yes."

"And your hatred of homosexuality is an offshoot of that protective instinct?"

"I don't hate homosexuals!" His voice was approaching the top of its range.

"I would hardly call your statements supportive, Mr Ethridge."

"Look, lady, I don't care what people do in their own homes. I just don't want to have to deal with it!"

"But you don't object to *eavesdropping* on it, do you?"

"I couldn't help it! It was loud. I couldn't help but hear!"

"You could have gone into the other room. You could have pounded on the ceiling to let them know they were being loud. But you chose to keep silent and listen, Mr Ethridge. Why?"

"I said I was curious. That's all!"

"Miss Chandler, you've covered this ground rather thoroughly, I think. Unless you have anything relevant to establish by this tack, I suggest you move on."

She turned to look at the folder, her hand moving forward. It stopped halfway, held as if by steel chains. She tried to move her hand, but the muscles of her arm would not respond. A murmur ran through the courtroom. Dayce pushed the folder forward, but she could not pick it up. She did not look at Dayce or Alan or Joe. She saw only the gentle face of Ruth Ethridge, of Hillary and Jennifer Ethridge. It was as if those faces controlled the muscles in her arm, her hand. She pulled back from the table, away from the folder.

Dayce jumped to his feet. "Your honour, may we have a fifteen minute recess?"

"All right. Court will recess for fifteen minutes!" The judge rapped the gavel twice and left the podium. The audience rose and stretched, a buzz of anticipation filling the room.



Dayce grabbed her arm and directed her towards the conference rooms. She did not resist. She did not look up.

# The Crossroads

Dayce literally pushed Catherine through the door, slamming it behind him with such force, that a photograph on the wall clattered to the floor.

“Sit down.” he commanded.

She obeyed, moving to a chair at the far end of the table. She wanted as much solid material and space between them as she could manage. She looked at him, her face a naked plea for calm and rationality.

“What the hell is your problem, Chandler?” It was half question, half accusation.

Her gaze fell to some point in space between them, taking in the whole room but none of its specific contents. “I can’t do this, Dayce. Not with his wife in the courtroom. Not with his kids sitting in that corridor.”

He walked slowly to the window, sitting on the dusty ledge, his arm against the frame. He waited.

“You can do this as well as I can. Better. You have a taste for the jugular...”

She stopped, reluctant to say it—knowing he would know her meaning in the silence. She looked over at him intently, her facial muscles loose, conveying nothing except an infinite weariness and admission of powerlessness.

“And you have a taste for nothing, Chandler. I’d hate to have my life depending on your legal skills, such as they are.”

“And what is that supposed to mean!?”

“Just exactly what part of that sentence didn’t you understand?”

“You have no right to say that to me. I’ve spent my life...”

“You’ve spent your life in a cushy set of law offices at daddy’s expense and three years prosecuting drunks and crackheads and traffic tickets! You’ve put away a few sleaze balls in three-piece suits that any green Assistant DA could have tapped their second year in law school. You’ve been dished out a collection of cases that wouldn’t dirty your hands or risk your reputation or smudge those pretty white silk gloves you seem to want to handle this witness with.” He saw her anger rising and moved towards her, as if his proximity would prevent its release. “You’ve put your life on the line a few times, but you and I both know who saved your ass when you did, don’t we?” He saw her face change suddenly, as if his words were a surprise. “I’m not a fool, Chandler. There’s been talk about the number of suspects that end up dead on your cases for a long time. You don’t think people notice? And now I know why”. She looked at him, fear replacing the anger. “So don’t tell me how you’re such a goddam crackerjack attorney, Chandler. You’re a drawing room lightweight who doesn’t want anyone to suffer except the guilty. You want justice without paying the price. And the price in this case is going to be *wrecked lives*. You had better face that...” She tried to rise, but he pushed her back down roughly, no trace of compassion or empathy softening his gestures. “You are going to have to go back in there and ask the question that needs to be asked, in such a manner that the implications are obvious. You are going to have to destroy *that* man’s life to save *Alan’s*. *That* is your only choice here. *Somebody’s going to hate you, Chandler*. You may even hate yourself for a few days. But it’s got to be done. You’re going to have to dirty those pristine hands of yours. And if you can’t do it!, then I suggest you get the hell off of this

defence team and open a dress boutique or a jewellery store someplace. But for Christ's sake, start acting like a lawyer instead of a fucking social worker!"

She shot to her feet faster than he could reach out to prevent it.

"Have you met Ruth Ethridge?! Have you spoken a single word to her daughters!!?"

Dayce stood staring at her motionless. He said nothing, as if her words were irrelevant.

"You're asking me to destroy three innocent people with information that is circumstantial, that may not be true in the sense that you want me to convince the jury that it's true. Don't you give a damn about that?!"

"No."

She shook her head slowly. "You bastard."

"That's right, Chandler... precisely right. That's what I am. That's what I *have* to be. I've been far worse during my lifetime. So long as it is in the service of innocence, that is what I must be. And that is what you have to be, too."

"And what about his family? What about their innocence?"

"Their innocence stands in the way of Alan Trescoe. Their innocence will hurt them, perhaps irreparable – but it won't send them to prison for forty years."

"You're asking me to destroy a *family*, Dayce."

A smile creased Dayce's face but it was an ugly smile. It was as if the word had torn a scab off a wound long closed and healed. "You bet I am. I want that courtroom filled with more blood than a coroner's office after a plane crash. I want that witness stand awash in blood."

"To avenge yourself?" Catherine asked.

"To save *Alan*."

He turned away, heading towards the door. She followed, intent on getting an answer to the question that had been haunting her for weeks. "If our client were an *Alice* Trescoe instead of *Alan* Trescoe, would you be quite so merciless?!"

He stopped abruptly and turned, his face completely devoid of emotion save for a faint hint of reluctance. He looked down at her for a moment.

"That's some question, considering who and what it is that's keeping your libido in check."

Her hand flew back, then swept forward and slapped Dayce's face.

In the instant after the blow struck, Catherine understood the nature of his remark. It was odd to feel the anger drain from her the instant her hand left his face, replaced by regret and an odd feeling of betrayal -- as if she were accuser and he, the accused.

She stepped back, half-expecting him to lash out at her but knowing that no power on earth could force him to harm her in any way. She knew that the pain he could inflict was not physical, that had he truly wished to harm her, he could have reached far deeper into her soul for his verbal weapons. His words had been meant as sarcasm -- their purpose to illuminate some dark corner of her soul, where the last small remnant of bigotry remained, huddled in the darkness. His words had brought it out naked into the open, and in one final, thoughtless act, it had lashed out in self-defence before dying.

"I'm sorry, Dayce..." She stammered slightly, the words coming over and over, tears filled her eyes. "God, I'm so sorry... I didn't mean..."

His reaction shocked her. As the traces of red her fingers had drawn to his cheek faded, they were replaced by a sad smile -- all the more sad because she knew that his ugly words to her had hurt him far more than her slap.

"How do *you* like it, Cathy?"

She fell back into a chair, exhausted, beaten -- as if her slap had drained the last of her will and stamina. She buried her head in her hands and sobbed, her shoulders and back shaking uncontrollably.

Dayce knelt down to her, his hands resting on her knees gently, his voice calm, subdued. She could feel his motive more in his touch than in his words. "*Now do you understand?*"

She lowered her hands into his, her face still wet with tears. He brushed them gently off her cheeks and drew her into an embrace. "There was no other way to make you see and feel what I've been talking about. It's like swimming in cold water, Cathy." She looked at him. "It's best to just jump in and take the agony in one fell swoop. After a while, you get used to it."

"I had no right to say that to you. I'm sorry."

"I know you didn't. But now you understand what Alan and I and tens of millions of other people have to put up with every day of our lives. I chose my own way of escaping it. You chose another" She looked at him, nodding in agreement. She understood what he meant.

"But most people *can't* get away from it."

"I know."

"I *care* about that man's wife, Cathy. I care *more* about his children. But I care *most* about Alan. If it comes down to pushing those innocent people into the cold water in order to keep Alan from drowning, I'll do it. That's what *I* have to do."

"You? I thought..."

He shook his head, slowly tightening his grip on her hands. "I can do it. You're in the water now and it's still cold and uncomfortable. I'm used to it. Someday you'll be able to do what has to be done and not give it a second thought. But not yet..."

He pulled her up slowly and handed her his handkerchief from his breast pocket. She dried her eyes carefully. "You're right about the past seven years, too. I have been kidding myself..."

He knocked her chin up affectionately. "You're a *good* lawyer, Chandler, but you'll never be a *great* lawyer. I know of no higher compliment I can pay you."

She handed the handkerchief back to him. "You mean all this time that I've been calling you a great lawyer, you've been insulted?"

He pulled the door open, then looked back at her, smiling. "I was *born* to be a great lawyer, Cathy..."

\*\*\*\*\*

"Your honour, I will be continuing the cross-examination of this witness."

"Proceed."

Dayce walked towards the witness stand the folder in his hands. He opened it slowly, reading for a few moments. The courtroom shifted slightly, the witness more. The tension unrelieved from a long morning of anticipation began to build again. Dayce prolonged the moment as long as he dared, allowing the silence to feed the tension.

"Mr Ethridge, you attended Penn State University, correct?"

"That's right."

"You majored in education?"

"Yes."

"You were the editor of the college newspaper in your junior and senior years."

"Yes." he answered proudly.

"You penned several editorials during your tenure as editor. Your eloquence in defending the freedom and inviolability of many disenfranchised groups is astonishing."

"Thank you. I meant every word."

"I believe you. Your stand towards expulsion of fraternities and sororities that discriminated against gays, blacks, Hispanics, almost any targeted group, was quite against the mainstream at the time. I discovered in my research that you were physically several times."

"Yeah. It went with the job."

"Mr Ethridge, would you say that your views towards these groups have remained the same in the last twelve years?"

"Objection! Irrelevant."

"Your honour, .my next series of questions goes right to motivation and for predisposition of the witness towards my client. The relevance will be made clear."

"I'll allow the questions, Mr DiCenzo. Objection overruled."

"Thank you, your honour." He turned back to the witness box. "Well?"

"I don't think my attitudes have changed all that much. Of course, now that I have a family, I have to consider their welfare."

"Of course. It must be difficult raising a little girl with such a dreadful disease." He studied the next pages of the folder. "Mr Ethridge, can you tell us what your younger daughter Hillary is suffering from?"

"She was infected with Herpes Simplex virus at birth."

"And what is the prognosis for your daughter?"

"She has been diagnosed as mentally deficient. She is slowly losing her eyesight. Her retinas are being slowly eaten away."

"I see. Your wife was infected with the virus and passed it on to the child?"

He shifted uneasily in the chair, his voice reluctant. "Yes. She was diagnosed postpartum."

"There was no trace of infection during the early months of the pregnancy?"

"No."

"Was it ever determined how your wife came to be infected?"

"No."

Dayce looked at the witness, his eyes levelled and calm. "No?"

"Our family doctor questioned both of us thoroughly. There were no risk factors that he could find."

"Did he do a blood work-up on the two of you?"

"No. He said the answers to his questions indicated it would be useless."

"That would assume that you both were completely truthful in answering his questions, is that not correct?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, if either you or your wife were to be less than truthful about possible exposure to a source of the virus, that would mislead him, would it not?"

"My wife and I do not lie, sir. Not about something as serious as this."

"I see. It's good to know that you do not lie about things as serious as this, Mr Ethridge. Your complete honesty will be important during these next few minutes."

He shuffled some pages in the folder and walked to the side of the defence table. Slowly, he turned to look into the gallery of spectators. His glance moved past Mrs Ethridge, past the sea of unknown faces, to a lone face in the back of the room, hidden among the rows of expressionless faces. He nodded slowly. A figure rose in the last row. Many around him turned, curious.

Dayce turned back to the witness stand. "Mr Ethridge, do you recognize the man who is standing at the back of this courtroom?"

He peered intently to the back of the room. "No, I don't think I do."

"Mr Ethridge, do you wear prescription lenses?"

"Yes, I do."

"Would you put them on and try again to identify the man standing in the back of the room."

"I didn't bring my glasses. I only need them for distance."

"Very well." Dayce turned. "Would the gentleman standing please approach the railing?"

"Objection! Your honour, this is irrelevant."

"Overruled. Step forward."

The young man made his way out of the row of people and walked to the front of the courtroom. As he approached, Dayce turned back to the witness. The facial muscles of the witness were pulled tight into a look of non-expression – an effort to appear effortless made its presence known in the pounding of a vein in the man's neck, that increased as the unknown man drew closer.

"I ask you again, Mr Ethridge. Do you recognize this man?"

"No." His voice was lifeless, uncertain. He shrank back in his chair as if trying to put as much distance between himself and the man as possible.

"Mr Ethridge, is this your last VISA™ credit card statement?" He handed the witness a photocopy.

"Yes. It is."

"The account number appearing on that photocopy is your valid account number since 1982?"

"Yes."

Dayce flipped a page in the folder. "Mr Ethridge, does the business name 'NIGHTMATES' ring any bells?"

"No."

He pulled a charge slip from the folder. "Mr Ethridge, is that your signature on this credit card slip?"

He studied the photocopy that Dayce handed him. He was silent for a few moments. "Yes, it is."

"And would you tell the jury what business establishment that charge slip was submitted by?"

"NIGHTMATES," he said slowly, barely audible. "But this slip is so old. I don't remember every business name I do business with."

"Mr Ethridge, what is your daughter Hillary's date of birth?"

"November 2, 1989."

"She is four years old?"

"Yes."

"Would you tell the jury the date on the charge-slip in your hand?"

He looked down slowly, as if he were reluctant to face the words and numbers he knew he would find there. "August 15, 1989."

"The final trimester of your wife's pregnancy with your brain-damaged daughter?"

He nodded.

"Please answer the question," the judge admonished.

"Yes."

"Your honor, I object to this entire line of questioning! It is completely irrelevant to this trial!"

"On the contrary, your honor, my next group of questions will show that, far from being truthful, this witness's testimony in regards to my client is a fabrication spun for personal reasons having nothing to do with the death of Mark Ventura."

"Objection overruled, Mr Maxwell. Mr DiCenzo, you had better be able to back up your contention."

He turned back to the witness. "When your family doctor asked if you had had any extramarital sexual contact, you answered 'No', didn't you, Mr Ethridge?"

He did not answer. He shrank back into the back of his chair, his face pregnant with fear and hatred, like an animal trapped in a cage. "I don't remember."

"I have subpoenaed a copy of your medical records, Mr Ethridge. I also have a complete medical file on you from your employer's medical department. Would you care to have the jury read it?"

"Objection!"

"Overruled. The witness will answer."

"No!"

"Mr Ethridge, isn't it a fact that you were diagnosed with Herpes Simplex virus four weeks after your business transaction with the young man standing at that railing?"

The witness shook his head savagely, but did not answer.

While the rest of the courtroom was transfixed by the drama unfolding before them, Catherine had turned to search out Mrs Ethridge's face. When she caught it, their eyes locked. Catherine tried to say through her eyes and face, that she was sorry. But there was no recognition in the woman's face. Her



expression was blank, lifeless, like that of an animal dead on the side of the road. Catherine turned away sadly.

"Isn't it a fact that you paid this young man \$75 00 for a one hour session of 'service' on the night of August 12, 1989? Isn't it a fact that you then transmitted the virus to your wife in the final months of her pregnancy with your daughter? Isn't it a fact that you *knew* how she had contracted that virus, that you *knew* that your actions were responsible for the damage to your daughter, that you *knew* that you were, in fact, the harbinger of your daughter's suffering?"

"Objection!"

"No!!!"

"Isn't it a fact at you wanted sex more often than your pregnant wife could provide it, that you couldn't face the idea of cheating on her with another *woman*, that you needed someone willing, professional, anonymous, and *male*. Someone who could take care of you and yet still allow you to deny any involvement with other *women* if you were confronted?"

"Your honor!! The prosecution most strongly objects..."

"No!!!"

"Isn't it a fact, Mr Ethridge, that once you realized that you had transmitted this virus to your *daughter* through your *wife*, you developed a pathological hatred for gay men? You blamed *them* for infecting you? For destroying your child and disabling your wife??"

"No, it's not true! It's *not* true!!"

"Your honor!! Counsel for the defence is abusing the witness!! We object..."

"Isn't it a fact that you swore to yourself that you would take your revenge on the *first possible target you could find*? That you would make sure that one of *them* suffered for what another one of *them* did to you?"

"Stop it!!! Stop it!!!" The cry came, not from the witness stand, but from the gallery. Mrs Ethridge had stood up, her face covered with tears, her arms held loosely in front of her in a desperate attempt at pleading. Her cry was the desperate plea of a creature facing imminent destruction, yet driven by instinct to try to protect the last vestige of trust and loyalty within. "*Please stop!!!*"

"Bailiff, please escort that woman from the courtroom," the judge said, pounding his gavel uselessly.

The bailiff moved forward slowly, taking her by the arm. She crumpled to the floor of the chamber, her sobs filling the room with an indescribable sound that was part animal, part human.

"You son-of-a-bitch !" the witness screamed, watching as his wife was led out of the room. "*Look what you've done!*"

"Look what *I've* done?" Dayce turned slowly, his eyes sweeping the jury, taking in their reactions. His eyes came to rest on Thomas Ethridge, his voice calm and direct as he delivered the final blow. "Mr Ethridge, I think it's clear *who* has done *what* in this courtroom today. You *lied* to the police. You *lied* to the jury. You *lied* to your wife and family." He watched as the anger rose in Thomas Ethridge. "If

you had been home with the family you claim to love instead of spread-eagled on some stranger's bed, your daughter wouldn't be dying – and my client wouldn't be here."

"God damn you!" Thomas Ethridge sprang from the witness box, lunging for Dayce. The bailiff caught him short, grabbing his arms and dragging him out of the courtroom. A stream of obscenities and threats followed. As the witness was dragged from the courtroom, his screams fading into the distance, he turned to the jury. "I have no further questions of the witness."

\*\*\*\*\*

The door slammed behind the judge, his motion like dark fluid moving through the room as he swept past the attorneys and flowed into the chair behind his massive mahogany desk.

"Your honour, I..."

"Silence, Mr Maxwell!! You'll speak when I ask you to speak." He turned to Dayce and Catherine angrily, his voice under a control borne of years of experience. "Mr. DiCenzo, your little speech at the end of cross-examination will be a part of my report to the state bar. I trust you understand what the content of that report will be?"

"Yes, your honour. I'll be prepared to answer your complaints."

"I shall instruct the jury of the speculative nature of your line of questioning."

"From the witness' reaction, I would say my speculation hit pretty near the bulls-eye."

"Maxwell, why didn't you research this witness' past more thoroughly. As much as I loathe the methods used by defence counsel, your witness' credibility is open to some question here."

"Mr DiCenzo has sources that we don't, your honour. I don't have many professional acquaintances who are male prostitutes."

"Perhaps Mr Maxwell should broaden his professional horizons, your honour, to include male prostitutes as well as female. Eh, Maxwell?"

"Enough, both of you! Miss Chandler, I am not including you in my complaint to the state bar, as yet. I must warn you, however, that a repeat of what happened today will result in the two of you appearing in tandem. Do I make myself clear."

"My associate took what we felt was appropriate action against an obvious perjurer, your honour, If he goes before the bar, then so do I. I would have handled the witness in *exactly* the same manner."

Dayce looked at Catherine, a look of pride and respect in his eyes, but his eyes were hidden from the others. They heard only his calm voice saying "The decision was mine, your honour, Miss Chandler had no idea I was going to speculate in this direction. In fact, she tried to dissuade me."

"Miss Chandler's instincts were quite correct. You could have handled this matter more... delicately, counsellor."

"Yes, your honour."

"Will you be calling any further witnesses, Mr Maxwell?"

"No, your honour. But I would like the opportunity to redirect."

The judge sighed heavily, leaning forward in his chair. "When we resume on Monday, you will have that opportunity. Mr DiCenzo -- Miss Chandler -- I expect your conduct to remain within professional confines for the duration of this trial. Is that understood?"

"Yes, your honour." Catherine answered. Dayce merely nodded.

"And you, Mr Maxwell. I don't want any retaliation for the events of this afternoon. Is that clear? I will allow you a great deal of latitude, but you are not to repeat this afternoon's theatrics. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, your honour. The state isn't desperate enough to..."

"Out! All of you!"

They shuffled out slowly, respectfully - Dayce pulling the door closed quietly.

"That was quite a stunt, DiCenzo. I would never take a chance like that."

"I know you wouldn't, Maxwell. That's why you're an *assistant* DA."

Joe shrugged. "You never know about juries. I mean, I can imagine they might not like your dragging some poor guy with a dying daughter through the mud like that."

"He should have thought of that *before* he jumped into the mud."

"What do you think of your friend's actions, Cathy? Pretty inspiring, huh? Of course, if you're going to go digging under rocks, it helps to have someone who's lived there before."

She fixed him with a steely glare, refusing to rise to the bait. "Speaking of rocks, Joe, aren't there a few you and your private investigator should be out slithering around under right now?"

"Nice touch, Chandler. Pretty soon, you'll be every bit as capable as your friend here."

"Is there a point to this conversation?"

"Have you read the stuff I gave you yesterday?"

She shook her head. "I have a client to defend. I don't have time for your adolescent trivialities. Maybe after the trial I'll look at it."

"When you do, Cathy, why don't you make sure Mr DiCenzo is still around. You may be needing an attorney" he started to walk away, but turned back to add "and none of his little courtroom games will be enough to stop me."

He turned quickly, not waiting for an answer.

"What has he got on you, Chandler?" Dayce asked. "What does he know?"

"I don't know. I didn't read the stuff."

"Maybe you should."

She shook her head. "I don't want to think about Joe right now."

He took her arm, guiding her towards the exit. "You had better start. Because obviously he's thinking about you."

\*\*\*\*\*

The manila folder lay on her desk. She had thrown it there absentmindedly the day before and forgotten its existence. Now she sat at her desk looking at the folder, reluctant to open it, resentful of the control it exerted over her at this moment. She did not want to look inside. She told herself angrily that it could wait until the trial was over, until she was stronger. Whatever blow it promised to deliver, she knew she was not ready to receive it.

She pulled the flap up and away from the back, breaking the seal. She pulled the thick stack of papers out slowly, as if they were a venomous snake or bounded by razor-sharp edges. With only a circle of light and the strains of a Rachmaninoff piano concerto to disturb the darkness and silence, she started to read.

\*\*\*\*\*

Alan and Dayce had been silent for hours. Dayce had thrown together a quick dinner of vegetable soup and Caesar salad. Alan had taken a short nap, a long stretch of sleepless nights finally taking their toll. It was late evening when Dayce roused Alan and served the dinner.

They ate in silence. The city noise beyond the windows seemed muted, distant as if they were eating in a huge dining hall in an estate miles from the nearest sign of human habitation or activity. Even Herkimer was silent, his usual attempts at seduction for table scraps replaced by a strange bout of sleepiness. He remained curled up on top of a heating vent in a corner, an immobile patch of orange against the charcoal grey of shadows.

Alan could sense that Dayce did not feel like talking – knew that in some way he could not explain, the day's events were not meaningless to him, that he was affected by what he had done in some way Alan could not name, but that it was a subject not open to discussion.

"What choice did you have?" Alan asked suddenly, quietly, no pity or accusation· marring his words.

"None."

With only the feeble light of the candles before them and the sound of utensils against china to disturb the darkness and silence, they finished their meal.

\*\*\*\*\*

Deep in the tunnels, Vincent walked alone towards the South Junction. He had been drawn to this spot nearly every evening - some phantom haunting his days with memories of days spent in carefree exaltation, days spent exploring the world with Devin, with no thought of the limits of time or space to restrain them.

No matter how many times he read the words on the stone, no matter how many times he read and re-read Devin's letters and notes -- they could not banish the phantom from his mind or from his soul. Something drew him here, some feeling akin to his bond with Catherine, but different somehow -- more subtle, more pervasive.

He reached the junction, the glow from the torch in his hand throwing faint shadows against the walls. He sat against the wall facing the carved stone, his back pressing against the damp, cold stone. The stone inscription stood above him, the words burned into his consciousness, yet still able to touch him in some way he could not explain. He could not break their hold on him.

With only the faint glow of the torch beside him and the sound of his breathing to disturb the darkness and silence, he stared at the inscription again, and wept.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Your call sounded pretty urgent, Chandler. You've even got Alan worried. What's wrong?"

Without saying a word Catherine threw a stack of well-worn papers at Dayce across the coffee table. He picked them up and started reading, curious. As the minutes and pages unfolded, his expression changed perceptibly -- from curiosity to fascination to concern. When he came to a page containing two photographs, he started.

"I knew I recognized that old guy from someplace!"

"You...." she stammered. "..you knew *Jacob Wells*?"

He shook his head. "Not personally. Do you remember what subject my post-graduate thesis work dealt with?"

"No."

"The New York Subcommittee Interrogations during the McCarthy Committee Hearings. I know every witness ever called, the charges lodged against them, and the results of their appearances. I even followed up their lives after their testimony." He looked back at the photograph. Jacob Wells was one of the 'Chittenden Four.'"

"Who?" she asked, startled.

"The 'Chittenden Four'. They were a group of four research scientists attached to the Chittenden Research Facility in Connecticut. They were involved in several different nuclear research projects, trying to refine certain characteristics in animals to make them more resistant to radioactivity. I remember they were called, as a body, before the McLelland Committee in early 1953. They refused to cooperate with the committee... claimed their work was going to be used for military purposes, to blunt the effects of a Soviet first strike. They removed their most sensitive work from the facility before their appearance before the committee. I remember some of the questions from the interrogations. They threatened the men with prison, branded them as communist sympathizers. Then suddenly, before they were to be cited for contempt and jailed, they all vanished on the same night. No trace was ever found of their work, their notes, their families. It was gone, as if they had been spirited away by aliens. There was a big brouhaha for a couple of months and a lot of finger-pointing, but eventually it disappeared from the headlines. Federal warrants were issued and, so far as I know, they were renewed every year."

"Look at the final pages."

He turned obediently to the end of the file. The warrant for Jacob Wells' arrest stood as silent confirmation of Dayce's words. "They still want him."

"After *forty* years? Why?"

"Apparently, they were convinced they had made significant progress in their work."

She reached for a pack of cigarettes, half-empty, and pulled one out, lighting it quickly. She walked to the window, a thin, twisting veil of smoke trailing after her.

"When did you start smoking again?"

"Today."

Dayce weighed the folder in his hands. "This is serious stuff in here. If it's ever discovered that you know the whereabouts of this man, the feds will be on you like white on rice."

She continued to peer into the darkness outside the window not turning. "Who were the other members of the 'Chittenden Four'?"

"Let me see... there was Richard Kambaugh, John Pater... and I think a man named 'Acondia'... I can't remember his first name.

She remained silent for a few moments. "What do you know about John Pater?"

"He was a brilliant research chemist. I remember he did his undergraduate work at St John's here in the city."

He published several controversial papers dealing with the possibility of unlocking the secret of genetic differentiation and using it as a key to isolating characteristic dominant genes for engineering superior specimens of certain animals. There was a lot of speculation that he had begun experimenting in this area when he vanished."

"Did he testify before the committee?"

"Of course. I can get you a transcript of his sessions, if you like."

She took a drag on the cigarette, exhaling the smoke ferociously. "Do it." He watched her silently.

"What do you know about John Pater, Cathy?" She turned to him, surprised by the question.

"Don't try to bullshit me, Chandler. You know something about him. What is it?"

She sat down beside him, tossing the cigarette to extinction in a half-empty coffee cup on the table. "John Pater founded the Tunnel World community below. Jacob Wells was his best friend. Together, they offered a safe haven from the world above. They tried to build a community of scholars and craftsmen."

"What happened?"

"What I've been told is that John's wife discovered Vincent as an infant, half-dead on some January night, wrapped in rags and left in a pile of trash outside St Vincent's hospital. John came to regard Vincent as his own son. He slowly went mad, poisoning his wife and attempting to exploit the dangerous elements to Vincent's soul. Things got so bad, the others banished him from the community. He took refuge in the outer tunnels. He developed new types of drugs and peddled them above. Almost 50 people died. They couldn't do anything against him, he would have divulged their existence, destroyed everything below."

"What happened to him?"

"Vincent threatened him, destroyed his laboratory. He fled. He kept trying to exact his revenge, claiming that the Tunnel World was his. He kidnapped me, trying to lure Vincent to his death. He tried to wipe out everyone with a bomb during a celebration. Finally he used trickery and deception to attack Vincent psychologically – pretending to be Jacob and filling him with ugly lurid stories of having ripped his way out of his mother's womb. He nearly succeeded in turning Vincent against himself, but Vincent killed him in a fit of rage. He's dead."

"Jesus, Catherine!" He fell silent, thinking. "You're *sure* he's dead?"

"Three of us stood and watched as Vincent killed him."

"This story about Vincent... do you believe it?"

She looked down, then to the side, reaching for another cigarette. "No."

"What do you believe, Catherine?"

"What do you mean? What do I believe Vincent is?"

He nodded.

"I don't know. I don't believe he was the subject of any sort of genetic testing."

"He isn't. It's unlikely today, even with our modern equipment and computers and genetic mapping. It was totally impossible in 1953."

"I think there's a lot that Jacob hasn't told me."

"Have you discussed any of this with Vincent?"

She shook her head. "I accept Vincent for what he is."

Dayce picked up the sheaf of papers, chuckling slightly. "I wish there were more people like you around. It would make life so much simpler." He weighed the sheaf in his hand. "Who is this younger man here?"

"That's Devin, Jacob's son. The man that Joe was investigating. It was his funeral we attended."

"Well, Joe is after Jacob Wells now. He may even think you know the other two guys the feds want to get their hands on." He looked at her. "What do you know about them?"

"Nothing. Father has never mentioned them."

"That's impossible, Catherine. They were inseparable. They risked their careers for each other, went down to professional defeat together, vanished together on the same night. I can't believe he doesn't know anything about them."

"What do you suggest I do about this?"

He took the papers and threw them into the briefcase at his feet. "Let me handle things here. I think you need to talk with Vincent about what I've told you. He has a right to know."

She shook her head sadly, forehead pressed to her palm, her cigarette extending up and away from her, a dull red spot of fire at its tip. She seemed to have forgotten its existence. "I hate to hurt him. He's always believed Father... Jacob. He was someone we always felt we could trust, no matter what. This will be another blow of a series of blows."

"Would you rather I went with you?"

She looked up, gratitude evident in her eyes. "Would you? It might make it easier, coming from you."

"Sure. I'll run up to the house and pull my research. We can talk to Vincent after the trial."

He took the cigarette from her fingers and extinguished it in the same cup as its predecessor, then pulled her into an embrace, gently stroking her hair. She fell against his chest, worn down by frustration and anger. "Don't worry, Cathy. It will be all right."

\*\*\*\*\*

The insistent echo of chisel against stone filled the air around her. She remembered the last time she had stood in this chamber -- a night filled with fresh lilac and a multitude of candles -- a special night she and Vincent had arranged for Olivia and Kanin. She tried to forget the events of the days that followed.

Kanin threw his head up at the sound of her footsteps, shocked and surprised at seeing her.

"Catherine!" he said easily, tossing the tools aside and walking towards her. "It's good to see you." He moved to a small table at the foot of the unmade bed. "Can I get you some tea?"

"No, thank you. I'm not thirsty."

She moved to an old, overstuffed chair beside his work table. He stood in front of her, his smile friendly, curious.

"What brings you here?"

She seemed reluctant to speak. Kanin did not know her well enough to understand the pain that would have been evident to Vincent, to Dayce. He could sense only reluctance.

"I need to ask you about prison."



His smile vanished. He sat in front of her, his legs crossed and drawn up into his chest, his arms crossed in front of him and resting on his knees. "You've been inside prisons, Catherine; you know what they're like."

She shook her head, avoiding his gaze. "I don't mean that. I mean... I need to know about what you went through *inside* – when there was no one in authority to protect you."

"You mean..." They both understood what she was asking.

"I know how painful this is for you, Kanin, but I need to know what will happen to Alan if he is sent to prison. You're the only person I trust to ask."

It was Kanin's turn to fall silent, to fall prey to the reluctance Catherine had felt. She leaned forward, her voice low. She put a gloved hand on his arm, reassuringly. "I understand it must be difficult, but you don't have to sugar-coat your answer to me. You can't say anything I haven't imagined in my worst nightmares. I just need to know..."

"Catherine, even my own worst nightmares weren't as bad as what I went through. From the second night on..."

"Were you...?" He nodded. "Kanin, how did you fight back?"

"The only way you can. I acquired a protector. Someone to keep the gangs and the thugs away from me."

"What did you have to give him in return?"

She knew the answer before he looked up at her, tears welling in his eyes. "I'm sorry, Kanin. That was stupid."

"It was better than facing a gang of strangers every day, Catherine. He was good to me, kept me safe from the worst of it. And he didn't demand much more than I was capable of giving."

"Kanin, it still must have been torture for you." His eyes never left hers, answering her through their steadiness, their clarity. "What will happen to Alan?"

"I've seen his photograph in the newspapers we get from above. He's a beautiful man, Catherine." She nodded in agreement. "He'll be eaten alive in prison, Catherine. Even in the special section he'll be in because of his blindness, he'll be a constant target. Every day, every night. And he won't be able to find protection. He'll have nothing to bargain with, nothing to offer."

"There's nothing he can do to..."

"No way, Catherine. He'll be considered a piece of meat... nothing more. It will be a hell on earth."

She put her arms around Kanin's neck and kissed his forehead gently, sadly. "I'm truly sorry for what happened, Kanin. If I had only known..."

"You were doing your job, Catherine. It was the price I had to pay for what I did. I don't blame you. I never did."

She stood up and headed for the door slowly, her head down.

“Catherine? Why did you want to know this?”

She turned to face him, her shoulders sagging, her face empty. “There’s a price I have to pay for what I did, Kanin.” She answered turning away, before he could see the spurt of tears to her eyes.

\*\*\*\*\*

Saturday morning dawned bright with sunlight reflected off melting snow and a stiff wind from the southeast, warming the air gently as it attacked the remnants of the storm.

Dayce had called Catherine early, inviting her to accompany him and Alan back to his house in Connecticut to retrieve the files he had promised Catherine and to escape, if only for a day, the agony of the trial. The judge had approved Alan’s trip outside the state, so long as he was accompanied by either or both of his attorneys. She had accepted quickly and eagerly, anxious to escape the city.

She packed a basket lunch of chicken, salad, and expensive white wine. The windows to her apartment were open to the warming winds, her delicate curtain liners billowing into her rooms as she gathered her things together, awaiting Dayce’s call from the lobby. She walked to the open balcony doors, spreading her arms wide, revelling in the feel of the wind caressing the skin of her hands and arms. Her hair fell back over the fur collar of her leather jacket in a tangle of auburn and brown that matched the colour of her jacket, cascading in unruly strands down her back. Her hair seemed to blend into the leather, the colours matched so perfectly.

When her buzzer sounded, she threw the windows and doors closed and gathered her things into her arms. She met Dayce headlong at the corner of the hallway, nearly running over him in her haste. He gathered the heavy basket into his arms quickly, their laughter erasing all thoughts of courtrooms and warrants.

The sky flew to meet them as they headed north, a thin veil of clouds catching the sun rays and spreading them out, making the sky look like a spread of lemon peel from horizon to horizon. The colour washed over every object they saw, glinting off the windows of houses, the long shafts of skyscrapers, the wings of the occasional seabird. Catherine felt that if she were to breathe deeply, the lemon would remain on her tongue, a bright, clean remnant that would stay with her so long as the sun was there to feed it. She longed to share this day, any day like this, with Vincent. It was this type of day she felt he deserved.

As the cities dropped away behind them and the country opened wide, conversation drifted to stories of childhood -- of days spent in glorious freedom roaming through forests of green trees and abandoned houses, walking railroad tracks and exploring forbidden vistas. Alan regaled them with stories of his childhood in Philadelphia, of soft pretzels and water rice stands. Catherine and Dayce listened to his tales of lemonade stands and scout camping trips. His experiences were their experiences – the common thread of a generation. Catherine glanced at Dayce sporadically. She could discern nothing save pure enjoyment of the moment.

As they passed the whitewashed storefronts and drab farmhouses that made up their childhood home town, Catherine noticed that Dayce’s expression was different – that his eyes remained focused on the road ahead of them. His avoidance of any awareness of the town seemed deliberate, as if his being here were painful in some way she could not guess. The feeling faded as they moved past the city limits, and headed upwards, the highway climbing rapidly into the hills that flowed away to the northwest, to the ledge of grey stone that marked their destination. She thought she caught a brief reflection off the glass of his house as they started their climb, the glint of sun on broad clear panes. It

reminded her of a lighthouse that she had once seen. It's beacon lighting the way to safety, standing guard against the jagged rocks below.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dayce lit the kindling, the small, dry sticks springing to life quickly in the fireplace. The flames lapped at the base of the logs above, greedily reaching higher and higher, until the room was awash with light and heat. He replaced the screen and walked to the kitchen to wash the dirt and newsprint from his hands.

"Let's have lunch at the ledge. Give the house a chance to get warm." Catherine offered.

They headed slowly through the small stretch of woods that separated the house from the rocky overlook. Dayce guided Alan by the arm, Catherine carried the picnic basket. The snow was nearly gone here, the sunlight having forced a retreat of the white blanket into dark comers and shaded outcrops. The rock was bare at the overlook, bare and warmed by the sunrays. Dayce guided Alan to the flat stone bench, then sat next to him, his arm resting on Alan's knee lazily, impersonally, Alan's only physical anchor to a strange landscape. Catherine sat facing them, her back to the valley and the wind.

"I wish you could see this, Alan," Dayce said slowly, his words touched by the beauty of the vista that lay below them. "I love this place."

"Dayce told me he met you on this ridge, Cathy."

"That's right," she answered, taking the bottle of wine from the basket and opening it carefully. "I used to ride my bike up here after school. I would sit where you're sitting now and spend hours reading, drawing, listening to my transistor radio. Sometimes I would come up here just to sit and look out at the view."

"How did you find this place, Dayce?"

"I followed Chandler here. I noticed that she would head up the road on her bike almost every day, but I couldn't figure out where she went. Back then, there was no one living up here, no shops or stores. One day I followed her. I saw her park her bike and walk into the woods to this spot. I followed her, tried to sneak up on her. She was too smart for me. She had noticed me behind her and was waiting for me. When I reached the ledge, she was standing here, arms folded, waiting. I remember her saying something about this place belonging to her, that I had no right to follow her here. I laughed at her. I told her that she couldn't keep a place like this to herself."

"What did you do?"

"I asked her how she intended to keep me away. She grew very angry and flustered, but there was really nothing she could do. She begged me not to tell any of my friends about the spot -- that it was too beautiful and too important to share. I promised not to, so long as she would keep coming here."

"Is that true, Cathy?"

"Sort of. Actually, he was so pitiful that I couldn't bear to listen to his begging anymore. I finally broke down and let him stay."

"Yeah, right, Chandler," Dayce said. "You *wanted* me to stay."

"I suppose I did." she answered. She handed each of them a glass of wine, then poured one for herself, the plastic cool and smooth in her fingers. "I liked him. I thought he was cute."

"How old were you two when this happened?" Alan asked, a faint tinge of something that sounded like jealousy in his voice.

"We were both seven."

"Oh." Alan said, relief obvious in his voice. "So it was never..."

Dayce laughed. "No, it was never sexual, Alan. We both knew, from the start that it never would be. We grew to be friends very quickly. There was never a possibility of that kind of thing, even if I were straight."

"You knew about him." Alan asked, jerking his head towards Dayce but speaking to Catherine. "That early?"

"Not quite that early, but it didn't take long. I knew Dayce was different from the other boys I knew. I never asked, and by the time it would have occurred to me to wonder. I already knew."

"I think the fact that we both had a crush on Mr Harmon, our fifth grade science teacher, was her first clue." Dayce offered. Alan chuckled. Catherine and Dayce fixed each other with that look of anger and annoyance that only people who truly love each other can exchange.

"He was cute, wasn't he?" Catherine said pulling the chicken from the basket and offering Dayce a thigh.

They laughed together, all thoughts of the city gone now. They spent the hours of this day in innocent abandon, at the one spot they could all feel safe and secure – Alan with Dayce, Dayce among the familiar and comforting vistas of home, and Catherine out of the city's sight and reach.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dayce threw two fresh logs onto the dying fire. The flames faded for a few brief moments then found their way along the edges of the wood, then up the sides, finally engulfing them in bright yellow flame. The shadows in the room shrank as the flames grew, their edges growing less distinct, then indistinct no longer recognizable as human shadows. A few loud crackles and pops sounded then faded as the fingers of fire took hold.

Alan lay stretched out on the sofa, his body barely visible underneath a black and blue checkered down quilt. Dayce walked to him, pulling the covers up and over his shoulder and kissing his hair gently. Alan mumbled something indistinguishable, then turned towards the back of the sofa, his head sinking deeper into the pillow.

Catherine stood at the door to Dayce's study watching. She could see the tenderness in Dayce's touch, in his treatment of this man. It was rare to see this kind of tenderness from Dayce, rarer still that it appeared so effortless. She knew this is how she would want the man she loved to treat her, then she remembered. 'This is the way Vincent treats me.' She chided herself silently.

Dayce returned to the study, closing the door behind them. The light of two tensor lamps threw bright circles on the walls and ceiling near them, but left the rest of the room dark and indistinct. She could make out the faint shapes of books in the bookshelves and the computer against the far wall. All else

was blackness, except for a dark square through which tiny lights shone faintly. She realised she was looking at the sky and that the flickers were stars.

"Here's my thesis, Cathy," Dayce said handing her a thick sheaf of pages. "And I'll print out the full testimony from the 'Chittenden Four' sessions before we leave tomorrow."

She weighed the stack of papers in her hand, reluctantly.

"You don't really want to read that, do you?"

She shook her head. "I'm frightened of what might be in here. It's hard when you trust someone for so long and then..."

"I understand." Dayce said. She was shocked by the empathy in his voice. She looked at him intently. "But any pain you have to endure is better than living with a lie."

"No matter how many others are hurt?"

"That's right."

"Most people would disagree with you."

"That's how I know I'm right. Most people want to do things the easy way. They don't want to pay the price for things they feel or think or want."

She nodded, understanding. She put the thesis aside then leaned against the back of the chair, her shoulders dropping slowly.

"Too much wine?"

"I think so. I didn't realize how little sleep I've gotten these past weeks."

They were silent for several minutes, the silence feeding their languor. Dayce reached behind him and pushed a button on a small radio on the shelf behind his chair. The strains of a classical piece filled the room softly, the volume set low.

"Helps when I'm working at the computer," Dayce said, in answer to her unasked question. "I need music in the background when I work."

Catherine opened her eyes reluctantly, fighting the music and her body's cry for sleep. "Dayce, about you and Alan..."

He glanced up quickly the light cutting his face diagonally. "I know... I know. I promise not to take matters any further... until after the trial."

"So I'm right?"

"Yes."

"How does Alan feel?" Her voice was gentle.

"He doesn't know how I feel yet, but I can sense there's something there – something we both need. I just don't want to do anything so soon after... he's going to need someone in his life, Cathy. I want to be that someone."

She remained silent for several moments, giving him time to think about the question they both knew she would ask. "Do you love him?"

"Yes."

"Dayce, what if we lose? I talked with a young man from the tunnels. He spent over a year in prison. The things he told me..." She shook her head.

"Alan will never see the inside of a prison, Catherine. Not as long as I live."

\*\*\*\*\*

"Proceed. Mr Maxell."

The judge admonished, the trial had reconvened, the room filled to overflowing again, to witness the continuation of the fireworks they had witnessed days before. The judge had warned the spectators against any demonstrations – threatening to expel anyone who disobeyed. An edgy silence replaced the soft murmurs of expectation.

"Your honour, Thomas Ethridge is not present. We have tried to reach either him or his wife all morning, but there is no answer at their apartment."

"Have you tried his place of employment?"

He called in on Friday and told them he wouldn't be in this week. He didn't explain why. The receptionist who took the call assumed he wasn't feeling well."

"Can you proceed without a re-direct?"

"The state wishes to clarify the points raised by the defence in their cross-examination. We can move forward so long as we are granted the right to redirect once the witness is located."

"We object, your honour. The witness is not present as ordered. He made no provision with this court to account for his absence here today. We ask that his entire testimony be stricken from the record"

"Objection overruled Because of the sensational nature of the testimony on Friday, I am inclined to allow Mr Maxwell a great deal of leeway in his..."

"You bastard!!"

The cry came from the back of the courtroom. The doors had been flung open, crashing against the walls loudly. A woman staggered up the aisle, her hair dishevelled, her arms raised to clenched fists, her voice rolling through the hall, drowning out the echoes of the wood slamming against wood.

"You killed my husband!! You rotten bastard!!"

The bailiff caught her halfway up the aisle and held her, but she struggled against his grip, leaning forward, straining to free herself Catherine and Dayce had shot to their feet, as had Joe. The judge

pounded his gavel uselessly, the sound barely audible through her screams. Catherine moved to shield Dayce with her body, but it was pointless. The woman was glaring at Joe.

"You made him testify! He never wanted to!! You told him important his story was!! You opened him up to this!! You killed him, you son-of-a-bitch!!!"

Joe backed against the table, the force of her words as powerful as a slap in the face.

"Please escort this woman from the courtroom." The judge screamed, his pounding relentless now. The second bailiff grabbed an arm and they dragged her towards the doors.

"Your honour, I move that a mistrial be declared." Dayce said quickly.

"Motion denied." He pounded the gavel several more times, to quiet the gallery. "I declare a recess of one hour. Counsels report to my chamber."

\*\*\*\*\*

"What's the story, Maxwell?"

He looked at the report a deputy had brought him. "They found Thomas Ethridge's body in the Hudson this morning. Apparently he jumped from the George Washington Bridge sometime last night. His body was pretty badly battered."

"Did he talk to anyone over the weekend? His wife? A friend?"

"No. His wife is still incapable of answering questions." He shot a glance at Dayce. "I hope you're proud of yourself."

"I'm proud for having uncovered the pressure you put on him to come into this courtroom and lie to this jury. This is your handiwork, Maxwell."

"Silence, both of you!" the judge said quickly.

"What about his testimony, your honour?"

"Admissible."

"Your honour..." Joe said angrily.

"*Admissible!* Do I make myself clear? He was your witness, counsellor. Mr DiCenzo's actions were perfectly ethical. I don't admire his methods, but his attempts to discredit were entirely proper."

"How can this jury possibly put this incident out of their minds?"

"I will instruct them on the points of law involved, Mr Maxwell. That's my job. Have you any further prosecution witnesses to present?"

"No, your honour."

"Mr DiCenzo... Miss Chandler... is the defence ready to proceed?"

"Yes, your honour. We would like to add Mrs Ethridge to our list of ..."

"Denied. Her outburst will be stricken and I will instruct the jury no weight or credence during their deliberations. You will not discuss her emotional state or her belief that the state is responsible for her husband's death in your presentation. You are to act as if she did not exist."

Joe stalked out of the room angrily. The judge followed. "Reconvene in five minutes." He said softly as he passed them, closing the door in his wake.

"...at any cost..." Catherine mumbled.

"What do you mean?"

"Something Vincent said to me. He said we protect Alan at any cost..."

Dayce put his hands on her shoulders. "He was right, Cathy. You know that"

"Maybe one of you should explain that to Ruth Ethridge."

Dayce sighed, dropping his eyes. "We don't speak for Ruth Ethridge, Chandler."

"And just who the hell in that courtroom does?" she asked, pulling away from him and vanishing through the door quickly, not waiting for an answer.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dayce and Catherine presented the defence witnesses without incident. There was a dull sameness to the testimony, with words like 'kind' and 'affectionate' and 'generous' and 'devoted' appearing regularly. Joe did not object once during the testimony. The parade of witnesses seemed like one long, single witness testifying. This was not a roller-coaster ride - this was a ride in a rowboat on a peaceful pond where even ripples were non-existent

As Dayce finished questioning a witness, Alan leaned over and whispered to Catherine. "When do I go on the stand?"

"You don't."

"Why?" he said, his disappointment evident.

"If you go up there, Joe will want to know everything you heard that night. When you tell him about the witness, you'll be opening up his best shot at discrediting you. He'll also ask you how you came to contact me. We can't risk that."

"Why not?"

"If you told them that a witness they can't locate told you to contact me, then I become a target of the prosecution."

"But I could leave that out..."



"No, you can't. If you go on that stand, you tell the *truth*. In this case you don't need to testify. Their case is weak. Their evidence is entirely circumstantial. You don't need to subject yourself to the risk." She squeezed his hand gently. "Trust us on this one, okay?"

He nodded, his eyes unchanging, fixed -- but his smile acknowledging that he had heard her and he understood her motive...

As the final defence witness was excused, Dayce turned and faced the jury and Joe Maxwell, "Ladies and gentlemen, the defence rests."

Joe looked at him, his face ashen.

"Final motions tomorrow morning, nine o'clock. Closing arguments to follow."

\*\*\*\*\*

The wait was entering its third day.

Catherine, Dayce and remained in the courthouse until ten o'clock every night. The jury had asked for various interpretations of law and for complete definitions of 'intent' and of 'manslaughter'. They had asked for a complete transcript of Thomas Ethridge's testimony and for copies of the police reports.

"No way to tell," was how Dayce answered Alan's nervous questions about the length of their deliberations. "Usually, the longer they go, the better it is for the defence. But in this case, it doesn't apply."

"Why?"

"Because you're gay. They could be arguing about scripture and Adam and Eve for all we know. I just can't call this one. If it were a matter of the evidence pure and simple, I would say we had a sure thing in acquittal. But we all know it isn't a matter of just the evidence in this case."

"What do we do if..."

"We appeal."

Catherine seemed distant, depressed. "Sure. You know what that will mean. Six months, eight months in jail -- another trial -- another appeal and another six months." She looked at Dayce, her mouth twisted into an ugly shape he had never seen before. "How many cases like this have you seen overturned on appeal?"

He shook his head slowly. "One in a hundred."

She downed the remnants of a cup of coffee, the liquid cold and bitter against her throat. She squeezed the Styrofoam cup into a ball and threw it towards a trash bin in the corner of the room. As it fell into the bin, the door to the room opened slowly.

"They're in." the bailiff said slowly.

Alan rose slowly. His hands were shaking slightly. Dayce put his arm around Alan's shoulders and guided him out of the room gently. Catherine followed slowly, her thoughts held fixed and hostage by a cruel image -- the sight of Dayce as he bent over to kiss Alan as he slept, and the look in Kanin's eyes as

he told her what awaited this man in prison. She hated being a party to a proceeding where both these images hung balanced in the hands of a group of twelve strangers who could not know the truth as she knew it – as Alan knew it – and hated most being part of a world where both of these images could be thought equally undesirable.

\*\*\*\*\*

"The defendant will rise."

Alan stood up slowly, facing the general direction of the jury box. Catherine and Dayce stood as well. Most of the jury sat looking at their shoes, at their hands clasped in their laps, at the judge. None of them looked at the defendant.

"Have you reached a verdict on all counts of the indictment?"

The foreman rose. "'We have, your honour,'" she said, with obvious effort.

"What say you?"

"On count one of the indictments -- murder in the first degree -- we find the defendant, Alan Mark Trescoe -- 'Not Guilty'"

There was rustling in the crowd, but the judge struck the gavel quickly, ordering silence.

Catherine took Alan's closest hand in hers, squeezing it.

"On count two of the indictment -- manslaughter in the second degree -- we find the defendant, Alan Mark Trescoe -- 'Guilty'."

There was no reaction for several long seconds. Catherine felt Alan's hand leave hers as he lost the ability to stand. He fell back in his chair, his eyes staring vacantly ahead of him, his face frozen in a mask of pain and disbelief.

"Your honour, the defence hereby notifies the bench of its intent to appeal this verdict." Dayce said, mechanically.

"So noted." The judge looked briefly at a pad in front of him. "The jury is dismissed, with the thanks of the state of New York. Sentencing shall take place five days hence, in this chamber, at ten o'clock in the morning."

"Your honour, the prosecution asks that the defendant be retained in custody pending sentencing."

"We object, your honour. The defendant has shown no indication of intent to flee the jurisdiction. Considering the defendant's physical limitations, we think it unlikely he would be able to flee, even if he were so inclined. As the defendant has been convicted of a Class 'B' felony, we see no reason for such harsh action."

"I see no reason for such harshness, Mr Maxwell. The defendant is released on his own recognizance, pending sentencing. Court dismissed."

The spectators fell into animated conversation, some of it vituperative. There were flashbulbs going off every few seconds as Dayce led Alan out of the courtroom, throwing microphones out of their path and

saying “No Comment” over and over to the pack of reporters gathered around them like a pack of vultures around the carcass of a dead animal.

Catherine stood at the defence table, her eyes fixed on the jurors as they moved past her. They seemed to shrink away from her, pressing themselves to the rail to put as much distance between their bodies and hers as they possibly could. Only one of them looked at her, a young woman whose eyes betrayed the sorrow of someone who had fought and lost in a common cause.

Then she was alone in the room, her thoughts focused on one man – the one man she knew could help her. She knew it involved risk, that to do it would mean asking Dayce to risk his career for the man he now loved. That it might mean prison for both of them, even if they were successful. She knew that the man’s price would be steep. She would meet it, no matter how steep it might be.

Standing alone in a room dedicated to justice she knew, her decision was the only real justice possible now. It was *her* price to pay.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Mr Burch will see you now, Miss Chandler."

The words seemed odd to her now, empty of any expectation except his answer to her request. She had explained to him what she wanted done the previous afternoon. He had listened, aghast at first, then angry, then bitter at seeing the woman he loved driven to such desperation. He had not interrupted her once as she had spoken, his eyes betraying nothing save a consciousness weighting the words it was hearing against a measure she couldn’t guess. He had promised to give his answer the following day. He betrayed nothing of his intent in his promise, his voice had remained businesslike and impersonal, as if she were a contractor or a banker.

As she approached his desk he turned his chair to face her. He had been staring at a painting behind him, a watercolour rendering of a skyscraper he had built several years before. He regarded her carefully, his gaze unchanged. She felt as if she represented something to him that he saw in the painting, something proud and strong and worth fighting for. As she sat down, she could sense XXXXXX his answer before he spoke.

"All right, Catherine. I can arrange it. But the price may be steep for you."

"I told you I would do *anything*, Elliot, I meant it."

He looked at her, his eyes moving over her body slowly, then returning to her eyes. She did not look away from him, did not register any emotion. She knew him well enough to know that his glance was not an appraisal.

"I want to know everything about those tunnels."

She had expected it. Ever since they had fled through the tunnels to escape the Gourinista assassins, his curiosity had been aroused. He had been as good as his word – he had made no inquiries of her and made no attempt to return to the tunnels. But his promise then was a payment for the closing of a wound that had been open for years. A wound that could only be closed by admitting the existence of another man in her life. He had taken that blow like a man, uttering no cry of despair, no words of comparison, no recriminations. He had paid homage to her feeling and his own by accepting the truth and living with his promise.

"I promise, Elliot. I will tell you whatever you want to know. But only if that knowledge goes no farther than you."

He laughed, throwing his head back in the air. "My God, Cathy. You're the only person I know who would attach conditions at a time like this!"

He looked at her intently, his smile vanishing. "All right, Cathy. I promise you that anything I learn will go no farther than this office."

She inclined her head. "Thank you, Elliot."

They talked for another hour. Elliot explaining how the operation would work, what she had to do to set it in motion, what alternatives were to be taken should any part of the plan fail. She understood everything before he explained it, knowing full well all the possible paths that could lead to failure. She had foreseen them all, days before.

"You're sure you want to go through with this?" he asked as she was leaving.

She looked at him, her eyes like two fiery coals in the twilight that had seeped into the office. "Yes," she answered.

\*\*\*\*\*

The courtroom was not full the day of Alan Trescoe's sentencing. Without the prospect of conflict or confrontation, the majority of those interested in the case had flitted to more promising pursuits. Alan sat with Dayce and Catherine at the defence table. Joe was not present for the sentencing, his place taken by a young man Catherine did not know.

Alan had been given a chance to speak for himself before the judge. He had merely stated that he was innocent, that his attackers had killed the only person he had ever loved and that he was ready to accept whatever judgement was rendered. His voice was lifeless, meek.

The judge spoke of the great danger of circumstantial evidence and the siren lure of large amounts of money – of the defendant's spotless record and excellent character. He spoke as if he hated every moment of what he was doing, but his voice remained dignified and properly judicial. At the end of a ten minute oration that seemed more like a father-to-son talk than a lecture, he imposed a sentence of five years in prison and a fine of \$100,000.00.

Dayce sighed, leaned over to Catherine and whispering "The judge thinks he's innocent. I could have been a lot worse."

Catherine did not look at him, did not turn, did not answer. She merely stared straight ahead. Dayce kept looking at her, confused.

As Alan moved back towards the defence table, Dayce heard the judge tell the bailiffs to escort the prisoner to the waiting van that would take him to Riker's Island for processing. He also saw Catherine turn and look to the back of the courtroom, her head nodding once. A man stood up and walked out of the room quickly.

When Catherine turned back, she was met by Dayce's questioning stare. She gathered her briefcase and coat together. As the bailiff approached, she stepped past him and embraced Alan, her arms

holding him close. She kissed him on the cheek. "Don't be afraid, Alan. It's going to be all right. I'll see you soon."

Tears were welling in his eyes as she kissed him again.  
"Thanks, Cathy. I'll be okay."

Dayce moved closer, his arms enfolding Dayce hungrily. There was answer in Alan's arms as they pulled Dayce close. Dayce whispered something in Alan's ear that Catherine could not quite hear. She caught only a new onslaught of tears on his cheeks as he was led away. He looked fragile and frightened for a moment but Dayce touched his hand in a final gesture of parting, and Alan seemed to come to life before them, his shoulders up and back, his head held level and straight. He did not turn back as he was led out of the courtroom.

\*\*\*\*\*

Alan was handcuffed and placed in the back of a police van. An officer sat across from him. The driver and another officer entered the front seat and the van pulled away from the courthouse and into the downtown traffic. It headed east and north, towards Riverside Drive. Two police cars escorted them, one in front, one behind.

There was little conversation inside the van. The officer watched his charge, but there was nothing in his manner to suggest he would cause any trouble during the trip. He closed his eyes and leaned back against the padded seat, lost in thought.

The driver maintained a safe distance between the car ahead and the car following, manoeuvring through the late morning traffic easily. The morning was warm, sunny more like early spring than late winter. There was little traffic to molest them as they approached Riverside Drive. The exit ramp loomed ahead of them. The driver concentrated on the ramp, on the escort vehicles. He did not notice the car further ahead, and he did not see the car trailing the following police car as it swerved and came to a stop across the ramp, blocking access from behind.

The trap was set.

As the cars proceeded up the ramp, a large black car in front of them swerved suddenly, blocking the single lane ramp. The police car in front screeched to a halt, the officer inside certain that the driver of the car ahead was either drunk or had lost control of the vehicle. In seconds four armed men had materialised from the vehicle and surrounded his car. He raised his hands and got out of the car.

The driver of the van slowed, then stopped as events played out in front of him. He reached for the police radio on the dashboard; he stopped when he saw that his companion in the front seat had levelled a revolver at him. He drew back. The man drew handcuffs from his belt and secured the driver to the steering wheel. He ripped the radio cables from the dashboard. He pulled the keys from the ignition. It was over in ten seconds.

The police car behind had stopped. They could see nothing ahead. They thought it was merely traffic stopped on the ramp. Seconds later, the driver knew differently - but by then it was too late. He was secured to his steering wheel with handcuffs his radio destroyed, his keys pulled from the ignition.

Inside the van, the officer was helpless. Forbidden by law to carry a weapon inside the van, he could do nothing but watch through the two-way glass as the officers were subdued and immobilized. The officer who had been a passenger in the van unlocked the back door and ordered him out. He did not resist. He was restrained like the others and blindfolded.

"What's happening?" Alan cried, aware of the usual sounds and movements around him.

"Quiet. kid," said a voice near him. He heard something metallic snap-and suddenly his hands were free. The sound came again, and he could move his feet. He felt a hand on his arm, jerking him to his feet and out the back of the van. He felt the warm sun on his skin for a few seconds. Then he heard the sound of rubber tires peeling from somewhere in front of him. The car had backed to the front of the immobile lead police car. The men ushered him into the car quickly. He felt the warmth on his skin vanish. He could feel bodies on each side of him as the sound of rubber tyres squealing on pavement filled the car. The car sped away quickly. Somewhere in the distance, he could hear another car's tyres squeal on the warm cement. The rear car had straightened itself and sped into the anonymity of the lower East side streets.

It had taken sixty seconds. All Alan could sense was that he was being abducted. that not a single shot was fired, and that he was free. He sat immobile in the back of the car, surrounded by strangers, not knowing if he would be alive or dead in the minutes to follow.

\*\*\*\*\*

The warehouse was empty, shards of glass from broken windows littering the floors, the stains of engine fluids from decades past covering the floor, the dust of decades piled in the corners, dulling the windows, filling the air in sun-filtered clouds as the car pulled through the door quickly. A solitary figure stood by the door, pistol in hand . The car pulled into the end of the warehouse where a solitary figure stood in a tan winter coat.

The car door opened and a man in a black jumpsuit helped a young man out. With a nod of the head, the man in the black suit got back into the car quickly. The car sped back to the door. The man with the pistol pulled the warehouse door closed and reset the lock. The two figures heard the sound of the car speed away, then were enveloped in silence. The man stood in the empty expanse of the cold warehouse, shaking.

"It's all right, Alan."

"Catherine!" It was an actual scream. He lunged towards the sound of her voice. She moved to him, throwing her arms around him protectively, feeling him shuddering in her arms. "Don't be afraid. It's all right now. You're free."

"Catherine... Catherine..." he repeated, clutching her as if she were a life-preserver found in the midst of a storm-tossed sea.

"Come on, Alan. We have to move quickly."

She clutched his arm firmly and led him into the blackness of the air shaft. She remembered the last time she had stood here -- taking leave of Devin for the last time. She pushed the thought away quickly. There was no time for thought. There was only one goal for her now --to get Alan below and out of danger quickly. The questions, the explanations and justifications would follow. The powerlessness she had felt for so long seemed to drop away from her. This was no longer Alan's battle, or Dayce's battle, or Vincent's battle. Finally, in some way she could not explain, this was *her* battle, to be won or lost solely on the basis of *her* strength -- and the price she was willing to pay -- except it no longer seemed like a price to her. It was a personal victory against an adversary she was facing alone, now, for the first time.

\*\*\*\*\*

They had not spoken for many minutes. Alan could feel the chill around them, could sense the walls close to his body. Occasionally, he would nearly stumble on a stone or would brush against an outcropping of rock. He could tell they were not in a building, not above ground. He did not try to guess where they were, did not ask Catherine where they were going. He merely tightened his grip on her arm every few minutes. They stopped suddenly. He could feel a warmth on the skin of his free arm. It was more comfortable here.

"Alan, I have to leave. I won't be gone long. When I come back, Dayce will bewitch me."

"Don't leave me alone, Cathy." he said, his voice plaintive and small. He was shaking again.

"You won't be alone." came the voice, a voice that was not Catherine's.

Alan's face changed instantaneously. There was recognition, relief, wonder to replace the fear that had been there moments before. "It's you." he said dumbfounded.

"Yes." the voice answered softly.

Catherine guided Alan to a chair. He sat down slowly, automatically, his eyes never leaving the source of the voice. "You're the one who saved me." He reached his hands out in a futile attempt to touch Vincent. Catherine's hands met his and lowered them to his lap gently.

"This man will stay with you until Dayce and I get back. All right?" Alan nodded, his eyes wide in the darkness.

"There's so much I want to know."

"Anything you wish to know, I will tell you." They noticed a slight tremble in Alan's hands. "You're safe now, Alan. Don't be afraid."

Catherine put her hand on Alan's shoulder. "We'll be back as soon as we can."

"Okay." Alan said. His voice was calm now. His hands no longer trembled.

As she headed above, she heard Alan's voice in the darkness behind her, the first of what she knew would be long hours of questions and answers. "What is your name?" She heard the faint answer, 'Vincent.' mingled with the echoes of her footsteps.

\*\*\*\*\*

"I want to know what happened!" the judge thundered.

Catherine stood calmly, her face impassive. Dayce stood at her side. Joe stood next to the judge's chair, his eyes piercing Catherine like a spear.

"I don't know," Catherine answered, her control total, with no trace of deception or regret.

"Maybe Joe can tell you more. After all, I hardly could have immobilized five police officers and three vehicles alone."

"You have no idea who did this?"

"None," Catherine answered.

"What about you, Mr DiCenzo?"

"I was with Miss Chandler in a restaurant less than a mile from here. We were seen by four employees of the court. I don't know what happened or who is behind it."

The judge turned in his chair, fixing Joe with an equally withering stare. "And you, Mr Maxwell, What have you got to say?"

"It was a professional job, your honour. It was completed without a scratch on any of the officers, with no witnesses and no trace of evidence, in less than two minutes. We got a call over the police band minutes after the abducting. They told us where to find the cars and the officers. One of the officers took part in the abduction. We found out that it was an imposter... his credentials were forged. They were for a corrections officer now recovering from surgery in a hospital in Brooklyn."

"Any leads."

"None, your honour. No prints, no licence numbers on the vehicles, no trace of the men, no eyewitness who can identify any of them."

"What passible motive could they have had?"

"We think it might have been a radical gay group, but so far no one has called to claim credit for it."

"You think ACT-UP kidnapped a non-member over a non-AIDS issue?" Dayce said, disdain dripping from every word. "Next you'll tell us it was the Lavender Liberation Army!"

"Well, who do you think it was, Hotshot?" Joe fired back.

"I couldn't say, Maxwell. I don't have any professional kidnappers in my circle of professional relationships."

"Knock it off, both of you." The judge turned back to Catherine. "I'm freezing Alan Trescoe's bail, pending resolution of this event. If he was not involved, I will release the funds on his reappearance in this court. Maxwell, I want to know the minute you find out *anything*."

"You will. I promise." Joe said, his glance returning to Catherine.

"If either of you learn anything of his whereabouts, I want to know it. If I find out you are concealing *anything*, I will move for immediate disbarment and indictment."

"We understand, your Honour." Dayce said, guiding Catherine towards the door.

"You too, Maxwell. Do your job. I want Alan Trescoe found."

"We'll find him, sir."



Catherine and Dayce walked out together. Joe followed, pulling the door closed behind him. As they walked past a darkened conference room, Joe pulled Catherine aside and through the door. Dayce turned, but Joe stood to block his way. "I have a few things I want to ask Catherine... alone." Dayce eyed Joe, but stood immobile. Joe pulled the door closed slowly, not turning his back.

Catherine stood defiantly in the middle of the room. Joe had snapped the lights on, The door had closed behind him and Joe leaned against it.

"What do you want, Joe?"

"I want to know what's going on, Chandler. And I mean it. I know you well enough to know that you're hiding something about the Trescoe abduction. If you don't tell me what you know, right now, I'll treat you exactly as I'll treat those responsible when I catch them."

"You won't catch them, Joe. You're not anywhere near good enough."

"So you do know something about it?"

"I didn't say that, did I? I merely said you aren't good enough to catch them. Whoever they were. They're too smart for you."

"A shame *you* aren't. Chandler."

"When you think you have enough to indict me, you can send the federal marshals. Until that day..." She moved to pass him. "Get out of the way, Joe."

He stood aside, but he grabbed onto her arm and turned her to face him. His face was a bizarre cross of disgust and pain. "What's happened to you, Chandler? You were so dedicated to your job. You were one of John's most trusted employees." The pain was winning now, pushing the disgust aside. "You were my protégé, damn it. We had such great things planned..."

She waited, her expression inviting neither continuation nor conclusion. It was as if she were a stone statue, the words washing over and around her, but reaching nothing alive, nothing that could weigh them or respond or care. They were like stones dropped down a well, to vanish into the darkness and silence, with only faint echoes to mark their passage.

"Is there anything else, Joe?" The voice was as stony as her expression.

"I'm not letting up, Chandler. I'm going to be all over the two of you. This isn't over, not by a long shot. If I find out that you're involved in this, I'll see you both in prison. And don't kid yourself, Chandler. I nearly put your client there. I'll gladly put DiCenzo there."

"Don't *ever* threaten me, Joe. Not *ever*!" She tried to break past him, but he barred her way physically -- not touching her but not moving aside either. She fixed him with a contemptuous smile. "And as for prison, you'll never put Alan there. Nor Dayce. And certainly not me."

"And what are you gonna' do to stop me, Cathy?" he said. She looked at him silently, her face held rigid against the onslaught. "Huh?" he spat at her, leaning across the desk towards her. "Tell me!" he screamed at her, his words like fists raining down on her face and body.

She pulled the door open, then turned to face him, her features seemingly immobile, lifeless, unreached by his pleas or his threats. Only her eyes were alive with a cold fire, burning its way through her -- a fire

now out of control. Her answer filled the room with a silence more ominous, more pervasive than his screams. She heard the words first inside her. When she heard herself say them, she knew that the price she had to pay was paid in full, that the past would not hurt her again. She was stunned, not that she had said them, but that she said them so calmly.

"I'll kill you."

[ End of Part Two ]