

A sunset scene with the Statue of Liberty in silhouette on the right. The sun is a bright yellow orb in the upper left, casting a golden glow over the sky and the water. In the distance, several construction cranes are visible against the horizon.

On Your Honor

There is no justice without truth



WRITTEN AS A 'NOVEL IN A DAY'
ON OCTOBER 10th 2020

On Your Honor

written as a
Novel-in-a-Day



ON YOUR HONOR

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Time is no substitute for talent

Welcome to the fruits of NIAD X, a frenzied fury of written words that proves once again that the meeting of talent and sheer manpower can result in the creation of something thoroughly entertaining.

The original Novel in a Day took place on October 15th, 2011, after someone took to the forum of Literature & Latte (Scrivener's publishers) to complain about an article on writing an entire novel in three days. Yes, three days was declared to be 'for wimps'- on the proviso that you drafted in a bunch of friends to help your speed writing, of course – laying down the gauntlet and leading to NiaD's creation. Nine years later, the event is still bringing together writers from across the world in a day of manic creativity. As its name suggests this is the tenth incarnation of the event, which has produced a total of 28 novels – a pretty impressive tally when you think that the number of writing days completed adds up to just a third of a NaNoWriMo.

If you're unfamiliar with the mechanics of NiaD, it goes something like this: just after midnight, a group of shiny keen volunteers are sent skeleton details of a section of a plot with no knowledge of the wider story or where their work fits within this. They then have a day to turn that information into a chapter, which is submitted for compilation with the work of 23 now-looking-slightly-less-shiny others, creating the novel you've just downloaded. It's exhausting yet fun filled, and we're grateful as always to be a part of this.

So – a huge thanks to all NiaD's writers, many of whom sign up year after year, and a special mention to NiaD's creator, Rog - plotter, organiser, editor and general ringmaster of all. We hope you enjoy the novel as much as we enjoyed creating it – and maybe, just maybe, it might tempt you to sign up and join in next time around..?

Julia

October 10, 2020

On Your Honor

chapter one

B. Morris Allen

NEW YORK CITY, 1991

“It’s a family business, see?” Tony hadn’t really understood that when his father told him at age ten, but at the time he’d still thought his father was a garbage man, and that Salerno Sanitation Consulting was a different kind of business.

“Sure, of course,” said the woman he was talking to. She’d heard it before, and knew exactly what kind of consulting was required. She was one of his top consultants – a specialist in plumbing and other wetwork. “So when you gonna tell him?” Around them, the party was just starting to take off, and Louisa was taking on that sleepy cat look that meant she was happy.

“Not yet. Still a kid now, see?” They looked out the parlor window to the paving stones of the patio and driveway, where his eight year-old son Mark was playing with friends. The driveway and sidewalk were covered with cars, and the patio with motorcycles and scooters, but the kids had made a game of dodging around them. “When he’s ten. Same as my father

told me, same as I told Junior and Liza.”

“So not promoting him to lieutenant right away?” The woman, a hard-faced Armenian who went by ‘Tuna’, had a smile on her face, but its grip was tenuous, and her eyes were tight. The fish tattoo down one side of her face seemed to flick its tail when she was nervous.

It’s a celebration, though, he told himself. *Jokes and good cheer and keeping Louisa happy*. “No. Not till he’s 15,” Tony said. “Just like Liza.” Which was both a joke and a warning, and he congratulated him on his cleverness. Of course, Liza had a natural talent for the business. There she was now, across the room, talking shop with Striven, who liked big, hairy guys, but she was charming him anyway. Probably getting the latest figures on Striven’s private gambling consultancy on the East Side.

“He’s a good kid,” said Tuna, confusing Tony for a moment until she pointed out at the street. Mark and his crew – because Mark was in charge, which was a good sign – had expanded their game into the garden next door and the driveway across the street, taking turns hiding behind cars and shooting each other with finger guns. Cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians, sanitation consultants and union bosses, something like that. The closed window muffled the sound. Mark had his blue denim jacket on, so maybe cowboys.

“Course he is,” said Tony, but he was proud. Maybe Tuna was due for a promotion herself. The tattoo was dumb, but she had guts. “So, we been having this problem down the Bowery—”

From outside came a muffled thump and the squeal of car tires. *Careless kids*, he told himself, but also *celebration*. *Jokes and good cheer*.

“Oh my god!” said Tuna, and her brown skin had turned

pale, the stupid fish tattoo looking like a bathtub applique. And then he looked himself, trying to make sense of a knot of kids and a light blue jacket and a growing pool of blood.

He couldn't remember how he'd gotten outside, where the kids had gone, how he'd come to have a small, broken body in his arms. It was as if he'd just woken up, already saying, "Mark... Mark... Mark..." as if the repetition were some kind of magic spell. So far, all it had done was turn his grey shirt red.

"Put him down, boss. Put him down." The noise was meaningless, the voice from a familiar face and short, fake-blonde hair. He knew this woman, respected her. But none of it would mean anything until he got an answer from the boy in his arms.

"Mark... Mark... Mark..." The boy didn't move. His face, normally sweet and a little dirty, had blood all down one side, and a gash like a pebble had scraped its way across his cheek. His jacket only had one sleeve. Had there been two this morning?

Something blocked his view, and his head rocked to the side, cheek stinging.

"Snap out of it, boss. Mark's dead, and you're not doing him any good crying like this."

Dead? Who the fuck is this, to tell me my boy is dead? He put the body down, and stood, carefully, slowly. *We'll see about dead.* He'd done it before, and he could do it again.

Another slap came toward him from the woman, who'd straightened up with him, and he caught it, holding her arm with just enough force to hurt. Tina. That was who it was. His number 2. *Until now.*

"Glad you're with us again." Tina's face held steady as he

increased the pressure and started twisting her wrist in a way it wasn't meant to go. "Mark's dead, Tony. Hit and run. We got a doctor coming. Jojo's sister's here, she's a nurse, and she says there's nothing to do. Okay? So you gotta get your shit together, take care of your wife and kids. Take care of your *family*. Capiche?" She'd started to turn sideways to relieve the pressure on her shoulder from an arm twisted the wrong way.

He let her go. She was right. Emotion wasn't called for now. This was family business.

"Witnesses," he said, and Tina nodded. "House to house. Nobody leaves the neighbourhood. Nobody." He waited as she passed on instructions to a crew of lieutenants, some frightened, some angry, some blank and seemingly numb. "Call Thompson. You tell him to get his fucking cops on this like it was the fucking mayor. Hell, call the fucking Mayor, too. Tell him if this don't get solved today, he'll have trouble like no fucking trouble he's ever seen, I promise you that. Call the fucking unions too, tell 'em to be ready to stop work. You got it? *You got it?*"

"I got it, boss. I'm on it. We'll get this fixed, boss. I mean..." She winced.

"Yeah." The calm was starting to recede already, the ice in his veins fading, and being replaced by a different kind of cold. Someone had thrown a coat over the body – a coat with two sleeves. You could still see the little legs sticking out. And the blood. Mark's blood. *My boy's blood*. He trembled.

"You see to your wife, boss. And Junior and Liza." Tina took him by the shoulders, turned him, steered him through the crowd, away from the body. *Away from my boy*.

At the front door, Liza had a line of people, was scribbling something in a notebook. "White SUV. Got it. Nothing else? Next? Ford? You sure about that? Okay. Driver? No. Okay.

Next.” Junior was standing next to her, looking like a china doll that had already cracked and need just a touch to shatter.

“Louisa.” She looked hard and cold, her colored chestnut hair braided, her hands held carefully in front of her. The picture of patience and calm. The perfect wife. He took her in his arms and held her close, felt her shudder, felt her sag as her heart finally broke in time with his and the tears began to fall.

chapter two

Charlotte Barker

SCOTT PICKED HIS AT his nails until they had almost vanished. He looked down at the with great focus at each nail that had been torn back by his own fingers, right to the bone. He frowned and continued to pick his thumb nail when he heard a hammer knock his senses back into the room.

“Please could everyone rise, the court is now in session.” Scott stood up and hidden his shameful hands in his pockets. He waited for the judge to walk in and take his place at the front of the courtroom. He gulped, *is this man really going to decide my fate?* The judge nodded gravely at the assistant and addressed the crowd,

“I am Judge Andrew Clinton and I am judging the trial of Scott Moore, please be seated.” The crowd fell into their seats like they had fallen from the sky. The shuffling had stopped and Scott had a rising itch to pick his nails. He kept them in his trouser pocket.

Andrew lifted his glasses to his face and read his notes to the court.

“Mr. Scott Moore you are being trialled of killing Mark

Salerno on 23rd March earlier this year. Your defendant Daniel Lawrence will begin today's proceedings." Danny looked at Scott and gave him a brief nod. Scott knew that this was supposed to reassure him but it just made the whirlwind in his stomach worse.

"Mr. Scott Moore, please could you take to the stand to be questioned." Scott looked up and coughed to warm his voice up,

"Yes your honour."

He stood up as if he hadn't moved in weeks and slowly made his way to the stand. He sat looking at everyone glaring at him. His eyes moved towards the jury. He couldn't help but try and read them. Some of them were old, some of them looked too young to even be here but he knew one thing about them all, they all had a family. Maybe even children. He gulped harder and found his collar feeling a little tight against his throat.

"Mr. Moore, I have to ask where were you on Saturday 23rd March?" He shrugged and looked at the floor,

"I was at home."

"Mr. Moore was this all day?"

"No erm," he frowned and tried to remember what had happened detail by detail, "I woke up, got a coffee and went to Howard's Beach for a bit." Danny moved a little closer but made sure that Scott was in full view of the jury.

"Can I ask what were you doing at the beach?" Scott looked up at Danny and could see in his eyes he was encouraged to go on. He swallowed his nerves,

"I needed a break from everything and needed some time to think." Danny looked at the jury frowning,

"To think about what?" Scott sighed deeply,

"My wife had just had another miscarriage." The jury's

response lightened, their shoulders eased. Danny looked at the floor and back up at Scott,

"I'm sorry to hear that Scott. Had you been wanting a child for a while?" Scott fidgeted with his hands and nodded,

"yeah." Danny gave him time to recollect his thoughts.

"and what time were you at Howards Beach?" Scott looked up at Danny and squinted his eyes,

"I don't know, around half nine maybe?" Danny nodded and began to pace in the courtroom.

"and what did you do afterwards?"

"I went home to see Alice." Danny looked back up at him,

"Do you know what time this was?" He looked at the clock in the back of the courtroom and then back at Danny.

"I was back in my apartment for 11:30am." Danny nodded,

"Was she there when you got back?" He shook his head,

"No she had went for Groceries before I had got back."

Danny nodded,

"So that explains why she wasn't there when the police arrived." Scott nodded,

"yes."

Danny put his hands behind his back and looked up at Scott,

"Thanks Scott. You see your honour," he turned his attention to the courtroom, "Scott could not possibly have killed Mark if these scene of events are true. I have included witnesses to his statement from the coffee shop that he went to on that morning and have receipts to support the evidence." Danny now turned to the jury, his hand now relaxed at his side.

"As you can see, this man is a caring and well-natured man. He has been wanting a child of his own. Does this sound like someone who would leave a child for dead?" The jury began

to squirm and Danny released a slight smile from the corners of his mouth. He glanced back at Andrew,

" I have no further questions your honour." Andrew nodded,

"Thank you Daniel Lawrence."

He looked back at his notes on the case and returned his attention to the court.

"Please could Angela Bennett come up and begin her questioning." Angela smoothed her beige skirt and took the place of Danny. Danny looked at Frank and gave him a brief smile before returning to his seat.

"Good morning Scott." He nodded in replace of speaking, aware that she was going to be the one to try and bring him down.

"Please would you be able to remind everyone what you did after you had got your coffee at half past nine on Saturday Morning on the 23rd March."

Scott frowned,

"I went to Howard's Beach." She nodded and looked back to the court.

"Your honour, I appreciate that Daniel has provided witnesses to this case, however may I also remind the jury that the incident involving Mark Salerno, is supposedly to have occurred after Scott had been to Howard beach. Therefore the witnesses that have been found from the coffee shop are irrelevant to the case."

Danny stood up,

"Objection your honour." Andrew frowned, 'these witnesses demonstrate the truth within Scott's statement. Andrew cleared his throat,

"sustained."

Danny looked back at Scott and tried to reassure him.

Scott nodded and tried to gulp his fear away.

“Mrs. Bennett, you may continue your questioning,”

“yes your honour.” She looked back up at Scott and tilted her head,

“What was the weather like when you were at the beach Scott?” He frowned,

“erm, quite cloudy I think.”

“Had it been raining?” He rubbed the back of his neck,

“Not that I remember.” She nodded and began to pace,

“So there is no way that you could have had impaired vision on that day?” Scott froze as he could see where she was trying to take this question,

“No.” She smiled back,

“Thank you Scott.” She went back towards her desk and looked at her notes briefly.

“Now Scott you say that your wife was getting groceries after you had returned to the apartment.”

Scott nodded,

“Yes,” Angela folded her arms,

“Surely she was in an upset state after what you both had just gone through. Why would she go out in a very public place and carry on as normal when she was potentially mourning her unborn child?” Danny went to stand up but Scott starred at him to stop. He looked up at Angela, her smile hidden behind a fake look of innocence.

“She likes to keep herself busy. Whenever something bad happens she hides her emotions and tries to get on as usual. It’s a very normal thing to do.”

Angela nodded,

“Of course it is Scott. I was just wanting to make sure that everything was the truth. We are all aware that you have a witness for your journey of the day but there has been no

witnesses as of yet to explain that your wife was where you say she was." She moved closer to the jury.

"May I just ask you Scott, is the following image remind you of anything?" She gave an image to the jury, the judge and Scott himself.

"Yeah, it's my car." Angela raised her voice for all to hear,

"This White Ford Explorer is your car?"

"Yes." Angela nodded and faced the jury once again,

"This White Ford Explorer is the car that had caused the death of Mark Salerno." The jury began to stir in their seats. Angela smiled as she wiggled back to her chair and pulled out plastic bag with some material inside.

"Scott, may I ask you if this seems familiar?" Scott leaned forward to get a better view of it but shook his head.

"No, it doesn't."

"Really?" He shook his head for a second time. Angela showed the jury and the judge the piece of material.

"This piece of denim has a blood stain on that has been tested as the blood of Mark Salerno. This was also found by the police at your apartment once they had arrested you."

Scott looked at Danny as he left from his seat,

"Objection," he looked at the judge and pointed to the evidence. "This piece of evidence has been found in an illegal search and must be stricken from the records as it is a violation of the 4th Amendment." Andrew went to speak to Danny but instead turned his attention to Angela.

"Where was this piece of evidence found?"

"The police found this once they had arrested Scott for the hit and run incident." Andrew stared at Angela,

"Yes but where was this evidence located?"

"Inside his apartment in the hallway. This piece of evidence is what encouraged the police to arrest Scott Moore."

“Yes but they should not have taken this out of the apartment. This is a violation of the 4th Amendment and must be stricken from the records.” Andrew looked at Angela’s hope, Scott’s desperation and Danny’s perseverance. He gulped and cleared his throat.

"Sustained, this evidence is stricken from the record." Angela went to complain but Andrew hit the hammer.

“After this new piece of information we will leave the court here for a brief break and will reconvene at 2pm today. All rise.” Andrew hit the hammer and the court dispersed. Scott stayed in the stand and watched everyone pass him by. He was unsure whether to feel worried about what else Angela had found or relieved.

chapter three

Mark Rothwell

THE OFFICIAL CAR PULLED up in front of 100 Centre Street. As, Otis Johnson got out he said to the driver, "You'd better find somewhere to park. I'm not sure how long I'll be."

"O.K., I'll get that seen to a.s.a.p." Andrew Clinton hung up the phone, sighed and stroked the top of his head to make sure his hair was smooth and neat. He was proud of his appearance, always making an effort to stay trim.

For a few moments, he looked round his office, at the mahogany partner's desk behind which he was sitting; at the bookshelves on the right with their neat rows of boxes bound with red ribbons containing the notes for all the cases he had judged over the last ten years; at the bookshelves on the left with their serried ranks of legal tomes.

He looked at the silver-framed photos on his desk ... the one of Amy and him on their wedding day; the one of Amy he had taken on their holiday in Venice a couple of years ago. And then fondly at the one of Jean at her graduation from high school. He wondered how she was getting on at

Columbia.

He pressed the intercom button on his phone set and said, "Kirsty, can you come in, please?"

There was a knock at the door and Kirsty Anderson came in. Clinton looked at her with approval. She was attractive, this girl, with an open disposition, and always smartly dressed. She was also very bright; she'd make a good lawyer.

"Would you xerox these papers for me?"

"Do you want them right away?"

"Yes please, as quickly as you can."

Otis Johnson walked along the corridor in 100 Centre Street. He was thinking how best to get the message across to Judge Clinton. It wasn't going to be easy. At the door to the judge's chambers, he paused for a moment before knocking and entering.

A young woman, who was busy xeroxing some documents, turned round and looked at the visitor for a brief moment and then said, "Can I help you?"

"I'm here to see Judge Clinton."

"Do you have an appointment?"

"No, but he'll see me, I'm sure."

"Who should I tell him wants to see him?"

"Just say, I'm from Mayor Broderick."

"Could you wait a moment, please?"

Kirsty walked over to the door to Clinton's office and knocked.

"Come in!"

"Ah, Kirsty, have you got those xeroxes for me?"

"No, I haven't quite finished, but there's someone here who wants to see you."

"Who is it?"

"He just said he's here from Mayor Broderick?"

"From Mayor Broderick? Is he tall, black ... very fit-looking?"

"Yes."

"Hmm. Sounds like Otis Johnson. I guess I'd better see him. If Broderick's sent Johnson, it means there's something afoot! I suppose you'd better show him in."

Clinton stood up as Kirsty walked over to the door, opened it and said, "Come in please, Mr Johnson."

Johnson gave a wry smile at Kirsty as he passed. "Judge Clinton ..." he said as he walked over to the desk.

"Mr Johnson ... Ah, thank you Kirsty!"

Realising she wasn't to sit in on this, whatever it was about, Kirsty went out and returned to her photocopying.

Clinton shook hands with Johnson, then sat down again in the chair behind his desk and motioned to Johnson to take one of the chairs facing him.

"Well, Mr Johnson, what can I do for you?"

"I'm here because the Mayor, Mr Broderick, asked me to tell you that he's worried about the number of people who are being acquitted of crimes for which they've been indicted. As you know Mayor Broderick is very concerned about the violence and lawlessness in New York and the danger to honest citizens."

"Yes, I know about his concerns over the level of violence in this city. But why has he sent you to see me?"

"Well, looking at the records, a disproportionate number of acquittals have been from trials in your court."

"So?"

"He is concerned that you are being too lenient on defendants ..."

"Mr Johnson, as a judge, I am there to see that the law is implemented ..."

"But in your summings up, you are seen to be clearly directing the juries to bring in a not guilty verdict."

"I sum up the case that has been presented in court. If in my opinion as a judge, the case presented by the prosecution is not strong enough to warrant a conviction, or if for some legal technicality the case is inadmissible, it is my duty to say so."

"That's as may be, but the fact remains that you appear to find more legal technicalities or weak cases than your fellow judges."

"What my fellow judges find is their own concern, not mine. As judges, we each form our own judgement based on the cases presented to us and our knowledge of the law and precedent. I am not trying their cases, and they're not trying mine!"

"Well, let's move on. Mayor Broderick is also concerned about the tone you used in respect of Scott Moore."

"Scott Moore?"

"Yes, I presume you know who Scott Moore is!"

"Yes, he was the defendant in that hit-and-run case in which a child was killed."

"True, he was acquitted because in arresting him, the police violated the Fourth Amendment. They had no warrant to enter his property or hold him, and being a driver in an accident, however fatal, does not make him a public danger."

"But apart from being the defendant in the case, do you know who he is?"

"No, but knowing who he is would not have made any difference to my judgement! He was clearly the driver who caused the death of a child by criminally negligent driving and

immediately fled the scene. But he had to be acquitted, because of the infringement of his rights under the Fourth Amendment. My tone with him was what I would have taken toward any such person."

"I see I'll have to spell it out. Scott Moore is the brother-in-law of Frank Cole. I presume you know who he is?"

"Yes, the Real Estate developer. Everyone knows who he is."

"Mmm, but he is also one of Mayor Broderick's major backers. As you probably know, the Mayor's first term of office ends on December 31 in 1993. He wants to be re-elected for a second term, and Frank Cole's backing is essential for that. So clearly, Mayor Broderick doesn't want anything which will upset Frank Cole, such as intemperate language and manner towards members of his family by public servants of this city.

"In other words, on the one hand, Mayor Broderick wants me to go against my legal judgement and convict more defendants, even though the case doesn't hold up or there are technical reasons, as in the Scott Moore case for dismissing it, and on the other he wants me to be more lenient and to moderate my language towards any defendant who he thinks may have any relevance to his political ambitions!"

"I wouldn't put it like that ..."

"I don't know how else you could put it. Let it remind you that as a judge, my duty is to ensure the fair implementation of the law, irrespective of the status or relations of anyone who comes before me. Also, that my manner and language towards any defendant is entirely based upon the severity of the accusation and the attitude they show both towards any victims in the case and to the court and myself as presiding judge. Any of my fellow judges would uphold this."

"Then let me also remind you that your appointment to the New York Supreme Court, Criminal Term, comes to an end in January next year. I'm sure you are hoping to be re-appointed ..."

"Yes, of course."

"Then I would advise you to think carefully about what I have been saying."

"In other words, this is essentially a threat ..."

"I wouldn't say that; just some friendly advice from the Mayor, who has close connections with Robert Walters and William Provost. So think carefully."

"This is not something I am likely to forget! So, if that is all, I will get back to work."

He stood up, walked to the door and opened it ... he did not offer to shake hands as Johnson left the office. He shut the door, went back to his chair, sat down and cradled his head in his hands. He stared moodily at the photos of Amy and Jean.

Kirsty was sitting at her desk in front of a pile of xeroxes when Johnson came out. He gave her a smile and waved goodbye. She stared at him briefly. He went out, closed the door and set off down the corridor — job done, I think; I think he got the message.

Kirsty looked at the closing door then turned and looked at the closed door to Clinton's office — I wonder if I should take him these xeroxes? No, perhaps wait until he calls me.

chapter four

Matt Jardine

“IN GOD WE TRUST.”

Judge Clinton could still see the words of gold on the wall behind him as he turned away and closed his eyes. The guiding wisdom clung to the insides of his lids like a solar glare. The words began to soften then fade as he took off his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose. From inside his self-prescribed darkness he listened to the rhythm of his breathing. He tried to calm himself as he'd been shown.

“Stress? Is that all?” Judge Clinton had said when his wife begged him to go to the doctors and ask about the pains in his chest.

“Stress can kill you, Judge,” said his doctor, “you have to treat it with respect.”

They made a deal, settled on the type of compromise he saw in his court room every day: “No, absolutely no way am I trying Yoga. Yes, I promise to try and remember to take deep breaths when I feel myself getting angry.”

In through the nose, out through the mouth, in through the nose, out through the mouth, he could hear his doctor coaching from the

back of his mind.

“Your Honour, are you alright, sir? Can I get you some water?”

Judge Clinton opened his eyes and looked down in to those of Miss Anderson, his judicial intern. He smiled. *She’s a good girl*, he thought. *Jean would do well to finish Columbia and come and learn a thing or two about work ethics from this young lady.*

“I’m fine, Miss Anderson, thank you,” he said with a fatherly smile. He put his glasses back on, adjusted his gown and turned to the others with a scowl.

“Miss Bennett can you approach the bench please,” said the judge making sure that the level of his courtroom courtesy could only be received as hostile. The strip of muscle in his jaw flexed as she flashed him a saccharine smile.

In through the nose, out through the mouth.

He could hear his teeth grinding beneath the bellows of his breathing as the New York district prosecution attorney strode toward him with all the jauntiness and confidence of a ‘Star Player.’

“Your Honour?” she said, her head tilted to one side just enough to make him still need to focus on his breathing.

“Can I ask where you two enjoyed your little tête-à-tête?” he said barely able to keep the disdain from his voice.

“Your Honour?” she smiled, her face contorted in disingenuous confusion.

“Where was it Miss Bennett? La Colombo, Gregory’s, Blue bottle cafe, which one did you go to to discuss this deal?” he snapped.

“It was Alessandro’s actually, Your Honour,” she smiled without showing her lips. The judge felt the muscles in his shoulders clench. The leather creaked and cracked as he leaned back in his seat.

In through the nose, out through the mouth.

The second hand on the courtroom clock stabbed loud and sharp through the thickening silence.

“You’ve been with the DA’s office, what, four years?” said the judge.

“Five sir,” she corrected.

“How time flies, Miss Bennett, how time flies,” he said, his foot tapping up and down beneath his desk. He leaned forward and opened a manila folder and took out a photograph of the victim. He still cringed at how much the woman looking back at him from the 4x4 polaroid looked like his daughter. He took out a second photo from the folder and showed it to the attorney as she stood pencil straight, shoulders back, before him.

She held his glare without looking at the black and blue on the polaroid, or the swelling on one eye that made the victim look more like a journeyman prizefighter than a young woman.

“I’ve seen this Your Honour, it is my client sir,” she said. A sudden cold sarcasm bit at her words.

“Indeed it is Miss Bennett,” said the judge, “indeed it is,” he said taking his time to return the photos to the folder. He leaned back in his chair and folded his arms. They looked at each other, each waiting for the other to make the first move: *and this is my damn courtroom*, yelled the fury inside his head.

“You are an ambitious woman, are you not?” he smiled.

“I try and do the best for my clients, if that is what you mean by ‘ambitious’,” she riposted.

In through the nose, out through the mouth.

The judge looked past Miss Bennett to the defendant sitting next to his attorney, upright and crisp in an expensive looking blue suit and wide knotted pink tie. *Some men can look*

good in rags, he thought already hating the defendant, his arrogance muscling beneath his dazzling white starched collared shirt. He stared at Joel Saunders, case 129789, and investigated the smug details of his face.

“1,2,3,” the judge counted silently in his head. On three Saunders looked away. *The guilty always look away before 5*, he thought, *except the psychopaths*.

“It’s interesting that you say that,” said the judge refocusing his attention on Miss Bennett, “that you try and do your best for your clients.”

“I feel I do, Your Honour,” she said, a little too quickly. The judge smelled a pinprick of first blood. He clasped his hands and leaned his elbows on the desk.

“And you really believe that a deal with the defendant’s attorney over coffee at Alessandro’s to reduce Mr Saunder’s charges from rape to assault is ‘best for your client’? Is that what you are telling me, Miss Bennett? I’m sorry, I’m just trying to understand.” More blood seemed to spill from the attorney’s confidence as she shifted her weight from one foot to the other.

“Sir, this is an excellent deal for the state, sir, it really is,” she said. Her composure was cracking like a mud bath mask. The judge’s breathing began to settle as he leaned back again in his chair and let her stew in the discomfort that screamed from her body.

“You know that I don’t have to accept this bargain you two have conjured up,” he said, a disparaging wave condemning the two lawyers in his midst. Miss Bennett nodded without a word. He waved her back to her desk.

“All rise,” called the bailiff as the judge rose to his feet.

“Twenty minute recess for me to consider this nonsense,” he said before leaving the courtroom for his chambers.

Judge Clinton slumped into the chair behind his desk suddenly exhausted from the anger he'd tried so hard to breath away.

"Yes," he called out at three gentle knocks on his door. His voice was edged with a sharpness he hadn't intended.

"I'm sorry to trouble you sir," said Miss Anderson. She stopped at the doorway and squinted through the gloom.

"Would you like me to turn the light on, sir?" she said.

"Leave it off please, Miss Anderson," said the judge. She nodded and scampered silently across the red shag pile carpet.

"The papers sir," she said gently placing a small pile of legal documents on his desk.

"Thank you," he said. She smiled and turned to leave.

"Kirsty," said the judge.

She stopped and turned around, "Yes Judge."

"Can I ask you something?" he said.

"Of course sir," she said with an obedient smile.

"Why did you decide to study law?"

She looked up at the ceiling as if she were searching for the answer in the dark edges of the musty wooden panels. She looked back at him and pointed to the chair on the other side of his desk, her arched eyebrows asking his permission.

"Please, yes," he said waving his hand toward it. She sat down and looked at him with an intensity and certainty he'd never seen from her before.

"No one has ever asked me that," she said.

The judge frowned and pulled his head back to check if it was true. She nodded.

"Well?" he said.

Her whole chest moved as a breath sucked it's way into her body. She straightened herself in the leather seat.

"I knew my mum and dad always had a rocky relationship,"

she said. “I could hear them from my bedroom even when I put a pillow over my head.

“But as I got older, I started to see things I didn’t when I was little,” she said, folding her hands in her lap. “You know when you are very young, sir, and you are sort of ‘blind’ to the adult world?”

The judge nodded, he knew exactly what she meant.

“I started to notice when mum wore more makeup than usual and the days she’d wear baggy clothes,” she said.

“It was always the day after the night I’d listened to them fighting.” She stopped talking, suddenly transfixed by the wall of leather bound legal books behind the judge. She snapped back to attention as if returning from a trance.

“Anyway, by high school, I’d figured it out. My dad had been beating my mum for years and they’d hidden it from me. It was weird because we were a ‘well-to-do’ family, “ she said waving bunny fingers in the air to highlight the irony.

“I’m so sorry Kirsty,” said the Judge. She shrugged. The judge’s eyes widened as she told him how she’d even considered saving her money to pay for someone to drag her dad down an alley and beat him to a pulp.

“I thought going to law school might make me feel better in the long term, though,” she said with a tired smile.

The door shut with a click as she left. The judge was grateful for Kirsty’s openness and honesty. It was what he needed to remind him of why *he* had set out on the same journey nearly twenty years before.

He hadn’t had to endure the torture of learning that his mother was a victim of his father’s abuse, thank heaven for that, but he did share with Kirsty the same desire he saw glowing in her eyes. He knew what she meant when she’d told

him, “I want to ensure justice in the world, the ‘right’ way.” He remembered the ideal so well it had choked his throat with emotion.

Where have those days gone? he wondered as he glanced at the silver framed photo of his wife and daughter smiling at him from the corner of his desk. Where were the days when the words, “In God we trust” sent ripples of tickling inspiration up his spine like a snort of divine power? He knew those days were long gone. He didn’t even know who to trust anymore, certainly not god: that ship sailed with Amy’s double mastectomy and the extortionate fees he’d had to fork out, twice, for Jean’s rehab.

What he’d seen over the years in court had been the final nail in the coffin in his faith in humanity. He realised that the golden guiding words behind his chair in the courtroom were just that: words. He knew, more than most, that words meant nothing without action. He shook his head as he thought of how much the long unforgiving lanes of the judicial road had changed him over the years.

People weren’t interested in ‘right and wrong’ anymore. They were more likely to align their morals with the highest bidder. Is that what had happened to Attorney Bennett? Had ambition got to her? Did she think that a ‘definite deal’ would look better on her sparkling CV than a ‘potential loss’? Did her career mean more to her than the sanity of her client who would forever be the woman who ‘Cried rape’ when it was ‘Just a smack in the eye’?

Or had that son-of-a bitch- bastard-Frank-Albert Cole-the- God-Damned-third got to her? Maybe he had. Highly likely he had. The guilty little weasel, Joel Saunders, even wore the same coloured suit and tie as his boss.

Have I got enough left in me to stop this rot? He wondered as he

leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. *Have I got enough goodness left to bring back people's faith in the law, their trust back in God, their belief that humans do want more than just to grease their own pockets? If someone doesn't do it, we're screwed. If someone doesn't make a stand today, in ten, twenty, thirty years from now we'll have a businessman in the WhiteHouse rather than a God fearing one.*

The Judge rifled through the papers and prepared himself to deliver his verdict.

“All rise,” called the bailiff.

Judge Clinton settled himself back into his courtroom seat. He'd signed the small pile of papers Miss Anderson had given him and laid them neatly on his desk.

“Sit,” he grumbled to the attorneys. In unison they dropped into their seats as if they'd been sucked through the broken window of an aeroplane.

“Stay standing, Mr Saunders,” he snapped at the defendant without looking at him as he flicked through the documents. He pulled out a piece of paper, separated it from the others and covered it with the manila folder.

“Mr Saunders,” said the judge, looking at him over his glasses as if the effort was more than he deserved.

“Do you have children?” said the judge. Saunders shook his head, the subtlest hint of a smile twitching at his lips.

“Answer the judge,” said the bailiff in a voice that could scrape barnacles off the bottom of a ship. The judge looked at his bailiff and nodded with a smile. The bailiff nodded in return, all six foot six of his terrifying blackness committed to courtroom etiquette.

“No Judge,” said Saunders.

“Of course you don't,” said the judge shaking his head.

“They say that parents shouldn't prefer one child over

another,” he said, “it’s much the same in court.

“We judges are supposed to be even keeled, to give every one of you the benefit of the doubt- “innocent until proven guilty”, and all that.” Judge Clinton stopped and stared at Saunders until he saw the discomfort of his scrutiny in his wavering stance.

“But we are all human, and it is difficult to always be so... neutral,” he said taking a deep breath.

“The truth, Mr Saunders, is that I don’t like you.” The judge smiled inside as he watched Saunders struggle to find the correct response. His attorney twitched to make an objection until the judge’s glare fixed him in his seat.

“I don’t like you, and I’ve been in this game too long to care that I shouldn’t be telling you.” The judge leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes as he prepared himself.

“You raped a woman, Mr Saunders-“ he said opening his eyes and leaning his elbows on his desk.

“*Objection!*” Saunder’s attorney leapt to his feet.

“Sit down, you damn buffoon or I’ll have you thrown out of my courtroom.”

“Yes, Your Honour, I’m sorry,” said the attorney slumping back in his chair, his face reddened and chastised.

“You raped a woman and you are going to get away with it, Mr Saunders,” continued the judge, “how does that make you feel sir?”

“I don’t know Judge... I’m...I’m not sur-”

“For a snappy dresser you aren’t much with words are you Mr Saunders?” The judge took a breath as he realised how close he was to the edge of the line.

“What do those words behind me say, Mr Saunders?” said the judge.

“ ‘In God we trust’, sir,” he said.

“Yes, they do, Mr Saunders, yes they do,” sighed the judge as he moved the manila folder and reread the note on the sheet of paper.

“And lucky for you, they are meaningless.” The judge heard the collective in-breath of the six people in the room.

“Lucky for you this world is no longer run by the good but by the greedy. It is a terrible sin, you know that don’t you?”

“Yes, Your Honour,” said Saunders.

“And for your sins, Mr Saunders,” said the judge, “not only am I going to agree to this little ‘deal’ that went on between your attorney and the prosecution,” he said with a sardonic smile, “but I sentence you to a prison term that you have already served. “ The court room sunk under a tsunami of stunned silence.

“You are free to go,” said the judge glaring at Saunder’s attorney who was stifling a smile.

“Now get out of my courtroom, all of you,” he shouted. His breath clutched at his chest as he scrunched the paper up in his hand and watched the last of his guiding light walking away in the pocket of the devil.

chapter five

Ryker Hayes

IT WAS LATE IN the evening, sometime after eight pm. Judge Clinton didn't know. He didn't like looking at the clock after six pm when the majority of his coworkers had gone home. It made him feel guilty to know he had worked past dinner time again. His wife Amy didn't like it when he worked late, but she didn't call him when he did because they both knew it didn't make things better. He was in his office sitting in his dark maroon leather chair and his eyes ached from staring at his computer screen for so long. There was too much work to do this month and with the election coming up next year he didn't have time to spare a thought for his neglected wife. She would understand. Besides, it was safer for her if he stayed away from the house.

The latest case to come across his desk was the rape of a prominent business woman. He had finished looking over the evidence and had finally made his decision to dismiss the case. The prosecution had completely fumbled the evidence and the defense had five witnesses willing to testify the defendant had been at a social gathering at the time the prosecution said the

rape had taken place. Add in the fact the woman hadn't had a rape kit done afterwards his hands were tied. At least in this case the only backlash would be verbal not physical.

Clinton took off his reading glasses and rubbed his face. It was cases like this that he struggled to leave behind at work. He felt horrible for the woman if she was telling the truth and wondered if it was wrong to hope she was lying since the case had failed. Was it better to wish that she lied than to admit he had to let a rapist walk free? Now couldn't have been worse for a case like this to come across his desk.

Otis Johnson was on his ass about his low percentage of convictions. This wasn't a personal decision. He was doing his job and his job was to make sure the United States laws were upheld. Innocent until proven guilty. Those were words he lived by.

It was those words that were going to get him killed. He'd been living in fear since he threw out the Moore case. What could he do? The police had screwed up when they obtained evidence through an illegal search and he had to throw the case out. His hands had been tied.

A knock at the door made him jump. His right hand grasped the handle of his middle desk drawer and started to open it.

"Judge Clinton? Are you busy?" asked a hesitant female voice.

"Come in." He replied. He quickly closed the drawer hiding the contents.

The door opened to reveal one of his judicial interns, Kirsty Anderson. She had on her Duke sweatshirt in place of her typical black blazer. He had been correct on the time because she only wore that sweatshirt after seven pm. Her shoulder length brown hair was pulled back in a messy bun

and she held a thick manila folder pressed against her chest.

“Here is the memorandum from the Heckler case.” She said as she placed the folder on the corner of his desk.

“Thank you, Miss. Anderson.” He reached across the desk and moved the fold onto the pile of other memorandums waiting for his attention. His chest tightened at the sight of the ever growing stack. He didn’t have time for this. His time needed to be devoted to finding a way to put Moore behind bars.

“I finished my juris doctor degree a few months ago.” Kirsty brushed a few hairs that had come out of her bun behind her ear. “Have any full time positions opened?”

“I’m afraid not.” Her position at the supreme court was an unpaid internship to gain experience. She was a good worker and he would have liked for her to stay on staff, but all paid positions were filled at the moment. He wasn’t going to suggest it, yet he hoped she would ask him to be a reference on her resume. Her skills were sharp and he saw a successful future in law before her. Part of him wondered in light of his circumstances, if he should warn her against a career in their field.

“I’ve been sending out applications.” Kirsty said, but her eyes shifted away from his. He wondered if she was lying or if the number of applications was one.

He nodded then turned back to his screen. Tossing out the rape case gave him time. He had asked the police commissioner Thompson to help him build a case against Moore. Thompson wasn’t concerned, but he wasn’t the one on the wrong side of Tony Salerno.

“Has Mrs. Koster’s given you your case schedule for next month?” Kirsty rested her hand on her hip and bit the corner of her lip.

He turned back to his computer and opened the upcoming court schedule. “Yes.” He searched the document for her name. She had been assigned to a fraud case happening in three weeks. Before he could turn the computer screen to face her, Kirsty had come around to his side of the desk.

“Thank you,” She pulled from her slack’s pocket a small notebook and pen then leaned in close to the screen.

Clinton found himself suddenly hyper aware of his personal space. As she leaned in even closer, he sat stock still. The shoulder of her sweatshirt brushed against the arm of his suit jacket. The smell of old books was replaced by the strawberry scent of her freshly washed hair. Her free strands of hair fell loose from behind her ear and brushed against his cheek as she moved back.

He felt her breath on the back of his neck as she spoke, “You really helped me out.”

“I’m glad to be of assistance.” He kept his eyes locked straight ahead, afraid of accidentally moving his head to the side.

Kirsty slipped her notebook and pen back into her pocket then made her way across the room to the door. “Have a good evening, Judge Clinton.” She said with her hand on the door knob.”

“Goodnight, Miss. Anderson.” He picked up a newspaper off his desk and opened it as a nonverbal dismissal. He heard the door close as she took the hint. Slowly he let out a pent up breath and made a mental note not to be alone with her again during the rest of her internship. What she hoped to gain from seducing him was beyond him. From his graying hairs and growing age he knew it wasn’t out of any sense of attraction. Maybe it would be a good idea to go home after all.

As he went to put the newspaper down one of the

headlines caught his eye.

Scott Moore, the Killer of Notorious Crime Boss Toby Salerno's Son, is Missing.

Oh no. Oh no. Oh no! The newspaper fell out of his shaking hands. Amy and Jean. He had to do something. He opened the desk drawer and removed his Glock nineteen. It was a recent purchase and he hadn't had a chance to fire it yet. He hastily shoved it in the waistband of his slacks and went to his car. His hand was shaking so hard it took him two tries to get his key in the door. He didn't call ahead but he knew he didn't have to. Police commissioner Thompson would be there.

The drive to the police department lasted for an eternity. It had to be dumb luck that he hadn't been pulled over. He didn't know how fast he'd been going, but it hadn't been the speed limit.

He took the stairs two at a time then pushed the door open. A few people waited in the front in chairs. It may have been closer to eleven but this was New York. There was always crime happening.

A woman was talking to a female officer at the front desk. Clinton stepped in front of her and cut her off.

"I need to speak to commissioner Thompson. It's ur-" Before he could finish a police officer exiting a hall to his right cut him off.

"Hands in the air!" He shouted as he drew his weapon from his side.

"What the hell?" Clinton yelled as he stepped back from the front desk and raised his arms. He hadn't meant to shout. Adrenaline had been coursing through him since he saw the newspaper article.

The woman next to him let out an involuntary shriek and

fell back against the wall. His heart hammered against his chest and his breath was loud in the silent precinct.

“Turn and face the wall.” The officer with the gun ordered. The barrel never left his chest.

Clinton quickly turned around and pressed his chest against the wall. He kept his hands in the air. His palms felt sweaty against the peeling paint.

The woman scurried back from him and tripped over the leg of the closest chair. She fell backwards into the seat next to another woman in a slip dress. Prostitute.

“Keep your hands in the air.” The cop ordered.

Clinton felt hands against his waist. In the corner of his eye he saw the face of the officer who had been seated at the front desk. The office reached around to his front and removed the gun from his waistband. The gun!

Clinton cursed under his breath. He’d forgotten it was in his slacks. A bead of sweat dripped down the side of his face. How could he have been so stupid?

“What are you two doing? Stand down officer Randolph.” He recognized commissioner Thompson’s harsh resounding voice. “This is Judge Clinton.”

Clinton took his hands off the wall and slowly turned around. The officer with the gun had holstered his weapon. The female officer was standing to the side, his gun in her hands still.

Commissioner Thompson stood in the hallway next to Clinton. The anger in his eyes blazed. He held his hand out to the female officer and she gave him Clinton’s gun. “Officer Randolph, Officer Corrillo tell Officers Chapman and Kroeger to take your places in the front of the precinct. Now!”

“Yes, sir.” Officer Corrillo said. They both quickly left down the right hallway.

Waves of anger came off Thompson as he glared after them. “They’re two new hires.” He explained. “They didn’t recognize you.”

“No, I shouldn’t have brought the gun in. It was my mistake.” Clinton’s voice was still an octave too loud. His heart was slowing down. The panic he felt in the moment was dissipating.

The two waited in silence until the two other officers entered the room. Thompson turned and went back down the hallway he’d come from. Clinton followed him into his office without an invitation.

“What is this about?” Thompson asked as he took a seat behind his desk. On the pale blue wall behind him hung his framed diplomas and multiple awards from the city. He set the gun on his desk. Although covered in his papers, his desk was more organized than Clinton’s.

Clinton stood behind one of the chairs facing the desks. He grasped the back of the chair. The sweat on his palms made his hands slide on the leather backing. He licked his lips then spoke, “You didn’t tell me that Scott Moore is missing.”

“I didn’t think it was important.” Thompson rested his forearms on the desk and leaned forward. His fingers intertwined in front of him. His calm demeanor only angered Clinton more.

“Damn it, Johnson.” He snapped. “I told you I needed to know everything you know about Moore!” His voice rose against his will. He slapped a hand against the chair. “I am a target! That means Amy and Jean are in danger.”

“Calm down, Clinton.” Thompson ordered. He glared back at him. He leaned back in his tall backed chair. “You are not in danger. Think about it, with Moore gone Salerno has to focus on finding him. You’re free.”

Clinton took a hankey out of his pocket and wiped the sweat from his brow. His hands began to shake again. “I dismissed Moore’s case. I let the man who killed Salerno’s son walk free. I am a target! You need to take this seriously.”

“I am taking this seriously!” Thompson slammed the palm of his hand against his desk and stood. He pointed a finger at him. “Don’t you tell me how to do my job. You are the reason you are in this mess. You are the one who continues to let dangerous criminals stay on the streets. The system is broken in your court.”

He crumbled the hankey in his hand. “You have to find Moore.” Clinton growled back. It was his only hope.

“I assure you,” Thompson picked up the gun from his desk. “It is unlikely we will ever find him. If we do, it’ll be in pieces.” He stuck the handle of the gun in Clinton’s hand. “Leave my precinct.”

chapter six

Jacqueline S Miller

JUDGE ANDREW CLINTON SAT in his chambers perusing a huge pile of files of criminal cases on his desk.

The room was extremely plush with oak panelled walls lined with books and an exotic violet rug. Plants and portraits were tastefully displayed. The judge had worked hard to attain such salubrious working conditions, after many years of damp, cold, antiquated rooms. However, the comfortable setting had not prevented him getting a peptic ulcer from the stresses of the job. Ulcers prevailed amongst lawyers, the result of the job and of working in ‘the city that never sleeps.’

There was a knock on the door and a fresh faced young woman in a suit appeared, an anxious expression in her brown eyes. She smiled nervously.

“Good morning, sir. You...er...sent for me.”

“Yes, good morning. Kristen isn’t it?”

“My name’s Kirsty, sir. Lots of people make that mistake.” Her voice sounded huskier than usual and she coughed several times.

Judge Andrew Clinton indicated the vacant chair opposite.

“I have some files for you to look over.”

He glanced at her as she seated herself on the edge of the low chair. Her smile irritated him. Could she really be that happy?

As a judge at the NY Supreme Court, Criminal Term, Andrew had employed a steady stream of interns over the years. Usually these were fresh-faced, naive college grads who had idealistic views of the Law and of how they were going to change the world— for the better of course. Perhaps his cynicism was the result of being a middle-aged man in his fifties who fought against the inevitable signs of ageing by jogging several times a week, but he believed that he had never been as ‘wet behind the ears’ as some of the recent interns.

Kirsty Anderson, his latest recruit, was a slim 25 year old brunette who was better qualified than most, having recently obtained her JD from Duke. She had originally graduated from Charleston with majors in English and Comparative Literature which at least meant she could spell, although Judge Clinton wouldn’t altogether bank on it. Educational standards were definitely slipping which was why law offices were only taking on the very best candidates these days, demanding higher qualifications than in previous years. The judge’s interns were lucky in that they were paid a small salary, but probably only sufficient to cover basic food and travel. Most interns came from middle class families, keen to see them enter the prestigious Law profession.

The judge flicked through the sheaf of papers, frowning to himself.

“I don’t understand it,” he muttered.

“Sir.” Kirsty coughed several times and gripped the side of the desk. Her face turned red and she seemed to be choking. The judge pushed a jug of water closer to her.

“Here, help yourself.”

“Thank you.” She coughed again and inelegantly poured iced-water into a glass, spilling some of the contents onto the table. “My...er...asthma is playing up.”

“New York might not be the best place for you then.” He blew his nose loudly as if making his point. “The air is dreadful, especially at this time of year. All that traffic pollution.”

She sipped the water. “Not at all, sir. I love it here. The city is so...” She hesitated, seeking the word. “Vibrant.”

A faint smile flickered around his lips. “I didn’t invite you in here to discuss traffic and air pollution.” He indicated the files on his desk. “All these cases are most peculiar.”

Kirsty lowered the glass, and straightened her back trying to appear taller in the low chair.

“How so?”

He saw that he had her full attention.

“Almost every case this month, without exception, has been aborted.”

“Really, on what grounds?”

“Mostly missing evidence. Cases being filed out of time, and even a couple of Fourth Amendment violations. In fact, it’s one of the latter that I want you to investigate for me.” Opening the file he took out a photograph of a young boy and handed it to Kirsty.

“This child was killed in a hit and run case.”

“How terrible!” Her brown eyes looked as though they might brim with tears.

“Yes, it was.” He looked at her, concerned that she was upset. A law office was no place for an emotional young woman. “But what makes it particularly interesting is the identity of the child. Mark Salerno. You might recognise the

name.”

“Salerno?” Kirsty looked blankly at Judge Andrew Clinton, but then surprised him by adding, “Is he related to Tony Salerno?”

“The boy was his son.”

“Aren’t there rumours about Tony Salerno being a mafia boss?”

Judge Andrew Clinton raised his eyebrows, unexpectedly impressed.

“Indeed. They suspect the driver was Scott Moore. He works in Real Estate. The police visited him at home, but they searched his property without a warrant, thus breaking the Fourth Amendment.”

“And you suspect foul play?”

“Possibly. Nothing was proved because the case was dismissed. And now Scott Moore seems to have disappeared.”

The judge’s intercom rang. His secretary wanted to remind him of an important meeting that morning.

Kirsty studied the photograph of the young boy while she waited. Pale eyes in an innocent young face stared back at her. It was such a tragedy for a child to die.

“I’m running late.” The judge looked at his watch and rose, indicating that their interview was over. “Here.” Impatiently he shoved the file across his desk. “I suggest you read all of this. See if you can find any evidence that’s been missed. It will be good training if nothing else, but you might find something we can use...”

Back in the office, Kirsty seated herself at the cramped desk she had been allocated between the door to the women’s rest room and the fire exit. There was no natural light in her corner so she switched on a metal angle-lamp. It was cold and

draughty here, with frequent interruptions from the secretaries passing by to use the rest room, or the post boy bringing the mail into the office.

“Asthma, huh!” she laughed to herself, although she coughed some more. She retrieved a packet of honey-and-lemon lozenges from her jacket pocket. If the judge only knew: her voice was hoarse from too much singing, not pollution, although it had been smoky in the karaoke bar last night. She’d gone there with her best friend, Jamie, and Jamie’s boyfriend, Ken. It was such a joy to sing, much more fun than this boring old Law lark which was paying her a pittance. How she resented her middle class parents for pushing her into this profession. Maybe she should have stuck with the English Literature course and become a teacher or a writer, or followed her secret dream of becoming a singer. How glamorous that might be. She indulged herself in a little daydream in which she and Jamie formed a group. She imagined herself singing at pop concerts and appearing on television. She would become a spoilt diva who didn’t have to be at the beck and call of judges and criminals. She would be rich and famous and...

“Is everything all right, dear?”

Judge Andrew Clinton’s personal secretary, Pat, had just emerged from the ladies room. She wore enormous, pink-framed glasses which covered half her face, and an ill-fitting pink suit with padded shoulders. Her purple rinsed hair had been permed within an inch of its life. Apparently no one had informed her that the eighties were over and that nineties fashions were changing.

“Yes, thanks.” Kirsty frantically opened the file. “Judge Clinton has given me a case to investigate,” she whispered conspiratorially. “He says it’s very important.”

“Good. As long as he’s keeping you busy, dear. Be sure to let me know if you run out of things to do.”

“I will.”

Kirsty smiled as broadly as is humanly possible, showing both rows of teeth. These were not her best feature as she had refused to stick with the prescribed orthodontistry during her teens — braces were so uncool. But she had read somewhere in one of the guides for interns applying for placements, that the way to get on in life is to be extremely nice to everyone while working in a legal office or law court, and especially the secretaries who often wielded the power beneath the throne.

She flicked through a sheaf of papers, repeatedly telling herself,

“This is so interesting.”

Kirsty set to work, leafing through the documents, trying to find something that would help the judge reinstate the case.

She read the bios of Scott Moore and Tony Salerno. What if there was something shady going on and it wasn’t just a mere accident? What if it had been planned? But why would someone want to kill a young boy? Unless, he hadn’t been the intended target. What if Scott Moore had wanted to kill Tony Salerno but something had gone wrong?

There should have been enough evidence to present the case, but it had been dismissed on a technicality.

Kirsty opened some of her legal textbooks and reminded herself of the contents of the Fourth Amendment.

Then she found a photocopy of the police report for the evening of the incident.

Kirsty couldn’t believe her eyes: someone had made a 911 call to the police asking them to visit Scott Moore on the night of the incident, and while they were in the house, they had noticed a blood stain on the denim sleeve of his jacket, but

none of this evidence had been provided in court!

Kirsty frowned to herself and read through the documents several times. There were exceptions to the Fourth Amendment. Surely this would have been one of them, and yet the case had been dismissed on a technicality.

Clutching the file under her arm, Kirsty picked her way past the secretaries' desks.

"Can I help you?" Pat asked.

Kirsty wasn't sure if there was a hint of a sneer in her voice but she smiled broadly as she replied, "I wonder if I could have a quick meeting with Judge Clinton. I think I've found what he was looking for..."

Later that afternoon, Kirsty showed the Judge the police report and the details of the 911 call that was made on the day of the accident.

"Have you verified this with the police?" he asked.

"No...but..."

He sighed. "Don't worry. I'll get one of my team to phone the New York City Police Commissioner. His name's Joseph P Thompson, for your future reference. I'd like to see what his handle is on this."

Kirsty waited for an accolade of praise for a job well done. Instead, the Judge handed her a couple more files.

"Now, Kristen..."

"Kirsty."

"Perhaps you can have a look through these for me. As I said, there are several other recent cases which the courts saw fit to dismiss..."

chapter seven

M.T. Decker

DANIEL LAWRENCE, ESQUIRE CAREFULLY adjusted the picture in the bookcase behind his desk. Although they'd been divorced for 2 years now, the image of Annabeth still graced his shelves. Her photo added a certain gravitas to his office, pictures made him look more like a people person than he actually was.

Working for Frank Albert Cole, III, and his family enterprises had been lucrative, but success had come with a cost. People did not trust him.

Looking at the boss's case file, he understood why. Cole had been stretching the boundaries of good business practices for some time now, and quality was slipping. He had blurred the line between frugal and substandard, and it was only a matter of time before that came back to haunt him. The documents were all pointing to 'now' as the time.

Danny had tried to keep up with his boss, make sure that he had crossed all the 't's and dotted all the 'i's. But Cole wasn't happy unless the numbers were big, and Danny had long shifted from trying to protect the man, to staying out of the

blast radius.

He'd managed to keep the boss's image as clean as he could, but karma was catching up with them.

When you refused to follow the rules or worse, make up your own, things were bound to backfire in the worst possible way. According to the file, this was that time.

He looked at his watch and then back to the computer, time for him to check with his people. At least then he'd have a better idea of how close to the edge the boss was.

He poured himself three fingers of scotch and studied the golden liquid for a moment before logging into the company's FTP Server. The designated folder was empty. He took another sip from his whiskey and let the golden liquid roll over his tongue as he started reviewing his case notes.

The investigation had begun innocuously enough, a few cost overruns on a major project-- nothing too out of the ordinary. These things were bound to happen as a matter of doing business until they happened too often. Then it became a trail of breadcrumbs that drew the investigation further along.

Now it was just a question of time before the investigators found what they needed.

There were simply too many cases of substandard materials and price wars with companies that didn't exist.

Ten minutes later he checked, and he was surprised to find not one but three documents waiting for him, one from each of his major sources.

He continued to review the file he had while he downloaded the files and printed them. If this kept up, he was going to need to switch to coffee. Once the files had finished printing, he started reading.

The first came from Richard Lewis, one of his lifelong

friends and fellow transplanted New Jersey Boy. Ricky worked in the prosecutor's office as a paralegal. While he hadn't done any investigating himself, Rick had access to the investigator's notes and he had sent them all. The information they had gathered was damning.

The second document came from Rebecca Greenberg, a woman he knew and sometimes dated. Becca worked for the Office of State's Comptroller. Her report paralleled Ricky's, but there was a lot more information. Rick's report covered one project, her's documented five years worth of unethical business practices.

It started with a few irregularities from the latest project, the Bradford Building. Those irregularities had finally drawn the attention of the Comptroller's Office. The file outlined a long series of cost overruns, bid-rigging, illicit donations to political campaigns, and several cases of out-and-out bribery. The Comptroller's office had identified Cole's shell corporations that he had used as consultants and suppliers. The investigators suspected that the supplies had been leftover from other projects. Projects that had, themselves, been riddled with cost overruns and suspicious bidding practices.

The final report came from the State's Prosecuting Attorney's Office. His cousin, who was dating one of the clerks, reported that they were very close to convening a Grand Jury.

No, things did not look good.

He took another sip of his whiskey, letting it burn its way to his gut. He was not looking forward to telling Cole just how much trouble he was in -- but he had to.

He dialed the number and wasn't surprised when Cole picked up on the third ring.

"Sir, I need to talk to you."

There was a long pause as Cole spoke to someone, his voice husky and very un-businesslike. "Danny, I'm kind of busy right now, can it wait?"

"No, sir. I need to speak to you, now." Danny answered as he heard a woman's laugh in the background.

There was a pause, and then a sigh. "Meet me at the Surrey. Grab a drink in the bar and I'll meet you there in half an hour."

Danny looked at his watch. It would take him about ten minutes by cab to get to the Upper East Side Hotel. That gave him twenty for drinking and with the news he had--appreciating more whiskey sounded like a good use of his time.

"Very well, sir."

Thirty minutes later he was seated at the bar, a glass of Bowmore 15 in his hand. He drank, savoring the flavor as he tried to avoid everyone's gaze. The last thing he wanted was to answer inane questions. He wanted to sit at the bar and enjoy his drink. He definitely didn't want to think about was the case being built against his boss and his holdings.

He focused on his whiskey. He loved the way the Bowmore 15's less smoky flavor allowed the other, subtle flavors to reveal themselves as he sipped the liquor straight. He kept an eye on the door thankful for the moment to gather his thoughts.

When Cole arrived, it was not through the main door, but through the side entrance reserved for hotel guests. So he was staying here.

Cole looked at Danny's now empty glass and raised an eyebrow.

"It's bad boss," Daniel said, wasting no time in getting to

the point.

Cole nodded and gestured for him to follow. "I'm running late, you can brief me while I dress."

Dan shook his head and fell into step behind his boss, trying to update him as they walked. "It's the Bradford Deal," he said, once they were alone in the elevator.

"They've traced Venture Limited, LLC back to you. They know you've been using shell companies to start bidding wars with your competitors."

He paused as the elevator doors opened onto the 17th floor and Cole exited. Danny paused then moved to keep up.

The penthouse, Danny wasn't entirely surprised. Cole liked his luxury, and the penthouse suite of the Surrey suited him. Marble floors, a throne-like view of the Manhattan skyline - everything a real estate mogul needed.

He waited until they were inside and the doors were closed before he continued his warning.

"The investigators checked the three other competitors and found only one of them did not come back as one of your subsidiaries," he warned. When Cole didn't respond, he looked up.

He was surprised to see Cole was not only not listening to him, but primping in front of the mirror.

"Sir," he said. "That raises all sorts of questions. Bidding against yourself? You company subcontracting to other companies you run? That is a red flag."

"It's just bad communications. The left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing," Cole answered blowing it off.

Dan scowled as Cole took off his suit jacket and placed it next to his tux on the bed.

"Frank! This is serious," Dan said.

Cole nodded as he started comparing ties. "Which do you

think I should go with?" he asked.

Dan frowned, looking down at his blue jeans and his wrinkled dress shirt and shook his head. "You'll take fashion tips from me, but not business advice?"

"You can tell a lot about a man by the way he dresses," Cole admonished.

"And what is my fashion sense telling you?"

"That you will never rip me off for a pair of Testoni shoes and a one hundred thousand dollar vicuna suit."

Danny snorted at that. "Yeah, but there's still room for negotiating a pair of Air Jordans."

Cole shook his head. "No, if you were going to sell me out, you would have done it long ago."

"Don't make me wish I had - you are in serious trouble here, and if you don't do something -- even I won't be able to get you out. A Grand Jury is serious business. Indictments almost always follow.

Cole studied his friend for a moment and started to laugh. "You underestimate the power of knowing the right people. Trust me, Danny, we have nothing to worry about. There are still plenty of deals to be had."

"Sir, I really don't see how you can get out of this legally."

Cole's smile sent a shiver down his spine.

"Who said anything about legally?" Cole asked and then relaxed. "Danny, trust me, there are always deals to be made - rule number one, always make sure you know the dirt on a bigger fish. Have something on someone people want more than they want you. And if that fails - know they keep their skeletons."

Dan shook his head. "I can't be hearing this."

Cole smiled. "Don't worry about it. You do what you do and I," he said adjusting his tie. "Am going to go make some

of those connections I was talking about. Trust me, we aren't anywhere close to falling."

Dan watched as Cole finished adjusting his cuff links and making sure his hair flooffed the right way.

"Give me what they have, I'll read it on the way to the Charity Gala Mayor Broderick is hosting. It will be the perfect opportunity for me to do what I do. Everyone who's anyone will be there. That means everyone I need to talk to will be there."

"Sir..."

"Not another word -you've done your job, now let me do mine."

"Fair enough,sir," Danny answered, his tone resigned, then asked, "what are Testoni shoes?"

Cole laughed. "Very expensive, very well-made Italian shoes."

Danny nodded and handed Cole a very thick legal folder with a summary attached to the front. It was all the documentation his sources had provided.

Cole took the folder, brushed an imaginary piece of dust off his shoulder, and headed out. "Don't stay up too late."

When Daniel didn't move Cole smiled at him, his grin shifting to a more reassuring expression.

"It'll be fine."

Danny wondered if it would, but he knew better. He'd read the reports.

Frank watched the city through the tinted windows of his limousine and smiled. He had been responsible for more than a few of the edges that defined the skyline. This was going to be a good night. He knew it.

He gave the folder his lawyer had given him with a

sidelong glance and thought about the younger man. He'd been so insistent that he read it— but he knew it by heart. He'd been the one who had set things in motion and as much as he trusted Daniel Lawrence, there were things he never shared with anyone.

He scanned the information and smiled. They had a lot on him - but the didn't have everything. He knew what he had to do this evening.

He finished with the document and tucked it away in one of the seat compartments. He adjusted the mirror so he could get a good look at himself and nodded. He was ready.

He sat up as the limousine came to a stop. A moment later he stepped out and waved to a flare of flashbulbs and the soft sputter of shutters snapping.

Cole waved, unbuttoning the bottom button of his jacket and began walking. His popularity vanished as the next car arrived. Job done, he joined the line of attendees, invitation in hand. He chatted amiably with the people around him, but his eyes never left the Mayor.

Edward T Broderick, Esquire, USMC Retired, the man had reinvented himself on a regular basis, but one factor remained - he was the path to power in this town. He was power in this town.

Frank smiled as he reached the top of the stairs and the mayor held out his hand. "Frank! It's good to see you, glad you could make it."

It was obvious the man was repeating the statement and variations on it with each person, but the Mayor knew how to make it sound genuine. Cole turned as he heard the shutters clicking again and felt the warmth of the flashbulbs.

He had nothing to worry about.

chapter eight

Katie Quintero

ESPRESSO MACHINES STEAMED AND hissed, the clinking of ceramic mugs competing in volume with the cacophony of voices in the busy coffee shop. The morning rush was at its peak, the mayhem of post-dawn New York City swirling around an unperturbed Danny Lawrence. He sat at his usual small high top table in the eye of the storm, calmly sipping his cappuccino and reading the Times.

No matter what else was on his docket, Danny's mornings always began with this ritual. The frantic bustle was oddly calming, as the pandamonium in no way affected him. He also appreciated anonymity in the chaos, which was further supported by his "every man" look of jeans and a simple button-up shirt.

Danny's reading was interrupted by the buzz of his phone. He grimaced as he read the text, not only from the content, but because it meant an end to his solitude. He gathered up his paper and briefcase, nodding a swift goodbye to the barista as he placed his mug in the receptacle on the counter and headed for the door.

Even at this early hour, it was easy to tell today was going to be another hot one. With a long stretch of consistently hot May days, the city didn't have a chance to cool down overnight, leaving the streets smelling acrid and humid, which did nothing to improve Danny's mood after having his morning cut short. A warm breeze blew scattered trash across the gutter and up onto the sidewalk, tangling briefly with his sneakers as he walked toward the office.

Texting as he walked uptown, Danny responded to the message he received, letting the sender know he was on his way. Within a few minutes he walked into The Cole Building, where he worked as the in-house lawyer for Frank Cole's real estate development company. While this was the flagship building in the Cole empire, it was but one of several they owned in Manhattan alone.

Taking the elevator to the 40th floor, he stepped off into the beautifully decorated foyer. Smelling of fresh orchids and old money, the opulence is immediately apparent, from the marble flooring and Eames lounge chairs to the moonlighting-as-a-model receptionist. These trappings were a business necessity. To be perceived as successful, one had to look...nay, scream the part.

Striding to his office, Danny found Nevill Jackson waiting for him. In a company as sizable as Frank Cole's, it was prudent to not only have attorneys on staff, but to employ one's own investigators. Nevill was one of their best, not only when dealing with lawsuits and the ramifications of questionable business practices, but also to keep ahead of any potential issues that might affect the company. The latter is what brought him to Danny's office on this particular morning.

Nevill stood as Danny walked into the room.

“Good morning,” Danny said as he took a seat behind his desk. He gestured to a chair, inviting Nevill to take a seat.

“Morning, Mr. Cole,” Nevill replied.

“Let’s get right to it,” Danny began. “From your text this morning, I gather you discovered a problem with several of our ongoing projects.”

Nevill nodded. “As you know, I have contacts in various departments across the city. One of them reported a noticeable increase in one person’s activity at the city planner’s office. Apparently Kirsty Anderson, a judicial intern for Judge Clinton, has been requesting contract details on a number of our projects, including specifics on the negotiations, other bidders and the names of those involved in the discussions. Once I started looking into it, I found out she’s filed a couple Freedom of Information Act requests as well.”

“Do you know which projects specifically she’s been investigating?” Danny asked.

Nevill reached across the desk, handing Danny a list with several names on it.

“So many? Ok. Thank you for bringing this to my attention.”

Nevill nodded, rose and left the office.

Danny sat, pondering briefly before he started emailing several project leaders, telling them to send him all their information regarding the bidding on various contracts and which companies had been used to place the bids. Frank Cole’s dynasty was the parent company for a plethora of smaller, boutique firms and shell corporations, some used only to shuffle money, bankrupt in the case of massive lawsuits or disappear altogether when under too close of scrutiny.

While Danny waited for their replies, he pushed a button on his desk that made the glass walls surrounding him turn

opaque. He swiveled his chair, rising to slide a painting of Central Park aside, revealing a small safe. The combination was the date of his divorce, chosen as a reminder to never again put himself in such a vulnerable position.

Once it was open, he shuffled under some loose pages and pulled out a small black notebook. Inside, carefully coded to prevent anyone else from deciphering the content, was a list of projects, elected officials and how much the real estate developer had paid each to win a bid. He took the list Nevill gave him and placed numbers next to each project, corresponding with which official they'd provided financial incentive to choose their proposal. A couple names appeared multiple times, as did several of Cole's construction companies.

Email responses began to trickle in. Danny scanned the details of each, adding to his notes on Nevill's list. Fortunately two of the companies Kirsty Anderson had made inquiries about were no longer in business, having to close abruptly due to "financial difficulties." When that happened, all official records were conveniently lost when they moved out of their temporary workspaces. None of the other enterprises or main players overlapped ventures, limiting the connections one could draw between them. There were a few foremen who worked on multiple sites, but they just did the work and weren't involved in contract negotiations.

Danny breathed a little easier. From what he could tell, nothing led directly back to them. The officials were compensated from offshore accounts managed by the entities in charge of the individual contracts, which were several layers removed from the main Cole conglomerate itself. It would take a fair bit digging for anyone to even figure out some of these particular companies even had ties with The Cole

Group.

After replacing the notebook in the wall safe, Danny called up to the 45th floor. Frank's secretary, Alice, answered the phone.

"The Cole Group, Frank Cole's office. Alice speaking."

"Good morning, Alice. It's Danny. Is Frank in?"

"Yes, but Mr. Cole is on a call."

"Would you let him know I'm on my way up? It's important that I speak with him."

"Certainly. I'll let him know you're on your way."

"Thank you, Alice. See you in a minute."

Armed with his research, Frank walked back to the elevator, grabbing a lemon poppyseed muffin from the generous spread laid out daily in the reception area. The bell dinged and he rode up five floors to Frank Cole's main office.

Highly polished wood paneling adorned the walls, giving the vestibule to the executive suite a lavish atmosphere. Alice also lent the space a refined air, with her perfectly quaffed blonde hair, conservative skirt suit and librarian glasses.

"Good morning, Mr. Lawrence," Alice said as he disembarked the elevator. "He's ready for you."

"Thank you, Alice," Danny replied, setting the muffin on her desk as he walked by and toward Frank Cole's office. He rapped on the door once out of courtesy and strode into the office without waiting.

With an impressive 180 view of the city, Frank Cole's office was designed to impress. With a more minimal style than one would expect, everything screamed expense and was specifically designed to draw one's eyes to Frank's desk and his empire - the city - behind him.

Frank rose as Danny entered the room, walking around to the front of his desk. He was a few inches taller than Danny

and, while his Armani suits lent an impressive air to his person, his obvious enjoyment of sumptuous fare was also apparent by his comfortable and well fed physique.

“Good morning, Frank,” Danny said.

“Morning, Danny,” he replied, shaking his hand in a friendly greeting.

“Do you have a minute?” Danny asked, taking a seat in one of the chairs facing Frank’s desk.

“Certainly. I assume it’s important, given the early hour,” Frank replied, leaning back to half sit against his desk.

Danny shared the details of his meeting with Nevill and the result of his inquiries that followed. Frank shifted uncomfortably, interrupting to ask questions throughout Danny’s account. Once he finished, Frank sat down in the chair opposite, sighing audibly as he settled in.

“The important question is, how worried should we be?”

“Not much at all,” Danny reassured him. “While there’s always a chance that someone we...reimbursed for their assistance has a twinge of conscience and feels the need to unburden themselves, none of it ties directly back to us. We planned ahead for this eventuality, layering companies on companies, creating an endless quagmire to prevent anything untoward leading back to The Cole Company.”

Frank nodded. While among the business community his shady dealings were a poorly kept secret and served as a means to bolster his reputation as a ruthless operator, he had always been meticulously discreet on paper.

“Good. Good. Well, I’d say have Nevill keep an eye on the Anderseon woman so we can be prepared for any eventuality. Not that some intern is likely to get the best of me. But “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail,” he quipped, quoting H.K. Williams.

Danny nodded and rose, shaking Frank's hand before walking out. He noticed as he passed Alice's desk that the muffin sat undisturbed. As he rode the elevator back down to his office, he couldn't help but wonder if her dismissal of his attentions were personal or a general integrity, which was relatively foreign within the walls of this modern temple to industry and progress.

chapter nine

Jaysen O'Dell

THE ALLEY WAS FILLED with debris. One day of shit ejected from the assholes of buildings. Office workers. Tradesmen. Restaurants. Bodegas. They eat the raw materials in the mouth of the buildings, the materials are processed just like food passing through the bodies of a giant concrete and metal mollusk, and the indigestible effluence is shit out into the alleys. Alleys are the outhouses of the great buildings in cities.

What better place to hide a brother in-law.

Frank smiled at the sign over a perfectly painted door with a perfectly respectable rectangle of debris free concrete in front of it.

“Cole and sons - Commercial real estate available for immediate occupancy”

Frank's great grandfather, Frank Sr., started the agency building houses in the three boroughs. His son, Frank junior, moved into refurbishing prime, formerly commercial properties into luxury apartments in Manhattan. Frank the second ventured into construction of pure commercial property. But Frank the third... he leveraged the private

education and political contacts afforded to him by the previous Frank Coles, to move into building high-rise commercial properties and city contracts. From thousands, to millions to billions. Frank Cole the Third would live on in the memory of this city, the Big Apple, as long as his building remained.

As Frank reached for the door it swung open.

“Good evening sir! It’s a surprise, but a pleasure, to see you here. I did not expect you.”

“Good evening Victor. How is Mrs Kite these days?”

“Ahh... the Irish maid of my youth reminds me that she is Irish! Now if we could just find the youth...” Victor Kite smiled. A mischievous twinkle in his eye reminded Frank of a time when his wife was the center of his ... lust.

“How’d you do it Victor? One women for all those years...”

“Well sir, I like my cock attached. So I keep my pants zipped and my KIWCs all to myself until she suggests otherwise.”

“You are a better man than I, Victor, better than I.”

“Well... if you ask Mrs. Kite she may disagree!”

Frank chuckled. This old welder turned office doorman was always quick to make a pun. It was his last day with the firm. Tomorrow he would be retired. Out to pasture. Never to great Frank again.

“Victor, are you sure about retiring?”

“Yes sir. But it isn’t my mind you need to change. You see, I hear a welder calling me. Once a welder calls, you answer it or you are never a welder again. You sir, need to make the welder stop calling me. Now I know you have contacts, and I suspect that man living here is evidence of that, but I don’t think you can stop a welder from calling a man back into the

shop.”

“I think you are right on all accounts Mr Kite. You will be missed. Not just by me, but by everyone that has met you. You brightened our days with your humor. Anytime you need anything, just stop by one of our buildings and tell them ‘Victor Kite is protesting naked at the Red Lion’. How does that strike you?”

“Sir, if I didn’t know better I would think you were pulling my leg. But I must be off. Fluff and I have an appointment to keep!”

Victor extended his hand to Frank. As Frank reach out Victor grasped Frank’s hand with a crushing grip. “I may be a welder, but I know the power you hold in this city. Think long and hard about your moves in there. I suspect you have a mess that you are just starting to get your mind around. One mistake and your house of cards comes tumbling down.”

Victor smiled, patted Frank on the shoulder and walked toward the street.

“Take care Victor. Pet Fluff for me!”

“She’s been gone some years now. But I will tell her when I see her.” Victor walked around the corner disappearing from view. Frank felt lonely.

Walking into the building, Frank looked at the empty desk where Victor had been sitting. A few notes on the wall. A phone neatly placed. A well worn office chair. The loneliness intensified.

Going up the staircase, Frank went to suite 203. An alley side suite of 4 rooms with an executive washroom. Unlocking the door Frank walked in. “Yo Scott! You in here?”

“Jesus man! You scared the shit out of me!”

Scott came out of the executive office. Unshaven and sweaty he looked like the has been he had proven himself to

be. Greasy and fat, the former high school athlete was nowhere to be seen in him.

“I told you I was coming over.” Frank was disgusted by the state of the office suite. Empty food containers littered the counters and desks. Papers, mostly trash dailies and sports rags, littered the floor. “Did you forget how the trash pickup works?”

“Look man, I can’t go out there. Someone might see me. You know Tony has people looking for me. Who would take care of your sister if he gets me?”

“Just about anyone she wants. You realize that she doesn’t need you?”

“Yeah. I know. She’s above me. But right now... you need me.”

Frank thought back to the night of the accident. Scott was tired from a long day of leg work. They had stopped for a drink. Things happened fast. Scott knew that if Frank was arrested billions of dollars in contracts and millions of dollars in personal profit would vanish. Scott walked around the car, pulled Frank out and sat in the drivers seat. Scott never even noticed that Frank had just killed a kid in a crosswalk.

“Scott, if you hadn’t taken the fall...”

“Yeah, I know. But Jesus man... Tony Salerno’s kid! I’m a dead man!”

“No one knows you are here. Have things delivered downstairs. Only my trusted people work here.”

“For how much longer? I can’t keep on like this. You have to get me out of here and out of this city!”

“Tony has people all over the state. All over the country.”

“Then get me out of this country!”

“It’s not that easy.”

Scott was sitting on the waiting area couch. Face in his

hands. Rocking slightly. A snuffle escaped. “I just want to go home!”

“In time. I swear, I will get you out of this. I just need time. You know if anyone sees Alice walking in here they will know you are here. I swear to get you out of this, back to your house, and safe. You will be safe.”

“How can you promise that? You didn’t think about this when you fixed the trial. Now you will magically get smart and keep me safe?”

The more Frank tried to calm Scott the more agitated Scott became. Frank needed to change tactics.

“Fine. If you want to go home, I’ll call a car and you can leave now. Keep in mind you are risking not just your life, but Alice’s as well.”

“I don’t know. I can’t just go home. You need to give us enough money to hide. Get us new identities. You have to know someone. Get us out of here with \$10 million dollars. If you don’t I can destroy you.”

Scott looked at his hands. There wasn’t any blood on them. Or his clothes. The only blood was a small pool forming on the debris littering the floor. The indigestible effluence of a wasted life shit out into the outhouse of Scotts immediate surroundings.

chapter ten

Michael Roberts

“I THINK WE MIGHT need to circle the wagons, Frank.”

Frank Cole looked away from the window of his office towards his personal assistant.

Below him, Battery Park was starting to light up again as the city came to life again.

“Yeah, I’m sure we probably need to to, Marty.”

Just as he spoke, the intercom on his desk beeped.

Frank pressed the button.

“Yes, Greta?”

“Mr. Lawrence is here, Mr. Cole.”

“Thank you, send him in.”

“At least now we can find out how deep the shit we’re in goes.”

“I’m hoping puddle rather than well, personally.”

There was a knock on the door.

Jesus, Greta, Frank thought, just bring him in already.

The door opened and Greta held it while Danny Lawrence stepped in.

He was wearing a suit.

Not a good sign.

Danny never wore a suit unless there was a compelling reason.

“Is there anything I can get you gentlemen?” Greta asked.

Frank looked at his watch.

8:53.

He’d been up for three hours already today.

Hell, to be honest, he’d actually been up since yesterday morning, since he hadn’t actually been able to sleep very well.

“Could you call and get breakfast set up in the Board Room, please, Greta. Bagels and coffee.”

“Yes, sir,” Greta said, closing the door.

“So?” Frank asked, when the door was closed.

“I was at City Hall this morning, meeting with Bill Taylor and Tom Griffin.”

“Can I assume the result was not what we had hoped for?”

“You can.”

Frank exhaled slowly.

“Well, that’s unfortunate.”

“It’s more than unfortunate. My guy in the Comptroller’s office phoned me on the way back from the meeting. They’re prepared to proceed with possible charges.”

“Possible charges?”

“Well, more than possible, Frank.”

They set up for the meeting in the Hudson Room, so named because it overlooked the river.

Greta had ordered catering from the Carnegie Deli and the room smelled slightly of mustard and cooked meats.

At eleven thirty they arrived.

The older one identified himself as Tomas Fuentes and his younger associate as Brad Murry.

When they were all sat in around the table, Fuentes cleared

his throat.

“Mr. Cole, as you know, the City of New York has been under fire somewhat as of late for perpetuating an image of shall we say less than spotless business practises.”

“OK,” Frank said.

“And we have been tasked by Mayor Broderick to rectify this.”

“Tis a resolution devoutly to be wished,” Frank said.

“I’m sorry?”

“Hamlet? ‘To be or not to be’ speech? Seriously, you guys never read Shakespeare in high school?”

“We read ‘Romeo and Juliet,’” Murry said and Fuentes looked at him, then back at Frank and Danny.

“I’m not sure how this is germane to our conversation.”

“Just trying to lighten the mood a tad.”

“I don’t think it needs to be lightened, Mr. Cole. In fact, I think you need to remember how serious this situation is for you and your company. You’re facing possible prosecution on a number of offences, some of which are felonies, need I remind your legal council.”

“You do not,” Danny said, “I am aware of both the investigation and the implication of charges that your office has been using to intimidate my client, who had to this point been acting in good faith, as concerns your investigation.

“Good faith?” Fuentes said, “You *do* know that one of the possible charges is related to your obstruction of a investigation, right?”

“Mr. Cole’s office has been more than generous with both their time and manpower.”

“Mr. Cole’s office seems unable to provide evidence in a case, despite being subpoenaed to do so.”

Frank looked across the table at the two men who sat

there.

“As we pointed out...”

He felt Danny’s hand on his forearm, looked over at Danny and saw him shake his head almost imperceptibly.

Time to shut up.

“The Comptroller’s office was made aware of the clerical error that led to the evidence in question being no longer available.”

“Yeah, you said you ‘accidentally’ lost the files from that era, in a...what did you call it?”

Murry glanced for a few seconds at the written transcript and found it.

“Yes,” he continued, “an ‘unfortunate error in clerical procedure.’”

“Yes, the boxes containing records from June 1989 to December of that year were disposed of, rather than being archived like they were supposed to be”

“Hell of a mistake, huh?”

“Yes,” Danny said, “Regrettable but here we are...”

“Yes,” Fuentes said, “Here we are indeed.”

“I think the best way forward is to just act in the best interests of everyone involved.”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning,” Danny continued, “you guys need a win. I get that. Cuomo’s probably got his goons breathing down your necks to make sure you get one in the black side of the ledger this time. Having Gotti and Bonanno walk last summer must have really stung.”

“Not my department,” Fuentes said, “so, I’m unaware of how the DA is feeling about that case. However, I do know that they are very enthusiastic about our chances on this one, Danny.”

“They shouldn’t be, You know that your case here is a coin toss..at best...”

“At best, it’s a solid conviction and your client sees serious federal time.”

Fuentes turned his attention to Frank.

“I assume your council has made you aware of the potential consequences of a conviction, am I right, Mr. Cole?”

“I was made aware of the potential, which at this stage is all it is, Mr. Fuentes. But, yes, I am.”

“However,” Danny said, “as my client has pointed out.”

He threw another look at Frank.

Shut up it said.

“As he so...wisely...pointed out, it’s all potential, Mr. Fuentes.”

“We believe otherwise.”

“And my office believes it is. So, we currently seem to have a bit of a standoff. However, I assume you are here for more than just recapping the situation.”

“We are,” Fuentes said, “While the Mayor’s and the Comptroller’s offices are eager to successfully prosecute every case we can, we are realists.”

Here it comes, Danny thought.

“And?”

“And we are willing, in the pursuit of expediency and frankly, pragmatism...”

“To cut a deal,” Danny finished for him.

“In colloquial terms, yes,” Fuentes said.

“In colloquial terms, what is the deal?”

Fuentes motioned to Murry, who reached into his loather briefcase and pulled out a folder.

He handed it to Fuentes, who opened it on the table.

“Well,” he began, “There are several aspects to any offer

that we are willing to.”

“Ballpark it for us, Mr. Fuentes.”

Fuentes made an *OK, whatever* gesture with his shoulders, then said, “Essentially, five and a half million repayment on commissions gained through irregular public sector bidding practises in the cases of...”

He glanced down at his files.

“Tribeca Cultural Centre, The Shaunnessy Building renovation, towers one, two and three of the MLK block refurbishment in Yonkers.”

Danny looked at Frank.

Not too bad, the look said.

Fuentes caught the look.

“The penalty is cumulative, for each case”

“Five and a half million each?”

“That’s what we are offering in terms of the repayment aspect of the deal.”

“That’s not all?”

“Dissolution of the holding companies F.A. Cole and Sons and Blueshore Investments and relinquishment of all public contracts currently being executed by those companies and their subsidiaries.”

“No.” Frank said simply.

“Maybe you want to think this through, Mr. Cole.”

“F.A Cole and Sons was started by my Great Grandfather. It and Blueshore employ over a thousand people.”

“Both companies have been implicated in malfeasance of public funds, Mr. Cole. Like I said, maybe you need some time to think it over.”

“Think what over, exactly? You want me to pay almost twenty million dollars and then shut down the bulk of my operations, putting a thousand people out of work. This isn’t a

deal, Mr. Fuentes; it's...I don't know what it is...but it isn't anything resembling a fair deal."

"That is what City of New York is offering in lieu of prosecuting a case against you and your organization."

"That's too much," Frank said.

"That's what we're offering."

"Then I have to refuse."

"Perhaps you gentlemen could give us time to discu..."
Danny started to say.

"No," Frank said, "No. We're fighting this and we're going to win."

He looked at Danny, who looked at Fuentes and Murry.

"Well, now that we're aware of where we stand..."

"That's very unfortunate, Mr. Cole," Fuentes said.

He motioned to Murry and they both stood.

"I suspect one or both of you will be getting a call from the D.A.'s office in the next day or so."

"I suspect we will," Danny said.

At the door, Fuentes turned and shook Frank's hand.

"I would take the next day to rethink your decision, Mr. Cole, I really would."

"Duly noted, Mr. Fuentes."

"Can I walk you two out, Mr. Fuentes?"

"Of course," Fuentes said.

They passed Marta's desk and headed down the 'alley' between the cubicles on their left and the offices on their right.

Danny noticed a few of them glance up as he, Fuentes and Murry passed.

God, this could all be gone by next Summer, he thought.

"A word, Mr. Fuentes?"

"Sure," Fuentes said.

He motioned to Murry.

“Do me a favour and get Carl to bring the car around, please?”

“Sure,” Murry said, moving ahead of them.

When he was gone, Danny steered Fuentes into an office and closed the door.

“OK, Tommy,” he said, “What the actual *fuck*? Twenty Mill. punitive payment and dismantling a half billion dollars’ worth of companies? It’s like the D.A.’s forcing him to opt for a trial. They really that eager for a fight”

I’m just the messenger boy here, Danny. But, you and I go way back, so I’m going to say it again. He needs to really think about taking that deal.”

“You know he won’t. He can’t lose his Dad’s company. You know he can’t.”

“If he goes to trial and loses, which you realistically know is probable, he’ll lose it anyway...plus a lot more than just money.”

“You guys pushed him into a corner.”

“What we, white man,” Fuentes said, “Like I said.”

“Just the messenger boy...I get it.”

Fuentes reached out his hand.

“Good luck, Danny. And despite everything...Good to see you again.”

“You too. Give Amy my love.”

“I will.”

Danny walked him to the elevator, waited until it came and Fuentes got in, the door closed, then walked back to the Hudson Room.

Frank was looking at the river.

“How long?” he asked, without turning from the window, “I mean if shit really goes sideways.”

“No need to even consider that at this poi...”

“How long?” Frank said, finally turning.

“Worst case?”

“Might as well.”

“You’re indicted on everything, including the RICO charges...thirty years, no parole.”

“Fuck me,” Frank said.

“That is absolutely worst-case perfect storm of this going sideways, though. Realistic is you get two years less a day upstate at Club Fed in Farmington, get out in fourteen months, ten if they get crowded.”

“And I lose my license forever”

“Yes.”

“Alternatives?”

“As your legal council, I cannot in good faith suggest anything that violates the laws and statutes of this city, county, state or country.”

“That being said,” Frank said.

“That being said...Get Broderick in your corner.”

“Broderick is going to avoid me like the plague.”

“Officially, yes. But he has a dog in this fight as well. Remind him of that”

“He has plausible deniability though.”

“So do you, technically.”

“I’m not throwing them under the bus,” Frank said, “I’m not my Father.”

“No-one is asking you to...and no you aren’t,” Danny said.

Danny’s intonation changed so slightly at the end that Frank almost missed the admonition that it was.

“You think my father would have covered his ass better?”

“I think they were different times, Frank. Less regulated times.”

He looked out past Frank at the city.

“But, yes,” Danny said, “I think he would have covered his ass better. And I blame myself for not cultivating a better cadre of people to help us in this thing.”

“It’s funny, you know,” Frank said, “I grew up alternating between thinking the sun shone out of his ass and thinking he was just another hustler in a thousand dollar suit. Now I realize that he was probably the smartest guy I could have known and I should have listened to him.”

“I wouldn’t worry about it, Frank. Like I said, it was a different time. What worked for him wouldn’t fly these days. And we’ll beat this.”

chapter eleven

Bron Hogan

THE WEATHER FORECAST IN the city was for another hot, humid and uncomfortable day, so Frank Cole decided on a lightweight suit by Giorgio Armani. He studied his appearance in the mirror whilst he added his Cartier Santos cufflinks and was satisfied that his appearance was that of a man of influence. He said goodbye to his wife, Beth and left his home.

He had arranged to meet Ed, (Edward T Broderick, Mayor of the City of New York) at New York's most exclusive restaurant, Rao's, for dinner at six.

Frank's great grandfather had managed to buy one of the 85 original tables at Rao's shortly after they opened in 1997, and his father had inherited the table after he had died.

Rao's, or 'the Joint' as it is referred to by its regulars, was the perfect place to speak to Ed about arranging an appointment with Judge Andrew Clinton.

His first court appearance is scheduled to be held later in the month. Being charged with fraud for impropriety in bidding for public sector contracts over the past five years was a serious matter that needed urgent attention.

During the drive across town, he thought about the three things that he felt sure would help him get the Judge's support in his case:

- Clinton's ten-year term as Judge Clinton had only six more months to run
- Ed, Mayor of the City of New York, has the power to appoint and remove New York City Criminal Court judges
- Ed's first term as mayor was due to expire in less than two years, and Frank felt sure he would be looking to receive another generous contribution to his next campaign

His chauffeur pulled up in front of Rao's Restaurant on the corner of East 114th Street and Pleasant Avenue, in Manhattan just as the mayoral car drove off.

Ed was chatting to Rao's co-owner, Frankie Pellegrino Sr who was sitting outside the restaurant's small front door on its cement patio. Frankie was class personified, dressed in his usual attire of black blazer, white shirt, grey slacks, gold bracelet, and signet ring. His typical black velvet smoking slippers and a glass of Chivas on the table next to him.

Frank loved the story of how Frankie became known as "Frankie No:"

Owners of tables arrive on their appointed night when they like. The table is theirs for the duration of the evening.

If they cannot come, they either give it to a family or friends, sell it as a donation for a favourite charity, or, rarely, turn it back to the house. Because of this, it meant that if you want to get into Rao's, you have to know someone who knows someone who knows someone else. Which explains why Pellegrino became known as "Frankie No."

Knowing the right someone was something Frank Albert Cole III related to very well indeed.

Frank and Ed enjoyed a meal of seafood salad, followed by the super-sized meatballs that the restaurant serve in a home-style manner. They regularly dined together so spent the meal catching up on the local gossip.

Over coffee and cognac, Frank spoke to his friend about the upcoming court appearance. He asked Ed to arrange a meeting with Judge Andrew Clinton. Ed and Frank often helped each other, and without hesitation, the mayor agreed immediately and undertook to have someone phone him in the morning to confirm the appointment details.

Judge Andrew Clinton was concerned, he had arrived at work half an hour late due to delays in the traffic on a day with back to back appointments. He felt rushed as he struggled to make up the time lost. He was usually so punctual and hated tardiness in anyone, especially himself.

Just as he was getting things under control, he received a phone call from the Mayor's Office, which resulted in him having to reschedule things to accommodate a meeting with Frank Cole.

He felt pretty sure that the only reason Cole wished to meet with him would be to solicit his support with the case against him.

He knew the mayor and Cole were 'thick as thieves', but he was astonished that the mayor would get involved so obviously. When his appointment to oversee the case became public, he had told his wife, Amy, that "this case has come at the worst time in my career, especially being so close to the end of my ten year term."

"Andrew, this case may be the best one you ever have.

There will certainly be much publicity with it". said his wife.

Andrew groaned and summoned his secretary to arrange to reschedule his appointments to accommodate a meeting with Frank Cole.

The mayor's secretary phoned to advise that she had scheduled an appointment with Judge Andrew Clinton for midday.

Frank arrived at Clinton's courtroom and chambers in the 100 Centre Street building at the appointed time and presented himself to the reception area. After a short wait, somebody showed him into the office of Judge Clinton.

As they shake hands, Frank notices that Clinton's body language and demeanour are guarded and unfriendly.

Frank gets straight to the point and explain to Clinton that he knows he will be overseeing his case and hopes that he will be supportive of him.

Franks says "Your judicial term expires in a few months and, as you know it is unlikely that the mayor will be reappointing you".

"This is something that I may be able to assist in helping a fair and impartial judge fix."

Judge Clinton stood up, his face turned red, and he responded with "Are you trying to bribe me to support your case?" "That you would even suggest it is unconscionable and goes against everything that I have worked for during my legal career".

Frank responded with "no, of course, I am not attempting to bribe you, I was offering to speak to the mayor and help him change his mind about your reappointment, friends help one another, and I was trying to be friendly".

"I am appalled at your suggestion, and I wish to place on

record that I am offended by the whole suggestion and ask that you leave my chambers immediately” was Clinton’s response.

chapter twelve

Nate Kennedy

“AS LONG AS THE Jews don’t run over any more black kids, it’ll be fine, right?”

“You asking a question, Mayor?” Commissioner Thompson had sworn his oath to the police department, but never forgot how he got the job. An appointment from the Mayor was an honor, but could also get you in line for upcoming opportunities, even if the administration changed.

Mayor Broderick spun in his chair – a box-shaped leftover from the sometimes-chic ‘modern’ office furniture style of the mid-80s. He pulled on his cigar, drawing deep, spinning slow in front of the dirty windows and his stale furniture.

“I’m as tired as this god damned furniture. It’s like the early 70s in here, with some of the fat cut and a little shine added to make it look like the last decade actually made a difference. Underneath it’s the same shit. The blacks are rioting in the streets like MLK was shot all over again. The Russians are...”

“You gotta’ regroup, Mayor. The Russians have their own problems. New York City needs you now.”

Mayor Broderick jumped up and shouted out the door.

“Otis!”

“Yes, sir?” Otis Johnson’s head poked into the office.

“Cole is in front of Judge Clinton today. Get over to the court and see how they get along. Don’t tell ‘em you’re black, they might not let you in.”

“Yes, sir.”

Commissioner Thompson laughed.

“All rise!”

The packed courtroom followed the bailiff’s orders as Judge Clinton entered and took his seat.

“Be seated!”

Several rows back Frank Cole turned to his lawyer. “In persona Cristi. This asshole thinks he’s as powerful as Father Jacobs thinks he is. Stand up. Sit down. This court wouldn’t have any say in this town without my family, and he knows it.”

“That was 65 years ago, Frank. You’re too loud - there are ears everywhere.”

“You know this is just a power grab by the Mayor, Danny. Roderick’s gotta’ get me out of the way. He’ll cancel our contracts and give them to his pal, Fat Boy. You think he’s not giving kickbacks? There’s millions of dollars of rotten fruit ready to pick in that shit hole. Crown Heights. Look at it. One kid gets hit by a car and you get race riots so bad all the modern-day Bob Dylans show up with their harmonicas. You can’t save ‘em, kids. Out with the blacks and the Jews, in with the 90s.”

“They did fix the carousel in Prospect Park. It’s on the up-and-up.”

“Yeah. It smells like it is.”

Otis Johnson sat alone, far enough back to disappear, but not

so far that he'd miss a single word. The sharp sound of a women's heels hurried down the aisle. Sweat on her forehead, Angela Bennet was never late - even if she had to run. She took the only empty space in the first row and opened her notes for a final review. Her spot was tight. She didn't notice her knee touching the old man next to her. He did, and moved just enough to make room.

"There she is, the only integrity left in New York City's entire legal system."

"I like to think I'm honest, Cole."

"You're not in the legal system, you're in my pocket. That's different."

Judge Clinton's intern set a stack of paperwork on his desk, spoke quietly into his ear as she looked over the gallery. She dismissed herself as Judge Clinton called Frank Cole.

"Mr. Cole. I would be remiss if I did not say 'good morning,' and yet I find it hard to share such kindnesses. Let's go over what we've got here, just so we're clear. You're a very prominent man, Mr. Cole, through no fault of your own."

Frank fidgeted in the wooden chair behind the counsel's table.

"You're accused of rigging contracts. Counselor," he turned to Angela Bennet. "Remind me of the charges against Mr. Cole."

"Thank you, Your Honor." She stood, flipping through her folder, pulling out a sheet with scribbles in the margins. "Mr. Frank Cole is accused of impropriety in bidding on several public contracts, dating back to 1986. Specific projects aside, he is accused of arranging and collecting kickbacks through cash bonuses and other opportunistic investment vehicles with sub-contractors. Most notably with Brunell Transport, whom

he used to deliver supplies to projects throughout the boroughs.”

“And how is this illegal, Mrs. Bennet?”

“He worked with Brunell to arrange a lower price than is reasonable for delivery of heavy equipment and supplies to job sites. With his disproportionately low quoted rate, he was able to beat out other, more reputable, companies to win public sector bids on projects like community centers, subsidized housing, and redevelopment of government facilities. What was not shown in his contracts were details on change fees, additional shipment fees, change in destination fees, pickup fees, and more. While he quoted a low fee for minimal subcontractor services, he worked with them to design exorbitant add-on fees for services other bidders had included in their contracts. This made his projects, in the end, run millions of dollars over budget, and shielded him from blame. He received kickbacks in the form of off-shore, seemingly untraceable money, access to real estate investments around New York and around the world with preferred bidder status. This is, of course, just one example. Additionally,” Judge Clinton interrupted.

“That’s enough, Prosecutor. In short, you’re saying he added to his family’s war chest with unearned taxpayer dollars.” He looked toward Frank. “Is this true, Mr. Cole?”

“My client chooses not to answer, Your Honor.”

“Makes sense. Standing behind his lawyer, keeping his mouth shut when it counts the most - just like his daddy. How do you plead, Mr. Cole?”

Frank Cole and Daniel Lawrence stood. Danny was wearing the same suit he wore whenever they weren’t in the office; looking sharp, like a big city attorney should.

“Because we know this is a continued sham put on by the

Fat... by other developers and the Mayor's office, Your Honor, my client pleads *not guilty*. Additionally, we would like to make a motion to have a different judge hear the case."

Angela Bennet laughed.

"On what grounds?"

"On your prior relationship with Mr. Cole, Your Honor. It would be unethical for you not to remove yourself from this case."

"What prior relationship, Mr. Lawrence?"

"Did you not meet with my client to discuss the impending charges and how they relate to the upcoming Crown Heights redevelopment proposals my client wishes to submit?"

Judge Clinton looked toward the prosecutor with an exasperated exhale.

"No, sir, I did not. Are you questioning me, in my courtroom?"

"My client is asking to have the case heard by another judge, and your past relationship with my client seems to make that a credible request."

Frank leaned into Danny's ear. He pretended to whisper, like they discussed. Danny nodded in agreement to nothing, and the two held their silence before the judge. Judge Clinton glared back, both parties in a deadlock. Silence continued for over a minute.

"Mr. Lawrence, please explain to your client - again - that my meeting with him was to discuss the Mayor's upcoming community event in Crown Heights to bring business and development together with City Hall, the police, and community leaders for a safer, more prosperous future, open to all ethnicities and backgrounds. As I've said before, in no way did I meet in order to discuss possible criminal charges that hadn't yet come to light."

The courtroom sat in silence as Judge Clinton angrily scratched out notes on the papers in front of him, turning page after page. His scribbles echoed through the room. Otis Johnson heard the ventilation system kick in and drown out the judge. He waited with the rest of gallery as the judicial intern re-entered to quietly speak with the judge and drop more papers before him. What precedent was she able to uncover to justify Judge Clinton's obvious next move? It didn't matter, he thought. Just a little more info and he could give a full report to Mayor Broderick.

"Your motion is denied." The Judge looked directly at the counselor's table. "Frank Albert Cole, III - bail is set at \$1 million." Otis left the courtroom.

As they stood, Frank turned to his attorney.

"Pay the man. I'm going home."

chapter thirteen

Annette Pateman

KIRSTY ANDERSON LEANED BACK against the bark of a white birch tree. She stretched out her toes into the dark brown soil and ruffled the fallen leaves that littered the floor of the Duke forest. It was the labour day weekend, and she had flown to Durham, North Carolina from NYC to be with her boyfriend Darren. The flight was over seven hours long and she had not rested during the flight at all. She had been feeling too excited at the thought of being with Darren again. They had not seen each other for two months and the long distance relationship was starting to feel too difficult to keep going. Kirsty smoothed her long, straight brunette hair away from her face, and looked across the clearing at Darren. He was fiddling with a manual camera. She watched as a lock of wavy auburn hair fell in front of his green eyes, He needed a hair cut. Right now that really didn't matter. They were together, and that's what she cared about right at this moment.

Although Kirsty loved her job as intern to the high profile Judge Andrew Clinton, he could be demanding at times. It had been particularly noticeable over these last few weeks. Judge

Clinton had been appointed to the Supreme Court, Criminal Term in 1982 and was due for reappointment or not as it was nit certain. After ten years in the role which had almost cost him his marriage, if office gossip was to be believed. It was obvious to Kirsty that ‘the Judge’ as the office staff called him, was worried he could lose his coveted position. The office was alive with talk of the Frank Cole case. Kirsty had been working long hours researching the case, ploughing through papers and writing up case notes. She had barely had time to call Darren. Most nights she got home at eight o’clock, collapsed into a chair and phoned for some takeout. Which she ate and went to bed. Then repeated the same the next day. But, this was what she had wanted for a long time. She had been quite pampered growing up as she was an only child. Her mother Ellen had stayed home to raise her and her father had worked as a banker. So she had no student debt. A combination of scholarships and her parents paying the tuition fees meant she was able to attend North Carolina university where she graduated with a degree in English and Comparative Studies. This was followed by study at the prestigious Duke University, where she met Darren and where she gained her law degree. Darren had been studying journalism with a specialist project in photography. He had graduated at the same time as Kirsty and managed to get a job at a local paper where he worked on the ecological and environmental news. He had tried to get a job in NYC so that he could be with Kirsty, but so far had been unsuccessful.

Kirsty sighed and Darren looked at her “ I have a surprise for you” he said.

The Duke Lemur Centre was one of the things Kirsty loved most about Duke university. Darren knew this and had arranged for them to have a tour of the facility. The centre

was home to two hundred lemurs and fourteen species of lemur. Lemurs described as the most threatened group of mammals on the planet. Of course Kirsty had visited the facility several times as a student of Duke, but now that she had graduated she was not able to visit the centre as often. There was the seven hour flight to take into account for one thing, and her gruelling schedule as intern at the Supreme Court. She grabbed Darren's hand, she knew just where she wanted to go. She stopped in front of the Aye- Aye enclosure. She was always fascinated by the strangeness of this gentle and quiet mammal. She then hurried to look at the Black and White ruffed Lemur. They had such soft large brown eyes. They were striking with Black and white fur. The fur was not only beautiful, the ruff also helped to carry pollen from one plant to another plant. The Black and White Ruffed Lemur was one of the worlds great plant pollinators.

Kirsty wondered if she should quietly suggest that Darren could take out one of the 'adopt a lemur packages' where you received regular reports about the species of lemur you had adopted. She decided she would suggest it to Darren as something he could get her as a birthday present for her birthday the following month rather than the usual perfume. This visit to see Darren, to spend time in the Duke forest and visit the Duke Lemur Centre, was just the kind of break Kirsty had needed. She had been able to recharge her batteries. She was ready to return to NYC and the Frank Cole case.

Andrew Clinton sat at the head of the family table. His wife Amy had been labouring all morning it seemed, in the kitchen with the roast lamb joint. His wife had Welsh ancestry. She enjoyed lamb as it reminded her of the meals her late mother Bronwen Lloyd, who was born in Wales cooked. Of course it

wasn't authentic Welsh lamb. But nonetheless it reminded her of her mother and that was enough. Amy their daughter, was home from Columbia university for the Labour weekend she ambled into the kitchen from time to time to help her mother. Andrew smiled at his wife and daughter, but the smile didn't quite reach his eyes, which looked tired. The holiday hadn't stopped Otis Johnson from phoning just before Andrew sat down for dinner. Otis said he wanted to meet with him at his earliest convenience to discuss the Frank Cole case. Judge Andrew Clinton had a good idea what the meeting would entail, He had worked at the Supreme Court, Criminal Term for ten years. He knew Otis very well. Otis he knew worked for the mayor and the mayor often sent Otis to speak on his behalf and press his point of view. Andrew leaned over the table and cut firmly into the lamb joint. While his wife Amy and daughter Jean looked on.

Otis Johnson straightened his tie. He was having a woman friend round for his Labour weekend dinner. He was fussy about what he ate and preferred to cook his own meals, or to order food in from a few select restaurants. He had a delicate constitution and it became more unsettled when he was stressed, as he had been for a few weeks now. He was feeling under pressure from his boss the Mayor, regarding the Frank Cole case. Frank was rich and knew a lot of people. People who could help finance a future political campaign. The mayor was considering running again for the House of Representatives. He felt he was still young enough at fifty- five to do so. He wanted to leave his options open, and if this meant getting and keeping Frank Cole on side, then he would do so. He communicated this in no uncertain terms to Otis. Otis would have to communicate this directly to Judge

Andrew Clinton, who was handling the Frank Cole case. The doorbell rang and Otis straightened his light pinstriped blue blazer and got up to open the door. Liselle was as beautiful and chic as she always was. She wore her hair in a smooth black chignon and pearls glittered whitely on the lobes of her smooth dark brown ears.

Otis smiled and led her into the room of his condominium.

Kirsty sat at her desk. Daydreaming just a little about her few days with Darren. Her favourite Duke sweater lay against the back of her chair. Judge Andrew Clinton had nodded at her briefly on the way to his office, but had barely met her eyes. He had poked his head out the door to say that Otis Johnson will be visiting chambers shortly.

“Show him in and prepare some refreshments. No snacks are necessary, but some decaffeinated coffee, and my usual expresso would be nice. Thank you” he said.

Five minutes later Otis wearing a dark grey suit, which showed of his athletic build to perfection, came into the chambers. Kirsty got up and came round the front of her desk. She smoothed her knee length burgundy pleated skirt and greeted Otis.

“hello Mr. Johnson, Judge Clinton has been expecting you. Please follow me”

Kirsty knocked on the door and announced that Mr. Otis Johnson was here. The judge came to the door and motioned Otis to come into his office. The inner sanctum of his chambers.

Otis Johnson at six feet was taller than the Judge, and he used this height advantage, first by standing and next sitting in

front of the judge's desk. Otis when he saw he had the judges full attention, got up and leaned forward with both hands on the desk. Otis smiled down at the seated judge. He noticed a tick start beating on the judges right temple. He knew this wasn't going to be too hard. Otis cleared his throat.

“ Frank Cole is a friend of the mayor. He is a good guy and a loyal supporter of the mayor. We have to keep him on our side because to put it bluntly, he can bring in a lot of votes.”

Andrew felt his stomach twist with unease as he listened. Cole is very well know in New York City. He and his family have contributed a lot to the development of this city.

Otis tapped a long dark finger on a paperweight that was lying heavily on the judge's desk. Otis said,

“ Frank Cole is in the public eye. Everyone knows that he supports the mayor”

There was an edge to Otis's voice. There isn't a threat exactly, but there is a level of force. Andrew can feel it emanating from Otis, the level of coercion. Otis smiles often but the smile doesn't seem genuine. Otis continues,

“The trial must be a fair one. No great gestures are needed”

“Frank Cole is an upstanding citizen” Otis says.

“I'm sure you would like to be reappointed for another judicial term in January.”

Otis tells the judge. With that, Otis finally sits down again. He crosses his arms and sits across from the judge. The judge sits silent. He then looks up towards Otis, but not really at him. Judge Andrew Clinton pulls out his chair. He does not extend his hand to Otis. Otis responds to this end of meeting signal and gives a faint nod in the general direction of the judge and leaves his chambers.

chapter fourteen

Cassandra Lee

SEATED WITH HIS BACK erect, Frank Cole smirked, his fingers plucking David Bowie’s “Can’t Help Thinking About Me” in his trouser pockets. Playing imaginary rock guitar wasn’t something he usually did during *voir dire*, but the ambience around him was pregnant with such boredom he couldn’t resist it. Being a courtroom regular emboldened him to step up in his class act. The Coles had a proven track record of bailing themselves, himself included, out. The problem was... was there any unforeseen problem?

A petite woman with olive skin stepped forward. Danny eyed Frank. The woman looked familiar to Danny, but he wasn’t sure who she was. He glanced at Frank, who averted his glance.

Angela spoke. “Your Honour, I challenge the appointment of Miss Donica Dominiguez for cause—”

Frank fidgeted.

“For the past four years, she’s often spotted by the staff at Coleslaw Tower, which is the defendant’s office headquarters,

but her name had never been on the staff registry. There is a great likelihood of an undisclosed relationship between her and the defendant.”

“Insufficient grounds,” Clinton replied. “Overruled.”

Frank breathed a sigh of relief.

“Now for the opening remarks,” said Clinton. “The prosecution.”

“Thank you, Your Honour,” said Angela. She proceeded to describe a number of shell companies tied to Frank’s business. Frank detached from his feelings and escaped into his increasingly hazy mind. He trusted Danny to handle the real world for him.

That evening was only four years ago, but Frank made it his life’s secret mission to remember it. He and Beth had gone to a Tex-Mex diner to celebrate their twentieth wedding anniversary, or so it seemed. The press got wind of their firstborn son smoking weed on campus and TV anchors were harping on such juicy gossip, and teachers had told them Albert was bullying his fellow students. This well-timed dinner was merely a diversion from their incessant bickering on how to parent such disgraceful boys.

The waitress on duty at the counter blinked at him and smiled. “Do you have an appointment, sir?” She spoke with a cute stiffness.

“Yes,” he licked his lips. “For two.” A glance at the badge on her blouse. “You have an interesting name. D, D.”

“Yes, but you can call me Donna,” said the waitress.

“I shall call you DD.”

“Well,” she blushed, “follow me.” She ushered them to an empty table. “Have a seat. Here’s the menu.”

“You know,” Beth muttered, “I would very much prefer to

finish up the PTA minutes than sit all night with a curmudgeon.”

Frank kept his cool. His days with Beth were numbered, not in terms of divorce, but in intimacy.

When the bill came, Frank slipped a \$20 banknote into Donna’s palm. What Beth didn’t see was a scribbled memo containing Frank’s personal number deep inside the folded banknote.

Donna found the memo after she’d gone home. She had some idea that Frank Cole was a famous name, but never in her wildest dreams did she consider ever getting hold of his number. She called him straightaway.

“I’ve been expecting you, DD,” said the familiar masculine voice on the other end. “I can’t forget your beautiful smile. My wife loved it.”

Donna blushed. “I...”

“Thank you?”

“Yes, yes,” she said, nodding. “Thank you, sir. Have a nice day.”

“Tell your supervisor you want to stay back after work.”

Donna wanted to ask why, but the line went cold.

It was midnight, and Donna’s colleagues and boss had left the restaurant. She was mopping up the soup she had accidentally spilled in the kitchen galley when Frank slipped in through the back door in a plain grey tee and black glasses. Donna was about to scream but Frank hushed her.

“How can I wake up in time for tomorrow’s work?”

“It’s really a waste for you to work here, DD,” said Frank. “How long have you been in the US?”

“*Siete...* no, six years? Or seven?”

“How old are you?”

“23.”

“Actually,” he sounded softer, “how did you end up in this sorry place?”

Donna fought back her tears.

“It’s okay. Don’t cry. I want to help.”

“I...” Should Donna trust this near-stranger with her darkest secret? She knew he was wealthy, so. “I had a sister Andrea, we were very close, and a gang leader liked her so much he killed her. She would be starting college if she’s alive today. I came to America to have a better life. I saved money to pay for college. Still paying after graduation.”

“What degree?”

“Accountancy. I still have \$30k to go.”

“I tell you what, DD. Come to my office tomorrow morning. Here.”

Another handwritten note.

Sunrise. Two raps on the door. “Quick,” came the reply.

Midday. Donna handed the college finance office a cheque before lunchtime. Turned out, it paid off her college loans.

Sunset. Frank called Beth saying he’s working overtime at the office. She suffered him.

Midnight. Two flashlights in Coleslaw Tower. Voices talking about a particular folder. Never found.

The days thereafter: Condoms in Frank’s waste paper basket. Donna started working for a minor “independent” accounting firm.

The months thereafter: Frank acquired that firm. A different limousine was often seen shuttling between that firm and Frank’s offices. Financial records appeared, disappeared and reappeared in Frank’s offices. Donna took up a new job

away from the accounting firm.

Frank woke up from his sweet fantasy when Angela touched upon the missing folder. Angela said, “Evidence of cooking the books eventually turned up at the mayor’s offices. Your Honour, may I call the witnesses forward?”

“You may,” said Clinton.

Angela turned to the witness stand. “Janet Hancock, come forward.”

The witness was a stocky, plainly dressed woman wearing thick spectacles. One could tell she had failed to fit in with New York City culture.

“Miss Hancock, at the office party on 24 December 1990, what did you see?”

“Objection,” said Danny. Trusty Danny — Frank never had to sweat. Danny continued, “Vague.”

“Overruled,” said Clinton.

Angela asked, “What happened when you were on duty on Christmas Eve 1990?”

Janet said, “I was cleaning the cubicles and looking into every nook and cranny, and found a slim banana yellow folder. I mean, I’m used to the light blue folders, and so the unusual colour was really striking.”

“What did you do with the folder?” asked Angela.

“I took it to my manager. What else?”

“Did you open it?” asked Danny.

“No.”

“Do you remember what’s on the label on the folder apart from its colour?” asked Angela.

Janet hesitated.

Danny zapped, “Objection. Leading question.”

“Sustained,” said Clinton.

Frank knew the answer. This illiterate janitor was too dutiful not to care about suspicious items she'd found. Had that yellow file been opened, there would be no future for him and DD.

But Angela would not be daunted. She called for Janet's manager, Otis Johnson.

"Mr Johnson, is it true that, shortly before the company party on 24 December 1990 began, Miss Hancock handed you a yellow folder?"

"That is true," said Otis.

"Did you inspect its contents?"

Frank leant forward.

Otis drew in a deep breath. "No."

"Here I present the yellow folder," said Angela.

Frank hid a wry smile.

She opened it, and silence fell upon the room.

Every page in the folder was blank.

Otis Johnson had suspected that something was going on between the mayor's office's latest recruit and the limousine that visited his accounting firm every day. He could have asked questions, but he wasn't going to risk his future in politics as a minority representative to satisfy a little curiosity. Ask too many questions and one can kiss dreams of rising to power goodbye.

As the staff cluttered and decluttered the office of Thanksgiving and Christmas gifts, Otis noticed a new yellow folder on Donna's desk. The longer the yellow folder remained there, the more he became piqued with it. He lingered by it once; the label splashed across the folder cover was "5-year plan". Otis had lost count of the times he made educated guesses about the future, and anything that could be a

figurative crystal ball kept him riveted. He had not made this secret folder known to his boss, mayor Edward Broderick, yet.

After Janet had finally handed him the folder, he hid its real contents in his briefcase and replaced them with blank sheets of paper. That night, he reviewed the contents cover-to-cover so many times he could remember the details down to the exact location — but he could chalk that up to his eidetic memory that aided him in the Marines and subsequent law education. He was well aware that exposing Frank Cole’s affair would not put him in good graces with the real estate tycoon, who might fund his political aspirations in the future, hopefully the *near* future.

The following day, Edward called him into his office. “Where’s the yellow folder on Donna’s table?”

“Janet found it yesterday before the party and gave it to me.”

“Let me have a look.”

Otis smiled and handed the folder over.

Edward furrowed his brow as he leafed through blank page after blank page, squinting as if to read text printed by invisible ink. “This sure is interesting,” he said. Why were there blank pages in a folder ostensibly named “5-year plan”? Why was it on Donna’s table? Did it have anything to do with the limousines picking her up every 7pm after the evening security guard had reported for duty?

Frank Cole riffed David Bowie again as Danny coolly explained away the oddities in the supposedly incriminating folder — without making any reference to Donna. “As you can see, Your Honour,” said Danny, “my client is in the clear.”

Heaving a sigh, Clinton said, “The trial of Cole versus New York is adjourned to next Wednesday, after the

weekend.” He shook his head. Clinton couldn’t say this out loud: he was quite sure he had no misgivings about Frank Cole’s actual legal and moral standing, but he was beginning to doubt himself.

chapter fifteen

Ian E Hart

ON THE 23RD FLOOR of Vulture Mansions, on Fifth Avenue, Tom Bennett wiped the sweat from his brow with a scarlet, monogrammed gym towel and took a deep breath before starting his tenth and final set of crunches for the day. “Will you look at the sun?” he pointed at the red orb disappearing behind the row of apartment houses on the west side of Central Park, “It looks like one of those Chinese paper lanterns floating into the void.”

Across the room, Angela was mechanically pedalling the exercise bike as she read through yesterday’s court transcript on the laptop mounted on her handlebars. “Yuánxiāo jié,” she commented absently, “The Lantern Festival. Chinese New Year finished months ago.” She tapped the space bar, flipping the next PDF page as the distance meter on the bike ticked over to 50 miles. She stopped pedalling and sat up, rubbing her back, which still ached from the damned uncomfortable courthouse chair.

“What do you want to eat?” she asked. “Keeping to the Chinese theme, I fancy a bowl of pot-stickers with our

chardonnay.”

“I’ve already ordered pizza,” puffed Tom between crunches, “Hawaiian for me, Margarita for you. We can keep the chardonnay.”

The front door bell rang. Angela stepped down from the bike. “I’ll get it, you finish your set.”

Tom bounced to his feet and pushed past her, “No trouble, you pour the wine.”

Angela set two long-stemmed Riedel *Superleggero* glasses on the coffee table and rotated the bottle of Chateau Montelena in the ice bucket. Tom seemed to be spending a long time haggling with the pizza boy.

“Is everything OK with the pizza?” she called.

“I’ll be back in a minute.” Tom’s voice didn’t come from the direction of front door, but the other end of the apartment—their bedroom and Tom’s study. In a minute, he bustled back into the living room bearing the two pizza boxes like a waiter with a tray of canapés.

“Was there a problem?”

“Just something I needed to do,” he said dismissively, “I’ll plate up, shall I?”

“Don’t bother,” yawned Angela. “I fancy sharing straight from the box.”

Tom unscrewed the cap of the bottle, poured the wine and raised his glass. “To the case! It looks like you’ve got this Cole fraud on toast. When they clap him in irons, you’ll be front page on every newspaper in the country.”

“And a week later I’ll be wrapping fish ’n chips, as the Brits say.”

“That’s why you should be preparing your run now. Catch the wave at its peak and surf all the way into Congress, baby.” Tom posed like a surfboard rider on the handmade Persian rug

and mimed a perfect run from break to shore. Then he sat down, tore open the lid of the first pizza box and detached a slice. The mozzarella cheese topping stretched a yard before it snapped off and swung like a fringe below the spongy crust of the Hawaiian slice.

“I’m still not sure I’m ready for politics. I’m only 38. I still have a life” Angela detached a thin slice of Margarita and nibbled it thoughtfully. “What’s that?” she pointed at the pizza.

“It’s your Margarita. Did they put mushroom on it again?”

“No, underneath.” Angela carefully lifted the pizza and extracted a plastic zip-lock bag. “There’s something inside it.”

“Let me,” Tom took the bag, parted the zip lock and extracted four postcard-sized photographs. He stared at them in horror.

“Show me,” Angela reached for the photos, but Tom pulled his hand back out of reach. He walked to the sideboard and retrieved his glasses and inspected the photos closely.

“OK, enough of the melodrama already,” scowled Angela melodramatically. “Is someone blackmailing you?”

There were four photographs. In each one, Angela was naked, *in flagrante* with a buxom, blonde woman of Dolly Parton proportions.

“What am I looking at?” Tom looked flabbergasted. “Is your tongue in her ear? I hope that’s an ear... I think I recognise her. She was on the front page of *The Post* last week.”

“She’s DD Dominguez,” said Angela, her eyes had taken on a haunted look. “Frank Cole’s girlfriend.”

“What the hell’s going on Angela? Are you and her having an affair?”

“You and *she*,” Angela corrected him. “What’s going on is revenge porn or a feeble attempt at blackmail.” Angela

emptied her glass in one gulp and refilled it to the top. “I should have told you at the time: six months ago—I think you were in Hawaii at some international accountancy conference—there was a party at the office. We were celebrating the first successful prosecution of Trump for tax evasion...” she sat back and closed her eyes.

“And?”

“And Donica Dominguez made an appearance. Nobody introduced her, she was suddenly just there. I thought she must have been a film star. She was the most beautiful woman I’d ever seen in closeup.”

“You certainly got close up.”

“DD brought cocaine, lots of cocaine. It’s all a blur, I only remember bits of it. I remember sniffing a line off the Attorney General’s desk blotter. I remember playing Forfeits with Danny Lawrence... maybe he’s the one who brought DD to the party. He’s Frank Cole’s lawyer—that would make sense. I remember taking off my bra so someone could drink champagne from it. But I don’t remember any of... this,” Angela pointed at the photographs. “I remember waking up on the couch the next morning in my office, naked and covered by a rug.”

“So who took these photos?” asked Tom, absently pulling apart another slice of Hawaiian. “I mean, whoever took them has held off for six months. What do they want?”

“Maybe it’s a warning about standing for Congress. Remember Katie Hill? She had to resign when her pictures came out... What are you doing?”

Tom was pulling the slices of the Hawaiian pizza aside. He extracted a single sheet of oil stained paper and angled it beneath the light to read the blurred text. He read, “Tell your bitch to lay off Frank. There’s juicier pix to cum and Rupert is

holding the front page.”

“Not just the New York Post, then. Every Murdoch paper in the country.”

“That’d be the end of your Congress career.”

“It’d be the end of my bloody legal career. Imagine the standard Murdoch headlines, *All in the family Prosecutor in bed with Frank Cole’s mistress.*”

“What can you do? Can’t Cole get off? Isn’t Danny Lawrence his lawyer?”

“Frank’s as guilty as sin, caught with his hand in the cookie jar. I’m about to present his multiple account books and dodgy tax returns going back ten years. The jury is against him. The judge despises him. I reckon he’ll get seven to ten and be out in three minimum. His business is ruined,” she turned to Tom and addressed him like a hostile witness, “But is Frank Cole any more guilty than Trump, the Koch brothers, Ricketts, Beal, Washington? Compared to them, Frank’s small fry. In fact I quite like him—he can be a funny guy.”

“Is there any way you can... I don’t know what you lawyers call it... *minimise* things?”

“It’s all in the paperwork. I have thousands of pages of his financial returns that we’re about to present to the jury. I don’t understand half of it, but the forensic accountants have been through every page with a nit comb and I’m using the notes they gave me.”

Tom offered his wife the last slice of Hawaiian. She shook her head, so he took it himself. He spoke through the mouthful of pizza, “I could have a look over those account books if you like.”

Angela looked up and smiled indulgently. “Tom. I love you. I’m certain you love me. I love the way you’ve taken this...” she waved her hand over the photos, “I know you’re a damn

good accountant, but a team of twenty forensic accountants have been on this case for two years. We've got till Monday morning."

"Fresh eyes? It can sometimes help."

Angela leaned over and kissed Tom on the lips—she almost gagged at the taste of ham and pineapple. "I love you Tomkins and I really appreciate how you support me, but this is Mission Impossible. I'm going to have a long soak in a hot tub and you know how sexy that makes me feel. Let's forget about it tonight and go to 10am Mass on Sunday. Perhaps God will send an answer."

She ruffled his hair, put her tongue in his ear and whispered, "Don't stay up too late."

When Angela emerged from the bathroom, wrapped in a Belgian linen bath sheet, her face tingling from the body scrub, she found Tom still dressed in his Lycra gym pants and shirt, glasses perched on the end of his nose, studying the case files on her laptop. He looked up at her.

"I think I've found a way through this," he grinned, "Fresh eyes often see things tired eyes miss."

Angela looked at Tom and shook her head. Her husband was a hunk, all her girlfriends said so—he could have been a male model; and he was a damn smart accountant with billion dollar clients of his own. But he had no sense of humour and socially he was about as sophisticated as a puppy, with an imagination to match. She avoided introducing him to her colleagues and legal friends—she told herself it was to keep work and home separate, but really it was because she was worried they'd find him dull and make snide remarks about toy boys and gigolos. But she loved him for these very qualities and for his tolerance and belief in her. Look at how he'd

treated the photos—no accusations, no recriminations, simply support.

Tom's iPhone on the coffee table suddenly came to life and began vibrating on the glass top. The name on the screen was 'OJ'. She picked it up, but it immediately stopped vibrating and the screen said "Message." Tom was too involved in the reams of figures on the laptop to notice, so she took the phone into the kitchen with her and extracted a new bottle of chardonnay from the fridge. "OJ?" she asked herself. The only OJ she could think of was OJ 'Juice' Simpson, but why would the notorious footballer and convicted felon be calling Tom? She tried to open the iPhone but it was locked with face recognition.

Angela poured two glasses of wine and carried them back into the living room, along with the phone. She put a glass down at Tom's elbow and he looked up and smiled absently, "Thanks," and he turned back to face the scrolling figures on Angela's laptop again.

When Angela looked at Tom's phone again, the main menu was on the screen. The phone had been facing Tom when he looked up, "recognised" him, and unlocked itself. She wandered back into the kitchen and opened WhatsApp.

She recognised the picture of "OJ" immediately. It was Otis Johnson, Mayor Broderick's *eminence grise*, his principal advisor, or as some called him, "Broderick's Rasputin." Otis had a reputation: he was tall and athletic, intelligent and charismatic and, frankly, very sexy. But the thing she really remembered about him was the professional-looking espresso machine on a bench of its own in his office. Otis was famous for the quality of his coffee and it was said he had been the first choice for "the face of Nespresso". Clooney got the job when Otis refused because he said it would lower his

standards.

The message from OJ read, “What did she say?”

There were hundreds of messages to and from Otis Johnson on Tom’s phone. Some were cryptic, but many were so explicit they took Angela’s breath away.

“I love it when you kiss me on the lips.”

“Last night was a revelation. I never knew there was a Kama Sutra for men like us.”

“Coconut-flavoured condoms! What a sensation!”

She scrolled through the messages, going backwards in time through her husband’s gay affair with one of the most powerful men in New York. It had been going on for a long time apparently: the first messages were businesslike, arranging an appointment to discuss Otis’s IRS returns; the second was all about coffee; it seemed they went to bed together after no more than a week.

She looked in on the living room: Tom was still concentrating on the Frank Cole prosecution brief. She took the phone and her wine to the bedroom and changed into slacks and a t-shirt—she wasn’t going to have it out with him while wearing only a towel that could drop at the most dramatic moment. She noticed that Tom’s study door was ajar and, on impulse, glanced inside. Tom was so compulsively neat she had often accused him of having OCD, but tonight his desk was a mess. Strewn across it were a dozen plastic zip lock bags, and a brown paper envelope spilled its contents of postcard sized photographs into the clutter. More photographs of Angela and DD—she winced, the four she had seen were just the tip of the iceberg. To cap it off, in the wastepaper basket she found, screwed into balls, half a dozen versions of the pizza-stained demand note.

“You stinking, hypocritical bastard!” Angela slammed down the lid of the laptop and confronted a startled Tom. She waved the photographs in his face and scrolled the series of WhatsApp messages under his nose. She was so angry she could hardly speak.

“What... the...fuck... are you up to? You’re not only having a gay love affair—and exposing me to AIDs by the way—you’re trying to ruin my career! Did you set up those photos? Have you been in it with Miss Dominguez all this time?” Tom looked back impassively. Angela tried to scream, but her voice broke, “You damn lump of wood! What have ever I done to you?”

When she stopped, out of breath and panting, Tom carefully stood up, put his hands on her shoulders and grinned. “What have you ever done to me? You treat me as though I was a lump of wood. You tell everyone I have no sense of humour, but how about that? This time I got you, smarty pants!” He kissed her on the nose.

“You’re insane,” gasped Angela, “My husband is insane. Certifiable.”

“He might be insane, but he treats you like an intelligent woman and he has your best interests at heart.”

“I have no idea what you are talking about! Was this all a joke? Why did you set me up for blackmail? What’s with the photos?”

“I got your attention, didn’t I? You weren’t going to listen to me unless I shocked you into it.”

“Do you have anything intelligent to say, that I should listen to?”

“There you go again, Madame Prosecutor. You always have to be right. Let’s sit down together and discuss this like adults.” Tom filled Angela’s glass and passed it to her. “Cigarette?”

Angela looked at her husband as though he had just stepped out of an alien spaceship in a cornfield. “Are you insane? Oh, I forgot, of course you are insane. We established that.” She took a deep breath, “OK, what do you have to say?”

Tom lit a cigarette—a pink Sobranie—and sat back. “OK, I’m bisexual. But you knew that when you married me. I’ve been having an affair with Otis for two years. I didn’t try to hide it, but I guess you were so tied up in your own concerns that you didn’t notice. Six months ago Otis and I decided we needed to get your attention.”

“The party. The cocaine. The DD photos,” said Angela. “You set that up?”

“There are videos too, if you’d like to refresh your memory.”

“Get my attention for what?”

“Originally it was for a big announcement.” Tom took a deep breath, “Otis is going to stand for President at the next election.”

“President of what?”

“Of the USA, POTUS.”

“Seriously?”

“Why not? He’s 43, black, handsome, charismatic, a great speaker...”

“I get it, like Obama. There’s one big difference, he’s gay.”

“The USA is now ready for a gay president.”

“And you’re going to be... what, the First Wife?”

“Why not?”

“That’s why you wanted to get my attention—as you so quaintly put it.”

“Uh huh”

“And you’d like me to clear the decks so my husband can be FLOTUS... or is it FMOTUS?” Angela laughed. It was all

she could think to do. “Even if this insane scheme got off the ground, there are barely two years till the nominations. Who are Otis’s backers? Where’s his SuperPac?”

“Frank Cole has pledged a billion dollars to Otis’s campaign and a nation-wide SuperPac of estate agents is already mobilising to raise another billion. Everything is nearly in place. We were going to make the announcement in October. But a problem came up—you.”

“Me? Where do I fit into this madness?”

“We all assumed this fraud charge would be dismissed out of hand. The judge was bribed, along with half the jury, but after hearing your opening argument... well, Otis is worried that you might actually succeed in convicting him. With Frank in jail, his money’s in escrow and the SuperPac’s dead in the water.”

“You really want ‘your bitch to lay off Frank’ as your note so eloquently puts it?”

“There’s a way. There’s another set of books: I prepared them myself. Convince the jury they are legit and the case against Frank Cole folds.”

Angela stood up and walked to the window. She gazed out over the darkness of Central Park. “Let me get this straight: I go easy on Frank, he gets off, Otis gets the nomination, I lose my job. What do I do then, go home to Philly?”

“Oh no! Otis has plans for you.” Tom joined her at the window, “Remember how Biden chose Kamala as his running mate in 2020? She was the perfect foil for him: black, pretty, a prosecutor, tough on crime, everything Joe was not. Otis is going to need a white Kamala: pretty—that’s you; intelligent—who can match you?; tough on crime—no-one has more convictions; and ambitious—it’s your middle name, baby. Tom turned her face towards him. “Honey, don’t aim low and just

stand for Congress—you are the perfect candidate for President Otis Johnson’s VP.”

“This is lunacy.”

“You keep saying that. But what if we could pull it off?”

Angela looked back over the park, now as dark as her thoughts. “Vice Presidents are like jewellery—decorative, but ultimately powerless.”

“Until the end of the second term, then they are in the box seat for the next nomination. Play your cards right...” Angela shrugged. Tom turned her back to face him, “Sugar, you’re 38 now. Two terms...”

“I’d be younger than Obama.”

Tom put his arm around his wife’s shoulder and pulled her to him, “What do you think, honey? All this has really been for you.”

She gazed through her reflection in the window and across to the lights of Manhattan, then she abruptly turned and kissed him.

“Let’s go to bed, lover. I still think you’re mad, but I’ll give you an answer in the morning.

chapter sixteen

Dan Hallberg

IT WAS A HELL of a morning to be out of coffee. Tom had used the last remnants of their sole can of Maxwell House yesterday morning to make a disappointing pot of weak coffee. Angela chastised Tom for even trying to make a full pot, when if he had just made 2 cups it would have been strong enough to actually get them going in the morning. As it was, the amber, impotent liquid only managed to wake her up just enough for her to make a lethargic trek to the office. Once there, she was mercifully awoken by an obsidian colored lifeblood that was the viscosity of engine oil from 18 wheeler.

Angela had promised Tom she would get more coffee on the way home after opening arguments, but her mind definitely wasn't in the errand space at that time. So this morning she did not even have the flaccid bean tea of yesterday, which meant that she had to face the reporters outside the courthouse with no caffeine and little sleep.

"Were you happy with how things went yesterday?"

"Are you concerned about your case?"

"Is jail time a must?"

“Are you concerned this will-”

The questions came at her too fast to effectively answer them even if Angela wanted to; which she didn't.

“Excuse me, I have a long day ahead, I'm just wanting to get to work,” Angela said curtly as she parted the sea of reporters with almost a shoulder check. Even that did not keep them from shouting questions at her back. After checking in with security, Angela was single minded in her task. She knew the clerks' office one floor up from her courtroom kept a pot of coffee going all day.

Unfortunately for her, the clerk at the reception counter today was one Angela had called an idiot about 4 years prior. At the time, Angela could not remember if she had timely filed a motion that she was about to go into a hearing to argue, and the clerk went and fetched the wrong file a full 3 times. Since the exchange, the clerk has made Angela's life difficult whenever they have to interact, and thus Angela has sent her paralegal to handle most filings at that counter.

“My paralegal!” Angela thought. She ducked into one of the private conference rooms and rummaged in her bag for her cell phone. There were too many exhibits to produce to counsel and to the judge for Angela to carry in herself to the hearing, so her paralegal Samantha was going to be wheeling them in that morning. Hopefully she would also have a thermos.

Angela flipped open her Motorola and started to dial, only to find that the phone was unresponsive. After a couple of years of rather extensive use, the 30 minute battery charge was getting closer to 10, and she had forgotten to plug the damn thing in the night before. It was no matter really, by the time she slinked back down to her table in the courtroom, Angela saw that Sam was already in the building and setting everything

up.

“Hey boss,” Sam said as she neatly stuck identifying labels on each of the triplicate copies of the exhibits, “how has the morning been?”

After asking the question, Sam threw back what looked to be the last pull out of her large, purple and turquoise clad, styrofoam cup of coffee. If looks could kill, Angela would likely be back in that same courtroom as a defendant charged with homicide.

“Fine,” Angela sneered, “Is he here yet?”

Angela’s question was answered by the man himself, as the courtroom doors flew open and Danny Lawrence strutted in with his client in tow. Camera flashes lit up what had until then been a quiet courtroom as the photographers tried to get a glimpse of the goings on inside. You’d think Danny was strolling down his own hallway as he was holding his suit jacket and had yet to put on his tie. He was going to be as comfortable as possible for as long as possible.

As he reached his table and set down his things, Danny took the opportunity to face his opponent for the day.

“Good Morning Angie,” Danny said in almost a sing-song manner.

“Morning Mr. Lawrence,” Angela said as she pretended to be reviewing the contents of an exhibit she knew by heart at this point. This did not dissuade Danny.

“Hey, my assistant made a run over to Dunkin’, could I interest you in frosted chocolate one with jimmies? We’ve got a nice spread over here and you can feel free help yourself.”

“Mr. Lawrence, unlike you I like to be focused and prepared as much as possible, so I will be here working until the Judge calls order. You can keep your treats to yourself,” Angela leered, feeling quite happy with herself as she finished

telling Danny off.

He just shrugged, "Suit yourself."

Danny turned to put on his jacket and tie, and the blood drained from Angela's face as she saw that in addition to the donuts, Danny's assistant had also brought several carafes of coffee. Angela was considering whether or not a cup was worth the embarrassment when the jury began filing into the box.

"All rise," the bailiff announced as the Judge entered the courtroom, "the Honorable Judge Andrew Clinton presiding."

"Please be seated," the Judge stated in the kind of bored manner that Judges generally speak in as they enter a courtroom; as if a career of formalities has killed the charm of people standing up whenever you enter the room.

"We have a lot to get through, let's get started. Prosecution, please call your first witness."

"Your Honor, the State calls Lloyd Irving to the stand."

Angela's strategy was fairly simple in its theor. By her estimation, Frank Cole had committed so many fraudulent acts that he fit the statutory definitions of nearly a dozen types of criminal fraud under the New York Penal Code. Angela charged Frank on 5 of them and had 10 witnesses lined up to explain how he committed each one.

"Objection, hearsay."

"Objection, opinion."

"Objection, relevance?"

"Objection, calls for speculation."

"Objection, vague."

Such was the refrain from Danny, as Angela tried questioning her witnesses. Nearly every one of Danny's objections was met with an emotionless "sustained," from Judge Clinton.

As much as Angela wanted to be annoyed with Danny's incessant objections, if she was looking at them objectively herself she'd agree with them. Given the short time frame and the amount of witnesses to get through, Angela had not had enough time to properly prep each witness. Not only that, Angela had stretched herself so thin in learning about each witness and the specific elements of each charge that she was not able to ask the questions that would elicit the answers she wanted the jury to hear. Because of this, they rambled, and rarely made the kind of impact on the jury that she was hoping for.

On cross examination, Danny jumped on them like a viper, picking apart the details of their stories.

"So, in fact, you never actually saw Mr. Cole and Counselman Adderley together did you?"

"So you have no idea what was in the envelope in question, yes?"

"Therefore we agree that only a fool would think that my client would forge a signature on that change order, correct?"

Angela should have objected to that last question, and probably a dozen others, but she was trying to keep the elements of the various frauds straight in her head, and trying to piece together whether she had still proven each one. Hell, at this point she wasn't sure if she had proven any of them.

"God, why was I so stupid?" Angela thought to herself. Of the 5 fraud charges only First Degree Bribery of a Public Servant had any potential jail time on it. The rest were not likely to get the State much of anything back in restitution, if she had just focused on the big one she could have nabbed Cole. As it stood right now, her argument was as weak as her coffee yesterday morning.

"Counselor?" Judge Clinton grumbled, clearly annoyed, "Your next witness."

The blood raced to Angela's face, she couldn't remember what was next, so she said the only thing she could think to say, "your Honor, the prosecution rests."

A wave of confused murmurs rippled through the gallery, such that Judge Clinton gave a light tap of his gavel to regain order.

"Counselor, did I hear you correctly?" He too was confused, "You're ready to rest after just one day of witnesses? This trial is scheduled for three weeks."

"Yes your honor," Angela replied, "the State believes Mr. Coles guilty to be obvious based on witness testimony."

It was obvious to anyone watching the proceedings that Angela did not believe that.

Danny wasted no time, "your honor, the defense moves for a directed verdict. There are no facts at issue here, and the State has not presented evidence of any crime committed by my client."

Judge Clinton paused before answering, "I'll need a moment to consider, we'll take a short recess."

"All rise," the bailiff barked as the Judge retreated to his chambers. As soon as the Judge was out of sight, Angela slunk down in her chair.

"What the hell was that?" Sam harshly whispered, "I've been in the office non-stop prepping paperwork and arranging witnesses on this case and you fucking quit?"

Sam looked like she was going to cry, she was so angry. Angela at that point just wanted it to be over with.

"All rise," the Judge had apparently come to a decision.

"Mr. Lawrence, your motion is denied, I believe there are still questions of fact and law in this case given the evidence presented by the State. We'll begin tomorrow at 9:00 AM, with the Defense, court is adjourned," and with that the Judge

quickly knocked his gavel and evacuated to his chambers.

Danny looked over at Angela confused. He did not expect such a weak performance from her.

Angela just sat, staring at her table. Then, almost robotically, she stood; walked over to Danny; took his coffee; and left the courtroom.

chapter seventeen

Julia Ward

JUDGE CLINTON HAD HAD more than enough bull for one day. Cole and his attorney obviously got truckloads of manure shipped from Texas and Wyoming. Quite possibly Montana as well.

With a shake of his head, he disrobed and gathered a few things to take home before heading to his car. As he started his car, his brand new Motorola MicroTAC flip phone rang. More than likely it would be his wife Amy wanting to know when he'd be home. With a smile at the thought of surprising her, he let it ring. He could call his answering service in a minute.

However, not three blocks away, it was ringing again.

If Amy needed him, she needed him.

He answered. "Hi honey, what's up?"

"Daddy?" It was Jean and she was sniffing. A sob broke through the phone. "Daddy, I'm so scared. Please... Please come get me." The sobs broke and then crescendoed.

What the hell happened? Keeping his voice steady as he navigated traffic and headed to meet his daughter, Andrew

asked, "What happened, sweetheart."

"Just come get me. Please." Her sobs were heart-wrenching. Had it been a bad breakup?

God, had she had an affair with a professor? Certainly not Jean. She was as level headed as they came. What then? "I'm on my way, sweetheart."

"Don't hang up, Daddy."

"I won't, sweetheart. I'm right here." He stayed on the line the whole drive through Lower Manhattan and then up the 9-A heading north before pulling up next to a phone booth outside Butler Hall. It was only then that she hung up and flung herself into his car.

"Can we go home, please?" She kept looking around.

Reaching over, Andrew took his daughter's hand. "We're headed there now. What happened?" Whoever scared her like this would have the whole of the New York justice system down on them if he had any say.

Rather than answering, she just wept, sucking in gasps from time to time to fuel the next wracking sob.

"Honey, if this is some guy you met."

"No, Daddy. It's *not* just some guy. I was... I came out of..." Her hand went to her throat. "This guy... He..." She swallowed hard before continuing. "Oh, Daddy!"

"Do I need to take you to the hospital?" She'd been raped. There was no doubt in his mind.

"No. No..." With snuffle she seemed to gain some control. "No. I just..."

"No hospital?" Should he take her anyway? If she'd been raped it was important to get... *God, my little girl!*

"No." Her voice dropped to a nearly breathless whisper. "He had a knife."

"That's it. We're going to the hospital."

“No, I’m fine. Nothing like that, Daddy.”

“Then tell me what happened!” He’d lost his patience. Someone had hurt his little girl and he wanted to know who. And where the hell they were.

“I was coming out of the tutoring building, cutting through Heyman Center like I always do and this guy...” She huffed a breath before continuing. “This guy grabbed me and dragged me into the stair well. He choked me.” She gasped another breath. “I passed out. But...” She reached her hand to her throat again. “I was so scared. When I came to it was dark. I had no idea where I was. I had to feel around to find a door.”

His hands were white, wrapped around the steering wheel as he imagined them wrapped around the man’s throat. Forcing a deep breath, he asked again, “But you’re not hurt?”

“No. No. I...” Her voice dropped low. So low it scared him.

“What, Jean? What?”

She reached her hand to her throat again. “I think... I feel something, here.”

He looked to where she pointed on her neck. “Shit!” he yelled, slamming on his brakes. “I’m taking you to the hospital!”

It was barely a nick. But she’d been cut. *That bastard cut her!* As he looped back to the hospital, he called the police. They were waiting as he pulled into the Emergency room entrance.

Grateful he could pull strings, they were seen immediately and he hugged his daughter as she recounted the attack to the policemen while a nurse cleaned and dressed the small cut.

“I’m sorry, Daddy. I was never able to see him.” As she leaned against him, he hugged her.

“Not to worry, sweetheart. They’ve got an idea of his size and even the way he smelled. The rough clothes... You’ve

done a great job.”

He didn't leave her side as the policemen left.

The phone in his pocket rang. This time it had to be Amy. Could he talk to her right now? He wasn't sure. Maybe it could all wait until he got home.

But the phone rang again. And then again.

She was relentless.

“I can't really talk right now,” he told her.

“Is that mom?” Jean asked.

“Yes.”

“Is that Jean?” Amy's voice sounded shaky. “Oh, my God, Andrew, is she all right? I got the most horrible phone call asking if I knew where she was. Thank God she's with you. My God, Andrew. I was so worried. And then you wouldn't answer. What the hell happened?”

He gave Amy a very brief version: Jean was fine. There'd been some sort of attempted attack. As he lied, he was fairly certain it was disappointment in his daughter's gaze. He would not apologize for sparing his wife some of the terror he'd been feeling.

As he reassured his wife and hung up, he hugged his daughter. “You're coming home. And I'll have extra security at the house.”

His daughter didn't argue.

When they arrived at their home, Jean let her mother tuck her in while Andrew retired to his study for a steadying glass of scotch.

He was halfway through his sixth finger of scotch when the police called. They'd searched the area and found nothing. No sign of any struggle, no sign of her having been in the storage room, and no sign of the guy.

“Keep looking. It had to be Cole that son of a bitch. That

son of a bitch.”

“Who’s Cole?” His wife stood at the doorway. God only knew how long she’d been there. Her angry stride ate up the space between the doorway and his desk as he returned the phone to its cradle. “Who’s Cole, Andrew?”

Son of a bitch. Now I’ve done it. “Just a case I’m trying right now. It... I was thinking about something else.”

“You were thinking about the attack on Jean. She told me. She told me all of it. The stairwell, everything. My little girl, Andrew.”

“She’s my little girl, too.” As if the attack on his little girl hadn’t been enough, to now have his wife angry at him was too much. “It’s been a long day and an even longer evening. Let’s just drop it right now.”

“So who is this Cole guy and why would he attack Jean?” Again, she was relentless.

Staring deep into the last bit of amber liquid in his glass, Judge Andrew Clinton told his wife a little bit about the Cole case.

“Fraud? You’re getting him on fraud? That’s nothing? My God, Andrew. Real estate and public buildings? The government spends millions on a toilet and you’re willing to risk my daughter’s”—He shot his wife a warning glare—“our daughter’s safety going after some guy who’s only done a fraction of that?”

“He’s a criminal, Amy.”

“She’s our only child, Andrew. Let it go. What if it had been worse? What if he’d actually killed her, or, God forbid, raped her?”

It wasn’t like he hadn’t thought the same things.

“I am telling you, Andrew, if this is how it’s going to be, you might well be on your own. You think about it. Drop

this.”

It killed him, the pain and anguish in his wife’s eyes. A tear rolled down her cheek.

God, why? But he knew, this was the path he’d chosen. Justice wasn’t an easy mistress. “It’s not just about the fraud *now*, is it? He’s just attacked Jean. Am I supposed to dismiss that?” He was confident that would get her back on his side.

But it didn’t. “Andrew Clinton. She got away with barely a scratch. While, yes, I’d love for you to go after the bastard that hurt her, if it’s a matter of her being safe or getting hurt worse, then you let it go.” She’d gone from threats of leaving to pleading, tears rolling down her face. “This is about the safety of our family, Andrew. Drop this for Jean. For me. For us. For our safety.”

This was killing him. He had a job to do. He couldn’t let this man get away what he’d been doing. And even more so now. If he’d threaten the daughter of a judge, no one was safe. “As much as I love you and Jean, it’s not that easy.”

“Yes, it is.” Suddenly like steel, she stood, cold and unyielding. “It is, Andrew.”

A man feels like hell when the woman he cares about cries.
When the tears stopped abruptly, it was so much worse.

chapter eighteen

GabD

"I TOLD YOU TO get the older ones, just the MILFS -"

"I got what I could, Instagram influencers don't come cheaper by the dozen, you know. We've had to pay 'em all extra just to stand next to each other."

The window in the waiting room gave them a clear view of the crowd outside courthouse. Standing next to him, Danny could smell his client's personalized spray tan, *Rey del Mundo*. Sickly sweet, like funeral lilies, he thought.

"There's some nice pickings out there, Danny. Good job. You get their cell phone numbers?"

"Bad timing for that, Frank."

Danny Lawrence looked at Frank, who was idly smoothing his hair, lost in thought. Outside, the influencers gathered like leggy wading birds on the courthouse steps moving in a tight pack, each searching for a clear space and good lighting. Frank never travelled anywhere without social media coverage.

Danny wondered again why he'd taken this brief. Frank Cole was an asshole by any measure, but well connected and beyond rich. Danny's fee for this job was four times more

than he'd asked for, and that had been double his usual rate. He sighed and took out his notebook. He had plans; he needed the money.

"So our guys for this afternoon have all confirmed, Harvey, Madelaine - "

"And Billy." Frank interrupted. "Billy will be here and he'll bring it. Really bring it."

"I hope they all do," said Danny. A Hollywood producer, the head of New York's largest homeless charity and a movie star. What would a jury make of them? Did it matter that Frank really was corrupt to his fingertips and should be put away for fraud at the very least?

A knock outside the door and it opened. The court usher peered into the room.

"Mr Cole, Mr Lawrence, ten minutes."

"Time to go," Danny said.

Frank waved to the crowd outside and turned back to Danny, his white teeth gleaming in a tanned face beneath expensive hair.

"Let's get 'em, tiger."

Frank's grip on Danny's shoulder was heavy, steering him into the corridor toward the court waiting room like a weapon.

"I'm a lucky, lucky guy, you'll see."

Angela Bennett wasn't happy. She twisted a strand of hair around her finger as she stared down at the piece of paper in front of her. The stamp on the document was real, the document was genuine. The title deed to the St Catherine's Orphanage building, on one of New York's finest pieces of heritage land. Transferred to ColeCorp, Frank Cole's holding company for \$150,000, just a month ago.

"It's legit, I told you." Ed Broderick was sweating under his

collar, whether from guilt or middle age it was hard to tell. "Sister Madelaine said it wasn't a sale, it's more like a transfer of safekeeping." His air-quotes on the last word were limp, even he knew it was a scam.

"How is this even possible?" Angela shook her head.

"We didn't know about it until yesterday."

Angela's face hardened. "It's like he really is the king of New York, whatever he wants he just takes it!"

"Look, I can't deny he's a big donor to the city," Ed said in a low voice. "and he's important to a lot of people. His money's very important."

"To your mayoral re-election!" Angela swept the title deed in with her court papers and stood up. "I'm going to ask this be put into evidence. Let's see what happens then. This is absolute proof, 150k for a hundred-million-dollar property!" Her face reddened with anger.

Ed stiffened. "Don't blame me! I'm only giving this to you because -"

"You need him out of the way? But need his money, is that it?"

"Something like that."

"Sister Madelaine is a character witness for Cole this afternoon, I'll ask her about it then." Angela threw the door open and strode out, leaving Ed, still sweating.

Frank Cole waited in the interview room with Danny Lawrence, as his glamor team fussed about like butterflies, dabbing, spraying, patting. He watched the young woman opposite him deliberately cross and uncross her long legs, the tops of her lace stockings just visible. She tossed her hair over her shoulder, watching herself on her phone, ignoring him.

"People, people! I need some help here. Someone? Some

attention, here?" Donna called, to no-one in particular. She was used to getting what she wanted now, especially since she'd officially moved into Frank's new apartment overlooking the river. I'm his mistress, she thought smugly. Soon, his wife. She smirked into her phone, then slipped it into her bag. "Someone, please!"

"Honey, honey" - said Frank soothingly. "They're almost done with me here, just a few more minutes." He looked up as a cloud of translucent powder wafted over his face and coughed slightly.

A hairdresser began brushing Donna's hair as a makeup artist applied fresh lipstick.

Danny studied his phone, wishing he could be outside. He thought about his fee, then his plan.

Nearby, Frank and Donna sighed aloud at the same time, then simultaneously burst out laughing.

"See, honey, we really are on the same wavelength..." Donna slipped her foot from her Manolo's and ran it up Frank's leg. He pretended a shiver and she giggled.

Danny felt nauseous.

A soft knock at the door.

"Come in," he called.

A small woman, a miniature of Frank stepped through the door.

"Frank?" She called softly.

"Alice, hi!" Frank stood to hug his sister.

"I just thought I'd come by, moral support, if you need it -"

"Alice, I always need it, always need you!" He hugged the tiny woman, "really appreciate you coming, more than you know."

"Frank, I saw - "

"Frank! Frank? Is this where you are?"

Alice stood back as a tall elegant woman burst past her and stood angrily in front of Frank.

"She's here? You brought the hussy to court with you?"

"Hussy? Who are you calling a hussy?" Donna stood, as Frank sank back into the chair. Beth Cole turned to her.

"You? In here?" Her voice rose an octave. "Leave, now. I have business to discuss with my husband!" The emphasis on the last word hung in the air.

Donna looked at Frank, who looked away.

"I will not." Donna hoped her voice was as strong as Beth's as she drew herself up to her full five feet ten in heels. Beth, taller by two inches and two decades older, moved directly in front of the younger woman.

"Get. Out. Now." Her voice was icy. "It's enough you're installed at the apartment, but please, permit my husband a shred of dignity. He doesn't need his all his bad habits on display today." She gave Donna a push toward the door. Alice and Danny stood too, both keen to leave the room.

Donna huffed and swept out. "I'll be waiting outside, darling," she called over her shoulder.

Beth slammed the door shut. Alice and Danny sat down.

"Bethie, come on, she's -"

"You, shut up." Beth turned back to her husband. "Angela Bennett knows about the orphanage. I bet she's going to bring it up this afternoon."

"The orphanage? What about the orphanage?" Danny felt his stomach sink. This had always been a risk, another bad decision of Frank's coming out while he was on trial. The jurors were not forgiving of someone like Frank Cole. And an orphanage?

"Danny, I didn't tell you because it wasn't relevant to these

charges." Frank's face was apologetic. "It was a favour to Madelaine, and -"

"Bullshit, Frank!" shouted Beth. "It's you doing you all over again. Not thinking! The trustees are all over Madelaine and she's about to crack!"

"Danny, can you handle Madelaine on the stand this afternoon?"

Danny nodded, but inside he knew the answer was no. He didn't know what he was supposed to be handling. And if Beth Cole was worried about it, it must be really bad.

Alice touched his sleeve. "We know you can do this," she said in her soft voice. "That's why we hired you. Besides, Madelaine trusts you."

Frank stared hard at him. "This is where you'll have to earn the big bucks, Danny boy-oh. Can't have the fans getting the wrong idea about my good intentions, now can we?"

They left the interview room walking as a tight pack, Beth stalking ahead, Donna slipping in behind her to take Frank's arm.

"Not now, love," he whispered, shaking her off and striding alone.

Donna lagged back. "But -"

"It's OK," Alice stepped forward and took Donna's arm. "It's hard when you're the new one," she said. "Sit with me, it will be fine."

Donna sniffed and walked alongside the small woman. The new one? Who's that? Anyway, be good to be seen with the family, she thought. No going back from that! She stopped and took out her phone.

"Selfie?" she asked Alice.

"Sure." Alice smiled up as Donna took a dozen shots as

they walked.

Danny groaned.

By the time they reached the courtroom, Danny's Instagram alert pinged. Donna's Instagram showed the two faces smiling into the camera.

"We're all here today! #Victory for Frank!"

It already had over a dozen likes and it was just a minute old.

Judge Andrew Clinton was a man secretly, easily, impressed much as he hid the fact behind a hard line, no nonsense approach, the Man in Charge.

He straightened his robes as he stared into the mirror, squinting a little for effect. Years ago, he'd had ambitions to move up to the Appellate Division but somehow, he'd been stuck at 100 Centre Street, dealing with crimes at the coal face.

Crimes at the Coal face, that's what he'd said when they'd interviewed him for Night Line, when he'd been Someone Going Somewhere. He raised his eyebrows quizzically, leaned back magisterially, looking at himself, wondering if he looked this good to the two-dozen people who usually sat in his oversized courtroom. Somehow, he'd become Someone Stuck at the coalface.

He shook his head sternly at his reflection, looked at himself under lowered brows. The Man in Charge.

This case today, with Frank Cole, that was Going Somewhere. He knew it. And today, he would be his no-nonsense self, even though he was mightily impressed with Frank Cole and the witnesses scheduled to speak in his defense. The jury, they'd be easily impressed, he could tell.

"Judge?" Kirsty Anderson poked her head around the door to his chambers. "They're almost ready for you."

"Thanks Kirsty." She'd only been his intern for four months, long enough for her to secretly impress him.

He was ready to be secretly impressed today, but on the outside, hard-line, no nonsense. Today, he would start the move up. Frank Cole would be his ticket to the Appellate Court.

Behind the door, he heard the familiar words.

"All Rise."

He waited for the door to open, hoping today would be the day.

Waiting impatiently, he composed his face, waiting for the one moment of real power he every day. His one moment of complete control of the courtroom.

Three small knocks, the secret code. One minute.

He stood, ramrod straight, as the door swung open.

Looking at his shoes, he readied his face to look up, sweep the courtroom with a disdainful, distant gaze.

He stepped forward boldly and looked up, then hesitated, feeling his face soften from disdain to shock as he realised his courtroom today was filled to capacity, all three hundred seats full, and people standing along the back.

His courtroom was truly full.

And at the Defense table, Frank Cole.

Instantly, Andrew realised he was no longer impressed. Something about Frank in real life was wrong, the blunt arrogance in the way he carried himself, in his familiarity - no, his ease - in these surroundings that was not impressive. Frank Cole looked like he was the Man in Charge.

Andrew Clinton felt his face harden and his one moment of control disappear like smoke.

So far so good, thought Beth Cole as she settled back to watch Angela Bennett. Her case had been unremarkable for its lack of detail, something Beth thanked her lucky stars she'd managed to make sure of. No detail meant no case, except for this damned Orphanage. Frank had been greedy; Madelaine had been stupid. How had she missed this one?

Beth checked her twitter feed to see if any of the Trustees had released any information about the deal. There was nothing. No sign, good. She hoped she'd buttoned them down well enough with her list of favours and promises. A heady mix, it always worked well with people who aspired to more.

She sat back, watching Danny question Harvey Pink about Frank. Harvey Pink, film producer, beneficiary of annual Cole largesses that included a couple of overseas holidays with companions of questionable talents. Harvey was from Hollywood after all, and you know, Hollywood. She sniggered. Harvey was Frank's friend, she had nothing to do with him, except to review and file the tapes of his vacations.

"So, Mr Pink, how would you describe my client as a businessman? To your knowledge is he a man who always offer a fair price?"

"Objection your Honour, Leading."

"Sustained."

"I'll rephrase. In business, what sort of a man is Frank Cole?"

Harvey Pink looked at Frank, then at Danny.

"Frank is always a man of his word, in twenty years we have worked together on many projects including SuperMade - yes, with Alton Reese, still the number one box office for a weekend - and he's never asked for more than his share, he's always been there to help if asked. And to offer help. He's a

good man."

"Is it fair to say then, Mr Pink, that you trust Mr Cole in business?"

"It is."

"No further questions, Your Honour."

"Counselor?"

Angela Bennett looked at her notes. Harvey Pink, she could bring up that story about the hotel and Alton Reese, and that maid people said had been hushed up with Cole money, but there wasn't any evidence. Pink was a loyal Cole retainer as far as she could tell, no help to her case at all.

No sense wasting her one piece of ammunition on him.

She wanted Sister Madelaine.

"Miss Bennett? Questions for the witness?"

Angela sighed.

"No, your Honour."

"Fine. Thank you, Mr Pink, you may go."

Behind the Defense table, Beth let out a sigh of relief. Two to go, Billy Bento and Sister Madelaine.

Why had they decided to bring in Billy Bento again? Beth thought he was a bit of a lummoX.

"Call the next witness."

"William Bento."

She realised why Billy was on the list when the courtroom doors opened and a hundred camera flashes lit the space behind him, three hundred gasps and soft cheers sounded through the courtroom as he walked up the aisle.

Billy had more megawatt star power than the California electricity grid.

Eighty-six million Instagram followers, twenty million followers on Twitter. Guaranteed box office, four Oscars and eight Emmys.

He could make anyone bulletproof, just by standing next to them and Beth was glad he was standing next to Frank. In the reflected glare of such fan-love, even Frank would look like an angel.

As a judge of criminal proceedings, Andrew Clinton kept his tendency to be impressed well hidden. Major criminals, famous lawyers, sometimes the sheer gall of a crime would impress him but he realised the moment Billy Bento walked in that he would struggle hard to remain impassive with the biggest - and nicest - man on the planet sitting ten feet away from him.

Billy Bento. If he thought Frank Cole was a good guy, then maybe he was.

Except Andrew Clinton knew he wasn't.

Frank Cole was a bad guy, a fraudster of major proportion. Trouble was, Angela Bennett had proven little, other than Cole's occasional sloppy paperwork. So far there had been no evidence, and the few witnesses she'd produced had been feeble and ill prepared. But like his secret tendency to be impressed, Andrew Clinton was also sharp eyed when it came to the cut of a man, the style of him, the who of him.

His father had called it - the con of a man. And Andrew Clinton knew the con of Frank Cole, the real, slippery deal of him.

But Billy Bento, who was a good man - called Cole a friend. And because of that, no-one would ever know the real, slippery deal of Frank Cole.

Judge Clinton stole a glance at the jury who were, to a person, entranced - and yes, impressed - at being so close to a true world leader, if fans were the measure.

He settled back on the bench, feeling alternately impressed

and irritated with Billy Bento, his fans, and his personal loyalty.

Billy's towering frame dwarfed the small witness box, but he sat complacently after being sworn in, seemingly oblivious to its lilliputian dimensions.

He nodded at Frank, at Danny and Angela, at the jurors. Respectfully around the rest of the room. To those watching, he really did seem as nice as he was on Instagram.

"Good morning, Mr Bento." Danny stood his back to the Defense table. Behind him, Frank Cole leaned back as Beth whispered something in his ear. He nodded and swung back to the table, a secretive smile on his face.

"Good morning, Counselor."

"Thanks for coming." He paused. "You know why you're here today?"

"Yes, Mr Cole has been charged with fraud. I'm appearing in his defense."

"And you've known my client for how long?"

"Twelve years."

"And in those twelve years, have you ever known my client to engage in criminal or fraudulent behavior?"

"No, I have not."

"And in your own words, how would you describe Frank Cole?"

"He's a decent, honest man, always done the right thing by me, and the charities and investments we're both involved in."

"And those include the Sunshine Benefit charities?"

"They do."

"And whose idea was it to establish the Sunshine Benefit charities?"

"Mr Cole's. He put in the start-up donation of fifty million dollars, now we run it together with an independent board.

Over a hundred million a year now, distributed to homeless shelters providing meals and beds to five thousand people a day across America."

"A very worthy activity, for sure."

"Made possible by Frank Cole."

"Yes, thank you Mr Bento. I have nothing further Your Honour."

"Miss Bennett, your witness."

Angela walked slowly to the witness box, mulling over her options again. Questions of Billy Bento would just help Frank Cole - unless -

"Mr Bento, you came here of your own volition, correct? You offered to stand up for Mr Cole?"

"I did."

"And you did this because of your friendship with Mr Cole?"

"I did."

"Not because he is a major stakeholder in Trombone Media, your production company?"

"No, because he's a good man! A friend!" Billy Bento smiled around the room, landing his big friendly smile on Frank Cole like a warm hug. Several jurors smiled and nodded as well.

"Not because he's a partner in several building projects with you, including the Washington Topside building, the one at the heart of these allegations?"

"No, I'm here because he is - "

"Mr Bento, I acknowledge that you wanted to be here for your " - Angela paused - "friend, but for the jury's sake, we should be clear that your relationship with the defendant is more than charities and good works. There is also a hard business edge, isn't there?"

"Yes, and one I'm proud of."

"But one that benefits you, especially if he remains a free man?"

"OBJECTION." Danny was on his feet, as the crowd in the courtroom erupted with boos.

Andrew Clinton banged his gavel several times. "Order, ORDER!" he shouted, as the booing subsided. A number of cell phones were raised surreptitiously for photos and lowered again. Andrew Clinton glared around his courtroom. "I remind members of the gallery that you are guests in my courtroom, in which the use of phones for calls or photos during proceedings is prohibited. Anyone using a phone will have it confiscated and be charged with contempt of court." He looked around the room, now hushed. This was the drama they had come for.

"Now, he paused. "Defense's objection is sustained. Miss Bennett, the witness is not on trial. Contain your remarks to matters of character related to the defendant, not his business practices, please."

"But Your Honour, his business practices are surely..."

"Miss Bennett, matters of character only for this witness, please."

Angela Bennett sighed.

"I have nothing further."

Billy Bento stood to polite applause from the room as Andrew Clinton glowered at the crowd and the jury. The applause died to a smattering as Bento moved to sit behind the Defense table next to Beth Cole. Before sitting down, he blew a kiss to Donna and Alice, sitting in the next row across. Both of them beamed.

Beth scowled as Billy leaned over to peck her cheek.

"All good?" he whispered.

She nodded. "Just don't encourage that little hussy," she said, "I think he might be serious about this one."

"Call the next witness."

"The Court calls Sister Madelaine Eager."

Madelaine Eager wasn't really a Sister of any religion, nor in fact, did she have any sisters at all. Rather, she'd been a Vegas chorus girl when she'd first met Frank Cole twenty four years ago and they were both youngsters - she being the gift his father had procured for him to celebrate his eighteenth birthday, his arrival at adult manhood.

Rather than having sex, Frank junior had settled for a big joint, a bigger glass of Johnnie Black and a chat. They'd been firm friends ever since. Such good friends in fact, he'd added the sobriquet sister to her name, and so, she became Sister Madelaine Eager. Few people asked anything about her beliefs and if they did, she was happy to tell people her order was a small splinter group of the Sisters of Charity and Hope. Her name had made her a life for twenty-four years, and she lived well on it.

She hoped she could continue to do that, it certainly paid better than being a hooper at her age.

So when Ed Broderick, the New York Mayor had called her, she'd known something was up. He didn't call unless his campaign funding was threatened, which in this case it definitely would be, if certain matters became public knowledge. He'd been told about the safekeeping arrangements she'd set up for the title transfer for St Catherine's Orphanage, and it's multimillion dollar acreage on the Hudson; smart guy that he was, he'd recognised the imminent danger to his funding and mayoral campaign prospects if Frank was caught out. Broderick had called her

because one of the trustees, he hadn't said who, had called him about it, to see whether he could stop it going ahead, as Mayor.

Madelaine knew he wouldn't, Frank paid too much for Ed to ever overturn anything he did. There were a dozen similar documents floating around safely in legal limbo; Frank was happy, she was happy, Ed was happy, until now.

She had to believe Ed had it under control.

Which was why she wasn't worried about taking the stand. She knew she was a good actress but a poor liar under pressure. She thanked her lucky stars that Beth and Alice had convinced Frank to use Danny Lawrence, he seemed like such a nice boy, and he always came out on top without being mean about it. She wished she'd been able to speak to Beth before she'd been called, make sure she said the right things.

"Sister Madelaine Eager. The Court calls Sister Madelaine Eager."

Sighing, Madelaine stood and smoothed her black and white outfit, the simple gold crucifix pinned to her bodice the only jewellery she wore. Such a nice costume for a day in court. Sure to keep people on their best behavior.

"Sister Eager, good afternoon. Thank you for coming."

Madelaine looked mildly at Danny, her mouth a small, but gracious smile.

"Good afternoon."

"And you are acquainted with my client, Mr Cole?"

"I am."

"And how long have you known him?"

"Over twenty years."

"And in that time, have you been involved in many business transactions with him?"

"I have, many times. Charity work is what we do. I represent My Cole in several charity ventures."

"And in that time, how would you describe Mr Cole's approach to his role in such activities?"

"He's a fine man, a very fair man who enjoys sharing his wealth with those less fortunate."

At this, Billy Bento said loudly, "hear, hear" and clapped, turning to the crowd.

The crowd clapped, also saying loudly, "hear, hear".

Judge Andrew Clinton looked around the room, glaring out under his brow. He tapped the gavel and the room fell more or less silent. He studied Sister Eager a long moment. Something about her...he wasn't impressed, he was... what?

Madelaine shifted uncomfortably in her seat and looked at Danny, willing him to hurry and be done with her. Beth had said earlier the prosecutor, Angela Bennett was pretty weak, and more than likely wouldn't have many questions for her. She hoped that was still the case as she looked over to the Prosecutors table, and locked eyes with Angela Bennett, who was staring hard at her. Shocked, Madelaine looked down and folded her hands in her lap.

"Your witness."

Danny sat down at the Defense table. Frank waved to her. Behind him, Beth was pale, her face a tight mask. Ed Broderick was behind her.

Madelaine couldn't tell whether that was a tic in Beth's eye, or she was trying to signal her. A small cold knot formed in her stomach. Fear.

Angela stood and gathered her papers.

"Sister Madelaine Eager, lovely to meet you, even in these circumstances." Angela paused, smiling kindly. "You do such a

lot of good work for the city."

"Thank you."

"And you're a good friend of the defendant?"

"Yes, I think so."

"And you're a good friend of ColeCorp?"

"I don't understand the question."

"You're a good representative of the defendant's company, ColeCorp?"

"I don't represent anything, except the work of the Lord. And the charities Mr Cole asks me to be part of."

"Objection, speculation as to Sister Eager's business interests."

"Sustained. Miss Bennett is this leading somewhere? We are here to assess the character of Mr Cole."

"Yes, your Honour. I'm getting there." She held up her hand.

Madelaine looked over at Beth, who rolled her eyes back in her head and tipped her head to the side a little. No mistaking that.

"Excuse me, may I have a glass of water, please?" Madelaine's voice was weak, slightly thready.

"Get to it then, Miss Bennett. Clerk, get the witness a glass of water." Andrew looked at Madelaine. Was she really unwell? Was this too convenient?

A glass was brought. Madelaine sipped at it as Angela walked back to her table, shuffled the papers, placing one down on the table in front of her.

A pause.

"Sister Eager, in your role as representative of Mr Cole how would you describe his attitude to such investments of his time and money and yours?"

Beth tapped Danny on the shoulder and whispered

urgently to him. Danny turned and looked at Ed Broderick, who got up and quickly left the room.

Madelaine watched this as she tried to work out what she should do.

"Sister Eager, how would you describe Mr Cole's attitude, his motivation even -"

"Speculation, calls for the witness to -"

"Sustained! Miss Bennett!"

"Your Honour!" Danny was in front of Madelaine now, he shook his head, ever so slightly, tipped his head back.

Madelaine fell to the floor; her fainting act was second to none.

At the same time, Judge Andrew Clinton called "Sidebar, now!" as the court erupted.

###

"What are you doing here, Angela? She's a nun!" Danny was red faced with anger.

"Your Honour, I have evidence I was getting to, that goes to the question of Mr Cole's character!"

"Well, this is not the time or place to bring it up, and you know it. How long have you been a prosecutor?"

"Twelve years, Your Honour - but -"

"No buts. This is irresponsible, you know the laws of evidence, of admissibility! Are you seriously trying to have new evidence entered via witness character statements? And with this witness - a nun?"

Angela looked down, trying to hide her frustration.

"I'm going to pretend this didn't happen, Counselor. I expected better of the DA's office. You've turned my courtroom into a circus!" And now, I'll be stuck here, no Appellate Court for me, he thought bitterly.

Your Honour, I can prove she's involved, I think she may

be -

"May be what?" Danny turned on Angela, glancing over her shoulder at the jury who were watching the exchange avidly, even though they could not hear. Madelaine was sitting in the witness box, leaning slightly, palely twisting a handkerchief between her hands. "She's a religious sister of a holy order and you're about to accuse her of criminal behavior with my client?"

Andrew Clinton looked at Angela and waited for an answer. He knew there must be something, but...it wasn't this. Muttering in the court drew his attention and he glanced around, frowning, before turning back to them.

"Counselor, without proper procedure, new evidence cannot be allowed, nor can you induce a witness to some type of entanglement with such evidence."

Angela looked at him.

"Well, I have nothing further then."

"Fine." Andrew looked down at his schedule, made a note.

Angela shot Danny a look of loathing that included Madelaine as she returned to the Prosecutors table.

"Sister Eager," she said coldly, "thank you for your time today. I have no further questions."

Madelaine glanced at Beth, at Frank, both of whom looked mighty pleased with her.

Her legs wobbled a little as she stood up but shook even more as Billy Bento came forward to take her arm and guide her to a seat next to his.

Although he didn't mind appearing in court, even for actual crooks like Frank Cole, the summing up of a case was the trickiest part, thought Danny. A false step, a wrong word and the opacity of his cleverly woven half-truths would rip apart

and the reality of his story would be exposed; the jury would know instantly he was lying. He never felt as vulnerable as he did when summing up a case. And he knew if he got this one over the line, it could be his last.

Glancing at Angela Bennett as he addressed the jury, he realised she knew the truth about Frank, knew he was guilty but could not prove it, had not proven it. Silently, he blessed the convoluted evidence procedure that had really saved his client and Angela's dumbassery in trying to get something admitted the wrong way.

"And so it's clear, these charges of fraud against my client are baseless, cannot be proven, have not been proven. My client is everything he says he is, that his business associates and friends say he is- a good man, an honest man," he paused for effect, "a truthful man." He looked at the jury and nodded. "Thank you for your time, members of the jury."

Danny walked back to the Defense table, his hands shaking a little as he sat down. He knew Cole would be acquitted; they'd had everything going for them - star power, drama, and defense as performance art.

The jury filed out.

Outside in the corridor, it was a sea of phones and selfies. Frank was in his element, Billy on one side of him, influencers jostling to get their shots with him and Billy. Beth, across the hall, was talking animatedly into her phone, smiling broadly. Madelaine and Alice stood nearby, old friends catching up. They'd hardly made it into the crush of the corridor when it seemed the jury's decision was imminent.

Filing back into the court room, Frank was boisterously calling out, holding his fingers in the V for victory sign. Donna was trying to cling to his arm, fighting the crush of

people seeking their perfect shot with the richest man in New York or the biggest star on the plant - or both if the timing was right.

Danny sat at the Defense table, watching his phone blow up with tweets already claiming victory over the charges, a thousand of posts on Instagram with a gleeful, suntanned Frank in a group hug with Billy and Harvey Pink, the saintly face of Madelaine smiling beatifically behind them, an expression she'd perfected early for media shots.

Danny sighed. Behind him, he could hear Frank calling out to his supporters - "It's true, I am the King of New York! Maybe America if I want to be! You can do anything if you have the will!" A chant grew in the court room - "King Frank, King Frank, King Frank of New York!"

Turning, Danny watched as Frank slid into the chair next to him.

"This has been a great show, hasn't it?" Frank was jubilant. "You've earned your fee and then some for sidestepping that stinking pile of truth, eh? Right at the last moment? We all know it was -"

Danny nodded. Judge Clinton came through the door, and sat down at the bench, rapping his gavel.

The jurors filed in, barely twenty minutes after they'd left.

And there it was - the jury acquitted Frank of all charges and as the foreman read the verdict the courtroom erupted, drowning out his final words.

"King Frank, King Frank, King Frank of New York!"

Frank jumped up onto the Defense table, conducting the chanting, Billy Bento on the chair behind, leading the chorus.

Andrew Clinton banged his gavel, he stood, he shouted at them to sit, or face charges. He was ignored as the instagrammers recorded Frank and Billy chanting, conducting

the chorus of "King Frank, King Frank, King Frank of New York."

Finally, someone gave Judge Andrew Clinton a megaphone and he became the first judge in the history of the New York Supreme Court, Criminal Term to use one inside a courtroom.

"MR COLE, YOU ARE IN CONTEMPT" he bellowed into the megaphone.

Still Frank danced on the table, but the chanting slowed as a courtroom full of phones filmed the action.

"OFFICERS, ARREST THAT MAN."

Suddenly, Frank was on the ground, howling with rage. "Get off me, get these off me!" He shook the handcuffs, his face a beetroot under a shock of hair standing at pale orange attention.

"All phones must be turned off immediately or they will be forfeited. Anyone still using one will be in held in contempt!"

The sea of phones lowered, but it was obvious many were still recording, streaming live to millions.

"Mr Cole, you are in contempt. My courtroom is not a joke, it is not a place where you can disregard the law." Andrew Clinton was breathing hard, trying to maintain his dignity.

"You're just jealous, you're only a judge, you're a -"

"MR COLE! Three days, three days in the cells. Officers, take him away!"

Frank screamed with indignation as the instagrammers, the tweeters followed his progress with their phones as the court officers dragged him through the doors to the cells. Still, people were chanting, "King Frank, King Frank, King Frank of New York."

As the doors closed behind Frank, Danny wondered how he'd get out of this one. The crowds stood about in the

corridor, reluctant to go. King Frank of New York had gained and lost his freedom in an hour, but on the plus side - as the lucky guy he was today, he'd added half a million new followers.

chapter nineteen

Richard D. Andrews

FRANK WALKED IN THROUGH the door, flanked by two prison officers. He looked down at the floor, trying not to make eye contact with anyone as they escorted him in. He felt like he was totally out of place, the sound of his Salvatore Ferragamo shoes echoing round the room as he came to a stop at the admissions desk. The chain from his handcuffs broke the otherwise silence as he looked up as the officer called his name.

“Frank Albert Cole the third”, he’d only heard that name in full less than an hour ago when the judge had sentenced him. He looked up and took a step forwards. He inherently seemed to know what to do for some strange reason. The two officers still stood on either side, silent.

The prison guard behind the desk looked down at the sheet in front of him and then back at Frank.

“Do you know why you are being admitted today?” they asked, their expression as emotionless and as blank as the walls that surrounded him.

Frank nodded, his eyes glancing round the room, looking

for something to distract him. He felt physically sick, like something was trying to eject his entire stomach, feeling like saying anything would cause him to spontaneously vomit.

“Good.” They replied as they noted on the sheet.

“You’ll be interviewed later, but when you head to your cell, you must remove all your clothes, jewellery, belt and shoes. You’ll be able to keep two items of personal property that you can keep with you, providing they we do not deem them a risk to yourself, or other inmates,”

Frank nodded again. The guard behind the desk nodded to the two flanking Frank.

“Low threat, 326, second level” before dumping a pile of light blue and white clothing onto the desk in front of Frank.

Frank looked around as he wasn’t sure what to do next. He looked at the clothing and then back at the guard. ”aren't they meant to be orange? Or?”

The guards for the first time since he arrived cracked a smile and laughed.

“You, Frank Albert Cole,” they smirked more “The third, are what we deem a low threat, non-violent prisoners.” They paused.

“But you’d be advised to avoid the orange shirts, or the green tops.” They nodded again to the two guards either side of Frank.

Frank was nudged and hustled forwards as he leant over to grab the pile of clothes sitting on the desk.

Walking through the door from the admissions center into the vast open area of the prison was like walking off a cool plane into the heat of a Caribbean island. Except there were going to be no free cocktails or all you could eat buffets here. Rather than the intense heat hitting your face, a stale, stagnant smell of statutory males, a smell of those who didn’t overly hit

Frank. Unlike the silence of the admissions centre, a wall of noise hit him—hundreds of voices, not talking, but murmuring, whispering. Plotting something that came across as sinister, out of earshot of the prison guards who he could see slowly walking the gantry landings above, below and around him.

One guard nudged him towards a metal staircase.

“Level two, one up” he said as Frank almost tripped forwards towards the first metal step.

It was a short walk up the flight of steps. Looking down, he could see to the depths of the prison, each level looking exactly the same, the same metal ironwork making up each landing and stairwell. Above, looking through the gaps in the steps and gantry, he could see maybe 5 or 6 further levels, all carbon copies of this one. The grey walls, the dark metal—like hope been extracted from the place.

Walking along the landing, the guards stopped outside a door. Frank turned to look at the opening into a small off-white painted cell. The walls had been overpainted hundreds of times. Any defined brickwork no longer there, only a hint of the mortar lines showed through. Frank cautiously walked in, setting down the provided clothes on the bed. The sheets white, with a dark brown come green woollen over blanket on top. As his fingers brushed it he shivered. It was like the horrid scratchy blankets when he went away on camp as a child, rough like cardboard, with the small flecks of red thread that came off and always got stuck in your mouth. It was nothing like the satin sheets that he normally slept in next to Beth.

His thoughts suddenly swapped to DD, she didn't even know where he was, and Beth wouldn't be telling her, god forbid Beth ever found out about the 27-year-old he had on

the side!

“CLOTHES!”

The words from the guard still standing at the door cut through his daydream, yanking him abruptly and unceremoniously back into the stark reality of the room.

“Take off everything you have on and get into those.” The guard followed up, pointing to a plastic bag on the bed.

Frank undressed, placing each item of clothing into the bag. Folding them slowly and carefully. There was a separate bag for jewellery and other personal belonging. Frank went to unclasp his Rolex, looking to the guard for assurance. The guard nodded, Frank assumed this meant, yes, and continued to unclip it and slide it into the bag. He went to remove the two rings on his fingers, first his wedding ring, licking his fingers to ease it off. It had been there for some time and never removed. The other ring was another matter. It slipped off easily—it was the ring DD had given him. He only put it on when he was away from Beth and the boys; save awkward questions about its origin, but it reassured DD that he was committed to her, even if it was extra maritally, they jokingly called it their ‘other marriage’. DD was caring, well, caring in that she didn’t. She didn’t care that Frank was a married man, and she didn’t care about what Beth or the boys did. She only cared about Frank and their life together.

A cough from the doorway shook him again, back into the stark reality of the cell. Frank put on the pale blue clothing, popping his side satchel bag into the plastic one, sealing it shut with the security tape attached to the opening. The guard walked in, picking up the plastic bag as it crinkled, his carefully folded clothes sliding to the bottom in a heap, his shoes laying on top as the guard tossed it to the other standing just outside the door.

“Right, you have a visitor, Cole”, the second guard grunted as he literally screwed up Frank's bag.

“A visitor?” Frank looked towards him, trying to move his eyes away from the ever creasing clothes in his bag.

The guard dropped the bag carelessly to the floor, kicking it to the side gutter than was wet from who knows what, and looked at his sheet.

“Lawrence, Daniel Lawrence,” The guard squinted as he read. “Your lawyer, I assume?”

Frank nodded. The thought Danny was here already here filled him with hope that this nightmare was going to be quickly over. The second guard whistled up the landing and waved. A third guard, much burlier than the other two, walked down.

“Take Cole down to the visitor room” He reached down to pick up the plastic bag.

Frank could see the holes at the bottom of the bag had already let in whatever was flowing through the side gutters. His crisp, expensive suit had already soaked up whatever it was. He shuddered as he stood there.

The third guard looked at Frank.

“Cole, follow me.” He barked as Frank walked forwards, the two other guards walking back down the landings towards the admissions door on the level below. The third guard turned, walking in the opposite direction to the other two. Frank looked back at them and hurriedly followed the third guard.

“How do. I mean, what do I call you?” Frank double stepped to keep up with the burly strides of the guard. There was silence. He asked again.

“What do I call you?”

The guard huffed, stopped, and spun on his feet to face

Frank.

“You don’t Cole, you just don’t,”

He turned back and walked on at speed, Frank struggling to keep stride with him.

The visitor section was a stark contrast to the rest of the prison. Dark walnut edging what looked like freshly painted walls. Almost as if they were trying to convey a lie about what the rest of the prison was like. Frank could see Danny sat at a table, head down in a pile of paperwork, reading as he was waiting.

Frank sat down, the plastic chair alerting Danny to his arrival as it creaked.

“Frank” Danny looked up, putting down his pen.

Danny was still in the suit from court. Frank still couldn’t get used to seeing him like that, his day to day look, the cheap jeans, the crumpled shirt was more his style. Thinking back to his clothes in the bag, probably much like those now.

“Danny.” Frank paused, “what happened?”

“Well, your brief outburst..” Danny turned the pages in front of him, “Look. It’s three nights. You’re lucky they found you not guilty, it could have been 30 years, not to mention the fine,” Danny made a note on the top of one page. “Count yourself lucky. Ride it out.”

Danny picked up and sipped from a paper coffee cup on the table. Frank liked his coffee and his food. The smell of the coffee made his mouth water. He leant in across the table as Danny put the cup down again, steam rising from the top. Danny gulped, swallowing.

“How are you doing?” Danny coughed into his hand.

“Not bad, I guess” Frank closes his eyes, drinking in the coffee's smell through his nostrils, and he thought of warm bagels and fresh coffee for breakfast. “It’s not the St. Regis

but..”

Danny nodded, “Like I said, three nights, keep your head down, keep out of trouble, it’ll be over quick.” He took another sip of coffee, “You’ll be back with Beth, Frank and Albert soon enough.”

There was an unspoken acknowledgement between them that both knew the other knew about Donica, DD, but neither ever spoke about it. “..and..” Danny looked and stopped.

Frank nodded.

Danny closed the paper file in front of him and gathered up his stuff.

“Keep your nose clean as they say,” Danny stood, “Don’t talk to anyone, don’t draw attention to yourself.”

Frank nodded as Danny turned and walked away.

“Cole, cell” called the guard, Frank stood.

The walk back to cell 326 was much shorter, it was lockup time as most of the cell doors were closed. Their deep blue black paint shiny and thick also over painted over the years from the look of the rivets around the outside. When they reached Frank’s cell the door was wide open, the guard hung back, Frank turned into the doorway and stopped as he saw someone sat on his bed.

“Frank” said the figure as it put something back into his pocket. “I’m Jonny.”

Frank nodded, looking back over his shoulder to the guard as he wondered what was happening. He was in a single bed cell and didn’t know the rules on prisoners mixing.

Jonny sat, calm looking as he turned toward Frank. Frank noticed immediately the orange top and trousers.

“I’ve been asked to show you round.” Frank stood slowly as the bed creaked a sigh as his weight lifted off it.

“Show me round? By?” Frank looked back at the guard

again, who seemed to act like Jonny didn't exist.

The sound of cell doors slamming and locking echoed round the vast space as Jonny walked out of the door, past the guard as if he was invisible. He paused and turned. His demeanour changed from the relaxed, friendly character previously sat on the bed. He now seemed so much more, menacing.

“Walk with me.” Frank's eyes stared, his facial expressions fixed. It wasn't an invitation, it was a command.

They walked in silence for a while, Jonny occasionally pointing out things within the prison. Frank didn't really take much of his personal tour in, as his mind was more racing on who Jonny was, and who exactly had asked him to show him round. The most worrying question in Frank's head was why Jonny, and himself, seemed to be able to wander round unchecked when every other inmate was heading back to their cell for some lock-in.

Jonny turned a corner. There was a damper smell that grew stronger as Frank followed.

“These are the washrooms”, Jonny announced as he came to a stop, and leant against the tiled wall.

Frank looked round, unsure how to respond. He instead looked back at Jonny in silence, hoping that he'd say something he could respond to.

Jonny looked up and down the corridor that lead to and from the showers. It smelt damp and was more echoey than the rest of the prison. It was much brighter through as the area beyond where they had stopped was tiled in white. Admittedly, looking past Jonny, it looked like the rest of the prison having not been maintained or cleaned for years.

“I know what you're thinking.” Jonny lit up a cigarette, pausing briefly to offer Frank one from the top of the packet.

Frank shook his head. His heart was racing as he stood there, the sound of it thumping through his ears.

Jonny shrugged, closing his hands round the cigarette, lighting it with a silver zippo he slide from his pocket. Frank watched. This was no ordinary inmate—unchecked access to the prison, cigarettes, lighters and the guards acting like he didn't exist? He didn't have to follow the rules of the other prisoners. In franks head, and from pretty much every crime and criminal show he'd watched on TV, this meant Jonny, or rather whoever Jonny worked for, shouldn't be upset.

Jonny lifted his head from his hands. Dragging a deep breath and blowing smoke high into the air.

“Good man, not smoking.” Jonny took the cigarette from his mouth, “not great for you, you know, health wise,”

He puffed again as he turned, “although I can think of more painful ways to die.” He hung on the phrase as he tutted and walked further on into the shower area.

Frank followed, the dripping of the aged faucets all around him as Jonny stopped again.

“You might wonder,” Jonny started,

“Who you are?” Frank interrupted and then thought better of it.

Jonny nodded. “In your situation, as we should refer to it, that would be the first think I'd want to know,”

Frank stood there, pondering on what ‘situation’ he was in, other than the obvious.

“My employer, Mr Salerno,” Jonny continued between puffs, “I'm sure you have heard of him?”

Frank shook his head.

“Oh?” Jonny lowered his cigarette and looked puzzled “Thats strange because Mr Salerno has most definitely heard of you.”

Frank looked puzzled, he'd not heard of a Salerno before.

"Mr Salerno," Jonny continued, "He has mutual interests with," Jonny paused again to drag on the cigarette, "yourself. Your business interests."

Frank again shook his head. He couldn't recount any dealings with any Salerno's.

Jonny tossed the butt of the cigarette to the floor, crushing it with the toe of his shoe, twisting it, the sound of the tiled floor on the sole of his shoe gritty. "Nevermind, that, that is not important. The important part is that Mr Salerno has some concerns. Concerns that have caused him, well. Some sleepless nights."

Frank listened as Jonny pushed away from the wall and walked back towards Frank.

"I'm sure you sleep well at night with Beth? Or even Donna?" Jonny moved closer blowing the remaining smoke from his lungs into Frank's face.

Frank was shocked, shocked that he knew about DD. How could someone he didn't know, someone he only met five minutes ago, know about Beth, let alone DD.

Jonny smiled, "the kids Frank, why keeping ok? What is it Frank's 24 this year? And little Albert, turning a teenager this year, I think?"

Frank stood motionless, trying not to confirm anything with his movements or expression. Jonny knew everything, but how, and why. Why was he having this conversation with him? What did Mr Salerno want?

"I'll tell you why Mr Salerno is concerned, my friend. Tony has a lot of interests in New York. He wants to make sure his businesses and his family, like yours," Jonny turned motioning towards Frank, "are safe, and well. That nothing, lets say, unfortunately happens to them."

Frank nodded.

“Which is why Tony was extremely concerned when he was sent this by a mutual friend of ours.”

Jonny reached in again, pulling out a piece of paper. He handed it to Frank and stepped back, almost waiting for an answer from him.

Frank looked at the paper. It was a printout showing a grainy image of an SUV, a Ford Explorer. He looked more closely and back to Jonny, who just smiled and nodded. The grainy face of the driver was fairly recognisable, along with the number plate. Frank looked down to the corner. The date stamp was a few months earlier. 23rd March 1991.

He paused and looked back up, now white as a sheet.

“You can see Mr Salerno’s predicament here, Mr Cole.” Jonny has suddenly seemed to swap to a very formal voice, almost like some business contract was being discussed.

Frank stared at the paper. He could feel cold sweat forming on his forehead, the sick feeling rising again in his stomach. His hands were becoming sweaty and clammy. His head spinning. He slowly looked up back at Jonny.

Jonny smiled again, lighting up the zippo again.

“Think of the kids, Frank. Think of the kids.”