

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 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

Originally published: 2020

Copyright © 2020 Various Authors
Adela Torres, Ron Ward, Waleed Ovase
Chelsea Fuchs, John S, Tim Edwards-Hart
Nick Calvert, Kristie Claxton, K.R.Pynes
Sam Pynes, LG Red, Ioa Petra'ka
Sue Cowling, Cathi Radner Castrio, Ian Philpot
E. Kinna , Jeanette Everson, Dañiel Garcia
John Gray
Story by: Tim Rogers

The moral rights of the authors have been asserted.

*All characters and events in this publication are
fictitious and any resemblance to real persons,
living, dead, or some other state of being, is purely coincidental*

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons
Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.

You are free to share (to copy, distribute and transmit the work)
under the following conditions:

Attribution — You must attribute the work in the manner specified
by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that
they endorse you or your use of the work).

Noncommercial — You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

No Derivative Works — You may not alter, transform, or build upon this
work.

For more details, visit:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

Original cover photograph by: Tim Rogers

www.novelinaday.com

Also by Novel-in-a-Day:

The Dark

Lunar520

Made Man

Section7

Marshal Law

3 Ghosts

Start Wearing Purple

Auld Lang Syne

Butterfly Dawn

as Novella-in-a-Day:

The District

www.novelinaday.com

sponsored by

Literature & Latte, creators of Scrivener



for
Montrée
and
Vic

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

Adela Torres

NEW YORK CITY, 1991

"Oh, Tony this is *perfect!*"

Louisa doesn't squeal, but comes delightfully close. Tony can't help but smile as his wife's face lits up at the decorations in her favorite lilac-and-peach, the tasteful yet festive flower arrangements, the cheerful corner set up with kids' games. She's just come from the hairdresser or the estheticienne or some such feminine activity and looks remarkably young for her newly-minted 41 years, still adjusting shakily on her mind. Yes, Tony sees the incipient bags under her eyes, the softening of the neck, the slight loss of waistline. He doesn't mind, much. He can pay for whatever nip and tuck job she wants done, when she wants it. He'd even add some suggestions of his own at that point; he's sure she won't raise any objections.

"*You* look perfect," he replies, gallantly, and kisses her on the cheek. She giggles.

"I have to go change. The guests are supposed to start arriving soon, right? You'd better change too."

Tony doesn't see anything wrong with the slacks, shirt and sweater vest he's wearing, but doesn't grumble. He'd much prefer to have the day to himself, to be fair. Parties bore him. Yet it's a perfect occasion to see some people, talk some business, and get some work done while everybody's having fun.

And being noisy and confusing and hopefully if there's some bug that yesterday's sweep missed it wouldn't catch anything more dangerous than talks about shrimp cocktails and new cars and the latest Broadway hit.

He goes up and changes into a dark suit and tie. Louisa is wearing something blue and draped that enhances her breasts nicely without falling into a *come-on* look. She talks volubly about the party and the caterers and the guests and the food and giggles and titters like a fifteen-year-old. Tony likes that in a woman.

"You'll make sure the children behave," he says in a certain moment as she walks past him to change her earrings for the third time.

"Of course, dear," she says absently as she lifts up a diamond tear to her ear, then exchanges it for a dangling line of small blue stones. Sapphires? He doesn't remember buying those.

He walks behind her and catches her eyes in the mirror. "I don't want them bothering the other guests. You know Ed is coming."

"I know," she says, and starts to fasten the blue earring to her ear. "Don't worry, I'm sure they'll behave. They have all those games and they can play on the front yard too. Though I suspect Lizzie and her cousins will want to go upstairs to her room and listen to compact discs or whatever."

"They'd better not make a scene, is all I'm saying," he says,

dropping his voice. Louisa pauses with the other earring in her hand and looks at him via the mirror. A quick, uneasy look flashes across her eyes.

"I'll take care of it," she says, her voice softer and meek. Tony also likes that in a woman. He nods.

"I'm going down, Sal will arrive any minute now," he walks towards the hall, leaving her still holding the earring.

"And wear the diamonds," he orders as he's leaving the room, without turning to look back at her.

Sal arrives soon after. Tony offers him a drink in his ground floor study.

"All ready?," he asks, unnecessarily. Sal has organized everything for today, from the catering to the music to the guest list. There are some names in that guest list that Tony is very anxious to see turn up in person.

"Ed has promised he'll show up, but later, after four," Sal says, sipping his bourbon. "Town Hall meeting. But Otis will come right after brunch."

"Oh, good." Tony wanted the mayor for the social aspect of things, but having Otis here sooner will give him an opportunity to sound him off about a number of issues. And maybe to discuss again the waste contracts.

"Listen, I—," Tony looks around him. "Come outside."

"For the last time, Tony," Sal sighs. "You're not bugged. We shook the house down good and proper yesterday."

"Shut the fuck up," Tony snaps as he strides to the backyard. He waits there for Sal to join him and then steps aggressively up to his face.

"Even if you've taken my house down brick by brick," he hisses, "don't ever take the feds, or me, lightly again or I will have you disemboweled and thrown in a landfill, still writhing

and kicking and moaning. Understood?"

Tony is shorter than Sal. The threat might have been diminished by the fact that he's looking up at him. But what Sal sees is not a heavy, balding man about to enter his fifties. Tony's eyes are like hard, black, dry stone, and cold as all hell.

"Understood," he says. Sal's legendary calm does not shatter. Maybe he takes a bigger sip of bourbon. Maybe his throat works a little before swallowing it. Tony subsides.

"Right. Before the Mayor gets here I'd like to have a private conversation with Otis. Have someone from the office give you the drafts for the municipal waste contracts. We'll see if we can't offer them a better deal."

"In exchange for what?"

"Let's just say that if Ed doesn't work out I'd like to have a candidate ready."

"Otis doesn't want the town, he wants to be a Congressman."

"Office is office. We give him a good piece of cake for the mayor, we see his character."

"You mean how grateful he is. Later."

"Of course."

"Right. I'll have the papers here."

"And we'll talk outside, while all the guests are here. Make sure you give us some privacy."

Sal seems about to say something, but simply nods. Tony nods in return, slaps him on the shoulder.

"You're a pal. Come on, let's party."

Tony is smiling and sweating a little under his double-breasted suit. The party is on full swing; so much so that there are parked cars two streets away. The guests, a bit uneasy at first, soon relax under the influence of good food and plenty of

drinks. The children have been playing noisily in their corner but now the older ones have gone up to Lizzie's room. Louisa, prettier than ever under the influence of gifts, praise and pink champagne, is chatting up wives, refreshing men's drinks and tending to chocolate-covered toddlers without once endangering her looks nor her poise.

Tony has been playing catch with Tony Jr. and Mark for a while, but as the afternoon turns into early evening some of the people he wants to talk to start arriving.

"Here," he says, giving the rugby ball to Mark. "Go play somewhere else, son." He looks for Louisa, gestures for her to come over. She does, tipsy and a bit unsteady on her high heels. Mark is full of sugary treats, overexcited, and little Tony grumbles a bit about not wanting to go with "the kiddies".

"I wanna stay with you, Pa!," Tony complains. Louisa grabs his hand, a bit roughly.

"Come on, dear, don't make a fuss," she says. "We'll go to the kitchen and mommy will make you both some chocolate milk, all right?"

This seems to satisfy eight-year-old Mark, but Tony Jr. sulks and grumbles. Tony frowns at his eldest son.

"Go with your mother," he says. "Pa has to talk to some important people now."

"But I wanna staaaay!" Tony Jr. wails, loudly enough to attract the attention of some nearby guests. Tony grabs his son by the upper arm and shakes him.

"Anthony Robert Salerno, you will do as I say and you will do it *right now*." The last words are a hoarse bellow. Tony Jr. blanches, his face scrunches up. Tony pushes him towards his mother. "And don't you start crying now, what are you, a little girl? We'll talk about this later, see if we don't. Go inside! *Now!*"

The last word is a roar. Louisa embraces her oldest son while Mark leans away from his father's wrath. He's eight but he's already learning.

He wants chocolate milk but he knows that Anthony will be furious about Pa getting angry, and he'll take it on him. So Mark decides he'll hide, as he often does when people start shouting. He slips away from mommy's hand, unnoticed, while Louisa tries to comfort little Tony and take him away from her dark-faced husband.

Mark goes around the house to the front, where the driveway is packed with shiny, expensive cars. He darts around them for a while, imagining himself in a police shootout. The music for the party is muted here and Mark likes the quiet better.

Evening is falling and the light comes from behind him, from the house's windows. It throws his shadow ahead of him: a long, stick-like figure that Mark finds funny. He moves around like a puppet, making exaggerated gestures with his arms and legs, giggling as his shadow transforms into a strange dancing alien.

He follows the dance for some steps, playing with his head and arms. And then his shadow splits, turns into an angled, jerky double-vision. Mark is confused for a second and then realizes that there's another light source, coming from his right.

He falls, or is pushed, or a combination of both. He can't tell, because his head has hit the pavement and there's been a scary noise inside his head: hard, dull, wet. He feels warm all of a sudden, but apart from a whirlwind of movement he sees nothing much, so he thinks the lights have been turned off. He wants to get up but doesn't know how. It's all strange, disjointed.

Mark is, he finds, on the ground. He must have fallen, he thinks. He's trying to call for mommy but his voice doesn't seem to want to come out. He sees red: red lights, red pavement. Then the red lights fade away. So does everything else.

Louisa has gone around to look for Mark. She knows her youngest son likes to get away whenever there's a fight, whenever there's shouting. She's calling for him as she rounds the corner to the front yard and sees the car and something small running across the headlights. It's a split second in which she feels the weight of a whole world ending.

And then she hears a thud and a noise that must be her heart, stopping. Breaking. She screams. She runs to the small crumpled figure on the floor as the red lights fade down the street.

She sees the blood on the asphalt, so much blood for so little a body. She hasn't stopped screaming. She falls to her knees beside Mark's body. His blood soaks her skirt: warm, brutal, final. One arm is bare, pale in the evening: somehow she notices, without noticing, that part of one of his jacket's sleeves has been ripped off. The little hand, flecked with blood, has stopped twitching.

Behind her Tony's face is white, inhuman, paralyzed. She doesn't see him. She looks at her dead son as if it's the only thing she'll be able to see ever again.

chapter two

Ron Ward

THERE HE WAS DANNY Lawrence, Frank's attack dog, if he was Sicilian he'd look just like a Dobbie, sleek, smart and vicious, in a nice way. Nice suit but not ostentatious. "Who is he waving at, the freaking bailiff is blocking my way. Who would my lawyer be waving too? Frank ordered him to represent me. He should be looking at me!"

"Get out of your own head man. You gotta chill," like Danny said.

That first day at the police station. The cops started acting right when he walked into the interview room. "Please not Mr. Lawrence, call me Danny," he said holding out his hand. "You kept your mouth shut right Scott?"

The bailiff shook his chains. "Move forward keep walking until we get you to the railing, we will take off the chains there. We are going to let you walk in, you know, not in chains, your lawyer made sure." They moved forward and Scott could see Alice waving.

"Alice, he is waving at Alice. That makes perfect sense. I am scared, what if I do something dumb and they give me the

maximum. Good that he is waving to Alice I bet she is scared too, having him acknowledge her, she is smiling so pretty, wait, what if he is hoping to pick up with her after he throws my case. Oh my god man, pull it together. Danny is your best hope.”

“Stop there you know the drill by now, feet first then your hands. Stand still, any sudden moves will end in pain.” The bailiff said.

The courtroom was not full. By the judge's decree, all media were waiting outside. Inside friends and family of both defendant and victim. The curious, who were either clever or connected enough to get past the guards. A couple of court sketchers including one who was doing well in the greeting card and teeshirt game.

Gillian Harbuckle a sketch artist who was making her mark by doing traditional style court drawings, but representing the principals as various animals. She was very much on the rise and doing the work to get noticed. Angela Bennett was a fan and embarrassingly hoped for a favorable rendition, anything but a Pomeranian she had joked over breakfast.

Angela pulled the pen out of her mouth and gave her chin a soft left hook. The same pen tapping against the table seconds later brought a withering look from the stenographer. Feigning a need to look at notes she hid the pen in her portfolio.

Danny kept looking for people he knew and gently twiddled his fingers at them. It is my lion paw wave he told his assistant. Danny turned slightly pasting a welcome home soldier boy smile on his face for everyone in the jury to catch from the side.

Alice pointed urgently. With a slight turn of the head, he could see his client. “You are wearing the suit I sent over,

good boy.” Danny thought.

Hoping that some members of the jury were still watching he let go of his nearly solar Jaguar salesman’s smile. Scott caught it right on the chin and smiled back, not big but convincingly warm.

Scott took a breath then stepped into the courtroom proper. He threaded his way behind polished chairs, then behind Danny, and on to his own chair, where he promptly sat down. Only then could he look up.

“All rise for the Honorable Judge, Andrew Clinton.”

Danny touched the back of his client's armpit on his way to standing. Scott who had just plopped down stood too quickly and started listing to starboard. Danny grabbed his shoulder seam picking a bit of fluff from Scott’s suit reaching across to ‘pick’ another fluff, just enough pressure.

“Your cool, right?” Danny whispered while they were still in their fake embrace. Scott nodded not trusting his voice just yet. Scott preferred jams he could punch his way out of; all this theater got under his skin, games for rich people.

“You may be seated.” The bailiff had a nice baritone. The rustle of people sitting calmed Scott.

“You got a plan right Danny, I know you do, I remember, but you have more than that don’t you. Frank says your the best he has ever seen.” Scott very much wanted to keep talking but the look on Mr. Lawrence’s face stopped him.

“Yes,” Danny stared into Scott’s eyes. “I am the best, and I do have more. I fully expect the judge to dismiss this case. Stay the course and you will be celebrating with your sweet wife before you can believe it.”

His special power was making people believe things. Sometimes he felt there was magic involved. That is not the kind of power always used for good. His wife said when he

confided his feelings to her. “You could I guess, do good with it, but that would not make very much sense.” Annabeth had not laughed with him then. Danny laughed now remembering the whole situation, using it as fuel for his positive mental attitude.

To Scott, he said, “Look the judge right in the eye when he speaks to you. You played ball, right? Remember the locker room rule, never flinch.”

“I expect a clean fair trial here.” Judge Clinton began. “Mr. Lawrence, Ms. Bennett you have both been in my courtroom before, you know my rules. The defendant has entered a plea of Not Guilty. We are here to determine if that is the truth or if as the prosecution asserts Mr. Moore is guilty. You the men and women of the jury will be making that decision. It is your sworn duty to consider all the evidence presented and make your verdict based on the facts presented here in this courtroom. You will have to lay aside any prejudices you may harbor. You are here because both the Prosecution and the Defense have asserted that they believe that you will render a fair and just verdict. If you have any further questions we will endeavor to answer them once you have been sequestered in the jury room.”

Judge Clinton stopped to survey his courtroom. He was specifically looking for the defendant's father in law. He was slightly disappointed to see that he could not find him. Frank Cole was not here in person but people with that much money did not have to be present to influence an outcome.

“Bailiff will you please read the charges out so that they can be entered into the records of this proceeding.” The Judge let his voice get fuller, deeper as he pronounced the word proceeding. “It is the little things that matter,” he thought.

“The defendant is charged with leaving the scene of a

crime that resulted in a death. Mark Salerno, age 8, was struck and killed on 23 March 1991 at 79th St, Howard Beach, Queens. The driver of the vehicle who struck the boy fled without informing anyone of the accident.

“Any related charges in this case?” Judge Clinton said.

“No your honor,” the bailiff replied.

“Mr. Scott Moore, do you understand the charge against you?” Judge Clinton said.

“Yes your honor, I didn’t do it,” Scott answered.

“Do you wish to change your plea from not guilty to guilty?” Judge Clinton pressed, leaning forward in his seat and raising his gavel and the volume of his voice.

“No sir, I do not,” Scott answered staring straight ahead.

Danny smiled again, good boy not letting him goad you into reacting.

“Ms. Bennett, please proceed with your opening statement.” Judge Clinton said.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the facts are that on 23 march 1991 a young boy, Marc Salerno was struck down by a moving vehicle. The driver of the automobile did not exit the car to see if the boy was alive. No one called emergency services! No one called the police! No one stopped to help the injured child! None of the things you would expect a responsible citizen to do happened. The driver simply backed up and then sped away.

I will prove, that the craven person, who left an injured child, to die, from wounds that he, inflicted, is the defendant, Scott Moore! Angela pivoted to point at the defendant but her heel shifted. She had to take a step to keep balance. When she stopped twisting her finger was pointing at the sketch artist drawing animal cartoons. The artist began feverishly scribbling.

“Mr. Lawrence your opening statement please.” Judge Clinton said.

“Thank you, your honor. Esteemed members of the jury. The sad truth is that a child's life was snuffed out due to the carelessness of a driver. The hopes and promises of that young life will never be realized. That Marc Salerno was struck down by a moving vehicle is not in dispute. What is in dispute is the identity of the driver.

My client asserts he is not the guilty party. I believe him. Mr. Moore had never seen Marc until his photo was printed in the newspaper. The prosecution has spent a record low number of hours on this investigation. The DA's office accepted a conclusion offered by lazy police. The case against my client is a conglomeration of conjecture and happenstance cobbled together from half-truths and outright lies all adding up to Zee-Roe!” Danny made his fist into a tube and surveyed the jury through his lens.

“There is no doubt in my mind that you will find my client not guilty. Once you have heard the drivel the prosecution is going to offer up as fact. You will understand beyond any doubt that my client, Mr. Scott Moore is not guilty but he is innocent.” Danny straightens his spine smiling at the jury.

Judge Clinton held up a sheaf of papers. “The prosecution's witness list is a little bit thin Ms. Bennett.” Angela opened her portfolio, he was right this was pathetic. At least she was up against Daniel Lawrence. It took some of the sting out to lose to a well respected opponent. “Ms. Bennett, do you wish to respond?” Judge Clinton said.

“It is our belief your honor that it will not take that many witnesses to prove our case. Our office sees no benefit to the public order in dragging this proceeding out any longer than necessary. To that end, I would like to call Dr. Robert Gangly

to the stand.

Dr. Gangly works in a laboratory that processes blood work for both hospitals and the police department. His expertise is beyond question.” Angela waited while her witness was sworn in. The stenographer shot her another look and she dropped the pen, wishing she could just leave.

Slowly she approached the doctor. “Dr. Gangly do you recognize this.” Angela handed him a sealed evidence bag containing a strip of stained faded denim.

“Yes, it has my mark on it here.” He pointed at a red smudge on the side of the container.

“What can you tell us about this?” Angela prodded

“I understand it was found in the defendant's possession.”

“Objection, I object, foundation, the disposition of the cloth is outside the doctor's personal knowledge. Please instruct the witness to confine himself to his analysis of the cloth.”

“My apologies your honor.” Dr. Gangly said. “My part of the story is that the stains on the cloth are blood. Secondly that the blood in question is a match to the blood of the victim Marc Salerno.”

“Thank you Dr. Gangly.” Angela said, “I have nothing more for this witness.”

“Any cross examination,” Judge Clinton said.

“No your honor, I believe Dr. Gangly does fantastic work,” Danny replied.

“For my next witness I call Samantha Spankos,” Angela said.

Angela began thinking about her trip to Cancun. So different from the tedium of a difficult trial. She pinched the inside of her elbow to focus.

“Ms. Spankos do you recognize this?” Angela said.

“Yes, it is an evidence bag I received in late March. My mark and date are here on the receptacle.” She pointed at her initials.

“I was tasked with proving a match between the fibers on this sample and a denim jacket taken off the victim, Marc Salerno at the scene. My research shows that the torn piece does match the jacket taken off the victim.” Ms. Spankos said.

“Thank you Ms. Spankos. I have nothing more for you.” Angela said.

“Mr. Lawrence do you have any questions for this witness.” Judge Clinton absentmindedly brushed an errant hair back into place just behind his ear.

“No your honor I will agree that the witness’s tests were accurate.” Scott turned and looked at him as if expecting another objection. “We almost have them in our trap Scott, stay tuned,” Danny whispered.

“Please call your next witness Ms. Bennett.” Judge Clinton said.

“Officer Digletz will you please come to the stand,” Angela said.

The policeman was in the back of the courtroom. He seemed in no hurry to get to the stand. Scott started thinking about the time he sneaked under the bleachers at the basketball game in high school. Priscella Simmons was on the end of the bleachers sitting a ways from the rest of her cheerleading buddies. Neither of them liked basketball much compared to football. She had said, “come up and see me, keep me from being bored.”

“Yes your honor, it was him right there.” Officer Digletz was pointing his finger right at him. Scott was not pleased to be seeing the asshole cop again.

“What did you do when you saw the bloody denim on the

defendant's body," Angela asked.

"I asked him to stop walking. We were in the defendant's hallway on a domestic call but I knew there had been a hit and run. I said please stop and everyone stopped. I walked over to the defendant and took the torn denim from him." Officer Digletz said.

"What did you do then officer," Angela said.

"I asked him where he had gotten the fabric."

"And his response was?"

"He denied knowing anything about it. He said he had never seen it before. We have his boots and pants over there on the evidence table. They have the same blood on them."

"Objection! Assumes facts not in evidence." Danny yelled.

"Objection sustained. Those items have not been entered into evidence yet. Please refrain from referring to them as evidence until their link to the case has been established in this courtroom." Judge Clinton said.

Officer Digletz grumbled. Danny smiled at the jury. Angela wanted her control of the situation back.

"Officer Digletz once you had the torn cloth, what did you do," Angela asked.

"I called it in. I asked that they send a forensics team to work the defendant's car. I think hit and runs should be a higher priority. Especially when the victim dies. A detective finally showed up. I handed my evidence over to him. I was not involved in any more of the investigation after leaving the defendant's building."

"I am done with you for now Officer Digletz, I reserve the right to recall if we need to clarify things any further," Angela said.

"Councilor you witness." Judge Clinton said.

"Officer, it seems almost miraculous that you were able to

understand that you were looking at evidence when you saw my client walking by you in the hallway, that is correct right, he was just walking by?”

“Not exactly, we were coming down the stair from the floor above and the defendant was coming up the other staircase. We sort of bumped, he seemed agitated, you get a sense of things out on the street.”

“So you bumped on the staircase and he was grumpy. So you searched him?” Danny asked.

“No! Kind of, aren’t you supposed to object when he puts words in my mouth.” Officer Digletz glared at Angela.

“My apologies officer, just one more question then. Where on my client's body was the torn cloth? How did you see it?” Danny stepped back to his table and waited.

“It was stuck on his leg.”

“Is that absolutely true? I think you phrased it differently in your case notes?”

“The torn cloth was stuck to his boot and his pants. Mostly his boot.”

Danny took a moment pantomiming deep thought. When the courtroom was just the right quiet he said.

“Are you out of your mind? We all have to walk around in New York streets. You walk around in New York’s streets. A piece of stained cloth is far from the worst thing I have tracked home with me.” There was a smattering of giggling. Danny smiled at the jury. A couple of the jury members checked their shoes.

“It is not like that, the blood matches.” Officer Digletz said.

“I motion for dismissal of this case. The cloth is undeniably the fruit of the poisonous tree. There is a complete lack of foundation. My client is only guilty of having evidence

stuck to the bottom of his shoe. He could have stepped on it anywhere.”

“That is not fair,” Officer Digletz said.

“What is not fair Officer Digletz. Is my client having his fourth amendment rights violated? Don't you agree?” Danny looked up at the judge, he also agreed.

“You picked up the evidence with your fingers, held it until a detective could arrive and then you handed it to said detective. Who I generously assume put the torn denim into a proper evidence bag. I reassert that my client's only crime was stepping in it. What is to keep me from assuming that you picked up the cloth at the scene, your chivalry kicked in, you had to find a perp. You carried the cloth to your next call and dropped it in the hallway. Or you saw my client and got a gut feeling he was a bad guy. A hundred other stories make as much sense as this tale of inadequacy we are being asked to countenance as truth.

Your honor any evidence obtained stemming from the torn cloth has to be stricken from the record, the prosecution has no untainted evidence. There is only one recourse, the case has to be dismissed.” Danny looked humbly toward the bench. He no longer needed the jury but you could see that they believed him.

“Is this true Ms. Bennett? Do you have any evidence that is not tied to a piece of torn cloth allegedly found stuck to a man's shoe?” Judge Clinton leaned forward onto his elbows, gavel raised.

“No your honor, the bloody denim is the crux of our case, a lucky find that unfortunately, was not followed up with good police work.” Another concession speech, another guilty man free to pursue his nefarious plans until the next time he gets caught. ‘We will get you eventually’ should become the motto

of the New York Justice industry. Maybe Ms. Harbuckle could work up a logo.

“Even if we did come to a guilty verdict, there is no way such a verdict would stand up to appeal. The chain of evidence is thoroughly tainted, the police fumbled their responsibilities at nearly every turn.” Judge Clinton turned to speak directly to Officer Digletz. “I have no choice but to dismiss the charge against the defendant.

Alice jumped from her seat reached over the banister and started strangling Scott in her own loving way. Danny Lawrence beamed.

chapter three

Waleed Ovasse

OTIS GRIPPED HIS COFFEE mug with determination. That's what he'd taken to calling it to make himself feel better for the probable carpal tunnel he was giving himself. The thermos was slightly warm, as he'd been sipping on it lightly for most of the morning. He sighed as he took another sip.

He sat on a park bench across from the Court building, laying out the pieces to the conversation that was about to happen. While he was here on official business from the Mayor's office, the entire meeting could appear like a shake down rather than a gentle nudge. Although, he reminded himself, that after 12 years in the Marines, he wasn't sure if he really understood what gentle meant.

He took a swig and swung himself up from the bench and crossed the street. The issue was that he was just an aide to the Mayor. While it would be uncouth for the Mayor to lead this meeting, Otis almost felt like a second hand goon. He waved himself past the security guards, flashing his badge as necessary and nodding with propriety and authority before ascending multiple sets of old marble stairs. Judge Andrew

Clinton kept his chambers almost hidden in the back of the building. Otis had heard stories of how Judge Clinton hated to be disturbed. Which was why Otis had decided not to make an appointment. Even though the entire affair would be short, he wanted his presence to have some impact.

He rounded the last corner of one of the back hallways and found himself in front of the doors to Judge Clinton's chambers. Sitting at a desk just in front of the doors, Otis presumed, was Judge Clinton's judicial intern.

"Good afternoon, may I help you?" she asked, looking up from a large stack of papers.

"Afternoon," mumbled Otis, taking another sip of coffee. He checked his watch with a flourish. "I believe Judge Clinton should be returning to his chambers in a few minutes. His last case for the day should be wrapping up shortly."

"While that may be the case, is there anything I can help you with? Do you have an appointment?" she asked.

Otis smiled and stretched out his hand. "Otis Johnson. I'm here to see Judge Clinton."

She shook his hand lightly, taking her hand back immediately. "Kirsty Anderson, Judge Clinton's clerk. I don't see you on his appointments for today. I don't know if he'll be able to see you."

"I understand, however I am from the Mayor's office. I suspect he will want to see me."

"From the...Mayor's office," she mumbled. He watched her make the connections in her head, before she moved her stack of papers and looked at her calendar. "You could have made an appointment," she snapped. "Judge Clinton is very busy."

"I felt it would be better to just drop in and say hello. He and I, and the Mayor too, go way, way back," replied Otis. He

took another swig of coffee, hoping that this conversation would be over shortly. “I could just wait for him here, or perhaps in his office.”

“No, no, his office won’t do. He doesn’t like that,” she replied, gesturing to a chair by the wall. “Just wait here and he’ll see you as soon as he can.”

“Not a problem,” answered Otis. He dropped into the chair.

“May I ask what this meeting is regarding? I’d like to write something down about it all,” asked Kirsty.

Otis thought for a second, contemplating denying her request all together. The meeting was strictly off the books for a reason. But from experience, he knew that lawyers liked to take notes. He took a sip of coffee. “Law and Order,” he replied. He watched her scribble it down on a notepad.

“Law. And. Order,” she repeated, as she wrote.

“I’m absolutely loving the new season. I thought the Judge might have some useful critiques and we could compare notes. Fantastic show.”

She looked up from his notepad and glared. “I see,” she replied. “Sounds extremely important.”

“Oh, I promise you, it is of the utmost importance.” Otis sat back and closed his eyes, taking another sip of coffee. If his timing was right, it would only be a few more minutes before the Judge walked through the doors.

Judge Andrew Clinton wasn’t a large man by any means, he was shorter and pudgier than Otis, but there was something about his mousey hair and build that gave off a sense of having lived and worked in a court room for a long time. He came off as authoritative and judicial. Especially, as Otis’s eyes snapped open to see Judge Clinton standing above him.

“Good morning Otis,” said Judge Clinton, sneaking a smile. “I hope I haven’t made you wait too long.”

“Not at all, not at all,” replied Otis, getting up from his chair. “I wasn’t sleeping anyway.”

“Right, right, Just resting your eyes,” replied Judge Clinton. He waved Otis into his office and winked at Kirsty. “Block off 3-4 minutes for this meeting Kirsty. Then come and remind me that the Mayor’s office also has things to do today.”

“Yes sir,” replied Kirsty, smiling.

Judge Clinton closed his chamber’s doors and sat behind his desk, rearranging the papers in front of him. “And how may I help the Mayor’s office this evening,” asked Judge Clinton.

“The Mayor is concerned, Judge Clinton,” replied Otis. He took another sip of coffee, realizing that it had now gone cold. He took a larger gulp, using the luke warm bitterness to push him forward. “The Mayor is very concerned. Between the Moore hit and run case the other day, and your general numbers, he and I are very concerned.”

“Which one is more important Otis, he or you, or I?” Judge Clinton replied.

“This is serious sir.”

Clinton looked up from his papers. “Remember which side of this desk you’re sitting on.”

“Yes sir.”

“Proceed with whatever you’re here for, Otis.”

“Your conviction rate is down, sir.”

“Laws are laws. People don’t always break the law.”

“The Mayor ran on a platform to increase law and order. Safer streets, safer homes.”

“Good show, too, right?” smirked Judge Clinton.

Otis sighed. “Your term is expiring at the end of the year,

and without the Mayor's support, re-appointment will be difficult."

"I think you mean impossible," replied Judge Clinton. He pushed himself back from his desk and leaned back in his chair. "Proceed, Otis."

"Convictions are down. Law and Order. We need to get back to that. The Mayor wants to make sure that you remember that." Otis could feel that he was losing traction and relevance in the conversation.

"Anything else that the Mayor wants me to remember? Perhaps the Mayor's office could send me a memo every week, or maybe even every day."

Otis took another gulp of cold coffee. This wasn't going the way he had expected. "Your tone in the Scott Moore case was inappropriate, sir."

"Now we get to it. I acquitted the man, and I know his history with you, and with the Mayor, and with the Mayor's campaign. And you're upset with my...tone?"

"Yes, sir."

"I acquitted him, Otis."

"Yes, sir. You did."

"Do you know why I acquitted the man? Because of the law."

"Yes sir."

Judge Clinton got up from his chair, indicating that the meeting was over. Otis looked at his watch. He had expected it to last a little longer than it had.

"The Mayor's Office would like to remind you that law and order are important to this City and to the Mayor. We would like to remind you that an increase in conviction, to create safer streets and safer homes is important to us, and a goal for this Mayor's administration," said Otis, stretching out his hand.

Judge Clinton looked at Otis's outstretched hand and declined to take it. "And I'd like to remind the Mayor's office that I have other options."

"I apologize, sir. I don't understand."

"It means I won't be putting innocent people in jail, Otis."

"Yes sir."

"The door's behind you. Have a great day. I have important work to return to," said Judge Clinton. He sat back down his chair and began rummaging through his stacks of paper.

Otis stood, staring at the Judge for a moment before turning on his heel and retreating. Kirsty sat at her desk and looked up at he walked out. "Have a great evening and enjoy the new season!" she said as he walked out.

The humid evening air hit him as he walked onto the street. He had gone into the Judge's chambers with a purpose, and although he hadn't wanted to shake the Judge down, he had a feeling the Judge had shaken him down. It wasn't clear if the Mayor's message for the Judge had sunk in. He took a deep breath. At least the Judge understood that the Moore case was important. The rest of it though, was a little unclear.

He walked towards the Mayor's office, deciding to take the long route as he tried to come up with how he'd explain the meeting to the Mayor. Hopefully, he wouldn't be shaken down again.

chapter four

Chelsea Fuchs

“PLEASE RISE, THE HONORABLE Judge Andrew Clinton presiding.” The bailiffs voice filled the room and echoed off the back wall. Judge Andrew Clinton made his way out of chambers and towards the bench. He took his job seriously, it had become more than just a job. It had become a passion. The conversation with Otis Johnson chewed at the back of his conscious as he pushed the thoughts away and began to get his mind ready for the long day ahead. Pre-trial mornings always dragged on but he needed to stay alert and at least appear to be focused. If the Mayor wanted higher conviction percentages, well that would just depend on the evidence, now wouldn’t it.

Judge Clinton looked down from his seat and across the court room. He watched as his judicial intern came from chambers and made her way towards him. Ms Anderson handed him his itinerary for the day and as he looked at the cases on his docket and then across the courtroom. The room seemed busier than he expected for a simple pre-trial motion. The standard crew of convicts, rebel rouser's and noise makers

at on one side of the court room. Smartly dressed men and women not usual for these types of proceedings sat on the other.

As the bailiff swore in and instructed the jury, Judge Clinton's mind was anywhere but on this case. He looked at the man in front of him. According to the paperwork, Joel Saunders was an architect. He was very well dressed for court and the stress of the situation didn't seem to have affected him at all. Perhaps it was the smirk that the young man wore on his face that rubbed the judge the wrong way.

As the proceedings moved forward it was business as usual. This Joel Saunders fellow was being charged for rape. Judge Clinton took off his glasses and rubbed at the bridge of his nose. This case had the potential to be a media circus depending on how slow the days headlines were. He slid his glasses back on and looked down at the man who dressed like a banker but looked like a body builder.

"How do you plead? Guilty or not guilty?" Judge Chambers scribbled a note for a hot cup of coffee to be waiting in his chambers.

Joel Saunders rose before he placed his hands on the table and leaned forward. "Guilty."

"Your honor," Angela Bennett interrupted the proceeding as she stood to address him.

"Ms. Bennet?"

"The prosecution believes it would be in the best interest to accept the plea deal."

Judge Clinton looked down at his docket again. As clear as black and white a plea bargain had not been entered into the court prior to the trial. This was not how things were done in

his court. He glared at Ms. Anderson as his gaze searched the courtroom before settling back on Angela Bennett.

“Counselors, a word in my chambers.”

Judge Clinton stormed from his courtroom out the side door, his robes an angry dog, yapping at his heels. The two counselors followed in his wake. Kirsty quickly gave him a steaming cup of freshly brewed coffee before exiting the room. He slammed the coffee down before he flung out his robes behind him and sat in his chair behind the ancient oak desk. It had been in his family for generations and that seemed to ground him somehow. What he did, on a day to day basis was going to affect people for generations to come. He didn’t take his job as judge lightly and he would not be made a mockery of. The smell of the freshly brewed coffee pulled at his attention but he would not be dissuaded.

He glared at the lawyers across from him.

“This is not how we do things in my courtroom. We do not just do our own thing. There are policies and procedures in place and I should reject this plea straight off because you ignored these policies and procedures. I don’t like being surprised in general and I especially don’t like being surprise in my own courtroom.” His booming voice filled the space. He reached up to loosen his tie before shaking his right arm. Deep breaths, he needed to take deep breaths.

Angela calmly sat in one of the two chairs on the other side of the desk. She folded her hands into her lap and crossed her heels beneath her chair. “Your honor,” she began as she looked from the judge to the defense attorney and back again. “We believe this is the best use of the courts time.”

“The best use of the courts time would be to follow procedure and to give me a heads up when you’re planning on

changing your plea more than a moment beforehand.”

Angela nodded her head in agreement as she placed her hands on the desk and leaned forward. “This was a last minute plea bargain, and really is in the best interest of the state.”

Judge Clinton downed his cup of coffee. “Is it? Is it really? With all the high profile rape cases going on in the city right now, how will this one not be taken as sweeping another one under the rug. Look at this guy. A pretty boy who can do whatever he likes and argue it down to a simple assault? How is that going to look to the press.”

“Your Honor, while I agree that the optics look bad, this will be tied up in the courts for months, if not years. He’s already admitted his guilt. He’s willing to say that he did wrong and take responsibility for his actions.”

The judge picked up the terms of the plea deal. “Simple assault and time served? That’s good for the state?”

He threw the papers onto his desk and they fluttered across the dark wood surface. What a joke! It was up to him to decide if the guy should stand trial or walk away with a hand slap.

“Sir, I know how this looks, I really do. But I believe it’s the states best option. There is evidence that he roughed up the victim. But the circumstantial evidence is not what it should be to drive a conviction. In addition, if we accept some of the evidence, it could start a dangerous precedence. Rape is wrong, and should be punished, but we have to make sure that we’re punishing the right person, not just an easy target.”

Judge Clinton’s stomach rolled. What if the victim had been his own daughter? What would he want the judge to do in his place? He was in that place. He wanted to nail the twerp to the wall. He wanted the opportunity for the evidence to be

heard and for a jury of this man's peers to judge him and his actions.

"Sir," Angela's voice cut through his thoughts. "We have spoke to the victim and she's agreed with this course of action. This will free up the courts time to go after criminals we have hard evidence to convict. It will save the tax payers unknown amounts of money. Again sir, it is in the states best interest."

"As long as it doesn't turn around to bite me in the butt," he muttered as he dismissed the lawyers from his chambers and made his way back to the courtroom.

After giving a quick summary of the conference in chambers, the judge continued with the court proceedings.

"I understand there is a plea bargain agreement in this case. If for some reason I choose to reject this agreement, any plea you have entered may be withdrawn and a plea of not guilty may be entered to the charges. Is that understood?"

Judge Clinton watched Angela strain to hold back her objection. But there were policies and procedures and those must be followed. There would be no fault placed on his court.

Through gritted teeth Judge Clinton asked the defendant if he understood the terms of the plea deal. Joel shook his head that he understood.

"Is this your signature on the plea?" Judge Clinton took a deep cleansing breath.

"Yes, your honor."

He then looked to the defense lawyer. "Does your client have a rational and practical understanding of the proceedings?"

"Yes, your honor."

Several questions about competency and understanding of

the process continued back and forth and the terms of the plea bargain were read to the court for the record.

His hands were tied. What more could he do?

“Mr. Joel Saunders, you are charged with simple assault. How do you plea?”

“Guilty, sir.”

Judge Clinton took off his glasses once more, rubbing the bridge of his nose, before putting them back on again.

“I will accept your plea of guilty.”

After reviewing the paperwork one last time, Judge Clinton spoke.

“Joel Saunders, you are pleading guilty to simple assault. You are sentenced to time served and are free to go.”

The resounding cheers from the courtroom surprised the judge. That was not the reaction he was expecting. Only a slight figure in the third row drew the judge’s attention. She appeared in stark contrast to those around her.

The judge sat back in his chair on the bench feeling completely defeated. The mayor would be getting his conviction percentage after all, just not the way it should be done.

chapter five

John S

CLINTON SAT AT THE desk in his chambers, thinking about what Johnson had said.

He thought about it, and he frowned, and he thought about it some more. Thinking about it was, he realised, fruitless. The number of convictions wasn't something he could control, it was up to the Police and the DA to bring plausible, compelling cases to trial. Cases with the right amount of evidence, following due process, which could realistically secure convictions. It wasn't for him to plug the gaps in their shoddy work.

"I have the courage of my convictions," he said aloud to the empty office, and tried to think about something else. Maybe he should -

There was a knock at the door. Distraction. Just what he needed.

"Come in," he said.

Kirsty Anderson came into the room.

"Can I have a minute?" she asked.

"Sure, no problem," he replied, trying to keep the relief

from his voice.

Anderson carefully closed the door behind her, looking slightly nervous as she approached the desk.

“Everything okay?” Clinton asked. “Are you -”

“No, *I’m* okay,” Anderson said, shaking her head, “but I just heard something that I thought you should know about too, and so I ... ”

She shrugged, and sat down, facing Clinton across his desk. She took a breath, as if marshalling her thoughts, and then spoke.

“Okay. Right, look it could be a coincidence, but... you know how I talk to people who are interning in other places, right?”

“Yes,” Clinton lied. It made sense that she would do so, though he’d never given it any kind of thought - but he didn’t want to stop her when she was clearly just getting started. “I think you’ve mentioned it.”

“Okay, good,” Anderson said, with a nod. “It’s just that I was talking earlier with my friend Cal, who’s interning in Missing Persons, and he told me something about a new case they’re looking into, and ... look, I think you’re probably entitled to know this anyway, but it *is* about an ongoing investigation, so if we can treat this as kind of confidential, that would be useful.”

“That’s not a problem,” Clinton said, and gestured to the walls around them, as if being in his chambers immediately conferred some kind of legal privilege on anything said in the room. “I won’t talk about who I heard anything from, if that’s the issue.”

“Thank you, yes,” Anderson said. “Just don’t want to get Cal - or me - into any kind of trouble, though I should imagine the case will soon be public knowledge. But, the thing

you need to know is this: you remember Scott Moore, from that hit and run case? The one where -”

“The case I dismissed because of ... an illegal search, wasn’t it?”

“That’s the one,” Anderson nodded. “Moore was the defendant, and -”

“If I remember,” Clinton cut in, an edge to his voice, “a lot of the case wasn’t about the defendant, was it? It focused mainly on the victim, the eight year old boy, because...”

“...because he was Mark Solerno. Yes.”

Neither of them spoke, but their eyes met.

“And,” Clinton said, “I’ve got a sneaking suspicion that your friend in Missing Persons, Clark -”

“- Cal -”

“- *Cal*, told you something about Scott Moore ... being a missing person?”

Please let me be wrong, Clinton thought, but the look in Anderson’s eyes told him that hope was in vain.

“His wife called it in - he didn’t come home,” Anderson said.

“Hmm,” Clinton said. “It would be great if I could think he was missing like Agatha Christie, not missing like Jimmy Hoffa, but-”

“Who?”

“It doesn’t matter,” Clinton said, irritably. “I mean, I hope he’s coming back. From wherever he is.”

“I don’t know anything else, but I asked Cal to try and find out more for me if he can...”

“Right,” Clinton said, nodding slowly. “Okay. Thank you Kirsty, this is - well, it’s not good news, but it’s good *to know*. The sequence of events doesn’t look good, does it? Man kills son of mob boss in hit and run, and when his case is

dismissed on a technicality, the man vanishes? It's not hard to imagine what might have happened..."

Clinton ran a hand over his face, and took a breath.

"Anything else I should know about it?" he asked.

"That's all I know right now," Anderson said. "I don't how quickly Cal will be able to tell me anything else, he's in the office today, but I -"

"No, that's fine," Clinton said. "Whatever you can find out - it would be useful to know what the police are doing about this..."

Clinton thought for a moment, then sat back in his chair.

"In fact," he said firmly, "we shouldn't have to wait to find out more about this. I'll speak to someone about it."

Anderson's eyes widened, anxiously.

"I -"

"Not like that," Clinton held up a hand. "I don't mean someone in Missing Persons, they'd only ask about my source. I'm thinking I'll talk to the Police Commissioner. And don't worry, I'll make sure that he doesn't know how I found out about it."

"If you could..." Anderson said, "thank you."

"No, thank *you*," Clinton replied, meaning it. "This is something I needed to hear about. I'm glad you - and your friend - made the connection between the two cases. Because other people will make the link soon enough. And if the police aren't all over Moore's disappearance, it'll look like they're happy to let Solerno and his friends do pretty much whatever they want. And that's not a message we should be sending."

"Agreed," Anderson said. "Well, thanks for this, I guess I'd better get back to..."

She pointed over her shoulder, towards the door and the

office beyond.

“Of course,” Clinton said, and as she stood to leave he looked at the phone on his desk, but then changed his mind. “Actually, Kirsty, could you do one thing for me? Could you call the Commissioner’s office and tell them I’ll be by to see the Commissioner in ... oh, about half an hour?”

“Certainly,” Anderson said. “Do you want me to arrange a cab?”

“No need, I’ll take my chances and hail one.”

“All right - and if the Commissioner’s Office asks what you want to talk about, what should I say?”

“Just tell them...” Clinton considered for a moment. “Tell them it’s confidential.”

Outside the building, on Centre Street, taxis seemed to be in short supply, and Clinton began to wonder if he’d made a mistake in not getting Anderson to phone a service for him.

But after a couple of minutes, he saw one coming his way, waved it down, and climbed in.

He gave the driver the address, and sat back in the cab’s rear seat, glad for the air conditioning.

“Hot enough for you?” the driver said from beyond the plastic screen that separated them, and smiled as if he was the first person ever to say that line. He glanced at Clinton in the rear view. “Only May, but feels like summer. Is this that global warming I saw about on the news, maybe?”

“Could be,” Clinton said, trying to put a strong dose of no-I-don’t-want-to-make-small-talk into his tone. It didn’t work.

“I think you’re right,” the driver said, apparently answering himself. “Hardly had any rain either, and - oh, no, hang on, I’m thinking of April. April Showers, that’s what they call

it...”

Clinton realised it wasn't really a conversation, and that his contribution was only expected to be the occasional noise of agreement, so he left a tiny bit of his brain to listen to the driver's monologue - which was mainly on the topic of the weather, and the occasional dash of sharp criticism of the driving of others on the road today - and set to thinking about the conversation he'd be having once he arrived at his destination.

His previous dealings with Police Commissioner Thompson had been mixed - they shared the dubious delight of both being appointed by the Mayor, with all the tensions and uncertainties that involved. But apart from that, they had little in common when it came to their approach - past interactions with Thompson had left Clinton in no doubt that the Commissioner was skilled at playing the political game. More than once, he had he wondered if in Thompson's case the police motto 'to protect and serve' referred to protecting and serving the public, or just himself.

“Oh, will you look at this?” the driver shouted suddenly, gesturing at the road ahead as he brought the cab to a sudden stop. “What the hell's this? Looks like it's backed up all the way to the Helmsley Hotel, what a nightmare. Could be here a while...”

The driver shrugged, but Clinton noticed that he didn't move, or even offer, to switch off the meter.

Given the way his day was going, the prospect of paying to sit in the back of the cab and endure more conversation about the weather was too much for Clinton to bear.

“I'll walk from here. Thanks,” he said, and pushed a couple of bills through the gap in the screen and got out before the driver could say anything.

It was warmer outside, but Clinton thought he could cover the remaining handful of blocks and still be there in decent time, so he started to walk.

By the time Clinton arrived, it was more like forty minutes than the thirty he'd asked Anderson to predict, but on arrival he was expected and welcomed as if he was on time, and an assistant escorted him to the Commissioner's office.

As the Commissioner wasn't strictly a sworn member of the police force, he'd taken it upon himself to keep his office as far away as possible from most of the other officers in the building. The assistant led Clinton down a corridor, away from the overpopulated open plan area where the tired and burdened officer, like the discarded paper cups on their messy desks, were generally crumpled, with a mix of coffee and cigarettes inside.

The brass sign on the door to the Commissioner's office caught the light as the assistant opened the door and led Clinton inside, the footfalls making no sound on the thick carpet underfoot.

"Andrew," Thompson said from the other side of a large wooden desk.

He stood and extended a hand, smiling a smile which didn't reach his eyes, and seemed *tight*, somehow. His clothes and haircut looked similarly restrained, as if something was holding him in, making him act unnaturally. Perfect, Clinton thought, for a man who might run for some kind of office in the coming years.

"Joseph," Clinton replied brightly as they shook hands. He knew Thompson preferred to be called Joe, as it made him seem like more of a normal guy, a *regular Joe*, and so he made a point of not doing that. "Great to see you. That's a very nice

tie.”

Both of these observations were lies, and Clinton didn't make much effort to make them sound plausible.

“Very kind,” Thompson said, with equal insincerity. “Please, sit.”

Clinton did so.

“So, what's on your mind?”

“It's a bit of follow-up to a case you might remember,” Clinton said. “Case against Moore, the hit and run. Led to the death of a young boy - Tony Solerno's boy, in fact.”

“Ah,” Thompson said, nodding slowly. “I do remember that one. Nasty business. But wasn't that case thrown out? If I recall, it -”

“That's right,” Clinton said. “Illegal search. Fourth amendment violation, so I had to dismiss.”

“Oh yes,” Thompson said flatly.

“The thing is,” Clinton said, and leaned forward in his chair, “the defendant in that case has - well, it's come to my attention that he's gone missing.”

“Missing.”

“That's right. Do you know any more about this? About what's being done to look into it, I mean?”

“I understand why you're asking, Andrew,” Thompson said slowly, as if each word was being carefully selected. “I really do, but let me be honest with you...”

And that was when it happened.

Clinton had been a judge for almost a decade, and had worked as a criminal defence attorney before that, and he'd seen it in people's eyes so many times now, he knew what to look out for; it wasn't just the words ‘let me be honest with you’, which more often than not meant that the person was about to tell a lie, but it was also the tiny, momentary change

in the eyes: sometimes their gaze darted away for a second, sometimes they narrowed for a fraction before going back to normal, and sometimes it was just that they started blinking a little bit more than before. It varied, but the years had taught Clinton to watch for it as it was a Poker tell. And it always meant one thing: *this person is not telling the truth*. Or, at least, they were hiding something.

And so when Thompson stopped meeting Clinton's eye and his gaze darted - just for a splinter of a second - to the phone on his desk, Clinton felt the certainty run through him like a slow electric shock.

He's not telling me everything.

"I'm almost embarrassed to admit it, but I really don't know more about this than you do," Thompson said with a shrug. "I had an update about it myself about, oh, an hour ago, but other than that..."

He left the sentence hanging and looked Clinton directly in the eye, as if daring him to challenge what had been said.

"Hey, no need to feel embarrassed," Clinton said, with a warmth he didn't feel, "you can't keep on top of every case in the city, after all."

"Thanks for your understanding," Thompson said, and sat back in his chair. "And *I* understand *your* concern - I mean, it looks bad, doesn't it? Suspect in a case about the death of a young boy doesn't go to jail - doesn't even go to *trial* - and then he vanishes. Looks like someone might have taken revenge against a child-killer, I know."

"Not just any child, of course," Clinton said, "the son of Tony Solerno, a man who knows a lot of people with the skills to make someone disappear."

"There *is* that aspect of it," Thompson said. "Certainly adds an extra urgency to the case. I'll make sure we look right

into it. Best officers on the case, that kind of thing.”

“I’d appreciate it,” Clinton said.

“Not a problem,” Thompson smiled. “Now, I don’t want to say *I told you so* or anything, but of course if this case had gone to trial and Moore had been convicted, well, we wouldn’t be having this little talk, would we? Safe inside a cell, where no harm could -”

“I had to throw the case out,” Clinton said, with a shake of the head. “Ignoring the fact that it’s a constitutional violation, if I hadn’t, some lawyer would have brought it up later on, and ... well, probably the same result. We both know that.”

“Maybe, but yet another dent in your possible conviction rate, which can’t be good with less than a year until your reappointment date ...”

Thompson left the thought hanging, and Clinton’s mind raced: *had Thompson been speaking to Johnson? Did he have the ear of the mayor’s aide? Why would they be talking about his reappointment?*

Keeping his expression steady as these thoughts tumbled around his mind, Clinton looked at Thompson, hard, and without blinking. For a moment he thought he saw something flicker in Thompson’s eyes, as if he realised he’d said too much, or stepped over the line ... but then it was gone.

“As I say, Andrew,” Thompson said, casually, “I’ll make sure we do everything we can on this. But it’s a missing persons case, and in a city the size of New York, there’s only so much we can do. I mean, investigating a murder or assault, we’ve got a body we can look at, but when someone’s missing, the only evidence you have is nothing. The gap where they ought to be. And that makes it a lot harder to track them down.”

“I appreciate that,” Clinton said, “and I appreciate you’ll do all you can. Thanks for your time, Joseph, it’s been useful, and

I hope you'll keep me informed about the hunt for Scott Moore, that would be ... reassuring."

"Of course," Thompson nodded, and Clinton stood, ready to leave.

"Again," Clinton said, "thanks for your time."

"My pleasure," Thompson said, and they shook hands.

"We'll speak soon, I hope," Clinton said as he walked towards the door, and as he put his hand on the handle, Thompson couldn't resist having the last word.

"Yes, I'll try to - what was it? Ah, yes - to *reassure* you," he said, and even without turning, Clinton knew he was smiling as he added: "but I think we both know it's likely that Moore will never be found."

Clinton didn't turn round, didn't give him the satisfaction of seeing the look on his face.

He turned the door handle, and stepped out of the office. And, resisting the temptation that burned inside him, he did not slam the door.

chapter six

Tim Edwards-Hart

JUDGE ANDREW CLINTON STARED at the closed door to his chambers. He knew he had work to do, but he couldn't settle. He was restless and just wanted to pull on his track gear and go for a run. Instead, he stared at his door and steepled his fingers to his mouth.

When Andrew first met Amy all those years ago, she helped him learn to recognise these moments. He had always been strictly rational, applying logic to whatever problems he faced. Amy taught him to use his intuition as another source to inform his logic. At first he thought it was hippy nonsense but she was hot, and he was young, so he thought he would play along. She taught him to slow down, breathe, and pay close attention to what he felt and what he thought. Not why, only what. As he spent more time with her that summer, he began to notice that sometimes he really did feel things before he knew them. One of the first things he came to know from pausing to pay attention was what he really felt about Amy. He proposed the next day. Twenty-something years of marriage later showed it worked.

Over time, Andrew began to think of these moments as his subconscious noticing something that his conscious mind was yet to recognise. The same process of slowing down and paying attention to what he felt lead him to leave his private practice to work for the New York courts. Later it lead him to seek nomination, and hence be elected, to the judiciary. When he paid attention to these moments, it paid off.

Andrew's fingers tapped absently on his lower lip. What had he noticed this time? What was he feeling? What were the thoughts that came unbidden?

"It's not right." He surprised himself by saying the words out loud.

What wasn't right? He could feel the truth of the thought – something definitely felt wrong. He really noticed it after the Moore case. At first he thought it was because of the case itself. The initial brief and evidence submitted to the court seemed straightforward, but the whole case was dropped because of a technicality. Despite his personal misgivings, the legalities were clear and he had applied the rule of law to the facts presented.

"Not the *why*, the *what*."

He wasn't really bothered by why the case was dropped, or even that someone who was probably guilty avoided trial – he didn't like it, but it wasn't the issue. No, what really bugged him was that this was yet another case before him that had ended prematurely. It seemed there were a lot of cases like this recently. There was the missing evidence in the Lancaster case, the endless plea bargaining of Johnson and the Reynolds cases. And the Jackman case. He could think of at least half a dozen cases like these.

Andrew didn't think he'd seen even a dozen such cases in the previous thirty years, yet here were now a dozen in less

than a year.

Judge Andrew Clinton lowered his hands and picked up his phone.

“Julie, find the new intern and ask her to see me. Soon as possible. I have a task for her.”

Kirsty was startled when Judge Clinton’s secretary called her to say he wanted to see her straight away. She dropped what she was doing and raced to his chambers, convincing herself on the way that he was going to fire her. She must have looked a state when she arrived as she could barely keep her voice steady and couldn’t sit down. To hide her nerves, she stood in front of an Andy Warhol painting and pretended to look at it. The secretary — Julie (bless her) — wasn’t fooled and offered a glass of water. Without waiting for a reply, she brought it over and whispered, “It’s OK, he’s got a job for you.” Kirsty almost fainted with relief.

Now she was sitting in his chambers, waiting to hear what Judge Clinton wanted her to do. She suddenly remembered the rumours about some of the other judges, and was doubly grateful for Julie’s words of comfort.

Judge Clinton still hadn’t spoken, he sat there looking at her, fingers pressed to his chin. Kirsty waited, eyes scanning the volumes of legal texts filling the bookcases that lined his walls.

“Kirsty.”

She blinked at him in surprise. This was the first time she had heard him say her name since they were introduced on her first day.

“I need your research skills, but this task is a little... different.

“Something’s not right. As servants of the court we are

tasked with ensuring that the law is applied fairly and dispassionately according to the facts presented before us. But something's not right."

He held up a file. Kirsty recognised it from the Moore case.

"It's unlike the police prosecution team to screw up, so find out why this case went wrong. And if there's time, tell me if there's any reason to suspect a link with any other cases, starting with these." He held up a piece of paper with some handwritten notes on it.

"I need you to be discreet. And I need you to be fast. Any questions?"

"Anything I should be looking for? Is there something you want me to find?"

"What I *want* you to find is nothing, but I think you'll find more than that. Beyond that, all I know is that every single one of these cases was withdrawn and I'm no longer convinced that was because of the reasons put before the court. Start with this one," he handed her the Moore file, "but I want you to know about the others in case it helps. Let me know as soon as you have something to report."

It took less than two days for Kirsty to find what she was looking for. In her excitement, she stood beside Judge Clinton's chair as she laid out her findings on his desk.

"The police left out crucial evidence in their submissions to the court. Look..." She pointed to a copy of a police report on the table.

"The officers on the scene report that Scott Moore initially agreed to talk with them, but then attempted to run when they asked about Mark Salerno. So we have implied consent, then probable cause. But also the officers could see what looked like blood stained clothing in the hallway behind him – which

is probably why he tried to run. According to Maryland and Macon, 1985, a search is lawful if the items are in plain view.

“The implied consent argument might not hold, but the probable cause and visible items are both strong reasons for police to enter the premises. But none of this was presented to the court. Without it, then the only logical conclusion is that there was a breach of Moore’s Fourth Amendment rights – which was your finding when you dismissed the case.”

Judge Clinton sat back in his chair.

“Any links to others?”

“Maybe. I haven’t had time follow up, but there is a possible link with at least two so far.”

“Go on.”

“Well, the father of the boy who was killed is Tony Salerno. He is thought to be a mob boss, but if we stick to the known facts, he’s a businessman. He runs a waste management company, and a consulting business. One of the cases you listed involved one of his staff, but the case was dropped when the evidence was lost. Tony’s consulting business is to local unions. And one of the plea bargaining cases involved a union rep. And Scott Moore has disappeared since his case was dismissed. None of this is evidence, but it seems a strange coincidence. The question is, ‘Why?’”

“No not why, only what. Always focus on the what.”

chapter seven

Nick Calvert

“WHAT TIME DOES IT leave? Uh huh... Okay Jason, I’ll see you there.”

Danny Lawrence frowned as he replaced the receiver, glanced out of his office window and muttered a curse; the traffic was crawling.

He told Maybel, his personal assistant, to re-arrange his day’s appointments, except for the last one; his daily briefing with Frank Cole.

“Can I tell them why?”

“No, sorry.” Danny said, and smiled to lessen the sting. Maybel liked to be in the know and when she wasn’t his coffee often arrived weak, and in a chipped mug. She was far too efficient to sack.

An hour later he pulled into a customer parking bay by pier 3, Sheepshead bay.

Jason Fishman watched from the deck of the Princess Of The Sea as Danny parked his Porche. Watched as Danny walked over to the booking office as the bright red car’s soft top

locked into place. Jason wasn't envious per se. Sure, he'd have liked a Porche, but this was New York, and there were far too many scuzzoids who took pleasure in demolishing other peoples' toys.

Ten minutes later Danny, wearing cut-off jeans and an old NYU T-shirt, arrived beside him at the railing on the upper deck.

"So, why..." Danny said in a loud voice.

"Shh. We'll be underway soon, then we can talk."

"Uh huh. You know you're a tad paranoid, Jason?"

"I do, and it's for good reason."

They'd met in the seventies at the beginning of their first year at New York University. Both had been taking law, but only Danny had had an end goal in sight. Together they'd plumbed the depths of student debauchery and become the best of friends. In their third year Danny had fallen for Annabeth while Jason had had an offer he couldn't refuse and had dropped out.

Side by side they leant on the railing and watched as the bow and stern cables were released. The boat backed slowly away from the jetty, then turned towards the open sea. There was a squark from the tannoy.

"This is the captain. I'd like to welcome you all aboard the Princess Of The Sea and our ten o'clock Dolphin and Whale watching excursion. The trip will last three hours and if yesterday was any indication there is a large pod of dolphins in the bay.

"We have a snack bar and gift shop in the aft cabin. And as it's forecast to be another sweltering record breaking day, may I remind you all to keep hydrated. The snack bar serves a deliciously refreshing iced tea, and for those who forgot their cameras they have disposable ones at a very reasonable price.

“We will be on station in under an hour. I wish you all a pleasant voyage.”

The passengers started milling about and Jason decided it was safe to talk.

“You ever seen the Gene Hackman flick ‘The Conversation?’”

“What? No,” Danny said, confused, “fraid I haven’t. Why?”

“It’s about a surveillance expert who can capture conversations anywhere. Literally. He has help, of course, but that’s not the point.”

“And the point is?”

“The point is that I didn’t want anyone overhearing us. Frank Cole is fucked, and I really, really don’t want to see you end up in an orange jump suit, too.”

“They’re close then?” Danny asked.

“You know I had the hots for Annabeth, once?” Jason said.

Danny barked a laugh, and grinned. “Me too, Jason. Me too. She’s free and living high on my dollar, if you’re still interested.”

“Na. My point is you always have to temper your expectations with the possibility or maybe the certainty that you’ll end up disappointed.

“Remember that Barber we used to go to?”

“Close shave Brian the razor?”

“Yep. Well, they’re as close to Frank Cole as that.”

“Fuck!” Danny said as he thumped the railing.

“Yeah. Sorry I don’t have anything more positive to tell you. You’re okay, though?”

“Yeah. I had opportunities, but Frank pays me well enough that I didn’t... well, you know.”

“I do. And the Porche?” Jason said quietly.

“If you must know it was a present from my grandparents.”

“Just checking, Danny.” Jason wrapped an arm around his friend and squeezed, then let him go and put his hands back on the rail.

The boat’s engines throttled up and with squeals from those on the lower deck the bow wave got bigger.

“Oh, wow!” Danny said in an awed voice as the first dolphins of the day started breaking the surface and riding the bow wave.

“I thought you’d like it.” Jason said.

“Like it? I love it! Why have I never done this before?”

“It’s easy to take your own town for granted, Danny. I’ll bet you’ve never been to the top of the Empire State, either.”

“No, I haven’t. Have you?” He glanced at Jason quizzically.

“Sure, but only on assignment.”

“You work for me.” Danny said.

“Presently, bud. Presently.” Jason said, reaching inside his windbreaker, pulling out a small envelope and handing it over. Danny frowned, then folded it and slid it into his back pocket.

“Thanks.”

Frank Cole was sitting behind his oversized walnut partners desk smoking a large Havana and sipping a glass of what was probably single malt when Danny finally arrived.

The journey back had been a nightmare of bumper to bumper traffic, and even though it was sweltering Danny had had to put the roof up and use the car’s air-con to avoid the exhaust fumes. Even listening to Mariah Carey’s new CD hadn’t helped his darkening mood.

“You’re late, Danny.” Frank Cole said mildly as Danny slid

into the leather visitor's chair. "Why is it you're always late?"

"I had to see my undercover man, Frank. And no, I'm not always late.

"Well then, why is it you can't be bothered to wear a suit?" Frank said, leaning back and stretching.

"I do in court. Besides, you don't employ me to wear a suit."

"True enough. Cigar?"

"No, but I'll take a drink. You might want a top up, too."

"You think it's bad then?" Frank said, waving Danny over to the wet bar to help himself. Danny filled two glasses with ice, then added scotch. Handing one to Frank he sat down again and took a sip; then a deep breath. Frank Cole generally did what Frank Cole wanted to do, and it was difficult, if not impossible, to get him to change his mind.

"Frank. Speaking as your in-house attorney I have to tell you that according to multiple sources you are close to being indicted on both state and federal charges.

"Close is always relative, but seriously, it's not looking good. They have pretty much everything they need based on your Community developments in Queens and The Bronx."

Frank closed his eyes and leant back in his chair. "Don't worry Danny. I'll get Broderick to sort it out. They can go after Fred Trump and his swine of a son, instead. That'll give them the column inches they want!"

"Sir, they've already had a go at the Trumps. I was told that they think you're an easier target."

"So where did this come from? And don't tell me it was Broderick, because I wouldn't believe you. Edward and I have been hand in glove since the first time I funded him to run for Mayor.

"Well?"

“If I had to guess, and a guess is all it is, I’d say it’s about the next Mayoral elections. Otis Johnson, Broderick’s senior aide, was seen dining with Giuliani. And as you know Giuliani is tight with the Trumps.”

“No. No! It’s a good theory, Danny, but I think you’re... what’s the phrase? Something to do with dogs and trees?”

“Barking up the wrong tree?”

“That’s it! And that’s what you’re doing. Don’t worry. I’ll speak to Broderick at the Four Seasons, tonight. I trust you have a suit suitable for the occasion?” Frank gave Danny a wolfish grin.

Danny Lawrence was worried. With the meal and speeches over he watched the body language of those sitting on the Mayor’s table and his worry deepened. Frank was sitting to the right of Mayor Broderick—an honoured position—yet Broderick was ignoring him, talking instead to his chief adviser Otis Johnson, and occasionally smiling at Otis’s partner. Finally, Danny saw Frank turn to the lady sitting next to him. She began to smile as Frank turned on his charm.

The orchestra started up, and soon couples began to dance.

“Do you think we charged enough?”

Danny snapped to, realising the elderly brunette to his left had put her hand on his arm. “I’m sorry. I was miles away. How do you mean ‘charged enough?’”

“Well, we settled on five thousand a head, but some of the committee thought we should have asked for ten.”

“I think that you made the right choice. It’s a fine line. Ask too much and you have empty seats.” Danny looked around the ballroom. “And as you can see it’s full.”

“Oh, I’m so glad you agree!” The brunette purred in Danny’s ear. “Perhaps we can have a dance?”

“Oh, I am so sorry, but my employer just beckoned,” Danny said, unentangling himself and getting to his feet.

“Don’t be a stranger,” the brunette said. Danny smiled at her as he walked over to the Mayor’s table where they had all pushed back chairs and got to their feet.

“Mayor Broderick, let me introduce my in-house lawyer Danny Lawrence.” Frank said, smiling with a bonhomie that Danny could tell was fake.

“An honour Mayor Broderick,” Danny said, holding out his hand. The Mayor shook with a slight grimace as the press photographers’ flashes blindsided him. Ushering Danny out of the way Frank stepped quickly in and slung an arm around The Mayor’s shoulder, his other hand clasping the Mayor’s as they both smiled at the cameramen.

chapter eight

Kristie Claxton

DANNY RUBBED THE HEAL of his hand over his eye. He could feel the start of a headache coming on, and it wasn't going to be good.

Paula King sat in the chair across from him. Her long legs, which he knew for a fact were just about perfect, were hidden inside a pair of slacks. But fortunately for him, the blouse she wore was about as see-through as you could get and still be legal. The swell of her breasts was visible since she left just enough buttons undone. Her dark hair cascaded around her shoulders. He was pretty sure she did it to lighten the blow of what she found out. Give the boss a bit of good news before slapping him in the face with bad.

The report she just handed him was bad news.

"How sure are we about this?" he asked.

"I wouldn't have brought it here if I wasn't 100 percent on it," she said. She flicked her hair off her shoulders and leaned back in the chair, exposing her natural assets.

"That's what I was afraid of."

His eyes traveled over her. Maybe if he could imagine

something good, he wouldn't have to worry about the shit that was coming down.

"Where did you get this?" he asked, picking up the report with two fingers, almost as if the papers carried some dangerous disease.

"I have a few friends who are close enough to the happenings at the court."

"Close enough?"

Paula shrugged, "Judge Clinton is smart. He vets his people well. Those who are around him wouldn't talk, at least not to those they don't know. I've talked to enough people and did a bit of research on my own. This is a report you can trust."

Danny frowned. He got up and paced in front of the windows. His office on the 27th floor had a great view. He'd dreamed about a view like this ever since he was a clerk. He loved this office, his sanctum sanatorium. Tonight, it felt stifling.

"Drink?" he asked, pouring himself one from the small bottle he kept hidden behind his books. Paula shook her head. He wasn't sure why he hid his booze. Most everyone in the firm drank and had a bar set up of one sort or another in their office, so there wasn't a reason for him to hide his. Plus, it was late enough on Friday that most of the office had left for the long weekend. The firm had a lot on their plate, but there was enough work to keep everyone busy and to allow those who wanted to go home early the opportunity too.

He walked back to his desk and collapsed in his chair, a flyer emblazoned with Frank Cole's face looked up at him. Frank's mouth was filled with brilliant white capped teeth, his overly tanned skin all but glowed, 'A NAME YOU CAN TRUST', Cole's slogan sat centered at the top. It matched the

ten park benches, 20 or so buses, and the countless subway ads. No matter where you looked, Cole's face could be found.

The report on his desk was the last thing he should be worried about. Danny's vacation was coming up. Two weeks in Ibiza, sun and sin was what he should be focused on, not whether jail was in the future.

"All right, All right," he said, leaning back in his chair and letting out a long breath. "Let me talk to him. Let me see what he says. Maybe we are worrying for nothing. This is not the big deal we think it is."

Paula tried to stop the smirk, but it still sneaked through.

"I hope for your sake you are right?"

She stood up and walked to the door. Danny couldn't help but watch her as she walked away, still trying to will good thoughts into his head. When she got to the door, she stopped.

"Who's ass are you going to save Danny?"

For a minute, he was sure she could read his thoughts.

"What do you mean?"

"Finish reading the report, then read it again. You've got as much at stake as Frank Cole does. This is a solid report. Something is coming down the pike. I know you like a challenge, but this may be too much, even for you."

She smiled and closed the door behind her.

Danny nodded, picked up the phone on his desk, and stabbed at the keypad.

"Cole!" Frank screamed into the phone.

"Frank, it's Danny."

"Danny, you've got to make this quick we were getting ready to eat."

Danny rubbed his eyes again and took a quick look at his watch. Almost nine o'clock on Friday. There wasn't going to

be much they could do right now. Maybe this could have waited until Monday. No, he was leaving for Ibiza on Sunday. By Monday, he would be too drunk even to be thinking about this place. He had to get ahead of this today. Maybe they could figure out something, get on top of this.

"Danny, Danny, I'm sure you called me just so I could hear you breathe, but I've got some stuff going on. You wanna hurry this up?" Frank asked, bringing Danny back to the present.

"Oh, um, sorry, it's just I need to talk to you about something."

"So talk."

Danny could hear Frank's deep inhalation of breath as he lit a cigarette.

"We may have a problem, Frank," Danny said. Danny knew Frank. He had a 'what me worry' attitude about almost everything. No amount of trouble would cause Frank concern.

"What kind of problem?"

"I have a report. It seems there's an interest in some of the donations you've made."

"Interest? Who's interested?"

The headache that had been threatening was now full-blown.

"Yeah, seems like Judge Clinton has a bug up his ass. They are looking into some of the contracts you've acquired recently."

"Do I know Clinton?"

"No, no, I don't think it's a name we've heard before."

"So why is he in my business?" Frank asked.

"I can't tell you that I don't have an answer for you, at least not yet. Not sure if it is personal or a vendetta."

"Well, tell me I have nothing to worry about, and I'll have

nothing to worry about," Frank said.

"I've got to dig into this, look at the report, run through so many friends of mine," Danny said.

"You don't sound convinced," Frank said, lighting another cigarette.

Danny cleared his throat, looked at the report, and started to thumb through it.

"Roache, Nashville, and Lincoln."

Frank let out a low whistle. "That it?"

"There are a few more. Some I've never heard of so that could be good for us, but-,"

"You think I'm holding out?"

Danny didn't answer right away, but eventually said, "No."

Frank let out an enormous laugh that lasted a little too long for Danny's tastes.

"You know everything about me, Danny, for good or ill. If there were something I was holding out, I'd tell you."

Danny rolled his eyes. If Frank were holding out, that would be the exact thing he wouldn't tell him.

"So, you have to do the same for me." Frank finished.

"What do you mean?"

"I'll say again, tell me I have nothing to worry about and I'll have nothing to worry about."

"What they have now is speculation and conjecture. And nothing I see can lead back to me or you."

"Then, it seems like you wasted a phone call," Frank said.

"Maybe I did," Danny said, but he knew he'd be missing that flight to Ibiza.

chapter nine

K.R.Pynes

“YEAH YEAH BABE, I’LL be home for dinner... No I’m not going to be late... I swear, just gotta tie up some loose ends... Yeah? Yeah... Okay babe...Yep, tell Alice I said hi...Okay, love you... Buh bye.”

Frank slammed the car phone down violently, wiping beads of perspiration from his brow with his other hand. The leather seats of the stretch limo, usually cool, were doing nothing to lessen the profusion of sweat soaking through the back of his Armani jacket.

“Damn it Linus, what the hell is wrong with the AC? Is it even on?” The chauffeur, unmoved, replied in the affirmative.

“Yeah okay, sorry, Linus. Women...can’t live with em, can’t live without em. You feel me?”

Linus replied in the affirmative.

“Sometimes I wonder why I even have a mobile. Damn nuisance. Never know if it’s the Missus or the Missus calling if you know what I mean.”

“Yes sir. We are approaching your intended destination sir.”

Out the tinted limo windows rose a regal but dilapidated row of Brooklyn brownstones. Evidence of recent renovations lay in the wrapped windows and abandoned Bobcat blocking the sidewalk.

“Pop the trunk, Linus. I’ll just be a few minutes.”

Frank’s oversized leather briefcase swung by his side as he ascended the brittle stone stairs. Fumbling with the realtor’s lockbox in the dwindling light, he finally pushed through the antique door into the dark entryway. The heavy door closed behind him with a satisfying bang which made him jump.

“Who’s there?” A shaking masculine voice called from the top of the staircase. Frank raised his arm to shield his eyes as a bright spotlight flashed in his face.

“Damn it Scott, it’s me!”

“Frank!” The younger man practically fell down the stairs as he rushed towards his brother-in-law. A loud sob escaped his lips as he fell into the waiting arms of Frank. “There, there,” Frank comforted the crying man, wrapping him in a tight embrace. “It’s okay brother, it’s okay. I’m sorry I haven’t been here sooner, but putting this situation to bed has been... well...pretty tough. But we’re getting there, okay?” He held the younger man’s shoulder fondly. “Well!” He continued, glancing around his real estate investment, “Doesn’t look like this has been too bad of a setup for you.” These dark, wallpapered rooms were on target to be one of his most lucrative investments yet when his crew finished renovating the block. “No one’s been in to work lately, huh? I told them to give this unit a break.” Scott nodded assent.

“It’s just been me; haven’t seen anyone.”

Frank stooped to turn on the bright work light left behind by the painters on the plastic wrapped floor. “No lights

installed yet down here, huh?”

“Nope,” Scott responded in a broken voice, wiping tears from his eyes.

“But the kitchen’s finished upstairs, right? Let’s head up and have a chat.”

Frank led the emotional man up the brownstone’s regal staircase, past ladders and abandoned paint cans to the newly modernized kitchen on the second floor. “Ah, here we go” Frank murmured as he switched on the lights and pulled two stools out from the large kitchen counter.

“Sit down kid; I brought you something.” Frank pulled a bottle of scotch from his large briefcase, followed by a stack of Dixie cups. “It’s not very classy,” he laughed, “But it’s all I could find on my way out of the office.” Scott smiled for the first time since Frank’s arrival. His breathing had slowed and the color was rising in his cheeks. Scott sipped his scotch tentatively.

“Have you seen Alice? Is she okay?” He murmured, kicking at some painters tape stuck to the newly grouted tile.

“Yeah yeah, she’s fine. Having dinner at our place tonight I think. Beth’s been keeping her busy. She’s my baby sister; I’ve been taking care of her my whole life. Way longer than you have” Frank darted Scott a teasing smile. “Don’t worry, we’ll keep an eye on her till this all blows over. Speaking of all this...” Frank nervously pulled at his sweat-soaked collar, “damn it Scott. What can I even say?”

Scott mumbled a vague reply. “It’s all good Frank. You’d have done the same for me. We’re family. And you’ve got kids. Me n’Alice don’t yet...just made sense.” He drained his Dixie cup of scotch. “But fuck man, that little kid...I know Salerno’s a bad dude and all, but he was just a little kid. It’s messed up man.”

“It was...an unfortunate circumstance, there’s no denying that. But Scott,” Frank grabbed his shoulder as if to keep him from collapsing off the stool, “it wasn’t our fault,” he looked down, abashed. “And if I’d have known it was Salerno’s kid at the time, I would have handled it differently. That’s for sure.”

“Fuck Frank, it doesn’t matter whose kid it was, it was a KID and we just left him there. Who does that? And then doesn’t own up to it? I feel like shit, man. Like, if I’d just been driving, we wouldn’t have even been there. It just keeps replaying in my head over and over, Frank.” Scott drained another glass.

“I was happy to drive the car that day, Scott. I really was. You weren’t really in any shape to take the wheel.” Frank looked coyly at the Lagavulin which Scott now cradled in his lap. Scott didn’t respond, but took another swig, straight from the bottle. “But it was kind of you to take the fall for me, Scott. You don’t know what it meant to me...what it means to me, and my family too if they knew. I’m under a lot of scrutiny in this city as it is, and I just can’t tell you how I appreciate you taking the fall. I’m going to get it all sorted out, honest to God. If I have to confront Salerno myself, I’ll do it. Alice needs you back; we all do.” Scott listened to this speech with tears streaming down his face.

“Thanks, brother.” He embraced Frank, blubbering through tears and drunkenness his fondness and thanks.

“It’s what a brother does, Scott. I’d do anything to protect my family, you know that.” He smiled intensely at the younger man, showing all of his pearly white teeth. “Well, okay, time for me to go and you to go to sleep, kid. You’re a mess. I’ll walk you down to your room. You have everything you need?” Frank questioned kindly.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m doin fine Frank, jussst fine.” Scott

slurred drunkenly.

Frank took Scott's arm, and led the unsteady man out to the staircase. "Okay Scotty, let's take this slow." He chuckled, drawing the younger man out onto the narrow landing.

The fall played out in slow motion. As Scott's foot reached for the top step, he somehow tripped forward with so much violence that he crashed head first over the low, antiquated railing. Just grazing the great glass chandelier, Scott hit the floor with an excruciating crackle of breaking bones which echoed through the empty house.

Frank stumbled frantically down the stairway, nearly falling himself over the plastic lined steps. "Scott! Scott!"

His brother-in-law's body lay in a crumpled heap, unmoving in a growing pool of blood swirling and coagulating into tiny drops on the plastic-covered floors. Scott's eyes darkened, flickering slowly once, then twice, and then closed.

"Scotty...Scotty." Frank whispered, crouching beside the dead man. He checked for a pulse, and sighed deeply. "You never really had what it takes, did you, Scott?" Frank stood up, brushing the dust off of his Armani. Without looking back, he stooped to pick up his oversized briefcase, and with one fluid motion, adjusted his tie, slicked back his hair and opened the ancient door. Humming to himself, Frank closed the key in the lockbox and danced down the brown stairs to the waiting stretch limo. As he clambered inside, he knocked on the driver's partition.

"We'll need a quick clean up tonight, Linus."

"Yes, sir."

"Floor should be fine. The plastic wrap did it's job."

"Yes, sir."

"The rest of the Lagavulin is still in the kitchen. Keep it."

"Thank you, sir."

Frank settled back in his seat, eyes closed and his hands joined together at the top of his broad middle.

“Ah Linus?”

“Sir?”

“Roll down the windows. It’s a lovely evening.”

chapter ten

Sam Pynes

“DANNY, AM I GETTING fat?”

Frank Cole was looking down at where his protruding gut was preventing him from scooting his rolling leather chair up to the expensive walnut conference table.

Danny was partway through a reticent shrug when Frank answered his own question. “Eh, gah ta hell. I look fabulous.” He gave his head an ironically flamboyant swish, throwing back long hair that wasn’t there. “The more expensive the suit, the more they shrink, am’I right? Too bad, I really liked this one.”

Danny smiled from the other side of the conference table, leaned back in his chair and rested his white Nikes on the polished surface. His jeans and light flannel shirt matched his posture.

“Relax, Frank.”

“If by relax you mean dress like a bum, then no thanks.”

“If you’re referring my shirt, I’ll have you know it’s a very comfortable cotton blend.”

Cole’s secretary walked in with a tray of coffee, which she

set on the long sideboard table. She wasn't yet old, but older than she dressed. The office was a long room containing a table that was almost too big for it, and a long row of floor-length windows along one side which gave a panoramic view of the New York City skyline.

"Susan, be a dear and have the city people sit in the waiting room for awhile. I'll buzz you when we're ready for them."

"Of cowhse, Mr. Cole," she answered in a Staten Island drawl as she quietly shut the door behind her.

"Seriously though, do we really need to settle with these pencil-pushers?" Frank complained.

"We might need to, if you want to keep wearing Italian wool instead of orange polyester."

Frank threw up his hands in a placating gesture.

"Don't worry Frank, we'll consider all the options. They might not really have much to go on. These investigations can be pretty routine for companies that win a handful of bids in the same year, as you know."

Frank's voice was calm and steady. "But this is the last five years, Danny, and I'm not sure why this is happening at all. I thought Ed and I had an understanding."

Danny removed his feet and pulled his chair up to the table. "He has only been in office for six months, Frank, not five years."

"I hate giving away money."

"And like I told you before, negotiating a settlement just gives us more time to... consult our own sources. Anyway, I wouldn't go about mentioning your *apparent* understanding with the mayor in front of the comptroller suits if I were you."

As if his words made him appear, the secretary's voice was announcing the official over the bulky intercom at Frank's

elbow as the man himself came through the door.

“Mr. Stein from the Comptroller’s office here to see you, sir... excuse me!”

A short man with a short beard and round glasses abruptly took a seat at the table without looking directly at either of the men in the room. Two taller men with briefcases followed him in, one of them shutting the door behind them in the face of the exasperated Susan who shrugged apologetically at Frank as the door closed. The two men settled behind Stein’s chair. Evidently they were used to short meetings.

“As you are aware, I come as a representative of the New York State Comptroller’s office.” He snapped his fingers at the man on his right who smoothly opened his briefcase for him. Garrett Stein took out a single sheet of paper and inspected it, resettling his glasses further up on his sharp nose. “It seems the city of New York has reason to believe that in the last five years there has been fraudulent activity in regard to bids for public development projects of which you have been a part, and that learning of this investigation you have inquired about settling with the city.” He looked up, finally, with a flat gaze indicating that a reply was warranted.

All through this speech Danny could see Frank’s ears slowly fading to red as the top of his cheeks joined the hue. Frank could be a positively jovial fellow when he wanted to be, but he was not used to being addressed in such a direct and authoritative way. Frank said “yes” between clenched teeth, without actually opening his mouth.

Stein continued as though this input was all that was necessary to trip the next bit of his programming. “It is entirely incumbent upon me then, Mr...,” he consulted his paper, “Cole, to inform you that the settlement process requires a certain amount of due-diligence on my part to

assure that this is the best avenue for justice as far as the use of public monies is concerned.”

The entirety of Frank’s face was now red, following the subtle acknowledgement that this bureaucrat neither knew nor cared that he was speaking to the most respected real estate developer in New York, who was also a member of one of the oldest families on the island.

“I’ll have you know that I am admitting nothing by settling, I just don’t have time for courts and lawyers, I’m a very busy man.”

“What my client means,” Danny cut in “is that he is merely investigating his options of settling at this point, as he wouldn’t want to be wasting public money on a fruitless investigation.” He gave Frank a significant glance.

“It is my experience,” the man continued, “that the state rarely ever makes back its losses in any comprehensive way in the majority of such cases. Unfortunately for the taxpayers, remuneration is the lesser part to justice, but justice, at least, is something.”

The cold strength behind these words indicated to Danny that this man was more than the IBM in a suit that he seemed to be: he was a true believer, and it would be better not to mess with him.

Frank didn’t hear it, or didn’t care.

“Do you *know* who I am?” Frank spat, more than asked.

“No, Mr. Cole. I do not know you. I only know the facts. I don’t need to know who you are, only what you have or haven’t done and whether what you have done is in accordance with the laws of the state of New York.”

Frank stood up and buttoned his slightly too tight jacket, filling the room with his almost six foot frame. “I’m Frank Cole, you rodent! I know your sort. You’re a bunch of pencil-

pushing bureaucrats who couldn't make it in the real world so you help the government steal from the people who are strong enough to make something of themselves! My family built this fucking town, and I'm not going to sit here while you and your army of rats try to take it away from us!"

Stein blinked up at him unfazed, before depositing the paper into the preemptively open briefcase and rising to calmly button his own jacket. "You know what you think you know. I know what I think I know. But pretty soon we'll all know what actually is. And that, Mr. Cole, is what I care about. The only thing that I care about *is* what *is*."

One of the silent suits opened the door, where Susan had apparently been standing just a moment before, as she could be seen hurriedly rearranging the magazines in the waiting room. As the public servant turned to walk out the door he said, "Your application for settlement has been denied, Mr. Cole. You will be hearing from our lawyers."

The door shut, leaving behind an empty and awkward silence. Danny whistled and put his shoes back up on the table. Frank sat down heavily, and the front button popped off his jacket to clatter mockingly on the polished table.

chapter eleven

LG Red

“JUSTICE?” SAID KIRSTY. “WHAT is that?”

Judge Clinton sighed. “Ms Anderson. I’m not a function. Call me Andrew, or call me Judge Clinton if you want to be formal. Please don’t call me ‘Justice’.” He looked over the intern’s shoulder, across the skyline to where the erection of the Cole Tower was pushing ever upwards. At the mid-level of the tower where they were beginning the glazing, builders, their yellow hard hats making them look like tiny push pins, crawled along the scaffolding, and far below a toy crane swung a matchstick-sized girder across the car park. “What’s what?” he asked.

“That sandlapper there.” She pointed with her chin.

Clinton raised his eyes along the length of the tower, and stared straight across. He saw the man she was talking about, staring across into Clinton’s office from a ledge of scaffolding at the same level. “Sandlapper?”

“He has a country look about him.”

So he had, now that Clinton noticed Country, but wealthy country. Golf club country. A man in a cream linen three-

piece suit, with a bolo tie slung around the careless collar of a blinding white shirt, and a soft Italian leather manbag slung over his shoulder, property-developer-style, and the racing field-glasses held to his eyes. “Shit,” Clinton muttered.

“Justice!”

“He’s going to try to come up here. Can you head him off?” Clinton pulled the string of the vertical blinds, and they twisted as one, cutting off the view into the office.

“Who is he?”

“Better you don’t know. You’ll have a more concrete air of refusal.”

“Ooookay!” Kirsty trotted out. “Lip zipped.”

She put her head back around the door. “I’ll tell you one thing: he has a swagger like a bluetick hound!”

Kirsty thought about the stairs. She didn’t like elevators, they made her feel like a chicken in a processing machine. But she risked missing the bluetick hound – while she was running down, he could be riding up, if he put on some speed and got down from the tower and across the park in time. She took the elevator.

They came nose-to-nose under the portico. She could see him deciding whether he knew her or not. “Ah, Miss Anderson, so nice to see you again!” He seized her hand and pressed it between his, like a couple of chicken thighs dipped in a wet sauce. “You’re looking as beautiful as ever.”

“Well, bless your heart,” Kirsty said, extracting her hand and smiling with all her teeth. “Where are you going on such a fine day, Mr Cole?”

To see your attorney and try to wriggle out of a fraud charge, you greasy crook – she felt this thought pressing to get out past her teeth, and widened the smile an impossible fraction more. She’d recognised him now. Judge Clinton had forgotten that

Kirsty had been on a day's interning in the courthouse when Frank Cole was charged with fraud for what the District Attorney had called, "harrumph, *impropriety* in bidding for public contracts over a five-year period". ("Sample charges," she'd heard an FBI woman mutter to her partner as Cole oiled his way out of the witness stand.)

Cole now, smoothing back his Brylcreamed hair, just that little bit too long, in the typical property developer look, adopted a Southern tone to match her own. Or so he thought. "I've come to see your boss man, little lady!" He leaned in to murmur in her ear. "On *very* private business."

"Well, that dog won't hunt," Kirsty said, still smiling, smiling. "My boss man is caught up all day today. But if you'd like to make an appointment for next week, we might could do that?"

The Rhett Butler imitation disappeared, and his lips with it. With his mouth in a straight line, Cole shoved past Kirsty and made for the elevator.

She noticed an odd thing then. The Mayor was coming down the stairs. As he saw Cole storming across the lobby his head went back like a possum seeing a rattlesnake, then he came forward, all smiles. "Mr Cole, good day."

Cole stopped and whipped around to face him. "Mayor Broderick!" The two men looked into each other's faces for a fraction of a second – Cole's louche rich-boy effect contrasting with the mayor's ramrod ex-Marine stare. Then they broke ranks and went opposite ways.

Kirsty caught up with Cole and slipped into the elevator as the doors whispered shut.

Cole eyed her. "I thought you were going out, Missy."

"Just for a breath of—" she breathed out, "fresh air."

She was scuttling behind Cole when he punched in the

door of Judge Clinton's office and strode across to tower over him. He put his two fists on the mahogany of the desk and leaned down to talk into the judge's face. "Andy. Andy, Andy. You trying to avoid seeing me?"

"That's nothing but the truth," Andrew Clinton said.

Cole turned around to Kirsty. "I swear, you're like a sticking plaster on a shoe. Can I be alone with my friend Andy?"

Kirsty took one look at the judge's face and thought not. "Justice?"

"Stay, Kirsty."

"There's nothing untoward happening here," Cole said to her, showing his teeth. "Everything's above board."

"That's one construction to put on it," Judge Clinton said. He picked up a glass – one of the clear ones Kirsty had brought in during her first week – and took a sip of water. "I can't see you, and I can't talk to you."

"Nobody knows I'm here," Cole said. "Just us two."

You sowed your wild oats on Saturday, and now you're praying for crop failure on Sunday morning, Kirsty thought as she watched him. He was perfectly still. Anyone would have thought he was perfectly calm, too, but his face was contused, his hands had opened out on the desk, and as they moved they left sweat marks.

"How's Amy?" Cole asked the judge. "I hope she's well."

Kirsty stepped back to the window and tried to fade out of sight.

"My wife is quite well, thank you." The judge's phone rang, and he lifted the receiver and dropped it back.

Cole let the silence grow. "And your daughter? Jane, isn't it?"

"Jean."

“She’s in Columbia, am I right? I was just talking to the president of the university earlier. And the mayor is on the board too. Isn’t it the mayor who has your reappointment next year in his hand? He can appoint you or let you go on your way?”

This is power, Kirsty thought. The ability to threaten without saying a word that could be interpreted as a threat.

They seemed to have forgotten her. Then Cole whirled around, and said, “Now, Missy, you wouldn’t be old enough to remember this, but the judge here was hard on moonshiners back in his Chicago days.”

“They make moonshine in Chicago? I never heard that.”

“Well, you should know all about that, little missy.”

Her flesh crept. How could he know her granddaddy ran a still in Beaufort County back in the day?

Cole turned back to Judge Clinton again, all smooth now. “You’re a man who needs help, I know that.”

Not from criminals, Kirsty thought. But maybe she was wrong. Maybe some criminals were halfway to State office. From what she’d seen of him in a quarter hour, she wouldn’t be surprised at anything.

“Andy, Andy, Andy,” he said again. “You know it’s hard to do business. You know about bureaucracy.” He waved across at the half-constructed tower. “Every day there’s a new permit, and every permit takes half a year going through a hundred different offices. Everybody takes shortcuts. You can’t do business unless you take shortcuts. It’s the way the system works.”

This broke Clinton’s hypnotic trance. The judge jumped to his feet. “Out!” he said. “Get out right now. I didn’t hear any of this. If you want to make a plea, your attorney can speak for you in court.” He drove forward, Cole backing before him.

Cole reached into the doe-leather bag hanging on his shoulder, and pulled out a long brown envelope. “A country place, a nice hideaway on a lake where you could bring Jean and Amy, and... anyone else you cared to? Nobody need know.”

“Are you offering me a bung?” Andrew Clinton grabbed the envelope out of Cole’s hand, tore it across – with some difficulty – and flung the pieces on the ground. “Get out.”

“I’m sure a dozen people saw me coming in here, with little missy here,” Cole said, wetting his lips and drawing them back over his teeth. “Including the mayor. You’re going to have to recuse yourself, you know.”

“I tell you, get out of here.”

“If you convict me, it doesn’t matter what the sentence is, they’re going to say you took a sweetener. You might as well get something you’ll love. And Jean and Amy too.”

“Kirsty, please show Mr Cole the way out.”

Cole planted his feet in their pointed kid shoes, and stood foursquare with his back to the door. “All you minor functionaries imagine you’re backed by the heavy machinery of the State. Don’t think you can count on that, Mr Judge.”

Clinton put his hips and his hands back against his desk and leaned on it. Before this, her boss had always struck Kirsty as elegant, but looking at him facing Cole, she could see the difference between Cole’s bespoke linen suiting straight from Milan, Italy and Judge Clinton’s ordinary jacket and pants from Macy’s. The judge’s pants were creased at crotch and knee where he had been sitting. Cole’s suit had fallen effortlessly into its classic lines the moment he stood up from where he had been crouching over the desk.

“I’d better go,” Cole said now, straightening his lapels and shrugging his jacket into a nicer set on his shoulders. “Gotta

meet the mayor.”

chapter twelve

Ioa Petra'ka

THE COURTROOM STANK OF stale stone, wood varnish and the lingering fug of cigarette smoke, which coiled blue and angular in the mid-morning light. Briefcase buckles snapped and pens clacked against tables, the stenographer tested her clattering apparatus, the court artist coughed and sharpened his weapons, shucking slivers of pencil to the floor with his X-Acto knife. Every sound, muffled and echoed by the volume of the room as it was, felt to Cole like the clicking of a stray insect beside one's ear as they awake from a midday nap, ultimately setting a dour mood upon the rest of the day.

He swiped his hand in the air, as if warding off said insect, attempting to brush aside the sounds of the routine warming up of legal machines. The corner of his eye twitched, and he shifted in the unpadded wooden chair as he attempted to stifle the normally welcome, though contextually invasive, memories of his recent visit with Donna.

The entryway door creaked open, and Angela Bennet shouldered her way into the courtroom. Lawrence glanced at the prosecutor the District Attorney had sent. Despite a few

perfunctory meetings regarding unacceptable plea bargains, he was as yet unfamiliar with her abilities and background. This concerned him and caused him to make a mental note to remind his paralegal to do some poking around. He had half expected her appointment to be temporary, while the DA summoned a heavy-hitter, and felt slightly miffed that this did not seem to be the case.

He turned to Cole to assess his client's state of mind, and was concerned at how the environment here seemed to be playing against him. Cole's leg shuddered almost audibly within its silk suit encasing, bouncing up and down as his eyes flicked from sound to sound in the room. Well, it was no matter, today was not a day for performances—save for one small matter that even Lawrence a bit nervous about.

The door at the back of the hall slipped open, and paused, as Justice Clinton seemed to be speaking to someone just outside the courtroom. The assembled staff and legal teams found themselves at a pause, unwilling to return to casual waiting, with the Justice's robed back in sight. The bailiff shifted nervously, caught between the required impartial gaze across the room and attempting to ascertain the moment of the Justice's formal arrival.

Bennett's chair barked across granite as Clinton backed into the room and made his way toward the bench. Bailiff Schimpft cleared his throat and cried forth, "All rise, for the honourable Justice Clinton. Court is now in session."

Fabric and limbs shuffled up as Clinton made his way slowly to the bench, and eased himself into the chair. He reached out toward the ashtray and lifted the still lit cigarette to his lips, before rumbling, "Please be seated," placing the cigarette back. "The case of New York State versus Frank Cole, docket number...", he shuffled some papers beneath his

limp hand, "23 dash 4872 is to begin pre-trial proceedings. I am to understand that discovery has been submitted by the District Attorney?"

Bennett leaned into the mic, "Yes your honour, we have submitted to the court our preliminary findings, though we reserve the right to submit further evidence before the date of the trial."

Justice Clinton nodded slowly, transfixed by the paperwork hidden beneath him, "And does the defence find this satisfactory?"

Daniel Lawrence replied, "We do, your honour, granted we retain the right to submit for a delay, should the State produce further evidence in excess of what can be reasonably handled within the given time frame."

"Is this to your agreement?" Clinton aimed his question at Bennet.

"This is acceptable to the State, your honour."

Justice Clinton took another drag from his cigarette, and let his gaze rest upon the mural painted on the back wall, before continuing, "It is always in the interest of the people, that matters be resolved swiftly and without drawn out formalities, would it be too much to presume that the parties involved have come to an agreement?"

Lawrence glanced over at Bennett, who nodded to him to speak, "We have reviewed the State's conditions for bargaining and have found them wanting. It is in our belief that the state does not have the necessary evidence to back its negotiating position. We are prepared to take this to trial, your honour."

Clinton was entirely unsurprised, and found his mind wandering beyond the confines the moment as the rote words were spoken, "Now then to the matter at hand, Frank Cole, please submit to the court your pleading in this case, do you

plead guilty or not guilty?"

Frank half stood, and blurted overly loudly into the microphone, "Not guilty, your honour, I plead not guilty to the charges", levelling a hostile, bloodshot glare at the bench. Lawrence delicately plucked at his sleeve and motioned him back into his chair.

Sifting through a sheaf of documents, Lawrence paused, prodding at the yellow marked document he had been looking for.

He stood and took to the podium, unnecessarily adjusting the microphone, which squawked a protest along its metal spine. Angela tucked her chin down to obscure a roll of the eyes.

"At this time we are filing a motion for the recusal of Justice Clinton in this case," snapping the document against the podium, which caused another shriek through the audio system. Cole winced and pinched the crease along the side of his suit leg. Lawrence continued, "on grounds of conflict of interest and unwarranted prejudice against my client, for which I believe there to be adequate documentation in the public record. We have—", he brandished the yellow-marked papers with a taut fury.

"Let me stop you before you embarrass yourself further," the Justice's rolling voice striking a mellow rumble of interruption. "Whatever documentation you feel you have to support this motion is, and I believe any appellate court will readily agree, is unsubstantiated on merit that any discomfort," he paused, letting the word linger as he drew deep on the smouldering remains of his cigarette, "your client may feel with regards to my position in this case is entirely one-sided. I myself have no umbrage with Mr. Cole's personal matters, insofar as they do not infringe upon the legalities I have been

charged with adjudication."

Lawrence lifted his papers and leaned in toward the mic, but was cut off by Justice Clinton's continuing monologue. "No sirs, I do not serve at the pleasure of your client, and any objection you or he may feel toward my position as an officer of this court is irrelevant and subjective. In fact I would go further to say that I take would, were I to be unduly swayed, take particular offence at the implication that my abilities to discharge my duties are in any way impacted by the state of your client's mind toward myself. Anyone who has worn these robes as long as I have will know that every other defendant or plaintiff who walks through those doors may wish me ill merely upon the grounds of their own disposition. If one cannot stand to the principals of the law in the face of that, they have no right to be behind this bench."

Lawrence nodded and returned to his seat. Cole was outwardly furious, reddened of cheek and jaw askew, already plucking at his sleeve and leaning in. But Lawrence knew the Justice had played his argument well, and beyond refutation. The notion of sufficiently proving bias based on a few instances of clashed sabres in the press would only stand to delay the trial, a fruitless tactic when employed against the state. But Cole gibbered nonetheless, sour breath spilling around his ear, forming pointless noises that were best mollified than debated. He signalled sharply with his hand beneath the table, indicating that Cole should accept his fate for now.

"Now then, if there are no further motions or stipulations by either parties?" he paused momentarily before continuing, "Based upon the significant financial wherewithal of the defendant, I am placing bail at three million dollars. I am setting the date for the trial, pursuant to case number 23-4872,

on the 12th of August, 1991." He then brought the gavel down. "The matter of pre-trial proceedings for the State of New York versus Frank Albert Cole the third is concluded."

"Three million," Cole scoffed into Lawrence's sleeve, "I'll look in my couch". Daniel nodded politely and resumed gathering his papers.

Justice Clinton stood, and as he had before, left his cigarette to smoulder in the ash tray and swiftly departed to his chambers.

chapter thirteen

Sue Cowling

OTIS ENTERED JUDGE CLINTONS Chambers. Pausing, he took a moment to take in the full splendour, dignity and space of the room, the floor to ceiling shelves filled with leather bound legal, political and history books. The photos of family and friends scattered around the room and the personal touches that made this Judge Clintons. Otis got a good sense that Judge Clinton was comfortable here after almost ten years in office, a home from home and he smiled, something to store away at the back of his mind if their discussion did not go as he planned.

He carried on across the room to where the Judge was waiting for him, they shook hands briefly and both took a seat, opposite each another across a wide old oak desk, covered with neat piles of folders, a yellow legal pad and a container of sharpened pencils.

Otis observed that the Judge was fit, and looked healthy, he obviously worked out, and at 52 probably had no plans to retire any time in the near future, an important observation that pleased Otis.

The Judge indicated the coffee cups on the desk, “I know you live on coffee, so I made sure we start off our meeting refreshed.” He picked up his cup, sipping the hot drink, steam fogging the glasses perched on the end of his nose.

Otis followed suit, picking up his cup, relieved to see his favourite beverage in front of him. He took a long gulp, and they both put down their cups at the same time, as if indicating it was time to talk.

Otis made the first move. “Good Day your Honour, thank you for making the time to see me today...” Judge Clinton cut him off before he could continue.

“Let’s cut with the formality, shall we? As aide to Mayor Broderick, I know you are his problem solver, so really the question is what it is he wants you to solve, and how can I be of assistance with that?” He leaned back in his chair, making himself comfortable, while observing Otis keenly.

Otis smiled. “Straight to the point, I like that, I can work with that.”

He unbuttoned his jacket and took a similar relaxed posture, stretching his legs.

“I am here because Mayor Broderick is concerned, in fact he is extremely concerned about the trial of Frank Cole. As you know Cole is being charged with fraud, for impropriety in bidding for public sector contracts, and we are talking fraud here over the last five years”. He paused to try and gauge the Judges reaction, but Judge Clinton just sat there waiting for Otis to continue, giving nothing away in either his posture, or his expression.

“I will come straight to the point. Mayor Broderick wants to make it quite clear that Frank Cole is considered by him to be a well-respected public figure. Mr Cole is also a strong supporter of the Mayor, his administration and his various

campaigns. I think we could say he is an upstanding figure in the community...” He paused to make the point crystal clear and was about to continue when Judge Clinton raised his hand to silence Otis.

“I think that is a matter for the Supreme court to decide, on whether Frank Cole is in fact an upstanding figure in the community, or if he is, as charged, a crook that needs to be sentenced and pay for fraudulent activity that has cost New York City’s taxpayers hard earned dollars over the last five years, don’t you?”

Otis ignored that and carried on. “You know the Mayor has a fierce love for New York, this corruption scandal coming during the first year of his administration could undermine all the work the mayor is doing to clean up the City. He has already increased efficiency, and is working hard to straighten out the mess of the City’s finances left by the last administration. He has already introduced tighter spending controls. When he entered office, he promised among other things to deal with the alarming rate of crime within the City and has plans for an expanded police department. He does what he promises. He is a competent, methodical and intelligent man, who is dealing with layer upon layer of arcane regulations, that have created millions in waste, and a serious lack of competition which has led to higher costs and poor services that are bad for the City, they are bad for everyone.”

Taking a deep breath, he continued. “The sheer size and scope of the procurement system is daunting, did you know that in 1989-1990 there were over 22,000 contracts of work amounting to over \$10 billion dollars, probably 25% of our budget is procuring goods, services and construction. That is a huge responsibility, and one that the Mayor and his administration take seriously. We are talking projects to keep

the City running, training, building new infrastructure and the Mayor, well the Mayor takes that seriously. It's not a one size fits all judgement when making decisions.

I don't need to tell you that the contracting of public services is a way for us to reduce our service costs and a competitive and efficient economy of scale."

Judge Clinton pulled a white starched handkerchief from his pocket and noisily blew his nose, then popped the handkerchief back in a pocket of his jacket.

"I understand the mayor is worried, I am sure he does not want any scandal to cloud the work he is doing. However, it could be that the Mayor is not exercising sufficient oversight within his administration..."

"I am sorry Sir, but I have to dispute that statement, the Mayor is an upstanding member of this community and that is a slur on his image that I cannot allow, he has tight reins on everything that happens within his administration." Otis normally calm was feeling things were not going quite how he planned, but he still had his trump card to play if he had to. "I should remind you we need developers like Mr Cole to create an environment for economic growth. It is this type of case that will make investors think twice about investing."

He stood, needing to stretch his legs, he picked up his coffee cup and drained the lukewarm drink, before placing it back on the desk.

At that moment there was a tap on the door and in walked a young female, smartly dressed, with long brunette hair swinging as she moved. In her arms were a pile of files, which she placed on a side desk near the Judge.

"These are the files you requested for the Frank Cole case Judge Clinton." She turned to go.

Judge Clinton gestured to Otis. "Let me introduce you to

one of my judicial interns Kirsty Anderson who has a promising career in front of her.” He smiled.

Otis shook hands, with the now blushing Kirsty. “It’s a pleasure to meet you Kirsty, I am sure we will cross paths again soon.” His mind was considering how he could use this person to his advantage, and he stored her name away for future reference, as Kirsty left the Chambers.

Walking over to the window he turned, facing the Judge who was still seated and watching him. They were like a cat and mouse, watching each other’s movements, planning ahead to the next move.

“This is a wonderful office; it must be coming up ten years now?”

He paused and looked inquiringly at the Judge.

Judge Clinton smiled, “Yes indeed, ten years is up January next year, but I have no plans to retire just yet.”

Otis smiled back at Judge Clinton. “That soon, so your hoping to extend your career maybe another ten years?”

“Yes, indeed I am, fifty-two is too young to retire and what would I do all day?” He laughed.

“It would be a shame to lose such talent, I agree. Otis returned the conversation to the Cole case. “The Mayor wants to ensure that Cole has a fair trial, after all as I have already said, he is an upstanding citizen and supports the Mayor both publicly and financially on many projects for the City. Mayor Broderick wants me to make sure you understand the importance of a fair trial, one that is not a grandstand against Mr Cole. A criminal justice system that will operate openly and fairly in the case of Mr Cole, and one where all the important issues of the case are heard.”

The Judge stood. “Now look here does Mayor Broderick really think this will not be a fair case, are you suggesting we

are not open and fair.? That Mr Cole is in danger of not having a fair hearing, how dare you suggest the Supreme Court is corrupt.”

“I think” Otis replied, “That I am not suggesting anything, I am just pointing out how it could be viewed and that we need to make sure it is open and fair for Mr Cole, that it would be in your interest to ensure that happens.” He looked around the room again, slowly making sure the Judge was aware of what he was doing. “I really do think it would be in your interest to see justice plays out. This is a lovely office and I can see you here for many years, maybe?”

With that and before the Judge could reply he walked across and held his hand out. Shaking the Judges hand he said “Thank you for taking the time to meet today and for the coffee, which was most appreciated. I will pass on your regards to Mayor Broderick and your assurances that we can rely on you to make sure this trial proceeds in a fair way. With that he turned to leave.

The Judge spoke as Otis walked across the room. “I already had a good idea of this meeting Mr Johnson and the files that Kirsty brought in are so I can go over them in case anything was missed. I also am keen for this case to be heard fairly, and for any evidence that is important to the case be included.”

Otis smiled. As he opened the door he added, “Thank you. It would be a shame to see this office change occupants too soon. Have a good day your Honour.”

He left whistling softly as he walked down the corridor to the exit.

chapter fourteen

Cathi Radner Castrio

DANNY TUGGED AT HIS collar. He would have liked to remove his suit jacket, but that would have only drawn attention to the scorch mark on his shirt. He should have given more thought to his wardrobe. It was times likes this he missed Annabeth. She would have laid out a suit and tie, and remembered to make sure he had a clean shirt. It wasn't until he was half-dressed that Danny realized he had two clean shirts to choose from: one had returned from the cleaners with scorch marks, the other one was newly purchased and still had the creases folded in by the manufacturer. He'd opted for the new shirt, only to find that it was too small at the neck. He could barely tolerate a tie in a shirt that fit.

Danny passed through the impressive building lobby. The center was two stories tall, held up by massive marble columns. A clock hung in the center, surrounded by ornate art deco lights. Two grand stairs cases with intricate railings flanked the room. Danny passed these on his way to the elevator that would take him to the courtroom.

By now, the Court Officers should have known him. They

could have saved him the hassle of going through the metal detector, but they seemed to enjoy his ordeal. He stood in line, waiting his turn, while the officer passed a wand over a portly gentleman before making him remove his belt buckle. Danny shrank into his clothes and looked away when Angela Bennett breezed past the guards.

“Morning Charlie!” she waved to the officer with the wand. “Hey Jim,” she called to a second.

“Good Morning, Counselor. Go right in.”

Angela pretended not to notice Daniel Lawrence just as he pretended not to see her. Neither one of them wanted to engage in small talk. They each had their jobs to do.

Angela’s job should have been the harder one. She had the burden of proof. But the state didn’t bring cases unless they thought they could win. The police had been gunning for Frank Cole for years; they finally had enough to bring charges. The only difference between this case and the dozens of others Angela had tried, was the size of the fish in the fry pan. Usually she was after small fry, but now they had the big fish, Frank Cole. The slime ball was finally going to get what everyone knew he deserved. And the press, and hence the world, would be watching because it was Frank Cole on trial. She tugged at the hem of her pencil skirt wondering if perhaps she should have opted for a bright red power suit instead of her usual heather plaid.

When Danny reached the head of the line, he gave a friendly greeting to Charlie and to Jim. He didn’t get the warm welcome that Angela received. They waved him through and moved to the next in line.

Frank Cole was an arrogant bastard. Anyone who read a newspaper, or watched TV, already knew that. And Danny had the near-impossible job of defending the asshole. Danny had

taken the job for Cole expecting to work on mergers and acquisitions. He wasn't cut out to be a trial attorney. He hadn't thought about hearsay or the best evidence rule since law school. He had spent hours reviewing the criminal procedure law to prep for trial. That time might have been better spent combing through the state's evidence, but Danny had the uneasy feeling that if he had to win this case on the merits, he had already lost.

If Frank Cole had taken his advice, he would have hired outside counsel, a real defense attorney, with courtroom experience. But Cole was too arrogant to follow anyone's advice. It made him the worst kind of client. He had insisted on a jury trial, and then insisted on using in-house counsel, more specifically Daniel Lawrence.

Danny had tried everything he could think of to get out of the case. He had briefly considered getting himself disqualified. As in-house counsel, if he was a potential witness, he couldn't try the case, but Danny didn't want to find himself on trial as one of the conspirators, either. He hadn't actually worked on the deals at issue; he had just worked on enough other deals to know that his boss was guilty as charged, and guilty of a whole lot more. But if Cole went down for fraud, he wasn't going alone. Cole would get a slap on the wrist, maybe pay a few fines, but then the state would come for Danny, his co-workers and his friends. Everyone who got their pay-checks from Cole. They didn't deserve to lose their careers, maybe even go to jail, just because Cole cut every corner to make a buck. And Cole would find some way to save his own skin, no matter who had to go down in his place.

Danny had to defend Cole, who was no-doubt guilty, and who refused to follow Danny's advice, or anyone else's. He had to get Cole acquitted and he had to do it without pissing

Cole off in the process.

Danny took his place at the defense table. Cole, sat beside him, wearing a suit that cost more than Danny's last paycheck. He didn't seem to be sweating. He looked mildly amused, if anything. He smiled as the commissioner of jurors, lead the jury to their seats.

"All rise, Supreme Court Criminal Term is now in session. The Honorable Andrew Clinton presiding."

Danny had prepared, and rehearsed his opening argument. Then he had ripped up his notes and thrown them away. The jury didn't want to hear about proof, or evidence, or the flaws in the prosecution. They wanted to gawk at Frank Cole, III, so that later on they could regale their family and friends with stories about the trial. Danny felt a bit sorry for them. Criminal Court was rarely as exciting in real life as it was on TV.

Angela Barrett, on cue, rose to her feet to deliver her opening statement. She was poised, polished and confident. Her years as a prosecutor gave her an advantage. She had no reason to be awed by the court or the judge; she was on home turf.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, the People will prove beyond a reasonable doubt, that the Defendant, Frank Cole, III, violated the penal code of this state by conspiring to commit fraud. That he knowingly violated the State Finance Law and the Public Works Law with the intent to illegally profit and to defraud the people of this state. The proof will show that Frank Cole, III conspired with others to violate section...."

The jurors were beginning to glaze over. Those who hadn't managed to manufacture an excuse to avoid jury duty had hoped to find themselves on a jury hearing the details of a murder or kidnapping. When they learned that the Defendant

was Frank Cole, they expected to hear the behind the headlines stories of lavish parties and high-priced prostitutes. Instead they were being bombarded with penal law provisions and contract law violations. Juror number one checked his watch. Juror two tried to picture what the attorney was wearing under her clothes. Juror three watched the judge, trying to get a clue whether he was pleased with what was said.

Danny watched the jurors. He found the District Attorney's speech almost as boring as they did, and he had been to law school, and had an inkling what she was talking about. As she droned on about public trust, Danny felt his panic beginning to subside.

If Danny had been a hired defense attorney, he might have kept his opening comments to the safe, "the state will be unable to prove its case." But it wasn't just about getting Cole out of the hot seat, it was about making his boss happy, and keeping his own employment, and that of his co-workers, secure.

"Thank you, Counselor," Judge Clinton said. He turned to Danny, "Attorney Lawrence, would you like to make an opening statement?"

Danny stood. He stifled a yawn behind his hand. Juror three giggled and received a stern look from the judge.

"Sorry about that," Danny said to the jurors. "But let's be honest, booooring stuff there. My colleague may be excited about state finance laws and clause seventy of some contract, but that probably makes her the only one.

"Did you all get a look at that clock when you came in the building? Pretty impressive." He gave a low whistle. "That thing is gorgeous. And those marble columns? Two stories tall. Not to mention the beautiful marble walls and floors and those stair railings. Wow. I'd like to have a clock like that in my

house. Now that's something to be excited about. That my friends is what a public works contract is all about." He gestured toward his boss, "Mr. Cole isn't a criminal. He isn't accused of robbing widows and orphans. The state is accusing him of violating contracts. Not even violating contracts, just planning to do so with other people. And who are those people? State employees. And who is the contract with? The state of New York. We are here because the state is angry because it doesn't like its own contract. The state likes to have impressive buildings and beautiful clocks. It just doesn't like paying for them. So the state makes laws about its own contracts, laws that say you have to pay the cheapest price, and also laws that say what wages you have to pay. They create piles of red tape, and then if they don't want to pay for their buildings and their clocks, they get other state workers, like the District Attorney you just heard from, to find violations of those rules that they made.

"Mr. Cole is on trial because he is good at what he does. Even with all those ridiculous rules created by the state, he still manages to put up buildings, and to make money at it. And so the state looks at him, and figures anyone who can follow all their rules and still make a nickel, must be cheating somewhere, and they spend more taxpayer money trying to prove that's the case. That folks is why we're here, so that we can have pretty clocks, in beautiful buildings, while the state continues to claim to the taxpayers that the state is on their side."

Danny struggled to maintain a serious facade as he took his seat. The relief was washing through him. For the first time in weeks, he felt like he might be able to pull this off. Cole was nodding and looking pleased with himself.

The judge wasn't smiling. He looked sternly at Danny.

“Thank you, Counselor.” He turned his attention to the jury, “Ladies and gentlemen, it is now five o’clock. The state, in fact, appreciates your service, we will adjourn until Monday morning at 9 o’clock. You are reminded not to discuss the case with anyone and not to read any newspaper articles regarding this case, or regarding the defendant. I will see you all on Monday morning.”

The commissioner led the jurors out of the courtroom. Danny and Angela gathered their notes and files and the court stenographer began to collect her things.

The Judge chuckled. “Not quite the slam dunk you expected, eh, Ms. Bennett? The judge smiled. “Counselors, have a good weekend.”

chapter fifteen

Ian Philpot

VISIONS OF SLEEP FADED. The reality that had been tangible and full of sensation was now nothing more than a fading memory. She woke up feeling flushed and the tips of her fingers was still tingling. As her eyes slowly opened, she winced at the daylight that poured through the window. The space next to her in bed was vacant — Tom must have gone for a weekend run in the park.

Angela Bennett put on her robe, shuffled her feet to the kitchen, and slowly made herself a bowl of oatmeal. She then poured herself a cup of coffee from the pot that Tom had put on before he left. She sat at the dining room table and picked up the book next to where she normally sat. It was a science fiction book — something she normally would not have read, but it was a special request Tom made of her. He was very much into space and the future and possibilities beyond human capacity, and that made Angela wonder if he was somehow getting more from life than her because he could imagine life beyond what was.

Midway through the oatmeal, Angela found her mind

drifting, following the sounds of the city that came in through the walls of her apartment. There were conversations from neighbors, cars, and traffic and horns the street, and somehow, through it all, there were other noises of nature seeping in. Whether it was birds, or somehow the rustling of trees in the wind from a distance, it made its way into her apartment and made her wonder whether it all was real and all had consequence.

The knock at her apartment door came to her surprise. It could have been one of the neighbors, but none of the neighbors would knock that hard. She walked over to the door and peered through the peephole. On the other side, she saw a tall man, at least tall enough that he was at the top of the fisheye glass she peered through. He was dressed in a nice suit that was slightly loose and double-breasted, very modern. She did not recognize him, nor did she understand how he could've gotten into the building without being buzzed in. Sometimes this was the work of salesmen, but this man was coming to her apartment on the weekend, and he did not look to be wearing a cheap suit like a salesman would be. The man waved. Angela stepped back, shocked at his sanguine aggression.

She straightened her robe and opened the door.

“Hello, Mrs. Bennett,” the man said with a smile. Angela had seen that kind of smile before — it was a knowing, discomfoting smile. In her experience, it had been worn by homicidal psychopaths who had done something bad but did not feel bad for it.

“Can I help you?” Angela said, squaring her shoulders up and straightening her back. It was her normal courtroom posture, though she preferred not to have to hold that posture through the weekends.

“Yes, *Mrs. Bennett.*” The man changed his posture so his arms were in front of him and he held one wrist in his hand in front of his waist. “You see, *Mrs. Bennett,* I am an associate of Frank Cole and—”

“I’m not allowed to talk about a case that’s currently at trial,” Angela said cutting him off.

“Oh my,” the man said moving on of his hands to his chest. “I don’t mean to discuss the DA’s maligned case against Frank and how he’s done nothing outside the boundaries of the legal system. You are absolutely correct, it would be inappropriate for you and me to discuss his rightful innocence while his case is ‘currently at trial.’”

Angela furrowed her brow. Her lips tightened. “Then what do you want? Mister...?”

“I came across some information that I think might help you in your case.”

Angela folded her arms in front of her. “And what might that be?”

“Something that I think is going to really change things for you.” He reached into his breast pocket and pulled out a manila envelope. “In this envelope, are some very interesting pictures of you and a colleague of yours.”

“I’m sorry?” Angela’s face grew warm, but she learned early in her law school days hide her face from getting flushed. What she could not control with her increased heart rate, but he didn’t know about that.

“You know, someone approached me with some interesting information. It’s about you and one of your coworkers. I think you know what I’m talking about.”

“I am certain I have no idea.”

He bent the two small metal pieces at the top of the envelope and slipped up the top. He then slowly pulled out

one of the pictures and turned it so Angela could see a woman that looked just like her exiting the passenger side of a white Chrysler LeBaron. That was not her car.

“I believe this is you”, he said. “And I believe the following pictures are you entering the Beekman Hotel for an indeterminate number of hours. I believe this was one of the nights you were supposed to be at work late working on the case. And I believe that your effort on the case is of interest to my associate, Frank Cole. That is how I was able to come into possession of these photographs.”

Angela knew better than to acknowledge the photos. Even with a small piece of evidence, no matter how true, she knew she could talk her way out of it.

“That may not be me in those photos,” Angela said. “And if it were, you have no evidence that I didn’t spend that time at the hotel in a work-related meeting. And you have no evidence that would hold up anywhere to prove that anything happened between me and anyone else.”

“Oh, no? But your associate, Mr. Maguire, would probably differ.”

“Whatever you think you know, you don’t,” Angela said sternly. “Maguire doesn’t matter.”

The man tucked the photograph back into the folder and replaced it in his breast pocket. “I believe I have everything I need for the person to whom it matters most.” At that very moment, the elevator made a dinging noise down the hall and the man pointed his finger in the air. “I believe the person to whom this matters most is arriving right now.”

Shocked, Angela bit her lower lip. She quickly released it, but it happened out of nervousness that was greater than she expected. “What do you want from me?” she asked.

“Drop everything. Drop the case. Drop monitoring Frank

Cole. Drop at all.”

“This is blackmail,” Angela said.

The elevator doors opened, and Tom stepped out. Angela gave him a smile, but he could tell that something was off with a suited man talking to her at that moment. He walked over quickly.

“What’s going on?” Tom asked.

Before Angela could reply, the man answered. “We’re just talking about the case.”

“All good things I hope?”

“Yes,” the man answered. “All good things.”

“Honey?” Tom asked. He was looking for confirmation.

“Yes.” She leaned toward him to give a gentle kiss. As she separated from him, she could feel his sweat on her lips, and she remembered a part of that faded memory of a dream. She smiled. “All good.”

“Have a good day, *Mrs.* Bennett,” the man said as he turned to leave. Angela turned back inside, but Tom lingered a moment to watch him go.

Angela went back to her oatmeal to get some food in her disturbed stomach — and also to avoid any direct questions Tom might have.

Tom closed the door and started doing stretches.

“What was so important that it came up on a weekend morning?” he asked.

Angela took a sip of her coffee to allow her a few more seconds to iron out her answer.

“He was an eye witness for something to do with the case.”

“What did he see?”

She took another long sip. “I’m not sure, but he says he has proof that he wants to make public.”

“That can only be good for you, right?” Tom asked still

stretching.

“I’m not sure that this is going to end the way I want it to.”

Tom walked toward Angela. She was feeling pressured. Her face was starting to get warm, and she wasn’t sure she could keep controlling it.

“Did you get to the part at the hotel with the LeBaron?”

Shocked, Angela turned to look directly at Tom’s eyes as she bit her lip. She froze.

“The Baron?” Tom pointed to the science fiction book next to her. “It’s a pivotal scene.”

Angela released her lip as she realized she must have misheard Tom.

“No. Not yet.”

Tom walked away. “You need to tell me when you get there. It’s life-changing.”

“I will.”

Angela’s gut clenched as she watched Tom walk away. When she heard him turn on the shower, she gave a deep sigh and rested her head on the cover of the book.

chapter sixteen

E. Kinna

A HEAVY WALL OF humid heat blasted Kirsty Anderson when she exited a cab near the south entrance of New York City's 100 Centre Street courthouse. The sidewalk was already packed with wannabe spectators. Court wouldn't be in session for another half hour, but people had lined up overnight to get a coveted spot for day two of Frank Cole III's fraud trial.

"Right this way, people." One guard said, motioning the line of people towards the door. "One at a time...that's it. Follow the signs to the open courtroom on the left."

Kirsty smiled at the guard when he held his arm out to hold the line so she could pass. Inside, she could see that the crowds were bigger than yesterday during the opening arguments.

One man complained to anyone who would listen. "Aww, you mean we stood outside all night for the bloody overflow room?"

"It's all those reporters hogging the seats." Another man replied.

"Don't matter, it'll still be good. That Bennett woman is

gonna tear Con Man Cole a new one!”

“Pfft. As if he’s gonna testify. No way that fancy lawyer of his allows that.”

Kirsty’s high heels clicked a staccato echo in the hallway as she walked past the two men who were now arguing about what the best spots were to watch the proceedings on a large television screen. At least the courthouse had air conditioning. It promised to be a long day, though one she’d relish as an intern to the presiding judge, Andrew Clinton. It would be a nice change from the usual eight to ten hours writing briefs and checking citations. However, she was mostly looking forward to watching Angela Bennett, who was considered one of New York’s fiercest litigators.

Finding her way to the back row, where a spot had been reserved, Kirsty pulled out her notebook in preparation for the day’s testimonies. A young woman, about her age, shuffled in to sit beside her and smiled.

“Which paper do you write for?” The girl asked.

“Oh, none. I’m one of the judicial interns. I take it you’re a journalist?”

“Yep! Well, I will be after this trial is over and I convince my uncle at the New York Post to put my article on the front page. It’s sensational stuff! By the way,” she extended her right hand, “I’m Meghan Welland.”

“Kirsty Anderson. Nice to meet you.” She shook Meghan’s hand, and then glanced around, noting defence attorney, Daniel Lawrence, had arrived.

“I can’t decide if he’s handsome or not.”

“Who?” Kirsty asked.

“Lawrence. But doesn’t it strike you as odd that a guy as rich as Cole only has his corporate lawyer and not one of the big wigs?”

“It is unusual, yes, but he seems to be doing a good job so far.” Kirsty couldn’t divulge the details of all the pre-trial motions, but Lawrence had managed to win several of them.

“So, who do you intern for?”

“Judge Clinton.”

“Ooh do tell! You must have some *serious* inside info.” She said, her face lighting up like someone given the biggest present at Christmas.

Kirsty fought the urge to roll her eyes, instead giving the girl a weak smile. “Not really,” she lied, “interns aren’t privy to as much as you’d think.”

“Well, that’s a bummer.” Meghan said as her expression shifted to one of someone who’d had that unopened Christmas present snatched away.

She looked so deflated; Kirsty fought the urge to laugh. When the crowd erupted with excited murmurs, she looked up to see the defendant saunter down the aisle to his seat at the defence table. He wore a navy-blue pinstripe suit with a silky texture that only big money could buy. It was luxurious, if somewhat ill-fitted. Frank wasn’t obese but he was packing a few extra pounds, and so the fabric strained around his arms and legs. Of course, it didn’t affect his ability to walk with the arrogance of someone born into extreme wealth, privilege, and sycophantic adoration. Frank Cole III wasn’t handsome, nor was he ugly, but a smug condescension wafted off him like a malodorous vapour trail. As Kirsty told her parents after the first time she saw him in court, the man had a bad vibe. There was little doubt in Kirsty’s mind he was guilty, though she’d never admit it to her legal colleagues who all lived by the mantra: innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

At nine o’clock, right on cue, the Bailiff faced the crowd and said, “All rise for the honourable Justice Andrew Clinton.”

When her boss had taken his seat behind the bench, the Bailiff stepped forward again.

“All rise for the jury,” he said, as the twelve men and women filed into the jury box. Unlike the previous day during opening arguments, there was an electric energy emanating from the gallery now that witnesses would start appearing. It was a palpable excitement as dozens of people expected to see firsthand, the take down of corrupt New York royalty.

Judge Clinton waited until everyone was seated and then said, “Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Today we continue with the trial of the State of New York versus Frank Albert Cole III.” He looked to the plaintiff’s table. “Ms. Bennett, you may call your first witness.”

“Thank you, Your Honour. The state calls Milo De Fabio.”

The man walking to the witness box was about five foot seven, with a compact, stocky build. His dark hair had feathered grey strands at the temples, and his skin was the crinkled bronze of someone who’d spent most of his life working outdoors. The De Fabio family owned one of the oldest and most reputable construction companies on the East Coast. Milo had inherited controlling shares when his father, Vito, died several years ago.

“Mr. De Fabio,” Angela Bennett began, “you are the owner of Fabio and Sons Construction, correct?”

“I am.”

“Your company has worked with the defendant’s company?”

“Yes.”

“And you have completed several contracts with the defendant, Mr. Cole?”

“Objection,” Lawrence said, “leading the witness.”

“I’ll rephrase. How many contracts have you worked on

with the defendant?”

“Eighteen in the past twenty years.”

“So,” she said, “eighteen from 1970 to 1990?”

“Correct.”

“How many of those in the past five years?”

“One.”

“Prior to 1985, would you say that Mr. Cole had been happy with your company’s services?”

“Objection calls for a conclusion.” Daniel Lawrence didn’t bother looking up. “Counsel is asking the witness to speculate on my client’s opinion of his company.”

“Sustained.”

“Prior to 1985, did the defendant or any of his company’s officers ever advise you that he was not satisfied with any of the services your company provided?”

“No.”

“How about after 1985?”

“Yes.”

“What was the nature of the complaint?”

“Well, it was the last job we did. He called me up and accused us of using low grade materials.”

“Were you?”

“No.”

“So, what did you tell the defendant at that time?”

“I told him he was full of crap and I challenged him to prove his allegations.”

Kirsty looked towards Frank Cole and saw him smirking while whispering something to Daniel Lawrence. She knew from the preliminary hearing that Milo De Fabio had sued Cole for breach of contract. He claimed that Cole had broken, without cause, their agreement to convert a couple of warehouses in the Meatpacking District into expensive

boutiques and nightclubs. People thought Cole was crazy or stupid, or both, for investing in that hell hole of a neighbourhood, but investment bankers had started to take notice when Cole bought up several buildings. Over the past few years, most of the district's infamous sex clubs had been shut down and word on the street was the famous designer, Diane von Fürstenberg, wanted in on one of those spaces. Still, for Kirsty, the idea that the Meatpacking district could ever be respectable was beyond ridiculous. It had to be a scam.

Milo continued under direct examination, testifying that around 1985, Frank Cole had started working with new construction companies and stopped taking Milo's calls. At the same time, several real estate developers dropped De Fabio and Sons from their contractor roster, forcing the company to file for bankruptcy protection. After considerable downsizing, and diversifying into other industries, they just managed to stay afloat. Curiously, Kirsty had noted from the pre-trial briefings, the prices of all public sector bids rose appreciably between the time Cole cut off De Fabio's company and his indictment for fraud.

"So," Angela said, "is it your belief that the defendant pressured these other developers not to enter into contracts with your company?"

"Objection, inflammatory."

"Sustained."

"Is it your belief that..."

"Objection, leading question. Counsel is asking what the witness believes, not what he knows to be fact."

"Sustained." Judge Clinton looked down his nose at the prosecutor. "Ms. Bennett, please rephrase the question."

"Yes, Your Honour. Mr. De Fabio, approximately how many other companies did you attempt to enter into contracts

with after your falling out with the defendant?”

“At least twenty.”

“And did any of them provide you with their reasons for not entering into a contract with your company?”

“One did, yes ma’am.”

“What company was that?”

“Macron Industries.”

“And what reason did Macron Industries provide?”

“They told me that Mr. Cole had told them they’d regret it if they did.”

“Objection!” Daniel threw his pencil down on his notepad. “Hearsay. We request that the witness’s remarks be stricken from the record.”

Angela Bennett closed her eyes and said, “Your Honour, I...”

Kirsty recognised the look of annoyance on Judge Clinton’s face when he said, “Counsel, approach the bench.”

As both lawyers began whispering with the judge, Meghan leaned over and whispered to Kirsty. “Whoa, that was intense.”

“It happens,” Kirsty said. However, she was surprised that Angela Bennett had made so many mistakes with her first witness and earned a bench conference so early in the day. She’d expected to see top notch skills not a cascade of poorly worded questions, especially considering the high profile and high stakes nature of the case.

When the bench conference finished, both attorneys returned to their tables and Judge Clinton ordered the jury to disregard the witness’s statement. Expecting that Angela would continue with De Fabio, Kirsty’s mouth dropped open when Bennett instead said she had no further questions for him.

The defence declined to cross-examine. Why would they, Kirsty thought, when the only incriminating thing he said had been disqualified.

“Your Honour,” Angela said as she approached the podium, “I call Otis Johnson.”

A tall, attractive black man rose from the gallery to take the stand.

“Who is this guy?” Meghan Asked.

“He’s the Senior Aide to the Mayor,” Kirsty said.

“Why is she calling him? Shouldn’t she be calling someone from that Macron Industries to back up what De Fabio said? I mean, shouldn’t she have known that De Fabio would say that?”

“Yes, but she probably will later,” Kirsty said. Of course, Bennett would do that, she reasoned. If Macron could testify that Frank Cole had threatened them, it would be explosive evidence. But she also knew that there was evidence of the Mayor’s involvement in the public sector bids, and so she assumed Bennett was planning to explore the more serious links between Mayor Broderick, and Frank Cole. Even though she didn’t recall Otis Johnson being mentioned in the pre-trial briefs, it was possible something new had come up. However, Kirsty noted that neither Frank Cole nor Daniel Lawrence looked surprised or concerned about who was now seated in the witness chair.

Otis Johnson started his testimony by explaining his background as a United States Marine before graduating from Brooklyn Law School. As he detailed his work on Ed Broderick’s mayoral campaign, several reporters paid close attention.

“Would it be fair to say, Mr. Johnson,” Angela asked, “that Mr. Broderick intends to campaign for a second term as

Mayor?”

“Well, sure. Why wouldn’t he?”

“And how much money, would you estimate, the campaign for his first term cost?”

“Objection, irrelevant.” Daniel Lawrence shook his head.

“Overruled.” The judge replied. “The witness may answer.”

“It was two million dollars. I know because I submitted the financial reports with the committee.”

“And how much did Mr. Broderick’s failed campaign for Congress cost?”

“Objection, also irrelevant.”

“Overruled.”

“It was around one million dollars,” Otis said.

Angela gripped the podium. “Help me understand, Mr. Johnson, how a campaign for a city mayor would cost twice as much as a campaign for Congress?”

“Objection, immaterial. Your Honour,” Daniel stood up and addressed Judge Clinton, “I fail to see the relevance of this line of questioning.”

“I will withdraw the question.” Angela paused for several seconds before continuing, as though she was unprepared for this witness. “Mr. Johnson, umm,” there was another pause, “yes, I’m sorry. Mr. Johnson, are you aware of any direct financial contribution from the defendant to Mr. Broderick’s mayoral campaign?”

“No.”

“Are you aware of any direct financial contribution from the defendant to Mr. Broderick personally?”

“Not to my knowledge, no.”

“Thank you. I have no further questions of this witness.”

Meghan once again leaned in a whispered. “What the hell?”

Why did she stop?”

Kirsty shook her head in response. It made no sense, and the use of the word “direct” seemed calculated. She knew that there were campaign finance records that disclosed Frank Cole had paid thousands of dollars towards three of Broderick’s campaign fundraisers. Not that it was illegal, but it was clear the two men were connected, and Broderick owed Cole his gratitude if not more. Angela Bennett’s tense posture as she waited for Lawrence to cross examine Otis Johnson, was a sharp contrast to Frank Cole leaning back in his chair while he smiled at the jury.

“So, Mr. Johnson,” Lawrence said, “just to clarify that, to the best of your knowledge and recollection, my client never directly donated financially to Mr. Broderick’s campaign or to Mr. Broderick in any capacity. Is that correct?”

“Yes.”

“I have no further questions, Your Honour.” Lawrence pivoted towards the defence table and grinned at the jury.

Several reporters looked confused, but they grew animated when Judge Clinton declared a fifteen-minute recess. Many of them, including Meghan, ran out of the courtroom to phone their newsrooms or get on camera in time for the noon broadcast. Kirsty nibbled on a granola bar and flipped through her notebook. She found the entry she’d made a few weeks ago when Bennett had requested a subpoena for the Broderick campaign’s banking records. At the time, Kirsty assumed it was to see where the money had come from, because most mayoral campaigns didn’t cost as much as Broderick’s had reported spending. That and given Cole had dozens of shell corporations, she’d expected Bennett to find that one of those ghost companies had “directly” contributed money to Broderick.

Meghan returned just in time to get seated before court resumed. “So!” She said. “I called my uncle and guess what he said?”

“I—”

“He told me that Broderick definitely spent way more than is normal when he ran for mayor. *And*, he said that Broderick’s opponent, the guy who lost, was supposed to testify today about what he told the New York Campaign Finance Board, but Angela Bennett told him that he would no longer be called as a witness.”

“Did she say why?”

“I don’t know. My uncle didn’t tell me, so I guess not.”

Kirsty let that percolate while Angela Bennett called her next two witnesses: a Mrs. Brown who worked as Cole’s secretary for five years and a Mr. Larson, the Controller at Cole’s company for the past ten years. Both had nothing but glowing things to say about their boss, which wasn’t a surprise. What was a surprise is that they had taken the place of more valuable witnesses, like the guy who’d lost his mayoral bid to Broderick. Not that a disgruntled political loser didn’t need to be taken with a giant grain of salt, but surely if he had evidence worthy of submitting to the Campaign Finance Board, that testimony would be more relevant than learning how Cole liked his coffee prepared.

As the day wore on, the palpable energy of excitement buzzing through the gallery in the morning, had shifted to a dull restless sigh of boredom. If any of the journalists had expected a major scoop for the evening news, it was clear they’d given up hope as Bennett finished her tedious questioning of Mr. Larson.

“I have no further questions of this witness. The state rests, Your Honour.”

At that declaration, dozens of newly energized bodies snapped their heads to attention in unison. Had they heard correctly? The State rested? That was their case? Kirsty's mouth dropped open once again, as did Meghan's. Even Judge Clinton's face bore an expression of shock at what Angela Bennett just said. Kirsty watched as Daniel Lawrence stood and addressed the court.

“Your Honour, the defence submits that the state has not only failed to prove their case against my client beyond a reasonable doubt, they have failed to prove it beyond a modicum of doubt. Therefore, we request that the jury be released and that this case be dismissed on those grounds.

Judge Clinton narrowed his eyes and stared directly at Angela Bennett in prolonged silence before shifting his gaze to Daniel Lawrence. “The defence motion is denied. Court will resume tomorrow at nine a.m.; at which time, the defence will present their case.”

Daniel sputtered. “But Your Honour I—”

“Mr. Lawrence your motion is denied. I will see you here tomorrow morning. Court is adjourned.”

The bang of the gavel reverberated through the courtroom. Dozens of reporters rushed outside, including Meghan, leaving Kirsty to sit and wonder what had just happened. Something was wrong. Bennett looked pained as she shoved documents into her briefcase, and Lawrence looked annoyed. Kirsty didn't understand why Judge Clinton hadn't approved the defence motion, because it was obvious to everyone that Bennett had fumbled her case beyond salvageable. Kirsty's first reaction was to follow the judge to his chambers and get some clarity, but the Bailiff was blocking the doorway, which meant Judge Clinton had left orders he did not want to be disturbed.

Instead, she sighed and watched as Frank Cole III winked at a couple of courtroom groupies simpering in the second row. Ugh, she thought, those women had no shame or self-worth. His gaze then wandered and met her own, and she recoiled at the smarmy narcissism rolling off him and making her skin crawl. Looking away, she gathered up her purse and notebook, and walked into the hallway. She needed a drink. Maybe that would help her make sense of what the hell just happened. One thing she knew for certain, tomorrow promised to be interesting.

chapter seventeen

Jeanette Everson

GODDAMMIT! WHAT NOW? CLINTON scrunched the wodge of notes into the pocket of his trousers and quickened his stride. The secretary – Gloria? Gretchen? – scurried away, eager to be out of range of his annoyance at being interrupted by this barrage of identical messages, all impeccably hand-written onto neat squares of memo paper. By Gladys, that was it. A stack of notes, written by Gladys, all saying to call Amy, *now*. Scarlet robe swinging behind him, Clinton strode into his chambers, already wrestling off his wig. He mopped his brow ineffectively with the scratchy wig, before dropping it onto the leather Chesterfield. Still sweating, he reached for the phone on his desk, punching at the familiar numbers with a stubby forefinger.

The shrill ringing of the telephone in the elegant hallway of the comfortable home he shared with Amy, just a few blocks from the courts, echoed through the receiver. Forcing himself to breathe more slowly (“*Think of your heart, dear,*” even in absence, Amy’s voice nagged him in times of stress.) he imagined his wife tripping daintily across the parquet to

answer it, although in truth it was several years since Amy had tripped daintily – her 46 years still looked closer to 36, but she was certainly no longer the svelte 20-something he'd first set eyes on. His momentary reverie was broken by the sound of his wife's interjection, a little tinny with static, and higher pitched than her usual refined telephone manner.

"Clint," she cried, and promptly burst into tears.

He manoeuvred his way around the desk, expertly flicking the phone cord over the stack of papers, and sat heavily in his chair. He aimlessly nudged the papers into a tidier pile as he waited for his wife to regain control – several deep breaths, hiccupping sobs, and an ugly snort as she blew her nose. She tried again.

"Andy," she deferred to her more usual nickname for her husband, a sure sign that she was more in charge of her emotions. Clint was for when they were young and carefree, life ahead of them, now reserved for heightened passion or extreme emotion. She preferred 'Andrew' now among colleagues or staff, 'Andy' among friends or when they were alone, assuming a formality she felt his upwards climb through the courts necessitated. "Andy, it's Jean," and then she was gone again, lost to a new volley of sobs.

"Amy," his voice was firm and calm. Years of exposure to the criminal nuances of New York had given him a steady game face and outwardly unflappable demeanour. The whiteness of his knuckles as he gripped the receiver to his ear belied his manner only to the portrait of his predecessor that hung on the wall behind his chair. "Amy. What is it?"

Between gasping, shallow sobs, she managed to spit it out. Jean, apparently, was currently sedated in the care of the Columbia University Medical Centre under the watch of one of her housemates. Some kind of 'incident', Amy's panic

incited a fresh wave of weeping which caused the word to waver uncertainly through the telephone wires.

Clinton sighed inwardly. He hadn't time for this. Just because the prosecution rested, there was still plenty to consider before the case continued. Proceedings were, however, finished for the day and his desk had, at least, been cleared for the duration of this damn Cole case. His intern, Kirsty, could tidy up for him and handle things for the rest of the day; she had to learn sometime. He supposed he should go home and see what the fuss was about.

Turning his key in the lock some forty minutes later – he hadn't hurried, this wasn't Jean's first drama – he hung his jacket neatly on a peg by the door, smoothed his greying dirty-blond hair in the mirror in the hallway, and slipped off his shoes. The damp patches under his arms reflected the August heat rather than worry or exertion. He undid his top button, eager to take off the sticky shirt and replace it with a fresh one, and padded towards the back of the house. He found his wife pacing in the kitchen, an undrunk china cup of green tea cold and scummy on the countertop, and an undrunk mug of coffee next to the sink.

She turned angrily as he came into the room, eyes black-rimmed with streaked mascara. He parried the blow, opening his arms to her. "I came as fast as I could," he lied, "I had to recess. You know how it is." She did, of course. She was accepting, proud, supportive of her husband's position, and usually understanding of the demands that came with it. Truth be known, she *liked* being the wife of a judge. She allowed him to enfold her into his arms and gratefully rested her head onto his chest. They stood there for a moment before he gently pushed her away to ask, "Tell me, then, what has she done this time?"

Less than ten minutes later they were in a taxi bumbling impatiently through the stop-start New York traffic. The Hudson gleamed alongside the road like a sliver of silver in the bright summer sun, totally unnoticed by the Clintons as they gazed irritably out at the traffic while the cabbie chatted inanely about something or nothing.

An interminably long forty-five minutes later (“Keep the change, man.”; “This way, sir, madam, follow me please.”), they were at their inert daughter’s bedside. She appeared to be sleeping peacefully, and Amy visibly relaxed at the sight of her apparently uninjured child. She grasped her daughter’s hand and slumped onto the chair beside the bed, freshly vacated by a lanky Asian girl Amy thought she vaguely recognised. Amy stroked her daughter’s arm softly, noticing now the red welts on her wrist; a slight ridge beneath Amy’s thumb as she gently caressed her daughter’s skin.

Andrew, having given his daughter a cursory glance, now turned to the other girl. “What happened this time?” he asked.

There had been too many previous incidences of drinking, minor drugs, wild sorority parties, that he had had to try to play down, smooth over, and keep out of the papers. Nothing major, but as a supreme court judge, he would have preferred a straightforward *nothing*.

“Judge Clinton, Mrs Clinton,” the girl began, “didn’t they tell you on the phone? It was horrible; she was so scared-” She broke off as Andrew took a step towards her and looked at her properly for the first time since entering the room, taking in her pale face and the slight tremor as she spoke.

“I’m sorry,” he said, arms open in a conciliatory gesture, “I can’t remember your name. I think we have met though?” he smiled in his most reassuring ‘trust me, I’m a judge’ manner. “What exactly was horrible? What was she scared of?”

The girl sank back slowly against the foot of Jean's bed, perching her backside onto the edge, careful to avoid her sleeping friend's feet. She sighed, pushing a loose strand of sleek black hair behind her ear. "You should sit down," She nodded towards another chair tucked behind the door and waited while Andrew dragged it nearer to the bed.

"She's been getting these strange messages for a while. Did she tell you anything?" She glanced first at Andrew, then at Amy. Both shook their heads; Amy met her gaze with a blank expression before shrugging her shoulders and turning her attention back to her daughter. The girl took a deep breath.

"Li," she said. "I'm Li. I live across the corridor from Jean. We're housemates. Friends, too, of course. So," she crumpled a fistful of the bedsheet between her fingers, playing with the fabric for a moment as she considered how to start. "A couple of weeks ago – two, three – I'm not sure – she got a note under her door – her bedroom door, not the main door – someone from inside the house." She looked up at Clinton. He nodded, *Go on*. "It was a bit weird; said, 'You have beautiful skin', with a crappy little drawing of a butterfly – well, a moth, we supposed, after the next ones came, you know, like in that film? Did you see it?"

"The one about the lambs? No, Jean talked about it when it first came out. She saw it a few times already, I think. Go on." His face remained impassive, open, not recognising the connection yet.

"So at first, she thought it was just a joke, someone who fancied her, or something – like you said, she loved the film – she thought it was someone who knew that, but then there were more, getting more graphic each time – what the writer wanted to do with her skin, you know, and she stopped thinking it was funny and cool, and she began to get a bit

scared by it, talked to the counsellor, made us all promise to be more careful locking the doors, and so on. We kind of thought it was a joke too – sorority stuff, a prank, you know? But then she started to think someone was following her too...” she tailed off as Clinton stood up abruptly and began pacing.

“That bastard!”

Li looked up in surprise. “Who?”

“Cole. My current trial. Frank Cole. He’s been insinuating all through the case that he doesn’t appreciate my impartiality. He’s been making veiled threats since the trial began. Nothing specific, snide comments, talk of ‘consequences’.” Clinton’s tone made the quote marks around word seem quite audible, leaving it hanging in the room like an unwelcome cobweb. He waved an arm as if to brush it aside. “I’ll show that bastard what happens when impartiality stops.” He muttered a string of obscenities under his breath and continued to pace. He stopped abruptly in front of the window, looked out across the campus, and took a deep breath. Forcing calm, he turned on his heel and gestured to Li to continue. “Sorry, go on.”

“So, this morning, she woke to find someone standing over her... she said she tried to call out, but he stuffed her teddy bear over her mouth – you know that manky old toy she still sleeps with?” Li gave a fleeting grin as she thought of the bedraggled, smelly childhood toy that Jean still kept on her bed.

“Bluey. He’s a rabbit.” Amy said, as if it mattered.

Li glanced up at Amy, but continued as if she hadn’t spoken. “Held it down against her mouth, so she couldn’t call out. And then she said he said something to her about how lovely her skin was and how he was sure she wanted to keep it looking lovely and maybe he would be back to change that for her... she was crying and screaming and didn’t make much

sense to be honest with you but she was so scared. He had a knife, she said. One of those sharp pointy ones that retract, you know, the ones you use for DIY? He kept showing it to her and telling her where he'd make the first cut. He didn't actually hurt her, not really, but he'd tied the teddy to her using the cord of her dressing gown, to make sure she didn't scream, and then he used a rope to tie her to the bed, all the while going on about her lovely skin, and his knife, and showing her the knife, and he must have brought the rope with him mustn't he? Because I mean it's not the kind of thing she'd have lying around is it? So he must have been planning it, and, and it must've been sharp she said because he cut the rope with it and it just sliced through it really easy she said and..." Li's words rushed together, crowding each other, overlapping and confused until she shuddered and pressed her hands to her mouth in two neat balled-up fists. "It was terrible." She stopped and looked up at Andrew, tears spilling over her cheeks. "I went in to get a book off her and there she was." She sniffed loudly and rubbed at her face with the sleeve of her cardigan. Andrew lifted a decanter from the bedside locker and poured a glass of water, passing it across to Li without comment as he waited for her to compose herself.

Amy, having been largely silent while Li was speaking, now also began to sob again, not so loudly as when she had been on the phone to call Andrew home, but with quiet, frightened gulps. She rubbed her fingers lightly over the welts on Jean's wrists, then leant over to push her daughter's hair back from her forehead, smoothing it gently away from her face while she searched for signs of trauma or pain.

None of them had noticed the nurse, who now cleared her throat softly in the doorway to announce her presence. Briskly taking charge of the room, she placed an incongruously

cheerful, brightly coloured blanket of crochet squares around Li's shoulders, patted her on the back, placed a hand gently on Amy's forehead and her forefingers to Amy's wrist, observing as she did so the fob watch that hung from her chest. She checked a chart at the foot of the bed and finally stilled to address the Clintons.

"She's just sleeping it off. No physical harm." The nurse was efficient and reassuring. Her vitals are fine. She'll wake soon I should imagine. I'll call my colleague to talk you through. Let's get you off for a check over now love." This last she addressed to Li, before turning to the Clintons and adding, "She's had a shock, no doubt, wouldn't leave her friend 'til you arrived, time she came away now, lots to process." With that, she ushered Li from the room, leaving Andrew and Amy staring at each other, unanswered questions in Amy's eyes, and a new fury in his.

"The bastard," he muttered. "The utter bastard. I'll see he gets his sentence now. I never thought he'd follow up on the threats. And he'd already started to carry them out. He's been doing this throughout the trial... the bastard. I'll see him hang." Andrew's previous scepticism of his daughter's ability to keep out of trouble had been replaced by a fierce reminder of his duty to protect her – a duty he'd failed her in today. He slumped onto the bed, filling the slight indentation where Li had sat, and leaned his head into his hands.

Despite the already sweltering early morning heat of New York in summer, Clinton jogged the few blocks to the courts, relishing the time to himself. He wouldn't admit it, but he was starting to enjoy this jogging, now he'd got over the initial indignity of Amy's jibes about middle-age spread and long lunches. At home, Amy fussed around her daughter, now comfortably ensconced in her childhood bedroom; in his

chambers, the day's proceedings couldn't wait. Usually unruffled, he was decidedly indecisive about the day ahead. He prided himself on professionalism, his reputation, and his unfailing ability to preside over his courtrooms with unbiased calm, but today, for the first time in his career, he must face someone had threatened Clinton's own family. It would be impossible to disguise his own views now. As he ran, questions bounced through his thoughts to the beat of his Walkman. *It Ain't Over 'til it's Over* pulsed through the headphones and he upped his pace. *Damn right*, he thought, agreeing soundlessly with Kravitz. Would he do the right thing; declare a mistrial, remove himself from the case? Continue to preside, ensuring his full wrath sway the outcome? Reach over the bench and throttle Cole? His footsteps echoed rhythmically from the sun-scorched pavement, the heat emanating up through the thin soles of his shoes.

Jean, in the taxi home the previous evening, had said little, but once home, she had begged her father to make it stop. She had, once she had retold the details and added in the parts Li had missed, been first surprised, then furious, and eventually even a little relieved at her father's revelation that Cole must be the perpetrator of the attack. How dare her father put her life in danger? Didn't he think how scared she would be to be threatened by that man's minions, or whoever he'd sent to stalk her and terrify her? But at least, a reason, an explanation; better than an inexplicable random attack from a stranger without motive, or a college boy whose path she had unknowingly crossed. As he ran onwards towards the courtrooms, Clinton recalled his daughter's pleas in a loop in time to the music. If it was Cole who was behind this, then her dad would be able to fix it, sort it out, get the man behind bars, see appropriate retribution, all those clichés that she

believed her father was capable of when he sat in court in his robes and allowed his serene wisdom to ooze into the minds of juries with a glance here, a nod there, or a barely audible sigh to indicate disagreement or displeasure. Kravitz segued into Adams – *Everything I Do* – and despite Clinton’s preference for ‘proper’ music, he wryly acknowledged that the tape Jean had left in his Walkman was hitting the spot this morning with its current chart playlist cobbled together from her CD collection. Yes, he would make things right. He’d do it for her. Hadn’t her mother begged with him, late into the night, and again over breakfast, to advocate leniency for Cole. “It’s only fraud after all,” she had said, as Jean listened to them talking in bed while they thought she slept in the room next door, quietly at first, then louder, the next morning as he looked up at her across the jug of freshly juiced something or other in a vicious shade of orangey-green. “Not murder. Not worth risking your daughter for.”

chapter eighteen

Dañiel Garcia

DANNY LAWRENCE LOOKED FLABBERGASTED at his files. Perhaps it was the exhaustion of the long day at court, or the boring and toothless attack of the prosecution. No, he thought. It was the last witness they had to present. He had expected more of an attack by Angela Bennett in the beginning. But now he knew why. As Danny glanced towards the prosecution he saw Angela lowering her chin just enough to hide the grin on her face. "She knows our witness is no good," muttered Danny.

"What's wrong?" whispered Frank Cole, who leaned in close.

Danny leaned in closer to Frank. "Nothing, Frank. Just stay calm and all will be fine."

The judge, Andrew Clinton, motioned towards Danny. "Your next witness, Mr. Lawrence."

Danny rose. "I'd like to call in, Barry Houndlehuck."

A murmur rose through the courtroom, interspersed with whispers of disbelief. "The artist?"

Judge Clinton looked astonished as he recognized the

name. A look of admiration and concern spread across his features.

Danny straightened his suit as he approached the witness. "Mr. Houndlehuck, you have been commissioned by Mr. Cole for several projects in the past. Is that true?"

The unshaven old man, scratched at his beard. "Yup, several projects."

"He always reimbursed you, on time, and fairly?"

The old man raised his finger in recognition. "Yup, sure did. Even got paid, too."

"Does Mr. Cole strike you as a good man, an honest man, decent to his fellow humankind?"

Houndlehuck stroked his chin in thought. "Well, he ain't never hit me yet. But I guess he'd be good at it. Maybe a decent hitter for a ballgame or two, too."

Danny closed his eyes and slowly breathed in what surely must have been his last breath of air as a lawyer. Just as he was about to ask his next question, he heard a polite cough from judge Clinton.

"Mr. Houndlehuck, what does baseball have to do with Mr. Cole?"

Houndlehuck looked up at the judge. "Well, nothing I suppose. Except that he likes hotdogs. That's a new project I'ma painting for him."

Confusion on judge Clinton's face. "Why hotdogs?"

The old man knit his brows together in thought. "Well, everybody likes hotdogs, don't they? I figure, if I painted it for his buildings, people'd like him, too."

The judge leaned in. "Mr. Houndlehuck, are you saying that Mr. Cole is not a likable person or indulges in strange humanitarian efforts?"

Angela Bennet's face was almost sunk to the desk as she

tried not to laugh.

Danny raised his hand for a question to the judge. "Your honour, permission to approach the bench, for a sidebar, please?"

Judge Clinton raised an eyebrow, and waved Danny towards him. "You may approach."

With all the respect of court he could muster, Danny Lawrence approached the judge. "With all due respect, your honour. I feel your questioning is clearly interfering with the proceedings, influencing the witness, and may be grounds for an appeal later on." Danny strained to keep his expression as concerned, respectful, and humble as possible.

Judge Clinton looked at Lawrence long enough to make his point clear, and just too long to be anything but misgiving. "This is my courtroom, Mr. Lawrence."

"Of course, your honour." Danny quickly lowered his head and backed away. "The defense rests, and we await the decision of the jury and the court."

After an hour long break the courtroom was filled again. The jury representative looked nervous as he stepped out and addressed the courtroom. "Based on the, uh, evidence we've seen and, uh, have heard today. We pronounce the defendant, Frank Cole, not-guilty"

A mixture of ahs and ohs filled the courtroom, but quickly died down and turned into a light mumble as the people present realized that they weren't such a large crowd to begin with.

As the prosecuting lawyer, Angela Bennett, began to pack her files Frank turned towards her and shouted: "I told you I'd win."

Danny looked at Frank with an exasperated expression.

He'd seen this type of thing happen before. "No need to gloat, Frank. We've won. Let's go.

Frank ignored Danny's sensible warning. He shot out his hand towards Ms. Bennet, emphasizing each word with a thrust. "You can't beat justice, Bennett, and you can't beat Frank Cole!"

Angela Bennett's expression hardened into a neutral, cold stare at her briefcase as she closed it.

Frank Cole's voice grew louder in an attempt to penetrate the hard facade. "No woman can take on Frank Cole and think she can come out on top! And she ain't never gonna come out on top without an orgasm!"

Danny held back his hand to reach for his client as Frank said those last words, and rolled his eyes. The line had been crossed.

"Mr. Cole. Even though the jury and the court found you not-guilty on the charges against you, I do find you in contempt of this court. You are hereby sentenced to three nights in a cell, effective immediately! Have a good day, Mr. Cole." A heavy clack reverberated through the courtroom. Without further words Judge Clinton laid down his gavel, rose, and exited.

Frank looked around in disbelief as a massive, short haired bailiff approached him. "What?!" His puzzled gaze turned towards Danny.

Danny Lawrence merely shrugged his shoulders. "Sorry, Frank. I told you so, those are the rules in court."

The bailiff grabbed Frank under the arm, and with forceful precision dragged him towards a back door. "This way, sir"

Danny turned his own gaze down to his own files as the loud protests from Frank filled the courtroom. The backdoor closed with a resounding click, so did Danny's briefcase.

chapter nineteen

John Gray

THE OFFICER ESCORTED HIM into the first of this afternoon's bland spaces. Lots of ugly, functional furnishing - everything that could be was bolted down. Everything was designed to be wiped clean, but probably wasn't. At least there seemed to be some aircon working somewhere; a relief in the current heat.

The first officer handed papers to another and left.

"Face the wall, hands on the wall!"

Frank complied and was patted down again.

"Take off your belt and shoes, place them in this box, then walk through the detector."

"I need to confirm your ID, sir. Full name?"

"Frank Albert Cole".

"Date of Birth?"

"February 15th 1943."

"Last four of your social?"

"What?"

"Last four digits of your social security number"

"Uh... 4971."

"OK, take a seat over there, please." The officer gestured

to a bench seat along the far wall. The only space left was next to a man in his twenties who had an intense look on him, suggesting the use of some kind of intoxicant. Standing would just draw more attention though, so he walked over, gestured to the space, and the man shrugged. Frank sat.

“Nice suit.”

“Well...”

“Don’t worry man, not my style. What you here for then?”

“I got angry. In court.”

“Never a good move. Me, I just well, lose it, sometimes.”

He turned round and stared intensely, as if to make a point.

“Right ... I’m Frank.”

“I’m Mickey. Not the mouse though. And not Metal Mickey either.” Mickey briefly glared at him as if to nip a well-worn quip in the bud. Frank noticed that his nose looked bent out of joint: no stranger to a bit of brawling, then, though Frank reckoned he seemed settled enough at the moment. That didn’t ease the sense of foreboding Frank felt being here. New place, new rules, new challenges.

He’d skimmed over plenty of newspaper reports about the city jails and their problems, but what was it to him? If you did the crime, serve the time. No need to provide cosy quarters for the people who dragged the city down rather than build it up! He appreciated the irony of that now he’d seen the other side of the system. He imagined Mickey was pretty familiar with this place and glanced across. Mickey’s eyes were closed and he was dribbling from the side of his mouth.

“Frank Cole!” a voice called. Frank stood up and was pointed to another desk. Another round of questions and checklists presumably.

“Right. I’ve got some questions to go through with you. And ...nice suit.”

After the bureaucracy, searches, uniform and bedding issue Frank was grateful for an end to the tedium and a bit of time on his own. The day room for his group of cells was another sparse room, sticky and airless, with tables bolted to the floor, but he could at least stop answering questions. His cell might have had a marginally better atmosphere but Frank reckoned his senses were rapidly becoming dulled to the smell of damp and stale sweat. He placed his bedroll on the appointed bed, returned to the day room and sat trying to gauge his neighbours without attracting any attention. This was a low security unit, so in theory the others here wouldn't have a history of violence.

He had only sat for a few minutes when another officer appeared with a clipboard.

“Frank Cole?”

He stood briskly.

“You’ve got an attorney visit - Daniel Lawrence. Follow me.”

And so he went, through the stinking corridors; through several security doors, down several floors to a space where the paint was perhaps more recent and the aircon was apparently working. He was ushered into a large visiting room and pointed to a table. Once seated, Danny was shown in, carrying a briefcase which he placed on the floor on his side of the table. The guard who had shown him in returned to a chair in the corner.

“Hi Frank.” Danny seemed obviously nervous and fidgeted as he sat down. “How’s it going?”

“Well enough. Tedious mainly.”

“Yeah, well... I think it’s pretty clear they shoulda just fined you, not sent you down here.”

“I reckon they thought that here too when they did my paperwork, but I bet they see all sorts and aren’t going to question.”

“Just keep your head down and don’t make trouble.”

“Right, I bet that’s exactly it.”

“I meant that you should keep your head down and stay out of trouble.”

“Really, Danny - what do you take me for?”

It was clear that Danny was about to say something then thought better of it.

“I know that I should have kept my mouth shut today. But there’s something else going on here.” Frank shrugged. “What have you got to tell me, anyway?”

“I think you just sit it out. We’ll take action later to challenge the imprisonment. I reckon we’ve got a good case that it was unnecessarily punitive. But we’ll sue later rather than have more hearings now.”

“That’s kind of what I expected you’d say. Look, can you make sure that we don’t get behind on the NCG project? There was stuff that really needed done on that this week and I don’t want this to hold it up.”

“I thought of that, Frank.” Danny picked up a file from his case and raised it so that the waiting guard could see it. The guard came over and watched from a few feet away.

“Mr Cole has to sign some documents for his business.”

The guard nodded. Danny slid the first across the table, and handed a pen to Frank.

Frank noted the title on the top page. Feeling Danny’s gaze, he flicked to the last page. Maybe this place was making him become paranoid - he wouldn’t normally read in full everything Danny prepared. He signed and passed the document back.

“And this one too, please.”

Frank spent even less time before signing the second document. Danny took the pen back and replaced the documents in his case. The guard moved back to his chair in the corner.

“So”, said Frank after a brief pause, “you’ll get that off to Thompson in the next day?”

“Yes. And I don’t think there’s anything else with a deadline on it.”

“Good. But let me know.” He lowered his voice. “You seem to be able to get in here at quite short notice if needed.”

Danny smiled, and stood.

“Thanks for the visit, Danny.”

“You’re welcome. Any time.”

Danny left, and Frank was escorted back to his block.

On the way back, his thoughts returned to Danny’s nervousness. Frank knew that he didn’t often visit prison - Danny was mainly a commercial lawyer - though he’d done it before and during the trial. This place didn’t give you the mental space to think things through clearly. Everything was a potential threat and that spilled over into not trusting people.

It was not as if Frank had built his success on the back of naive trust, but he knew he had come to depend on loyal staff who made what he had accomplished possible. And here he was, getting suspicious about those same staff. A quiet afternoon and a good night’s sleep were probably what he needed most now.

On arriving back in the day room, he found a magazine lying on a table unattended and picked it up. It was copy of “American Angler” from the winter. Fishing was of no interest

or relevance to him here but it was something to hold while he continued to discreetly observe the room.

As a result he spotted the man as soon as he came across - trying to look casual, but actually moving quite purposefully, Frank thought.

The man sat down next to him.

“Mr Cole?”

Frank nodded, and put down the magazine.

“You into fishing?”, the man asked.

“Not really. I did a bit with my father when I was a teenager, but not so much now.”

“I always did. It ran in my family, so I try and get the magazines when I can.”

“Sorry - I didn’t know it was your...”

“Don’t you worry yourself about that. All friends here.”

There was something almost forced in the way he said it.

“I’m Rich. I mean, my name’s Rich. I’m not ‘rich’ rich.” It was said as a well-practiced introduction, but he could almost have added “not like you” to the end.

“Call me Frank.”

“Well, Frank. Should I show you what’s what?”

It seemed to be best to go along with it, so Frank did.

The tour of the limited facilities in the wing was necessarily short; the introduction to the “local rules” was short but necessary, and the constant anecdotes about fishing and outdoor pursuits were unnecessary but to be endured. Somewhat oddly (Frank thought) Rich had picked up the fishing magazine when they’d started. Nothing that had been said about the “rules” suggested that the magazine was of great value or at risk of theft. But this place obviously did strange things to your thought patterns.

The commentary from Rich seemed to have reached the point of unnecessary repetition: Frank felt it was somewhat like the earnest hotel bell boy who starts demonstrating the curtains and the doors to remind you to tip him, though he couldn't see what Rich was after.

Rich eventually stopped and pretended to look at the block's bulletin board, though he'd already explained the importance of the notices that would appear there.

"I have something to show you," he said. He glanced around briefly as he brought the fishing magazine up in front of him.

Rich opened the magazine, and started leafing through it.

"So, Frank, there's a gentleman I work for. That fine gentleman's name is Tony Salerno, and he thought you should see this."

Frank was momentarily nonplussed - what would Tony Salerno want him to see in a fishing magazine?

Rich stopped flicking through the magazine, revealing a print tucked inside the pages.

Frank took a sharp intake of breath. The image was a print from a CCTV recording - probably a city-operated camera given the location. The white date and time were clearly legible at the bottom: 23 MCH 91

"I'm told a mutual friend sent this over to Tony."

The picture showed a white Ford Explorer, and it was clearly Frank driving.

The colour drained from Frank's face. He put out his hand to brace himself against the wall. How did this happen? This meant that... There was too much to make sense of. His head was spinning and feeling faint he shuffled back to a seat and sat down. Rich had vanished, but the fishing magazine had been left on the table. The cover picture showed an orange-

jacketed man fishing alone amongst the snow-covered rocks of a river.

Frank shivered: he also felt cold and alone as the fear rose within him.