

I Remember Tomorrow

William Butler



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I dedicate this book to Becky Pope who, for many years, was the sole female officer on the police department in Gilmer, Texas. Understanding she may not see herself as such, I consider her to be a pioneer, having opened the door for others to follow in her footsteps. While no character in this story is modeled after her, Becky was a great inspiration by virtue of the intelligence and professionalism she brought and continues to bring to the field of law enforcement.

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Chapter One

Soft rain fell on the patrol car's windshield making the wipers squeak. Jeanette sat in the passenger seat, biting her lower lip and feeling nervous. Her first day with the police department was an hour old and she hadn't done anything terrible yet.

So far, so good, she thought.

The driver's door opened and a tall, slim man slid behind the wheel. He pulled off his hat and shoved it between the headrest and the cage behind the front seat.

Stuart didn't care for rookies or women who thought they were cops. Both reasons prompted the police chief to make him Jeanette's field training officer.

"Well, Henderson," He fastened his seat belt, "you ready to deal with it?"

Jeanette nodded.

Stuart pulled the gearshift down into drive and eased away from the curb.

"You check everything out already?"

Jeanette nodded again.

"Hey," he spoke without taking his eyes from the road, "Henderson."

"Yes, sir." She brought her head up from the patrol report she'd been filling out.

Stuart pulled up to a stop sign and put the car back in park then turned to Jeanette.

"Let's lay down a couple of ground rules before we get off on the wrong foot. First off, when somebody asks you a question you

answer; with your mouth not your head. I know you got a lotta loose stuff up there but I can't tell whether you shakin' it or noddin' by the way it rattles. Understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"And my name's Stuart, not sir. Understand?"

"I understand."

Stuart put the car back in drive, moved around the corner and headed toward the center of town.

With a population of fewer than seven thousand, Chimney's police department consisted of only seven fulltime officers. Jeanette was the newest. She landed the job when a rash of burglaries and thefts forced the city council to hire more people.

"Here's another rule for you." Stuart turned onto the town square and pulled behind a line of cars waiting for a traffic light. "Spend more time watchin' what's goin' on out the window than what's on your clipboard. You can always get your paperwork caught up later."

Jeanette laid the clipboard on the seat between them.

"What is it you don't like about me?"

Stuart shrugged.

"Ain't it obvious?"

"I'm a woman?"

"That's part of it." The light changed and Stuart followed the cars through the intersection. "I'm used to working with people who've been in the business for a while. You know; they usually know a little more about what they're doin'. A rookie can get you hurt. That bothers me. So, I don't much care for rookies."

Jeanette wanted to ask him how long he'd been brain dead. It came out, "So how long you been a cop?"

"This'll be my second year with Chimney." He turned onto a residential street and slowed their speed to a crawl. As he drove, his eyes moved carefully from house to house. "I was with Jamesboro for five years before I came here. The pay's better here

and the insurance too. Linda was pregnant then and I had to think about that.”

“So,” Jeanette shifted in her seat, “I guess that gives me about three years more experience.”

Stuart glanced in her direction.

“I did just over ten years as a cop in the army.” She explained, not returning what had become an angry glare.

“My last assignment was with a drug suppression team in Germany. I wasted a guy in a bar when a setup went bad. The army started given me a ration of crap over it. Things at home were for shit too. My husband was a civilian; worked at the PX which is the army version of a department store; and I found out he was sleepin’ around whenever I was on duty. I told him to pack his bags and then I filed for a divorce. I got out when it was final.”

“So you weren’t a real cop. You was just an MP?”

Stuart was trying to find a way to win back his pride.

“Just an MP,” she spat with as much indignation as she could muster. “You know I caught a load of that crap at the rinky-dink academy you guys go to around here. What is it with you civilians? You think all we did was break up bar fights or somethin’?”

“Hey,” Stuart hadn’t expected such a sharp response, “I’m sorry. I wasn’t ever in the service...”

“Hey,” Jeanette said, mockingly, “I won’t hold it against you. And by the way, that car’s fixin’ to run that stop sign.”

Stuart jerked the patrol to the left and slammed on the brakes as a red panel van drove full speed through the stop sign. It missed the patrol by inches then pulled to the curb after clearing the intersection.

Stuart flipped a switch that turned on the red lights and eased in behind the van. He reached for the radio mike and grabbed Jeanette’s hand.

“I’ll radio it in.” She said as she pulled the mike from its rack and stepped out to stand behind the open car door.

Stuart exited, waited until the radio dispatcher acknowledged their location, then started toward the driver's door of the van. Jeanette laid the mike on the car seat and walked to the back of the van. Peeking through the rear window, she saw half a dozen video recorders covering the van floor. She tried the handle on the back door before moving along the side toward the front.

Just before reaching the window of the passenger door something flashed through her mind: an image of the driver pushing a gun into Stuart's face.

She unholstered her pistol, brought it up and slowly eased forward. She stopped when she reached the open passenger window and the scene in her mind matched the one in reality.

"Hey, asshole." She struggled to keep her voice calm. "You wanna die young?"

She could see Stuart's face, pale and blank as he stared into the muzzle of the driver's gun. All she could see of the driver was his long, black hair and the back of his denim jacket.

"Looks like we gotta situation," the man answered without turning.

"Looks that way," Jeanette felt her heart pounding in her chest and silently ordered it to slow down. "Problem is, I don't think you understand your options."

"Oh I understand, alright," his voice quivered. "You're gonna put your gun down or I'm gonna blow him away."

Jeanette had a brief flashback to a bar in Germany and a similar situation that ended with the death of a young boy too scared to reason. She pushed the thought to the back of her mind.

"And what happens after you kill him?"

A moment of silence as the driver considered the question. Then, without further comment, he slowly held his gun to the side and let it dangle on his finger from the trigger guard.

Stuart was still frozen in place.

"Grab the gun, Stuart."

His hand flashed up and snatched the revolver. Jeanette moved around the front of the van, keeping her pistol trained on the driver. She stopped when she came around to the street side and could see the man's face.

"Open the door, Stuart, and get him on the ground."

Stuart complied, although his movements were slow and mechanical. After placing the man on the ground, he pulled handcuffs from a pouch on his pistol belt.

When their prisoner was secured, Jeanette holstered her gun and took in a deep breath.

"Get on the radio." She ordered. "Tell the dispatcher we're okay and we'll be bringin' one in. And get a wrecker out here for his car."

Stuart stood and started toward the patrol. Two steps later he stopped and turned back to Jeanette.

"Thanks."

She smiled.

"No problem."

"Hey." The man on the ground tried to squirm into a sitting position. "You just gonna leave me down here?"

"Hey," Jeanette reached into a pocket on her uniform shirt and extracted a card, "what's your name, anyway?"

"Johnny Cummings." He turned his head to look up at Jeanette. "And I know my rights. You can't just leave me like this."

"Count your blessings, Johnny." She fingered the card with one hand, while resting the other on the butt of her gun. "You could be dead right now. And just so I know that you know your rights, let me read them to you before you say anythin' else."

An hour and a half later Stuart and Jeanette walked across the county jail parking lot to their patrol car. At the car, Stuart stopped before opening the driver's door.

"How'd you know?"

Jeanette looked at him quizzically.

“What?”

“You had your gun out before you ever got a clear view of what was happenin’.” He pulled the key out of the car door and leaned his arms on the roof. “How’d you know I got caught with my pants down?”

“I saw him in the outside mirror.” She lied.

Stuart shook his head.

“There wasn’t no mirror on your side. That was one of the things I checked off on the inventory sheet before the wrecker hauled it off.”

“Hey.” Jeanette opened the door on her side. “What difference does it make? Everything turned out okay.”

She sat in the car and pulled the door closed. Stuart joined her and started the engine before he asked again.

“It makes a difference to me.” He pulled the gearshift into reverse but kept his foot on the brake. “How’d you know?”

“Would you believe me if I said it was women’s intuition?”

“Try again.”

“Tell you what,” Jeanette glanced away then turned back, “find us someplace to get a coffee and I’ll think up a different lie.”

“Alright,” he backed out of the parking slot, “but it better be a good one.”

The Kitchen Door occupied a corner of the intersection of North Wood Street and State Highway 155, a stone’s throw away from the county jail. They made the drive in silence. When Stuart turned off the engine in the parking lot, Jeanette opened her door and started from the car.

“Wait a minute.”

“Okay,” she stopped with one leg on the pavement, “I remembered it; just before it happened.”

Stuart didn’t have a chance to respond because Jeanette was out of the car and headed toward the restaurant as soon as she

finished speaking. Stuart slammed his fist on the steering wheel and climbed out of the car to follow.

In the restaurant, they found a table and ordered coffee from a waitress. Jeanette stared at her hands, clasped in front of her on the tabletop. Stuart waited until the waitress brought their cups and moved away before he prodded again.

“What do you mean, you remembered it?”

His manner had changed dramatically since their first meeting, less than two hours earlier. The flippant arrogance was gone. Jeanette took a sip of coffee and continued to avoid his glance. After a long silence, she set the cup on the table.

“I remember things that haven’t happened yet.”

Stuart smiled.

“You’re jokin’, right?”

She looked up at him, concern in her eyes and shook her head.

“You can see in the future?” His voice peaked. “Is that how you knew the van was gonna run the stop sign?”

“But it’s not all the time,” she nodded and signed, choosing her words carefully. “The Army psychiatrist called it forward memory. He said everybody’s got it but most people never develop it to the point where they realize what’s happening.”

“Your psychiatrist? You mean you had a shrink?”

She didn’t like the direction the conversation had taken. These were private parts of her life; things she kept to herself because of the potential for problems. She stared at Stuart through narrowed eyes, as the muscles in her jaw tightened.

“You say that like an accusation.”

“And you’re avoidin’ the question,” he half smiled. “Why don’t you wanna tell me what’s up?”

Jeanette stared at him a second longer.

“Because you’re an asshole and I don’t trust you. Because when I was a kid, I thought everybody could do the same thing. When I got older I found out how wrong I was, how different I

was, and it scared the hell outta me. Because it's what let me find out Kevin was sleepin' with my best friend. And because when I needed it the most, it didn't do a damn thing to keep me from killin' a kid. It's not fun. It's not neat and you're damn right I had a shrink. Not because I'm crazy but to try and keep from goin' crazy."

"Sorry I asked."

"Yeah," her eyes turned down, "me too. I guess you're gonna bring this up with the Chief?"

"Hadn't planned to," his voice took on a gentler quality. "But can't you see that? I mean, can't you tell what's gonna happen?"

She shook her head.

"It's not like that. I can't..."

She stopped in mid-sentence and looked up from her coffee. A tall, dark haired man approached their table. Realizing Jeanette's attention had shifted, Stuart turned in his seat as the other man spoke.

"Hey, Stuart."

"Richard!" He stood. "When'd you get back in town?"

The two men shook hands. They stopped short of exchanging hugs as Stuart remembered Jeanette.

"Richard, this is Jeanette Henderson. Jeanette, this is my wife's brother, Richard Enfield."

Richard leaned forward, offering his hand. Jeanette accepted absently.

"I didn't know Chimney had progressed far enough to hire a female cop." He smiled broadly. "Does that mean we're finally comin' out of the Stone Age?"

He noticed Jeanette's gaze was fixed, as it had been since he approached, and she still did not speak.

"I'm sorry." His voice took on an apologetic tone. "I didn't mean to offend you."

"I'm," Jeanette shook herself from the trance, "I mean, no. You didn't."

Abruptly, she stood and dug into her pocket for change. "I'll get the tip if you pay for the coffee."

Stuart glanced at her puzzled.

"Coffee's free here, but..."

"Good," she cut him off, her voice almost panicked. "You leave the tip then and I'll meet you at the car."

She looked at Richard, a nervous smile on her face.

"It was good meeting you."

Before Richard could formulate a response, she brushed past and headed toward the exit. The two men stared at one another, confused.

"Do you always have that effect on women?"

"She's your partner."

Stuart reflected on the earlier events.

"A good one, too." Then another thought came to mind. "Have you talked to Linda since you got in?"

"No. I was gonna give her a call when I got to the house."

"Make sure you do." Stuart pulled a wad of bills from his pocket and dropped one on the table. "She'd have a fit if she found out I knew you were back before she did."

"I better get back on the road." He glanced at his watch. "I'll talk to you later."

"Okay." Richard's thoughts went back to Jeanette's behavior. "Tell your partner, I didn't mean to say anything out of line."

"Forget about it." He headed for the door. "We've had a rough day, already."

He found Jeanette waiting in the car, busying herself with their patrol report.

"Are you okay?"

He sat and pulled the door closed.

"Yeah," Jeanette answered without looking up from her work. "Why do you ask?"

"Cause you got kinda spaced back there."

They moved from the parking lot and drove north toward the city limits. Near the edge of town Stuart moved the car to the side of the road and parked. He turned sideways in the seat and rested an arm on the seat back.

"Somethin' bugged you about Richard. What was it?" He stared directly into her face. "Did you see somethin'?"

"No," Jeanette shifted in her seat, suddenly restless. "Nothin' like that."

"You're lyin'."

Jeanette finally looked at him. But before she could reply the radio sounded, dispatching them to a family disturbance. Stuart turned around in his seat and put the car in drive while Jeanette answered the radio. As he pulled onto the highway, he glanced over at her. She knew he wondered what thoughts were going through her mind. Before he could ask, she looked up and smiled.

"Maybe you're not such a jerk after all."

"I'm not even gonna ask."

"Not now, anyway," she added.

They drove into a clean, middle-class neighborhood. Single story homes and well-kept lawns lined the streets. Here and there, bicycles and toys occupied driveways and young children played in their yards.

Stuart stopped in front of a red, brick house with a flower-lined walkway. He reached for the radio mike but stopped short when he realized Jeanette was already telling the dispatcher they had arrived.

As they exited the car, a woman opened the front door of the house. Mud covered her light blue dress, her blond hair was mussed and dirty, and she walked urgently toward Stuart and Jeanette.

Jeanette reached her first.

"What's wrong, ma'am?"

"My husband and his brother," tears streaked the dried mud on her face, "they're trying to kill each other."

“Where are they?” Stuart asked.

He reached out and touched her arm in an effort to calm her.

“In the backyard,” she sobbed. “It’s a stupid fight. I mean, Larry shouldn’t even be still mad about it. I mean, it’s been years and years. But he just won’t stop.”

“You stay here by our car.” Stuart reassured the woman.

He and Jeanette trotted up the driveway and around to the back of the house. Before they reached the back yard, they heard the shouts of the two men; one heavy, but calm; the other, loud and shrill.

Stuart was just ahead of Jeanette as they rounded the corner of the house and found the two men on the ground: one seated on the chest of the other. The man on the bottom was slim and well muscled, while the guy on top was heavier, rounder and not so well proportioned.

“Police officers,” Stuart announced, “what seems to be the problem, here?”

“The problem,” the smaller man mouthed, “is that this fat fuck won’t get off me.”

“Hey, Larry,” the other man commented. “I told you I’d let you up if you’d leave. You kept mouthin’ and fightin’ so here we sit.”

He turned to Jeanette, who stood several paces to Stuart’s right.

“I didn’t know we had a lady on the department.”

Jeanette had to smile at the man’s jovial attitude.

“Well we do,” she acknowledged, “and I’m afraid I’m gonna have to ask you to get off of your friend.”

“He ain’t no fuckin’ friend.” The bottom man shouted. “He’s my damned brother.”

The top man stood slowly. Having noticed Jeanette’s hand resting on her pistol, he brought his hands up in front of him with his palms out.

“I’m Sam Clark.” The heavy man said. “This is my brother, Larry. We were just havin’ an argument and things got a little outta hand.”

“Looks like.” Stuart stepped forward so he was between the two combatants. “What’s this all about?”

Larry rolled to one side, jumped to his feet, and brushed mud and grass from his clothes.

“The bastard stole my girl friend and married her.”

“That was fourteen years ago, you dumb shit.”

“I don’t care if it was fourteen days ago.” Larry took a step forward but stopped when Jeanette moved beside Stuart. It put both officers between Larry and his brother. “You took her from me when she wanted me, not you.”

“I think you need to go home, Mr. Clark,” Jeanette offered.

“I think you need to get fucked, bitch.”

Jeanette’s eyes narrowed.

Stuart started around her but she put a hand on his arm, “I got this,” and shook her head.

“Mr. Clark, you can either go home or go to jail.”

He took a step closer, “Kiss my ass,” and doubled his hands into fists.

Jeanette moved toward him, stepped to one side and brought a knee up into his stomach. Larry doubled over as the air rushed from his lungs and Jeanette pushed him forward with the heel of her palm. He stumbled which let Jeanette grab a flailing arm with one hand and eased him to the ground. Her handcuffs seemed to materialize in her free hand and before Larry could regain his senses he was secured and helpless.

“You’re under arrest for assaulting a peace officer.” Jeanette’s voice stayed calm and business-like. “I won’t bother reading you your rights because I don’t plan on asking you any questions about the offense for which you’ve been arrested.”

She looked over at Stuart and Sam. Her scuffle ended quickly enough neither man had the chance to help. They stared disbelieving at Larry who squirmed and cursed in the mud.

“Ah,” Jeanette cleared her throat, “I take it the lady out front’s your wife, Mr. Clark.”

“Yeah,” a smile came to Sam’s face, “but how’d you do that, ma’am? I mean, I’ve been fightin’ him on and off for most of my life and I was doin’ good just to stay on top. But you laid him out just like boom, boom, boom.”

“That’s what they train us for at the academy. Right, Stuart?”

“Ah. Yeah. Right, Mr. Clark.” Stuart wiped the confused expression from his face. “And why don’t you go with my partner. She’ll wanna get some information from you and your wife for our report. I’ll get your brother loaded in the car.”

“Okay.” Sam glanced down at his brother again then back at Jeanette. “I love it. We can go through the house.”

Jeanette followed Sam through the house. They found his wife, Alison, waiting patiently by the patrol car.

“Honey,” Sam called, motioning to her from the front door. “They wanna get some information from us.

They moved back into the house and tried to make themselves comfortable. After getting their personal information, Jeanette asked the question that occupied her since Larry’s outbursts about Sam and Alison.

“What’s the problem between you and your brother?”

Sam sat in a straight-backed chair at the kitchen table. Alison hovered near a window, watching Stuart handle Larry and Jeanette stood in the doorway leading to the living room, scribbling in her pocket notebook.

“He’s got it in his head that Alison was supposed to marry him and not me.”

“How long’s this been goin’ on?”

“Since we were in high school.” Sam leaned forward, propping his elbows on the table. “That’s been eighteen years, now.”

“Eighteen years?” Jeanette said in disbelief. “You’ve been puttin’ up with him for eighteen years?”

“Doesn’t make sense, does it?” Alison chimed in. “I dated Larry for about a month. We went out maybe four or five times.

Nothin' ever happened that should have made him think we was anything but friends. He and I were in the same grade and Sam was a grade ahead."

"They'd gone out twice before I even met her." Sam went on. "Anyway, not long after that—maybe a few months later—me and Alison started seeing each other. We got married a year after she graduated and I guess up till then, Larry thought he still had a chance. Today's not much different than what usually happens. Just that we wound up draggin' Alison in the fight with us."

"How long's he gonna have to stay in jail?" Alison turned away from the window.

"Till he can make bail." Jeanette flipped the notebook closed and tucked it into her pocket. "You guys gonna get him out or is he gonna have to call somebody?"

Alison looked at Sam for a moment.

"Let him sit there for a while," Allison insisted.

"Maybe," Sam nodded, "it'll bring him around a little bit."

"Well, folks we're gonna get over to the jail." Jeanette straightened and headed toward the front door.

"Officer Henderson...?"

Alison walked from the kitchen and stood only a few paces behind Jeanette.

"I'm scared," she glanced over her shoulder to make sure her husband wasn't listening, "of Larry. I didn't tell Sam, but before he came out, Larry was, well... He was trying to hurt me and he was acting crazy. Even more than usual."

"I don't know what to tell you, Misses Clark. Did you want to file assault charges against him?"

"No." She shook her head. "I want him to leave us alone."

For the first time, Jeanette noticed how tired Alison looked; as if the years of fighting and bickering had taken a heavy toll. She wanted to reach out to her but held back; maybe because of a lack of self-confidence or because her own life was so unstable.

“I don’t really know what to tell you, there.” She felt like a coward running from a fight. “Just that the next time it happens, try and call us before it gets out of hand.”

Alison’s sad eyes brighten a bit.

“Okay.” She smiled. “Thanks for comin’.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Jeanette turned and opened the door. Stuart waited on the lawn beside the car. In the back seat, Larry leaned against the door, unmoving. Jeanette walked briskly to the car and Stuart tossed her the keys as she came within a few feet.

“Your bust,” he smiled, “you get to drive.”

The drive to the county jail was quiet. Larry never spoke; his pride wounded by the defeat at the hands of a woman. Stuart busied himself with the patrol report while Jeanette let her thoughts wander.

She welcomed the scuffle with Larry and the distraction of someone else’s problem. It gave her a chance to occupy her mind, to fill it with clutter and distraction. At times like that she did not notice images of things to come. At times like that she felt comfortable and happy. At times like that she could tell herself she was normal. Quite times, like their drive to the jail, were the things she hated and feared. When her mind was unencumbered, images flowed freely; scenes from experiences passed and those yet to come.

“Hey,” Stuart called quietly, “Earth to Henderson.”

“I’m here.”

She smiled and thanked him mentally. She also noted how drastically his personality had changed since their initial meeting earlier that day. Had she judged him prematurely?

“When we finish booking this guy in,” he laid the clipboard on the seat between them, “we need to go by the office and do some reports. We’ve got two pretty good ones to write up and it ain’t even lunch, yet.”

“Okay.” Jeanette glanced at her watch. “It’ll be noon before we finish with this. Why don’t we swing by McDonald’s and get something on the way to the office? That way we can eat and get the reports outta the way at the same time.”

“Works for me.”

They arrived at the jail and deposited Larry. After grabbing some burgers, they called the dispatcher to have the next calls handled by another patrol. At the office, they settled down and started on their reports and meal.

Stuart worked on the disturbance call while Jeanette worked out the details of the earlier arrest. Over the years, she learned some rather creative ways to fabricate explanations for her insight. On more than a few occasions it had allowed her to get the upper hand in some difficult situations.

“Henderson,” Stuart looked up from his work and spoke around a mouth full of burger, “what you did to that Clark guy. Does it have a name or did you just make it up?”

Jeanette chuckled.

“Just say he lunged at me and I kneed him in the stomach and then placed him on the ground.”

“Sounds good to me.” A thought occurred to him. “By the way, why’d you hold me back? Or did you know what was comin’?”

“Yeah.”

She averted his gaze.

“Yeah, what?”

“I saw it.”

“How?” Stuart set his pen on the desk. “I mean, what do you do?”

“It’s not something I do.” She didn’t want to talk about it but she knew avoiding the issue would only make him more curious.

“I don’t control it. It just happens. Sometimes, if I’m busy with something else, I don’t notice. Other times it’s vague or it doesn’t relate to anything going on, so I don’t know whether my mind’s just wandering or I’m remembering something.”

Stuart reached into his pocket for a pack of cigarettes.

"How far ahead can you see things?"

"You sound like my shrink; a thousand questions."

"Sorry." He started to withdraw. "I'll shut up."

Jeanette had continued to work on her report. Now she stopped as thoughts from several hours ago resurfaced.

"I've seen Richard before," she announced, "five years ago. In a dream."

"Is that why you got so weird when he walked up?"

She nodded.

"I didn't know it...hell I didn't even know I'd be here, then."

"Does that happen often?"

"No." She chewed on her lip, gathering her thoughts. "Not that I remember. Couple of minutes or a couple of hours is normal. A few times I even remembered stuff four or five days ahead."

"Well, what's the difference?"

"You don't understand. I dreamed about him five years ago...for five days straight. The exact same dream."

She closed her eyes, bringing back the memories from so long ago.

"We were dressed up. He was wearing a tux and I was in a long, blue dinner gown. There was a crowd of people outside...a hospital. And I was talkin' to a nurse about..."

A curious expression crossed her face.

"...a rape?!?"

"In formal wear?" Stuart cocked his head to one side.

"Doesn't make sense, does it?"

"No." He shook his head. "But nothin' about this has made sense...so why start now? What happened next?"

"He took me home after the hospital." She straightened, "and it was the place I'm staying at, now."

Abruptly, she stood and strode from the room. Stuart followed her into the lobby then out onto the front porch.

"I'm sorry," she pressed a palm to her forehead. "I needed some air. I can't handle this shit right now."

"What shit?"

He was genuinely concerned, a fact that surprised her. It may have been because she saved his life earlier or everything that happened since. Whatever the reason, she felt he was as concerned about her as he would be for the officers he worked with for years.

"We made love, you nitt-witt," she finally answered. "He took me home and we made love."

"So what's wrong with that?" He still did not understand her dilemma. "Sounds like a pretty good time, to me."

"That's not the point." She turned away. "Hell, I don't know the point. Maybe I don't like knowing in advance when I'm gonna get some. Maybe I don't like bein' told what to do."

"But nobody's tellin' you what to do."

"Yeah?" She growled. "That's not the way I see it. How would you like it if I told you that you were gonna run over a kid on the way to work tomorrow?"

He took a step back.

"You're shittin' me, right?"

"It's just an example, Stuart."

"Oh." He relaxed. "But that's not the same. That's not like learnin' somethin' good."

"Depends on your definition of good."

Her voice was low, with a sharp edge.

"You lost me again. Isn't sex good?"

"I haven't been with anyone since before my divorce was final."

Stuart raised an eyebrow.

"Why not?"

"Because the thought of being touched by a man, any man, pissed me off; made me wanna puke. Because I didn't think

anybody wanted to be with me, for me. Not for my body, not for the animal pleasure of raw, naked sex; but for me.”

Stuart misread her tone and made the mistake of uttering a halfhearted snicker.

“Men are pigs, huh?”

“You got it!”

She spun around on him, her tone taking a harsh, bitter quality. Stuart raised his hands in a defensive gesture.

“Not all men are like that.”

“If men are the best of the breed,” she stared at him with anger lighting her eyes, “like they think they are, then we’re one hell of a sorry species.”

“You don’t know Richard,” he laughed. “I used to think he was gonna grow up to be a priest. In fact, I think he was a virgin till he met his wife.”

As quickly as Jeanette’s anger surfaced, it now subsided.

“His wife?”

“Yeah. She died in a car wreck,” his voice took on a peculiar quality, “five years ago.”

Jeanette went pale.

“Oh my dear God....”

Chapter Two

Jeanette undraped her jacket from the chair back and slung it over her shoulder. Stuart sat on the edge of a desk and made finishing notes on their patrol report. But Jeanette suspected his attention was on her and their conversation of several hours earlier.

“What’re you doin’ tonight?” He set the clipboard on the desk beside him.

“I don’t know,” she stopped by the office door, “figure I’d get cleaned up, have some dinner and maybe watch somethin’ on TV.”

“Why don’t you come by my place for supper? I’m sure Linda wouldn’t mind.”

Jeanette shook her head.

“I don’t wanna impose on your wife.”

“You won’t be,” he stood and retrieved his car keys from a pocket. “I called the house and she insisted on me askin’ you over. Which is odd when I think about it ’cause she’s never cared one way or the other about the guys I work with.”

“Okay.” She gave in. “What time?”

“We usually sit down to eat ’bout five-thirty.” He glanced at his watch. “It’s three now; get there by four and we can have a few beers beforehand.”

“You got Bud?” She smiled.

“Miller.”

“It’ll have to do.”

Jeanette walked out to her car and climbed in. The little Ford started with a turn of the key. As she eased out of the parking lot,

Stuart waved from the front porch of the police station. Jeanette drove over to the curb and rolled down her window.

"I just called Linda to tell her to expect you." Stuart's eyes were worried. "Richard's gonna be there."

Jeanette's heart fluttered and she closed her eyes as she leaned her head back. Stuart walked over and rested his arms atop the roof of the car. He wanted to say something or prompt her to say something.

"Maybe," he blurted, "you wanna make it another time."

"That won't solve anything." Jeanette chewed her lip then sat up in her seat. "I'll see you at four."

"You sure?" He stood and took a step back, "I can tell Linda somethin' came up and you couldn't make it."

"They say," Jeanette pushed the gearshift into first but kept her feet on the clutch and brake, "you gotta look it in the eye or you'll be runnin' from it for the rest of your life."

"They," Stuart offered, "don't always know what the hell they're talkin' about."

"I know."

She popped the clutch and squealed the tires as she pulled away from the station. She drove across town to her apartment, a one room on the first floor of a twenty-four-unit complex. When she closed the front door behind her, she threw the dead bolt, slipped the security chain in its slot, and slumped to the floor with her back to the door. Her body shook, little quaking tremors, and she felt cold and weak.

Five minutes later she found the strength to stand. She dropped her jacket in a chair by the door then unbuckled her pistol belt and laid it on the jacket. Slowly, with a great deal of effort, she moved to the back of the apartment and into the bathroom where she ran a tub of water. The tremors still racked her body and as soon as the water filled half of the tub she undressed and climbed in.

She slid down in the tub until only her head remained above water. The warmth seeped into her pores, wrapped itself around

her and made her feel comfortable and secure. Then the images came and filled her mind. Five years had passed since she had seen them; five years since they had snaked across her consciousness. She closed her eyes and wept quietly, wondering how long she could hold onto her sanity.

When she finished bathing she dressed but her movements were slow and methodical. She chose a pair of jeans and a loose, cotton blouse then opted for a pair of Reeboks over the western boots that occupied a corner of her closet.

The phone rang and she reached across the bed to grab the receiver from the hand of a smiling Mickey Mouse.

"Yeah?"

"You alright?"

"Stuart?"

She turned to look at the clock on her nightstand. It was four-thirty.

"I thought you mighta changed your mind."

"No, no," she shook her head. "Just took a little longer cleanin' up than I figured. I'm about to head out the door, now."

"Okay. We'll see you in a few."

She started to say good-bye, then thought to ask, "Is he there, yet?"

The line was silent for a second.

"Stuart," she prompted.

"Yeah." His voice low and quiet. "Yeah, he was already here when I got home."

"Don't worry about it. I'm not." She lied. "I'll see you when I get there."

"Sure." The worry from earlier returned. "Bye."

Jeanette handed the phone back to Mickey and rolled off the bed. From somewhere, she found renewed strength and moved with purpose as she strode from the apartment.

Stuart lived in a small, three-bedroom, brick home. Crab grass fought with scattered, colorful toys for control of the lawn. The

neighborhood reminded Jeanette of the one she and Stuart visited earlier. While these homes were older and smaller, both neighborhoods had the same feel of small town domesticity.

Stuart stood waiting at the kitchen door as Jeanette turned off the street and into the driveway. He stepped out onto the carport with a beer in each hand and handed a bottle to Jeanette while she climbed from the car. She turned it up and swallowed, savoring the cold, tingling sensation. When she brought the bottle down it was half empty.

"You don't waste no time, do you?"

"Hey," she wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, "somebody hands me a beer, I figure they want me to drink it."

"Come on in and meet Linda."

She followed him through the carport and into the kitchen. A handsome woman, nearly as tall as Stuart, stood at the sink, up to her elbows in dishwater. She turned when they walked in.

"So you're Jeanette." She pulled her hands from the water and wiped them with a towel. "I hear you pulled his butt out of a ringer, today."

The smile on her face and outstretched hand, belayed the sarcastic tone. Jeanette accepted the hand with a bit of hesitation and for a moment, was lost for words. She glanced at Stuart and could tell he felt the same unease as he made the formal introduction.

"Jeanette, this is Linda." He clamped a hand on Linda's shoulder and squeezed slightly. "Linda this is our new rookie..."

Jeanette's shot him an angry glance.

"...er, sorry." He swallowed hard. "I meant, this is my new partner, Jeanette."

"I don't know if I like the idea of Stuart working with a woman."

"Don't you think women should be cops?"

The new voice came from the doorway that led to the living room. Richard leaned against the doorframe, sipping a glass of tea.

“No,” Linda released Jeanette’s hand and smiled, “I mean I don’t trust Stuart to keep his eyes and mind on his work instead of on you.”

“Not to worry,” the tension in the air eased and Jeanette realized she had been holding her breath. She exhaled slowly and returned Linda’s smile. “He’s not my type.”

“Have you met Richard, Jeanette?”

Jeanette started to say yes, then noticed Richard waving a hand and shaking his head behind his sister. She understood the gesture but not the reason.

“No I haven’t,” she finally said.

Linda turned to her brother, who quickly dropped his hand.

“Come on in here.”

He walked into the kitchen and Jeanette took a reflexive step backward. She turned and quickly met Stuart’s eyes, then brought her attention back to Richard who stood only a few feet away.

“Richard Enfield,” he reached for Jeanette’s free hand, “and I’m pleased to meet you.”

Her pulse rate jumped and she could feel her heart thumping in her chest. She brought her hand up to meet Richard’s. He clasped it tightly and for a moment, Jeanette thought she would faint. Her mouth fell open, as if to speak but as in the restaurant, no words found their way to her lips. Richard noticed the hint of fear in her eyes, but continued to hold her hand.

Stuart came to the rescue.

“Why don’t we go on into the living room and let Linda finish in here.” He hooked Richard’s arm and broke his grip on Jeanette’s hand. “The sooner she gets done with the dishes, the sooner we can eat.”

“Jeanette...?”

Linda cocked her head to one side and eyed Jeanette oddly. The sound of her voice broke her trance.

“Oh.” She shook her head. “I’m sorry. I guess my first day just took more outta me than I realized.”

“I know how that is,” Linda lied. “Stuart gets like that sometimes, too.”

Jeanette took another swig from her beer and drained the bottle. She looked around for a wastebasket then met Linda’s eyes, which she had been avoiding. Rather than inquire about the questions that came to mind, Linda opened a cabinet door beneath the sink. Jeanette walked over and dropped the bottle in the plastic trashcan.

“We met when me and Stuart were havin’ coffee, earlier today.”

“I figured as much.” Linda offered a more genuine smile. “They think they’re keeping big secrets from me, but I’m usually one step ahead of them.”

The smile turned to a look of concern.

“Are you sure you’re alright?”

“No,” the answer was more honest than Jeanette had intended, “but worrying about it’s not gonna make it any better. I just got some things that’ve been botherin’ me. Thanks for askin’, though.”

Linda plunged her hands back into the dishwater before remarking, “There’s more beer in the frig.”

“Thanks.”

She stepped over to the refrigerator; found two six packs and grabbed another bottle. Linda still faced the sink and showed no sign of continuing the conversation, so Jeanette joined Stuart and Richard in the living room.

“Hey, Jeanette,” Stuart sat in a gray, high-backed, easy chair, “I was just tellin’ Richard about the guy you took out over on Anderson Street.”

He stood and turned back to Richard, spreading his arms apart.

“I mean, he was one of these pulp wood haulin’ types; thick through the chest with arms to match. But she just kinda danced to one side,” he did a little jig and stuck one leg out in front, “and next thing anybody knew the guy was on the ground eatin’ dirt.”

Richard glanced at Jeanette, not sure whether to be amused or embarrassed. Jeanette moved to the sofa and sat across the room from him. She watched Stuart's demonstration with slight annoyance but found she wanted to laugh at his comical awkwardness.

"You know you're gonna have to teach me that, don't you?"

She raised her eyebrows.

"But I thought you didn't like working with women and rookies."

"Oh," his face acquired a hurt puppy expression, "I did say somethin' like that, didn't I?"

Jeanette nodded.

"Well, I guess I..."

"...was wrong." Linda stood in the doorway between the living room and kitchen.

"But then that's nothin' new, is it?" She smiled. "You're used to humble pie. By the way, if anybody's interested, supper's ready."

They moved into the dining room. Jeanette trailed behind the others, waiting to see what the seating arrangements would be. She wanted to take every precaution to keep her distance from Richard. Luckily, when the others found their places the open chair was on the far side of the table from him.

"Smells good." She sat and slid her chair up to the table.

"Thank you." Linda accepted the complement. "But it's just Irish potatoes and a pot roast. We used to have it all the time when I was growin' up in Chicago."

"Stuart didn't tell me you were from Chicago."

"Aye lassie," Richard chimed in with his best Irish accent, "a strict Irish Catholic background."

"I have some family up there," Jeanette stabbed a square of potato. "O'Conner and Mallory, from around Highland Park."

"That's where our dad's from." Linda sipped from a cup of coffee. "He used to work for a guy named Simon O'Conner who ran a men's store."

“Over on Park Street?” Jeanette’s eyes brightened.

“Yeah,” Richard answered, “right next to a big department store.”

“Hey, that’s my uncle.” Jeanette beamed. “He’s married to my father’s oldest sister.”

“From what dad tells us,” Linda reached across the table for the salt shaker, “he was a real ass hole.”

She glanced at Richard and winked. Then looked from Stuart to Jeanette who both sat with their mouths open.

“She’s kiddin’, guys.” Richard smiled.

“No I’m not. Dad used to always come home at night talkin’ about the guy. How he was a fat, lazy, suck head. Made dad do all the work, while he sat around and ran off at the mouth with the customers.”

“Linda!” Stuart’s eyes widened.

Richard leaned back in his chair with an amused expression while Jeanette stopped with a fork full of food between her plate and her mouth. Her eyes moved from Linda to Stuart, and then back to Linda, who grinned broadly before bursting into laughter.

“Had you going for a minute, there, didn’t I?”

“Son of a...” Stuart signed before a snicker escaped.

The remainder of the evening went well, finally winding down prior to ten o’clock. Jeanette left feeling relieved, having survived the encounter with Richard without the world coming to an end.

When she arrived home, she readied herself for bed and wondered what terrible thing she actually expected. Reflecting on it, she decided her fears had been unwarranted and she settled in for a nights sleep.

The following day began without incident. She met Stuart at the police department. They checked their patrol car and started their shift with nothing more than small conversation. The day eased into afternoon before their first call. Jeanette’s attention had been on her conversation with Stuart about the City Council when

the image of a woman raced across her mind. It was intense enough to cause her to twinge but with her mind occupied she failed to pay heed.

They were driving through the parking lot of the town's only supermarket when the dispatcher called on the radio, sending them back to the department to take a report. Stuart pulled back onto the highway and accelerated slightly as he weaved through traffic.

"Why the rush?" Jeanette asked, a bit curious. This was the first time she had seen Stuart in a hurry to do anything.

"The Chief's at the office," Stuart chewed on his lip. "He's got this stop watch and he likes to time us to see if we fart around when we get calls at the office. He's got this thing about pleasing the public."

"Whatever."

They came to a stop at the curb in front of the department and noticed the Chief standing on the front porch. He was tall and stocky, with hard features and a deep voice. Worry exuded from his expression and he moved toward them as they stepped from the patrol.

"I want you to do this one, Henderson." He pulled a cigarette from a pack in his shirt pocket without taking his eyes from Jeanette. "And I want you to use all that fancy trainin' you got in the Army while you're doin' it."

"Sir?" Jeanette was thoroughly confused by his abruptness. "I don't understand. Stuart's the senior partner."

"And I'm the Chief," he lit the cigarette, inhaling deeply before continuing. "So, you'll be handling this one. Any questions?"

Jeanette looked at Stuart but found no support or indication that he would reply.

"No, sir," she finally answered, "other than, where's the complainant?"

“Follow me.”

They moved into the station and walked through the lobby. A short hallway led to restrooms on the right and the squad room on the left. Seated at one of the officer’s desks was a thin, tired woman. Her hair was mussed and her makeup ran from the tears that streaked down her face. She held a wad of tissue in one hand, while the other clutched a purse.

Jeanette walked over and pulled a chair up close. She sat beside the woman, rather than behind the desk, wanting to make her feel comfortable instead of like she was about to be interrogated.

“Hi. My name’s Jeanette.” It was almost a whisper.

“Hi,” the woman looked tentatively at Stuart and the Chief, who stood in the office doorway. “Are they going to be in here?”

Before Jeanette could respond, the Chief tugged on Stuart’s arm and pulled him out of the office. The woman sniffled and wiped at her nose then tried to speak again.

“When did you start workin’ here?”

“This is my second day, ma’am,” Jeanette adjusted her seat so she could better see the woman’s face, “but I’ve been a cop a lot longer than that.”

The woman looked as though she wanted to talk but was having trouble finding the words. Jeanette tried to help her.

“Why don’t you start by telling me your name?”

“Ruby.” She whimpered. “Ruby Anderson.”

“Okay, Ms Anderson...”

“It’s Misses Anderson.”

There was a hint of indignation in her voice.

“I’m sorry...”

Jeanette wished the Chief had told her more about what was going on here. She was beginning to feel rather uneasy. She reached out and placed a hand on the woman’s arm.

“Did someone hurt you?”

As the words left her lips, she remembered the woman's image that danced across her mind's eye before they were called back to the station. In the same instant, the twinge from earlier returned as new sights flooded into her consciousness; flashes of things that had happened to Ruby; sights, sounds, odors; all of them covered with fear and hurt and pain. Jeanette jerked her hand back, as if she had pricked a finger on a thorn. The images stopped.

"Somebody raped you...didn't they?"

Ruby looked at Jeanette with sad, mournful eyes and the flow of tears renewed themselves. Rather than speaking, she simply nodded and wept openly. Jeanette leaned forward and held her close, letting her cry for several minutes before she tried to go on.

An hour later, Jeanette waited at the receptionist's desk of the hospital. Stuart and the Chief stood at the counter with her, talking among themselves. Ruby had been taken into a treatment room, where she would be examined and specimens taken by the doctor for use as evidence. Jeanette finished talking to the receptionist and turned to the Chief.

"When we pulled up at the station, why didn't you tell me this was a rape?"

"Would it have made a difference?"

"Maybe."

"I don't think so," he started to pull a cigarette from his pocket then remembered he couldn't smoke in the hospital. "Besides, she wouldn't talk to anybody but a woman. Otherwise I woulda taken the report. We're lucky she reported it at all."

"Why's that?" Stuart looked puzzled.

"It happened around eleven last night," Jeanette answered for the Chief. "That was more than sixteen hours ago. I think she almost didn't come in."

"I still don't understand," Stuart reiterated.

Jeanette exchanged a knowing glance with the Chief, who shook his head.

“Don’t worry about it,” he said.

At the same moment, a nurse pushed through the double doors from the trauma unit. She held a clear, plastic container about the size of a deck of cards.

“Here’s the rape kit,” she handed the box to Jeanette, “and she wants to talk to you.”

Jeanette grabbed her clipboard from the counter and followed the nurse. Ruby waited in a small room. The only furnishings were a chair and an exam table. She sat on the edge of the table, a white hospital gown wrapped around her.

“What’s gonna happen, now?”

Jeanette turned to the nurse, who had followed her into the room. The woman blushed, slightly and backed out into the hallway.

“Well,” Jeanette pulled the chair closer to Ruby and sat, “I’d really like for you to come back to the station with me and give us a written statement. I know you gotta be tired, but it’s really best if we can get this now, while everything’s still fresh in your mind.”

“But I didn’t see him.” Ruby shivered and pulled the gown close. “He was behind me the whole time. How can a statement do any good?”

“I wanna ask you some questions.” She thought a second and rephrased herself. “Actually, I wanna ask you a lot of questions. If you’d seen who it was, we could just go out and try to find him and pick him up. As it is, we’re gonna have to put all of this together like a puzzle and we can’t solve the puzzle until we’re sure we have all of the pieces. Even if you didn’t see him, there’s still gonna be things he mighta said or did that’ll help us find out who he is. Do you understand?”

Ruby nodded.

“It’s just that... It’s just that it’s...”

“...so hard talkin’ about it.” Jeanette finished for her.

Ruby's eyes were sad and she lowered her head. Jeanette stood and before she realized it Ruby had reached out and grasped her hands. In that instant, Ruby's memories slammed into Jeanette's mind again, rocking her physically. She twitched and gripped the other woman's hands tighter as a wave of nausea washed over her and made her weak. She felt Ruby's revulsion, her fear and loathing, and she felt the physical pain as if it had been her own rather than the woman who held onto her.

"Ruby," she muttered, trying to keep the panic out of her voice, "I know this is hard for you. I know you'd rather go away and try to forget it ever happened. But you won't be able to forget, and what you're feeling won't go away until you can come to grips with it. If we don't get this guy, he's probably gonna do it to somebody else. You don't want that do you?"

"No." She whimpered and shook her head.

Jeanette fought to retain her composure as the images from Ruby's ordeal continued. The earlier sensations began to subside into a sick feeling in her belly and dull throbbing in the back of her head. Slowly, she slipped her hands from Ruby's grip and the link was broken as suddenly as if a faucet had turned off. She staggered back, kicking her chair into the wall. Ruby was so involved in her own emotional state, she never noticed Jeanette's pale complexion, the sweat on her brow, or her rapid breathing.

"I want you to get dressed and come back to the station with us." She straightened herself. "You think you can do that?"

Ruby looked up at her, her eyes sad and tortured.

"If you think I should."

Jeanette shook her head violently.

"Don't do this because of what I think. You gotta do it for yourself."

A knock at the door made both women jump as the nurse peeked in with a look of concern.

"Is everything alright in here? I thought I heard somethin' hit the wall."

“We’re okay,” Jeanette smoothed her short hair and moved to the door. She stopped as she grabbed the handle and turned back to Ruby who traded her sad expression for a halfhearted smile.

“I’ll be just a minute. Let me put my clothes back on.”

Jeanette returned the smile and walked out.

“Well?” Stuart said, with a dumb expression on his face.

He and the Chief had been hovering by the door. They both looked anxious.

“She’s coming back to the office to do a written statement.” As she spoke the words, Jeanette remembered the images that flowed from Ruby during their brief contact.

“But I don’t think it’s gonna give us much to work with. She didn’t see the guy and she was so scared during the whole thing she didn’t notice anything that’ll help.”

“Then,” Stuart pushed his hands into his pockets, “what’s the use in gettin’ the statement?”

“Because,” Jeanette remembered a line from a song she once heard, “every little bit counts?”

Ruby gave a five-page statement. It detailed everything she could recall. But, as Jeanette feared, the horror of what happened overshadowed all else. She never saw the man’s face; never noticed his clothes or his voice when he spoke. She remembered he had been strong and stank of liquor, but that description could fit nearly half the city’s male population.

The man entered her home by breaking a window in her kitchen with a rock that was found when Stuart and another patrol officer went to check the scene. They recovered cloth fibers from the broken glass but nothing else and when asked, Ruby recalled the hand he placed over her mouth had been gloved.

When Jeanette and Stuart finished tagging the evidence and writing their reports, less than half an hour remained on the shift. As they sat in their office, sipping coffee from paper cups, the phone rang.

Stuart reached across his desk and grabbed the receiver. He spoke briefly then handed the receiver to Jeanette.

"They wanna talk to you." He grinned.

"Who is it?"

"Ask 'em."

Jeanette put her cup on the desk and took the receiver.

"This is Officer Henderson. Can I help you?"

"Hi," the voice said, "this is Richard."

"Hi." Jeanette straightened and licked her lips, as her mouth suddenly went dry.

"You doin' anything tonight?"

"Well," she shifted in her seat and shot Stuart a viscous stare, "I had some readin' I was gonna do, but I can always put it off for some other time. You got somethin' better in mind?"

"Yeah. How about dinner? What say I pick you up at six?"

Jeanette wasn't sure she was ready to be alone with him. While the previous night had gone without incident, she felt it might be pressing her luck to go any further.

"I don't know. I mean, how do I know your intentions are honorable?"

"Hey," Stuart broke in, "you know you wanna go, so quit stringin' him along."

"Tell Stuart to shut up," Richard said over the phone.

"Richard said to shut up." Jeanette grinned pleasurably.

"Well, excuse me!"

"Make it six-thirty," she said to Richard. "I need to pick somethin' up from the store on the way home."

"Okay. See you then."

"Yeah. See you then." She dropped the phone in its cradle and looked at Stuart.

"You can do this." He tried to be reassuring.

"That's easy for you to say," she felt like she may have made the wrong choice. "He's not the man of your dreams."

"Just don't wear a blue evening gown."

“Funny,” she drank the last of her coffee and threw the empty cup at him, “it is to laugh.”

Jeanette worried when she left the police department, she worried on her way to the store, and she worried on the drive to her apartment. When she arrived she had almost decided to call Richard and cancel their date. She walked into the kitchen and reached for the phone that hung on the wall when it rang.

“Hello...”

“Henderson?”

“Yeah, Chief. What’s up?”

There was a long silence.

“Chief?” she asked again.

“I need you to come back up to the department.”

“Why?” She knew the answer even as she asked. “What’s up?”

“We got another rape.”

She changed the receiver to her other ear and reached for the refrigerator door with her free hand.

“Can’t somebody else handle it?”

The long silence again. This time she could hear voices in the background.

“Chief?”

“I want you on it,” he grumbled. “You’ll get comp-time for it.”

As if that made it okay.

“I’ll be right there.”

She laid a finger on the receiver cradle, hanging up the phone then released it and dialed Richard’s number.

“Richard.” She tried not to sound relieved. “I gotta cancel our dinner. Somethin’s come up at the station.”

“Okay.” His disappointment was not as easily disguised. “Give me a call when you get back in. Maybe if it’s not too late we can still do something.”

“Yeah. Maybe.” She had no intention of calling him later. She’d been saved by the bell and she wasn’t about to jump back in the ring. “I’ll see you later.”

Five minutes later she walked through the police department door and found a group of people seated in the lobby. She glanced toward the back of the room and found the Chief. He motioned with an incline of his head.

“What’s all this?” She whispered when she stood beside him.

“This way.”

He took her into the squad room. In the same seat where Ruby had waited that morning, another woman sat looking small and hurt. She wore a gray terry-cloth bathrobe. Her face was bruised and blood had caked over cuts that crisscrossed her nose and cheeks.

“Her family went out for an early dinner,” the Chief spoke low, trying to keep the woman from hearing. “She stayed home to watch the baby. When the others came back they found her on the floor in the bedroom like this...minus the robe.”

Jeanette closed her eyes and lowered her head, shaking it from side to side.

“Let’s get to it.” She growled.

Her tone made the Chief take a step back.

“Was that for me?” He asked.

She tweaked the corners of her mouth into a quick grin but didn’t answer. Instead, she moved to the teenage girl who sat looking like her world had ended.

“Hi. My name’s Jeanette.” It was almost a whisper.

“Hi,” the girl looked at her with tired eyes. “I’m Annie. You gonna get the bastard that did this?”

“With your help,” venom dripped from her voice, “I’m gonna give it one hell of a try.”

The examination at the hospital, the statement back at the office, the collecting of evidence from the scene, all of the steps from the previous case were repeated with the new one.

Jeanette’s original shift ended at three that afternoon. It was nine forty-five when she signed her name to the report cover sheet and dropped it in the secretary’s box.

"I want you to take the day off, tomorrow."

The Chief leaned against the door jam that led to his office.

"Even if you get another rape report?"

Jeanette realized she was out of line before she finished the sentence. Still, it felt good.

"Touché."

Mentally she smiled and decided to take advantage.

"You mind fillin' me in on what's goin' on here?" She walked over to him and stared up into his face. "I mean, am I the only one here that can work a rape case?"

"You don't get it, do you?"

"Get what?"

"The woman this morning," he pulled a cigarette from his pack and lit it, "the girl tonight. You don't know who they are, do you?"

"Should I?" She was becoming agitated.

"I figured Stuart woulda filled you in on the local socio-economic class system by now. I guess not." He inhaled on the cigarette and blew smoke toward to ceiling. "Both of them live over in Winston Terrace. That's were the money families are. It's bad enough we got some asshole runnin' around rapin' people; it's worse 'cause of where he decided to do it."

"Well kiss my ass," again Jeanette spoke before considering her words. "You mean that if they were from another part of town, it wouldn't be just as bad?"

"Individually, yeah," surprisingly, he didn't react to her lack of respect, "collectively, politically, it couldn't be worse. Rape is rape and it doesn't matter whether you drive a Mercedes or an old Ford. I'm already catchin' flack from this. Now we got some pretty good officers here. But at best their street cops. They do a good job on patrol; they can handle disturbances and even armed robberies. But they're for shit when it comes to workin' a crime scene and doin' the follow up."

"Aren't you the one that hired them?"

He smiled at her.

"I hired you too."

"Oops...."

"I didn't mean it like that." He straightened and crossed to a desk by the window where he snubbed his cigarette into an ashtray. "Even if you were pushin' the line a bit."

"Sorry," she almost lowered her head, "but it's been a long day."

"Don't worry about it. I wish I had somebody to snap at right about now." He motioned to the door. "Let's get outta here."

Jeanette led the way down the short hall and through the lobby. When they stepped outside, she stopped and let the night air touch her. It had turned cold and she shivered, but still reveled in the sensation. It was the norm that January saw some of the coldest weather in the northeastern part of the state. It seemed this year would be no different.

"You know, it took a lot of politickin' to get you on here."

Roger pulled the door behind him and checked the handle to make sure it was locked.

"How so?"

"This is East Texas," he withdrew another cigarette. Instead of lighting it, he stuck it in his mouth and spoke around it. "Women cops are still rare...specially in little towns like this. But I wanted you, not because I was tryin' to be a trendsetter but because I liked your background. I talked to half a dozen of your previous supervisors...."

"You did?" Surprise lit her face.

"Yep," Roger nodded, "even the CID Commander at your last station. I wanted somebody to round out the department. We got applications from a lot of good-ole-boys, even from some guys that've worked on some of the bigger departments around here. None of them had your experience. I figured if you hung out with the other guys enough, maybe some of what you know might rub off on them."

He glanced at his watch.

"It's after ten. You better take off. I'll make sure your time gets logged in."

"Yeah." Jeanette sighed. "I better head home and get some rest."

"And remember, don't come in tomorrow."

"No problem. I'll see you later."

She trotted off to her car and climbed in. After starting the engine, she slumped down in the seat and closed her eyes, letting her head lull back against the headrest. She felt bone-weary and looked forward to getting home and taking a long, leisurely bath. After a few minutes she pulled out of the parking lot and headed away from the office.

When she eased into her parking spot at the apartments she noticed someone seated on the steps outside her door. The shadowy figure wore a heavy coat with the collar turned up and his head was bowed preventing Jeanette from seeing his face. She touched her holster and unsnapped the pistol.

Keeping her attention on the man, she stepped from her car and pushed the door closed behind her. As she approached her apartment, the man raised his head then stood slowly. He held something in his left hand and the right was stuffed in the pocket of his coat.

Less than ten paces away, Jeanette stopped and called to him.

"Hi," she spoke loudly with a forced, friendly tone, "are you waiting for me?"

"As a matter of fact," Richard took a step away from the door and into the light shining down from a big, mercury vapor lamp in the parking area, "I am."

Jeanette felt the tension flow from her chest as she let her hand drop away from the grip of the pistol. She closed the distance between them, shaking her head.

"It's not the wisest of moves to wait in the dark in front of a cop's apartment."

Richard raised his eyebrows, realizing that her tone was not so jovial as it could have been.

"Sorry," he apologized and felt rather foolish, "I guess I didn't think of it that way. I thought you might come home and forget to call me, and I really wanted to make sure I saw you tonight."

Jeanette didn't like the sound of that but instead of addressing the issue, she brushed past him and opened the door.

"Come on in. I'll put some coffee on."

They went inside and Jeanette dropped her pistol belt in the chair by the door. Relieved of its weight she felt better: more human. Richard followed her into the living room and found a seat on the sofa that stretched across the wall opposite the front window. He placed a tall paper sack on the coffee table and leaned back, trying to make himself comfortable. But Jeanette's unease had already rubbed off on him.

"So," he made an attempt at light conversation, hoping it would lighten the mood, "what happened at the office? Was it major?"

Jeanette had walked into the kitchen and busied herself with the coffee maker.

"So, how long did you have to wait for me?"

She made a vow shortly after starting her career in law enforcement: never bring home to the office and never bring the office home. Side stepping Richard's question had been so natural he never realized what happened.

"Hadn't been long." He glanced at his watch. "Maybe thirty minutes."

Jeanette scooped coffee from the can and moved to the basket of the coffee maker. Suddenly it dawned on her how unnerving it was having Richard in the apartment. A shudder made her dump half the grounds on the counter. Without a sound, she lowered her hands, braced herself against the counter top, and forced her breathing to slow. When she looked up, Richard stood in the entrance to the kitchen.

“You alright?” His voice carried an edge of concern. “You look sorta pale.”

Jeanette grabbed a dishtowel, brushed the coffee from the counter into her hand and deposited it in the wastebasket beneath the sink.

“Guess I just put in too many hours today.”

“Go on in the living room,” he crossed the room and picked up the scoop, “I’ll get this.”

“Thanks.” She pushed past, happy to put some distance between the two of them.

In the living room, she flopped down on the sofa and slumped back in the cushions. It felt good to relax and close her eyes. The day had been long and hard, and she needed some time alone, but she did not want to offend this man whom she feared so.

“Open the bag on the table,” Richard called from the kitchen.

“What’s in it?” Jeanette sat up.

She grabbed the sack and removed a fat, round bottle of cheap wine. Smiling, she twisted the cap, stuck a finger inside and touched the finger to her tongue. It had a loud, grape soda flavor.

“Here.”

He stood behind her, holding two long stemmed, plastic glasses.

“It’s not the good stuff, but it is alcohol and it’s really not that bad.”

Jeanette took the glasses and poured for both of them. Richard came around the couch and sat next to her, retrieved one of the glasses and took a sip.

“Ooh,” he turned up his nose, “maybe it is that bad.”

They laughed together, and Jeanette finally began to feel comfortable.

“Stuart says he really likes working with you.” He took another sip. “What’d you do to him?”

“What do you mean?”

"I mean, he's a classic example of the East Texas male. He's a nice guy and all, but when it comes to women he's got some real fifties ideas. Like women should stay home and take care of the house. You know; the whole barefoot and pregnant thing."

Jeanette had been swallowing when he made the remark and nearly choked with the last comment. She placed her glass on the end table beside her and touched the back of her hand to her mouth to catch a drop of wine that tried to escape.

"He started the caveman routine when we first met, and I was afraid they'd stuck me with a real brain dead specimen at first. But after getting to know him, he seems alright."

She conveniently omitted the details of Stuart's motivation to change. To her surprise, Richard mentioned it.

"Yeah, he was sayin' you bailed him outta a pretty bad situation."

"We got lucky." She tried to explain. "He got caught off guard and I happened to be in the right place at the right time."

"That's not the way he tells it."

She eyed Richard curiously; not sure how much he knew.

"I don't understand."

Richard shifted in his seat so he could look directly at her.

"I guess I oughta stop hedging."

"I guess you should." Jeanette's defenses came back on line. "What did Stuart tell you?"

"Don't be mad with him. I sorta tricked him into tellin' me about you."

"Damn it!" Jeanette stood and stepped away from the sofa. "Damn it! I shoulda known better than to take his word. He promised..."

"...that he wouldn't tell the Chief." Richard finished. "And he didn't. If I hadn't pushed him into it, he wouldn't have told me. Don't blame him. Please."

"I think maybe you should go."

"It's called precognition." Richard's voice became low, almost apologetic. "It's the ability to see things before they happen."

"I don't really wanna hear this."

"I know," he stood and started toward her, then decided against it, "but you need to."

"And what's that supposed to mean?"

"Com'on," he motioned to the sofa. "Sit down."

"No," she shook her head. "For the time being, I'd rather stand."

Richard sighed and lowered himself to the couch.

"Have you ever met anybody else who could do the same thing?" He asked.

She gave him a look as though he had just fallen out of a tree.

"I'm serious." He picked up his glass and took another sip. "Have you?"

"No. Why?"

"I know two who can. I know four people who can tell you what you're thinking, another one that can tell you what you did yesterday, and half a dozen who can do all of that and more."

"And what nut house did you escape from?"

Jeanette noticed that she was smiling and they both laughed.

"Will you sit down, now?" Richard patted the seat next to him.

"Okay," Jeanette relented, "but I'm giving notice that I do this under protest."

"Noted and logged."

She joined him on the couch but pushed back against the armrest on her left. The gurgling of the coffee maker drew her attention to the kitchen and she decided she wanted something other than wine. She stood and grabbed her glass from the end table.

"You want some coffee or are you gonna try and continue to defend your taste in wines?"

He looked at his glass then at Jeanette.

"Let's go with the coffee."

He followed her to the kitchen where Jeanette acquired two large mugs from her cupboard. One had a picture of a yellow giraffe, the other a blue teddy bear. She handed the teddy cup to Richard.

"My grandma, what big cups you have."

"Hey," she poured his first, "if you come to my house to drink coffee, you're gonna drink it from real cups, not saucers."

When she finished pouring, she leaned back against the counter.

"Now tell me about these weird friends of yours."

"Well," he put the cup to his lips and sipped, "we get together at least twice a month. Usually at one of our houses, but from time to time, we meet at a restaurant for lunch on a Saturday or somethin'."

"And," she pushed.

"And we talk about stuff."

"What kinda stuff?"

"Meditation, astral projections, palm reading, tarot cards..."

"Whoa," Jeanette put up a hand, "you talkin' about psychics and shit like that, aren't you?"

"Yeah," he looked puzzled. "Didn't you know that's what you are?"

"I'm not a psychic." The objection was stiff. "I mean, yeah I've got forward memory and all, but I can't tell the future."

Richard tapped the side of his head with two of his fingers.

"What do you think forward memory is? Like I said; precognition; it's a psychic trait. And from what I understand you're pretty gifted."

"Gifted?" Her voice became shrill, "there ain't no gift to it. At best it's a pain in the ass. You got any idea what it's like to know what's gonna happen before it happens?"

“Yeah.”

“Oh. So, I suppose you’re a psychic too?”

“Yeah. I am.”

Jeanette rolled her eyes and straightened. She walked past Richard and back into the living room. He followed, but just as she started to sit on the sofa, she changed course and turned back to the kitchen, nearly running into him.

“This is loony, you know that? This is just plain loony.” She finished her coffee and went back for more. “And just what kinda psychic traits do you possess?”

“Basically clairvoyance; that’s being able to discern things without the aid of the normal five senses.”

“So you read the backs of cards, and tell what’s inside of closed boxes and stuff like that?”

Her tone dripped with sarcasm.

“I can—I mean I have. But it’s more than just that. It’s like instincts to the nth degree. You know what I mean?”

“No,” Jeanette raised her eyebrows and shook her head, “I don’t believe I do.”

“I tell you what,” Richard finished his cup and set it in the sink, “we got a meeting tomorrow night. Why don’t you come with me and check it out. I want you to meet one of the folks there, anyway. She helped me when I first started gettin’ into this.”

“I don’t think so.”

“Why not?”

“Because I haven’t gone that far off the deep end, yet. I mean, I spend damn near half my waking hours just tryin’ to keep a grip on my sanity. I don’t think gettin’ together with a bunch of nuts is what I need.”

As soon as she spoke the words, she realized how cruel it sounded. Richard stood with an expression that bordered on distress.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it that way.”

“I,” Richard stepped closer to her, “I think you need us. I think you need to talk to people who are more aware of things than your psychiatrist was. I won’t attack his intentions, or his belief that the way he was working with you is the best thing for you. I will attack his belief that his training and experience were going to help you. After all, forward memory is a medical term for something the medical community doesn’t understand. They’ve seen it enough that they should, but they have this narrow little view of the world and unless things fit into their neat little folder of the way things are, they can’t cope with it. Their answer is to treat you like you’re mentally disturbed. Then they’ll try to cure you, either with therapy or drugs. The problem is that there’s nothing to cure. What you have; what you can do; is normal and you don’t cure people from normalcy.”

“Sounds like you’re speaking from experience.”

“I am.” He lowered his eyes. “When Carol died I lost it. I went straight off the deep end. I mean, I knew if she went to the store she wouldn’t come back. I tried to tell her but I didn’t understand what was happening. I couldn’t see it, but there was this nagging little voice in the back of my head that told me things and it was screamin’ so loud I almost couldn’t hear anything else. But I couldn’t make her understand.”

He turned his head and closed his eyes tightly, trying to hold back tears. Jeanette felt suddenly uneasy. She wanted to comfort him, but could not find the words. She wondered what kind of woman Carol had been to have such an effect after so many years.

“I’m sorry.” Slowly, Richard regained his composure. “But the point I’m making is that if I’d known what was happening, I might’ve been able to stop her. As it was, I didn’t and I couldn’t. Now, your case might be different. You might actually stagger around until you finally open your eyes by yourself. But you’re gonna run into a lotta walls before that happens. If you learn how to handle it, if you learn how to use it, you might be able to steer around some of those walls.”

“What time’s this meeting?” Jeanette muttered.

“Seven-thirty.”

The mention of time made Richard glance at his watch. Midnight loomed close and he stood, placing his cup on the coffee table.

“I better get out of here. You’ve had a long day and you probably wanna get some rest.”

Jeanette followed him to the door, considering what had been said and how he had behaved. When Richard opened the door, he stopped and turned around. They were only inches apart and she could smell the mixture of coffee and sweet wine on his breath.

“You wanna come by and get me at about six-thirty?”

“Does that mean we got a date?” Richard smiled.

Jeanette nodded.

“Six-thirty it is, then.”

Without considering the ramifications, he leaned forward and kissed her briefly then pulled away.

Jeanette’s eyes widened, she felt her heart skip a beat and she realized her breathing was so fast she was nearly panting. They stared, unspeaking for a split second before he touched his lips to hers again. It was soft but filled with a quiet energy and she melted into him, savoring the moment. When their lips parted, he seemed sullen, much like the moment when he spoke of his wife. Then, slowly, a gentle smile crossed his face.

“Stuart was wrong.”

Jeanette looked at him curiously.

“What?”

“He said I wouldn’t remember how.”

Jeanette smiled broadly, remembering her revelations to Stuart a day earlier.

“He’s not the only one who was wrong.”

“Care to elaborate on that?”

“No,” she placed a hand on his chest and gently pushed him beyond the door’s threshold, “and I’ll see you tomorrow night.”

Chapter Three

Jeanette's hand groped across the nightstand in search of the ringing phone as it sounded again and made her grimace before she could home in. She knocked the receiver from Mickey's hand, then picked it up and laboriously brought it to her ear.

"Hello?" She murmured.

"What do you do on your day off," Linda's voice was far too bright and cheery for eight in the morning, "when you're new in town, and the only people you know are the ones you work with?"

"Lin..." Jeanette sat up in the bed. "Linda?"

"Yeah. Richard said he was over to your place pretty late last night, so I decided you didn't deserve to sleep in. You wanna go into Tyler or Longview with me?"

"I wanna go back to sleep."

"That's not one of your options."

Jeanette swung her legs over the bedside and squinted as she tried to read the hands on the clock. It occurred to her she needed to get a digital clock, maybe with a radio.

"Tyler or Longview, huh?"

"Yep," Linda's voice oozed perkiness, "choice is yours."

Jeanette considered for a moment then a thought came to mind. "What about Dallas? It's only a couple a hours away, isn't it?"

"Yeah, straight out the interstate."

"I'll drive." Jeanette's mouth tasted like sand but she was starting to come around. "My car doesn't burn as much gas as that tank you and Stuart got."

“Okay. I’ll have coffee on when you get here. See you in about an hour.”

“Yeah,” Jeanette hung up the phone, “you’ll see me when I get there.”

She hefted herself out of bed and stumbled into the bathroom where she paused at the mirror over the sink and moaned when she saw her reflection. Her short hair, flat on one side and spiked on the other, looked like a punk rocker nightmare. She leaned forward and inspected her blood shot eyes then closed them and shook her head.

“You’re not gettin’ any younger, chicky.”

If she was going to resurrect herself, a shower was definitely in order. She turned on the water and undressed as the bathroom filled with steam. As she stepped one foot in the tub, the phone rang.

“Well kiss my....”

Her hand reached for a towel as she hurried back into the bedroom.

“Yeah?”

“Hi.”

Naked beneath the towel, goose bumps rose on her arms and she felt arousal rush from her head to the tips of her toes.

“Hi, Richard.”

“What’re you doin’ today?”

Jeanette adjusted the towel with her free hand.

“Me and Linda are gonna ride into Dallas as soon as I can get cleaned up and over there. Where are you?”

“I’m fixin’ to head out the door. I gotta be at work in about twenty minutes. I just wanted to see if you slept alright.”

“Yeah,” she sat on the edge of the bed, “and we’re still on for tonight, so don’t worry about me changin’ my mind.”

“Okay,” he paused and Jeanette heard muffled voices in the background, “I’ll give you a call when I get home tonight.”

“Alright.” It dawned on her how pointless the conversation was. It also dawned on her she didn’t care. “See you then. Bye.”

She handed the phone back to the grinning mouse and stayed on the bed for a moment. She finally shook herself and went back into the bathroom.

After cleaning up, she grabbed a quick bowl of cereal and headed over to meet Linda. Only when she pulled into the driveway of her partner’s house did she remembered what Linda said over the phone. Richard had talked to her sometime between leaving Jeanette’s apartment and that morning when they spoke on the phone. She wondered on the content of such a conversation and how much of her private life Linda knew.

The ponderings were interrupted when she noticed Linda standing in the open doorway to the carport. Jeanette put on a smile and switched off the car.

“What took you so long?” Linda asked.

“Oh,” Jeanette moaned as she climbed from the car, “Richard called when I was gettin’ in the shower.”

Linda smiled and nodded.

“He has a way of picking the worst time to want to get on the phone.”

“Must be a family trait.” Jeanette said jokingly. “I did not wanna get outta bed when you called.”

“Hey you’re in East Texas, now. We don’t sleep the day away out here.” Linda pushed the door open and let Jeanette walk past.

“That reminds me, you never did say how you wound up here. I mean, you got family up north and it’s not like this is the place to be.”

The two women walked through the kitchen and into the dining room. Jeanette set her purse on the table and slid into the straight-backed chair. She started to answer but caught a whiff of freshly brewed coffee and an overwhelming need grabbed her.

“Please,” she leaned forward, “you gotta let me have a cup of that coffee.”

“No problem.”

Linda stepped into the kitchen and pulled two cups out of the dish drainer. While she poured, Jeanette busied herself checking her lipstick in a tiny mirror from her purse. Linda rejoined her and they sipped from their cups before Jeanette finally answered the earlier question.

“When I was gettin’ ready to get outta the Army I decided I needed to go someplace where I could start from scratch. I coulda got on a department in Chicago, where my folks are, but...”

She searched for the proper expression.

“...I didn’t wanna be around anybody who’d been a part of my life with Johnny.” She closed her eyes and Linda noticed her hands tighten around the cup. “Damn I hate him.”

She set the cup on the table and put a hand over her eyes, turning away from Linda. Emotions held in check suddenly rushed to the surface and tears quickly found their way to her eyes. In an instant, she brought herself under control, sniffled once and found her composure. Linda felt awkward. At the same time, she marveled at the ridged control Jeanette exercised over herself.

“I don’t know how you do it.”

Jeanette looked up, puzzled.

“Do what?”

“Keep such a tight rein on what you’re feelin’.” She took a sip of coffee, looking at Jeanette through the steam that drifted up from the cup. “If me and Stuart ever split up, I think I’d go crazy.”

“What makes you think I’m not crazy?”

They both snickered and the tension eased noticeably.

“I’m glad Stuart got you as a partner.” Her eyes locked on Jeanette’s, but the smile remained and the tone was still friendly. “I wasn’t too hot about the idea at first: young, good lookin’, woman cop ridin’ around with my husband for forty hours a week.”

“Plain Jane cop, you mean.”

“Don’t kid yourself, lady,” Linda turned up the last of her coffee and put the empty cup on the table, “nine or ten years ago I mighta looked as good as you. In fact, back then, I was runnin’ the streets back home so hot and heavy there wasn’t a man around who was safe. That’s parta why I had Stuart invite you over for dinner the other night. Had to check you out...see if my man was gonna be safe.”

Jeanette blushed.

“I don’t take complements well.”

“Sorry.” Linda stood. “Well, you ready to get on the road?”

“Yeah.”

They headed south on the main road out of Chimney. Ten minutes later they were traveling west on the interstate toward Dallas. The two-hour drive gave them a chance to get acquainted. As they neared Dallas, traffic slowed to a crawl and Linda expressed reservations about their decision to venture into the larger city.

“I never remember how bad it is until I get here.”

“That’s another reason I moved to Chimney.” Jeanette leaned forward and changed stations on the car stereo. “I got tired of crowds a long time ago.”

“So tell me,” Linda pulled a cigarette from a cloth case, “what was it like in the Army. I came real close to joinin’, myself. But at the last minute I chickened out.”

“Well,” Jeanette chewed on her lower lip, “actually, it pretty much sucked. I mean, it had its good points. Like job security, free medical, and a place to live. But, when you really got down to it, it was like bein’ at work all the time. I mean, here I get up in the mornin’s and put in my eight hours. But when the shift’s over I’m on my time.”

She reflected on being called back in the previous night and modified the statement.

“Mostly my time. But when the shift ends in the Army, you still belong to Uncle Sugar.”

“Uncle Sugar?”

“Yeah. Uncle Sam, Uncle Sugar...same song different verse.”

“So why’d you stay in so long?” Linda glanced ahead and spotted a sign announcing the LBJ Parkway. “That’s our exit up there.”

Jeanette glanced over her shoulder, checked traffic beside her then turned the steering wheel and started to move into the right lane. Half way through the lane change she jerked the wheel back to the right. An instant later a pick up, coming from an on ramp, swerved in beside them.

“Son of a bitch.” Linda gestured with her hand as she shouted out the open window. “That guy coulda run all over us.”

The pick up driver leered at the two women briefly before accelerating ahead and disappearing into the ocean of slow moving cars.

“I didn’t even see him till he was already there.”

Jeanette didn’t comment. She reacted not on what her eyes had seen but on the picture that played out in her mind. She relaxed when Linda went back to the original subject of their conversation.

“So, anyway,” Linda tossed the butt of her cigarette out the window, “if the Army sucked so bad, what kept you there so long?”

“Stupidity as much as anything else. Really, I just got caught in a rut. I had a job, I had a family, and I was doin’ somethin’ I thought served a purpose. As it turned out, what family I had went down the tubes, as much because of the Army as anythin’ else. And after I killed that kid, I kinda lost somethin’. You know, it’s like findin’ out you’ve been dreamin’ when you thought you were awake. All those years I spent workin’, sweatin’ over whether I was gonna make a good case; all the time the world’s goin’ to hell in a hand basket.”

She reached their exit and turned off the interstate. There seemed to be more traffic on the parkway, but it flowed smoothly.

“How far we goin’?”

“See the mall just down the way?”

Jeanette tipped her head up and saw the long, low building less than a mile ahead.

“Anyway,” she went on, “after my husband decided he was stupid and the Army finally stopped tryin’ to burn me over the shootin’, I figured I’d better get out before things got even worse. Even with all that, it was still like leavin’ home all over again. I hadn’t realized how we’d isolated ourselves from the rest of the world.”

“What do you mean?”

Linda lit another cigarette.

“It’s hard to explain unless you’ve been there. It’s sorta like the difference between...”

In mid sentence, an image shot into Jeanette’s mind. The physical sensation manifested itself as a sudden weakness and she lost her grip on the steering wheel for a split second. At the same time, she was hit with a mild dizziness and nausea.

The image was of a woman with short blonde hair and soft features. She wore glasses and sat in a dimly lit room with a small group of others. It was so clear it could have been a photograph. As quickly as it came, the image and discomfort passed.

Linda’s voice brought her out of the momentary trance as they came upon the turn off.

“You’re gonna miss the off ramp.”

“Oh shit!” She snatched the wheel hard and the car lurched to the right. “Sorry about that.”

“For cryin’ out loud,” Linda was pale, “I thought you were havin’ a heart attack or somethin’. You started shakin’ and had this blank look on your face.”

“I don’t know.”

She pulled into the mall parking lot and found a parking place. When she switched off the car she closed her eyes and leaned back

in the seat. A sharp pain began at the back of her neck and crept up into her head.

"I feel like death warmed over. Like I've been out in the sun too long."

Linda frowned with concern. She turned in her seat and put a hand to Jeanette's forehead.

"You don't seem to have a fever or anything. You wanna just sit her for a minute?"

"No." Jeanette breathed deeply and turned her head from side to side to loosen the muscles in her neck. "I think I'm okay."

"You sure." The worry in Linda's voice was genuine. "I can drive us back, you know."

"No. Let's go see how much money we can spend."

Their excursion lasted more than three hours. Linda seemed like a child in a candy store, sampling dresses, shoes, even perfume. Jeanette managed to control her urges and throughout the escapade she selected a single pair of denim jeans.

When the shopping spree ended the two women stopped at a lunch stand in the mall. Jeanette bought a corny dog with mustard and a small bag of fries while Linda indulged herself in a double hamburger with onion rings and a large Coke.

"So tell me, what's the deal with the rape." Linda pushed a stray sliver of lettuce in her mouth. "Stuart says there's been two in the last couple of days."

Until that point, they had gone the entire day without mentioning work. Jeanette learned years earlier that bringing the job home led to trouble. It tended to be a leading cause of burn out among cops. It was especially poor judgment to discuss ongoing investigations with civilians. Even if they were married to fellow cops. But for whatever reason, she relented and violated both traditions.

"We don't have a hell of a lot yet." She licked a drop of mustard that threatened to fall into her lap. "None of the lab work's back, yet, so we don't really have much to go on."

“You got any idea who the guy is?”

“Well, there’s been two so far. Last one’s what kept me so late last night. And it’s not lookin’ so good. Only witnesses are the women that were raped and they haven’t been able to tell us much. It’s not like rape’s all that rare; just that most of them don’t get reported.”

Linda looked at her with a queer expression.

“What do mean?”

“You didn’t know that?” Jeanette wiped her mouth with a napkin. “Yeah. The feds figure that somethin’ like sixty or seventy percent of the rapes never get reported. I mean, there’s lots a reasons. Everythin’ from it bein’ somebody the woman knows to not wantin’ to go through the business of a nasty trial. You gotta remember, most times it comes down to his word against hers and a good defense attorney’s gonna try everythin’ he can to make her look like a slut and say she asked for it. Even if it’s a stranger they’ll try to say she invited the guy in her house, or she picked him up in a bar, or the way she was dressed she was askin’ for it.”

“Sounds like a crock a shit to me!”

“I agree,” Jeanette finished her dog and dropped the stick in a wastebasket beside their table, “but that’s the way it ends up. If the thing goes to trial...”

“What do you mean, if?”

“Lotta cases get pled without ever goin’ to court. Some of the others don’t get prosecuted because the State doesn’t think they got enough evidence for a conviction. Even if the guy goes to court and gets convicted he may never see the inside of a cell until all of his appeals have been used up.”

“Son of a bitch.” Linda’s demeanor had changed. “So what’s the use in reportin’ it if the guys gonna get off.”

“That’s what I was sayin’. That’s what a lotta women think. But if they don’t report it they’ll never know what woulda

happened. Maybe the guy that raped them has done it to four or five other women. If nothin' else, maybe it'll let the guy know he almost got caught and he'll think twice before he tries it again."

"Or maybe he'll just be more careful."

The voice came from behind Jeanette. She turned around to see a woman with brown shoulder length hair and striking features. She wore a black jumper that followed her lines and curves as if painted on.

"Hi, Elizabeth." Linda's expression belayed her pleasant tone. "Haven't seen you in a while."

"I've been workin' over in Marshall for about six months. Don't get much time to run around anymore." She glanced at Jeanette then back to Linda, waiting for an introduction.

"Jeanette, this is Elizabeth Anderson. She's been tryin' to get into Richard's pants for the last couple of years. We don't usually run into each other that much but that'll probably change now that he's back in town."

Linda smiled widely and cut her eyes at Elizabeth.

"She doesn't mean that." Elizabeth ignored the critical portion of Linda's remark, returned the smile and extended a hand. "I'm glad to meet you, Jeanette. Do you two work together?"

"No," Jeanette glanced in Linda's direction then back at Elizabeth, "with Stuart on the police department."

"Oh. So you must be the new officer I heard about. I don't know whether to congratulate you or offer my sympathy. You know, I didn't think they'd ever hire a woman on there."

She moved around the table and sat in the empty chair. Jeanette caught Linda roll her eyes and shake her head. It was obvious there was no love lost between the two women and Jeanette had to wonder why they worked so hard to remain pleasant with each other.

"I take it you're not from around here."

"Just did a stretch in the Army." Jeanette turned in her seat. "Before that I lived up north."

"I thought I caught a Yankee accent." Elizabeth pulled a pack of cigarettes from a small handbag. She offered one to Linda and Jeanette, who refused. "So, how do you like it down here? It's gotta be real different from what you're used to."

"I don't know. For the most part, people are people. You got good ones and assholes wherever you go. Lotta how you get along depends on your attitude more than theirs. Same thing's basically true in police work. You got good guys, bad guys and cops. That stays the same no matter where you go."

Linda glanced at her watch.

"Oops." She snapped her fingers. "Where has the time gone?"

"I really wish we could stay and chat but we better start back or I won't have time to get supper on." She stood and gathered her bags. "And you've gotta get ready for your date with Richard, this evening, don't you Jeanette?"

"Linda!" Jeanette retorted.

Elizabeth's head snapped around in Jeanette's direction. For an instant, something akin to hatred appeared in her eyes, then vanished and was replaced with a mock smile.

"Well, don't let me keep you from your affairs." She mouthed.

"We won't."

Linda was enjoying the moment. She inclined her head at Jeanette, who stood and grabbed her single sack.

"It was good meeting you, Elizabeth."

"Oh." Elizabeth glared. "The pleasure was mine, I'm sure."

Jeanette leaned close to Linda's ear when she bent to pick up her tray.

"Quit fartin' around and let's get outta here before this woman comes unglued."

"Elizabeth," Linda continued to grin, "you take care and be sure to drop by the house when you get the chance. Okay?"

Jeanette grabbed her arm and pulled her away before Elizabeth could answer. Once they were out of earshot, she tugged on Linda's sleeve.

“What the hell was that all about?”

“I hate that woman with a passion!”

“Why?” Jeanette looked confused. “What’s the deal?”

“She’s made it her mission in life to get into Richard’s pants. And she’s never been shy about what she intends to do if she ever gets her hands on him. I just don’t like her. Hell, we weren’t even friends before she went on the war path.”

“So you decided to use me to open a wound and rub salt in it.”

“Hey,” Linda chuckled, “you catch on fast.”

Jeanette joined her.

“You wicked, wicked woman, you.”

“I know. Don’t you just hate me for it.”

A light rain began to fall as they drove back from Dallas. Clouds darkened the sky, yet the mood of the afternoon failed to dampen their spirits. They joked and laughed as they drove. At some point, Jeanette realized she had missed this part of life. Since her divorce, she had forsaken many of the simple, pleasurable things like friends. She wondered how she had survived without them.

They reached Chimney’s city limit at just before three o’clock. Jeanette turned down a side street and headed toward Linda’s house when Linda tugged at her arm.

“Run by the station. I wanna tell Stuart to pick up somethin’ on his way home.”

Jeanette shrugged and turned a couple of corners that brought them in front of the police department. Linda hopped out of the car and trotted inside. Less than a minute later she appeared in the doorway motioning for Jeanette to come in.

Jeanette switched off the car. Before she could open her door, Stuart and the Chief stepped from the building and began moving her way.

“What’s goin’ on?” Jeanette was worried.

“There’s been another rape.” Stuart started.

"Make that three." The Chief interrupted. "Two before daylight and one sometime early this afternoon."

Jeanette's shoulders slumped.

"Dear God."

"We don't have any full time investigators," the Chief pushed his hands into his pockets, "so I'm pullin' you and Stuart off patrol and givin' this to you. He knows the people in town and you've got the background. You won't be workin' anything else until I say so."

Jeanette looked at Stuart.

"Let me go home and change and I can be back up here in about half an hour."

"No," the Chief shook his head, "I told you to take the day off; as much because we're not budgeted for the overtime as anythin' else. I do want you in here first thing in the mornin'. I think we got some good prints from the one today. I want you to see if you can match them with any of those we already have. That and we got some semen samples. It's not much, but it's better than nothin'. And one other thing...."

He reached into his back pocket and pulled out a small pager.

"Here." He tossed it like a Frisbee. "I want you to be called if we get anything else."

Jeanette caught the pager with one hand and fastened it to her belt.

"What about the women?" She chewed on her lip. "Were any of them able to tell us anythin'?"

Stuart glanced at the Chief before speaking.

"One a the ladies from last night said she could see his hand and the sleeve a his jacket. At least we know he's white and he had a denim jacket."

"Are the reports done on them yet?"

The drizzle had stopped but the sky grew darker and lightening flashed in the distance.

“They will be by the time you get in tomorrow.” The Chief looked up at the sky. “So, why don’t you get outta here before the bottom falls out?”

“No argument there.” Linda mouthed from the porch.

She walked to the car, where the others stood in a small huddle. Jeanette sighed, hating to leave with so much work to be done. Reluctantly, she stepped around to the driver’s door and got back in the car. Linda climbed in next to her, rubbing her temples with her fingers.

“You got a headache?”

“No.” She opened her eyes. “But I will before the night’s over. Stuart loves patrol and I know, sure as I’m sittin’ here, he’s gonna whine and moan all night long about bein’ pulled off.”

“Hmpf.” Jeanette started the car. “A big baby, huh?”

“Like you wouldn’t believe.”

“Well. I wish I could come over and help you through it...”

“But you’ve got a date with Richard.”

Six thirty came and went without a sign of Richard. By a quarter to seven, Jeanette had become worried. She paced back and forth between the kitchen sink and her dining room table, cradling a cup of lukewarm coffee. Five minutes later she called Linda.

As the phone rang once, there was a knock at the door. She slammed the receiver on the hook and nearly lunged across the room. Standing at the door she rubbed her hands on her pants and waited for another knock before reaching for the knob. Couldn’t let him think she’d been sitting around waiting for him to show up.

“And just where have you been?” She said as she swung open the door.

Instead of Richard’s face, she stared at a bouquet of red roses.

“I’m really sorry.” Richard whispered in his best sheepish voice. “But I ordered these at noon and when I got there at six

fifteen, they hadn't even started puttin' them together. I'm really sorry."

"You said that already."

"I know."

He peeked out from behind the flowers, the corners of his mouth turned down.

"You know how it makes somebody feel when you're late for their first date?"

"Probably." His expression became a modest grin. "But it's been so long since I was on a date, I've forgotten."

"Get in here."

She grabbed his arm and pulled him inside. Pushing the flowers aside with one hand, she closed the door with the other and leaned forward. The feelings from the night before returned as their lips touched and for a few moments every problem in Jeanette's life melted away.

"You know, we oughta get goin'."

Richard whispered, his mouth brushing against hers in the lingering backwash of their kiss.

"Yeah." Jeanette pushed herself against him until he was backed against the door, her eyes closed, her mouth hovering near his. "Whatever you say."

Another minute passed before either spoke again.

"And we oughta put these in some water, too." Richard muttered.

Jeanette had to put her hand to his chest and force herself away. Even then, her eyes remained closed for a second before she reached down for the roses. Without a word she ambled to the kitchen and filled a short pitcher with faucet water, then deposited the flowers.

When she returned, she noticed Richard looked rather pleased with himself.

"What're you so happy about?"

His expression immediately changed to that of a child caught with its hand in the cookie jar.

“Who, me?”

Jeanette looked behind her then back around.

“I don’t see nobody else standin’ here.”

“Ah...”

“Don’t worry about it, lover boy. I feel the same way. I just hide it better than you.” She grinned. “Let’s go.”

They headed for Longview in a pouring rain, on treacherously slick streets. Surprisingly, they didn’t talk much. Jeanette mentioned she had been pulled from patrol and would be working with Stuart on the rape cases. Richard, in turn, noted that he had been offered a job in Tyler with the University Medical Center.

“They want me to be part of a research project on sleep disorders. Could be some really bizarre stuff.”

“What do you know about sleep disorders? I thought that was a part of psychology.”

“It is.” He glanced in her direction, then back at the road. “Didn’t I tell you that’s my field?”

“No.” Jeanette widened her eyes and shook her head. “Not unless I missed something during the time when you had your tongue down my throat.”

They both laughed.

“I’m sorry. I guess I don’t usually talk about work when I’m off.”

He pulled to the curb in front of a sprawling apartment complex. The buildings formed a horseshoe around a well-kept courtyard. Lantern lights mounted on wrought iron posts illuminated the walkways and the appearance was of a quiet, safe place.

“Well,” Richard switched off the car, “here we are.”

“Yeah.”

Jeanette shifted in her seat and peered out her window.

“All of the sudden I feel nervous about this.”

“Don’t worry. It’ll be fine.” Richard reached over and placed a hand on her leg. “Besides, everybody here is weird so they won’t notice if you freak out.”

“Thanks a lot.” She leaned over and kissed him quickly.

They climbed a set of stairs to the second floor and walked to the apartment on the corner nearest the street. As Richard moved to ring the bell, the door opened.

“Hey, Richard.”

The woman smiled warmly and opened the storm door, letting Richard and Jeanette inside. The small living room was filled to capacity. Three women sat on a sofa against the far wall. A young man occupied a corner on the floor in front of a glass display case. Four more women were scattered about the room in chairs or lounging on big, overstuffed pillows.

Jeanette glanced around the room quickly, trying to avoid eye contact while at the same time attempting to get a feel of the gathering. She smiled coyly and inched closer to Richard who stood just in front of her.

The woman at the door came around and hugged him warmly.

“We thought you might not make it, what with the rain and all.”

“It slowed us up a little,” Richard and the woman parted, “but it coulda been comin’ down cats and dogs and we’d of still been here.”

“Hi.” The woman turned to Jeanette. “I’m Susan.”

“I’m Jeanette.”

They shook hands and Jeanette felt something like a mild static charge pass between them. Susan seemed not to notice, so Jeanette pushed the incident aside.

“Let’s see,” Susan touched a finger to her lower lip in a moment of contemplation, “over on the couch is Leann, Julie, and Karen. Then David’s the one on the floor by my china cabinet.

And over here is Carol, Regina, Dana, and Angela's the one stuffing her face from the candy dish."

"Hi, everybody."

"Find a place to plop down, make yourselves comfortable and I'm gonna put some more coffee on."

Jeanette felt the muscles in her neck begin to knot as nervous tension crept in. She and Richard stepped over Angela and sat on the floor in front of an end table. The living room was open, leading into the dining area. Fixtures on a ceiling fan and a pole lamp in one corner filled the room with light.

"Okay." Susan came back in and sat on the corner of a low, wooden chest that served as a coffee table.

"We were asking everybody to tell us what's changed since the last time we met. But before we go on with that," she turned to Jeanette, "and since Richard obviously didn't tell you much about what we do, why don't we fill you in on these get-togethers of ours."

"You mean when we're not smokin' dope and snortin' coke." Leann snickered.

The others laughed quietly and Jeanette felt some of her nervousness subside. Oddly, though, Susan still made her feel ill at ease.

"I'm sorry." Leann mouthed. "We knew you were a police officer and I just couldn't resist that. Had to see if it made you go all pale or somethin'."

"Alright, you guys." Susan interrupted. "Let's try to stay just a little serious. We don't wanna have her leave here thinkin' we're a bunch of fruit cakes."

David sat forward and crossed his legs.

"Don't let them kid you, Jeanette. We are fruit cakes."

"Free thinkers." One of the others voiced.

Jeanette smiled as her hesitation about the evening faded into the background.

“What do you guys do, read palms or meditate or somethin’?”

“Well that,” Susan offered, “and we try to help each other with problems we might be having. Basically, we all believe that there are things; in the world or in the universe; that we don’t understand, things that are bigger than us. Some people call it ESP others call it psychic ability. But we, all of us here, recognize that if we don’t learn to use it or understand it that one of several things can happen.”

“You’re gettin’ heavy on us, Susan.” Angela threw a chocolate in her mouth. “When I was a little girl I used to have a friend that I played with that nobody else could see. We would do all kinds of stuff together. I used to think that everybody had a friend like that. When I got older, I started learning that not everybody’s friend was like mine. And after a while, I think it was when I was in the seventh grade, my friend just stopped coming around.”

“Why’s that?” Jeanette asked.

“Because I stopped believing in her.” Angela’s expression turned sad. “Somebody told me that make believe friends were for little girls. So I told my friend and she just didn’t come back again.”

“I still don’t understand.” Jeanette was genuinely confused. “You grew up and you didn’t need your make believe friend anymore. What’s wrong with that?”

Richard had listened quietly, letting Jeanette blend into the group. He sat forward and leaned closer to Jeanette’s face.

“Her friend came back two years ago,” he commented.

Susan jumped up from her perch as the coffee maker gurgled from the kitchen. She trotted out of the room while Angela tried to explain to Jeanette.

“When Rachel showed back up...”

“Who’s Rachel?” Jeanette asked, knowing the answer before she finished. “Forget I asked.”

“Okay,” Angela went on. “Anyway, when she showed back up she brought some others with her and it was like we’d never been

apart. Seems she understood that I had to finish growing up before I'd be ready to see her again."

"This is too deep for me."

Jeanette stood and made for the front door. Richard started after her when he felt Susan's hand on his arm. She held two cups of coffee and shook her head. Richard sat back down and Susan followed Jeanette out onto the walkway.

"You look like you could use some of this."

Jeanette turned at the sound of Susan's voice. She accepted the coffee and took a couple of sips before speaking.

"Thanks. I just had to get some air."

"Hey," Susan drank from her cup, keeping her eyes on Jeanette, "I know how it is. You're with a room full of strange people and all of a sudden you start to feel a little claustrophobic. By the way, did I get the coffee right?"

"Yeah."

"Good. You sorta had that cream and sugar look about you."

"It scares me sometimes." Jeanette offered, without prompting.

Susan stepped forward and leaned her arms against the iron rail. The walkway overlooked the courtyard. The air was filled with night sounds, crickets and whippoorwills, even an occasional owl's hoot. The rain had stopped and clouds began to part, revealing patches of star-filled sky. Susan breathed deeply, relishing the feel of the air as it rushed into her lungs, cool and fresh and clean.

"It used to scare me all the time." Susan cradled her cup in both hands. "Especially when I was young. I could touch people or just be real near them and I'd feel their thoughts. Sometimes it was just vague images that didn't make sense. Other times it was clear like I was watching a movie. When I was a kid it didn't really bother me because I thought everybody was like that. I mean, if you got near somebody you started sharin' their life. It made sense to me."

"Why?"

“Why, what, hun?”

“Why does it happen?” Jeanette felt a sudden wave of sorrow wash over her. “Why did it have to happen to me? I didn’t ask to be like this, dammit! I just wanted to be like everybody else—you know? I wanted to get married and have a good job and maybe someday have some kids. I just wanted to be happy.”

Susan reached out and touched the back of Jeanette’s hand. A spark arched between them causing Jeanette to jump back.

“What is that?”

“Just static electricity,” Susan smiled. “Nothin’ to do with what we’re talkin’ about.”

“Good,” Jeanette sighed. “I don’t think I coulda stood a physical manifestation right now.”

They both laughed.

“How long have you been able to see the future?”

“How did you know?”

Susan grinned.

“Richard told me when he called and asked if he could bring you here.”

“Good. Cause if you’d said you just knew I think I woulda thrown myself over your balcony.”

“We started this group about a year and a half ago. There were only six of us, originally. A friend of ours, who’s not here tonight, got us together to discuss a book, of all things. It was about meditation, and understanding yourself and metaphysics in general. After a while, things just kinda snowballed. We usually get together, now, about once or twice a month. Sometimes we do specific meditations, other times we practice readings, and other times we get into just exploring the things each of us can do.”

“I coulda used somethin’ like this just before I got outta the service.”

“If it doesn’t do anything else, it gives us a sounding board for the things that are happenin’ in our lives. And you still didn’t answer me.”

Jeanette sipped from her cup again and stared out into the night.

“For as long as I can remember.” She chuckled. “As a matter of fact, that’s what the psychologist in Germany called it...forward memory.”

“That’s about as close as most psychologists are gonna get. The real name for it is precognition. And as you’ve probably guessed it means that you can see the future.”

“But I don’t wanna see the future. I just wanna live it.”

“And what woulda happened if you hadn’t seen the guy with the gun on Richard’s brother in law?”

Jeanette lowered her head.

“He’d probably got his stupid head blown off.”

“But...”

“But I saw it comin’,” she sighed with resignation, “and saved the day.”

“There is one other thing you gotta remember. And this is real important.” Susan turned and looked directly at Jeanette. “Nothing is set in stone, hun. All things, especially the things that haven’t happened yet, are subject to change.”

“I don’t understand.”

Susan thought for a moment.

“The things you see may or may not be the way it’s actually gonna be. There’s too many variables and any one of them can throw things off course.”

“Somethin’ else’s been goin’ on lately, too.”

“What’s that?”

“I’ve been seein’ stuff that’s already happened to other people. I’ve never done that before.”

“All I can say about that is, it’s rare that a person with a strong psychic ability to only be capable in one area.”

“But I’m not a psychic.”

“Don’t fool yourself, Jeanette.” For the first time, Susan’s voice took on a serious tone. “You’re a psychic. From just the

little Richard's told me, and what you've said, you're a very strong psychic. What you've done so far is just the tip of the iceberg. What you need to do is learn to open to it, to work with it instead of letting it stay random."

"How?" Jeanette turned and leaned back against the rail. "How do I control something I don't understand; something that scares me half to death?"

The door to the apartment opened and Richard stuck his head out.

"Is this a private party or can anybody join?"

Susan and Jeanette scowled at him.

"I guess that means private party," he said, looking like a hurt puppy. "Ah...the other's wanted me to ask if we were gonna do a meditation tonight."

Susan glanced at Jeanette.

"You feel up to it?"

"What the hell," Jeanette turned up her cup and swallowed the last half of her coffee, "in for a penny, in for a pound."

When they stepped back into the apartment, Susan grabbed a chair from the dining area and set it where she could see everyone in the living room at once. She made herself comfortable then asked of Jeanette, "Do you wanna take off your shoes? It might make you more comfortable."

Jeanette nodded. She sat on the floor, her back against the end table and kicked off her shoes. Richard moved around to the other side of the table, so his legs jutted into the short hall that led to the back of the apartment.

"Okay," Susan began, "whatever you need to do to get comfortable, go ahead and do it. Let's start by taking some deep breaths. Inhale through your nose and hold it for three seconds, then exhale through your mouth. Inhale...hold it...exhale, slowly. One more time...inhale, hold it and exhale."

"We're gonna do a generic meditation tonight; this bein' Jeanette's first time. I want everyone to close their eyes and relax

their muscles. If it helps, you might want to tighten them up first, then release the tension. Work your way from the tips of your toes to the top of your head. Even your face, relaxing your jaw, your lips and the muscles of your eyelids. Feel the sensation, as you seem to sink into the place where you're sitting. Let your entire body relax."

Jeanette felt good. Comfortable, calm, and at peace as she followed Susan's voice and visualized herself walking down a staircase toward a door. At the bottom of the stairs she reached for the door and opened it. A world opened up to her; full of sights, sounds, odors, even the warmth of the sunlight that shown down. Somewhere in the distance, she heard Susan's voice continuing to drone on. Not quite a part of the place she could see, but still ever present.

Without warning the scene changed. Instead of the pleasant, comfortable place on the other side of the doorway, she found herself in an empty room with pale, gray walls. A heavy wooden door was the only thing that broke their lines. She walked toward the door and pushed through into a deserted hallway lined with doors like the one to her own room.

An overwhelming sense of distress washed over her and she began running down the hall. As she came to each door, she opened it and peered inside. Every room held the same scene: a woman, sobbing into her hands, wearing a drab, white hospital gown. After a dozen rooms, Jeanette became frantic as she searched for a way out of the place. Yet, no matter how many doors she tried, all led to another examination room with another weeping woman.

Jeanette screamed.

"Hey." Susan held Jeanette by the shoulders, providing a reference point back to reality. "Open your eyes, hun. Open your eyes slowly."

Jeanette's eyes snapped open, still gripped in the panic from her vision. She realized her mouth was gapped open from her scream and felt embarrassed.

“Are you back with us?”

Jeanette nodded.

“Are you okay?”

“If my heart would just slow down,” she shivered and her head turned from side to side as she sought Richard.

“Did I scream out loud?”

Richard nodded, but it was Susan who answered.

“You rattled the windows, hun. Are you sure you’re alright, now?”

“I think so.” She lowered her head. “Jeez, you guys. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to ruin your meeting.”

“You didn’t.” Leann came off the sofa and knelt behind Susan. “That’s what this is all about; helping each other through this stuff. It’s a whole lot better than tryin’ to do it by yourself.”

“Can I,” Jeanette looked up, her breathing still ragged, and offered a half hearted smile, “can I have a glass of water or somethin’?”

“Sure.”

Susan stood and went to the kitchen. She returned with a glass and handed it to Jeanette who started with a sip, then took several large gulps that drained the last drop.

“Thanks.” She wiped her mouth with her sleeve. “So what do we do now?”

The entire room seemed to sigh as if everyone had been holding their breath, waiting in anticipation.

“Well,” Susan leaned back on the makeshift coffee table, “we usually, talk about what we experienced during meditation. But if you wanna forgo that part....”

“No.” Jeanette shook her head. “I want to. Maybe one of you can make some sense outta it.”

“Here.” Angela leaned across the others, holding the dish of chocolates. “You’re gonna start feelin’ hungry in a minute.”

Jeanette looked at her with a peculiar expression but accepted the dish.

“How did the meditation start?” Richard asked. “What did you see at first?”

“Well,” Jeanette unwrapped a chocolate covered mint and popped it into her mouth, “it was real calm and peaceful at first. I was goin’ down this staircase and there was a door at the bottom....”

She talked for the nearly twenty minutes, devouring the dish of candies, while describing the details. The others listened intently, never interrupting to ask questions. When she finished, she leaned back on one elbow and waited for comments.

Angela cocked her head to one side and sat forward.

“Do you know how many rooms you looked into before you started screaming?”

“Ah... eleven, maybe twelve.” Jeanette shrugged and shook her head. “No. It was twelve. I’m sure of it.”

Angela and Susan exchanged knowing glances.

“Was each woman a different person, or were they all the same?” Angela went on.

“Different person. One was just a high school kid. Another was forty-something with light brown hair...another one about thirty and blonde. No; they were all different.”

“Okay,” Susan reared herself up to sit on the edge of the coffee table, “now think about this before you answer. Have you ever seen any of them before?”

Jeanette closed her eyes, trying to recall the images of the people she saw. Richard inched closer, anticipating a negative reaction but when she opened her eyes, they were angry rather than frightened.

“Yeah.” She glared. “Two of them. I met ’em yesterday....”

“They were the one’s that were raped. Weren’t they?” Susan observed.

Jeanette nodded.

“How’d you know that?”

Susan ignored the question.

"Did you see a man in any of the rooms?"

"No!" Jeanette's voice took a sharp tone. "How'd you know about the rapes?"

"I didn't... not really. I could tell it was something," she searched for the right word, "something strong, something painful and traumatic. Rape's the only thing that fits that description for me. I could feel it when I was holding you."

"I'm sorry." She closed her eyes and threw her head back. "I didn't mean to snap at you, like that."

"It's alright. You've had a pretty rough time tonight."

"I'm still sorry. I shouldn't have took it out on you."

Richard glanced at his watch.

"We probably better get ready and head back anyway. It's gettin' pretty late."

"No need to rush off?" Leann complained. "We're just gettin' warmed up."

"I wish I could." Jeanette rose slowly. "But I gotta work tomorrow. And I'm not gonna wanna get up as it is."

The others stood and one by one, crossed the room to give Jeanette and Richard a hug. At first, Jeanette was hesitant exchanging such an intimate gesture with people she had known for so short a time. But as each came forward, she found the act compassionate and warm, and it served as a bond or remembrance to hold onto until next they would meet.

Susan was the last to take Jeanette in an embrace. When they parted, she held Jeanette's hands and leaned forward to whisper in her ear.

"It's not your enemy. Relax and learn to work with it. I think you'll find that it's as much a part of you as the color of your hair and eyes."

"I hope you're right." Jeanette muttered. "I really do."

Jeanette turned and started to precede Richard to the door when the pager went off.

“Damnit!” She looked at Richard then to Susan. “Can I use your phone?”

“Sure, hun. It’s in the kitchen, right inside the door.”

Jeanette crossed the room and stepped into the kitchen. As she dialed, she thought about the things she had seen during the meditation. She was so preoccupied with her thoughts; she didn’t realize Stuart was speaking on the other end of the phone.

“Sorry, Stu. Did you guys page me?”

“Yeah.” He sounded breathless. “One of the patrols responded to a burglary in progress. The lady at the house had the guy at gun point when the patrol got there.”

“Is it our rapist?” Jeanette asked expectantly.

“Could be. The lady caught him when he was comin’ in through the bedroom window. And get this,” Stuart almost laughed, “it’s Johnny Cummings.”

“Okay,” the name meant nothing to her, “and...”

“Johnny Cummings,” Stuart repeated, “the guy that put the gun in my face.”

“Son of a bitch!” Jeanette exclaimed. “I’ll be there in about half an hour.”

Chapter Four

Jeanette found a surprise waiting when she pushed through the police station door. With Roger, Stuart, and Johnny Cummings were the Sheriff, two of his investigators, and the District Attorney.

“What gives?” Jeanette’s hands went to her hips.

“Before you fly off the handle,” to Roger’s surprise, Jeanette was calm, “let’s explain what’s goin’ on here.”

“Who said I was gonna fly off the handle?” Jeanette glanced at the Sheriff then back to Roger. “What’s goin’ on?”

“We need you to do us a favor with this kid.”

Tom Allen had been District Attorney for nearly twelve years. At fifty six, he was tall and slim with a full head of silver hair. A massive heart attack during his first term in office left him weak and debilitated. Amazingly, he fought back until he regained all of his solid, two hundred twenty pounds.

“This kid?” Jeanette stabbed a finger at Johnny, who grinned and seemed to find the situation amusing.

“Yes, ma’am.” Tom leaned back in his chair. “Mr. Cummings has been working with us on a number of...er...projects. In exchange for his cooperation in these matters, we’ve agreed to offer him a certain degree of protection under circumstances such as these.”

“I don’t believe this crap!” Jeanette turned to Roger. “Don’t tell me this little scum bucket has police protection!”

“Now look here, little lady...” Tom stood and started to cross the room.

Before he could take a step, Jeanette spun around and closed the distance between them.

"You can kiss this little lady's..."

"That's enough, Jeanette," Roger interrupted.

"No," she insisted, "it's not enough. I've seen how this goes. And if you think I'm gonna stand still while this bunch a good ol' boys cuts a rapist loose, you better think again."

"Rapist?" Johnny's eyes widened. "I ain't raped nobody!"

"Yeah," the Sheriff spoke for the first time, "you ain't said this had anything to do with them rapes you been workin', Roger. I thought we were lookin' at a burglary."

"You thought wrong," Jeanette jumped back in.

Roger grabbed Jeanette's arm and pulled her backward out of the office and into the hall. After slamming the door behind them, he turned to her.

"You're here because it's your case. Don't confuse that with how I run my department. I've let you get away with a few remarks since you've been here, but that stops right now."

Jeanette scowled at him without replying.

"Well..." he prompted.

"We gonna get to hang onto this punk?"

"It's our arrest. If I have to book him on misdemeanor charges just so the DA doesn't have a say in the matter that's what I'll do."

Jeanette felt the knots in her shoulders relax.

"All right."

"Now," Roger pulled his cigarettes from his shirt pocket, "I don't think you really need to go back in there."

Jeanette cocked her head to one side and the frown returned.

"Is this still my case?"

"Yeah," Roger lit a cigarette and blew smoke toward the ceiling, "but me and Stuart can handle this part. 'Sides, I'm more concerned about you gettin' some sleep so you can be fresh when you come back in the morning. I want you to try and piece

together enough from those other reports to pin this on that little punk.”

Jeanette stewed for a moment. She glanced at the closed door to the squad room then back at Roger and rolled her tongue across her teeth.

“I take it you’re not givin’ me a choice in this?”

Roger shook his head.

“Nope.”

“Then I’ll see you in the morning.”

Instead of moving toward the lobby, she spun around, opened the door behind her and stuck her head into the room.

“Stu,” she said, “I’ll be back at seven.”

“Seven it is.” He looked confused, but managed to hide it in his voice.

Before she pulled the door, Jeanette turned to look at Johnny and shook her head.

“That’s twice this week you’ve looked down the barrel of somebody else’s gun, isn’t it?”

“Yeah,” Johnny straightened in his chair, “so what?”

Jeanette clucked her tongue against the roof of her mouth and extended a finger, pointing it at the boy.

“Three’s the charm....”

She ducked out of the room and closed the door before anyone could respond. When she turned she bumped into Roger, who stood with his hands on his hips, eyeing her disapprovingly.

“An attorney could interpret that as a threat.”

“Hey,” she grinned, “only attorney in there’s the prosecutor. See you in the morning.”

“You said that already.”

Jeanette raised an eyebrow and eased past without further comment. She decided enough had been said for one evening and trotted out to the car.

“That was quick.” Richard remarked as she slid into her seat.

She buckled the seat belt.

"Doesn't take long when you're good."

A second later she slammed her fist against the dashboard.

"Damn it!"

"Whoa," Richard stopped short of starting the car, "where'd that come from?"

"You don't wanna know," she sighed. "On second thought, I'd don't care whether you wanna know or not."

She turned in the seat and stared at his face illuminated in the dim glow of the instrument panel lights. In that brief instant, what had been an unexplained attraction turned into something more, something stronger, and she fell in love with the man from her dreams.

"I love you," Richard whispered.

Jeanette felt a shiver rush down her spine and settle somewhere deep inside.

"How did you know?" She asked.

Before he could answer she added, "Don't tell me," and touched a finger to the side of her head. "Instincts. Right?"

She leaned forward, touched her lips to his and let herself melt into him. When they paused to take a breath, she nearly laid in his lap, her back pressed against the steering wheel.

"You know," she said with her eyes still closed, "if the guys come out and catch us like this, I'll never live it down."

"Do you care?"

"No."

They kissed again, long and warm and passionately until someone tapped on the windshield. Instead of stopping, they continued, running their fingers through each other's hair and tasting all they had to offer.

"Hey," Stuart tapped harder on the window, "we got laws against that kinda stuff around here."

Jeanette pulled away then brushed her tongue against Richard's lips before sitting up in her seat. She rolled her window down and leaned out.

“Hi, partner.”

Stuart leaned over so he could look across the car at his brother in law.

“Does your sister know you’re running around with loose women?”

“I’m a big boy, now.” Richard grinned and started the car. “And we were just leaving, officer.”

“Speaking of loose women,” Jeanette remembered her encounter in Dallas, “what’s the deal with you and this Elizabeth Anderson?”

“Uh oh!” Stuart remarked. “Where’d you hear about Elizabeth?”

“Me and Linda ran into her at the mall in Dallas. In fact, I thought the poor woman was gonna stroke out when Linda told her me and Richard were goin’ out tonight.”

Richard and Stuart burst into laughter.

“Linda likes to live dangerously,” Richard said through gasping breaths.

“You mean,” Stuart leaned forward on the roof of the car, “Elizabeth didn’t try to pull your hair out or anything?”

“Not funny, guys,” Jeanette became serious. “What gives?”

“Actually, we’ve been wonderin’ what happened to her,” Richard smiled. “I mean, up until I left town this last time, I couldn’t go anywhere without her poppin’ up. We’re talkin’ the grocery store, the gas station, the bank. Heck, I was even runnin’ into her when I’d take my lunch breaks at work.”

“So what stopped it?”

“He went to Austin for a month and a half,” Stuart offered, “said it was for a conference and some classes he was givin’ at the University. We think he was tryin’ to ditch Elizabeth.”

“The woman’s bazaar,” Richard’s eyes narrowed and his voice took on a ominous tone, “in ways you wouldn’t believe, Jeanette.”

Jeanette shook her head and changed the subject.

"What say you carry me back to my place. I'm gonna have to come in tomorrow and get crackin' on this."

"Change in plans," Stuart said. "Chief wants us to take the weekend off. Says he wants to do the Monday through Friday thing long as we're on this."

"Damn it!"

Jeanette slammed her back into the car seat.

"How the hell're we supposed to put a case together if we can't work on it?"

Richard put a hand on her leg but it was Stuart who commented.

"Ease up," he grinned, "we got the bastard locked away for the weekend. The DA agreed to stay out of it until the punk can go before a judge. I think he doesn't wanna get caught in the middle of a big mess. You know, if Johnny gets let out and there's another rape, it could be the end of his career in politics."

Jeanette gave in, something she'd found herself doing quite a bit lately.

"How about takin' me home?" She said in a defeated voice.

"It's not but ten-thirty," Richard offered, concerned about her mood. "You feel like gettin' a bite to eat?"

"Sure," Jeanette sighed. "Not like I got anything better to do."

Five minutes later, they found themselves in the parking lot of the Kitchen Door, where she and Richard first met. It was Chimney's only restaurant open later than nine at night.

They were seated by a young waitress with a bad case of acne who took their order and brought them each a glass of wine.

"Is this to make up for that awful stuff at my house the other night?" Jeanette smiled.

Richard nodded, "Touché," as he held up the glass in salute.

"So," Jeanette sipped from her glass, "tell me about yourself, mystery man. Seems like everything I know about you I got from somebody else or by accident."

“Well,” Richard cocked his head to one side, “there’s not that much to tell. If I get that position at the University, I’ll be spending a lot of time up there. For the last couple of years I’ve been dabblin’ in a private practice.”

“What about your stay in Austin?” Jeanette leaned forward and folded her hands together. “The one that let you escape Elizabeth’s clutches.”

He rolled his eyes.

“Did you have to bring her up?”

“You know,” Jeanette smiled, “Stuart said he used to think you were a virgin, till you got married.”

“Stuart’s talks too much but he’s a lot better person than he lets on.”

The waitress returned with their plates. When she moved away, Jeanette started to take a bite but stopped and put her fork down.

She glanced up and asked, “So what’re you saving yourself for, now?”

“What?” A bit of sausage tried to sneak out of the corner of his mouth.

“You’ve been moving rather slowly with me. I mean, most guys would’ve tried to get me in bed the night you came over. What’ve you been waiting for?”

“The right woman.”

“And how are you gonna know when she comes along?”

“Instincts...that’s my gift. I’m a lot better with it than I used to be. But it’s taken a lot of practice.”

“Did Susan help you, too?”

“We helped each other.”

Jeanette’s expression changed. “There’s an implication there.”

Worry crept into her face. It never occurred to her Richard might be romantically involved with someone else.

He nodded and Jeanette added, "And you're not going to elaborate."

"You have an active, inquisitive mind." He laid his fork on the plate.

"You mean I ask a lot of questions."

"That, too."

"Sorry. But," she started to mention the subject of her conversation with Stuart two days ago.

"You also keep a lot to yourself."

"Not always."

"Not when you get backed against a wall. And once you start, it's like opening a floodgate. Everything just pours out. Then when you realize what or how much you've said, you close the gate and nothing else gets out. Right?"

"You're tryin' to read me like a book?"

He touched the side of his head with a finger.

"Instincts—remember? That's my gift."

"So what else do your instincts tell you about me?"

"You're afraid to get close to me—in fact I scare the hell outta you. And I haven't figured that out yet."

"If I'm so scared why am I here now?"

"Because you're trying to defy fate."

"Fate?" She raised an eyebrow. "What's fate got to do with it?"

"Fate speaks to you," his tone became sincere, "tells you her secrets, shows you the things she sees. When they come in bits and pieces, they're easier to digest. But whole portions make you feel small and manipulated—like a pawn in some great game. Like you're not in control of your life or your destiny."

Her eyes narrowed and a slight frown creased her brow.

"Damn you!" She whispered.

He reached across the table and touched her hand.

"There aren't many people who I can talk to like this. What you've gotta remember is you're not alone. We're one of many—

you and I. It doesn't make us special or better than those who aren't aware. But it does make us different."

"Is philosophy another one of your fields?"

"No. But it helps me to stay sane."

Jeanette suddenly felt uncomfortable and tried to free her hand from his grasp. He tightened his grip slightly, intent on making her listen. As he did, images flooded into her mind.

His past, present, and future rolled across her consciousness like pages flipped through a book. She saw him as a little boy, playing in his back yard. She saw him as an old man, seated before a Christmas tree and surrounded by children. She saw him as he appeared now, driving through the streets of the city.

Her breathing came in gasps and her heart raced. She looked into his eyes then down at the hand clamped over her own and the images continued, one behind the other, in rapid succession with no end in sight.

She shook her head from side to side and tried to speak. Her mouth moved but the words got lost on the way to her lips and the only things that came out were little, painful moans. Finally, with a great effort, she screamed and jerked her hand free.

"Stop it!!!"

She stood and muttered, "Dear God, dear God...."

"What's wrong?"

Richard came around the table and extended a hand to try and steady her.

"Stay away from me!" Hysteria gripped her and she put her hands to the side of her head, closing her eyes as tightly as she could. "Don't touch me!"

"What happened?" Richard pleaded.

The other restaurant patrons fell quiet and stared while Richard moved toward her, grabbed her arms and held on.

Her eyes snapped open and she screamed, loud and shrill then whimpered, panting, "Please don't touch me. Please don't touch me. Please, please, please...." and collapsed into his arms.

A sliver of sunlight poured into the bedroom through a crack in the blinds. It touched Jeanette's cheek and crept slowly toward her eyes as the sun arched upward in the morning sky.

Richard touched her arm and shook her gently.

"Ummm," she moaned and a comfortable smile crept across her face. "What time is it?"

"Just past nine," he whispered. "How do you feel?"

"Like I could sleep..." it suddenly struck her the voice was wrong for the situation and her eyes snapped open in a panic.

"Where..."

He placed a hand on her arm but quickly withdrew it, remembering what happened in the restaurant.

"It's okay. You're in your apartment. I got the manager to let me in when I brought you home."

She sat up in the bed and inched away from him. With some hesitation, she lifted the blanket covering her to inspect herself and saw she wore a thin nightgown and nothing else. When she looked up her expression was a cross between anger and confusion.

"Linda got you outta your clothes and into bed. I called her from the restaurant and had her meet me here."

His expression turned hurtful.

"I wouldn't try anything the way you were last night."

"I don't remember what happened." Her eyes looked frightened. "I mean, I remember we went to the restaurant to get somethin' to eat. But I don't remember anything after gettin' there."

"It might be better that you don't. I think you started readin' me and for whatever reason, it kinda overloaded you. You started screamin' and then you just passed out. Has anythin' like that ever happened before?"

"Not that I know of."

"How is she?" Linda stuck her head into the bedroom from the hallway.

"Pretty good." Richard said without looking away from Jeanette. "I think she just over did it a little."

"You had us worried," Linda admonished. "Richard said you really went wild."

"Did you guys spend the night here?"

Richard nodded.

"We took turns sleepin' on the couch. We wanted to make sure one of us was awake in case you needed somethin'."

The phone rang, making Jeanette jump. She reached for the receiver, grabbing it with her left hand; with her right, she kept the sheet pulled close around her neck.

"Hello?"

"Jeanette," the voice said. "This is Susan. How you feelin' hun?"

"More confused than anything else." She cut her eyes at Richard. "I take it Richard called you, too."

"Hey," Susan tried to reassure. "Don't be too hard on him. I'd have been real upset if he hadn't."

"Just a minute, Susan." She cupped her hand over the receiver. "You mind steppin' out and lettin' me put some clothes on?"

Richard smiled sheepishly and left the room. When he pulled the door behind him, Jeanette slumped down in the bed and brought the phone back to her ear.

"Sorry. Richard was in here and I'm next to naked. Not that I'm modest or anything but it just didn't feel right."

"I know what you mean," Susan answered. "Anyway. I just wanted to make sure everything was okay and let you know you can call or drop by anytime today. I'm not goin' anywhere and from what Richard told me, you might need a sympathetic ear or at least a sounding board after what happened."

Jeanette thought for a moment. While Susan seemed nice enough, she knew next to nothing about the woman and her police

instinct told her trust no one until you're sure they have nothing to gain from betraying you.

"Thanks for the offer but I think I wanna rest more than anything else, right now. Can I take a rain check?"

"Sure, hun. If you need anything, give me a call."

With that, Jeanette hung up and lay back on the bed. She closed her eyes, trying to remember something of what happened the night before. Finally, she decided to slip into some clothes and satisfy her need for nourishment. She grabbed a pair of wrinkled jeans and, from one of her dresser drawers, retrieved a white T-shirt with an Army logo splattered across the front.

When she emerged from the bedroom she found Richard and Linda in the dining area sipping coffee. It made her want a cup.

"What'd Susan have to say?" Richard asked.

"She was just checkin' to see if I might need to talk about last night." Jeanette's bare feet squeaked as she walked across the kitchen floor to the coffee maker.

"But I told her since I couldn't remember anything there wasn't much to talk about."

Richard turned in his chair so he could look at Jeanette.

"That could change."

"Hey," Jeanette smiled around her cup as she took a sip. "That's why I keep you around, doc."

She noticed that Richard's gaze had shifted from her face to the T-shirt and realized it allowed a rather clear impression of her small breasts, the nipples of which had become erect. Rather than embarrassed, it gave her a bit of satisfaction and she wondered if she subconsciously intended to omit a bra.

Richard noticed she noticed him noticing and his face took on a red glow as he turned away.

"Caught ya!" She whispered.

Linda looked up from her coffee.

"Did I miss somethin'?"

"No." Richard muttered.

"Depends on your definition of something." Jeanette leaned back against the counter. "I just caught your brother having dirty thoughts."

"What?"

"Don't listen to her, Linda. She's still a little weird after last night."

Jeanette laughed.

"Don't worry, Richard. I might have been disappointed if you hadn't looked."

"You guys have lost me."

"Well," Richard stood and placed his cup on the table, "we probably better get outta here and let her tend to her affairs."

"Yeah," Linda stood and grabbed her purse from the chair back, "I need to get home and check on Stuart. He's not used to having to fend for himself. He probably hasn't had breakfast. Actually, he's probably still asleep."

"I take it, he knows about this too."

"Nope," Linda smirked. "He was asleep when Richard called. And lookin' at the fact that he hasn't called over here lookin' for me, he may not even know I'm gone."

"I'd appreciate it if you didn't tell him about what I did." She thought for a second. "Or what you say I did."

"Fine by me. Far as I'm concerned we can keep it between us girls." She glanced at Richard. "That means you too, brother."

"Ha, ha."

He glanced at Jeanette, who noticed he had to force himself to look directly at her face. She shook her shoulders slightly as she pushed away from the counter, making her breast jiggle.

It was enough to divert his gaze again.

"Boy do you have a dirty mind," she snickered.

"You're doing that on purpose."

"Yep." She walked over to him. "After all, we weren't discussing the weather in your car outside the department, last night."

“You got a point, there.”

Richard smiled, leaned forward and touched her arm, intending to plant a kiss on her cheek. In the instant of contact, a connection was made. Jeanette jerked and stiffened as his emotions slammed into her. She felt his passion for her, warm and loving. But beneath that there was something else; something cold and mournful; something buried and believed forgotten but suddenly brought to the surface.

She placed her hands on his chest and pushed hard enough to make him stagger backward. Her face was pale and her eyes were wide and frightened. That quickly turned to tearful pain.

“Don’t love me because you miss her. Please.”

Richard turned to Linda, who expressed only confusion. He looked back at Jeanette and said, “I don’t... I don’t understand.”

“You still love Carol,” Jeanette almost sobbed, “and just then, when you were holding me, she was the one you wanted to be with.”

“That’s not true.”

“Yes it is!” She screamed. “I saw it. I saw her.”

“But...”

“Please go.” She muttered.

“Don’t do this, Jeanette.”

“Please...”

He lowered his head, turned and walked past Linda. At the door, he stopped as if to say something. Instead, he merely opened it and stepped out.

“What the hell just happened?” Linda asked almost angry. “He loves you! In fact I haven’t seen him this happy about anyone or anything since Carol died.”

“I’m sorry. But I,” she hesitated for a second. “If he loves me, it has to be because of me. Not because he misses her, not because I remind him of her.”

“You don’t have to worry about the last part because Carol was nothing like you.” Linda shook her head and moved to the open front door. “She never woulda hurt him the way you just did.”

The door slammed and Jeanette found herself feeling very alone.

At first the ringing phone sounded like a distant bell, mixed with muted voices. Jeanette, cocked her head, listening as the sound grew closer then realized she'd dozed off on the sofa while watching TV.

Her hand groped for the phone on the end table as she sat up.

"Hello."

"Jeanette. This is the dispatcher over at the Sheriff's department."

"Yeah. What's up?"

"An Alison Clark called for a patrol and specifically asked for you. Said it's about the call you handled there a couple of days ago."

"Okay?" Jeanette was confused as to why the dispatcher would call her instead of just telling the woman she was off duty and sending another patrol.

"You wanna go by there?"

"Not really."

"Well she sounded kinda scared."

"Than send a patrol over."

"Well, the chief told us that if somebody calls and asks for a particular officer we're supposed to see if they wanna handle the call."

Rather than get into a lengthy discussion with the dispatcher she said, "Okay. I'll be on my way. But get one of the guys that's on duty to meet me out front of the house."

"Okay."

Jeanette slipped on a pair of sneakers and threw a button down blouse over her T-shirt. After clipping an off duty holster to her belt, she hurried out the door.

Jeanette found the marked patrol car waited in front of the Clark house as she pulled to the curb. She climbed from her car

and met the officer as he squeezed out from behind the wheel of the patrol. She'd been introduced to Andy Wilson when he relieved her and Stuart on one of their shifts. He didn't seem overly concerned about the call, and just kind of stood there waiting for Jeanette to tell him what to do.

"You been to the door, yet?" Jeanette asked.

Andy shook his head, "I was waitin' on you."

Jeanette shook her head, turned and walked briskly toward the house. The department was a far cry from the way things ran in the service.

She reached the door, stood to one side and knocked lightly instead of ringing the bell. Andy came up beside her, panting slightly. Rather than stand to the other side of the door he positioned himself directly in front of it. Several moments passed.

Jeanette felt worry boil up. She reached forward to try the knob. It turned and she pushed the door open. Slowly, she peeked around the corner of the doorjamb. As she turned back to Andy to put a finger to her mouth, he was about to call through the house to ask if anybody was home. She motioned him to follow her and they stepped inside.

Jeanette eyed the entryway and living room beyond then moved to the hall and the bedrooms in the back of the house. The entire time she could feel Alison was in trouble.

They reached the doorway of the master bedroom and Jeanette saw the top of Larry's head bobbing up and down on the far side of the bed. He hadn't seen them; intent on what he was doing.

"Whoa." Andy remarked without thinking.

It was enough to draw Larry's attention to the doorway but not before Jeanette leapt across the bed, snagged a handful of Larry's thick, shaggy hair and landed straddled across his back. In a single, smooth movement she unholstered her pistol and pushed the muzzle deep into the notch at the base of his skull.

Walking backward, she pulled the big man away from Alison who lay sprawled on the floor beneath him. In that instant a sharp

pain stabbed through her mind. Like some horrible, long forgotten memory, it made her twitch and brought bile up from the pit of her stomach. Only the immediacy of the situation let her push the thought and sensation aside.

But it left something in its wake: an intense, nearly tangible, revulsion. And she was angry—very angry.

“You,” her voice became an animal-like growl, “can give me your hands or I can blow your brain out through the top of your skull and we won’t have to worry about the cuffs.”

Much to her disappointment, Larry brought his hands around to the small of his back. Releasing his hair but keeping the pistol in place, Jeanette handcuffed him then gave him a little nudge that caused him to roll on to his side.

Holstering her gun, she turned her attention to Alison.

“You okay?”

Pants ripped and pulled down around her ankles, Alison lay, curled into a fetal position. Jeanette’s question caused her to open her eyes but she remained silent.

Andy still waited in the doorway, a blank expression on his face, wondering what to do. Jeanette decided for him.

“Look in the closet to your right, Andy, and toss me a pair of pants.”

“Oh,” he muttered. “Yeah.”

“Alison,” Jeanette touched her shoulder, “you still with me?”

Alison nodded.

“Here you go.”

Andy tossed a pair of jeans to Jeanette.

“You get these on.” She laid the pants across Alison’s stomach. “We’re gonna take him out to the car. Then I’ll be right back, okay?”

Alison nodded again.

Chapter Five

“Don’t I get to say anythin’?”

While pleading, Larry’s tone retained a hint of arrogance and it left a sour taste in Jeanette’s mouth.

“You get to shut up, Larry because I haven’t read you your rights.”

Jeanette stood beside the open back door of Andy’s patrol car.

“Well, aren’t you gonna read me my rights then?”

“Hadn’t planned on it,” Jeanette said, making a point of not looking at him.

“But you gotta read me my rights. I’m under arrest, ain’t I?”

“Yep, Larry, you’re under arrest.”

She placed a hand on the top of the car door and leaned her face over it, staring at Larry. “But I don’t gotta read you your rights if I ain’t gonna ask you nothin’. And since you got nothin’ I wanna hear the best thing you can do is shut up!”

She slammed the car door on the last word. Andy stood on the other side of the car by the driver’s door.

“You sure you won’t need any help with him at the jail?”

Andy shook his head as he dug the car keys from his pocket.

“I think you took all the fight outta him.”

Keys in hand, he stopped just before crawling behind the wheel.

“Stu said you was good. I thought he was just braggin’ on you.”

“What can I say?” Jeanette smiled. “I’m gonna sit with her for a little bit then head back to the house.”

“No problem. I can do a coversheet and let you fill-in the details when you come back on shift.”

That said, Andy wedged himself into the car and drove off.

Jeanette sighed, thrust her hands into her pant pockets and turned to walk back to the house. She found Alison in the kitchen seated at a little breakfast counter. Jeanette's first impression was of a rag doll; worn and tattered, she seemed all used up.

"Sam's gonna be mad at me."

Jeanette frowned and cocked her head to one side.

"I don't think so." She shook her head. "Not at you."

She stepped into the kitchen and pulled a stool up to the counter as Alison broke into sobs.

Forty minutes later, Jeanette drove into the parking lot of her apartment. As she walked toward her door, she heard a car come into the lot. When she turned she saw Susan behind the wheel of a beat-up, old Nova.

Jeanette unlocked the apartment door, turned back and walked to the edge of the parking lot.

"Hm," Susan moaned as she walked up. "Did I catch you at a bad time?"

"No." Jeanette shook her head. "In fact, I could probably use the company right about now. Come on in and I'll put some coffee on."

She led the way and conducted Susan to the sofa. Neither woman spoke while Jeanette worked in the kitchen. Finished, she moved into the living room and flopped down next to Susan.

"Do you ever feel..."

Susan finished for her, "...like the world is ganging up on you?"

"Yeah." Jeanette leaned forward and cupped her face in her hands. "I mean, ever since I got here it's been one thing after another."

"And as if the job weren't enough," Susan added, "you've got all this other crap goin' on, too. Yeah, I know exactly what you mean."

“So,” Jeanette sat up, “it’s not like Chimney’s down the block and around the corner from your place; what brings you to town?”

“Richard called me.”

“Oh.”

“Not to worry.” Susan slid closer and placed a hand on her leg. “I’m not here to scold you or anything. He just wanted me to make sure you were okay and after what happened this morning, he didn’t think you really wanted him around right now.”

“Actually, I do want him around,” she turned to look at Susan, “all the time. It’s like he’s a drug and I can’t get enough of him. Like I’m feeding off his energy or something and when I’m not with him I feel drained and empty.”

Susan laughed.

“You’re in love, hun.”

“Yeah. I know.”

“So why are you so worried about it?”

“Because I can’t be. Not yet. Not now. Not this soon.”

Susan shook her head and smiled.

“And just when is too soon or soon enough? Where does it say how long we’re supposed to know someone before we fall in love with them? If there’s a rule book, nobody’s ever bothered to show it to me.”

Jeanette leaned back.

“It’s just that...”

“Nothing’s set in stone, hun. If you never remember anything else, you need to remember that one thing. Nothing’s set in stone. That’s especially true about the future; even when you’ve seen the future. It can all change and it doesn’t take much to bring about change. In fact, just having glimpsed something can set you on the course to change it.”

Without prompting, Susan stood, walked around the sofa and into the kitchen. She grabbed two cups from the countertop and poured two coffees. When she sat down again, she handed one to Jeanette and took a sip from her cup.

She continued the conversation as if it had never paused.

“There’s something else.”

Jeanette looked up from her coffee, “What’s that?”

“You’re doing the same thing I used to do. You’re fighting it rather than letting it take its natural course. That only leads to one thing.”

“Oh?” Jeanette could see concern on Susan’s face.

“Yeah. You, huddled in a corner someplace, muttering to yourself.”

“It can,” Susan licked her lips and closed her eyes, “it will, if you let it, make you lose your mind.”

Opening her eyes, she placed her cup on the coffee table and turned in her seat so she faced Jeanette.

“It used to be I just about cut myself off from the rest of the world. I didn’t go out, I didn’t answer the phone, and I didn’t let anybody come over to the apartment. Heck, I was so sensitive that if I touched a letter somebody sent me, I could see the faces and lives of everybody that’d touched it on its way to me. Now that will rattle your cage.”

“Oh my God. What’d you do?”

“I stopped fighting it. I took a deep breath, opened the door one day and walked out side.”

“There’s a little market down the street from my place. I took a stroll down there and shook hands with and spoke to everybody I met. At first it hurt like hell. It was like somebody had laid me on my side and poured hot water in my ear. It was everything thing I could do not to go running down the road screaming like a banshee.”

“But after the first half dozen people it got better. When I’d been out for an hour, I’d shaken hands with maybe thirty people or so. By then I could do the two-handed shake and really hold on for a while.”

“It’s not that things didn’t flood in on me, it’s just that it didn’t hurt once I stopped fighting it.”

“Nothing you see will hurt you just because you see it. If you see a horrible accident with bodies twisted and torn; even if one of them is your own; seeing it doesn’t make it happen. It was going to happen whether you saw it or not. And like I said, seeing can be all it takes to set you on the path to preventing it.”

“You don’t control destiny. Not yours, not mine, and not anybody else’s. All you do is get a glimpse of what might be.”

“But what about Richard?” Jeanette’s voice was sad. “I saw his wife. I felt what he felt for her. When he was holding me, he was thinking about her. I can’t compete with that. I can’t compete with a dead woman.”

“You don’t have to. And I know Richard well enough to say he doesn’t love you because you remind him of her. Carol was beautiful and loving. But she was a meek, fragile little thing.”

Susan thought for a moment then worked her mouth into what reminded Jeanette of a small pout before saying, “Hun, he’s always gonna love Carol. No one and nothing can change that. But you’re not in a competition for his heart. You don’t have to beat her to win him. And I think it’s safe say that if he didn’t love you, he wouldn’t be with you.”

Jeanette brought a hand up to her face, covered her eyes, then let the hand drift down over her mouth and stared blankly across the room.

“I need to call him, don’t I?”

Susan nodded.

“I think you owe him that much, at least.”

She glanced at her watch. “I better get going. Got another stop to make while I’m in town.”

Jeanette stood and walked with her to the door. To her surprise she found herself giving Susan a hug before opening it.

“I think you’re gonna be okay, hun. I really do.”

Before Susan’s car pulled from the parking lot, Jeanette was on the phone, dialing Richard’s number. She almost hung up when she heard him answer. Instead, she whispered, “Hi.”

“Are you okay?” Richard’s distant voice replied.

“Not really. But I’m better than I was.”

A moment passed without either speaking. Jeanette stood in the short hall beside the kitchen counter. Back to the wall, she slid slowly until she sat on the floor, knees bent in front of her.

“I,” with her eyes closed, she whispered again, “wanted you to know I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

“No it’s not.” She leaned forward, resting her head on her knees.

“No it’s not.” She whispered again as tears flowed from her eyes and puddled on the floor between her legs. “I love you. Dear God, I love you so much and...”

She sniffled and wiped her nose with the back of her hand but the tears came harder.

“...and I don’t ever want to hurt you or make you sad.”

“Hey,” Richard tried to comfort her, “don’t do that. Don’t cry.”

“I’m sorry.”

She tried to stop but only succeeded in making it worse.

“I’m so sorry.”

“Do you want me to come over?”

“No.” She finally regained some of her composure. “Not right now. I think I need to be alone for a little while. At least for the night.”

“Okay. Then I’ll call you first thing tomorrow.”

Jeanette nodded.

“I take it you’re nodding your head.”

“Yeah,” she chuckled and wiped her nose again, “I guess you couldn’t see that on the other end of the phone, could you?”

“Nope,” his voice smiled. “I’m good but I’m not quite that good. Not yet, anyway. I’ll talk to you tomorrow, then.”

“Yeah. Bye.”

She stayed on the floor a few minutes before mustering the energy to stand and hang up the phone. Absently, she went about collecting the cups she and Susan used and placed them in the kitchen sink. With that done, she wandered back into the living room, sat on the sofa and picked up the TV remote. Her mind went back to the conversation with Richard as she flipped through channels on the television and settled on an old, black-and-white movie.

As she stared blankly at the television, something happened. The faint sound of distant music wafted into the room as if carried on a gentle breeze. She recognized the tune; a wedding march played on an organ. Staring harder at the television, she tried to match the sounds to what was happening on the screen.

Just then she heard hushed laughter. It caused her to sit straight in her seat and glance around the room. Out of the corner of her eye, she caught a faint movement. When she turned, she saw the ghostly image of woman holding a small child and talking to someone next to her.

Jeanette recognized her. But the recognition did nothing to make sense of what she saw. Linda sat in a high-backed church pew beside Stuart. She leaned closer to him, whispered something in his ear then pointed with her free hand toward the front of the church.

Church?

Jeanette considered for a moment she had lost her mind and this was the way it had manifest itself. She turned in the direction Linda pointed and saw a man and woman standing before a priest. The priest made the sign of the cross with one hand, while holding a bible in the other. At the same moment, the woman, wearing a pale blue dress, turned to glance over her shoulder.

The child in Linda's arms let out an excited squeal that pulled Jeanette's attention in that direction. When she turned back to the couple, she stared into her own face and watched her lips speak in a quiet voice, "It's okay. It's all going to be okay."

The other Jeanette then turned back to the priest and continued reciting her wedding vows.

Jeanette bolted from the sofa. As she did, the scene before her dissipated like smoke caught on a breeze like the one that brought the sound of music to the room.

She felt her heart pounding in her chest and her breathing came in quick, shallow pants. She glanced around the room, reassuring herself she was still in her apartment. Her first instinct was to phone Richard. She discarded the idea almost immediately and remembered the things Susan told her.

She also realized what happened was unlike her flashes of forward memory. It hadn't taken place in her mind. Though gossamer, it had been tangible and intruded into the real world: unfolding in the room with her. Before she could consider further, the phone rang.

Jeanette rounded the sofa and picked up the receiver.

"Hun?" There was concern in the voice on the other end of the phone.

"Susan?"

"Are you okay?"

Jeanette turned and took a look around the room as if to make sure before answering.

"Yeah." She nodded. "I think so. But..."

"Alright then. I had a twinge that said something was up, so I pulled into a little convenience store and called."

"I..." Jeanette hesitated.

Then, "I don't know what it was. It was like a dream or somethin'. But I wasn't asleep."

Jeanette related the experience, "...and then it just stopped."

"You had a waking dream, hun."

"A what?"

"A waking dream. It's a dream that happens when you're awake. But it's still just a dream. You're gonna be alright. It's nothing to worry about."

“So, what? Are we joined at the hip? Is that how you knew to call?”

“No baby; nothing so dramatic. You just sent out some really strong vibes, that’s all.”

For a moment neither woman spoke.

“You still with me?”

“Yeah.” Jeanette closed her eyes. “I think so.”

“You need to get some rest, hun. You’ve had a rough day and a rough night before that. You don’t want to wear yourself out.”

Jeanette nodded.

“If you need anything, remember, I’m just a phone call away.”

Jeanette nodded again.

“And you really ought to start using words when you’re talking to people on the phone. It makes it easier for them to hear you.”

Jeanette could hear the smile in Susan’s voice.

“I’ll remember that.”

“Okay then, hun. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Yeah. Bye.”

Jeanette placed the phone in its cradle and leaned forward on the counter for a moment before straightening and retiring to the bedroom. To her surprise, she slept soundly. If she dreamt, she had no memory of it the next morning.

She spent Sunday cleaning the apartment and hoping no one would call. From the time she woke, she decided she wanted to limit her contact with others that day. Her logic being to avoid touching or seeing anyone, thereby reduce the likelihood of unpleasant or unwanted events.

In late afternoon, as she worked in the kitchen preparing a bite to eat, a memory pushed to the forefront. Something Richard said while they sat in the restaurant two nights earlier.

“Fate speaks to you,” he said, “tells you her secrets.”

It was the first recollection of that night and made her stop what she was doing because she realized she had a hole in her life.

With the exception of that one phrase, she had no memory of what happened once they arrived at the restaurant.

Standing in front of the sink with the water running, knife in one hand and a potato in the other, Jeanette closed her eyes and tried to push aside the veil obscuring the events of that night. When she realized she was giving herself a headache, she stopped and took a deep breath, then tried again.

She remembered the meeting at Susan's apartment. She remembered the police station. She even remembered pulling into the parking lot with Richard at the restaurant. Everything after that, however, was gone: as if it had been cut from her memory with a pair of scissors.

When she decided she was getting nowhere, she finished cutting the potato and dropped the cubes in a pot of water. While that cooked, she minced half an onion and began sautéing it in a fry pan. To that she added ground beef.

She removed the potatoes from the stove, dumped them into a bowl and mashed them. By then the onions and ground beef were ready.

Mixing everything in the bowl, she seasoned with pepper and salt then made small, oval shaped patties. These she coated in flour, dipped in egg batter, and rolled in breadcrumbs. A few minutes later, she removed four golden brown croquettes from the frying pan and went to the table in her dining area.

Jeanette started to take a bite but stopped, put her fork down, and mouthed words from the conversation nearly thirty-six hours earlier.

"So what're you saving yourself for, now?"

In that instant her memory returned.

Chapter Six

A bell rang: faint and far away.

It rang again: louder and closer.

Jeanette climbed from her sound sleep feeling like she'd been underwater. When the phone rang a third time, she found it with her eyes closed.

"Yeah."

"Where are you?"

"Hmm? I don't know. Where did you call me?"

"Jeanette," Stuart's calm voice carried a tone of urgency, "are you awake?"

"I think so." She sat up in bed but kept her eyes closed. "What time is it?"

"Almost ten."

"I guess that means I'm late for work, doesn't it?"

"Yup."

"Okay." She finally opened her eyes. "Let me get cleaned up and I'll be there in a little bit."

Forty minutes later, she drove into the police department parking lot. She climbed from the car, straightened her uniform, turned and nearly ran into Roger.

"Son-of-a-bitch!"

"Not the greeting I'm accustomed to," Roger smiled, "first thing in the morning but it's better than some. I hope you got enough rest this weekend."

Jeanette lowered her head.

"Sorry I'm late."

“Don’t worry about it. You put in enough overtime last week to more than make up for it.”

“Walk with me.” He hooked her arm and headed away from the station. “There’s a class of fourth-graders touring the department, so it’s a little full in there right now.”

The police department occupied a corner lot. The road in front, the east side of the building, was little more than a narrow alley. Anderson Street ran along the north side. Across the street were buildings for an ambulance service and the local gas utility.

Roger stopped when he reached the corner.

“We had a rape-free weekend. That lends credence to the theory that your boy, Johnny, is a likely suspect.”

“I take that to mean you were able to keep the county boys from lettin’ him out?”

“Yup.” Roger lit a cigarette. “He was arraigned this morning and bond was set at fifty-thousand. Right now, the only charge against him is the burglary. I’m hoping you’ll find enough in the lab report to tie him to the other.”

“So,” Jeanette raised an eyebrow, “the lab results are in?”

“Just on the first case. Stuart has them. We’ve got a file on Johnny that dates back quite a few years. I’m sure if you go through it you’ll find something in there on his blood type. If it matches up, it’ll put us one step closer.”

“So what’re you standin’ around out here for?” He ground his cigarette butt under his heel. “Get to work.”

Jeanette spun around without responding and jogged back to the station. Pushing through the front door, she was greeted by a crowd of waist-high kids being ushered by a rather stressed-out looking woman.

She found Stuart seated at one of the desks in the squad room. He sipped on a cup of coffee and scribbled on a yellow notepad. He looked up and smiled when she walked into the room.

“I want you to know, Linda gave me hell all weekend because of you.”

Jeanette cocked her head to one side. A puzzled expression came across her face.

"Come again."

"Saturday morning," he started, "when she and Richard got back from your place. She cussed you up one side and down the other. It took the better part of an hour for me and Richard to get her calmed down."

Jeanette pulled up a chair to one side of the desk, turned it backward before sitting, and leaned her arms across the back.

"I am so sorry."

"Yeah," Stuart went on, "even after that she still went around pouting and looking like she wanted to bite somebody's head off for most of the day. It wasn't until Richard called back that afternoon; I guess he'd talked to you by then; that she finally started to act like a sane person."

Jeanette lowered her chin on her folded arms, "I guess I really got on her bad side, didn't I?"

"So," Stuart grinned, "are you one of those high maintenance women I always hear about?"

"Knock it off." She grinned back. "Have you looked at that lab report, yet?"

"Yeah," he grabbed a manila envelope and handed it to her, "but it's all Greek to me. All except where it shows the blood type."

Jeanette extracted the contents and scanned though the report. To her surprise, it was very thorough.

"Chief says we got a file on Johnny."

"Sure do." Stuart stood and went to a bank of file cabinets at the back of the room.

"We've handled him for everything from misdemeanor assaults to drunk driving."

He pulled open a drawer and quickly retrieved a file folder.

"Here we go."

Jeanette took the file from him.

"I just wanna see if we got anything on his blood-type."

"Should be." Stuart followed Jeanette back to the desk. "One of the drunk driving arrests was a traffic accident. We got a blood draw while he was at the hospital. I was the arresting officer on that one."

Jeanette found the forms she was looking for and pulled them from the file. She grabbed the lab report again, flipped to a section near the back and ran her finger down the page until she found what she was looking for.

"Damn it!"

Stuart sat up in his chair.

"What?"

"It's not him."

She flipped the lab report and form from Johnny's file around for Stuart to see.

"Johnny's a type O-positive. The rapist is an A-negative. It's not him."

Jeanette slammed her hand on the desktop, "Fuck me to tears!" and stood just as Roger came into the room.

"I take your outburst to mean we've got a problem."

Stuart looked sheepishly from Jeanette to the chief before answering.

"It's not Johnny," he said.

Before the chief could comment, the phone rang. Stuart scooped it from the cradle and answered.

"Police Department. Can I help you?"

He immediately handed the phone to Jeanette.

"It's the county jail."

Still fuming, Jeanette took the phone.

"Yeah?"

After listening for a moment she spoke again.

"No problem. I'll be over to get it in a little bit."

When she hung up Roger and Stuart waited before asking.

"Larry Clark got bailed out this morning but he didn't take his personal belongings. County just wanted to know if I'd come by there and pick them up."

Stuart looked puzzled.

"When'd you put him back in jail?"

"Late Saturday morning." Jeanette put the lab report back in the envelope. "He attacked Misses Clark in her house while the husband was at work. The dispatcher called me because she asked for me specifically and I met the patrol over there."

"Go on over and pick that up." Roger crossed his arms and leaned against the doorframe. "When you get back I want you to pick through that lab report and see what you can get out of it that might put you closer to identifying the perp."

Jeanette nodded and turned to Stuart.

"You drivin'?"

He stood.

"Wouldn't have it any other way."

When they returned from the county jail, they had another surprise waiting for them. Alison Clark sat in the lobby of the police department. As in their previous meetings, Jeanette couldn't help but notice how weak and fragile the woman looked.

"Ms Clark?" There was genuine concern in Jeanette's voice. "Is everything alright?"

Alison rung her hands and fidgeted before answering.

"Larry," she began. "Larry's been calling the house. I guess ever since he got out of jail. He says he's gonna hurt Sam. Says he's gonna hurt Sam and then take me away and..."

She trailed off into tears.

Jeanette sat next to her and turned in the chair to face the other woman. She placed a hand on Alison's shoulder and squeezed gently.

"Where's Sam, Ms Clark? Where's your husband?"

"He's at work. I haven't told him." She looked at Jeanette with pathetic eyes. "I haven't told him about this weekend, either."

"Okay, Ms Clark," Jeanette sighed, "here's what we're gonna do. I want you to give a written statement to my partner. You remember him from the other day, don't you?"

Alison glanced over at Stuart and nodded.

"Okay. And while you're doing that I'm gonna see about getting an arrest warrant on Larry for phone harassment and threatening an assault. This time I'll see if we can get the judge to deny bond. I think three incidents in a weeks time should be enough to convince a judge that Larry's a danger to the public."

Stuart stepped closer and extended his hand to Alison.

"Come on back to the office with me and we'll get started on that statement."

Alison took Stuart's hand and stood. As she headed to the back of the station, she turned back to Jeanette.

"I should call Sam and tell him what's happened, shouldn't I?"

"I think so." Jeanette curled her lip into her mouth. "I think he needs to know what all's happened."

Stuart and Alison disappeared into the squad room.

"Do you ever wonder," Roger stood behind the counter to the clerk's area, "if some people were just born to be victims?"

"That woman, Chief," Jeanette stood and shook her head, "is probably one of the sweetest, gentlest people I've ever met. People shouldn't have to go through their lives always being afraid. People like her shouldn't have to worry about assholes like her brother-in-law. They just shouldn't."

It was Roger's turn to sigh.

"And in a perfect world, they wouldn't. But..."

"Right." She turned to him. "You know this DA better than I do. You think I can get a warrant on Larry based on her statement and the other two reports?"

"Nope." Roger shook his head. "But I can."

Jeanette smiled coyly, "Thanks."

He wagged his finger at her, "But don't get used to me doing your leg work."

"Not to worry."

As Roger left, Jeanette realized she still held the paper sack with Larry's personal affects. She headed to the property room where she dumped the contents on a table and prepared to inventory them.

She picked up a watch and immediately a feeling of revulsion washed over her as images snaked into her mind. It made her take a deep, gasping breath and drop the watch.

"Oh my God." She muttered.

Cupping her hands over her mouth, she took several deep breaths to regain her composure. Something Susan said came back to her. It is rare for a person with a strong psychic ability to only be capable in one area.

Slowly, she reached for the watch. Once in her hand, she clung to it. Images filled her mind: three faces of three different women. She recognized all of them. As quickly as it began it stopped and the watch became just a watch rather than a vessel or conduit.

When she stepped into the squad room, Stuart looked up from speaking to Alison.

"Ms Clark?" Jeanette whispered. "Alison?"

Her back to the door, Alison turned around, still looking pitiful.

"How many times," it was hard for Jeanette to keep the anger from coming to the surface, "has Larry raped you?"

Alison lowered her head and closed her eyes. Tears trickled down her face and her whole body shook as she wept uncontrollably.

Jeanette walked over, knelt and put an arm around her.

"Oh Alison, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry."

When Sam finally arrived at the police department, it was nearly noon. Stuart made the call, not giving him any details, just

letting him know he was needed there. Alison had regained as much composure as she was going to. She still sat in the squad room with Jeanette when Stuart and Sam came in.

"Alison?"

She held a tissue and wiped her nose with it before turning at the sound of Sam's voice.

"Mr. Clark," it was Jeanette, however, who stood and walked toward the door where the two men waited, "let me talk to you out here first."

Touching his elbow, she guided Sam back into the short hallway and pulled the squad room door closed behind them.

"What's going on, officer?" Sam's eyes were sad and pleading. "What's happened to Alison?"

"There's really no easy way to say this, Mr. Clark." She felt like she was telling someone a family member had died. "Your brother, Larry, has been raping your wife on and off for the past several years."

It staggered him and he backed against the wall almost falling. Jeanette maneuvered him to a chair and helped him sit.

"Mr. Clark?"

He didn't answer but just stared into space.

"Mr. Clark?" Jeanette said again. "Are you still with me?"

"What?" He tipped his head up toward her but his eyes were still blank. "Huh?"

"Mr. Clark," she went on, "we think Larry's committed at least half a dozen other rapes here in the last week. None of the other women has been able to identify their attacker, but Alison can. With her statement, we've got enough to arrest your brother for what he's done to her."

Sam still stared up at her but Jeanette couldn't tell if he really understood what she said.

"Mr. Clark? Do you understand what I'm saying?"

He nodded but the blank expression stayed.

“You need to take Alison home and stay with her. If Larry comes to your house or calls you, you need to call us, right away. Do you understand?”

He nodded again and stood.

“I need to take Alison home?”

“That’s right, Mr. Clark. Take her home and stay there with her. She doesn’t need to be alone right now.”

Guiding him by the elbow again, she walked Sam back to the squad room. When they stepped through the door he drifted to where Alison sat and helped her to her feet. Neither spoke as they turned and headed to the door.

He stopped beside Jeanette and with the same dead expression asked, “Will you let us know when you have him?”

Jeanette nodded.

“As soon as we pick him up.”

“Thank you.”

Jeanette followed the couple down the short hall and into the waiting area. Roger opened the front door from the other side as they reached it.

“Oh.” He apologized, stepped to one side and held the door to let the Clarks out.

After pushing the door closed he turned to Jeanette. “DA says he’ll give you your warrant but he wants you to compile a report including all of the incidents.”

“He’s our rapist.” Jeanette remarked without expression.

Roger narrowed his eyes and frowned. “What?”

Jeanette nodded.

“He’s been raping her for years. She just never said anything to her husband or anybody else. I get the feeling that somehow she thought it was her fault.”

Roger crossed the room to the counter separating the lobby from the receptionist’s area and reached for the phone behind the desk. After punching in the number to the District Attorney’s

Office, he put his hand over the receiver while waiting for an answer.

"I take it you've got all that in her statement?"

"Yeah."

"And the other rapes. How are you tying him to those?"

Jeanette stepped over to a row of chairs along the wall and flopped down in one.

"Just circumstantial right now," she lied, "but if we can get samples from the guy, I'm sure it'll match what was in the rape kits."

"Draw up your affidavit for the felony warrant and take it over to the judge's office. I'm going to see if they'll issue the warrant and have it waitin' for you."

An hour later, Jeanette and Stuart walked out of the County Judge's office with an arrest warrant for Larry Clark. As they pulled out of the Justice Center parking lot, something occurred to Jeanette.

"Head over to Alison's place."

Stuart bunched up his lips and pulled to the curb.

"Why?" He turned in the seat, "Larry lives on the other side of town."

"Because, he's at their mother's house and we don't know where that is."

"And how do you know that?"

Jeanette smiled at him.

"A little birdie told me."

Stuart nodded and made a U-turn from the curb to head north toward the little, quiet neighborhood where Alison and Sam lived.

"I don't know if I'm just getting' used to you or what, but I almost expect you to know this stuff as a matter of fact, anymore."

"Well," Jeanette fidgeted in her seat, "that makes one of us. Ever since I got here it's been getting' worse."

“You mean better, don’t you?”

“Since when does worse mean better, Stu?”

They turned off the main road onto a residential street and Jeanette was hit with a sense of dread she couldn’t contain.

“Drive faster, Stuart. Something’s wrong.”

Stuart urged the patrol car forward with more urgency and didn’t bother to ask for particulars. Having reaped the benefits of Jeanette’s gifts, he wasn’t inclined to question her the way others might.

As they turned the corner onto the Clark’s street, Jeanette’s eyes sought out the house.

“Sam’s car’s gone.” She intoned.

Stuart parked in the driveway. Climbing from the patrol before it was fully stopped, Jeanette nearly ran toward the front door. As she reached forward to knock, the door opened.

“Misses Clark. Where’s your husband?”

“He went to their momma’s house,” Alison sniffled, “said he was gonna carry Larry up to the police station.”

“Damnit!” Jeanette sighed. “Where does their mother live, Misses Clark?”

“Over on Hampton. Right across from the elementary school.”

“Do you know the house number?”

“I,” she sniffled, “I think it’s 210. But I’m not sure.”

“Okay, Misses Clark.” Jeanette grabbed the portable radio from her side. “Stay here and wait for me. Do you understand?”

Alison nodded.

Jeanette spun around and radioed the dispatcher to have the other patrol meet them at the address Alison gave. Back in the car, she turned to Stuart and shook her head.

“I told you I had a bad feeling about this.”

“What’s up?”

“210 Hampton.” She growled. “And we need to be there, like ten minutes ago.”

The address wasn't more than half a mile from the Clark home and it took little more than a minute to drive there. The other patrol arrived at the same time. However, when Jeanette saw the ambulance backed in the driveway, she knew they were too late.

The house was a ranch style with a porch that ran the length of the front. Sam sat in a wicker chair on the porch to one side of the doorway. He looked up as Jeanette and the other officers came up the walkway.

"Larry's dead, Officer Henderson."

Jeanette stopped just out of arms reach.

"Do I need to read you your rights, Mr. Clark?"

Sam shook his head.

"He shot himself before I could get past momma. I guess he overheard us arguing; tellin' her what all he'd done."

Jeanette glanced at Stuart.

"You guys go on in. Get what you need for the reports and don't forget about the mothers information."

Stuart paused for a moment.

"You sure you got it here?"

"Yeah."

Once Stuart walked away, Jeanette grabbed the chair next to Sam and sat.

"I wish you'd have done as I asked and stayed home with Alison."

"I know but," Sam sighed and bowed his head, "I figured I could get him to come in without a fuss. Thought I could talk some sense into him."

Jeanette put a hand on top of his.

"She's gonna blame herself for this too, you know."

He looked up.

"What do you mean?"

"Mr. Clark, your wife thinks she's to blame for all the trouble that's been between you and Larry all these years. That's why she

never told you what was really going on. Some kinda way she got it in her head she needed to be punished.”

“She didn’t have nothin’ to do with it.” Sam frowned and shook his head. “Larry was pretty much born a dumb-ass. He always wanted what he couldn’t have. And on his best days he was just a big bully.”

“Doesn’t change what your wife thinks.” Jeanette stood. “She thinks it’s her fault for what happened to her; for what happened to those other women; and she’s gonna think it was her fault Larry killed himself.”

She turned and started into the house but stopped just before going through the doorway.

“I’ve met a lotta people since I started being a cop. But I can’t say I’ve ever met anybody sweeter or more vulnerable than your wife. If you don’t do anything else in your life, Mr. Clark, you need to make sure she understands that Larry was responsible for the things he did. Not you, not her, and not anybody else.”

“I’ll do that.”

“Good.”

At three that afternoon the day shift ended. Jeanette still sat in front of a stack of reports and forms. Roger walked into the squad room as she tossed a legal pad into a basket on the desk.

“What are you still doing here?” He leaned against the doorframe.

“Well,” she looked up from the papers in front of her, “I’ve still got the forms that get sent to State, to finish.”

“Well,” Roger mocked, “you need to go home. I told you we can’t afford the overtime.”

She tried to argue.

“But I was late coming in this morning. So I figured I needed to make that time up.”

“You figured wrong. You worked this weekend and that makes up for this morning. Go home.”

Jeanette closed the cover on the open notebook, pushed it to one side and stood.

"You don't have to tell me twice."

"Apparently I do." Roger smiled. "But we'll chalk it up to you being new. And by the way, good work."

"Not as good as it coulda been," Jeanette shook her head, "or Larry Clark would still be alive."

Roger straightened and walked over to the desk.

"Are you gonna beat yourself up over that?"

Jeanette scrunched up her mouth and thought for a moment.

"No," she shook her head, "I'm gonna take my own advice. Larry was responsible for what he did."

"Good." Roger crossed his arms and nodded. "Now get outta here."

"You got it, boss."

Outside, in the parking lot, she sat in her car for a moment; eyes closed, head leaned back on the seat. Though abbreviated, the day seemed to have been long and difficult. The only good thing was it hadn't given her time to think about Richard.

"Don't just stand there," she said without opening her eyes, "say something."

"How'd you know I was there?" Richard asked.

"A little birdie told me."

She sat up in the seat, turned and rested her arms, crossed, on the window frame. Richard leaned down and kissed her gently on the top of her head.

"So," she smiled, "I only warrant hair-kisses now."

He knelt so he was at eye level with her.

"I figured I'd start there and work my way down."

He leaned forward until their lips almost touched but instead of kissing her he spoke.

"I want you to be my wife."

To her surprise the question didn't take her aback. As well, even though she kept her eyes closed, she could see Richard

clearly. She could see the street behind him, the parking lot behind her and the police department building beside that.

She smiled.

“I think,” she whispered. “I think I’ve been in love with you for a very long time. Since before I came here. Since before I left the service. Even since before I married my ex-husband. I just never thought you were real until that day you walked up to Stuart and me in the restaurant.”

Richard still squatted before her, staring into her closed eyes.

“Can I take that as a yes?”

“Yeah,” she smiled, “I think you can take that as a yes.”

Chapter Seven: Epilogue

Jeanette sat on the edge of her bed wearing only a sheer robe. The clock on her nightstand bathed her in soft, green light while behind her Richard snored quietly. After considering it a while longer, she stood and trod into the living room, bare feet squeaking as she walked across the linoleum and stopped at the phone on the wall beside the kitchen.

She picked up the receiver and dialed then waited.

“Hey, hun.” Susan answered.

Jeanette shook her head.

“You’re always one step ahead of me, aren’t you?”

“I’ve been sitting here in bed,” Susan’s voice smiled, “watching old movies and waiting for you to call all night. I take it Richard’s asleep?”

“Yeah.” Jeanette turned her back to the wall and leaned against it. “We talked for a bit afterward, but I think I wore him out. Next thing I knew he had dozed off, so I covered him up and came out here.”

“Actually, you sat on the edge of your bed for a while deciding whether to call me before you did.”

They both laughed.

“So. What is it you wanted to tell me at one in the morning?”

Jeanette chewed on her top lip then exhaled.

“I,” she began to weep, “I remember tomorrow, Susan. I called the Chief when we got back here and told him I needed the day off. We’re flying to Nevada because I don’t want another day to pass when I’m not married to him.”

“Good for you, hun. So what’s the problem?”

"I guess," she wiped the tears from her eyes, "I guess there isn't one. I just wanted to say, thank you."

It was Susan's turn to get quiet.

"You know you're welcome, hun. Now hang up and call Linda so you can tell her you're marrying her brother."

"Okay."

She hung up then picked up the receiver again and dialed Linda's number. Stuart answered.

"I won't be in to work in the morning and neither will you."

"What?" He was groggy being wakened from a sound sleep. "Who is this? Jeanette?"

"Yeah. Now put your wife on the phone."

"Huh?" Stuart still wasn't fully awake. "Why do you wanna talk to Linda? And why aren't you comin' in tomorrow?"

"Shush, Stuart. Just put Linda on."

"Alright."

In a moment, Linda's sleepy voice answered.

"Hey." Jeanette whispered. "Two things."

"Jeanette?"

"Yeah."

"What time is it? What's wrong?"

"It's a little after one and nothings wrong. Now shut up and just listen for a minute."

"Okay."

"You were right and I'm sorry. That's the first thing."

"I'm always right. But what are you talking about?"

"Don't worry about the details. You'll figure it out when you wake up in the morning."

"If you say so. What's the other thing?"

"Richard and me are getting married tomorrow. We're going to Nevada and you and Stuart are coming with us. We've got four seats booked out of Shreveport at noon. So you need to get a bag for you and Stuart packed, first thing in the morning. Okay?"

"Yeah. Sure. Can I go back to sleep now?"

“Yeah.”

She hung up and walked back to the bedroom. As she pulled off the robe and climbed into bed the phone rang.

“Hello?”

“Jeanette?” It was Linda: her voice more awake.

“Hey.”

“You’re gettin’ married?”

“Yep.”

“Oh!” Linda screamed. “I knew something was up when Richard didn’t come by tonight.”

Jeanette smiled and laid her head on the pillow.

“So you’re okay with that?”

“Oh hell yeah!”

“Thank you.”

“So we’ll see you over here,” Linda’s voice returned to something closer to normal, “say about nine or so?”

“Yeah. That sounds good.”

“Okay then. Night, night.”

“Night.”

Jeanette reached to hang up the phone and Richard stirred.

“Is everything okay?” He asked.

“Yeah.” She rolled over so she could look at him. “That was Linda.”

“You told her?”

“Uh huh?”

“And she’s okay with everything?”

“Uh huh?”

“Good.” He said and drifted back to sleep.

Jeanette rolled onto her back and stared up at the ceiling. She thought she’d find a little shop or boutique when they landed in Las Vegas. She was sure she could find a blue evening gown like she had in mind. And of course, Richard would need a tuxedo.

She closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep.

THE END