

Prologue

The terror in her eyes and the realisation she's going to die is sweet medicine to my soul.

Her eyes widen, and then concede, when the spoilt bitch knows her time is over.

Her blood spills as I carve into her my hate for her perfect existence.

Oh, the gratifying sound of her last breath.

She too will taste the feeling of nothingness.

1 Lucas Monday

The shrill of the phone broke through his dream-filled sleep. He reached for the faces fading from view. As his mind broke through the haze, they disappeared. Lucas sat up with a start and dizziness assaulted him as he groped around in the dark to answer the insistent ringing.

"Hudson."

"It's me," Maggie responded.

"What time is it?"

"Bout six."

"What's up?"

"We got another one."

"Dammit. Where?"

Maggie filled him in as he tried to wake up. He pulled a suit, shirt and tie from his ordered wardrobe, while Maggie gave him directions.

“I’ll be there in twenty,” he told her.

He shaved quickly, before showering with the cold on full. As the icy water prickled his skin, he attempted to shake off the still lingering images. He forced the torment deep down, back where it came from, where it belonged. Chilled through, he stepped out and his aching body protested with a shiver. Physical pain was easier.

He glanced in the mirror to discover his eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep. He shrugged. What did it matter? Running his fingers through his hair, he took a few deep breaths of preparation, for what he was again about to face. He threw on his clothes and after a tedious ride in the sluggish lift, he jumped into his unmarked car.

As he drove, memories of that day came with a vengeance. The day he’d successfully put behind him, until last week. The visions refused to fade, night *and* day now. *He looked down and saw the blood, so much blood.*

He shoved himself back to reality. He needed to concentrate. Twelve years as a cop he’d seen the horrors, dealt, and pushed them aside. Some had been harder than others but he’d gotten through unscathed, until now. This case was different, it was affecting him.

Maggie was waiting when he arrived. She strode towards him, her frame athletic and her expression grim. Even with a scowl, she was a stunner. With her short blonde hair and penetrating blue eyes, she didn’t look like your average cop. Her physique and sharp features turned heads. Although she didn’t possess conventional good looks her beauty was unique.

“Definitely the same?” Lucas asked.

“Fraid so.”

The familiar lump appeared in Lucas' throat as they flashed their badges at the taped off scene. An officer indicated towards the dank alleyway in the rear which

was undetectable from the road. The unmistakable stink of rotting garbage assaulted Lucas as they turned the corner.

She appeared to be mid twenties, lying face-up, naked and brutalised. Her wrists and ankles lacerated, indicating she'd been bound. A gaping smile remained where her throat had once been. The absence of blood indicated she'd been murdered elsewhere. Purple and yellow bruises speckled her body from days of abuse while her face was battered and swollen. Lucas could almost see the fear lingering in her unseeing eyes.

Across her chest the words 'SPOILT BITCH' were slashed in red, light and dark. The varying degrees of colour and congealment indicated the wounds were inflicted over time. Another beautiful young woman tortured and left in a dirty alley behind a warehouse, as if she meant nothing. It would *not* feel like nothing to the people who loved her. Lucas knew *this* first-hand. Bile rose in his throat. What sick bastard could inflict these horrors?

Techs were walking the grid, collecting evidence and taking photos when the Medical Examiner arrived. David Walker was in his late forties. A short, squat man with sharp features and thinning hair, his compassionate nature complemented his thoroughness. His knees creaked from the strain as he knelt beside her.

"The chest wounds and cause of death appear consistent with the last victim," he began. "Ligature marks on the wrists and ankles too."

"Similar dump spot as the last one." Lucas noted.

"Yes, all too familiar." Maggie shook her head. "Any ID again, Dave?"

"Can you help me roll her over?"

As he slipped on latex gloves from his pocket, Lucas crouched and helped to roll the body from back to side. He held her in place as Dave took her temperature and examined her. Lucas swallowed down the lump wedged in his throat; handling dead victims never got any easier.

"Yes here it is." Dave told them. He bagged it and passed it to Maggie.

“Thanks Dave.” Lucas turned to Maggie. “Same MO.”

She nodded her response.

“Let’s go,” he said. “See if we can work out what these two have in common.”

At the station, coffee in hand, Lucas logged onto his computer. As it slowly loaded, he attempted to push aside creeping images. A solitary word became his silent mantra. Focus. He tapped his fingers, impatient, waiting for the missing persons’ database to load Kate Miller’s report. He considered making another coffee when at last the details materialised before him.

She’d been reported missing the previous Monday night, although she’d in fact been missing since Sunday. He pulled the report on the first victim, Libby Greene, from the pile on his desk, to scan again with fresh eyes, checking the correlations. Libby was missing for six days before her body had been discovered early, the previous Tuesday morning.

Libby had been sexually assaulted several times over the six days, while the letters cut into her chest were also inflicted over time. Her throat slashed, leaving the identical gaping hole they’d seen that morning. She too was dumped behind a warehouse having been killed elsewhere.

Both bodies were discovered first thing in the morning by a worker opening the building. Libby had been dead a few hours when discovered. Kate on the other hand, lay exposed most of the weekend.

“Hey,” Maggie said. As she slid into her chair, she aimed a breakfast roll at him. “Here, eat something.”

“Thanks, but I don’t know if I can.” He grimaced. “Looks like our latest vic, Kate, had been missing for about six days before she was killed. I think the two might overlap.”

“So he grabbed Kate before disposing of Libby...” She paused. “I thought about that on the way over. This is one sick puppy we are dealing with here, Hudson. Holding one girl while stalking another and perhaps holding them both. Can you imagine what they would be listening to...?”

Lucas nodded. “He could have more than one location too.” He shook his head in frustration.

“We’re speculating until we get Dave’s report. It could be a copy cat. My bet is it’s the same guy though.”

“Mine too, a lead would be helpful. I guess it’s time to talk to Kate’s family and friends, see if we can find a suspect or some kind of connection.”

Lucas drove in brooding silence while Maggie scanned the files. When she finished she turned to stare at him.

“What?” he asked and grinned hoping it would deter her questions.

“Are you ok?”

“Yeah.”

“I just thought...”

“I’m fine, Mags.”

“If you want to talk about it...?”

“I know where you are.” He smiled. “Thanks.”

2 Chelsea Friday

Chelsea sat on her overstuffed suitcase and forced it closed. Although she’d planned a three day trip she’d packed enough for a week. She thought back to her last visit and realised it had been months since she’d been home. Eagerness to escape from her busy schedule and relax with her family, along with excitement, rose within her.

“I think you’ve packed enough,” Elle told her.

“Probably,” she answered. “I never pack light.”

She shrugged before glancing over her shoulder at her friend and roommate. Elle's tall, slim frame leant gracefully against the doorway. She flipped her long, straight blonde hair over her shoulder as she studied Chelsea through dark blue eyes.

After Chelsea had advertised her spare room for let she'd met Elle. Her vivacious, charming nature, reminded Chelsea of her sister, Charlotte, and they'd grown very close, almost on sight. They'd been roommates for a year now

"I'd better get a move on. If I'm late I'll never hear the end of it." Chelsea lugged the suitcase off the bed.

"Let me help you." Elle took most of the heavy burden. "Seeing I have the house to myself this weekend, I might ask my new guy over for...dinner." Elle grinned.

"When do I get to meet this one?"

"If all goes well this weekend," Elle nudged Chelsea with her elbow. "Maybe we can organise something when you get home."

"Sounds good."

They walked into the garage and Chelsea hit the button to open the automatic door. Elle loaded her suitcase into her sleek, compact car while she jumped in. Chelsea stuck her head out the window as she backed out, "don't do anything I wouldn't do."

"Doesn't leave me much," Elle grumbled as she waved.

As Chelsea drove away she looked at the house which held many memories, happy and painful. The contemporary house with its small colourful garden, which Chelsea tried to keep tidy when time permitted, was welcoming. A two storey home with three bedrooms and an efficient modern kitchen all encompassed a cosy ambience and the two balconies which extended out from the front bedrooms added charm and a view.

Regardless of the sadness which surrounded her within its walls, she still felt the smile tug at her lips at the comforting sight of home.

Lucas
Friday

Her hug was warm and he brimmed with comfort and love. She kissed his cheek and ruffled his hair. He scoffed a little but he loved her attention nevertheless. She waved goodbye, her eyes filled with motherly love as she told him not to be late. Her face began to fade and he was there, the place he never wanted to be again.

She lay crumpled on the floor, her blood so dark it appeared black. Her hazel eyes stared lifeless while he held her cold hand. His clothes soaked up her lifeblood as he drew her close. He hoped in vain her heart still beat or her eyes would become warm again. He never wanted to let her go, even as the kind voices urged him to do so. He didn't want them to take his mother away.

Lucas sat upright with a jolt, bathed in sweat. The dreams had returned after years of silence, the horror re-emerging. The memories fresh again, as though it happened yesterday, while his chest ached and his eyes stung.

Now the images haunted him again, he began to doubt for the first time since receiving his badge, whether he had the capacity to continue with the case. He was beginning to lose focus, his edge. When conscious he could escape but now the nightmares had returned, sleep was no longer his friend again.

Amy
Monday

The girl who answered their knock appeared to be a younger version of Kate and there was no doubt they were in the right place.

“Can I help you?” she asked.

“Yes I’m Detective Hudson,” replied Lucas showing the girl his badge. “This is Detective Johnson. We need to ask you a few questions.”

“Are you here about Kate? Did you find her?”

“Yes Ma’am we believe so,” Maggie took over. “May I ask your name please?”

“Yes my name is Amy. Is she ok?”

“Are your parents at home?”

“Only Kate and I live here. Please will you tell me, what is it?”

“We believe we found your sister this morning.”

“Where is she? Is she...?”

“We have a photo to show you but I’m afraid it might be a shock. If you’re not sure...”

“Please I just need to know.”

“Is this Kate?” Maggie asked gently, showing her a head shot of the victim.

“Oh no, please no,” Amy whispered as the blood drained from her face. “That’s my sister.”

Silent tears rolled down Amy’s face and as Maggie embraced her, she broke into heart wrenching sobs. The two detectives glanced at each other; they hated this part of the job.

Several heartbreaking minutes passed before Amy’s tears subsided and her composure returned. She took a step back and with a determined set to her chin, looked at the detectives.

“We’re very sorry about your sister but we do need to ask you some questions, so we can find out what happened to her.”

“Please come in.”

“If you need time,” Maggie said.

“No, I want to do it now.”

She brought them through to the sitting room.

“What do you need to ask me?” she asked taking a seat and gesturing for them to do the same.

“When was the last time you saw Kate?” Lucas began.

“On Sunday night as I was leaving to go out with friends, it must have been about six as the movie started at seven. When I got home about eleven her bedroom door was closed and I thought she was asleep.”

“When did you realise she was gone?”

“When she wasn’t home by six on Monday night I began to worry. I rang her at work and they said she hadn’t been in...” Her voice trembled and she dabbed at her eyes with a tissue.

“This was when you reported her missing?”

“I rang her phone first and found her things were still here.” She paused. Lucas looked at Maggie; Libby’s possessions had been left at home too. “I rang everyone we know and no-one had seen her...so I reported her missing.” Amy picked at the tissues scrunched in her shaking hands as she chewed on her lower lip.

“Did she say if she was going anywhere or meeting with someone?”

“No.”

“Do you know if she was having anyone over?” Maggie took over again.

“Um she mentioned she’d met this guy but she didn’t say if she was meeting him.”

“Perhaps she had him over or he came to pick her up?”

“She wouldn’t have invited him here as I don’t think she knew him very well. She’s really...cautious but it’s possible she’d planned to go out. She didn’t say she was quite vague about it. She would have said more if there was something happening. We are...I mean were, very close.” She bit her lip again and fresh tears threatened.

“Did she tell you his name?”

“No.”

“Could there be anyone who may have held a grudge against her?”

“No she’s a fantastic beautiful big sister. I don’t know why someone would want to do this!” The tears ran down her face again.

“Just a few more questions and then we will leave you in peace,” Maggie said.

“Do you or your sister have a lot of money?” Lucas asked her.

“What?”

“Is your family well off? Were you spoilt?”

“No, why are you asking me this?” She furrowed her brow in confusion.

“There was a...note left at the scene.”

“No, our...parents are working class. We rent this apartment. We pay our own way...I..I don’t understand.”

“Can you think of anything else about the man she was seeing?”

She shook her head. Tears ran down her face again and her shoulders shook.

“We don’t want to make this any harder than it already is but we do need to send over some crime scene investigators along with a couple of officers, to check for fingerprints and evidence in case she invited someone in.”

She nodded her assent.

“We appreciate it. Please don’t touch anything in the meantime, especially your sister’s room.” Maggie paused. “We need someone to come down and identify the body, would you like us to arrange for your parents to do it? We would have gone to them first but we didn’t have any contact details.”

“It’s ok, I’ll ring my parents. I don’t know how I am.... Can we do it later?”

“Yes when you’re ready. Are you sure you’re ok?”

She nodded.

“Once again we’re sorry,” Maggie told her as Amy showed them to the door.

Once in the car Lucas and Maggie sat in silence for a few minutes with their own thoughts, wondering what the ME may have discovered.

“Too similar to be a different guy,” Maggie spoke breaking their silence. “Both had a mystery guy and were missing five days or longer. Neither spoilt or well off but had the words cut into them. Why use these particular words?”

“I’m having trouble with that too. They both have dark hair and are short and petite too. Maybe they resemble someone or they dressed well and he assumed they were rich,” he speculated.

“Hopefully Dave will have something for us.”

3
Broken Souls
Friday

It was around nine and there appeared to be little activity on the streets. As Chelsea drove through the stillness, a familiar sentimentality flowed through her. Her mind drifted back to the first time she'd brought Wes to meet her family. How his brilliant blue eyes widened in amazement at the houses and estates, almost as if he couldn't believe places like this existed. She remembered his beaming smile as they drove in the gates and how proud she'd been to bring him home.

Stop it Chelsea, he's gone.

She brought herself back to the present as she continued up the drive. As she pulled to a stop, her sister ran out to meet her. Charlotte wrapped her in a big bear hug, by way of their usual greeting, as Chelsea climbed from the car.

Charlotte's curly, strawberry blonde hair bounced and her dark brown eyes sparkled, as she spoke with animation. Her chatter remained constant as she strode confidently towards the house. Chelsea, considerably shorter than her tall, slim sister, had to quicken her steps to keep up. As they entered the large hall, a fluffy grey cat wandered in and wound his way around Chelsea's legs.

"Hello Sebastian." Chelsea beamed as she picked up their beloved pet. "It has been so long since I've seen you."

Chelsea placed Sebastian down as Sarah's short, petite frame rushed down the stairs, to embrace her eldest child.

"Oh darling, I'm so glad you're finally here. I was beginning to worry." Her brow creased. "I wish you would leave earlier and so you'd get here before dark."

"I couldn't close early today, I had to finish some bouquets for a wedding this weekend."

The arrangements were for her shop, Bloom, which she'd bought with the help of a business loan, several years before. Chelsea took pride in what she'd achieved without the aid of her wealthy parents.

"You work too hard, Chelsea. Maybe you should hire more help." Sarah stopped. Chelsea's expression had silenced her. "Very well no lecture. Let's go and locate our men."

As the girls followed their mother toward the study, Charlotte continued to update Chelsea.

"You're not going to believe this but Evan is already seeing Sasha Brooks."

"You broke up about three weeks ago didn't you? I thought it wasn't that serious," replied Chelsea

"That is *not* the point. *I* broke up with *him* and he still should be heartbroken."

"Aren't you already interested in someone else?"

"Once again that is *not* the point." She pouted her full lips before stomping into the study.

Chelsea laughed, amused by her sister's latest folly. As she followed Charlotte, the familiar inviting radiance permeated from the room which had always been their sanctuary. The blazing fire from the hearth produced an inviting glow and provided the room with comforting warmth.

Upon entering she discovered her grandfather, Harold, sitting in one of the comfortable leather chairs by the fire, drinking his ritual nightcap of brandy. His thick, fuzzy beard always ready to tickle your cheek and his wavy grey hair, as usual, was in disarray. Chelsea always found her Pa to be an uplifting sight.

Her father, Bradley, sat opposite, attempting to read a book. His long, lanky frame filled the chair, while his thick dark wavy hair crept down his face as he came very close to snoozing.

Chelsea's brother, Hayden, a younger version of his father, lay on the couch adjacent with iPod plugs in his ears. He thumped out a beat on his legs.

Seeing her baby brother, ten years her junior at fifteen always brought forth familiar tender feelings. She'd loved to mother him as a child.

Hearing the women entering the room, her Dad's eyes sprang open as though he hadn't been about to doze and her Pa beamed at her.

"Come over here and give your old Pa a kiss."

Chelsea walked over to give her grandfather an affectionate cuddle and kiss. "Hi Pa, it is *so* good to see you. Hope you've been good."

"Never," Harold replied. "I have to keep Mrs Simpson down the road on her toes."

Chelsea laughed and proceeded to her father. "Hi Dad," she said giving her dad a squeeze. "I've missed you; it's nice to be home."

"We miss you too honey, it has been far too long."

Chelsea glanced over at Hayden, who was still playing a drum solo and totally oblivious to anything happening around him.

"Hayden," Sarah yelled.

"Huh?" he yelled over the music. "What?" He opened his eyes and seeing his sister had arrived, he pulled the plugs out of his ears. "Hi Sis."

Chelsea walked over to her brother and kissed him on the head. "Hey Hads."

"Now I can go to bed," he mumbled.

Hayden unfolded his long, lean frame from the couch. He trundled out of the study and upstairs to his room in the left wing of the house.

"So full of conversation our Hayden," commented Sarah rolling her eyes.

"He's a teenager, Mum. I don't remember being much better, cut him some slack."

"I do, Chelsea but sometimes trying to talk to him is like pulling teeth."

Chelsea curled up on the couch her brother had vacated, happiness warming her as she listened to the chatter around her. For the first time in weeks she felt completely relaxed and comfortable. She soon discovered her eyes growing heavy.

Through her sleep haze she heard her name and opened her eyes to see Sarah's kind face beside hers.

"I think perhaps you should go off to bed honey, especially if you want to get an early start in the garden tomorrow."

She glanced around to discover only Sarah and Charlotte were still up.

She said goodnight before heading up the sloping staircase to her old room. Still painted mauve with butterfly motifs adorning the walls, done as a teenager. The same white canopy bed draped with sheer curtains looked inviting as always. Remembering her suitcase she turned to retrieve it from the car, to find it had been brought up already, probably by Bradley and left on the seat by the window.

As she prepared for sleep, she tried to ignore the memories of Wes. They haunted her most in this room. During one of their visits, the last one with him, he had proposed to her on the balcony, under a star-filled sky.

After the family celebrations, they had lain together on this very bed. His broad, athletic shoulders were facing her as he propped up on one arm beside her. Her vivid memories of him, staring at her with his pale blue eyes as his straight blonde hair fell over one eye, his contented, boyish, charming grin. Gazing at each other filled with love, unable to contain their happiness and excitement about the prospect of a life together.

If he wanted a life with you, why did he leave? Why can't I forget him, it has been a year? I have gotten on with my life, run the shop, kept busy but he just keeps creeping back it. Stop it Chelsea he's gone, get over it.

Feeling fatigued, she closed her eyes to block out the memories and eventually drifted off to sleep.

Lucas found himself once again unable to find the solace of sleep. His mind swirled with images of her lifeless body. The case continued to trouble him and sleepless nights were doing little to help.

He considered blocking out the images, refusing to leave, with a sexy brunette. He couldn't remember the last girl he'd brought home to his near empty apartment and thought a roll in the hay might relieve some stress.

Lucas decided against the idea, as another girl with a name he wouldn't remember or would never see again, would be a pointless waste of energy. Besides *they* usually wanted to experience the re-run and he was *not* in the mood to deal with any strings or a scorned upset girl. He didn't desire being polite and refusing a second round. He was too tired to be nice.

He wondered if it was just loneliness or whether in reality he craved someone to share his life and burdens with. With haste he shook off the whimsical notions. He didn't get involved. Being too close to anyone and then losing them, hurt way too much.

Burying his longing, he attempted to clear his mind and obtain some much needed rest.

4 Hope Saturday

Chelsea was woken by the sun streaming in the window and the birds chirping their morning songs. She sat up and stretched languidly. Gazing out the window, she was greeted by the colourful spacious back garden, with its assortment of annuals and perennials along with the numerous hedges edging the yard. It was a sight to behold. Pottering around within the grounds, with Sarah and Charlotte, would be just the therapy she needed today. Chelsea filled with sudden enthusiasm, went down the hall to shower.

The smell of waffles and pancakes intoxicated her as Chelsea descended the stairs. As she followed her nose, she heard Sarah singing along with the radio, which would be blasting from the bench and smiled.

She spotted Hayden first, slouching on a stool at the breakfast counter, scoffing down a pile of pancakes. Charlotte sat in her pyjamas next to him, drinking coffee, and attempting to wake up.

Harold and Bradley, sitting at the table, were discussing issues from the newspaper and not agreeing. While Sarah swung her hips in time to the music, which accompanied her humming and singing, as she flipped pancakes at the stove. Chelsea grinned despite herself at the scene welcoming her as it was as familiar as her own face.

“Well this is a sight for sore eyes.” She was greeted by her family in various fashions.

Chelsea slid onto the stool beside Charlotte. When her stomach growled she discovered she was as hungry as her brother appeared to be and devoured her awaiting breakfast.

“Thanks Mum, that was great.”

“You’re welcome dear. Why don’t you head out to the garden while I clean up in here?”

“What are you up to today Charlotte?” asked Chelsea turning to her not quite awake sister.

“Give me another half an hour and I’ll help you.”

“Good, we can catch up some more. What about you Hads?”

“What?” he said glancing up from - was that more pancakes? “Um, I have to do some study otherwise I can’t go to the movies tonight with Josh,” he mumbled looking at Sarah with distaste.

“Don’t look at me like that, Hayden. The girls had the same rules as you.”

“You bet we did,” Charlotte grumbled.

“I’d better get started then, it looks like you two have been a bit neglectful of the garden lately.”

Chelsea’s mind drifted back to Wes as she attacked the garden and pulled out stubborn weeds. She remembered him doting on her as she completed the very

same tasks. He'd fetched her drinks, wiped her sweaty brow and lovingly made and brought her lunch. She thought they'd been so happy together.

They spent the relaxing hours chatting in relaxed comfort until she'd finally, after almost three years, asked about his family. She'd thought, now they were engaged, she ought to know this much about him. She'd known little about them, for he'd never spoken of any living relatives. When the subject was broached he'd become very touchy so she didn't ask again.

Wes had always been awestruck by the Summerville's wealth and rightly so, she supposed. Although she'd received a privileged upbringing, she had never taken her life for granted and understood how fortunate she was. Chelsea, Charlotte and Hayden had never gone without or want for anything. Her entire family had and still did work hard. Her parents and her grandparents before them were dedicated to providing the best possible upbringing they could for their children. Chelsea was well aware of how daunting it could be to some.

Many people over the years had resented or were jealous of her birthright and while at school the taunts of 'spoilt brat' and 'rich girl' were prevalent. Chelsea was often hurt by the derision, nonetheless it made her more determined to go out on her own and rely less on her parents. Despite the fact that her parents owned the house Chelsea and Elle lived, she insisted on paying her half of the rent. She knew them to be proud of her independence and her need to pay her own way, although they didn't want or need her to.

When Charlotte and Sarah joined her, Chelsea shook away the painful memories and settled into the tasks ahead. The women spent the remainder of the fine, warm day catching up and Chelsea began to feel lighter in her heart. Being around her family always lifted her spirits. As usual, Charlotte did more talking than weeding and Chelsea was warmed by the familiarity of her perpetual entertainment. That night, exhausted after a day in the garden and full after a nice dinner with numerous debates, the girls settled in the large sitting room, with a bottle of wine and their favourite movies.

Hayden had gone out; he'd completed his studies as promised, whilst Harold and Bradley were in the study for the evening. It was just as it had always been. Chelsea thought perhaps the last of her scars were finally beginning to heal.

After having breakfast in the usual manner the following morning, the sisters decided to do some window shopping. Neither Chelsea nor Charlotte could ever say no to a relaxing Sunday, walking the streets and perusing the local wares.

"So how's your love life? Charlotte asked in her typical inquisitive way.

"Fine thanks."

"Which means you have none, right?

"I don't have the time or inclination. I have family, Bloom and friends. I don't need anything else."

"Chelsea hasn't it been a year? Just get over it already."

"It has nothing to do with Wesley. I'm just not interested," Chelsea said a little too bitingly. "Oh, Sylvia's shop looks great. I love the bag in the window. It would go great with my brown boots."

"Yeah it's great. I get the hint, Chels. I'll butt out."

"Thanks. So who's your new guy?"

"Well, he's not mine yet but give me time. His name's Scott and is in one of my classes. He's really smart and so cute; I can't believe I didn't notice him before."

"You were pretty wrapped up in Evan."

"Yeah I suppose but I don't usually miss someone so hot!"

They both laughed which turned into a fit of giggles and Chelsea couldn't remember the last time she laughed so hard with her sister. They spent the rest of the afternoon catching up and walking through the quiet streets.

Monday

“Well the cause of death is the same. Bled out from a cut throat,” Lucas commented reading from Kate Miller’s report. “Ligature marks are consistent with being tied at wrists and ankles, with what appears to be a nylon rope, which of course can be bought anywhere. Her injuries were inflicted using some type of thin, sharp knife once again.”

“The cuts were all made over the period they were missing and there are signs of multiple sexual assaults. ‘This guy is patient.’” Maggie paused. “So where do we go from here, Kate’s friends?”

“Yeah I think so. One of Libby’s friends, what was her name?” he asked Maggie, who looked over Libby’s report in front of her.

“Kelly Bradshaw.”

“What did she say about Libby’s new man?”

“Kelly told me, according to Libby, he was charming and handsome but shy and that was why she hadn’t introduced him to anyone. She thought Libby seemed pretty keen.”

“Maybe Kate had met the same guy and he used the same excuses. Obviously he didn’t want anyone to meet him, so no-one could identify him.”

“Looks that way, I’ll go through missing persons now and find all girls around twenty five who match the victims. If our man is true to form, he may have already grabbed another.”

Reading Kate’s file Lucas nodded in agreement before looking up suddenly. “Did Libby have trace evidence on her body which came back as flour?”

“Um,” replied Maggie once again scanning the report. “Yes a flour substance from transference, either from his hands or the location.”

“I’ll check out all abandoned warehouses and factories that would’ve used flour.”

Lucas began his search hoping there would only be a few to check out. The database located four possible warehouses within the metro area. Two had been in bread and baked goods production, the other two flour mills and spread out over

the city. None of the locations were in close proximity to the two scenes. It would take a while to conduct a search.

“Lucas, I’ve found two possible missing girls who fit the description. Maybe we should talk to the people who reported them missing, see if they had a mystery guy. We might get a description, something.”

She proceeded to tell him their names, description and last known address.

“One of the factories is nearby we can check it out on the way. Maybe we’ll get lucky.”

When it came time for Chelsea to leave, Sarah started with her standard lines.

“You should come home more often.”

“You work too hard.”

“We just miss you so much.”

The more Chelsea protested the more it continued. Once a final goodbye, she headed off on her journey back home. She used the drive to reflect on the last three days and how much better she felt. It *was* time to move on, to stop wallowing and wipe away the painful memories. Was it pure loneliness which had her dwelling in the past? Was this why she hadn’t let go? Did she miss Wesley or just the idea of him? If only she could forget his beautiful face.

Three and a half hours later, after a delay getting back into the city, Chelsea pulled into her drive to discover the house dark. She decided Elle was probably asleep and had forgotten to leave the light on or more than likely, she was out. Elle spent many nights away from home so Chelsea wasn’t too concerned.

After lugging her suitcase up to her room, she decided to sit and reflect on the balcony, her favourite haven. While gazing at the lights over the city and listening to the hum of city commotion, she resolved it was time for a new beginning.