Dinah: A Novel

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DINAH: A NOVEL

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

By

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B.A., Wright State University, 2005

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Andrea Dinah Harris ENTITLED Dinah: A Novel BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Arts

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Three years after her rape, Dinah begins to have visions of other rapes. Her visions are prompted by physical contact with the rapist or his victim. She decides that the visions are being sent to her so that she can stop the rapists. Although questioning her sanity and the morality of her actions, she begins killing the rapists. When Dinah later decides that the killings are futile, the ghosts of women who have been killed begin to haunt her. However, as Dinah begins to understand how the killing of rapists by a woman helps dismantle the social construction of women as victims, she recognizes these ghost women as her allies. Despite the complications of her personal relationships and the growing suspicions of police detectives, Dinah ultimately embraces the killings as her spiritual mission.
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The text of Dinah contains multiple representations of rape, and, indeed, Dinah is a book about rape, specifically the societal construction of rape that enables its perpetuation as an act of gendered violence. And as a text containing representations of rape, Dinah is part of a long and distinguished succession of tales. Representations of rape are included in Ovid's Metamorphoses, Shakespeare's The Rape of Lucrece, and in the Bible. In fact, the protagonist of Dinah shares her name with a woman whose rape is told in Genesis 34. This connection to the Bible is indicative of the long literary and societal history of rape, as well as Dinah's religious and spiritual quest. In addition, this connection to the Biblical story establishes one of the novel's key themes—retribution. Whereas the rape of the Dinah in Genesis 34 is revenged by the woman's brothers, the Dinah in the novel seeks retribution for the rape of women as a gender.

The refiguring of retribution for rape as justice for a gender, delivered by an abused member of that gender, is representative of the way in which the specific treatment of rape in literature has changed. The Western canon has tended to treat rape as an inflicted absence—something men do that results in the exclusion of women from the text and
society, often through madness and suicide. However, as the literary canon has been expanded to include women writers from diverse races and cultures, rape has become something experienced, and often overcome, by women. Essentially, stories of rape are now more frequently told in full from the perspective of the women who survive it, rather than told in part from the perspective of those who commit it. For example, in two of the oft cited canonized texts containing representations of rape, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* and E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, the rapes are characterized by elision. However, in one of the most frequently taught contemporary tales of rape, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, rape is described in graphic detail by the survivor, who becomes the text's heroine.

Likewise, Dinah is a rape survivor and a heroine. She does not act out of a simplistic desire to avenge her own rape. Indeed, the man who raped her is not among the men whom she targets. Instead, Dinah kills men who have or will rape other women; she kills to save others. In this sense, perhaps, Dinah may be compared to the classic female heroine who puts others before self; however, simply as a woman who kills, Dinah also challenges the societal notion of women as victims. In fact, contemporary tales of rape often challenge the traditional rape narrative by including
the death or attack of the rapist. For instance, in Frances Washburn's *Elsie's Business*, Buchi Emecheta's *The Rape of Shavi*, and Estela Portillo Trambley's "If It Weren't for the Honeysuckle" the rapists become victims of violence as a result of their crimes against women.

In *Dinah*, the men become the victims. Dinah kills men who have committed rape and men who will rape in the future. Her killing of the men before they become rapists accentuates their status as victims and thus further undermines the gendered notion of victim. Not only is a woman killing men who are guilty of rape, she is also killing men who are "innocent." Within the text, however, these killings are both practically and theoretically necessary to the eradication of rape. In a practical sense, the killings are necessary to prevent the men from raping. Theoretically, the killings are necessary to change the notion of women as the inevitable victims of male violence—a notion that, at least in feminist theory, is deemed integral to the perpetuation of rape in society.

Indeed, within feminist theory, the social construction of women as victims is the focus of current discussions regarding the anti-rape movement. Feminist scholars such as Pauline Bart, Kathleen Barry, Sharon Marcus, Martha McCaughey, and Renée Heberle have questioned
the unintended conflation of irreparable harm and rape in the survivor discourse and the ultimate usefulness of speaking out as an effective political strategy. Claims of a "victim discourse" have gained momentum in recent years, adding a sense of urgency to our need to deconstruct the notion of women as victims. Dinah is testimony to my belief that this deconstruction will take place through new forms of discourse and narratives, rather than through a return to the historical silence surrounding the global epidemic of rape. In other words, this novel is an attempt to find a new way of speaking about rape, one in which women are not portrayed as inevitable victims, yet the full horror and reality of rape are still portrayed.

By treating rape as a horrific crime that can be eradicated by the gender who most suffers the effects of this crime, Dinah proposes a radical shift in the current rape discourse, a shift toward violence as a necessary and moral tool of womankind's movement toward equality. This treatment of the eradication of rape as a feasible and worthy endeavor is necessary in part because of the claim that contemporary portrayals of rape are encouraging the view of rape as something that is not only an inevitable part of women's lives but also a catalyst of positive transformation in their lives. In other words, when texts
like *The Color Purple* portray rape victims as becoming heroines after their rapes, it can be argued that rape enables woman's transformation. Thus, a representation of rape that is intended as a positive portrayal of women can instead be used to undermine the urgent need to stop rape.

The relationship between representations of rape in literature and the reality of rape in women's lives is established in two seminal scholarly works, *The Violence of Representation* by Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse and *Rape and Representation* by Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver. However, the relationship is perhaps most vivid in the similarities between recent rape memoirs and fictional accounts of rape. As a rape survivor, I have become acutely aware of the enactment of representation on my physical body as a text. Moreover, I am stunned by the power of the spiritual connection with other women that is invoked in me when I read both fictional and non-fictional accounts of rape. Alice Sebold's *Lucky*, Patricia Weaver Francisco's *Telling*, and Nancy Ziegenmeyer's *Taking Back my Life* are rape memoirs that portray this spiritual dimension of rape—this connection between the state of our spirits and the violence that is inflicted upon our physical bodies.

The spiritual focus in *Dinah* is an acknowledgment of this very real connection. *Dinah* is connected to other
women who have been raped through their shared pain. Indeed, she is visited by women who have been killed during or after their rapes. These "ghost women" become her allies. This depiction of the victims of violence as still intimately involved in the earthly lives of their rapists is similar to the portrayal of Alice Sebold's protagonist in *The Lovely Bones*. Sebold's work is told through a young girl who has been raped and killed. At the end of this work, the rapist dies through what is suggested to be the action of his victim in heaven. Likewise, Dinah is portrayed as a representative of spiritual goodness. The killings of the rapists are enabled through the spiritual gift of dreams and visions, and the killings are ultimately portrayed as her spiritual mission on earth. Thus, *Dinah* is far more than just another book about rape: it is a book about the spiritual meaning of the most "human" of actions.
I. BEGINNING THE SEVENTH DAY
Dinah knew the time for choices was past. She had to go in. Yet she stood in the hallway staring at the metal handle of the door. She should have paid more attention when she came along the other times with Susan, paid attention to the details. But she had been focused on the women and how seeing them made her feel. This was supposed to be "empowering"—that's the word her therapist had used. Helping other women become "survivors" was supposed to make her feel better.

But it didn't.

It just reminded her.

Tonight was the first time she had ever come to the hospital by herself to talk to one of the women. She had her card and the brochures in her purse. Her job was to provide whatever services the woman needed, without being judgmental or giving advice. From what she had seen, most of the women just wanted to forget it had ever happened.

She wasn't allowed to tell them that this was the kind of thing you don't forget.
She moved away from the door and backed against the wall. Better to wait. A nurse came out carrying a sample, and Dinah peered beyond her into the room through the closing crack of the opened door. She remembered looking through a crack from the other side of a similar door and seeing her father in the hall, seated in a plastic chair, gray head in his hands. Dinah had been young, but the woman in this bed was younger. She couldn't be any more than seventeen. Her thin blonde hair was spread against the pillow, and her tan couldn't hide the large bruise on her cheek.

Dinah was 24 now, but she felt much older. She had aged a lot in the past three years. Although her pale skin was still smooth and her dark brown hair still fell full to her shoulders, her eyes had something old in them. They changed colors, and people were always staring into them, wondering what made them change.

When the nurse came back down the hall, she stopped by Dinah, "Are you from the Victim Advocacy group?"

Dinah nodded.

"Well, you can come in now. The exam is over."

Dinah took a deep breath and followed the nurse into the small room. The doctor was explaining to the young
woman in the bed that she could take emergency
contraception to make sure she didn't get pregnant. Dinah
looked over at the nurse; she held a tiny plastic medicine
cup in one hand and a larger Styrofoam cup in the other.

When the woman on the bed slowly nodded, the nurse
gave her first the tiny cup, and then the larger cup full
of water.

After she had swallowed twice, Dinah approached the
bed.

"Marisa, my name is Dinah. I'm a Victim Advocate. I'm
here to help answer any questions you might have about your
recovery."

It was important to speak about the recovery as if it
was a certainty; that's what Susan had told her.

Marisa looked at her briefly and then turned her head
toward the wall.

"I'm going to leave my card and some brochures on the
table here for you," Dinah told her. "What's most important
for you to remember right now is that you have nothing to
be ashamed of. What happened to you is not your fault, and
there are people to help you get through this." She paused.
"Do you have anyone coming?"

"My mom and my . . . boyfriend."

Dinah and the nurse exchanged a look.
"That's good," Dinah said. "I'll be out in the hall if you need me."

When the nurse came back out, she smiled at Dinah. "You did just fine," she said.

Dinah appreciated the words. The nurse was in her mid-fifties and went about her duties with the self-assurance of someone who saw pretty much everything there was to be seen and still came back the next day.

Dinah smiled and thanked her, but she questioned what good she had really done. What good really could be done.

Within a few minutes, Marisa's boyfriend was at the desk down the hall. Dinah knew it was him when she heard him say, "Some asshole raped my girlfriend, and I need to know where she is." He was skinny—his sleeveless shirt revealed little muscle—but carried himself as if he was much bigger.

She steeled herself; it was her job to calm him down before he went in there.

She stepped in his path as he approached. "Hi, I'm Dinah from Victim Advocacy," she said, holding out her hand. "Could I talk to you for just a minute about Marisa?"

He stopped and reluctantly extended his hand. "I'm Todd."
"Hi, Todd," she said and smiled. "Marisa has had a traumatic experience. Right now what she needs most is for everyone around her to be calm and supportive of whatever she wants to do. It's not important right now who did this to her or why. What's important is that she knows it wasn't her fault and that she has people willing to help her get through this."

"What do you mean it doesn't matter who did this to her?" he snapped. "It matters to me. It matters a hell of a lot to me."

She tried to keep her voice calm and soothing, like Susan did: "I understand what you're saying, Todd, but what Marisa really needs right now . . ."

"How do you know what Marisa really needs?" he demanded. "I know her better than anyone, and I'm telling you that what she needs to know most is that the creep who did this isn't going to get away with it."

When he finished speaking, he brushed past her and headed toward the door to Marisa's room. Dinah knew it would be pointless to say anything else.

At first, she could hear nothing coming from the room. Then she heard Todd's voice: "Just tell me who did it."
Dinah couldn't hear Marisa's answer, but she must not have given up the name because Todd insisted again: "Tell me who did this to you!"

A few minutes later, he stormed out of the room, and Dinah poked her head in. Marisa was crying. "Are you okay?"
She nodded. "I can't tell him who did it."
What Dinah was supposed to say was "Who you tell and what you tell is your choice." Instead what she said was "Why not?"

Marisa ignored the question. "I didn't want to tell anyone, but I was worried that maybe I caught something from him, or I got . . . pregnant."

"You will have to be rechecked for STD's, but the pill you took will make sure that you don't get pregnant."

"I shouldn't have called my mom and Todd, but I just started feeling so lonely."

"They love you, and they want to be here for you. There's nothing wrong with asking for help."

They were both silent for awhile, and then Marisa turned to look at her.

"You're not allowed to tell anyone what I tell you, right?"

Dinah nodded. "I can only repeat what you tell me if you give me permission to do so. I can be made to testify
in court if there's a case, but they hardly ever subpoena victim advocates."

"I'm not pressing charges."

She paused, and Dinah waited for her to continue.

"I can't tell Todd," she finally said, "because he'll kill him." Then, in a barely audible whisper, she added, "It was his best friend."

Dinah nodded again, trying to maintain a blank, but comforting face. "I see."

"I had to tell someone. You understand, don't you?" Marisa pleaded.

She sounded desperate for someone to tell her she was doing the right thing. "Yes, I understand," Dinah told her.

She sat down in the chair next to the bed, and she and Marisa waited in silence for Marisa's mom to arrive. When she hurried into the room, Dinah rose and went to stand by the door. Dinah looked away as the mother and daughter embraced, and then she gave the mother one of her cards. Before she left, she offered her hand to Marisa.

As they held hands, Dinah felt herself falling . . . falling through complete darkness and then landing in a dimly lit room. She frantically looked around as her eyes adjusted to the change in light. Where was she? The walls
were covered with large beer logo signs. Stairs were in the corner. She was in someone's basement. The large, open room had a pool table, a big screen television, and a small bar. An open bottle of vodka was on the bar. Two pool sticks were propped against the table. She heard voices behind her and turned around. There was an old floral couch. Marisa was sitting on the couch next to a boy. His hand was playing with her long blonde hair.

"Todd doesn't ever have to find out," he told her. As he spoke, he moved his hand down her pink sweater to her breast.

She moved his hand and said, "No, Eric."

His eyes blazed, and he opened his mouth. But before Dinah could hear what he said, she was back in the hospital room.

Marisa had released her hand and was looking at her strangely.

Dinah tried to smile encouragingly and then quickly nodded to the mother before she fled from the room.

As she walked down the hallway, she tried to slow the beating of her heart and stop her hands from shaking. She had been there—right there—when it had happened. How was that possible? It wasn't. She must have imagined what had happened because of what Marisa had told her. It was that
simple. She had just recreated the scene in her mind. That's what she kept telling herself as she walked through the hospital.

Todd was standing outside the front doors talking on his cell phone and smoking a cigarette.

"I hate seeing her like this," he was saying. Then there was a pause and "No, man, she won't tell me his name. But if I find out . . ." Another pause and "I know, Eric, you'll be right there with me."

Dinah felt herself spinning, spinning until she nearly threw up, like she and her brother used to do on the front lawn in the summertime.

She walked blindly toward her car, trying to focus. The parking lot lights seemed like large stars that had come too close. As soon as she got inside the vehicle, she called Linda's emergency number.

She explained what had happened in the hospital and how Todd's conversation confirmed it as true.

Her therapist couldn't fully hide her annoyance at being wakened to discuss visions. "Dinah, I think this is just your mind's way of telling you that you're not ready to be a Victim Advocate."

"But I thought you said this would be good for me," she protested.
"Yes, I did," Linda admitted. "But it seems to be making things worse."

"You mean because I had a vision."

"Well, yes, because you recreated someone else's rape in your mind, and now you seem to be convinced that it really happened that way." The thinly-veiled annoyance in the other woman's voice had changed to open frustration.

"But what about the name?" Dinah insisted. "I heard the name in my vision."

"I know you believe that you did, but that's just not possible," Linda declared, as if catching and disposing of a ludicrous notion that had somehow managed to slip by her. "Look, why don't you consider taking some time off from Victim Advocacy?" she said. "Schedule an appointment, and we'll sit down and figure out some other way that you can help. Okay?"

Dinah thought for a moment. Part of her wanted to believe that it was all in her head, but another part of her wanted to believe that it was real.

"Dinah?"

"Okay," she finally agreed.

When she got home, her boyfriend Tim was waiting up for her. "What took you so long?" he asked, not even looking up from the screen.
"She was just a kid. I had to stay until her mom came."

"Somebody raped a little girl?" His eyes widened, and he shut off the television.

Dinah sighed and hung her car keys on the hook next to the front door. She laid her oversized black leather purse on top of the stack of mail on the kitchen counter. "No, not a little girl, a teenager."

"Oh."

His tone, half disappointed that it was just an "ordinary" rape and half relieved that it wasn't so bad, annoyed her. "You know, rape is just as bad when you're an adult," she told him.

"Right," he said and gave her that look she hated. That "I like you and all, but you're a little wacko, baby" look.

Before she could say anything else, he turned his back on her and headed into the bedroom. She slowly followed him. From the door, she watched him strip down to his briefs and pull down the floral comforter. She stared at his belly and the hair on his shoulders and wondered how she could have ever found him attractive. Things had been getting worse between them ever since she started volunteering.
As she changed into her long cotton nightshirt, he lay in bed under the striped sheets, watching her. She tried to ignore him.

"I still don't understand why you're doing this," he finally said.

"Well, you'll be happy to know that I'm probably going to quit."

"Good. Then maybe you'll be able to think about something else besides rape for a change—and things can get back to normal."

Even though she hated him when he said things like that, she was still glad to curl into him and feel his arms around her. And she hated herself for that.

She waited until he began snoring to whisper, "Something weird happened at the hospital. When I touched that girl's hand, I could see the rape. It was like I was there. I know who did it." She lay there, not sleeping, just running the scene in the basement through her mind over and over, imagining what she would have seen if Marisa had just held on to her hand a little longer.
Crazy Chick

When her alarm went off the next morning, she was still awake. The sight of her exhausted face in the mirror convinced her that something had to give. Maybe Linda was right: maybe she wasn't ready to work as a Victim Advocate. She couldn't put herself through this every time she saw a victim. She was going to lose Tim and her mind.

As the day wore on and she grew more and more tired, she made her decision. She called Susan from the back office at the store and told her that she didn't think she was going to be able to volunteer anymore. Susan said she understood. Apparently, Dinah wasn't the only volunteer to drop out after her first solo visit to the hospital. Susan promised to make contact with Marisa that day.

Dinah wondered what would happen with Marisa—if she would keep the secret of who had raped her. It wasn't right. She was protecting the man who had raped her in order to protect her boyfriend. That was too heavy a burden for anyone—let alone a sixteen-year-old girl. Dinah shivered at the thought of Marisa being forced to hang out with Eric, probably in that same basement.
When Tim got home from work that night, she told him she had quit the victim advocacy program. He gave her a quick hug and then declared they should go celebrate. She started to tell him that all she wanted to do was sleep but stopped when she thought about the fight that would follow. As she changed from her dress slacks into jeans, she tried to convince herself that she was happy, too. Maybe it would be better just to return to normal and forget all that other stuff.

Of course, he wanted to go to Max's. It was the bar where they had met a little over a year ago, back when she was still a bartender. During the last year she had worked there, Tim had started coming in several times a week, often with some of the other guys from the carpenters' union. Dinah worked at Max's almost four years—two years while she was still in college and two years after she graduated. She had been complaining about being broke one day in her English Comp class, and the girl next to her told her to try bartending. The girl said it was easy and great money—that guys threw money at pretty bartenders, whether they knew how to make drinks or not. Dinah had started as a cocktail waitress at a big sports bar the next week, but, when they still didn't let her move into
bartending after six months, she went looking for another place. That's when she had found Max's.

It was a hole-in-the-wall that served high school sporting event style food and very cheap, generous drinks. Max, the owner, had liked her and given her a job purely on that basis. It hadn't been the best money, but the regulars had taken care of her. Her tips from just a few nights of work each week had gotten her through those last years of school in moderate style, and she had started working full-time at the bar after graduation. When she had quit last year to "get a real job," Max said it was about time, that she was way too good for the likes of his place. Then he'd added under his breath that maybe she should get rid of Tim, since she was too good for him, too.

It was funny how Tim was so convinced that Max liked him. But Tim seemed unable to comprehend that anyone could actually not like him. So they went to Max's on a pretty regular basis, and, even though Dinah would have liked to go some place a little nicer, she never complained because she liked seeing Max.

He had become a father-figure for her in a way because there was so much her own father didn't understand about her life. If she had a hangover, Max gave her a little lecture on drinking too much, a little sympathy, and some
Tylenol, whereas Dinah's father didn't even seem to know what a hangover was.

On the way to Max's, Tim got a call from some guy he knew from work, and Dinah tried to act like she didn't care when he told the guy to meet them at Max's. After he got off the phone, he asked her if she minded that he had asked Mark to meet them, and she said no.

When they got to the bar, she had to remind him to leave his knife in the car. He carried it on his belt, and Max would spot it instantly. Max had a strict "no weapons" policy, and Dinah knew Tim would get angry if Max called him on the knife. She thought Tim might give her a hard time about taking it off, but he just laughed and stuck it under the seat.

By the time they made their way to the counter, Max was already wiping down a place for them to sit. He reached over to give her a hug and then gave Tim his usual nod.

"Hey, how you doin', Max?" Tim spoke too loud, as usual, and Dinah cringed.

While he went over to talk to some guys at the end of the bar, Dinah started munching on some popcorn.

"How ya doin', honey?" Max asked.

"Okay. How are things here?"
"Not too bad, not too bad," he said, looking around at the small crowd. "Place still isn't the same without you. You were our one . . .

". . . touch of class. I know, Max, I know," she said and smiled.

About ten minutes later, Dinah was sipping on her usual Jack and Coke when she heard Tim call to someone at the door: "Mark! Over here, man."

As soon as Dinah's eyes found the man at the door, she started to feel sick to her stomach. She knew she didn't want to get any closer to him. When he reached Tim at the other end of the bar, Tim looked over at her and motioned for her to join them. She pretended not to see him.

"Dinah, come here a second, babe!"

Eyes turned toward her, and she slowly got up and walked toward the two men. With each step, she felt the churning of her stomach increase.

"Dinah, this is Mark, my bud from work." Tim's words sounded like they were coming from very far away. She looked down at Mark's outstretched hand. It was odd for one of Tim's friends to shake her hand. Usually they just checked her cup size.

Something seemed to be wrong with his skin. His face didn't look that old, but his skin seemed wrinkled and
covered with age spots—his fingers curled with arthritis. She blinked and refocused. His hand looked normal now, but she could feel the sweat soaking into her blouse. Her eyes were burning, and she could taste the soured Ranch dressing she had poured on her salad at lunch. She looked at Tim, wondering how he could not notice that something was wrong with her.

She held out her hand, but as the man's finger tips touched her skin, the images started, and she recoiled. "I have to go to the Ladies Room. I'll be back in a minute," she told them both as she turned and quickly walked away.

There was no way she could shake that man's hand. The images were pelting her like hail. Hands around neck. Silver necklace. Ripped white shirt. She knew her way to the bathroom, found her way through the images.

She sat in the stall and cried, trying to be quiet so that no one would hear her. But it took her a long time to stop. Whatever the images were, wherever they came from, she just wanted them to go away. She knew that if she shook that man's hand the same thing would happen to her that had happened at the hospital. She would see a rape, only this time it wouldn't be from the victim's point of view.
When she had collected herself enough to look reasonably composed, she came out of the stall and tried to repair her make-up in the mirror.

Claire, Max's long-time waitress, came in. "Dinah, you okay?"

She nodded, intent on trying to wipe the black smudges from underneath her eyes.

"Well, sweetie, that boyfriend of yours is out there in the hall, and he asked me to check on you."

"I'm fine. Thanks." Dinah smiled, in case she had any doubts.

Claire still looked skeptical, but she went into a stall and closed the door.

When Dinah came out, Tim didn't even look at her, just started walking toward the front door. She followed him, embarrassed, not even looking up to wave bye to Max.

When they got in the car, he exploded, banging his hands against the steering wheel for emphasis. "Why the hell do you always have to act so crazy? That was a guy I work with. Now he thinks I'm dating some crazy chick. You're always bitching at me to introduce you to my friends . . . Now do you see why I don't?"
She watched him slam the key into the ignition. They had taken her car to the bar, but he had driven. He always drove. *Jerk.*

When she didn't answer, he took a deep breath and started again in a slightly softer tone. "What the hell happened?" he asked. "We were having a good time. You seemed fine. Did you just get sick or something?"

"I had a really bad feeling about that guy. Like he wasn't a good person," she tried to explain. "You know I have those feelings sometimes."

"And I'm getting the feeling more and more that you're losing it," he snapped. "That guy's my friend. I've known him for years. It's all in your head, Di."

The "in your head" comment is what got to her. "I don't care if you've known him for twenty years!" she yelled. "Something's off about him, and I don't want to be around him!"

"Fine. Whatever," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "I don't want to fight about this anymore. I'm sick of fighting."

When they got to her apartment, he parked the car and tossed her the keys. Then he walked to his own car and left, not even coming inside. He called her at two to say he was coming by. He was drunk, but she still wanted him
there. It made her feel better to have him lying next to her.

She opened the door for him, and he stumbled in, dropping his wallet and keys on the counter before heading to the bathroom. She went back to bed, hoping he would come in and just fall asleep. When he came out of the bathroom, her eyes were closed.

"Baby, wake up. Let's make up," he whispered in her ear as he slid in next to her.

She kept her eyes closed and refused to move when he tried to get her to roll over onto her back.

He sighed. "Fine. Be that way. Be mad. At least I'm here."

He was asleep, snoring in minutes. She lay there next to him, loathing herself for liking him next to her.

She fell asleep into dreams that made her scream.

Tim was shaking her. "Dinah! Wake up! You're dreaming again! Damn it! Wake up!"

Someone had been trying to kill a woman, and Dinah had been screaming for help. But she wasn't the one being killed. It was someone else. So why was Dinah screaming? The dream began to slip away from her.

Tim got out of bed and began pulling on his jeans.

"Jesus, Dinah. I have to get some fucking sleep. I have to
be at the job site by seven tomorrow morning. I can't deal with this shit. I'm going home."

"Stay, Tim. I'm sorry," she said, scared of what would happen if he wasn't there when she fell asleep again, when she woke up screaming. "Please don't go."

He sat back down on the bed and looked at her. "Alright, but I have to get some sleep. You say it helps when I'm here, so how come you're still having nightmares? It's like I'm doing you no good."

"Yes, you do, Tim. I swear. Please stay."

"Prove it," he said as he climbed back in next to her. She let him climb on top of her and push up her nightshirt, but as he moved inside her, she started crying.

For a few minutes, he didn't notice the tears, but when he leaned down to kiss her, his lips grazed against the wetness on her cheeks.

"Christ. Are you crying?"

He got off her and rolled over on his side. "You have to get over this shit" were the last words he said to her before he started snoring again.

When she came out of the bedroom the next morning, he was stuffing the small bundle of movies and CDs he kept at her place into his jacket, but she pretended not to see
what he was doing. She walked him to the door, forcing herself to act like this was just another morning goodbye.

He smiled and kissed her.

When he finally called her the next day, he told her what she already knew, that he couldn't take all her crying and acting crazy anymore. She promised not to talk about the images any more, to stop crying, to stop waking him up with bad dreams, but he just told her he loved her and hung up. From a guy like him, "I love you" was a relationship death sentence.
What's in the Dark

Dinah called in sick to work the morning after Tim broke it off. She had spent the night fully clothed on the couch, watching television to avoid the dreams. It was the first time she'd called in since she started last year. Mary could handle everything. She should actually be the one running the store, not Dinah.

Dinah had been walking through the mall, baked pretzel in hand, when she had seen the sign in the window of the small luggage store and decided on a whim to fill out an application. It turned out the store manager had just up and quit one day, and the owner was desperate to get someone in there so he could stop coming in. He had an assistant manager for the evening and weekend shifts, but he needed someone who could work the day shift throughout the week. Dinah lied and said that she had been assistant manager of Max's Restaurant for the past four years; she knew Max would go along with the story if asked. When the owner saw that she had management experience and a college degree, he hired her on the spot. He didn't seem curious
about why someone who was pre-law would want to manage a luggage store.

She hadn't known the first thing about higher-end luggage, but she had quickly learned. Mary had taught her most of it. She had been working there since the store opened ten years ago. Sometimes when Dinah came into work, Mary would ask her how she had slept, and Dinah would always say fine. But the dark circles told the older woman the truth. Shortly after she had begun working at the store, Dinah's dreams had gotten worse—as if to keep up with what was going on during the day.

It had started as a vague, uneasy feeling that something just wasn't right about a certain man. Dinah would try to shrug off the feeling, chalk it up to paranoia. But within weeks, the feeling had progressed to an immediate reaction of revulsion whenever she was in the same room with such a man. Then, when one of the men accidentally brushed up against her one day in an elevator, the feeling that he was somehow bad became the concrete knowledge—through blurry, disjointed images—that he had raped someone.

After that, just seeing these men or standing near them made her physically ill. Her skin would begin itching. Her face would become flushed. Sweat would break out on her
forehead. Her eyes would water from the acrid smell they
gave off, the stench of the shame and humiliation they
feasted on. Then the bile would rise in her throat. She
stayed as far away from them as possible, often leaving
rooms so quickly people wondered where she had gone.

Most of the time, she just thought the images were an
extreme reaction to some kind of intuition about the types
of men they were. If anyone knew a bad man when they saw
one, it was her. She could tell by the way they walked into
a room, the way they ordered their food and their drinks,
the looks they gave women, even the way they dressed and
combed their hair.

Other times, though, she wondered if she were insane.
She could laugh about it during the day, but not at night.
The dreams were the reason she had stayed with Tim; he was
a warm body next to her when she woke up—she could reach
over and touch his skin and convince herself that it had
only been a dream.

She had two types of dreams: one in which horrible
things were done to her and one in which she did horrible
things to other people. She would wake up in the mornings,
lying in sweat, and try to convince herself that the world
outside her window—the world of perky news show hosts,
mothers who packed peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in
plastic cartoon lunchboxes, husbands who kissed their wives goodbye, and noisy children who arrived safely at school on bright yellow school busses—was the real world.

But, as the images during the day grew stronger and more frequent, something changed in her. Each morning it took her a little longer to accept this was the real world, and not just to accept it, but want to accept it. Something about the nightmares was familiar, and very, very real to her. In the dreams, as awful as they were, she felt as if she belonged—that she was supposed to be there. The only time she felt this way during her days was when she saw the images. It wasn’t that she liked what she saw; it was that she understood what she saw. Over time, the images became more real to her than the world around her. They became the real world, the world no one else wanted to talk about.

When Dinah had nightmares as a child, her mother would tuck her back in bed and say, “There is nothing in the darkness that wasn’t there in the light.” Her mother had been right. All the things that hide in the darkness are there in the light, as well. We just choose not to see them.

Not too long after Dinah had begun seeing the images, she had started seeing a therapist. She wanted to find out if she was truly insane, but she also wanted to tell
someone about the dreams at night and the images during the
day. She wanted to feel that the darkness in her dreams at
night wasn't hers alone.

By the end of their session, her therapist had
diagnosed her with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and
explained that the images and the dreams were symptoms of
the disorder. Dinah had tried to act relieved at having a
diagnosis, but she wasn't. She didn't want it to be just
some disorder.

But when she tried to question the diagnosis, Linda, a
large woman with a fondness for tacky floral blouses and
brown shoes, grew impatient: "The images and dreams are
classic symptoms, and your personal history supports the
diagnosis," she said. "What you need to focus on is
regaining control of your mind and body. When you feel
yourself entering a flashback, you need to use some of the
cognitive tools we've discussed."

Dinah had patiently waited for her to finish and then
asked, "How can they be flashbacks if I'm not even in
them?"

Linda had bristled. The pause before she answered made
it clear that she didn't have a ready answer. "Well, Dinah,
sometimes, we are so scared of seeing ourselves as the
person in the flashback that we substitute the faces of friends, family, or even acquaintances for our own faces."

"But I don't know any of the women," Dinah tried to protest. "I've never even seen them before."

"Of course, you don't consciously know them," the therapist declared triumphantly. "Your mind has registered these faces unconsciously, for use later. It's a survival tactic, to distance yourself from the events in the flashback as much as possible. Sometimes, women even make up faces, from a composite of features they've seen."

She sighed and put her hand on Dinah's arm. "Regardless of what the faces look like, the women in those flashbacks are you."

Dinah had tried to believe Linda and had even told her that the images and dreams were lessening, thanks to her use of the cognitive tools. She had jumped at the suggestion to become involved with victim advocacy when Linda suggested it a month ago. But now, things had changed. She had seen another woman's rape—she had been there. The images weren't coming from her head; they were coming from other people. And if they were coming from other people that meant that she was supposed to see them; someone wanted her to see them.
The thought that she had been chosen too see the images became her delicious secret. She would take it out when no one was looking and take a small nibble, just for a taste, like she had done with the solid chocolate Easter bunny that her parents had bought her every year when she was a little girl. She had found a new place, safe from her older brother, to hide the bunny every year, and she always made it last for months. Even as an adult, she would sometimes treat herself to expensive chocolate and stow it under the coupons on top of the fridge—taking it out when she was alone and had had a bad day. Now that Tim was gone, she could take down the secret and examine it in the daylight, turn it this way and that in the sunlight as she decided what to do with it.
Beginning

The first day she called in sick to work, Dinah watched Lifetime for hours and ordered pizza. She glanced at the clock when it came time for her therapist appointment, but she didn't bother to call and make an excuse. She alternated between congratulating herself that Tim was gone and being terrified that she would be alone now. She kept both phones next to the couch in case he decided to call—decided he wanted to come over. In a weak moment, she left him a voice message on his cell, asking him to call her. She had just hung up the phone when the evening news came on. The lead story was about a woman who had been reported missing by her husband.

At the beginning of the report, the newswoman was standing in front of an apartment building that Dinah recognized as being just off the highway. When the camera switched to the interview of the woman’s distraught husband, Dinah legs buckled. She had seen him at the gas station a week ago. She had been standing in line to pay when she felt the now-familiar feeling of nausea sweep over her. She had turned to see the man join the line just
behind her. The nausea and dizziness had intensified, and
she had dropped her car keys. He had bent down to pick them
up for her, and she had had no choice but to take them from
his hand.

As soon as her skin touched the metal of the keys, a
strange jolt had gone through her body, like she imagined
an insect might feel in that brief moment of life when its
wings grazed the bug zapper. Images had come into her mind,
images of a woman's head being banged against the floor, in
the apartment where this man was now being interviewed. She
recognized the burgundy leather couch, the glass table, and
the sculpted metal lamp.

As Dinah stared at him now on the screen, the images
that she had tried to block in the gas station came back—
only this time they weren’t disjointed. This time they told
a story.

He was holding a cell phone in one hand. "You bitch!
Who were you talking to on the phone just now? Was it him?"
he screamed.

He didn't wait for an answer. "I know it was him.
Don't even try to lie to me." His face was red, and spit
flew out from his mouth with the words.

Dinah watched as a drop of spit landed on the cheek of
the woman.
The woman didn't even make a move to wipe it off. She glanced at the doorway, just for a millisecond, but he saw her and moved directly in her path of escape.

"Answer my goddamn question!" he yelled. "Who was that on the phone?"

"It was just someone I work with," she tried to explain. "He needed to know where I had put a file."

"Lying whore!" He hit her, palm open, square across the face, and she fell.

"Please, Jimmy. Please, don't. I swear I'm not cheating on you. I love you," she pleaded with him.

Her husband got on top of her and grabbed her hair. He pulled her head up and then slammed it back down to the floor. Twice he did this.

"If you love me so fuckin' much how come we never even have sex anymore?" he demanded.

"I'm sorry," she sobbed. "We can have sex anytime you want."

"Fine, then I want it now," he told her.

The woman shut her eyes, making Dinah wish she could close her eyes, as well.

But as he started to pull off her skirt, the cell phone lying on the floor next to them rang. He looked at the number and then threw the phone into the next room.
"Guess he couldn't find that file," he said, as he pulled down his pants. He shoved up her skirt and pulled down her underwear. Each time he slammed into her, he banged her head against the floor.

"Please stop," she begged. "I don't feel good. I promise we'll do it later."

"Tell me you love me," he ordered. "Tell me I'm the only one."

"I love you," she said. "You're the only one."

She said it again and again. Then she just stopped. Her husband moaned and let go of her hair. Her head fell back against the floor with a thud. Her eyes were still closed.

He looked down at his wife. "You're mine, Angela. Always will be." Wiping the sweat from his face, he stood up and pulled up his pants.

"Get up. Let's go get something to eat. I'm hungry."

But her eyes stayed shut. She didn't move.

Suddenly, he panicked. "Angela, get up!" He kneeled on the floor next to her and shook her, softly at first, then harder. "Oh my god. Angela, wake up! Wake up!"

He jumped up and headed toward the phone on the wall. He had already dialed the first two numbers when he looked over at his wife's body lying on the floor, underwear
around her knees, skirt bunched at her waist. He hung the phone back on its cradle and came back to her. Leaning down close to her mouth, he listened. Then he tilted her head and covered her mouth with his. He blew two large breaths and then placed his ear against her chest. He rose to his knees and began pushing down on her chest with his hands, ordering her to breathe. He frantically pushed over and over and over, until he finally collapsed onto her chest, sobbing. He tenderly pulled up her underwear and smoothed her skirt back down. Then he fell back against the couch and just sat there, staring at her body, as the tears ran down his face.

When Dinah came out of the vision, she was standing by the couch, looking at the floor. The news report had moved on, and both phones were lying at her feet. Her body felt used, like something had thrust its way into her mind and then moved out from there to take over the rest of her. She sat down, fighting the urge to puke.

“I should call the police.” She said it out loud, as if someone was there waiting to see that she did the right thing. But once the phone was in her hand, she couldn’t do it. What would she say? They would think she was a lunatic. They might even think she had something to do with it. She
had nothing to offer the police—no evidence to prove that the husband had done it.

The images replayed over and over in her head, but she could never get any farther than the husband sitting against the couch. She had no idea how he'd gotten rid of the body. She began to think she had just imagined it, that she was just inserting the faces of people she'd seen into her own nightmares, like Linda said. It was easier to think that than to try to figure out what else could be happening to her and why.

That night she couldn't sleep. She went through everything that had happened the last year, every vague feeling, every bout of nausea, every image. It all seemed to be leading up to this. She made two decisions that night. She would never go back to see Linda, and she would talk to her father.
When she called in sick again the next morning, Mary seemed almost happy. Dinah suspected she probably enjoyed being the boss for a while. Her next call was to the church building.

"Glendale Church of Christ."

"Hi, Dad."

"Dinah, it's good to hear your voice . . . Is everything okay?"

"I'm fine," she reassured him. "I was just wondering if you have any free time today."

"I can rearrange some things," he said. "Why? What's going on?"

"I just wanted to talk."

"Okay. Do you want to come by the office, or do you want to meet somewhere?"

"How 'bout I bring you lunch. Roast beef sandwich and a loaded baked potato sound good?"

"Sounds great. I'll be done teaching my class at 1:00."

"I'll see you then."
"Dinah?"

"Yeah? What is it, Dad?"

"You sure everything's alright."

"Everything's fine."

She wasn't about to try to explain everything that had been going on over the phone. This was definitely a sit-down, face-to-face conversation.

When she got to the church building, her dad was still talking with some of the older members of his Bible class, so she snuck into the office to wait. She didn't feel like chatting and trying to explain what she'd been doing with herself lately. She hadn't been to church in over two years, and everyone knew she lived less than an hour away. She looked at the closed doors of the Sanctuary as she passed and wondered if God would speak to her if she fell on her knees in the place of worship.

While she waited she stared at all the books on the shelves in her father's office. She wondered if any of them had anything to say about what was happening to her. When her father came in, she was leafing through a book about the Old Testament prophets. The book underneath it was about angels.

"Food's on the desk," she told him.

"Take the day off from the store?" he asked.
"Yeah. I decided I deserved a little break from the cut-throat world of luggage sales."

"Think anymore about going to law school?"

She shook her head, and he let it drop.

He gestured toward the books in her hands as he sat down. "What are you reading?"

She put the books back on the shelf and sat down on the other side of the old wooden desk before answering. "Oh, I was just thinking about how God used to talk to people in the Old Testament."

"Go on."

"Like how God used to speak in visions and dreams, used to send angels."

"And?"

"And I'm wondering whether maybe He does still speak to us that way, or, if He stopped, but now He has started again." She avoided meeting her father's eyes.

He was quiet for a moment before responding. "Are you having visions, Dinah?" he finally asked.

From anyone else, the question would have been either a joke or a precursor to a psych ward referral, but from her father, someone who believed that the spiritual and the material coexisted, it was a serious question.
"No, of course not," she told him. "I'm just wondering how we know what our purpose is."

"Well, first let's go back to the vision question," he said. "Instead of speaking to individuals through visions and dreams, God speaks to us all now through the Holy Spirit. We still have guidance, Dinah."

"I know, but sometimes I would like a straight answer."

Her father laughed, and she joined him.

"You always pushed for the 'straight answer' even when you were little. Your mother and I could never just give you one of those pat parent answers they make you memorize when you have kids."

"Do you think it's possible that God might send visions or dreams to someone today?"

"Anything's possible with God, you know that. But I guess I tend to think that God's plan for us moves forward."

"You mean that we've moved through the Old Testament to the New Testament."

"Yes."

"What if there's more?"

"I don't follow you."

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"What if there's more to God's plan than just what we read about in the New Testament?"

A worried look crossed her father's face, and she regretted having spoken.

"We seem to have gotten away from your question about our individual purpose here on earth," he said.

She smiled "You know how my mind works, always going off in about ten different directions at once."

He nodded, and they laughed again, clearing the tension from the air.

She sat there as he explained to her how we all have individual gifts and that God has given us the freedom to choose how we use those gifts to His glory. She murmured responses when expected and tried to appear interested in what he was saying, but all she could think about was that in the past God had used visions, dreams, and angels to tell people—people He had chosen for something special—what they should do. She had grown up listening to her father read those stories—magnificent tales of angels dressed in armor appearing to leaders before they went into battle and visiting the dreams of faithful women to give them strength and embolden their actions. She had believed those stories.

As he hugged her goodbye, he asked her when she was coming by the house to see her mother, and she promised to
visit soon. He didn't ask about Tim. That was one thing he
and Max definitely agreed on.

"You'd tell me if something was wrong, wouldn't you?"
he asked as she walked out the door.

She turned and smiled. "Of course, I would, Dad." He
had acknowledged the possibility that what was happening to
her was real. That was enough.
As soon as she got home from the church building, Dinah got online and checked the news. Nothing new about Angela had been in the paper this morning, but something may have happened since the paper was printed. She checked nine more times that day, but nothing new was being said.

At one point, Mary came into her office as she was checking the news and stood beside Dinah's chair reading the screen. "Poor woman," she said. "Everyone's saying that her husband did something to her."

Dinah made no reply, just flipped the computer off and got up from her desk. She didn't want to hear Mary's thoughts on the case. The old woman was always talking about the good in people; she probably couldn't even wrap her mind around the thought that someone could rape and kill the person they married.

The next morning, as she dressed for work, Dinah flipped through all the news channels, trying to find out more. The police still weren't saying anything. It continued that way for several days. She couldn't think...
about anything else. She had decided that what happened with this case would determine what would happen with her—would decide if she was insane or not. She became obsessed with the story, listening to every newscast and checking the news updates online and on the radio several times an hour during the day. Finally, a week after the original newscast, the police announced the case was being considered a murder investigation. The husband had been brought in for questioning and was being treated as a suspect.

But now that she had her "sign," Dinah still didn't know what to do. Did it mean she had really seen him kill his wife? Or did it just mean that her feeling about the guy had been right? Or did it mean nothing at all, just some coincidence? She waited for news that he would be charged, hoping that he would confess and that the newspaper would release some of the details of the murder. She needed to know if what she had seen had really happened.

When he was finally charged, a few days later, she still didn't know for sure. The news didn't include any details—just that he had murdered his wife and disposed of the body. She needed more information to be sure.
The next day the news reported that, instead of turning himself in, as his attorney had promised the police he would do, he had fled. She turned off the television and went into the kitchen, started running the water to wash the dishes. As the water ran over the sink lip and onto the counter, she watched it.

_Fled._

He was gone. They knew he did it, but they let him get away. And she had helped him get away by not believing.

That night she dreamed of dying.

She was no longer in her apartment; she was in the apartment from her vision and the newscast. Not watching from her bed, but actually there—in the room where the rape was happening. He was on top of his wife on the floor just a few feet from where Dinah stood. She moved toward them, but then she felt a hand on her arm. The woman was standing next to her. Angela, the woman on the floor being beaten and raped and killed by her husband, was standing next to her, watching, just as Dinah was.

She took Dinah's hand and led her over to the bodies on the floor. For a second, they watched the rhythm of his pounding and the banging of her head against the floor. Then, together they lay down to die.
Dinah was on the floor, looking up at him. Her face still burned from the smack of his palm. Her body ached from the new trauma to her already bruised bones. She tried in vain to brace her body for each thrust and each bang of her head into the floor. She couldn't scream because she had to tell him she loved him, that he was the only one. Her only thought was to get through, somehow get through it, so that she could leave, get away. The pain in her head grew sharper with each bang; suddenly, everything went blank. She tried to form the words "I love you," but the words were gone. Everything was dark.

Then she was standing with Angela again, looking down on him as he thrust into her. They watched him finish and slowly realize she was dead. Watched him slump against the couch and stare at her body. Then he got up, grabbed his keys and left. When the door had closed behind him, Angela went over to her body on the floor. She kneeled down and took her still warm hand as her tears splashed down onto her face. Dinah came and kneeled beside her, watched as Angela gently kissed her forehead and stroked her cheek.

When he came back in he was carrying a pruning saw and a roll of black landscaper's plastic, and Dinah remembered what she had heard on the news, that he worked for a landscaping company. She hadn't made the connection then,
but now she did. A pruning saw could cut through wood and through skin and bone. The plastic was to put under the body, to keep him from leaving evidence behind.

They watched as he cut apart her body. He cried as he worked; the tears and the snot running down his face as if eager to join the blood. When she lay there in pieces like a disassembled doll, he rolled her up in the black plastic. He found a bag in the closet to carry her out. They watched as he left. Then Dinah woke up.

She sat up in bed, staring out into the living room, half expecting to see a body lying there. Was that what had happened? Is that how he had disposed of the body? It was hard for her to hear her thoughts above the roaring pain in her head . . . Pain in her head?

She ran into the bathroom, half expecting to see a palm print on her face, but it was only a little red. She was officially a lunatic. She got herself a glass of water and then decided to go back to bed, to read for a while if nothing else. When her head hit the pillow, she nearly screamed. The back of her head was throbbing. She ran her fingers gingerly through her hair, feeling the large bump. She jumped when the phone rang.

"You awake?"

It was Tim. He was drunk again.
"Yes."

"Can I come over?"

"No." She hung up the phone and began rubbing the knot on her head again.

The phone rang again a few minutes later. She let it go to the answering machine.

"Come on, Dinah. Pick up. I'm sorry. Just let me come over so that we can . . . ."

The machine cut him off. But he called right back.

"Fine. At least let me pick up the rest of my stuff. I left my knife in . . . ." This time it was her finger on the button that cut him off.

Believing that a dead person could communicate with her through dreams was one level of crazy. Believing that she could actually relive the dead person's death through a dream was a whole other level of crazy—one she didn't want to reach. She must have hurt her head in her dream, acted out what she was seeing. She had heard of people doing things like that in their sleep.

She stayed awake until it was daylight and then went for a jog. She hadn't run in months. When she stopped to take a breather, she remembered that Tim had called last night, asking to come back, and she had hung up on him. She
laughed out loud. Maybe that was the benefit to being
insane—you didn't mind being alone.

Outside her door, she picked up the paper. The article
on the front described how Angela Thompson's body had been
found in pieces, wrapped in black plastic, and buried in
the woods.

She wasn't crazy. It was real. What she had seen was
real. She had seen that woman be beaten, raped, and
murdered. Had even seen her dead body be cut up. And now it
was too late to make her killer pay. He was gone.

She wondered about the other images she had seen over
the last months. What if they all belonged to stories like
Angela's and Marisa's? If they did, Dinah could pick out
the men. She could make sure no one else got away.

This idea became her new secret. She pulled it from
its hiding place whenever she was alone and considered its
possibilities. She didn't yet know what to do with it.

Then, about a week after the body was found, Dinah
almost swerved off the road after listening to a political
radio commentator talk about how the government could
reasonably predict which spot would be targeted next by
terrorists. The images of Angela's rape and murder had
first come to her when she was at the gas station, a week
before it had actually happened, before she had seen the
news report of Angela's disappearance. The images had been a warning.

By the time she pulled into her parking spot at work that day, Dinah knew—knew what she would do the next time. Something had changed in her, now that she knew the images had been a warning. Warnings were meant to get people to do something, to save people from harm. If she had understood, she could have saved Angela.
Access

That day at work Dinah had another vision. When she came out to check on the floor, a man was standing at the counter talking to Mary. Her body temperature rose, and her stomach began churning. She wasn't ready yet, not so soon. She turned to go into the back, but then she thought of Angela and made herself go over to the counter.

"Mary, it's about time for your break, isn't it?" she said. "I'll finish up the sale for you."

Mary gave her a strange look but moved away from the counter, and Dinah took her place at the register. "I hope you found what you were looking for, sir," she said.

"I did. Thank you." He had a slight accent, as if he had grown up in the South but tried not to show it too much.

He smiled at her as she handed him the pen to sign the receipt, and she tried not to visibly cringe. As his fingers grasped the other end of the pen, she felt herself slipping into darkness. She found herself in a car. The woman was wearing a short black skirt and a sequined halter top, like she was going to a party or a club. The seats
were tan leather. He was driving, and she was playing with the radio stations. The clock read 10:22.

When she came back to the store he was signing the receipt. She catalogued his features: 6'0. Brown hair. Brown eyes. About 180 pounds. Pressed khakis and a navy striped Polo shirt. Cologne was Polo, too.

She held out her hand for the pen, and he smiled again as he handed it to her. Now the clock in the car read 1:45, and the woman was leaning back in her seat. The car stopped, and the passenger side door opened. The man pulled her out, and she asked what he was doing. Then Dinah heard the unzipping of his pants. The woman at first tried to explain that she was too drunk, that she didn't want this to happen here. She didn't yet realize that she was being raped.

"Thank you very much, Mr . . ." Dinah looked down at the receipt. " . . .Greenman."

She handed him the bag with his attaché case and then watched as he choked the woman to death. He was dragging her body out of the car and rolling it into the water.

As Dinah watched him walk out of the store, she panicked.

What should she do? Follow him? Call the police?
To say what? "I'd like to report a hallucination. A guy who bought an attaché case at my store is going to rape and kill a woman. I can tell you the time of night, but not the month, day, or year. No, I don't know what woman."

She looked down at the receipt again. "Anthony M. Greenwood."

She didn't need to follow him right now. She knew what time of night the rape was going to happen. When the time came, she would be there. She would do what she should have done for Angela. And Anthony Greenwood would find out that someone else had access to his world.

When Dinah got home, she looked up "Anthony M. Greenwood" in the phone book. Only two were listed. One lived in an affluent suburb, at a street address followed by a number. One lived on a street that Dinah knew ran through a run-down section of the city, lined with one bedroom houses and liquor stores. Polo did not live in a one room house by a liquor store. She left around 6:30. She knew that the woman was already in the man's car by 10:22, but she didn't know what time the woman got in the car. It turned out, not surprisingly, that Anthony Greenwood lived in an upscale apartment building.

One of the cars in front of the building was a convertible. Dinah decided to park on a street across from
the building. She sat there for hours, radio surfing and
trying to ignore the rising doubts. At 10:30, the car was
still safely parked, and she decided to leave. The rape
would not happen tonight, if it was going to happen at all.
As she drove away, she began to question herself again.
What if she really was just going crazy? What if the
visions were just hallucinations—her mind drawing on things
she saw on the news or in the paper?

When she saw her apartment building, she decided to
keep going. There would be no rest in that bed tonight
anyway. Driving would help her think, sort things out. Was
she going to spy on Greenwood every night? What if a year
went by, and he never picked up the woman? Would she keep
going there indefinitely or would she eventually have to
accept that she needed help?

A normal person would want to be wrong. Dinah didn't
want to be wrong. She wanted confirmation that she had this
gift because she knew without even consciously forming the
thought that the images, the dreams, and the visions were
connected to what had happened to her three years ago. If
the gift was real, then it was true: everything did happen
for a reason. She could help stop other women from being
hurt.
After she had driven for an hour, she realized her tank was sitting on empty. By this time she was in the middle of nowhere. That was one of the reasons she loved Ohio. You could go urban to rural in less than an hour from pretty much anywhere in the state. She pulled off at a Sunoco. "Pay at the Pump" convenience had apparently not made its way here, yet. She went in to pay and found herself in line behind a teenage couple. The girl was wearing the boy's letter jacket.

When the boy asked for a pack of Marlboro Reds, the old man behind the counter asked to see some id. "Sure, old timer."

The boy flipped open his wallet, and a condom fell out. The girl giggled.

"Maybe one day soon I'll get lucky," the boy whispered loudly to the man.

"Brian!" the girl beside him protested, smiling even as she winced.

Dinah remembered what it was like in high school. If you were a girl, you had two fears: being labeled a virgin or being labeled a slut. The distinction between the two was a thin line. She had known several girls who had felt pressured to lose their virginity with their boyfriends, only to be deemed a slut when the relationship ended.
She smiled at the girl as the couple left, wishing her luck. Then she placed her hands down on the counter, where the boy had plopped his wallet. Suddenly Dinah was inside the boy's head. She could feel his impatience and restlessness. She knew his thoughts: he'd been waiting for months, he'd given her his class ring to wear, she was ready, she should stop pretending to be such an angel when she dressed like that and kissed him like that, he had spent so much more money on her than any of the other girls who had given it up so much easier. It was time. Tonight. At the party.

Then Dinah saw what would happen, saw the car parked outside the party, saw the windows fogged up and inside the boy holding the girl down and telling her that it would be fine, that it wouldn't hurt, that this was what couples did, that this was how to show love. She handed the clerk the twenty dollars and walked quickly back to her car. The boy's car, a silver Honda Civic with custom rims and a purple light underneath, was just pulling out of the parking lot. She pulled out slowly behind him. All she could think about was Marisa—what it must be like to have to see the guy who raped you in the halls at school every day.
Following them was easy until the kid turned off the main road. He was driving about 80 on back roads that he had probably grown up on, and Dinah was worried about him noticing her car behind his. Suddenly, the red lights ahead of her flashed, and she knew he had stopped. What if this was when he raped the girl? She pulled her sweatshirt hood over her head and slowly drove by the house that the boy had parked in front of. The couple was going into the house. When the front door opened, Dinah saw the mob of teenagers inside. She had heard the music even before the door had opened.

What the hell was she going to do? Go into the party and announce the kid was a rapist? Wait until the couple came back out and try to talk to the girl? Call the cops and break up the party? She started the car, but then quickly turned it back off.

She remembered that night when she was twelve. She had awakened screaming, and her mother had rushed in. As her mother held her sweat-soaked body, Dinah told her about the nightmare. How a man had held her down and forced his penis into her. Her mother was shocked. At first she seemed more worried about the idea that her daughter was dreaming about sex, but Dinah lied about seeing it on a movie she had watched at a friend's house.
She sobbed, "I don't want that to happen to me, Mom."

Holding her close, her mother had said with all the confidence in the world, "Honey, I promise that will never happen to you."

"But how do you know, Mom?" she asked. "How can you promise?"

Her mom smiled, long accustomed to such questions from her daughter. "Because you're good, and you're smart," she said. "And God is always watching over you. Now go to sleep."

At the time, her mother's words had comforted her, but Dinah knew now that being good and being smart isn't always enough. And God watches a lot of things. That girl in the party needed her help. Dinah was the only one besides God and the rapist who knew what was going to happen to her. She had been given access. She was the only one who could stop it. Dinah couldn't do anything about what had happened to Marisa, but she could do something to help this girl.
Swinging

At least ten cars were parked in the driveway, the large front yard, and even along the side of the road. Dinah turned her car around on the next side road and then headed back past the house. She knew from her vision that the rape would take place in his car. If she called the police to break up the party, she would just put the couple in the car that much sooner and that much longer. The key was the car. She knew exactly what to do.

There had been a dirt road about a quarter of a mile before the house. She would park there and walk back to the party house. She had what she needed here in her car. The day she got her first car, a ten-year-old Buick covered with rust spots, her father had presented her with keys in one hand and a baseball bat in the other. “One’s for your freedom. The other’s for your protection,” he told her. She had been too embarrassed to keep the bat where other people could see it, but it had ridden around with her in the trunk for years, switching from car to car like the old atlas in the glove compartment. It was here with her now, under an old blanket in the trunk of her black Grand Prix.
She opened the trunk and pulled the bat out. She might not have the strength to break the windshield, but she could definitely crack it. It was obvious from the special rims and undercarriage lights that this guy loved his car. A huge crack in the wind shield would kill the mood instantly.

As she headed toward the Civic with the bat, she remembered that she had another weapon with her. On the answering machine, Tim had started to say something about leaving his knife. She hadn't thought about it until now, but the last time they had gone to Max's he had left his knife in her car. He must have been so angry when they got back to her apartment that night that he forgot to grab it.

Slashing the tires would keep the car where it was. The girl would have to get a ride with friends or call her parents to pick her up. Dinah didn't try to think beyond tonight; she would worry about that later. Right now she just had to bring the date to an abrupt halt.

She got down on both knees and fished the Kershaw Lock-Blade out from under the seat, thanking her ex, wherever he might be getting drunk, for finally doing something right. Now armed with the knife and the bat she walked quickly toward the car. The door to the house opened, and two kids came out to sit on the porch under the
dull, bug infested light. One of the boys was obviously feeling sick. Dinah waited in the shadows of a tree until the more sober boy led the other one back inside. The people inside the party wouldn't be able to hear anything over the music, and there were no neighbors within hearing range.

She made sure her hair was completely tucked inside her hood. If anyone did come out of the house, she wanted them to see a teenage boy. When she flipped open the knife, she was surprised by how long the blade was, at least three and a half to four inches. She was even more surprised at how much fun it was to jab the blade into the rubber. She was almost finished when approaching headlights sent her scrambling behind the front of Brian's car. The car full of teenagers squeezed into the last empty space in the front yard, and the kids were inside within seconds. Dinah took a deep breath and stood up. The bat was lying on the ground. She folded the knife back up and stuffed it in the front pocket of her sweatshirt. Then she bent down and picked up the Louisville Slugger.

As her fingers circled the handle, she felt like she was playing t-ball again. "Swing with everything you have, Dinah" her dad always tried to convince her. She had been scared to miss, preferring to hit the ball with a slow,
sure swing rather than miss the ball with a too fast, too powerful swing. She closed her eyes and leaned into the swing. The first blow caused a small x in the windshield. She looked around. No one seemed to have heard anything. She swung again, this time pretending that the little x was in the forehead of the car's owner. The crack spread clear across the windshield.

Suddenly the door opened. Framed in the light, she saw Brian and his girlfriend. Dinah dropped to the ground and peered around the side of the car. She couldn't hear what they were saying, but it looked like the girl was going back in the house for something. Brian, though, was headed straight toward his car.

Apparently, he had started drinking hard as soon as they had arrived at the party because his walk already displayed the extra machismo that excess alcohol seemed to provide so many men.

"What the fuck?"

From her hiding place on the other side of the car, Dinah tried to determine if she should make a run for it. If he went back inside the house to tell someone what happened, she could make a clean getaway. "Go back inside. Go back inside," she whispered and then held her breath. She didn't hear anything. She counted to ten and then
slowly raised her head just enough so that she could look out the driver's side window. He was standing directly across from her, looking down at the tire. She froze, and he looked up.

"Who the fuck are you? Are you the dickhead that did this to my car?"

She stood up on shaky legs and turned to run. She might be able to beat him to the car. He had been drinking, and she was scared. She took off, and, for a few seconds, she thought he wasn't even going to chase her. Then, she heard his footsteps.

"You think you can run away, you little chickenshit! Just run away after you wrecked my fuckin' ride! You're fuckin' nuts!"

He was gaining on her. She still held the baseball bat in her hand. The knife was in her pocket. What the hell was she doing? Running from some teenage kid. Some teenage kid who was a rapist. She was tired of being scared. Tired of running.

*The weaker sex my ass.*

Dinah stopped and turned to face him. She gripped the wood handle in both hands and raised her arms. She was not going down without a fight—not this time.
He stopped, too, shocked for a second. "So, you want to play some ball do you?" he growled, looking at the bat. He moved closer. "Swing, batter, batter. Swing."

She waited.

"You're not even going to get a swing off, cocksucker."

As he lunged for the bat, she let go with her right hand and grabbed the knife in her pocket. As he grabbed the bat, she lunged with the knife. She caught him in the left side. Like when she stabbed the tires, she couldn't believe how good it felt when the knife sank in.

"You son-of-a-bitch, you fuckin' cut me!" Still holding the bat, he looked down in amazement at his side. Fueled by his yell, she twisted the blade and plunged it in even deeper.

He tried to speak again, but all that came out was a bloody gurgle. When he fell toward her, she pushed him back, letting the knife go with him.

He lay there, trying to breathe around the blood, as she turned to pick up the bat. She stood over him, straddling his chest and pushed back her hood. She remembered Marisa whispering, "It was his best friend." She remembered that night in the support group when the woman sitting next to her with the two black eyes said that the
way she knew her boyfriend cared about her so much was because he hit her every night. She remembered Angela lying there on the floor being raped by her own husband and whispering "I love you" when all she wanted to do was scream. And she remembered what it felt like to lie on the examining table while they took skin, hair, and semen samples from her body. She had been forced into a different world that night. And now, as she raised the bat, Dinah stepped back into that world.

He looked up at her, his eyes widening first at the sight of the raised bat and then at the realization that she was a woman.

He was dying, and he wanted to know why. She could see it in his confused, panicked eyes.

"Because I'm a woman," she told him just before she swung.

The low thud of the wood hitting his head didn't seem nearly loud enough to be a pronouncement of death, let alone vengeance or redemption. She stepped back, vaguely disappointed the skull had cracked so easily.

But then, she looked down at the bloody bat in her hands. Oh, my God. What have I done? Her hand had no strength left to hold the bat, and it fell to the ground. She sank to her knees beside the body.
"Brian?" the girl called. "Where'd you . . . What the hell happened to your car? Brian, where are you?"

Dinah could see the girl standing on the other side of the car. She needed to get away now. She reached out and tried to pull the knife out, but her arm was shaking too badly. The other arm was needed to complete the job. Knife in one hand and bat in the other she ran down the road.

She was in the shadows, nearly to her car, when the girl began screaming.

She laid the bat and the knife on an old towel in the backseat and wrapped them up as if they were a muddy pair of shoes. As she left the town, she heard the sirens. But all she could think was how proud her dad would have been if she had swung the bat like that when she played t-ball.
She spent the first part of the ride home searching the darkness behind her for the throbbing glow of flashing lights. Someone must have seen what had happened. It was a high school party. At least one of the cars parked outside the house must have contained a teenage couple. She imagined the boy in the car suddenly stopping his thrusting and telling the girl underneath him, "Oh shit. Someone's beating Brian's windshield with a bat." The girl would scramble up and peer out the window as she covered her breasts. They would both watch as Brian came out. Their eyes would widen as Dinah lunged into Brian with the knife. The girl would try to scream as the bat connected with Brian's skull, but the boy would cover her mouth with his hand.

When the police responded to the cell phone call, they would jot down Dinah's physical description and then follow her tracks along the side of the road to where she had parked her car. They would head out of town with sirens blaring to find the twenty-something woman in the hooded
sweatshirt who was driving out of town with a bloodied baseball bat and knife in the backseat.

She glanced back at the bat and the knife. Should she get rid of them? Maybe it was better to keep them and clean them up, rather than risk dumping them and having them be found and traced back to her. But if the cops found her in possession of the two weapons . . . She didn't know what to do. She was new to this. This was bullshit. She could see into the future and know exactly when and how a rape was going to occur, yet she had no idea if the police would be knocking on her door the next day?

The more she thought about it, the angrier she got. The vision is what led her to that house, led her into a situation in which a boy had ended up dead, at her hands. She felt like she had been used. Like she had been tricked into assembling some incredibly powerful and dangerous piece of technology without being told what it would be used for—like the scientists who made the bomb that would eventually be loaded onto a U.S. plane headed for Japan. Henry, one of the oldest members of her father's church, was retired military. He had loaded one of those bombs onto the plane. And he had been praying for salvation ever since. She should never have followed the couple from the gas station. She wasn't ready for this.
She could end up in jail.

Dinah marveled at how selfish she was. A boy was dead, and all she was concerned about was whether or not she was going to jail. Somehow her selfishness seemed a worse crime than the killing. Two images fought inside her head. One was of Brian lying on the ground. The other was of Brian raping his girlfriend. Whenever the image of Brian lying on the ground began to prompt her to turn the vehicle around and head back toward the flashing lights, the image of Brian raping his girlfriend stopped her and steadied her hands on the steering wheel.

The first thing she did when she got home, after she had cleaned off the baseball bat and the knife and hid them in the closet, was to pull out the bottle of Jim Beam from under the sink. Mechanically, she poured herself a shot and downed it, not even flinching at the taste. Which guy had left it behind? She couldn't remember. All of them had drunk something. She sat in her living room staring at the black television screen and downed shot after shot after shot. Soon the image of Brian on the ground looking up at her seemed to blend with the image of his girlfriend lying underneath him. The fear in the eyes stayed the same. With the help of the whiskey she finally fell asleep. Those eyes were the last things she saw. She knew those eyes...
The next day she woke with a raging headache and a weak stomach. The first thing she did was get the paper outside the door. She had to know if it said anything about Brian. A quick scan of the headlines revealed that the story hadn't made the newspaper yet. She should have felt relieved, but she didn't.

She felt like what she was—someone who had killed a teenage boy.

She didn't have to kill him. She could have left him there on the ground, bleeding from the first jab. His girlfriend would have called 911, and he would have been fine. The chances of tracing it back to Dinah would have been slim, and she could have just taken off.

No. They would have traced it back to her. She would be in jail right now. He would have described her to a sketch artist, and her picture would have been all over the news.

And he was a rapist. She kept telling herself that killing him had probably saved more than just one teenage girl. But she still struggled to make it through her shower without throwing up. She was most sickened by the thought that she had enjoyed smashing his head in.

At the breakfast table, she went over her options again. Turn herself in? Why? What good would that do? It
wouldn't bring that kid back to life. And the bottom line was that the world was a better, a safer, place for women without him in it. If he was already raping now, what would he have grown into? How many women had been raped by men who started out like him—raping their high school girlfriends, or their best friend's girl, at parties? His death didn't even begin to even the score. On the scales of justice the bodies of women still far outweighed the bodies of men.

She found it comforting to be logical. She couldn't change the past. What was done was done. If someone had seen her and the police came looking for her, she would admit what she had done and suffer the consequences. But there was no point in offering herself up as a sacrifice. She had only defended herself. She had not gone there intending to kill him. And, even if she had, killing him was an act of defense on behalf of that young girl and every other woman he would have hurt.

Besides, it felt good being the one in control, the one causing the fear.

She turned back to the paper. The story on the front page was about a woman's body found in a local river. The woman had been reported missing the day before her body had been found, so the police had already made a positive
identification. A picture of the woman ran below the column. Dinah stared at the picture. She had seen that woman before. It took her a few seconds to realize where she knew the woman from. It was the woman from her vision in the store.

Anthony Greenwood was not a man who was going to rape and kill a woman. He was a man who had already raped and killed a woman. The woman's name was Cheryl Jones. She was holding her young son, Nathan, in the picture. The nausea Dinah had been fighting took over, and she barely made it to the bathroom before her Special K and toast came back up.

How could she have been so stupid to assume that the rape had not yet happened? She had been so sure because the vision of Angela had come to her before the rape. Because she had wanted to believe she had some power over the situation—that she could stop the rape and save the woman. She had wanted to believe her gift had been sent to her so that she could help other women. But maybe it wasn't a gift at all. Maybe it was just an acutely developed awareness of pain.

What would be the point of knowing exactly how and when someone had already been raped? Even if she found a way to make the police and the legal system listen to her,
the woman's life, whether she lived or died, would still be irrevocably changed. And, who was she kidding? Dinah knew exactly how trivial the crime of rape had become in the legal system. No, discovery after the fact did little if anything to stop the violence itself. What the hell was the point of her visions if she couldn't help the women?

At least the vision about the girl last night had made sense. She had saved that girl. That kid would not be hurting anyone . . . ever. Wait. Her mind was racing. What was she saying? She had followed that couple intending only to prevent the rape. The killing of the john had only been.... *The john? Where did that come from? . . . an accident. He had come after her. She had to protect herself. Intentional killing was different. Even the law distinguished between premeditated murder and manslaughter. Manslaughter—what an oddly appropriate term. Was killing the purpose of her visions?

Under the weight of these thoughts she staggered back into the kitchen and sank down in the chair at the table. The little boy in the newspaper picture was smiling peacefully back at her. If someone had killed Anthony Greenwood a week ago, Nathan Jones would still have a mother. The article reported no leads. Cheryl had asked her sister to watch her son while she went on a date. According
to the sister, Cheryl had met the man at a restaurant.
Cheryl had told her sister that the man's name was Jonathan and he was a realtor. Cheryl's car had been found at Christopher's, a small seafood restaurant, but none of the staff remembered her dining there. The police were asking for anyone with information to come forward. A tip hotline number was provided.

Dinah had her hand on the phone before she had even finished reading the article. Then she stopped. The police traced these kinds of calls. She would call from the payphone down the street. She threw on some sweatpants and another hooded sweatshirt and made sure to walk the long way to the gas station so that she would appear to come from the opposite direction of her apartment. Before picking up the phone, she slipped on a pair of gloves. She looked down at them with surprise, realizing that she had retrieved them from the closet without even thinking.

"Hello. I have some information regarding the Cheryl Jones case."

The female voice on the other line sounded tired and annoyed. "What is the nature of the information?"

"I know who did it."

The voice was unimpressed. "And who do you think did it?"
"Anthony Greenwood raped Cheryl Jones outside his car at 1:45 am," she replied. "He choked her during the rape, and then he dragged her body from the car and rolled it into the water."

"How do you know this?" the woman asked.

Dinah ignored the question. "He drives a brown Mercedes convertible with tan upholstery," she continued. "The night Cheryl died she was wearing a sequined halter top and a black skirt."

She heard a click on the phone, and the new voice belonged to a man. "Ma'am, did you witness this crime? We need you to come to the station . . ."

Dinah hung up the phone and walked quickly back to her apartment the same way that she had come.

She sunk down in the chair at the table and finished reading the article. The writer ended by noting that Cheryl Jones was a single mother who, according to her neighbors, frequently went out in the evenings with various men.

"Fuck you all!" Dinah shouted at the paper. What the hell did it matter how many times or with whom Cheryl went out? The only reason it mattered that she was a single mother was because now a little boy probably didn't have any parents at all. His single parent had been raped, killed, and dumped on the side of the road.
As Dinah counted out the money for the register that morning, Mary asked if she had heard about that poor boy out in Covington.

"What boy?" she asked.

"Why, the one who got beat to death with a baseball bat."

"That's horrible!" she exclaimed, hoping she sounded sincere.

Mary nodded solemnly. "I guess he was a bit of a hot-head and had a lot of enemies. You know kids today don't settle things with their fists like they used to . . ."

"Do they know who did it?"

"No, I guess all the kids at the party were intoxicated, and no one saw anything." "That's too bad."

Dinah waited until she made it into the backroom before she smiled, and then she immediately felt ashamed of herself for smiling. She kept the radio on in the office throughout the day so that she could hear when they arrested Anthony Greenwood or if any more news was released.
about Brian. Brian's death was being attributed to the rise in teen violence, and Cheryl's death was being attributed to the lifestyles of today's single mothers. The only reason her story seemed to be getting any attention at all was because she had a son. Pictures of little Nathan crying were all over the news. Nothing was said about any tips called in.

As the day went on, Dinah decided that she would settle for hearing that an "unidentified man had been brought in for questioning." By the time she left work, she was struggling to remain calm. She had handed Anthony Greenwood over to the police. Surely, they could find some physical evidence to link him to the crime. Or, did she have to do that for them, too?

Nothing was said on the car radio as she drove home. She almost ran up the steps to her apartment, thinking irrationally that she would miss the one news blurb about the case and never know what happened. She watched the six o'clock from house burning to local sports update—nothing was said about the case except that police were following up on several leads.

She dreamed that night of the little boy in the picture. He was asking her why she didn't help his mommy, and she was trying desperately to explain to him that she
didn't get the vision until after his mother was already dead.

"You know who did it," Nathan insisted.

"But I already called the police," she protested.

"No, stop him," he told her. "Like you did with that boy who was going to hurt his girlfriend."

As soon as she woke up, she checked the paper. Still no mention of Greenwood being brought in for questioning.

The day passed slowly and anxiously. Dinah fluctuated between worry over whether the police would trace the death of the john to her and anger over how long it was taking them to follow the lead she had given them to Cheryl's killer. She no longer referred by name to the boy she had killed two nights ago; he had become "the john." The police in the town seemed to have given up any hope of finding his killer. The media had moved on.

But, finally, on the news that evening, the city police chief announced they had questioned a local man in regard to the death of Cheryl Jones. He would not comment on whether the man was a suspect but did reveal that the man was not in police custody.

"So, you just let him go?" Dinah asked the screen. Greenman was probably somewhere laughing right now, laughing and planning his relocation to a spot where he
could inconspicuously rape and kill again. She threw her glass of half-filled iced tea at the television. She was disappointed when the plastic mug didn't even make a scratch.

As she wiped the tea off the screen, she came to the realization that they weren't going to do anything. Nobody cared what happened to a single mom who went out "frequently" with "various men." Cheryl Jones had not been smart or even good. She had asked to be hurt.

Before going to bed, Dinah opened the door to the cabinet under the sink. Vodka? Brandy? Rum? Vodka, she decided. As she raised the bottle to her lips, she prayed that it would keep her from dreaming. It didn't.

She woke up in a panic, scrambling to catch a breath. She felt like someone had been strangling her. Within minutes, she was breathing normally again, but her throat still hurt. When she looked at herself in the mirror, she lost her breath again. There were bruises on her skin, shaped like fingers—fingers pressing in on her throat. She ran her hand over them wonderingly.

"You don't have to do that," she said. "I won't forget."

She wore a turtleneck to work that day.
Four days later, she was still wearing a turtleneck, and Greenwood had still not been taken into custody. Her nights were spent reliving Cheryl's death. Her days were spent playing a little game: If the police didn't arrest Greenwood by the seventh day, it meant that she could kill him—that it was okay. Failure to arrest was justification for murder.

On the seventh day, as she watched the mid-day news, she saw the sign from the woman news anchor—the almost imperceptible nod that said, "They're not going to do anything. It's up to you." Dinah wasn't completely nuts; she knew that the newscaster had really only said that there had been no new developments in the Cheryl Jones case. But the grim nod was a sign nonetheless.

Dinah had already planned how she would do it. She had watched the john in the early mornings before he left for work and in the evenings after he came home. She knew his routine—knew when he was most vulnerable. But first, she would give him an option: confess or die. She liked the idea of giving him an option. It made her feel both powerful and generous. She had been given an option once: head or ass. Either suck his penis or let him stick his penis in her ass. It wasn't a real choice. After she got done sucking, he stuck his hand up her rectum.
That night she used a payphone several miles away from her apartment—a different payphone from the one she had used to call the police about Cheryl. Just in case.

"Hello." His voice was cheerful, with that slight Southern drawl. Just like he had sounded in the store.

"Anthony Greenwood?"

"Yes. Who is this?" He didn't like not knowing who he was talking to. He liked to be the one in control.

"You have two choices: Tell or die."

"Excuse me?"

"Tell the cops you're the one who raped and murdered Cheryl Jones or die."

"Who the hell is this?"

"The person who knows what you did."

"Look, I don't know what you think you know, but you're wrong. I didn't rape or kill anyone. And if you call here again, I'm calling the police."

Click.

She made the same call for the next two nights. He didn't call the police, and he kept answering the phone. He was angry, and he was desperate to know who she was—to find out how she knew so much. She tantalized him with the details that no one, not even the police knew.
On the fourth night she held the picture of Cheryl and Nathan and told them that she would take care of everything soon. They smiled back at her.

Dinah had dated an electrician's assistant for a while before Tim. He used to call her all the time from his cell phone, drove her mad. One time, when she had no time to talk, she had asked him irritably, "Aren't you at work? How are you talking on the phone at the same time that you're connecting wires and stuff? Is that even safe?"

Oblivious to her irritation, he had gone on and on about these cool ties that he was using to bunch wires together. Apparently, the ties could be tightened around the wires with one hand. Dinah had finally hung up on him, pretending to lose the signal. But she hadn't hung up before her brain had registered what he said about those ties.

From the moment she had first started thinking about killing Greenwood, she had known the killing had to be done by choking. That was how Cheryl Jones had died. He needed to know how it felt. The ties had taken her a while to find at the large hardware store on the other side of the town, but she was afraid to ask someone for help. Luckily, after she had already been there for half an hour, a man in an electrician's uniform had walked by her, and she had
followed him to the right section. Joe had been right. The ties were really easy to tighten with one hand.

She had bought the gun three years ago. One of the women in her support group said that having a gun underneath her pillow was the only way she slept at night, so Dinah had bought a gun and even became a member of a firing range. She still couldn't sleep, but at least she didn't jump every time the refrigerator kicked on. The gun had gradually been replaced by a man sleeping next to her, and she had moved it to the closet.

When her alarm went off at 4:00, Dinah was already awake. The ties, the gun, and the wire were lying on her nightstand. She had been practicing, acting out the scene of the kill. Dressed in dark baggy clothing, hood over her head, she got in her car. By 4:30 she was parked two streets away from the john's apartment building. She got out and waited for him outside the entrance.

Although the April mornings still felt more like winter than spring, he ran every day. He was out the door by 4:45 when no one else in the building was even awake yet. The paper didn't come until 5:00. Before his run, he stretched and checked his shoelaces off to the side of the building's front door—right in front of her hiding place just around the building's corner.
The door opened, and she heard him yawn. He must not be sleeping well. She peeked around the corner, watching him swing his arms from side to side. She waited, looped tie and loaded gun in hand.

When he kneeled to check his shoelaces, she stuck the gun in his back.

"Stay down, or I pull the trigger."

Rather than tensing, his body relaxed. He had been waiting for this, waiting for the phone caller to show up. "So who are you? A friend of that poor woman in the paper?"

He had started to rise.

"I said 'Stay down.'"

When he heard the click of the chamber being loaded, he was still.

"Whatever you want, dear." He made it sound like he was trying to calm a girlfriend who was being particularly unreasonable . . . perhaps even hysterical.

"Now, put your hands behind your back, palm to palm."

Again, he hesitated. Ultimately, he must not have believed that she would kill him—must have thought she just wanted to protect herself as she extorted a confession—because he put his hands behind his back just as she commanded. She could feel his confidence. He agreed to put his hands behind his back because he thought he was still
in control of the situation—didn't actually believe he would be hurt, that she could hurt him.

She slipped the loop over his hands, pulling tightly. He started a little when he felt the tie around his wrists. "So what would you like?" he asked. "A made-up confession? Spoken into a tape recorder perhaps?"

"No," she replied. "I just want you to die."

When he felt the gun removed from his back, he turned his head. She had put the gun in her pocket. She didn't need it anymore. The wire would do just fine.

He felt the wire cut into his throat before he could say anything else. "How does it feel to be helpless?" she whispered in his ear. "To feel yourself dying and not understand exactly how you came to be in this situation. To be dependent upon someone else for your life."

He was gasping, trying to catch his breath, trying to free his hands. He tried to stand up, but she used the force of her body to hold him down. Off-balance from being on one knee, he fell into the pavement, taking her with him. She knew she couldn't lessen her grip. She had closed her eyes, focusing only on the way it felt to know that she was taking the life from him. The moment was eternal.

Her eyes opened at the feeling of another hand on top of her own, and she swung her head around. It was Cheryl
standing behind her. When there was no life left to take, the woman gently pulled Dinah’s hands from the wire.

They stood there for a moment, Cheryl’s arms wrapped around Dinah’s body, hands on hands. Then Dinah was alone. She put the wire back in her front pocket with the gun. The john’s expensive running shoes were sticking out at weird angles, like they had been trying to run away from the oddly bent legs.

"Sometimes you don't get a chance to run," she told them as she dragged the body around the corner of the building.

Dinah jogged away from the building just before the van with the morning paper pulled up. Anyone watching her go back to her car would just dismiss her as an early morning runner. The bump in her front pocket could have been anything—bottled water, a billfold, a can of mace.

She was at home getting ready for work when the body was discovered. Today was trash day. Always a good day—a day when the new white liner in the kitchen can symbolized a fresh start. The satisfaction she felt came as no surprise. She had known she would feel that way.

She had known it years earlier when she had sat in the witness box and pointed at the defendant. In that moment, she had learned that she could kill without remorse.
Now she had.
Waiting for the Right Time

The news was full of Anthony Greenwood's death. Now that he was dead, the police seemed more willing to identify him as the leading suspect in Cheryl's rape and murder. Although they never officially declared him the killer, the media took care of that for them. As it turned out, he had lived in five different states and had been questioned in relation to three other rapes, one that had also been a murder. The media was fascinated with the idea that his death had been retribution for Cheryl Jones and—after a forensics expert admitted on air that a 5'7 woman of average weight could have killed Greenman and an insider on the police force admitted that a woman had called in an anonymous tip identifying Greenman—especially with the idea that it might even have been a woman. Cheryl's family and friends had been questioned; everyone checked out. Dinah watched Cheryl's mother on television after she was questioned. She looked square into the camera and said, "I didn't kill that man or have anything to do with him being killed. But I want to thank whoever did." Dinah smiled when she heard that.
She felt cleansed. Whatever blood was on her hands had somehow purified her. The dreams stopped. The images stopped. Some days she felt as if she had finished what she was supposed to do. Other days she felt as if she was just being given a small reprieve. The city was shocked at the year's high murder rate, but no one connected Brian to Greenman or openly considered the possibility that the murder of an upper-class white man might have something to do with the epidemic of rape and abuse of women in the city. Cheryl and Angela were largely forgotten in the frenzy over who had killed Greenman. Regardless of whether she was done, Dinah knew that she could not do anything right now that would draw more attention to the Greenman case or to herself.

So she waited. She spent her days at the store and her evenings and weekends getting ready for whatever might be coming. She pushed the couch from its spot beside the recliner in the middle of the room to an out-of-the-way position against the far wall, and then replaced the coffee table that had been sitting in front of the couch with a weight machine. Instead of just sinking into the overstuffed green couch every night while she watched television, she worked out now. Dinah told herself that she just wanted to get in shape, but she was worried about what
would happen if the next john turned out to be bigger and stronger than Greenman. She might not always have the element of surprise or the right weapon on her side.

She also studied. Psychological reports on rapists. Current legislation on rape. Rape statistics. Rape theory and prevention. Survivor testimony. Everything she could get her hands on. She went to the library, but never checked the books out. She used internet cafes and shopped at bookstores, always paying with cash. She didn't want to leave a trail. When she had read everything she could find about rape, she started reading about murder—how to kill people and get away with it. She started with profiles of serial murderers and moved on to forensic evidence.

One night she purged the apartment. She started by dumping out the liquor under the cabinet and throwing out anything in the fridge that she had bought because Tim liked it. Out when the zesty barbecue sauce, the bleu cheese dressing, the sharp cheddar cheese, the salami, and the Mountain Dew. From there she moved on to the bathroom and the extra toothbrush, cheap electric razor, deodorant spray, and Head and Shoulders shampoo. After the bathroom, she hit the closet, pulling t-shirts off the hangers and tossing them into the trash bag as she went. Next was the lingerie drawer. She just pulled the whole thing out and
shook its contents into the bag. She used the empty drawer to store her supplies: gun and ammo, silencer, knife, wire, ties, gloves, and newspaper clippings, books and magazines. When she was done with the drawer, she sorted through the jewelry box on top of the dresser for anything she had not bought. Her last stop was the picture albums that she kept stowed under her bed. She barely glanced at the photos as they went sailing into the bag.

Dinah felt completely sane, for the first time in a long time. She readied herself and waited. Waited for the visions to start again. Waited for the time to kill.

But, as the months passed, and nothing happened, she began to think it was over. It was harder and harder for her to remember what it had felt like to kill. It seemed like it had all happened a long time ago—like a story that someone else told her.

Her mom called every few weeks to see how she was doing. Sometimes Dinah answered; sometimes she didn't. When she did answer, she always made up an excuse to get off the phone. But when her father called in June to remind her that her mother's birthday was in a few days, she remembered that she had a family and people who cared about her—that she wasn't some lone vigilante. And she realized
that she didn't want to be. At least for a day she wanted to go back to that normal world.

"I'll be there on Saturday afternoon, Dad," she said. "Tell Mom to decide where she wants to go eat."

When she got to the house, her mom and dad were so excited to see her that she felt guilty for waiting so long to visit.

"Your brother called to wish me a happy birthday, so I'm late getting ready," her mom apologized.

"It's alright. We've got all evening. Take your time."

Her father raised an eyebrow. "No big plans on a Saturday evening?"

"Tim and I broke up."

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"You don't have to pretend to be sorry. I know it's a good thing that he's gone."

"In that case, congratulations!"

"Thanks, Dad."

Her mother called from upstairs: "What was the congratulations for?"

Dinah had to hand it to the woman: over fifty, and she still had perfect hearing.

She rolled her eyes and called back: "I broke up with Tim, Mom!"
"Thank God!"

Dinah laughed, and she and her father moved out of the entry way into the family room. A baseball game was on the television, but her father turned it off when they sat down.

"Anybody new?" he asked.

"I'm taking a break from dating."

"Not a bad idea," he agreed.

He was silent for a moment, and she knew he was wondering if it was okay to ask.

"I don't think I'm going to go to law school, Dad. I'm pretty content being the manager of the store for right now."

"I didn't even ask this time," he protested.

"I know, but I could tell you wanted to."

"Seeing how the legal system actually works just soured me on the whole thing."

"But you could make a difference—change things for the better. That's what you used to believe, anyway."

"I still believe one person can make a difference, Dad. I just don't think my difference is going to come through the law. The system's too corrupt."
Dinah's mom came in on the tail-end of the conversation. "You weren't already bugging her about going to law school, were you, William?"

"It's okay, Mom. I've decided I like being a store manager."

"And there's nothing wrong with that," her mother declared. "It's good money and decent benefits."

Dinah's father still didn't look convinced, though. He had always expected great things from her. She knew she had disappointed him. She wished she could tell him about Cheryl, but she wasn't sure he would understand. And she couldn't put that kind of burden on him.

Over dinner, her mother informed her that there were a few eligible bachelors in their congregation. "Good Christian men," she said, as if that settled it.

"And how dorky are these 'good Christian men'?"

Her father almost choked on his steak at the sight of her mother's indignation.

"Just because they're good men doesn't mean they're unattractive."

"I never said it did. Now, answer the question: how dorky are these 'good Christian men'?"

When her mom refused to answer, Dinah turned to her father for help: "Dad, tell me the truth. How bad is it?"
He looked at his wife and then threw up his hands. "What do you want me to do, Celeste? Lie to the girl."

"Of course not!"

"In that case, they're pretty dorky."

"William!"

"It's okay, Mom. You'll be happy to know that Mary at the store has a good Christian nephew all picked out for me, and I'm thinking about going out with him."

"Well, how come you'll go out with her good Christian man, but not mine?" she asked.

"Because I've seen his picture," Dinah retorted.

That comment did them all in, and they were still laughing when the waitress came by to ask about refills.

It was a good meal—the best meal she'd had with her parents in a long time. On the drive home, she thought about how devastated they would have been if she had been arrested or even questioned about one of the murders. Her family's reputation would have been ruined. Her father probably would have been fired. They deserved better than that. She was glad the visions had stopped.

But that night she had a dream—her first in months. She dreamed she was Dinah, from the Bible story, the one she had stumbled across when she was little and still read her Bible every night. Shechem raped her, and then she was
given by her father and brothers to be his wife. But in Dinah's dream, it was her sisters, not her brothers, who came to rescue her from Shechem's house, and she rose with them to slaughter the men. She stabbed Shechem, plunging the knife deep into his side and then twisting it. When they returned to their father Jacob's house, he told them "Well-done" and ordered a victory feast. When Dinah awakened, she was still seated at the feast.
Getting Back Out There

Preoccupied with her dream the night before, Dinah wasn't paying attention to Mary as she rambled on. But the woman's sudden gleeful exclamation of "Oh good! You won't regret it!" snapped her back into the reality of the storeroom.

"Wait, what did I just agree to?"

Mary patted her on the arm. "Too late to get out of it now," she said. "You just agreed to go on a date with my nephew Michael."

As Mary hurried off, probably to call Michael, Dinah sighed. She didn't want to hurt the old woman's feelings, but she had no intention of dating anyone. When he called, she would just keep putting him off until he finally gave up. Hopefully, he would get the hint quickly.

Later that day, a woman who seemed familiar to Dinah came into the store. By the time Dinah realized who she was, it was too late; the woman had spotted her.

"Dinah Grayson?!

"Ellen Tanner." Ellen had been one of her suite
buddies before Dinah moved out of campus housing and into her own apartment. She had always been nice to Dinah's face, but some of the things she had said about Dinah had made it back to Dinah through mutual acquaintances. She had been one of the people who said what had happened to Dinah senior year wasn't surprising considering the way Dinah liked to party.

Dinah met her halfway and allowed herself to be hugged.

"Actually, it's not 'Tanner' anymore," the woman told her, waving a large rock in front of Dinah's eyes.

"Congratulations, Ellen."

Ellen looked down at her ring, admiring it in the light. "Yes, Alex went all out on this little baby, didn't he?"

"Oh. You and Alex Huffman got married?" Alex had been there that night. He had testified that she had left willingly with a guy from the party.

Ellen looked around the store approvingly. "So are you the manager here?"

"Yeah. For about a year now."

"That's wonderful! We were all so worried about you after that whole mess, you know."
Dinah wanted to gag—so worried, she thought, that they had all avoided her like she had a contagious disease.

"So what are you doing now, Ellen?"

"Oh, me? I just spend Alex's money," she said, laughing. "He's the Vice-President of his father's firm now."

Dinah could tell Ellen was waiting for recognition of her husband's achievement, but Dinah was not about to congratulate Alex on his successful use of nepotism.

As if in response to Dinah's unenthusiastic nod, the woman's tone changed from friendly former suite mate to pretentious wife of up-and-coming businessman. "Actually, that's why I'm here. Alex needs a new briefcase, something appropriate for the new VP."

"Let me get our sales associate for you." Dinah turned to call Mary, but, of course, she had been listening to the whole conversation and was already standing there before Dinah had finished speaking.

"Mary, this is a . . . associate . . . of mine from college. Take good care of her, okay?" She turned to Ellen and forced a smile. "It was good to see you, Ellen."

Dinah couldn't make it to the back fast enough. She leaned against the metal racks of merchandise and took a deep breath. Seeing Ellen brought it all back. The party.
The aftermath. Walking for graduation because her parents were so excited but knowing that everyone there was staring at her and pointing her out to friends and family. No one had invited her to their graduation party. Her parents had taken her out for a celebration dinner, but all she had been able to think about was the upcoming grand jury date. She stayed in the back until Ellen left.

That night, Dinah dreamed of her graduation. As she walked to the front, she could hear everyone whispering, "That's her." "That's the one." She held her head high, determined not to cry. She accepted her degree and turned to look at the photographer. Behind him was not a crowd of black-clad graduates, but women. Women of all ages and colors. They were clapping. She looked up into the stands. Only women were there, too. She walked uncertainly back to her seat. They were still clapping and cheering, and the other graduates seem to have disappeared.

A woman stepped out from one of the rows and took her hand. It was Cheryl. "Thank you, Dinah," she said.

"But who are all these women?" Dinah asked.

"Some you already know. Some you'll meet them later," she told her and smiled.

Dinah looked around then, at their faces. One face she knew well. Angela.
When she thought about the dream the next morning, her first reaction was embarrassment at how good it had made her feel to redo her graduation. But the more she thought about what Cheryl had said about meeting the other women, the more convinced she became that the dream had been a warning to prepare her for what was coming. The reprieve was over. Greenman's case was unsolved. It was time again. She had more work to do; she was sure of it.

All day long, she was in a hyper state of vigilance—waiting for something to happen. When Mary mentioned something about her nephew probably calling Dinah that night, she nodded absently. She didn't have time to deal with a blind date right now. She would get rid of him quickly, and Mary would just have to deal with it.

She was working out when the phone rang that night.

"Hello. Is this Dinah?"

"Yes, this is Dinah."

"Hi, this is Michael Evans. I think my aunt Mary would like to set us up."

Dinah had to laugh at his polite phrasing. "That's probably the understatement of the year," she told him.

"So she's been hounding you, too, huh?"

"Five days a week for the past two months."
"I'm sorry. You're probably already sick of me, and you haven't even met me. But, in case you're not, from what Mary says, you're absolutely wonderful, and, if even a tenth of what she said about you is true, I would love to take you to dinner."

Dinah almost felt bad for him. "Look, Michael. You sound like a great guy, but I'm not really interested in dating anyone right now."

"Oh. Okay. Well, I'm sorry I bothered you then."

"It's perfectly alright. Thanks for understanding."

"No problem. But, hey, I meant what I said. So, if you change your mind and my aunt hasn't married me off yet, the dinner offer still stands."

"Thanks," she said again. "If I were to change my mind, you would be first on my list."

She hung up the phone and deleted the caller id, relieved that the conversation had gone well and the nuisance was over. Now all she had to do was deal with Mary.

The phone rang again at 3:00 a.m. She sat up in bed, trying to process the ringing. She looked at the clock and panicked. Mom? Dad? "Hello? Hello?"

No one was on the other end. She hung up the phone and settled back into bed. But as she stared into the darkness
it seemed like she could just make out the figure of a person sitting on the end of her bed. To reassure herself that she was imagining something in the darkness, she turned on the lamp next to her bed. She hadn't been imagining things. Cheryl was sitting on the end of her bed.

"You can't be here," she said. "It's not possible."

"Yet, here I am."

"You're dead."

The woman smiled. "Yes, as far as this world is concerned, I'm dead."

"So how can I see you?"

"Because the worlds are not separate," she said. "You know that."

"I'm not sure what I know anymore."

Cheryl laughed then, and the sound seemed to come from inside the walls of the room—like music from another room.

"You need to go on that date."

"You came here from the dead to tell me to go on a date?"

"It's important that you go."

Before Dinah could ask any more questions, Cheryl was gone. The spot on the comforter where she had sat was smooth, as if she had never been there.
Dinah sat there until dawn in the light of the lamp waiting for an explanation. When none came, she decided that she would have to call Michael and go on the date. That would be the only way to find out what Cheryl had meant. She would go prepared for anything. She wondered about Michael. What if he was one of the men she was meant to kill? It would be tricky because of Mary, but she could pull it off. The last few months had prepared her for this. She was ready. And if she had to run afterward, she was ready for that, too.

When Dinah asked for Michael's number the next day at work, Mary hugged her.

"I knew you would like him as soon as you heard his voice!" She declared triumphantly as she wrote down the number.

Dinah called him that night after dinner. He was surprised at her sudden change-of-heart, to say the least.

"I haven't dated since my last relationship ended," she told him." But last night, after I hung up with you, I finally realized that it was time for me to quit hiding out and get back out there."

She could hear the smile in his voice when he responded: "Well, I guess I'm just the right guy in the
right place at the right time, then. But that's okay with me."

He suggested an Italian place called Antonio's, and they agreed to meet there at 7:00 that Friday night. After Dinah hung up the phone, she made sure her gun was loaded and then laid the silencer next to it on the nightstand. She had changed since the last time. She had been angry when she had killed the first two johns. Now she wouldn't be killing just out of anger; she knew this was what she was supposed to be doing. And she wasn't alone in this. The women were helping her. That's why the visions had stopped—the women were protecting her from getting caught. And now they were telling her it was time again.
II. DOUBTING ONE BY ONE
Small Talk

Dinah arrived at the restaurant early and parked at the back of the restaurant near the kitchen doors. After giving her name to the woman at the door, she sat outside on one of the benches to wait for Michael to arrive. He pulled up about five minutes before 7:00 in a new, silver Ford 150. She hadn't pictured him driving a truck, so the vehicle caught her off guard a bit. Then again, she thought, if you're disposing of bodies, a truck may come in handy.

He looked just like the picture Mary had shown her. He was a little under 6'0, clean-shaven, with dark brown hair that seemed to want to curl. From the way his arms filled the sleeves of his dress shirt, he probably worked out. His pressed white shirt was tucked into his khaki pants, and his brown shoes looked polished. He was definitely trying to make a good impression. He had seen her as he pulled up, and now he walked toward her quickly.

"You must be Dinah. I'm Michael."

For a second, it looked like he was going to extend his hand, but then he grabbed the handle of the
restaurant's front door and held it as a group of older women came out.

When the women had passed through, he turned back to her. "I'm sorry. Have you been waiting long?"

"Just a little while. I went ahead and gave them my name to add to the wait list."

"Okay, good."

He seemed flustered that she had beaten him to the restaurant and taken care of the wait list.

"Why don't you have a seat?" she said. "There's room."

He blushed. "You'll have to excuse me. I'm just a little nervous. It's been awhile for me, too."

"How long?"

"About a year."

"Really? Do you mind if I ask why?"

"No, as long as you don't mind a bit of a sad story."

"I don't mind."

"My mom died a little over a year ago. She and I were very close, and I've been working non-stop the past months to help cope. I didn't want to date until I knew I could make it through a lasagna dinner without breaking into tears."

"Lasagna dinner?" she asked.

"That was my favorite dish she made."
Dinah glanced at the restaurant sign. "But you picked an Italian restaurant," she said.

"Oh, I've been good for the past several months; I just haven't found anyone I really wanted to share a meal with."

She nodded.

"I probably shouldn't have told you all that, but I never saw the sense in keeping stuff back. The other person's going to find out anyway, right?"

"I guess so."

"What about you? What's your sad story?" he asked.

"Just a long-term relationship that ended badly," she said.

He looked as if he would like to know more, but she didn't offer anything else.

"Well, I hereby declare the evening from here on out to be sad-story free as such sad stories have already been summarily dispensed with at the beginning of said date."

She laughed at his dramatic lowering of the imaginary scepter and said, "I concur."

They sat there chit-chatting for a few minutes more about the bizarre Ohio weather and the latest movies until the lights in Dinah's restaurant pager began flashing.
She didn't know what to make of him. He was clearly nervous, but he seemed nice enough. She hadn't experienced any images or bad feelings, even when he sat next to her on the bench. But then again, she hadn't really touched him yet.

He held the door for her as they walked into the restaurant. When she presented her pager to the young woman at the podium, she blushed and said, "I'm so sorry. We accidentally paged you by mistake."

"There's only a few more people in front of you on the list, though, and there are seats available in the bar," she added cheerily.

Dinah nodded when Michael gestured toward the bar, and they headed that way through the small crowd of people packed around the podium. As soon as they stepped into the bar area, Dinah knew that a john was close. Tiny prickles of flame were sweeping over her body. She stood at the bar behind Michael, growing dizzier by the second. She ordered a chardonnay and then turned to head toward one of the small tables. As she turned, she brushed up against a man standing slightly behind her. Suddenly she was gone. She was in the parking lot. The man was offering a ride to a drunken young woman. When she said no, he began steering toward his car anyway. She gave in and stumbled along. As
he put her into the passenger seat, she closed her eyes, and he smiled and pushed up her dress. Dinah could hear what he was thinking . . . "That's right. Let me see that young pussy I've been waiting for all night. Keep it right there, baby, so I can see it while I drive."

Michael nudged her gently, and she pushed past the man to a table.

"Everything okay?" he asked when they had sat down.

"Yeah, I just don't like being in tight spaces with lots of people," she told him. Something flashed across his eyes when she said that, and she wondered what she had just reminded him of.

"Well, hopefully, we'll get a real table soon."

She nodded and smiled, but all she could think about was the man from the line and how she would stop him from raping.

Dinah watched the bar as she sipped on her wine. What happened in the vision happened in the parking lot here tonight. The man was wearing the same clothes. She watched him order a shot of whiskey and carry it back to the tiny table in the corner. She looked around, wondering where the woman was. She and Michael had just started talking about their jobs when the pager lit up again.
On their way back to the podium, they passed her, the woman from Dinah's vision. She looked about twenty-one, very pretty, with carefully applied, heavy make-up and a dress that didn't seem to want to stay up over her chest or down over her ass. Men's eyes, young and old, followed her into the bar. To Michael's credit, he didn't even glance.

Dinah looked back into the bar as the hostess prepared to seat them. There was a small mirror in the corner between the lobby and the bar entry, and she had a clear view of the john. He was staring with disgust at the spectacle of men at the bar competing to buy the young woman a drink.

Once at the table, Dinah quickly sat in the chair that faced out into the restaurant. She needed to make sure she could see the doorway into the bar area and that Michael could not. She sat there making small talk and trying to decide how she could best connect a bullet from the gun in her purse with the small scowl line between the eyes of the john in the corner.

"So how long have you managed the store?" he asked.

"About a year now." She could pretend to go to the bathroom and lure him outside. "What about you? How long have you worked at the hospital?"
"A little longer. I moved back to the area when my mom got sick. Was Business Management what you went to school for?"

"Actually, I started out as a Political Science major." The silencer should take care of the noise factor. She would just need a place to store the body, so that it wouldn't be found until after they left the restaurant.

She resented being distracted from the john. This was insanely frustrating. She needed to get rid of Michael. There was no guarantee that if she faked being sick, he would actually leave with her. Besides, he was her employee's nephew; she couldn't just ditch him.

Michael kept talking, compelled for some reason to fill every single silence with some inane comment or question.

"I can't remember if I locked my truck. I hate when I do that." He almost jumped from his chair, fishing his keys out of his pocket. "It's new, and I'm still a little protective."

"Go ahead," she said. "I'd hate to be responsible for such a nice truck being stolen."
Date Murder

Once Michael had passed through the door, Dinah got up and went back into the bar area. The bartender was serving the young woman another drink.

Dinah waited until he was done collecting the money for the drink from the man on the woman's right before trying to get his attention. "Did I by any chance leave a cell phone in here?" she asked. "I can't remember if I brought it with me."

As the bartender looked around, she quickly scribbled a note on a cocktail napkin.

"Sorry. It's not here," he told her.

"Oh well. Thanks anyway."

Once the bartender had turned around to make more drinks and she was sure that no one was paying attention to her, Dinah walked through the tables toward the john in the back corner. She dropped the napkin on his table as she passed. When she glanced back from the bar entrance, he was holding the napkin in his hands.

Michael came back in the restaurant just as Dinah came out of the bar.
"I thought I might have left my cell phone in there," she explained.

He seemed puzzled at first, as if trying to recall the image of her taking her phone from her purse, but her smile distracted him.

When they got back to the table, Dinah made sure to appear interested in everything he said and even flirted with him a bit. By the time she excused herself to go to the bathroom, his smile seemed permanently plastered to his face.

After turning back once to confirm that Michael was still facing the back wall of the restaurant, she paused in the doorway to the bar and made eye contact with the john. He had a new shot sitting in front of him, along with her napkin note. He looked confused, but she knew he would not be able to resist. As he looked up, she smiled and mouthed, "Meet me outside," then held up two fingers. She knew that curiosity would drive him outside in less than one.

Checking Michael's back one more time, she veered from the restroom entrance to the front door and slipped outside. She was waiting around the corner of the building when the john came out. He smiled nervously at her. She beckoned to him and headed quickly toward the back of the restaurant. She didn't want anyone to see them together.
When he caught up to her by the restaurant dumpster, she welcomed him with an embarrassed smile. "Thanks for meeting me out here," she said. "My date's a total loser, but I still don't want to hurt the guy's feelings."

He smiled, as if he had no trouble understanding why she would rather be out here behind the restaurant with him.

"Dating can be a real pain," she continued. "Especially when the good ones never call." As she talked, she kept one eye on the back door of the restaurant. It was slightly ajar and an alternative rock station was blaring just over the top of the sounds of the industrial dishwasher and the loud banter between the cooks and the waitresses.

Dinah touched his arm to initiate the connection. She wanted to hear his thoughts. He was thinking that he would have remembered a looker like her. That she must have him confused with some other guy—some guy who apparently had a huge cock.

"Sorry about that. I accidentally put my pants in the laundry before I took out your number," he said. He hoped she didn't expect him to remember her name. She was hot. He wouldn't mind doing two chicks in one night. This one could be a warm-up for the little blonde in the bar. The thought
of sliding his cock into the blonde while it was still covered with the barely dried juices of this brunette got him excited. Like doing two sisters or something. "But I really wanted to call."

"I wanted you to call. I wanted to do that thing again. That thing that made you so wild before."

"Yeah, that was great." Now he knew this bitch was nuts. She couldn't even remember the guys she fucked. He would make it hurt. She wouldn't forget him.

"I could do it again if you want. Right now," she crooked her finger and looked down at his crotch, then ducked behind the dumpster. She pulled the gun from her purse. On the walk to the back of the restaurant, she had screwed the silencer on and laid the gun at an angle in the still opened purse. The purse had been hanging off her shoulder, behind her when he got to the back. Now she grasped the steel in her hand.

He had always known stuff like this happened. It had just never happened to him. This whore was going to fuck him in the parking lot while her date waited inside. He would make sure she had trouble walking back in. He stood there a moment, reaching down to make sure that everything was working right.
"Come on, slowpoke. I have a date to get back to," she called softly.

When he came around the dumpster, the gun was still in her purse at her side. With her right hand, she unzipped his pants. "Let's get you out of there, before you bust through."

"Oh my. What's this?" she asked in mock amazement as she pulled down his underwear. She lowered herself to her knees on the cement, careful not to lean into any of the pieces of glass, careful not to let go of him.

That's right. Suck my dick, you crazy cunt, he thought.

He grabbed her by the back of the head and tried to pull her head toward him, but she resisted, and he liked that. He was looking down at her. She smiled up at him and moved forward as if to take him in her mouth. He leaned his head back and closed his eyes. She dropped his penis from her hand and pulled the gun out of the opened purse at her side.

"Surprise," she whispered as she fired into him.

She watched calmly as his eyes blared open in shock, and he fell back against the dumpster.

She had come to love the surprised looks on their face—that look of confusion when they realized they were
the victim, the one on the receiving end of the violence. Just for good measure, she fired into his forehead, as well.

As she walked away from the dumpster, she glanced back to make sure that no stray body part had managed to slip out of its arranged position and reveal her work. She examined her arms. There were a few streaks on her right arm from where she had grazed the blood slowly soaking through his shirt, but her hands were clean—not even a drop. Maybe that was a sign.

The front of the dumpster was lined with bags that were too heavy to make it into the opening at the top. In comic strips and sitcoms it's always the boy who takes out the garbage. It had been that way in her family. Girls dusted. Lemon-scented polish was more acceptable on their fingers than the juices of rotting fruit and bloody meat trays that soaked through the bottom of the cheap trash bags. Leaving the body behind the dumpster seemed sloppy. Like her brother Josh throwing the white kitchen trash bag at the large can in the garage and pretending not to notice when his throw fell short or his aim failed. But this body must have weighed at least 200. There was no way she could lift it into the dumpster.
She scanned the parking lot to make sure no one could see her and then quickly walked out from behind the back of the restaurant. Anyone noticing her checking her watch would think she was running late for a date. Actually she was checking to see how long she had left her dinner date waiting. Eight minutes. Her brother used to ask her to watch the clock as he dashed to empty all the household trash cans into the large can in the garage and then wheel the can to the curb. His record was six minutes.

When she ducked back into the Ladies Room, the only occupant was the young woman from the bar. She was adjusting her cleavage in the mirror.

The woman shot Dinah an embarrassed look. "This dress was a mistake," she explained.

Dinah looked at the woman, ignoring the breasts spilling out of the top of the dress. "It could have been," she replied.

The woman stared at her for a moment, trying to determine how to take the comment. Dinah placidly returned the stare and then turned back to the mirror. A few seconds later, the woman grabbed her purse from the counter and left.

Alone in the bathroom, Dinah wiped the sweat from above her top lip. What little makeup she wore was still
intact, but she reapplied the pale mauve lipstick anyway. The silver lipstick case fit snugly next to the 38 snub nose revolver. The silencer required more room, but like the lipstick, it was indispensable. She wished she had room for a hairbrush, but the travel sized brush always broke with three strokes of her thick brown hair. Her hair had become disheveled during the dragging, and her pale cheeks were slightly flushed.

She closed her eyes and willed herself to look as if she had been standing at the bathroom counter engaging in girl talk for the past two minutes, willed herself to be back in that world of first dates, nice guys, and polite dinner conversation.

When she slid back into her seat at the table, Michael looked relieved, as if he had begun to think he had been ditched. At the sight of her, his blue eyes relaxed, and the lines in his forehead disappeared.

"I'm sorry it took so long." Dinah smiled. "I was helping a woman with her dress."

He smiled back. "No problem. I long ago accepted that the women's bathroom holds mysteries beyond my limited male understanding." He leaned forward slightly. "I am a little curious as to what exactly goes on in there, though."
At the close distance, Dinah noticed the tiny strands of gray scattered throughout his dark, wavy hair. She wondered if the gray bothered him. She felt as if she was high, and he was high with her. She was glad he was there—someone to share the rush with.

"What happens in the Ladies Room stays in the Ladies Room," she said mysteriously.

When he laughed, she was surprised to realize he had one of those laughs that it's impossible to hear and not want to join in—to find out what the hell is so funny. She hadn't heard a laugh like that in a long time. What are you doing with me?

The waiter interrupted her thoughts. "Your dinners should be out any minute. Is there anything else I can get for you?" he asked. "Perhaps another glass of wine?" He, too, seemed relieved Dinah had returned, thankful he would not have to ask the awkward question of what to do with the pasta she had ordered.

Michael looked at Dinah. "Will you think I'm a lush if I have another?"

"Not if I have one, too."

"Another glass of merlot and one more chardonnay as well, please."

"Certainly."
When the waiter placed the merlot in front of Michael, Dinah stared enviously at the glass.

"What is that look about?" he asked.

"I wish I had ordered the merlot," she confessed.

He looked devastated, as if the success of the date hinged on the drink order. "I'm sorry. I just assumed you'd want another chardonnay since that was what you were already drinking," he paused but then hurried to add. "I should have asked you. Let me get the waiter back over here."

He started to lift his arm to signal the waiter, but she placed her hand over his to stop him. It was the first time she had touched him, and her whole body reacted. Like the touch of his skin was a shot of hard liquor downed in one gulp. She quickly pulled her hand away, embarrassed by the attraction between them. She wondered if he had felt it.

"It's okay. It's my own fault," she told him.

"Actually, it's pretty stupid."

"Tell me."

"You can’t laugh." Had she really just said that? She briefly considered getting the gun out of her purse and shooting herself, but he had somehow managed to look at her as if she'd said something intriguing.
"Okay."

"I don't even like chardonnay," she confessed. "I just got in the habit of ordering white wine because I'm such a klutz. I always seem to spill stuff on myself."

He gestured toward her blouse. "But you're wearing black."

"I know. That's the stupid part. At the last minute I changed into this outfit from a white dress, but when we ordered I forgot that I had changed."

"You changed?" He was fighting back a huge smile.

"Yeah." It had been nice for a while to play this little dating game, but now it was over. He clearly thought she had changed because she was nervous about the date. She knew the only reason the dress had come off was because she had imagined the blood from a gun wound spreading across the silk. They were living in two different worlds.

An hour and several glasses of wine later, they left. Dinah looked in the bar area as they passed. The young woman from the bathroom was talking to the man on her right, while the man on her left bought her a drink. The glass in front of her was empty, and she was taking the last sip of a Cosmopolitan. Dinah scanned the room. It was okay. The woman was safe now. At least for now.
As he walked her to her car, the wind carried the pungent odor from the dumpster, and they both glanced at the back of the restaurant. She thanked him for helping her "get out there" again, and he thanked her for letting him be the one. As he turned to go, she quickly gave him a kiss on the cheek. He seemed stunned, and she laughed as he headed slowly back to his truck.
Called

By the time she got home, she was mad at herself for impulsively giving Michael that kiss. There was no use in leading him on. He had served his purpose. She had killed the john at the restaurant. There was no use in pretending she was normal. The dead body behind the dumpster would be found soon. Either some of the restaurant workers would use the dumpster for cover when they decided to share a joint and discover the body then, or, when the dumpster was emptied that week, the truck driver would notice the body on the ground.

She wondered if Michael followed the news and if he would call her to say, "Hey, you know that restaurant we just went to? Well, some guy got shot there the same night." It was a great conversation starter. She would have to gasp and say something appropriate like "Oh, my God! You mean the body was there the whole time we were eating dinner? How awful! Dumped like trash." Hopefully, Michael didn't follow the news.

She wondered if he would even call. He hadn't said he would. It was just as well if he didn't. She couldn't get
involved with anyone, especially not a guy like him—someone her mom would call "one of the good ones."

Although her mom had encouraged her to start dating again after graduation, she had also frequently reminded Dinah to "Be careful" because "You know that your judgment on men isn't exactly the best." The words used to make Dinah feel as if she should just lie down and permanently spread her legs, to save everyone a whole lot of time and trouble. But when she thought about her mother's words now, she wanted to laugh at the irony. Her judgment on men was amazingly accurate these days.

The phone rang as she was changing clothes for the night. The caller id read "Michael Evans." She wondered what could have possibly happened in the last hour that required a phone call. Oh, shit. Had the body already been found?

"Hello?"

"Hey, it's Michael. I just wanted to tell you again that I had a really great time tonight."

She relaxed. "I did, too. Thanks again for dinner."

It was a really good dinner.

"I was a little flustered there at the end, and I didn't ask you what I wanted to ask you."

"What was that?"
"Would it be too soon to ask you out for dinner and a movie?"

"Dinner and a movie. I don't know. I'll have to think about that one." She couldn't help being flattered that he wanted to see her again, but she also knew that anything more than one dinner date was impossible.

"Oh. Okay..."

She could almost feel him slump.

What could it hurt? "Give me a call Monday. I just need to double check my work schedule for the week."

"Great. I'll call you Monday."

"Bye." She couldn't help smiling. He had called her an hour after their first date ended just to ask her if she wanted to go out again.

But seconds later, she realized how ridiculous this was. She had just killed a man on their first date—while Michael was sitting at the table waiting on her. What the hell was she doing? She killed men; she didn't date them.

That night she dreamed. A surreal dream in which she came home from a hard day's work of killing rapists, and Michael was waiting for her with dinner on the table—the washer ready just in case any blood had gotten on her clothes. In a bizarre way, it had been a happy dream. The
dream convinced her that she would not answer the phone when Michael called on Monday.

Her mother called her the next morning at seven. "Dinah, tomorrow the congregation is honoring your father for twenty-five years of service. It's a surprise, and I know it would make him so happy if you were there."

"Your brother's too far away to come, of course," she added.

"Mom, why you didn't tell me about this earlier? It's an hour's drive."

She sensed her mother pursing her lips and preparing for the attack. "Your father never asks for anything for himself. Just gives and gives. (Pause) Especially to his children. (Pause) The least you can do is show up to see him honored for his years of service."

It was too early in the morning for this shit. "Fine, Mom. If saying that I'll be there will end this conversation, I'll be there."

"Not 'saying' you'll be there, 'promising' to be there and then being there."

"I promise to be at church tomorrow, Mom. Right now though, I'm going back to sleep." Dinah hung up the phone quickly. If she had stayed on the phone a second longer, her mother would have used the confidence from her small
victory to launch all all-out assault. The woman could be like a shark sometimes, following the small drops of blood to the wounded flesh.

She stayed in bed until noon, doing her best not to think about anything. Inevitably though, memories of attending church as a little girl began floating through her mind. The ruffled dresses, sitting on the front pew with her mom and watching her father, the feeling of specialness at being the preacher's daughter changing over the years into resentment at the never-ending lecture on how everything she did and said reflected on their family and could be used to hurt her father. She had stopped going to church when she was a teenager, amidst arguments between her mother and father about what to "do" with her.

She had gone back to church briefly after college graduation, though. Gone back to try to recover that feeling of safety, the feeling that "God is in control, so everything is right with the world," the feeling that "Everything happens for a reason." One of the elders had taken Dinah aside during that time and told her that "the strong" are always tested by Satan. It was to God’s glory that people suffered, he had assured her. Dinah had smiled and nodded, trying to look appreciative, but she knew that
if indeed God had been testing her, she had failed. Unlike Job, she had not become more righteous.

But even after two more elders personally assured her that everything horrible that happened was God’s will, she had not stopped going. She needed to feel forgiven, and church was where she had been taught to confess her sins. She had stopped going to church for the second time in her life after an older woman in the congregation shared with Dinah how God had used "the terrible thing that happened to me" to make her become a better person.

Ruth had beautiful white hair and always wore pastel colored suits in springtime, with matching hats and low-heeled pumps. She prepared the communion trays, baking the tasteless unleavened bread and pouring the grape juice carefully into the tiny little plastic cups. Her husband walked her down the aisle every Sunday morning to the third pew back on the right. At the end of their conversation, when Dinah could barely stand to listen to any more, Ruth had motioned to her husband and whispered, “Praise God that Ed was willing to love me anyway.”

Dinah had not been back to worship since. She could not accept that the God whom she had come to know through her father would accept the sufferings of millions of women as a reflection of His glory—was pleased with the way in
which these battered and bruised women managed to carry on with their lives and even forgive the ones who had hurt them—welcomed the ones who had died from their bruises with pleasure—happy those who had been left behind could do something good with what had happened.

Dinah was sure of little about God, but this she knew: Everything that happened on this earth did not serve His purpose. Either her God didn't exist, or He had failed in his creative experiment. If her God existed, He had lost control of His world—it had split into two. There were two worlds existing side by side on this earth. One was the world of normalcy—where everyone went about their daily lives oblivious to evil, content in thinking of Heaven and Hell and all their inhabitants as far removed from their human existence. In the other world, though, evil and good were at war, and evil was winning. She had seen that world, been surrounded by the darkness and felt the breath of its creatures, and she knew that redemption could not come until that world was conquered. She understood why God's Son had descended into hell to save His people.

Tomorrow morning would be the first time Dinah had been to worship since she had chosen to re-enter the darkness, since she had chosen to kill, and her return would be a test to see if the path she was on led to
redemption or to damnation. The place of worship was sacred to Dinah's family, and she carried this idea of the sacred place with her still. If she could be at peace while at worship in the sacred place, she would have no more doubts, no more guilt.

But it wasn't God she was worried about as she closed her eyes that night. She was worried about her father. About catching his eye during the sermon and having her life revealed to him. He had spoken so often about feeling the Spirit at work in him when he spoke—about looking out into the church and knowing somehow which people most needed to hear about the love and forgiveness of God that day. Often people came up to him after church and said, "Pastor, it was like you were talking just to me."

She was terrified to think what it would do to her father to see her as she really was—to see the gun in her hands. For him, the rules were the same now as they had always been. He believed in one world, both spiritual and material, ruled by an omnipotent, loving, and just God. For him, the darkness had already been conquered. He would tell her that the darkness was of her own making. Maybe he was right. She knew that she would one day pay a price for what she was doing. The women wouldn't be able to protect her forever. Yet as she thought of entering the place of
worship, her fear of prison, death, and even hell paled in comparison to her fear of her father's eyes.
One by One

When Dinah pulled into the parking lot of the church building the next morning, she had two feelings—guilt and anger. She struggled to comprehend how she could feel so guilty for forsaking beliefs she had rejected. She felt guilty for failing her father yet simultaneously angry that he had failed her. Logically, the two failures should cancel each other, but they didn't.

The rain began to fall as she sat there staring out the windshield at the nicely-dressed church-goers entering the building to shake hands with her father. It was one of those moments when she just couldn't help but look up at the sky and think she was being sent a message. If the rain had been accompanied by thunder and lightening, it would have been a message of divine disapproval and anger, but the rain softly falling on the windshield seemed more suggestive of sadness than anger.

This is where lunacy begins. When you start thinking God is speaking to you, that nature's events are planned according to your personal road to salvation.
She turned on the windshield wipers at high speed and watched the rain splatter. The squeaking of the frantic wipers against the nearly dry glass almost drowned out the sound of the two small children screaming two cars over. She looked over and laughed. The mother was turned around in the driver's seat, and Dinah could tell from the pointed finger at the end of her raised arm that she had just delivered a stern lecture on the appropriate attitude for church. Something most likely that ended with "We are here to be thankful and worship God, damn it! So be thankful and worship, or you're both going to get it!"

In a few minutes, after the crying of the children had softened to a whimper and the mother had checked her hair in the mirror, the happy family would enter the church, dressed in their best expressions of thankfulness and devotion.

When the mother turned in her direction, Dinah quickly flipped down the visor mirror and pretended to be checking her make-up. It was the wrong thing to do. Something was missing in her eyes—had been for a long time. When she was a child, her mother had tested her for "true illness" by looking in her eyes, rather than placing a hand on her forehead. "If the sparkle's gone, I know you're really sick," she always said.
Staring into her eyes, Dinah knew the sparkle had been gone for a long time. She also knew that her mother had been right.

She wondered if it was possible to fake sparkle. She had lied with such ease to Michael and the john the other night. Now all she had to do was lie to her parents and a bunch of old people, all of whom desperately wanted to believe, despite all evidence to the contrary, that she was still their beloved Minister Grayson's little "angel," the girl whose thick hair always escaped from the ribbons, who always won the scripture contests and who always brought the most friends to Vacation Bible School.

Dinah opened the car door. Church would be starting soon, and her mother was probably scanning the auditorium for her face right now. The rain had stopped. The sun seemed to confirm the reality of her situation—the condemned preacher's daughter entering the house of the Lord.

But she had wasted so much time sitting in her car that the Sanctuary doors were already closed. A white-haired man in an outdated blue suit opened the door for her with a smile. "Good to see you back, Miss Dinah," he said softly as she went through the door.
She turned back and smiled. "Thanks, Walter. It's good to see you, too."

He must be eighty by now, but he still smiled like he meant it. His wife had died five years ago of breast cancer. They had been married over fifty years. Still, he smiled.

Heads turned as Dinah walked down the side aisle. She had planned to sit in the back, but, now that people were staring, she knew sitting in the back would bring even more attention to her than sitting up front by her mother. Things were tense enough with her mother; no reason to make things worse. Refusing to sit in the family pew was tantamount to public airing of the family problems—the unforgivable sin.

Her mother flashed a beautiful smile as Dinah sat down, no evidence of her displeasure at her daughter's tardiness apparent on her face. Her father leaned slightly forward from his spot on the other side of his wife and winked, as if to say, "Don't mind all the staring. What else are they going to do when a beautiful woman walks in?"

Dinah had decided to wear the off-white silk dress she had opted against on her date with Michael. Was it naive of her to think she would be safe inside her father's church; that a john could not possibly be lurking among these good
Christian men? In fact, the possibility had not even occurred to her until the Sanctuary door had swung open. What would she do if someone here prompted the visions? Follow them to the bathroom and stow their body in the baptistery, to be found by her father when the smell began wafting over the flower arrangements in the baptistery window?

To her relief, though, no visions came, and she mouthed the words to the old songs, along with her mother, who never felt comfortable singing above a whisper in public. When her father's voice would falter on a wrong note, she and her mother would look at one another and smile, peaceful for the moment in their mutual love of this man who so loved the Lord.

Soon it was time for the communion trays to be passed. An elder, an amazingly white man with a bald head and a paunch held precariously between two suspenders, got up to speak. He talked about Jesus' love for the people, about how Jesus had once used seven loaves and a few small fish to feed thousands of people. He emphasized how Jesus had handed a basket to each of his disciples, and each time a disciple reached in the basket there was always another piece of food to hand out; each time a person reached his or her hand into the basket, there was always another piece
of food. The imagery, that one by one Jesus fed the people, was powerful. And Dinah could not help but think that most seemingly overwhelming problems are conquered in little pieces, person by person, one by one.

As he offered the prayer for the bread, Dinah bent her neck in the wave of bowed heads that swept across the room, only to jerk it back up a moment later. "Good to see you this morning, David." The soft words of Walter sounded as if they were coming through the microphone up front, but Dinah knew that only she had heard them. And only she heard the reply: "Thanks, Walter. I had a bit of car trouble on the way."

Something was coming. The sound of the bottom of the Sanctuary door scraping across the frazzled carpet was deafening. The multiple perfumes of the women around her rose in a cloud, and she nearly choked. She watched the latecomer sit down at the end of the pew next to her. He was in his forties, skinny, with close-cropped hair that looked like it had been dyed black to cover the gray. His narrow paisley tie hadn't been in style in years, but it hung down neatly over the buttons of his crisp white shirt.

He had made it just in time for the communion. As he passed the tray to her, the vision came, like a camera had suddenly been plugged into the computer that was her brain.
She saw a woman sitting on the ground and laughing. She was staring at the sky as the man next to her peered through a telescope. Then the woman was lying down on a blanket. Her eyes came open for a few seconds when his moans grew louder. Later, she was looking at herself in the mirror as if trying to see through a fog. Finally, she held her panties in her hand and raised them hesitantly to her nose.

When the vision ended, Dinah realized she was still holding the tray, and the man next to her was staring at her. She took a piece of the bread with shaking hands and passed the tray to her mother. It took her several seconds to lift the bread to her mouth, and she felt her mother's eyes on her. She gulped down the small piece and bowed her head again, as if in prayer. To many there she probably looked the picture of repentance, head bowed during the communion, tears welled in her eyes. When the tray of cups was passed, she barely raised her head. As the warm grape juice ran down her throat, she thought of the woman in her vision, drinking the wine. She coughed, and her mother patted her on the back.

"Be right back," she whispered.

Still coughing sporadically, she made her way past her mother and father and back down the aisle toward the Sanctuary doors. She looked back before she left. The man
named David was still seated, head bowed respectfully and eyes closed. She felt the bread and the wine coming back up, along with the bile, and barely managed to choke it back down. One by one.

"Walter, please tell my mother and father that I am not feeling well and decided to go home."

"Sure thing, Miss Dinah, You take care of yourself and come back to see us soon, okay?"

"I will, Walter."

She hurried to her car, almost expecting to see her mother running after her to lecture her on the impropriety of leaving while people were still taking the Lord's Supper.

The rain began falling again just as she opened her car door, and she wondered what that meant.
"Beautiful"

The next evening, she woke to the ringing of the phone. Where had she put that thing? She ran through the apartment trying in her drowsy state to track the ringing to its source. She had come home from work and fallen asleep on the couch. After four rings, she finally saw the phone lying on the kitchen counter next to the mail. Knowing the answering machine was about to click on, she quickly answered the phone without looking at the number.

"Hello!"

"Dinah, hey, this is Michael."

"Oh, hi." Her annoyance at not checking the number came through in her voice.

"Um. I was wondering if you had had the chance to check your schedule."

"Check my schedule?"

"Remember? For our dinner and a movie date?"

"Oh, right. It looks like I'm going to be pretty tied up for a while," she lied.

"Okay. Well, why don't you give me a call when you have some free time?"
"Sure. Sounds good. I'll call you."

She was shocked at how easily she had gotten rid of him and even more shocked by the vague feeling of disappointment that he had let himself be gotten rid of that quickly.

A minute later, the phone rang again. It was him.

"Hello."

"Listen, I'm sorry to bother you again, but I need to know something."

"Okay." Where was this going?

"Do I have a shot with you or not?"

She decided to let him rephrase.

He did. "I mean, I really like you, but I don't want to waste your time or my time by pursuing this if you don't feel the same."

She couldn't help it. She was impressed. It took a lot of courage to just put it all out there like that. "Things in my life are complicated right now, Michael. Really complicated."

"No offense, Dinah, but that's not what I asked you."

She smiled, in spite of herself. "Yes, I like you."

"One more question then: Will you call me, or should I call you again?"
This was her way out, and she liked him more because he was giving her one. "I'll call you."

"I'll talk to you soon, then."

She laughed at the undertone of hesitancy in his confident words.

"You have a beautiful laugh, Dinah. In fact, since I didn't say it on our date, I'll say it now: You really are beautiful."

"I'll call you." She hung up abruptly.

Why did he have to say that? Then again, how could Michael possibly know she cringed at the word beautiful? It wasn't the only word that made her cringe, but it was one of them.

He had told her to open her eyes, told her that he would put the pillow back over her face if she didn't. Then he had looked her up and down, trailing his finger over her breasts and down her body, drinking her in.

"You are beautiful," he told her. Then, still straddling her, he had reached over to the dresser and grabbed a camera. "These are just for me, because you're beautiful. Unless you try to get me in trouble. Then, I'll have to mail them to your parents' home, to your father's church, to all your friends at the college."

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As he snapped the pictures, he instructed her to pose, to smile, to spread her legs further. She did it all, with tears streaming down her face, knowing she would not make it out the door of the bedroom before he caught her again. Knowing that her complicity in her own humiliation would help convince him that it was safe to let her go.

When he was done taking the pictures, he put the camera down and stroked her face. "You really are beautiful," he said, before he raped her again.
Will

She didn't want to call her mother. In fact, she had been avoiding her phone calls since she had nearly run out of the church that day. But she had to find out more about the john, and her mother would know everything. Maybe a surprise visit with questions woven into the dinner conversation? No. She would just treat this john like the others. From that devout look on his face Sunday morning, he just might be the type who actually showed up for Wednesday night Bible study.

On Wednesday morning, she called the car rental place and asked them to send over a mid-sized sedan. The car was at her apartment in an hour. She worked until 5:30 and then headed toward the church building. On the way, she slipped on a blonde wig and some dark sunglasses. Cliché. But it still worked. She couldn't afford to be recognized by any of the church members. She sat in a parking lot across from the church building entrance and watched as everyone arrived. Her mother pulled in at exactly a quarter 'til 7—like clockwork. Celeste always said that fifteen minutes was just enough time for polite conversation but not nearly
enough time for impolite intrusion. Her dad had been inside the building getting ready for the night's class long before Dinah arrived.

At five 'til she started to get a little anxious. She needed the john to show. She had no idea if the rape had already happened or was yet to happen. And even if the rape she saw in her vision had already happened, another woman could already be at risk. The only other option was to quiz her mother. As Dinah weighed the risk versus the high cost of a lengthy personal conversation with her mother, the john drove by. Exactly on time.

She watched him get out of his tan Ford Taurus and stride, Bible in hand, into the building. He was dressed nearly identically to the way he had been dressed on Sunday, same pressed slacks and shirt, narrow tie hanging straight down over the buttons. The word that came to Dinah's mind as she watched him walk with measured, even strides into the church building was "meticulous," and she wondered if he was meticulous in every area of his life.

While she waited for the Bible study to end, Dinah found her thoughts straying to her childhood. What would Mrs. Gramercy at the Living Spirit Academy have thought if Dinah had written "assassin" or "hit-woman" in the blank next to the question about future profession? Just writing
"lawyer" and "President" had caused enough stir as it was. Gramercy had broken down in tears one time just because Dinah had told her that she had no intention of inviting everyone in the class to her birthday party. Dinah listened outside the door during the parent-teacher meeting and was shocked to hear the battle-worn matron sob as she asked Dinah's parents how such a wonderful family could produce such a strange, strong-willed child. The question had not gone over well with Dinah's parents, and both had reacted with anger. Later that night, however, Dinah had heard her mother pose a similar question to her father as they lay in bed.

Dinah tried to ignore the thoughts of what would happen to her father and mother if she was ever caught, but this job was too close to home. This john attended her father's church. By going after him, she was potentially putting herself and her parents in danger. They didn't deserve that.

She had almost decided to leave when people began filing into the parking lot. There were plenty of good reasons not to do what she did. She had gone over every one of them in her head, but not a single one changed the fact that she had been sent the vision—and that what she was
doing was necessary to correct the imbalance and to stop the darkness from seeping over into the light.

The john came out of the building alongside her mother, and Dinah froze. "Get away from her," she yelled. But they continued talking, oblivious to the woman in the car across the street, Celeste smiling on cue at the end of every sentence that came out of the john's mouth.

Finally, Dinah's mother got in her car. The john watched her drive off, standing in the parking lot with his Bible clutched to his chest. Dinah shivered. She realized that his thoughts were coming to her—she could see them, a green cloud of stench wafting across the parking lot and through the window of her car. No. This wasn't supposed to happen. She hadn't even touched him... But the woman who gave birth to her had. Just before she had got in her car, she had held his hand.

He was imagining her mother unconscious beneath him, imagining what a triumph it would be to make love to the minister's wife. He never ever hurt women. He just put them to sleep. Asleep, they could not succumb to the temptation of the flesh. Asleep, they could lie there peacefully while he went about the dirty business of man. He made love to these women in the way that God intended. He had heard the pastor talk once about the love between man and wife.
believed that both man and woman should enjoy the act of sexual intercourse. David knew better. Sex was a necessary act to spread the righteous man's seed. The minister's wife was probably too old to have a baby. She would just be an example.

Dinah's hands gripped harder on the wheel. He actually believed that raping these women was God's will. She started the car and waited for him to pull out of the parking lot, anxious to begin her work. But as she watched him drive by, singing to himself, she couldn't follow him. She couldn't do it. It wasn't the risk; it was the realization of what they shared. Deep inside her she believed that the killing of these men was what God wanted her to do. She was every bit as loony as him. God condoned murder no more than he condoned rape.

But the visions. Where did the visions come from? If Cheryl was dead, how could she communicate with Dinah, without God's knowledge, without His permission? Why had Dinah been given this ability if she was not meant to use it? And what about the story of Dinah? The men who followed God avenged the rape of their sister by killing an entire clan. They had not been punished. No words of recrimination from God were written down regarding them. Her father once told her God only expects us to do the best we can in the
world we live in. In her world, murder was the best she could do. Sometimes people must die so that others may live. The innocent sacrifice had already been made. It was time for the guilty to die.

She could still catch him. He wasn't driving that fast. She pulled out of the parking lot and sped through two intersections before she saw him just ahead. Good. He hadn't turned off the main road yet. One by one.

He lived in a modest home in a quiet suburban neighborhood—the kind where the biggest neighborhood problem is the people who inexplicably prefer parking along the street rather than in their own driveways. The john parked inside his immaculate garage. Before the door closed completely, she noted all the boxes stacked neatly along the sides and the large telescope leaning against the outermost tower of boxes. Judging from the number of boxes, he was a collector.

One of the key pieces of evidence at the trial was the two pictures he had taken of Dinah. She had told the detective at the hospital to look for the camera. She wasn't even thinking about a trial at the time; she just hated the thought of those pictures existing—of being passed around, mailed to her home or her father's church, or posted on the internet.
She was terrified he had done something with them or the camera before the police arrived to arrest him. And the first search of his bedroom had turned up no camera. When the detective told her the news, she had panicked, and the desperation in her voice had convinced him to look again. The second time they found it. The film was developed, and the four pictures of her lying on the bed nude were found at the end of a roll of film devoted to pictures of the rapist at a Pearl Jam concert.

The defense had attempted to use the photos to support their version of events. According to them, the photos clearly showed her willing participation in the "adventurous" sexual events of that night. They argued that if she had truly been in the act of being raped, she would have bolted for the door as soon as he picked up the camera. She certainly never would have posed so "seductively."

He had told her to "look sexy," but luckily, the terror and pain in her eyes was obvious to anyone who looked beyond her pose and forced smile. Still, it had been humiliating, sitting there while all the jurors stared at the photographs. She could tell that some of them, especially the men, wanted to ignore the look in her eyes and buy the defense's story. Condemning a whore who poses
for pornographic shots is easier than admitting that their own wives, girlfriends, and daughters could be forced to pose like that. Why didn't she try to run? They needed that question answered more than any other, but only someone who had lived through it can truly understand the answer.

Ultimately, a stash of similar photos had been discovered, and the police had identified several of the women. Only one admitted what had happened and agreed to come forward. The rest had worked too long and hard to forget what had happened to admit it now. But that stack of photos was Dinah's first exposure to the collector—the rapist, who, like many serial killers, keeps mementos of all the people he hurts.

Tonight, as she stared at the boxes disappearing with the closing of the garage door, she wondered which ones contained a "stack of photos." Someone who kept that much stuff would not have been able to resist keeping something from each of the women that he raped. Then again, the collection might be out in the open, in the house. After all, he probably wouldn't feel the need to hide his collection because he believed that what he was doing was God's will. Each thing he took from a woman was the equivalent of a jewel in his heavenly crown.
She decided to drive around to waste the little time left until it was fully dark. She needed the cover of darkness; the neighborhood was small, and people might notice an unfamiliar car or face. Shortly after ten, she parked and began her walk. The older couples out for a stroll and the kids playing ball in the yard had all gone inside. She planned to sneak in through the back door. But as she approached the house, the garage door began to rise. Shit. He was going somewhere.

Just before she ducked around the side of the house, she noted that the telescope was gone. Maybe it was with him in the car. If so, that meant that he was going for a night peek at the stars. This could be the night she had seen in her vision. She walked quickly back to her car as he drove down the street.

Dinah followed him out into the country, keeping just close enough to maintain sight of his tail lights. She was both worried and relieved that other cars were on the road. Their presence helped her remain unnoticed by the john but also increased the chances that her car could be placed in the area.

She began to notice several cars pulled off on the side of road. Some had binoculars; others had telescopes. Something "astronomical" must be happening tonight. Dinah
just hoped her john liked his privacy when he gazed into the heavens.

Soon, the other cars dwindled to nothing, and he pulled off onto a small dirt road. She continued on until she came to a dense grove of trees on the side of the road. She would leave her car there. Anyone who passed it would simply think she was another star gazer. Walking back along the main road would be dangerous.

She grabbed her small flashlight from the trunk and set off. When she approached the road that he had turned on, she turned off her flashlight. Once her eyes had adjusted to the darkness, she made her way to a hiding place behind some large bushes. She could hear him singing softly to himself. She knew the words to the tune by heart.

*Some glad morning when this life is o'er, I'll fly away.*

*To a home on God's celestial shore, I'll fly away.*

*I'll fly away, O Glory, I'll fly away.*

*When I die, Hallelujah, bye and bye, I'll fly away.*

"I'll Fly Away" had been one of her favorites when she was a little girl because she loved to imagine herself with wings soaring up through the clouds. It was oddly appropriate now. Maybe God still did send signs.

She could just make him out, bending over the telescope less than twenty feet away. Should she announce
herself or try to sneak up on him? Would he be preoccupied enough with whatever was in the sky to not hear her footsteps?

The decision was made for her when she heard a car approaching. If he looked up, she would announce herself as a fellow gazer. If he remembered her from that Sunday, so much the better. It would be that much easier to get close to him. If he remained intent on the telescope, she would use the noise of the car passing to muffle the sound of her steps. Regardless, she would make her move when the car passed.

He didn't look up until she was three steps away, reaching behind her back for the gun stuffed in the top of her pants.

"Beautiful night for a meteor shower, don't you think?"

She dropped her arms down to her sides. Would he recognize her as the preacher's daughter?

"Yes, it is."

"It's okay. I know why you're here. I'm not scared of dying. I knew someone would be sent to kill me—to stop my work. I knew it was you when I saw you in church that day. You and I are a lot alike. Both earthly warriors in a spiritual battle."
Her anger swirled inside her, rushing to her head. They were not the same. Not by a long shot. She stepped in front of the telescope.

"I named a star for each of them, you know. When you find a new star, they let you do that." He sighed contentedly. "Their own little piece of heaven."

She aimed her gun at the end of telescope, but her hand faltered a second as she processed what he had just told her. His mementos were not tucked away in boxes: they were displayed in the sky for everyone with a decent telescope and a star catalogue to see. He had made the rapes of these women part of the heavens. And now he wanted to die looking at his collection. She steadied her hand. She hoped he would see the bullet coming—that he would die looking into lead.

"Maybe they'll let you name the fires in hell," she told him as she walked away.
Chance

On the drive home, she couldn't get what the john had said out of her mind. He thought she was just like him—only on a different side. And the same thought had occurred to her as she sat in the parking lot earlier that day. Had she confined herself to a world in which insanity and violence were the norm? She was supposed to be protecting the other world, not cutting herself off from it completely. What if she got sucked in too deep and could never get out again?

When she got home, she tried to turn off her thoughts by turning on the television. Tonight she craved reruns of the shows she had watched as a kid—things like Happy Days, Cheers, and The Cosby Show. She wanted that comforting feeling of normalcy that she had known as a child. Back then, thirty had seemed old, and fifty had seemed close to death. She had been unable to imagine herself at these ages. Now, at 24, she struggled to imagine her life at 40. Would she just keep killing until she got caught? What if she never got caught? Would she wake up one day and find that no one had been raped—that her services were no longer required? Was going back to a normal life even an option?
A part of her wished the visions had never come—wished she had a normal life again, even if it was a pretend one. She wondered if it was better to live in the happy world full of denial. Sometimes, when she was washing the dishes, buying groceries, or smiling at the sight of a child holding hands with his mother, she even felt normal again. At those times, she was sure that it wasn’t too late for her. She could still go back to that other world.

What if everything really did work together for good? Maybe Michael wasn't just the path to another john. Maybe he was a way out. She hadn't seen Cheryl or any of the other women since the night Cheryl told her to go on the date. Maybe she was meant to stop that night. To kill one last john and then live happily ever after with her "good, Christian man." What if Michael was God's way of telling her that she could still live in that normal world—that she didn't have to spend the rest of her life alone—that something good could come out of the things that had happened to her?

Her father had once told her that the people we meet, the people we choose to love, are opportunities given by God for us to choose who we want to be.

"Did you know I almost married another woman before I met your mother?" he had once asked her.
She had been shocked. "No, of course not," she told him.

"I did," he said. "Her name was Elizabeth, and I loved her very much."

"What happened?"

"I realized that she would not strengthen my relationship with God—would not be the best helpmate in the ministry."

"So you just broke it off with her?"

"Yes. And a year later, I met your mother and knew she was the one who would help me be the person I wanted to be—that God wanted me to be."

What if Michael was Dinah's opportunity to choose to be a different, a better woman? What if he was her way back into the world where people slept without nightmares, believed that good was more powerful than evil, and taught their children that violence was not the answer?

Maybe the visions would stop coming if she chose to return to the normal world. Maybe God was giving her a choice. She tried to imagine her life without the gift. Being able to walk down a crowded street, eat at a restaurant, have a few drinks in a bar—all without any flashes of recognition, unsolicited images of violence. Without the gift, she would no longer be responsible. She
could go through life without ever feeling the need to kill.

She didn't want to be like David, to live in that world anymore.

She looked at the clock. 10:30. She picked up the phone.

"Sorry to call you so late, Michael, but I was wondering if I could still take you up on the offer for dinner and a movie."

The two days since Dinah's late-night call had passed too quickly; her thoughts were still noisily tumbling over each other when she heard Michael's knock on the door Friday night. This date was different because she wanted to go—it wasn't about a john. No dreams in a week. Only a partial vision at the grocery store yesterday. No dead visitors. She had been sleeping through the night. She stood there on the other side of the door from him and wondered if she should wait a while before she opened the door. Did opening the door immediately signal desperation? Maybe she should pretend to still be getting ready. Did women do that? Should she invite him in, or should they just leave right away? She looked around, at the dirty dishes on the kitchen counter and the weight bench in the
center of living room. They should definitely just leave. She sighed and opened the door. **Things were easier before.**

Then, he was standing there, in dark dress slacks and a pin striped shirt with matching tie. And all she could say was “Hi.”

“Ready to go?” he asked, and she breathed a sigh of relief.

It was weird, how nervous she was. But going on this date was like admitting the possibility that she could be in a relationship with a man again—like allowing herself the hope of a normal life. All she had in her small black purse was a tube of lipstick, a compact, her driver’s license, and a credit card.

As they walked down the stairs, she almost turned around. What if she ran into a john? Leaving the gun meant she couldn’t do anything if she had a vision. Leaving the gun meant she would have to be normal. For at least a few hours, she would be back in the other world—where men and women actually dated, guns stayed in dresser drawers and closeted shoeboxes, and second chances were possible. Killing a violent man at less than a foot away didn’t faze her. But making small talk with a nice man across a dinner table? That was scary. She had always known that people who exist in the world of life fear death. She just hadn’t
known that the opposite was true, as well. People who exist in the world of death fear life.
Magic Act

As they walked to his car, she nodded along, pretending to be able to hear him above the sound of her frantic inward breathing. He opened the passenger side door for her. She smiled and told him, "Thanks." It was something about the way he did it. Not like he wanted to show what a smooth guy he was. Like he wanted to do something nice for her and that was the only opportunity he had right now. As he walked around to the other side of the car, she found herself wondering if he opened doors for everyone.

After they had been driving for a few minutes, Dinah realized that she had no idea where they were going. An old familiar feeling of wariness began to creep back in. Where was this guy taking her?

"Okay, I dressed up like you told me to," she said. "Now what's the big secret? Where are we going?"

"All I'm going to say is that there will be entertainment with dinner."

"You didn't exactly answer my question."

"It's a surprise."
"So am I your hostage?" she asked, hoping her voice didn't sound as tense as she felt.

"Absolutely not. When we get there, if you decide you want to go home, we'll leave." He paused. "I would be crushed, of course, to the point of complete emotional devastation—but we'll leave."

When she didn't respond, he asked, "Not a big one for surprises, are you?"

"Not really."

"Well, how about we try it this once, and if you don't like it, I'll never try to surprise you again. Deal?"

"Deal," she told him.

The rest of the ride was awkward, with Dinah nervously trying to figure out where they were going, and Michael trying to make Dinah forget her nervousness.

"Did you hear about what happened at that restaurant we went to last week?" he asked.

"No, what happened?"

"Apparently, some guy that had been sitting in the bar got shot in the back of the restaurant that night."

"Really?"

"Yeah. The cops think it might have been payback for some unpaid debts because he was a gambler. His pants were
down, so they figure that he was drunk and taking a leak on the way to his car when it happened."

"Yuck."

"Yeah. I guess it took a few days for the body to be found."

When she didn't say anything more, he turned to look at her. "I'm sorry. That was pretty disgusting pre-dinner talk."

"No, it's okay. I think murders are fascinating."

"No kidding? Why is that?"

"Well, I was pre-law in school, with a focus in criminal law."

"You didn't tell me you were pre-law."

"I wanted it to be a surprise," she told him, with a smile.

"Touché," he said, then added, "If you're interested in bizarre murders, I guess the police in a town not too far from here found a guy who was shot while looking through a telescope—actually shot through the telescope."

"You're making that up!"

"No, I swear. I just heard it on the radio on my way to pick you up."

"Do the police think there's a connection between the two murders?"
"Not that anybody's talking about. They're treating them as just another example of the recent crime wave. All the news shows keep inviting sociologists on to explain the increase in violence in U.S. cities."

Finally, he pulled into Sycamore Hospital parking lot. She had been there before, on a visit with Susan. "Isn't this where you work?" she asked.

"Usually, yes, but not tonight," he told her cryptically.

At first she thought he meant he was trying to be romantic by saying he would not be working tonight. But, once they entered the building, she realized he had been talking about the hospital and not himself. As they walked into the cafeteria, a smiling teenage boy in a tux asked for their name.

"Michael Evans and Guest."

"Thank you, Mich . . . sir. Right this way, please." As the boy motioned for them to move toward the tables, Dinah noticed he seemed to have difficulty raising his arm and controlling it once it was slightly raised.

She slowed her pace to the table when Michael touched her elbow. Only then did she hear the sounds of labored breathing from the boy trailing them.
Michael leaned over. "He wanted to do this so badly. We couldn't tell him no."

She nodded and turned her head slightly so that she could see the boy out of the corner of her eye. He was walking with a lurching motion, as if the floor was moving underneath his feet.

Once they arrived at their table, Michael introduced Dinah to their host.

"Charlie, this is my date, Dinah."

Dinah said, "Hi, Charlie" and smiled, wondering if she should extend her hand. Did teenagers shake hands when they met people?

He solved the problem for her by giving her a small, clumsy wave. As he left, he whispered something to Michael.

"What did he say?" Dinah asked.

"First no surprises. Now, no secrets? You're no fun," he teased her.

She was caught off guard by the comment and could only stare at him blankly.

"I'm joking, Dinah. Charlie just paid you a compliment, that's all."

She found herself smiling and beginning to relax.

"What did he say?"

"He said, 'Way to go, man.' "

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As they laughed, the rest of Dinah's wariness seemed to dissipate, and she found herself looking around the room as if it was actually the location of a curious date rather than a potential killing. Streamers and balloons were in abundance, and a huge banner that read "Sycamore's Annual Youth Talent Show 2007" hung suspended from the light fixtures over an empty area of the floor. Multicolored plastic tablecloths had been hung in front of the normal cafeteria serving line, and the same style table cloths decorated the twenty or so round tables scattered throughout the room. Crammed around the small tables were the children and their families. Many of the children were in wheelchairs.

An attractive, thirty-something woman wearing a white Oxford shirt and tight black pants approached their table to take their drink order. According to her hospital nametag, her name was Stephanie, and Stephanie seemed intent on getting Michael's attention.

"Michael! You look great. Will you be having the juice, milk, coffee, tea, or water this evening?"

Dinah noticed that she leaned a little too close to Michael as she spoke. There was some oldies music playing, but it wasn't that loud.
Michael postponed his order to introduce them. "Stephanie, this is my date, Dinah."

"Hi." Stephanie reluctantly turned and graced Dinah with a heavily lipsticked smile.

"Hi, nice to meet you" hadn't even left Dinah's mouth before the other woman had turned back to Michael.

"What can I get you to drink?"

Michael looked over to Dinah who murmured "ice water" and echoed her choice. "Two tall glasses of ice water, please."

Dinah was pleased to see that Michael's eyes didn't follow Stephanie’s ass as she walked away. She had to admit: It was a nice ass.

"She's alright. Just likes attention a little too much," Michael remarked.

"Some women do," Dinah replied.

"You don't seem to."

"No, I guess I don't." If only he knew how much she depended on not getting attention. "So . . . we're here for a talent show?"

"Yep. All the kids who are permanent in-patients or regular out-patients decided a couple of years ago to hold an annual talent show. The kids here are really close."
"So, how do you know the kids? I kind of pictured you sitting in an office looking over papers all day."

"Usually, I do. But about six months ago, a mother whose appeal for financial assistance had been denied came to my office and convinced me to actually visit the kids whose paperwork would be crossing my desk."

Michael stopped his explanation when Stephanie came back with the two glasses of water.

"And?" Dinah asked, not about to allow Stephanie to begin talking again.

"And, I wasn't the same after that first visit. I mean, I knew we had kids in the hospital, but I had never actually seen any of them, apart from maybe being wheeled into the hospital by their parents or riding in the elevator. I had only two choices after that first day: I could never again visit the children's wing and just pretend it didn't exist, or I could visit it every day and try to make their existence a little easier."

"How did you manage to do that—make their existence easier, I mean?"

He seemed reluctant to go on—reluctant to make himself look too good. "I just starting tapping the hospital's big donors for money."

"How has it been going?"
"Most of our donors have been patients here themselves or have had loved ones who were patients, so it's really not that hard. The ones who are reluctant are asked to come to my office and have lunch." He smiled sheepishly. "Then, on our way to lunch, we walk through the Children's Wing, and I introduce them to the kids."


"Thanks."

They were silent for just a moment, contemplating one other. Then, their chicken was delivered, and the show began.

First, several giggling little girls in wheelchairs did a karaoke version of Kelly Clarkson's "Miss Independent." They were followed by two boys telling jokes, most of which Dinah recognized from her own early school days: "Why didn't the skeleton cross the road? Because he didn't have enough guts." Next up was a girl who quickly drew a startling accurate caricature of a father sitting in the audience. She was followed by a teenage boy who strummed along to a guitar while he mumbled the words to an original song that sounded like a combination of several hits from Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. Then, a girl with a pink scarf covering her head played Bach on the violin while her mother pretended not to be crying.
Throughout the show, Dinah had the strange feeling something was missing, that she had forgotten something. It took her a while to figure out what it was. Then, when the final act, a small magician complete in top hat and tails, came on, she realized what was missing. The whole time they had been here, she had not once even thought about that other world.

She looked over at Michael, and he responded by scooting his plastic chair next to hers. Out of the corner of her eye, Dinah saw him move his hand and then stop and place it back on his leg. She felt herself drawn in—by the way he opened the door, the kids he was helping, the way he watched her to make sure she was comfortable. Her eyes still on the little magician desperately trying to find the rabbit in his hat, she reached over and placed her hand on his. Without even looking down, he turned his hand over so that their fingers could interlock.

At first, she smiled at the warmth of his touch, but soon her hand became unbearably warm. It was like heat was traveling from his hand up through her arm and then spreading throughout her entire body. She remembered the heat from his touch at the restaurant, and how she had attributed it to her physical attraction to him. She took her hand away as the first drops of sweat began tricking
down her back. Something wasn't right. When the magic act
ended, she got up and headed toward the bathrooms she had
seen by the front door on their way in.

"I'll be right back," she told him, trying not to look
in his eyes.

When she came out of the stall, Stephanie was washing
her hands.

"You better be careful with that one, honey," she said.

"What do you mean?" Dinah asked.

"I mean, watch yourself with Michael Evans."

"Why is that?"

"Well, let me put it to you this way. When he first
came here, we all wanted a crack at him, if you know what I
mean. Single heterosexual guy—nice looking, great body,
intelligent, decent job—we were all over it."

"And now?"

"Now he's not looking so hot. The first woman he went
out with up and quit one day after she came out of his
office in tears. Wouldn't tell anyone what happened."

"So you think he did something to her?"

"I don't know, but I know something happened to make
that woman quit."
Dinah finished washing her hands with the other woman's eyes on her. She tried not to show any reaction. This could just be a jealous woman trying to get even with Michael for not asking her out. "Thanks for the tip," she said.

When she got back to the table, she didn't take her seat. Michael glanced at her sharply and then stood and asked if she was ready to go.

"Yes," she said and began walking quickly toward the door.

He hurried to catch up with her.

"Everything okay?" he asked.

Dinah just kept walking, staring straight ahead. A line of sweat had broken across her forehead, and she was clenching and unclenching her hands. She was remembering how wrong she had been that night three years ago—thinking that she was safe with him as she drove him home and then helped him inside. She didn't even have her gun with her tonight. She considered taking a cab, but then she decided that she didn't want to completely cut off contact with Michael. She had met him for a reason.

Michael stopped walking. "Dinah, are you okay?"
When she still didn't stop walking, he reached out to grab her arm, but she felt him reaching for her and turned around.

"Don't," she said. "It's okay. I just started to feel a little nauseous, that's all."

He retracted his arm. "Is there anything I can do?"

She gave him a weak smile. "I think I just need to go home and lie down."

"Can do."

He opened the car door for her and then waited by the side to make sure that she got in okay. "In?"

"Yeah."

On the way home, Michael interrupted his radio browsing every few minutes to ask if she was okay. By the third time, she was ready to throw herself out of the vehicle.

She couldn't believe how stupid she had been, allowing herself to believe that he was her way back—a chance at a normal life. Of course, something had to be wrong with him to want her. And she had been ridiculous, thinking she could have a normal life again. Even if she never had a vision of a man hurting a woman again, she could never change what a man had done to her—how it had marked her. No one had ever given her a straight answer when she had asked
how long that feeling lasted, and now she understood why. Apparently, it lasted for the rest of your goddamn life.

"You okay?"

"Just fine."

Maybe he was just like the others, and she had just been too stupid to see it. Maybe her gift wasn't foolproof. Pretending she could ever have a normal life again was a joke. The idea that God had sent her a "good Christian man" was comical. He was probably laughing at her right now.
Don't Say a Word

Dinah watched him pull away. She had been standing there at the window trying to figure out what he was doing sitting there. The longer he sat there, the more she started to doubt herself and the worse she felt. It was probably all in her head. Nothing was wrong with him other than he seemed to like crazy women. That woman Stephanie had probably just been trying to get a rise out of her. And she had. She pulled back the comforter on her bed and slipped under it, unable to find the energy to change out of her fitted black dress.

She had been lying there for only a little while when she heard a knock on the door. At first, she thought it might be Michael, coming back to demand an explanation. It wasn't. Through the peephole, she could see a woman who looked vaguely familiar to her. She opened the door.

Dinah recognized her as a woman she sometimes passed on the stairs, the one who wore conservative pantsuits and pulled her thick curly hair neatly back in a clip. Usually, she had her daughter with her. Tonight she was alone, and her eyes were red as if she had been crying.
She spoke before Dinah could think what to say. “My name is Anne Johnson. I live with my daughter Tabitha on the fourth floor. My daughter is missing . . .”

As Anne held out the photograph, Dinah heard the soft intake of her breath, the physical sign of a desperate hope that this stranger, this neighbor, would smile and say, “Oh, yes. Tabitha’s right here.”

Dinah glanced at the photograph but quickly turned away. She realized now that Tabitha was the little girl in the partial vision she had in the supermarket yesterday. As soon as her fingers had closed around the handle of the shopping cart, she had seen a little girl’s hand holding a man’s hand. Then she had heard the little girl crying and seen the man on top of her. She had not been able to see the girl’s face.

“I’m so sorry,” she said. “I haven’t seen her. Are the police looking for her?”

The woman had begun breathing again, each in and out a crushing blow reminding her that her daughter might not be taking the same breaths. “Someone’s on the way . . . They told me to double check with all our friends and neighbors . . .” Her words trailed off as the tears began flowing again.
Dinah reached her hand out to touch the woman. “We'll find her.” Then, without thinking, she added the words she had heard so often growing up: “I’ll be praying for you both.”

The woman's “Thank you” was mechanical, but her eyes seemed to brighten the slightest bit at the thought that someone else would be asking God to help. "I better get back," she told Dinah as she turned away.

Wiped from the strength it took to stall the vision, Dinah quickly closed the door and sunk to the floor. The picture had reminded her, but touching the mother's arm had propelled her back into the vision. Now, against the closed door, her strength to fight it was gone, and she had no choice. It was coming. Prayers or no prayers.

She could see Tabitha, sitting there on the mattress. Her jeans were off, and she was shivering in her yellow t-shirt. Not from the cold. It was incredibly hot in the closed room. No, she was shaking because she was crying. She was pleading to go home and apologizing for riding her bike too far. She got up slowly from the mattress and walked to the door. Sinking next to it, she sobbed into the wood, "I want to see my Mommy. Please let me see my Mommy. I'll be good." Dinah could see the blood spot on the mattress, and she knew why Tabitha moved so slowly.
She put her palm on the door, as if Tabitha was on the other side and would feel the comforting heat from her hand through the wood . . . Then she saw the door open, saw the knife in the man's hand, and knew that the search team, if they found anything, would be finding a body and not a little girl.

She stayed there, outstretched palm against the door, as her tears pooled on the tile and listened to the silence that followed Tabitha's cries. Dinah fell asleep there by the door, willing herself to slip back into the darkness.

The next morning she woke stiff from lying on the tile. Her hand had slid and now rested palm down against the floor, fingers stretched out, as if trying to feel for something on the other side of the door. She rose unsteadily and crossed to the window. Down below she could see the cop cars and two news team vans. She wondered if they had found any sign of Tabitha. She needed to know where to find the man who had pushed that cart before her at the supermarket—the man who had raped and killed an eight-year-old girl. This time, her vision had provided no clues.

She took a quick shower and then headed upstairs. She wasn't sure which apartment Anne lived in, but she figured it wouldn't be too hard to find. She was right. The door to
the apartment opened just as Dinah reached the top of the stairs, and she could see Anne inside, talking to a reporter. Several men, wearing badges but no uniforms, were standing around the room, drinking coffee and talking in low tones.

The man coming out stopped her as she tried to slide by him into the apartment.

"May I help you?"

"I'm a friend of . . . a neighbor of Anne's from downstairs," she explained, trying to catch Anne's eye.

"She's busy right now. I can let her know that you stopped by, Miss?"

"Dinah."

The man gestured to the hall, but Anne had seen what was going on.

"She doesn't have to go. She's a friend," she said loudly from across the room.

The low murmurs stopped, and everyone turned to stare at the mother. Her anger was palpable.

The man who had been leaving let Dinah move by, and she quickly walked toward Anne. Yesterday they had been neighbors, but today they were friends. Two women in a room full of men who saw the abduction, rape, and killing of a little girl as just another case to be solved.
The murmurings resumed, and they sat down next to one another on the couch.

"I wanted to see if there was anything at all I could do," Dinah told her.

Anne shook her head. "They've found a crime scene," she whispered.

The murmurings had stopped again. Dinah felt the glares from the detectives standing around them. This was their case. No doubt they had instructed Anne not to speak of the investigation. She was only the mother.

Dinah pushed back the hair that had fallen across Anne's cheek. "Let's get you cleaned up a little bit," Dinah suggested, motioning toward the rooms down the short hall.

"Oh . . . okay," Anne nodded, allowing herself to be led into her bedroom.

She sat wearily on the edge of the bed as Dinah softly closed the door.

"Now, what did they find exactly?" she asked. "Do they have any idea where Tabitha is?"

"Two witnesses saw a man take a girl into an out-of-business furniture store not too far from here," Anne repeated what she had first overheard and then reluctantly been told. "One of the back rooms in the store contains
evidence of a crime, but they're not sure yet if it has anything to do with Tabitha. They asked me for her hairbrush . . . Do you think that means they found blood?"

"I don't know," Dinah told her truthfully.

"Do you think my little girl is dead? That's what they all think."

"I don't know," she answered again, unable to tell the truth but also unable to lie.

"Every time I shut my eyes, I see her, hurt or dead," Anne whispered.

"I know." Dinah took the woman in her arms as she moaned.

They rocked back and forth on the bed, anguished cries rising within Anne and escaping through her mouth into Dinah's chest where she had buried her face.

At one point, a detective opened the door to peek in, but he quickly shut it again at the sight of the two women holding one another.

Dinah had seen her father comfort the sick, the dying, and the grieving many times. The familiar words came to her now. "God, we know how much you love Tabitha and Anne. Please be with Anne now, as your angels are with her daughter wherever she is. Give them strength and comfort until they see one another again."
As she prayed, the woman's moans began to cease.

"Did you sing to Tabitha when she was a baby?"

"Yes" came the low, muffled reply.

"Tell me what you sang, and we'll sing it together for her now."

The words came haltingly on trembling notes. *Hush, little baby, don't say a word, Mama's gonna buy you a mocking bird...*

She joined in. *And if that mocking bird won't sing, Mama's gonna buy you a diamond ring...*
When Anne had finally fallen asleep from exhaustion, Dinah left her, softly closing the bedroom door behind her just as she had when they had come into the room. The men in the living room seemed embarrassed now to look at her, humbled by the suffering in which she had shared.

"Anne is asleep, but I'll doubt she'll sleep long," she said to no one in particular. "Please tell her that I will be back as soon as I can."

Several of the men nodded, and she left. When she got back to her apartment, she glanced at the clock and was surprised at how late it already was. She had been in the bedroom with Anne for two hours. It was already ten. She couldn't sneak into the crime scene until after it was dark, and she didn't know what to do with herself until then. Running was out of the question; her body still ached from the strange way she had slept. Calling Michael was out of the question. She couldn't just hang out in the apartment. She didn't want to go in to work. A feeling within her was growing, but she couldn't quite place it at first. It was restlessness but not the kind of restlessness
that made her want to run away. No, it was the kind of
restlessness that made her want to run to something. To
somewhere—to be more precise. She wanted to go home. To
that place with the Bible pages worn to tissue-thinness by
the constant smoothing of her father's fingers and the
ridiculous pot holders shaped like roosters, waiting by the
oven for her mother's hands to fill them.

Right about now, her mom would be pulling into the
garage and telling her dad to stop napping and help carry
in the bags. She always bought groceries on Saturday
mornings; that was the only time when Dinah's dad was
guaranteed to be at home to help carry in the bags. Even if
he had a wedding to perform, it wouldn't be until later in
the afternoon. It was the same way with the refueling of
her car. She somehow planned it so that the car never ran
low on gas unless her husband was available to fill it up.

Dinah went in through the still-opened garage and
smiled at the sight of her parents putting up the groceries
in the kitchen.

"Hi, Mom and Dad."

Her mother whirled around. "Dinah! You nearly scared
us to death! What are . . ." Her mother stopped before
asking the question, as if not wanting to acknowledge the
unexpectedness of a visit from their only daughter.
"Hey, Dinah. Heard you pull up." Her father turned around and gave her a smile after carefully shelving the three cans of peas he had in his hands.

"I just thought I'd stop by and apologize for running out on the church services last time I was there. I wasn't feeling too good."

"It's okay. Lots of people get sick at the thought of listening to one of my sermons," her father told her, gently cutting off his wife before she could begin a lecture. "Isn't that right, Celeste?"

"Your father exaggerates," her mother responded dryly. Dinah picked up the produce off the table and opened the fridge. "Still keeping the onions cold, Mom?"

"Of course, that's the only way your father can stand to chop them."

The three of them put up the groceries together, content to let the questions go unspoken for now.

When everything was in order, they sat at the kitchen table, sipping some iced tea from the pitcher on the counter.

"Is everything okay?" her father finally asked.

"There's a woman in my building, a friend of mine, whose daughter has gone missing. The police don't think she's alive."
Her mother gasped, "That missing little girl on the news lives in your building?"

"Yes."

"Do you know them well?" she asked, glancing at her husband with that worried look parents always exchange when they sense their children might be in danger.

"Not too well," Dinah said. "But I spent most of the morning with Anne, the mother, and she's barely holding up."

"Where's her mother, her family? Doesn't she have a husband?" Her mother fired off the questions almost angrily, as if unable to comprehend why a woman would have to lean on a neighbor in her apartment building during such a time.

"She's divorced, and her family doesn't live here."

Dinah's father finally spoke. "What can we do?"

"I don't know anything about her religious background, but she does seem to take comfort in the thought that people are praying for her daughter."

"What's the daughter's name?" Her father asked, reaching out his hands to his wife and daughter.

"Tabitha."

They closed their eyes as he began to pray. "God, we know how much You love all Your children. We lift up two of
Your children to You now, Anne and her daughter Tabitha. Please be with them both. Watch over them and give them strength until they see one another again. And be with Dinah as she ministers to them. Work within her, Lord, to show them Your love. In Jesus' name, amen."

When Dinah felt the squeezes from her father and mother's hands, she tried to smile. It was a tradition in their family; the extra little squeeze at the end of the prayer meant everything was going to be okay.

But she knew it wasn't. She knew Tabitha was already dead.

Dinah's mother put her hand on her daughter's shoulder. "Your friend and her little girl are in God's hands," she said with well-rehearsed conviction.

Then, having thus settled the matter of the missing little girl, she began inquiring into Dinah's job, health, eating habits, and potential love life. Dinah answered as best as she could, but she wasn't really paying attention. All she could think of was the way Anne's body had shaken with the moans that had escaped from her body as they rocked together on the bed and the sounds of Tabitha begging to go home to her mommy as he brought the knife down. "Be with Dinah as she ministers to them," her father had prayed.
Her father remained silent, happy to see his wife and daughter conversing without arguing. After a while, he rose from the table and sighed dramatically. "I am off to mow the lawn because your mother has informed me that we are the disgrace of the neighborhood."

"There you go, exaggerating again, William," her mother replied, rolling her eyes.

"Do you want some help, Dad?"

"No. You stay here and talk with your mother."

As the door closed behind him, Dinah asked, "What would you have done, Mom, if someone had taken me when I was a little girl?"

Her mother looked startled. "I don't know. Cried and prayed. Gone on television and begged for your return. I just don't know." She paused and began smoothing the tablecloth in front of her. "It's what a mother fears most, you know, that her child will be taken away somewhere and hurt—that she will be unable to go to them."

"But what if I was never returned, never found? Or what if just enough pieces of my body were found to determine that I had been raped and then killed?" Dinah pressed.
"Dinah!" her mother looked up from the tablecloth angrily. "How can you even ask me to think about such a thing?"

"Because I held Anne this morning while she cried, and I am trying to imagine how she will feel if the police are right about what they think happened to Tabitha."

"Dear God, I hope they are wrong . . ." her voice trailed off. "I just don't know. All we can do is put our trust in God."

"Is that what you did when I was raped?" Dinah asked. "Just trusted in God?" She was surprised by the anger and bitterness in her own voice.

Her mother's eyes filled with tears. "I . . . I don't want to talk about this anymore."

"Why not, Mom? How come we never talk about this?" she pressed. "Your daughter was raped. Did you trust in God then?"

Her mother rose quickly from the table and went over to the sink. "Did you know a man from church, one of our newer members, a man named David, was found dead?" she asked. "Someone shot him while he was looking through his telescope out in the country. The police found some odd stuff at his place, things that suggested maybe he had hurt women in the past."
Dinah got up and stood behind her mother. "And what if he had?" she asked. "Do you think he deserved what he got?"
"Vengeance belongs to the Lord," she answered quietly.
"You didn't answer my question, Mom."
"And I won't," she said over the sound of the running water.

Her father had come back in the house and was staring at her. As she walked past him, he put a hand on her arm, but she shrugged him off.

"I'm leaving. I have some stuff to do back at the apartment." She held her head down to hide the tears and quickly walked to her car.

But her father followed her. "Dinah, what's wrong?"
She turned. "Do you remember what Josh did when he found out I had been raped?"

Her father nodded. "He got my father's old rifle out of the closet and asked me where I kept the bullets."

"And you wouldn't tell him where they were. You took the gun from him," she said. "You told him he could leave, but he wasn't taking the gun with him."

Her father was silent.

"Why did you do that, Dad?" she asked. "Didn't you want the man who raped your daughter to be killed?"
"Of course I did," he said. "That's why I didn't tell him where the ammo was."

"I don't understand."

"If your brother had left to kill him, I would have gone with him," he explained. "I had to stop us both from giving in to the hate."

"What about justice?"

"What about it?"

"Doesn't a just God desire justice, as well as forgiveness?"

"Yes, and that's why we leave it to Him to execute justice."

"How do we know that's what He wants us to do—to leave it all to Him?"

"In Scripture, God is referred to as the judge . . . Dinah?"

She had been looking off into the distance, but when he spoke her name, she slowly turned her head to look at him.

"You know Jesus teaches us to love and forgive those who hurt us."

Her father was looking at her strangely, and she wished she had never brought it up. He would never
understand. And evil continues to flourish, and little girls like Tabitha continue to go missing and turn up dead.

"She's dead, Dad," she told him. "He killed her. He raped her and then he killed her."

"But how do you know this?" he asked. "I thought you said the police weren't sure, yet"

"They're not," she said. "I am."

"Does this have something to do with the visions you were asking me about?"

When she didn't answer, he said softly, "You can't let what happened to you taint everything. She may still be alive."

She shook her head.

"Goodness and love still exist, Dinah. God is still in control."

As her father moved to hug her, she got into her car. She knew she would crumble if she felt his arms around her. She started the engine and drove away, refusing to look back at the sight of her father standing alone in the driveway.
Soon after she got back to the apartment, Dinah went upstairs to check on Anne. But when the detective who answered the door said that she was in the back with her family, Dinah decided not to go in. She was glad that Anne's family was with her. Dinah had other work to do.

"Can you tell her that I stopped by, and that I'll try to come by again tomorrow?"

"Sure."

She ate a microwave dinner, read the day's paper, and then stared at the television for a while. At one point, she asked aloud, "Where are you now, Cheryl? I need your help. I don't know how to find this man."

At dusk, she heard the heavy footsteps of the detectives and police officers leaving the building. They must have given up hope that Anne would be contacted by the person who took Tabitha. Dinah wondered if Anne understood that their leaving meant a decrease in the likelihood that her daughter would be found alive.

She waited until midnight and then headed toward the furniture store that had been deserted for two years now.
She passed it whenever she took the round-about way to the highway to avoid a traffic jam at one of the major intersections. Back before everyone started going to the mega-stores and the island malls, lots of small businesses had thrived, but the generation that didn't believe in buying your couch at the same place you bought your toilet paper was almost completely gone from these neighborhoods—their modest homes with porch swings and white siding replaced by balconied apartments.

She parked several streets away, blending in with the line of cars in front of a cheap apartment building. The stairwell between the floors was not enclosed, so she walked straight through from one side to the other and then circled the building.

She approached the store from the back. No one was there, but the crime tape confirmed that she had the right store. The back door was easily jimmed, and she was in within seconds.

It didn't take her long to find the room. Broken down couches and chairs littered what used to be the selling floor, along with a few old mattresses. One of these had been pulled into a store room. The blood spot was marked with a number. She could also see where the police had
dusted for fingerprints. This guy was a pro; the chances that he had left fingerprints were slim to none.

Dinah didn't need the actual fingerprints, though. She just needed a place he had touched with his hand. The door knob had doubtless been touched by too many other hands by now. But the mattress—nobody would have wanted to touch the mattress. She kneeled and placed her hands palm down on the mattress, on either side of the blood. She hadn't been sure that she would be able to do anything with such indirect contact, but within seconds she felt the familiar dizziness and nausea.

She was in his head.

She's ruined now. Like a broken little doll that someone lays gently in the trash can. But she wouldn't stop crying. Over and over. Asking for her mommy. Even with the heavy door closed, he could still hear her in there crying. If she didn't shut up, someone might hear. And he had heard on the news that the police were looking for her. Their time together would have to end.

He liked this part almost as much as he liked the part when he felt them give inside and make room for him. The blood was always warm. He hated to wash it off afterwards. And when he sliced them at the end, the blood that ran over
his hands was just as warm, welcoming him into their bodies in another way.

If you covered them from the neck up, you couldn't even tell they were dead. Eyes glassy and wide open with fear. Beautiful little rain drops on their cheeks. Lower lips extra red from where they had bitten down and slightly ajar, as if waiting to be kissed for the first time. Sometimes he would get so aroused looking at them that he would want to make love to them again. But he never did. That would be disgusting.

He opened the door, pushing her back as he did so. She had been lying against it, curled in a little ball.

"Please can I go home now?" she asked him, staring up at him with those beautiful wide brown eyes.

He knelt down beside her and stoked her cheek. "Yes, of course, you can," he said.

She had just started to smile when he brought the knife to her throat. He held both hands there and closed his eyes, feeling himself within her again.

He caught her with one arm as she started to fall and then picked her up.

He carried her to his car, out the back door and put her in his trunk. Dinah rode next to him, carefully watching the street signs, ignoring his humming.
When he pulled into a driveway, she was confused. She followed him into the shed in the back and watched him pick up a shovel.

He laid it in the trunk next to Tabitha.

When he got back into the driver's seat, his cell phone rang.

"What is it?"

"I thought you were getting a ride with someone from work."

"Fine. I'll be there in ten minutes."

As he pulled out of the driveway, Dinah felt herself leaving him.

No, I need to see where he buries her. But the very fact that she could articulate this need was evidence that the connection was broken.

When she came out of the vision, her right hand was hovering just over the blood spot on the mattress. She quickly jerked it back.

She didn't know where Tabitha was buried, but she did know where the man who had buried her lived.

The john lived in a small frame house on a street down from an elementary school. When Dinah drove by the house, the porch light was the only light visible. The curb in front of the house was empty. The john's car was nowhere in
sight. He had been interrupted last night. Had he been able to bury the body after he had given the person on the phone a ride home? If not, he might be burying the body right now. He would need the cover of night, just like she did. Dinah decided that she would be waiting for him when he got home.

She parked a few streets over and cut through the alley to his house. She knew what she was doing was dangerous. There had already been two men murdered in the past two weeks. Someone was going to start to suspect something. Just being here put her in jeopardy.

When she reached his yard, she checked her watch. 4:05. Her father would be down on his knees in prayer right now, asking for the Holy Spirit to speak through him in the sermon he would give later that morning. As a child she had wondered how a person knew if the Spirit was working in them. She imagined it was like being struck with lightning and feeling the energy from above surge through your body. Everybody at church said that you got the Holy Spirit when you were baptized, so she had been eager to come out of the water and feel the electricity connect with her wet body. But when she had been lifted from the cold water in the baptistery, she had felt nothing different. Only years later, when she started killing these men, did she ever
feel that rush of energy spread through her, that powerful knowledge that something greater than her was working through her. Only now did she understand what it meant to be baptized in fire.

The house and its two small yards were enclosed in a waist-high, chain link fence. A gate opened to the alley. The house next door was dark. As she closed the metal latch behind her, she noticed the faint glow coming through a side window of the john's house. The window was open a few inches. She quietly approached. No noise, except for the whir of a ceiling fan, came from inside the room. She peered through the bottom half of the window.

Someone was in the bed, back turned toward her, sleeping on top of the bedspread, like Dinah did when she was too exhausted or too hot to get underneath the covers. The person moaned slightly, and Dinah pulled back, pressing herself against the side of the house. She waited a minute and then looked back through the window. The woman on the bed was wearing a brown waitress outfit. The name tag still pinned to her shirt read, "Hi! My name is LOUISE." She was wearing heavy support hose and the kind of shoes only waitresses and nurses wear—shoes that tell of long hours and heavy burdens. Louise was snoring and occasionally muttering in her sleep.
Dinah looked around the room. A picture sat on the dresser. She peered at it; the woman with the man in the picture could be the woman in the bed. She looked back at the woman; she wore a gold band on her ring finger. The john was married.

Dinah leaned against the house again and lowered to her knees to avoid the glow from the window. She had no plan for this. Louise complicated things. She would have to kill the john without waking this woman. She couldn't kill her, but she couldn't leave a witness, either. As she sat there, running through the scenarios in her head, a car pulled up in front of the house. She edged closer to the front. When she heard a car door shut, she peered around the side of the house from her crouched position. Someone was standing behind the car, getting something out of the trunk. It was him. She recognized the boots even though they were covered with dirt now. He slammed the trunk closed. He had the shovel in his hand.

As he began walking toward the front gate, she jumped back. He would need to put the shovel back in the shed. She ran and closed the door of the shed behind her just as she heard his humming.

The bastard was humming. Something she knew. She looked around her, eyes adjusting to the dark. Snow shovel?
Hammer? Weed cutter? Snow shovel. She grabbed it and stood to one side of the door. When the door opened, she swung. The metal connected dead on with his face, and he fell before he even had time to yell. He lay there, half in and half out of the shed. She pulled him in with her. There was no room. She would have to step on his body to get out. She stared at him, wondering if he was still alive.

He was. The slight moan gave him away. He would be opening his eyes soon. She considered taking the weed eater and trimming some overgrowth while she waited.

"Hey. Wake up."

She kicked him in the side and pressed the metal edge of the blade against his throat. His eyes opened in a panic, and he began thrashing. She pressed down harder.

"Stop moving, or I'll push this thing all the way down."

He stopped moving when he saw her lift a foot to put on top of the blade.

"If you tell me where the little girl is buried, I'll take my foot off this blade."

She waited a second before removing her foot. When he looked ready to talk, she pulled up slightly on the blade so he could speak.

"What lit . . ."
She put her foot back on the blade and pushed with only a fraction of her weight. "Don't waste my time," she told him. "The little girl you just buried. The one you raped and then slit her throat. I want to know where she's buried. If you don't tell me, I will kill you and your wife."

He looked at her in surprise at the mention of his wife.

"Yes, I've seen Louise," she said. "She's sleeping peacefully, and she'll be fine just as long as you tell me what I want to know."

"How do I know you won't kill me anyway, after I tell you?"

"The police have already been called. They can deal with you. I just want to know the location of the body before you use it to make some deal with the prosecutor."

"But if you kill me, you'll never know where the body is."

"I can live with that. I can't live with you using her body to get a lighter sentence."

She could see a trickle of blood run out from under the blade. She pushed slightly harder. His eyes told her to stop. She raised the blade.
"Okay," he gasped. "The body is in the field behind the school . . . not the soccer field, the overgrown field, the one they were going to use to add on to the building before the levee got voted down."

She wasn't sure if he was telling her the truth, but she didn't have any more time. "I'm so sorry. I couldn't help my . . ." He was crying now, his tears running down into the trickle of blood coming from his throat. "I swear that's where she is. Take her to her mother. Tell her I'm sorry . . ."

"Thank you . . ." She lifted the blade. He closed his eyes for a second in relief and then started to raise his hand. But before his fingers could reach the cut, she pushed the blade into his throat, the full force of her weight pressing down through her foot. " . . . for having a snow shovel in your shed," she finished, as the blade met the bone.

She used his shirt to wipe off the handle of the snow shovel and the door. She would use her own shirt to wipe off the window ledge. She had to go now. Daylight was almost here. She opened the door and looked around in the weakening darkness. The house on the left was still dark. The house on the right looked empty.
Before letting herself out through the gate, she stopped by the window to make sure Louise was still asleep. She was.

By daybreak, she was back in the parking lot of her apartment building. No one was around. She parked the car and then jogged around the side of the building. She ran for about ten minutes, long enough to get a good sweat going and to be slightly out of breath. When she jogged back into the parking lot, one of the detectives from yesterday was going into the building. He waited and held the door for her.

"Good morning."

"Morning, officer," she panted. "Any . . . luck . . . finding Tabitha?"

"Not yet. But we're hoping someone will call the tip line."

Dinah nodded and looked down, pretending to be more out of breath than she really was. She had a phone call to make later.

"You should be careful out there jogging when it's not fully light," he told her as they climbed the stairs.

She turned around and smiled, "Thanks. I always am."
Only when she had shut her apartment door, did she realize what song the john had been humming. "Amazing Grace," she told the empty apartment.
Doubts

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found;

Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,

And grace my fears relieved;

How precious did that grace appear

The hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils and snares,

I have already come;

'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,

And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,

His Word my hope secures;

He will my Shield and Portion be,

As long as life endures.
Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

The john from church had been singing "I'll Fly Away." Now, this pedophile was humming "Amazing Grace?" Was she imagining it? She had sung both songs countless times while standing next to her mother in church. The songs made the johns seem connected to her. Like they, too, had once been children standing in front of a pew next to their mothers. In the shed the john had told her that he was sorry, that he couldn't help himself. What if that had been the truth? Was he any less deserving of grace than her?

Exhaustion came over her, and she fell onto the bed as if a weight had been dropped on her chest. She dreamed that she was flying, beautiful white wings lifting her through the clouds, but then she started to fall. Her wings grew heavy, and soon she could no longer lift them. As she hurtled to the ground, she turned to look at them, to see why she couldn't fly away. It was because of the blood—the blood was weighing them down.
She woke and looked at the clock. Noon. Sunday worship was over. Her father and mother would be standing in the foyer of the church shaking the hands of the faithful as they went their separate ways. Dinah had her own service to attend.

She called the hotline from a payphone and told them where to find the body of Tabitha. Then she went for a drive. She passed church after church, marveling at the number of cars pulling out of the parking lot. It was hard to reconcile the numbers of people that worshipped God on Sundays with the amount of evil that existed. As she waited at one stoplight, she watched a little girl in a blue dress come dancing out of the church. She waited for her parents by jumping up and down the steps. When they came out, she happily extended a hand to each and then swung between them as they lifted her up and down all the way to the car.

Dinah pulled her eyes away from them at the sound of a horn blowing behind her. She slowly pulled through the intersection, straining for a last glimpse of the little girl getting into the backseat. No matter what she did, no matter how many johns she killed, she could not guarantee that the little girl would be safe. If the mother and father promised the little girl that they would protect
her, they would be lying. Too much evil was in this world. No one could truly protect anyone else.

She had once heard someone say they should buy an island and ship all the pedophiles and rapists there to live. But then someone else asked what we would do when the island filled up. And another person posed the horrifying situation of being innocent and being sent to live on such an island. That person had asked if anyone would be willing to be the innocent person who got sent there, so long as it meant all the guilty ones got sent there, too. Of course, everyone said no. But now, as Dinah thought of Tabitha's raped body buried in the ground of the elementary school and of the little girl jumping up and down the steps of the church, she knew that if she were asked that same question today she would say without hesitation, "Yes, I'll be the one."

But it didn't work that way. She couldn't stop them from being hurt. If she could take away their pain, she would. She would take it all. But she couldn't. No matter what she did, she couldn't take it away—not completely. And she knew that she also couldn't take another vision of a little girl without panties on a bed, of a woman’s naked body being thrown out like trash. The pain was consuming her. There would be nothing left of her if she continued.
With each step she took into the darkness, she lost a little more of herself. She had learned that you can’t put your hands in their blood and remain untainted. She was scared of what she was becoming—scared that soon she would be stuck in the darkness forever.

That evening she knocked on Anne's door again. The door was opened by a woman who looked like a slightly younger version of Anne.

"Hi, I'm Dinah, Anne's neighbor from downstairs. I was just checking to see how she was doing.

"I don't mean to be rude, but let me check and see if Anne feels like talking."

"Sure. I understand."

Dinah stepped into the living room. It was filled with people, most of whom, it seemed, were temporarily living there. She responded to a few nods and then stood quietly by the door while Anne's sister went into the back bedroom.

When the sister came out again, fresh tears were visible on her cheeks.

"You can go in . . . She . . ." The woman paused and contemplated this stranger who lived in the same building as her sister. "She received some news earlier."

Dinah nodded and then quickly walked past the curious eyes of the people sitting thigh to thigh on the couch.
She knocked softly on the bedroom door and waited for Anne's "Come in."

She was sitting in a chair by the window, rocking slowly. Tissues were scattered in the floor. She was clutching a photo album and a stuffed unicorn to her chest.

Dinah sat on the edge of the bed and waited.

"They found Tabitha. She's dead," Anne repeated the words as if they were being whispered to her by some invisible prompter crouched next to the chair.

"I am so sorry, Anne."

"People keep telling me that it's better to know for sure than to spend years or even the rest of my life wondering if she's alive."

Dinah nodded.

"I'd rather wonder. At least then you still have some hope left."

Dinah didn't know how to respond. She was the one responsible for leading the police to the body. She stumbled on her words, "Do they know what happened?"

Anne looked at her as if she was an idiot. "Someone raped and killed my baby," she said.

Dinah blushed. "Have the police arrested anyone?"
"A man matching the description of the man seen with Tabitha at the abandoned store was found dead this morning."

"They're sure he's the one?"

"I don't know." She looked down at the album in her lap. "My little girl . . . the baby I rocked to sleep in this chair . . . is gone."

Dinah went to her and kneeled beside the chair. She was there on her knees looking at the pictures of Tabitha when Anne's sister came in the room.

Dinah rose and then bent down to give Anne a hug before she followed the sister out. "Let me know if there is anything at all I can do," she said as the apartment door closed behind her.

The tears came then, dropping quietly onto the steps as she walked slowly back down to her apartment. What she had done accomplished nothing. Tabitha was still dead. Her mother was still grieving a daughter. She had felt strange in the apartment, as if she didn't belong around people who were mourning the lost life of a little girl. She took life. She added to the blood that others cleaned up. What the family was doing, what her father did—the comforting of the ones who were suffering—was the real work. She belonged with the ones who spilled the blood.
But she didn't want to belong there. Not anymore.
Unresolved

She spent the next day at work in her office with her door locked. She didn't want to see anyone, especially Mary. She couldn't handle listening to her talk about Tabitha as "that poor thing," and she definitely didn't want to know Mary's thoughts on the possible vigilante murder of the man who had killed Tabitha. She had enough guilt already. Last night she had decided. She was done. Even if the visions came back in full force, even if she never slept another night through, she was done. She couldn't stop them. There were too many. What good had she really done anyway? Marisa's rapist had gotten away with it; so had Angela's. And Angela, Cheryl, and Tabitha were still dead. The police would figure out that they were looking for a woman who killed rapists, and the hunt would be on. She was done. This time her decision had nothing to do with Michael or any false of hope of a normal life; she knew that wasn't possible. She just didn't want to kill anymore.
But then she got home and saw the fishing pole sitting outside her apartment door. A note was stuck on the hook: “Bet I catch more fish than you. Call me. Michael.”

It was ridiculous and perfect at the same time. Dinah had grown up fishing with her grandfather and father, but she hadn't been in years. How had he known? Michael was unresolved. She needed to know what his part in all this really was.

She picked up the pole and went inside. How would she explain her behavior at the end of their first date? Temporary psychosis? Mild schizophrenia? That time of the month?

She got his voice mail. “Hi, Michael, it’s Dinah. I’m ready to kick your ass in fishing whenever you want. Name the mud hole, and I’ll be there.”

She kept the phone nearby, and she waited.

He called a few hours later.

"I heard about the little girl in your building. I'm so sorry. Did you know her?"

"Not really," she said and then quickly changed the subject. "So when is this fish-off taking place?"

"Would you prefer early morning or late night?" he asked.
“Late night, of course,” she told him. “That’s when you can find the best nightcrawlers.”

“A woman after my own heart,” he declared.

She tried to sound like she was looking forward to it, but she still couldn’t shake that feeling she’d had when she held his hand at the magic show. Something was wrong about him; she just didn’t know what. She would be prepared this time. She would find out exactly who he was, and then she would bring an end to this, one way or the other.

She awakened that night to the sound of the television. She grabbed her gun from the nightstand and slowly made her way into the living room. A woman was sitting on the couch. In the light from the screen, the sequins on her halter top glittered, and Dinah knew it was Cheryl.

She flipped on the overhead light and lowered her gun.

"Did you really think that was going to do any good?" Cheryl asked, motioning toward the gun.

"Sometimes it's quite effective," Dinah said.

"I just came to tell you something."

"What? Go fishing with Michael?"

"You've already decided to do that. I just came to tell you that this is not about any individual woman or
victim; it's about all of us. You have to look at the bigger picture, Dinah."

"What do you mean?"

"Why don't you watch some television," she said, before she disappeared.

Dinah sat in the coldness where Cheryl had been and stared at the screen. *What do dead people watch late at night?*

But there was no show on the screen, just images, thousands of images flickering rapidly across the screen—women being killed, women being raped, all different times in history, all different countries, all different ages, sizes, colors. She sat mesmerized, wondering where it was coming from and how she was seeing it. Then the screen suddenly went blank. She had no idea what she was supposed to have realized, what Cheryl had been trying to tell her. Was she just trying to guilt Dinah into continuing by reminding her how many women were being hurt, had been hurt, and would be hurt? Dinah already knew that. That's why she wanted to stop—because she realized how futile it was. Nothing was going to stem the tide, certainly not one woman. She wanted to scream. *Why can't I just get a straight answer?*
For the next three days, Dinah avoided people as much as possible. She went to work, stayed in the back office away from Mary, and then drove home. But on Thursday, her gas tank was just about empty. She would have to stop at the gas station on the way home, but she could just slide her card through at the pump. No need to have contact with anyone.

The station was full, and she had to wait for an empty pump. Her tank was half full when the attendant came out with a roll of receipt paper.

"It's outta paper," he said. "You wanna receipt?"

"No. I don't need one," Dinah told him. She could feel it coming on, strong. She pulled the nozzle out and went to put it back on the pump, but as she moved toward the pump, her arm brushed against his.

The contact was too much for her.

She struggled to hang the nozzle back up. Her hands were shaking, and her vision was beginning to blur.

"You okay?" the attendant asked.

"I'm fine," she spat at him as she climbed back in her car.

She wanted to drive away, but she was caught.

He was waiting around the side of the building when the woman came home. He knew her address because he checked
her driver's license every time she bought cigarettes. He knew her routine because she came in the mini-mart the same time every afternoon with her uniform on. Second shift.

When she went to open the front door of the building, he came behind her. One hand over the mouth. One hand holding the knife in her back.

"I won't hurt ya as long as ya stay quiet."
She started to scream but stopped.

"Walk," he ordered.

"Where are we going?"

"To your apartment. Just keep walking, and don't make a sound."

He knew she lived on the bottom floor, and that it was unlikely they would pass anyone at this time of night. They didn't.

When they got to her apartment door, she paused.

"Open it."
She struggled to get the key in the lock, and he pressed the knife more deeply against her.

He shut the door behind them after they walked in.

"What do you want? Whatever you want, take it," she said. Her voice was shaking.
He laughed. "I want you."
She began trembling.
"Don't turn around or scream, and you'll get through this just fine."

He pushed her into the bedroom and leaned her over the side of the bed.

She began to cry.

A knock on the car window brought Dinah out of the vision. The attendant was holding her receipt. "You want this?" he asked.

She shook her head and put the car in drive. As she drove away, she looked back at him. He was standing there, staring at her car, the receipt in his hand.

Her own hands were still shaking when she got home. She was exhausted from fighting the vision that kept trying to replay in her head. Over and over, she stopped the scenes as if with a remote and then methodically erased the tape.

"Go away. Go away. Go away." She lay on her bed in the dark room repeating the two words until they became an indistinct mumble.

She dreamt that she was digging for nightcrawlers. But it wasn't worms in the mud; it was body parts. They kept trying to slip out of her fingers as she attached them to the hooks. As soon as they landed in the water, Dinah could see things moving toward them in the murky water. When she
reeled in the heavy lines, men were feeding on what was left on the lines. They struggled free of the hooks before she could pull them all the way in. Each time one got away, she grew more and more frustrated. But then Michael came, and he brought worms. He told her she needed to use the worms instead. They laughed when they reeled in the first fish together. She woke to the realization that it was Friday.
Fishing

Dinah spent the day alternating between trying to block the vision from yesterday and trying to figure out what she should do with Michael. When Mary asked her if she had any plans for the weekend, she reluctantly admitted that she and Michael had made plans for that evening. Like the wife asleep in the john's house, Mary complicated things. She acted as if her nephew could do no wrong, but Dinah knew something about him was off. She didn't get the feeling about him that she did about the other rapists, but that just might mean he hadn't raped anyone yet. Would she be able to kill him if she had to? Then again, what if he truly was one of the good ones? What would she do with him then? Either way there was no future for them, but she still had to know—still had to see it through. She promised herself she would know by the end of the evening.

When he picked her up, he was wearing jeans and a t-shirt that showed off his arms, and she remembered how attracted she was to him.

On the way to the river, Michael asked her if she heard the latest update on Tabitha.
"No, I haven't been watching. Why? Did they find the
guy who did it?"

"I read in the paper this morning that they think a
guy who got murdered a few blocks from an elementary school
may be the one who took her."

"Really? I hadn't heard that." She decided to switch
the subject. "So have you been to this site to fish
before?"

"Of course not. That would give me an unfair
advantage, wouldn't it?"

She laughed and gave him a cynical look. "Yes, it
would."

"The paper also said there was evidence, not publicly
released by the police, that a woman may have killed the
guy."

She swallowed hard and tried to appear disinterestedly

He shrugged his shoulders. "Paper really didn't say
why—just that the police weren't ruling out the possibility
and were pursuing all leads."

"It doesn't seem right." She was venturing out onto a
ledge, but she couldn't seem to stop herself.

"What do you mean?" he asked.
"Well, a little girl is dead, and the man who raped and killed her is dead," she said. "Maybe it should end there."

He didn't say anything for a minute. "A human life is still a human life. And one person shouldn't be deciding who deserves to live and who deserves to die."

"Actually, I think there are times when only one person has the right to make that decision," she replied.

"Maybe you're right," he said. "Maybe there are times like that." He was staring into the distance, and she wondered what or who he was thinking of.

"So, do you always have these heavy philosophical discussions with your fishing dates?"

He looked back at her and smiled. "I've never even gone fishing on a date before."

The stretch of river was deserted just like Michael had promised it would be. On the way to the fishing spot, they stopped off to dig for nightcrawlers.

"Sure you're up for this?" he asked.

"Are you?" she retorted as she grabbed the small shovel from him and sunk it deep into the moist dirt.

Within minutes they were both covered in mud, but the bucket was full of the huge slimy worms.
"I guess I forgot how messy this could be," he apologized.

"It's okay. But something's missing." She kept her back to him as she rolled the mud in her hands into a small ball.

"What's that?"

"This!" She had good aim, and the lobbed mudball hit him square on the chin.

He stood there without moving for a few seconds before wiping the mud from his face. "I can't believe you just did that."

He almost sounded angry, and she regretted letting down her guard for a moment. But then he ducked down and scooped up a huge mound of mud. "How 'bout a mud mask?" he asked as he threw the ball at her.

He wasn't quite quick enough, though, and she easily ducked. "No thanks. I just went to the spa a few days ago."

"Well, did you get some worms while you were there?" He was holding the bucket of worms at a perfect throwing angle.

"You wouldn't."

"Oh, I would."

"Okay. Okay. Truce," she begged.
"How can it be a truce if you got me, but I never got you back?" he asked.

"Fine. I'll stand still, and you can throw one mudball at my chin."

"I find those terms acceptable." He set the bucket on the ground and then began rolling the mud next to it.

"But it can't be bigger than the one I threw, and you have to lob it, like I did."

"Anything else you want to add?" He stood there with the huge mudball in his hand, grinning at her like they were on a playground.

"No. Just be gentle," she closed her eyes and waited for the mud to hit.

When she still hadn't felt anything a few seconds later, she opened one eye. He had dropped the mudball and was standing just a few inches in front of her.

"Change of terms," he said and leaned in.

Dinah was expecting to feel his lips on hers, but he kissed her chin instead, right where the mudball would have hit. Only when she tilted her head down, did his lips find hers. She could just barely taste some of the mud that had found its way into his mouth, but the kiss was perfect—firm, like he had been waiting to do this for a long time, and also gentle, like he was perfectly happy to stay right
where he was in this moment with her. She waited for something to happen—nausea, dizziness, uncomfortable prickly heat, any of the signs to let her know who he was—but nothing like that happened. All she felt was the way a woman should feel after she's just been kissed.

"I think I got the better end of our truce," he told her when they stopped.

"I wouldn't say that," she said.

Just before casting their lines into the water, he extended a filthy hand and said, "May the best man win."

"You mean best woman, don't you?" she countered.

Within five minutes, she had pulled in her first fish, a respectable smallmouth bass. Within twenty-five minutes, she had caught four fish, and Michael had only caught one.

"Something's not right here," he protested as he threw back in his scrawny bluegill.

"What do you mean?"

"The only logical explanation is that you cast some kind of magic spell on the fish," he declared.

"Magic spell?"

"Yep. I bet you promised them all that you'd kiss them and turn them into princes if they let you reel them in."

"If I had the magic to do that, then how come you didn't turn into a prince when I kissed you?"
She laughed at his mock-hurt expression. "Oh! I get it. You were already a prince. I am so sorry."

"Apology accepted."

A few hours later, Michael graciously conceded the victory, bowing as he did so.

“I stand corrected. You are the fishing queen, and I am nothing but a jester in your court."

“The jester was always my favorite, anyway,” she told him.

As they packed up the gear to leave, though, a more serious mood seemed to settle over both of them—as if leaving the river represented a decision about where they were headed in their relationship and not just where they were headed next on their date.

Dinah broke the silence. "I have to ask you something."

"Shoot."

"What happened between you and the woman at the hospital who quit?"

"Who told you about that?"

"Why? Is it something you don't want me to know? I thought you said you hadn't dated anyone in over a year."
"I haven't. That's why Karla was so upset. We went out once as friends. Then, she told she wanted to be more than friends, and I told her that just wasn't going to happen."

"So that's why she left your office crying, but why did she quit?"

"Honestly? I don't know. But I doubt it had much to do with me."

She was silent as he searched her face.

"Satisfied?"

"For now."

"So, my turn for a question: Is that why you ended our date early that night—because someone told you about that?"

She nodded. "Stephanie cornered me in the bathroom and told me to be careful."

He grimaced. "So much for her being harmless. I'm glad I never went out with her."

"She definitely seems interested."

"I know. She's been throwing me hints ever since I got there."

"You seemed oblivious that night at the magic show."

"Why am I going to pay any attention to Stephanie when I can pay attention to you?"
She blushed, then, despite herself, and he smiled.
"That's the first time I think I've had the slightest bit of the upper hand in this thing."
"Ready to get going, Fishing Queen?"
"Yep. But we're going to get your new truck filthy."

He looked down at his mud soaked clothing and shoes.
"I guess I hadn't really thought about that . . . Oh well, no big deal. Upholstery can be cleaned."

She looked at him for just a second and then began taking off her clothes. She felt both out of control and completely in control. "Look. Don’t take this the wrong way, but why don’t we just take off our clothes . . . I mean, ride in what's under our clothes. It’s just like wearing a swimming suit anyway."

His mouth dropped. She was taking off her shirt.
"What? Don’t you have on underwear?" she asked as her head poked out of her top.
"Yees, of course . . . ."

"So what’s the problem? Never seen a woman in bra and panties before?"
"Yes."

"So, come on, fish boy. Strip."
He turned away and focused on the worms that were left in the can. “What do you think we should do with the worms? Save them or put ‘em back in the mud.”

“In the mud. They deserve a reprieve.”

When she was down to her underwear and bra, he was still staring in the can.

"Nervous about somebody seeing you?” she asked.

"Nervous about you seeing me,” he confessed.

"I'm not looking. I promise,” she said as she raised her eyebrows and looked at his shorts.

When they got into the vehicle, he watched her pull the seatbelt over the middle of her breast and the lap belt over the top of her bikini underwear and began laughing.

"It's a good thing I have tinted windows; otherwise, a lot of truckers would be wrecking."

"The only thing that matters is if you wreck. Think you can handle it?"

"Yeah. I can handle it."

What surprised her even more than how easily she had stripped down to her underwear was how comfortable she still felt, even now, riding next to him without any clothes on. She told herself that she was testing him, pushing him to see what kind of man he was. But although
her gun was in her purse if she needed it, deep down she wanted to trust him. She wanted him to be different.

They talked about fishing, their families, church, work, and childhood—everything but what was going to happen when they got to her apartment. She got a kick out of watching him trying not to look at her body. He had the kind of body that she used to feel safe curled next to in bed. Strong arms and legs. Wide chest with plenty of room for her to lay her head.

When they got back into the city, she got her shirt from the floorboard and pulled it back over her head. Once they were in the parking lot of her building, she slipped on her pants and then waited outside the vehicle while he got back into his pants.

"Why don't you come inside and let me throw your shirt and pants in the wash. I could make some coffee."

"Is this an attempt to get me naked in your apartment?"

"Maybe." It was out there. She had done it. She had invited him into her apartment. She wasn't scared. She wanted this—wanted him. She could handle whatever happened. What was taking him so long to answer?

"I'm good with that," he finally said.
Once he was actually in her apartment, though, Dinah began to second-guess herself again—to remind herself how insane this was. She left him standing in the middle of her living room and went to the bedroom to get him a change of clothes. She still couldn't explain the feeling she had gotten when she touched his hand, and, even if she could, it was still impossible for her to get involved with someone. For all she knew, the police were already tracing the murders back to her.

When she came back to the living room, though, he was standing in exactly the same place she had left him, looking very nervous and very attractive. Then again, she thought, what was this one night going to matter in the long run?

She smiled and handed him the t-shirt and sweatpants she had grabbed. "You can change in the bathroom, if you want. I promise to stay out here and not peek."

"Well, I wouldn't want you being overcome with desire. My body has that effect on women, you know," he replied, strutting toward the bathroom.
She laughed at his exaggerated strut and went back into the bedroom.

When he opened the bathroom door, she had changed into a clean pair of jeans and t-shirt and was sunk down into the oversized lumpy couch, pretending to read a magazine. "Took you long enough," she teased him.

She got up to take his dirty clothes from him. "I'll be right back. The washer and dryer are in the basement. Coffee's on in the kitchen."

As Dinah walked down the steps to the laundry room, she thought about his boxer shorts. The plaid cotton fabric was worn to softness and the elastic around the waist was slightly loose. They were the kind she would steal to wear around the apartment. When she put his wet jeans and t-shirt in the washer, she felt almost domestic. She shook the feeling off and thought instead of what Michael had looked like without his shirt and pants on.

She had been surprised by how large his biceps were and how chiseled the muscles in his legs were. His back was strong, too, smooth with well-rounded shoulders. Even the little bulge of his stomach was sexy to her because it was a vulnerable spot he kept hidden from everyone.

She blushed as she went up the stairs, thinking of how easily she had slipped off her clothes. She had ridden next
to him virtually naked! How had she done that? Right now she could barely manage the thought of sitting next to him in sweatpants on the couch. She paused outside her apartment door and tried to shake the nervousness. This was ridiculous. It wasn't like this was her first time.

When she opened the apartment door, Michael was staring at her CD collection. "I gave up pondering the weight bench in the middle of the floor," he said. "Now I'm just trying to figure out how you go from Prince to George Strait," he said.

"Well, it usually doesn't happen in the same night," she admitted. "What I listen to depends completely on my mood at the time."

He put down the CD and turned to look at her, "I see. So what is your mood right now?"

She ignored the question. "Did the coffee get done?"

She walked over to the pot and then reached to get two mugs off the rack over the counter.

"Actually, I'm not a big fan of coffee," he said.

"Oh." She could feel him standing behind her. She stared at the rack.

"I'm not even a big fan of clean, dry clothes."

His hand was on her waist. A gentle tug. She turned.
Suddenly both arms were around her waist, and she was staring into his eyes. He was only a few inches taller than she was—perfect kissing level. “So what are you a fan of?”

“Oh, the usual. The Red Socks, old westerns, my red plaid boxer shorts . . .”

“I’m a fan of those, too.”

“. . . and you.”

“Well, there is a club. We can send you a membership form.”

“Can I just apply in person?”

“I guess.”

A second of just looking at one another. Then the kiss.

Soft, firm lips asking her to open up. She did.

She vaguely remembered kisses like this—where you feel like you’re running out of air, but you don’t want to stop. A kiss that seems to travel over your entire body, knocking on each door to make sure everyone’s awake. A kiss that starts out calm and neat but ends up wild and messy—lips mismatching and groping for any other area to grab onto.

When his mouth reached the end of her neck, she pulled back.

He lifted his head. “Sorry. I got carried away.”
“No, it’s okay. I’m just ticklish, that’s all.”

“Do you want to stop?”

“No.”

He still made no move, so she ran her hand through his hair.

“No?”

“No.”

She took his hand and led him into the bedroom. They stood there at the foot of the bed just looking at one another for a moment. Then she slid her hands under his t-shirt and searched for that perfect place—that spot where her hand could rest while her fingers played with his chest hair. She smiled when she felt his nipples get hard, and then she slid her arms around him and found his lips again.

She lifted his t-shirt over his head and then took off her own. The feel of his skin against her breasts made her hungry. She was loosening the drawstring of his sweatpants as he fumbled with the clasp of her bra. He stood there naked, staring at her as she took off her jeans. When the jeans were on the floor, she went to kiss him again, but he wanted more than her lips. He moved her back onto the bed, and she pulled him with her. He kissed her chin, her ears, her neck, her breasts, even her bellybutton. His mouth paused for a moment at the edge of her panties, and then he
tugged on the lace. Her laugh came out more like a moan, and he raised his head to look in her eyes.

"Can the lace go?" he asked.

"The lace can definitely go," she murmured.

He slid her panties off and then continued kissing her. He didn't stop until she asked him to, until she said, "I want you inside me now."

If he hadn't been so desperate to be inside her, he might have smiled at the urgency in her tone.

He stayed with her all night, keeping his hand on her, even as they both shifted. He didn’t try to control where she moved; he just made sure that wherever she moved, she could feel him—feel that he was still there. She had felt the strange feeling of heat coming from him off and on as they made love, but it became part of everything else her body was feeling—even made her more excited. She didn't care what it was about him she didn't know; she just didn't want him to stop.

She had forgotten what it was like to make love. And now that she had been reminded, she was nervous. She wanted him to go. There was no reason for him to stay. This wasn't going anywhere—couldn't go anywhere. She lay and waited for daylight, so that he would get up.
The Day After

When he was still sleeping at seven o'clock, Dinah decided to get something to eat. Maybe if she made enough noise, he would get the hint. She was starving, but the fridge and the cabinets were almost bare. She hadn't been to the grocery store since she had had the vision of Tabitha. Her stomach was demanding eggs and bacon. Eggs scrambled until fluffy with just a hint of cheddar cheese. Bacon fried to "soft crispy"—the way she always "ordered" it when her mother got up early to make sure that Dinah and her brother ate a good breakfast before school. Toast with light tan lines, buttered not quite to the point of saturation. Everything about breakfast was about points, knowing when to stop. If he would wake up, she could go to the grocery store.

"Hey, you. I thought we were sleeping in." He was standing in the doorway of the bedroom in her sweatpants and a yawn.

"I got hungry."

He perked up at the suggestion of food. "Uh-huh. What you got?"
"Not much, unfortunately. Actually, I was thinking about making a run to the grocery store."

"Or, we could just hit Waffle House," he said cheerily. "All I need is my clothes."

"Oh, shit. The clothes. I'll be right back!"

Dinah sprinted down to the laundry room in her robe. Luckily, some other late laundry-doer had put the wet clothes in the dryer for her. When she got back he was lounged on the couch in a mock-sexy position.

"Hey, baby. Want some of this for breakfast?" he asked her.

She dropped the jeans on his face and went into her room to get dressed. Waffle House sounded good, and it would get him out of the apartment.

She was surprised when he just assumed that he would be riding with her, but she didn't say anything. He could leave when they got back to the apartment. On the way to breakfast, he fiddled with every gadget in her car. First the windows went up and down. Then the vent got turned off and on. Then his seat slid back and forth. Then he adjusted the mirror on the outside. Then, she could tell from his expression, he figured out how to switch on the seat warmer.

"You're such a guy," she said between laughs.
"Why, thank you very much. I am very manly, aren't I?" he responded. "But what, may I ask, prompted this sudden, accurate assessment of my manliness?"

"Guys have to play with everything with any kind of technology behind it. They have to know how everything works, and they have to be the one who gets to push the buttons."

He leaned over into her lap suggestively. "Yes, I'm guilty as charged. I love to play with things."

She shoved his head back over, and he feigned hurt. "I had no idea you were this goofy," she said. "Making love does that to me, I guess," he said.

She felt a little flip in her stomach when he said "making love." The only time she had ever heard guys say "making love" instead of fucking, screwing, hitting in, tagging it, getting it on, or, if they were polite, having sex, was when they were making a joke in front of their buds, laughing at what their girlfriends or wives made them say.

"It had been a while for me . . . like a few decades," he said.

She looked at him startled, and he confessed, "Well, not exactly decades, but a while."
"Me, too," she said finally, trying to remember exactly how long. She couldn't remember the exact last time she had sex. It had been with Tim, of course, but all the times they had had sex had long-ago blended together in her mind.

"I need to tell you something."

She pulled into a parking spot and turned off the engine. "Okay."

"It's nothing bad, Dinah."

"Okay," she said again.

"I just . . ." He started over, "I just don't do this without it meaning something." He paused. "I'm not saying it has to mean the same thing to you or anything, but, well, I kinda' hope it does . . ."

She had no answer for that, so she leaned over and kissed him. He tried to keep talking, but she wouldn't let him.

When he stopped trying to talk, she pulled back and flipped open the vanity mirror.

"I look like I had wild sex last night."

"Yes, you do," he agreed, "and you're gorgeous."

She snorted at the compliment. The mirror confirmed that she looked horrible, but what did she care? She was only here for the eggs and bacon. Just before they got out
of the car, a huge growl came from her stomach, and she realized that she hadn't felt really hungry in a long time.

"We better get you in there fast," he teased.

Breakfast wasn't awkward like she thought it might be. There was no more talk of feelings. He laughed when she dropped a forkful of omelet in her lap, and she laughed when he got a single hash brown strand stuck to the side of his face next his mouth. They joked with the waitress, made fun of the customers who looked hung over from the night before, and gobbled up their food like they had been starving.

It felt right.

Then, a man in a navy sweatshirt and navy nylon exercise pants came in and sat at the counter a few seats away from their booth. As he passed, he brushed against Dinah's shoulder.

"What about this cat? What's with the pants that swish?"

But Dinah couldn't laugh as his swish, swish imitation. She was too busy trying to fight down the food that was coming back up from her stomach. Now she remembered why she hadn't been hungry in so long.
She saw it coming in her head, like a camera moving in closer. The still life of the man with his arm hooked around the woman's neck suddenly took life.

"I've got to go the bathroom," she said as she jumped up.

As she walked quickly down the narrow hall, the words in her head seemed to echo and bounce off the walls: "Bitch, if you scream again. I will kill you."

She made it the bathroom, but it was locked. When she tried the knob, the person inside yelled, "Wait a minute, will ya?"

She looked around in a panic. The men's bathroom door was slightly ajar.

She dashed in, locking the door behind her. The woman had stopped screaming, stopped doing anything. Was she dead? No, she was still alive. Dinah could see her chest heaving as she fought for breath.

He released his arm. "Now, see how easy this can be?" he asked, suddenly sweet again, as he zipped down his pants. "I don't want to hurt you. It's just that you got me so turned on. I was watching you dance, and I knew that you were moving those hips for me. I want you to move those hips under me."
Dinah watched the woman's face. When the tears began rolling down her cheeks, Dinah knew he had entered her. The woman closed her eyes, as the tears continued to run out from under her lids.

"Come on, baby. Move those hips for me. He can't do what he needs to do if he thinks you're not into it. Come on, just like you're dancing again."

Dinah tried to tell the woman to move her hips. If the man didn't get hard, he would blame her and probably kill her in his impotent rage. Whether or not she moved her hips might be the difference between being raped and being murdered.

But the woman's body didn't move.

"Move those beautiful hips now, or you'll never move again." His voice had changed again, and Dinah knew he was reaching the limit.

Move them. Just a little. Move them.

The woman's eyes opened, and she whispered, "No. You'll have to . . . kill me."

Dinah knew what she was feeling, knew how it felt to be told to participate in your own humiliation and potential destruction. Just do it. Just do it and get out of there with your life.

But the woman stayed still.
"Fine, have it your way," he growled. Dinah winced as he lifted her head by the hair and then banged her head into the concrete. Her eyes closed again, and Dinah wondered if she was dead or just unconscious.

The man took his limp penis in his hand. "She's all yours now. Wake up."

Dinah looked away. She needed to see where they were. It was behind some building. She could hear faint music in the background. Beer bottles were scattered around. A night club. They were behind a club.

When she looked back, he was moving his hand around underneath the woman's skirt and kissing her exposed breasts. "Yeah, that's good isn't it? You like that, don't you. Not even awake, and you're still getting wet."

He stuck his penis back in, but the hardness must have only lasted a second because he began to grow angry again. "Damn it. Am I gonna hav to kill this sorry bitch to get you goin'?"

His anger was growing with each second that his penis failed him. "Stupid bitch. This is your fault. Acting like a whore on the dance floor but won't ante up."

He peered down at her. "Are you dead, yet? No, how 'bout this then?"

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His hands were around her throat. Suddenly, the woman's eyes opened, filled with panic. Her body began to move under his. Still with his hands around her neck, he cooed, "That's it, baby. Now we're talking. Oh, yeah, move those hips for me."

Michael was knocking on the bathroom door. "Dinah? Are you okay? I saw you come in here. Are you sick? Is there something I can do?"

She stared into the dirty mirror as the vision faded. He had left her lying on the ground, but she had struggled to her feet and found her way to her car. As she stumbled across the parking lot in her dirty mini-skirt and torn blouse, a group of guys standing by their cars called out to her.

"Hey, honey, you get some action behind the building?"
"I'm jealous. I wanted a piece of that sweet ass."
"You'll be back next week, right?"

Before she began vomiting, Dinah managed to say, "I'm fine, Michael. Just a little too much food for this early in the morning. I'll be there in a minute."

As she rose unsteadily to her feet and wiped off her chin, she realized he was still standing outside the door. She could feel his uncertainty and his concern.

"I'm fine, Michael. Really."
This time the irritation in her voice worked, and she heard him walk away. When she was sure he was gone, she sunk back down on the dirty floor and leaned against the wall.

When Dinah came out of the restroom Michael was waiting by the front door. Relieved that she would not have to go near the john at the counter, she quickly walked to him. But as she did so, the john got up, too. They arrived at the door at the same time. Michael moved aside to let the man go by, and Dinah stepped back. As the door started to swing shut, Michael grabbed it and looked expectantly at Dinah.

"Ready to go," he asked, in the same concerned voice that he had used to ask if she was okay from outside the bathroom door. He seemed puzzled by how she had ended up so far away from him.

"Sure," she said, trying to sound okay.

But as she walked through the door, the john came back in carrying a newspaper that he had bought from one of the stands outside.

He waited in the small entry way for Dinah to continue through the door and pass, but instead she backed up again, right into Michael.
Instinctively, Michael backed up, too. As Dinah turned away, he told the man, "Go ahead. She's not feeling well."

The john looked at Michael extending his arm to hold the door from inside the restaurant and then at Dinah standing off to the side with her eyes fixed on the wall. "Thanks. Hope everything's okay."

When she was sure he had had time to be seated at the counter again, Dinah hurried through the doors. Once on the outside of the restaurant, she looked back through the large windows. He was just sitting there, drinking his coffee and reading his newspaper. Michael must think she was nuts. Then, the john turned around and looked at her. He smiled. He smiled in the same way he had smiled down at the woman when she had finally started moving her hips, as if he knew that he owned her—that her independence and control were an illusion.

Within two seconds, though, he had turned back to his newspaper, and Dinah was left standing there, staring stupidly through the glass. Michael touched her shoulder. "Come on. Let's get you home."

There was no goofiness on the way home. Michael drove, and she stared out the window. He didn't pressure her to talk.
When they got back to the building, he followed her to the apartment so soundlessly that she was surprised when he came in behind her, surprised he was still there.

"What can I get for you? What do you need?" he asked.

Why did he keep asking her what she needed all the time? Did he really think that he could give her what she needed? Was he that naive to think that she was just some sensitive woman who needed a big, strong shoulder to cry on?

"Did I do something wrong?" he asked in a strange voice much too small for him.

Does he actually think this is about him? "No, of course not. Why would you think that?"

"It's just that you seemed angry with me all of a sudden."

"I'm really not feeling well, Michael. Breakfast was great, though. Thank you."

"So . . . I guess I should probably get home now and let out my dog."

"Yeah, I think I'm just going to lie back down for a while."

He seemed about to ask her if she was okay, so she pre-empted him. "I'm fine."
He gave her a kiss on the cheek and headed toward the door. But he had only taken a few steps before he turned back around. "That man at the restaurant. The one in the swishing pants. Did you know him?"

She was startled by the question. How could she say, "No, I don't know him, but I did see him brutally rape a woman and leave her to die."

"No, why do you ask?"

"It's just that you seemed to have a strong reaction to him, and he looked at you like he knew you."

It was the look in her eyes. The john had seen the look in her eyes and recognized her. Just like she could recognize them, they could recognize her. She was one of them—the women who lay on the grass, the cement, the wood, the tile, the bed, the backseat and look up with eyes full of fear even as they move their hips. When she was killing men, when she was the one in control, the look wasn't there. But now, now that she had decided to stop . . .

"No, I don't know him," she lied to him.

And as she shut the door behind him, she realized that he knew she was lying.
III. Shifting Revelations
Forgiveness

Dinah tried to go to bed and just curl up, but all the little noises in the apartment seemed amplified. The running of the refrigerator sounded like a combine. The clicking on and off of the air conditioner sounded like an airplane just inches away from the window. She could even hear the small clock on her dresser pronouncing the seconds. There was no way she could sleep. She had to get out of there.

But if she did, she ran the risk. The risk of running into someone like the man at Waffle House. She realized that she had been kidding herself. This was her life. She would never be free of it. It was like squashing cockroaches. Step on one, and five million just come out from nowhere. It would never end. Ever.

She looked at the clock. 10:50. She could go to Max's. The bar had a big lunch hour and evening crowd during the week, but it stayed fairly deserted on the weekends. And Max always appreciated a good silence. The music on the jukebox only got turned on by patrons, and
conversation was never obligatory. It would be a safe place to go on a Saturday. And besides, she needed a drink.

The small bar was only a few miles away, so she made it there right as Max opened the door. "Hi, Max."

He grunted in response, and she knew that it was not an unfriendly grunt. Years of working later in bars had made him a bear in the mornings. He never even cracked a smile until about 2:00.

He slid her her usual, a Jack on the rocks, and then started taking inventory for his order on Monday. She stared at the blank screen of the television mounted above the counter. After a few minutes, he sighed and tossed her the remote.

"No thanks," she told him, sliding the remote away from her on the counter.

He shrugged and went back to counting bottles.

Dinah cringed as she heard the front door open.

"Hey, Max! Did I leave my keys here again last night?"

She recognized the voice. It was a guy named Bill who came in like clockwork every night and drank until closing time. He drove there straight from his job at the auto plant, and whenever he drank too much to make it the five blocks to his house, he would take a cab. The cabbies hated him, but they couldn't say no to Max.
Max's response was to deposit a set of heavy keys on the counter with a bang.

"Thanks, man."

Dinah looked into her glass, hoping that he would just leave. Please leave. Just leave. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw him pick up the keys in his hand and start to turn. Good.

Then he changed his mind and plunked down next to her. "Well, as long as I'm here, I might as well have a drink. It's five o'clock somewhere, right?"

He looked at her and grinned, as if he had just told a great joke. She continued staring into her drink.

"You care if I turn on the tube?" he asked, already reaching for the remote.

Once the power had blinked on, he turned to Dinah again. "You hear about this crazy shit that went down at an elementary school yesterday?"

She shook her head, still refusing to make eye contact with him.

"Well, this white dude. Some sicko, with a wife and everything, decided to bust into this school and start shooting kids. Can you believe that shit?"

He waited for her response but didn't mind continuing without one.
"The sicko's wife supposedly made a statement or something to the families of the victims, and I want to see what the hell she thinks she can say to make up for her old man being a lunatic who just shot up their kids. People kill me."

Bill was right. The school shooting had eclipsed the updates on Tabitha's killer. Dinah listened to the newscaster previewing the gunman's wife's statement that would be aired in a few minutes. As part of the preview, the news channel showed an interview with two couples identified as parents of two of the slain children.

One of the wives talked about how she took comfort in the knowledge that her baby girl was in heaven and added that she would be praying for the family of the man who had killed her daughter. Her husband followed her statement by saying that they would try to follow Jesus' teachings and forgive the man who had sinned against them.

"Can you believe that shit?" Bill asked her. "If it was my kid got killed, I'd shoot the guy and let God worry about the forgiveness part."

For once, Dinah agreed with something Bill said. As soon as Max came out of the liquor closet, she handed him her six dollars and left. She wasn't about to stick around for the statement of the gunman's wife. Just before the
door closed behind her, she heard Bill ask Max what her problem was.

She drove home thinking about forgiveness. She had been taught forgiveness all her life, but she had never understood its power until after she was raped, and she couldn't forgive herself.

Her father used to tell a story in a sermon about a woman he had tried to help. She had come to the church building early one morning, banging on the door and crying. Dinah's father had talked to her, held her sobbing body in her arms, and told her what she needed desperately to hear—that it wasn't too late for her to come back to God, to accept the love of her Savior. The woman had told him how she had been selling and abusing her body. He said it didn't matter. She told him about the abortions and the kids who had been taken away. He said it didn't matter. She left with this hope in her eyes, wanting so badly to believe that it was true, that God did still love her and she could still be saved. She had promised to come to church on Sunday. That Sunday evening, Dinah's father got a call. His card had been found with a dead woman. He identified her body at the morgue, and then went to her home and followed the trail of bloody handprints on the wall to the room where she had killed herself.
Her father used the story to talk about forgiveness and how we think that just because we cannot forgive ourselves we assume that God can't forgive us either. "The truth," he always ended, "is that we must first accept God's forgiveness before we can forgive ourselves.

Forgiveness was a strange thing. Dinah found it easy to forgive others who had done her wrong; she always had. Even the idea of forgiving her own rapist had not been incomprehensible to her. But it was different being the one who was wronged, the one with the moral standing to forgive, and being the one who felt the pain of the one who had been wronged. She knew why she killed. She wanted the pain of the women to stop. It filled her sometimes to the point where she could not breathe. She felt the pain of every woman who had ever been molested, assaulted, coerced, and raped. Like millions of tiny open wounds, she felt them. She wanted to stop the source of the pain.

Forgiveness was the right of the women who had been hurt by these men. Dinah had no standing there. She dealt in retribution, not forgiveness. God was in charge of spiritual retribution. But there needed to be a physical reckoning as well. The scales had been tipped far too long in favor of the ones who hurt. Dinah had put her hand on the scale, and tried, with each new body she added, to
begin to slowly, ever so slowly, make things even. But now she understood that they would never be completely even, no matter what she did.
Perfect

When Michael called that night, Dinah was glad to hear another human voice.

He asked her if he could come over. “I need to talk to you,” he said. "It's nothing bad—don't worry."

"Okay." She knew why she agreed to let him come over. She wanted to act normal again, wanted to believe that his presence, the presence of another person, could stop her from being pulled into the darkness, because she could feel it coming, and she was scared. She could feel the women waiting for her to act, and she wanted the burden of their pain to fall on someone else.

When she opened the door, Michael held out lilies—her favorite. As she ran to put them in water and set them on the dining room table, she felt like a little girl again when her father had brought home roses for her mother and a small bouquet for her.

She started: “I just want to apologize for this morning. I’m sorry that my weak stomach ruined our breakfast.”
But he wasn’t going to accept the same explanation.

“Look, I may be out of line here. In fact, I know that I am. But I need to ask you something.”

She nodded for him to continue, but she was unprepared for what he asked.

"I need to know what happened to you that made you not trust anyone, made you not trust men. I need to know exactly what I'm up against."

She stared at him blankly.

"Did someone cheat on you, lie to you, beat you . . . do something worse?"

She moved away from him. "Why are you asking me this?"

"Because I care . . . because I'm falling for you."

She wasn't going to have this conversation. "Do you want something to drink?" She began to walk toward the kitchen, but he grabbed her arm. She stopped, still facing the kitchen.

He dropped her arm, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to grab your arm. I just need to know; it's all I've been thinking about."

When he let loose her arm, she continued walking into the kitchen. She stood at the counter, the tears collecting into a tiny pool along the bottom line of her chin. She made no noise, but soon she was shaking. She tried to stop,
but it was impossible. He would see her shaking and know that it was true. She didn’t want him to know that it was true. She wanted him to think she was just some crazy woman. Better crazy than raped.

He came to her, but stopped just short of touching her. “You are perfect,” he whispered.

The words echoed through her head as she tried to latch on to them. They didn’t make sense. She was not perfect. She was hate and violence and sin personified.

He gently turned her toward him and lifted her chin. He repeated the words as he stared into her eyes. “You are perfect.”

She felt the darkness slipping away—felt the blood weighing down her wings dissolving into dust—felt the pain becoming a dull, almost imperceptible ache—felt the memory of death and killing growing distant.

He gathered her in his arms and let her breathe.

She went to sleep wrapped in his arms.
But Michael couldn’t stop the dreams. They slipped under his arms and in through an ear—whispers of pain that became cavernous echoes inside her. She saw herself walking to her car, remembered that she had felt tipsy, as if the three drinks she could have and still be "okay" to drive had been a miscalculation. Back then she hadn't made the connection that three plastic cups could contain the contents of a bottle.

He had come stumbling outside after her, asking for a ride. They had talked at the party; he had recognized her from a class they had together last quarter. She vaguely remembered them exchanging a kiss downstairs where the pot had been. She turned guiltily to see what he wanted. She just wanted to go home.

"I live near campus, give me a ride?" He sounded worse off than she did. She thought she remembered him being in the bathroom and someone saying that he was sick. "Get in," she said, laughing at the thought that someone was so much worse off than she was.
Dinah stood there on the sidewalk outside the house, watching herself drive away with him but unable to stop it. Then she was there, in the backseat of the car, watching herself drive him home. They were sitting outside a house. Dinah was waiting for him to get out so that she could drive off, but he was struggling with the door handle. She had been worried that he would throw up, but he hadn't. Just laid his head against the window and closed his eyes.

"I need s'm help," he told her.

She sighed and got out of the driver's side.

No, don't do it.

She opened his door, and he fell forward, forcing her to catch him. She helped him to his feet and walked him toward the door. At the door he gave her the key, and she opened it for him.

"Help me in" he said as the door swung forward

No, don't do it.

She laughed and pushed him through the door, but he hung on to her neck and she had to go in, too. It was a typical bachelor pad probably shared by five guys—hand-me-down furniture, large screen television, video game controllers on the floor, beer cans on the table, beer signs on the walls. No one else seemed to be home.
When she tried to untangle his arms from her neck, he moaned. "Don't think c'n make it to my room."

No, don't do it.

"You probably need to go to the bathroom," she muttered, allowing him to propel her forward down a narrow hall. When they got to his room, he collapsed onto the bed, pulling her with him.

"I've got to go," she told him as she pulled herself up.

"Kiss 'for you go?" he asked, sounding hopeful but hopelessly drunk.

No, don't do it.

She leaned back down to graze his cheek, but when he turned his head, she ended up kissing him lightly on the lips. When she tried to raise back up, he pulled her into him, kissing her hard, and then flipped her over, so that he was on top.

"You're not goin' anywhere 'til I fuck you," he said.

He didn't sound so drunk.

Dinah stood there in the corner of the bedroom, watching herself be raped, helpless to do anything to stop it. Heard him say, "Everyone saw us kissing. They saw us leaving together. You came in my house . . . in my bedroom. No one will believe you."
And she knew he was right. She had suspected it then as he lay on top of her and bit her neck and her breasts—so sure of his story of consensual rough sex that he didn't even bother trying not to leave any marks—and now as she stood there watching it happen, she realized just how right he had been.

But she saw something now that she hadn't seen then. They were there, surrounding her. The others. Her father had told her that angels had been there with her, making sure she survived. He had been right, in a way. It was the other women she had felt that night.

When she woke from the dream, she could still feel his arms pinning her down. She threw them off and then heard Michael mutter in his sleep. Michael. Michael was lying next to her. She tried to calm her breathing, but the old tricks didn't work. It wasn't "just a dream." She couldn't just tell herself it wasn't real. It was.

She got up to go to the bathroom. She needed the bright light, the cold tile under her feet. As she tip-toed toward the door, he asked, "Are you okay?"

"Yeah. Just going to the bathroom."

She closed the door behind her and sat down. She wondered how long she would need to wait before he fell back asleep. She didn't want to slip back into bed and feel
his arms again. Not right now. But she also didn't want to have to explain what had changed.

So she sat on the edge of the tub as the details of her rape played through her head over and over. Before long her rape was running together with all the other rapes she had seen in her visions. She wanted them gone. Out of her head. Forever. All of them.

She stood up and stared at herself in the mirror. She didn't look insane—just very, very tired. She turned her head to go, and something caught her eye. She looked back in the mirror and just for a second, just a second, they were all there. Bloody, smeared lipstick, tear-stained cheeks, bruises, plastic smiles, the women in her visions were all there. One of them had marks on her neck and lay staring at the ceiling as a male doctor took samples.

"No!"

She didn't realize that she had said it out loud until Michael's sleepy voice came from the other room, "No what?"

"Nothing. Just talking to myself."

He opened the covers for her, and she slid back in. His arms draped over her, and she tried not to shudder. It felt like a betrayal. Like lying there in his arms was somehow betraying the women in the mirror, betraying herself. She could feel them staring at her.
The next morning Michael left early. He had promised to take a look at his Aunt Mary's garbage disposal and try to figure out why it was making a strange noise.

Dinah watched him get dressed, hoping he didn't sense how grateful she was that he was leaving. When he leaned over to give her a kiss goodbye, she fought the urge to fake a yawn and faked the kiss instead.

"I'll call you this afternoon, okay?"

"Okay," she smiled and snuggled deeper into the covers. Her eyes stayed closed until she heard the sound of the door closing behind him. When she was sure he was gone, she got up and put on her sweatpants and a t-shirt.

She ran hard, pushing herself more than she had for a long time, refusing to stop until her body was completely exhausted. When she did finally stop moving and take a break to catch her breath, it was after noon, and the trail had become crowded with families walking their dogs and couples holding hands. She stood on the side for a while watching everyone go by. A woman walked by her slowly, smiling, and then lifted a hand to wave at her as she moved on into the crowd.

Dinah instinctively waved back before her fatigued mind had processed who the woman was. Then, hand till in mid-air, she realized it had been Angela, the way she had
looked before her husband had raped and killed her. Dinah started after her, but it was too late. She had already disappeared.

As the crowd swept by around her, Dinah looked down at the ground where Angela had been standing—at a line of bloody footprints. She began walking, following the blood, sure it would lead her to Angela. She wanted to yell at everyone to stop moving, but a seemingly endless succession of tennis shoes ran through the footprints, hopelessly smearing the blood. Soon, the footprints were no longer even discernible, and Dinah had to give up.

As she jogged home, she scanned the faces of everyone she passed, waiting for Angela to reappear, but she didn't.

When Dinah got back to the apartment, a moving truck was parked outside the building. She ran into Anne, carrying a moving box, on the stairs.

Her hair had been hastily pulled back, and she was wearing a wrinkled t-shirt and jeans that looked like they had been slept in. But her bloodshot eyes denied the possibility of sleep.

"You're leaving?"

"Yes, it's too painful to stay here, and my parents have invited me to come live with them for a while."
"I hope . . ." Dinah didn't know what she was trying to say, how to express her wish that Anne would somehow find a way to continue living.

"Thank you," Anne responded without waiting for Dinah to finish.

Dinah watched her walk slowly down the steps before she opened her apartment door. The black curls dangling over the arm of the recliner startled her, and she froze.

"Hi, Dinah."

Dinah forced her legs to move, to walk her around the front of the chair.

"Tabitha." She tried to speak calmly. "Your mother is leaving now. Aren't you going with her?"

"Not right now," the little girl told her. "I need your help."

Dinah watched as the little girl's face became strangely bloated and then began to decompose. "I did help you, Tabitha," she whispered. "I killed him."

"I'm not Tabitha," the voice was older now. This girl was almost a teenager, with long brown hair and a nose ring.

"I need your help, too, Dinah," she said.

The face and hair changed again, and this time it was Angela.
"I still need your help, Dinah," she said softly.

Dinah struggled to keep her hold on reality as the room suddenly filled with women and little girls. All looking at her, speaking in tandem, "We need your help, too."

"Oh, my God." She struggled to find the door even though it was right behind her.

Just before the door closed, she heard them say, "Don't go, Dinah."

She stumbled down the steps and into the sunshine.
Haunted

But even the sunshine and the noise of the movers couldn't dispel the feeling that she was being chased by the women in her apartment. It was Angela's face that stuck with her the most. Dinah had just been coming to understand her gift when she had seen Angela be raped and killed. She had not understood then what she needed to do, and Angela's husband, her rapist and killer, had gotten away. Her presence was a reminder of a debt that had not been fully paid.

Was it possible to outrun spirits, ghosts, hallucinations—whatever they were? She considered just driving as fast as she could out of town, but she didn't know where to go, where they wouldn't be able to find her. She sat there for half an hour, car running, just staring out the window, until finally she decided that her best bet was to try to escape mentally. With that thought, she put the car in drive and headed toward Max's place.

The bar had a few customers watching the game on the television, so Dinah chose a booth. Max came over to the
table with a short Jack and Coke within a minute after she sat down.

"This is becoming a daily event."

She looked at him blankly.

"You came in here yesterday, too," he explained.

"I needed a quiet place and a drink."

"Well, lucky for you, I've got both, and you're welcome to them." He turned to go, but stopped a few steps later and turned around. "Everything okay? No more bad guys like Tim giving you shit?"

"No. I'm good." She tried to smile but knew the effort was probably more grotesque than anything.

She sipped her drink and watched the door out of the corner of her eye—wondering if they would come in that way, or if they just bypassed doors altogether. By her third stiff drink, she had stopped paying attention to the door and was paying more attention to the conversation at the bar about the game. A few more men had straggled in, but Dinah remained the only woman in the place until her fourth drink.

When Max came by, she asked for another drink, but he just patted her on the back and said, "Slow down there, slugger. It's still early." She nodded, knowing better than to protest. As he moved away, the door opened, and a woman
came in. She was wearing a Reds shirt, so Dinah figured she must have come to watch the game with some of the guys seated at the bar. But the woman sat at the opposite end of the bar from the cluster of men.

Max had gone in the back to change a keg, so the woman just sat there staring at herself in the mirror as she lit a cigarette. When the woman turned around, Dinah quickly refocused her gaze on the pre-game show. But it was too late; the woman had seen her staring at her. She stared back at Dinah for a few seconds and then returned to her cigarette and the mirror. A minute later, another woman came in. This one was wearing a floral sweatshirt and looked like she had mistaken Max's for a PTA meeting. She sat down next to the woman in the Reds shirt. The other woman offered her a drag on her cigarette, and she took it, turning as she did so to look at Dinah.

When she turned back around, Dinah followed her gaze and realized that what the two women were staring at in the mirror was not themselves, but her. Only her reflection was visible in the mirror.

She quickly swallowed the rest of the liquor in her drink and then got up to leave. But as she walked toward the door, another woman, much younger, came in. Dinah met her eyes and turned around. She headed toward the back hall
and had her hand on the bar to go out the emergency exit when she heard Max's voice behind her.

"You go out that way, and you'll set off the alarm."

She pulled her hand back and turned to face him.

"Sorry. I guess I forgot. I just needed some air."

"You okay?"

"Yeah. Fine."

She closed the bathroom door with his eyes still on her. She splashed some water on her face and stared at herself in the mirror. "You're being paranoid. Get a hold of yourself."

She took a few deep breaths and headed back to the bar. The alcohol must be getting to her. She wouldn't drink any more, just hang out and talk to Max while she sobered up to drive.

She breathed a sigh of relief when she saw that the three women were gone now.

She sat down at the bar and asked Max for a glass of water.

When he set it down in front of her, she asked him what had happened to the women who had been sitting at the bar: "They not like the atmosphere, or did you refuse to serve them frozen daiquiris?"

"Huh?"
"I was just saying that those women sure left quick."

"What women?"

"The ones who were sitting here."

"They weren't here when I came out of the back."

"Oh. I guess they left when I got up."

The man a few seats down had been listening and chimed in with his two cents worth. "There haven't been any women in here all day except for you, honey." He paused and then raised his voice for the next part. "Now, of course, those two Cubs fans over here have enough estrogen to be classified as women. Maybe you mistook them for women."

He got two middle fingers in response, and Dinah tried to smile. "Maybe."

"Drink up." Max gestured to her water, and Dinah raised the glass to her lips. As she did do, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. She wasn't alone. They were there, standing behind her, all three of them. She closed her eyes and let loose of the glass. It fell, breaking into several pieces on the floor, and Max hurried over to clean up the mess.

"I shouldn't have served you so much. Let me get you another glass of water."

She opened her eyes. They were gone.

"You wanna lie down?"
Max was speaking low so that the other customers couldn't hear.

"I guess I need to."

"Come on."

He led her up the back stairs into the apartment he kept above the bar. "The couch is pretty comfy. I'll get you a pillow."

The room had begun to spin, and Dinah was all too happy to lie down. Max slipped a pillow under her head and softly closed the door behind him.

Dinah couldn't close her eyes while the room was still spinning because it made her want to throw up, so she stared at the ceiling instead. Finally, the alcohol took effect, and she fell asleep, thinking of mirrors.

The girl was wearing a red sweater and a flared black skirt. She was lying on the bed, smiling. The guy bending over her was smiling too, as he unbuttoned her sweater and pushed up her skirt. Her eyes began to close, and he patted her cheek. "Don't go to sleep on me, yet, baby. Stay awake just a little longer."

She smiled again, but her eyes were closed a few seconds later. Shortly after he began thrusting inside her, she began throwing up, just barely raising her head and letting the vomit run down her chin. He grabbed her hair
with one hand and pulled her head forward, so she wouldn't choke. He gagged, but then he closed his eyes and kept going. When he was done, he took the bedspread and wiped the vomit off her. But he couldn't get it out of her long hair, so he took off her clothes and put her in the shower.

She seemed to come to when the water started running over her, but within seconds she was out again, head slumped against the shower door. When the water running out from her finally ran clear, he pulled her out and laid her on the bed.

Dinah followed him into the hall and down the steps. The downstairs was full of people. The men looked to be in their twenties and thirties, but some of the women seemed a lot younger. The long hair and thick sideburns on the men might be making them look older to her, though. Most of the women had on flared skirts and sweaters like the girl upstairs, but some of them had on tight bellbottoms. Everyone seemed to be drinking something, and almost as many seemed to be smoking something. Some guy was strumming on a guitar in the corner, but Dinah couldn't make out the music.

The man from upstairs gestured to three guys sitting on a couch, and they followed him into the kitchen.
"That chick that was dancing down here is passed out upstairs in the bedroom. You guys wanna have some fun?"

"What do ya mean, dude?" The guy who asked was huge, linebacker huge.

"I mean, there's a naked girl in my room who's so high she won't care who is doing what to her. She's a little worse for wear, but she's still good."

"Right on."

This guy was smaller, but still built.

He and the one Dinah had followed from upstairs headed out of the kitchen.

The other two stood there looking at one another.

"What the hell are we doing?"

This one hadn't spoken, yet, and when he did, Dinah looked at him more closely.

Something about him seemed familiar.

The giant downed his beer and smashed it on the counter. "We don't do this, we'll never live it down," he said. "Come on, Max."

Dinah stepped back. The shorter guy was a younger Max.

She followed them back upstairs. She didn't want to, but she did. When she came in the door, the small, cut one was already on top of the girl. Max and the giant stood by the door. When the guy on top of the girl got done, he held out his hand to Max. "Your turn."
Max looked like he was about to be sick. He told the one next to him to go ahead, but, when he turned to leave, the short guy who had just finished stopped him. "You gotta take a turn, man. We're all in this together."

"No way, man. I'm not doing this. I got a girl." Max shook the other guy's hand off and turned again to leave.

The first one grabbed him then. "That's cool, Max. But you say anything about this, and you're dead," he told him. "You were here, too."

"I know. You don't have to remind me." He made it out the door and down the hall to the bathroom before he threw up. Dinah stood there by the toilet watching him.

When she woke up, Max was leaning over her, and she screamed.

He jumped back with his hands outstretched. "Hey, calm down. It's just me."

She sat up and rubbed her eyes. "How long was I out?"

"About two hours. I've been checking on you every half-hour."

She debated whether or not to ask him, but she wanted to know. "Max, I have to ask you something."

"Okay, kid."

"Why don't you drink?"
"Because I got to that point when one was never enough."

"But how did you get to that point?"

He sighed. "I wanted to forget things. That's why most people drink too much, you should know that."

"What kinds of things?"

"Things I don't talk about." He turned to go, effectively ending the conversation, but she stopped him.

"Things like that night at the party with the girl and your three friends?"

He stood still, his back toward her. "How do you know about that?"

"So it did really happen."

He slowly turned and looked at her. "Yeah. It happened."

"You could have done something to help her. You wanted to do something."

"How do you know what I wanted to do thirty years ago at a party?"

"I saw it in your eyes," she told him.

"You 'saw it in my eyes'? Jesus Christ, Dinah, what the hell is going on?"

"I have dreams, Max, okay? Bad dreams where men hurt women."
"And I was in your dreams?"

She nodded.

"It was a long, long time ago. I'm not that person anymore."

"You sound like you're trying to convince yourself."

"Maybe I am," he admitted. "Maybe if I ever convince myself, I'll be able to forgive myself."

"Only one person can forgive you for what happened that night," she told him. "And she's not in this room."

He cringed at the anger in her voice, but she didn't allow herself to feel sorry for him. "It could have been me, Max."

The tears were filling in his eyes. He knew what she meant. He knew what had happened to her that last year at school. "Dinah, I . . ."

"You better get back downstairs before someone makes off with a keg."

His muffled sobs followed her down the steps, but she walked out the door without a backward glance. The three women at the bar watched her go. Two of the women left when the door closed behind her; the other, the younger one wearing the red sweater and the black skirt, didn't. She stayed and waited for Max.
Sanctuary

When Dinah got to the car, she leaned her head against the wheel and tried to grab hold of the thoughts swirling around in her head. Everything, every place, everyone was tainted and always would be. There was no place for her to go—to escape to—they would find her—both the men and the women. She was connected to them.

She was startled by the sound of her cell phone ringing. It was there beside her on the seat. It must have fallen out of her pocket before she had gone inside the bar. The number calling was "private." Had they found a way to call her now?

Just before she knew it would go to voice mail, she flipped it open.

"Hello?"

"Hey, you're not one of those 'love 'em and leave 'em' kind of women are you?"

"Michael?"

"Uh–yes. You do remember me, right?"

"Of course, I was just . . . lost in thought. . . . The phone startled me. Where are you calling from?"
"Home. My number here comes up private. I usually just use my cell."

"Oh."

"Well, hey, I've been trying to call you for the past hour. I thought maybe we could go see a movie this evening . . . if you don't already have plans."

"Oh. I'm sorry. After I took my jog, I decided to stop by and visit a friend, and I left my phone out here in the car."

"No big deal. Is everything okay . . . with your friend?"

"No . . . yeah . . . I don't really know."

"Want to skip the movie? I can just come over and keep you company."

"That would be gr . . . Wait, actually, you know what?"

"What?"

"I've never seen your place."

"Are you saying that you want to see it?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I would."

"Well, then, maybe you should come over tonight for dinner and a movie."

"How about I come over now for a shower and then dinner and a movie?"
"Okay."

"Got any clothes I can borrow . . . maybe a pink sweatshirt or something?"

"Hmmm. Probably can't come up with a pink one, but I may be able to do something in lavender."

"Perfect. Just tell me how to get there."

He lived about half-an-hour from the bar, and by the time she pulled into his drive, she had decided she would fight. Fight for her normal life back. She could deal with the visions and everything she was seeing. Once they understood she was done, they would leave her alone, leave her in peace. They would have no choice.

"I can't help you anymore," she said to the empty car, then repeated it louder: "You hear me? I can't help you anymore. I'm done."

She knew they heard her; just saying the words out loud had power.

The front door was open, so Dinah stuck her head in and called, "Pizza delivery!"
The first one to greet her was a black and white English Springer who seemed to think he had known her all her life. She was allowing her face to be licked when Michael came out wearing a chef hat and one of those awful aprons that says, "Kiss the Cook."
"I see you met Milo."

"I don't even want to know who gave you that," she said, pointing at the apron.

"Actually, it was someone you know."

She thought a second, "Mary? She didn't!"

"Oh, she did. Thought it was the cutest thing."

"I guess . . . maybe if the right guy was wearing it . . .," Dinah said doubtfully.

"Oh that was harsh! Just for that—no dinner for you."

She leaned forward and kissed him. "Forgive me?"

"Okay, since you put it that way . . . you can have some dinner."

He kissed her this time, a lengthy kiss that made Dinah forget about everything but the way his lips felt against hers.

When they broke apart, he gave her a quizzical look.

"Where exactly did you visit this friend?"

"What do you mean?"

"You taste like . . ."

"Jack. Sorry. We had a few drinks at a bar we used to go to all the time."

"Putting back some whiskey on a Sunday afternoon. That's my kind of woman."
He kissed her again, pulling her to the bathroom with him. "Okay, the whiskey I can take, but the jogging sweat—whew!"

It took her a few seconds to realize he was only joking. His arms pulling her shirt over her head gave it away.

"You just want me to get naked."

"Maybe," he admitted.

"Get out of here, you pervert," she said and gave him a small push toward the bathroom door.

"What? I can't watch?"

"No!" she said giving him another push and then closing and locking the door.

From outside the door, he told her, "You know, as owner of this shower, I have the legal right to supervise all use of said shower."

"Whatever," she called back, laughing.

The bathroom was clean, a small miracle in a bachelor house. He had laid out a pair of grey and blue boxer shorts and a white t-shirt with pink lettering that read "Find a Cure"—no doubt something he had been given at the hospital. She smiled at the pink letters and turned on the shower.

The shampoo and soap didn't smell as good as her shampoo and body wash, but it wasn't bad, and the shower itself was great. Detachable, moveable head. Strong stream,
with ten different settings. When she finally got out, a fluffy, oversized blue towel was sitting on the toilet lid. She hadn't noticed it before and realized that he had picked the lock and come in while she was showering.

She had forgotten to turn on the fan, and she had to wipe the steam from the mirror in order to see herself. Her hand paused a few inches away from the glass as she wondered what she would see in the haze behind her. She could feel them. She slowly wrapped her hand in a section of the towel and then took a deep breath.

A few swipes, and she could just make out the wall and the towel rack behind her. Nothing was there. If they had been there, they were gone now. She breathed again and finished brushing her hair. His little brush definitely wasn't on the same level as hers, but at least it got some of the more obvious tangles out.

Her dirty clothes were gone, picked up when the towel got dropped off, no doubt. As soon as she opened the door, she was hit by the smell of something cooking, something good cooking. Her stomach rumbled, and she followed the smell to the kitchen.

He was humming to himself as he added seasonings to what looked to be chicken breasts simmering in a skillet.
When he saw he, he abruptly stopped, hand on bottle in mid-air. "Hey, you. Have a good shower?"

"It was great. Thanks."

"Do you need to borrow the hairdryer? It'll only cost you another kiss."

She wrapped her arms around him and kissed his chin.

"No, I'll just let it air dry."

She liked the feel of his arms moving, stirring the contents of another small skillet, dashing seasonings.

"What are you making us?"

"I'm not sure," he admitted. "I like to experiment. Hopefully, it will be edible."

"It smells really good."

"Thanks. Want something to drink? I don't have any whiskey on hand, but . . . ."

"Water will be just fine," she said, smacking his butt.

He pointed her to the cabinet with the glasses, and she used the ice and water dispenser on the fridge to fill her glass. "Can I get you something?"

"I think I'll have the same."

She fixed him a glass of water and then sat down on a stool at the counter across from him to watch him cook. He grabbed jars seemingly at random from the cabinet and
sprinkled their contents into the skillet with ridiculously grand gestures. Then he would lean down, wave the steam over the skillet toward his nose and breathe in deeply as he smiled. It was fun just watching him.

Dinner was wonderful, a newly created chicken and rice variety with vegetable medley. When they couldn't eat anymore, they left their dirty plates on the table, and he led her into the family room.

"Here are my DVD's. I don't have a bunch, but all the ones I do have are worth watching . . . At least I think so."

She laughed at the alphabetized cases and pretended to read the titles as she summoned her courage. She wished the Jack hadn't worn off. Last night he had been tender with her—made her feel wanted and cared for. Tonight she wanted to feel safe in a different way—to feel as if she didn't need some kind of special handling—like she wasn't different, like there were no bad memories that could be reawakened with a wrong touch or a word.

She walked to him on the couch. "I don't want to watch a movie."

"You don't?"

"No." She kneeled and slowly took off her shirt. He reached to place a hand on her breast, and she undid her
bra. His fingers cupped her breast and then played with her nipple. "Pinch it," she told him.

His fingers came together with her hard nipple in the middle, and she told him, "Harder." His fingers clamped down, and she moaned. His other hand went to the waist band of her shorts and found its way inside. When his fingers discovered her wetness, he told her, "I want to make love to you. Let me take you in the bedroom."

"No," she said. "Here."

It was more hurried, more passionate, rougher than before, and he hesitated several times, but she encouraged him. As he grew more and more excited, she could feel the heat coming through him, entering her. She felt as if she was burning from the inside. "That's it. Harder," she told him. They came at the same time, he groaning and shaking as if he was going to suddenly fall apart and she releasing a series of small screams.

As he lay on top of her panting, he asked, "Are you okay? That didn't hurt you, did it?"

"If it did, it was only in a good way."

They lay there, sweat mingling, trailing fingers over each other's bodies.

He joked about the steam coming off their bodies, but she didn't laugh. Instead she thought of those faces in the
mirror, peeking through the steam from her hot shower. When she had wiped the mirror with the towel he had laid out for her, they had disappeared. She fell asleep and dreamed of looking into a mirror, the shadow of wings behind her.
Revelations

Dinah awakened at daybreak, feeling rested. She gently lifted his arm that was thrown around her and snuck out of bed to get dressed. She stood there for a moment beside the bed just staring at him, wondering if it was possible that he could have been sent to protect her. She dismissed the thought quickly. That kind of thinking would do her no good. He was just a man.

As she turned to go, he opened one eye. "Going so soon?"

"I have to go to work today, and so do you," she told him. She had just enough time to make it back to the apartment and change clothes before work—the shower would have to wait until after work. She held her breath as she opened the door to her apartment. But nothing was there. She rushed in and quickly changed before they could come back. When the front door closed, she sighed with relief. No women, no little girls, no ghosts, no visions.

The back-up on the highway didn't even bother her. Even if she wasn't certifiable and dead women were really asking her to help them, she still had a choice. Even in
the Bible, the people who were called seemed to have a choice. Of course, they always ended up choosing to do whatever God, the angel, or the vision wanted them to do, but there was still a moment when they had a choice. She had done what she could; it was time to stop. They would just have to accept that. She could not take away their pain.

She went through the day at work with an obvious contentment that quickly drew the notice of Mary. But rather than seeming cheered by her boss's demeanor, Mary seemed worried.

Dinah wasn't surprised when the older woman knocked on her office door that afternoon.

"Yes?"

"Can I come in for just a minute, Dinah?"

"Come on in."

Mary looked embarrassed, possibly even ashamed. "I talked to Michael earlier," she began, "and he told me that things were going really well between you two."

Dinah nodded, confused by Mary's guilty tone.

She looked away, staring at the metal file cabinet in the corner. "That woman that knew you from college came back in Friday after you left. She wanted to get her husband's initials engraved on his case."
"What does that have to do with Michael and me going out?"

"She mentioned what happened to you in college."
Dinah took a deep breath. Leave it to Ellen. "Okay. I'm still not understanding what this has to do with me going out with Michael. That was three years ago, Mary."
She hadn't taken her eyes off the file cabinet. "I don't know if I should tell you this or not, but I can't sleep at night worrying about it."
"Just tell me what it is."
"I'm not really Michael's aunt. I used to volunteer with a group that helped women who had been raped make new lives for themselves."
Dinah felt her heart begin to race. "And?"
"And Michael's mother was one of the women we helped. She came to us after she found out she was pregnant."
Dinah tried to process what she was hearing. "Are you trying to tell me that Michael is the product of a rape?"
She nodded slowly.
"Does he know this?"
"I think so. He always suspected something—knew his mother had been hurt somehow. She never told him the truth—just told him that his father had left. But Michael found some things after his mother died last year—some pictures
from when the man was put on trial for hurting another woman. He noticed the similarity between the man and himself and asked me about him I didn't want to tell him what his mother had tried so hard to keep from him, so I didn't answer him. But, after those pictures, I think he already knew the answer anyway."

Now Dinah knew why he sometimes felt wrong to her. It wasn't him she felt; it was his father. Before she could fully wrap her mind around the thought, Mary spoke again.

"That's not all."

She was silent for a moment, as if waiting for Dinah to prepare herself. Dinah didn't know what else there could possibly be.

"Michael's mother, Josephine, she was raped at a time when women, especially Catholic women, didn't have abortions. She . . . had a rough time with Michael. She loved him very much, but he reminded her of the man who had raped her. She didn't want to give him up, but she had a hard time believing that some of the . . . badness . . . from his father didn't find its way into him somehow."

Dinah nodded because it seemed like some response was expected from her.

"And Josephine was . . . odd . . . because of the rape. She never really got over it—never even really looked
at another man again. Just focused on doing right by Michael. And, as Michael got older, it sometimes seemed like he was taking care of her, rather the other way around."

Dinah could sense that the big part, the part Mary had been avoiding was coming.

"Michael also started showing interest in girls and women . . . who had been hurt . . . like his mother."

Something fell inside her, but Dinah wasn't sure what it was.

"We both worried about it, Josephine and me. It was like he wanted to make up for what his mother had gone through. We even wondered if he felt something inside and was trying to assure himself that he wasn't that kind of person . . ."

Dinah stopped her before she could go any further. "I get it, okay, I get it. You think Michael is attracted to me because he senses or somehow knows what happened to me, and you don't think that's good for either one of us."

"Well, yes. But do you mean that you haven't told him?"

It was Dinah's turn to look away. "No, but he suspects. He asked me about it, and I didn't answer him."
The two women sat there in silence, the waves of a man's act washing over them.

Dinah could feel something hardening within her—light changing into dark. He was sick. He probably saw his mother when he looked at her. All she was to him was another woman to try to save. That's why he was fine with the fact she had been hurt—it turned him on. Everything seemed to grow heavy. Even her skin seemed to weigh too much; she wanted to get out from under it.

"Dinah, are you okay? Please say something. I'm so sorry . . . ."

But before she could form any words, the front door sensor chimed. "Mary, will you please take this customer? I'm going to go get a cup of coffee."

She grabbed her purse and headed to the gourmet coffee shop a few stores down. She could feel Mary staring at her as she quickly left the store, could hear the concern lining her voice as she asked the couple who had come in if she could show them anything.
Red Roses

Dinah sat in the coffee shop at a tiny table, pretending to be focused on her hazelnut latte. She wanted silence in her head. It felt like a traffic jam, pieces of information bumper to bumper, all trying to pull ahead of one another but with nowhere to go.

A silver-haired man leaned down and asked if he could share her table. She scanned the shop before answering; there were no other empty seats.

"Sure," she tried to smile back at him.

"I'm Red," he told her as he sat down.

"Hi, Red."

He extended his hand, and she didn't know how to refuse it without looking ridiculously bitchy. But the second her skin touched his, she knew she should have found a way. Before she could even rise from her seat, the vision was there—his smooth voice playing in the background.

He wore a navy suit and was seated behind a large oak desk. The woman was in a black, knee-length skirt with a blue silk blouse. She stood in front of the desk. The view
through the window in his office was dark. No noise came from outside the office. The door was closed.

He told the woman that he was sure she would move ahead soon—that she was meant for better and bigger things. Then he asked her what she was willing to do to get there, if she understood his influence with the board, and finally if she liked to suck dick. He told her his wife didn’t. Then he made a bad joke about how, ever since Clinton, it didn't even count as sex.

He had taken off his suit coat as he spoke, and now he pushed out his chair from the desk and stood up so that she could see the bulge in his slacks. “I can make you very happy with the company, if you can make me very happy here,” he said, smiling, hand resting on his crotch, as if he were showing her pictures of his grandchildren.

The woman was stunned. She moved to leave, but he quickly crossed from around the desk and cut off her path. His tone changed. “It's not so bad, Carolyn. All the other dyke execs have done it, too,” he told her. "Then again, you're not a dyke, so you'll like it even more."

"Mr. Behrman, I'm leaving now," she said, her voice was filled with uncertainty.
She headed toward the door, but he blocked the door.

"Call me Red, Carolyn. We're on a first name basis now. Tomorrow we'll be colleagues."

As he put his hands on her breasts, he told her, "It's just another part of the job." His hand moved down her skirt along her hip. "I know about Jamison and Paul. They said you were good, real good."

He pushed her against the wall and held her there with the weight of his body as he hiked up her skirt, "Before that damn women's lib came along, I never had to do this. Now, it's a dog and pony show. You have to pretend not to want it so you feel good about yourself when you get together with all your little feminist friends and talk about your pay raises and your corner offices."

He pushed aside her panties and stuck his fingers inside her as he talked. She winced at the roughness of his probe. "See, you're already wet. You want the boss to do you. You know what I can do for you," he whispered in her ear.

When he was sure she was wet enough, he took his fingers out of her and unzipped his pants. "Just relax and enjoy it," he told her. "Tomorrow, when everyone is congratulating you on your big promotion, you can think of my cock inside you."
In his excitement, he struggled to undo his belt. "Damn it," he muttered. By the time his belt was undone and his pants had slipped down to his ankles, his erection was gone. He pulled down his underwear and grabbed her hand.

"Stroke it," he commanded. Eyes closed, she slowly began moving her hand, pulling the limp organ out against his shirt tails. When he was hard again, he shoved her hand out of the way.

"Please don't do this," she begged. She gasped as he forced himself into her, and the tears began to roll down her cheeks.

He pounded her into the wall. "The... price... for... a... corner... office... is... a... hard... fuck," he told her.

He pulled out just before he ejaculated and covered his penis with a handkerchief from his pocket. When he had caught all the cum and wiped himself off, he chuckled. "Can't have you getting pregnant now, can we? That might interfere with your big career."

She stayed pressed against the wall, eyes closed as he straightened his tie and zipped up his pants.

"Congratulations on that promotion, Ms. Lehman."

At the sound of dismissal in his voice, she pulled down her skirt and tucked her blouse back in. She left
without a word, carefully wiping her tears and leaving
Dinah standing there with Red.

Dinah came out of the vision to the awareness that the
man across the small table from her was asking her
something. "Are you okay, miss?" he repeated.

As his still blurry face came into focus, she jumped
from the table, spilling her latte. She tried to make
herself walk calmly toward the door. She didn't want to
make a scene. People here might recognize her.

As she headed back to the store, she decided to take
off early for the day. She needed more time to think. The
way that woman Carolyn had just smoothed down her skirt and
wiped her tears, as if it was really just another tough
part of the job, had gotten to her. She had looked
resigned, and Dinah suddenly realized that all the women
she had seen be raped had the same look, either as they
walked away or as they died. They knew it was part of being
a woman. She wanted to weep for them all, but she also
wanted to scream her outrage. How could she just walk away?
She would never get that look out of her head.

When she came back into the store, the couple was
still there. She moved to pass them, but Mary stopped her.
"Dinah, these people are detectives," she said. "They're
here to ask us about a customer we had a while ago . . .
Anthony Greenman. He's the man who was killed outside his apartment building when he went for a jog several months back."

Dinah stared blankly at the couple. She should have known they were cops. The woman was dressed in worn slacks, a wrinkled blouse, and shoes way too sensible for her thirty years. The man was older, balding. His clothes were neater, but still too non-descript to belong to anyone else but a cop or a computer engineer. "Anthony Greenman?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am, we found a credit card receipt for this store. He bought an attaché case."

"I'm Detective Miller, and this is my partner Detective Adams," the man introduced them while the woman showed Dinah a copy of the receipt.

She took it in her hands and stared down at the three digit associate number. She wondered what Mary had told them—if she had told them that Dinah had sent her to break so that she could finish ringing Greenman out.

"On the receipt, it says that Mary here waited on him," the woman added. "She told us that was her associate number."
"Are you the Dinah Grayson who lives at 222 Westbrook, Apartment 20?" the man suddenly interrupted, looking down at his notebook.

"Yes. How do you know my address?"

"Your name was on the list of tenants for the building where Tabitha Johnson lived."

Suddenly Dinah realized why they were here, investigating Greenman, months after his murder: They were looking for, or had already found, a connection between the murder of Tabitha's rapist and the murder of Greenman.

She handed the receipt back to the woman. "Yes, Tabitha lived in my building. It was awful what happened to her."

This time it was the woman who spoke. "It seemed coincidental to us that you had contact with two murder victims in the past six months."

"Yes, it made me acutely aware how fragile life really is," she told them, willing herself to remain calm. She wondered if they had made the connection with David, yet.

"So, like I asked your employee, did you notice anything strange about Mr. Greenman. Did he say anything odd? Did anyone seem to be following him that day? That kind of thing."
She took a gamble. "I didn't really have any contact with Mr. Greenman," she told them. "I was in the back while Mary waited on him."

When they didn't contradict her, she looked over at Mary. Her face was expressionless—something Dinah had never seen her pull off before.

"Okay," the woman said. "We're just following all the possible leads in both cases right now."

"We may be in touch again, Miss Grayson," the man added. "So please stay where we can reach you.

As the detectives left, a delivery woman came in carrying a vase of roses.

"Dinah Grayson?"

"Yes?"

"These are for you," she said, handing over the roses.

Dinah took the roses and stared back at the detectives watching her from the door.

"Thank you."

Dinah and Mary watched them leave in silence.

The roses were gorgeous, white with dark pink tips. She took them to her desk in the back and left Mary to handle the front. They said nothing to one another, and Dinah wondered why the other woman didn't ask her why she had lied about Greenman.

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Just as she was walking out the door, the phone rang.

"Uh . . . yes . . . I'm just calling to confirm delivery of a dozen roses to a beautiful woman."

Michael must have recognized her voice when she answered the phone. "Yes, I got the flowers, Michael."

"Oh. Good . . .," his voice trailed off in uncertainty.

"Thank you. They're beautiful."

"I'm sorry, did I catch you at a bad time?" he asked. "I can call you later if you're busy."

"Yeah, things are a little hectic, right now," she agreed. "I'll give you a call later, though."

"Okay."

She hung up before he could say goodbye.
Someone Special

She drove from work to the church building. She had to know if they had connected David's murder to the others, if anyone had talked to her father. And she had to say goodbye just in case. She made it there just in time before her father left for the day; the doors were already locked.

She buzzed the intercom and waited for him to come to the front door.

He smiled through the glass when he saw her and then bent down to unlock the door. She watched him, staring at the thin, white hairs on his head and remembering a time when they had been nearly black.

"What's the occasion?" he asked as he held the door open.

"Just wondered how everything was going."

She breathed a sigh of relief at his puzzled look. No one had connected her to David yet. If they had, they would have had to go through him.

"Fine, just the usual," he said. "Everything okay with you?"
"Yeah. I just wanted to give you the heads up that I might be moving soon."

"What? Where to?"

"I'm not sure, yet. But I have a couple of job offers from some larger companies—good offers, more important titles, bigger pay, better benefits."

"That's great! But when did all this happen?"

"Oh, I've been keeping it under wraps until I was sure," she told him.

"Well, your mom and I will have to take you out to dinner to celebrate."

"That would be great, Dad."

"Anything else on your mind?" he asked.

"I just . . . wanted to tell you thanks."

"For what?"

"For everything you've done for me," she said. "You've been a great father. You didn't make any mistakes."

"Okay," he chuckled. "What's all this about?"

"I just don't say thanks enough," she said.

"I still don't think you're telling me everything, but you're welcome," he replied. "And, since we're sharing, you should know how proud I am of you."
She tried to smile back at him, but the words were just too painful. She had not done anything to make her father proud of her for a very long time. "Thanks, Dad."

"So can we take you to dinner? Just let me call your mother and make sure she hasn't already started fixing anything."

Dinah rose from her seat in the foyer. "Another time, soon," she said. "I already have plans this evening."

He raised an eyebrow. "Anyone special?"

"Nope, no one special."

Impulsively, she hugged him. It had been a long time since she had hugged her father—sought comfort in his arms. She hoped he would remember this hug when the time came. "I love you, Dad."

"I love you, too," he told her.

She left before he could see the tears.
Why

Dinah had just finished working out when she heard a knock on the door. It was decisive, almost business-like, and she wondered if the detectives would let her change before they took her to the station. She was so convinced of what was coming that she didn't even check to see who it was before she opened the door. It was Michael.

"I had to come," he said. "Mary told me everything."

"What do you mean 'everything'?' she asked.

He looked around the hallway. "Can we talk inside?"

She reluctantly opened the door wider to let him walk through.

As soon as the door was shut, she asked again, "What do you mean Mary told you 'everything'?"

"She told me what happened to you."

"And did she also tell you that she told me about you."

"Yes. I don't care. I was planning to tell you anyway."

"I'm not your mother, Michael. You can't save me."

He paled. "What are you talking about?"
"I know why you do this," she said.

"Do what?"

"Pick women who have been hurt."

He shook his head. "No, you don't understand."

"Yes, yes I do. I understand perfectly. You get off on it—helping the poor, wounded females. It's like taking care of your mom all over again. That must have been rough when she died, having no one messed up to take care of anymore."

The bullet hit its mark. He grabbed her arm. "Don't talk about my mother. You don't know anything about her."

She wrenched her arm free. "I know she wished she would have aborted you."

She expected him to hit her, at the least, leave in a rage. But instead, he sat down on the floor. "I know," he said.

The anger suddenly left as quickly as it had come, and its loss made her feel weak. She sat down next to him.

"I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have said that."

"It's okay. It's true. When she looked at me, she saw him, my father—the one who raped her. I didn't know for sure until I found the newspaper clippings, but I always knew something was wrong, something connected with me."
Dinah's revulsion at how he had come into being was gone. When she took his hand, all she felt now was sadness—a cold river slowly pulling her under.

"Sometimes, she would just start crying, for what seemed like no reason at all. Eventually, I realized that she was crying when she looked at me. I didn't understand until I saw how much I look like him."

"You're not him, Michael."

He ignored her. "I wanted to kill him, you know. That was my first response when I realized who my father was; I wanted to kill him. But underneath the clipping of the sentencing hearing was a clipping about how he had been killed in prison. So I didn't even get that satisfaction."

There was nothing she could say.

"He was convicted of raping three women, but they think he raped even more. My mother was most likely one of the first."

"I used to wish my mom was normal—like all the other moms," he told her.

Dinah could understand that.

"Do you remember when ET came out?" he asked her suddenly.

"Sure, it was the biggest movie that year."
"Right. I was eight when it came out. Everyone at school had already seen it. I had to beg and plead my mom for weeks to take me to see it. Money was really tight, and she didn't have any desire to see an alien movie. Everyone at school had gone to see the movie. Only me and Murray, the other kid without a dad around, didn't get to see it in the first two weeks it was out. It wasn't quite so bad not seeing it, when at least I wasn't the only one. Then, one day, Murray came to school gloating. His dad had come to visit him, and they had gone to see E.T.—had popcorn and everything. So, all that week I pestered Mom to take me. I even told her that I would pay for the snacks with my birthday money if she paid for the tickets. I was so excited when she finally said we could go. All I could think about was how I would able to join the conversations at school now and laugh at all the inside jokes about the movie that no one bothered to explain."

Dinah smiled. Every kid knew that feeling.

"We had just ordered our popcorn when she started acting funny. She told me she didn't feel so good and that we had to go." Michael paused, and his voice was softer as he continued. "I told her 'no.' That this time she wasn't going to ruin things for me. I told her it wasn't fair how
she was always getting sick. I told her to go wait in the
car, and I would see the movie by myself."

He stopped, and Dinah wondered if she should tell him
to go on.

"She started shaking and making a scene. People I knew
were there. I just dropped the tickets and headed toward
the door. In the car, when she tried to talk to me, I told
her that I hated her. But later that night, I heard her
talking to Aunt Mary on the phone, saying, 'No, you don't
understand. It wasn't him. I know it wasn't him. But this
man looked like him.' I thought 'him' was my father, and I
was right. I just didn't know then that my father was also
my mother's rapist."

"You were just a child. You didn't know."

He looked at her then, for the first time since he had
sunk down on the floor. "I have been looking for you,
Dinah," he said. "You're the one."

"What do you mean?"

"My mother always told me that I had a purpose. I
never really understood what she meant or why she kept
telling me that until after I found out the truth about my
father. It was her way of telling me that I was meant to do
something good, that she had reconciled herself to what had
happened in the comfort of that thought."

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Dinah shook her head. "You can't take responsibility for what happened to your mother or her decision—any more than you can take responsibility for the actions of the man who raped her."

"You still don't get it," he said. "My mother changed at the end, as she was dying. She didn't look at me the same. It was as if she had come to some kind of peace. She looked at me with hope, not with doubt. She told me that I was good, and that I would do something good that would make the world better."

She stared at him, still not comprehending what he was saying.

"Don't you see?" he said. "It's not about my mother or my father, or even me. It's about you. I'm here to help you. That's what I was meant to do."

Dinah dropped his hands and stood on shaky legs. "You need to leave," she said.

He scrambled to his feet after her. "Okay. I'll leave," he said. "But first you have to look at this."

Dinah watched as he pulled a folded page from his back pocket. It looked like a page torn from a Bible.

He handed it to her. "After I talked to Mary tonight, I went through my mother's things. This was folded and stuck in the pocket of a photo album."
Dinah looked down at the page. It was from Genesis 34.

"Your name is underlined," he said. "And look what she wrote next to it."

Dinah stared at the scrawled words. They were hastily written, as if the writer had come to a sudden realization about something very important.

"Why Michael?" she said aloud.

"It's not a question," he told her. "It's a statement of purpose. Why I am here."

She handed the page back to him, unwilling to look at it anymore. His fingers touched hers, and this time she felt the familiar heat course through her veins. She blinked. Behind him, she saw them, all of them. The women.

"Can you see them?" she asked.

He turned around. "See who?"

She blinked again, and they were gone. She didn't understand. Was he here to save her from them? Or to save her so she could help them? She didn't understand . . .

"Dinah, I love you."

With the words, she came back to the moment. "This is insane Michael. It's just a story. That's all. It's just a coincidence that she was raped and that I was raped. Lots of women are raped."
"And it's coincidence that my mother marked this story for me, and I met you?"

She needed him to go. She couldn't think with him standing there, staring at her. "Crazy people see coincidences everywhere," she told him as she opened the door.

"Just think about it," he said. "I'm not crazy. I'm supposed to be in your life."

She shut the door on him and unplugged the phone.
Shifting

Dinah turned on the television and willed her mind to stop working, to be pulled into the sitcoms that came on one after the other in canned-laughter monotony. When she got up to get something to drink, she saw the Bible page lying underneath the door.

She hesitated and then bent to pick it up. She traced the outline of the words his mother had written. The vision came as she made the loop at the bottom of the "y."

There was a woman in the passenger seat of a car a man was seated next to her. He was older than she was; she looked no more than 20. He looked at least 30. He was wearing a butterfly-collar shirt and bellbottom pants. She was wearing an orange and white A-line mini-dress. Dinah could just barely recognize the sound of Bad Company's "Shooting Star" on the radio over the sound of the rain pounding against the windows.

"I think we'll have to stop here for a while," he told her, not sounding displeased.

He got out and went through the door under the cheap neon "Office" sign. Dinah stayed in the car and watched the
woman; she was worried. She did not want to stay here at this cheap motel with this man.

He came back holding a key. "We'll just wait out the storm, and then I'll take you home."

"My parents will be worried," she told him. She didn't say how worried she was.

"Well, you can call them from the room if you want," he offered.

"And tell them I'm at a motel off the highway?" she asked incredulously.

"No, I guess that wouldn't be good," he admitted with a chuckle. "Well, you can explain it all when you get home. Make something up if you want. But I'm telling you that we can't safely make it back for at least a couple of hours."

He pulled the car into the space in front of the room, but when he moved to get out, she stayed still.

"Come on. We can watch tv."

"I think I'll just stay out here."

He sighed and closed his door. "Well, I'm not leaving you out here by yourself, so I guess I'll just have to stay with you. I wish I hadn't spent that twenty-five bucks, though. I could have used that money. No way the manager's gonna give me my money back now."
She looked down at her white platform shoes in the floorboard.

"Look. I promise—no funny business. There are two beds in there."

Finally, she said, "Okay."

When they dashed from the car to the room, Dinah followed them, knowing the woman should have stayed in the Plymouth Fury.

There were two beds, just like he had promised. She chose the one farthest from the door and sat down. He sat on the other bed and turned on the TV. After a while, she slipped off her shoes and stretched out on the bed. As the storm continued, her eyes grew droopy and finally closed. Dinah sat in the small chair in the corner and alternated between watching her sleep and watching the man on the other bed.

After the woman had been asleep about an hour, the man took off his shirt and unbuttoned his pants. He forced his hand down inside, looking over at the woman first to make sure she was still asleep. He lay there playing with himself, laughing at Johnny Carson's monologue. Dinah hoped he would get himself off and go to sleep. But he didn't. As Johnny welcomed the first guest, he pulled his pants all
the way down and lay staring at his erect penis in the light from the television set.

Dinah tried to whisper to the woman. "Wake up! Wake up!" For a second, the woman opened her eyes and looked right at her, as if she had heard something, but then she just closed her eyes again.

The man walked over to the set and turned it off. Then he looked out the window. The storm had ended. Finally, he stretched and walked slowly over to the empty side of the woman's bed.

He lay down next to her and began pushing up her dress with one hand while the other hand stroked his penis. When his hand touched the skin of her breast underneath her bra, the woman awoke.

She started to scream, but he placed his hand over her mouth. "Ssshh, it's okay. I'm going to be real gentle. If you don't like it, we can stop."

Through his hand, she mumbled, "I don't like it. I want to stop."

With the hand that had been on his penis, he grabbed her other breast. She tried to move her head away as he kissed her.

"You haven't even given it a chance, yet," he said. "Just wait. You'll like it. You'll see."
He pulled down her panties.

Dinah could feel the coldness and the roughness of his fingers. She knew the only time fingers had felt down there on this woman had been when her doctor examined her last year. It hurt.

He was poking inside her now, whispering "That's nice, isn't it?" His other hand was still over her mouth, but with muffled words and shaking head she begged him to stop.

He didn't stop. She cried out in pain when he entered her, and Dinah felt something tear within her. He put the pillow over her face to stop her scream from leaving the motel room. "Oh, that's good. Brand new," he moaned just before he climaxed.

When he was done, he lay on her sweating, and told her he'd take the pillow off as long as she didn't scream. She had stopped screaming several minutes before. The only sound coming from under the pillow was sobbing.

As she lay there trembling, dress still pushed up, he got dressed. "The storm has stopped. I can take you home now," he said in his nice voice. "Better get yourself cleaned up. You don't want your daddy knowing what you've been up to."
Dinah sat in the backseat on the way to the woman’s house. They were silent all the way home, but as he pulled up in front of her house, he grabbed her arm.

"You spent the night with me in a motel room. No one will believe you're a nice girl." She was staring out the window. He grabbed her cheek and turned her face towards her. "You're not a nice girl anymore, Josey. Now you're mine. And if you try to say differently I'll make you regret it."

Dinah came out of the vision into the dim glow from the television in the darkened apartment. Her underwear felt wet. She went to the bathroom and pulled down her pants. She could see the small red stain through the front of her white underwear. She hurt.

She refused to think of the significance. She just wanted it all to end—to go away.

"That's not really what you want, is it?"

The woman's voice came from the bedroom. It was unfamiliar.

Dinah pulled her pants back up and walked into the bedroom. The woman sitting in the chair in the corner looked much older than the woman in her dream, but it was definitely her—Josephine, Michael's mother, Josey.
"Is that what you really want?" she asked again. "To be normal again?"

"If it means no dead people in my bedroom at night, no police detectives trying to cart me off to prison, no insane men? Then yes, that's what I want."

The woman shrugged and smiled. "Unfortunately, you don't have that option."

"I can choose to ignore you all."

"Yes. But you can't choose not to see us."

"Why are you here?"

"Because I love my son, and I know how important it is that he succeeds."

"Succeeds at what?"

"At protecting you. He's right, you know. You are the one."

"What 'one'? What does that even mean? Are you telling me that my whole meaning in life is to give your son someone to save so he stops feeling guilty about you?"

She laughed, and Dinah shivered at the realization that it was Michael's laugh. "Of course not. Your purpose is far greater than that."

"I can't keep killing them. I am going to be caught and arrested."

"Not right now, not here. This is only the beginning."
"The beginning of what?"
"Of the change."

Dinah wanted to scream and shake her by her bony shoulders. "What change?"
"The balance is shifting. It won't end with you. Others will follow. And the darkness will give way to light."

She was starting to fade, and Dinah needed her to stay, to explain.
"What am I supposed to do?" she screamed.
"Your work."

Dinah tried to make it to the chair, but it was too late. All that was left were the two words lingering in the air. She fell asleep hours later at an awkward angle, head cocked toward the chair in the corner, but Josey did not come back. And when she awoke to the small alarm clock on the nightstand, she felt more lost than ever.

The alarm went off at 5:00, and Dinah slowly wakened. She didn't remember setting the alarm last night. She lay there debating whether to go in to work; she wanted to ask Mary something, but she was worried how she would respond. She had not trusted anyone else with her secret yet. She was focused on the thought of the police; the other stuff would have to wait. What she had told Josephine had been
true—if she were caught, she would no longer even have the option to do what they wanted. She would be in a cell.

Traffic was at a standstill again, so she decided to exit and get to work without using the highway. She turned down a residential street that she thought connected to one of the main streets only to find that it was a dead end. As she started to put the car in reverse, she saw them in her mirror. Lines of them standing behind her vehicle, from its bumper to the end of the street. Some of them she recognized; some of them she didn't.

She closed her eyes and continued reversing. They weren't real, so she couldn't hurt them. When she opened her eyes again, they were gone. She backed into a driveway and turned around. She stopped at the corner and debated which way to go.

"Lost?"

The woman was standing outside her window, but Dinah heard her as if she was sitting right next to her.

She gunned it and turned right.

"Sure this is the right way?" This time the voice sounded like it was right next to her, because it was. Angela was sitting in the passenger seat.

Dinah pulled over. "Just tell me what I have to do to get rid of you."
"You can't ever get rid of us, Dinah. We're part of you," she said. "You're connected to all of us, all those who have gone before and all those who will come after. And we're all connected to the men who made us this way."

"Why can't you just leave me alone?"

"We can't. We know you're the one."

"No, I'm not," Dinah protested.

"You've been chosen."

"Chosen by who?"

"By Everything."

Dinah lowered her head onto the steering wheel and waited for the rushing in her ears to stop.

"We were with you at the beginning, and we will be here with you when your work is done."

"But . . ."

"It is time. The new way is here."

The certainty in the woman's voice scared Dinah. "I still don't understand," she said.

"You will . . . soon."

Dinah heard voices outside the car. Two women in spandex pants and long t-shirts were speed walking their dogs. As she looked out the window, Angela disappeared. Dinah waved her hand through the place Angela had been
sitting. Her skin tingled, and for just a moment she felt the weight of another hand on her own.
Heart Trouble

When she got to the store, Mary was already there, waiting.

"How did it go with Michael," she asked.

"I'm not sure," Dinah replied honestly. "But I think I may need your help with something else."

"What is it?"

"This group that you were a part of—that helped Michael's mother relocate—are they still active?"

"Yes? But why?"

"I know someone who may need to relocate—the whole bit, change of state, name, physical description, everything. She can't be found."

"Is she a rape survivor?"

"Yes."

"But there's more to it than that, isn't there?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I haven't made contact with the group in a while. When would she need to leave?"

"Within the week, possibly the next two days."
Mary sighed. "You didn't want those detectives to know you talked to Anthony Greenman."

"No, I didn't."

"If we help this woman, we could be putting ourselves at risk."

"I know. That's why I'm not telling you anything else about her—or what she's done."

"Will you tell her 'thank you'?" she asked. "From those of us who wanted to, but didn't or couldn't."

"Yes." Dinah wondered how she had taken this woman for granted for so long—this woman who held so many secrets and was willing to risk so much to help others.

Her eyes asked the question.

"My daughter," Mary replied simply.

Dinah spent the rest of the day trying to prepare for Mary to run the store, without making it obvious that she was preparing to leave. She wanted the police to think she had just gotten scared and taken off, not that she had planned her escape. If they knew it was planned, they might look harder at Mary and find out about the group.

She had almost finished when her cell phone rang. She struggled to make out the words of the voice on the other end.

"Mom, slow down. I can't understand you."
She reached for the desk to steady herself as her mother's words began to make sense.

"Which hospital?" she asked.

Then, "I'll be there as soon as I can. Have you called Josh?"

Mary came in as she was hanging up. "I love you, Mom. Everything's going to be fine."

"What is it? What's happened?" she asked.

"My father—he had a heart attack."

"Go. I'll take care of everything else."

She gave Mary a quick hug before she left, the only hug she'd ever given her in the year they had worked together.

The hospital her father had been taken to was forty minutes away. She hoped she would make it in time. That nothing else would happen before she got there. Her mother had said he was stable, but that he'd given them quite a scare. It had happened at the church building—she didn't know what had caused it.

Dinah didn't want to lose him, not now. How could she leave with him like this? What would it do to him when he found out why she had left? She had to see him, had to explain. She sped on, cursing the slow drivers, the traffic, and the red lights. Finally she was there.
"Can I help you?" the woman at the front desk asked.

"Yes, I need to know where William Grayson is. He was brought in after a heart attack."

The phone rang, and Dinah bit her lip as the nurse turned away to answer it. "Hang on just a second," she mouthed.

As Dinah stared at the people waiting in the emergency room lobby, she remembered again how her father had looked sitting in a dirty plastic chair, waiting for his raped daughter to come out of the examining room.

"Are you family, miss?"

"Yes, I'm his daughter."

"He's in room 101 right down the hall."

"Thank you."

Dinah's mother was sitting next to the bed, crying softly into a handful of tissues. Her father seemed to be sleeping. He was hooked up to several machines.

"Mom?"

Her mother looked up and then held out her arms.

Dinah kneeled in front of her and took her mother into her arms.

They stayed that way for several minutes.

Finally, Dinah's mother wiped her eyes and released her daughter.
"Sit down," she said, gesturing to the other two chairs in the room. "Your father's asleep."

"How is he?" Dinah asked. "Have you talked to the doctor?"

"The doctor says it was a minor heart attack. She thinks it's a good thing . . ."

Dinah motioned to the machines on the other side of her father's bed. "The doctor called this a good thing?"

". . . because it gives us time to change things before he has total heart failure . . . like a warning," her mother explained.

Dinah glared at the door, as if preparing to confront the doctor who would say such a thing to her mother.

"Honey, try not to get angry," her mother urged. "Your father is fine. His arteries need some work, and he needs to stop working so much, but he's fine."

"What do they think triggered the attack?" she asked.

"They don't know. He was talking with some police detectives shortly before it happened."

Dinah felt he breath catch, "Police detectives?"

"Yes, they were asking questions about that member who was killed . . . David Henson."

"What kind of questions?"

"I don't know, Dinah. Why does it matter?"
"It doesn't. I'm just trying to figure out exactly what happened."

"What's important is that he's okay now."

"You're right. I'm sorry," she apologized. "Let's just focus on Dad getting better."

Dinah scooted her chair over next to her mother's chair on the side of the bed, and the two women waited, trying not to stare at the beeping machine that was tracking his heart, yet drawn to it over and over again.

When her father still hadn't wakened several hours later, Dinah told her mother to get some sleep: "I'll wait up with Dad," she promised, "and I'll wake you if he so much as opens an eye."

"I don't know . . ." She looked doubtfully at her sleeping husband. "I should be right beside him when he wakes up."

Dinah gently pulled her up from the hard-backed plastic chair, toward the partially reclining chair in the corner. "You will be right here, Mom. And I'll wake you the second he wakes."

As her mom settled into the chair, Dinah got a spare pillow and blanket from the closet. When her mother was tucked in, she resumed her post next to the bed. The nurses who kept coming in were annoyed with them for sitting right
next to the bed, in the way, but Dinah was with her mother on this one. Her father was not going to see empty space or a hospital counter when he woke up—he was going to see family.

Several more hours passed before he woke. Finally, around midnight, Dinah heard the rustle of sheets and knew her father was beginning to wake up. He blinked hard several times and then slowly opened his eyes. Dinah got up to go waken her mother.

"Let her sleep." His voice was hoarse from the tube, but his words were clear.

Dinah turned around. "I promised to wake her up, Dad. She'll kill me."

He started to laugh and then coughed instead. Dinah moved back to his side, frustrated at not being able to help.

"If she hasn't killed you yet, she's not going to," he whispered.

Dinah smiled, remembering all the times her dad had come between them when they were ready to kill one another.

She leaned over and kissed his dry cheek. "I'm so glad you're okay," she told him. "I was really scared."

"I got a glimpse," he said. "I got a glimpse of heaven, but that was all."
"I guess God just wasn't ready for yet."

"I'm ready," he said, looking at the machines.

"Well, we're not ready to let you go."

He started coughing again, and she tipped one of the Styrofoam cups filled with water to his mouth.

"You should stop trying to talk," she told him.

He gestured toward her.

"You want me to talk?"

He nodded.

"What about?"

He slowly moved his hand and placed it over his heart.

"Your heart attack?"

He shook his head.

"My heart?" she asked.

He nodded.

"It's good, Dad," she told him. "I'm fine."

"Police."

"I know."

He didn't say anything, just took her hand and squeezed—just like they used to do at the end of their family prayers before the meal. Three squeezes meant "I love you."

She waited for the third weak squeeze and then gently squeezed him back.
"I need to tell you . . ."

He shook his head and raised a single finger in the air.

She smiled at the familiar answer. "What matters is what's between me and God?"

He smiled and squeezed her hand again.

"Do you still believe in angels, Dad?" she asked.

He nodded and then pointed at her.

"Yeah, I do, too." Then she leaned toward him and whispered, "I think I've seen them, and, you're right. They're nothing like the pictures."

As she straightened and began to move back from the bed, he put his hand on her arm, and she leaned down again.

"You're . . . angel," he told her.

He hadn't called her his angel in a long time, and she smiled as she sat back down in the chair by his side. She longed for the days when she could climb into his lap, and he would read her stories of heroes from the Bible—the days when his words were all she needed to believe—when it was so clear who the heroes were.

Once she was sure he had gone back to sleep, she got up to stretch her legs and see if she could find a vending machine. All that was left in the food machine was a bag of Spicy Doritos, but she would take whatever she could get.
She decided to compliment the chips with a Diet Coke, opting for the caffeine not yet available in bottled water. On her way back to the room, she remembered the last time she had been in a hospital room—how she had held Marisa's hand and been taken to her rape. Everything had changed after that day.

A nurse came running down the hall toward her father's room, and Dinah quickened her pace. He had been fine. What had happened? Her mother was standing in the doorway. The nurses and a doctor were bent over her father. Dinah couldn't see what was going on, but she could hear the machine. The beep, beep of the heart was gone, replaced by a static buzzing. Her mother looked dazed.

"Mom, what happened?"

"The noise from the heart monitor woke me," she said, "but when I looked at your father, he seemed so peaceful, as if he was still sleeping. I just . . . I just can't believe he's gone."

"Gone?" She had just talked to him. He had been fine. He had called her his angel. How could he be gone? She told him they weren't ready for him to leave.
The Strong One

Dinah stayed the night with her mother and waited until some of the women from church arrived the next day before going to her apartment to get her things. She packed several changes of clothes, her essential toiletries, and the contents of her supply drawer. When she came out of the apartment with her suitcase, Detectives Miller and Adams were waiting for her. She smiled at the thought that they were standing so close to the weapons she had used in the murders.

"We're sorry about your father, Miss Grayson," Miller said.

"I'm sure you are," she replied, continuing to walk to her car.

"Not going out of town are you?" he asked.

Dinah turned to glare at him. "I'm going to be with my mother. She just lost her husband of 33 years."

"We are sorry about your father. He seemed like a good man," Adams said.

"Then why did you drive him to have a heart attack?" she asked.
The detective faltered. "We were looking into the death of one of the members of your father's church. We didn't realize he was your father until we got there."

"So how do you explain this third coincidence?" Miller chimed in.

"I don't," she said and continued walking toward her car.

"We'll be in touch," he told her as she got in the car. She watched them in her mirror as she drove away, wondering just how much they really knew. She had been so careful not to leave any evidence. What could they possibly have on her?

That evening Dinah went to pick up her brother and his wife at the airport. They hadn't seen each other in two years, not since he'd accepted the job of pulpit minister for a large church in North Carolina. Dinah had always managed to be somewhere else during their brief visits to her parents' house. It was awkward now. But when she saw the tears form in Josh's eyes, she hugged him. Grief was one thing they had in common.

He insisted on performing the funeral himself.

"But, Josh," his mother protested. "Are you sure you want to put yourself through that? Your father had many friends who were ministers, friends who want to take part."
"They can take part, Mom," he replied. "But family is leading the service. That's how Dad always did it, and it's what he'd want."

Dinah's mother had been unable to argue with that. Her husband had performed the funerals of his older brother, his mother, and his father, as well as her own parents.

Dinah took up residence in her old bedroom adjacent to her parents' bedroom, and Josh and his wife Melanie took the guest bedroom down the hall. She finally called Michael back the day after her father died because he wouldn't stop calling and leaving messages on her cell. Mary had told him what had happened.

He showed up at her parents' house a few hours after she called him. She talked with him briefly on the porch, letting him know the details of the viewing and the funeral.

"I would like to come, but I need to know if you want me to be there," he told her.

"It's up to you, Michael."

"I'm asking you," he insisted.

She stared at him, trying to fit the man standing in front of her in the puzzle of her life. "If you can't come, I'll understand," she finally said.

"I'll be there," he promised.
She sat on the porch a while longer after he drove away, thinking about her dad's last words to her. She had told no one that her father and she had talked shortly before he died. She blamed herself. He never would have had the first heart attack if the detectives had not been questioning him about her.

He preached forgiveness and second chances. But he was gone now. She couldn't even feel his presence anymore. She knew he was in heaven with God; he belonged there. He had died and taken the last remnants of her childhood faith with him. Whatever faith she had now was in something different than he had ever preached, but something, she liked to think, he could understand. He had always believed she would do great things.

When she finally came inside from the porch, her brother was sitting at the computer in the den, his head in his hands.

"You okay?" she asked from the doorway.

"Just trying to write Dad's eulogy," he answered, raising his head but not turning around.

"I don't know how you can do that. I couldn't."

"Yes, you could." He turned and looked at her, the tears still fresh on his face.
She started to go to him but then sat on the couch instead.

"You're the strong one, after all," he said.

"What? I'm not the strong one," she said. "You're the strong one."

He shook his head. "No, I'm the obedient one, the dutiful one, the one who never causes problems, but I'm not the strong one."

"I don't know how you can say that."

"Because it's true." He paused. "Remember when you came home from the hospital and I got Dad's gun and wanted to go out after the guy."

She smiled. "Yeah. I never thanked you for that."

"Well remember how easy it was for Dad to talk me out of it?"

"What does that matter?"

"Because even as Dad was talking me out of it, I could see it in his eyes."

"See what?"

"That he would have been proud of me if I had pushed him aside and went to find the guy."

"That's not true," Dinah argued. "Dad lived forgiveness, not just talked it."
"I know that, but I also know what I saw in his eyes that day."

Dinah looked at her hands.

"If it had been me, you would have gone," he said.

"You would have taken the gun and went to find him, and . . . ." he paused, as the tears begin to choke him. " . . . and even as Dad prayed for you, he would have been proud of you."

She stared at him now, trying to believe this was her brother telling her this.

He took a deep breath. "So I have to do this, Dinah. It's the least I can do." He turned back around, and Dinah left him staring at the words on the computer screen.

She took care of the funeral arrangements, leaving her brother and mother to deal with the never-ending phone calls and visits. Her mother seemed to find comfort in talking with those whose lives had been touched by her husband. She never refused to take the phone or come to the door. Dinah arrived early at the funeral home to make sure that everything had been handled correctly. She had stood by her father's casket for only a minute, to straighten his tie. He wasn't in there.

As she waited for people to begin arriving, she walked around the lobby. Another viewing, for a young woman names
Marta Alvarez, had already begun. She glanced in the room as she passed and abruptly stopped. The woman standing off to the side of the casket was the same woman in the enlarged photo in front of the closed casket.

The woman looked up at her and smiled faintly. When Dinah turned to go back to her father's room, the woman was standing in front of her.

"I'm sorry about your father," she said.

"How do you . . . ?"

"In passing."

"I could not go where he was going, not yet."

Dinah realized then that the woman had met her father after his death.

"Why is your casket closed?" she asked.

"Because I threw myself from the roof."

"Why would you do that?" Dinah asked the question even though she already knew the answer.

"Because I was ashamed."

"But why were you ashamed?"

Marta sighed. "Because my uncle forced me to have sex with him."

"That's his shame, not yours," Dinah protested.

But Marta continued speaking as if she had not even heard her. "I told my mother. She said I had brought it on
myself, embarrassed the family by seducing my father's brother."

Dinah looked away, unable to meet the pain in the woman's eyes. She remembered the story her father had told, about the woman who had promised to come to church and then killed herself instead—because she could not accept God's forgiveness. She did not question Marta further. She had no need to. She knew that rape makes an innocent person feel they are to blame for their own humiliation and pain, makes them feel as if they are unforgivable, unlovable, and unworthy of justice.

She turned back to Marta. "Tell me where this uncle is."

She gestured toward the room where the body of Dinah's father lay. "Your father, he preached love and forgiveness?"

"This is love," Dinah told her. "And forgiveness for evil is something only God can grant."

The woman slowly extended her arm, and Dinah followed her finger to a man in the first row, holding a crying woman. "There is my uncle, sitting with my mother. His name is Edgar Alvarez."

As she welcomed guests to her father's viewing, Dinah kept an eye on Marta's viewing. When the uncle left, she
walked outside. He climbed into a green Chevy Blazer a few cars back from the hearse. Dinah watched as Marta got into the backseat, and then she went back inside and joined her mother and brother next to her father's casket.

The funeral was a blur. Dinah stayed close to her mother, holding her and handling painful conversations when needed. At one point Dinah thought she saw Detectives Miller and Adams, but she couldn't be sure. There were so many people there. Mary came to her with tears flowing and whispered as they embraced that everything was set whenever she needed it. Dinah nodded and thanked her for coming. She rode next to her mother in the hearse and sat next to her in the folding chairs at the cemetery. Michael came up to her at the cemetery, and Dinah hugged him as she had hugged all the other mourners.

"I am here whenever you need me," he told her. "All you have to do is call."

"I know," she said.

He took her hand. "I mean it, Dinah. Please call me."

"I will," she promised.

The numbness had begun to wear off, and she was beginning to think again about what she would do. Michael was a secondary concern; he could be of little help to her, and she didn't want to involve him any further. She trusted
Mary not to say anything to him about her leaving. She wondered if Josh was right and her father would be proud of her. She had to believe that he would.
Dawn

She stayed awake into the wee hours of the morning, thinking of what she would do. She should not have committed to the uncle at the funeral. It was rash. She needed to leave. Her brother would make sure her mother was taken care of. Mary would take care of the store . . . and of Michael. The police were fitting the pieces together. It was only a matter of time. She could not risk another kill.

But she awoke in the morning to a news report that Red Behrman, wealthy business executive had been killed. At first the story was sketchy; a woman, possibly a former employee, had killed him. Then, as the day went on, they showed footage of the woman who had been arrested. It was Carolyn, the woman Dinah had seen Red rape. By the evening news, it was common knowledge that Carolyn had admitted to the murder and was claiming that Red had raped her. At first, the news people called it a case of "sexual harassment," but then Carolyn's lawyer issued a statement alleging that Red had raped, and not just harassed, Miss Lehman.
Dinah was stunned. Now that the memorial service was over, the calls and visits had largely tapered off, and her mother spent most of the day in her bedroom reading and sleeping. Dinah checked on her every few hours, but spent the rest of the time glued to the television in her bedroom, flipping through the cable and local news stations for any updates on the Behrman case. Her brother kept SportsCenter on in the family room 24-7, so she didn't have to worry about talking about the case with him.

The next day, when Carolyn was released on bond, she was swarmed with reporters. She confirmed that Red had raped her, and then added, "I am not the only one this man raped. Other women will be testifying that he did the same to them."

When a reporter asked her what defense she would be offering, she replied, "Self-defense. Just being a woman in this country requires daily acts of self-defense, and we are tired of it."

When another reporter asked who she meant by 'we,' she didn't hesitate to answer: "I mean the hundred of thousands of women who have been raped world-wide. By 'we' I mean the woman who killed the man who raped that little girl Tabitha Johnson, and the one who killed that serial rapist Anthony
Greenman. Because make no mistake. Those men were killed by a woman, and she is not alone."

When the reporters tried to question how she knew that a woman had killed those men, she sighed and asked, "Who else would have done it?"

Her lawyer jumped in to clarify that her client had no direct or indirect knowledge of any other murders, but was merely speaking of her belief that she was not alone in her refusal to allow her gender to continue to be abused and slaughtered.

Dinah cringed at the word "slaughtered," even as she acknowledged its truth. She wondered if she and this woman Carolyn had had some of the same visitors. How else could Carolyn know that a woman had killed those men?

But what was even more amazing to Dinah than Carolyn's statement was the stunned reaction of the reporters. They didn't even know how to describe what Carolyn had said. The notion of women rising up en masse and killing in retaliation for years of abuse was incomprehensible to them. Suddenly, the latest information about rates of violence against women was everywhere. Everyone was talking about it.

And as Dinah watched the public outpouring of support for Carolyn from other women, other survivors, she
understood. She finally understood what Cheryl had meant that night—had wanted her to see on the television that night. All the victims were women. She had watched how women had been treated for centuries. If it was going to stop, people would have to see women differently. No one wanted to believe that a woman could kill, kill when raped, kill when threatened, kill when abused, because it would change everything. If women were no longer the inevitable victims, it would change the balance of fear and of power. That's what Angela had been trying to tell her that day. The time was here. The scale wasn't just tipping; it was changing.

As the media continued to probe the police for more information on the "woman serial killer," Dinah began packing her things. She had put the books and magazines from her supply drawer in the bottom of the trash can yesterday. The weapons would go with her. She had already called Mary earlier that day at a payphone in the mall. She would call her again to confirm the plans once she was on the road.

As she stood outside her parents' bedroom door, debating whether or not to say goodbye, her mother called, "Dinah, is that you?", and her decision was made for her.

She set her bag down out of sight and opened the door.
"You were going to leave without saying goodbye?"

"How did you know I was standing there?"

"Because I'm your mother, and I feel you. You have things to do. I know this. I also know you're not telling me the truth about where you're going. There is no new job, is there?"

"No."

"Will you be safe?"

"I have people looking out for me."

"Will you be happy?"

This question was harder to answer. "I don't know, but I know I'll be doing what I was meant to do."

She held out her arms for her daughter, and as Dinah moved into them, she felt that her mother was satisfied with her answer.

When she straightened, her mother was crying.

"Mom?"

"I'm . . . I'm sorry, Dinah."

"Sorry for what?"

"Because I failed you—I wasn't there for you after the . . ."

Dinah smiled and wiped away the tears. "It's okay now. Everything's going to be okay. I may not be able to call
you for awhile, but I'll find a way to get in touch. Take care of yourself."

"You know your father and I love you very much, don't you?"

"Yes. I love you, too, Mom."

Dinah told her brother she was going back to the apartment and asked him to watch after their mother. He nodded, focused on the latest baseball update. Dinah's sister-in-law had flown back to North Carolina the day before to take care of their two young children.

As Dinah walked toward her car, she noticed a Ford Crown Victoria across the street from the house. Peering inside, she recognized the profile of Detective Adams. They were following her. She was glad she had opted for the gym bag instead of the suitcase. But how was she going to leave?

An arm grabbed hers as she went to get inside the car. She spun around, expecting to see an officer.

"Michael! What are you doing here?"

He rolled his eyes toward the detectives' car. "We had plans, remember?"

"Oh, right. With everything going on, I completely forgot."
"Why don't you ride with me?" he said, grabbing her bag from the backseat.

"I was kind of set on driving," she tried to protest.

"Let me drive for a change, okay?"

Although she didn't know what he was up to, she couldn't leave now anyway, so she nodded and followed him to his truck parked a few houses down the street in the opposite direction of the detectives.

He waited to say anything until they were past the detectives' car. "Mary called me and said you needed my help."

"I'm fine."

"I have a car waiting for you at a shopping center. We're going to go eat at a restaurant a friend of mine manages. He owes me a favor. You'll leave through the back exit. Here's the key to the Ford Focus that will be outside the back door."

She took the key with trembling hands.

"You know?"

"I know enough."

"Why are you doing this? You could be arrested."

"Because I meant it when I said I was supposed to be in your life."
She could not argue with him when he was helping her escape.

But as they pulled into the parking lot of the shopping center, she told him, "You can't go with me where I'm going."

"I know that," he said. "But my mother will be with you."

Before they got out, he handed her a wad of money. She started to refuse it, but he pressed it into her hand. "I don't need it, and they'll be monitoring your bank account and credit cards."

When she moved to stuff the money in her gym bag, he motioned toward the Crown Victoria pulling into the lot and told her, "You have to leave it. If you carry it with you into the restaurant, they'll know you're making a run for it."

She nodded, shocked that she had considered taking it with her. She pulled out the knife and the extra ammo from the bag and stuck them in her purse, next to the gun.

The wood shades hanging in the front window of the small Chinese restaurant were pulled shut, and Dinah wondered if they had been closed for her. Once they were inside, Michael nodded to the man behind the counter and then led Dinah to the door at the end of the back hallway.
"Are you leaving town right now?" he asked.

"I have one stop to make," she told him.

He grabbed her hand as she moved to go, and she felt the heat spread through her body. It was oddly comforting this time, like the feel of an electric blanket on bare legs and feet in the winter time, just before the blanket gets too hot.

"Be careful, please," he begged her.

"I will," she promised. "Your mother's not the only one looking out for me."

The Focus was parked next to a Camry. No one was in sight. She was in the car, speeding away, within seconds. She didn't look back.
The day after the funeral, she had called the four “Edgar Alvarez” listings in the phone book and identified herself as being from the funeral home that had handled the services for his niece Marta. The first two callers had told her she had the wrong number, but the third caller had asked what this was about. He sounded nervous, until she told him that they had found a pair of expensive eyeglasses and were trying to track down the owner. He seemed to buy her story and even seemed to consider claiming the glasses for himself, until Dinah added that the frame was cracked.

The address that matched the phone number was in a neighborhood in the city that the police tried to avoid. There had been two shootings there in the past month. It was a great location to shoot someone—even if you didn't have a silencer. The residents knew to duck their heads and make sure not to see anything the police might want to know about. She would do this one quick—no fuss, no muss. Single shot to the head.

She scanned the cars behind her as she drove. No sign of a blue Crown Victoria.
It was almost dark by the time Dinah got to the john's house. The house numbers were missing, but the Chevy Blazer from the viewing was parked in front. She parked in between the Blazer and an Oldsmobile missing most of its front end. It was a tight squeeze, but no one could see the Focus' license plate unless they were looking for it.

The porch light was hanging by a wire, but at least one light was on in the house, and when she got closer she could hear the television. She pulled her gun out and held it behind her back. She only wanted to get far enough in the house to shoot him without anyone outside seeing it. She knocked on the door, but no one answered. She had begun to wonder if he was even home when she heard noises, like someone muttering.

She knocked again, harder. When the muttering seemed to grow louder, she said, "Mr. Alvarez. I'm a friend of your niece's."

The door opened a crack, and Dinah repeated. "Mr. Alvarez, I'm here to talk to you about Marta."

The door opened wider, but she still couldn't see anyone.

"Mr. Alvarez?"
She stepped in the dark room and tried to get her bearings. When the door shut behind her, she jumped and pulled the gun from behind her back.

She still couldn't see anyone. Then she heard him, somewhere on the floor behind the door. He was still muttering, but she couldn't make out what he was saying. She fumbled around for a switch and finally found one. The light revealed a shuddering mass huddled in the corner behind the door.

Dinah put the gun behind her back and kneeled down a few feet from him. "What are you trying to say?"

Finally, she caught the strain of what he was saying: "She made me do it. She wanted me to."

He looked as if he had been pulling at his hair, and his jeans reeked of dried urine. Dinah got back on her feet and stood in front of the cowering man, contemplating if she was even needed here.

"Edgar, look at me," she ordered. "Tell me who 'she' is."

When he didn't answer, she asked, "Is 'she' your niece? Are you talking about Marta?"

He stopped muttering then and looked at her with terror-filled eyes. "She's here," he whispered. "Ella es un demonio."
Dinah looked around. "Who's here?"

He raised his left arm and pointed, but when Dinah followed the line of his finger, she still saw nothing.

Then she felt a hand on her shoulder. "I wasn't sure you'd come," Marta said. "We've been waiting for you."

The john in the corner had tucked his head into his chest and resumed his muttering.

"Can he see you?" Dinah asked the woman.

"He thinks he can," she answered. "He thinks I am haunting him for what he did to me."

"Are you?"

"I don't have to," she replied with a slight smile.

"You're here."

Dinah looked over at the john. It looked as if he was trying to burrow into his own body.

What could she do to this man that was any worse than what he was already doing to himself?

As if in answer to her question, he extended his right arm that had been tucked between his legs, and Dinah saw the gun grasped in his hand. She tightened her own grip on her gun. "Edgar, who is the gun for?" she asked.

"For me," he said at first. Then he seemed to change his mind. "No, it's for her."
"You can't kill someone who's already dead," Dinah told him.

"Ella no es muerta!" he screamed. "I see her! She’s standing right behind you."

As he raised the gun, Dinah saw the front door open and then felt herself being pushed face-down into the floor. Her gun went flying from her hand and slid across the linoleum. She heard two shots fire.

A body fell on top of her with a groan, and she struggled to get up. By turning her head, she could see Edgar, still sitting against the wall. He had dropped the gun and was sobbing into his arms. "Ella es un demonio."

She finally managed to push the body to the side and pull herself out from under it. Something about this body seemed familiar to her. She kneeled next to it and flipped it back over so that she could see the face.

"Michael?"

She quickly pulled up his shirt. Blood was pouring from the two holes in his chest.

"Oh, God. Oh, God." She put her hands over the holes, but they couldn’t stop the blood.

"What have you done?" she screamed at the man still huddled in the corner. He was staring at her blankly, still mumbling about demons.
"Michael, you're going to be okay," she told him, through her tears.

"Call 911, you idiot!" she screamed at Edgar. "Do it!"

He stared at her uncomprehendingly, and she realized that he was too far gone to even process what had happened. Michael's mouth was moving, but she couldn't make out what he was trying to say. She leaned down and caught the word "Sorry."

"What?" she sobbed.

"You . . . hate . . . surprises."

Still holding one hand over the holes, she used the other to smooth back the hair from his forehead, leaving a partial red handprint on his skin.

"Go," he told her.

"No."

"Go," he said again. His mouth hung open after he finished speaking, and his glazed eyes fixed on something behind Dinah.

She pulled her hand from his chest and picked up her gun. She pointed it at the john's head and fired two times. "You have to go."

Dinah recognized that voice. She looked back over at Michael. Josey was cradling his head in her arms. "Go now," she told her.
Dinah rose to her feet and looked down at the mother holding her dying son. "Are you angels?" she asked.

Josie smiled, "No, but you are."

Dinah stared at the gun in her bloody hand. "I can't be," she said.

"There have always been more than one kind of angel, Dinah. Don't you remember Egypt?"

Dinah walked outside the house and closed the door, remembering the story. When the Pharaoh of Egypt had refused to let the Israelite slaves go free, God had sent plagues. When the Pharaoh still would not let God's people go, He had finally sent the angel of death to claim the first born son of every Egyptian household. It had moved across the land, but it had not entered any of the Israelite homes because their door frames had been marked with the blood of sacrificed lambs.

Dinah looked down at Michael's blood on her hands and wiped her palms down both sides of the door frame. Marta joined her, wiping the blood from the wounds on her body where she had fallen into glass. This house had been marked for death, and death had now cleansed it. The story had changed.

When she came down from the porch, the john's neighbors were watching her, staring and pointing at the
blood on the door. They made no move to stop her as she walked toward her car. They couldn't see the women lining either side of Dinah's path. She walked in between them, meeting the eyes of each woman. She did not know them, but she recognized the pain and the resignation in their eyes. As she passed, the resignation faded from each set of eyes. And as it faded, each woman disappeared.

Only when they had all gone, did she remember that she had to get away. She ran to her car. At the end of the street, she passed a police car, but the cruiser didn't turn around. She watched the flashing lights in her mirror, waiting until she could no longer see them before she breathed again. She could feel them with her: Angela, Cheryl, Tabitha, Carolyn, Marta, and Josephine. And she could feel her father and Michael, too. They all believed in her when she had not yet remembered who she was. But now she remembered. She remembered that we are not the stories we read; we are the stories we write.

The story of my name is in Genesis 34. The story of my spirit is still being written. My name means "vindicated." In both stories, the vindication comes through blood.