

GO-BETWEEN

Chapter One



SHE STILL WONDERED IF she'd made the right decision.

She'd spent a lot of time thinking about that, in the two years that had passed since. She'd had a choice.

"I've got some funds stashed," he'd said. "I can set you up with enough to make a fresh start someplace."

"What do *you* want?" she'd asked.

Silence for a long moment. "I'm tired of doing it all on my own."

The other choice she'd made back then, in retrospect, she'd clearly chosen wrong.

At times she could still feel the golf club in her hands, the weight of it, the slightly sticky grip, until it became slippery with blood.

She really should have killed him.

THE PAYROLL WAS SCREWED up, again.

Really, what was the point of hiring a service if they couldn't get it right?

Jesus stood there, still in his work T-shirt and black pants, ball cap in hand. He seemed apologetic, like he was doing something wrong for asking. A middle-aged man, short, wiry, with a shaved head and a fuzzy tattoo on his neck. One of her line cooks.

He probably was here illegally, but she didn't really care. He had the right paperwork, and he worked hard.

She was covered.

She signed the check and handed it to him.

“Thank you, Missus Carmichael.”

“Don’t thank me. You worked for it. You should get paid.”

AFTER HE LEFT, SHE finished entering expenses on her spreadsheet. It looked like it was going to be a decent month. On track for 90K plus in gross receipts. She’d gotten some great deals on wine from Sonoma and Lake County, and she was more than happy with the prices and quality of produce and meat she was getting from the local farmers—well, local and a few hundred miles away. You couldn’t be a total purist about these things.

She did some filing. Tidied up the tiny office. It didn’t take much to clutter it up. Watered her plants. The lavender wasn’t doing well. Probably not enough sun. The office had a window that faced east, and Arcata was foggy much of the time, in any case.

I could buy a sun lamp, she thought. One of those therapy lamps, for seasonal affective disorder.

Maybe she could use it too.

My life’s not bad, she told herself. It’s not bad at all. And it’s way better than it was.

Walking into the seating area of the bistro, she reminded herself of that.

She still felt a little thrill sometimes when she looked at it. The redwood burl tables. The dark walls. The photographs on them, lit by accent lights.

Her work.

It was all her work, really. She’d been very careful about everything. The place settings. The silverware. The glasses.

She'd gone for a simple, elegant look with an unfinished edge. Japanese design. Wabi sabi, the deliberate imperfection, the acceptance that all things were transient.

And good food. Good wine. Microbrews. Single-lot-origin coffee. She kept the prices reasonable, the value high.

"There's some money in this town," he'd said.

College students. Some of them still wanted a nice place to go. Not fussy. Not pretentious. But something for a special occasion. A place to take a serious date, or your parents, when they came to visit. The Cal State faculty made up a good chunk of her regulars too.

Them, and the more professional cannabis entrepreneurs.

Whatever, she thought. They had some things in common, really. The best growers were all about the quality. Perfectly trimmed buds, sticky and sparkling with crystals. No pesticides. Different strains for different highs.

And different medical applications. Indica for insomnia. High CBD for pain management. Sativa for PTSD. You can cure cancer with cannabis oil, some of them said.

She thought they tended to exaggerate.

They liked her wine and cheese selection, her organic, grass-fed beef. Fresh, seasonal vegetables and fruit, artisanal baked breads, estate olive oils.

No GMOs, of course. Arcata outlawed those.

One of her pot regulars, Bobby, sat at a two-top with his girlfriend, Gina, underneath her photo of redwoods and mist. A cliché of sorts, she knew, but technically a nice shot.

She thought that Bobby was more of a broker than a grower. But she wasn't sure, and she didn't really want to know. Bobby kept his business quiet, especially compared to the medical growers, where everything was regulated and

registered. They were trying to prove a point, she knew, the medical growers and dispensaries, that marijuana could be a legitimate business, one that paid sales tax, joined the local Chambers of Commerce. Served the community.

The federal authorities busted them anyway.

“Easy pickings, operating out in the open like that,” Bobby had said once with a shrug. “No thanks.” He wasn’t crazy about the latest attempt to legalize cannabis for recreational use in California, either. “Prop 391’s just a tax grab by the state,” he’d said. But then, a lot of the growers were split on it. “What’s that going to do to price? Who gets the licenses? How can we compete against Big Ag?” being some of the more common complaints. “Artisanal weed,” was the usual rejoinder. “Like a fine Napa cabernet versus Two Buck Chuck.” But not everyone would be able to make that transition.

What would happen to the economy here, without black market marijuana holding it up? The lumber industry collapsed decades ago. Arcata had the university, at least, but in other parts of Humboldt? There wasn’t much else.

Bobby waved. In his fifties, round faced, balding, with the remaining hair shaved short, a wool Kangol cap he nearly always wore, retro Armani tortoiseshell glasses, tweed jacket over a designer T-shirt. Gina, a decade younger, at least, curly hair shot with gray, wearing layers of peasant blouse and yoga T-shirt.

She smiled back and approached the table.

“Emily! How’s life been treating you?” he asked her.

“Great. Keeping busy.”

“I can see that.” Nine P.M., and the restaurant nearly full. “What are we in the mood for, hon?” he asked Gina. “A nice Cab?”

“Fine with me.”

Know your customer. Appeal to his vanity.

“Try the Rafanelli, if you haven’t yet. It’s not that easy to get a hold of, and a great value for the price.”

Bobby ran a finger down the wine list. “It ain’t cheap.”

“It is for what it is.”

“I’ll take your word for it.”

She took a half-step toward the bar, thinking she would bring the wine over herself, while Kendra, the waitress, took orders at the four-top by the front window.

“Hey, is Jeff around?” Bobby asked. “I left him a couple messages.”

She hesitated. “He’s fighting a fire.”

“Oh, that’s right.” Bobby propped his elbow on the bar and leaned back. A studied pose. “The one out near Trinity Forest.”

She didn’t want to talk to Bobby about this, about whatever it was he wanted, because she was pretty sure that she already knew.

“Right,” she said.

“Well, listen, when he gets back, can you ask him to give me a buzz? I have a little gig for him.”

Great, she thought. Just great.

“DID YOU KNOW THAT the same bulbs that light our streets are probably used on your indoor garden? Now there’s a better solution—Butterfly Bulbs can increase your yield up to thirty percent by maximizing photosynthetic—”

Home.

She switched off the radio.

The tires of her Prius crunched the redwood chips covering the driveway. She decided to just leave the car in the

drive. Getting out, opening the garage door and parking in the garage felt like too much trouble.

Outside, fog dripped off the pines.

We really should get a garage door opener, she thought, given how much it rained, but then, it wasn't their house. Not one she'd choose to buy, really. A sixties ranch-style that hadn't changed much since the sixties, with the exception of newer carpeting and paint.

It's a house, she thought. And maybe it wasn't as upscale as the one she used to have in Los Angeles, but it was a place to live, and it wasn't bad. God knows, not too long ago, she'd wondered if she'd ever have a decent place, and this was more than decent, even if it was just a rental.

Not that her old house, when she thought about it, was ever actually hers.

Call it whose it was—her husband's.

But not even Tom's, really. The house had belonged to the bank, or to some obscure hedge fund in Iceland, to whoever it was who'd bought the mortgage.

This rental house was owned by a couple who owned a string of dispensaries in Humboldt and Trinity called "Green Solutions." Three bedrooms, the master, an office and a guest room. A good-sized living room. A kitchen that could use some updating, with those "Colonial" knotty pine cupboards she couldn't stand and a cheap electric stove, but after a ten-to-twelve-hour shift at the restaurant, the last thing she wanted to do was cook.

A hot tub out back, overlooking a stand of redwoods.

The hot tub sounded good. Between the day's work and the session she'd had with her trainer at the gym that morning, she was both pleasantly sore and bone tired.

She used the controller on her keyring to deactivate the alarm. Unlocked the deadbolt and the doorknob key. Stepped inside the entry. Headed to the kitchen.

A glass of wine, she thought. Turn on the hot tub, soak a while, and go to bed.

The kitchen opened out onto the deck where the hot tub was. She flicked on the accent light above the butcher-block island—the one thing about the kitchen that she did like—unlocked the sliding glass door, and turned the dial on the stucco wall to start up the hot tub. The jets came on with a massive burp and a bubbling hum that settled into the wooden planks of the deck like a squad of aquatic mosquitoes.

What wine to have, she thought? Maybe the Sonoma Pinotage she was thinking about adding to the wine list at Evergreen.

She opened the bottle and set it on the butcher-block counter.

It would take about twenty minutes for the hot tub to heat up.

I'll get out of these clothes, she thought. Take a quick shower, put on the thick terry robe, sweats and Ugg boots, and maybe start on the wine. Not too much though. Tempting as it was to just drink until she was ready to crawl into bed, it wasn't a good idea, and she knew it.

Two glasses. That was enough.

She couldn't afford to lose control.

As she stepped into the bedroom, an arm circled around her waist.

SHE ALMOST REACTED THE way she'd been trained. Almost drove the heel of her palm into his groin, slammed the crown of her head into his jaw, stomped her heel on his

instep, shoved her elbow into his throat, all the things she'd learned how to do.

“Hey.”

“Jesus Christ, don't do that,” she said.

His hand paused briefly on her hip before letting go.

“Sorry.”

She turned. He wore a T-shirt and sweats, his hair damp from a shower, his face freshly shaved, but he still smelled like wood smoke. She could feel her heart beat in her throat, and she swallowed hard.

“Just don't.”

He lifted his hands. “Okay.”

She knew him well enough to read the emotions: irritation mixed with hurt, followed by a sort of resignation, the half-smile that he wore like camouflage.

She struggled to smile back. To make her voice warm. “I turned on the hot tub,” she said. “And opened some wine.”

He stared at her for a moment, then nodded. “Sounds good. I'm beat to shit.”

STANDING UNDER THE SHOWERHEAD, letting the strong jets of water pulse against her scalp, she asked herself, yet again, what she was doing with him.

She thought that she knew the answers, but she couldn't seem to stop asking herself the question.

Safety. That had been a big part of it. Security. He'd had all the money. Sure, he'd offered to give her something if she'd decided to go it alone, but how much would that have been? How long would it have lasted?

She'd taken the path of least resistance, again—staying with the man.

Things are different now, she told herself. She had the bistro. She had Evergreen. She owed him for that, but she could support herself. *Was* supporting herself.

She turned off the shower, wrapped herself in her terry robe, and went out to check on the hot tub.

HE'D ALREADY GONE IN.

"Hot enough?" she asked.

"Getting there." He leaned against the side of the tub, eyes half-closed.

"You want anything else with the wine?"

"Water'd be great."

She brought out the bottle of wine, two glasses, and then the pitcher of water with a couple of plastic tumblers. Put them down on the redwood deck. Slipped off her robe and draped it on the Adirondack chair by the tub.

He watched her now as she stepped into the tub and sat on the bench next to him.

"I bet you could kick my ass," he said.

She had to smile. "I doubt it."

"Maybe I'd let you."

He leaned over and kissed her. His lower lip had cracked, probably from the fire's heat, and she could taste the hint of blood. She moved closer to him, and his arm circled around her back. His other hand came to rest on her breast, fingertips gently stroking her nipple.

Just the way she liked it.

This was one of the other answers.

Stupid, she told herself, and shallow. But true.

She couldn't pretend that it didn't matter. She liked looking at him, the long, lean body, the black hair shot with gray,

the blue eyes and sharp cheekbones. It shouldn't matter, but it did. He loved sex, and he was good at it. Good with her. And after the long drought that had been her marriage, well, why not?

Don't ask that question, she told herself. But of course, she always did.

"I think I'm ready for some of that wine," he said. The bottle and glasses had ended up almost behind him, and he leaned back and started to reach for the bottle. Drew in a sharp breath. "Shit!" he gasped, falling back against the side of the tub.

"Shoulder?"

"Yeah." He managed a grin. "I think I'm getting too old to be a fireman."

He wasn't that old. He'd just turned forty-two. And he was in good shape. But she could see the scar from the injury even in the near dark: a jagged oblong the size of a large grape, bigger than it needed to be because they'd waited to treat it, white edges around a dark, red-brown hollow.

She poured the wine. They toasted silently. Sipped.

It was smooth. Smoky. Which seemed appropriate.

"So how was the fire?" she asked.

"Fun. You know. Worked our asses off. Lost a house by Junction City, but that was it in terms of structures."

"Are you really thinking about not volunteering any more?"

He gave a one-shouldered shrug. "I dunno. I mean, I need *something* to do."

"The charter business . . ."

"Too slow. Not enough to cover the Caravan. Hangar rental's going up next month."

“Evergreen’s doing really well. You own the plane. We can cover the hangar.”

“It’s not enough.”

He poured them both more wine. “Bobby left me a couple of messages. Said he has a gig.”

She hesitated. She knew that he probably wouldn’t listen.

“Is it really a good idea?” she asked anyway.

“Minimum risk, maximum reward.”

“It’s not minimum risk,” she said, feeling a surge of irritation. “You know, the rest of the country isn’t Humboldt.”

“Compared to what I used to do?” He gulped some wine. “Look, setting up here took most of my bank.” Which might have been aimed at her. Opening Evergreen hadn’t been cheap. “And there’s no way I want to be without some real cash. In case, you know?”

Then he grinned. “Besides, it’s patriotic. Supporting the local economy. Taking business away from the Mexicans. Win-win.”

She fought the urge to get out of the tub, storm off, slam a few doors. Not her style. Not the person she wanted to be, anyway.

Also, he had a point.

“Okay,” she said. “But you have to promise me. If we’re . . .”

Her throat closed. She couldn’t get the words out. She wasn’t sure what the words even were.

It wasn’t like they had a commitment. What did they have in common, really? They’d been thrown together, and they’d stuck together because it seemed to make sense.

It wasn’t love, or anything like that. She wasn’t sure she even remembered what being in love felt like.

It was attraction. Pheromones. It was making the best of the situation. He kept things light, and so did she.

Maybe I can't feel anything deep, she thought.

But she liked him. He was funny, and he was kind. And he'd kept his promises to her.

"If we're going to stay together," she finally said, "there needs to be a point when you're done. With things like gigs for Bobby."

He let out a long, slow sigh. Nodded. "Yeah. I know. You're right."

"I'll clean up," she said. "Why don't you go to bed? You look exhausted."

He smiled, because that was how he was. The good guy. The one who let things slide. Who appreciated what he had. Pretended to, anyway.

"Thanks. I'm wiped."

She shut down the hot tub, put on the cover. Washed the wine glasses and put them in the dish rack to dry. Threw the bottle in the recycling bin. Decent wine, she thought, and she liked that it was local. If she could talk them down a little on the case price, she'd stock it.

By the time she went into the bedroom, he was sound asleep.

She rinsed off in the shower, put on a T-shirt and pajama bottoms—no need for lingerie—and slid under the covers next to him.

Lying there, she thought, he's not perfect, but god knows, neither am I.

Maybe this is close enough, she thought.

Not a life she ever could have imagined living. But it wasn't bad.



TWO DAYS, HE'D SAID. "Texas. Flight plan's for Houston, if anyone asks."

One day down, one to go.

Almost 10 P.M. Time to close up shop, she thought, and go home. She shut down her computer, turned off the office light, locked the door.

Tuesday night. A slow one. The kitchen was already closed, except for bar snacks for another hour. She wasn't sure if the hour would be worth it. The bar empty except for two stools. The four-top settling their bill. Only one other customer that she could see, sitting at the two-top tucked into the alcove to the right of the front window. A dark corner, she thought. Maybe she needed to install another accent light. Kendra, the waitress, was there, laughing at something the customer had said, blocking her view of him, except for his shoulder, the side of his torso, some curly gold hair.

As she walked toward the door, a part of her already knew. Before Kendra stepped away and she saw him clearly, her heart had already started racing, raw adrenaline coursing through her body like a flood of melted ice.

The man at the two-top smiled and lifted his hand.

"Well, hello there, Michelle—how nice to see you again."

Fucking Gary.

Chapter Two



A PART OF HER wanted to run. It was the rage that stopped her, coming in hard after the rush of fear.

Gun. She carried a .38 Smith & Wesson in her Be&D hobo. Tucked in a holster sewn into the leather. She'd had it made custom. Her hand snaked toward the flap.

Gary's smile broadened, his eyes trailing the movement.

Fuck, she thought. She couldn't just shoot the son of a bitch down in her restaurant.

Could she?

Kendra paused at her side, whispered in her ear: "He said you were old friends. He's been waiting. Do you want me to—?"

"It's fine." She forced a smile. "I was just surprised."

"Did he call you 'Michelle'?"

"An old nickname. Excuse me a minute."

She waited until Kendra had gone over to the four-top to pick up the check, and then she approached Gary's table.

"Why are you here?"

"I thought you might have time for a glass of wine." He chuckled. "We have some catching up to do. Don't you think?"

The last thing she wanted to do was sit down and have a drink with fucking Gary.

"What do you recommend?" he asked, running a finger down the wine list. "You know a lot more about this stuff than I do. Something nice. And smooth. My treat."

She kept her voice steady. Smiled like she would if he were any other customer. “Kendra? Would you bring over a bottle of the Turley please? Two glasses.”

She turned back to Gary. “Anything else?”

His eyes moved from hers, slowly down her body. Taking everything in. “I’ve already eaten.”

She rolled her eyes. He was so fucking predictable.

Michelle pulled out the chair opposite Gary, and sat.

Kendra brought the wine.

“Well, thank you . . . Kendra, right?” He smiled. “Kendra was telling me about her studies at the college here, while I was waiting for you. Getting your master’s in . . . environmental . . . *systems*, is it?”

“That’s right,” Kendra said. “It’s a great program. I think your friend’s son would really like it. But there’s a lot of options. Environmental engineering, environment and community . . .” She was fresh faced and earnest, her enthusiasm for her subject close to the surface, like her enthusiasm for most things. A sweet girl.

Not someone Michelle wanted to put in front of Gary, not for another minute.

“Kendra, why don’t you go ahead and punch out. I’ll pay you for the rest of the hour.”

“I still have some side work—”

“It’s been so slow. Don’t worry. Matt can handle it.”

The bartender. In his late twenties, tattooed and pierced, hard bodied from mountain biking and rock climbing and whatever else he did.

Not that he’d be any match for Gary.

Michelle’s heart started pounding again, and she thought, Matt will be okay. He’s over at the bar, where he won’t hear

anything we say. He won't know anything. He won't be a threat.

She just didn't want to be left alone with Gary, even if Matt was no real protection.

"Thanks, Emily—see you tomorrow!" Kendra said over her shoulder.

Gary raised his glass.

"If you think I'm going to toast with you—" Michelle said.

"Now, now. We're two old friends, having a drink. How's it gonna look to your boy-toy at the bar if you don't?"

She pasted a smile back on. Lifted her glass. Clinked. Watched Gary sip.

She wasn't going to ask how he found her. He wouldn't tell her the truth, she knew.

Most probably, somewhere along the line she and Danny had been compromised, by someone who'd claimed to be on their side.

"Well, this is really nice," Gary said.

If he meant the wine, it was. She'd been tempted to order the cheapest glass on the menu for him, but even those were decent. Might as well make him pay for it.

"The whole place, I'm just so impressed. I bet those are your photos on the walls, right? I always did think you had a real good eye."

"Right."

"You look like you've been working out," he said, sniffing at the wine. "I mean, you always were into that as I recall, but seems like you've taken it to another level."

It was true, but she wasn't going to tell him that. Wasn't going to tell him about the self-defense classes, the

kickboxing, how all that activity was one of the few things that helped her relax.

“You know, you kind of inspired me, actually. I’ve been working out a lot myself.” He sat up straighter. Displaying himself. “You notice?”

Oh please, she thought.

But taking the opportunity to really focus on him, she could tell that he looked different. Thinner, for one. Harder. Even his face. His eyelids looked less puffy, the bags below them almost gone.

Good god, had he gotten his eyes done?

The mouth was the same, the cherub lips. And the hair, the gold curls, with their salon highlights.

“You’ve lost some weight,” she said.

“Well, you know, I was in the hospital for almost a month, thanks to you. Yeah, I lost a lot of weight. When I got out, I had to do a bunch of physical therapy, and after all that, I just thought, well hey, why not turn over a new leaf while I’m at it?” He rubbed a patch on his cheekbone. “Still numb. Multiple fractures.” Touched the bridge of his nose. “Yeah, and that bump’s left from where they reset it. I could’ve had more work done but I kinda like it, actually. Gives me a distinguished touch, I’ve been told.”

Deep, calming breaths, she told herself.

“So is that why you came here, Gary? You want to compare injuries? Because you know, I have a few. Thanks to *you*.”

“Be nice if we could just call it even. Wouldn’t it?”

At that, she laughed. “Are you really going to tell me that you came here to kiss and make up? Do you think for one second I’d believe that?”

“No, I don’t expect you would.” He settled back into his

chair. “But one thing I hope you do believe, Michelle. You know how I used to tell you that I thought you had a lot of potential? A natural aptitude? I meant that. I really did.”

A sinking feeling. How many times had she read that description in a book, not really thinking about what it actually described? She felt it now, a hollow plunging in her gut.

She didn’t need to know exactly what was coming to have a pretty good idea of its shape.

“No,” she said.

“You haven’t even heard what I have to say.”

“I don’t need to.”

Now he chuckled. Took a hearty swallow of wine. “You really think you get to say no?”

Red pulsed behind her eyes. She thought about the gun. “I should have fucking killed you,” she said.

“Yeah. You probably should’ve,” he said without heat. “Rookie mistake. It’s always best to finish the job.”

He drank some more wine and finally pushed his glass away. “Tell you what. I know this is a lot to absorb right now. I’m staying at a little bed and breakfast just off the square. The Lady Jane Grey. Cute place. Got a hot tub and everything. Why don’t you come see me tomorrow morning, nine-ish, and we’ll get caught up?”

Michelle nodded. It was easier to agree than to argue.

Now he stood. Retrieved his wallet from a back pocket. “One glass is my limit these days.” He pulled out three one hundred dollar bills and tossed them on the table. “You can take the rest of the bottle home.” He smiled. “On me.”

AFTER GARY LEFT, SHE stayed where she was. Picked up her wine glass. Thinking she wanted to snap the stem

between her fingers, hurl the glass against the wall. At the redwoods photo, maybe. Because it really was a cliché.

Instead she had a sip, and then another.

She finished the glass. Picked Gary's money up off the table, grabbed the bottle of wine, and went over to the bar.

"For the Turley on number five," she said, handing Matt the money.

"Wow. That's a big tip."

She shrugged. "Make sure it gets divided up."

"What about the bottle?"

Michelle glanced at the two customers on bar stools. Students, she thought, a girl and a boy who looked like they'd barely reached drinking age. On a date, probably. Nursing draft beers.

"You like wine?" she asked them. "It's on the house."

OUTSIDE, THE FOG WAS thick, leaving her face damp with its chill. She kept one hand on the butt of her .38 as she clicked on her key to unlock the Prius, parked behind Evergreen.

Stupid, she thought, sliding into the front seat. He's not waiting out here to kill me, or kidnap me. He wouldn't have come into the restaurant that way if that had been his plan.

Whatever it was he wanted her to do would be his version of revenge. Or the start of it. He'd put her in some situation that she couldn't get out of. Where she'd be afraid, all the time. Terrorized.

She remembered the things he'd threatened her with, before. She remembered the things that he'd done.

It's all a game to him. It's fun.

She arrived home, not remembering the drive.

Still keeping her hand on the pistol, she clicked off the alarm and went inside.

No Danny. He wasn't due back yet, but still, she'd wanted desperately to find him here. She wanted to tell him what had happened. To have him hold her.

She went out to the garage and retrieved one of the burner cell phones.

They could have kept the phones in the house safe, but that looked bad, Danny had said. "Just throw them in a box of crap in the garage. Like it's a piece of junk we haven't taken to the electronics recycling. If anyone finds one, you don't know what it is or how it got there." A cheap phone, with no GPS. Prepaid minutes, bought with cash at a big-box store in another state.

She dug out the charger, stashed in a different bin on the workbench. Plugged in the phone. Went to texts, and punched in a number.

A two-character text: 86.

She waited. No response.

Okay, she thought, it might still be okay. He could be on his way back. He could have already tossed the phone.

She went back into the house. Grabbed her iPhone. Her "Emily" phone. The one with the plan through AT&T, the one that she paid for out of her "Emily" bank account every month, like a normal person.

She called Danny's "Jeff" phone. "Hey," his recorded voice said, "Sorry I missed you. Leave a message."

"Hi, it's Emily. Can you call me back, as soon as you pick this up. It's important."

He turns his phone off all the time, she told herself. If he's still doing his run, it would definitely be off. Stashed in a signal-blocking bag, to make sure it couldn't be tracked.

But he was supposed to have his burner cell on, if he was still doing his run.

She went to her bedroom closet. Retrieved another cell phone from her other hobo, a Marc Jacobs she didn't use much any more. Her "Michelle" phone. Also prepaid. A risk, she knew. But she didn't keep any numbers in the phone book. Deleted the calls she made after she made them, as well as any incoming.

The only person who had the number was her sister, and Michelle had already changed it twice.

She couldn't tell Maggie what had happened in Mexico, or after. Where she was now, what she was doing. She'd seen Maggie and Ben once, eight months ago, meeting them in Santa Barbara for a "getaway weekend."

"You can't ask questions," she'd told Maggie. "Only call me if it's an emergency. I mean, a *real* emergency." She'd given Maggie an email address too, that she accessed through a VPN. "Use that first. I'll check it every day."

It wasn't foolproof. Cutting off all contact would have been the safest thing to do. But she'd lost everything else. She wasn't going to lose what was left of her family.

Their parents had been older. They'd gone from retirement community to assisted living to nursing home, the kind of journey where the horizons shrunk to a room and a wheelchair. Mom was gone. Dad had Alzheimer's. It was a weird blessing, in a way, that there wasn't enough left of him to miss her.

She put money into an account for his care, every month. Derek, their lawyer, took care of that. It was supposed to be untraceable.

She didn't necessarily trust Derek.

Michelle dialed Maggie's number. If her sister's phone was tapped, so what? She didn't have to worry about them ping-ponging the cell phone tower, about them locating her. Gary was here. They already knew.

It took five rings for Maggie to pick up.

"It's me," Michelle said quickly. "Is everything okay there? Just answer yes, or no."

"Yes. Michelle?" Maggie sounded sleepy. It was almost 11:00 P.M., and she usually went to bed around now, so she could get up in the morning, make Ben his lunch, drop him off at school and get to the office on time.

"You're sure? There's no one . . . no one's making you say that?"

"No. Jesus. What is this, a spy movie or something?"

Michelle nearly laughed.

"Look, do me a favor," she said. "Can you, can you just . . . take a few days off? Go somewhere. You and Ben. I'll cover the cost."

"No, I can't 'go somewhere.' Lucia's on maternity leave, I'm covering her desk, they'd *kill* me. Seriously, Michelle, what the fuck is going on?"

Maggie sounded royally pissed. Michelle supposed she couldn't blame her.

"I can't get into it right now. It's . . . it's complicated."

What could she tell her? If they were listening, what could she say that wouldn't make things worse?

"I'm glad everything's okay," she said. "Just . . . if you have any problems, if anything . . . call me, okay? If the number doesn't work, email me."

"Okay." There was silence on the other end of the line. "Look," Maggie finally said. "Whatever's going on, just tell

me. We'll figure out how to deal with it. This, this whole mystery act of yours, it's ridiculous. It can't be that bad." She laughed, a nervous chuckle. "I mean, you didn't kill anyone, did you?"

MICHELLE TOOK AN AMBIEN. She didn't like taking them, but the natural sleep aids, the melatonin spray, the herbs, weren't going to work tonight, and she knew it.

Better a chemically induced sleep than none at all. You can't sleep, you can't think straight, and she needed to be able to think.

Even with the Ambien, her thoughts went in circles.

AT 6:33 A.M., HER Emily phone rang. She might have been awake before it rang.

Danny had programmed her ring tones. She'd never cared about that stuff, but he liked doing it, and his choices made her smile.

"Lawyers, Guns and Money." The ring tone for business. Derek Girard. Their attorney.

Her heart pounded. If she hadn't been awake before, she was wide-awake now.

"Hello?"

"Emily? Derek Girard. Sorry to call so early. But we have a situation."

Chapter Three



MICHELLE PULLED INTO THE Evergreen parking lot just after 9 A.M. She could have parked by Lady Jane's, but she needed to steady herself, and the walk would help. No matter how scared she was, no matter how angry, she had to play this right.

She cut across the green expanse of the Arcata Plaza, past the statue of President McKinley at its center, then down G Street by the Arcata Hotel, ignoring the panhandlers begging for change, or if not that, a joint. Normally she enjoyed lingering in the Plaza, with its mix of Settlement, Victorian and Craftsman buildings, wondering what previous owners of some of them had been thinking when they'd covered up historic buildings with modern facades, or, more happily, watching the progress of the latest restoration.

She was tempted to linger now. To put this meeting off, just a little while longer. But it was better to get it over with.

Better not to be late.

Her destination was a Victorian a few blocks off the Plaza.

Lady Jane's served breakfast in the garden when the weather was decent, Michelle knew, and it was nice enough today. Mid-sixties. Almost sunny. She missed the LA heat, sometimes. It was hardly ever really warm in Arcata.

At least the climate here is good for my skin, she thought, and then she wanted to laugh.

Gary sat at a table in the back of the garden, under a

wicker archway threaded with ivy, his legs stretched out, feet propped on a chair in front of him. He wore a baseball cap, the first time Michelle had ever seen him in any kind of hat, and sipped from a teacup. He seemed to be staring at the fountain, though she couldn't be sure. The centerpiece of the fountain was an Indian-style Buddha. Not really a good fit with Victorian. She'd always wondered about that.

"Well, good morning, Emily." He bowed his head a fraction and pinched the brim of his ball cap.

Michelle took in the logo. "The Humboldt Crabs?"

"Champions of the Far West League," Gary said, grinning. "You know they beat the Healdsburg Prune Packers last night?"

Michelle pulled out the other chair and sat. "I missed it."

"Right here in Arcata." He shook his head. "I have to say, this town . . . it isn't really *you*, Michelle."

"How would *you* know?" she snapped back.

"I'm actually a pretty good judge of character."

The waitress approached. One of the owners: Jennifer. A few years older than Michelle. Patagonia vests, hemp skirts and handmade soft leather boots.

"Emily, so nice to see you!"

Michelle forced a smile, and nodded. "Great to see you too."

"What can I get you?"

"Just coffee. Thanks."

Gary watched Jennifer pick her way down the gravel path that led to Lady Jane's kitchen. "Interesting woman, don't you think?"

"Do not fuck with anybody else here, Gary."

For a moment, he was silent. "Well, well," he said.

Jennifer returned with coffee. "Is there anything else I can get you? We have fresh baked scones."

"No thanks," Gary said. "I have to watch my gluten."

Michelle sipped her coffee. She made a better cup at Evergreen, but this wasn't bad.

"All right," she said, when Jennifer could no longer hear. "What do you want me to do?"

"That's it? You're just gonna agree?"

He sounded oddly disappointed.

"No. I'm going to hear what your job is first. And then I'm going to think about it."

Gary leaned back in his chair. "You know, I gotta admit, I was pretty surprised to see you and Danny still together. I never would've thought that would last."

"Just tell me what you want."

Now Gary smiled. "So you're willing to go to the mat for him? Who'd a thunk?"

You can't lose it, she told herself.

More to the point, you can't pull out your .38 and shoot him in Lady Jane Grey's garden.

"What's the job, Gary?"

"Babysitting," he said. "I need you to look after somebody. She's rich. And tragic." He shook his head. "Such a sad story."

"Babysitting?"

"Well, she's gone a little overboard with the self-medicating, and she operates in the kind of social milieu that I figure you're familiar with. Fund-raisers and such."

"What would I do?"

"Look after her. Manage her appointments. See if you can get her to take a yoga class or two." He snorted. "Right in your wheelhouse."

No way it could be that easy.

“That’s it?”

“Well, there might be a couple other things. Nothing you can’t handle.”

Great, she thought.

“So who is this woman, exactly?”

“You take the job, I’ll tell you. Otherwise, you can pretend it’s one of those gossip columns, where you’re supposed to guess. ‘*This* wealthy socialite with a tragic past is known for her charitable efforts and social conscience. But when she’s out of the public eye, she likes to drink till she pukes and take pills till she passes out. Friends fear she’s gonna drown in her own bathtub.’” He chuckled. “I never can figure out who it is. Can you?”

“I don’t try.”

Gary pushed his baseball cap back on his forehead and tilted his face up toward the sun, which had just managed to break through the coastal fog.

“Well, you take a day or two to think about it. Examine your situation, and decide what your priorities are. I’ll be in touch.” He smiled. “You got a number you prefer for me to call?”

“THERE’S NO REASON FOR you to come out,” Derek had said, on that first phone call.

“I need to talk to him.”

“Look, we’ll have the arraignment Friday, we’ll hear the complaint, and we’ll find out what the bail conditions are. Best-case scenario, he’s back in Arcata in a couple days.”

“Worst case?”

“Well, there’s a whole range of possibilities with bail,

home detention, electronic monitoring, surrender of passport . . .”

He hadn't said anything about the court not granting bail at all.

“ON WHAT GROUNDS?”

“They consider Jeff . . . a flight risk, apparently.”

“A flight risk.”

Michelle laughed. It wasn't a bad call.

She sat on a stool in her kitchen at home. Derek had scheduled the phone call for 9 P.M., after his flight home to San Francisco, and she'd left Evergreen to take it. No way she wanted to deal with this at work, not even in her office.

“Look, I know this is all pretty scary. And it is serious, but it could be worse.”

“How so?”

“They're charging him with trafficking under a thousand kilograms. If it had been a thousand or above, he'd be facing a ten-year mandatory minimum. As it is, it's his first offense, so he's looking at five.”

“Five *years*?” She could hear the edge of hysteria in her voice. But why was she so surprised by this? So flattened? She'd known the kinds of risks he was taking.

“At a minimum. On the high end, as much as forty.”

“Jesus.”

“Now, I don't think that's a likely scenario. My goal is to have Jeff spend as little time in jail as possible and to walk out of there with a clean record. But I'd be remiss if I didn't inform you of all the potential outcomes.”

Michelle tilted back the bottle of Napa meritage she'd brought home to sample and poured another glass.

“There’s another thing we need to discuss. Odds are they’ll get a warrant to search your house. And at some point, they’re going to want to talk to you. I strongly advise you to not have any conversations without having an attorney present. A case like this, they’re looking to find evidence of a conspiracy. And they love rolling up a girlfriend because she’s holding cash or drugs.”

“I’m not holding anything,” she snapped.

“I know, I know,” he said quickly. “I just want you to be prepared.”

Was there anything in the house? Anything that could incriminate her, or Danny? She didn’t think so. The gun she carried was legal. The cash they had on hand, well, there was about \$5,000 in the safe, but that wasn’t illegal, was it?

“Because of that, I’m going to ask you for an additional retainer up front,” Derek was saying, “in case your asset situation gets . . . complicated.”

“How much?”

“Ten thousand if you can. That should be more than enough, assuming this doesn’t go to trial.”

“Fine,” she said. “I’ll take care of it.”

“Try not to worry. I’ll call you as soon as I have news.”

“I’m coming out,” she said. “I need you to arrange the visit. To the jail.”

“Emily, look . . .” There was a considered silence on the other end of the line. “Jeff feels . . . it might be uncomfortable for you to . . . present yourself to the authorities. It’s . . . not a nice situation.”

Which probably meant, Danny was worried about their fake identities being exposed to too much scrutiny.

Too fucking bad.

“Just tell me what I need to do to see him,” she said. “And I’ll be there.”

SHE FOUND A LATE afternoon flight from San Francisco that would get her into Houston just before 11:30 P.M. on Saturday, with an unavoidable layover in Phoenix. The flight from Arcata to SFO wasn’t much cheaper than the flight to Houston.

She had a few hours to kill at SFO. She sat in the Mission Bar and Grill, had a quesadilla, and drank a glass of wine. Watched the jets pull up to the gates, through the smoked Plexiglas windows.

She didn’t know what Derek knew. How much he knew about Danny and his background. He knew about some of it, obviously. That Danny was involved in the drug trade, certainly.

Who Danny had really worked for before, who he was working for in Mexico?

Michelle didn’t know if Derek knew that much.

When they’d set themselves up in Humboldt, Derek had been there. He’d arranged the payments to her father’s nursing home. To Ben’s college fund. “Untraceable,” he’d assured her. “I know that you have some privacy issues.”

Did he know enough to have sold them out to Gary?

THE MOMENT SHE STEPPED off the plane and onto the jetway in Houston, she could feel the heat. Even at 11:30 P.M., it clung to her: thick steam perfumed with burnt jet fuel. Puerto Vallarta wasn’t this bad, she thought. There was an ocean there, at least. This, this was some kind of malarial fever dream. Endless freeways looping around a flat plain,

strings of Christmas tree lights marking the way. Houston was a drained swamp; she thought she'd read that once. No physical landmarks. No hills. No valleys. No ocean.

Strip malls. Condos. Warehouses and big-box stores. High-rises, clustered here and there like outbreaks, transplants from some other city.

She'd been the last stop on the Super Shuttle. She'd picked an inexpensive hotel that wasn't too far from the jail, but far enough away to get some distance from whoever might be watching Danny's visitors. Far enough away for her to relax, or try to, at least.

The hotel was nice enough. The room had a view of the freeway, and of a water tank on the other side of it. She thought it was a water tank, anyway. Shaped like a mushroom, painted a sea-foam green and surrounded by a spiderweb grid of wire.

Maybe it was a gas tank, she thought. This was Texas, after all.

“YOU CAN'T BRING ANYTHING with you,” Derek had said. “No purse, no cell phone, no notebook, no pens, nothing. You have to put it all in a locker at the jail. The only thing you can bring in is the locker key. Be careful how you dress. No tank tops. No short skirts. Nothing see-through. And if you wear an underwire bra? Switch it out. You only get a couple tries through the metal detector. Oh, and don't forget your driver's license. They won't let you in without a valid state or federal ID, with photo.”

She'd nodded, even though he couldn't see that. Taken notes. Sipped her meritage.

“What happens next?”

“We’ll petition for another bail hearing. Line up witnesses and documents showing that Jeff isn’t a flight risk.”

Good luck with that, she’d thought.

“You’ll do that from San Francisco?”

“There’s no point in my staying in Houston. You don’t want to get billed for all those hours, and I’m limited in what I can do for you right now. I’m not licensed to practice in Texas. But I’m working with a local firm and petitioning the judge for *Pro hac vice*—that’s representation ‘for this occasion.’ They usually will grant motions like this, and I should be able to act as Jeff’s official counsel going forward. In the meantime, my counterpart in Houston, Marisol Acosta, is on the case and a very sharp gal who specializes in federal drug trafficking. If you have any questions or concerns, call her.”

MICHELLE LAY ON THE queen bed in her hotel room and listened to the fan blowing cool air through the room. She’d closed the blinds and the curtains so no light leaked in, but she could still hear the rush of cars from the freeway, like a low ocean wave that never stopped hitting the shore.

Christ, she thought. How are we going to pay for all this? She’d paid Derek the ten thousand, but in a case like this . . . the bills would add up.

Plus, asset seizures. Derek had warned her about that. Things you owned that might be funded by drug money, police departments and federal agencies, they seized those. All the time. People in Arcata complained about that, how the federal authorities would confiscate property if they could reasonably claim it was connected to drug profits.

Vehicles. Houses. Businesses.

Like Evergreen.

You can't worry about that now, she told herself. First things first. See Danny. Tell him what was going on. Find out what he thought she should do.

She'd worked through all the options, and she thought she knew what the best one was, but maybe he had a better idea. An angle she hadn't thought of. Because the best option she'd thought of for this situation wasn't very good at all.

Chapter Four



MICHELLE HOPED SHE WAS in the right line.

The jail reminded her of a bank in a seedy neighborhood crossed with a DMV. It had that institutional smell: stale air, dust and old sweat, mixed with the chemical tang of industrial cleaner, chilled by air conditioning. White brick walls. Plexiglas windows. Long lines. The people who waited were mostly women. Black women. White women. Latinas. Some Asians too. A lot of them looked poor, going by their clothing, by the extra weight they carried.

She'd found a tiny metal table with white paper slips that had to be filled out with Danny's information, "Jeff's," rather: his SPN number—the number for the jail, his cellblock, his bunk. Found the lockers farther back, and stowed her purse in one for a quarter. Stood in the line for the 6th floor, at least, she thought it was. The line stretched the length of the institutional lobby. She'd glimpsed a row of Plexiglas windows, where the deputies waited, the ones who would process her request, and check her for outstanding warrants.

"This your first visit?"

Michelle flinched.

The woman who'd asked the question stood behind her in line. A tall, middle-aged black woman, dressed in a matching turquoise skirt and cardigan, like she'd wear to an office. Processed hair neatly curled.

"Yes," Michelle said. "Yes, it is."

“It gets better after you’ve done it a few times.”

“It does?”

The woman shrugged. “Well, not really. You just learn what to expect, that’s all.”

Her name was Deondra, and she was visiting her son.

“Off his meds,” she said with a sigh. “Not that it’s clear they work. At various times they’ve diagnosed him manic-depressive, mildly schizophrenic, ADD, Asperger’s . . . Anyway, he was creating a disturbance and had some marijuana on him, and that was that. A hundred eighty days for the marijuana and a hundred eighty days for disturbing the peace.”

“How much marijuana?” Michelle had to ask.

“Oh, it was about half an ounce or so.”

Great, Michelle thought. Half a year for half an ounce.

And Danny? Coming in between 200 pounds and a ton?

“That seems pretty harsh,” she said.

“Well, it was the second time he got caught with it.” Deondra’s smile was more of a grimace. “At least he might get some treatment, if I can get him transferred to MHU.”

“MHU?”

“The mental health unit. They’ve got more resources inside here than they do out in the community, I’m sorry to say.”

They’d reached the front of the line. The Latina woman standing at the window stepped aside. It was Michelle’s turn.

She pushed the piece of paper with Danny’s information into the battered aluminum trough.

“ID?” the deputy asked.

She gave him her California driver’s license. Emily’s license.

There was nothing to worry about, she thought. Emily didn't have any outstanding warrants.

She wasn't so sure about Michelle.

The deputy held up the license, studying the photo, then shifted his attention to her face.

Sweat beaded on her forehead, dripped down her back.

Well, it's over 90 degrees outside, she thought, so he won't think that's strange.

Will he?

She shivered in the cold draft from the air conditioning vent.

"California?"

She managed a smile. "Yes."

He turned away to stare at a computer screen, and started typing on a keyboard.

She stood there. Waited.

Finally, he scribbled something on the white slip of paper with Danny's information, and slid that under the window.

"You get the license back after," he said. "Have a nice visit."

THE NEXT LINE WAS for the metal detector.

It should have been quick, but it wasn't. The detector seemed to buzz for every third person passing through it.

"They've got that thing set so sensitive," Deondra said, rolling her eyes. She busied herself taking off her earrings, her necklace, a bracelet, and putting them in a Baggie. "You never know what's going to set it off. Sometimes it's the hooks in your brassiere, I swear."

Michelle was glad that Derek had warned her about underwire.

It took her two times to get through the metal detector, the second time passing it by removing her shoes. On the other side of the metal detector was an elevator. She stood at the back of the crowd waiting for it to return from the upper floors.

Behind her, Deondra asked. “Did you bring a wet wipe?”

“A wet wipe?”

Deondra reached inside the Baggie she’d used for her jewelry and pulled out a small packet. Stretched her hand out to Michelle.

A sanitary wipe.

“I brought two. Believe me, you’ll want to use it.”

INSIDE THE ELEVATOR, MICHELLE faced the doors. She was nearly pressed up against them. Close enough to stare at the scratches in the aluminum that spelled out, SUCK PUSSY.

ANOTHER PLEXIGLAS WINDOW WITH a uniformed deputy behind it. Another line, a short one this time. It was colder than downstairs, ridiculously cold. “Yeah, that’s why I wear the sweater set,” Deondra told her. “Supposedly keeping it cold helps with sanitation. There’s a lot of diseases here. Staph infections. Chicken pox.”

She hadn’t seen a single window on the floor. Nothing but artificial light. The visitation room reeked, the scent of stale sweat and sewage carried on the chilled air. To her right were a series of windows, barely separated by narrow acoustic dividers. Visitors crowded around them, most leaning against the cement pillars that served as stools rather than sitting on them, some even perched on the narrow counters, carrying on conversations in shouts.

“You just hand the deputy your slip.” Deondra explained, over the din. “Then you go find a window and wait. They’ll bring him in.”

It was nearly Michelle’s turn. “Thanks,” she said. “Thanks for all your help.”

Deondra made a little shrug, smiled her grimace of a smile. “It’s best we help each other. Believe me, you won’t get much help from anyone else.”

MICHELLE FOUND AN EMPTY window. At the window to her left was what looked like a family: a young Latina and two small children, the mother holding the smaller of the two up to the glass, so the kid’s father could see, at least, she assumed the young man on the other side was the father. To her right, a rare male visitor, white, middle-aged. She watched as the visitors changed positions, putting their mouths and then their ears up against the circular metal speaker. Even so, how could anyone hear the other? Every word seemed to be bellowed.

She studied the speaker grate, the Plexiglas around it. Dried spit. A smear of lipstick.

She opened Deondra’s wet wipe and cleaned the area as best she could. Then sat on the pillar and waited.

The visitation room on the inmate side had two banks of windows, the one she faced, and one on the wall opposite. She could see the visitors on the other side of those windows, and she had a sudden flash, a vision, of an endless series of windows, of prisoners and visitors, lined up, yelling through the glass.

She fought off a wave of dizziness, of nausea. Suck it up, she told herself. After almost two hours in various lines, the

visit would be over soon enough—you were only allowed twenty minutes.

Finally, a deputy brought him in.

Like the other prisoners, he wore orange scrubs with HARRIS COUNTY stenciled in black, and rubber shower shoes.

Unlike most of the other prisoners, he was handcuffed, hands behind his back. Why was that?

He didn't see her, at first; she watched his head swivel back and forth, trying to spot her. She stood up and waved.

His eyes fixed on her. His face changed. She wasn't sure what to make of the expression. Sad? Worried? Angry? Then he put on the familiar half-smile. The one he used to cover everything up.

The deputy walked him over to the stool. He moved stiffly, like he was guarding an injury. He hadn't shaved today. His eyes were bloodshot, the lids dark with fatigue.

For a moment, Michelle didn't know what to say. "Are you okay?" she managed.

He frowned a little. He hadn't heard her. She pressed her lips against the metal speaker grate and yelled, like everyone else. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah," he said. But his eyes and expression said something else. A fractional headshake. A warning. Don't ask.

He leaned in toward the grate, wincing as he did, arms pressed tight against his sides, his torso held too straight. Had he hurt his ribs? She remembered moving like that, when she had that injury. She put her ear up to the grate. "I'm sorry," he said.

Michelle closed her eyes for a moment. As tempting as it was to say, "I told you so," it didn't seem like the time.

And besides, that might sound incriminating.

“We’ll deal with it,” she said.

“You didn’t need to come. We’ll have another bail hearing in the next two weeks, and Derek’s sure I’ll be getting out this time.”

Now it was Michelle’s turn to shake her head. She gestured for him to listen and spoke as clearly as she could into the speaker without shouting.

“Gary’s in Arcata. He showed up Tuesday night.”

She pulled away from the window so she could see his face. For a moment he looked stunned. Then he swallowed, and his face turned still with rage.

“Motherfucker,” he mouthed.

“Yeah.”

She gestured for him to listen. Waited as he shifted position, grimacing as he did, and pressed his ear against the grate. “He’s got some kind of job for me.”

“No.”

Michelle didn’t need to put her ear to the speaker grate to hear that.

“I think I need to take it.”

“You can’t.” His voice was faint, tinny. This wasn’t something he was willing to shout to be heard. She pressed her ear against the speaker and let him have his turn.

“You know what his endgame is,” he said. “No matter what he promises.”

“I don’t think there’s a better choice.”

“There is. Call Sam.”

One of Danny’s old contacts, who’d helped set them up in Arcata with their shiny new identities. Michelle wasn’t sure she trusted Sam either. He’d be in an even better position than Derek to have sold them out. But she nodded anyway.

“I will. But look . . .” She forced a smile. “We’re going to need the extra money to pay for Derek, and this other attorney here. And the job sounds like it could be fun.”

That, of course, was a lie, one she told on purpose, in case anyone was listening. Danny knew it, too.

“What about Evergreen?” he asked suddenly. “I mean, you put so much work into the place.”

The rush of affection she felt for him just then, the intensity of it, took her by surprise. Suddenly it was clear to her how she felt about him, like a switch had been flipped.

Great timing, she thought. Just great.

“I can hire someone. Don’t worry about it.”

“Em . . .” He drew in a deep breath, and flinched. “Why don’t you . . . just . . . get away for a while? You know? Go someplace nice. Until this gets settled.”

Run, he meant. Hide.

“No. I want to help.”

“But this—”

“It’s the best option.”

“It’s not.” He laughed shortly. “Believe me, I can think of a bunch of better ones.”

Like you doing time? she wanted to ask. Because if she knew one thing for certain, it was that Gary had set Danny up, and people that Gary set up were pretty thoroughly screwed.

“I’ll handle it,” she said. “Don’t worry. It’s temporary.”

AFTER SHE LEFT THE jail, all she wanted to do was go back to her hotel and take a shower. A long one. The jail’s stink clung to her clothes, to her skin, her hair. Her own stink clung to her as well, the panic sweat from when she’d given the deputy Emily’s license.