

Out of Order

By Kate Simon

*The first time he saw her she was covered in blood. Then, everything in his life turned upside down.*

Detective Malcolm “Mac” MacLeod was inside the courthouse when he heard the shots followed by screams. He ran up the main staircase, trying to block out the extraneous noise and focus on where the shots originated. He got to the third floor and saw people running down the north hallway where the conference rooms were located. With his gun drawn, he cleared room after room. He pushed open the door of a conference room and saw a woman staring out what was left of the window. She turned and saw she was covered in blood. At her feet was a young man who’d been blown out of his chair by the force of the bullet that had pierced his skull. He checked the boy’s pulse and confirmed he was dead. He looked up at the woman who was still standing by the window. He pushed her aside and looked out the window. The shooter was long gone. He turned back to check on the woman. Her light brown hair was plastered to her cheeks by the blood running down her face.

“Ma’am? Are you alright?” His words seemed to reach her and she snapped out of her torpor.

“That has to be the dumbest question that has ever been asked in the history of questions.”

He stopped for a moment. He was thrown. “What’s your name?”

“Lorna. Lorna Dunn.”

Oh Christ, not her. Lorna Dunn was a defense attorney, a notorious one at that. She’d bounced more air tight cases out of court than any attorney in the city. She could rattle the most seasoned of cops on the stand.

“Who’s this?” he asked pointing to the dead boy.

“My client.”

“Name?”

“Justin Zagretti.”

“Ah, shit,” he muttered. It had been all over the papers. Zagretti, the seventeen-year-old son of a local crime boss, had been arrested for the kidnapping of his sixteen-year-old girlfriend, Sandy Caldwell. Her father was the commander of the local Army fort. The kid was the immediate suspect. The girl’s parents had done everything they could to keep the two apart, including, homeschooling her, to no avail. When the colonel and his wife came home from a function, the housekeeper had been drugged and Sandy was gone. The girl had yet to be found. Mac looked at the boy lying in a growing pool of his own blood. Now, they may never find her. He looked at Lorna who was trying to push bloody strands of hair off her cheek. He reached for her arm and led her to a chair out of view of the window. “Please, Ms. Dunn, sit down.

A courthouse security guard ran into the room. He looked around and muttered, “Shit.” He pulled out his gun and advanced.

Mac put out his hand. “Stop. Shooter is long gone. Get the EMT’s up here.”

The guard looked at the dead kid. "EMT's aren't going to help him."

"Not for him, for her!"

Only then did the guard seem to notice Lorna was bleeding and grabbed his walkie talkie. "It's Hughes. We've got one injured and one dead. Get the EMT's to room 305 and alert the coroner."

Mac tried to check her pupils. He wasn't sure if she was going into shock. She'd sustained a number of scalp cuts from the shattered window glass and those could bleed profusely. He grabbed some tissues out of a container on her desk and started to press them to her wounds. The blood running down her face had soaked her clothes. They weren't enough of them to explain her chalk-like skin color.

"What are you doing?" she demanded.

"Trying to figure out where all the blood is coming from."

"Who the hell are you?"

"Detective Malcolm MacLeod, Homicide. Call me Mac."

She pointed to the body. "Shouldn't you be paying attention to him?"

He huffed as he pushed another tissue against a wound. "For Christ's sakes, woman, I'm trying to make sure you don't join him."

The EMT's came into the room with their gear. They confirmed that Justin was beyond their help and turned their attention to Lorna. They moved her to a gurney and started their exam. They cut off her bloody jacket and discovered the reason for all the blood. Lorna had been shot.

Lorna opened her eyes to the sight of ugly acoustical tile and the stiffness in her shoulder. She pulled herself to a sitting position and looked around the room. Sitting in a corner chair was the detective who'd burst into the conference room with his gun. Her brain was foggy. What was his name? Matt? No, Mac. She'd seen him around the courthouse and at police headquarters. How could she not? There was something about him, a presence. There could have been a room full of people but she'd know if he was there. No woman with a pulse could have missed those azure blue eyes. Right now, those eyes were closed.

"Hey," she called. Nothing. "Some guard you are." She reached for the glass of water on her tray table and knocked it over. Ice and water spilled from the table all over her blanket and ran to the floor. "Shit, shit, shit!"

"What is it?"

"Well, if it isn't sleeping beauty. I knocked over my water."

He shot her a look of daggers and grabbed the wet blanket off her, using it to wipe up the floor and table. He tossed the blanket a small hamper and hit the nurse's button.

"Yes, Ms. Dunn?" called the nurse through the intercom.

"It's Detective MacLeod. Ms. Dunn has made a mess of her blanket. She could use a new one when you have a moment."

"Of course, Detective. I'll be right in."

"Why did you tell her that? You made it sound like I threw up, or worse!"

The nurse came in the room with a couple of blankets on top of a computer cart.

"How are you doing, Ms. Dunn?"

"I didn't throw up. All I did was spill my water."

"Not to worry," she smiled as she covered her with the two fresh blankets. "How's that?"

“Very nice, thank you.”

“How are you feeling?” she asked as she ran a thermometer over her forehead.

“Not too bad, considering.”

“That’s the nerve block. When that wears off, you’ll feel it.”

“Dandy.”

The nurse took the rest of her vitals and made some notes. “You’re numbers are good. I’ll let your doctor know.”

“I need to call people,” she said.

“Later. You need to talk to me first.”

“Are you always this much of a pain in the ass?”

“Definitely,” said Mac. He pulled out his phone and called his boss. Chief Daniels was none too pleased that his kidnaping suspect was dead. Since Sandy Caldwell wasn’t under the age of sixteen, the FBI hadn’t gotten involved. As far as they were concerned, Sandy Caldwell was a local matter. Unfortunately, his boss was taking heat from the Army and Sandy’s father, Colonel Caldwell.

“Is she awake?”

“Yes,” said Mac.

“Has she said anything?”

“I thought you’d want to be here.”

“No, I’m across town trying to placate two sets of angry parents. The Zagretti’s are blaming us for their son’s death. The Caldwell’s are demanding we find their daughter. Find out what the lawyer knows and get back to me.”

“Yes, sir.” He hung up the phone and was about to question his witness when he was interrupted by the doctor. An older man with white hair and long lab coat walked in. Mac stood and held out his hand. “Hold up.” He looked at the man’s ID and checked on something on his phone. “Okay.”

“Is that really necessary?” Lorna asked.

“The person who shot you is still at large.” He glared at her. “So, yes, it’s necessary.”

Lorna dismissed him with a wave of her hand. “Fine.”

“Mrs. Dunn, how are you feeling?”

“It’s Ms. Dunn and again with the stupid questions. I’ve been shot. Why don’t you tell me?” Lorna almost felt guilty for the doctor’s discomfort but screw it, she had a hole in her shoulder and a giant pain in the ass sitting in her room.

“I’ve repaired the damage to your muscles. Fortunately, the bullet didn’t go through any bones. You’ll need physical therapy but you’ll make a full recovery. I’ve left orders for your medication but you can be released when you’re recovered from the anesthesia.”

“Excellent,” she said as she pulled off her new blankets. She looked over at Mac. “If you can find my purse, I’ll call a cab.”

“No way,” said Mac.

The doctor tossed down his tablet on the bed. "All right, that's enough. I spent several hours using my considerable talent stitching your shoulder together. You will lay down until I determine you are fully ready. Once that nerve block wears off, you're going to hurt like hell. So, lay down, relax and enjoy the drugs while you've got them." He turned toward Mac and tossed him a sealed bag. Here's what's left of the bullet."

"Shit," said Mac.

"It must have passed through something before it hit her. Otherwise, there wouldn't be much left of her arm."

Lorna paled at their description. "Hey, I'm right here, still in the room."

"Thank your lucky stars," said Mac. "Now relax. Thank you, doctor." The doctor left the room as Mac examined the bullet.

"Who the hell do you think you are, speaking for me?"

"I'm the guy who's trying to save your ass."

"What are you talking about? They were after Justin. They got him. I'm collateral damage."

"Lorna, stop. Take a breath. Now tell me exactly what happened."

"I can't tell you about my conversation with my client. It's privileged."

"Not your conversation, your actions. You were talking to Justin. What happened?"

She closed her eyes and tried to remember, even though she'd pay good money to forget. "I was talking to Justin and I heard a the glass behind me shatter with a bang

as he flew back in his chair. I didn't know what happened at first. I got out of my chair and looked behind me that's when I heard the the rest of the glass collapse with another bang and it sprayed all over me."

"Shit," he muttered.

"You swear a lot."

"It's called for. Think about it, Lorna. The first shot was meant for Justin."

"First shot?"

"There were two shots. Think about when you turned around. How long was it between the first shot until the second?"

"The rest of the glass shattered after the second bang, maybe a couple of seconds."

"It wasn't the sound of the window collapsing. It was a second shot."

Lorna gasped at Mac's implication. "They were trying to make sure they got him."

"They got him with the first shot and they knew it." Mac held up the remains of the bullet. "This is what's left of a 50-caliber sniper bullet. A bullet like that took off the back of the kid's skull."

Lorna thought she was going to be sick.

"My guess is you moved just enough after the shot and it was deflected from the falling glass and the metal frame of the window. It probably saved your life, let alone your arm."

“But why come after me?”

“Because they figured whatever Justin knew to get himself a deal you would know too.”

“It wouldn’t matter what I knew or didn’t know, I can’t break privilege.”

“You definitely can’t break it if your dead.”

Mac almost felt bad for being so blunt with her. Almost. She had a reputation for being tough as nails. She was going to need to be to get through this. “We’re going to need to keep you in protective custody until we get this guy.”

“Like hell you are! I have clients, clients who are depending on me.”

“We’ll contact your office and tell them you’re off the grid for the immediate future. One of your associates can handle your cases.”

“How do you know I have associates, let alone anyone who could handle my cases?”

“You’re Lorna M. Dunn, Esq. You own the biggest criminal defense practice in the city. You have a team of ten lawyers working for you.”

“I need to talk to my people.”

“No.”

“What the hell do you mean no? Who the fuck do you think you are?”

“You swear a lot,” he smiled.

“It’s called for.”

“Lorna, stop being pissed off for five minutes and think. Who knew you were meeting with Zagretti?”

“Probably his parents.”

“They were footing the bill,” said Mac.

“Hey, table your indignation, flat-foot. Yeah, I make a lot of money, but I’m worth every penny.”

“Lorna Doone,” he muttered.

“Excuse me?” she asked.

“Everyone knows your nickname.” Lorna Dunn was in demand by all the criminal elite and they paid well. It didn’t escape Mac’s notice that, even laying in a bed wearing a hospital gown and a sling, she was also stunningly beautiful. It was a running gag that people would leave boxes of the rich cookies, Lorna Doones, on her desk, or in her brief case or even her trench coat pocket.

“So, I take it you left cookies for me? Let me guess, my coat pocket.”

He tried to hid a smile. “Not me.”

“You know, I don’t mind.”

“Mind what?”

“The cookies. They’re very good cookies.” Then she gave him a sly smile. “So am I.”

And there it was. The famous Dunn technique. She could throw the most seasoned detective off their game. Well not this time, sweetheart. “Who in your office knew about the meeting?”

“Someone in my office? Are you kidding me?”

“The Zagretti fortune has been estimated at three billion dollars, that’s billion with a b. That kind of money could buy off a lot of people.”

“Not my people.”

“I hope you’re right. We’ll still have to investigate them.”

“This is ridiculous! Why would the Zagretti’s pay my considerable fee only to murder their son?”

“Any number of reasons. He may have had access to family information that could send a lot of people to jail in exchange for revealing the location of the girl.” Mac watched as Lorna bit her lip. Normally he’d find the move sexy. What it told him now was she definitely knew more than she was telling him.

Mac pulled his phone out and hit a contact button, and called his partner. Pete Garver had been Mac’s partner for ten years. They had one of the highest closure rates in the department. But this was going to be a tough one. “Pete, where are you?”

“Trying to dodge this shit storm. Why did it have to be Lorna Dunn?”

“Yeah, well, it is. Do you have anything on the shooter?”

“No, he was a pro. Policed his brass before he left the scene. The only reason we know the scene is triangulating the shots.”

“Where was the location?”

“Roof of the Maddox Hotel.”

“What? Shit, that’s got to be...”

“Nine hundred and fifty feet.”

“Definitely a pro.”

“Has she told you anything?”

Mac gave her a snide glance. “Client privilege.”

“The guy’s dead. I doubt he cares.”

“Yeah, well, she does.” He turned his back to her “And we both know it doesn’t matter that the guy’s dead. Find out what you can and get back to me.”

“What are you doing?”

“I’m staying here.”

“What?” asked both Pete and Lorna.

“Someone tried to kill her and they’re still out there.”

“Since when is it your job to play bodyguard to Lorna Doone and her fabulous cookies.”

“This isn’t about her. It’s about a kidnapped girl and the death of the son of the city’s biggest crime boss. What do you think Chief Daniels would do if I walk away from our only lead and she’s killed?”

“I’m touched,” said Lorna.

Mac shot her a glare. “Call me with whatever you find.”

“Will do.”

Mac hung up and looked at Lorna. "I don't know about you, but I'm hungry." He grabbed the buzzer from her hand and pressed it."

"Yes, Ms. Dunn?" asked the nurse.

"It's Detective MacLeod."

"Oh, are you still there?"

"Still here. Can Ms. Dunn get some food?"

"The dinner tray should be up in an hour."

"Is she allowed a full menu?"

"Yes."

"Thanks." He glanced at his phone and started paging through his contacts. I'm ordering from Paulina's. They make a decent steak sandwich."

"I'm not hungry."

"It's four o'clock and I bet you haven't had anything since coffee this morning."

"Are you always this much of a pain in the ass?"

"Asked and answered. So what do you want? Steak sandwich?"

"I wouldn't mind a turkey sandwich."

Mac gave her a sly smile. "Soda?"

"Ice tea."

Mac called the restaurant and placed the order for delivery. He looked at Lorna and grinned. "Do you have any cookies? Chocolate chip? That'll do. Thanks."

"Very funny," she said.

"You're welcome. The food will be here in twenty minutes."

She winced when she tried to sit up. He came to her side and grabbed her good arm. "Here. Let me help you." He helped her into a more comfortable position and moved the buttons to elevate her head. "Better?"

"Thanks. Look, Detective,"

"Mac."

"Mac, I'm sorry I've been a..."

"The word you're looking for is bitch." Mac was surprised when she laughed.

"Yeah, well, I'm used a more adversarial relationship with the police. I'm not used to cops being so..."

Mac fluttered his eyes, "So teddy bear adorable?"

Lorna laughed so hard she grabbed a tissue and wiped her eyes. "Okay, seriously. Thank you for what you've done for me today. I do appreciate it, but honestly, I don't know what I can do to help you?"

"I get it but I can't just leave you unguarded until we figure this out."

"Wouldn't they normally assign an officer?"

"Yeah, well I have a dog in this fight."

“How so?”

He held up the collar of his jacket and showed her the blood stains on his slacks.

“They ruined my suit.”

“Oh, geez. I’m touched.”

Mac smiled. “It was a very nice suit.”

Lorna finished off her sandwich and had to admit it was really good. Even the damn cookies were good. She looked at Mac as he made another call, probably to his partner. She couldn’t figure him out. He knew she wouldn’t break privilege, not that anything she knew would explain why someone would kill Justin and try to kill her. She knew Malcolm MacLeod’s reputation. She was glad he was a cop she’d never had to face on the stand. He was as by-the-book as they came. She just couldn’t figure out why he was still in her room. The shooting happened nine hours ago. He should have handed her off to someone else. Why didn’t that bother her as much as it should? He was a highly experienced detective. He’d be able to protect her much more effectively than some new recruit. She looked at him stretched out in the lounge chair. He caught her looking and winked, just to annoy her. The real problem was, it didn’t annoy her. She didn’t mind looking at those bright blue eyes. What the hell was wrong with her? She was shot a few hours ago. Get your head in the game Lorna! He hung up the phone. “Any news?”

He sighed and stuck his phone in his pocket. “No, Pete’s got a team of working on the security cameras but so far, nothing.”

"I don't understand any of this," said Lorna.

"Neither do I. They're going to a lot of trouble to silence you."

"No, that's not what I mean. The Zagretti's, despite being third and fourth generation, are old school Italian. They revere the old ways. What about that says they'd murder their own son?"

"The Godfather notwithstanding, I don't think so, but it's all I've got. The Caldwells certainly wouldn't want Justin dead before he said where he took Sandy." Lorna reached for her water glass and found it empty. "Here, I'll get that."

"You don't have to wait on me."

"The nurses work hard enough. Besides, I could stretch my legs." He tossed the empty Styrofoam cup and headed toward the hall. "Don't run off."

"Very funny," she winced.

"Nerve block wearing off?"

"Yeah."

"I'll tell them at the desk." He was about to leave when a dietary tech came in with a cart and a dinner tray with a fresh pitcher of water. She left the tray and the pitcher with some fresh Styrofoam cups filled with ice. She pushed her cart out of the room and closed the door behind her. "Well, she was a charmer, wasn't she?" He poured Lorna some fresh water and stuck in a straw. "Here, have a sip and I'll let them know at the desk you need a painkiller."

"I'm fine."

“You’ve been shot. You need something.”

Lorna glared at him. “How do you know?”

“I know,” he said quietly.

Mac walked out to the nurse’s station and found Lorna’s shift nurse; a young, dark haired woman named Becca. “Becca, Ms. Dunn needs a pain shot.”

“I’ll just be a couple of minutes.”

“Thanks.”

By the time he got back to her room, Lorna seemed to have dosed off. He leaned over her to check on her and bumped into the bed. He wasn’t surprised she didn’t stir. The stress of the day had finally caught up with her. He grabbed the second Styrofoam cup and poured himself a water. It had been a long day and he was no further along than he had been this morning. He looked down at the blood stains on his pants. “Damn. I really liked these.” He took another sip of his water and set it on the end table. At least he tried. The glass spilled and water spilled over the floor. “Damn.” He leaned over and got dizzy. Then everything went black.

Lorna thought she heard a crash. She tried to open her eyes but she only saw shapes. Her head was throbbing. She looked to where Mac should have been. He was collapsed on the floor. She felt a movement to her side. There was a figure in surgical scrubs. There was no face. Why was there no face? "Help him," she whispered. The figure reached for Lorna's IV line. She saw a movement then felt her arm go cold. The figure left the room as her heart began to race. She reached for the IV line and used what strength she had to yank it out of her arm and pulled the tube out of the bag. That set off a small alarm. "No one will hear," she thought. She reached for her heart monitor pads and ripped them off her chest. She smiled at the sound of a loud klaxon. The door flew open and a nurse saw Mac on the floor and hit a button on the wall.

"Code Blue, room 410. Get security in here now!"

Lorna's head was splitting. She touched her face and felt a nasal cannula. She heard a female voice.

"Please leave that there."

"Where's Mac?"

"He's in the next room," said a deep male voice. Lorna opened her eyes and turned toward the voice. She saw a tall man with salt and pepper hair. He walked toward her and she noticed his blue eyes. "I'm Pete Garver, Mac's partner."

"What happened?"

"You were both drugged. You seemed to get a higher dose."

Lorna tried to sit up. "Someone was here. I fell asleep but then I heard a crash. I thought I saw Mac on the floor but I was dizzy. But there was someone in the room. They

injected something in my IV. I felt really weird so I pulled it out. I pulled off my monitor because I knew it would set off the alarm.”

“Why didn’t you press the call button?”

“I didn’t think I had time to wait.”

“You were right. They got to you just in time.”

“What about Mac?”

“They think you were both dosed with a strong sleeping med.”

“The water. It was in the water.”

“We’ve already bagged everything. Can you describe who was in the room?”

“No. All I saw was a figure. I couldn’t see a face.” She rubbed her hand over her face. “I couldn’t see a face.”

“Probably a surgical mask. Could you tell if it was a man or a woman?”

“No, I’m sorry.” She fought to keep her eyes open. “How is Mac?”

“I’m fine.”

Lorna saw Mac standing at the door, holding an IV pole. He was wearing a hospital gown and not much else. “Mac?” she whispered.

“What the fuck are you doing out of bed?” yelled Pete.

“I’m fine. What have you got?”

“Not much. Everything is being tested. Besides being dosed someone gave Ms. Dunn an injection.”

Mac walked to her bed, dragging his IV. “Are you alright?”

“I think so.”

“She pulled off her heart monitor to set off the alarm,” said Pete.

Mac looked at her and smiled. "Clever girl." He put his hand on the bed rail. "I'm sorry, Lorna."

"For what?"

"I didn't stop it."

She managed a smile. "Get over yourself, MacLeod. There's nothing you could have done to stop it."

Pete chuckled. "She's a piece of work."

"That she is."

"Alright, all of you, that's enough," said the shift nurse. She pointed at Mac. "You, back to bed." She pointed at Pete. "You get out. This patient has had enough for one night."

"She can't be left alone," said Mac.

"She has a policeman outside the door. Now both of you, out!"

Pete flashed his badge at the petite blonde. "I'm Detective Sergeant Peter Garver. I need to question Ms. Dunn."

The nurse walked up to Pete and poked him in the chest. "I'm Head Nurse Mary Pearson and on this floor, I outrank you. So, get your ass out of my patient's room before I have you thrown out." She opened the door and waved over the officer.

"Problem, ma'am?"

Mary looked at Pete. "Is there?"

"Fine, we're going." He looked at the officer. "No one enters this room without proper ID and police escort." He pulled on Mac's IV pole and pointed at the glaring nurse. "Come on. Let's get out of here before this one kicks our asses."

"Don't think I won't," she said.

Mac pushed his way into his room and sat on the edge of his bed. “Did you bring me some fresh clothes?”

“Yes, I did, but I think the fact that someone tried to kill you is the more pressing matter.”

“They tried to kill Lorna. I was just knocked out. We’ve got to get her out of here. Where are my clothes?”

“In the closet.”

Mac tried to stand but fell back.

“You’re not going anywhere, not until you get the all clear from the doctors.”

“They’re taking a big risk, coming after her in here. We’ve got to get her someplace safe.”

“She wasn’t exactly alone. You’ve been with her the whole time,” said Pete.

“Don’t remind me.”

“This is not your fault.”

“Anything on the girl?”

“Nothing.”

“Damn.”

“That’s not necessarily bad. We haven’t found a body or any evidence of violence. From everything we’ve heard, Justin and Sandy were good together. The only ones who didn’t approve were the parents. I’ve talked to their friends. A few of them did say Sandy seemed troubled by something she wasn’t willing to talk about but she was more than happy to talk about Justin. There was never any indication of anything wrong between the two of them.”

“That could be an indication she was covering for him. We’ve seen that before,” said Mac.

“True, but I don’t think that’s the case here. They were all willing to show me videos they’d taken of the two of them. They seemed relaxed and happy. None of the friends think Justin would have hurt her. From watching the videos, I’d have to agree.”

“Has forensics come up with anything?”

“We’ve got the ballistics but there’s no match against anything in the system. If Dunn would talk to us, we might get a lead. But that little spitfire isn’t gonna let us near her.”

“Even if we could talk to her, she wouldn’t tell us. Believe me, I tried. What we need to get her out of here. As soon as word gets out they failed, they’ll try again.”

Pete walked over to Mac’s bed and pushed on his shoulders. “Lay down. You aren’t going anywhere tonight. Neither am I. Now close your eyes and get some rest before I get Mighty Mouse in here to strap you down.” He leaned over his bed and smiled. “Although you might enjoy that.”

“Shut up, you jackass,” he chuckled.

It didn't take long for Mac to realize he wasn't in his own bed. The needle embedded in his arm was a good indication. The last twenty-four hours came flooding back. He needed to get out of here. He looked over at the chair across from his bed and saw Pete dozing. Mac pulled his lips together and let out a high-pitched whistle. He chuckled as Pete startled awake.

"Jesus, Mac."

"Do you have anything new?"

"Good morning to you too, sunshine. Nothing new overnight."

"Is Lorna okay?"

"I've checked on her several times and the room has been covered by officers all night."

The shift nurse came in with her cart. "Good morning, Mr. MacLeod. I'm Kathy. I'll be you're shift nurse."

"Morning."

The young woman took his vital signs and made notes. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine. I need to get out of here." He held out his arm. "Can you get this thing out of me?"

Kathy looked over at Pete. "Is he always like this?"

"This is his sunny side."

"Good Lord," she smiled. "I'll notify your doctor."

He held up his arm again. "Can you get this out?"

"Not yet. You need to finish your IV."

"It's just a bag of saline. I don't need it."

"Neither one of us get to make that call. I'll notify your doctor."

Mac reached for the needle and pulled it out. He pressed his thumb to the hole and bent his arm.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

“Just get me a bandage.”

Kathy grabbed a gauze and taped it firmly to his arm. “Un-freaking believable.” She turned to Pete. “I’m going to get his doctor. If he tries to leave, shoot him.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Pete smiled.

Mac took a shower and changed into the polo and khakis Pete brought him. He combed back his hair with what passed for a comb in the hospital. He came out of the bathroom and headed for the door.

“Slow your roll, cowboy,” said Pete. “You haven’t been cleared yet. You walk out that door and I’ll have to shoot you. Do you know the paperwork I’d have to do?”

There was a knock on the door and a young man in a lab coat walked in. “Mr. MacLeod.”

“Who are you?”

“I’m Doctor Mann.”

“Of course, you are,” said Mac. Pete shook his head and made a sweep of his neck with his hand.

“I see you’re raring to go,” he smiled.

“Ya, think? Now just sign whatever you have to. I have work to do.” He tried to walk past the doctor, who pushed him back to the bed.

“Just sit you’re ass down.” He looked over at Pete. “Is he always like this?” Pete just laughed.

“I have to get to work,” said Mac.

“And I’m the guy who decides whether you get to do that or not.”

“Excuse me?”

“You are an officer injured in the line of duty. If I don’t sign off on your department paperwork, you’re not going anywhere.”

Mac was surprised when the young kid stared him down.

“So, can I do my job now so you can do yours?”

“Yeah, sorry,” he said, properly chastened.

The doctor took his vitals and listened to his chest. He looked at Mac's chart and made some notes. "How are you feeling? Any dizziness?"

"No. I feel okay."

"Your bloodwork indicated you got a large dose of a sedative, Ambien."

"That's pretty easy to get in a hospital," said Mac.

"Actually, not. Any medications would have to come from the pharmacy. Ambien is not something we would normally prescribe."

"When would it be prescribed?"

"Normally by a personal physician."

"Thanks, Doc. That's helpful."

"Good. According to the bloodwork we took this morning, it's cleared your system. I'll clear you for work."

"Thank you. How is Lorna Dunn?"

"I can't discuss another patient with you."

"God, I'm getting sick of privilege."

"She's my next patient. She may allow you to be present if you ask. She's been asking about you."

"She has?"

"Apparently, she's concerned you were hurt in her defense." He shrugged. "Go figure."

Mac smiled. He had that coming. He extended his hand "Thanks, Doctor."

"You're welcome."

They waited outside Lorna's door until Doctor Mann opened the door to them and they followed him in. Mac was relieved to see Lorna looking much better. "How are you feeling?" he asked.

"Better, thank you."

"Ms. Dunn, first things first. Your wound is healing. Only a piece of the bullet was lodged in your shoulder. You'll need to keep it covered and keep an eye out for infection. Your bloodwork came back clear. You were very lucky. Your IV was contaminated with propofol. It was enough...well...it was very good you pulled out the IV."

Lorna looked at Mac and for the first time, he saw fear. "They really are trying to kill me," she whispered.

"We need to get you out of here."

"Ms. Dunn should stay at least another day."

"No." Mac looked at the doctor and regretted his tone. "Doctor, it's very hard to keep Ms. Dunn safe in this environment, not to mention it puts your other patients and staff at risk."

"She's had surgery. She needs after care."

"I was an army medic. I still have my EMT certification." He pulled out his wallet and showed the doctor. "I can look out for her."

"Very well. I'll get her paperwork in order. I'll write some scripts she may need. If you see any evidence of infection or effects from the drugs you get her back here right away." He made some notes on the pad and looked up at Mac. "If this comes back to haunt me, I will not hesitate to throw you under the bus, Detective."

"Understood," he said with a slight smile.

The doctor left and Mac turned to Pete. "I'll give you the scripts to fill. Pick up some clothes for her. Can you be back in thirty?"

"Yeah, no problem."

“Hello!” Lorna called from her bed. “I’m still in the room. I’m not going anywhere until you tell me what’s going on.”

“I’m going to get you to a secure location. A place with alarms and weapons so I can protect you while we try and figure this out.” He turned to Pete. “Get a couple of burners.” He handed his phone to Pete then looked at Lorna. “Where’s your phone?”

“It should be in my bag. The EMT grabbed it for me.”

Mac opened the closet and found her phone. It was already powered down so he handed it to Pete.

“What the hell are you doing with my phone?”

“You can be tracked by it. It’s powered down and you have my word we won’t try to crack whatever password protection you have on it. But if the bad guys do manage to ping your phone’s location, they’ll see it’s secured at police headquarters.”

“And where is this safe place you’re taking me?”

Pete chuckled. “Wayfair?”

“It’s the safest place.”

“Where?!” she yelled.

Mac smiled. “My place.”

Lorna was furious at being decisions being made for her. Who the hell did they think they were? “Yo! Starsky, Hutch, somebody better tell me what you’re planning and do it now!”

Mac looked at her like he’d only just noticed she was a part of this. “We need to get you out of here. Having you in the hospital has proven not to be safe for you. It also puts the other patients and the staff at risk. I have a cabin on Wayfair mountain. It’s secure and I’m well-armed. We’re getting rid of the phones so we can’t be tracked.”

“I’ll pick you up a rental,” said Pete. “Your Crown Vic screams cop.”

“Get me an SUV, something with some pickup.”

“I can’t just disappear.”

“That’s exactly what you need to do.”

“I have client’s, responsibilities.”

“Call your office and tell them you’ll be unavailable until further notice. Your associates can handle your cases.”

“How the hell do you know if my associates can handle my cases?”

“Your firm is the most in demand defense firm in the city. You wouldn’t hire idiots.”

She sighed, knowing she was beaten. “Fine. Give my phone.”

“Use the hospital line. Don’t tell them too much.”

Lorna rolled her eyes as she reached for the phone. She dialed and her receptionist picked up. “Dunn and Associates.”

“Joanie, it’s Lorna.”

“Oh my God, Lorna! Are you okay? We only know what we saw on the news and the police won’t give us anything.”

“Get everyone in the conference room and put me on speaker.” A few moments later Joanie came back on the line.

“Lorna, everyone is here.”

“Hi everyone. First of all, yes, I was hurt but I’m okay. I’m sure the police have already been in touch with you about Justin Zagretti.”

“Don’t worry, Lorna. We haven’t told them anything.”

Lorna couldn’t resist smiling at Mac and Pete. “I never had a doubt any of you would talk to the police about a client. I’m going to be unavailable until further notice while I recover.”

“I thought you said you were okay?” asked Luke, her youngest associate.

“I will be. I need to rest. Karen, are you there?”

“I’m here, Lorna.”

“You’re in charge until I get back.”

“Will you be at home?” asked Karen.

“No.”

“Oh,” she said quietly. Lorna knew Karen understood what this meant. She was in danger.

“I have every faith in all of you to handle things while I’m gone.”

“We will,” said Karen. “Take it easy and get better quick.”

“Thank you, everyone.” She hung up the phone and looked at Mac and Pete. “Did I pass muster?”

“You did just fine,” Mac smiled. “Very evasive. You must have aced that class in law school.”

Lorna picked up a kidney shaped plastic dish and flung it at Mac’s head. The only thing that would have been more satisfying was if it had been full. He caught it in his hand.

“Nice aim, work on the arm.”

“Shut up.” She sighed and looked at the two men. They really were trying to keep her safe. “Look, guys, I’m...”

“Sorry?” Mac offered.

“You’re pushing your luck with me.” She took a breath. “I’ve been thinking. I’m walking a fine line here, but I do have something I can tell you.” She saw the look when both men reverted to cop mode. “The paperwork had been filed and it would have been public knowledge, maybe, within a day or so.”

“What?” asked Mac.

“Justin was going to plead not guilty. The DA had offered him a plea deal but he refused. We were going to trial.”

“Why tell us now?”

“The paperwork was probably sitting on some court clerk’s desk. It won’t take long before it works through the system.”

Mac looked at her and nodded. “Thanks.” He turned to Pete. “Once we get set up go talk to the parents. Both sets.”

“Got it. If there’s nothing else, I’ll get going,” said Pete.

“Thanks, buddy.”

Pete looked at the front door of the Zagretti home. It was a large colonial in the best section of town. There was a wreath on the door with a black band across it. Talking to a victim's family was never easy. Talking to this family was going to be a barefoot run through broken glass. He took a breath and knocked on the door. A small woman with dark hair and tear swollen eyes opened the door.

"Yes?"

"Mrs. Zagretti," He showed his badge. "I'm Detective Garver. I'm investigating your son's death."

"His murder!" she cried.

"Yes, ma'am. May I speak with you and your husband?"

"Carlo!"

"What?" A grey-haired man walked into the entryway. He was thin and looked like he hadn't slept.

"It's the police."

"What do you want? We're in mourning."

"I understand, sir. I'm investigating what happened to your son." Pete made a conscious effort not to say shooting or murder. "Can I speak with you?" Carlo ignored his question and walked into the living room. Mrs. Zagretti stood back and waited for Pete to walk in, then she closed behind him. He followed the Zagretti's into the living room and sat opposite of them.

Pete looked at Carlo. "First of all, I want to express my sympathies at the death of your son. I have spoken with your son's friends and they have all said what a fine young man he was."

"Save your platitudes," said Carlo. "I know what you're here for. You think this is my fault."

"Carlo, no!

“Rose, he’ll use Justin as a way to harass me.”

“Mr. Zagretti, I am only here to investigate your son’s case. I am not interested in pursuing any other matters. I would like to talk about Justin.”

“Justin is...” Carlo paused. “Justin was a good boy, smart. He was going to be an architect.”

“How long was he seeing Sandy Caldwell?”

“I don’t know, about six months,” he said.

“They went to prom together,” said Rose as she dapped at her eyes.

“His friends said he and Sandy were very close.”

“They were good together,” she said.

“So, you approved of Sandy.”

“She’s a nice girl, respectful,” said Carlo.

“She’s not Italian but she is Catholic,” said Rose.

“Did you ever see any tension between the two of them?” asked Pete.

“No! Never. Justin would never hurt her. He loves...loved her,” said Carlo.

“Mr. Zagretti, do you think one of your associates might be responsible for Justin’s death.”

Carlo drilled him with a look that told him why this man was feared. “If I knew who did this, they would already be dead.”

Rose put her hand on Carlo’s leg. “Everyone we know has been by to express their condolences.”

Pete looked between the two parents and knew he had all he would get from them. He stood and extended his hand to Carlo. “Thank you for talking to me, Mr. Zagretti.” The man cautiously took his hand. He then shook Mrs. Zagretti’s hand. “Mrs. Zagretti.”

Rose didn’t let go of his hand. “You find who did this.”

“I will find justice for your son. You have my word.”

Pete drove out of the Zagretti’s neighborhood and pulled over into a parking lot. He pulled out his new burner phone and dialed. “Mac, where are you?”

Mac put him on speaker. “We’re on our way. Thanks for the gear.”

“We need to stop at my place. I need some fresh clothes. I can’t live in a hospital sweatshirt and scrub pants.” said Lorna.

“Is she still complaining?” asked Pete.

“When is she not?”

“Shut up both of you.”

“Look in the big Walmart bag,” said Pete.

“I’m strapped in and I’m wearing a sling. I can’t turn around.”

“Good Lord, woman.” Mac pulled on to the side of the road and parked. He reached into the back seat and pulled out a large Walmart bag. “Here.”

Lorna looked through the bag, seeing a few shirts and shorts. There was a pair of jeans, socks and sneakers. “Well, ah, thank...wait,” She pulled out new underwear and bras. “These are all my size. Exactly. How did...?”

“I have a gift,” said Pete.

“He has a gift,” said Mac with a grin.

“For heavens...” she started shoving the clothes back in the bag.

“The words you’re looking for are ‘thank you, Pete,’” said Mac.

“Thank you, Pete,” she growled.

“You’re welcome.”

“I assume you called for something more than an opinion on your fashion sense.”

“I spoke with the Zagretti’s. I don’t think they had anything to do with their son’s death.”

“What makes you think so.”

“He kept referring to Justin in the present tense. He had to correct himself.”

“What does that mean?” asked Lorna.

“If he had something to do with it he wouldn’t make that mistake,” said Mac,

“What I saw were two grieving parents.”

“So we got nothing.”

“I didn’t say that. They weren’t opposed to the relationship with Sandy. They liked her very much. They said she was respectful. The mother liked that she’s Catholic. They also said Justin loved Sandy. He would have never hurt her.”

“So that takes the family out of the equation,” said Mac.

“I’m going to talk to the Caldwell’s tomorrow.”

“I’m going to stop for food and then we’ll lockdown at Wayfair. Call me after you talk to the Caldwells.”

“Will do.”

Mac pulled into a market he didn't normally frequent. He parked and grabbed a Phillies cap and an extra pair of sunglasses from his gym bag. "Here. Put these on."

"I never come up this way. No one is going to know me."

"Digital CCTV is easy to hack."

"You're being excessive."

"For God's sake woman. Someone out there is trying to kill you. Do you get that?!" Mac immediately felt guilty for the stricken look on her face. He tried to soften his tone. "I'm trying to protect you, Lorna. Let me do my job." She nodded and put on the cap and glasses. They grabbed a cart and pushed their way through the aisles. "Pick up whatever you like."

"How long do you think we'll be gone?"

"Probably not too long but let's get enough for a few days." He grabbed a few steaks and some easy steam bag vegetables. He stocked up on eggs and bacon. "What kind of coffee do you like?"

"Anything better than the coffee at the police station would be fine."

"Agreed." He grabbed a box of regular and a box of decaf coffees. They walked around the aisles and grabbed most of the things they might need. Anything they didn't use would keep at the cabin. They walked down the seasonal aisle with toys and candy. He grabbed a bag of chocolate, then spotted a teddy bear with a get well soon t-shirt. Mac pulled it off the shelf and handed it to Lorna.

"What's this?" she asked.

"I didn't have a chance to get you flowers."

"I don't understand."

"Everyone who has surgery gets a present."

"Oh, really?"

"Hey, I don't make the rules."

“Thank you,” she whispered.

“You’re welcome.” He thought he saw her smile.

Lorna was surprised at the what Mac called a cabin. It looked like something on the cover of a country living magazine. It was beautifully landscaped log cabin with a deep porch overlooking a lake. "Wow. This is beautiful."

"Thanks. I like it."

He unlocked the front door and deactivated the alarm. "Make yourself comfortable. I'll get the groceries."

"I'll help you."

"Your arm is in a sling and your last med is about wearing off. You need to rest. Let me show you to your room." He led to down a short hall and opened a door. "The sheets are fresh. There's only one bathroom but it's right across the hall. Don't open any of the windows. They're tied to the alarm."

"This place is hell and gone from everywhere. I bet there isn't a neighbor around for a mile. Why all the high tech?"

"Neighbors are more like two or three miles away. The bears and coyotes are a bit closer."

"The what?"

"Don't worry. I have perimeter lights. They'll go off if anything or anyone gets close."

Lorna sat down on the edge of the bed. Her head was spinning, her shoulder was throbbing. Someone was trying to kill her and now she had to worry about wildlife?"

Mac sat down on the bed next to her. "Lorna, I don't want you to worry about your safety. Nothing will get in here. After you get a rest, I'll show you my weapon closet. I promise, you're safer here than in the city."

She looked at him and saw his genuine concern. "Show me now."

"What?"

"The weapons. What have you got?"

“Okay, follow me.” He led her down the hall to his bedroom. There appeared to be two clothes closets but one had a keypad. He plugged in the numbers and opened the doors. There were a number of handguns and a rack of shotguns.

“Good Lord. Are you planning to invade a small nation?”

“I’m a collector. I take them to the range and practice with the various types. Each one fires a little differently.”

“Why do you keep them here instead of the city?”

“Because my service weapon is all I need in the city.”

Lorna looked at the various sized hand guns. “Do you think you could show me how to use one?”

“Really? Lorna, you do know that you only aim one of these at someone when you intend to shoot them.”

“I get it.” She turned to him and smiled. “Just make sure I don’t want to aim it at you.”

Mac got the bags out of the SUV and dropped the groceries in the kitchen. He grabbed Lorna's bag of clothes, her prescription and a glass of water. He needed to check her incision and change her bandage. Lorna was staring out the window at the lake. Standing there in her oversized sweatshirt and scrub pants, the powerful, dominating attorney looked small and fragile.

"Lorna, I need to check your incision. Let me help you with your sling."

"Do you expect me to get undressed in front of you?"

"You're going to need help getting out of that sweatshirt. I'll help you out of the sweatshirt and help you into the t-shirt I saw in the bag. I will promise to avert my eyes."

"Fine," she sighed.

"I wouldn't want to turn to stone," he smiled. He could see she was looking around for something to throw at him.

"You can hit me later. You need to let me check your incision." She sighed and walked toward him. He carefully removed her sling off her left arm and set it aside. "I'll hold on to the neck and the right sleeve. Try to pull your good arm out." She groaned as she pulled her right arm free. "Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm just frustrated."

"I know. Let's get this done and I can take care of you." He caught a look from her as she slid her arm down her side. He handed her a tank top that would allow him to examine her injuries. He turned his back as she slipped it over her head with a minimum of groaning.

"You can turn around now."

Mac tried to focus on looking at her wounds and not how the t-shirt clung to her trim frame. "Can you manage to change into the shorts?"

"Yeah, I think so."

"Okay, you do that and I'll get my first aid kit." He grabbed his well-stocked kit out of the hall closet. He knocked on her door before looking in. "Can I come in?"

“Yeah.” Lorna was sitting on the edge of the bed and looked worn down.

“Okay, let me take a look.” First, he took a look at some of the scalp lacerations and gently wiped some dried blood with antiseptic pads. “These look good.”

“Oh, sure.”

“No, really. You only have one or two stitches in this one wound. The others are shallow. Scalp wounds bleed like crazy but these will heal and you’ll never be able to see them.

“Really?”

“Really. Now let’s take a look under the bandage.” He did his best to pull the tape off without hurting her. He looked at the wound and it appeared to be healing normally. It was a bit swollen at the incision but that was to be expected. “This looks good too. Can you try and move it?”

She raised her arm a bit and winced. “Shit.”

“I know it hurts but you’re going to want to keep it moving. You don’t need the sling in here because you’re going to take it easy. Now get in bed.”

“Excuse me?”

“Cool your jets, counselor. You’re about to crash. You need to take your med and get some rest.”

“You’re pretty good at telling me what to do.”

“It’s a gift,” he smiled. He opened the prescription bottle and handed her a pill. “Take this.”

“I don’t need it.”

“Your love of arguing knows no bounds. Take the freaking pain pill that I can tell you need.”

“You don’t know what I need.”

He bit his tongue from telling her what he really thought. “Lorna, you’re pale as a ghost and you need to rest. Take the damn pill, woman.”

“Fine!” She took the pill and set down the glass. “Are you happy now?”

“Ecstatic.” He pulled an extra pillow out of the closet and set it on top of the other pillows. “Get under the covers. Use this to keep your shoulder elevated.” Much to his surprise, she did as she was told. “Oh, I forgot.” He grabbed one of the bags and pulled out the teddy bear. “Some company.” He set it next to her on the bed. “Close your eyes and get some rest.” For some inexplicable reason, he pulled the edge of the comforter up over her, tucking her in. “I won’t be far.” He turned to leave.

“Mac?”

“Yeah?”

“Thanks.”

“No problem, counselor.”

Mac got the groceries unpacked, then took a quick look around the porch. Everything seemed undisturbed since last weekend. Whenever he didn't have to work the weekend he came up to his cabin. He loved the quiet. He'd hike the mountain and indulge his passion for photography. It was something he did just for himself. Pete would join him once in a while to fish, but generally he didn't bother. He spent most weekends relaxing and reading. The one thing he didn't do was bring a woman here. Especially not someone like Lorna Dunn. She was a witness in an ongoing investigation. She was an annoying pain in the ass. She was stubborn and argumentative. She was also hot as hell. His dangerous train of thought was interrupted by a call on his burner phone.

"Yeah, Pete. Did you talk to the Caldwells?"

"No."

"No?"

"They said they couldn't see me today. I would have to wait. They'll see me tomorrow after five, when the Colonel gets home from the fort. It's not just the father. The mother is a unit commander. She's a captain."

"Excuse me? Their daughter is missing and they want the investigating officer to make an appointment?"

"Something is really off there."

"No shit. To hell with their schedules. Pull them in to the station if you have to."

"I have an idea. I'm going to take the day to look into the Caldwells. I know it's a risk because it's another day without finding the girl."

"Actually, I don't think it is. Where ever Sandy Caldwell is, I think she's safe."

"Then why doesn't she show herself? Her boyfriend is dead. It's all over the news, including all the national feeds because of the Zagretti connection."

"That is the question of the day. Let me know if you find anything."

"How's your houseguest? Driving you crazy?"

Mac thought of her in her tiny t-shirt and shorts. "You have no idea."

"Try not to kill her. We may need her."

"I'll do my best." He hung up the phone and walked back into the house. He peeked in on Lorna. He'd been right. She was out cold. The painkiller wasn't that strong, but it was enough to let her have a good rest. He was about to close the door when he spotted it. Lorna Dunn, power house attorney, was sleeping with her good arm wrapped tight around a teddy bear. Nothing about the last day was making any sense at all.

It didn't take long for Lorna to realize she wasn't at home. Her shoulder was sore, but she could move it freely without the constraints of the sling. She smiled at the teddy bear as she set it aside. It had been strangely comforting to hold on to the bear while she slept. She pushed herself out of the bed and stood and judged her head clear enough to walk. It must have been late in the day because the sun was going down and her stomach was grumbling. She opened the bedroom door and found the lights on. She followed the sound to kitchen. The sight of Mac made her stand stock still.

He'd showered and changed out of his ruined suit. He was wearing a white tank t-shirt that fit him like a glove and a pair of gym shorts. His arms and chest were sharply defined. His stomach looked flat and was probably rock hard. He moved around the island and she could see his thighs were like tree trunks. His ass defied description. He hadn't slicked back his hair and she was admiring his thick waves when he noticed her in the doorway.

"Well, hello Sleeping Beauty."

"Very funny."

"How's the shoulder?"

"Sore but okay."

"I'm getting dinner started. You good with a steak?"

Lorna put her hand over her stomach as it growled. "Yeah, that'd be great."

"Okay, have a seat. Would you like an ice tea?"

"I'd rather have a glass of wine."

"First, taking those pain meds means no alcohol. Second, I don't have any."

"A beer?" she asked hopefully.

"I don't drink."

"At all?"

"Nope," he said as he put the ice tea in front of her.

“Oh.”

Mac smiled. He knew what she was thinking. “When I decided to carry a gun for a living, I decided I would never do it impaired.”

Lorna took a sip of her tea, trying to hide her embarrassment.

He pointed to his t-shirt. “Sorry for this. I thought I’d done my laundry. I’ll throw a load in after we eat.” He placed the salads on the table.

She tried to hide her smile. “No need to apologize.” She took a bite of the salad and enjoyed the balsamic dressing. He must make a habit of eating well. “Can I ask you a question?”

“Ask.”

“How old are you?”

“Sixty.”

“Wow, okay.” She pointed to his arm. “Why all this?”

“All what?”

“I understand fit. Cop, chasing bad guys, I get it. But you’re ripped. You must live in the gym. Why?”

“I work with men half my age. I need to keep up.”

“I can understand that. I have another question.”

“Am I being cross examined, counselor?”

“I’m not nearly this pleasant in court.”

“This is pleasant?” he smiled.

“Shut up and let me ask my question.”

“Proceed,” he grinned. The bugger was enjoying this.

“Why do you slick your hair back?”

“I like to keep it tight.”

“You shouldn’t bother.”

“Why?”

“Women would rather run their fingers through your curls than your hair product.”

Mac nearly choked on Lorna’s remarks. This was probably her way of putting him off balance. It was her specialty. It was time to take back control. “Can I ask how old you are?”

“Fifty-two.”

“You seem very fit yourself. You must spend a lot of time at the gym too.”

“I run. It helps me clear my mind.”

He took another sip of his tea. Well, that hadn’t worked. Instead of making her uncomfortable, he couldn’t get the image of her running out of his mind. They finished their salads and Mac cleared the dishes and placed small steaks and some steamed vegetables on the table. She took a bite and smiled. “This is really good.”

“I’m glad you’re enjoying it.” They were both so hungry they demolished their meal in short order. He started clearing the table and was surprised when she began to help. “You don’t need to do that. I don’t want you to hurt your shoulder.”

“It’s okay, really. I’ve had worse pain from running.”

They were finishing the dishes when he decided to fill her in on Pete’s call. “The Caldwells are dragging their heels about talking with Pete.”

“I wonder why?” she said quietly.

“No, you don’t.”

“What?”

He dried his hands and set down the dishtowel. "You know where she is and why she left." He knew he was right when she didn't answer. "Someone doesn't want her found and they were willing to kill Justin and you to make sure of it."

"I can't help you."

"You think Sandy is safe where she is. If you didn't think she was safe I believe you would have found a way to warn her. Sooner or later, she will be found and they'll kill her." He was losing his patience.

"I can't help you," she repeated.

Mac ran his hands through his hair. She was driving him crazy. "Don't you understand they'll kill you if they have to? You have to help us find her."

"I can't!"

"Is the privilege between you and a dead guy worth dying for?" he yelled.

"Yes!"

"What?"

"It has to be worth it. If it's not then I've wasted thirty years of my life. I took an oath." She moved closer and pushed a finger in his chest. "So did you. Serve and protect. Do you violate your oath whenever it's convenient? Who the hell are you to tell me to violate mine, you arrogant son of a..."

In a moment of pure madness, Mac grabbed her face in his hands and pulled her into a deep kiss. His brain registered surprise when she responded not with a punch to his gut, but with a passion that made his head swim. They only pulled apart when they ran out of air.

"Why did you do that?" she gasped.

"I wanted you to stop talking. It was all I could think to do."

"Effective," she smiled as she grabbed his t-shirt with her fist and pulled him back into another fiery kiss.

Mac fought to think straight. "Lorna," he whispered.

"What?" she asked as she nipped at his neck.

"We shouldn't."

"You're single."

"How do you know?"

"I pay attention. No trace of a woman."

"You're a witness in an ongoing investigation."

"Is your sexual prowess such that you can make me reveal my secrets?"

Mac chuckled. "Doubtful."

She took him by the hand and smiled. "Let's find out."

"What about your shoulder?"

"Do you always talk this much?" She pulled him into another fiery kiss.

There was a part of him that was saying this was a bad idea. The rest of him wasn't listening. He led her to his bedroom and closed the door as Lorna pushed him against it with another kiss. She ran her hand up his chest.

"Take this off, please," she whispered. He yanked the shirt over his head and Lorna's eyes widened. "Damn," she smiled as she ran her hand over his chest.

"Your turn." He carefully slipped the shirt over her head. He felt himself growl at the sight of her breasts. He placed a gentle kiss near the wound on her shoulder. "Are you sure?" Lorna smiled and pushed off her shorts and panties in one move of her good arm. "I'll take that as a yes," he grinned as he pushed off his shorts and boxers. Now it was Lorna's turn to growl. She ran her hand down his back and grabbed his ass.

"Damn, dude. You have not been wasting your time at the gym."

Mac chuckled and gave her a kiss. "So glad you approve." He walked toward the bed and pulled down the comforter. Lorna sat down and scooted over. He climbed in next

to her and gave her a kiss. “You have to promise to tell me if I hurt your shoulder.” She reached her hand around his neck.

“I promise. Now, stop talking,” she said as she pushed her fingers through his hair. “Oh yeah, I was right about the hair,” she smiled as she pulled him into a kiss.

Whatever doubts Mac had were lost in a haze as he explored every inch of her with his fingers, lips and tongue. He couldn't get enough of her feel and her scent. Her moans were driving him mad. Her long legs were strong and powerful. He found out just how powerful when she pulled him toward her and locked them around his waist. Mac braced his arms and lost himself in her.

Lorna stirred and realized she was tucked up against Mac's chest. It felt so good to be in his arms. Or it would if her shoulder wasn't aching. She tried moving her arm straight up to loosen the muscles. "Ow."

"Are you okay?"

"I'm a little stiff. It's okay."

"It's time from your med."

"I'm fine."

"Let's not have this argument again." He got up and left the bedroom. Lorna took the moment to enjoy the view. When he returned, she enjoyed that view too. "Here's your pill and some water. Take it."

"Fine," she grumbled. Mac turned on the nightstand lamp and she took the pill. "Happy now?"

He gave her a lopsided grin. "Yeah, I'm pretty freaking happy."

Lorna looked up and smiled. "Well aren't you a little full of yourself." She noticed a small scar on his stomach, a round one. She reached up and touched it. "You do know what it's like."

"Yeah."

"What happened?"

He got back into bed and put his arm around her waist. "I was only on the job a few months. A guy liked to beat his wife and didn't take kindly to being arrested."

"How much time did he get?"

"Twenty-five to life."

"Good."

"Good? You surprise me counselor."

"Why does that surprise you?"

“I would expect you’d want to know what his defense was?”

“Did he have a history of beating his wife?”

“Yes.”

“She never filed charges?”

“Yes.”

“Neighbors called it in?”

“Yes, again.”

“You tried to stop him and he shot you.”

“That’s about it.”

“Then I’m glad he got what he deserved. I have little patience for wife beaters. I have no patience for people who shoot cops.”

Mac leaned up on his elbow and smiled. “You are a surprising woman, Lorna Dunn.”

“Why? Because I don’t like people shooting cops? Yes, I believe everyone is entitled to a vigorous defense but it sounds to me like he had no defense.”

“How do you know I didn’t have it coming?”

She brushed her hand across his cheek. “I know.”

“Careful, counselor. I may begin to think you like me.”

Lorna smiled. “You mean for some other reason than the blistering hot sex?”

“Other than that.”

“Of course, I like you, Mac. You and I have a lot in common.”

“How’s that?” he laughed.

“You and I, we’re flip sides of the same coin. We love the law and we dedicated our lives to serve it. Our only problem is doing it together.”

Mac gave her a soft kiss. "I think we'll figure it out."

"You do?"

"Yeah," he smiled as he pulled himself over top of her. "Later."

Pete knocked on the door of the Caldwells at precisely five thirty p.m. He had a feeling being late would not be tolerated. The door was opened quickly by Colonel Caldwell. Mark Caldwell was six feet tall with jet black hair trimmed short. He would have been described by women as handsome if it hadn't been for his pale complexion and the dark circles under his eyes. "Colonel Caldwell? I'm Detective Garver."

"Come in. Do you have any news? Have you found my girl?"

"No sir, not yet. Can we talk?"

"Yes, come in." He turned toward the stairs. "Jean, the detective is here."

Captain Jean Caldwell came down the stairs. She'd changed from her uniform into pale slacks and an Oxford shirt. Her blond hair was in a tight bun. The look she gave him made him more uncomfortable than Carlo Zagretti had. "Captain Caldwell, thank you for seeing me."

"Have you found our daughter?"

"No, ma'am."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"I'd like talk to you about Sandy. What you might think is something small could prove important." They sat down in the front room and Pete took out his notebook. "You recently started homeschooling Sandy. Wasn't that a little difficult with your schedules?"

"I hired a tutor," said Jean. "She needed to focus on her studies and not that...boy."

"You didn't like Justin."

"His father is a criminal," said Mark.

"She'll never get into West Point now," said Jean. "Not with all this business."

"She wanted to go into the Army?"

Jean's manner seemed to waiver. She reached for Mark's hand. "It was our hope that she would follow in our footsteps."

Peter took the opening to look around the room. It was a testament to the Caldwell's military careers. Plaques, awards, ribbons, photographs all for the parents. There was no sign of Sandy in the room, save a small family portrait. "You've had very impressive careers. You've been in a number of different cities." He looked at the parents. "We're you expecting a transfer soon? If Sandy didn't want to leave her boyfriend..."

"No," said Mark. "This is my terminal assignment."

"Terminal assignment?"

"I'll be retiring soon."

"Will you as well, Captain?"

She looked uncomfortable. "Yes. Otherwise I could be transferred away from my family."

"Is there somewhere Sandy liked to go?"

Jean looked frustrated. "We went through this with police before. We don't know where that criminal boyfriend of hers took her. Now that he's dead we may never know. For all we know, he may have killed her."

"Don't say that!" shouted Mark. "You have to find her."

"We're doing our best." Pete looked at the Caldwells and decided to throw them a curve ball. "Do you have any idea who would want to kill Justin Zagretti?"

"No," said Mark. "He was the only one who knew where she is. Now we may never find her." He brushed tears away from his eyes.

"We don't know what he was into. It probably had something to do with his family," said Jean.

Pete realized he wasn't getting any more from them. He stood and extended his hand. "Thank you both for seeing me."

He walked toward the front door. Mark opened the front door. "You have to find her."

“We’re doing everything we can.”

Peter sat in his car and thought about the Caldwells. He had the particulars of their career information, or at least as much as he could get from the Army. He needed to talk to some of their colleagues. He also wanted to talk to the tutor and the housekeeper. He had the contact information from the original police report. He wasn’t going to wait until the morning.

Mac poured himself a glass of water and looked out the kitchen window into the darkness. He was out of his freaking mind. That had to be it. He'd had sex with Lorna. She was a witness. A wounded witness at that. He smiled to himself. That didn't seem to slow her down. He shook his head. Absolute madness.

"I wondered where you gotten to."

He turned to see Lorna in the kitchen doorway. "I'm sorry. Did I wake you?"

"No. I think maybe the pill wore off."

He walked over and looked at her bandage. He'd made it smaller than the hospital bandage but it still covered the incision. "I'd like to take a look."

She ran her hand up his chest and smiled. "You've already had a good look."

"Very cute. I want to check your incision."

"Fine."

He pulled the bandage off and the incision didn't appear any worse for the wear of their activity. "It looks pretty good. You can leave the bandage off."

"Great. The tape itches."

"You're not due for another pill for a couple of hours. Will you be okay?"

"Yeah, I'm good."

"Ice tea?"

"Yes, thanks. Can I ask you a question?"

"It's what you do," he smiled as he set the glass of tea in front of her.

"How long have you been out of the Army?"

"Thirty years."

"What was your rank?"

"Master Sergeant."

“Why did you keep your EMT certification after all this time?”

“I studied hard. I didn’t want to waste the effort. Besides,” he smiled. “It comes in handy once in a while.” The burner phone rang and he saw Pete was calling. “Hey, what have you got?” he asked.

“I talked to the Caldwells. There’s something off there. The father is devastated and the mother is pissed. I talked to a couple of their colleagues. No one had a bad word to say about them but they said they are reserved, keep to themselves. I talked to the girl’s tutor. She only started with her this semester. She said she was a good student but she worked with her only a few hours a day. The housekeeper is a different story. She said she felt sorry for Sandy, that she was very sad. They would eat together when the parents worked late. It was one of those nights when her drink was spiked.”

“Do you have the police report?”

“Yeah.”

“What was in the housekeeper’s drink?” Mac could hear pages flipping.

“Let me see. Here it is. Ambien.”

“Something is very wrong in the house,” he stared at Lorna. She looked at him stock still. Never blinking. She was telling him nothing, and everything. “Shit,” he whispered. “Look into their previous assignments. See if there’s any history of hospital stays for the girl.”

“Do you think...?” asked Pete.

“It would make sense.”

“I don’t know how much information I’ll get from the army.”

“Give it a try. In the meantime, I’m going to call Irene Baker.” He hung up the phone and looked at Lorna. “Thank you.”

“I didn’t say anything.”

He leaned over and kissed her cheek. “No, you didn’t. Not a word.”

“Who’s Irene Baker?”

“She runs a teen hotline. They advertise all over the high schools. Justin and Sandy may have reached out to her.” He dialed a number and hoped. “Hello, Irene?”

“Yes?”

“It’s Mac MacLeod.”

“Hi, Mac, I didn’t recognize the number. How are you?”

“I’m good, Irene. Thanks. I’m hoping you can help me. I’m looking for a girl who may have reached out to you for help. Sandy Caldwell.” The pause in her voice told him Irene knew the girl.

“Mac, you know I can’t reveal confidential information.”

“I know but I don’t want you to tell me where she is. I just want to talk to her. I want to be sure she’s okay and I want to confirm the reason she left.”

“Confirm?”

“We know she was being abused. I need to confirm it before I can proceed with pressing charges.”

“I don’t know if she’ll cooperate. She’s pretty devastated.”

“She knows what happened to Justin?”

“Yeah. Poor kid’s a mess.”

“We’re trying to get justice for him as well as her. Irene, you know me. You know you can trust me. Tell her I won’t force her to do anything. All I want right now is to confirm she’s okay.”

“FaceTime?”

“That’ll work.”

“Okay. I’ll call you back when I have an answer.”

Mac sat back against his chair. “Okay, at least we know she’s safe.”

“Now what?” asked Lorna.

“I don’t know about you but I’m hungry. I bought some cake. Want some?”

“That’s it? Do I want some cake?”

“What else do you want?”

“I don’t know. I thought you might react a little differently after having found Sandy.”

“Technically, I haven’t found her. I have confirmed she’s safe, so I am greatly relieved.” Lorna jumped when the lights flashed on in the back yard.

“Oh God,” she whispered.

He looked through the window and smiled. “It’s all right. Come here.”

“Are you sure?”

“Positive.” Lorna approached but stood behind him. “Look.” He pointed out the window. There was a small family of deer wandering through his back yard. Two small fawns following a doe were nibbling on some wild blueberry bushes he’d planted for the animals. If he’d had his cameras out he’d take some shots.

“You never did show me how to shoot.”

“Fancy some venison?”

“No! If the lights come on and it’s someone less benign than a family of deer, I want to be ready.”

He brushed his hand down her back. “Sure. Come on. I’ll show you.” They went into his bedroom and unlocked his gun closet. He pulled out a small hand gun, checked the barrel and showed it to her. This is a 22. It has a very little recoil. Are you left or right-handed?”

“Left.”

He placed the gun in her left hand and show her how to hold it with her right hand over her left. “Once it’s loaded, you just point and shoot.” He patted his own chest.

“Remember to aim center mass.” He stood behind her and pointed her at the mirror. “Now, pull the trigger.” Her hands were trembling but she pulled the trigger. She turned and handed him the gun.

“I can’t,” she whispered.

“You did fine.”

“No, I mean I could never pull a trigger on someone.”

He set the gun down and pulled her into a hug. “It’s okay. It’s good you figured that out now.”

She slapped his chest. “If it comes to it, you better cover my ass.”

He pulled back and looked at her. He knew she expected him to make a smart-ass remark. “You have my word.”

Mac was making breakfast for Lorna when the phone rang. "Hey, Irene."

"Hi, Mac. I've talked to Sandy. She's agreed to talk to you. Two o'clock."

"Ah, thanks, Irene. I'll call you from my other line."

"Alright, Mac. I'll talk to you later."

He disconnected the call and called Pete. "Pete."

"Do you know what time it is?"

"About seven. Wake up."

"Yeah, yeah, I'm awake. What's up?"

"Irene has Sandy Caldwell. She's safe."

"Ah, that's great news."

"She's agreed to talk to us."

"She's coming in?"

"No. She's agreed to FaceTime. Two o'clock. Meet me at my place and bring our phones." He disconnected the call and poured the coffee.

"Do you think it's safe?" asked Lorna.

"Yeah, I do. I'd like you to be with me when we talk to Sandy."

"Of course."

"Let's get some breakfast and we'll get going."

They drove back to town and pulled into his condo. He carried in the rest of the clothes Pete had bought for Lorna. He smiled as he remembered helping her dress this morning. Her shoulder was better, but not good enough reach behind her back to put on a bra. She looked good in a new t-shirt and jeans.

"Can I call my office?"

“You can use the line in my office. Pete should be here soon with our phones.”

Lorna called her office and assured the staff that she was safe and recovering. Her associates were handling their cases. Karen was taking care of Lorna’s clients and there were no pressing reasons for her to go into the office. Karen told her that so many flowers had been delivered to the office that conference room look liked a florist shop. She looked out the window and wondered how long was she going to do this. Thirty years of defending the good and the bad left no time for a real life. Not one with a partner and kids. The kid boat had sailed but maybe not the partner?

She’d never felt more comfortable with a man than she had Mac MacLeod. Even when they were arguing she felt energized in a way she’d never felt before. He was smart and honest. She trusted him. There was also the small detail of not being able to keep her hands off him. The man was built like a brick bunker. His blue eyes made her melt like a school girl. Just thinking about him made her heart race. This was crazy. He’s a cop. She’s a defense attorney. It’ll never work. She heard voices and went back into the living room. Pete had arrived with their phones.

“Hello, Pete.”

He looked at Mac and then back at her. “Hello, Ms. Doo...Dunn.”

Lorna smiled. “Call me Lorna. So where did you hide the cookies? Pockets, briefcase.”

He blushed as he handed over her phone. “Front seat of your car. You shouldn’t leave your car unlocked.”

“Noted,” she laughed. Mac walked towards her and put a hand on her arm.

“How’s the shoulder.”

“It’s okay.”

“Truth.”

“It’s sore but I don’t want a pill yet. I want to be clear headed when you talk to Sandy,”

“Excuse me?” Pete asked as he looked at Mac.

“Sandy knows Lorna was Justin’s attorney. She may have questions.”

“What about your privilege?”

“You both know everything I knew. There’s nothing left for me to reveal.”

Mac ran his hand up Lorna’s arm. “We have an hour before the call. Why don’t you go relax on the couch? I’ll make you a cup of tea.”

“That sounds great, thanks.” Lorna sat down and kicked off her shoes. She pushed her shoes off and got comfortable on the pillows. Maybe she’d close her eyes for just a minute.

Pete followed Mac into the kitchen. He could feel his partner’s tension as he reached for the kettle. He knew what was coming. “Did you bring the files?”

“Of course, I have the files, screw the files! What the hell, Mac?”

“What?” he feigned ignorance. It didn’t work.

“You and Lorna Doone? Are you out of your mind?”

“Her name is Dunn.”

Pete paced the tile. “Holy shit. You’re sleeping with her. Mac, she’s a witness.”

“I know that.”

“So, you are sleeping with her.” Pete shook his head. “Do you know what Daniels will do when he gets wind of this?”

“The chief doesn’t have to get wind of anything.”

“He’s a detective, too. We detect! What I’m detecting now is a high level of sexual tension mixed with some serious denial.”

“Look, Pete, buddy, I appreciate your concern. Right now, we need to focus on the Caldwell case.” Mac poured the tea.

“Knock it off, Mac. Talk to me. What’s going on with you?”

“Honestly, I don’t know. We argue like crazy but then we...”

Pete put up his hand. “Spare me the details. Do you care about her?”

He looked out toward the living room. “I don’t think we stand a snowball’s chance in hell.”

“That’s not what I asked. Do you care about her?”

He sighed. “Yeah.”

Mac and Pete had spent the hour reviewing what information they had on the case. He looked at his watch and connected his phone to his laptop. He pulled up the FaceTime app and dialed Irene. Her face popped up on the screen.

“Hello Irene.”

“Hi, Mac.”

“You remember my partner, Pete Garver.”

“Of course. Hello Pete.”

“Hi Irene.”

“I also have Lorna Dunn with me. She was Justin’s attorney.”

Lorna leaned into the screen. “Hello. If Sandy would rather me not be present, I’ll leave.”

“No,” said an off-screen voice. Sandy Caldwell came into view. She was a petite blonde, a young version of her mother. “You were with Justin.”

“Yes, I was.”

“Did he...? Was it bad?”

“It was over in a moment. He never knew what happened.”

She put a tissue to her eyes. “I guess that’s good. I heard you were hurt too. Are you alright?”

“Yes, thank you. I’ll be fine.”

Mac took the center of the screen. “Sandy, we know why you and Justin reached out to Irene for help. We just need you to tell us what happened.”

Sandy glanced at Irene. “I don’t know if I can.”

“It’s okay,” said Irene. “I’ve worked with him before. You can trust him.”

Sandy nodded and looked at Mac. “I left because of my father.” She looked down at her hands. “He’d always been such a good dad. He always made time for me no matter

what his schedule. As I got older...he started coming into my room at night. At first he started touching me." She took a deep breath and Irene clasped her hand. "I tried to tell my mother but she didn't believe me. She called me a liar. She said he'd never do such a thing. I started locking my door. That worked for a little while but one day last month, he came home early. My tutor had gone. It was the housekeeper's day off." She looked into the screen and tears were streaming down her face. "He raped me." Irene gave her a hug as Lorna reached for Mac's hand under the table.

"Can you tell me what happened next?" asked Mac.

"I told Justin. He wanted to tell his father. He said his father's people would make him sorry. They don't stand for that sort of thing. I wouldn't let him. I was worried about being pregnant so Justin took me to a clinic outside the city. They did a bunch of tests and they gave me a morning after pill."

"Sandy, did they do a rape kit?" She nodded and wiped her eyes. "They will still have the samples. If you give your consent, we can have it tested."

"What good will that do?"

"I'm going to get a warrant for your father's DNA. When we match it, he can be charged."

"The Army will just cover it up. My father is a big shot."

"Not if we give them the proof. They won't be able to hide it."

Lorna leaned into the screen. "Sandy, I will represent your interests in this. I will make sure that when the local police turn your father over to military jurisdiction that you will receive justice."

"You're a big shot lawyer. I'm just a kid. Justin's family had money."

"Do you know what pro bono is?"

"I think so. It means you do it without charging me. Why would you do that?"

"It's what Justin would have wanted. He loved you, Sandy. Truly loved you."

“Do you think my father killed him?”

“We’re going to find out. We’ll get justice for him too. I promise you,” said Mac.

Sandy nodded. “Okay. I’ll call the clinic.”

“Thank you. We’re going to move quickly. I’ll keep in touch with Irene. It does mean that once he’s charged you will have to come in.”

“Once I’m sure he can’t get to me,” she said.

“I’ll be in touch soon. Thank you for talking to us.” Mac disconnected the call and sat back. “We need to get a warrant for Caldwell’s DNA.”

“Mac, reality check,” said Pete. “When it was just missing kid, the Army was happy to let us take the lead. We can’t charge an Army Colonel with rape. He will fall under the Army’s jurisdiction.”

“I’m aware of that.”

“So how do you plan to get around that little detail?”

“We call the Caldwell’s in to the station because we have news of their daughter. Then we get his DNA.”

“How about that pesky little warrant?”

“We talk to Judge Ryder. He has no patience for child abuse.”

“Guys, you’re getting a warrant for someone you know you can never prosecute. His lawyer will get it thrown out,” said Lorna.

“Just because I can’t prosecute him doesn’t mean the investigation is illegal. Once we have what we need we turn it over to the Army.”

“You’ll need a forensic tech standing by to do both the analysis on the rape kit and Caldwell’s DNA. If this goes through the system it could take weeks or months.”

Mac looked at her and smiled. “My, you are a clever girl.”

“So I’ve been told.”

“Gag! Is this what I’m in for?” asked Pete.

“Shut it, jackass. I think it’s time to bring the Chief up to speed. He has enough pull to get the tech ready and waiting. You get the paperwork ready and get the sample from the clinic. You can call Irene for the location.”

“Fine. I’ll get going. I’ll call when I’ve got the sample.”

Mac closed the door behind Pete and took a breath. “I need to call my chief.”

Lorna wrapped her arms around his waist. “Take a minute and breathe.” He gave her a quick kiss.

“I really need to make the calls.”

“No. Sit for a minute.” She led him to the couch and they sat. “Are you sure about this? You’re not going to get the conviction.”

“The only thing that matters is that Caldwell pays for what he’s done to his daughter and Justin.”

“Why do you think he shot Justin?”

“Jealousy? I don’t know. We’ll find out when I question him.”

Mac met Pete at the forensics lab in the morning. Gina Ramos met them in the lab. Her black hair was pulled into a tight ponytail. A white lab coat covered her jeans and Star Trek t-shirt. Pete handed her the sealed evidence bag.

“This must be a big deal. Your chief called my boss and he called me. Do you know how much my boss hates breaking protocol? I’ve been told to drop everything else.”

“This is about the Zagretti and Caldwell case,” said Mac.

“Oh.”

“We need everything you’ve got as soon as you’ve got it.”

“I assume you’ve got a suspect sample.”

“We will soon. We’ll get it to you as soon as we can. We need this to be kept quiet. No one can know it’s related to the Caldwell case.”

“You know this is going to take at least twenty-four hours.”

“Whatever you can do to speed it up would be appreciated.”

“The machine will only process so fast.”

“I understand. We’ll see you later.”

Mac and Pete waited for the Caldwells. He touched his jacket to reassure himself he had the warrant in his inside pocket. Judge Ryder knew Mac wouldn’t have come to him without the solid statement of Sandy Caldwell. Mac did warn him that the Army would not look kindly on his signing the warrant.

“What are they going to do to me?” he smiled. “I’m retiring at the end of the year. I’m not worth their trouble.”

Mac nodded toward the hallway as the Caldwell’s arrived. “Colonel Caldwell, Captain Caldwell, thank you for coming.”

“You have news about Sandy?” asked Mark “Have you found her?”

“Please, follow us.” Mac and Pete led them toward an interrogation room and closed the door. He waited for the Caldwells to sit as he and Pete sat opposite them.

“Why have you brought us here?” asked Jean.

“We’ve had contact with your daughter.”

“What? Where is she?” asked Mark.

“She is safe.”

“Where is my daughter?” he yelled.

“She is in a shelter situation for now.”

“What does that mean?” asked Jean.

“It means she’s safe. It also means we know why she left.” Mac saw Mark Caldwell go pale. “She was raped.” He looked Caldwell in the eye. “You raped her.”

“No,” he whispered.

“Lies!” shouted Jean. “She’s a lying bitch! My husband would never do such a thing.”

“Your daughter tried to tell you but you called her a liar.”

“More lies. It was probably that criminal boyfriend of hers.”

“After the rape, Justin took her to a clinic outside the city where they performed a rape kit. We are running tests on that kit right now. Mac reached in his jacket and pulled out the warrant. “This is a warrant for your DNA.”

“You can’t do this,” said Jean. “You don’t have jurisdiction over us.”

Mac looked at Jean. “Do you really want the Army to know about this? You say this is all lies. We’ll perform the test and when it doesn’t match that will be the end of it. The Army will never have to know.”

“Fine,” said Jean.

Pete pulled the DNA kit out of the desk drawer. He pulled on a pair of latex gloves and opened the tube. He pulled out the long swab and aimed it at Mark. "Open please." Mark seemed to fade to near invisible. "Colonel, please open your mouth."

"No."

"The warrant says you have no choice," said Mac. Mark slowly opened his mouth and Pete took the sample. He pushed a form toward him. They'd already filled out the personal information for him. "Please sign here, Colonel." Mark picked up the pen and signed. "You will hear from us as soon as we have the results."

"What about my daughter?" he asked.

"She will stay where she is for now."

"Are you sure Sandy is safe?" Mark looked at Mac with tears in his eyes. He almost felt sorry for him, almost.

"That I can tell you for certain, Sandy is safe."

"Come on, Mark," said Jean. "Let's get out of here."

The Caldwelles left Mac and Pete in the room. "Well, that was interesting," said Mac.

"He's guilty as sin," said Pete.

"No doubt, but I'm talking about the mother. She seems ready to defend him against her own child."

"She's a piece of work, that one."

"She sure is. Get that sample down to Gina. I want this guy."

Mac was happy to know that Lorna was waiting at his apartment. It had been a long day. He and Pete met with Chief Daniels and brought him up to speed. He was a good guy and he always backed his people. But Mac knew if this thing blew up it would be his ass on the line.

“Lorna, I’m back.” She came around the corner from the kitchen wearing a tiny t shirt, shorts and nothing else. His brain went full stop.

“Hi, how did it go?”

He stared at her long legs and how the short shorts showed them off to their best advantage. He put his hands on her hips and rubbed them down her ass.

“Earth to Mac.”

“Huh?” he asked as he gave her a kiss and pulled her tight.

“How did it go, you horn dog?”

“Oh, yeah,” he said as he stepped back. “We got the DNA sample. We’ve got a forensic specialist working on them both. She’s not to leave them until she gets the results.”

“Do you think it will be a match?”

He stood back, thinking now about Sandy. “Yeah, I do. Her father looked like he was ready to pass out.”

“What about the mother?”

“She doesn’t believe it and called Sandy a lying bitch.”

“She’ll have to believe it when the test results come in.” She took him by the hands. “There’s nothing we can do until then. Let’s think about something else for now, like dinner.” She pulled him into the kitchen. He saw pots on the stove and the appeared to be something in the oven.

“What’s all this?”

“I’m roasting a chicken. I’ve got some mixed vegetables going and some red potatoes. I know you probably never look at a carb but I love potatoes.”

“Wow. How did you do all this? I haven’t done grocery shopping this week.”

“The market delivers. Now go change and get comfortable. Dinner will be ready in about twenty minutes.”

Mac went into his bedroom and stripped off his suit and put in the dry cleaner bag. He jumped into the shower and tried to wash off the day. He would never understand men like Caldwell. At least he knew Sandy was safe. He toweled off and put on a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. He thought for a minute about combing his hair back but decided to let it go. Lorna liked it that way. He looked in the mirror. When had what Lorna liked become so important? He heard her chuckling.

“You look very pretty. Are you ready for dinner?”

“Yeah,” he smiled. “Let’s eat.”

Lorna enjoyed cooking for Mac. She didn’t get a chance to cook much. All she did was work. Work and come home to an empty apartment, not even a cat. She’d dated occasionally but most men were either intimidated by her or wanted to advance their social standing by being seen with her. Mac MacLeod was neither one of those things. He was a good man, an honest cop with the added perk of being smoking hot. So, what was her problem? Was she so out of practice in relationships that she didn’t think it could work? She saw Mac primping in front of the mirror and decided to stop over analyzing and go with her gut. They’d met under the worst possible circumstances but she had the feeling if she didn’t pursue this relationship, she’d regret it for the rest of her life.

“This was really good,” he smiled as they cleaned up the dishes.

“Thanks,” she smiled.

He ran his hand up her back. “How’s the shoulder?”

“It’s okay.”

“Truth?”

“Sore but I took some Tylenol.”

“Good. After this is all over, you’ll need to start some physical therapy.”

She smiled and ran a hand up his hard chest. “I prefer our physical therapy.”

“So do I,” he chuckled. “Speaking about until this is over, I’d rather you stay put here. You can work from here if you need to. Just stay in the apartment and away from the windows.”

Her heart skipped. “Do you think I’m still at risk?”

“Honestly, I don’t think so,” He pulled her into a hug. “But I’m not willing to be wrong.”

Lorna smiled. “Careful, Detective. I might begin to think you like me.”

“I like you just fine.” He gave her a soft kiss that quickly turned passionate. They finally came up for air and she looked into his eyes.

“Mac, what is this? Do you know because I’m confused as hell?”

“I’m not sure. I know I think you’re smart and beautiful and funny. Also, I am having a hell of a time keeping my hands off you.”

“I don’t recall asking you to,” she grinned.

“I think after this is all settled you and I should figure out this thing between us.”

“Good plan,” she smiled. “What do we do in the meantime?”

Mac grinned and took her by the hand.

Mac was shaken awake by Lorna’s thrashing. She was moaning and moving back and forth. He lightly touched her good shoulder. “Lorna, sweetheart. Wake up.”

Lorna’s eyes flickered open. “Huh?”

“You were having a nightmare.”

“Oh, sorry. I didn’t mean to wake you.”

“Don’t apologize. Do you want to tell me about it?”

“It was nothing.”

He brushed a stray curl from her cheek. “We’ve been honest with each other so far. Why stop now?”

“I was back in the conference room, looking out the window. I was trying to see who it was but I couldn’t. They kept firing and I was trying to get away. I saw you in the doorway. I was trying to get to you,” her voice hitched. “but I couldn’t reach you. I was so scared.”

Mac wiped the tears from her cheek. “I’m not surprised by a dream like that. Sweetheart, you’re going to need more the physical therapy after this.”

“I’m not crazy.”

“Of course not. Having a response like this after a shooting is normal, but you will need to talk to someone about it.”

“Did you?”

He paused and thought about what happened all those years ago. “I still see his face.”

“Who’s face?”

“The kid who shot me.”

“Did you talk to someone?”

“Eventually. This was nearly thirty years ago. They didn’t put as much emphasis on mental health as they do now. Fortunately, I had a progressive captain who saw I was struggling. He arranged for me to see a therapist.”

“Did it help?”

“Yeah, it did. What happened to you was as much a trauma to your mind as it was to your shoulder. Treat them both.” He gave her for a soft kiss. “As to the matter of not being able to reach me, no matter what, I’ll be there.”

She touched her hand to his cheek. “I believe you.”

He’d pulled her into a deep kiss when his phone rang. He looked at the call ID and cursed. “Pete, you better have a damn good reason for calling.”

“Mark Caldwell is dead.”

Mac pulled up in front of the Caldwell home. The ambulance and the local patrols were parked in the driveway. A small gathering of neighbors was standing in the street despite the fact that it was three in the morning. He got out of his car and flashed his badge at one of the patrol officers. "Make sure those people stay back." Pete came out of the Caldwell house and met him on the lawn. "What the fuck happened?"

"He shot himself."

"Coward. Come on. Let's see what this shit has done now." Mac followed Pete into the Caldwell home. Jean was sitting on the sofa, answering the questions of the local police. She looked pale and shaky. He flashed his badge. "Detective MacLeod. What have you got?"

The patrolman stood. "Mrs. Caldwell was asleep when she heard the shot. She came downstairs and found her husband in the office."

Jean stood and pointed at Mac. "This is your fault. You pushed him to this."

He looked at the patrolman. "Stay with Mrs. Caldwell."

"It's Captain!" she shouted as he walked with Pete to the den. He stood for a moment and took in the scene. Caldwell was leaning over the right arm of his desk chair. A large portion of his head was now spread over the carpet. A picture of Sandy was in front of him on the desk.

"Where's the weapon?"

Pete pointed toward the opening under his desk. A .38 revolver was sitting at his feet. "It must have slid down his lap."

Mac looked around the room. It was full of the history of a military career than ended with a bullet to the brain. He looked at the techs taking pictures. "Photograph the body now."

"We still have to finish the room," said one tech.

"No. Body first. Let the EMT's get him out." He waved over the EMT's. "Get this guy to the coroner. He will meet you there."

“At this hour?”

“Yes. I want our coroner to see him before the Army finds out about this.”

Mac and Pete walked out into the hall. He pulled out his phone and rang Gina.

“Hey Mac. I was going to call you in the morning.”

“What have you got?”

“The test is not yet complete but I can tell you your suspect is related to the victim, closely related.”

“It’s not a surprise that the DNA matches. The suspect has killed himself. They’re bring him in now. Can you call the coroner on duty and have him meet you and the body? I need to make sure we have all the information we can get before the Army claims the body.”

“Ah geez, Mac. The Army? Are you going to get me in trouble?”

“No, this all falls on me.”

“You’ll owe me, Mac.”

“Gina, don’t let anyone get to the body before you’re finished.”

“I’ll get security.”

“My partner will be escorting the body.”

“I’ll be doing what?” asked Pete.

“I need you to make sure we get everything we need before the Army gets to him.”

Pete rolled his eyes. “What else is there to know? The bastard raped his own daughter and when he got caught he killed himself.”

“I don’t know, but there’s something. Either way, Sandy deserves answers.”

It was nearly dawn when Mac got back to his apartment. He walked into the bedroom and pulled off his jacket. He secured his weapon in his gun safe.

“Is he dead?”

He turned to see Lorna sitting up in bed. “Yeah.”

“Is it over?”

“It looks like it.”

“You’re not sure.”

“Something isn’t sitting right. He was desperate to see his daughter again. I don’t see him killing himself.”

“He knew his career was over as soon as the test results came back. He’d go to prison for raping his own daughter.”

Mac sighed and rubbed his face. He was exhausted. “I guess.”

“Come on, lay down. Try and get some rest.”

“That is the best offer I had all day.” he smiled.

Lorna grinned. “I may come up with something better.” Mac got into bed and pulled her close. “How’s the arm?”

“I’m okay, promise.” She reached for his waist and started moving her hand down. “Besides, I’m left-handed. I can be very effective like this.”

He smiled and closed his eyes. Lorna was proving her point when it hit him and he sat bolt upright. “Shit!”

“What? What did I do?”

“No, nothing. I know what’s wrong. I have to get back to the coroner’s office.”

Lorna got out of bed. “I’m coming too.”

They arrived back at the coroner's office just in time to find an Army officer arguing with a patrolman. They were both armed but this was police territory. Patrolman wins. Mac flashed his badge. "Detective MacLeod."

"I'm Lieutenant Jeffers. I'm here to retrieve the body of Colonel Mark Caldwell. This is an Army matter."

"Not quite yet." He looked at the patrolman and nodded. "As you were."

Mac and Lorna walked into the coroner's exam room. Lorna did a quick about face when she saw the bloody remains of Caldwell's head. "Pete, did you bring the file?"

"Yeah. What's going on?"

"That's what I'd like to know," said the bald guy in the white coat. Gina took care of the introductions.

"Mac, this is Dr. Berry."

"Hello, I have some questions."

"I haven't finished the full autopsy but the obvious is certain. A .38 caliber bullet separates brain matter from your skull."

"Gina, have you done the blood test. Was there any Ambien in his system?"

"Yeah, enough to make most people drowsy but if he was used to taking it he may have had a higher tolerance."

"If he was taking a sleeping pill, why was he in his office? Did you look at his hand?"

"Yeah, positive for gunpowder on his left hand," said Gina.

"No, his right hand," said Mac.

Gina and Dr. Berry looked at Caldwell's right hand. They examined front and back and then looked at each other.

"Pete, the file." Mac handed the file to Gina. "Look at his signature."

Gina looked at the paperwork and then looked at him and smiled. "You're something else, Mac. This man was definitely right-handed."

"I will confirm that," said Dr. Berry. "His right hand, compared to his left indicates wear from years of primary use. This man could not have shot himself in the left temple. I'm declaring this case a homicide."

Mac looked at Lorna. "Are you alright?"

"I'm okay. If he was murdered it had to be..."

"Exactly." They walked out into the hallway to find Lieutenant Jeffers waiting for them.

"Detective MacLeod, I insist you let me take Colonel Caldwell's remains so he can be given the proper burial he deserves."

"Okay, first, your Colonel was about to be arrested for raping his sixteen year old daughter."

"No," he whispered.

"Yes. We have the tests to prove it. Second, he didn't commit suicide."

"Captain Caldwell said..."

"You spoke with Captain Caldwell?"

"Yes, she called me and told me to take her husband's body on post."

"Lieutenant, who's the commander of your unit?"

"She is. Captain Caldwell."

Mac shook his head. "You're going to want to follow us."

They arrived at the Caldwell home to find a military vehicle in the driveway. Mac looked at Jeffers.

“That’s probably the post chaplain. It’s standard procedure. Detective, this can’t be right. Captain Caldwell is the most squared away officer I know.”

Mac turned to Lorna. “I’ll need you to wait in the car.” She was about to protest when he put his hand on hers. “You can’t be a part of this.”

They knocked on the door and an Army captain with Christian crosses on his lapels answered the door. “Can I help you?”

Mac and Pete flashed their badges. “Detectives MacLeod and Garver. I believe you know Lieutenant Jeffers.”

“What’s going on?”

“We need to speak with Captain Caldwell.”

“Now is not a good time. She’s suffered a terrible loss.”

“Allow me to rephrase. We are going to talk to Captain Caldwell. Please stand aside.” They pushed their way past the chaplain and found Jean Caldwell sitting on the couch with a tissue clutched in her hands.

“What are you two doing here? You caused all this! Jeffers? Have you completed your orders?”

“No Ma’am.”

“Why not?” she demanded.

Mac sat down next to her. “Your husband didn’t kill himself; he was murdered.” He watched the color drain from her face. “You probably woke up and he wasn’t there. Even after taking his sleeping pill, he couldn’t sleep, so he got out of bed. You found him asleep in his desk chair, staring at a picture of Sandy. She was all he thought about, all he wanted and you had enough.”

“That’s not true.” Her hands were trembling as she held the tissue to her eyes.

“Jean, you should wait for a lawyer,” said the chaplain.

“You got the handgun, wrapped his hand around the trigger and fired.”

“That’s not true. He killed himself.”

“You would have gotten away with it too except for one little detail.” He leaned in close. “Your husband was right handed.” Jean dropped the tissue and the façade.

“I was the best there was, I still am. I was one of the first women on a Special Response Team. When no one could make the shot, I could.” She looked at Mac like she could make him understand. “I took out terrorists. Terrorists! Then I got pregnant and they took me off the team. Sixteen years of desk jobs following Mark’s career path, not mine. He started pulling away from me. I lost my career to her, I wasn’t going to lose my husband too.”

“Why did you kill Justin Zagretti and try to kill Lorna Dunn?”

She looked at him like she was confused at the question. “They knew where she was. They might have brought her back.”

Mac stood and looked at Jeffers. “She’s all yours.”

Jeffers walked toward his commanding officer. “Captain Caldwell, please stand.” He pulled handcuffs from his belt. “Captain Jean Caldwell, you are under arrest for the murder of Colonel Mark Caldwell, Justin Zagretti and the attempted murder of Lorna Dunn.”

Mac walked out to the car as Jean Caldwell was taken to Jeffers' car in handcuffs.

"Is it over?" asked Lorna.

"Yeah. She confessed."

"Why did she...God, I'm terrible. All I can think of is why did she try and kill me?"

He got into the car and threaded his fingers through hers. "You're not terrible. It's a normal reaction. She was afraid that you and Justin knew where Sandy is and you would bring her back. When she missed you in the courthouse, she tried again in the hospital. She dosed the water with her husband's sleeping med. She probably got the propofol from her own evidence locker."

"Why didn't she want Sandy back?"

"She was jealous."

"God," she whispered.

"She's the Army's problem now."

"I guess so."

Pete knock on the car window. "I need to make a stop."

"We need to brief the chief," said Mac.

"Before that. I need to talk to the Zagretti's. I don't want them to find out when this hits the news. That wouldn't be good for anyone."

"I should be there," said Lorna. "I met with them when they hired me to defend Justin."

A few minutes later they approached the Zagretti home and Pete knocked. The door was opened by Rose Zagretti, who looked even more worn down.

"What do you want?"

"We have news. May we come in?"

“Carlo!” she shouted. Carlo Zagretti joined them in the hall.

“Mr. Zagretti, this is my partner Detective MacLeod and you know Lorna Dunn. May we speak with you and your wife?”

“Come in,” he said as he led them to the living room.

Rose approached Lorna. “Are you alright my dear? They said you were hurt.”

“I’m recovering, thank you.”

“We have news,” said Pete. “There has been an arrest in your son’s murder.” Pete didn’t mince words this time. “The suspect has confessed.”

“Who did this to my son?” asked Carlo.

“It was Jean Caldwell, Sandy’s mother.”

“What?” gasped Rose. “Why would she do such a thing?”

Pete explained what had happened and how she was now in the custody of the Army. “What? Why? They’ll cover it up.”

“No sir, they won’t,” said Mac. “We have solid evidence against her.” He looked at Lorna smiled. “And Sandy has an advocate. Lorna will make sure justice is served.”

Lorna reached for Rose’s hand. “Your son was a brave young man. He loved Sandy very much. He was getting Sandy away from her father so she’d be safe. He was a very honorable young man.”

Carlo nodded. “Thank you.”

Peter nodded to Carlo. “We’ll be going now.”

Carlo stopped him and shook his hand. “You kept your word.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I will remember that.”

Mac and Lorna relaxed on the deck of his cabin, watching the lake. It had been a hell of a week. They'd taken the weekend to regroup. Lorna was going back to her office on Monday. Chief Daniels had smoothed the ruffled feathers of the Army officials who were annoyed that Mac and Pete hadn't immediately turned over the investigation. Pointing out that it would have meant revealing the fort commander was a pedophile seemed to shut them up. He looked out at the lake and sighed. It had been a hell of a week.

"What's wrong?" asked Lorna.

"Nothing's wrong."

"You sighed. What's wrong."

"I'm just wondering how much longer I want to do this."

"Do what?"

"The work. I'm finding more and more I'm looking forward to when I'm out of the city and sitting here. I could put in my papers."

"Retire?"

"That was the plan. Retire and move here full time."

"Nice plan."

"Really?"

"Really. I was thinking along the same lines myself. I think thirty years is long enough. I don't think I'd retire completely. Working with Sandy Caldwell has me thinking I might do some advocate work."

"I like that idea. You could do a lot of good. Could you afford to do it?"

She made a derisive sound. "Yeah. Karen would jump at the chance to buy my practice and as you have pointed out several times, I was very well paid. So yeah, I could afford it."

Mac thought twice about the next question. Should he? Ah, what the hell? "Would you stay in the city?"

Lorna smiled. "Are you asking if I'd want to stay here, with you."

"Yeah, I am."

"Well, well. Aren't you the fast mover, Detective?"

"That doesn't answer my question," he grinned as he reached for her hand. He was interrupted by his ringing phone. "Sometimes I wish I didn't have service up here." He answered the call and put it on speaker. "Pete, this had better be good."

"It's Jean Caldwell. She's dead."

Mac sat bolt upright. "What? How?"

"They found her hanging in her cell."

"Shit!"

"Lorna, the Army has notified Sandy. I thought you'd need to speak with her too."

"Yes, I will. Thanks, Pete."

"I'll talk to you later," said Mac as he hung up and stared at the lake.

"You don't think it's suicide, do you?" asked Lorna.

"Not a chance in hell. Jean Caldwell was a first-grade narcissist. She valued her own life over everyone else. There is no way, no matter what, she would have killed herself.

"Carlo Zagretti?"

"Probably."

"But how? She was locked up in an Army jail."

"The man has unlimited and far-reaching resources."

"What are the chances the Army can prove it?"

“Slim to none.”

“What are the chances they’ll even bother to investigate?”

“Slim to none.”

Mac and Lorna held hands and continued to watch the water for some time. “It is awfully nice here,” she said.

“I think so.”

“Yes.”

“Yes what?”

“I’ll stay.”