And You Learn How to Kill

a novel by Teri Ekland

Part 1: The Road to Murder

Chapter 1: The Move

Lucy Davis

December 10, 1989

Okay, radio listeners. This is Jeff Jeffers, your KFYI host with the most provocative debates coming your way live from the Valley of the Sun. Tonight, we're discussing Debra Milke who allegedly plotted the murder of her four-year-old son. Milke is now on trial fighting for her life. Let's take our next caller . . .

I slam off the nightstand radio. Tonight's topic doesn't interest me that much although I like to call into talk radio, sometimes even religious programs. Not that I'm a "holier than thou" type person like my daddy Moe Davis. On talk radio, I can speak my mind without directly facing a person. And if I don't like what someone says, I simply hang up like I did last night on Dr. Beth, Radio KZAM. Her program was about people who disgrace their families. Naturally, my older sister came to mind.

For eleven years Trace and I shared a cold upstairs bedroom in an old house on Walnut Street, Butte, Montana. We may be sisters but we're opposite in every way. She has luscious

blond hair, full lips, baby-blue eyes and her earlobes are perfectly small. As for me, well, I'm a dishwater blond, my eyes are slate-blue and Trace herself claimed my earlobes were too long. My sister was popular in high school. She went to dances, pep rallies, sports events, you name it, and she had scads of boyfriends. Of course, Daddy knew nothing about them. But I did. She couldn't keep secrets from me—not when we shared the same old bed that belonged to Daddy when he was a kid.

As for me, I've never dated anyone in my 25 years and the only time I did anything extracurricular was in second grade when Mom forced me to join the Angel Bluebirds. She thought I needed to make friends. Or maybe Trace suggested this. To get me to join Mom even took a day off each week from her job at Hometown Hardware to be the troop leader. I joined hoping Mom would show me more attention. It backfired because Mom helped out every other Bluebird except me. After a few months, I quit and so did Mom. "I don't see any use to being troop leader if you aren't part of the troop," she told me.

It was no different at home. Mom catered to Trace and my brothers more than she ever catered to me. Once I even told her *I'm your daughter, too!*

You are? she replied to be funny.

It wasn't funny to me. In fact, for weeks the words *you are* kept ringing through my head like echoes at Yellowstone's Grand Canyon where Daddy took us camping every summer because it's only a two-hour drive from our house on Walnut Street.

When Trace was sixteen and I was ten, she ran off with one of her boyfriends. This didn't bother me. It meant I had the upstairs bedroom to myself and Trace wasn't around to make snotty remarks about how I looked or acted. Then she comes home pregnant, like a jezebel, as Daddy took to calling her, and she stayed in *my* room until a couple adopted her "love child."

After explaining how my sister disgraced our family on radio KZAM, Dr. Beth said to me *Lucy, maybe you envy your sister's free spirit. Is it so terrible to have a love child? Sometimes we need to walk in the other person's shoes. Especially when she's family.*

This is when I hung up. I couldn't believe Dr. Beth twisted my story into something about me. She was mocking me like my horrible brother Scottie used to do when I was little. He constantly picked on me, called me ugly names, hit me, and did unspeakable things. And he never let up. He made my childhood a joke which is why I'm in Mesa now, far away from my bad memories on Walnut Street, Butte, Montana.

"Cards are dealt." My aunt Lucinda calls from the kitchen. Daddy named me after her which is why I'm her favorite niece. Although her only other niece Trace isn't even in the picture. We don't know where she is and haven't heard from her since she left Butte after the baby was born and got adopted out.

In the long, narrow kitchen, I sit at the green metal table across from Aunt Lu. She wears an old pink-corded housecoat and has her gray hair set in bobby pins and these old-fashioned metal clamps. I don't know how she sleeps on these clamps, but she does. Maybe old folks get used to such things.

"Have you been smoking in here?" I pick up my cards. "I'm happy to be living with you Aunt Lu, but I can't stand your cigarette smoke."

"You smell the litterbox," my aunt says with her raspy smoker's voice. She doesn't even look away from her fanned-out cards.

"Don't blame Sylvester for the odor," I say. "Your house reeked of Chesterfields when I moved in."

My aunt smirks but I don't care. I'm protective of my black tuxedo cat. When I first brought him home from the shelter where I work, Aunt Lu claimed not to like cats because they shed fur and scratch up the furniture. Now, despite her complaints about the litter box, she acts like Sylvester's her grandson and says things like "Grandma's got some tuny fish for puddy cat" or "here's some creamy cream for grandma's little boy."

As I sort through my cards, Aunt Lu mentions the Milke case about the woman headed to death row. She usually listens to the Jeffers Hour on the kitchen radio. Sometimes I join her but I prefer lounging on my bed away from her irritating cigarette stench.

"Imagine telling a child he's seeing Santa Claus then shooting him in the head," my aunt continues. Once she's got something she wants to talk about, there's no holding her back. "Can't get rid of a child just 'cause you don't want him around. A child's not like an animal."

"Let's not discuss the Milke case. It's too upsetting and you'll start whimpering about being a childless widow."

"I think of you as my daughter." Aunt Lu smiles like she's got a winning hand.

"I know. You've told me before."

"I've kept everything you ever sent me. Still have that popsicle stick cross you glued on a blue paper plate with cotton ball clouds, macaroni bluebirds and the Lord's Prayer in capital letters. I think you made it in third grade."

"No. I made it in second grade when I was an Angel Bluebird. Now, can we play some gin rummy?"

"That's right, I remember. You made it in the Bluebirds."

To amuse my aunt, I start singing the troop song I still remember after nearly twenty years. I guess it's the only thing I retained from that experience. It goes to the tune of *School Days,* a song my aunt probably sang when she was in grade school a century ago.

"*Bluebirds, Bluebirds, dear and golden Bluebirds. Camping and singing and being good. Faithful to God and our sisterhood. Unlike what other girls may do, for we are the Angel Bluebirds."*

My aunt claps when I finish the song. I like bringing a smile to her face because I know she loves me and I love her, too. I can't thank her enough for getting me away from my folks. I don't care how much she loves her brother Moe Davis; Daddy was a terrible father to me and a horrible husband to Mom. What goads me most is that Mom waited on Daddy hand and foot and went along with whatever he said even after she got sick with multiple sclerosis and had to quit working at Hometown Hardware. Daddy was disappointed only because he had to work double shifts at his construction jobs to make ends meet. That's the kind of man he is.

For years, it seems, I couldn't pry myself from Butte like I was a fly stuck on a sticky strip in a barn. After graduating from Butte High, I stayed home and mostly listened to the radio and read Harlequin Romance novels in my bedroom. Because of her MS condition, I helped Mom with her chores -- laundry, cooking and some cleaning. But I swore I'd never wait on Daddy like she did. That was one task I refused to do.

Fortunately, Scottie had already left home during this time and my folks never asked what I intended to do with my life until my little brother Philip moved out and I became the only Davis kid in the house. Then Daddy started pestering me to get a job and pay rent. "This is my house," he'd scold. "You live here, you go by my rules. The Lord don't like freeloaders."

Naturally, I couldn't stand obeying Daddy's strict rules after I was grown, but I didn't feel like pounding the pavement either. I resorted to asking my grandparents on the McGrew farm outside Missoula if I could come live with them.

"I thought you were helping out your mother," Grandma McGrew said.

"Yes, but Daddy wants me out of the house."

Mom's parents agreed I could live with them if I helped out with chores around the farm. In my mind, this was a perfect solution because a visit to the farm had always been a bright spot in my otherwise crummy childhood. When the adults were out target-shooting for deer hunting season and Scottie wasn't around to torment me, I'd jump from the barn loft onto piles of hay or pretend to be a rooster by using the pampas grass growing near the chicken coop.

For over a year I fed and watered chickens, hogs, goats, dogs, and barn cats. I eventually got tired of the dirt and mud. Farm life began to feel like a deer hunting trip in Eastern Oregon. And I hated those trips mostly because Scottie always went too. It seems he lived just to put me through hell.

Before moving back to Walnut Street, I asked my oldest brother Charlie if I could live with him and babysit his kids in return. Charlie is seven years older than me. He's the only family member I ever really liked. In fact, on the Halloween I turned seven, Charlie became my hero. I was walking down the dark neighborhood street dressed in a clown outfit with big floppy shoes, a red-ball nose and Daddy's old flannel Pendleton shirt as a pair of trousers. Of course, Mom forced me to drag along Phillip. I don't remember his costume because my baby brother was kind of a non-entity during my childhood probably because all my attention went to keeping away from Scottie's constant bullying.

Anyway, Scottie and a few of his friends popped out of nowhere and snatched my pillowcase of candy. I ran home dragging Phillip along and told Charlie what happened. He darted from the house in his slippers and cornered the bullies in Arbor Lodge Park.

Scottie had somehow disappeared before Charlie arrived; he was always good at avoiding trouble and making himself scarce. I never told Charlie that Scottie was one of the bullies because I knew Scottie would kill me if I did. Phillip didn't squeal on Scottie either. He never did. Phillip and Scottie were two peas in a pod. Phillip looked up to Scottie who never bullied anyone but me.

I was happy Charlie got back my pillowcase of candy, but Scottie and his creepy friends had eaten all the Hershey Bars and Reese's Peanut Butter Cups which are my favorite candies to this day.

At Charlie's house, I believed things were working out for everyone. I loved taking care of my nieces Jody and Nicky so much that I considered becoming a pediatric nurse one day and working with kids as a career. And I did have some background in nursing Mom when I helped out with some of her chores.

I haven't acted on the idea yet because I'm not in any rush to return to school after living through four terrible years at Butthole High. *These are the best years of your life* Mom liked saying whenever I complained about school. The truth is, I've never had any "best years" and this especially goes for high school. I felt out of place and sometimes hid in the bathroom stalls to avoid being seen, apart from sophomore year when I became best friends with Kathi Longwood. She was about the only best friend I've ever had except maybe for Aunt Lu.

About a year into my stay at Charlie's, I was standing outside the kitchen door listening to my brother and his then wife Roxanne. Early on in childhood, I took to eavesdropping on my

folks or anyone else in the house because I figured people were talking about me or about what Scottie was doing. Nobody ever talked to me directly, it seemed, and eavesdropping was my only way of learning what was going on or how my folks were thinking about me or my situation.

I don't like what Lucy's saying to Jody and Nicky Roxanne said. *Like what?* Charlie asked and the bitch said something like *Lucy claims Scottie tried to shoot her during a deer hunting trip and that she's going to kill him one day. I don't like that kind of talk around the girls.*

The next morning, Charlie claimed Roxanne's parents were coming to town and needed my room. My brother was trying to be nice but really, he let me down and kicked me out of the only family home I ever really had until now with my aunt. After only one night back on Walnut Street, I called Aunt Lu and explained what Charlie had done and asked if I could live with her in Arizona. Since I'm her favorite niece, she loved the idea and paid for my flight to Phoenix. When I was leaving Bert Mooney Airport a year back and looking out the window at Butthole, Montana, I vowed to never return.

Not long after I arrived in Mesa, Aunt Lu hooked me up with a job at the dog pound through a member of her church. I had told her I'm considering being a pediatric nurse but am reluctant to go back to any kind of school and my aunt figured this job would somehow prepare me for nursing school. Bolster my nerves, if that makes any sense. In truth, I suspect Daddy told her I needed to work for a living and not freeload. I really don't care what he has to say as long as I'm not living anywhere near Walnut Street.

Aunt Lu's church friend, Mr. Deihl, is the administrator of the Maricopa County Rabies Control Animal Shelter on Durango Street. Because of my experience on the farm, he offered me a job feeding shelter animals and cleaning out the kennels. Recently, he certified me as a lab

technician. I stock cabinets, sanitize the lab and help the veterinarian put down sick and unwanted animals. The kind of pet nobody adopts. When Mr. Deihl asked if I could emotionally handle the job, I said *Sure. I watched my grandpa kill chickens and grew up going on deer hunting trips and saw lots of dead and gutted out deer.*

I don't talk about my new promotion to anyone except my aunt because I don't know anyone else to talk to other than her old lady friends who come over for pinochle after Sunday services. Aunt Lu has me playing cards with them. I don't mind this but sometimes I worry because my aunt loves bragging about my certification. I've made her promise not to mention the downings. *Just say Mr. Deihl promoted me and leave it at that* I tell her. *Downing animals isn't something to brag about. It's a terrible job someone's got to do.*

December 17, 1989

Tonight's guest is Dr. Brent Johnson, Jeffers announces on the radio. My aunt and I are eating spaghetti and meatballs at the kitchen table. I plan to phone in tonight.

Dr. Johnson is a psychology professor at Brown University. Dr. Johnson. In your recent bestseller Who's at Fault? Who's to Blame? you claim that the adulterer suffers the most heartbreak when the innocent party is unaware of the infidelity. Let's see how our listeners feel.

At the wall phone I dial 800 RADIO KFYI. I'm eager to give this Brown professor a piece of my mind.

Our first caller is my old friend Lucy Davis from the animal shelter.

"The rabies control animal shelter," I correct.

Right. You're the Rabies Lady? Jeffers jokes. *Good to hear from you Lucy. Do you agree with tonight's guest? Do you consider the adulterer a victim?*

I like the way Jeffers leads me into the discussion. He has much more style than Dr. Beth and when he ridicules a caller it's for a good reason. Like the time some idiot called in about an oil refinery under construction. Jeffers reminded the caller that refineries reduce pollution and provide jobs!

"Dr. Johnson," I say over the phone. "Why should we care about the adulterer when he's the culprit?"

Don't you see? Ms. Davis. Anyone with a conscience is a victim.

Dr. Johnson's phone voice isn't in sync with the radio. This causes me to pause a moment to gather my train of thought. "Maybe, Dr. Johnson," I finally say. "But by giving some sleazy guy so much attention we forget about the innocent person—the real victim. Right?"

Look at it this way, Ms. Davis. Has someone ever emotionally hurt you? Are you married?

"Well, no." I grow uneasy. The conversation is turning on me like it did the other night on Dr. Beth's program.

Do you have a boyfriend? the doctor asks. I hold out the phone feeling put on the spot.

Does the Rabies Lady have a boyfriend? Jeffers announces over the radio. *We'll find out after a quick break.*

My aunt gestures not to hang up but I do anyway. I can't stand talking about my personal life even on talk radio. Besides, what am I going to say? *No. I've never even gone out on a date and probably never will!* I don't think so. The doctor would make me his punchline just like Scottie used to do.

"Now, why'd you go and do that?" my aunt asks. Maybe her hair clamps are agitating her. "You coulda lied. Don't have to say what's true on the radio."

“Forget about it,” I say still standing by the wall phone.

My aunt turns up the radio. I don’t want to listen but can’t pull myself from the kitchen.

Lucy, are you there? I hear Jeffers’ voice. *Well folks, it appears our friend the Rabies Lady hung up. Let’s assume she has no boyfriend. No wonder she can’t sympathize with the adulterer. Right, Dr. Johnson?* Both men chuckle over the radio.

“Turn it off!” I yell and lunge for the dial.

“No, you don’t.” Lucinda grabs my wrist. “I have a right to hear the rest of the program. It’s my house.”

I jerk my hand free, retreat to my bedroom and slam the door shut.

While lying on bed staring at the ceiling, Jeffers’ ridicule and my aunt’s words *It’s my house* ring through my head. I feel terrible. For too long I’ve avoided changing things that aren’t right. Like my lack of friends and a love life. And now I’m living with an old lady aunt who’s acting like Daddy and Charlie. It seems nobody wants me in their house.

Sylvester scratches the door. I let him in; he pounces on the bed and nudges my hand like he always does. This cheers me up and I decide to make changes for the better. Starting tomorrow.

Over the next few days, I spend my lunch hour checking out apartments. I don’t want to come home late and make my aunt suspicious. I need to ease her into the idea of my moving out. Despite what she said about the house being hers, I know she’ll miss me and that she loves me like no one else ever has.

Within a week I find an inexpensive, furnished studio on Durango Street near the animal shelter. The Quail Shade Apartment Complex is perfect except they don’t take pets. But I plan to

sneak Sylvester inside. No one will know about him. He's a quiet, older cat that needs only a little food, water and a comfortable place on my lap.

On Saturday morning, I tell Aunt Lu I'm moving out.

"You can't leave me, sweetheart," she protests like I knew she would. "We've had such a short time together."

"I've been here over a year, Aunt Lu. That's plenty of time. I need to be more responsible, like Daddy says. I need to be out in the world, on my own."

My aunt says nothing and retreats to her bedroom probably to sulk and smoke a Chesterfield.

Before taking off, I stand outside her door with Sylvester in one arm and a shopping bag of miscellaneous items in the other. "I'm leaving. I'll visit you every week for a game of gin rummy."

She refuses to acknowledge me so I head out the carport door.

I place Sylvester inside my green 1980 Toyota that Aunt Lu gave me when I arrived in Mesa. As I'm about to drive off, she appears at the carport door in her pink-corded bathrobe. I unroll the window. She approaches and places a hundred-dollar bill in my hand and gazes sadly at me like she wants to say something but nothing comes out. She then returns to the house.

Maybe she agrees that I need to learn responsibility. That it's time for me to leave the nest. But she doesn't have the courage to tell me what's on her mind. It's so typical of my family, of my folks; especially Mom. I grew up trying to figure everything out on my own. It was the main lesson my folks taught me through their neglect and indifference. Like it was my job as a little kid to make them feel good about me and never bother them about what was going on in my life—that a bullying brother caused me a great deal of pain.

“We’ll spend Christmas together,” I call after my aunt realizing she’s not like Mom and Daddy. She cares enough about me to let me live with her and get me a job, give me a car, money for nursing school, and maybe even help me understand that I need to be responsible for myself. The truth is, she won’t be around forever. “I love you, Aunt Lu. And I’ll be over Sundays for pinochle.”

As I drive away, I think about how the day is only half over and I’m already emotionally drained. Tonight, I’ll probably be too tired to listen to talk radio or watch TV. Most likely, Sylvester and I will plop down on the hide-a-bed sofa and quickly fall asleep.

Chapter 2: The Night Out

As the months go by, I visit my aunt less and less. It’s too exhausting to drive through Phoenix traffic to Mesa. When we speak on the phone, she asks “When are you moving back home?” Like my situation is temporary. It’s not. For the first time in my life, I feel in charge of myself. Nobody’s watching me, judging me, or making me feel guilty about something. About myself.

In fact, I’m ready to start sharing my evenings with a friend or more importantly, a boyfriend. How I’ll go about this, I’m not quite sure. Sometimes I lie awake at night thinking about a plan of action, like placing an ad in the personal section of the newspaper or joining a dating service. No matter what I come up with, I can’t make myself go through with it. I didn’t realize life on my own could be so unnerving.

I haven’t met any of my neighbors at Quail Run Apartments. No one in the corridor is friendly and the laundry room is creepy. I’ve ended up washing my clothes in the bathtub which makes my hands chapped and cracked. This won’t go over too well with anyone I end up dating!

Then there's another problem. I don't want anyone, especially the landlord, to discover my cat. I'd hate losing my apartment because of Sylvester and I can't return him to the shelter after saving his life. There's something binding between Sylvester and me, the rescued and the rescuer. It's a spiritual thing though I don't consider myself very religious anymore. Daddy, with all his religious talk, strict rules, and lack of love, squeezed that stuff from my spirit.

I almost give up hope about meeting anyone special and consider moving back in with Aunt Lu to pretend I'm not such a loser when her Church lady friends come over and want to play pinochle with me. Then everything changes after the new bookkeeper at work, a redheaded gal named Tiffany Shelton, asks me about Montana in a very friendly way. Evidently, Mr. Diehl mentioned I was from Butte. With a sweet Georgian accent, she invites me to join her for lunch in the cafeteria. I agree although I typically bring my own lunch and keep to myself.

Over sandwiches and coffee, Tiffany starts talking about her ex-boyfriend. "Jeffrey recently called and wants to get back together."

"Someone like you must have a boyfriend all the time," I can't help but say. In the back of my mind, I'm thinking Tiffany can help me meet someone special. Maybe even an ex-boyfriend she no longer wants.

"Since my last breakup, I've been exploring the talent of Phoenix and having a grand ol' time while I'm at it." Tiffany speaks with all the confidence in the world. I really admire her and wish I could be so bold.

"Would you like to go out and meet guys with me," I summon the courage to ask even though, obviously, I'd be second fiddle at any night spot with Tiffany.

Tiffany smiles and holds out a strand of my stringy, shoulder-length dishwater blond hair. “First, we must do something about this. And a splash of blush and lipstick will do wonders for that pretty little face of yours.”

I smile feeling a surge of hope as if Tiffany’s the answer to my prayers. As if God placed her at the pound so she could help me meet someone special. As if she’s my guardian angel of mercy. “Maybe,” I finally think to say. “But I could never be as pretty as you.”

The following Saturday evening I drop by Tiffany’s apartment dressed in jeans and a navy-blue turtleneck sweater. Tiffany opens her door wearing a flashy, lowcut blouse with turquoise sequins.

“Wow. I feel underdressed,” I admit.

My new friend ushers me to a closet filled with more clothes than I’ve owned my entire life. Even more than Tracy ever had. Tiffany tells me to pick a blouse. I shuffle through dozens of blouses, slacks and dresses and feel almost paralyzed. I’ve never seen such an assortment of clothes so properly sorted out into sections and colors. Most of my clothes end up on a chair or the floor.

“Here, try this one.” Tiffany pulls out a pale-pink, long-sleeved blouse with rosebuds on the lapels and breast pockets.

“It’s beautiful,” I say. “But I don’t want to damage it. Sometimes I’m kind of clumsy.”

“Don’t be silly. Try it on.” Tiffany practically dresses me then she sprays herself with *Wind Song* perfume and offers me a dab.

“I have allergies to strong scents,” I say, hoping I don’t offend her. She’s such a nice friend.

As we stand before her vanity mirror, I feel as glamorous as my sister ever was. In fact, I've never felt so pretty in my life. Back in Butte, Kathi Longwood and I didn't primp up or go out on dates or to parties. Like my sister. But now I'm feeling as excited as I did when leaving Butte for the last time.

I start imagining who I might meet. *It won't be love at first sight*. *That's too much like the soaps. And he'll never cheat on me because I'll be his one true love.*

"I bet you're thinking about Mr. Right," Tiffany says as she pins back my hair and applies blush on my face.

"I hope to meet someone nice," I think to say, feeling put on the spot. People usually don't interrupt me when I'm imagining things. It's like I got caught in the act of doing something wrong. Oh well. I trust my new friend. I know she won't let me down.

People are flocking inside Bobby McGee's Conglomeration, Tiffany's favorite nightclub in Phoenix. I show my ID to the bouncer, enter the double doors and rock music practically breaks my ear drums. The large dance floor has a central strobe light that reminds me of Oaks Park Roller Rink where Kathi Longwood and I sometimes went skating on Saturday afternoons. Round and round we skated in circles. Then the deejay said to reverse. Go counterclockwise. Or, he said, only the boys skate. Then, only the girls. Then couples. That's when Kathi and I skated together holding each other's hands in a way that crossed our arms.

The dance floor at Bobby McGees is much more chaotic. Folks aren't moving in the same direction under the strobe light. They're dancing every which way and they're all guys with gals. It makes me dizzy with anticipation.

Tiffany goes straight to the main bar. It's bustling with people so she squeezes up to the counter. I follow behind and stand alongside her.

"I'm having a grasshopper. What'll you have?" Tiffany looks at me.

I hadn't thought out this situation. The only alcohol I've ever had was a beer with Aunt Lu to celebrate my arrival in Mesa. My folks never had alcohol in the house and Kathi and I didn't drink like a lot of other students at Butte High. I can't admit this to my new friend and look even more out-of-place than I feel. "I'll have one of those, too," I say.

"Two green grasshoppers for the ladies," the bartender remarks. He's a handsome man in a white dress shirt, black bow tie and red velvet vest. While he concocts our drinks, the strobe light flashes on his dimpled chin. He winks at me, sets my drink on the counter, folds his thick forearms on the bar and leans toward me. "Are you from around here?" he asks.

I hold the large frosty drink to my lips and feel my face burning up. I sip the drink to cool off. It tastes like the mint saltwater taffy Grandma McGrew makes on the farm outside Missoula and smells a lot like Tom's breath. Maybe he's been chewing mint Certs.

"My friend comes from Butte, Montanny," Tiffany tells the bartender, breaking the tension pulsating in the room. At least for me. "You know, Yellowstone Park."

"Yellowstone, eh?" The bartender looks right at me. "Never been there. And never heard anything about Butte. Must not be a very big town."

I'm tempted to say *Take off the "e," add a "hole" and you'll know where you're at*. It's something Kathi and I came up with in high school and told a few other students for kicks. But it's too childish to share now. "Yellowstone's mostly in Wyoming," I offer. "But it's only about a two-hour drive from where I used to live in Butte. My daddy took us camping there each summer. He liked to fish in the creek that runs through the canyon."

“Name’s Tom.” The bartender’s broad hand firmly shakes mine. His grip hurts a little. I introduce myself but before I say anything else another customer distracts Tom and Tiffany suggests we sit at a small table at the end of the bar.

I notice the table is full of glasses. “Maybe someone’s sitting there. Why don’t we stay here and talk to Tom? He’s a nice guy and seems to like me.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Tiffany declares. “We’re sitting at that table. I’m in the mood for dancing!”

I have no choice but to follow Tiffany. I sit with my back to the bar and sense the strobe flashing on me like I’m the main attraction of this place. Like I’m the conglomeration! The hick from Butthole Montana. I slowly sip my grasshopper to make it last. I hesitate to drink too much and lose control. I don’t have a clue about my tolerance level.

“Girlfriend. You’re milking that puppy.” Tiffany raises her voice above the loud music. “Let’s get you going. Order another drink and join the party!”

When the waitress arrives, I order a second grasshopper and notice Tiffany eying a husky, bearded man sitting alone at the bar. He’s wearing a blue Pendleton-type shirt with the sleeves cut off. When he catches sight of my friend, he nods, puts down his beer and approaches our table.

“Hello, ladies.” The man towers over me and I get a whiff of his deodorant which overpowers Tiffany’s Wind Song and smells like it’s not fully working. He offers us Kool menthol cigarettes. I of course say I don’t smoke but, to my surprise, Tiffany takes one and he lights it for her. I’ve never seen her smoke before.

Tiffany notices my look. “Might as well smoke in a place like this.” She asks the man to join us and he straddles the chair to Tiffany’s left, across from me.

The man tells us he's an independent subcontractor in the sheetrock industry. "Usually, I work for the city of Phoenix," he boasts. "I'm one of those rare Arizonans born in Arizona. Name's Matt Skipper. Friends call me Skip."

The loud speakers begin playing *Tonight* by New Kids on the Block. Tiffany wiggles her shoulders and says to Skip "Let's boogie" and they're off to the dance floor leaving me alone at the table.

I consider returning to the bar and talking to Tom but he's chatting with another gal. I prop up my head and watch Tiffany and Skip dance under the bright spinning strobe and start thinking about an enchanting time I had as a little girl. It was the only thing I liked doing on my family's deer hunting trips. There was this cold stoney creek that ran beside our hunting camp among the scrub pine and Douglas firs of Eastern Oregon. Cattail reeds grew in a marshy area along that stream, with aspen trees and milk thistles. I would pick a cattail about to burst, hold it up like a magic wand and wade down that cold stoney creek as the fluffy seeds flew into the golden aspen trees. I believed my magic was making those aspen leaves rustle like God was sifting his fingers through piles of gold coins. It felt good to make magic happen back then like it seems to be happening now under the rotating light.

"Why aren't you out dancing?"

I look up and see Tiffany fanning her freckled face with her hand. Skip is standing beside her with a thin man in a white T-shirt. He has light-brown hair cut in a shag and looks just old enough to drink alcohol. "This is my partner, Ron Goatcher," Skip says to me.

Ron lightly shakes my hand. He isn't bad-looking although he's no Robert Redford or Cary Grant as my aunt might say. He's kind of skinny in fact.

Janet Jackson's *Escapade* begins playing and Ron asks me to dance.

“Go.” Tiffany gestures and she and Skip return to the dance floor like old pros.

I feel apprehensive. My only experience dancing was during gym class with Kathi Longwood. In fact, that’s how we became best friends. We were both the last girls picked to partner up for dance lessons and we gravitated toward each other after that.

Ron holds out his hand and leads me to the dance floor where the swarm of folks dancing makes me lightheaded. Then the strobe light seems to sprinkle me with its magic, or maybe it’s the memory of that stoney creek where I made my own magic happen. I start dancing to Madonna’s *Keep it Together*. Ron winks at me like he thinks I’m cute. I can’t help but wonder if he’s Mr. Right. But I’d hate to jump to conclusions.

When we return to the table, Ron pulls out my chair and I sit before my grasshopper thinking that this Ron Gotcher may be a little rough around the edges but he seems like a nice enough guy. A gentleman of sorts. Nothing like my daddy ever was. No. Moe Davis was just plain rude at times and onery to Mom and to me**.**

“Skip tells me you’re from Montana.” Ron takes his seat. “Been here long?”

“A little over a year.”

“Like it?”

“Beats the cold winters of Butte.” I want to say I hate Butte because I come from a terrible family but I don’t want to dampen the mood. Besides, if I start talking about Daddy, I might mention Scottie and I’ve never told anyone what my horrible brother did to me. I’m afraid if I do, the person I tell will just ridicule me. I never told Trace, of course. Once or twice, I complained to Mom that Scottie was mean to me but she turned it around and blamed me, or so it seemed. I heard “nobody likes a tattletale” more than once when I was little. And I never told my best friend Kathi. It’s just too embarrassing and shameful.

“I’m sure it does.” Ron snaps me from thoughts about my stupid family. I notice he’s looking directly at me but his mind seems to be drifting around the club like the strobe light. It makes me wonder if he senses I’m keeping a horrible secret from him. My face is burning again; I feel the strobe shining on me, singling me out. Fortunately, Tiffany and Skip return to the table and distract Ron and me.

When the waitress arrives, Tiffany asks for a sparkling water. “I’m driving,” she informs everyone.

“None for me,” I quickly say. I’m starting to feel a little queasy and am afraid I’ve reached my tolerance level.

“Oh, come on,” Ron insists. “You’re not driving.”

“No. But I’m not used to drinking this much.” I start giggling and feel like I’m going to lose control of myself. It’s a horrible feeling and I’m sure thinking about Daddy and my brother hasn’t helped matters.

“I thought so,” Ron says. “A Bud for me and another grasshopper for the lady from Montana.”

“What kind of work do you two lovely ladies do?” Skip asks above the rock music.

“We work at the Maricopa County animal shelter,” Tiffany volunteers. “It’s a government job. I do the bookkeeping.”

“Bookkeeper!” Skip exclaims. “Why don’t you come work for me?”

“If the price is right,” Tiffany says.

“Honey, my price is always right.”

I sit back. Now my stomach is really doing loops because I'm dreading that Tiffany will blurt out that I help put down animals or that I shovel shit. I'm such an idiot. Why didn't I warn her not to reveal these delicate matters?

"And you?" Skip looks at me and lights himself another Kool.

The menthol and Skip's body odor are making my thoughts freeze. I can't figure out what to say.

Tiffany seems to sense something's going on with me. "Lucy's a certified assistant veterinarian. She helps take care of the animals."

I smile as best I can. Tiffany said the perfect thing—something I never thought about saying. She's such a good friend.

"Veterinarian?" Skip sounds astonished. "Hear that, Ron? Little Lucy here's a veterinarian."

"Ron takes a swig of his Bud. "I like animals. Had a dog right after we moved to Phoenix. Came from the pound. Truck hit it a few years after we moved. Just left it on the road all bloody."

He laughs, confusing me about what's going on in his head. Just like Scottie's double talk. Telling me one thing then twisting it around and calling me terrible names. Making me feel stupid or blaming me for something I didn't do. All of a sudden, my stomach gurgles. "I have to pee." I abruptly stand, nearly knocking over Ron's beer. I make it to the toilet stall in time to lose the grasshoppers in my stomach plus the burger I gulped down for supper.

"You all right in there?" I hear a woman's voice.

I puke some more.

"Don't feel bad, honey. I've been there, too. Many times."

I pull myself up and wipe my chin and the toilet seat. To my horror, grasshopper vomit has spotted Tiffany's beautiful pink blouse right on the rosebuds. At the sink, I struggle to wipe it off with a paper towel but the rosebuds bleed and the stain won't come out. I'm making everything worse. On my way back to the table, I'm hoping no one notices the stains or realizes that I've been sick.

Ron is alone at the table waiting for me. "Are you okay?" He blows menthol smoke my way. "You look sick."

"No, I'm fine." My stomach is grimacing like it does when I'm watching the vet put down a poor animal. Like it did whenever Scottie came around to do ugly things no boy should ever do to his little sister.

"I ordered you a fresh drink." Ron points to a tall frosty grasshopper before my seat.

I stare at the drops of moisture sliding down the glass, drip by drip. "I've got to go," I say. "Got to work early tomorrow."

"Guess those animals don't take the weekend off." Ron laughs. "Say, I'll take you home, sweetie."

"No!"

Ron stands and puts his arm over my shoulders. "You're in no condition to drive," he whispers with his stale, menthol breath on my neck.

I shudder. Scottie used to do this to me. Clutch his arm around me to trap me. I wiggle from Ron, inch onto the dance floor and pull Tiffany from her dance.

"What is it?" She sounds annoyed. I hardly care. I feel sick to my stomach and can barely breathe in this stuffy conglomeration.

“I’ve got to go!” I yell over the music. Skip stares at me like I’m a psycho and returns to the table where Ron Gotcher is drinking his beer.

“Girl, don’t be a pain,” Tiffany says over the clamor. “The evening’s just getting started.”

“I’m not feeling very good,” I practically scream.

“Too many grasshoppers?” Tiffany touches my chin. “Have Ron take you home.”

“Please, Tiffany.” I feel like a deer cornered in the ravine. Like a little girl trapped in the basement dungeon with a monster. “I’m afraid of what might happen if Ron takes me home. I don’t even know him! Maybe I’ll call a taxi.”

“Never mind, kiddo. I’ll take you home.”

“I’m sorry, Tiffany,” is all I can think of saying. I’m trying as hard as I can to keep it together in front of my new sophisticated friend. But I’m claustrophobic and at the very edge of losing it or throwing up again, one or the other, or both.

I follow Tiffany back to the table and nod goodbye to Skip and Ron. They don’t seem to care about my leaving. I make it outside Bobby McGee’s without barfing or acting like I’m out of my mind. Maybe because I’m going to my little apartment where Sylvester is eagerly waiting for me. I can already feel his head nudges and hear his purr.

Chapter 3: The Boyfriend

Throughout the rest of the weekend my nausea never subsides but I manage to drink hot tea with lemon, listen to the radio and watch a little TV. When I close my eyes I see pale-green grasshoppers hopping from my head down to my wincing stomach.

Early Sunday morning Lucinda calls and invites me over for cards after church. I claim to have work at the shelter. If my aunt knew I wasn't feeling well she'd be over in minutes and Sylvester is all the comfort I want.

Monday morning, I take a taxi to Tiffany's apartment to retrieve my car. This takes longer than I anticipate and I arrive at work ten minutes late.

"Morning dear," Tiffany says when I enter the front office. "Feeling better?"

Tiffany hadn't called me over the weekend so I assumed my new friend was angry about my making her leave the club early. But she is cheerful and friendly which is a tremendous relief. I was dreading the notion of losing the one good friend I've made in Arizona.

"Thanks, Tiffany," I say as I stop by the front counter. "I'm much better today. Guess I'm not used to drinking grasshoppers. Sorry I made you leave so early."

"You never mind, girlfriend." Tiffany pauses from her work. "I went back and had a grand 'ol time. Danced 'til the joint closed. Skip's a great guy. We really hit it off. In fact, I'm seeing him tonight."

"I'm glad," I reply, then remember the blouse Tiffany lent me. I had tried scrubbing it but the rosebuds bled even more and the vomit stain won't come out. All my efforts ruined the material. "About your blouse."

"Oh, that." Tiffany gestures with a friendly wave then examines her neatly polished nails. "Keep it, if you like."

"Oh? I do like it. But let me buy it from you."

"Of course not! It's yours. Ron thought it looked great on you."

I smile but am reluctant to ask what Ron did for the rest of the evening. I assume he went back to dancing with the other single gals in the club.

“Ron wants to see you again,” Tiffany continues. “I was going to give him your number.”

“No—you didn’t!” I gasp, thinking to myself that I need more time to ponder all these changes in my life before I suddenly leap into a relationship. And besides, I’m not sure about this Ron Goatcher fellow.

“Don’t worry, kiddo. I told him I’d ask you first.”

“I really don’t think he liked me.” I sit beside Tiffany’s desk which is something I never do because I don’t like to chat needlessly and distract people from their work. However, I can’t help myself now. I’m curious about Ron Goatcher.

“He told me he likes you after you left,” Tiffany insists.

“I didn’t get that feeling. I was too sick from the drinks.”

“You know guys. They don’t like to come off too strong. I prodded it from him. Hey, maybe this weekend we can all go out together. You, me, Skip and Ron.”

“It’s my weekend shift, remember?” I play with a paper clip on Tiffany’s desk and think *I do want to go out again. And Ron did show an interest in my work with animals.*

“Tell you what,” Tiffany says. “I promised Skip I’d make him my famous chili rellenos with chicken fajitas. Let’s have a dinner party the next day you’re off.” She grins, coaxing me to agree. “After dinner, I don’t know. Maybe we’ll watch a video or play cards. You said you playing gin rummy.”

I feel put on the spot and almost say that I’ll think about it but don’t want my good-natured friend to grow impatient. “Sure, I could bring ambrosia or a tossed green salad. I’m off next Monday and Tuesday.”

“It’s settled then. I’ll let you know what the guys say.”

I get up and head for the back room to talk with the veterinarian about my day's work. The job suddenly disgusts me and having been sick from grasshoppers doesn't help.

For the rest of the week I think about Ron Goatcher, a man I barely know. I have trouble visualizing his face although I remember his hairy hands and the gold ring on his pinkie finger. Then I recall an *Oprah* episode called "Love at First Sight." This hadn't happened between me and Ron. Maybe it will at second sight, I try to convince myself.

The week continues to be difficult. The *Jeffers Hour* isn't very interesting. One program is about tax evasion, another is about "soft" addictions to things like exercising, reading, or watching TV, rather than hard-core addictions such as to drugs, pornography, gambling and alcohol. Then my mother unexpectedly calls and asks whether I've met anyone special at my aunt's church. I don't tell her I stopped attending church when I moved out of Lucinda's house and it seems my aunt hasn't mentioned this to my mother as well. Bethany Church is too far away and I work at least one weekend a month. Besides, church serves no purpose in my life, not anymore. It doesn't make me feel closer to God and I've never met anyone at church except for Aunt Lu's elderly friends and they're hardly special.

"No, I haven't met anyone, Mom," I say, wondering what my folks would think about my getting drunk at Bobby McGee's.

The following Monday night, I arrive at Tiffany's apartment dressed in jeans and a beige, long-sleeved T-shirt. I have on the lipstick and mascara I purchased earlier that day, and a dab of *Wind Song* perfume behind each ear. I bring a tossed green salad because it goes better with Mexican food than ambrosia.

While I help Tiffany prepare the fajitas, the radio is playing ‘60s and ‘70s rock music—The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, Chicago, and Queen’s *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

“I love Queen. Especially this song,” Tiffany tells me as she stirs a pan sizzling with chicken strips.

“Do you ever listen to talk radio?” I hand Tiffany diced onions and peppers which she adds to her Mexican dish. The spicy appetizing aroma fills the apartment.

“No, never,” Tiffany replies. “I like music, not some stick-in-the-mud rambling off his opinion.”

“Well, you should try listening to the *Jeffers Hour*. He’s great.”

Someone knocks at the front door.

“Must be Ron. Skip would come right in.” Tiffany heads to answer the door.

I suddenly feel anxious, as if I’m meeting this man for the first time all over again.

“Hey, there.” Ron enters the kitchen with a case of Schlitz malt liquor. He’s wearing jeans and a white T-shirt. He’s neatly combed his hair but still has a few days growth on his face. “Can’t wait to eat.” He sets the beer on the counter then approaches me, holds up my chin, and kisses me on the lips. His breath smells of beer.

I’m astonished but somewhat relieved by his brash behavior. I don’t need to worry about what to say.

While Tiffany continues to cook, Ron opens beers for himself and me. Tiffany drinks wine. “Here’s to us.” He toasts and takes a drink.

I sip my beer but vow to myself to go easy on the alcohol.

“What’s the vet been up to?” Ron asks me.

“Not too much.” I stumble for something else to say and remember that Ron believes I’m an assistant veterinarian which I am in a sense although my job is much more complicated and I’m worried about becoming confused if he forces me to discuss it. In no way do I want to reveal the downing of unwanted animals. My job is too serious a topic for my first real date with Ron.

To my relief, Skip enters the apartment, shouts out his greeting, and turns on the TV to watch the NBA playoffs between the Phoenix Suns and the Portland Trail Blazers.

“Typical guys,” Tiffany remarks as she and I place food on the table behind the sofa in the front room. “I forgot to tell you about the game. Guys love watching sports!”

“That’s all right,” I say although I’ve never been interested in sports because of Daddy’s restrictions, but since I’ve been living on my own, I’ve learned to like a lot of new things, such as rock music, which is something Daddy would never allow in the house. And tonight, I’m feeling optimistic.

During dinner the TV is blaring and little conversation occurs except during commercials. When Ron hands me another can of Schlitz, I’m reluctant to refuse because I don’t want to be some kind of party pooper. I want to fit in. Besides, the strong beer relaxes me more than the grasshoppers did and I even begin to enjoy the playoffs especially when noticing how thrilled Ron is each time the Suns make a basket. He just might be someone I could love.

After dinner, Tiffany snuggles on the sofa with Skip. Ron sits on the floor against an armchair and motions me to sit beside him. I hesitate but take my beer and sit at his side like I’m an old pro at doing this.

“Go easy, girl,” Ron teases when I swallow some beer. “Don’t want you puking.”

During a commercial break he suddenly grabs me in a strong embrace and kisses me intensely, scratching me with his rough face and causing some of my Schlitz to spill. But no one

notices. When the game resumes, his attention goes back to watching the playoffs. Near the game's end the Suns are twenty points ahead and I wiggle free from Ron to use the toilet.

When I return only Ron is in the room and he's sprawled out on the sofa. I now face another situation—being alone with a man who obviously has sex on his mind. I don't know what he expects from me and I start thinking about how my horrible brother touched me and made me feel cheap and dirty. Filthy. Nasty. I try to not think such ugly, disturbing thoughts but they nevertheless take hold of me.

"Where's Tiffany?" I ask.

Ron gestures to the bedroom. "Guess we won't be seeing them two for the rest of the night." He gets up and turns off the TV. "The game's as good as over," he says and takes my hand and leads me to the sofa. "Come on, sweetheart. Let's talk."

He briskly pulls me next to him and pecks my neck with kisses. "Umm, you smell good." He pulls my shirt from my pants.

"Stop it!" I push him away. I want something to happen, to significantly change my life, but this man is moving too fast and he scares me and I can't stop thinking about my brother.

"What's wrong, sugar? Don't you like me? Tiffany said you were crazy about me."

He kisses me and reaches under my T-shirt to grope my small breasts.

"No. I'm not ready for this." I pull away and stand from the couch, unsure of what to do next. Even my strict daddy never laid a hand on me. He never touched me inappropriately. No one ever has except for Scottie who now makes me feel repulsed and afraid of what sex is all about. I'm disgusted with myself and with Ron Goatcher.

Ron sits up and stares at me for a long, intense moment. "What the fuck do you want me to do?" His voice is hateful.

“Tiffany!” I yell, suddenly feeling afraid of Ron, like there’s no telling what this out-of-control man might do. “I’m leaving!” I turn to dash out the door.

“Fine. Go!” Ron shouts.

Tiffany appears from her room dressed in a black silk bathrobe and white fuzzy slippers. “What’s going on?” She looks at Ron.

“I’m out of here.” Ron purposely brushes past me as he’s leaving.

When I start crying, Tiffany says, “Go home, kiddo. Sleep it off. Tomorrow you’ll forget all about this, as if nothing’s happened.”

I grab my purse and head out the door but stand in the apartment hallway for ten minutes to make sure Ron isn’t lingering in the parking lot.

May 1990

“Friendships shattered by romance—next on *Donahue*!” the TV announces.

I’m lounging on my sofa bed and waiting for the program to start while Sylvester is kneading my lap. *How true*, I think to myself and reflect on the friendship I once had with Tiffany Shelton. When I left Tiffany’s apartment over a month ago I felt betrayed, as if Tiffany, Ron, and Skip had set me up to make a sport out of me because of my inexperience. And Tiffany is the worst culprit of all because she was supposed to be my friend and she masterminded the whole thing.

The incident keeps bringing back unpleasant memories from my childhood. It isn’t just Ron’s aggressiveness that distresses me. Rather, it’s my own inabilities, my not knowing how to act or what to do, that make me feel like the *stupid little clown* that my brother used to call me.

About a week after the incident Tiffany made a sort of apology. “Look, girl,” she said from her desk when I scampered by trying to avoid her glance. “Let bygones be bygones. I mean, we have to work together, so we should at least be on speaking terms.”

I uttered “sure” and continued on my way while thinking about what my sister insinuated when I was ten. Tracy and I had been in our shared bedroom. I was watching her primp up for a special date. “I hope to start dating, too, when I’m in high school,” I remember telling her. But instead of encouraging me, Tracy paused from applying her mascara and said, “One day, little sister, I’m sure the right man will come along for you. But don’t expect that to happen until much later in your life. Probably when you’re middle-aged.”

Tracy had really crushed my spirit back then. And now, as *Donahue* begins his show, I think that Tracy was probably right. I doubt I’ll ever find someone special to love before I’m in my forties. Maybe even in my fifties. Like the stupid game we played in kindergarten, I’ll be the one who ends up with the old maid card.

On Monday morning, June 14th, I wake up dreaming I was married to Robert Redford in my favorite movie during childhood *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. The dream cheers me up and I decide to return to Bobby McGee’s on my own to at least talk to Tom the bartender. He was a genuinely nice guy who seemed to like me and I remember him being as handsome as Robert Redford.

To prepare for an evening on the town, I spend the day shopping at Desert Sky Mall. At a Quick Cuts beauty salon, I have my hair cut and permed, an idea that’s been percolating in my mind since I went to the nightclub with Tiffany Shelton. But I’m hesitant when it comes to making drastic changes. My hair has always been shoulder-length and never permed.

At first, I'm not so sure I like the new style but the beautician assures me that it suits the roundness of my face which makes me even more hopeful for my evening out.

I then shop for a new blouse like the one I borrowed from Tiffany which I've wadded up and tossed in the back of my closet because I don't want to throw it away. Instead of a blouse, I end up buying a fuchsia colored, form-fitting mini-dress with sequins. The store clerk says I look fabulous in it which makes me even more confident and prepared to paint the town red. Or maybe fuchsia.

By six o'clock in the evening, I leave my studio in my new dress, new makeup, *Nights in White Satin* perfume and my silver charm bracelet which Charlie gave me on my sixteenth birthday. I rarely wear this bracelet or any jewelry for that matter, but this is the only piece of jewelry I own. Tonight, I'm glad I have it, although I'm not necessarily sentimental about it. Or about anything that reminds me of my childhood family. They all disappointed me one way or another. Of course, Scottie was the worst of them all but I can never forget how Charlie, the brother I looked up to, kicked me to the curb. No. If I were sentimental about this bracelet, it would be loaded with charms. But it only has a sweet sixteen charm from Charlie, a cross from my folks, and a colorful Arizona sunset flag charm that Aunt Lucinda gave me on my first birthday after I moved in with her.

At Bobby McGee's I'm disappointed to find a woman with short black hair is tending the bar instead of Tom. "Tom Sanderson quit a few weeks ago," she says as she pours my glass of house wine. She then takes my order for a shrimp scampi dinner.

Because it's a weekday the nightclub is less noisy and smoky and much more to my liking. A few single women are chatting at the bar and a few couples are dancing to *Dixieland*

Delight, music which is also more to my liking. I sit back, sip my wine, and enjoy being out on the town.

After the bartender brings my dinner and I'm nibbling on a shrimp, a young man in a light blue polo shirt and khaki slacks sits at the bar a few stools away from me. He's average height and has shaggy dark-brown hair and a dark mustache flapping over his lip. He orders a beer, looks at me and nods, but says nothing, as if something preoccupies his mind.

"Are you from around here?" I'm surprised by my boldness but it feels good. Raindrops aren't falling on my head tonight.

"Me?" The man points to himself. "Actually, I'm from Mesquite, Texas but I've been here for a few months. How about you?" He moves to the stool beside me. "Are you from Phoenix?"

"Hardly, but I've lived here a while. I love Arizona. The weather, that is. I'm originally from Butte, Montana where it's cold and snowy all winter long."

"Big sky country and all that," the man says with a slight smirk. I like him already.

"That's right." I laugh, astonished at how easy it is to talk to him.

"Can I buy you a drink?" he asks. "I think that's what I'm supposed to say next. Anyway, you're very sexy in that dress, if you don't mind my saying."

I smile, feeling energized by his flattery and pleased that I chose the perfect outfit for my night out. Things are going far beyond all my hopes and expectations.

"I don't usually come to clubs," the stranger says. "But I happened to be in the neighborhood visiting my mother."

"That's sweet," I say, picturing myself as Tiffany Shelton which makes talking to this man even easier. I feel pretty, confident, and in charge. It's like I admire myself.

“Mother’s why I’m out here.” The man sips his beer. “She moved here six years ago to cure her asthma. But it’s gotten worse. Now she barely has enough money from dad’s pension to cover the cost of her nursing home. I’m her only child. My older brother died in a car crash several years ago.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. But you’re a good son to help your mother.” I think about Charlie, the only Davis child who stayed in Butte to look after our parents and the only sibling who sends me cards for my birthday and Christmas.

“I’m Brian Potthoff, by the way.” The stranger holds out his hand and lightly shakes mine, jingling my charm bracelet in the process. “I’m a painter. An artist,” he continues. “So, I don’t always have an income to help out my poor mother.”

“What do you paint?” I’m intrigued to be meeting an artist.

“Mostly desert landscapes for hospital lobbies. It’s a job. What I really like to paint are nudes in the abstract.”

“Now that sounds like a line if I ever heard one,” I tease. It suddenly strikes me that this man beside me might be the one. I have this affectionate feeling inside me. Like a sentimental feeling I’ve never had. Am I experiencing love at first sight? I wonder. The notion is invigorating although somewhat frightening. I’d hate to be wrong.

“There’s nothing quite so beautiful as the curve of a woman’s waist or the arch in the sole of her foot.” Brian smiles, as if sizing up my reaction. “And you? Come here often?”

I grin and sip my wine. “Not really,” I say. “I felt like going out tonight and listening to music. It’s my birthday.” I lie, deciding on the spot that I need a good reason for celebrating.

“No kidding? You shouldn’t be alone. Not someone as fine as you.”

My inside grin widens. “Oh, I’m not alone. I mean, well, you’re here, too.”

Brian laughs and toasts to my birthday. “How old are you?” he asks.

“Hey, you know a woman doesn’t reveal her age.”

“You’re right. What do you do otherwise, when not listening to music on your birthday?”

Without hesitation I answer, “I’m a certified assistant veterinarian for the Maricopa County animal shelter near Durango.”

“Is that right? Impressive. You must like animals.”

“Oh, I do. But I’m hoping to be a pediatric nurse one day and work with children. I’m thinking about registering for classes next fall.”

“Let’s try our hand on the dance floor. What do you say?”

I wasn’t even thinking about dancing because I’ve been so involved with just talking to Brian Potthoff. But the idea enchants me like I’ve waved my cattail wand of feathery ferry dust and magic is happening.

We dance the next several dances until I practically beg to sit at a table. Once seated, we talk for about an hour and then Brian unexpectedly apologizes and says he has to leave.

“Me too,” I say, although I’m sorry the evening is ending so soon. I really like Brian. He’s polite and far more attentive to me than Ron Goatcher who turned out to be an obvious creep.

Brian walks me outside into the warm evening air of Phoenix. When I reach for the door handle of my green Toyota, he rests his hand on mine. I shudder from his touch and turn toward him while trying to conceal my nervousness. Gently, he kisses me. His mustache tickles but his moist lips taste sweet and feel cool. I wish he would gather me up and carry me off into an Arizona sunset. Or sunrise. Like the one on the Arizona flag. Maybe the charm on my bracelet is what’s making this magic happen.

“I hope you don’t mind,” Brian says after ending his kiss. “I couldn’t help myself. I’ve been feeling rather low lately and you’ve been like an angel of mercy tonight. I needed to meet someone like you.”

“Me too,” I quickly admit, stunned by the romance in the air, by the bond we seem to be sharing. “I woke up this morning and decided not to let any more raindrops defeat me! And now I’ve met you.”

Brian kisses me again and we embrace. “Hey, Lucy,” he says. “Do you want to come to my apartment tonight? Well, it’s not really my place. I’m apartment-sitting for an old friend who went to New York for the summer.”

“I thought you had something to do,” I whisper, trembling from the tantalizing moment.

“I do and it’s to be with you on your birthday, if you want it that way.”

I say nothing as the evening folds me in Brian’s arms and the distant noise from I-17 dwindles away.

Chapter 4: The Cat

Because Brian has no car, I drive him from Bobby McGee’s to where he stays in a studio even less furnished than mine. It has only a twin bed—a cot really, a card table, and a folding chair. On the walls are several paintings and sketches of nude women which Brian proudly points out as examples of his work.

At first, I’m apprehensive about making love because of what Scottie did to me, something that’s too personal to ever reveal to anyone, especially my first lover. But Brian puts me at ease with his cool and relaxed manner, and when I’m lying in his arms, I feel like the

person I've wanted to be for a very long time. Maybe all my life. I'm a somebody now. And not an insignificant nobody no better than a piece of trash, like Scottie always made me feel.

By five AM, however, I wake up with this urge to return to the seclusion of my studio. It's as if I'm afraid to linger too long in such a good thing or I'll end up making it go away. I wake Brian and claim I must go home to feed my cat. He groggily asks me to stay until a reasonable hour but I insist on leaving. I'm too uncomfortable all of a sudden. It's difficult to explain except I don't feel quite right about myself in the situation.

Back at my studio, I wait to hear from Brian but he doesn't call me even though I left my phone number on a note beside his bed. I don't remember seeing a phone in his studio but he could use a pay phone to call me. Then I begin blaming myself. Of course, he'll never call me. No one leaves at five in the morning except on one-night stands. But it wasn't a one-night stand! My mind insists. My relationship with Brian Potthoff is fate. We're meant to be together.

Days go by and Brian never calls me. Every night I think about melting in his arms and tears fill my eyes because I'll never again meet someone so special. I consider returning to Bobby McGee's in the hopes Brian will be there, or showing up at his apartment just to say hello. But I can't summon the courage to go through with such plans. Brian is supposed to call me first. He's the man. I can't force a relationship although I'm certain Brian liked me as much as I liked him. We had a deep connection during our night together. I felt it! I believe we're soulmates, that he will become the love of my life.

To help with my insomnia and anxiety, I begin nipping phenobarbital sodium crystals from the medicine cabinet in the shelter's examination room—the same substance that the Vet uses to down unwanted animals. The Vet told me all about the drug and explained that in small doses it helps with anxiety. Before bed each night, I take a small dose with a glass of warm milk.

If nothing else, the drug helps my mind stop racing with thoughts that I've totally blown it with Brian like a complete knucklehead.

At the animal shelter one morning, about a week after I slept with Brian, I'm in the back room scrubbing down the examination table when Tiffany appears at the double metal doors. "Hey girlfriend," she warmly says like we never had any kind of falling out. "Looks like you've been busy. There's some guy here to see you. A Mr. Brian Potthoff." She emphasizes the last name as if Brian is some kind of British royal.

"Thanks Tiffany," I say, now grateful that my former friend doesn't resent me. "Tell him I'll be out in a minute?"

"Sure thing, babes." Tiffany leaves me standing at the metal table. I'm overjoyed that Brian didn't forget about me after all. But I'm cautious. I don't want to come off as being too hasty and make another mistake like I did when I left his studio at five in the morning. And besides, he didn't call me when he could have.

I quickly comb my hair and apply lipstick and a dab of *Wind Song* perfume, to cover traces of the disinfectant penetrating the lab room. It's an unpleasant odor that, along with animal urine and feces, never escapes the compound.

In the front waiting area, Brian is at the counter talking to Tiffany like a casual guy, like I remember him. In fact, he's wearing the same blue polo shirt outside his khaki slacks.

When Brian sees me, he warmly grins. I notice he's neatly trimmed his moustache and I shiver. *This is true love,* I tell myself. *Not a one-night stand.*

"Hi Lucy," Brian says. "You left this at my place." He holds up my silver charm bracelet.

I had forgotten about the stupid thing because I'm not used to wearing it and my mind was preoccupied with wondering if he'd call me or not. I take the bracelet and immediately notice a new charm attached to it—a painter's easel with glass stones representing dabs of paint. "What's this?" I ask, smiling at Brian.

"A little something for you to remember me by. It's a belated birthday gift." Brian stands before me with a playful grin. He's enjoying my surprise.

"For me?" I ask, recalling that I had lied about it being my birthday which is in October. Brian's token of himself warms my heart. I feel like he's just given me a diamond engagement ring. I slip on the bracelet without even thinking to thank him.

"Do you like it?" he asks as he helps me with the clasp.

"Oh, God. I love it. I'll never take it off!"

"Read the back of the charm," Brian says.

I hold up my wrist and read *To Lucy, Love Brian* then I notice Tiffany's teasing glance and suggest to Brian we go outside and get some fresh air.

In the heat of late morning, we sit beside the building at a picnic table under an awning with a misting system. Brian takes my hand and the bracelet jingles and shimmers in the spray. "I've missed you," he says.

"I was afraid I'd never see you again," I admit, immediately feeling stupid. He'll think I'm too anxious, too dependent on him already. I should act like he's nothing out of the ordinary in my life. At the same time, I've never felt such relief. He's the first boyfriend I've ever had.

"I wanted to see you again but I don't have a phone. Anyway, here I am."

"I'm glad." I gaze in his eyes. He has a calm look about him, an inviting look. In a way, he looks like how I imagine Jeff Jeffers' face—reassuring, suave—although Brian's voice lacks

the deep quality of Jeffers'. I ask Brian what he's been doing the past week and he admits he's been looking for work.

"Art projects?" I ask while admiring my new charm of an artist's easel.

"Not necessarily," he says. "I need any job so I can keep a roof over my mother's head and food in my belly."

"Oh?" I recall Brian's meager apartment. The man doesn't have much to offer in the way of possessions. But that doesn't bother me. I come from a poor background and as a child I rarely received what I truly wanted during holidays and birthdays. In fact, I always got crappy gifts so unlike Tracy who seemed to get whatever she asked for.

I turn to Brian and smile to shake my head clear of my childhood family. I now have a new one. I have Brian to think about and he has a widowed mother to take care of. "At least you follow your dream of being an artist," I say feeling proud I've come up with such a positive thing to say. It must be the magic of my new charm from my new boyfriend. "Most people just talk about being this or that until they die. But they never do anything about it."

"I do my best," Brian says. His mood is different now. It's as if he's feeling quite low and needs my emotional support. Maybe he doesn't have any friends to confide in. I can certainly relate to that. Perhaps he's a starving artist and he's hungry.

"Hey, can you stick around for lunch?" I ask. I feel bad for him, yet sensitive. A man can't stand to be humbled. "We can have lunch now, if you like," I add, grateful I won't be helping to put down any animal today. The procedure always makes me melancholy no matter how hard I try to adjust to the task. Someday I may talk to Brian about what I actually do. But not today. He seems to be the one who needs a sympathetic ear from a friend.

"Sure, I'm game for lunch. But I warn you, I'm pretty low on cash."

“This is my territory. My treat,” I quickly say.

I take him to a nearby Burger King where we order cheeseburgers and romanticize about the night we spent together.

“My pillow still smells of your sweet scent,” he tells me as he holds my hand on the table between us, the hand with the silver charm bracelet. He seems to be admiring it.

“*Nights in White Satin* or *Wind Song*?” I ask, but Brian doesn’t answer. Perhaps he doesn’t know about ladies’ perfumes.

I glance at my watch on the other wrist and notice I’m taking more time off work than I should but it’s difficult to end my visit with Brian. Still, Mr. Diehl doesn’t take kindly to tardiness or long lunches. And since my aunt always asks Mr. Diehl about me whenever she runs into him at Bethany Church, I feel pressured to work hard. I don’t want to disappoint Lucinda.

“Brian. I’m really having a good time but I’ve got to get back to work. Isn’t that a fine pickle?” I use an expression daddy often said when he missed the kill shot and the deer got away. *“What a fine pickle that was,”* he’d say when recounting his story to the other hunters at camp.

“Look Brian, you could come over to my place tonight, if you like,” I don’t want to flub it up again by not arranging our next meeting. “I’m a pretty good cook,” I lie. The fact is I rarely cook and typically eat fast food burgers or frozen or instant meals. But with Brian, I picture whipping up fish sticks with garlic toast and a tossed salad served with chilled Chablis. “I’ll come get you,” I add, remembering Brian doesn’t have a car.

“No, no,” Brian insists. “Just give me your address and I’ll be there at seven. Now get back to your job and don’t keep those animals waiting! I’ll see you tonight.” He then gives me a moist kiss and hurries off to the nearest bus stop.

That evening, Brian doesn't arrive at my apartment until nine o'clock when I'm putting away dinner after deciding he isn't showing up after all. But since bus service in Phoenix is rotten, I quickly forgive him. Besides, I'm so relieved to see him that I haven't an ounce of disappointment in me. "Next time," I tell him, "I *will* pick you up."

Brian spends the night with me and when I head for work the next day, I invite him to remain at my place while picturing how nice it will be when both Brian and Sylvester greet me at the door when I return home. Brian agrees but insists he'll be looking for work while I'm away, so I give him an extra key to my apartment. "Come and go as you like," I say as I leave for work.

When I arrive home that evening Sylvester doesn't greet me at the door like he always does and Brian is slumped on the sofa watching the small black and white TV on the table before him. I notice my cat hiding beside the refrigerator and grow concerned. But after I set my things on the kitchen counter Sylvester approaches me. He's just nervous with strangers, I figure. I affectionately pick him up and then warmly greet Brian who gets up to kiss me. It's so sweet. I feel like I've fashioned myself a real home and family.

"I'm glad to see you're here." I tightly hug Brian. "How was the job hunting?" I ask, believing Brian went out for a while and then came back.

"Didn't go. Got up too late. A night with you is hard on a man." He caresses my neck with kisses. I notice his breath smells of beer but am not too concerned. It's just something men do, I figure.

I understand the problem and say, "Look, Brian, you can use my car if it'll help. I can take the bus."

"Thanks babe," he says. "I know I'll find a job. I had a lead on a mural project for the city which I'll bid for after I decide on a price."

“That’s wonderful. It’s settled. We’ll go to your apartment and pick up your things. Tonight, if you like.” Suddenly, I realize I’m being too pushy so I quickly add, “Or, if you’re under an obligation to apartment sit, I could pick you up on my way to work. You could then drop me off and use my car.”

“No problem. I’ll just call the dude and turn in my resignation.” Brian laughs and leaves me to wonder what’s so funny about what he just said.

By the weekend, Brian moves in and tells me he needs some money to make payments to his mother’s nursing home so they won’t throw her onto the street. “Her pension barely covers her basic needs let alone the rent,” Brian says. “And this is the third nursing home I’ve put her in.”

I don’t hesitate to give Brian money from my checking account. I admire his concern for his mother and have never seen such dedication in a man. Not even Charlie demonstrated this kind of devotion and Charlie is the one person I admired most until Brian came along. Brian’s difficulty in finding suitable work also moves me. It isn’t easy for an artist to make money, I’m sure, and I respect him for sticking to his drive. I try comforting him, but like any man, Brian has his pride. He’s down on his luck now but one day, with my support, he’ll rise to great heights and become a famous artist. I just know it. Feel it deep in my bones.

As the days go by, I relish being with Brian and he quickly becomes a part of my life. I love watching TV with him, with Sylvester on my lap, and I love when he tenderly holds me after we make love. Sometimes, when I return home from work, Brian surprises me with a dinner of pork and beans or SpaghettiOs and garlic bread. I never dreamed I could be this happy and

feel this fulfilled. When I'm with Brian the haunting memories of what happened to me as a child disappear. Poof! Gone. Up in smoke. Brian is kind to me, not cruel, not rude and mean and I don't feel guilty anymore about my sexuality. About my being a stupid little girl. Which I'm not anyway. Not anymore. And his smoking doesn't even bother me mostly because he's so down on his luck. I'd hate to take anything away from him.

The time finally arrives, however, when the chubby landlord of Quail Run Apartments, Layton Howard, confronts me about Brian moving in unannounced. Concerned that Layton will discover Sylvester, I offer to pay more rent. Layton agrees to take cash on the side plus an additional deposit which nearly drains my checking account for the month. But I manage to squeeze by without withdrawing from my savings. So far, I've saved over three-thousand dollars from my job plus the money Lucinda gave me specifically for my nursing school tuition. I promised my aunt and myself that I wouldn't touch this money for anything else.

From July through September, when the monsoons plague Phoenix, I take the bus to work so Brian can use my car to look for a job and visit his mother. I help him out with money for gas, cigarettes, and food. I assume everything's working out routinely. Until one morning.

I'm about to leave for work when Brian says, "Look Lucy Lu, I could use some extra money while I'm unemployed. I'd like to give my mom some of the things she needs that her nursing home doesn't provide. She likes chocolates and a pinch of peach Schnapps. I'm her only son and right now I don't have a job. How do you think that makes me feel?"

"Why don't you bring her to the apartment and let me meet her?" I ask, although I don't push the matter because in truth, I'm afraid Brian might ask the old woman to move in with us and I want to be alone with my boyfriend.

Brian gives me a strange look, one I've never seen before, then he grins and says, "I'll take you to meet her after we marry. My mother doesn't need to know I'm out of work and living with a girlfriend. She's got enough problems of her own without my adding to them. Being old, sick, and poor isn't easy."

"Marry?" I ask with surprise. Until now we haven't discussed marriage although I've been thinking about it since my first night with Brian. I haven't broached the subject because I don't want to ruin the way things are going between us. I've already decided to use my savings for a wedding and honeymoon instead of nursing school, despite my promise to Aunt Lu. Since Brian entered my life, my dream of being a pediatric nurse has drastically dwindled. Now I want to honeymoon in Hawaii, a place I've longed to see ever since my fourth-grade teacher gave a slide show about the tropical island paradise. It was such a stark contrast to boring, landlocked, snowbound Buttehole Montana.

"We'll talk about it after you get home tonight," Brian says. "Now get going if you want to catch the bus. Don't keep those puppies waiting."

I stand before the door for a moment to make sure my cat doesn't dash out into the hall. "Okay," I say to Brian. "I accept your proposal. But I'm eager to meet your mother and show her how perfect I am for her son."

All day at work I daydream about becoming Mrs. Brian Pottoff but when I return to the studio that evening and bring up the subject of marriage, Brian tells me he doesn't want to discuss it at the moment. He's obviously not in the same good mood that he was in that morning. He's distant, which is a new thing, but I let it go. I don't want to pressure him or make his mood worse.

The next morning, Brian remains in bed and tells me to take the car. “Look honey,” he says groggily. “Just go. It’s too goddamn hot and humid to look for work today.”

“But sweetheart, you need a job and to visit your mom. And we could use some groceries.”

“Get the fuck out of here,” Brian mutters.

“What?” I ask, unsure of how to react. He’s never used much profanity around me and certainly never at me. I feel hurt but don’t want to anger him. Yet, I have feelings. “I wish you wouldn’t talk to me that way.” I’m standing by the bathroom door, feeling pressed for time while not wanting to agitate Brian. I understand him and am sure my nagging doesn’t help matters. I remember Daddy sitting at home without a job on several occasions. He’d grow restless, moody, demanding, unbearable to live with. Yet, my mother never raised her voice in anger toward him. She worked around his moods. Was Mom trying to protect us from Daddy’s disappointments? I now wonder. I didn’t realize all this until I moved away and started reflecting on my childhood. Before, I just assumed my daddy was mean and ornery but now I understand how hard it is for a man to be without work.

I sit on the sofa bed beside Brian who’s prone on his stomach. I affectionately kiss his head while thinking *Men do have their pride*.

At work, I mull over Brian’s predicament. I consider asking Mr. Diehl about a job for my fiancé but I can’t imagine Brian would agree. Cleaning kennels isn’t appropriate work for an artist. I then think about asking my aunt about a job because Lucinda is well-connected with church members, but I haven’t even told her about Brian. Aunt Lu would flip out if she knew her

favorite niece was living in sin, and so would my folks, especially Moe who lives by the wrath of God.

That evening, I find Brian on the sofa watching TV. He hasn't prepared any kind of dinner. In fact, it appears he hasn't budged all day.

"Someone's been trying to call you," Brian tells me when I place my things on the counter and pick up Sylvester.

"I hope you didn't answer the phone." I had previously asked him not to, in case my aunt or mother call. I don't want them to know about Brian. Not yet. Not until we get married and I can introduce him as my husband.

"Look, Lucy Lu," Brian tells me. "I'll answer the fucking phone whenever I want to!"

"But what if my mother calls? And why are you swearing at me?" I can't help but ask. Brian ignores me and continues watching TV.

I join him on the sofa, feeling exhausted from balancing so many things—not revealing the downing job to Brian, Sylvester to the landlord, and Brian to Lucinda or my folks, and I must keep Brian feeling good about himself. My biggest worry is that everything will come to a head and catch me in a landslide explosion, a real pickle, when all I want to do is focus on how happy Brian makes me. I love him deeply and feel sure he cares as much about me.

The next morning, Brian again tells me to take the car. "I'll come home at lunch," I suggest. "You can use the car then."

I believe everything is set but when I return to the apartment at noon only Sylvester greets me. The cat brushes against my legs which is something he hasn't done since Brian moved in. In fact, Sylvester has never overcome his shyness around Brian. Or is it stress? I wonder. I

can't understand my cat's behavior. Brian seems nice enough around the animal. At least he seems to tolerate my cat.

"There, there kitty." I affectionately cuddle my pet. "Want some cream?" I set Sylvester down and pour a small dish of cream while wondering why Brian isn't home when I specifically told him I'd be back at noon. Perhaps he's out looking for work, by bus, like he used to do before we met. Yet, it's blazing hot outside and he didn't leave me a note. No, I tell myself, Brian most likely stepped out for a moment.

I turn on *All My Children* and watch it as long as I can then rush back to work and in my haste get my first speeding ticket. All afternoon, I wait for Brian to phone me at work but he never does. I can't call him because he changed his mind again and told me he wasn't going to answer the phone.

When I return home that evening, after stopping at Arby's drive through for our dinner, I'm relieved to find Brian in front of the TV. He's dressed only in his undershorts and the strong smell of marijuana fills the studio. Brian puffs on a joint and ignores my arrival. On the coffee table before him sits a plate with Zig-Zags, a bag of brownish-green hemp, and a glass pipe.

"Pot?" I ask, surprised, although Brian previously admitted to smoking pot, insisting that marijuana is no worse than alcohol and it inspires his creativity.

"Got a problem with it?" Brian asks.

"No," I quickly respond, not wanting to upset him. But many things are troubling me as I set the beef sandwiches on the kitchen counter. "What if Layton smells this?" I finally ask.

"He won't, pussycat. Not if you put that towel back under the door. Come here, try some of this." He lights his glass pipe.

"What's that?" I ask as I bring the food to the coffee table and place it before him.

“Try it.” Brian coaxes me.

“I’ll stick to wine. Want a beer?” I go to the kitchen and pour myself a glass of wine and get Brian a beer while wondering if I should mention that I came home for lunch and he was away, no doubt buying the pot and whatever it is he’s smoking in the glass pipe. I know nothing about drugs except what I’ve learned from TV and talk radio.

I sit beside Brian, eat my sandwich, and sip some wine. It’s twenty minutes before the *Jeffers Hour* when the TV generally goes off and the radio comes on except on the nights that Brian wants to watch a Bronson or Chuck Norris movie or *Unsolved Mysteries* or *America’s Most Wanted* and *Cops*. I summon the nerve to mention my $95 speeding ticket.

“What?” Brian exclaims, slamming his beer on the coffee table. “I never asked you to come home. That was your idea. Are you stupid?”

“I know.” I feel ridiculous because of my actions and, at the same time, disturbed by his comment. My horrible brother used to call me stupid. “I’m sorry, sweetheart,” I finally say. “Please don’t call me stupid! I’ll make sure it’s what you want first. Maybe we should get an answering machine so you can screen the calls.”

“Great,” Brian says. “Now where are we going to get $95? From your aunt, I hope.”

“I’ll come up with it,” I say. “I could go to traffic school and pay only $40.”

“Yeah,” Brian breaks his attention from the TV to look at me. “You do that. What about your savings? Wouldn’t hurt you to dig into that.”

“You know I’m saving for our honeymoon in Hawaii,” I tell him. He ignores me. Lately, I’ve been growing increasingly troubled by his behavior. Or more precisely, Brian’s been growing ruder and ruder and less romantic. It’s how men become when they don’t have a job, I recall a talk show discussing this issue. Somehow, I must help Brian return to his kinder, more

romantic self, the one I met at Bobby McGee's. I'm not sure how I'll manage this, but if it takes giving him all of my money I will. A man needs his dignity.

During a commercial break, Brian puts his arm over my shoulder and looks at me as if sensing my concern. "Look, Sweetheart," he says. "The truth is I'm really worried about my mother. I think they're going to toss her out of that nursing home. I was visiting her today, if you must know. I just ran into a friend on the bus who sold me the pot for a good price. That's all."

"What's in the pipe?" I ask.

"Don't worry about that. This is just a stimulant made from coca leaves."

"Chocolate?" I ask, to be funny. I know he's not smoking Hershey Bars or Reece's Peanut Butter Cups.

"You really are stupid, aren't you?" Brian states and then takes a hit off his glass pipe. "Listen, Lucy Lu. I'll handle everything. In fact, I got a lead on a job. It's not painting murals or landscapes. It's painting houses. I'm going to check on it tomorrow. But it means working from four AM to noon."

I want to be supportive of my boyfriend's artistic career, but since Brian moved in with me, I've not seen any of his art supplies and I've only seen a few of his nude paintings. "Why don't you set up an easel and paint me?" I suggest as a way to motivate him to start using his talent. "Or sketch my portrait? It's something I'd really like from you. Like the easel charm you gave me."

"Why?" Brian snaps. "Do you think I'm not actually an artist?"

"No. Of course, I know you're an exceptional artist. I love the work you've shown me."

"Look, Lucy Lu," Brian says sarcastically. "If I feel like painting your picture, then that's what I'll do. For now, you should be happy about my job prospect."

I sit back, sip my wine, and rationalize that Brian probably needs more time to adjust. The apartment isn't his, after all, and he *is* the man of our house. The worst thing I can do is make him feel less important. His situation is difficult enough without my adding to it. He's in a transitional stage like I was when first moving to Mesa. He just needs time. His nude paintings are good, although I imagine with the right model his paintings could be better. I tell myself that it doesn't really matter. I'm happier now than ever before and I only want Brian to be happy with me. Even if he doesn't do anything.

Over the following weeks, Brian becomes increasingly quick to flare up and snap at me. Sometimes his anger pops out unexpectedly. He starts yelling things like—Who took my shit? Who put this here? Why'd you do this, or that? Or, Why are you looking at me like that? Then he blames me for things he himself does, like misplacing his lighter and claiming I took it even though I don't smoke. When we lie together at night, Brian is often still in a bad mood and he turns away from me to smoke on his pipe. At these times, I feel terrible; I'm afraid Brian is falling out of love with me and I really want to marry him and honeymoon in Hawaii. I don't want that dream to disappear like my dream of becoming a pediatric nurse.

Day by day, I try to think of ways to make Brian feel good while carefully addressing important issues, such as his job search, his painting, and his smoking too much pot. "Honey," I venture to say one evening as we sit on the sofa bed. I gently pet his leg as if he were the cat. "Why not paint a while and forget about this job hunting? I make enough money for our rent, food, and gas. And you're so talented."

Brian pushes my hand off his leg in a gesture I can't read. "Look, Lucy Lu. Don't trouble yourself over me. I'm fine. If you want me out of here, I'm out."

“Oh no! Please don’t think that way. You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me.” I’m stunned. It’s the first time he’s mentioned moving out and that’s the last thing I want to happen. “I’ll fall apart if you leave me. I love you that much. Honey, really, you can do whatever you like. I don’t mind. I want you here. I need you. You’re my life.”

“Then don’t worry so much and shut up talking to me. I don’t like arguing, especially with a chick.” Brian emphasizes each word and then takes a drag off his glass pipe which he now seems to smoke more than the marijuana joints.

I slink back into the sofa, emotionally tormented and drained. Brian pulls energy away from me but I hesitate to say anything critical. It might have the wrong effect and cause him to leave me. I lean on his shoulder and look at his face. He smiles, but his attention is on Robert Stack and Texas UFOs. No, I tell myself, I must not make Brian feel troubled in any kind of way. He’s going through hard times, something I can certainly understand. He’ll come around and things will get better for him, like they did for me.

I begin returning home for lunch each day in case Brian wants to use the car. Most often he doesn’t and when I enter the apartment the TV is blaring away and Brian’s slumped on the sofa smoking pot or his glass pipe. I’m careful not to arouse his anger but sometimes I get on his nerves for the slightest reason—putting salt on his TV dinner or bringing home the wrong fast food. He grows testy when I want to visit my aunt for a game of gin rummy so I stop going to Lucinda’s altogether. Then there’s the problem with the cat. Brian doesn’t like Sylvester. Any sneeze or cough he blames on my cat, anything out of place, any odor, Sylvester is the cause even though the apartment is never that tidy anyway. And if he ever finds cat hair in his food his mouth explodes with such profanity, you’d think Yellowstone’s volcano finally erupted.

The day arrives when Brian says, “Get rid of that cat tonight or I’ll leave!” I don’t know what to do except gather up Sylvester and drive to Lucinda’s.

But when I stand in my aunt’s cluttered kitchen, holding Sylvester, Lucinda refuses to take the cat. “You can’t push me from your life and expect me to help you at the drop of a hat, young lady. You don’t answer your phone and you haven’t called me for weeks, let alone drop by for a visit.”

“Think of the cat, Aunt Lu, not me. I rescued him from death and I really need your help.”

“Sorry,” Lucinda crushes out her cigarette. “I’ve been very hurt not knowing what’s going on in your life. And so have your parents. I’ve called your work several times but you won’t take my calls. I even ask Mr. Deihl about you and he tells me you’ve been showing up late. I was ready to drive all the way across town to the dog pound to see what’s going on with you. And you know I hate driving through Phoenix traffic. Now you show up wanting me to take your cat without so much as an explanation or phone call.”

“Are you trying to teach me a lesson?” I ask, furious with my aunt’s behavior.

“No. I’m just trying to find out what’s going on with you.”

“Well, I think you’re being heartless. Here I am, desperate, and you’re lecturing me. I can’t believe it! I’ll never come see you again!” I stomp from the house with Sylvester tightly in my arms.

Lucinda follows, begging me to come back inside. But I’m too upset.

I drive to a Circle-K payphone and call Mr. Diehl although I’m well aware he already has three dogs and eight cats. But what’s one more cat?

Over the phone, I explain the situation. Not that I have a live-in boyfriend who hates Sylvester but that my landlord saw the cat and threatened to evict me if I didn't get rid of it. Mr. Diehl promises to talk to Lucinda. "I'm sure she'll take Sylvester," he says. "She's just venting her anxiety over your absence in her life. You're like a daughter to her, you know." I hold back my tears when Mr. Diehl agrees to temporarily take Sylvester because he knows all too well about the unwanted animal situation.

After I leave Mr. Diehl's, I park at a Burger King and rest my head on the steering wheel. My life is no longer as simple as when I kept to myself, when me and Sylvester spent evenings listening to the *Jeffers Hour*.

How can Brian be so cruel? Doesn't he realize I love my little animal? Doesn't he care? God, I think, *the cat never complains. He only wants food and cream.* Tears fall, my nose runs, and my stomach feels as twisted as my life. But I wipe my eyes and rationalize that Brian's probably right. The cat is an unwanted animal, like it was at the shelter. It just didn't work out having both Brian and the cat in my tiny apartment. By far, Brian's more important than a silly old cat. I did the right thing. Perhaps now Brian will be happier. Certainly, I tell myself, all the complications are worth having Brian around. I no longer feel so lonely and unworthy of love.

Chapter 5: The Mother

August 1990

When I return to the apartment, Brian treats me tenderly and doesn't mention the cat or ask what I ended up doing. We tend not to discuss things anyway, and I'm relieved he's not in a bad mood.

As he soothes me to sleep that night, by letting me rest in his arms, I'm convinced that the emotional turmoil I feel comes from my tremendous love for Brian, not from the loss of a silly old cat.

At work the next day, Mr. Diehl never mentions Sylvester and I don't ask because I really don't want to know and I'm not going to call Lucinda. In fact, I've decided to disconnect the phone. It's too much trouble and the savings will be worthwhile. I can call my folks from work and maybe I'll even visit Lucinda after a few weeks, teach her not to be such a cruel bitch. Maybe then I'll find Sylvester at my aunt's house. But I refuse to dwell on this thought. I'd be heartbroken again if my cat isn't there.

After Sylvester is gone, things between me and Brian seem to improve. When I come home, I catch myself looking for the cat but my focus is on Brian. Within a week he tells me he got the job painting houses in a subdivision and that he needs my car early in the mornings. I resign myself to taking the bus again, but don't mind. I'm just happy Brian finally got a break. He's treating me nicely now and I don't want to spoil his mood with any of my stupid questions. I don't want to be a nag.

One evening in September, after the monsoon is over and the heat of Phoenix drops a few degrees, Brian claims that his mother's nursing home will throw her out if he doesn't pay a thousand dollars in back rent. "I begged them to wait until my first pay check but they refused. Ain't that a bitch. She's just a senile old lady."

Without hesitation, I happily offer to solve his problem by breaking into my savings for the cash he needs. I don't like seeing him so upset and on the verge of tears. Besides, it's the least I can do for the love of my life. It's for a good cause and I'm sure something good will

come of it. Someday, somehow, we'll be able to honeymoon in Hawaii. But first things first and right now Brian desperately needs my help.

The next day, after I return from the bank and give Brian the cash, I again ask him to take me to meet his mother. "Let's tell her we're married if that'll help the situation."

"After I take care of this crisis," Brian tells me. He's already standing from the sofa ready to leave the apartment. "All the confusion is hard on her health and she's taken a turn for the worse. She barely even knows me."

"That's terrible. How will you explain the money?" I hesitate to ask. I don't want to press the issue but it seems only fair that his mother is aware of who's providing for her welfare.

"She doesn't know I've been without work so I'm sure she'll assume it's from me."

"But I'm here too," I plead. "Please let me meet her."

"I'll think of something," Brian kisses me at the door. "Thanks for being a lifesaver." He leaves and doesn't return until late that night after I'm sound asleep on the sofa bed.

On my first day off work, in October, I chill a bottle of red wine and pick up Brian's favorite dinner from a neighborhood Kentucky Fried Chicken. Brian claims to love me but lately he seldom mentions marriage and we're making love less and less frequently. Usually, I like to let Brian determine when we have sex, but tonight I feel a bit bolder and want to at least try to set a romantic mood after he returns home from work. I'll push the idea that we get married right away and save up for our honeymoon in Hawaii. Perhaps I'll get pregnant, I contemplate, but quickly discount the idea. Brian is a stickler when it comes to birth control and I know he would never forgive me if I killed the rabbit.

That evening Brian returns home earlier than expected. I still have bobby pins in my hair which I quickly pull-out so he won't notice. With my fingers I comb my hair, upset because I wanted to look perfect for him and haven't even applied any makeup or perfume. "Honey," I say while standing at the oven where I'm warming up the chicken. "You're home early. I wanted to surprise you."

Brian kisses me and his expression is somber. He looks haggard and his hair is straggly. His T-shirt is untucked. I don't mention that he smells of pot and beer.

After Brian turns on the TV, sits on the sofa and lights a cigarette, I ask, "Is something the matter, sweetheart?"

"I guess not, unless you consider getting laid-off something that matters."

"What?" I try to ignore the smoke he nonchalantly exhales. He says nothing. KFYI is blaring from the kitchen making the apartment chaotic with noise. I feel disappointed, not in Brian, but in the mood ruined by events out of my control. Life is difficult, I think and snuggle beside my fiancé while he rolls himself a joint. My movement causes him to spill some of the pot.

"Lucy, please!" he glares at me. "Can't you see I'm in the middle of something?" I sit back and glance at a Cosby Show re-run. It's the crazy episode about Cosby, his son, and sons-in-law giving birth to toy ships, sandwiches and whatnots. As soon as Brian lights his joint and deeply inhales, he blows a pot kiss in my mouth. I cough. He laughs. I've never taken to smoking his pot and I really don't appreciate pot kisses but I never tell him this. Who am I to spoil his fun?

"What happened?" my curiosity makes me ask.

“Got laid-off, I said.” He speaks as if losing his job were no big deal. I suppose it isn’t as long as I have my job. *How will we save up for our honeymoon?* I wonder. It seems another blow to my hopes and dreams.

“But why? You haven’t even gotten your first paycheck.” I’m thinking about his mother, poor Mrs. Potthoff, and wondering what will happen now. I’ll have to offer more money from my account. From my wages each month. Maybe Hawaii is just a pipe dream after all. What a pity. What a real fucking drag!

“The foreman caught me and this other guy smoking a joint.” Brian laughs. “We offered him a hit but he didn’t appreciate our humor.”

“You were fired?”

“Guess that’s one way of looking at it, Lucy Lu. But never you mind. I’ve decided to start painting again. Starting with you.” He begins tickling me then playfully pins me down on the sofa. But before we get too far, he draws another puff from the joint that was burning on the coffee table.

“That’s great.” I sit up sorry he’s stopped roughhousing. I still have in mind to seduce him, especially now that he seems playful. But I’ll wait until after dinner. Brian can become moody and angry when he’s hungry.

Brian eats the chicken while watching the seven o’clock movie–*Death Wish Two*. I quietly eat beside him and keep him replenished with beer throughout the movie. The mood isn’t quite right, I keep thinking. He’s too involved with the action drama. I know if I start in on him too soon, before he’s ready, or before the movie is over, he’ll be pissed. And that’s the last thing I want to happen.

After we finish eating, I take the dishes to the kitchen. Then, out of the blue, Brian leaps up and says, “I have somewhere to go.”

“Where?” I stand at the kitchen sink, stunned by his words.

“You’re sure nosy sometimes.” Brian tucks in his T-shirt.

“I have plans for tonight,” I say, shocked that my romantic evening is completely ruined. Until now I felt sure I had set the right mood despite the fact that Brian got fired.

“What plans? You already missed the *Jeffers Hour*.” At times, Brian really bites me with sarcasm. “Look, Lucy Lu,” he adds, somewhat apologetically. “I need cash. If you must know, I’m going to see about some art supplies. Some guy at the site told me his wife is selling her supplies. She’s an artist but has palsy and can’t paint any more. I’ll be back shortly.”

I feel trapped. I desperately want him to stay, but at the same time, if he’s finally motivated to start painting, I won’t hold him back. I give him the cash in my purse and he leaves me alone to watch the rest of the stupid movie.

That night, Brian fails to return home. This frightens me, especially when he isn’t beside me the following morning. For hours I mindlessly watch soaps, thumb through People Magazine, and worry that Brian could be hurt or even dead. I don’t know how to find him. He’s never told me where his mother lives.

Finally, at two in the afternoon, Brian walks in the door greeting me as if nothing’s wrong.

“Brian!” I yell, unable to control my anger.

“What’s up pussycat?” he asks. His eyes are bloodshot. “I’m sorry.” He takes me in his arms but I push him away.

“I’ve been sick with worry? Don’t you care about me? Where have you been? Where are the art supplies?” I notice Brian isn’t carrying anything.

“I was too late. You shouldn’t worry so much, Lucy Lu. I can’t call you because you disconnected the phone.”

He walks to the kitchen, takes a pack of Merit cigarettes from his T-shirt pocket and lights one, then he peers in the refrigerator for something to eat. “If you must know.” He pulls out a can of beer. “I was with my mother on the streets by Van Buren. They threw her out!”

“What?” I ask from the sofa. “I don’t believe it. Why didn’t you bring her here?”

“I can’t bring her here, little lady.”

“But there are shelters in town. Your mother can’t sleep on the street. This just isn’t possible.” I feel confused, unable to fathom how an old woman ends up on the street and I wonder who’s at fault. The caregivers at the nursing home? Or Brian’s stubborn old mother herself? At the moment, a grain of sand could burst my nerves into flames.

Brian ignores my reaction. With a bag of Dorito chips, he lies on the unmade sofa bed and props his head on pillows to watch TV while munching his chips. He motions me beside him.

I comply and say, “I’m really mad at you.” He lightly kisses my forehead. “We have to do something about your mother,” I add, feeling more at ease. “Where’s she now? Not still on the street?”

“We’ll take care of her later. But first.” He rolls onto me and crushes the chips between us. “We have other business to attend to.” He rubs his groin against me and his moustache bristles against my neck, causing me great irritation.

“Stop!” I push him off. “How can you think about making love at a time like this?”

“All right!” He stands, pulls me off the bed and hurts my arm with his grip.

“What’s gotten into you?” I wail.

“You want to meet my mother? Let’s go meet her.” Brian pulls me to the door, letting me grab my purse along the way. “But I warn you. She won’t take kindly to meeting you. She’s in a confused state of dementia. And I doubt she’ll let you decide where she’s going to live. I can barely do that, she’s so damn stubborn. It took me a month to coax her into the last nursing home.”

I let Brian drive the Toyota as we head off to find his mother. At the bank, I closeout my account and give the remaining cash to Brian. I suppress any doubts about what he tells me. Besides, I reason, if he fails to introduce me to his mother, he’ll prove himself a liar. If not, I’m right in trusting him with my money.

Near Van Buren Street and 7th Avenue, University Park stretches for several blocks with green lawns, Mexican palms, cracked cement tennis courts, and a sod baseball field. “This is where the homeless live,” Brian tells me. “Because of bad luck, no luck, or a run of sorry choices.”

On one corner of the park, the Church of God in Christ has a stage set up for a prayer assembly. A small crowd of men, women and a few families of all races, have gathered.

“Each one reach one,” a woman’s voice airs over loud speakers. “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord. He is worthy of praise. Reach out and behold his mercy. Amen.”

“These people have gathered for the free sandwiches and sodas.” Brian laughs. “Not to receive Jesus.”

Across the street, within hearing range of the prayer assembly, Woodland Park stretches several more blocks. Strutting pigeons and cooing mourning doves wander across the park's tattered lawn, among the trees, scattered shopping carts, and sprawled out sleeping men.

Brian drives around both parks several times until he stops at one corner of Woodland Park where an old woman lies on flattened boxes under the shade of an acacia tree. She has presumably filled the nearby shopping cart with her possessions. Although it's over 80 degrees, she's bundled in a gray wool cardigan, polyester slacks, and sneakers with holes.

Brian laughs nervously as he parks my car near the old woman. I give him a disapproving look. This is hardly a laughing matter.

"Mother," Brian calls as we approach the old woman. She coughs and stirs from her nap.

"Mrs. Potthoff." I crouch beside her to see if she's all right. Her deeply wrinkled face is pale except for ruddy cheeks and badly chapped lips. Her breath reeks of cheap wine and her body odor makes me gasp. Brian starts laughing again, not holding back this time.

"Stop it, will you," I scold him. "She's your mother."

The woman groans and opens her gray and blood shot eyes. "Who is it?" she mutters, wiping her mouth and rubbing her eyes with spotted hands that have chipped and dirty fingernails. She glares at me.

"A friend," I say. "And your son." I look at Brian who's standing behind me snickering almost uncontrollably.

"Hungh?" The woman squints. "Go away." She waves. "My son's a bad boy. He doesn't love me."

I urge Brian to speak. At the same time, I'm trying to understand how Brian must be feeling. Even though he did the best he could, he's failed his mother because of his run of bad luck. But he's not acting right.

"Mother," Brian says at last. Then he snickers.

I ignore him and take the woman's rough hand. "We're here to take you home, Mrs. Potthoff."

"Home? Who are you? Go away!" The woman jerks from my grasp.

I stand and whisper to Brian, "Talk to her. Tell her anything, just get her into the car so we can take her to the nearest shelter."

"All right, I will," Brian says. "But you go away. Can't you see she's delirious?"

"She's drunk," I say, wondering how this happened**.** *And you're obviously high on something, too,* I want to tell Brian but don't because if I mention something like that to him, he could spew off defensive words to put me in my place. Lately, he's become extremely touchy about the slightest thing. Sometimes, even when I'm trying to be pleasant and considerate, I end up provoking him.

"Bad habit," Brian admits. He bends over the old woman and says, "Mother." The woman pushes at his shoulder. Brian turns his head from her breath. "Listen Lucy Lu, you've got to go. I can't handle my mother with you hovering over me like a bitch."

"Don't call me that in front of your mother!"

"Stop talking and go!"

"But I can help. And besides, how will you get her to the shelter? She looks heavy."

"I need to talk to her alone. Now that you've met my dear old Mom, you ought to be satisfied." He reaches down to button the sweater around the old woman. She slaps him and he

pulls away and looks at me. I'm stunned. "This is where we spent last night, sweetheart," Brian says to me. "Sure, I bought her the wine because I had to do something to keep her comfortable."

"I can't believe this," I say. "It doesn't make sense. Are these her things?" I indicate the shopping cart.

Brian grasps me by the shoulders and says, "Go home, Lucy Lu. I'll straighten this out. Thanks to you, I got enough here to set her up for a few months." He taps his breast pocket where he has all my savings then he embraces me. "I'll pay you back every dime and we'll have that honeymoon in Hawaii. I'll get another job, soon. I just know it."

"Promise?" I ask, troubled by matters not entirely clear. Who am I mad at? Why do I feel like something is horribly wrong?

"I promise," Brian repeats. "Now beat it so I can take Mom back to the nursing home in a taxi."

"All right, I'll leave." I kiss Brian and say to the old woman, "Good-bye, Mrs. Potthoff. I'll be seeing you real soon."

As I walk alone through the park to my car, filthy derelict men stare at me and make me feel creepy. They are lives tossed away, I think, like the unwanted animals at the shelter.

As the days go by, life for me grows more chaotic, if that's even possible. Brian continually smokes his glass pipe and whenever I ask him about his mom or what he did that day he becomes defensive, like I'm putting him down or interrogating him. Sometimes, Brian angrily knocks something over and makes me clean it up or his mean side just pops out and there's nothing I can say or do to calm his anger and hatred. In his worst mood, he calls me names, drives me to tears, then calls me a *crybaby bitch*. And once, when I had no money to give him,

he went so far as to call me a *greedy piece of shit*. I can't fight back because he explodes and he always wins any argument anyway purely because of his out of control behavior.

When Brian is in one of these bad moods and I touch him at night while we lie in bed, he snaps, "Don't touch me!" It seems that the meaner he is to me the more I beg him to love me and accept my apology for whatever he thinks I did wrong. "I love you more than I've ever loved anyone before," I tell him. "Please don't pick on me and put me down. That's what my brother did. And you're not Scottie!" But despite my protests, when Brian's in a bad mood he remains distant and I feel as helpless and horrible as I did when a child and had no one to turn to for help but myself.

I begin to rationalize that the drugs Brian smokes and the stress from his mother's situation are affecting his behavior and causing his hateful and angry reactions. His unpredictable moodiness. He can't help himself. And I end up deciding that none of it really matters as long as we have each other. I try to cling to the good times and the dream of our having a life together. I know Brian loves me and will get better at controlling his moods, after his stupid mother dies.

Then one evening, as we're eating Chinese takeout at the kitchen counter and listening to the radio, I venture to ask Brian about his mother's welfare. He seems to be in an okay mood.

"She's getting worse," Brian tells me.

"Let me go visit her with you," I say. "I think she likes me. She seemed to perk up when she talked to me."

"Not true! Mother became stressed and disoriented after meeting you in Woodland Park." Brian digs into his egg foo young then continues, "She's such a burden now. I doubt she'll live much longer although it seems like she's got a pretty strong ticker."

“Honey, I hope you aren’t giving her any more wine,” I say, turning down the kitchen radio. Brian continues to be in a relatively good mood and I want to keep him that way.

“Of course not. The caregivers won’t permit alcohol in the nursing home. It’s her mind. She’s slipping into oblivion. Like I hope to do with a good hit of acid.” He laughs and takes a large spoonful of chicken fried rice. “You know,” he says while still chewing his food. “They ought to get rid of folks once they start going downhill, mentally. Like they do those animals at the pound.”

His comment astonishes me and I ask, “You know about that?” I never told Brian about euthanizing the animals because I didn’t want to talk about it especially after he made me get rid of Sylvester. The fact is, I seldom think about the downings anymore. I just do my job. It’s become routine. Like hunters killing four-point bucks or farmers killing their livestock and chickens. No big deal. Just a job someone’s got to do.

“Do you think I don’t know about what goes on at the pound?” Brian takes a large chunk of twice cooked pork and chews on it likes its venison jerky. The way Daddy does after he smokes up a fresh batch in the smoker.

“But who told you?” I ask. I don’t think it was Tiffany because she quit weeks before and Brian only met her a few times. He doesn’t know anyone else at the pound and I don’t know his work friends and I don’t have any friends for him to know. I have nobody in my life but my aunt and I haven’t seen or talked to her since the night I showed up at her house with Sylvester. She hasn’t called me at work probably because she’s still teaching me a lesson about life—*thou shall not ignore thy aunt lest thou be punished.* I don’t care. It saves me from having to beg-off from any invitation to play gin rummy. I assume my cat remains at Mr. Diehl’s but I don’t ask him because I’m afraid of learning that they had to destroy Sylvester.

Brian gulps down his meat with some beer and says, “No one had to tell me, dipshit. I heard about it on one of those talk shows. Some animal rights wacko called in.”

“On the *Jeffers Hour*?” I ask, wondering if the producers finally used my suggestion about animal overpopulation and the tragedy of destroying so many unwanted pets. But because I rarely miss the program, I can’t imagine they aired my suggestion without my knowing.

“Just heard it in passing,” Brian answers, defensively. “Why are you being so touchy? Do you kill those pets yourself?”

“Maybe.” I’m dreading an argument but I feel like he’s putting me on the spot. Setting me up in some kind of trap.

“I really don’t care if you do,” he assures me. “Though you might want to expand your horizons and make a hit on my mother.” He laughs like he’s impressed with his wit.

I quietly sit on the kitchen stool, stare at Brian, and think, *what an asshole*. He puzzles me tremendously. He cares about his mother like a good son but then he laughs in her presence, provides her with wine, and jokes about killing her. None of this makes sense.

Weeks go by and I still don’t call my aunt or folks although I occasionally think about doing so. Then, one Saturday afternoon while I’m reading the National Enquirer on the sofa bed and Brian is napping with his head on my lap, someone knocks on the door. Startled, I spill my Dr. Pepper on Brian’s face.

“Hey, bitch!” he exclaims.

“Who could that be?” I whisper, wondering if I must hide Brian’s pipe and marijuana from the police. No one ever comes to our door unless I’ve asked the landlord to repair something in the apartment.

“Must be Layton,” Brian wipes the soda off his face with my shirt.

The knock returns. “Lucy,” comes a woman’s voice.

I wiggle up and push Brian from my lap, spilling more soda. “Take it easy, will you,” he says.

“Lucy, are you in there? I need to talk to you,” the voice returns.

“It’s my aunt!” I look at Brian, hoping he’ll know what to do.

“Just open the fucking door.” Brian sits up on the sofa. “It’s about time she finds out what you’re doing.”

“Hide that dope,” I whisper, my eyes sweeping the room for other signs of illegal behavior.

“I’m here,” I say at last, brushing my blouse and patting down my hair. I open the door and see Aunt Lu with a shopping bag of groceries on the hallway floor beside her.

A sudden surge of emotion swells up between us and in an instant my aunt embraces me. Any feud we ever had between us fades away.

“I’m sorry,” I say, not sure for what. I just feel sad and sentimental all of a sudden.

“I’m sorry too, sweetheart. I’ve missed you,” Lucinda replies. We hold each other a moment longer.

“Isn’t this precious,” Brian says from the sofa. He’s smoking a cigarette.

Lucinda’s eyes focus on him. “Oh, you’ve got company,” she says.

Brian snickers and I glower at him then invite my aunt inside.

“I brought your favorite foods,” she says, picking up the shopping bag. “If you don’t mind, I thought I’d cook us up some lasagna. I brought the cards along, too.”

Lucinda makes herself at home in the kitchen, tidying up the counter and preparing the meal with my help. All the while, Brian lounges on the sofa watching *Pee-wee’s Playhouse*. No one speaks until Lucinda says to Brian, “And what do you do?”

“Paint,” Brian says.

“Houses?”

“Of course not. Paintings.”

“He’s an artist,” I brag and point out the nudes on the far wall but then regret doing so because my aunt looks astonished.

“I see.” Lucinda continues dicing tomatoes for the sauce.

During the meal at the kitchen counter, Brian comments on how delicious the lasagna is. “Wish Lucy took after you,” he smirks.

Lucinda gives Brian a long look. “Mr. Potthoff,” she says at last. “Are you living here with my niece?”

“What do you think?”

“I assume you’re the reason she no longer calls me.”

“Aunt Lu!” I say, hoping to stop the tension in the room from thickening any further.

“That’s her business, not mine.” Brian leaves the counter.

Lucinda looks at me. “Mr. Diehl says you’ve been arriving late for work. Is this true?”

“Sometimes. I have to take the bus now.”

“What? Why? What’s wrong with the car I gave you?”

“I’m using it,” Brian flippantly says from the sofa. His behavior crushes me.

“You’re using *my* car?” Lucinda exclaims, her blue eyes scowl at Brian.

“You gave the car to me,” I mutter, suddenly feeling cornered. The day’s turning into a complete disaster, one well beyond a mere pickle.

Lucinda looks at me. “I think you should move back home with me. From the looks of things your life’s spinning out of control.”

“No, I’m not moving. I’m happy with Brian. I love him. Why can’t you accept that? We’re getting married. You should be happy for me.”

At the sofa, Brian shakes his head and continues watching TV.

Without a word, Lucinda stands from the counter and heads to the door.

“If you leave like this,” I say to her, tears welling in my eyes. “Don’t bother coming back. I don’t ever want to see you again!”

Lucinda stops before the door. Her own eyes are moist as she looks at me. “I may not come back Lucy, but you’re always welcome home. Not him.” She indicates Brian who rolls his eyes.

As Lucinda closes the door behind her, I yell, “Why wouldn’t you take my cat when I needed you to?” I then slowly turn and look at Brian who shakes his head and begins rolling a joint.

Feeling beat, I sit at the counter and silently hold my head. Then, on impulse, I stand and reach for the small radio on the counter, toss it in my purse, and head for the door.

“Where the hell are you going?” Brian asks.

“To call the Jeffers Show from the bar down the street.” I slam the door behind me.

In the phone booth at Screecher-Hawk Tavern, I stand listening to my portable radio. *"This is Jeff Jeffers, your host for the hour. Tonight, we're talking about the fall of communism in Eastern Europe."*

I get through on the third ring although I'm not sure what I'm going to say, not having formulated any opinion about communism, other than it's wrong. In fact, the subject doesn't interest me.

"Our next caller is Lucy Davis. Good evening, Lucy."

"Good evening, Mr. Jeffers."

"Haven't you called in before?"

"That's right, a while ago. I'm the one who works at the rabies control shelter, remember? You called me the Rabies Lady."

"Indeed, I do. Folks, it's our old friend the Rabies Lady. Just teasing there Lucy. Good to hear from you. And what's on your mind tonight. What do you suppose is going to occur now that the Soviet Block is breaking-up?"

"Actually, I want to talk about my job."

"Well, I'm sure you do Lucy, but tonight were keyed into. . ."

"I help the Vet kill animals. Dozens of kittens, puppies, cats and dogs, even rabbits. Do it at least twice a week."

"My God, you never mentioned that before. How can someone like you, with such a sweet-sounding voice. . . Why, I don't imagine you're much taller than five foot two. How is it someone like you can put down grandma's little Muffie or aunt Ruthie's Fluffums? Must be terrible."

“You’re right, Jeff. But this isn’t a joke. Someone’s gotta do it. There’s a population explosion of unwanted dogs and cats in the county.”

“Still, you must cry every time you stick a little puppy with a needle.”

“Especially at first,” I answer. “But after downing hundreds of puppies, you learn not to care too much about the individual animal and then you sort of learn how to down each one as if it were, you know. . . Someone’s gotta do it because there aren’t enough people to adopt them. Besides, God gave mankind dominion over the animals to hunt for sport, to eat, or to use for creature comforts. And to kill when they’re not wanted. It’s kind of like all those homeless people in Woodland Park. Nobody wants them around. They’re human trash!”

“Woah, slow down Lucy dear. Are you suggesting we euthanize the homeless? That’s way out there in left field.”

“No, I don’t think we should kill anyone but. . .”

“Well Lucy, the Rabies Lady, I’m sure you have much to say about this sad and sickening dilemma, but tonight we’re interested in Gorbachev and Romania. Thanks for your call.”

The line goes dead and the radio continues with *Well folks, that was our old friend from the animal shelter—a bit odd. Maybe she’s overexposed to those euthanizing drugs. Anyway, such a job must be hard on a person. But let’s get back to the night’s topic. Our next caller is a Boris Kozlov from Deer Valley. . .*

I turn off the radio, feeling bad that Jeffers cut me off but at least I got to say something on the air about the animals. It makes me feel better and I disregard Jeffers’ comment about my being odd. He was just being funny. Like he was when he first started calling me the Rabies Lady. After all, the matter is too serious to deal with head-on.

I return to the apartment and find Brian gone. I'm glad. I don't want to face him. But later that night he crawls into bed beside me and shakes me awake. "I heard you on the car radio tonight. Boy are you disconnected from reality. Calling in and talking off the wall. And what are you thinking about the homeless? You best keep away from that area. Brother, am I sorry I ever took you to Woodland Park? I had no idea how whacked-out you really are."

"I'm not disconnected," I protest. "And what gives you the right to wake me up? Where have you been?"

"None of your business. We're talking about you," he shakes me again, forcing me to sit up and listen. "Why'd you call in about that muck you do at the pound. It wasn't even the topic. If I were you, I'd a mentioned your crazy aunt. You ought'a down her!" He roars with laughter.

I merely look at him in the dim light then lie back down and cover my head with my pillow. Brian leaves me alone and smokes a last cigarette before he goes to sleep.

During the following weeks, Brian becomes increasingly cold toward me and I can't do anything about it. We never make love anymore. He rarely kisses me and I constantly fear saying the wrong thing or making the wrong move and upsetting him. He's gone much of the time and claims to have a temporary job through Manpower. When we're together, he seems preoccupied with everything but me and I feel pushed deeper into an empty, lonely cubby hole.

"Thinking about your mother?" I distract Brian one evening while he's at the kitchen counter reading the comics in the Arizona Republic. I can no longer tolerate his indifference toward me. He must come to terms with whatever bothers him which is, most likely, his mother.

"What do you care about my mother?" Brian glances at me standing across from him, leaning against the counter.

“What about downing her?” I ask, jokingly. “She’s a burden to you. She doesn’t even know you. It would be a blessing in disguise.” I finally say what’s been on my mind for days. In fact, over the weeks I’ve been stock-piling baggies of phenobarbital from the pound. I still take a small dose at night whenever I can’t sleep. But I’ve also been thinking that I might use the drug to put Brian’s mother out of her misery. I’d do anything for Brian. Ridding him of this impediment isn’t so terrible. And besides, the woman has deteriorated into nothing but a drunken homeless burden who reeks of wine and body odor.

“Stop thinking like that,” Brian scolds, turning his attention entirely on me. “You’re talking about premeditated murder in the first degree.”

“Don’t worry. I won’t do anything. Unless you want me to.”

He says nothing but gives me one of his funny looks that says I’m too weird to deal with. He then resumes reading the comics.

A few days later, I come home from work and find Brian packing a grocery sack with his scant belongings—a razor, toothbrush, a couple of shirts, and a few pairs of boxer shorts. Then I notice he’s taken all of his nude paintings off the walls.

“Sweetheart,” I say. “What are you doing?”

“What’s it look like?” he says with sarcasm. “I’m leaving you.”

“You can’t go!” I yell and begin to cry. “You need me. We were going to make love tonight. I planned it.”

He stops his packing, glares at me and says, “Make love to you! Not if you paid me.” He continues collecting socks strewn around the studio.

“Where’re you going?” I ask, shocked by his cruel words. I’m beside myself with confusion. “What did I do to cause this? My only fault is that I love you more than life. But

you're a moody man, an angry man, and I never know when you'll pop off. You can't leave me, Brian, you don't even have steady work. At least wait until you find a good job."

"Look, Lucy Lu. It's no good. You can't help me anymore. There's no more money. It's over between us. You smother me and I can't take it anymore."

"No, no, it's not over between us. I love you too much. You're my first love. My family never loved me. How can you abandon me so heartlessly?"

"Look Lucy Lu. I've got another girlfriend. Where do you think I've been spending my time?"

"With your mother."

"Yeah, right. Like that old lady is really my mother. You're a piece of work, Lucy Davis, and I'm outta here." He finishes tossing odds and ends into his bag, grabs the Toyota keys on the kitchen counter, and heads for the door.

"You can't take my car," I yell behind him.

He stops and calmly says, "You already signed it over to me, remember?" He then leaves, carefully closing the door behind him.

I remain at the counter dumbfounded, weeping like a crybaby bitch. About a month earlier I *had* signed the car over to him only because he applied for a chauffeuring job and needed proof of owning a car with the title under his name. Then, he never got that job. But it didn't matter. I don't regret what I did. *He'll be back,* I swear to myself as I wipe my tears with the kitchen towel. He just needs time for himself. Like he said, I've smothered him with my love. I don't believe for a moment that Brian has another girlfriend. He just said that so I won't follow him. And I won't, at least for a while, a very short while.

Chapter 6: The Murder

November 1990

When the alarm sounds the next morning, I slam the off button, get up, dress, walk to the local bar and phone the rabies shelter to tell them I'm feeling sick and won't be coming to work. "Jenny," I say to the clerk who took over Tiffany's position. "It's Lucy. I'm sick again. Sorry. Guess I'll go see a doctor."

"Lucy," Jenny's voice comes over the phone. "Hold on a minute."

I wait on the line until I hear, "Hello, Lucy, Randy Diehl here. You know, this is the sixth time this month you've been ill. We can't tolerate this any longer."

I stand at the bar, hold the phone away from my ear and gaze at it. My head is pounding with anger. I say into the phone, "You know what, Mr. Diehl. I quit!" I hang up, unconcerned about my future. I've been wanting to quit my stupid job ever since I first shoveled shit. Finally, I've found the courage to do so. *Lately, in fact, I've been finding the courage to do a hell of a lot,* I think to myself. *If only I could find Brian and keep him where he belongs. With me.*

For the rest of November, I sit idly in my studio, day after day, hoping Brian will show up. I never stop thinking about where he might be or what he might be doing. I also wonder if Mrs. Potthoff is back on the bleak streets of Van Buren. *How can Brian afford to keep her in a nursing home now, without a job?* I keep thinking.

I finally decide to take action and find him. I call Manpower but they won't give out information and Brian never mentioned the address of his mother's nursing home. I begin to wonder if Brian himself is living on the streets of Phoenix. By the time December rolls around, I hop on a bus to 7th Avenue and Van Buren.

It's early evening when I arrive at Woodland Park and look around at the people sprawled out on the lawn, sleeping, drinking, and laughing together. But I don't see Brian's mother. Then a man shouts, "Hey baby," and another man approaches and asks me for money. I brush him away and head to Shorty's Tavern.

While I'm sipping a glass of wine a man sits beside me and asks my name. For an instant, I consider going home with him, if he has a home, but he's drunk and smells so disgusting that I return to Woodland Park. This time I spot Brian's mother reclined on flattened boxes beside her shopping cart full of useless junk. The old woman is wearing the same blouse, slacks, and gray cardigan sweater but now she has a ragged quilt wrapped around her shoulders to fend off the chill.

I near her and ask, "Mrs. Potthoff?"

Brian's mother slowly opens her eyes and peers at me. "What d'ya want?" she groans. Her voice is phlegmy and horse and her oily gray is hair matted.

"It's me, your daughter-in-law. I married your son. I'm surprised to see you back out here. Why aren't you in your nursing home?"

In her drunken stupor the woman struggles to sit up. "My son's who?" She tries to focus on me. "Do I know you?"

"I'm Brian's wife, Lucy Lu. I helped put you in the nursing home. It was my money that kept you there. Three thousand dollars, I'll have you know. What happened? And where's Brian?" My voice is yelling, I realize, so I calm down and smile at Mrs. Potthoff. I hardly want to scare away my only link to Brian. Thinking of my boyfriend suddenly fills me with concern. The money obviously wasn't enough to keep his mother in nursing care. Brian must be feeling horribly guilty. No wonder he was so moody and angry.

“Who’s Brian?” the old woman asks, looking around suspiciously.

“Your son.”

“Ah yes, my son. And what do you want? You’re bothering me.”

“I don’t mean to bother you. I love your son. We got married in Vegas and we’re going to honeymoon in Hawaii.”

The woman squints at me, straining her head when she says, “Why ain’t that sweet. Married that shithead son of mine and you’re going to Hawaii.”

“Now, now, now, Mrs. Potthoff. You mustn’t talk like that. Brian’s been nothing but good to you.”

“Oh, yeah. Well, no. He’s a good boy. I say yes to getting married and going to Hawaii. Let’s have a toast.” The woman searches the area, her little world. “Had it here a minute ago.”

“Are you looking for wine?” I’m thrilled Mrs. Potthoff is accepting me although the homeless woman probably doesn’t know what she’s saying. I feel like I’m bound to find Brian through her. Day and night, I’ve been missing my fiancé so much that sometimes my chest and head physically throb with pain even after a large dose of phenol. “I can get us some wine, if you’ll wait here,” I say.

“I ain’t goin’ nowhere, little miss.”

The woman sprawls back down and I run off to Poncho’s Market, the nearest convenience store. When I return, Mrs. Potthoff is snoring on her boxes. “Here,” I say. “I brought you a gift.”

The woman coughs and looks at me. “You again. Go away. You’re bothering me, like that reporter fellow.”

“But I have wine for you.” I show the old woman a bottle of red Thunderbird.

“Lixir! Isn’t that sweet.” The woman struggles upright.

I sit beside her, trying not to let the odor overwhelm me. “A toast,” I say and unscrew the lid.

The old woman reaches for the bottle, obviously aching for a drink, but I push her back. “Ah ah. First, mother dearest, you must tell me where Brian is. Your son.”

“Oh yes, my son.” The woman scratches her head and clears her throat. “Are you really married to my son?”

“That’s right. I’m also Mrs. Potthoff. Mrs. Brian Potthoff. Now I need to find him.”

The woman glares questioningly at me. “I hate to disappoint you, Mrs. Potthoff, sweetie, but I ain’t seen my son in a hell’v’a long time.”

“No, no, Mrs. Potthoff, that simply isn’t true! We were here a few weeks ago. If you want some elixir, be a good girl and try harder to remember. I want to know where your son is. Right now!” I hold the bottle from her reach, taunting her so she’ll tell me about Brian.

“Ah, all right.” The homeless woman straightens herself against the shopping cart as if trying to recall her son’s whereabouts. “Cincinnati,” she says at last.

“No! That won’t do.” My stomach knots up with fury but I try to calm my voice by speaking slowly. “I know he’s around here somewhere.”

“Okay, all right,” the woman struggles to say. “I think he’s living on Washington Street. But that’s all I know.”

“When does he come to see you? I know he does. He’s a good son, your only child. He really cares about you. And he’ll be a famous artist one day, with my help. I promise you that, Mrs. Potthoff.”

The woman gives me a confounded side glance like she's trying to answer properly but is too far gone to understand my questions. "He's here every Sunday, bless his heart. Now how about that toast, little lady. To your marriage."

"Good girl. When on Sundays?"

The old woman thinks a moment, coughs, and says, "Don't know. He's an odd one, that son of mine. Just shows up sometime on Sunday after the church bells start ringing."

"Are you sure?" I'm growing impatient with her stubborn stupidity.

"Oh, I'm real sure about that. The church bells ring on the day he comes around to see me," Mrs. Potthoff proudly says as if she's found a stretch of clarity in her mind. "Yes, indeed. Anytime on Sunday that rascal boy of mine. He is a good son, that he is."

"Okay then, on Sundays. Here's to your son and my husband." I take a swig of the fruity Thunderbird, grimace from the repulsive taste, spit it out to my side, and hand the bottle to Mrs. Potthoff.

"To my son." The old woman guzzles down as much wine as she can before I take back the bottle.

I stare at the vulgar woman while the sweet taste lingers in my mouth. It's the worst wine I've ever had but to the old woman, obviously, it's the elixir of Mercury. For an instant, I consider bringing Mrs. Potthoff to my apartment but the old homeless woman is just too disgusting and more intolerable and tedious than my boring folks. *No,* I think to myself, while looking at my mother-in-law. *She must stay in this down trodden park so that on Sunday, I can surprise Brian. Maybe I'll even help her do herself in. Brian doesn't need to know I've done anything to his mother. No one does. And once the old woman's gone, Brian will be free from*

her and entirely mine. He'll return to me and we'll resume our happy lives together. We'll really get married and honeymoon in Waikiki or Honolulu.

I leave the park and return to my apartment.

Before Sunday arrives, I find it difficult to concentrate because I can't stop thinking about Brian or his mother. Reading is out of the question. I consider calling the *Jeffers Hour* and while on the air declaring my love for Brian and begging him to come home to me. He sometimes listens to talk radio because of my influence. But I decide to reserve that idea for later. My best bet now is Brian's mother—*the old crone who stole my money to squander on cheap wine.* I spend hours sitting on the sofa listening to radio ga ga and stewing in a hive of wasps, as Daddy liked saying whenever I was upset or pouting.

In a fit of rage, I finally hurl my glass of Chablis against the far kitchen wall and shatter it all over the apartment. "Swift," I say aloud. "See what you make me do, Mrs. Potthoff, you ungrateful piece of shit!"

When Sunday arrives, I return to Woodland Park early in the morning. To blend-in with the homeless crowd I wear jeans and the wrinkled, stained blouse from Tiffany Shelton, which I retrieve from the back of my closet. I also put on a long black wig that Lucinda gave me after I first arrived in Mesa. *I wore it one Halloween when Cecil was alive* I remember her telling me. The long nylon hair falls down my front and back and the wide thick bangs nearly cover my eyes. I'm convinced I look homeless and hopeless. No one, not even Brian, will recognize me. At least I don't smell bad.

After I get off the bus on Van Buren, I begin walking toward the park while seeing the same bums coughing and hawking up spit. A man calls out to me in a drunken voice, "Hey,

lady." I sharply turn and see a lanky middle-aged man pissing against a garbage dumpster beside a building. I flip him off and continue crossing the street. The man follows me and shouts, "Come here, sweet miss. I want to talk to you."

"Shut up. You filth!" I scream at the top of my lungs.

The man chuckles and saunters to a nearby tree. He's still laughing to himself as he flops onto the ground and picks up a bottle of wine.

Riffraff magots, I think to myself. *Ought to do away with them all.*

At the far end of Woodland Park Mrs. Potthoff is sitting near her shopping cart. At nine in the morning, it appears she's just woken up. She rummages through a sack and pulls out a jelly doughnut to eat. It's probably stale.

I sit against an acacia tree far enough away so she doesn't notice me yet close enough to watch her. In the midst of cooing mourning doves and the onslaught of traffic noise, I watch Mrs. Potthoff for over an hour eat her breakfast and do nothing. The late autumn sun intensifies but I'm cool enough in the shade. Finally, the old woman works her way up and pushes her cart to the end of the street. She spits and goes into a bar probably to pee, certainly not to wash her face. I then follow her to Poncho's Market, wait outside the store, and watch Mrs. Potthoff buy wine and sweet rolls with money she has stashed in her clothes.

When she exits, she asks me, "Spare a quarter for an old lady, honey?"

Brian's mother doesn't even recognize me, her own daughter-in-law, I'm thinking with amusement as I place a dollar in her dry hand. "Here! Now beat it," I say.

The old woman mumbles something as she places the dollar in her bra and returns to her cart outside the store.

I enter Poncho's and buy a bottle of Thunderbird, for authenticity. "Where'd you come from?" asks the store clerk, a chubby Italian looking man in his fifties. I merely glance at him and return to the park where I find a young Native American couple occupying my spot under the acacia tree. They both have long black hair, rather like my wig. They're wearing denim shirts and jeans and dark sunglasses, something I should have added to my own disguise.

I lean against a nearby palm within view of Mrs. Potthoff who is back at her boxes guzzling wine. Within an hour, she falls asleep and I curl up beside the palm and nod off myself. When church bells begin to ring, I wake up and notice the old woman and her cart are gone. I'm horrified, heartsick in fact, and feel certain I've missed Brian. I toss aside the bottle of wine and look around for Brian's burdensome old mother.

"Hey, you," the Native American man says to me. He and his young woman remain entwined on the ground, their long black hair flowing together.

"What?" I scowl.

"Are you throwing away that liquor?"

"It's yours," I say and scan the area. The man, who's probably twenty, leaps for the wine, leaving his woman giddy with laughter.

"Did you see that old lady over there?" I ask as he grabs the bottle of Thunderbird.

"You mean ol' Wind Tunnel?" he asks.

"Yeah, Old Wind Tunnel," I repeat with impatience. "If you're referring to the fat lady with the cart."

"She usually heads to that vacant lot on 10th and Adams about now. To look for treasures." The young man chuckles.

"Was she with a short mustached man, her son? Brian Potthoff."

“Son? Didn’t know ol’ Wind Tunnel had it in her.”

“Yeah, her son! He comes here every Sunday.”

“Okay, right,” the young man replies. “Don’t get rude. Like I said, check down on 10th. She’s around. She can’t move fast even for a wind tunnel.” He returns to his companion and together they guzzle the wine.

I grab my bag and rush down the street while picturing Brian and thinking how happy he’ll be to see me. *And he’ll know I forgive him and understand his predicament. Of course, Mrs. Potthoff meets her son on Washington Street. Perhaps he takes her to a café for lunch. What else can he do? She’s probably too stubborn and too stupid to go to the shelter.*

Nearing 10th and Adams, a seedy part of town near the State Capitol, I spot a vacant lot of dirt, rocks, weeds, carts, and trach strewn around an abandoned brick building. At the far end of the lot, behind a shopping cart loaded with junk, Mrs. Potthoff is crouching in her frayed wool cardigan. Brian, however, is nowhere in sight.

Crushed with disappointment, I’m convinced the old woman is purposely misleading me about Brian. The thought makes me furious and I wonder what to do. I could wait out the rest of the day, but the noon sun is making my scalp itch under the synthetic wig and the smell of my perspiration makes me feel like a tramp sponging off the bleak, mean streets. I’m disgusted and can hardly stand myself.

Still, there’s a chance Mrs. Potthoff told me the truth and I’ll die if I miss Brian, so I decide to wait a while longer. From a distance, I watch Mrs. Potthoff pick up an old shoe and a bottle that may be worth something. I grow angrier and angrier at my predicament.

From behind me I hear a man shout above the traffic noise. “Hey, it’s you!” I turn and see the same drunk and lanky man that pestered me earlier that morning. “Wait up, sweet miss,” he yells, crossing the street.

“This is too damn much!” I exclaim, and toss my wig into the field and stomp off toward the bus stop. For a moment, I completely forget about Brian. My only thought is to return to the comfort of my little studio away from the sewage of the streets.

Back home, I shower then rest on the sofa, scolding myself for giving up so easily. Even if I missed Brian, I still must deal with his mother. I can’t let her get away with all the misery she’s causing both Brian and me.

By four o’clock, I slip back into my homeless clothes and wrap a scarf around my head. Then I catch the bus back to Van Buren while thinking that Brian might be there and that it’s time for my luck to change.

The church bells are ringing when I spot Mrs. Potthoff asleep near her cart. To my dismay, Brian’s nowhere in sight. I stand by the snoring woman and notice the black wig in her cart. I roll my eyes and feel so disappointed that I decide to confront the old lady for lying about her son.

When I tap her shoulder with my foot, Mrs. Potthoff loudly grunts. The stench in the air makes me as nauseated as the grasshoppers I drank at the Conglomeration. In fact, while pouring bottled water onto the woman’s ruddy cheeks to revive her from a drunken stupor, I imagine live grasshoppers splashing onto the ground. The image makes me dizzy.

The woman snaps awake, “What is it?” She coughs but then drifts back to sleep.

“Wake up!” I bend over and shake her shoulder.

Mrs. Potthoff tries to focus on me, her intruder. “Go away, slut,” she moans. “Can’t you see I’m a sick old lady? Ain’t got no drugs. No leads.”

“Come on dearest, get up.” I nudge her again.

Mrs. Potthoff struggles upright and smiles but doesn’t bother to wipe the water off her face.

I remove my scarf and tenderly dry her.

“Thanks,” she says. “Some cad tried to drown me.”

“I brought you a present.” I indicate the wine in a paper sack. “But first you must tell me why you’ve been a naughty girl.”

“Naughty girl? Who are you?”

“You remember me, don’t you?”

“Yeah, I do.” The old woman widely grins, showing dirty, stained, and a few missing teeth. “Let’s have a toast, honey. What d’ya say?”

“Not so fast, mother dear. First, tell me why you lied about Brian?” I sit cross-legged on the ground beside her.

“What?” She rubs her eyes.

“Stop it, Mrs. Potthoff—Wind Tunnel.”

The old woman chuckles. “You been talking to that Indian fellow, haven’t you? He’s been calling me that ever since he heard me fart a real good one.”

“You’re disgusting.” I laugh and pretend I’m amused. I don’t want to lose rapport with Brian’s mother. “Yes, we’ll have a toast as soon as you tell me about Brian, your son.”

“My son, right?” Potthoff asks, as if trying to please me. Her thirst for alcohol seems unbearable. “Don’t know. Wish I did. Maybe he’ll be along shortly. Please, have pity on a sick old lady.” She reaches for the sack of wine at my side.

“Not so fast.” I push her back, tiring of this situation. But I must find Brian. And this old woman is my best lead.

“Please, pretty please,” Potthoff holds her hands in prayer.

“All right.” I hand her the wine. “Drink yourself into oblivion where you belong.”

“You’re an angel of mercy,” she says and takes the sacked wine.

I smile. “Brian called me an angel of mercy on the evening we first met.”

“Called you what?”

“An Angel of Mercy.”

Potthoff guzzles the wine, gasps for a breath, and gulps some more. “You don’t know how much I ‘preciate your generosity.”

“What happened to all the money I gave you? And why’d you leave the nursing home?”

“Money? Who told you about my money?” Potthoff holds the bottle aside like she’s afraid I might take it.

“Oh, never mind,” I say. “And don’t worry, I won’t take your wine. It’s a gift. Here.” I pull a package of Doritos from my bag. “Have some dinner.”

“You are an angel.”

“That’s right. Be sure to tell Brian, my husband. Remember?”

“Oh, that I’ll do.” Potthoff nibbles on the chips and washes them down with the wine.

By dusk, I have no more patience to wait around for Brian and I tear a piece of paper from the wine sack and scrawl out a note. *Darling,* I write, *I have never stopped loving you and*

never will. You are my life. You alone have hijacked my heart. You can torment me, abuse me, stone me, spit in my eye, but I'll go on loving you until the day I die. In fact, I would die for you. Kill for you. Please, please come home to me.

I decide not to sign the note. Brian knows my handwriting and he knows I'm his one true love. I stuff it deep inside the woman's breast pocket along with a ten-dollar bill. "Promise me you'll give this note to your son, Mrs. Potthoff. I must leave now. Got a life of my own, you know."

"Oh, I promise." The old woman pats her chest over the note. "First thing when the church bells start ringing."

I take the woman's hand and stare in her eyes. "Be sure you do just that. It's a matter of life and death. And if you're a good girl and do like I ask, I promise to come back with more of your favorite elixir!"

Mrs. Potthoff gently squeezes my hand and looks content, like she's just made a new and generous friend. I know the feeling.

A week goes by but Brian never shows up at my apartment. *Certainly, his mother gave him the note* I keep telling myself *and he understands we're meant to be together.*

Expecting Brian to return by Christmas, I buy him a bottle of Jack Daniel's and two polo shirts, one red and one green. But the days continue to pass as I wait for Brian to show up. Two days before Christmas, I can no longer stand the idle waiting and become furious with Mrs. Potthoff because I know she didn't give Brian the note.

By eight o'clock in the evening, I dress in Tiffany's wrinkled pink blouse and toss the bottle of Jack Daniel's in my bag, along with some bread, bologna, and cheese to feed Brian's mother.

Before closing the refrigerator door, I stop for a moment then grab the syringe I used to give Sylvester his 5-way shot and a few baggies of phenobarbital sodium crystals. All the while I'm thinking *Who knows how the evening might unfold?*

In the pitch darkness, I catch the bus to skid row.

The Van Buren area is quiet as I saunter toward Woodland Park. It seems that most people are away, probably doing last minute Christmas shopping at the malls. Someone passing me says, "Merry Christmas." I don't reply. Tonight, I'm in no mood to be merry and ho ho ho jolly. I'm on a mission to end Brian's hardship and clean up and clear out human trash.

At the far end of the park, I locate Mrs. Potthoff and half expect to see a makeshift Christmas tree from Brian or the shopping cart decorated in Christmas lights. But no. Only Mrs. Potthoff is lying on the ground covered with black plastic garbage bags. The night before it had rained and the old lady probably thinks it'll rain again tonight because scattered clouds are obscuring the moon and the stars.

I sit beside Brian's sleeping mother. "Wake up, Mrs. Potthoff. I've brought you a Christmas present."

"Go away," she mutters. "I ain't in the mood for Christmas."

"No, dearest. I'm sure you could use a taste of sweet elixir before beddy-bye." I take the bottle of whiskey from my sack, open the lid, and place it under her nose.

Mrs. Potthoff struggles up, rubs her eyes, and stares at me in the dim street light. “It’s my Christmas angel.” She grins.

“That’s right.” I smile. “Mrs. Potthoff, were you a good girl? Did you give the note to your son?” The homeless woman scratches her scalp. “You forgot to, didn’t you?” I open the woman’s cardigan, reach into her blouse pocket, and pull out the note. The ten-dollar bill is gone. “I knew it!” I exclaim with anger. “I can’t depend on you for anything, can I?”

“Oh, no? You can.”

I put the note back in her breast pocket then watch her feel around all her pockets as if looking for another surprising note.

A gust of wind starts blowing through the acacia trees and I hear a voice in my head. *Who’s there?* I ask myself. But I hear only traffic horns, a car alarm, and a siren in the distance. In my peripheral vision I see flashing blue police lights, and then many, many voices begin drifting through the smoggy air. People are chattering inside and outside of my head. The odor of fried venison liver and onions begins to assault my senses. *Do homeless people grill meat?* I ask myself. *No*, it becomes clear. *The smell is from a deer hunting camp. And the salty, gamey taste in my mouth is the raw meat Scottie and Martin are making me eat.*

My mind reels back to the deer hunting trip on the year I turned nine and started my period. The year Scottie tried to kill me with his rifle. *I’m wading down the cold stony brook in a pair of flipflop thongs collecting pretty stones to give to Lawrence and Esther. I’m waving my cattail wand to create magic. The white fluffy seeds blow into the golden aspens where God’s fingers are sifting through piles of golden coins that jingle in the breeze.*

In the distance, I hear the first rifle shot. That’s okay I tell myself *hunters usually trek along the ridge and down the mountain glen to look for rutting four-point bucks. Nobody hunts*

along the ranch road where I'm Sacajawea leading the Lewis and Clark expedition. Or so I'm thinking. *Then the next bullet rushes past my head in slow motion. . .*

The siren grows louder, the blue flashing lights become brighter, more intense. But I regain my focus on what I'm about to do like a deer hunter aiming for the kill shot.

As if waking from a coma, I stand before the homeless old woman and hold up the bottle of Jack Daniel's. "The time has come to do what I must do," I say aloud, pause a moment and correct myself. "No. I must do what God tells me to do. No. I mean what I'm destined to do. Brian will find the note on his mother and know I did the good deed and he'll be home by Christmas morning."

"Hungh?" the old woman stammers.

I hand her the liquor. "Here, Mrs. P. Merry Christmas. Drink up, I don't have all night."

"Nope," Potthoff takes the bottle. "Me neither. And a Merry Christmas to you, sweet angel of mercy." She drinks with a lust and gluttony I've never seen before. *Can she even tell the difference between Thunderbird and Jack Daniel's?* I wonder. "Slow down." I lower the bottle from her mouth. "I can spend more time with you." I remove the bread and bologna from my bag and make her a sandwich. "I bet you're hungry."

The old woman grabs the food. She apparently went to bed hungry. What a sad thing to happen to an old lady. To anyone.

I stare at Mrs. P and start thinking about Brian. How did he end up with such a burden? It's hard to believe this pathetic creature is the mother of my one true love. *Life really gets stupid when it comes to family*, I think then begin realizing that I haven't called my folks in over two months. And that I tossed their unopened Christmas card at the back of my closet. They'll be worried, I know. Maybe they're expecting gifts from me. *But who cares? Let them suffer like*

they made me suffer with their cheap gifts and deliberate taunts. My folks knew what Scottie was doing to me. They knew he shot his rifle at me. They didn't care. My brother was just being a boy, in their minds, and I was just a stupid little girl of no consequence. I was a nonentity in their lives. No, there aren't any gifts from Lucy Davis this year except for my gifts to Brian. I delight in my thoughts and begin laughing out loud.

Mrs. Potthoff finishes her sandwich and guzzles down more 'lixor. "Save some for me." I take the bottle from her. I suddenly feel struck by a howling gust of wind, one that emerges from the desert and blows through the city into the homeless park where it nearly knocks me down. I feel lightheaded and have no reflections or thoughts except to take precise aim. *I'm a deer hunter now, not a rabbit in a stew.*

I reach in my bag for the syringe and phenol and add the crystals to the remaining whiskey and shakes the bottle until the crystals dissolve. Potthoff lies back and seems satisfied with having a full belly.

I pull back the syringe plunger to draw in air, tilt the bottle on my lap, push down the plunger, and fill the syringe with four times the dosage to down a large dog. If this isn't enough, I'm thinking, I'll try another hit, then another, until I finish the job. Mrs. Potthoff's enormity and ill health make the task uncertain. She may end up in a peaceful slumber for the night. And what use would that be? I'll have to wait around to be sure the drug takes effect just like I used to do at the pound before the technicians loaded the dead animals in a pickup truck to dump in the desert.

Killing's so easy, I tell myself while looking at the amber liquid in the syringe. The 'lixer. In my mind, images of animals at the pound blur together. No one kitten or puppy, cat or dog stands out to me like they used to. In fact, I see only mangy, sickly animals with matted fur and pussy eyes—gross, unwanted creatures.

The old woman belches from the whiskey. I feel repulsed and tell myself that people will assume she died of a heart attack caused by her alcoholic condition. The thought makes me snicker.

"What's so funny?" Potthoff remarks, reaching for more of her 'lixer. In the street light, I see the silly grin plastered on her face.

"No more alcohol dear," I say. "Not now. I have medicine instead to help ease your pain."

"My sore aching muscles?" Potthoff innocently asks. "Doctor told me I have RA and lupus."

"That's right. I have medicine for your muscles, your RA and lupus. Diabetes too, if you've got that. Brian told me all about your ailments." I move closer to the woman, carefully hold the syringe upright, and help her lie comfortably on her back. She's heavier than I expect.

Potthoff moans as I get rid of air bubbles in the syringe like I did when giving Sylvester his shot. I push the plunger until a drop appears at the tip of the needle. "There we are, dear Mrs. P. This will only take a moment and then you'll feel like new." I lift the old woman's blouse and try to locate the area of her heart under her left breast. I reassure myself that no one will notice the needle mark under such a mound of flesh.

"It's my muscles that trouble me. Not my heart," Potthoff remarks. "My ticker ticks just fine."

"Oh? Well," I say. "I'm a nurse, you see, and you must trust me. An injection into the heart is the quickest way to reach your entire body, especially your muscles. Besides, didn't you know that the heart is a muscle, too?"

“My angel,” Potthoff whispers. It seems she’s found a comfortable position; one she probably finds before nodding off.

“That’s right, fall asleep.” I concentrate on the task at hand. I must hit the heart exactly right or the effect will take longer. When I locate the right area, I plunge the needle deep into her flesh and inject the amber liquid. All the while, I’m sensing it ooze into my own heart. The sensation is thrilling, like having a wish come true.

I then vigorously rub the area to help cover any sign of a needle mark. A small amount of blood seeps from the injection site and I wipe it with the edge of my “homeless” blouse from Tiffany Shelton.

“Ouch,” Brian’s mother declares in a delayed reaction.

“It’ll be over in a minute, sweetheart. And then you’ll feel good forever and ever.”

At the rabies shelter the drug usually took effect within a minute, seconds sometimes, but with Mrs. Potthoff I wait five, then ten minutes while checking her carotid artery now and then. The stubborn old lady doesn’t easily die. Her heart *is* strong.

“All right, then.” I prepare another dose with the remaining mixture in the whiskey bottle. I again inject the drug into her heart. This time I hold my fingers over the carotid artery and feel the woman’s life magically slip away. I’ve extinguished the flame that burns inside her and the church bells in her head begin ringing in mine.

I place her hands on her lifeless chest, cover her with the plastic bag, and step back to observe the motionless body. I feel exhilarated, no longer empty inside. Now I’m the one on top of the cliff looking down and throwing rocks at the stupid, worthless, human trash. God himself speaks to me and says, *Ye have dominion over every living thing that moveth*.

I laugh aloud, look around, throw the syringe and empty bottle into my bag, and head for the next bus home.

Chapter 7: The Reporter

Christmastime 1990

Dave Cadowsky

Shouting voices resonate in the large room of cubicles where reporters punch at their keyboards. The smell of burnt coffee permeates the air. I'm slumped at my desk, tension rings through my neck. It's been a long day and I'm ready to go home for Christmas Eve. But I can't afford such a luxury. Not me, Dave Cadowsky, investigative reporter for the Arizona Republic. I need an angle, one lousy line for the lamest story of my career—*Man Robs Beauty Shop at TriCity Mall.* The story, I'm sure, will go no further than the *Valley and State* section.

I rub my aching neck, sip strong bitter coffee, and recall the best story I've ever penned. The Bob Crane murder in '78 occurred two years after the murder of investigative reporter Don Bolles. The piece won me a National Press Club recognition award. I fondly recall the ceremony, a small gathering at Pinnacle Peak Patio where I gave a little speech on investigative reporting. I remember Elaina proudly gazing at me from our table. She was so beautiful, so young—her blond hair in a soft page, her bright green eyes lovely, endearing. I was young too, full of pep, wit, and always Johnny-on-the-spot for a cover story. I could sniff out a good lead miles away. Now I'm 45, balding, graying, and evidently squeezed dry of a good story line.

"Shit," I say aloud, my fingers on the Macintosh keyboard ready to pound-out the information I've gathered on the robbery. No deranged lover was involved. No disgruntled and

jealous husband. Just some punk kid robbing a hair salon. Maybe the boy needed Christmas money for his family. Now there's an edge—*Son Robs Beauties to Buy Mom a Gift.*

"Got a problem there, Dave?" A jovial voice bellows from above me.

I peer from the screen and see Dennis DeShay leaning over the cubicle wall. Dennis is a robust man but at least he has a full head of dark hair and looks 35 instead of his 45 years. Even though he's my best friend, Dennis is annoying as hell and always around to pester me at my most trying moments. For twenty years we've both been on the Republic staff competing for the front page. Lately, Dennis is outdoing me -- his fishing buddy -- with twice as many front-page bylines.

"Get lost, asshole," I stammer. "I'm busy."

"Yeah, I can see that." Dennis glances at the computer screen before I can close the file. If there's one thing I can't stand, it's someone peering at my work before it's finished, especially when that someone is Dennis DeShay. First drafts are private matters, meant to be rough, misspelled and never critiqued.

"What do you want, Dennis?" I cross my arms and lean back. "If it isn't about fishing or the Sun Devils, I'm not interested."

"No, buddy. I'm just looking out for you. Hey, if you want to pick up on that homeless feature you did last month—that Pulitzer Surprise piece of art—I got a flash for you."

"Let's hear it," I say impatiently, not amused by my friend's taunting. The piece had been about a skid row drug problem with tenuous connections to the State Capitol. The story ended up a small lead-in paragraph in the *Valley and State* with the rest buried on page six.

"Not so fast, buddy. You already owe me for the Keating lead. Now you'll owe me twice."

“Okay,” I say. “If it’s good, I’ll double up. Remember, I got two teenage boys to feed. And it’s Christmas.”

“Ain’t life a bitch and then you die.” Dennis roars obnoxiously, a laugh only he can muster. He enters my cubicle and leans against the desk beside the Mac. “Well, I just heard on the scanner that some bum found a dead lady.”

“So?”

“It’s the same lady you wrote about, Mr. Cadowsky. The one wrongly pinched for selling drugs. Re-mem-ber, the old lady you sympathetically portrayed.”

“Really?” I rub my chin in thought. “You mean Vicki?”

“Yeah, old Vicki what’s her name?”

“Murder?”

“Doesn’t sound like it. The old crone’s heart apparently gave out. She was pretty bad off a month ago when you whored yourself for the job.”

“Elaina about killed me for staying out all night. Sunday’s our date night. I really thought I had a cover story with the Capitol connection and all. You know, Arizona’s Mafia, Don Bolles.”

“Pity. Win some, lose some. Easy come, easy go. Well, old buddy. Some of us got work to do around here.” Dennis leaves the cubicle, adding, “remember, that’s two you owe me.”

I open my file and stare at the rancid lead-in while thinking how Vicki’s death could be a story. *Skid Row Witness of Drug Conspiracy Found Dead on Christmas Eve.* I shake my head in doubt although I’m still convinced a drug operation is happening behind the backs of legislative members at the Capitol, perhaps as far as the Governor’s office. Who knows? In 1976 someone assassinated my colleague Don Bolles for his probing into the truth behind land deals, race track

gambling, and top state politicians. When Bolles started his car on that fateful day, a remote devise triggered six sticks of dynamite. Bolles survived for ten days. It had been a horrible story to cover for us fellow reporters at the Republic. When I started nosing around the Capitol, I received my share of threatening letters and phone calls. It seems that a family of Mafioso are still thriving in Arizona and I want to shatter their enterprise and carry on the legacy of Don Bolles.

My original tip about the skid row connection came from an anonymous phone call. Major drug transactions were supposedly occurring in Woodland Park where I met Vicki, a harmless old lady. If anyone witnessed anything, it was Vicki. She had lived in the park for a long time. Police had even arrested her for selling narcotics. But that travesty was a sham. I believe someone set up Vicki to eliminate her as a witness. The misjustice, however, didn't chase Vicki from her home on the streets. She had no place else to go.

Vicki had told me about money exchanges in Woodland Park and she described a woman with a long black wig who sounded like the undersecretary of state. I even spent the night in the park with Vicki to watch the activity while fearing for my life. I had been desperate for the story but nothing happened that night.

Maybe I still have a story, I think and stop typing my current piece. Vicki is dead. How? Murdered? A harmless vagabond snuffed out? By whom? Who wanted her out of the park? No doubt the lowlife scumbag who threatened her life if she didn't keep her mouth shut about what she saw in the park. I do have a story and even if it only makes page six of the *Community Section*, I at least owe Vicki a few phone calls. If I'm lucky, I might uncover a murderer.

I pick up the phone and dial the County Medical Examiner's office where the staff reviews unattended deaths. A deputy examiner answers the phone.

“Gus? Dave Cadowsky here.”

“Hey, Pollock. Wha’s up?”

“Hear you got an old lady from skid row.”

“Our big excitement of the day. Quite a mess. She’s been dead since last night and was starting to stink when they found her.”

“Any signs of murder, something good like that?” I ask with hopeful expectations.

“Nah. Died of a pickled heart. I’d say right off the bat.”

“Autopsy?”

“Why bother. We’re too busy around here as it is. And nobody suspects anything, know what I mean.”

“Too bad. Too bad,” I say. “Mind if I stop by and pay my respects?”

“She’ll be in storage a while. Police are trying to locate her family but I’m doubtful about that. She’ll probably have to burn.”

“Pity,” I say, searching my brain for something Vicki might have said about family. “Say, I remember she mentioned a son in Cincinnati. Might try there.”

“Cool,” Gus replies. “Thanks for the tip.”

“See you around five.” I hang up and speed dial Elaina to tell her I plan to stop by the morgue on my way home. She’s annoyed that I’ll be late on Christmas Eve but she’s also supportive because she knows I need a story break and must go wherever a lead might take me.

Before heading to the morgue, I tie up my current lame piece of prose for the deadline. And that takes an hour. God, I wish someone would phone me with the perfect story for tomorrow’s Christmas Day spread.

Lucy Davis

It's nearly ten AM on Christmas Eve Day when I wake up. The night before, I was so exhausted when I got home that I fell asleep on the sofa and slept through the alarm and well past my planned time to get up and start looking for a job. I'm nearly out of food and money and don't want to ask my aunt for help. I'm still angry with her, angry with myself, with Brian, with his mother. With everyone in this lousy world.

Suddenly, I remember the events of last night and I sit up in shock. "What did you do, Lucy Lu?" I say aloud, recalling the last injection into the old woman's heart and feeling her pulse fade away. But my head's fuzzy about anything else that happened.

In the bathroom, I wash my face and stare in the mirror at my piercing, slate-blue eyes. I'm not sure who I see or how I really feel. The reality of the act I committed is clear, however. I downed another human being, not an animal.

Brian's face suddenly appears in the mirror in place of my own, reminding me that I did it for him. How can I possibly feel any remorse over such an unselfish act of love? Besides, the old woman was a burden to Brian and to herself. I did everyone a favor.

Under the shower, cold water needles my skin and coaxes my mind awake. Pictures flash before me of Mrs. Potthoff lying dead but I mentally take a sharp Bowie knife and slices away these haunting images. Brian is my only concern.

I remain in my studio all day watching TV and hoping beyond hope that Brian's found the note and will return to me. My gifts for him still sit on the kitchen counter, minus the Jack Daniel's, of course.

As the hours pass by, Brian never shows up.

On Christmas morning, I awake to a knock on my door. Brian? I think.

Before I can shout his name, I hear my aunt calling out, "Lucy, sweetheart, are you in there?" I sit up but refuse to answer the door. I have no desire to visit with her. *How dare she come around after the harm she's caused me* I think to myself. *She probably forced Brian to leave. Of course, she did! How could Brian stick around after Lucinda's unpleasant visit?*

"Lucy, please, if you're in there. I need to talk to you."

I stare at the door. A card appears from underneath it. Then I hear her footsteps fade away. *Jesus*, I think as I crawl from bed to turn on the TV, ignoring the card. *Can't everyone leave me alone?*

In an hour or so, on my way to the kitchen, I pick up the Christmas card and toss it in the back of my closet along with the rest of my unopened mail and the wrinkled homeless blouse from Tiffany Shelton.

A few days following New Years, as I'm watching Oprah and eating potato chips on the sofa, someone again pounds on my door. "Brian," I yell in excitement. *It must be him* I swear to myself as I rush to the door. But when I swing it open, I see Layton the landlord leaning against the side jamb.

"No, I ain't Brian," the burly man says with sarcasm. "I'd say we're a little late on the old rentaroony, Miss Davis. Due on the first. Holiday or no holiday."

"Shut-up, asshole!" I shout. "You conned me out of enough rent when Brian was here."

"Sorry, it doesn't work that way." Layton holds out his chubby hand, palm up. "Pay, or get on your way. And I mean it Lucy. Mr. Tiller insists. I'm just doing my job."

"I don't have any money. You give him what you robbed from me. I just lost my job the other day."

“Ain’t that a shame. Look. Either you pay me tonight or I’ll call the police to evict you.”

“You can’t evict me until the end of the month you lying fat bastard!” I scream.

Layton flashes a devious smile and peers beyond me at my studio. “What have you been doing? This place is a disaster zone, a health hazard!”

I slam the door in his face and return to the sofa to resume eating chips and watching Oprah, as if nothing has occurred.

By late afternoon, I decide to go out dancing. However, I’m smart enough to realize that I must disguise myself because I’ve committed a crime. I run to the local convenience store and buy *Clairol Nice’n Easy* dark red. I want to look glamorous like my ex-friend Tiffany Shelton.

After I dye and set my hair, I put on some makeup, my silver charm bracelet, and my fuchsia sequined dress, remembering how sexy Brian thought I looked the night we met at Bobby McGee’s Conglomeration. In a large tote bag, I toss a few toiletries, some food, and the baggies of phenol I’ve stockpiled in the refrigerator.

Because I won’t be returning to my studio, I grab the wrinkled blouse from Tiffany and a few other items of clothing, and head out the door not bothering to lock it.

At a local tavern, I order a glass of Chablis and notice an Arizona Republic lying on the bar stool beside me. I skim the headlines. There isn’t any noteworthy news, just some story about a freeway closure and one about vending machine robberies. *Big fucking deal* I’m thinking. But when I thumb to the third page an Associated Press headline leaps out at me *Homeless Woman Murdered—Victim of Capitol Drug Trafficking Scandal?*

Wide-eyed with intrigue, I read the story. *Death of homeless woman aroused suspicion of Phoenix reporter David Cadowsky who investigated a drug conspiracy last year. The day after*

Christmas, Cadowsky requested an autopsy on the homeless woman. The examiner determined there were possible signs of foul play.

"Do you have any of last week's *Arizona Republics* around here?" I ask the bartender as I toss aside the newspaper I'm holding. The gray-haired, professor-type man places a stack of Republics on the bar in front of me and smirks, as if he thinks I'm peculiar and he's so perfect. What an asshole. But I don't respond to him. Instead, I search through the newspapers for any story by David Cadowsky.

I find one published in the December 26th issue on page seven of the front section. The story reviews some kind of scandal involving a Mafia connection to state politicians. Cadowsky says the dead homeless woman was an informant in one of his earlier stories. Her name is Vicki. Simply Vicki. No last name. *It's believed the woman's son lives in Cincinnati* I read. *Investigators found an apparent unsigned "love note" on the victim. Could this be a code for drugs? "I will die for you. Kill for you," the note reads.*

"Cincinnati!" I exclaim. The annoying old bartender glances my way but then ignores me. The old lady was right, I think to myself. Brian's gone to Cincinnati. But why? He's from Texas. I sigh; my hopes are frustrated once more. Then I realize that Brian's probably received word of his mother's death and has already returned to Phoenix. *No wonder Brian didn't come home to me for Christmas. He was in Cincinnati for some reason. Somehow, he got the note from his mother's pocket, or read about it in the newspapers. But now that I've left our apartment, how will he find me?*

The thought puzzles me and I reassure myself that I did the right thing. I unburdened Brian and lured him back to Phoenix. And I've made it into the newspapers. I'm a celebrity of sorts. A person of note!

Feeling empowered, all of a sudden, I throw a dollar on the counter and head for the door, ready to go dancing. I wiggle my shoulders and see myself as Tiffany Sheldon.

"That's two fifty," the old bartender yells from behind as I'm leaving the tavern.

"I'll be back. Just stick it on my whatchamacallit. And while you're at it, add a dollar tip for yourself."

Outside the bar I stand on the sidewalk and watch the traffic pass by. *Where will I go?* I wonder. I have very little money and am not about to return to my apartment. Layton's possibly entered it by now. He's a thief and probably a rapist! Maybe he's called the police. He's such a crooked troublemaker. And I can't let them catch me when I haven't even located Brian.

I take the bus to Van Buren and 7th Avenue and by nine o'clock I'm at Shorty's Tavern in the heart of skid row. The juke box is playing Willie Nelson's *When the Roll is Called up Yonder.* Several grungy men are shooting pool. I put my bag on an empty bar stool and order a beer. Then I survey the dark smoky room that smells musty from years of sweaty, drunken clientele. Ridiculous pathetic people.

"Where do they take dead bodies?" I ask the bartender, a young man wiping the back counter. He stares at me for a moment as if I've asked him a stupid question then he says, in a thick accent, that he hasn't a clue. He resumes his task.

At the other end of the bar, I notice a familiar man looking at me and grinning like that simple-minded guy in *Of Mice and Men*. It's the tall, middle-aged man with a bony face. I suddenly remember his cat calls and regret having caught his glance but then I feel like dancing and he's the only talent around. I motion him over.

The man happily grabs his beer and sits beside me. He wears a smelly and soiled Phoenix Cardinals sweatshirt.

“Hey, Red,” the man drools. “Don’t I know you from some place?”

“Sure Pops. Come on,” I take his hand and lead him to the juke box. I select *Another One Bites the Dust* then swirl on the floor while the lanky man tries to keep up with me. He appears perplexed but overjoyed most likely because he hasn’t had this much stimulation since landing on skid row.

When the song ends, I’m dizzy and return to the bar to finish my beer, leaving the puzzled man alone by the juke box. He staggers over to where I’m sitting, leans toward me, and closes his eyes. “Hey, Red. My darling. How ‘bout a kiss?” His breath is as foul as a pile Brian’s unlaundered socks.

I push him away and he nearly falls to the floor but catches himself. “That’s not nice,” he slurs.

“Hey, why don’t you pay for my beer, old man?” He happily reaches in his pocket and hands the bartender a couple of dollars.

“Now, beat it Pops,” I say. “Come back when I’m ready to dance.” I merely shake my head as the man tries to focus on me.

“You’re pretty, Red,” he says. “Want a smoke? Charlie here sells loose cigarettes from the pack. Loosies are a dime a piece.”

“Lucys? Humm,” I say. “Well, old man. I am feeling good tonight. Why not smoke?” The man buys six cigarettes which I grab from the bartender and toss in my bag prepared to head to the women’s shelter on Adams. I don’t feel like dancing anymore although I don’t know why.

“Hey, where’re you going,” the lanky man calls from behind me as I leave the bar. He follows me onto the street.

“Get lost Pops. I don’t want your company anymore!” I shrill.

“But I need a smoke. Hey, got any wine in that magic sack?” He gazes at my tote bag. It’s a cool winter evening, Phoenix style, and the noisy traffic and exhaust of Van Buren Street seem to percolate beneath the streetlights.

I stop and stare at the pesky man. “Do you know Mrs. Potthoff, Vicki Potthoff?” I ask with anticipation. “Old Wind Tunnel?”

“Mean Vicki?” the man asks. I nod and smile. The man continues, “She’s a goner, I hear. Fell off the other night. Never woke up.”

“That’s right. She bit the dust!” I take hold of the man’s thin, trembling arm. “Has her son been around? Brian Potthoff.”

The man stares at me for a moment then tries to kiss me. I whack him across the face. “You useless old shit,” I say and head toward the park on my way to the shelter. I scan the area hoping to see Brian and sit on a park bench beside a tree to wait for him to miraculously appear. But before long, I hear the lanky man say, “That wasn’t nice. Hitting an old fool like me. I just want to party, Red.”

I look at the man as he dawdles before me. *Here he is* I’m thinking to myself *the same old pesky blight on society.* I don’t even think about what I’m going to do next. The man has been asking for it all night, in fact, ever since I first encountered him weeks ago. *Tonight, I’m going to unleash my magic powers once again.*

“Yeah, Pops, let’s party.” I rise from the bench and take his hand. He bears the same simpering grin Vicki Potthoff had when she got her elixir. *Truly, I’m the Angel of Mercy* I tell myself and lead the man toward the empty lot where Vicki had searched for her treasures.

“Where we going, Red?” the man asks as we move along the streets as swiftly as his condition allows.

“Don’t you want to make love, old man?”

“Ho boy.” He pauses a moment to catch his breath. “Yes. Darling of mine.”

At the far end of the field, beside an old abandoned apartment building, I let go of the man’s hand and sprawl out on the grass and weeds. The man plops down beside me.

I stare at the stars dimmed by the city’s sphere of light. In my mind, each star begins to flash and spin like disco globes. “The constellations are disco dancers,” I say to the man who now lies on his side staring at me and trying to recover his breath. “I ought to be on a shooting star leaping through the heavens, beings I’m an angel of mercy.” I laugh aloud and look over at the lanky man. I’m glad he’s exhausted enough not to bother me for another kiss. “Feeling good Pops?”

“Sure am, Red. Just hope I can wake up little George. Been an awfully long time since I put him to work. Other than pissin.” He laughs.

I sit up and rummage through my bag for the wine I brought from home. “Lookie what I got, Pops.”

When the man sees the wine, he struggles up for a drink.

“Me first,” I say and take a few gulps. I can’t explain it but I feel like all the stars above are tingling my skin as if I’m drunk on the elixir of Mercury. *Now I have all the powers of dominion, not Daddy. Not Scottie. Not God. Not no one but Me! I’m the one who rules with a magic wand!* The thought makes me laugh uproariously.

The man joins me in laughter and reaches for the wine. I take out two loosies. I’ve only smoked a few times before when Brian coaxed me into it. Now I want to take up the habit. I’ll be a smoker when Brian finally comes home. He’ll like that. We’ll share cigarettes and smoke

together. Even pot and whatever it is he smokes in his glass pipe. But wait a minute! I announce to myself. I don't have a home anymore. I'm homeless. How will Brian ever find me?

"Here, Pops," I hand him a lit cigarette.

The man wipes his mouth then touches my breast. I slap him teasingly, lean on one hand, and deeply inhale my loosie and blow the smoke toward heaven. I stare at the man, figuring him to be fifty, and grab the wine before he finishes it off. *These homeless people are sure greedy gluttons* I tell myself as he lies snugly on his side, seemingly content. He belches, closes his eyes, and drags on his loosie.

"You're no fun, Pops." I snuff out my cigarette. "I thought you were going to tantalize me with George."

The man says nothing. He's gone. I check his pulse. It's strong and vibrant. "Scared me for a moment," I say. "I thought God beat me to the punch line."

From my bag, I remove the syringe I've been carrying around since using it on Mrs. Potthoff, as if it has some kind of sentimental value and I can't part with it, as if it's become my magic wand. Besides, it comes in handy now. I also take out a baggie of phenol and pour the crystals into the wine bottle. I prepare the syringe, roll the sleeping man on his back, and raise up his shirt. There's no problem plunging the needle through his thin, slack muscle into the heart where I inject the steady stream of liquid death.

The man sleeps like a good boy. I feel his carotid and find no pulse. "No, too soon!" I exclaim and put my ear on his heart. To my relief, I hear a battered and abused heart desperately struggling to beat. Within a minute, I hear nothing but my own excited heartbeat and the distant sound of traffic. I carefully place the man's left hand to his side and try to make him appear as if he's died in his sleep from natural causes.

The night grows stiff with darkness. A chilling breeze nips my flesh. The traffic noise begins to fade.

All at once, the lanky man's eyes pop wide open as if he's seen a ghost. He *is* a ghost! His left-hand grabs my wrist with my dangling charm bracelet.

I screech and try desperately to yank my arm free but his grip is strong and his eyes are plastered on me like laser beams. I can't pull away from him. "You're dead!" I scream. "You're a fucking corpse."

The man continues to clutch my wrist as if he's trying to drag me down into hell, the *place of eternal damnation*.

With all my strength I yank free and leap away from the horrible dead man. In the process, he rips off my bracelet and grasps it in his boney hand.

I start to flee for my life and leave everything behind, including my bag, but then I stop myself. Haste is irrational. I must return for the evidence. For my things.

When I do, the man's round eyes are staring at the stars. I stand beyond his reach. He doesn't move. His hand lies across his chest where it collapsed clutching my charm bracelet.

I grab my bag then look around to see if anyone has heard my scream. No one's in sight.

I kick the man's legs. There's no movement. No rigor mortis.

Slowly, cautiously, I crouch over the body. "One, two, three," I count and attempt to yank my bracelet from the cadaver's grasp. Before I'm able to free it, the man's other hand pulls my head onto his chest while clawing my cleek and piercing my neck with pain.

My heart drums violently. I fear I'm having a heart attack and will die on the body of the man I killed. Then I realize he's an inanimate object like the deer carcasses hanging from pine

poles wedged in fir trees at the McGrew deer hunting campsite. I grip my bracelet and roll away while tugging at it until the cadaver lets go.

For a moment, I peer at the sky while lying on the rough earth trying to catch my breath and still my racing heart. Once back on my feet, I deeply inhale the chilling night air. No one seems to be around so I toss the bracelet in my bag, along with everything else I brought to the scene, and head for Adams Street while glancing back several times at the horrifying dead man.

Dave Cadowsky

"I already heard," I say as Dennis DeShay leans over my cubicle. "Another body on skid row. I'm already at pathology." I get up to leave.

"Yeah, but it's a tenuous link," Dennis suggests. "These skid row bums live on the edge of life. Die all the time. Do it to themselves."

"Gus performed an autopsy on this poor fellow," I say.

"And?"

"Alcohol. But there were bruises, signs of a struggle, and a trace of sodium phenobarbital. I'm the one who convinced Gus to perform an autopsy on Vicki. If I'm lucky, then bingo–mass murders and my story has a clusterfuck angle!"

"Gus will do anything for you," Dennis whines. "He won't even make a skin scraping for me."

"I'm off." I push in my chair and grab my briefcase.

Dennis yells after me, "Don't be surprised if the cheap wine these people drink isn't made from peno. . . whatever. And don't forget we're fishing at Lake Pleasant this weekend."

"Unless I get a story break," I yell back.

On the way to the morgue, I scramble through my mind for a good lead-in. *Capitol Drug Ring Out of Control. Homeless Victims Pay with Their Lives*. What if it isn't murder? I begin to think. Dennis could be right. Death from wine. Cheap thrills. Maybe I'm stretching it. Maybe there isn't even a drug ring and Bolles died without any connection to organized crime.

The Jeffers Hour

Welcome back friends. This is Jeff Jeffers, your host with the most provocative and controversial hour available to you from the Valley of the Sun. Tonight, we're discussing the issue of forced retirement. Our guest is Dr. Dwight Vickers, author of "Phased Out." Mr. Vickers, it seems that some people just aren't ready to retire. And then suddenly, they're out the door.

That's right Jeff, Dr. Vickers says over the radio. *And the psychological trauma can be devastating, although many people are overjoyed at the prospect.*

Our next caller is Tiffany Hoffman, Jeffers interrupts. *She's a waitress at the Golden Bowl in Mesa. Hello caller, are you taking a break from all those Mesans?*

"That's right, Jeff. People are pesky out here in Mesa."

Ms. Hoffman, are you looking forward to early retirement? Sounds like you're still very young.

Yes, Mr. Jeffers. I am.

You sound familiar. Have you called in before?

No! This is my first time.

Ms. Hoffman, callers usually phone in with an opinion. Got one?

Yes, I do, Jeff. I think early retirement is a great idea. We ought to retire more people, like those homeless bums on skid row. I say, shoot 'em up with phenol and get rid of 'em all.

Sounds drastic. And that's about all we have time for from Tiffany the Mesa waitress. Gee folks, I guess Mesa has its share of whacked out individuals. Our next caller. . .

Dave Cadowsky

I stare at the radio on the dining room sideboard in stone-cold astonishment. My mouth drops open and blood drains from my face.

"You all right, dear?" Elaina waves her hand in front of me. My wife, sons Cliff and Paul, and I are finishing our dinner with key lime cheesecake, Elaina's specialty.

"I've got a story," I exclaim. "Quick, Elaina, get my notepad. What was that restaurant in Mesa? The Golden Bough?"

"Right Dad," thirteen-year-old Cliff mutters.

"No, it was the Golden Bowl," exclaims fourteen-year-old Paul. The boys have grown animated from my excitement.

Elaina hands me a pad and pen and I vigorously jot-down what I just heard on the radio. "This is my story of the decade. Definitely a Pulitzer nomination. Got to go, kids," I leap from the table and head for the den to grab my briefcase.

Elaina trails behind. "But honey, what's the connection? The woman probably read your piece about the homeless deaths."

"Yes, Elaina." I stop and grasp my wife by the shoulders. "But I never mentioned the phenobarbital. Couldn't. Detective Ellis warned me not to. Could harm his case, you know.

We've been here before." I give her a long warm kiss and tight embrace. "Wish me luck, hon. I've got research to do and a story to finish before some other schmuck gets ahold of it."

"Be careful," Elaina says as I close the front door. I've heard these words many times before. Elaina is such a supportive wife, I'm thinking, always there for me in times of joy and times of difficulty. Naturally, I upset her when I went to Cincinnati but her anger was short lived. She understands I need a break like this. And she'll be rooting for me. After she clears the dishes this evening, I imagine she'll call her friends to brag that her husband has a big scoop. She won't reveal anything about the story because she knows how important secrecy is in my profession. One word to the wrong person could kill my lead. But that's never happened and I'm confident it won't happen now.

Central Phoenix Precinct, Homicide Investigation Unit

Sergeant Jack Ellis, department head, sits behind his desk at the Central Phoenix Precinct, Homicide Investigation Unit on the third floor. His pungent pipe smoke chokes the air in his private office. Outside the open door is a large room of detectives busy working at desks cluttered with files. There aren't any cubicles like the ones we have at the Republic.

"You blew it, Mr. Cadowsky," says the heavy-set African American father of five.

For thirty years, my friend Jack Ellis has worked for the Phoenix Police Department, as a patrol officer, a night detective on robbery detail, and then he toiled away in the Sex Crimes and Assaults Unit. Finally, Jack landed his current and coveted position in the homicide detail. These days he wants nothing but simple cases so he and his wife of twenty-nine years can retire in five years. They're eager to move to a mobile home park in Bullhead City, across the Colorado River from slot machines, shows, and prime rib dinners in Laughlin, Nevada. In fact, Jack requested a transfer to something less stressful but the Chief of Police claimed the city's single homicide

detail required an established veteran like him. As head of homicide, Jack assigns cases to his detectives, legwork to his rookies, but he works the difficult cases himself before informing the Deputy County Attorney when a suspect is in custody.

Jack sighs, peering at me sitting before his desk. I'm holding a notepad and pen, a pencil in my ear, my legs are crossed. On occasion, my informative tips make his job easier but most often he really hates reporters, especially me. Despite our usefulness, Jack claims reporters spell trouble. We interfere with investigations, corrupt leads, and just plain get in the way. But Jack and I go back nearly twenty years and we share a mutual respect. We both have occupations that require relentless probing and research. More often than not, I come to Jack first with information vital to a case, as with Vicki's murder.

Jack accepted the homeless murder cases believing they'd be a simple matter. Then, as he likes to tell me, I started mucking things up with so-called political and underworld connections. I generally follow the ground rules established between us and wait for the right moment to break my story, except for this recent little slip up.

"I told you not to mention the barbital," Jack practically yells. "Now this mystery woman of yours has probably left the country. You're an irritating son-of-a-bitch!"

"Jack, you know I must give the public its news and earn my bread and butter. If I don't, some other jerk-off will. I'm home free on this one. It's the mystery lady who slipped up, am I right?"

The detective glowers at me, knowing I'm right although I've come dangerously close to breaking the unwritten code of ethics between us. "Anyway, can we get on with it?" I ask. "We're married, brother, you and I. We can't live without each other." I throw Jack an obnoxious kiss to lighten the mood. "Any new leads, my friend?"

“Aren’t you eager today.” Jack sets aside his pipe and reaches behind his desk to the coffee pot. He refills his stained cafeteria cup.

“This is a hell of a story, my friend.”

“Yes, yes, the story’s yours. Some pup from the Gazette was nosing around earlier this morning but I got rid of him.”

“Sent him on a wild goose chase?” I ask, amused.

“I quit doing that. Don’t want any hotheaded reporter shoving his self-righteous indignation down my throat.”

“That’s very good.” I pretend to quote Jack on my notepad.

Jack nods. “I told him he might want to recheck that restaurant. The Golden Bough.” We both laugh.

I raise my pen. “Any prints on the old lady’s wine bottles?”

Jack calmly sips his coffee and seems to savor its taste and aroma. “No. Her shopping cart of things are in storage. Remember. No one collected evidence. The coroner ruled she died a natural death, at first. But we picked up prints on a bottle near Mark Abercrombie, the second victim.”

“Any family come forward?”

“No. Abercrombie doesn’t match any missing person’s report. The bartender at Shorty’s, some Vietnamese guy named Tung Nguyen, claimed Abercrombie hung out at his tavern whenever he panhandled enough cash. No leads. However, Nguyen saw Mark leave with some redheaded dame in a pink evening dress the night of his death. Nguyen said she asked him something about where they take dead people. He remembered it because it was so unusual.”

“Excellent,” I take vigorous notes. “Our mystery woman?”

“We ran a name check. Only two Tiffany Hoffmans in the state. One is an old lady in Flag. The other is a four-year-old in Tucson. There was a B. Hoffman, but it turned out to be Barney.”

“Makes sense, I don’t think she’ll give herself away so easily. She’s at play. A serial player. A sociopath.” I pause in thought. “The bartender sounds like a great witness. Anyone else see this mysterious redhead?”

“What?” Jack asks. “You haven’t interviewed every transient on skid row? I’m surprised at you.”

“I’m headed there next,” I reply. “But those people are reluctant to talk unless forced into court. I was lucky to meet Vicki. Pity someone killed her. And the barbital? Any leads on that? Where it comes from?”

Jack sips his coffee and relights his pipe. “Used in every hospital and veterinary clinic. We did, however, ask for transcripts from the Jeffers program.”

“Clever of me to suggest it, wouldn’t you say?”

Jack shrugs. “Perpetrators love publicity. And if she called in that night like a wacko, I’m sure she’s done it before. I’m also sure she’s been enjoying your coverage, if she’s still in the state.” Jack hands me a folder of printouts. “Be my guest,” he says. “All my rookies are on assignment. Read these transcripts in my office so I can keep an eye on you.”

I wink at Jack then quietly sit back and begin skimming page after page of the transcripts. After nearly forty minutes I pause and carefully reread *Well Lucy, the Rabies Lady, I’m sure you have much to say, but tonight we’re interested in. . . well folks, that was the Rabies Lady—a bit odd. Maybe she’s been around too many euthanizing drugs.* “Bingo! I found something here,” I

interrupt Jack as he's looking over case statements that one of his rookies just dropped off. "Can I mark it?"

"Sure, sure," Jack gestures okay then tokes on his pipe.

I scan the transcripts for earlier phone calls from this Rabies Lady or anyone named Lucy. "I really think we have something here," I say in a serious tone then read Jack a passage about killing animals at the dog pound.

Jack grabs the sheet and rereads it himself. "All right," he says, placing the transcripts on his desk. "Let's call the rabies control shelter and ask for a Ms. Lucy Davis—the mysterious Rabies Lady. I have some field work to do this afternoon. For one of my rookies." He chuckles.

Chapter 8: Butte Montana

January 21, 1991

Lucy Davis

The Central Arizona Women's Shelter on Adams Street, near the old pioneer cemeteries, disgusts me. It smells of disinfectant like the dog pound and the gals living here between the unadorned, institutionalized walls are constantly chattering; and the fifty-year-old matron, Mrs. Neuberger, insists I scrub the toilets. Bitch! She also scolds me for leaving a mess at the sink after I touched up my roots with Clairol red hair dye. But I refuse to do anything and Mrs. Neuberger claims I've violated my two-week probationary stay.

"May I suggest," Mrs. Neuberger says to me as I stand before her office desk. "That you go to the battered women's shelter. If they have room they'll take you in for a while." She hands me a business card with the phone number circled. "Tell them this Brian fellow you've been talking about abused you."

“You don’t know shit about my boyfriend!” I snap at the police-like woman.

This all came about because everyone at the shelter kept asking me about the deep scratches on my cheek and I had to come up with an explanation. I thought to say that I’d had a spat with my boyfriend. At the same time, I was asking the gals at the shelter if they knew Brian Pottoff with the offhand chance that someone might know him and his whereabouts. I had to reveal his name. But I never intended to give anyone the impression that Brian had physically abused me, like I’m a battered woman without a spine. “No!” I tell Mrs. Neuberger. “I’m not a pathetic victim and Brian never hit me or slapped me in any kind of way.”

“You must go somewhere, honey,” the matron persists. “Because you can’t stay here without doing your fair share of the work. Go by the rules or no bed.”

I stomp into the dormitory to gather my tote bag but before I leave, I trade my wrinkled and stained blouse from Tiffany Shelton, and my fuchsia sequined dress for another woman’s Sun Devil’s T-shirt and a pair of loose-fitting jeans. Then I toss the half-used *Nice’n Easy* box onto my cot and head out the doors tossing the card to the battered women’s shelter over my shoulder.

It’s three in the afternoon when I find myself walking toward the bus stop on Van Buren while not really knowing where I’m headed. Maybe I’ll spend the night in Woodland Park, I’m thinking, on the very boxes Brian’s mother once used. Maybe Brian will show up. “Oh, stop it,” I say aloud and pull my red hair in anger. The fact is, I’m hungry and tired of the whole mess Brian’s stupid mother caused me. If that old woman hadn’t been around in the first place, Brian and I would be in Hawaii right now living in honeymoon bliss.

On my way to Woodland Park, I walk down a side street of old houses where drug deals obviously take place. At the end of the block, I notice a police car patrolling the area. I stop dead

in my tracks, worried the cops will turn down the street I'm on. They do. I'm completely paralyzed. The syringe and a baggie of phenol are in my bag. Back at the women's shelter, I had been using a pinch of the stuff each night to help me sleep in the noisy dormitory room.

When the patrol car nears it slows down and the officers stare at me. I turn my head and pray they'll pass by. I continue walking nonchalantly even though I want to turn and run the other way. As soon as they pass by, I speed up my pace but not too fast because I don't want to arouse any suspicion. At the end of the street, to my relief, the patrol car is nowhere in sight. Once I'm inside the park, I flop down on the grass, use my tote bag as a pillow, and quickly fall asleep under the warm afternoon sunshine.

Before long, I wake up to a series of phlegmy snorts. Startled, I look toward the noise coming from a nearby tree and trash can where an old man lies huddled on the ground. He seems to be trying to clear a breathing passage so he can return to sleep. I survey the area. There's no sign of the patrol car or anyone else. I have an apple in my bag and decide to set it by the old man so he'll have something to eat after he wakes from his difficult slumber.

As I carefully place the apple on the ground beside him, he coughs like phlegm has clogged his every corpuscle. Must be asthma, I think to myself, or an upper respiratory infection like pound animals sometimes contract. And when a pound animal starts sneezing, it's condemned to death because the shelter can't afford to have an upper respiratory infection spread like wild fire through the kennels.

A surge of pity overtakes me as I stare at the man trying to sleep. I see a few people by the restrooms but they seem preoccupied in their own little world. They're probably doing drugs. I sit beside the old man and reach in my bag for the syringe and white crystals. Wanting quick success this time, I pour the entire baggie into my bottled water and prepare the syringe. The

drug may have lost some of its potency but I expect it to work. The old man is close to his end anyway.

He wakes and sees me but only makes raspy breaths. I peer in his tired eyes which were probably worn-out years ago and yet, here he is living an uncomfortable existence. Until now when his angel of mercy will nudge into the kingdom of Jesus.

This time, I shove the needle in the jugular, unconcerned about leaving a mark. I want to be quick and disturb the man as little as possible. I wish I could give him more air for his last breath on Earth. When I finish and chuck the syringe back in my bag, I watch his heavy and difficult breathing. He jerks a bit. Then, to my surprise, his eyes open wide and his look reminds me of my second downing at the pound, about a year earlier. It was a Shepherd-mix six-month-old puppy whose wide eyes gazed at me as the drug took effect. The pound Vet saw me look at the dog's eyes and said, "When you're stuck with the job of downing an animal don't look in its eyes."

It was good advice that I would subsequently follow but now I vividly remember the Shepherd's confused gaze. He was asking me why? Saying, I don't understand. He was scared. I reach over and shut the old man's eyes to a world that's all too often wicked and cruel.

At six o'clock in the evening, I show up at my aunt's doorstep. Lucinda eagerly welcomes me home with hugs and kisses. "You look so tired, child," she says. "Red hair? It looks nice. Suits your complexion."

In the kitchen, Lucinda pours me a glass of homemade lemonade from the lemon tree in her backyard. I quietly drink the cool refreshing juice and allow my aunt say whatever it is she

has to say. I don't feel like talking about anything and I have no appetite for making idle chit chat.

"I can't tell you how sick with worry I've been," Lucinda remarks. "It's been nearly five months since I last heard from you. Lucy, that boyfriend of yours imprisoned you emotionally and forced you to shun your entire family. But what I need to say can wait until after you've had a good night's sleep. I can hardly imagine what you've endured but I know it was traumatic. Never mind that. I'm so glad you've come home to your aunt Lu."

I eventually retreat to my former room which hasn't changed since I moved out over a year before.

The following morning, well past eleven, I groggily enter the kitchen. Lucinda sits at the green metal table reading the Republic and watching Bob Barker on a small black and white TV. "I made your favorite—buckwheat pancakes," Lucinda says as she goes to the stove and heats up the griddle. She then pours me a cup of coffee.

"Uhha," I mutter, feeling wrung out. I lazily add sugar to my coffee. My focus is on the TV and I'm not really thinking about anything else, not even Brian. I want nothing but rest. Peace and quiet. The homeless shelter got on my nerves, like Layton had, like my job had, like Brian's mother had, as well as all the tramps on skid row. My life's become overwhelming. Now I hardly care what happens as long as someone else takes charge of my situation. Like my Aunt Lu.

Lucinda places before me a plate of pancakes and pours heated maple syrup on top. A pleasant aroma fills the kitchen but I can't eat. My appetite has drained away.

"Aren't you hungry, sweetheart?" Lucinda asks.

I shrug and look at my aunt for the first time this morning. She appears too peppy for a woman in her senior years. But Lucinda's always been cheerful in the mornings as if she's trying to make life into a good thing. And for me, life isn't so pleasant. I take a bite of the pancakes. "Umm good," I somberly say to appease my aunt.

"Listen," Lucinda says, holding her cup of coffee and sitting across the table from me. "There's something I must tell you."

"Got a cigarette?" I push aside the pancakes I've barely touched. It's no use.

"What? You took up smoking?"

"Why do you care? From the smell of it you've been smoking like a chimney ever since I left."

"Sure." Lucinda fetches a pack of Chesterfields. With a match, she lights herself a cigarette and one for me.

I deeply inhale the smoke. "What do you have to tell me, Aunt Lu. Bad news, I suppose."

Lucinda gazes at me like she's unsure what to say. Then she bluntly exclaims, "Lois had a stroke and died nearly three weeks ago."

"Oh? You mean my mother?" I don't feel any sentiment or emotion. Maybe I should. I don't know nor do I care, really.

"Just after New Year's," Lucinda continues. "I tried to find you, to tell you. But your landlord said you moved out."

I say nothing and continue to smoke.

"Lois was ailing something fearful. I flew to Montana for the funeral. It was real nice. Your daddy said Lois was awfully sad she hadn't heard from you all those months. She didn't understand why."

“I suppose so. She was that way. Rather too chipper, like you, Aunt Lu.”

“Lucy,” Lucinda says with obvious frustration. But she pulls back like she senses something is terribly wrong with me, as if I need professional help, as if I’m a strung-out heroin addict from skid row!

“Your father would love to see you,” Lucinda continues. “I’ll buy your ticket to Butte.”

I gaze at my aunt. “I expect he could come down here if he wants to see me. You know I hate Butte. Especially now. I’m sure it’s frozen under a blanket of snow.”

“But your mother died, sweetheart. And you know Moe won’t come down here, especially with his bad heart.”

I turn up *The Price is Right* deciding I’ve had all I can take of my aunt. *Come on Down!* the TV announces.

“Want to play a game of gin rummy?” Lucinda asks.

“No,” I snap then retreat to my bedroom where I plan to sleep for the rest of the day. Maybe for the next week. I don’t know.

Late the next morning, however, my aunt calls me to breakfast and I decide to join her at the green metal table and watch TV or listen to her chatter. Soon after I sip my coffee and take a bite of buttered toast, I notice the frontpage headline in the Arizona Republic my aunt has been reading. *Mystery Woman Possible Suspect in Homeless Deaths.* I smirk aloud.

“What’s so funny?” Lucinda asks. She’s sitting across the table from me, smoking, drinking coffee, and watching Regis and Kathy Lee.

“Regis is a funny guy,” I suggest, not wanting to alert my aunt to the newspaper story. In truth, I’m feeling elated about seeing that I made the headlines in the Republic because of what I did the night before. While my aunt was playing pinochle with her Church friends at a card table

in the living room, I had felt a tremendous urge to connect with Jeff Jeffers. But pure gut instinct told me to use a fake name when I made the call in the kitchen, out of Lucinda's hearing.

I take hold of the newspaper, read the full article by David Cadowsky, and chuckle because Cadowsky went to the Golden Bowl Chinese restaurant looking for a waitress named Tiffany Hoffman, the mystery woman, and discovered no such woman existed because Tiffany Hoffman was my fake name and the Golden Bowl was my fake job when I phoned into the Jeffers show. What a stupid reporter!

"It's good to see you smile, sweetheart," my aunt declares.

I pay no attention to her and re-read Dave Cadowsky's article. *They'll never catch me* I'm thinking. But then I begin to worry and decide that maybe I'd better leave Arizona until this story dies down. I look at Lucinda who stares at me with a mind-numbing smile. "I think you're right, Aunt Lu. I want to go see Daddy as soon as possible and pay my respects to Mom. This afternoon, in fact."

"Why, this is wonderful Lucy." Lucinda claps her hands. "I'll call the airlines right now before you change your mind."

"No!" I say, realizing that I need to use an alias in case the police are on to me. "I'll get my own tickets. Just give me your credit card. But you can drive me to the airport," I add, as a concession to my dear Aunt Lu.

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Winter in Montana is a dreadful time of year, I'm thinking during my flight to Butte. I can't imagine sticking around for very long because the cops might sniff out my trail and hunt me down. Two years ago, when I flew away from Bert Mooney, I vowed to never return. Now here I am and Butte has already made me weary before I've even arrived.

These days, I know nothing about my older sister or youngest brother. As for Scottie, I don't care to ever know anything about him. I haven't since I was about ten and began avoiding him and his taunts. And when I used to talk to my folks, they never mentioned their other kids. I don't even know if they have grandkids other than Charlie's two girls and Tracy's baby born out of wedlock. I don't know and don't care. My family hasn't had any holiday gatherings on Walnut Street since all us kids moved out of the house. Of course, I never told Charlie what Scottie did to me. I never told anyone after my folks blamed me for my "dirty little lies" that weren't lies. It's all so shameful now that I look back on it. My folks had acted like I was more sinful than Tracy. Like I was the jezebel.

At the terminal gate, Charlie hugs me and tears well in my eyes. I haven't cried for a long while, probably since Brian walked away. Now I feel emotional. I've missed my tall handsome brother. Over the past several months, I forgot about this and wonder why I never sent Charlie a Christmas card or read the ones he sent me. But it doesn't matter anymore. My life now is in "existing" mode. I'm living moment by moment. I have no idea where I'll go or what I'll end up doing and I doubt Charlie will suddenly become a big part of my new life on the run.

"Little Lucy," Charlie says, gazing at me from arm's length. "Why, you look so pretty. Red hair?"

My elation fades. I immediately sense my brother's concern and know that Lucinda has called him and discussed my predicament, saying, no doubt, that my "boyfriend" involved me with drugs.

"Did Lucinda say something to you about me?" I ask, pulling away from Charlie.

“Hey, the girls are hoping to see you tonight. They’ve missed you. So has Kay.” He’s trying to change the subject by bringing up his second wife of five years, and his daughters from his first marriage.

“Where’s Dad?” I ask, somewhat disappointed. I really didn’t expect Moe Davis to meet me at the airport even though I had hoped to be wrong. He seldom moves from his recliner and now with Mom dead and no one around to wait on him hand and foot, I suspect he’s pathetically needy.

“You know Dad.” Charlie takes my carry-on bag that I borrowed from Lucinda. “He figured he’d greet you at home. Anymore, he hates to leave the house for fear he’ll drop dead of a heart attack. Got any baggage to claim?”

“Nope. This is all I possess in the world.” We walk toward the parking area.

“Well,” Charlie ventures to say. “Your room is crammed with boxes you ought to rummage through and take what’s yours.”

“Yeah, sure.” Already distressed and disappointed, I picture all the unwanted Christmas presents and cheap birthday gifts from my childhood. However, I must make this visit work at least for a while and there’s no better place in the world to lie low than Butte, Montana.

My childhood home on Walnut Street was built during the depression. Figures. It only has two bedrooms upstairs and one bathroom on the main floor. My three brothers slept in the basement which I remember being a cold open area with a tiled floor, the chimney base, and a furnace. My folks didn’t allow me to go down there and as a little girl I was reluctant to sneak around and do anything they told me not to do. I got into enough trouble for doing nothing but being alive. Unfortunately, I did go downstairs one time when Scottie tricked me into thinking he

was going to show me where the boys slept. But he only took me down there so he could pull down my pants and call me a dipshit.

When I enter the front door of my old house, frosty air rushes inside from behind me. My father is holding open the door and I fake a cheery smile. We don't hug. Never have. It's not something the Davis family customarily does except tonight at the airport with Charlie, and with Lucinda, of course. She's a hugger. But in general, I don't like my family touching me and haven't since early childhood when Scottie inappropriately placed his hands on me. Although, that did change with Brian. I loved him touching me and I loved touching him.

Moe Davis looks worse than I remember. He's older, grayer, and more bent over and worn out. I'm surprised he manages to greet me at the door. I survey the living room's clutter of reupholstered colonial furniture and porcelain collectibles from Mom's garage sale shopping days. The house smells like my father, like old people. It makes me miss the stale cigarette odor at Lucinda's house.

"Been nearly two years since I've seen you," Moe takes my bag from Charlie and walks to the stairwell off the living room.

I walk to a knickknack table across the room and examine a clay hula dancer with a wiggly skirt. I remember it from childhood, on the same table, in the same spot, and probably with the same dust. It came from some distant relative who went to Hawaii. All the knickknacks in the room are dusty. I feel nothing sentimental about anything I see, only pure amazement at how long my folks needlessly kept all this junk. I myself have recently left an apartment full of junk and don't miss a thing. Sentiment and attachment are something I gave up long ago, probably when first leaving Butte. Probably when I was a little girl and my brother tore the head off my Skipper doll and threw it out the window of our station wagon as Daddy drove down the

freeway. The only thing that matters in life, I'm thinking to myself, is my relationship with Brian.

"Hope you don't mind. We used your room for storage," Moe Davis says. He's staring at me like he wonders how I'll react.

"What?" I ask. Moe has interrupted my thoughts like a sheet of ice-cold steel metallically twanging before my face.

"Your old bedroom." Moe looks puzzled by my reaction. "Kay's been helping me sort through your mom's things to give to the Salvation Army. She helped me get your room ready. It's hard for me to move around like I used to."

"I can see that." I replace the hula dancer on the table and walk to the stairwell, grab my carryon bag, and run up the steps to the bedroom I once shared with my older sister until she left home for good. In fact, the same old queen bed is still in the room and it was a bed that belonged to Moe during his childhood on the farm outside Missoula.

That night, while I'm in that bed, I'm examining my silver charm bracelet. It's valueless now, I'm thinking, because it lacks Brian's painter's easel charm. By the time I realized that the dirty corpse had yanked it off, it was too late. I could hardly return to the vacant field to look around. *I'll toss the dam thing in tomorrow's trash* I decide *or at the airport's trash when I fly the hell out of Dodge.*

I turn off the nightlight but can't sleep. Despite all that's happened, I miss Brian more than ever. I can't get him out of my thoughts and I don't have any phenol to help me sleep. I'm afraid that I won't see him for a long time. But if our love is as true as I know it is, we're destined to be together someday. Meanwhile, it frustrates me to be back in Butte and forced to

deal with Moe Davis. *He probably expects me to fix his breakfast* I tell myself. *Well, I'll show him a thing or two. I'll set the tone for this little visit and won't go downstairs until at least noon.*

The next morning, I wake up at eleven thirty and hear the TV blaring in the living room. I saunter down the steps to shower while wondering what to expect. I'm determined to make the day go my way and not my father's. I must teach him a lesson for demanding so much from my mother all those years and for being such a lazy stupid bum.

To my utter disappointment, I find a widowed neighbor lady preparing my father's lunch. As it turns out, Charlie had asked Mrs. Fernet from across the street to help Moe with his meals. This frustrates me. I thought Charlie was the one decent member of my family. And now he's made this pandering arrangement. Is there no end to my family's hopelessness?

After pouring myself a glass of milk, I sit at the kitchen nook table. Moe is in the living room watching TV and Mrs. Fernet stands at the kitchen counter making sandwiches.

"You don't have to come around anymore," I say to the neighbor lady. "Now that I'm here."

"Oh, I don't mind." Fernet continues with her task. "I can use the extra money. Besides, Moe is a dear friend. Do you like onions with your salami?"

"Don't want anything," I growl, troubled by the woman's mere presence. It's an added dimension I hadn't anticipated. I'll have to call Charlie and scold him for not warning me about this Mrs. Fernet. "You going to marry him?" I ask, then gulp down my milk.

The woman stops what she's doing and looks at me. "No, honey, Moe and I are just friends."

"I don't care if you do."

"Are you sure you won't have a sandwich?" Mrs. Fernet changes the topic.

I say nothing and stare out the breakfast nook window at the old, half dead apricot tree standing over the concrete birdbath of frozen water. Robins and sparrows are busily fluttering around the small fenced-in backyard, shivering from the cold I imagine. *I'll go mad staying one more night in this old house,* I'm thinking. *It's haunted, creaking at night from Mother's ghost stalking me and asking me,* "*Why weren't you at my funeral!?"*

"There's plenty of leftover chicken in the fridge, if you get hungry," Mrs. Fernet says. She neatly sets her sandwich on a plate and takes it to Moe. I then hear the front door close. Apparently, I've scared her off which makes me smile. I immediately go to the kitchen wall phone to call Charlie and ask him if there are any more surprises I should know about.

Charlie apologizes for not warning me about Mrs. Fernet and invites me over for dinner this weekend. I decline, claiming I want some time to myself. He says he understands. "And please," I emphasize. "Don't ask Kay or your kids to come around and see me. I need a few days of rest."

"But Kay's been helping Dad with the sorting."

"I'll do that!" I snap.

"And the girls are eager to welcome you back home. Nicky and Jody adore you. They've made you a special card."

"Please, Charlie, not for a few days. And tell that Fernet lady to keep away while I'm here. I can't stand her." Charlie agrees to call the neighbor and postpone the arrangement until I feel more comfortable. He then tells me to call him, day or night, if I need anything or just want to talk to someone.

For the rest of the day, I rarely speak to Daddy. I help him with dinner, although I purposely overcook the spaghetti and burn the garlic toast, suggesting he learn to cook for himself if he doesn't like it. His mere presence, his very existence, annoys me.

The next morning, I enter the front room and find him snoring in his recliner and the TV airing an Andy Griffith re-run. Moe's life has come to nothing, I'm thinking. He's just a sapped-out shell of a man who never really amounted to much anyway. I can only shake my head in pity.

The wall phone in the kitchen rings. I answer it and Charlie reminds me to make sure Moe takes his heart medication. He adds that his invitation to dinner still stands. I try to humor him and delay his involvement in my life by again telling him that I need time to rest. I suggest that I'm keeping busy by going through the boxes in my old room.

"That's great," Charlie says. "Find any keepsakes?"

"A few pictures, I guess," I lie, disappointed that Charlie is now a complete nuisance. I must get back together with Brian. He's the only person who makes any sense.

In the afternoon, Lucinda calls and asks me why I didn't call her after I arrived in Butte. "I forgot," I say, bothered by her concern. What a pest! Without saying anything further, I stretch the cord from the kitchen wall to Moe's recliner, hand him the phone, and retreat to my old bedroom.

At the top of the stairs, I overhear my father saying *I hesitate talking to her, Sis. She's rude. . . and she used to be such a sweet little girl, never had a temper. She's changed. . ."*

I shut the door to my room and fall on the bed to sleep off the boredom.

The next morning, I get up early enough to fix my father breakfast now that Mrs. Fernet isn't coming around. I barely acknowledge Moe when he enters the kitchen and sits at the

breakfast nook table. “Tracy came to the funeral,” he says as I hand him a bowl of corn flakes. “Wish you were with us. Was a lovely affair. She would’ve liked it. All her children together.”

“Yeah, well, I wasn’t there.” I join him at the table with my own bowl of cereal. It suddenly hits me like a landslide. My mother, Lois Davis, *is* dead. But I can’t summon any sympathy. Not for a woman who ignored me for the sake of her husband and precious sons and beauty queen daughter. *Mother never listened to me. She believed me to be a dirty little liar. Why was I so disappointed?* I can’t remember specifics, only that whatever my folks gave me wasn’t what I wanted. “I thought you hated Tracy, the jezebel,” I say to Moe after taking a bite of cereal.

“That was a long time ago. People change. The Lord teaches us to forgive. I miss your mother, Little Lucinda.” He uses a name he called me when I was small. I didn’t like it then and I don’t like it now.

I stare at Daddy. Milk drools from the corner of his mouth. It makes me sick and I leave the table carrying my half-finished bowl of cereal to the sink. I then retreat upstairs. At first, I plan to lie in bed all day and listen to the radio but halfway up the steps, I decide to resume my search through the boxes. The day before I had started sorting through some of the junk after Moe had headed up the stairs to do so himself. He usually doesn’t go upstairs except to sleep at night. I had been annoyed because he was obviously play acting when he started up the steps. He was really trying to trick me into going through the boxes. But now, something draws me to look through the jumbled memories of my childhood. Maybe it’s plain old curiosity. Brian might like to see some pictures from my past—something we could pass on to our children.

Against the wall opposite the queen bed are about a dozen cardboard boxes filled with this junk. I crack open the east window to allow in some fresh brisk air. *What a waste of time,*

I'm thinking as I methodically go through a box. *Why am I doing this? For whom? My father? Always doing something for someone else. Will this never end? Everything I uncover should have disappeared a long time ago so no one ever again would encounter it. But no. Moe now forces me to stir up the dust and sort through yesteryear's garbage.*

I find a Chatty Cathy doll, Lincoln Logs, Tinker toys, and other gifts I never asked for, never wanted. Some are hand-me-downs from Tracy, like the Skipper doll had been until Scottie ruined it for me.

I toss the toys in a garbage sack for the thrift store, not caring if some stupid little kid will be disappointed because his folks can't afford anything better. I smile at the thought of some poor kid getting Scottie's old Etch-a-sketch which my evil brother has probably cursed like a Ouija board. I imagine it etching out degrading mocking names such as "crybaby bitch," "tattle tale slut" or "tag along cunt."

Next, I look through a box of old hunting and fishing gear. For safe keeping, I set aside a Bowie knife with a bone handle because it might come in handy. I find a box of faded pictures. In one, my father holds my hand when I was perhaps three. We stand before the old apricot tree which was half dead even then. At times, Moe had tried to be nice. But most often he put me down. I recall one incident sophomore year when I had been excited about going to the Sadie Hawkins Dance with my best friend Kathi Longwood. I hadn't been to a school dance before and was nervous but filled with anticipation. I put on lots of eyeliner, blue shadow, and red lipstick that Tracy had left behind in our room when she moved out. I was trying to look like Elly May Clampett. When I asked my folks to take a Polaroid picture of me and Kathi, Moe remarked, "No wonder your brother put his hands on you. You look like a slut?" It was a mean, thoughtless thing to say and I never forgot it. I didn't go to the dance that night. Kathi went alone and hooked

up with Greg McMurtry. After that, our friendship came to an end and for the rest of my high school years, I was pretty much a loner**.**

Many of the black and white Polaroids are of deer hunting trips to the McGrew ranch in Eastern Oregon. In one, I'm about four years old and am sitting at the back of an old pickup truck holding a stuffed lion named Roary. Around me are great uncles, Moe, and cousins. They were all deer hunters and Bible reading men who never drank alcohol. Lined up on the ground before us are ten deer heads with their tongues hanging out. The men were displaying the antler points that they valued as trophies. I don't remember being among the ten 4-point buck heads and I appear to be oblivious to the carnage surrounding me.

A chilling draft suddenly enters the open window. I shiver like I used to do during the winter months when I tried to pull the covers away from my sister but Tracy would never budge or wake up and I shivered into the mornings. In my mind, the bedroom begins to rotate and project slides from my past onto the bed, dresser, walls, ceiling, and floor like the strobe light at Bobby McGee's. I feel possessed by those deer hunting trips. The sight, smell, and taste of raw venison. I hear the prayers and religious talk of uncles and my father around the camp among the fir, juniper, and pine. *I wade along the cool stony brook beside camp and shake my magic cattail wand until the pod bursts with white fluff that scatters into the golden aspens.*

But the magic cattails never rescued me from Scottie and my wishes never came true. Scottie didn't die. Instead, he threw rocks at me and then tried to shoot me in the head.

Chapter 9: Deer Hunting at the McGrew Ranch

Somehow, because I'm hiding from the police and forced to sort through these boxes to please Daddy, I can't stop thinking about all the wrongs of my childhood. Scottie constantly

exploited me without any consequences. He could blame me and call me degrading names and my folks scolded me when I tried to stop him. Scottie was much more than mischievous and full of *snakes, snails, and puppy dog tails* as Mother liked to say. He was a spawn of the Devil. But when I was a skinny and shy little girl, I couldn't do anything but wonder why boys like Scottie and his buddies acted so mean.

My mind rattles with resentment. My heart throbs. My breathing becomes shallow and rapid. *Who do I resent most? My folks or God? Was I put on Earth just to delve out resentments? Do I hate my life? No. You did this to me. No. You did it to yourself. You're a pitiful poophead* I can hear my brother say when he was being nice to me.

During the times Daddy was between jobs, he sometimes took us camping and fishing at Glacier National Park or Yellowstone. But our main trip each year occurred in late September or early October during the annual deer hunting campout at the McGrew ranch in Eastern Oregon, near the Strawberry Mountains and John Day. For most of those years, Daddy drove a Rambler station wagon and pulled our '63 Shasta trailer-house that my grandparents gave us after they bought an Airstream in '65.

When my entire family went on these hunting trips, the sleeping arrangements got rather crowded in that stupid little trailer-house. My folks slept on the foldout table, Philip and Charlie slept on the foldout couch at the back, Scottie and his friend got to sleep in the station wagon, and Tracy and I slept on the high bunk bed over the back couch. More precisely, Tracy slept at the edge and I slept crammed against the wall. The air was so stale I could barely breathe and sleep through the night. But I couldn't change the arrangements. One time I asked to sleep in my grandparents' Airstream but cousins were occupying all their extra beds. Then Daddy scolded me for being such a pest.

The drive from Butte to Pendleton, Oregon lasted ten hours. Whenever we passed the Pendleton Woolen Mill Daddy liked saying *That's where they make our red plaid hunting shirts*. During those drives, when my whole family came along, I spent endless hours sitting in the back seat between Tracy and Charlie. Mom sat up front with Philip, her baby boy, and Scottie and the friend he always got to bring along played with matchbox trucks in the back. They folded down the booster seat so they could pretend to be on a flat-bed truck or a motor boat, a space ship or whatever boys liked to imagine.

When Scottie and his friend got tired of running their little trucks across the back window ledge and over the wheel covers, they played guessing games. Scottie called one of these games "4-hole punch" after the Buick models that have 4 portholes to indicate the number of cylinders under the hood, at least that's how the boys explained it.

Sometimes Scottie asked me to play along. I usually didn't mind breaking away from my TV magazines about the Monkeys, the Supremes, and Star Trek. And I liked it when Scottie was being nice to me. Tracy and Charlie were too old to join in the games and they pretty much kept to themselves. Charlie read *Boy's Life* or Daddy's *Field and Streams* and Tracy read endless romance novels which she continued reading throughout the deer hunting week, usually on a lawn chair outside the Shasta trailer-house. Rarely, if ever, during these long drives to the McGrew ranch, did Tracy or Charlie notice when Scottie was being mean to me. They pretty much ignored whatever was going on. And so did Mom and Dad.

The objective of 4-hole punch, Scottie explained, was to spot an old 4 punch Buick passing by, or a Cadillac, or whatever model the boys decided upon, and then whoever first spotted the selected car would yell "4-hole punch." The winner then got to punch the other players in the arm. It was a stupid boy's game but I played along.

One time, Scottie's best friend Martin had come along on our trip and he told us to look for a '64 Buick Electra. I spotted one before the boys did and I yelled, "4-point Buck." No one laughed at my joke and Scottie disqualified me from the game. I always lost anyway and Scottie took pleasure in bopping my head or punching my arm a little too hard. He got away with it because we were playing a game and I had agreed to play along.

"Are we there yet?" Scottie and Philip would start complaining after we passed through Pendleton onto 396 south to John Day. I quietly sat back because whenever I complained Daddy would say to me, "Nobody likes a whiner!" It was something he never said to the boys. And Scottie would echo whatever Moe said and then call me a crybaby, a tattle tale, a tag along—the list goes on and on.

Each year when we arrived at the McGrew ranch both Mom and Dad reminded us kids that we were close to the Oregon Trail although they never actually showed us this famous wagon train road. The McGrew ranch stretched across thousands of hilly acres filled with scrub brush, juniper ridges, and Douglas fir valleys. Back in the 1920s, my mother's great uncle had ventured farther west than Montana and established the McGrew ranch. Lawrence and Ester McGrew owned the spread when I was small and I called them my aunt and uncle although they were really distant cousins. They collected rocks and had a rock polisher in their ranch house which they showed me during one of my trips. They even gave me some of their polished jaspers, agates, and red, green, and turquoise stones with mossy patterns.

On our way to the hunting campsite, where at least twenty McGrew and Davis families were staying in tents, campers, and trailer-houses, I was always the first one to spot a deer along the roadside and I did so from the middle of the back seat. I felt proud of this ability I had above everyone else. But no one seemed interested in that fact. Scottie would even mock me about it or

claim to have seen the deer first. Or he'd say, "Lucy doesn't know anything about deer. And if she does, no one cares!"

But I did know about deer. In fourth grade, I wrote a report about the white tail, black tail, and mule deer from information in the school's World Book Encyclopedias. My teacher Mrs. Gifford had asked me to read my report aloud in class, after several students had read their own stories. Then the class voted on which was the best story. Of course, no one voted for mine because I was the least popular girl. The funny thing is that the very next week Mrs. Gifford asked another set of students to read their reports. She called on the most popular girl, Jan Talt who had long blond ringlets, to read her report but Jan hadn't written one so she privately asked me if she could read mine. I gave her my report about deer and the class voted her story as the best one because Jan Talt had read it. No one even realized it was the same story I had read the week before. Not even the teacher. I didn't feel too bad about this. In fact, I felt proud that the class voted my story as the best even though nobody gave me credit for writing it. Throughout my school years I was kind of a nonentity but I did know about deer and I always spotted one before anyone else.

Before the week was up at the McGrew hunting camp, dozens of skinned deer were hanging from pine poles wedged in the Douglas firs or over pickup trucks. The carcasses, pelts, and deer heads attracted scads of wasps and flies and the campsite reeked of raw gamy venison. During the campfire meals at night all the hunters sat around eating boiled potatoes and fried venison liver and onions which I detested but my grandmothers forced me to eat it. "If you're going to hunt deer, you're going to eat liver and onions," they both would tell me.

The women at camp did the cooking and cleaning up and the men did the praying at the nightly campfire. Cousins Ed, Lawrence, Bill, and Daddy read from their Bibles and led prayers

of thanks for the 4-point buck and doe. Afterword, they discussed the white tail deer they had missed that day or the one they killed and how they tracked it down and fired the kill shot. They all wore Pendleton shirts and orange vests and caps to keep other hunters from mistaking them for deer, and they carried Remington and Winchester rifles and Bowie knives to gut the deer and make it lighter to drag back to camp.

Even the women hunted and butchered their deer like pioneer women on the Oregon Trail. Both of my grandmothers hunted and so did my mother and her cousins Torchy, Wilma, Ruth, and Maisy. *Did the women drag their deer back to camp by themselves?* I don't remember how that worked. Tracy had refused to ever learn how to hunt. She was a beauty queen and hunting is a dirty and messy ordeal. Charlie tried it one year and didn't like it. But when I was little, I wanted to be a hunter and I used to say *I can't wait until I'm old enough to hunt* and my mother would reply *Not until you're at least sixteen* and then Scottie would chime in with some degrading remark like *You're too stupid to hunt and if you did, you'd shoot yourself or someone else. Nitwit.*

WHO'S THE NITWIT NOW? YOU NITWIT FUCK! I think as I crumple the hunting pictures and throws them in a trash bag. They're faded anyway and it's not like I'm giving this stuff to my children. Siblings don't count. Parents don't matter. *At least mine never have.* I suddenly begin thinking about my present predicament. *Did I do something I can never undo? Did I hunt and kill a deer or two? Three? And why do I care about my fucked-up childhood? That's all in the past. I have to look ahead. At some kind of future. Some kind of goal. Having a baby would be nice. I'd like to be a mother. Brian! Do you hear me. I want your sperm. I want to have our love child.*

In 1973 I turned nine on October 9th. I started my period that year, earlier than most girls, and Mom got sick with MS and had to stay home from the deer hunting trip. Philip stayed with her because he was mommy's baby boy. Charlie and Tracy had already stopped going on our annual trips. I didn't want to go that year because Scottie was going along with Martin and no one else would be around.

Scottie had been inappropriately touching me for perhaps two years. After he had tricked me into going down to the basement, I thought I'd never let Scottie trick me again but he kept it up. He would corner me in the bathroom or in my bedroom while Tracy was talking on the kitchen phone and Philip was in front of the living room TV and our parents and Charlie were away. He'd tell me that I deserved what he was doing to me because I was a stupid girl. It made no sense, and yet, Scottie made me feel guilty, ashamed, and worthless deep inside. Whenever it happened, all I could do was pretend it wasn't happening because if I resisted or told on him, Scottie threatened to kill me and I believed he would. I was afraid of him and had no one to help me. No one to turn to but God and many times I asked God that my brother die, but he didn't die.

Mom forced Daddy to take me along that year. She apparently didn't want me around it now seems to me. *For some reason no one could love me because I was just a stupid, pathetic little girl who twisted around the truth. No. That's not what happened! Whenever I told the truth about what was happening, they gutted me like a deer each and every time.*

During that fateful trip, Scottie and Martin egged each other on with "boys will be boys" ideas. I tried to ignore them and hide from them among the relatives but I only made Scottie try even harder to torment me. One time, he and his buddy cornered me in the Shasta trailer-house and made me eat a piece of raw venison. "If you don't eat it," Scottie threatened. "I'll tell Dad you said 'fuck.'" Scottie and Martin smirked when I took a bite of the slimy, gamy red meat. I

spat it out and ran to hide in the juniper scrub outside of camp but I could hear the boys laughing behind me. “Now you’ll get worms, dipshit,” they hollered.

On the day I turned nine, a huge incident happened before I could even celebrate with the cake grandma Davis baked for me in her Airstream trailer. It was early afternoon and a few hunters had returned to camp and were skinning their deer on the back of pickup trucks. Because I thought Scottie and Martin were catching salamanders upstream in the brook that flowed near camp, I decided to walk in the other direction and collected bouquets of cattail reeds in the marshy places.

With a Bowie knife I found next to a deer carcass, I cut a cattail reed with a pod that was about to burst. I rolled up my pant legs and in flipflop thongs I waded down the cold stony brook while blowing the cattail fluff and pretending it was my magic wand. The white feathery seeds fluttered into golden aspens trees that rattled in the breeze and I asked Jesus to grant me as many wishes as I could make.

When I reached a hillside ridge overlooking the stream, something splashed in the water two feet before me. At first, I thought it was a jumping frog or a salamander but then I looked toward the ridge and saw my brother and Martin. “Don’t you see me?” I yelled. I couldn’t believe they would try to injure me for fun. But they kept hurling rock missiles that splashed water on me until one hit my forehead and made me bleed. I screamed and ran back to camp.

The incident ruined my ninth birthday because Daddy and uncle Lawrence had to rush me to the emergency room in Pendleton for stitches. When we returned to camp Daddy acted more upset with me for interrupting the evening and being a pest than he was with Scottie and Martin who claimed they hadn’t seen me because I hadn’t been wearing an orange vest.

Early the next morning, Daddy decided to take Scottie out hunting with him. He claimed he wanted to start teaching his son how to hunt deer but I believe Daddy was just trying to keep Scottie away from me. Martin stayed in camp and fished at the stream because Daddy didn't want the responsibility of teaching someone else's kid how to hunt. I watched my father and brother head up the juniper ridge then I helped wash the breakfast dishes before Grandma Davis headed out on the hunt.

Later in the morning, I decided to walk down the ranch road not far from camp and explore the grassy hills. I was hoping to see a golden eagle or a prairie falcon and find some unusual rocks that I could give to Lawrence and Esther for their polishing machine. I didn't want to play at the stream because I knew Martin was there.

As I walked down the dirt road, I pretended to be Sacagawea on the Lewis and Clark expedition. Every school child in Montana knows Lewis and Clark traveled through Ft. Peck, Great Falls, and Missoula, Montana, near my grandparents' farms, and on to Oregon even before pioneers established the wagon train route known as the Oregon Trail.

After about fifteen minutes, I thought I heard a rattle snake and I became worried. Then I remembered Daddy warning me that wolves, bears, and mountain lions sometimes wander onto the ranch from the Malheur National Forest or the Strawberry Mountains. But I assumed he was teasing me or going along with something Scottie might have said. Then I noticed turkey vultures circling the sky overhead and I stopped to carefully listen for a predator. I began to feel afraid and powerless against these wild beasts.

I heard a car approaching from down the road and thought it might be Lawrence but it wasn't the McGrew's jeep. It was a large green 4 door Land Rover and I assumed it was

someone from a neighboring ranch because I didn't recognize the vehicle. I worried that maybe I had wandered off the McGrew property even though I hadn't meant to go very far.

I'm not sure why but I ran up the hillside to hide behind the sagebrush. Maybe I felt shy because I wasn't used to strangers and didn't want to answer their questions. From my hiding place I watched the Land Rover pass by while the occupants stared at me. When they were far enough away, I ran down the hill and decided to return to camp because the encounter had rattled me. I'd been feeling content in my own little make-believe world and then these strangers had unexpectedly come along.

As soon as I reached the road back to camp, I heard the first rifle shot. This wasn't too odd because the sound of distant shooting went on throughout the mornings and early afternoons. But hunters usually trekked along the ridges and down the mountain glens where the deer were grazing and the bucks were rutting. I didn't think anyone hunted along the ranch road so close to our campsite. Then I heard another, louder rifle pop. A hunter, I feared, was mistaking me for a deer. I wasn't wearing an orange vest or hunting cap because I hadn't intended to walk very far from camp; I had just gotten carried away playing like I was Sacagawea. One way or the other, I knew I was in big trouble. Either someone would shoot me or Daddy would kill me for not wearing an orange vest and cap.

When the next bullet rushed by my head in a flash, I screamed, "Hey! I'm here. I'm a person not a deer." I climbed back up the hillside into the sage and brittle brush and hid beside a pile of lava rocks. I again yelled out my presence when another shot ricocheted nearby me and blew the soil into a plume. At that moment I knew someone was intentionally shooting at me. I believed I was going to die. I fell to the ground, remained motionless and the shooting stopped. I

stayed where I was for about an hour when a cousin drove along in Esther's jeep and took me back to camp.

Because of my failure to wear an orange vest, I hesitated to tell Daddy that someone had shot at me but I finally had to admit it because if I didn't, whoever wanted to shoot me would try it again. "Someone tried to kill me," I said to Moe while glancing at Scottie who still wore his hunting attire. He was standing by the food table making a plate of food with his buddy Martin. He looked at me and winked, as if to say *You're right. Stupid. I shot the bullets at you!*

I knew in that moment that Scottie was out to kill me for sport or to keep me from telling someone that he was touching me inappropriately. And I knew he was going to torment me even more for looking at him as I just did.

Of course, Moe scolded me for wandering off without wearing a vest. "Are you dense?" he asked. "I already warned you about this! You have no one to blame but yourself."

"No, she's not dense. She's an airhead!" I can still hear Scottie saying and then laughing along with his buddy Martin.

Daddy discussed the incident with the other hunters and they all concluded that the shots were unintentional and that I had to be more careful and always wear an orange vest and cap even while in camp. Moe then restricted me to the Shasta trailer-house for the rest of the trip. But before I could even make up my bed on the top bunk that night, Grandma McGrew returned to camp after a visit at the ranch house with Lawrence and Esther. She had heard from the neighbors in the Land Rover that *a little girl who sounded a lot like Lucy* was hiding from them when they drove down the road. "How long were you wandering around in the range of fire?" Grandma asked me with concern, "What's going on with you, Lucy?"

I felt trapped with no way to escape. No one took my side and apparently, I was at fault for not wearing the warning vest. “I’m not always wrong about everything I do!” I remember yelling at my grandmother and father. I felt like I was grabbing a rattlesnake by the neck. But my efforts to stand up for myself only made Moe angrier because I was talking back and being smart.

“Am I ever sorry that you came along,” he said to me. “You’ve been nothing but a headache without your mother around to help out.”

For a moment, I wondered what my father even meant. Was he sorry I was even born? And besides, when my mother had been along on previous hunting trips, she rarely interacted with me. She went out hunting with everyone else and when she was back in camp her attention went to Philip and to her cousins, uncles, aunts, and parents, everyone else but me. “If Mom were on this trip,” I remember protesting. “Nothing different would be happening concerning me.”

“Quit sassing,” Moe yelled. “Or I’ll throw you off a bridge like that lesbian did to those two kids.” Daddy was talking about Jeannace June Freeman who killed her girlfriend’s young children in the early sixties by tossing them off the bridge at the nearby Crooked River Canyon. It was a haunting and notorious story that Daddy used to tell me just to scare me into behaving.

“I didn’t do anything wrong,” I protested. “Except go for a walk!”

“Next year you’re staying home!” Moe snapped.

“Good. I didn’t want to come on this deer hunting trip anyway,” I yelled because I was terribly upset at Scottie, his buddy, and at my dad for never taking my side.

Daddy walked away, leaving me to stew in my hive of wasps, as he liked to say whenever I became upset like I was.

I never went on another deer hunting trip after the one in 1973. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to keep away from Scottie until I was fourteen and he left home for some job, I'm guessing, or for a girl he met. I didn't care what happened to him then and I certainly don't care now. He is gone. Out of my life for good. Except, it seems that certain terrible memories from childhood are never really gone for good. They have been permanently stamped in my head like a stain on a delicate blouse and if you try to scrub it out, you only ruin the material and make the rosebuds bleed.

Chapter 10: The Father

January 25—February 2, 1991

I look around my old bedroom, irritated by the circumstances of my life, and vow to immediately flee Butte and never return. Life can't get much worse than this, I'm thinking. It just goes on and on twisting its way through time, leaving unwanted gifts and empty spaces in a heart longing for what's lacking. And not even knowing what that is! On and on life parades through generations, stopping only to trash some unwanted voice. When will it all stop? This madness. When will I find peace and happiness? When will I be with my one true love? And when will all the riffraff die and go away?

I leave my room, slam the door, and stand at the top of the stairway holding my hands out from my sides ready to claw anyone in my path. My scream echoes down the stairs and through the house. Then I see my father at the bottom of the steps, paralyzed at the banister. He was probably about to venture upstairs to see how I was making out.

He gazes at me for a moment then asks in a trembling voice, “Find anything you like?”

“Sure Daddy. Lots of wonderful memories,” I say and descend the stairs, pass by my father, and sit at the sofa to finish the day’s cross-word puzzle at the coffee table.

“That’s nice,” Moe says, still standing at the banister. In a moment, he walks into the kitchen and closes the swinging door.

I turn down the TV and hear him dialing the phone. So, I stand by the kitchen door and listen to what he says.

“I don’t know what to do,” he quietly speaks. “Never in my life have I felt so helpless. Lois is no longer around to manage things and my daughter is tormenting me with anger and hate. She needs help, Lucinda. She nearly gave me a heart attack! You must fly up here. Charlie must come over. I can’t take being alone with her anymore.”

When he ends his call, I return to the sofa and finish the crossword puzzle at the coffee table. I have nothing to say to Moe or to anyone else for that matter and I don’t even care if he knows I heard what he said to my aunt. They’re obviously all against me now and I’m against all of them.

Later that evening, I’m sitting in the living room watching America’s Most Wanted and wondering if John Walsh will feature me on his program. Moe is leaning back in his recliner. I just gave him a nitroglycerin pill. He seems more relaxed about me.

“Charlie’s coming over tomorrow,” he says before he’s ready to retire at eight thirty.

“I don’t care,” I say. “It really doesn’t matter who drops by. I’ll be leaving in the morning to resume my search for Brian.”

“Lucinda told me about this boy, Brian,” Moe says.

Astonished, I look at my father. He has his hands braced on the armrests. “What about Brian!?”

Moe hesitates, as if caught in the middle of a decision. Should he say nothing or should he probe into this secret life of his baby girl? I know the look. “Did this boy do something to you?” he finally asks.

I say nothing and keep my eyes glued on the TV. Then I peer angrily at my father. “I guess everyone’s been talking behind my back. What exactly did Lucinda say to you? You know she wouldn’t even take my cat when I needed her to. Damn her! Damn you all.”

I’m about to stomp out of the room and head upstairs to bed but I change my mind and look at my father. *He’s so lost, so out of phase with the world. What does he have to live for? He has no more hopes. He never had any dreams. No more wife at his beck and call. He’s truly just waiting to die and meanwhile he’s making himself useless to everyone around him, like the clutter in this stupid house on Walnut Street. Soon his heart will become so corroded someone will have to dress him and change his diapers.* The idea makes me sick. Like cleaning the dog kennels. *No,* I’m thinking to myself, *this man’s death is long overdue. In fact, he probably shouldn’t have been born. But if he hadn’t, I wouldn’t have either and although sometimes I wish I’d never been born, I was born to be an angel of mercy.*

“Let’s have some wine,” I say.

“What?” he mutters, appearing confused.

“Nothing, Daddy. Just thought we could share some wine.”

“You know I don’t drink, Lucy. Never have.”

“Now’s the time to start, old man. Need to limber up those arthritic bones. Get your heart pumping!”

My comment makes him chuckle and I get up and rub his knee on my way to fetch the chilled burgundy I bought that afternoon at the local 7-Eleven.

"Here you go, Daddy." I sit on the arm of Moe's chair and hold a glass of wine close to his mouth. The TV loudly bellows *Can't be the real thing!* from a New Kids on the Block Coca Cola Classic commercial. Moe is hard of hearing and always has the TV up loud.

"Now be a good boy and open wider," I say.

Moe sits up in his recliner and takes the wine from my hand, "I'll do it myself." He takes a sip.

"Good boy, Daddy. Guzzle it down." He takes a few more sips. I immediately refill his glass.

"No more, honey," he says.

"But Daddy. I feel like celebrating."

"All right. But that's probably all this old stomach can handle."

"Let's make a toast. To father and daughter."

"I like that," Moe says.

"I knew you would. Now drink up or the toast won't count."

Moe goes along with my celebration, probably glad that my mopey mood has changed. As soon as he finishes drinking his wine, I refill his glass.

"But you haven't finished yours." Moe indicates that my glass is full.

"I already filled it up again. Didn't you notice? Now, what should we toast to? Your turn, Daddy."

"Umm. To Mother." Moe holds up his glass. By now he looks quite happy.

"Very good, Daddy. To Mother." I tap his glass with mine.

When it's nine-thirty, I help my father from his chair and walk him upstairs to his bed which isn't an easy task because Moe is sloshed and nearly dead weight, rather like old Vicki Potthoff. I help him into his pajamas then into bed.

"Gotta piss," Moe says as he struggles to sit up but can't.

"Just piss, Daddy. You can do it." From the door, I glance back at him then leave the room to fetch his heart medicine. I have a lot of things to take care of this evening, or what remains of it, and no time to waste.

February 2, 1991

Lucinda Bowers

It's after midnight when I crawl out of bed and answer the kitchen phone thinking my niece might be calling. I've been waiting for her call, sitting on pins and needles ever since Detective Jack Ellis came to my house questioning me about Lucy and making threats that if I'm withholding information, he'll arrest me for obstruction of justice. He said Lucy was a person of interest in the recent homeless murders. I was reluctant to hand Lucy over without talking to her first. The detective asked me to meet with my niece, wear a wire, and coax her into talking about the murders. I agreed because I didn't have a choice.

"Has Brian contacted you?" Lucy immediately asks without even saying hello.

"Where are you?" I ask, relieved she's called but distraught because I must lure her back to Phoenix.

"Bert Mooney," Lucy says. "Listen, Aunt Lu. Depending on what you know, I plan to either catch the next flight back to Phoenix or head to whatever state Cincinnati is in. But first I need the number of that hotshot reporter Dave Cadowsky. According to his newspaper articles, he knows Brian's whereabouts."

“What are you talking about?” I ask with concern. “Why would this reporter know about your boyfriend. What has Brian done to you?” I’m starting to suspect that this boyfriend may be the one who caused those homeless murders. He was shady and looked capable of murder, not like my little Lucy. When a child in Butte, Lucy had always been such a small fry who never harmed anyone. She was attentive to her Sunday School lessons and Moe’s Bible readings. She was a good Christian child. Who pierced her young heart with such vengeful poison? I’ve been thinking of late. Certainly not Moe or Lois, they were such God loving parents. No matter how hard I’ve tried, I can’t connect my sweet little niece with the homeless murders.

“Brian didn’t do anything to me,” Lucy says defensively. “And Cadowsky knows him because he hired Brian to paint murals at the Arizona Republic, that’s all. This Cadowsky wrote up an article about Brian’s career as an artist. That’s all. You see, Aunt Lu. My boyfriend’s going to be famous one day because of my help.”

“What happened?” I ask. “Why’d you leave him? Or is it that he left you?”

“Never mind that. You’re asking too many questions. I’m the one with the questions and I want to get the number of this reporter.”

“And why are thinking about going to Cincinnati? Did Brian go there? If so, what about his job at the Republic?”

“Stop it, Aunt Lu,” Lucy shouts. “You’re giving me a headache. Just tell me if Brian’s called you or if you can find that reporter’s number.”

I decide I’d better start speaking calmly even though I’m anxious to learn what’s going on in my niece’s life. If I keep pressing for answers, she’ll hang up and I don’t want that to happen.

“Yes, Angel,” I say to my niece. “Come on home. Brian keeps calling me and asking for you. He’s here in Phoenix wondering where you are.”

I hate lying to my dear little girl. But sometimes a lie is the only way to straighten out a life.

Part 2: The Road to Death Row

Chapter 11: The Arrest

February 2, 1991

Lucy Davis

“You were gone less than a week,” Lucinda says as we wait at the Sky Harbor baggage claims. It’s four in the morning and very few people are around. “You’ve brought back more than you took. Did you find nice things at Moe’s?”

“Sure, Lucinda.” I’m watching for the suitcase I took from Moe’s room. I had grabbed all his petty cash, plus a few things I thought might come in handy, including food and the bone-handled hunting knife. When I left the house on Walnut Street my scattered thoughts held nothing but notions of survival.

“How’s Moe?” Lucinda asks.

I grab the old suitcase, open it, and shuffle a few things into my purse. Lucinda stands nervously by. “He was sound asleep when I left,” I say. “He had a bit too much to drink.”

“Drink? Moe doesn’t drink. I wonder when he took it up. Must’ve been after Lois died. Poor Moe. Can’t be good for his heart.”

“Yeah, poor Daddy. He was dead drunk when I left. Couldn’t even sit up.”

“Heavens,” Lucinda says with concern. “You left him like that.”

“Aunt Lu. Don’t worry. We had a few toasts to my leaving and then he went to bed. I was just joking. I was sure to give him his nitroglycerin pills and let Charlie know I was leaving so he could call that Fernet lady to look in on him.” I lie, not really caring about her learning the truth. I’m just trying to pacify her questions, for now, so I can get on with finding Brian which is why I want Cadowsky’s number. Since he wrote about Brian’s mother, I figure he must have contacted Brian for his newspaper stories. It seems logical.

While I gather my suitcase, I notice my aunt looking around. “Something wrong?” I ask as we’re about to leave the baggage claims area.

“No, nothing’s wrong. But let’s have some coffee. Upstairs.”

“We can have coffee at your house.” I glower at her. “Look, if you don’t want me to stay with you, fine. I really only want that reporter’s number so I can find Brian. Why didn’t you get Brian’s number when he called? I can’t understand you.”

“I’m sorry. I wasn’t thinking. But please, I want you to stay with me as long as you like. It’s just that my back’s been acting up and I could use a cup a coffee before driving home. It’s in the middle of the night!”

“I’ll drive,” I say defiantly. I’ve already grown weary of my aunt.

“Come on. Humor an old lady.” Lucinda rubs her lower back, like it pains her.

“Fine. Whatever you want, Aunt Lu.” I hand my claims ticket to the attendant then lug my suitcase to a food court on the second floor where a few people are drinking coffee and eating snacks. I sit at a corner table while Lucinda buys two cups of coffee. She then sits across from me.

“You’re acting weird,” I say. “Don’t think I haven’t noticed.”

“I’m sorry, it’s just my back.”

“No, it isn’t. Was Brian around today?” I’m feeling anxious and angry. I’m tired of putting up with people’s stupidity, especially old people like my dad and Aunt Lu.

Lucinda says nothing. It’s as if words simply won’t form in her mind or fall from her lips.

“I bet you’re trying to keep Brian and me apart,” I say. “Like his mother. That old disgusting tramp!”

“Who?” Lucinda asks.

“Where’s Brian?” I hover over the table and sneer at my aunt but then pull back realizing I must be careful and not give any subtle hints that connect me to what’s actually going on. That I’m this mystery woman of David Cadowsky and that I did away with Brian’s mother.

“Calm down. All right?” Lucinda has a worried look in her eyes. “When Brian called, um, yesterday, he said he wanted to come around and meet with you. Today or tomorrow.”

I grin, relax a bit, then remove from my purse a picture of my mother holding me as a baby. I found it when shuffling through the pictures in my old bedroom. “This is for Brian.” I slide it across the table to show my aunt. “I knew he’d come around. He’s just being cautious. I confused him because I smothered him with love. I know he loves me too. He gave me an artist’s easel for my charm bracelet!” I immediately regret saying this and hope my aunt doesn’t ask to see the charm or the bracelet because I pitched it out the car window on my way to Bert Mooney.

To change the subject I say, “Really, Aunt Lu, I believe your little visit to my apartment scared him off. You intimidated him by being so blunt. You see, artists are very sensitive people. And he knows you’re my only family so that’s why he contacted you, I’m sure. At least with this picture he’ll see I had a mother who loved me.”

Lucinda smiles at me and nervously sips her coffee. She then glances around the terminal before looking at the picture. “That’s real nice, sweetheart. A picture of you and Lois,” she says in a fake kind of way.

“Who are you looking for?” I ask.

Lucinda breathes deeply and looks at me. “Lucy. I’m worried about Moe. I better call Charlie and have him check on my brother.”

“I told you I already called Charlie and arranged for that Fernet lady to take care of Daddy. Besides, it’s four in the morning. Charlie’s still sleeping. And as I said I was just joking. Moe’s fine. I’m really getting tired of your little games, Aunt Lucinda.”

“Lucy, how did you get to the airport?”

“What? I drove Daddy’s car. Why?”

“And left it at Bert Mooney?”

“Stop it, you’re getting on my nerves and I think you’re lying about Brian calling you. Will you please just give me Cadowsky’s number and I’ll be out of your life for good.”

“I don’t want you out of my life.” Lucinda lights a Chesterfield. I help myself to one. Lucinda inhales, blows a stream of smoke to one side. Tears well in her eyes and she asks me, “What have you done? Why do you really want to talk to this Cadowsky fellow?”

“What are you talking about? What do you think I’ve done, Aunt?”

“What about my brother? Are you sure he’s all right? His heart isn’t good.”

“Are you worried I might do something to you?” I laugh. At the same time, Lucinda looks toward the food counter. I turn and see an old black man in a rumpled suit. He looks away when I spot his glance.

“Who are they?” I ask Lucinda while reaching for the Bowie knife in my purse. “What are we doing here? Is this a set up? Are you wearing some kind of a wire?”

“No, no, no.” Lucinda is now fully in tears.

“You liar,” I scream and leap from my seat firmly gripping the bone handle of the knife. I point it at Lucinda’s throat. I don’t want to hurt her, just scare her. But I’m so angry and confused I really don’t know what I’m doing or going to do. “You betrayed me!” I continue to holler.

The men at the counter and in the food court rush across the room. They’re aiming guns at me. One of them shouts, “Stop! Police!”

Lucinda manages to get away but my knife has nicked her neck and I see a drop of red. This scares me. Then I watch my aunt run ten feet and stop by a café divider. I don’t chase her. Instead, I stand at the table tightly gripping the Bowie knife with both hands, pointing the blade upward, and looking back and forth. I don’t want the cops to shoot me and I’m not looking to kill anyone. Especially not my Aunt Lu.

“Nobody’s going to hurt you, Ms. Davis. Just do as I say and drop the knife,” the black man says as he stands five feet from me.

Suddenly, flashes and clicks explode behind him and I’m practically blinded by the light.

I shield my eyes and position myself with the knife held in front of me. “Stop it!” I scream. “Stop the flashing strobe lights!”

The black man turns. Directly behind him is a young man who grips a flash camera. The black man yells at another man standing beside the photographer. “You’ll answer for this, Cadowsky!” he hollers. “You son-of-a-bitch, goddamn reporter.”

“Don’t hurt her,” Lucinda screams at the top of her lungs. She’s still at the divider with her arms wrapped around herself as if she’s shivering from a Butte, Montana cold winter night.

I look beyond the black detective and calmly ask, “Are you Dave Cadowsky?”

“That’s right, honey,” the black man says as he waves the reporter to keep back. “That’s who he is? And I’m detective Jack Ellis. I want to help you, Ms. Davis.”

“Do you know where Brian is?” I ask Cadowsky, looking past this Jack Ellis.

“Yes, he does, honey,” Ellis replies. “Now give me the knife and we’ll go see Brian.”

“No!” I snap and resume a defensive posture while tears well up in my eyes. I’m so emotionally wadded up that I can’t think straight. I point the blade at Cadowsky. “I’ll give the knife to him. He knows where Brian is. Is he in Cincinnati? Or is he here in Phoenix?”

Ellis looks behind him and angrily sneers at Cadowsky then quickly glances back at me. “Well, answer the lady, asshole,” he says. “Is Brian in Cincinnati?”

Dave Cadowsky

I stand frozen. I never meant to interfere with Jack’s police work. After Mrs. Bowers called me at two this morning, begging for some guy’s number, I agreed to meet her at the airport and offer whatever information I had that Lucy might want. Although, Lucinda’s story didn’t make much sense. She had rambled on and on about my profiling an artist who was painting murals at the Republic. I quickly figured out that perhaps Lucy had concocted this story for the sake of her aunt. In any event, I knew the call from Lucinda Bowers offered me my biggest break yet in the homeless murders and the story’s headline began clicking in my mind *Mystery Woman Apprehended at Sky Harbor*.

And here I am, standing at the scene of apprehension with this newly hired college grad who can't keep his camera still. *It's this punk's fault* I think to myself. *The kid knew he wasn't supposed to take photos until I gave the okay, until after the detectives had everything under control.* I know Jack will hold me accountable and not the rookie cameraman. *This may be my greatest story,* I'm thinking*, but it's unlikely Jack Ellis will ever cooperate with me again.* "That's right, Lucy," I finally think to say. "I got Brian's address. He's waiting for you in Cincinnati."

Lucy wipes her eyes with the back of her free hand. "You got his address?"

"That's right, darling," Ellis says to Cadowsky. "Now give us the knife so we can all go to Cincinnati."

"You're lying!" Lucy screams at Jack. "You take me for a fool?"

"Cadowsky," Ellis motions to me while his eyes remain on Lucy's knife.

Jack wants me to figure out the lines. If I succeed in ending this situation without anyone getting hurt, then maybe there's a chance he'll forgive me. "Lucy." I step forward. She doesn't budge but appears slightly more at ease.

I extend my hand. "Let me have the knife, sweetheart, and I'll give you a note from Brian."

"Careful," Ellis states. "I don't know who I'll shoot first."

Lucy focuses entirely on me while still grasping the knife. "Did you talk to him?"

"I sure did." I lie, worried I'll say something wrong. If I carefully think out each word, I just might win her over and reconcile this situation with Jack.

"What did Brian say?" she asks.

This is a tough one, I'm thinking. "He wanted me to find you and give you this note." I reach inside my shirt pocket and pull-out Elaina's shopping list which I failed to fulfill the day before. Not to arouse Lucy's suspicion, I keep it folded when I hold it up. "Please Lucy, we don't want anyone hurt. Especially you. Please hand me the knife and I'll give you Brian's note."

"Did you read it?" Lucy asks.

"No. It's private. I promised Brian not to read it and to give it straight to you." I now have both hands extended, the folded note in one.

Lucy looks at her aunt who offers a reassuring smile through her tears. "Go on baby," she says. "Drop the knife. Nobody's going to hurt you. I promise. I love you with all my heart. You're my baby girl."

"That's right," Ellis says as he eyes his men to be prepared and gestures for everyone, especially Lucy, to keep calm. "Drop the knife. Easy does it."

Lucy Davis

I take a deep breath. My eyes itch and everything blurs before me and in my mind. For a moment, I don't know where I am and what I'm doing. It's as if I'm watching a video with Brian while fading in and out of sleep, waking up one moment, wondering about the story, then falling back asleep. Is it real? A fantasy? Am I part of a television drama? Police Story. Where am I at in this story? I stare at Ellis. *Who is this large man pointing a gun at me? Why would anyone point a gun at me? I'm just a simple bumpkin from Butte, Montana.* Suddenly, the knife falls from my hand.

As Ellis scrambles for the knife, several of his men run up and grab my arms, shove me against the table, and cuff me.

“Stop it,” my aunt screams. “You’re hurting my niece. You promised you wouldn’t hurt her.” I see my aunt looking at Jack Ellis but I’m feeling too numb to hate her for obviously setting me up to teach me how to be responsible, perhaps.

Cadowsky stops my aunt before she reaches the plain-clothes cops cuffing me. “It’s all over now, Mrs. Bowers,” the reporter says.

“You promised not to hurt her,” my aunt cries at Jack Ellis. “I wouldn’t have told you about this if I knew you were such cruel bastards.” My aunt looks overwrought with grief like I’ve died before her very eyes.

“No one’s hurt, Mrs. Bowers. She’ll be all right.” Ellis looks back at Cadowsky as if to say *Take care of the hysterical aunt!*

Dave quickly complies and carefully takes hold of Lucinda’s arm and guides her away from me.

The camera starts flashing again as two men walk me from the terminal. Their grip is firm. I’m dazed but remember I never had a chance to take Brian’s note from Dave Cadowsky.

Chapter 12: Estrella County Jail Waiting Room

February—March, 1991

Dave Cadowsky

In the waiting room before the glass enclosed reception tank, I eagerly lean back on my chair. My legs are crossed, my arms folded. Dozens of people are sitting on the hard blue vinal chairs waiting to visit inmates at the Estrella County Jail on Durango Street. Most are men with rotund bellies, tattoos, long hair, and beards. They appear to belong in the facility but are waiting

to visit girlfriends, sisters, wives, and mothers. Maybe just a friend. Certainly, no one is waiting for the same reason I am.

I think about my continuing coverage of Lucy Davis, star inmate at Estrella. With each article about her, I try to grab as many readers as possible with new and interesting facts such as how County Attorney Rick Romley is seeking the death penalty for three counts of premeditated intentional murder. And the fact that, if convicted, Ms. Davis will be the second woman on Arizona's death row. Debra Milke is currently serving time at Perryville while awaiting her first mandatory appeal to the Arizona Supreme Court.

In my most recent piece I discuss the opening of Estrella Jail and how Maricopa County now has the largest county jail system in the world. Originally, the State believed Estrella would hold two hundred juveniles and four hundred female drunk drivers and women awaiting transfer to a state-run facility like Perryville. This all changed before Estrella even opened its doors because the demand to jail females increased beyond all projections. The State is prosecuting more women than ever before, mostly for accomplice crimes committed with husbands or boyfriends. These days, Estrella houses nearly five hundred women.

Shortly after they jailed Lucy, she called me at the Republic and asked about Brian's supposed note. I felt relieved she hadn't read Elaina's shopping list that night at the airport. I feel disgraced when someone catches me in a ploy to gain a story. Over the phone, I told Lucy I still hadn't read the note and that Brian never called me back. I wanted to tell her the truth but I worried that one lie too many would land me in trouble.

"When you hear from Brian, Mr. Reporter, will you let me know?" Lucy had asked.

"Of course," I replied. "The police are hunting him down as we speak."

“What are they going to do to him? I thought he was in Cincinnati.” Lucy had sounded concerned.

“It’s all right, Lucy,” I said, worried she’d hang up on me when I’ve been trying to interview her since her apprehension. “Nobody’s going to hurt Brian. They just need to question him about your case. I’ll make sure he contacts you.”

“I think you’re lying, Mr. Cadowsky,” I remember Lucy saying. “Just like everyone else. Brian never gave you that note.”

“No, no, Ms. Davis. I did hear from Brian.” I lied. She hung up.

I had phoned the jail again but Lucy refused to take my call or grant me an interview. But I persisted. I wrote her letters and called the jail requesting interviews. This is my fifth time in the Estrella waiting room hoping Lucy will grant me a visit.

I’m sensitive about thrusting people into the news and making them look bad, although some people deserve to look bad but many are just going about their lives and struggling to make ends meet. Still, my mission in life is to expose the world for what it is. To tell a story where a story calls out to be told; although, admittedly, with a few twists and tugs to make the damn piece work. And I sympathize with Lucy, especially after seeing her at the airport trapped like an animal of prey, not a serial murderer, while desperately calling out for some loser named Brian. How did this young woman become so obsessed? It’s a great storyline.

Now, as I sit waiting for an interview, I’m hoping she’s read my letters and believes I want to justly portray her story. Not make her into the callous beast some people claim her to be.

“Mr. Cadowsky,” comes a woman’s tinny voice over the loudspeaker. I approach the reception tank. The woman behind the glass is barely audible as she explains, “Miss Davis refuses to see any reporters, especially you Mr. Cadowsky. Maybe next time.”

Each rejection disappoints me. I can't help it. My expectations always soar when it comes to this story. "Let her know I want her side of the story."

"My, oh my, but that girl is popular," the woman says, looking up from her paperwork. "Five reporters in two days and a whole lot of other folks."

"Like who?" I ask.

"Lucy Davis refuses to see anyone except the dicks she's forced to see and that psychiatrist who claims she's fit for trial. Poor girl. Wouldn't say she's too fit. And she doesn't stand a chance with Judge Albee. This is going to be one hell of a trial!"

I nod as a guard enters the reception tank and hands the clerk a file. Over the loudspeaker, she calls for the next visitor.

Lucy Davis

Because I'm facing the death penalty, the guards at Estrella keep me in the "close custody section" for dangerous felons and pre-trial inmates with behavioral problems. Like me. On both sides of a central guard station are two retaining areas housing us inmates behind steel slider doors with wire-enforced, triple-paneled glass windows. Each area has a day-room with tables and benches anchored to the concrete floor and a television anchored high on the wall. As if one of us might steal it! They stack us on top of each other in two levels of cells. Each cell contains a steel sink-toilet combination, a bunk, writing table, and a stool all firmly anchored to the floor.

They keep me in locked-down except for one hour each day when they allow me to sit alone in the day room or exercise in a walkway like at the dog pound. They make me wear an orange jumpsuit with "MCSO (Maricopa County Sheriff's Office) Inmate" stamped in bold black letters on the back. I don't have privileges like less security risk inmates but I no longer care. This is the perfect place for me as far as I'm concerned. No one bothers me, much, I'm

provided for and I'm famous. I know this, although I have little contact with the outside world, but my neighbors talk. Guards talk. One way or another, information gets around inside the jailhouse.

My life carries on day by day, hour by hour, as I await breakfast, lunch, dinner, my "out time," my "shut down time" and my "wake up time." The occasional visiting detective, doctor, reporter or attorney annoys me.

I'm numb to the world that keeps filling my veins with phenobarbital until I don't even sense the pain of living. It's difficult to explain this, even to myself. Perhaps I'm anemic, I sometimes think, but the doctor who gave me a complete physical exam, as part of the psychiatric screening, concluded that I'm normal. I took his meds for a while but they didn't do anything for me. Didn't make me feel better, didn't resolve any of my deeply seated issues, the ones stamped in my brain. So, I began refusing the psychiatric drugs they want to shove down my throat. *It's your right not to take them* neighboring inmates tell me.

I'm living in a stupor. Even Brian is fading from my thoughts like an old Polaroid black and white photo. When I do think about him, I can't understand why he doesn't visit me unless he's now working in Cincinnati. Painting murals or something. I wish him well but in the back of my mind I'm still hoping we'll meet again. When we do, he'll be grateful that I unburdened him so he can pursue his painting.

Reporters keep pestering me for interviews. It isn't that I hate the thought of an interview. Rather, I'm just too weary to go through with one. Questions from detectives, psychiatrists, and my attorney are hard enough. That reporter who tricked me at the airport, Cadowsky, keeps bugging me for an interview. I'll meet with him one day and ask about Brian's note. But for now, I enjoy keeping him waiting. It's my entertainment, my only way of getting back at people.

I'm in a position of power, I often think while lying on the top bunk staring at the gray concrete ceiling.

At first, I refused to see Lucinda who kept asking for a visitation. But today, I've decided to stare at her, face to face, and ask how it feels to betray someone you love.

We meet in the long narrow visiting room. A young security guard stands at the door. The room has five booths; each has metal stools anchored to the floor on both sides of the triple-paneled glass that separates visitors from us high-risk inmates.

"I didn't tell them you were in Montana," Lucinda admits as she sits behind the glass facing me and speaking into a phone. The guard keeps me cuffed because of my irregular outbursts of beating my fists against the walls and tossing food trays in my cell. I can't seem to help myself. At times, my pent-up anger explodes and I have no other way to release it. Why am I so angry? Because I was born into a world that has done nothing but fuck me up!

"You lured me back to Phoenix, Aunt Lu. I'd be in Cincinnati now with Brian. But no. You had to play games with me."

"I didn't know what to do that night you called. And yes, honey. The police terrified me about harboring a fugitive. They call it obstruction of justice."

I look down, away from my aunt's goggling eyes, so I can think. I appreciate her honesty but won't forgive her. I'll never forgive anyone. "Why didn't you take Sylvester that night?" I finally ask.

"I've always regretted that, hon. I'm so sorry. Please forgive me." Silence awkwardly stiffens the already stifling air. "I found a lawyer for you." Lucinda finally says, changing the subject. But I don't care anymore. About anything. "A young lady from Snell and Wilmer," my

aunt continues because I say nothing. “She was top of her class at Stanford. The firm is eager for the chance to help you.”

“You can’t afford a highfalutin lawyer!” I snap.

“Sweetheart, I’ll pay with everything I have to see you get a fair trial,” Lucinda pleads. “Charlie says he will, too. You don’t need to settle for a court appointed bulldog.”

I abruptly stand, alerting the guard. “I don’t want your goddamn lawyer!” I scream. “I don’t want anything from you. Not now. Not ever. You wouldn’t even take my cat!”

The guard grasps my arm and briskly pulls me to the door. “I’m through with this little visit, anyway,” I manage to say before the door to the visiting room slams shut.

Chapter 13: The Attorney

Arizona Republic, March 16, 1991
Delays in Davis Case Provoke Public Defender
by David Cadowsky

“The State’s case against Lucy Davis is weak and county prosecutors are afraid to go to trial,” says attorney Chris Stevens Friday afternoon after a Supreme Court hearing for Ms. Lucy Davis of Mesa. Stevens is the second attorney appointed to defend Davis who the DA accuses of murdering three homeless victims. During the hearing, Stevens blamed the county attorney’s office of dragging their feet. “Seems to me that if they have the evidence, they would have presented it already,” Stevens claimed. “Therefore, they must be withholding something to take us by surprise.” Deputy County Attorney Heidi Brown denies Steven’s allegations.

Deputy Public Defender Chris Stevens, esq

In the tiny conference room, I’m sitting across the gray metal table from my client, an indigent ward of the State. Her hands are uncuffed at my request. My blurred reflection on the

table shows a serious face with light brown hair trimmed back from a widow's peak and the blue tie that my wife Leslie recently gave me for my twenty-ninth birthday. My main objective for this first meeting with Ms. Davis is to win her over so I can win her case.

Since I began my legal career at the public defender's office four years earlier, I've wanted a capital case and was lucky my office assigned me to Lucy Davis. She has a fair shot of fighting a death sentence, if it comes to that, considering the State's flimsy evidence and my own determination to battle it out with the kind of verve I had during law school. I've already filed motions to suppress evidence and to appoint co-counsel with capital litigation experience.

Unlike Lucy's previous attorney, Mr. Daynes, I have a background in capital punishment. For the past two years, I've been assisting attorneys on capital cases and I've been a foe of the death penalty since enrolling in a clinic on capital punishment at Arizona State School of Law. I learned about the hypocrisy of this absolute form of justice without retraction. For one thing, it costs more to keep inmates on death row than it does to jail them for life. Then there are unfair discrepancies among those who receive a death sentence. Most death row inmates are indigent black, brown, and native Americans or poor whites. Defendants who can afford attorneys with good track records on capital cases rarely find themselves sentenced to death. I hope to make this case an exception.

"Who sent you?" Lucy asks. She doesn't look at me when speaking. It seems she's gazing at her own reflection on the metal table.

"The court sent me, Ms. Davis. I'm your attorney now and I'm here to help you. You refused your aunt's counsel and fired Mr. Daynes."

"That's right," Lucy says defiantly. "He was an asshole. Calling me sweetheart, honey, kiddo, and not returning my calls. That's sexual harassment! My cell neighbors tell me this."

“In that case, you’re lucky you got rid of him,” I say, hoping my client cooperates and I can build her confidence in me. “It’s not easy to terminate a court appointed attorney.”

“Oh? Well, people around here tell me I can fire my attorney for good cause. He wanted cameras during the trial. I got my constitutional rights!”

“Yes, you do, Lucy. And I already made a motion to prohibit cameras. Albee is an impartial, no-nonsense judge. He doesn’t like lengthy, pointless arguments or sloppy attorneys because he has a docket to fill and one case is not more important than another. Except for cases involving the death penalty.”

Lucy hesitates a moment then says, “I don’t trust anyone. Especially anyone in my family. And everyone knows all lawyers are crooks!”

“But you need an attorney. Do you understand how serious the charges against you are? Romley wants the death penalty and your former attorney failed to stop him. Forty days have already passed. It’s a done deal.”

“Okay, Mr. Hotshot Attorney,” Lucy says. “Can you explain the law to me? It’s something I need to learn about now that I’ve checked into hotel death row.”

“Yes, Ms. Davis. I promise to explain the proceedings during the trial. I can see you’re intelligent. And you deserve my respect.”

“Why does Arizona want to kill me?” Lucy asks, her gaze still upon me.

“Arizona law presumes a death sentence when there’s proof of a single aggravating factor that goes beyond an average first-degree murder. Romley claims that there are two aggravating factors in your case—multiple murders and murders committed in an especially heinous, cruel and depraved manner.”

“I’ve never been cruel,” Lucy raises her voice. “That just isn’t me. It’s always been somebody else being cruel to me!”

“I want to be on the level with you, Ms. Davis, and explain our best strategy for winning your case and avoiding this sentence of death. According to the statutes, cruelty involves a perpetrator who causes sadistic mental or physical distress and pain to the victim. Heinous and depraved involves the perpetrator’s mental state and attitude as evidenced by his words and actions.” I pull from my briefcase a copy of the DA’s request for the death penalty. “Lucy, the DA claims the victims were defenseless and uncertain of their fates because you, allegedly, taunted them between the time you intended to kill and the actual killings. Please, Ms. Davis, work with me. Trust me.”

“Trust you?” Lucy’s slate-blue eyes peer at me. “I only agreed to see you because they threatened to take away my rec hour. By the way, how long have you been out of law school? You look very young. Not much older than me.”

“Five years this May, Ms. Davis.”

“Five years isn’t much time to learn how to defend a murderer, is it?”

“I’m thorough.” I turn to my notes to shield my difficulty in dealing with this obviously troubled woman. I don’t want to upset our relationship before it even starts. Lucy Davis is my first “high-profile” case and she could make me a celebrity defense attorney and land me at a big law firm with big money. I hadn’t made law review at ASU but I take my job seriously and work day and night so my clients receive fair and just treatment regardless of what I believe about their guilt or innocence. “This case concerns your life or death, Ms. Davis. And there’s been talk of four counts of murder if the prosecutor can prove you planned to kill your father while you lived in Arizona.”

“I didn’t kill my father. He died of natural causes. Can I help it if he overdosed on his heart medicine? Besides, how can they prove what I was thinking while I’m in Arizona. That’s impossible.”

“I doubt they can. Unless you said something to someone. This is a jurisdictional problem, Lucy. When the elements of a crime are committed in different states, any state where part of the crime is committed can try the case. Premeditation is an element of first-degree murder.” I pause for a moment. “I don’t want to lose your attention with my legal explanations. Anyway, let’s not worry about this fourth count. But please understand the serious nature of the charges. The State wants you dead. I don’t.”

Lucy again peers down at the cold metal table. I suddenly feel sorry for her and see a frightened young woman hiding behind a tough, uncaring persona. I’ve seen such defensive shields before but never so clearly. She’s not the mask she struggles to wear. “Are they treating you well?” I ask. “It’s important. You can tell me.”

“I’m okay.” Lucy looks up. “No one bothers me much. Which is good. I know all my neighbors. You learn a lot in a place like this. The guards call us a bunch of bad, mean girls!” Lucy smiles for the first time.

I nod, grateful for her sudden light-hearted disposition. I might have a chance with her. “Lucy, I’m here to do whatever I can to win your case.” I turn from her to examine my notes, unsure of why I suddenly feel self-conscious. I’m just an ordinary guy who fought his way through law school, passed the bar, met and married an average woman. Who am I to take on a capital case where the State places my client’s life on a judicial platter, where the media chews and digests every nuance of her life and trial? I recently met with Vicki’s son to help me with Lucy’s mitigation phase of the trial, if she’s found guilty. The man was indifferent about his

mother's death, yet he strongly favors the death penalty. If the victim's son had opposed it, I would have had some ammo for Lucy's mitigation. "I've talked to Vicki's son," I say to Lucy.

"Has Brian come back from Cincinnati?" Lucy perks up.

"You mean Brian Potthoff?" I ask. She nods. "The police located Mr. Potthoff in Phoenix," I admit but decide to forestall revealing that Brian will testify against her, if we go to trial. During a pre-trial interview, I already encountered Lucy's former boyfriend and found him to be like one of the DWI losers I used to defend. "Look Lucy, you've got to tell me about your childhood and your relationship with Mr. Potthoff so I can bargain on your behalf with the county attorney. Did this jerk Brian Potthoff dick you around and push you off the deep end? We all go a little crazy, now and then. You, maybe just a little bit more. I'm not saying you're guilty of anything." I nervously tap my pencil against the pad. Then stop myself. "Lucy. Do we plead guilty and make a deal?"

"What if I don't want to plead guilty? Maybe I'm innocent."

"Lucy, as your attorney, I strongly advise you to take a plea bargain if the DA presents one and that usually involves your pleading guilty for a life-sentence instead of death. If you don't take a plea, they'll throw us into the courtroom arena with such defense strategies as intoxication, which is a weak possibility, or lack of specific intent, which is also an unlikely strategy."

"What about insanity?" Lucy appears sincere but I thought she knew the court had ruled out insanity after a psychologist from the Department of Correctional Health Services had evaluated her mental state at the time of the murders and concluded that *Lucy is detached with dulled sensitivities, as if she's constructed a barrier around herself against the pain of life's*

disappointments. It is my impression that Ms. Davis suffers from an acute antisocial personality but there's no evidence, whatsoever, that she is or ever has been insane.

"Insanity has been ruled out," I say. "Insufficient state's evidence is our best strategy. However, Ms. Davis, a trial can be traumatic. You're up against the jury, the judge, and long agonizing hours of having your life ripped apart."

Lucy stares at me for a moment. "Mr. Stevens. Can you tell that reporter Dave Cadowsky I want to see him?"

"I strongly advise against that. Unless I'm present."

"Of course." Lucy nods in agreement, then gestures to the guard that she's ready to return to her cell.

My first meeting with Ms. Davis has ended rather abruptly and I foresee a heavy workload because she's not going to take a plea deal from Romley. My first step now is to find a couple of gung-ho anti-death penalty law students from the ASU clinic to intern for me during this case. My co-counsel and I will need as much help as we can get. But I'm optimistic. Have to be if I plan to be effective. The one thing we have going for us, I believe, is that the small and demure Ms. Davis doesn't look like a brutal serial killer.

The Arraignment

Lucy Davis

Dressed in my MCSO orange jumpsuit, I stand beside my attorney before the bench where Judge Albee of the Maricopa County Superior Court sits clad in his black robe. He's a plump man of fifty with thick glasses and reddish gray hair. His deep voice makes me feel tromped upon even before he directly speaks to me. Also present in the courtroom are the prosecution team, a bailiff, guards, and a court reporter.

“If you want a trial, Ms. Davis.” Albee looks at me. “You’re entitled to the assistance of your attorney and the aid of subpoenas to force people into court. You’re entitled to face witnesses who testify against you so you can present your own case, offer your own evidence, and testify on your own behalf. Or you can remain silent. It’s up to you, Ms. Davis. No one can force you to testify. Do you understand all these important constitutional rights?”

“Yes, sir,” I say, avoiding the judge’s glare and recoiling into my childhood shell of shyness.

“Deputy Grams, would you convey this form to Ms. Davis?” the judge requests. The deputy hands me the form. “Where it says ‘defendant,’” Albee continues, “I want you to sign your name. This records your plea of not guilty. Do you understand?”

I look at my attorney; he nods for me to speak. “Yes, sir,” I say while remembering something my cell neighbor said. *Listen, honey, we all deserve our day in court. Don’t take the plea. Don’t let these assholes railroad you. Stand up for yourself. No one else ever will*.

I couldn’t have agreed more and I’m confident I’ve made the right decision. *Why should I fall into another trap?* a voice yells inside my head. *As a child, I learned to keep my mouth shut and hide from Scottie. All I have to do now is never admit to anything because if I do, my troubles only get worse. No one’s on my side! No one’s looking out for Little Lucy Lu except for Lucy Lu herself*. “Your Honor,” I declare, “I’m not guilty of these crimes, sir.” And I sign the paper.

The deputy hands the form to Albee and two male deputies and a female guard escort me back to Estrella County Jail on Durango Street not far from the dog pound where I used to work.

—

From behind the Plexiglas booth, I stare at Dave Cadowsky. The reporter smiles. In a few weeks the courts have scheduled my case for trial and I decided to give Cadowsky exclusive rights to my story because by now I feel like I know him. He's been so persistent to gain my trust after his blundering betrayal at the airport. He really seems to understand me and my case unlike all the other knucklehead reporters who keep asking for interviews and visitation rights.

Mr. Cadowsky isn't thrilled to have my attorney sitting at his side especially because Mr. Stevens refuses to comment on my case.

"You're a liar," I say from where I sit.

"What?" Cadowsky is behaving like he honestly isn't sure which lie I'm referring to.

"That note wasn't from Brian, was it?"

The reporter looks downward. He's embarrassed. I've caught him off guard and that makes me feel good. I hold the power. He got so pumped up at having scored an interview with me that he completely forgot about the stupid note. Now I've put him on the spot. Asshole.

"I had to tell you that, Lucy," Cadowsky admits while drawing squiggles on his notepad. "It was a difficult night." He glances at Chris for his reaction. My attorney says nothing. He's not here to help the reporter but rather to prevent me from saying something that might destroy my case. And to keep Cadowsky from publishing anything that no one said. Anyway, that's what Chris told me before we set up this little *ménage à trois* as my neighbors like to call such meetings.

"Good," I say. "I'm glad you didn't lie. Tell me now, Mr. Hotshot Reporter. Did you meet Brian in Cincinnati?"

Cadowsky hesitates, acting surprised. Then he says something that completely floors me. "Lucy, do you believe Brian Potthoff is Vicki's son?"

“What?” I gaze at the reporter then at my attorney. Mr. Stevens shrugs.

“I think there may be a mix up,” Cadowsky tells me. “Brian Potthoff is unrelated to Vicki Jones. Her son in Cincinnati is Nathaniel Prichard.”

“Oh?” I look down at the counter then at my attorney. He says nothing, not even through his expression.

“Did Brian confuse you?” Cadowsky asks. “Did he claim that Vicki was his mother?”

My head begins to pound. “No,” I finally say. “I mean yes. I suspected something was wrong between Brian and this homeless woman during our first meeting in Woodland Park. Brian said she was his mother and I took Brian at his word even when he joked around with me. I take everyone at their word and guess what, Mr. Hotshot Reporter, everyone turns around and confuses me! Now my life’s truly shattered. There’s nothing left for me. Nothing at all. The State wants me dead. Everyone’s lied to me.” I clasp my head in anguish.

“Are you alright?” Chris asks.

I look up. My eyes are no longer teared. “I’m fine, Mr. Attorney. What’s your next question? Mr. Reporter.”

Arizona Republic, April 18, 1991
Gag Order in Davis Case Granted. Change in Venue Denied
by David Cadowsky

Prosecutors in the Maricopa County Attorney’s Office asked for a court-imposed gag order on people involved with the Davis case. The recent interviews with murder suspect Lucy Davis and her attorney Chris Stevens angered the DA. Because of extensive pre-trial publicity, defense attorney Chris Stevens asked Superior Court Judge Albee to move the trial to Pima County. Judge Albee heard the arguments on both sides but denied the motion for a change of venue

because the defense failed to show that pre-trial publicity would prejudice the jurors toward the defendant's guilt. However, Albee granted the gag order.

First Day of the Trial

Lucy Davis

On the tenth floor of the Superior Court building, the paneled courtroom walls have a stuffy institutional feeling like any county facility, like the dog pound and the homeless shelter on Adams. The great seal of Arizona emblazons the wall behind the judge's seat between the state and nation's flags. To the left of the judge's empty bench, against a side wall, are two rows of seats for the jurors. To the right is the witness chair and the bailiff's seat.

At the defense table, my attorney and his co-counsel Julie Fuller shuffle through papers. My second attorney is in her late thirties. She wears a white blouse with a floppy bow and a pale blue suit that twists around her large figure.

A court reporter stations herself at a table near the witness stand. Her chair slides against the floor and screeches like finger nails across a chalkboard. At each end of the room stands a deputy sheriff in a stiff tan uniform with gold stars on blue shoulder patches. One deputy has a crewcut like Daddy had when I was little, the other has longer blond hair brushed back from his pocked face.

To each side of the entry aisle are five rows of hardwood benches crammed with whispering spectators anticipating my high-profile trial**.** The court reserves the first row for family and reporters. Lucinda isn't present nor is Vicki's son Nathanial Prichard. Among the reporters sits Dennis DeShay who's covering the trial for his friend Dave Cadowsky. Because both Cadowsky and my aunt are witnesses for my defense, Mr. Stevens tells me that they can't be in the courtroom during my trial.

Deputy attorney Heidi Brown and her co-counsel Chester Peterson, a more senior man from the County Attorney's Office, sit patiently at the prosecutor's table. Heidi is tall and thin. She wears a forest green suit, has her auburn hair in a tight French braid, and her deep-set green eyes are heavy with makeup. I find her intimidating even before she presents her case simply because she and her team want me put down like I'm a sick dog at the pound.

I'm patiently sitting next to my attorneys. My hair is now straight and dishwater blond. Instead of wearing my orange jumpsuit, I'm wearing a floral blouse and Navy-blue skirt that Lucinda brought me. My aunt and I are on good terms these days. I've forgiven her. I really had no choice because there's no one else in my ball court except for bleeding heart well-wishers opposed to a death sentence. And besides, Aunt Lu persistently apologized and vowed she'd always support me, no matter what. She says she loves me and I must admit, I feel the same way about her.

I'm gazing downward although I occasionally glance at the bench but never look behind me. I don't want to see the faces watching my trial—the I Hate Lucy Show. I'm unnerved and stripped of the confidence I gained over the last few months. Just prior to this travesty, I had resigned myself to the guidance of Mr. Stevens. I no longer remember how empowerment feels. I barely remember anything about those episodes during last Christmas. It's all a fuzzy haze like a Montana blizzard in the Rockies. Now I'm existing simply to watch the drama of my life unfold. All the players are here to either spare me or condemn me to death. What a pickle I'm in, a real hornet's nest.

The door to the jury box opens. Eight women and six men enter the room, each is carrying a notepad and pencil. The last juror is a man in a pink shirt. They are all white people casually dressed in shirts or blouses. Two women are wearing dresses. I stare at the pink shirt

juror recalling Judge Albee's words the day before, during the *voir dire* process which took hours. "Do you have any reservations about giving a verdict that might lead to a death sentence?" the judge had asked. "No, sir. Not at all," pink shirt had replied.

In fact, one by one, all the jurors gave the same answer while I sat there feeling pathetic and probably looking like I deserved to die at the hands of the State. *It's odd,* I'm thinking now. *All these people are strangers and yet, here they are prepared to evaluate and judge me and my life. I ought to know them well.*

Tap, tap, tap sounds the bailiff's gavel; it wakes me from my thoughts. "All rise," he calls as Judge Albee enters the room in his imposing black robe like he's Darth Vader.

"Thank you." Albee seats himself. "Good morning. Let the record show the presence of the jury, counsel, and defendant." The judge turns his attention to the jurors on his right. "Ladies and gentlemen, I'm going to give you some ground rules to help you in your service to the court. Your job is to apply the law to the facts. My job is to decide questions of law that arise during trial." He looks at the attorneys. "As for counsel, they're here to present evidence. Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you must determine if that evidence is fact or fiction."

It's hot in the courtroom and the oldest woman on the far end of the jury box is fanning herself with her notepad. Some jurors are glancing at me but for the most part their attention is firmly on Judge Albee who leans back and tells them that each side will make opening statements. "Don't speculate or let sympathy or prejudice factor into your decisions. And don't let my opinions concern you. The State charges the defendant with three counts of first-degree murder. Don't think the defendant is guilty because she's charged with these crimes. Lucy Davis pleads not guilty and we must presume she's innocent. The State must prove that she's guilty of

these crimes beyond a reasonable doubt after you carefully consider all the evidence or lack thereof."

The judge asks his clerk to read the indictment and state the plea and turns to the prosecution. "Ms. Brown, you may now make your opening remarks on behalf of the State."

I'm not looking up from the table while thinking, believing, that my life doesn't matter anymore. I notice Mr. Stevens nervously taps his pencil. Ms. Julie stops him.

The courtroom is quiet when Heidi Brown stands with confidence. "May it please the court. Defense." She nods at my attorneys and the jury. No, she doesn't nod at me. She hates me. I'm her target. She wants me dead.

"Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I'm Heidi Brown, attorney for the State of Arizona." She nears the jury box. "Our case involves the murder of three victims. I will show that this case transcends a mere tragedy. This story involves the cruel and depraved murders of innocent, homeless, and elderly victims who, unlike you or me, were struggling to survive on the streets of our city. I ask you, were they less deserving of life than we are? Oh, I think not." Mr. Stevens gently taps my folded hands resting on the table.

"On the night of December 23, 1990," Heidi continues. "Lucy Davis cold-heartedly injected Mrs. Vicki Jones with alcohol and a deadly dose of phenobarbital. Two weeks later, on the evening of January 7, 1991, she savagely injected Mark Abercrombie with that same deadly substance. But Mr. Abercrombie desperately struggled for his life. He wanted to live. He had every right to live. I will show evidence that Lucy Davis bore scratches from that struggle with Mr. Abercrombie. The County Medical Examiner will provide evidence of her flesh found in the victim's nails. Two weeks later the defendant took the life of another elderly homeless man. A man whose name we don't even know. We don't know where he comes from or how he ended

up living on the streets. We only know that he was a poor unfortunate old man who lost his life due to the brutal whim of Ms. Lucy Davis."

"The State charges the defendant with three counts of first-degree murder. We must prove three elements for each charge. First, that Davis caused the deaths of Vicki Jones, Mark Abercrombie and the unknown man we will refer to as John Doe. Second, that Ms. Davis intended to cause the death of each victim. And third, that she thought about killing the victims before she killed them."

Heidi briefly comments on why she will call each of her witnesses to testify against me then concludes her opening remarks. "This is a serious case and I ask you to carefully listen to each person's testimony and evaluate the evidence and make sure it corroborates. Thank you very much."

Albee sits quietly for a moment as if steadying the courtroom for the next event. He turns to my attorney. "Mr. Stevens, do you wish to make an opening statement at this time?"

My attorney moves to the front of our defense table and leans against it. "I do, Your Honor."

"You may proceed."

"Your Honor, Ladies and Gentlemen." He nods at the jury, "Counsel." He glances at Heidi and her co-counsel Mr. Patterson. "My name is Chris Stevens and I represent Lucy Davis. For however long this trial may last, I'll prove that what happened in this case is not as simple as the prosecution claims. If it were, there'd be no need for a trial. Please keep an open mind and don't judge Ms. Lucy Davis until you hear all the evidence. Unfortunately, you won't hear Lucy's side of the story until the defense cross-examines the witnesses and points out problems

in the State's case. Bear in mind, you can't trust every witness who takes the stand. Some are unreliable and even fraudulent. We'll explain this to you during our cross-examination."

Chris looks at the jury as if talking directly to each individual. "Through the inconsistent and contradictory testimony of the State's witnesses, I'll prove Lucy Davis didn't commit the crimes as charged on the nights of December 23rd, January 7th, and January 21st. The State's witnesses are going to tell you a bizarre story about a world none of us want to live in. They'll tell a story of human pain and misery, of drunkenness, confused perceptions, and faded memories. The State will exaggerate the morbid details of this case. But the fact that these killings are morbid or tragic doesn't mean Lucy Davis is guilty. There are no eye-witnesses. There's no direct evidence. Only circumstantial bits and pieces that don't fit together. There's no proof of the defendant's intent, motive or her actions. I don't believe Ms. Davis is capable of such crimes. Look at her, ladies and gentlemen. She's a shy country girl from Butte, Montana."

Chris nods at me and I look at the table before me. I'm not trying to frown or smile too much and appear as if I'm smirking, according to my attorney's advice. His words make me feel good about my chances for an acquittal. But I don't want to feel too optimistic and break my heart all over again.

Heidi abruptly stands. "Your Honor," she says, her hands are on the table as she leans forward. I notice her long squared-off fingernails neatly painted a natural pink. "With all due respect, Counsel is arguing his opinion rather than presenting the facts of this case. He might confuse the jury."

"True, Ms. Brown." Albee looks at Chris. "Mr. Stevens, please reserve your opinion for your closing argument. Now it's better to state what you expect the evidence will be. We want Ms. Davis to have a fair trial but we can't afford needless and lengthy discussions."

"Of course, Your Honor." Chris smiles and quickly adds, "I've heard that jurors often make conclusions about guilt or innocence during opening remarks." He turns to the fourteen members on the jury panel. They all have very serious expressions. "Clearly, that would be unfair. Ladies and gentlemen, Lucy Davis won't get a fair trial unless you analyze the credibility of each witness and find reasonable doubts about the involvement of Ms. Davis in these crimes she didn't commit. I repeat, did not commit. On the day Lucy Davis is set free, you can rest assured that you've allowed justice to be served. Thank you."

Chris takes his seat and talks to Julie. He taps me on the shoulder and whispers, "Lucy, you're doing great. Stay alert because the battle's about to begin."

My heart is palpitating from the energy of my attorney's speech and I don't want to feel anything else. I'm now completely resigned to sit back and watch my entire life play out before me. Episode after episode. I want a positive outcome for the Lucy Show. I don't want to view any old re-runs and I don't want the network to cancel my program!

Chapter 14: The Prosecution

July 16, 1991

I sneak a quick glance at the grandmotherly juror wearing a turquoise V-neck blouse with Western style fringe. She's staring at me and quickly looks away. I vividly remember her agonizing over one of Albee's *voir dire* questions. *Do any of you people know anything about this case*? *From the newspapers, radio, or television? Have you talked to anyone about it before you entered this courtroom today*? Nearly every juror's hand went up. They all had some inkling about my case. Albee specifically asked the grandmotherly woman *As far as you know, is there anything you've read or heard that would make it impossible for you to sit as a fair and*

impartial juror? The woman had said *No, Your Honor. I can sit on the jury without prejudice.* Albee replied *Thank you. We appreciate your candor, Mrs. Trayner.*

That was her name, I recall as I glance back at Mrs. Trayner who sits poised in the jury box watching the judge with a fair and impartial face prepared to evaluate and, *what was that big fancy word? Compulate, computate, correlate?* all of the evidence.

The exhibits that Heidi presents include photographs, drawings at the scene, autopsy reports, my silver charm found near Abercrombie's body, and my handwritten note found on Vicki Jones.

Heidi first calls to the stand a young Native American woman with long black hair. She nervously sits in the witness box looking like a fish out of water. I remember her from Woodland Park. She even sports the same dark sunglasses, blue jeans, and denim shirt. The clerk places her under oath and Heidi calmly asks her to recite her name for the court.

"Carma Susee."

"Carma," Heidi proceeds, "I request you take off your sunglasses so the jury can see your eyes. Is that all right with you?" The witness doesn't respond. "Is that okay, Carma?" Heidi asks. The woman still says nothing.

"Ma'am, could you please remove your glasses during the questions," Albee states. "The quicker you cooperate the quicker we can wind up your testimony. Do you understand? You're not on trial, Ms. Susee."

She removes her glasses.

"Thank you, Carma," Heidi says then asks the witness to tell the jury that she resides near Woodland Park when not on the Navajo reservation. "Ms. Susee, did you know these murder victims?"

“Yes.”

“What were their names?”

“Well, like we don’t know everyone around the park by name. I knew Old Wind Tunnel but me and my old man didn’t know her name was Vicki.”

“Do you mean Woodland Park?”

“Yes.”

“And do you mean the murder victim Vicki Jones?”

“Yes.”

“How well did you know the victim?”

“Like, she sometimes talked to me and my old man. Bought us loosies, food. She was all right.”

“Was Lucy Davis ever in Woodland Park?”

“Well, like I didn’t know her name when she came to the park.”

“Please answer yes or no.”

“What was your question?”

“Did you see Lucy Davis in Woodland Park?”

“Yes. I seen her.”

“Do you see Lucy Davis in this courtroom?”

“What? Are you kidding me?”

“No, Ms. Carma. Do you see Lucy Davis here today? Can you point her out?”

The witness points to the table where I am sitting next to my attorney.

“Are you pointing to the defense table?”

“I guess.”

“Ma’am,” Albee says to the witness. “Can you point again to the person you identified as Lucy Davis.”

“Right there.” Carma limply points towards me; the gesture obviously troubles her. It troubles me as well. I don’t like being accused. Blamed. Scottie did that all through my childhood including pointing his finger in my face and calling me names.

“May the record show the witness identifies the defendant Lucy Davis,” Albee states.

“Where have you seen her before?” Heidi asks.

“She used to hang out at the park with Vicki.”

“With Vicki Jones, you say?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Did you see Lucy Davis with Vicki Jones on the night of December 23rd?”

“Ma’am, how can I remember these details? I barely remember who I saw yesterday.” A chuckle arises from the jury box and the spectators at the back of the courtroom. Chris looks pleased. I feel myself laughing inside though I keep myself from grinning.

“Just before Christmas,” Heidi quickly adds, stifling the amusement. “Surely you can remember that?”

“No, ma’am. It’s all a blur to me. I can’t say if I saw her with Wind Tunnel that night or Christmas or whatever.”

“Okay, Carma. Do you recall Vicki Jones ever mentioning Lucy Davis, the defendant, by name or description?”

“Yes ma’am, I think so.”

“And what did Vicki say to you about the defendant?”

“Objection.” Chris stands and states loud and clearly, “This is hearsay.”

Heidi side-glances Chris then turns to the judge. “Your Honor, I’m merely trying to establish the victim’s state of mind. This is admissible evidence.”

“Objection overruled, continue counsel.”

“Carma, I know you probably don’t like being here but you’re helping Arizona achieve justice. When I ask you these questions, I’m not trying to make you uncomfortable. Do you understand?”

“Uh-huh. I mean, I think so.”

“Could you please tell me what Vicki, Wind Tunnel, said to you about the defendant?”

“One time I asked her about the woman, I mean, Lucy. I asked because she gave me and my old man some wine. And she was wearing this wig trying to look like an Indian lady, I think.”

“Who was?”

“Lucy Davis.”

“And what did Vicki tell you?”

“I asked Vicki if Lucy was like her daughter. And Vicki says something like ‘that strange gal is stirring up trouble because of my son.’ It was kinda crazy talk cuz Old Wind Tunnel didn’t make much sense when she talked. She was drunk most the time.” Carma snickers nervously, showing a missing front tooth.

Heidi smiles in return, obviously trying to be friendly with a difficult witness. “Clearly, Ms. Susee, Vicki was concerned about this strange gal, Lucy Davis?”

“I move for a mistrial,” Chris suddenly bursts out, startling me and the jurors and making my other attorney grin. “This witness recites a great deal of hearsay conversation allegedly made by the deceased. Obviously, I’m in no position to cross-examine Vicki Jones.”

“Your Honor,” Heidi says with her hands relaxed at her sides. This makes her appear even taller and slimmer than she already is. “As the court knows, there are many exceptions to hearsay. One is ‘state of mind.’ My witness is offering testimony about the victim’s anxiety toward Lucy Davis. That’s all. It’s relevant and admissible testimony.”

“Vicki’s state of mind isn’t at issue. Ms. Brown,” Chris says to Heidi. “I believe you’re offering these statements for the fact of the statements and not for the victim’s state of mind.”

“Motion denied,” the judge rules and Chris sits back down. I take a deep breath hoping my attorney has scored points with the jury. When Chris went over what to expect, he said he’d be making many objections so that the appellate court, if it came to that, could determine if the judge ruled incorrectly during the trial. *Despite the judge’s ruling, I’ll make my point to the jury and they’ll question the validity of a witness’s testimony* I recall Chris’ words. I told him it sounded like a good idea but what do I know about the law? I barely made it through Butte High and never made it into any kind of nursing school.

“All right, Ms. Susee,” Heidi walks toward the witness stand, smiles and nods, careful not to block the jury’s view of the witness. “Did Vicki Jones ever indicate that Lucy Davis threatened her?”

Carma looks at me and at Heidi, then, for the first time, she surveys the jury. “Those killings in Woodland Park were acts of mercy.”

“Please. Just answer the question.” Heidi looks surprised by this unexpected answer. “Did Vicki Jones feel threatened by Lucy Davis?”

“That old lady, Wind Tunnel; she was real sick. Shivering when it was hot, sweating when it got cold. And that old white guy. Man, he was suffering. We all knew that but no one helped him. Maybe she did.” Carma nods at me.

“Your Honor,” Heidi protests.

“Ms. Susee,” the judge says. “You must keep your answers confined to the questions Ms. Brown asks. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir. I do.”

Chris nudges his co-counsel. They seem amused by what’s going on.

“Thank you,” Heidi continues. “Now, about Vicki Jones. Did she ever seem afraid of Lucy Davis?”

“Afraid? We all got to be afraid, don’t we? And that Old Wind Tunnel, I seen her sick and tired. No one cared. Yeah, she called Lucy her Angel of Mercy. Maybe she thought Lucy came along to send her out of this world, I don’t know.”

“Objection, Your Honor,” Chris yells. “This is speculation on the part of this witness.”

“Sustained, the jury will disregard that last statement. Counsel?” Albee looks at Heidi.

“I have no further questions at this time, Your Honor.” She returns to her seat.

Albee asks my attorney if he wishes to cross-examine. “Yes, Your Honor,” Chris stands. He had already suggested to me that the “mercy” angle might screw with the jurors’ heads. He casually stands close to the witness and introduces himself to Carma. “Ms. Susee, I’ll be brief so we can finish with your testimony and you can go home. On the occasions you noticed Lucy Davis visiting Vicki Jones, would you say Lucy was bringing Vicki food?”

“You could say that.”

“Thank you, Carma. Your Honor. That’s all.”

“OK. Let’s take a twenty-minute recess.”

Half an hour later, amid yammering voices echoing through the courtroom, a female guard leads me back to the defense table after having escorted me to the bathroom. Chris is reviewing notes with Julie. He turns to me as I sit beside him. “Things are looking good. How are you doing?”

“Okay, I guess.”

Chris hesitates a moment and then he nods to the spectators behind me. “Lucy, your sister’s here.”

“What?” I’m taken by complete surprise and thinking *My sister? I don’t even know her and she hardly knows me. How the hell does she know about all this? Is my trial broadcast all over the world?* I slowly turn to face the people behind me. Although, Dennis DeShay has been greeting me each morning with a tap on my shoulder, I’ve never turned around to look at him or all those other spectators. Until now.

Not far behind me on the first row of seats sits a tall thirty-two-year-old woman with layered golden hair. She is neatly dressed in a tan skirt, white cotton blouse, and black vest. Her baby blue eyes gaze at me with sympathy. Maybe it’s pity. Her full red lips seem to whisper my name.

Stunned, I turn forward away from the woman I haven’t seen for years. “You didn’t tell me she was coming,” I whisper to Chris.

“Yes, I did Lucy, remember? I asked her to testify at your mitigation hearing, if it comes to that. She’s deeply stirred by your trouble and feels terrible that she’s kept out of touch for so long.”

Before I have time to think about this, the courtroom begins to settle as the recess comes to an end. Emotions rankle my body. I’m feeling flushed, bruised, and lost in a world never

meant for me. My head becomes filled with chaotic memories like the strobe light spinning above the dance hall at Bobby McGee's Conglomeration. The producers of the I Hate Lucy Show have just tossed me back into my horrible, troubling childhood. Then, a single thought suddenly emerges. I want to know about Tracy's love child, the niece I never got to meet because the adoptive parents took the baby as soon as she was born. At least, that's what my folks told me all those years ago and Tracy never told me anything before she left Butte for good.

"I've missed you, Lucy," Tracy says from behind me. I won't turn around even though my head pounds with grief, as if I had the baby and it died. I bow my head and feel Chris's hand on my shoulder.

"Please, Lucy," calls a voice from the past.

Chris gently takes hold of my elbow and helps me stand. I turn. Behind the railing, Tracy stands with her arms outstretched to me.

I freeze. My damaged life fills me with sorrow.

"Lucy," says the beautiful woman with tears falling down her cheeks. *It's unbecoming*, I'm remembering these words from Tracy herself. She often said them to me when I did something beneath her standards. I could never be as "cool" as she was.

Tracy reaches for me and our hands clasp, gently at first, then tightly. I move closer until Tracy draws me into an embrace that lasts a brief second because the bailiff calls the court into session and Chris eases me back to my seat.

Heidi stands at her table. "The State calls Mr. Brian Potthoff."

I suddenly forget about my older sister because my eyes and thoughts are transfixed on the man I once loved as he saunters before the clerk. She swears him in and Brian sits on the

witness stand. He wears Lands' End trousers and a long-sleeved blue shirt even though it's July. He has neatly trimmed his dark hair and moustache. I think he's applied Just for Men hair dye. His cold brown eyes avoid my stare. I look down at the table and think *How do you feel, Lucy Lu? Don't be alarmed. Be as cool as a cucumber.*

Chris had already warned me about Brian and explained the prosecution hopes his testimony will connect me to the crimes.

After a few preliminary questions, Heidi asks Brian, "How long have you known Ms. Davis?"

"Less than a year."

"How well did you know her?"

"We lived together for a few months."

"Were you lovers?"

"Excuse me?"

"Just answer the question."

"Maybe. Yeah, at first."

I'm awed at hearing the familiar voice answer Heidi's questions. A voice that said, not so long ago, "I love you" when his body mingled with mine. Now I'm searching my heart for the love I once had. I would have died for him. *Had I really killed for him*? These feelings slipped away the moment Cadowsky revealed the truth about Vicki Jones. Brian had faked me out! Made me into a stupid clown. Just like Scottie used to do. And now I can't remember how it felt to love him. Is love make-believe? Someone else's dream retold to me? I don't feel bad about the deaths, just foolish, and I don't hate Brian. Instead, I have this gnawing sensation inside me like something is slowly corroding me. And I have no idea where these numb sensations will take

me. But one thing I know for certain, I won't let this man hurt me anymore. I'll be brave, like my attorney advised me to be. *Fight any impulse you have to lash out at him* Chris said. *Keep still. Be patient. Let me take down Brian Potthoff.*

"Yes, I was her boyfriend," Brian says.

"Now, as far as being here today, would you rather not testify against the defendant?"

"I'm here to tell the truth."

LIAR! a voice shouts in my head. I look at Brian then at Chris who taps my hand to calm me.

Heidi stands near the jurors when she asks, "Does it bother you, Mr. Potthoff, that your testimony might convict Ms. Davis and lead to a death sentence?"

"I'm here to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

He's smug, I'm thinking, like a DWI loser as Chris suggests.

"You didn't answer my question, Mr. Potthoff."

"Sure, then, it bothers me," Brian admits.

"Mr. Potthoff. What's your current relationship with the defendant?"

"We're just friends, I guess."

LIAR! The voice returns to my head. *You're not my friend!*

"A close friend?"

"Well, not exactly. I haven't seen her for a while. Thought it best. She was acting weird."

"Objection."

"Just answer the question," Albee says to Brian.

Yes, butthole, just answer the fucking question, I'm thinking to myself and trying very hard not to let him rattle me and not let the jurors see my anguish.

“Mr. Potthoff. Were you living with the defendant at the Quail Shade Apartments?”

“Yes.”

“Have you seen the defendant since her arrest?”

“No.”

“Mr. Potthoff, while you were living with the defendant, did you notice anything unusual in the refrigerator?”

“Yes.”

“Describe it to the jury.”

“She started bringing home these sandwich bags of white crystals. At first, I thought the powder was crack cocaine but then she said it was barbital crystals from the pound, you know, the stuff they down animals with.”

“What did she tell you about the phenobarbital crystals?”

“Well, see, Lucy had been talking off the wall about downing the homeless cause they’re unwanted blights on society.”

“Is that what she said?”

“Yes. Exactly. Blights on society.”

LIAR, the inside voice grows so intense my head is about to explode like a Yellowstone geyser. Like Old Faithful. To still my thoughts, I cup my hands over my ears.

Chris whispers like a parent to child, “Patience, Lucy. Be at peace. Let me take down Brian.”

Heidi is looking at her notes as if composing her question. “Lucy Davis told you that the drugs were meant to kill Vicki Jones, is that correct?”

“Objection. Leading the witness.”

“Overruled, continue.”

“Mr. Potthoff?”

“Lucy said she’d kill that lady. That’s correct. Vicki Jones, the old lady she thought was my mother.”

Heidi looks at the jurors. “Did Lucy use the phenobarbital drugs stored in your refrigerator herself?”

“Yes. To help her sleep at night.”

Julie whispers to Chris who looks at me. I hadn’t told him about my insomnia and my need to take phenol to help me relax my racing thoughts so I could fall asleep. I shake my head to say it isn’t true. He whispers that we need to speak during the next break. “If more surprises crop up,” he tells me. “I’ll have to request some conference time with you.”

Heidi walks to the exhibits on the bailiff’s table. Chris and Heidi previously met with Judge Albee to select crime scene and autopsy photos that wouldn’t prejudice the jury. Nothing too gory or gruesome, in other words, although it’s not like I’m accused of shooting my victims then beheading, gutting, and skinning them and hanging their corpses from pine poles lodged into trees. Among the exhibits are crime scene drawings, autopsy reports, my handwritten note found on Vicki Jones, the bloodstained blouse from Tiffany Shelton, and an empty box of red hair dye. Chris tells me that Mrs. Neuberger will testify that the blouse and hair dye box belonged to me and that I left them at the homeless shelter on Adams. There is, however, no fingerprint evidence at the crime scenes matching mine.

Heidi picks up an exhibit then paces over to the witness stand. “Mr. Potthoff. Do you recognize this?” She holds up a plastic bag with the silver painter’s easel charm the cadaver ripped it from my bracelet.

“Yes, I do. It’s the charm I gave Lucy.”

“What’s on the back?”

“An inscription that says ‘to Lucy, love Brian.’ I gave it to her when we first started dating.”

“And so, Mr. Potthoff, after giving Lucy Davis the charm, did she wear the bracelet?”

“All the time. She was sentimental about it and, I don’t know, maybe she felt she had to wear it because I gave it to her.”

Heidi drinks from a glass of water on the prosecution’s table and asks a few general questions about Brian’s relationship with me. Nothing objectionable. She’s just killing time before some upcoming bombshell, I’m assuming.

“Now, Mr. Potthoff,” Heidi says. “Please explain to the jury this little joke of yours.”

“I was just fooling around because Lucy was set on meeting my mother and I don’t have a relationship with my real mother. We were out by Van Buren and I saw Vicki in the park and I stopped the car and told Lucy the old lady was my mother. It was a joke, see, a prank. I admit. Lucy was pestering me all the time about getting married and taking this trip to Hawaii. I thought that by introducing her to Vicki, she’d get off my case. Man, did it ever backfire.”

LIAR! the voice now screams and I no longer feel numb. My entire body itches and flares.

“What happened after you introduced Lucy to Vicki Jones?”

“I sent Lucy home and left the old lady in the park. That’s all. Vicki Jones didn’t even know what was going on. Over the next few weeks, Lucy got ridiculous. I couldn’t stand her obsession with me. So, I packed up and left.”

“How did she react to your leaving?”

“Man, she flipped out. I told her I had another girlfriend just to get her to back off. But she wouldn’t believe me. Really, I had to get away.”

“Prior to your leaving, did the defendant say anything else about downing the homeless?”

“Objection. Leading.”

“Overruled.”

“Mr. Potthoff?”

“Yeah, she called that radio program and talked about it.”

Heidi then produces transcripts from the *Jeffers Hour* and has Brian read the part where I talked about downing animals in connection with the unwanted homeless.

“Was it Lucy’s voice you heard making this call?”

“Yes, it was.”

It was you! the voice throbs in my head. Even Chris’s touch no longer soothes me.

“Okay, Brian. Did Lucy say she’d kill Vicki Jones, the woman she believed to be your mother?”

“Yes, she did.”

“Did Lucy blame Vicki for your leaving?”

“Objection. Speculation. This witness didn’t even see or talk to Lucy Davis again until today. He has no way of knowing what Ms. Davis thought after he left her.”

“Sustained. The jury will disregard that last question.”

Brian suddenly glances at me and grins. He is silently smirking at me. His little fool. Just like Scottie used to do when he got me in trouble for something he did! Scottie acted this smirky way in front of Daddy or Mom or even Charlie or Tracy.

“Stop it!” I scream and leap from my chair.

Chris and Julie quickly stand to coax me back down. But they can't and I lean over the table, braced by my hands, and scream, "You betrayed me. Lied to me. You killed that old lady. With your lies!"

Like a shock wave, voices rumble through the courtroom and through my head.

"Lucy, stop it," Chris pleads as he rubs my back to calm me. Julie does the same. "It's okay. We'll be all right. We'll make it through this."

"Order, order," the judge bangs his gavel. "Counsel get your client under control."

As the gavel sounds, the courtroom quiets. The deputy sheriffs prepare to cuff me but Julie motions them to wait. Chris is calming me by holding my hands and whispering to me. I feel like a caged animal they're about to shoot for target practice. I have nowhere to go and no one is going to stop the gun from shooting me. No one is going to believe me. No one cares if I die. Then a voice, maybe it's my attorney speaking, seems to sound in my head and I turn around and spot the beautiful face of my sister sitting in the front row behind the railing.

"Baby, baby," Tracy mouths and instantly I see my mother's smile in my sister's eyes. I smile back at her and quietly sit in my chair. The pain in my head has somehow vanished. I don't know why.

"Are we back to order now?" Albee looks directly at Chris. "Ms. Davis," the judge addresses me. "Any more outbursts like this and we'll keep you confined in cuffs and you'll wear your inmate jumpsuit during these proceedings. Do you understand?"

I say nothing and keep my head lowered. I can't look at the judge or at Brian. I don't want to see their faces.

"Please answer," Chris whispers.

"Do you understand?" Albee asks again with anger in his voice.

“Yes, Your Honor,” My voice echoes in the silent courtroom like the faint pitch of a little squirrel Sylvester once brought inside Aunt Lu’s house.

“Very good,” Albee says. “I think it’s about time for lunch. Ladies and gentlemen, at this time we’ll take our noon recess.”

At one PM sharp, court resumes. We all rise as Albee takes his seat. “Good afternoon. Let the record show the presence of the jury, counsel, and the defendant. Ms. Brown you may proceed.”

Heidi stands and faces the judge. “At this time, I have no further questions for Mr. Potthoff.”

I summon the courage to continue watching the I Hate Lucy Show and shake out the butterflies of hope in my stomach. During recess, Chris claimed that my outburst might actually appeal to the jury’s senses. *They’ll clearly see you as the brunt of Brian’s deceit.*

“Mr. Stevens, you may question the witness.”

“Thank you, Your Honor.” My attorney steps to the front of our table and reminds Brian of their interview in the County Attorney’s office during pre-trial discovery. “Now, Mr. Potthoff. What did you tell Lucy about your mother before introducing her to Vicki Jones?”

“Nothing.” Brian is being smug.

“Are you sure? In your discovery interview you said something different.” He hands Brian transcripts and instructs him to read it. “During the interview, Mr. Potthoff, you corroborated Lucy’s story after I convinced you that it was in your best interest not to lie into the tape recorder. Can you explain to me why you just answered ‘nothing’ to my question and yet, as specified in the transcript, you described keeping your so-called mother in a nursing home?”

“Oh, well. I made a mistake. I forgot.”

“You forgot what? Misleading the court or did you forget what you said to Lucy?”

“What?” Brian looks puzzled.

“Why don’t you speak to the jury? Mr. Potthoff. Tell them why you told Lucy your mother was in a nursing home.”

“Like I said, to get her off my back.”

“Oh? Didn’t you ask Ms. Davis for money to help keep your mother in nursing care? Didn’t you, in fact, defraud Lucy Davis out of her entire savings?”

“No, she gave me that money of her own free will.”

“Yes, but didn’t you tell Ms. Davis, under false pretenses, that the money was for your mother?”

“No.”

“And isn’t that why you took her to skid row to meet Vicki Jones?”

“Well. . .”

“Just answer the question, yes or no.”

“Your Honor,” Heidi stands. “Counsel is badgering the witness and not giving him a chance to respond.”

“Mr. Stevens, please ask one question at a time,” Albee says.

“All right, Mr. Potthoff, Brian, did you or did you not take all of Lucy’s savings and tell her you were using it to place your mother in nursing care?”

“Well, no. Not all of it.”

“What did you use Lucy’s money for? Since there was never any nursing care for a nonexistent mother?”

“Well, for art supplies. Lucy wanted me to paint. I wanted to surprise her.”

“Isn’t it true you partake in recreational use of marijuana and crack cocaine?”

“Objection. Improper line of questioning. No priors.”

“Sustained,” Albee rules. “I think you should redirect your line of questioning, Mr. Stevens. The jury will disregard that last question.”

Chris moves halfway between his table and the witness stand. “When the prosecutor asked you about your line of work, you told the jury that you are an artist. But really, Mr. Potthoff. What kind of work did you actually do when you were living with Lucy Davis?”

“I painted houses and did some construction work.”

“During the entire five or six months you lived with her?”

“Well no. I got laid off.”

“You mean fired for smoking marijuana on the job, don’t you?”

“Objection,” Heidi says, “Where’s the foundation for this?”

“Your Honor,” Chris says. “I have a witness for my case-in-chief to verify that Mr. Brian Potthoff was fired for drug use. The testimony is meant to impeach his credibility as a witness.”

“Sir,” Heidi protests. “Opposing counsel never told me about this. The testimony isn’t even related to the criminal charges. The defense must introduce testimony to support his claim.”

“I know,” Chris interrupts. “We just found our witness this morning. No time to warn you. Sorry, Ms. Brown.”

“Objection overruled for the record,” Albee rules without pause for consideration. “Counselor, you may continue. Let’s move this trial forward, however. You can bring this testimony out during your case-in-chief.”

As Heidi sits at her table, Chris approaches the witness stand. “Did you ever have a pending chauffeur job?”

“No.”

“But didn’t you tell the defendant, Ms. Davis, while you were living with her, that you needed the title to her car for a chauffeur job?”

“Well, yes, I forgot.”

“Did Lucy Davis sign-over her car to you thinking you needed it for a job that didn’t even exist?”

Brian looks agitated as he backs away from the microphone. He glances at me, then at Chris. I have no reaction. No deep feelings about being duped. I’m just watching with fascination my court appointed attorney expose Brian’s deceptions one by one. I feel removed from the drama like I’m watching an episode of Matlock. Or Perry Mason. I’m actually feeling somewhat redeemed.

“Please answer the question,” Chris says.

“Yes. In a way. But I was looking for such a job.”

“And now you’re in possession of that car, aren’t you Mr. Potthoff?”

“It’s not like that. Lucy gave her car to me of her own free will.”

“No further questions.” Chris returns to the defense table, sits between me, and Julie and wipes his moist brow.

“Ms. Brown, do you have other questions for the witness?”

“No further questions at this time.”

“Mr. Potthoff, you may step down from the witness stand. If need be, can Ms. Brown recall you for more questions?”

"Yes sir." Brian stands.

I look down at the table, hoping, as Brian quietly slips from the courtroom, to never see his sorry face again.

Chapter 15: The Defense

Arizona Republic, July 17, 1991
Davis Trial Under Way
by Dennis DeShay

The first day of the Lucy Davis trial entailed suggestions of mercy killing, the defendant's emotional outburst, and a heart-wrenching embrace between sisters who hadn't seen each other for fifteen years. After former boyfriend Brian Potthoff took the stand, an enraged Davis leaped from her chair, alarming deputies and rattling the courtroom. Near the end of yesterday's drama, defense attorney Chris Stevens discredited State witness Brian Potthoff. Trial proceedings will continue this week and may spill into next week.

The Second Day of the Trial

Spectators pack the courtroom like it's Bobby McGee's Conglomeration!!! They include Dennis DeShay of the Arizona Republic but my sister Tracy isn't present. I know this because I bite the bullet and turn around to look for her.

Prosecutor Heidi Brown is wearing a light blue skirt and a short-sleeved jacket over a black blouse. Her first witness is Tung Nguyen, the bartender at Shorty's Tavern. Heidi asks if he remembers me on the night of the Abercrombie murder. He does. Heidi indicates the charm and suggests that a silver bracelet was dangling from my small wrist on that night. Tung remembers me as having short curly red hair and wearing a pink sequined dress and perhaps the bracelet, but he can't swear to it. Through Nguyen, Heidi establishes my connection to Mark

Abercrombie on the night of his murder. And, Mr. Nguyen introduces my stupid question about what happens to dead bodies, something I've completely forgotten about.

During cross examination, Chris reveals that Abercrombie had a somewhat abusive personality when the bartender states that he saw Abercrombie slapping a previous girlfriend in a drunken rage. As far as my question about dead bodies, Chris leads Tung to acknowledge that Vicki's death had already hit the newspapers and therefore my question proved nothing. Anyone might be curious about what happens to people found dead on the streets of skid row. The question hardly connects me to murder. I'm beginning to feel like Chris Stevens is deserving of a topnotch promotion. But I don't want to jump the gun before he even wins my case. Still, he's giving me a shred of hope. Something to believe in. Maybe even myself.

One of Heidi's witnesses is a female cop obviously accustomed to speaking directly to jurors. Her testimony is a sharp contrast to Brian's as she describes her activities at each crime scene, then tells the prosecutor how she carefully secured artifacts into evidence and had them properly impounded. Chris tells me her testimony is important because the prosecution can't use illegally obtained or mishandled evidence against me.

On cross-examination Chris asks the officer how familiar she is with Woodland Park.

"I've worked in the area for three years," she says.

"Isn't it true that transients living in the parks collect anything they find on the streets?"

"It seems that way. They often have shopping carts full of this and that. Vicki did. As did Mark Abercrombie."

"In your experience with transients and their possessions, it wouldn't be unusual for any one of them to spot a silver charm from a distance and keep it as a sort of treasure."

“No, of course not. For that matter, anyone would pick up something like that silver charm. I would. Wouldn’t you?”

Chris smiles. “No further questions.”

When detective Jack Ellis takes the stand, I carefully watch the man who apprehended me at the airport and later questioned me at the precinct. He had been friendly and patient, so unlike other cops who’ve interviewed me. *Detective Jack Ellis is a big fat mellow cat* I’m thinking and the image of Sylvester makes me smile. Chris catches this and winks kiddingly but I know he’s reminding me not to smile too much or the jury might see me as being smug.

While on the stand, Ellis appears relaxed like he’s having a casual conversation with his wife while watching TV, the jurors being the television where he focuses his attention. Heidi asks about his presence at the autopsies of Mark Abercrombie and John Doe. The detective testifies about how he searched for evidence when identifying items from the victims’ shopping carts and then he discusses his first interview with me.

At cross-examination, Chris asks, “Isn’t it true, Detective Ellis, that someone like you, with years of experience, can gain much information about a suspect from how he or she behaves during the initial interview?”

“I can tell when someone’s lying or hiding something.”

“And how did you read Ms. Davis?”

“She isn’t your regular criminal type. She seemed out of her element.”

“Like she was hiding something?”

“No.”

“Like she was lying?”

“No. More like she doesn’t trust anyone. Like people in her life gave her reasons to be that way. Most suspects I interview behave this way, but Ms. Davis was more like a mistrusting victim than a scum repeat offender who doesn’t trust his own mother.”

“Objection,” Heidi says. “Your Honor, this man is not an expert in psychology.”

“Sustained. Mr. Stevens, please move on.”

“I have no more questions.”

The prosecutor calls the deputy medical examiner Dr. Gustoff Arne Larson who testifies that the cause of death for each victim was an overdose of the barbiturate phenobarbital and that the manner of death was homicide. He explains that during the autopsy he took the photographs that Heidi is showing the jury. When Heidi walks back to the witness stand, she asks, “Did your examination of the victims reveal who committed these offenses?”

“Yes. From the skin scrapings under Mark Abercrombie’s nails.”

Heidi proceeds to establish that the skin scrapings were consistent with samples taken from me and she stresses that the victim most likely struggled for his life before succumbing to the poison.

During his cross-examination, Chris asks Dr. Larson, “Were there any other signs of a struggle? Bruises, cuts, scratches?”

“No. Only the scrapings in Abercrombie’s fingernails.”

“I see. And are skin scrapings conclusive identification?”

“Not positively. Not like matching blood types.”

“Is that right?” Chris nears the stand and angles himself to face the jury and the witness. “Now, Doctor, in your expert opinion, when a victim is struggling and scratching the perpetrator, is it usual to find only one hand with scrapings?”

“Anything’s possible.”

“True. But let’s talk about what’s more likely. Wouldn’t it be more likely for a struggling victim to use both hands when defending himself?”

“Probably, unless one hand is pinned down.”

Chris glances at the jurors then proceeds. “Were there any signs that Mr. Abercrombie’s right hand had been pinned down or somehow rendered useless?”

“No evidence of that.”

“And there were no other signs of a struggle, correct?”

“That’s correct.”

“Now, Dr. Larson. Wouldn’t you say that the scrapings were more like those obtained by an attacker slapping his victim?”

“It’s possible, but I really couldn’t say for sure.”

“But it is possible, correct?”

“That’s correct.”

“No further questions.”

The prosecution calls a handwriting expert to verify that I wrote the note found in Vicki Jones’ pocket. She shows the jury my note along with a sample of my handwriting to further authenticate that I wrote *I could kill for you*. Next, a state serologist testifies that he examined my blood type and that of each victim and that he analyzed the bloodstain on the blouse I left at the homeless shelter. Tiffany Shelton’s blouse. He testifies that I have a different blood type from that found on the blouse and that the bloodstain matched the blood type of Vicki Jones.

On cross-examination, Chris asks the serologist, “Having examined the bloodstain on the blouse marked exhibit # 34, can you conclusively state that the bloodstain came from the victim Vicki Jones?”

“No, I can’t.” The serologist looks at the jurors. “Blood properties degrade, some more rapidly than others, and by the time we received this blouse we were only able to analyze it for the basic A, B, AB, and O blood types.”

“I see. What was the blood type found on the blouse?”

“Type O.”

“Now, doctor, isn’t blood type O more common than the other type?”

“Well, yes. Type O is in about 44 percent of the population. A occurs in about 40 percent. AB is the rarest type.”

“Now let’s say the bloodstain did come from Vicki Jones. Is it conclusive where the blood came from?”

“What do you mean? I don’t understand your question.”

“Vicki’s autopsy report indicates she suffered from the mycobacteria disease, hemoptoic tuberculosis? As a physician, you are familiar with this disease, are you not?”

“Yes, to some extent.”

“What are some of the symptoms?”

“Fatigue, shortness of breath, blood in the sputum.”

“Is that right? Spitting up blood?”

“Yes. In the saliva.”

“Could your analysis determine any sputum on the blouse?”

“Yes, we could analyze for that. But only about 80 percent of the population secrete certain chemicals into sputum and other body fluids. Identity isn’t always possible.”

“Was there any saliva on the blouse?”

“We didn’t check for that. Each analysis requires a different test. We were only examining the blood type. There were other stains on the blouse. Green stains from the emesis of an alcoholic beverage.”

“Is it possible that you would find sputum on the blouse if you tested for it?”

“Probably not now. Sputum degrades as rapidly as blood.”

“No further questions.”

After a short recess, the prosecution calls my old boss Mr. Randy Diehl from the Maricopa County Rabies Control Shelter. He testifies that I had access to the phenobarbital drug that poisoned the murdered victims. Heidi then calls a pharmacist, Mr. North, to explain to the jury that phenobarbital comes in capsules, tablets, suppositories and the white, odorless, flaky crystal sodium used at the rabies shelter and that it’s obtained only with a prescription from a doctor or veterinarian.

During his cross-examination, my attorney asks the pharmacist, “What is phenobarbital prescribed for?”

“It’s used to treat seizures, insomnia, anxiety, or as a sedative before surgery.”

“Are the tablets or suppositories soluble in water?”

“Yes. That’s correct.”

“I see, so you could dissolve a phenobarbital tablet, say, with alcohol or water in the same manner as the sodium crystals and come up with an intravenous solution.”

“That’s true, that’s possible.”

“Would you get the same result? Would you find the same chemical compounds in the blood?”

“Yes, because all phenol products are only slightly soluble in water, so chemists add sodium salt.”

“Mr. North, you mentioned that veterinarians prescribe phenobarbital, correct?”

“Yes, that’s correct.”

“Someone with an epileptic animal could get the drugs and keep getting them without being closely regulated. Is that true?”

“It’s possible.”

Chris walks back to the defense table and looks over his and Julie’s notes. He looks at me. *Your looking good* his eyes tell me. He leans against the table and looks at the witness. “Mr. North, you’ve lived in Arizona all your life, I understand?”

“True, born and raised here, one of those rare native Arizonans.”

Chris chuckles and eyes the jury. “Right. Been to Mexico?”

“Numerous times.”

Chris smiles. “Could you tell the jury if phenobarbital is available in Mexican pharmacies without a prescription?”

“Yes, it’s readily available in Mexico just like many other drugs that require prescriptions in this country.”

“No further questions.”

On re-direct Heidi stands at her table and asks the pharmacist, “Could you tell if phenobarbital sodium, specifically, was found in the victims’ blood and not the other forms of phenobarbital?”

“Possibly,” he relaxes in the chair. “The amount of sodium in the compound might indicate what product was used.”

“And you’d know this by seeing the toxicological report?”

“Most likely.”

Heidi has the witness read the toxicological report of the victim’s blood analysis and the witness determines that the product used was most likely, although not conclusively, the phenobarbital sodium crystals.

“That’s all.” Heidi returns to the prosecution table.

Chris elects to re-cross the witness. He asks, “Are phenobarbital sodium crystals readily available without prescription in Mexican pharmacies?”

“Yes,” the pharmacist says. “In fact, more so than the other forms of the drug.”

“Thank you, that’s all.”

July 18, 1991

On the fourth day of trial, I’m wearing a brown cotton sundress over a long-sleeved white T-shirt that my aunt provided me. As the jury enters the courtroom, I look at the fifth juror, an older, tall man. During *voir dire*, when Albee asked if anyone would find it difficult to vote for a conviction knowing that the death penalty is a possibility, I thought this man hesitated even though he didn’t raise his hand.

The prosecution’s final witness is a psychologist who counsels technicians at the rabies control shelter. The psychologist explains that he works with the men and women trained to euthanize animals at both the east and west-side facilities. He implies that killing animals is not that dissimilar to murdering people, especially if a person has an unstable personality. “Some

people tend to think that killing animals differs from killing people. In reality, killing is killing. It's the taking of a life. And it does eventually trouble people."

On cross, Chris asks the psychologist how many people kill animals routinely, through hunting, farming, fishing, manufacturing, pest control, and in scientific research. He stresses to the jury that the psychologist makes a weak connection because killing animals is common in society. "If this connection is valid, more animal killers would be killing people. The downings at animal shelters are routine and accepted forms of institutionalized killing. It's a method to control animal overpopulation."

Heidi stands for her re-direct with a yellow note pad in her hand. "How many animals does a worker euthanize on a day-by-day basis?"

"Well, the shelters euthanize up to 80,000 animals each year. So, on an average day, a worker might kill 50 animals. Maybe more."

"Why, that's astonishing, Doctor. Wouldn't that have much more psychological impact on a person than say, what a sports hunter experiences when shooting a deer?"

The witness seems to think about his answer. "Most likely."

"Or with the institutionalized manufacturing of fur products where the worker or farmer isn't directly killing the animal, holding it down and injecting a drug into its heart, actually touching the animal? Maybe even petting it before it dies?"

"Yes, true, I would say workers at the kill shelters who euthanize hundreds of animals experience much greater trauma than a sports hunter or farmer."

"No more questions, Your Honor."

Chris has no re-cross and Heidi ends her case-in-chief.

After a short recess, the judge says, “The State has rested. Mr. Stevens, you may proceed with your case-in-chief.”

Chris first calls to testify the foreman that fired Brian Potthoff for smoking marijuana on the job. Next, he places my aunt on the stand to testify that I’m a peaceful nonviolent person of good character. Chris previously explained to me that the prosecution can’t introduce evidence of bad character to prove I’m likely to have committed the crime. *But we can introduce evidence of good character that’s inconsistent with the crime* I remember him saying. He also warned me that once he introduces such testimony, the rules of evidence allow Heidi to rebut with evidence of my having bad character. Chris also warned that my aunt was a risky character witness because of her emotional attachment to me. *But she knows your character better than anyone else and in general, elderly women appear honest when placed on the stand.*

Chris’s words still ring in my ears when the bailiff swears in Aunt Lu. She looks serious, although somewhat cautious. During our last visit, she said she hopes her testimony will make all the difference. *This has turned my life upside-down* she said. *But if I can, I want bring you back home where you belong.*

“Lucy was going to be pediatric nurse and care for children,” my aunt answers my attorney’s question. “She has hopes and dreams. She’s just been a little shy all her life.”

“Did she ever harm anyone, show any violent behavior toward animals, before taking the job at the shelter?”

“Oh, heavens no. Lucy really cares about animals. She worked on my parents’ farm tending chickens and livestock and she rescued a cat from the pound.” Lucinda looks at me, “Sylvester is at my house now. I’ve always regretted not taking him in the first place.”

I look at her and wonder why in the hell she's waited until she's testifying in court to tell me this. My aunt perplexes me but deep inside I'm more relieved to know that my cat is alive. But then again, I can't help but wonder if she's lying. Maybe Sylvester is really dead.

"Please keep to the question, Mrs. Bowers." Albee interrupts my thoughts.

"To the best of your knowledge, Mrs. Bowers, did Lucy have any prior trouble with the law?"

"Nothing. Only a speeding ticket. And that was because of that. . ." Lucinda begins to cry. "It was that boyfriend, that Brian fellow. He really abused her. He tried to get her to take drugs! I believe he's behind these homeless murders. Yes, I do."

Albee pounds his gavel. "Mrs. Bowers. I understand this is difficult for you but let me remind you again, don't voice your opinion. The jury will disregard that last statement."

Chris hands my aunt tissues from the bailiff's table. "And to the best of your knowledge was violence ever a part of Lucy's childhood?"

"No." Lucinda regains her composure. "It just doesn't make sense. Lucy was always a peaceful girl. Quiet and considerate. She sent me homemade cards and was willing to move-in with me and humor me with games of gin rummy. No, I swear to the Lord, my niece is not a murderer. She's a sweet, simple girl from a good Christian family."

"No further questions." Chris takes his seat at the defense table.

The prosecution elects to cross-examine Lucinda. Heidi attacks with questions about why I didn't attend my mother's funeral.

"It was that boyfriend, that Brian Potthoff. He kept Lucy from her family!"

Heidi has no further questions and Albee adjourns the court for lunch.

In the afternoon the defense team puts me on the stand. Chris had asked if I wanted to testify on my own behalf. *It's a trial tactic for defendants that look innocent. You fit that description and I'm hoping the jurors will sympathize with you. But the risk is that Heidi will provoke you during cross*. I told him I'm ready to take on whatever Heidi puts out.

Chris questions me about my relationship with the first victim, Vicki Jones. As Chris and Julie suggested, I'm sitting up straight with my hands folded on my lap. I'm glancing at the jury. Julie provided me with a headband to hold my hair away from my eyes. She wants the jurors to have a clear picture of my face because she says I look as innocent as a lamb. I'm careful to maintain a serious expression when telling my side of the story.

"After Brian left me, I went to Woodland Park several times looking for him through Vicki. I brought her food because I felt sorry for her. She was old, sick, and so alone. I couldn't understand how she ended up like that. And all along, I was believing Brian's lies. His total lies."

"And when was the last time you saw Vicki Jones?"

"It must have been two Sundays before Christmas because I always went to the park on Sundays. That's when I thought Brian met his mother. When the church bells ring throughout the day. I guess it was about the 16th or 17th of December when I last saw Vicki Jones, the lady I thought was Brian's mother."

"Did you go to Woodland Park to meet Vicki Jones on Sunday, December 23rd?"

"No. You see, it was almost Christmas and I spent all my time in my apartment. Like a fool, I was waiting for Brian because I believed he'd come home for Christmas. I even had presents for him which were still there when I abandoned the apartment. I'm sure the police and everyone else saw them."

Chris pauses, pacing himself and me. “The last time you saw Vicki Jones was Sunday December 16th, correct?”

“That’s correct. And it wasn’t until I went back to the park after New Year’s that I learned she had passed away.”

Chris moves closer to the jury box. “Lucy. Can you explain the blood on the blouse that Mrs. Neuberger testifies you abandoned at the homeless shelter?”

“Oh that. I don’t really know. Except that the old homeless woman was always coughing and spitting up blood. I cleaned her up a few times. It didn’t bother me because I hope to go to nursing school one day. I guess some of her blood got on my blouse. That’s all I can think of. I was going to see if a hospital would take her. Or a shelter. But she wouldn’t go anywhere.”

Chris asks me to explain the phrase *I would kill for you* from the note found in Vicki’s pocket.

“It’s just a figure of speech. Between Brian and me. He knew what I meant. We were really in love, anyway, I was really in love with him. I gave him all my savings to keep Vicki in a nursing home. But evidently Brian stole my money for his own use. Probably to buy crack cocaine. I was gullible, I admit. But that doesn’t mean I killed for him.”

“Did you blame Vicki Jones for Brian leaving you?”

“Of course not. That’s ridiculous if you think about it. I know a lot of these people are trying to make me look crazy, like I was obsessed with Brian. Yes. He hurt me. I was hopeful he’d come back to me. Look, after I got to know Vicki, I felt sorry for her and tried to help her out. No way did I blame her for Brian leaving me. Brian is a con man. A trickster, which I didn’t understand at the time, but I mean, how can you blame a sick old lady for Brian’s behavior?”

Chris asks about the circumstances surrounding the night of January 7th, the night of Mark Abercrombie's murder.

"That night I was out of work and evicted from my apartment so I headed to the shelter on Adams. I didn't go to my aunt's house because I needed time to get over Brian and my aunt had pissed me off for not taking my cat. I figured in time I'd get over Brian and look for work, maybe even move back-in with Lucinda. Well, I dropped by Shorty's Tavern for a drink. So, what! When the bartender told me about Vicki, I naturally asked about her body. Sure, I put it poorly but I wanted to know where they buried her. People here act like that's a crime. I cared for the old woman and thought of her as my mother-in-law."

"Did you see Mark Abercrombie at Shorty's?"

"Oh yeah. He was there. So were lots of street folks. I relaxed, had a drink, then this guy Mark, I didn't know his name at the time, comes up to me as I'm drinking a beer and wants to dance. I did, figuring what the heck, the old guy's probably lonely. That's how it is on skid row. People are lonely, old, drunk, and sick. After a dance, I bought him some loosies then told him I was heading to the shelter. Everyone knows about that shelter on Adams. It's where street folks get legal help and a place to sleep. This Mark fellow offers to walk me to the shelter. It was dark, kind of late, so I figured what the heck. Along the way, he starts pestering me. I told him to get lost and he got pissed, started calling me a cunt and a slut. Horrible names. Then he grabbed me."

"Where was this?" Chris asks.

"Like, at the west end of Woodland Park. I swear someone must've seen this. But I guess no one likes to squeal."

"He grabbed you in Woodland Park?"

“Yeah, he tried to kiss me and I hit him. He grew angry and slapped me hard. His long dirty nails scratched my cheek. He was laughing as I ran off to the shelter. And that’s the last time I saw him. He didn’t follow me.”

“And you reached the shelter at what time?”

“About nine o’clock. A few days after I checked into the shelter, I heard about Abercrombie’s murder. For two weeks I stayed secluded in the shelter. I was concerned someone might pester me about him.”

“How is that? Why would anyone pester you about the murder?”

“See, I had been with him. The bartender knew it, so did the people in the park who saw him slap me. The thing is, I thought the police would force me to testify. But I never dreamed they’d suspect me of his murder. And, like I said, I needed to be alone to figure out what I was going to do and get over Brian. It’s hard to explain and I know these people here have been twisting things around about me. Saying I was obsessed enough to kill.” I pause a moment to think and keep my story clear and straight. I can feel my eyes water because being my own testifying witness makes me feel highly emotional. “Brian was my first boyfriend,” I finally say. “And he really hurt me.”

“Thank you, Ms. Davis.” Chris hands me a tissue and smiles. “Now explain to the jury what you were doing January 21st of this year.”

“The only thing I remember about that day is leaving the shelter because I wanted to go to my aunt’s house. It was time. I needed her. I needed to go home.”

“Did you pass through Woodland Park on your way to your aunt’s?”

“No, not even. That was the last thing I wanted to do. I headed in the opposite direction towards the Capitol and caught the 592 to town and then transferred buses to my aunt’s house in Mesa.”

“You never went near Woodland Park on January 21st, correct?”

“Only on the bus. Look, it seems there ought to be witnesses. I mean, that lady at the shelter saw me going toward 19th Avenue. She ought to know.”

“Now Lucy.” Chris pauses as if to formulate his question. “During this trial you’ve heard people say some pretty ugly things about you. That you behaved erratically, didn’t attend your mother’s funeral, that you were obsessed. How do you respond to these remarks?”

I look at my attorney and his co-counsel then at the jury. “Like I’ve been saying, Brian threw me for a loop. He was a bad experience. He treated me poorly, lied to me, and tricked me out of my savings for nursing school and lied about a job so I’d give him my car. At the shelter, I was trying to pull myself together and eventually I did and went to my aunt’s house and then to Butte, Montana to visit my father. I felt terrible about my mother’s death. Then my dad dies. But look, just because some jerk used me that doesn’t make me a killer. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Namely, in or near that park when this whole thing came down. That’s all. I’m not a murderer.”

“Your Honor, I have no further questions at this time.” Chris returns to the table to prepare with Julie for the prosecution’s attack.

Heidi stands close to the jury, as if to keep their eyes more on her than on me. “Lucy, didn’t you tell Mrs. Neuberger at the homeless shelter on Adams that the scratches on your face came from a spat you had with Brian. Why change your story now?”

I look at Heidi, surprised by the question. I must think for a moment and collect my wits. “Like I’ve been saying, by the time I went to the shelter on Adams, I was confused and mad at Brian so I just said that, that’s all. I wanted to blame him for being such a jerk.”

“Now, Ms. Davis, during your testimony you said Mark Abercrombie called you a cunt and slut. Didn’t that anger you?”

“It scared me more.”

“Enough to kill him?”

“No, of course not. I didn’t kill anyone.”

“But you had, in fact, said to Brian that you would kill his mother?”

“No, I don’t remember saying such a thing. Brian is a bold-faced liar. He’ll lie about anything, to anyone, if it serves his purpose.”

“What about the note in Vicki Jones’ pocket that you’ve admitted leaving for Brian?”

“That was just something between him and me.” I sigh; this bitch is frustrating me.

“You kill, don’t you?” Heidi asks.

“What?”

“You killed animals, didn’t you?”

“I helped with the process. That’s all. Everyone here knows that by now.”

“And people?”

“No, yes. No,” I stammer. “What’s your question?”

“Is there a difference?”

“No, yes. I mean. . .” I look at Chris. His eyes try to steady me without appearing like he’s coaching me on what to do or say. The jury would hold that against him and me.

“Do you make a distinction between people and animals?” Heidi persists.

“Objection.” Chris stands at the table, coming to my rescue. “Your Honor. Counsel is purposely harassing the witness. She’s way out of line.”

“Overruled. Continue Ms. Brown. I want to hear the answer.”

“Lucy, can you answer my question?” Heidi’s voice is sharp, impatient, although calm enough so she doesn’t sound deliberately angry in front of the jury.

“What do you mean?” I ask. “What’s the question?”

“Do you distinguish between the downing of animals and the downing of homeless people in Woodland Park? That’s my question.”

“No, I mean, yes of course. What’s your question, again?”

“Is it possible that someone might fabricate a story in order to keep from getting convicted of murder?”

“Objection.” Chris leaps from his seat. “Your Honor, I implore you. This is pure harassment of the witness.”

Albee looks at both attorneys, then sustains the objection. “Counsel,” he addresses Heidi, “I think this line of questioning has gone on long enough. Do you have any more questions?”

“Yes, Your Honor, a few more.”

“Very well, let’s move on with it.”

“Ms. Davis, who told you about Vicki’s murder?”

“Oh?” I’m surprised by her question and try very hard to keep calm. “Some guy at Shorty’s bar, I think. It’s been a while, you know.”

“Was that before or after you asked the bartender about dead bodies?”

“Before, of course.”

“And why did you ask this person in Shorty’s Tavern about Vicki? Did you know about her murder?”

“No. I just asked this guy if he’d seen her, the old woman, because I hadn’t been around for a while. And he told me she was dead.”

“Isn’t it true that on December 23rd, the last Sunday before Christmas, you went to Woodland Park one last time looking for Brian?”

“No! I waited at my apartment for him, for a solid week.”

“But you went to Woodland Park every Sunday looking for Brian Potthoff, correct?”

“Yes, mostly on Sundays because that’s when Vicki said her son showed up. When the church bells ring every hour. That’s when I thought Brian was her son. But he wasn’t. It was all a lie!”

“Then why would you skip this last Sunday before Christmas? Especially if you wanted to see Brian so much? Spend Christmas with him.”

Careful, I’m telling myself, *this bitch is trying to stump me.* I look at Chris. But he makes no indication of what I should say because the jury is looking at him, too.

“I did because of the note. I left the note with Vicki and thought Brian would read it and come home for Christmas. So, I waited for him in my studio.” I relax a bit, take a subtle breath, and sit back and watch Chris deeply inhale and exhale.

“Okay, Ms. Davis. Is it your testimony, here today, that you’re totally innocent of these crimes and wrongfully charged with three counts of murder?”

I peer at Heidi. “Yes, ma’am,” I say, with as much confidence as I can muster. “It is.”

“It really doesn’t upset you a lot, does it?”

“What?”

“These murders?”

“Yes, I’m upset about these murders. About this whole ordeal.”

“No further questions, Your Honor.” Heidi sits next to Mr. Peterson at the prosecution’s table.

Chris stands before me. He must re-cross, I’m fully aware, after Heidi’s brutality.

“Lucy,” Chris says. “Do you distinguish between killing animals and killing people?”

Feeling more relaxed now, I look at him, then at the jurors. “Yes, of course I do. Killing people is murder. Killing animals is justified, in many circumstances, I mean.”

“Would you kill a homeless person like you helped euthanize those animals at the shelter?”

“No. I would not.”

“With regard to these murder charges, did you have any involvement?”

“No sir, I did not.” I’m looking directly at the jurors as I speak while hoping that nothing in my eyes betrays me.

“I have no further questions.”

“Any re-cross?” the judge asks Heidi.

“No, Your Honor.”

“Mr. Stevens. Do you have any further witnesses?”

“One, Your Honor. I call Mr. David Cadowsky to the stand.”

The hotshot reporter enters the courtroom neatly dressed in slacks, a long-sleeved white shirt and pale green tie. Chris establishes Cadowsky’s credentials then asks about his newspaper articles covering the homeless area of Woodland Park.

“Last October, I wrote several feature articles concerning drug transactions near the State Capitol.”

“And did you interview Vicki Jones at that time?”

“Yes, she was my primary contact. See, it’s difficult to get people in the area to answer questions. They’re suspicious of everyone. They think strangers are out to cause them trouble.”

Chris presents the articles Cadowsky wrote for the Arizona Republic.

“In this article,” Chris states to the witness. “You claim that Vicki was wrongly arrested.”

“That’s correct. Poor old woman. She was harmless. I interviewed her because she lived where most of the transactions took place in Woodland Park.”

“What was the premise of your investigation?”

“That the Arizona Mafia is cutting drug deals in Woodland Park. And that the cartels of Mexico are passing a high volume of cocaine through Arizona under the eyes of certain legislators.”

“What do you mean that deals are cut in the park?”

“The big guys meet and agree on where they’ll ship the drugs. That kind of stuff. And Woodland Park’s a perfect front for their operation because a lot of smalltime dealers are in the area. No one suspects anything big is happening there because the park is so close to the Capitol and the police department.”

“It wasn’t a smalltime operation you were investigating? A few punk drug dealers in the shady side of town?”

“Objection.” Heidi stands. “Your Honor, where’s this leading?”

The judge looks at Chris. “Counselor?”

“Please, just give me a moment, sir. I’m trying to establish an important theory about the murders.”

“I’m interested,” Albee states. “But move it along.”

Chris returns his attention to Cadowsky. “You wrote that Vicki Jones witnessed these transactions.”

“That’s what she told me. I even spent one night there, a Sunday night, observing the park myself. Vicki claimed the transactions took place on Sunday nights. She knew it was Sunday because of the church bells. To her, the bells announced that drug deals were taking place.”

“Your Honor,” Heidi protests.

“Counselor, could you please take us somewhere with this? Quickly.”

“Did you ever see the defendant Lucy Davis during the time you spent in the park with Vicki Jones?”

“No. Never. And I would’ve remembered her because she sure doesn’t look like any of the other residents in the area. Unfortunately, I never saw any cartel lords in the park either, the ones Vicki described.”

“Lucy Davis didn’t arrive at the park until after you wrote these articles about Vicki and the transactions she witnessed, is that correct Mr. Cadowsky?”

Heidi objects. “This witness can’t answer this complicated question. He doesn’t know for sure whether or not Lucy went to the park in October. He was only there a few times, not permanently.”

“Sustained. Please, Mr. Stevens, do get to your point.”

“Yes, Your Honor. Mr. Cadowsky, did Vicki Jones ever receive death threats last October when you were interviewing her about the drug transactions in Woodland Park?”

“Objection. This is hearsay.”

Chris glances at Heidi then at Albee. “But it goes to the victim’s state of mind.”

“All right. I overrule the objection. Continue.”

“Did Vicki Jones receive death threats during this time?”

“Yes. She told me that after my first article portrayed her as a witness, some man threatened her life. When I first learned about her death, I assumed some drug goon killed her because of my articles. I felt bad which is why I asked for an autopsy.”

“Did Vicki Jones describe who threatened her life?” Chris glances at Heidi. She keeps quiet.

“She said this ‘big brute of a white guy’ approached her and threatened to kill her if she spoke again about what she witnessed in the park.”

“But she did talk to you again, Mr. Cadowsky?”

“That’s right. She was worried but was more concerned about clearing her park of the drug dealings. She cooperated with me until the end.”

“Has anyone ever identified this big burly white guy Vicki Jones described? Do you know who he is?”

“No. Unfortunately, I don’t. I quit investigating the story because I also received death threats and my wife made me stop. You know, they murdered Don Bolles because he uncovered land deals connected with politicians and the Arizona Mafia. Anyway, I don’t know who threatened Vicki. Just like I don’t know who threatened me. My threats always came by way of phone calls and letters addressed to me at the Republic. No one ever threatened me in person.”

“Did Vicki ever see this man again?”

“No, never again, as far as I know. I only saw her once more, when I helped her out of jail after they falsely arrested her. She had my card, see. I was her only contact. She even called me her son. And the next thing I know she’s dead and the coroner determined natural causes. A pickled heart.”

Chris glances at his notepad on the defense table. “Mr. Cadowsky, did you ever see Mark Abercrombie or John Doe in Woodland Park?”

“Not that I can be sure of. But Vicki knew everyone there. I believe she knew Abercrombie.”

“Mr. Abercrombie could have witnessed some of these drug transactions as well?”

“Objection.” Heidi stands. “Clearly, this calls for speculation on the part of the witness.”

“I’ll sustain your objection, Ms. Brown. I think you have made your point, Mr. Stevens. Do you have any further questions at this time?”

“No, that’s all.”

“Any further witnesses?”

“I have no further witnesses. The defense rests.”

“Ms. Brown, any rebuttal?”

“I have no further questions. No further witnesses. Your Honor, we rest.”

“Ladies and gentlemen, we now are going to recess for the day and will reconvene tomorrow morning for closing arguments.”

Chapter 16: The Verdict

Lucy Davis

In the visiting room at Estrella, I'm facing my older sister who's dressed in a tan blouse and blue blazer. The glass panel separates us. It's the first time we've been alone together for nearly fifteen years. After our initial greetings and a few words about missing each other, it seems neither of us can think of anything to say. I mean, what can I say, what do I care to ask her? *Oh, yeah, I doing fine, sister. Loving life! And you, how's it going with your fine, perfect, and charmed self?*

Finally, into the hand phone, Tracy says, "I'm married now to a wonderful man. John Mahoney. We met at the Pacific NW Bell where we both work. He convinced me to attend the Four-Square Church in Milwaukie where he's the head deacon. We fell in love and now have a six-month-old baby daughter named Sandy Rose."

"Evangelical Christian?" I ask, surprised. This is not how I remember my sister from fifteen years before. "Tracy, I thought you ran away from all that. From Moe and his strict hardline religion."

"People change, little sister. I changed and was born again after I met John and started attending church. I've put all my hopes into my new husband. He, in fact, wants to start his own church one day."

"Wow, Tracy. I'm impressed," I say, but I don't really mean it. I don't know why. Maybe it's because I grew up feeling like religious people have a self-righteous view of themselves and I'm presently in a position where such a view is trying to destroy me. I'm trying to think of something to say without praising her for suddenly becoming a good good person and without putting myself down in any kind of way. I'm more than exhausted with people putting me down. Especially lately when my entire life has become one big put down. "You must feel pressed to get back to your new baby," I finally think to say. "Why did you come here? You didn't have to, you know."

“Your attorney asked me to and so did Charlie because he couldn’t make it to your trial. Charlie and I still keep in touch, by the way. He’s terribly worried about you but he can’t get away from his job. Anyway, Lucy. Yes, I miss my baby very much. I talk to John at least five times each day. While I’m gone, his mother is looking after Sandy Rose.”

“Do you ever see your other daughter? The one you gave away?” I ask, seeing my thin, ashen face in the glass between us. I haven’t been eating well since before the trial and there’s no phenol to help me with my insomnia and racing mind.

Tracy smiles. I don’t think she was expecting this question. “I’ve only seen her pictures although I send her cards. Her name is Jewel Anne and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Cox, live in Bremerton, Washington off the Puget Sound.” Tracy rummages through her purse, opens her billfold and holds a picture to the glass. The little girl in the picture has long blond ringlets that remind me of Jan Talt, the most popular girl in my elementary school.

“Her parents sent me this photo,” Tracy says. “She probably won’t visit me in Portland until after she’s eighteen. You see, Lucy.” Tracy hesitates. “My husband John doesn’t even know I had an illegitimate child.”

“You haven’t told him?”

“No. Of course not. I have a reputation to keep and I don’t think he’d understand my background. My husband comes from an upscale family.”

“I see. Well, Jewel Anne is beautiful.” I gaze intently at the photo. I want to say that the child resembles Tracy but I can’t see any resemblance to anyone in my family. “I’d love to meet her.” I look from the photo to Tracy. “Can you send me a picture of her?”

“You’ll meet her, one day, as soon as you get out of here. Hey, I was thinking you could come to Portland and live with John and me until you get on your feet. Portland’s a great city and there’s a nursing school up on the hill.”

“I’d like that,” I say, somberly. I haven’t put much thought into my future since before my arrest for the homeless murders. Except now. Maybe because my sister’s here to support me, I’m optimistic that I’ll be set free. Any other thought is too much to bear. “I wish you hadn’t given her up. Your daughter, Jewel Anne.”

“I know, baby sister.” Tracy’s pretty blue eyes begin to water. “But sometimes life doesn’t go the way we want it to. The way we hope it will. You’ll be all right, though. I got this feeling.” She reaches out to me and touches the glass between us.

I look down for a moment, then say, “If I don’t get out, if they don’t set me free, I may never have kids. And that’s all I really want.”

“Don’t think that way sweetheart.”

“It’s hard not to when you’re caged up like an animal.”

“I know.” Tracy nervously twists the wedding band around her finger. She then asks, hesitantly, “Lucy. I want to tell you about something I saw when you were little. Your attorney asked me to testify about it, if it comes to that.”

“What?” I’m puzzled. I haven’t a clue what Tracy could mean.

“I saw Scottie with you in the bathroom, the door was ajar. I saw him touching you in ways he shouldn’t have, but I never said anything. It was just before I ran away from home and I lived in my own turmoil. I wanted to say something but I had no relationship with Mom and Dad or with my brothers, except for Charlie and I could never tell Charlie such a thing. Lucy, when I

lived at home with our parents, I learned to keep quiet about family matters. I'm ashamed now. If my silence led to your confusion later in life."

"Scottie did enough confusing for everyone. But honestly Tracy. I always believed that Mom adored you, doted over you, before you ran away and had Jewel Anne. I thought you had a good relationship with our parents."

"Mom expected me to be perfect and no one could talk to Daddy, not even Charlie. Mom and Dad stifled me and when I met Jacob, the father of Jewel Anne, I saw my chance to leave Butte. Then Jacob didn't want to be a daddy and I had to return home. I couldn't stand it so I left for good. It's as simple as that. I found a life in the Pacific NW and now I'm as happy as a clam. Jesus provides and leads the way. Remember that little sister."

"Gee, Tracy. I'm real glad for you." I'm trying to hold back the sarcasm. "I guess we never really knew each other. I wasn't close to anyone in our family. And Scottie was a monster. Was I the only one in our stupid family who experienced that? I doubt anyone ever touched you inappropriately or picked on you like you were a joke. I doubt you have any idea what it's like to live with constant torment and terror from the devil himself!"

Through the Plexiglas pane, Tracy stares at me a moment. "Lucy, Scottie died two years ago in a high-speed chase from the cops. He was living in Las Vegas with his friend Martin who evidently had this connection to a bigshot drug dealer on the strip. I read about it in the newspaper, then I phoned Charlie. He said Mom learned about it from the police."

"He got what he deserved," I say without emotion.

Silence falls between us, then Tracy touches her mouth with her finger tips, her manicured nails are polished red. She appears ill at ease. "I want to ask you about the crimes," she says. "Is that all right? You know you can tell me anything if you want to."

I stare blankly at my sister, pondering her words. “Are you asking me if I killed those people?”

“I’m just saying you can tell me anything,”

“I see.” I smile, reassuringly. I instantly feel sorry for my sister and understand her. Tracy has this other life, other thoughts and feelings that I don’t even understand. We’re strangers and the connection between us exists only because we are from the same pathetic family. Litter pups. I’m the runt, Tracy’s the pick of the litter and she needs to know the truth about me before the mitigation hearing, in case Chris calls on her to testify about the molestation. In case the State puts me to death and I take the secret to my grave. The pitiful notion doesn’t anger me, like it should. It merely makes the Plexiglas between us more prominent.

“Tracy,” I say, momentarily. “Remember when we were camping in Yellowstone? When I was about seven. I guess you were eleven or twelve?”

“Sure, baby sister. I remember.”

“We were at the Morning Glory Pool and I started fussing because it smelled like rotten eggs and Scottie was picking on me. He grabbed my coin and tossed it in the pool. And mom thought I was picking on him. Tattling. Whining. You threatened to push Scottie in the pool until Mom punished you. Do you remember that?”

Tracy gazes at me, as if trying to remember the incident, but she can’t. It’s like she can only see her own reflection in the pane before the face of her younger sister.

“I never forgot it,” I continue. “I know it was a simple thing. Probably no one but me remembers it.”

Tracy shakes her head, wiping her tears with a lace hankie from her purse.

“I think it was the first time you stood up for me. I wasn’t sure why you did, but it meant a lot to me. I thought maybe you really cared about me. And for a long time, I kept waiting for you to do the same thing again whenever Scottie picked on me. As if that day at the Morning Glory Pool had been just the beginning of how you’d treat me. It took me a long time to realize that sometimes things happen only one time. Instead of being a trend, a pattern. But it wasn’t unique. You showed up in the courtroom for me. And you’re here now.”

“I wish I could remember that incident in Yellowstone,” Tracy says at last. “I wish I had told Mom and Dad about what I saw. I just couldn’t. I didn’t have a good relationship with them, with myself. But I was so happy to see you in the courtroom the other day. It’ll always mean a lot to me.”

“After I’m dead?”

Tears roll down Tracy’s cheeks and she dabs them with her hankie. “Please don’t talk that way. We all make mistakes in life. God knows I’ve made my share. But we can always set things right. Like now. Get to know each other. Start over. God forgives you, little sister, and I pray He forgives me for letting you down.”

“I’m sorry. You’re right. Look, Tracy, what I want to say is that I never forgot you defended me that day. Even when I acted like I hated you because of the baby. Even when I went along with our parents and called you a jezebel. Like Mom and Dad. Like Scottie. I was never ashamed of you. I only thought I was because everyone else was. I just acted like people wanted me to act. And all along I was jealous of you. Can you believe that? Why couldn’t I have a love child? Why couldn’t someone take me away from Butte?”

“You’ll be all right, little sister. I promise. And we’ll move on with our lives, together, as sisters.”

For a moment we stare at each other until I finally say, “No Tracy, you needn’t worry. I never killed anyone.”

July 23, 1991

Judge Albee sits behind the bench; his reddish hair looks slightly messy. The courtroom remains silent as he asks the jury forewoman to hand the verdict forms to him through his clerk. At the defense table, Chris Stevens stands beside me. Julie Fuller is attending another trial. Only Heidi Brown stands at the prosecution’s table.

The courtroom seems unbearably silent and ready to pounce on me or set me free if I’m Lucky Lucy Lu. I feel stiff, dazed, prepared for whatever blows my way. Then Albee reads to the court, “We, the jury, duly sworn in the above, entitled action, upon our oaths, find the defendant, Lucy Marie Davis, guilty of the crime of first-degree murder.”

Instantly, the courtroom rumbles with “ahs” and whispers until the judge taps his gavel. He reads two more verdicts of guilty for the remaining counts of first-degree murder. Chris stands frozen. He looks at me beside him. I look down at the table, stone-cold and deadpan. Chris squeezes my shoulder. “You’ll be all right.”

I’m thinking, why does he bother to say anything to me. He’s failed me, like the world has, and his remark sounds empty. Stupid, really. In my mind I keep hearing Mom’s echoing words, *You are, You are, You are. . .* Guilty!

Albee’s gavel quiets the courtroom’s commotion. “Are these your true verdicts, so say one, so say all?” Everyone on the jury nods. “Does either counsel wish to have the jury polled?” Albee impassively asks. It’s like I’m not even standing here and this whole ordeal is about me. I’m the star of the I Hate Lucy Show and I’ve just won an Emmy for my starring role.

"I ask for a jury poll, Your Honor," Chris says. Is he trying to recover from the shock? Show me he has work to do and no time for emotions?

"Very well. At this time, the clerk will ask each jury member if these are your verdicts. Please respond by saying yes or no."

The clerk proceeds to read off each name on the jury and he affirms the three verdicts.

"Hang in there," Chris whispers to me.

I'm numb and apathetic about my fate. That lesbian lady, Jeannace June Freeman, tossed me off the bridge at Crooked River Canyon. Something like that. I'm free falling and about to hit bottom in a messy splat!

"This doesn't mean a death penalty," Chris whispers, as if I need to hear anything at this point. "There's still the mitigation hearing, appeals, and you have lots of public empathy."

I want to tell him to shut up and leave me the fuck alone so I can stew in my nest of wasps. But I remain passive and perfectly still. Why? I'm not sure. Because this episode of my Sit Com has already ended.

November 18, 1991

Commotion stirs in the courtroom as my pre-sentence hearing commences. Spectators again fill the observation benches behind me. No jury is present. So that nothing will surprise or anger me during the proceedings, Chris explained in great detail what I should expect, including unpleasant testimony about my disturbing childhood experiences and my brother's molestation and abuse. "We must persuade the judge to spare your life against the prosecution's death wish. Heidi wants to prove that your crimes involve aggravating circumstances beyond a reasonable doubt and I must convince the judge, by a preponderance of the evidence, that mitigating circumstances outweigh the aggravating factors."

I'm resigning myself, once again, to sit back and watch the Lucy Show, Season Two without popcorn or Dorito chips. Only a warm glass of unfiltered water sits on the table before me. I'm still shattered and broken apart about this whole ordeal but refuse to take any kind of their psychotic medications. I don't trust the psychiatrists or psychologists or social workers who come to the jailhouse to unburden my mind. Or is it, plague my psyche with their BS? Either way, I don't like what any of them have to say about me and I certainly don't believe that what they want me to take, for my benefit, will actually help me. The only thing I know now is that this phase of my trial offers the world the very worst part of my life, in order to spare it.

Heidi appears especially polished for the hearing. Her hair is neatly braided, her suit is a tan tweed, and her long nails match her pink scoop neck blouse. She first calls to the stand a forensic toxicologist. "What effect does phenobarbital have when mixed with alcohol?" She's trying to establish her main aggravating factor, that phenobarbital poisoning is heinous and cruel.

"When barbiturates are mixed with alcohol a complicated interaction occurs," says the tall middle-aged black woman with tightly curled hair.

"And what might that be, Dr. Fromme?" Heidi asks.

"It differs among people, depending on how much alcohol they routinely consume."

"I see. And in the cases of Vicki Jones and Mark Abercrombie, both alcoholics, how might the mixture of phenobarbital and alcohol injected into their hearts affect them?"

"Excessive drinkers metabolize more rapidly than the rest of us. And since the perpetrator injected the drug into the heart, and because two of the victims were over sixty, it probably led to seizures and convulsions before death occurred."

Heidi walks before the witness stand, blocking Dr. Fromme from my view. This annoys me. I'm certain she's deliberately taunting me. But Chris doesn't object. He already warned he'd

be keeping his interruptions to a minimum during this portion of my trial because his job is to persuade the judge and not the laymen jury.

"Dr. Fromme," Heidi continues. "Please describe in detail the effect of mixing alcohol with phenobarbital."

The witness peers past Heidi, beyond me and my attorney, to the spectators at the back of the courtroom. "The pheno-alcohol mixture injected into the heart most likely created an acute neurotoxic poisoning that depressed the central nervous system, the lower brain stem, the respiratory and circulatory mechanisms. Early on in the poisoning the victim probably demonstrated muscular spasticity from the uneven depression of different neuralgic levels."

"So, doctor, in your expert opinion, did these victims suffer after they were poisoned?"

"Yes. Possibly a great deal. Each victim probably experienced a severe headache or severe chest pain, nausea, and extreme panic."

"And this severe panic was enough to cause one of the victims to lash out and scratch his killer?"

"Objection," Chris stands. "She's leading the witness, Your Honor."

"This is a hypothetical," Heidi protests. "It's permissible to obtain a factual basis for this expert's opinion."

"Overruled," Albee says.

Heidi continues. "Would you say Mark Abercrombie severely suffered, given the evidence of his reaction?"

The witness looks at the judge, then at Heidi. "Yes," she says. "Abercrombie's reaction, the scratching, would indicate he most likely suffered."

"Thank you, Dr. Fromme. That's all I have for this witness."

Chris declines his opportunity to cross-examine. I remain frozen in my seat. There's nothing I can do anyway.

Heidi calls Dave Cadowsky to the stand and asks how long he's worked as a news reporter. I'm surprised. I had no idea my hotshot reporter was going to testify at this part of my trial. I wonder what he could possibly say. Obviously, he's no expert in anything but his own ego.

"Is it fair to say, Mr. Cadowsky, that you've covered other superior court cases?"

"That's correct," the reporter replies. He seems uncomfortable. I'm thinking that perhaps Heidi forced him to testify and contribute to my looming death. He told me, time and time again, that he only wants to tell my story and not help determine it. But he's already proven himself to be a big opportunistic liar without shame. Just like everyone else in this world full of such good good people. And yet, they're all eager to hold me accountable and make me feel ashamed of myself. This seems to be my life's story.

"How did you come to interview Lucy Davis at the Estrella County jail?"

"I asked her for an interview. In jail, it's up to the defendant to notify people whether or not to accept an interview. Lucy Davis allowed me to interview her on three occasions."

"Mr. Cadowsky, when was your most recent interview with Ms. Davis?"

"Last week."

"How did you conduct that interview?"

"I asked questions and she replied. Rather like we're doing." The courtroom chuckles and Albee draws order with his gavel.

"On this last interview, did you ask Ms. Davis whether, under the right circumstances, she could kill again?"

“Can I check my story,” Cadowsky asks. “It would refresh my memory.” Heidi hands him the newspaper article, which he reads. “Yes, I raised that question. She said under the right circumstances couldn’t we all kill. Don’t we all kill?”

“And did the defendant describe her state of mind during the tortured slayings she committed?”

“Well, at one point, when I asked her about the killings, she said she tried to make death as quick and peaceful as possible.”

“She said that to you?”

“Yes, but then I realized, after they published my article, that she might have been referring to the animals at the pound. The ones she helped euthanize.”

“But that’s not what you wrote in the article, correct?”

“I know, but it wasn’t clear during the interview. I believe I was mistaken.”

“All right, Mr. Cadowsky. You also asked if Ms. Davis slept well at night, meaning does she have a clear conscience. What did she say?”

“Yes, I remember that. She said she didn’t have problems sleeping. That she packaged away the killings in her mind and really doesn’t think about them anymore. It’s all over, she said, and I quote, ‘like I had an ugly tumor removed. Once gone, I forget about it.’” Cadowsky pauses, then adds before Heidi can ask her next question, “But again, I think she meant the animals at the pound. She never confessed to actually committing murder. The killing of human beings.”

“But, Mr. Cadowsky, that’s not what you wrote in your article. Isn’t the news you report a matter of truth? Isn’t that your job, to relay the truth?”

“Of course. It’s just that sometimes we have deadlines to meet before I can more clearly understand the meaning behind what someone said.”

Heidi looks blankly at Cadowsky as if to challenge his words by her presence of mind. I'm simply sitting back, stunned by this testimony. Cadowsky is correct. I was talking about killing all those animals! Don't people get that?

Heidi turns to Chris. "Your cross." She struts back to her table like she's the queen of Sheba. Bitch!

My attorney approaches the witness, places his hands on the stand, and says, "Isn't it true, Mr. Cadowsky, that you're out to make a name for yourself with this case. Lucy Davis is your opportunity? Your ticket to a Pulitzer Prize?"

"I am an investigative journalist."

"Isn't it true that you look for an angle even if it stretches the truth. You want a book out of all this, don't you?"

"It's my job to report the news in a readable fashion." Cadowsky casts a nervous glance around the courtroom, catching sight of me. I give him an empty look, not one that scolds, blames, or approves. In fact, I'm perfectly calm. He already knows that I know he's a lying bastard who's not surprised by anything he, or anyone else has to say. The I Hate Lucy Show is, after all, only a situation comedy.

"Even now, as we speak," my attorney continues. "That mind of yours is writing this chapter, correct?"

"Objection." Heidi stands. "What's the relevance of all this?"

"Objection sustained," Albee rules. "Counselor, I suggest you move on."

"All right. Mr. Cadowsky, you discussed with Lucy her parental background, her friends and so on, didn't you?"

"Yes. She indicated her family traumatized her as a child. Terrorized her, in fact."

“That’s right. And your article mentions how her brother’s molestation and her parent’s mistreatment and neglect have impacted her adult life, is that correct?”

“That’s my belief,” Cadowsky says. He seems relieved that the focus is no longer on his credibility. “Lucy said she didn’t have many friends, ever, and that she’s always felt disconnected from the rest of the world like she was watching a movie about her life that didn’t even involve her except when people were hurting her. She enjoyed talk radio for that reason and felt most comfortable when she could phone in and hang-up if the discussion turned against her.”

“Now, Mr. Cadowsky. Did the defendant ever indicate to you whether she could or would kill again?”

“I don’t think anyone can say they won’t kill. It depends on the situation. Self-defense. The defense of others. Of family. Of country. Like I said, I think she meant the animals at the pound when she spoke about killing. She seemed confused and she confused me. I never got a straight confession from her, if that’s what the prosecution expects to learn from me. She never, ever said to me, ‘Mr. Cadowsky, yes, I murdered those poor homeless victims.’”

“Thank you, Mr. Cadowsky, that’s all I have.”

Before the hearing, Chris encouraged me to take the stand and claim that my ex-boyfriend, Brian Potthoff, had beaten me and verbally and emotionally abused me. I began believing that he actually had beat me, but at the last minute I refused to testify to this even if it might save my life. Then I learned that Tracy had returned to Portland and wouldn’t be testifying on my behalf during the mitigation hearing.

“I’m sorry Lucy,” Chris told me. “Tracy had to get back to her baby and her obligations at work and church.”

Maybe my sister was too emotionally upset to testify. This is no surprise to me. It's par for the course. Tracy didn't want to soil her glamorous fingernails or have her name smeared in the newspapers. Then she'd have to admit that she came from a disgusting family with a sister convicted of murder. Good riddance, I tell myself about Tracy. I don't need or want her pathetic attempt to be my sister. Go stick you head in the Morning Glory Pool and scald your pretty unblemished face! You two-faced phony.

My attorney decided to call on Lucinda to again explain how honest and generous I was and that I was willing to humor "a bunch of old church ladies by playing cards." However, during her testimony, Lucinda becomes so upset that Albee excuses her from testifying any further. She's the only witness that makes me well up deep inside. I can't stop the tears that tumble down my cheeks. Chris hands me a tissue and I'm sure he's liking my sappy reaction. But it's only judge Albee who matters now and when I look at his ruddy face, I see a stone-cold impartial old man who's taking care of serious business. There's no empathy in his look of judgment. It's a look I've seen many times before.

As an expert witness, my attorney places a clinical psychologist on the stand. Before my trial, Dr. Kimbro spent eight hours with me, in half hour sessions, conducting interviews and giving me psychological tests. He looks like an aged patriarch, like Moses, but he speaks with a polished Brooklyn accent. Today he wears a gray suit, a paisley tie, and brown loafers that glisten like glass. He sits smugly on the stand, like a cocky, elderly man who's clearly impressed with his credentials. I didn't like him during the sessions and I don't like him now as my attorney's expert witness.

"What were these tests?" Chris stands near the witness.

“A visual motor gestalt test, a sentence completion test, and a figure drawing test. In one test, I had Ms. Davis write a story about situational pictures.”

“What are your bottom-line findings, Dr. Kimbro?”

“After several sessions Lucy admitted that her brother penetrated her with his finger on more than one occasion. When Lucy told her parents they accused her of lying. Her father made her feel ashamed about what was happening to her. Whether it’s true or not, Lucy believes that this same brother tried to shoot her during a hunting trip. All these traumatic factors have permanently impacted Lucy’s psychology. One of my test results indicated that Lucy Davis suffers from ‘impulse control disorder,’ probably from her childhood abuse and mistreatment.”

“And can you tell the court about impulse control disorder?”

“It has to do with a person’s uncontrolled reactions to situations where most people maintain a level of control. We call it ‘borderline personality disorder.’”

“Is this borderline disorder serious?”

“It can be.”

“And what causes such a disorder, Dr. Kimbro?”

“Generally speaking, a borderline disorder results from childhood experiences. Unfortunately, children internalize the standards, values, and behaviors of their parents, older siblings or role models during the time they are learning how to respond to the world. In cases of a dysfunctional and abusive family, such as that of Ms. Lucy Davis, the child experiences grave inconsistencies and fails to develop a basic and stable core identity. Instead, she becomes confused about her self-worth and what’s expected of her. This leads to patterns of erratic, unpredictable responses to changing circumstances in the environment. The borderline patient hasn’t progressed to a mature understanding of the self. She sees the world from her own point of

view. Most of us learn to internalize the views of others and to account for our own actions and evaluate what's going on. Most people think critically but an overly egocentric borderline person can't because she views herself as the center of everything. Things happen to her. She is a victim."

"With Lucy Davis, did you find any evidence of organic brain damage to explain her impulse disorder?"

"No. There's nothing in her history to indicate organic damage, although it's always a possibility. An accident could have happened that she forgot about. We look for patterns, observe how the patient talks, and watch for nonverbal indicators of defensiveness. We also look at the patient's relationships, her employment history, hobbies, and childhood trauma. Psychology is a highly subjective field, I'll admit. But most likely, Lucy Davis suffers from a learned disorder caused by her unfortunate childhood. When first meeting Lucy, I had difficulty separating her from her immediate concern that Brian Pottoff, her former boyfriend, had abandoned her. Despite her going to trial, she couldn't separate herself from this concern. You see, whatever is most emotionally arousing captivates a borderline patient. The patient reacts as a frightened child does when she's abused, abandoned or confused. For five or six years, Lucy admitted that she hid from her abusive brother. She was afraid of him. He traumatized her. And so did her indifferent and neglectful parents."

Chris turns toward the judge when he says to the witness, "Dr. Kimbro, in your expert opinion, and through all the time you spent with Ms. Davis, would you say that stress drove her over the edge into this unreality and that this stress came from her childhood trauma and her intense relationship with Brian Potthoff, a first love?"

“Yes, that’s what I conclude. It’s highly probable that when committing her crimes, the defendant reacted with a substantially impaired ability to conform her behavior to the requirements of the law. She couldn’t think critically. She couldn’t control her impulses, her racing negative and harmful thoughts and beliefs. She fell into a make-believe world, if you will.”

“Although not enough for an insanity plea, correct?”

“No, but close. I’m not saying she didn’t know what she was doing. But she suffered from an intense psychological collapse beyond her control. In layman’s terms, she had a psychotic breakdown.”

“Thank you, Doctor. Your Honor, that’s all I have at this time.” Chris takes his seat next to me at the defense table.

Although Chris went over this testimony with me, I still find it shocking. Deep inside I feel like an idiot. Is this testimony actually helping me? I ask myself as my attorney puts his hand on the back of my chair for reassurance. Early in life I learned to never talk about Scottie. Now, in front of the entire world, my private parts, my genitals, are on full display! My filthy brother is toying with me all over again, pulling down my pants in the basement and making me feel like trash! The newspapers, TV, and talk radio shows will feature all of this. My aunt already mentioned that Jeff Jeffers had a program dedicated to my trial. But she wouldn’t tell me what people were saying and I didn’t want to know. Dr. Kimbro’s testimony implies that I’m a clueless, damaged victim. His testimony is meant to save my life but if I’m so pathetic, I have to wonder, is my life really worth saving?

Before I can sink further into my hole of self-pity, Heidi is standing before Dr. Kimbro cross-examining him. “Doctor,” she says, “Doesn’t borderline mean it’s on the border line? Only a slight affliction?”

“No, no, counselor. It’s a term of art in itself, like schizophrenia, manic depression, or narcissistic, histrionic, and antisocial disorders. It’s not on the border line of a disorder.”

Heidi pauses a moment in thought. “Do people choose to have disorders or is it something they just have?”

The doctor gives Heidi a long hard look. “Ma’am, I don’t think anyone chooses to have a disorder.” The courtroom snickers.

What a clueless bitch, I’m thinking about Heidi. Looks like she’s not thinking critically! Chris gives me a slight nod, not anything that would distract the judge.

Heidi cuts-in through the snickering. “Tell us how much you’re getting paid to take the stand, Dr. Kimbro.”

Without hesitation, the doctor says, “$300 per hour as an expert witness and $250 an hour to interview the patient. Is that what you want to know, Ma’am?”

“I have no further questions,” Heidi says.

I stare at Heidi as she returns to the prosecution’s table and pours herself a glass of water. Chris taps my shoulder and whispers, “Lucy, focus on the judge, not Ms. Brown.” He’s already warned me, many times, not to show any anger. “Be calm and at peace, no matter what takes place, especially now that your very life is at stake.”

I look down at the polished table, at my ashen, blurred face. My attorney needn’t worry, I think. The sober expression I see is as frozen in place as my mind. As my life.

November 24, 1991

Judge Albee sits at the bench ready to reveal his decision about my death sentence. “We have examined the mitigating circumstances involved in this case.” His deep Darth Vader voice echoes through the chamber and ricochets in my head.

“Unfortunate childhood mistreatment and good character weighs in favor of leniency and the defense has shown evidence supporting both. However, the killings in this case didn’t arise from heat of passion, struggle or an attempt to escape. The defendant deliberately and carefully conceived, meticulously planned, and killed in cold-blood. The State has shown compelling evidence that the victims suffered from a toxic combination of drugs and alcohol.”

“I’ve heard experts testify that Ms. Davis shut-down mentally when she killed. We have considered evidence of impulse control disorder and find disagreement over the defendant’s ability to conform her behavior to the law. Such a disorder is not an excuse or justification. It absolves nothing. In balance, mitigation does not outweigh the aggravating circumstances of cruelly poisoning helpless, elderly and innocent victims.”

“When seeking the death penalty, the State looks for outrageous crimes that jump out at you. Here we have a case of serial torture and killing and the law weighs on the State’s side. Personally, I oppose the death penalty but I’m not free to vote my conscience. I’ve taken an oath to uphold Arizona law and now have the painful duty of sentencing Ms. Lucy Marie Davis to death by lethal injection. Lucy Davis planned and executed three heinous and cruel murders. She is absolutely responsible. Why? Because she didn’t have to kill.”

I’m sitting quietly, feeling phenobarbital fill my each and every cell. Nothing could have prepared me for the judge’s decision. My attorney never coached me on how to react if Albee proclaimed this sentence. Perhaps Chris himself couldn’t face this possibility. Now he’s failed me yet again, I’m telling myself as Albee’s deep sounding words keep ringing through my ears.

It might not be exactly what he said, but I'm hearing over and over again an echo at the Grand Canyon of Yellowstone Park *You're a dead woman, Lucy Lu, you are, you are, you are.*

Chapter 17: A Visit with Lucy Davis at Perryville Women's Prison

The Arizona Republic, March 30, 1993

by David Cadowsky

In 1992, after nearly thirty years, Arizona resumed executing inmates starting with Don Eugene Harding in the gas chamber. Because Harding's death was gruesome, agonizing, and lasted ten minutes, Arizonans voted for the State to use lethal injections in capital punishment cases. Opponents of the death penalty are now concerned that the outrage against state-sanctioned deaths will dwindle. Death row inmates who committed a crime prior to last November have the option of execution by lethal gas or by lethal injection.

Ms. Lucy Davis is currently on death row awaiting her mandatory first appeal. She has a long way to go in her fight to convince appellate courts to change her death sentence to life or to overturn her conviction altogether. Ms. Davis has never shown any remorse nor has she confessed to the three homeless murders. After living in seclusion for two years, she has granted my request for this interview.

While walking past cyclone and concertina-wire fencing, through creaking thick metal doors, I hear a loud engine and notice television monitors high on every wall. There are no locks on the restroom doors and the entire facility smells of disinfectant. This is Perryville Prison for Women, a part of Arizona's Department of Corrections. After signing-in and leaving my personal effects at the front desk, a guard escorts me to a private interview room.

Clad in rubber sandals and her blue inmate jumpsuit, Ms. Davis looks haggard when we meet in the small windowless chamber. At first, her slate-blue eyes rarely look at me, as if she's in a world only she can enter. Soon she opens up and answers my questions about her lonely existence on death row. She even admits to wanting this interview because she has a lot to say. Ms. Davis tells me she eats her meals alone and exercises outside each day for half an hour. Her morning shower is in a stall adjacent to her cell. Whenever she leaves her cell, other death row and maximum-security inmates remain in their cells to prevent her from interacting with them. Her life has become a routine of isolation and introspection.

Ms. Davis spends her day reading novels and writing letters to pen pals. During her trial and since her sentencing, Lucy's case has gained international attention and she's built up a fan base of death penalty foes. They are ordinary people, law students, and university professors from Europe, India, Australia, Canada and of course, the US. Ms. Davis has received a few marriage proposals but has no interest in "a romantic relationship" with anyone.

"I'm satisfied with friendship letters discussing my views and the views of those who write me. I have no more room in my little life for a love affair." Lucy laughs when she tells me this. "Isn't that a song? *I'm through with love.* I'm just a poor girl from a poor family. Nobody loves me, nobody will spare my life. But, as they say, easy come easy go. My heart is locked up on death row where I keep all my feelings icy cold."

A major reason Lucy granted me this interview is because her aunt, Lucinda Bowers, wanted the Arizona Republic to publish a Christmas card letter sent to Lucy from her mother. Her mother, Lois Davis, wrote the card shortly before she died in 1990. Lucy had never opened the card and left in her abandoned apartment.

Lucinda Bowers received a box of Lucy's belongings. During the trial, Bowers kept the box hidden from public knowledge. "When Lucy became a murder suspect," Mrs. Bowers confessed to me. "I didn't look in the box because I feared uncovering evidence the prosecution could use against my niece. I love Lucy. She's the daughter I never had. Then the appellate attorney phoned me about Lucy's appeal and I had a feeling there might be something useful inside that box. When I read the Christmas card letter from Lois, I believed it would persuade the seven justices on the court of appeals to overturn Lucy's death sentence. At the same time, I realized I could face legal trouble if I revealed the letter because it was evidence I withheld during the trial."

Mrs. Bowers shared the letter with Lucy's appellate attorney, Ms. Gina Amy Watkins. In a brief before the Supreme Court of Arizona, Ms. Watkins plans to present the Christmas letter as crucial mitigating evidence that was withheld during Lucy's trial. It could have swayed the trial judge to reject a death sentence.

In the letter, Lucy's mother admits to knowing that her son sexually abused Lucy and attempted to take Lucy's life. Ms. Watkins believes the Christmas letter provides written testimony and documentary evidence on a matter the witness, Lois Davis, knew about. The letter is a recorded recollection, a family record concerning a family history of neglect and abuse.

During my interview with Ms. Davis, I ask how she feels about what her mother wrote in the letter. "I found it unusual for two reasons," Lucy tells me. "For one thing, Mom wrote more than a few words with her quoted scripture and she didn't sign it 'Love from Mom and Dad' like she always did. My father never wrote me a single letter or card in his life."

I ask Ms. Davis why she hadn't opened her mail before she abandoned her apartment in Durango. She says, "At that time, my life was spinning out of control and I hated my childhood

family. My fiancé, Brian 'Pothead' Potthoff had left me. I lost my job. My bills were piling up. I threw all my unopened mail at the back of my closet so I didn't have to deal with anybody or anything. It's as simple as that!"

"Your mother's letter sounds heartfelt," I suggest to Ms. Davis. "She ends with the words, *'I have always loved you and I always will.'* Do you feel your mother's love from the letter? Do you feel some kind of closure with her?"

"My mother's words mean very little to me," Lucy replies matter-of-factly. "And I don't know why, except that whatever she had to say to me never seemed meaningful. I'm certain that love is more than just words on a card. Actions *do* speak louder." Lucy pauses. "Or maybe not. Words can also hurt. I'm not so sure anymore about a lot of things. My mother was an old-fashioned Montana farm gal from the fifties. She believed she was a good person, from a God-fearing family. When one of her children was flagrantly abusing another one, she couldn't face that reality. What happened to me was unclean and unholy to her, not something good, good people come to terms with. No, Mr. Cadowsky. Mom's words of love are a pretend thing. She might as well have written, *'Faked you out, bo ditty'* like my horrible brother said after he tricked me."

"That's very cynical, Ms. Davis," I suggest. "Your mother confesses to knowing about the abuse from your brother. This is very strong evidence kept from the mitigation phase of your trial."

"My brother died a fool's death and got no redemption. That's redemption enough for me. Is that cynical? Mr. Cadowsky."

I ask Ms. Davis to tell me about her childhood, as background for the Christmas letter. "Mom loved her sons. Me, not so much. It's the feeling I got as a child because of subtle things. Like who got the attention or the gift they wanted. When I was nine, Mom got sick with multiple

sclerosis. Sixteen years later she knows she's dying and feels the Lord calling her with church bells and singing angels. But Mom wanted to make things right with God. Not me. Her heartfelt letter was on her laundry list of tasks like she used to write out before our deer hunting trips. Here's the thing, Mr. Cadowsky. In Mom's letter, she claims she and my father kicked Scottie out of the house and that Charlie and Moe drove him to Pittsburg and left him there. My mother wasn't being trueful. My sister Tracy told me Scottie died in Las Vegas. Some people, like my brother, are pure evil and unredeemable. Good, good people, like my folks, well, they hide behind their religion but they are two-faced and they fabricate their realities. When my mother came face to face with the Lord, she wanted to receive my forgiveness. But she never got it."

"Do you forgive your mother now," I ask.

"Don't know," Ms. Davis replies. "The jury's still out on that one."

"Do you forgive yourself?"

"For what? Mr. Cadowsky. I know it seems like my mother's letter gushes with love for me but I had a self-reckoning after reading it, not a reckoning with my mother. I believe sometimes people really don't love, when they should. Parents, in particular. I believe mothers can love certain kids over others. Maybe even resent or just dislike a kid for a variety of reasons. My mother adored her first daughter and lavished her with attention, clothes and gifts. I got Tracy's hand-me-downs. I was a second fiddle, not so pretty, a whiney tag-along little girl, as my horrible brother called me."

I ask Ms. Davis if she believes in the Almighty and thinks about the possibility of her execution. She says, "A man in New Delhi, Professor Cholan Muthukumaraswami, has written me many interesting and philosophical letters. In one, he suggests that if I accept Jesus, Abraham, Mohammed, Krishna, and the many faces of Buddha, I'll find forgiveness,

redemption, and restitution, and will justify my life. So, every night as I lie on my lonely cot, isolated from the rest of the world, from all living creatures, I pray to the gods, spirits, and saints of the world, not just to the one God of my parents."

"Do you feel any remorse?"

"How can I have remorse? I'm not guilty. The world has made me suffer and now it makes me pay with my life, for nothing."

"Do you hold out hope for your appeal?"

"I'm prepared to go anyway the wind blows. But I never quit hoping to be in a place that is better than where I presently am."

"Do you hate your parents?" I ask.

"Hate destroys the soul, my friend from India advises. No, I just pity them for their ignorance."

"And you brother?" I ask my final question for the second woman to be living on Arizona's death row.

"Yes, I hate Scottie and am glad he now lives with Beelzebub! I have severed myself from a family that caused me so much pain. Now I sleep easy each night and without needing phenobarbital."

The guard suddenly opens the clanky metal door to the interview room and takes Lucy back to her lonely cell.

Chapter 18: A Letter from Lucy's Dead Mom

Christmas, 1990

Dear Lucy,

Glory to God in the highest heaven and peace to those on whom his favor rests. Luke 2:14

This may be my last Christmas, Lucy. I sometimes hear church bells ringing and the Lord calling me. His angels are singing with bluebirds and I want to set things right with you.

I know you had a difficult childhood because of your brother and your father, maybe because me. You have to understand that your father is a difficult man to please but he's the head of our family and a man of faith.

The Lord says confession is good for the soul. And I have a few things to confess to you and to Jesus. I knew Scottie did things to you that no brother, no boy, no man, should ever do to a little girl. You told me he touched you and I didn't want to believe you. But I knew what he was doing to you. I overheard Scottie brag to his friend about shooting at you on the McGrew ranch the year you turned nine and I had to stay home because of my illness.

You have to understand, Lucy, your daddy refused to accept any such wrongdoing and I could never go against him once he settled his mind on the matter. Before I got sick, I was busy working at the hardware store and taking care of your father, your brothers, and Tracy. Your sister took a lot of my attention. You might think I loved Tracy more. Maybe she did shine before she sinned. Tracy disappointed me because I believed she would influence you in good ways and take care of you while I worked. But Tracy turned into a jezebel.

Lucy, I've had a hard life and may have squeezed you out of love by neglecting you. If I sinned and turned a blind eye and swept Scottie's sinful behavior under the rug, I ask for your forgiveness. It was during a time when we never discussed such things and the truth is I can't discuss it now. If my neglect has caused you harm, I'm sorry. I never told you this but as soon as Scottie turned 17, I asked Moe and Charlie to drive him to Pittsburg to get him away from you.

Lucy, if you are in trouble now, I urge you to turn to the Lord. Moe and I did get Scottie gone and we did let you stay home with us after high school.

I know there's nothing I can do for you now that you're living on your own, but please don't blame people for their pain.

I have always loved you and I always will.

Merry Christmas, 1990, Mom

Chapter 19: The Jeffers Hour

December 18, 2013

"This is Jeff Jeffers, your KFYI host with the most provocative and controversial debates coming your way—live from the Valley of the Sun. Tonight, our guest is Professor Edwin Garfinkle from the Arizona Capital Representation Project, the death penalty clinic at ASU College of Law. He is sharing with us his knowledge of the death penalty appeal process."

"Professor Garfinkle." Jeffers says. "Four women are currently living on Arizona's death row at Perryville prison. Two months ago, they released death row inmate Debra Milke. Please explain to our radio listeners what happened in the Milke case. Why was she exonerated?"

"Thank you for asking that question, Mr. Jeffers. The US 9th Circuit Court of Appeals overturned Milke's conviction and set her free because during her trial the State withheld evidence from the jury. This is known as egregious prosecutorial misconduct. Milke is the second woman on death row the US courts have ever exonerated."

"Let me remind my listeners," Jeffers says. "Ms. Lucy Davis has been on death row for twenty-two years. She's exhausted all her appeals. Even SCOTUS has turned down her last

appeal and the courts have scheduled her execution for tomorrow night. Any words about her case, Professor?"

"Tomorrow night, December 19th, Arizona has scheduled Lucy Davis to become the fourteenth woman executed since the 1976 SCOTUS reinstatement of the death penalty. She has spent more time on death row than any other woman. She went in at age twenty-seven and is now nearly fifty."

"Why do inmates spend so many years on death row? Professor Garfinkle."

"The average time served on death row is twelve to fifteen years. But in the case of Lucy Davis many factors have prolonged her sentence and postponed any execution date. First, the Arizona supreme court upheld the trial court's verdict and sentence, then her appellate attorney filed a writ alleging newly-discovered evidence. Unfortunately, Ms. Davis has fired three attorneys and that caused many delays. After Lucy exhausted her state appeals, her attorneys filed briefs with the federal courts. They had already petitioned for a writ of certiorari to SCOTUS and a federal habeas corpus for issues not connected to the trial. These writs can take over ten years. That's why inmates on death row linger for twenty years or more, waiting and hoping the State doesn't kill them. There was some hope for Lucy in 2002 when Arizona changed its law so that a jury must determine a sentence of death. In Lucy's case, a trial judge made that decision. In a nutshell, a jury, not a judge, must unanimously decide on a sentence of death. A hung jury is a retrial. A second hung jury is an automatic life sentence. But even considering this new law, the courts refused to change Lucy's sentence to life."

"What about DNA evidence concerning Lucy's case? I understand that by 2011, DNA evidence led to the exoneration of 17 death row inmates."

“Correct, Mr. Jeffers. DNA came into play several years after the trial of Ms. Davis. But the blood and saliva samples on Lucy’s blouse found at a homeless shelter hadn’t been well preserved and deteriorated. Besides, there’s always the possibility that DNA evidence could prove Lucy’s guilt rather than her innocence. And you’re right, Mr. Jeffers. As of 2011, Arizona enacted DNA access laws that give death row inmates the right to DNA testing. Unfortunately for Ms. Davis, no one collected DNA samples at the homeless crime scenes.”

“At this eleventh hour, does Lucy have any options left? Is it too late for an exoneration?”

“Governor Jan Brewer could grant her clemency. If the five-member Board of Executive Clemency agrees to it.”

“Okay, radio listeners,” Jeffers announces. “Here’s my question to you. Are there differences among the women on death row? Some still claim that Lucy was a mercy killer, not a cold-blooded murderer. People call Aileen Wuornos a serial killer and Karla Faye Tucker a born-again evangelist. What’s your opinion? Let’s open the lines. . .”

“This is Mrs. Lucinda Bowers, aunt to Lucy Davis. . .” a soft woman’s voice comes over the radio.

“Well, well, this is a real treat,” Jeffers says. “Good evening, Mrs. Bowers. Thanks for calling in.”

“Hello, I want to talk about tomorrow’s execution.”

“Can you please speak up Mrs. Bowers. This is talk radio, we need more amplification.”

“I can’t because the guard isn’t far from where I’m standing at the day room phone.”

“What?” Jeffers asks.

“This is actually Lucy Davis and I want to discuss my execution.”

“Lucy? Are you really Ms. Davis? Are you listening to the radio now?”

“No, I can’t have a radio on death row. I haven’t listened to radio ga ga goo goo for over twenty years!”

“Please go on, go on. . .”

Lucy raises her voice and says, “Yes, LUCINDA.” Then she lowers it and says, “You see, Mr. Jeffers, I lied to the warden and said I wanted to make one last call to my Aunt Lu. She’s the only family I got. And she’s a very feeble old lady. Eighty years old. Lucinda arranged for this conference call. Her friend Mr. Deihl helped set it up. My Aunt Lu is still trying to do everything she can to get me a stay of execution. She’s meeting with the governor tomorrow.”

“This is fascinating, Ms. Davis. But what about your sister, Tracy. I remember she came to your trial and you had a sort of reunion, after many years.”

“Yeah. Wasn’t that a bit of a side show? No. My sister dropped out of sight,” Lucy pauses and raises her voice, “LUCINDA! It seems that a sister, or people in general, can be really nice, once or twice. Then indifference appears and bites deeply and there’s no recourse from indifference. If people don’t care, they don’t care. You see, AUNT LU, my sister wrote me off as good for nothing. *What are you good for?* my Dad used to ask me when I was little and then he’d answer *Good for nothing!* He thought he was kidding but it was never funny to me.”

“Lucy,” Jeffers breaks in. “I’ve followed your case since the beginning. Thank-you for calling tonight. I feel like I’m hearing a voice from God. Do you have remorse, over what you did? I’m sure our listeners would like to know.”

“I’ve had twenty-two years of self-reflection. And you know what, LUCINDA! I refuse to go down the rabbit hole of self-loathing, even though the world hates me, stones me, and spits in my eye. Then leaves me to die. No, I ain’t never admitted to nothing, and that’s a triple

negative! I'm Lucy Davis and I matter in this world. And you know what else, Mr. Jeffers, I'm thankful for this little life I have. It may not be much, here on death row, but it's a life."

"Lucy, Ms. Davis. . ." Garfinkle says, but Lucy cuts him off.

"I have to go now, AUNT LUCINDA. The guard gestures that he's given me my five minutes. He doesn't know you're not my AUNT LU."

The line goes dead.

"Folks," Jeffers says with great enthusiasm. "That was our own Lucy Davis. I know her voice. I listened to her on tapes from my shows many times. Fantastic, we wish her well. Let's pray Governor Brewer grants her clemency."

"Or SCOTUS offers a stay of execution!" Garfinkle adds.

"Okay, Professor," Jeffers says. "Let's take another caller. I'm eager to hear what our radio listeners have to say."

"Thank you, Jeff, so am I," Professor Garfinkle adds. "Since the mid-1990s, the attorneys and students at the death penalty clinic have been trying to help Lucy with her case but she's consistently refused our help. Sometimes people condemned to die become very stubborn about their situation. As if this is their only means to have power over what's happened to them."

"Well, we'd like to give everyone a chance to speak," Jeffers cuts in. "But it appears that the lines are jammed. Everyone has something to say concerning Ms. Davis. We'll have to wait until tomorrow night. For now, this is your host Jeff Jeffers calling it a day. Carry on!"