
~ Specter Of Fear ~

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Disclaimers

Love/Sex: This story features strongly implied and explicit consensual relationship between adult women. If this bothers you, is illegal in the State, Province or Country you live or if you are under the age of 18, close this page immediately and find something more appropriate for you to read.

Language: The use of a mild expletive is used.

Violence: There is some violence.

Hurt/Comfort: There is definitely some hurt/emotional discomfort with some brief scenes of angst and heartache to be dealt with by the characters.

Acknowledgment: Thank you for all your help Alice, Carmen, Linda and Teresa

Dedication: For my friend who told me not to be afraid then pushed me out of the nest. You gave me wings and I flew.

The song "Come Away With Me" written by Norah Jones

Specter Of Fear

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Long tanned legs slid out of the bright yellow Jeep as feet landed on the gritty white sand. Using her hand as a shield against the glare of the hot sun she scanned the desolate beach, scattered with broken bottles and trash, for signs of the mystery caller. Her blue eyes saw no movement at all, not even the normal shore birds were around.

"Damn!" she said loudly. "Why am I not surprised?"

The melodic ringing of her cell phone took her attention away from the water slapping against the rocky beach. "Yeah?"

"Bailey, is this how you treat all your girls? Leave them standing on the street corner like a prostitute waiting for a John?"

"Annie? Damn, I got held up, I'm sorry. I'll be right there."

"Don't bother, I won't be here!" With those words the phone went silent.

"Shit!" Bailey Colson jumped back into the Jeep, started the engine and sped off towards the pavement her long black hair blowing in the wind as the sand fishtailed behind her.

Knowing Annie as she did, she headed for Horseshoe Lane and their home. Just as she rounded the corner of the tree lined street she saw Annie getting out of a taxi and quickly walking up the brick sidewalk. The tires screeched to a halt and Bailey leapt out of the car ran up the walkway, skipped the steps and opened the door. Going inside she saw Annie standing in the well lit hallway with her hands on her hips, tapping her foot, with a scowl on her face.

Oh no, here we go again, Annie is on the warpath. "What the hell is going on, Annie? I said I would be there, couldn't you wait another few minutes?" she demanded.

"Bailey, I'd been waiting fifteen minutes. How do you think it made me feel to be standing around on the corner? Is that sand you're dragging into the house? Is that why you couldn't bother to be there to pick me up on time?" Annie screamed.

Bailey's blue eyes pierced her lover. "Annie, what's wrong with you? You're blowing this way out of proportion. I got held up, I'm sorry."

"Not good enough! Who were you with on the beach? Some little hottie you picked up in a bar? I thought I could trust you, Bailey, apparently I was wrong!" Annie's green eyes were flashing with fury and her cheeks flushed.

"Annie, I wasn't with anyone." Her face was wrinkled in astonishment at the comment. How can she even think that? Walking over to the woman she lifted her chin and looked into her eyes. "Baby, what is this all about. Please tell me."

Slapping the fingers away she hissed. "You do this all the time, you think you can just waltz in here and sweet talk your way out of trouble. It's not going the work this time, Bailey. I know all I need to know right here in this letter." Annie waved a typewritten note in the air.

Bailey grabbed the paper out of Annie's hand. "God, Annie, every time you get one of these we go through the same thing. Let's see what's this jerk has to say about me this time." Bailey growled as she began reading the letter.

Annie,

No longer can I stand by and watch that which do to you what she did to my friend...she has all the answers doesn't she...she is so smooth...she can explain away everything...can't she...why do you think she moved into your home...so when it comes time to leave she will have nothing to keep her there...the bitch did that very thing to my friend...strung her along for month declaring her never ending love...then when my friend came to me to change her will...I am a lawyer...making that weasel her only beneficiary she told my friend she was nothing but an ugly fat loser that no one wanted...then she left my friend heartbroken...taking her life savings...of course she was so embarrassed by the whole thing she won't warn you herself...I have photos if you want them.

She goes around telling everyone who will listen about her latest conquest and how glibly they are...she talks about you all the time and how she has special plans for you Annie...she says she will toy with you longer than most...she and her cronies have plans for you...how can you be so glibly?

Be smart Annie, don't let her ruin your life like she has countless others...get out while you can.

Mary

"What a bunch of bullshit! Do you actually believe this crap?" Bailey was shaking her head in disbelief as she saw the doubt on Annie's face. "Tell me you don't believe this! If you remember we decided to move in here together because the backyard is bigger for kids."

"Frankly, I don't know what to believe anymore." Annie lowered her head, as if deeply wounded and began walking away.

Bailey touched her shoulder in an effort to stop her forward movement. As Annie turned around green met blue.

"Annie, I love you. I thought you knew that. I've never wanted anything from you but to make you happy. Do you really believe after

all the times we poured our hearts out to each other that I am the person in that letter? It isn't my style, Annie, and you know that...don't you?" Her blue eyes never wavered.

Annie shook her head as she began to sob. "I do know it isn't your style...I'm just so tired of this shit. Why is this happening? Every letter has a different name, how many does this lawyer person make it? Six or seven? Are all these people liars? What do they have against you or what have you done to them? I just don't know, Bailey, I just don't know."

Blue held green for a long moment until a low growl was then heard. "I have no idea who these people are or why they are doing this." Each word pronounced with precision. "Yes, they are all liars, for I have done none of what I stand accused of. There is not one word of truth, Annie, and you know that...you have to know that or the love I thought was so strong is nothing but a sham."

Annie stood there in disbelief as she heard the words. "My love for you isn't a sham." She whispered, the pain evident in her voice. "How can you say such a thing? I love you as I have never loved another. In my heart I know none of this is true but, even you have to admit it sounds damning." Green pleaded with blue.

Bailey's heart went out to the small woman. She was right, it did sound damning. *Hell, I even question myself.* Still she knew if they split these people would win. Wrapping Annie in her arms, she kissed her before speaking. "We will work this one out sweetie, I promise. Funny, how this one said there were pictures, wonder why they weren't sent with the letter?" Taking a deep breath she continued. "There is one solution you know, if you get rid of me I have a feeling you will not hear from them again."

"NO!"

"Don't say I didn't give you the chance, Annie."

"NO! Don't you get it? I don't care if it is true! You drive me crazy and sometimes I get so angry with you that I want to scream. But, I thank God everyday that you came into my life and I can experience intense, deep, everlasting love. I am willing to pay any price for that feeling. I love you so much, Bailey. My life is so much richer for knowing and loving you." Her green eyes were on fire with passion as she spoke.

"But, there is still a part of you that doubts me. I know that life has taught you to be wary, Annie, but believe me when I say I will never hurt you. This person deals in generalities, never any facts, only innuendos."

Burying her head further into the comforting shoulder Annie sobbed. "I'm sorry. Please forgive me."

Kissing her forehead Bailey rocked them back and forth. "Shhh love, it's okay. I'm going nowhere and we can work on the trust issue together. Okay?"

"I would like that. I do love you so much, Bailey."

"I know baby, I love you too."

Pulling back a bit so she could see her lover's face, Annie asked, "Why were you at the beach?"

"I got a call telling me if I came to the Third Street Beach I would have all the answers about the letters you're getting."

"The Third Street Beach? Bailey, are you crazy? You're lucky to still be alive! You know better, how could you go there?"

"Because we need answers, Annie. I'll do whatever I need to so you are safe and we are rid of this idiot. I do have a question for you."

"Okay, go ahead."

"Who knew I was going to pick you up today?"

"Everyone on my staff. I told them we needed to quickly end the afternoon meeting as I was getting a ride home at four sharp. Why?"

"Anyone else?"

Annie scrunched her eyebrows together thinking of who else she might have told. "No, no one else. Again, why?"

"Doesn't it seem strange to you that twenty minutes before I'm to pick you up I get a call to go somewhere for this information?"

A look of disbelief and terror came over Annie's face. "It's someone in my office!"

"BINGO!" Bailey once again pulled Annie closer. "Now to find out who, are you up for that?"

Hugging Bailey closer she whispered. "Is it okay if I am really scared right now?"

A whisper came back. "So am I."



Annie was out for her morning jog keeping to the well traveled main streets and away from the lonely paths she usually used. This usually was her time to clear her mind but today she couldn't help thinking about her current situation. The letters and the attacks toward Bailey were becoming a strain on their relationship. *Just how much more of this is Bailey willing to take before she moves on?* She wondered. Thinking back to their first meeting she was sure it was by accident and nothing more. Wasn't it?

Standing in the back of the elevator Annie was going over her notes for the meeting. As the elevator travelled from floor to floor people got on and off although she never noticed them. Suddenly, the elevator came to an abrupt stop. Looking up, she saw two men and a woman in front of the panel of buttons. Reaching in her pocket, she pulled out her cell phone and quickly dialed. "Rick, the elevator stopped again. Thanks." Then she went back to her papers.

"This happens all the time?" A voice asked.

Annie simply answered "yes" and continued reviewing her notes.

"Did anyone ever tell you it's rude to not look at the person you're talking to?" The voice asked again with a hint of teasing behind the words.

Raising her head to defend her actions, she saw the most gorgeous blue eyes she had ever seen. They were a deep penetrating blue reminding her of the sky on a clear day. "I'm sorry, I just need to get this done before my meeting. This old elevator goes out all the time, it should be back working in no time at all." Looking over to the men, who were trying to figure out how to get out of there, she shook her head. "Pushing those buttons will really make a difference." she said laughingly.

The taller of the two men turned his head to say. "At least we are trying to do something about it, lady!" Then, shaking his

head, went back to aimlessly punching buttons while the other surveyed the ceiling.

"Think he's seen too many movies." Annie said indicating the man looking up. "Men, who needs them."

The woman in front of her raised her eyebrow. "What do you mean by that?"

Annie looked at the woman who had a smirk on her face. "Oh, they're just not my cup of tea." She replied, grinning right back at the woman.

"Really?" The woman now had a bright smile. "Would I be your cup of tea?"

"Depends. Do you have a significant someone in your life?" Annie couldn't help smiling at this charming woman.

With a wink and a smile the woman answered, "Nope."

"Then to answer your question, yes, you would be my cup of tea." Annie felt a rush of happiness throughout her body.

The woman reached her hand out. "Bailey Colson."

Taking the offered hand, she replied, "pleased to meet you Bailey, I'm Annie Banks."

Over by the panel of buttons, the two men, who apparently realized their attempts were futile, stood there trying to discreetly listen to the two women.

A brilliant smile came over Bailey's face. "I don't suppose you would like to have lunch with me today...would you?"

"Are you familiar with the little diner next door? I usually go there at eleven thirty for lunch. Why not meet me there?"

Just then the elevator groaned and began its upward journey. The women's eyes and hands were still locked when the elevator doors opened with a growl.

Looking up, Annie realized it was her floor. "This is my floor...will I see you at lunch?"

Bailey once again smiled. "It's a date. See you then." With that Annie was gone and the elevator doors closed.

Lunch had been wonderful; they talked about anything and everything, spending a great deal of time laughing. There was so much left to say that they made a date for dinner that night. The rest was history.

With sweat dripping down her face and a t-shirt clinging to her body, Annie smiled at the memory. As she got closer to home her heart skipped a beat as she saw a bright yellow Jeep pull up alongside the curb. "Hey good-looking, want a ride back home or are you going to torture yourself more?"

Slowing down then stopping Annie began slowing her breathing down. "It would be more torture if I let you drive away without me." Annie was beaming as she got into the car and collapsed in the seat. "Bailey, I've been thinking about those letters."

Bailey raised her eyebrow. "Annie, they hold no truths."

"I know that... it's not what I was thinking. There's got to be a common thread and we need to find it then we can find out who's doing this."

"You're right. I've been thinking too...if we knew why then we would know who."

Annie began to laugh. "Great minds as always."

"Scary isn't it?" Bailey took Annie's hand and squeezed it gently. "Wouldn't have it any other way, my love."



Walking into her office Annie put her briefcase on her dark oak desk, punched in her code for voicemail and listened to the messages. All were normal work related calls except for one.

The muffled voice was hard to hear and eerily familiar, but she couldn't place it. "Annie, you are such a fool. Do you know where she is now?' A sinister cackle was heard. "She's planning your demise. Don't be gullible, keep an eye on your back." Another evil laugh then the message ended.

As she punched in the speed dial number Annie was shaking. "Come on pick up. Please Bailey, pick up."

"Hi, you have reached Colson Consultants. Please leave a message and we will get back to you as soon as possible. Thank you and have a great day."

"Bailey, where are you? I need you right now, please call me as soon as you get this. It's important."

Annie began taking deep breaths trying to calm down. A knock on the door made her jump.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you Annie, I have your mail."

Annie looked at the door and saw her friend standing there. "Oh, Betsy, thank goodness it is you. It has been one hell of a morning already. Come on in."

"Are you okay, Annie? You look like you've seen a ghost." Betsy's face was filled with compassion for her friend.

"Yeah, I am fine. Hey, how have you been?" Annie smiled warmly towards the woman as she rose from her desk chair.

"Pretty good considering." Betsy shrugged her shoulders.

Moving closer, Annie tilted her head and scrunched her eyebrows together. "What's the matter? Are you okay, that biopsy you had came back negative didn't it?"

Betsy couldn't help but smile at this petite woman who was so warm and kind even if she was her boss. "The biopsy was fine, thanks for asking. My problems have to do with Alexis, I asked her to move out."

"Oh no, Betsy, why? I thought you two were so happy."

"She just became too possessive, Annie. Questioning my every move, crying and screaming at me all the time. I just couldn't take it anymore. I think she needs professional help and that I can't do."

Annie felt compassion for her friend. "Is there anything I can do for you? A shoulder to cry on?"

"You're sweet, but I'm okay...going on a much needed vacation next week. Thanks for listening; I need to get back to work. See you later." With that the woman began to leave only to turn back just as the phone began to ring. "Oops, forgot to give you the mail." She whispered.

Collapsing in her chair Annie picked up the phone. "Banks."

"Annie what's the matter?" Bailey's voice sounded anxious.

"Just a minute." Getting up she walked over and closed the door. "I need you." The words were said in a soft-spoken, yet stressed voice.

"Have you been hurt?"

"No, I received a voice mail from that person and it's very disturbing. Said you were going to kill me." Annie sighed.

"Did you save it?"

"Yes."

"This is what I want you to do...forward the message to our machine at home, tell your secretary you need to leave for a while then I'll pick you up."

A tired and weary voice replied. "Okay." There was a brief pause.

"Bailey, where have you been?"

Bailey frowned at the comment. "What do you mean where have I been? I left you a message saying I had to pick up some supplies."

"Nice try, Colson, I received no such message."

"I don't know what to tell you, Annie, I left the message about thirty minutes ago."

Annie's eyes began surveying her tidy desk. "Shit!" she exclaimed.

"Someone has been in my office, Bailey."

A surge of panic for Annie's safety went through her body. "How do you know that?"

A low, slightly panicked voice spoke. "You know how anal I am about everything in its place...well things have been rearranged."

All Bailey could think of now was to protect the most precious thing in her life. "Annie, I am on my way now, I'll park along Water Street. Meet me there, okay?"

"What are we going to do?" Frustration evident in her voice. "This is getting way too close to home."

"We can decide that together later, right now you need to forward the voice mail, and meet me. Are you going to be okay?"

"I will be, when I see you." Annie felt a small sense of relief just knowing she would be seeing her lover. "Please hurry."

"Already in the car. See you soon."



Just up and leaving her job when she had only arrived would not be an easy task for Annie. The morning briefing would have to be moved up which essentially meant the whole day would need revising. But, right now Annie needed to see and touch Bailey, to ground herself and know that she was not alone in all of this. As long as the person remained unknown she would always be looking over her shoulder wondering if they were there.

Walking back to her office a fellow employee, Phil Soneson, stopped her. "Hey, Annie, strange thing happened this morning. I got a voice mail meant for you."

Tilting her head she asked. "What do you mean, Phil, how can that happen? What was it about?"

"Don't know how it happened, it did though. Someone wanted you to know they were going to be late about something or another."

A chill ran up her spine. "Oh, thank you, Phil, guess we will have to have someone look into that." Annie turned and began to walk back to her office when Phil once again spoke.

"Annie, did you get that ride you were waiting for the other day?"

Spinning around Annie captured his eyes. "Excuse me! Why are you asking me that?"

"Hey, no harm meant." Seeing the suspicious look on the woman's face he added. "Don't you remember my asking you if you needed a lift when you were standing on the corner?"

"You did? Can't say that I recall that, Phil. In answer to your question, yes, it all worked out fine."

By the time Annie returned to her office she was shaking. Gathering up her coat and keys she exited her office and locked the door. In the elevator she stood to the side so she could watch everyone, wondering if her stalker was among them. Quickly exiting the elevator and the building Annie walked to the corner and turned left onto Water Street, relieved when she saw the bright yellow Jeep parked a few hundred yards away.

Opening the door she sighed. "Am I ever glad to see you." She was rewarded with a brilliant smile and a comforting hug.

Bailey whispered. "I love you, Annie, and I will protect you with my life if need be. I won't let anyone harm you ever. We are in this together, no matter what." Blue eyes darkened with anger and fear.



The following week was uneventful as the women poured over the letters trying to find a common thread that might give them a clue to the identity of the person responsible. Annie really didn't think Phil a suspect as he was married and had kids although Bailey's comment of *rule no one out* made her realize just how vulnerable they were.

"Bailey, do you remember the day we met?"

A smiling face and a loving voice turned to her. "How could I ever forget the best day of my life? What about it?"

"I didn't think much of it at the time but I received an email when I returned from lunch that day. It said something like...you'll meet a stranger who will change your life forever...be careful people aren't always as they seem. Of course I thought of you." A bright smile crossed her face.

Frowning Bailey tilted her head as an eyebrow rose. "I was doomed from the start, wasn't I?"

"I don't understand." Annie thought the comment strange since meeting Bailey had changed her life forever.

"Don't you see? The seed of doubt was planted from the beginning."

"Bailey, I don't doubt you? How can you say that?"

"Yes, you do, Annie. You can't help it, this creep saw to that!" A touch of anger could be heard in her voice.

Moving closer Annie touched Bailey's hand. "I'm sorry. I really don't doubt you." Taking the hand she placed it over her heart. "In here, I know you love me and would never harm me." Then she raised the hand to her lips and gently kissed it.

Smiling Bailey caressed the face with her hand. "I know, baby." For a long moment blue and green held each other in love.

Taking a deep breath Annie continued. "Today I received another email and this one I printed out. Take a look and see what you think."

I have been having strong feelings about you and wanted to warn you. You will be ill advised by someone you trust and it will bring pain. Trust me, there will come a time and place and your life will depend on it. I hope you make the right choice that makes you happy for that is the most important thing. Beware those close to you are not as true as they profess to be.

"Annie, can you think of anyone in the office that's into the occult or that you told about believing in second sight? Anyone at all?"

"I go to work and do my job, that's all. Others stand around gossiping but I'm not one of them. I never speak of my personal life or feelings, besides the occult would be the last thing I would discuss with anyone. Besides, doesn't everyone believe in second sight a little?"

"Annie, did you ever get a bruise and wonder where you got it thinking that something that nasty looking you surely would remember how it happened?"

"Of course, but I don't see what a bruise has to do with this."

"It has to do with off hand comments that you don't remember saying. Like what you just said...doesn't everyone believe in second sight a little...someone could hear that and take it as you do and go from there."

Annie's eyes widened as she realized what Bailey was saying. "It can be anyone, can't it? Shit, what are we going to do? Are we ever going to find this idiot?"

Pulling her lover closer, Bailey whispered into her ear. "We keep looking, Annie, until we come up with answers. And, we will find them for we are in this together. Something this creep is counting on not happening. Together we will be invincible."

They spent the rest of the day going over all the clues they had until Annie finally found something.

"Hey, Bailey, I think I have something. Look at this." At last she found the key.

Sliding down on the floor next to her partner Bailey looked over the shoulder past the blonde hair as she inhaled the sweet fragrance that was Annie. "What did you find?"

"Look on this letter, right here and then on this one and all the rest." She excitedly pointed to all the consistencies.

"Well I'll be. Bet this person didn't even realize what they were doing. Amazing." Bailey was beaming. "You know what this means, don't you?"

"Yep, they are all from the same person." It was the first time in weeks that they both felt like they had some type of handle on this whole mess. "It's a relief to know that it isn't a whole group after us." Annie closed her eyes and leaned back into Bailey as strong arms held her close.

"Baby, now we have to figure out why they are sending the letters. Annie, I don't think they're after you, all these letters seem to be hate mail against me." Bailey gently kissed the head in her arms. "Why do you think this person hates me so much? It is so frustrating to read this garbage and have no defense against it."

"Bailey, you think it's about you? What I don't understand is why? Why would somebody want to do this, what do they have to gain?" Annie kissed the hands holding her then turned around to face her lover. "You have to believe me, I know none of it is true. Yes, there is a part of me that believes it but it's a small part and I know in my heart that you would never do any of the things that you are accused of." Then, in a reverent fashion she kissed the lips before her.

Soon passion was ignited as both women clung to each other groping, touching, feeling and wanting to be as close as possible. "I love you so much, please never leave me."

Annie looked deep into Bailey's eyes, "leave you? How could I do that? You're my heart and soul." She sealed the pledge with a kiss leaving no doubt in her lover's mind how much she was loved.

"What do you say we lock up and go to bed?" A smug smile covered Bailey's face as her eyes ravaged Annie. Standing up she held out her hand and was not disappointed when Annie took it then stood up and gave her what can only be described as a sensuous hug.

Smiling broadly Annie giggled. "Hmmm, you read my mind. Come on, let's go, I can't wait to get you into bed."



Monday found Annie once again in the elevator on her way up to her office. As had been her habit of late she stood to the side eyeing everyone in the elevator. There had been a lull in the letters over the last week but it was not enough to calm her fears.

Unlocking her door she went in put her briefcase down and punched the buttons to listen to the messages. They were all work related except one...

"Hey, beautiful just wanted to let you know I am thinking about you. What do you say we have lunch at the diner? Call me. I love you. Bye."

A goofy smile came over Annie's face as she picked up the phone and dialed the number. Getting the answering machine she left a message...

"Hey, beautiful can't think of anyone else I want to have lunch with. See you there at twelve thirty. Oh, bye the way, I love you too. Bye."

As she replaced the phone she heard a tentative knock on her door. Looking up, she saw her friend Betsy standing there. Frowning she asked. "I thought you were on vacation this week? What's up?" It was then that she noticed the look of grief on the face in the doorway.

"Do you have a minute Annie? I really need to talk to someone."

"Sure. Come on in."

"Thanks, do you mind if I close the door?" Betsy's eyes were pleading.

A momentary flash of fear came over Annie, as she thought of being in her office alone with someone with the door closed. "No, no come on in and sit down Betsy. You look like you've lost your best friend. Want to tell me about it?" This was her friend, who obviously needed help; Annie never would turn away a friend in need.

"Oh, Annie, something terrible has happened and it's all my fault. I don't know what I will do."

Getting up from her chair Annie went around the desk and sat down next to her friend. "What do you mean? What's happened?"

Tears were now flowing freely down Betsy's cheeks. "It is Alexis..." The woman's voice was almost incomprehensible.

"Alexis, what is wrong with Alexis, Betsy?" Annie moved closer to her friend and put an arm around her shoulder.

"Gone...she is gone...suicide." Hands were shaking as she tried to wipe the tears away.

Grabbing a tissue and giving it to her friend she tried to soothe her. "It's going to be okay."

"You don't understand! It was my fault! If I hadn't asked her to leave she would still be alive. I knew she was unstable but I threw her out. How could I be so cruel? I loved her. I don't know what I will do."

"When did this happen?"

"Yesterday. I had all my bags packed and I was on my way out when the news came. I just don't know how I will live with this guilt. If only..." The tears were flowing again.

"Have you gone to see her yet? Want me to go with you?"

Betsy patted her friend's hand. "Thank you, Annie, you are a good friend. She was in Florida with her family; I will need to go there. I just can't bring myself to go yet."

"Why don't I get your things from your office and then we'll get your bags out of your car and I'll take you to the airport. What do you say?"

A shaky voice replied. "Thank you, I would like that very much. My flight leaves in three hours."

Glancing at her watch, Annie calculated she had enough time to do this and be back in time for lunch with Bailey. "Good. You pull yourself together and I will get your things. Be right back." With that Annie got up and left her office, slightly closing the door behind her.



Annie arrived at the quaint diner a few minutes late but that was good, considering her morning. "Hi, sorry I am late, I took Betsy to the airport."

Bailey shook her head as if she couldn't believe what she heard. "Just the two of you?"

"Oh, Bailey, Betsy wouldn't harm a flea. I deposited her at the door and left. See, here I am all in one piece." She spread her arms out and moved a hand down her body as she giggled. Suddenly Annie felt a

chill, as she realized just how stupid she had been. Her face paled as she spoke. "Pretty dumb of me, wasn't it?"

With an eyebrow raised, Bailey simply said. "Yes."

"But, she was so distraught because her former partner, Alexis, committed suicide. What else could I do?" She tried to justify her actions but knew it wasn't working.

"You could have called a taxi or put her on a bus. Annie, now is not the time to let your kindhearted side run wild." Blue fixing on green.

"I know, I just didn't think it would be a problem with Betsy." Gazing at the woman across from her she pushed her bottom lip out a little in a pout until Bailey smiled.

Blowing out a breath she smiled. "I'm glad it turned out okay, this time, you might not be so lucky again." Bailey kept the green eyes, so filled with compassion, captured. "So, how well did you know this Alexis person? Did she seem like a suicide candidate to you?"

"Actually, I never met her. You know how office friendships are, rather casual and not very personal. Betsy has been there for me over the years and I like her very much but as to her ex-partner...never met the woman. I did talk to her on the phone once, that's all I know."

Bailey smiled towards her friend and lover. "You are so wonderful, do you know that? Betsy is lucky to have you for a friend. So, what do you feel like for lunch?" Then wiggling her eyebrows she added. "Of course we could always leave here and you can have me." A lecherous smile crossed her face.

Shaking her head Annie laughed. "Believe me, if I hadn't been away all morning we would be out the door by now. I think I will be forced to eat a Caesar Salad instead." The smile and wink were unmistakable.

"Not only are you wonderful but, you are bad, Annie Banks, very, very bad."

"And, you love every minute of it, Bailey...every single minute. Do you know I love you?"

"Oh, yes, I most certainly do."



The day had been nasty with raging rain and blustery winds. A cold gust of wind blew into the house as Annie opened and closed the door. Bailey removed her glasses and looked up to see the disheveled, wet woman. "Hey, nice day for ducks but not for you." Laughing, she then got up and walked over to this precious, but soaked woman.

Green eyes flashed. "You think this is funny, do you?" Then she took off her coat and shook it as hard as she could in Bailey's direction. Laughing she added. "Now that's funny." Watching Bailey raise her hands in an attempt to cover up she laughed even more..

Gathering her lover in her arms she kissed her. "How was your day? I have all your favorites for dinner."

"Oh, you think a nice meal can make up for your meanness, do you?" Annie was giggling as she hugged Bailey back. "It will do for a start." Disengaging herself she added. "First you need to see the letter I received today." An ominous tone was in her voice.

"Damn! Okay, let me have it. Can't wait to see what the jerk has to say this time."

"I don't think you will be happy. Just a minute let me put my things down and I'll get it." Going to the hall closet she put her briefcase down then looking at her coat decided to hang it on the banister to dry. She was in no hurry for Bailey to see this particular letter for it was incredibly nasty towards her lover.

Finally, she came back into the room and handed Bailey the mail watching her face as she read it.

Annie,

What has that woman done for you to be so glib and believe all her lies? She tells you all sorts of things that endear you to her but they are all lies, nothing but lies.

You think it is so wonderful how she speaks about her mother but that is not what she tells others. Oh no, she hates the woman and thinks of her as a burden. This woman you have come to trust has a black heart...DO NOT trust her Annie she is a bottom feeder.

I know she has endeared herself to your friends and they all think she is some sort of saint but she is Satan. She has several

cronies in her office and together they conspire against you and brag about the great job they are doing making you believe it is someone else. One of these cronies came to me because she felt guilty about how they have cast a shadow on an innocent. I told your lover that she is to stop using the office and our facilities for this...it is just not right.

She is nothing more than a snake in the grass Annie. Please think about what you are doing and get out before you are further embroiled in her schemes. In the end you will be brought down along with the innocents she is dragging into this.

Murial

Annie watched as Bailey read the letter and saw only a blank look on the face that she loved. Wondering if it was shock or resignation as she asked cautiously. "What do you think?"

At first Bailey just stared at her without expression then, shook her head in acknowledgement. "What do I think?" Her cheeks reddened in anger. "ENOUGH! That is what I think. How can anyone be so vile as to write this shit? To say that about my mother is despicable. I have had it, Annie! ENOUGH!"

Annie moved towards the woman in an effort to comfort her. "Bailey." She said as she touched an arm.

Jerking her arm away, she hissed as she headed for the door. "Don't, Annie, just don't!"

"Where are you going? It's pouring rain out there."

"Don't care, I need some fresh air."

"Can I go with you?"

"It's a free country, do as you wish." With that she was out the door.

Annie grabbed her coat and put it on as she rushed out the door following her lover. She had to practically run to keep up with the long strides of Bailey. "Bailey, will you please talk to me." She pleaded as large raindrops splashed about them and the wind seemed to blow clear to the bone. "You are getting soaking wet; you don't even have a coat on. Please, Bailey, stop!"

Spinning around Bailey looked straight into Annie's eyes. "Not until I am good and ready to! If you don't like it go back to the house!" Then

just as quickly she spun back around and continued down the sidewalks of the well tended neighborhood.

Finally, Bailey arrived at a park and sat down on a picnic table with her feet resting on the bench. The thick foliage of the trees turned the raindrops into large splats that randomly dropped around them. Annie wasn't sure if it was rain or tears she saw on the face that she loved. Sitting down next to her, she cautiously put her arm around the soaked shoulders and was relieved when the gesture wasn't rebuffed.

"Hey, you want to talk about it? I am so sorry I got you mixed up in this. It breaks my heart to see you hurting and this walk in the rain brought me to a decision, Bailey." She looked over to see if there was a response. There was none. "I will handle this from now on and never show you any of the messages I receive."

Bailey finally turned towards Annie, "You can't do that. We are in this together, remember?" A long slow breath followed. "I just can't understand how someone could do this, Annie. I sat with my mother and held her hand as she died, how could they say such a thing? How can anyone be so malicious and evil?"

Annie drew her love even closer. "I know, baby, this person doesn't know you or those words never would have been written. Let's face it, they don't know you at all."

Suddenly, Bailey's eyes opened wide in amazement. "That's it! Do you have the letter with you?"

Annie scrunched her eyes. "What's it?"

"Annie, this is important, do you have the letter with you?"

"No, it's back at the house. In case you hadn't noticed it is pouring down rain out here."

Grabbing a hand, Bailey excitedly said. "Come on let's go, I need to see that letter." With that they were off and running, literally.

Once back at the house, dripping wet, Bailey headed for the living room and the letter.

"Bailey, slow down!" Annie demanded. "Dry off first. That letter won't be any good to us if you get it all wet."

"Shit! Look at me, I look like a drowned rat. You're right of course, Annie." Just then Annie tossed her a fluffy towel she had retrieved

from the bathroom. "Thanks," she said with a smile. "You always take care of me. Have I told you yet today that I love you?"

Annie smiled and shook her head. "Yes, very early this morning. Remember?" She wiggled her eyebrows then winked. "I would love a repeat performance, but I think we need to look at that letter first, don't you?"

"Right again, but don't think I'll forget to show you how much I love you later on." A smile, that could only be described as sensual, crossed Bailey's face.

Laughing, Annie replied. "Not to worry love, I will be sure and remind you if you forget." Then she gave Bailey a quick kiss on the cheek. "Now, are you going to tell me why we had to run all the way home?"

Pulling Annie down to sit with her on the comfortable easy chair, Bailey scanned the letter. "Yep, just as I thought. Annie this isn't about me. Look here." She pointed to a passage. "I don't have cohorts at work Annie or someone to tell me not to do something...I'm it! Do you think this person has the wrong people?"

Annie was puzzled by this turn of events. "Do you really think this person has the wrong couple? That sounds rather outrageous to me."

The look on Bailey's face told the story. She hung her head as she spoke. "No, I don't. But, I do think this is not about me, as we had thought." She was reluctant to make eye contact with her lover.

Lifting the chin gently, as green met blue, she spoke softly. "Tell me what you're thinking, please. Don't spare me, Bailey, I need to know."

For a long moment Bailey just stared at the green eyes that were so trusting. "It has nothing to do with me personally, but everything to do with you." Seeing the quizzical look on the face in front of her she continued. "This attack would have happened no matter who your partner was. This person doesn't want you with anyone. Once your lover is discredited then you will be free for the creep to pursue. So you will recognize them as something other than...a friend, a co-worker maybe even someone you don't even acknowledge. This person wants you to notice them. Everything that is written is supposition and innuendo, no facts just hints at half-truths. This idiot made a mistake in assuming I have a normal type job."

"That's right! Amazing! Seems like it was also supposed that I am some idiot who can't see through the sham. Am I that gullible, Bailey?"

"Gullible? No. You are too trusting, would be more like it. This person thinks that you can be manipulated...perhaps at some point he or she pulled something over on you and they think they can continue to do that." Bailey's voice was soft and consoling.

Hanging her head, Annie sighed. "How did this ever happen? I can't imagine who would be doing this." Raising her head she continued.

"What do we do now, Bailey, we aren't any closer to knowing who it is?"

"Ah, but we are, love." A sadistic smile crossed her face. "Let me think on it then we can formulate a plan of attack." Gathering Annie in her arms she held her close and whispered. "I love you Annie, I won't let anything happen to you, ever."



It was Friday and Annie was relieved. Work had been chaotic all week with one long meeting after another. Flopping down in her chair she blew out a breath as she punched in her code to listen to her voice mail. No messages of real interest to her except for her daily dose of Bailey's love. Smiling she found herself in a particularly good mood. A knock on her door made her look up to see who was there.

"Hi Phil, quite a meeting today wasn't it?"

The small man had a broad smile on his face as he leered at Annie.

"Yes it was. I wanted to stop by and tell you what an outstanding job you did."

The look on his face was not lost to Annie as she felt the hairs on her neck prickle. "Thank you, Phil. I think the whole team stepped up to the plate on this one." Silently she was praying for someone to come by or call so she didn't have to deal with him any longer.

"We all sure did...and that killer outfit you have on today didn't hurt either. Well, I'm off. See you Monday." With that he left leaving Annie trying to comprehend what he had said.

Getting up from her chair she left the office and went to Betsy's office. "Hey, do you have a minute?"

Betsy looked up from her work and smiled. "Sure, anytime for you, Annie. What's up?"

"I had the strangest visit from Phil Soneson, he told me that my killer outfit helped the meeting today. First of all I am his boss and he shouldn't speak that way to me but also, isn't that sexual harassment?" Inside she was trembling as this spooked her.

"Hmm, I'm not sure it is, Annie. Sounds to me like one of Phil's typical comments, a backhanded compliment would be my guess. Did he say anything else?"

Shrugging her shoulders Annie said. "Not really...he did compliment me on my presentation. I guess this sounds really stupid, doesn't it?" She felt her face reddening as she realized how idiotic she sounded.

Betsy came around from her desk and stood by Annie's side. "What's going on, Annie? You haven't been yourself for some time now. Want to talk about it?"

Patting her friend's arm she weakly smiled. "Your plate is too full right now, Betsy. Besides, I don't want anyone else to be involved and get hurt." Remembering her friend's loss she added. "How are you doing? I know it has been a rough few weeks for you."

Betsy laughed. "Nice try at changing the subject. I am fine but I am worried about you. If you ever need someone to talk to you know where to call." Smiling she patted the hand that rested on her arm.

"Thanks my friend, I will keep that in mind. Now, I think I will pack my things up and head home. Any plans for the weekend?" She asked as she headed for the door.

"Not really, I might have some friends in for dinner. We usually like to get together and after dinner we read a story out loud to each other."

Annie paused for a moment before walking down the hallway. "Sounds like fun. I am glad you are keeping yourself busy."

"You are welcome to join us." Betsy offered.

"Sorry, maybe another time. I already have plans for the weekend. I will see you Monday. Bye for now." Turning she started back towards her office.



"What the hell you are doing going through my desk?" Annie roared. Eric Flowers, a smarmy little man, was bent over her desk looking for something.

The man jerkily turned around. "Oh, Ms. Banks, you scared me."

"I repeat, what are you doing going through my desk?" She glared at the man who always seemed to be lurking in the shadows.

"No, no you don't understand, I was looking for something to write you a note. That's all I was doing." His squeaky, annoying voice replied. "I would never go through anyone's desk, ever. Especially yours, Ms. Banks."

Her eyes were no longer a soft emerald green but deepened into a dark forest green. "A note, you say? Exactly what type of note would YOU need to leave me?" Each word was enunciated with precision.

"Ah, um, Phi...Mr. Soneson told me on his way out to let you know there was an envelope for you at the reception desk. I came straight away to your office and when you weren't here I thought I would leave you a message. I...I...didn't have any paper or pen." The little man was sweating bullets. "No harm was meant."

Nodding her head Annie cleared her throat. "I see. Tell you what, Eric, why not go to reception and get the envelope for me. If you come back with one I will know you are telling the truth...if you don't then I will have your ass fired. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, yes I do." He slid past her and started out the door. "Be right back."

The petite blonde let out a long breath, finally acknowledging the fear that had gripped her. Sitting down she surveyed her desktop for any signs of missing items. Everything seemed to be as she left it but at this point in time she couldn't be sure. She now found herself second guessing everything and everyone. It seemed like only a brief moment before came Eric with the envelope.

"Here you go, Ms. Banks. See, I was telling the truth...now I won't get fired, right?"

Annie snatched the manila envelope out of his hand. "Get out of here and don't ever come in my office again!" The little man practically ran out of her office. Annie smiled as she wondered if he was going to wet his pants. *Stupid little man.*

Looking at the envelope a cold shiver ran up her spine...she knew what it was. "DAMN! I don't think I can take much more of this." With

those words she threw the envelope at the door then put her head down on her arms. "Why?" Was all she could sob.

"Is this how mail is delivered now, Annie?" A voice said.

Looking up she saw Leslie Dawson standing in the door holding the envelope. "I'm sorry, my temper got the best of me."

"Well, it came at me with such force I thought I would be decapitated. What's wrong? Girlfriend troubles?" A light lilt was in the woman's voice.

Annie glared. "Excuse me? What did you just say?"

The woman's eyes were bulging as her face reddened. "I'm sorry, the gossip around the office is you are gay."

Standing up and going around to the door, Annie stood in front of the woman. "Tell me, Leslie, should I believe the gossip I hear about you?"

"Hey, don't get all huffy, I said I was sorry!"

"What I do or do not do in my private life is no business of yours or anyone else in this office. We are here to work not spend the day flapping our mouths about others. Perhaps you should look for a different line of work...say as a gossip columnist." Angry didn't begin to cover what Annie was feeling.

"You're the one that threw this envelope at me!" Leslie shouted.

Grabbing the envelope Annie was about to give her retort when Betsy stepped between them.

"Leslie, leave, please."

"Hey, I didn't start this, Miss Goody Goody did. You all think she is so wonderful and nice. WRONG she is nothing but a bitch." Suddenly remembering who she was talking to and about she added. "I don't care if she is the boss, she threw something that could have caused me injury!"

Flashing Leslie an angry look, Betsy said. "Go now!" There was no denying she meant business as Leslie left the area.

Taking Annie by the arm she led her into the office and closed the door. "What was that all about, Annie? Now, I'm even more worried about you. It isn't like you to be totally out of control. If you won't talk with me about it you need to talk with someone."

Annie was totally humiliated by her actions. "I'm sorry, I was completely out of line. I will be sure and apologize to Leslie on Monday. Right now, I think I will go home now and have a nice hot bath."

Betsy stared at her friend, who was clearly agitated and it had something to do with the envelope she clutched in her hand. "You're really in no condition to be driving, Annie, is there someone I can call to come take you home?"

Looking at the portly woman, who had always been so nice to her, Annie could only hear Bailey's voice...trust no one, Annie. No one! "Thanks Betsy, but I will be fine. I'm going to sit here, collect my wits and then go home." Looking at the woman again she added. "Don't worry I won't run anyone down." Then she smiled warmly.

"Will you do me a favor and call me when you get home? I will be in my office for another few hours." Her voice was pleading with her friend.

"Yes, I will. Now, you go back to that mountain of work...I promise to call you." Smiling as she gently lead the woman to the door.

"I will be waiting for the call." Betsy said over her shoulder as she exited the office.

Gathering her belongings, Annie stuffed the envelope in her pocket, locked the door, and then headed home to her salvation, one Bailey Colson.



Closing the door behind her Annie leaned back against its coolness, closed her eyes and breathed in the smells of home. At last she was safe. Slowly opening her eyes she beheld the wonder of Bailey before her, all decked out in a very revealing red teddy. Then, the heavenly creation moved towards her crooning her favorite Norah Jones song.

"Come away with me in the night, come away with me...I see my poor baby has had a long day at the office." Relieving Annie of her briefcase and pocketbook she cast them aside as she slowing removed the coat. "Mmmm, you look delicious." Then, stepping even closer, her arms surrounded her lover and pulled the zipper to her dress down. The dress fell to the floor as Annie stood there in her slip. "*Come away with me and we'll kiss...*" she softly sang as she took the small hand and led them to the bathroom.

Flickering lights danced on the walls and ceiling with the romantic glow of candles. The sensual aroma of jasmine filled the warm steamy air. A wonderful bubble bath beckoned her weary body. Reaching down, Bailey slowly lifted the slip up and over Annie's head, while her eyes showed appreciation for the beautiful body. Unfastening the bra she slipped it off as well only leaving the lacy panties. Once those were removed she led the vision of beauty to the tub and held her hand as she slid into the wonderful warmth.

As she felt the tension begin leaving her body Annie closed her eyes and whispered. "I have been dreaming about this moment all day."

Kneeling down beside the tub, Bailey began to lather the waiting back. "Let me soothe all your worries away, love. Tonight we will lock out the world, no phones, no visitors only you and I." Smiling she kissed the top of the blonde head. "*Come away with me where they can't tempt us with their lies, I want to walk with you on a cloudy day, come away with me...*"

"I love the sound of that, Bailey, it has been one hell of a day." Closing her eyes she melted into the strong hands that were gently massaging her back. "Nothing to bother us, how I love our Friday night dates." Suddenly she opened her eyes and sat up straight. "Shit! We will be bothered if you don't bring me a phone!"

Bailey cocked her head and smiled. "Anything for you, love. What's up?"

"Nothing really, I just need to call Betsy and tell her I got home safe or she will be calling and I don't want that." Annie called out as Bailey went down the hall for the portable.

"Here you go. I think I have missed something here." she said as she watched Annie dial.

"Hi, it's me, I'm home safe. Guess you stepped out of the office. See you on Monday, bye." Turning the phone off Annie looked up and saw the grimace on Bailey's face. "It's nothing really...stop frowning, you are more beautiful with a smile."

Bailey lowered herself into the tub and enfolded Annie in her arms. "Why don't you tell me about this nothing."

"Oh, Bailey, can't it wait? I need you, please, I don't want to spoil tonight." She said pleadingly.

Bailey pulled her closer. "Sweetie, I can tell you are upset. If you share it then it will be out in the open and we will deal with it tomorrow. You aren't going to be able to relax until you let it out." Gently she lowered her head so she could kiss the luscious neck.

Annie related the events of the day and how embarrassed she was on the way home remembering her outburst. "I can't believe I acted like that, Bailey, it just isn't like me."

"Shhh, it's okay, we will sort it all out tomorrow. For now I can only think of one thing...*Come away with me and I'll never stop loving you...*"

Bailey let Annie set the mood and tone of the night. Throughout the evening into the early morning hours they held each other close whispering words of love and devotion. Secure in the knowledge that neither was alone and would always be loved they fell asleep in each other's arms.



Saturday found the women working in the yard. Bailey mowed the lawn as Annie tended to the flowerbeds. After that was done they sat by their pond and watched their six fish swim through the cascading water of the waterfall. This was their favorite time of the day for it gave each some much-needed peace from the hectic world they lived in.

Rising up from her seat Annie smiled. "Want a beer?"

"Sounds good. Why don't I take you to Wilson's and we can have a beer or two and some of their great Nachos. I might even spring for some wings." Bailey wanted to ask about the day before but was waiting for the right moment. Maybe going out would be the right time.

"Wings you say? Hmmm, that sounds like an offer too good to refuse." Holding her hand out she pulled Bailey up and gathered her in her arms. "I love you. Did you know that?"

Smiling, as she got lost in the sea of green eyes she sighed. "Baby, you show me every minute of the day. I love you too. Come on, let's go, I can hear those Nachos calling my name."

Laughing the two went off arm and arm as they collected the car keys and set off to their favorite hangout.



Wilson's was the typical dark moody neighborhood bar. The walls were filled with sports memorabilia while a jukebox continually played old country standards. The atmosphere invited everyone to come in and have a good meal and a fun time. Patrons could sit around the bar, at a small intimate table or in a booth and know if they wanted to be alone they could be.

The women entered and were greeted by the friendly bartender, Nancy. "Hi, Ladies. Good to see you."

"Hey, Nan, can you send a couple of drafts over our way?"

"Sure thing, anything else?"

"Yeah, some of those fabulous nachos. I have been dreaming about them all day." Bailey laughed as she bantered with the woman.

Annie tugged at her lover's sleeve. "You promised wings."

"Oh, dear me I forgot." Bailey teased. "You sure you want those greasy things? I will share my nachos with you."

Eyebrows raised and green darts were shot. "You promised!"

Laughing Bailey added. "And, an order of wings...extra hot."

"Thank you." Annie said as she led them to a back, secluded booth.

Once their order came they began indulging their senses in the delicious fare in front of them. Laughing, Bailey reached over and wiped wing sauce off of Annie's cheek.

"Didn't know you were that hungry, Bailey, you can have a wing if you want one." Then she winked and offered a meaty morsel.

"You're wonderful." As she was gazing into green eyes the waitress came.

Clearing her throat the stout woman asked. "Need anything? A couple more beers?"

Bailey never took her eyes away from the pools of green before her.

"Sure, two more would be fine." Reaching across the table she took a small hand and pulled it to her lips and kissed it. The strain of the last few months was evident on the beautiful face. "Anne..."

Annie scrunched up her face. "What's wrong? You never call me that unless there is trouble, out with it my friend."

There was a long silence as the beers were delivered. "Thanks." Blue searched deep into green looking for the answer but finding none. Finally, Bailey took a deep breath and spoke. "We need to talk about yesterday and I need to see the letter."

Annie tried to lower her eyes but the blue held them. "I know." She whispered. "Just don't know how much more I can take, Bailey, I seem to be frightened of everyone."

Bailey got up, slid in next to Annie and put her arm around the smaller shoulders in a comforting gesture.

In the distance, eyes narrowed, as they could no longer see the woman with long dark hair. The woman was a definite thorn and should be eliminated; the only question was how.

"Annie, I have some ideas but first we need to read that letter. Do you have it with you?"

Slowly Annie reached into her pocket and placed the envelope on the table. "I haven't even opened it, Bailey, I wanted us to read it together." A lone tear escaped from the pools of green. "I'm frightened."

Hugging her love closer, Bailey sighed, "I know you are but you have to remember that we will get through this together. These letters will lead us to the person, I know it. They will give us knowledge and with that we will have understanding. With understanding we will know who it is." Picking up the envelope she opened it and they began to read...

Annie,

What hold does that bitch have over you? How can a smart woman fall for her line of shit? No doubt she has professed her innocence to you but everything you have read about her is true. Why not ask her about the woman that made such a scen when the slut left her...the woman turned up missing. She is evil to the core Annie, so when you end up missing, don't say you weren't warned. It was absolutely unbeleavable to see you running down the street in the rain after her. Have you no pride? What hold does that bitch have over you? Obviously she has you so far under her spell you won't believe anything bad about her. What a fool you are being. Don't be so glibble Annie...you are too smart for that. Can't you see your life

depends on getting away from her fast? Run Annie...run before it is too late. She is evil to the core Annie.

Since you choose not to believe the wrotten word expect to find a package arriving for you containing all the mail she has sent to your friend warning them to stay away from you. There will also be some photos of past liasons...some I think you will recognize. Seeing is believing...you will be shocked when all this is reveled to you. Perhaps then you will see the evil one for what she is.

Karen

Annie was shaking, Bailey was seething.

In a small voice Annie spoke. "We are being watched and followed, Bailey."

Bailey leaned over and peered out of the booth to the patrons in the bar. "Annie, I'm going to get out and I want you to go look around and see if you recognize anyone. Then go to the bathroom and I'll watch if anyone pays attention to you."

"Do I have to?"

"I'm afraid so sweetheart. Don't worry, I will be watching over you and won't let anything happen. Trust me." Then she patted a shoulder. "Go on, make sure you notice everyone."

"I do trust you, Bailey." She smiled a small smile. "Of course, if you don't move, I can't do my sleuthing."

Shaking her head, Bailey slid out of the seat making way for her love to get out. "I'm right here, you will be safe." Then she winked as she gave a swift pat on Annie's backside.

Bailey sat back down on her original side so she could watch the other patrons only to realize that she had no idea what Annie's co-workers looked like.

As Annie moved through the dark bar she tried to notice everyone there. Back in a dark corner she thought she recognized the shadow but when she looked again it was gone. On her return trip she again scanned the room but saw no one she knew.

"Anything?"

Annie's brows furrowed. "No...not sure. I thought I saw Phil but the lighting is so poor I can't be sure. Probably my imagination for when I looked again no one was there."

"Where about do you think he was?"

Looking around the back of the booth she looked for the exact place. "Over there on the left side of the bar where it is so dark."

"I saw someone leave from that area but I thought it was a woman not a man. You need to show me pictures of these people so I know who I am looking for."

"A woman? Really? I have some pictures from last year's picnic I think they're all there."

"Good. Now, I have a plan that might help us find this jerk."

"I'm ready for anything that will end this nightmare, Bailey."

Bailey got up and once again slid in next to Annie only this time she checked the next booth to see if anyone was there. No one was. "If it's okay with you, I have lined up a profiler to look over all the letters and give us an idea on who this person might be."

Annie cocked her head. "A profiler? You mean like on television? Do you really think this person can tell us something useful?"

A long slow sigh was heard then shaking her head Bailey said, "Yes, I think it will help us. It will narrow down the list of suspects. Right now we suspect everyone. This person is a psychiatrist who has helped the police from time to time." Shrugging her shoulders she added. "Other than finding the consistencies in the letters we really don't have anything to go on. It's a start love, and we need that."

Laying her head on the strong shoulder next to her Annie also sighed. "How soon can we get started?"

Reaching in her pocket Bailey took out her cell. "How about right now?"



Meredith Armstrong was a small woman with intense features. She could not be called good looking by any means but she was striking. Her short graying locks accentuate dark brown eyes, dark skin and full lips. There was no denying her presence in a room. Sitting in the

comfortable living room she slowly read each message Annie had received.

The two women watched Meredith's facial expressions as she read. Sometimes her eyebrows would rise as if in surprise and other times they would squeeze together as if she were puzzled. Finally she put the papers down and looked directly at them both.

"Annie, do you have any idea who might have sent these?"

"I wish I did." She whispered. "Have you come up with any ideas about this person?"

"I would like to take these with me and go over them in greater detail if you don't mind."

Turning first to Bailey for confirmation, Annie replied. "Of course." Her voice reflecting her dejection with the lack of information.

Picking up on her partner's mood Bailey asked. "Is there anything you can tell us...anything at all?"

"I know you are anxious to have answers but I wouldn't be doing my job if I wasn't thorough. I can tell you one thing though."

Both women perked up and looked at the woman with great interest.

"They all appear to have been written by the same person...there is more but I want to be absolutely certain before we discuss this any further. I will be back in touch with you by Wednesday." With that she gathered up the papers and put them in her portfolio and stood up.

Annie also stood up and held her hand out. "Ms. Armstrong, thank you for taking us on. I need answers or I will never be able to live a normal life. This is getting out of hand."

Meredith smiled as she shook the offered hand. "We will talk more on Wednesday, I will call you about a time. Goodnight to you both."

Bailey walked towards the door with Meredith, as she opened the door she spoke. "Keep her close to you at all times, Bailey...I fear she is in great danger."

Bailey just stood there stunned as the woman walked down the sidewalk to her car. A bolt of fear struck her and she scanned the street for strange cars or people. Closing the door she locked it with

both locks and went to the back door and did the same. "Annie?" She called out.

"I'm right here you don't need to shout. What's up?" She said as she walked closer and hugged her partner.

"How 'bout we make some popcorn and watch a movie tonight?" Returning the hug she buried her face in the clean smelling hair.

"Thought we were going out tonight?" Annie backed away so she could look into Bailey's face.

"I'm really tired. Do you mind?" How could she tell her about the danger? Wednesday would be soon enough to spin her world more out of control.

Smiling, Annie returned to hugging Bailey. "No, I don't mind at all, it means I get you all to myself on the couch. What movie did you have in mind?"



When Annie arrived at work on Monday she found her office door unlocked. After scanning the corridor she slowly pushed the door open fully and peered in. Carefully she entered the office holding her keys between her fingers as a weapon. Knowing the only place someone might hide would be under her desk she quietly moved in that direction. She was relieved to find no one there. Letting out the breath she had been holding she laid her briefcase on the desk then took off her coat to hang on the back of the door. Then, she saw it...there on the back of the door hung a crude doll with a knife in the heart. A note read...DEATH TO THE BITCH.

Annie gasped at the sight and let out a small cry. Hurrying over to the phone she quickly dialed the familiar number. Collecting her composure she waited while the phone rang hoping Bailey would be there.

"Bailey Colson."

She breathed a sigh of relief. "Oh, Bailey, I am so glad you are there." It was impossible for her to keep the quiver out of her voice.

"Annie, what's the matter?" Instantly Bailey knew something was wrong.

"When I got here the door was unlocked."

"Are you okay?"

"Yes, no one was inside but, there was a message on the door. Its a small doll with a knife through the heart and a message, death to the bitch."

"Annie, don't touch anything and call the police. This has gone too far. I will be there as soon as I can."

A new sense of purpose came over Annie. She would not give in to this person, she would not be beaten and she would not let Bailey be hurt.

"No, don't come. I am not calling the police either, Bailey. I will call Doctor Armstrong and see if she can come take a look. It is time we turned the tables on this idiot."

"Just how do you plan to do that, Annie, we don't even know if it is a man or a woman?"

"Not sure, but I will come up with something. I will not allow anyone to threaten you, Bailey."

There was something in Annie's voice that told Bailey she would get nowhere at the moment. "Do you have Armstrong's number?"

"Yep. I will call you later on. Bye."

"Annie, I love you...." She knew that message was not heard as the phone disconnected before she spoke. Holding the phone to her cheek she stared off into the distance trying to formulate a plan. She dialed quickly hoping the man would be there as time was critical now. "Hey, Jimmy, this is Bailey. I have a job for you."



Meredith Armstrong arrived in Annie's office an hour later.

"Have you moved anything?"

"Nope, it is as I found it."

"Did you call the police?" Meredith asked as she carefully looked over the message, doll and knife.

"No." Annie watched the woman's movements with interest. It was as if she were trying to see the door from every angle, she walked around the office always keeping the door in her sight.

"Why not?" Meredith gave a puzzled look.

"Because I think that is exactly what this person wants me to do. Panic and show fear...I will not give anyone that satisfaction!"

A broad smile came across Meredith's face giving her an almost friendly appearance. "Good for you, Annie. Most of these creeps get great satisfaction out of seeing their victims react to what they have done." Then she cocked her head and smiled again. "You've had enough, I take it?"

Annie shook her head. "I don't like being terrorized and manipulated and I won't do that anymore."

"It might be dangerous."

"Yes, it might, but I don't think this person is counting on my being dangerous too." The look on her face told the story...she was not going to be the prey anymore.

Patting Annie on the shoulder, Meredith collected her coat and headed for the door. "I'm done here. I need you and Bailey to be in my office on Wednesday, at three. I will see you then." With that she left the office.

Annie stood there staring at the doorway for some time before she sat back down at her desk. "No one threatens Bailey." She muttered as she turned to her computer to check her mail. One from a tbrazil@mail.com caught her eye, the subject: Betsy's health. Opening the message she was surprised to learn that Betsy had gone to visit her daughter only to end up in the hospital for an emergency. Quickly she wrote a reply asking for the name of the hospital and the details of her friend's illness. Then to her surprise a familiar name popped up on IM.

Hi beautiful. How are you doing now?

Annie felt a smile cross her face as she responded to her love.

Wonderful, now that I see you. Want to take me to lunch?

The response made her smile broader.

That would make my day. I will pick you up at 11:45

Great see you then. Bye I love you.

I love you more. Bye

With that, Bailey's name disappeared from the screen.



It was three o'clock on Wednesday as Annie and Bailey sat in the outer office of Dr. Meredith Armstrong. Bailey took Annie's hand in an effort to calm her nervousness.

"Just like a doctor, keep you waiting." Annie giggled at the remark. "Wonder if we will have to have an examination or will she just assume we are healthy?"

Again Annie laughed and then slapped Bailey on the leg. "Silly, she isn't that kind of doctor. Bailey, are you scared?"

For a moment Bailey thought. "Scared? No, I wouldn't call it that. It's more like apprehension, what if she has nothing, only vague ideas. We need something concrete if we are going to move on and end this."

Shaking her head Annie spoke. "That's how I feel too. After Monday, I am bound and determine not to let this psycho run my life anymore!" Then she squeezed Bailey's hand. "I love you, Bailey, no one threatens you...no one. Just as you would protect me with your life I will do the same for you. This jerk doesn't know the person they are messing with. No more will I be afraid!"

Just then the door opened. "Good afternoon, ladies. Won't you please come into my office. Sorry, my last patient needed extra TLC today." She gestured for them to sit at a round table. "Please have a seat and we will get started."

"Thank you. I hope you have some useful information for us Dr. Armstrong." Annie said as she took a seat next to Bailey.

"Meredith, please. When we are done it will be up to you to decide if it is useful or not. First, I would like to reiterate what I said to you last Saturday. I am not a mind reader or a fortune teller, I derive all my conclusions from years of experience in both clinical and field work."

Bailey looked at Annie then spoke. "We understand that, Meredith, hopefully with your insight we can find a starting point to this person's identity."

"Hopefully what I have to say will help you achieve that. Remember that most of the time it is the small bits of information that lead to the biggest revelations." Meredith looked at the two women for a moment before she spoke again. "Since we do not know this person's

identity I think it will make it more real if you put a name to the person."

"Sounds logical to me. What do you think, Bailey?"

"Yep, time this phantom had a name." Bailey could see the sense in this exercise.

"Specter is another word for phantom what about that?"

Meredith shook her head. "Yes, Annie I think specter is a great name." She knew that if Annie was to ever feel in control of the situation she would have to be the one giving the name. Watching Bailey she was sure that she was thinking the same thing...an identity would give some shape and substance to the stalker.

With that she took out her notes. "I have this all written in a report for you but I like to work directly from my notes for they are my first impressions." Then she handed each a packet containing several pages. "Before you read these, I would like you to hear what I have to say. Then you can read this over and we can discuss it further."

"Sounds fair." Annie tried to keep the knots in her stomach from reflecting in her words.

"You are right to think all this comes from the same person. There are too many similarities in the phrases, spelling and style not to be. When I first read the letters on Saturday I felt this was a man but the incident on Monday changed that. That kind of action is usually that of a woman. This person is full of rage and anger towards you, Annie but, at the same time, loves you deeply. Bailey, you are a nuisance that needs to be removed, I would take the death threats as real.

This person is probably middle-aged with a low self-esteem. I don't think many friends are in their life. If you look at the letters the paper is of poor quality and the typing seems to be all over the place. This person is not very orderly and probably overweight and rather slovenly although I think in the work place you don't see that as much but it is still there.

I think that this is a control freak, that hates not being in charge and number one. That is the reason for the threat against Bailey; she is number one in your life Annie. I think this person is very convincing as a liar and has probably lied numerous times with good results. Manipulation is evident just by the lengths gone to with the letters

and the numerous names. This person is trying to convince you that there are numerous people that feel the same way...probably convinced you to do something in the past with the same tactic.

This person's ego is huge and considers them self as highly intelligent although I see no signs of that...creative in a crude way yet very sloppy in what they do. The letters seem to degrade when they are agitated such as the last one. It rambles and has numerous errors obviously very upset when you were seen running in the rain, Annie.

My conclusion is that this person has the potential of being very dangerous and is escalating as you refuse to heed the warnings, Annie. Manipulation hasn't worked, the next step is violence, I'm afraid."

Annie and Bailey sat listening, wondering if this would ever end without one of them getting hurt or heaven forbid, dying.

Finally, Bailey spoke up. "Let me see if I have this straight? This person is a fat loser who has no friends and could either be a man or a woman. And, on top of all that, they are obsessed with Annie and want anyone she is associated with out of the way. Does that about sum it up?"

Annie nudged Bailey. "Bailey, stop." Her eyes bore daggers into the woman next to her.

"I wish it were that simple, Bailey. Twice now this person has mentioned letters and photos as proof. So far nothing, right?"

Both women shook their heads.

"If you actually receive something of that nature then we will know this person means business. If, on the other hand, nothing comes of it, then perhaps the danger is not as passionate. We will have to wait and see on that one."

"How long?" Annie asked eagerly.

"You received the letter on Friday, this is Wednesday...I think if you have nothing by the weekend you will never get anything."

"That is a good thing, right?"

"Yes, Annie, that is a good thing. Right now all we can do is wait and see if anything else comes up. It's quite possible that the incident on Monday was the culmination of the rage...we will just have to wait and see."

Bailey took a long and hard look at Meredith before she spoke. "What are the chances that was the culmination?"

Meredith sighed. "To be honest, I'll be surprised if that is the end."

Bailey stood up and held out her hand. "Thank you, Doctor, we will keep in touch." Then looking down to Annie and smiling she said. "How about I treat you to dinner?"

Annie was clearly shocked at the actions of her lover and gave Bailey the *what is going on* look. "I'd love it. Meredith, thank you for everything. Don't take this the wrong way but I hope we don't see you again under these circumstances." Then she held her hand out.

Meredith laughed. "I hope so too, Annie. Please let me know if anything else occurs and I will keep going over what we have in case I missed something." Letting go of Annie's hand she turned to Bailey who definitely was distressed by something. "Are you okay, Bailey?"

Smiling Bailey answered in less than convincing voice. "I am great! Haven't eaten all day though, and I'm famished. You ready to go, Annie?"

"Yep, right behind you. Bye, Meredith, take care."

As the doctor watched the two women depart she couldn't help but feel uneasy. *Hmm, just why was Bailey acting so strange?*



Nothing happened until Friday when Annie received the now familiar envelope. Previously they would make her stomach do flip-flops but now they just angered her. Tearing it open she read...

Annie,

Guess you are wondering about the package...ask the slut...know what she did...she went to the mail room and got real friendly with the girl there...if you know what I mean...the story is that the mons coming from that room last Tuesday could be heard all over the building...then what do you know the package comes for you and mysteriously disappears...wonder where it is...why not ask the bitch...one of your friends tol her to go to hell when she warned her not to go near you...guess what happened to her...she got hit by a car last weekend...now she is out of work...she got

the message from the evil one loud and clear...you will be next...don't be so glib...get away while there is still time.

A Friend

The letter fell to the desktop as Annie spun around in her chair and opened her email. Scanning through the messages she found what she was looking for...the mail about Betsy. Quickly she punched in the number for Betsy's office but only got voice mail. Next, she flipped through her book until she found Betsy's home number. Impatiently she drummed her fingers waiting for an answer...finally she heard a voice.

"Betsy? Is that you?" The voice was familiar but not Betsy's; she didn't think but, then again, she had been ill.

The person cleared their throat and spoke softly. "No, this is Teresa, her daughter. Whom am I speaking to please?"

"Hi, Teresa, this is Annie Banks, I work with your mother."

"Oh, yes, I sent you an email. I'm here staying with her while she recuperates."

"May I ask what happened to her?" Then she added, "We are all so worried about her."

"I'm sorry." She whispered. "Mother was hit by a car."

Annie was speechless; she didn't know what to think. "May I speak with her please?"

"She is sleeping now, would you like me to have her call you later?"

"No, that's all right, just tell her I called and hope she has a speedy recovery. Bye."

As Annie hung up the phone she could hear her heart pumping fast. Quickly looking through her book again she dialed another number.

"Hi, this is Annie Banks, I need to speak with you immediately."

"How soon can you get here?"

Looking at her watch she replied. "I can be there in ten minutes."

"See you then...just come on in, I'm alone here today."

Hanging up the phone Annie gathered up the letter, her purse and keys as she headed for the elevators.

As she stood in front of the elevator doors Phil approached Annie. "Do you have a moment?" He asked her.

"Make it quick, Phil, I'm on my way out." She impatiently answered.

Phil's eyes bore into her, the tone of her voice and her attempt to brush him off offended him. "Sorry, to hold you up but, this is about work!" Her responded gruffly.

"Look, Phil, just tell me what you need, please." The elevator car had arrived and she was anxious to go. "Hold the door, please, Judy." She called out. "Go ahead, Phil."

"Do you know when Betsy is going to return? She has all the notes for the Weston account and I can't proceed without them." His eyes continued to burn into her as she kept glancing at the elevator.

Annie gave out a sigh. Waving towards the elevator she said. "Go ahead, I will get the next one, Judy. Thanks anyway." With his eyes leering at her she felt a cold chill run through her body as she turned back to Phil. "Have you spoken with Frank?" She asked him, annoyed with his whole demeanor. This was something he should have taken care of himself and she didn't particularly care for how he was looking at her.

"Yep, he said she gave him a copy last week but he can't find them. So, we can't continue until she comes back...which will be when?"

Annie couldn't believe what she was hearing. "Come with me." She commanded as she headed for the nearest conference room. Once inside she placed her belongs on the table and turned to Phil. "Let me get this straight, Phil. The team that you are in charge of is missing a key piece of information, one of your people had the information and misplaced it and now you want me to solve the mess. Does that about sum it up? If it does, then I will have to rethink assignments with yours being the first."

Phil was fuming. *How dare this woman talk to me like this. She'll be sorry, that is a guarantee. Get yourself under control Phil baby, you don't want to blow this.* He then scratched his head, took a deep breath and nodded. "You're right, I should take care of this myself. Sorry to have held you up. If you could just tell me when she is returning, I would appreciate it."

Annie had already picked her bags and was headed for the door. "Phil, I am not sure, why don't you call her, I believe she is at home." Once in the hallway she turned. "Phil, when I come in on Monday I expect the Weston account to be moving forward. Do I make myself clear?" With cold green eyes fixed on him her face showed no expression.

"Yes, perfectly." *Bitch*, he thought to himself, *one day you'll be sorry.*



Opening the door the woman called out. "Meredith? Are you here?"

"Here I am, Annie." Meredith said as she poked her head around a high backed chair. "Come over here, sit down then tell me what is so urgent."

Annie walked over with the letter in her hand and pushed it in Meredith's direction. "I just got this!" Sitting down she continued. "This is not good at all. I don't know what to think."

Taking the letter Meredith reached over and patted Annie's hand. "Calm down while I read this."

Annie took a deep breath and watched as the letter was being read.

"This is interesting. Specter is covering for your not getting the package. Why is this so disturbing, Annie?"

Annie couldn't help but tremble as she spoke. "Last Monday I received an email telling me about someone I work with who was in the hospital. I never thought anything more about it until this." She pointed at the letter. "I called her home and her daughter answered and when I asked what the problem was she said her mother was hit by a car. Meredith, I don't know what to think? Do you think it has been Bailey all along?"

"Annie, what I think is unimportant. What do you think?"

Annie looked off into the distance, her eyes misty with tears. "My heart tells me Bailey could never do something like this. When she tells me she loves me, I believe her."

"But..."

"But, there is some doubt. I can't help it. Bailey told me she never had a chance from the beginning, maybe she is right."

"Why did she say that?"

A smile came to Annie's face as she remembered a pleasant memory. "The day we met was magical." The smile broadened. "After we had lunch I came back to my office and there was an email from someone saying a stranger would enter my life and change it forever." She paused recalling the day.

"Why would that be a cause for doubt, Annie?"

"Oh, it wasn't that, it was something else...it went on to say to be careful because people aren't always as they seem."

"Ah, the seed of doubt was planted."

"That is what Bailey said. I just don't know what to believe." Annie hung her head.

Meredith reached over and lifted Annie's head. "What does your heart tell you, Annie? What do you believe deep down inside?"

Green eyes looked straight into dark ones. "Bailey never would do such a thing, she isn't capable."

"Good. From what I have seen of Bailey, I don't believe she is capable either. It is clear to me that she loves you deeply and wants nothing but to protect you. So, that leaves us with this letter and the fellow worker and how it all goes together."

"I would like to call Bailey and have her join us, if you don't mind."

"Not at all dear, use the phone on the desk. I need some time to digest this letter."

After speaking with Bailey, Annie returned to her chair but just stood there seemingly in a daze.

Meredith looked up. "Annie. Annie?" When there wasn't an answer she raised her voice. "Annie!"

Coming out of her trance Annie looked at Meredith. "Oh, I'm sorry I was trying to figure out how to tell Bailey that once again I doubted her."

"Do you want to talk about it?"

Annie shook her head then sat down. "When Bailey speaks of our love and her love it is so positive. I don't think she would ever doubt my love but I consistently doubt hers. I just don't get it."

"Has she ever given you reason to doubt her, Annie?"

"No, that's just it, she has done nothing that I know of to make me think she is going to hurt me and leave. Still...there is a nagging doubt."

"Have you spoken with Bailey about this. You know, if she doesn't know there's a problem she can't fix it."

"Meredith, the problem is with me! And yes, I have told her how I feel and she responds with she loves me and has no plans for leaving."

"Why can't you believe her, Annie?"

"She is so beautiful and could have anyone she wants but she is with me. We go out and women and men fall all over her yet, she is still with me."

"Does she ask for the attention?"

"Not that I can tell. She once said she was a flirt but when she met me that all stopped because she was complete. How can that be? How can I be enough for her?"

Meredith shook her head and smiled. "Annie, I have watched how she looks at you and cares for you. The love and contentment I see is so genuine. You need to accept that and let the rest of your doubts go. Believe in her, Annie, and everything will be as it should." Then she rose and knelt in front of Annie. "Can you do that, Annie? Can you accept her love for what it is?"

Annie closed her eyes and let out a breath. "I will try. Now, how do I tell her I once again doubted her?"

A broad smile came across Meredith's face. "With love, my dear, with love." Just then there was a knock on the door. "There she is now. Will you answer the door for me, please."

"Yes, do you mind if I speak with her in private for a minute?"

"Not at all. Go now, she is waiting."

Meredith watched as Annie greeted Bailey then led her by the hand to a secluded corner. She saw the two sitting closely together but as Annie spoke Bailey seemed to move away. The look on Bailey's face could only be described as somber, never changing expressions. Annie spoke with her hands waving as she tried to explain what had happened and why she doubted her lover. Finally, Bailey got up and started towards the door with Annie following closely behind. She

reached out and touched Bailey's back in an attempt to make her stop. Bailey spun around and glared as Annie said something to her. Then, they embraced and once again sat down this time holding hands and sitting close.

Waiting five more minutes Meredith finally spoke. "Ladies, could you please join me over here?" Seeing the couple acknowledge her request by getting up she added. "We have much to discuss."

Each woman took a seat near Meredith. Bailey spoke first. "May I read the latest letter from Specter, please?" Bailey read the letter and then handed it back to Meredith. "You're the expert, what is your take on this one?"

Meredith could see the pain in Bailey's eyes as she spoke. "Well, the first thing that struck me is that, as we suspected, no mail or pictures. That is a good thing for it gives us a better understanding of the lengths Specter will go." Turning to Annie she asked. "Is the fact that the woman at work was hit by a car common knowledge?"

Annie frowned. "Wish I knew. I learned long ago about office gossip so I tend to stay away from the lunch area and hallways. All I know is the email I received on Monday and that never mentioned anything about what was wrong." Annie shrugged her shoulders and tilted her head.

"I see, hmmm...two ways to look at this...either this person knew about the accident because they did it or it was their lucky day when they found out. It is important we know when this became general knowledge, Annie, anyone you can call?"

"I think so. Let me try." With that she got up and headed to the phone on Meredith's desk.

Bailey's eyes followed Annie as she spoke. "Are we in more or less danger since there weren't letters and pictures?"

Meredith nodded her head. "Less, I think."

"Have you considered the possibility that this could all be a set up, Meredith?"

"Yes, I have, Bailey. First we need to find out what information Annie comes up with. Ah, here she comes now."

"Apparently everyone in our office received an email late yesterday from Betsy explaining what had happened to her. I never really looked

in my inbox this morning so I am not sure if I have one or not but, I suspect I do." Annie looked expectantly at Meredith. "Does that help?"

"Yes, it does, thank you. This was a lucky coincidence for your stalker giving them more ammunition to add to the fire. Specter knew you wouldn't take them seriously without the letters and photos to back them up so this worked out perfectly. By casting more doubt on Bailey, Specter took the spotlight off until a new plan can be formulated. We need to disrupt that plan."

Bailey became agitated. "Once again I will ask, what about the setup angle?"

Annie shook her head as she tried to get her mind around the question. "From who, Bailey? Surely not Betsy, she is the one who got hit."

"Are you sure of that, Annie? Have you seen her injuries?" Bailey couldn't believe how naïve Annie was. "Trust no one...remember?"

"Bailey, you are being totally ridiculous. It is one thing to tell one person but she told everyone! Don't you think that will be hard to cover up? Besides, Betsy doesn't have the kind of intelligence to pull off something like this."

"Annie, what turnip cart did you fall off? Trust no one and by all means never underestimate anyone...that could be our undoing."

"Ladies, if you don't mind, we need to refocus. Annie, Bailey is right, everyone is under suspicion and everyone is capable. Hopefully my plan will bring this creep out into the open...if you are willing to put yourselves out there. Your choice."

"Before we go on, Meredith I need to tell you both something." Bailey looked unusually nervous.

"Go on." Both Meredith and Annie spoke at once.

"After Monday's incident, I called a friend of mine, Jimmy, to keep tabs on Annie and see if anyone was following her. He didn't see anything unusual although he did see the same car twice. We traced the license plate but the owner has no apparent connection to Annie. If your proposal includes danger, Meredith, I think we need him to continue to shadow her."

"You've had me followed?" Annie was shaking her head. "I sat here and told Meredith that you trusted me and now I find out it was a lie! Really, Bailey, how could you do that?"

Bailey frowned. "I didn't have you followed Annie! I trust you completely! All I was trying to do is see if this creep was following you so we could find out who it is."

Annie buried her head in her hands and began to sob. "I'm so sorry, Bailey, when will this ever end? I'm not sure I can take much more."

In a flash Bailey was by her lover's side putting an arm around her she whispered in her ear. "Shhh, Baby, it will all be over soon. Not sure how but, it will be over. Will you try to hang in there with me a little longer?" Bailey felt Annie nod her head. "Good, that's my girl."

Turning her attention towards Meredith, Bailey asked. "Tell us your plan, Meredith. Please."

"Of course I will. I do think if this Jimmy person can do it he should keep an eye on both of you. I am sure that Specter thinks that the information you received today will drive a wedge between you. Remember I said we must disrupt the plan? You two must become very noticeable as a couple; show that you are not apart but stronger. This should flush the idiot out into the open. I think Specter will be enraged enough to do or say something that will lead us to their identity. What do you say, want to give it a try?"

The next hour was spent with the three women hashing out a plan of attack.



With the plan in action Annie and Bailey spent the entire weekend out and about holding hands and enjoying each other's company. If anyone thought their evil letter would tear them apart it was obvious it didn't. By Sunday night, their high profile weekend left them both drained.

Holding her hand out Bailey spoke. "Take my hand love, then follow me to an evening of pure unadulterated pleasure. I promise to make your every wish and dreams come true. Won't you please come with me?"

Annie didn't think there would ever be a time when she could resist the woman before her. "Show me the way." Then she put her hand in the offered one as she walked towards their bedroom.

Bailey took Annie in her arms and began to hum as they danced. Piece by piece clothes were removed until they danced with nothing between them but skin. With thighs between thighs each woman could feel the passion growing to tantalizing heights.

Annie whispered, "Bailey, please."

"Soon, my love, soon." Bailey spoke as her lips hovered over the waiting lips of her lover. Each time Annie tried to capture the teasing lips they were moved away. Soon those hovering lips were near her ear, then down her neck and over to the other ear.

"Baby, you are driving me crazy please love me now, I need you." The want and need was so great that Annie was trembling. Then, she felt strong arms lift her and carry her to the bed where she was gently laid on the mattress.

Bailey joined her then rolled over on top of her lover and straddled her rising up on all fours. A sly, seductive smile crossed her face as she bent down to kiss the luscious lips below her.

Annie wanted more and put her arms around Bailey's neck to pull her closer. Next thing she knew her arms were above her head being held down.

"Not yet, sweetheart...be patient." Then she bent again as her lips hovered once again.

"Bailey, please." Annie pleaded once again.

Annie could feel the moisture of her lover as Bailey sat up on her belly.

"You are so beautiful, Annie. I love you more than I ever thought I could love another. You've brought me peace and, at last, I feel as though I have found my way." Then she took Annie's left hand. "Will you walk the path of life and beyond with me? Will you be mine now and forever? Will you be my life partner, Annie?" As she spoke she slid a diamond ring on Annie's finger.

A glorious smile crossed Annie's face. "Oh, Bailey, yes, yes, yes. I love you...forever isn't long enough. I promise to love you for all time." Then she pulled the beautiful woman towards her and kissed her sealing the promise.

Somewhere in the night Annie surrendered completely, as did Bailey. All doubts and fears were gone replaced with a sense of forever.



The yellow Jeep pulled up in front of Annie's office building. "Have a great day, love." Bailey smiled as she gently touched her lover's arm. Uncharacteristically, Annie leaned over and gave Bailey a long passionate kiss. Smiling seductively she said, "Remember that all day baby, there is more waiting for you when we get home." Then she winked as she slid out of the car and crossed the sidewalk to the entrance of the building.

Once in her office Annie emptied her briefcase wondering why she even bothered taking the papers home. The weekend had been so full of activity with Bailey she never had the opportunity to even look at them. Here in the early morning quiet she could look at them before the phone started ringing and others arrived at work.

An hour later her phone rang. "Ms. Banks, this is Stacy, I have a beautiful flower arrangement out here for you. Want me to have someone bring it to you?"

"For me, Stacy? Are you sure?" Never had Annie received flowers at work.

"Yes, unless there is another Annie Banks in the building." Stacy was giggling wondering why the woman was questioning her. The flowers were gorgeous, who wouldn't be delighted to get them?

Annie too laughed. "Guess that was a foolish question, Stacy. Would you please bring them to me."

"Sure thing."

"Thanks, Stacy." Annie hung up the phone as a sense of fear came over her. The weekend had been so perfect; she pushed Specter way in the back of her mind until this unexpected event.

Stacy's smiling face appeared at her door. In her hands was a crystal vase filled with red and yellow roses. "Here they are. Looks like someone has a crush on you." The smile continued to fill her face; she had no way of knowing how much fear that statement created in Annie.

"Thank you, Stacy. They are beautiful, aren't they?" Annie took the vase and set it on her desk then turned and thanked Stacy once again as she left.

Closing the door, Annie fearfully took the card from the middle of the flowers. The name on the envelope was indeed hers. Inside the card read...*I love you, thank you for saying yes...* Annie smiled and let out a breath as she pulled one rose out and smelled the fragrance. Picking up the phone she dialed the familiar number. "There never was a chance of anything but yes. I love you too."

"You got the flowers then. Good, I wanted you to know I am thinking about you."

"Every time I look at them I will think of you. That should be all day long." Annie giggled like a schoolgirl.

"Want to meet me for lunch?" Bailey's voice had a seductive tone.

"When you ask me like that how could I resist. Where shall we meet and should I clear my afternoon for you?"

"Why, Ms. Banks, whatever do you have in mind?"

"Hmm, you, my love, you." Annie could feel herself becoming aroused.

"In that case, my love, I suggest you tell everyone you will see them tomorrow." Bailey was struggling not to go pick up Annie right away.

Closing her eyes in an attempt to calm her mounting emotions. "I will do just that, Bailey. Pick me up at one, okay?"

"Annie, you're killing me here. That's four more hours without you...I'm not sure I can make it."

Laughing Annie replied. "Cross your legs love, and pick me up at one. I love you."

A hardy robust laugh was heard through the phone. "That will be hard to do but, I will do it just for you, baby. I love you. Bye."

"Bye, I am counting the hours." Annie held the flower to her face as she hung up the phone. Smiling, she recalled the night before and how absolutely romantic Bailey had been. Her reverie was disrupted by a knock on the door. Turning Annie pulled the door open to find Betsy Stennis standing there.

"Hi, just wanted to let you know I'm back." The woman whose face was heavily made up gave a weary smile. Her left arm was in a sling and a thick bandage was wrapped around her left ankle.

"Betsy, please come in. Are you sure you are ready to come back? From the looks of you it may be too soon." As the woman gingerly walked into her office Annie's heart went out to her. Indicating Betsy should sit down, Annie pulled up a chair and sat close by.

"I'm fine, I need to do something, sitting at home in fear is not good. Please let me try." The woman pleaded. "They told me in HR I would need my supervisor's okay to come back, so here I am. I forgot the note from my doctor but, will bring it in tomorrow"

"Betsy, will you tell me what happened and what your doctor says about your recovery?"

"When I left here that Friday I wasn't expecting this, I can tell you that. I drove down to my daughter's because she was having some personal problems. On Sunday, I was crossing the street to go to Mass when out of nowhere, a car came directly at me. I tried to move back but it seemed to intentionally head towards me. Then at the last minute, when I knew I was a goner, it swerved away knocking me to the pavement. I was terrified, Annie, I saw my life pass in front of my eyes."

"Betsy, thank God you didn't get killed. Did you see what kind of car it was?"

"How could I miss it, Annie, it was a bright yellow Jeep."

Annie couldn't help it, she gasped. "Did the police find the driver?" Her mind was in a whirl as she struggled to keep her composure.

"No, they said it was probably some drunk." Betsy's eyes were misting over as she recalled the horrifying event. "So, do you think I can come back to work, boss?"

"You know how I hate that."

"I know, but that is what you are."

"First, I need to know what your doctor said, Betsy."

Betsy took notice of the flowers on the desk. "Those are lovely, Annie. Looks like you have an admirer." Turning she smiled. "As for my doctor, he said I could resume work if I did light duty then work my

way up. It really depends on me and how I am feeling. I need to come back to work, Annie." It was then that Betsy took notice of the diamond ring. "Does that ring mean what I think it does? Wow, that's one big rock."

Glancing down at her hand Annie smiled as her mind flashed to Bailey. "Thank you, yes it does mean I am engaged. As to your working, why not give it a try on the condition that if you need to you will go home." Annie moved the chair slightly as she got up to help Betsy who seemed to be struggling to rise.

"Thanks, getting up with one hand and a bum foot is rather difficult." Turning towards the door she grimaced. "Congratulations, is it anyone I know?"

"No, I don't think so. Do you need help getting to your office?"

"I will be fine. Thanks."

"Okay, don't forget to go home when you begin feeling bad."

"I won't." The woman said as she limped down the hall.



Two weeks had passed without a letter, mail or phone message from Annie's stalker. Still she could feel eyes watching her. This person had become a phantom who was always present in her life. It was only when she was alone with Bailey she felt safe, although even then, she had passing thoughts of cameras in their house watching every move.

"Annie, I have a surprise for you." Bailey was all smiles as she held something behind her back.

Stepping closer to her lover Annie tried to reach around her laughing as she was nudged away. "Come on, you know how I hate this." The pleasure on her face was evident in spite of her words.

Bailey began inching her way backwards towards the couch. "Come over here and sit with me and I will reveal all, my love."

"Reveal all! You're getting naked for me? How wonderful, let me help." A lecherous smile crossed her face as she began with the buttons.

Bailey struggled between telling her surprise or letting Annie have her way with her. "You temptress you." She said as she bent and kissed hungry lips.

"Ah, you like the idea do you." Annie purred as she unzipped jeans and slid her hand inside.

Bailey closed her eyes as she felt nimble fingers touch her. "Baby, I love the idea." She squeaked out as her passions rose.

Fingers stroked and teased as Annie felt Bailey respond. Suddenly, she stopped and withdrew her hand much to the dismay of her lover.

"No, please don't stop." Implored Bailey.

"Oh, I will begin again once you tell me what the surprise is." Annie winked then laughed at the look on the face before her. Somewhere between shock and dismay. "You didn't think I would let that pass by did you?"

Bailey closed her eyes, then laughed. "You, my love, are bad, very bad."

"I know. Now, how about that surprise." She couldn't help grinning.

"You drive one hard bargain. I actually forgot about it there for a minute." Laughing again Bailey produced what looked like airplane tickets.

"Where are we going?" Annie said as she tried to grab the tickets.

Pulling the envelope away Bailey leaned in for a kiss. "Not so fast." Then she winked. "I just might have my conditions too."

"Baileeeeeeeyyyyyyy, that's not fair. Come on, show me, please."

Laughingly, Bailey moved closer to Annie and placed the tickets in her hands. "It is fair but what the heck, I love you."

Annie opened the tickets and noted the destination. "Hawaii? We are going to Hawaii?"

Bailey pulled Annie close. "I thought if you liked it we could get married there. I want our marriage to be legal, Annie, for everyone to know that our love is without question." She then tilted her head and shrugged her shoulders. "Guess you could say I am old fashioned."

Annie kissed her love. "I love old fashioned and I love you for this, Bailey. You are constantly surprising me with the depth of your love and commitment." She kissed the lips again. "When do we go? What about our families?"

"So many questions." Bailey said as she leaned into Annie so she would fall backwards. "They will all be answered in time...right now you need

to finish what you started." Pulling back slightly she smiled then positioning her legs and body on top of Annie she proceeded to demonstrate the depths of her love.



Once a week, since their engagement, Annie received flowers at work. This Monday was no exception. As she took one red rose to smell its sweet perfume she opened the card only to have the flower drop to the desk. The note simply read...from the SLUT. Closing her eyes all she could think of was the words from some movie she couldn't remember the name of...I'm Baaack. Sighing, she picked up the phone and dialed. "I need you." Was all she said.

A half-hour later Bailey entered her office frowning when she saw the flowers. "I didn't send those." Then looking at Annie's face she moved closer. "Baby, what has happened?"

Annie handed her the card. "Will this ever end?"

Walking over to the door Bailey closed it then pressed the button to lock. Quickly she went back to Annie and gathered her in her arms and just held her close. As she felt her love trembling she knew that right now she needed to feel safe. "I have you, Annie, let it go." She whispered.

The trembling became greater as Annie spoke. "What have I done to deserve this? I have tried to be strong but how can I fight back when I don't even know who I am fighting?" Sobs began. "I don't want to do this anymore, Bailey. I want it all to stop! Why, why is this happening?"

There was nothing for Bailey to say; she didn't know the answers either. So, she rocked Annie back and forth as she sang softly to her. "Come away with me where they can't tempt us with their lies...come away with me."

Annie began to settle down as she felt Bailey's heart beating while hearing the sweet melodic tones of her voice. This was real; this is what counted not some apparition that didn't even have the guts to show their face. "Never leave me." She implored.

"Baby, you have me forever, that is my promise to you. I love you, Annie, that is the one truth you can always count on."

"I do love you so much Bailey, I sometimes wonder if you know how much."

"...I want to wake up with the rain falling down on a tin roof while I'm safe in your arms. So all I ask is for you to come away with me in the night, come away with me." Bailey kissed Annie's cheek gently. "We are together all ways in all things, forever."

Annie took a deep breath as she felt some of the stress subside. "Will you stay with me for a while longer?" She couldn't stop the pleading sound in her voice. "Please."

"I am here as long as you need me." Giving one last hug she released the woman in her arms. "I need to make a few calls, is that okay?"

Smiling at last, Annie softly slapped Bailey's arm. "You're silly. Why not make yourself at home at my desk while I attend a meeting. I should be back in an hour or less."

"Glad to see that smile. I will be here when you return." She gave her lover one last hug before she headed for the desk and the phone.

"You always make me smile. If anyone asks, tell them you belong to me." Smiling over her shoulder she opened the door and left.

Dialing a number Bailey listened to the rings and was annoyed that a machine answered. "It's Bailey, you were right. Call me on my cell." Hanging up she thought out loud. "Whatever are we going to do?" Her eyes wondered over Annie's tidy desk landing on her unopened mail...then she saw it...the familiar envelope. Grabbing it she ripped it open and began to read the message.

How can you be so stupid Annie...she gives it up for anyone and everyone...with all that experience she must keep you well satisfied...is that why you dont leave...are you blind to her lies...do you think flowers and a ring make you special...not a chance...even now she is planning her escape from you...the sight of you makes her sic...why are you so glib...you deserve better...I dont blame you...many have fallen for her lies and trickery...what is she promising...to take you to some island for a wedding...ah...you didn't think I knew that did you...she tells her cronies everything...they have a good laugh at your expense...did you know she has someone following you...he is pathetic...spotted him the first day...miss goody goody...everyone around your

office laughs at you...calling you the lesbo ho...there is still time to redem yourself...get away from her...give your love to someone that deserves it...someone who will love you back...dont let her control you anymore Annie...she is evil to the core...if you leave with her you'll never come back alive...heed the warning...this is serious busines...your life depends on it.

Folding the paper Bailey placed her head in her hands as tears began to flow. Somewhere Specter was lurking about, monitoring their every move, would they ever be safe or free from the fear. Lifting her head and wiping her eyes she dialed the number again, this time she would press the button for an emergency. Meredith needed to be aware of what was happening; now that there were more threats on Annie's life. "Whatever are we going to do?"



Annie stood at the window staring out at the street below. Somewhere amongst all the people and cars was Specter, blending in, unnoticed, always watching. Yes, Specter was a good name for this person, Meredith was right, giving it a name made it less surreal. The question now was how to flush Specter out. The ramblings of the last letter led Meredith to believe Specter was realizing the battle was lost and was pulling out all the stops. She still didn't believe they were in any real danger for there had been nothing but empty threats and promises. Although, they still needed to be vigilant for there was no way of knowing what would trigger a sick mind into violence.

The hour was late, Annie needed to catch up on her work and fix any loose ends before she left for three weeks. Smiling she thought back to the week before as she tried on dresses for the wedding. Bailey was bemused as she watched the parade of ensembles before her; never quite happy with anything Annie tried on. Until, she came out with a simple white sundress that showed off her figure beautifully. The wolf whistle was all she needed to know this was what she would be wearing to their wedding. Then she turned to Bailey and told her it was her turn...this memory brought a big smile to her face...all Bailey did was turn to the salesperson and say, *I will take the same dress. This way no one will tell where one leaves off and the other starts...it is as it should be, Annie.* She had to agree. *How did I ever get so lucky to find you Bailey?* She wondered.

Answering the phone she heard the voice she loved speak to her. "Hey, how much longer will you be?"

Annie swore she could smell the scent of her lover. "Not much longer. What did you have in mind?"

"Well, I was thinking along the lines of a feather whip and fur handcuffs." There was a hint of playfulness in Bailey's voice.

Annie laughed out loud. "Where on earth did you come up with that? Have you been surfing the internet again?"

"Why not come home and find out what I have been up to, baby. I just might surprise you...and myself too."

The warmth and happiness in Bailey's voice made Annie long to be in her arms. "Tell you what, I will finish up and be there by..." she glanced at her watch, "seven-thirty at the latest."

"Baby, I can't wait to hold you in my arms. Hurry please."

"I will just for you lover." All the while she was stacking up reports getting ready to leave.

Bailey felt a chill come over her and suddenly it was important for her to tell Annie she loved her. "I love you, Annie, come home to me."

"Well, I love you too, I am coming home soon. Bye."

As the phone disconnected Bailey whispered bye. She couldn't stop the feeling of doom that filled her mind and body. Grabbing her keys she ran out of the house, got in her jeep and started down the street towards Annie's building. The sense of urgency was overwhelming as she entered the bypass on her way to save Annie, of that she was now sure.



With her briefcase packed and her coat on Annie closed the door and locked it. Glancing down the hallway she noticed a light. *Strange, didn't think anyone else was here.* Dropping her possessions by her door she quietly walked towards the light knowing whose office it was but certain the occupant couldn't be Betsy. Stopping just before the doorway she listened to any sound. All she could hear was typing so she cautiously peeked around to see who was there. She let out a big sigh of relief. "Betsy? I didn't know you would still be here."

The startled woman turned around looking like a deer caught in the headlights. "Oh, Annie, you scared me!" She said as she held her hand over her heart. "I am trying to catch up on all I missed while I was out."

Annie's eyes narrowed as she saw the sling off the injured arm. "Is your arm all better? I thought I saw you wearing the sling earlier."

"It was feeling better so I thought I would try taking it off...it interfered with my typing."

"Are you sure that is a wise idea?" Annie looked around the office as the hairs on her neck stood on end. "I must admit from the sound of it your typing skills don't seem to have been harmed."

The woman got up from her desk and walked towards Annie. "You are so gullible, Annie. Tell me do you always believe everything you are told?"

Annie began backing away as she suddenly realized who this was. "It is YOU! Betsy, how could you do this to me? I thought we were friends." Disbelief was written all over her face.

An evil look crossed the woman's face. "Friend, you don't know the meaning of the word. I could have given you everything but you chose that slut instead. Now you must pay for your sins." With that she was moving towards Annie.

Turning, Annie took off down the hall towards the elevators and desperately began pushing the button. "Come on, come on." She said as she looked back over her shoulder to see an enraged Betsy heading her way. Knowing she didn't have time to wait she started trying doors wishing she hadn't dropped her keys. Door after door was locked as she heard Betsy's footsteps getting closer and closer. Finally, she found a bathroom open and went in making sure the door was closed behind her. Going in a stall she crouched on the toilet, holding her breath, hoping she would not be detected.

After what seemed like hours, she heard the door open. "Annie, I know you're in here. You can't hide from me. Come out, come out, wherever you are, it is time to pay the piper." She began pushing in the doors until she came to the one that was locked. "Very bad place to hide, Annie, what do you think this is a B grade movie? Now be a good girl and open the door."

Annie held her breath and didn't move a muscle. If this monster was going to get her, she would have to break the door down. Her eyes scanned the space between the wall and floor as she calculated Betsy was too wide to fit through and even if she tried Annie could smash her head with her foot. Up above was the same situation, Betsy wasn't tall enough to reach the top and if she could Annie doubted her abilities to scale the wall. All in all she felt she was in the best place she could be considering her alternatives.

BANG! BANG! Betsy was pounding against the door. "Come out here you bitch!" BANG! BANG! She beat the door again then rattled the handle. "It's giving way slut, you better start saying your prayers." BANG! BANG!



Bailey's car screeched to a stop in front of the building. Scrambling out she ran into the building and headed straight for the elevators only to see a sign OUT OF SERVICE. "Shit!" Looking around she found the stairwell and began skipping steps as she raced towards Annie's floor. Once there she ran full out to Annie's office and her heart stopped as she saw the briefcase and coat lying in the hallway. Further on down the corridor she saw an open door with a light on. Carefully she entered the office and found no one there but on the floor near the door were her lover's keys. Picking up the keys she moved towards the desk where she noticed a typewriter with a partially typed document in it. The desk, that could only be described as a total mess, was cluttered with stacks and stacks of papers. "Who is this person?" Bailey asked herself. Turning back to the typewriter she was horrified by what she saw...

You had your chance misy...now you must pay for your sins...no longer can you be allowed to parade around with that slut...you must learn your lesson...it is time

"My God, this is Specter! Who are you?" Looking down on the cluttered desk she saw a name. "Betsy Stennis. Damn you! Annie where are you?"

Exiting the office she looked up and down and went left jogging as she tried each door. Every so often she would stop and listen for any sound. Reaching the end of the corridor she turned around and ran faster back to the elevators where she stopped. Then she

heard...*Nooooooooo please don't*...until quiet reigned once again. A shot of fear went up Bailey's spine as she recognized the voice of her lover. Now, with the adrenaline coursing through her body, she slowly crept towards the voice of her lover. *I'm coming love, stay safe for me.*



Finally the door gave way and swung open. Annie, from her crouching position lunged at Betsy knocking her down. Desperately she tried to get away but her ankle was grabbed and she fell to the floor. Betsy was on top of her with a wild possessed look in her eyes as she pummeled Annie's body. "You bitch! I'm going to make you pay!" She growled as she began hitting her prey about the face and body.

Annie freed her arms and attempted to fight back only to be slapped so hard she saw stars. Betsy stood up and grabbed Annie's hair as she dragged her to her feet. Quickly she removed the belt from around Annie's waist and secured her hands behind her back. Pushing the captured head towards the mirror as a knee forced her against the counter Betsy sneered. "Look at yourself whore, not so pretty now are you? Wonder if that bitch of yours will still want you with a scar across your face? If you are still alive, that is." A sick laugh ensued as Annie saw, through the mirror, Betsy holding a knife. Slowly she dragged the tip of the blade along the blonde woman's cheek. "Just a little more pressure and we'll see blood. With even more pressure, a deep cut that not even plastic surgery can fix. Of course, we could end it all now and just slit your throat." An evil laugh was heard. "No, we think not, that would be too good for you. You need to suffer for your transgressions."

Annie could feel the cold steel of the blade as it glided across her face as Betsy's hot breath spoke in her ear. "How do you like it, Annie? This is how we felt when you screwed us out of the job that was rightly ours. This is how we felt when you flirted with Alexis and stole her away. She paid for that just as you will pay." Rubbing up against her the mad woman continued. "How do I feel against you lovey, are you getting hot? Want me to take you? Hmmm?" Then Annie felt her head slam against the mirror and her knees began to buckle as she was thrown to the floor. The last thing she remembered was crying out... *Nooooooooo please don't*...just before she lost consciousness.

Bailey was certain the voice came from the area in front of her. Stopping once again she heard muffled sounds coming from the restroom. Standing in front of the door she tried desperately to hear what was going on so she could formulate a plan of attack. It only took hearing "Now, I shall have you for my own sweetness" to shelve all plans and thrust open the door. There, Betsy Stennis was standing over Annie who was lying on the floor. She looked up at the intruder, her eyes filled with madness. "Come to save her, bitch? You're too fuckin late." A wild laugh ensued as the woman came towards Bailey. "Now it's your turn, slut."

Annie's chest was rising and falling so Bailey knew she was alive but for how long was the question. She needed to overpower this mad woman and do it fast so she could go to her love. "Come on then, see if you can."

Betsy lunged with the knife poised to stab her prey. To her surprise the much stronger Bailey grasped her wrist and twisted until the knife dropped. Then a swift upper cut sealed her fate as the deranged woman fell to the floor.

Bailey rushed over and fell to her knees. Annie's face was battered and bruised and blood was visible on her blouse. Gently she touched the bruised face. "Annie? Wake up love, it's all over, you're safe now." Tears were welling up in Bailey's eyes, as the love of her life didn't respond. Carefully she reached under Annie and undid the restraint, then eased each arm out. "Baby, please wake up for me, please." The look on Annie's face was one of peace, almost as though she was in a wonderful dreamscape of rolling fields and gentle breezes where at last she was free.

Betsy began to stir and Bailey moved her body so she was able to watch the crazy woman and stop any attempts she might make to retaliate. She will have to go through me first...that will never happen! With her guard up Bailey kept an eye on Betsy while she tended to her love.

Groans were heard. "You fuckin bitch!" Betsy screamed as she rose to her feet after retrieving the knife. "You'll be sorry!"

Rising to her feet Bailey took a defensive position. "Don't think so, you'll be cooling your heels in jail shortly."

A confused look came across the now swollen face of Betsy. "Jail? Don't think so, bitch." Then she turned and left the room.

After securing the door Bailey walked back over to Annie and once again knelt down and gently kissed her lips. "Hey, sleepyhead, wake up." She cooed as she began to sing, *Come away with me and we'll kiss on a mountaintop, come away with me and I will never stop loving you...*

Annie heard the one voice she knew would always make her feel safe but couldn't quite grasp where it was coming from. Turning her attention back to the soft grass she was laying in she wondered how she could leave this beautiful place of peace. Here she was free and the feeling of unconditional love was all around. Again she tried to focus on the voice that kept calling her but the need to stay here was so very strong. Then she heard another voice that wasn't really a voice but a conscious awareness of another being speaking to her. "Your choice, my child, you may stay or go back."

Annie felt herself responding with out speaking. "How can I leave such love?"

"You don't have such a love back there?" the voice questioned.

She felt the touch of lips on hers and heard a memory of a song.

"Bailey." She whispered.

"I must go back."

"Yes, Bailey, she has walked with you throughout all time. Go now my child, there will always be a place here for you."

Annie felt her body being held in a warm loving embrace before she felt herself traveling back to consciousness. Slowly opening her eyes she began to smile when she saw the vision before her. "Bailey..." Was all she could say.

"My prayers were answered. Thank you." Bailey whispered as she laid her cheek next to Annie's. "Welcome back, my love." For several moments the two women remained motionless as they gloried in just being.

With a start Annie moved. "Bailey, Betsy...Betsy is the stalker she's here...save yourself...she wants to kill us!"

"She's gone, Annie. I don't think she will be bothering us again. We need to get you to a hospital. Do you think you can move or should I call for an ambulance?"

Closing her eyes Annie began taking a mental inventory of her body. Except for some pain in her face and midsection she thought she could move. "Well, I can wiggle my toes and my fingers." Slowly she raised one leg, then the other. "And, my legs seem to work." Then she raised her arms. "Arms too. Will you help me up?"

Carefully Bailey placed her arm under Annie's shoulders to help her sit up. "Sit like this for a minute, don't want you passing out on me."

Annie was a bit woozy sitting up but that passed quickly. "I'm okay. Shall we see if we can get me standing now?"

Slowly both women got to their feet then embraced. "Thank God you are safe, Annie. I love you so much, I don't think I could live without you."

"Your love brought me back." Just then Annie began to wobble. "Forgot to check my head I think. It really hurts."

Bailey scooped Annie up in her arms and carried her down the hall towards her office. Taking the keys from her pocket she opened the door and gently put Annie down in a chair. Retrieving Annie's belongings from the hallway she glanced to see if Betsy's light was still on. All she could see was a closed door. I will deal with that later. She said to herself as she went back to tend to her love.

"Baby, I am going to call Doctor Lewis and see if she can meet us at the hospital. How are you doing?"

Annie looked up at the beautiful woman she called her own. "Great if you count feeling like your head is about to explode as good." A small smile followed as she closed her eyes.

"Annie, don't go to sleep! Annie, do you hear me?" A note of panic was in the voice.

Opening her glassy green eyes she smiled again. "Hey, I am right here, you don't have to shout."

Holding the phone in one hand she stroked Annie's cheek. "Baby, you might have a concussion...you can't go to sleep. Do you understand me?"

Closing her eyes she frowned at the pain. "I am so tired Bailey, can't I just sleep for a little while? Promise I'll wake up."

"Doctor Lewis, hi, this is Bailey Colson. Can you meet me at the hospital, Annie has had a bit of an accident and I am afraid she has a concussion. Her head is extremely painful and she wants to sleep but I am not letting her. Okay, we will see you there, thanks."

Helping Annie stand Bailey put her coat on before once again picking her up and taking her to the elevator. "Damn, it doesn't work." Looking towards the stairs she took a deep breath and headed for them.

"No, no, Bailey, don't!" Annie moaned.

"Annie, you need to go to the hospital."

"No! You don't understand!" Annie couldn't understand why her lover wouldn't listen.

"What don't I understand?" She asked softly as she nudged the door open.

"The elevator...it works."

As she was about to start down the stairs Bailey shook her head. "No, it doesn't there was a sign when I came in."

"You don't understand!"

Stopping Bailey looked at the woman in her arms who was becoming agitated and that wasn't good. "Okay, love, why not tell me what I don't understand."

Smiling broadly Annie slurred her words. "They just put the sign up at night...it works." Then she closed her eyes.

Turning around Bailey couldn't help but smile, she really didn't want to walk down all those stairs with Annie in her arms. Pressing the button for the elevator it did indeed work.



The extent of Annie's injuries was not as bad as she looked. She did have a concussion, which required an overnight stay in the hospital. Along with the numerous lacerations she had a deep cut on her abdomen that required eight stitches. Bailey never left her side, watching over her partner she vowed to keep her safe no matter what.

Doctor Tracie Lewis gave them a curious look when they explained how this all happened. It was clear to the doctor that Annie had been beaten but both women insisted it was an accident. It wasn't until Meredith arrived and took her aside that she stopped the line of questioning. Shaking her head as she left Meredith, the doctor said, "I hope you know what you're doing, this isn't a game you know."

Meredith gave her sternest look as she spoke. "Trust me, I am well aware this isn't a game. All I need do is look at Annie and know that."

Entering the hospital room Meredith patted Bailey on the arm. "Do you want some time away from here? I will stay with her, Bailey, she will be safe."

"Leave Annie? No, that will not happen now or ever." Looking over at the sleeping figure in the bed she continued. "Now that we know Specter's identity, how soon before she is arrested? She needs to be in a loony bin."

Feeling the hand she was holding move she smiled as the eyes opened and a small voice said, "Hi." Annie tried to clear her throat. "Water."

In a flash Bailey was there with cup in hand. Maneuvering the straw towards Annie's lips she said. "Here you go love, small sips, okay?"

Green eyes smiled at her in love and gratitude. When she had enough Annie creased her eyebrows. "Bailey."

"What, baby?"

Closing her eyes as she composed her words she sighed deeply. "I want this over..." another deep breath was taken, "I will take care of Betsy." Closing her eyes once again she readied herself for the onslaught from Bailey.

"What?"

Before she could get started Meredith placed a hand on her arm and shook her head. "Annie, why?"

Opening her eyes she searched the room. "Meredith? I didn't know you were here." Then she turned to the one person she needed to understand. "I know you want to protect me but this is something that I need to take care of myself. This is about me and I must take measures to stop it from happening again." Closing her eyes she knew she was not making sense. "Bailey, I love you. Will you trust me with

this, please?" Once again she closed her eyes the whole affair was becoming too much for her jumbled brain.

As she was about to open her mouth, Meredith took Bailey's arm and led her to the doorway. "Annie needs to have control of this one, Bailey. If she is ever going to get past what happened to her she needs to do it her way."

"Her way is to let that horrible person not face justice! Call me crazy, but I don't see how that will help her recover." Was she the only sane person here?

"You're not the one lying in there or the one who had to face the attack of a madwoman. She needs to do it her way or this will haunt her forever. Can't you see that, Bailey? The only thing that the woman can be charged with is assault. We have no proof that she was the one sending the letters. The most she would get is a year and that would be suspended probably because there is no past record."

"But I saw the start of letter in her typewriter!"

"Did you see her typing it?" She looked as Bailey shook her head no.

"Then please, let Annie handle this her way, not yours."

Clenching her teeth Bailey rubbed her eyes with her thumb and forefinger. "All I know is the maniac that made our lives hell all these months will walk only to come back and do it all again. What kind of shrink are you that you can't see that!" With that she turned her back on the woman and started back to the room.

There are days when even the most sensible of people become exasperated with the stupidity of people. For Meredith this was that day. Grabbing Bailey's shoulder she spun the startled woman around. "This is **NOT** about you! What part of that don't you understand? Annie needs your support, **NOT** your criticism! That is what love is all about. Now get your ass in there and tell her you are on her side no matter what!"

Bailey just stood there with her mouth open and disbelief on her face. The words that Meredith spoke were playing over and over in her mind. Had she been so selfish that she hadn't considered Annie's feelings and emotions? All she ever wanted to do was keep her partner safe and happy. Now, here was this woman telling her...what? Then it suddenly dawned on her what Annie and Meredith had been trying to

explain. "Annie needs to do this alone...it is hers to control. All I can do is be there for her."



Three days later Annie was back in her office ready to take care of Betsy Stennis. Standing up she straightened her back and headed down the corridor towards the office of her adversary. Annie was shocked to learn that the woman was still here working as if nothing had happened. She tentatively placed her hand on the doorknob wondering if she should knock. Hell, I am in charge; I can go anywhere I want without knocking. Opening the door she was surprised to see Betsy smiling at her.

"Annie, I'm glad you are back, we were all so worried about you and the accident you had."

She has got to be kidding! What kind of sick woman is she? Annie thought to herself as she looked at the stranger before her. "Be in my office in fifteen minutes." She commanded before turning and leaving.

Once back in her office Annie got the recorder out of her coat pocket and set it on the desk. She also retrieved all the photocopies of the letters from Specter and laid the folder on her desk. Taking a few deep breaths she gathered her courage for what she must do.

A knock on the doorframe alerted Annie to Betsy's arrival.

"Okay, I'm here. What's up?"

Getting up Annie walked over to the door calming her fears as she closed it. Going back to her desk she held up the recorder. "I want you to be aware that I am taping this meeting."

Betsy tilted her head and creased her eyebrows. "Annie, what is going on? Did you have some sort of head injury?"

"Cut the bullshit!"

"I don't understand what you are talking about? Exactly what is the problem?"

Annie sat for a moment in mild shock from the woman's apparent lack of knowledge of the incident. *Meredith said this might be her tactic.* "I am not falling for your little act, Betsy. I would suggest that you try the truth for a change."

"I am telling the truth I have no idea what you are talking about."

"When I first came here you were the only one who bothered to introduce yourself, I really appreciated that. During the whole time I had all those problems with my hormones going wacky you were there for me. I thought you were such a kind and decent woman. Apparently I was way off the mark on that one."

"Still don't understand what you are getting at, Annie."

"The higher ups wanted you gone from the company years ago. I put my career on the line for you and asked them to let you stay. For the record I got this job because I was the best qualified...in fact, Betsy, you were never in the running for it. As I said they wanted you gone."

"Well, I appreciate your going to bat for me but I still don't know what is going on."

Picking up the file Annie handed to the woman across from her. "This is what is going on, Betsy. The months of harassment and stalking by you! You spied on me, threatened me and beat me up! You betrayed me!"

Taking the folder Betsy flipped through the letters then handed it back. "I don't know who sent those to you but I assure you it wasn't me. I could never do such a thing."

Annie knew if she reacted in anger all would be lost so she closed her eyes in an attempt to gather her composure. After counting to ten she spoke. "Your denials are very touching, Betsy, but they are not working. There are witnesses and of course there is the bruise on your jaw...don't tell me it was from the car hitting you we both know that never happened."

Holding her hand up to her face Betsy stroked the bruise there. "I got this from a date that liked beating on people. Other than that I haven't the foggiest notion about what you're talking about."

"What about your daughter? How could you use her like that?"

"Keep my daughter out of this, she is no concern of yours. Why are you doing this to me?"

"What about Alexis, your lover who committed suicide. Did you drive her to that? Did you feel guilty when you went to her funeral in Florida."

"How dare you! I loved Alexis her death destroyed me! Why are you being so hateful towards me, Annie, I have done nothing to deserve this treatment."

Annie opened her desk drawer and took another folder out and placed it on the desktop. "I have it all right here, Betsy. I would suggest you come clean it will make everything much easier for you."

"Oh, now I get it, you are making all this up so you have a reason to fire me. It won't work you know, I know my rights."

Annie let out a small laugh as she shook her head. "You're going to play this to the end aren't you? I will give you one more chance. It is up to you if you take it or not."

"Don't need any chances for I have done nothing."

Opening the folder Annie looked at Betsy; this time it was not in fear but in pity for the person so desperate for recognition. "My mistake was I took you at your word, Betsy, I believed you. With a social security number it is very easy to find out all about a person. A few well-placed questions to neighbors can reap a wealth of knowledge. Want to know what this report says about you?"

A look of fear came over the woman's face, she clearly hadn't anticipated this. She sat there with her mouth partially opened as if she wanted to speak but couldn't.

"I will take your silence as a yes. It never occurred to me that you would be so desperate for attention from me that you would invent so many outlandish stories. First thing we found out is that you are married but your husband seems to have disappeared off the face of the earth twenty years ago. There isn't a daughter or a son for that matter, you never had children naturally or adopted." Shall I continue? "Still not speaking I see...I will continue then. Seems there is absolutely no record of an Alexis or anyone committing suicide when you said. In fact, according to your neighbor, Mrs. Sandborn, you have always lived alone and never have visitors. Several other neighbors confirmed this. It is doubtful that this Alexis person ever existed in your life." Looking over at the distraught face she asked. "Shall I go on?"

Betsy lowered her head. "No, stop please."

Annie continued in a very business-like fashion. "Legal drew up this statement which indicates you are leaving the company of your own free will and will not hold the company or anyone associated with it liable. I want you to go to your office and clear out all of your possessions and come back here. A guard is at your door and will remain there until you are finished. Then he will escort you back here where I will personally inspect everything to make sure you have only that which belongs to you. Then with a witness present you will sign this paper. Do I make myself clear?"

Betsy shook her head, stood up and left the room.

Leaning back in her chair Annie sighed deeply. No longer was she afraid of the specter. At last she could continue her life with Bailey without any doubts or fears.



The Hawaiian wedding was a dream come true for both women. Bailey was like a child with a great surprise she had to keep. She arranged for all the family members to be there to witness the ceremony. Both women in the exact same white dress stood hand in hand in front of the minister as they pledged their love for one another.

"Annie, my love, you have given me so much...love, joy, happiness and rest for my weary soul. I was searching for what I needed to be complete and there you were. From the day we met my life went from me to we. Thank you for loving me and allowing me to love you. I love you."

Tears were cascading down Annie's cheeks as she listened. Squeezing the hand she held she began. "Bailey, you are the love of my life. I thank God everyday for that old elevator breaking down." Both women smiled remembering the incident. "I never knew my life was missing something until I saw your smile. You will always be my partner, my lover and my protector. Thank you for loving me and allowing me to love you. I love you."

Bailey, taking Annie's left hand, placed a ring on her finger. "Annie, will you walk with me through all time and be my love?"

"Yes, yes I will." She said as she looked at the woman before her adoringly.

Then Annie took Bailey's left hand and placed a ring on her finger. "Bailey, will you walk with me through all time and be my love?"

Bailey tilted her head as a glorious smile crossed her face. While blue captured green she simply said, "Yes, for all time."

Holding each other close they kissed then turned to their family and friends. Bailey spoke. "Will you all please join us for a celebration of love?" Then taking Annie by the hand they walked back down the aisle this time as partners and soulmates.

Three weeks later Annie returned to work tanned and serenely happy. She and Bailey were planning on starting a family and would be visiting Dr. Lewis later in the week. Life is good she thought as she picked up the phone. "Hi there lover, wanted to let you know I love you." A look of complete love crossed her face as she listened.

"I was just thinking about you, love. An hour ago you were in my arms and I can still feel you there. I began missing you the moment you left." Bailey's voice dropped an octave to a seductive tone. "I want you."

Annie dropped her mail with those words. "God, how I love you, Bailey. Do you think there is anyway we can both not work and be together always?"

Bailey couldn't help herself she laughed. "How long do you think we would last twenty-four seven, Annie? Who would cry monkey's uncle first?"

"Just imagine, twenty-four seven with me and a baby." Annie was laughing too.

"Actually I was thinking along the lines of bed sores."

"Oh, you would expect to have your way with me constantly?"

"You would object?" The smile on her face was undeniable.

"Hmm. Tell me, is this morning an example of your talents?"

"Just a sampling love. I have all sorts of tricks up my sleeve."

"You are making an excellent case for yourself. I would like to run my fingers up that sleeve and see what is there." Annie's voice had a lilt in it as she spoke. Gazing at her desk she saw it!"

"Baby, you can go up my sleeve anytime you..."

"Damn, I can't believe it!"

"Annie, what's the matter? I thought we were teasing each other, I'm sorry if I upset you." Bailey couldn't understand what she said to make such a drastic change in her lover.

Annie didn't speak immediately as she tore the envelope open. "NO, it's not you, Bailey. Guess what I got in the mail?"

Fear gripped Bailey. "Tell me it is a free trip to Hawaii and not what I think it is."

Laughing, Annie said. "Wish I could, Bailey, but I'm afraid it is not a trip to Hawaii. It is as you fear." Laughing more she added. "She must think not only am I gullible but I am stupid too. Listen to this..."

Dear Annie,

I am the last person you want to hear from but I thought you should know. My mother has incurable cancer and hasn't long to live. The doctor has suggested we try a specific Tibetan herb that has had some success with her type of cancer. Other than that there is little to be done. Sorry I bothered you but I thought you should know.

Teresa

"Can you believe it, Bailey? How ridiculous! What am I suppose to do feel sorry for her, run to her side and say all is forgiven, or forget that this Teresa person is nothing but fiction?"

Bailey listened to the letter and its implications. Clearly the woman was deranged and had an extreme obsession that revolved around Annie. What could they do? Nothing really, she was sure they would hear more. "Baby, what do you say we treat this as what it is, an annoyance that has now become a joke."

"She will always be out there, won't she?" Annie knew she had to accept that fact.

"I'm afraid so, Annie. We will always know who it is and, the upside for you is that you will never have to face it alone. I love you and will always be there for you, no matter what."

Smiling, Annie came back to center; Bailey did that for her. Yes, this annoyance would always be there to haunt her from time to time. As long as she had Bailey with her to hold her hand and keep her

grounded she would survive the onslaughts of Specter. No longer would she be afraid.

THE END

Feedback is always appreciated

Please let me know what you think. Thank you.

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