

USA TODAY & WALL STREET JOURNAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LISA REGAN



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Over The Edge: A P.I. Jocelyn Rush

Digital Short

By Lisa Regan

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DEDICATION

For Susan Sole

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Molly

Five Years Ago

My feet pound along the packed-earth Wissahickon Creek trail. Sweat drips from the nape of my neck, down the length of my spine, and into the back of my shorts. It beads on my nose, falling as I run, and turns my hair, pulled tightly into a ponytail, slick and heavy on the back of my neck.

I've been running along this path four times a week for six months, and once every few times out, I manage to overtake him on the trail. I tried not to notice him, but all that lean muscle called out to me. I knew he saw me too. Then one day, as I ran past him, I turned and met his eyes. Blue fire. He smiled. I smiled back. I ran ahead. He followed.

From then on, it's been a game we play.

This section of the creek trail is called Forbidden Drive. The irony isn't lost on me the day something finally happens. The morning is fresh and dewy, sunlight slipping through the canopy of trees overhead, dappling everything around me. I see his back. Today he is shirtless, and every muscle in his back and shoulders ripple, glistening with sweat. I run up beside him, closer this time. When I turn to catch his eye, there is something there that wasn't before. An acknowledgment. I see you, those fiery blue eyes seem to say. I know what you want. I run ahead. Far ahead but not so far that he loses sight of me. I veer off the trail at a break in the trees, my feet crushing the brush beneath them. I hear a snapping twig behind me, and I know he's there.

I stop when I reach a kind of clearing. It's big enough, private enough. I put my hands against a tree trunk, leaning over, my breath coming fast and hard from the slightly uphill run through uneven terrain. He doesn't talk. Hands grip my hips, digging into the flesh. Hot breath slides down the nape of my neck. It doesn't take long. We're not wearing much to begin with, and our bodies are already shiny and wet with sweat. Once we've both shuddered with satisfaction, we part ways, wordless.

It happens a few more times after that. No words. No names. Then the winter sets in, and I turn to the treadmill for my daily jog. Sometimes at night, lying in bed, I close my eyes and remember how he felt, the way his

blue eyes caught me in their snare. I remember the way my body reacted to the things he did. The risks I took.

I'm glad it's over. It was only a dream. A kinky fantasy. Fleeting. Gone forever.

I think I won't ever see him again.



Jocelyn

Present Day

The seductive sway of Anita Grant's hips drew every gaze in the room. Even Jocelyn Rush couldn't help but follow her partner's rear as she sauntered from the bar into the dining section of the TGI Friday's on Philadelphia's City Avenue. Anita, clothed in a tight black skirt and an equally form-fitting purple blouse that showed off her ample cleavage, weaved through the tables. The other patrons inched their chairs closer to their tables to make way for her. For a Tuesday at lunchtime, it was quite crowded. Then again, there were at least a dozen office buildings nearby.

Jocelyn sipped her Coke and watched as Anita approached their target. Deon Simpson couldn't keep his focus on his mistress as Anita got closer. Jocelyn watched his dark eyes drift from his date's face to Anita's curvy form. She hadn't worn stockings, and her brown skin was smooth and supple, glimpses of it flashing from the slit in her short skirt as she walked. Simpson's eyes flitted back to the mistress, then once more to Anita. When he licked his lips nervously, Jocelyn nearly laughed out loud.

Ages ago, in what seemed like a different life, before going into business with Jocelyn, Anita had been a prostitute. As a Philadelphia police officer, Jocelyn had even arrested her a couple of times. When deciding which of them would approach Simpson, Anita had suggested she do it, and Jocelyn had conceded. They didn't want Deon to bolt, and Anita knew how to own a room. Jocelyn's brusque, cop-like demeanor was no match for Anita's sexy sway. As predicted, Deon Simpson was practically a captive audience.

From where Jocelyn sat, she could hear the conversation. "Deon Simpson," Anita said, her voice soft and a little husky.

The man practically melted in his chair. The mistress put her hands on the table, as though she were about to spring out of her seat and fly at Anita. "Yes?" Simpson said.

Anita pulled a folded sheaf of papers from a slim black purse slung over her shoulder. She handed the papers to Simpson. "You've been served," she told him. With a wink, she turned away. "Have a nice day," she called over

her shoulder.

She headed for the double doors. Jocelyn threw a ten on the bar and followed her out. In the parking lot, they laughed as they got into Jocelyn's ancient Ford Explorer. "Did you see the look on his face?" Jocelyn asked as they pulled out of the parking lot and onto City Avenue.

"That was pretty satisfying," Anita agreed.

Serving civil complaints wasn't Jocelyn's thing. She was a private investigator now, retired from her position as a detective with the Philadelphia police department, but she and Anita had to keep their little fledgling PI firm afloat, so they took what they could get. Deon Simpson's wife had hired them to confirm that he was having an affair. Once Jocelyn had proof, Mrs. Simpson had filed for divorce and asked Jocelyn and Anita if they'd serve the divorce complaint.

Another job in the books.

"Not much traffic today," Anita remarked. "You and Caleb might even have time to do some house hunting if we get back in time."

Jocelyn rolled her eyes. "Let's go back to the restaurant," she joked.

Caleb Vaughn was a lieutenant with the Philadelphia Special Victims Unit. They had met on a case in which Anita—and eventually Jocelyn, in her quest to find Anita's assailant—had been attacked. They were both single parents and had fallen pretty fast for each other. It had been two years, and they were trying to take the next step—moving in together.

Anita laughed. "That bad?"

"We can't agree on a damn thing," Jocelyn answered as they made their way onto the bridge that stretched over the Schuylkill River, connecting City Avenue to the Manayunk section of the city. It was three lanes going only in one direction. Drivers headed to City Avenue from Manayunk going the opposite direction were on another bridge upriver. Jocelyn stayed in the far right lane, headed toward Ridge Avenue North, when she noticed a large, burgundy-colored SUV in the rearview mirror bearing down on them.

"What the hell—" she started to say, but then the other vehicle plowed into the back of Jocelyn's Explorer. Metal clanged against metal. Their

bodies snapped forward, seat belts cutting across their bodies. Jocelyn braked, knuckles white on the steering wheel. Thoughts rattled around in her head like loose change. She blinked and turned to Anita, who was staring at her, wide-eyed. "You okay?" Jocelyn asked.

Anita's fingers reached to her forehead and came away bloodied.

"You okay?" Jocelyn repeated.

"I think so, yeah."

Metal screeched as the other driver tried to back up but only succeeded in pulling the Explorer backward.

"Jesus Christ," Jocelyn muttered. She looked in her rearview mirror and saw a flash of a woman's face. Blonde hair pulled back from her face, sunglasses. "She hit me so hard, she got under my bumper."

Horns blared from traffic stopped behind them. Engines raced as vehicles accelerated into the other two lanes. Jocelyn felt the familiar flush of anger swell inside her. Anita must have sensed it, because she placed a warm hand on Jocelyn's forearm. "Rush," she said. "It's okay."

Jocelyn tried to swing her door open, but it was bent in the frame. "No," she said. "It's not okay. Look how goddamn hard she hit us. I can't even open my door."

The harder she pushed against the unyielding door, the bigger the fireball of rage in her stomach burned. She maneuvered her legs out from under the steering wheel and, bracing herself against the wedge between her and Anita's seats, she used both legs to kick at the door. The other driver tried to back up again, and the Explorer bucked.

"Unbelievable," Jocelyn said. Sweat dripped in rivulets down the side of her face.

"Rush," Anita said. "Calm down. Let's just call nine-one-one."

"I don't need nine-one-one," Jocelyn snapped. "I can handle this."

"Which is exactly what makes me think we need nine-one-one."

With an otherworldly groan, the vehicles separated. Jocelyn's door sprung open. She started to get out but then the woman revved her SUV's

engine. Jocelyn knew at once what she intended to do.

“If this bitch thinks she’s leaving the scene, she’s got another think coming,” Jocelyn mumbled and scrambled back behind the wheel.

The offending SUV struggled to move forward, tires straining against its crumpled front end. Jocelyn used the delay to turn the Explorer sideways across two of the lanes of traffic, blocking the SUV from going anywhere—unless she wanted to get clipped by one of the cars flying past in the outermost lane blasting their horns at the two of them. People in Philadelphia didn’t stop for car accidents.

From her window, Jocelyn saw the SUV’s driver’s side door swing open. The woman stepped out. A pair of low heels peeked from beneath tailored brown slacks, clacking against the asphalt. Jocelyn hopped out.

“Hey,” Jocelyn called to her. “Just what the hell do you think you’re doing?”

The woman turned her head away, looking over the mangled hood of her vehicle. At what, Jocelyn couldn’t guess. There was a waist-high concrete median, then a narrow pedestrian walkway and a chest-high metal rail. Below that, the Schuylkill River churned, its currents swift and high from a series of early fall rainstorms.

Jocelyn stepped toward her. “Hey,” she said again. “Did you hear me? You could have killed us. Where were you going in such a hurry?”

The woman didn’t answer. One of her hands went to her chest, fingers gripping a diamond pendant that hung over her creamy cashmere sweater.

Jocelyn felt her face flush. She pointed a finger at the woman, her voice rising to a shout. “I’m talking to you. Just what the hell were you doing? Do you have any idea how hard you hit us? My friend is over there with a concussion. You don’t get to drive away from this.”

The woman held up both hands as if in surrender. “I… I’m—”

“Let me guess; you’re sorry. Save it, bitch. Sorry doesn’t mean shit to me. You could have killed us. We both have kids. Next time, watch where the hell you’re going.”

“I didn’t—” the woman started, but again, Jocelyn cut her off.

“Tell it to the police when they get here. You’re not getting off the hook for this. Not by me. Not today.”

The woman’s eyes drifted back to the side of the bridge.

“Jesus Christ,” Jocelyn said, the anger burning her up from the inside out. “Are you even fucking listening to me? What is wrong with you? You’d better hope my friend is okay, or I’m going to—”

Jocelyn stopped short of threatening the woman, catching herself before she said something she’d deeply regret. She saw her own reflection in the woman’s sunglasses as she took another glance in Jocelyn’s direction. Then the woman spun on one of her taupe heels and ran around the back of her SUV, losing one of her heels as she went.

Jocelyn ran after her, for the first time feeling the pain and stiffness in her low back. A spasm slowed her down. She rounded the back of the SUV just in time to see the woman effortlessly vault the median onto the pedestrian walkway.

Jocelyn limped toward her, waiting to see which way she was going to go—toward Manayunk or back toward City Avenue, left or right—but she did neither of those things. Without even a split second of hesitation, the woman clutched the outer rail with both hands, and like a gymnast about to mount a horse, she used her arms to lift her body upward, her hips levering her legs up behind her, sending her entire body over the rail and plunging into the river below.



Jocelyn hefted her weight over the median, her back screaming in protest. Leaning over the outer rail, she could see the woman’s crumpled form as it floated downriver, just a creamy bump cutting the surface of the murky brown water. Jocelyn couldn’t tell if she was alive or not. Then her arms began to flail and thrash. Even from where Jocelyn stood, she could see the woman struggling to stay afloat. Her head bobbed up once, twice, and then her body went under and didn’t come back up.

“Rush?” Anita called.

“Call nine-one-one!” Jocelyn shouted.

She turned back to Anita, who was just emerging from the passenger

side of the Explorer. Anita took two steps and crumpled. Jocelyn scrambled back over the median and ran toward her friend. She leaned down, feeling like the muscles in her low back were about to snap like rubber bands and slipped an arm around Anita's waist, pulling her back to standing.

"I think you have a concussion," Jocelyn told her. "Get back into the car and sit."

As she helped Anita fold herself back into the passenger seat, Jocelyn saw the black gleam of her cell phone case on the driver's side floor. She went around to the other side of the vehicle and snatched it up, dialing 911.

Anita said, "Did that woman just jump off the damn bridge?"

"She sure did."

Once the 911 call was complete, Jocelyn shot a text to her former partner, Detective Kevin Sullivan, who worked in the Northwest Detective Division, which covered the particular area of the city in which they sat.

Jocelyn kept an eye on Anita while they waited for the marked units, followed by Kevin, to show up. In a matter of minutes, the bridge was awash in police cars and spinning red and blue lights. EMS workers loaded Anita into the back of an ambulance and headed to the nearest hospital. Jocelyn promised to follow once she spoke with Kevin.

He stood on the pedestrian walkway, staring out at the river, a notebook in one hand and a pen in the other. "Rush," he said as she limped over. "You're telling me this lady smacked into you, got out of her car, never said a word, and jumped into the Schuylkill River?"

"Yeah," Jocelyn answered. "That's exactly what I'm telling you, and I don't think she could swim. Not from the way she was thrashing around before she went under."

"Well, shit." He motioned toward the river. "How far a drop you think that is?"

Jocelyn had been trying to estimate that herself since the woman jumped. "A hundred, hundred-fifty feet?"

Kevin poked his head over the rail. "At least. Far enough to kill someone, anyway," he said. "That's my guess. I'm surprised she was even

alive after she hit the water.”

“Did you get the marine unit out?”

He nodded. “Yeah, they’re downriver looking for her now.”

“You find out who she was?”

“Wallet in her purse on the passenger’s seat says Molly Porter. Age thirty-two. Lives in Manayunk. Car is registered to an Evan Porter. I assume that’s her husband. I’ll head over there once this is all cleaned up.”

Jocelyn had her phone in hand, tapping it against her thigh as she surveyed the scene. Her Explorer would have to be towed. It was probably a total loss. Kevin followed her gaze. “Can I give you a ride to the hospital?”

“Sure,” she said. “After we go to Molly Porter’s house.”

“Rush.”

“You said you were going to stop there.”

He rolled his eyes. “Yeah, after I drop you at the hospital. Who’s gonna pick up Anita?”

“I called Caleb while I was waiting for you to get here,” she said. “He said he’d get all the kids home. Anita’s mom will keep an eye on all of them, and he’ll check on Anita at the ER.”

Kevin chuckled and shook his head. “Fine, but you’re waiting in the car.”



Molly Porter had lived in a white stucco rowhouse on one of Manayunk’s steep, crowded hills. It was a one-way street, too narrow to accommodate parking on both sides. One side was lined with cars packed tightly together. Kevin circled the block twice looking for a parking spot before finally pulling onto someone’s pavement on the no-parking side of the street. He threw his light up onto the roof of his unmarked vehicle and got out. Jocelyn followed suit. Kevin shot her a cautionary look.

“What?” she said. “I have to stretch my back.”

He raised a brow at her. “You’re waiting out here.”

She watched him walk across the street, climb the two steps to the front

door, and ring the doorbell. A moment later, a young girl answered; a chunky blond baby on her hip—a boy, judging by his dinosaur onesie. Jocelyn estimated the girl to be eighteen or nineteen. Long brown hair cascaded over her shoulders. Her skin had the soft, supple look of a teen who hadn't yet shed her baby fat. As Kevin spoke, her face creased with confusion, then crumpled. Jocelyn wondered who she was in relation to Molly Porter. A younger sister? Maybe just a sitter? She was too old to be Porter's daughter. Kevin followed the girl inside, the door closing behind him. A few minutes later, he emerged, striding back to the car.

Jocelyn got in the same time he did. "What was that about?" she asked.

"That girl is the neighbor." Kevin pointed to a salmon-colored rowhouse beside the Porters. "Her name is Tessa. She lives there with her parents. She was just here watching the Porters' son."

It was only in that moment that the realization that the small, adorable Porter boy would grow up without a mother hit Jocelyn right in her gut. *Why, she wondered. Why would a traffic accident cause Molly Porter to throw herself off a bridge when she had a baby boy waiting for her at home?*

"Did she say where Molly had gone?" Jocelyn asked.

Kevin shook his head as he pulled out of his parking spot. "Tessa is homeschooled. She says every Tuesday for the last nine months, Molly has asked her to watch the baby for exactly two hours. She never says where she's going—and here's the kicker."

Jocelyn waited, a sinking feeling starting in her stomach to accompany the gut-punch from earlier.

"She pays Tessa to never tell her husband that she's gone out."



Kevin had learned from young Tessa that Evan Porter owned a small craft brewery and restaurant in Conshohocken, which was a short drive up the Schuylkill expressway, roughly ten miles from Manayunk. Porter's Pub was housed in a former warehouse and had been rehabbed to look modern, edgy, and yet inviting to the crowd of young professionals who filled its large bar and dining room. This time, Kevin didn't protest when Jocelyn followed him inside and up to the bar.

Although Kevin's suit made him fit right in with the other patrons, his age—mid-fifties—made him stand out like a parent at a college keg party. At thirty-eight, Jocelyn was closer in age to the crowd filling the place, although she was more shabbily dressed. Still, she felt the eyes of several customers on them as they waited for the bartender to come over. She wondered if they looked like they had when they were both on the job—very much like cops.

The bartender was a young, muscle-bound man whose smile failed the moment he laid eyes on them. *Yep*, she thought. *We look like detectives.*

“Help you?” the man said, his gaze falling somewhere between them as though he wasn't sure which one of them he should address.

Kevin tossed his credentials onto bar. “We're here to see Evan Porter. It's important.”

The man took a few seconds to look over Kevin's identification before disappearing into a door behind the bar. Moments later, he emerged with another man in tow. Evan Porter was tall, a little older, and a little less fit than the bartender, although he was dressed the same—in a black polo shirt and khaki pants. Jocelyn estimated mid-to-late thirties. His short, brown hair was brushed back from his forehead and stiff with gel. He had a square jaw, his skin close-shaven, and he walked with the confidence of someone who always got what he wanted. Jocelyn had seen it often. His blue eyes flashed as he smiled widely, as though they were old friends coming to call. He wasn't in the least bit worried.

“Detectives,” he said, extending a hand to each one of them from across the bar. “Evan Porter. What can I help you with?”

Kevin nodded toward the door he had emerged from. “Is there somewhere more private we can speak?”

Porter crossed his arms over his chest. The bartender shot them surreptitious glances, but the patrons' attention was now glued to several of the large-screen televisions, hanging from the walls, which played a Phillies game. “Is that necessary?” Porter asked. “What's this about?”

Kevin gave him a look that said, “it's your funeral,” and then told him, “Your wife was in a fender bender about two hours ago. She rear-ended another vehicle. Afterwards, she jumped off the City Avenue bridge into the

Schuylkill River. The Philadelphia Police Marine Unit is looking for her.”

The smile stayed plastered on Evan’s face, but his posture went rigid. No part of his body moved except for his lips. “Excuse me?” he said. “I’m sorry. I think you have the wrong person.”

Jocelyn rattled off his address, ignoring the stern look of caution Kevin shot her. “Is that where you live?”

“Yes, but…”

“You have a wife named Molly?” she went on.

“Yes, but…”

Kevin pulled out his cell phone and brought up the picture he had taken of Molly Porter’s driver’s license. The rest of the contents of her purse, and her vehicle, had been taken into evidence. He turned the screen so that Even Porter could see her face. “This your wife?”

Evan’s Adam’s apple bobbed up and down in his throat like a yo-yo. His words seemed to come from deep within his diaphragm, bubbling up from some place his body had trouble accessing. “Please, come into my office.”



His office was four gray walls and a desk with very few personal touches. Only a framed photograph of Molly and their son sitting on the corner of his desk hinted at his private life. There were bookshelves with binders, filing cabinets, and a bank of screens on one wall showing various parts of the building. On his desk was an open laptop, which he snapped closed before collapsing into his chair. Jocelyn and Kevin remained standing.

One hand swiped down over his face, which had lost a shade of color in the time it took them to round the bar and go into his office. “I don’t understand,” he said. “Molly is at home with our son, Christopher. This can’t be right.”

“Your son is at home with the babysitter,” Kevin said.

His eyes lit up as he latched onto this piece of information. “We don’t have a babysitter. You must be mistaken.”

Jocelyn said, “It’s your neighbor. A young girl named Tessa. She’s watching your son. Your wife went out. Tessa says that she didn’t tell her

where she went. Do you know where she might have gone?”

“That’s impossible,” he said. “Molly is a stay-at-home mother. She wouldn’t need a babysitter, and if she needed to go out, she would have called me. You just—you have to have the wrong person. This is some kind of mistake.”

His gaze went to the photo of his wife and son. Tears welled in his eyes.

“Maybe she went to visit a friend?” Jocelyn suggested, although she thought of the clothes Molly Porter had been wearing. More professional looking than Jocelyn would have expected from the stay-at-home mother of an infant. When Olivia was that small, Jocelyn had alternated between jeans and pajama pants and nearly always been covered in spit-up or remnants of baby food. “Or to a job interview?”

Porter shook his head and blinked back his tears. “No, no. Molly wouldn’t be going to a job interview. She wanted to stay home with Christopher. All her friends live in New York. That’s where she’s from.”

“Her family?” Kevin asked.

Porter shook his head. He continued to stare at Molly’s photo. His voice was low. “I’m her family. Me and Christopher. Her parents passed a long time ago. She doesn’t have anyone else.”

“Sounds lonely,” Jocelyn remarked.

His brow furrowed as he stared at her, hesitating momentarily. Then he said, “I guess it seems that way, but we’re happy. We have our son. I was—I was going to give Molly the family she never had. My wife is happy, Detectives. This has to be some kind of mix-up.”

But happy people don’t jump off bridges, Jocelyn thought.

As if he had had the same thought, Kevin took out his phone once more and brought up a picture of the Porters’ mangled SUV. He showed it to Evan. “This your wife’s vehicle?”

Porter’s hand flew to his mouth but not before the words “Sweet Jesus” slipped out. He closed his eyes, taking a moment to compose himself.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” Kevin said.

Evan's eyes snapped back open. A phone appeared in his trembling hand. "I'll call my wife," he said.

Jocelyn and Kevin watched as he dialed a number. After four rings, a tinny female voice said, "You have reached Molly Port—"

He hung up and dialed another number. In the silent office, they could clearly hear a female voice, thick with emotion, answer. "Oh, Mr. Porter. Oh my God. It's Tessa. The police were here. Molly, she—"

Evan cut her off, his voice growing steadier with each word. "It's okay, Tessa. I'm with the police now. Is this true? Molly went out this morning?"

"Yes, I'm sorry. She's always come back before."

His eyes widened. "Before?"

"Oh—well, yeah. On Tuesdays, she goes out. I'm sorry, Mr. Porter. She asked me not to tell you."

A pink flush started at his throat and rose to the roots of his hair. "How long?"

"Mr. Porter, please don't be mad. I—"

"How—" His voice had risen, and he caught himself, as though he had just remembered that Jocelyn and Kevin were in the room. "How long has she been going out on Tuesdays?"

There was a silence. Jocelyn leaned forward in her seat, straining to hear Tessa's answer. "Like, at least since Christopher was born."

He closed his eyes. "Thank you, Tessa," he said. "I'll be home soon. Stay with Christopher until I get there."

Jocelyn couldn't help but bristle at the flat-voiced way he gave instructions to the girl. As though she were a servant, not a neighbor who had been doing his wife a favor. What if she had somewhere to be? Evan Porter was either too arrogant or too grief-stricken to consider that. Jocelyn's money was on arrogant.

Porter threw his phone onto the desk and put his head in his hands. "Oh my God," he cried. "Dear God."

"Mr. Porter," Kevin said, "did your wife have a history of mental

illness? Depression?”

“No, nothing like that.”

“Can you think of any reason why your wife would attempt to harm herself?”

“No,” Porter replied without looking at them. “No, I can’t, but you can ask her when you find her.”

Kevin sighed. “Mr. Porter, we believe Molly survived the fall, but witnesses say she appeared to struggle once she was in the water.”

Evan palmed his forehead. “Oh God. Oh God. She can’t swim. You have to get her out of there. She never learned to swim. Did you call someone? Did someone go in after her?”

Jocelyn said, “Mr. Porter, I’m sorry. No one was close enough to dive in after her.”

“But someone has to get her out. Is anyone looking for her?”

Kevin answered, “As I told you when we got here, we have the Marine Unit looking for her now, but Mr. Porter, you should know that based on all the information, we believe this is a recovery operation, not a rescue operation. I’m very sorry.”



Back in Kevin’s car, they watched Evan Porter rush from the double doors of the front entrance to the parking lot. He got into a big, black Escalade and peeled out, tires squealing.

“She was isolated,” Jocelyn said. “No family, no friends. Not even a regular babysitter.”

“Lots of women are stay-at-home moms,” Kevin pointed out. “And often they don’t have time for much else, especially when their kids are very young.”

“She jumped off a bridge, Kev.”

“Could be postpartum.”

“I’m not sure she’d still have postpartum depression at this stage. That boy looks almost a year old. You should check and see if there have ever

been any domestic calls.”

“Yes,” Kevin said, smiling at her briefly as he pulled out of Porter’s Pub and headed back toward Philadelphia. “I haven’t forgotten how to do the job, Rush.”

“Sorry.”

“It’s okay,” he said. “Truth is, I miss having you around.”

“I’d love to know where she was going every Tuesday. Can you get her phone records? Write up a warrant for the GPS in her vehicle?”

Kevin said, “I can. Not sure I’ll get them. You know there’s no crime here, right? She jumped off a bridge. Offed herself. There’s no one to arrest. I’ve notified the husband. No need to talk to anyone else, because you and Anita saw her kill herself. Case closed.”

Jocelyn knew this was true. Had she been on the job, the two of them would be back at the station writing up their reports, waiting on a call from the Marine Unit, if and when the divers found the body. Had she been on the job and not directly involved in the accident, she might even be able to let it go. But she had harshly misjudged Molly Porter, taking all of a few seconds to peg her for a bitch, thinking only of the injuries to Anita and how the accident could have been much worse. What if she hadn’t gotten out of the car to confront Molly? Would she still be alive? What if Jocelyn had simply let her drive off? Would little Christopher Porter still have a mother? Had Jocelyn’s signature anger and rash behavior cost the woman her life? What if she had just gotten out of the car and told her she was calling the police instead of berating her? Would it have made a difference? Jocelyn knew she wouldn’t be able to let it go, whether Philadelphia police closed the case or not. But for now, there was no sense in pushing Kevin. He was still a detective, and Jocelyn knew from experience the cases would be backing up at Northwest Detectives.

“You’ll let me know when you hear from the Marine Unit at least?” she asked.

“Of course.”

Her gaze went to the narrow streets flashing past the window. “Thanks. You can take me to the hospital.”



Anita had a concussion and a laceration to her forehead. Jocelyn waited with her as the nurse prepared her discharge paperwork. She used the time to look up Evan Porter on her phone. He was thirty-five, an MBA graduate of Columbia University, the son of David and Maryanne Porter. The older Porters owned one of the largest real estate development companies in the area. David ran the company and Maryanne spearheaded their charity foundation. The Porters had been turning up at every red-carpet event in the city going back as far as Jocelyn's browser had been collecting photos.

Evan began showing up in the photos as a gangly teenager, standing in a tuxedo between his smiling parents. Over the years, he grew and developed into a handsome, brooding college student. Not at all like the man she had met today, with his easy charm and artificial smile. With a bit more digging, Jocelyn found that Evan Porter had been spending the family money since leaving college to open a series of failed businesses. A nightclub on Philadelphia's waterfront that had gone under in less than a year; a restaurant in center city that lasted three years; and a trendy, upscale bar in Manayunk that had closed after two years. Porter's Pub in Conshohocken was the longest-tenured venture yet, in its fourth year of business.

"You're looking those people up, aren't you?" Anita said from her hospital bed.

Jocelyn grunted and typed in Molly Porter's name along with the keywords "New York." There were dozens of Molly Porters. Jocelyn searched for her name using Philadelphia as a keyword and turned up even more Molly Porters. When she typed in Evan Molly Porter, she got a wedding announcement from four years ago.

"You're not gonna let this go, are you?" Anita asked.

Jocelyn looked up long enough to give her a tight smile.

Anita sighed and shifted the soft ice pack on her head. "It wasn't your fault, Rush. People who jump off bridges will jump off bridges whether you're yelling at them or not."

"But what if I was what finally pushed her over the edge?"

"You weren't. Whatever sent her off that bridge started long before she

ever laid eyes on you.”

Jocelyn said nothing. She knew Anita was right, but that didn't do a damn thing to dispel the feelings of guilt ballooning inside her.

Closing her eyes, Anita said, “Wait until tomorrow, would you? I'll dig up what I can.”

In their time together as Rush and Grant Investigations, Anita had become one of the finest internet stalkers Jocelyn had ever known. If there was dirt to be found on the Web, Anita would locate it.

Jocelyn took one last quick look at Facebook and Instagram but found nothing for either Porter. “Only if you feel up to it,” she told Anita. “Tomorrow this will all be forgotten. Other than finding her body, the case is already closed.”

“Pretty white blonde lady living in a nice neighborhood, married to a rich white boy, jumps off a bridge?” Anita said. “I find it hard to believe the press isn't interested in all that.”

Jocelyn stood up, her phone back in her hand. “You're right,” she agreed. “I'll be right back.”

She slipped into the hall and called one of her media contacts from her days with the Philadelphia Police Department. After finishing the call, she waited with Anita until she was discharged. Caleb picked both of them up. With assurances from Anita that she would be just fine under the care of her mother and two teenage children for the next couple of days, Jocelyn and Caleb took Olivia and went home to Jocelyn's Roxborough rowhouse. As she soaked her sore back in a hot bath, Jocelyn couldn't help but wonder about Molly Porter. The woman lived maybe ten blocks away from Jocelyn. It was even possible that they'd crossed paths at one of the local grocery stores, coffee shops, or other businesses. Jocelyn could have even passed her in one of the neighborhood playgrounds where she often took Olivia to play.

In her bedroom, Caleb's long, lean body was stretched out on what had become his side of the bed. He wore his usual choice of pajamas—a pair of shorts and a T-shirt. The lights were off; only the flicker of the television cast a jittery glow over the room. Beside him, smack in the middle of the bed, snored Olivia. Bare feet peeked from beneath her My Little Pony nightgown,

and cinched tightly in her arms was the stuffed animal du jour—a long-necked dinosaur that Caleb had bought her at the Academy of Natural Sciences over the weekend. Her brown hair fanned half across Caleb’s pillow and half across Jocelyn’s.

“I thought we were making her sleep in her own room,” Jocelyn said, though she couldn’t help but smile. Olivia’s face was even sweeter and more angelic when she slept.

Caleb reached over and stroked Olivia’s hair. “Let her sleep a few minutes. Then I’ll carry her back to her room.”

Jocelyn had raised Olivia from an infant, taking over her care from her sister Camille—then a drug addict—when Olivia was only seven days old. It had been Jocelyn and Olivia alone with only the help of Jocelyn’s best friend, Inez, and Inez’s mother until Olivia turned five and Caleb came along. Jocelyn’s fears that Olivia would be resistant to having a man in their lives—besides fun Uncle Kevin and Jocelyn’s own uncle, Simon Wilde—were unfounded. She loved Caleb instantly. Sometimes, Jocelyn suspected that Olivia loved Caleb even more than Jocelyn did. The two had quickly become inseparable, and Caleb, having already raised a son who was now in college, had all kinds of parenting tricks up his sleeve, which Jocelyn was only too happy to put into action. Now, whenever Caleb stayed over, Olivia climbed into bed between them. Sometimes in the middle of the night and sometimes, like tonight, before she had even been to her own bed.

“You feel okay?” Caleb asked.

“Sore back,” Jocelyn said as she got into bed on the other side of Olivia. She planted a kiss on her daughter’s forehead. “That woman today—the jumper—she had a little boy. Just a baby.”

“I know,” Caleb said. He pointed toward the television. “The news caught wind of it.”

Jocelyn fished the remote from the tangle of sheets and turned the sound up, a smile stretching across her face.

She felt his eyes boring into her. He said, “What did you do?”

She waved him off. “Shhh. I want to hear this.”

Lights from the press cameras cast a harsh glare on Evan Porter as he stood on the Schuylkill riverbank, flanked by two uniformed police officers. He was taking questions from reporters. Although Jocelyn couldn't hear the questions, his responses were clear, thanks to all the microphones thrust into his face. "No, no. She wasn't depressed. I don't know why my wife did this. It's unlike her. We have a son at home, Christopher, a beautiful, little baby." He paused, eyes cast down, as though he were getting choked up. He faced the cameras again with glistening eyes. "She would never leave our son. Not like this."

Another question. He answered, "I don't know where she was coming from."

More shouts. Another response. "I don't think her jumping had anything to do with the accident. It was a fender bender, from what I've been told."

It went on, but Jocelyn had stopped listening. He wouldn't be offering any new information anyway. The news cut back to the studio where the anchor told viewers that the police would continue to search through the night. She felt Caleb's gaze on her again.

"You called the press?" he asked incredulously.

She didn't answer.

"Jocelyn, what the hell for?"

She met his eyes. "People don't just decide to jump off a bridge because they got into a fender bender. That woman—" The newscast flashed a photo, which had likely been provided by Evan, of Molly on her wedding day, because Molly Porter didn't have a Facebook page. Jocelyn had already checked. She picked up the remote and paused the newscast. Molly Porter's face filled the screen, smiling at them, her blonde hair pulled up in the front and then cascading in ringlets over her shoulders. She was beautiful. Stunning, really. Staring at the photo, Jocelyn noticed a light-brown birthmark on Molly's right cheek that she hadn't noticed on the bridge. It was close to her jawbone, and if her head hadn't been angled slightly, it wouldn't be visible. It was almost star-shaped.

Jocelyn continued. "Something was going on with her. Something that bears investigating."

Caleb raised a brow. “So, you feel guilty. Help me out here: she hit you, gave Anita a concussion and you a sore back, and you’re blaming yourself because she jumped off a bridge?”

“She has a little boy, Caleb. A baby.”

“Even people with kids can be suicidal.”

Jocelyn looked down at Olivia again. She knew he was right. She’d seen it on the job. Being a parent didn’t solve all your mental health issues. Jocelyn couldn’t shake the feeling that there was something more going on.

“Maybe she was doing something wrong,” Caleb challenged, although his tone was calm. Playing the devil’s advocate. “Maybe she was having an affair and didn’t want anyone to find out. Maybe that’s why she jumped.”

“An affair is a possibility,” Jocelyn conceded, “a probability even. But I’m not sure if it’s a reason to kill yourself. Whatever it was that she was doing on Tuesdays was about to be found out, and Molly Porter would rather die than face the consequences of whatever she was doing.”

Caleb looked at the screen, studying Molly’s face. “Jocelyn, I’m not sure this is a situation that you can fix.”

“I’m not trying to fix it.”

“Then it’s not a case you can solve. Actually, it’s not even a case you can investigate. You were personally involved.”

“But I—” She started to speak, but he was leaping out of bed, walking closer to the television.

“Holy shit,” he said.

“What? What is it?”

“I have to go in,” he said, searching for the jeans he’d strewn on the floor earlier.

“Go into work?” she asked, perplexed.

“It’s about Molly Porter,” he said, gesturing toward the screen. “I think I’ve seen her before. Can you find this photo online and screenshot it to me?”

Jocelyn picked up her phone. “Sure,” she said. “But you better call me the moment you find what you’re looking for.”



Caleb woke her at three a.m. Olivia still snored beside her. Jocelyn got out of bed and followed him downstairs to the kitchen, eyes bleary with fatigue. Her back ached with every step.

“I’m obsessed,” she told him. “But this could have waited until morning.”

He sat at the table. “Well, yes, it could, but I don’t want to risk Olivia overhearing any of it.”

Jocelyn folded herself into a chair across from him. “That bad, huh?”

But of course she had known it would be bad. Caleb worked for the Special Victims Unit. Their focus was on sexual assault and other crimes against children and the elderly. Quite honestly, Jocelyn wasn’t sure how he could stomach it, even though she knew it was a vitally important job.

He placed his phone in the front of him. “You know we work a lot of child porn cases, right?”

She covered her stomach, suddenly feeling nauseated. “Oh Jesus.”

“There’s a video called the ‘Star’ video. It’s been circulating for years. We’re talking long before streaming was a thing. A lot of law enforcement divisions that work child porn cases are aware of it. It’s one of those videos that used to be... well, as my boss always says, ‘extremely popular among child porn enthusiasts.’ What we might think of today as viral. Basically, if you caught a guy with child porn in his house, he had a copy of the ‘Star’ video.”

Jocelyn grimaced. “Jesus.”

“Yeah. I mean, like I said, this was before streaming, so we don’t find it much anymore, but it’s pretty well-known. Anyway, no one has ever been able to locate the girl in the video. She’s maybe twelve or thirteen. In a hotel room. There are... several men. In the video, she says her name is Star. That’s why it’s called the ‘Star’ video.”

Jocelyn said, “Let me guess, she calls herself Star because of the birthmark on her cheek. The star-shaped birthmark.”

Caleb shrugged. “We have no way of knowing why she chose to call

herself Star, but yeah, she has a star-shaped birthmark on her right cheek. That's actually how I recognized her. Its shape is very distinctive."

"Molly Porter is Star. Was Star."

Caleb swiped the screen on his phone. Jocelyn held up a hand to block her view of it. "Please," she said.

He shook his head. "You know I couldn't show it to you anyway. It's just a screenshot of her face. That's all."

He turned the phone toward her. The image was grainy and dark, but the brown, star-shaped birthmark on the young girl's right cheek, near her jawline, was unmistakable. In fact, in the screen grab Caleb had taken, it looked darker than in Molly Porter's wedding photo. Jocelyn wondered if it had faded over time or if Molly had made a point of trying to cover it with makeup whenever possible.

"We think that Star was a prostitute," Caleb went on. "This video has been circulating for nearly twenty years."

"Molly Porter was thirty-two. So it could be her."

Caleb took his phone back, turned it off, and placed it on the table. "We can never prove it though."

"No, I guess not," Jocelyn said. "But it would explain why Molly Porter has no past."

"Do you think her husband knows?" Caleb asked.

Jocelyn pushed her sleep-tousled hair behind her ears. She thought of what she'd found online—the Porter family at galas and charity benefits, dressed in fine clothes, standing on red carpets to have their photos taken. "I don't know," Jocelyn answered honestly. "I don't know that the Porter family would have been accepting of a past like this if they knew."

"Maybe just the husband knows," Caleb said. "It's possible."

"That could be why they're so private," Jocelyn considered. Her own thoughts had run more toward a domestic abuse situation. Evan Porter had been so firm in his conviction that his wife would have no need to leave their house, and Molly Porter had gone so far as to pay the young babysitter not to tell him she'd been going out. Why the need to keep the simple fact of

leaving the house from her husband? “Something’s not right,” Jocelyn concluded.

With a sigh, Caleb turned his phone to the sleep mode and stood, looking down at her with a half-smile. “I’m guessing you’re hell-bent on finding out what that is.”

Jocelyn smiled back up at him. She loved him for not telling her to let it go. “Yes,” she answered. “Yes, I am.”



They were down a vehicle. Caleb helped Jocelyn get Olivia off to school and then dropped her at a nearby car rental place so she could get some wheels. Her first stop was Anita’s house to check on her partner and fill her in on all she’d found out. Anita said she’d tried to find out what she could about Molly Porter online until her head started to pound. Jocelyn told her not to worry about it—to get some rest—and headed off to the Porters’ home. She called Kevin on her way over.

“Did the Marine Unit find anything?” she asked as soon as he picked up.

“Good morning, Rush. Nice to hear from you. How are you today?”

She rolled her eyes. “Come on, Kev.”

“Where are you right now?”

She didn’t answer.

“Rush,” he said. “You’re not on the job anymore, and this is not one of your cases.”

Luck was with her as she pulled onto the Porters’ street. A parking spot yawned open a few houses up the hill from the Porters.’ Jocelyn maneuvered into it while Kevin went on about how she should let the Molly Porter thing go.

“I’m going home, Kev,” she lied. “My back is killing me.” That, at least, wasn’t a lie.

They hung up after he again promised to let her know if Molly Porter’s body was recovered. Jocelyn cracked the window of the rental car and turned it off. She wasn’t sure what she was even doing here. The truth was that she had no intention of approaching Evan Porter. Kevin was right. This wasn’t a

case.

Along the pavement side of the street, several news vans were parked—NBC 10, 6ABC, and FOX 29. No reporters waving microphones were in sight, but a few more casually dressed people loitered in the street, smoking cigarettes and scrolling on their phones. Jocelyn pegged them for producers or cameramen. They'd probably be there most of the day and possibly the next day, but the news moved fast in Philadelphia. Within a few days, the Molly Porter story would be completely forgotten. Even if her body was found, there was no guarantee the press would return to cover it. Not if something juicier was happening in the city.

With a sigh, Jocelyn settled back into her seat and watched the front of the Porter home. A woman in jeans and a form-fitting T-shirt walked past. Jocelyn saw a tattoo sleeve extending from the cuff of her right shirtsleeve to the back of her hand—all elaborate black designs. Her hair was long and dark with bright red streaks slashing through it. The red of a cherry, not the soft auburn or light tangerine of natural hair color. The woman slowed at the Porter home, staring just a moment at the front door before walking on.

Jocelyn stayed for an hour but realized she wasn't going to see much—not with the news vans lining the street. The next day, she returned to nearly the same scene. This time, only the 6ABC van remained. Again, she sat in her rental car for an hour. She was about to leave when she saw the tattoo-sleeved woman with the cherry red streaks in her hair walking up the street, this time toward Jocelyn. Her face was heavily made up—foundation caked over her pale skin, her eyeliner and mascara so dark and pronounced she'd almost qualify as goth. As she drew closer, Jocelyn got a better look at her face. A nose ring glinted from her left nostril. Jocelyn estimated her to be in her mid-to-late thirties. Again, she slowed as she passed the Porter home, eyes lingering on the front door, but then kept walking. Jocelyn used her rearview mirror to watch the woman walk to the top of the street. The corner house had a "For Sale" sign in its front window. It was on the two front steps of that house that Tattoo Sleeve sat and produced a pack of cigarettes from somewhere inside her bra. She lit up and exhaled, her eyes fixed on the Porter home.

For a moment, Jocelyn wondered if she was just a curious bystander or

neighbor. Someone who knew of the Porters and was now interested since she'd seen Evan Porter on the local news. Using her rearview mirror, she kept an eye on the woman until, after finishing her cigarette, she stood, flicked the butt to the pavement, and walked around the corner.

Jocelyn started her vehicle, pulled out of the parking spot, and sped down the street. She turned right at the bottom and then made her way up the neighboring street, searching for the tattoo-sleeved woman. She weaved through several nearby streets, but the woman was gone. With a sigh, she drove home.

On day three, Molly Porter's body still hadn't been pulled from the river, but the media people were gone from Evan Porter's street. Jocelyn sat outside once more after dropping Olivia off at school. There was no activity. She waited only twenty minutes this time, thinking how stupid this was—what did she hope to find out or to gain from stalking the Porter home? The neat stucco exterior told her nothing about why Molly had chosen to jump off a bridge.

Her fingers brushed the car keys, about to turn the ignition, when the front door opened and young Tessa stepped out. She got to the second step before turning back to the partially opened door. There stood Evan Porter, bare-chested in a pair of boxer shorts with a satisfied grin on his face. Tessa waved and flashed him a momentary smile—a kind of delirious, euphoric smile but marred with something else. Something beneath it. Uncertainty.

Guilt.

“Oh shit,” Jocelyn muttered to herself. She took a closer look at the babysitter. Her round face was flushed. The back of her hair was mussed, and her shirt looked crooked on her body. Once the Porter door closed behind her, she hurried over to her own home and disappeared inside.

“Son of a bitch,” Jocelyn mumbled. That hadn't taken Even Porter long—or the babysitter. She wondered if the two had been carrying on together before Molly killed herself, although Jocelyn wasn't sure how they would have managed if Molly was home as much as Evan had alluded to. Would Molly have trusted Tessa to keep her mysterious Tuesday outings a secret if she knew her babysitter was screwing her husband?

Thoughts tumbled through Jocelyn's brain as she stared through the windshield. A flash of red in her sideview mirror caught her eye. A few houses up, sandwiched between two parked cars, stood Tattoo Sleeve, her cell phone aimed at the front of the Porter household. She'd recorded the whole thing, Jocelyn realized.

She was out of the car in seconds, hurrying up the hill toward the woman. Tattoo Sleeve caught sight of her and turned, fleeing. Jocelyn's back screamed, tightening up, and slowing her down. "Wait," she called. "Dammit."

Her breath came out in huffs by the time she reached the crest of the hill, the woman now out of her sight. Pain made sweat bead along her forehead. As she rounded the corner, turning left as Tattoo Sleeve had, she saw the woman again, not running away as expected but struggling to get the key into the lock of an extremely old-model Chevy. As Jocelyn neared, she looked up and scowled. "I don't know what you think you saw back there, but it's none of your business."

Jocelyn held one hand against her low back, trying to breathe through the pain. "It's not what you think," Jocelyn told her. "I just want to ask you a couple of questions."

The woman froze, her hand hovering over the driver side door handle. She looked Jocelyn up and down, taking in her jeans and old Phillies T-shirt beneath a leather jacket. "You a cop?"

Jocelyn shook her head.

Some of the panic in the woman's taut posture leaked away—whether she believed Jocelyn wasn't a cop or she just realized that Jocelyn was in no shape to do anything to her, Jocelyn wasn't sure. "Then who are you?"

Jocelyn stepped forward, leaning a palm against the dull brown hood of the woman's car for support. "I'm the person Molly Porter rear-ended before she jumped into the Schuylkill River."

"Oh shit."



Bob's Diner had been a fixture in Jocelyn's neighborhood since the late 1940s. It sat along Ridge Avenue between a church and a cemetery, sleek in

silver chrome with red stripes on its exterior. The inside was a throwback to the 1950s, and fittingly, it was one of the only businesses around that still took cash only. Jocelyn and Lacey—that was Tattoo Sleeve’s actual name—slid into a booth and ordered coffee while they looked over their menus.

“Just because you were there the day Molly jumped doesn’t make you trustworthy,” Lacey told her without looking up from hers.

The waitress arrived with their coffees. Jocelyn ordered eggs and bacon. Lacey asked for French toast. Once they were alone again, Jocelyn said, “Yeah, I get that.”

“You used to be a cop, didn’t you?” Lacey said. “I can tell. You have that look.”

Jocelyn dumped two sugars into her coffee along with some creamer and stirred. “Yeah, I was on the job a long time. I’m a private investigator now.”

Lacey’s shoulders shifted up just a fraction with tension. “Who hired you?”

“No one,” Jocelyn said.

“Then what were you doing outside of Molly’s house?”

Jocelyn sighed. “I need to know why she jumped.”

Lacey sipped her coffee black. “What do you care?”

“I have some, uh, issues keeping my anger under control. That day, I didn’t react well. She tried to leave the scene and I blocked her. I got out of the car yelling. Called her a bitch. Next thing I know, she’s over the railing.”

Lacey laughed, drawing Jocelyn’s gaze to her face. “You think it was your fault.”

“I think if she hadn’t hit me that day, or even if I’d just let her flee the scene, she’d still be alive.”

“I didn’t peg you for stupid,” Lacey remarked.

“I know, I know. If she was suicidal, it wasn’t because of anything I did or said. But I was the last straw. I can’t leave it alone. I have to know.”

Their food arrived. Lacey took a large bite of her French toast and spoke around it. “Did you talk to Evan?”

“I was there when the police notified him.”

“Well,” Lacey said, “if it wasn’t obvious then, it should have been obvious this morning. He’s a mega douche. You want to know why Molly jumped? Evan Porter.”

“How do you know?” Jocelyn asked. “How do you know the Porters?”

“The Porters,” Lacey scoffed. “I don’t know the Porters. I knew Molly. The ‘Porters’ cut me out of her life after they got married.”

“How long were you and Molly friends?” Jocelyn asked, finally picking at her eggs.

Lacey shrugged. “Since we were kids.”

“So you knew her when she was Star?”

Lacey’s fork clattered onto her plate. “What did you say?”

Jocelyn explained how she had found out about the notorious ‘Star’ video.

Lacey hung her head. “There were a lot of videos.”

“Of you too?”

Lacey nodded.

“Did you know her before...?”

“Before we became prostitutes?” Lacey asked, her tone harsh. “No. We met in New York. We both had the same pimp. Molly was twelve when she was first brought in. Dumb as a rock, naïve as could be. I was a couple of years older. The other girls, they hated her. New girls are still being groomed, which means they get treated like little princesses until they get broken in. Seeing them always reminded me of when I got there. Made me sad. Some of the other girls took it worse. A few made it their mission to make her life hell. More than it already was. She was so doe-eyed. I couldn’t take it.”

“You took her under your wing?”

Lacey said, “More or less, yeah.”

“How did she end up there?”

“Her story was the same as most.”

“Meaning what?” Jocelyn asked.

Lacey answered, “You know, inattentive parents or no parents at all.”

“Which did Molly have?”

“None at all. Never knew her dad. Mom died of an overdose when Molly was still a toddler.”

“Who raised her?” Jocelyn asked.

“Her aunt.”

Jocelyn thought of Olivia—how she had taken over care of her when Camille’s drug habit proved her unfit to parent. “Being raised by an aunt doesn’t automatically set you down the path to prostitution,” she pointed out. “Lots of kids are raised by relatives and turn out just fine.”

“Sure they do,” Lacey agreed. “But lots of kids don’t have the shitty self-esteem Molly used to have. All it took was a guy lavishing her with attention, making her feel like she was special.”

“Again,” Jocelyn said, “I would argue that’s what every woman wants—a person who lavishes us with attention and makes us feel special.”

“Yeah, ’cause most women understand that they deserve to be treated that way because they’re worth something,” Lacey said. “We’re not talking about most women. We’re talking about girls who start out with virtually no self-worth. Nothing. That kind of attention is everything to you when you think you’re nothing.”

“You and Molly thought you were nothing?”

“Less than nothing. For us, attention was currency. The more special you could make us feel, the more we would do for you. Anything. And we got in so deep and fell so hard that by the time the guy suggested having sex with other men for money, we thought it was a brilliant idea. Next thing we know, we’re being pimped out a dozen times a day. One day you wake up and you realize you’re not living a goddamn Cinderella fantasy, and that a man who makes you fuck strangers all day for nothing in return except the back of his hand doesn’t actually love you. It was a hard lesson for both of us.”

“I’m sorry,” Jocelyn said.

Lacey shrugged. “We got out.”

“How?”

“I had parents. Like, real parents. I ran, went home, and took Lacey with me. By then we were both getting older. We’d run before and not gotten very far—we stayed in the city and stayed with someone we knew. Our pimp found us, beat the shit out of both of us, put us on the street ’til we bled nonstop for a week. We figured out we needed to get as far as we could. Our pimp, he’d kill us for sure, but he wasn’t driving hundreds of miles to track us down. He had a business to run, new girls to break in. Molly said he’d tell everyone he killed us and let us go if we could get far enough away.”

“You came to Pennsylvania.”

Lacey nodded. “My family lives in Bucks County. Far enough away from New York City. My parents let Molly stay with us. By that time we were both eighteen, so there was no need to involve the authorities. We laid low for a while, tried to put our lives back together. Molly worked her ass off waiting tables to save up for college. She stopped going when she met Evan.”

“I take it Evan wasn’t the knight in shining armor she hoped for.”

Lacey barked a short laugh. “Girls like me and Molly don’t get happy endings.”

“Why did she marry him?”

“It was a long con,” Lacey explained. “Just like our pimp pulled. He was everything any straight woman could ever dream of—until after the wedding. Then he got controlling, started hitting her, keeping her in the house, isolating her. I got cut out.”

“How do you know he hit her?” Jocelyn asked.

“I’ve got emails,” Lacey said. “Molly wouldn’t go to the cops because she didn’t want her past dragged into the light. Especially not after she married into some fancy Main Line family. It would have been mortifying, not to mention she would have had no credibility.”

“Did Evan know about her past?” Jocelyn asked.

“Not at first. Not until after they were married. It was before he showed his true colors. Molly told him in a moment of weakness, believing he would

accept her anyway. Give her all that unconditional love he promised.”

“But he didn’t.”

“No. He almost killed her. There was actually a hospital visit after that. He took her outside, threw her into the street, made her tell the police she was in a hit and run.”

“Why would he stay married to her?”

“Are you kidding me?” Lacey said. “It was perfect for him. He got to amp up his abuse a hundredfold. He enjoyed it. Calling her whore and slut. Knocking her around and feeling totally justified because she lied to him. He got to feel so superior every single day of their marriage. After that, she documented it all, photos and everything.”

“You’re saying every time Evan Porter hit her, Molly emailed you about it?”

Lacey nodded. “She had a secret Hotmail account. Evan didn’t know about it. It was the only way we could communicate after he banned me from their ‘perfect’ life.”

“But if she had all that evidence—”

“No cops. Under any circumstances,” Lacey said.

“Then why bother?”

“Because of Christopher.”

“The baby—did he ever hurt the baby?” Jocelyn asked.

Lacey shook her head. “Not that I know of, but according to what Molly said in her emails, he barely paid any attention to the kid. I’m afraid of what’s going to happen when he has to parent little Christopher himself.”

“Is that why you were there?”

Lacey shrugged. She speared a piece of French toast with her fork but didn’t eat it. “Molly made me promise that I’d sue Evan for custody of Christopher if anything ever happened to her.”

“Jesus,” Jocelyn said. “Evan’s his father. You’re not even family. That’s going to be an uphill battle.”

“I know. That’s why Molly documented everything in her emails.”

“She planned to kill herself?” Jocelyn asked. “At some point?”

Lacey shook her head. “No, she was afraid Evan would kill her. I guess she just couldn’t stand it anymore.”

“Molly paid the babysitter to watch Christopher every Tuesday while she went out. Two hours every week. She even paid this girl not to tell Evan. Where do you think she was going?”

“I don’t know. Wherever it was, though, she must have been sure Evan would murder her if he found out, or she wouldn’t have jumped.”

“Do you think she was just running? Maybe she thought she’d survive the fall?”

“Nah. Molly never learned how to swim. Better to do herself in than let Evan kill her, I guess.”



Three Months Later

Jocelyn was seated at the Rush and Grant Investigations office conference table reviewing their current caseload when Anita burst into the room. “Your press contact just called. She said you need to turn on the news right now.” Without waiting for a response, Anita swept across the room, scooped up the remote control, and flicked on the television mounted on the wall in the corner of the room. She flipped channels until she came to a newscast, a perky, blonde reporter standing outside of the Municipal Services Building at 15th and Arch Streets. Beneath her the copy read: “A Mother’s Secret Life?”

She spoke into her microphone, her expression serious. “It’s been three months since Molly Porter took her own life by jumping into the Schuylkill River after a fender bender. Although her body has not been recovered, authorities do not believe there is any chance that she survived. They suspended their search after two weeks.”

The screen cut to a member of the Philadelphia Police Marine Unit, standing on the riverbank. “Unfortunately, we don’t have the resources to search indefinitely. There is still a chance that she could surface. When a person drowns, the gases eventually build up in the body and give it

buoyancy. We might be able to recover her then.”

The screen cut back to the reporter. “The Porter family isn’t willing to wait that long. Last month they called in a private search team, the Garden State Underwater Recovery Unit. It is a nonprofit based in New Jersey whose mission is to help families recover drowned loved ones when the police have expended all their resources.”

A montage flashed across the screen. Boats in the river, divers emerging from the water with nothing. While it played, the reporter continued, “While it is believed that one of Molly Porter’s shoes and her shredded sweater have been recovered, divers have not yet found her body.”

The screen cut to Evan Porter emerging from the family court building, an attorney beside him, and then Lacey exiting shortly afterwards with her own, more shabbily dressed attorney trailing behind. The reporter said, “In the wake of Molly Porter’s suicide, disturbing details have emerged from her past. Her friend, Lacey Gaither, a Philadelphia resident, filed a petition for custody of the Porters’ one-year-old son. Gaither alleges that Evan Porter was abusive toward his wife. She produced emails and photographs going back three years, which her attorney offered in court today. Evan Porter’s attorney dismisses Gaither’s claims out of hand.”

On-screen, Porter’s sharply dressed attorney stopped for the cameras. The sound picked up as he addressed the topic of the emails and photos. “Clearly doctored,” he said. “Made up. She can’t prove these documents and photographs are actually from Molly Porter. Molly’s not here to corroborate the outlandish story she’s trying to sell. This is a woman with an ulterior motive. She sees an opportunity for personal gain here. She doesn’t care about Christopher. She has no right to custody. This is a waste of the court’s time, and we’re confident that the judge will rule in Mr. Porter’s favor. Once that happens, we’ll be looking to sue Ms. Gaither for defamation of character.”

The camera returned to the reporter, whose face was pinched as she delivered the final bit of news: “One of the things that Evan Porter’s attorney alleged in court today was that Gaither and Molly Porter met while they were prostitutes many years before Molly met her husband. While Gaither has three prior arrests for solicitation, Molly Porter had no criminal record and

our sources weren't able to uncover any evidence that Molly Porter was ever a prostitute. In a new twist, Lacey Gaither's attorney has asked the court to force Mr. Porter to submit to a DNA test. Porter's attorney tells us he will gladly prove his paternity to put an end to all this so the focus can return to finding his wife and laying her to rest. Denise, back to you."

Anita muted the television. "Well," she said. "All the dirt is coming out now. You think this Lacey chick is right—that Evan Porter's not the father?"

Jocelyn tore her eyes from the screen and looked at Anita. "No. I think she's grasping at straws. No judge is going to take custody away from a child's father and give it to a non-family member with an arrest record when the father is a law-abiding, upstanding member of the community. Porter's attorney was smart—it would cost a lot of money to track the source of the emails and photographs and even then, it might not show definitely that Molly was behind them."

"You think it's true? That Evan Porter is abusive?"

"Yeah," Jocelyn said. "I can see it."

Anita turned the television off. "I guess we know why she jumped then. She had a past and married a guy who would one day kill her. She snapped. Shame for her son though."

Jocelyn's fingers fidgeted with a pen on the table, spinning it round and round. "But why that day? What was she doing? Where had she been? I keep thinking maybe she was planning to leave him somehow, but if she was planning to do that, why would she jump? She went out every Tuesday for all those months for exactly two hours."

Anita folded her arms across her chest. "I know these loose ends bother you, Rush, but really, it doesn't matter. If she jumped off that bridge at a moment's notice, she was already headed in that direction. She would have found another way to leave this world—and if she didn't, her husband would have probably helped her out. I mean, there's really no way to even find out, is there? Unless someone came forward, and no one's going to put themselves in the middle of that circus. The woman is gone. You're gonna have to let this one go."

But Jocelyn was already thinking of a way she could find out where

Molly Porter had been that day. She was fairly sure there was one—she would just need a little help.

To Anita, she said, “How’s your head?”



Attorney Lonnie Burgess was a solo practitioner operating out of the Germantown section of the city. He had helped Jocelyn solve the cold case murder of his high school girlfriend a couple of years earlier, and they had kept in touch, which was why he saw her immediately and without an appointment when she showed up at his office and explained what she wanted to do.

He smiled at her from behind his desk, steepling his hands together. “You think there is some way that I can help you get the GPS records from Molly Porter’s vehicle? I’m a lawyer, Jocelyn, not a miracle worker.”

“There has to be a way. A lawsuit of some sort. You could subpoena them.”

“What kind of lawsuit?”

She shrugged, standing before him instead of sitting because she had been sitting all day, and her lower back still bothered her. “I don’t know. That’s why I’m here.”

He swiveled his chair from side to side as he thought about it. “Sit,” he said.

“I can’t. My back hurts.”

“From the accident?”

“Well, yeah. It hasn’t stopped bothering me.”

“What about Anita?”

“She had a concussion.”

He lifted his chin and smiled at her. “I know how we can get them.”

“Tell me,” Jocelyn said, excitement spiraling up her spine.

“We’ll present personal injury claims for you and Anita. Normally, I would write to Molly Porter’s auto insurance carrier and say you were injured, put the company on notice that we’re pursuing claims for your

injuries. Until we start litigation and the discovery process, there's little chance I'd be able to get her GPS history, but if I present a claim against the manufacturer, allege a defect in Molly Porter's vehicle that caused the accident, rather than her negligence, I can get the vehicle inspected. Of course, I'm not going to pay for an expert to inspect it."

"I will," Jocelyn said.

"And you understand you're going to need someone who can get the GPS information from the vehicle."

"I can get someone, but it's been three months. Would the vehicle still be available?"

Lonnie shrugged. "I would say yes. Even if it's been totaled or sold, if we have the VIN, we can track it down. If Porter had it repaired and kept it, even better. But keep in mind, there's no way to do this without him finding out you're suing."

"I'll handle Evan Porter," Jocelyn said.



It took Lonnie nearly a month to get permission to have his "expert" inspect the Porter vehicle prelitigation. Jocelyn had her supposed expert all lined up. She'd had to go to her Uncle Simon—her mother's brother. Once upon a time, Simon Wilde had been a successful criminal defense attorney. When Jocelyn and her sister were teenagers, Camille was raped by a group of their classmates. Their father chose to cover it up rather than bear the brunt of the bad press. He was the most prominent criminal defense attorney in the city, and he hadn't wanted a trial where Camille would make a less-than-stellar witness to tarnish his reputation. Simon, his partner at the time, had had no idea.

After Jocelyn and Camille's parents died, Simon fulfilled a promise he'd made to their mother. He framed Camille's attackers for crimes they hadn't committed. Jocelyn had figured it out and turned him in.

Although he had been disbarred and was on house arrest now for framing Camille's classmates, in forty years of practice he had met every type of criminal imaginable and remained friendly with most of them—especially those he managed to gain acquittals for—in case they proved

useful later. Simon put her in touch with a guy only a little older than her who would clean up well enough to pose as a mechanical engineer and be able to download whatever GPS coordinates were in Molly Porter's vehicle's system. As it turned out, Evan Porter hadn't done a damn thing with the vehicle since Molly totaled it. It sat on the back lot of Porter's Pub next to several dumpsters, according to Lonnie, who had accompanied Simon's guy to the inspection.

"Porter looked like he wanted to kill both of us," Lonnie related with a chuckle when he showed up at her office a few days later with a manila envelope in hand.

Jocelyn licked her lips as she took the envelope in hand. "I bet he did. I hear his temper is a real problem. Thank you, Lonnie."

She took it into the conference room where Anita joined her. "How much did you pay for this?" Anita asked as Jocelyn shook the contents of the envelope onto the table.

"You don't want to know."

Together, they searched the pages for what they were looking for. "She was in Ardmore less than thirty minutes before she crashed into us," Anita remarked when she pinpointed the address.

Ardmore was a wealthy suburb outside Philadelphia, part of an affluent area that locals referred to as the Main Line. "What the hell was she doing there?" Jocelyn asked.

Anita left the room and returned with her laptop. "Let's type it into Google Earth and see."

As Anita worked on the computer, Jocelyn looked over the times and coordinates. Molly had spent just over an hour at the location that Anita was now pulling up on her computer. It turned out to be a commercial area with a large office building on one side of the street and a strip mall on the other. Anita tried zooming in on the strip mall to see which businesses were there, but the street view image blurred the closer she got. "We'll have to drive over there," Jocelyn said.

Her cell phone rang, and she answered without looking, her eyes still on Anita's computer. "Rush," she said.

A woman's voice said, "Jocelyn? It's Kim."

Kim Bottinger was a nurse at Einstein Medical Center. She also happened to be dating Jocelyn's old partner, Kevin. "What's up?" Jocelyn asked her. "Is Kev okay?"

"Oh yeah, he's fine. I'm at work. I've got a woman here. She was just admitted through the ER, and she asked me to call you."

"What's her name?"

"Lacey Gaither."



Anita went with her to Einstein Medical Center. Kim met them in the waiting room of the ER and took them upstairs to the patient rooms. "She's already talked with the police," Kim told them.

"The police?" Anita asked.

As they entered the room, Jocelyn saw why. Lacey Gaither had been beaten so badly, she was barely recognizable. Her face was swollen and bloomed with red and purple bruises. Her lower lip had been split nearly to the bottom of her chin. The doctors had evidently stitched it back together when she got to the ER. Her right eye was swollen completely shut. Jocelyn was fairly sure she could see the impression of a boot tread on her left cheek. A large cast encased her left arm from shoulder to the base of her fingers.

"Not too much time, okay?" Kim said. "They're going to be taking her to surgery for her leg soon."

As Kim slipped out of the room, Jocelyn approached the bed. She wanted to touch Lacey, but it didn't look like there was any place on her that wouldn't hurt with contact. Instead, Jocelyn said softly, "Lacey, it's Jocelyn Rush. I'm here."

Her left eyelid flickered. Her mouth barely moved, but her voice came out scratchy and faint. "Thank you for coming."

Jocelyn pointed to Anita, who stood at the foot of the bed. "This is Anita Grant, my partner. She was in the accident with me. Is it okay if she's here?"

"Fine," Lacey breathed.

"What happened to you?"

“P–Porter’s friends. They got me.”

“Evan Porter’s friends attacked you?” Jocelyn asked, already feeling a white hot ball of fire forming in the pit of her stomach. “How many?”

“Four.”

“Jesus,” Anita whispered. “Where were you?”

“Walking home from work,” Lacey labored. “On the street... pushed me into an... alley.”

She took a moment to catch her breath then continued, “Beat me. Left me. Someone found me... brought me here.”

“How do you know they were Porter’s friends?” Jocelyn asked.

Lacey took a few ragged breaths. “They looked like him. White, wealthy, well-dressed but trying to look like they belong... in the hood. I think I... saw one in Molly’s wedding pictures. One of them said, ‘You might have gotten your DNA test, but you won’t get the kid,’ and another told me to ‘drop the court thing.’”

But she wouldn’t be able to prove that it was anyone Evan Porter knew. Even if she were able to positively identify one of the men from Evan and Molly Porter’s wedding photos, Jocelyn was sure the men would give each other alibis. They would never pay for what they’d done to Lacey. Jocelyn’s knuckles ached from clenching her fists, but she tried to focus.

“The DNA test,” she said. “Why did you ask for it?”

“My lawyer’s idea,” Lacey said. “Thought it would... buy time.”

Her eyelid fluttered. She wouldn’t be lucid for much longer. As Lacey drifted off to sleep, Jocelyn touched her fingertips. “I’m going to help you,” she promised. “I’m going to take Evan Porter down.”



“Rush,” Anita said once they were back in Jocelyn’s rental car. “Just how do you think you’re going to—what did you say—take Evan Porter down?”

White-knuckling the steering wheel, Jocelyn weaved her way through the streets of the Logan section of the city, turning on Broad Street, which she could follow to Center City and from there to the upscale Rittenhouse

neighborhood. “I’ve got to talk to my Uncle Simon again,” she said.

“Well, that doesn’t sound like a good idea,” Anita remarked, ignoring the acerbic look that Jocelyn shot her.

Anita remained silent as they drove, leaving Jocelyn with her thoughts. She had only a vague idea of how to stop Evan Porter. Any man who would arrange such a savage attack on a lone woman deserved to be in prison, not to mention whatever abuse he’d been doling out to Molly Porter during their marriage. The thought of Evan raising little Christopher alone made her ill.

She understood now why Lacey had gone to such lengths to gain custody of the boy. Lacey had exposed herself not only to being shamed in court because of her past but now in the press. She’d endangered her own life to try to get Christopher Porter away from his father. Because Evan was a monster, and just as Jocelyn would have done in the same situation, Lacey would rather die than live with the guilt of not fighting for the boy. Jocelyn had taken in her sister’s daughter without hesitation the moment she realized that Olivia would grow up in a drug den being pimped out as early as age four.

A shudder ran through her. Anita said, “Think about this carefully, Rush, before you go back to Simon. At least let’s stop for coffee. Talk it over.”

Jocelyn found a parking spot a block away from Simon’s apartment building. She pulled into it and turned off the car. She looked at Anita. “You know I can’t walk away from this Porter thing.”

“I do.”

“So I won’t be upset if you wait in the car.”

Anita smiled. “I don’t need to wait in the car. I wanted to stop for coffee because I want to make sure *you* can live with what you’re about to do. I was down with this the minute we walked into that hospital room. But I lived the life, Rush. I can live with breaking the law or doing something wrong to make something right. I’m just not sure you can.”

Jocelyn sighed and opened her door. “I’m not sure either.”



Simon Wilde was nearing eighty, an aging Al Pacino look-alike with

shock white hair. He answered his door with a smile, dressed in silk pajama pants, a white tank top, and a robe draped over his thin frame. “Jocelyn,” he said, stepping aside so she and Anita could come inside. He looked out onto the sidewalk. “No Olivia?”

“She’s in school,” Jocelyn said.

Simon ushered them into his sitting room where two leather Chesterfield sofas angled toward a fireplace. Embers glowed from a pile of ash in its hearth. A coffee table sat between the couches, newspapers spread haphazardly across it. “Sit,” Simon instructed. “Can I get you ladies anything?”

Jocelyn shook her head. She and Anita sat side by side on one sofa, and Simon sat across from them. She couldn’t help but notice the thick, electronic bracelet around his ankle. Every time she saw it, her heart felt sad, and yet she knew Simon held no ill will toward her. He had told her many times that things could have turned out worse for him. After a lengthy trial, Simon had been found guilty of most of the charges levied against him, and somehow during sentencing he’d managed house arrest for what would likely be the rest of his life—which he could live with.

“What can I do for you, Jocelyn?”

“I need your help with something. Something that’s not technically legal.”

Simon smiled as if waiting for the punchline. When neither he nor Jocelyn spoke, Anita cut in, “She’s serious, Simon.”

He gestured to his ankle bracelet. “I can get you one of these pretty cheap, Jocelyn.”

Jocelyn rubbed her eyes with both hands. “You know I would never ask for your help with something that wasn’t legal if it wasn’t absolutely critical.”

“I know that you are your mother’s daughter, except with more backbone than she had. Before I go on, what is it exactly that you want me to do?”

“I know you know people,” Jocelyn said. “People who can do things for the right price. There’s a DNA test pending at a private lab for a custody

case. I need the—” She broke off. She couldn’t believe the words were about to come out of her mouth. She’d spent seventeen years of her life boiling with rage at her parents for covering up Camille’s assault.

A crime was a crime and should be punished. She’d always believed that. That’s why she’d become a police officer instead of finishing college. She hated people like her father. People who thought they were above the law. But her father had traded Camille’s justice for his reputation. Simon, in framing Camille’s attackers, had at least had a more honorable reason for breaking the law. Now Jocelyn was proposing to break the law to ensure the safety of Molly Porter’s son. But did that make her any better than her father? Or Simon?

She wasn’t sure.

“I need the DNA results to be changed. I need them to not be a match.”

Simon was silent for a long time. “Jocelyn, think about what you’re asking me to do.”

She began to explain the situation, but Simon silenced her with a hand in the air. “I’m certain your reasons for being here are noble. You wouldn’t be asking something like this if they weren’t. But Jocelyn, my career—my legacy—was destroyed, my freedom taken, because you believe a crime is a crime and that crimes should be punished. Because of you, Jocelyn.”

“No,” she said. “Because of you—you chose to frame those men. And should what I’m asking come out, I’ll never give up how the results came to be falsified. I never spoke to you. Anita was never here. I’ll take full responsibility.”

She could feel the weight of it as she spoke. She knew on a visceral level that she was right. At worst, Evan Porter would abuse his son. At best, he’d raise Christopher to also be an abuser. Neither option was something she could live with—not knowing what she knew and having the resources to change the course of Christopher’s life.

Simon let a few moments pass. Then he sighed and leaned back into the couch. “Well, it will cost quite a bit. What you’re talking about—it’s not that easy.”

“You know how much Mom and Dad left me,” she told him. “I can

afford it.”

He nodded. A few more moments passed. Finally, Simon said, “Okay, tell me what I need to know.”



Jocelyn didn’t sleep for three days. Several times a day, she picked up her phone, pulled her contact list up, and found Simon’s name. She could call it off. It wasn’t too late. So Evan Porter would lose custody of his son. Would that stop him from going after Lacey? And who was Jocelyn to play judge, jury, and God and change Christopher Porter’s life? What right did she have? She kept trying to justify it in her mind. She could keep Christopher from Evan, but would Christopher or Lacey ever be safe?

She had to keep moving. Otherwise, the thoughts would sink her. Anita suggested they drive out to the place that Molly Porter had gone on the Main Line the day she died. They parked in the strip mall, taking note of the businesses: a coffee shop, a daycare center, a laundromat, a children’s swim school, a boutique clothing store, a pet supply store, and a hoagie shop. Nothing that stood out to either of them, unless she’d been meeting someone for coffee or lunch. They walked across to the office building and went inside, studying the directory. A pharmaceutical company, doctors’ offices, lawyers’ offices, an accounting office—the list of tenants was lengthy, but again, nothing stood out to either of them.

Feeling defeated, they trudged back to the car and drove back to their office, where Jocelyn dozed in her desk chair until Anita came in with her open laptop in hand. “Rush, wake up,” she said. “Look at this.”

She set the laptop on Jocelyn’s desk. Jocelyn blinked the sleep from her eyes and stared at what looked like property records. “What is this?”

Anita pointed to the screen. “The office building belongs to Porter Investments.”

“Evan Porter’s father’s company,” Jocelyn said, adrenaline shooting through her veins. “But wait, Porter doesn’t have an office there, does he?”

Anita shook her head. “No. But there is a suite that’s being leased by a charity foundation that Mrs. Porter works closely with. I called the building’s management office and said we were looking for a space. I was able to

confirm that that suite has been vacant for almost two years, but it's not available because Mr. Porter instructed them not to rent it out."

"Not rent it out? Why would he choose to just leave it empty?"

"It's not empty," Anita said. "The building manager says it's furnished. The foundation just doesn't use it."

"Which makes even less sense."

"Clearly Mr. Porter uses it. This whole arrangement is on his say-so."

"And Molly Porter came to this block every Tuesday," Jocelyn said. "The two of them used it?"

"Looks that way."

"Well, let's go see him."



David Porter's secretary was an impenetrable force until Jocelyn told her that she and Anita were the women Molly Porter rear-ended on the day she died. The woman got up from her desk, which sat on the 27th floor of a tall, glass building in Center City, Philadelphia, and walked back into David's office, closing the heavy, wooden door behind her. A moment later, she returned, motioning toward the door. "You can go right in," she said, without looking directly at them.

David's office was massive and awash with light. The city sprawled before them from every angle the windows offered. David was a taller, better-looking, older version of his son. He was thinner than Evan, fit, with crinkles at the corners of his eyes that gave him a kind look. He wore a light-gray suit with a white, long-sleeved, button-down shirt, and pink tie. He stood and came around to the front of his desk as they entered, shaking both their hands as they made introductions. Anita and Jocelyn sat in the guest chairs while David perched on the edge of his sleek desk.

"Ladies," he said, "I'm so sorry to be meeting you under these circumstances. I'm not sure we should really be speaking, given the fact that you're bringing personal injury claims against Molly's estate—which is basically my son."

"We're not here about that," Jocelyn said. "We're here because we know

you met with Molly Porter on the day she died.”

To his credit, David showed almost no reaction. Only his Adam’s apple quivered in his throat as he swallowed. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“When is the last time you saw Molly before her death?” Jocelyn asked.

He looked helplessly around the room. “I don’t know. I don’t remember. We weren’t close. My son and I aren’t close. I really don’t understand—why are you here? I’m sorry my daughter-in-law hit you, but I don’t see what any of this has to do with anything. I’m afraid I have to ask you to leave.”

Jocelyn heard her phone chirp inside her jacket pocket. As she and Anita stood to leave, she pulled it out and saw a message from Simon. *Call me ASAP.*

She turned back to David before leaving and thanked him for his time. Before he closed the door on them, Jocelyn had a glimpse of his stricken face.

She waited until they were outside to call Simon. “What’s up?”

“That thing you asked me to do? It doesn’t need to be done,” he said.

Jocelyn felt a dropping sensation in her stomach. “What?”

Anita stared at her. Jocelyn beckoned her closer, holding the phone between their two heads so Anita could hear. “That issue that you wanted me to take care of,” Simon said. “Turns out it was completely unnecessary.”

He spoke in code because they were on a cell phone and Simon had done just enough underhanded things to be paranoid about their cell phone conversation somehow being picked up by a third party. But Jocelyn knew what he was getting at, and when he told her the final bit of news, she stormed back into the building with Anita in tow. They took the elevator back to David Porter’s office and didn’t give the secretary a chance to speak before they strode past her desk and threw open David’s door.

His mouth hung open. The receiver of his desk phone sat limply in his hand. “I have to call you back,” he said to the person on the phone and hung up.

Jocelyn closed the door behind them and advanced on his desk.

“You can’t be here,” he said. “You have no right to ask questions. It’s not like you’re a police officer.”

Jocelyn smiled. “No, I’m not a police officer. There are no rules that I have to abide by. I’m just a person who was in an accident with your daughter-in-law.”

“I’ll have you arrested for trespassing.”

Behind Jocelyn, Anita said, “You might want to hear what we have to say first. Then you can call nine-one-one.”

Before he could protest further, Jocelyn said, “You’re Christopher’s father, not Evan.”

“Wh—what?”

“You were having an affair with Molly. She met you at an office building in Ardmore in a vacant charity office every Tuesday before and after Christopher’s birth.”

“No. How do you—?”

“The court ordered a DNA test for your son—to prove his paternity—because Molly’s best and oldest friend, Lacey Gaither, was suing for custody. That DNA test is going to show that Evan is not Christopher’s father. It’s going to show that he is Christopher’s half-brother.”

“How do you know that? You can’t... you can’t...”

“I can’t what?” Jocelyn said. “It doesn’t matter how I know. It’s not going to change anything. I can turn around and leave right now. You don’t have to tell me the truth about Molly. That’s not going to change the fact that in the next week or so, those DNA tests are going to land on Evan’s lawyer’s desk. I hope you have a good relationship with your son, although he doesn’t seem like the forgiving type.”

As David’s hands covered his face, Jocelyn turned. She and Anita walked to the door. Anita’s hand was on the doorknob when David said, in a defeated tone, “My son is not forgiving. We don’t have a relationship. Not a meaningful one. He’s going to kill me. I know his tendency toward violence. I know what he did to Molly.”

Jocelyn and Anita walked back toward his desk and quietly sat down,

listening as his story poured forth. “It didn’t start out as an affair. I mean, not really. Molly, she liked—well, have you ever heard of ‘stranger sex’?”

Jocelyn raised a brow, but Anita sighed and said, “It’s exactly what it sounds like. Having sex spontaneously with a complete stranger.”

David looked at them over his fingertips. His voice was slightly muffled as he went on. “I had never done it before. Years ago, long before Evan had even met her, I had some... encounters with her. We both used to jog the Wissahickon Creek trail. I never even knew her name. It only happened a handful of times. Then I didn’t see her again. Never expected to see her again. Until my son brought her around and introduced her to my wife and me as his fiancée.”

“Why would Molly do something like that?” Jocelyn asked.

David’s hands flopped onto his desk. His features sagged. “I asked her once. You know about her past, I suppose? Well, thanks to my loving son, the whole world knows now. I found out a couple of years ago, after she told Evan and he nearly killed her.”

“Yes,” Jocelyn said. “We know she was manipulated into prostitution at a very early age.”

“She got out,” David said. “Did quite well for herself. But she said sometimes she felt like she didn’t deserve the life she made for herself. She felt like she needed to break away. To do something bad, something taboo.”

“Something risky,” Anita interjected.

“Yes,” David breathed. “Like me, she never thought we’d ever see each other in real life. We never talked. I didn’t even know her name until Evan brought her to dinner. We kept our distance after that. I hoped the relationship with Evan would fizzle, but Evan always gets what he wants. They were married. I stayed away from her. My intention was to forget the whole thing. It would destroy my wife, not to mention enrage my son.”

“What happened?” Jocelyn asked.

“Like I said, she told Evan about her past, and he beat her so badly he nearly killed her. Then convinced her to lie and say it was a hit and run. She called me after she was nearly recovered. Begged me to meet her. She told

me everything. I felt... I felt sorry for her.”

“But you were in love with her,” Anita said.

He nodded. Tears glistened in his eyes. “God help me, I was. For a long time, we simply carried on whenever and wherever we could. Any time she could safely get away from Evan. Then she got pregnant. I didn’t see her for almost a year. After Christopher was born, she wanted to meet. I thought she wanted to resume the affair, and I was prepared to tell her I couldn’t, but what she wanted was to blackmail me.”

“Blackmail you?” Jocelyn echoed.

“She wanted money, or she was going to tell Evan about our affair—even about the encounters on the Wissahickon Creek trail. I told her I’d help her, but only if she met with me from time to time so I would know she was okay. I think she was planning to use that money to leave Evan.”

“How much?” Jocelyn asked.

David sighed. His gaze drifted to the wall of windows and the vast city beyond. “A half million dollars. She had me deposit it into an account in her name—an account she closed a few days after the money was deposited. I don’t know what she did with it or how she hid it from Evan.”

“Did you know Christopher was yours?” Jocelyn said.

He shook his head. “No. I never suspected. We were careful, after the trail. What we did on the trail was extremely risky. So once she was married to Evan, we were more diligent about using protection. At least, I thought we were.”

“Your meeting the Tuesday she died,” Jocelyn said. “Did you have a disagreement? Was she upset?”

“No. She wasn’t upset. She was normal. We met for five minutes and parted ways.”

“Five minutes?” Jocelyn said. “But she was in Ardmore for over an hour.”

David shrugged. “I don’t know what to tell you. I spent five minutes with her. That was the last I saw of her.”



David Porter had not exaggerated when he said that his son would kill him when he found out about his affair with Molly. The DNA results were delivered to the parties in the custody dispute between Lacey and Evan a week later. Evan's lawyer managed to keep the whole thing quiet until Evan showed up at his parents' home in a rage and beat his father senseless. Evan's mother tried to intervene and ended up injured herself. The entire thing was covered widely by the local press—adding even more unseemly details to the whole Porter scandal. Evan's friends were not prosecuted for their attack on Lacey—as Jocelyn predicted, they denied everything and already had alibis lined up. Evan would never pay for ordering them to attack her, but Jocelyn was satisfied that he would spend a great deal of time in prison for what he had done to his parents.

David, as Christopher's biological father, signed over custody to Lacey Gaither. David knew that Molly's dying wish had been that Lacey raise her son, a wish that David was fully prepared to honor, as long as he was given visitation. David's wife cared for Christopher until both Lacey and her husband were well enough to do so. Then she filed for divorce from David.

Lacey's recovery was slow and difficult, but Jocelyn kept tabs on her and helped her whenever she could. The guilt of driving Molly Porter over the edge still nagged at her. Disappointment in herself for stooping so low as to try to have the DNA results tampered with continued to gnaw at her gut. Still, she had felt an obligation to the woman she'd driven off the bridge to see that her son was protected. She still didn't know if she'd made the right choices. Perhaps she should simply have walked away from the Molly Porter thing—like any other person would.

Doing the right thing wasn't always clear or simple. Not for the first time, she accepted that she was the kind of person who couldn't leave the puzzle pieces scattered.

“Where are you?” Caleb's voice interrupted Jocelyn's thoughts.

She looked around the interior of her new car, which was parked outside of a house she, Caleb, and Olivia were about to tour together. It was one of the few both she and Caleb could agree on. Now it only needed to pass the Olivia test. “I'm in this car,” she said.

From the back seat, Olivia called, “That was a silly question.”

He laughed. To Jocelyn, he said, “I mean in your mind. Where are you?”

Jocelyn shook off thoughts of Molly Porter for the umpteenth time in the many months since she heard David Porter’s revelations. “I’m sorry,” she said. “I’m here. I’m with you two. Let’s go look at the house.”

But as they walked through the rooms with Olivia exclaiming and jumping around excitedly, her mind kept going back to Molly. Because she had finally figured out where Molly went every week after meeting with her father-in-law for five minutes. It had taken quite a few drives past the office building where she used to meet with David for Jocelyn to realize she was looking in the wrong direction.



Molly

Present Day

I pinch the sand between my toes. The salty spray of the ocean mists over my face and bare arms. It is nearly sunset before I see Christopher, running across the sand on his tiny legs, a red plastic shovel in his hand. A floppy white hat covers his head, and I can see white streaks of sunscreen on his arms and legs. His torso is covered with a rash guard covered in cartoon dolphins. He shrieks with joy as he runs through the surf, Lacey limping along behind him. Her head is thrown back, her mouth open in laughter. She's done a good job with him. He looks healthy and happy, and he's grown so big. It makes my heart ache for all that I've missed. But it had to be done.

I still can't believe that I pulled it all off. Getting the money from David had been the easy part. Even hiding it hadn't been as difficult as I anticipated. The swim lessons—that was the challenge. I couldn't go to my local Y or a local gym. People in my neighborhood looked out for one another. If I was a regular at one of those places, people would remember me and approach me elsewhere. I couldn't risk anyone talking to me in public when I was with Evan.

I'd had to pay an exorbitant price to the woman who ran the Guppies Swim School in Ardmore to give me private lessons every Tuesday before she opened the business for children. Disappearing into the Schuylkill had always been my plan, but I had wanted it to be some kind of boating accident or something less dramatic. When I hit that car on the bridge coming home that Tuesday afternoon, I knew I couldn't face Evan. Getting caught out of the house would expose all my secrets—or enough of them that he would kill me and maybe even Christopher. To this day, I still think of it as a brilliant stroke of luck that I got into an accident on a bridge. I didn't even think about whether I'd survive the fall. It was the greatest leap of faith I ever took. But it was worth it.

Now we are free. All three of us.

As they get closer to me, I smile. I kneel down so I am at Christopher's height. He pulls up short when he comes within a few feet of me. His smile

wavers only slightly. He waves his little shovel. "Hello," he says.

A tear slides down my cheek. It's the first time I've heard him speak. I make a note to ask Lacey what his first word actually was. There are so many things I don't know about my son now that I will need to learn from her.

"Hi," I choke out.

He looks back at Lacey, who is walking slower now, her eyes alight as they land on me. In her hand is a small plastic bucket half-filled with sand. As she comes up behind Christopher, she places a gentle hand on the top of his head. "Did you meet a new friend?" she asks him.

For a moment, he looks up at her, confused. Then he looks back at me. "What's your name?"

"My name is Nina," I tell him.

The End

A NOTE FROM LISA REGAN

I would like to thank the usual suspects. You know who you are and I love you all deeply.

Also, dearest fans, you are the most amazing and wonderful readers any author could ever hope for! I never get tired of hearing from you. For those of you who wanted a new Jocelyn Rush story, I hope you enjoyed this one.

To readers new and old, if you'd like to keep up with my new releases, please sign up for my newsletter here (I promise not to flood your inboxes with emails!):

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