

Of Guilt and Honor

A Novel by Brett Barney

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Prologue

Jerry Hatcher looked out from the center of the stage, delivering his monologue to the crowd of anxious gatherers for tonight's show. He had grown accustomed to the heat. His flashy blue silk shirt, purchased several blocks away on Hollywood Boulevard, reflected the bright radiance of the light. His navy blue dress slacks did not, and grew warm as they absorbed the heat. The outfit was specifically designed and tailored for a single hour on network television. Even the shiny black dress shoes glistened under the powerful lights which centered on him.

Jerry had enjoyed a quick rise to late-night stardom. His thin frame and healthy lifestyle allowed him to keep pace with the fast-moving profession he had chosen. Sponsored by the efforts of a talented marketing agent, and a great deal of luck, he had settled in on the ratings with a good piece of the market. He had already surpassed the expectations of a newcomer, and was threatening to move up a time slot. Jerry knew the life expectancy of a late-night talk show host didn't entail a great amount of time, but he refused to dwell on that. Optimism required him to ignore history and reality at times. Hatcher just triumphed in his moment of fame, and tried to offer the viewers what he believed they wanted to see.

His comedic talents had earned him several awards, and his cable special still appeared from time to time on several other channels he now competed against. The tall, dark haired man, with a hint of sarcasm in his smile had won the hearts of many. He had a unique sense of humor, clean and refined — rarely flagrant — with a subtle, but enjoyable amount of class. He steered clear of tasteless jokes, offering the public a different kind of evening entertainment.

He felt comfortable in the spotlight of such a volatile career, not ashamed of his conservative lifestyle. He enjoyed his work, and the minor inconveniences that came with it. Anyone could give the public ordinary talk show guests. He provided them with something more, making a distinct effort to bring a wide range of guests to his show, many with more interesting topics to share than the latest Hollywood gossip. Surprising to most network analysts, his strategy pulled in a great number from the evening audience, and other networks already fought to copy his style and program.

Jerry smiled with satisfaction as he presented the humor of his many creative writers. His act was new, and refreshing to the scene, and he would follow it with a quality show, loaded with truly interesting guests. Jerry had managed to pull off a truly unique guest again tonight. After three separate phone conversations in which he prodded at the entertainment value of the man, he had quickly convinced his producers to put the man on his show. He finished his opening line of jokes with a remark about the budget deficit, receiving a roar of laughter from the crowd, and noticed the prompter signaling him to announce the evening's guests.

"This evening, it is my pleasure to welcome Dr. Bernard Baxter to the show. As one of the youngest nominees for the Nobel prize in medicine, he will share some of his work in the

field of cancer research. He's a remarkable man, very interesting and enjoyable to speak with. It should prove to be a wonderful learning experience for everyone.

"Who says you don't get quality programming after ten p.m.?"

Bernard Baxter sat at the small table, while the makeup woman finished applying the last of the powdered cosmetic to his face, darkening his complexion for the bright lights of the stage. He heard the familiar line over the speaker in his dressing room, a phrase which had launched Jerry Hatcher into the television ratings. Bernard knew he had only a few minutes before he went on.

He had taken a tour of the stage earlier, and they warned him how hot the lights might feel. The light in the room was intense, to simulate the outside environment, and to adjust the guest's eyes prior to their appearance. Even with the rumble of the air conditioning in the background, fighting valiantly against the heat, he already felt the light perspiration caused by the lights.

Donna, the makeup artist sitting across from him, concentrated on her job. She didn't seem to notice the audio coming from the speakers in the room. It was a sign of strong concentration. She took great pride in the appearance of the guests on the show, and Bernard had enjoyed the small talk with her. He glanced at the look of professionalism on her face as she checked her work for imperfections. She would make a good researcher, he thought to himself as he admired her. She took great pride in her work, and was a master of her profession. He could tell by the look of satisfaction on her face, that the woman loved her job.

She smiled softly and wished him luck. He thanked her as she put her powder brushes away in the bag, and a moment later, she left the room to check on the second guest. The stage manager came soon afterwards to lead Bernard to the curtain. His thoughts quickly returned to the interview, and the work that he would share. He felt a certain excitement, as he always did before a public appearance. He couldn't deny that he received an amount of satisfaction from discussing his work in a public forum.

Bernard heard the sound of his introduction coming through the speaker, and stood near the stage manager as the curtain opened momentarily, allowing him to walk across the set. The applause rose as Bernard walked over to take a seat near Jerry Hatcher. Bernard wondered for a moment if the crowd really applauded him out of his appeal, or just because the prompts above the stage signaled them to do so. He didn't worry about it for very long, as he made a point not to emphasize those things he could not control.

Bernard shook the hand of the trendy young host, and turned for a moment to face the crowd. He bowed slightly, standing for a moment to acknowledge his gratitude toward the warm

reception of the crowd. He stood slightly taller than Jerry, and his stature seemed to dwarf the host's, though they were of nearly equivalent weights. He followed Jerry's lead, and took his seat near the expensive oak desk that Jerry sat behind each night.

The lights on the stage were much brighter than the dressing room, and the scents of a hundred visitors, crammed tightly into the small audience seating area, filled the building. Most had stood in line outside for hours, and the mixture of cologne, perfume, deodorant and sweat created a noticeably putrid aroma inside. As Bernard forced himself to ignore the odor, he wondered to himself why the station had never bothered to invest in a better ventilation system.

A glass sat at a small table to Bernard's right, filled with the guest's preferred drink. Bernard had chosen cognac, not only for flavor, but for its ability to soothe his nerves. He had brought his own bottle of a preferred and imported brand. Public appearances never really bothered him, at least not after the first sip. He sat calmly and smiled out at the crowd with his warmest smile. Jerry liked Bernard. He looked natural on camera, and didn't fit his original expectation of a scientist. The man was slightly rough, but extremely good looking and charming.

Bernard had presented research to many people over the years, standing in front of huge conferences of well-educated peers. These presentations he sometimes found stressful, though he had learned to keep his mind focused through almost anything, and enjoyed presenting to his peers. Tonight was a different sort of crowd for the scientist.

"Welcome, Dr. Baxter," Jerry ushered with a smile. Bernard could see the slight nervousness in his actions, and knew the host still questioned the success of his guest in the ratings.

"Thank You," Bernard allowed. He liked Jerry, and the change he attempted to make in traditional late night talk shows, by teaching those who refused to sleep. He could respect the man, and wanted to assure Jerry that he wouldn't let him down.

"Now, most of the people in America know your name quite well," Jerry started, as he presented some background on his guest. "You are one of the youngest people ever to receive a nomination for the Nobel Prize in medicine. Your work is already respected by a great number of people around the world, and the rumors around the scientific community suggest that you are near a tremendous breakthrough in cancer research, as well as the favorite for the award."

"That about covers it," Bernard replied with a pause, followed by a slight grin. He had a calm demeanor, and relaxed wit as he teased the anxious host.

"No, you won't get off my show that easily," Jerry threatened in a serious tone, trying to hide his smile. "Ratings," he reminded. "It would be a great honor if you might share some of your work with our viewers, or at least, the portion that our regular viewing audience can understand."

“Our work isn’t anything which is that difficult to understand,” Bernard admitted honestly, “It’s actually a very basic approach we have taken. Research requires a stubborn individual, and someone who likes to disagree with everything everyone else says.”

“Is it true that you are close to a new treatment for cancer?” Jerry asked seriously.

“We are optimistic, definitely,” Bernard allowed, though he retained his excitement in the fact.

“What can you tell us about it, which can shed some light on your work, for those of us who haven’t spent ten years at educational institutions?”

“Jerry,” Bernard scorned, “give yourself some credit. All science is actually quite simple, you know. Scientists are some of the most air-headed people you will ever find. It is the ability to take a complex problem, and apply an amount of simplicity in order to solve it, that makes a good scientist. It is the same thing with our flawed host virus.”

Bernard’s face glowed as he spoke. He had always enjoyed sharing his work with those around him, and tonight’s show offered him a new forum to explain his accomplishments. His looks, contradictory to the general stereotype, were fashionable. As a medical researcher, who dealt with microbiology every day, he had to maintain a level of cleanliness. He had come from a new breed of scientists, mystified by the new powers of science, respectful of the ability it provided, and the possibilities at his hands. He lived in a new social atmosphere, attending conferences, and dealing with powerful research companies, who invested in him personally, and funded his work.

He had a naturalness in the way he talked. His youthful appearance, and apparent mastery of his field, provided a certain appeal. Indeed, a handsome man, his eyes were filled with a fire arising from his ambition. His deep voice had a strong eastern accent, and he spoke very clearly.

He had married a beautiful woman, who he met in college, and started his own family. She knew him as nobody else could, admiring all about him. His hair was a soft brown, cut by his stylist of fifteen years, and it set off his calm and non-intimidating manner. It had changed little during that time, taking on a bit of refinement. He wasn’t a trendy man, but his wife managed to keep him fashionable enough. He wore a comfortable pair of dress slacks and a nice shirt, chosen by his wife for the occasion.

“Anyone who has ever taken a high school biology course knows that DNA is the primary building block of all cellular structure in our bodies,” Bernard continued. “The DNA in our bodies makes up the genetic code that you find in every cell. The cell is a very complex unit of the human body. There are a great number of other molecules that exist in a balanced environment within its walls. Everything within the cell reacts for one reason or another as directed by the DNA.

“Cancer, in many forms, appears as a malignant tumor, or generally, a mutation of the cell. The human body is remarkable in its abilities to seek out deformations in the genetic code, and make repairs where they have occurred. In cancer, the mutation spreads too quickly for the repair mechanism to alter the changes, or it is unable to make the alteration because the mutation is so vast. We have taken an approach different from most therapies.”

“And what is your approach?” Jerry asked, in a voice evident his deep interest.

“We’ve worked years to develop a method using recombinant DNA technology. In practice, the theory is very straightforward. DNA research really took off following the discovery of the structure of the double helix. The double helix is two strands of molecules that match one another in bonding characteristics. It is possible, to remove DNA material, and separate the two strands of the double helix from one another.

“What we do, is remove healthy DNA, from healthy cells. We also take mutated DNA, from cancerous cells, and split the double helix of each. We mix the healthy and mutated DNA back together, recombining the double helix of the two. In the regions where the mutations or differences occurred, the two strands don’t match one another, and won’t bond together.

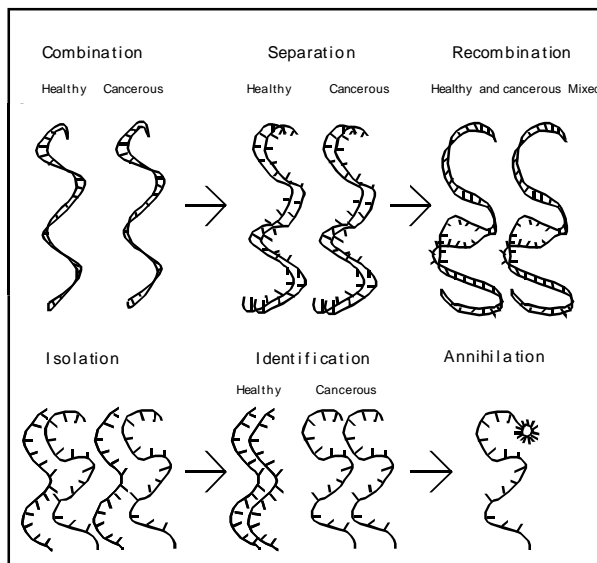
“Using selective molecules, we can separate the portions of the strand that didn’t recombine. This separation removes a small segment of the DNA, from each of the two strands, one healthy, and one cancerous. By determining which strand is the mutation, we have obtained a fingerprint of the mutation, at the molecular level.”

Jerry looked over at the monitor display, where Bernard pointed out each detail as he spoke on the chart he had brought along. Jerry really liked the man, a scientist who brought his own props.

“From this point, we can selectively place the mutated segments inside a virus. We use several techniques to reproduce the virus in large quantities, and allow the virus to enter the subject. The virus invades the body, and seeks out the mutation in other cells.”

“So, let me get this straight,” Jerry asked, a look of confusion on his face. “You use a virus to attack the cancer. Aren’t viruses harmful?”

“I’ve spent years working with others to develop viruses that are rather feeble,” Bernard explained, his manner was understanding, and never condescending. “It’s taken a great amount of work, but we’ve learned enough now to develop certain viruses that can serve our purpose. Basically, we’ve removed all of the virus’s natural defenses, so that if something ever happened, it would be quite easy to destroy.



“We’ve developed the viruses to use a phospholipid membrane as their cell walls, very similar to healthy animal cells. The virus requires a synthetic chemical, unlike anything found in nature, in order to multiply. Because of this, it is completely unable to reproduce once introduced

to the host. We add only enough of the virus to destroy the cancer, and the viruses are very selective for the cancers we are currently working on.

“From there, we need only attach an annihilator ion to the selective site. Once it locates the mutation, it releases a radical, which reeks havoc through the cellular system, destroying the ability of the cancer to reproduce.”

“You make it sound rather simple,” Jerry replied with apprehension.

“The theory is simple.”

“How far are you away from applying this in the field of medicine? What obstacles still stand in your way?”

“We’ve submitted some of our work to the FDA for preliminary notification, but we haven’t entered clinical studies yet. Most of our work involves laboratory animals. The procedure is still quite complex, though I have people working on all phases to lower the amount of laboratory work, and put it into production.”

“Where does your work stand right now?”

“We’ve based much of our research on gaining the most selectivity that we could possibly obtain,” Bernard noted. “I’ve studied viruses for many years, and one thing about viruses is that most are rather selective for a specific region of the body. The first virus we’ve worked with, causes some forms of pneumonia, and concentrates in the lungs. We’re working with another that is quite common in brain tissue, while another invades the fatty structure of our bodies.

“With these three viruses, we can successfully attack tumors or cancers associated with the lungs, brain, or breast. The basic principle doesn’t change substantially in each. We’ve just selected a virus which helps to seek these cancers out. Why try to create something nature has already perfected? The world of viruses is immense, and as we achieve success in these areas, we’ll move onto others.”

“What do your results look like?”

“We’ve done tests on rats and rabbits to this point,” Bernard answered, not even noticing the heat from the light as he showed his work. “It takes approximately one week from isolating the cancer to developing the virus for administration.

“We generally culture an amount of the virus twice the mass of the cancer itself. Because we’ve designed the virus to use only synthetic chemicals for reproduction, we have to take care of all growth outside the subject. It also cuts down on other viruses which might get into the growing chambers, because they can’t break down the synthetic chemical, and thus have no source of food.”

“From there, we add a small amount of the virus, and watch the subject for undesirable results. If the tumor or cancer diminishes in size, and there are no adverse effects, we add more, until we have destroyed all the bad growth.”

“Will this be a feasible method for cancer treatment?” Jerry asked, recalling some key points from their first discussions prior to the show.

“Cost is a great issue with my investors, of course,” Bernard allowed. “We want the treatment accessible to everyone, and profitable at the same time. My personal views are that the feasibility is not derived from the cost of the treatment, but the ability to perform it. It requires eight professionals, highly trained, and very knowledgeable to perform the therapy. Even if we achieve the desired goals of our research, that number will not fall less than six. We cannot cure every cancer out there by ourselves, and we will have to train others to administer our therapies.

“The training will take as much as six weeks per group, and I doubt that they can treat more than thirty patients at any one time. The treatments will have to take place in clinics, and range from a one week, to one month stay. I can’t really venture to guess a price to get the treatment out to the public.”

“You make it sound as if we are still years away from a cure,” Jerry remarked with pessimism.

“This is not a simple and fool proof technique,” Bernard agreed calmly. “This method is a very non-traditional treatment method, and no one treatment will cure every strain of cancer. That’s the horror of cancer. It’s never the same in any two patients. This is the reason that we have chosen this approach. For a disease that is subject specific, you need a cure that is subject specific. I believe that we are taking steps in the right direction.”

“So, there is promise?” Jerry pressed.

“Absolutely. More than half of our subjects have seen major to complete reduction of cancerous cells.”

“How long until you enter clinical studies?”

“My goal is to gain approval within three more months. We still have several avenues to explore before I feel we can safely begin tests on human cancer subjects. We’ll probably run into some problems with clinical tests, because our therapy is subject specific, and studies on noncancerous subjects cannot be performed. I feel confident that the results of our studies will convince the FDA to approve us within a year for wider studies. During that time, we will train others to perform our therapy as well, to expand treatment and studies.”

“If it all works, what then?”

“There is still much work to do in the cancer forum. This technique shows promise, but it won’t cure everything. We’ll learn more, as we work further, and changes will need to occur, other advancements will arise. There is so much work to be done.”

“You’ll be a very rich man,” Jerry suggested.

“I’m already quite rich,” Bernard responded simply. “My investors see to it that I live comfortably, and there are much greater riches out there than money. I place little value on money. To me, perfection is walking into a pediatric unit of a hospital, entering the room of a three year old child who is unable to walk because of the plum-sized tumor inside her skull, and knowing you have the ability to treat it.”

The roar of applause rose from the audience around the two men. Bernard showed little more emotion than a slight grin, while Jerry could not hide his smile from the cameras. He knew that he had once again chosen an entertaining and unique guest for his show, and the ratings would confirm that fact for him in the coming weeks. He would need to make a note to invite this man back on the show in a few months, when they received the approval for clinical studies.

Max hadn’t meant to catch the evening talk show, but he had stayed late at work to finish wrapping up his latest case. It was the price he paid to serve the public as a police detective. Max had heard a great deal about the local scientist. He had heard the rumors about the work they did. It seemed funny that he had never seen the man until tonight, several hundred miles away in California. The local community had grown, though Max still remembered the days you met the local residents on the street, not the television. As Max finished his drink before retiring for the night, he wondered if he ever would get a chance to meet the popular scientist that lived on the other side of town. A moment later he smiled to himself at the awkwardness of the thought. It wasn’t often that a police detective crossed paths with a famous scientist.

Chapter One

Dr. Henry Lansing stared intently through the lenses of the high powered microscope. The healthy cells he had obtained from the subject still showed no signs of attack, but he knew it was happening. These screenings were just another part of the research that he found fascinating, yet at the same time, very monotonous.

He had spent fifteen years studying medicine. As a top researcher, he spent most of his time working with genetics. He had first read about the work done by Bernard Baxter as he finished his graduate work at Boston Medical. Writing the man a letter he never expected a reply from, he earned the chance to visit the man at his research facility. At that time, Bernard still reigned as a leading fanatic in the scientific community, his ideas preposterous, but Henry saw through all that, at the genius.

Henry joined Dr. Baxter soon after his visit, and had taken an integral part in most of the discoveries which had thrust Bernard's career to the forefront of modern medicine. Henry's friends had looked with skepticism on him when he first told them that he would join Dr. Baxter, but now all that had changed, and he often received queries from the same acquaintances about possible openings on the research team.

Henry maneuvered through the tide of publicity that his work had brought the team, standing idly by and allowing Bernard to take the spotlight. He often told his friend and colleague that he didn't envy a life of constant attention and interviews. Henry wanted to stay focused on the work. He had learned a great deal from Dr. Baxter during his career, and the man's insight and understanding of the workings of the human cell had never ceased to amaze him.

Henry knew he could take little credit for the advancements that had taken place through their work. He understood the processes they developed, and handled a great deal of the workload, but he lacked the vision that had made Bernard Baxter a legend in the medical field. Bernard always told him that he couldn't have made it this far without him, but Henry could see through all that. Bernard Baxter needed nobody in reality. He had only chosen Henry because of his work ethic, his ability to understand and comprehend the complex ideas which flowed from his own mind, and perhaps, because he enjoyed the praise.

Indeed, Henry Lansing hailed Bernard Baxter as the most incredible mind he had ever encountered. He enjoyed his mentor's wit and charm, his undeniable ability to entrance people with vivid premonitions of the future, and the entire breadth of his existence. Henry could fumble over a question for days, present it to Bernard, and receive a detailed lecture, explained to the finest point — usually awe inspiring — in a few minutes.

Henry did not only admire Bernard for his science, but also for his role outside the laboratory. He was a model citizen, devoting his time to the betterment of mankind. He spent endless hours within the community, speaking at public schools and dinners, while bringing out the best in those around him. Bernard could mingle with anyone, from grant providers, to kindergarten children. He never spoke down to anyone, and would talk to anyone who would listen. He loved to share his knowledge, and could communicate with young children with great ease. He spent a great deal of time with high school students in the state, trying to persuade them to attempt more promising careers in science and medicine.

Bernard balanced everything, from work to his social life. Henry had dedicated his life to his work. He had learned several things from Dr. Baxter during the time he spent here, things that he felt bettered him. The one thing that stuck out was the love for health. Henry often thought that if people lived their lives the way he and Bernard did, cancer might not exist at all. The memories of babies in pediatric cancer centers reminded him that they were fighting a disease that didn't always choose its victims selectively.

Henry had learned soon after arriving on the team, that his lifestyle would need to change drastically to keep up with Bernard's frantic pace. He started to join Bernard for the endurance training exercises, and soon developed his own love for fitness. He adapted a new form of eating habits soon after that, and over the years had learned to think of his body as a shrine, serving it nothing he found unpure. He flushed his body continually, drinking a minimum of a gallon of water each day, and eating a prescribed diet.

As a bachelor, Henry complimented himself by reading in his spare time, and socializing with other scientists. He had goals of someday reaching the realm of knowledge where Bernard obtained his ideas. He maintained fond hopes that a time would come when the whole universe would suddenly make sense to him, and he knew education was the route to those hopes.

Henry glanced back down through the lenses on the microscope, looking for activity in the cells he monitored. In the deepness of his thoughts, he hadn't even heard Bernard walk into the lab behind him. This was far from an unusual occurrence. It seemed quite common at times that you would turn around to find Bernard looking over your shoulder, studying you while you worked. Henry had grown accustomed to it.

"Good afternoon, Henry," Bernard greeted as he looked about the small room. It had no windows, since the exact lighting was important for the room. The three microscopes here were the best in the building, and very sensitive. Bernard visited the lab rather infrequently anymore, but Henry often joked that he kept more paperwork here than in his own office. The two separate doors of the room led in from the hallway, and adjoined to a community lab next door.

"Good afternoon, Dr. Baxter," Henry responded, hardly flinching in his own seat. "Are you all prepared for the dinner tonight?"

“Oh, you know I don’t fuss about such nonsense. Carolyn will take care of everything. You will be there, of course,” Bernard requested firmly.

“Of course,” Henry answered, as though insulted. “I have the new data compiled from the manipulations you suggested last week. I have about two more days left before the last of it comes in, but none of that matters now.”

“Why’s that?” Bernard asked, without the slightest change in his voice. He turned to face his most aspiring student, taking a break from the strain of the microscopes.

“Malignancy disappeared in all the specimens in the study.”

“We should scale it up then,” Bernard replied plainly. “Keep the slides for a few weeks. I want to look at several other aspects over time.”

“Yes,” Henry agreed, turning back to look down through the microscope.

Bernard watched the man work in the lonely room. Almost eight years his younger, Henry still tried to keep up with the latest fashions, wearing a sharp shirt and tie of lively colors to go with his comfortable slacks.

Bernard stood at the door, reviewing the small report Henry had prepared earlier in the day. He wore a pair of faded jeans, and an old T-shirt with numerous holes from chemical splashes. His lab coat hung loosely from his shoulders, still unbuttoned, and his open toed sandals looked more comfortable than the loafers Henry wore.

He still hadn’t removed the sunglasses that rested on top of his head, but the outfit said it all. Bernard planned to spend some time in the lab today. He only wore his lounge clothes at home and when he had a new idea prodding around his head, something he planned to investigate.

“You planning a busy day?” Henry asked.

“I was out at the driving range when I saw it,” Bernard admitted, realizing his habits were easily deciphered by the man.

“What did you see?”

“A flaw in our last experimental design. It could explain a lot of unanswered questions, and could justify why we didn’t see any effect in five of the specimens.”

Bernard took a long sip on the orange juice he had brought in with him, never lifting his eyes from the report he read. It was a different attitude than his public appearances, more natural and straight forward with those around him. He didn’t press those who worked for him, but expected greatness from them. He also praised and cared for those who shared his work.

“We’ve already developed a secondary means to treat it. I don’t see a need to search for another solution,” Henry protested. He hadn’t taken the 2 percent failure as hard as Bernard.

“It isn’t a solution that I’m looking for, I just feel that we’re looking at the wrong problem,” Bernard explained, trying to soothe the feelings of anxiety that his friend felt. “It’s futile to search for an answer when you still haven’t discovered the proper question.”

“And you’re going to do all this before dinner tonight?” Henry asked in a surprised tone.

“I don’t need to get ready for three more hours. I should know if my hunch is correct in less than two. Then I can return tonight to verify it after dinner.”

“Shouldn’t you eat between now and then?”

“Henry, this is a dinner. They’ll serve you food,” Bernard chuckled, glancing over at the scientist.

His colleague looked up from the microscope and removed his fashionable eyeglasses. Henry rubbed the soreness from his eyes. He had spiked his hair back with a small amount of mousse to make it look wet, another fashionable trait. He was a good-looking man, but too involved with his work for the singles scene.

“But you’re the guest of honor,” Henry argued. “You’ll be speaking.”

“This is a funding dinner,” Bernard explained calmly. “All these people care about is cure or not, and we both know how the research looks now. These people don’t care about our latest achievements, and most of them couldn’t begin to comprehend the small details over dinner. I won’t need to speak more than about fifteen minutes, and Carolyn wouldn’t allow me to talk longer than that anyway, for fear I would get carried away. She has a number of other people lined up to speak too. I’ll get my chance to eat. Why don’t you head along, take a few hours to enjoy the day outside? Your data will all be here when you get back. You’ll ruin your eyes straining them that way.”

“I suppose you’re right. I’ll see you at dinner,” Henry replied, realizing that Bernard wanted some time alone in the lab. He had a subtle way of suggesting people leave him to his work.

“That’s better, Henry. There’s more to life than just this research.”

Bernard reached over to the radio a moment after Henry walked from the room, and changed the music to fit his own taste. He approached the large refrigerator in the room, and started to remove old slides again.

“Hello, dear,” Carolyn greeted her husband with a short kiss pressed gently against his lips.

“You look incredible, Carolyn. This is your new dress?” Bernard asked as he looked over her latest creation.

“Yes, we made some last minute alterations this morning, but I’m very happy with the results.”

“It looks truly stunning on you. A little bit less conservative than your usual taste, but I have to say that I like what it does for you.”

“Well thank you, Bernard,” she replied in a sultry voice.

Carolyn took his arm in her own, and led him over to several other people who had already arrived at the dinner. Bernard didn’t enjoy the social chatter as much as his spouse, but he understood the reasons for engagements like this evening.

He looked at his wife with awe. It was her beauty that had first drawn him to her. They had met in college, at a function for the students who stood out in each of the individual colleges. She represented the college of fine arts, as a gifted dancer and oil painter.

They left the function early that evening, escaping to a local coffee house, and enjoying a long conversation that lasted late into the evening. Her work fascinated Bernard in ways that few things could. He had always held a deep respect for the arts, and he held the same respect for his wife.

She took an avid interest in his work as well, something few people did at that point in his life. He only pursued his beliefs after her urging, leaving the original focus of his research to follow an idea his teachers found incomprehensible, but Carolyn knew the possibilities that sometimes lie within things foreign to the intellectual mind.

Carolyn gave Bernard confidence, and asked for little in return, but Bernard had always tried to repay her belief. As a dedicated researcher, he often became lost in his work, and through her guided hand, experienced a vast sea of beauty, offering a mental release for a troubled mind. He had developed several of his key theories during exhibits he attended with Carolyn, and alone.

During a time when much of the art had grown faceless, she introduced him to masters of a different breed. Art encompassed a great horizon of knowledge and understanding of the world. This vision, of how objects reacted to their environments, supplied the basis for Bernard’s research, a line previously passed over by many others.

Bernard fell in love with Carolyn at a glance, learned the true meaning of the word after a few hours of conversation, and developed a powerful relationship which had withstood the pressures of the modern world. He admired her ability to pour out her feelings like one pours a glass of water, and convey those feelings through her dance and paintings.

He had never learned to display his emotions in such a manner. He expressed himself through his work. His desires and the beauty of his mind came out in the successes he had already accomplished, and gave him his individuality. He owed much of what he had become to Carolyn.

They avoided marriage in the beginning, focusing on their individual dreams, but never staying far away from one another for prolonged lengths of time. They both placed the value of

their relationship as the highest priority, acknowledging that they each added to the other's successes, through a mutual bond.

Bernard often described what they had as a synergistic cooperative. Alone, they both had their individual abilities. He was no artist, he knew. He was a scientist, a man tied to the natural boundaries of the human body. She enjoyed his work, relishing his accomplishments as much as he did himself, but realized it wasn't a career suited for herself. She felt in awe at his ideas, never grasping where he actually derived them from, but together, they complimented one another, and pushed each other to higher realms within their work.

Carolyn had toured with two different dance companies, and displayed her work in galleries across the world. She had never achieved the global acclaim comparable to Bernard's own, but had developed a name for herself in the art world. She didn't need the acclaim like her husband. She derived her personal satisfaction from the beauty of her work, and not from unlocking the secrets of the human body. He never held her back, actually delaying the date for their marriage by two months for her to extend her performances in her first dance tour. Bernard pushed her to continue doing what she loved, but soon after her second tour, she lost the desire to perform to great audiences in a dance arena.

She left the company soon after that, pursuing her love of dance in a studio they built in their first home. She found that she loved working at her own leisure, and continued to paint from her dance studio as well. Bernard once joked that he need not work at all, for her painting brought in a generous income, but both knew such a thing would never happen. He worked because it was what he loved, and not even Carolyn could fill such a need in his life.

The hours she spent at dance still showed in her form. She had spent a great deal of time working with the designer of her dress for this evening. Bernard knew that there were plenty of other men here, who would admire her unmistakable beauty the same way he often did, during the evening presentation.

She had pulled her hair back, allowing the features of her face to radiate in the soft light of the room. She wore very little makeup, not wishing to hide those unique features that God had blessed her with. Her soft blue eyes accented the honey blonde hair, full and engulfed in large, seductive curls. Though his work had allowed him to travel much of the world, Bernard had never met a woman whom he felt as perfect as his wife.

He often felt unworthy of such grace and eloquence. She took great care of her beauty, choosing to dress in ways which didn't hide it, but didn't flaunt it either. He had never seen her wear an item in public that he felt indecent or sordid. She had an air of sophistication about her, and displayed her beauty in more elegant forms. He just threw his clothes on in the morning, usually preoccupied with his work for the day.

Carolyn ran the business end of his work. She had an uncanny skill for handling such affairs, and tonight was business. He had a hard time convincing investors of his work, but Carolyn had a natural ability to persuade people to see the wonders of what they had already done, and what they could continue to do.

The events for the evening lasted several hours. Carolyn had orchestrated everything, bringing various local groups of performers for several shows throughout the night. The dinner tasted wonderful, though it honestly was not necessary. Most all who attended would approve continued funding on the merits of the work alone, but everyone enjoyed the attention to detail put into the evening, and a break for celebration.

It was after the dinner, in a suite Carolyn had commissioned, where she and Bernard met Henry and three other scientists to celebrate the renewal of the contract. After an hour of conversation and praise to one another, all retired their separate directions for the night.

"It was a beautiful dinner, Carolyn," Bernard commented as they relaxed in the back seat of the cab for the short ride home.

"The dancing was lovely," she agreed, taking a second to relax after the evening of festivities. She found the events of the evening exciting, exhilarating and tiring at the same time.

"I noticed you have your oils out again. Your latest painting has sat rather idle for a while," Bernard mentioned as he inhaled the sweet smell of her perfume. Her soft hand touched his own, and he felt the smooth skin of her firm hands.

"Yes, I know, but that will change. You were in my studio today?"

"This afternoon. I went downstairs to relax before tonight's dinner. Why the sudden change?" he asked, taking interest in his wife's renewed efforts in her work.

"I'm not sure, Bernard," she said somewhat confused. "I just found myself suddenly inspired this morning. If I still feel this alive when I get to the house, I'll probably continue on it tonight."

"It's rather late," Bernard replied.

"I know," she smiled, "but like yourself, I sometimes do my best work at night. Are you still planning to go into the lab this evening?"

"Yes," he responded, glancing at his watch, "I have to take a look at some tests in a few hours, and I wanted to set up another batch for tomorrow. There's something else that I'm missing, and I think these results will reveal what it is."

"Very good. When will you sleep?" she asked, moving over closer to him, to absorb some of his warmth. She always enjoyed it when her husband dressed up for a formal occasion. She often felt that he looked more distinguished in a suit.

"I might take a small nap at the office, and I'll be home by eight to lie down for a few hours."

“Perhaps we can meet at noon, and work off some of life’s aggressions?” she suggested with an innocent smile.

“That would be wonderful. What about the kids?”

“I’ll put them down for their naps, and that should give us at least an hour.”

“I’ll be there.”

“All right, sweetheart,” Carolyn replied as she nuzzled up to him and laid her head down on his shoulder. Bernard eased a bit as well, and enjoyed a few minutes of semi-sleep during the short trip home.

Bernard returned to the lab late, after changing his clothes to something more comfortable. The institute seemed rather quiet as he opened the locked door and walked down the long hallway to the back of the building. There were many rooms for research, most on perimeter walls, with windows. He had designed the building to contain many windows. Bernard hated feeling like he worked in a box.

It was still, however, a laboratory, and there were several small rooms in the building that had no windows, to keep them protected from outside light. They each had locks and special lighting which he could filter if he worked with sensitive compounds. He had plans to do such work this evening. He entered the room, noticing the lights already on inside. Bernard recognized the woman sitting at the bench immediately.

“Hello, Linda, working late?”

“I thought you might come back tonight,” she replied as she looked up.

Linda wore her lab coat over the shorts and T-shirt that she had on beneath. She was one of the youngest women in his group of researchers. He had found her knowledge of viral growth a strong asset to the project, and her personality had intrigued him from the beginning.

A beautiful young woman, with short, sandy brown hair, all in curls, she had a wonderful sense of humor, and a keen sense of awareness in her work. She viewed Bernard as a friend before a colleague, and he treated her with the same sense of respect he gave each of his group members. Her youth was seen by some as a weakness, but Bernard thought otherwise. Age wasn’t a sign of intelligence.

Linda had never pursued a graduate degree, though Bernard had pressured her several times to continue her education. He found her a natural, though she didn’t seem as ambitious as some of the others who worked for him. She had a fun-loving view of life, and her youth seemed to rejuvenate Bernard’s spirits on many occasions.

At times, he felt almost like a father, prodding her to strive for greatness, and protecting her from those who didn’t show her the respect she deserved. At other times, Bernard had deeper feelings for her.

She had never won at love, the victim of two relationships gone bad. He had first met her as the last remnants of her romance came apart in a scene of rage. He had stepped in then, rescuing her from a battered living arrangement, and taking her into his own home until she could get on her feet again.

It was there that she had first come to him. Bernard had never realized the depths of his feelings for the beautiful creature until that moment. Looking into her deep brown eyes, he understood her thoughts, and saw her inner beauty. As lovers, they had explored things that neither could truly understand, but returned again and again to experience repeatedly.

In all of his acquaintances, Bernard had gained many friends who he spoke freely with, but nothing like Linda. In this wonderful person, he had found the only person who understood his frustrations. He knew the many problems which might plague a relationship like theirs, but they had never run into an obstacle.

Bernard and Linda came from two different worlds, and their lives would someday lead them in opposite directions. He had not the time to devote to a blossoming love, and she wanted freedom, the same freedom Bernard had first introduced to her. He had helped her become independent, and freed her from the psychological bonds she had always centered on in her past relationships. She wanted no more than he, to enjoy the time they had at encounters such as tonight.

The silent love affair flourished on spontaneous meetings, and Bernard had never found himself capable of turning away her advances. As she walked over to embrace him, he found the sensation of yearning growing overwhelming inside him. He could never reject such an offer of intimacy, and in the following hours of solitude, he would not bring himself to attempt a try.

Chapter Two

Bernard Baxter sat in the second row of the small auditorium. He had designed the room especially for group meetings like this. It was the only time that the whole group of scientists obtained a verbal forum to discuss new issues, and correspond on old. It was also important to the success of their work, and he enjoyed the comfort of the room. Well lit, with warm lights, even the sound system of the room was state of the art. The designer bragged that it sounded as if the speaker was right before you from any seat in the auditorium.

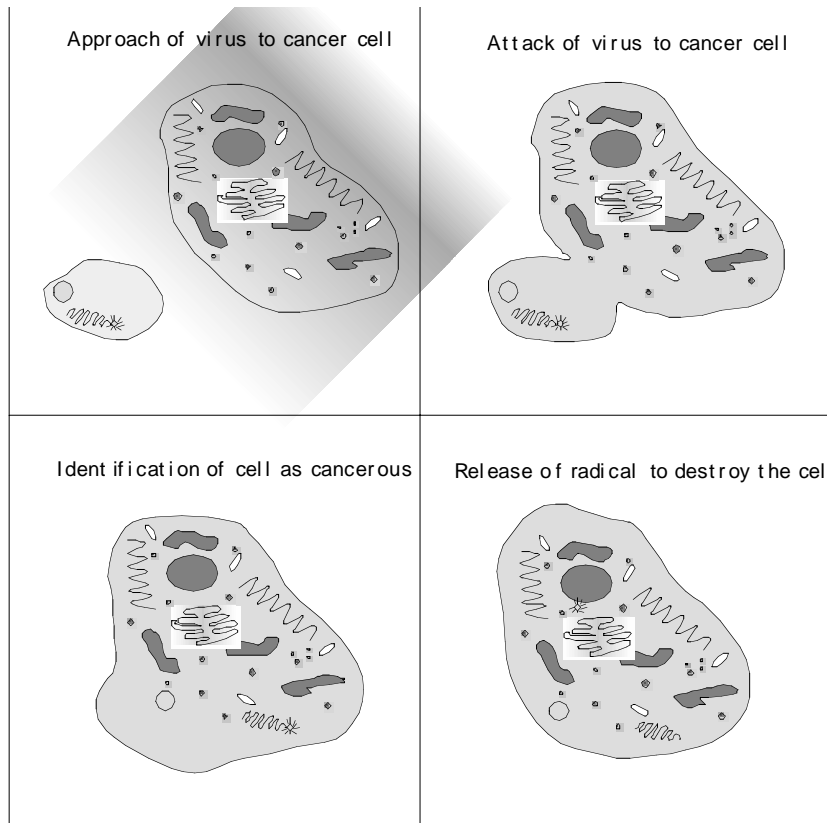
Bernard began the meeting by explaining the status of their latest funding. It was a good note to start the workday on, he told himself. He had already filled most of his colleagues in over the past week, but wanted to explain it all in detail before the entire group, and their weekly meeting was the most logical place to do that. It was a family atmosphere in the room. The friendships here went beyond the workplace, and people spoke freely about the work. Bernard spoke frankly and tried to sound optimistic, a trait which didn't come easy to him.

Henry Lansing took the stage after Bernard, addressing the group on the work he had done for the past few weeks. It looked good, but something bothered Bernard about it. He couldn't place a finger on it yet, but he knew there was something. He couldn't complain really, all the data they had collected thus far was extremely positive. As he watched Henry speak to his colleagues, he tried to step back from the work and look at it objectively.

Henry pressed a button on the small remote, switching off the lights in the large room. A moment later the overhead projector came on, showing a diagram that the entire group could make out clearly. It was a diagram that Bernard often presented, when explaining the information to others, except that Henry had cleaned it up a bit, to explain the work better.

"As you can see from the diagram," Henry announced to the group, "we are working with annihilation techniques, to destroy function inside the cell. This is done by means of an attached radical ion. In the virus, which is illustrated as the hexagon in the left, the annihilator is attached to the RNA identifier chain.

"The virus attacks the cell in a tradition fashion, except that it is weaker than most traditional viruses, and for that reason, only capable of performing the tasks we design it for. Upon entering the cell, the identifier searches for a matching RNA strand. If it finds the strand, it binds, and the annihilator segment of the virus is released to destroy the cell."



“The coating of the cell is a simple phospholipid, and though the diagram doesn’t accurately display the actual size of the virus, which is much smaller than a typical cell, it is easily incorporated into the cell wall. The cell will later replace the foreign material created by the virus. The nucleus of the virus is relatively inert, and eventually breaks down inside the cell, as does the identifier and attached radical. After about one week, all material from the virus generally breaks apart into harmless amino acid complexes.”

The small presentation created a great deal of questions, which Bernard always enjoyed. He realized the need for intuitive discussion, and liked to keep everyone on the project well informed. To maintain this fundamental point of educating his colleagues, he always had somebody from one of the internal groups update the others in the laboratory.

Bernard had spent many years studying viruses, and liked fresh opinions. Since he often felt that he understood viruses better than he did people, he knew that he often needed a fresh opinion.

His years of work had yielded several very interesting techniques. He had learned several methods for changing the virus’ outer wall, to closely match normal human cells. His genetic engineering had also enabled him to develop a virus which could only use very specific materials for growth and reproduction. He knew his virus had little chance of causing problems in a

patient, but he wasn't satisfied there. He also changed the genetic material so that the virus was extremely susceptible to attack by ultraviolet light. With all these precautions, he had become one of the few people who was truly capable of selective viral attack to combat disease.

Henry finished his presentation and turned over the meeting to Dr. Ellen Brockbank. She led a team to design the first studies on human subjects, and Bernard knew she would soon take over the majority of the study. He had spent an increased amount of time with her of late, and knew there was nobody better to head this part of the research. She had done such studies before, for other pharmaceutical companies.

The group of scientists around him was very diverse. Of the twenty-five people, only eleven were males. He had never planned this, but found more women taking higher roles in research at universities and developmental institutions. He knew that women had a different perspective of the world, something he had learned from his many years with Carolyn, but it was the ability of the female mind to look at things with a broad understanding that had brought him to hire so many women on his staff.

Ellen detailed the first set of clinical tests she had designed from Bernard's first few experiments with laboratory animals. He watched her with deep interest, listening carefully to what she had to say. She took the role of his hands, molding his thoughts into a series of tests to prove his theories, and eventually, destroy those cells which deteriorated the health of the human body. As he listened, he tried to open his own mind. He had heard this before, but wanted to make sure they approached it correctly.

Ellen walked quickly to her office. Bernard followed close behind, trying not to fall too far back. She walked at a fast pace, rarely finding time for small talk at work. Her level of professionalism was matched by none at the center. She had pulled her soft red hair up in a loose bun, and Bernard could make out the fine details of her neck as he walked.

Of everyone on staff with Bernard, no other woman came close to the elegance of Ellen. She presented herself in fashionable business attire, painstakingly chosen to meet the fine details of her own tastes. She felt that dress was a direct reflection of how a person felt about themselves. It was true in her own case. Only Henry knew more about the core of Bernard's work than Ellen. Her role required an extensive background into every study Bernard had ever run, but she went beyond that, thinking hard about the important information they wished to gain from their clinical tests. Her insight and intuition would pay off in ways Bernard could never imagine. Bernard would never find flaws with her work, and he praised her work to everyone he encountered.

"We need to talk about your latest study," Ellen urged as she led him into the well-organized office.

Bernard walked in behind her and shut the door. The room smelled lightly of her perfume, and felt warm from the sun seeping in through the partially opened blinds. He reached over with a hand and locked it as Ellen placed her white lab coat on the large rack to the side of the door.

“What about it?” Bernard replied.

Ellen said nothing as she turned around and clenched his face tightly in her hands. Her lips met his before he could utter another word, and she pressed her mouth firmly against his, tasting a return that gave her a slight shiver.

“I’ve missed you, Bernard,” Ellen whispered softly.

Bernard said nothing, as he closed his eyes and kissed her again. Her hands relaxed and fell to where she wrapped them around his sides. She pressed against his firm, strong body, rubbing a leg gently up his own.

Bernard picked her up, without releasing his lips for her own, and carried her over to sit down on the cleared desktop. He eased her gently back as she buried her face in his neck, gently kissing a trail down to the top button of his shirt.

They moved quickly together. Bernard raised Ellen’s skirt up to around her waist, while she undid the buttons to his trousers. A moment later, with their garments only semi-removed, Bernard’s exploration of her body had already begun.

The actions of both suited their individuality. Both knew what they wanted from life, and what they wanted from the other. They acted their respected roles in the office, but behind closed doors, enjoyed each other’s company to the fullest. Few things could arouse Bernard’s interest like a woman who knew what she wanted. Ellen had her sights set firmly on success, and her work with him had helped him achieve his accomplishments at alarming rates.

Bernard watched with satisfaction as Ellen eased back and devoured the moment. Her grasp tightened on the desktop, and her eyes closed. She had desired this encounter all morning, even through the meeting, and her face showed her enjoyment.

He often thought to himself that no other woman could satisfy him sexually the way Ellen did. She had studied many things in life, and understood many of the body’s natural sensations in ways that Bernard knew few people could dream. As an expert in physiology, Ellen had learned everything she could about the relationship between the different mechanisms reacting within, but her understanding of physical stimuli only truly displayed itself during certain moments, such as now.

Ellen had moved her office to this end of the building months earlier. She enjoyed the view from the second story windows, which made up the back wall of the office. Bernard had chosen a location for the facility which looked over a spectacular view of the small city. Ellen

requested the office for aesthetic reasons, but it also provided a safe haven, free of onlookers from neighboring buildings, for their afternoon interludes.

They met very infrequently, though Bernard had no real idea of the number of times they had engaged one another on the desk, or anywhere else in the building. Ellen's hours of work differed drastically from Bernard's. He worked when he felt it worthwhile, and at all hours of the day. Ellen stuck to a more conservative schedule, choosing to enjoy her evenings at home. Though their working relationship was strictly professional, their social relationship was strictly sexual. They had little in common other than their research. It was their differences, and the goals of their work, that created the strong attraction.

Both made little sound during the encounter, expressing themselves strictly through the movements of their bodies. They had reputations within the building to protect, and their positions didn't offer any reason why two heads of staff should not spend long lengths of time behind closed doors. They could act innocent, and their status kept people from asking questions.

Five minutes after walking into the office, Bernard withdrew from the close embrace, and stood away from Ellen as he helped pull her up off the desk. She stood up with a bit of weakness, tired from the quick, but intense engagement. He marveled at how quickly she could return from such a relaxed and unhindered form to her usual stern and proper state.

She bent over and pulled up her undergarments, and then adjusted her skirt in the wall mirror she had bought for her office. When she turned to look at Bernard, after checking that her appearance met her level of standards, he had already fixed his trousers and checked his shirt. He had taken a seat to admire her. Her beauty radiated from the sensitive, light complexion of her skin. Ellen was a thin woman, with modest curves. Though of average height, she seemed at first glance fragile. One quickly learned that she had the heart of a lion, and the will to go with it.

"It's been a while," Ellen replied as she turned and walked over to sit down at her desk. Her voice was calm now, without the tension he had noticed earlier.

The office echoed the same sophistication as the clothes she wore. She had altered many things, including the paint, to suit her tastes. It felt very soothing to her, which had helped make it her personal favorite of locations for their interludes.

Bernard eased back in the comfortable lounge chair across from the desk. He looked up and smiled at her with all his warmth and personality. It felt awkward, he thought, not to hold a woman after the fact, but Ellen didn't want any emotional attachments, and he understood her feelings. The truth of their relationship was almost cold, but they had also managed to develop a strong friendship, and could separate it from their underlying need for one another.

"How are you doing?" he asked sincerely.

"I'll be fine," Ellen answered. "The papers should be finalized in a few more weeks. I sometimes wonder if it's the right thing to do."

“How’s John doing?”

“He’s been very supportive. I think he wants to mend things up before we go our separate ways. He really was my best friend in the beginning, and I hate to think I’m losing such a good friend, along with my husband.”

“Did you enjoy your trip?”

“It was very relaxing,” Ellen smiled. “I met John in New Orleans. We had dinner there and went to some of the festivities. He wants to introduce me to a woman he’s met, but we decided to wait until after the divorce. I’m worried about him. He’s very independent, but he likes to have someone to fall back on. I hope he doesn’t rush into anything once we sign the papers.”

“John’s a smart man,” Bernard comforted. “He knew enough to snap you up when he had the chance.”

“He also knew how to cheat on me,” she snapped sarcastically.

“I didn’t say he was perfect.”

“No, and I should see beyond that,” she agreed half heartedly. “I guess I still worry about him.”

“I’m sure he’ll take some time to decide what the next step should be in his life before he takes it. You can both try to patch things up with one another if you’re doubting this, but it’s probably just the last minute jitters. There’s bound to be some anxiety when you separate with a mate of fifteen years.”

“I know, it just seems like we’ve abandoned it for selfish reasons,” Ellen replied in a confused voice. She looked down as though entranced with her own thoughts.

“Your happiness is hardly a selfish reason,” Bernard answered seriously. He had witnessed the tide of emotions she dealt with, and tried to listen when she needed companionship.

“You’re right,” she smiled, looking up again. Her eyes showed her strength, though they couldn’t fully hide the pain.

“Things will turn out in the end,” Bernard assured her, “you’ll see.”

“It’s too bad that you’re still married,” she replied, suddenly feeling awkward as he looked at her. “Once my divorce is final, we could meet whenever we liked. I would like to travel a bit, and you would be such nice company. No more worries about looking respectable in public.”

“Yes,” Bernard allowed, answering the shy expression of her feelings, “but I am married, and our relationship is good now. If we did this any more frequently, you might grow tired of me.”

"I doubt that," Ellen replied honestly. Her deep respect for him came with some strong emotions, though she knew he would never leave his wife. She would never admit it to herself, but she often wondered if she truly desired that.

The knock at the door interrupted the conversation at a good time for both, as they could no longer find words to express their feelings. Bernard turned slowly in the swivel chair to glance up at Henry. He could tell by the look on his friend's face that the man was anxious.

"Excuse me for interrupting," Henry spoke with excitement. "I just reviewed the latest results. I wanted to discuss them with you both."

"Come on in, Henry," Ellen replied with a smile as she directed him toward the other swivel chair across the desk from her. Henry took a seat beside Bernard and handed him a copy of a report he had printed from their database.

"Eighty-five percent," Henry announced before Bernard could read through the results. He couldn't hide the smile on his face.

"The advanced tumors still aren't responding very well," Bernard replied with annoyance. "Only seventy percent. This is the most powerful annihilator we've come up with so far. I'm hesitant to put anything nastier than that inside the virus."

"It could just be a delayed reaction," Ellen pointed out.

"It should be apparent by now, if anything is going to happen," Bernard replied. "We won't see much more of an increase than this. I see that we aren't finding very high levels of damage to healthy cells. I may have engineered the bond between the annihilator and locator too strong. I think that we aren't getting a good separation after the virus identifies the cell as cancerous."

"Eighty five percent is a good success rate."

"I didn't come this far for eighty-five. I want complete destruction in all cases."

"That might be too much to hope for," Ellen agreed with Henry.

"We can beat eighty-five," Bernard insisted.

"What do you propose?" Henry asked.

"I've got a study running now that should give some indication of the performance of the annihilator. The preliminary results will come off this afternoon. I want confirmation of this before we move into the human celled phase of the project. There's no reason to waste any time if we aren't ready to take the next step yet."

"Agreed," Ellen said with sureness. The clinical studies would take a great deal of effort, and she didn't want to repeat them because they weren't ready and sure of themselves prior to initiation.

"What if the separation is good?" Henry asked instinctively.

“Then our techniques to develop the RNA locator needs more work. I don’t want to introduce a bomb in the body that isn’t destroying harmful cells. First, we figure out why we aren’t at least above 90 percent in our treatments. It bothers me, because theoretically, no cancer is immune to the treatment.”

Another knock at the door brought the three out of their conversation as Bernard again turned to see who had interrupted them. The woman’s face peeped through the door, and her eyes locked on Bernard where he sat.

“Dr. Baxter, you do remember your lunch appointment for today?”

“Yes, Nancy,” Bernard replied to the friendly reminder. He thought highly of the job that his personal secretary did around the center, and she had a way of tracking him down to make sure he kept his appointments.

Nancy exchanged a friendly glance with Ellen, and then smiled softly at Henry. He smiled back, wishing she would step fully through the door, so that he could admire more than just her face.

She was a beautiful young woman, and very intelligent. He knew that Bernard had more in mind for her at the facility than just a secretary. She planned to continue school, once she had established residency in state. Eventually, Bernard would bring her into the lab as a valuable asset to their work. In the meanwhile, she managed his schedule for him.

Henry had developed a very personal relationship with most of the people at the laboratory, and Nancy was no exception. His general attitude toward everyone, and the numerous hours he spent at work, had sparked numerous conversations with his fellow associates. The conversations generally led to strong friendships, and he had many throughout the center.

He and Nancy had talked on many occasions, and he found her exceptionally beautiful. He sometimes wished that their relationship might advance into something else, but knew that it never would. He had made commitments in his life, and right now, that meant he could never pursue more than that with her. He watched her close the door and then turned back to Bernard, still unwilling to give up on his opinions.

Chapter Three

Detective Max Harmon had grown accustomed to waking at odd hours of the night. As the chief investigator for homicides in the department, it was part of his job to visit each crime scene personally, and he liked to get there as soon as he received a report. It didn't happen often. There were only a small number of homicides each year, well below average per capita, but he was no stranger to the night.

Max had a reputation in the department as an ornery, egotistical man. He realized that this description fit him. He had witnessed many things in his life that sickened him, and surprise at people's actions had ceased in the distant past. He had learned to bottle down his emotions, trying to keep them separated from his work. It gave him his professionalism, but also labeled his overall character.

He cared little about all this. Max was sure of one thing, he was very good at what he did. He worked very closely with the forensics department, and had a sense of picking apart homicides. His abilities had earned him several distinguished awards over the years, and the admiration of many of his fellow officers.

The shiny tint of gray in his thinly trimmed hair showed his age. He had never tried to hide it, and realized that the early development of such traits came with the job. There were many hidden benefits that accompanied his work, but he paid them little attention. He often told his acquaintances that he had a wrinkle for every murder case he had worked on. He had worked on a great number over the years.

An older man, he had put on a few pounds since his early youth as a rookie cop. He tried to keep his health, but the stress and long hours made it hard to find the time, and the job was catching him. He never let any of that slow him down. The wrinkles on his face, were remnants of a hard working individual, and the grooves worn by deep thought, which often turned into brilliance. Max loved what he did, and had never found such pleasure as when he nailed a suspect with the proper evidence to gain a conviction, and often, a confession.

Max didn't know much about the scene. His wife had awakened him twenty minutes earlier, and he felt almost surprised to hear the voice of Cameron McBride at the other end of the phone. With the commissioner in town, it seemed reasonable to expect the notice to come from him, but the district attorney asked Max to hurry as a personal favor to him, and that was really all he could say. That was the first sign that there was something more to this case. He had to admit that his curiosity was peaked.

The house was easy enough to find. Surrounded by a half dozen emergency vehicles with lights blazing, it had already disturbed most of the neighbors from their sleep. Max flipped on the red light atop his dashboard and weaved his way to the center of the vehicles. It was the nicer

part of town, but Max knew that rich people were no more immune to homicide than the poor, and didn't find this shocking at all.

He pulled out his badge and flashed it at a fellow officer as he approached the large home. He didn't need to show his identification. He was well known by everyone on the force, but he did things strictly according to procedure. Max had never had a case ruined by faulty detective work.

The house looked elegant from the outside, even basking in the rays of red lights. His good friend and partner, detective Fred Chase, had control of the scene as he walked in the door. The house was busy with a number of people, many as tired looking as Max felt. Fred told him that the Commissioner was already on the way.

"What have you got?" Max asked in a calm tone. The careless attitude almost tempted Fred to make an effort at jarring some kind of emotion, but he had learned years earlier that Max looked at his job as a business, the business of finding criminals.

"The wife's dead upstairs," Fred explained. "We have the husband in the kitchen while they take pictures of the room. He's covered in her blood."

"How?"

"Knife," replied Fred, "possibly a sword, he has dozens around the house. He's some kind of collector. We haven't found the murder weapon yet, but they're looking around. It's a single slash across the throat, and nothing more. She's been dead a few hours at least."

Fred was a large man, sure of himself, though often reckless because of it. He was cocky, and Max sometimes had to bring him back down to earth, but he was also full of spirit, and dedicated to his job. He liked what he did, and had a low appeal for criminals, which also made him good at what he did. His size and strength were often intimidating, which worked to their benefit.

"What's he said so far?" Max asked, after making sure they were a safe talking distance from the kitchen.

"Very little," Fred answered as he led Max up the staircase to the second floor. "Talk about cold, this guy shows less emotion than you."

Fred didn't turn to see if he had gotten any reaction. He knew he wouldn't, but he took advantage of the chance to prod at Max. Ten years of work together — and a strong friendship besides — gave Fred one of the few privileges to crack smart remarks at such a respected person as Max.

"He called it in," Fred continued. "The guy claims that he just woke up and found himself covered in his wife's blood. He turned on the light, found her there, reached for the phone and called us. He says he slept right through it."

The house was alive with voices, though Max also sensed the death. It was an incredible home, beautifully furnished. He couldn't help but notice the elegant paintings that hung on the

walls, and wondered at the price of such a work. The decor of the home felt soft, even in the harshly bright lights.

“You sound like you don’t believe him,” Max commented, but Fred could sense the questioning tone hidden within the statement.

“They have an alarm system for the house,” Fred replied, presenting what he already had gained, “and it didn’t go off until we arrived a half hour ago. There are only two people in the house. The two kids are conveniently at their grandparent’s house for the weekend.”

Max walked into the room which several others already occupied. Max recognized the photographer immediately, and felt better to see such a professional working on the case. He was taking numerous shots of the scene from many angles, but took a second to nod a friendly hello to Max as he continued. Max liked dealing with the best when he put together cases for the district attorney. Glancing around the room at the others, he realized immediately that all the best forensics people were already here.

Both men placed the plastic covers over their shoes and gloved their hands before walking over to where the body lay on the bed. Max usually didn’t notice the smell of blood, but the room had such large quantities scattered about that it filled the air with a heavy stench. His eyes went to work immediately, noticing specifics about the scene.

“Looks like a sword, and from this side of the bed,” Max responded in a somber voice. “The mattress has a slash on the edge of the bed. The murderer must have stood at the side of the bed to make the slash. She didn’t struggle. Her hands look clean. She didn’t even grab for her throat. He must have got her while she was sleeping. Wiped the blood off the weapon on her nightshirt. You can see the trail of the blade.”

The sheets of the bed had changed from a soft white to the deep red hue of the blood which covered more than three quarters of it. The color seemed dark, and looked hardened. Another forensics examiner stepped forward from the other side of the room.

“The body temperature indicates she died almost three hours ago,” the man reported to Max. “She bled to death quickly, too deep in sleep to know it happened.”

“Any news on a weapon,” Max called out to the other officers walking outside the hall.

“Nothing yet,” came back a reply.

“Don’t be stingy with the film,” Max told the photographer as he walked back to the door. “Let’s get an exact time of death. I want to talk with the husband now.”

“Max,” Fred interrupted as he followed his partner down the hallway, “there’s something else you should know.”

Fred reached out and grabbed Max by the elbow, leading him away from the others for a moment. Max noticed a hesitation in his voice, something uncommon for the young and high-strung friend.

"Why did the district attorney call me out for this?" Max asked, paying no attention to his partner's comment. Fred had grown used to his partner's ability to filter out everything around him when he was in deep thought.

"Don't you know who that was?" Fred asked with surprise.

"No," Max answered firmly, as though he had missed something. It was another cold reality of his job. He didn't look at victims as people, but as evidence, and he knew it was impersonal.

"That's the body of Mrs. Carolyn Baxter."

For the first time that night, and indeed in all the years Fred had known his partner, he saw a look of surprise on Max Harmon's face. It lasted only a moment, then quickly disappeared.

"The wife of the infamous Dr. Bernard Baxter?" Max asked, acknowledging his recognition of the name.

"Correct."

"That explains the call from McBride," Max uttered to himself.

"Max," Fred continued in a nervous and hushed voice. "Dr. Baxter made an unusual request when the first of the forensics people arrived here."

"What's that?"

"He asked that we draw a blood sample from both himself and his wife, immediately."

"Really?" Max asked, a hint of suspicion in his eyes.

"The man is a doctor," Fred explained, "and he's entitled to a blood test if he wants. There wasn't any reason to deny him that right, and we didn't seem to think it would hurt her at all. We went ahead and drew blood from him just before you arrived, and they took a blood sample from his wife as soon as they entered. He asked that we freeze both specimens. They're in dry ice now."

"Building himself an alibi?" Max suggested.

"Possibly," Fred replied, as though ashamed for aiding a possible suspect.

"Did he give any reason why he wanted a blood sample taken?" Max asked with intrigue.

"No, but under the circumstances . . ." Fred answered in a reserved voice.

"If forensics doesn't have a problem with it, then I don't," Max answered, replying to the question that Fred felt reluctant to ask. Fred knew his partner had strict methods for handling crime scenes, but had never confronted this sort of situation before.

"I just wanted you to know what's happened so far," Fred explained as they headed back downstairs.

"I appreciate it, Fred," Max replied simply. His eyes continued to examine the house carefully as they walked.

Max walked into the kitchen through the mass of people inside the house. He found the doctor sitting at a kitchen chair, no sign of emotion present on his face. The man looked

different, nothing like his television appearances of recent days. His grey night shirt and shorts were partially saturated with blood, and his hair pressed to one side where he slept on it. He seemed solemn, but angry.

“Hello, Dr. Baxter, I’m detective Harmon,” Max greeted.

“Are we ready to go, detective?” Bernard asked in a quiet, but clear voice.

“Go where, Dr. Baxter?” Max asked with no emotion.

“To the police station. I assume you will be taking me in for questioning?” Bernard suggested.

“Why do you think that?” Max replied, never taking his eyes away from the lock they had made with Bernard’s the moment the conversation began. He was studying now, prodding for an indication of guilt.

“Because if I were in your position, that’s what I would be doing,” Bernard replied plainly.

“Do you want to tell me what happened here, Dr. Baxter?” Max suggested as he sat down.

“It looks to me that someone has slain my wife,” Bernard pointed out wryly. “How would you interpret it?”

“Who killed your wife?” Max asked seriously.

Fred watched his colleague exchange words with the high-status suspect in the most professional manner allowable. Neither man ever showed the slightest change as they spoke, nor did either look away from the stare.

“I don’t know,” Bernard said with a pause, as though he were asking himself. “Yet.”

“You will though?” Max asked, soliciting a reply.

“Eventually.”

“And then what?”

“Then I’ll deal with the parties in the appropriate manner.”

“That’s why we have the justice system,” Max suggested.

“Your justice system,” Bernard replied coldly. “Now, if your people have taken enough photos of me in these clothes to suit your needs, I wish to change and take that ride down to the police station with you.”

“What makes you so sure we’re taking you with us?”

“Let’s see,” Bernard uttered sarcastically, no longer hiding his impatience, “I called you half an hour ago, reporting my wife’s murder, and I’m the only person in the house. Your people already verified that, and our alarm system — state of the art — never registered any break-ins. I would say you have an open and shut case on me. I expect that you’ll take me in.”

“But you’re innocent,” Max argued, memorizing the replies for his time on the stand. He still hoped his jaunting would initiate a more emotional response.

“Until proven guilty,” Bernard replied with spite.

“I’ll have an officer retrieve your clothes. You won’t mind if my forensics agents get some more samples from you?” Max suggested, illustrating his control of things. He had not achieved his goal, but the intimidation would wear away the hardness exhibited by his suspect.

“Not at all, but I would like to get away from the commotion soon,” Bernard said firmly.

“The wheels of justice often move slowly, Dr. Baxter,” Max answered as he slowly turned and walked away.

He had already set a tone for the interrogation with the man. Max knew that angry people confessed easier. He enjoyed confessions more than building cases, because it meant there was no doubt come time for sentencing the guilty.

Max Harmon walked up to the research center and entered through the lobby doors. The building was unique, its grounds finely landscaped. It was a two-story building, and very spacious inside. A receptionist sat at the front desk, wearing a headset to answer calls. She smiled warmly at the two officers as they entered the lobby and quickly greeted them.

“Welcome to the Northwestern Cancer Research Institute. How may I help you, gentlemen?” she addressed the two.

“We need to speak with Nancy Dobbs. Is she in yet?” Fred asked. It was still quiet inside, he noted, not yet busy with the day’s work. He found it rather awkward, as he noted that his watch read eight thirty.

“Yes, Ms. Dobbs comes in at eight to prepare Dr. Baxter’s agenda. Is she expecting you?”

“I doubt it,” Fred replied, looking beyond her at the long hallway behind her desk.

“May I ask what this is regarding?” the woman asked as kindly as she could.

“An official police investigation,” Max replied, not really interested in salutations. He pulled his badge out of his coat pocket and displayed it to the young receptionist. “Would you please point us in the direction of Mrs. Dobbs’ desk.”

“Just down the hall, and to the right,” the woman answered, unable to hide her sudden surprise.

“Thank you, ma’am,” Fred replied.

Max followed the directions down the long hallway, making a turn at the end which led to Bernard’s office. He found Nancy Dobbs sitting behind her desk, reading a scientific journal. She didn’t see the two of them approaching, but he found it hard to miss her.

Nancy wore a cream suit jacket and skirt outfit. It had the effect of looking very sophisticated, while not hiding the beauty of her legs, which were visible beneath the desk. She brought her head up from the journal as the two men came closer, and her soft brown eyes met

Max with a bright glow. She smiled at Max with the same greeting as the woman at the front desk, and for a moment, he wondered why he had ever gone into police work.

“Excuse me, gentlemen, may I direct you somewhere?” she asked politely.

Max managed to set aside his urge to stare and focused for a moment on his investigation. It took only a second for the purpose of the visit to return to him, but still, he fumbled to reply.

“Are you Nancy Dobbs?” Fred asked for his speechless companion.

“Yes,” the woman replied, turning to look at Fred. “May I help you?”

“We were wondering if we could ask you a few questions about Bernard Baxter?” Max managed, regaining his speech.

“He should be in momentarily,” the woman answered. “He still has to finish setting out his agenda for the day. If you would care to wait, I can see if he has time for an appointment. What is this regarding?”

“We tend to believe he won’t be in today,” Max answered, wishing he was thirty years younger again. “Is there somewhere we can go to speak privately?”

“Sure,” Nancy replied, a look of bewilderment apparent on her face. “We can go to the secretaries’ lounge.”

She stood up, setting the medical journal to the side, and walked past the two men. She seemed slightly hesitant as she returned to the main hall and brought them to a nicely furnished room about four doors down the hallway. Max followed closely behind, admiring the young woman as she walked ahead. She was tall, and slender, with a look of athleticism about her. She entered the room and walked immediately over to a coffee machine in the room, while the two men entered behind her.

“Would either of you care for some coffee?” she asked.

“No ma’am,” Max returned. “Do you mind if we shut this door?”

“You don’t plan to attack me?” the woman asked with an innocent, yet strangely suggestive smile. The comment made Max suddenly turn flush, and again lose his train of thought.

“No ma’am,” Fred replied with a grin, as he closed the door. “I’m detective Chase, and this is detective Harmon. We just wanted to ask you a few questions about Dr. Baxter, if that’s all right?”

“Sure,” she answered, sitting down at one of the chairs in the room and crossing her legs to retain some modesty with the alluring skirt. “Is he in some sort of trouble?”

“We aren’t sure yet. We’re hoping that you can help us clear some of this up, Mrs. Dobbs,” Fred answered, making an effort to remain standing.

“Miss Dobbs,” Nancy corrected, stressing her marital status.

Max studied her carefully — like most of the people he questioned — checking her reaction for anything unordinary, but as he looked at her, he had a hard time maintaining his focus on the reason for the visit.

She wore her long brown hair down over her shoulders. The large, soft curls seemed to bounce with every motion of her head, and accented her eyes the way his wife's did in her youth. He had always felt that his wife was one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen, and Nancy Dobbs suddenly made him believe he had found another. Her looks made him wonder why she worked as a secretary for a leading scientist, instead of modeling glamorous clothes down walkways at exquisite fashion shows. Everything about the woman seemed to cry beauty, and he felt glad that Fred was here to keep the questions directed on the case. Fred's youth and acquaintance with the dating scene made him far more suited for questioning a woman of such beauty.

"Dr. Baxter's wife was found murdered last night," Fred informed the woman, well aware that the tone of the conversation should change if they were to question her seriously.

"Carolyn?" Nancy asked with disbelief.

"Yes," Max answered, suddenly aware of his mind's wandering, and preparing to pursue his line of questions.

"How did it happen?"

"Someone cut her throat with a knife," Max replied plainly, suddenly feeling heartless as he noted the reaction on the woman's face. Her posture changed as she flinched from the remark.

"And you think that Dr. Baxter had something to do with it?" she asked, her astonishment unmistakable.

"We aren't really sure yet, ma'am," Max replied, trying to sound more sympathetic. "We were hoping you could help us sort through this."

"Well, I'll do what I can," she assured them, suddenly growing very serious about the conversation. The sincerity was evident in her shaky voice.

"Are you aware of any problems Dr. Baxter and his wife were experiencing recently?" Max asked simply, trying to ask the questions in a relaxed manner, and not suggest any certain response. After several hours of careful study and the Baxter's home, he felt much more alert and functioned much better than with Bernard.

"I just work for Bernard," Nancy replied timidly. "I make an effort to keep my nose out of employers' social lives. He seems like a very nice man," she paused, fighting the thought. "I've always admired him. Why would you think Bernard did it?"

"It looks rather incriminating at this point," Fred answered, understanding the shock they had induced, but trying to keep her from asking questions herself. "Do you know anyone who would want to frame Bernard Baxter for his wife's murder?"

"I can't imagine why anyone would do such a thing," Nancy answered, still visually shaken by the news. "He's trying to save lives with his work. I don't know why anyone would want to stop that. He's very active with the community. He's talking to some students this afternoon."

"How well do you know Dr. Baxter?" Fred asked after a moment, wondering if the interview would be productive. He could sense that she wasn't the right person to question about their subject.

"I take his calls during the day, and try to keep him to his schedule of meetings and such, but I don't get involved with much of his work. He's always very kind to make small talk with everyone here, even the secretaries, but I don't know how much help I can really be to you. I haven't even worked an entire year for Dr. Baxter."

"Yes," replied Fred in a somber tone, realizing his efforts were futile. He exchanged glances with Max, acknowledging silently that they needed to move on. "Perhaps you can point out some of the other scientists on staff that are closer acquaintances to Dr. Baxter?"

"Sure," answered Nancy. "His closest associate is Dr. Lansing, but he hasn't come in yet today. I did see Dr. Brockbank in her office this morning. Perhaps you would like to speak with her."

"Could you direct us to her office, Ms. Dobbs?" Max asked, knowing that time was of the essence at this point.

"Sure," Nancy replied, attempting the nicest smile she could under the circumstances. She walked out the room. Max and Fred followed her in the direction of another office, near the end of the main hall. She halted midway, and glanced back with a look of remorse, her eyes noticeably wet. "I'm sorry I can't be much more of a help, gentlemen."

"You've done just fine, Miss," Max replied. She turned and walked silently down the hall, looking ahead in a shocked gaze at the closed door she approached. Max noticed Fred's eyes studying the woman's features as they followed her down the hall, and couldn't help but smile to himself.

"Excuse me, Dr. Brockbank, these two gentlemen would like to speak with you for a moment," Nancy announced in a saddened voice. She didn't look at Ellen, unable to face her coworker in her state of grief.

Ellen looked up from the computer screen where she sat and stood to greet the two. She smiled kindly, but professionally. Her gentle freckles were noticeable against her soft red hair. Max was immediately taken by the appearance of the woman. Though older than Nancy, she was equally attractive.

"Excuse me, detectives, but your names slipped my mind," Nancy apologized.

Max noticed Nancy trembling, and motioned to Fred to show her outside the door. He couldn't help but feel sorry for the young girl. Such beauty, he thought to himself, should not experience such grief. He knew the tolls that the horrors of his work had done to him, and tried to protect the innocent from those horrors whenever possible.

"That's all right, Ms. Dobbs, we can introduce ourselves," he assured her again. "My name is Max Harmon, and my partner is detective Chase. We wondered if we could bother you for a moment of your time?" Max began, matching the woman's professionalism. He was a graduate of the old school, and still wasn't completely comfortable with women in higher roles in the workplace.

"Is this about the divorce?" Ellen asked with surprise and irritation. "John and I have already come to an agreement."

"I'm sorry, Dr. Brockbank," Max answered. "This covers other matters."

"Please, Ellen," she replied hesitantly as she reached out to shake his hand. She now seemed unsure of the purpose of the visit, and Max sensed her defenses rise. The reaction signaled him to the type of personality he was dealing with. Knowing a subject's personality was always a valuable asset during a questioning.

He paused to wait for his partner to return. The shades in the office were set to allow the natural light from the morning sun in, but block the direct rays. Max turned as Fred returned a moment later.

"Yes, Ellen," he corrected as he addressed her, "we wanted to ask you some questions about one of your associates, Dr. Bernard Baxter," Max began as Fred shut the door. He exchanged another glance to make sure that Fred had asked Nancy to take a moment in the lounge, and allow them to talk with some others in the lab. Max knew the importance of keeping people separated prior to questioning, and Fred explained how important it was that they talk with others before news spread through the building.

"Is he all right?" she asked hesitantly.

"He's fine ma'am," Max explained, "It's his wife."

"Carolyn?" she asked, sudden horror on her face. "What's wrong?"

"We found Carolyn's body last night," Max answered calmly and with compassion, learning from his previous experience. "Somebody murdered her, and we have reason to believe that Bernard Baxter is involved."

"Oh my," Ellen murmured with grief, her professionalism suddenly gone. She dropped heavily into her seat, not bothering shaking Fred's hand, as she had Max's. "You've got to be kidding."

"No, ma'am, I'm sorry," Max answered with a pause. "It's rather important to our investigation that we learn as much as we can right away. Nancy tells us that you worked closely with Bernard."

"I'm in charge of his clinical studies for the new therapy," Ellen explained. "Our work relationship is quite close," she replied, in response to the unasked question.

"Did you know of any marital problems between Bernard and Carolyn?" Max asked, trying his question again on another subject.

"This is some kind of mistake," she answered, suddenly defensive of the insinuation. Max noted the sudden hint of anger in her once soft eyes. "Bernard would never harm Carolyn. In all my life, I've never met two people who cared for one another more than he and his wife."

"I understand that, Dr. Brockbank," Max expressed, "and we just want to unravel the events that led up to Carolyn's death. If he is indeed innocent, then your cooperation could really help him right now."

Max spoke calmly and assertively, trying to ease the noticeable tension. He realized they needed a new approach to questioning Bernard's acquaintances.

Ellen leaned back in her chair, her face grew pale against her soft red hair, and Max again felt shame for delivering the tragic news. Her deep gray business jacket and cream blouse brought out the faint color of her skin, but her beauty was now overshadowed by her sadness.

"Carolyn came by the office late last night, around eight," she said. She was noticeably more relaxed and collected, as she slowly detailed what she could remember for the detectives. "I don't usually remain here that late, but most of the top people in the center were here last night, to see the latest results when they came off. We did some work with a radioisotope, to determine what is happening in the cell."

Ellen suddenly realized that they probably didn't care to hear the specifics of the research. The sudden shock had forced her mind to wander as she spoke, recalling details not important to the anxious detectives. She stopped a moment to focus her thoughts, before continuing.

"She seemed as radiant as ever," Ellen continued, getting back to the specifics of their first question, "and she left with Bernard after a short meeting with all the lead scientists. I think they walked out with Henry Lansing. The first hard evidence from our work came out last night, and it was conclusive that the treatments are working. It places all our work ahead of schedule by a few months. He seemed extremely happy when he left the lab with her. This is just too much to believe. When did it happen?"

"Late last night," Max answered, giving her a moment to calm herself.

"Did Bernard mention where he and his wife were headed when they left?" Fred asked a moment later.

"I didn't speak with either of them as they left. I spoke directly with Bernard shortly after we reviewed the data. He and I outlined a new study in some of the larger animals to confirm his results, and he gave me some ideas for clinical testing. I didn't get a chance to visit with Carolyn at all. A small group of us shared a drink, and they wandered out without really saying goodbye."

“You mentioned that he spoke with Dr. Lansing?” Max asked with interest.

“Henry and Bernard are very close friends,” she explained. “He’s probably the closest thing we have to an assistant head scientist on the project.”

“Where is Dr. Lansing now?” Fred questioned, noticing the bright sun warming the office, and making it uncomfortable to the jacket clad investigators.

“I haven’t seen him this morning, which is rather unusual,” she noted oddly. “He sticks to a pretty tight schedule, and should be sampling one of his tests in a few minutes. It will take some time to set those samples up. He should at least have been here a short while ago,” she replied, glancing down at her watch.

“Where’s his home?” Max asked, interested in her response.

“I’ll get the address for you,” she answered, reaching for her Rolodex. Her hands were noticeably shaking as she thumbed to the card with Henry’s information.

Max left a minute later, after asking that she not contact Henry until they spoke with him. He and Fred walked back to the front of the building. Max passed Linda Craven on the way down the hall. He smiled at the unusually cheerful woman. He realized her mood would probably change suddenly in a few moments — the same way the others here had — when she received news from the occupants of the building. Max wished he could speak with every person individually, knowing that someone in the lab might know that hidden secret about Bernard Baxter, which would provide some explanation for why he might kill his wife.

Fred walked a few feet ahead of Max, and nearly walked into an older gentleman who stepped suddenly out from a door along the hallway. The man turned and braced for a collision, but Fred managed to stop just short of running into him. The man apologized with a look of embarrassment, and turned quietly to walk away.

Max paid the man little attention as he walked on. The man seemed out of place at first to Max, but a glance at the door from where he had come, quickly halted any suspicions. He had probably just finished working for the evening, and replaced his cleaning supplies in the janitorial closet, before heading home.

There were more pressing thoughts on Max’s mind at the moment. He wanted to talk to as many people as he could at the start of this investigation. Dr. Brockbank had just revealed the biggest fish in the bowl to him, and Max decided to find Dr. Lansing before trying to talk to anyone else at the laboratory. He knew that with such a high profile case, it was best that he and Fred not split up. Max felt his age, and didn’t want his first mistake on a case to be broadcast across the world.

“Well, that just destroyed all my misconceptions about scientists,” Fred remarked as the two men walked alone to their parked car in the outside lot.

“What did?” Max asked, confused by the remark.

"I don't remember the last time I saw that many gorgeous women at a social club, and this is a research laboratory."

"What," Max questioned with a smile, well aware of the hypocrisy of his next remark, "can't women have beauty and brains at the same time?"

"How many of the brainy girls that you went to school with looked like that?" Fred defended. He knew that even with all the years between them, their minds often worked alike.

"There were some very pretty ladies in there," Max agreed. "I wonder how Bernard Baxter ever managed to get any work done?"

"You heard them," Fred responded sarcastically. "Bernard Baxter is a saint. We should just go back to the precinct now and release him. Our investigation might as well be over." Fred's blunt sarcasm was a trait Max had learned to enjoy.

"I know," Max chuckled without a grin. "I'm really going to enjoy putting him away for this one."

Dr. Lansing woke to the thunderous sound of pounding on his apartment door. He had lived in the apartment since he first arrived to work for Dr. Baxter, and knew his landlady better than his own mother. He enjoyed the quiet that the comfortable abode usually provided, but this interruption suddenly jaunted that.

Henry noticed the clock as he climbed out of bed, and suddenly tried to shake the sleep from his head. The pounding that continued even after he finished, reminded him of his last drink the previous evening. Henry had always awoken at least ten minutes before his alarm went off in the mornings, but he could hear it playing music clearly as he walked toward the door.

Henry retrieved his robe on the way, and walked quickly to halt the irritating pounding from the solid wood door. He could only wonder who would come calling for him. In the back of his mind, he remembered that he had a sampling to make at eight o'clock, and had already missed it by half an hour. His grip was limp on the knob, as he realized his strength was not yet full from the night's sleep, but he managed to open it.

"Yes," Henry responded, realizing how dry his voice sounded as he greeted the two men at his door.

"Are you Dr. Henry Lansing?" Max asked, noticing the tired expression on the man's face.

"Yes," he answered, clearing his throat. He struggled to focus on the men.

"I'm detective Max Harmon, and this is detective Fred Chase. We were wondering if we could ask you a few questions about Dr. Bernard Baxter?"

"Sure," answered Henry as he opened the door further to show the two men inside. "Can I ask what your interest is with Bernard?"

"You haven't heard?" Fred asked, probing the man.

“Heard what?” Henry asked innocently.

“Carolyn Baxter was found murdered last evening,” Max answered for his partner.

Henry felt his feet fall out from beneath him even before he could reach the table. He wasn’t sure who it was, but one of the officers quickly came to his side and helped him from the floor. He took a seat at the couch, while Max remained standing. Fred looked him over for injuries.

“We’re sorry to have to bring such tragic news, Dr. Lansing,” Fred replied apologetically, as he stood up. “She died early this morning. We’re holding Dr. Baxter until we can clear a few things up about last evening.”

“Bernard?” Henry asked, unable to hide the shock on his face.

“Yes, Dr. Lansing,” Max answered calmly.

“Why?” Henry asked with anger.

“He is a suspect in the case at this time.”

“Not Bernard,” Henry replied, his strength returning quickly, “he loved Carolyn more than anything.”

Max looked about the apartment, noting the cleanliness of the surroundings. The shades were drawn, making it rather dark. He noticed several articles of clothing, lying on the floor leading to the bedroom. Henry appeared visually shaken, as Max would expect, and seemed disoriented. His hair was combed back, a generous amount of gel still present, though he could see where it had become pressed to one side from lying on a pillow.

“Dr. Baxter collected cutlery,” Max responded, ignoring the statement. “Did you know much about it?”

“Cutlery?” Henry asked in confusion, and then suddenly understanding. “You mean his swords. He’s an avid collector, yes. Why do you ask that?”

“Mrs. Baxter died of an apparent laceration to the throat by a large, sharp instrument. We have reason to believe that one of Dr. Baxter’s swords was the murder weapon.”

“I’m sorry, officers,” Henry answered in disbelief. “This is all too much to believe. Where’s Bernard now?”

“We’re holding Dr. Baxter at the station. Are you aware of any recent marital problems that the Baxters were experiencing?” Max asked, still probing for some hint of a motive.

“I’ve never met a happier couple. You really think he’s responsible, don’t you?” Henry asked with certain amazement.

“If you don’t mind, Dr. Lansing, we just want to ask you a few more questions, and we’ll leave you alone.” Max assured him. He had never liked it when the people he interviewed asked him questions.

“Hold on a moment,” Henry replied defensively. “If you want answers from me, then you had better answer a few of my own questions.”

"We don't want to have to take you down to the station to finish this, Dr. Lansing," Max stated firmly. "It would be an unpleasant experience for all of us."

"Did she suffer?" Henry asked, unable to hold back the tears.

"It looks like she died quickly," Max answered, feeling badly for his aggressive attitude. "Did you know Carolyn very well?"

"They're both very close friends," Henry replied, sobbing. "I've known Carolyn since I first arrived to work with Bernard. He would never kill her. Bernard could never do such a thing."

"We have reason to suspect otherwise. Some of your colleagues at the center told us that you met with Bernard and his wife before they left last evening."

"We shared a drink. He called Carolyn down to the center when he looked over some results. He had expected the results to be inconclusive, but it was all very apparent that the therapy had a definite success. He expected it to take a great deal longer to prove our work. It called for a celebration. We're several months ahead of any other research group working with this new technology. We should beat everyone to the clinical tests. It almost guarantees us of the patent rights."

"Meaning?" Max asked with intrigue.

"A great deal of money," Henry answered, still sobbing. "Everyone on the project knew the implications of this discovery. Bernard and she drank a small glass of wine. I talked with them both on the way out. They were going off together to celebrate."

"You didn't notice anything strange about Dr. Baxter or his wife while they were together yesterday?" Fred asked solemnly.

"Nothing unusual. I don't know what you think happened, but Bernard Baxter is in the business of saving lives, not striking them down."

"We'll probably contact you again, Dr. Lansing, quite soon. We've got some other people to talk to now. If you think of something that might help us — remember something unusual, perhaps — don't hesitate to contact us."

"How's Bernard?" Henry asked.

"Unbelievably calm," Max accused. "He should be just fine, Dr. Lansing."

"Can I contact him?"

"Sure, but not at the moment," Max answered. "We'll run a follow-up interview on him this afternoon. Depending on the district attorney's decision from what we find, he may be released by then."

"What do you mean, he may be released?" Henry asked wearily.

"This really doesn't look very good for Dr. Baxter," Max replied honestly. He finished writing down some notes and handed Henry a small card. "Call us if you think of anything."

Henry watched as the two men approached the door. Max turned suddenly before leaving, and asked one last question. Henry noticed a different look on his face than before.

“You don’t know of anyone who might want to frame Bernard, do you, Dr. Lansing?” Max suggested.

“He has his share of adversaries.” Henry admitted. “There are several other research institutes competing against us to develop this new technology. I would doubt that anyone would try something this drastic, but there is a great deal of money involved in finding a cure to cancer. This research could make a number of people affiliated with our work very rich.”

“Did anyone outside the lab know of yesterday’s events?” Max asked with intrigue.

“No,” Henry replied quite surely.

“Anyone in his laboratory who would profit from getting him out of the picture?” Max asked seriously.

“No,” Henry responded quickly, and angrily. “The people who work for Dr. Baxter adore him. We all realize that we’re just riding on his fame. If he walked out tomorrow, our progress would quickly fail. He’s the whole reason that our laboratory does what it does. Dr. Bernard Baxter is the Northwestern Cancer Research Institute. Nobody could profit from this. Chances are that your holding him on suspicion of murder will destroy everything we’ve worked for, and affect all our careers.”

“You know Dr. Baxter quite well. Some of your coworkers referred to you and him as close friends,” Max said in a threatening voice.

“Yes,” Henry answered the semi-question.

“Did you ever witness a feud between him and his wife?”

“Neither Bernard nor Carolyn have aggressive dispositions. I couldn’t ever define a disagreement between them as a feud. They worked out their differences in a very civilized manner.”

“You never heard Bernard Baxter raise his voice at her?”

“If you’re asking if Dr. Baxter ever abused his wife, whether verbally, emotionally or physically, then the answer is no.” Henry had grown weary of the questions, and his anger was apparent. “He treated her with the same amount of respect he gave everyone who worked with him. He’s an extremely fair man, and never once treated Carolyn in an undesirable manner.”

“Nobody’s perfect,” Fred argued in a low voice. The remark irritated Henry’s already distraught emotions.

“You’re right,” Henry answered, so angry that all he could do was stare at the man. “Nobody’s perfect, but Bernard Baxter would never harm his wife. If you’re looking for somebody to tell you that Bernard is anything besides an extraordinary individual, trying to make a difference, then you’re searching for liars.”

Max realized that he and his partner had already pressed Henry too far, and that any further questions at this point were useless. He could see the signs of emotional stress already present in Henry's facial expressions, and knew that Henry cared for Carolyn in a genuine manner.

"We're sorry to have to do this to you," Max uttered softly. "I'm really sorry about Carolyn. We just want to figure out who's responsible, and see that justice is served. This is the way we have to do it. We'll leave you now, Dr. Lansing. Please call us if you think of anything that might be useful to our investigation."

Chapter Four

Cameron McBride walked into the office where Max Harmon and his partner had already seated themselves. He hoped Max could suppress the nervous feelings that he experienced. He was still young, and building a name for himself. This case had the unwanted result of throwing his name into the public eye. He had already received three calls from reporters asking if he would arrest Bernard Baxter for the murder, and only ten hours had passed since it all occurred.

The office wasn't very large. His wife had decorated it, using a small portion of his yearly budget to bring it to her own style of fashion. It was elegant, far more than Cameron himself thought necessary, but he had learned not to argue the point with her. He walked over for a drink, before sitting down. It wasn't really his style to drink this early in the day, but this wasn't his typical day.

"Thanks for looking into this one, Max," Cameron uttered solemnly as he sat down behind his desk. "What do you think?"

"He'll have a hard time proving he's innocent."

"He doesn't have to," Cameron replied, in a sheepish voice.

"He will," Max assured. "We just need to make it convincing."

"That's what I thought," Cameron admitted. "Is he guilty?"

Max had sat patiently waiting for the appointment, and took a moment reaching for his book. He had not yet developed the level of respect for Cameron that he had for his predecessor. The skinny, brown haired lawyer looked fresh out of prep school. Max knew that the clothes and haircut were his wife's idea, but the image still did not appeal to him.

"That's the real question," Max replied finally, glancing at his notes. "Let's look at what we know. His alibi is that he awoke to find his wife slain in the bed next to him. I don't know too many people who could sleep through somebody slashing a person's throat as they lay next to her. I'm sure her death made some sound. It's not very believable, and it puts him at the scene for sure.

"His alarm never registered anyone breaking into the house, and it's the top of the line. The only way you get in, is if you know the access code. He had no servants of any kind, so that didn't wander into the wrong hands by some accident. We've asked for a list of the people who knew the code, and there's only a handful, outside of the company who installed the system, and even they can't access it without a police order. They are a reputable company, we checked.

"The weapon used, is almost undeniably a sword, of which he collected many," Max continued, as he detailed what he already knew. He spoke only of the things he could prove, and spoke as though he were on the witness stand. "His most prized sword is missing from the house. We're looking for it now, but we can't understand why it's gone. It might be valuable, but nobody can display it now, it's evidence. They had riches, jewelry, documents from his research

and other valuables, all left intact. It makes it hard to believe there was any other motive for crime besides the murder. There are life insurance policies, but they're negligible compared to his net worth.

"The most convincing thing is that the alarm was on when the first officers arrived. How many criminals would turn an alarm back on? The guilt is all there. Dr. Baxter will have to prove that he's innocent."

"On the other hand," Fred concluded, "we've talked to many people. He's extremely active in the community, and nobody would ever have suspected this from him. There's no prior indication of misconduct. His reputation is solid."

"Could someone have framed him?" Cameron asked.

"We're looking into it," Max answered, "but it would be bordering on impossible. They went to great lengths, and it won't be easy to prove to a jury. They had to be very close to him to pull this off, and why would any of his colleagues want him framed. They all stand in line for a tremendous fortune from their work. He's the key to all of that, and everyone's quick to admit that they can't finish without him. The only person I can imagine capable is the one we're detaining now."

"You've already talked to him," Cameron noted. "What's your gut feeling?"

"That's a hard question," Max smiled uncomfortably. "I've interviewed killers at the crime scene before, who had developed alibis almost foolproof, and they all showed some emotion afterwards. They at least tried to fake some kind of grief, and many looked genuine. This Bernard Baxter, he's a work of art. I don't think he's cried a tear since it happened. He's shown no emotion at all, and seems unbelievably calm. He almost frightens me. I've dealt with cold-hearted, the man is ice."

"You think he did it?" Cameron asked intently. He knew how much he had to rely on Max.

"I don't see any other way." Max admitted. "I would like to find the weapon, and I don't know how he got it out of the house. We still have a lot of digging to do, but I can't foresee any possible change. He just doesn't seem like a volatile man. He seems almost too calm."

"That's funny you would say that," Cameron commented. "That's just what the police said in a report on the west coast a few years ago about the man."

Cameron pulled a file from his top desk drawer and handed it across for Max to review. Max opened the file and began to study it carefully. Cameron watched closely, wondering if Max would find it as amusing as he had.

"He was mugged?" Fred asked from over Max's shoulder, unable to hold back his surprise. He generally allowed Max to do most of the talking, only throwing in his own thoughts if he felt necessary. He knew that he was the rookie, and Max the seasoned veteran, but as he glanced down at the report, he could no longer hold his excitement.

“Yeah, the guy just about died from it,” Cameron replied. “He has to walk with a cane now, and lost mobility in one of his arms.”

“That’s odd,” Max replied, “I didn’t notice Dr. Baxter limping at all when we brought him in.”

“I’m not talking about Bernard Baxter,” Cameron said plainly. “I’m talking about the mugger.”

Max read further, and noted what Cameron had said in the file. The hospital’s report was five pages long. Max only glanced at it.

“What happened?” Max asked, looking up momentarily from the report.

“The attack took place in a park,” Cameron stated, explaining only the key details. “A witness who was walking home from work saw it all from a distance. She said that this man approached Dr. Baxter from behind, running quickly to attack him. She reported that Bernard responded to the attack before any contact was made, and launched a quick and violent counter attack. He did it all in a single movement, causing all the damage listed in that hospital report before his attacker hit the ground. Then he continued his walk at a calm, almost relaxed pace, to a phone where he called the police.

“The witness stayed around, and reported what she had seen. The police found it odd that he would take a walk through a park in such a rough neighborhood at that hour of the night. He was unarmed, and said he was just out for a walk to clear his mind. He asked that the police not publicize the attack, and urged the witness to keep quiet about it also. They filed the report, and left it at that. Someone forwarded it to me when they saw the press coverage on this morning’s news.”

“What happened to the mugger?” Fred asked.

“He doesn’t run up behind people and try to attack them anymore,” Cameron replied with a grin.

“I see,” nodded Max, finding a small amount of humor in the statement as well.

“Anyhow, the press will probably have the story soon as well. Have you caught the news? They’re already speculating the arrest. The city is crawling with reporters. We’re under the magnifying glass now,” Cameron uttered nervously as he took a long sip on his drink.

“Press coverage won’t hinder our investigation,” Max replied calmly, finding a silent gratitude in the appearance of the fidgeting district attorney.

“I don’t like witnesses interviewed before they take the stand.”

“Not Bernard’s people, they won’t talk,” Max assured him. “They’re too loyal to jeopardize him.”

“Good,” Cameron replied with a sigh of relief.

“What’s Dr. Baxter doing now?”

“He’s still in holding,” Cameron answered.

“Anything unusual?”

“He’s asked for two more blood samples,” Cameron said warily. “Your forensics analyst will have a busy day at this rate. Why do you think he wants the blood drawn?”

“That’s a good question,” Max remarked with interest. “I’m sure it is some sort of alibi. Maybe he’s on some psychiatric medicine. If he shows that it isn’t present in his blood, it might give him a temporary insanity plea. We’ve already called for a medical file on him. Did he ask us to do anything to them yet?”

“Store them in liquid nitrogen,” Cameron replied. “He wants them stored until the preliminary hearing. Should we halt it?”

“I don’t think we can until we’ve charged him. If we did, they might argue tampering. I don’t think we want him to get off on something stupid. The most we could do is make him bring someone else in to take the blood, but I think he wants us to keep the specimens. He’s been good to cooperate so far, let’s just humor him for a while. At least if he cops an insanity plea, our investigation is over. Then we can dump this into your lap.”

“He’s a smart man,” Cameron replied. “I don’t want to prosecute an insanity trial. I have a hunch that isn’t what he’s looking for anyhow. What have you learned from his acquaintances?”

“They think he’s some sort of deity,” Max said sarcastically.

“Excuse me?” Cameron asked in confusion.

“I couldn’t even find anyone who could think of a negative aspect of the man. It will be hard to dig up someone to give a conflicting character analysis of the guy. He’s supposed to talk at a school this afternoon, and helping to put a house together for the poor later this week.”

“Everyone has some dirt under the carpets,” Cameron suggested.

“He’s hidden his better than most,” Max replied.

“That just means that when we find it, it’s bound to have some substance to it. He’s gone to great pains to get where he is, and he’s stepped on somebody’s feet somewhere along the line.” Cameron had worked with Max before, and knew he was good at uncovering dirt. He realized Max hadn’t taken to him yet, but that didn’t matter. Max was good, especially if you boosted his ego a bit.

“I don’t know,” Max hesitated.

“I need you to dig deep into this guy’s background for us. He’s obviously not what we’ve all envisioned to this point. I don’t look forward to prosecuting him, but all the evidence points to him, and we need to fulfill our civil responsibility. I want to know everything there is to know about Dr. Bernard Baxter. This case could ruin a lot of careers. I don’t want any surprises in the courtroom.”

“I understand your interest, counselor,” Max noted to the nervous prosecutor. “Detective Chase and I will concentrate our efforts on the case. Any ideas of when you’ll go to trial?”

"We're formally charging him with the murder at a preliminary hearing tomorrow. The grand jury won't have trouble with the indictment. He's cooperated with us very willingly so far. I don't know what will happen when we deliver the formal charge."

"It's sure to be interesting," Fred noted.

"I'm afraid of that," Cameron admitted wearily.

"I want to talk to him again before we charge him," Max stated with sudden curiosity. He knew that Bernard would pose a challenge to him, but he was never known for backing down from a challenge.

"I'll want to be there," Cameron urged.

"I'll set everything up," Max agreed.

Bernard walked into the small interrogation room and took a seat at one end of the table. He still looked calm, Max noted, though a little tired. He had cleaned up a bit, and seemed calmer than earlier. The bloody night shirt was in evidence, and Bernard wore a nice button down shirt and comfortable pair of pants. Max had a feeling of unrest in his stomach, and he wasn't sure if this interview would help ease any of those feelings, but he had hope. He had already made his feelings clear to Bernard, and wanted another chance to break him. Max knew a little taunting could go a long way.

"Hello, detectives," Bernard uttered simply to Max and his partner. His voice was low, and he spoke very slowly and clearly. His attention remained focused on Max.

"Hello, Dr. Baxter," Max replied. "How do you feel?" he asked to make small talk.

"How should I feel, detective Harmon?"

Bernard glanced around the room they had brought him to. It was simpler than he expected, with only a few wooden chairs scattered about, along with the small table he sat at. Even the light had no fixture, which created a very harsh glare. He knew this was intentional. The drab gray walls were unevenly painted, but the mirror was there, on the wall to his left, opposite the door. They could see his profile from where the others undoubtedly stood behind the one way glass. He knew they were watching.

"Most people in your shoes would show more emotion than you have, Dr. Baxter," Max replied with a hint of accusation.

"We all deal with tragedy in our own way," Bernard stated, seemingly uninterested as he glanced around.

"Yes," Max agreed, "Perhaps you're right."

"So what's the verdict, detective?" Bernard asked, almost sarcastically, as he looked directly at Max. "Am I guilty or innocent?"

"I wouldn't mind hearing the answer to that question from you, Dr. Baxter."

"It probably isn't the answer you're looking for," Bernard pointed out.

"Is there anyone who would want to frame you for this murder?" Max asked, allowing Bernard a chance to open up.

"Obviously, there is," Bernard answered, a hint of irritation present in his voice.

"Who?"

"If I knew that," Bernard replied tranquilly, "I wouldn't be here right now."

"Has anyone threatened you recently?" Max suggested.

"People don't threaten me, detective Harmon," Bernard answered, as though insulted.

"You don't have any idea of who might want to harm your wife?"

"No."

"I have to be honest with you, doctor," Max began with sincerity. "You aren't looking so good in the eyes of this investigation right now. Every piece of evidence points towards you. If you're truly innocent, and you know something that can help us, please tell us now. I don't want to spend time gathering information to send an innocent man to prison. If we had to make a decision of guilt based on a crime scene only, you would have received your sentence hours ago."

Max spoke frankly as he calmly addressed Bernard. Fred sat back and allowed his partner to do the questioning. He had seen Max break people before, and allowed his partner to work the suspect as only a professional could. It was the nerves that generally got to the guilty, and nothing made a person more nervous than a relaxed voice talking to them slowly. When Bernard failed to reply, Max continued.

"We have more than enough evidence to take this case to trial now. We'll ask the judge tomorrow to hold you over for trial. The paperwork for charging you with this crime is already filled out. I have between now and tomorrow morning to find some bit of information which could prove that you weren't involved with this crime. I need your cooperation to help save your reputation — and perhaps your future — from a terrible embarrassment. What information can you offer me to clear this matter up now?"

"You want honesty?" Bernard asked, looking directly at the detective. The sound of his voice was not sincere. He could sense Bernard holding back.

"Yes," Max replied.

"Usher your companion out of this room and vacate the people standing behind that mirror on the wall. Then we'll talk about my innocence."

Max sat up and looked over at Fred, acknowledging Bernard's wishes. Fred silently stood and walked out the door. He then looked back at Bernard, who stared directly into the mirror.

Cameron had never felt such a cold sensation as he did while Bernard Baxter stared over towards him. The man gave Cameron the eerie sensation that Bernard's stare was centered directly at him. He watched as Bernard waited, aware that the man couldn't really see him, but something in his gut made him feel as though there were no barrier there at all. Fred came in and

watched for a moment, but realized after a few moments that they wouldn't get anywhere standing there. Even as Fred asked Cameron to leave the room with him, he felt as if Bernard's eyes actually followed him to the door. It was shortly after he left the room that Bernard resumed speaking.

"I'm telling you to your face, detective Harmon," Bernard finally replied, "that I awoke this morning and found my wife dead at my side. All your evidence shows otherwise, but if I were to kill my wife, it would not have been this way."

"I need more than that," Max stated with suspicion.

"That's all you get," Bernard answered coldly. "I could tell you everything, but I probably shouldn't, for my own sake. So I won't. You'll find far more if I don't give you any information. I want you to dig deep into what has occurred. You'll have to do this on your own, Max."

"You might not like my approach."

"Now, why wouldn't I?" Bernard asked softly.

"I might not be siding with you on this one, Dr. Baxter," Max replied with a threatening voice.

"Why wouldn't you?" Bernard asked, his voice evident that he was toying with Max. "You know my line of work. I try to save lives, not end them. I'm a Nobel prize nominee, and a distinguished scientist. Even with all the evidence against me, nobody will believe that I killed my wife. You don't even have a weapon yet. It isn't a solid case. Others might find it a bit hollow."

"I don't care what others believe," Max answered simply. "It's what I think that matters."

"What do you think?" Bernard asked with a smirk.

"I think you killed her," Max replied without any expression. He allowed Bernard to toy with him, using the opportunity to get a feeling for Bernard's state of mind.

"Good," Bernard replied, nodding his head. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I'll dig up every ounce of dirt on you," Max smiled in a quiet threat. "You're playing everyone for a fool."

Bernard glanced up at the light, smiling as he scratched his chin. Max waited until Bernard looked back.

"Did you kill your wife, Bernard?" he asked in an angry, yet calm voice. It was cold, with an icy tone.

"Perhaps I did," Bernard suggested, looking away for a moment. "The evidence is clear."

"It looks that way," Max said plainly.

"So what more do you need, detective?"

"A reason," Max answered, always interested in a motive. "Why would you kill your wife?"

"When you uncover the reason, you'll know who killed her," Bernard replied. He could play the mind games as well, and wasn't about to turn over control to the detective.

"I believe I know now," Max stated.

"Do you really?"

"What are you trying to hide?"

"I'm quite certain you'll figure it all out," Bernard replied surely. "You're a good detective, Max. I've heard about you from some of the other officers. You have a reputation for finding the truth."

"Yes I do, but I don't like to waste my time. Your wife was a beautiful woman. Did she lose interest in you?" Max asked, prodding for some hint of the secrets he held.

"You should have asked her that. I can't really answer for her."

"Well, neither can she, now," Max replied in irritation.

"No, she can't," Bernard answered plainly.

The two men exchanged stares, never looking away from one another. It was an exchange of anger, and near hatred. Max had seen it in few men, but her recognized it clearly. Only the low hum of the old, but brilliant light above, was heard in the room.

"So what do you want to do, Dr. Baxter?" Max finally responded, breaking the long silence.

"I haven't decided that, Max."

"You've planned this for a while, correct?" Max asked, his voice slow, to allow the words to sink in. He was revealing the future, showing Bernard how the line of prosecution would go.

"Why do you ask that?" Bernard asked innocently.

"The kids were gone," Max replied simply. He stood from his seat, and turned his back on Bernard as he slowly started to walk around.

"Yes, they were," Bernard agreed, paying little attention to the remark.

"You've hidden the weapon well."

Bernard sat silently.

"What's in the blood?" Max asked as he turned suddenly to stare into the man's soul again. Bernard seemed undaunted by the change in Max's tone.

"Heme, Iron, a variety of built up immunities..." Bernard spouted off in an innocent manner to try the detective's patience.

"Why did you ask them to take a blood sample from you?" Max asked, ignoring the smart comment.

"Let's just say, I have a hunch there's something in it of importance."

"Like what?"

"I'm not really sure yet," Bernard replied, looking at the wall. "I'll let you know when the analysis comes back on it," he informed as he smiled an evil grin at Max.

"Do you really think it will stand up in court? It sounds rather suspicious to me. A man wakes up next to his dead wife, and has the sense to ask for a blood sample. People will see right through it. Do you think you'll baffle everyone with your science. Let me guess, it has to do with an alibi," Max suggested, seemingly unconvinced.

"You are good, detective," Bernard complimented in a harsh voice. "I'm glad you're investigating. You don't believe anything, do you?" he asked, in the same manner as a teacher would question his student.

"Just the truth," Max replied with integrity.

"Even the truth isn't always what it seems," Bernard replied, looking in his eyes. "Question everything, it's a good rule to live by. Never make a simple assumption. I'm starting to like you already."

"I wish I could say the same, Dr. Baxter."

"I won't change who I am just to please you, detective," Bernard replied with a sly smile.

"You'll be destroyed in court," Max threatened.

"And in the media as well," he shrugged carelessly, "The court's my only hope, Max," Bernard replied humbly. "And of course, you."

"A trial's just going to create more problems for you."

"If that's how you choose to look at it," Bernard replied without hesitation, illustrating that he didn't fear the publicity of a trial.

"It will," Max replied honestly. "You can't imagine how I can destroy your public image. I already dislike you, Dr. Baxter. I'll show people the truth. Newspapers don't sell by telling people how good you are either. Tack on the media as your adversary as well. All the truth surrounding this will come out."

"I'm counting on it," Bernard acknowledged.

"You might have convinced your colleagues that you're above such evil, but I'll bring more than just your colleagues to court. I don't believe it. I just need to find others who don't either. My job isn't to make you look good in court."

"No, it isn't," Bernard replied with arrogance. "I won't insult your abilities, Max. I'm glad to have you working for me."

"I don't work for you," Max objected.

"Sure you do, Max," Bernard taunted. "You're my investigator. You'll uncover the truth for me. You don't want to believe it, but you know I'm right, Max. As soon as you began this investigation, you began working for me. Every ounce of information you uncover, you do so for me."

"You really want a trial, don't you?" Max asked with disbelief.

"Of course I do. I don't plan to avoid a battle in court. I need a trial. I need to see what you're capable of, before I can decide whether you're worthy of knowing what happened last night."

"Why the sarcasm?"

"No sarcasm, just honesty, Max," Bernard stated simply. "You just refuse to believe it."

"A man's word doesn't amount for much, if he's a murderer."

"Honesty is a rare commodity these days," Bernard agreed.

"But you're an honest man," Max smiled sarcastically, showing his obvious distrust.

"I won't lie to you, Max. Ask me anything you want."

"Did you kill your wife, Bernard?"

"I can't let you off that easily," Bernard replied, as though it were all a game to him.

"You come back to me when you figure it all out. I'll let you know if you're right or not."

"What's there to figure out?"

"More than you might care to uncover," Bernard replied honestly.

"I'm not afraid of revealing secrets," Max threatened.

"Good."

"What do you have to gain by allowing us to smear your public image?" Max asked with interest as he walked towards the door to leave.

"Vengeance," Bernard whispered angrily.

"The law will avenge your wife's death."

"Your law, Max?" Bernard asked with mockery. "I'm already guilty in your law. I'm talking about something deeper."

"If you know something, let me help you," Max stressed, trying to appear genuine.

"Sorry, Max, I take care of my own vengeance," Bernard replied simply, without looking in Max's eyes.

"Not if you're in prison."

"You might be surprised, Max," Bernard hinted quietly.

"I should be going," Max replied, aware of the workload he had before him.

"Hey, Max," Bernard called out before the detective could leave.

"Yes, Dr. Baxter."

"You come to me if you have any questions," Bernard suggested, acknowledging the seriousness of the situation, and hinting at an honest cooperation. "I hate to admit it, but I'm at your mercy here. My life depends on how well you do your job. You come to me if you find something interesting, and I'll tell you if you're on the right track or not."

"We've chosen opposite sides here, Dr. Baxter," Max stated plainly.

"You just choose to believe that," Bernard pointed out. "In time, you'll realize that our goals here are one in the same."

“We’ll see you in court tomorrow, Dr. Baxter,” Max answered coldly, as he turned and walked out the door.

Chapter Five

Judge Hayden Rutherford walked into the courtroom and had a seat at the same bench he had occupied for almost twenty years now. He had always felt himself a fair man, and for that reason, couldn't figure out what he had done to deserve this.

He didn't bother to look up, but placed his fingers upon his temple, and leaned down to look carefully at the file before him. He blinked twice, hoping that the names might transform before him, but everything remained unchanged. He sat for a few seconds, feeling that he had made a mistake by only taking six of the antacid tablets before leaving his chamber. His stomach had already burned through them, and he knew it would only get worse.

The room was rather somber, with very little lighting. The building where he worked had only a few more years before it would make the state registrar of historic sites, and had that distinct municipal odor about it. It was a welcome scent to Hayden, and he had never pressed to get the lighting updated in his court. The light poured in through the old stain glass windows, often making him feel relaxed, but he felt little of that comfort today.

Judge Rutherford reached up with his gavel and slammed it decisively upon the hard wooden pad. The older man detested most of the people who generally appeared before him, but he was fair, and he knew he was fair. He stood on his principles before his personal feelings, which was why he detested the media even more than most of the defendants he saw. He didn't even look up at the people in his courtroom today, until he studied the page for another moment.

"Dr. Baxter," Hayden finally spoke as he looked up at the defendant. "I see you have denied the right to have your attorney present."

"Yes, your honor," Bernard replied.

The group of gatherers for the hearing immediately started writing, raising the low, yet distinct sounds of pen on paper to a very noticeable level. The room was extremely crowded today with anxious, but well behaved reporters. Hayden knew that every word he uttered had the potential of making it on the evening news.

"Dr. Baxter, this is a preliminary hearing," Hayden explained, as if to a child. "We are holding this hearing to decide if the state has proper grounds to try you for one count of first degree murder, the murder of your wife. This is a very serious accusation, and I would recommend that you seek council to represent you."

"I would prefer not," Bernard answered in a calm voice.

He wore a suit, one of the few he owned, which he had brought with him from home on the morning of his wife's murder. He stood alone at the center of the courtroom, and all eyes were focused directly at him.

"Might the court ask why you prefer to deny representation?" Judge Rutherford asked with wonder. He could already sense the pounding developing inside his head.

“I do not wish to place my destiny in the hands of another individual. I am a well educated man, your honor, quite capable of defending my innocence in this court. There’s no reason for me to seek council on these charges.”

“Have you ever defended a man facing a trial for murder before, Dr. Baxter?” Hayden asked with an tone of arrogance.

“No sir, I have not,” Bernard responded simply, looking directly at the judge with a stature evident of his respect.

“I do not wish for anyone to make a mockery of my court,” Hayden informed, stating his displeasure clearly.

“I will not make a mockery of your court. I fully respect your position of authority, and the dignity of this court. I believe in the fairness of this forum, and see no need to bring in an outsider who knows nothing about me to defend my innocence.”

It was a blunt statement, addressed properly, but most importantly, it was correct. Hayden couldn’t force Bernard to accept representation, but that didn’t sooth Hayden’s desire to get professional counsel for Bernard. He decided that he would have to attempt another method of persuasion.

“In that case,” Rutherford replied, “would you allow the court to appoint a counselor to you, for the shear purpose of advising you. I realize the depths of your knowledge, and have no doubt that you can read up on and understand proper protocol in this court, but it is in your best interest to have a trained professional on your side. It will make it extremely awkward for you to question your own acquaintances. In the defense of fairness, I must insist that you take a legal aide to address the court.”

“I do so with hesitation,” Bernard relented, “but if it would make your honor more comfortable, I will take a court appointed attorney on for the purpose of advisement and to direct questioning.”

“Appreciated, Dr. Baxter,” Hayden replied with a slight sigh.

Hayden Rutherford looked out into his courtroom, beyond the tables of the defense and prosecution, into the sea of people who had gathered for the preliminary hearing. He noticed the faces of several lawyers in the audience who had come drop defiantly to the ground, hoping the judge would not recognize them. It was Daren Holt, an attorney who had pestered Hayden for years in his court, who caught his immediate attention. A sly smile appeared across his face as he realized his vengeance.

“I notice a very fine attorney, Daren Holt, had some extra time to attend today’s proceedings. He has a great reputation, and I’m sure would donate his time as pro bono, to your research, to represent you. What do you say, Mr. Holt?” Judge Rutherford asked with a tainted smile.

Daren said nothing for several seconds, as the shock of what the judge had just done sunk in. He realized quickly that all eyes in the court were upon him, but the thought of his career — suddenly thrown into the spotlight — made him squirm as his mind raced for an excuse.

“Mr. Holt, has the cat got your tongue? You won’t deny the court’s request, now will you?” The question seemed to cut like several knives.

“No, sir,” Daren replied in a stuttered voice, unaware of his own reply as he said it. “That is, unless Dr. Baxter has any reservations about me. I haven’t defended many murder trials,” he responded, surprised by his own speed to reply with an intelligent and well thought remark. He looked to the front of the courtroom, and realized for the first time that Bernard had never turned around to look at him.

“I can find no complaints with Daren Holt,” Bernard replied to the judge. He paid no attention to the reaction in the courtroom behind him, centering his attention on the judge.

“Then I appoint Daren Holt as a legal aide and counselor to Dr. Bernard Baxter. Would you like to confer with your lawyer before we proceed further?”

“No, sir,” Bernard replied quickly.

“Your honor, I would like to take a moment...”

“I wish to enter a plea of not guilty in the murder trial of my wife,” Bernard replied, cutting Daren off before he could finish.

“Dr. Baxter, this court has not yet charged you with any crimes. You must wait until a charge has been stated.”

“May I speak freely for a moment, your honor?” Bernard asked humbly.

“Very well, Dr. Baxter, you have the court’s attention,” Hayden responded, looking up over the rims of his glasses with his threatening eyes.

“I’m quite certain that the prosecution has mounted a lengthy, and detailed list of evidence with the intent to bring charges against me,” Bernard stated, as respectfully as any person ever had addressed Hayden. He looked directly at the judge, paying no attention to the mass of people behind him. “My defense is at this point, very weak, if even respectable. I intend to prove my innocence, and provide evidence that I was framed. I can’t do that right now, but I could hire a very prominent lawyer, with presumably better qualifications than Daren Holt, to defend me, and provide a legitimate reason for releasing me on a bond. That would harm everyone involved in this investigation.

“As we both know, this is a high profile case. If I return to my lab, I highly doubt that I would get a moment’s peace to continue my work. It would hamper me, as well as the prosecution, by bringing this trial more publicity than it has already received. I don’t want to hamper any of the efforts to bring justice in the case of my wife’s murder, but I do want to continue my work.

"All that I ask of the court, is that you offer me liberal visitation rights during my stay in holding, while the proceedings of the court take place. My colleagues and I are very close to developing a powerful treatment for several forms of cancers. The cost of this knowledge is unmeasurable in human lives. Even if I had committed the crime that the prosecution plans to convict me of, would it not serve the public to complete our research?"

"It would," Hayden replied, listening intently.

"I would like to think that I am an important part of that research. I design most of the projects, and need to maintain communication with my staff to assure that we achieve our goals. I won't slow down the court's ability to a speedy trial, I only ask that you don't block my ability to finish the line of research to clinical testing."

"What do you suggest, Dr. Baxter?" Hayden asked with intrigue.

"Unhindered flow of literature to me, and back to my colleagues from me. Multiple visitors, without heavy limits on those conferences, and access to a phone line, during working hours of the day."

"As long as it has no adverse effects on the prison facility, and the safe handling of yourself and those prisoners around you, I would see no problem with that arrangement. Prosecution?" Hayden asked as he glanced over to Cameron.

"The prosecution has no arguments with allowing Dr. Baxter to continue his work from behind bars, at least through the duration of these proceedings."

Cameron found himself surprised by the question, and irritated that Hayden had allowed Bernard to speak out of order, but he did know better than to argue with Judge Rutherford.

"Then that's settled," Hayden said with satisfaction. "I'll advise the proper people in holding of the arrangements."

"You're honor," Bernard called out again.

"Yes, Dr. Baxter."

"I have another request to make."

"Yes?" his irritation apparent now.

"I asked one of the state's forensics analysts to take some samples of my blood after my wife's murder. They are still in his possession. I would like him to turn those over to a scientist I know for analysis. I believe that important information can be obtained from a test of the blood. The information might then be used in my defense. I don't want the information disputed. If I could ask the state to run identical tests, to confirm our results."

"What sort of tests?" the judge asked intuitively.

"A GC/Mass Spec analysis for biologically active chemicals. It's a positive identification for all components in the blood. It's a straight forward procedure, and I'm sure that the forensics lab is properly equipped to handle it."

"What do you expect to find from these tests?"

"I don't know," Bernard admitted, "but the woman who will run the test for me will know what it is when she finds it."

"How extensive are the tests?" Hayden asked, realizing the time and money considerations for forensics testing.

"Very simple," Bernard assured. "I'll cover any costs for the equipment and personnel to run the tests. I just want the tests to be admissible as evidence in my trial. And I want confirmation from the state's labs if the samples are conclusive."

"I'll take the matter up with the state forensics lab."

"Thank you, sir."

"Is there anything else," Hayden prodded, "before we begin, Dr. Baxter?"

"No, your honor."

"Fine then," Judge Rutherford replied. "On the advice of a grand jury investigation, the prosecution may now state its formal charges against the defendant."

Daren Holt walked into the quiet conference room. He still hadn't overcome the immense knot in his stomach. His career had just become a part of the national attention, and he still prayed it was just a dream. The sight of Bernard Baxter sitting at the table destroyed that fleeting prayer as he walked over and took a seat across from him.

The room was dim, and very disgusting. The jailer didn't spend any extra time cleaning out the small area designed for defendants to meet with their lawyers, but it was less of a drive than the trip out to the prison, and Daren wanted to talk to his new client as soon as he could. Bernard hardly stirred, waiting for Daren to take his seat. Even the chairs were uncomfortable.

"Hello, Bernard," Daren greeted, holding out his hand. Bernard reached over and took the shake with a slight smile.

"What did you do to Judge Rutherford?" he asked coldly.

"Crossed paths with him one too many times, I suppose," Daren replied honestly. He took a seat across from the man and sighed, realizing suddenly how unprofessional the action must have looked.

"I'm sorry you got drug into this," Bernard replied sympathetically, "but you're here now, and it would only hurt you to leave. I know you probably aren't too happy about all this, but I'll watch out for you."

"You shouldn't be worried about me, Dr. Baxter," Daren responded with an assuring smile. He knew that he needed to collect himself, and try to comfort his defendant as they prepared a defense. "I'm a pretty good lawyer, and I can handle myself against Hayden Rutherford or Cameron McBride. You're the one who's on trial for murder."

"I realized that, Daren," Bernard admitted as he looked the man over carefully. Daren already felt the knot in his stomach tightening. He had watched with humor as Bernard

demonstrated his arrogance to the court, and laughed to himself about it. He no longer saw the same humor in the situation as the single counselor advising the man. Bernard had already acted hastily, and allowed himself to fall to the mercy of the court, while he had a chance to fight the charges, or at least make bail.

“Where do you want to start?” Daren asked wearily. Bernard looked the lawyer over. He was of medium height, and slightly overweight. He had grown a mustache, trying to compensate for his rapidly thinning hair. Bernard compared his face to that of a weasel, which he found oddly fitting for the man.

“I’ve already begun,” Bernard stated simply. It was a simple display of control, not really caring for the help offered to him. His tone made clear that it was also an insult, demonstrating his lack of respect for the man. “I entered my plea. How long before it all goes to trial?”

“I looked at the court schedule before I came by,” Daren replied, getting back to the business of the trial, and ignoring Bernard’s more noticeably arrogant character traits, “and I figure that Rutherford will set a date in about three weeks. I’ll file for an extension to prepare your defense. I should be able to swing another couple of weeks based on what happened today. I can plead no contest to premature...”

“I see no reason for us to postpone the trial,” Bernard broke in. “Don’t file anything without asking me first,” he informed his attorney firmly.

Bernard said it so casually, yet Daren noticed the authority behind the words. He knew he had to take his stand now, if he was to salvage any part of the trial before it began. Bernard’s was not the only reputation on the line now.

“As your attorney, I strongly suggest we take our time on this trial...”

“You aren’t my attorney,” Bernard replied calmly, cutting him off again, “you’re my legal aide. Let’s get the record straight right here, Daren. I’m running this show. I didn’t request your help in my defense, and in all honesty, I don’t really need it. I could take any flunky lawyer off the street and attain all the services I’ll need for this trial. You’re simply a tool, a puppet if you must. You’ll invest only the time required to read my questions to witnesses.”

“Don’t insult me, Dr. Baxter,” Daren replied angrily. “I don’t care how intelligent you think you are, they’ll eat you alive in that courtroom. I’m a damn good trial lawyer, I just stepped on the toes of the wrong judge. Your Nobel prize nomination doesn’t intimidate me. You’ll come to find I’m a fairly smart person myself.”

“Is that so?” Bernard replied, in a manner condescending.

“Yes, it is,” Daren replied, aware of the growth of tension in the room.

“Then why are you working this case pro bono?” Bernard pointed out.

“You’ve got a sense of humor too, huh?” Daren replied with a chuckle. “You could always pay me for my services when this is over.”

“I’ll let you know after I see the verdict,” Bernard smiled wryly.

"Fair enough."

"So, are you going to ask me?" Bernard asked with interest.

"Ask you what, Dr. Baxter?" Daren asked with apparent confusion.

"Ask me if I did it."

"No," Daren replied. "A good lawyer never asks. He might not like the answer he gets in return, and you still have to defend your client, regardless of guilt or innocence."

"That's what I hate about lawyers," Bernard remarked to himself, not minding the company he shared. "There's no honor in the profession. How are you to defend somebody if you don't know what you're defending. It's a blind misuse of a poorly run system."

"Somebody has to defend the guilty," Daren said simply, ignoring the insult. "Every man deserves a fair trial, regardless of guilt. Our system guarantees the right to plead your case before a jury of your peers."

"How do you plead your case to the court, when you don't know if there is any truth to it?"

"I try not to look at it that way."

"So, you would prefer not to know?" Bernard prodded.

"If you wanted to confess to the murder of your wife, you probably would have done that prior to this afternoon's arraignment. If you want to confess your guilt to me now, you have that option, and my position prohibits me from ever revealing any confidence you entrust to me. I would advise you not to, because I would rather not try to defend your life if I have personal differences about you. It's best for our relationship during the trial if I don't ask for an answer to that question."

"That's your choice, Daren," Bernard agreed. "I guess I should respect it, though it leaves little to respect."

"Is there anything I should know before we begin," Daren paused, "that might harm us later in the case."

"You just said you didn't want me to tell you anything that might hinder the abilities of yourself to defend me in a professional manner," Bernard pointed out.

"I'm not talking about things I wouldn't like," Daren clarified. "I'm talking about potential bombshells. I'm just trying to plan a defense that will protect us. If there's something about your wife's relationship with you that could damage our credibility, I need to plan for it now. Are there any secrets in your past that the defense might uncover and use against you?"

"I'm not hiding anything," Bernard stated clearly.

"Good," Daren replied with relief.

Max and Fred walked into Cameron's office shortly after the hearing to formally charge Bernard. It was a small victory, and Bernard had hardly put up a fight, but they had publicly

stated that he was the prosecution's opponent now, and they all knew what that meant. It didn't necessarily sit well with any of the men. The media storm outside the courthouse was like nothing any of them had ever seen.

Cameron was red with anger. He had already seen Judge Rutherford grant every request that Bernard had made, and Cameron hadn't even had the sense to object to anything. He knew he was shocked by the events, and had allowed himself to sit idly by and watch without a word. He wasn't about to let Bernard control the entire trial. He needed to take a stand soon, to set a tone for how decisions would be made, and who would decide the outcome of the charges. Hayden had already made many of those choices for him. It irritated him with how quickly key decisions had been made, and how he had failed to stop it.

"We need more, Max," Cameron stated as he paced across his office for a drink.

"I know," Max replied, not really caring that he would have to take the brunt of Cameron's frustrations. He sat down in one of the chairs and tried to rub the headache from his forehead. He had already developed a loathing for Bernard Baxter, and wanted a guilty verdict as much as Cameron. He knew that Cameron and he had chosen the same side, and he would need to place his personal feelings aside.

"He's got some tricks ready for us, and I don't like it," Cameron stated in disgust. "We need to put a little bit of heat on him. Nobody should get it that easy."

"He didn't try to fight a thing," Max stated, noting that it could have turned out worse. He didn't try to hide his dissatisfaction with Cameron's performance in the courtroom. "He could easily have postponed the hearing and requested that we keep him under house arrest. The judge my have granted it. At least we know he isn't going anywhere."

"Rutherford just about gave him the keys to the prison," Cameron answered in dispute. "Bernard Baxter isn't going to make a total mockery of this trial. He's in my territory now, and we'll rip him apart. I want you to find me every disgusting scrap you can on Bernard Baxter. If he bit his mother while she breast fed him, I want to know about it. That son of a bitch wants a trial, and we'll deliver one. At least he doesn't have a lot of time to prepare a defense, though he still might prolong that."

"The evidence is undeniable," Fred responded, speaking out to break the awkwardness, and reassure his two companions. "If he wants this to go to trial, he's just signing his own death certificate. From the pictures we took at the crime scene, he's a sure thing for the gas chamber."

"He has to be convicted, before he can be punished," Cameron noted pessimistically.

"I'm wondering," Max said aloud, though mostly to himself, "if he's speeding up the trial because he doesn't want to give us much time to prepare our case."

"We'll have a good case against him," Cameron stated confidently. "I want him to suffer through this trial. He thinks he's paved his road on this, but I can throw in an obstacle or two. I'll

contact the warden. I've done some favors for him before, and it's time to collect. Let's see how Bernard Baxter likes his new cell mate."

Bernard walked down the long hallway of cells. Most of the prisoners were still outside getting some air in the prison yard, and it left Bernard alone with the two guards who escorted him and the prison warden. The warden had already left his impression on Bernard. His arrogance and ill manners seemed almost undeserved of a man in his position.

Warden Theodore Jennings opened the small cell personally for Bernard. He seemed to derive some pleasure from such a high profile member of society in his facilities, and looked eager to rub it in Bernard's face. The old man looked mean with anger, but deep down, Bernard could sense he was smiling.

"Well, Dr. Baxter," The man replied in a voice turned harsh by countless cigarettes, "we're glad that you could take the time to visit our facility. I hope you find everything to your pleasing. I understand that you dealt with Judge Rutherford to get more liberal access privileges, and we'll try our best to accommodate your wishes. I regret to inform you, that we are a little over booked at the moment, and all our guests are forced to share their personal quarters with another individual. Of course, your cell mate is chosen randomly — by the computer — and you ended up with one of our better patrons." The sarcasm was only too clear in his voice, despite the distortion.

"I'm sure, Warden," Bernard replied as if the whole act meant nothing to him.

Another guard came forward holding the arm of an individual dressed almost identical to Bernard. He had always made a rule to judge others once he got to know their personality, but this man's appearance made Bernard wonder if that was best. The man's composure was sloppy, and left an immediate impression on Bernard. The smirk on his face made Bernard raise his guard immediately. Neither brought Bernard the level of tension as the evil in his eyes.

"Ooh, this one's a pretty thing," the man replied once examining Bernard over. "I'm sure we'll get along just fine," he sneered.

"Dr. Bernard Baxter," Ted grunted with satisfaction again, "meet James Lithmore, convicted sexual offender."

"I like to keep it to persons younger than yourself, doctor," James continued, "but I might make an exception in your case."

His mannerism was whiny and irritating, as his eyes looked carefully over Bernard. The intimidation fell short of impressing Bernard, and he paid the man little attention.

"I'll leave you two alone now, to get better acquainted with one another." The warden taunted. "We'll let you know when your visitors arrive, Bernard."

Warden Jennings led the three guards out of the room, not bothering to hide the smile on his face as he did. Bernard walked over and set his things down at the edge of his bunk. He

didn't pay any attention to James as he did this, seemingly preoccupied with the chore of preparing his bed.

Bernard glanced the cell over for a split second, analyzing it in his mind. Like every place he had spent time in the past few days, it was a cold gray, though this seemed much less sanitary than most of the others.

James watched from beside the locked door, waiting for a hint of nervousness in his new companion. At six feet, he was a healthy one hundred and ninety pounds. His face bore several scars from malignant moles that prison physicians had removed. His complexion also displayed the remnants of heavy acne, improperly cared for at a young age, and his hair had begun to thin. His strong jawbone seemed clenched in anger, an anger created by the confines of concrete and steel.

Bernard glanced over at him as he lay down on his bunk. He could tell that the man awaited a reaction from his presence, but Bernard had no interest in comforting the man's ego. He had learned not to let a foe feel he could intimidate you.

"If you're just going to stand there and watch me, how about waking me in an hour," Bernard suggested. "I have a lot of work before the end of the day, but I could use a short nap."

"Perhaps I'll join you," James replied with a crude smile.

"I don't recommend that," Bernard replied plainly, not even looking at the man. "And don't let me sleep past an hour, or I may become very angry. Trust me, James, we'll get along much better, if you never have to witness my angry side."

A moment later, Bernard closed his eyes, and drifted into a light slumber.

Fred Chase tapped gently on the apartment door. They had tried several times to find Linda Olsen at the laboratory, but she didn't keep regular hours, and so they had resorted to seek her out at her residence. It was a small apartment complex, on the quiet end of town. The grounds were well kept, though only modest homes.

The door opened slowly, and the absence of light inside made it hard to see the woman clearly. She looked up at the two men with tired eyes, trying to decipher the reason for the visit. Any trace of emotion was missing from her face.

"Linda Olsen?" Fred asked.

"Yes," the woman replied, her voice low and somber.

"I'm detective Chase, and this is detective Harmon," Fred introduced, nodding towards Max. "We've tried to reach you at work, but you haven't been in for a few days. We wondered if we could bother you for a few minutes of your time?"

"Sure," Linda replied as she opened the door. She stepped back from the door, and led them inside, allowing Max to catch the door on his way in. She walked, as though in shackles, her depression quite evident. Fred entered the living room first, taking a moment for his eyes to

adjust to the darkness. Max followed close behind. A moment later, just as Fred began to make out the interior clearly, Linda opened the shades to the living room, showering the apartment with the afternoon's light.

"I'm sorry for the mess," Linda responded as she looked around her home. "I'm having a minor emotional low right now. I become a slob whenever I get feeling this way."

The apartment seemed comfortably quaint, though it needed a thorough cleaning. It was decorated fairly modestly, yet respectable by most standards. Max wondered for a moment if she shared it with a roommate, but decided there were more important questions to ask first.

"I apologize," Max answered. "Did we come at a bad time?"

"Yes," Linda replied timidly, looking away in embarrassment, "but it isn't looking better for a while, unless you decide to release Bernard."

Max looked over in shock, and noticed she had glanced up to see his reply. He suddenly realized that the woman had taken Bernard's incarceration harshly, and that the charges against him had caused her absence at work. The effect of Bernard Baxter on peoples' lives amazed him more the further he dug into the case.

"You and Bernard were good friends?" Max asked.

"We are much more than friends," Linda replied frankly. "I owe him so much, and I can't do a thing for him right now. It really hurts to see what this is doing to him."

She took a seat on the couch, closing the box which held a half eaten pizza on the coffee table. From the looks of it, Max figured it was more than a day old. The rest of the home seemed to confirm that suspicion, seeming as if life had halted for the woman. Her eyes showed signs of her saddened state.

"This has affected your work?" Max asked with disbelief.

"I've gone in a few times to keep up on things," Linda replied, wiping a new tear from her eye, "but emotionally, I'm worthless. It's just too much for me to face the others at the research center. Bernard was so good to me, and witnessing the media destroy him is just beyond my abilities. I can't even look people in the eyes without breaking down."

"When did you first meet Dr. Baxter?" Fred asked, trying to show some compassion for her.

"I started to work for him after I dropped out of the university. I was working for a laboratory, and wanted to relocate to this region of the states. My boyfriend lived an hour north of here, and I didn't like the long distances I had to travel while in school."

"I understand," Fred remarked.

"Why are you doing this to him?" Linda pleaded, her eyes filling with tears.

"We don't enjoy this, ma'am," Max spoke up. "We're just trying to find the truth to all of this."

“He didn’t do it,” she replied in saddened disgust. “Look at all the good things he did for the people he’s come in contact with. If I hadn’t met Bernard when I did, I would still be the victim in a violent relationship. He made me look at what was happening, and when my boyfriend didn’t want to back off, Bernard came to my rescue.

“I had nothing left. I was thrown out — with nowhere to live — and he took me in, and got me back on my feet again. He and his wife were wonderful to me. They helped me clear the haze out of my life, and renewed my own confidence. It took some time, and my work suffered for a while, but he stood by me like an older brother. You’re making a good man look like a monster. Why don’t you start looking for the person who killed his wife?”

“I’m truly sorry, Miss. Olsen,” Max said, trying to sound sincere, “but we have to learn as much as we can about the situation between him and his wife before we can even consider that. If this was a setup, then it was better than any I’ve ever seen. I’ll find the mistake if one was made, and the guilty always make a mistake.”

“It seems like you and the media are stepping too quickly to conclusions, detectives,” she replied, not bothering to hold back her tears.

“You show me something that makes me question his guilt, and I will give it my utmost attention,” Max responded truthfully. “If you lived in the Baxters’ household for a period of time, then there’s a wealth of information we might gain from talking with you. Are you willing to take some time to give us this information.”

“Anything that would help Bernard, but I won’t hurt him. If you’re just going to use me to make him look bad, don’t bother. If I tell you anything, you must promise to help him.”

“If I find our conclusions are wrong, I’ll personally bring Bernard back to his home.”

“All right,” she agreed.

“Then why don’t you get cleaned up a bit, and you can come to the station with us. You need to get a grip on your emotions, and it would do you good to get out of the house for a while. You can’t just hide here forever.”

“I don’t want to see the media,” Linda answered with panic.

“You won’t,” Max assured her.

Chapter Six

Henry walked into the conference room of the prison. Its design indicated the level of security that the prison took to secure the occupants of the building. The layout of the room made it impossible for visitors to contact the prisoners in any manner other than through the small phone receiver that allowed communication. There were four booths, each with a thick synthetic glass divider allowing the visitors only the slightest amount of privacy. The clear glass also allowed the guards to keep a watchful eye on those who occupied either side of the separating window. The openness of the room made him nervous.

Henry walked to the chair indicated by the guard on duty, and a few moments later, Bernard appeared through the door behind the glass. He looked suddenly weak to Henry. In all the years that Henry had spent working with him, he had never experienced such a feeling of shame for his friend.

Bernard sat down at the desk across from Henry. He lifted up the phone as Henry did. Henry had never seen so little emotion.

“Hello, Bernard,” Henry managed, trying to sound strong.

“Henry,” Bernard replied plainly.

“I’m so sorry,” Henry uttered, expressing his pain for his friend.

“So am I, Henry. I know I’m not the only person feeling a loss right now. The police have already come to you?”

“Yes,” Henry replied. “How are you holding up?”

“Don’t worry about me, Henry,” Bernard shrugged off the question. “There’s more important issues for your concentration right now.”

“You’re locked up, Bernard,” Henry answered, trying to force some emotion from his mentor. He had never seen the man in this state, and it frightened him. “That’s the greatest issue right now. What should I do to get you out of here? I can find you a good lawyer.”

“No,” Bernard answered firmly. “I’m not fighting the incarceration. It’s best for everyone if I remain behind bars at the present time. I don’t intend to fight that at all.”

“They’ve charged you with murder, Bernard,” Henry replied, stating the obvious. His grief had created many things, including confusion. He sensed some disappointment as Bernard remained steady in his actions, and knew he had to remain strong.

“I know,” Bernard replied. “The judge held a special hearing this morning. The formal charges have already been brought against me. In the interests of our work, I asked that the judge allow me to meet with you and others on the project frequently.”

“They already charged you? This is moving too quickly.”

“I don’t want it drawn out.”

"But we could get you out of here," Henry argued. "There are good lawyers out there. Any one of a dozen could have you out of here in a few hours. Let me contact one for you."

"There's no reason for that. I can accomplish a great deal more in here than I could if I tried to get out. The media would eat me alive, and I don't wish to deal with that now. There is no reason to waste time or resources on a thieving lawyer. I want you to listen to me, Henry. Our work can't fail because of all this. We're close, too close to allow this to set us back. I need you to continue the work we started. Don't allow someone else to take the credit for what we did."

"How can you talk about that now?" Henry asked in disbelief. "Aren't you the least bit worried about the charges against you?"

"No," Bernard instructed. "I'm worried about developing a treatment for a disease, something I've worked many years to achieve."

"But what about Carolyn?" Henry asked, looking for some words of wisdom, or at least sorrow.

"Delaying our research won't bring her back, Henry," Bernard replied plainly.

"What happened, Bernard?" Henry asked, searching for some reason for her death.

"Somebody killed Carolyn, in cold blood," he stated, and for a moment, Henry thought he saw a flair of rage, but when he looked closer, there was nothing.

"Why are you allowing them to do this to you? You didn't kill her."

"I can't prove that," Bernard admitted.

"You don't have to, Bernard. They have to prove that you did."

"Not in this instance. They have a strong case."

"What do you mean, not in this instance?"

"Everything looks like I did it, Henry," Bernard explained. "If I don't cooperate with them, then I don't stand a chance. This way, I can accomplish both of my tasks at the same time. I have to bargain while I have bargaining power. With these arrangements, at least I have an existence, and I can work with you. If I fought this, they would have me here in a couple of weeks, threatening that I was instable and a danger to society, and I wouldn't have such liberal visiting status."

"Who did this?" Henry whispered quietly, not trying to hide his anger.

"I don't know yet."

"What do you want me to do?" Henry asked with respect.

"Bring me my work, and become my hands, ears and eyes. We can still make it, Henry, but you and I must work together. You've invested a great deal of time in this work. You don't really want to lose all that any more than I do. We've already suffered a great enough loss."

"How are we supposed to function like this?"

"It will get worse before it ever gets better, Henry. Count yourself lucky that we have what we do right now. You must contain your emotions."

“What’s happening to your kids?” Henry asked. He had so many questions, but his mind kept no order to them now.

“Carolyn’s mother is taking them. She’ll keep them until I can work things out here. She’s handling my personal affairs at the present. You’ll go to the funeral.”

“Yes.”

“Good.”

“You should be there.”

“I don’t want her burial to be chaos. She deserves some peace now.”

“What about the others on the project?”

“Ellen has already been by this morning. If we can work together on this, we’ll still meet our goals on time. I can’t lose the research, it has to continue.”

“This won’t be easy,” Henry stated with concern.

“But it’s possible,” Bernard assured him.

Max reached the laboratory early in the morning. He had tossed and turned most of the night, trying in vain to get some rest. Something was eating away at him, and he had to search through the building again, to check some more records. A week of extensive interviews with those who worked with Bernard had revealed little more, and people weren’t quick to aide him in building a case. He knew there was something that he had missed, and it had kept him awake most of the night. There were secrets here to uncover, and an early morning visit to the facility — when few were around — was the only way he would learn them.

The janitor had opened the door for him. He expected some of the scientists to come in early, but only the janitor inhabited the building with him at this early hour. The whole breed of people who worked here seemed to tend towards late hours.

He had already spent about twenty minutes going through Bernard’s office, and still not uncovered any more. He walked out to the secretary’s lounge, and poured himself a cup of coffee, when the janitor walked in to clean up the room.

“You don’t mind if I straighten up in here a bit?” the man asked politely. His Scottish accent was strong, and rather cheerful, Max thought.

“Oh no,” Max answered sincerely. “I’m the one who’s wandered into your working hours right now. Don’t let me get in your way.”

“You’ve had a pretty busy weak,” the older gentleman added. He seemed to feel compassion for Max, and his efforts for a break in the case.

“I’m just trying to make sense of all this,” Max replied.

“Things don’t look to good for Dr. Baxter, do they?”

“No,” Max said sternly, “they don’t. Did you know him very well?”

“Dr. Baxter?” the man asked with a chuckle. “Sure, I knew him well enough. He had very odd hours, you know. He used to come in at all hours of the night. He’s a fairly friendly young lad. Took good care of old Loyd, yes he did.”

The older gentleman was short, and looked as though he would burst from the navy blue overalls he wore. He wasn’t a very large man, but should have given himself another inch or two in the waste of the uniform. His light red hair seemed to hint at the country of his origin, and for some reason he couldn’t explain, Max expected the man to offer him some ale at any moment.

“I’m sorry,” apologized Max. “The name’s Max Harmon, detective of homicides.”

“Loyd McGavin,” the janitor replied.

“You liked Bernard?” Max asked, almost from habit. He didn’t mean to interrogate the man, but it was his nature to ask such questions, and they often flowed from his mouth without any effort.

“He’s a good man. He treated everyone with the respect they deserved, even myself. A lot of people wouldn’t give someone like myself the time of day, but Dr. Baxter treated me like a good friend. He helped me out when I needed a job, and pays a very fair wage.”

“How long have you worked for him?” Max asked, trying to make some small talk. He felt suddenly guilty for questioning everyone he met, and often tried to talk to people normally, but it was difficult.

“Since he built the building,” Loyd replied, having a seat at the table across from Max. The man’s eyes looked tired, but he seemed content.

“Bernard and I met in the park one afternoon. He was relaxing and watching the pigeons, and waiting for his wife to meet him. I was looking through the classifieds for something to do with my time. He noticed what I was doing, and asked me what sort of work I was looking for. I told him that I was going insane after my retirement, and my wife had just passed away. He gave me a card and told me to come by and talk to him.

“I realize it isn’t the most glorious position in this facility, but he allowed me to make my own hours, and offered a generous salary. He’s a smart one, Bernard is. He and I get along really well. I hope things work out for him. He’s a good lad.”

“You don’t think he killed his wife?” Max suggested wryly.

“Not for a moment. Everyone has their faults, but Bernard would never do such a thing,” Loyd replied with conviction.

“Perhaps he just fooled everyone,” Max suggested, still prodding for a hint of doubt in somebody’s eyes. It was hard, his heart wasn’t into prodding people this early in the morning.

“No,” the man replied quite surely. “Loyd can read honesty on a man’s face. Bernard’s an honest man. If he says that he didn’t kill her, then he didn’t.”

“Did you know his wife?” Max asked, giving up and returning to the small talk.

“Sure,” Loyd replied sadly. “A pretty lass, she was. A sweet thing too. She came by from time to time. I don’t think I ever met such an elegant woman, even my wife Rachelle — bless her soul — didn’t hold a match stick to Mrs. Baxter. Bernard may not have been an angel, but he watched out for her.”

Max glanced up suddenly, slightly stock at the janitor’s observations.

“I haven’t heard anyone refer to Bernard in that manner,” Max noted with suspicion.

“What manner is that?” Loyd asked now, reversing the roles they played for a moment.

“An angel,” Max answered. “It seems that most of the people here seem to think that Dr. Baxter was the closest thing they knew to heaven itself. You’re the first person who didn’t swear by such an oath on the spot.”

“All I said was that he’s no angel,” Loyd replied oddly.

“Oh, no offense intended, Loyd,” Max said apologetically, realized it was just an off comment, and he shouldn’t analyze things so deeply. “I just meant that I haven’t found a person who could offer a single fault to the man’s character. It’s hard to believe that anyone is so perfect as that.”

“We all have our faults,” Loyd assured him with a knowledgeable grin, “even Dr. Baxter.”

“Really,” Max replied in disbelief. “I would love to hear about one.”

“He did have a certain weakness for the ladies, if you know what I mean.”

Max looked up in sudden awe. Loyd had mentioned it so nonchalantly, that it almost seemed like it didn’t matter, but to Max, it was the first good news he had heard all week. He studied carefully now, looking for a hint of deeper truths.

“Do you care to elaborate, Loyd?”

“Well, it’s hardly my right to criticize Dr. Baxter,” the man admitted. “Old Loyd didn’t exactly remain faithful to his own dear Rachelle — bless her soul — but she forgave me after a time.”

“Bernard had an affair?” Max asked in awe.

“Maybe I shouldn’t talk about it,” Loyd answered, suddenly seeming hesitant.

“Anything that might shed some light on the events prior to Carolyn’s death would help our investigation,” Max assured him, trying to maintain his professionalism. “We need to know the truth about this place to determine who’s responsible. He’s on trial for murder, and it might even help him in the end.” Max had learned with most that it helped to point that out.

“Well, he was very secretive about everything. I don’t even think he realizes that I knew about it all.”

“Knew about what, Loyd?” Max asked calmly, displaying a poker face he had developed after years in this line of work.

“Knew what happened behind these walls,” Loyd suggested.

“Who was the affair with?” Max asked, skipping to the punch line.

“I can’t really say that for sure.”

“Why not?”

“I never really saw them together,” Loyd confessed. “It’s more a feeling that something was going on.”

“Based on?”

“Personal experience,” Loyd said with remorse.

“Any evidence?” Max prodded.

“When you clean every room in this building, you sometimes find things that others didn’t necessarily bury well enough. Don’t think I’m some sort of pervert, detective Harmon, but you come across certain things at times.”

“I understand,” Max noted with as much professionalism as he could muster. “So what have you noticed?”

“There’ve been many instances when more than one individual stays late to work in the facility. I’ve heard things, noticed odd behaviors, and recognized that not all the instances revolved strictly around work related business.”

“Who?”

“I’m not trying to hide it from you, detective,” Loyd replied sincerely. “It isn’t like it’s just one individual. These scientists, they’re a different sort of individual. I’m rarely completely alone in the building. Some of them stay all night, others come rushing in early in the morning. Dr. Baxter went to great lengths to keep the facility open at all hours for late night inspiration. He isn’t the only person who comes in at odd hours, and most of the time he’s busy with his work, but some times, I wonder.”

“So there isn’t any particular individual who you suspect, Loyd?”

“Oh no,” Loyd conceded. “There are a number of ladies here that I couldn’t rule out. I’ve even wondered if he’s faithful to his mistress.”

“What are you saying?”

“If you’re dipping your ladle in one cup of soup, why not every bowl at the table,” he suggested with a sly smile.

“Multiple affairs?” Max asked with interest and shock.

“It’s crossed my mind,” Loyd acknowledged.

“Do you know everyone who works here very well, Loyd?”

“I know most,” Loyd admitted. “Some I know only from an occasional smile, but others I know well. Marie is a beautiful woman, but older and happily married for many years. Linda and I have talked for hours at times, since she often comes in so late, and Nancy, his secretary — she’s a pretty lass — chats with me nearly every day. She’s a little paranoid that people don’t

like her, because she's new. I like to talk to the pretty ones — still have that weakness — and she's very friendly.

"There are others. Sherrie, but she's got one on the way, and her husband knows Bernard very well. Most of the rest are single. They're all married to their work, in a way. Bernard hired some pretty ladies. He likes to keep healthy, well groomed people here, and places a great deal of value on personal appearance."

"Did Bernard play any favorites?"

"Everyone was a favorite, and he knew them all on the personal level," Loyd replied. He seemed rather serious suddenly. "If you're asking if anyone received special treatment, then the answer is that he treated everyone here like they were special, regardless of male or female — or ethnic background — for that matter. He's a friend to everyone, even myself. I'm only telling you all this, because I have no doubt in my mind that Dr. Baxter's innocent. You'll come to understand that in time."

"If you were him, Loyd, which of the women here would you have targeted for an affair," Max prodded, trying to get the hunch out of the man.

"Why, detective," Loyd smiled with an innocent grin, "if I didn't know better, I would say that you're asking me to select your quarry for you."

"I need more than a hunch, Loyd. The truth isn't found from hunches."

"Dr. Brockbank separated with her husband about a year ago," Loyd answered. "Her divorce is final any day now. Dr. Baxter and she are very close, and it's no secret that he's been supportive and helped her during the past months. She's had a rough go of it, and she's a very beautiful woman. I'm not sure of the circumstances surrounding her divorce, but she works with Dr. Baxter in closed quarters quite often."

"Would you have cheated on a woman like Mrs. Baxter for Dr. Brockbank, Loyd?" Max asked, looking for some assurance.

"To each his own," the old man answered. "The reasons a man chooses to cheat on his wife are not necessarily in looks alone. I know it's hard to believe coming from an old man, but sometimes, it's not so much a matter of beauty, as it is a matter of intensity. Often, you don't realize how strong your feelings for someone are, until you're suddenly alone with them, and realize what you've refused to see."

"How strong is your hunch?"

"I wouldn't bet my soul on it, but as I told you before, detective, I make my own hours, and people don't always realize when I'm in the building. Sometimes people express themselves much louder, when they don't realize that there are other ears nearby."

Loyd smiled lightly as he stood up from the table and left Max alone in the room. He felt guilt for saying what he did, remembering the days past, when it was him that people spoke of this way.

Bernard walked into the conference room of the prison and found Max sitting at the table across from the vacant seat. He had started to get used to the room from his various closed conferences with the legal staff. It was well lit, with a large table. Both entrances to the room were locked from the outside, and a guard stood in earshot. Bernard smiled at his lone visitor as he took his seat. Max hated the smile.

“Hello, detective,” Bernard greeted.

“Dr. Baxter,” Max allowed, wishing it weren’t so cold in the room.

“How’s your investigation coming?” Bernard asked intently, making himself comfortable.

“It seems to be getting more interesting,” Max hinted, a smile emerging on his face.

“Really, how so?” Bernard asked, calm and relaxed, as though he had little interest, but still listened for the sake of conversation.

“Are we still being honest, Dr. Baxter?”

“When have I lied to you, Max?” Bernard asked with an almost sarcastically innocent look about him.

“How many affairs have you had?” Max asked bluntly.

“Ooh, is this a trick question?” Bernard smiled with unrelenting control.

“No tricks, I just want the truth,” Max stated frankly.

“How many affairs do you think I’ve had?” Bernard asked with a look of pride, trying to uncover what Max knew.

“Are you admitting that you’ve had affairs?” Max asked.

“I have a feeling that it wouldn’t serve any purpose to deny it.”

“That at least supplies a reason for killing your wife,” Max said with a grin. He felt he had finally found what he needed. He still wanted a confession, along with an accomplice and murder weapon.

“Does it?” Bernard asked, as though the news meant nothing to him.

“Crimes of passion arise more often that you might expect, Dr. Baxter,” Max assured him.

“I’m sure they do,” Bernard admitted.

“It’s a motive.”

“But a shallow one.”

“Do you want to talk about it?” Max asked, pressing for the confession, but realizing quickly that he would not receive one.

“No,” Bernard replied firmly, but carelessly.

“Why not?” Max asked with a grin.

"Have you ever had an affair, Max?" Bernard asked, suddenly very serious when he spoke.

"No."

"You are truly an honorable man," Bernard conceded. "I respect that, Max. I honestly do respect that. I wish I had such honor, but as you have learned, I'm not as honorable as everyone thinks."

"So why kill your wife?"

"I never claimed that much dishonor," Bernard replied coldly.

"I just don't understand why you would sacrifice your marriage," Max argued, frustrated with his suspect. "Your wife was a beautiful woman."

"Don't pass judgment on my marriage until you understand it."

"This won't look good at your trial."

"What won't look good?" Bernard asked, as though he didn't really care for an answer.

"A love affair with one of your co-workers."

"What does it even have to do with my trial?"

"It shows you for who you are, Dr. Baxter," Max stated with anger, but strangely, enjoying the moment.

"Sure it does, Max. I admit it, I was not completely faithful to my wife, but that has nothing to do with this murder. You don't even know who she is, do you, Max?"

"I can find out," Max stated, a look of threat on his face.

"But you'll never prove it."

"Then why not tell me?"

"That would be no fun at all, Max," Bernard replied, smiling as he prodded Max along.

"I can put every acquaintance of yours on the stand."

"It's called the fifth amendment, Max. Nobody has to answer any question that might somehow incriminate themselves. Every time you approach an acquaintance of mine with the question, I'll ask for a reason, and if you're trying to prove that someone is an accomplice to the crime, that's incriminating, and they won't have to answer the question."

"What if they choose to answer?" Max suggested.

"Let me give you another dose of honesty, Max," Bernard replied seriously. "You're trying to prove that I'm guilty of this crime. You can do anything you want with my reputation. You can paint me into whatever character you wish, but if you try to soil the reputations of my associates, you'll see a side of me you won't like very much."

"I have a lot of respect for the people I work with, no matter what my relationship outside the office with any of them, and I'll protect them from any attacks. It serves you absolutely no purpose to try this line of questioning on them. I'm your target, Max. Steer clear of my associates' social lives."

“I told you, Dr. Baxter,” Max pointed out. “I’m interested in the truth, not in the lives of your employees. I’m just getting started with this investigation. You’re proving to be an interesting individual.”

“I’m glad I’ve met your expectations, Max, but I must be honest, you’re falling short of mine,” Bernard expressed with disappointment. “I really expected you to uncover this a long time ago. If you’re going to figure this out, you need to step up the pace a bit.”

“I’ll see what I can do, Dr. Baxter,” Max replied sarcastically.

“Good, Max. Now, if that’s all, I need to get back to the books. I’m falling dreadfully behind in my work.”

“Sure, Dr. Baxter,” Max allowed. “By the way, how’s your cell mate doing?” he asked, looking for some fuel to add to the flames burning around Bernard.

“Oh, James?” Bernard answered calmly. “He’s a very interesting person. He makes me glad to know that we are one of the same species. You didn’t have any hand in rooming the two of us together, did you, Max?”

“Sorry, Dr. Baxter, I can’t take the credit for that one,” Max replied with a grin, as he motioned to the guard standing outside the door.

Chapter Seven

A week of intense investigations had turned up a number of leads in the collection of testimony for the case. Max had found several of interest, though none had turned up anything substantial to build his case upon. His current lead had intrigued him to the point where he had decided that it warranted a quick trip out of state. After a confirmation of seats and some breakfast on the way to the airport, he and Fred caught a short flight from Boise to Phoenix.

It was almost two in the afternoon when Max and Fred entered the office of Greg Archuletta. They had called only to verify that he was in all day, before hopping the flight to Arizona. Greg was a certified public accountant, with his office based in Phoenix. The heat of the city created a difference in extremes for the two men, but the weather wasn't really on their minds at this point. He would only be here for a few hours, before picking up dinner and catching another flight back.

Max pulled out his badge and showed it to Greg's secretary as he approached her. The woman didn't seem too surprised. She was very cordial, and didn't even ask what their visit regarded. She stood up and directed the two of them to the office door behind her desk. Greg had a number of other associates working for him, but his office was by far the most elite of the small accounting firm. Max walked beyond the woman and found Greg busy at his desk, alone in the well lit and comfortably sized office. The back wall behind Greg was one solid window, with a large view.

"Greg Archuletta," Max asked after thanking the woman as she left the three of them alone.

"Yes," Greg replied, standing and directing them to the two seats across from him. "I take it that this is regarding Bernard?" he asked intuitively.

"News travels quickly," Fred returned, looking around at the lightly stained oak furniture. The desk was cleared of all but a few papers, and a small monitor from his computer, concealed somewhere beneath.

"His popularity has increased drastically during the past few years," Greg answered with a smile. "The media loves a good controversy. Those people who didn't know him before, sure know him now."

"You were expecting us?" Max asked, surprised by the relaxed nature of the man.

"I had a hunch that someone would be coming to see me," he admitted. "You're police officers?"

"Yes," Fred stated, removing his badge for identification. "Detectives from the homicide department in Boise."

“Had to make sure,” Greg apologized. “I don’t want to add any flames to the fires burning around Bernard, and it’s only a matter of time before the press starts trying to dig this deep into his past.”

Greg was a shorter man, and his hair had begun to thin on top. He combed it back in a fashionable manner, not trying to hide the fact. His stalky size and confident manner were indicative of his personality. Max could also sense that the man would speak his mind when asked to do so.

“You know Bernard pretty well?” Max asked.

“I used to know him really well,” Greg replied. “We’ve both become busy men, and our work is on different ends of the spectrum. I don’t think either of us has kept up as well as we should.”

“How long were you roommates with Bernard?” Max asked, assuming his questioning face, hard and stern. Fred recognized the drill, and sat back to allow his partner to carry on.

“We roomed together for our first four years of college. We met in the dormitories, and shared an apartment our junior and senior years.”

“You didn’t know Bernard prior to college?”

“No,” Greg answered. He was calm, and very sincere, Max noticed, with seemingly no nervousness. Max could sense one thing, he was telling the truth, or one of the best liars he had ever met. “We both came to college alone, and it was just a matter of coincidence that our housing supervisor pulled our names out of the hat at random. We were very good friends during those first few years. He was swiped up for graduate school quickly, and I came out here to start my business after I became certified.”

“You realize that we’re prosecuting Bernard for the murder of his wife?”

“I’ve watched the news,” Greg replied honestly. Max realized that he was slightly offended that they thought him that unaware of the situation. “The media is turning it into a fiasco, although that’s nothing new.”

“I’m out to find the truth, Mr. Archuletta,” Max expressed solemnly. “Everything I’ve found this far, points to Dr. Baxter as the aggressor in this crime. If you can help my investigation, and provide any new information, we would really appreciate your cooperation.”

“Well,” answered Greg, “I can tell you that I can’t believe any of it. The Bernard I knew years ago would never do anything like that, but people are known to change. I have a strong view of morality, and justice. Whoever did this, should pay with their life. If Bernard changed that much, then his position doesn’t change any of that. I would like to help you with your investigation by all means, but I don’t really know what I can offer.”

“We’re wondering about Bernard’s past,” Max specified, trying to gain some trust with his next remark. He had learned to adapt his approach to acquaintances in this type of situation. “Is there anyone who might want to frame Bernard for the murder of his wife?”

“Bernard certainly isn’t the most popular person in the views of many people who’ve come into contact with him over the years. I can think of a number of his former teachers who couldn’t find a kind word to speak about the man if you asked them.”

“How so?”

“Bernard and I took a class together our second year. He was always a prized student. I don’t recall him ever receiving a grade less than an A-, but that doesn’t mean that his teachers thought too highly of him. I’m surprised that he didn’t get thrown out of school for the episode in the class we had together. I have a feeling that it did affect my grade, because I roomed with him.”

“What are you trying to say?” Max asked, interested in hearing the story.

“We took a biology class from Dr. Lancaster. Bernard made the class look like a walk down the beach, until the test before our final. He had aced two of the tests prior to that, and lost points for a miscalculation on the third. It was our fourth test, where he missed another question. He disagreed with the answer, and went to speak with the teacher about it.”

“Yes?” Max asked, prodding the man to continue.

“I had a harder time in the class, one of the reasons I’m an accountant, and not a scientist,” Greg replied frankly. “Bernard often tried to help out, but he didn’t look at things the same way as our teacher did. He had a unique outlook of things, but saw everything differently than most. Bernard came back from talking to our teacher extremely upset. He said the professor had told him he shouldn’t whine about missing one question. He still had the high score for the entire class, and Bernard told him he was a pompous ass.”

“So what happened?” Max asked with a smile.

“Bernard wouldn’t let it rest,” Greg replied with a hint of a grin. “He told Dr. Lancaster what he thought of him during the meeting, and left calmly. When nothing happened to Bernard’s grade after a few days, he went to see the dean of the college. Bernard had done this sort of thing before. It’s funny, but college professors don’t really like their students to correct them — very few will back down to a confrontation by a student who finds a fault in something they’ve taught — even if they know they’re wrong.

“Bernard is a man of conviction,” Greg expressed his opinions openly. “He told me that he didn’t give a damn about his grade. He knew he would still get his A out of the class. He told me that he didn’t want some dinosaur — brought up on the ideas of the past — to fill the heads of students with lies. He was very emotional about the whole incident,” Greg chuckled to himself, “and Bernard rarely got emotional.”

“The dean held a meeting with the professor, Bernard, and two other professors from the department. Bernard presented his case, along with research that he had found from several leading institutions, and forced the professor to change the answer on his test. The professor also had to take the question off the test completely, because Bernard said it was unfair to penalize

the rest of the class, because the professor had failed to properly teach them the correct way to answer the question.”

“Really?” Max asked, intrigued at Bernard’s insistence, and then realizing it shouldn’t really surprise him.

“Dr. Lancaster didn’t take the incident very well. He hadn’t enjoyed watching a student bash his reputation before his colleagues. He delivered one of the nastiest finals that I ever experienced in college, and was forced to retract it after all the students in the class protested the level of difficulty to the dean.

“The professor almost quit his job over the entire affair. The dean retracted the test, and drew up another final on his own accord. After about a week, Dr. Lancaster cooled down about it, but I don’t think that Bernard ever lists him as a reference anywhere. Incidentally, Bernard aced both of his final exams.”

“I don’t think that Dr. Lancaster had grounds to murder Dr. Baxter’s wife though,” Fred replied after a moment, the sarcasm apparent in his voice.

“Oh no,” Greg answered with a smile. “I didn’t mean to imply that, but that’s just the way that Bernard handles everything. He stepped on the toes of a number of people in the scientific community. I was really surprised when I learned that he was nominated for the Nobel Prize. He doesn’t have many admirers among his peers.”

“You mentioned that Bernard isn’t overly emotional,” Max replied, getting back to the reason he had come here. “What do you mean by that?”

“I’ve never seen Bernard get physically emotional — or violent, as you would refer to it — before,” Greg answered. “He used to argue his case very dramatically, but you never witnessed Bernard lift a hand in anger. Even when he got angry — an anger that might cause you or I to lash out and strike at somebody — he seemed almost to relax. He’s a very clear headed man. He’ll step back from a situation and think about it for some time, before he finally reacts on it. I saw several instances where his emotional control astounded me.”

“What sort of instances are your referring to?” Max asked.

“Confrontations with other students,” Greg clarified. “I recall one instance where a student walked into him on campus, and didn’t take very kindly to Bernard not trying to dodge him. The guy was an athlete — I don’t even recall the sport — but a bigger guy, and rather cocky. He got in Bernard’s face, and started asking for trouble. I was amazed how coolly Bernard handled the whole situation. When the guy threw a fist at him, I don’t even recall how Bernard responded, but the man was on his back a moment later, wishing that he had never crossed paths with Bernard Baxter. There are others out there with similar feelings towards Bernard.”

“Bernard struck him?”

“He defended himself very well,” Greg replied simply, almost admirably. “I would never dream of challenging Bernard to a sparring match.”

“Sparring match?” Max questioned, a little confused. “Like Boxing?”

“I don’t know what you would call his classification,” Greg wondered aloud. “He never did stick with any form of self defense, but I certainly wouldn’t call it boxing.”

“Did Bernard actively practice Karate?” Max asked. “Is that where he got involved collecting weapons?”

“He didn’t take Karate,” Greg answered. “He attended a few sessions of Tai Quon Doe with me, but didn’t last very long. He never liked guns, but he was fond of old world weapons, if that’s what you mean.”

“He had an extensive collection of swords at his home,” Max stated.

“Oh, yes,” Greg replied. “He had several swords that he purchased through college. He had a fascination for the blade, and studied it extensively.”

“Really, how so?”

“In every way he could,” Greg commented. “He watched exhibitions, took some classes in fencing, and even took several trips to meet some other enthusiasts. There are many forms of swordsmanship, each with a certain grace and artistic quality about it. Bernard has an eye for beauty — he always did — and he loved swords.”

“Did you ever feel that his fascination with these weapons was extreme?” Max asked, feeling that he was finally making progress at uncovering the animal in Bernard.

“Never,” Greg answered sternly.

“Why?”

“Do you practice any of the martial arts?” Greg asked.

“No.”

“I didn’t think so,” Greg stated confidently. “You refer to Bernard’s collection of swords as weapons, in a derogatory tone, but a person with respect for the arts of combat would never insult another who develops an intrigue in a similar art form. The sword is a very eloquent instrument, quite unlike the barbaric weapons of today. A man who picks up a sword to defend himself is placing his own safety in his abilities, and wagering his abilities against those of another.

“A gun fires a projectile, which may ricochet off a wall, or be thrown off its course by a gust of wind. It’s a very cowardly weapon, if you compare it to other instruments of old world battle. A bullet might hit a rib, and slash a gapping hole through your heart, or pass clean through a shoulder, doing very little superficial damage. A person can fire upon his adversary from great distances, and never see the eyes of the man he kills. A great age of warfare ended with the advent of gun powder, and a beautiful art was all but buried.”

“Do you practice the martial arts, Mr. Archuletta?” Max asked instinctively, looking for the source of this respect he had for Bernard.

“How did you ever guess?” Greg asked sarcastically.

“What do you study?”

“I’m a black belt in Tae Quon Doe. I’m also proficient with swords, and pass on my skills to others.”

“Did you introduce Bernard to swords?”

“No,” Greg answered in an assuring tone. “It was quite the opposite situation. I went with Bernard to a special exhibition once. A group of men from Thailand put on a demonstration by special invitation, and Bernard managed to work us in to watch it. It was a unique experience by all standards, almost unheard of from our standpoint. There are many martial art forms that refuse to open the door to western view, and this was one of those. Bernard got us through with some of his contacts, and our eyes are among a select few that ever saw such beauty.”

“You said he attended Tae Quon Doe with you several times,” Max continued, trying to keep to the point of the visit.

“Correct, but he didn’t stick to it.”

“Why not? We’re led to believe that he practices some form of self defense,” Fred spoke up, trying to determine the validity of the man’s words. So far he had heard nothing that fit his own description of Bernard.

“Correct again,” Greg agreed, “but not Tae Quon Doe. I told you that he was a very unique person. His mind worked on a broad view of things, and to develop yourself in a martial art takes determination and extreme obedience. It’s a set of rules that governs your actions, and doesn’t vary extensively in any form. You must study an exact reaction to any action, and learn to react that way without thinking about it. Bernard didn’t ever live by such ideals. He said that he never wanted to limit himself to a set of guidelines, though I don’t think of it in these same terms. I found that this was a very standard view among many of his scientific acquaintances.”

“So what form of self defense did he study?” Max asked, not trying to hide his confusion.

“I’m not sure,” Greg replied honestly. “He still hadn’t found a form that he felt was right for him when we went our own ways. He studied — every day in fact — but ventured into a number of arenas to search for the form that appealed to himself. He’s a very strong individual, and capable of some incredible things. I’ve seen others underestimate him before. He’s influenced greatly by emotions, and he’s one of the few men I’ve known who understands his emotions at that level.”

“He doesn’t seem very emotional to me,” Fred replied, trying to understand what he heard, but not really taking it to heart.

“That’s the beauty of the man right there,” Greg pointed out. “See, you’ve already underestimated him. He’s a very intelligent man, and when the time comes, he’ll release his emotions violently, if he has to.”

“Would he become emotional enough to kill his wife in her sleep?” Max asked, feeling he had earned the right to the man’s opinion.

“Never,” Greg answered without hesitation, as he summed up a creed he had learned years earlier. “That’s the attack of a coward, and of anger. Bernard has a deep respect for the sword, and the methods of fighting that surround it. A man who fights with a sword, uses love, not anger, to control his movements. Love and beauty are one in the same, and always accompany each other. If you love something, you will find beauty in it. If you find beauty in something, you can learn to love it. Anger is paired with hate, and a true master never results to hate. It will cloud your abilities. Bernard would never insult the art form by committing such an act, regardless of anything his wife had done. If he were to murder his wife, which I still doubt, he would have done it by a means he doesn’t respect so greatly.”

“How do you kill somebody respectfully?”

“If you did it by Bernard’s standards, she would have armed herself.”

“You feel confident speaking for Bernard like this, when you said yourself that you haven’t kept up with him in years,” Max suggested.

“People’s views on some subjects may change, but the entire person never does,” Greg replied. “It took an entirely different person than Bernard to kill his wife. Judging from the work he does, I don’t think he’s changed that much.”

“You said that you witnessed him attack another student,” Max asked, starting a new line of questioning.

“He didn’t initiate an attack, just defended himself when the time for it arose,” Greg defended.

“And you study the martial arts as well?”

“I’ve told you that I’m a black belt.”

“Have you even had to defend yourself with your martial art?”

“No,” Greg replied proudly. “It is always best to walk away from a confrontation, if you can. I’ve always managed to avoid such a confrontation. You never know for sure if your adversary is better than you, and sometimes it’s best to never find out.”

“But Bernard has defended himself on several occasions,” Max argued. “There was an incident in a park a few years back where...”

“Some people have good luck,” Greg replied, cutting the detective off suddenly, “and others don’t.”

“You blame his confrontations on luck?” Max asked, expressing his disbelief.

“The ones I know about, yes,” he stated simply, “they were bad luck. He did his best to keep the situation from getting volatile, but it just refused to happen. It’s like a curse to some people, they don’t go out looking for trouble, but it seems to find them, no matter where they go. Bernard was minding his own business when that mugger almost lost his life. Look at the report, detective, I’ve seen it. He fought an instinct that he spent years developing when the mugger attacked him. The finishing blow to the line of defense that Bernard used would have crushed that man’s skull.”

“You know about the mugger?” Max asked, not hiding his surprise.

“Yes.”

“So you’re saying that Bernard was kind to the guy,” Max replied half heartedly. “I don’t know if just the fact that he spared a man’s life something to be admired. If he’s so advanced in fighting, why use a defense that would kill in the first place?”

“You don’t understand, detective,” Greg responded, trying to hide the irritation of the two men questioning him. He had spoken many times to people who didn’t understand that which was foreign to them, or refused to listen. “In any martial art, you learn a natural series of reactions. No martial art is perfect, because there’s always an attack that you don’t have a counter action for, and that’s why it is best to avoid a confrontation. Most people who practice the arts realize this flaw to their art form, and continue to train, even when they become a master. That’s when the true learning, and the beauty of the art, makes its appearance to the pupil, allowing the pupil to develop new techniques, to further enhance the art form.

“You don’t have time to think about the motions in an attack, they must flow and become a natural reaction. You spend years training your mind to initiate a certain response, and Bernard’s ability to abort that series of responses is why your mugger friend still walks the face of the earth.”

“That’s a pretty strong response,” Max said in annoyance, trying to point out the brutality of the philosophy.

“The martial arts arose from peasants in Asia, who were constantly subjected to brutality. They developed the various martial arts to defend against brutality. As the methods spread, they took on different appearances with different cultures.

“These people were enslaved by a more advanced civilization, and if you fought the system, you were killed. A strong point of the art is to disable your assailant. Yes,” Greg agreed fully, “many of the responses are brutal in nature, but some are meant to defend against a knife or gun. If your attacker has such a weapon, it isn’t generally in your best interests to worry about their safety. The martial arts are methods of self preservation, and sometimes that requires the elimination of your adversary. It’s nowhere near as barbaric as kids roaming the streets with automatic weapons, firing at defenseless targets from a speeding vehicle.”

“We appreciate your time,” Max said, trying to sound sincere, but realizing suddenly that the trip was a waste of his time. “It’s been enlightening, but hasn’t really offered much more than we already knew. If you think of something else, don’t hesitate to call me.”

Max handed the gentleman a card and followed Fred out to his car. It was warm as they walked back across the parking lot, much warmer than Boise. The heat made for a silent trip until they reached the car, and climbed in their seats.

“Do you believe that load of bullshit?” Fred asked once they had driven a few blocks away from the office.

“Arrogance seems to be a cheap commodity among these people.”

“Agreed.”

“What I don’t understand,” Max stated in disgust, “is how they feel that cutting up one another isn’t barbaric. It doesn’t seem any more refined than the Neanderthals carrying their clubs. Beauty and art, that’s the biggest crock of shit I’ve ever heard. The man slayed his wife with a sword, while she slept. He was all alone in the house. I just wish we could find that sword — wherever he hid it — and wrap this case up. Then we can expose him to all his acquaintances, and each of them can stuff this “code of honor” shit up their ass.”

Chapter Eight

Nancy Dobbs was in Bernard's office when Max entered. The soft sunlight showered her where she stood beside the desk. She seemed almost lost in her confusion. Max knew she felt unneeded with Bernard gone, though her work hadn't slowed much. She looked up at him and smiled softly at him. She felt bad for Max, trying so hard to build a case against a man adored by his peers. She had seen the difficulty he had experienced over the past several days, and wished she could offer him some aide. She also felt that she had her own troubles, and his presence didn't help that.

"Good morning, Ms. Dobbs," Max greeted.

"Hello, detective, and how's your investigation coming along?"

Max tried to smile as he walked in the room. He was deep in thought, but still felt obliged to return her hospitality, and he had a weakness for smiling at pretty women, even if he was old enough to be her father. It was about as far as his flirting ever carried, but he enjoyed the exchanged smiles as any man would.

"We've pieced together some really good evidence, and your employer is proving to be an interesting study," he replied.

She wore a cream shirt with a dark green vest, and a knee length skirt. She was a beautiful woman, who dressed to accent her features, and her class. As he looked at her, he could only hope that his own daughter would grow into such a lovely, and intelligent creature. During his several interviews with the woman, he had grown to respect her, and her knowledge.

"You'll put this place out of business," Nancy teased him, trying to make light of the nerving situation. Max knew full well how awful he seemed to the people employed here.

"I'm not trying to destroy this place," Max assured her as he attempted a smile. "I just want to make sure that justice is served."

"It must be hard, trying to prepare a case against such a high public figure as Dr. Baxter," Nancy allowed, feeling the same tension as he did in the room. They were like enemies it seemed, but she knew it should not be this way.

"I don't allow the publicity to get to me," Max said with an honest smile.

"I wish I could offer some help, detective," she replied sincerely. "It really is hard to believe that anyone could do such a thing. His wife was really a wonderful woman. I always did like her. It makes me feel creepy to think that somebody I knew did something like this."

"You almost sound like you believe he killed her," Max replied.

"Don't you?" Nancy asked in surprise. "After all, you have charged him with the crime."

"Yes, we have, but you're the only person here who will actually acknowledge that it is possible he killed her. I can't get anyone else here to even consider the thought," Max replied, suddenly surprised by his open revelation of his frustration. He had always made a point not to

discuss his work with potential witnesses in a case, and felt far less than professionalism for the slip.

“Well, I am the newest member of his staff,” She replied, as though she felt guilty that she didn’t defend her boss in the same manner as her colleagues did. “Maybe if I had worked here longer than I have, I may have been persuaded to the same sort of thinking.”

“Yes, perhaps,” Max agreed. “Can I ask you a personal question, and you must promise not to take offense by it.”

“Sure, detective,” Nancy smiled, “I don’t think anything could surprise me at this point.”

“Did you know that Bernard was unfaithful to his wife?”

“I’ve never heard anyone mention it,” Nancy replied sincerely, “but I’ve wondered from time to time if it was going on.”

“Why do you say that?”

“He seemed a little more friendly with certain people here than others. He’ll sometimes have a meeting with one of the staff members, behind closed doors, and comes out looking a little — how should I say — wrinkled.”

“Did you and Bernard ever have a thing going?” Max asked seriously. The remark did cause a slight bit of embarrassment to cross her face, but she replied quite quickly. He sensed that she knew he would ask it.

“No, detective,” she smiled with a blush. “He kept our relationship quite professional. I’ve been dating someone off and on, and I think he knew about it. I know,” she kidded him, “they always wonder about the secretary.”

“Did he ever make a pass at you?”

It was always odd for Max to ask such questions, and he usually handled himself quite well, but he found himself feeling awkward as he tried to maintain eye contact with her. In his embarrassment, he had to turn away for a moment.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized, “I don’t mean to seem so forward, I’m just trying to develop an image of how he operates.”

“That’s quite all right,” she assured him with a gentle smile. “I don’t take any offense to it. Bernard has never approached me in a manner I find awkward, but like I mention before, I’ve only been here for a while,” she replied, as she hesitated. He noticed a strange look on her face, and then a smile to herself. “I wonder if that means that he doesn’t find me attractive. Oh well, I guess I’ll just pretend that it’s only because I wasn’t here long enough for him to make a move.”

Max smiled back at the woman’s remark. He liked her relaxed sense of humor, and wondered himself why such a philanderer as Bernard had never approached her.

“I wouldn’t take it personally, ma’am,” Max replied honestly. “You’re a beautiful woman, and I’m sure he would have got around to you. You should just count yourself lucky that he didn’t get to you sooner.”

"I suppose you're right," she smiled, glowing lightly at the compliment.

"So what brought you to work for Dr. Baxter?" Max asked, trying to make some small talk, so she wouldn't think harshly of him.

"This will sound silly," Nancy replied bashfully, "but I planned to continue my education, and really liked what Bernard was doing here. I left my hometown when I was offered the opportunity to come here, even if just as a secretary. I felt there was much I could learn from him, and hoped that if I got him to notice me, he might take an interest in my future."

"So you came here just because of Bernard?" Max asked with surprise.

"I know," she replied with a clear look of embarrassment, "it doesn't look so promising anymore, but he had quite a reputation where I came from, and as I weighed out the risks, I decided it was worth a chance."

"If you don't mind my saying so, it is sort of a long shot."

"I know, but I usually get things if I want them badly enough," she replied, then suddenly turned bright red when she realized what she had said. "I don't mean to sound boastful, I'm just very ambitious, and go after things I really want. I had a professional interest in Bernard."

"I wanted to work with Bernard, and I have, just not at the level I originally planned on. If things hadn't turned out this way, I would have become one of his pupils — I'm sure — just as Henry did. It's just too bad that he had to have a dark side like this, because I'm sure he would have given me a chance once he understood my abilities. He was just so busy, and didn't have a chance to take a greater interest in me."

"You really had some high expectations," Max answered, feeling almost sorry for her. He had seen many people's dreams shattered by such senseless crimes as this, but it seemed strange that a man on trial for murder could invoke such desperation from people in this way.

"Well, Ms. Dobbs, I'm truly sorry that it ended this way, for your sake. I don't enjoy destroying people who served as such positive role models to others."

Max suddenly realized what he had said, and how odd it sounded as he spoke the words. He didn't like to admit that he had some respect for his suspect, and never took a personal interest in the crimes he investigated.

"No, detective, you're right," Nancy agreed, demonstrating that she could still look rationally at the situation. "It's best that I never received such an opportunity, because then it might be harder for me to say goodbye, once it's all over."

"And he hasn't had the opportunity to manipulate your mind in the same fashion as the rest of your colleagues," Max added. "Feel good that you didn't allow yourself to be pulled into all the lies also."

Nancy smiled and walked out of the room. Max couldn't help but feel guilty. He had instrumented the investigation that would end an era of Bernard Baxter to these people, and even those who hardly knew him, had some effect from the man on their lives.

Henry walked into the prison visitors room, and took his seat at the booth. A guard sorted carefully through the four books that he had brought today, making sure that he hadn't brought Bernard anything he could use as a weapon. He walked over and handed it to another guard a moment later, who disappeared down the hallway.

It took a few minutes before Bernard arrived through the door behind the glass. There were two other prison visitors in the other booths already, and with Henry here, it left only one unoccupied booth in the room. It also added a certain amount of noise to the room, which Henry regarded with gratitude. The noise would actually provide him with some privacy from the guard who always stood at the door.

Bernard picked up the phone from the other side, and smiled at his good friend. It was good to see him smile. He seemed more rested, and relaxed. Henry couldn't remember a time that Bernard looked better. Henry picked up his own phone, and waited for Bernard to speak.

"It looks like you're getting close, Henry."

"I can almost taste it, Bernard." His excitement was evident in his voice. "The latest results from the alteration is in the journal. I don't feel safe bringing you all this," Henry replied with a look of paranoia. "What if somebody copies it during the transfer?"

"I'll take care of all that. As soon as I can find three proofs from the work, we'll submit for publication," Bernard replied, trying to comfort his anxious colleague. "It will follow in the next monthly journal, and nobody can touch it. It would take them weeks to determine how we accomplished everything. They can't break the code before us, not by a long shot. We're three months ahead of Dr. Wood's group, and they're still trying the other procedure. This is a better approach, and it doesn't require any poisons administered into the body. I like it, Henry."

"I just feel like it's taking too long," Henry argued, not trying to hide his frustration.

"That's how it feels when you know it's right, but we can't move so quickly that we don't check our theories properly," Bernard stressed. "I don't want to look like a fool in front of the scientific community. We have to do it right, not hastily."

"Do you really feel confident about this?"

"I do," Bernard answered surely. "The cell is very complicated, and we don't need to attack every angle of it to destroy the function. We need only to concentrate on a single element of the balanced cycle. If we destroy the inner balance, or even disrupt it, we will find absolute success. Our problem is that we're using a poison to destroy. We're looking for a quick solution, instead of a logical one. Think of the cell as its own body."

"If you wanted to kill somebody, you don't need to cut them into a hundred pieces. A simple blood clot will achieve the same outcome as a hundred rounds fired from an automatic rifle. The final result of death is the only thing you worry about, not the method by which it is

achieved. In our situation, death is only the inability to reproduce, or grow. The body can take care of the clean up work.”

“I want you to review the data,” Henry stressed, wishing they were working together again. “Give me any ideas you can come up with on a few minor side effects we’re seeing. I need it before I launch the new study, to make sure there aren’t any other angles you want examined.”

“I’ll look it over this afternoon,” Bernard assured him. “I have a few more chapters in some other material to finish first, but I’ll let you know first thing tomorrow.”

Henry looked up as the guard he had given his books emerged from the door opposite the glass barrier. He walked over and handed the material to Bernard, who took it without looking up at him. The interruption suddenly reminded Henry of the other issues on everyone’s mind.

“How are you holding up, Bernard?” Henry asked with compassion, feeling selfish for allowing the situation facing his friend to slip his mind.

“I’ll live, I think,” Bernard answered plainly. “It looks like they’re trying to give me a little trouble, but I expected that. How about you, Henry? How do you feel?”

“I don’t really know,” Henry replied honestly. “All my emotions are so mixed up. I’m really angry.”

“Clear your head of the anger, Henry. You can’t afford to cloud your thoughts with something so destructive. The time is not yet here.”

“I’m working on it, Bernard,” Henry said, trying to sound sincere, “but it’s difficult for me.”

“It’s difficult for everyone,” Bernard pointed out. “We’ll have our day, Henry, but first we will finish what we began,” he exclaimed, more a command than just a statement.

“What do you need?”

“I need you to keep things moving on your end,” Bernard stressed, concentrating on the importance of the work, “and continue to keep me informed.”

“The other information is in your journals,” Henry added. “I buried it between two studies. It doesn’t look like anything important.”

“I didn’t expect anything, but thanks for the effort,” Bernard replied, acknowledging his appreciation in the tone of his voice.

“If you need anything, don’t hesitate to ask, Bernard.”

The look on his face exhibited the honesty and loyalty of the statement. Bernard read the seriousness of it as he looked back. Henry sensed the new problem that Bernard now faced, even though he had no idea what it was.

“You might not like it,” Bernard almost whispered.

“If it means that our work is completed, then I will never question it. I mean this, Bernard, anything at all.” Henry had never felt such tension before, but his strength remained.

“Will your conscience be able to handle the consequences?” Bernard said, testing his friend’s loyalty.

“Will yours?”

“If I’m considering it, then my conscience can handle it,” Bernard stated, as though it were very clear.

“Just let me know what you need.”

Max and Fred walked up the doors to the home of Ellen Brockbank. This would be the third interview they had conducted with her, and the fact that he had to come to her home in the evening didn’t make it any easier. He could tell from the last interview how busy she was, and that she didn’t appreciate the lists of questions, but he had more information to check out now, and that meant that several women would receive another interview.

Ellen hardly looked surprised as she opened the door. She had a glass of wine in her hand, and wore a comfortable sweatshirt and shorts. She opened the door fully and beckoned them both in with a wave as she turned and walked inside, never uttering a word. It was a different side of the woman, that neither had ever seen before.

“We’re sorry to bother you, Dr. Brockbank,” Max apologized, attempting to settle the mood. “We’ve just run into some more questions for you.”

“I expected you,” Ellen replied seriously, and with annoyance. “I hear that you’ve already contacted several other women at the lab.”

“Yes,” Max replied.

“Why are you concentrating your efforts on the women?” Ellen asked with a note of irritation.

Max walked inside to the living room of the elegant home. A plate of Chinese food — delivered from a local restaurant — sat on the coffee table, and the sound of classical music echoed softly from an expensive stereo. The bottle of wine sat at the side of the plate, freshly opened. Ellen sat down on her couch, and made herself comfortable, as the two men took a seat at the couch across from her.

“Our latest line of questioning regards only the female coworkers of Dr. Baxter’s,” Max replied, trying to seem unbiased.

“Do you plan to investigate any other people for Carolyn’s murder?” Ellen asked, displaying her displeasure with the way he had conducted the investigation thus far.

“Should we?” Fred asked sarcastically.

“It just seems to me that you’re all too eager to paste the blame on a very good man. Why such effort in destroying the public image of a great role model? A little bit of envy?” she suggested in an insulting tone. “Trying to make up for your inadequacy in other regards? You

know, in our modern society, it's good for people to have such positive role models as Bernard Baxter."

"Not if he's guilty of killing his wife," Max argued, no longer interested in treating her politely.

"I see that got us absolutely nowhere," Ellen answered, not really interested in arguing, and wishing she could get rid of them soon. "So what's the problem now, gentlemen?"

"We're led to believe that Bernard did not always remain faithful to his wife," Fred replied seriously.

"Why do you think that?" she asked as she picked at her food, not really that interested in the remark.

"Was he?" Max pressed.

"Why don't you ask him?" she asked coldly, looking up at the two.

"We're asking you," Max replied with a serious look.

"Bernard is a grown man. He's adult enough to make those sorts of decisions for himself. His personal life was his own business, and I never inquired into his social interests in that manner. If you want an answer to that question, why don't you contact him," she suggested, making it apparent that she would not reveal her own opinion.

"You just finalized your divorce?" Max asked innocently.

"Yesterday," she acknowledged as she took a sip of the wine.

"Why did you and your husband call it quits?" Max asked bluntly.

"We no longer felt the desire to remain married," she replied simply. "We both grew down separate paths, and couldn't justify fighting for a relationship that had lost its fire."

"Did Bernard have anything to do with your divorce?" Max asked, prodding around his question.

"No," she answered with assurance, "except for the moral support that he and Carolyn offered when I announced that my husband and I had decided to end our marriage."

"You knew Carolyn very well?" Max inquired.

"Yes," Ellen replied honestly. "I already told you that I was. I was deeply hurt when I heard of her death. She was a beautiful individual, inspirational to those around her. We went to lunch regularly, and shared many of the same interests."

"What sort of interests?"

"A thirst for knowledge, a love of fine art and decor, and the admiration of Bernard Baxter. Her basis of life commanded respect, and I never knew Bernard to disregard that. They were an incredible pair together, but you've condemned the man without trying to understand him."

"Ma'am, we just look at the facts," Max defended.

"The things you choose to call facts, I consider arguable."

“How do you argue this case?” Max replied, standing firmly on his opinion. He had grown tired of the arrogance.

“I argue facts everyday,” she answered with a sharp and convincing stare, “and my work has taught me that if you choose to dig a little deeper, the facts aren’t always what they seem.”

“How close did your relationship with Bernard get?” Max asked with a cold, and unrelenting firmness. He no longer wished to play games with the woman, and wanted to get to the point of his visit.

“We worked together frequently,” she answered, staring him in the eyes.

“Did Carolyn know how frequently you were together?” Max asked.

“Absolutely,” she answered without shame.

“Did she know about his affairs?”

“I don’t know,” she replied, as though the question had no merit. “That is an item between Bernard and his wife, and it was never once brought up in our conversations. My husband never bothered to tell me about his affairs, but some men will tell their wives. What the situation between Carolyn and Bernard was on that issue, I really can’t even venture a guess.”

“Yet, you’ll defend his innocence in the matter of her death to the hilt. Why is that, Dr. Brockbank?”

“I’ve worked with Bernard for a few years now, detective,” she stated as surely as all her other interviews. “You get to know people over time. Everyone develops their own image of their friends and colleagues, and my relationship with Bernard was on a personal enough level that I would defend him fully against any such accusation.”

“Did you have an affair with Bernard?” Max asked, looking directly at her.

“I don’t know if I want to answer that question,” Ellen replied flatly, never looking away.

“Why not?”

“I don’t really like the way you asked it,” she smiled with a certain rebellious charm, “as if you’re implying that I have. You’ve already condemned one innocent individual. Perhaps I don’t wish to add my name to the list.”

“We’re just conducting as thorough of an investigation as possible.”

“No,” she disagreed. “I think you’ve gone beyond that, detective. You’re on a witch hunt at this point. I believe you’ve probably worn out your welcome.”

“If we place you on the stand, you’ll have to answer our questions.”

“Then put me on the stand,” she answered, undaunted by the threat. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have an entire series of experiments to prepare by morning. While you and your colleague are out collecting witches, the rest of us are still concentrating on the real demons in this world.”

Bernard sat on his bed, with his back leaned up against the wall of his cell. He had a reading lamp, attached to a post on the bed, that he used to provide extra light in the dimly lit dwelling. He had returned only moments earlier from a period of time spent outside in the prison complex. The fresh air had done his mind good, and his thoughts had already drifted deeply into the book he read when his cell mate returned a few minutes later.

James Lithmore looked over at his companion as he entered the cell. He already disliked Bernard. Bernard kept that small 14' x 10' dwelling relatively tidy, and had posted several papers on the walls by his bunk. James walked over and took a seat at the chair across from Bernard's bunk. He glanced up at the book that Bernard read, and noticed that it was a journal.

James had never liked anyone, but what angered him most about people was a lack of respect. Bernard had already demonstrated his lack of respect on their first meeting, and he hadn't made any effort since then to change his ways. James knew that meant he would have to force respect on his companion.

"Ooh, a journal. Anything about me in that?" he asked snidely.

The lack of response took a few moments to settle in James' gut. He expected a smart comment out of the man, but Bernard's failure to even register a response angered him deeper. James realized that he had to do something soon, if Bernard was to know his place in prison life.

Bernard had managed to filter out all the interruptions from beyond what he read, and even learned to ignore the vile person he had been forced to reside with, but James had finally warranted a small response. The spit at the top of his journal angered Bernard, not for the symbolism of the act, but for the attack on his work.

He reached up above him and pulled James pillow down off its bunk, wiping the saliva and its contents off the journal. He sat the book down on his lap, and looked over at James, sitting with a smirk of satisfaction on his face.

"What do you want, James?" Bernard asked with irritation, and the tone of his voice indicated that he didn't really care. "I'm trying desperately to put my personal feelings for you aside, and make this as bearable of a situation as possible for both of us, but you refuse to let it lie at that. You may feel free to lash out verbally in any manner you prefer at me, but I don't recommend you attempt another act such as that."

"Whatcha gonna do about it, Mr. Nobel Prize?" James prodded.

"If you wish to attack my character, I can live with that, but should you attack my books — or any other piece of my work — I consider that a direct attack on my being. You may continue to do just that, but realize what it is you do. If you attack my being, then I must defend myself. I do very cruel things to people I must defend myself against. Make sure you're adequately prepared to suffer the consequences of your actions before you try that again.

"Your simple existence disgusts me in ways I can't describe. You've committed vile acts against innocent children, and in my eyes, have already condemned yourself to an eternity spent

in hell. I would be only too happy to deliver your one way ticket to eternity. Your life hasn't done an ounce of good for a single member of this human race. By the laws of nature, it serves the best interests of our species as a whole if you are eliminated from the genetic tree. I'm a scientist and a Christian, James Lithmore. Don't test my convictions in either faith."

Bernard tossed the pillow over to James, and returned to his reading.

"Whatever," James smiled as he climbed up into his bunk and laid down for a nap. He had achieved the level of irritation he hoped for, and needed only wait for the moment of his next confrontation, which he still needed to plan.

Chapter Nine

It was later in the evening, and Max sensed the hunger growing steadily in his stomach. He had dug up the woman's name earlier in the day, and decided to fly out to Portland to check it immediately. In the rush to the airport, and the frantic pace his mind had worked at during the day, he realized that curiosity had won, and he still hadn't eaten anything since breakfast. He commanded himself to put his hunger aside as he checked in with the ticket booth of the theater.

Max walked down the aisle of the large auditorium. There were a group of fifteen women, working with an instructor on the stage. Only the stage lights were lit, but they made it possible to find his way to the front of the older building. He looked at the women on stage, stretching while the instructor worked with one dancer in particular. He waited for recognition from one of them, and then noticed the woman sitting alone in the third row back from the stage. She was the only person watching the rehearsal.

She looked over momentarily, but never broke her concentration on the group. Max took a seat next to her, glancing up at the stage of dancers. Instinct told him she didn't appreciate the visit.

"Pam Jarvis?" Max asked as he looked over at the woman. She was a very pretty woman, but his first impression of her told him she rarely smiled. She didn't seem like a cheerful person.

"You must be detective Harmon," she replied, without looking over at him again. She spoke in a low voice, so as not to disturb the instructor on stage. She seemed extremely interested in the dancers, for some reason he didn't understand.

"Yes," he answered, wishing he could watch her eyes as he spoke to her. He could tell a great deal about a person, and the information they provided, by watching their eyes.

"I'm sorry you had to come here to see me," she stated, though it didn't sound very sincere, and she seemed more attentive on the stage, "but I don't have a great deal of time on my hands these days. Rehearsal starts in about twenty minutes, and they hardly give us time to eat between getting off the bus and the rehearsal. Even this rehearsal hardly gives one the time to properly stretch the muscles."

"Yes," Max agreed, not really interested in the gripes of her business. "Well, I do appreciate your taking the time to speak with me."

"So, she's dead then?" the woman asked casually.

"Yes," Max answered, suppressing the stunned feelings he had. The woman looked very elegant, her honey blond hair tied in a bun at the back of her head. She wore a great deal of make-up, probably for the show, he told himself. Even with all her beauty, he felt something dark, and ugly about the woman. Her tone of voice assured the feelings.

"I figured it would happen sooner or later," she replied, almost with a smile. He could see the hostility brewing inside of her, though it didn't really take a detective to decipher that.

Max allowed the shock of the woman's response to slip by him. He had not met another such morbid person since Bernard. He still hoped the woman could supply him with some key information, though most of his hopes to close the case were quickly crushed during his interviews.

"You roomed with Carolyn Baxter on her last tour with the ballet?" Max asked, sticking to the purpose of his trip, and not allowing her feelings to halt his work.

"Yes, we roomed together. She didn't finish the tour though," she explained, as if he didn't know.

"That's what Bernard told us. How well did you know her?" Max asked, trying to keep his poker face, as he did with any tough subject. He realized the futility of his efforts, since she really never looked over at him.

"We were very close friends," she said, and he noticed a small smile on her face, which quickly subsided to the same emotionless expression she wore when he first arrived. "I knew her from her previous tour. She was a very good dancer, with a very respectable reputation in the dance community. She was capable of many things, and had a promising career ahead of her."

"She was married following your first tour," Max stated, trying to make the woman aware of what he knew, and verifying his information.

"Yes," she confirmed.

"Did her husband meet her very often?"

"I only recall two times on the second tour that I saw him. We were on a six month tour. He came to see a performance in New York, and then he came when she left the company."

Pam watched the dancers with such a content look, that he wondered if she really cared about the questions he asked. She acted as though she might miss something if she happened to take her eyes away, and it severely agitated Max as he tried to continue.

"They hadn't been married long then?"

"Newlyweds, I believe," she agreed, "married a year and a half. She talked about Bernard like he was the world, and called him almost every day. I met him during the first tour, and saw him at the wedding of course," she replied, looking over suddenly at him "He seemed like a very nice man. Why do you think he killed her, detective Harmon?" she asked, searching for the same motive that had eluded him until now. His suspicions were strong, but he knew he still had no answer for her questions.

"I'm still looking for the motive," Max replied, as though he wasn't optimistic it would ever show itself.

"Well, don't let it slap you in the face," she lashed out with an insult, making him feel suddenly petty in her eyes.

"You know the motive?" He asked, trying to hide his sudden interest.

"I'm a dancer, detective," she continued, rubbing more salt in his wounds. "You investigate homicides. What motive would I know that you wouldn't."

"Well, there are a number of possible reasons to examine," he defended, wondering where the hostility stemmed from.

"I'm sure there are," she agreed, looking back at the dancers. "They were a very complicated couple."

"So why did she quit dancing?" He asked, realizing she wanted him to work for the information she concealed.

"She didn't quit dancing," Pam replied simply, as though the question had little merit. "As I understand it, she continued her dance at home. He built her a beautiful studio in their home, you know," she informed him sarcastically. "Carolyn always had a way of getting the things she wanted. She had everything, a graceful dancer, a renowned artist, and a knowledge of beauty surpassed only by a select few. She didn't need a tour to attain her fame."

"She left it all rather suddenly, wouldn't you say?" Max asked, trying to appeal to her general attitude.

"There were other factors besides just the tour involved," the woman allowed.

"Such as?" he prodded, hoping the point of her game would soon become apparent.

"I believe there was the business of an affair."

"Well, I guess I should act as if that comes as a surprise, but it doesn't," Max replied in a rejected manner. "It seems to be a reoccurring story."

"Well, we're only human, now aren't we?" she answered, as though it meant nothing, but the hostility remained, and he felt that her anger had deepened.

"So then, why did she leave?" he asked, trying to make some sense of what had happened.

"To salvage their marriage," she replied, concentrating on the dancers now more than ever. "They had a big argument about the entire ordeal, and could hardly even speak to one another, but she didn't want to see it end. She quit the company, so she wouldn't have to quit the marriage. It was all very noble of her."

"You don't sound very sincere," Max criticized. He now greatly wished she would reveal the form of her anger.

"I just never understood why it happened, I guess," she finally relented. "You would think that people could respect the commitment they made in their relationships."

"I suppose you're right, Miss Jarvis," Max agreed honestly, "but this small revelation isn't the first of its kind. It seems that Bernard Baxter had a certain weakness for affairs. It's just the same story, seeping out from every stone we turn over. It appears that he never did change his ways. This only illustrated that some people don't change."

"I hate to criticize you," she lied, "but you seem to have jumped to a premature conclusion this time, detective."

"What do you mean?" He asked, a strange look evident on his face. The mind games she played now had him so confused he could hardly think straight.

"I never said anything about Bernard having an affair," she replied, no longer hiding the irritation that his presence caused.

"What are you getting at?"

"I mean it wasn't Bernard that this was all about," she said plainly, never looking at him.

"Bernard wasn't having an affair?" he uttered in confusion.

"Not to my knowledge," she admitted, though she never denied it.

"But you just said..."

"That he came to see her in regards to an affair," Pamela interrupted. "I never said it was his affair that the dispute regarded."

"Carolyn's?" he asked in bewilderment.

"Yes," she replied, seemingly relieved.

"Are you sure?" he asked, as though she hadn't convinced him.

"Quite sure," she replied firmly, and suddenly angrily.

"Why?" Max asked, more out of personal interest, than the fact that he needed to know for his investigation.

"Because it was my fiancée that she had an affair with," she replied, turning again to look him in the eyes. The tears were apparent now, streaming down her soft cheeks.

"I'm sorry," he replied, not really knowing what to say.

"Oh, don't apologize," she said, wiping her tears away. "It's best that I learned he was a creep before I married him. It was a very rough time for all those involved. I had it easier than most. I was able to walk away from my relationship, knowing that I hadn't made a big mistake. Carolyn felt terrible about it, and I couldn't bear to look at her. I blamed her for it."

"What about Carolyn and Bernard?" he inquired.

"I don't really know why he didn't divorce her," she said, as though she had asked herself the same question many times. "He had always seemed like a nice guy, with his head on straight. The affair had a really negative effect on him, and he was suffering from deep depression. He loved her very much. Most women can only dream of such love. He wanted to leave, but I don't think he could bring himself to do it."

"In the end, she walked into the company director's office, and resigned. In one fatal move, she destroyed her entire career, and left the public world of dance forever. Watching Carolyn dance was inspirational," she replied, as though it served her some pleasure to remember. "I looked up to her as my personal mentor, if you must know. I wanted so badly to dance the way she could, but some things you just can't attain on work alone."

“Do you believe he is capable of this?” Max asked, suddenly getting a true glimpse of the emotion that surrounded the couple.

“I don’t know why not,” Pam answered. “I’ll admit to you, detective, there was a point where I had violent plans against the woman. Perhaps she finally drove him beyond rage, or maybe she drove somebody else to that point. I only met the man a few times, and I can’t really tell you.”

“That’s quite all right, ma’am,” he assured her. “I appreciate your time. It has offered my case several new avenues for a motive.”

Max stood up and began walking away from the woman. He stopped as she called out to him, not sure what she wanted to say.

“He was a good looking man.”

“What’s that?” he asked, confused by the remark.

“Bernard,” Pam answered nonchalantly, “her husband. I remember him as a strikingly nice looking individual. I always envied Carolyn,” she admitted with remorse, “for all that she had. I looked at my own accomplishments and treasures as minuscule to hers. I wanted everything she had. I wanted her life — and yes — even her husband at one time. I was so busy coveting the treasures that she possessed, I didn’t realize that she had stolen away with the only treasure I could call my own. Can you imagine how that hurt? Everyone’s talking about what a wonderful person Carolyn was, but you should dig a little further. I’m not the only person she hurt in this manner. It was a big façade, and I was too busy admiring the beauty to see beyond it all. Perhaps she finally took something from someone, and they couldn’t stand idly by.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Max answered, and left the auditorium.

Bernard lay on his bunk, his eyes closed. He had drifted quietly to sleep, enjoying the rare solitude of the prison chambers. He had still not reached a level of deep sleep, but fallen far enough from consciousness not to hear the sound of the movement in the bunk above him. The quiet tranquility hardly registered a bump as his cellmate’s feet dropped effortlessly to the hard floor of the cell below.

James had fought the growing conflict within himself for far too long. He could no longer suppress his urges, just as he couldn’t before, with the others. He had always blamed the fault on society for finding his desires unacceptable. There were many in the world who loved others, and he had never viewed his love indifferent from that. He had learned at a young age that his feelings were wrong, the first time his parents had caught him with a younger sibling.

His punishment then had seemed harsh, especially to a young boy trying to explore his feelings. He took his beating, but could not change his ways. He looked at every individual as a means of exploration. His father had fought him in that respect, but in the end surrendered to something he could not control.

The foster homes were all a blur to James now, even as he prepared to take another victim. A society that dealt less severely than his own parents, taught him ways to deal with his urges, burying them deep inside. All that just seemed to allow the fury to grow, until intense moments such as now. He had learned how to retain his role as a model citizen, and where he could disrobe of the mask he wore to “fit in.”

He was twenty-five when society finally realized the truth about him, and the long line of innocence he had managed to destroy in the process. His punishment this time, to place him in a building filled with persons just like himself. He had finally learned that there were others with his “disease,” who held the same deranged fantasies. It seemed to comfort him, to know that he was not alone.

From this new cache of resources, he learned even more. He learned new ways to get away with his crimes, and to continue his deviant acts. He learned about the emotions that he could experience at such times, and he learned how to make sure his victims never breathed a word about it.

The law didn’t catch him again until he had shut up two more victims, but this time, permanently. His case would travel through the meandering system of courts for another eight years, and that was only if he exercised the minimal number of appeals required by the state. With a little luck, the death penalty would be found cruel and unusual punishment by the supreme court once again. At the worst, he would spend another twenty years in prison, before he finally earned another shot at parole.

In prison, James had learned many new things. The first, was that survival here required strength, and for that, he had found a curious new joy. The steroids gave him endurance, unbeatable strength, and something he had never known before, a physical advantage. He no longer had to limit his fantasies to those who could not defend themselves. Prison had also taught him that there were other sources to achieve his pleasure. He knew how to hurt people, and his size and strength made him a suitable opponent to any other man in the facility.

He approached his new cellmate carefully, preparing to overtake the man before he could respond. It was very dark, but his eyes had adjusted to the darkness. He could see the level of sleep that Bernard rested at, and his pulse seemed to quicken as he made his move. He climbed silently over Bernard, to where his face was directly above his present victim. He had learned swiftness early on in prison, and knew that an aggressive opponent made sure he attacked first.

As he prepared for the act, he could not help but crack a smile. His hand came to rest over Bernard’s mouth ever so gently, and the brutal force of the attack left its quarry in an unrelenting set of circumstances. In a matter of seconds, the struggle was over, as the new victim fell silently unconscious.

Max walked into the office of Cameron McBride. Fred already sat in the seat across from the desk, and Max took his place beside his partner. He looked up at his two companions, and realized that they had eagerly awaited his return. He also wished that he had found the information he was searching for — and had gained new insight — but knew he didn't have anything to throw it over the edge.

"Not much," Max answered before either man could pose the question.

"We still need a motive. I thought that Miss Jarvis could supply us with that, it sounded promising over the phone."

"She did offer some interesting information, but it isn't anything like we had hoped for. It appears that Carolyn Baxter didn't shy away from the extra-marital affairs either. Pamela Jarvis painted a slightly different picture of our victim than the others who knew her."

"Jealous Husband?" Fred suggested.

"It won't carry very far," Cameron commented. "We're going to paint him as an adulterer, and we need that for the jury to find fault in him. If we show that it was a mutual thing — where they both did it — it minimizes the desired effect."

"That's what I was thinking," Max agreed, not really wanting to admit that they shared an opinion. "It also opens a possibility that one of her betrayed lovers could get in the house. All that could create a greater backfire, if the defense questions the witness intensely. I'm afraid Miss Jarvis might create some compassion for Bernard in the eyes of the jury. It's your call, but you might pay dearly for it. I can't see where bringing her on as a witness can do anything for our trial."

"Carolyn left the ballet company of her own accord, to return to her husband and mend her marriage. Pamela hinted that Carolyn had done this sort of thing before, and I've noted that several of her male acquaintances have acted nervous when I questioned them about her and Bernard's relationship. I suggest we drop the entire line of questioning."

"Agreed," Cameron noted with no apprehension. "It doesn't matter very much at this point anyhow. The trial begins in two days, and we can't put much together on this angle by then. We have the jury selected, or we could select potential people for that, but it's too late now. We're still lacking a solid motive, but he still plans to take the stand. If he does, I'll get enough out of him for a motive. The evidence is clear, and all the jury needs is a little prodding to believe it."

"It seems almost like a cult," Max pointed out.

"We'll portray that same image to our jury," Cameron noted. "We're all set to get started on this case in court, and our game plan is decisive. Keep looking for more, but we're pretty sure on this. We'll nail him."

As Max looked away, he wished he could share in Cameron's optimism.

James Lithmore opened his eyes and looked up at the ceiling of his cell. He didn't know what had stirred his sleep, and for a moment, fought desperately to recall the events of the previous evening.

As he turned his head to look around him, he felt the sudden shock wave erupting within his skull. He reached for his head, but the movement of his arm sent a wave of pain up the entirety of his back. The overall soreness in his body seemed to accompany every move he attempted, and he finally gave up to a simple glance around the room.

"Good morning, sleepy head," Bernard called out from the chair in the corner of the cell. "How was your sleep?"

"What happened?"

"You don't recall? Why, James, that hurts," Bernard replied with an insincere sadness. "Such a tender moment as last eve, and it simply fades from your memory? I had so hoped that it were as good for you as it was for me. I doubt that I can ever look at you with a grain of respect again. You just used me, and cast away the memories like so much garbage. Perhaps the next time you join me in sleep, I shall not be so willing."

James moaned as the previous night slowly returned to the depths of his thoughts. He remembered so little, after he climbed from his bed.

"What did you do to me?" he asked, searching for some recollection.

Bernard placed his book down at the make shift desk and walked over beside the bunk where James lay. He stood beside the pillow, his face only inches from James. There was a spark of anger in the threatening glare.

"I didn't kill you."

"You'll pay for this, Dr. Baxter."

"No, James, I will not," Bernard stated simply. "Now, you listen to me you perverted little bastard piece of cowardice," he whispered quietly. "I warned you once verbally, not to touch my personal belongings. Last night, I issued you a one-time physical warning, not to touch my being. You only receive one of those. I lost my patience with you long ago. If you threaten me now, or so much as look at me awkwardly, then you have forced me to launch my final defensive strategy.

"Quite honestly, James, I view my life as much more worthwhile than your own. You have brought nothing but pain and suffering to those around you, and I attempt to find cures for people's pain and suffering. If the choice of one of our deaths is eminent, and the decision is placed in my hands, then the next time, you will not awake to the sight of this cell.

"I will send you down to the deepest depths of hell without a second thought. Your destiny now lies in your own hands. That is all."

James looked at his cellmate with shock. The sudden fire that appeared in the man's eyes disappeared as quickly as it had come, then he turned and returned to the seat across from the

bunk. He paid James no attention at all as he picked up his book and began where he had left off. As James attempted to reach for his head again, he realized why. It would be some time before he could muster the strength to climb from his bunk, let alone plan his revenge for the now sworn enemy.

Chapter Ten

Judge Hayden Rutherford took a long sip out of the bottle of chalky tasting antacid. The gritty liquid left a film on his teeth and the same sick taste he had grown accustomed to during his years on the bench. He placed the bottle back inside his desk and walked out the back door of his chambers to the large courtroom. He walked down his private hall, as he considered it. He only had to share it with the four other judges who worked in the building. It led directly to each of the courtrooms, and was clear of all the reporters and crowds that packed into the other halls of the building.

Hayden felt relief that the state had a law against cameras inside the courtroom, but it was full of reporters sitting in the audience. He knew there were court artists as well, and one way or another his face would make the evening news. He had limited the number of people he allowed inside the court today. He didn't look forward to conducting a trial of this magnitude, but there was no longer any way around it.

He waited until his name was called and the people gathered inside stood respectful of his title, then he walked through the back door positioned just a few feet to the left of his bench. He noticed Bernard first, staring off at the window on the east side of the court. He stood respectfully, but Hayden noticed that his mind seemed elsewhere. What an odd man, Hayden thought to himself, on trial for murder, and his thoughts weren't even in the room.

Hayden sat down at the bench and asked the people to be seated. He never looked out into the audience, as he hated to cross eyes with reporters. The court clerk called out the case number and name, and Hayden took the cue as his opportunity to speak.

He looked over at the jury, they had spent three days selecting it, and he knew it was a fair and honorable group they had assembled for the trial. The real fun began today, Hayden knew. The prosecution had spent some time preparing for this, and their opening arguments would signal that Bernard had actually entered the debate phase of the trial.

Hayden motioned to District Attorney Cameron McBride, who stood up from behind his table. He had one of his greatest trial attorneys from his staff working the trial with him, but he would take the spotlight for the prosecution. It was a strong case, and he knew he couldn't fail in a guilty verdict from the box of people he now addressed.

"Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury," Cameron announced as he walked up to the box to talk directly with the group of peers. "You have been called to pass judgment on the guilt or innocence of the defendant, Dr. Bernard Baxter. This is indeed a high profile case, and you will no doubt see some incredible testimony. I believe you will find Dr. Baxter guilty of the crimes we have charged him with.

"As this case proceeds, I want you to listen to the evidence, and the alibis. We will present only what we know is a fact. You will not experience any surprise testimony, or

incredible theories about what may have happened the night that Carolyn Baxter died. All you will hear is evidence, strong evidence that is quite undeniable.

“During this trial, we plan to present what we know. Listen to what we know thus far. I will bring up numerous witnesses to present this in a factual format, but think about this now.”

“Bernard Baxter,” Cameron said, turning around to look over to where Bernard sat, “claims to have slept through the murder of his wife. We’ll present numerous pictures of the scene he allegedly slept through.

“The good doctor had invested in one of the top security systems on the market. When the police arrived at his home, this alarm had still not once registered a break in.

“We have pictures of Dr. Bernard Baxter, as we found him that evening, covered in the blood of his wife. The blood that flowed from wounds which the state medical examiner describes as, and I quote, caused by a sharp instrument — a sword — judging from the size and route of the wound. How odd that Bernard Baxter is an avid collector of swords, one of which is still missing from his collection.”

“Perhaps you would like a motive,” Cameron suggested, turning around again to face the group of people. “Bernard Baxter stands to make an unthinkable amount of money if his technology actually works. Many people believe that it will. He would have shared that fortune with his wife, if she were still alive.

“I think that when we are finished presenting this case, you will find that the only decision you need to make is how long of a cord to use when he is hung. We believe that this is a prime example of a premeditated, and well thought out murder. We also believe you will agree with this statement, beyond any reasonable doubt.”

“Thank you, your honor,” Cameron replied to the bench as he walked back across the courtroom to his seat. Hayden waited for Cameron to sit before he looked over to where Daren sat, clearly ready to make his own case to the jury. Hayden disliked both men, though he couldn’t decide who he despised more. He had an unnerving feeling that before the end of the trial, he would know for sure.

“Mr. Holt,” Hayden commanded from his seat. “You’re opening arguments please.”

“Yes,” Daren replied, standing from his seat and walking gingerly over to where the jury sat. He looked over at them as seriously as he could, and decided how he would address them.

“You’re all very intelligent individuals. I am sure that you will all be very fair, and weigh this evidence for what it is, unfounded. What you must remember during this trial, is that what happened to Carolyn Baxter, commands a great deal of emotion, but you can’t allow those emotions to cloud your sense of fairness.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, don’t allow the anger that you will experience upon reviewing pictures of these crimes, to create a false illusion that hurts an innocent man.

Remember this as well, he has experienced just as much anger from this — if not more — than any one of us can possibly imagine.

“One person in this courtroom knows for sure, right now, if Bernard Baxter is guilty or innocent. That person is the man who is charged with this crime. That person is the same man who woke from his sleep to find his cherished wife dead beside him.

“You want facts?” Daren asked them. “Consider this. If Bernard Baxter did kill his wife, but the alarm never registered a break in, then why have the police never uncovered a murder weapon. Where would he have hidden it? He’s covered in her blood, in their scenario, and yet they find no blood in any other region of the house.”

“I agree that this crime is a catastrophe,” Daren expressed to the jury, “but it is also a catastrophe to condemn an innocent man of killing his wife. Judge the defendant on his actions, and on the good that he has done. The prosecution will try and make you angry at my client, by using something he had no control over, to destroy him.

“The media is already ruining the reputation of a great man. He has no motive. Look at the lifestyle that he lived prior to this incident. Bernard Baxter is not a man who cherishes material wealth. He isn’t a man of greed. His work is aimed at sharing a great gift with the world.

“Bernard Baxter loved his wife. You won’t find any evidence of past marital problems. The prosecution can put whoever they want on that stand, but the people who knew the Baxters best, will not be able to honestly tell you that their relationship was anything other than model.

“The murder of Carolyn Baxter was a very well planned and thought out crime. From the eyes of a criminal, it is a masterpiece, and the work of a disturbed individual, who didn’t plan to get caught. It is not, however, the work of Bernard Baxter.”

“Thank you, your honor,” Daren replied as he returned to his own seat.

Hayden allowed a silence to fall over the room for several seconds before he continued. He was just about to address the prosecution when the interruption came. Hayden was an older man, but his sight was still very sharp, and he recognized the man instantly as he peaked in the door.

The man entered the courtroom from the doors serving the audience. The bailiff had recognized him as a member of Daren Holt’s staff, and a gopher for the defense. He walked quietly up to a seat behind Bernard, and handed up a small document to Daren.

Daren took the sheet, thumbed it over, and handed it to Bernard. He studied the paper carefully, then leaned over and spoke quietly near Daren’s ear. A look of relief on Daren’s face, that had appeared after reading the paper, dissipated quickly as Bernard spoke, but he turned back to continue talking a moment later.

Hayden had watched the entire scene with anxiety, not willing to even venture a guess at what this was about, but he noticed Daren looking up anxiously at him as he again called the

session to order. A moment later, he stood up from his table and locked eyes with Judge Rutherford.

“If it please your honor,” Daren said with a slight hesitation, “the defense wishes to address the court on a new piece of evidence.”

“You know the routine, Mr. Holt,” Hayden remarked with a somber irritation. “You will be given your chance to present your evidence after the prosecution has had its own opportunity to present their side of this case.”

“You honor,” Daren persisted, “this is a new development, which the prosecution will undoubtedly be briefed on later today, but we feel that it might save a great deal of everyone’s time if this is presented now. I realize that this contradicts common protocol, but the information was not available during the grand jury investigation, and the information indicates a major flaw in the prosecution’s case, and a strong argument for my client’s innocence.”

“Mr. Holt,” Hayden replied, wondering why he had picked Daren to represent Bernard, “this is highly irregular.”

“If the prosecution has any objections,” Daren allowed, “we will withdraw the request and wait until they have finished with their own witnesses. In the interests of wasting invaluable time presenting a case — that you may throw out upon witnessing the new evidence — all we ask for is a little leniency.”

“Mr. McBride?” Hayden asked the prosecutor, indicating his hesitant feeling in the tone of his voice.

“Is this in regards to the blood samples?” Cameron asked from his seat.

“It is,” Daren replied, still watching the judge.

“Your honor,” Cameron replied, speaking clearly and professionally in the interests of furthering his career, “the prosecution has no arguments with the presentation of any data from the samples, provided we are given a chance to confirm the results with our own staff. We would ask only that we are offered leniency in cross examining the evidence.”

“What sort of leniency, Mr. prosecutor?” Hayden asked, unsure of what tricks would play out before him.

“Your honor,” Cameron replied frankly, “we have reason to believe that the information obtained from those blood samples may be a fabrication by the accused. Dr. Baxter has an extensive knowledge of the human body, and may easily have tainted his own blood with a false alibi. All we ask, sir, is that this be taken into account before you make any rulings on the evidence, and that we are allowed to thoroughly explore the possibilities of tampering on the part of the accused.”

“Do you have any objections to this, Mr. Holt?” Hayden asked, looking back at Daren.

Daren glanced over at Bernard who shook his head in response. His face remained expressionless, even as Daren spoke.

"That is satisfactory with the defense, your honor," Daren replied as graciously as he could.

"How do you wish to present this evidence?" Hayden asked, his reservations apparent.

"If it please the court, we wish to call an expert witness to testify before the court on the findings of Dr. Baxter's blood samples."

"How long?"

"She can be here in an hour," Daren informed. "She's just assembling several visuals to present the information to the court."

"Very well," Hayden replied, "we will recess for an hour, at which time this trial will resume, expert witness or not."

"She'll be here, your honor," Daren assured the irritated man.

The woman walked up and repeated the oath at the front of the courtroom. She sat down in the booth and looked up at the defense table. She had pulled her blonde hair back in a braid, and changed into a suit coat and skirt for the appearance in court.

Anne looked as if she were in her early thirties, though that cheated her actual age by almost eight years. She had brought several large diagrams and charts from her workplace, and handed them to Daren before taking the stand. The judge addressed her first, before turning her over to Daren for questioning.

"Will you state your name for the court please?"

"Anne Ahmer," the woman replied, accenting the words with her soft, feminine voice.

Daren waited for a nod from Hayden before beginning the line of questions that Bernard had prepared for her.

"Will you state your occupation, Dr. Ahmer?" Daren asked, as he walked up from the table, to stand before her.

"I'm a qualitative analysis specialist for Analytical Solutions here in Boise. I do contract work through our firm on unknown samples."

"What is your background in the analytical field?"

"I received my Bachelor's in Chemistry from Texas A&M, spent three years working at an analytical firm before Dr. Meyers from the University of Michigan recruited me as a Ph.D. candidate in analytical chemistry. I received my doctorate eight years ago, moved here and began Analytical Solutions with another former colleague seven years ago."

"How large is your outfit?" Daren asked insightfully.

"We handle several large contracts for leading industry members, and act as a third party laboratory in data disputes."

"What is a third party laboratory?"

“When two contract labs give conflicting results on identical samples, we are chosen to come in and determine who is at fault. We’re certified at Analytical Solutions in over five hundred analytical methods, and specialize in biological unknowns.”

“What is the most common form of analysis you do?”

“We run GC/Mass Spectrometry most commonly, because it’s the most precise form of analysis on the market for carbon based samples.”

“Carbon based?”

“Biological and organic,” she answered simply.

“When did you first meet Dr. Bernard Baxter?”

“He came to Analytical Solutions about four years ago, and signed us to a large contract,” she answered, very relaxed and comfortable speaking in front of the court. Daren could tell by the way she spoke that she knew her work as well as anyone could. “It was back in the days when he was still searching for a common link in all cancers on the genetic level. They were working on genetic separation techniques, and ventured out beyond his field of expertise, into my field of expertise.”

“How long were you affiliated with Bernard?”

“Bernard signed a contract with us for almost two years, but after about a year, the number of samples we received dropped drastically. The results didn’t look very promising, and they abandoned their research for a new approach.”

“You haven’t worked with him since then?”

“Oh no,” she corrected him quickly, “we still work together, but the samples come in spurts. He can handle most of the basic stuff, but when it gets too complex, he comes to me for a professional opinion.”

“Why is that?”

“Because I specialized in Mass Spectrometry, and studied different techniques for identifying unknowns and proving exact identities.”

“What does the GC/Mass Spectrometry instrument do?”

“As a Gas Chromatograph, it separates compounds from one another, and as a Mass Spec, it gives a chemical fingerprint for a molecule. Each molecule has its own unique fingerprint, just like you and I do. Another bonus, is that it can determine the concentrations more accurately than a Gas Chromatograph alone, because the fingerprint lets you know if there are other impurities in your sample peak.”

“Why are you here today, Dr. Ahmer?”

“Bernard requested that I analyze some samples for him to present in this trial.”

“What were these samples?” Daren asked, feeling that the questions seemed to flow quite well.

“They were blood samples, taken from him by a forensics specialist for the state, following the death of his wife. He had them taken at two hour intervals for about ten hours.”

“Did he tell you why he wanted you to analyze them?”

“He told me that he believed he had been drugged, and asked me to look for any biological compounds in his blood that should not have been there.”

“And what did you find?” Daren asked, now as interested in the questions as the rest of the court. He hadn’t had adequate time to prepare Anne for the trial, but she had thus far shown to be a model witness.

“I found two substances in his bloodstream that weren’t in my libraries. Both showed sites on the molecules of biological activity. I tracked both over time, and found some interesting trends to the data. I spent some time drawing out theoretical structures for the molecules, and then went to the national research database for new compounds to determine their source.”

“Did you find anything?”

“I located a positive match on both chemicals, from a pharmaceutical research facility in Maine. The compounds were named Thoricidian A and Thoricidian A Intermediate. I contacted the company that tested the materials, and obtained copies of control studies run in lab. Thoricidian A acts as both a tranquilizer and a sedative, but it never made it into production.”

“Why is that?”

“It was hoped that Thoricidian would find its way into surgical practices because of physical characteristics of the drug. It appears that the intermediate form of the drug has some interesting side effects of maintaining a steady, but slow heart rate, allowing the patient to spend longer times in surgery with less physiological shock to the body. It showed promise for a number of surgeries, where time is a factor, but it failed in expanded clinical studies on animals.”

“How did it fail?” Daren asked, reading from the card he held.

“It induced a short term coma in many of the subjects, though this wore off after a few days. The researchers thought they could work around this, since it allowed the patient a period of time to heal following surgery, with little fear of movement. They anticipated recovery times to increase, but then they found some other interesting side effects of the medication.”

“Such as?”

“Mortality spread across the board on a number of the specimens,” she replied frankly, “They attempted to focus on a particular reason for the deaths, but it seems that a number of factors were involved. Since the chemical exists in two forms, and changes during the time it’s in the bloodstream, they felt that there might be other forms, or radicals — as we would refer to them — that could generate other reactions of biological importance.

“It appears that factors ranging from blood type, stomach pH, other medications, and level of physical activity all showed up as possible reasons for the mortality. They designed

several other projects to further study the problem, and found that it was a random and often sporadic result — not at all predictable — and the funding for the project halted.”

“How common were the deaths?” Daren inquired, not sure why he should ask.

“Less than two percent, but much too high for a pharmaceutical company interested in developing medications to aide doctors, not put them out of business. There was too much risk involved, and they abandoned the research to try something else.”

“Did they ever test the drugs on human subjects?”

“Yes,” Anne replied. “The first set of clinical studies in animals showed significant promise, and they ran a study on a group of twenty healthy human subjects. It was in the expanded studies, where they looked at the drug in a greater variety of subjects, altering environments and physiological conditions of the animals, that they found the sudden mortality showing up. They only ran the one study on human subjects. Then they halted it when they found the problems in the animals.”

“What’s the significance of this, Dr. Ahmer?” Daren asked, hoping she could tie it together.

“The results from the study on human subjects had very little variance from one subject to another. Their greatest interest was in the length of times the drug rendered the patient unconscious, and unresponsive to physical stimuli. No surgeon wants his patient waking in the middle of brain surgery, so this was important to the researchers. The researchers monitored the levels of the two forms of Thoricidian in the bloodstream, and all twenty regained consciousness from physical stimuli around the same levels of Thoricidian A in the bloodstream, when eighty percent of the compound had taken on the Thoricidian A Intermediate form. The drug is administered at 100 mgs Thoricidian A per liter of blood, or 600 mgs for the typical subject in the study. At a range of 18-20 mgs/liter, all twenty of the subjects returned to consciousness.

“This data, along with the formation of the intermediate — which is relatively stable for a period of ten hours — allows us to calculate the approximate dosage and time that the Thoricidian was administered.”

“How approximate?”

“Within half an hour of the time of administration, and within 5 mgs/liter of the amount administered,” she replied with certainty.

“If it please the court, your honor,” Daren uttered, turning away from the witness, “we wish to submit two charts of data.”

A minute later, after examination by the judge and prosecution, Daren placed the two graphs on an easel beside the witness stand.

“As you can see in the graphs,” Anne continued, “the amounts of Thoricidian A and Thoricidian A Intermediate that I found in Bernard Baxter’s blood match the study conditions almost identically. The person who administered the drug knew how to use it.”

“In your opinion, doctor, and from the research you have reviewed, is it possible that Bernard Baxter awoke at 2:30 a.m., the approximate time of the murder of Carolyn Baxter?”

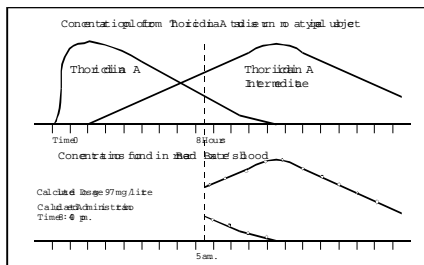
“These study results would indicate that such an act would be impossible. Levels of Thoridicidien would have been almost twice the amount found to maintain unconsciousness in the other patients.”

“Where did you obtain these samples?” Daren asked with a smile.

“From the state forensics lab,” she replied, as professionally as any defense attorney could ask for, “where they were stored after Bernard requested samples be taken.”

“Why do you think he requested this,” Daren asked next, trying to ask the shocker before the prosecution could.

“Thoridicidien has a side effect like many other tranquilizers. You wake up feeling very strange, tired, and even groggy. There’s a mood of depression experienced by most who took



part in the study. It leaves you feeling slower, and confused. Quite frankly, you feel as though you’ve been drugged.”

“Thank you, Dr. Ahmer. That will be all, your honor.”

Hayden looked over at Cameron McBride with a spark of anger in his eyes. He disliked many things, and a sloppy case against a high level personality was one of those things. He wished he could deliver the slap in the face himself, but knew the media would handle that for him.

“Would the prosecution care to cross-examine the witness?” Hayden asked in a tone that revealed his disappointment in Cameron.

“Yes, your honor,” Cameron replied, without a hint of surprise on his face. He had already looked over the copies of the charts given him, and had no intention of backing down.

He had talked with several different drug specialists prior to today. He had anticipated a move like this, and had learned the necessary information to counter the new claims. He knew not to underestimate Bernard Baxter, and Bernard was about to learn not to underestimate him. He stood up with his copies of the graphs, and walked to the front of the courtroom.

“Thank you for presenting this information, Dr. Ahmer,” Cameron began.

“You’re welcome,” Anne replied politely, but in bewilderment.

“How would someone such as Bernard Baxter make this drug?”

“Your honor,” Daren stood up immediately, “we object to that statement. It insinuates guilt on the part of my client.”

“I’m just asking how a capable person would make this drug, your honor,” Cameron argued.

“Let the court decide blame, Mr. Prosecutor,” Hayden warned. “I don’t want these sort of mind games in my courtroom.”

“I apologize, your honor,” Cameron allowed with as much respect as he could allow. “I’ll rephrase the question. If I had the ability to make this, how would I go about it?”

“The drug is prepared under nitrogen, in a very laborious process. It cannot come in contact with air until it is solidified as a salt. It requires extensive work to produce it, and certain aspects of the procedure are unreleased, to guard against patent infringements. The details of its synthesis are still guarded. Only the original makers could produce it.”

“What about a gifted individual, who demonstrates exceptional abilities above and beyond the average person,” He persisted.

“You’re grasping at impossibilities.”

“Am I now?” he asked with apprehension.

“Yes,” Anne answered firmly.

“What were the levels of Thoracidian in Bernard’s blood when the first sample was taken?”

“21 mgs/liter of Thoracidian A, and 76 mgs/liter of Thoracidian A intermediate.”

“Didn’t you just say that in the study held by this pharmaceutical firm concluded that the concentrations for consciousness in the study were between 18 and 20 mgs/liter.”

“Yes,” she replied, looking at her notes to see what he misunderstood, “but 21 is hardly a significantly higher concentration than the results from their study.”

“It is on the higher end of things,” Cameron compromised.

“Yes,” she agreed.

“Bernard Baxter contacted the police regarding this incident at 4:08 a.m., and your first sample was taken at exactly 4:58 a.m.,” Cameron replied with a straight face. “I know this,” he

paused, “because I have copies of the documents that Bernard had my forensics investigator on the scene sign when it was taken, and a copy of the call he made, which registered when he contacted the police.

“There’s a window of time of approximately fifty minutes between your sampling, and the time he was conscious enough to call authorities. Fifty minutes prior to this sampling, what would the concentration of Thoricidian A have been?”

Anne looked down at her notes, suddenly realizing where the conversation had led her. She realized the obvious problem with the results of her studies, and sat speechlessly looking for an answer.

“I’m guessing,” he answered for her, “but I think I’m at least in the ballpark on this one, that the concentration was around 27 mgs/liter of Thoricidian A. Is that a fair approximation?” Cameron asked with arrogance.

“Yes, but it doesn’t mean that this is fabricated,” she replied.

“I’m not suggesting that he wasn’t conscious at 4:08 a.m. when he made the call,” Cameron assured her. “I believe he was, and the concentrations of this drug in his system were 27 mgs/liter. I believe that Bernard Baxter is an exceptional individual, capable of many things. I also believe this information has absolutely no merit as an alibi. Is it safe to say that the studies of this drug weren’t very extensive, Dr. Ahmer?”

“They found flaws with the drug, and discontinued...”

“It wasn’t an extensive study,” Cameron interrupted again, suddenly showing anger for the witness.

“No, it wasn’t,” she answered, the distaste in her mouth for the man growing ever steadily.

“Is it safe to say that given the circumstances — and the limited amount of information about this drug — that Bernard Baxter is indeed immune to the effects of the drug.”

“I wouldn’t venture that far,” she stated, trying to demonstrate her opinion on the matter.

“He was conscious at 27 mgs/liter, more than 40% higher than any of the other subjects in the study. If he’s conscious at this point, how can you justify saying that he wasn’t conscious around 2:30 a.m.?”

“The concentration would have been more than double the results in the study conducted by the makers of Thoricidian A,” she replied calmly. “It’s highly improbable.”

“But you can’t rule it out, can you?”

“No,” Anne answered quietly.

“Why not?” he pressed, feeling his grip on the trial tighten.

“Because the only way to do it is to run tests on Bernard, and that is illegal in these United States. It is not approved by the FDA, and has shown to cause death in some studies in laboratory animals. Proving it would endanger the life of Dr. Baxter.”

“A moment to address the court, your honor,” Cameron requested.

“As you wish, Mr. McBride,” Hayden agreed, as he had suddenly developed a new respect for the attorney.

“This evidence is impressive,” Cameron uttered as he walked back towards his desk, “but we can’t use any of it in this trial. The defense proposes that Bernard is incapable of this murder because he’s under the influence of this drug. I suggest that we can’t trust the information, because he has already illustrated an ability to overcome the effects.

“He also has the knowledge to do the sort of work to make this drug in his own laboratory, and could have planned this entire thing out for an alibi prior to his wife’s murder. This is all very elaborate, but I request that the court ignore the evidence as unsubstantiated, and unreliable.”

“Your point is taken into advisement, Mr. McBride,” Hayden answered with a bit of admiration, “but I won’t throw it out completely. Your point with the limited studies of this drug are relevant to this court, but we cannot deny its existence in his bloodstream.

“I also advise the jury to take into consideration the levels of drug in Bernard’s bloodstream at the time he contacted police. This information will be weighed against other evidence, just the same, and I leave the decision of its importance up to the jury.

“Your arguments are very strong, and I advise you to find other evidence to substantiate your own theories, just as the defense did with this information. Unless you have anything else, I would like to get on with this trial.”

Cameron took the defeat lightly, realizing that his point was clearly stated before the court. He had already proven his abilities against Bernard Baxter, and that meant the defense would be careful of displaying sloppy information like this again.

“I have only one more request, your honor, to finish my cross-examination of this witness.”

“By all means,” Hayden replied, “continue, Mr. Prosecutor.”

“Dr. Ahmer,” Cameron said, turning back to the witness, “at any time since you’ve known Dr. Bernard Baxter, have you had a relationship of a sexual nature with him?”

“Your honor,” Daren jumped in defense of the witness.

“It’s a legitimate question,” Cameron replied before Daren could say anything.

“He’s badgering the witness,” Daren responded.

“Mr. McBride, you will withdraw the question,” Hayden ordered.

“Might the prosecution request a reason for such a ruling?”

“You’ve demonstrated absolutely no reason to ask such a personal question of a witness,” Hayden said in outrage. “I can’t have you asking such questions of every person the defense calls on without substantial grounds to warrant a reply.”

“Withdrawn,” Cameron conceded.

"I will not have witnesses treated harshly by anyone in my court without reasonable cause for such an action," Hayden scorned. "Dr. Ahmer, the court apologizes for Mr. McBride's flagrant disregard for the emotions of this courtroom. I can't always control the mouths of the lawyers in my domain, but I can punish them if it happens again," he threatened.

Daren sat back down, satisfied with the judge's remarks about the question. he looked over to where Cameron stood, allowing Hayden to calm before continuing.

"The prosecution wishes to reserve the right to recall this witness again at a later date," Cameron answered calmly to the angry judge.

"Why wait until a later date?" Hayden inquired, the look on his face illustrating that his mood had not changed.

"I need to first build a significant enough case to warrant a reply to my previous question," Cameron answered the judge frankly.

"The prosecution will note that it is really testing the patience of this court," Hayden warned with a sharp voice, "but warranting such an occurrence in the future, the court will grant the prosecution permission to reintroduce the witness to the courtroom."

"Thank you, your honor," Cameron answered as he started to shift through the papers on his desk.

"Your honor," Anne spoke up from her seat, "I have no problem answering Mr. McBride's question now."

"I will advise you that it is not necessary to reply," Hayden stressed.

"I have nothing to hide."

"Then, go ahead," Hayden answered.

"During the number of years I have worked with Bernard Baxter," she said, looking over at her long time acquaintance, "our relationship has always remained completely professional. I have a deep respect for him, and his work. I also knew his wife very well. My husband and I are happily married, and I have never once been unfaithful to him in our many years of marriage. Bernard never once made me feel uncomfortable, or made any remarks or actions to lead me to believe that his intentions were any more than those of a good friend. Our families are close, but my level of morality is not one to be questioned."

"Thank you," Cameron replied from his seat. His face showed the satisfaction he felt from getting Hayden to relent to his question. "We have no further questions of this witness."

Bernard walked into the conference room with Daren following quickly behind. He had requested a short meeting after the morning's fireworks. The afternoon of forensics specialists, police officers and other crime scene specialists had kept the prosecution away from more of Bernard's colleagues, but he knew that when the trial continued Monday, they would slowly start introducing more.

"I need you to speak with every woman I've worked with that is on the list of their witnesses," Bernard announced once Daren had closed the door to the small drab grey room.

"What about, Bernard?" Daren asked, noting the seriousness in his client's voice.

"I want them prepared for the same harassment as Mr. McBride delivered to Dr. Ahmer. Anne is a very close friend of mine, and appeared today as a favor to me. I could have had her send a male colleague of hers to share the information. If the prosecution wants to throw mud, I'd like to keep their target list down to just myself."

"Why don't we just allow the women you work with to tell the truth?" Daren observed innocently. "The prosecution will just come out looking like ruthless cutthroats."

"Because you might not like their replies," Bernard answered in a somber tone, warning him with the expression on his face. "I don't want to take anyone down with me. There's a good chance they'll convict me of this crime, and I don't want the media to have any factual confirmation to throw on the fires. These people are well respected individuals in the community, both scientific and social. You let them know what they're in for. I thought the prosecution would try to keep this whole ordeal respectable, but I now realize that I was wrong. I would hope we could harbor them from answering those questions."

"We should be able to convince Hayden that it isn't proper," Daren replied seriously. "If any of them admit to carnal relations with a murder suspect, they could be called accessories. I can direct them to plead the fifth. They'll take some heat for it, but I doubt Hayden would call it contempt. The media harassment could become stiff. By refusing to answer, you don't look very innocent."

"Inform them of the consequences, but let them know what's in store when they take the stand. I don't want any surprises for these people. I have an obligation to protect them from my personal troubles."

"Very well then, Bernard. I'll start speaking with them immediately, starting with the first on the prosecution's list. Do you want to let me know anyone in particular?"

"Talk to them all," Bernard replied. "It's best if you have no idea who might be a guilty party in my affairs."

"Agreed."

Chapter Eleven

Bernard walked into the conference room of the prison, feeling almost no surprise to find Max Harmon waiting for him. He walked over and took his seat in the chair across the table from the man. Max looked up at him and smiled. Bernard didn't see him smile much.

"I've got it," Max stated plainly.

"What's that?" Bernard asked, seemingly intrigued by the visit.

"Your motive."

"Is it money, or sex, or power?" Bernard offered plainly.

"I believe it's sex," Max answered with a smirk. He noticed the emotion in Bernard's face seemingly fade away.

"I am not a man who views the value of a life less than the value of sex. You should know that by now," Bernard replied in an insulting manner.

"Carolyn had an affair," Max replied, watching for a hint of anger.

"That will be very hard to prove," Bernard said sincerely.

"You don't deny it?"

"Should I?" Bernard asked, the expression on his face serious.

"Do you want me to bring in a witness to prove it?" Max asked in a threatening manner.

"It would do you no good at all," Bernard said with disinterest. "Witnesses lie all the time, and this trial has a great deal of publicity. It's a unique angle, Max, but all we have to do is say that you just brought in somebody looking for attention. This trial has a lot of attention centered on it. The media will buy it, and so will the jury."

"It makes me think you killed her, Bernard," Max stated with certainty.

"Why is that, Max?" Bernard asked, the interest back in his face.

"You learned of your wife's promiscuity," Max pointed out, "and confronted her about it. You even threatened to leave her because of it. In your mind, it's perfectly fine for you to have affairs, but it's a terrible sin if she does. She promised to remain faithful, and when you learned that she strayed again, you were overcome with fury. In the middle of the night, you awoke and killed her out of anger. I've seen it all before. The whole double standard issue showing its ugly face. You've got the ego, and it all fits so perfectly."

"That's a very horrid picture you've just painted, Max." Bernard's voice carried the hint of sadness, but also an unmistakable tone of denial. He turned away to stare at the wall, and Max felt his thoughts were elsewhere.

"Admit it, Bernard," Max asked, trying to prompt a confession. "Save everyone the trial. Isn't it bad enough that you took her life? Will you also run her name and image through the mud, just to create the illusion that someone else is responsible? You were overcome by rage, and you killed her. Emotions are powerful, especially if you bury them deep down."

"I don't plan to bring up any information that would smear my wife's reputation," Bernard informed plainly. "She's already dead, and I plan to allow her to rest peacefully."

"You couldn't stand the thought of your wife with another man," Max insisted, trying to unlock the rage. "You lost control of your anger, and punished her for her actions."

"I don't allow rage to overcome me," Bernard replied calmly. "We have to go to trial, Max. That's the only way I'll find out who killed my wife. I have to avenge this terrible crime. I would like to end all this for you, Max. I see that this is really upsetting you. I apologize that you must spend your time investigating such a brutal end to a beautiful woman. I know it must eat away at you, but I appreciate your good work."

"I have a motive on you, you bastard," Max threatened, the professionalism gone now.

"That's your whole problem, Max. You're too busy looking for a motive. You're so far off the path, you can't smell reality anymore. As an investigator, you should keep your emotions out of this," Bernard scorned, insulting Max's manner of professionalism. He looked harshly at Max, before smiling as if he understood. "Don't be too hard on yourself. I can't really admit that I'm looking in the right place either. Eventually, one of us will cross the truth. If I do, you'll know about it. What about you, Max," Bernard asked with interest, "will you tell me if you learn the truth?"

Max realized the mistake he had made, and decided it was best to take some time to calm down. He stood silently, never taking his eyes from Bernard, and left the room without uttering another word.

Dr. Ellen Brockbank walked up the courtroom aisle from her seat in the audience. Her style and grace caught the eyes of most everyone inside the room. She had worn a cranberry dress, which hung down just below her knees. She had pulled her red hair back in a French braid, and it looked soft and warm against the contrasting color of the dress. Even Hayden kept sight of her as she approached the stand beside him. She took her oath in the same manner, and waited patiently for Cameron to begin the questions.

"Good Morning, Dr. Brockbank," Cameron greeted as he looked her over for signs of nervousness. He found none, just a calm and determined looking woman waiting for her first question. He tried to make a visual assessment of each witness before he began his questioning, to determine his approach.

"Good Morning," she replied with a calm authority.

"You've worked with Dr. Bernard Baxter for a few years now, correct?" he asked, laying down a foundation to start from.

"Correct," she replied, still calm, but noticeably irritated by the petty question he had offered.

"You're very deeply involved in his research?"

"I'm responsible for setting up clinical laboratory tests. My role grows more important the closer he gets to a treatment. I'm considered to be a key staff position."

"You worked with Dr. Baxter often, and very closely?" he asked in an insinuating manner.

"That's right."

"Could you describe your relationship with him?"

"We're good friends," she admitted, "as well as colleagues. We've argued many times about how we should accomplish our goals, and we've both managed to avoid offending one another. He's one of my dearest friends, and I would trust him with my own life."

"You just recently signed your divorce papers, from your first husband?" he asked, ignoring her remark about Bernard.

"Correct."

"You were married for quite some time?" he asked, as though it seemed odd to him.

"Yes."

"This must have been a rough time for you," Cameron replied in a sensitive tone. "A divorce isn't an enjoyable experience."

"Have you been divorced?" she asked in a heartfelt manner, but the underlying sarcasm was very evident.

"No," he replied with a slight bit of irritation. "Could you please just stick to answering my questions? I asked you if you felt your divorce was easy."

"No, but it establishes the end of a relationship, and gives you the ability to move on with your life."

"So it must have been a deeply emotional time for you."

"Yes," Ellen replied truthfully, "At times."

"You moved here to work with Dr. Baxter," Cameron stressed, "no doubt leaving most of your friends behind."

"I made new friends," she answered simply.

"Any close friends, besides Bernard?" he asked, the hint of suspicion noticeable in his voice.

"Sure," Ellen answered with a bit of offense taken. "I like to think that I'm good enough company to entertain the prospect of new friends. I have a number of close friends, outside the workplace as well as within."

"Would you call Carolyn a good friend?" he asked in wonder.

"She was a dear friend," Ellen answered sadly.

"You were rather upset when you learned of her death," he remarked.

"I'm still upset about it, and I hope you find her killer," the anger very much apparent when she spoke.

“Did Carolyn ever discuss her personal life with you?”

“Some elements of it,” she admitted.

“Yes,” he replied with a smile of frustration. “Did she ever talk about her husband?”

“At times.”

“Sexually?” Cameron pressed.

“Bernard and I are colleagues,” she said, noting the level of offense she found from this remark, “and it hardly seems appropriate for her to discuss such a personal topic with one of his coworkers.”

“Then you weren’t that close of friends?” he replied.

“We didn’t act like school girls, no,” Ellen replied in disbelief. “I have a great deal of respect for both Carolyn and Bernard, and she never brought up such a subject with me. I wouldn’t think it in her character.”

“Did you know much about their personal lives,” he asked with a pause, then pointed out, “from your acquaintance with either individual?”

“I didn’t pry,” she replied plainly.

“Did you know about Bernard’s affairs with other women?”

“I don’t feel that I can fairly answer that question.”

“Why?” He asked with a look of threat.

“Your honor,” Daren quickly interrupted from his chair. “We object to this line of questioning. The prosecution has not established through any evidence that Bernard Baxter was anything but a faithful husband.”

“The court agrees,” Hayden replied firmly. “We don’t prosecute anyone on theories in this courtroom. If you have significant evidence to prove this line of questioning is appropriate, the court would have no choice but to allow it to proceed.”

“Very well,” Cameron replied with a shrug, and turned back to his witness. “Dr. Ellen Brockbank, did you ever have an affair with Bernard Baxter?”

Ellen glanced over at Bernard, never showing any visible shock on her face. His eyes met hers for an instant, and then she looked away.

“First of all, I feel that answering that question diminishes my personal right to the respect I deserve as a member of a civilized society. Secondly, after discussing this subject with counsel, I have been advised by my attorney not to answer that question on the grounds that it might incriminate me as an accomplice in your investigation. I therefore retain my right to remain silent to any questions that dig deeper into mine and Bernard’s relationship in that manner.”

“How convenient,” Cameron replied, looking over at the Judge. Hayden nodded agreement with Ellen’s statement. He took a step back from the witness box, and addressed her again.

“You do realize, Dr. Brockbank,” Cameron informed his witness, “that by refusing to answer that question, you pose a great deal of suspicion in the eyes of these jurors. Why not just answer the question and clear yourself of any suspicion?”

“You have my answer, Mr. McBride,” she smiled simply. “I don’t wish to be added to the list of witches that your henchmen have already created through this tragedy, and I won’t give you the satisfaction of an answer.”

“By refusing to answer, you only hurt yourself,” Cameron argued.

“No,” she replied, her anger concentrated on him from her stare, “by refusing to answer, I’ve stated that I don’t feel that my personal life has any bearing on this trial, and I won’t allow you to pick it apart and criticize it before the world just to prove you can. I have a very good reputation to defend, and I don’t want you to soil it for your own pleasure. I take offense at the mere suggestion of it.”

“No more questions,” he relented, walking back to his seat.

Bernard just shook his head as the judge looked over for cross examination.

Chapter Twelve

Nancy Dobbs made herself comfortable in the chair. She didn't know what to expect from the questioning, but had prepared herself mentally for this day many times. She still felt unsure of why the prosecutors had chosen her for questioning, and knew she would soon learn why. After the way Cameron had treated Ellen the day before, Nancy felt a little uneasy about the situation.

Cameron had other thoughts on his mind as he approached her at the front of the room. He had spoken with her on other occasions, and felt sure of one thing. She was the only person who worked for Bernard Baxter who didn't demonstrate complete loyalty. He knew that this probably arose from the short period of time working with him, but at least he could get unbiased opinions from her, and perhaps more.

"How long have you worked for Bernard Baxter?" Cameron asked as he began on the list of questions he had memorized.

"Six months," Nancy replied timidly into the microphone. She had done her hair fashionably, aware that artists would sketch her for every news agency in the country. She had spent hours picking out an outfit which accented her beauty, and left her distinguished as well.

"What is your position at the laboratory?"

"I'm Bernard's personal secretary."

"What type of work do you do for him?" he asked, taking care not to pressure her as he asked his questions.

"I take his calls, write up his memos, and try to keep him to his scheduled appointments."

"Before his incarceration, did he have a great deal of appointments?"

"Not really," Nancy said shyly, "One or two each day, and then numerous meetings inside the lab. He did pretty good, usually, but often ran one meeting into another."

"How would you characterize him?" Cameron asked simply.

"He's very busy," she replied, thinking about the question for a moment, "but doesn't allow stress to get to him. I always thought he was a very good boss. He doesn't demand too much from people, but expects everyone to do their part to keep things running smoothly."

"Were you very good friends?" he asked innocently.

"We got along," Nancy replied sincerely, "but I wouldn't say we were really good friends, at least, not compared to others in the lab. He had some very close relationships within the company with some of the other employees. He and I never developed a similar relationship, but then, I'm not one of the head scientists."

"Did you ever find any of his relationships with other employees to be too close?" Cameron suggested.

"What do you mean?" Nancy asked with confusion.

“Did you ever have reason to believe that Bernard was having an affair with one of his colleagues at the lab?”

“I never walked in on anything,” she answered with a slight look of confusion, “if that’s what you’re asking?”

“Did you ever think he was?”

“Your honor,” Daren called out, “He’s leading the witness.”

“A little more subtle, Mr. McBride,” Hayden replied in his threatening tone of voice.

“I can’t really start throwing out accusations,” Nancy answered before the bickering could go any further. “A person might feel that there’s something going on within the walls, but I can hardly condemn anyone for something I’ve never been able to substantiate. Dr. Baxter is an adult, and his personal life was his personal business. I never stuck my nose where it didn’t belong. I’m his secretary, not his mother.”

“You made quite a sacrifice by coming here to work for Bernard,” Cameron stated before the court.

“How do you mean?” she asked, unsure if he were asking a question or not.

“You picked up and moved here from Seattle, just to work as a secretary for Bernard,” Cameron pointed out.

“I moved here, and applied for a job when it came open,” Nancy clarified, unsure of Cameron’s intentions.

“Did you apply for any other jobs?” he inquired.

“No,” Nancy stated plainly.

“How long were you here before you applied for this job?” he asked, suddenly more interested in her answers than before.

“About two weeks,” she replied innocently.

“Did you have interests in working anywhere else when you moved here?” he asked calmly.

“If I couldn’t find a job after a period of time,” she admitted.

“But you came out specifically to attempt to obtain a position working for Bernard Baxter,” Cameron stated, turning to face the jury.

“That’s right,” she replied, as though it didn’t seem at all unusual to her.

“Why?” he asked, not really implying any wrong on her part.

“I heard about the work he did here, and hoped that I could somehow take part in his accomplishments,” she said sincerely. “I have an associates degree in medical technology. I didn’t really expect to be put on staff, but I had hoped to convince him of my interests in his work, and somehow work my way into the company.”

“And you did,” he remarked.

“Yes,” Nancy smiled timidly. “I spent two years working as a secretary while putting myself through school, and convinced him that my technical background would aide me as his secretary. It isn’t a lifetime career, but I still have hopes to someday move up the ladder, and become integrated into the laboratory.”

“You took quite a risk moving all the way out here with nothing firm established prior.”

“Yes,” she admitted quietly.

“People might consider you a fanatic to take such a chance.”

“I felt the odds were worth it,” she stated simply.

“Would you classify most of the people you work with as having comparable interests in working for Bernard Baxter?”

“Do you mean, are they fanatics?” she asked oddly.

“To put it another way,” Cameron allowed.

“I wouldn’t call it fanaticism,” she replied, displaying her dispute with his assessment of the situation. “These people just believe in him and his abilities, the same as I did. Some people just go to extremes in the pursuit of knowledge. I’m putting off the next step in my education to work as a secretary, just to learn more about the work done inside the walls of Bernard’s lab. It’s been a very educating experience, and to answer your question, yes, most people who work there are more fanatical — if that’s how you wish to define it — than myself.”

“Do you plan to continue working for Dr. Baxter?”

“I hope to,” she said, but the optimism was not apparent in her voice.

“You think he’s innocent?” Cameron inquired, the interest apparent on his face.

“I don’t know that,” she replied honestly. “I didn’t know him very well, but I can’t imagine him doing such a thing.”

“So you believe he’ll be back in the lab someday?” he questioned, as though the question were not really necessary.

“I hope so, in the interests of cancer research, and in the interests of our society,” she answered in an honest voice. “He has a wealth of knowledge to share with the world, regardless of what he may have done.”

“Did Bernard ever come on to you?” Cameron asked in a serious voice.

“What do you mean?” she asked in confusion.

“Did you and he ever share a sexual relationship?” Cameron clarified.

“No,” Nancy replied in a shocked voice.

“He never made a pass at you?” Cameron pushed, trying to get a clear idea of their relationship.

“No,” she answered again. “He was always very kind to me, but I can’t recall a time that he ever said or did something I would find unacceptable for workplace conduct.”

“Thank you, Ms. Dobbs. I have no further questions.”

Hayden looked down at the bench where Bernard sat with his legal council, and noted the man shake his head before he could even ask the question, but Hayden asked anyway, for the court record. A minute later, Nancy stepped down from the stand and walked back down the aisle, too timid to cross eyes with her employer..

Bernard glanced up at the clock, and noticed that there were only about fifteen minutes until Henry should arrive for their meeting. He placed the book he read aside, and stood up to walk around in his small cell. James noticed the pacing across the floor, and sat up in his bunk.

“Daily meeting, doc?” James asked in mockery.

“Soon,” Bernard replied, more to himself than his cellmate.

“You seem rather anxious,” James noted wryly. “Something important coming today?”

“Everything I receive is important,” Bernard remarked harshly.

“You know, Bernard,” James uttered, the arrogance back in his voice, “me and some of the other boys have a little party we’re throwing for you. Something like an induction, so that you can feel like a true inmate. We thought we would get a group together to present you with something to remember us all by.”

“What’s the problem, James,” Bernard asked calmly. “Aren’t you man enough to fight your battles alone.”

“You see there, doc,” James remarked in a cocky tone. “There’s the problem again. You keep forgetting that you’re the new guy in this joint, and you haven’t developed any respect for those of us that are seasoned veterans. You’re causing problems, and your refusal to cooperate means that the boys need to make an example of you.”

Bernard turned and took a step towards James, who instantly cringed and moved toward the opposite wall. Bernard stopped short and smiled over at the man. He was about to speak when the guard walked up to the cell and asked him to step out, unlocking the door with a yell at one of the other guards.

“We’ll continue this conversation later, James,” Bernard replied as he walked away from the cell.

Henry sat at the same booth he always chose when he visited the prison. He directed every effort to retain calm while here. Every time he visited the institution, he had the same feeling. He practiced the relaxation techniques he had learned years ago, and worked into his every day routine. He praised the efforts, as they always helped him keep his focus when he felt the pressure.

Bernard entered the room on the other side of the glass, and walked patiently over to his seat. His eyes remained steady as he studied Henry carefully, and then picked up the phone. Henry picked up his own receiver, and tried not to notice the guard a moment later, when he

brought the small stack of books to Bernard. Henry looked back at Bernard once the guard had left.

“What did you find?” Bernard asked immediately.

“Some of the cancers are showing resistance to the new annihilator ion. We have a sixty percent success rate in the latest study,” Henry replied with disappointment.

“I expected that,” Bernard replied, no shock in his voice. “What about the trace material, to track the decay of the annihilator.”

“That’s even worse,” Henry admitted. “It’s just like you thought. In the treatments that failed, we hardly found any trace of radiation in the cellular excretions. It’s possible that we need to use another method to confirm it.”

“No,” Bernard answered, “The radioactive site of the molecule would have shown up somewhere if the cell was destroying it. This just confirms everything we’ve thought all along. We still have a long way to go.”

“It isn’t a complete failure,” Henry noted. “We destroyed sixty percent of the cancers that we treated in the study. It’s definitely positive news. We can’t expect to destroy every form of cancer out there with one specific annihilator. We’ll develop more, and continue to work towards a total cure.”

“No,” Bernard replied firmly. “We need something that destroys all cancers. It will take too long with hit and miss attempts, and we’ll never get approval. We’ve already overcome the hardest part. We’re to the point where we can identify the cells specifically. We can’t allow a hitch in the treatment to cause problems.”

“I don’t know if it’s possible,” Henry answered pessimistically.

“It is,” Bernard stressed. “We’re just overlooking the obvious.”

“It’s something for the time being at least,” Henry pointed out. He was growing weary of the secrecy, and wanted to publish. He had listened to Bernard’s insisting that they wait for too long, and for something he wasn’t really sure would ever happen.

“It will never pass as a drug,” Bernard replied simply.

“But, Bernard,” Henry protested, “it destroyed sixty percent of the cancers. These were advanced cancers, hard to destroy.”

“And in the other forty percent,” Bernard pointed out in a stern voice, “we introduced a molecular poison, designed to seek out and destroy the inner working of the cell, by a radical reaction. If the cell did not continue to function, then you now have a patient with cancer and molecular poisons inside its body. It will never pass the FDA. If it fails to destroy the cancer, it could leave the patients in worse shape than they were to begin with.”

“But it does break down eventually,” Henry replied.

“It’s still a radical until it falls apart, and it isn’t falling apart as well as we had hoped.”

"I know," Henry finally conceded. "Then we need to find something that destroys every form of cancer." His voice stressed his feeling that it was inconceivable.

"Maybe not," Bernard replied slyly. "There are other ways."

"What are you thinking?" Henry asked, recognizing that his friend had a new idea.

"What happens if you place any organic cell inside an organic solvent?" Bernard asked simply.

"It dissolves."

"What dissolves?" Bernard asked, his questions developing a purpose.

"Pretty much everything dissolves," Henry replied, searching for the answer hidden within Bernard's questions.

"You skipped the most important thing, Henry," Bernard pointed out, "Every reaction occurs in stages. What dissolves first?"

"The cell membrane," Henry answered, still unclear of the buried secret.

"And what would happen if you only added enough solvent to dissolve a portion of the cell wall?"

"It would probably rupture."

"And the cell?" Bernard concluded.

"Could no longer function," Henry grinned.

"You see, Henry," Bernard smiled, hinting his new optimism, "we're trying to make a simple process difficult. We've already developed a method to selectively seek out the cancer cells. Then, like any zealous person, we immediately try to kill everything inside the cell, by introducing a poison. We skipped steps, Henry."

"So you want to dissolve the cell. We would have to add a great deal of solvating molecules to the cell to accomplish it. How are we supposed to control it?"

"No," Bernard replied, ignoring the question. "We just need to disrupt the natural balance of the cell. If the cell cannot function, then it will not reproduce, and it will die. The body will remove it like any other waste. Cellular membrane structure is fairly standard throughout the body. The structure can be disrupted by any number of compounds. We don't need to dissolve the entire membrane. If we just create small imperfections, so that standard ion transfers can't occur inside the cell, it will fail. Create a larger pore along the surface of the cell membrane, and the body will do the rest."

"Weaken the skin."

"Basically," he agreed.

"Do you want the same method as we used with the annihilator ion, activated once it seeks out a cell with the cancer equivalent strands?" Henry asked in a slight confusion. He always felt a little hazy on the new concepts that Bernard brought up, until they had a few days to sink in.

"Same function," Bernard agreed. "The selective molecule locates the cancer, and reacts with it, thereby releasing the now active ion. The active ion seeks out the cell wall site, and reacts to create an imperfection in the surface."

"Any ideas?" Henry asked, realizing his friend had already given it much thought.

"I've labeled three that I believe might work, in my latest notes. The first is probably the best. In that one, we incorporate the weakened sight into the membrane of the virus. I'll review the results of the annihilator ion studies, just to affirm everything. I trust that you brought everything?" Bernard asked seriously.

"It's all there, everything you need to replicate the experiments," he answered, a change noted in his voice.

"Thank you, Henry," Bernard replied sincerely.

"How are you holding up, Bernard?" Henry asked, remembering that the trial wasn't going well at all. He had hoped that the information they presented a few days earlier would have his name cleared by now, but he recognized the same problem that Bernard, and even Cameron McBride did. It wouldn't stand as a solid alibi on its own merit. Bernard needed more than that.

"I'm better," Bernard assured, "now that the trial has begun."

"Just remember, Bernard," Henry stressed, "if there's anything you need."

"I know, Henry," Bernard replied seriously.

Bernard climbed into his bunk at light out, and rested his tired eyes from the hours of reading. James had grown more brave during the afternoon, and Bernard anticipated something to happen in the next few days. James did have people in the prison who may help him. They were just a small group of deviants, but he didn't really like the idea of watching his back constantly. He already knew that come morning, he would no longer have that threat.

James continued to coax him, even as he climbed into his own bunk. He hinted at what scenario he might have planned for the day of retribution, and Bernard had to smile to himself. It just made it easier to justify his actions. He had never felt himself in danger during his stay here, but at least this would give him some breathing room.

Bernard listened to the giggling above him for several more minutes, allowing James to feel satisfied with his torment, then suddenly Bernard could not resist the question.

"What do you think you will find in hell, James?" Bernard asked with interest.

"What's that, doc?" James chuckled from his bunk.

"Dante describes a number of punishments in his work, inferno. How do you imagine it?"

"I don't believe in all that, doc," James laughed to himself. "Do you think I'm headed there?"

"Yes, I do. I hope you enjoy yourself there," Bernard replied as he rolled over and relaxed in slumber.

He awoke slowly, careful not to stir and wake any of the hundred men in the cell block. He moved slowly, scanning the area immediately around him. He held perfectly still for almost ten minutes, until the guard finally passed by his cell. He had studied the guard's movements on several different nights, and knew the routine. A minute later, he slowly crept from his bunk to the stack of books against the opposite wall.

The binding on the book cracked without much effort, and Bernard removed the three syringes, setting them on the floor beside him. He wore a pair of socks over his hands to keep them clean of his fingerprints. Two were already used, and Bernard knew what he needed to do.

The third was clean, and full of solution. The plastic syringes had easily slipped through metal detection, and Bernard had seen others here using drugs. He opened the pens that Henry had supplied, and removed the three fine needles from inside. A moment later they were prepared. He looked around carefully as he walked over to the bunk where James lay and grabbed firmly near his cellmate's shoulder blade. A moment later the man's body fell limply unconscious, and Bernard injected the solution in his arm, near the other scores of tracks.

The act was simple, and took less than a minute. He worked patiently, making sure to mark each of the syringes with his cellmate's fingerprints, and left the used syringe in his hand. He set a small piece of surgical tube in his other hand, and then took the two empty syringes and slid the needles under the unconscious man's skin, contaminating them both with his blood.

Bernard glanced his work over, and placed the two contaminated needles in a box among James' other belongings. He covered James with a blanket, and replaced the cotton socks at the bottom of his bed. He knew that such a large dose of sedative in its purist form would slow the heart rate to a dead stop, and end his cellmate's life in his sleep. Bernard had come to terms with that fact days earlier, and felt no remorse as he returned himself to sleep.

Max sat alone in the conference room, trying to imagine what went through Bernard Baxter's head. He had spoken with the warden about the incident, and wanted to hear Bernard's account of the events, even though he really had no desire to speak with the man again. He was quickly growing weary of the young scientist.

Bernard stepped in the door, peaking around the corner, almost playfully as the guard pushed him into the room. Max looked up at the large man, and nodded for him to leave. He could see that Bernard's eyes were still not quite adjusted to the bright light, after several hours spent in solitary confinement. Max had already advised the warden not to return Bernard to the lesser quarters.

"Good morning, Bernard," Max greeted, little emotion in his voice.

"It is not such a good morning," Bernard replied in a heartfelt, but insincere tone of voice. "My dear cellmate died last evening, and I am deeply troubled by this news."

"Why did you do it, Bernard?" Max asked, paying no attention to his remarks.

"You don't think I'm responsible, do you, Max?"

"Overdose, very cute," Max complimented wryly.

"I warned him about the drugs," Bernard stressed, in the same voice he used to lecture others. "Some people just won't listen."

"This complicates things," Max replied.

"Life is filled with many complications."

"There will be a full investigation," Max informed his suspect.

"I hope so," Bernard agreed. "They need to determine why access to those drugs is so easy here. The warden should probably receive a reprimand for this unnecessary death."

"Not a very honorable death," Max pointed out.

"Fitting for the individual," Bernard replied, suddenly very serious.

Max glanced up at Bernard, and suddenly realized just what had happened. He wished very much that he could hate Bernard, though at that second, he actually wanted to congratulate him. He actually found himself admiring him, and then remembered the other murder that Bernard had ties to.

"We won't find anything incriminating, will we?" Max asked simply.

"Nothing that would indicate any involvement on my part," Bernard replied, as if offended by the remark.

"It is too bad that it comes to this," Max stated to himself.

"I know I won't sleep well tonight," Bernard agreed, his sarcasm apparent in his voice.

"Did you kill him, Bernard?"

"I won't lie to you, Max," Bernard stated simply.

"I'm still not convinced, Bernard," Max stated honestly, forgetting about the death of James for a moment. "Who would have killed her?"

"Who has gained something here?" Bernard asked the detective.

"Monetary," Max replied, "I checked it all out."

"You'll have to dig, Max. It won't be obvious."

Max realized suddenly where the conversation had led him, and that he was presenting his own information to the defendant he had worked so hard to build a case against. He knew he wouldn't accomplish much more by conversing further.

"The investigation will remain low key," Max stated as he stood up. "After your wife's murder trial is over, we'll decide what to do about this."

"There's no investigation necessary," Bernard replied firmly.

"I know," Max acknowledged.

Chapter Thirteen

Cameron approached the stand where Linda sat awaiting his questions. She seemed more excited about sitting in front of the court than her previous two colleagues. She wore appropriately formal attire for the hearing, but still very modern and alluring, and more evident of her youth. Cameron almost felt guilty that he had to question such a delicate and petite woman as Linda. She was a high spirited woman, young and full of energy, but not strong enough to face the abuses of a high profile trial.

There were several questions that Cameron felt she could clear up. She spoke rather freely with them each time Max had questioned her about Bernard, and she seemed comfortable talking about him. He knew she had secrets, and hoped that if he could reveal a few for her, she would continue where his questions left off. He had spent a great deal of time looking into her past, and hoped he had enough to get the truth from her. In the back of his mind, he knew there was more than hope. He was counting on it.

“How is it that you first came to know Bernard Baxter?” Cameron asked, after allowing her a moment for the tension to rise.

“I started working with him shortly after he opened the research center,” she replied, trying to look as professional as her colleagues. “I’m in charge of microbial growth and breeding at the lab. I specialize in certain aspects of virus study.”

“How would you define the working relationship that you and Bernard shared?” he asked intuitively.

“He was a friend, more than an employer. It often hardly seemed like work at all.”

“You enjoy working with him?” Cameron smiled.

“He’s a great guy to work for,” Linda answered honestly. “I’ve seen a great deal of failures in the lab, and he never seems to get upset about it. He knows that he’ll succeed in the end, and views failures as one more step towards accomplishment.”

“You lived with Bernard Baxter for a short period of time, is that correct?” Cameron asked, setting a tone for his questions.

“Yes,” she replied simply. “I lived with Bernard and Carolyn for about six weeks, shortly after I came to work at the lab.”

“Why was that?”

“I was experiencing troubles from a relationship with my boyfriend,” Linda replied, a look of shame evident as she looked away from Cameron, and at her feet. “Bernard recognized that I needed some time to straighten out my life. It was a very selfless act that he and his wife did to help me. I always appreciated their kindness.”

“What sort of troubles were you experiencing?” Cameron pried.

“I was a battered woman,” she said with sadness, “the victim of a physically and emotionally abusive partner. I had gone to the hospital to recover from some of my injuries when Carolyn first came to see me. I didn’t really know her that well, but she talked to me for several hours, and I finally ended up confessing all my problems to her.

“She returned the next day with Bernard, checked me out of the hospital, and took me home. Bernard gave me a week away from work, and Carolyn spent most of her time with me, helping me work through my feelings. They even paid for a psychiatrist to come to the house, and help me clear my head of the abuse.

“Carolyn Baxter was one of the most beautiful women I ever met, and I’m not talking about physical beauty. Whoever killed her, deserves to die, a long and painful death. I don’t know where I would be today if she hadn’t stepped in and made me regain control of my own life.”

Linda glanced up and then looked down from Cameron’s stare. Her eyes had filled with tears as she talked, and it took her a moment to regain her composure. Cameron allowed her a second, agreeing with her statement, and hoping that the jury did as well.

“What became of the man that you shared the abusive relationship with?” Cameron asked a minute later, once Linda had calmed down.

“He came to see me,” she admitted, wiping the tears from her eyes with a tissue, “a few nights after I moved in with Carolyn and Bernard. Bernard had gone to the house we shared, and picked up enough of my things for a few weeks. He hadn’t talked to my boyfriend about the beating. He just walked in and took some of my belongings, and left again.

“When Greg came to the house, Bernard allowed him in to talk to me. He and Carolyn left us alone to talk in a quiet room, and I admit I felt some fear about seeing him again. He told me that he wanted me back, but by then Carolyn had helped me regain enough of my self respect to demand some time away from him, and to ask him to get help for his problem.

“After about ten minutes, he got upset with me, and started to threaten me. I thought that he was going to beat me again, but Bernard came into the room, and showed him outside.”

“How did he show him out?” Cameron asked with interest.

“What do you mean?” she asked in confusion.

“Did Bernard strike him?” Cameron repeated the question, clarifying himself slightly.

“No,” Linda replied with disgust for the man, “not that I ever saw. He walked in, took Greg by the arm, and told him he would have to leave. Greg started yelling at him, but I never saw Bernard get physically rough with him. He kept pretty calm about the whole event, and never said anything about it again.”

“Have you ever seen Greg since that day?”

“No,” Linda answered with a slight shiver. “I thought he might return, and try to seek some revenge, though I never did anything to him. I was really scared for a long period of time, but Bernard helped me overcome all of that.”

“How?” Cameron asked.

“He taught me how to defend myself against aggression,” Linda said, some strength suddenly apparent on her face. “He spent a few afternoons with me, educating me in defensive tactics. I still remember them, all of them,” she stressed. “I practice regularly. He told me to stay at his house until I felt comfortable going out on my own again, and I stuck around for about a month before I could handle an apartment of my own. He helped me financially, to overcome some of my debts, which were one of the primary reasons I had moved in with Greg in the first place.

“Carolyn took care of two more sessions with the psychiatrist, and we retained a very close, and very personal friendship together. I loved her like a wise older sister that I never had. I’m eternally indebted to both of them.”

Cameron waited a moment, feeling confident with the line of questions he had developed to get her to this point. He smiled softly, hiding his true feelings of triumph from her. A moment later, he changed the order of his questioning.

“Bernard taught you a series of defensive maneuvers. Can you describe the goals of the maneuvers?”

“To even the odds against an attacker of greater size and strength,” she answered, as though she repeated the answer several times each day.

“Were these martial art maneuvers?” Cameron asked in an unsure tone of voice.

“Yes, I believe they were,” she replied, aware that he already knew this, and finding the question odd.

“So Bernard taught you something about his particular martial art that he practices?” Cameron asked, the same tone to his voice.

“I don’t know if I would put it that way,” she replied defensively, “He spent some time teaching me basic defensive movements, and ways to quickly strike back at an opponent who might serve as a threat. Simply stated, he gave me back my freedom, and the confidence that I could take care of myself in most ordinary situations.”

“It’s safe to say that you were a student of his?” Cameron asked intently.

“He spent several afternoons with me,” she replied in confusion, “teaching me fundamentals and a few simple moves that could quickly immobilize an adversary, but I wouldn’t call myself one of his students.”

“Why not?” he asked simply.

“Because he didn’t take on additional students. He spent a great deal of time teaching his art form to his actual students. There was even a point where I approached him about becoming

one, and he talked to me about it for some time, before he convinced me that I really didn't need it. I asked him if he would take me in as a student if I did need it, and he hesitated about it greatly. He said that he didn't like having large numbers of students, and didn't wish to take on any more. He did say he would consider it, if it were needed.

"He gave me the names of several men in the community, who taught students in a number of different martial arts, that had made a profession from teaching. He said to go to one of them if I really felt that I needed it. I took a year of Tai Kwon Do from another gentleman, and then I quit trying to advance. I still practice what I learned, but I finally decided — as Bernard had told me — that I didn't really need a black belt in the martial arts to feel confident with myself."

"But you were aware that he trained other students?" Cameron pointed out.

"Yes," she answered for the second time.

"Did you know anyone who trained with him?" he inquired.

"Yes," she replied, now irritated with the manner he used to question her. He had spoken with her in detail about this, and she found it awkwardly annoying for him to act as though he were hearing it for the first time. "Dr. Henry Lansing is one of his pupils. I told you all this several weeks ago. Perhaps you didn't listen?"

"I ask these questions for the sake of the jury," Cameron replied, trying to calm her.

"Then don't act like an imbecile when you do," she answered wearily. "I doubt they would."

"Miss Olsen," Hayden intervened, regretting that he had to reprimand her show of spunk and heart. He had actually enjoyed the remarks, though his face would never show it. "Please stick to answering the prosecutors questions, regardless of your personal feelings about him. Realize that you are answering these questions for the sake of the jury, and try to ignore the tone of the prosecutor's voice if it bothers you."

"Did you ever speak with Henry about it?" Cameron continued, ignoring the remarks of the woman and Hayden.

"Not in great detail," Linda replied. "Bernard didn't make a big fuss about his knowledge in that regard. I think that the vast majority of the people who worked in the lab had no idea that he practiced the martial arts."

"Did you know about his fascination with swords?" Cameron asked slyly.

"I don't know about the fascination," she answered honestly, "but I did once stumble upon him training once. He was very reserved about it, and never once mentioned his training to me. I witnessed him practicing one night, but never mentioned it to him."

"The lab purchases memberships for everyone to a local gym," she explained. "It has a large room with a high ceiling, for gymnastics and tumbling. He goes there from time to time,

and locks the doors of the room for privacy. He and Henry entered the gym one night, and I saw them go inside the room.

"I was there playing racquetball with several others from the lab, and they were inquiring as to what he did there. I told them that he trained, and we decided to sneak a peak at them. There's an observation room for coaches, that looks over the tumbling floor. We snuck a key to the room, and went inside. We left the lights off, so they wouldn't know we were watching. You couldn't see inside from the gymnastics room without some light. I didn't know before then that he practiced with swords. We watched for about five minutes, and then slipped out."

"Was anyone else there?"

"Just Bernard and Henry."

"When you were still living with Bernard and Carolyn, did you ever see him practicing there?"

"No," she replied, wondering about the question herself.

"So he was secretive about it?"

"I don't know that," she replied truthfully.

"He never told anyone," Cameron pointed out.

"Nobody asked," she defended. "Henry obviously knew."

"How did you get the last of your things from your previous residence back from Greg?" Cameron asked, changing the subject suddenly.

"We went over on a day when he was not at home, and took what was mine."

"Who all went?" Cameron interrupted.

"Bernard and I," she answered, as though it should be obvious. "We also closed all the accounts that he and I shared mutual debts in, and paid half of the remaining balance of each. Greg had to open new accounts with his name alone to continue making any purchases. It made me completely independent of him."

"Do you know about anything that happened to Greg immediately following your breakup?" Cameron asked with a grin.

"Not in great detail," she replied casually.

"Would it surprise you to learn that he spent a few nights in a hospital about a week after you told him it was over?" Cameron asked with a renewed interest.

"No, I knew about his stay in the hospital," she answered simply.

"Did Bernard have anything to do with that?" he suggested.

"I have no idea," she answered plainly. "You would have to question Bernard about that. The last I spoke to Greg, was at Carolyn and Bernard's home, and I really don't know how he came to need medical attention."

"He was in very bad shape," Cameron explained thoroughly. "He was severely beaten up, and for a period of time, the doctors felt he might be permanently disfigured from his injuries."

“Well,” replied Linda with emotion. “I wish I could say I feel sorry for him, but I tell you quite truthfully, he probably had it coming to him. He had made a number of enemies from his quick temper. Who did it to him?” she returned the question.

“He’s never said. Perhaps I can question him also,” Cameron hinted slightly, but aggressively, staring coldly at her. It was a bluff, and he knew immediately that she didn’t believe him. She didn’t seem at all flustered by the remark, and she didn’t need to feel that way. Greg never had seen who attacked him, but Cameron had tried it just in case.

“Your honor,” Daren spoke from his chair. “The defense must protest the treatment of this witness. We request that the prosecution not threaten any of the witnesses they put on the stand.”

“Agreed,” Hayden replied. “Questions, Mr. McBride, not threats.”

“Did you ever have a romantic relationship with Bernard Baxter?” Cameron asked bluntly.

Linda glanced over at her former lover for a moment, watching the expression on his face, which hadn’t changed once since she took her seat in the chair. His face only slightly moved. It was a movement that most in the courtroom would not notice, but Linda did. She had thought long about her decision to the question, when Daren first called her about it. She had made her decision about her answer earlier this morning.

“After discussing this subject with counsel, I have been advised by my attorney not to answer that question on the grounds that it might incriminate me as an accomplice in your investigation. I therefore retain my right to remain silent to any questions that dig deeper into mine and Bernard’s relationship in that manner. I also find it personally insulting that such a question is brought out here in a public forum. You would also, if we traded places.”

“I could honestly answer no to the question,” Cameron remarked.

“I wouldn’t patronize you by asking such a question.”

“Very well then,” Cameron replied with a shrug, “I have no further questions for this witness.”

Chapter Fourteen

Bernard walked quickly down the long corridor. The guard had him shackled, and the security in the prison had started to treat him more carefully since his roommate's death, but he didn't mind. They had given him his own cell for the time being, and it allowed him to get more work done than he had previously.

He took a step back from the door when they arrived, and the guard stepped forward and opened it for him. He led Bernard in, and allowed the other guard standing inside the room to back him up while he undid the shackles.

After four days of witnesses at the trial, he had already seen five of his associates questioned, along with numerous forensics analysts and police officers describing the scene. He knew it would only get worse. They hadn't even gotten to Henry yet, and their case was already strong.

Bernard took a seat, and rubbed his wrists slightly, aware that the men liked to keep the devices very tight. He looked up and smiled at the face on the other side of the glass. There were no other prison residents in the visitation room, something the prison had taken care to consider. The trial had already gained too much publicity, and the warden didn't want his own future destroyed by anything. He still had a prisoner's death he was trying to keep buried from the media.

"Thank you for coming," Bernard spoke after picking up the phone line that connected him to his visitor. She tried to smile for him, though her own guilt made it hard for her. She felt as though she had betrayed him with her testimony.

Bernard looked down at the documents she had brought to him. They were well prepared, and exactly as he had written them in his journals. She did good work, he had always told himself, and felt guilty himself that he had never given her a chance to prove her abilities to him.

"I'm so sorry, Bernard," Nancy replied after a minute. "I feel so terrible. I hope I didn't say anything to hurt you."

"No, Nancy," he smiled, looking up from the papers he read. "You told the truth, and I don't fear that. I have only the highest respect for you. It is I that should be apologizing to you."

"Whatever for?" she asked in bewilderment.

"For not realizing the depths of your interest in my work," he answered firmly. "I never understood how serious you were to take a role in the work we do at the research center. You are obviously a very intelligent woman, with quite a future ahead of you. I never offered you a chance for any opportunities to demonstrate your talents, and that is something you deserved. I hope that in the future, you will allow me to make it up to you."

Nancy looked at him with shock, not quite expecting this response from him. After several days of guilt, she had tried to prepare for his notice of termination. The response she received took her completely by surprise, and she couldn't help to hide the smile that quickly emerged on her beautiful face. Bernard smiled back at her, letting her know how sincere he was about what he had said.

"I look forward to that," Nancy replied.

"When I get out of this place," Bernard assured her, "you will have your chance to work in the laboratory with the rest of the scientists. You practically write up all my reports now as it is. You probably know more about this work than most of the people that study it each day. I guarantee you, there are much greater things ahead of us."

"I just hope that I can live up to your expectations," she replied.

"You will," he answered. "There's no doubt in my mind."

Bernard looked down at the papers she had brought once again. He looked up again as the guard walked in the door on the other side of the room, and handed her the notes he had prepared. She took them and glanced over them for a moment. His handwriting and thoughts were generally very cluttered and unorganized, but she had a naturalness for making them very clear and readable, as he noticed with the returned documents.

"I need a favor from you now, Nancy," Bernard told her as he looked up again. She glanced up with excitement, her thoughts pasted to his every word. He knew then, that he had chosen the right person for this job.

"I need some more information from you. I need you to dig as deep as you can, and get me whatever you can find on the drug Thoricidian A, and its intermediate. I want to know everything there is about it, from the person who created it, to any other testing done on it. I need you to do the most in-depth literature search possible."

"All right," she replied. "Where should I start?"

"Medical Journals," he answered. "The American Medical Association, as well as the United States Pharmacopoeia both publish journals. They will reference other journals, and those will reference others still. Get everything you can find throughout history that deals with Thoricidian and any other related drugs."

"I subscribe to several of those journals already," she replied.

"Good," he smiled, "then you know how they read, and the level of discipline required to do what I ask. Take as much time as necessary to get me this information. If you can do that, then we can get serious about our other work together."

"Agreed," she replied. He knew that he had never seen such joy in anyone before. He wished silently that he had recognized her exuberance long before now, but knew he could no longer change the past.

“Bernard,” Nancy asked, the tone of her voice changing to one of uncertainty. “Do you think you’ll beat this conviction?”

“You do not even need to consider that, Nancy,” he assured her. “I am quite positive that we will prevail, and our work will continue, regardless of the outcome of this trial. I have to trust those people who have worked for me all this time, and that means that there will be more opportunities for people within our organization to take greater roles in the research. Your place at the research center is secure, and we will continue. With any luck, I will return to the clinic soon, and carry through the work which I began.”

“I look forward to it,” she replied, the smile on her face serious and sincere.

Doctor Blaine Sunderland walked up and took his seat at the front of the courtroom. His presence here was still misunderstood by Daren Holt, who couldn’t figure out why one of Bernard’s former colleagues would appear on the prosecutions list of witnesses, but Bernard had told him not to give it much worry.

He was an older man, his hair rapidly turning grey. He had a poorly groomed beard and mustache, and wore an old suit outdated to modern fashions. He looked thin, with horn-rimmed glasses, and shook slightly from the early onset of arthritis.

Blaine repeated the oath before the court, and waited for Cameron to approach him with his list of questions. He saw that wild flare in Cameron’s eyes, the same flare he had developed when the man first contacted him about testifying here.

“Dr. Sunderland,” Cameron addressed the man, “can you tell the court a little about yourself?”

“Yes,” Blaine replied, in his older, and refined voice. “I study methods of treating cancer. I am the chief researcher at the Innovative Concepts for Medicine Research Center. I began the center about ten years ago, with the help of several of my colleagues. Our work is highly respected in the field of medical research.”

“So it is,” Cameron agreed. “What sort of research do you do?”

“We do work with genetic identification of mutative strains. We were pioneers in the early study of this work.”

“I see,” Cameron responded. “And can you tell this court, where it is that you first came to meet Bernard Baxter?”

“Yes,” Blaine answered. “I remember the day quite well. I was giving a lecture about one year after we began the research center. It was an open lecture, where we discussed several of the avenues which our center investigated. It was when the concept was still quite foreign to a great deal of people, and we weren’t receiving our due credit for what we had already achieved.

“Bernard Baxter had just finished his doctorate, and was doing some research under another scientist who attended the lecture. I suppose Bernard tagged along, because he found our

work so fascinating. I presented the lecture, which was greeted with much apprehension. There weren't a great number of people who stayed around afterwards to talk with me, but Bernard approached me and asked some very intuitive questions.

"We went and shared a dinner together, and talked for several hours about the new technology we had uncovered. I recognized then that he was an ideal candidate for a role at our center. He seemed to know a great deal about our work, and had read several of my own papers from before I began the center. I returned to get approval from the others at the center, and about a week later, I phoned him and asked him if he would be interested in a position on our staff."

"And what was his reply?" Cameron asked.

"He declined the offer," Blaine answered, a noticeable anger in his voice. "I tried for some time to reason with him, but he wouldn't budge. He gave me some lame excuse about how he wasn't really interested in the work we did, and I finally relented and gave up in trying to persuade him. At the time, I really didn't understand the reasoning for his apprehension, but it soon became clear."

"Why is that?" Cameron asked.

"A few weeks later I found a small article in a prominent medical journal. It was a detailed list of several of the concepts that Bernard and I had discussed at our dinner that evening. I was naturally shocked by this, and my fellow associates weren't very happy about it either. He had taken several of our new technologies, and pasted them where everyone could see it. A great deal of work that we had spent years to uncover was suddenly presented for the entire community, and it destroyed much of what we had done to become a leader, and put ourselves ahead of other researchers. That single article, and my mistake of discussing our technology with him, ruined the competitive advantage that we had developed for our company."

"What action did you take?"

"Naturally, I contacted Bernard about the article. He argued with me for some time, saying he didn't feel that he had done any wrong. I even went as far as to threaten legal action. He then informed me that he had plans of doing research as well in this area, and that he would be a competitor."

"What became of the legal action you took?" Cameron asked.

"It was decided that we wouldn't gain anything by a lawsuit. He didn't have any money at that time, and it was a poor judgment on my part to share such valued information for that. We didn't want to waste valuable resources on legal fees, and felt he would give up on his blind ambition for our work. We have paid dearly for this mistake. In many areas, his research team has surpassed our own, and we're both in competition to get the treatment perfected."

"You and Bernard are not really friends, are you?"

"No, sir," Blaine replied, "he stole a great number of things from me, and has used the information only for monetary gain. I offered him a chance to work with us, so that together we

could reach a cure quicker than either center would alone, but he wanted the money. He refused to take a partnership, and figuratively speaking, he spit on everything I worked for.”

“Thank you, Dr. Sunderland.”

“You’re welcome.”

“I have no more questions for this witness,” Cameron responded as he returned to his seat.

Bernard had never looked up at Blaine Sunderland as he spoke. He had sat quietly writing down a list of notes as the man spoke, and handed those to Daren for the cross examination. Daren glanced it over, and looked with apprehension at Bernard before approaching the witness.

“Hello, Blaine,” Daren replied, making sure to address him by his first name, as Bernard’s notes suggested, while he studied the questions. “That’s a nasty image you painted of my client.”

“Sometimes, the truth is an ugly thing.”

“I’m sure,” Daren looked up, smiling. “Let us go over the facts again, please. You presented a lecture to a group of scientists about nine years ago. In this paper, you presented three main points. Bernard Baxter approached you following this presentation, because he was intrigued, correct?”

“That is correct,” Blaine agreed.

“Of those three points, Bernard disputed two of them with you, correct?”

“I wouldn’t call it a dispute,” Blaine argued.

“Obviously, it wasn’t really a dispute,” he agreed. “You decided it was important enough to invite him to dinner with you, and discuss his concerns. You said you spoke for several hours that evening. Is it not also true that most of that time the two of you discussed his points. This discussion could be considered as an argument.”

“That depends upon your point of view,” Blaine defended. “Science evolves against somebody stating an opinion and others disputing it. The fact remains that I started down this line of research long before Bernard Baxter.”

“What if I could produce a paper written by Bernard Baxter for one of his professors, the same professor that invited him to “tag along,” as you defined it, to your lecture. Say — for arguments sake — that this paper deals with the same line of research you do, but it was written a year before you ever formed your company, written before you had published anything about your work. If he published this article in a national college literary magazine for new research avenues, then he didn’t really steal your ideas, did he?”

“One man’s research for a short paper can’t be held against seven men’s in depth studies for two years. He took from us a solid foundation, and started to openly compete against us, using insider information.”

"You said yourself," Daren pointed out, "that Bernard Baxter has actually surpassed you in many areas of the research you both work on."

"In some areas."

"So obviously, he understands the work better than you do."

"You obviously know nothing about research, don't you?" Blaine asked.

"No," Daren admitted, "but I believe Bernard Baxter does. When you offered Bernard a position at your company, what was it?"

Blaine sat quietly for a moment, looking over at the prosecution for some assistance. Cameron sat back, wondering just what he had missed from his talks with the man.

"You offered him a junior researcher position, correct?"

"I believe so," Blaine admitted, looking away.

"You yourself are a member of the board of directors, and you had ten senior researchers working for you at the time you offered him this position."

"There was a strong opportunity for promotion," Blaine defended, looking sternly over at Daren.

"Bernard showed you the flaws in your research, and you tried to exploit that for your own purposes. He told you when you offered him the job that he had put a great amount of thought into the work he had done, and that he thought you were headed in the wrong direction. He told you at that time that he planned to pursue work in this area."

"I don't recall that," Blaine replied.

"Your company actively pursued a lawsuit against Bernard when he published that paper. A panel of scientists was chosen by the lawyers representing you, to determine if the case had significant merit to warrant a trial. This panel of five scientists, from several independent locations, looked over his publication, as well as those that your company had published, and a number of publications following the one you claimed was stolen from you. All the members of that panel sided with Bernard Baxter, stating that if anyone is leading the pursuit of this technology, it is Bernard Baxter. In fact, Dr. Sunderland, three of the five members of that panel now actively support Bernard Baxter by funding his research."

Blaine Sunderland sat still, his face red with anger. He kept looking over to Cameron, who could do nothing for him. He looked back over at Bernard, who no longer looked down at the paper. He was centered on Blaine, his face emotionless.

"You've made a number of advancements in your research lately, haven't you, Dr. Sunderland?" Daren asked, allowing the silence to subside.

"That's correct," Blaine responded, almost as surprised at the question as Daren was when he saw it on the list. "We're pursuing a number of avenues that Bernard Baxter has never published anything on. We've beaten him to publication with our last three articles. Who's the one falling behind now?"

“You’re still pursuing the Crutchfield Virus as an active attack mechanism for entry into the cell, aren’t you?” Daren asked, completely unaware of what he had just asked.

“I’m afraid that I’m not allowed to discuss that, since it is now considered a violation of my company’s policies to discuss research in an open forum.”

Daren smiled to himself as he glanced down at the next question, amazed at Bernard’s abilities to foresee the replies of the witness.

“Say, just as a hypothetical situation, that your company were actively investigating this approach, but Bernard’s group had given up on the technology six months ago, because they knew that this approach had already failed. We’ll say — completely hypothetically — that the virus showed fifty percent degradation upon introduction to the body, because it isn’t very resistant to attack in its altered state,” Daren quoted from the notes. “Wouldn’t this explain why you need to add twice as much of your virus to achieve the expected results.”

Daren couldn’t understand what he had just said, but he could tell by the expression on Blaine’s face that it had upset him.

“If this were truly the case,” Daren pointed out blindly, “and you were still investigating this technique, then you still have a long way to go before you’re actually looking at a feasible treatment. It would be very hard to push through a treatment that falls apart immediately upon injection into the body. Especially when that virus is carrying a molecular poison.

“Let’s also say, hypothetically, that somebody in Bernard’s group realized this months ago, but didn’t make that information available to everyone who works for Bernard, for security reasons. During this time, they’ve pursued other avenues, but kept it rather quiet. They’re probably significantly further in their research than you are.”

Dr. Blaine Sunderland didn’t even look up at Daren, he just glanced over at Bernard. He suddenly realized the mistake he had made in coming to the trial, and taking the stand against the man. What was worse, he understood also that he had underestimated Bernard. For everyone else in the courtroom, the last three questions meant nothing, but for Bernard and Blaine, it meant a great deal. As he looked at Bernard from the stand, he saw something that no other person who had testified thus far had seen during the trial. He saw a smile on Bernard’s face, and a look of satisfaction.

“The two points that Bernard first argued with you, who was right?”

“That’s a matter of opinion.”

“Allow me to rephrase the question,” Daren allowed, “Was Bernard wrong?”

“No,” Blaine finally relented.

“We have no more questions, your honor,” Daren informed as he walked away from Blaine and returned to sit beside Bernard.

“The prosecution calls Dr. Henry Lansing to the stand.”

Cameron remained seated until they had sworn Henry in. He looked over his notes for a moment more, preparing to use one of Bernard's closest friends as a tool against him. He wouldn't be an easy witness, and Cameron felt some intimidation as he approached the scientist. He wore a fine suit for the appearance, aware of how many people would see his face this evening on the news.

"Dr. Lansing, you have known Bernard Baxter for many years now, correct?"

"Yes, I have," Henry replied calmly, looking directly at the prosecutor. His voice exhibited an authoritative sureness in its tone.

"How did you first come to meet him?"

"I spoke to him after a seminar he presented at my college. I found his ideas very impressive, and made my interests in his work apparent when we talked. I wrote him in regards to some of his work, and asked him about his research lab. He called me a few weeks later, and asked me to come down here to look at his laboratory."

"Your professors at Boston Medical regarded you as a fine student, and said that you had a promising career ahead of you. Coming to work for Dr. Bernard Baxter was a risk at that time in your life, wasn't it?"

"It was, but it has proven otherwise."

"Yes, it has, until now," he replied wryly.

"We're still continuing our work," Henry defended.

"Yes, I know," Cameron paused to absorb a moment of light laughing from the courtroom. "What influenced your decision to come here to work for Bernard Baxter, instead of going to work at one of the larger, more prosperous firms that were actively trying to recruit you?"

"Bernard never tried to recruit me. He made me aware of the risks, but offered a whole different world of research. I was intrigued, and felt an intellectual stimulation unlike anything I had ever known when I was around him."

"Did the salary he offered compare with these other companies?"

"No, not really. I didn't come to work here for the money."

"But you stand to make a fortune if your new therapy maintains the level of promise it has already illustrated."

"Absolutely."

"What's your financial cut in the Northwestern Cancer Research Institute?"

"I have no idea," Henry answered plainly. "Everyone who works for Bernard owns a profit percentage of the company. The longer you work for him, and the more bonus points you earn, the higher your percentage grows."

"Bonus points?"

“If we set a goal for ourselves, and a person inside the lab is instrumental in reaching that goal, they earn bonus points. The top members of the laboratory regularly review everyone’s merit towards reaching goals. It adds some capitalism to the work, but most look at it as a matter of internal recognition than monetary reward.”

“What’s your percentage?”

“Ten percent.”

“Is anyone else inside the plant above ten percent?”

“Not to my knowledge,” Henry answered. “Myself and Dr. Ellen Brockbank have the highest shares, and I believe she’s around five percent.”

“What sort of income does that generate for you?”

“I’ve never received any income from profit.”

“Why is that?”

“Because we’ve never sold any of our technologies. The entire research facility votes at any time we develop something that we might market, and the votes have always been unanimous to retain rights. Nobody wants to sell false hopes. We’re in it for the cure.”

“So you’ve never earned extra income from your labor?”

“No, I haven’t.”

“If you cashed in and sold your shares right now...” Cameron began.

“We couldn’t,” Henry answered abruptly. “The only way we cash in on those shares is if we, as a company, decide to sell something, or if the company is sold.”

“Do you know your company’s worth?”

“I couldn’t even venture a guess.”

“A leading business analyst did,” Cameron replied. “He estimated the worth at more than ten million dollars. Your share of that would be over a million dollars. That’s only the worth of information obtained until now. If you cured cancer, the value would be much greater.”

“If the company were sold.”

“What’s your salary?”

“I make almost seventy thousand dollars a year.”

“You would be significantly richer if this company sold.”

“If you say so,” Henry allowed.

“Haven’t you ever felt that your salary is a bit unfair?”

“I told you before, I’m not interested in the money.”

“What percentage of the company belongs to Bernard?”

“About fifty percent, I believe.”

“Was all that Bernard’s?”

“No, he shared it with his wife. She invested a great deal of money in the facility when he first set it up, and she had a pretty good say in everything that happened there. She celebrated our accomplishments just as much as any other scientist.”

“What happens to her percentage of the company now that she’s dead?”

“I assume it transfers to Bernard. I believe she left him everything in her will.”

“Did you ever witness Bernard Baxter strike his wife?”

“Never in anger.”

“A simple yes or no will do.”

“I won’t answer it that way,” Henry replied sternly.

“I request that you do.”

“I don’t give a rat’s ass what you request,” Henry replied with irritation, though retaining his composure. “If you wish for an answer to your question, then you will allow a full and complete answer. I won’t answer it any other way.”

“Why not?”

“Bernard Baxter practices a unique form of the martial arts. He chooses to take a defensive position on the state of our modern society. There was a point in time where Carolyn was attacked by an individual while she was at school, years ago. She managed to fight the man off with her keys, but took a tremendous beating for it.

“When Bernard learned of the incident, he chose to teach her a means of proper defense against assailants. She had a fear for guns, and didn’t want them in the house with children around. I witnessed Bernard training her on several occasions, and during those instances, there were times he struck her, though never violently. He taught her ways to defend herself from violence. I never saw him hit her in anger.”

“But he did hit her?”

“Yes,” Henry admitted.

“Did he ever hit her as hard as to leave a bruise?”

“I don’t recall an occurrence where she was bruised, but I know that they happen. It does little good to learn to defend yourself against an assailant who isn’t really applying any effort to his attack.”

“What do you know about Bernard’s fascination with swords?”

“It isn’t a fascination, as much as a deep respect,” Henry explained.

“I’m not interested in an essay, Dr. Lansing. Just answer the questions please.”

“I know a great deal about his swords.”

“Why is that?”

“I studied as a student of his, ever since I came to work for him. I also, share this fascination — as you call it — with swords.”

“Did he ever compete with his swords?”

"I can recall one or two times he took part in a competition. He quit taking part in them soon after I came to work for him."

"Why is that?" Cameron asked.

"Carolyn requested that he stop, when she quit performing dance in a public arena. They both decided that their lives were public enough from his work, and didn't want to call any more attention to themselves."

"How did you come to be his student?"

"I asked him to teach me his art. He spent weeks working with me before he decided to take me as a student. He doesn't accept new students readily, and keeps to himself about his training. He's very good at what he does, but does it for himself now."

"Did many other people at the research center know about his swords?"

"I think a great number of people knew about them. Anyone who had ever been to his home had seen the collection, and I had others ask me about them before."

"You were the last person to speak with Bernard and Carolyn together, before her death. You first learned of her death at your residence, is that correct?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Do you recall Bernard's mood that evening?"

"He was very cheerful, as I recall. I hadn't seen him that happy in a long time. He had been working on a new approach, and finally seen some positive results that same day. We shared a drink between the three of us, and they went home. I saw them both to their car."

"Did you drink a great deal?"

"We all had a glass of a fine wine that we had saved for a moment such as that evening. It was a festive drink, as I recall, but it was only the one drink."

"You didn't notice any nervousness in Bernard?"

"No, I can't recall that I did."

"What did you do that evening?"

"I went out with some other people from the research center."

"Who?"

"I believe there were four of us. Linda, Nancy and Jeremy. We went and had a quick meal, then they dropped me off at my home."

"Have you ever dated anyone from the research center?"

"I wouldn't really define anything as dating, at least not seriously. I can't count the number of times I shared a meal or movie with another person at the lab, but it's usually just to socialize. Most of us are single, but we get enough of one another at work. I wouldn't call any of it dating. I did see one person for a few weeks, and really enjoyed her company, but we were better as friends, and both realized it."

“What was your first reaction when you learned that Carolyn was dead?” Cameron asked with interest.

“Shock, and then anger. I had just awoken when the detectives came to see me, and I wasn’t feeling myself. I’m still shocked, and can’t understand why anyone would want to hurt her. I never did make it to work that day. It’s one of the worst days of my life, and I shall never forget it.”

Cameron turned away from the stand and began to walk over to his table. He sat down comfortably before looking back over to Henry again.

“I just have one final question, Dr. Lansing. Do you recall an instance at a meeting among your colleagues where Carolyn voiced an opinion that she felt your research team should make every effort to keep the costs of your new therapies to a very reasonable price, almost half of what some of your supporters and funders recommended?”

Henry sat for a moment, as though going through his own thoughts.

“Yes, I believe she did at one particular meeting voice that opinion, though nobody really stood up and argued about it. Our research center is made up primarily of scientists. You’ll find that we’re a different sort of people than most, rarely interested in growing inconceivably rich from our discoveries. Most of us just want to live comfortably, continue our work, and perhaps achieve infamy if we devise an actual cure to this disease.”

“Is it possible that there are people in your organization who would like to see a higher price tag on this technology.”

“Sure, it’s always possible.”

“Bernard Baxter stands to earn a great deal of money from this. It would prove a financial benefit to him to have Carolyn out of the way, correct.”

“If you choose to ignore everything I’ve just told you, then yes, Mr. McBride, he does.”

“We have no more questions for this witness.”

Hayden looked over at Bernard, expecting to see the familiar wave of a hand. He rarely cross examined, and the judge didn’t really expect it. He was surprised to see Bernard scribbling on a tablet as he watched for a response. Bernard finished writing on his sheet of paper and handed it to Daren for the cross examination. It was a relatively short list, though he had highlighted several of the questions.

“You knew Carolyn quite well, didn’t you?” Daren began.

“We were very good friends. I feel a great loss with her gone.”

“I understand that, Dr. Lansing,” Daren replied sympathetically. “Sadly, Dr. Lansing, Carolyn isn’t here to present herself to the court, so that these people might know her as you did. Do you feel comfortable saying that you knew her quite well?”

“Yes.”

“In your opinion, would you call her a strong person?”

“Very strong willed, and extremely self motivated,” Henry agreed.

“Could she have lived as productive of a life without Bernard?”

“Sure.”

“Would she have stayed around if Bernard ever beat her?”

“Never.”

“Your honor,” Cameron called out. “This is all very speculative. You’re allowing a witness to speak on behalf of the victim. I could present any number of strong willed women that were too frightened to leave their abusive spouse, and I will if necessary.”

“Point taken, Mr. Prosecutor,” Hayden replied from his bench. “The defense will stick to presenting facts, not opinions. I don’t want anyone speaking for the deceased.”

“Did you and Carolyn ever discuss her personal life with Bernard?”

“From time to time.”

“So, you understood the basic functioning of their relationship?”

“I know Bernard very well. He and I shared a very strong and professional relationship. Carolyn and I were much more personable with each other. She and I often discussed things that Bernard and I wouldn’t. They had a wonderful relationship, and she simply adored him.”

“How would you define their relationship?”

“I would call it a mutual need for one another, with a strong sense of communication. They were both very individualistic and also dependent on one another.”

“Were they very close?”

“Extremely.”

“Could you elaborate.”

“They were both deeply involved in one another’s work. Bernard learned to paint, so he could spend extra time with his wife. They shared everything, including their feelings, with one another. They also listened closely to each other.

“If Carolyn didn’t like somebody, Bernard would avoid them. One of the reasons that Bernard chose to ask me to work with him, was because his wife requested that I come into the lab. I really liked everything about Bernard’s work, but it was as if Carolyn had the final say in things.”

“Were there actual instances that this occurred?”

“Absolutely,” Henry stressed. “When Bernard began his research in cancer, he learned that another man, Dr. Blaine Sunderland, was doing work of a similar nature. Both men got together and discussed their ideas, and Dr. Sunderland tried to persuade Bernard to join up with him. Bernard wanted to, but had some reservations about it. He asked his wife what she felt, and she advised him against it. He made a major decision in his life based on her personal intuition.”

“Bernard must have a great deal of respect for her.”

“Yes he did, and I never once witnessed anything to make me doubt that during her entire life. It’s a tragedy that she died, but it’s just as great a tragedy to condemn Bernard Baxter for this crime. If you understood him the way I do, you could never charge him with this.”

Chapter Fifteen

Daren Holt walked up to the front of the courtroom, well aware of the risk that his client had already taken. The trial already looked bad for Bernard, and nothing he could say at this point would change that. He wanted to ask the bad questions first, so Cameron couldn't make a theatrical mockery of Bernard, but there was little more Daren could do to ease the bleak future of his client, and he didn't know enough about the man to know if it would serve any purpose anyway. One of the worst things possible that the defense could do was to place the defendant on the stand, but there was no reasoning with Bernard Baxter.

Daren watched Bernard carefully as he approached him. As always, Bernard sat rather expressionless. He wore a nice suit, that Daren had retrieved from his home. He seemed humble sitting before the jury, but Daren knew Bernard would waste no time shattering that image.

Bernard had made his mind up weeks ago to take the stand, and never paid any attention to the advice of Daren. Now that the time was here, Daren had a few ideas to get the truth out of the man. He had spent a great deal of time trying to learn the truth about his client's personal relationship with Carolyn, and felt that the jury only needed to hear it as well. All he needed was the reasonable doubt, and he already held that himself.

"Is it not true, Dr. Baxter," Daren asked plainly, "that your wife had various affairs during the span of your marriage?"

"If it pleases the court, I refuse to answer that question," Bernard replied, a sudden scowl on his face. The icy stare he returned to his attorney met a look of surprise.

"I ask that my client be instructed to answer the question," Daren responded, looking at the judge for support.

"Dr. Baxter, you will answer the question as asked."

"No, your honor, I will not," Bernard replied, never taking his eyes away from Daren.

"That was not a request, Dr. Baxter," Hayden informed in an angry voice. "It was a direct order by the court. Answer the question that your attorney asked."

"Or what? You'll hold me in contempt?" Bernard asked, furthering to irritate Hayden by denying him the dignity of looking him in the face as he spoke. "Go ahead. I refuse to soil the reputation of my wife. Her personal life has no bearing in whether or not I am guilty of the crime you've charged me with. I ask that my attorney pursue another line of questioning."

"Dr. Baxter," Hayden turned with a look of anger, his face flush and his patience tried.

"The defense wishes to withdraw the question, your honor," Daren blurted out. His neck already hung out far enough, and he didn't want a judge that despised his client as well. It was hard to draw back from something that could help his client, but he couldn't afford to jeopardize him any further.

"Very well," Hayden responded, closing his eyes and turning back to face the attorney.

“One question then, Dr. Baxter,” Daren remarked. “Did you kill your wife?”

“No,” Bernard replied calmly.

“The defense has no further questions, your honor.”

It wasn’t much, but it left Bernard the option of appeals. He wanted to make a few mistakes which would allow Bernard some time if he were convicted. He would be sure to meet with the media, and tell them how difficult a client Bernard had been. He would then explain that it was a tactic he had purposely used. He knew he didn’t look like a very good attorney at this point in time, but that would ease the criticism somewhat.

Daren returned to his table, the defeat evident on his face. He had spent a great deal of time gathering his information and preparing the line of questions. He hated to abandon it, and knew the prosecution would ask those questions in a much more hostile manner.

“Prosecution,” Hayden announced after taking a moment to regain his composure..

“Did you love your wife, Dr. Baxter?” Cameron asked from his seat.

“Very much,” Bernard replied sincerely.

Cameron leaned back in his seat and studied Bernard before continuing. He had expected more questions from the defense, but knew of the opportunity before him. He wanted to break Bernard here. It would do wonders for his career, and it was simple given all he knew.

“Were you faithful to your wife?”

“That depends on how you define faithful,” Bernard replied, his eyes focused on Cameron.

“Have you at any time had a relationship of a sexual nature with another woman during the duration of your marriage?”

“Yes.”

“More than one?” Cameron asked, standing and walking over to face Bernard.

“Multiple affairs,” Bernard replied nonchalantly.

Cameron’s face remained unchanged as he fought back the smile.

“Was your wife aware of your affairs?”

“I don’t know that, I never asked.”

“How many times, would you estimate, did you and your wife have intercourse in the month prior to your wife’s death?”

“We didn’t,” Bernard replied simply.

Cameron held still a moment, slowing the pace and allowing the excitement in the room to increase slightly, before asking his next question.

“How many times in the prior three months?”

“Zero.”

“The prior year?”

“None.”

“When was the last time your wife and you had intercourse?”

“Almost three years ago.”

“Why?”

“We agreed that it was best for our relationship.”

“Excuse me for the comment, but that doesn’t sound like much of a marriage, Dr. Baxter,” Cameron pointed out, his ridicule evident.

“I had no complaints.”

“Of course not,” Cameron smiled, “you were having multiple affairs.”

“I object, your honor,” Daren called out from his seat. “The court has not determined that any affair occurred in the past three years.”

“They did,” Bernard answered calmly.

Daren looked coldly at Bernard for a moment, and looked back at his notes on the table. His anger and frustration were now fully justified.

“Who did you share intercourse with during the month prior to your wife’s murder?” Cameron continued.

“I won’t answer that,” Bernard replied in a cold tone. “This court does not need to soil the reputations of anyone besides myself. You’ve already established that I was not a model husband in regards to monogamy. If you want to continue your character bashing of me with a cooperative witness, then I suggest you concentrate on me, not my lovers. I will not stand for you harming the integrity of any of my associates or friends. I will not disclose the names of anyone I was involved with. Any further questions regarding that subject are futile.”

“That’s very honorable of you, Dr. Baxter,” Cameron replied bitterly. “Your wife made a great deal of money from her art, didn’t she?”

“Yes.”

“You made more though?”

“Off the top of my head, I would say we both made similar salaries.”

“You could have both supported yourselves alone?”

“Absolutely,” Bernard agreed, “and comfortably.”

“If you both made enough money to support yourselves, and you weren’t romantically involved...”

“I never said we weren’t romantically involved,” Bernard interrupted. “All I said is that we weren’t having intercourse.”

“Many people would define it as the same thing.”

“Those with a limited perception, perhaps,” Bernard agreed.

“If your wife and you were not engaging in sex, and you weren’t financially bound, why did you remain married?”

“We never saw a reason to separate.”

"Don't you think that's a bad environment to raise your children in?"

"I disagree. You act as if divorce is the only alternative."

"I think it's absurd for children to grow up in a family where the parents don't love one another," Cameron argued in a scornful tone of voice.

"I loved Carolyn intensely," Bernard replied angrily. "We had a healthy relationship to raise our children under."

"I think you're avoiding the question."

"I think you're a self-centered bastard," Bernard answered calmly and without expression. "Carolyn and I committed ourselves to raising a family, and we didn't cower away from that commitment when our sexual relationship dwindled. I place a very high value on my family, and the simple fact is that Carolyn was the best mother possible for my children. We never wanted to subject our children to a separation of any kind. If you think I consider remaining in my marriage with Carolyn to be a sacrifice, then you're wrong, so let's get that straight right now. I always appreciated living with her, and sharing her company. I didn't want to leave my wife."

"Did you share the same bed?"

"Yes."

"Your wife was a beautiful woman, Dr. Baxter. Are you telling the court that you shared her bed, but refrained from sex for the past three years?"

"Is that impossible for you to comprehend?"

"It is," answered Cameron.

"Try it yourself," Bernard replied. "You discover a great deal about your spouse when you force yourself to regard her in a non-sexual manner. You might be missing a great deal of beauty you never knew about."

"My relationship isn't in question here," Cameron pointed out.

"Maybe it should be."

"My wife's still alive," Cameron snarled.

"But is your relationship alive?" Bernard asked calmly.

"Are you a homosexual, Dr. Baxter?" Cameron asked suddenly.

"I find that lifestyle revolting, sir. Are you?" Bernard returned, speaking in a low tone which aggravated Cameron tremendously.

"The witness will refrain from asking Mr. McBride questions," Hayden interrupted. "It is you on trial, Dr. Baxter, not the prosecution."

"Did you have sex with anyone on the day of your wife's murder?"

"No."

"The week prior?"

"That has no pertinence in this case."

"Who are you to decide what is pertinent?" Cameron asked.

"I have the answers," Bernard replied, "as well as the right to choose. Trust me, it isn't important."

"You think highly of yourself," Cameron spoke in a revolting voice.

"I do a great amount of thinking, Cameron."

"You feel you are a better person than most," Cameron stated in scorn.

"No," Bernard replied, "but I feel I am a better person than you."

The light laughter from behind Cameron rose loud enough for Hayden to slam the gavel once at the courtroom. Bernard's face remained very emotionless as he spoke, but his thoughts were centered. Cameron could tell that Bernard enjoyed taunting him this way.

"Do you believe in God, Bernard?" Cameron asked.

"Only a fool denies a belief in God."

"What are your thoughts on the death penalty?"

"I have nothing against it."

"What about justifiable homicide?"

"Not in this case. You couldn't justify my wife's death."

"Where's the other sword?"

"I don't know that," Bernard answered simply.

"Would somebody want it?"

"I can't imagine why, it was a gift."

"You fought competitively," Cameron replied.

"I did, but I quit some time ago."

"Why is that?"

"My wife asked me to, when she quit performing on stage."

"Just because your wife asked you?" Cameron remarked, suggesting that Bernard was hiding something.

"Yes."

"You are quite honorable," Cameron remarked, trying to induce a reply for the jury. Bernard sat quietly, awaiting the next set of questions.

"Let me just see if I can sum this testimony of yours up. You admit that you have affairs, on a regular basis. You stand to make a great deal of money from your research, and you would have had to split that with your wife. You loved your wife, though you haven't had a sexual relationship with her for three years. Am I correct so far?"

"Yes."

"And now you expect this jury to believe that you woke up one evening, in your million dollar home that you built, and found your wife lying dead beside you. Do you have a burglar alarm, Dr. Baxter?"

“Yes.”

“Was it working that evening?”

”Yes.”

“Did it register a break in?”

“No.”

“Would it be very easy for a criminal to slip in undetected?”

“Quite close to impossible, I would suspect.”

“Well, it sounds like a pretty water tight alibi to me,” Cameron replied in a sarcastic tone as he turned and walked away from Bernard. “We have no more questions for the defendant, your honor.”

Henry walked into the visitors room again, aware of his failure. He didn’t like to admit it to himself, but he realized that he had come to the end of something he no longer understood. He sat down at the chair, awaiting the man he had learned so much from, feeling rather pitiful. His whole world was falling apart, and the latest events just added to the uncertainty of what the future held.

Bernard walked through the door a few minutes later. He had a strange look on his face. Henry had never seen so much anger, and some relief. He knew the man had experienced a great deal during the past few weeks, and didn’t wish to bring the news he did today. It would take a great toll on Bernard, and nothing looked good for him anymore.

“It failed?” Bernard asked, reading the expression on Henry’s face. Henry noticed the evident dissatisfaction Bernard stressed in his tone.

“I can’t understand it, Bernard,” Henry defended, though it only served to make him feel that much smaller of a man in the eyes of his mentor. “I thought for sure that we would see success with this. I don’t know what else to try.”

The room was empty again, allowing them to speak fairly freely. Henry had even learned to ignore the guard who stood nearby.

“I’ve missed something,” Bernard said to himself. “It should have worked. What am I missing?”

“I don’t know,” Henry confessed.

“Are you sure you did it the way I told you?”

“Yes.”

“Do you understand what you are doing?”

“Not completely, it’s still foreign,” Henry admitted. “What else do you need from me?”

“I need more than just raw data,” Bernard replied in frustration. “I need my laboratory.”

“Perhaps the judge would let you out on bail for a while, for the good of our research.”

"They would never allow it," Bernard replied. "The trial looks too bad, and they would anticipate me running. It's too late to try that now."

"There must be something we can do."

"We could do so much if we could just make this treatment work," Bernard uttered in frustration. Henry had never seen such a display of hopelessness from Bernard.

"I know," Henry said in disbelief.

"Do you believe in the research, Henry?" Bernard asked in a manner as serious as Henry had ever known.

"Yes," the man replied sincerely.

"Do you honestly think we will uncover the treatment?"

"It's so close," Henry replied. "We're slowing down, and there are others closing in faster than ourselves."

"Can you imagine what we would become?"

"I've thought about it," Henry admitted.

"You want to be a part of it," Bernard pointed out.

"More than I can admit."

"And you would stop at nothing to achieve that, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," Henry replied.

"I always knew the truth about you, Henry," Bernard stressed angrily, "but until recently, I didn't know how far you would go to achieve the dream."

It was early when Max arrived, and he wondered if it was the right thing to do. He didn't like it. The strange feeling had come over him soon after receiving the call, and he knew that his gut was trying to tell him something. He knew that the trial would end soon, and he wanted to move on from the case, but the tone of Bernard's voice told him that it was important.

He entered the quiet conference room to find Bernard sitting alone. The guard closed the door behind him, leaving them both alone. The dim light made it hard to see in the dark room, but Bernard could still make out the man's face.

"Hello, Max," Bernard greeted in a voice like none he had ever heard.

"What's this about Bernard?"

"The trial."

"There isn't much time left for you, Dr. Baxter," Max expressed in a manner not hiding his dissatisfaction.

"You'll be in the courtroom today, won't you?" Bernard asked.

"Should I?"

"I think you'll find it all quite interesting."

"What sort of trick have you and your lawyer worked up now?"

"I work alone, Max," Bernard replied. "You know I despise lawyers, the same way you do. If I could find a way to disgrace the whole lot of them, I guarantee you that I would. They think that they're pretty powerful people, but they don't do much other than feed off of honest people. You don't really like them either, do you, Max?"

"Not especially," Max admitted. "Is this all you brought me out here for, Dr. Baxter?"

"No, Max," Bernard replied. "I just wanted to make sure you would be there, so that you understand. By the end of this day, Max, I can assure you, that you will understand everything."

"Why should I believe you, Bernard. You've never shown me any reason to doubt what I believe."

"But today, Max, I will present to you the truth."

Daren had reserved the conference room as Bernard asked. Bernard took his seat in the small room in the courthouse. Daren looked extremely nervous today. Bernard knew that the man had a bad feeling about the case. Bernard had handled everything in a manner that made him look terrible, and made every possible flaw he could manage. Bernard almost felt bad that it would all end soon. He enjoyed seeing the man suffer so much.

"You wanted to see me, Bernard?" Daren asked with hesitation.

"I will give you a list of questions," Bernard replied, his face suddenly unlike anything Daren had ever seen. There was a seriousness in his words, and something more. "You will read them to whom I ask you to call. You will ask only those questions, and not review them prior to addressing each one. You will not ask any questions not listed on the sheet of paper I give you. When it is all over, you will get me out of the courthouse as quickly as possible. You want to look like a good lawyer in front of the world, then today is your opportunity."

"What's going on?" Daren asked in shock.

"I know who killed me wife, and you will help me see that justice is served now."

Hayden took his seat at the bench, aware that there were only three other people left on the list of witnesses for the defense. It wouldn't be long before the trial was behind them all, and he hoped that the jury would find Bernard guilty as quickly as possible. He dearly needed a week off from work. It was a quick trial, and not as drawn out as it could have been, but it had still taken a toll on his health, and he needed some rest. Watching the media critique everything he said had made for many sleepless nights.

The judge took his seat at the large desk, and looked down at Daren. The man looked more nervous than usual today. He didn't know why it was that he enjoyed seeing the man this way, nor that Bernard shared the same feelings.

"Would the defense care to call their next witness?" Hayden asked.

Bernard reached down and removed a sheet of paper. He handed it to Daren, who stood up to speak to the judge.

“If it please the court, we wish to recall a witness, for further testimony.”

“Who do you want?” Hayden asked.

“We wish to recall Dr. Henry Lansing to the stand.”

“Very well, is he in the court?”

Daren looked behind him to where Henry was already climbing up from his seat. He felt strange about calling the man without knowing what he would ask him, and he felt even stranger when he saw the look of surprise on the man’s face. A few minutes later, Daren opened the list completely, and approached the seat where Henry sat.

“Dr. Lansing, if someone leaves the research institute, what happens?”

“How do you mean?” Henry asked hesitantly.

“If somebody quits, what is the company policy?”

“They lose their percentage that they own. It’s a stipulation of the contract we all sign when we take on employment with the research center.”

“If Bernard dies, or for any reason, cannot function as the head of the institute, who takes over as head of the center?”

“I would,” Henry replied simply.

“You are very close to final development of this research, aren’t you?” Daren asked.

“We are extremely close.”

“On the night that Carolyn died, what discovery was everyone celebrating?”

“We saw the first set of results from a pilot study we ran. It was premature, but we felt at that time that we had found the key to the treatment.”

“And now?” Daren continued, reading slowly and carefully, so that he asked the questions exactly as Bernard had written them down..

“We know that was a false assumption, and there were still a few minor obstacles to overcome.”

“So everyone felt that they had found the cure for cancer that evening?”

“Something to that effect.”

“If you had actually uncovered this cure, your investors would have paid a great deal of money for that, correct?”

“I assume that it would have generated a significant amount of money.”

“Define significant.”

“How large of a number would you like,” Henry asked with irritation. “We’re talking about a definite cure to one of the largest plagues of our time. Nobody can put a price tag on the worth of this technology.”

“So then, people had a reason to celebrate.”

“Absolutely,” Henry replied. “Until we found a problem several days later with the results.”

“You shared drinks with Bernard that evening.”

“Yes, I already testified to that,” Henry replied.

“When did you share drinks?”

“Around 9:00 p.m., I suppose.”

“And Carolyn was present.”

“That’s correct.”

“The next morning you were late for work.”

“Yes,” Henry replied. “I overslept.”

“Are you late often?”

“Rarely.”

“You were the last person to see Carolyn alive with Bernard.”

“Yes.”

“And you’re a close family friend.”

“Yes,” Henry replied, growing impatient with the questions.

“You’ve even taken care of their home before, when they were away.”

“Yes,” Henry replied innocently. “I took care of their dogs.”

“You know about Bernard’s spare key.”

“That’s how I got in the house.”

“Two years before you met Bernard, you worked with Dr. Housely, while you were finishing up your doctorate.”

That’s correct,” Henry replied, a look of horror on his face.

“During the time you worked with him, didn’t you take part in a set of studies for a pharmaceutical company that had developed a new drug?”

Henry sat still, looking over at Bernard with a face of anger.

“Didn’t you run several studies on a drug called Thoricidian A?”

Henry never looked up at Daren, but the anger on his face had changed his complexion to a deep red color.

“You bastard,” Henry uttered at Bernard, who met his stare with his own angry face.

“You stood to make a great deal of money with a cure for cancer. You are now acting as the head of the research center that will develop the cure. With Bernard in prison, and his wife dead, you will run the Northwestern Cancer Research Institute.”

“You won’t pin this on me,” Henry uttered as he started to stand from his chair. The bailiff was quick to respond to Hayden’s instructions, and met the man before he could reach Bernard. In one instant, Hayden realized the mistake that Cameron had made, and already made his decision before Daren could ask.

“I ask that charges against my client be dropped,” Daren replied, a smile evident on his face.

“Prosecution,” Hayden asked in anger, as the low mumble from the audience slowly rose with the intense commotion.

“The state of Idaho wishes to drop charges of murder against Dr. Bernard Baxter.”

Several minutes later, after Hayden personally led him through his office to the special entrance to the building, Bernard climbed into the car parked at the back of the courthouse.

Chapter Sixteen

Bernard sat at the bench, looking through the lenses of the microscope. The evidence from the two slides was indisputable. He examined the second closely, trying to determine if any cells still functioned, but after several minutes, he couldn't locate a single one.

It was all quite simple, though he knew that Henry didn't really understand it well enough to find the flaw. It had only taken him two hours after he reached the lab to make the necessary changes, and grow up a small amount of virus to perform the simple test. He had more growing now, but it would take a while to grow enough to perform a good sized study. Bernard didn't worry about that anymore. He had changed his clothes, feeling more comfortable in what he wore for the first time in over a month. It was good to be a free man again.

He turned back to the other slide, and examined the cells in it as well, looking for any that showed signs of weakening. He remained quite confident that he had developed it correctly. It hadn't taken nearly as long as he expected, which was even more positive. It meant that the treatment reacted with the cells quite quickly. It also meant that he would have additional time left for the evening. He didn't want to waste any more time. The past month had already slowed his progress enough.

The knock at the door actually startled Bernard, and he turned quickly to see who disturbed his solitude. The door cracked just slightly, and Ellen walked into the room and took a seat beside him. He saw the sadness in her eyes, and the confusion.

"I'm so sorry, Bernard," she spoke finally, after what seemed like forever. "I'm so sorry for the mess this has all made of your life."

"Thank you," Bernard replied solemnly.

She wore more casual attire than her usual outfits. Bernard knew she had probably come from home once she heard about the trial.

"What will you do now?"

"I've already done it," Bernard answered with a hint of a smile.

"Done what?"

"Found the problem with the treatment."

"I thought there was some problem you and Henry couldn't figure out," Ellen replied, the look of confusion growing.

"See for yourself," he answered, turning the microscope to face her. She reached over and looked through the lens to the slide. Bernard allowed her to carefully examine each of the two samples, before continuing.

"How did you find it so quickly?"

"Once I knew who was responsible for Carolyn's death, I decided to hold back pieces of information, because I didn't feel that it was safe to share all this. I know it caused everyone a

great deal of frustration, but I couldn't risk losing everything. I knew that we could easily obtain this, but I had to make sure I got out before I finished the work."

"What did you do?"

"I just incorporated a flaw into the reaction mechanism. It was simple, and since I designed the mechanism, it was simple to plant the flaw. Nobody expected an engineered flaw in the virus, and so it easily went undetected. I just removed the flaw."

"How long have you been here?" Ellen asked.

"Since the trial ended."

"You must be tired."

"No," Bernard replied, "but I do have some business to attend to, as soon as I wrap up here. I'm growing some more of the virus now, and I have the samples prepared for the test."

"I can spike them, if you would like."

"I would really appreciate that," Bernard replied with a warm smile.

"Are you going to see your children?" Ellen asked.

"No," Bernard replied. "I still need to make peace with my wife's death."

"I understand," she replied honestly.

"Ellen," Bernard spoke before he left. "Thank you."

"For what?" she asked.

"For standing by me, through everything."

"I would never abandon you, Bernard."

"Thank you," he reiterated.

"Well," Fred spoke finally, after the long ride in the car. "That's one of the strangest endings I've ever seen in a trial."

"I know," Max returned. "How the hell did we miss that?"

"I don't know. We checked his background, and didn't see any reason to think he was involved with anything like that."

"What are you planning tonight?" Max asked with interest.

"I thought I would accompany you with the questioning. If we work together, we might break a confession from him tonight. I wanted to take some time off when we wrap this up."

"How would you like a different assignment for the evening?"

"What are you thinking?" Fred asked.

"I'm thinking that this doesn't add up."

"It sounds pretty convincing to me," Fred argued.

"I know, but I still don't trust him."

"So what's the plan then?"

“Why don’t you see if you can find our friend, Bernard,” Max instructed. “Keep an eye on him if you can. I think I can handle this questioning fine on my own. I’m just wondering if this might have been a joint effort.”

“If you think so, Max,” Fred replied, realizing his partner’s instincts had paid off before.

Bernard walked down the short hallway. It felt good to move about freely again. The evening sun had just set on his way from the lab. He followed the map he had memorized in the lobby as he walked into the apartment building several minutes earlier. A few more paces, and he arrived at the door. He felt somewhat relieved that he hadn’t seen a soul on his way in.

He tapped firmly on the door three times, and waited patiently for an answer. He had changed into a casually sophisticated attire before leaving the research center. He always kept several sets of clothing at his office. It was comfortable inside the building. He had never been inside before. The door opened a moment later, with a slight look of surprise on the woman’s face when she recognized her guest.

“Hello, Bernard,” Nancy said, the shock evident in her voice.

“Hello, Nancy,” Bernard replied with a soft smile.

Nancy stood for a moment before the look on her face slowly changed. He had never seen such a warmth in her eyes. Bernard had always admired the woman’s beauty, but only this close did it seem to envelope him. Her smile assured him that the feelings between them were genuine.

“I hoped you would come,” she replied with satisfaction. Nancy stepped back to allow him inside the apartment. It was decorated with an undeniable sophistication, but he didn’t even seem to notice. He glanced around only for a moment as he stepped beyond her and inside the living room.

She closed the door, turning to stand with it at her back, as she studied him with deep interest. She wore a soft blue robe that covered the nightgown she wore beneath. The robe dropped down to just below her knees, leaving Bernard no idea what she wore to sleep in. She stayed standing at the door, her arms behind her.

Bernard turned to look at her more closely, noting the look of intrigue on her face. Her eyes looked directly into his, and for a moment he saw a slight spark he had not known for some time. The look in her eyes told him many things, but it was the invitation he saw that finally broke the silence.

Bernard stepped forward, dropping a hand to her side as he advanced. Her hand came around to meet his, halting him only for a moment, before she pulled him near with her other. Her eyes closed as their lips met, and they clasped one another tightly. A desire they both shared for too long unleashed itself with a passion neither could imagine.

His hand dropped from the small of her back, and he pulled her body with determination, sensing the curves of her form pressed tightly against his own. With one movement he lifted her off her feet, noting that she never hesitated as he walked away from the door. In that moment, he realized the depth of the woman's feelings for him, and the desires he had just released, but never doubting whether he could meet her expectations.

Fred reached the top of the building and immediately ran across the roof to the edge. Something in his gut told him that this would prove interesting. He reached the edge of the roof, and looked over the small lip in the architecture, over towards the building adjacent where he had watched Bernard enter. He had finally picked up Bernard's trail at the lab, where he knew Bernard would first check in.

Fred knelt down and looked over the building, trying to recall which apartment it was that Nancy Dobbs resided at. It took him a moment, trying to recall his steps from the one time he and Max had visited this building to interview her. He recalled the room number immediately — he had always been good with numbers — and started looking across the windows on the third floor. It was the second from the end, he remembered, though from the outside his bearings were turned around, and he had to think for a moment to locate the correct side.

Fred lifted the binoculars from his coat pocket and focused them on the room about forty yards away from where he now sat. In the darkness, he was hardly visible from his perch. He could see the night stand lamp sitting beside the bed, and carefully searched through the room. Nancy had left the blinds open, not worried about anyone on the top floor of the office building staring at her as she read in bed. As he continued his search of the surroundings, he saw Bernard walk inside, carrying the woman.

Fred's mouth dropped in shock as he continued to watch the scene develop through the aide of the binoculars. It was only a matter of about a minute before the two were completely naked and locked in a tight embrace, moving savagely over the large bed in the room. Caught by the surprise of the moment, he hesitated before regaining his sense of reality.

Fred released one of his hands from the optical device and retrieved the cellular phone the department had supplied him with for occasions such as now. He used it primarily for personal calls, but appreciated its presence more at this moment than he could ever explain. He pressed lightly on the auto dial that called his local dispatch office. The call was answered immediately.

"This is detective Chase," Fred announced. "I need to speak directly with detective Max Harmon. Please get him for me now."

The rookie officer knocked once on the questioning room door, and entered a moment later. Max looked over immediately, not hiding the irritation that the interruption caused him. All

the frustration of the day's events showed on his face, and the man knew not to give Max a chance to vent his anguish upon him.

"Sorry to interrupt, detective Harmon," the young officer said in a timid voice. "you have an important call."

Max said nothing as he looked over at Henry Lansing, and stood up from his chair. Henry had said little during the two hour drilling and mind games Max exercised on him. Max walked towards the door, indicating to the younger individual to keep an eye on his prisoner while he took the call.

He continued down the hall and into the section of the precinct that handled homicides, where his desk sat at the middle. Max reached down and pressed the flashing red button as he pulled the receiver to his ear. His head pounded with the aggravation of the day.

"Max Harmon here," he uttered in a stern voice.

"This is Fred," the voice on the other end replied.

"What's up, Fred?" Max asked in a somber tone.

"It looks like your friend Dr. Baxter took no time getting over the grief of his wife's death," Fred answered with a noticeable chuckle.

"Why do you say that?" Max asked with certain interest, ignoring his headache.

"He followed a line directly from the lab to his secretary's residence."

"Nancy Dobbs?"

"That's the broad," Fred confirmed. "Seemed in a hurry to get there."

"I wonder what he's doing there?" Max asked himself.

"Would you like my detailed analysis?" Fred asked.

"Can you see them?" Max asked in confusion.

"You might say that I have a bird's eye view of the whole situation."

"I won't even ask," Max replied. "What are they doing?"

"Your good friend, Bernard, just nailed her," Fred replied frankly.

"They're doing it?" Max asked in disbelief. His age and generation had helped create a very reserved tone whenever he talked about things of a sexual nature. His partner had realized this early, and enjoyed throwing the man a twist with his street talk.

"They're playing a drawn out game of pop the weasel as we speak, Max," Fred informed his partner, trying to mask the inner satisfaction he gained from the remark.

"I see," Max answered calmly, glad that nobody was in the room to see the red on his face as he blushed.

"What's the call, boss?" Fred asked as he continued to observe.

"We can't really arrest them for it," Max answered with a bit of sarcasm.

"I thought this one was supposed to refrain from his advances," Fred uttered, still a little surprised by the spectacle he witnessed.

“So did I,” Max replied, surprised that the woman had deceived him this way.

“What should I do?” Fred asked, trying to retain some professionalism.

“Stay put,” Max replied. “Don’t lose Bernard until I have everything wrapped up on this end.”

“Did you get your confession yet?” Fred asked seriously.

“He’s keeping very quiet,” Max answered. “Keep me informed, Fred. Call back immediately if the situation develops further.”

“How much further do you think it can go?” Fred asked with a note of humor.

“He’s full of surprises,” Max stressed. “I want to know if something funny happens.”

“I’ll fill you in on all the details,” Fred assured him.

“I know you will,” Max replied as he hung the phone up.

Bernard climbed quietly from beneath the covers of the soft satin sheets of the bed. He glanced over to make sure his movement hadn’t stirred the woman he had shared such passion with. The intensity and duration of the acts they performed had taken a toll on her strength, and she now rested comfortably under the covers.

He had allowed himself a few minutes of rest to recuperate from the act he had taken such an aggressive role in, but could no longer sleep with the unquenchable thirst that hung over him. He moved quietly away from the bed, retrieving his boxers from the floor where they had fallen during the intense frenzy that led him to lie beside her. The light from the full moon outside shone through the open blinds of the apartment, and after a few minutes of rest, his eyes were well adjusted to the dark.

He walked out the open door, and headed down the short hallway of the elaborate apartment, on his way to the kitchen. He now studied the home more carefully, taking in as much as he could about the residence that was so foreign to him. The vaulted ceilings stood high above him, giving the dwelling a feeling of great size. It was a large apartment, with a great deal of open space. Bernard had always liked open space in architecture.

Nancy had good taste in her furnishings, but there were other things here as well, that had a slightly less feminine feel about them. He wasn’t really interested in those things now. The past few weeks had clouded his sense of the beauty around him, and forced him to concentrate more on uncovering the secrets to his wife’s murder. It was all over now, he knew who had killed her, but there was still one thing left to do.

Bernard turned at the entrance to the kitchen, and walked in the opposite direction. The living room contained several pieces of eloquent furniture, with an antique look about them. It was an old dresser, with a great number of intricate carvings on it, that he approached. He reached up and slid open the large drawer at the top of the piece. It opened smoothly, demonstrating the great care its owner had taken to keep the piece in such good condition.

He reached inside, and felt for the bottom of the drawer. It took a moment to empty the contents from the drawer on top of the dresser, but he quickly found what he had come for, and removed the false board which lined the bottom, to reveal the small space hidden beneath. He drew the weapon from where it lay and stepped back with it spread in his hands.

He admired the fine craftsmanship of the sword as he moved his hand to hold the weapon firmly in his grasp. With a graceful movement, he formed a figure eight in the air before him, carving it effortlessly. He had spent many years training with the weapon, and it felt comfortable in his hand.

Bernard slashed at the air around him with the extension of his arm. His wrist controlled the instrument, making smooth arcs which sounded like gentle whispers as they cut soft currents around him. In the speed of the movement, he exchanged the sword from one hand to another, assuring himself that his mastery of the craft had never left him.

He opened his eyes, suddenly looking around him again, realizing that he could not lower his defenses now. She stood there, twenty feet ahead of him, at the end of the hallway. She still wore the camisole and satin bottoms that she had worn to sleep in after their evening of passion fulfilled. There was a new look in her eyes now, he noted it as he continued to move the sword about him, with intense fury. Then suddenly, he stopped and held it out before him, admiring it again.

"It is truly a beautiful instrument," he remarked, not looking up at her. "I'm sure you've come to admire my treasure as well."

"You could say that," she returned firmly as she stepped into the living room. For the first time, Bernard saw what she carried in her hand, confirming his thoughts.

"Was it worth it?" he asked, looking directly at her.

"It's mine, rightfully," she replied in a bitter tone.

"You've never proven yourself worthy of it. This is the tool of a master, and a prize that I took with all the honor that has surrounded this weapon throughout history. You've tainted that now."

"The history died when you took possession of it," she argued with spite.

Bernard swung the sword around him three times, spinning it in a circular movement in his left hand, allowing it to dance in his fingertips. He looked at her still, but for the first time, the anger he had suppressed for weeks became apparent on his face.

"It was very cowardly, Nancy."

"You chose her destiny, Bernard," she smiled wryfully.

"She would have ripped you apart. You took the life of a beautiful woman for the sheer purpose of greed," he pointed out, pausing as he took a step towards her. "Admit it, Nancy, this was the only way you would ever obtain the sword that your own teacher refused to grant to you. You denied a person the opportunity to die with honor, someone who fully deserved the

opportunity to prove the depth of her abilities. Tonight, I will deny you that same honor in your death.”

“You have no idea what you’re dealing with,” Nancy threatened with a hate so sincere that Bernard felt the chill against his skin. In the darkness, he watched her step towards him, and saw the intense anger on her face, as the moonlight brought out the clenched ripples around her eyes.

“I’m dealing in death now, and I’m fully aware of that,” he answered as he swung the sword around and brought it before him to guard against the attack. She stepped forward to accept the challenge, bringing the sword in her hand up to meet him. They stood for a moment with the swords touching near the tip, before Nancy withdrew and launched her assault with the intense fury derived from her many years of training.

“I’m losing my patience, Dr. Lansing,” Max said in a tired and irritated voice as he walked over to look in the man’s eyes. He had never known such arrogance in a breed of person before. He held back the smile that wanted to emerge from the back of his mind as he realized that he actually enjoyed working with Bernard more. At least Bernard said something from time to time. “We can’t just sit here all night. Why don’t you face up to the truth. It’s all very clear.”

The knock on the door startled Max. He knew his nerves were fighting from the overdose of caffeine he had administered to himself through the countless cups of coffee over the past few hours. Still, he felt sure that he was wearing Henry down. He would break eventually.

Max turned to look at the person whose head peaked into the room that he and Henry had to themselves. The dim light of the room made it hard to distinguish who the person was from the bright lights flooding in from the rest of the station.

“Sorry, detective, but we thought you would want to see this,” the young rookie said in a shaky voice.

“It had better be good.”

Max walked over and looked at the sheet of paper that the young officer handed him. He read through the first few lines of the paper before the sound of his teeth gritting against one another echoed through the small room.

“Damn that bastard,” Max cursed as he turned and walked over to where Henry sat. Max noticed the man glance down at his watch and look up at him calmly.

“You may not have murdered anyone, you son of a bitch,” Max spoke forcefully to his suspect, “but I’ll make sure as hell you receive the maximum as an accessory if you don’t come clean right now.”

“Are you threatening me, detective,” Henry asked politely. The tone of his voice didn’t surprise Max near as deeply as the fact that the man had finally spoken for the first time this evening.

"You never did any work with Thoricidian A."

"I never said that I did," Henry replied innocently.

"Lying on the stand is called perjury in this state."

"I answered no questions, detective," Henry answered as he looked up at Max intently. "I said nothing," he paused in a manner that so reminded Max of Bernard, "explain to me where I lied."

"What sort of game are you playing here?" Max asked, the fear suddenly apparent on his face.

"This is no game, detective," Henry answered simply.

"You didn't kill Carolyn?"

"I was deeply in love with Carolyn, and could never have lifted a finger against the woman. I've never cared so deeply for anyone in my entire life. I wouldn't kill a lover."

"Where's Bernard at?"

"I honestly don't know the answer to that," he replied sincerely.

"Obviously he gave you a good reason to put you up to this," Max answered with disbelief at Henry's show of total devotion.

"He said he needed to vindicate his wife's death. That's enough reason for me."

"So where is he?"

"I expect that he's probably with whomever killed his wife."

"He killed his wife," Max argued with rage.

"Even now, detective," Henry replied slowly and in almost a whisper, "you refuse to try and understand things which are foreign to you. You deny the man everything, even in the end."

"He's going to kill her," Max said to himself, as the rage cleared long enough for him to remember where Bernard was. He turned suddenly and approached the door as it opened before him.

"Detective Chase again," the detective informed him as he ran for the phone across the room. He reached it in less than ten strides.

"What's going on, Fred?" Max asked as he grabbed the phone from the table.

"All hell just broke loose here, Max. You had better get down here. The good doctor and the lady just started dueling with swords. I think we found your murder weapon. I'm calling for some help."

"Get over there, and shoot the bastard if he even looks at you funny. I'll be there in a minute," Max answered as he pulled the keys from his top drawer of the desk and ran to the parking lot outside.

The clash of steel rang through the raised ceilings of the apartment. The room was ideally suited for training, and allowed Bernard the freedom to move his sword with all the skill and

abilities as in his own residence. He realized soon after the challenge began that Nancy had spent many hours training in her home. She knew the clearance around her weapon wherever she stepped, and had twice forced him to back into a region where his abilities to swing his own weapon freely were hindered.

His great skill, and brutality in kicking over lamps and other items that got in his way, had allowed him to retain his control of the fight, but she had thus far proven a worthy opponent of his skills. He felt almost guilty that he admired her abilities with the weapon. He had not come here to admire the woman, only to prove his hunch, and serve her with the destiny he felt obligated to deliver.

In the intense fury of the struggle, he concentrated his anger, releasing it in the strength that he used to wield the sword. Her ability to fend off the attacks were strong, but she could not meet them with the same amount of strength, and the toll of the fight had already shown itself in the form of fatigue. He had begun to wear her down, and his anger masked any tired sensations of his own.

The brutality of his strikes showed no mercy upon the woman as he forced away another lash at him and returned his own offensive maneuver before she could compensate for her loss of balance. She managed to dodge the strike, but in doing so lost her footing and fell backwards to the ground.

She rolled quickly as she tried to spin out of the fall and return to her feet, but Bernard had already predicted the move, launching another assault on her as she tried to come to her feet. His sword clashed against hers as she defended her life against the advancing blade, but she couldn't defend the counter move, and his foot swept quickly, catching her behind the ankles and dropping her hard on her back. The pain of her shoulders slamming into the floor, jarred her frame, but she ignored the pain, realizing her life depended upon maintaining her defenses.

She brought the sword up to guard against the next attack, but in the defensive action, she failed to anticipate his next move, and with her eyes focused on the blade of steel, she didn't see it coming. Bernard watched her eyes carefully as he raised a foot and caught her elbow sharply from the odd angle. The speed and force of the blow shot pain through her entire arm, but it also moved her hand in the opposite direction of her grip on the blade, and she suddenly realized that the weapon sat at the other side of the room.

It was at that moment that Bernard hesitated, allowing his satisfaction in disarming the woman to cloud his defenses. As he stopped for the split second to relish his victory over her, he failed to realize the position he had left himself in, and the force of her foot striking his abdomen knocked him backwards and off his feet.

He rolled back to his feet with the sword held firmly, and he realized that the action was not necessary. She had already rolled from her position and retrieved her weapon, though the hot sensation of stinging nerves in her arm made handling the weapon a little harder.

“Even had I granted you the opportunity to challenge me, you never would have won the right to this instrument,” Bernard told the woman as he walked towards her with the sword before him.

“You haven’t won yet, doctor,” she replied with a sneer.

“Choose to believe what you will, but you are about to die, Nancy.”

The anger on her face grew deeper as she lashed out with her sword again. Bernard met the steal harshly with his own blade, and immediately started launching his assaults quicker and more violently. She slowly backed further away, as his strikes came closer to meeting her flesh, and she knew she couldn’t hold him off for much longer.

Nancy fought with everything she had, but the certainty and mastery of his skills far surpassed her own, and her muscles already ached from the tension. She knew that it was only a matter of time before she failed to dodge or repel his attacks, and she could no longer turn back. She had placed herself in this set of circumstances, and the look on his face told her that before it ended, one of them would die. The sweat from her forehead now poured down her face, and she felt the stinging sensation as it met her eyes.

Bernard lashed out furiously, his concentration allowed him to manipulate her every move, and he continued forcing her into the corner, where her agility would suffer. His strikes with the sword felt very smooth, and he fought with a certainness he had never experienced before. The rush that accompanied pure battle was unlike anything he had ever known before, though he wondered what percentage of the sensation came from the knowledge of vindication.

As he continued to overtake her forcefully, the sureness of his moves made her own moves seem radical and poorly chosen. Her first mistake was the wide swing she took when he backed away for a moment to launch another assault. The frustration that she tried to release through the sword took too much effort, and left her no space of time to respond when he changed the angle of his attack in mid swing. He dropped gracefully to a knee as he came at her from down low, and the steal of his blade met her arm, finding little resistance as it sliced the layer of skin and flowed against the resistance of her bone.

She hesitated a moment in shock, not yet feeling the pain from the wound, but fully aware the she had taken the attack with her limb. She glanced down at her arm, watching the blood rise to the surface of her soft skin. In that moment, she realized the seriousness of the situation, and forgot that her challenger would not halt his attack for her to acknowledge and size up the hit.

She raised her sword a moment to late, and her grip had never compensated for the direction of the next lash. The sword sailed across the room as it absorbed the energy from the clash of steel, and suddenly she stood unarmed, the flow of blood from her arm increasing.

Bernard lashed out with the sword in a scissored maneuver, missing her skin by nearly inches, but he didn't plan to meet her flesh yet, as he most certainly could now. He wanted her to know the feeling of helplessness, before he finished the act, and cut her down.

Nancy looked up at him, the anger concentrated in her stare. The tightness of her face, clenched in rage at him for delivering her this doom, drastically changed the beauty he had always known in her. He didn't hesitate, or even give the matter a second thought as he backed away with the sword only a few inches from her heart.

"You chose this path, and it is my duty to deliver you this fate."

"She died very peacefully," Nancy replied with a smirk. "She looked very lifeless. It was such a beautiful site, you and she lying there in a pool of her blood."

"I want you to know that you brought this upon yourself," he explained shamelessly. "There were other ways to obtain the sword."

"You refused to allow that," she answered in spite.

"No," he replied seriously, "you refused."

Bernard took a long, deep breath as he backed off a few inches, preparing to make the final strike. The door crashed open violently behind him, but Bernard refused to take his sight off his quarry. He didn't even flinch or bother to turn as he held perfectly still, not willing to give up the kill so easily.

"Step back, doc," Fred called out in a threatening voice. Bernard could feel the man's sights locked firmly on his back, but he held perfectly still. He knew the results of a radical movement, and he still had not completed the task he came for.

"Come on, Bernard," Max attempted to coax as he ran into the room behind his partner. He had driven the six blocks to the apartment building as quickly as his vehicle would take him, and been just a few yards behind his partner up the steps to this floor of the building.

Bernard still refused to move, noticing the look of satisfaction on the woman's face, and the stream of blood that dripped down her arm from the wound. He fought the aggressor of his inner self, and the temptation to free more blood from the confines of her body.

"Slowly, Bernard," Max continued calmly, his gun trained on the man who had caused him so much stress the past few weeks. "There's no honor in dying from a bullet, is there?"

"There is very little honor in this room right now," Bernard replied simply. "Do you understand now, detective?"

"I understand that you need to start taking steps away from that woman, or I will be forced to discharge my weapon in your general direction. I'm very good with this weapon, Bernard."

"Shoot him," Nancy screamed in a panic which sounded so sincere that Bernard believed it himself. "He's going to kill me. He's a lunatic."

"Come on, Bernard, she's defenseless," Max pointed out.

"I can see that she carries no weapon," Bernard acknowledged.

"I really don't wish to kill you, Bernard," Max spoke in a manner which for the first time showed some sincerity, "but if you don't start moving away from her, I will be forced to do so."

Bernard slowly lowered the weapon away from his target's chest, and towards the ground. He started walking backwards without taking his eyes off the woman. Max kept the gun aimed and ready until he was two full paces away from Nancy.

"Now, set down the sword," Max replied, growing slightly nervous as he realized that Bernard had actually moved several paces closer to him. He could see the relief flush across the face of the woman, who stood clasping her arm. He realized suddenly that she wore only a small nightgown. He made a point not to look very closely, not really sure if it was because he was a gentleman, or because he didn't feel safe taking his eyes off Bernard. Standing in his boxers, he seemed a greater threat, with the solid masses of his frame exposed.

He watched as Bernard bent down and placed the weapon gently on the floor. He stood up, with the weapon at his feet, but still refused to look away from the woman. Max saw Nancy drop to the ground, hiding her face in her arms as she started to weep uncontrollably. She started to move slowly towards the corner of the room, the sound of her cry making the only disturbance of the silence in the deathly quiet room.

"Kick the weapon away from you, Bernard," Max ordered, the tension evident in his voice.

Bernard did as asked, and suddenly Max felt safe holding only the gun in his hands. He wanted to run over and comfort Nancy, aware of the fear she must have experienced from the madman, but knew he had to first shackle Bernard. He reached down and replaced his weapon in the shoulder harness, replacing it with the pair of cuffs that he had near his belt.

He kept his eyes focused on Bernard, knowing that Fred still had a clean shot at him if something happened. He and his partner handled the situation as professionally as any two men could. They knew how to watch out for one another, and they knew they had to eliminate the threat of Bernard before going to the aide of Nancy Dobbs. It was their professionalism, and their failure to anticipate the other threat that allowed them to fall into jeopardy.

Nancy reached the corner and placed her back against the wall. She never lifted her face from where it was buried in her arms, but she was only a few inches from the antique dresser and all its drawers. She glanced out of the corner of her eye as she continued her little act, and saw where they concentrated their attention.

It took her only a fraction of a second to reach over and retrieve the weapon from the drawer, and as she stood up from the floor, she skillfully targeted the large caliber handgun at Fred, and fired a round from the short distance of twenty feet. Her abilities with the weapon hardly mattered from this short of a range, and the bullet impacted hard, driving him several feet back.

Bernard reacted first, as he had never taken his attention away from her. He rolled to the ground quickly, as Max reached for his weapon, still in shock. He jumped at the last second, realizing he would never defend himself in time, and in doing so, managed to change the point where the projectile impacted him. The round pounded him hard in the shoulder, and he hit the ground with an intense crash.

Nancy turned the weapon, trying to train it in Bernard's direction. In the commotion, he had hit the ground, but reacted radically from what she had anticipated. Instead of running for cover in the apartment, he advanced towards her, and as he came up, she realized why.

She tried in vain to get the gun between herself and him as he lurched at her from below. He came out of the somersault and his foot met her wrist solidly as she moved the weapon to fire on him. The gun fired again, but well before she had moved it into position. The round impacted harmlessly into a wall on the opposite side of the room, and the force of his foot knocked the firearm from her grip.

Bernard realized his mistake as his foot again came in contact with the ground, and he spent all his energy on trying to maintain his balance. Nancy recognized it as well, and her years of training in swordplay as well as other martial arts suddenly paid off as he gave her a window of opportunity.

He saw it coming, even before she made contact, but the force of her strike knocked him back hard, and the balance he had tried to regain meant nothing. His arm only absorbed a small amount of the swing, his face took the rest. As he hit the ground and slid a few feet backwards, he wondered at himself for never noticing the strength in her firm legs before now.

Shaking away the ringing in his ears, he struggled to maintain his consciousness, realizing that his concentration was broken. He focused for a split second, and managed to locate her in the shadows of the apartment. He could see where she had headed, knowing full well that she would never locate the gun in time.

He heard her laugh as she retrieved her sword, and he started to react towards the new threat. He could see his own weapon, across the room, and started his dash to retrieve it. Even as he ran, he could hear the sound of the other sword, slashing through the air as she advanced on him.

He dived forward, catching the handle of his weapon as he rolled and came up to face the threat. His sword clashed with hers before he could stand, but he countered the motion by catching her abdomen with a foot and thrusting her away with his intense strength. Nancy flew backwards and impacted the wall of the room, managing to keep her balance enough to remain standing. She shook off the new pain from the solid wall, and launched at Bernard again as he tried to stand.

Bernard saw it coming, and realized she would force him back to the ground if he tried to continue. Her sword was already drawn back as she ran, and he could not put enough force into

his own swing to counter it when it struck. He hesitated for a moment as she ran, and made the decision at the last second.

In a sporadic movement, he dropped and twisted his body, backing away from the challenge to dodge the strike. He dropped to one knee, as he passed his weapon to his left hand, holding it upside down. He arched his back, allowing the sword to cross paths within a few inches of his left ear, as he crouched down and extended his left arm fully behind him.

His wrist twisted, angling the sword upwards, and holding it firm. He allowed her own momentum to deliver the blow, and she failed to realize the mistake before the tip of the blade pierced through her flesh. By then, she could not halt her movement. She arched violently as the sword cut cleanly through her chest. Bernard released his grip on the weapon as she passed beyond his sunken form and fell hard to the ground, only a few feet from where Fred lay motionless on the floor.

Bernard jumped quickly to face her, and immediately realized the success of his decision. He heard her groan as she grasped at the carpet in pain. He could see the trail of blood across the last few feet of her path as he walked towards her, and he heard her curse him under her breath. Her back still faced him as she lay there in agony. He could see the sword laying beside her, where she dropped it after pulling the weapon from her chest. He stepped over her and retrieved the weapon, then stepped a few feet away to watch her die.

“You bastard,” she whispered from the floor. He could tell from the tone of her voice that she hardly had the strength to speak. “You’ll never understand why she had to die, but you’ll be with her.”

Bernard stood there, trying to understand what she meant by the remark, but it made no sense to him. The sword he had cherished for so many years rested in his grip, the blade covered with her blood. He saw her turn to look up at him, and refused to deny her some respect in death. He met the stare, seeing clearly the rage in her eyes.

The soft blue satin camisole showed clearly the deep red stain of her blood, reminding him of the night he awoke to find his wife dead. He felt different now, knowing that her death was avenged, and he watched the woman with almost a satisfaction. She rolled over more fully, and he noticed the puddle of blood on the carpet beside her, and then he saw her arm rise slightly.

It happened so suddenly, that he couldn’t react to the threat. He realized then that she hadn’t grabbed at the carpet in pain, but had retrieved something from beside Fred. She brought the large handgun up with what she had left of her strength, and the sound of the blast echoed through the air.

He felt almost no sensation as the bullet struck. His eyes blinked instinctively from the magnitude of the sound waves at such a close distance. He waited for the pain, but stood in

confusion as it never arrived. Looking himself over for a sign of the wound, he glanced back up at her to determine how she had missed.

She was lying there, lifelessly. He could no longer see her face, but made out the spatter of blood on the wall directly behind her. He turned his head to look to his right, and saw Max crouched on his knee, his pistol still aimed from where he had fired the shot.

Bernard sat down his weapon and walked over to where Fred lay. He crouched over the man, and put his hand around the man's neck, feeling for a pulse. He could see the hole where the bullet had hit him square in the chest, but there was no blood. With his free hand, he felt beneath the shirt, and realized what had happened.

"He's wearing a vest," Bernard spoke as he looked over to where Max sat in horror. "The force of the impact must have knocked him out."

"Thank God," Max replied with relief, as he made the sign of the cross with his free hand. He realized then that his weapon was still trained at the dead woman, and holstered it back in his belt.

Bernard stood and looked over at Nancy, seeing for the first time where the bullet had entered her skull. He turned from her and walked over to Max, studying the growing blood stain from his shoulder. Max dropped down and leaned up against the wall, trying to keep his strength up. He didn't seem threatened as Bernard knelt down beside him and examined the wound.

"You'll be all right," Bernard comforted the man. "She just caught the muscle. I don't see much internal damage."

The sound of sirens, faint in the distance, were growing louder each second, and he knew it would only be a minute or two before more officers arrived. Max realized it as well, and reached down for his cellular phone. He pressed the first memory button on the device, and a moment later had the dispatch office.

"This is detective Harmon, I have two officers down, and require medical assistance. The situation is under control. The subject is in custody."

Bernard hinted at a smile as he looked over at the man, then noticed the glazing in Max's eyes. Max dropped the phone as he fell limply out of consciousness, and Bernard retrieved a towel to keep down the bleeding.

Chapter Seventeen

He awoke to an immense pain, throbbing in his shoulder. It took several minutes before he realized where he was. The nurse smiled down at him, glad to see him regain consciousness. It came back to him slowly, but as clearly as if it had just happened.

“How long have I been out?” Max asked the woman, realizing how dry his throat was.

“You’ve been unconscious since they brought you in last evening.”

“What time is it now?”

“Eight,” she replied.

“I’ve slept ten hours?”

“Twenty-two,” she corrected. “It’s eight in the evening. You had surgery about an hour after you arrived. We had to do some work on your shoulder. The bullet clipped the bone, and was fragmented in your muscle.”

“Where’s my wife?” Max asked.

“She’s asleep down the hall. She was up with you most of the night, and the doctor sedated her, so she could get some rest.”

“How’s my partner?”

“He’s fine,” the younger woman replied. “I believe the bullet fractured a few ribs, and he has a great deal of bruising, but we released him this morning. It’s a good thing he had his vest on.”

“Yes,” Max agreed.

“Perhaps you should wear one as well,” she prodded.

“Yes,” he agreed with a hint of a smile.

“I’m going to get the doctor now,” she told him. “He wanted to see you when you regained consciousness.”

It took about twenty minutes for the doctor to examine him, and they told Max that they would allow his wife a few hours of sleep before disturbing her. The door opened a few minutes after the nurse and doctor left him alone. Max was glad for some company to disturb the silence of the dim room.

“Hello, Max,” Bernard called out from the door. “How do you feel?”

“I’m ready for some answers,” Max replied. “Come on in, doc.”

“I think you’re entitled to know the truth,” Bernard answered as he walked in and sat at the chair beside Max’s bed. He wore a deep colored rugby shirt, and pair of jeans. Max had become accustomed to seeing him in the gray prison outfit, and the suit he wore during the trial. This casual look was unfamiliar to him.

“How did you know that she did it?” Max asked finally.

“You pointed it out to me, Max. I thought the same as you, that they had taken the sword because it might reveal something about the killer. I didn’t think that there was anything more to it than that. The sword was given to me by a man I trained with for several months. I defeated him at a tournament, and he gave me the weapon as a gift. It had special meaning, but I thought its value was something I alone knew.”

“So how did that tell you that Nancy did it?”

“The sword was the reason that Carolyn died.”

“Why not just steal it?”

“I won the sword, and soon after that, I quit fighting. The only way to honorably gain the sword was through me, either as a student, or as the prize from a match. Carolyn asked me to quit fighting, and regardless of what anyone thinks, I did love my wife, and respected her wishes.”

“So why kill Carolyn.”

“Carolyn never liked Nancy,” Bernard replied humbly. “I hired her because she wanted so badly to work for me, and I thought she demonstrated a great deal of ambition. When she and Carolyn met for the first time, my wife told me that she didn’t have a good feeling about the woman. She warned me to keep my distance, that there was something disturbing about her.”

“Did you have an affair with her?”

“No Max, I did not,” Bernard replied, showing shame for the first time since Max had first met him. “My wife and I agreed to live our personal lives separately, but I still honored her requests, as she did mine. If I asked her to stay away from somebody, she did, and I likewise. We never talked about our affairs with one another, but we did still communicate, and respected one another. I really did love my wife.

“Nancy knew that Carolyn didn’t want me spending a great deal of time with her. She wanted me to take her on as a student, but never approached me about it. As I look back on it, I realize that she hinted at it, but I always ignored that sort of talk. I suppose that her anger towards me and my wife developed into something beyond her control. She wanted Carolyn gone, and me to suffer. This achieved both goals.”

“So she stole the sword, and killed your wife with it as the icing on the cake?”

“She never used my sword to kill Carolyn. She had her own weapon for that purpose. That sword has a lot of history in it, and has never been dishonored.”

“Why was she so wrapped up in the sword?”

“The man who gave me the sword,” Bernard replied, “was a former teacher of hers. I didn’t know that until two days ago, when it all started coming together. She had never earned enough respect for him to hand it down to her. He died about eleven months ago, and his widow told one of my acquaintances that a woman had come to the house, expecting him to leave it to her in his will. When she didn’t receive it, and learned that I had won it, she came to Boise, in

hopes of training with me. She had a passion for the art, Max, and that passion can often distort one's view of things. When nothing worked out for her, she took the action into her own hands."

"I still don't understand the anger," Max replied.

"She wanted to gain the weapon honorably, but I made it impossible for her. She was dishonored that she didn't receive it from her former teacher, and she had to admit to herself that her teacher felt me more worthy before she could challenge me for the weapon. I suppose she felt betrayed and wronged, and her arrogance made it impossible for her to believe that true. This was how she chose to take out her revenge. There are a lot of people who were upset when I quit competing, because that denies them the ability to regain their honor. I defeated a great number of people, and they'll never again get the chance to prove themselves against me. Nancy was never granted the chance to challenge me in the first place. Her honor was denied without any opportunity. That's a very strong emotion to some."

"So you were trying to figure all this out while you were in prison?"

"Yes," Bernard replied, "and it wasn't easy. All the evidence you had collected pointed towards Henry. It stumped me, because I knew Henry wasn't capable of it."

"Why is that?"

"Because Henry was having an affair with my wife, and loved her dearly."

"So why did you accuse him of the crime?"

"I never did any such thing. My lawyer did that."

"But Henry was willing to commit perjury to go along with it."

"Henry did no such thing," Bernard argued.

"I was there, Bernard."

"He never lied, Max," Bernard confirmed. "I made sure of it. He just failed to respond, and Daren presented the evidence as if it were really true. We were relying on the pressure of the trial to convince Judge Rutherford that you no longer had a case against me, even when you did. All I had was a pretty good hunch, and I had to get out and approach Nancy to prove it."

"Did you have to sleep with her?" Max asked in disbelief.

"It was necessary to gain her trust, so I could search the house."

"And Henry agreed to this?"

"He loved Carolyn very dearly, and wanted as badly as I to see her death vindicated. I offered him that, and I weighed the deck against him."

"How's that?"

"I made him believe that I needed to get out to prove our research. I deceived him, but it was necessary to get out and clear everything up."

"You planned to kill her," Max reflected.

"The thought had crossed my mind," Bernard replied.

"They can't really pin that one on you, since I killed her," Max pointed out to himself.

"I know, Max. I never planned it that way. I fully expected to spend some time in jail for my actions last night."

"I suppose she had it coming to her."

"The woman has caused me a great deal of grief," Bernard admitted. "She killed my wife, stole one of my greatest treasures, and all the time she worked for me, she was selling me out to my competition."

"What do you mean selling you out?"

"She was sending copies of our research to Blaine Sunderland. I had wondered how he had caught up with us so quickly, and while I was in prison, it allowed me to check into everyone who works for me. I had each of them gaining special information for me. I had several of them duplicating the same work, just to reveal who was my leak.

"When I uncovered her as the leak," Bernard explained. "I sent a friend to Nancy's old home, to collect more information for me. I also let Blaine know that I had figured it all out.

"Everything pointed to Nancy. Her relationship to the sword, the indication that she was selling me out, and the fact that she prepared the drinks that Henry and I shared with Carolyn on the night of her murder. When I learned that Henry overslept the next morning, I knew that he had been drugged also."

"How did she get it?"

"I keep a spare key at the office, and she can access my computer, to get access to all my personal information, including my alarm code. She knew she had to drug me and Carolyn."

"Carolyn?"

"Yes, Max," Bernard replied. "I'm a very light sleeper, and my training makes me very alert to possible attacks. Carolyn was also my student, along with Henry. She had to have been drugged as well, for somebody to kill her in her sleep. That's why you saw no sign of a struggle."

"It must have been quite a shock to wake up and find your wife dead," Max replied, his regrets for Bernard apparent for the first time.

"I didn't find my wife there, Max," Bernard replied compassionately. "That was just a body I awoke to find beside me. My wife was much more than that. I loved her so much."

"Then why the affairs?"

"They hid the pain."

"You hid a great deal of pain," Max remarked, "judging by the number of affairs you had."

"It's a shallow lifestyle, Max," Bernard admitted. "Passions of the flesh do not satisfy the desires of the heart. It's an empty life, impossible to compare to one of intimacy and total devotion to one person. True happiness is not attained by the variety of a dozen lovers."

"They are some beautiful women," Max pointed out.

“But without total commitment, the possibilities of the relationship can never be reached. As I look ahead of me, I do not intend to live this same lifestyle. I would so much have liked to share a relationship with Carolyn which contains the elements of your relationship with your own wife. You can’t understand the respect I hold for you in that aspect.”

“Hayden will love to hear about this stunt,” Max laughed to himself, regretting the action as the pain traveled through his arm.

“He’ll have to take that up with my lawyer. He’s the one who pulled the whole stunt off.”

“You really don’t like that man, do you?” Max asked seriously.

“No, I can’t say that I do.”

“So it really wasn’t about sex, money or power,” Max remarked to himself.

“No, Max, it wasn’t. It was about something even greater than that. It was about honor.”