

TELL NO LIES

by Julie Compton

Good will, like a good name, is got by many actions, and lost by one.

-- Lord Jeffrey

PART ONE

SPRING

Chapter One

Jack drove his car a little too fast out of the parking garage, his tires screaming as he rounded the coiled curves of the down ramp. He fumbled with the radio, looking for a song to match his upbeat mood, all the while keeping his eyes ahead and his left hand on the steering wheel. A slight grin graced his face, though he wasn't aware of it.

That morning, the jury had returned a verdict in the most publicized murder case he had ever prosecuted. The case had been hard fought for two weeks, and he had worried about the outcome until the very end – even after his boss, Earl, came to hear closing arguments, complimenting him afterwards, and even after a few of the jurors smiled at him on their way back to the jury box, just before the verdict of guilty was read. But Earl's belief that "juries love Jack Hilliard" proved true again.

He'd called Claire as soon as he returned to his office. She listened and laughed with him as she always did, asking certain questions that only another lawyer would know to ask. Before they hung up, Jack announced that, for the first time in weeks, he'd be home in time for dinner.

Now he was already past the innerbelt, far enough out of the city to smell the suburbs, fragrant with freshly cut grass and the overgrown lilac bushes that bloomed untamed near the off-ramp into Clayton. When his cell phone rang, he answered without bothering to look at the caller

ID.

“Hiya, babe.”

“Gosh, Jack, I never knew you felt that way about me.”

Jack felt his face redden. “I thought you were Claire,” he said. Even though he’d known Jenny Dodson for almost nine years, and he’d reached the conclusion early on that she talked this way to everyone, her flirtatiousness still unsettled him at times.

“Obviously,” she purred. “Hey, *Mr. Hilliard*,” she said then, speaking his surname in an intimate tone that transformed it into her own pet name for him, “I hear you won your case. Congratulations.”

He smiled. “I did. How’d you hear?”

“Are you kidding? It was the top story on the five o’clock news. You’re famous again.”

“Yeah, so what am I doing hanging out with the likes of you?” he said, laughing.

“I won’t dignify that with a response. Will I see you tonight? I’ll buy you a drink to celebrate.”

“Tonight?” But as soon as he said it, he remembered. The bar association was having its annual awards dinner, and Earl, as the St. Louis District Attorney for more than thirty years, was receiving an award for his many years of dedication to public service.

“Damn, I completely forgot about it.” Earl hadn’t mentioned it after the trial, Jack knew, because he hadn’t wanted to take away from his moment of victory. One of the many reasons Earl was a great boss, and also one of the reasons Jack had to go to the dinner.

“Were you heading home?” Jenny asked.

“Yeah.” He sighed. “But I’ll be there. Why are you going?”

“You forget easily, Mr. Hilliard,” she chided. “Not every lawyer in town has had the good

fortune to jump ship from a big firm to the security of the DA's office. I still have to fish if I want to eat. It always helps to do a little mingling with the other sharks in town."

Both knew he hadn't exactly "jumped ship" from Newman, Norton and Levine. It was more that he'd been thrown overboard. But he *had* landed a plum job. Although he shared the title of Assistant District Attorney with twenty-four other lawyers, only Jack was seen as Earl Scanlon's protégé.

"Should be an interesting night," Jack said. "I'm sure his old time bar association buddies plan to roast him." His mind drifted to the new logistics for the evening. "Listen, I'd better hang up and call Claire. She's gonna have to try to find a sitter. I'll see you tonight, okay?"

"Okay. Don't forget, first drink's on me. I'll see you tonight, *babe*."

She hung up before he could respond, and he shook his head and laughed, knowing she'd be pleased with herself for having found a way to tease him one more time about his earlier mistake.

The hotel was near the Mississippi riverfront, in the heart of St. Louis. The evening was damp, but warm for late April, so Jack left his car in the garage near the courthouse and walked the nine blocks to the hotel. The air was thick with humidity, and he smelled the pungent scent of the river. The rush hour traffic had already begun to dissipate, and the few cars leaving the city drove too fast down Market Street. The road was still wet from an earlier shower; tires sprayed water as they rolled through puddles on the way to the highway.

Inside the hotel, he immediately began looking for Earl. Most of the lawyers attending the event were still in the lobby, scattered like orbiting moons around the center bar that served as their

planet. It was a local businessman's hotel; the reservations and check-in desk had been strategically placed at the top of the escalator on the second floor, leaving room on the main level for happy-hour and even a small dance club with its own entrance from 4th Street.

Jack spotted his boss near the escalator. He was leaning against a large, shoulder-height marble post with an arrangement of exotic flowers on top of it. Earl stood only about 5'6", and the towering structure made him appear even smaller. He was with a group of defense lawyers from Clark & Cavanaugh. They were all laughing.

"There's my man!" Earl said, setting his drink down. He grabbed Jack's right hand as he approached and patted him on the back with the other hand. To the others, he said, "Jack Hilliard, gentlemen. Are you all familiar with each other?"

Was he familiar with them? Was Earl crazy? Two of the four lawyers standing with Earl were among the best known criminal defense attorneys in the city, and Jack had tried cases against them on more than one occasion. The other two he recognized as senior associates from the same firm. They often sat at the defense table, second chairing cases. It was not unusual for the bigger defense firms to put two, sometimes three, lawyers on a case. The attorneys in the DA's office joked that defense attorneys were only half as smart as the opposition, hence the reason there were always at least two of them.

"Yes, of course," Jack answered politely. "Good to see you again." He shook each of their hands as they congratulated him on the outcome of the trial.

The truth was, Jack couldn't wait to get away from this group with their custom made suits and Rolex watches. One of the many reasons he loved being a prosecutor was that it demanded more substance and less style. He liked being an average Joe; it felt true, as if the outside finally fit the inside. When he had practiced at Newman, he'd always been on edge about how he looked. He

didn't worry about that stuff anymore. As long as he wore a suit in the courtroom – sometimes even a sport coat was acceptable – it didn't matter whose name was on the inside label.

He stood there listening to the banter between them, feigning interest, but he began to suspect he'd interrupted something more than a cocktail conversation. What was Earl doing with these guys, anyway? They talked to Earl as if he was one of them, and he responded in kind. Jack's stomach flipped, like it did when he feared he'd overlooked a key piece of evidence or forgotten to ask an important question. He felt as though everyone else knew something he didn't.

“Gentlemen, will you excuse us?” Earl finally said. “I'd like to talk to Jack in private.”

This time it was Earl shaking hands. “We'll see you after the roast,” one of them said, and they all laughed.

“Nervous?” Jack asked him once the others had walked off.

“Nah, this will be a piece of cake compared to what those guys have done to me in the courtroom over the years.” He picked up his drink from where he'd set it on the post next to the flowers.

“So what's up with the goon squad, anyway?” Jack asked, but when Earl's smile faded and he looked down, Jack knew he'd said the wrong thing.

Earl took a deep breath. He seemed nervous. “I'm going to make an announcement tonight, but I wanted to tell you beforehand.”

Jack narrowed his eyes. “Why do I feel the same way I did right before Newman laid me off?”

“You're not being fired, Jack.”

“Oh, I know that. If I was, I'd hope you wouldn't make an announcement out of it.”

Earl laughed; Jack didn't. They both stood for a moment, looking at each other and

wondering who would speak next. Jack leaned against the post and crossed his arms in front of him.

“You’re leaving, aren’t you?” he said.

Earl nodded. “Yeah, I’ve accepted an offer to join Clark and Cavanaugh.”

“I knew it.” *Do the right thing, Jack.* “Well, congratulations,” he said, cracking a smile and reaching out his hand.

Earl hesitated before extending his. “Thanks.” He tilted his head slightly, studying Jack.

“You know, I tried to talk to you this afternoon after court. I wanted to tell you before now. But you were on the phone almost from the minute you came back to the office.”

“Sorry about the ‘goon squad’ comment,” Jack said.

Earl dismissed it with a shrug of his shoulders.

“So, are you going to clue me in on why you’re leaving?”

Earl looked down again at the tumbler in his hand; except for small chips of ice, it was now empty. “It’s time, Jack. Time to let someone else lead the troops.”

“Bullshit. What’s that supposed to mean?”

Earl touched Jack’s sleeve. “Come on,” he said, turning toward the bar. “You look like a thirsty man, and I need a refill.”

“If only they knew what they were really congratulating you for,” Jack said when they reached the bar, referring to the numerous interruptions along the way. He motioned to the bartender.

“Be with you in a minute, hon.” She smiled, flashing a perfect set of white teeth at him.

Earl snickered. “I can’t believe your wife lets you out of the house alone.”

“I’m waiting.”

“What can I say? I’ve been at the DA’s office for over thirty years, right out of law school.

It'll be nice to do something different." Jack was skeptical, and Earl knew it. "Look, they made me an offer that was too good to pass up. It'll be a nice, cushy job. I'll get to pick and choose the cases I want, I'll have a decent office for once in my life – big window, furniture that's not government issue, some real art on the walls . . ."

"Take it from me – the big window and nice furniture get old real quick." Earl laughed, but Jack continued, "And you get to pick and choose your cases now. When's the last time you tried one that wasn't high profile?"

The bartender approached and slapped two cocktail napkins on the bar. She leaned on her elbows, displaying her ample cleavage. "What'll it be, gentlemen?" she asked, eyeing Jack.

"Whiskey and Coke," he said, smiling just enough to be polite.

"Scotch and soda," Earl said to her, watching the exchange. "Try to put yourself in my shoes," he said to Jack.

"I just don't buy what you're telling me. I think I can honestly say this is the first time in your life you haven't been convincing."

Earl sighed and looked around the room. "I'm fifty-six years old. I've already put two girls through college, I've got one in there now, and the last one will start next year. Not to mention the weddings I'll probably be expected to pay for. I want to do it all for them, and so far I've been able to. But it ain't cheap. Helen and I want to travel, see some sights before we're too old to enjoy them. Frankly, I don't want to have to worry about the money any more."

Jack watched his boss. The crow's feet around Earl's eyes were pronounced even when he wasn't smiling, and his silver flattop was peppered with short strands of muted black. Jack felt he knew Helen pretty well, as well as one gets to know a boss's wife, and he'd seen their girls grow into women during his eight years in the DA's office. But he still had the distinct sense that there

was a lot about this man that he didn't know.

"Well, you're convincing me now," Jack said. "I'm beginning to wonder if I'm saving enough."

"Don't get me wrong, Jack. We're not in the poorhouse or anything. It's just that Helen's sacrificed a lot for my career, and I'd like to be able to spoil her a little in return." Earl grabbed the drinks and handed one to Jack, who had turned around to face the crowd. "I guess you could say I sold out, huh?"

"No, I wouldn't say that." Jack took a long swallow. The bartender had made it strong and the liquor burned his throat, but nevertheless he wished he'd ordered it straight. He was going to need it tonight.

"It won't be the same without you," he said.

"I was thinking the same thing."

"When will you leave?"

"I'll finish out my term, wait till after the election."

Jack leaned against the bar and looked out over the dwindling crowd. He tried to imagine who in the office could fill Earl's shoes. Although he had good relationships with most of the lawyers there, he couldn't picture any of them as his boss. For an instant he indulged in fantasy and imagined himself in the position, but just as quickly dismissed the idea as unrealistic. The effect of Earl's decision started to sink in. What if some lawyer from outside the office decided to run? That would be even more disruptive than having an insider take over. The office had a chemistry that Earl had nurtured during his years there, and the slightest change would upset it permanently.

Jack's train of thought was interrupted when he saw Jenny coming through the revolving doors. Even after all these years, the blackness, the absolute darkness of her hair, struck him. She

had dark russet skin, and he remembered how when he first met her, he'd thought maybe she was Hispanic. He'd been a little ashamed that he couldn't tell; he thought he should have been able to, but when she'd introduced herself – “Jennifer Dodson, Jenny's fine” – her all-American name had surprised him and he'd never had the nerve to admit his ignorance to her.

Earl turned to see what Jack was looking at.

“A pretty girl enters the room and your eyes light up, don't they?” Earl said.

“No law against looking.”

“True. But there's been plenty to look at all night, and you haven't blinked 'til now.”

Jack shrugged. “She's my friend, Earl.” What more could he say? This evening *was* beginning to remind him a little too much of his days at Newman, when for a time his friendship with Jenny was fodder for the office gossip mill.

“Speaking of pretty girls, where's Claire?”

“At home. We couldn't get a sitter; it's hard on a weeknight.” He didn't add that they'd only started looking for one a short time ago, after Jack had called Claire from his car in a panic. “She sends her regrets.” Jack's eyes followed Jenny as she met a group of partners from Newman and ascended the escalator with them. He could feel Earl watching him.

“Can I give you a little bit of advice, Jack?”

He turned to Earl and laughed. “You've never given me bad advice, so sure, go ahead.”

“You have to get that woman of yours out more. It's not good for her to be cooped up at home so much with the kids.”

Jack rolled his eyes. It was true that they'd started a family just after they were married, while still in law school, and the weight of that burden fell on Claire. But they'd both been infatuated with the idea, rationalizing that it would be better to have a child while they were still in

school so Claire wouldn't be pregnant while interviewing or just starting a job. Michael was born late the following summer, after their second year. Of course, once they had him, they couldn't wait to have another, so Claire ended up being pregnant anyway during her first year at Marshall & Hawes. She quit practicing after having several miscarriages, though, and shortly thereafter got the job at the law school teaching legal writing to first year students. Jamie was born six years later. It had worked out well for her – she had a flexible schedule that allowed her to spend more time with Michael, and later, Jamie – and it worked out well for the school – it was an untenured position.

“She’s still teaching at the law school three days a week. With that and her volunteering at the kids’ schools, she’s probably busier than I am.” Earl looked doubtful. “Anyway,” Jack continued, “no offense, but I think if she had a night out she’d rather be having a nice Italian dinner down on the Hill.”

“I think I’d have to agree with her. I know the food would be better. Just take care of her, Jack. She’s a good woman.”

“I know that.” Jack grinned. “That’s why I convinced her to marry me.”

Earl finished the rest of his drink in one swallow and set the glass on the bar. “Okay then, let’s get upstairs.”

Once in the ballroom, they split up. Earl moved toward the front of the room, and Jack joined a group of prosecutors at a large table. It was all he could do not to reveal to the rest of them what he knew; he suspected Earl wouldn't have told any of them before telling him. He was a little disconcerted, though, that Earl hadn't broken the news before tonight. But after years of watching him in a courtroom, Jack knew this was consistent with his way of doing things. Unlike Jack, who approached the judges, juries and even witnesses in a quiet, if open way, Earl preferred the power

that came with catching people off-guard.

The dinner was slow, with numerous presentations and awards. Once Earl stood to speak, though, he mesmerized everyone with his commanding presence and dry sense of humor. Despite his small size, he filled the room.

After he accepted his award, told a few 'war' stories and made a funny rebuttal to some of the digs that had been made in jest about him, he suddenly became humble. When his words started to suggest the conclusion to his speech, but before he actually said "I'll be leaving the District Attorney's office at the end of my term to join Clark and Cavanaugh," a comprehending hum settled over the room, and Earl had to fight against choking on his emotions. Jack had the urge to stand up and tell everyone that it was all a big hoax. Wasn't this Earl the consummate joker?

Instead, he sat with his arms crossed and watched Earl regain his composure as the hum gave way to applause and then organized chaos. If they'd planned on making any more announcements or speeches, the time had passed.

Jenny approached Jack's table as dessert was served and ignored. After hugging and congratulating him again on his trial, she sat in the chair next to him, abandoned only a minute before by another lawyer. She pushed an empty glass away and set her own drink down in front of her.

"Big news for you guys, huh?" she said to the group, and to Jack, "You keep a good secret."

He opened his mouth to defend himself, but Maria Catalona, one of the newer prosecutors in his office, spoke first. "We didn't know. This is news to us, too."

Jack wasn't sure he would have been so forthright about their pre-announcement ignorance.

"We're placing bets on who will succeed him," said Frank Mann. "Care to make a wager?"

Jack suspected that Frank was hedging bets on himself. He'd been at the DA's office longer

than Jack, and Jack had heard through several sources that Frank was envious of his close relationship to Earl. Frank probably viewed Earl's announcement as an opportunity to reassert his former position in the office pecking order.

“Come on, Dodson, who’s your money on?” Frank urged.

“Well . . . I don’t know,” Jenny said, pretending to be thinking. “Let’s see.” She looked at Jack and nudged his arm with her elbow. “I think Jack would be a great District Attorney.”

Jack nudged her back. “Get out of here, Jenny. Go back to your stiff suits.”

“Yeah, like we didn’t see that coming from a mile away,” said Jerry Clark, another prosecutor.

Jenny took a sip of her Martini. Jack could tell from the look on her face that she didn’t like it that they weren’t taking her seriously, even though she hadn’t meant to be serious, and that she was preparing her response.

“I mean it. I’m not just saying that because we’re friends, although that would be an added benefit, wouldn’t it? If I ever got in trouble.” She laughed, and the others laughed with her. “Really, though, Jack is perfect for the job.” She paused, loading her ammunition. “There’s no question he has the trial skills for the position, but what makes—”

“Now, Dodson, how would you even know that?” Frank asked.

“Well, *Mr. Mann*, I’m aware he wins many more cases than he loses.”

Jack’s spirits dipped a bit; he’d thought he was the only one she referred to as ‘Mister’ in quite that way.

“I mean, just look at his most recent stellar performance.” Jenny turned and winked at him.

“That he wins more than he loses doesn’t mean anything,” Frank snorted, “except maybe that he’s smart enough to take a plea bargain on the difficult ones.”

Jenny ignored him. “As I was saying, before I was so rudely interrupted . . .” She cleared her throat, took another drink, and glared at Frank. “What makes him perfect, in addition to his trial skills, is his administrative aptitude. After all, what’s the most important job the DA has? Setting policy, knowing which cases to make a priority, and knowing when to play and when to fold.” She lifted her glass and finished it off. “Don’t you all agree?” she asked the others. They mumbled the obligatory assent. She was at the edge of drunkenness, and it was apparent to everyone there.

“Dodson, there’s a gaping hole in your argument.” Frank glanced at Jack and grinned at him, as if they were in on the teasing of Jenny together. “Your friend’s a dove. He’s even turned down the Barnard case.”

Jack felt all eyes turn cautiously in his direction. Everyone at the table, even Jenny, knew exactly which case Frank referred to, because in the past few days it had become impossible for St. Louis residents to turn on their televisions or radios and not hear about it. Cassia Barnard was a twelve-year-old girl who’d been kidnapped and brutally murdered months before, and the cops had finally made an arrest earlier in the week. Every seasoned prosecutor in the office had lobbied Earl for the assignment – the case had the potential to make an attorney’s career – every one except Jack. He knew there was a good chance Earl would seek the death penalty, and for that reason alone, he didn’t want it. It didn’t surprise him, though, when Earl offered it to him anyway. And it didn’t surprise Earl when Jack turned it down. Frank was the lucky runner-up.

Now the table looked at Jack with veiled pity, as if he hadn’t played a part in his exclusion from the case.

“Well, I agree with Jenny,” Maria said brightly, trying to quell the awkwardness that had followed Frank’s comment. “I think he’d be a great boss.”

Brown nose, thought Jack.

As if bolstered by Maria, Andy Rinehart spoke up. “Jenny, Mann’s just arguing with you because he wants the job for himself.”

“Frank doesn’t like to admit that we might prefer someone else,” said Jeff McCarthy, one of Jack’s closer friends in his office. They all laughed, except for Frank and Jack.

The alcohol was starting to have its effect on everyone now. Jack remembered what one of the litigators at Newman, one of the few he respected, told him when he’d first started there. “Loose lips sink ships” he liked to say. Jack could feel this boat starting to take on a lot of water.

“I suspected as much,” Jenny said, pleased they were beginning to come around.

“Well, *Jack’s* not interested,” Jack said, hoping to cut them off.

“Who’s the hunk from your firm?” Maria asked Jenny, changing the subject because she was more interested in young men than office politics.

“Who?” Jenny seemed distracted.

“The guy you were sitting with.” She lowered her voice. “The one with the bedroom eyes.”

Jack turned to look. He recognized most of the other lawyers from her table, but he didn’t recognize this guy. He was young, perhaps a new associate at Newman.

Jenny laughed. “Oh, you mean Lance,” she said, putting the emphasis on his name, and she shrugged her shoulders, as if to say, ‘What kind of name is that?’ “He’s new. He thinks he wants to work in the bankruptcy department, so I’ve been assigned to be his mentor, whatever that means.”

Maria raised her eyebrows. “Lucky you.”

“The way he’s been hanging on you all night, Dodson, it looks like he has more than mentoring on his mind,” Frank said.

Jack looked at Jenny to gauge her reaction to Frank’s comment. She wouldn’t date someone ten years her junior, would she?

“No, thank you,” she said. “He’s a little too . . . how should I put this? . . . compulsive for me. He’s the type of guy who would insist on putting a towel down during sex to protect the sheets.”

They all burst out laughing. Jack was a little embarrassed. He pitied the lawyer; he knew no one at the table would ever be able to talk to him without thinking of her comment.

“I’ll be back,” Jenny said, holding up her now empty glass to indicate where she was heading. Jack grabbed her arm and pulled her down closer to his face.

“Cool it with Frank, will ya?” he whispered so the others wouldn’t hear.

“All in good fun, Jack. Not to worry.” And then she said again, “I’ll be back.”

After she left, Frank stood and came to Jack’s side of the table to say goodbye. He placed his hand on Jack’s shoulder and leaned close to his ear. “She’s crazy about you, Hilliard. Someone better warn Claire.”

Jack felt a blush rising. “It’s a threesome, Frank, didn’t you know?”

By the time Jenny returned, most of the lawyers at the table had scattered. Maria was still across from them, talking quietly to another woman from the Public Defender’s office.

Jenny snapped her fingers as she sat down. “What are you thinking about?”

Jack just shrugged.

“The next election?”

“No.” He waved to Maria as she and her friend stood to leave the table.

“I don’t believe you.”

“Jenny, why are you pushing this?”

“Because you could do it, and you know it.” Her voice was low, but insistent. “Didn’t you

see the look on Mann's face when I said your name? He knows you could do it, too, and it kills him."

Jack pushed his chair away from the table. In all the years he had worked in the DA's office, he had only given a passing thought to becoming *the* District Attorney. He'd always dismissed it, though, because Earl was so clearly that man. Jack had figured there would be at least ten more years until Earl retired, before anyone would have to think about his successor. Anyway, as Frank had so bluntly pointed out, Jack – unlike most prosecutors in the state – was deeply opposed to the death penalty. It was an obstacle that wasn't going away.

"I think I need another drink, too," he said, rising from the table. Jenny followed him.

"You'd be the perfect man, Jack," she said, her voice a little boisterous from the Martinis she'd been drinking.

"You're crazy, Jen. And you're drunk."

As he stood at the bar trying to get the bartender's attention, she leaned in closer.

"You're only partly right. I'm drunk, but I'm not crazy." Jack could smell the alcohol on her breath. It mixed with her perfume, a musky scent he'd noticed before. "Juries love you – your track record speaks for that. Earl would most definitely support you. What more could you ask for?"

Jenny shrugged her shoulders, lifted her glass and raised it in a mock toast.

Jack laughed. "It's that easy, huh?" He put a tip down on the bar and turned away with his drink in hand. "Jen, you're forgetting something." He loved to prove her wrong; she was always so confident.

"Yes, Mr. Hilliard?" She raised her eyebrows, grinning back. She knew what he was doing.

"Would you vote for a prosecutor who didn't believe in the death penalty?"

Her grin disappeared, and despite her contrary position in the countless arguments they'd

had over the issue, she answered without hesitation. "If that prosecutor was you, of course I would."

They stood for a moment, staring at each other. Jack instinctively reached up and moved a stray hair away from her face, but then remembered this wasn't Claire he was standing with.

What was he doing? "Sorry," he whispered.

She pretended not to have noticed. "You're a good man," she said, still serious. "You do what's right, what's good. You wouldn't be swayed by politics, or by friendships. You have a moral code that you live by, and God knows that's a scarce quality among the attorneys in this town. You'd make an excellent DA." She paused, and furrowed her brow in thought. Then she laughed. "Drunk or sober."

Jack relaxed a bit, relieved that the smart-ass Jenny he knew had returned.

Maria approached them as they moved away from the bar. "There's a bunch of us going to the club downstairs in a little bit. I'm passing the word."

"Let's go, it sounds fun," Jenny said.

"No, I've gotta get home soon."

She grunted in exasperation. "Come on, Jack. Your boss just made the biggest announcement of his career. He's going to want to celebrate. You have a lot to celebrate, too. Don't be such a party-pooper."

Jack sighed. He always had trouble telling her no. "Only if he's going."

They found Earl not far from the dais, as though he'd made the effort but hadn't been able to break loose from the lingering throngs wanting to talk to him.

"So what's the report from the home front?" Earl asked. He smiled at Jenny.

"Don't tell me you haven't spoken to anyone yet?" Jack eyed his boss warily.

“Yes, I’ve spoken to some of them, but I want to know what they’re saying when I’m not there.”

“It’s all good, Earl, don’t worry,” Jack said.

“Actually,” Jenny piped up, “their biggest concern is who’s going to succeed you.”

“Really?”

Jack knew exactly where she was heading with this. He carefully moved closer to her, not wanting Earl to notice, and stepped on her toe. She let out a little “ouch” and glared at him. Earl looked at her curiously.

“Just the typical talk, Earl,” said Jack, trying to pretend he didn’t know what her problem was. “They’re just wondering about their future, that’s all. We came over” – he looked at Jenny – “to see if you’re joining the group downstairs.”

“Yeah, I’ll be down as soon as I can break away. You guys go on ahead.”

The club was already jammed with bodies. The Thursday night happy hour crowd had hung around even after the price of the drinks had gone up, and now lawyers from the banquet upstairs had joined them, too. The music, some sort of 1970s disco, was louder than it needed to be, and Jack wasn’t sure he was in the mood to put up with it. He trailed reluctantly after Jenny, who’d worked her way through the mass of bodies to reach the bar. When the bartender turned his back to fix the drink, Jack laid into her.

“Jenny, what are you doing? You need to slow down.”

“I’m thirsty.” She tapped her fingers on the bar to the beat. She didn’t look at him.

“So have a glass of water.”

“Screw you, Jack. Can’t I have a little fun? It’s been a long time since I’ve had some fun.

It's all work, work, work."

But Jack suspected work wasn't what she was talking about. He assumed she was referring to her ex-boyfriend. Alex was an adjunct professor from the university where Claire worked; Jenny had met him years before at a summer party in Jack's backyard. After living with Alex for several years, she had recently left him.

"You're going to have to catch a cab home, then," Jack said. "You're not driving."

"Fine." She reached into the side pocket of her skirt and pulled out some money to pay for the drink. "Anything. Just leave me alone about the drinking."

Just then Earl came down, and Jack was relieved when Jenny found a lawyer from her firm to dance with, leaving him alone to shout over the music to some of the other prosecutors who had joined them. Earl didn't stay long, though; it was clear he was merely putting in an appearance.

"I'm too old for this," he joked when Jack tried to get him to stay, because he felt he was supposed to.

The dance floor eventually thinned out, and Jack spied Jenny each time she made a trip to the other side of the bar. He smiled to himself; she probably thought she was being sneaky and inconspicuous. But he knew she was keeping an eye on him, too, because when all the lawyers he'd been talking to finally left, she reappeared at his side.

"Dance with me." She grabbed his hand and tried to pull him onto the dance floor.

"You're spilling your drink." He reached for the glass in her other hand and took it away.

"Come on," she begged. "Let's have some fun. I just wanna dance."

"I'm not a good dancer, Jen," he protested. "I step on toes."

She lifted her arms above her head and swung her hips to the beat of the music. Her eyes

were closed and he knew she wasn't listening to him; the music had completely absorbed her. He watched her dance, a little embarrassed by her drunken display but drawn to it nevertheless. The camisole under her jacket had come untucked when she'd raised her arms, and he could see her flat stomach. Her hair, that luminous black hair that held such a tactile attraction for him, oscillated in waves behind her. Her movements were fluid, uninhibited. *Like a stripper on the East side*, he thought. He glanced around the club to see how many other guys were probably thinking the same thing. His eyes met Andy Rinehart's. They both laughed a little and Andy waved his hand like a cooling fan in front of his face. Jack shrugged. He had to get her out of there before she became the talk of the town.

"Come on, Jenny," he said, catching her by the waist in mid-gyration. "You've got to work tomorrow. We need to get you home to bed."

She let her arms fall. Her face was inches away from his and she stared at him, unwavering. "Well, that would be fun, too."

Her statement caught him off-guard and his throat tightened; she had never said anything so directly sexual to him before. But then, she'd never been so drunk with him before.

"Where's your car?" he asked.

"In the garage," she said, still moving to the music as he led her out of the bar.

"Which garage, Jenny?"

"The same one I always park in."

He sighed. "Across from the stadium?"

She nodded. "But my keys are in my office," she said, giggling, like somehow it was funny that she was in one place and her keys were in another.

Shit. It'd been more than eight years since Jack had set foot in Newman's offices, and he

didn't relish the thought of doing it now.

Somehow he managed to get her across the street and into the lobby of her building without running into anyone. The ride in the elevator up to the twenty-third floor felt familiar, like eight years hadn't passed since the last time he had been there. Everything was the same, just as he remembered. The elevator looked the same – the mirrored walls, the chrome railing – even the carpet was the identical midnight blue.

His luck ran out when they stepped out of the elevator into the firm's lobby.

"Jack! Is that you?" The voice boomed from down the hall to his left.

Oh God, of all people. It was his old boss, Steve Mendelsohn. What the hell was he doing here at this hour? Mendelsohn, together with Rob Kollman, was one of the co-chairs of Newman's litigation department. Jack quickly reminded himself he had been away from this firm for over eight years, during which time he had become a successful prosecutor and had probably tried more cases in the past year than Mendelsohn had tried in the last ten. He had no reason to be intimidated by this man any more.

Jack forced a smile on his face as Mendelsohn approached.

"Hey, Steve, how are you?" Jack extended his hand.

"Jack, my boy, it's been too long."

Yeah, right, Jack thought.

"What brings you up here?"

"I'm walking Jenny to her car. We just came from the bar association dinner. She left the keys in her office."

Only then did Mendelsohn acknowledge Jenny's presence. His eyes traveled the length of

her long body, both lecherous and disapproving at the same time. Jenny straightened her posture as she mumbled “Hello,” and Jack wasn’t sure if it was her way of defending herself or whether it was an instinctive response to being looked at like that. Despite his earlier internal pep talk, Jack could feel himself getting worked up over this jerk.

“You two are still friends? That’s great. I love it how you kids are able to have a social life outside work. That’s really great.”

Jack wanted to tell Mendelsohn that he was thirty-five years old and had two ‘kids’ of his own. But he knew Mendelsohn still thought of him as unformed larva, fresh out of law school. So he restrained himself – barely. “You should try it, Steve.”

Mendelsohn looked at him curiously, and then he let out a deep, low laugh and patted him on the back. “How’s life at the DA’s office treating you? You keeping those drunk drivers off the streets?”

To hell with restraint. “Actually, I just tried the Adler murder case. I’m sure you read about it in the papers.”

“Oh, that was you?” Mendelsohn asked.

“Yup, that was me. The jury returned a guilty verdict just today.” Jack hoped Mendelsohn was beginning to realize that the man standing in front of him was not the same young lawyer he had fired years before on a night very similar to this one.

“Well, congratulations are in order.” The fake smile had left Mendelsohn’s face now. “Shall I show you to Ms. Dodson’s office?” He looked at Jenny once more. “I’m not sure she’s in a condition to remember where it is.”

Jenny glared and began to speak, but Jack interrupted her. “That’s not necessary, Steve,” he said. “*I* remember where it is.”

* * *

Jenny cut loose as soon as they'd reached her office and she'd slammed the door behind her.

"The fuckin' asshole! I could poke his beady eyes out, looking at me like that! If he thinks he's going to oust me from this firm or screw up my partnership chances, he's got another thing coming!"

"Jenny, calm down. What are you talking about?"

She continued to rant as she walked to the drawer where she kept her purse. "He's trying to blame me for all the shit happening with Maxine Shepard, and I'm not going to let him. He's into something – I don't know what yet – but I'm not going to let him make me take the fall for his crap!"

Jack searched through her purse as he tried to make sense of what she was saying. The only part that sounded familiar was the mention of Maxine Shepard. "Crazy Maxine," as Jenny always referred to her, was one of Jenny's least favorite clients. She was a spunky widow whose husband had left her with more money than she knew what to do with. Sixty-two years old, Maxine wore Levis and sweatshirts at the same time she wore a three-carat emerald-cut diamond ring on her finger. She smoked Virginia Slims menthols incessantly and spoke with a permanent rasp in her voice. Maxine came to Newman around the same time as Jenny, after her husband's children from his first marriage, a brother and sister, contested their father's will and attempted to obtain control of the large estate that had been left to her. As told to Jenny later by Maxine, the children had disliked her from the day they were first introduced.

"I'm sure it had something to do with the coat I was wearing that day, some beastly old fur their father had given me – how was I supposed to know it had been their mother's?" Jenny had mimicked Maxine's deep voice when she first told Jack about her.

Maxine prevailed, and with her caustic personality and seemingly never-ending supply of litigation work for the firm, she soon became a legend around the office. Jenny's first face-to-face meeting with her had occurred just last summer, after another one of Maxine's investment deals had gone sour and Jenny was asked by Mendelsohn to "go after the crook that bilked her out of her money". When Jenny didn't immediately indulge Maxine's style and Maxine didn't warm to working in the shadow of Jenny's youth and beauty, a cold war ensued.

"Are you having trouble with Maxine?" Jack asked. He handed her the purse, minus the keys.

"She fancies herself as some worldly business woman just because she inherited all this money. But she doesn't have the business sense she needs to play the part. She refused to listen when some of the guys in corporate suggested she hire someone to handle her investments. She keeps getting screwed and if I'm not able to clean up the mess, she blames me." Jenny lowered her voice. "And Mendelsohn blames me, too."

"What did you mean, 'he's into something'?" Jack's voice was pressing, insistent; he didn't trust Mendelsohn either.

But Jenny only shook her head and didn't elaborate. She was winding down, and he let it go. He'd ask her about it later, when she was sober.

Her phone rang, and they both stared at it as if it'd just come to life.

"Who's calling you at this hour?" Jack asked.

She made a dismissive noise and waved it off. "Let it go."

This time Jack persisted. "You think it could be Mendelsohn?"

She ignored him and headed for the door, but he reached for the phone. She saw him do it, and before he had a chance to speak, she snatched it from his hand and hung it up. "It's not

Mendelsohn, Jack. I'm certain it was Alex and I can't deal with him right now, okay?"

Before they finally left her office, he called for a taxi to meet him at her house in an hour. Plenty of time to get her car and drive her home. They walked along Broadway toward the garage. She was quieter now, but he knew from the skip in her step that the alcohol was not even beginning to wear off. Jenny seemed to have forgotten the run-in with Mendelsohn and the call from Alex. The streets had dried, but a damp smell still hung in the air.

They passed the open door of a sports pub, and Jenny tugged on Jack's sleeve to stop him.

"Uh-uh, no way," he said. "There's gonna be a cab wait—"

She shook her head and put one finger to her lips to quiet him, and then pointed into the pub, over the bar. Jack looked up to see his own face on the television screen above the bartender's head. The bartender had his back to the bar and had paused in the middle of pouring a beer to watch. The faces of the three patrons sitting at the bar gazed up at the same angle.

"It's the eleven o'clock news. They're talking about your win today," Jenny whispered.

Jack fidgeted under the neon light above the doorway. His face and gestures on the screen were animated – "approachable" Earl called it – as he answered the reporter's questions about the Adler case. Jack always enjoyed the interviews in the moment, but watching himself afterwards made him uncomfortable. Tonight was no exception, particularly because the next questions were about the recent arrest of Clyde Hutchins, the accused in the Barnard case. He'd known Jenny Dodson long enough to know where that topic would take them.

"Come on, Jenny, I've already lived this episode," he joked, as Hutchins' photo appeared on screen. He took her hand and led her away from the doorway just as the reporter made the switch. But it was too late.

“They should fry his ass,” she announced. When he didn’t respond, she stopped on the sidewalk. “Oh, come on, don’t tell me you wouldn’t like to see that creep get what he deserves. The guy tortured that little girl! And then he left her out in the cold to die a slow death!”

Jack tugged on her sleeve to get her moving again. There was no use trying to have a serious discussion now, so he merely said, “Let’s just get him convicted first, why don’t we? Okay?”

“But if there was ever the perfect argument for the death penalty, don’t you think this case is it?”

He sighed. “I don’t think there will *ever* be the perfect argument for the death penalty.”

As they rode the parking garage elevator to the fifth level, neither spoke. Jack watched Jenny; she kept her head down, looking at her hands. He wondered if the embarrassment of the bar dance was beginning to sink in, or whether she was just thinking about Mendelsohn. Or Alex.

He saw her car, a bright red Jeep Wrangler, as soon as they stepped off the elevator. It was only one of a few still parked on that level. They crossed the empty cement, illuminated by the yellow overhead lights on the ceiling and the ambient glow of the lights of surrounding office buildings that filtered in through the open sides. Their footsteps echoed, and for a moment they walked in step with each other. When they reached the car, he retrieved her keys from his pocket and started to unlock the door. She reached down and softly touched his hand.

“Will you dance with me now?” she whispered.

Jack remained still, his eyes on their motionless hands, but he could feel his heart beating wildly, uncontrollably, in his chest. He knew, he just knew, what was going to happen, and he stood there frozen; he should just say no and open the car door as he had planned. But there was something in her voice, something that said ‘don’t reject me again, like you did back in the bar.’

“There’s no music.”

She understood then that he had accepted. “That can be remedied,” she said as she took the keys from him and, with much concentration, opened the door herself. She sat down in the driver’s seat, her legs still outside, and put the keys in the ignition. The music she had been listening to on the way to work began again. “Crash Into Me”. She leaned over and turned up the volume slightly. The slow, gentle sounds of an acoustic guitar and brushed cymbals floated through the humid air of the garage and out into the night. Had he not known better, he would have thought she had planned all this.

She stood and took his hands, intertwining their fingers. They moved together away from the car, and she moved closer to him. For the first time in nine years he felt her body against his, and even with their clothes as a barrier, it was exactly as he’d imagined – and feared. He could feel the fullness of her breasts as they pressed on his chest, and her hips as they brushed up against his. She began to sway to the music, taking him with her.

“Jenny . . .” he tried to speak, but it came out hoarse and he was forced to clear his throat.

“Shh. Just listen, move with the music,” she murmured. She closed her eyes and rested her head on his shoulder.

He stared out at the lights of the city, trying to regulate his breathing. *This is the alcohol*, he told himself. He prayed she wouldn’t let go of his hands, because he knew he would have no control over them.

She began to lead them around in slow, easy circles. His head reeled, but she seemed unaffected by it all, so relaxed, and he suddenly worried that this *pas de deux* had a whole different meaning for him than for her. Maybe she did just want to dance.

He tightened his hands on hers, discreetly taking the lead. He felt her tense and knew she

had sensed the switch. He stopped the turning, led them back to the car as slowly as she had led them away, and backed her up against it. She lifted her head and looked at him, startled by his sudden authority.

“You don’t step on toes,” she said.

“No, I don’t,” he said, admitting his lie.

Her dark brown eyes were black tonight, and he stared into them, trying to see behind them. She met his stare, as if they were locked in a contest, but finally gave in and looked away.

“Look at me.” He turned her cheek so she faced him again. “What are you doing?”

“What are *you* doing?” she replied without hesitation.

He asked himself the same question as he bent his head down to meet hers. As he felt her lips and then her tongue, he finally submitted completely, his fingers caressing the heavy strands of her silky hair.

His tongue explored her mouth, slowly and gently, without urgency. He felt her hands move to his shoulders, and she exerted slight pressure in no particular direction, as if she was unsure whether to push him away. He disregarded it, determining her intentions instead from the hungry response of her mouth.

Later he wondered how they didn’t hear the elevator cables moving, how they didn’t hear the doors opening and then closing, hard and resolute. They didn’t hear the footsteps, or even, unbelievably, the opening of the car door on the other side of the garage. It was the start of the car’s engine that startled him and caused him to back away from her, and only because, for less than an instant, he imagined the sound to somehow have come from Jenny’s car.

“Come on.” He grabbed her arm and led her quickly around to the passenger side. The spiral ramp that led to the exit was on their side of the garage and he wanted them inside her car before the

other one reached them. She seemed not to have the same sense of urgency. The soporific effects of the alcohol had kicked in, and she stumbled as she tried to get inside.

“Jenny, please,” he begged. Without looking, he could see the headlights approaching. He turned his back to the car as it passed slowly behind hers. *Keep going, keep going*, he thought, knowing that had he been the driver, at this hour, he would stop, wondering if the woman was there willingly.

It passed without stopping, and he thanked it and cursed at the same time, hoping it was indicative of his good fortune and not some girl’s bad luck in the future. He waited until it drove onto the ramp before walking to the other side of the car. When he got in, he looked over at her; she had her head laid back against the headrest with her eyes closed. He leaned across her to grasp her seat belt, taking care not to let their bodies touch again. As he struggled with the buckle, he watched her face, wondering if she had fallen asleep. And then he saw it. A tear. Just one, in the outer corner of her eye, pooled in the space between her upper and lower eyelids, caught heavy in flight by her black lashes.

Jenny lived in one of the rehabbed Victorian duplexes on Lafayette Square that lined the streets around the park. The taxi was already parked outside waiting for him when they arrived. He touched Jenny’s hand gently to wake her.

“I’ll be right back,” he said to the driver before helping her up the front stoop. The taxi driver nodded in understanding, as if he had watched the same scene unfold numerous times before. Jack fumbled with Jenny’s keys, trying a few to determine which opened the door. One finally fit, and he shoved the door open with one hand while balancing her with the other. They were greeted by a Siamese cat; it mewed insistently as it wound its body first between her legs and then his. He

pushed it gently out of the way with his foot and kicked the door closed.

It was dark inside, and he felt for a light switch on the wall. He debated whether to try to get Jenny upstairs into her bed, but thought better of it and steered her towards the couch. She immediately rolled onto her side, drew her legs up, and grasped the throw pillow under her head with both hands. He went upstairs, foregoing the interior lights this time in favor of the soft dim glow from the streetlights below. He stopped in the doorway to her bedroom, startled by the imposing mahogany four-poster bed in front of him. He remembered there had been no bed when he and his son, Michael, had helped her move; she'd lived with Alex, of course, before moving here. Now, she'd dressed the bed to rival any linen catalogue. And pillows. There had to be at least seven or eight pillows at the head. A white scarf draped from post to post. His eyes were drawn to the room's tall windows, which were framed by long, white sheers that matched the bed scarf. He smiled a little, amused by the evidence of the difference in their disposable income; he and Claire still slept on the old bedroom set handed down from her parents. And after five years in their house, the bedroom windows were still covered by roller shades.

He walked around the end of the bed and looked at the items on her dresser. He picked up a picture, one he'd seen in a box when they'd helped her move. It was an old photo – of Jenny, he presumed – taken when she was a little girl. Despite the difference in age and the lighter hair color, the lips on the little girl in the picture were unmistakably hers. She must have been playing dress-up. She wore a billowy, oversized dress shirt – her father's, perhaps – gathered at the waist by a skinny belt. She had adorned herself with a pill-box style hat with a large, glorious bow in the front, and jewelry everywhere. She wore heels, high black pumps with sharp pointed toes that, because of the camera angle, actually seemed to fit her tiny feet. What struck Jack most, however, as he studied the picture, was the make-up. This little girl, who looked to be no more than five or six, had on the

make-up of a grown woman.

He continued to study the picture. The little girl stared back at him, cocky and self-assured even then. Everything was the same but the hair; he couldn't figure out the hair. He knew hair became darker as one grew older, but from this amber to black? He was sure she didn't dye it. He set the picture back down, puzzled.

At the end of the dresser, on the floor, a discarded bra and pair of panties lay carelessly at the edge of the area rug. Their intimacy embarrassed him, and he suddenly remembered why he had come up here.

He turned and tugged the comforter from her bed, disturbing another cat, this one a skinny orange tabby curled up in the middle of the pillows. As he gathered the comforter in his arms, something black between the mattress and box spring caught his attention. He stepped closer to the bed and lifted the mattress a bit. A semi-automatic pistol – he recognized it as a Walther PPK 380 caliber – rested on the white cotton top of the bed skirt. He immediately thought of Alex, but then dismissed the thought, and figured it was just her way of feeling safe in the city. It bothered him, though, that she had never mentioned it. But then, why would she?

He returned downstairs and covered her, and then squatted down next to the couch and moved the hair off her face as an excuse to touch it one more time. "I'll see you later, Jen," he said softly, unsure whether she heard him.

He opened the front door to leave, but her voice whispering his name stopped him.

"Don't deny yourself what you really want." She mumbled as she spoke, from alcohol, from sleep. "It's so close."

"Jenny . . ."

"Jack, do it. Run for DA. Just do it."

Without looking back, he stepped into the quiet still of the night and closed the door behind him. He locked it and dropped her keys through the mail slot.

He settled into the back of the cab, tried not to inhale the sickeningly sweet scent of the peach-shaped air freshener hanging from the rearview mirror. And he wondered how one night in his life could have so drastically altered his view of the world.