

— ONE —

The day starts the same way it usually does. Just another monotonously gorgeous October day in Miami, the sky typically blue and cloudless, the temperature expected to reach eighty degrees by noon. There is nothing to suggest that today will vary significantly from yesterday or the day before that, nothing to suggest that today, or more specifically *tonight*, will change my life forever.

I wake up at seven. Shower and dress—a black pleated skirt and white cotton blouse, slightly more formal than my usual fare. Brush my hair, which is light brown and hangs in loose waves halfway down my back. Apply a hint of blush to my cheeks and a touch of mascara to my lashes. Make some coffee, scarf down a muffin, and call downstairs at eight thirty for one of the valets to bring up my car from the underground garage.

I could go get the vintage silver Porsche myself, but the valets get a kick out of driving it, even for the thirty seconds it takes to accelerate up the circular ramp from my parking spot on lower level three to the front entrance. This morning it's Finn, almost handsome in his uniform of khaki pants and short-sleeved, forest-

green shirt, behind the wheel. “Busy day, Miss Carpenter?” he asks as we exchange positions.

“Just another day in paradise.”

“Enjoy,” he says, closing my door and waving me away.

I head for Biscayne Boulevard and the law offices of Holden, Cunningham, and Kravitz, where I’ve been employed as an investigator for almost two years. The firm, home to approximately three hundred employees, a hundred and twenty-five of whom are lawyers, occupies the top three floors of an imposing marble tower in the business heart of the city. Normally I’d enjoy another cup of coffee while exchanging pleasantries with whomever happens to be milling around the staff room, but today I’m due in court, so I park my car in the underground lot, lock my licensed Glock in the glove compartment, and hail a cab for the short ride over to 73 West Flagler Street and the Miami-Dade County Courthouse. Street parking is minimal to nonexistent in this area, and I can’t afford to waste precious time looking for a spot. I’ve been called as a rebuttal witness in a case involving corporate espionage, and I’m anxious to take the stand. Unlike many in my profession who prefer to remain invisible, I actually enjoy testifying.

Maybe that’s because, as an investigator, I spend a great deal of my time in relative isolation. My job involves gathering information that will prove useful in courtroom defense, investigating cheating spouses and suspicious employees, engaging in surveillance, taking photographs, videotaping clandestine encounters, searching out and questioning prospective witnesses, locating missing heirs, and rounding up facts, some of which turn out to be pertinent and admissible in court, others merely prurient but useful anyway. When I have gathered up all the necessary info, I sit down and write up a report. Occasionally, like today, I’m called to testify. A cursory knowledge of the law is essential, making the several years I spent at the University of Miami majoring in criminology not a total waste of time, despite my leaving before completing my degree. According to the online site where I secured my investigator’s license, it is part of my job description to be clever, well-informed, dogged, methodical, resourceful, and discreet. I try to be all of those things.

There's a long lineup of people already waiting to pass through the metal detectors when I arrive at the courthouse, followed by an excruciatingly slow ride in a crowded elevator to the twenty-first floor. It seems almost laughable now to think that back when construction of this twenty-eight-story building was completed in 1928, it was not only the tallest building in Florida but the tallest building south of Ohio. Amazingly, its white limestone exterior still manages to stand out amid the largely indistinguishable glass structures that surround and dwarf it. Inside the building, it's a different and less impressive story, the lobby still awaiting funds to complete its stalled refurbishing, the majority of courtrooms feeling as stale as they occasionally smell.

"State your name and occupation," the county clerk directs as I take the stand and agree to tell the whole truth and nothing but.

"Bailey Carpenter. I'm an investigator with Holden, Cunningham, and Kravitz."

"How are you, Bailey?" Sean Holden asks as I take my seat. Sean is not only my boss but one of the firm's founding fathers and major stars, even though he's only forty-two. I watch him do up the buttons of his blue pinstriped jacket, thinking what an impressive man he is. Not good-looking in the traditional sense, his features somewhat coarse, his hazel eyes small and a little too direct, his dark hair a bit too curly, his lips a touch too full. Just a little too much of everything, which is usually just more than enough to intimidate the hell out of the other side.

The case before the court is relatively simple: Our client, the owner of a local chain of successful bakeries, is being sued for wrongful dismissal by a former employee. He is countersuing, arguing that the woman was fired for divulging trade secrets to his chief competitor. The woman has already testified that her meetings with the competitor in question were totally innocent, that she and her husband have known him since childhood, and that their meetings, all of which are detailed in my report and already entered into evidence, were for the sole purpose of planning a surprise party for her husband's fortieth birthday. She went on to volunteer that she is an honest woman who would never know-

ingly betray her employer's trust. That was her mistake. Witnesses should never volunteer anything.

Sean asks me a number of seemingly innocuous, job-related questions before zeroing in on the reason I'm here. "You're aware that Janice Elder has already testified under oath that she is, and I quote, 'an honest woman incapable of such betrayal.'"

"Yes, I'm aware of that."

"And you're here to refute that statement?"

"I have evidence that refutes both her assertion of honesty and that she is incapable of betrayal."

The lawyer for the other side is immediately on his feet. "Objection, Your Honor."

"Mrs. Elder opened the door to this line of questioning herself," Sean states, and the judge quickly rules in his favor.

"You said that you have evidence that refutes both her assertion of honesty and that she is incapable of betrayal?" Sean asks, repeating what I have said, word for word.

"Yes, I do."

"What is that evidence?"

I refer to my notes, although the truth is I don't need them. Sean and I have been going over my testimony for days, and I know exactly what I'm going to say. "On the night of March 12, 2013," I begin, "I followed Mrs. Elder to the Doubleday Hilton Hotel in Fort Lauderdale. . . ." Out of the corner of my eye, I see Janice Elder hastily conferring with her lawyer. I see the panic in her eyes.

"Objection," her lawyer says again.

Again, he is overruled.

"Go on, Ms. Carpenter."

"I watched her approach the reception desk and secure a room card. Room 214, registered to a Mr. Carl Segretti."

"What the hell?" a man exclaims from the bench directly behind Mrs. Elder. He is Todd Elder, Janice's husband, and he is already on his feet, a combination of shock and outrage causing his tanned skin to glow bright red, as if he has been set ablaze. "You've been sneaking around with Carl?"

“Objection, Your Honor. This has absolutely nothing to do with the case at hand.”

“On the contrary, Your Honor. . . .”

“You lying little bitch!”

“Order in the court.”

“You’ve been fucking my goddamn *cousin*?”

“Bailiff, remove that man.” The judge bangs on his gavel. “Court is recessed for thirty minutes.”

“Good work,” Sean remarks out of the corner of his mouth as I walk past him out of the courtroom, the hostility in Mrs. Elder’s eyes burning into my back like acid.

In the hallway I check my phone while waiting to see if I will be recalled to the stand. There is a message from Alissa Dunphy, a third-year associate at the firm, asking me to look into the possible reappearance of one Roland Peterson, a deadbeat dad who fled Miami some months ago rather than pay his ex-wife the several hundred thousand dollars he owes her in back alimony and child support.

“Well, that was a rather unpleasant surprise,” a voice behind me says as I’m dropping the phone back into my oversized canvas bag. The voice belongs to the lawyer representing Janice Elder. His name is Owen Weaver and I estimate his age as early thirties, which makes him just a few years older than me. I note that he has a mouthful of straight white teeth that don’t quite go with his engagingly crooked smile.

“Just doing my job,” I tell him, only half-apologetically.

“Do you have to do it so well?” The smile spreading from his lips to his soft brown eyes tells me we’re not really talking about the case at all. “Do me a favor,” he says.

“If I can.”

“Have dinner with me,” he continues, confirming my suspicions.

“What?”

“Dinner? With me? The restaurant of your choice? Saturday night?”

“You’re asking me out?”

"You're surprised?"

"Well, under the circumstances . . ."

"You mean the fact that you just blew my case out of the water?"

"There is that."

"We still have to eat."

"There's that, too." The courtroom doors burst open and Sean Holden strides purposefully toward me. "If you'll excuse me a minute . . . my boss . . ."

"Of course." Owen Weaver reaches into the inside pocket of his navy jacket and hands me his card. "Call me." He smiles, first at me, then at Sean. "Give me ten minutes with my client," he tells him before moving away.

Sean nods. "What was that all about?"

I slip Owen's card into my bag and shrug, as if to indicate our conversation was of no importance. Sean looks back toward the courtroom, my eyes following his. Mrs. Elder's husband is standing alone and stone-faced beside the door, his fists clenched at his sides, his body muscular and coiled, ready to spring into action. He catches my glance and mouths the word *bitch*, transferring his fury at his wife to me. Not the first time misplaced anger has been pointed in my direction.

By the time court resumes half an hour later, Mrs. Elder has agreed to drop her suit if our client will do the same. Our client grumbles but ultimately gives in, and nobody leaves happy, which I've heard is the sign of a good compromise. At least Sean and I are pleased. "I have to run," he tells me as we're leaving the courthouse. "I'll catch you later. And Bailey," he adds, hailing down a passing cab and climbing inside. "Congratulations. You did real good."

I watch the taxi disappear into traffic before hailing a cab of my own and returning to Biscayne Boulevard. Despite our victory in court, I'm feeling a bit let down. I guess I'd been hoping for something more than an ungrammatical pat on the back. A celebratory lunch would have been nice, I think as I locate my car in the underground garage and climb inside, unlocking the glove

compartment and returning my gun to my purse, where it lands on top of Owen Weaver's business card. I'm toying with taking him up on his offer. Since breaking up with my boyfriend, I've spent far too many Saturday nights alone.

I'm still debating whether to accept his invitation some twenty minutes later as I turn the corner onto Northeast 129 Street in North Miami. Parking my car on the quiet, residential street, I head toward the lemon-yellow building at the end of a row of similarly old-fashioned, pastel-colored, low-rise condos. This is where Sara McAllister lives. Sara was Roland Peterson's girlfriend at the time he fled the city rather than support his children. My hunch is that Sara McAllister just might be the reason he came back, something I intend to find out.

Near the end of the street is an elongated circle of shrubbery, a spot both self-contained and secluded, despite its proximity to the road. I couldn't have asked for a more perfect surveillance spot. Taking a quick look around to make sure no one is watching, I retrieve my binoculars from my bag and slip into the middle of the bushes, dislodging several coral blossoms as I crouch among the flowers and raise the binoculars to my eyes. I aim them at the third-floor corner unit of the four-story building and adjust the lenses until they merge into a single image.

The drapes in Sara McAllister's living room are open, but with the lights off, it's difficult to make out much of the interior except for a white-shaded lamp positioned next to the window. The apartment appears to be empty, which isn't surprising. Sara is a saleswoman at Nordstrom and usually works till six. I decide there's little to be accomplished by hanging around now. It makes more sense to come back this evening.

I have two meetings scheduled for this afternoon as well as a backlog of paperwork to finish off. I also want to call my brother, Heath. It's been a week since we've spoken, and I can't stop worrying about him. I take one last, seemingly casual look around the old street, frozen in the sunlight as if it were frozen in time, as still as a photograph.

I'm pushing myself to my feet when I see something flash in a

window across the way, a hint of someone moving just out of frame. Has someone been watching me?

I lift the binoculars back to my eyes but see no one. Professional paranoia, I decide, as I extricate myself from the bushes, brushing a fallen hibiscus blossom from the shoulder of my white blouse and swiping at the dirt clinging to my knees. I decide to change into more appropriate attire before coming back tonight, when I can use the darkness as a protective shield. I'm foolish enough to think it will keep me safe from prying eyes like mine.

— T W O —

This is what I remember: the warm night air, darkness as soft and inviting as a cashmere shawl, a gentle breeze brushing flirtatiously across the tops of the sweet-smelling shrubs in which I'm hiding, their coral flowers now folded in on themselves, closed to the dark. I'm vaguely aware of their faint aroma as I peer through my binoculars into Sara McAllister's third-floor window, my knees aching from squatting so long in the same position, my toes cramping. It's closing in on midnight, I've been here for hours, and irritability is curling around my consciousness like a hungry boa constrictor. I'm thinking that if I don't see something—*anything*—soon, I'm going to call it a night.

That's when I hear it—the snap of a twig, perhaps, although I'm not certain, that signals someone behind me. I turn to look, but it's already too late. A gloved hand quickly covers my mouth, blocking my screams. I taste leather—old, stale, earthy. And then, those hands, seemingly everywhere, on my shoulders, in my hair, snapping the binoculars from my fingers, as fists slam into my stomach and against the side of my head, causing the world around me to blur and the ground to give way beneath my feet. A pillowcase is

pulled roughly over my face. I can't breathe, and I panic. Keep your wits about you, I tell myself in an effort to regain my equilibrium and hold my growing terror at bay. Keep track of everything that's happening.

Except that everything is happening too fast. Even before the pillowcase is pulled into place, the white cotton overwhelming the blackness of the night, I see nothing but a vague shape. A man, certainly, but whether he is young or old, fat or thin, black or brown or white, I have no idea. Has the man I've been waiting for been waiting for me? Did he spot me hiding in the bushes and simply bide his time?

This is good news, I assure myself. If it's Roland Peterson, he'll want only to scare me, not kill me. Killing me would invite more trouble, and he's in enough trouble as it is. He might rough me up a bit, throw the fear of God into me, but then he'll disappear. The sooner I stop struggling, the sooner he'll leave me alone.

Except he isn't leaving me alone. He's spinning me around and tearing at my clothes, his fingers ripping open the buttons of my black shirt and pushing my bra up over my breasts. "No!" I shout when I realize what is happening. Another fist crashes into my jaw, filling my mouth with blood. "Stop. Please. Don't do this." But my pleas are muffled and, if the man hears them at all, they do nothing to halt, or even slow down, the ferocity of his attack. An instant later he is tugging my jeans and panties down my hips. I kick furiously at the air, and I think my boot connects with his chest, but I'm not sure. It's possible I only wish it had.

What is happening? Where is everyone? I already know the answer. There is no one. The people who live in this neighborhood are, for the most part, on the plus side of sixty. No one goes out after ten o'clock, let alone this close to midnight. Even the most dedicated of dog walkers put little Fifi to bed hours ago.

I feel the full weight of the man's arm across my neck and shoulders, pinning me like a butterfly on a wall, as his other hand fumbles with his pants. There is the sickening sound of a zipper opening, then more fumbling, something being unwrapped. He's putting on a condom, I realize, contemplating taking advantage of

this distraction when a sudden punch to my stomach leaves me barely able to breathe, let alone attempt an escape. The man quickly pries my legs apart and pushes his way inside me. I feel the sudden cold of the lubricated condom as he tears into me, his hands reaching around me to grab my buttocks. I will my body to go numb, but I can still feel every vicious thrust. After what seems an eternity, it's over. He bites down on my right breast as he climaxes, and I cry out. Seconds later, his lips approach my ear, his breath penetrating the fibers of the thin pillowcase. He smells of mouthwash, minty and crisp. "Tell me you love me," he growls. His gloved hand clutches my throat. "Tell me you love me."

I open my mouth, hear the word "bastard" tumble from my lips. That's when his hand tightens its grip. My nostrils flare against the stiff cotton of the pillowcase, and I gasp in horror, gulping at the air, swallowing blood. *I'm going to die here*, I think, not sure how long I can remain conscious. I picture my mother and father, and for the first time am glad they aren't alive to have to deal with this. The man's thumb presses down hard on my windpipe. Tiny blood vessels explode like fireworks behind my eyes. And then, finally, mercifully, the outside darkness slips beneath my eyelids and I see nothing at all.

When I come to, the man is gone.

The pillowcase around my head has vanished, and the night air is licking my face, like a cat. I lie still for some time, unable to move, trying to gather the thoughts that are scattered among the broken hibiscus flowers framing my face, the taste of blood fresh in my mouth, a painful throbbing between my legs, my breasts bruised and sore. I'm naked from the waist down, and even with my eyes nearly swollen shut, I can make out the rivulets of blood that crisscross my thighs. Slowly, I pull my bra back into position, gather my blouse, and reach through the broken shrubbery for my jeans. My panties are missing, as is my canvas bag, and along with it, my gun and the license to carry it, my wallet, my cell phone, my

camera, my ID (both personal and professional), and the keys to both my car and my condo, although I do manage to locate my binoculars.

“Help me,” I hear someone cry out, barely recognizing the voice I know is mine. “Somebody, please, help me.” I struggle into my jeans, then try to stand up, but my legs have all the strength of wet noodles and they collapse underneath me, so I crawl toward the street where I remember parking my car.

Miraculously, the silver Porsche is still there. Probably too conspicuous to steal. Definitely not the most suitable car for someone in my profession, but it had belonged to my mother and I’m not about to part with it. Now I clutch at the door handle as if it is a life preserver, trying to pull myself up. The car’s sophisticated alarm system instantly erupts into a cacophony of honks, bells, and whistles. I collapse onto the road, my back against the side of the door, my feet sprawled in front of me. Glancing toward the apartment I’ve been watching, I see a man appear at the window. Instinctively, I raise my binoculars. But the binoculars are too heavy, and I’m too weak. They fall beside me, cracking against the concrete.

The next thing I remember is waking up in the back of an ambulance. “You’re going to be all right,” I hear the paramedic saying.

“You’re going to be all right,” another voice echoes.
They’re wrong.

That was two weeks ago. I’m home now. But I’m definitely not all right. I don’t sleep, at least not without powerful medication, and I don’t eat. When I try, I throw up. I’ve lost at least ten pounds I couldn’t afford to lose, being at least ten pounds too thin to begin with. And not on purpose. I’m not one of those women who believes in dieting or even watching what she eats, and I hate exercise. At twenty-nine, I’ve always been naturally slender. “Skinny Minny,” they used to taunt me in high school. I was the last girl in

my class to wear a bra, although when my breasts finally did sprout, they grew surprisingly, even suspiciously, large and full. “Implants, obviously,” I heard one woman in a group of female lawyers at Holden, Cunningham, and Kravitz whisper as I passed them in the corridor one day last month. At least I think it was last month. I’m not sure. I’m losing track of time. Another entry for my “things lost” column. Right under “confidence.” Just above “sanity.”

I’ve lost my looks, too. Before, I was pretty. Large, blue-green eyes, prominent cheekbones, a slight overbite that makes my lips seem fuller than they really are, long, thick brown hair. Now my eyes are cloudy with neverending tears and circled by bruises; my cheeks are scratched and hollow, my lips cracked and even torn from where I bite at them, a habit I used to have as a child and have now revived. My hair, once a source of great pride and joy, hangs lifeless around my face, dry from too many washings, as is my skin, which is rubbed raw from all the showers I take. But even with three and sometimes four showers a day, I don’t feel clean. It’s as if I’ve been rolling around in the muck for weeks and the dirt has seeped so deep into my pores that it has infiltrated my bloodstream. I am contaminated. Toxic. A danger to all who look at me. No wonder I barely recognize myself when I look in the mirror. I have become one of those pitiful-looking women you see on street corners, shoulders hunched, trembling hands extended and begging for spare change, the kind of woman you cross the street to avoid. The kind of woman you secretly blame for her misfortune.

This woman has become my roommate and constant companion. She follows me from room to room, like Marley’s ghost, shuffling across the beige marble floors of my spacious two-bedroom condo. Together, we live on the twenty-third floor of an ultra-modern glass building in the Brickell section of Miami, an area often referred to as “Wall Street South.” In addition to being the financial center of Miami, the neighborhood is full of upscale shopping malls and quality hotels, not to mention more than ten thousand condo units in luxury complexes with spectacular views of both city and ocean. The floor-to-ceiling windows in my living

room look out at the beautiful Miami River, while identical windows in my bedroom overlook the backs of other glass high-rises. Unfortunately, many of the apartments sit empty, Florida real estate having been hit especially hard in the recent economic downturn. Despite this, another tall building is going up just across the street. Cranes are everywhere. The new national bird, I can hear my mother laugh. Surely we have enough tall glass buildings, I think. Still, who am I to protest? People in glass houses, after all. . . .

I moved in last year. My father bought the apartment for me, even as he insisted he would be happy if I lived at home forever. But he agreed that it was probably time for me to be on my own. It had been two years since my mother's death. I was working. I had a boyfriend. I had my whole life ahead of me.

Of course, that was then.

This is now.

Now I have nothing. My job is on hold; my boyfriend is gone; my father died of a sudden heart attack four months ago, leaving me an orphan. At least I think it's been four months since my father died. Like I said, I've lost track of time. That can happen when you stay in your apartment all day, when you jump every time the phone rings and leave your bed only to shower and go to the toilet, when your sole visitors are the police and the one sibling who isn't suing you over your father's estate.

Thank goodness for my brother, Heath, even if he's not a whole lot of help. He collapsed at the hospital when he first saw me after the attack, actually fainting dead away and almost hitting his head on the side of the gurney. It was almost funny. The doctors and nurses rushed to his side, and I was temporarily forgotten. "He's so handsome," I heard one of the nurses whisper. I can't blame her for being temporarily distracted by Heath's good looks. My brother, older than me by a scant eleven months, is by far the most beautiful of my father's children, his dark hair always falling into eyes that are an unnaturally deep shade of green, the eyelashes that frame them obscenely long and girlish. Women are always falling in love with Heath. Men, too. And Heath has always had difficulty saying no. To anyone. To anything.

At the hospital, they examined me thoroughly, then pronounced me lucky. An odd choice of words, and probably my face registered this, because they quickly qualified: By “lucky,” they meant my attacker had used a condom, so he left no semen inside me. As a result, I didn’t have to go on any of those awful anti-AIDS drugs or take the morning-after pill to prevent unwanted pregnancy. He spared me that. Such a considerate rapist. The downside is that he left not a hint of himself behind. There is no DNA to run through sophisticated CSI computers. Unless I can give the police something more to go on, unless I can remember something, *anything* . . .

“Think,” I recall the uniformed police officer gently prompting the night of my attack. “Can you remember anything about the man, anything at all?”

I shook my head, felt my brain rattle. It hurt, but trying to talk hurt even more.

“Can we go over everything just one more time, Miss Carpenter?” another voice asked, this one female. “Sometimes the more we go over something, the more we’re able to remember. Something we don’t even realize might be significant. . . .”

Sure, I remember thinking. Significant. Whatever.

“Your name is Bailey Carpenter, and you live at 1228 Northeast First Avenue. Is that correct?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“That’s downtown. You were found in North Miami.”

“Yes. As I told you, I was staking out an apartment there. I’m an investigator with Holden, Cunningham, and Kravitz.”

“That’s a law firm?”

“Yes. I was looking for a man named Roland Peterson who skipped town about a year ago. We represent his ex-wife, and we’d gotten wind Mr. Peterson had recently slipped back into the city, possibly to visit his old girlfriend.”

“So you were watching the girlfriend’s apartment?”

“Yes.”

“Do you think Roland Peterson is the man who attacked you?”

“I don’t know. Are you going to arrest him?”

“We’ll certainly check him out.”

I suspected that Roland Peterson, whether he was the man who raped me or just a deadbeat dad, was probably halfway out of Florida by now.

“Can you describe the man who attacked you?”

I shook my head again, felt my brain slide toward my left ear.

“Give yourself a few minutes,” the female officer urged. I noticed that she was in plain clothes, which probably made her a detective. Detective Marx, I think the other officer called her. “I know this isn’t easy, but if you could try to put yourself back in those bushes.”

Is Detective Marx really so naïve? I think now. Does she not realize I’ll be in those bushes for the rest of my life?

I remember thinking she looked too petite, too insubstantial, to be a police officer, her light gray eyes too soft, too caring. “It’s just that it all happened so fast. I know that’s such a cliché. I know I should have been more alert, more aware of my surroundings. . . .”

“This wasn’t your fault,” she interrupted.

“But I’ve studied judo and tae kwan do,” I argued. “It’s not as if I don’t know how to defend myself.”

“Anyone can be caught off guard. You heard nothing at all?”

“I don’t know,” I told her, trying to remember and not remember at the same time. “I *felt* something. A slight shift in the air. No, wait. I *did* hear something, maybe a footstep, maybe a twig breaking. I started to turn around, and then . . .” A tissue suddenly appeared in the officer’s outstretched hand. I grabbed it, tearing it into pieces before it reached my eyes. “He started hitting me. He was punching me in the stomach and face. I couldn’t get my bearings. He put a pillowcase over my head. I couldn’t see. I couldn’t breathe. I was so scared.”

“Before he hit you, were you able to make out anything? A shape? A size?”

I tried to picture the man. I really did. But all I saw was the darkness of the night, followed by the suffocating whiteness of the pillowcase.

“Could you see what he was wearing?”

Yet another shake of my head. “He must have been wearing black. And jeans. He was wearing jeans.” I heard the man’s zipper and wanted to scream to block out the sound.

“Good. That’s very good, Bailey. You *did* see things. You *can* remember.”

I felt foolishly proud of myself and realized how eager I was to please this woman whose eyes were so soft and gray.

“Could you tell what color the man was, if he was black or white or Hispanic?”

“White,” I said. “Maybe Hispanic. I think he had brown hair.”

“What else?”

“He had big hands. He was wearing leather gloves.” Once again I tasted the stale leather and swallowed the urge to gag.

“Can you estimate how tall he was?”

“I think he was average.”

“Could you tell if he was overweight, skinny, muscular . . . ?”

“Average,” I said again. Could I be any less informative? I’ve been trained to notice the smallest of details. Yet all my training evaporated with that first punch. “He was very strong.”

“You struggled with him.”

“Yes. But he kept hitting me, so I never got close enough to make any real contact. I never got a look at his face. It was all one big blur. And then he pulled that pillowcase over my head. . . .”

“Did you notice his shoes?”

“No. Yes!” I corrected myself, my mind flashing on the iconic Nike swoosh in the canvas of the man’s sneakers. “He was wearing black Nike sneakers.”

“Can you estimate what size?”

“No, damn it. I’m useless. Absolutely useless. I don’t know anything.”

“You *do* know,” the officer said. “You remembered the sneakers.”

“Half the population of Miami owns sneakers like those.”

“Did he say anything?”

“No.”

"You're sure?"

"He didn't say anything."

Which is when I felt the man's lips moving toward my ear, his voice penetrating the pillowcase with the same sickening force he was penetrating me. *Tell me you love me.*

My entire body started trembling. How could I forget this? How could my mind have blanked out something so obviously, terribly important?

"He told you to tell him you loved him?" Detective Marx repeated, unable to disguise her surprise or her revulsion.

"Yes. He repeated it twice."

"Did you?"

"Did I what?"

"Tell him you loved him?"

"No. I called him a bastard."

"Good for you," she said, and again I felt a surge of pride.

"Okay, Bailey. This is very important. Can you tell me what he sounded like?" She was already elaborating before I could formulate a response. "Was he American? Did he have an accent? Was his voice deep or high-pitched? Did he speak with a lisp? Did he sound young or old?"

"Young," I said. "Or at least, not old. But not a teenager," I qualified, trying to remember what teenagers sound like. "He was whispering—actually, it was more of a growl. I didn't hear an accent or a lisp."

"Good. That's very good, Bailey. You're doing great. Do you think you'd recognize him if you heard that voice again?"

Oh, God, I thought, panic making me dizzy. Please don't let me hear that voice again. "I don't know. Maybe. Like I said, he was whispering." Another surge of panic. Another onslaught of tears. Another tissue. "Please, I just want to go home."

"Just a few more questions."

"No. No more questions. I've told you everything."

What I'd told her was that the man who raped me was most likely a white male of average height and weight, between the ages

of twenty and forty, with brown hair and a fondness for black Nike sneakers. In other words, I'd told her nothing.

"Okay," she agreed, although I heard the reluctance in her voice. "Is it all right if we stop by your apartment tomorrow?"

"What for?"

"In case you remember anything else. Sometimes a good night's sleep . . ."

"You think I'll sleep?"

"I think the doctors will prescribe something to help you."

"You think anything will help?"

"I know it doesn't feel that way right now," she said, placing a gentle hand on my arm. I forced myself not to recoil at her touch. "But eventually you *will* get over this. Your world *will* return to normal."

I marveled at her certainty, even as I marveled at her naïveté. When has my world ever been normal?

A brief family history. My father, Eugene Carpenter, was married three times and spawned seven children: a girl and a boy with his first wife, three boys with his second, and Heath and me with his third. A successful entrepreneur and investor who amassed his great wealth in the stock market, regularly buying low and selling high, my father was brought to the attention of state investigators on more than one occasion because of his suspiciously good fortune. But despite their best efforts, they were never able to prove anything even approaching misconduct or malfeasance, a source of deep pride to my father and equally deep frustration to his eldest son, the assistant state's attorney who initiated the original investigation. My father subsequently cut off all contact with his namesake, then cut him out of his will altogether. Hence the lawsuit over his estate, of which Heath and I are the chief beneficiaries. The rest of our half-siblings have joined the suit to claim what they insist is rightfully theirs.

I can't say I blame them. My father was, at best, a lousy husband to their mothers and an indifferent parent to all of them. What's more, he had a warped, even cruel sense of humor. He

named the three sons he had with his second wife Thomas, Richard, and Harrison (Tom, Dick, and Harry), and although he always insisted this was unintentional, at least until Harry came along, one thing was indisputable: He constantly played the brothers against one another, the result being that, were it not for the lawsuit, I doubt any of them would be on speaking terms today.

Amazingly, this was not the father that either Heath or I knew. Our childhood was idyllic, our father as loving and attentive as any child could possibly wish for. I credit my mother for this. Younger than my father by eighteen years, he often proclaimed that she was the first woman he'd ever really loved, the woman who taught him how to be a man. And I guess that because he loved her, he loved us, too. The father I remember was generous and tender, soft-hearted and fiercely protective. When my mother died three years ago of ovarian cancer at the tragically young age of fifty-five, he was beside himself with grief. Still, he never deserted us, never sought escape in the man he used to be, was never the man my half-siblings all remember.

He was always there for me.

And then, suddenly, he wasn't.

The man I'd considered invincible died of a massive heart attack at the age of seventy-six.

That was four months ago.

Since he died, I've broken up with my boyfriend, Travis, and embarked on what most people would consider an ill-advised affair with a married man. Not that one thing has anything to do with the other. My relationship with Travis had been deteriorating for some time. I was reeling from my father's unexpected loss, experiencing a renewal of the daily anxiety attacks that had plagued me after my mother died, times when I couldn't move my legs, when I couldn't draw sufficient air into my lungs to breathe. I tried to hide these attacks from everyone, and I was largely successful, but there was one man who wasn't so easily fooled. "Are you going to tell me what's going on?" he'd ask. "What's *really* going on?" And so I did, reluctantly at first, then compulsively, as if once that particular tap had been turned on, it was impossible to shut

off again. He quickly became my closest ally, my confidant, eventually, perhaps inevitably, my lover.

I knew right from the start that he would never leave his wife. She was the mother of his children, and he couldn't imagine being just a part-time dad, no matter how unhappy his marriage. He said that while he and his wife rarely argued, this was because they lived largely separate lives, and that although they were regularly seen together in public, they retreated to opposite ends of their house when they were alone. They hadn't made love in years.

Do I believe that? Am I really so gullible? I don't know. I only know that when I'm with him and that when we're together, I'm both where and who I want to be. It's as simple—as complicated, as complex, as awful—as that.

When I think now of the times we made love, the gentle way his fingers explored my body, the soft probing of his tongue, the expert way he brought me to orgasm, it seems impossible that an act so full of tenderness and love can, in other circumstances, be so overflowing with rage and hate, that what produces so much pleasure can inflict so much pain. I wonder if I will ever again experience the joy of a man's touch, or if every time a man enters my body, I will feel a rapist ripping into my flesh, if each time a man's lips move toward my breasts, I will convulse in horror and disgust. I wonder if I will ever be able to enjoy sex again, or if this is something else that has been forever taken from me.

When they brought me home from the hospital, after all the tests and hours of police questions, my brother was so traumatized that he chain-smoked at least four joints before he was able to calm down—"We should call Travis," he kept mumbling, and then he fell sound asleep. Even though Travis and I are no longer a couple, he is still Heath's friend. They were friends before Travis and I hooked up. In fact, it was Heath who introduced us. Heath still doesn't understand why we broke up, and I haven't told him. He's upset enough as it is.

So now I stand by my bedroom window in the apartment I never leave, staring absently at the backs of half a dozen identical glass towers, the hollow eyes of my reflection staring back at me,

my fingers folded around the omnipresent binoculars that have become a virtual extension of my hands. There's a large chip in one side of them now, from when they hit the ground after my attack, and my fingers go to it automatically, as they would to a scab. I lift the binoculars to my eyes and hear my mother's voice: *Tell me what you see*. I focus on the nearby construction site, watch one worker arguing with another, his fingers poking angrily into the other man's chest, as another worker intervenes.

Slowly, I shift my focus, the two circles of the binoculars continually merging and separating as I move fleetingly from one floor to another, constantly readjusting the lens. Eventually I settle on the building directly behind mine, sliding my view from one window to the next, invading the lives of the unsuspecting and unaware, monitoring their casual routines, violating their privacy, drawing them close while keeping them at a safe distance.

The phone beside my bed rings, and I jump, although I make no move to answer it. I don't want to talk to anyone. I'm tired of reassuring people I'll be all right, that it gets a little easier every day.

It doesn't, and it won't.

I press the binoculars tighter to my face, watch the universe unfold from afar. This is as close to the outside world as I want to get.